

Notes and Comments

Replication of Instability: Political Socialization in Northern Ireland

JAMES RUSSELL*

The purpose of the research on which this paper is based was to investigate by social survey methods some of the political attitudes of schoolboys (aged between 8 and 16 years of age) who were living through violent years in the history of Northern Ireland. Political attitudes were studied against the social characteristics and backgrounds of a large sample of schoolboys during the fifteen months prior to the announcement of direct rule from Westminster in 1972. This paper focuses upon affect towards the Stormont Government during the last two years of its existence.

The general background of the surveys was one of increasing violence, tension and political instability. The concept 'government' was highly salient to both adult and schoolboy populations. There was no need to probe schoolboys into communicating their thoughts about government. Interviewing continued right up to the day when direct rule was declared imminent. Since this introduced a new government for Northern Ireland, the surveys were ended. Only fifty interviews were missed from the planned quota.

The surveys involved formal questionnaire interviews with some three thousand boys (almost equal numbers of Catholics and Protestants).¹ A total of 972 interviews were in grammar schools, 946 in secondary intermediate schools (secondary modern),² and 1,116 in primary schools. The sample was designed so that respondents should be drawn from: areas experiencing different disorder levels; school catchment zones with different religious proportions; towns of considerably varying sizes; both east and west of the river Bann (the prosperous and less well developed areas of Ulster); near to and far from the border.

In the secondary school fieldwork equal numbers of grammar and intermediate schools were chosen in order to uncover differences that might exist between grammar schoolboys and others. The secondary school years selected were first (11-12 years) and fourth (14-16 years). The primary school years chosen were primary four (8-9 years) and primary six (10-11 years).

* The New University of Ulster.

¹ When the first survey was undertaken in the secondary schools, I had no assurance that my research would be funded by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission beyond an initial year. Because of the relative lack of mixed (both-sexes) schools in Northern Ireland, I decided that the ten weeks at my disposal (mid-January to Easter 1971) were insufficient to visit all the boys' and girls' schools necessary for a Northern Ireland sample. Furthermore, dividing the sample between boys and girls, at every stage of analysis, would have led to having too few cases to make any sense in some of the cross-tabulation categories. Having made the initial decision to survey among boys only, it became necessary, in order to compare secondary and primary samples, to interview boys even after the project had been extended.

² When the secondary school sample was collected in 1971, approximately equal numbers of boys in grammar and secondary intermediate (secondary modern) schools were included. There are, however, many more boys in secondary intermediate than in grammar schools in Northern Ireland. Thus, in order to make the secondary sample more representative of Ulster schoolboys, weighting after selection was necessary. Allowing for a sprinkling of 'others' (i.e. other religion) in the grammar schools the following is a fair approximation of the actual schoolboy population attending schools defined by religion in 1971: (see *Tables overleaf*)

Certain school years had to be selected because it was impossible to cover every school year within the time available. Spreading the sampling framework over eight years allows time for political development. Including the fourth year in secondary schools almost certainly involved interviewing some boys who were actively engaged, whatever their motivations, in violence.

AFFECT TOWARDS GOVERNMENT

'Government' is the set of institutions making a legal claim to promulgate decisions binding upon all who live within a territory. To most people the term government applies to the group of people who occupy the most important positions within the institutions. To many children, especially younger ones, government is a person, or persons, exercising authority over an area wider than that under the control of their parents and teachers. Just how extensive this area may be varies from child to child: some have accurate perceptions of the territory their government rules; others have fanciful notions that their government rules the world.

'Affect' is the emotion one feels towards any person or object. Thus, affect towards government is the emotion one experiences when thinking about government. It is likely to be the feeling one has when anticipating the reactions of government towards oneself. Such affect may be positive or negative: one may love or hate a government, be pleasantly disposed towards it or uninterested, feel that its intentions are benevolent or malevolent.

Before we begin to study affect towards government, we must know whether or not the boys in the sample have a perception of 'government', and, if so, what form this perception takes.

