Brexit and Scotland:
towards a political geography perspective

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Abstract

This paper looks at the 2016 referendum on the United Kingdom's (UK) membership of the European Union (EU). This produced a result where a majority of those voting in the UK chose to Leave. However the focus here is on the marked geographical distinctions within the UK, and in particular the difference between Scotland, where a majority voted to Remain, compared to England where most chose to Leave. The factors that help explain Scotland's relatively high Remain vote, are considered, and the implications of Scotland's majority position for the territorial coherence of the UK state are examined. When assessing two possible hypotheses to explain the different outcome in Scotland, it is argued that individual voters and their profile characteristics present broadly the same patterns of difference as in England. The importance of place and the creation and play of distinct political landscapes is, however, found to be a more viable explanation. A comparison of voting records on either side of the Scotland/England border, both for the referendum itself and for political parties with opposing positions on EU membership, reveals a clear pattern of difference. It is concluded that the referendum has exposed and deepened pre-existing divisions in UK society, not least territorial cleavages, and in this respect it was to amplify the 'tyranny of the majority' as well as the 'brutalism' of the unconstrained referendum.

Key words: European Union, United Kingdom, Scotland, referendum, Brexit, border, politics, state, Europe

1. Introduction

Both among social scientists, as well as amongst politicians, the virtues of the referendum as a means of deciding policy issues – the devolution of decision-making

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power from elected representatives to the electorate at large – is deeply contested (Butler, Ranney, 1994; Qvortrup 2014). As a counter to the inability of representative democracy to be able to effectively reflect public opinion and preferences, the referendum is a means of extending the practice of democracy, particularly where there is a demand for constitutional change. Further, as S. Tierney (2012) has argued, based on an analysis of recent experience in western democracies, the referendum provides a means of airing debate over issues which are of public concern particularly where confidence in representative democracy is itself waning. Thus, resorting to the use of referendums has become more common in western democracies in recent decades, often mirroring the dealignment of electoral voting patterns and the tapering of support for established political parties, trends which in the United Kingdom (UK) were emergent in the 1970s.

Such an increase in the use of the referendum has served to emphasise, at least, for those on the 'losing' side, its 'brutality', as well as, more generally, its inherent advantages and disadvantages. The brutality of the referendum stems from its reliance on the principle of majoritarianism, that winning or losing is decided by simple majority. While such an outcome can be annulled where minimum levels of turnout are prescribed as thresholds which must be met, in their absence – as in the recent Brexit referendum – winning can be achieved by a majority as slim as 50% of the votes cast for a particular preference + 1. By definition, such a small majority does not produce a clear outcome, and leaves a substantial minority disaffected by the result. The divisiveness of the referendum result can be exacerbated by the extent to which voting preferences are identifiable with cleavages already apparent between voters – those of the Right and Left, of educational attainment, socio-economic position, age, gender and geography. In these circumstances the zero-sum nature of the referendum outcome will have a divisive effect between social groups as well as potentially between different regions. In this paper the implications of the recent Brexit referendum in the UK are explored, looking particularly at Scotland, in which, in contrast to both the UK-wide position and especially by comparison with England, a clear majority of those voting were in favour of remaining within the European Union (EU). Before specifying the particular research questions some background to the referendum is discussed; the rules through which it was operated and the

implications arising from the nature of the UK as a complex multi-nation state. Initially, however, the way in which political geography is able to address the understanding of referendums such as Brexit and its implications for the territorial state is outlined.

Referendums are, in effect, a special type of election. How, then, political geographers have studied elections becomes translatable in the study of how the referendum is conducted, the analysis of its outcomes, in particular an understanding of the territorial variations of voting preferences, and its implications for governing the territorial state, especially where voting reflects spatial cleavages and have cumulative implications for political cohesion. These different types of study conceal a wide array of questions political geographers have sought to research in the analysis of elections – the methods (or laws) through which elections are organised, for example, has been a fruitful area of research in its own right, spawning in turn research into the spatial implications of different types of electoral system, into redistricting and, in turn, to the biases that can be introduced through such practices as gerrymandering (for an overview of redistricting experience in the UK see R. J. Johnston *et al,* 2001).

