

Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies, n. 7 (2017), pp. 45-64  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/SIJIS-2239-3978-20750>

# From State Terrorism to Petty Harassment: A Multi-Method Approach to Understanding Repression of Irish Republicans<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract:*

Beginning in 1969, the Provisional Irish Republican Army conducted a paramilitary campaign designed to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, creating a 32 county democratic socialist republic. The Provisional IRA's campaign officially ended in 2005, but former Provisionals and others who followed them continue to pursue armed struggle to this day. The Provisional IRA and its successors are part of the centuries old and highly documented "resistance" of Irish people to British interference in Ireland. Over those centuries, state authorities – the British, Irish, and Northern Irish governments – have "resisted" the dissent of Irish Republicans. This paper draws on three different research methodologies available to social scientists – counts of events that inform quantitative analyses, intensive interviews/oral histories, and visual sociology – and argues that a multi-method approach will provide a better understanding of the dynamics of "resistance" in Ireland and, more generally, social protest.

*Keywords:* Irish Republican Army, Sinn Féin, Social Movements, State Repression, Terrorism

Since the eighteenth century, Irish republicans have often been at the forefront of "the layers of resistance" to British occupation of Ireland. In

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by a National Research Foundation Dissertation Grant (1984), the Indiana University Office of the Vice President for International Affairs, and the IUPUI Office of Professional Development. I thank Des Dalton, Kenzie Latham-Mintus, Mike Maitzen, Lynn Blinn Pike, Dieter Reinisch, and Terry F. White for their help. Please direct all correspondence to Robert W. White. The author retains exclusive copyright to all photographs.

1798, inspired by Republican philosophy and the American and French Revolutions, the United Irishmen tried to “break the connection with England” and create an independent Irish Republic. The United Irishmen failed, but they would serve as an inspiration for those who followed them. In 1916, rebels seized the General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin and proclaimed the Irish Republic. Although the British quickly smashed the rebellion, it set the stage for the Irish “War of Independence” (1919-1922). The Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its political wing, Sinn Féin, pursued a political and military campaign that was most successful in the south and west of Ireland, and in Dublin. In response, the British partitioned the island into the six counties of Northern Ireland (which remains a part of the United Kingdom) and the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State (to become the Republic of Ireland in 1949).

The Anglo-Irish Treaty (1922) confirmed partition but also granted nominal independence to the Free State and this satisfied many republicans (see Lyons 1973). Other republicans refused to accept the Treaty and continued to support the use of armed struggle for a re-united Irish republic, including IRA campaigns from 1939-1945 and 1956-1962 (Bell 1979). And beginning in 1969, the Provisional IRA and its political wing, Provisional Sinn Féin, waged a guerrilla and political campaign in pursuit of a 32 county democratic socialist republic. Between 1969 and 2005, when the Provisional IRA formally ended its campaign and decommissioned weapons, more than 3,600 people were killed.

The conflict has generated an incredible number of scholarly books and articles (see Whyte 1990; McGarry and O’Leary 1995; Hargie and Dickson 2003). The Provisional IRA was responsible for approximately 1,800 of those fatalities, more than any other organization or grouping of activists. Because they played such a prominent role in the conflict, much of the focus has been on the Provisionals (e.g., Bell 1993; Taylor 1997; Moloney 2002, 2010; English 2003) and their successors in “dissident” organizations that continue to support armed struggle for a united Ireland (e.g., Horgan 2012; Morrison 2013). However, state agents, led by the British Army and including the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Ulster Defence Regiment (amalgamated into the Royal Irish Regiment in 1992; UDR/RIR), were responsible for more than 350 fatalities. In fact, British soldiers killed more Catholic/nationalist civilians in Northern Ireland than they did Provisional IRA volunteers (see Sutton 1994; Conflict Archive on the Internet, <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/>>; McKittrick *et al.* 2007).

