Vanity of the bonfires? Eleventh night bonfires and loyalist influence after negotiated settlement in Northern Ireland

Terrorism and Political Violence

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20

Vanity of the Bonfires? Eleventh Night Bonfires and Loyalist Influence After Negotiated Settlement in Northern Ireland

Amanda Hall

To cite this article: Amanda Hall (2022): Vanity of the Bonfires? Eleventh Night Bonfires and Loyalist Influence After Negotiated Settlement in Northern Ireland, Terrorism and Political Violence, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2022.2081077

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2081077

TERRORISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE
https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2081077

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Vanity of the Bonfires? Eleventh Night Bonfires and Loyalist Influence After Negotiated Settlement in Northern Ireland

Amanda Hall

School of Politics, Economics, and International Relations, University of Reading, Reading, UK

ABSTRACT

Cultural events can mask latent potential for a resurgence of violence following negotiated settlement, building sectarian identities and support through otherwise-legitimate forms of expression. This article examines this phenomenon in Northern Ireland, investigating how Loyalists utilize Eleventh Night bonfires. It is argued that, in becoming more professional in construction and more sectarian in imagery, bonfires build and maintain paramilitary power, generate political capital within Unionism, and reinforce boundaries between groups. Bonfires are a key part of the culture war which has developed in Northern Ireland, raising vital questions about the role of culture following negotiated settlement in deeply-divided societies more broadly.

KEYWORDS

Northern Ireland; Eleventh Night; culture; paramilitarism; loyalism; sectarianism; post-conflict

Introduction

Direct paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland waned following the 1990s ceasefires and post-Good Friday Agreement weapons decommissioning. Yet cultural celebrations remain battlegrounds through which identities are enacted and territory is marked—replacing paramilitary violence, but serving a similar societal role with displays of strength and community cohesion designed to further enforce boundaries between "us" and "them." This is most evident in the July commemorations of the Battle of the Boyne, as the Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist (PUL)[1] community celebrate the victory of Protestant William of Orange over Catholic King James in 1690; thousands gather to watch bands parade on July. These events are not without controversy or violence: when efforts were made to restrict a band from marching by a Catholic church while playing sectarian songs in Portadown in 1995, a years-long struggle between the Orange Order and the state broke out. Issues around the claiming of space with paramilitary flags or murals celebrating violence have been equally controversial. The cumulative effect of these celebrations has been the transference of conflict identities to a new generation. Cultural and community events allow violent actors to maintain community control, wield influence over formal structures of peace, and reinforce boundaries between ethnic groups through the leveraging of sectarian ideas and images. Groups can not only maintain conflict roles and identities, but also continue to build them—making understanding the role of culture and community after negotiated settlement vital if a return to violence is to be avoided.

While issues around parading, murals, and flags have been studied and challenged by policies, academics, official enquiries, and community organizations, not all controversial cultural and community events have received equal scrutiny. Loyalist bonfires, lit on July 11 each year, remain little-understood as they have adapted to this post-ceasefire climate and been claimed by violent actors seeking to reaffirm local control and build support. These bonfires, constructed of rings of pallets surrounding rubbish under the watch of local Loyalist groups, can reach over thirty meters in height and are frequently adorned with sectarian rhetoric and imagery. This can include the Irish

CONTACT Amanda Hall amanda.hall@reading.ac.uk University of Reading, Shinfield Road, Reading RG6 6EL, UK

tri-color flag, signs reading "KAI" or "KAT,"[2] the campaign posters of nationalist politicians, or effigies of individuals from the Catholic-Nationalist-Republican (CNR) community. Challenges to these structures before they are burnt see violent threats made against those who interfere. Parties attempting to remove structures often need police protection and obscure their identities as they work. Attempts to protect people and property from burning bonfires see neutral actors attacked. However, these are new developments since the Troubles began to wane; during and before the conflict, bonfires were smaller, more local, and largely passed without incident. Many are even anecdotally remembered as being cross-community. As the Troubles gave way to ceasefire, bonfires became a way of demonstrating explicitly sectarian ideas and sympathies. Not only do these events tap into the same societal schism exploited by parades, flags, and murals, but they have also changed to fill this role at the same time as other forms of culture have held fast to their "traditional" expression as a mark of legitimacy.

What accounts for the changes to the practice of bonfires, and how have bonfires been used to express sectarian ideas, reinforce conflict-related identities, and allow paramilitary groups to increase their power in ways that have been supported by formal structures of power following paramilitary ceasefires? I argue that Loyalist paramilitary groups have claimed Eleventh Night bonfires to build support from the community, to regain and retain territorial control, and to reiterate the boundaries between the PUL and CNR communities. This capitalizes on the historical perception by many in the PUL community that they have been "left behind" by the peace process. This idea of a loss of control and influence has been exacerbated by recent political events in Northern Ireland that see the influence of unionist politicians eroding, while Brexit threatens their relative status within the United Kingdom more broadly.

In addition to addressing bonfires in Northern Ireland, this research contributes to debates about peace in deeply-divided societies, particularly liberal peace in western democracies. As many countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, see increasing polarization and the development of fervent culture wars around the perceived erosions of culture and identity, lessons from Northern Ireland can be transferred. This research applies James Davison Hunter's "culture war" model—issues on which there is no middle ground, allowing them to become sources of major social cleavage[3]—to the whole of society as divisions permeate seemingly unrelated aspects of life and impose barriers on moving between groups. This all-encompassing model of a "culture war" has entered the global lexicon in recent years, linking together myriad issues under binary, identity-based division. There is a growing body of work on culture wars and commemoration, but researchers have yet to fully address the ways these challenges can be leveraged by violent actors to build legitimacy and support. This article, as part of the broader literature about peace-building and ethnic conflict, highlights the challenges of balancing values of freedom of expression with those of peace and stability and how these challenges can be exploited to further build conflict identities and distance between groups. Through this case study, I argue that tacitly-approved symbolic confrontations strain the peace and further divide society, emphasizing that it is violent actors—and not the formal structures set in place by the Good Friday Agreement—that determine Northern Ireland's future.

Sectarianism, boundaries, and cultural celebrations

Violent actors, such as paramilitary organizations, seek to maintain power and control after their campaigns have been formally ended through negotiated settlement. This is particularly true if negotiated settlement has been seen as a "defeat" for the organization or the community it represents, leading to resistance not on the substance but rather on the basis of perception. The Israel-Palestine conflict is illuminating here: support for negotiated settlement is predicated not on the contents of an agreement, but rather on the emotions it evokes—including nebulous ideas about "fairness" and the appropriate degree to which the out-group has been "punished."[4] A growing body of research considers the link between emotions and peacebuilding, contending that initial emotional responses to a settlement shape later actions to either uphold or challenge its terms.[5] If these build on historical

feelings of betrayal or give the impression that the other side has not been sufficiently penalized, it follows that space opens up on which violent actors can capitalize to reassert their power, control, and legitimacy as protectors of their community.

Opportunities to build on markers of identity and belonging are most valuable when clear boundaries exist, built on intentional ethnic allegiance and identity practice rather than chance. It is perhaps not surprising that, in essentializing identity through the structures of negotiated settlement and in the absence of direct violence, culture has become a new vector for contestation. Literature on ethnic conflict contends that conflict escalation builds in-group legitimacy and support, and prompts official governmental responses to demands and expectations.[6] Group mobilization supports rebellion against states, particularly in cases where groups feel economically marginalized or excluded by the state; violent or extreme actors can leverage these grievances to push back against formal institutions through increasingly extreme demands,[7] which states are inclined to meet when the group is perceived to be a threat.[8] This can incentivize the development of "anti-government" agendas and rhetoric even from armed groups that may be "pro-government" in their fundamental aims,[9] as in the case of Loyalist paramilitary organizations acting in defiance of government structures in which parties representing their community maintain the largest vote share due to the perceived weaknesses of the state since the peace process.[10] This "instrumentalisation of identity" allows grievances to be leveraged to benefit particular actors within groups, explaining the extent to which identity can be mobilized by violent actors in civil conflicts as it contributes to different views of the conflict itself.[11]

In Northern Ireland, insecurity over the relative position of the PUL and CNR communities is nothing new: "relative group status" and "parity of esteem" have been sticking points since the 1990s.[12] By 2007, it was clear that the optimism following the Good Friday Agreement referendum and perception that the peace process was of equal benefit to both communities had begun to wane, particularly among the PUL community,[13] while recent debates around Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol have reignited debates about the equal implementation of the peace process and its promises.[14] Divisions became increasingly stark as paramilitary decommissioning was complete. Without the immediate threat of paramilitary action as major groups had committed themselves to the principles of peace,[15] markers of identity and belonging gained new salience as ways of demarcating "us" and "them." These divisions remain felt and relevant to daily life through the formal structures of the Good Friday Agreement itself, which made identity the center of new institutions, furthering the perception of Northern Ireland as driven by a single binary.[16] Paradoxically, in tolerating sectarian division and symbolic confrontations because they are not direct violence, the conditions that make a return to violence possible remain largely unchanged and unchallenged, as division is further legitimized and can be leveraged to maintain power disparities between groups.

