

Political demography: the Northern Ireland Census, discourse and territoriality

Background

In societies divided by ethnic or national conflict, population figures are often heavily politicised. This has certainly been the case in Northern Ireland, where the Census data has often been used to advance sectarian arguments – over issues such as the Catholic/Protestant headcount – or to suggest increasingly divided communities. Researchers from Queen’s University Belfast examined the census data and how it was covered and interpreted, to assess its political implications and its limitations.

Key findings

Plus ça change...: There were significant demographic shifts in Northern Ireland between 1991 and 2001, but the interpretation put on it by politicians and the media remained the same. In both years, the ‘story’ was twofold: that the Catholic population was rising faster than the Protestant population; and segregation was rising inexorably. Many such stories started to appear in advance of Census data publication.

Unconventional wisdom: While politicians publicly repeated this narrative, their private understanding was often more sophisticated. They knew of local examples which contradicted the prevailing notion of increased sectarianism, yet they saw their own experience as exceptional. The politicians also acknowledged that perceptions of Protestant demographic decline were being used to justify paramilitary violence against Catholics.

Slower growth: 44 % of the population in the 2001 census was Catholic, an increased share of the population, but a smaller increase than many in politics and the media had predicted. A closer analysis of grid square data showed that it was wrong to assume that the two communities were everywhere ‘growing apart’: there were more areas where population change was similar in the two communities than where it changed differentially. Patterns of growing suburbanisation, declining city and town centre populations and growth on the urban fringes mirrored other UK cities, though there were some areas where Catholic and Protestant migration patterns differed.

No nationalist majority yet: Expectations of an ‘end to the Unionist electoral majority’ proved premature. Politicians, academics and media commentators all overestimated the extent of Catholic population growth. The newspapers predicted that nine parliamentary constituencies could change composition in the 2004 Assembly elections, yet this only happened in North Belfast and the losing Unionist blamed other factors.

New voters, new politics? Talk of demographic shifts helped Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party to win new seats. But contrary to popular wisdom, growing Sinn Fein support has come from new voters, not existing Social Democratic and Labour Party support. There is now also a small but significant 'third' grouping, often not noticed, which is associated with the responses 'No religion' or 'Other religion' and with electoral support for candidates who are neither explicitly unionist or nationalist

About the study

The study was conducted by Professor James Anderson, Dr Ian Shuttleworth, Dr Chris Lloyd and Owen McEldowney (School of Geography, Queen's University Belfast). Their research included interviews with 29 politicians and officials; analysis of BBC radio coverage in Northern Ireland from 1986-1994; and a qualitative analysis of newspaper coverage of demographic issues after the 1991 census. They also analysed census data and population projections in detail.

Further information

The full report "Political demography: the Northern Ireland Census, discourse and territoriality" is on the ESRC Information Centre at [new website].

Key words

Northern Ireland, Ulster, demography, population, Catholics, Protestants, census data, elections

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**Political Demography:
the Northern Ireland Census, discourse and territoriality**

**Professor James Anderson, Dr. Ian Shuttleworth, Dr. Chris Lloyd and
Owen McEldowney**

SUMMARY REPORT

The project's main objectives were: to analyse the public discourses surrounding the 2001 Northern Ireland Census; to relate them to the already available data on population trends, segregation and projected future changes; and to assess their political implications in terms of voting patterns and through in-depth interviews with political party representatives. We also aimed to indicate some of the limitations of Census data, and to relate analysis in Northern Ireland to other divided societies.

The project was 'multidisciplinary' and 'multi-method', bringing together demography, geography and politics, and qualitative and quantitative methods, in novel ways. It involved media analysis, in-depth interviewing, and statistical analysis, and it achieved its objectives, though more detailed analysis and writing up the results continues.

Findings on the discourses on demography

In Northern Ireland, as in other 'divided societies', there is a comparatively strong and constant interest in sectarian demography. The two strongest and most persistent population narratives are that: (a) the number of Catholics relative to Protestants is continually increasing across the region, eroding the formerly 'safe' unionist majority; and (b) segregation is increasing inexorably with 'growing apartheid' between Protestants and Catholics making reconciliation and a solution to the 'national question' more difficult despite the Good Friday Agreement.

The media discourses on the 1991 census were still present with little substantial change in character in 2001, despite major changes in the demography and politics of Northern Ireland. The timing of demographic stories in the media showed that they were mostly 'pre-factual', i.e., they first appeared and became established as speculative stories *before* the Census results became available, or before actual votes were cast. In many cases these stories were politically motivated and self-serving for those instigating them.