Repression is “any action by another group which raises the contender’s cost of collective action” (Tilly, 1978, 100; Davenport *et al.* 2005). Some of the most insightful work on state repression in Ireland – “resistance” to Irish republicans by state forces – has been by journalists and other interested parties. For example, writer/journalist John McGuffin (1973) docu-

mented the use of internment without trial as a part of the state's repertoire of responses to unrest. Journalists Peter Taylor (1980) and Anne Cadwalader (2013) documented the brutalization of suspected republicans by the police and collusion between the security forces and loyalist paramilitaries (loyal to the Crown). Similarly, Fathers Denis Faul and Raymond Murray (2016 [1974]) documented the torture of Irish republicans that followed the introduction of internment in 1971 and the British Army's involvement in alleged "shoot-to-kill" operations in which suspected republicans were shot dead when they might have been arrested (Murray 1990; Faul and Murray 2016 [1974]; see also McGuffin 1974). If these activities had occurred in a non-Western country, experts would have labelled them "state terrorism". Social scientists who have examined state violence in Ireland include White and White (1995), White (1999), Rolston and Gilmartin (2000), Sluka (2000), and De Fazio (2009, 2013; see also Koopmans, 1997; Earl 2011).

In the following, three different social science methods offer insight on the repression of Irish republicans since 1969: quantitative counts of events; qualitative intensive interviews/oral histories; and visual sociology. Each approach has its costs and benefits and they are only three of several that might enhance our understanding of the conflict and its associated state repression. Other methodological approaches available include participant observation and comparative and historical research (see Ragin 1994, 31-53). My purpose is to demonstrate that our understanding of the dynamic relationship between "resistance" (by Irish republicans in this case) and the state's response ("state resistance" or "state repression") will be significantly enhanced through multi-method approaches.

### 1. *Counts of Events*

A common approach to studying social protest is to examine counts of events over time, such as the monthly number of deaths from political violence (see Rucht *et al.* 1998). Quantitative data on the Irish conflict have been available for decades (such as, Elliott and Flackes 1999 and earlier editions; Sutton 1994), and their examination reveal important dynamics of the conflict.

Figure 1 presents the monthly number of fatalities associated with the Irish conflict between 1966 and 2006. The data show clearly that *something* happened in 1969 that started a low level conflict and in 1971 *something* triggered an escalation of violence that peaked in 1972. Political violence stayed at a relatively high level for a few years and then stabilized at a lower but still deadly level that lasted into the 1990s. The effect of the Provisional IRA's 1994 cease-fire and the Omagh bomb in 1998 that killed 29 people are also shown (the Omagh bomb was the single most deadly incident in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 2005).

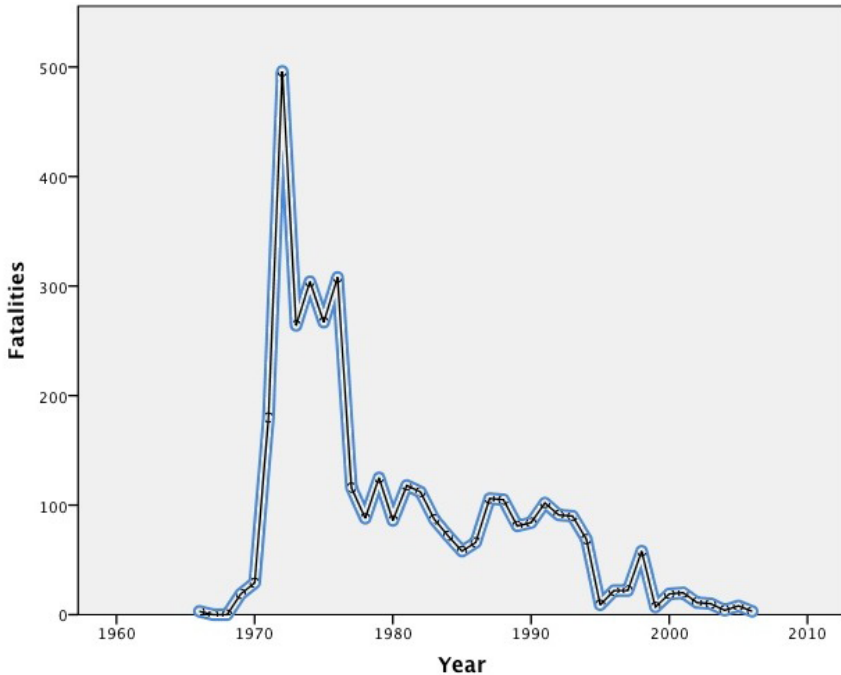


Figure 1 - Deaths Caused By Irish Political Violence, 1966-2006.  
Source: D. McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*, 2007

