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Revolution, 1916–1923

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Introduction

Few periods of Irish history have generated as much historiographical controversy as the revolutionary era. The key issues were identified as early as 1924 by P. S. O'Hegarty whose pessimistic pro-Treaty polemic, *The Victory of Sinn Féin*, argued that the unnecessary use of political violence after the Easter Rising had destroyed the spirit of the national movement and demoralised the Irish people.[1] Reflecting a wider literature of disillusionment, articulated primarily through fiction and drama (most notably Seán O'Casey's powerful Dublin trilogy), O'Hegarty's thesis did not elicit a response from professional historians for almost half a century. Consequently, the first draft of the history of the revolution was written by republicans. Memoirs such as Dan Breen's *My fight for Irish freedom* (1924), Tom Barry's *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* (1949), and the *Fighting Series* accounts recorded by Irish Volunteers depicted a conflict between the Irish people and the malign forces of the British Empire (even if some of these accounts registered uncertainty about the extent of popular commitment to republican ideology and armed struggle). The Civil War was largely overlooked, as were the perspectives of those who had not experienced the preceding 'four glorious years' as a period of liberation. The First World War, the formative event of the decade, provided little more than a backdrop to the conflict in Ireland. This narrative was reinforced by school textbook, as well as by State commemoration that centred on the sacrificial gesture of Easter 1916 rather than on the more divisive violence that followed. The emergence of a post-revolutionary Catholic nationalist consensus ensured that the significance of earlier radical impulses was marginalised.

1 P. S. O'Hegarty, *The Victory of Sinn Féin* (new edn., Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2015).

In the 1970s, when professional historians belatedly turned their attention to the period, more critical interpretations emerged. Emphasising the conflict's uneven geographical impact, local studies presented a more complex picture of the revolution at its grassroots.[2] These 'revisionist' accounts emphasised social and political divisions rather than nationalist unity, and explored how factors other than selfless patriotism, such as generational conflict, collective pressures and increasing social frustrations, motivated many activists. They identified continuities between the separatist and constitutional nationalist movements, such as their cross-class appeal and reluctance to adopt socially divisive policies. The emergence of a popular physical-force movement was presented more as a departure from Irish political tradition than, as nationalist interpretations had suggested, an inevitable outcome of centuries of resistance to British rule, the cultural revival of the late nineteenth century, and the Irish Party's compromises. The resilience of constitutional nationalism before the de-stabilising impact of the Ulster crisis, First World War and Easter Rising was emphasised, while the light grip of British rule appeared a more important causal factor than the grievances and sense of oppression articulated by the 'revolutionary generation'.

British shortcomings in administration, counter-insurgency, intelligence-gathering and propaganda were seen as more important to the outcome of the conflict than the heroism or ingenuity of republicans.[3] In recent decades, revolutionary violence has emerged as a central issue as the focus has shifted from fighting for freedom to killing for Ireland.[4] It was shown that civilians formed almost half of the revolution's victims, and that combatants more often died, unarmed, at the hands of hidden assailants rather than as a result of the daring ambushes at crossroads described in IRA memoirs. The nationalist conceptualisation of the conflict as an 'Anglo-Irish War' was challenged by the idea that the campaign for independence also encompassed a form of civil war between antagonistic religious and political groups within Ireland. The term 'revolution' was increasingly adopted, acknowledging not only the radical nature of the process by which a transfer of political sovereignty was brought about by violence, but also the

2 One of the earliest and most influential was D. Fitzpatrick's *Politics and Irish Life, 1913–1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1977).
3 C. Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland 1919–1921. The Development of Political and Military Policies* (Oxford University Press, 1975).
4 Most notably in another influential local study, P. Hart's *The I.R.A. and its Enemies. Violence and Community in Cork 1916–1923* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

extent to which it was bound up with wider strands of sectarian, agrarian and intra-communal conflict.[5]

Against the backdrop of the Northern Irish 'Troubles' (1969–1997), the acrimonious debates prompted by these new interpretations revealed a gulf between popular assumptions and scholarly perspectives. For many of its critics, and some of its advocates, 'revisionism' represented a riposte, conscious or not, to the Provisional IRA's appropriation of Irish history as much as the outcome of new research or methodological and theoretical advances.[6] It was also criticised for replicating some of the limitations of the nationalist historiography it sought to revise, such as its Anglo-Irish focus and preoccupation with moral concerns. A key question, for example, remained that raised by O'Hegarty: 'whether the bloody catalogue of assassination and war from 1919–21 was necessary'.[7] The end of the Troubles saw much heat dissipate from these disputes, as is evident both from changing popular attitudes and 'post-revisionist' historiography. For example, despite being criticised for its nationalist bias, Ken Loach's influential film, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006), did not shy away from depicting republican brutality, or acknowledging how social factors shaped the conflict. Although contentious aspects of IRA violence, particularly in Cork, continue to provoke historiographical disputes and press coverage, these controversies are better understood as a 'metaphor for far wider disputes over Irish national history and identity' than the product of genuine disagreements over evidence, methods or interpretations.[8] By contrast, the transformation of public attitudes to Irish soldiers in the Great War provides a striking example of the extent to which a more pluralistic understanding of the past has gained ground. By incorporating the campaign for Home Rule and Ireland's experience of the First World War alongside the War of Independence, and by encompassing the experiences of previously marginalised groups such as labour and women, the Irish Government's 'Decade of Centenaries' programme similarly reflects a more nuanced approach than previous commemorations.

5 C. Townshend, 'Historiography: Telling the Irish Revolution', in J. Augusteijn (ed.), *The Irish Revolution 1913–1923* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002). The 'realization that both social revolution and ethnic conflict were part of a broader concept, formerly known as rebellion and now defined as civil war' has also informed wider historiographical approaches in recent years (S. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 417).

6 See, for example, the introduction to R. Fanning's *Fatal Path. British Government and Irish Revolution 1910–1922* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013).

7 R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600–1972* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 506.

8 S. Howe, 'Killings in Cork and the Historians', *History Workshop Journal* (2014), 77, 178.

Popular and scholarly perspectives have also been shaped by the availability of new sources such as the Bureau of Military History and the Military Service Pensions collection. Recent historiographical developments include a greater focus on the experience of people from ordinary rather than elite backgrounds; the use of collective biography to explore the formation of the revolutionary generation; consideration of the conflict within the broader context of the enthusiasm of the 'pre-revolution' and disillusionment of independence; and more sophisticated research on the relationship between sources, historical narratives and memory of the revolution.[9] Complementing the detailed focus provided by an ever-expanding range of local studies, comparative and transnational approaches are providing broader perspectives on revolutionary violence, as well as demonstrating more clearly how political change in Ireland was shaped by global influences, including wider currents of modernity.[10]

Rather than offering a detailed account of the course of the revolution, this chapter focuses on the relationship between violence and political developments during these years, highlighting recent historiographical shifts where significant. Why did the period after the Easter Rising see the emergence of a formidable threat to British power rather than, as occurred after previous insurrections (1803, 1848, 1867), the collapse of republican resistance? How did the revolutionaries' popularity after 1916 shape their ideology? Was the relative success of the campaign for independence due more to the use of violence or to the political mobilisation that underpinned it? What role did external factors play? Why, given the militancy of the republican campaign, was its outcome so conservative?

Easter 1916

The revolution began in 1916. While a military failure, it was the Easter Rising that provided 'Ireland's 1789 or 1917', including 'a preliminary sketch of the

9 See, for example, R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces. The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890–1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2014); D. Ferriter, *A Nation and not a Rabble. The Irish Revolution 1913–1923* (London: Profile Books, 2015); R. S. Grayson and F. McGarry (eds.), *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

10 See, for example, N. Whelehan (ed.), *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History* (London: Routledge, 2014); R. Gerwarth and J. Horne (eds,), *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford University Press, 2012); T. Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence. Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia 1918–1922* (Oxford University Press, 2010); M. Walsh, *Bitter Freedom. Ireland in a Revolutionary World 1918–1923* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015).

revolution to be, complete with a claim to exclusive sovereignty by the insurgent government and army'.[11] Despite years of planning by a determined revolutionary faction, the rebellion's impact owed more to the collapse of the political assumptions underpinning the alliance between the Irish Party and the Liberals (outlined by Matthew Kelly in an earlier chapter in this volume) than the inherent appeal of insurrectionary republicanism.

Three key factors had created this long-awaited opportunity. The most significant of the 'longer-term developments in attitude and mentality' identified by Kelly derived from the impact of the late nineteenth-century cultural revival on nationalist consciousness. Vigorously cultivated by organisations such as the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association, particularly amongst the younger generation, the idea of an Irish national identity that was not only separate to that of Britain but was defined in opposition to English values implicitly challenged the underlying integrationist assumptions of John Redmond's political project. The Home Rule crisis of 1912–1914 presented a more immediate political challenge. The emergence of the Ulster Volunteer Force and Irish Volunteers, and the arming of both organisations in the spring of 1914, undermined popular nationalist faith (never unconditional, as even the rhetoric of Irish Party politicians made clear) in the ability of constitutional methods to secure fair play from Westminster. It also weakened British authority in Ireland, as was demonstrated by the Curragh mutiny and the increasingly anxious tone of police reports outlining the threat of civil war in Ulster.

The third, and most important, destabilising factor was the outbreak of the First World War. As in other imperial states with discontented nationalities, the pressures of total war created the conditions for revolution: 'As surely as Verdun or the Somme, Dublin in 1916 was a First World War battlefield.'[12] But notwithstanding the events that would follow, it is important to note the lack of popular support for militant nationalism in the summer of 1914. Despite the many difficulties the war would later present for the Irish Parliamentary Party, Redmond's prestige was affirmed, first, by the enactment of Home Rule at Westminster (albeit suspended for the war's duration) in September 1914, and second, by his ability to retain the support of over 90 per cent of the Irish Volunteers following the split triggered by his decision to fully commit his party to the British war effort.

