

THE EXTENT AND POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF INTER-COMMUNAL  
GROUP FRIENDSHIPS IN NORTHERN IRELAND :  
SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF FOUR SURVEYS

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This contribution to the debate on integrated schooling in N. Ireland is mainly concerned with the social and political effects of the friendship patterns of four thousand schoolboys and one thousand adults. The research is based upon the secondary analysis of four social and political surveys gathered in N. Ireland between 1970 and 1975. The secondary analysis was made possible by a nine-month grant from the Social Science Research Council.

The original aim of the first survey (1971) was to gather information about the political beliefs, attitudes and values of two thousand secondary schoolboys who lived in different parts of N. Ireland.<sup>(1)</sup>

The original aim of the second survey was similar to that of the Secondary schoolboy survey of 1971. The Primary school survey began in November 1971 and one thousand schoolboys were included.<sup>(2)</sup>

The original aims of the third survey were to gather self-reported information about the nature and frequency of acts of defacement and destruction of housing and neighbourhood facilities; to examine motivations leading to such destruction; and to investigate background factors which may be important in predicting destructive attitudes and behaviour. In all, 1,100 boys in 12 secondary schools in the Greater Craigavon area of N. Ireland were interviewed in 1975.<sup>(3)</sup>

The original aims of the adult survey were to gather information about forced population movement; demands for integrated and segregated living; participation in, and attitudes to, rent strikes and squatting. The survey was conducted with 1,000 tenants of the N.I.H.E. in 1975.<sup>(4)</sup>

The first two samples were what one might call criteria samples. Certain quotas had to be filled according to age, school-type, school stream and geographical area. The Greater Craigavon sample was a universe sample only failing to reach boys in first and fourth years who were absent from school on the days of the interview. The adult sample was a stratified quota sample on a semi-random basis. Thus, none of the samples were truly random samples. On the other hand, every possible human effort was made to avoid biasing the samples in any particular direction.

Secondary analysis concerns the extraction of knowledge on topics other than those which were the focus of the

original surveys. One of the main practical benefits of secondary analysis is that it economises on money, time and personnel which would be used in conducting new surveys. One of the major problems in secondary analysis, however, is that the secondary analyst may not know enough about the original surveys to carry out a reliable analysis. In this case the problem is overcome in that the secondary analysis was carried out by the primary analyst who also collected/supervised and wrote the final reports on the original surveys. Another problem in secondary analysis is that there may be slight changes in meaning (slippage) between variables being compared. In this paper the main variable is comparable across all four surveys.

The main characteristic to be examined in this paper - friendship between religions in Northern Ireland - does not vary greatly in either question form or response categories in three of the four surveys. Where the question form does vary (the adult survey) the responses can be reclassified to give the reply distributions one would have expected if the question and response categories had been in the same form as in the three schoolboy surveys.

TABLE 1 Friendship between Religions in N. Ireland.

Secondary schoolboys 1971 (N = 1,932)\*

"Are you friendly with any Roman Catholic/Protestant young people?"

	Protestants	Catholics
1. Yes	58%	66%
2. No	37%	32%
3. No Answer	5%	2%

Primary schoolboys 1972 (N = 1,116)

"Are you friendly with any Roman Catholic/Protestant children?"

1. Yes	47%	55%
2. No	53%	41%
3. No answer	-	4%

Greater Craigavon Secondary schoolboys 1975 (N = 1,088)

"Are you friendly with any Roman Catholic/Protestant young people?"

1. Yes	39%	40%
2. No	60%	59%
3. No answer	1%	1%

Adult tenants of the Housing Executive 1975 (N = 1,000)

"Thinking of all the friends you know, what proportion would you say are also Protestant/Catholic?"

1. Some friends in other religion	70%	72%
2. No friends in other religion	29%	28%
3. No answer	1	1

\* Weighted for Religion and School Type (5)

The internal reliability and validity of youthful responses were checked against similar questions within the questionnaire. The high correlation obtained between them enable us to treat the internal reliability and the validity of the friendship questions as being satisfactory. In the adult sample no internal checks were possible since no roughly similar question to "friendship between religions" was available.

The basic distributions of friendships between religions in N. Ireland (Table 1) show that, taking all the samples together, approximately three-fifths (56%) have one or more friends in the other religious group. What concerns us now are the possible effects of friendship between religions for social, religious and political opinions, attitudes and values. While investigating the possible relationships between friendships across religious boundaries and other variables, the appropriate zero-order statistics will be used. Later these zero-order statistics will be controlled for.