Yet, despite their ability to harbor the "preconditions" of violence—"factors that set the stage for terrorism over the long run"[17]—tolerance for culture and identity are hallmarks of the liberal peace, especially in Western democracies, such as Northern Ireland. This inherent tension in the "liberal peace" has been examined for both its "intellectual and practical shortcomings," and the extent to which the resultant "peace" fails to be fully emancipatory.[18] The ability of the structures of peace to reinforce power dynamics, especially dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that come with a focus on material security, has been argued to reinforce conflict dynamics based on the parties that participate in peace negotiations and therefore have their interests represented in its terms,[19] trapping society within the structures of conflict, while the need to oversimplify conflict structures to reach a negotiated settlement limits the ultimate success of the peace process.[20] These weaknesses of the liberal peace are exacerbated in Northern Ireland, where negotiated settlement focused on what could be agreed (an end to the Troubles) and allowed what could not be agreed (culture and identity) to continue to develop, further legitimizing the actions of those who seek to maintain societal division and becoming a new outlet for sentiment previously expressed through direct violence. Recent research indicates young loyalists are particularly motivated to act by a combination of losing territorial control, challenges to their culture, and the perception that the CNR community are benefitting at PUL expense.[21]

It is in the interests of paramilitary groups that markers of culture and identity continue to divide—incentivizing the participation of those who may act as spoilers to peace. Individuals and groups who may have signed on to the negotiated settlement may only invest in its terms insofar as they can be leveraged for the group's own aims and power maintenance. This mirrors larger trends around nationalism and nationhood, described by Christian Joppke as "not so much 'nation-building' but 'nation-freezing'" within civic and ethnic nationalisms, reinforcing boundaries between groups as individuals seek to regain control or power they perceive themselves or their community to have lost.[22] This desire to retain influence provides paramilitary actors with a valuable opportunity. In Northern Ireland, recent research suggests that one expression of this has come through punishment shootings by paramilitary organizations as violent actors retain social control through mechanisms that have become normalized,[23] dating back to the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement and its perception as a loss for the PUL community,[24] as well as broader patterns of violence and control such as drugs trafficking and extortion.[25] This contributes to a body of work evaluating paramilitary violence since the peace process gained momentum.[26] There is little reason to think that mechanisms which are less directly violent cannot be similarly leveraged, as previously evidenced among dissident Republicans.[27]

At present, little is known in academic literature about Eleventh Night, especially when compared to well-studied cultural practices such as parading and flags. On these, a consensus has developed that they hold a dual role, serving as both a ritual connecting past and present and as a means of staking a claim over the future.[28] This is particularly true with commemorations and symbols that are historically linked to the PUL community, such as Orange Parades and the Union Jack—symbols which gained salience as the Troubles waned.[29] Both have been subjects of clashes between the state and the people since the early 1990s, most notably with violence at Drumcree beginning in 1995 and the Flag Protests of 2012.[30] In both cases, the sense of fear and potential for loss by the PUL community was palpable: any change to traditional parading routes in Portadown or traditional flag-flying patterns over Belfast City Hall were portrayed as further evidence of the encroachment of the CNR community, prompting escalating violence and demanding a political response as protests threatened to unravel the fabric of peace.

This alienation has not been limited to cultural events, permeating the relationship between the PUL community and the state since the early 1990s. Some pockets of working-class loyalism—particularly those controlled by the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), such as the community in Ardoyne at the heart of the Holy Cross disputes—have developed a community identity built on the victimization of the PUL community during and after the Troubles. This belief of being "left behind" by the state began to take root with Loyalist and Unionist opposition to the Sunningdale Agreement in 1973. This has strengthened in response to grievances that the PUL community has been abandoned by the state. Many perceive the state to have prioritized the CNR community and failed to equally apply the peace dividend as the peace process—including the creation of the new Northern Ireland Assembly—explicitly included the CNR community to redress previous exclusion.[31] Upset to historical PUL social and political hegemony is palpable and perceived as a loss for the PUL community, driving the belief that they are vulnerable to the further eradication of their rights and identity due to the zero-sum nature of this power. The state is no longer perceived to be solely on their side. Alienation from the state through this belief creates opportunities for violent and non-violent non-state actors to expand their influence in ways designed to attract government attention and change the status quo.[32] This is further shaped by ideas about identity wherein individuals develop their mutually-reinforcing sense of both "self" and "other" through group membership—particularly in post-conflict transitions, where the residual effects of violence (and the impact of that violence on shaping identities) leave the possibility of a return to conflict simmering beneath the surface.[33]

Conceptualizations of the "culture war" may have begun with Hunter's work documenting single-issue divisions in American society, but have developed in the years since along two divergent tracks with explanatory power over the grievances of the PUL community. The first of these is rooted in ideas of conservativism and the creation of culture articulated by Edmund Burke, as well as those of cultural capital and symbolic violence defined by Pierre Bourdieu.[34] Here we can fix the debate around

a resistance to change and how the subjective nature of culture means that it only maintains its power through social reproduction—so meaning can be changed in response to stimuli. The second is seen in the mainstream usage as a means of sorting groups and individuals based on larger value structures expressed around issues deemed to be the "fine tip of the wedge." These two framings overlap in the relationship between culture and power, as well as the significance of widespread desire to maintain or challenge the status quo and associated structures. Both are useful for understanding changes to Eleventh Night and the implications of those changes for the future of peace.

The utility of both conceptualizations of the "culture war" is clear in how social divisions have entered the zeitgeist not as single issues but instead as world views that distort the entire field of vision. While Hunter described division based on a single feature, leaving room for overlap in other areas,[35] the culture war as develops in deeply-divided societies becomes all-encompassing: there is only a single binary through which life is defined (or, as a deliberate choice, stood apart from).[36] The culture war thus becomes invisible, lowering the quality of peace and threatening its endurance by reinforcing division and legitimizing conflict structures. In a region emerging from protracted civil conflict, it is not surprising that these fill the gap left by ceasefire, as would-be violent actors continue to exert social control and communicate that they remain ready for a return to action. Social psychologists explain this through social identity theory as identity is derived from both group belonging and group difference,[37] while researchers of social movements highlight the link between understanding and mobilizing this shared or collective identity for political purposes.[38] Both approaches illuminate how the culture war maps on to binary ethnic identity and its expression, explaining developments in Northern Ireland. Violent actors seek to capitalize on markers of "their" identity and culture—particularly those markers of identity and culture which are not already claimed—in ways that can help build power and legitimacy. These cultural markers, in turn, become potent symbols of an us-versus-them culture war built from social identity schisms, growing in significance and salience as identity groups mobilize around or against them. Seemingly commonplace choices—so-called "banal sectarianism"[39]—become ways violence endures after the end of a conflict, filling the void left by the formal ceasefire and ensuring that identities shaped by violence endure.

Old grievances are now played out around seemingly low-stakes events, which in turn become new battlegrounds. Identity-based conflict cannot be easily addressed through formal processes. Instead—as demonstrated through current understandings of contested peace, peacebuilding in deeply-divided societies, and the endurance of violence after peace accords—violence takes on new forms within formal institutions, shifting to accommodate the silencing of weapons while failing to adjust to any expectation that formal truce may change inter-community relations. As militant action waned in Northern Ireland, cultural events gained renewed salience. Darby explains the transition:

> During the period of organized violence, paramilitaries must be dominant and disciplined to be effective. When a ceasefire is declared the discipline of the military campaign diminishes, but the underlying sectarian hatreds remain, taking the form of riots and undisciplined confrontations with ethnic rivals or the police.[40]

This sectarian hatred can also find an outlet in cultural or identity-based practices, such as Eleventh Night. An alternative viewpoint is that this rise in inter-group conflict on a less militant level is, in part, due to the lower barrier to entry of the culture war, making building or attending a bonfire a seemingly low-stakes activity. Either interpretation points to renewed desire to clearly demarcate boundaries between groups. These shifting kinds of violence—rather than its elimination—highlight that these are the same grievances, acted out through new mechanisms.

It is not surprising that violence endured after ceasefire was declared. Violence—both direct harm and its immediate threat—has become not only the result of sectarian division but continues to support this division.[41] These are simultaneous, and overlapping, processes. The violence of the Troubles further polarized people and communities from the pre-existing divisions of the 1950s and before; now it is those boundaries perpetuating the threat that violence may return. These patterns of behavior risk the endurance of peace, ensuring that the "new beginning" promised by the Good Friday Agreement is not achieved. Instead, as Darby warned, "The danger is that such confrontational

violence may swing the balance from negotiation back toward a military campaign."[42] The participation of paramilitary groups in the construction and celebration of bonfires, coupled with language calling for extermination of Catholics in Northern Ireland, as through signs reading "KAI" and "KAT," seems to reiterate that this swinging pendulum may have a short string.

Eleventh Night bonfires are a perfect candidate to be co-opted as a method of expression and control for paramilitary groups. Unlike parades, long linked to the Orange Order's politics of "respectability," the informality of bonfires has left them as cultural free radicals. Indeed, Orange Order have repeatedly sought to distance themselves from the perceived hooliganism of Eleventh Night to concentrate on the July 12 marches, beginning in the 1990s and continuing through to discussions of bonfire celebrations during the COVID-19 pandemic.[43] Additionally, while increased violence and controversy around parading at Drumcree led to the development of the Parades Commission, which can impose restrictions on the practice of parades enforced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), bonfires have escaped such restriction. While the Parades Commission has not been without controversy—including claims that it is illegitimate or threatens the expression of individual and community identity, as well as cultural practice—the Commission endures, and controversy around July 12 parades has drastically reduced.[44] As parades are highly controlled by both their participants and outside regulations—including bans on the signing of sectarian songs or re-routing parades away from nationalist areas—bonfires have emerged as an opportunity for unregulated cultural practice, dictated by local councils and influenced by community demands or the threat of violence. For example, in 2017 Belfast City Council's effort to place an injunction on bonfires saw Loyalist firebrand Jamie Bryson demand that unionists speak out against the perceived restrictions; unionist leaders quickly complied, accusing Sinn Féin of instituting a "cultural war" against Eleventh Night and PUL culture.[45] The distancing of the Orange Order from these events, lack of formal oversight, and ability of controversial figures to demand support from politicians have given violent actors an opportunity to claim these celebrations and associated trappings of legitimacy.

