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WIDER Working Paper 2023/18

# **‘Ten pound touts’: post-conflict trust and the legacy of counterinsurgency in Northern Ireland**

Kristin M. Bakke<sup>1</sup> and Kit Rickard<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the legacies of wartime rebel governance and counterinsurgency tactics. Insurgents rely on civilian support for resources, information, and cover. To defeat insurgents, the state attempts to extract information from communities where support for insurgents is highest. We argue that strong norms against civilian collaboration emerge in these areas, which may have long legacies for local community trust. To explore these legacies, we conduct a case study of post-conflict Northern Ireland. While both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups established wartime institutions, the counterinsurgency targeted Republican groups in urban areas with the use of informants. Drawing on secondary literature and a survey, we show that strong norms against informers—‘touts’—persist long after the end of the conflict in Republican strongholds. These areas show lower levels of local community trust than their Loyalist counterparts. The Northern Irish case demonstrates the detrimental effects of dynamics likely to shape other post-conflict states.

**Key words:** trust, counterinsurgency, post-conflict, rebel governance, survey

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## 1 Introduction

After throwing the bomb, he ran to the house of a woman who spies on her neighbours for the republican movement, keeping a close eye on happenings offensive to her republican morality. She thinks her association with the IRA gives her clout in the community. In one sense, of course, she is right. But she does not know that behind her back she is loathed and despised. In every Catholic community in Northern Ireland the republican movement has a network of informers like her. (Collins 1998: 3).

What are the long-term impacts of violent conflict on local community trust? In particular, how do the dynamics of a particular counterinsurgency tactic—the use of informants—shape trust within local communities? We explore these questions in the context of Northern Ireland, a post-conflict society that, by many accounts, is a success story, as the armed conflict has not recurred. The 30-year long conflict known as ‘the Troubles’ erupted in 1968 and officially came to an end with the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. But while the armed conflict—which was fought between, on one side, Republican paramilitary groups wanting to be part of the Republic of Ireland rather than the United Kingdom (politically, the Nationalist side) and, on the other side, Loyalist paramilitary groups (politically, the Unionist side) and the British security forces—has not reignited, its legacies still characterize everyday life in Northern Ireland. And these legacies characterize life in ways that are likely to shape the very fabric of society: people’s ability to trust others in their local community.

Honing in on both Catholic and Protestant communities that were controlled by paramilitary groups during ‘the Troubles’ (1968–98), our recent public opinion survey reveals significant differences in local community trust between the two communities involved in the conflict. We argue that this difference is due to the role of the British counterinsurgency that mainly targeted Republican groups in predominantly Catholic neighbourhoods. In these areas—in contrast to Protestant areas—decades of infiltration and the experience of never knowing who an informer is has undermined internal cohesion. That is, in these areas, present-day trust is jointly shaped by the legacy of paramilitary groups’ social control and the legacies of the state’s counterinsurgency tactics.

## 2 Literature review: armed conflict and post-war trust

Much research on conflict resolution and post-conflict societies has emphasized that among the key challenges facing societies that have experienced armed conflict are low levels of political trust (e.g., Bakke et al. 2014; De Juan and Pierskalla 2016; Fisk and Cherney 2017; Lake 2010; Wong 2016) and high distrust of the other ‘side’ in the struggle (e.g., Bar-Tal 2000; Hewstone et al. 2006; Noor et al. 2008; Trew 1986). Indeed, research on post-war institution building is often built on the (sometimes implicit) assumption that a central challenge to overcome is how to build institutions that can minimize distrust both of an unchecked state and the other side (see Lake and Rothchild 1996; Weingast 1998), for example by creating peace agreements that entail credible commitments (e.g. Walter 2002) or developing power-sharing institutions (e.g. Roeder and Rothchild 2005). Similarly, conflict resolution efforts aimed at fostering contact between ordinary people from the (formerly) warring communities are built on the assumption that such contact can help build intergroup trust and break down stereotypes and strict us-versus-them boundaries (e.g. Maoz 2011). In Northern Ireland, central to the Good Friday Agreement was power sharing

between Nationalist and Unionist political parties, and conflict resolution programmes were taking place even before the conflict officially came to an end—and are today central to civic programmes aimed at bringing together Catholic and Protestant children and young people.

Expectations from the literature when it comes to intra-group trust and local community cohesion are more mixed. On one hand, research has shown that traumatic experiences such as wartime violence cause distress (e.g. Ringdal et al. 2007) and can have detrimental effects on people’s trust in their fellow human beings (e.g., De Luca and Verpoorten 2015; Rohner et al. 2013). To the degree that a war is characterized not only by fighting between the ‘sides’ but also within each side—as many conflicts are (e.g. Bakke et al. 2012)—it may have negative consequences for local community trust in the post-war period (Cassar et al. 2013). On the other hand, a growing body of work anchored in psychological research on ‘pro-social growth’ and ‘altruism born from suffering’ is challenging the conventional wisdom and suggesting that experiences of violence can, inadvertently, contribute to bonding and community cohesion (e.g., Bauer et al. 2016; Blattman 2009). Experiment-based studies, for example, have shown that people living in communities with the greatest exposure to violence are the most likely to invest in trust-based transactions (Gilligan et al. 2013; Gilligan et al. 2014); that is, research suggests that experiences of violence can have both negative and positive implications for community trust and cohesion.

The existing literatures on the implications of armed conflict for trust have primarily been based on arguments about what the *violence* in conflict does. A growing body of work has brought attention to how armed groups, to varying degrees, also engage in wartime governance, such as ‘policing’ and courts, educating children, or running hospitals (e.g., Arjona 2016; Duyvesteyn 2017; Loyle et al. 2021; Mampilly 2011; Podder 2017; Sivakumaran 2009), which may boost local-level legitimacy and, as such, have implications for local-level trust. Rebels may provide governance and create institutions to demonstrate their political goals and signal their ability to rule, both to their constituents (Revkin 2021; Stewart 2021) and foreign states and organizations (Coggins 2016; Huang 2016; Stewart 2018). While ‘rebel rule’ in its own right may boost the local legitimacy of the rebels, an unintended consequence is that such ‘stronghold’ areas are also areas that may be the target of the state’s counterinsurgency campaign, which, in turn, may diminish local-level trust. It is this nexus between informal wartime institutions and the state’s counterinsurgency tactics that we explore.

### **3 Argument**

To develop our argument, we build on the literatures on rebel governance and counterinsurgency. Whereas rebel governance may boost local-level trust, the state’s counterinsurgency campaign, particularly if it relies on informing, will have long-term detrimental effects on local community trust. As we subsequently show in the case of Northern Ireland, in areas targeted by the state’s counterinsurgency campaign, norms against informing developed and continue to undermine trust within the community.

#### **3.1 Why do rebels govern?**

First, let us consider why rebels govern and what implications that may have for trust. Rebels are often militarily weaker than the state and, thus, engage in guerrilla warfare, the distinguishing features of which are (1) an avoidance of battles—which rebels may lose—and (2) a heavy reliance on ‘local knowledge’ and local support to compensate for inferior numbers and weaponry (Wickham-Crowley 1992: 3). Armed groups seek to establish territorial control to mount a credible military challenge against an often much stronger state. Controlling territory and civilians within it

are therefore key short-term goals for ultimately achieving long-term political concessions, such as secession or regime change, from the government. While civilians within the territory are an important source of material support in the sense that they provide shelter, information, and recruits, they also pose significant military challenges. Key among these challenges is civilian defection, when discontented civilians ‘collaborate with the state, providing crucial information and engaging in actions of sabotage against insurgent rule’ (Mampilly 2011: 54; see also Arjona 2017). Faced with this, insurgents can rely on violence to quell discontent and remove the ‘disloyal’ from the territory (Steele 2017), but sustained control by coercion is a costly strategy and ‘rebels cannot fight wars effectively while holding a gun to the head of every civilian’ (Arjona et al. 2016: 3).<sup>1</sup> It is less costly to control civilians with some level of consent. Indeed, as shown by a growing body of literature on rebel governance or wartime institutions (e.g., Arjona 2016; Mampilly 2011; Stewart 2021), rebels often pursue a variety of legitimation strategies (e.g. Terpstra and Frerks 2017), including public goods provision, to foster legitimacy and induce civilian collaboration.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, rebels do not only focus on out-fighting the enemy, they also attempt to ‘out-administer’ them (Ahmad 1971: 15). As McColl (1969: 614) notes, the development of ‘insurgent states’ signals the group’s strength vis-à-vis the state *and* provides it with ‘at least an aura of legitimacy’ likely to boost recruitment and support and prevent defection. Equally, wartime order creates clear rules of conduct that facilitate the monitoring and punishment of civilian defection (Arjona 2016).