One of the first questions we may ask is whether experiences of friendship with individuals in the other religious group generalizes to greater social acceptance of the other religious group as a whole.

In the Greater Craigavon Secondary schoolboy sample (1975) two-fifths felt that the "other religion" was hostile towards them. Friendship with individuals in the other religious group is positively related to modifications in seeing all the members of the other religion in a hostile way (Protestants .55/Catholics .50).

Both Protestants and Catholics in the Primary (1972) and Secondary (1971) school samples appear to have much the same priorities regarding the social distance which should be imposed between religious groups. In both samples friendship between individuals in different religions is positively related to greater acceptance of the other religion into such social relationships as brothers-in-law, neighbours and school-sharers.

To measure the extent to which Protestant and Catholic tenants keep themselves to their own religion in social relations, each tenant was asked the proportion of co-religionists he/she met in a variety of contexts. For both religions, friendship between individuals of different religions was very strongly associated with increased primary group contacts between religions (Protestants .40/Catholics .40).

Across a number of important social measures, friendship between religions seems important for reducing hostilities and for increasing acceptance of members of the other religion into important primary groups. Friendship between individual Protestants and Catholics, therefore, appears to generalise to all sorts of social relations

including reduced hostility towards the other religious grouping as a whole. This, it may be argued, is just what one would expect from those who experience inter-communal group friendships. However, at a minimum, one can reject (.001 level of confidence) hypotheses which suggest that there is no association between individual friendships across religious lines and a greater acceptance of the other religion in a variety of settings.

It is sometimes contended that integrated religious schooling might lead to a diminution of religious life among Catholics in particular. In N. Ireland this hypothesis is difficult to test because of a small number who attend schools which are predominantly populated by young people of the other religious grouping. What we may ask here, however, is whether or not the experience of friendship across religious lines does anything to alter the religious grouping. What we may ask here, however, is whether or not the experience of friendship across religious lines does anything to alter the religious attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of schoolboys and adults.

One of the main weaknesses of extracting knowledge on topics other than those of the focus of the original surveys is that one encounters areas of research containing too few variables to test specific hypotheses. This is true of variables specific to religion as faith in all of these surveys. On the other hand, religion as politics is well represented in the variables of all four surveys. There are in these surveys three characteristics which may be regarded as specific to religion as faith: respect/affect for religious leaders; belief in the teachings of the Bible/Church; Church attendance.

First, friendship between religions does nothing to either increase or decrease respect/affect for religious leaders among Protestant and Catholic adults and young people. Second, friendship between religions is not related to belief in the teachings of the Bible or the Catholic Church. Protestants and Catholics who have friends across religious lines do not appear to alter their ways of thinking about the Bible and the Catholic Church, as a result of this friendship. Third, friendship between religions is not related to frequency, or infrequency of Church/Mass attendance.

Friendship across religious lines does not appear to be related to religious attitudes, beliefs and behaviour as measured by the indicators examined in this section. There may, of course, be other measures of involvement in religion which are associated with friendship across religious lines. As far as the secondary analysis of these surveys can take us, there appears to be no relationship between religious faith and practice and having friends who belong to the other religious communal group in N. Ireland.

Given that friendships between individuals in different

religious groups does appear to generalise to a greater acceptance of the other religious group as a whole, and that such acceptance does little to alter specifically religious ways of life, one might expect such friendships, where they exist, to modify some of the extreme political beliefs, attitudes and values which divide some Protestants and Catholics in N.Ireland.

(a) Nationality

The question we must ask here is whether or not the groupings having friends across religious boundaries are closer in their national identifications than their co-religionists who have no such friends. Friendships across religious lines may have consequences for religious group identifications with mutually exclusive nations. Alternatively, perhaps those with more common national outlooks in different religions find it easier to make friends across religious lines. At a minimum, friendship between religions does nothing to reinforce national differences between religions.

(b) Constitution

Two constitutional issues used in the earlier surveys concerned the Union of N. Ireland and Great Britain and affect towards the Queen. As far as these two constitutional issues are concerned, friendship between religions appears to have greater consequences for Catholics than for Protestants. Inter-religious friendship may promote an easier acceptance of the Northern Ireland Constitution among Catholic schoolboys. Whatever the direction of influence between such friendships and political values, it certainly seems quite clear that friendship between religious groups does nothing to reinforce anti-Constitutional attitudes.