The earliest pilot work in 1970 convinced me that children of 8 years of age in Northern

(Fn. 2 cont.)	Protestant				Catholic			
	Population		Sample		Population		Sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Secondary intermediate	23,516	62	478	50	20,228	72	474	49
Secondary grammar	14,134	38	477	50	7,997	28	503	51

The weight for each of the above sample categories was determined by dividing the schoolboy population in each category by the sample size in the same category. The following weights were then attached to the categories concerned (rounded off to the nearest figure):

	Protestant	Catholic
Intermediate	49	43
Grammar	30	16

This process produced the following weighted secondary school sample:

	Protestant		Catholic	
	N	%	N	%
Intermediate	23,422	62	20,382	72
Grammar	14,310	38	8,048	28

TABLE 1 *Ability to Assign Those Who Work for Government to the Public Sector of Life: Primary Boys*

	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Public	96	92
Private	2	3
No answer	2	5

Ireland have a grasp of the concept of government. Pre-testing for the primary school survey revealed that by the age of 8, 95 per cent of the children could differentiate between the public and private sectors of life. At age 7 (primary three), however, only 45 per cent managed to differentiate between persons who worked for government and those who did not. Thus the primary survey began with 8 year olds. During the primary survey (1972) the boys were presented with a list of six occupations³ and asked to choose those who worked for the government with the results shown in Table 1.

Thus it is with confidence that we can proceed to ask boys how they think and feel about government. Earlier studies have revealed that younger children do think of government in terms of persons.⁴ Thus it may be wasteful of time and resources trying to teach a given political concept until a child has reached the appropriate developmental level. On the other hand, if schools wish to have a maximum of influence in political thinking, they should begin helping the child to orient himself towards political concepts as soon as they begin to form. Children's perceptions of government have previously been found to begin with a few figures of high governmental authority. As the child develops, his attention turns to other, more abstract, aspects of government as he becomes aware of its group and institutional character. The boys in Northern Ireland were offered the choice of either selecting one of the ideas of government given in the questionnaire or supplying their own. Their perceptions of government (whether personal or institutional) are reflected in Table 2.

Findings in Ulster bear out what is common in other research in child political socialization: children begin with personalized conceptions of government and later revise these in favour of more institutionalized outlooks. The older boys in Northern Ireland were much more likely to think of government in terms of parliament while the younger boys were more prone to identify government with the Prime Minister and the Queen.

The Northern Ireland Government enjoyed more administrative and legislative independence than any other part of the United Kingdom. The Government of Ireland Act, 1920, states that the supreme authority of Westminster is unaffected by the creation of Stormont. Until Westminster suspended the Northern Ireland Government in 1972, however, British Cabinet ministers had no executive power in any of the powers transferred to Stormont.

In Northern Ireland no government can be popular for long because it is difficult to satisfy discordant groups at the same time. A government which is thought to be distributing collective goods fairly may be attacked by Protestants because this may mean that fewer Catholics will emigrate from Northern Ireland. Such a government may also displease Catholics for not

³ The six occupations employed were: policeman, baker, soldier, butcher, judge and grocer. Greatest hesitancy occurred over the public versus private nature of the judge's role.

⁴ Robert D. Hess and Judith Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

TABLE 2 *Perceptions of Government by Religion and School Year*

	Primary (%)	Secondary first year (%)	Secondary fourth year (%)
Protestants			
Personal	66	55	46
Institutional	32	41	47
Other	—	2	3
No answer	2	2	4
Catholics			
Personal	64	50	41
Institutional	31	44	49
Other	2	3	6
No answer	3	3	4

introducing social reforms quickly enough. What is of particular interest in the context of our research is how adult evaluations of government were transmitted to schoolboys during a particularly turbulent time in the history of Northern Ireland: a time when the security forces of Ulster could not enforce the law and political leaders were in exceedingly precarious positions. One might say that this was not an ideal time to investigate affect towards government. Alternatively, it is of immense interest to know how the youthful population was reacting to a political authority at a time when the momentum of events was leading to its collapse, or suspension.

Most of the studies of children's affect for government have been based upon scales of infallibility, leadership qualities, power and benevolence. Of all the items used to tap affect, benevolence is the most affect-laden and has mainly been operationalized in terms of 'would want to help me if I needed it'.