Critically, while there are similarities between 'normal' periodic elections conducted under representative democracy – national or local elections - and the holding of referendums, there are also significant differences between them. National and local elections are typically contested between established political parties that seek to mobilise voter support across a wide range of policies, whereas the referendum is contested around a single issue. It may attract novel *ad hoc* cross-party alliances championing a particular argument, as in the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 where the major Right and Left parties shared a joint platform opposing the nationalist party. In the Brexit vote, too, Leave and Remain preferences tended to split the major parties of Right and Left (Conservative and Labour, respectively) and there were unconventional alliances crossing party lines. Frequently, the issues around which referendums are organised are politically contentious and might be emotionally charged – making a change to the constitution, extending or withdrawing abortion rights, limiting immigration and in the case of Brexit, leaving the European Union. In other words, referendums can be divisive,

potentially more overtly than for 'normal' elections because conflict is centred round a single (contentious) issue.

From a political geography perspective understanding referendums highlights questions that have been core to electoral geography, but it also raises other questions arising from the particular nature of the referendum. Typically, then, elections are organised around constituencies (wards or electoral districts) in which the outcomes have both local impact, the election of a representative of a specific political party for that area, and national impact, in that local results are aggregated nationally to determine the 'winning' party. The Brexit referendum was conducted geographically, allowing for voting analysis to explore the correlates of voting preferences across electoral districts, as will be seen later. Critically, however, the results of the referendum centre on the single count, the number of voters supporting or opposing the question posed *nationally.* For practical purposes the holding of a state-wide referendum may be delegated and organised geographically, perhaps using existing electoral or local government units, but the results from these separate areas is limited to their contribution to the overall (national) count, which is the decisive factor. Analysing the Brexit referendum from a political geography perspective can incorporate orthodox questions of electoral geography, such as how elections are organised spatially and the implications of spatial organisation for outcomes, and ecological analysis of partisan support between electoral districts. These similarities with the political geographer's understanding of 'normal' elections aside, the nature of the referendum process was to raise fundamentally different questions too. Critical here is an understanding of the geographical framework in which the Brexit referendum was conducted: in effect, the vote, as has been noted, was conducted on the basis of a single constituency in which each vote counted and was given equal weighting, a reality which the authors argue was to have profound implications for the result, its geography and its implications for the cohesion of the overall (UK) state.

How the Brexit vote was to be conducted – the question to which it sought opinion, how the count was organised including the rules through which an outcome was to be decided – sought to make the process transparent and unambiguous. Initially, the decision to hold a referendum was taken in 2014 at which time the UK

Government was a coalition between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties; because the latter were strongly pro-European, holding the referendum was effectively vetoed. The largely unexpected return of the Conservatives to power in 2015, albeit with a small majority, meant that a referendum could be held. Beyond the possibility of a referendum being held and that it was to be a simple Yes/No (Leave/Remain) vote, the details of how the voting was to be undertaken were not to be aired extensively during the 2015 election campaign, nor significantly in the debates surrounding the enabling legislation. It was taken as given that the result would depend on a simple majority, though there was little discussion, for instance, given to the turnout level required and whether there should be such a threshold. Stipulations on turnout for a referendum to initiate a policy or constitutional change in the UK, as elsewhere, are not without precedent – the 1979 Scottish devolution referendum (for example) required a majority of those voting in favour of devolution *and* that the turnout of those opting to vote in preference was over 40% of the entire electorate, rules that broadly were also applied to the recently held referendum in Hungary eliciting opinions on immigration. Thus, in the Hungarian referendum in spite of an overwhelming proportion of voters opting for tighter immigration controls, the vote failed to win constitutional recognition as the turnout was below 50%. Similarly, in the 1979 Scottish referendum while more than 50% voted in favour of devolution, the preference failed to attract 40% of the entire electorate, and thus the proposal to establish devolution faltered. Also, while in the Brexit referendum the voting outcome was to treat the UK as a single unit, the actual organisation of the vote, including the count, was to be organised on a local authority basis – that is, the distribution of preferences were to be publicised geographically, even though such results would only have significance cumulatively, in their contribution to the overall number of preferences for remain or leave. The process ensured that voters were aware of how their local area voted, adding to the potential divisiveness of the referendum, particularly for supporters living in areas that were ultimately on the 'losing side' once the national count was declared.