A 2017 report commissioned by the Community Relations Council and backed by government—leaked to the *Irish News* marked "confidential draft" in 2018 and otherwise unavailable—concluded that bonfires are a vehicle through which paramilitary groups "extend their legitimacy and control community activities."[46] Comments from anonymous interviewees note "There is no way something like that is going to happen without the boys [paramilitary members]," and "If we get this [managing bonfires] wrong we are legitimising things. People are extorting, holding communities to ransom."[47] Respondents stressed that the lack of direct and open ownership of these structures made them difficult to talk about, much less address in systematic and productive ways.[48] Yet, despite this paramilitary link, the importance of bonfires to these communities was stressed in the 2021 report by the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, which heard that bonfires were "a key element in the heritage and traditions within the Unionist and Loyalist community" as bonfires were part of "the central period of celebration and commemoration within the broad Unionist and Loyalist community."[49] Alongside this, the commission found that:

> people do not always view bonfires positively. The Commission heard that in some areas bonfires are dangerous and raise considerable safety and environmental concerns, particularly where they are constructed close to homes or property, or burn toxic materials. The burning of flags, emblems, election posters and other offensive images and items on bonfires also causes concern to many people.[50]

These debates—framed, but not resolved, by efforts to address such controversies—highlight the perception of the power held by paramilitary groups as it relates to cultural practice and the difficulties in disrupting the ideas.

This article addresses both why and how the process seemingly unquestioned by those interviewed has taken shape, arguing that violent actors leverage cultural events to maintain power and control within their communities, as well as reinforce boundaries with the "other" community in divided societies. By framing this as a way conflict is continued through the structures of "peace," I address

both what has changed in the practice of Eleventh Night since the early 1990s and what drives these changes. Through increased professionalism, politicization, and sectarianism these pyres indicate that where there is smoke—in the symbols and rhetoric used—there is fire, as deep-seated identities which once supported the Troubles endure. Paramilitary organizations have leveraged bonfires to maintain their power and influence through seemingly "legitimate" celebrations, allowing them to gather support from their communities and from political actors based on historical meaning and the preservation of tradition. This has ramifications for our understanding of post-conflict societies, as well as inter-group relations more broadly as violent actors leverage growing culture wars to support their aims.

Eleventh Night bonfires throughout history

Eleventh Night bonfires highlight the role of culture in keeping conflict alive for a new generation, making this a valuable case study for understanding cultural evolution after negotiated settlement. Through in-group and out-group concerns about identity and belonging, as well as security under perceived threat, the vulnerabilities of the peace-time order are made clear. Violent actors can exploit these vulnerabilities to reinforce boundaries between groups that may have been blurred by the peace process. Reinforcing boundaries allows these actors to maintain control through legitimate means of cultural expression which are left unchallenged by the structures of the liberal peace. Bonfires have gained new and renewed salience through a series of deliberate choices and changes, demonstrating how nationalism and identity are enacted in deeply-divided societies in the immediate aftermath of protracted inter-community violence.

These bonfires are the strongest remaining example of the celebration of ritual events with fire in Northern Ireland, though they have changed—in both practice and purpose—since the end of the Troubles. Traditionally both Catholics and Protestants have included bonfires in celebrations at Midsummer, May Day, and Halloween.[51] By the eighteenth century, these non-sectarian events were joined by single-community celebrations, as Protestants gathered on July 11 to commemorate the victory of William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne—recalling fires along the coast to guide his ships—while Catholics gathered on August 14 to celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of Mary.[52] Over time this latter tradition was replaced with celebrations on August 8, the anniversary of internment.[53] Catholic bonfires have waned in popularity, though they are still used in response to Eleventh Night in some cases—such as in August 2020 where poppy wreaths were burned on a bonfire in Derry,[54] or bonfires lit in Strabane on Halloween where the inclusion of flags is justified by organizers as "that the 'other side' do it"[55]—evidence of the importance of "fairness" to the endurance of peace.

Though other bonfire traditions have waned, Eleventh Night endures. While bonfires now tower over residential areas, images from the late 1970s and early 1980s show more casual structures, built from scrap wood and tree branches gathered by young boys in the weeks leading up to July 11.[56] Paramilitary groups were not the instigators; bonfires throughout the Troubles were built by local residents, without violent imagery and rhetoric. Bonfires from this period are remembered as "proper pyramid shapes not square or round or superstructures."[57] Some mixed residential areas included Catholic neighbors.[58] Bonfires during the late 1970s and 1980s are remembered as friendly competitions between neighbors with street games, singing, and dancing: one local history, published in 1995 by residents of the Rathcoole Estate, accompanied photos of haphazard piles of wood and other waste with the explanation that "if you had the biggest 'boney,' then you attracted the largest crowd of people to watch and had a big party,"[59] bringing the community together, even at the height of the Troubles.

Yet, at the same time as bonfires were being recalled by Rathcoole residents as informal events culminating in friendly competition, they were becoming increasingly controversial. What had previously been Williamite historical commemoration or a general community event—not unlike July 12 parades today—shifted to target Northern Ireland's CNR population and demonstrate community strength and cohesion. This developed as Eleventh Night came under control of Loyalists

who were losing influence in other arenas. Bonfires changed to mark territory and belonging, bringing the in-group closer together and further dividing it from the out-group. This was first noted in academic research concerning flags in 1994, when Bryon and McCartney claimed "it has [in recent years] become more common to erect the opponent's flag on bonfires which are then of course burnt."[60] Depictions from 1990 show an outside perspective on what had become a "sanitised presentation" of the commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne, with reports that year's celebrations integrated "Kick the Pope" messaging as "a demonstration by loyalists that this is their state, carved out by Britain in its and their interests and in which nationalists have no place other than as second-class citizens."[61] This description, from the *Sinn Féin West Belfast Bulletin*, demonstrates that Eleventh Night was perceived as deliberately aimed at intimidating the CNR community as the Troubles began to wane—and that this was a marked change from experiences in years immediately previous.

Bonfires are an example of how the long-term preconditions of violence can become normalized. Specifically, these celebrations demonstrate how such preconditions have remained relevant in Northern Ireland in the form of acceptable sectarianism, encouraged by Loyalist rhetoric. While bonfires had been anti-Catholic in previous years due to this focus on William of Orange and the history of Protestantism, this began to shift to be directly against nationalists and Republicans; while there are links between these identities, this change in focus is significant for its reflection of the quality of peace and community relations. Eleventh Night bonfires demonstrate that the Good Friday Agreement itself is not sufficient to bring about an end to conflict, as their historic informality meant they were well-poised for Loyalist exploitation. Conflict may change form but remain destabilizing as violent actors seek to capitalize on deeply-held feelings of identity and belonging among individuals and communities after an elite-driven process of political settlement.[62] This, in turn, keeps conflict alive and passes it to a new generation through seemingly "acceptable" practices. In evaluating these changes through the lens of ethnic conflict, peacebuilding, and commemoration it becomes possible to identify how the structures of the liberal peace can be exploited by violent actors to maintain power and relative status. This has implications not only for understanding the quality of peace after negotiated settlement, but also for navigating the increasingly fraught "culture wars," drawing new attention to divisions over identity and belonging.

Becoming more inflammatory: Changes in Eleventh Night

Bonfires are now more professional, politicized, sectarian, and divisive than ever before, illuminating the extent to which violent actors have seized control of bonfires and use them to gain community support while threatening "outsiders" with violence. These changes—coupled with the insular nature of bonfires, as they do not involve the nationalist community directly—highlight the vulnerability of peace. As communities become increasingly polarized through ritualized markers of culture and identity, the potential for the "new beginning" of the Good Friday Agreement seems further from realization than ever before—a worrisome sign, particularly as Northern Ireland has been seen by the international community as a template of success to be modelled in other deeply-divided societies aiming to end violence.

Eleventh Night bonfires demonstrate how the legacy of active conflict is enacted through cultural celebration, allowing paramilitary involvement and support to simmer under the surface and maintain key "preconditions" of violence. These celebrations are important to Protestant communities, who understand bonfires as part of their cultural heritage, and warn Catholic communities, who see bonfires as a threat. This dual perception supports the argument that the role of these fires has shifted from commemorating the Battle of the Boyne toward being distinctly anti-CNR events led by Loyalist paramilitary groups communicating both the strength of their community support and their continued resistance to the "other." These simultaneous meanings are reinforced by changes to the practice of bonfires since the early 1990s, making them a bellwether of the quality of peace.

The most visible change to Eleventh Night bonfires is their size and the professionalization of their construction. In communities across Northern Ireland, including Newtownards, Craigyhill, and Moygashel, bonfires have become sources of pride and indicators of community support for and the strength of paramilitary groups who organize construction and "protect" bonfires from outsiders. Those celebrating Eleventh Night before and during the Troubles were likely to find themselves gathered around a pile of tree branches;[63] one 2019 bonfire in the Craigyhill estate in Larne proudly celebrated being built from fifty-four lorry-loads of pallets, numbering approximately 9500 and stacked into a pile 225 layers—over 100 feet—tall.[64] The bonfire on this site in 2021 was larger still, reported to be over 140 feet tall and made of over 17,000 pallets.[65] While these Larne structures have been newsworthy for their height, they are not the only examples of "monster bonfires" seen in recent years: across Northern Ireland, bonfires dwarf housing estates and businesses, constructed with previously-unthinkable resources and precision.

