

The Housing Executive Response to *a Shared Future*

Community relations and housing

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**Housing
Executive**

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Executive summary

- I. The purpose of this study is to explore possible responses by the Housing Executive to the *Shared Future* consultation paper produced by the Northern Ireland Office. *A Shared Future* followed the Harbison review of community relations and suggested that we need to move to a pluralist but shared society with explicit policy objectives connected to that end. The document has a number of direct and indirect references to housing policy and management and the purpose of this study is to help the Housing Executive make an appropriate policy response.
- II. The research used statistics, case studies and in-depth interviews with key policy actors in order to examine the Housing Executive's response to the consultation document. The research also reviewed conditions on integrated housing and looked at existing policy and practices within the organisation upon which a policy response could be based.
- III. Survey research shows that most people, including Housing Executive tenants would prefer to live in mixed religion housing and attitude surveys have shown a more recent rise in willingness to live on integrated estates. Moreover, the 2001 Census shows that demographic trends are more favourable to integrated housing in the Districts identified as the most mixed in Northern Ireland. However, the data also showed that violence, especially at community level has increased and mistrust at the interface has reduced the prospect of more ambitious locally based community relations schemes.
- IV. An analysis of a selected number of segregated Housing Management Districts also emphasised policy limitations but did highlight progress on interface violence, wall murals and cross-community contact. The Consumer Panels often operated as an effective forum for inter-community dialogue around common housing and related social problems.
- V. However, it is important to note that there has been significant policy development in areas related to housing in managing and responding to segregation, integration and territoriality. Land use planning, urban regeneration and community development programmes have all recently prioritised community relations in major policy statements. These represent an important opportunity for the Housing Executive to make programme connections and to realise policy objectives through partnership with other relevant agencies and Departments. It is important that the Executive make explicit these connections and how they relate to their role in responses to ethnic-religious division in local society.

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- VI. The analysis showed that the key response should be framed around the Housing Executive's capacity to **facilitate and encourage** integrated housing, safe living and the management of contested environments. There is a real recognition of the limits of housing policy historically, currently and in the future. Segregation is the product of a wider set of social and political relations and whilst it has a dynamic of its own, it cannot be solved exclusively within the housing arena. Partnership with other Departments, policies sectors and interest is the priority and there are policy frameworks, such as Neighbourhood Renewal, for the Executive to play its role in a joined-up approach. However, it was also acknowledged that high-level Government strategic and structural commitments were required for the Housing Executive to work effectively with others on complex problems such as flags and political graffiti.
- VII. The research showed that the Housing Executive have developed an incremental response to community relations with a range of practices and initiatives across functional areas, levels and geographic areas. It is argued that these amount to a sound response to housing in a divided society and the basis of a comprehensive response to the *Shared Future* process. The Towards a Community Relations Strategy and the subsequent Community Safety and Relations Strategy set the policy context for a more expansive statement of the agency's contribution to managing territoriality and ethnic-religious conflict.
- VIII. The Housing Executive needs to articulate a clear set of values or principles for addressing community relations in the context of *A Shared Future*. These might include: safety; choice; partnership; equality and social need. Linked to this the agency should consider making the following objectives more explicit in the context of both the review and NIHE planning priorities. a. to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of people in danger as a result of community conflict in Northern Ireland; b. to facilitate and encourage integrated housing as far as this is practical, desirable and safe; and c. to recognise the desire of some people to live in segregated areas and to work in partnership to address the complex housing needs of a divided society.
- IX. The Housing Executive can point to a large number of structural relationships, planning strategies and specific initiatives that deal with segregation and integration. The organisation needs to make these explicit, connect them more effectively and support their implementation and development. Specific examples include work with Belfast City Council on flags and graffiti, Habitat for Humanity on integrated housing, the Common Ground Consortium on segregation and Mediation Network on responding to crises. *A Shared Future* also needs to develop the structures, such as the Community Action Group, to support the Housing Executive's attempt to tackle segregation and integrated housing.

1 Introduction

An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing.
The Agreement, 1998, p.17.

The two Governments recognise that Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society, with ingrained patterns of division that carry substantial human and financial costs. They recognise the importance of building trust and improving community relations, tackling sectarianism and addressing segregation including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing
Joint Declaration by the British and Irish Governments April 2003, p.8.

Our strong belief is that Northern Ireland must become a society where there is equality, respect for diversity and recognition that we are interdependent on each other. We believe that the aim of policy must, therefore be to develop a more shared and pluralist society

A Shared Future, A Consultation paper on improving relations in Northern Ireland, 2003, p.7.

Growing as a Community Sub-priority 2: We will improve community relations and tackle the divisions in our society:

During 2003, put in place a coordinated plan of short term actions across government and key agencies to help build trust and confidence within and between communities including: action to support the capacity of local communities to deal with matters of dispute or division, including the proliferation of sectarian graffiti, unauthorised flag flying, the erection of memorials that can lead to community tensions; improving communication at interfaces; underpinning community development; and developing intervention programmes for young people.

