

The Impact of Brexit on the identity of Small British-European Nations

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ABSTRACT: This paper considers an under-explored impact of the Brexit process, namely its effect on the collective identities of Small British-European Nations (SBENs). We hypothesize that, not only might economic and political issues be important consequences of Brexit, but so might changes in regional, national and European identities. This has major implications for various policy areas, including the relationship of SBENs with the European Union (EU) and Europe more generally, and their efforts to attain autonomy and independence. Quantitative data is used to analyze public opinion on this topic. Findings suggest that British and European identities are more likely to be statements of protection. Brexit seems to affect value perceptions towards Europe, the EU, and the United Kingdom. However, collective identities based on cultural factors seem to be less affected by the Brexit process.

Keywords: Brexit, Britishness, European identity, islandness, small British-European nations

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Introduction

Brexit is still a highly topical issue. Most of the literature on the subject is dominated by economic, legal and political analyses. The objects of analysis have mostly been the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK) or individual European states. This article attempts to add a new analytical perspective: the impact of Brexit on collective identities (CIs). The objects of study observed for this purpose are also new: Small British-European Nations (SBENs).

The literature suggests that strong national sentiment was a key factor in the UK referendum, but it is likely that the situation for the SBENs was more complex and nuanced due to their particular status. So, the article considers several questions to draw out their perspectives. What happened to small European societies that are UK ‘dependencies’, but not integral parts of the UK? What CIs are present? To what extent do CIs influence each other? To what extent does this influence SBENs’ respective relationships with the EU and the UK? And what has Brexit changed? A wide-ranging spectrum of outcomes are conceivable: from potential declarations of independence (with the prospective goal of integration into European organizations) to the possible establishment of new UK municipalities.

We start by introducing the research subjects (the SBENs) and include information about their political relationship to the UK, the Crown and the EU, as well as some of the economic influences. We explore CIs, including national identity and European identity (EI) and explain their influence. Based on previous research, the idea of Britishness and an island mentality come across as important commonalities.

Data collection was carried out by means of quantitative online surveys using snowball sampling. The analysis covers national, regional, and European identity, the image of the EU, the preferred associations of SBENs, and the issue of separatism and statehood.

Brexit and SBENs

In Europe, there are four SBENs: Gibraltar (a British Overseas Territory), and the Crown Dependencies (CDs) of the Isle of Man (IoM), the Bailiwick of Guernsey (BoG), and the Bailiwick of Jersey (BoJ). The Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) of Akrotiri and Dhekelia are also British Overseas Territories, but primarily military bases. Their administrations report to the Ministry of Defence in London and have, unlike the others, no autonomous status or national feeling (SBAs, 2021; Gruner & Woyke, 2007, p. 213; Gold, 2005, pp. 225-226; Segell, 2001, p. 125). Because of this, the SBAs are not considered as SBEN here.

SBENs: An overview

The IoM had a population of 84,586 in 2019 living in an area of 572 km² (World Bank, 2021d; Gruner & Woyke, 2007, p.213). Its official languages are English and Manx. Its currency is the Manx pound, fixed to the British pound. It lies in the Irish Sea, between Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland. Manx political autonomy descended from the Norwegian kingdom of the Hebrides with its lordship transferred to the English Crown. (Cook, 2001, p. 650; Pilkington, 2001, p. 217; The Royal House, 2021).

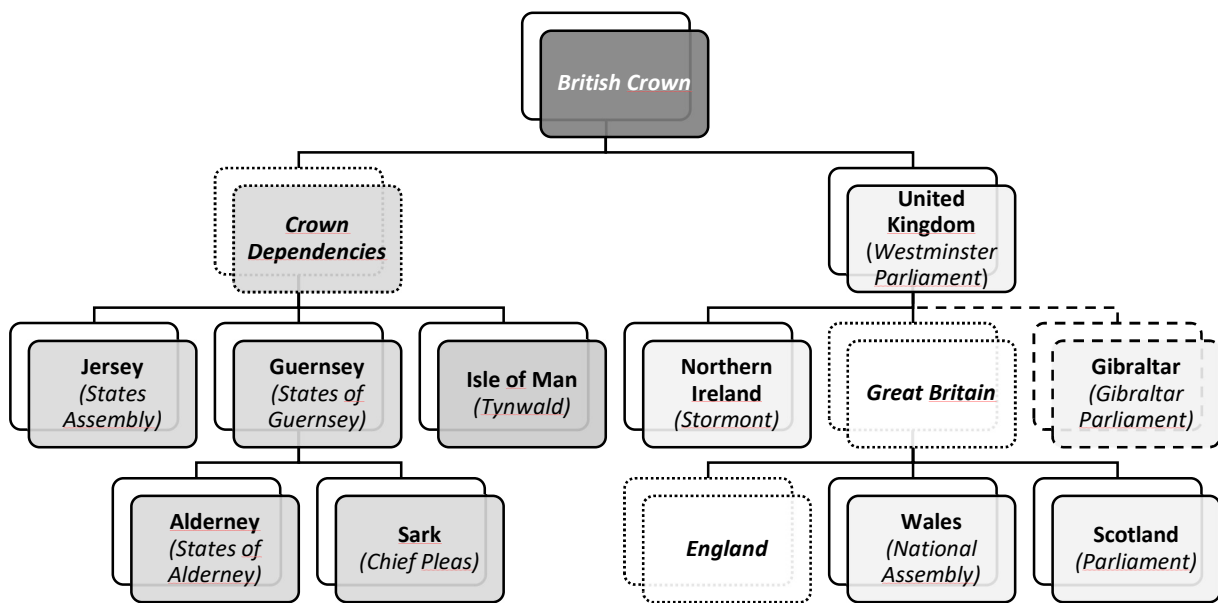
The BoJ and the BoG descended from the Duchy of Normandy. The BoJ consists of a land area of around 116 km² with a population of 101,476 as of July 2021. Its official languages are English and French. However, a small minority in Jersey still speaks the Norman dialect known as Jèrriais. Its currency is the Jersey pound, fixed to the British pound. (Cook, 2013, p. 190; States of Jersey Statistics Unit, 2012; CIA, 2021; Syvret et al., 2011)

The BoG consists of the main island of Guernsey and several islands including Alderney, Sark, Herm, Jethou, Brecqhou, and Lihou. In July 2021, 67,334 people lived in a total area of 78 km². Its official currency is the Guernsey pound, fixed to the British pound. The official languages are English and French. A minority also speaks the Norman dialects of Guernésiais and Sercquiais. The BoG consists of three relatively independent entities: Guernsey, Alderney and Sark. All have their own parliaments and governments. Those of Sark and Alderney have ceded some powers to the Guernsey Parliament (Cook, 2013, p. 189; Sallabank, 2013, p. 56; CIA, 2021).