11 P. Hart, *The I.R.A. at War, 1916–1923* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.
12 K. Jeffery, *1916. A Global History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 104.

Consequently, the decision to mount an insurrection, taken by the IRB's supreme council shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, should be seen as a reflection of separatist weakness, as well as frustration at the moderate state of popular opinion demonstrated by nationalist goodwill for the war effort.[13] Both the IRB and Irish Volunteers were divided on the merits of an unprovoked rebellion, with only James Connolly's small socialist Irish Citizen Army fully committed to a policy of insurrection. The posthumous significance accorded to Patrick Pearse, the president of the Irish Republic proclaimed at the General Post Office, ensured that the Rising was subsequently widely seen as a 'blood sacrifice'. The rebellion's key organisers, veteran Fenian Thomas Clarke and Seán Mac Diarmada, were influenced by less mystical considerations. They intended a principled and heroic gesture to reawaken the spirit of militant nationalism amongst the apathetic masses, an aspiration that helps to explain their prioritisation of symbolic gestures, such as the proclamation of a republic, over military objectives during Easter week.[14]

The rationale for the Rising was essentially provided by the war: a distracted Britain, a powerful German ally, and the promise of weapons, military assistance and diplomatic support practically obliged Irish revolutionaries to rise. Even defeat, acknowledged by many leading rebels as the most likely outcome, held out the promise of subsequent success when – as most separatists assumed – Germany won the war. Emotional considerations were also vital, with leaders such as Clarke, Pearse and Mac Diarmada articulating to subordinates the shame and humiliation they would feel if the war ended without an attempt to assert Irish independence in arms. These motives were viewed as irrational by contemporaries such as Eoin MacNeill, the nominal commander of the Irish Volunteers, as well as by some later revisionist historians, but the insurrectionaries' belief that, in time of war, the advantages of an unsuccessful rebellion – the assertion of separatist credibility, the revival of the physical-force tradition of which they saw themselves as guardians, and the undermining of the Irish Party and its denationalising Home Rule project – were preferable to inaction, was borne out by subsequent events.

A dramatic string of mishaps led up to the Rising, among them the interception of the *Aud* with its cargo of arms by the British navy, the arrest of Roger Casement following his landing at Banna Strand, County Kerry, and the issuing of a countermanding order by the ostensible commander

13 Jeffery, *1916*, 105.
14 F. McGarry, *The Rising. Ireland: Easter 1916* (Oxford University Press, 2016 edn.).

1. Eoin MacNeill (1867–1945). Gaelic scholar and nationalist politician. Chief of Staff of the Irish Volunteers in 1916.

of the Volunteers, Eoin MacNeill, the effect of which was to largely confine the rebellion to Dublin. Yet the scale of the insurrection proved sufficient to achieve the military council's objectives. The occupation of the GPO and other prominent buildings throughout Dublin by around a thousand rebels (their numbers rising during the week) on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, led to a week-long battle for the capital that gripped Irish and global attention. Confronted by some 20,000 British troops, many of Irish nationality, the rebels had no chance of military success. The insurrection was over within six days, leaving almost 500 people (the majority of them civilian) dead, and much of the centre of the city in ruins. The punitive British response to the rebellion, understandable in the context of what was regarded as a treacherous 'stab in the back' in a time of war, further

ensured the success of the military council's aims. The decision to execute sixteen rebel leaders, arrest 3,000 suspects (many innocent of any involvement in the Rising), and intern two thousand men and six women in British prison camps ensured that public hostility to the rebels' actions began to give way to popular sympathy for the rebels and, subsequently, their political cause, such as it could be discerned.

The Rise of Sinn Féin

As the signatories of the Proclamation had intended, many Irish republicans would come to see the Rising 'as the starting point for all subsequent history'.[15] That the insurrection seemed to herald not only political but social and cultural transformation was clear from contemporary responses. Within days of the executions, critics of the 'childish madness' of the rebellion, such as the embroiderer Lily Yeats (sister of W. B.), were anticipating 'the beginning of Ireland'.[16] However, the Rising also marked the end of an era for some within the tiny revolutionary world that existed before Easter 1916 when an idealistic minority pursued republican and other radical aims. The execution of the signatories of the Proclamation – a document which epitomised the rebellion's inchoate radicalism – marked one rupture, but so too did the emergence of a popular mass movement led by Éamon de Valera, one of the most socially conservative of the Rising's surviving leaders, which recruited a younger, more rural, and more nationalistic cohort of activists radicalised after 1916. This development saw the eclipse of modern influences such as socialism and secularism that – alongside physical-force republicanism, cultural nationalism and a sense of victimhood – were espoused by marginal pre-revolutionary organisations.[17] The extent to which the meaning of the Rising came to be located in a narrower understanding of freedom is illustrated by the popular ballads and print culture that flourished after 1916. For example, the popularity of 'The Soldier's Song' which spread, alongside the new Sinn Féin movement, like wildfire demonstrated the appeal of martial values and the idea of a heroic struggle between 'the sons of the Gael' and the 'Saxon foe' which reflected the historical narratives absorbed by the revolutionary generation. The marginalisation of women's voices, previously a significant

15 Ferriter, *A Nation*, 168.
16 R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life. II: The Arch-Poet 1915–1939* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 45–50.
17 R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces*; F. McGarry, *The Abbey Rebels of 1916. A Lost Revolution* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2015).

element within advanced nationalist circles, formed another aspect of this development.[18]

Despite its disorienting speed, the Irish Party's demise was far from inexplicable. The cumulative impact of the Ulster crisis, First World War, and Easter Rising exposed the contradictions between the moderate, conciliatory, imperialistic rhetoric of Redmondism and the popular nationalist sentiment expressed by grassroots Irish Party politicians: Irish interests, it became clear, were not so easily reconciled to those of Britain. Out-manoeuvred by his ostensible allies within the Liberal Government, as well as his opponents within Ulster unionism and the Tory Party, Redmond's currency was devalued by his repeated concessions, particularly on partition and support for Irish enlistment, in return for the same post-dated cheque for Home Rule. By placing implacable opponents of Home Rule, such as F. E. Smith, Andrew Bonar Law and Edward Carson, at the heart of the cabinet, the coalition government of 1915 had further damaged the Irish Party's credibility, as did growing anxiety about conscription.[19] There were also other, longer-term, factors at work: the party's aging leadership made it seem out of touch, and the perception that it was wholly embedded in a Westminster establishment, contributed to this malaise. And recent historiography has emphasised the importance of generational change in the party's demise.

The impact of the Rising accelerated these difficulties, as did the executions, and the failed attempt to introduce Home Rule in the immediate aftermath of Easter week. The inability of the Irish Convention, which met from July 1917 until March 1918, to achieve a consensus on implementing Home Rule may have represented the last chance for a peaceful settlement, as nationalist support for self-government within the United Kingdom was further eroded by a radical shift in post-war expectations. As the Hapsburg, Ottoman and Russian Empires crumbled, other subject nationalities threw up their 'own Redmonds and de Valeras debating the merits of cooperation or resistance', and it was not only in Ireland that the resisters 'were in the ascendant' by 1918.[20] However, there was nothing assured about the rise of separatism, nor prescriptive about the precise form it would come to take. The consensus that

18 For women before the revolution, see S. Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

19 On decline and poor strategy, see respectively M. Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland, 1910–1916* (Oxford University Press, 2005) and Fanning, *Fatal Path*. J. McConnel's *The Irish Parliamentary Party and the Third Home Rule Crisis* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013) presents a more positive view of the party.

20 Walsh, *Bitter Freedom*, 37–8.

emerged around the goal of a republic masked the ideological incoherence of the marginalised coalition of republicans, cultural nationalist intellectuals, militant Catholic nationalists and socialists that had brought about the rebellion. The new nationalism was sustained, as Ernie O'Malley's revolutionary memoir suggests, more by the iconography and emotional appeal of the Rising's legacy:

> The people as a whole had not changed; but the new spirit was working slowly, half-afraid, yet determined. The leaders had been shot, the fighting men arrested, and the allied organizations disrupted. Without guidance or direction as if to clarify itself, nebulous, forming, reforming, the strange rebirth took shape. It was manifest in flags, badges, songs, speech, all seemingly superficial signs. It was as if the inarticulate attempted to express themselves in any way or by any method; later would come organization and cool-headed reason. Now was the lyrical stage, blood sang and pulsed, a strange love was born that for some was never to die till they lay stiff on the hillside or in the quicklime near a barrack wall.[21]

Notwithstanding the shifting sands of public opinion, no organisation could readily claim the Rising's legacy: Sinn Féin had not supported the Rising; the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was a secret fraternity; and the surviving 1916 leaders were obscure figures. Nor was it clear how the rebels' aspirations – even if popularly endorsed – could be achieved. Re-emerging in 1917, the executive of the Irish Volunteers affirmed its determination to renew the struggle for the Republic but prudently made clear that its members would not be called upon to repeat the tactics of Easter 1916.

Sinn Féin's October 1917 convention brought together advanced nationalists identified with Arthur Griffith's party, rival groupings such as Count Plunkett's Liberty League which had won considerable support, militaristic Irish Volunteers and the IRB's radical separatists. The evidence of growing support for this 'new nationalism' provided by a series of by-election victories strengthened the impetus towards unity. While Griffith's pragmatic argument that a republic could not be achieved without a British military defeat was outweighed by the emotional appeal of the legacy of Easter 1916, the convention fudged other key issues such as the party's stance on violence. Sinn Féin's strategy of passive resistance – exemplified by the policy of abstention from Westminster and advocacy of a revolutionary counter-state to undermine the British administration in Ireland – remained in place, albeit as much due to the

21 E. O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (Boulder, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart, 1999 edn.), 47.

