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## **Public Attitudes to Gaelic and the Debate about Scottish Autonomy**

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# Public Attitudes to Gaelic and the Debate about Scottish Autonomy

## Abstract

Scotland seems to be a counter-example to general theories of the relationship between language and national identity or nationalism. These theories point to three components in the ideology of language and nation – that being able to speak the national language is necessary for full national membership, that the national language is a core part of the nation's culture, and that the future of national political autonomy and the future of the national language are connected with each other. In Scotland, it has appeared that language is not central to national membership or culture, and language campaigning has not been central to the political campaigns for autonomy. The paper presents new evidence, from the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, which questions these beliefs about the relationship between language and national identity or nationalism in Scotland.

## Keywords

Language; nationalism; national identity; Scotland; Gaelic

## 1. Gaelic and Scotland

Debates about language have been prominent in movements for the political autonomy of small nations since the late-nineteenth century, with renewed vigour since the 1960s. Yet Scotland, which acquired a strong form of autonomy when a devolved Scottish Parliament was set up in 1999 and which will hold a referendum on full independence in 2014, has often seemed not to have a language question of this kind, in relation to either identity or politics. McCrone (2001: 149), for example, points out that in Scotland 'the distinctive markers of national identity, such as language and religion, have been largely absent, certainly in comparison to other inhabitants of these islands, notably the Irish and the Welsh.' McLeod (2001: 7) similarly notes that 'Gaelic does not serve as a talisman of Scottish national identity.' On politics, Harvie and Jones (2000: 3) argue that 'unlike [in] Quebec or Flemish nationalism, there is no language motor' in Scottish nationalism. Hanham (1969: 160) explains that, though there were several groups of what he calls 'Gaelic militants' in early-twentieth-century nationalist politics, they were pushed out of the Scottish National Party in the interests of seeking wide support. McLeod (2001: 8) agrees that 'the link between the Gaelic language and Scottish nationalism – in the ... strict sense of support for the establishment of a Scottish state independent of the existing United Kingdom – is a weak one.'

Harvie and Jones (2000: 3) further suggest that the reason for the absence of a language question in Scotland is that only 1% of the population speak Gaelic. The number of speakers has been in decline since 1891, when questions on the topic were first asked in approximately their present form in the decennial Census: the number of speakers has decreased from around a quarter of a million in the late-nineteenth century to 57,375 in 2011, or from just over 6% of the whole population to 1.1% (National Records of Scotland, 2013; see also MacKinnon (1990) and Withers (1984: 209-51)). The strongest remaining density of Gaelic speakers is in the western islands and the north-western seaboard of the Highlands, although the distribution of speakers is more widespread: in the 2011 Census 48% of Gaelic speakers were reported as

living in the Lowlands. Withers (1984: 212-3), though noting the regional concentration of the density of Gaelic speakers into the Highlands and Islands, observes that the concentration of incidence should not be allowed to conceal the wide geographical spread of speakers.

However, there have been attempts to revive Gaelic since the 1960s as a language of Scotland (Gebel 2002: 20). Macdonald (1999: 101) has described developments since the 1960s as constituting a Gaelic ‘renaissance’ that is ‘not confined to the Highlands’, but is ‘spread, ... if unevenly, throughout Scotland’. Gaelic, she concludes, is ‘increasingly being cast as a language of *Scotland*’ (Macdonald, 1997: 240; author’s emphasis). The change in attitudes to Gaelic started in the early 1970s (for example, MacKinnon, 1974). Macdonald notes that ‘Gaelic is increasingly politicised’, along with which ‘there seems to be a shift from regarding language as primarily communicative and embedded in social relations, to regarding it as more of a *symbolic* matter’ (Macdonald, 1997: 241; author’s emphasis), the development of what Chapman (1978) referred to as a ‘Gaelic vision’ in Scottish culture.

Since the mid-1980s, there has been a growth of Gaelic-medium education (Johnstone et al, 1999; Nicolson and MacIver, 2003; O’Hanlon et al., 2010, Robertson, 2001), of Gaelic broadcasting (Cormack, 2004; Milligan et al., 2011), and, more generally, of public status (Marten, 2009: 317; McLeod, 2006; Oliver, 2005). The most notable event politically was the passing by the Scottish Parliament in 2005 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act which set up a government agency, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, with the task of promoting the use of the language. This Act was supported by all political parties in the Parliament, and indeed was introduced by the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats which formed the Scottish government at the time, and which are firmly opposed to Scottish independence. The rhetoric following from these developments has claimed Gaelic as a Scottish national asset: for example, Bòrd na Gàidhlig asserted in its first five-year plan that ‘the Gaelic language is a unique part of Scotland’s national heritage. Gaelic belongs to the people of Scotland and it is our responsibility as a nation to maintain its existence in a modern, multicultural and multilingual Scotland’ (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2007: 8). However, none of this promotion of the language has been tightly tied to the movements for Scottish self-government.

We ask three specific Research Questions arising from this background:

1. Do the people of Scotland view Gaelic as part of life in Scotland?
2. If so, is Gaelic seen as necessary to Scottish culture?
3. Are views about Gaelic associated with views about the constitutional status of Scotland, especially in connection with the referendum on independence in 2014?

We address these topics by investigating attitudes to Gaelic among the general Scottish population, using a specially designed module of questions in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey of 2012. Although some previous social surveys have investigated this topic (for example, Scottish Government (2011) and MacKinnon (1981)), they have been open to doubt methodologically in that their questionnaires have tended to frame Gaelic positively rather than neutrally, and in that they have been conducted by quota sampling rather than random sampling. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, as explained in Section 3, uses random sampling, and in the design and piloting of the questions particular attention was paid to ensuring that the overall balance of the questionnaire was neutral by having a mix of questions with

positive, negative and neutral framing of Gaelic.