Gibraltar is a self-governed British Overseas Territory, part of Her Majesty's dominions and ruled by Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar. (Gibraltar Parliament, 2006) It lies at the entrance to the Mediterranean from the Atlantic. Gibraltar shares a border with Spain and is around 6.8 km² in area. In 2019 the population was around 34,000. (Statistics Office - HM Government of Gibraltar, 2020; Bullard, 2017; Orsini, 2018, p. 31) The UN has declared Gibraltar to be a Non-Self-Governing Territory and Gibraltar's sovereignty is disputed with Spain. (United Nations, 2020) The official language is English, while an Andalusian-Spanish dialect is widely spoken. Gibraltarians have become a bilingual society, with unique accents in both English and Spanish and with Llanito or Yanito, a specific form of code-switching sitting astride the two (Statistics Office - HM Government of Gibraltar, 2020; Gorla, 2017, p. 444; Archer, 2006, pp. 107, 110–114; Picardo, 2019, p. 161) The Gibraltar pound and the British pound are its legal tender (HM Government of Gibraltar, 2011, p. 3).

The Manx parliament, Tynwald, and the parliaments of the BoG and the BoJ, are subordinated directly to the British Crown. Gibraltar and its parliament, however, are subordinate to the UK Parliament. The UK Parliament has virtually no legislative power over its CDs, but in the case of Gibraltar it has, theoretically, unlimited legislative power, which in practice it exercises only in areas reserved to the UK and not those devolved to Gibraltar without its consent (UK Parliament, 2019, para. 26, 35) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The structure of the realm of the British Crown (Sturm, 2007, p. 139).

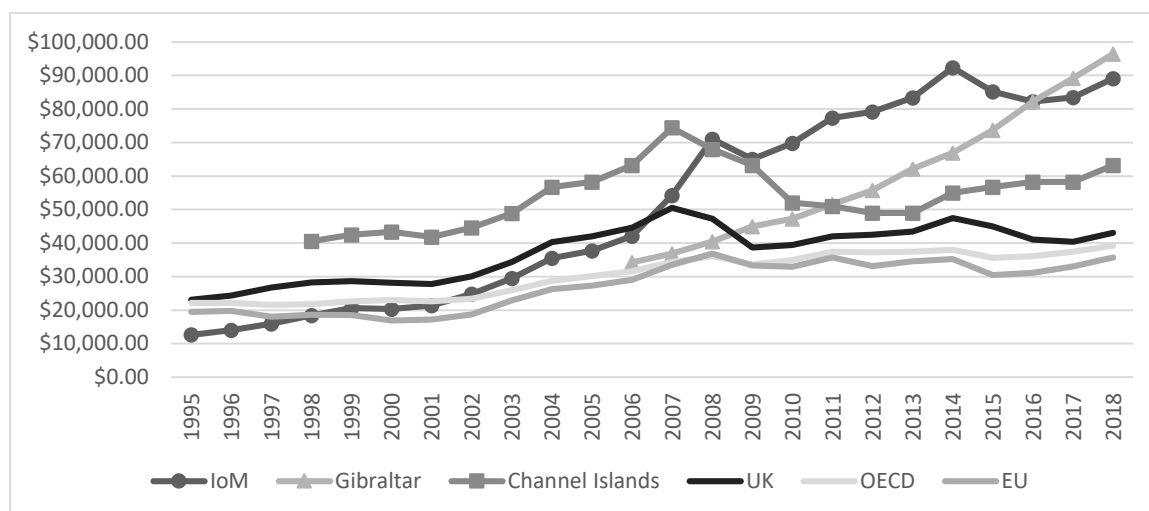


Note: The names of the corresponding ‘parliaments’ are in brackets. The ‘country’ of England and the island of Great Britain have none.

An economic overview

All SBENs yield a high level of wealth (Figure 2). Their GDPs per capita have been higher than the EU or the OECD average since 2001, and since 2009 higher than the UK average. With the exception of Gibraltar, all were impacted by the 2008/09 global financial crash, but have since recovered, albeit BOG and BOJ quite gradually. Gibraltar is economically self-sufficient (as are the CDs) and has established a successful and diversified economy. Key industries include financial services, shipping, e-gaming and tourism. Despite a noticeable move from the public to private sector economy, government spending remains important for employment. The IoM has also done well economically, and there are similarities between it and Gibraltar. Again, financial services (supported by low rates of taxation) and e-gaming lead the way, supplemented by film-making and digital media. The Channel Islands, also with a focus on financial and legal services, have struggled in recent years, with a decline in productivity and a high cost of living that has outstripped wages (World Bank, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d; 2021e; 2021f; Brandtjen, 2019, pp. 119-120; 2021, pp. 90-91).

Figure 2: GDP per capita (current US\$) (World Bank, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d; 2021e; 2021f).



SBENs, Brexit and the EU

Even though the CDs have never been an integral part of the EU and did not take part in the Brexit referendum, they did have economic and political agreements with the EU (Mut Bosque, 2020, p. 156). The recently established Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the UK and the EU that came into force on 1 January 2021 applies to the CDs to a limited extent, covering trade in goods and related topics as well as access to fishing waters (Channel Islands Brussels Office, 2021; IoM Government, 2020; Council of the EU et al., 2021).

Gibraltar had an integral place in the EU (Ferdinand et al., 2020, p. 53). However, it never took part in the Customs Union nor in the Common Agricultural Policy (EC, 1972, pp. 20, 127, 196). This meant that the territory of Gibraltar was never part of the EU, but the government and the people were. The borders with Gibraltar became, especially in the economic sense, external borders of the EU (Brandtjen, 2021, p. 93).

The aforementioned treaty between the UK and the EU, according to Art. 744 III, is not applicable to Gibraltar, which makes the future status of Gibraltar complex. Spain received a draft mandate from the European Commission to negotiate with the UK in July 2021. It includes the proposal to remove physical checks and controls on persons and goods. The mandate is without prejudice to the issues of sovereignty and jurisdiction and focuses purely on cooperation in the region (European Commission, 2021). The outcome of the negotiations remains open and uncertain, given the sensitivity of the issue.