2. Police 'mugshot' of 'B. Stuart', aka Ernie O'Malley (1897–1957), revolutionary and writer, ND *c.*1920.

lack of any alternative as to widespread commitment to the ideas of Griffith whose former advocacy of a 'dual monarchy' rendered him suspect to both doctrinaire republicans and militarists. Two days after replacing Griffith as leader of Sinn Féin at the convention, Éamon de Valera was confirmed as the president of the Irish Volunteers, marking an uneasy convergence between the republican movement's political and military wings.

An 'attitude or an atmosphere rather than a strategy', Sinn Féin acquired popular support before it possessed an agreed leadership or political programme. Its appeal was based primarily on a rejection of the old (Redmondite) order. It was less evident what it stood for: 'Republicanism, for most of its adherents, was about achieving separation – sovereign independence – rather than implementing any concrete political programme.'[22] It also entailed an important moral dimension, rooted in the cultural forces that had moulded the revolutionary generation. Whereas constitutional nationalists usually emphasised pragmatic arguments for self-government, republicans agreed on

22 C. Townshend, *The Republic. The Fight for Irish Independence* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 19–25, 52–7.

the spiritual basis for independence. For the committed, republicanism was less a political preference than a moral outlook, characterised by the cultivation of masculine values such as patriotism, virility, temperance and integrity.[23] Influenced by Young Ireland's romantic nationalism, this ideology drew strongly on the cultural revival and, increasingly, on Catholic nationalism. The restoration of Irish, for example, became a central aim, and ideas about Irish history and national identity were more influential than republican political theory. The chauvinistic dimension of cultural revivalism must be seen in the context of generations of discrimination and insecurity, but it is not difficult to discern the roots of post-revolutionary conservatism in this moralistic vision.

A party that thrived on agitation, Sinn Féin benefited from the indecisiveness of the British government whose policies oscillated between counterproductive coercion and ineffective conciliation. The government's inevitable prioritisation of the war effort over Irish political considerations also enhanced republican fortunes. The most striking example of this was the decision to extend conscription to Ireland in April 1918, a policy necessitated by the political cost of not doing so in the rest of the United Kingdom rather than the practical benefits of imposing the measure on Ireland. As H. E. Duke, the Irish Chief Secretary, observed: 'You might as well recruit Germans.'[24] The resulting crisis destroyed the Irish Party's credibility and facilitated a closer relationship between the Catholic hierarchy and Sinn Féin. Resistance to conscription which, quite predictably, was never imposed, 'was probably the most potent single motive for radicalisation throughout the war'.[25]

The Counter-state

Sinn Féin won 73 seats in the December 1918 general election, reducing the Irish Party – which had dominated nationalist politics since the 1880s – to six seats (four of which were the result of an electoral pact with republicans

23 M. Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland. The Sinn Féin Party 1916–1923* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 214–65; T. Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858–1928* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

24 A. Gregory, '"You Might as Well Recruit Germans": British Public Opinion and the Decision to Conscript the Irish in 1918', in A. Gregory and S. Pašeta (eds.), *Ireland and the Great War: 'A War to Unite Us All'?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

25 Townshend, 'The Irish War of Independence. Context and Meaning', in C. Crowe (ed.), *Guide to the Military Service Pensions Collection* (Dublin: Óglaigh na hÉireann, 2012), 111. See, for example, J. Borgonovo, *The Dynamics of War and Revolution: Cork City, 1916–1918* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2013).

brokered by Cardinal Logue). Republicans had benefited from the trebling of the electorate by the 1918 Representation of the People Act, and the UK's first-past-the-post electoral system, but the result marked a watershed. The sectarian electoral map remained unchanged, however, with Unionists dominant in the north-east. Designating themselves TDs (=Teachta Dála, or Deputy), Sinn Féin's representatives met at the Mansion House, Dublin, to establish an Irish parliament. They proclaimed independence on 21 January 1919, the same day that an ambush by Irish Volunteers at Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary, killed two policemen.

There was nothing inevitable about the drift to war that followed. Reserving the right to make 'use of any and every means', Sinn Féin's manifesto had emphasised the importance of securing a democratic mandate to allow it to mount an appeal for independence at the Paris Peace Conference. In documents such as the 'Message to the Free Nations' and 'Declaration of Independence', the party drew on a wide, if not necessarily consistent, range of justifications for independence. These included the right to self-determination, the cultural, historical and racial unity of the nation, international law, the 'principle of government by consent of the governed', as well as 'the old tradition of nationhood handed on from dead generations'. Depending on the intended audience, racial assumptions could displace anti-colonial rhetoric, as with de Valera's complaint that 'Ireland is now the last white nation that is deprived of its liberty'.[26] Predictably, given the ebbing of the Wilsonian tide, little subsequently came of the appeal to Paris that had formed such a central aspect of Sinn Féin's election manifesto: 'self-determination was a panacea to be introduced only in the defeated empires'.[27]

Local studies have provided a sophisticated anatomy of the Irish revolution on the ground but shed little light on the extent to which transnational factors determined its outcome. Regardless of the failure at Paris, republicans – as their propaganda made clear – were emboldened by a growing awareness of how imperialism was giving way to a new world order whose legitimacy stemmed from the growing acceptance of the principle of national self-determination: 'In 1914 Ireland's cause seemed a parochial dispute within the United Kingdom; now, in 1918, empires had collapsed and the world was being re-ordered according to the "national principle".' In the weeks preceding

26 Quoted in B. Nelson, *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 234.

27 Walsh, *Bitter Freedom*, 39; E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

the 1918 general election, republics were proclaimed in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, while even Britain and France had deemed it necessary to affirm that national governments should derive 'their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous population'.[28]

While much shaped by contingency, the republican campaign combined an impressive variety of strategies ranging from long-established techniques such as the use of arbitration courts, moral force, and electoral politics to more novel innovations such as guerrilla warfare and the establishment of a revolutionary government. Some Sinn Féin candidates emphasised the aim of a republic, but others spoke more vaguely of independence. The flexible nature of the campaign, particularly its potent combination of collective mobilisation, counter-state formation and violence, presented a far more formidable challenge to British power than previous insurrections. Irish Republicans, Peter Hart has suggested, 'invented modern revolutionary warfare, with its mass parties, popular fronts, guerrilla warfare, underground governments, and continuous propaganda campaigns'.[29]

Irish revolutionaries achieved more success in the sphere of propaganda than on the field of combat.[30] The republican campaign was underpinned by a sophisticated effort to mobilise international public opinion and diplomatic support. De Valera's presence in the US from June 1919 to December 1920 demonstrated the importance attached to global opinion, even if his presence there divided Irish-American opinion, failed to secure diplomatic recognition, and, while $5 million was raised by an external Dáil loan, little of this money reached Ireland. The republican government's Department of Foreign Affairs established representatives abroad, while the Department of Propaganda cultivated the international press. The publicity generated by such activities constrained Britain's military campaign in Ireland, and brought increasing pressure from Washington on London to reach an accommodation with Irish republicans.[31]

Republicans also benefited from the rapid development of modern communications which offered 'imperial administrators, unionists and nationalists alike a tangible connectedness with a larger, trans-national network'.[32] While illustrating how the republican campaign provided a model for other

28 Walsh, *Bitter Freedom*, 37–8.
29 P. Hart, *I.R.A. at War*, 3.
30 M. Walsh, *The News from Ireland: Foreign Correspondents and the Irish Revolution* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).
31 Townshend, *The Republic*, 70–2.
32 C. Morash, *A History of the Media in Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130.

anti-colonial movements, recent research has also provided more nuanced insights into how ideas about empire, race and self-determination shaped alliances between Irish republicans and other subject peoples.[33] Studies of international responses to the revolution similarly demonstrate how efforts to mobilise support were shaped by the shifting identities and aspirations of Irish emigrant communities, with striking differences between diasporic responses in the United States and Australia and New Zealand where the political and demographic context limited support for Irish republicans.[34]

Revolutionary efforts at home were similarly innovative. While not always resulting in practical outcomes, the attempt to establish a functioning Dáil administration strengthened the republican claim to legitimacy. The raising of a loan of half a million pounds from 150,000 Irish subscribers funded pilot schemes in housing, land purchase, fisheries and cooperative enterprises.[35] The establishment of arbitration and special land courts, and the takeover of local government, made the Dáil a tangible presence throughout much of the country, including areas that experienced little conflict. Not all initiatives were as successful. Policing, conducted by Irish Volunteers, relied on fines, beatings, and expulsions, while the suppression of republican courts made such rough justice even less accountable.

Ultimately, the significance of the Dáil government lay in its symbolism. Even the most successful practical manifestation of the republican administration – its network of arbitration courts – had an important propaganda function, as the increasingly demoralised Royal Irish Constabulary complained. The establishment of a native legal system, the London-based *Daily Herald* noted, demonstrated both the credibility of the Dáil and the popular repudiation of the legitimacy of British rule: 'This invisible Republic with its hidden courts and its prohibited volunteer troops, exists in the hearts of the men and women of Ireland, and wields a moral authority which all the tanks and machine guns of King George cannot command.' While the willingness of Unionists to resort to republican courts was primarily motivated

33 See, for example, Walsh, *Bitter Freedom*; Kate O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919–64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); M. Silvestri, *Ireland and India: Nationalism, Empire and Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); K. Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

34 Nelson, *Irish Nationalists*; T. J. Meagher, 'Irish America Without Ireland: Irish-American Relations with Ireland in the Twentieth Century' in Whelehan (ed.), *Transnational Perspectives*; R. Sweetman, 'Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week? Antipodean Irish Catholic Responses to the 1916 Rising', in R. O'Donnell (ed.), *The Impact of the 1916 Rising. Among the Nations* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008).