Areas where insurgents develop wartime institutions are likely to exhibit high levels of ingroup trust (and low levels of out-group trust) for several reasons. First, these areas are on the frontline of group antagonism. The effect of living under insurgent rule can foster strong ingroup favouritism through the experience of a shared struggle. And, similar to the legacies of ingroup bonding experienced by members of armed groups (e.g., Daly 2016; Nussio and Oppenheim 2014), they can have legacies that extend well beyond the official end of the conflict. Second, wartime institutions help ensure predictable behaviour through clear rules that are followed by civilians and enforced by insurgents—a predictability that may enhance local community trust. Over time, not only do the rules become well known to civilians in these areas but civilians come to internalize shared concepts of how things should be done through a socialization mechanism (e.g., Bateson 2017; Checkel 2017). Norms—defined as socially defined and enforced standards of behaviour (Deaux and Wrightsman 1988)—emerge, and they have sticky legacies. In the post-conflict period, areas that experienced high levels of rebel governance for a long time are likely to exhibit relatively high levels of local community trust, especially if civilians continue to live among their ingroup in highly segregated areas. The same areas, due to their shared experience of the conflict and violence, exhibit low levels of intergroup trust. It is the latter that explains many post-war peacebuilding initiatives aimed at fostering greater contact and trust. All else equal, areas that experienced rebel rule are expected to exhibit relatively high levels of local community trust. However, areas in which wartime institutions developed and rules were enforced by rebels may be likely targets of the state’s counterinsurgency campaign, which—and this is our focus in this paper—can have negative implications for local community trust

### **3.2 Contested control and duopolies of violence**

The most basic public good required by humans is personal security. To ensure security from internal and external threats, armed groups often seek to establish a monopoly of violence not

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<sup>1</sup> As Ahmad (1971: 8) notes, ‘(g)uerrilla warfare requires a highly committed but covert civilian support which cannot be obtained at gunpoint’.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Lawrence (1929) claims that a guerrilla army ‘must have a friendly population, not actively friendly, but sympathetic to the point of not betraying rebel movements to the enemy’.

dissimilar to states (see Weber 1958 (1919)). On the ground, however, armed groups rarely achieve a monopoly of violence and may have overlapping areas of military control. This is recognized in research on criminal groups which, unlike rebel groups, rarely engage in competitive state-building (Kalyvas 2006). Indeed, criminal groups often exist alongside the state which may ‘ignore, deny, or even collaborate’ with them (Lessing 2021: 855), in a dynamic described by Skaperdas and Syropoulos (1997: 61) as a ‘duopoly of violence’. Staniland (2012: 247) notes that ‘dual power’ is common between armed actors and state forces, too, where wartime political order ranges from ‘collusion and shared sovereignty to spheres of influence and tacit coexistence to clashing monopolies and guerrilla disorder’. Armed groups seek to establish a monopoly of violence in areas they control, but there is significant variation in their ability to do so, and they may rarely achieve this goal. Instead, they often operate in areas of contested authority. Here, securing the loyalty of civilians is particularly important for insurgents as civilian collaboration with the state risks significantly undermining local insurgent control and, ultimately, group survival. As Ahmad (1971: 10) notes, ‘(o)ne renegade can destroy a whole network in the area by informing the enemy who invariably tortures him to get the names of others’.

### **3.3 How does the state undermine rebel control?**

The counterinsurgency literature provides a rich account of why and how the state attempts to counter territorial control and popular support to armed groups. Scholars recognize that support to rebels is often crucial in determining the success of an insurgency movement, which is true whether the insurgents are a ‘vanguard of the working class’, as advocated by Che Guevara, or aim to foster support before launching an insurgency, as proposed by Vladimir Lenin, with an urban focus, and later Mao Zedong, with a rural focus. The literature identifies two main strategies available to states fighting insurgencies (Kilcullen 2010). The first is an ‘enemy-centric’ strategy that aims to destroy the network of rebels in the belief that by doing so, the problem disappears (e.g. Callwell 1896). The second and now more common approach is a ‘population-centric’ strategy and is closely linked to ‘classical insurgency’ (e.g., Galula 1964; Kitson 1971; Thompson 1966).<sup>3</sup>

Because insurgents require control over and support from the population to compel the government into concessions or military defeat, the state attempts to limit civilian support for insurgents. They do so by first gaining military control of an area (the ‘clear and hold’ strategy). Insurgents may still be present but not able to openly operate. The state then begins rolling out public goods to win over support from civilians. Civilian support for the state increases and they begin to provide information on the identities and locations of insurgents, who are subsequently targeted and forced out of the community. Britain’s Malaya counterinsurgency is an example of this strategy working successfully (Stubbs 2011). To increase the presence of the state in contested areas, the British army increased the size and skills of civil administration and built roads to connect isolated villages. New teachers and educational supervisors filled new positions generated by the expansion of the school system and medical teams were brought in from abroad to provide health care. In time, areas were described as ‘white’ when there were no insurgents or links between civilians and insurgents. Civilians in these areas were rewarded by lifting food restrictions and other measures aimed at severing the tie between insurgents and the civilians.

A successful counterinsurgency, thus, relies on both military and political responses—it is about winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the civilian population. Operations to usurp local support for insurgents tend to include a mix of military and political strategy, but the main enemy-centric counterinsurgency tactic is to gather information that can be used to locate, identify, and ultimately eliminate insurgents. Information, which is often harboured by civilians, is, thus, a fundamental

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<sup>3</sup> This approach was applied by Frank Kitson (1971) in Northern Ireland, where he was a commander.

resource in irregular war (Kitson 1971). It is the contest over information that underpins Kalyvas's (2006) theory of selective violence as a joint process—'the political actors' attempts to deter individual defection, and individuals' decision to provide information to political actors' (Kalyvas 2006: 173; see also Balcells 2017). As Podder (2017) notes, information is the key resource held by the population and it needs to be controlled.

### **3.4 Norms against informing**

In areas of contested control between the state and armed actors, norms—which are often brutally enforced, at least initially<sup>4</sup>—emerge against providing information to outsiders. The use of coercion decreases as civilian compliance becomes quasi-voluntary (Podder 2017). Kalyvas (2006) discusses the emergence of norms against informing in all conflicts. The practice of 'necklacing' in South Africa, the 'Sourire Kabyle' in Algeria, and executions by the 'Nutting Squad' in Northern Ireland are all examples of brutal rebel tactics aimed at eliminating and dissuading informers. Over time, unless the state manages to break the link between insurgents and the community, civilians in contested areas become socialized into accepting these norms. Armed groups have informal organizational infrastructure—often consisting of children and women—that provide a 'resilient information, finance, and supply apparatus' (Parkinson 2013: 418). These organizational substructures monitor the population and prevent the leaking of information. However, over time, norms ensure that civilians self-police. We would expect that norms against informing leads to diminished levels of local community trust because awareness of informing is high among the civilian population and the devastating effects for the insurgency, especially over a long conflict, are well known.

