

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 19 (Politics and International Studies)		
Title of case study: Improving Democratic Representation and Participation		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Ailsa Henderson	Professor of Political Science	2007 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Using her research expertise on regional political culture and political behaviour, Henderson played a pivotal role in improving the quality of democratic representation, citizen engagement and the measurement of citizen preferences. Appointments to two boundary commissions and as independent researcher of the Citizens Assembly of Scotland led to: (i) pioneering reforms to the methods and criteria used to draw electoral boundaries, producing enhanced representation in 77% of the most deprived data zones in Scotland; (ii) change to Scots electoral law to increase the range of multi-member wards and thereby enhance community representation; (iii) ministerial and legal commitments to extend the consultation and scrutiny of future changes to electoral boundaries; and (iv) more effective techniques to measure and evaluate citizen attitudes between electoral cycles.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The impact is underpinned by Henderson's extensive body of research on regional political culture and political behaviour. From 2008 to 2012, she held a Marie Curie International Incoming Fellowship (EUR206k) to conduct research on regional political cultures in Europe, adding a further comparative element to her research expertise in Canadian and UK political cultures. She developed an innovative methodological approach, using cluster analysis to identify political cultures below the level of the state and exploring how they in turn influence political behaviour (3.1). Her research demonstrated how and why regions matter in understanding political behaviour (3.2), and how regional identities, regional legislatures and electoral structures shape regional political cultures in multi-level states (3.3). She explored the consequences of regional political cultures, including territorial variation in policy preferences, electoral engagement, trust, efficacy and vote choice (3.2, 3.4). Her UK research consistently demonstrated the extent of territorial variations in constitutional preferences, including the way that identity relates to partisan and constitutional preferences (3.4, 3.5).</p> <p>Henderson's research has paired detailed work on voter knowledge acquisition and engagement with innovations in survey methodology and the measurement of public opinion, particularly around national identities and constitutional preferences. This included the development of a relative territorial identity measure (3.4) to identify distinct regional patterns. As PI on the ESRC-funded 2014 Scottish Referendum Study (GBP250k) and 2016 Scottish Election Study (GBP509k), she outlined how voters engage with different forms of democratic campaign, including identifying the campaign features that maximize knowledge acquisition and engagement (3.6). Building on her role as Co-Director of the Future of England Survey since 2011, she has, since 2018, conducted parallel surveys in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to create an annual 'State of the Union' survey, identifying variations in territorial identity and the extent to which citizens hold shifting and ambivalent attitudes to the union, driven in part by different political cultures within the state (3.5).</p>		

3. References to the research

- 3.1** Henderson, A (2009), 'Institutional Boundaries and Regionalism: Social, Economic and Political Regions in the Canadian Arctic', *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 43 (2): 109-36, DOI: [10.3138/jcs.43.2.109](https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs.43.2.109)
- 3.2** Henderson, A (ed) (2011), *Why Regions Matter: Small Worlds in Comparative Perspective*, London; Routledge. ISBN 9780415668910 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.3** Henderson, A (2011), "'Small Worlds' as Predictors of General Political Attitudes", *Regional & Federal Studies*, 20 (4-5): 469-85, DOI: [10.1080/13597566.2010.523621](https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2010.523621)
- 3.4** Henderson, A, E G Poole, R Wyn Jones, D Wincott, J Larner and C Jeffery (2020), 'Analysing Vote Choice in a Multinational State: National Identity and Territorial Differentiation in the 2016 Brexit Vote', *Regional Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/00343404.2020.1813883](https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2020.1813883)
- 3.5** Henderson, A, C Jeffery and R Liñeira (2015), 'National Identity or National Interest?: Scottish, English and Welsh Attitudes to the Constitutional Debate', *Political Quarterly*, 86 (2): 265-74, DOI: [10.1111/1467-923X.12163](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12163)
- 3.6** Liñeira, R, A Henderson and L Delaney (2017), 'Voters' Responses to the Referendum Campaign'. In: M Keating (ed), *Debating Scotland*, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 165-90 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

4. Details of the impact

Improving the Electoral Process

Henderson's research demonstrated that geography and demography play an important role in creating and sustaining political cultures and communities, generating three key changes in the electoral process:

(i) Reforming the method and criteria used to devise electoral boundaries

The design of local and national elections is a complex task that involves balancing equal representation, parity of access to elected representatives, and parity of their workload, in the face of continual demographic change. It is also highly contentious politically, as change can alter the balance of power between and within parties and regions. Periodic reviews of electoral boundaries are undertaken by politically neutral expert bodies. Henderson's appointment to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland - as Commissioner in 2013, and Deputy Chair in 2017 - as well as her appointment to the Boundary Commission for Scotland in 2016 (5.1), opened avenues to use her research insights and methodological expertise to inform the Commissions' approaches and recommendations.