35 Ferriter, *A Nation*, 214–28.

by self-preservation, the widespread acceptance of Dáil institutions undermined the efforts of British propagandists to associate republicanism with lawlessness and Bolshevism. The 'Irish Republic is very nearly in being', the unionist *Irish Times* reported in July 1920: the 'Sinn Féin flag flies already over the whole province of Munster, and soon will fly over the whole of Leinster and Connaught and over a large part of Ulster'.[36]

Arbitration and land courts (backed, when required, by IRA force) also diffused the potential for agrarian agitation which socially conservative politicians such as Griffith feared could 'wreck the entire national movement'.[37] Revolutionary violence stemmed not only from competing ideologies but from the breakdown of state authority, socio-economic pressures and communal tensions. The collapse of law and order, suspension of land redistribution, curtailing of emigration, and increasing pressure on land due to rising food prices, had created a surge in agrarian agitation in the spring of 1920, resulting in cattle-drives, land seizures, and violent intimidation. This was most evident in the west of Ireland where landless labourers and small farmers on uneconomic holdings struggled for survival in the shadow of landed estates and large grassland farms. In an effort to prevent such unwelcome developments, the Dáil prohibited land agitation in June 1920 and, more constructively, established a bank to facilitate land purchase.

While politically astute, Sinn Féin's determination to alleviate rural class tensions, particularly in Connacht where there was a strong link between popular agrarianism and support for the new movement, demonstrated the limits of the republican challenge to the existing social order. While Sinn Féin could do little to alter the fact that some two-thirds of agricultural holdings were classified as 'uneconomic', agrarian radicals came to realise that republican court rulings were oriented towards the status quo. David Fitzpatrick has attributed the movement's social conservatism to a thick strand of grassroots continuity with the Irish Parliamentary Party, which resulted in the 'old wine' of Home Rule politics being 'decanted into new bottles'. This thesis has been challenged by local studies of other regions that have emphasised the lower socio-economic status of Sinn Féin activists.[38] Republican policy was

36 Quoted in A. Mitchell, 'Alternative Government: "Exit Britannia" – The Formation of the Irish National State, 1918–21', in Augusteijn (ed.), *Irish Revolution*, 76–7.

37 T. Dooley, *'The Land for the People'. The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004), 46. And see above pp. 142–4.

38 Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 107; F. Campbell, *Land and Revolution. Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891–1921* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 225, 262.

also shaped by the relatively middle-class background and social conservatism of Sinn Féin's national leadership.

Countess Markievicz's Department of Labour similarly strived to dampen labour agitation. Despite a sharp resurgence in the fortunes of general trades-unionism, driven by government-imposed wartime labour regulations and successful campaigns for pay increases by agricultural workers, there was little support for radical socialism within the leadership of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union whose membership soared from 5,000 to 120,000. Following the execution of James Connolly, his successors such as William O'Brien – who has been criticised for failing to appreciate the strength of nationalist sentiment amongst Irish workers – prioritised labour interests over revolutionary politics. The Labour Party's pragmatic decision not to contest the 1918 general election could not but marginalise working-class political representation during a formative period, even if the party performed well in 1922. As with its response to other sectional groups, such as feminists, Sinn Féin sought to placate labour without committing itself to radical change. A Democratic Programme – substantially drafted by trade-unionist and Labour leader Thomas Johnson – which outlined a range of social democratic aspirations was endorsed but never implemented. Moreover, even with the dilution of its socialist rhetoric by Sean T. O'Kelly, this modest document was derided as 'mostly poetry' by Kevin O'Higgins whose subsequent prominence in the Irish Free State executive council demonstrated the ascendancy of right-wing impulses after the revolution.

Sinn Féin's cautious approach proved effective notwithstanding a surge in strikes and increased class conflict, trends attributed by one labour historian less to 'the exploits of the IRA and the achievements of Sinn Féin' and more to the 'real inspiration provided by events in Europe; the Russian revolution, the factory occupations in Italy, the industrial unrest in Britain and Germany, and, most of all, by the way the victorious allies turned the old world upside down in 1919'.[39] Revealingly, each of the major strikes between 1919 and 1921 – an anti-conscription general strike in April 1918, a protest in Limerick provoked by its proclamation as a special military area in April 1919, a two-day strike in support of hunger-striking prisoners in April 1920, and a protest by railway workers who refused to transport munitions between May and December 1920 (leading to the dismissal of a thousand workers) – were motivated by

39 E. O'Connor, 'Agrarian Unrest and the Labour Movement in County Waterford, 1917–1923', *Saothar. Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, 6 (1980), 54–5.

national rather than class politics.[40] Such civil resistance, Charles Townshend suggests, was more effective in terms of its impact on morale than on the British military campaign: 'Ireland's struggle for independence was, fundamentally, a struggle not for military victory but to impress upon Britain the seriousness of Ireland's claim. What was really under attack was the legitimacy of British rule.'[41]

Other aspects of the Dáil experiment were less successful. Its institutions had no authority in north-east Ulster, nor did Sinn Féin formulate a constructive policy to address Unionist concerns. The implementation of the 'Belfast Boycott' of northern goods in response to the intimidation of Catholic workers by Belfast loyalists merely heightened sectarian tensions. The takeover of local government in the South after the 1920 local elections exposed the British claim that republicans lacked popular support, but the Local Government Board's docking of funds to councils that declared their allegiance to the Irish Republic blunted the impact of this development. Efforts to build Griffith's counter-state also attracted the contempt of some within the IRA including Liam Lynch who described Sinn Féin branches and Dáil bodies as 'a burden on the Army'.[42] Such hardliners may have welcomed the authorities' decision to ban Sinn Féin and suppress the Dáil in September 1919, which ensured that violence, rather than politics, increasingly determined the pace of events.

The War of Independence

The military conflict can be divided into three phases. The period from 1918 to 1919 saw the formation of Irish Volunteer companies, and a gradual shift, driven by militants within the movement, from public defiance to guerrilla warfare.[43] The first sustained violence in Dublin came with the targeting of policemen and Dublin Castle officials by Michael Collins's 'Squad' of assassins. There was initially little public support for such ruthless methods and

40 F. Costello, *The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath 1916–1923. Years of Revolt* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 151–85.

41 C. Townshend, 'The Irish Railway Strike of 1920: Industrial Action and Civil Resistance in the Struggle for Independence', *Irish Historical Studies*, 22 (1979), 282. For a contrary view, emphasising class consciousness, see C. Kostick, *Revolution in Ireland: Popular Militancy 1917–1923* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2009).

42 Hart, *The I.R.A. and its Enemies*, 229.

43 C. Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland. Government and Resistance since 1848* (Oxford University Press, 1983); J. Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare. The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence 1916–1921* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996).

they were often condemned by Catholic clergymen.[44] Although the campaign had been preceded by a Dáil-led effort to sever links between the local community and the RIC, branded as 'spies in our midst',[45] many republican politicians were also shocked by such killings which contributed to tensions between the political and military wings of republicanism.

The second phase, from early 1920 (when assassinations were retrospectively endorsed by the IRA leadership at GHQ) to the summer of 1920, saw greater coordination between IRA units to attack barracks and the consequent withdrawal of the RIC from much of rural Ireland. Technically the responsibility of the Dáil's Minister for Defence, Cathal Brugha, the IRA campaign was conducted by the 'band of brothers' at GHQ with little regard for political oversight. The influence of Collins's Irish Republican Brotherhood, a rival power structure within the Irish Volunteers, further complicated relations between the government and army.

The final phase witnessed a professionalisation of the IRA campaign through the formation of flying columns of 'on the run' men, a local initiative endorsed by GHQ. By early 1921, increasing British military pressure saw a return to smaller-scale operations, with occasional exceptions such as the disastrous burning of the Custom House (which resulted in the death of three Volunteers and the arrest of 80 more). It was not until this period that the Dáil formally endorsed the IRA campaign, but tensions still remained, not least between followers of de Valera, president of Dáil Éireann, and the versatile Michael Collins whose offices included that of Minister of Finance, IRB president, and GHQ director of intelligence.

Volunteer companies often emerged from pre-existing youth networks such as GAA clubs.[46] With a median age of 23, IRA men were younger than Sinn Féin members, with many viewing themselves as more committed to the struggle. A radical minority, often from Fenian backgrounds, played an important role in establishing companies but the decision to join the IRA was for many a collective one. Shaped more by peer pressure than ideology, companies sprang up overnight as influential community leaders recruited

44 For the wide range of clerical attitudes to republican violence, see B. Heffernan, *Freedom and the Fifth Commandment: Catholic Priests and Political Violence in Ireland, 1919–21* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

45 *Dáil Éireann*, Minutes of Proceedings, 1919–1921 (Dublin: Stationery Office, n.d.), vol. 1, 10 April 1919, p. 67.

46 For the IRA's composition, see Hart, *The I.R.A. at War*, and local studies such as Augusteijn's *From Public Defiance* and J. O'Callaghan's *Revolutionary Limerick. The Republican Campaign for Independence in Limerick, 1913–1921* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010).

'friends, neighbours, cousins, work- and teammates'.[47] This suggests that radicalisation was often more a consequence than a cause of IRA membership, even if countless Volunteers subsequently testified to the motivation provided by the impact of the Easter Rising and the cultural revival. Described by the police as unskilled, unemployed, or otherwise lacking in social status, the composition of the IRA broadly reflected Irish society. The rich and poor tended not to join, while lower middle-class shop assistants, clerks, and skilled workers were overrepresented. Most IRA men were single, literate, employed, and, disproportionately, Catholic. A strong identification with moral values and ideas of respectability was common, particularly among officers.

