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# Public support for paramilitary groups: a case study of the Irish Republican Army

Promotor: Prof. S. PARMENTIER

Verhandeling, ingediend door SVEN BOLLENS, bij het eindexamen voor de graad van MASTER IN DE CRIMINOLOGISCHE WETENSCHAPPEN

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**Summary**

The conflict in Northern Ireland has received a lot of attention, both by the academic world and the media outlets. This research is an attempt to explore a topic which has not received much prior academic attention, which is the public support for the Provisional IRA during the early years of the Troubles. The Provisional IRA was one of the most successful politically violent groups and had an incredible lifespan. In the literature on paramilitary groups like the Provisional IRA, one sometimes encounters the presupposition that the long survival was only possible because it enjoyed support in its community. This research is an attempt to delve deeper in this topic, firstly by describing the public support enjoyed by the Provisional IRA and secondly by explaining this public support. The answers provided to these questions flow forth out of a combination of a thorough literature review and expert interviews held with academics, former volunteers and a former member of Sinn Féin. The public support for the Provisional IRA was something that fluctuated during the Troubles. One can distinguish three types of factors that explain the public support: internal, external and contextual factors. The internal factors are related to the behavior of the Provisional IRA and include its policing role, its role as a defender of its community, the role of fear and intimidation and the Provisional IRA's actions. The external factors are related to the behavior of other actors than the Provisional IRA and include the collective strains and actions of the state and its actors. The contextual factors are related to the broader context and include the culture and Catholicism, the collective identity and social ties.

**Acknowledgements**

"Yet none but an Ulster man can fairly criticize Ulstermen. The foreigner, looking at the surface of things, judges both sides too hardly" (Doyle, in Elliott, 2000, p. 338).

This dissertation started as a mission to provide an answer to a question that had fascinated me for quite some time and has ended in something that has challenged me both as a person and as an academic. This is not to say the search for an answer has ended, as this was a mere sketch of the picture that ought to be drawn. My gratitude goes towards several groups of people.

First of all, I would like to thank my promoter, Professor Stephan Parmentier, for having given me a certain amount of freedom in my research and his supportive attitude towards my research.

Secondly, I will forever be in debt to my parents, who have allowed me to study. The gift of self-improvement was the best I could ever receive.

Thirdly, I would like to thank those close to me, for tolerating all the conversations on Northern Ireland, for providing me the chance to distance myself from my research and for simply being my friend.

Fourthly, there are numerous people who have helped me directly with this research. I have talked to several people in regards to this topic; those conversations have been deciding for this dissertation. Not only have they influenced the research, but these conversations have also left a certain impression on me. The critical approach that was encountered in many of the conversations with the experts was admirable and inspiring.

Finally, there is the group of people that have helped me indirectly. This ranges from the researchers I have spoken to at the start to the friendly woman from the Queens University of Belfast's library who allowed me access. Thank you for your hospitality.

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**List of abbreviations**

CRM: Civil Rights Movement

GST: General strain theory

INLA: Irish National Liberation Army

IRA: Irish Republican Army

NICRA: Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association

OIRA: Official Irish Republican Army

PIRA: Provisional Irish Republican Army

RUC: Royal Ulster Constabulary

SDLP: Social Democratic and Labour Party

UVF: Ulster Volunteer Force

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Appendix I: A priori coding scheme
Appendix II: A posteriori coding scheme
Appendix III: Topic list (including the open-ended questions asked at the start of the interview)
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## Introduction

Northern Ireland has experienced a lot of violence during the period of the Troubles. It is estimated that over 3700 people were killed during the conflict and 40000 were wounded (McGrattan, 2010, p. 1). Broadly speaking, this violence was committed by three groups. The first group, the governmental actors, is often referred to as the 'security forces'. In the period of the Troubles, this was mainly the members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the British army[1]. The second group, the loyalist paramilitaries, consisted of different groups who expressed loyalty to the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland (e.g. the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) …). The third group, the republican paramilitaries, consisted of different groups who desired the end of the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland (e.g. the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA) …). The PIRA was created in 1969 when it split away from what would then be called the OIRA.