We argue that norms against informing can have long legacies—like many aspects of violent conflict (Wood 2008). While local norms are often sticky, we suggest this is particularly the case for 'informing norms', for two reasons. First, when conflict ends, the areas where local norms against informing are strongest are the same areas where elites will attempt to reintegrate or build the presence of the formal institutions of the state. However, the norms are likely to make this process particularly difficult. Second, actors that seek to continue to undermine state authority are likely to tap in to take advantage of these norms to pursue their goals, be they political or criminal.

### **3.5 Expectations**

Thus, while local community trust may be high in areas where there was a shared experience of violence and informal governance provided by armed groups, a counterinsurgency strategy based on informing will have long-term detrimental effects on local community trust. In areas heavily targeted by the state's counterinsurgency campaign, norms against informing are likely to develop, which will undermine local community trust.

## **4 Research design**

To evaluate the legacies of wartime institutions and counterinsurgency, we conduct a 'plausibility probe' (Eckstein 1975) case study of the legacies of the conflict known as 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland. Research on the local legacies of conflict and wartime order faces an important

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<sup>4</sup> As Ahmad (1971: 10) notes, 'to ensure that the popular conspiracy of silence develops no seams, exemplary punishments are given to those suspected of having informed the enemy'. For example, Lecomte-Tilouine (2009: 386) describes how Maoists in Nepal amputated 'a dozen local goons and six police informers' to drive enemies of the revolution out of the community, but that cases of physical violence were subsequently rare.



methodological challenge because areas controlled by rebel groups are often inherently different to other areas. Therefore, comparisons, especially long after a conflict has nominally ended, are difficult to make. Post-conflict Northern Ireland, however, offers the opportunity to compare areas with similar experiences of wartime order provided by armed groups but that vary in terms of their relationship with the state. Similar research designs are possible in conflicts where pro-state paramilitaries operated with significant independence from the state, such as Colombia (see Arjona 2016) or Libya (see Lacher 2020). Indeed, as we show below, post-conflict Northern Ireland is particularly well suited to probe our theoretical expectations because non-state armed actors on both sides of the conflict provided rudimentary public goods in the form of informal ‘justice’ systems. However, Republican groups in predominantly Catholic urban areas were the target of an extensive and decades long counterinsurgency campaign by the British state, whereas Loyalist groups in predominantly Protestant urban areas were not, or less so, and there is evidence of significant collusion between the state and Loyalist groups. The case, thus, provides variation in the relations between armed groups and the state, from ‘clashing monopolies’ in Catholic areas to ‘collusion’ in Protestant areas (see Staniland 2012).

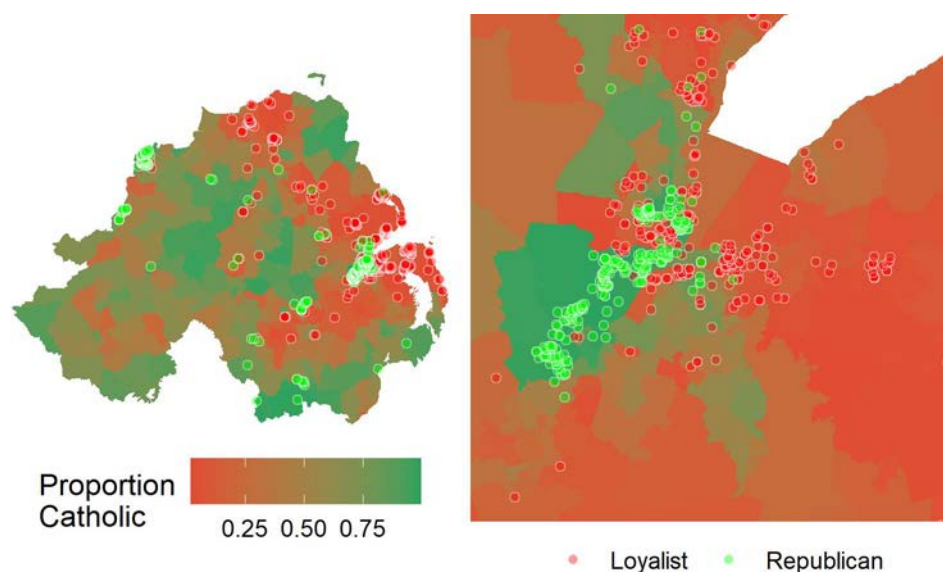
We draw on a survey fielded in the summer of 2022.<sup>5</sup> The survey was fielded in areas where violence by paramilitary groups persists in the form of so-called ‘punishment attacks’, including kneecappings (what the police calls ‘paramilitary-style attacks’). These are attacks directed at the groups’ ‘own’ communities (ingroup attacks). In previous research, we showed that there is a correlation between areas experiencing such present-day social control by armed groups and their social control during the conflict (Rickard and Bakke 2021). We sampled census tract areas, known as Super Output Areas (SOAs), that are worst affected by paramilitary-style attacks between 2008 and 2018 (there are 890 SOAs in Northern Ireland, with an average population of 2,000 people). To do so, we rely on data provided to us by the Police Force Northern Ireland (PSNI). The paramilitary-style attacks, which are directed at the groups’ in-groups, include both assaults/beatings (which involve ‘major or minor physical injury to the injured party typically involving a group of assailants armed with, for example, iron bars or baseball bats’) and shootings (which ‘usually result in the injured party being shot in the knees, elbows, feet, ankles or thighs and the motive is supposedly to punish the person for anti-social activities’) (PSNI 2021). This type of violence occurs across Northern Ireland, but clusters in urban SOAs such as Derry and Belfast, as shown in Figure 1. We selected the eight SOAs worst affected by Republican attacks and the eight SOAs worst affected by Loyalist attacks, sampling a total of 512 respondents.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This research was funded by the Norwegian Research Council (grant no. 275404), as part of the project ‘Street-level Autocrats’ (led by Kristin M. Bakke and with Co-PIs Marianne Dahl, Scott Gates, and Pavel Baev). The project is registered with the Norwegian Center for Research Data (no. 369827) and has ethics approval from University College London (no.4931/002). The survey was fielded by Belfast-based Perceptive Insight.

<sup>6</sup> As part of the bigger project, we also sampled similar areas that experience no or few paramilitary-style attacks. For the analysis here, we want to hold present-day violence constant, hence we focus only on areas that experience high levels of such attacks.

Figure 1: 'Paramilitary-style attacks' (2008–18) across Northern Ireland (left) and Belfast (right).



Note: census tracts (SOAs) are green where there are high proportions of respondents who identify as Catholic according to the 2011 census. The colour of the circles indicates whether the attacks were conducted by Republican (green) or Loyalist (groups). By definition, 'paramilitary-style attacks' are ingroup attacks, as collected and categorized by the PSNI.

Source: authors' illustration.

The empirical analysis is structured as follows. First, we present the case, discuss the extent and nature of wartime governance, and outline the British counterinsurgency strategy. Second, we discuss the emergence of a norm against informing that emerged in predominantly Catholic areas and which, we argue, persists today. Third, we present the results of the survey-based analysis. We show how local community trust is significantly lower in predominantly Catholic areas compared to predominantly Protestant areas. To demonstrate the role of a norm against informing, we show that people in Catholic areas are *still*—more than decades after the conflict nominally ended—more fearful of being perceived as informers.

