

# JOHN MCGARRY

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## BIOGRAPHY

John McGarry was born in Northern Ireland in 1957 and immigrated to Canada in 1981. He received his BA from Trinity College Dublin and his MA and PhD from the University of Western Ontario. He taught at the University of Western Ontario and the University of Waterloo before moving to Queen's University in 2002, where he is currently a professor of political studies and a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Nationalism and Democracy. Professor McGarry has advised governments and appeared as an expert witness before a committee of the U.S. Congress. In 2008/09, he served as the first senior advisor on power-sharing at the United Nations (Mediation Support Unit, Department of Political Affairs). He is presently the lead advisor on governance to the UN-led negotiations in Cyprus. In 2010, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He was nominated a Trudeau fellow in 2011. In 2013, he won the Killam Prize (Social Sciences) and was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal by the Governor General and Royal Society of Canada.

Professor McGarry specializes in the academic and practical aspects of ethnic conflict resolution. He is the editor, co-editor and co-author of 12 books on this subject, including *Divided Nations and European Integration* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), and *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements* (Oxford University Press, 2004). He has written and co-written over 70 articles and book chapters on his research, which have appeared in such journals as *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, *Nations and Nationalism*, *Political Studies*, *Parliamentary*

*Affairs, Government and Opposition, Political Quarterly, Journal of Conflict Studies, and Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics.* He is on the editorial board of five academic journals and is a fellow of the Penn Program on Ethnic Conflict at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a former member of the executive board of the International Political Science Association's Research Committee on Politics and Ethnicity. Professor McGarry is a regular contributor to public media, including NPR in the United States and the CBC and TVO in Canada. He has written op-eds for several newspapers, including Canada's *Globe and Mail*.

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses a key challenge that confronts anyone who wants to understand or resolve ethnic conflict. The challenge is the "metaconflict," or the conflict about the conflict. Metaconflicts exist in all conflicts and are waged not just by politicians and academics, but by everyone with a political view. The paper focuses on Northern Ireland's metaconflict, but it draws lessons from this experience for elsewhere.

There were four main explanations, and associated prescriptions, for Northern Ireland's "troubles." Irish republicans traced the conflict to British imperialism, with the inference that if Britain withdrew, Protestants/unionists could be peacefully integrated into a united Ireland. Unionists blamed it on unrepresentative republican militants, with the inference that Catholics/nationalists were prepared to accept the United Kingdom. Others claimed the conflict was materially rooted, and prescribed an end to inequality or an end to deprivation. The most common popular explanation was that the conflict was religious in nature, and required secularism or ecumenism if it was to end.

The paper shows that each of these accounts was seriously flawed, and that a proper, empirically informed, reading of Northern Ireland's conflict was that it was "bi national" in nature, waged by two rival ethnonational communities with ties to the Republic of Ireland and United Kingdom, respectively. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 succeeded in addressing the causes of conflict because it was squarely based on bi-national principles.

The lecture draws three lessons for other conflicts. The first is the simple methodological point that appropriate prescription requires clear and accurate explanation. The second is that students or policy-makers seeking explanation should be wary of metaconflicts and be prepared to do their own assiduous research. Finally, it is argued that correct explanation and prescription are insufficient conditions for conflict resolution: there must also be political will.



LECTURE

# “Conflicts and Metaconflicts: Northern Ireland and Lessons for Other Hard Cases”

Dalhousie University

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## Introduction

I was brought up in Northern Ireland as a Catholic during the 1960s and 1970s. My first exposure to the Northern Ireland “problem” came at age four, just after I had moved with my family from a farm into the predominantly Protestant town of Ballymena. My mother gave me sixpence and sent me out to the corner store to buy candy, but I was waylaid by a much larger Protestant boy who gave me a beating for being a “Fenian”—a derogatory term for a Catholic, as I later discovered. In spite of this first encounter, my antagonist and I later became the best of friends.

This incident took place in 1961, several years before the Northern Ireland conflict broke out in 1969. During the conflict, which raged essentially until the late 1990s, over 3,600 people were killed.<sup>1</sup> It was no Rwandan-scale holocaust, but it was significant nonetheless. The population of Northern Ireland was around 1.5 million people for most of the period in question—less than half the population of Metropolitan Toronto today, in an area less than twice the size of Ontario’s Algonquin Provincial Park. Northern Ireland’s per capita

1. There are continuing sporadic outbursts of usually non-lethal violence.

death rate in this period thus equates to 10 times the number of American casualties from the Vietnam war, or around half a million people being killed in the United States today. The British army lost 763 soldiers in Northern Ireland, more than in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Falklands, and the first Gulf War combined. Northern Ireland's police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, lost 302 officers from a force that numbered just 8,000 to 10,000. The death rate, moreover, represents a small fraction of the injured, including the seriously injured. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that virtually everyone in Northern Ireland knew someone whose life had been ended or whose body had been damaged by the conflict.

Fortunately for me, my exposure to the violence took place mostly at a distance. Like others, however, I had my share of incidents. One evening, for instance, I walked unknowingly past an Irish Republican Army (IRA) car bomb that was parked outside a Protestant pub and exploded minutes later. Another night, I arrived home late to find my family waiting up for me: neighbours had discovered the burning body of a man not far from my house and there was concern it was me. In the end, the dead man turned out to have been a developmentally challenged Catholic who had been killed in response to an IRA firebomb attack earlier that day on some neighbouring shops; I had spoken a few hours earlier to one of the people later convicted of his murder. There were other incidents, too: the murder of a student at my school who had been wearing our school uniform in the wrong place at the wrong time; the murder of a classmate's brother who was cut down by machine-gun fire in an attack on a pub; the murder of another student's father, who had been a police officer.

I spent my undergraduate years between 1975 and 1979 at Trinity College, Dublin, in part because it was safer than Belfast. I left for Canada in 1981 to pursue graduate studies, prompted by an economic recession but also by the conflict: the year I left, 10 young men starved themselves to death during an Irish republican hunger strike.

Given this background and my profound interest in politics, it seemed the most natural thing in the world for me to become absorbed in the study of violent conflict and conflict resolution. The same background produced the same result for my close colleague, Brendan O’Leary. He and I attended the same Catholic grammar school in Northern Ireland, St. McNissi’s College. After graduating, O’Leary went to Oxford and the London School of Economics, while I went to Trinity College and the University of Western Ontario. O’Leary is now a professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania, while I am a professor of political studies at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. Since the late 1980s, we have been individually and jointly researching and writing on conflict and conflict resolution. Both of us take the view that research on these questions can and should inform public policy. We have both advised multiple governments and worked as the senior advisors on power-sharing to the Mediation Unit of the United Nations.

In this lecture, I discuss a major challenge that confronts researchers, policy-makers, and others concerned with understanding and resolving ethnic conflict. This challenge is the metaconflict, that is, the conflict about how to explain the conflict, and how to end it. Metaconflicts exist with respect to every conflict and are waged by academics, journalists, political partisans, and impartial external agencies, indeed by everyone with a view on the conflict. My lecture discusses Northern Ireland’s metaconflict and applies lessons learned from Northern Ireland’s experience to research and policy-making in similar settings.

### **The Northern Ireland Metaconflict**

As any sensible medical doctor knows, one must diagnose properly before one can prescribe properly. Understanding the nature of ailments and their causes is vital to developing cures, or to offsetting the worst symptoms. This rule is just as applicable to doctors of philosophy and anyone interested in conflict analysis and resolution.



The difficulty that O'Leary and I discovered in trying to diagnose the Northern Ireland problem in the early 1990s was that there was no consensus about the nature of the conflict and, therefore, no agreement on the way forward.