A volunteer rather than professional army, which drew its support from urban as well as rural Ireland (despite a tendency in revolutionary memoirs to romanticise the latter), the IRA was defined by a strong localism. Regional leaders often resented the efforts of Richard Mulcahy's GHQ – which was unable to supply weapons in the quantity desired or to meaningfully direct operations – to impose its authority through a combination of bureaucracy and exhortation. GHQ ultimately failed to mesh a campaign of local struggles into a nationwide campaign. 'Each county was different', recalled Ernie O'Malley: 'the very map boundaries in many places seemed to make a distinction. . . . Sometimes I came to a townland where there was a company of twenty or thirty men and boys. Tall, well set-up or lanky, eager, lithe, willing to learn and anxious to take risks. Six miles away across the barony the people were cowed; the men had no initiative'.[48] Varying levels of local initiative contributed to the unevenness of the campaign, with determined leadership and levels of communal support often proving more important than the availability of weapons or social or geographical factors.[49]

Women played a significant role in revolutionary mobilisation although Cumann na mBan's activities – centring on first aid, catering, fund-raising, propaganda, attendance at funerals and rallies, and carrying despatches and arms – were firmly gendered.[50] Few would have expected otherwise, as Eithne Coyle recalled: 'We were more or less auxiliaries to the men, to the fighting men of the country. It wasn't a case of taking orders because we had our own executive and we made our own decisions, but if there were any jobs

47 Hart, *The I.R.A. and its Enemies*, 188.
48 O'Malley, *Another Man's Wound*, 140.
49 O'Callaghan, *Revolutionary Limerick*, 209–15.
50 M. Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution, 1910–1923* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 179–90.

or anything to be done, the men – they didn't order us – but they asked us to help them, which we did.' Women were also marginalised within Sinn Féin. Countess Markievicz made headlines as the first woman elected to Westminster, but she had been only one of two female republican candidates in 1918. Six women were elected to the Dáil in the 1921 election but four were widows or mothers of republican martyrs. At the grassroots, where attitudes were more conservative, women played little role in the party.[51]

Women who performed more dangerous roles, such as spying, were often overlooked in subsequent accounts such as the *Fighting Stories* that relegated their role to short features such as 'How the Women Helped'.[52] They were also denied military pensions in the early years of the Irish Free State. Margaret Skinnider, who had been shot three times as she led men in battle in 1916, was refused on the grounds that 'the definition of "wound" … only contemplates the masculine gender'. Women were subsequently permitted to apply for pensions but the criteria emphasised auxiliary 'service of a military nature' rather than political activism.[53] The reluctance to acknowledge the active role of women formed part of a wider post-revolutionary dispensation that valued women as mothers rather than citizens. While yet to be integrated into the wider historiography, new sources such as the Military Service Pensions collection are providing greater insight into women's roles but there remains a need for further gendered analysis of the revolution, including how ideas about masculinity shaped the exclusively male organisations which dominated the republican movement.[54]

By 1920 it was clear that the demoralised police could no longer cope with the republican challenge. With the exception of the political policemen in G Division, who were targeted for assassination, the Dublin Metropolitan Police, which refused to carry weapons on patrol, played little role in the conflict. Within the RIC, an armed force that operated outside Dublin, many resigned, kept their heads down, or (as within the wider British administration) provided the IRA with information. The effectiveness of the IRA's intelligence network partly accounted for Dublin Castle's failure to suppress republicanism, as did weaknesses within the British administration including

51 Quoted in M. Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2000), 199; Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland. The Sinn Féin Party 1916–1923* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 201–4.

52 Coleman, *County Longford*, 190.

53 Ferriter, *A Nation*, 340.

54 For unionist masculinities, see J. McGaughey, *Ulster's Men. Protestant Unionist Masculinities and Militarization in the North of Ireland, 1912–1923 (*Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012).

its 'inexperienced officers, amateur techniques, poor security, [and] lack of co-ordination' between the seven or so organisations tasked with intelligence-gathering. The resulting intelligence failures allowed influential reactionaries in the British establishment to depict Sinn Féin as 'a minor, temporary, unrepresentative phenomenon that could be eradicated', contributing to the cabinet's reluctance to pursue peace initiatives during the final 12 months of the conflict. Intelligence failures though were as much a consequence as a cause of inept government policy.[55]

Throughout early and mid-1920 British security forces in Ireland were restructured to cope with the growing IRA threat. Pay was increased and the RIC was stiffened by three new forces. These included 10,000, primarily British-recruited 'temporary constables' (dubbed 'Black and Tans' because of their improvised uniforms), and a 2,300-strong 'Auxiliary Division' that was recruited from former army officers who 'neither looked like police nor behaved like them'.[56] The appointment of General Sir Nevil Macready as commander-in-chief in Ireland improved the morale and effectiveness of the army but Major General Hugh Tudor struggled to coordinate the five police forces he inherited under a poorly defined role as 'police advisor'. The central flaws of Britain's 'hopelessly uncoordinated' counter-insurrectionary campaign remained: the lack of a unified command over security forces, and the government's inability, despite Macready's pleas, to commit itself to a clear military or political strategy.[57]

The Black and Tans earned their reputation for unruly behaviour but recent research offers more nuanced insights into this hastily recruited and poorly trained force. Predominantly urban, working-class, British, and Protestant, these 'rough' men did not conform to the more disciplined, respectable ethos of the mainly Catholic, rural RIC, but it has been argued that they were not necessarily more likely to be involved in reprisals than the Irish-born policemen they worked alongside. Less prominent in collective memory, the Auxiliaries – who operated independently of the restraining influence of the RIC – behaved more egregiously. Rather than comprising the dregs of society or brutalised First World War veterans, D. M. Leeson suggests, both forces were composed of ordinary men acting under extraordinary pressures. Republicans were conscious of the overwhelming military superiority of the Crown forces, but the

55 P. McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels. British Intelligence and Ireland 1916–1945* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2008), 427, 429.
56 Townshend, *The Republic*, 158.
57 D. Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands 1912–1939* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 92; McMahon, *British Spies*, 49–54.

view from inside the police barracks looked rather different: 'From the police perspective, the Irish insurgency was a one-sided war. The guerrillas did most of the killing, and the police did most of the dying.'[58] The RIC, which regarded itself as a civil police force, endured casualties of 10 per cent (rising to 24 per cent killed and 42 per cent wounded for those involved in combat).[59]

The new paramilitary forces were allowed a loose rein, particularly in comparison to the army which took discipline more seriously. Accountability was further diminished by the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act which replaced trial by jury and coroners' inquests with courts martial and military courts of inquiry. These measures reflected the authorities' remarkable failure to convict a single republican for murder by the summer of 1920. The controversial policy of reprisals – the use of collective punishment including the burning of houses and economic targets such as shops and creameries in areas where IRA attacks occurred – further encouraged outright lawlessness. There is disagreement among historians regarding how much reprisals such as the burning of Balbriggan on 20 September 1920 or the destruction of much of the centre of Cork in December 1920 were officially sanctioned, but influential figures from Winston Churchill and General Macready down to divisional police commissioners were certainly implicated in reprisals which, at different stages of the conflict, were connived at, denied, condoned, punished and eventually authorised.[60]

Almost half of the 2,141 fatalities recorded between January 1917 and December 1921 occurred within three counties (Cork, Dublin and Antrim), with the ten least violent counties accounting for less than 5 per cent of fatalities.[61] The IRA was responsible for inflicting around 46 per cent of fatalities, while the Crown forces accounted for at least 42 per cent. The IRA and police each made up around two-fifths of combatant fatalities with the army (20 per cent) accounting for the remainder. On both sides only a small proportion of combatants killed people but the brutalisation of some of those who did so contributed to the cyclical patterns of violence that emerged. While the IRA depicted itself as a defensive force, its violence was often intended to force the pace of events. This was a rational and effective strategy, as the frequently indiscriminate response of the Crown forces, which were usually

58 D. M. Leeson, *The Black and Tans. British Police and Auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 191, 130.
59 Townshend, *The Republic*, 159–60.
60 Fitzpatrick, *Two Irelands*, 91; Leeson, *Black and Tans*, 223.
61 E. O'Halpin, 'Counting Terror: Bloody Sunday and The Dead of the Irish Revolution', in D. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Terror in Ireland 1916–1923* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2012), 152. The following statistics derive from the same source.

unable to identify their assailants, alienated moderate opinion, further undermining British legitimacy. Describing the 'thrilling' course of events in mid-1920, Collins eagerly anticipated how 'Ireland is in for the greatest crucifixion she has ever yet been subjected to'.[62] The level of violence was low compared to other contemporaneous conflicts but it escalated sharply. Crown force casualties, for example, doubled every six months in the final 18 months of the conflict, while over three-fifths of fatalities between 1917 and 1921 occurred in 1921.[63] While fatalities provide a concrete measure of violence, like any other statistic, they can distort the picture. The increase in the proportion of non-combatant fatalities in the final months of the conflict may have reflected the difficulty of killing 'hard targets' such as soldiers (despite increasing numbers of IRA attacks) rather than greater brutality.[64]

Crown forces killed more civilians (42 per cent) than the IRA (31 per cent) but historiographical controversy has tended to focus on IRA violence. A disproportionate number of the IRA's civilian victims were Protestant, particularly in Cork where 70 of the IRA's 200 civilian fatalities were Protestant (five times their percentage within the population).[65] Given that Protestants were overwhelmingly Unionist, some of these were killed for allegedly passing information to the authorities but Protestants were also targeted because their status as 'other' aroused suspicion or resentment. In many areas of the country, however, IRA discipline prevented or constrained sectarian violence. Peter Hart's contention that many of the IRA's civilian victims were shot because of who they were rather than what they did has been robustly challenged. In particular, the extent to which the execution of 'spies' and 'informers' was justified by security concerns rather than religious affiliation has produced extensive debate. IRA intelligence in Cork city, for example, has been shown to be more effective than Hart suggested.[66] Hart also overstated the extent to which revolutionary violence was responsible for the decline of the Protestant minority in Southern Ireland by 33 per cent between 1911 and 1926, while his claim that ex-servicemen were systematically persecuted by the IRA has also been persuasively challenged.[67]

62 Quoted in Ferriter, *A Nation*, 204.
63 Townshend, 'The Irish War of Independence', 113.
64 P. Óg Ó Ruairc, *Truce: Murder, Myth and the Last Days of the Irish War of Independence* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2016).
65 Hart, *The I.R.A. at War*, 234.
66 J. Borgonovo, *Spies, Informer, and the 'Anti-Sinn Féin Society': the Intelligence War in Cork City, 1920–1921* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007).
67 D. Fitzpatrick, 'Protestant Depopulation and the Irish Revolution', *Irish Historical Studies*, 38 (2013), 643–70; P. Taylor, *Heroes or Traitors? Experiences of Southern Irish Soldiers returning from the Great War 1919–1939* (Liverpool University Press, 2015), 244.

