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Alienation: The Case of the Catholics in Northern Ireland

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Introduction

The word 'alienation' carries a number of intrinsic connotations that are useful when examining a case of political alienation. For Marx, the estrangement of the individual from himself was to be remedied by abolition of private property so that the plight of the individual worker, forced to be simply the means to an economic end, might be shortcircuited. Freud saw the individual estranged from himself by living up to the expectations of others so that (as Marcuse was later to point out) the individual was no longer the originator of his own acts; he was no longer his true self. He lost interest in life because it was not he who was living it.

Clearly, when we are talking about alienation of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, we are using the term at a more superficial level. However, the historical and socio-psychological antecedents of the term are valuable adjuncts to the specifically political analysis. The alienated citizen is often apathetic because he is not recognized for what he is; and his identity may, at best, be ignored or, at worst, be denigrated. Political lassitude follows logically from a political identity being ghettoised into a backwater far removed from mainstream political life. A dictionary definition of 'alienation' will mention being 'estranged,' 'foreign in nature,' and 'belonging to another place, person or family, especially to a foreign nation or allegiance.'¹ Such a definition usefully bridges the gap between the psychological ('estranged') aspect of the term and the political ('Belonging to a foreign nation or allegiance') dimension. This coupling of two aspects of alienation are especially pertinent when we consider the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland.

In a political context the term alienation denotes the sense of being or feeling, foreign. The alienated group is one that feels foreign although it resides within the state; it feels that it does not fully belong to the wider society and often withdraws into itself and becomes increasingly aware of its separate identity. Such a group is often a numerical minority but it need not be so. The crucial attributes are that it sees itself as being subordinate or marginal to the dominant political culture. Thus Blacks in South Africa, although numerically a majority, are best analyzed as a minority, and an alienated minority within the South African state. Most alienated groups, however, are, numerically speaking, minority groups in a larger society, e.g. the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the Jews of the Soviet Union, or the Sikhs in India.

The word 'alienation' has recently become a prominent weapon in the battle of words between politicians in Britain and Ireland when referring to the position of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. The New Ireland Forum Report² ascribed the impasse in Northern Ireland to the 'alienation of nationalists in Northern Ireland from political and civil institutions, from the security forces and from the manner of application of

the law.' The theme seemed to have struck a sympathetic chord when the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in a speech in July 1984, stressed the importance of finding mechanisms through which the distinct national identity of Catholics could be expressed. More recently, after the Anglo-Irish summit, the communique spoke of the need to cater for the separate identity and aspirations of the minority. However, more recently still, (November 1984) both the British Prime Minister (Mrs. Thatcher) and the new Northern Ireland Secretary (Mr. Hurd) publicly deplored the use of the word alienation implying that it was both an exaggeration and inaccurate. In response to those statements there has been no shortage of spokesmen for the Catholic community indicating the extent of the alienation they perceive among their coreligionists. For example, the Bishop of Down and Connor, whose diocese includes Belfast, wrote in late November of 1984:

It has been claimed this week, even at Prime Ministerial and Secretary of State level, that the degree of alienation has been exaggerated, perhaps even that the term itself is inappropriate. Living in day to day contact with the situation as I do, I have to assert quite categorically that the alienation in the nationalist community is real, it is profound, it is increasing, it is spreading to more and more sectors of that community.³

Since there appears to be wide disagreement between leading actors in the Northern Ireland situation as to whether and, if so how much, alienation is experienced by the Catholic community, it is timely for some kind of analysis to be carried out. Otherwise, there is a danger that the word alienation will simply become a rhetorical device for political point scoring. Already, in fact, some spokesmen for the majority Protestant community have pointed to the alienation that they feel, for example, at policemen being gunned down in the streets. This sort of counter charge, based as it undoubtedly is on a real sense of grievance, risks devaluing the intrinsic worth of 'alienation' as a political concept. The experience of alienation, claimed by the Catholic community has important policy implications. The state must, presumably, react to alienation if it perceives it as being widespread. To ignore alienation, or to wish it away by pretending it is not there, could lead to policies that are not simply unhelpful, but actually counter-productive.

In this paper, the term alienation will be operationalized along a continuum ranging from abstentionism at one extreme to support for violence against the state, at the other. The actual components of alienation that are being examined here are (in ascending order of gravity):

- (a) identification with a national ethos distinct from the national ethos of the majority
- (b) support for policies involving another state in policy-making; and, at the same time, abstentionism from the political process within the state

- (c) lack of support for, and hostility to, the judicial system, the forces of law and order, and the penal system of the state
- (d) support for political parties that condone violence as a means of effecting political change; support for paramilitary groups; support for violence to overthrow the state.