Henderson played a key part in overseeing the fifth review of electoral arrangements (2014-2016) and was "*instrumental in shaping the approach*" of the LGBCS. This was the first boundary review since 1997, and the sensitivities involved required the LGBCS "*to develop a robust methodology*" (5.2). She devised and applied a novel cluster-based methodology to identify similar groupings of local councils. As detailed in the Commission's minutes and working papers, this led directly to a change in the method employed by the Boundary Commission (5.3). The Chair of the Commission testified that Henderson "*showed us how a technique she had developed for her research on the political culture of regions could be applied by the Commission to set boundaries and councillor numbers in a way that enabled fair representation while defusing political reactions to change*" (5.2).

Before the review, population density and distribution were the primary consideration in determining representation. Henderson raised awareness among commissioners that fairness of political representation and the workload of elected members is also shaped by socio-economic challenges in the area. This led the Boundary Commission, for the first time, to include measures to capture the socio-economic circumstances of local life (specifically by using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation [SIMD]), as well as population distribution, to categorise councils in the boundary-drawing process (5.3b). The Chair of the LGBCS testified that Henderson's expertise was "*central*" in leading the commission to revise its approach to reflect "*the fact that poverty and social deprivation place distinctive pressures on Councillor workload,*

meaning that citizens in these wards now have more effective and convenient access to their political representatives” (5.2). The LGBCS’s final recommendations were made to Ministers in May 2016, with proposed boundary changes made to 26 of the 32 Scottish local authorities. As a result, in more than three quarters (77%) of the most deprived data zones in Scotland, the population will benefit from enhanced electoral representation (5.4). As Scotland’s Holyrood and Westminster parliamentary constituencies use local government ward boundaries as building blocks, this approach will also result in fairer, more equitable, representation in the Scottish and UK parliaments.

(ii) Securing a Change to Electoral Law

The 2007 introduction of the Single Transferable Vote for Scottish local elections specified that all multi-member wards required either three or four elected members. Although enhancing proportionality, this requirement generated new barriers to political representation. In areas of low population density, it led to geographically large wards with competing interests. In urban settings, capping ward sizes at four members meant that communities were frequently divided. Drawing on her research on the importance of communities of identity in fostering political participation (3.2, 3.3), Henderson argued in evidence to the Scottish Parliament’s Local Government and Communities committee that Scotland’s varied geography and demography - combining dense urban settings and sparsely populated rural areas - required a more flexible approach to determining electoral boundaries and the number of elected representatives in each ward. In particular, she argued that a broader range of multi-member wards, of between two and five elected members, would enable electoral boundaries *“to capture local ties and special geographic circumstances better”* (5.5a). Her evidence informed directly the Committee’s concern in its final report at the *“inherent contradiction between respecting local ties and boundaries and the legislative requirement that, above all else, consideration must be given to electoral parity”*, and its recommendation that the legislative framework, process and methodology be reviewed ahead of the next boundary review (5.5b, p.15). The Scottish Government subsequently introduced the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill. It included changes to the rules governing boundary reviews, and its accompanying policy memorandum quoted Henderson’s evidence (5.6, p.6). The Bill’s enactment in July 2020 means that electoral representation in future local government elections will be based on mainland wards of between two and five elected members. This additional flexibility will make it easier to ensure electoral boundaries accommodate local political communities of varying sizes.

(iii) Influencing Law and Policy on Consultation and Scrutiny of Boundary Reviews

Ensuring sufficient consultation and transparency in the process is vital to building confidence in the outcome of boundary reviews. Henderson’s testimony to the Scottish Parliament’s Local Government and Communities committee addressed questions about the methodology, the novel use of the SIMD indicator, and the process of approval. Her evidence was cited extensively in the Committee’s report (5.5b). In particular, drawing on her evidence of different review processes worldwide, the Committee elicited a commitment from the Minister to reconsider the role of local authorities, the Parliament and Scottish Ministers within this process (5.5b, p.15). The resulting Scottish Elections (Reform) Act now includes an enhanced role for Parliament in the approval process of boundary reviews.

Henderson also influenced a change to UK legislation designed to enhance consultation and improve public engagement in boundary reviews. In 2018, she represented the Boundary Commission for Scotland as an expert witness to the Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs committee. During this testimony, she said there was insufficient time for a review before the subsequent Westminster elections, and that the timing of public hearings should be moved to the second consultation phase to better react to issues raised by the public in phase one. The committee cited this evidence in its report, noting it was important in forming their judgement that running the review again would provide insufficient time for public engagement, ultimately contributing to the government’s decision to postpone the review (5.7a). Clause 4 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act (2020) also adopted Henderson’s recommendation that the Boundary Commissions should hold public hearings during the secondary consultation period instead of during the initial consultation period (5.7b).