This change has produced new physical and environmental risks through both size and construction materials (including tires used as internal supports).[66] As pyres threaten homes and businesses, public services are increasingly called in to deal with dangerous structures. This brings with it evidence of a secondary change in the practice of bonfires: their increased politicization and distance from agents of the state. In the days leading up to July 11, 2017, for example, the fire service responded to previous experiences of disorder with a public information campaign to reassure that the presence of firefighters was not an attempt to "ruin" the event or interfere with the "fun," but rather a response to the threat of these massive structures.[67] Despite this effort, multiple crews were attacked for efforts to interfere with these displays;[68] similar scenes have played out in the years since. In 2021, the fire and rescue service that they experienced eighty-one "bonfire related mobilisations" between July 9 and July 11[69]—a marked increase from 2020 (twenty-four incidents, though celebrations were limited by pandemic-related restrictions), and 2019 (thirty-four incidents).[70]

Despite being called in, public services have little control over bonfires. As arms of the state, any involvement is perceived as the repression of legitimate cultural display and met with hostility or, in some cases, outright targeted violence.[71] This reinforces a crucial message of the culture war: paramilitary groups are the legitimate sources of power in these areas, and any interference of outside forces (even in emergencies) is tantamount to an attack on community sovereignty, which is seen as more important than state legitimacy. It is perhaps not surprising that Loyalists in communities with the largest and most controversial bonfires—including Craigyhill, Newtownards, and Moygashel—were among those who declared in April 2021 that they would not engage with the policing of bonfires following controversy about policing standards surrounding the June 2020 funeral of republican Bobby Storey.[72]

These displays of strength are part of larger patterns of paramilitary activity, such as "punishment attacks," used to enforce rules and control communities; while the number of such attacks peaked in 2001 before dropping dramatically, their number has steadily increased in the last decade.[73] This increase—coming after the 2007 restoration of Stormont—further demonstrates the extent to which paramilitary groups have grown in influence and strength. Here again, agents of the state have attempted to intervene, as with a 2018 public service campaign, "Ending the Harm," providing guidance for individuals and communities to work against these organizations.[74] Of course, these efforts only work insofar as communities can engage with efforts willingly or without fear of reprisal. Despite the size of the 2019 Craigyhill bonfire, and its proximity to nearby homes, no complaints were raised to either the Council or the Housing Executive,[75] and the structure is not unique in this categorization. The challenges of peace are seen though this interplay: clandestine groups remain powerful, controlling communities even when that comes at material cost. By normalizing sectarian language and activities—rather than working to directly counter them, as has been the approach taken to other kinds of paramilitary activity—it becomes a short step to a new wave of direct violence. This was proven in spring and summer of 2021 when paramilitary-led riots spread in response to perceived shortcomings of policing and the flaws of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Efforts to address hostility against and violence toward state agents are stymied by the cultural significance of these events, including how it has been passed to a new generation. In 1995, those in Rathcoole recalled the bonfires of their youth in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a "history [that] was handed down to us by our elders and peers," though even then "it was just the 12th" without complete historical understanding.[76] Generational transference of bonfires was more recently raised at the 2018 Northern Ireland Youth Forum. Here, young people identified that bonfires were "a tradition within their communities."[77] However, many struggled to identify what exactly was meant by this tradition, or what it was celebrating, instead pointing out that "it's about bitterness . . . it's sectarian and it drags everyone into hard line thoughts;" "it's all about hatred, especially when the flags get burnt;" and "it's about the paramilitaries and having a place in the community."[78] Alongside this critique of the events was the sense that there was "a negative bias in media reporting around Unionist and Loyalist culture, particularly when it came to bonfires . . . participants felt that individuals were being demonized for their involvement in bonfires. There was a sense that Unionist culture, in general, was being denigrated."[79] Here again is evidence of a culture war dividing communities from each other and the state, with conflict over symbols and rituals conflated with fear of being made illegitimate, powerless, or unwelcome.

In addition to growing in size and further dividing communities from the state, Eleventh Night bonfires have grown in controversy through the integration of explicitly anti-Catholic images. These demarcate the social boundary previously policed through paramilitary action; the prevalence of such demonstrations has grown as the culture war has gained strength and replaced the direct violence of the Troubles. Sectarianism has found a new outlet: changes to the practices of Eleventh Night are not just process-based (as community competition encourages taller structures) but symbolic in their own right. They signal ownership of these celebrations not by the community but by the paramilitary groups who most benefit from their practice. As bonfires rarely come up against the nationalist community directly—the 2021 bonfire at Tigers Bay, near the interface with New Lodge in Belfast being a notable recent exception[80]—this symbolism and messaging is crucial as a way of communicating with those seen as "other."

The most controversial of these symbolic markers are sectarian: the burning of Irish flags, Nationalist politicians' campaign posters or effigies,[81] or signs reading "KAT" or "KAI." In these symbols bonfires depart from the connected celebration of parades, which continue to focus on William of Orange. These are new additions to bonfire celebrations that were not seen during the Troubles, instead becoming commonplace as violence began to wane. Rather than glorifying their own culture, this explicit anti-Catholic, anti-Irish, and anti-Nationalist rhetoric shines a spotlight on the sentiments of paramilitary actors normalized beyond the ceasefire. The most aggressive celebrations are the result of intentional paramilitary action, rather than the organic sentiments of an aggrieved community. Most notably, the presence of armed gunmen, including instances where weapons were discharged,[82] demonstrates the (at least tacit) support and presence these organizations maintain. While violence is not a new feature of Eleventh Night[83] the shifting of sectarianism from riots, bombings, and shootings to the bonfire itself demonstrates how sectarian ideas have become normalized and sanitized for popular consumption, helping to build further support for paramilitary groups and Loyalist sentiment in ways that engaging in direct violence could not achieve.

Bonfires have become part of the post-1998 zeitgeist, constructed, as Dominic Bryan argues the parading tradition has been,[84] to serve a specific political purpose. These escalations, particularly as they are maintained through decisions made by young people, indicate the degree to which "tradition" has become a means through which conflict can be kept in the public consciousness and passed to a new generation, highlighting the continued vulnerability of peace in the region. Even in cases where Loyalists themselves may not influence the celebration, the normalization of sectarian language and symbols in celebrating Eleventh Night is important for passing these beliefs on, as evidenced by the perceptions of young people interviewed. This signals how these bonfires have developed a larger significance than during the pre-"peace" years: they are not only significant for their role in physically bringing the community together, but also for what they represent—and what it would mean if

"outsiders" were successful in attempts to intervene. Youth bonfires have found themselves in the crosshairs: when funding was retracted for the Roden Street bonfire in 2017 over concerns about its size, the children's bonfire at "Sandy Row Fun Day" was cancelled by organizers. Calls then went out on social media—it was "not fair the kids have to suffer"—without acknowledgement of why funding was pulled.[85] This version of events becomes a useful mobilization tool in the culture war, further entrenching division for a new generation. This new generation is crucial to paramilitary organizers, as passing along conflict-based identities, grievances, and associated preconditions provides a new cohort of recruits to be mobilized when direct violence does occur—as it did in the riots of spring 2021, when the PSNI arrested boys as young as thirteen and fourteen.[86] It is a short step from celebrating the burning of Irish flags and celebrating the death of Catholics to rioting at an interface against them.

Discussion

It is imperative that bonfires run each year, regardless of human or social cost. This is clear in efforts to restrict access to the sites, even as a matter of safety, under the argument that restrictions to bonfires are cultural oppression. Pushback is legitimized with campaigns such as those run by the fire service,[87] which do not challenge the underlying premise of the legitimacy of violence at bonfire sites. Similarly, where structures pose a risk to homes and property, it is residents—and not the towers—that are displaced.[88] In some cases, bonfires have caused significant structural damage and yet gone on the next year with minimal changes.[89] Where agents of the state have become involved in the removal of pallets, tires, and other constituent parts, great measures have been necessary to ensure their safety, including obscuring identities or police protection.[90] In other cases bonfires have been set alight early, reiterating the lack of state control.[91] Organizers also may hold their ground, refusing to disrupt their planned celebrations. This was the case in 2021, after a bonfire was built on the Loyalist Tigers Bay side of the Tigers Bay/New Lodge interface in Belfast and became subject to legal challenge.[92] This was accompanied by calls for the PSNI to remove the structure—calls that organizers responded to with threats of "serious disorder," including threats to life.[93] This threat was effective and the bonfire burned in its original location on July 11 against the backdrop of the song "Billy Boys," including the lyrics "we're up to our necks in Fenian [Catholic/Irish] blood surrender or you'll die."[94] These pyres remind those watching—or hearing about them, as many Catholics and middle-class Protestants distance themselves—of the endurance of paramilitary control and the independence of these communities from the state, as these songs are sung even by those without paramilitary links. Loyalists show power and control over their local communities, as well as threaten CNR communities, by strengthening these claims of legitimacy.

The example of Tigers Bay further demonstrates the extent to which bonfires have become an accepted source of paramilitary power. Organizers communicated directly through the structure, adding signs to their tower reading "Loyalist Tigers Bay Bonfire" and "Move at your own risk." Calls went out across social media that the area was "under siege," as Bryson again rallied attention; prominent politicians including then-DUP leader Jeffery Donaldson and then-First Minister Paul Givan made statements of support.[95] Political defense further legitimizes these celebrations: bonfires are not a fringe issue relevant only to proximate residents, but are bellwethers of the broader treatment of the PUL community. Support from officials drives the narrative that bonfire organizers act legitimately and with community support. Tiger's Bay Community Group emphasized this:

> This is no longer about a bonfire; it goes to the core of the one-sided peace process over the past 23 years. Unionism must give, and nationalism must get. We have nothing left to give and we as a community will peacefully and lawfully defend the right of the bonfire builders to celebrate our culture.[96]

This "no surrender" mentality—recalling resistance to the IRA during the Troubles, itself referencing the Siege of Derry in 1689—is reiterated by bonfire organizers and supporters.[97] As a result of the zero-sum perception of community relations, any loss for the "self" is a gain for the "other" as one side "gives" and the other "gets." Here again we see the idea of "fairness" and "culture" playing centrally on

the relationship between groups, as well as between groups and the state, in the aftermath of the peace process: because the process is perceived to have benefitted the CNR community at the expense of the PUL community, the latter fails to support the conditions of negotiated settlement while capitalizing on its structures to carry out celebrations with minimal interference.