Historians, journalists, and social scientists have identified key events that explain the onset of conflict in 1969 and its rapid escalation in 1971 (Bell 1979; Bishop and Mallie 1987; English 2003). In the late 1960s, a civil rights movement sought equal rights for the minority nationalist/Catholic community who faced discrimination from the majority unionist/Protestant community (not all Catholics are nationalists and not all unionists are Protestant). The Northern Ireland government at Stormont grudgingly granted civil rights demands while loyalists (loyal to the Crown) and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) assaulted peaceful civil rights activists. This culminated in August 1969 with major rioting in Derry and loyalist attacks on Catholic neighbourhoods in Belfast. In the short term, the British Army replaced the RUC as peacekeepers. In the long term, the British Army became an agent of repression.

Unrest in both communities escalated and in the summer of 1971 the British gave the Northern Irish government permission to introduce internment without trial. It was a standard response to unrest (McGuffin 1973). Even though nationalists and unionists had engaged in violence, on 9 August 1971, British soldiers raided nationalist areas, arrested suspected IRA sympathizers, and held them without charge or trial. It was a gross violation of

civil liberties and the Provisional IRA experienced a sudden increase in support that was immediately translated into paramilitary activity, as shown in Figure 1. Internment was followed by Bloody Sunday. On 30 January 1972, at an anti-internment march, British soldiers shot dead 13 unarmed nationalists/Catholics in Derry; a 14th victim died later. Violence peaked in 1972.

From the founding of Northern Ireland in 1920, Irish nationalists had long-standing grievances against the local Stormont government and the British government in London. Until August of 1971, those grievances had not generated a mass insurgency. Presenting the annual count of fatalities and having a basic understanding of events shows that the response of state authorities to unrest was a key variable that gave the Provisional IRA mass support in the early 1970s and provided enough support that they would they would remain active for a quarter of a century (see Bell 1979, 1993).

Figure 1 also shows that when it is carefully organized, state repression can inhibit violence. At the end of July 1972, the British Army implemented Operation Motorman. Soldiers saturated Provisional IRA strongholds in Belfast, Derry, and other locations. The heavy presence of troops limited paramilitary operations and violence declined. Over time, more sophisticated counter-insurgency techniques, and other factors beyond the discussion here, reduced the violence even more. Between the late 1970s and 1998, there was a low-grade insurgency in Northern Ireland that the authorities could contain, but not eliminate.

The data in Figure 1 were compiled by a mix of journalists and historians and offer a summary of *Lost Lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles* (McKittrick *et al.* 2007, 13-21). *Lost Lives* is an amazing resource for detailed and sobering information on the victims. Another detailed source is Malcom Sutton's *Bear in Mind These Dead: An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland 1969-1993* (1994). Although some have questioned the categorization that Sutton provides (Bruce 1997), the general conclusions drawn from McKittrick *et al.* are consistent with those of Sutton. Further, because both McKittrick and Sutton present detailed information on each death, scholars may draw on the raw data to classify the deaths according to schemes that fit their own research agendas, e.g., focusing on the activities of Republican or Loyalist organizations.

