

How many nations are there in Ireland?

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Abstract

In answer to the question 'How many nations are there in Ireland?', the Irish nationalist tradition has long argued for a 'one-nation' view, which has sometimes been challenged by a unionist 'two-nations' perspective. It is argued here that these views are flawed and, moreover, that the imprecision of existing terminology confuses the picture further. The 'two-nations' label is employed here to apply to the perspective according to which the island of Ireland contains both an Irish nation and an Ulster nation, while the view that sees it containing an Irish nation and part of the British nation is better summed up as a 'nation and a bit' theory. A 'no-nation' view, according to which no nations at all have yet come into existence in Ireland, is also identified. It is argued here that all these answers to the question are inadequate. One common shortcoming is that they ascribe to Ulster Protestants a uniformity that does not exist in reality and thus they fail to take adequate account of the depth of the intra-Protestant cleavage, which is more than merely a tactical disagreement about short-term political aims. A 'three-nations' (or 'two nations and part of another nation') perspective, identifying an Irish nation, an Ulster Protestant nation and a part of the British nation, is the most appropriate.

Keywords

Nations; nationalism; Northern Ireland; Ulster nationalism; British identity; Protestants.

Introduction

The question of how many nations are embraced by the island of Ireland has sometimes been a focal point for political controversy, with a nationalist 'one-nation' perspective challenged by a unionist 'two-nations' theory. In fact, quite a number of possible answers to the question are plausible, depending on exactly how a nation is defined and on how we choose to label particular senses of identity. In this article, I shall first discuss the idea of 'the nation', and then move on to consider six answers that have been given to the question of how many nations there are in Ireland.

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The nation

As is well known, clarifying the concept of a 'nation' is easier said than done. I shall not embark on an exhaustive discussion of the subject, which has received a good deal of academic attention, or opt for one definition as opposed to others. Rather I shall identify the main points at issue and, in the subsequent discussion of national identities in Ireland, consider the implications of the various perspectives. There are two main issues. First, is the question 'What is a nation?' to be decided on the basis of objective characteristics or by subjective decision? Secondly, what is the difference between a nation on the one hand and an ethnic group or a community on the other?

On the first question, there is now virtual unanimity that nations are 'imagined' communities (Kearney 1989, p. 4; Anderson 1991); in other words, that subjective criteria are of far greater importance than objective ones, should the two come into conflict. The most notable exception was Stalin, who defined a nation as 'a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture' (quoted in Deutsch 1966, p. 22). Apart from the vagueness of many of these terms, it is hard to sustain the claim that nations must be based on objective characteristics. Factors such as a common language, religion, culture, history and territory may well facilitate the development of a feeling that the group constitutes a nation, but none of these is a necessary condition. As Krejci and Velimsky (1981, pp. 44–45) put it:

Whether the rest of the world, especially the interested neighbours, are or are not willing to acknowledge the group in question as a separate nation is, in the long run, irrelevant. The subjective factor of consciousness is the ultimate factor which eventually decides the issue of national identity.¹

The answer to the second question, the difference between a nation and a number of other collectivities, is less clear. Evidently, not all imagined communities are nations. Consequently, some writers have emphasized the element of ethnicity, by which is meant 'common descent, either real or putative, but, even when putative, the myth has to be validated by several generations of common historical experience' (van den Berghe 1981, p. 16). Connor observes that the word 'nation' originally conveyed the idea of common blood ties, and defines a nation as 'a self-aware ethnic group', a definition broadly endorsed by Ronen (Connor 1978, pp. 381, 388; Ronen 1979, p. 28). However, the existence of many self-defined nations whose members clearly do not share common descent – for example, because their skins are of differ-

ent colour – weakens the idea of any universally valid definition of a nation that is based upon ethnicity.

The work of Anthony Smith is perhaps the fullest attempt to grapple with the concepts of nation and nationalism, and his conclusion in the 1980s that ‘there is no once-for-all unique definition of “nationalism” or “the nation”’ (Smith 1983, p. 166) indicates the elusiveness of the ideas.² Smith later suggested a distinction between a Western, ‘civic’ model of the nation, entailing ‘a community of people obeying the same laws and institutions within a given territory’ and an Eastern, ‘ethnic’ model, emphasizing a community of birth and native culture (Smith 1991, pp. 8–15). He is one of the few writers who ventures to specify a population figure needed by a nation, placing this, with qualifications, at around half a million (Smith 1983, pp. 188, 322–23).

A point of contention is whether a ‘nation’ must, by definition, seek a separate state. Some writers insist that it must; for example, van den Berghe (1981, p. 61) defines a nation as ‘a politically conscious ethny, that is, an ethny that claims the right to statehood by virtue of being an ethny’. Similarly, ‘the urge for independent statehood’ is a core element in Alter’s definition of a nation (Alter 1989, p. 18; see also Birch 1977, p. 28; See 1986, p. 4). Anderson, too, implies that a desire for a sovereign state is one of the features that distinguishes a nation from other imagined communities (Anderson 1991, p. 7). Others disagree: Shafer (1972, p. 18; see also Boyce 1991, p. 19) maintains that nations usually, but not necessarily, ‘press for a completely independent state’, and Smith regards as nations several groups, such as the Scots and the Catalans, that do not seek their own state. For Kellas (1991, pp. 3–4), similarly, nations may be content to remain part of a larger state. Macartney (1934, p. 99) is careful to distinguish the two ideas, observing that

the will to form part of a political state can be entirely independent of considerations of personal nationality. It cannot be assumed without question that membership of a nation necessarily involves the will to join the other members of that nation in forming a national state.

Seton-Watson (1977, p. 1) takes much the same line. Smith (1986, p. 154) holds that whether a nation or an ethnic community seeks independence or not depends on the potential benefits and costs in its specific situation; this should not be made part of the definition.

The latter view seems the more realistic, as the requirement that a ‘nation’ must demand its own state to be recognized as such is unduly demanding. It would exclude many widely accepted ‘nations’, such as the Scots, Catalans and Basques (plus the Irish before 1918), merely on the ground that they do not with one voice demand a separate

state, even though they all appear to be 'politically conscious'. It would also mean that, to the extent that the European Union comes to approximate a federal state, not even the French, Germans or Danes could regard themselves as nations. By such a restrictive definition, a stable multinational state cannot exist. Such a proposition should be empirical rather than axiomatic.