None the less, as Hart's ground-breaking work so compellingly demonstrated, much revolutionary violence was intimate, brutal and shaped by a complex range of social forces. Individuals of low social status, for example, were disproportionately targeted. In the revolutionary backwater of County Monaghan, around half of the 20 or so individuals killed by the IRA during the 'Tan War' (as the conflict was termed by some republicans) were civilians. Labelled as spies or informers, they included Hibernian supporters of the Irish Party, Protestants, ex-soldiers, pedlars, the 'weak-minded' and others on the margins whose perceived lack of respectability increased their vulnerability in a climate of terror. Although the likelihood that 'private vengeance exacted its toll under cover of civil turmoil' was acknowledged publicly at the time, such killings were rarely mentioned after independence.[68] One reason why controversies such as the shooting of the Pearson brothers in Coolacrease, County Offaly, or of suspected Protestant informers in Dunmanway, County Cork, generate more heat than light is the difficulty of disentangling fact from rumour, or communal enmities from ideological motivations.[69] Given the importance of security concerns in guerrilla warfare, moreover, such killings – regardless of their justification – served a purpose; as one IRA man explained, they 'had the effect of keeping "our own weak ones right" '.[70]

Ten per cent of civilian fatalities were female. These were mostly accidental deaths, often the result of trigger-happy police patrols. The IRA killed three women notwithstanding GHQ's ban on such executions. In Monaghan republicans killed Kate Carroll (described by one IRA man as 'a half-wit') because her involvement in poitín-making gave rise to concerns about spying, but her marginal status and more intimate factors may have contributed to her death.[71] Recent research has shed light on gendered violence ranging from intimidation or the cutting of hair (a punishment commonly inflicted by both sides on women suspected of fraternising with the enemy) to rape (which the republican *Irish Bulletin* devoted an issue to publicising). While the sources are problematic, sexual (as opposed to gendered) violence appears to have been comparatively rare.[72]

68 *Dundalk Democrat*, 31 December 1921, quoted in F. McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy. A Self-Made Hero* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 72.
69 J. Augusteijn 'Coolacrease', *History Ireland*, 17 (2009), 56–7; Howe, 'Killing in Cork'.
70 McGarry, *O'Duffy*, 47–73.
71 Ibid., 65–6; Ferriter, *A Nation*, 209.
72 Ferriter, *A Nation*, 210; L. Ryan, ' "Drunken Tans": Representation of Sex and Violence in the Anglo-Irish War, 1919–21', *Feminist Review*, 66 (2000), 73–95; M. Coleman, 'Violence against Women in the Irish War of Independence, 1919–1921', in D. Ferriter and S. Riordan (eds.), *Years of Turbulence: The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2015).

As with other aspects of the conflict, Ulster was a place apart. The IRA campaign there was restricted to areas with substantial Catholic populations, such as Monaghan and south Armagh. Belfast (where over 500 people were killed between 1920 and 1922) was, in per capita terms, the most violent place in Ireland. The conflict in Ulster has received relatively little historiographical attention. Debates about sectarian violence, for example, have focused on Cork, despite the much greater role played by religious identity in structuring violence in the North.[73] Many of Belfast's fatalities died as a result of communal rioting and sectarian reprisals. Sparked by rumours of republican infiltration fanned by 12 July celebrations, as well as the assassination of a Banbridge-born RIC officer in Cork five days later, riots spread throughout the north-east in 1920. These culminated in the expulsion of 5,500 Catholics and 1,900 'rotten Prods' from the shipyards, a phenomenon that also reflected economic competition between insecure workers in a declining industry. The killing of D. I. Swanzy in Lisburn, again by the Cork IRA, resulted in a further wave of violence the following summer: 'Long-standing communal rivalries, inflamed by armed gangs in various uniforms and disguises, ensured that in Ulster the "Anglo-Irish" conflict began to take the shape of a sectarian civil war.' Catholics, outnumbered and confined to vulnerable enclaves, inevitably bore the brunt. Only 23 per cent of the population in Belfast, they accounted for 56 per cent of deaths, 75 per cent of workplace expulsions, and 80 per cent of those displaced. Violence was, none the less, two-sided rather than a pogrom, with combatants from both communities justifying their murderous actions as defensive.[74]

Violence in Ulster peaked after the Truce of July 1921, demonstrating the limitations of applying conventional (i.e. Southern Irish) periodisation to the conflict as a whole. The pattern of violence in Ulster was shaped by preparations to establish a Northern Irish State following the introduction of the Government of Ireland Act in 1920. Under pressure from James Craig, the Northern prime minister in waiting, the British cabinet approved the formation of the Ulster Special Constabulary, ignoring warnings from senior officials about the likely consequence of arming one side in a sectarian conflict. Control over this force was ceded to Ulster Unionists, ensuring that security concerns were prioritised over the admittedly slim possibility of reconciling northern Catholics to the new state. Levels of violence in Belfast matched the

73 R. Lynch, *The Northern IRA and the Early Years of Partition, 1920–1922* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006); idem., 'Explaining the Altnaveigh Massacre', *Éire-Ireland*, 45 (2010), 186–7.

74 Fitzpatrick, *Two Irelands*, 96–9; Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. at War*, 241–58.

worst years of the recent Troubles but Ulster did not experience anything like the scale of violence that marked other contemporaneous ethnic border conflicts. The killing of a Catholic publican, Owen McMahon, along with four of his sons and an employee, by a squad of RIC and B Specials in North Belfast in March 1922, and the killing of six Protestant civilians in rural Armagh by Frank Aiken's Fourth Northern Division, were shocking precisely because they were exceptional.[75] Tim Wilson's comparative research on conflict in Ulster and Upper Silesia (a disputed frontier zone between Germany and Poland) suggests that ethno-nationalist violence was qualitatively and quantitatively greater in areas where boundary markers were ambiguous. Ulster's conflict, structured by the 'hard boundaries' of its religious divide, was less violent than in Silesia where language and religion transcended national affiliation, rendering communal blocs more permeable. As in all civil wars, violence – whether intended to polarise identities, reinforce boundaries or assert control over territory – was far from irrational.[76]

The importance of the social mechanisms that limited violence require further research, as do the experiences of the many parts of the country that witnessed little conflict. Important constraints included parental and clerical authority, morality, compassion and the fear of punishment (criminal or divine). There has perhaps been too much focus on violence given the importance of other factors in determining the outcome of the conflict. Like the activities of the Dáil, the IRA's role was essentially propagandistic. Levels of republican violence are not necessarily the most reliable means of gauging revolutionary support, while other forms of agitation, such as the struggle in the prisons, did much to shape the campaign. The confinement of almost 6,000 men by June 1921 ensured that imprisonment 'was one of the most common experiences shared by activists'. By turning 'sites that were supposed to "quell political dissent" into places where resistance, even revolution was nurtured', prison protests were arguably more effective, both in terms of raising public consciousness and exposing the limitations of the British State, than the killing of small numbers of Crown forces.[77] Even unsuccessful protests, such as those of Thomas Ashe, who died in 1917 following force-feeding, and Terence MacSwiney, who died in Brixton Prison on 25 October 1920 after

75 T. Wilson, '"The Most Terrible Assassination that Has Yet Stained the Name of Belfast": The McMahon Murders in Context', *Irish Historical Studies*, 37 (2010), 83–106; R. Lynch, 'Altnaveigh Massacre', 184–210.

76 T. K. Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence*; Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*.

77 W. Murphy, *Political Imprisonment and the Irish, 1912–1921* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 1, 10.

a 74-day hunger-strike, generated enormous publicity and sympathy, focusing global and British opinion on Ireland.