## **2. Language, national identity and nationalism**

The general theory of nationalism points to three components in the ideology of language and nation, relating to language use, language symbolism and nationalist politics. The first of these – the claim that being able to speak the national language is necessary for full membership of the nation – has been prominent in nationalist politics since it was first made by Herder and Fichte in the late-eighteenth century (Harguindéguy and Cole 2013: 2; Hutchinson, 1994: 42-44; Kedourie, 1993: 56-65; Macdonald, 1997: 38, 50-2, 242; Smith, 1991: 72-79). Anderson (1991: 48) notes that adopting a common national language is intrinsic to the modern age: ‘the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the ... diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which ... set the stage for the modern nation.’ Hobsbawm (1990: 95) sums up the political effect: ‘for the ideologists of nationalism as it evolved after 1830 ... language was the soul of a nation, and ... increasingly the crucial criterion of nationality.’ Keating (1998: 26), likewise, notes of that period that ‘linguistic uniformity became an issue when nationalist ideology declared that it was a necessary element in national identity.’ He further comments on late-twentieth-century regionalism that:

one measure of a regional specificity is provided by the existence of different values, norms and behaviour among regions within the same state. ... The most common sources of such values and patterns of social communication are religion and language.  
(Keating, 1998: 85)

The second ideological claim about language and nation is that the national language symbolises the nation’s heritage, an example of what Smith (2009) calls ‘ethno-symbolism.’ Blommaert and Verschueren (1992: 358) point out that in debates about nationalism in the 1990s, ‘language assume[d] the character of a clear identity marker,’ and that ‘language choice is highly symbolic.’ These comments have continued to be relevant: thus May (2000: 374) argues similarly that ‘language and culture are ... linked symbolically’, and Cole and Harguindéguy (2013: 28) note ‘the link between identity, language policy and nationalism’, even where language campaigning is not linked to ‘separatist aims.’

A common tendency in the academic literature is to tie the cultural importance of language to the first ideological claim – competence to speak it. May (2012: 133-6), for example, though acknowledging ‘the cultural significance of language to ethnic and national identity’ (135), agrees with Anderson (1991: 135) that it is a mistake to treat languages ‘as emblems of nation-ness, like flags, costumes, folk dances and the rest,’ arguing that ‘being unable to speak a particular language places immediate restrictions on one’s ability to communicate – and, by extension, identify – with those who speak that language and any ethnic and/or national identities with which it is associated.’ Nevertheless, some writers have argued that the cultural importance of a language is not dependent on its being widely spoken. Macdonald (1999: 107) disputes the view which she attributes to ‘late eighteenth and nineteenth century romantic nationalism’ that ‘language [i]s a key marker of “having an identity”,’ arguing that ‘many nationalist histories ... tend anachronistically to project back assumptions of a tight link between language and identity.’

The third component of the ideologies of language and nation relates

the future of the language to national political autonomy. Harguindéguy and Cole (2013: 3) sum up the connection: ‘languages can channel the social, economic and political frustrations of regions with respect to central state governments.’ Gellner (1983) describes the connection between language and the state as such a condition of modernity that nationalists campaigning for the autonomy of small nations could not but aspire to make the language of their nation the language of a new state for the nation. He argues that the very legitimacy of the new state would require it because ‘modern loyalties are centred on political units whose boundaries are defined by the language ... of an educational system’ (Gellner, 1964: 163; see also McCrone, 1998: 68; Hroch, 2000: 22-23). Hobsbawm (1990: 63) goes so far as to say that ‘languages multiply with states; not the other way round.’

It is certainly true that nationalist campaigning, whether in the late-nineteenth century or more recently, has made language issues politically prominent. Cole and Harguindéguy (2013: 28) note that the linguistic homogenisation that accompanied the process of state building in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ‘converted regional languages into lesser-used languages and, in turn, provoked a reaction against the dominant language.’ One of the best-known instances is in Ireland: in the words of Ó Riagáin (1997: 171), ‘the movement which sought to restore the status of Irish was part of a general reaction within Ireland to late nineteenth-century imperialism.’ Keating (1998: 53-54) notes of the period since the 1960s that the ‘revalorisation of regional cultures, dialect and accents’ was ‘a rejection of central cultural domination and the values which it often incorporates.’ Wright (2000: 179-93) pointed out the potential link between language campaigning and campaigning for regional political autonomy, and this has been exemplified in many of the late-twentieth-century movements that have asserted that securing a national identity requires political autonomy – for example, in relation to the languages Welsh, Irish, Breton, Basque, Catalan, Sorb, Sámi, Māori, Quechua, and Guaraní (Cole and Williams, 2004; Ó Riagáin, 2007; Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009; Timm, 2009; de Luna and Azurmendi, 2005; Echeverria, 2005; Clots-Figueras and Masella, 2009; Strubell, 2001; Glaser, 2007; Marten, 2009; May, 2005; Nicholson and Garland, 1991; Hornberger, 2006).