Politicians still believe that demographic change is the product of largely sectarian factors. One popular idea is that there is strongly differential demographic behaviour by religion. Also, fear, intimidation, 'chill', violence and strategic 'ethnic cleansing' are thought to drive local population movement, despite very considerable reductions in violence since 1994. Despite most of the continuing sectarian violence being directed against Catholics, this narrative is more prevalent in Unionist discourse, reflecting a psychological phenomenon seen in other ethnic conflicts situations: the demographic 'anxiety' of the majority. However, it was noteworthy that politicians' private understandings are often much more sophisticated and nuanced than their public statements and the media debate.

Findings on the facts of demography

Population and electoral projections and predictions in the academy as well as the media are politically and statistically questionable. Past academic population projections were found to be seriously wide of the mark. Electoral predictions of a significant political change towards Nationalism turned out to involve serious over-estimations by Unionist, Nationalist, academic and media commentators alike.

The similarity in crude death-rates between Catholics and Protestants, and the declining (and converging) crude birth-rates for both groups as revealed by the 2001 Census, suggest that inherently difficult-to-predict migration flows will assume greater relative importance in the future; population projections will become increasingly sensitive to changes in this volatile demographic component, and their value becomes increasingly questionable.

Belfast, mid-Ulster and London/Derry are areas of high residential segregation; and the estimation of covariance functions in 1971 and 1991 indicated that residential segregation generally increased *between these two dates*, i.e., areas dominated by Catholics or Protestants became larger, though much of the increase may have happened early in the period. Recent change will also be estimated when 2001 grid-square data become available. However, contrary to the narrative of 'growing apartheid', preliminary analyses show no evidence of increasing residential segregation between 1991 and 2001. Furthermore there is evidence of increased residential mixing in some areas; and analysis of workplace segregation in 1991 and 2001 also counters the dominant segregation narrative as it showed that there was increasing mixing in workplaces.

Analysis of change by 1km grid-square shows that the areas where both communities increased or decreased together outweighed those where there was differential increase/decrease, indicating that the two communities did not 'move apart' everywhere. The general pattern of change – with population decreases in city and town centres and growth in urban fringes – was in fact similar to that observed in many UK cities – and could perhaps be the result of the same sorts of economic and institutional forces. However, there were some areas where Catholics and Protestants did appear to behave differently, and here sectarianism might best be seen as an *additional* causal factor (rather than always being the main or only one considered).

Conclusions and Outcomes

We concluded that media and political representations of demographic change in Northern Ireland were not accurate representations, and often contrasted sharply with the more interesting (and positive) reality which the statistics can reveal. We also came to understand the way in which these representations become received as 'truth'. They come to have an existence that is virtually independent of data, because of their continuing repetition and re-cycling, their political usefulness, their media value and coherence or understandability (if their sectarian terms of reference are accepted).

To publicise our conclusions, two papers were presented at the International Population Geography Conference at the University of St Andrews in August 2004. In November 2004, a seminar was organised in partnership with the Community Relations Council (CRC) in Belfast, to disseminate our preliminary quantitative and qualitative findings to local 'user groups' - key policymakers, NISRA, politicians and community representatives - and to get critical feed-back to inform further analysis and more detailed publication of results.

We hope that our research will caution against over-simplification in future media and political debates involving sectarian demography in Northern Ireland; and that it will provide a stronger framework and methodology for combating self-serving or counter-productive demographic analysis in other divided societies.

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END OF AWARD REPORT, December 2004

As in other societies divided by ethnic or national conflict, in Northern Ireland population numbers and trends are highly, if not overly, politicised. Research on the 1991 and earlier Censuses and on the public discourses surrounding them (Anderson and Shuttleworth 1994, and 1998) had revealed various questionable uses and abuses of statistics at the level of the region and its sub-regions and localities. The issues included alleged increases in the residential segregation of Catholics and Protestants - taken as markers of 'Irish' and 'British' national identities; increases or decreases in their respective numbers; and imputed causes and effects of these changes, particularly their (generally negative) implications for political reconciliation, for altering local 'balances of power', and indeed for the continuing existence of Northern Ireland as a separate entity.

In some cases these accounts were justified by the figures, but they were often imbued with political meanings and contradictory interpretations which were not supported by the available data. There were strong tendencies towards misleading exaggeration or self-serving but harmful distortion. There were problems at several levels. Firstly, some accounts were flawed in straight factual terms because the data were inappropriately analysed. Secondly, and more importantly, the basic equating of politics with religion has always been problematic. While sectarian religious head-counting was built into the political fabric of Northern Ireland by the way its original borders were drawn (to give it a 'safe Protestant majority' of roughly 66% to 33% Catholic), the reduction of political identity and aspiration to religious categories is a gross over-simplification, distorting politics and marginalising non-sectarian factors and concerns. Thirdly, there were generally flaws in imputed causations which typically emphasised sectarian political motivations and systematically down-played or excluded 'non-sectarian' socio-economic factors. Sectarian factors can be important but they rarely operate in isolation and it is often difficult to establish just

how important (or unimportant) they are. And, fourthly, there were flaws in terms of assumed political effects, with little or no recognition that the effects of demography on politics are generally highly mediated, indirect and complex. They are mediated by public discourses and ideology and by political party and voting systems. Again, it can be difficult to establish just what the effects might be, and not least where they involve projections into the future where one guess may be as good as another.