Recently developed "terrorism" databases also offer counts of events on the Irish conflict. The most prominent of these is probably the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which offers information on "non-state" political violence across the world (Lafree and Dugan 2007; Global Terrorism Database 2011, <<http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>>). Scholars and other interested parties may browse the GTD by region, country, attack type ("armed assault", "bombing/explosion", etc.), and perpetrator group. The data are "open-source" and scholars may focus on the activities of individual organizations as varied as Al-Qaeda, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the

Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). As is always the case, however, there is a risk to relying on secondary data. With respect to Ireland, the GTD should be viewed with caution. For example, six civilians and a military chaplain were killed in the famous bombing of the British army base at Aldershot in February 1972. The bomb is often wrongly described as a reply to Bloody Sunday when in fact it had been planned for some time. The GTD (accessed 20 April 2017) attributes the bomb to both the “Official IRA” (who were responsible) *and* the generic Irish Republican Army (see Bell 1993, 288).

There is not a specific entry for the Provisional IRA. Instead, the GTD reports incidents for the Irish Republican Army that were perpetrated between 1970 on through to 2011. A Continuity IRA (formed in 1986) attack in Dungannon in November 2003 and a Real IRA (formed in 1997) attack in Derry in May 2011 are attributed to the Irish Republican Army (GTD, accessed 20 April 2017; “British Crown Forces Targeted” 2003; “For The Record”, 2011). The Continuity IRA and the Real IRA are found among the perpetrator groups, but these attacks are not attributed to those organizations. Although the GTD has improved over time, the data should be handled with care<sup>2</sup>. It is also important to note that some scholars painstakingly collect their own data (see Tilly 1978, 245-306; Demirel-Pegg 2014).

Research on the conflict in Ireland that draws on event counts has found important results (such as, Thompson 1989; White 1993a; Lafree, Dugan and Korte 2009). Peroff and Hewitt (1980), as an example, drew on Richard Deutsch and Vivien Magowan’s three volume *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of Events* (1968-1974) to show the effect of different policy approaches on Catholic and Protestant rioting between 1969 and 1973.

With respect to understanding state repression and its influence on activism, the most important limitation of event counts is that they only document a reaction, they do not necessarily tell us why the reaction occurred. Figure 1 shows that internment and Bloody Sunday were followed by an increase in political violence but the counts do not explain *why* people turned to armed struggle. Was it because young nationalists wanted to lash out and hit back at the British or because state violence de-legitimated state authority and suggested that political violence was an appropriate political choice? The

<sup>2</sup> The issues noted with respect to the GTD and the Irish conflict are at the time of writing and are subject to correction. For example, into 2016, the GTD attributed to the Official IRA incidents that occurred as recently as 2013. As of March 2017, however, the most recent attack attributed to the Officials was in September 1979. Currently (accessed 20 April 2017) listed under the generic Irish Republican Army are recent events perpetrated by a variety of organizations that include the New Irish Republican Army, the Continuity Irish Republican Army, Oglaiigh na hEireann, the Real Irish Republican Army and older events that would have been perpetrated by the Provisional IRA. The value of these data will likely depend upon how familiar a given researcher is with Irish Republicanism.

best way to learn how repressive events shaped the lives and decision-making processes of activists is to speak to them (see also Sageman 2014; White 2017).

## 2. *Intensive Interviews/Oral Histories*

Intensive interviews and oral histories are frequently used to study involvement in social movements and political protest (see Portelli 1991; della Porta 1992; Blee and Taylor 2002). Accounts from activists offer rich, detailed information on the motives and social processes that promote recruitment and sustain activism. Several authors have interviewed activists to better understand the conflict in Ireland (such as, Bell 1979; Sluka 1989; Moloney 2002, 2010; Bosi 2012; Reinisch 2016).

The quotations that follow are from interviews I have conducted with activists in the Irish Republican Movement (see White 1993b, 2017). For a respondent from Portadown who joined the Provisionals in the early 1970s, Bloody Sunday was important, but that event in and of itself did not prompt his recruitment. His involvement was also influenced by the state's response to events which included suspending civil liberties and introducing internment without trial in the context of a civil rights campaign:

*Q: What made you change – change your mind (about peaceful protest)...?*

*A: Well, um – different events, like Bloody Sunday and such like things like that convinced me totally that there was not – the only way to get rid of them was through armed struggle. That you weren't going to do it by peaceful marches. Like the civil rights marches were some massive big marches, multi-thousands of people, you know? And there was a bit of a feeling that this would do something. But it turned out like that nobody listened to the masses that were marching.*

For this respondent political violence became an option because of the perceived failure of peaceful protest. His involvement in the Republican Movement was a *political* decision and not a simple reaction that he wanted to hit back in response to Bloody Sunday.