One reason for the British government's continued reliance on coercion by late 1920 was the grip over Irish policy exercised by its partisan administrators. Supported by well-placed figures in Britain, including the chair of the cabinet's Irish committee Walter Long, and Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the alarmist reports of Dublin Castle officials to Downing Street depicted republicans as an unrepresentative 'murder gang' and, more outlandishly, as part of a global Bolshevist threat. The Unionist stranglehold over policy was weakened by the appointment of Sir Warren Fisher, the head of the British civil service, to investigate the British administration in Ireland. His damning report – 'the Castle administration does not administer' – saw hardliners marginalised in favour of more pragmatic administrators such as the reforming undersecretary Sir John Anderson and the Dublin Castle 'fixers' Mark Sturgis and Alfred Cope.[78] Publicly, however, as the rhetoric of the new chief secretary, Sir Hamar Greenwood, made clear, Britain's aim remained the effective prosecution of the war. Continued reliance on repression also reflected the belief of the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, widely shared throughout Britain, that Irish independence would be 'fatal to the security of the Empire'.[79] This helps to explain the failure to exploit tensions between republican moderates and militarists, as well as the lengthy delay in closing the gap between the offer of Home Rule and a more realistic settlement. Lloyd George, while instinctively a pragmatist, was further constrained by the Liberals' reliance on the Tory majority in government. Studies of the wider British world suggest, however, that the principal reason for inaction in Ireland was the more urgent demands placed on overstretched military, intellectual and political resources by anti-colonial violence across India, Egypt and the Middle East.[80]

November 1920, the bloodiest month of the conflict, might be seen as a turning point. Bloody Sunday, when 35 people (including British agents and spectators at a GAA match) were killed in Dublin, and the IRA ambush at Kilmichael, in which 17 Auxiliaries were killed, shocked British public opinion. By demonstrating the credibility of the IRA's campaign, such violence increased the impetus for a decisive policy response. As at the beginning of the revolutionary decade, Ulster – or six counties of it – played an important

78 Townshend, *The Republic*, 138.
79 Leeson, *Black and Tans*, 225.
80 K. Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918–22* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

role in the final stage of the conflict. The real purpose of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, which established parliaments in Dublin and Belfast, was to secure Northern Ireland's existence prior to British negotiations with republicans. Although the origins of the Irish revolution lay in Ulster's campaign against Home Rule, Belfast and London now perceived the advantages of a measure that 'offered Unionists power over a restricted territory, while absolving the British government of direct responsibility for the application of that power'.[81] Demographic realities ensured that Unionists in Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal had now to be abandoned by their Ulster Unionist brethren in order to secure a more manageable six-county settlement. For Northern Catholics, reduced to a permanent minority without the safeguards previously provided by 'direct rule' and an Irish nationalist majority, it was the worst possible outcome. Lloyd George's decision to partition Ireland before negotiating with republicans may have been a 'short-term fix' with 'dire long-term consequences',[82] but it is difficult to envisage other means by which Conservative support could have been won for the more generous settlement necessary to bring peace to Southern Ireland.

Treaty and Civil War

Hawks on both sides of the War of Independence depicted the Truce of July 1921 as a missed opportunity but this often reflected disillusionment about the compromises that followed. Conversely, Treaty supporters such as Richard Mulcahy, who lamented the IRA's inability 'to drive the enemy from anything but a fairly good-sized police barracks', stressed republican weaknesses. While inflicting more casualties than ever, the IRA was also sustaining higher losses due to improvements in British intelligence and counter-insurgency methods. The internment of 4,500 men and incarceration of a further 1,000 convicted prisoners intensified the pressure on the IRA to reach a settlement.[83] While in a position to bring ever greater resources to bear, British officers such as Macready – who warned the cabinet of the need 'to go "all out" or "get out" ' – painted a disturbing picture of the methods required to secure victory. As in the late twentieth century, the belated acceptance by British politicians of the need for a more far-reaching political settlement pointed to the effectiveness of republican violence.

81 Fitzpatrick, *Two Irelands*, 101.
82 Hopkinson, *War of Independence*, 203. For British policy, see Fanning's *Fatal Path*.
83 M. Hopkinson, *Green against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988), 9.

Despite sparring between de Valera and Lloyd George through July 1921, it was clear that any likely deal would centre on dominion status. De Valera had pointedly informed the Dáil that 'we are not doctrinaire republicans'. On the other hand, on her return from the United States after the Truce, the militant republican, Mary MacSwiney, had been alarmed by the 'atmosphere of what I can only call compromise' that she found in Dublin. 'I was told to the right and left of me that we could not possibly get a Republic.'[84] Tensions between and within the IRA and Sinn Féin increased as the talks dragged on through the autumn. To the irritation of Collins and Griffith, who led the negotiations in London, de Valera – who controversially chose to remain in Dublin rather than tarnish the status of his presidential office as a symbol of sovereignty – continued to insist on external association, an ambiguous concept based on voluntary association with the Commonwealth. This subtle attempt to bridge the gap between independence and a humiliating subordination to empire held as little appeal for militant republicans as their Tory counterparts.

Following two months of negotiations the Treaty was concluded on 6 December after Lloyd George melodramatically threatened the Irish plenipotentiaries with 'terrible and immediate war'. Clearly under immense pressure, their willingness to sign the agreement without referring the final version back to Dublin (later the subject of much recrimination) reflected their belief that it represented the best attainable settlement, as well as the virtual breakdown of relations between Collins and Griffith on the one hand and their less pragmatic cabinet colleagues at home on the other. De Valera's surprising inability to persuade a cabinet majority to reject what he saw as an attempt to impose the Treaty as a *fait accompli* ensured that it was left to the Dáil to determine the Treaty's fate. That institution, it would soon become clear, lacked the authority to contain differences over the Treaty within constitutional parameters.

The Treaty debates divided those who advocated the settlement as a stepping-stone to full independence from those who rejected the Dáil's right to dis-establish the republic. Doctrinaire TDs such as MacSwiney dismissed the influential pro-Treaty argument, reiterated by GHQ figures, that the only alternative was a return to a conflict that the IRA could not win by asserting that 'the issue is not between peace and war, it is between right and wrong'.[85] Concepts such as loyalty, honour, deceit and hypocrisy featured more than

84 Laffan, *The Resurrection*, 346; T. P. O'Neill (ed.), *Private Sessions of the Second Dáil* (Dublin Stationery Office, 1972), 17 December 1921, 247.

85 Laffan, *The Resurrection*, 356.

ideology, indicating the continuing importance of a republican discourse of virtue rather than ideology.[86] Backed by public opinion, pro-Treatyites could afford to distance themselves from extreme expressions of such attitudes, whereas even relative moderates such as de Valera resorted to legitimist assertions such as 'the people have no right to do wrong'. Partition seldom featured in the debates. For Irish republicans, as for imperialists like Churchill, symbolic issues centring on sovereignty, such as the oath of fealty to the monarch and membership of the British Empire, were paramount.

The occasion as much as the cause of the Civil War,[87] the Treaty brought to a head tensions within a party that encompassed dual monarchists, pragmatic nationalists, and republican separatists who rejected any link with Britain. Many anti-Treatyites depicted the split as one between those who remained loyal to the Republic and those they cast as apostates but tensions between rival personalities melded with ideological and political differences. Encompassing social issues as well as local rivalries, the factors that determined the stance of ordinary IRA men across the country were not restricted to attitudes to the Treaty: as one IRA veteran recalled, 'it all depended on which crowd you got into'.[88] The repudiation of de Valera's proposed alternative to the Treaty by some anti-Treaty IRA leaders also suggested that some form of conflict was likely whatever compromise was struck in London. In contrast to the Provisional Republican leadership of the 1990s, little effort had been made to prepare the way for compromise before the 1921 ceasefire.

Like the War of Independence itself, the split can also be seen as a consequence of the Rising's 'politics of exaltation' which narrowed the potential for political compromise. 'You are all abstract fanatics', complained Eileen Gould to her future husband, the writer and anti-Treaty IRA volunteer, Sean O'Faolain, 'suffering, not out of love for your fellow man but out of love for your own ruthless selves'.[89] Reflecting on the elitist impulses within republicanism, Ernie O'Malley also conceded 'a certain hardness in our idealism. It made us aloof from ordinary living, as if we were above it'. This suspicion of the masses – who had only been shaken from their complacency by the violence of 1916 – was demonstrated by Liam Lynch's injudicious observation

86 J. Knirck, *Imagining Ireland's Independence. The Debates over the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 175–6.
87 Joe Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 105.
88 Sean Harling, quoted in K. Griffith and T. O'Grady, *Curious Journey. An Oral History of Ireland's Unfinished Revolution* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1988), 285.
89 S. O'Faolain, *Vive Moi! An Autobiography* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993 edn.), 165. E. O'Malley, *The Singing Flame* (Dublin: Anvil, 1978), 285.

that the people 'were merely sheep to be driven anywhere at will'.[90] Some political scientists have identified a clash between romantic idealists and pragmatic realists as central to this split but historians place more emphasis on contingent factors. Charles Townshend has suggested, however, that those who most vehemently opposed the Treaty 'had mostly been less committed to the task of turning the Republic from an abstract concept into a functioning machine of representative government'.[91]

Accounts of the split often reflect the terms of the original rupture. Interpreting the pro-Treaty victory as the 'birth of Irish democracy', Tom Garvin's analysis echoed many of the arguments articulated by P. S. O'Hegarty's 1924 polemic, while Brian P. Murphy's republican account conveys sympathetically the legitimist ideals that framed the anti-Treaty outlook.[92] Emphasising the often overlooked role of the threat of British violence should the Treaty be rejected, some political scientists now interpret the conflict as one between the conflicting rights of self-determination and majority rule rather than, as previous accounts had suggested, between anti-democratic 'Gaelic Romantic' and more modern 'Irish-enlightenment' values.[93] Inevitably, the evolution of the Irish Free State to full independence, a development predicted by Collins and, ironically, achieved by de Valera, has diminished understanding of the anti-Treaty rationale. However, notwithstanding popular support for the Provisional Government, the idea of the Irish Civil War as a vindication of democracy and the rule of law is complicated by Treatyite authoritarianism and the new state's execution without trial of scores of prisoners.[94]

The postponement of violence until the summer – despite the provocative occupation of garrisons by anti-Treaty IRA forces, and the intemperate rhetoric of de Valera who warned that republicans may need 'to wade through Irish blood' – made clear the reluctance of both sides to resort to arms. Given that a majority within the IRA opposed the Treaty, Collins's conciliatory initiatives also allowed the Provisional Government and its fledgling army an opportunity to establish their authority. Efforts to avert conflict included

90 Quoted in T. Garvin, *1922. The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996), 43.
91 Townshend, *The Republic*, 449.
92 Garvin, *1922*; B. P. Murphy, *Patrick Pearse and the Lost Republican Ideal* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1990).
93 B. Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 2005); J. Prager, *Building Democracy in Ireland. Political Order and Cultural Integration in a Newly Independent Nation* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).
94 J. Regan, *Myth and the Irish State* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2014).