Given these various problems and the political importance of (mis)interpretations of demography, both for Northern Ireland and for divided societies more generally, we decided to undertake a more systematic analysis of the discourses around the 2001 Census, the assumed causes and effects of demographic change, and their basis or lack of basis in the data. This however proved overly ambitious, partly because of data inadequacies, and we therefore divided the work into two projects: one to create consistent time series data to facilitate a direct or proper analysis of population trends and changes 1971-2001 (the ESRC 'Linking Censuses through Time' project, now under way); and the present project whose objectives were more limited than originally intended (though, in the view of one referee, still over-ambitious for a one-year project).

We sought to show how sectarian accounts of demography reproduce sectarianism; and while a full-scale alternative analysis was not possible in this project, we wanted to suggest non-sectarian factors and explanations which need to be considered. More specifically, we aimed to see how the situation had changed since 1991 and particularly since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. While the Agreement reflected much lower levels of violent conflict, demography had become even more politicised, a case perhaps of 'war by other means'? Firstly, as our research confirmed, segregation - or 'growing apartheid' in one oft-repeated phrase - was widely assumed to be increasing inexorably and this was taken as 'physical proof' that reconciliation between 'the Protestant and Catholic communities' was becoming ever more difficult. Secondly, the '66%/33% safe Protestant majority' of Northern Ireland's inception had been approaching closer to an 'unsafe' ratio of perhaps 55%/45%. Indeed some politicians and commentators had thought that in 2001 the slim Protestant majority would disappear, though this was to prove unfounded. However, with the overall ratio approaching numerical equality, the traditional discourse of the region having a 'majority' and a 'minority' community was becoming less tenable, though it still has popular currency; and in many sub-regions and localities it does continue to have applicability.

Objectives

This project's main objectives were to de-construct the public discourses surrounding the Northern Ireland Census of 2001; to relate them to the already available data on demographic change, segregation and projected future changes; and to assess their political implications in terms of voting patterns and through in-depth interviews with political party representatives. We also wanted to indicate some of the limitations of Census data, and to relate analysis in Northern Ireland to other divided societies. All these objectives have generally been met, though because of time constraints, the data collected (especially the interview material) require further, more detailed analysis; and some particular intentions (e.g., to project sectarian population trends) proved less meaningful and were replaced by more detailed work on segregation.

Methods

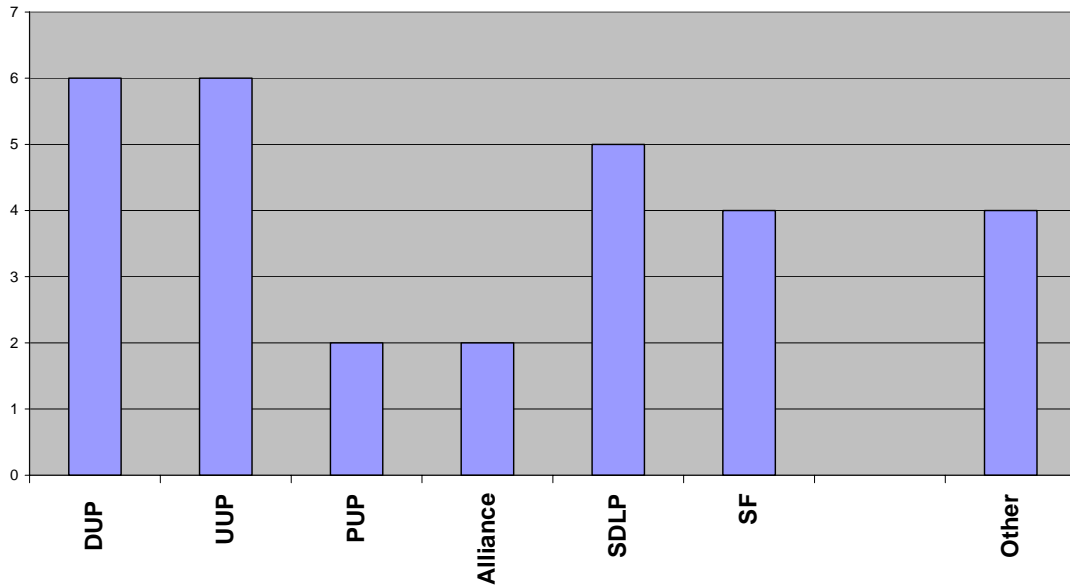
The project was 'multidisciplinary' and 'multi-method', bringing together demography, geography and politics, and qualitative and quantitative methods, in novel ways. It involved media analysis, in-depth interviewing, and statistical analysis.