Fortunately for the social scientist, there are numerous mass opinion surveys in Northern Ireland that can be used to facilitate a reasonably accurate measurement of the four components of alienation outlined above. Mass opinion surveys can be buttressed by election results and the policy programmes of political parties. From such measurement, a number of hypotheses suggest themselves:

- (a) the Catholic community experiences alienation to a greater or lesser degree in terms of the above components
- (b) alienation is, however, experienced in varying degrees of severity; and socioeconomic status, age and political party affiliation will be variables strongly associated with experience of alienation
- (c) tensions within the Catholic community are attributable not so much to the differential experience of alienation, but to the means of overcoming it.

Our analysis will proceed in three steps. First, we will place the Catholic community in its demographic context. Second, in the main body of the paper, we will analyse each of the four components of alienation in terms of mass opinion survey evidence. Thirdly, we will reappraise each of our hypotheses in the light of the evidence that has been adduced, and conclude with an assessment of the extent to which they can be confirmed or rejected.

The Catholic community

The national population census in the United Kingdom is conducted once every ten years. The most recent census (1981) is not a completely reliable statement of the religious complexion of the Northern Ireland population because there was a considerable resistance (especially among Catholics) to the question on the religion of the respondent and, to a lesser extent, to filling out the census form at all. It has been estimated that 22% of the total population in Northern Ireland failed to state their religion either because they refused to answer the relevant question or because they refused to fill in a form. This short-fall is reckoned to be about twice as great as that of the previous census in 1971.⁴ This resistance to the census can itself be regarded as a symptom of alienation in the Catholic community: census forms were burnt in public on the streets, and a female census enumerator was shot dead.

As part of its task of ensuring that employment patterns reflect the local denominational structure of the population, the Fair Employment Agency in Northern Ireland undertook a study to ascertain, more accurately than the 1981 census, the size of the Catholic community.⁵ This Report made use of school registers, parochial records, and government-sponsored household surveys. The Report, published in 1985, concluded that the

Catholic share of the total population (1,562,200) was 39.1% in 1981, compared with 34% as reported in the 1981 census (and 31% in the 1971 census). The Catholic community is relatively youthful: 46% of the under-15's in the Province were Catholic, and 36% of the adults. Moreover, the fertility rate remains higher among Catholics than Protestants (the ratio of children to married women for Catholics and Protestants is 2.57 and 1.6 respectively). Of the 26 local government districts in Northern Ireland, eight have a majority of Catholic adults, but twelve have a majority of Catholic schoolchildren. Given the age profile of the Catholic community, and its relatively higher fertility rate, it has been suggested that the minority in Northern Ireland could become a majority early in the next century. If we extrapolate present reproductive differentials between the two communities, and assume no emigration, it is possible to foresee the Catholic community becoming a majority of the voting-age population by the year 2025.⁶

The purpose of the foregoing remarks is to emphasize that the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland is (a) a very large minority and (b) increasing in size both relatively and absolutely. This has important repercussions for our discussion of alienation among Catholics. It is easier for a group that constitutes, say, 5% of the total population (e.g. Protestants in the Republic of Ireland), to accept that its political leverage or access to economic resources may be marginal in terms of the national total. It is much more difficult for a minority constituting 40% of the population to accept inferior treatment in economic, political or judicial domains. As the relative size of the Catholic community increases, the pressure on the national government in London to accommodate these increased demands (especially when expectations are higher) will increase *pari passu*.

On this 'bedrock of alienation' lies a substructure of perceived relative deprivation vis-a-vis the chosen reference group i.e. the Protestant majority. In the political sphere, a high degree of overlap⁷ between religious affiliation and party identification means that the Catholic minority parties have been effectively excluded from policy-making since 1922. The refusal of the Protestant majority parties to countenance any form of 'partnership' or 'consociationalism'⁸ as a formula for giving Catholics access to real political power, has alienated the two main Catholic parties from the political process. This marginality of the Catholic community to the political process is compounded by its marginality in other key state agencies e.g. the police (where Catholic participation is about 10%); the Civil Service (where a recent report⁹ showed that 'Roman Catholics are not adequately represented at the key policy-making levels'); and in the judiciary where only three out of twenty judges are Catholics.