(c) Government

After researching whether or not schoolboys had a perception of Government and what form this perception took, boys were asked, in all three surveys, how they felt about Government. In the earlier samples (1971-72) Government referred to Stormont whilst in the Greater Craigavon sample (1975) Government meant Westminster (Direct Rule). During the adult survey (1975) tenants were asked how important they thought it was to obey what Government commanded through laws and regulations. Friendship between religions is positively related to higher affect and obedience towards Government at four different time periods during the current violence in N. Ireland. The relationships, although nowhere very strong, is much more obvious among Catholics than among Protestants. For instance, Catholic Secondary schoolboys (1971) who had Protestant friends were 20 per cent more positive to Government than their more estranged co-religionists.

(d) The Security Forces

During the years of disorder Protestant and Catholic children and young people have differed widely in their views of the police and the soldiers. In most cases friendship between religions is not related to attitudes towards the security forces among Protestant boys. In the Greater Craigavon survey (1975), however, those with Catholic friends are more positive towards the police and the soldiers. Among Catholic schoolboys, in particular, friendship across religious lines is consistently linked, in all three surveys, to more positive views of the police and army. For instance, in the Greater Craigavon survey Catholic boys who had Protestant friends were twice as likely to be positive in their views of the security forces than their more segregated co-religionists.

(e) Challenges to the Government, Vandalism and Violence

In N. Ireland the authority of various governments have been challenged by actions that fall short of bloodshed. For instance, the Catholic Rent Strike (1971) challenged the Stormont Government's internment policies and the Ulster Worker's Strike (1974) was a generally non-violent means of bringing down the N. Ireland (power-sharing) Executive. Holding illegal demonstrations, such as banned parades, is another common form of challenge which has been issued to governments in N. Ireland. In both of the earlier surveys (1971-72) schoolboys divided fairly evenly on whether or not Protestant or Catholic parades which had been banned by the Government should, or should not, go ahead. In almost every case friendship across religious lines is negatively associated with such challenges to the Government. In the largest survey (1971) the secondary schoolboys who had friends across religious lines were more than 20 per cent less likely to approve of banned parades than their more segregated school-sharers.

The 1975 Secondary schoolboy survey was primarily concerned with attitudes towards, and acts of, destruction and defacement of housing and neighbourhood facilities. Malicious destruction (against the other religion) and ideological vandalism (against political rules and authorities) seem most applicable in N. Ireland among all the motives for destruction considered.<sup>(6)</sup> Among both Protestants and Catholics the number of destructive acts reported within a six month period decreased among those who had friends across religious lines. Much the same picture emerges regarding attitudes to destruction - the more segregated schoolboys are about twice as ready as others to justify teenage "vandalism". Both teenage justification of destruction and reported acts of destruction decrease among those who count schoolboys in the other religion among their friends.

In all three of the schoolboy surveys between 1971-75 similar questions were used regarding approval of violence for either a Protestant Ulster or a United Ireland according

to the respondents religion. In the earlier surveys 60 per cent of schoolboys agreed that people had a right to fight in order to keep Ulster Protestant or to bring about a United Ireland. By 1975, 80 per cent of the Greater Craigavon secondary schoolboys approved of violence for these goals. Friendship between religions is negatively associated with approval of political violence. Only among some Protestant schoolboys does a more integrated experience fail to reduce violence approval by less than 20 per cent.

Approximately two-thirds of schoolboys in 1971-72 and nine-tenths of boys in 1975 thought that Protestants and Catholics in N.Ireland disagreed over politics rather than over specifically religious matters such as "God and the Church". In this study friendship across religious boundaries appears as a characteristic which may substantially effect social and political orientations. Friendship between individuals in different religions does appear to generalise to a greater acceptance of the other religious group as a whole for social interaction. Such friendship, however, appears capable of improving communal group relations without weakening or strengthening the specifically religious beliefs and behaviours of those concerned. In what is probably the most divisive area of all in N. Ireland - politics - friendship between religions is related, strongly in many cases, to modifications in extreme political beliefs, attitudes and values.