In arguably our most important work on the Northern Ireland conflict, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, published in 1995, we set out to show what was wrong with the most common explanations of the conflict and to offer our own explanation. There were at least four dominant explanations of the conflict, all of which we thought were fundamentally wrong.

### **The Irish Nationalist Explanation**

The first explanation was the principal argument put forward by Irish nationalists, the overwhelming majority of whom were Catholics. Some Irish nationalists proffered an ethnic account of their nation in which Northern Ireland's Protestants were interlopers from Britain, who had been unjustly settled in Ireland by the English (and Scottish) Crown in the early 17th century and who should be repatriated. This was a logic that, if applied to the Americas or much of the rest of the world, would have produced absurd consequences, which perhaps explains why it was not usually aired to strangers. The dominant analysis of Irish nationalists, however, was republican and civic in nature. It held that all the people of Ireland, including Protestants, were members of the Irish nation and were entitled to collective self-determination. From this perspective, the problem (the obstacle to Irish unity and freedom) was that the British state had partitioned Ireland in 1921 and now occupied the northern part. Using classical imperialist divide-and-rule tactics, Britain was held to have promoted divisions among the Irish people by privileging sections of the Protestant community, who were now in alliance with London out of narrow self-interest. The British state, nationalists claimed, had a strategic interest in holding onto Northern Ireland because Northern Ireland was, at the time of partition, the

main industrial region of Ireland, and because, during the Second World War and the Cold War, it lay astride important shipping lanes in the North Atlantic.

The prescription associated with this analysis was straightforward: the withdrawal of the British state from Ireland. Britain should “give Ireland back to the Irish” as Paul McCartney, of Irish extraction, put it in song. For Irish republican extremists in the IRA and related organizations, the British imperial presence in Ireland justified the use of armed force: it was a war of national liberation. When Britain withdrew, it was thought, Northern Ireland’s Protestants would reconcile themselves to a united Irish republic, which would promote liberal freedoms of religion and association and would protect against religious discrimination.

The Irish nationalist explanation was popular not only in Ireland, but also in the Irish diaspora, particularly in the United States. Several Irish Americans supported the Irish republican armed struggle with financial donations. Ironically, the Soviet Union shared the republican view that the conflict was anti-imperialist. This may have been the only opinion that the Soviet Union had in common with Irish America, the community that had produced Senator Joseph McCarthy.

The difficulty with the Irish nationalist analysis was that it did not take seriously the manifest political position of the Protestant, or unionist, population of Northern Ireland. It was clear from opinion polls, election results, and the violent conflict between nationalist and unionist armed factions that the front line of the conflict lay within Ireland rather than between the people of Ireland and the British state. Unionists strongly rejected a united Ireland and insisted instead on maintaining the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Whatever past role British imperialism may have played in fomenting divisions, they had developed deep endogenous roots and could not now be ignored. Britain may not have been the strictly honest broker that it portrayed itself to be, but neither, by

the 1990s, was it the key obstacle to Irish unification. Indeed, even by partition in 1921, many of the British elite were willing to abandon all of Ireland, seeing its retention as a risk to Britain's political stability. By the end of the 20th century, the consensus shared by the British elite and the British public alike was that Northern Ireland was more of a drain on the British treasury than it was an exploitable colony: it was a place apart that would be better off in a united Ireland.

Another difficulty with Irish civic nationalism was that while it expressed itself in the liberal language of impartiality between two religious communities, its core goal was profoundly biased against one of Ireland's two national communities. For at least some of its supporters, Irish civic nationalism seemed to be ethnic nationalism in tactical guise.

### **The Unionist Explanation**

Unionists (British nationalists) were more likely than Irish nationalists to take an ethnic view of their national community. The first unionist prime minister of Northern Ireland, Sir James Craig, declared to his followers that they had built a "Protestant parliament and a Protestant state."<sup>2</sup> During the conflict, however, and particularly from the mid-1980s, this ethnic perspective attracted strong intellectual competition from a civic unionist account that mirrored that of Irish republicans.

Civic unionists accepted that Northern Ireland's Catholics had been treated as second-class citizens by the exclusively Protestant and unionist Stormont regime that had governed Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1972, when it was prorogued by the British parliament at Westminster. For the unionist left, the problem in Northern Ireland was caused by ethnocentric political elites in both communities that were eager to prevent class politics that would unite their constituents. Electoral integrationists argued that the Northern

2. B. O'Leary and J. McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London: Athlone Press, 1993), 107.

Ireland problem was a consequence of the failure of the main British class-based political parties, Labour and the Conservatives, to contest elections in Northern Ireland; this failure left the field open to ethnic chauvinists.<sup>3</sup> Civic unionists, in agreement with their ethnic counterparts, blamed the violence on bands of fascist Irish nationalist paramilitaries who were waging sectarian war on Protestants and killed any members of their own community who dared to dissent from the Irish republican line by joining the police or by working on security installations. Irish nationalist elites within the government of the Irish republic were seen as tacitly or actively supporting these militants by offering a safe haven to republican gunmen, and by maintaining a constitutional claim to Northern Ireland that stood in the way of Catholics' acceptance of the Union.

The main prescription associated with civic unionism was the integration of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom. In practical terms, in the 1990s, this involved normalizing the direct rule regime that had been in place from 1972, and governing Northern Ireland in the same way as Yorkshire or Kent, thereby abandoning any thought of returning to a devolved regional government. Drawing on a classic carrot-and-stick strategy, the proponents of this view argued that once Northern Ireland's Catholics came to experience prosperity and equal citizenship within the United Kingdom (the carrot), they would have little difficulty embracing a British civic identity. Electoral integrationists thus called for the main British political parties to contest elections in Northern Ireland, believing this would transform the local political culture from one of ethno-centrism/sectarianism to a so-called normal modern politics based on socio-economic issues like the economy or the environment. The stick of civic unionism involved a war on terror, the giving of no quarter to militant and chauvinist republicans or their political

3. H. Roberts, "'Sound Stupidity': The British party system and the Northern Ireland Question," in *The Future of Northern Ireland*, eds. J. McGarry and B. O'Leary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 100–36.

allies. Civic unionists also thought that London should pressure the Irish state to abandon its irredentist claim to Northern Ireland.

The problem with the civic unionist analysis was that it did not take seriously the strong support of Northern Ireland's Catholic community for a united Ireland. Just as Northern Ireland's Protestant community had voted for unionist parties since the extension of the franchise to the male masses in the latter part of the 19th century, Catholics in what had become Northern Ireland had no less resolutely supported Irish nationalist parties. Opinion polls suggested that neither Catholics nor Protestants would vote for British political parties if they organized in Northern Ireland, or would vote for them only if the parties supported Irish nationalist or British unionist goals, respectively. This evidence suggested that electoral integration would have no discernible effect on the political divisions, and might also have resulted in lost deposits for the British parties. This in turn suggested that the absence of British parties from Northern Ireland may have been a rational response to the parties' lack of support there, and evidence of their unwillingness to become embroiled in Northern Ireland's politics, more than a contributing factor to the conflict. Republican paramilitaries did indeed kill Catholic policemen and sometimes targeted them because they were Catholics, but most Catholics shared the same constitutional aims as Irish republicans and did not want to join what they saw as a unionist police force. That Catholics' support for Irish nationalism long preceded the republican campaign of armed violence that began in the late 1960s suggested that republican intimidation did not explain Catholics' anti-police views. Similarly, as Irish nationalism had given rise to the Irish republic rather than the reverse, it was more sensible to see the republic's irredentist claim to Northern Ireland as an expression of nationalist sentiment than as the cause of it.