Governments learn from their mistakes. We can pretty much assume that the British Army took steps to ensure that there would never be another Bloody Sunday. Previous Dublin governments had interned Irish republicans in response to insurgencies. With first-hand evidence that it would be counter-productive, the Dublin government did not re-introduce internment in the 1970s. Following Operation Motorman, successive British and Irish governments did employ an array of counter-insurgency methods to constrain Irish republicans.

In Northern Ireland, British troops, the RUC, and the UDR/RIR patrolled city streets and the countryside, supported by helicopters. Activists and potential activists were monitored. Tens of thousands of homes were raided. There

would be millions of car searches. The Irish government worked to secure the border and monitor activists. Both governments introduced legislation making it easier to obtain convictions and over time there was more and more cooperation between the Irish, Northern Irish, and British security establishments (see Burke 1987, 41-42; Bell 1993, 287-288, 362-363, 404; Coogan 2000, 382-383).

Much of Northern Ireland became a war zone. Counts of fatalities and changes in the monthly size of the security forces do not capture what life was like for Irish republicans. Personal accounts from activists do. The following is from an activist who grew up in Newry and was a teenager in the early 1970s when she became involved with the Provisionals. She responded to the general question of why she became involved in the Republican Movement:

A: Well, I decided to get involved with the Republican Movement because – I was 8 years old when the Troubles started, when the present campaign started in the Six Counties, and the family was all Republican and most of my friends' fathers and that were taken away and interned. And I used to – used to see the Brits regularly beating women and men and that on the streets. And I myself was beat up. I was only about twelve. So I just knew, even when I was so young, that this was Ireland and they had no right to be here. Beating us up. And I knew at that stage that the police was corrupt. The B-Specials [a reserve police force disbanded in 1970] and – would just come into nationalist areas and breaking down doors and beating people up and things like that. You know, and taking them away. And hearing on the news that a man was shot dead because he was Catholic. That kind of thing. I just knew that it was all wrong and that eh – that there was an army called the IRA that was fighting to get them out...They had no right to be here. And it wasn't until I got older that I sort of understood the thing a bit better then, you know?

The respondent was influenced by a complex panoply of social forces, including her family background, state repression from the police and the British Army, and loyalist attacks on Catholic civilians. Through the 1970s and into the 1990s, the authorities would use a combination of measures to monitor activists and limit their ability to operate.

At the front of the counterinsurgency were the RUC, the British Army, and the UDR/RIR. This respondent, from Belfast, was a teenager when he joined the Provisionals in the early 1980s. He had no memory of the civil rights movement but he was very aware of police harassment:

*Q: Do you remember the Civil Rights Movement?*

A: No.

*Q: No? Okay, before you got involved, being from a Republican family were you harassed? Was your family harassed by the RUC?*

A: Oh yeah. Well about two or three years ago before I joined Sinn Féin the British Army and the RUC came to our home. It was three or four in the morning and they stripped the house down. They took my father away in his pajamas, and he wasn't released until six o'clock that night.



A count of the number of persons arrested would not capture the experience of an early morning raid in which the house was “stripped” and your father arrested only to be released without charge fourteen hours later.

Accounts collected through intensive interviews and oral histories are an important source for understanding human behaviour. Like counts of events, accounts from activists have their limits. Memories are fallible. Some activists will intentionally lie while others will unintentionally tailor their responses to make themselves and/or their movement look better. Scholars who collect intensive interviews should recognize these threats and take steps to limit their influence, such as by checking accounts against the historical record (Brown and Sime 1981; White 2007). Unfortunately, the collection of intensive interviews from activists in the Irish conflict has recently come under a different kind of threat.