The influence and importance of collective identities

To understand how Brexit may affect identity, the CIs within SBENs need to be understood. These are often conceived of as a shared foundation for togetherness. This can be based on various factors such as inherited and/or current strokes of fate, shared ideas, convictions, interests, or a collective defence against a common enemy. Solidarity is required within a community who share an identity. The politically most important and modern version of CI is the nation (Schneider, 2016, pp. 167-168).

Nations are collective groupings of people who feel a common sense of belonging and differentiation due to ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or political factors which might change over time (Riescher, 2015, p. 403). Identities cannot be enforced or judged. Individuals seek a positive social identity, and through this, positive self-esteem by distinguishing their social group from another. Economic prosperity of a group is as important to its sense of belonging as its policies. If an individual does not like a group or another person, he or she will never identify with them but will develop an identity to distinguish or distance him- or herself from them (Brinthaupt, 2008, pp. 551-552; Chu, 2008, p. 594; Davis, 2008, p. 556).

Having said this, several simultaneous CIs are not precluded. Political and national/regional identities are difficult to separate from each other because of their mutual influence. So-called multiple identities also make more diffuse the relevance of a national identity (Segell, 2001, p.132; Schmidt, 2010, p. 531). Identities can relate to a region, a nation, an ethnic group, or a political structure. European Identity (EI) seems to be a mixture of regional and political ones (McCormick, 2010, p. 5). EI encourages the population to feel connected to Europe as a separate space, promotes solidarity and loyalty among the population and towards Europe, and is the basis for all activities relating to European policy (Hüttmann & Wehling, 2009, p. 205). Principles of representative democracy, the rule of law, social justice as the goal of economic progress, a respect for human rights, as well as institutions and common policies, and procedures for cooperation are described in the 'Document on European Identity' in 1973 as components of EI. This identity exists in addition to, not as a substitute for, individual national identities (Schneider, 2016, p. 167; Stoica, 2016, p. 468).

'Europe' is often used as a synonym for the EU. Thus, the question of EI also becomes an inquiry into images of, and the relationship to, the EU (Brandtjen, 2019; 2021). However, there are other organizations in Europe, such as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEA). EFTA now consists of four members (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein) and is an intergovernmental free trade area. The EEA, on the other hand, is an agreement between the EU and EFTA (excluding Switzerland) to strengthen the four freedoms and common economic relations. (EFTA, 2021) Due to the lack of research, it is uncertain what SBENs' concept of 'Europe' is, or whether Brexit has begun to change this definition.

Age, gender, ethnicity, religion, education and media access are important factors influencing CIs. Young people are more likely to consider biological markers, while older people are more likely to consider faith, place of birth or bloodline. Women tend to have a lesser sense of national identity than men in societies with masculine attributes. Ethnic-cultural factors such as ancestry, birthplace or language can create a stronger sense of separation. Followers of the dominant religion in a society tend to have a stronger national identity. Highly educated people in developed countries tend to be less nationalistic and more cosmopolitan. An important factor shaping identity is the media landscape. Media communication represents society's mirror and is a guiding image for perceiving and understanding reality (van Berkel et al., 2017; Stokes, 2017; Harris, 2012, p. 119; Windari, 2021).

Previous research on the IoM and Gibraltar reported the influence of neighbouring states and regions. On the IoM, the Manx media are less represented than media from the UK. The IoM lacks its own TV channel, or an island-run area of the BBC or ITV, as the Channel Islands have, for example (Brandtjen, 2019, pp.191, 200). In Gibraltar, there is a national broadcasting corporation: the GBC. Thanks to its geographical proximity to southern Spain, it

receives British and Gibraltarian, as well as Spanish and Moroccan channels (Brandtjen, 2021, p. 118).

Britishness and 'islandness'

It appears that Britishness, the feeling of being British, is part of each SBEN's national identity and underlines the multi-layered nature of collective identities. 'British' means having a strong perceived connection to the British Crown, royal family, and Britain's constituent nations. Britishness is manifested differently among the individual SBENs. It is not English, Scottish, Welsh, or Northern Irish, but British (O'Byrne, 2001, p. 151). However, Englishness, or English culture, seems to represent a counterculture to the SBENs (Brandtjen, 2019; 2021). This begs the question of whether because of Brexit, the feeling of being British might also change.

'Islandness', or an island mentality, is a common denominator for the SBEN population's sense of identity. It represents a sense of belonging due to the geographical isolation of a place, the feeling of smallness and remoteness, and a people's sense of living in a unique environment (Beswick, 2020, pp. 26-27). SBENs, except Gibraltar, are islands. However, because of the conflict-ridden relationship with Spain and the Rock's long-standing isolation, there is also a certain degree of 'Islandness' in Gibraltarian society (Brandtjen, 2021).

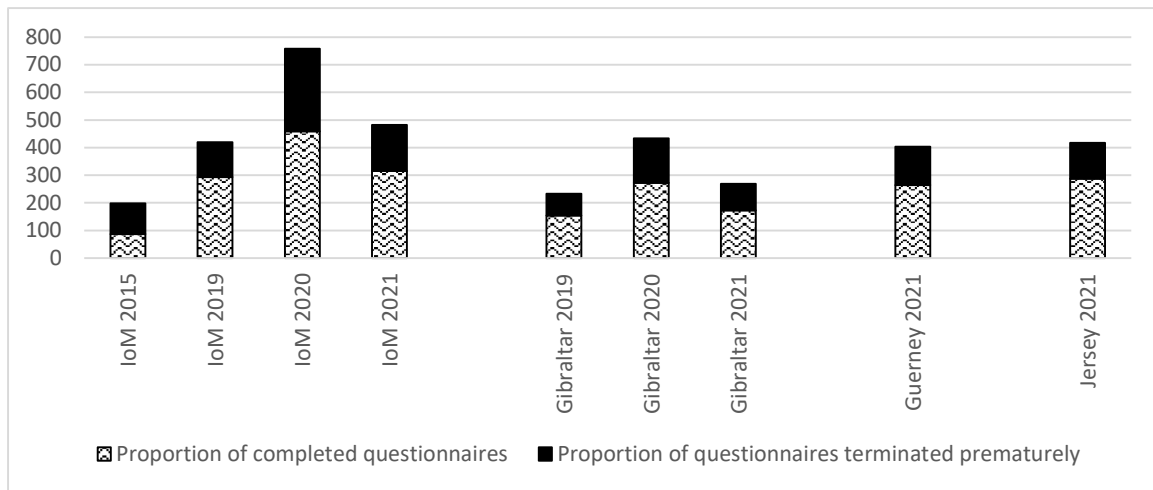
Small in human and natural resources, SBENs find it hard to increase their wealth without a flourishing foreign trade, and foreign investments and net exports become especially important (Jørgensen, 2001; Hansen & Olesen, 2001). SBENs seem to need a strong international partner acting as a protective economic, political, normative and military power (Friese, 2011; Ipsen, 2004). However, the more the protection of SBENs by international law proceeds, the less is the need for tacit or explicit 'protectors', and SBENs' autonomy is less likely to be in danger (Duursma, 1996). Perhaps other partnerships, such as with the EU, could therefore replace the UK's role. Membership of, or association with, organizations such as the EU or EFTA pose advantages for SBENs, such as having one voice among equals, electoral power of small populations, common security and foreign policy, and access to cultural, economic and democratic development funds (Books, 2001, p. 222).