## 5 Counterinsurgency in Northern Ireland

### 5.1 The conflict known as 'the Troubles'

At the heart of the conflict, which emerged in the late 1960s, were economic difficulties faced by both the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities. The Unionist community, which historically had dominated economically, was hit by industrial stagnation. The Catholic community, particularly working-class Catholics, were aggrieved due to unemployment and long-term discrimination, most notably in housing provision. Mobilization led to violent clashes between the two communities. The police, then known as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), often sided with the Unionists and, therefore, became a symbol of an oppressive state for the Catholic community. By 1969, the British army was deployed to secure order. Though it was initially welcomed by the Catholic community, the army, too, became a

symbol of an oppressive state due to its use of violence, most infamously during the 1972 peaceful protest march in Derry that became known as Bloody Sunday.<sup>7</sup>

## 5.2 'No go' areas and wartime governance

When ethnic rioting broke out in 1968, paramilitary groups emerged on both sides of the communal divide and, to differing degrees and at different times, sought to exert social control within their communities. While the paramilitary groups had never truly disappeared after the Irish Civil War (1922–23), historians and political scientists generally agree that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) had lost touch with the Catholic community in Ulster by the 1960s (Bell 1997; Hanley and Millar 2010; Sanders 2011). The re-emergence of these groups in urban working-class areas, and the swelling of their ranks during the 1970s, is often attributed to the strong-handed tactics employed by the state in response to civil right protests, violence against the Catholic community, and discriminatory policies such as internment (English 2003; Murphy 2015).

Police violence towards Catholics led these communities to erect defensive barricades in the overwhelmingly working-class areas of Derry and Belfast (O'Dochartaigh 2005). These areas became 'no go' areas for the state. Republican paramilitary groups quickly became heavily involved in the local defence, largely due to a demand from the communities, and the 'no go' areas effectively came under the control of the IRA (English 2003; Hanley and Millar 2010). These spaces became 'sanctuaries' (Feldman 1991), which came to be policed by local defence groups even after the barricades were dismantled. Indeed, once the army moved into Northern Ireland in 1969, the RUC was no longer deployed to police these areas, but the army did not engage in everyday policing. Hence, there was a policing vacuum that was filled by the paramilitary groups—both in Republican and Loyalist areas—and once it was filled, the areas became more or less inaccessible to the state. Although Loyalist groups were ostensibly on the side of the state, they, too, came to take on community 'policing' roles when they thought the state had not acted quickly or gone far enough.

The 'no go' areas were areas of high support for the paramilitary groups, which proved to be crucial for them to pursue the armed struggle. As Collins (1998: 225), a former member of the Provisional IRA, notes, 'without the community we were irrelevant. We carried the guns and planted the bombs, but the community fed us, hid us, opened their homes to us, turned a blind eye to our operations (...)'. Republican groups, therefore, attempted to foster and maintain popular support in predominately Catholic areas. Faced with the option of ensuring support through coercion or consent, Republican groups opted for the latter, partially due to the security risk of civilian collaboration. Indeed, as Sluka (1989: 166) notes, 'intimidation would be inherently counterproductive for the IRA and INLA, because it would alienate support and lead to an increase in the number of people prepared to give information to the Security Forces'.

In Belfast's Republican 'no go' areas, for example, community councils were established and included justice, development, and welfare committees (Feenan 2002: 153). The main public good provided by paramilitary groups was community 'policing', but they also contributed to running Irish language schools, welfare provisions to the families of political prisoners, and, as the city's buses were prevented from serving these areas, the black taxicab service. As far as the rudimentary 'justice' system went, it operated as follows: cases of minor offences were brought before People's

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<sup>7</sup> Members of the Nationalist community call the city 'Derry' and members of the Unionist community call it 'Londonderry'. For simplicity, we will refer to 'Derry' henceforth.

Courts,<sup>8</sup> which decided on the punishment to be enforced by the IRA. Indeed, paramilitary groups in both Republican and Loyalist communities developed a system of punishments based on the seriousness of the offence under consideration (Monaghan and Mclaughlin 2006: 176), ranging from warnings, curfews, fines/victim restitution, acts of public humiliation, punishment beatings, punishment shootings (such as kneecappings), expulsions, and assassinations (Silke 1998, 1999b).

### 5.3 The British counterinsurgency

The initial approach to emerging political violence in Northern Ireland was militaristic. Internment, which overwhelmingly targeted Republican communities (de Silva 2012: 94), was introduced on 9 August 1971, a day on which more than 342 people were arrested (Cronin and O’Callaghan 2015: 210). The policy is largely considered to have been a failure, resulting in increased intercommunal rioting and a growth in the membership of Republican paramilitary groups (English 2003). The British forces recognized that a military solution was not effective in quelling support for Republican paramilitaries and, instead, pursued a strategy of ‘normalization’ and ‘criminalization’ (Guelke 2007). They particularly targeted the Catholic ‘no go’ areas to undermine support for Republican groups and, ultimately, reduce the groups’ ability to inflict harm. Leahy (2020: 5) notes that the British forces required inside information from the IRA and the Republican community in which it was embedded in order to disrupt IRA activities, reducing it ‘to a level at which it caused minimal disruption to political, social and economic life in Northern Ireland’. Key tools in the latter were the reliance on informers and agents.<sup>9</sup>

As Kalyvas (2006: 175) notes, there are three major sources of information: material indices, violent extraction, and consensual provision. The British forces attempted to extract information in all of these forms, although they relied predominantly on consensual provision. The counterinsurgents recruited informers in the Republican movement, including in areas where Republican groups had high support, but also within the ranks of the different Republican groups, notably the Provisional IRA but also other rival groups such as the Official IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). Informers at the higher echelons of the paramilitary groups became known as ‘supergrasses’. People like Christopher Black in 1981 (member of the Provisional IRA whose information led to the arrests of 22 people), ‘Stakeknife’ in 2003 (thought to have been Freddie Scappaticci, head of the IRA Internal Security Unit), and Denis Donaldson in 2005 (former IRA and member of Sinn Fein) were top-level informants that wreaked havoc at the highest levels of the Republican movement.

The British forces also relied on material indices, albeit to a lesser extent. Such intelligence was gathered by agents using a range of technologies, most notably photography and audio recordings. While the use of technical surveillance, including electronic listening devices, became more central in the 1980s, Leahy (2020) notes that use of electronic intelligence occurred in the early stage of the conflict, too. For instance, he details the use of covert photography of church attendants on the Crumlin Road in northwest Belfast. According to the intelligence officer involved in this operation, this type of information created an ‘intelligence picture’ that was helpful in case an IRA suspect was arrested and attempted to use church attendance as an alibi (Leahy 2020: 32). Technical surveillance became more sophisticated as the conflict went on. For instance, in 1989, the GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters—a British governmental security and intelligence organization) built a 150-foot-high intercept tower to monitor phone calls between the UK and

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<sup>8</sup> On the provision of justice by rebel groups, see Loyle (2021) and Sivakumaran (2009).

<sup>9</sup> Informers are recruited after joining an organization, while agents are recruited first and then join an organization (Leahy 2020: 10).

Ireland (Leahy 2020: 140). Ultimately, as Kirk-Smith and Dingley (2009: 558) note, ‘an informant might be able to tell you more in five minutes than any other method, such as electronic surveillance or satellite images, could tell you in five months’. Indeed, the use of agents and informers was the ‘primacy of counterinsurgency’ (McGovern 2016: 293).

There was important regional variation in counterinsurgency strategies, especially between rural and urban areas. In the early years of the conflict, the IRA was well supported within its communities and ‘remained elusive’ in ‘no go’ areas (Leahy 2020: 39). As such, they would often make little to no attempt to conceal their identities (Leahy 2020: 39). And yet popular support for the IRA made intelligence hard to obtain. As the conflict progressed and the British forces regained a military footprint in the ‘no go’ areas through a 1972 military operation known as Operation Motorman, urban communities became challenges for the Republican groups. As paramilitary groups also recruited from these communities, insurgents often continued to live at home with their family (Soule 1989). The Special Branch, which was in charge of intelligence gathering, aimed to recruit informers within or very close to the paramilitary organizations (Kirk-Smith and Dingley 2009: 556), which was easier in urban settings with tightknit communities (Taylor 2014). According to a British soldier (Leahy 2020: 149), certain features of urban areas made infiltration possible: the compact nature of Republican estates in the cities allowed ‘nosey neighbours’ greater opportunities to spy on the IRA. Low-level informers, as opposed to the ‘supergrasses’, gathered the bulk of basic information in pubs, clubs, and the streets.<sup>10</sup> The British forces often recruited young, first-time criminals who were arrested and persuaded to become informants in exchange for dropping charges or reduced sentences (McGovern 2016; Soule 1989: 40). These became known as the ‘ten pound touts’ after an article in a prominent newspaper in West Belfast, the *Andersonstown News*, carried the phrase on its front page.