More immediate, perhaps, is the marginality of the Catholic community to the region's economic life. Auger¹⁰ has shown that 'there is a marked tendency for Protestants to dominate the upper occupational classes while Catholics are found predominantly in the lower classes.' Auger also found that Catholics are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than Protestants. In his 1978 mass opinion survey, Moxon-Browne found 7% of

his Protestant respondents and 14% of his Catholic respondents without jobs.¹¹ Catholic males are particularly badly affected. They constitute less than 21% of the economically active population, but 44% of the unemployed. Within work contexts, Protestants are more likely to be found in supervisory roles or high status positions than are Catholics. Thus in the medical sector, for example, 21% of doctors are Catholic, but 43% of nurses. In education, Catholics have 15% of the administrative positions but 39% of those in teaching. The rather high proportion of Catholics in non-manual occupations is attributed by Auger to the need of the Catholic community to 'service' itself. Thus teachers and clergymen account for one-third of Catholic non-manual occupations while the equivalent figure for the Protestant community is 19%. In a highly segregated society, the existence of a Catholic middle class, whose primary role is to cater to the needs of its own community, does little to mitigate the marginality of Catholics in the economy generally.

The components of 'alienation'

We turn now to consider the four components of Catholic alienation mentioned earlier. The first of these was 'identification with a national ethos distinct from the national ethos of the majority.' The birth of Northern Ireland as a political entity was destined to guarantee a bifurcated sense of national identity within its boundaries. Ireland had never been absorbed politically or culturally into the United Kingdom as effectively as Scotland or Wales. In 1920, Northern Ireland might have left the United Kingdom had it not been for the determination of a majority of its inhabitants to remain part of a British state. The resulting constitutional formula was a messy compromise (a devolved government) that pleased no-one. Catholics felt aggrieved that they were now 'trapped' in a 'Protestant state;' the Protestants felt aggrieved that their region was now to be governed at one remove from London; and the British government was less than pleased at being unable to offload responsibility for the region onto a government in Dublin.

The legacy of this settlement was that national identity became a divisive concept. Broadly speaking, Catholics tended to look south to the government in Dublin as the appropriate focus for their Irish national identity. Protestants continued to look towards London as the focus for their British identity. Politics within the region became rooted in the constitutional question: most Catholics persisted in feeling that their identity could not be given true expression except in an all-Ireland state (and this aspiration was given some legitimacy by the Constitutional claim to the territory of Northern Ireland by the Republic of Ireland). Most Protestants persisted in their fear that their British identity would be in jeopardy if Irish unity was ever achieved, and in their belief that their economic, political and cultural interests could only be safeguarded within a British state.

Opinion survey evidence suggests that Catholics are surer of their national identity than are Protestants. When asked to indicate their national 'label,' Catholics will overwhelmingly reply 'Irish' while Protestants may

say 'Ulster' or 'British.' Rose argues that Protestants national identity is partly based on a negative reaction to being thought of as 'Irish:' they may be vague about what they are, but they are sure about what they are not. This is confirmed in Rose's finding that most Irish people attribute their nationality to being 'born and bred' (93% of the group) while 53% of those who see themselves as British attribute this to being 'under British rule' (an inherently less secure basis for national allegiance).¹²

In Table 1, we can see the extent to which national identity follows religious lines in Northern Ireland. We can also see that, in the ten-year period (1968-78), being British (and not being Irish) has become more important for Protestants.

Table 1
Northern identity in Northern Ireland:
Comparisons between 1968 and 1978

Question: Which of these terms best describes the way you usually think of yourself? British, Irish, Ulster, Sometimes British, Sometimes Irish, Anglo-Irish, Other?

	Catholics %		Protestants %	
	1968	1978	1968	1978
British	15	15	39	67
Irish	76	69	20	8
Ulster	5	6	32	20

N.B. Percentages are rounded to the nearest digit. Responses for 'British' 'Irish' and 'Ulster' only are shown.
N = 1291 (1968) 1277 (1978).

Source: E. Moxon-Browne, *Nation, Class and Creed in Northern Ireland*. Aldershot: Gower (1983), p. 6.