Data collection about collective identities

We started quantitative surveys first in the IoM in 2015 and they have been conducted annually in other SBENs since 2019. The surveys did not include any questions, which might lead to the identification of a person, were completely anonymous and fulfilled data-protection regulations. The results were analysed using SPSS (Brandtjen, 2019; 2021). The number of participants in different years varied. Percentage results are to be interpreted in the context of the total number of participants ([Figure 3](#)).

The Manx local radio station 3FM supported the survey from 25th May to 31st December 2015. In 2019, 2020 and 2021, all surveys were promoted via Facebook and Twitter from 1st January to 31st March. The snowball sampling method was used to enable the participation of hard-to-reach populations within a low information context. Additionally, this method allowed the possibility of further information exchange through comments and groups. Unfortunately, representativeness was difficult to guarantee (Dosek, 2021). Therefore, participants were asked about gender, age, education level, income group, occupational group and area of residence.

Figure 3: Number of participants.



The surveys create snapshots of participants’ opinions regarding evolving CIs. Like public opinions, CIs refer to the forming of objective or subjective beliefs, lacking the certainty of knowledge. Therefore, any opinion on identities, can be true, false, or contradictory (Kleinsteuber, 2015, pp. 423-424). Due to the different promotion of the survey in 2015, the response rate is very low and should be viewed through a more critical lens. In the case of Guernsey and Jersey, where initial surveys were only carried out in 2021, a comparison over time is not yet possible.

Based on the respective censuses, in all years, younger age groups are underrepresented, and older age groups are overrepresented. The gender ratio is also very male-biased, by between 60 and 80%. Finally, 40–50% of participants in all surveys have a university degree (Bachelor, Master or PhD). Whether the latter is representative cannot be verified due to a lack of data. Due to this sampling, the results may be influenced by the aforementioned factors and may not be completely transferable to the overall population.

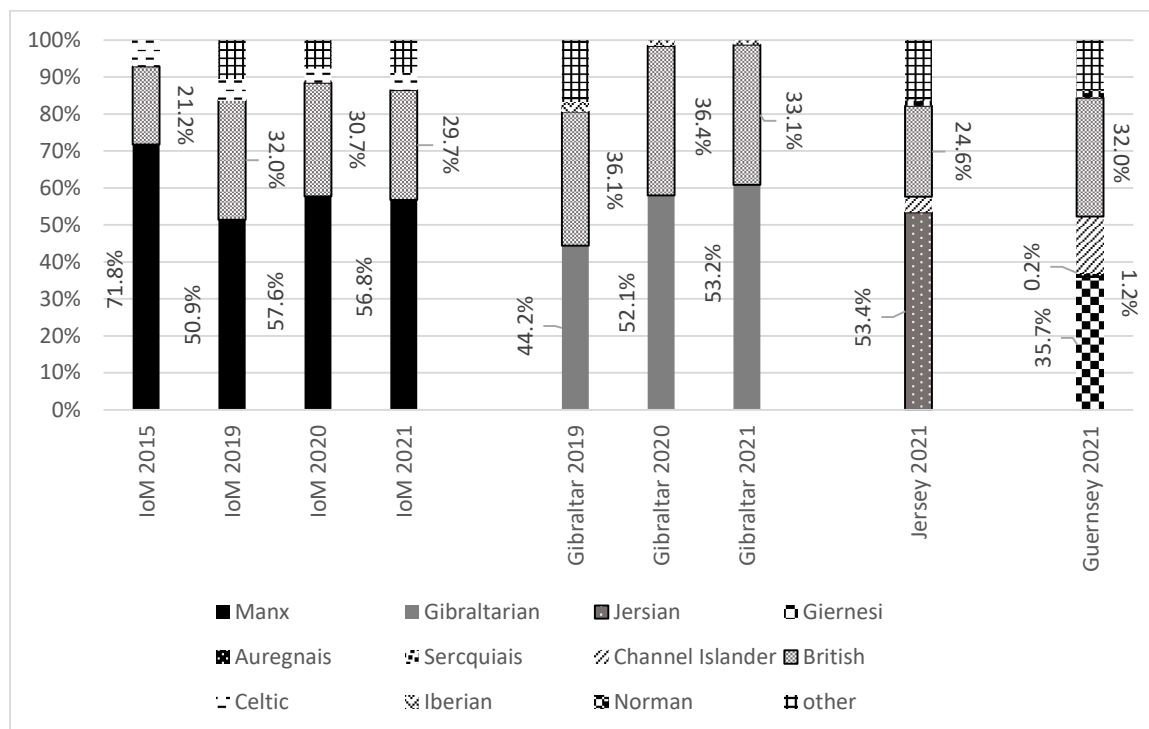
Collective identities in SBENs

Based on cultural, regional, and political circumstances, participants were asked about their national or ethnic affiliation. There were no multiple response options to indicate a possible trend. Participants in the IoM could choose between Manx, British and Celtic, in Gibraltar between Gibraltar, British and Iberian, in BoG between Giernisi, Auregnais, Sercquiais, Channel Islander, British and Norman and in BoJ between Jersian, Channel Islander, British and Norman. Furthermore, ‘other answers’ could be selected and detailed. Some participants used this option to indicate combinations of the already specified groups. Additionally, questions were asked about EI.