There is some evidence that public attitudes follow such ideological associations of language policies with campaigning for autonomy. For example, Cole and Williams (2004: 576) found there to be a strong link between attitudes to language and attitudes to autonomy in Wales. However, this association is not found everywhere: Cole and Williams found no such relationship in Brittany, and Miley (2013) has pointed out that in Catalonia the support for promoting the Catalan language is more common among governing elites than in the population generally, with working-class people whose main language is Castillian being least supportive of policies to support Catalan. The instance of Catalonia then also shows that, to understand the politics of a language, it is important to examine the views of people for whom it is not their main language or who can not speak it. Unlike in Catalonia, but as in Scotland, this is usually the majority, as May (2000: 378) notes.

### **3. Data and Methods**

#### **3.1 Data**

The data were collected as part of the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey in 2012. The survey has been a leading annual source of independent, high quality survey data on

public social attitudes in Scotland since 1999. It is run by ScotCen Social Research (<http://www.scotcen.org.uk/>), the Scottish arm of NatCen Social Research. The survey in 2012 used a two-stage cluster sample. The clusters were 87 postcode sectors, drawn from the Postcode Address File. In urban areas, they were selected with probability proportional to the number of addresses in each sector; in rural areas the probability was proportional to twice the number of addresses. The sectors were stratified by the Scottish Government urban-rural classification, by region and by percentage of household heads in non-manual occupations (Socio-Economic Groups 1-6 and 13) in the 2001 Census. 28 addresses were selected randomly from each of these postcode sectors. At addresses, and within dwelling units, interviewers randomly selected one person aged 18 or over.

The questionnaire was administered by computer-assisted face-to-face interviewing, along with computer-based self-completion for sensitive questions. The questionnaire covered many topics in addition to attitudes to Gaelic; here we draw also upon questions relating to (i) demographic matters such as age, sex, and social class, (ii) personal national identity and (iii) preferences concerning the powers of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey is normally conducted in English, but respondents were offered the option of completing a Gaelic-language version of the questions on Gaelic; none chose to do so. In total, 1,229 interviews were conducted, giving a response rate of 54%.

The achieved sample was weighted to match estimates from the General Register Office for Scotland of the age-and-sex structure of the population in summer 2012. The weighted data were representative of highest educational attainment (by comparison with the Scottish Household Survey of 2011), and of levels of party-political support in the May 2012 elections to Scottish local councils. The weighted data were also representative with respect to competence in the Gaelic language as reported in the 2001 Census, in that around 1% of the sample were Gaelic speakers. There was some understanding of Gaelic at levels below functional competence: 2% of the sample understood at least ‘a few simple sentences’, and 22% understood ‘the odd word’.

### **3.2 Methods**

The first two Research Questions are explored mainly by univariate analysis, as described in Sections 4.1 and 4.2. The third Research Question relates to the constitutional future of Scotland. The statistical models assess associations with three dichotomous choices derived from the constitutional options shown in Table 1:

#### *Choice 1: ‘Full powers’ versus ‘not full powers’*

We give most attention to this question, since it is the choice that will be presented in the referendum on independence in September 2014. The whole sample is involved in this modelling.

Although we gave respondents the option of maximal devolution, this option will not be on the ballot paper in the referendum. Therefore, the outcome of the referendum will largely be determined by whether the third of people who support maximal devolution opt for stronger or weaker powers than they prefer (full independence or the status quo). The other two modelling strategies thus assess whether attitudes to Gaelic are associated with a respondent’s preference in either of these two directions.

*Choice 2: 'Full powers' versus 'maximal devolution'*

These models are confined to the 67% of people who support one or other of these two options.

*Choice 3: 'Maximal devolution' versus less than maximal devolution (that is 'devolution' or 'abolition')*

These models exclude the 35% of people who support 'full powers'.

Logistic regression is used to assess whether, allowing for control variables, attitudes to Gaelic are associated with preferences between constitutional options. The models assess associations with the probability 'p' of, for example, supporting full powers for the parliament, in terms of one or more explanatory terms 'x':

$$\log(p/(1-p)) = b_0 + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + \dots$$

Because all of the substantive variables are categorical, these 'x' terms are indicators of membership of categories other than the statistical reference category. For example, in the model of support for full powers for the parliament, there is an 'x' term indicating that the respondent is in the 'routine manual' social class, and its coefficient 'b' would record the difference in the probability of supporting that constitutional option between that social class and the reference category of 'professional and managerial' class. The strength of evidence that any particular regression coefficient 'b' is different from 0 in the population (thus indicating a real difference in probability in the corresponding category compared to the reference category) is measured by comparing the estimate of 'b' to its standard error. A ratio greater than about 2 indicates that, at the 5% level of statistical significance, there is evidence of a difference.

The variable used in the models to indicate attitudes to Gaelic is that which recorded hopes for the future number of speakers of the language (Table 6 below). There are two reasons why we used this variable rather than the other Gaelic variables in Tables 3-8. One is that it refers to a central aspect of policy – raising the number of speakers of Gaelic (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2007, 2010, 2012). The other is technical: after inserting the control variables (below), this variable explained at least as much variation in the model of 'full powers' against 'not full powers' as any of the other Gaelic variables (measuring variation by the amount of deviance explained (Tarling, 2009: 67-68)).

For selection of control variables, we draw upon prior analysis by Curtice and Ormston (2013) who found (using the 2012 and previous years of the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey) the associations with constitutional choices indicated in summary form in Table 2. The controls cover demographic measures, expectations of independence or of maximal devolution, and perceptions of how well Scotland fares in the Union. The aim of the present modelling is to assess whether attitudes to Gaelic are associated with support for a particular constitutional option, and, if so, whether any such association may be explained by the control variables from Table 2. All the variables were entered into the models together, since we had specific hypotheses to test in connection with the Gaelic variable and since the appropriate controls had already been selected by Curtice and Ormston.