The geographical divisiveness of the referendum rapidly became apparent during the campaign process given the pre-existing geographical variations apparent in the support for leaving the EU, and given the differential power geometries

characterising the UK state resulting from the devolution process. Major differences in the level of support for the EU within the UK were already apparent through, in particular, the party support for the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the party created specifically to mobilise support for the UK to leave the EU. Devolution to the minority nations altered the balance of power within the UK state after its establishment in 1999, Scotland in particular gaining autonomy over a growing number of policy fields, a number of which had major connections to the EU. Overall, the effect of devolution has been to give emphasis to the political differences between the nations comprising the Union, including the position and role of England.

In post-Brexit Britain the territorial schism between Scotland and the UK state – effectively between Scotland and England – is seen as having deepened. Fundamentally this deepening of the division stems from the differences in the level of support for remaining in the EU: while in the UK the overall support for remaining within the EU was 48.1%, in England this dipped to 46.8%, while in Scotland 62% expressed a strong wish to remain in the EU. The differences have polarised the positions of the governments representing the UK state and Scotland – while the position of the former is to ensure that the Brexit vote is translated into action for the whole of the UK state and not held to ransom by 'divisive minority nationalisms', meaning in particular Scotland, a nationalist-led government in Scotland is equally determined to ensure that the clear preferences of the Scottish electorate to maintain strong links with the European Union are maintained.

This paper provides a preliminary exploration of two questions relating to the Brexit referendum and specifically to Scotland's position within it:

(1) What factors help explain Scotland's relatively high Remain vote, particularly by comparison with England?

(2) What are the implications of Scotland's majority position for the territorial coherence of the UK state.

The paper draws on a number of data sources, primarily the results of the Brexit referendum itself and of recent election results together with opinion poll data and other secondary sources.

2. Explaining the Scottish result

While the ultimate outcome of the referendum to leave the EU was poorly predicted by the welter of opinion polls taken in the immediate and longer term periods before the actual vote, the preferred position (to remain) in Scotland was far less of a surprise. Attitudes towards EU membership, particularly the position adopted in England in comparison with Scotland, consistently identified significant differences between the two countries (Table 1). Not only was the proportion of English voters sampled choosing to leave the EU consistently higher than it has been in Scotland since the turn of the century, but the difference in attitudes between the two countries has tended to increase over time. What is also apparent is that the surveys - and particularly the opinion polls in the lead up to the vote itself - under-estimated the strength of opposition to remaining within the EU for the UK overall, as also within England and Scotland specifically. In both countries the actual proportion voting to leave in 2016 was double that suggested two years earlier. Given the demo graphic dominance of England within the UK – accounting for over 85% of the population – it was in that country that the 'switch' towards leaving the EU was to have a disproportionate effect on the overall result.

Table 1. Attitudes towards 'Leaving the EU', England and Scotland 1999-2014 (%)

Country	1999	2000	2003	2004	2005	2013	2014	Change 1999-2014
England	14	18	16	19	17	26	26	12
Scotland	10	11	11	13	14	19	17	7
Difference	-4	-6	-5	-6	-3	-7	-9	-5

Source: adapted from R. Ormston (2015)

While the longer term trends suggested that Scotland would take a different position towards leaving the EU from the UK as a whole, and England in particular, explaining this difference is more problematic. Two basic hypotheses provide a plausible basis for explanation, reflecting different scales around which interpretation is structured. One set of explanations centre around the individual voter and their profile characteristics, in particular their age, socio-economic position, educational profile, the type of area in which they live (urban, rural etc.) and other

characteristics – whether, in other words voting for Brexit could be traceable to differences between how such profile characteristics of the voters influenced voting preferences in Scotland as opposed to elsewhere in the UK. A different route to explaining the variations between Scotland and other parts of the UK, centres on the aggregate, specifically the importance of place and how different places – nations or regions, for instance – become defined around the creation and play of distinct political landscapes. Key here are the ways in which national identities relate to political preferences and the extent to which political processes as they unfold in different spaces foster difference in, for example, support for political parties and, by extension in the attitudes towards specific issues. Also, at play here is the extent to which place is associated with key institutions through which political ideas become circulated around and through, notably the media. Thus, to what extent does Scotland function as a distinct political space distinguishing it from other territorial areas of the UK state and is this to be linked to its distinctive stance towards Brexit? While the two explanatory routes operate at different scales, they are not mutually exclusive – voters, defined by their profile attributes that may correlate with their political preferences to a greater or lesser degree, are also citizens of multi-level spaces, local neighbourhoods through to nations, through which political processes are mediated.