National sentiment and the role of ‘Britishness’

Figure 4 shows that in Jersey and the IoM, more than 50% of participants identify as local nationals. In Gibraltar in 2019 and Guernsey in 2021, less than 50% exclusively claimed to have this local national sentiment. The level of national sentiment appears to show a clear upward trend in Gibraltar and the IoM since 2019. The high value in 2015 on the IoM is relative to the low response rate.

Figure 4: Which is your national or ethnic feeling?



Between 21.2% and 36.4% of all participants surveyed stated that they felt British. About 0.1% of all participants amongst the Manx, Jersians and Guernsians responded with a combination of British and their respective local nationality. In the Gibraltarian polls on the other hand, this affiliation was about 3–8%. This may be due to the special protective function of the UK in Gibraltar.

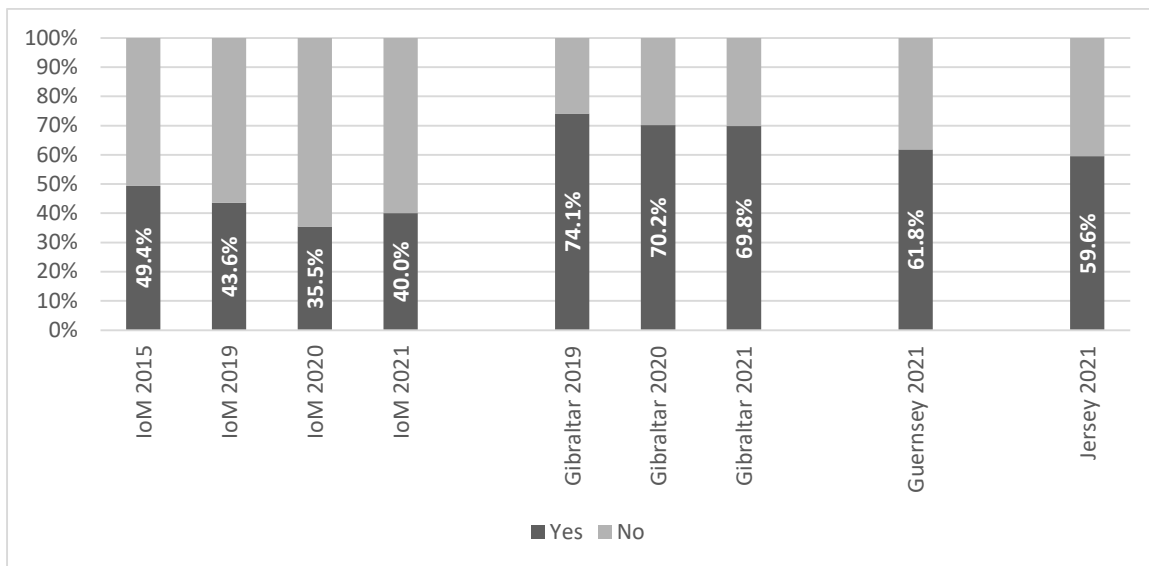
On the IoM, and except for 2015, this feeling of Britishness seems to have reduced over time. It is unclear whether this has come from people experiencing the effects of Brexit at first hand.

European sentiment

Except for the IoM, most respondents (between 59.6% and 74.1%) reported feelings of Europeanness (Figure 5). People’s feelings of EI also depend on their territory’s geographical position. Comparing the results of Gibraltar, with its land border and long distance from the UK, with those of the IoM, in the Irish Sea, the following conclusion might be made: The more distant from the UK and the closer a SBEN is to an EU member state, the more strongly people report feelings of being European. The values of the Channel Islands, with their geographical location midway between the other case studies in terms of distance to the UK and to continental Europe, seem to support this statement.

In the IoM and Gibraltar, a negative trend seems to be emerging about EI. This appears to be due to the interests and media landscape of their immediately neighbouring states, the respective territories’ relationships with neighbouring states, their relationships with the UK or the EU, or a combination of other, less easily quantifiable factors, such like religiousness or personal experiences.

Figure 5: Do you feel European?



The sub-group of those who feel both European and British at the same time is the one with the lowest proportion in all years and regions. It is only undercut by the sub-group in Guernsey (2021) who feel both Channel Islander and European, and the sub-groups in the IoM in all years who feel both Manx and European. Furthermore, there is a trend over the years showing that participants younger than 40 years old, and people with a higher level of education feel more European.

Brexit's realignment

Because of Brexit, SBENs' links with the EU, EFTA and the EEA are greatly changed and have been loosened. Consequently, it becomes important to examine what form of European integration the SBEN participants prefer. This depends on their image of the EU. Participants surveyed were able to indicate whether the EU was a positive or a negative institution and which European organization they would like to belong to. The options given were the EU, EFTA with simultaneous EEA membership, EFTA without EEA membership or none of the above. The option of EFTA without EEA membership would roughly correspond to the status of Switzerland. Additional questions were asked to ascertain whether the answers given resulted from economic, political, cultural or historical reasons.

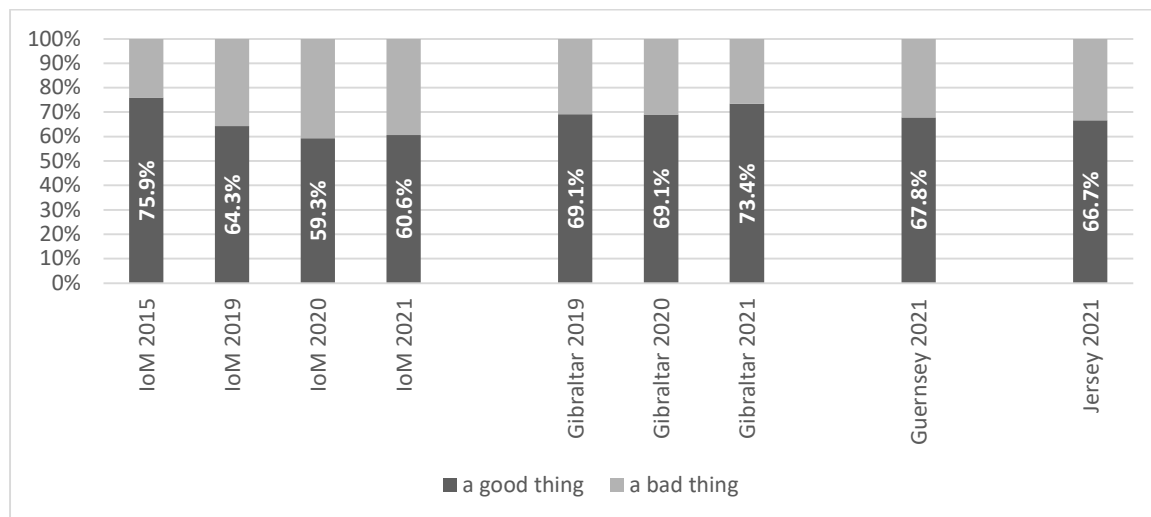
As a result of Brexit, the EU will become the largest political and economic partner for SBENs, so special partnerships or EU-membership could possibly become options in the future. Participants were asked to indicate their preferred EU affiliation: as a separate state, as an autonomous region, as a municipality, a free association or not belonging at all. On the one hand, these options reflect current forms of participation in the EU and, on the other hand, they serve as a control question for the desired degree of autonomy. Free association represents the status of Andorra or San Marino. Both are closely linked to the EU and are part of the EU Neighbourhood Policy but are not members of either the EU or EFTA (EU Delegation, 2021).