In the early 2000s, the “Belfast Project” quietly collected interviews from veteran Irish Republican and Loyalist activists. The goal was to record the “motives and mind sets of participants in the conflict, a resource of inestimable value for future studies attempting to understand the phenomenology of societal violence” (Hachey and O’Neill 2010, 2). The project was funded by Boston College and directed by journalist Ed Moloney and a key reason that persons agreed to be interviewed was the promise that their accounts would not be made public for thirty years or until after the respondents had died. When Moloney published *Voices from the Grave: Two Men’s War in Ireland* (2010), which was based on interviews with former IRA commander Brendan Hughes (1948-2008) and prominent loyalist David Ervine (1953-2007), it was assumed that the project was safely lodged with the Burns Library of Boston College.

In his account, Brendan Hughes implicated Gerry Adams, the President of Sinn Féin, and Ivor Bell, a reported former IRA leader, in the 1972 murder of Jean McConville, a widowed mother of ten and alleged informer. Hughes was deceased and the controversy might have faded but for statements from Dolours Price, who was still living. Price implicated herself and Gerry Adams in the McConville case and revealed that she had also been interviewed. Subpoenas ultimately led to the transfer of some interviews from Boston College to the Police Service Northern Ireland (the RUC’s successor), several arrests, and charges against Ivor Bell and loyalist Winston Rea (see for example, Pals and Lowman 2012; “The Belfast Project, Boston College, and a Sealed Subpoena”).

The Belfast Project casts a long shadow over scholarship based on interviews with activists. Even if the questions asked are not controversial, respondents today are rightly concerned that their personal opinions might end up in the hands of the authorities. This may hinder scholarship for the foreseeable future but with time the controversy will fade. In the meantime here is a third methodology available that thus far has been underutilized.

### 3. *Visual Sociology*

Photographs and video have for decades documented the state's response to protest in Ireland. An RUC attack on a peaceful civil rights march, in Derry on 5 October 1968, is often considered the start of the modern "Irish Troubles". The shocking attack was filmed and broadcast world-wide and the film is often included in documentaries. Books, newspapers, magazines, and documentaries addressing the conflict often include photographs or film of rioting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, photos of IRA and loyalist volunteers, and the funerals of the 1981 hunger strikers, especially the funeral of Bobby Sands (see for example, O'Doherty 1986). To the author's knowledge, however, there has been no systematic examination of the conflict in Ireland through the lens of visual sociology (see Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013).

Visual sociology is "based on the premise that the world that is seen, photographed, drawn or otherwise represented visually is different from the world that is represented through words and numbers" (Harper 2012, 4). Visual sociology "connects to different realities" and therefore leads to different understandings and insights when compared to more traditional social science methods (*ibidem*; see also Becker 1998). In the 1990s, two Provisional IRA ceasefires and the Good Friday Agreement (1998) greatly reduced the level of conflict in Ireland but, as shown in Figure 1, conflict did not end. The ongoing conflict provides an opportunity to examine state repression through visual sociology.

Republican Sinn Féin and the Continuity IRA, which split from the Provisionals in 1986, are two of several "dissident" Irish Republican organizations that reject the Good Friday Agreement. They also reject the "dissident" label and argue that it is the Provisionals who have abandoned the ethos of Irish Republicanism.

Republican Sinn Féin is widely viewed as the political wing of the Continuity IRA, but the connection is denied. The party does acknowledge that the two organizations share the same political goal and supports the right of Irish people to engage in armed struggle in pursuit of a united Ireland. Because of this, its members are subject to state repression. However, the nature of state repression has changed. With the decommissioning of Provisional IRA weapons in 2005 and the transformation of Sinn Féin into a fully constitutional party that is embraced by most Irish republicans, there was no longer a need for a heavy police and army presence on the streets of Northern Ireland or spy posts in places like South Armagh, and so on. Visual sociology offers insight on the subtle kinds of state repression that are currently used against Irish republicans.