Studies of how profile characteristics of the voter correlated with preferences towards remaining within or leaving the EU following the referendum highlight a number of common trends. These are more accurately expressed in correlational rather than causal terms and with some major exceptions (discussed later) tend to rely on the results from constituencies within which the vote was organised i.e. they are based on (local) aggregate data rather than the individual. In the UK overall pro-Brexit voting tended to be higher among elderly populations, among those with lower educational qualifications (Clarke, Whittaker, 2016), and those who were less likely to live in larger urban areas (Wilson 2016). Furthermore, a distinction has been identified between urban cores and urban peripheries (Johnston et al., 2016), though pro- and anti-Brexit voting in the major cities tended to reflect residential socio-economic segregation. Thus, in cities such as Birmingham, which overall voted by a very small majority to leave the EU (50.4%), in inner city wards, characterised by

higher ethnic diversity, the remain vote peaked at over 70% whereas in peripheral wards of the city dominated by white working class households the statistic could be lower than 30%.

Based on internet panel data from the British Election study conducted immediately after the referendum J. Curtice (2016) has shown that the social divisions of age and educational background characterising how electors voted broadly within Britain were repeated in Scotland. The data was drawn from over 30,000 interviews, 3,600 of which were resident in Scotland – in other words, the data captured individual preferences, though significantly the effect of social divisions was to emulate the differences identified at the more aggregated constituency level. There were differences between Scotland and England, however, so that while age and educational attainment followed an all-Britain trend, the remain vote tended to be higher in Scotland for similar groups of voters. Age, then, was a pronounced correlate of the remain vote in both countries but was more pronounced in Scotland – 73% of those in the 18-34 age group voted remain in Scotland, compared to 67% in England, while amongst those older than 55 years the difference was greater, 54% and 41% respectively. Similar differences were apparent in the relationships between the university degree-educated in Scotland (74% preferring remain) and England (64%). In effect, the results mirror the greater reluctance to leave the EU amongst the Scottish electorate as the overall result in Scotland was to demonstrate.

How Scotland contrasts with England as a political landscape – the second explanation introducing the play of place – can be initially appreciated by contrasting the Brexit voting in the authorities on either side of the border separating the two countries (Table 2). The play of the border is apparent in two ways. Most strikingly, positions pro- and anti-Brexit were to be significantly different on either side of the border: voters in the two English authorities opted to leave the EU whereas in their Scottish counterparts voters sought to remain. In some areas the preferences were to be emphatic – in particular, in Carlisle, the only dominantly urban local authority among the four areas, less than 40% voted to remain in the EU, a clear contrast to the voter preferences in either of the two Scottish authorities. Second, is the question whether voters in these areas, who by definition occupy borderland positions, differ in their attitudes towards EU membership from the overall position adopted in their

respective countries. In other words, is living close to the border reflected in attitudes towards EU membership matched by preferences differing from voters living elsewhere in their respective countries? Differences are apparent between those living on the English side of the border and those living on the Scottish side. Thus, in both of the English authorities abutting the boundary, the leave vote was at least as high as it was overall in England, and considerably higher in Carlisle. In Scotland, in contrast, while both areas voted to remain, the levels of support for continued membership were lower than the national trend. The vote for remain in Dumfries and Galloway (53.1%) was the second lowest in Scotland and markedly lower than the national value of 62%; similarly, though less pronounced, attitudes towards retaining membership were more ambivalent in the Scottish Borders authority than for Scotland as a whole. Whether these differences, however, reflect a 'border effect' is debatable.

Table 2. Brexit voting on either side of the Anglo-Scottish Border

Local authority areas	% remain	% leave
England	46.80	53.20
Carlisle	39.86	60.10
Northumberland	45.89	54.11
Scotland	62.00	38.00
Scottish Borders	58.47	41.53
Dumfries and Galloway	53.06	46.94

Clearly, if there is such an effect, it can only be argued in the case of Scotland, where in England attitudes amongst voters in the two authorities were at least as anti-EU as voters elsewhere in England, and in one area, Carlisle, were significantly more so. Attitudes in these English borderland authorities were if anything to emphasise the differences with voters on the other side of the border. Further, the outcomes in the two Scottish authorities may reflect factors other than their being close to the border being in line with an urban/rural dichotomy apparent within Scotland as a whole in which there were higher levels of support for EU membership

in the more heavily urbanised central belt as opposed to the lower levels of support in the more rural areas of southern and northern Scotland.