This highlights two understandings of bonfires and thus their dual role in maintaining paramilitary influence. The first is that builders gain legitimacy in their communities as "defenders" against anti-PUL forces. Community groups, such as those in Tigers Bay, support bonfires and organizers when under threat. But it is not only grassroots support that is built through bonfires: organizers also gain legitimacy from government officials. This can come from statements or appearances at bonfires as well as more macro-level decision-making, such as in the decision of the DUP to withdraw from a cross-community working group on bonfires convened by the Derry and Strabane District Council because they felt the PUL community was "disenfranchised with the whole process within council" and that liaising with bonfire organizers was a more effective way of resolving local issues.[98] They also benefit from calls by politicians against these structures, such as calls by Sinn Féin for the removal of the Tigers Bay structure, as this provides them with examples of oppression. While efforts to restrict bonfires have faltered at the macro-level due to these dynamics, there have been some local attempts to encourage alternative construction materials[99] or to control the size and scope of some bonfires through storing materials until an appropriate time—though in 2017 more than 3,000 stored pallets were stolen from Belfast City Council and unionist councilors opposed the scheme as an attempt "to dictate how loyalists should celebrate their tradition."[100] Challenges and support not only give bonfires and their organizers more legitimacy within government structures, but also reiterate that controversial decisions by violent actors seeking to gain attention or influence can attract support, rather than condemnation.

This perception of legitimacy has been confirmed in survey data from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILTS), asking "How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements about July and August bonfires … Bonfires are a legitimate form of cultural celebration" each year from 2016 to 2020.[101] While less than half of respondents each year indicated they "agree" or "strongly agree" with this statement, it is perhaps not surprising that, given the prominence of PUL bonfires in July in comparison to CNR celebrations in August and at Halloween, there is significant variation in the perception of these celebrations based on the respondent's declared identity (see Table 1).[102]

While Protestant perception of bonfires has remained relatively stable across these surveys, perception of bonfires from Catholic respondents and those who identified as having "no religion" has dropped dramatically. While 24 percent of Catholic respondents and 53 percent of respondents with no religion either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that bonfires were legitimate in 2016, by 2020 this number had dropped to 17 percent and 32 percent, respectively. In the same period, the percentage of respondents in these categories who "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" has grown: from 51 percent and 24 percent in 2016 to 64 percent and 46 percent, respectively, in 2020. This change is not mirrored among those from Protestants who are most likely to celebrate these events or to have bonfires celebrated on behalf of "their" identity, demonstrating how bonfires have drawn a social boundary. 57 percent of Protestants surveyed in 2016 "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, while 20 percent "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed." In 2020, these numbers were 56 percent and 24 percent.

Table 1. Responses to "bonfires are a legitimate form of cultural celebration," 2016 and 2020 (percentages)

	2016: "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"	2020: "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"	2016: "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree"	2020: "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree"
Overall Results	42	38	33	41
Protestant Respondents	57	56	20	24
Catholic Respondents	24	17	51	64
Respondents with no religion	53	32	24	46

The stability of Protestant support—even as bonfires have become more controversial—indicates that these changes reflect a common consensus, rather than the views of a radical fringe. This further legitimizes the actions of bonfire builders and positions them as the voice of the community. This boundary between groups is the goal: bonfires are not about winning over the CNR community or even middle-class Protestants who distance themselves from the celebrations (including moving out of estates where the most controversial structures are built). The more distance put between these "outsiders" and bonfire builders, the more that the narrative of being oppressed or left behind can be leveraged—further incentivizing controversial actions.

While bonfires are not the only battleground of the culture war that has developed since 1998—taking the trappings of previously contested ideas and reforming them in response to negotiated settlement—they are an important part of the larger narrative built around contested identities, territorial control, and the right to belong. This resonates across society, helping everyday actions among individuals become their own micro-referenda on the quality of peace whereby cross-community contact is high when peace seems secure and low or confrontational when the peace seems most at risk. In positioning seemingly commonplace choices as means through which violence can endure after the end of a conflict, it is easy to see the development of a culture war in a deeply-divided society.

There are three overlapping factors which have driven the changes in the practices of Eleventh Night in the last three decades. The first of these is the sense of working-class Loyalist alienation from the state and the peace process in general—sensitivities that have roots in the height of the Troubles and the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement.[103] This is drawn into sharp relief as the structures of the peace process are perceived to have benefitted Catholics at the expense of Protestants—especially as the realization of the civil rights agenda benefitted the CNR population (by extending rights, including to employment, housing, and voting, to all). This exacerbates concerns about the potential for CNR "supremacy," reinforcing distrust in formal actors and challenging their legitimacy in vulnerable communities. As a result, paramilitary actors exploit these fears—demanding "protection money" from businesses, enforcing justice through violence, and controlling cultural celebrations.

Recent years have heightened these fears. Stormont has never been a stable institution, most recently facing collapse in February 2022 following the resignation of First Minister Paul Givan and the subsequent refusal by the DUP to form a new government after the May election. This instability means government cannot be consistently trusted to act on behalf of the people. Fears of abandonment were further supported by the results of the Brexit process and the resultant Northern Ireland Protocol; these policies saw support for Westminster and mainstream politics further erode, leading Loyalist groups to withdraw their support for the peace process through the Loyalist Communities Council in March 2021 and producing widespread rioting in March and April of that year.[104] This withdrawal was treated as a legitimate risk, not saber-rattling by organizations of a bygone era, demonstrating that Loyalist groups continue to pose a threat to peace in their words and deeds. All of this indicates that the changes to Eleventh Night are not the result of inevitable developments in practice—they are deliberate framing as violent actors use cultural markers to remain powerful after ceasefire.

The changes to the practice and production of Eleventh Night are a clear example of how paramilitary groups leverage cultural expression to exert control. This second factor driving changes to Eleventh Night practices builds on previous patterns of insecurity and division—ranging from skepticism about state support for infrastructure development to the "peace walls" between communities that have grown in size and number since the end of the Troubles.[105] The celebration of bonfires are a symptom rather than a cause of control as violent actors seek to exploit vulnerabilities and fears within the community to grow their power, moving the needle away from the goal of "peace." This reading of bonfires as evidence of strategic acting after negotiated settlement provides transportable lessons beyond the region: cultural events are a key commodity in post-negotiation landscapes, allowing violent actors to capitalize on lingering resentments and latent divisions, build support under the guise of "legitimacy," and evoke strong emotions to influence the state.

The third driver of change can be seen in that communities where bonfires are most controversial and violent actors exert the most influence are those which have historically been unstable interfaces or seats of paramilitary support. Paramilitary groups are not necessarily growing their reach, but rather are using bonfires to maintain and deepen their support in these previously-loyal communities. For example, Tigers Bay was described as a "sea of hatred" in 1997, while reports from 2008 emphasized it was important to maintain barriers between Tigers Bay and New Lodge so that violence did not escalate.[106] These patterns of division and confrontation indicate that the precise locations of these flashpoints matter: the preconditions of violence are built into historical memories and relationships that are easily reignited in response to new "threats." As many communities most impacted by Loyalists around Eleventh Night also do not see their needs and priorities reflected in the actions of legitimate powers, it is perhaps not surprising that they have turned to paramilitaries to once again fill the vacuum.

This explains why it is crucial to bonfire organizers that their events go ahead, on time, and at precise locations. All of this is built on control: control of the event, control of the community, and control of the state response. Loyalist groups have proliferated since the end of the Troubles under familiar narratives of "protection," linking themselves to specific local areas in response to local needs. With names like "Cavehill Young Loyalists,"[107] "Ballysally Young Loyalists,"[108] and the "South East Antrim Protestant Interface Network,"—all named after neighborhoods or towns—these organizations present themselves as legitimate representatives of their community to build cultural and social capital within neighborhoods, especially as groups such as the UDA and UVF have agreed to ceasefire and decommissioning.[109] The South East Antrim Protestant Interface Network went so far as to declare in 2007 they were withdrawing their contributions to public and community safety during riots and periods of heightened tension[110]—indicating they had previously filled this "policing" role in general terms. Other organizations focused on specific issues, such as the "Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne" set up in response to protests at the Holy Cross school, which focused on injustices, sectarian attacks, and intimidation they claim had been ignored by politicians.[111] These are examples of how the sentiments expressed through Eleventh Night are part of a broader range of concerns, particularly in the working-class communities that feel they have been left behind by the peace process.

Bonfires are a dramatic way to grasp attention for larger issues, reminding those in power that violent actors remain influential. This allows paramilitary groups to shift larger debates, such as that around Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol. Deliberate changes in practice support this, changing perceptions of bonfire organizers and celebrants and providing more legitimacy. In risking violence through these structures—such as the threats to life made by those in Tigers Bay—the level of influence held by these actors can in turn shift. This is a model that is easily exported to other sensitive subjects and one that can be exploited by both sides of the culture war, setting a dangerous precedent that is difficult to counter once established.

This situation may be shaped by Northern Ireland's unique cultural contours, but clear parallels emerge between this region and others emerging from protracted civil and ethnic conflict. The implied threat of violence and the images of control that this produces are crucial: at some point, the energy to support these celebrations is no longer drawn from violent actors but from the community, who can in turn influence the state. For communities that feel they have been left behind by decades of development prioritizing "the enemy," this is a valuable motivational tactic and incentivizes increasingly extreme action to obtain these responses year-on-year. The timing of these changes reinforces the potential impact of this strategy by exploiting the vulnerabilities of the peace process when relations are at a nadir or stability is already in question—such as the summer of 2021, in the wake of concerns over the Northern Ireland Protocol that sparked rioting and the withdrawal of support for the Good Friday Agreement by the Loyalist Communities Council. Exploiting these points of weakness gives cultural celebrations their maximum potential impact.