The PIRA was one of the main militant republican movements during the period of the Troubles. From the onset of this period, much attention has been paid to the Northern Irish conflict, both from academics as from the media. Less attention has been paid to the public support for the PIRA during the conflict, even though it was essential for its survival (Sluka, 1989, p. 65). The title of Sluka's work (1989) refers to the quote which is often contributed to Mao Tse-tung: the paramilitary group is the fish which needs water (= support) to survive. The assumption on which this research started was that public support is essential for paramilitary groups. It is also believed that a better understanding of the support such a group enjoys can contribute to an improved conflict management.

This dissertation as a whole is an attempt to find out how paramilitary groups are supported by the public and by what factors this public support might have been influenced. The case is defined in three ways: first of all, this study focuses on the Northern Ireland conflict and is limited to the PIRA due to pragmatic reasons (e.g. the amount of literature available). Secondly, it is limited to the public support coming from the community the PIRA is embedded in. Thirdly, this study's focus is limited from the start of the Troubles to the period of the mid-70s. There are two main research questions that drive this research. The first question is descriptive: it is about how the public support for the PIRA can be described and

[1] In reality, there were other governmental actors that were responsible for violence too (e.g. the Ulster Constabulary Specials, or the 'B-Specials', who were disbanded in 1970).

seeks to know how it evolved and how it differentiated according to different sections within the community. The second question is formulated in an explanatory way, as it seeks to find out what factors might have influenced the public support for the PIRA.

This dissertation consists of six chapters: the first two chapters are a literature review, in which the reader is provided with a brief historical overview of the conflict and a theoretical framework that both function as the foundations of this research. The historical overview is focusing on a few key points in the history of the Northern Ireland conflict that are important for the research that follows, but this overview also includes an attempt to gain a better understanding of the conflict and its relationship with the Northern Irish society. The theoretical framework, in the second chapter, provides a collection of relevant theoretical concepts that will be used in this research. The third chapter aims at increasing the transparency of this research, as its goal is to provide the reader an insight in the research design. This includes an overview and evaluation of the sampling process, the data collection and the chosen methods. In the fourth chapter, the theoretical concepts are applied on the conflict. To the application of the theoretical framework data from expert interviews is added: these data are brought in interaction with the literature. The fifth chapter includes a discussion of the theoretical framework presented in this research, the value of this research and suggestions will be made for potential follow-up research. This dissertation ends with a conclusion outlining the main results of this research, which is the final chapter.

## 1. Historical, political and societal background to the conflict

The Northern Ireland conflict can be approached from many perspectives. It is not the goal to provide an analysis of the whole history and society of Northern Ireland, as this would be irrelevant for this research, but rather to highlight a few crucial aspects of the history, politics and society. To provide such an analysis in a comprehensible manner, some ideas on the concepts community and identity in the Northern Irish context are put forward in the first part of this chapter. In the second part, the origin of the conflict is briefly looked at. In the third part a closer look is given to the Northern Ireland conflict itself, which is an attempt to understand what happened during the early years of the Troubles. The three parts which follow are an elaboration on this, in which the political actions, the relationship between the PIRA and the community, and the role of culture are being highlighted.

### 1.1. Notions in regards to community and identity

The usage of the concept community is dangerous, as one risks the possibility of using a term that triggers a whole range of different meanings if it is not properly defined (Seagrave, 1996, p. 2). Therefore a brief introduction is needed before delving deeper into the topic to avoid any misunderstandings. This theoretical preface is a two-folded attempt: first of all, the meaning given to this concept in this specific research will be explained, which is essential as it will be the theoretical foundation. Secondly, this will be applied on the context at hand: how are the different communities narrowed down and what other possibilities are there?

Bourdieu (2007, pp. 276-278) describes habitus as the durable and internalized dispositions. Social groups are understood as sets of individuals that have the same class habitus (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 283): this is the individual habitus which reflects the "common schemes of perception, conception and action" (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 283) of a group. Using this as a starting point, communities can be understood as social groups of which the members have such common schemes. This does not rule out heterogeneity within the community: Shirlow (2003, p. 76) suggests that a highly segregated community may consist of heterogeneous populations. In other words, a community is not a set of homogeneous individuals and may have different sections.