In addition to this clear evidence that Catholics identify with the national ethos of the inhabitants of the Republic of Ireland, there is also evidence that they have more contact with them. In answer to the question 'Have you ever travelled to the Republic?' 64% of Catholics but only 37% of Protestants replied that they visited on 'many occasions' or 'regularly'.¹³

Next, we consider the second component of alienation: 'support for policies involving another state in policy-making; and, at the same time abstentionism from the political process within the state.' The largest party in the Catholic community is the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). It was founded in 1970 as the heir to the Nationalist Party that had carried the banner for Catholic opposition to the regime in Northern Ireland ever since its inception. The aim of the SDLP was, and still is, to act as the party of 'constitutional nationalism' playing the role of 'legitimate opposition' to the majority-dominated political system in the Province. Throughout, the party has been hampered by its inbuilt numerical inferiority and this has caused the party leadership (especially under John Hume) to attempt a broadening of the political debate to include (or involve) at one time or another various external actors e.g. the Dublin government, the British government, the EEC, and the United States.

The latest phase in this broadening process was the establishment of the New Ireland Forum in 1982. This was a conference of four political parties (three from the Republic, and the SDLP from Northern Ireland) whose task it was to map out a blueprint for a 'new Ireland' in which Catholic and Protestant, north and south, would peacefully coexist. The Report from the Forum mapped out three possible scenarios for the future of Ireland but

each was eventually ruled out by the British government as being impractical at this time.

For our purposes, the importance of the New Ireland Forum was that it represented an attempt by the SDLP to enlist the involvement of political parties in another state; and thus reflected the alienation of the party from the *status quo* in Northern Ireland. The idea that the government of the Republic should be involved in any political settlement in Northern Ireland is one that is very attractive to Catholics (but distasteful to Protestants who see such involvement as the 'meddling' of a 'foreign power' in the internal affairs of the United Kingdom). Successive opinion surveys show how important the involvement of the Republic is for Catholics. In 1978 78% of Catholics agreed that 'in any political settlement in Northern Ireland the Irish government would have to be consulted' (30% of Protestants). Two years later, in response to the suggestion that the Republic's government 'should be involved in discussions about the future form of government in Northern Ireland' 58% of Catholics (14% of Protestants) agreed.¹⁴ In 1984, when asked if the government of the Republic of Ireland should 'have any say in constitutional changes affecting Northern Ireland, or not' 61% of Catholics said Yes (10% of Protestants).¹⁵

The two principal political parties, in the Catholic community, the SDLP and Provisional Sinn Fein (PSF), have followed an abstentionist policy with regard to some aspects of the political process in Northern Ireland. Both parties now participate in elections at four different levels of representation: local government; the regional assembly (in Belfast); the national parliament (in London); and the European Parliament (in Strasbourg, France). However, a distinction can be made between the two parties' policy regarding taking up seats after an election. PSF takes its seats in the local government elections but not in the regional assembly or the national parliament, whereas the SDLP takes its seats in the local government elections, in the national and European Parliament, but not in the regional Assembly. The objection of PSF to taking its seats in the regional and national forum is that it does not wish to accord them legitimacy, whereas the local government councils are seen as valuable channels of influence to and from grass-roots opinion. The SDLP takes its seats in all cases except the regional Assembly because it regards the Assembly, established in 1982, as being inadequate since it has no 'Irish dimension' (i.e. no link with the Republic of Ireland). This policy of abstentionism, followed in different degrees by the two Catholic parties means that the Catholic community has virtually no representation in the regional Assembly¹⁶ and only one representative in the Westminster Parliament (out of 17 MP's from Northern Ireland). Abstentionism is clearly a popular policy in the Catholic community since both parties have, between them, held on to their share of the vote in the last three elections. Participation in elections is a way of receiving a mandate for abstentionism. Abstentionism is a clear symptom of political alienation.

Our third component of alienation was 'lack of support for, and hostility to, the judicial system, the forces of law and order, and the penal

system.' For the Catholic community, the way the law is applied and enforced is a litmus test of the state's declared intention of providing impartial justice for all its citizens. Consequently, any dissatisfaction must be a major contribution to alienation.

The legitimacy of the state is inextricably tied up with the legal measures required to maintain law and order e.g. the Emergency Provisions Act 1978 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1984. Both Acts shift the onus of proof on to the accused in some circumstances e.g. possession of firearms or explosives found on premises in the case of the EPA, and in the case of the PTA, an individual can be required to live in a part of the United Kingdom for reasons which are unspecified and against which it is therefore difficult to construct a defence.¹⁷ A range of offences in both Acts are tried in special courts without a jury. The EPA still contains within it a provision for internment without trial although this is currently in abeyance. However, a source of considerable grievance is that suspects are being remanded without trial for periods of one or two years awaiting their cases to come to court. In March 1984 the House of Commons was told that 108 people had spent more than a year in custody awaiting trial.