De-constructing public discourses about the Census involved a qualitative analysis of over a decade of political and demographic commentary since the 1991 Census, covering the main Northern Ireland newspapers, selected British, Irish and local papers, and other media. Some newspapers had electronic archives for the past five years which facilitated a quantitative analysis of the amount of coverage of different issues. To cover earlier papers, and local ones, we used various public libraries as well as the papers' own archives. A BBC radio archive was used to examine Northern Ireland radio coverage of demographic issues from 1986 to 1994. Relevant TV current affairs programmes were monitored but total coverage of TV news proved impossible because of restricted access to archives. The internet was found to be sporadically useful where websites were spawned by some local interface disputes involving demographic discourses.

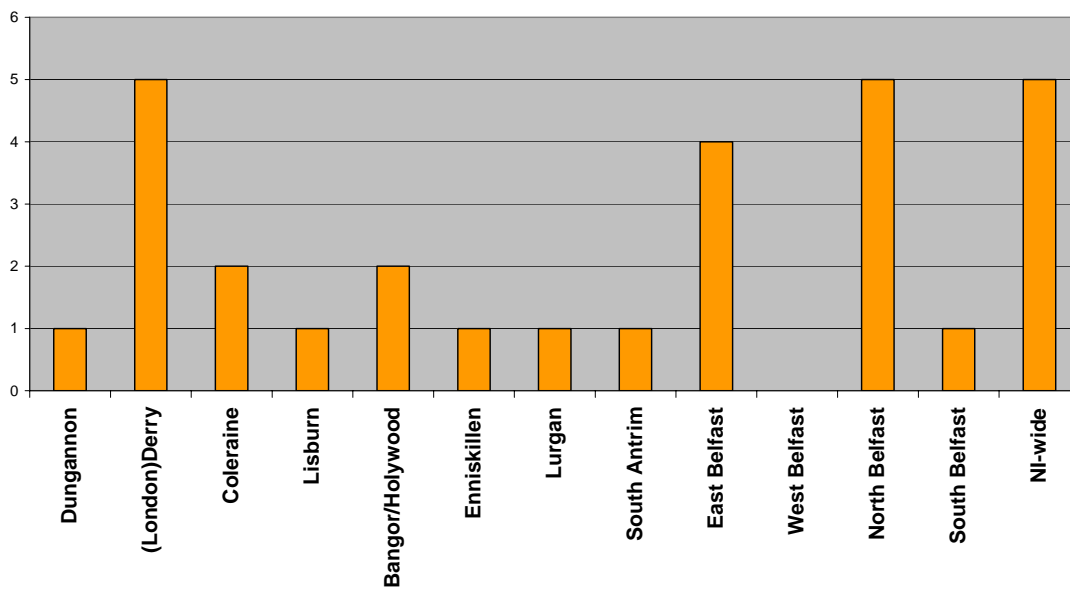
Public discourses were further investigated in the interviews with political party representatives (29 interviews, exceeding the original target), though interviewing had the wider purpose of examining politicians' views on how demography influences territorial politics. The interviews were semi-structured and covered a commonality of themes while also allowing the interviewees to raise and develop their own concerns. Interviewees were selected on the basis of the media analysis, those most frequently

reported as commenting on demographic issues being approached first, though we also ensured a geographical spread across Northern Ireland and coverage that broadly reflected the electoral strength of the various political parties.

Number of interviews done by Northern Ireland political party



Number of interviews done by area



The interviewees included Westminster MPs, Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, local councillors and party advisers. Some senior politicians had to cancel interviews but three party leaders were interviewed and in other cases senior colleagues deputised. To get a wider perspective, officials from the Housing Executive and from the Census Office were also interviewed because they interact closely with local politicians on demographic matters.

Quantitative analysis was mainly involved to fulfil the objectives of assessing the political discourses in relation to census data, and demonstrating the limitations of the data and of sectarian explanations. Specific tasks set out in the research proposal were to assess past population projections; to analyse residential and other types of segregation at a variety of spatial scales; to consider the validity of sectarian explanations of population change; and to analyse voting statistics. These will be discussed briefly in turn.

For past population projections we mainly focused on the work of Compton and Boal (1970) and their forecasts of the changing communal balance of the population were assessed against the 2001 Census. With decreasing (and converging) crude birth-rates and comparable crude death-rates, it seemed that difficult-to-predict migration patterns are assuming greater relative importance in determining communal balances. This increased the unreliability of projections and weakened the case for attempting further ones. Instead, more effort was put into analysing segregation and sectarian explanations using the 2001 figures.