Programme for Government, 2003, pp.18-19.

1. The link between community relations and housing policy has been prioritised at a political level in Northern Ireland with increasing force. The statements above show that choice, safety and mixing are crucial components of any long-term political settlement. The interviews carried out here suggest that there is a consensus, on part of the Government at least, that a *shared* society will be the best long-term basis for social stability and political progress. There is also evidence that the financial costs of segregation in dual provision of services and facilities are less tolerable in the context of the pressures on public expenditure. The priority for integration is therefore political, policy and efficiency related and it is clear from this analysis that the Northern Ireland Office and OFMDFM wish to see explicit programmes and initiatives that work towards these objectives.

Objectives of this paper

2. The overall aim of this report is to help construct an appropriate policy response by the Housing Executive to the *Shared Future* paper. This is supported by the following objectives:

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- i. To review policy responses in the field of housing and housing related policy areas especially those now emerging in urban policy and land use planning;
 - ii. To set out statistical data on segregation, integration and violence in Northern Ireland;
 - iii. To evaluate the attitudes of key stakeholders in the policy system to the development of a housing response to the *Shared Future* document;
 - iv. To assess the specific conditions for the development of integrated housing especially as they relate to changes in local circumstances since the (University of Ulster) 2000¹ review;
 - v. To set out the implications for policies and practices within the Housing Executive and a specific response to the *Shared Future* consultation document.
3. The research involved a review of secondary data, analysis of documentation and in-depth interviews with key people in the housing and community relations field. Some of these interviews helped to develop case studies in specific housing localities at District level. A structure of the interviews is set out in the table below.

Table 1 Programme of in-depth interviews

Sector	Number
Community relations policy	5
Community relations practice	5
Strategic housing policy	3
Housing management	14
Housing Association interests	4
Planning and urban policy	3
Academics	3
Equality policy	3
TOTAL	40

4. *A Shared Future* was launched in response to the Harbison review of community relations policy and the specific policy aims of the review are set out in the table below. It could be argued at the outset that all are relevant to the work of the Housing Executive but some will have a more direct impact than others especially where they relate to integration and segregation in the residential arena. For instance, the *Shared Future* document specifically commits the Department for Social Development to "increasing support for communities living in integrated housing" (p.17).

¹ It is important to note that the fieldwork for the 2000 report was conducted primarily in 1999.

Table 2 The policy aims of *A Shared Future*

Specific policy aims
▪ To support the development of integrated communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together
▪ To encourage communication, tolerance and trust in areas where communities are living apart
▪ To promote respect, encouragement and celebration of different cultures, faiths and traditions
▪ To eliminate sectarianism and racism and enable individuals to live and work without fear or intimidation
▪ To reduce tension and conflict at interface areas
▪ To shape policies, practices and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow

Source: NIO, 2003, p.8

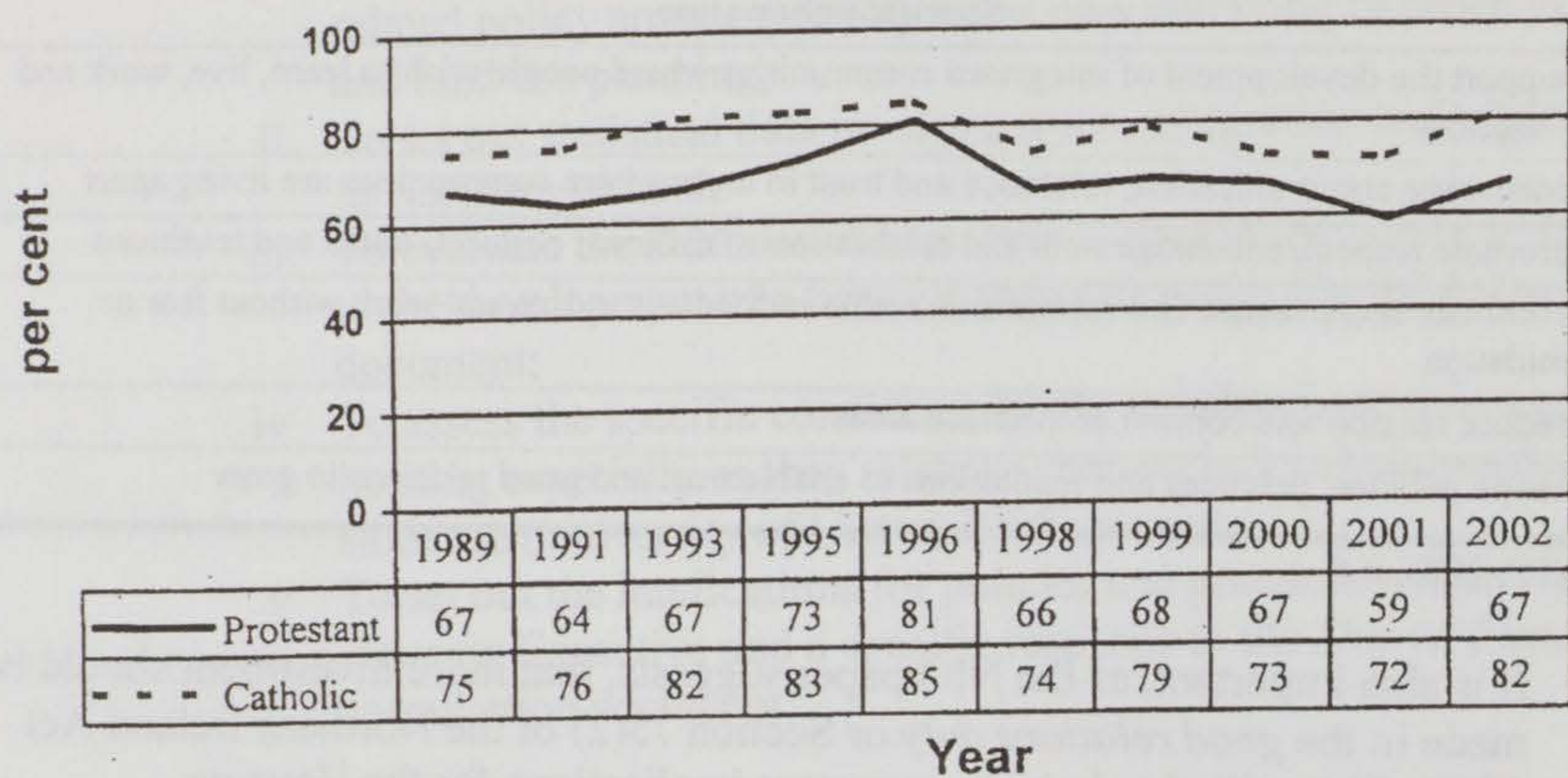
5. It is also important, as the NIO paper suggests, that more investment should be made in the *good relations duty* or Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This will clearly have important implications for the Housing Executive's Equality Plan and the fulfilment of their Statutory Equality Obligations (SEO). It is also important to clarify that the scope of *A Shared Future* is broader than integrated housing and that the Executive need to respond to the continuum of specific proposals and broader policy objectives set out in the document. For example, this includes responses to interface communities, areas possibly sliding from mixed communities to more segregated ones and community contact in areas where segregation affects how people use housing services and related facilities. Again, it should be emphasised that in responding to these challenges housing might be only one part of an integrated partnership required to advance most if not all aims in the policy document. It is for that reason that we map out where and how the Housing Executive might connect with other policies and programmes to achieve its good relations objectives.

Preference for contact

6. The Housing Executive has used the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey in attitudinal and corporate awareness research. Part of its value is that it has recorded attitudes to integrated housing over time and the latest results are shown in the diagram below. The most positive attitudes were reached in 1996 in the post ceasefire era but after that date there was a decline in positive attitudes until 2001. The latest results for 2002 indicate an upswing in support of eight percentage points for Protestants and ten percentage points for Catholics.