The British counterinsurgency aimed to collect information about the location, identities, and plans of Republican groups. They did this predominantly through the use of informants and agents. In urban areas, informers were mostly low-level members of paramilitary groups or members of the community in which the groups were embedded. These places, such as Ardoyne and Falls Park in Belfast, as well as the Creggan in Derry, were targeted by a British counterinsurgency campaign that relied heavily on the use of informers.

#### **5.4 Collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries**

Although Loyalist paramilitary groups also emerged from the intercommunal violence of the late 1960s, they were inherently different in their relationship with the state. Whereas Republican groups emerged to defend predominately Catholic communities, Loyalist groups emerged first and foremost to protect the Union. This relationship fundamentally changed after the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1985, when the British government shifted its historic alliance with the Unionist community in exchange for a stronger partnership with the Republic of Ireland, which still had a territorial claim on the six northern counties enshrined in its constitution (Arthur and Jeffery 1988; Todd 2011). Silke (1999b) shows a clear trend since the Anglo-Irish Agreement, with Loyalist groups increasingly partaking in vigilante activity and no longer cooperating with the RUC. According to a Loyalist paramilitary speaking in 2007, ‘there was an absence of policing and when people needed help, they went to the paramilitaries who were the ones who could deliver instant

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<sup>10</sup> The IRA Green Book specifically warns against the risks of ‘loose talk’ if members of the Provisional IRA drink too much alcohol: ‘Another important thing volunteers must realize and understand is the danger involved in drinking alcohol and the very real danger, of over-drinking. Quite a large body of information has been gathered in the past by enemy forces and their touts from volunteers who drank. Volunteers are warned that drink-induced loose talk is the MOST POTENTIAL DANGER facing any organisation, and in a military organization it is SUICIDE’.

justice because there was no formal connections or relationships with the police’ (Byrne and Monaghan 2008: 64).

There is significant evidence of ‘systematic and institutionalised’ collusion between the British forces and Loyalist paramilitaries, which was particularly high in the 1980s and 1990s despite the growing distance between the state and Loyalist groups (McGovern 2016: 297). Links between paramilitary groups and locally recruited state forces predate the conflict (Cochrane 2013), and there has long been suspicions of ‘dual membership’ (Collins 1998; Sluka 1989: 222). According to the Report of the Patrick Finucane Review (de Silva 2012: 253), there were 270 instances of assistance between members of the security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries in just the two years between 1987 and 1989, the most common form of which was ‘targeting information on Republican terrorists’. Indeed, de Silva (2012: 11) estimates that 85 per cent of UDA’s intelligence originated from sources within the British security forces. Clearly, the relationship between the state and Loyalist communities was fundamentally different to that between the state and Republican communities. While the state’s counterinsurgency targeted Republican groups in their communities, it relied on Loyalist paramilitaries to eliminate Republican insurgents that it, as a liberal democracy, did not have the legal basis to do (Rolston 2005; see also Mitchell 2004). Despite significant intelligence sharing, members of Loyalist paramilitary organizations were pursued by the state and charged with terrorism. Indeed, as noted by Richard English in de Silva (2012: 95), ‘the idea of close cooperation between Loyalists and the state ... sits uneasily with the very large number of Loyalists imprisoned by the state during the Troubles’. It is important to highlight that there was not a clear-cut cooperative relationship between the British forces and Loyalist paramilitaries.

For our research, we are interested in how people’s experience of counterinsurgency tactics differed across the main cleavage of the conflict. So how did the British counterinsurgency affect Loyalist communities? As Leahy (2020: 13) notes, the ‘operational difficulties’ of infiltration can be investigated ‘by studying IRA activity levels at the time’. One indicator that is telling is deaths due to ‘informational collaboration’ with the state, according to McKeown’s (2009) Post-Mortem database. Figure 2 shows the number of deaths coded as *internal security*, those who were paramilitary ‘members, as well as non-members, whom [Republican or Loyalist groups]<sup>11</sup> felt might be conveying information about them to the security authorities’ (McKeown 2009: 9). Figure 3 shows the breakdown in victims coded as *alleged informers*—people who were murdered by paramilitary groups as punishment for informing—which is split into those who were members and non-members.<sup>12</sup> McKeown (2009) claims that the victims often seem to have been under some pressure from the security forces because of suspected previous criminal activity, but that these accusations are not verifiable. The bodies of many victims, known as the ‘disappeared’, have still not been found.<sup>13</sup> Important for our purposes is that both figures demonstrate that Republican

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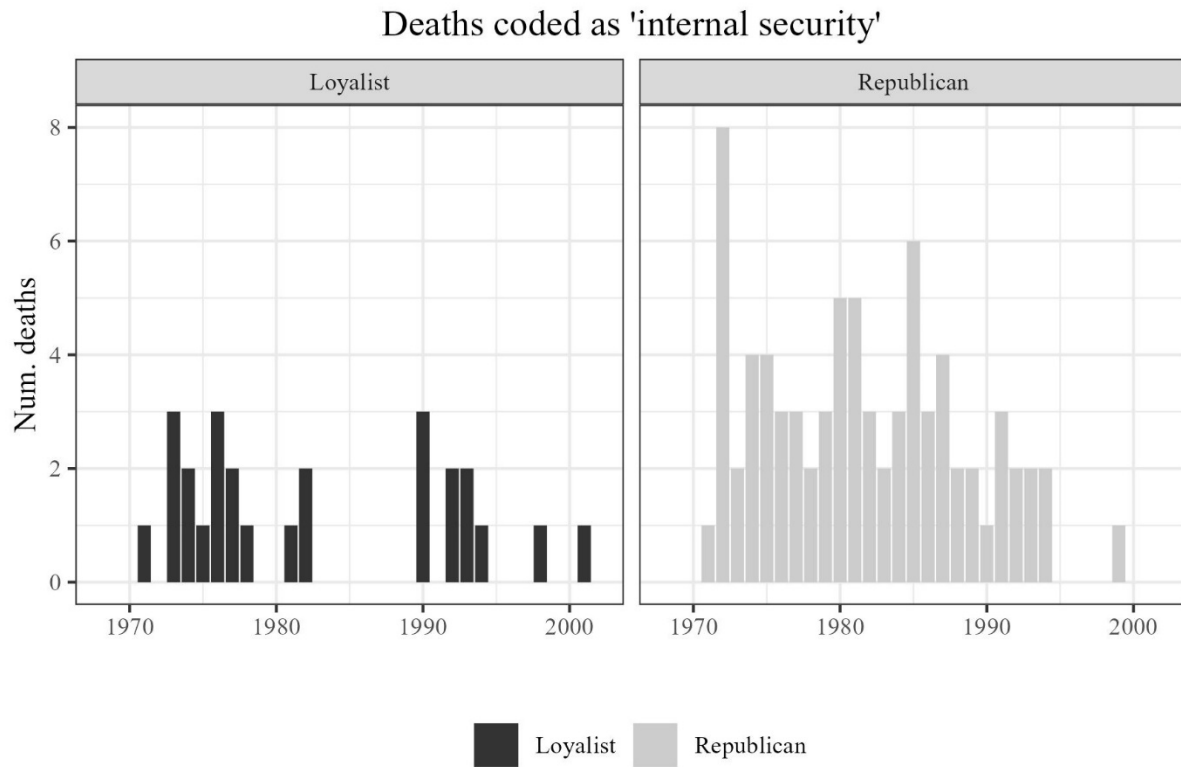
<sup>11</sup>The Post-Mortem database outlines which specific groups were responsible for the deaths. We aggregate Republican groups to include the following: the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), the Irish People’s liberation Organization (IPL), the Provisional IRA, the Official IRA, and other non-specified Republican groups). Loyalist groups include the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), Red Hand Commando (RHC), Red Hand Defenders (RHD), Ulster Defence Army (UDA), Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), and other non-specified Loyalist groups.