Another issue that has become a source of grievance and controversy is the use of 'supergrasses' i.e. the convicting of a number of accused persons on the evidence of one person who is himself accused of a serious crime. There are a number of objections that have been raised to the use of 'supergrasses': an individual may settle old scores by implicating a person he dislikes; the police may be tempted to construct false evidence for the supergrass to use in his 'story'; the payment of money and the granting of immunity from prosecution to the supergrass means that a terrorist may escape trial and punishment. In general, the system of supergrasses has tended to discredit the judicial system and is partly to blame for the alienation of the Catholic community from it.

In the last two years the apparent adoption of a 'shoot to kill' policy on the part of the security forces has further alienated the Catholic community. The members of the police and army are almost exclusively Protestant, the victims of the shootings invariably Catholic. During 1983, seventeen people were killed by either the British Army or the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). Thirteen members of the security forces were charged in connection with seven of these killings. In all cases there were long delays in bringing the cases to court; and in all cases the soldiers and police were acquitted. Even moderate Catholic opinion has been alienated by these apparent travesties of justice. In a recent policy document, the SDLP says:

The fact that these trials were heard in non-jury courts with the repeated appearances of the same judges in almost every case gave rise to a serious questioning of the impartiality of the judiciary and whether it was now legal for British soldiers or the RUC to kill civilians with impunity. The situation unfortunately remains unchanged with no soldier or policeman being convicted of a killing of a civilian while on duty in the streets of

Northern Ireland. Such a position has, must and continues to lead, to great alienation from the judicial process.¹⁸

The use of plastic bullets by the security forces, as a riot control weapon, has been condemned by the European Parliament and avoided in all parts of the United Kingdom except Northern Ireland. By the beginning of 1985 fifteen people had been killed by plastic bullets, some of the victims being children under 15. The use of plastic bullets has been condemned by the SDLP since they sometimes kill innocent bystanders; they represent an excessively dangerous weapon in circumstances where 'minimum force' is the legal maxim governing riot control; and the rules governing their use are often broken by the security forces.¹⁹ The failure to prosecute, let alone convict, those who have killed civilians with plastic bullets has 'contributed and continues to contribute to the alienation of a substantial and increasing section of the nationalist population from the judicial system as a whole.'²⁰

In sum, the panoply of special laws in Northern Ireland gives the RUC and Army the legal back-up for stopping, searching, detaining, arresting and questioning individuals (mainly young unemployed Catholics) and this constant surveillance by the forces of law and order can itself breed resentment, and a sense of alienation which, in turn, only makes the task of these forces harder in the future. In a society where national identity is divided, it would be more conducive to gaining the support of 'Irish' Catholics for the judicial system if flags, crests, emblems and other symbols of 'British' identity were erased from the court buildings. The alienation of many Catholics from the judicial system is emphasized when they feel that they are receiving 'British' or 'Protestant' justice in the courts.

In Table 2, we set out some opinion survey evidence that indicates the extent to which Catholics are unsupportive of the law and order being dispensed in Northern Ireland.

Table 2

Question		Catholics %	Protestants %
How fair do you think the RUC is in the discharge of its duties in Northern Ireland?	Very fair	4	37
	Fair	43	59
Do you think that in the main the legal system in Northern Ireland dispenses justice very fairly, fairly, unfairly, or very unfairly?	Very fairly	4	25
	Fairly	32	64
	Unfairly	37	7
	Very unfairly	20	2
Do you approve or disapprove of the use of plastic bullets by the security forces as a weapon during riots?	Approve	9	86
	Disapprove	87	8
Do you think that the evidence of supergrasses should be or should not be admissible without corroboration in the trials of those charged with terrorist-type offences in Northern Ireland?	Should be	10	35
	Should not be	81	46

Belfast Telegraph-Price Waterhouse Survey
January 1985

N = 955

Source: *Belfast Telegraph* 6 February 1985, p. 7

The fourth and final component of alienation consists of 'support for political parties that condone violence as a means of effecting political change; support for paramilitary groups; support for violence to overthrow the state.' This component reflects alienation at its most intense: a desire to reject the system by force rather than reform it from within. This dichotomy within the Catholic community - evolution versus revolution - is matched, respectively, by the struggle between SDLP and PSF. These two parties have been competing for the soul of the Catholic community. In the last three elections, for the regional Assembly in 1982, for the Westminster Parliament in 1983, and for the European Parliament in 1984, PSF won 35%, 43% and 38% respectively of the Catholic vote.