Despite increasing controversy surrounding bonfires in recent years, they have received comparatively less attention than related issues of flags and Orange Order parades. This is specifically *because* of the way division is enacted: unlike parades, bonfires do not come up against the

nationalist community as a matter of historical practice. Bonfires—especially the most controversial—are built in distinctly working-class Protestant areas, rather than in "mixed" estates or middle-class communities. In focusing on one narrow cross-section of the community, violent actors maintain a specific kind of conflict identity and ratchet what is seen as an "acceptable" kind of violence year-on-year. Instead of being a response to a local threat or experience, the decision to invoke the "other" is a deliberate decision, renewing attention to the intensity of division. That this is growing in size and scope demonstrates that more than two decades of declared peace in Northern Ireland have not supported an end to conflict, but rather shifted its delivery. Conflict continues to destabilize by incentivizing more extremism. Eleventh Night bonfires demonstrate the depth of division and its renewed role as a marker of community identity which keeps alive the preconditions of violence and risk of return to conflict as paramilitary actors use culture to maintain power.

The violence seen after the Good Friday Agreement around cultural markers highlights the fragility of peace in Northern Ireland in ways that parallel the periods of relative quiet previously in the region's history: root causes of conflict are maintained through patterns of association, identity, and culture.[112] This shifting violence played a crucial role in the peace process—evidenced by the fact that direct violence waned following ceasefires but was functionally replaced by cultural or symbolic violence which continued to threaten the peace.[113] It was not enough that paramilitary guns had largely been silenced in this preliminary foray into peace, as the rise of "ordinary decent crimes"[114] and the shifts in cultural practice which followed indicates that animosity between groups was not limited to paramilitary ideology but has become part of shared social experience.

Conclusion

Eleventh Night celebrations have changed in practice and significance since the Troubles. This has been supported by a number of deliberate changes to bonfire practices in recent years: bonfires have become taller and more professional in their construction, begun bearing sectarian images and symbols, and actively resisted interference by state agents. They have become tools for the expression of political opinions, and forced action from elected officials—further legitimizing these once informal celebrations. All of this has allowed violent actors to leverage bonfires to build and demonstrate their support, simultaneously reiterating their power while threatening the CNR community and, implicitly, the hard-won peace.

These changes highlight how cultural markers have become co-opted by violent actors to reinforce their power after negotiated settlement. Bonfires became controversial as conflict waned, replacing the direct violence of the Troubles with the symbolic violence based on imagery, identity, and threats. That this can occur in a strong state with robust governmental institutions and the hallmarks of the liberal peace is particularly concerning—if these celebrations can be claimed and reclaimed in Northern Ireland, how can similar results be avoided in less stable regions, where state actors may have less legitimacy or fewer resources? This broader application makes understanding the root causes of these changes to Eleventh Night urgent, as they potentially hold the key to disrupting risky patterns when optimism from the peace process is at its height and before controversial changes can be fully established.

This analysis contributes to a new understanding of how violent actors challenge peace after negotiated settlement, bringing into focus the threats generated and sustained through culture and with community support. By clearly demarcating boundaries between "us" and "them," bonfires pass conflict identities to a new generation, capitalizing on the inclusivity of the liberal peace to gain protection and legitimacy for those aiming to exploit social fault lines for their own gain. This sets a dangerous precedent and encourages escalation over time, as the most inflammatory celebrations garner attention and force declarations of support (or condemnation) from all quarters, incentivizing a feedback loop that is not easily disrupted. This, in turn, contributes to the notion that the community is "under attack" from the out-group and draws the in-group closer together, accelerating the loop.

Bonfires are a canary in the coal mine of peace, as the changes in their practice and perception highlight the extent to which grievances between communities endure and violent actors remain prepared to capitalize on these for their own aims.

Acknowledgments

This article has been presented at the University of St Andrews, the University of Reading, the Political Science Association of Ireland Annual Conference, and the Political Science Association Annual Conference. I appreciate feedback received at these presentations, and all those who engaged with the work in its draft form. In particular, this research was improved by comments from Vladimir Rauta, Nick Brooke, Kieran McConaghy, Tim Wilson, and the anonymous reviewers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Amanda Hall is a lecturer in politics and international relations at the University of Reading. Her current research investigates the quality of peace in Northern Ireland during and after the formal peace process. More broadly, her research interests include post-conflict politics and the degree to which violence and its threat continue to shape peace after ceasefires, especially in deeply-divided societies.

ORCID

Amanda Hall http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4929-3257

Notes

1. While the label "PUL" to refer to the Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist community is—like its counterpart "CNR" to refer to the Catholic-Nationalist-Republican community—an oversimplification of the relationship between these identities, these labels are used in this article in keeping with practices of both academia and public policy.
2. "KAI" being an abbreviation for "Kill All Irish" and "KAT" being an abbreviation for "Kill All Taigs," using a derogatory term for Catholics or Nationalists in Northern Ireland.
3. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle To Control The Family, Art, Education, Law, And Politics In America* (Avalon Publishing Group, 1992).
4. Philippe Assouline and Robert Trager, "Concessions for Concession's Sake: Injustice, Indignation, and the Construction of Intractable Conflict in Israel-Palestine" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 9 (2021).
5. See Eran Halperin, *Emotions in Conflict: Inhibitors and Facilitators of Peace Making* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).
6. Manuel Vogt, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Lars-Erik Cederman, "From Claims to Violence: Signaling, Outbidding, and Escalation in Ethnic Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65 (2021): 7.
7. See: Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Halvard Buhaug, *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Frances Stewary, Ed. *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
8. Paul Staniland, *Ordering Violence: Explaining Armed Group-State Relations from Conflict to Cooperation* (Cornell University Press, 2021).
9. Huseyn Aliyev, "Pro-government Anti-government Armed Groups? Toward Theorizing Pro-government 'Government Challengers'" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2020 (advance online publication).
10. Steve Bruce, "The Problems of 'Pro-State' Terrorism: Loyalist Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4, no. 1 (1992): 67–88.
11. Kavus Abushov, "Drawing a Boundary between Structural Factors and Identity in Ethnic Conflict: Bringing Back the Role of Identity," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2020 (advance online publication). See also Velery Philip Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia," *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1995): 130–66, 37.

12. See: Tom Hennessy and Robin Wilson, "With all Due Respect: Pluralism and Parity of Esteem," *Democratic Dialogue*, Report No 7: June 1997. Available at https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/dd/report7/ddreport7.pdf.
13. Roger Mac Ginty and Pierre du Toit, "A Disparity of Esteem: Relative Group Status in Northern Ireland after the Belfast Agreement," *Political Psychology* (2007).
14. Mary C. Murphy, "Northern Ireland and Brexit: Where Sovereignty And Stability Collide?" *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 29, no. 3 (2021): 405–418.; John Garry et. al, "The Future of Northern Ireland: Border Anxieties and Support for Irish Reunification Under Varieties of UKexit," *Regional Studies* 55, no. 9 (2021): 1517–27.
15. Decommissioning has not brought a complete end to paramilitary violence, particularly that from dissident groups, but it does mark a key inflection point in the perception of the threat of violence—and how that threat was managed—by state actors.
16. Amanda Hall, "Incomplete Peace and Social Stagnation: Shortcomings of the Good Friday Agreement," *Open Library of Humanities* 4, no. 2 (August 10, 2018).
17. Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (1981): 381.
18. Oliver P. Richmond, "The Problem of Peace: Understanding the "Liberal Peace," *Conflict, Security & Development* 6 (2006): 3.
19. Emma van Santen, "Identity, Resilience and Social Justice: Peace-making for a Neoliberal Global Order" *Peacebuilding* 9 (2021): 3.
20. Paul Dixon, "Bringing Politics Back In: Interpretations Of The Peace Process And The Security Challenge in Northern Ireland," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 32, no. 4–5 (2021): 812–36.
21. "Sectarianism in Northern Ireland: A Review," The Sir George Quigley Fund Committee, 2018, https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/410227/A-Review-Addressing-Sectarianism-in-Northern-Ireland_FINAL.pdf.
22. Christian Joppke, "Nationalism in the Neoliberal Order: Old Wine in New Bottles?" *Nations and Nationalism* 27 (2021): 4.
23. Kit Rickard and Kristen M. Bakke, "Legacies of Wartime Order: Punishment Attacks and Social Control in Northern Ireland," *Security Studies* (2021) (advance online publication); and Rachel Monaghan, "'An Imperfect Peace': Paramilitary 'Punishments' in Northern Ireland," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 3 (2004): 439–61.
24. Andrew Silke, "Ragged Justice: Loyalist Vigilantism in Northern Ireland," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 3 (1999): 1–31.
25. Andrew Silke, "In Defense of the Realm: Financing Loyalist Terrorism in Northern Ireland—Part One: Extortion and Blackmail," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 21, no. 4 (1998): 331–61. DOI: 10.1080/10576109808436073; Andrew Silke, "Drink, Drugs, and Rock'n'Roll: Financing Loyalist Terrorism in Northern Ireland—Part Two," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 23, no. 2 (2000): 107–27. DOI: 10.1080/105761000265557.
26. See: Rachel Monaghan and Peter Shirlow, "Forward to the Past? Loyalist Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland since 1994," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34 (2011): 8; John Jupp and Matthew Garrod, "Legacies of the Troubles: The Links between Organized Crime and Terrorism in Northern Ireland," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (advance online publication); and Marisa McGlinchy, *Unfinished Business The Politics of "Dissident" Irish Republicanism* (Manchester University Press, 2019).
27. Robert W. White, "Why 'Dissident' Irish Republicans Haven't Gone Away: A Visual Study of the Persistence of 'Terrorism,'" *Contention: The Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Protest* 9 (2021): 1.
28. See: Neil Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Berg Publishers, 1997); Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition And Control* (Pluto Press, 2000); Jonathan S. Blake, *Contentious Rituals: Parading the Nation in Northern Ireland* (Oxford University Press USA, 2019); and Katy Hayward and Milena Komarova, "The Limits of Local Accommodation: Why Contentious Events Remain Prone to Conflict in Northern Ireland," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37 (2014): 9.
29. Flags were mired in controversy before the Troubles, dating back to the Flags and Emblems (Display) Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 which banned the flying of any flag deemed to risk peace in the region. In practice, this was used against the Irish Tricolour while the Union Jack was legally exempt from any control. See: Henry Patterson, "Party versus order: Ulster Unionism and the Flags and Emblems Act," *Contemporary British History* 13, no. 4 (1999): 105–29, DOI: 10.1080/13619469908581562.
30. Adrian Guelke, "Northern Ireland's Flags Crisis and the Enduring Legacy of the Settler-Native Divide," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 20 (2014): 1; Donna Halliday and Neil Ferguson, "When Peace is Not Enough: The Flag Protests, the Politics of Identity & Belonging in East Belfast," *Irish Political Studies* 31 (2016): 4; Kevin Hearty, "The Great Awakening? The Belfast Flag Protests and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist Counter-memory in Northern Ireland," *Irish Political Studies* 30 (2015): 2.
31. Brian Graham, "The Past in the Present: The Shaping of Identity in Loyalist Ulster," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16 (2004): 3; Jennifer Todd, "Northern Ireland: From Multiphased Conflict to Multilevelled Settlement," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 15 (2009): 3–4; Neil Southern, "Protestant Alienation in Northern Ireland: A Political, Cultural and Geographical Examination," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33 (2007): 1;