<sup>12</sup>The Provisional IRA Internal Security Unit, known colloquially as the ‘Nutting Squad’, dealt with informers within the ranks of the organization. Eamon Collins (1999) claims to have been a member.

<sup>13</sup>The ‘disappeared’ are the 17 people known to have been murdered and secretly buried during the conflict by Republican groups. The bodies of four victims have not been discovered but appeals for information and community activism to locate them continue. The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims Remains was established in 1999 to obtain information on the location of remains of victims (see [www.iclvr.ie](http://www.iclvr.ie)) and family members continue to campaign for information (see [www.thedisappearedni.co.uk](http://www.thedisappearedni.co.uk)).

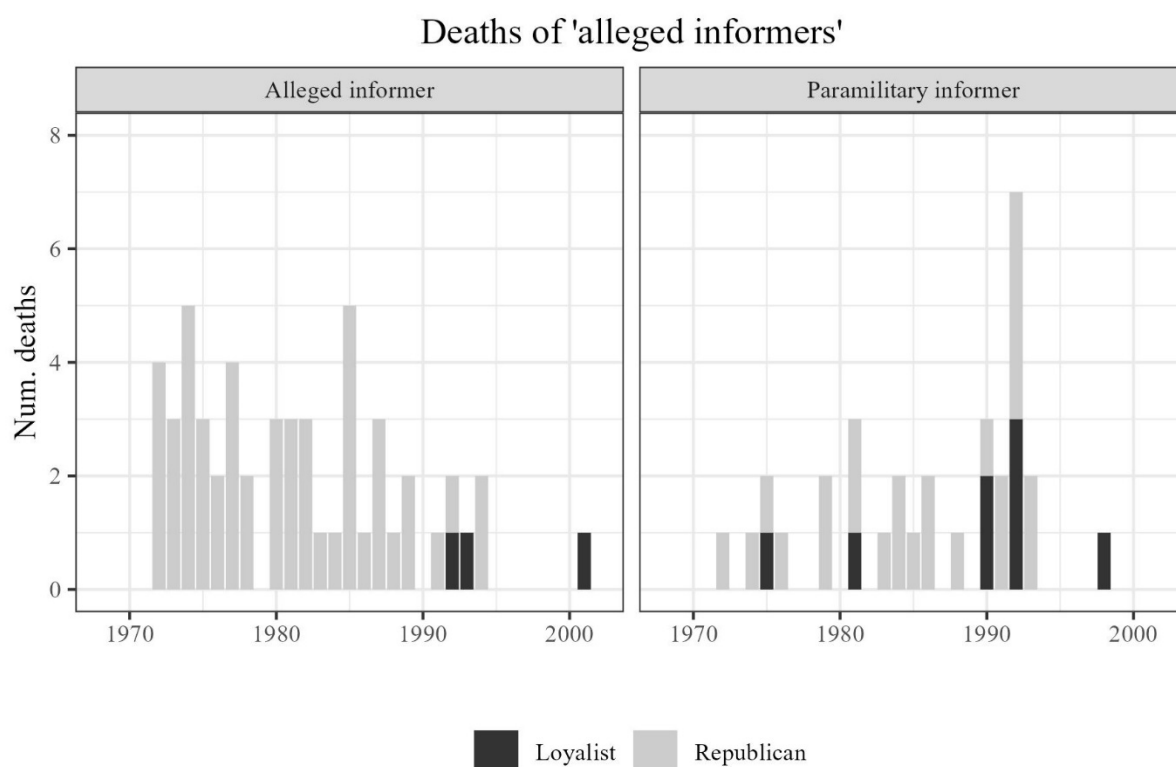
paramilitary groups targeted informants at a higher rate than Loyalist paramilitary groups. This is especially the case for non-member informers—i.e. informers from the community in which the paramilitary groups were embedded.

Figure 2: Punishment deaths coded as 'internal security' in the Post-Mortem database (1968–2001)



Source: authors' illustration.

Figure 3: Deaths coded as 'alleged informer' and 'paramilitary informer' in the Post-Mortem database (1968–2001)



Source: authors' illustration.

In sum, the British counterinsurgency campaign relied heavily on the use of informers. While both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups were embedded in urban communities and provided limited governance in the form of informal 'justice' systems, the state focused its use of informers on Republican communities. Republican paramilitary groups were more likely to target and murder people suspected of informing because they were heavily targeted by the counterinsurgency. Therefore, the relationship between the state and communities controlled by paramilitary groups depended on whether the community was under Republican or Loyalist control.

### 5.5 Norms against informing

Insurgents rely on local populations to provide resources, information, and cover. This was also true in Northern Ireland, where Republican paramilitary groups sought to impose social control for political and military reasons. Politically, these communities served to undermine the legitimacy of the state and 'de-normalising' Northern Irish society (Bean 2012: 212). Practically and militarily, these areas provided Republican groups with sanctuary, and became notorious as centres of IRA recruitment, organization, and arms concealment (Downey 1983). Compliance was particularly important due to the nature of the insurgency. The social control imposed on urban communities served both political and military purposes, particularly in the ongoing information war between Republican groups and the British security forces. It was ensured through a combination of intimidation, punishment, and rewards, which also served to identify and eliminate informers or so-called 'touts' (Feldman 1991; Monaghan and McLaughlin 2006). Bean (2012: 212) claims that, by the late 1970s, the British security forces were confronting an insurgency that had successfully built a deeply rooted micro-society within sections of the Nationalist community.



In the tightly knit Catholic micro-societies, nothing was ‘more despised than an informer’ (Soule 1989: 40). Soule (1989) argues that, in a vicious circle dynamic, the backlash against the British informer system led to greater community support for Republican paramilitary groups. Indeed, the informer system led to delegitimizing state authorities even further, creating a governance vacuum that Republican paramilitaries filled by performing ‘normal police duties’ (Soule 1989: 40). Crucially, the British counterinsurgency led to a strong social stigma and norm against informing. As Figures 2 and 3 show, informers or ‘touts’ were targeted by Republican paramilitaries. The British counterinsurgency relied heavily on informers and fostered an environment of distrust within Republican paramilitaries and their communities. Indeed, according to a former member of the Provisional IRA, ‘we were in total disarray ... You didn’t know who was a tout, or who was going to poison you’ (cited in Leahy 2020: 143).

Dudai (2012) argues that informers became a ‘folk devil’ in certain communities during the conflict. ‘Folk devils’ create moral panics, whereby ‘a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerge to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests’ (Cohen 1972: 1). According to Dudai (2012: 37), the norm played an important role during the conflict by fostering (1) group cohesion and (2) a process of nation-building by defining and punishing betrayal. However, he claims that hostility to informers has ‘continued almost unabated well into the peace-process years’ because reconciliation—while possible across the ethnic divide—is still beyond the pale for communities and informers. Dudai (2012: 40) claims that informing is an ‘intimate betrayal’, especially because of the localized and close-knit nature of Republican groups and their urban communities.