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The next task of this paper is to look into the background experience of those who have friends across religious lines in N.Ireland in order to see if such inter-communal friendship is, for instance, a social class and area based phenomena, or whether it is equally found among all groups of schoolboys. (We shall concentrate now only upon the schoolboy surveys as the adult survey lacks some of the comparable background controls we need). The second task of this section is to control the effects of friendship between religions upon social and political opinions, attitudes and values to see whether such effects are spurious, relying upon other factors for their apparent influence, or if such effects are to be found among all sub-groups of schoolboys.

Fortunately for the secondary analysis many of the controls were carried forward, from survey to survey, giving twenty comparable background characteristics.

These are:

Religion  
Religious proportions where respondent lives  
Social class  
Social class proportions in school groups (classes)  
Age  
Perceptions of local violence  
Geographical area (e.g. East, West, Belfast)  
Involvement in peer groups/gangs  
Membership of Orange Order (Protestants only)  
Marching with Orange Parades (Protestants only)  
Irish language classes (Catholics only)  
Gaelic games (Catholics only)  
Nationality  
Violence on television watched  
Educational aspirations  
Historical interests  
School type (Grammar etc.)  
School year (Grade)  
School authority (Voluntary, maintained etc.)  
Type of head and staff (religious, lay etc.)

These control variables had to be prepared for multiple regression with friendship between religions as a dependent variable. This was carried out by examining each control variable singly in relation to friendship between religions and selecting the best dichotomies of friendship within each control variable. The dichotomized control variables and the dichotomized friendship variables were then submitted to multiple regression analysis and the independent variables predicting most variance in friendship between religions were used to conduct a "branch analysis" in which we are able to reach sub-groups which vary very considerably in their friendship patterns.

(a) Protestant Secondary Schoolboys (1971)

Among these Protestant boys two-thirds had a friend or friends who were Catholics. Influences appearing to contribute to increases in such friendships are attending a Grammar school, not marching with the Orange Order, and perceiving little or no trouble in the immediate environment (82% had friends who were Catholics). Influences contributing towards a more religiously segregated experience are, attending a secondary modern (Intermediate) school, marching with the Orange Bands, and perceiving some trouble in the local environment (43% had friends who were Catholics).

(b) Catholic Secondary Schoolboys (1971)

Among Catholic Secondary schoolboys in this survey 67 per cent had Protestant friends/friend. Influences which may contribute to increases in such friendships were perceiving no trouble in the local area, attending a Grammar school, and living in the North East of the Province (83% had Protestant friends).

(c) Primary Protestant Schoolboys (1972).

Characteristics contributing to increases in friendship across religious lines are, living in the North East of the Province, being older, and belonging to the middle class (94% had Catholic friends).

(d) Primary School Catholics (1972).

Background factors predicting greater integration between religions among Catholic primary schoolboys are living in the N.East of the Province, and having Irish historical interests (92% had Protestant friends).

(e) Secondary School Protestants (1975).

Characteristics associated with increasing friendship across religious lines among Protestant boys are, aspiring to education after the minimum school leaving age; not marching with Orange Bands; and living in a mixed religion town (81% have Catholic friends).

(f) Secondary School Catholics (1975).

Background factors appearing to influence friendship patterns in this group are, having a national identity other than "Irish" (could be "Ulster" or "N.Irish"); attending a technical school; and perceiving no trouble in the local environment (75% having Protestant friends).

Friendship between religions among schoolboys in N. Ireland varies widely between sub-groups of the various samples. What is most important in relation to this variance, however, is whether or not the apparent influence of friendship in modifying extreme social and political attitudes is simply a spurious effect relying upon the actual variance encountered in these sub-groups. In other words, does friendship between religions really modify extreme political views, or do these other influences bring about the modifications among those who also happen to be friendly with boys in the other religion?

In this study the question of controls upon the association between social and political views and friendship between religions has been approached in two ways:

(a) observational controls; (b) automatic controls.

(a) Observational controls

Living in N.Ireland leads one to make at least two observations about the effects of friendship between religions upon social and political attitudes: (i) there is much more segregation in Belfast than elsewhere in the Province; (ii) working class boys live in the most religiously segregated areas and have much more experience than middle class boys of violent confrontations between religions or with the security forces. Following these observations the relationship between social and political views and friendship between religions was controlled by

both social class and area (Belfast v non-Belfast) for both religions separately. In almost every case the area/social class control made little or no difference to links, where these existed, between social/political attitudes and friendship between religions. Across the range of social and political variables examined earlier, friendship between religions appears to modify extreme beliefs and attitudes among boys of all social classes and areas of N. Ireland.