Republican Sinn Féin pledges its allegiance to the all-Ireland Republic proclaimed in 1916 and does not recognize the authority of the Northern Ireland or Dublin governments that resulted from the Government of Ireland Act (1920). Over Easter weekend (25-28 March) of 2016, the Dublin government and several non-governmental organizations commemorated the 100th anni-

versary of the Easter Rising. On 26 March 2016 (Holy Saturday), Republican Sinn Féin organized a commemorative event in the Kilwilkie Estate in Lurgan, County Armagh, Northern Ireland. A parade led by a “Republican colour guard” marched to nearby St. Colman’s Cemetery where wreaths were laid in honour of deceased republicans. Republican Sinn Féin advertised the march but did not notify the authorities of the march. It was, therefore, an illegal march.

Image 1 shows the colour guard – dressed in fatigues and wearing scarves and berets – marching through the Kilwilkie Estate. The fatigues and scarves are controversial and often draw the attention of the press, anti-Republican political figures, and the police (see McDonald 2016). Prior to the event, an unmarked police car drove through the area and passed by several people who participated. A helicopter appeared overhead.



1 - Republican colour guard, Kilwilkie Estate, Lurgan (26 March 2016)  
© Robert White

At St. Colman’s Cemetery, speakers addressed a small crowd and the “Easter Statement from the Leadership of the Republican Movement” was read by a member of the colour guard. At one point, a Police Service North-

ern Ireland (PSNI) land rover stopped outside the main cemetery gate. The threat of arrest was enough that some people, primarily those with small children, withdrew from the scene. After a short period of time the land rover moved on; the helicopter was present throughout the event.

In Image 2, a member of the colour guard addresses the crowd while the helicopter hovers overhead. The helicopter is relatively high above the cemetery and it appears that its presence was a minor inconvenience. However, at times the helicopter would fly at a lower level, perhaps to allow for better photography and/or video recording by the authorities, and this would make it difficult to hear speakers. Also, as I moved about the cemetery trying to photograph the speaker and the helicopter in one image, it seemed that the helicopter would intentionally change location. Filming, instead of photographing the speaker and the helicopter, would probably have provided a better record of the event.



2 - A member of the colour guard reads the "Easter Statement" while a helicopter hovers overhead (26 March 2016) © Robert White

Two days after the Lurgan event, Republican Sinn Féin commemorated the “Easter Rising Centenary” with a march in Dublin from the Garden of Remembrance in Parnell Square to the nearby General Post Office (GPO) on O’Connell Street. The authorities were not notified of this march, either.

Before the march, there was a heavy police presence in front of the Garden of Remembrance. Image 3 shows groups of officers from the counterterrorism Special Detective Unit (“Special Branch”), wearing distinctive dark blue jackets and hats, standing in the street and watching potential marchers, interested passersby, and journalists.



3 - Police officers (with “Garda” on the back of their jackets) observing the crowd outside of the Garden of Remembrance (28 March 2016)

© Robert White

A piper and colour guard usually lead a Republican Sinn Féin march. As members of the colour guard began to “form up”, members of the Special Branch moved in to explain that they would not be allowed to wear scarves over their faces, as shown in Image 4. The officers claimed it was illegal for the colour guard to cover their faces in public, but no specific legislation was identified. When someone in the crowd asked if that applied to women wearing burqas, there was no reply. As the police officer left the conversation he repeated his warning that they would not be allowed to parade through Dublin’s streets wearing their scarves.



4 - A member of the Special Branch warns members of the colour guard that they will not be allowed to march with their faces covered (28 March 2016) © Robert White

In addition to the disagreement over the wearing of scarves, the route of the march had to be negotiated. It was a holiday and as part of the state's commemoration of Easter 1916, streets in central Dublin were blocked. In contrast to the small number of people who witnessed the Lurgan parade, central Dublin was crowded with shoppers, vendors, entertainers, other commemorative events, and so on. There was some concern that the march would not be allowed to reach the GPO. Image 5 combines three separate photographs of Des Dalton, the President of Republican Sinn Féin (along with other members of the party) negotiating the parade route with a Garda Superintendent (wearing the more formal cap) while members of the Special Branch (in baseball caps) watch. After some discussion, there was an agreed upon circuitous route to the landmark GPO.