The policies of the PSF party, and the extent of the support for the party, embody the more extreme forms of alienation found in the Catholic community. The party sees itself, and is widely perceived to be, the 'political wing' of the IRA. Its principal goal is to expel British influence from Ireland and unite the country. In the meantime, it takes part in all elections, but only takes its seats in the local government councils. It condones the violence of the IRA on the grounds that this violence is a justified response to the presence of British troops on Irish soil.

The rapid emergence of the PSF as an electoral force dates back to the hunger strikes of 1981. These hunger strikes, staged by IRA prisoners claiming recognition of their 'political status,' resulted in ten deaths. The British government resolutely refused to make any concessions, and this obduracy led to the politicisation of a dormant republican (i.e. extreme nationalist) vote in the Catholic community. The demonstrations of popular support for the hunger strikers led to a new awareness of the political leverage that might be derived from participating in elections. These voters had previously stayed at home: now this dormant alienation was transformed into votes for an anti-system party, a party that not only fought elections but also condoned violence as a means of political change. As the party conference heard that November (1981) it was the 'ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in this hand.' Although the popular support for the hunger strikers never really engulfed the entire Catholic community, the response (or lack of response) from the British Government to the strike went a long way to crystallize hitherto ill-defined alienation on the part of even moderate Catholics who had become frustrated at the lack of political progress within Northern Ireland. Thus the hunger strikes acted as a catalyst: PSF was able to take the tide of opportunity at its flood, and even the SDLP was forced to adopt a more militant posture. Long simmering frustration, and a feeling that even the non-violent constitutionalism of the SDLP was failing to get a response from the British government, served to benefit PSF whose ambivalent attitude towards violence, and more forthright condemnations of Britain, seemed appropriate responses to those who had nothing to lose, and possibly something to gain, by rejecting the *status quo*.

The attitude of the PSF towards violence is undoubtedly part of its electoral appeal. It is also one of the principal features that distinguishes it from SDLP supporters. It is sometimes alleged that a vote for PSF is a 'vote

for violence' but this is not wholly true as the figures in Table 3 demonstrate. There is a widespread view within PSF that violence is sometimes justifiable if only because of the lack of any alternative paths towards political change. However, there are other facets of the PSF 'image' that attract voters' support. There are shown in the subsequent table (Table 4).

Table 3

Question: How strongly do you agree or disagree that the use of violence can sometimes be justified to bring about political change?

	Sinn Fein %	SDLP %
Agree	70	7
Neither	7	8
Disagree	22	81
D.K./No opinion	1	4

Source: MORI Poll (unpublished) June 1984

N = 1639

Table 4

Statement which fit respondents' ideas and impressions of Sinn Fein.

	Sinn Fein Voters %		Sinn Fein Voters %
'Extreme'	10	'Has good leaders'	41
'Makes the British take notice of the nationalists'	84	'I've always supported the party's views'	42
'Tough'	34	'Out of touch'	2
'Active in the local community'	56	'Behind the times'	2
'Evil'	2	'Trustworthy'	21
'Has good policies'	58	'Caring'	16
'Offers most hope of a solution to the troubles'	51	'Moderate'	9
'Represents people like me'	58	'Too cooperative with Britain'	1

Source: MORI Poll (unpublished) June 1984

N = 562

We have already established that there is considerable support among PSF voters for the use of violence to bring about political change. We have also seen (in Table 4) that the appeal of the party is broader than a mere mandate for the gunman. Clearly, PSF voters perceive their party as being well-led, active in local communities, representative of its grass-roots and, above all, (cited by 84% of PSF voters) able to make the British government take notice of nationalist demands. As the PSF is the 'political wing' of the IRA it is worth considering the views taken by PSF supporters towards the IRA. Does the link between the party and the paramilitary organization constitute a life-support system for the party? The answer appears to be 'yes.' Whereas 39% of SDLP voters agree that the 'IRA are basically patriots and idealists,' this figure rises to 77% for PSF voters.²¹ On the more specific policy question of whether PSF should 'renounce the armed campaign of the IRA' only 22% of PSF voters agree (exactly the same percentage that is against violence for political change in Table 3).

The support for the violence of the IRA among four out of five of PSF voters represents the extreme point on the continuum of 'alienation' ranging across our four 'components:' at one extreme, a desire to work within the system, but at the other a marked inclination to overthrow the system by force. An investigation of the principal demographic features of the PSF support shows it to be young, from the lower socioeconomic strata, often unemployed, and more likely to be male than female. Some of these

features of PSF support can be seen in Table 5, while comparisons with the SDLP can be made.