Informing the Measurement and Understanding of Citizen Preferences

Elections are central to the democratic process, but effective representation also necessitates an understanding of attitudes and preferences of individuals and communities between elections. Henderson played a critical role in supporting practitioners in measuring these preferences, as well as helping policymakers to understand how attitudes and identities have evolved between elections. She worked closely with leading polling firm IpsosMori on its Scotland Political Monitor, creating questions to assess the evolution of public opinion on constitutional and partisan preferences. As Ipsos Mori's Research Director attested, Henderson's crafting of questions to evaluate perceptions of party performance "*resulted in much more nuanced data*". Her advice on redesigning the question on support for independence and union from a binary question to a 1-10 scale, for example, was "*helpful in exploring and understanding the views and characteristics of the 'soft middle', who are not as clearly fully committed to either position*" (5.8).

As a result of her experience developing survey questions to evaluate citizen knowledge acquisition and engagement, Henderson was appointed in 2019 as one of three independent researchers to the first government-sponsored Citizens' Assembly of Scotland. Her role was to design questionnaires to track members' experience, knowledge and understanding during the learning and deliberative phases of the Assembly. This generated independent data briefings that were a "*crucial tool*" guiding the delivery of the Assembly and of '*critical importance*' to its success. The Assistant Secretary to the Assembly noted that this real-time research was "*particularly valuable as it provided an ongoing check on the Assembly operations and delivery, immediate reflections from members on their experience... and subsequently enabled the Secretariat and Design team to make improvements, when required, at each weekend*" (5.9).

Henderson's understanding of evolving political cultures within the UK, and the territorial variations in attitudes towards government, politics and constitutional futures, was sought after by governments across the United Kingdom. She accepted invitations to present her research to the Scottish Government, the Scotland Office, the Cabinet Office, and the Treasury, and was keynote speaker to the inaugural conference of *Devolution & You*, a learning programme for civil servants established by the Head of the UK Governance Group in 2016. She was twice guest speaker at the annual UK Governance Group Away Day, coordinated by the Cabinet Office. In 2019 she presented her research on attitudes to the Union to a meeting of permanent secretaries, prompting an unsolicited response from the then Cabinet Secretary, Sir Mark Sedwill, who noted:

"My Permanent Secretary colleagues and I valued the opportunity to hear your insights on the factors underlying these different attitudes, and how we might build common understanding and value of the union amongst the nations of the UK... the state of the Union is one of the most challenging and grave issues of our time, and one which I am focused on addressing. I would like, therefore, to refer to your research in my first day briefing with the new Prime Minister to present the significance of the challenge we face" (5.10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Public Appointments

- (a) Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20201124234838/http://lgbc-scotland.gov.uk/about-us/commission>
- (b) Boundary Commission for Scotland,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210113094835/https://www.bcomm-scotland.independent.gov.uk/?q=about-us/current-commissioners>

5.2 **Testimonial:** Chair of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland, 30 September 2020

5.3 Local Government Boundary Commission

- (a) Meeting Minutes (October 2013; November 2013; December 2013), showing Henderson's proposal of cluster analysis and the influence of this on development of LGBCS methodology.

- (b) Working Papers (2198 and 2203), in which Henderson applied cluster analysis (including SIMD) to ward design and presented this to LGBCS.
- 5.4 **Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's Fifth Electoral Reviews** - <https://web.archive.org/web/20200915003307/http://lgbc-scotland.gov.uk/reviews/fifth-statutory-reviews-electoral-arrangements>
- 5.5 **Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee**,
(a) Official Report (featuring Henderson's witness testimony), 5 October 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210212160611/https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10566&i=97247#ScotParl>
(b) Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's Fifth Electoral Reviews, 2016. https://web.archive.org/web/20200824173217/http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Local_Gov/Reports/LGCS052016R03.pdf
- 5.6 **Scottish Government**, *Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill Policy Memorandum*, 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210104023631/https://beta.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/current-bills/scottish-elections-reform-bill/introduced/policy-memorandum-scottish-elections-reform-bill.pdf>, p.6
- 5.7 **UK Parliament**, Committee Inquiry and subsequent legislation on boundary review
(a) House of Commons Public Administration and Affairs Committee, *Parliamentary Boundary Reviews: What Next?* (Henderson's evidence cited pg. 13).
(b) Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/25/section/4/enacted>
- 5.8 **Testimonial**, Research Director, Ipsos MORI Scotland, 25 January 2021
- 5.9 **Testimonial**, Assistant Secretary to the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland, 28 January 2021
- 5.10 **Sir Mark Sedwill**, correspondence, 14 June 2019