(b) Automatic controls (Table 2)

Rather than select controls which one intuitively feels may be important for reducing the association between social/political attitudes and friendship across religious lines, one may allow the multiple regression programme to automatically select controls which cause most variance in friendship patterns and use these in higher-order correlations (Partial Correlation). The automatically selected controls have already been discussed when investigating the dispersion of friendships between religions in the various samples (a - f). The automatically selected controls do reduce the strength of relationship between social/political attitudes and friendships between religions, but only to a very limited extent. In many cases the controls have little or no effect upon the relationship between friendship and other characteristics. Where the strength of relationship between friendship and social/political attitudes is reduced by these automatic controls, the reduction is not great enough to allow us to say that friendship between religions is a spurious effect relying upon other underlying factors. Thus, although the level of friendship between religions varies in different sub-groups of schoolboys in N. Ireland, friendship between religions, where it is found, has consequences for some social and political attitudes, beliefs and values. In general, friendship between religions, where it is found, modifies extreme social and political attitudes among schoolboys in N. Ireland without weakening specifically religious beliefs and practices. If one is able to use such friendship between religions as a surrogate for integrated schooling one would be able to say that integrated religious schooling is intimately associated with improved community relations between religions in N. Ireland.

TABLE 2 Strength of Relationships between Social/Political Beliefs/Attitudes and Friendship between Religions  
(zero correlations of .20 or more reported)

	Protestants		Catholics	
	Zero	Higher	Zero	Higher
<u>Secondary Schoolboys 1971</u>				
Image of the other religion	-0.28	-0.21	-0.31	-0.27
Attitude towards Riots	0.30	0.23	0.37	0.31
Similarity to other religion	-0.40	-0.35	-0.41	-0.38
Affect to Government	-	-	0.20	0.14
Affect to Police	-	-	0.34	0.28
Affect to Soldiers	-	-	0.34	0.29
Political Violence	-0.28	-0.22	-0.22	-0.18
Affect to Prime Minister	-	-	0.20	0.15
Affect to Queen	-	-	0.24	0.18
Social Distance:				
- Conversion	0.24	0.19	-	-
- Marriage	0.26	0.18	0.22	0.21
- School-sharing	0.37	0.32	0.36	0.33
- Neighbours	0.41	0.36	0.43	0.38
- Expulsion	-0.38	-0.32	-0.35	-0.31
<u>Primary Schoolboys 1972</u>				
Image of other religion	-	-	-0.27	-0.22
Attitude towards Riots	-	-	0.31	0.30
Similarity to other religion	-0.29	-0.22	-0.43	-0.43
Affect to Government	-	-	0.20	0.20
Affect to Police	-	-	0.24	0.16
Affect to Soldiers	-	-	0.29	0.25
Political Violence	-	-	-0.28	-0.28
Affect to Queen	-	-	0.29	0.29
Social Distance:				
- Marriage	-	-	0.27	0.23
- School-sharing	0.25	0.28	0.32	0.21
- Neighbours	0.34	0.24	0.40	0.35
- Expulsion	-0.24	-0.12	-0.35	-0.34
<u>Secondary Schoolboys 1975</u>				
Image of other religion	0.55	0.49	0.47	0.44
Acts of Vandalism	-	-	0.27	0.23
Similarity to other religion	-0.37	-0.32	-0.38	-0.38
Affect to Police	-	-	0.27	0.24
Affect to Soldiers	-	-	0.30	0.25
Political Violence	-	-	-0.24	-0.20

FOOTNOTES:

1. For a full description of this survey see Some Aspects of the Civic Education of Secondary Schoolboys in Northern Ireland, James Russell (Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission, 1972).
2. For a fuller description of this survey see "Replication of Instability : Political Socialization in Northern Ireland", James Russell, British Journal of Political Science, Vol. 7, pp.115-128
3. For a fuller description of this survey see "Motivations for the Vandalism in N. Ireland : Research Paper", James Russell, Education Conference 1977 (University College, Cork.)
4. For a fuller description of this survey see Housing Amidst Discord (CES, 1980
5. For a description of the Weighting see "Replication of Instability", op. cit.,
6. See "Motivations for Vandalism in N. Ireland", op. cit.,