Brexit represents a kind of emancipation or independence, and accordingly questions arise as to whether SBENs prefer independence, whether Brexit has promoted this in the short term, and whether the SBENs' own identity justifies taking this step. To explore this preferred autonomy status, the survey presented options for full independence, extended autonomy, the status quo, or less autonomy and greater integration with the UK. Regarding the combination of preferred autonomy and EU membership, participants were asked about the degree of Europeanized separatism they would prefer.

The image of the EU

The image of the EU seems to be very positive (Figure 6). The EU is seen as something positive by a majority in all years in all SBENs (between 59.3% and 75.9%). Even on the IoM, where EI was demonstrated to a lesser degree, a positive image of the EU is held. Over time, we do see a negative trend on the IoM and a positive trend in Gibraltar, which may be related to Brexit. Here, too, physical proximity to the EU or the UK seems to be the essential factor. Temporal comparisons in the Bailiwicks are not yet possible.

Figure 6: I believe the EU is ...?



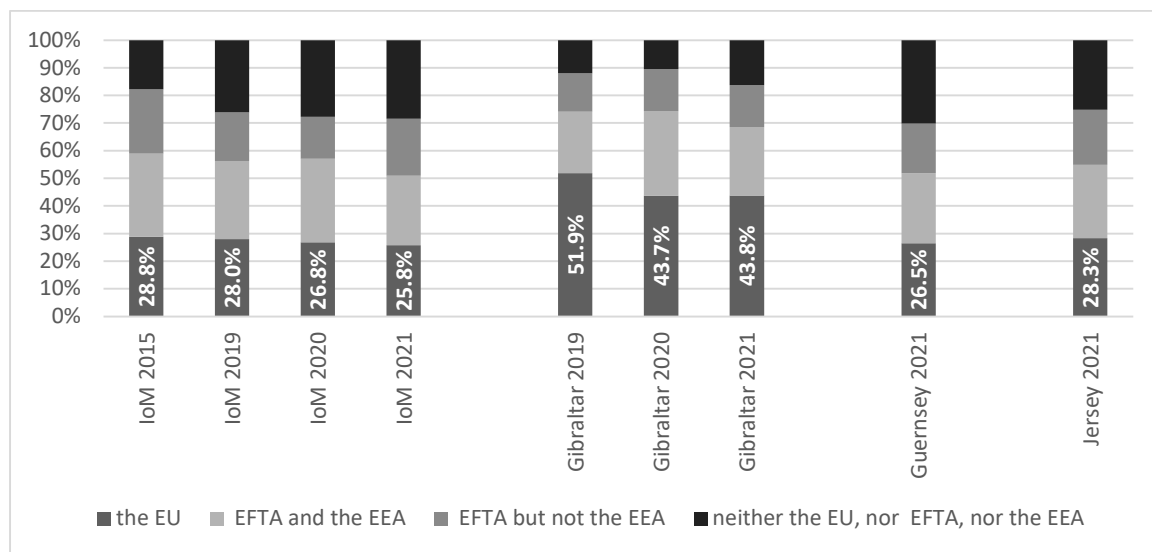
The Manx participants tend to state a positive image if they belong to a younger age group, if their income is higher or if they live in a more urban area. A big difference in profession, level of education or daily use of language was not observed in the group. In Gibraltar, participants aged between 30 and 50 years who speak mostly Llanito and Spanish and those with a higher income tend to have a more positive image of the EU. The self-employed and participants with a very low or a very high education level have a relatively negative image. The self-employed and older participants in Jersey and Guernsey view the EU rather negatively.

In general, the more participants feel European and/or identify with the respective local nationality, the greater the positive image of the EU. Those who said they had a positive image, cited economic and political reasons for their opinion. Freedom on the European continent seems also to be a factor. Those who considered the EU negatively mostly cited cultural reasons as well as political reasons. Conversely, this could signify that the EU and EI relate less to common values and more to economic factors.

European integration

The survey shows preference for EU membership is highest in Gibraltar and lowest on the IoM. In both, a negative trend has emerged. Nonetheless, a preference for EU or EFTA membership seems to be strongly desirable. EEA membership (EU and EFTA membership with EEA affiliation) is more popular than solely EFTA membership, regardless of EEA affiliation. The BoG and the IoM display the highest opposition to integration with these organizations in 2021 (30.2% and 28.5% respectively) (Figure 7).