As with Irish civic nationalism, civic unionism, ostensibly based on equal rights for every citizen regardless of religion, was profoundly biased toward one community. Its central goal—the

protection of the Union—was identical to the central goal of ethnic unionists. Indeed, civic unionism emerged as a serious argument among unionist intellectuals only in the 1980s, at a time when the British government was showing exasperation with traditional ethnocentric unionist politicians—an exasperation that led it to begin cooperating closely with the Irish government in the management of Northern Ireland. This timing made civic unionism appear tactical in nature, an attempt to win hearts and minds in Great Britain rather than to appeal to Catholics in Northern Ireland.

### **The Materialist Explanation**

The materialist explanation for the conflict overlapped with the Irish and particularly the British integrationist accounts but was put forward independently in several forms. One prominent argument was that Catholic alienation was caused by inequality, particularly economic inequality.<sup>4</sup> This view was based on clear facts, depicted in the reports of independent commissions and in the academic literature, that Catholics had worse jobs, incomes, housing, and other material goods than Protestants.<sup>5</sup> Inequality, many argued, was caused by discrimination at the hands of the Protestant-dominated Stormont parliament and Protestant-dominated municipalities, although it was also linked to larger Catholic families, arguably an indirect result of inequality as well as of Catholic doctrine. Those who saw inequality as the problem pointed out that Catholic protests had begun in the mid-1960s with the mobilization of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, whose main aim was civic equality.

A second and distinct materialist argument was that the conflict was based on deprivation. The advocates of this view pointed

4. D. Smith and G. Chambers, *Inequality in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

5. E. Aunger, "Religion and occupational class in Northern Ireland," *Economic and Social Review* 7, no. 1 (1975), 1–17; *Cameron Report, Disturbances in Northern Ireland: report of the commission appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland* (Belfast: HMSO, 1969).

out that the standard of living in Northern Ireland was significantly lower than in the United Kingdom in general and that paramilitarism on both sides appeared to be concentrated in working-class ghettos rather than in middle-class neighbourhoods. They also observed that the most radical parties on each side, Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), drew disproportionate support from the less well off. A third argument was that the conflict was attributable to criminality on the part of the paramilitaries. Republican and loyalist paramilitaries were routinely described as “gangsters,” “Mafiosi,” “godfathers,” “racketeers,” and “mobsters,” all terms that suggested that they were rent-seekers primarily interested in self-enrichment. As an American journalist, Scott Anderson, argued in *Harper’s* magazine in 1994, “Assigning [Northern Ireland’s] violence to religious hatreds or skewed nationalism or mere senselessness is too easy. In fact, the hard men have a very good reason for wanting to sabotage any prospect of peace, one that has less to do with flags or gods and more to do with money.”<sup>6</sup> As the headline of Anderson’s article put it, the gunmen were “making a killing.” Supporters of the criminality thesis pointed to extortion schemes, bank robberies, and evidence of high-profile paramilitaries enjoying lavish lifestyles.

Materialist analyses produced materialist prescriptions. Those who thought that inequality was the problem prescribed civic equality, that is, a neutral state with anti-discrimination legislation, professional and impartial agencies charged with allocating public goods, and a bill of rights for individuals presided over by a judiciary blind to plaintiffs’ religion. The left counselled affirmative action programs aimed at establishing a level playing field and urged public investment in jobs, housing, and education. And the right, including the Thatcher government, prescribed the development of an “enterprise culture” that would produce economic growth.

6. S. Anderson, “Making a killing: The high cost of peace in Northern Ireland,” *Harper’s* (February 1994).

Indeed in 1989, Richard Needham, the Conservative minister for Northern Ireland, argued that the best way to resolve the conflict was to “[find work] for 10,000 unemployed boys in west Belfast.”<sup>7</sup> In line with mainstream unionist thinking, the explicit and implicit prescription of those who believed that paramilitaries were gangsters was to pursue anti-racketeering measures, such as investigations into the acquisition of assets and money laundering, as part of a “war on terror.”

The main difficulty with these materialist theses was that they abstracted from the political (nationalist) dimension of the conflict. Inequality and discrimination were indeed sparks that ignited protest in the mid- to late-1960s, but the protest also focused on an underlying Irish national identity that quickly came to the fore, with Catholics—including Catholics who saw inequality as a major problem—regarding Irish unity as the solution and voting for parties whose core platform had this aim. In contrast, small political parties that emphasized equality as an end in itself languished, as did the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. Even before direct rule was implemented by the British government in 1972, and increasingly under the direct rule regime, the British state took measures to outlaw discrimination. The distribution of public housing was handed over to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, an impartial agency; discrimination in employment was banned under the Fair Employment Act of 1976, and a second, strengthened act followed in 1988. These steps helped to bring about the impartial allocation of public and private goods, but they did not succeed in reconciling nationalists to the Union or in appreciably diminishing the conflict, let alone ending it.

The difficulty with the deprivation thesis was that there were areas in Great Britain and in Ireland, notably the vast working-class neighbourhoods of Glasgow, Liverpool, and Dublin, that were just

7. Cited in J. McGarry and B. O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 265.



as deprived as Belfast but suffered no similar violence. Indeed, there were many parts of the world that were much worse off, including native reserves in otherwise developed countries, where deprivation gave rise to apathy and self-abuse, not violent rebellion. The business cycle also suggested no linkage between the economy and violence: violence did not increase when unemployment was high or decrease when unemployment was low. Nor did violence increase when unemployment dipped after a period of sustained growth, as a more sophisticated account of the relationship between materialism and violence posited.<sup>8</sup> Rather, escalations in violence were likely to be correlated with political triggers linked to the international conflict, such as the increase in republican violence after the British internment of Catholics (nationalists) without trial in 1971 or the British army's killing of 14 unarmed protesters in January 1972 in an event that became known as "Bloody Sunday." And loyalist (unionist) violence was linked to republican violence as well as to perceived threats to the Union.

The argument that personal gain was important in motivating paramilitaries was belied by high death and incarceration rates among paramilitaries. Had the paramilitaries been primarily motivated by self-interest, these high rates would have driven these individuals toward less dangerous criminal activities. Similarly, material self-gain did not seem a plausible motive for the 10 hunger strikers who starved themselves to death in 1981, the year I left Ireland for Canada. It was true that protection rackets and money-laundering operations were numerous, but their proceeds were mostly used to fund the fighting. Personal criminal racketeering was rare, particularly on the republican side. Paramilitaries participating in personal enrichment at the expense of the "cause" were likely to incur the wrath of their colleagues as well as that of the security forces. In O'Leary and my view, those who focused on criminality as the

8. T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

reason behind paramilitarism underestimated the importance of Irish and British nationalist motivations. Indeed, some of those who supported the criminality thesis did so as partisan participants in the struggle between the national communities: they were British nationalists (unionists) eager to deflect attention from the role of the British security forces in provoking armed Irish nationalist resistance through excessive force and collusion with loyalists.

### **The Religious Explanation**

The fourth principal explanation for the Northern Ireland conflict was the most popular of all, at least outside Northern Ireland. This was that the conflict was about religion. How else was one to make sense of a conflict in which the main protagonists were Catholics and Protestants, and in which the most popular politician in the region was the Reverend Ian Paisley, a fire-and-brimstone Protestant preacher? The religious explanation had several variants. Some of the devout believed that the problem was not religion per se, but the way that certain priests or preachers abused God's word. Secular accounts were more likely to portray the problem as inherent to religion itself. Proponents of this view maintained that the Northern Irish had too much religion, and saw the conflict as a sort of late 20th-century re-run of the 17th-century European Wars of Religion.<sup>9</sup> A corollary of the secular view was that the conflict was caused by educational segregation in religion-based schools, a system defended by the Roman Catholic hierarchy in particular.