Table 5

Some comparisons between the SDLP and PSF.
Base: Catholic voters in European election 1984 (June)

	PSF	SDLP
Age		
18-34	38%	46%
35-54	22%	58%
55 +	16%	65%
Gender	PSF	SDLP
Male	34%	54%
Female	24%	64%
Socioeconomic status	PSF	SDLP
ABC1	66%	
C2DE	33%	57%

Source: MORI Poll (unpublished) June 1984

N = 457

Comparisons with the 'constitutional' SDLP are instructive, PSF is a young party and is firmly based in the lower socioeconomic echelons of the Catholic community. About 50% of PSF voters are under 34 (compared with 29% of SDLP voters). One-fifth of PSF support comes from non-manual socioeconomic groups, while one-third of SDLP support does. 31% of PSF supporters are unemployed; but only 13% of SDLP supporters. Asked what the cause of the Northern Ireland problem is, PSF supporters are more likely to see it as a clash of national identity, and less likely to see it as a problem of 'terrorism' than SDLP supporters. Both Catholic parties evince strong dissatisfaction with the British Government's handling of the situation in the Province, but this dissatisfaction is much stronger in PSF than it is in the SDLP. The crucial difference between the two parties is their attitudes towards violence. As we have seen (see Table 3) PSF supporters are much more likely to condone violence than SDLP supporters and while 29% of PSF voters say they 'strongly' agree that violence is sometimes justified, only 1% of SDLP voters fall into this extreme category.²²

Conclusion: policy implications

Faced with widespread alienation within the Catholic community, ranging from those who accept the status quo and are willing to make it work, through to those who see violent change as the only hope of reform, the British government is forced to steer a middle course between the men of violence and the 'constitutional' politicians. But, unfortunately, concessions made to the latter are often seen, and claimed, as concessions to the former.

Since 1969, when the present spate of civil unrest erupted, the British government has responded to the crisis along three avenues: security, economics, politics. In the political field, there have been several attempts to construct a framework of devolved government within which the two communities could cooperate to their mutual benefit. So far, this has not been achieved. The brief power-sharing experiment of 1974 lasted five months but was eventually wrecked by Loyalist (i.e. extreme Protestant)

reactions to the proposed North-South Council of Ireland which was perceived as the thin end of a wedge that would lead to a united Ireland. The present 78-man Assembly in Belfast is the latest experiment. Its role is purely advisory and consultative although the intention is that legislative powers could be devolved to it if there was sufficient cross-community consensus to warrant it. At the moment this seems unlikely as the two Catholic parties, PSF and the SDLP, are boycotting the Assembly because it excludes both an 'Irish dimension' (i.e. with the Republic) and any real recognition of Irish identity among Catholics in Northern Ireland. Since 1973, proportional representation has been introduced into local and regional elections in Northern Ireland (a novelty in the United Kingdom) with the aim of enhancing the influence of the Catholic minority in political affairs. While this has undoubtedly happened, it has also led to the splitting of the confessional 'blocs,' into two parties each, so that extremists on both sides now have parties to themselves (PSF for the Catholics, DUP for the Protestants). The prospects for reconciliation between moderates in each community is now more remote because the 'moderate' parties (OUP for Protestants, SDLP for Catholics) have to look over their shoulders at the more militant policies of the parties on their flanks.

Security policy has made progress in its primary aim: the reduction in the number of fatalities in the Province. In 1972 over four hundred people died in the region; now the annual total is less than one hundred. The cost has been high in terms of alienating the Catholic community. Special legislation giving the police wide powers of arrest, detention, and interrogation; long periods of remand; the abolition of juries for many trials; the use of supergrasses; the apparent immunity from conviction of policemen or soldiers who murder civilians; and the overwhelming Protestant composition of the security forces: all these facets of the security policy of the Government combine to minimize the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the Catholic community. The policy of 'Ulsterisation' - the policy of transferring the burden of security to locally recruited personnel - has done little to kindle hope in the Catholic community that law and order will be impartially administered.

Economic policy has consisted of building up the infrastructure of the Province - roads, houses, harbours, energy supplies - so that foreign investment will stimulate greater employment opportunities. Per capita expenditure is higher in the Province than in the rest of the United Kingdom: and so is the dependence on welfare handouts.