This measure of affect was adjusted in two ways in this study. First, the emphasis on the individual child was diluted. The item 'wants to help people like me' was substituted to allow the boy to reflect community feelings more directly. Second, most affect scales using the 'help me' item have ranged from 'would always want to help', to 'would never want to help', or 'would not usually want to help'. Pilot testing in Northern Ireland soon revealed that this negative statement towards government was not sufficient to encompass all attitudes. Thus the more extreme case of 'wants to hurt people like me' was introduced. The question takes the following form:

Here are some things people sometimes say about the Government of Northern Ireland. TICK the ONE that comes closest to telling about the Government of Northern Ireland.

1	2	3	4
The Government <i>always</i> wants to help people like me	The Government <i>sometimes</i> wants to help people like me	The Government <i>never</i> wants to help people like me	The Government wants to <i>hurt</i> people like me

TABLE 3 *Affect towards Government by School Type and Religion*

	Protestants (%)	Catholics (%)
<i>Grammar schools*</i>	(N = 477)	(N = 503)
1. POSITIVE	37	16
2. positive	55	49
3. negative	6	25
4. NEGATIVE	2	8
No answer	0	2
<i>Intermediate schools†</i>	(N = 478)	(N = 474)
1. POSITIVE	30	18
2. positive	49	45
3. negative	15	23
4. NEGATIVE	5	11
No answer	1	3
<i>Primary schools‡</i>	(N = 561)	(N = 548)
1. POSITIVE	64	33
2. positive	30	34
3. negative	2	17
4. NEGATIVE	1	12
No answer	3	4

* Difference Index = 27%. † Difference Index = 16%. ‡ Difference Index = 31%.

Options 1 and 2 represent *positive affect* to government. Item 1 will be regarded as the 'benevolent' view of government and will be represented by POSITIVE in capitals in Table 3. Item 2 will be represented by 'positive' in small letters. Items 3 and 4 will be regarded as negative affect to government. Item 4 reveals 'malevolent' feelings about government and will be represented by NEGATIVE in capitals, in the table. Item 3 will be represented by 'negative'.

Only about 2 per cent of the boys did not answer this question. This indicated that feelings were well formed on this issue and that little hesitancy existed about expressing them. This is typical of Ulster adults, adolescents and children. Few boys asked any questions during the administration of this question. One reason for this may be that it was preceded by four questions, in the same form, regarding affect for policemen, soldiers, prime minister and Queen.

Since there are few guidelines regarding children's affect for government in Northern Ireland, one could take adult regime outlooks as one indicator of how children might respond to political questions. The Adult Loyalty Survey (1968) found that, 'among Protestants, supporters of the Constitution outnumber overt opponents by a majority of seven to one. Catholics, by contrast, are divided into three almost equal groups - supporters, don't know and opponents. Only one third are prepared to explicitly endorse the Constitution.'⁵ Although support for the Constitution and affect for government are not analogous in all countries there is a case in Northern Ireland for expecting attitudes to the Constitution to be a rough indicator of how a person feels about

⁵ Richard Rose, *Governing Without Consensus: An Irish Perspective* (London: Faber, 1971), p. 189.

government. On the other hand there are some upholders of the Constitution whose attitudes to government are far from strongly positive. But using the adult finding as a general guideline one might hypothesize that Protestants will be more likely than Catholics to see government in favourable terms.

As expected, Protestants are more positive in their attitudes to government than Catholics (Difference Index = 25 per cent).⁶ Protestant children are more prone to take up the extremely positive position. Catholics are more negative in outlook, yet a majority did have favourable attitudes to government. There are more divisions within Catholic opinion on this issue than among Protestants. Yet it is noteworthy that in February–March 1971, 64 per cent of Catholic schoolboys recorded positive affect towards the Stormont Government, and that in the few months before the announcement of the suspension of the Government 67 per cent of Catholic primary boys were positively oriented towards it, with fully 33 per cent recording the most ideal affect (i.e. option 1).

It might have been hypothesized that differences between Catholics and Protestants regarding government would have been greatest in the intermediate schools which contain higher proportions of the working class than either primary, or grammar schools. But boys of different religions in the intermediate schools are closer together in their feelings about government than is observable elsewhere. This is caused mainly by 20 per cent of Protestant intermediate boys being negatively oriented to government. This reflects the tendency, sometimes observable, of the adult Protestant working class to see the official Unionist Party as a middle- and upper-class institution.