Residential segregation in 2001 was analysed by the calculation of *D* and *P* indices (of Dissimilarity and Isolation, respectively), for Northern Ireland as a whole and for specific sub-areas such as District Councils. This analysis was expanded by the innovative use of geographical measures of segregation analogous to Geographical Weighted Regression (GWR), to show how segregation varied between different parts of Northern Ireland. Importantly, these indicators freed the analysis from depending on the usual pre-determined aggregations of administrative units such as wards; it permitted neighbourhoods of different size to be constructed allowing the data to be more thoroughly explored. In addition, covariance functions were used to explore the spatial scale of residential segregation using 1971 and 1991 grid square statistics (ignoring 1981 data because that Census suffered under-enumeration and non-response to the religion question). This analysis will be extended to 2001 when

the grid square data are made available (to be statistically correct this kind of analysis is appropriate only for areal units which are of equal size, so wards etc. are not suitable). The methodology takes into account the fact that segregation is a function of scale and that different aggregations of counts will result in different values for the segregation indices, and it allows assessment of the robustness of the segregation measures.

To complement the (usually exclusive) reliance on residential data to measure segregation, work was also undertaken on workplace segregation at ward level using special tabulations from the 1991 and 2001 Censuses. Modelling the relationship between the religious composition of a ward's residential population and the composition of workers who work there helped to identify areas which could be sites of mixing with departures from the expected norm. Analysis of the patterns and possible causation of population change was conducted using a ward-to-ward migration matrix provided by the Census Office of Northern Ireland and the first outputs from the ESRC 'Linking Censuses through Time' project. Preliminary descriptive analysis of migration was possible, but further analytical work remains to be done. Basic analysis of geographical patterns of communal change 1971-1991 has also been completed.

Voting statistics were looked at in a comprehensive review of the three Northern Ireland dailies and the *Irish Times* over the period of the 2003 Assembly elections. Constituencies where change was predicted were identified and compared with the eventual results. We were able to use 2001 census data on religious distributions in a comparison of the 1998 and 2003 Assembly election results. The voting statistics were entered from the Electoral Commissions printed results, with 'independents' (not legally labelled as 'Nationalist' or 'Unionist' but often meriting those labels *de facto*) categorised according to their views expressed in newspapers and election handbooks.

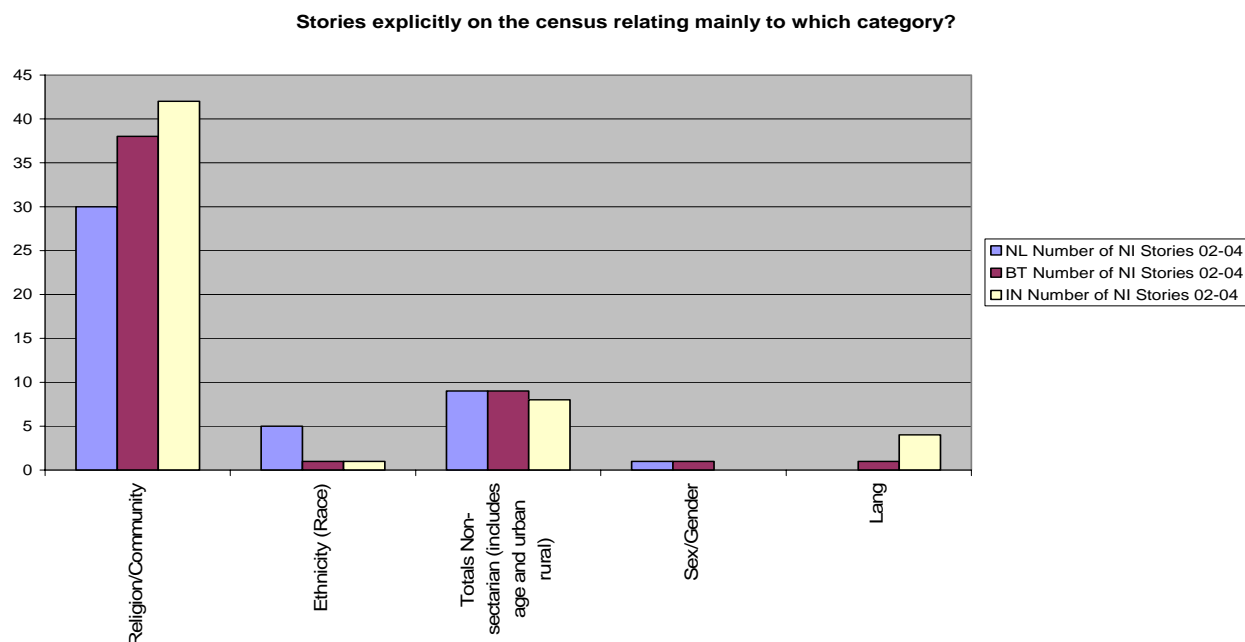
Sectarian demographic change cannot be properly correlated over time to voting patterns because of the different timing and infrequency of Census enumeration. Statistics available from the *Life and Times* survey (www.ark.ac.uk) were, however, used to gauge attitudinal and electoral change at the Northern Ireland level, in order to assess whether the release of the much publicized census religion statistics changed the population's thoughts about the constitutional future of Northern Ireland.