Nations in Ireland

There is little dispute that there is at least one fully-fledged nation on the island of Ireland: the Irish nation, predominantly Catholic, with predominantly Gaelic origins and attached to the idea of a separate Irish state independent of Britain. Opinions vary as to just how distinctive a nation this is; for Whyte (1978, p. 263), the Irish nation ranks high on a scale measuring nationhood, whereas Heslinga (1979, pp. 93–102; see also Fennell 1983, pp. 12, 37), quoting a plethora of Irish observers, stresses the impact of Anglicization on the Republic of Ireland and discusses the extent to which it can be considered a 'British province'. But by any criterion, it is clear that there is such a thing as an Irish nation. Much of the subsequent discussion in this article will turn on the question of how to describe those who define themselves out of the Irish nation.

Mainstream Irish nationalist analyses, reluctant to renounce publicly a one-nation analysis, tend to lump other perspectives together indiscriminately under the heading of a 'two-nations' theory. Unfortunately, the use of labels to define these perspectives in the literature is rather inconsistent and sometimes illogical, so it is as well to clarify the ones to be used here. I shall discuss six different views, summarized as follows:

- No nation* – there are no nations on the island of Ireland (Dorn/Lysaght);
- One nation* – there is just one, Irish, nation in Ireland (the Irish nationalist tradition);
- A nation and part of another nation* – there is an Irish nation and part of the British nation (British and Irish Communist Organization [BICO], Pringle);
- A nation and a bit* – there is an Irish nation and an Ulster Protestant community (Miller, Bruce);
- Two nations* – there is an Irish nation and an Ulster nation (Miller?, Bruce?);
- Three nations / two nations and part of another nation* – there is an Irish nation, an Ulster nation and part of the British nation (Todd?).

No-nation theory

This perspective is the least common. The only known example of its advocacy occurs in a pamphlet published in 1973 by the Revolutionary Marxist Group (Dorn 1973). In an appendix, D. R. O'Connor Lysaght sums it up thus (p. 44):

The Northern Ireland Protestants do not constitute a separate nation, or part of a nation separate from the majority of the Irish people. It [*sic*] is rather a part of an unformed Irish nation that had its growth stunted when its original bourgeois revolution was smashed and of which the establishment will be one function of the coming Socialist revolution . . . similarly, the claim that the Irish Catholics on their own form a nation must be rejected for the same reasons . . . In short, the 26 County community is merely a section of an unformed national community.

As Dorn (1973, p. 29) puts it, there is, so far, not even one nation in Ireland. He sees the people of Ireland as a whole developing towards nationhood. He rests his definition on that of Stalin, and concludes (pp. 17–18) that, by this criterion, ‘the Protestants of Northern Ireland are not a distinct nation; their community lacks stability and its most distinctive features are those that must be liquidated’. Northern Protestants, to adapt Stalin, are (p. 18) ‘an historically evolved community of language, territory and economic life, with a psychological-cultural make-up arising out of its instability as an entity’.

The no-nation view rests on a rigid definition of a nation, and on a perspective according to which the emergence of a nation is the product primarily of economic forces. If the required economic changes have not occurred, what we see today cannot be a nation. In the same way, some argue that if the cook has not used a specific set of ingredients in a prescribed way, the pudding cannot taste good. Others believe that the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

One nation

Up until twenty-five or so years ago, the ‘one-nation’ paradigm reigned almost unchallenged in the literature and in political culture south of the border. Ireland, it was maintained, was one nation by any test whatever. However, this paradigm has now become largely extinct among students of the subject. As John Whyte puts it, ‘virtually no-one who has put themselves to the discipline of researching on Northern Ireland still defends the one-nation theory’ (Whyte 1990, p. 191). If nations are defined by a subjective feeling of commonality, then Ulster unionists are clearly not part of the same nation as the

rest of the people on the island, while if they are defined by objective factors, then any argument that 'proves' that all the people of the island constitute one nation could also be used to 'prove' that the British and the Irish form one nation (Pringle 1985, pp. 39–44). Proponents of the one-nation view are reduced to insisting on *a priori* grounds that Ulster unionists are 'really' part of the Irish nation while deploring unionists' reluctance to accept this supposed fact (Ó Ceallaigh 1991, p. 49; Gerry Adams in O Connor 1993, p. 345).

A nation plus part of another nation

Those holding this view feel that Ulster Protestants are part of the British nation. For Harkness (1988, p. 130), 'the Protestant Unionist in Northern Ireland has no . . . identity crisis. He knows he is British'. Robert McCartney (in Roberts 1986, p. 8) is just as robust: 'Ulster Unionists are of the same stock . . . as Margaret Thatcher's Finchley electorate'. The point is argued at some length by the British and Irish Communist Organisation [BICO] and by Pringle (both of whom sum up their perspective as 'two nations', a term that, as we have explained, will be used in a different sense in this article). On the crucial question of Ulster Protestants' national identity, BICO display some ambivalence as to whether they form an Ulster nation or are part of a British nation. They say: 'The statement that "Ulster is British" is not at all in contradiction with the view that Ulster might be a nation within the British state, merging into the British nation' (BICO 1975a, p. 65). This may be so, but it does not answer the question whether 'Ulster' is such a nation. BICO justify their ambivalence by arguing that the British generally are ambivalent on the subject. They say that the British 'have never worried about whether they were one nation or three' (1975a, p. 65).

This is not entirely true, however, as shown by the persistence of Scottish and Welsh nationalist movements. Moreover, some would argue that there is no such thing as a 'British nation', seeing Britain as a multinational state (or even, less plausibly, as an entity with no real nationalist dimension—see, for example, Aughey 1989, p. 24; Longley 1990, pp. 6–7). However, there is plenty of evidence that 'Britain' is something with which people identify as a nation. Survey evidence has shown that about a third of people in each of England, Scotland and Wales think of themselves first and foremost as 'British' rather than as English, Scottish or Welsh, and that 'Britain' inspires more pride among those who belong to it than many other nations do among their members (Rose 1982, p. 14; Rose 1984, p. 15). Linda Colley (1992) has argued persuasively that a British nation was forged by a number of experiences, primarily wars against Catholic France, over a period of a century or more, and resulted in a country that embraced Prot-

estantism as one of its core values and that comprised the relatively new nation of Britain and the much older nations of England, Scotland and Wales (p. 374). Ulster Protestants were able to join in this process enthusiastically (Hennessey 1993), since for them the Catholic 'Other' was closer at hand and much more tangible than France. While the notion of Britain as a multinational nation may seem self-contradictory to some political scientists, this does not deprive it of meaning for ordinary people. Smith (1986, p. 166) observes that it is in fact 'a common feature of modern political life' for people to feel that they 'belong simultaneously to two "nations" '.