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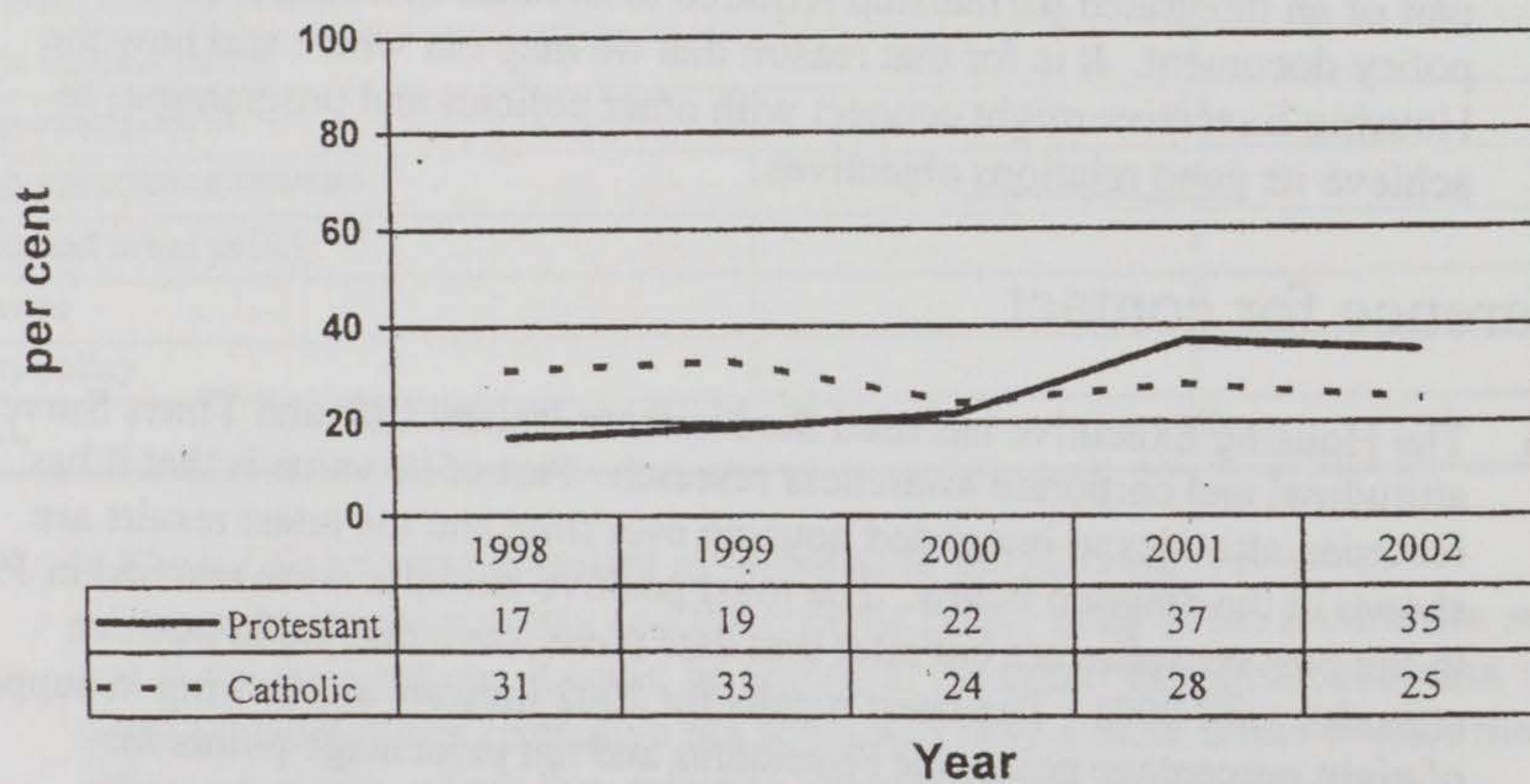
Figure 1 Percentage of respondents who would prefer to live in a mixed religion neighbourhood



— Protestant - - - Catholic

7. The diagram below also shows Protestants are now more likely to consider themselves the underdog than Catholics which needs to be understood in the context of hardening attitudes in some Loyalist housing estates and the reduced tolerance for mixing in some areas described the in the Housing Management District case studies.

Figure 2 Percentage of respondents who agree that "My cultural tradition is always the underdog"



— Protestant - - - Catholic

8. The Housing Executives own *Public Attitudes Survey* (2002) also showed that 46% of respondents were concerned about community relations in their area and

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that 82% were concerned about community relations in Northern Ireland as a whole. More Housing Executive tenants (52%) were concerned about community relations than owner-occupiers (45%) in their own neighbourhood.

9. A total of 81% of respondents felt that *the Housing Executive should remove sectarian murals from its properties* although fewer Executive tenants (69%) were likely to feel this way than owner-occupiers (84%). Eighty-four per cent of Catholics felt this way compared to 79% of Protestants. Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents thought that it should be Housing Executive policy to promote a religious mix on its estates, although again, fewer Executive tenants (59%) felt this way compared with owner-occupiers (59%). The variation by religion was statistically insignificant at 84% for Protestants and 83% for Catholics. The table below looks at alternative housing choices for the population as a whole and this confirms integrated housing as the preference of most people (60%) and to some extent, provides justification of the policy emphasis on mixed living in the *Shared Future* document.

Table 3 Religious mix of area and respondents' preferences

Preference	Percentage
I live in a mixed area and wish to continue doing so	60
I live in a Protestant area and wish to continue doing so	16
I live in a Catholic area and wish to continue doing so	11
I live in a Protestant area but would prefer to live in a mixed religion area	7
I live in a Catholic area but would prefer to live in a mixed religion area	3
I live in a mixed area but would prefer to live in a Protestant area	1
I live in a mixed area but would prefer to live in a Catholic area	0
I live in a Protestant area but would prefer to live in a Catholic area	0
I live in a Catholic area but would prefer to live in a Protestant area	0
Don't know or refused	2
Total	100

Source: NIHE (2003) *Public Attitudes Survey 2002*, Belfast, NIHE.