Results

While qualitative and quantitative methods were used in combination, it is simpler to report the results separately.

Qualitative results

Analysis of the media, supplemented by interview data, revealed a comparatively strong and constant interest in sectarian demography. For example, the graph below shows the relative distribution of a sample of stories from the Northern Ireland daily newspapers a year either side of the Census. As for politicians interviewed, even the more centrist ones had discussed sectarian demography at length within their party. We analysed the structure and trends in these discourses and found that the main demographic narratives established around the 1991 Census (and earlier) were still present in 2001, with little substantial change in character despite major changes in the politics and the demography of Northern Ireland. These narratives now constitute 'a sectarian worldview' rather than a contemporary data-based analysis (Anderson and McEldowney, 2004), yet we found that they penetrate even the most serious journalism, government documents and academic analyses, while politicians claim that they influence party and even government policy.



The two strongest and most persistent population narratives, found in the media and interviews alike, were that: (a) the number of Catholics relative to Protestants is

increasing 'across the board'; and (b) segregation is increasing inexorably with Protestants and Catholics increasingly 'growing apart'. These same facts and analyses were constantly repeated with little or no qualification regardless of political perspective. While politicians and newspapers disagree across the sectarian divide on the ideological meaning of the trends, they generally share a common view of what the trends are, and seem relatively oblivious to any counter-evidence. The two population narratives were related to electoral predictions of steady Nationalist increase and electoral polarisation. They were also related to many other changes but all emphasising 'Nationalist/Catholic progress' and 'Unionist/Protestant retreat', and/or 'increasing Catholic-Protestant polarisation' in most areas of Northern Ireland life.

At a local level, population trends were also still believed to be the product of largely sectarian factors: fear, intimidation, 'chill', violence and strategic 'ethnic cleansing', despite very considerable reductions in violence since 1994. This analysis was more often (and more strongly) emphasised by unionist newspapers and politicians, despite there being a bigger reduction in violence against Protestants.

Our analysis of the timing of stories in the media showed that they were mostly 'pre-factual', i.e., they first appeared and became established as speculation before the Census results were published, or before the votes were cast or counted, rather than being based on an analysis of census or other data; and in many cases they were clearly politically motivated. We found that stories were exaggerated, or were completely independent of actual data; and also that they were often 'planted' by politicians without being checked or refuted (except by equally sectarian counter claims from opposing politicians which left their supposedly 'factual' basis unchallenged). Thus we concluded that Northern Ireland's media coverage of demography is similar to that of the media in many other ethnic conflicts: it generally acts as a simplifying and distorting mechanism which mainly reinforces convictions already held by ethnic-based parties and their supporters rather than enabling them to think anew in the light of changing realities (Seaton and Watson, 1998).

Politicians often talked of the 'perception' that sectarian demographic change was important thus distancing themselves from the views of the public and their constituents, while at the same time repeating and not actually challenging them. Unionist politicians also emphasized their role in trying to calm the fears of unionist voters and Protestant constituents who have exaggerated perceptions of Catholic

population increase, while Nationalist ones tended to over-estimate the Catholic growth relative to the statistical evidence. We thus identified a psychological phenomenon seen in other ethnic conflict situations: the demographic 'anxiety of the majority' (Horowitz: 1985; 175-176; Arel: 2002). In our study we also saw its converse: increasing 'minority group' confidence and magnanimity.

With respect to the causes of population change, another significant finding was that politicians' private understandings are often much more sophisticated and nuanced than their public statements. Also interesting was the extent to which politicians' local knowledge strongly contradicted the predominant narrative of 'ever-increasing segregation'. Yet they still agreed with the overall conventional wisdom, seeing their own local experience as exceptional, imagining that segregation was increasing 'everywhere else' in Northern Ireland, and sometimes citing misleading and simplistic ward homogeneity statistics gleaned from the media as 'proof'.

Politicians strongly confirmed the widespread ideas of Protestant demographic decline and differential demographic behaviour by religion in Northern Ireland. They also confirmed that these ideas were used by paramilitaries to justify violence against Catholics. Each side of the political divide also had a minority who favoured using demographic-related threats as a means of securing political ends. While much of the media and some politicians now present the overall Northern Ireland political balance as 'reality', or as an 'opportunity', rather than a 'threat', this stance is still largely absent from local politics.