Certainly BICO themselves are in no doubt that there is such a thing as a 'British nation', which came into existence during the nineteenth century, evolving through the fusion of the English and Scottish nations and a 'pre-national' people, the Welsh (BICO 1975a, p. 65). In another pamphlet, they argue strenuously against any development of 'Ulster nationalism' and stress the benefits of being part of the United Kingdom (1975b). Ulster nationalism, they argue (pp. 27–28), would be suffused by fundamentalist Protestantism, with 'some weird variant of imperialist ideology' as a second strand. It is Unionism that has kept these elements in check (p. 81). But while this may be desirable, from BICO's perspective, it still does not prove that Ulster Protestants are fully incorporated into the British nation as opposed to being a non-British group (or nation) that has benefited from being governed by the British state.

Pringle (1985) adopts a similar position, arguing that Ulster Protestants are part of the British nation, yet remaining reluctant to dismiss completely the idea that they might in themselves form a nation. He spends considerably more time in establishing that they are not part of the 'Irish nation' as defined by Irish nationalists than in discussing what exactly they are. He describes Unionism as 'an intense form of British nationalism' (p. 267), and stresses throughout that Ulster Protestants see themselves as British. However, unlike BICO, he acknowledges that there is considerable evidence that most British people do not see Ulster Protestants as British. He maintains that this does not prove that they are not British; the sense of identity which the mainland British have with those in Northern Ireland is, he says, probably not much weaker than that which the English, Scots and Welsh share with each other (pp. 46–47). He also argues that the English, Scots and Welsh give political allegiance to the British nation and state, while each thinking of itself as the 'we' group, so there is nothing unusual about Ulster Protestants' relationship to the British people or nation.

However, this seems to underestimate the extent to which people on the neighbouring island feel no affinity with Ulster Protestants and do not distinguish greatly between them and Ulster Catholics. The very

name of the state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, emphasizes that Northern Ireland is not a part of Britain. The British government declared at Sunningdale in 1973, and reiterated in the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 and the Downing Street Declaration in 1993, that Northern Ireland could vote itself out of the United Kingdom and into a united Ireland whenever it wished.³ Such a declaration, an extraordinary one for a sovereign state to make with regard to a part of its own territory, was a clear sign that the people of Northern Ireland were not regarded as an integral or indispensable part of the nation, and even the most obtuse or trusting unionists could hardly fail to develop a suspicion that Britain would not be sorry to be rid of them.

This seems to be the way the British people see things, too. Perhaps, as Wright suggests, Ulster Protestants would have been more important to the British if the two territories had been separated by a post-1918 diktat, as the Sudetenland Germans became more important to Germans generally after Versailles (Wright 1987, pp. 98, 110–11). But instead of seeing them as unredeemed fellow-citizens, the British seem to look on Ulster Protestants as Irish people who through some quirk of history have managed to acquire a right to British passports. Opinion polls in Britain since the mid-1970s have shown a consistent majority in favour of a united Ireland and a withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland; indeed, the British hold these views more strongly than do Northern Ireland Catholics, never mind Protestants (Gallagher 1992, p. 161). The very concept of 'British withdrawal' would, of course, make no sense if Northern Ireland were seen as part of Britain. Numerous writers have remarked on the resentment of Ulster Protestants who find, when they travel to England, that people there regard them simply as 'Irish' or 'Paddies' (for example, Belfrage 1987, p. 55). The electors of Finchley might not share the views of Robert McCartney on the affinity between them. In the plaintive words of one Protestant woman, 'Has loyalty any meaning if nobody wants it?' (quoted in Murphy 1978, p. 164).

To the extent that a nation is self-defined, it is questionable whether the 'British nation' can be said to include the Ulster Protestants if the mainland British do not consider them to be part of 'us'. This case is undoubtedly an oddity. Most nationalist disputes concern a nation (such as the Irish nation) that claims the right to govern a second group on the ground that the latter is 'really' part of the nation, despite its claims to the contrary. Groups that claim to belong to a larger nation whose own members do not see them as co-nationals are few and far between. But there seems no reason not to apply the criterion of self-definition to such cases as well. By this criterion, Northern Ireland Protestants (and Northern Ireland Catholics) do not form part of the British nation.

A nation and a bit

The difficulties of seeing Ulster Protestants as fully incorporated members of either an Irish nation or a British nation have led some to label them as a group that lives outside the world of nations altogether. This view seems to have been first advanced by Michael Farrell, in the periodical *Northern Star* in 1972. His argument is outlined (and, of course, vigorously rejected) by BICO, who coined the phrase 'nation and a bit' theory for it (1975a, p. 72). Its fullest exposition is to be found in Miller (1978), and it has also been endorsed by Nairn (1977) and Bruce (1986). The pithiest expression is Belfrage's: unionists are 'patriots without a patria' (Belfrage 1987, p. 265).

Farrell wrote in 1972 that 'the best summary of the position is that the Ulster Protestants are a community caught between two nations, the Irish and the British'. Miller's view is essentially the same: 'Ireland embraces one (Catholic) nation and one (Protestant) community upon which, for certain specific reasons, the general causes of nationalism did not take effect so fully as elsewhere' (Miller 1978, p. 46). He argues (p. 4) that 'no community – not Britain, not the United Kingdom, not "Ulster" and certainly not Ireland – has attained for Ulster Protestants all the characteristics which a nation commonly possesses in the modern world'. The explanation is historical: 'Modernisation worked in such a way as to produce two nations in the British Isles but to leave, in the North of Ireland, a community many of whose members did not feel fully incorporated into either' (p. 80). Ulster Protestants are best seen, according to Miller, as members of a 'community' whose only instinctive allegiance is to each other. The 'loyalty' they profess to Britain is a conditional loyalty, owed only if Britain fulfils its side of the contract that Ulster Protestants believe they have with it, under the terms of which it guarantees to preserve their position and their property. Miller stresses, incidentally (p. 4), that in his view the fact that Ulster Protestants are a community rather than a nation does not deprive them of a right to self-determination *vis-à-vis* the Catholic Irish nation (this is discussed more broadly in Gallagher 1990).