Affect towards government in Northern Ireland thus varies by religion and school-type. There is much more negative affect than is found in other studies.

THE AGGREGATE PATTERN OF AFFECT

In order to sort out the relative importance, taken together, of various influences, it is convenient to use the statistical technique known familiarly as 'tree analysis'.⁷ Essentially tree analysis is a step-wise regression programme. The first thing we must do is select a number of potential influences from the information gathered for the various school groups under consideration. The computer systematically considers which of these influences separates the boys most completely in terms of their views of government. The potential influences included in this analysis are as shown in Fig. 1.

⁶ The Difference Index ranges from 0 when the proportions are identical in the groups compared to 100 when no one in one group shares an opinion or attitude with someone in another group. The lower the index the greater the similarity between the groups being compared, and the higher the index, the greater the difference.

⁷ J. A. Sonquist and J. N. Morgan, *The Detection of Interaction Effects*, Monograph No. 35, Survey Research Centre, The Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1964. By the time a reader has worked through a number of potential influences, considered separately, he will begin to ask which is most important. So, in order to sort out the relative importance of various influences, it is helpful to use a statistical method capable of drawing together a number of influences. The technique used here, Automatic Interaction Detection, is known familiarly as 'tree analysis' because it produces figures that resemble the branches of a 'tree'. Essentially, AID is a 'stepwise regression programme' which operates by finding that dichotomy based on any predictor which accounts for more of the variance in the dependent variable than any other dichotomization based on grouping the categories of a single predictor into two groups. Having made this first dichotomy, the AID programme then takes the groups produced by the first division and splits them in a similar manner. The process of dichotomizing groups continues in this manner to the end of the 'trees'.

I	<i>Religious and national community</i>	
	Church attendance (P*)	Respect for priests (C)
	Mass attendance (C*)	Religion
	Respect for minister (P)	Strength of religion (P)
	Strength of religion (C)	Marching Orange bands (P)
	Friendship across religious lines (P)	Playing Gaelic sports (C)
	Friendship across religious lines (C)	Irish language (C)
	Membership of Junior Orange (P)	Nationality
	Strength of nationality	
II	<i>School and peer group†</i>	
	Respect for teachers	Social class in school group (class)
	Teacher perception of history course	School year
	Pupil perception of history course	Schools stream
	Pupil interest in history	Grammar or intermediate
	Social class in school	Position in peer group
III	<i>Local influences</i>	
	Subjective assessment of level of trouble in area	
	Religious proportions in area	
	Geographical area	
IV	<i>Social class</i>	
	Socio economic group	
	Social class	

Fig. 1. Potential influences on boys' feelings towards government

* Where questions concern one religion only this has been indicated by P = Protestant and C = Catholic.

† Classes in 'civics' were not included in the analysis because earlier cross-tabulations showed that they make little, or no, difference to the political attitudes of those who take them.

First of all, we wish to consider the ways in which the predictors under consideration can influence the emotional feeling that primary schoolboys have about government. In the total primary school sample, 81 per cent showed a positive, or very positive, feeling towards government. The first branch in the tree, as expected, separates Protestants and Catholics (see Fig. 2).

There are no predictors capable of splitting primary school Protestants in their views of government. This indicates that immediately prior to the suspension of Stormont the Government held the almost unswerving loyalty of Protestant primary schoolboys.

The question then arises: what influences Catholics feelings towards government? The social-class composition of the school group (class) is second in importance among primary boys: Catholic boys who belong to homogeneous social-class school groups are much less likely to have positive feelings towards government. Among Catholic primary schoolboys who belong to heterogeneous social-class school groups, those who have Protestant friends are more likely to have positive feelings towards government. We cannot say that those without Protestant friends turn against government through sectarian isolation, for 66 per cent of them still show positive feelings. But we can say that they are less likely to feel strongly positive about government.