The norm against informing enforces a standard of behaviour. Like all norms, it is sticky and has an enduring legacy on communities, but it might be particularly sticky due to the intimate nature of the betrayal in such tightknit communities. Indeed, according to Cochrane and Monaghan (2012: 20), ‘a hatred and loathing of informants remains deep within the Republican psyche’. This norm is likely an important factor in why post-war engagement with the police is ‘viewed politically as contentious and problematic for some sections of the community’ (Byrne and Jarman 2011: 447). Indeed, the criminalization of paramilitary groups and the use of informers by the security forces during the conflict mean that ‘in some areas even being seen talking to the police is still considered informing’, according to a community worker interviewed by Topping and Byrne (2012: 47). Evidently, over a decade after the conflict nominally ended, there was still a stigma in sections of the community ‘who perceived informing the police about crime as ‘touting’ (Byrne and Monaghan 2008: 65) or ‘collaborating with the enemy’ (Byrne and Monaghan 2008: 114).

Writing more recently, Fr Martin Magill, a Catholic priest in West Belfast, claimed that the principle of ‘not touting’ is deeply ingrained within society and that being a ‘tout’ is considered ‘to this day despicable and not to be done’.<sup>14</sup> This is a sentiment echoed by our interviewees in Northern Ireland, several of whom suggested, ‘you just did not call the police’, either because the police was not present, you mistrusted the police, or you were afraid to be labelled as a ‘tout’.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Fr Magill’s opinion piece, “‘Touting’ and the ethics of gathering information’ appeared on *Sluggie O’Toole* on 16 August 2018, (see Magill 2018)..

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication, 28 and 29 August 2018. We conducted 15 semi-structured interviews in Northern Ireland in August 2018. Interviewees included people working in civil society organizations engaged in conflict resolution and restorative justice (some of whom are former members of paramilitary groups); people who live in areas where practices of informal justice happen; and members of the PSNI. When contacted (via email or phone), potential interviewees were informed about the purpose of the project and assured that their participation was anonymous and confidential, unless they wished to be named in their professional or public capacity. All interviewees were based on

In sum, in their counterinsurgency strategy in Northern Ireland, the British forces relied on informers, which created a norm against informing that persists to this day and, we argue, undermines local community trust. This norm developed particularly in Catholic ‘no go’ areas as these were the areas in which the British relied most heavily on informers.

## 6 Survey results

To investigate whether the persistence of norms against informing has detrimental long-term legacies on community trust, we rely on a public opinion survey conducted in both Catholic and Protestant ‘stronghold’ areas across Northern Ireland. These areas include residents who are from a Catholic (over 98 per cent) or Protestant (over 82 per cent) background according to the 2011 census. They include predominately Catholic areas such as Ardoyne and Falls Park in Belfast, and the Creggan in Derry, and predominantly Protestant areas such as Shankill in Belfast and Love Lane in Carrickfergus. These areas all experienced the same conflict and have high levels of economic deprivation. Crucially, these areas were all ‘no go’ areas during the conflict—and they continue to experience high levels of paramilitary violence long after the conflict nominally ended. That is, these areas are similar on key dimensions likely to affect community trust, but one half of them—the Catholic areas—were harder hit by the counterinsurgency campaign than the other half.

As a measure of local community trust, we asked people how much they trusted ‘people in your neighbourhood or village’. Respondents could state that they trusted ‘not at all’, ‘not very much’, ‘somewhat’, or ‘completely’. We treat all dependent variables as continuous variables and estimate linear regression models. The key independent variable is whether the area is predominantly Protestant or Catholic. Our expectation is that predominantly Catholic communities, which were more affected by the British counterinsurgency, are less likely to exhibit high levels of community trust. We also account for age, income, education, and gender, as well as personal experiences of violence, which—as noted in the literature review—has been linked to both social distrust and community cohesion.<sup>16</sup> All models include robust standard errors.

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oral informed consent. The data collection was registered and approved with UCL Data Protection and Ethics Committee (ID 4931/002).

<sup>16</sup> We code respondents as having personally experienced violence if they reported that they were ‘shot at (with either real or plastic bullets)’ or experienced ‘physical violence (beaten, tortured, or otherwise injured)’ by either the army or the police. Over 27 per cent of respondents reported that they had experienced violence. Separating into Catholic and Protestant communities, 40 per cent and just 12 per cent of respondents, respectively reported experiencing violence at the hands of the state.

Table 1: Results of a linear regression analysis in which community trust is the dependent variable

	Community trust	Community trust
Intercept	2.131*** (0.042)	2.026*** (0.165)
Catholic community	-0.290*** (0.067)	-0.236** (0.076)
Experience violence		-0.171+ (0.094)
Age		0.001* (0.000)
Income		0.156*** (0.041)
Education		-0.003 (0.033)
Gender (female)		-0.186* (0.078)
Num. Obs.	491	377
R2	0.038	0.102
R2 Adj.	0.036	0.087
AIC	1,095.9	818.9
BIC	1,108.5	850.4
Log.Lik.	-544.959	-401.463
RMSE	0.73	0.70
Std. Errors	Robust	Robust

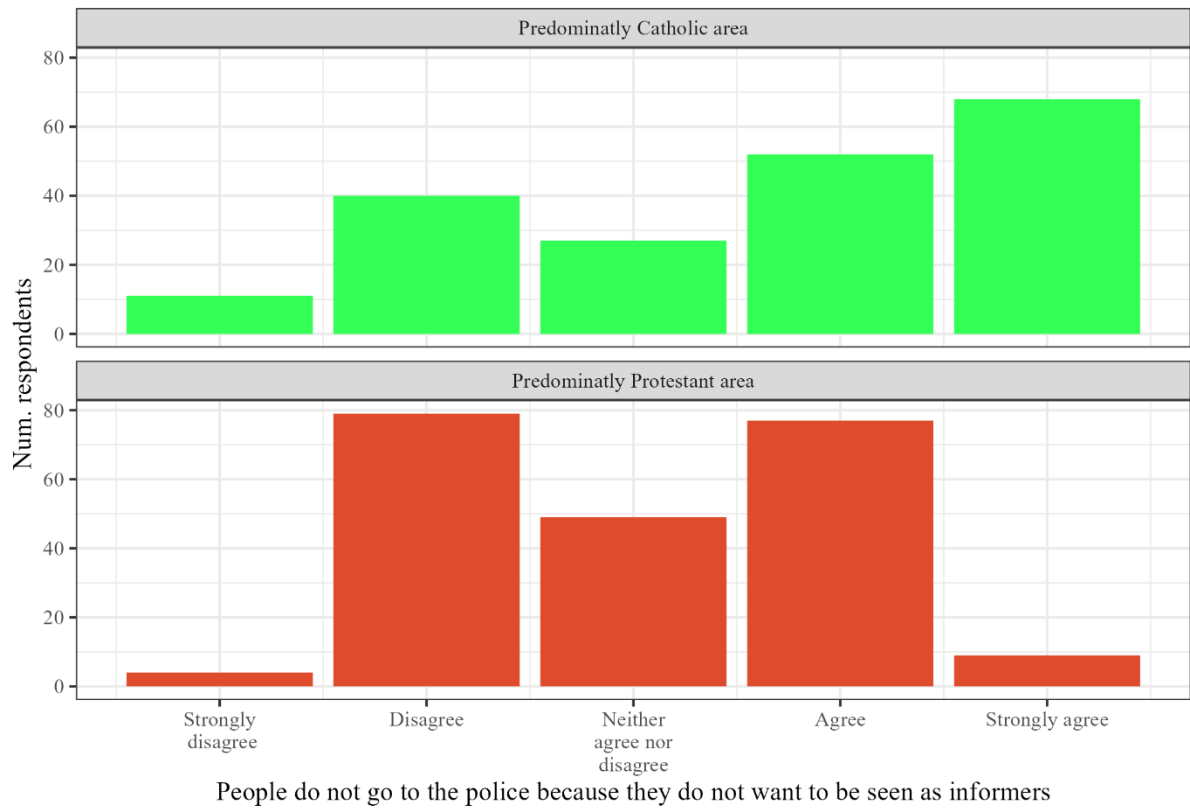
Note:  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: authors' calculations.