Miller offers an illuminating and perceptive account of the continuity in Ulster Protestants' political culture since the time of the plantations. But his analysis is open to serious challenge on three fronts. First, what exactly disqualifies Ulster Protestants from being considered a nation in their own right? Second, is their 'conditional loyalty' really as remarkable as he suggests? Third, are Ulster Protestants any less incorporated into the British nation than are the English, Scots or Welsh?

It is surprising that Miller does not offer any clear statement as to the precise distinction between a community and a nation (Mason 1985). This makes it difficult to evaluate his argument. However, it is possible to draw inferences as to how he distinguishes the two. One aspect

seems to revolve around whether the community demands separate statehood. He writes (1978, p. 4): 'In suggesting that the Ulster Protestant community is not a nation, I mean in part that its own members do not readily conceive it to be a potential claimant to sovereignty'. Or, again (p. 119): 'Members of a nationality can be distinguished by certain attributes, according to the myth of nationality, and a prime task of statesmanship is to erect state boundaries enclosing homogeneous peoples so defined'. Thus, since Ulster Protestants do not demand an independent state, they do not qualify as a nation. However, as we have already seen in the first section of this article, this is a very narrow and demanding definition of a nation, which could equally well be used to 'prove' that England, Scotland and Wales are not nations.

Besides, there is the incontrovertible fact that at the time of the third Home Rule Bill of 1912, Ulster Protestants did take steps in the direction of establishing an independent state. The great majority of them, nearly half a million in all, signed a covenant promising to use 'all means which may be found necessary' to defeat the Bill, and the Ulster Unionist Council decided that a Provisional Government of Ulster would be set up the day the Bill went through (this is discussed in Miller 1978, pp. 94-106). For Miller, even this is not enough, since, he argues, it does not prove that Ulster Protestants saw themselves as a nation. Instances of Ulster Protestants claiming that they were a nation are dismissed as a mere tactic; the label 'Ulster' was merely 'a designation which they were reluctantly prepared to put forward as a "nationality" if that was a necessary ploy in the game of self-determination they were, perforce, playing' (p. 119). Miller's theory seems invulnerable to empirical refutation. No amount of evidence showing that Ulster Protestants have conceived their community to be 'a potential claimant to sovereignty', or self-designation as a nation, would, apparently, be sufficient to prove that they are a nation rather than just a community.

Miller is undoubtedly on safer ground when he argues that Ulster Protestants feel only a conditional sense of loyalty to the British state. What can be questioned here is whether they are at all unusual in this. Miller assumes that conditional loyalty is 'anomalous in the modern world' (p. 5), but it is surely the case that *all* communities and citizens feel a sense of only conditional loyalty to the regime under which they live. To argue otherwise is to suggest that, say, Texans would comply with a federal government decision to hand their state back to Mexico, or that parents would hand over their children for slaughter if their government and parliament enacted legislation requiring them to do so. It is rather obvious that in each case the affected parties would consider the regime's action, even if formally legal, to be a violation of the terms requiring citizens to give allegiance to the state. The reason why the conditional nature of most people's loyalty to their

state is rarely exposed is that few governments ever threaten to take the kind of drastic action that would cause it to become manifest. This is not the case for Ulster Protestants. Their refusal to give unconditional loyalty to a regime that, as they see it, toys periodically with the idea of delivering them into the hands of their enemies, is hardly surprising; in such circumstances, it would be extraordinary if their loyalty were other than conditional. Their fears, as we have seen, have some substance; neither the British people nor their government would be particularly sorry if Ulster Protestants decided to leave the United Kingdom. The uneasy nature of the relationship is rooted in the conditional and qualified desire of the United Kingdom state for sovereignty over Ulster Protestants, and in the conditional nature of its claim to that sovereignty, as much as in the orientation of Ulster Protestants to the state.

The third strand in Miller's argument is that Ulster Protestants do not feel themselves fully incorporated into the 'British nation' (p. 120). He argues that people on the mainland do: from the eighteenth century onward, a sense of British nationality has overridden the 'local identities' previously held by people in Scotland and Wales (p. 65). As we have seen, this is open to question; it can reasonably be argued, as it is by Colley (1992, p. 6), that Scottish and Welsh national identities have continued to exist together with a British national identity rather than being obliterated by it. While the mainland British themselves may not conceive of Ulster Protestants as part of their nation, as we discussed above, this is not the same as showing that Ulster Protestants' own subjective relationship to the British nation is any different from that of the English, Scottish or Welsh, as Miller claims it is.

Nairn's view is essentially the same as Miller's. Nairn, too, does not define a nation; like Miller, he seems in practice to equate nationalism with a demand for a separate state. For him, the Protestant community lacks 'some political identity more secure than the Jekyll-and-Hydeism which imperialism has bequeathed it' (Nairn 1977, p. 241). But Nairn's analysis was unduly influenced by the impact of what were then recent events. He argued that in the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council [UWC] strike 'the working class . . . made the Ulster nation' (p. 242), and saw in it the emergence of an Ulster nationalism. He welcomed these signs that Ulster Protestants were at last moving towards 'nationhood', and even rashly predicted that an independent Northern Ireland would be a member of the European Community [EC] and the United Nations before the end of the 1970s. Subsequent events have hardly borne out this analysis. Moreover, his concentration on the 1974 UWC strike (which entailed a considerable degree of intimidation) overlooks the far more significant developments of the 1912-14 period, when Ulster Protestants were much more united in their resistance to the wishes of Westminster and Irish Catholics.

Bruce also espouses Miller's theory. For him, Ulster Protestants are an 'ethnic group', not a nation, and so 'the conflict in Northern Ireland involves a nation on the one hand and an ethnic group on the other' (Bruce 1986, p. 258). Although he argues that 'important consequences' follow from Ulster Protestants' being an ethnic group rather than a nation, he omits to identify the criteria by which we might distinguish one from the other. In his view, the only secure identity that Ulster Protestants have is provided by evangelical Protestantism (pp. 258, 262), and the conflict in Northern Ireland is essentially a religious one (p. 249). However, given that very few Protestants subscribe to an evangelical brand of Protestantism, it is a considerable exaggeration to suggest that evangelicism provides a bedrock to which all Protestants 'return' at times of crisis, or that it is 'the core of ethnic identity' for loyalists, as Bruce maintains (Bruce 1986, p. 262; Bruce 1994, p. 30). Many Ulster Protestants, indeed, feel strongly disdainful towards what they regard as the crude dogmatism of evangelicism and certainly feel no instinctive affinity with evangelicals who are not Ulster Protestants.