Not all of those who accepted religious explanations proposed prescriptions. The belief that the conflict was based on religion led some to link it to atavism, the presence of ancient hatreds beyond which the rest of Europe had moved several centuries earlier. This

9. This view was particularly popular among the English, hence the joke that when airplane passengers were about to descend into Belfast airport, the pilot would come on the intercom to advise them to set their watches back 300 years.

engendered a sense of hopelessness, or a cynical view, popular in England, that the people of Northern Ireland should be left to their own devices to fight it out to the last man. Others argued that Northern Ireland needed modernization (less religion) and, in the meantime, proposed the classical liberal solution to Europe's religious wars: a separation of church and state that relegated the practice of religion to the private sphere where it would be protected and where discrimination on religious grounds would be outlawed. Still others focused on integrated education as the panacea to the conflict, that is, a single publicly run education system in which the children of all denominations and faiths learned together. In my estimation, this was by far the most popular prescription for the conflict in media coverage outside Ireland. Finally, those who thought that the way religion was presented caused the problem prescribed ecumenism and looked to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and of moderate Protestant sects.<sup>10</sup>

There were many serious problems with these religious explanations. One was that Northern Ireland's political parties did not espouse religious goals, but rather nationalist (Irish nationalist and unionist) ones. The same was true for the paramilitary organizations on both sides. The IRA—the main Catholic paramilitary organization—was not calling for a Catholic theocracy, but for a united Ireland; meanwhile, its Protestant equivalents were not defending Calvin's ideas on predestination or Luther's 95 theses, but union with Britain. Opinion polls showed that most so-called Protestants did not even go to church; this suggested that further modernization/secularization or ecumenism would not appreciably affect their political views. Many Catholics went to mass, but the conflict persisted in spite of regular calls from the Catholic hierarchy, including the Pope himself, for paramilitaries to refrain from violence. Indeed, it seemed likely that more secularization in Northern Ireland would

10. E. Gallagher and S. Worrall, *Christians in Ulster 1968–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

have roughly the same effect as it had had on relations between Quebec and English Canada during and after the Quiet Revolution: namely, that it would do nothing to erode identity divisions.

Contrary to the position of a leading religious sociologist,<sup>11</sup> the Reverend Ian Paisley's popularity had little to do with his religious views. The church that Paisley led—the Free Presbyterians—had a minuscule following (less than 2 percent of the Protestant population) and was dwarfed by the much larger Presbyterian and Anglican churches. Rather, Paisley was popular because in addition to being a churchman, he led an important unionist political party (the DUP) and was by some margin the union's most articulate and strident political defender. His support could be tracked to his regularly displayed ability, during a polarized violent ethnonational conflict, to outflank moderate unionist politicians who suggested compromising with nationalists. As for segregated education, there was little evidence that it had caused division, since the division between Ireland (and then Northern Ireland's) two communities had long preceded the establishment of mass public education. Nor was there evidence that integrated education would solve the conflict, as it did not touch on the main constitutional question; or rather, to be more precise, by abstracting from the constitutional question, it did nothing to change the constitutional status quo. There was, finally, another very considerable obstacle to integrated education: most parents, particularly in the nationalist community, supported the current system, which meant that integrated education would have to be coercive in nature.

### **Our Analysis of the Problem**

O'Leary and my analysis of the conflict, as suggested by my criticism of these other explanations, was that it was fundamentally waged between two national communities, one Irish and one British, each

11. S. Bruce, *God Save Ulster! The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

of which wanted to be governed by its nation-state. It was this dimension that had to be dealt with squarely and fairly if the conflict was to end justly. The national division was rooted in the Crown's plantation of English and Scottish Protestants in Catholic and Gaelic Ulster in the early 17th century. Even at this early point, religion, while more important then than later, served as what Walker Connor calls an ethnic marker, delineating an ethnic division between planted settler and expropriated native.<sup>12</sup> By the end of the 19th century, this division had become ethnonational in character. The initial conflict was not preordained to last, as accounts based on atavism or primordialism might suggest. Rather, its transformation from a settler-native conflict into one between rival national communities was a direct consequence of British and Irish failures at state- and nation-building.<sup>13</sup> In the centuries after the plantation, British authorities proved unwilling or unable to enact policies that might have integrated Irish Catholics into the British state and nation. At the same time, from the outset of the movement for Irish independence in the 19th century, Irish nationalists and eventually the independent Irish state proved unwilling or unable to articulate a vision of an independent Ireland that northern Protestants could support or accept. In the language of recent social science, Ireland's ethnonational divisions were "constructed" from tangible socio-economic distinctions rooted in settler colonialism. The divisions were multigenerational and were entrenched by state policies, local politics, and episodic bouts of intercommunity violence. At every democratic election after the

12. W. Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). This explains the perhaps apocryphal story about the Catholic farmer who was asked by a television reporter in the early 1970s to explain why he had voted for Bernadette Devlin, MP, a Trotskyist, an ardent opponent of the Catholic Church, and an avowed atheist. The farmer replied that it was because she was a "Catholic atheist."

13. B. O'Leary and J. McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London: Athlone Press, 1993), 54–106.

franchise was extended to the United Kingdom's male working class in 1881, virtually all Catholics and Protestants in the six northeastern counties of Ireland that became Northern Ireland in 1921 supported nationalist or unionist parties, respectively. Non-unionist or non-nationalist parties never polled more than 10 percent. Civil society mirrored political society: the main mass organizations, the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Orange Order, were respectively nationalist and unionist. Civil society organizations that transcended the divide were never anything other than minuscule.<sup>14</sup>

The entrenched nature of the ethnonational divide meant that the rival proposals of British and Irish integrationists were utopian. There was no prospect in the 1990s of Northern Ireland's unionist community accepting a united Ireland, even if the individual rights of its members were protected, and no prospect of Irish nationalists becoming reconciled to equal citizenship in the United Kingdom. The problem with the materialist and religious explanations was that they abstracted from the core constitutional issue in the conflict or, just as often, were put forward as part of the constitutional conflict. Thus, many of those who suggested that conflict resolution required economic growth or a dose of secularism were deliberately endorsing the unionist constitutional status quo by default, or explicitly argued for an integrated United Kingdom as the path to economic growth and secularism. Irish nationalists also endorsed materialist and religious explanations, but argued that ending partition was the way to eliminate sectarianism and sectarian inequality, and promote a vibrant economy.

14. F. Cochrane, "Unsung heroes? The role of peace and conflict resolution organizations in the Northern Ireland conflict," in *Northern Ireland and the Divided World: Post-Agreement Northern Ireland in Comparative Perspective*, ed. J. McGarry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 137–58. The United Irishmen of the late 18th century was an arguable exception, one that was wrongly magnified by Irish republicans at the end of the 20th century as an example of what was possible then.

A resolution of the conflict thus required prescriptions that were radically different from those discussed thus far. Political institutional arrangements were needed to deal with two vital dimensions. First was the question of how the deeply divided polity of Northern Ireland should be governed. It could not be governed exclusively from London or Dublin, as the rival integrationists wished, as this would have been nationally partisan. Government from Dublin *and* London would have been fairer, but was sub-optimal, as Northern Ireland's own citizens and politicians would have then played a limited role in deciding their own affairs. Regional self-government for Northern Ireland offered the best way forward, as long as it was constructed in a way that both communities could accept. This latter condition ruled out majoritarian political structures of the sort that are associated with the Westminster system used in Canada at the provincial and the federal level and in the central government of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland's provincial government between 1921 and 1972 had been based on the Westminster system, with disastrous effects. It had resulted in a government that was exclusively Protestant and unionist, and that discriminated against the large Catholic and nationalist minority in the allocation of jobs and public housing and in other matters, thus entrenching its alienation from the constitutional order. Majoritarian structures have had some success in polities that are not deeply divided and in which a substantial body of floating voters are prepared to shift their support to different parties; this produces alternating governments. In a deeply divided polity, in contrast, voters vote ethnically, and majority rule produces permanent government by the ethnic majority.