3. The Four Courts, Dublin, on fire at the beginning of the Irish Civil War, 1922.

cooperation on attempts to destabilise the North (which resulted in renewed communal violence, and the collapse of the northern IRA), an attempt to devise a republican constitution (scotched by London), an abortive pact election, and repeated efforts by IRB leaders to reach a compromise. Beginning with the shelling of the Four Courts by the Provisional Government army on 28 June 1922, the Civil War was fought in two phases: a brief period of relatively large-scale fighting which saw the anti-Treatyites pushed out of urban strongholds, and a longer period of more familiar low-intensity rural conflict. Although the anti-Treaty IRA outnumbered Provisional Government forces at the outset of the conflict, its initial adoption of a 1916-style defensive strategy prevented it from exploiting this advantage. This may have reflected a commendable lack of ruthlessness – 'the truth is, our hearts were not in it, and this alone contributed a good deal to our military defeat' – but it also stemmed from deep divisions among the anti-Treaty leaders.[95]

In contrast, the Provisional Government – if not necessarily its inexperienced and less ideologically committed soldiers – demonstrated a greater

95 M. Harnett, *Victory and Woe* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002), xii.

sense of purpose notwithstanding cabinet divisions between conciliatory militarists (such as Collins and Mulcahy) and hawkish civilians (like O'Higgins). Following the collapse of large-scale resistance by the autumn of 1922, the IRA could do little more than prolong a destructive campaign of sabotage and guerrilla warfare. By the final stages of the conflict, the government forces – drawing on British resources – numbered 55,000, while some 10,000 republicans (including 500 women) had been interned. The death of Collins in an ambush in rural Cork on 22 August 1922 prompted a harder line from the Provisional Government. A Public Safety Act in September permitted the execution of those caught bearing arms. As with the earlier conflict, legitimacy proved crucial. Dependent on commandeered resources, the presence of the IRA was often resented by civilians, while the republican government established by de Valera commanded little allegiance. Similarly, republican hunger-strikes led to demoralisation rather than public sympathy. Regardless of anti-Treaty condemnation of the 'Green and Tans', the 77 (or more) executions carried out by the Free State army provoked less disquiet than the 24 carried out by the British during the War of Independence notwithstanding the fact that some of these – such as the shooting of four IRA leaders on 8 December in reprisal for the assassination of a TD after their imprisonment – were conducted without much pretence of legality. The public appeared to accept Kevin O'Higgins's crude assertion that 'the safety and preservation of the people is the highest law'.[96] Despite private misgivings about these draconian measures, the Catholic hierarchy also provided important moral support to the Provisional Government by issuing a joint pastoral condemning the anti-Treaty campaign.

The violence of the Civil War requires further research, as is clear from the uncertainty around its level of fatalities, estimated at around 1,500 deaths. From Pearse's sacrificial gesture in 1916, republican violence had come full circle, with combatants ruthlessly inflicting atrocities on former comrades. Operating as the Criminal Intelligence Department, and within the Dublin Guard, former members of Collins's Squad were involved in the worst excesses such as the murder of 17 anti-Treaty combatants who were tied to mines in three separate incidents in Kerry on 6–7 March 1923. In Dublin the corpses, in some cases mutilated, of around 25 abducted republicans were dumped on the streets.[97] The psychological impact of such harrowing incidents on a tightly-knit movement probably contributed more than the relatively low levels of violence (around 25,000 deaths and 8,000 executions occurred in the roughly contemporaneous

96 Ferriter, *A Nation*, 281.
97 Ibid., 287; Townshend, *The Republic*, 441–3.

Finnish Civil War) to the Civil War's bitter legacy. In contrast to the aftermath of the recent Troubles, a general amnesty ensured that these killings were never investigated. Civil War enmities were central to Free State politics but a veil of silence was drawn over much of the violence of the conflict. This was particularly the case on the pro-Treaty side where the duty to remember their dead took second place to the need to secure support for the new state.[98]

As with the preceding conflict, wider social tensions had shaped revolutionary violence. Some parts of the west of Ireland, relatively quiet during the previous conflict, were more active in the Civil War. The discontented – including landless labourers, small farmers, and striking workers – often perceived their interests as lying with the unfulfilled aims of the republic rather than the Free State whose politicians identified themselves with the restoration of law and order and the return of the bailiff.[99] A counter-revolution of sorts could be discerned in the Provisional Government's use of a Special Infantry Corps to break strikes and restore land to its owners. The changing economic context provided an important, if widely overlooked, factor in shaping social conflict during the revolutionary period. The collapse of the wartime agricultural boom triggered by the resumption of international trade in late 1920 simultaneously increased rural grievances while undermining labour's bargaining power, thereby 'making class a less significant factor in the later phases of unrest despite the dreams of Liam Mellows and Roddy Connolly'.[100]

Those in favour of the Treaty drew support from the press, business interests and the propertied, but, equally, the Labour Party and trade-union movement were also broadly pro-Treaty. While reactionary Free State generals such as O'Duffy denounced anti-Treatyites as Bolsheviks and criminals, a contested discourse centring on status and respectability provides more insight into the Civil War's divisions than clear-cut class distinctions.[101] As during the earlier conflict, Protestants were disproportionately targeted. Around 200 properties, mainly 'big houses', were burned between December 1921 and the end of the Irish Civil War. Arson, often carried out by non-combatants, formed part of a wider campaign of intimidation, cattle-maiming, personal

98 A. Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War. History and Memory, 1923–2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

99 See, for example, M. Farry, *The Aftermath of Revolution. Sligo 1921–23* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2000).

100 D. Fitzpatrick, 'Irish Consequences of the Great War', *Irish Historical Studies*, 39 (2015), 650.

101 G. Foster, *The Irish Civil War and Society. Politics, Class and Conflict* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

violence and economic sabotage, illustrating how revolutionary violence overlapped with communal enmities and conflicts over land, property and authority.[102]

Aside from its demoralising legacy – 'a kind of rot proceeded in the country', one government minister recorded – the Civil War proved damaging in several respects. It was ruinously expensive: £10m of £26.5m spent on public services in 1922–1923 was devoted to security and reconstruction, while Treatyite concern about the threat to the state saw, as in other interwar 'successor' states, the erosion of liberal democratic principles. The coincidence of state formation and military crisis stymied administrative change, ensuring reliance on existing British administrative structures in Ireland rather than the divided republican institutions that had emerged during the revolution. Revealingly, the republican courts, the Dáil government's most successful innovation, were scrapped in favour of a return to the *status quo ante*. The conflict left little scope for initiative: one of few such successful developments, the formation of an unarmed police force, was the product of necessity (following a mutiny), and owed more to the British (rather than colonial) model of policing than innovation. The resulting continuity was partially masked by the adoption of Gaelic names and symbols. Such continuity did, however, reinforce the stability of the new regime, one of few successor states to remain a functioning democracy by 1939.

The Civil War also contributed to 'the sharply conservative aftermath of the revolution, when nascent ideas of certain kinds of liberation were aggressively subordinated to the national project of restabilization (and clericalization)'.[103] This was particularly evident from the experiences of women. Although the opposition of many prominent republican women (including all six female TDs) to the Treaty was often a product of their personal ties to martyred republicans, their stance was presented as evidence of the hysterical nature of women and their unsuitability for political life. By empowering the more moderate section within Sinn Féin, the split ensured that the Treaty became an end in itself rather than a stepping-stone to unity (although the limits of Michael Collins's more expansive interpretation of the Treaty settlement were evident by the time of his death). The endurance of Civil War hatreds also reinforced the marginal role of ideology in a party political system which, unlike most European countries (but like most former colonies),

102 G. Clark, *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).
103 Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 117.

4. Irish Free State soldiers in jubilant mood, 1923, possibly at announcement of an end to the Civil War.

was structured more by divisions over the national question than by social or class issues.

Conclusion

The revolutionary period can be seen as a decade-long negotiation over the terms of British withdrawal. Although much the weaker side, republicans benefited from the rapidly changing international context between 1912 and 1923, as well as from their skilful mobilisation of revolutionary politics, propaganda and armed struggle. Around 7,500 people were killed or wounded as a result of political violence during the revolution.[104] Although comparatively low, these statistics represented 'the culmination of a process in which, over three years of guerrilla conflict, violence permeated society'.[105] Violence accelerated the pace of change, resulting in a level of independence that few

104 Hart, *The I.R.A. at War*, 30.
105 Townshend, *The Republic*, 452.

could have anticipated before 1914, but it also narrowed the potential for accommodation between the two Irelands and between Ireland and Britain.

Notwithstanding the relative success of the republican campaign, which influenced anti-imperial movements elsewhere, Irish revolutionaries did not achieve their central aims: the restoration of the Gaelic language, complete separation from Britain (for many, the essence of republicanism) and territorial unity. Nor did they fully comprehend the tensions between the last and first two of these aims. Independence rarely lived up to expectations. The enthusiasm of the revival gave way to a more insular ethos, and it became clear that political independence would not automatically lead to greater prosperity, improved standards of welfare or an end to emigration. The revolution produced losers as well as winners, including liberals, feminists, and labour; religious minorities on both sides of the border were left, in Churchill's caustic words, 'to stew in their own juice'.[106] Among the losers can also be counted the many revolutionary veterans who endured lives of hardship and disappointment after, as well as during, the conflict. For all the achievements of independence, the radical impulses that brought about the Irish revolution failed to prevent the dawning of a conservative settlement across the island.

106 Fanning, *Fatal Path*, 360.