Other writers can be seen as espousing the main elements of the 'nation and a bit' view, while sometimes entering reservations about specific aspects of it. For Aughey, Ulster unionists have (or, at least, one might like to think they have) transcended the very idea of 'nation'. They are rational beings who have decided to throw in their lot with the United Kingdom because of the progressive, multicultural nature of that state and not because of any supposed common ethnic background: 'the identity of unionism has little to do with the idea of the nation and everything to do with the idea of the state' (Aughey 1989, p. 18). Indeed, he goes further to argue that this applies to all members of the United Kingdom: 'The political cohesion of the United Kingdom – its "identity" if you like – cannot lie in loyalty to the nation. There is no British nation – there are only British citizens' (Aughey 1989, p. 24). Although brief mention is made of an emotional link between unionists and Britain (p. 26), the overall impression is that unionists' desire for membership of the United Kingdom is primarily pragmatic and instrumental. Unionism, Aughey continues, is not a poor substitute for nationalism – it is, instead, 'more appropriate in modern conditions' than Irish, or perhaps any other, nationalism (p. 28). Unionism, thus conceived, is compatible with any type of culture or religion; it is as open to an Irish-speaking Catholic as to anyone else. To ask about the national identity of unionists is therefore, it seems, the wrong question – unionists have progressed beyond the stage where outdated concepts like 'nation' have any applicability to them.

There are, though, problems with Aughey's analysis. The claims that there is no British nation, and that British people do not have an ethnic or cultural or religious orientation to their state, are, as we have

seen, very hard to sustain. Aughey acknowledges that his account of Unionism may be thought of as a mere rationalization, as altogether too abstract and too far removed from 'the "social carriers" of this theory, namely flesh-and-blood Ulster Protestants' (1989, p. 28). This is indeed a powerful objection. While his argument could be seen as a valiant attempt to make a case for Unionism in terms that have contemporary resonance, there is little evidence that most Ulster unionists hold the views that they do for the reasons that Aughey suggests they do.

Seton-Watson (1977, pp. 41–42) seems to hold a similar view to that of Miller. For him, Ulster Protestants are Irish, but they do not belong to the Irish nation, or form a nation themselves. They are devoted to the Union with Britain but they are not, fairly obviously, English or Scottish. Seton-Watson appears to see them as in some kind of transitional stage, and, given time, they may become part of the Irish nation. Anderson, too, can be placed in this category: for him, unionists lack a clear national identity. 'Not unambiguously "Irish" nor fully "British", they are located between these two fully-developed national entities and have claimed to belong to both' (Anderson 1989, p. 163).

None of those advocating the 'nation and a bit' theory offers a convincing answer as to why we should not regard Ulster Protestants as a nation. It is one thing to demonstrate that they are not members of the 'British nation', though even this is not always done persuasively, but no coherent rebuttal has been offered to the idea that they might form a nation themselves, which stands (in its own eyes) in roughly the same relation to Britain as do Scotland and Wales. Only by adopting definitions of a 'nation' so restrictive that neither Scotland nor Wales could qualify can Miller, Nairn and Bruce withhold the label from Ulster Protestants.

Two nations

Perhaps surprisingly, very few have proposed a two-nations view, which holds that the island of Ireland contains an Irish nation and an Ulster nation. Heslinga's reference to 'the modern Ulster nation' (1979, p. 204) is an exception in the literature. Adamson, perhaps the most enthusiastic promoter of the idea of an Ulster nation embracing both Protestant and Catholic and sustained by the legacy of the Cruithin, is calling for the creation or rebirth of such a nation rather than claiming that it already exists (Adamson 1982, p. 108).

Ironically, the most persuasive advocates of this view are writers who expressly reject it, such as Miller and Bruce. They stress the lack of mutual identification between Ulster Protestants and either the 'mainland British' or Irish nationalists, and the extent to which Ulster Protestants feel they can, in the last resort, rely only on themselves.

Bruce describes them (1986, pp. 257–8) as an ‘ethnic group’ who ‘see themselves as the outcome of shared historical experiences and as the embodiment of a culture of a distinctive kind, with its shared traditions, values, beliefs, life-style and symbols’. By most writers’ definitions, what Bruce is describing is a nation. The historical events that mean most to Ulster Protestants mean little – good, bad or indifferent – to anyone else. Of the symbols that are most significant to them – the Union Jack, the Red Hand, Orange marches, the Star of David, King Billy on his white horse, and many more arcane and often masonic-inspired images (Buckley 1989; Loftus 1994, pp. 14–56) – only the first is shared with the British. Their largest and most significant organization, the Orange Order, has little relevance outside Ulster and a few other parts of the world. Their political parties do not run candidates or organize outside Northern Ireland. Even a significant annual affirmation of Britishness, Remembrance Day, can be seen as honouring Ulster’s dead as much as commemorating a specifically British experience.

Jackson could be seen as giving some support to the view that unionists constitute a nation. He casts doubt on the conclusions of Loughlin to the effect that in 1886 unionists saw themselves more as a fully-fledged part of a British nation than as a community with an exceptionally conditional allegiance to Britain (Loughlin 1986, p. 157). His own analysis of speeches by Ulster Unionist MPs between 1884 and 1911 shows that their main focus was on Ulster rather than on the UK or the empire, and their concerns about Home Rule centred on its implications for themselves (Jackson 1989, p. 120). For Jackson, an Ulster nation emerged at this time, even though it did not immediately produce an Ulster nationalism (p. 15). However, he acknowledges that this nation was not based on any clear national identity, and he does not press the claim that a clearly-defined Ulster nation came into existence.⁴

The main objections usually advanced against this two-nations view are that Ulster Protestants do not, as a rule, either call themselves a nation or demand a separate state. However, neither of these points is as decisive as some writers seem to think. For one thing, Ulster Protestants are aware, as seemingly Nairn was not, that any independent Northern Ireland would contain a substantial proportion of Catholics strongly opposed to the existence of the state. There would also be strong doubts about the financial viability of such a state, and about its chances of securing international recognition and acceptance if it came into existence against the wishes of the Republic of Ireland and northern Catholics (Guelke 1988, p. 186). The ability of an independent state based on a purely Protestant identity and the present territorial boundary to survive the security and military threats to its existence is questionable, and it is hardly surprising that Protestants are not keen

to try to go it alone without any British support. However, they clearly demonstrated in the 1912–14 period their determination to seek an independent state if the only alternative was what they saw as rule by the Irish Catholic nation, and there are many Protestants, perhaps a majority, who would seek an independent state rather than accept a united Ireland if the British were to withdraw.