It is important to note which potential influences do *not* influence boys' feelings to any great extent. Religion is independent of educational influences since it is ascribed at birth. The social-class proportions in the school group is more a function of the social nature of the school catchment area than of educational planning. Among Catholics, there is little relationship between respect for teachers and government and only 8 per cent in the homogeneous social-class

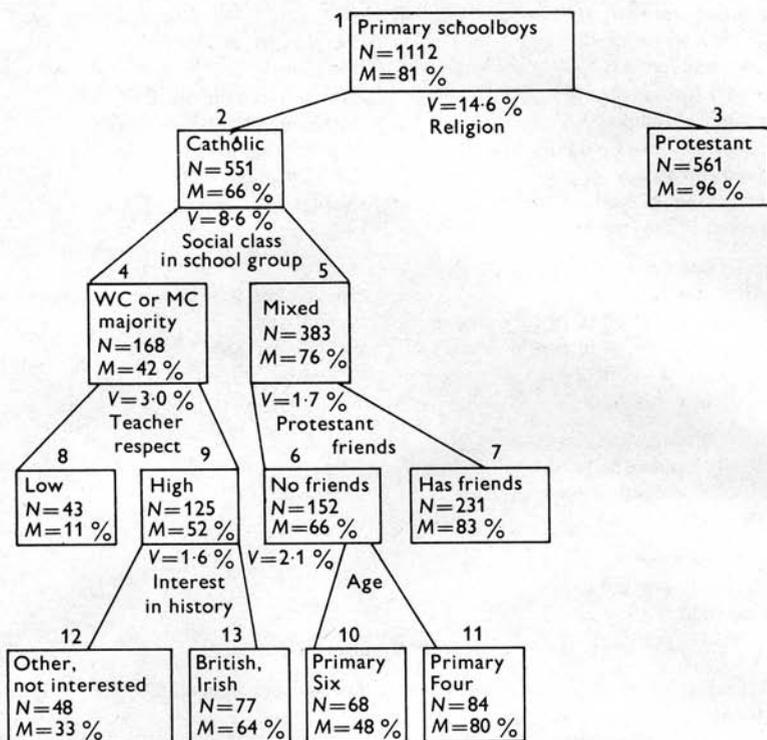


Fig. 2. Primary schoolboys with positive affect towards government. N = number of boys in group. M = % in group with positive effect. Variance explained = 31.6%

school groups had low respect for their teachers. Interest in history, more a function of community influence than school history courses, explains only a small part of the variance. Not least in significance is the absence of any influence of Irish language classes upon Catholic schoolboys.

Protestant primary boys differ little among themselves: positive feelings for government are strong everywhere. Among Catholics, by contrast, there are major divisions into sub-groups. At one end is a group (20 per cent of all Catholic primary schoolboys) in which four-fifths have positive feelings towards government: these are boys who are part of mixed social-class school groups (classes) and have a Protestant friend or friends. At the other extreme, there is a group of 4 per cent of Catholic primary schoolboys, where nine-tenths lack a positive feeling towards government. They are boys who belong to homogeneous social-class school groups (classes) and hold their teachers in low respect.

In order to submit secondary school data to tree analysis, the weighted sample (see fn. 2) had to be reduced proportionately in numbers. Thus the weights of 49, 43, 30 and 16 in the secondary sample were proportionately reduced to 4.9, 4.3, 3.0 and 1.6. This is reflected in the different numbers of boys in each school type that appear in Table 3.

Among secondary schoolboys 75 per cent showed a positive or very positive feeling towards government. The first branch of the tree, as with the primary schoolboys, separates Protestants and Catholics (see Fig. 3). Among Protestants respect for teachers is first in importance; boys who think it is not at all important to respect teachers are much less likely to have positive feelings towards government. The group of 'anti-teachers' and 'not very pro-government' boys

