

## The importance of understanding ethnicity, language and religion in modern day community safety and policing



Technology supporting policing at the Notting Hill Carnival

### Key messages

- **Origins is relevant both to crime pattern analysis and to police communications**
- **It has proved useful in border control and in public order campaigns**
- **Origins will be most effective in communications when used to profile the groups most likely to be involved in or fearful of different sorts of police incident**

### Context

Origins is a system which enables the police to infer the cultural background of people involved in police incidents simply by examining their names.

In the past, when police forces have needed to understand the background of people involved in crime incidents, the default method has been to ask them their ethnic origin. For obvious reasons having to ask for this sort of information in an operational setting is not always convenient. Persons apprehended and victims may not see it as relevant. It distracts from more urgent tasks. For these and other reasons it is seldom practical for the police to obtain information for 100% of cases other than in very exceptional circumstances and for short periods of time. Even in prison, for example, the ethnicity of as many as 20% of inmates remains unrecorded.

Using the combination of first name and family name, Origins enables the police to associate over 99.5% of named individuals with an ethnic or religious group. It does this with a high degree of accuracy. The coding can be done retrospectively, unobtrusively and in a manner which compares the number of people in each Origins category with the number that would have been recorded if the people involved in incidents had been typical of the adult population of the police force area.

## **Applications**

During the past eight years the information company Experian has been licenced by OriginsInfo and Webber Phillips, originators of the system, to distribute the Origins product. Some dozen or so forces have used the product, often in conjunction with Experian's Mosaic classification system.

In 2016 OriginsInfo and Experian agreed that OriginsInfo should take back responsibility for the sales and support of the product in the field of policing. OriginsInfo and Webber Phillips now service police forces directly with a wider and more up to date set of products within the overall Origins portfolio.

The precise details of how individual police forces have used Origins need to be treated in confidence. However we are aware of a number of distinct applications for which the service has been successfully used. These include:

- Criminal investigation
- Border control
- Public order policing
- Behavioural change and nudge campaigns
- Communications

### *Criminal investigation*

Using information from Companies House, Webber Phillips has been able to demonstrate that each of Britain's minority communities have particular business areas in which they tend to specialise. People with Nigerian names are particularly likely to be directors of companies involved in security services, the ice cream trade has been traditionally run by Italians, the hire of earth-moving equipment is dominated by people with Irish names, petrol stations tend to be run by Tamil Sri Lankans and Post Offices by Hindu Indians. How these communities came to specialise in these business activities not even their members can always be relied upon to explain.

It would be surprising, given the specialisation of members of different communities in different sectors of the formal economy, if there were not a similar degree in specialisation in different forms of crime. Without wishing to link particular criminal activities with particular communities publicly, it is our understanding that Origins has been used to research criminal gangs and international networks in relation to:

- Money laundering
- Modern slavery and human trafficking
- Prostitution
- Internet fraud
- Drugs

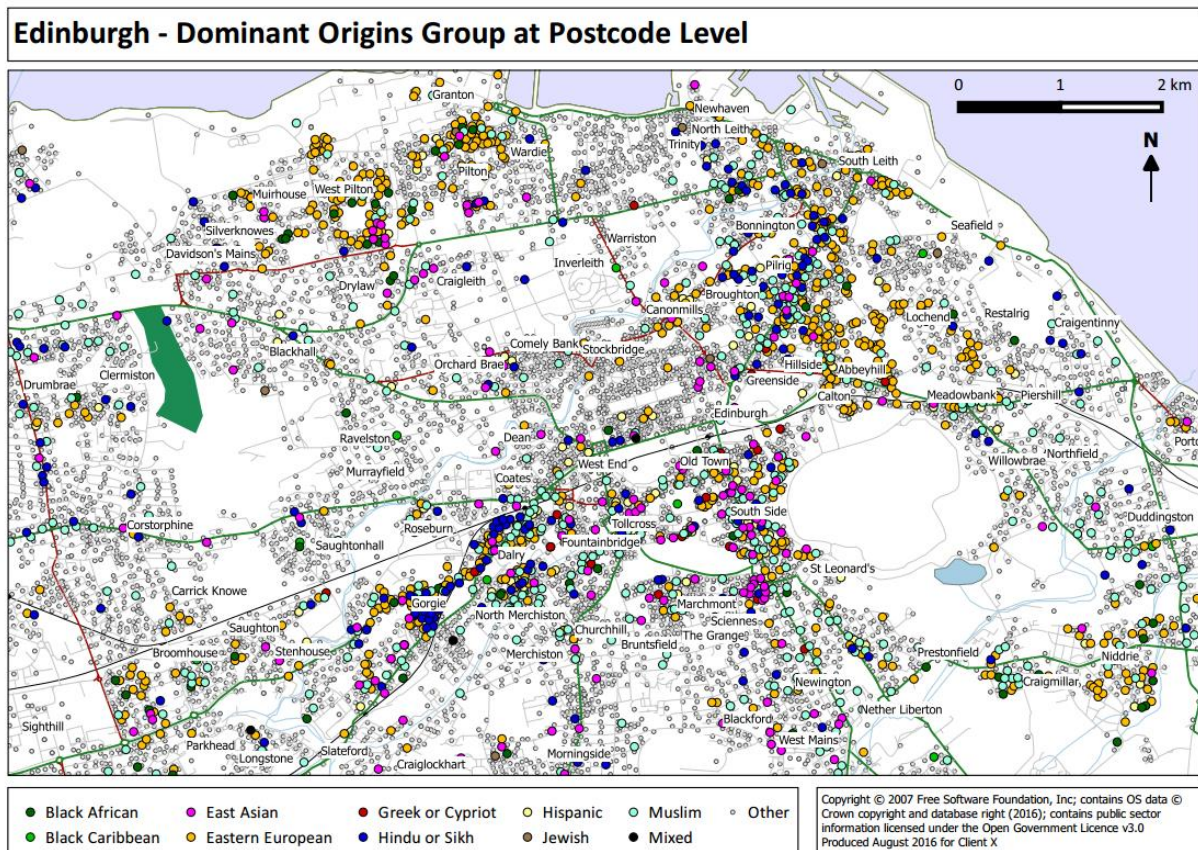
The ability of Origins to profile perpetrators and victims of these crimes does provide the evidence on which to justify the targeting of members of particular types of crime to ensure that investigations are not based on stereotyping but on hard evidence.