Some parts of the analysis use a variable recording the region of Scotland where the respondent lived (defined in terms of local council areas). The region referred to as 'Gaelic areas' is that covered by the three local councils Comhairle nan Eilean Siar,



Highland, and Argyll and Bute. The density of Gaelic speakers in the 2011 Census in these areas was, respectively, 52.2%, 5.4% and 4.0%. The next highest density in any council area was 1.0%, close to the density across Scotland (National Records of Scotland, 2013).

The descriptive analysis was carried out in SPSS, and the logistic regression in R (using ‘glm’ for fitting the models, and ‘adjust’ for estimating proportions adjusted for the control variables). The results of the logistic regression are not weighted, but were checked by re-running the models in the R package ‘svyglm’ which allows explicit adjustment for the designed stratification, the post-stratification, and the clustering (Lumley, 2010). Although some of the numerical details were different in that analysis from the results reported here, none of the directions or levels of statistical significance relating to the Gaelic variable were affected, and thus none of the inferences drawn below would have changed.

## **4. Results**

### *4.1 Research Question 1: Do the people of Scotland view Gaelic as part of life in Scotland?*

The first two sets of descriptive results (Tables 3 and 4) suggest that Gaelic is indeed accepted as part of life in Scotland. Table 3 summarises how people said they feel when they hear Gaelic being spoken. There is very little sense of being uncomfortable (since only 6% chose these options), and nearly one half (48%) chose to say they are comfortable with the language. Almost as many (45%) were indifferent, but that, too, is consistent with a sense that Gaelic is accepted as part of the linguistic context. This was in contrast with feelings towards other languages (not shown in the table): for Urdu, 24% chose one of the two options for being uncomfortable, and only 31% chose one of the two options for being comfortable; for Polish the figures were 21% and 33% respectively. The sense that Gaelic is part of life in Scotland is reinforced by the results in Table 4. Only 12% thought of Gaelic speakers as not having much in common with others in Scotland, and 68% believed they had much in common. Tables 3 and 4 thus indicate that Gaelic is accepted as part of Scottish society, even if only in the background. (This point is discussed further in Section 5.)

### *4.2 Research Question 2: Is Gaelic seen as necessary to Scottish culture?*

Two bodies of data are presented in relation to Research Question 2: (i) respondents’ perceptions of the importance of Gaelic to Scotland and (ii) respondents’ willingness to accord language rights to Gaelic speakers. Table 5 shows that Gaelic is believed to be important to Scotland by most people, but as a symbol rather than a competence: 76% see the language as important to Scottish heritage, but only 14% see the capacity to speak it as being important to being Scottish. Table 6 shows that 42% would like more people to speak Gaelic in 50 years than at present, but Table 7 shows that most (55%) wished such efforts to be focused on areas where Gaelic is already spoken, with only 32% wanting Gaelic to be encouraged throughout Scotland’.

Table 8 reports views on whether people should have the right to use Gaelic in certain domains – with their bank, council, doctor, in a public meeting and in a court of law. Respondents were also asked whether they felt there should be a parental right to Gaelic-medium primary education. For each domain, a very clear majority favoured language rights in Gaelic-speaking areas, ranging from 66% for communicating with a bank, to 91% for access to Gaelic-medium education.

However, for most domains, the level of opposition to language rights for Gaelic speakers was not negligible, being a quarter to a third of people in all domains except education and dealing with the local council, where it was 8% and 14% respectively. The proportion in favour of a right to use Gaelic throughout Scotland was for no domain more than one half, and was mostly around 30-40%

Thus we have evidence that being able to speak Gaelic is not regarded as necessary for full membership of the nation, but that the language is regarded as an important aspect of the national heritage. This position is a contrast with the classical role which language has played in the ideologies of national identity and nationalism generally, in which competence in the language has been thought to be an essential feature of national identity (as outlined in Section 2). It seems that, in Scotland, a language might be regarded as a core part of the national culture even when speaking it is not itself believed to be central to belonging to the nation. However, symbols may be potent, and so the third question is whether views about Gaelic are associated with views on parliamentary autonomy.

#### *4.3 Research Question 3: Are views about Gaelic associated with views about the constitutional status of Scotland?*

We assess here whether views about Gaelic play any part in people's preferences among the constitutional options that were shown in Table 1. Before getting into the detailed results, we summarise the conclusions broadly: positive views about Gaelic were associated with support for greater autonomy in each of the three dichotomous choices set out in Section 3.2. That association remained strong in Choice 1 (the preference for or against 'full powers') even after allowing for the statistical controls. In the other two choices, the controls explained most of the association between attitudes to Gaelic and constitutional preference.

Initial exploration showed that there was little difference in views about Scottish autonomy among the second, third and fourth categories of the variable recording hopes for the future of Gaelic (Table 6) (namely, 'same number of people as now', 'fewer people than now', and 'don't know') and so they are amalgamated for this modelling.

Table 9 presents the results of the statistical modelling of the choice for or against full powers. Model 1 shows a strong univariate association between favouring full powers and wanting there to be more Gaelic speakers in 50 years than at present: the negative regression coefficient of -0.85 for the category 'same or fewer speakers or don't know' shows lower support for full powers in that category than in the reference category of 'more speakers than now'. The coefficient is over seven times its standard error of 0.13, and so we have strong evidence of such an association ( $p < 0.01$ ).