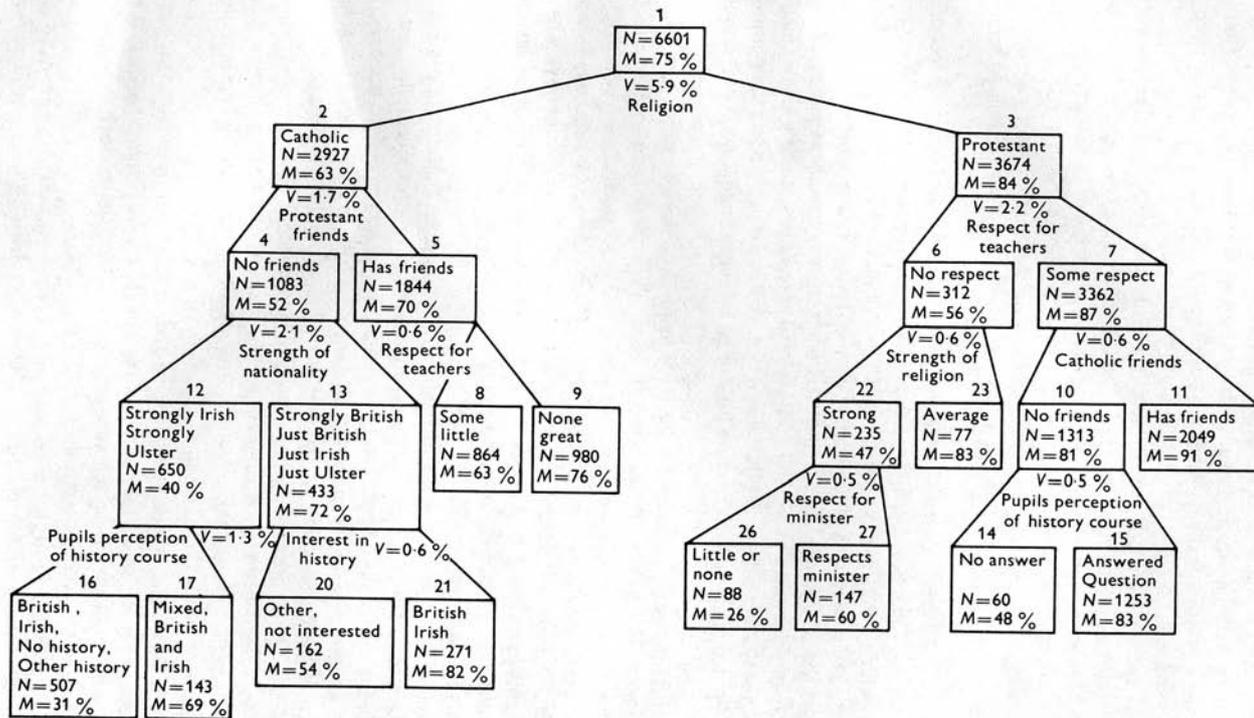


Fig. 3. Secondary schoolboys with positive affect towards government. N = number of boys in group. M = % in group with positive affect. Variance explained = 16.6%

is, however, small: it constitutes only 8 per cent of the secondary Protestant school sample. Among Protestant boys who *do* have respect for teachers; those who have a Catholic friend or friends are more likely to show positive feelings towards government. But Protestant boys without Catholic friends do not turn against government through sectarian segregation, for four out of five still show positive feelings. Such boys are, however, less likely to feel strongly positive about government.

Among Catholic secondary schoolboys, Protestant friends and the lack of them shows up as an important influence, identifying a group of one Catholic in three who have no Protestant friends, half of whom are negative towards government. Those without Protestant friends are also affected by strength of national identification. Among those with a strong Irish or Ulster⁸ national identification, only 40 per cent have positive feelings towards government – a proportion much lower than those who feel strongly British or who possess an ‘ordinary’ national identification.

Respect for teachers is more related to affect for government among Protestant secondary boys than it is among Catholics. Such respect, however, may be due more to the respect teachers receive within communities than to strictly educational effects within the schools. Interest in history, and perceptions of the main content of history courses, do not appear until the very end branches of the tree. Again, historical interests may have been generated more by the community of origin than by the school alone, and perceptions of one’s history course, rather than what the teacher says about the course, are what separates boys in their attitudes to government. Formal courses in civics have little or no influence upon schoolboys’ attitudes to government.