Northern Ireland therefore required a power-sharing or consociational government in which the executive, legislature, and broader public institutions were broadly representative of all of Northern Ireland's communities.<sup>15</sup> Consociation also entails decision-making

15. A. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

rules in the executive and the legislature that prevent majorities from outvoting minorities, at least on matters that the latter consider vital. Finally, consociation means some degree of self-government to the extent desired and practical.

But consociation was insufficient for Northern Ireland. A power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, as a region of the United Kingdom, would have accommodated Irish nationalists' aspiration to be included in their government, but would have done nothing to satisfy their national aspirations for political links to the rest of Ireland. In addition, the key reason why unionists were reluctant to share power with Irish nationalists was because the unionists feared that the Irish nationalists, because of who they were, would use their role in government to destroy the Union. As a second step, therefore, an agreement needed to address the national dimension of the conflict, including the fears and aspirations of both communities. It needed to confront the fact that Northern Ireland was not simply deeply divided, but deeply divided along national lines.

Our analysis of the Northern Ireland problem in *Explaining Northern Ireland* became in one academic's view the "most orthodox modern explanation of the conflict."<sup>16</sup> Another described it as having achieved "hegemonic status."<sup>17</sup> Although we claim no credit, Northern Ireland's landmark agreement of April 10, 1998 (hereafter, the Agreement),<sup>18</sup> met our broad prescription for the conflict: the Agreement was negotiated by Northern Ireland's political parties and by the British and Irish governments with help from the United

16. A. Edwards, "Interpreting the Conflict in Northern Ireland," *Ethnopolitics* 6, no. 1 (2007), 137–44; quote: 138.

17. R. Taylor, "Introduction: The promise of consociational theory," in *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O'Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict*, ed. R. Taylor (London: Routledge, 2009), 310.

18. The Agreement was called "The Agreement" in a brochure that was mailed to every household in Northern Ireland, outlining its details. It is also known as the Belfast Agreement or the Good Friday Agreement, the latter because it was finalized on Good Friday, 1998.



States. *Explaining Northern Ireland* provided part of the intellectual backdrop against which negotiations on, and discussion of, the Agreement took place.

The internal or power-sharing dimension of the Agreement provided for a consociational government that would be constituted in most part according to the d'Hondt rule. This meant that each political party would automatically receive seats in Northern Ireland's executive branch in proportion to its seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly (hereafter, the Assembly), which was itself to be elected by a form of proportional representation based on the single transferable vote in 18 six-member constituencies. This had the effect of ensuring inclusivity, that is, it meant that every sizable party, including the radical parties of Sinn Fein (nationalist) and the DUP (unionist), were entitled to seats in the Assembly and the government in proportion to their share of popular support. This executive power-sharing was criticized not just by those who favoured majority rule, but also by those who thought that power-sharing should be restricted to moderate parties from each community on the grounds that a moderate coalition would be more likely to cooperate than a fully inclusive coalition would be. O'Leary and I, in contrast, have consistently supported d'Hondt on the grounds that inclusion in government for Northern Ireland's radical parties would strengthen moderates within their ranks, because it would give them a stake in government and the means to achieve important aspirations constitutionally. In the 15 years since the Agreement, Sinn Fein and the DUP have indeed moderated dramatically and now cooperate closely with each other. Indeed, they are now difficult to distinguish from their so-called moderate counterparts, the Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Ulster Unionist Party respectively.

D'Hondt also provided for a sequential method of portfolio allocation that prevented the large parties from monopolizing the most important ministries. Each of the parties entitled to a ministry was allowed to select one ministry, with the largest party selecting

first, the second-largest party selecting second, and so on. Once each entitled party had one ministry, the largest party was then given its second pick from the remaining ministries, the second-largest party got the next pick, and so on, until all ministries were allocated. This rule meant that smaller parties were more likely to receive reasonably important portfolios (and portfolios they wanted) than would have been true had the largest party or parties been responsible for allocating all portfolios. The rule also meant that two of the most controversial elements in power-sharing agreements—how many ministries, and which ones would go to which political parties—were resolved immediately and automatically after elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The executive was to be led by a first minister and a deputy first minister who in spite of their titles were equals. They were to be elected by a concurrent majority of nationalist and unionist deputies who would have to identify themselves as “nationalist,” “unionist,” or “other” for this purpose. The effect of this rule was to ensure that one of the two most important positions would be occupied by a unionist and the other by a nationalist. This rule was replaced in 2007 by a qualified form of d’Hondt in which the nominee of the largest party in the Assembly became the first minister, while the nominee of the largest party from the largest designation in the Assembly other than the first minister’s designation became deputy first minister. This subtle shift, which approximated what we had been arguing for since 2004, meant that the entire executive, including the first minister and the deputy first minister, would now be appointed automatically after elections to the Assembly.<sup>19</sup> It also meant that, as before, both posts could not be held by either nationalists or unionists, but that for the first time it allowed that one of the two positions could now be won by the “others.”

19. J. McGarry and B. O’Leary (2004), “Stabilising Northern Ireland’s Agreement,” *Political Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2004), 213–25.

Consociation also allows for communities to exercise mutual vetoes so that they, and particularly minorities, can prevent others from passing measures that seriously harm their interests. According to the Agreement, a number of designated “key” measures would require “cross-community votes.” This meant that to pass, the measures in question would require the support either of a concurrent majority of nationalists and unionists, or of 60 percent of the Assembly, including at least 40 percent of nationalists and unionists. Moreover, 30 members of the Assembly could raise a “petition of concern” over other measures that would make these measures subject to cross-community votes as well.

The Agreement dealt with the national dimension of the conflict in a number of important ways. Within Northern Ireland, the unionist and nationalist traditions were to enjoy “parity of esteem.” To accommodate Irish nationalists’ aspiration for links to Ireland, the North South Ministerial Council was established, comprising the Irish government and the Government of Northern Ireland. It was agreed that the council would meet in plenary twice a year, and in a smaller format to discuss sectoral issues (e.g., agriculture or education). The British and Irish governments also established a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in which the two governments agreed to cooperate on all policy matters that had not been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly (as well as all devolved matters in the event of the Assembly’s collapse). The Agreement recognized the right of the people of Ireland to self-determination and established a process through which a united Ireland could be established by concurrent majorities voting in simultaneous referendums in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. This was a compromise. The provision that the people of Ireland alone would settle their future was designed to satisfy Irish nationalists, but the requirement for concurrent majorities rather than a simple majority of the Irish people was included to allay unionists’ fears that a united Ireland would be imposed on them without their consent. The Republic of

Ireland also addressed unionist fears by amending its constitution to remove its irredentist claim to Northern Ireland. The Agreement further established the British-Irish Council, which involved the British and Irish governments and the devolved authorities of the United Kingdom, including those in Scotland and Wales. Although this was a weaker institution than the North-South Ministerial Council, unionists saw it as a tool for strengthening ties on an east-west basis. These steps to address the national dimension of the conflict were crucial to reaching an agreement.