However, wanting there to be more Gaelic speakers is also associated with many of the control variables. Looking at Model 4 in Table 9, we see that the coefficient for the Gaelic variable has fallen to -0.53 when all of the control variables are taken into account. Nevertheless, it remains statistically significant, being over three times its standard error ( $p < 0.01$ ). Thus we have strong evidence that, all other things being equal, people who want there to be more Gaelic speakers tend to want full powers for the Parliament. In further models not shown in the table, that association remained strong even after two further controls were added – views on whether the Scottish or English economy benefits more from the Union, and views on whether Scotland receives a fair share of UK public expenditure.

Models 2 and 3 in Table 9 show that most of the explanatory power of the controls comes from the two identity-related variables. The variable recording expected pride in Scotland if the country became independent (Model 2) reduced the Gaelic regression coefficient from -0.85 to -0.62. There was a further reduction to -0.57 by adding also a general measure of national identity (Model 3), after which there was only a small further reduction (to -0.53) from adding all the other controls in Model 4. These two identity variables attenuate the association with the Gaelic variable because they are strongly associated with it (Tables 10 and 11). From Table 10, the proportion wanting there to be more Gaelic spoken was 56% among people who thought that independence would give people a lot more pride in their country, but 31% among those who thought that independence would make no difference or would weaken national pride. Hopes for there being more Gaelic spoken were 51% among people who felt ‘Scottish not British’, but only 21% among the small group who felt ‘British not Scottish’ (Table 11).

In short, a significant part of the political associations with views about Gaelic is explained statistically by feelings about Scottish identity. This is perhaps not surprising in light of the finding that Gaelic is believed to be part of Scottish heritage (Table 5). Nevertheless, the association with identity is not the whole story, and – as Table 9 has shown – there is an association between support for Gaelic and support for the Scottish parliament to have full powers that is not explained by identity or by any of the attitudinal and demographic factors that Curtice and Ormston (2013) found to be associated with favouring full powers.

In further refinement of the models, there was no evidence of any interactive effect with identity, and there was also no evidence of any interactive effect with region: that is, the association of views about ‘full powers’ with views about Gaelic was the same in each category of identity shown in Tables 10 and 11 and in each broad region of Scotland.

The importance of the Gaelic variable in the models from Table 9 may be summed up by estimating what the support for full powers would be in the two categories of the ‘hopes for Gaelic’ variable if the means of the control variables were the same in these two categories (being set at their grand means in the sample). These adjusted proportions are shown in the first segment of Table 12. The gap between the two categories diminishes but does not vanish as more control variables are added, moving from 0.19 when there are no controls to 0.10 when there is the full set of controls. The size of these difference shows that the association of the Gaelic variable with views about independence is substantively as well as statistically significant. That is, in the first segment of Table 12, the support for independence is at least 50% higher among those who hope that more Gaelic will be spoken in 50 years’ time than among those who do not hope that – for example, 0.3 compared to 0.2.

The links between attitudes to Gaelic and views about other constitutional options (Choices 2 and 3, Section 3.2) are not so strong. Table 13 shows the parts of the results corresponding to the Gaelic variable. The control variables were as listed in Table 2, and each model also contained both identity variables that were important in Table 9. Thus the first row of Table 13 is the same as the row corresponding to the Gaelic variable in Table 9, showing the relationship between views about Gaelic and views for or against full powers. The second row of Table 13 records the association of hopes for Gaelic with favouring full powers as against maximal devolution. The pattern is similar to but weaker than that in the first row, and once all the controls are

in the model there is little evidence of any remaining association (the final regression coefficient of -0.26 being only 1.4 times its standard error:  $p = 0.15$ ). Much the same is true of the final row, which shows the role of attitudes to Gaelic in the choice between maximal devolution and weaker powers for the Scottish Parliament (the final regression coefficient of -0.31 now being 1.7 times standard error:  $p = 0.09$ ). The second and third segments of Table 12 show the adjusted proportions, which are only slightly less than in relation to the first segment – for example, in the final column (with all the controls) gaps of 0.07 and 0.08 compared to 0.10. Thus the weakness of statistical significance may be because we have restricted the sample size for Choices 2 and 3.

## 5. Discussion

On our first two research questions – whether Gaelic is, as Macdonald (1997, 1999) suggests, seen to be a core part of Scottish identity – we can reasonably conclude that it is. Not only is there almost no hostility to the language, but there is a quite widespread willingness to accord rights to use it, and a quite widespread hope that it will be more widely used. Gaelic is seen by a large majority of people as being important to the heritage of the whole of Scotland, even though only a small minority believe that being able to speak Gaelic is important to being Scottish. The evidence presented here about the views of the non-Gaelic-speaking majority thus bears out Macdonald's prescient conclusion in 1997: 'Gaelic has come to be accepted as a symbol of Scotland's distinctiveness' (Macdonald, 1997: 256). It may even be that Gaelic is heading in the direction of what Billig (1995) would call a 'banal' aspect of national identity, something in the background that impinges little on most people's lives but which is taken for granted in quite a positive way: that might be one reading of Table 3, which showed that, while there is hardly any unease about hearing Gaelic spoken, nearly half (45%) of people have no view either way.

On the third research question – whether views about Gaelic truly are separate from views about Scottish autonomy – the conclusion is that they are not. Support for the revitalisation of Gaelic is associated with support for Scottish independence, even after allowing for other reasons why people support independence. With a cross-sectional survey, we cannot conclude that language attitudes bring about constitutional attitudes. Reverse causation is possible – that support for any form of nationalism might influence attitudes to Gaelic. Nevertheless, we can say that Gaelic, identity and support for independence are connected with each other. In that sense, there is a language question associated with nationalism at a popular level in Scotland, a conclusion that is counter to the common view outlined in Section 1.