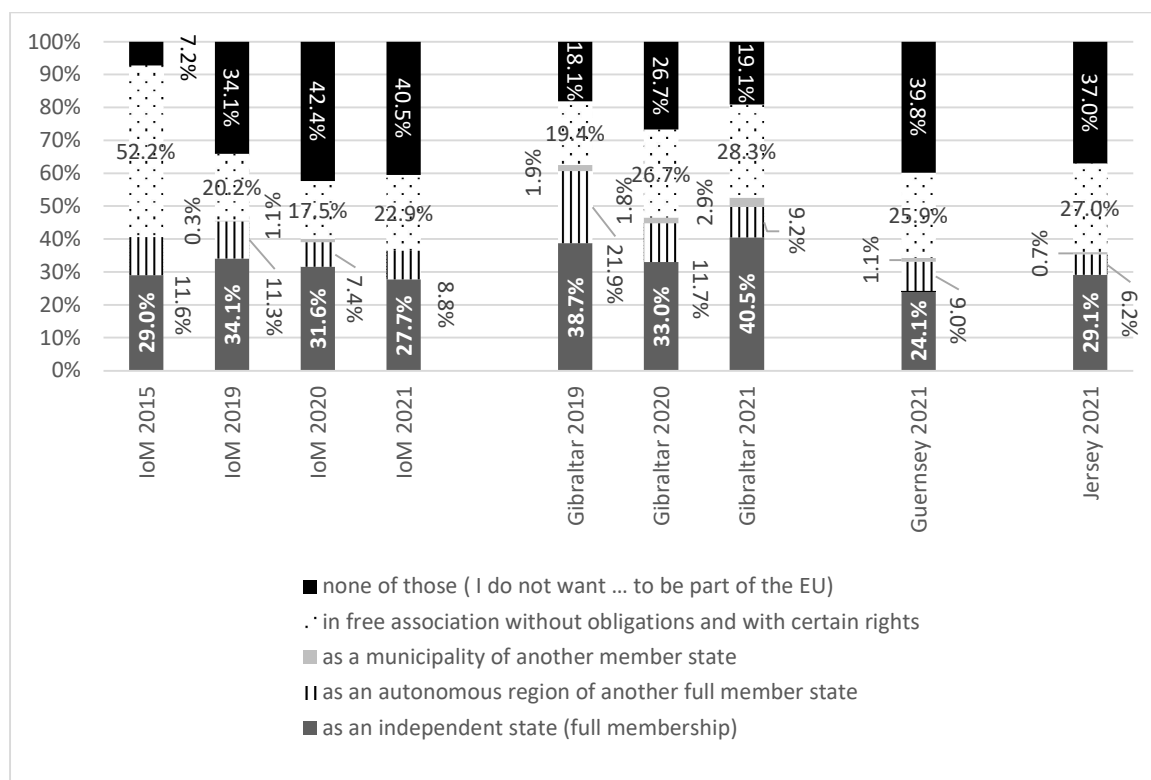
Figure 7: Are you in favour of the idea that the IoM / Gibraltar / BoG / BoJ joins ... ?



According to participants, the decisive factors influencing a desire for EU or EFTA membership are economic and political. Those who reject integration mainly cited cultural reasons. This would suggest that European integration has led to a fear of losing one's own culture and identity. One explanation for this fear could be the difference in size between the SBENs and the EU or EFTA, and these organizations' previous experience with the UK or its immediate neighbours. Physical proximity to the EU or the UK and to their respective media again seem to be important factors.

In Gibraltar, the idea of becoming a full EU member as an independent state has the largest share of supporters. In the IoM in 2015, the largest support is for free association. However, overall from 2015–2021, the largest share of Manx respondents is against any kind of association or membership. However, the proportions of all answer options are quite close to each other. Simply becoming a municipality of another state seems to have been clearly rejected by all SBEN (Figure 8). This suggests that this option represents a threat to the SBENs' already achieved autonomy. Clear differences between age groups, income groups, level of education or type of employment cannot be clearly discerned.

Figure 8: Should the IoM / Gibraltar / BoG / BoJ joins the EU, which form of membership or affiliation would you prefer?

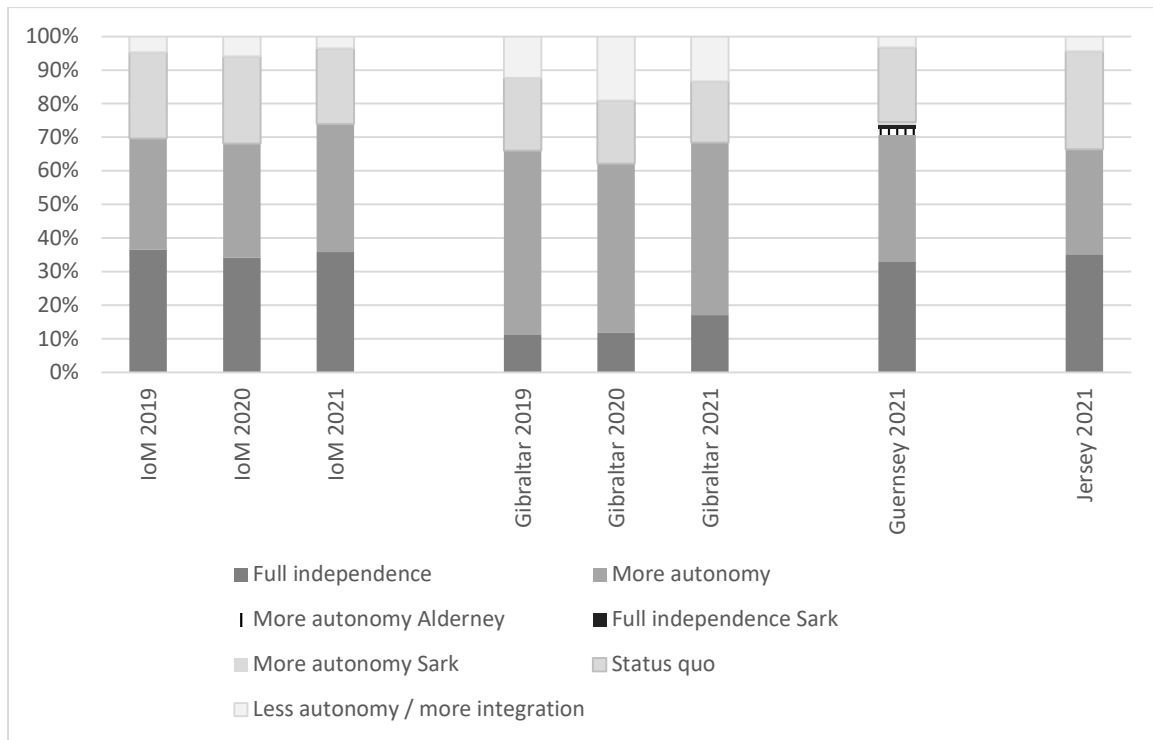


Independence movement

On the IoM in 2019 and 2020, in the BoJ in 2021, and among BoG participants from the island of Sark, the largest proportion is in favour of full independence. In Gibraltar, in the BoG and on the IoM in 2021, the largest share desire more autonomy. Most BoG participants from the island of Alderney also want more autonomy for themselves. The results from Sark and Alderney can be attributed to the federal structure of the BoG. (Figure 9).

Overall, the stronger the feeling of nationhood in SBENs, the stronger the desire for more autonomy and even statehood. The stronger the SBEN’s British identity is, the less statehood is favoured, and the more integration into the British state is desired. Additionally, on the IoM, the desire for independence or more autonomy is greater the less one feels European, or the lower one’s weekly income. In Gibraltar and the Channel Islands, the desire for statehood and greater autonomy is stronger; when there is a deeper sense of local national sentiment, the more one feels European, the higher one’s educational attainment, or the older one is.