Table 1 shows the main results of our analysis. Column 1 shows that respondents in predominately Catholic neighbourhoods are more likely to report low levels of community trust compared to respondents in predominantly Protestant neighbourhoods. Column 2 shows that this finding is robust to alternative model specifications, including the addition of personal experiences of violence and demographic control variables. Among the control variables, personal experiences of violence are associated with lower levels of community trust. Women are also less likely to report trusting people in their neighbourhood or village. Finally, wealthier people and older people—although the latter at just 90 per cent confidence levels—report higher levels of trust on average.

While the experience of the counterinsurgency is not the only way in which predominately Catholic and Protestant communities differ, we argue that a norm against informing means that Catholic areas have lower levels of local community trust. To assess whether a norm against informing persists in predominantly Catholic areas, we asked respondents to what extent they agreed with the statements 'people do not go to the police because they do not want to be seen as informers'. Respondents could reply that they 'strongly disagreed' to 'strongly agreed' on a five-point scale. Figure 4 shows the distribution of answers by community. The graph indicates that the proportion of people in predominantly Catholic communities who strongly agreed is high compared to respondents in predominantly Protestant communities, with almost twice as many people disagreeing with this statement in the latter.

Figure 4: Distribution of support for a statement about informing in predominantly Catholic and predominantly Protestant communities



Source: authors' illustration.

Table 2: Results of a linear regression analysis in which support for the statement ‘people do not go to the police because they do not want to be seen as informers’ is the dependent variable

	Informers	Informers
Intercept	3.037*** (0.066)	3.659*** (0.368)
Catholic community	0.600*** (0.113)	0.486*** (0.140)
Experience violence		0.235 (0.152)
Age		-0.005 (0.004)
Income		0.029 (0.070)
Education		-0.180** (0.064)
Gender (female)		0.077 (0.130)
Num.Obs.	416	329
R2	0.065	0.103
R2 Adj.	0.063	0.086
AIC	1,291.6	1,024.4
BIC	1,303.7	1,054.7
Log.Lik.	-642.811	-504.190
RMSE	1.13	1.12
Std.Errors	Robust	Robust

Note:  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: authors' calculations.

To control for confounding variables, we run linear regression models in which the dependent variable is the extent to which people disagree or agree with the statement. Table 2 shows the result of a linear regression model in which our key independent variable is whether the area is predominantly Catholic (as opposed to Protestant). The results in column 1 show that respondents in predominately Catholic areas are significantly more likely to agree to the statement ‘people do not go to the police because they do not want to be seen as informers’. The finding is robust to additional controls. While the coefficient is slightly lower (-0.486 compared to -0.600), the results in column 2 show that the strongest predictor for support for the statement remains whether the area in which respondents live is predominantly Catholic. Among the controls, the only variable reaching statistical significance is education. Generally, more educated people tend to disagree more with the statement. This is interesting because it is unlikely due to greater knowledge about informing itself. Instead, it is more likely that respondents are referring to whether they themselves fear reporting, and so we may be capturing actual behaviour and not just the perception of other people’s behaviour in their community.

Overall, the survey-based analysis provides empirical support for the expectation that local community support is lower in Catholic than Protestant ‘stronghold’ areas, and that this is due to the norm against informing developed primarily in Catholic areas that were the primary targets of the state’s counterinsurgency campaign.

## 7 Conclusion

Rebel groups often rely heavily on civilians during conflict. Governments recognize that rebels' strength comes predominantly from their ability to strike and retreat into areas of insurgent support. In asymmetric warfare, greater access to information is often key to rebel survival and, ultimately, extracting concessions from the government. Counterinsurgency strategies, thus, do not simply aim to eliminate insurgents but, equally, to undermine civilian support for rebels and extract information from civilians in areas controlled by insurgents. A growing body of work on wartime institutions shows that rebels attempt to rule by consent. Commonly, rebels create institutions to foster civilian support and legitimize their rule, but also to deter and punish collaboration. One such institution is the strong norm and stigma against informing. We show that these norms have long-lasting legacies on community trust with a controlled comparison of areas controlled by paramilitary groups during the conflict known as 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland.

During the conflict, paramilitary groups emerged on both sides of the main conflict cleavage: Republican paramilitary groups claiming to represent the Catholic community sought a United Irish Republic with Ireland, and Loyalist paramilitaries claiming to represent the Protestant community sought to remain part of the United Kingdom. Both groups established territorial control in relatively small urban communities, predominantly in Belfast and Derry. In these 'no go' areas, they established rudimentary forms of governance to fill a policing vacuum—informal 'justice' systems. However, the relationship between the paramilitary groups and the state was fundamentally different. The British forces mounted a three-decade long counterinsurgency against Republican groups which relied heavily on the use of informers. It would be false to describe the relationship between the Loyalist groups and the state as cooperative—indeed, the state arrested and charged members of Loyalist paramilitaries with terrorist offences. However, it was primarily in Catholic areas—and against Republican paramilitary groups—that the British forces relied on informants as a central component of their counterinsurgency strategy. In these predominately Catholic areas, a strong norm against informing emerged. Over time, civilians in these areas learnt to be distrustful of their neighbours. The Northern Irish conflict provides an opportunity to conduct a controlled comparison across similar communities that have different experiences of the counterinsurgency during the conflict.

We show that a strong stigma against informing persists long after the conflict nominally ended. Indeed, informers emerged as 'folk devils' in predominately Catholic communities during the conflict, which has persisted to the present, potentially because informing is such an intimate betrayal in such close-knit communities (see Dudaï 2012). To investigate whether the persistence of norms against informing has detrimental long-term legacies on community trust, we rely on a public opinion survey conducted in 2022 in both Catholic and Protestant 'stronghold' areas. The results of our statistical analysis show that respondents who live in predominantly Catholic areas have, on average, lower levels of local community trust, even when controlling for potential confounders. To explore whether this difference is due to a persistent stigma against informing, a further analysis of the data shows that people in predominately Catholic areas are more likely to agree that people do not go to the police because they do not want to be seen as informers.

Our work makes several contributions to existing research. First, while there is a growing body of work on rebel governance, and public goods provision in conflict more generally, we draw attention to the state's strategies and tactics to counter these efforts and undermine insurgent support. Second, we join a small but growing body of work specifically interested in the legacies of institutional change during conflict. We show that institutional change during conflict may be due, jointly, to the armed strategies of rebel groups and the military strategy of the state, which have enduring legacies on post-war society. We also contribute to understanding the legacies of

war in Northern Ireland and beyond. While there is some research on the reluctance of certain sections of society to turn to the police, we demonstrate the differences across communities, relying on quantitative analyses of original survey data across communities. Our findings can inform efforts to reintegrate the police into areas where the police was historically a symbol of oppression—areas that suffer from high levels of crime (e.g. Deglow 2022).

Decades of fear in predominately Catholic communities led to a persistent norm and high levels of local community distrust, which may undermine post-conflict reconciliation. We believe this work has implications beyond the Northern Irish context. As Dudai (2012: 39) notes, there was a strong informer culture in South Africa after apartheid, in Algeria after independence from France; and in Norway after World War II. It is likely that norms against informing emerge in most conflicts in which rebels seek to establish territorial control (see Kalyvas 2006) and foster civilian support by providing governance (see Mampilly 2011). These dynamics are likely to extend beyond asymmetric conflicts. For instance, at the time of writing, Ukrainian forces have been attempting to identify collaborators in territory regained from Russian invading forces. Shortly after Ukraine liberated Kherson in November 2022, the Ukrainian army refused entry to international journalists until they had identified and prosecuted civilians who had collaborated with Russian forces (Callaghan 2022). Equally, across Russian-occupied territory, the Ukrainian army is building a system of informers and resistance fighters to undermine Russian control and identify military targets (Khurshudyan and Hrabchuk 2022). The conflict in Northern Ireland demonstrates detrimental effects of similar wartime military dynamics on local community trust, long after the conflict nominally ended.

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