Demography in sensitive areas

10. The 2001 Census allows us to assess the impact of religion on place in Northern Ireland. The general trend to emerge from the Census is a slow down in the rate of growth of the Catholic population and a commensurate slow down of the decline of the Protestant population. The graphs below look at change in religion of the Housing Management Districts that showed potential to develop integrated housing in the University of Ulster 2000 study. It shows that the Protestant population has indeed stabilised at the same time as the Catholic population has not accelerated at the rate of increase registered between 1981 and 1991. This suggests that the demographic conditions are better suited to the

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maintenance of mixed housing in these areas and that this may stabilise further, especially if Catholic fertility rates continue to fall over the next ten years.

Figure 3 The proportion of Protestants in case study areas (% of total population)

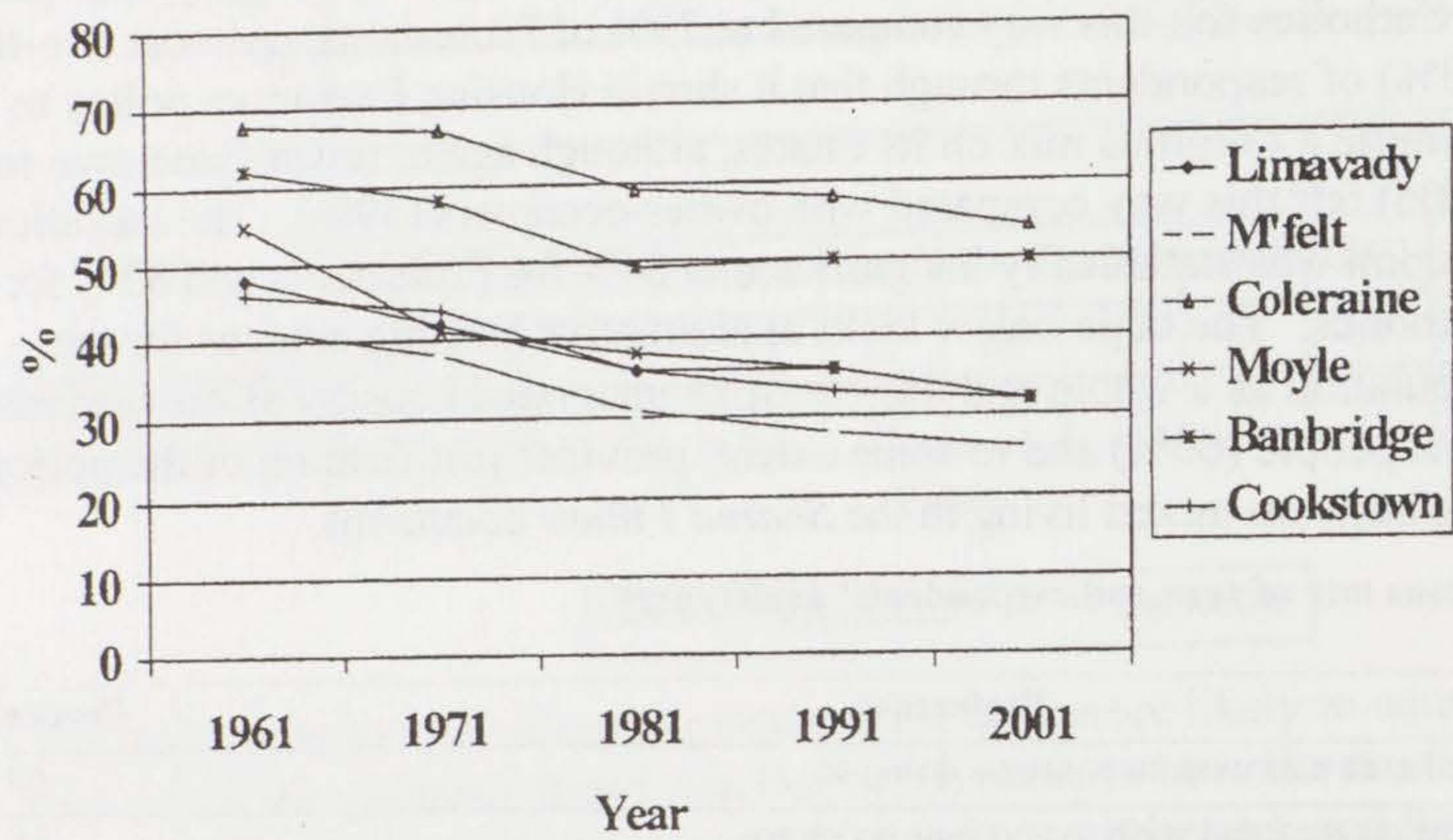
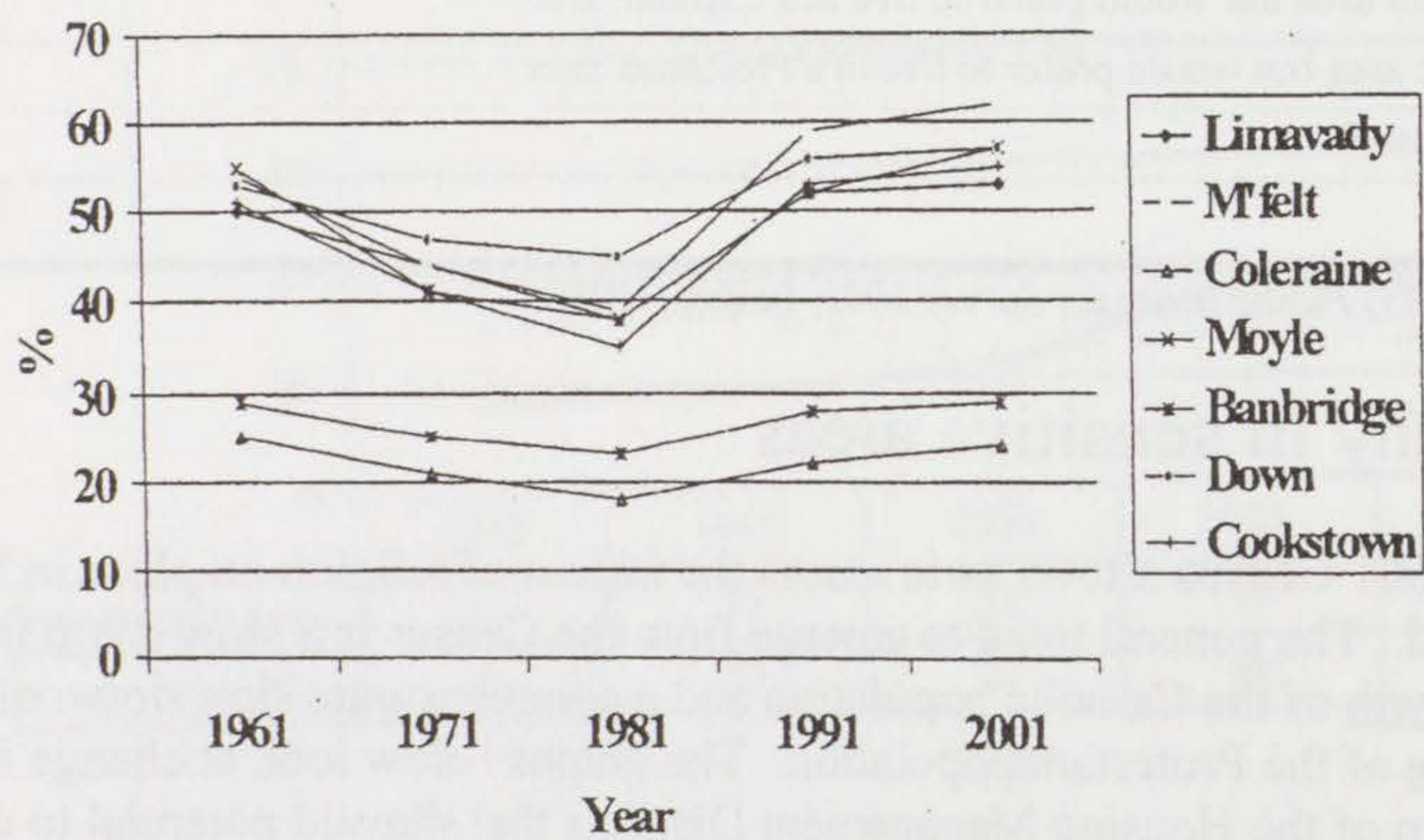