While any boundary effect muting attitudes towards membership of the EU among voters living close to the border is far from clear, fundamentally the border was to mirror the differences between England and Scotland the Brexit vote in the two countries was to expose. The boundary in this sense was to act as a container delimiting two separate political units, in turn suggestive of the role place has in distinguishing between the two countries as politically distinct units and that in the delineation of the difference the boundary acts as a meaningful marker. In a different (North American) setting J. R. McKay (1958) had shown how the international boundary between Canada and the United States had the effect of compartmentalising communication. While not an international boundary the Scottish-English border has more than cultural meaning. As a constituent part of a multi-nation state Scotland's distinctiveness as a separate political system has been the subject of ongoing debate, among political scientists in particular (Kellas 1989; Mitchell 2003; McCrone, Bechhofer, 2015), defined around and closely associated with the different institutions that were to remain after the Union with the then English state in 1707. Devolution and the re-creation of a Scottish Parliament in 1999 was to be the harbinger of Scotland's further convergence from the UK state and England, in particular (Keating 2010; Leith et al., 2012).

Key to understanding the contrasting political landscapes of England and Scotland and the distinctive position adopted by the Scottish voters in the Brexit referendum is the part played by political parties mobilising support to remain within or leave the EU on either side of the border. Over the longer term party support in Scotland has tended to be at variance with the position in England, a trend which since the 1980s has deepened. While, at the 2015 national election, the Conservative Party gained a majority in the Westminster Parliament (and a clear majority of the constituencies in England), in Scotland only 1 of the 59 seats returned a Conservative. Conversely, in the 2015 election there was a Scottish National Party (SNP) landslide with the party winning 56 seats. This was matched by the dominance of the SNP in the devolved Scottish parliament since 2007.

These contrasts between political party mobilisation and support and the position adopted towards the European Union in England and Scotland were at their greatest between the Scottish National Party and the United Kingdom Independence Party. Committed to the goal of an independent Scotland, the SNP has been consistent since the 1980s in seeing the future of Scotland as a full member of the EU; in contrast, UKIP was founded as a party with the explicit aim of leaving the EU. Within Scotland support for the nationalist party worked against the ability of UKIP to attract support. Conversely, within England in which the only political party unequivocally supporting continued membership of the EU, the Liberal Democrats, offered less opposition to the Brexit position of UKIP than did the SNP in Scotland. Within the two dominant political parties in England, the Conservative and Labour parties, support for continued membership was more ambivalent, allowing UKIP more 'political space' to attract support. In effect, while in Scotland the dominance of a single party supportive of continued membership of the EU was able to crowd out the ability of UKIP to attract support for its cause, in England the picture was more fractured.

The fundamental difference in the levels of support to remain within the EU between Scotland and England is closely matched by the variations in electoral support for UKIP in the two countries where the party has failed to gain a foothold among Scottish voters. In the 2015 General (UK-wide) Election, UKIP gained only 1.6% of the Scottish votes cast compared to 14.6% in England (Table 3). Further, where the 2015 election was held against the background of a possible referendum on European membership, the increase in support for UKIP in England since the previous election in 2010 was more than 10%, whereas in Scotland it had grown by less than 1%. These differences in support for the party most explicitly opposed to membership of the EU between England and Scotland – which in turn was to have an influence on the fundamental difference between the two countries in the referendum – was part of a longer term trend (Table 4). Since the 1997 election whereas in the UK at large the UKIP share of the vote had increased slowly up to 2010, by the 2015 election its popularity had increased significantly, largely accounted for by English voters. The longer term trend in SNP support, in contrast,

experienced a downturn in the first three elections in the new century but a significant surge in 2015 with half of the electorate supporting the nationalist party.