There are three more general conclusions to be drawn from the Scottish data presented here about the place of language in national identity and in the politics of national autonomy. One is that a language might have a symbolic role that has little to do with competence, unlike in Wales (Aitchison and Carter, 2000; Livingstone et al., 2011) or Catalonia (Clots-Figueras and Masella, 2009). However, it might be noted also that in those areas of Wales where English is dominant the Welsh language has a similarly symbolic role (Livingstone et al., 2011) and that Welsh, like Gaelic, is now cast in government pronouncements as the property of the nation: for example, the first National Language Plan for Welsh was entitled 'Iaith Pawb' – 'everyone's language' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003). There are parallels also with the Irish language, which Ó Riagáin (1997: 171) and Mac Giolla Chríost (2012) note to be a symbol of identity even among people who do not speak it. Very few

people in our survey were fluent in Gaelic, and yet very favourable views of the language were reported. Gaelic competence is not widespread enough for its use to be a major factor in Scottish identity and politics, but the Scottish case shows that there being only a small number of speakers of a language is no barrier to its being seen to be culturally important, nor an impediment to its being associated with nationalist political sentiments.

The second general point relates to the consensual nature of the relatively recent shift towards more positive public attitudes to Gaelic. Gaelic does now seem to be widely regarded as (in a phrase used by Macdonald (1999: 108)) a ‘language of Scotland’. Gaelic has become an icon of nationhood, separate (as Macdonald (1997: 242)) notes) from ‘everyday social relations’ in that its status is not seen as being linked to the capacity to speak or understand it. It has acquired that position through being accepted by the non-Gaelic-speaking majority as part of the nation’s heritage, and in that sense the nationalist view of Gaelic has prevailed – in Macdonald’s (1997: 38) words again, the view ‘that “originality” and age are sources of contemporary authenticity and legitimacy’. The situation is thus quite different from that in Catalonia, where large parts of the general public – even third of people who have Catalan as their main language – are sceptical of the language policies of the government of Catalonia (Miley, 2013: 17). The Scottish case suggests that a minority language can be a unifying force because most people value it, even if few people speak it. Gaelic may then exemplify the contingent nature of the relationship between language and identity, as proposed by Eastman (1984), who encapsulates her argument in this example (270): ‘we don’t have to speak French to act French and believe we are French.’

The final general conclusion is that our findings suggest a response to a question concerning the characteristics and consequences of national identity that was asked by McCrone (2001: 145). Writing about Scottish identity, but referring to all the variety of new nationalisms that have emerged since the 1960s, he suggested that

the question to ask is not ‘how best do cultural forms reflect an essential national identity’, but ‘how do cultural forms actually help to construct and shape ... [national] identities’.

Our findings show Gaelic to be a cultural form that does not – in these terms – reflect a national identity, insofar as not many people regard speaking it as being essential to Scottish identity. But we have also found that the Gaelic language contributes to constructing Scottish national identity symbolically. It adds specific cultural content to the sense of belonging to the Scottish nation, and – despite being spoken by only 1% of the population – influences views about Scotland’s constitutional future

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## Tables

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**Table 1**

**Options for powers of Scottish parliament**

	Percentage
<i>Full powers</i> : The Scottish Parliament should make all decisions	35
<i>Maximal devolution</i> : The Scottish Parliament should have power over everything except defence and foreign affairs	32
<i>Devolution (the status quo)</i> : the UK Parliament should makes decisions about taxes, benefits, defence, and foreign affairs; the Scottish Parliament should decides the rest	24
<i>Abolition</i> : the UK Parliament should make all decisions for Scotland	7
Don't know	2
Sample size	1,225

*Percentages are weighted; sample size is unweighted. Excludes people who did not respond to the question (0.3%).*

*The question asked was: 'Which of the[se] statements comes closest to your view about who should make government decisions for Scotland?', the options being those shown.*

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**Table 2**

**Predictor variables in models of support for options in relation to Scottish autonomy**

<i>Dependent variable in binary logistic regression</i>	<i>Predictor variables</i>
Support or oppose parliament with full powers	Expected effect of independence on Scottish economy. Expected effect of independence on Scottish taxes. Expected effect of independence on Scottish voice in the world. Expected effect of independence on sense of national pride in Scotland. National identity. Sex. Social class.
Support parliament with full powers against support maximal devolution <sup>1</sup>	View on whether Scotland receives fair share of UK government spending. Views on whether Scottish or English economy benefits more from the union. Expected effect of independence on Scottish economy. Expected effect of independence on Scottish voice in the world. National identity. Sex. Social class.
Support maximal devolution against support status quo or abolition <sup>2</sup>	Expected effect of maximal devolution on Scottish economy. Expected effect of maximal devolution on Scottish standard of living. Expected effect of maximal devolution on Scottish taxes. Expected effect of maximal devolution on sense of national pride in Scotland. Expected effect of independence on Scottish voice in the world.