5 - Des Dalton works to arrange the parade route for Republican Sinn Féin's march in central Dublin (28 March 2016) © Robert White

When the march left the Garden of Remembrance, the colour guard had their scarves but they were not covering their faces. By the time they reached the GPO, they had paraded past thousands of people with their scarves covering their faces, as shown in Image 6.



6 - A republican colour guard leads the “Easter Rising Centenary” march through central Dublin (28 March 2016) © Robert White

After the group took their positions in front of a podium from which speakers would address a sizeable crowd, Special Branch officers walked into the formation and pulled the scarves down. Image 7 presents two photographs combined into one image. It was a petty and provocative display of the ability of state agents to interfere with an event. If someone had resisted, s/he would have been arrested. And even if the charges were eventually dropped, it might be after a year or more of entanglement in the legal system.



7 - A member of the Garda Special Branch pulls the scarf from the face of a member of the republican colour guard (28 March 2016) © Robert White

Attempts to intimidate anti-GFA activists are frequent. The Easter Rising started on Monday, 24 April 1916. There were commemorative events at Easter 2016 (27 March) and then a month later around the anniversary date. Another Republican Sinn Féin march from the Garden of Remembrance to the GPO, on Sunday, 23 April 2016, passed without incident. A few hours after that march, however, activists were relaxing in a Dublin pub when members of the Special Branch arrived, as shown in Image 8. The officers walked from the front of the pub to the back, looked around, and then returned to the front and left. And in May 2016, following another “un-notified” Republican Sinn Féin event in Lurgan, the PSNI arrested twelve people suspected “of offences under the public processions act and associated offences”. A ten-year old boy was among those questioned by the PSNI and several people have been charged (see Young 2016).



8 - Members of the Special Branch walk through a group of Republican Sinn Féin supporters in a Dublin pub (taken with a cell phone; 23 April 2016)  
© Robert White

A next step in this visual analysis might be “photo-elicitation”, which combines intensive interview methods with visual sociology. As Harper (2012, 156) describes it, photo-elicitation involves “inserting a photograph (or other image, though most are photos) into the research interview” (see also Collier and Collier 1986; Blinn and Harrist 1991). In a photo-elicitation, members of Republican Sinn Féin, the colour guard, and/or the Special Branch might



be asked to offer their perspective on the photographs presented here. Photo-elicitation would probably reveal interesting insight on dissent and repression in the Republic of Ireland.

In Ireland, photographs and video have for decades documented dissent and the state's response. Quantitative analyses and intensive interviews/oral histories show the influence of high-level repression like internment or Bloody Sunday and less intense but still important (mid-range) repression, like being arrested but not charged. Irish republicans (and other activists) have also experienced subtle and petty state repression/harassment for decades, if not centuries. Our understanding of this kind of repression and its influence on activism can be better understood through visual sociology, especially with photo-elicitation.

Like event counts and intensive interviews/oral histories, visual sociology has its threats. The decision to include some images and not others, along with fundamental questions of obtaining access and deciding when and where to take photos or video, will influence the presentation. And underlying every presentation is an assumption that the investigator has not manipulated the images (Prosser 1998; Harper 2012). That assumption, of course, applies to all social data.

#### *4. Conclusion*

For centuries Irish republicans have resisted Britain's influence in Ireland. In reply, various state authorities have repressed ('resisted') Irish republicans. Different research methodologies demonstrate the different kinds of repression that Irish republicans have faced and offer insight on the reaction to repression. As described, there are merits to each of the methodological approaches, but there are also limitations.

Most important, the presentation shows that our understanding of state repression of dissent is significantly enhanced if we employ a variety of research methods. The power of sophisticated statistical analyses of quantitative data is complemented by the insight provided by accounts from intensive interviews/oral histories and the documentation provided by photographs and videos. Photo-elicitation provides an opportunity for additional insight. If our goal as social scientists is to better understand human behaviour, then we should be open to multi-method approaches.

#### *Interviews*

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Newry Republican interview, 1984.

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