Table 3. UKIP results – 2015 general election, GB, England and Scotland

Items	Great Britain	England	Scotland
Votes (millions)	3.863	3.611	0.047
% of votes	12.9	14.1	1.6
% change in votes 2010- 2015	+9.7	+10.7	+0.9
No. of seats	1	1	0

Table 4. Voting trends, UKIP and SNP general elections 1997- 2015

Items	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015
UKIP votes (000s)	106	391	606	919	3.86
UKIP- vote share %	0.3	1.5	2.2	3.1	12.6
UKIP - seats	0	0	0	0	1
SNP votes (000s)	630	622	412	491	1454
SNP – vote share %	21.5	22.1	17.7	19.9	50.0
SNP - seats	3	6	6	6	56

These differences in party support in the two countries, the increasing play of UKIP in England and the swing towards the nationalist party in Scotland, were to be mirrored in the differences in UKIP support between constituencies that abutted or were close to the Anglo-Scottish border (Table 5).

Table 5. UKIP voting at the 2015 general election in the Anglo-Scottish Border region

Area	Number of votes	Vote share	% change in vote 2010-2015
Berwick-upon-Tweed (England)	4513	11.1	+7.9
Berwickshire (Scotland)	1316	2.2	+1.1
Carlisle (England)	5277	12.4	+10.0
Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweedale (Scotland)	1472	2.8	+1.4
Penrith and The Border (England)	5353	12.1	+9.4
Hexham (England)	4302	9.9	*
Dumfries and Galloway (Scotland)	1301	2.3	+0.9

Note: * no candidate, 2010

In the 2015 election these differences were consistent – in each of the English constituencies support for the UKIP was several times higher than it was in adjacent constituencies on the other side of the border. Further, since the previous election (2010) UKIP's share of the vote in the English constituencies had increased substantially, while in Scotland the low level of support UKIP attracted was unchanged.

These contrasts tend to highlight the role of the border in distinguishing the two different political landscapes. Caution is needed in suggesting, however, that there is a border effect as such, where contrasts in the composition of the constituencies, their urban-rural makeup for example which other studies have shown to have had a bearing in the Brexit referendum, may have affected constituency outcomes. Rather, the boundary's influence is to be seen as a 'container', delimiting different political spaces in which in spite of the General Election being fought on a nation-wide (all UK) basis, elections in the individual nations comprising the UK are organised and contested on different bases. The stronger the electoral position of the Scottish Nationalist Party – campaigning for an independent Scotland