*Source: Curtice and Ormston (2013)*

<sup>1</sup> *Data confined to people who support one of these two options.*

<sup>2</sup> *Data confined to people who do not support 'full powers'.*

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**Table 3**

**Feelings when Gaelic is heard spoken**

	Percentage
Very comfortable	19
Comfortable	29
Neither comfortable or uncomfortable, or can't choose	45
Uncomfortable	5
Very uncomfortable	1
Sample size	1,112

*Percentages are weighted; sample size is unweighted. Excludes people who did not respond to the question (4% of total of 1,229) or who had never heard Gaelic spoken (6%).*

*The question asked was: 'How do you feel when you hear people in Scotland speaking to each other in Gaelic?', the options being those shown*

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**Table 4**

**Views on how much Gaelic speakers have in common with other people in Scotland**

	Percentage
A great deal	37
Quite a lot	31
Some	16
Not very much	11
Nothing at all	1
Don't know	4
Sample size	1,229

*Percentages are weighted; sample size is unweighted.*

*The question asked was: 'How much do you think that Gaelic speakers have in common with other people in Scotland?', the options being those shown.*

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**Table 5**

**Views on importance of Gaelic to Scottish heritage and to Scottish identity**

	Importance of Gaelic to Scottish heritage (% in column)	Importance of speaking Gaelic to being Scottish (% in column)
Very important	30	3
Fairly important	46	11
Not very important	17	39
Not at all important	4	45
Can't choose	3	2
Sample size	1,180	1,180

*Percentages are weighted; sample sizes are unweighted. Excludes people who did not respond to the questions (4% of total of 1,229).*

*The questions asked were (with the options shown):*

*'How important do you think Gaelic is to Scotland's cultural heritage?'*

*and*

*'Some people say that the following things are important for being truly Scottish. Others say they are not important. How important do you think to be able to speak Gaelic is for being truly Scottish?'*

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**Table 6**

**Hopes for the number of Gaelic speakers in 50 years' time**

	Percentage
Preference for number of Gaelic speakers:	
More people than now	42
About the same number of people as now	39
Fewer people than now	10
Don't know	9
Sample size	1,229

*Percentages are weighted; sample size is unweighted.*

*The question asked was: ‘*

*Thinking about Scotland in 50 years time, how many people would you like to be speaking Gaelic?’, the options being those shown.*

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**Table 7**

**Views about encouraging the use of Gaelic**

	Percentage
Gaelic should be encouraged throughout Scotland	32
Gaelic should be encouraged in areas where it is already spoken	55
Gaelic should not be encouraged	11
Don't know	2
Sample size	1,229

*Percentages are weighted; sample size is unweighted.*

*The question asked was: 'Which of the[se] phrases best describes what you think about encouraging the use of Gaelic in Scotland?', the options being those shown.*

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**Table 8****Respondents' views of the language rights Gaelic speakers should have, by social domain**

Domain	Percentage in row			
	A right wherever they live in Scotland	A right if they live somewhere Gaelic is spoken	Should not have the right to use Gaelic in this situation	Don't know
Dealing with local council	38	47	14	1
Witness in a Scottish law court	40	31	27	2
Speaking with doctor or nurse	34	37	27	2
Speaking at a public meeting	30	45	23	2
Dealing in writing with a bank	32	34	32	2
Access to Gaelic-medium education	48	43	8	1

*Percentages are weighted; unweighted sample size in each row is 1,229.*

*The question for the first five topics was of the form: 'Some people have suggested that Gaelic speakers should have the right to use Gaelic when dealing with their council, regardless of whether they can also speak English. Others disagree, or think you should only have this right in certain areas of Scotland. Which of the[se] phrases comes closest to your view about what should happen when a Gaelic speaker is dealing with their council?'*

*The question for the sixth topic was: 'In some parts of Scotland, parents can choose to send their children to a primary school where most of the lessons are in Gaelic. For example, children would be taught maths or history in Gaelic rather than in English.' This was followed by 'Which of the[se] phrases best describes what you think about whether parents should or should not have the right to choose to send their children to a school like this?'*

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**Table 9**  
**Factors associated with support for Scottish parliament to have full powers (negative coefficient meaning lower support than in reference categories)**

<i>Explanatory variable (and reference category)</i>	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>		<i>Model 4</i>	
	<i>Hopes for Gaelic in the future only</i>		<i>Add expectations of pride in Scotland if independent</i>		<i>Add national identity</i>		<i>Add other control variables</i>	
	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
Constant	-0.23*	0.09	1.04**	0.16	1.56**	0.20	1.70**	0.50
Hopes for Gaelic (ref. more speakers)	-0.85**	0.13	-0.62**	0.14	-0.57**	0.15	-0.53**	0.16
Expectations of pride in Scotland if independent (ref. 'a lot more')	A little more		-1.39**	0.18	-1.18**	0.19	-0.75**	0.23
	No difference or less or can't choose		-2.16**	0.19	-1.85**	0.20	-0.77**	0.25
National identity (ref. 'Scottish not British')	More Scottish than British				-0.70**	0.19	-0.48*	0.20
	Equally Scottish and British				-1.26**	0.20	-0.77**	0.23
	More British than Scottish				-1.29**	0.35	-0.79*	0.40
	British not Scottish				-2.10**	0.46	-1.35**	0.50
	Other				-0.23	0.32	0.05	0.37
Expectations of Scottish voice in the world if independent (ref. 'a lot stronger')	A little stronger						-0.63*	0.30
	No difference						-1.16**	0.32
	A little weaker						-1.38**	0.40
	A lot weaker						-3.00**	0.80
Expectations of Scottish economy if independent (ref. 'a lot better')	A little better						0.05	0.40
	No difference						-0.77(*)	0.42
	A little worse						-1.38**	0.45
	A lot worse						-1.62**	0.57
Expectations of Scottish taxes if independent (ref. 'a lot higher')	A little higher						-0.02	0.32
	No difference						0.57(*)	0.32
	A little or a lot lower						0.88*	0.41

*Table 9 continued on next page*

Table 9 continued from previous page

Respondent's sex (ref. male)	Female				-0.49**	0.17
Respondent's social class (ref. 'professional and managerial')	Intermediate				0.31	0.26
	Self-employed				0.89**	0.31
	Supervisory and technical				0.24	0.30
	Routine				0.92**	0.20
	Unclassified				1.65	1.06
Residual deviance		1364.5	1216.6	1156.9	977.6	
Number of residual degrees of freedom		1,103	1,101	1,096	1,079	

Key for statistical significance levels: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $0.01 < p < 0.05$ ; (\*)  $0.05 < p < 0.10$ .