Figure 9: I am in favour of ...



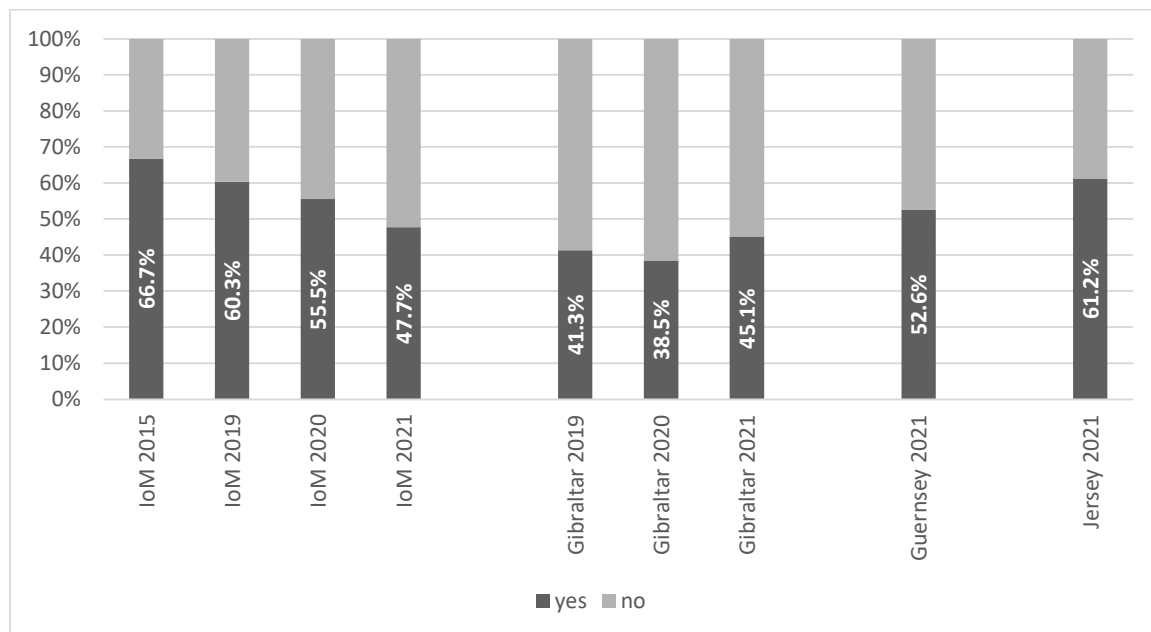
As far as full independence is concerned, there seems to be a difference depending on physical proximity to the EU or the UK and their respective media. If we look at the sum of participants who favoured full independence and more autonomy, we see the same proportion in all SBENs. Brexit seems to have had little influence here. Only Gibraltar shows a slight increase in the desire for full independence.

The relationship between the image of the EU, national identity and EI raises the question of whether statehood is preferred in order to become a full member of the EU (Figure 10). Notably, except for the results of the IoM in 2021 and Gibraltar, approval ratings are above 50% with the IoM showing a steady downward trend and Gibraltar a slight upward trend. On the IoM, this negative trend could be linked to a less favourable image of the EU. This could be related to the reporting of the Brexit process from news outlets based on the British mainland. The Gibraltar numbers are also surprising which can certainly be explained by the territory's complex historical relationship with Spain.

The data gathered show us that five factors seem to be important in an endorsement of independence and EU membership: a strong EI, a younger age group, a low weekly income and a strong desire for more autonomy or statehood.

EI and Britishness seem to be less about a cultural sense of belonging and more a question of protection. Depending on which membership seems more advantageous economically, politically and culturally, the stronger the respective sense of belonging. This, however, reduces Britishness and EI to a declaration of purpose for the protection of the respective SBENs.

Figure 10: Do you think that the intention to join the EU would be an argument for full independence?



Conclusion

The objective of this research was to find out to what extent the Brexit process has affected the collective identities of SBENs. SBENs are autonomous societies with their own cultural attributes. Their commonalities are a sense of Britishness and an island mentality. Here it was shown that their aspect of ‘smallness’ and their political, economic and geographical remoteness leads to the need for a protector. This role is one that could be played by either the UK or the EU. The respective populations were surveyed using a snowball sampling method.

The analysis showed that the identities of SBENs seem to be quite robust. Changes over time occur only on a small scale and for specific reasons that we have discussed in this paper. These identities are not necessarily contradictory to a British identity. Nonetheless, the drivers for a particular identity seem to be strongly attached to regional cultural elements like language, regional economic preconditions, a desire for autonomy, etc., thus deriving a strong connection to a SBEN identity. This strong sense of identity also seems to be the predominant reason why Brexit has had a rather minor impact on SBENs’ identities. Apart from a negative trend on the IoM, participants feel quite strongly European. The EU as an institution is generally perceived as quite positive. The Brexit process does not seem to have had a very strong effect here. It seems rather, physical proximity to the EU or the UK and representation by their respective media, has had a greater impact.

A greater effect is apparent, however, when looking at European integration. The desire for accession to the EU and EFTA, including accession to the EEA, seems to show a slight negative trend. If EU accession was possible, the individual SBEN’s preferred form of membership does not seem to have changed during the Brexit process. Only the relative number of respondents rejecting this option seems to have increased.

Nevertheless, there is a desire for more autonomy and even statehood. This of course depends on the respective sense of identity. Moreover, the possibility of EU membership appears to be a motivating reason for potential independence. The more pronounced the sense of national identity, the more likely SBENs are to express a EI, and the more independence or statehood is desired. Similarly, the younger the respondents are and the lower their weekly income, the stronger their desire for more autonomy or statehood. This does not seem to have changed much because of Brexit.

In conclusion, EI and Britishness seem to become more a declaration of protection. Depending on what is considered more advantageous for the survival of the respective society, there is a greater sense of belonging to that identity. Ideal values seem to be of less importance. The Brexit process seems to have only changed the reputation of the respective partnership to the EU or the UK.

Confirmation of this assumption would be an objective for further research, as would further examination of how Europe is defined by SBENs and other possible factors influencing their identities. We would also wish to achieve higher representativeness. A foundation stone has been laid for this.

Disclaimer

This article has not benefitted from research funding.

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