Quantitative results

Analysis of Compton and Boal's (1971) pains-taking population prediction for 2001, in the light of actual 2001 Census figures, showed that it had substantially overestimated the size of the 2001 population by at least 200,000. In this context it is difficult to assess the fact that their prediction that the Catholic share of the population would be in the range 41%-46% turned out to be consistent with the actual figure of around 44%. But given the absolute differences in the size of the predicted and actual populations, it raised questions about whether the consistency was coincidental, about the worth of projections of ratios, and whether something less pains-taking and elaborate (e.g., a simple projection of trends through time) would be just as useful? The analysis of the 2001 Census confirmed an increase in the Catholic share of the population – though less than expected in political discourses – and estimating the precise degree of increase was problematic because

of changes in the Census between 1991 and 2001. The similarity in crude death-rates between Catholics and Protestants, and their declining (and converging) crude birth-rates, as revealed by the 2001 Census, suggest that migration will assume greater relative importance in the future, and that population projections will become increasingly sensitive to changes in this volatile and inherently difficult-to-predict demographic component. The growth of the 'non-religious' group in Northern Ireland further complicates, and puts into question, the value of trying to predict future Protestant and Catholic populations.

The analysis of segregation results can be briefly summarised (with a fuller analysis available at www.qub.ac.uk/c-star in the selected outputs section). Belfast, mid-Ulster and London/Derry are areas of high residential segregation, and given that Belfast contains a relatively high proportion of the total Northern Ireland population it is probable that developments here are the main 'drivers' of population trends in general. But the analysis also shows that there are some areas of residential mixing, particularly in south and east Belfast and in the rural West. The estimation of covariance functions for 1971 and 1991 indicated that residential segregation increased between these two dates, i.e., areas dominated by Catholics or Protestants became larger (with a strong possibility that much of the change happened *early* in the 1971-91 period). However for recent change, the covariance functions can only be estimated for 2001 once the grid data become available. But the analysis of workplace data for 1991 and 2001 already shows *decreasing* segregation and counters the dominant narrative of 'growing apartheid'; it showed that there was greater mixing in workplaces than for residence – a finding confirmed by Equality Commission monitoring returns.

The analysis of patterns of social change served to falsify some elements of the sectarian 'explanation' of population changes. Analysis by 1km grid square data showed that the areas where both communities increased or decreased together outweighed those where there was differential increase/decrease, contrary to the narrative that the two communities were everywhere 'growing apart'. The broad patterns of change - population decreases in city and town centres, suburbanisation and growth on the urban fringes - are similar to those observed in many UK cities, and could perhaps be the result of the same economic and institutional forces. However, there were some areas where Catholics and Protestants did appear to behave differently, suggesting *additional* sectarian factors. But our analysis of migration flows could only be tentative and introductory. While showing that migrants

tended to move between wards of the same communal background, this could be explained in part by short-distance moves over an already-segregated residential geography. However, there was also substantial interaction between wards that were mixed (e.g., 40%-60% Catholic), and sometimes people left highly-segregated wards to move to these mixed locations; but further work is needed to analyse these complex patterns.

Electoral analysis showed that the widespread expectations of a significant political shift towards Nationalism in recent elections (e.g., talk of the 'end of the Unionist electoral majority') involved substantial overestimation by Unionist, Nationalist, academic, and media commentators alike. The proportion of Unionist seats in fact *increased*. For as many as nine constituencies, the newspapers predicted Nationalist-Unionist change as a result of demographics, yet *only in one constituency* - North Belfast - was one Unionist seat replaced by a Nationalist as predicted on the basis of demographics; and the Unionist in question, when interviewed, blamed local turnout differentials and not demographic change.

Unionists and Nationalist politicians used ideas about demographic change to get stories into the media which would make them look more likely to win than the facts actually suggested, the main motive seeming to be in order to increase the turnout of their supporters. This helped Sinn Fein win in North Belfast and the DUP to win in West Belfast. In all other cases predictions were falsified by events, confirming a general overestimation of the speed of demographic change and consequently of the rise in the Nationalist vote.

Comparing census and election data showed strong ecological correlations between religious balance, party first-preference support, and seats won by parties. It also showed the way the (PR) STV system works, reflecting demographic quotas for electoral seats and thus making demographics a sensitive matter. Equally however, it showed the significance of turnout levels, and the main swings between the 1998 and 2003 election were not between political blocs but within them.

More interesting is the ecological correlation between the size of the Catholic population and the intra-bloc Sinn Fein vis-à-vis SDLP vote. It seems from a comparison of the votes received by the SDLP in each election that Sinn Fein did not actually take votes from them. Individual-based survey data shows little switching (Mitchell, Evans and O'Leary: 2004); and interviews with Sinn Fein, trends over the

longer time period (McAllister: 2004), and our ecological analysis all indicate that Sinn Fein actually increased its vote bigger through attracting new voters and not by any net gain of SDLP voters. The census-elections analysis showed slightly larger than average votes for the more 'extreme' Unionist DUP in areas where Protestants were fewer; and in these areas turnout levels among Protestants in 1998 and in 2003 were also slightly higher.