Among Protestant secondary schoolboys, there are major divisions into sub-groups. At one end is a group (more than half the Protestants) of whom 90 per cent have a positive feeling towards government: they are boys who respect teachers and have a Catholic friend or friends. At the other extreme, there is a group of 2 per cent of Protestant secondary boys in which three-quarters lack a positive feeling for government. They are disrespectful boys who are ‘strong’ Protestants having little or no respect for Protestant ministers. This group illustrates how strong identification with a religious community and low respect for the religious leaders of the community are not incompatible.

Among Catholics, too, there are major divisions. At one end is a group (34 per cent of Catholics) in which three out of four boys have positive feelings for government: they are boys who have a Protestant friend or friends and have either great or no respect for teachers. The majority of this group, however, is composed of those who have great respect for teachers. At the other end of the Catholic side of the tree, there is a group (22 per cent of Catholics) of whom three-fifths have negative feelings towards government. They are boys with no Protestant friends, who feel strongly Irish or Ulster. The majority of such boys, however, have an Irish national identification and those feeling ‘strongly Ulster’ may be thinking in terms of a nine-county Ulster within a United Ireland.

The tree analysis shows that, although educational and ‘semi-school’ influences (such as the social class composition of the school group and respect for school teachers) are capable of explaining part of the variation among schoolboys, community influences (such as religion) are the chief predictors of affect to government.

⁸ Pilot testing in 1970 revealed that schoolchildren in Northern Ireland, when asked about nationality, generally called themselves, ‘British’, ‘Ulster’, or ‘Irish’. When these surveys were carried out Protestants were either ‘British’ or ‘Ulster’; Catholics were predominantly ‘Irish’ with a minority of Catholic boys subscribing to an ‘Ulster’ national identification. In such cases ‘Ulster’ need not be confused with Northern Ireland since it generally refers to the old (before partition) nine-county Ulster as part of Ireland.

Our findings suggest that Catholic schoolboys were not as totally alienated from the Stormont Government as might have been supposed. Yet the majority of both Protestant and Catholic schoolboys condoned violence for a Protestant Ulster or a United Ireland respectively.⁹ The Catholic schoolboys may have regarded the Stormont Government as a necessary, though temporary, caretaker during a conflict over mutually exclusive goals.

Students of political socialization have often stressed the *process* of socialization. They also, sometimes, ascribe a lot of influence in this process to the schools. In Northern Ireland a history of partially legitimate government makes for a process of socialization emphasizing both support for, and opposition to, the government. Further, schools, through their educational programmes, do not play a large part in this process. What matters in Northern Ireland is *what* the children are socialized into believing, and in Northern Ireland virtually identical processes produce dissimilar results. How do we reduce the dissimilarities, if indeed it is legitimate to attempt to do so? There is certainly not much point in looking at the present schools since they cannot off-set what is going on in the community they serve. Some educationalists maintain that teachers should start knowing the social experience of the pupils, recognize this as something vital and significant, and reflect it back to the pupils.¹⁰ If this were done, one would expect the schools to reinforce the discordant views of national communities. Thus, it is unrealistic to expect schools to create attitudes in pupils that are conducive to a common allegiance in Northern Ireland in the absence of support from the adult community and of a political institution generally regarded as fair and impartial.

Political socialization is often thought of as a gradual accumulation of political content derived from the main general agents of socialization such as the family, school and peer-group. In this study, religion was clearly the background factor that provided the best explanation of political attitudes. Religion, in Northern Ireland, is generally held to be a precursive factor (ascribed at birth) including ethnic and nationality aspects as well as religious identification. More of the variation in political attitudes of young people in Northern Ireland may be predicted from precursive factors than is predicted by variations in later experience. The content of political attitudes is most fundamentally shaped by the side of the religious divide into which a child is born. The persistent lines of division in Northern Ireland provide for the replication of political instability in coming generations. Only when there is some fundamental agreement on a political structure for Northern Ireland can we expect the main general agents of socialization to provide experiences that will gradually combine to determine how an individual will play his role as a citizen.

⁹ See James Russell, 'Northern Ireland: Socialisation into Conflict', *Social Studies: Irish Journal of Sociology*, IV (1975), 109-23.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Basil Bernstein, 'Education and Society', *New Society*, xv, No. 387, 26 February 1970, 344-7.