In addition to power-sharing and national dimensions, the parties to the Agreement confronted a number of crucial security issues, reflecting the fact that the region was not just divided or just nationally divided but was emerging from bitter violence. Among the most important of these issues was policing reform. For Irish nationalists, the existing police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which in 1998 was 93 percent Protestant, was a profoundly partisan body that had been responsible for serious abuses against their community, including collusion with loyalist gunmen in the assassination of Catholics. Nationalists preferred the police force to be radically reformed or disbanded and some of its members to be indicted for war crimes. For unionists, in contrast, members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary were heroes who had been on the front line defending Northern Ireland from a terrorist onslaught and had suffered grievously for it, losing 302 officers in the line of duty. The unionists maintained that the Royal Ulster Constabulary was the best police in the world and deserved medals for valour as well as hefty pay increases. Given these polarized views, it was hardly surprising that the negotiating parties were unable to reach agreement on this issue, instead handing it over to the Patten Commission, an independent international commission tasked with making its recommendations to the British government by the fall of 2009.

At this point, O'Leary and I wrote a short book, *Policing Northern Ireland: Proposals for a New Start*, aimed at influencing the

Patten Commission.<sup>20</sup> The book drew on best practices from around the world but was informed by the two principles that governed our general approach to the Northern Ireland conflict: namely, that to be acceptable to both communities, the police would have to be reconstructed on consociational and binational principles. The consociational element meant that the police force, at all ranks, should be proportionally representative of the community it policed. This again involved confronting integrationist arguments, many of which were based on civic principles of individual equality, but which masked a defence of the unionist status quo. One argument from this perspective was that what mattered was an impartial, professional, and human-rights-respecting police force and that, beyond this, the composition of the force was unimportant. Supporters of this position went further and claimed that any attempt to change the composition of the force, which would necessarily involve affirmative action, would be wrong, as it would offend the merit principle—the key liberal premise that the only justifiable basis for discrimination is talent. Any police service built on affirmative action, they argued, was bound to be less competent than one that was strictly meritocratic.

Our position, in contrast, was that a police service in any deeply divided polity was unlikely to be impartial unless it represented both communities. Police officers from one community could not reasonably be expected to shed their political and cultural background when they donned their uniforms, and even if they could, they would not be seen as impartial. Regarding competence, we argued that a police force from one community could not be effective in a situation where only a little more than half of the population trusted it enough to cooperate with it. Representativeness was essential for trust, and trust was needed for efficiency. This meant that affirmative action was required, at least for an interim period, until the police

20. J. McGarry and B. O'Leary, *Policing Northern Ireland: Proposals for a New Start* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999).

had appointed an adequate threshold of officers from the nationalist community.

We stressed, however, that as with consociation in the political sphere, proportionality in policing was insufficient. Comprehensive policing reform would need to address the fact not just that Northern Ireland was divided, but that it was nationally divided. The consociational principle of proportionality (affirmative action) was not enough because the main problem was not that Irish nationalists were eager to join the police force but were being turned away because of discrimination. Rather, the difficulty was that Irish nationalists had little interest in supporting or joining a police force from which they were alienated because they saw it as a nationally partisan force charged with defending the Union. The wider political provisions of the Agreement would deal with some of this nationalist alienation by making the political order something that both communities could accept, but additional steps, particular to the police itself, were needed to demonstrate that the police was nationally impartial (or binational). Toward this end, we recommended a number of fundamental symbolic changes, which sounds oxymoronic but was not. First, the name of the police would have to change. The Royal Ulster Constabulary was not something Irish nationalists were likely to want to serve in, and not just because “Royal” was in its name.<sup>21</sup> We suggested instead the Northern Ireland Police Service, a neutral name that made it clear that the police were there to serve the people rather than to act as a coercive instrument. We also recommended nationally neutral symbols to replace the Royal Ulster Constabulary’s harp and crown. The defenders of the Royal Ulster Constabulary had argued that the harp and crown

21. “Ulster” is a term that unionists, but not nationalists, use for Northern Ireland. For nationalists, Ulster is the historic province of Ireland, which includes the six counties of Northern Ireland and three counties in the Irish Republic. Nationalists therefore felt it inappropriate to use Ulster in the name of a police force that had jurisdiction only in six counties.

symbol was binational, but nationalists were quick to note that the harp was under the crown, which suggested colonial subordination. These suggestions for reform, and several others that focused on police accountability and the need for human-rights training, were endorsed by the Patten Commission and were eventually implemented by the British government. One senior Belfast journalist noted after the Patten Report came out that “What really surprised me was the number of times Patten refers to a book by two academics, John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, *Policing Northern Ireland*. Its summary makes 10 points, most of which find their way into the report in some form.”<sup>22</sup>

### **The Success of the Agreement**

Fifteen years old now, the Belfast Agreement has experienced intermittent instability, particularly in its early years, when the new political institutions were suspended by the British government on several occasions. Significant social segregation and political division persist. The Catholic and Protestant working classes still live apart. Catholics still largely vote for nationalist parties and Protestants for unionist ones. But Northern Ireland has nonetheless changed dramatically since 1998, and for the better.

The starkest way to measure the success of the Agreement is through statistics on lethal violence. In the 14 years before 1998, the year of the Agreement, 626 people were killed in Northern Ireland. Since 1998, 91 people have been killed.<sup>23</sup> The discrepancy is even more marked in the figures for the security forces. While 110 police officers and 142 soldiers were killed in the earlier period, the numbers for the later period are 2 and 2, respectively. Even this contrast

22. B. Whyte, “Patten...finding the gems in the detail,” *Belfast Telegraph*, September 18, 1999.

23. All statistics are from Deaths due to the Security Situation in Northern Ireland 1969 – 29 February 2012, available at [www.psni.police.uk/deaths\\_cy.pdf](http://www.psni.police.uk/deaths_cy.pdf).

arguably underrepresents the Agreement's contribution to peace, as the period before 1998 contains a number of years (1994–96) when republicans were adhering to a ceasefire as part of the negotiations that produced the Agreement. The discrepancy between lethal violence in the 20 years before the peace process began (1974–93) and the 20 years after (1994–2013) would therefore show an even starker reduction in lethal violence. Violence in the post-Agreement era has also tended to be more intra- than intercommunity, which contrasts with the earlier period. In other words, this violence is more the result of turf wars and personal rivalries than of ethnic conflict, and is arguably a result of peace and the absence of “real” enemies. Finally, the trend since 1998 has been consistently downward. The last two years for which statistics are available (2011 and 2012) are the only years since 1969 in which no one in Northern Ireland—neither civilian, nor soldier, nor policeman—has died from political violence.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, for the first time in Northern Ireland's history, both communities significantly support Northern Ireland's police service. In January 2007, even the republicans of Sinn Fein voted to support the police, and by November 2012, the composition of the police service was 30 percent Catholic, by far the highest proportion since 1921 and much higher than the 7 percent of 1998.<sup>25</sup> While support for Sinn Fein and the DUP has increased significantly since

24. Statistics on lethal violence are reported on an annual basis, which is why I left out 1998, the year of the Belfast Agreement. One effect of this is to miss the massive Omagh bomb that exploded just after the Agreement and killed 29 people. Even if the Omagh deaths are added to the statistics for the post-Agreement period, however, they do not substantially change the fact that there has been a massive drop in lethal violence after the Agreement was signed. Adding the Omagh casualties would also make the trend away from violence after 1998 even starker.