Breuilly (1993, p.398) concludes that ‘an effective nationalism develops where it makes political sense for an opposition to the government to claim to represent the nation against the present state’. Thus, had an all-Ireland state come into existence in 1920, the development of a clear Ulster Protestant separatist nationalism could have been predicted. However, as things stand, it does *not* normally make sense for Ulster unionists to frame their demands on the United Kingdom state in the language of an Ulster nationalism – this would, indeed, be counter-productive as far as winning British sympathy is concerned. Only at those times when it seems that the United Kingdom state is close to abandoning them does any kind of Ulster nationalism emerge, and the clearest examples have been found on the occasions of the three Home Rule bills. Were the British government to declare that Great Britain intended to secede from the United Kingdom, thus leaving Northern Ireland to its own devices, one could expect the rhetoric of nationalism to become very popular very quickly among Ulster Protestants faced with a choice between an independent Ulster and incorporation into a united Ireland.

The second reason why Ulster Protestants do not seek statehood, and a point that we shall develop further later on, is that there are many Protestants for whom the prospect of an independent Northern Ireland, shorn of any connection with Britain, would be little if at all more palatable than the idea of a united Ireland.

The same factors play a part in explaining why Ulster unionists rarely speak of themselves as a nation. Given the pragmatic arguments in favour of remaining within the United Kingdom and against seeking a separate state, it is hardly surprising that Ulster Protestants have not been inclined to stress their differences from the ‘mainland’ British. In addition, the very word ‘nationalism’ has unfavourable connotations for Ulster Protestants, given that it is, and has been for over a century, used throughout Ireland as virtually a synonym for *Irish* nationalism. Besides, the religious mosaic of Northern Ireland makes it difficult to think of a suitable name for their nation. The most accurate name for it is undoubtedly the Ulster Protestant nation, but one cannot, as MacDonagh (1983, p. 27) has observed of ‘Protestant Supremacy’, very well write this upon a map. While it is unusual for a nation, or even an ethnic group, to have its cultural identity determined primarily by religious affiliation, it is not unique. Krejci and Velimsky (1981, p. 225) argue that there are five such groups in Europe; that is, ethnic groups

for whom 'religion appears to be the decisive factor differentiating them from people speaking the same language as the group in question'. Among them, two – the Jews and the Yugoslav/Bosnian Muslims (see also Smith 1986, p. 23) – give themselves a name based on religion.

There are two further reasons why Ulster Protestants are disinclined to adopt the rhetoric of nationalism. The first is that they have no sense of a past that stretches back beyond the dawn of recorded history. This sets them apart from most nations or potential nations, for, in Smith's words (1983, p. xxiv), 'nationalism itself teaches that all nations have a past by definition'. The 'past' that nations believe they have may be largely created by the myths of their own nationalism, but it can at least be believed in a vague, almost subconscious way. Ulster Protestants lack such a mythical past. While it may well be true that the Scottish settlers from whom many of them are descended were themselves descendants of Ulster people who moved across to Scotland in earlier centuries (Stewart 1977, p. 34; Heslinga 1979, pp. 116–19), the important point is that Ulster Protestants, *as Ulster Protestants*, have no history that goes back before the early seventeenth century. All their history is recorded history. Their arrival in Ulster is too recent to be lost in the mists of time. The methods by which the plantation was effected can be reconstructed from documentary evidence; this is helpful to historians, but not to myth-makers. As Renan put it in 1882, 'historical error is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger' for potential myth-makers (Renan 1990, p. 11). The opportunity to 'invent tradition', to create (or revive or embroider) emotionally satisfying and bonding myths of a golden age, ancient gods or sagas of superhuman heroes (Hobsbawm 1983, p. 7; Smith 1986, pp. 191–92), is, for Ulster Protestants, if not impossible, then at least severely limited. Attempts at creating such myths have so far aroused more amusement than fervour. Even members of the Ulster Defence Association [UDA] were sceptical about the Cruithin myth when the organization's leaders were espousing it (McAuley 1994, pp. 95–96), while British Israelism – according to which Ulster Protestants are descended from the lost tribes of Israel – is 'just a little too exotic' for all but the most credulous (Buckley 1989, p. 194).

The second reason why Ulster Protestants tend not to speak of themselves as a nation, and why any analysis should pause before unequivocally endorsing a two-nations perspective, is that to label them as a nation might be to ascribe to them a uniformity that does not exist in reality. Indeed, this is a weakness in several of the above theories. Ulster Protestants are not a monolith (Coulter 1994). Whether the intra-Protestant cleavage is so deep that we should talk about 'three nations' in Ireland is a question to which we now turn.

Three nations (two nations and part of another nation)

There is no doubt that there are three national identities in Northern Ireland (and on the island as a whole). There is an Irish separatist identity, held almost exclusively by Catholics; an Ulster identity, held almost exclusively by Protestants; and a British identity, held by many Protestants and by some Catholics. The results of surveys asking about identity in Northern Ireland are given in Table 1.

Table 1. *Self-descriptions of Northern Ireland Protestants, in percentages*

	1968	1978	1984	1986	1989
British	39	67	77	65	68
Ulster	32	20	11	14	10
Irish	20	8	4	3	3
Northern Irish	—	—	—	11	16
Other	9	5	8	6	3

Source: 1968 – Rose 1971, p. 208; 1978 – Moxon-Browne 1983, p. 6; 1984 – poll conducted for London Weekend Television, data supplied by Edward Moxon-Browne; 1986 – data from survey by David J. Smith, reported in Whyte 1990, p. 69; 1989 – Moxon-Browne 1991, p. 25.

One interpretation of these figures might be that Protestants have finally made their minds up; a very clear majority had decided by 1978 that they were British, and the position has changed little since then. But this would be a simplistic interpretation. The very difference between the 1968 and 1978 figures is instructive; it might suggest that for many Protestants their national identity, whatever it is, is not very deep-rooted. The figures could thus be used to support Miller's theory that Ulster Protestants have no national identity; if they had one, it would presumably stay fairly constant from poll to poll. Instead, their national identity seems to be more volatile than their voting behaviour.