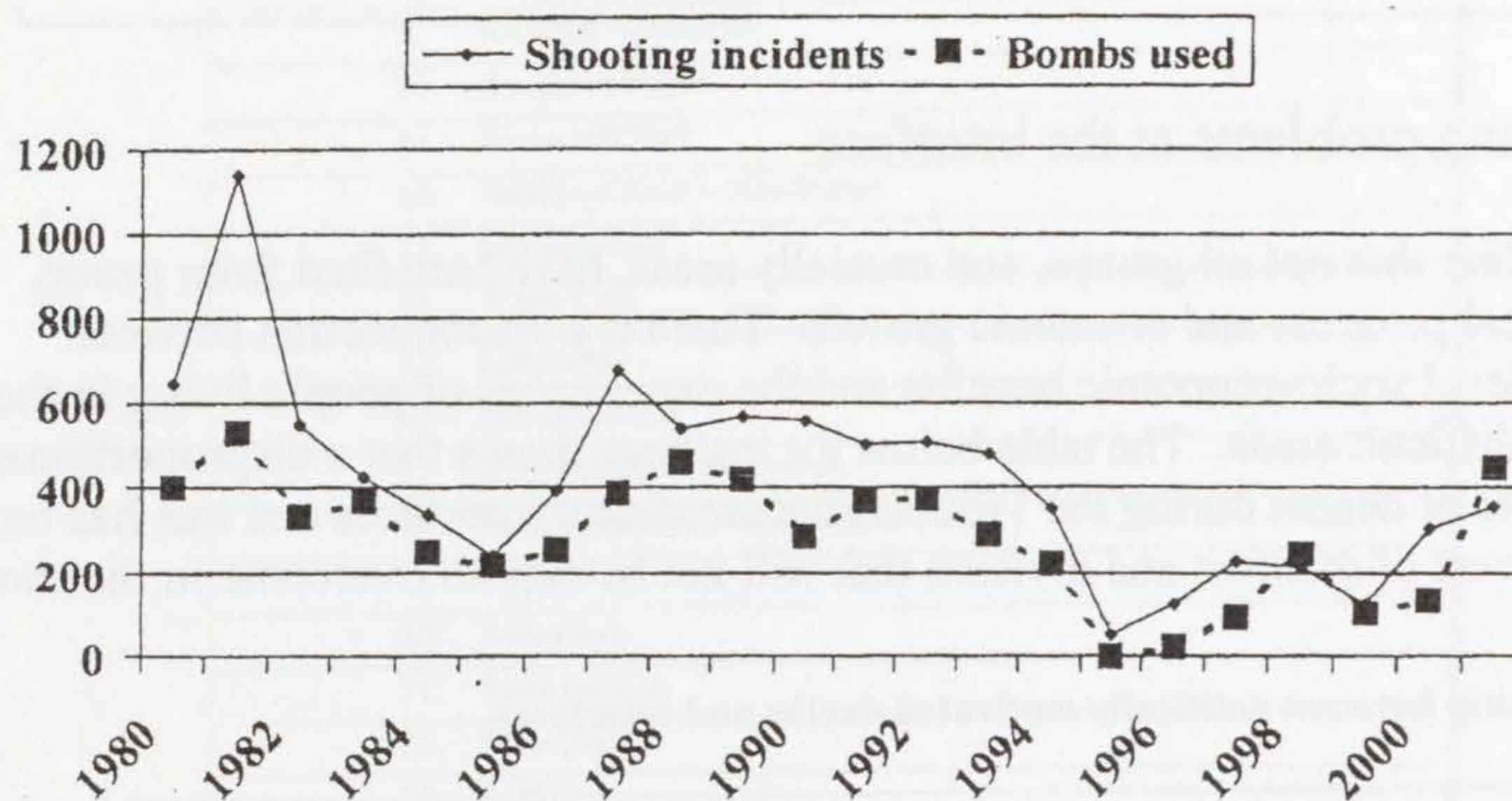
Figure 4 The proportion of Catholics in case study areas (% of total population)