25. Police Service of Northern Ireland, Workforce Composition Figures, available at [www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates\\_statistics/updates\\_workforce\\_composition\\_figures.htm](http://www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_workforce_composition_figures.htm).



the Agreement—an argument that is sometimes used to suggest that the Agreement has deepened divisions in Northern Ireland—these parties are pale shadows of their former radical selves. In addition to supporting the police, Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, has accepted that the status of Northern Ireland cannot be changed without the support of a majority within Northern Ireland and that this or any other political change must be achieved peacefully. For its part, the DUP has accepted the Agreement's power-sharing institutions, its North-South Institutions, and Dublin's involvement in Northern Ireland through the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. Of course, none of these institutional arrangements are the first preference of either party, but both parties have chosen to compromise in order that the institutions function. Power-sharing arrangements have been working successfully since 2007, and the Agreement as a whole is supported by an overwhelming majority of Northern Ireland's electorate and by 107 of 108 members of the current Northern Ireland Assembly. This remarkable progress does not mean that violence and political instability will never return to Northern Ireland, but it helps to explain why the region is often considered a role model for other deeply divided places.

### **Lessons from Northern Ireland for Other Hard Cases**

This brings us to the relevance of Northern Ireland's experience to elsewhere. To suggest this relevance does not mean that the Northern Ireland model can simply be exported, in all its institutional complexity, to other conflict zones. Each case has its own context and requirements, and there are no off-the-shelf solutions. Nonetheless, my work and my experience in Northern Ireland point to three important and generalizable lessons for those interested in conflict resolution, whether academics, policy-makers, or others.

The first is a simple and uncontroversial methodological point: an appropriate prescription requires a clear and accurate explanation. A starting point is to assess the depth of divisions, as polities

that are divided or deeply divided must be treated differently from those that are not divided but are ethnically diverse or homogeneous. Divided, especially deeply divided, places are often violently divided or potentially so. They are predominantly organized into mobilized ethnopolitical communities with distinct parties and civic associations, at least where this is permitted. This does not mean that every individual in these places identifies ethnically, but it does mean that ethnicity is the dominant basis of identification, and a durable one.

Other polities, in contrast, are not divided in any meaningful sense but are merely heterogeneous or multicultural, or even monocultural. In such cases, inter-ethnic violence is absent, and identification with ethnic communities, to the extent that it exists, competes with multiple other means of identification and is usually privatized (through churches, clubs, and the like) rather than the basis for political mobilization. Voters in these cases are generally prepared to support broad programmatic parties that deliver policies that are trans-ethnic or multicultural in nature. The depth of divisions is an empirically testable phenomenon.

Places that are not divided but are simply diverse or homogeneous can make do with political institutions that are “integrationist” in nature.<sup>26</sup> A governing executive that is composed in the standard majoritarian fashion need not be a problem as long as parties are broadly based, programmatically focused, and not deeply antagonistic to each other. The presence of floating voters in such places generally provides for alternating governments. The existence of broadly based parties also makes majoritarian or plurality-based electoral systems acceptable. There is generally no need for anything other than a single integrated public education system, except where

26. J. McGarry, B. O’Leary, and R. Simeon, “Integration or Accommodation? The Enduring Debate in Conflict Regulation,” in *Constitutional Design for Divided Societies: Integration or Accommodation?*, ed. S. Choudhry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41–90.

territorially concentrated linguistic minorities seek to maintain their language and culture.

In divided societies, in contrast, political institutions require rules that ensure that they are inclusive of all the state's sizable communities. This points to the need for consociational power-sharing within central or regional institutions, whether by way of parliamentary coalitions or rotating or collective presidencies.<sup>27</sup> It also points to the need for decision-making rules that protect minorities from having measures imposed on them, particularly in areas of special sensitivity. Deeply divided places are best served by proportional electoral systems, as these allow the various communities to be fairly represented by their own leaders, rather than restricting their choice, as plurality or majoritarian electoral systems might, to no representation or to representation by politicians from other larger communities.<sup>28</sup> Divided societies may also require community-based schooling, when there is resistance to assimilation into the culture of the dominant community.

The nature of divisions is also important to prescription. Where a deeply divided place is composed of what Ted Gurr calls communal contenders, that is, mobilized communities that compete for a share or all of the state's resources, the consociational institutions just described may be all that is needed.<sup>29</sup> This would seem to be appropriate for Burundi, Fiji, Lebanon, and Malaysia, for example. But other places, like Northern Ireland, are also ethnationally divided, that is, they comprise communities that see themselves as nations entitled to self-determination. In these cases, prescriptions also need to take account of the national division, which frequently entails

27. J. McGarry, "Is Presidentialism Necessarily Non-Collegial?" *Ethno-politics* 12, no. 1 (2013), 93–97.

28. Majoritarian or plurality-based electoral systems are consistent with minority representation in legislative elections where the minority is territorially concentrated.

29. T.R. Gurr, *Peoples versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000).

emphasizing territorial autonomy for minority communities, and sometimes pursuing other forms of national recognition. Size also matters. If ethnonational minorities are small and cannot realistically aspire to sharing power in central institutions, their goal may be restricted to autonomy. This is the case for the Bougainvilleans, the Aland Islanders, Mindanao's Moros, and the First Nations of North America. In cases where ethnonational communities comprise a significant share of the state's population, as in Bosnia or Cyprus, autonomy may need to be combined with power-sharing at the level of a central or federal government, with the exact trade-off between the two a matter for negotiation. Another contextual matter concerns whether an ethnonational minority is fully encapsulated within a state's territory, as is the case with the Scots and the Québécois, or if it is part of a larger ethnonational community that exists on both sides of a state border, as in the case of the Basques, the Irish nationalists, and the Kurds. In the former instance, autonomous institutions can be internal to the state; in the latter, there may also be need for institutional accommodation that stretches beyond states.

If deeply divided places are attempting to transition from violence or civil war to peace, they will need to agree on a range of matters in addition to the creation of power-sharing and power-dividing political institutions. Frequently, the most important of these matters, as the case of Northern Ireland shows, relates to security. Questions of security require equitable answers to what international peacemaking specialists call DDR (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration) and SSR (security sector reform). They may also include a range of matters that are legacies of violence and that require sensitive handling, such as the return of refugees to their homes, how to address the past (that is, violence) in a way that consolidates a peaceful future, and how to rebuild a shattered economy. In Cyprus, for example, agreement is not just necessary on a Cypriot government that is inclusive of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, and on an appropriate form of self-government for the

Turkish Cypriot minority. Agreement is also needed on the withdrawal of Turkey's army from the island and whether Turkey will retain what it sees as its treaty right of armed intervention in Cyprus. Other matters include the treatment of those refugees (mostly Greek Cypriots but also some Turkish Cypriots) who lost their property in 1974, and the recovery of the bodies of the missing from the fighting of that period.

The second important lesson I take from my work in Northern Ireland is that those who work on conflict resolution cannot rely on the academic literature, on the pronouncements of local politicians or external bodies, or on media sources to determine what sort of place they are involved in, including the degree and nature of its divisions. This is because there is always a metaconflict.