within Europe – was to become on one side of the border, the more it tended to crowd out the possibility of UKIP support, which was otherwise gaining electoral ground on the other side of the border. Such differences in party support were by no means to be perfectly mapped by Brexit voting – Euroscepticism existed among SNP voters, a third voting to leave the EU in the referendum. These 'inconsistencies' reflect the reality that just as support for the nationalist party does not necessarily mean support for independence – as the gap between the electoral share of the vote and consistent opinion poll evidence on independence suggests - nor does it mean that support for remaining within the EU is universal in Scotland.
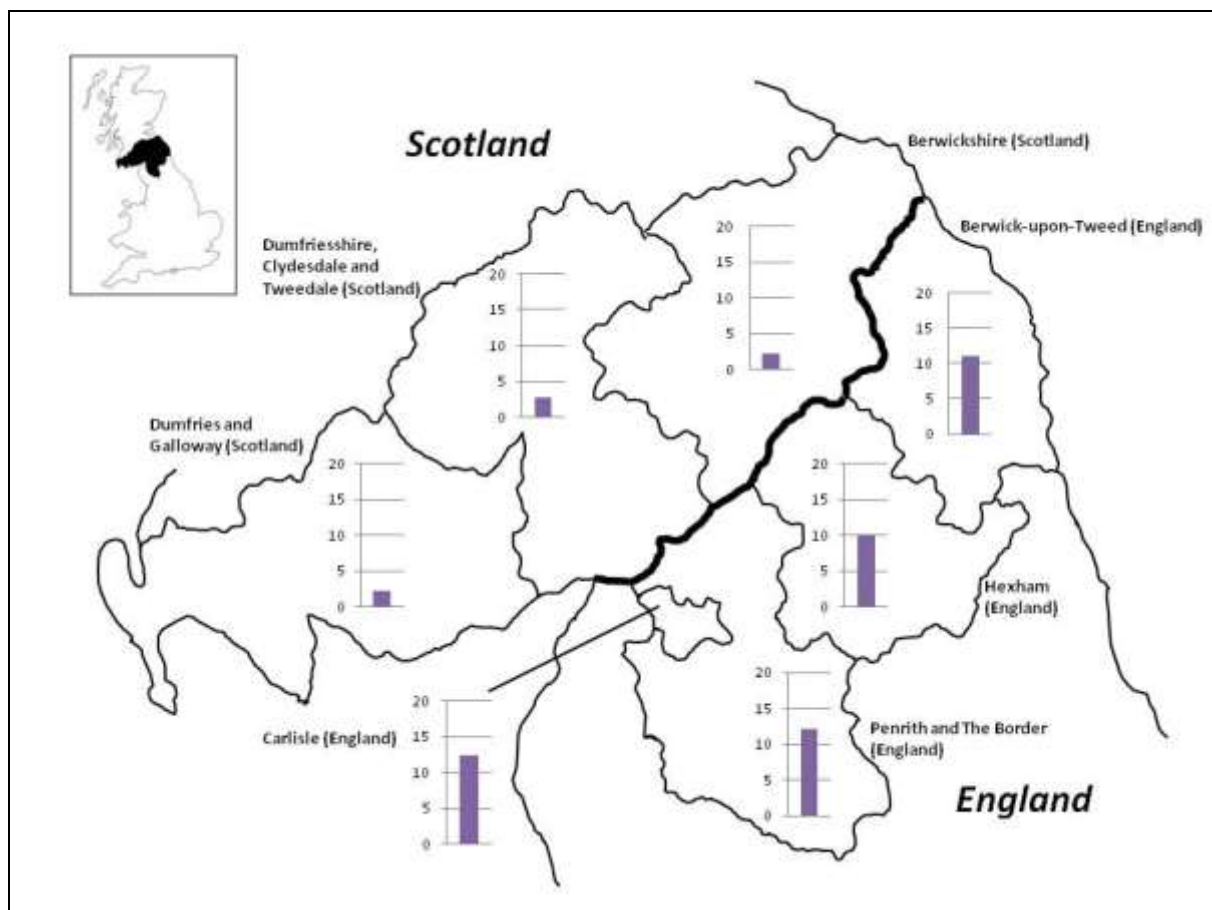

Figure 1. Variations in UKIP support in constituencies along the Anglo-Scottish

border (General Election, 2015)

3. Aftermath: Scotland and the post-Brexit state

The Brexit referendum was to expose multiple divisions within British society (Goodhart 2016), some relatively 'hidden', others, already established, which were to be re-emphasised. Among the more concealed divisions that were to surface were those between large city and rural and smaller town electorates; between the young and the elderly; between the educated and less educated; between those who were linked with the benefits globalisation had brought and those who were to be described more in terms of being 'left behind by globalisation'. Though, to a greater or lesser extent, such divisions had been in play in previous British elections, Brexit was to expose them more emphatically. Pre-existing territorial cleavages, between North and South, and between the nations comprising the multi-nation UK state were to become more emphatic following the referendum. Media representations – as well as the opinions of UK politicians from both the political Right and Left – contributed to the significance of these territorial divisions drawing a connection between the severing of the UK from the European Union with the probability that it would be accompanied by the break-up of the UK state. While in the immediate post-Brexit period such a conclusion is speculative, what is more certain is that the referendum, and in particular the English, and therefore UK, majority to leave the EU in contrast to the majority in the demographically much smaller nations of Northern Ireland and Scotland that opted for remain, did exacerbate salient territorial cleavages in which there were already pressures to secede from the UK state. For these minority nations – as for the larger electorate in the UK at large who had voted to remain – the referendum was to amplify the 'tyranny of the majority' as well as, given the narrowness of the leave majority, the 'brutalism' of the unconstrained referendum.

In Scotland these tensions were to become explicit – not only was the referendum result so much at variance with the overall UK and English results, but the governing nationalist party in the Scottish Parliament by definition was committed to seeking independence. For the nationalist party the Brexit vote highlighted the contradictions of the multi-nation state – that while devolution to Scotland had resulted in its own, relatively powerful Parliament, the central UK state still considered the nation to be a region of the larger entity. For the central

government, then, the referendum had resulted in a democratic outcome that applied to the UK state at large; for the Scottish nationalist the democratic will favouring remain could not be ignored.

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