However, this may not be the right conclusion either. The question asked of respondents in 1968, 1978 and 1984 was: 'Which of these terms best describes the way you usually think of yourself?', followed by a list of options (British, Irish, Ulster, sometimes British sometimes Irish, Anglo-Irish, other).⁵ In other words, they were not asked about their *national* identity specifically. Given the rather general nature of the question, it is not surprising to find variation from year to year in the responses of people who find more than one label entirely acceptable. The same pattern could be expected, for example, from surveys in Dublin that asked people whether they thought of themselves as Dubliners or as Irish, or surveys in Italy as to whether people considered themselves Italians or Europeans. Quite clearly, many people in the United Kingdom have multiple identities, and this is especially true of northern Protestants. Nelson (1984, p. 12) suggests

that 'most loyalists have complex and ambivalent feelings of identity, in different situations, a sense of "Ulsterness", "Britishness" or even "Irishness" may dominate'. While Ulster Protestants' willingness to accept an Irish identity has declined over the past twenty-five years, there is little doubt that most Protestants are prepared to accept both British and Ulster labels. For example, Moxon-Browne (1983, p. 8) found that 'Ulster' was the second preference of 74 per cent of those whose first choice was British, while 'British' was the second preference of 89 per cent of those whose first choice was Ulster.

The apparent swing to a British identity between 1968 and 1978 might seem to back up the arguments of BICO and Pringle, but both Rose and Moxon-Browne cast doubt on the commitment behind Protestants' selection of the British option. Rose asked respondents why they thought of themselves as they did. He found that whereas the overwhelming majority of people choosing the Irish or Ulster labels said they were 'born and bred' Irish or Ulster, only 41 per cent of those answering 'British' said the same. The most common explanation for choosing the British identity (given by 53 per cent) was 'living under British rule', which is, as Rose notes, rather an insecure foundation (Rose 1971, pp. 208-9). Moxon-Browne (1983, p. 6) explains the shift not in terms of a sudden discovery of an identity but as a response to the newly active threat to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, which produced a need to cling emotionally to 'a grouping large and powerful enough (even if occasionally unreliable) to withstand the inroads of Irish nationalism'.

What Rose's findings show is that, in 1968, there were some Ulster Protestants who thought of themselves as fully ('born and bred') British, and a rather larger number who felt they were 'born and bred' Ulster people. No doubt, a certain proportion of each would have given 'Ulster' or 'British' as their national identity, had the question referred to that specifically. Can this be used as the basis for a three-nations (or, following our earlier terminology, a 'two nations and part of a third nation') perspective?

Many writers have commented on the existence of a division within the Protestant community, but this has often been seen as purely political. The division has long been present, but was obscured under the Stormont regime by the appearance of near-universal Protestant satisfaction with the Ulster Unionist Party. The rise in the 1970s of the Democratic Unionist Party [DUP], led by Ian Paisley, and the inroads it has subsequently made into the support base of the 'Official' Unionists [UUP], has made the cleavage clear. So has the widespread use since the 1970s of the term 'loyalists' to apply to some but not all Protestants. The distinction between the two groups of Protestants has been characterized in various ways. Rose (1971, pp. 32-33) distinguished between Ultras and Allegiants; the former are people who support a particular

definition of the existing regime so strongly that they are prepared to break the laws, or even take up arms, to recall it to its 'true' way. Wright (1973, p. 221) distinguished between liberal and extreme unionists; the former sought Catholic support for the Union with Britain, but the latter felt that such support, even if attainable, would be inherently undesirable or too uncertain to trust. Miller, who argues that Protestants generally have held a contractarian attitude towards Britain, speaks (1978, p. 157) of 'the defection of a sizeable portion of the Protestant middle class from contractarian assumptions in the 1960s'. Whyte attaches particular weight to the cleavage in the Protestant community, and concludes (1978, p. 278) that 'it is because Protestant distrusts Protestant, not just because Protestant distrusts Catholic, that the Ulster conflict is so intense'.

Each of these distinctions, though, revolves around a mainly tactical disagreement among Protestants as to how to pursue a broadly agreed set of political objectives. Very few writers hint that the cleavage within Ulster Protestants could possibly be related to differences of national identity. Nelson (1984, p. 96) speaks of the Vanguard Party in the early 1970s as speaking for 'one historic element in Ulster Unionism – people who believed the Union had always been a tactical device for protecting their own identity, rather than the symbol of a strong emotional bond'. These people were at this stage 'only beginning to think seriously about the exact meaning of Ulster nationalism'. Later, a more coherent attempt was made to develop the idea of a separate Ulster identity (Nelson 1984, pp. 109–11). The fullest elaboration in these terms of the division among Protestants is that of Jennifer Todd (1987), who distinguishes between Ulster Loyalists and the Ulster British. For the former, the primary 'imagined community' is Ulster Protestants, and the identification with Britain is only secondary; 'the Protestant people of Northern Ireland are emphasized in Ulster loyalist writings and speeches over and above the British connection' (p. 6). Political life is seen as a struggle between good and evil, the only options being domination or humiliation. In contrast, the Ulster British have 'Greater Britain' as their imagined community, with only 'a secondary regional identification with Northern Ireland' within this (p. 11). To them, being British entails sharing an ethos whose values are progressive, liberal and democratic (p. 13).

Todd does not, it should be stressed, address the question in terms of nations or national identities, but, in the context of many of the definitions of a nation discussed in the first section of the article, each of these 'communities' could be seen as a nation. Clearly, her dichotomy could be used to underpin a three-nations theory. Ulster Loyalists, it could be argued, value the British connection only as a protection against Irish nationalism. If the Irish nationalist threat were somehow removed, they would have no further interest in being part of the

United Kingdom; their ideal would be an independent Ulster state whose regime would be under no external constraints, and in which their security (or hegemony) would be beyond challenge. For the Ulster British, the very prospect of living in such a state – intolerant, dominated by Orangeism, with fundamentalist Protestantism a central feature of the national culture and ‘The Sash’ or ‘Ulster’s Reward’ as the national anthem – would be a nightmare, possibly even less attractive than being incorporated into, say, a pluralist, outward-looking, united Ireland, should this be on offer.