Reviewing the conditions for integrated housing

11. The 2000 University of Ulster study suggested that a range of factors needed to be in place before a sustainable integrated housing policy had any real prospect of success and that conditions in 1999 did not support such an option. The analysis presented here suggests that despite macro-political developments, micro-community dynamics are still not sufficiently stable to *risk* explicit integrated housing schemes, in some areas at least. The diagram below shows that indicators of political violence fell dramatically after the ceasefires but both bombings (including pipe bombs) and shootings have now risen to pre-ceasefire levels.

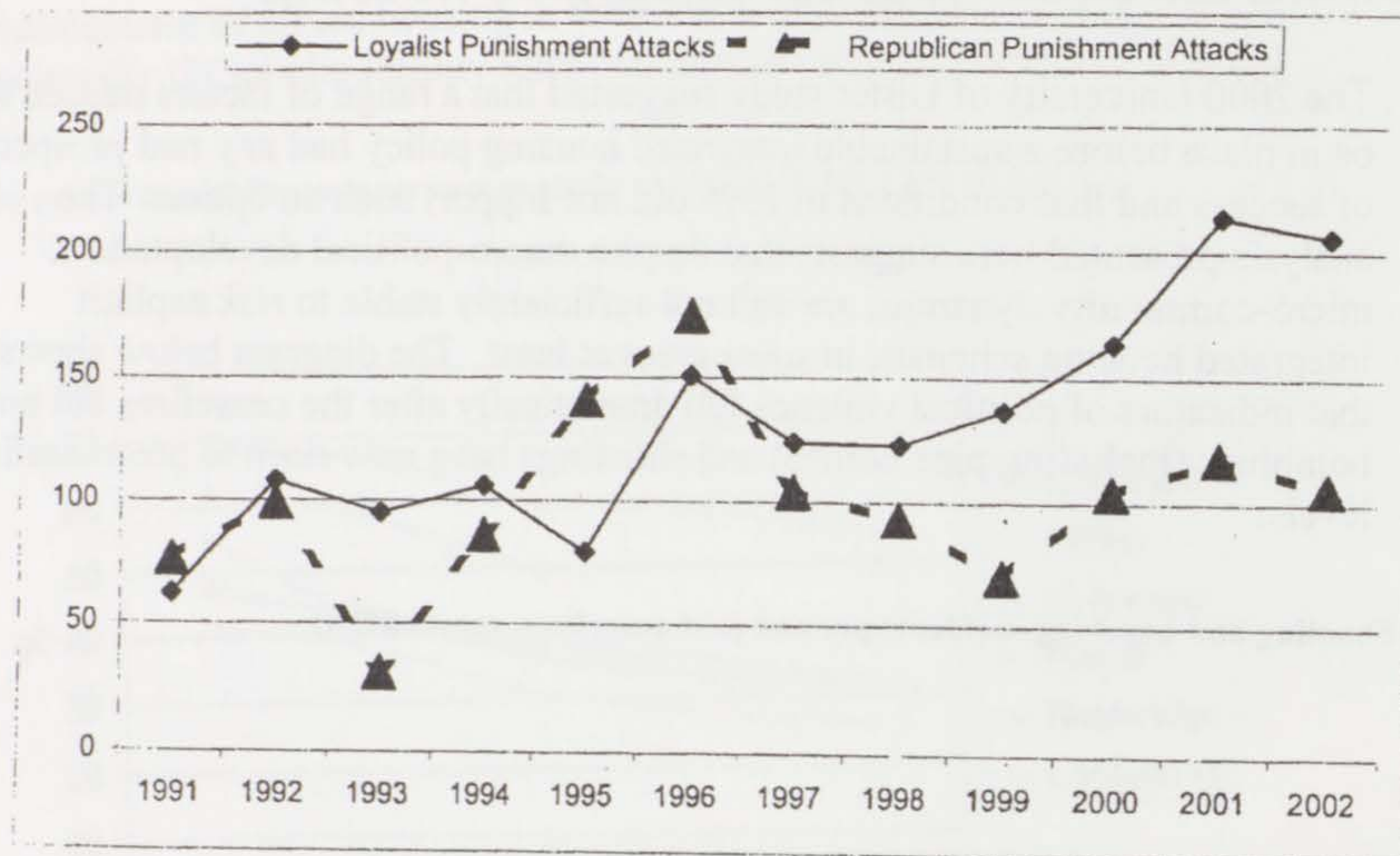
Figure 5 Shooting and bombing incidents pre and post-ceasefires, source PSNI



12. The diagram below also shows that paramilitary activity has increased on both the Republican and Loyalist sides although there has been a slight decline in the last recorded year. What is more concerning in the context of this research is that these trends tend to be highly localised and strongly correlated with public sector housing, making the conditions for mixed schemes even more problematic in some areas than four years ago.

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Figure 6 Punishment attacks 1991-2002 Source: PSNI



Continuing problems at the interface

13. It is clear that not all groups, and crucially areas, have benefited from peace, political progress and economic growth. There is a disconnection between high-level socio-economic benefits and the experiences of people living in the most difficult areas. The table below for instance shows that a disproportionate number of deaths during the Troubles occurred near interfaces and this has built up a level of mistrust and division that will not be easy to overcome in the short term.

Table 4 Relationship between politically motivated deaths and interfaces

Distance from Interface	% share of all deaths within BUA
Less than 100 metres	13.47%
Less than 200 metres	28.89%
Less than 300 metres	44.25%
Less than 400 metres	57.28%
Less than 500 metres	66.53%
Less than 600 metres	71.88%
Less than 700 metres	75.91%
Less than 800 metres	79.39%
Less than 900 metres	81.53%
Less than 1000 metres	84.25%
Over 1000 metres	15.74%

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14. The table below shows that there are now 25 interfaces in the city and evidence of continuing tension was reflected in the decision to further extend two interfaces in light of recent violence. Clearly, these are physical manifestations of a wider structural conflict and further underscore the limits of integrated housing in some places at this time.

Table 5 Interfaces in the Belfast Metropolitan Area in 2003

INTERFACES	
1.	Cluan Place
2.	Bryson Street
3.	Lower Newtownards Road
4.	Mountpottinger Road – Woodstock Link
5.	Duncairn Gardens
6.	Henry Street – West Link
7.	Manor Street – Roe Street
8.	Crumlin Road
9.	Alliance – Glenbryn
10.	Elmgrove Street
11.	Alexander Park
12.	Hallidays Road – Newington
13.	Mountcollyer
14.	White City
15.	Longlands
16.	Mountainview
17.	Squires Hill – Hazelbrook
18.	Northumberland – Ardmoulin
19.	Cupar Way
20.	Ainsworth
21.	Springmartin
22.	Springhill
23.	Suffolk
24.	Roden Street
25.	Carrick Hill – Peters Hill

26. This section has shown that the conditions for integrated housing on a large-scale basis do not exist in local society although there are positive demographic shifts that may help to stabilise areas that are currently mixed. Trust and safety will ultimately dictate the pace of desegregation and integration but there is limited evidence that they are sufficiently present to affect residential patterns in the short term at least.