Andrew Finlay, "Defeatism and Northern Protestant 'Identity,'" *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1 (2001): 2; Susan McKay, *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People* (Blackstaff Press, 2000); Susan McKay, *Northern Protestants: On Shifting Ground*. (Blackstaff Press, 2020); Seamus Dunn and Valerie Morgan, "Protestant Alienation in Northern Ireland," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 18 (2008): 3.

32. Vogt, Gleditsch, and Cederman, "From Claims to Violence."
33. Nevin Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).
34. See Claire Kramsch, *Language as Symbolic Power. Key Topics in Applied Linguistics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 117–32; Chris Samuel, "Symbolic Violence and Collective Identity: Pierre Bourdieu and the Ethics of Resistance," *Social Movement Studies* 12, no. 4 (2013): 397–413.
35. Hunter, Culture Wars.
36. Hall, "Incomplete Peace."
37. Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (Routledge, 1988).
38. Verta Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon D. Morris and Carol M. Mueller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992),104–29.
39. Colin Coulter, Niall Gilmartin, Katy Hayward, and Peter Shirlow, *Northern Ireland a Generation after Good Friday: Lost Futures and New Horizons in the "Long Peace"* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 193–95.
40. John Darby, "The Effect of Violence on the Irish Peace Process," in *A Farewell to Arms?: Beyond the Good Friday Agreement*, edited by Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen (Manchester University Press, 2000), 271; see also Seán Brennan, "From Warrior Regimes to Illicit Sovereigns: Ulster Loyalist Paramilitaries and the Security Implications for Brexit," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 32 (2021): 4–5.
41. Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen, "Introduction: a Farewell to Arms? From Long War to Uncertain Peace in Northern Ireland," in *A Farewell to Arms?* edited by Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen.
42. Darby, "The Effect of Violence," 271.
43. *The Orange Standard*, 1997. Linen Hall Library Divided Society: Northern Ireland 1990–1998, ORA2_077_006.; The Newsroom, "Orange Order chief: Support the 2020 Twelfth at home or online." *Newsletter*, July 11, 2020, https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/politics/orange-order-chief-support-2020-twelfth-home-or-online-2910536.
44. See Dawn Walsh, "Northern Ireland and the Independent Parades Commission: Delegation and Legitimacy," *Irish Political Studies* 30, no. 1: 20–40.
45. Jonathan Bell, "Belfast Bonfire Injunction: DUP Accuses Sinn Fein of Dictating Twelfth Celebrations and Calls for 'Cultural Convention,'" *Belfast Telegraph*, July 10, 2017, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/belfast-bonfire-injunction-dup-accuses-sinn-fein-of-dictating-twelfth-celebrations-and-calls-for-cultural-convention-35913461.html; See also Ann Marie Gray, "Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report Number Five" Community Relations Council, 2018, 189–192.
46. Brendan Hughes, "Paramilitary Control of Loyalist Bonfires Exposed in Leaked Report," *Irish News*, February 28, 2018, https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2018/02/26/news/paramilitary-control-of-loyalist-bonfires-exposed-in-leaked-report-1263722/.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, "Final Report," December 1, 2021, https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/commission-flags-identity-culture-and-tradition-final-report.
50. Ibid.
51. Alan Gailey and G. B. Adams, "The Bonfire in North Irish Tradition," *Folklore* 88 (1977): 1; Jack Santino, *The Hallowed Eve: Dimensions of Culture in a Calendar Festival in Northern Ireland* (University Press of Kentucky, 1998).
52. Gailey and Adams, "The Bonfire in North Irish Tradition."
53. Jack Santino, "Light up the Sky: Halloween Bonfires and Cultural Hegemony in Northern Ireland," *Western Folklore* 55 (1996): 3.
54. BBC News Northern Ireland, "Poppy Wreaths on Derry Bonfire 'Disgraceful and Insulting,'" *BBC News NI*, August 16, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-53795541.
55. Leona O'Neill, "Union Flags Set Alight on Halloween Pyre in Strabane," *Belfast Telegraph*, November 2, 2017, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/union-flags-set-alight-on-halloween-pyre-in-strabane-36282161.html.
56. See: Roy Wallace, "Goodbye Ballyhightown," *The Arts Council and Outer Belfast Action Team*, 1995, 63.
57. Women's Resource & Development Agency, "Summary Report on Reclaiming the Bonfires," 2017, https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/bonfiresbooklet-KT-edits-18.9.17-NO-PINK.pdf.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid, 62.

60. Lucy Bryson and Clem McCartney, "Clashing Symbols A Report on the Use of Flags, Anthems and Other National Symbols in Northern Ireland," (The Institute of Irish Studies Queen's University Belfast, 1994), 131.
61. Divided Society Collection, SIN3_005_002, *Sinn Féin West Belfast Bulletin*, July 1990.
62. Hall, "Incomplete Peace."
63. Women's Resource & Development Agency, "Summary Report," 2017.
64. *Belfast Telegraph*, "Video: Eleventh Night bonfire at Craigyhill estate Larne." July 12, 2019, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/video-news/video-eleventh-night-bonfire-at-craigyhill-estate-larne-38305334.html.
65. Connor Lynch, "Larne Craigyhill Bonfire: More than 17,000 Pallets Used in NI"s "Biggest" Pyre," *Belfast Live*, July 7, 2021, https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/larne-craigyhill-bonfire-more-17000-20989400.
66. "Health Fears Over Burning Tyres," *BBC News*, July 11, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6288838.stm; Niall Blaney, "Counting the Environmental Cost of Bonfires," *BBC News*, June 21, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6222680.stm.
67. Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (@NIFRSOFFICIAL) 2017 "If you're at a bonfire tonight & see Firefighters, it's because someone in the area is concerned & has contacted us for help. #firesafety." 04:06, June 11, 2017. Tweet; Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (@NIFRSOFFICIAL) 2017 "Firefighters are not our to spoil anyone's fun tonight–their job is to protect life & property from the dangers of fire #protectingoucommunity." 07:46, June 11, 2017. Tweet.
68. *BBC News Northern Ireland*. "Eleventh Night Bonfires: 'Exceptionally Busy' for Firefighters," July 12, 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-40578886.
69. Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service, "INCREASE IN OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY- July 11, 2021" July 12, 2021, https://www.nifrs.org/11-july-2021/.
70. Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service, "LOWEST NUMBER OF ELEVENTH NIGHT BONFIRE INCIDENTS SINCE 2015" July 16, 2019. https://www.nifrs.org/lowest-number-of-eleventh-night-bonfire-incidents-since-2015/.
71. Hall, "Incomplete Peace."
72. Brendan Hughes, "Bonfire Groups Won't Engage with Police after Bobby Storey Funeral Probe Outcome," *Belfast Live*, April 1, 2021, https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/bonfire-groups-wont-engage-police-20298345.
73. Rickard and Bakke, "Legacies of Wartime Order," p. 15; See also: Brennan, "From Warrior Regimes to Illicit Sovereigns."
74. Department of Justice. "Ending the Harm—What Can I Do?" 2018, Accessed November 10, 2019, https://www.endingtheharm.com/what-can-i-do/; The Northern Ireland Executive, "Executive Programme for Tackling Paramilitary Activity and Organised Crime," https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/articles/executive-programme-tackling-paramilitary-activity-and-organised-crime-0 (accessed July 10, 2018).
75. Gillian Halliday, "No Complaints Received Over Larne Bonfire," *Belfast Telegraph*, July 9, 2019, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/no-complaints-received-over-larne-bonfire-38294162.html.
76. Wallace, Goodbye Ballyhightown, 62–63.
77. "Loyalist Bonfire Report," Northern Ireland Youth Forum, August 2018, 13.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 9.
80. Connla Young, "Nationalist Residents in North Belfast Describe Living Beside Loyalist Bonfire as "a Nightmare," *The Irish News*, July 8, 2021, https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/07/08/news/nationalist-residents-in-north-belfast-describe-living-beside-loyalist-bonfire-a-nightmare–2379774/.
81. "Image of Martin McGuinness Attached to 'Twelfth of July' Bonfire," *Irish Times*, July 11, 2017, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/image-of-martin-mcguinness-attached-to-twelfth-of-july-bonfire-1.3150907; "John Finucane Tells Police that his Campaign Posters have been Placed on a Bonfire," *The Irish News*, July 11, 2017, https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2017/07/11/news/john-finucane-tells-police-that-his-campaign-posters-have-been-placed-on-a-bonfire-1081320/.
82. "Police Clash with Loyalists," *BBC News Northern Ireland*, July 12, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/1434983.stm, "A Show of Eleventh Night Defiance by Loyalist Gunmen," *Londonderry Sentinel*, August 15, 2007, https://www.londonderrysentinel.co.uk/news/a-show-of-eleventh-night-defiance-by-loyalist-gunmen-1-2091059.
83. Rioting and targeted violence have both been common around the eleventh and twelfth of July each year throughout the Troubles and beyond; one of the most notable incidents was the deaths of Jason, Mark, and Richard Quinn (aged nine, ten, and eleven) in 1998 when a petrol bomb was thrown into their family home by members of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). The Sutton Index of Deaths includes forty-one individuals killed in the period from 10–13 July from 1969 to 1998; victims and perpetrators were identified as coming from a range of backgrounds and organizations (including Republican groups), further evidencing a concentration of violence around that time of year. "Sutton Index of Deaths" CAIN: Conflict Archive on the Internet. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/ (accessed April 14, 2022).