How far one can project these two nations – the Ulster nation and the British nation in Ulster – back into time is open to debate, as is the question whether the difference between them is purely one of national identity or whether it has a basis in some ‘objective’ characteristic. The extent to which there is an ethnic cleavage among Ulster Protestants is uncertain. It is true that there was a sharp division among the original Protestant settlers, with a majority being Presbyterians from Scotland and most of the rest Episcopalians (now Church of Ireland) from England. The legacy is still clearly visible today (Robinson 1982, pp. 22–23). Even so, it would be stretching the point too far to argue that these two bodies of Protestants have remained ethnically separate ever since, with the former (the Scots) largely coinciding with the Ulster Loyalists and the latter (the English) being the Ulster British. The range of mechanisms that serve to keep Ulster Protestants and Catholics apart, as virtually separate ethnic groups, of which the most powerful is endogamy (Whyte 1986), do not operate within the Protestant community itself, given the extensive intermarriage among Protestants of different denominations, at least in the twentieth century. The relationship between class and identity seems to be more significant than that between denomination and identity (Moxon-Browne 1983, p. 9).

Although the ‘nation and part of another nation’ theory discussed earlier is weakened by the fact that most British people do not seem to see Ulster Protestants as part of their nation, the ‘three-nations’ (or ‘two nations and part of another nation’) theory can withstand this objection. The alienation of British people from Ulster Protestants could be explained in terms of the prominence of Ulster Loyalists, those having a purely instrumental orientation to the United Kingdom. If all Ulster Protestants belonged unambiguously to the ‘Ulster British’ camp, the likelihood of their rejection by the mainland British would be considerably less.

The British and Ulster Protestant nations, if nations they are, are not equal in their emotional appeal. Increasingly, as the formerly central role of the monarchy and Protestantism decline, ‘Britain’ corresponds more to the ‘Western’ concept of a nation, an entity stressing certain legal or cultural values, to which people can to some extent

choose to belong. If the values it stresses are no longer ones with which individuals have any affinity, they may 'stop feeling British'. In contrast, the Ulster Protestant nation corresponds more to the Eastern European ethnic nation, a community virtually restricted to those who are born into it, open neither to Ulster non-Protestants nor to Protestants from outside Ulster, and one that members cannot easily opt out of. In response to societal, political and cultural change in Britain, the apparently widespread feeling of Britishness (Table 1) could rapidly diminish, but being an Ulster Protestant is for ever.

Conclusion

I have outlined six different theories of how many nations there are in Ireland. Of these, the last seems to have the most to recommend it. The 'no-nation' view rests on an unclear idea as to what a nation is. The 'one-nation' view fails to take account of the differences in national identity among the people of the island and, in an analogous fashion, both the 'one nation and part of another nation' view and the 'two-nations' view fail to take account of differences among Ulster Protestants. The 'nation and a bit' theory offers no convincing explanation as to exactly why the 'bit' should not be seen as a nation. The model that best fits reality is the 'two nations and part of another nation' perspective, which for convenience can be termed the 'three-nations' theory.

Of course, these three nations are not equal in size, so the answer 'three' to the question 'How many nations are there in Ireland?' perhaps exaggerates the degree of heterogeneity on the island. If we employ the measure of fragmentation devised by Laakso and Taagepera (1979), which operates by giving due weight to the size of each group as well as to the simple number of different groups, we obtain a rather smaller figure. We can apply the measure to the number of nations in Ireland by calculating the proportion of people who express each of the main national identities: Irish, British and Ulster. Table 1 gives the breakdown for Northern Ireland Protestants; the corresponding figures for Northern Ireland Catholics from the 1984 poll – the most recent that did not include the 'Northern Irish' option – are that 77 per cent saw themselves as Irish, 10 per cent as British and 2 per cent as Ulster. This suggests that within Northern Ireland, about 52 per cent saw themselves as British, 32 per cent as Irish and 8 per cent as Ulster, with the rest being in 'intermediate' (such as 'sometimes Irish sometimes British') or other categories. Disregarding the 'other' responses, the 'effective number' of nations within Northern Ireland, in Laakso and Taagepera's terms, would be about 2.2. To put this another way, this means that the degree of fragmentation in Northern Ireland when it comes to national identity was the same as if there

were 2.2 equal-sized groups, each with its own national identity -- that is to say, the degree of fragmentation is slightly greater than if there were just two equal-sized groups, but significantly less than if there were three equal-sized groups.

If we assume further that all the people of the Republic of Ireland see themselves as Irish, then we find that approximately 77 per cent of the people on the island see themselves as Irish, 17 per cent as British and 3 per cent as Ulster. The island as a whole is less fragmented nationally than Northern Ireland on its own. Again disregarding those in 'other' categories, this distribution produces an answer of 1.5 nations to the question in the title of the article. Given the degree of alienation from Britain felt by many Ulster Protestants since 1984, the uncertainty among a significant number of northern Catholics as to whether they are still fully Irish (O Connor 1993, ch. 9), the ambivalent feelings among many south of the border about how far they share an identity with northern Catholics, and the obvious difficulties in trying to measure something as complex as national identity by means of surveys, it would be unwise to be as dogmatic about this figure as some have been in the past about their own answers to this question. The precise degree of fragmentation will vary over time in response to political events and demographic changes. However, the existence of three national identities on the island of Ireland is likely to be an enduring feature.

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Notes

1. For some of many other definitions putting the same stress on subjective consciousness, see Rose 1971, p. 28; Connor 1978, p. 388; Anderson 1991, pp. 6–7; Smith 1991, pp. 8–15.
2. Seton-Watson (1977, p. 5) also suggests that it is impossible to provide a precise definition of a 'nation'.
3. Moreover, the Downing Street Declaration distinguished (in paragraph 4) between 'the people of Britain' and 'the people of Ireland', and made it clear that 'the North' was part of the latter rather than the former.
4. Another writer who can be mentioned in this context is Gibbon (1975, p. 136), whose two sentences on the subject are often quoted, but his statement that in 1891–92 unionists 'were creating a form of nationalism' is not expanded upon.
5. In 1986 and 1989 the options were reduced to four: British, Irish, Ulster and Northern Irish. The inclusion of the 'Northern Irish' option rather confuses the picture,

as, unlike British, Ulster and Irish, it is unlikely to be seen by respondents as a potential national identity, and yet it is not rejected by either community because, being open to interpretation in different ways, it is compatible with both Britishness and Irishness (Moxon-Browne 1991, p. 28). The suggestion that the 'Northern Irish' label is, for Protestants, 'virtually synonymous' with the term 'British' (Waddell and Cairns 1991), does not follow from the data presented.

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