Researchers and policy-makers need to be wary of two sets of claims made in metaconflicts. One involves an exaggeration of the nature of divisions and a plea for prescriptions that are unnecessary or wrong. The most egregious example of exaggerated divisions is South Africa's apartheid regime. As a device for maintaining white, or Afrikaner, domination, Pretoria and its academic and media supporters exaggerated the divisions between whites and others, and the divisions among the others. Different African ethnic communities were given their own autonomous homelands, which were intended to provide the bases for independent states. In reality, the communities involved did not want autonomy, and the elites who were put in charge of these Bantustans were not representative of their communities—indeed, they were allies of the apartheid state. Far from seeking autonomy, communities in South Africa preferred integration into a common South Africa based on equal citizenship, combined with some moderate multicultural protections. Any aspiration for territorial autonomy or cultural protections that might otherwise have existed was sullied by the association between group rights and apartheid. The international community correctly rejected the apartheid regime's enforced division, which it interpreted as a farcical

attempt to get around the international consensus on decolonization and self-determination. Other racist regimes have similarly exaggerated differences for the purpose of maintaining control, or worse. At a less harmful level, people and organizations everywhere argue for territorial autonomy for communities, or communally based schools, even when most of the communities in question do not want such things. Think, for example, of the many Southerners in the United States who petitioned for their state to be able to secede from the union just after Barack Obama's re-election as president.<sup>30</sup>

The second set of exaggerated claims comes from the opposite perspective and is arguably more ubiquitous but less apparent. Integrationists frequently underestimate ethnic divisions while exaggerating social and political unity. Their claims flow from at least three Western enlightenment values that are generally seen as progressive and modern. First, Jacobin republicans and their heirs celebrate the virtues of a united and fraternal nation composed of a sovereign citizenry. Second, socialists celebrate class solidarity over ethnic identification, and see the nation-state as a basis for social solidarity, albeit as a transitional point en route to a post-national socialist world order. And third, classical liberals champion individualism and frown on all forms of communal thinking that could threaten individual rights and liberal freedoms.<sup>31</sup> All three of these perspectives see ethnic divisions as either superficial, stirred up by self-serving elites, or based on material causes, discrimination, or backwardness. They emphasize not just constructivism—the view that ethnic identities are human-made rather than primordial—but the feasibility of deconstructing and transforming these identities relatively quickly. To this end, integrationists shun publicly protect-

30. Anonymous, "Let's Stay Together," *Economist*, November 24, 2012, available at [www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2012/11/secession-and-elections](http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2012/11/secession-and-elections).

31. J. McGarry, B. O'Leary, and R. Simeon, "Integration or Accommodation? The Enduring Debate in Conflict Regulation" (2008).

ing minorities through power-sharing and territorial autonomy, and instead prescribe integrationist solutions—including majoritarian and centralized (unitary) institutions, common education systems, and single public languages—that are likely to fail in divided places.

Individuals who value unity, solidarity, equality, and freedoms may genuinely adhere to these republican, socialist, and liberal principles. If we examine the sociology of integrationists in divided places, however, we discover that integrationists are invariably the members of dominant or majority communities and sometimes of small scattered minorities, such as immigrants, who do not want or cannot realistically aspire to accommodation through power-sharing or territorial autonomy. In contrast, the members of significant minority communities reject integration and seek the accommodation of their culture and identity in political institutions, although, hypocritically, they may be integrationist toward minorities in their midst (minorities within minorities).

Looking closer still, we find that integrationism is not only favoured by republicans, socialists, and liberals from majority communities who aspire to fraternity, solidarity, liberty, and equality. Rather, many ethnocentric majority elites use integrationism opportunistically and cynically to cement their domination. This occurs in two ways. First, the core institutional prescriptions associated with integration are often perfectly compatible with ethnic domination.<sup>32</sup> Republicans defend unitarism as the best path to unity, but majority chauvinists know that unitarism means that the entire state will be controlled by the dominant community. Socialists prescribe material policies to promote equality, but these policies leave fundamental political inequalities intact; or, in concert with other integrationists, socialists propose social “mix and fix” solutions

32. J. McGarry, “Ethnic Domination in Democracies,” in *The Political Participation of Minorities: A Commentary on International Standards and Practice*, ed. M. Weller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35–71.

that can result in minorities being assimilated into the dominant community's identity and culture. And liberals may defend majority rule as the best decision-making mechanism because it is consistent with the equality of individual voters (one person equals one vote), but majority rule also clearly suits the interests of a dominant majority in a deeply divided place.

The second way that integrationism benefits ethnocentric majority elites concerns public opinion. Appeals to celebrated republican, socialist, and liberal "universalist" ideologies have significant propaganda value over unashamed and naked chauvinism. These appeals resonate with international actors, particularly in the West, for whom integrationism is a dominant and legitimate method of managing diversity. They also resonate with the followers of dominant group elites, whose unity and esprit de corps are strengthened by the belief that their community's interests are consistent with enlightenment values. Ethnocentric politicians' use of integrationist language is virtually universal, but a recent example from the uncompromising Sri Lankan president and Sinhalese leader Mahinda Rajapaksa, who presided over the military conquest of Tamil regions in 2009, will suffice: "When the people live together in unity, there are no racial or religious differences... Therefore, it is not practical for this country to have different administrations based on ethnicity. The solution is to live together in this country with equal rights for all communities."<sup>33</sup>

Assiduous research is required to avoid this Scylla and Charybdis of exaggerated division and exaggerated unity. The task is much easier in long-standing democracies, because the best measure of citizens' political aspirations is the parties they vote for (although one must still control for the effects of electoral systems and other political regulations that favour certain parties over others). In

33. G. Harris, "Sri Lankan Leader Seems to Reject Greater Autonomy for Tamils," *New York Times*, February 4, 2013.



essence, if a polity has reasonably free elections and the traditionally dominant parties are ethnonational, the polity is ethnonationally divided. If the polity is dominated by programmatic parties, it is not ethnically divided. Opinion polls are also valuable but are more subject to fabrication on the part of voters, who may fear displaying their true sentiments, particularly if these sentiments are radical and unorthodox. The depth of divisions can be assessed by studying social patterns (intermarriage rates, the extent to which housing or workplaces are integrated) and intercommunity violence.

Where democracy is lacking and opinion polls are impossible, the researcher can combine comparative analyses with objective social and geographic facts, notwithstanding those who warn against determinism. Thus, if it is true that every large territorially concentrated and culturally distinct minority in Western democracies seeks at least self-government and the ability to protect its language and culture intergenerationally, this is likely to be true also of similarly positioned groups in non-democratic or less democratic settings, the claims of dominant elites in these settings notwithstanding. Thus, Tibetans and Uighurs are likely to want significant territorial autonomy, irrespective of the opinions of the authorities in Beijing or those of integrationist thinkers.

The third and final lesson from the Northern Ireland conflict is one on which this lecture has had no time to focus: namely, that resolving the metaconflict, that is, establishing an accepted, orthodox position on the nature of the conflict and what is necessary to address it, is not enough to agree on a way to resolve the situation. Even if academics, political parties, and international actors broadly concur on the metaconflict, the parties must be willing to compromise. Plenty of places are the site of intractable conflict in spite of at least some significant meeting of minds on the metaconflict. In Cyprus, both sides and all of the relevant international parties have accepted since 1977 that the conflict is between two communities that are “politically equal” and whose conflict should be resolved

by way of a bizonal and bicomunal federation. Still, a settlement in Cyprus remains famously elusive. In Israel–Palestine, both communities demonstrate significant support for the position that the conflict is between two peoples and that a resolution should be based on two states. There is even a reasonably broad acceptance of details, including that the Palestinian right of return will have to be limited and that Jerusalem will have to be divided and shared in some way. But none of this has produced a resolution of the conflict.

So agreed conflict resolution requires not just consensus on an appropriate prescription but a consensus on a prescription that all of the relevant parties see as preferable to the status quo. Reaching such a conclusion depends on a number of factors, including the balance of power among the communities and the role played by outside actors. The Belfast Agreement was the product of a military stalemate between Irish republicans and the British security forces and loyalist paramilitaries; demographic change (a steady increase in the proportion of nationalists), which led unionists to fear that majority rule was a double-edged sword, and caused nationalists to conclude they could exercise substantial power within Northern Ireland without ruling out Irish unification in the long term; and close cooperation on the part of the main external forces, particularly the British and Irish governments, but also the United States. Just conflict resolution in other cases will require a similarly propitious combination of circumstances in addition to a resolution of the metaconflict.