84. Bryan, *Orange Parades*, 29–43. It is interesting to note that, despite becoming part of the zeitgeist, parades have retained their traditional imagery, including pictures of William of Orange, whose victory at the Battle of the Boyne the 11th and 12th are meant to celebrate. Not only is this imagery not visible in bonfires, but many people cannot identify this link; Eleventh Night has become nearly ahistorical, built only on that it has "always happened" and is threatened by those wishing to limit unionist expression.
85. Rebecca Black, "Belfast Council Pulls Funds for Kids" Party Due to Size of Bonfire," *Belfast Telegraph*, July 11, 2017, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/belfast-council-pulls-funds-for-kids-party-due-to-size-of-bonfire-35916249.html.
86. Police Service of Northern Ireland, "Update on Belfast Disorder," April 3, 2021, https://www.psni.police.uk/news/Latest-News/030421-update-on-belfast-disorder32/.
87. Hall, "Incomplete Peace."
88. "NI Homes at Risk Over Bonfire Concerns," *RTÉ News*, July 10, 2015, https://www.rte.ie/news/2015/0710/714010-ni-homes-bonfire-concerns/; Maidread Holland, "Portadown Residents "Should Not Have to Move Out Because of Bonfire,"" *The Irish News*, July 9, 2019, https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2019/07/09/news/portadown-residents-should-not-have-to-move-out-because-of-bonfire–1658732/; Claire Cromie, "Bonfire Fears: Housing Executive Boards up 52 Homes Where Residents are Afraid Whole Street will go up in Flames," *Belfast Telegraph*, July 10, 2015, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/bonfire-fears-housing-executive-boards-up-52-homes-where-residents-are-afraid-whole-street-will-go-up-in-flames-31366791.html.
89. Gillian Halliday, "Relocated Belfast Bonfire Still Threat to our Homes, Say Fearful Residents," *Belfast Telegraph*, July 7, 2018, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/relocated-belfast-bonfire-still-threat-to-our-homes-say-fearful-residents-37089243.html.
90. "Belfast Bonfires: Police Protection for Removal Teams," *BBC News Northern Ireland*, July 11, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-44790903.
91. Gerald Lennon, "Northern Ireland Bonfire lit EARLY a "Bid to Stoke Tensions,"" *Belfast Telegraph*, June 29, 2018, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/northern-ireland-bonfire-lit-early-a-bid-to-stoke-tensions-37063656.html.
92. This Legal Challenge Ultimately Failed: "Tiger's Bay Bonfire: Ministers Fail In Legal Bid For Removal," *BBC News Northern Ireland*, July 9, 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-57779341.
93. Ralph Hewitt, "Tigers Bay Bonfire Builders Warn of Threat to Life and Serious Disorder if Pyre Forcefully Removed," *Belfast Telegraph*, July 9, 2021, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/tigers-bay-bonfire-builders-warnof-threat-to-life-and-serious-disorder-if-pyreforcefully-removed-40632610.html.
94. Connla Young, "'Disgraceful' Chanting of Sectarian Songs at North Belfast Interface Bonfire," *The Irish News*, July 13, 2021, https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/07/13/news/headline-2384573/. The term "Fenian" originates as a label for the Irish Republican Brotherhood, who rebelled against the British state in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including through the use of political violence. It has since become a derogatory sectarian label.
95. "Givan: Nationalists Should Dial Down Rhetoric Over Bonfire," *BBC News*, July 8, 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-57770297; Connla Young, "Jeffrey Donaldson Visits North Belfast Interface Bonfire as Nichola Mallon and Jamie Bryson Hold Talks," *The Irish News*, July 9, 2021, https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/07/09/news/jeffrey-donaldson-visits-north-belfast-interface-bonfire-as-nichola-mallon-and-jamie-bryson-hold-talks-2381054/.
96. Tigers Bay Community Group, "Adam Street Bonfire Statement," *Facebook*, July 5, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/TigersBayCommunityGroup/posts/4555472467817050.
97. Including as the tagline of the most popular social media page celebrating bonfires, which has posted over 1250 pictures of structures around the region since March 2014. 11th July Bonfires. Timeline photos. Facebook, accessed November 21, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/11th-July-Bonfires-1479811488907292/?ref=page_internal.
98. "DUP Quits Council Bonfire Group Over Community Concerns," *BBC News Northern Ireland*, June 15, 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-57480178.
99. Mark Simpson, "Turning Hotspot into Friendly Fire," *BBC News*, July 10, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8145554.stm.
100. Bell, "Belfast Bonfire Injunction."
101. ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2016 [computer file]. ARK www.ark.ac.uk/nilt [distributor], June 2017.; ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2017 [computer file]. ARK www.ark.ac.uk/nilt [distributor], June 2018.; ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2018 [computer file]. ARK www.ark.ac.uk/nilt [distributor], June 2019; ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2019 [computer file]. ARK www.ark.ac.uk/nilt [distributor], June 2020.; ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2020 [computer file]. ARK www.ark.ac.uk/nilt [distributor], June 2021.
102. For responses across all years the question has been run, see Appendix.

103. Brian Graham: "The Past in the Present."; Neil Southern, "Protestant Alienation."; Andrew Finlay, "Defeatism and northern protestant 'identity'."
104. "Loyalist Group Withdraws Support for Good Friday Agreement," *BBC News Northern Ireland*, March 4, 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56276653.
105. J. Byrne, C. Gormley-Heenan, and G. Robinson, *Peace walls: public attitudes and impact on policy*, Policy Briefing University of Ulster/Institute for Research in Social Sciences, 2012.; Steven Moore, "Enterprise Project Raises Loyalist Fears," *Belfast News Letter*, May 28, 1993. Linen Hall Library Political Collection, Interface Areas Box 1.
106. Cal McCrystal, "The Sea of Hatred that is Tigers Bay," *The Observer*, April 20, 1997; Linen Hall Library Political Collection, Interface Areas Box 1.; Barriers "still needed" at Tigers Bay." *The Newsletter*, June 18, 2008. Linen Hall Library Political Collection, Interface Areas Box 1.
107. "Declaration" Cavehill Young Loyalists, retrieved September 18, 2007. Linen Hall Library Political Collection, Interface Areas Box 1.
108. "BYL Anthem" *Ballysally Young Loyalists*, retrieved September 18, 2007. Linen Hall Library Political Collection, Interface Areas Box 1.
109. Alan Murray, "We won't be policing flashpoints," *Belfast Telegraph*. January 7, 2007. Linen Hall Library Political Collection, Interface Areas Box 1.
110. Ibid.
111. Glenbyrn Under Attack. "A Plea for Help" *Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne*, retrieved June 24, 2002. Linen Hall Library Political Collection, Interface Areas Box 1. Glenbyrn Under Attack. "Is this security?" *Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne*, retrieved June 12, 2002. Linen Hall Library Political Collection, Interface Areas Box 1. Glenbyrn Under Attack. "No Confidence in Ministers." *Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne*, June 7, 2002. Linen Hall Library Political Collection, Interface Areas Box 1.
112. See: Denis P. Barritt and Charles F. Carter, *The Northern Ireland Problem: A Study in Group Relations* (Oxford University Press, 1962).
113. John Darby, "The Effect of Violence on the Irish Peace Process," in *A Farewell to Arms?*, edited by Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen, 268; Johan Galtung, "An Editorial," *Journal of Peace Research* 1 (1964): 1; Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27 (1990): 3; Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (1969): 3.
114. Christina Steenkamp, *Violence And Post-War Reconstruction: Managing Insecurity In The Aftermath Of Peace Accords* (IB Tauris, 2009), 2.

Appendix

Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey Results, 2016–2020 (percentages):
"Bonfires are a legitimate form of cultural celebration."

Table A1. Overall results (BONLEGIT).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Can't choose
2016	10	32	22	20	13	3
2017	9	31	18	17	20	5
2018	9	31	16	22	14	7
2019	8	30	17	24	15	6
2020	9	29	20	23	18	1

Table A2. Catholic respondents (BONLEGIT).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Can't choose
2016	3	21	22	29	22	3
2017	1	23	19	20	31	6
2018	3	19	18	32	24	4
2019	2	20	15	33	24	5
2020	2	15	19	33	31	0

Table A3. Protestant respondents (BONLEGIT).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Can't choose
2016	16	41	21	14	6	2
2017	18	37	16	17	10	3
2018	13	44	14	17	7	5
2019	11	42	17	20	7	3
2020	16	40	19	16	8	1

Table A4. Respondents with no religion (BONLEGIT).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Can't choose
2016	12	41	22	14	10	1
2017	9	32	23	14	18	4
2018	15	33	18	17	11	6
2019	12	26	20	17	17	8
2020	7	25	20	24	22	2