## Border Control

Being able to associate a person with a community can clearly contribute useful additional intelligence to the policing of UK borders and, along with other information, can assist border control with seeking relevant information from suspects.

## Public order policing

Particularly during the 2012 Olympics a number of police forces used maps showing the location of names associated with different competing nations to identify neighbourhoods where special police campaigns might be required.



An Origins map of Edinburgh showing the diverse communities who live alongside each other.

## Campaigns

Evidence of the communities most likely to offend in different ways has provided the basis for a number of campaigns, particularly regarding traffic offences. People from the Baltic States, for example, were found by one force to have been particularly over-represented among those apprehended for motoring offences. From this information it can be decided whether to mount communications campaigns to improve understanding of, for example, the requirement to licence and tax a car or of the speed limits associated with different types of road.

As in the health service, information of this sort can often be used to target communications to institutions regularly used by particular minorities or influencers, such as church leaders or local language press, which are effective at reaching them with specific messages.

## Communications

The development of databases of people who have signed up to obtain police communications potentially provides the opportunity to target messages to particular groups. Such messages might be triggered by specific hate crimes, by heightened security, as for instance the threat of attacks to the Jewish community, and reassurance, such as for example information about police presence in relation to demonstrations likely to be of concern to particular groups.



Above - an English Defence League March in Leicester

The ability to target signed up members of particular communities is also useful where a recent local incident has involved members of a particular community.

### **Insight**

In recent years many in the police service have been sensitive to criticisms regarding the failure of the police to recruit members from minority communities and for what is often referred to as “unconscious bias” in the treatment of members of different groups.

These criticisms are often made on the assumption that were it not for overt discrimination all people would behave in a similar way. In other words differences in behaviour are solely due to differences in opportunity and treatment. Whilst these arguments no doubt have some validity, it is not unreasonable to recognise that different cultures do foster differences in behaviour among their members. Although not all members of any minority behave in exactly the same way, it is legitimate to argue that deep seated attitudes do exist which characterise some communities and religions more than others, especially if these differences can be evidenced from operational data.

An effective policing strategy, whilst recognising that everyone is equal under the law, will nevertheless be based on evidence of which groups tend to be disposed towards (and against) different forms of crime. This evidence should be used to research networks whereby particular

groups recruit new members to participate in particular forms of crime or collaborate with agents in other countries.

In the past it has proved particularly difficult to generate this information. It was impractical to obtain this information at the point of the incident. It was difficult to obtain complete coverage of the information afterwards. Categories were often insufficiently fine – for example coding people as “South Asian” rather than “Tamil”. And, most difficult of all was establishing the profile of the adult population of a particular area to use as a benchmark against which to compare the involvement of that group in the local population. For example if 7.2% of traffic offences in a particular police force were committed by Eastern Europeans, was that percentage larger or smaller than that of the local population?

All of this information is now relatively quick and simple to obtain using the Origins system.

### **Implications**

One of the reasons why OriginsInfo and Webber Phillips have taken back control of the relationship with individual police forces is to provide a higher level of support due to our exclusive specialisation in Origins as a classification system.

We see the successful use of Origins in policing arising from the sharing of good practice among constabularies and from working with lead forces in particular policing applications.

We also believe that for the system to be leveraged to its full potential it is important that Webber Phillips should collaborate with specialists such as Visav who supply the platforms and communications technologies whereby Origins can be delivered to individual officers.