The entries are regression coefficients ('Coeff. ') and their standard errors ('s.e. ') in a binary logistic regression of the dichotomous variable recording support or non-support for full powers for the Scottish Parliament (Category 1, Table 1). The control variables (for which, see Table 2) are all categorical, and the coefficients show deviations from the reference category indicated.

For the question asked about hopes for Gaelic, see Table 6. The questions asked about national pride and national identity were (with response options as shown in the table):

'As a result of independence would people in Scotland have more pride in their country, less pride or would it make no difference?'

and

'Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?'

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**Table 10**

**Hopes for the number of Gaelic speakers in 50 years' time,  
by views about the effects of Scottish independence on national pride**

	Percentage wanting Gaelic to be spoken by more people than now	Sample size
Effects of independence on people's pride in Scotland:		
A lot more pride	56	233
A little more pride	52	394
No difference or can't choose or less pride	31	553
Total	43	1,180

*Percentages are weighted; sample sizes are unweighted. Excludes people who did not answer the question on 'pride' (4% of the total).*

*Categories 'no difference', 'less pride', and 'a lot less pride' have been combined since the latter two had few respondents (1.8% and 0.6% respectively).*

*For question wording, see Tables 6 and 9.*

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**Table 11**

**Hopes for the number of Gaelic speakers in 50 years' time, by national identity**

	Percentage wanting Gaelic to be spoken by more people than now	Sample size
National identity:		
Scottish not British	51	272
Scottish more than British	47	367
Equally Scottish and British	40	369
British more than Scottish	34	77
British not Scottish	21	81
Total	42	1,229

*Percentages are weighted; sample sizes are unweighted.*

*For question wording, see Tables 6 and 9.*

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**Table 12**

**Support for various constitutional options, by hopes for the number of Gaelic speakers in 50 years' time (adjusted<sup>1</sup> proportions)**

		<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
<i>Constitutional option</i>	Hopes for the number of Gaelic speakers in 50 years' time	Gaelic variable only	Add expectations of pride in Scotland if independent <sup>1</sup>	Add national identity	Add other control variables
Parliament with full powers	More than now	0.44	0.39	0.37	0.30
	The same or fewer than now, or don't know	0.25	0.26	0.25	0.20
Parliament with full powers compared with maximal devolution <sup>2</sup>	More than now	0.58	0.58	0.57	0.56
	The same or fewer than now, or don't know	0.45	0.47	0.47	0.49
Maximal devolution compared with status quo or abolition <sup>3</sup>	More than now	0.57	0.54	0.54	0.51
	The same or fewer than now, or don't know	0.42	0.44	0.44	0.43

<sup>1</sup> The adjusted proportions may be interpreted as estimates of the proportions of people who would support the constitutional option specified in the first column, if the distribution of the control variable(s) were the same in the two categories (in the second column) of the variable recording hopes for Gaelic. In these adjusted estimates, each control variable is set at its grand mean in the sample.

To assess the statistical significance of the differences in each model between the two categories of the Gaelic variable, see the corresponding model in Table 13.

<sup>2</sup> Data confined to people who support one of these two options.

<sup>3</sup> Data confined to people who do not support 'full powers'.

Table 13

Regression coefficients of variable recording statistical effects of hopes for the number of Gaelic speakers in 50 years' time in models of support for various ranges of powers of Scottish parliament

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>		<i>Model 3</i>		<i>Model 4</i>	
	<i>Hopes for Gaelic in the future only</i>		<i>Add expectations of pride in Scotland if independent<sup>1</sup></i>		<i>Add national identity<sup>1</sup></i>		<i>Add other control variables<sup>1</sup></i>	
<i>Constitutional option</i>	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.	Coeff.	s.e.
Parliament with full powers	-0.85**	0.13	-0.62*	0.14	-0.57**	0.15	-0.53**	0.16
Parliament with full powers compared with maximal devolution <sup>2</sup>	-0.55**	0.15	-0.44**	0.16	-0.42*	0.16	-0.26	0.18
Maximal devolution compared with status quo or abolition <sup>3</sup>	-0.62**	0.15	-0.43**	0.16	-0.41*	0.16	-0.31(*)	0.18

Key for statistical significance levels: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $0.01 < p < 0.05$ ; (\*)  $0.05 < p < 0.10$ .

<sup>1</sup> For control variables, see Table 2.

The entries are regression coefficients ('Coeff. ') and their standard errors ('s.e. ') for the 'hopes for Gaelic variable' (Table 6) in a binary logistic regression of the dichotomous variable recording support or non-support for the parliamentary options shown (Table 1). The coefficients show the difference for the category 'same or fewer speakers than now, or don't know' from the reference category 'more speakers than now'. The first row of results here is a copy of the corresponding part of Table 9.

<sup>2</sup> Data confined to people who support one of these two options.

<sup>3</sup> Data confined to people who do not support 'full powers'.