In five of the six parliamentary constituencies with 'non-religious' populations of above 16% in 2001, one 'centrist party' candidate was elected in 1998 *and* in 2003 (i.e., 'roughly 16%' of the seats, one seat in a six-seat constituency, was taken by a candidate not identified as either Unionist or Nationalist). This suggests the emergence of a 'third secular political grouping' in Northern Ireland. If so, it is a novel discovery of an identifiable 'group', and one which generally does not show up in Northern Ireland-wide sample survey research, perhaps because of its limited geographical concentration. These observations provide interesting correlations and hypotheses for further testing.

Activities

A number of activities have been undertaken under the remit of the project. Two papers were presented at the International Population Geography Conference at the University of St Andrews in August 2004, dealing with the media discourses and residential segregation. In November, a half-day seminar was organised in partnership with the Community Relations Council (CRC) in Belfast, to disseminate our initial findings to 'user-groups' - key policymakers, NISRA, politicians, and community representatives - and also to get critical feed-back from them to inform our further analysis of the data collected. Results from the research were also presented at internal research seminars in the School of Geography at Queen's.

Outputs

There are already several outputs in the form of presentations and short papers, referenced in Annex 1. Partly based on these, the team has three articles in different stages of preparation, and further articles are planned. 'Political Demography in Public Discourse: Sectarian readings of the Northern Ireland Census' - an overall outline analysis of the media discourses, political opinions, and the relevance of political demography in ethno-national conflicts by Anderson and McEldowney - will be submitted to *Political Geography* early in 2005. Next in the pipeline, is a re-

working of Shuttleworth, Lloyd and McNair (2004) into at least one academic article on the measurement of local segregation. Thirdly, the team is preparing a combined qualitative and quantitative critique of media, political and academic predictions and projections about demographic and political change.

We are continuing to do more detailed analysis of the interview data and this will result in at least one separate journal article. In addition, if further co-operation from some politicians is forthcoming, we will publish a detailed case study of one highly contentious recent population movement in North Belfast, where a fairly typical media-political misrepresentation involving 'ethnic cleansing' was generated and spread at a crucial moment in the 'peace negotiations', apparently to destabilise them or gain negotiating advantage. Furthermore, when these analyses are completed, we will be disseminating our conclusions in popular form through the local media, hopefully to counter the mis-use of demographic data and inform future debates.

Another output is the dataset of transcribed interviews. It will be deposited with the Essex Data archive by February 2005 after further discussions with interviewees about confidentiality assurances.

Impacts

It is too early to expect much impact on the political, community, civil service or media sectors with which we have engaged. However, we already know that our paper on demographic discourses presented at the CRC will be summarised by Groundwork, an environmental regeneration NGO with branches across Northern Ireland, for the local training of employees. Groundwork has also suggested organising joint focus groups to talk about local sectarian demographic issues. Interest was expressed by the Belfast Unemployment Centre in using our findings in some of its training courses. NISRA and the CRC noted our research results, were approving and co-operative, and agreed to make our findings and papers available through their libraries.

On inter-disciplinary academic impact, at population conferences we were told that our qualitative-quantitative research would be useful in other countries and other conflict situations. Presentations given at the School of Politics (November 2004) and the Institute of Governance (December 2004), and to the European Project on Border Conflicts (September 2004), used the research to question dominant academic

interpretations of Northern Ireland history, society and politics, and they were met with interest and some surprise. But academic dissemination has barely begun.

Future research priorities

Several research avenues have been opened up by the project. Prime amongst these is application of geostatistics and local approaches to the analysis of residential and workplace segregation in Northern Ireland. The availability of grid-based counts in Northern Ireland enable innovative approaches that are not possible (or are very problematic) elsewhere. Fruitful possible avenues include: the use of covariance functions and population-based neighbourhoods (rather than neighbourhoods based on distances) to examine complex patterns and scales of residential segregation 1971-2001; the analysis of demographic change through time and its relationship to electoral difference/polarisation; and more detailed analysis of possible causations. Subsidiary to this, a PhD topic has been developed to analyse ward-to-ward migration 2000-2001 in the context of changing housing markets, to examine further the interaction between sectarian/non-sectarian causes of population movement.

Finally, we are exploring the use of 2001 Council election data in comparison with 2001 Census data as this could give us more observations to properly analyze relationships between sectarian demographics, socio-economics and political change. We are also discussing providing electoral data on a consistent geography with ARK (www.ark.ac.uk - the main source of data on elections in Northern Ireland) at the Institute of Governance in Queen's, and will together apply for funding to harmonise the data and make council election statistics available and usable.

Annex 1

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