The Government's policy towards PSF consists of a 'twin-track' approach: encouraging constitutional nationalism (as expressed in the SDLP) and ostracising PSF representatives at Ministerial level. However, PSF is a legal party and both civil servants and local councillors are expected to deal with them in the normal way. This partial boycott of PSF representatives is defended on the grounds that PSF refuses to condemn violence, and as a way of bolstering the 'parliamentary' tactics of the SDLP.

Faced by an alienated minority, a central government has, in theory, a range of options extending from total suppression of the minority to a full

recognition of its separate identity *via* the creation of a separate state. Neither of these extreme policies is relevant to Northern Ireland since suppression of a minority consisting of 40% of the population is unthinkable, and territorial separateness is ruled out by the intermingling of the two communities. In between these extremes there lies a variety of options including consociationalism, cantonisation, total absorption, pluralism and relocation. So far, the Government has been attempting a policy of 'integration' or 'homogenisation' - a policy of treating the Catholic community as equal citizens of the United Kingdom: and much progress has been made in legislating away discriminatory practices and providing adequate economic resources. But it looks as if even this policy, even if successful, will have to make way for a new policy of pluralism (or more strictly 'binationalism') in order to satisfy the aspirations of the militant elements in the Catholic community. Already there have been straws in the wind: talk of the 'Irish identity' in Government circles, the financing of an Irish speaking school in Belfast, the refusal to proscribe PSF, and most recently the banning of provocative Protestant marches through Catholic residential areas. Otherwise, very little has been done officially to grant the Irish identity of Catholics its legitimate place in Northern Ireland, or to give Catholics access to policy-making in a meaningful sense, or to ensure that law, order and justice apply to all without fear or favour. If alienation means 'feeling a stranger in one's own country' then there is scope for making the Catholic community feel that they have a stake in the society they inhabit: if one is treated like an outsider, it is likely that one will behave like an outsider.

Attempts by the Government to promote 'binationalism' run into the problem of Protestant opposition. Lately, one has heard the phrase 'Protestant alienation' - a term loosely referring to the reactions of IRA violence, and 'reforms' by the Government to enhance Catholic political and economic participation. The situation is not a bi-polar one with the Protestants and British ranged against the Catholic community. On the contrary the situation is triangular: both communities are to some extent alienated from British rule,²³ albeit for different reasons and to different degrees. Thus the strategy of the Government, or any government faced by a multi-ethnic society, has to be that of 'balancing' interests and seeking the issues that bind rather than those that divide. Given the demographic trends in Northern Ireland, it seems advisable for the 'majority' of today to negotiate the terms for survival of tomorrow's minority.

NOTES

¹*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon (1973).

²Published in the summer of 1984.

³Bishop Cahal Daly, *Communities Without Consensus*. Dublin: Irish Messenger Publications (1984), p. 5.

⁴See D. Eversley and V. Herr, *The Roman Catholic Population of Northern Ireland in 1981: A Revised Estimate*. Belfast: Fair Employment Agency (1985), p. 1.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶D. Watt (ed), *The Constitution of Northern Ireland: Problems and Prospects*. London: Heinemann (1981), p. 88.

⁷See E. Moxon-Browne, *Nation, Class and Creed in Northern Ireland*. Aldershot: Gower (1983), p. 84.

⁸See A. Lijphart, 'Review Article: The Northern Ireland Problem: Case Theories and Solutions' in *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 5.

⁹Fair Employment Agency, *Report of an Investigation by the FEA for Northern Ireland into the non-industrial Civil Service*. Belfast: FEA (1983), p. 65.

¹⁰R.J. Cormack and R.D. Osborne (eds), *Religion, Education and Employment: Aspects of Equal Opportunity in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Appletree Press (1983), pp. 25-41.

¹¹E. Moxon-Browne, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

¹²R. Rose, *Government Without Consensus*. London: Faber (1971), p. 209.

¹³E. Moxon-Browne, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁵LWT/MORI Poll (May 1984) N = 1028 (Quota sample).

¹⁶There are, however, five Catholics in the transectarian Alliance Party which has ten seats in the Assembly.

¹⁷C. Scorer and P. Hewitt, *The Prevention of Terrorism Act*. London: NCCL (1981).

¹⁸SDLP, 'Justice' in Northern Ireland. Belfast: SDLP (January 1983) mimeo pp. 11-12.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹MORI Poll (unpublished) June 1984.

²²*Ibid.*

²³See E. Moxon-Browne, *op.cit.*, p. 56.