In applying this to the Northern Ireland context, one would attempt to answer the following question: what communities are present in Northern Ireland? It should be noted that the people in the Northern Irish society as a collective are not seen as a single divided

community. Ruane and Todd (1996, p. 77-78) give two reasons to assume there were two communities present during the period which is being looked at by them. Firstly, they differed in their perception of Northern Ireland as a desirable entity. Secondly, each community has its own interests. In a lot of the literature one will find the distinction between the Protestant community and the Catholic community. If one simplified it in a very blunt way, these communities can be seen as two social groups with different economic, religious, historical and political attitudes (Salazar, 1998, p. 374). In this research, the community which will be focused on is the Catholic community. The Catholic community is obviously not interpreted as a homogeneous social group. First of all, one can distinguish different sections within the Catholic community according to political beliefs. One political belief is republicanism, which is the desire to see a united Ireland as soon as possible, with use of the most effective means (Ruane & Todd, 1996, pp. 71-72). Another important belief is nationalism, which can be interpreted as the desire for an Irish dimension in the Northern Irish society, with the idea of achieving a united Ireland on the long term (Ruane & Todd, 1996, p. 72). These two political ideals fall under the broader concept of Irish nationalism. Not all Catholics identify themselves with these beliefs, as there are for example Catholics who see themselves as unionists[2]. Secondly, the group of people which is being referred to when the label Catholic community is used is not religiously homogeneous. Even though the vast majority identifies themselves with Catholicism, there is a variety in how it is perceived in practice (Ruane & Todd, 1996, p. 66). When one takes into account that there was a Marxist tendency in the republican movement for a while (Purdie, 1990, p. 123; Feenan, 2002, p. 155), it can hardly be argued that every member of the Catholic community was a theist. In that sense, the word Catholic community may be a misnomer. These are just two examples to show that, even though the Northern Catholic community knows certain cohesion (Ruane & Todd, 1996, p. 66), there are definitely different sections within the community, with overlapping memberships of those different sections. There was an explicit choice to use the religious labels in this research, as the communities are sorted by religion, even though the conflict itself is not a religious one (Ruane & Todd, 1996, p. xiv). This choice was made because religion was equal to Catholics their political identity and thus will be regarded as an important concept throughout this research (Elliott, 2000, p. 450). In regards to the many different labels of the Catholic/nationalist/republican community, these sometimes seem to be used interchangeably in the literature, but they are adopted as the author of the article

[2] Unionism is the ideology in which the union with Britain is seen as desirable (Ruane & Todd, 1996, p. 88).

expressed them. Broadly speaking, the Catholic community is seen as a community with many heterogeneous groups. When looked at from a political perspective, one of these groups is the nationalists, and violent republicanism is part of that broader group[3].

### 1.2. The origin of the conflict

The historical background of the conflict is important for several reasons. First of all, the complexity of the conflict demands an understanding of its roots if one wants to understand the public support. The situation that took place during the period of the Troubles is shaped by the historical Anglo-Irish relationship (Aretxage, 1993, p. 223). Secondly, it might be possible that that this has an influence on the public support: it seems plausible that people were constantly reminded of the historical roots in their daily life by "modern analogies" (Moxon-Browne, 1981, p. 52). This author argues this partially explains the public support for the PIRA.

In the literature on the conflict between Great Britain and Ireland on the one hand, and the conflict between the Catholic community and the Protestant community on the other hand, often is referred to the same starting point. This starting point is known as the Norman invasion, which begun in 1169 and is characterized by Anglo-Norman and English settlers arriving in Ireland. More crucial for the Anglo-Irish relationships was the reign of Henry VIII during the 16th century, which led to a military campaign on Irish ground. Holloway (2005, p. 6) remarks that from that point on, because of the argument between Henry VIII and the Pope, suppression of the Catholic faith and military conquest went hand in hand.

In the beginning of the 17th century, the province of Ulster, which had been independent for a long time, was brought under control of Great Britain. Around 1609 the confiscation of Irish land started, which was given to colonists: this is also known as the Plantation. This process can be seen as the core of the clash between the two communities. Darby (1995, pp. 16-17) confirms this by arguing this has been decisive for the conflict in Northern Ireland. He sees the following two centuries as a consolidation of the differences between the two communities, who are hostile towards each other. Holloway (2005, p. 7) states both parties created a hostile image of each other, which was the source for mutual hatred, fear and distrust from that moment on, as they would both represent the other

[3] Nationalism is sometimes interpreted as being opposed to republicanism, as they differ in their acceptance of violence, but this is not really nuanced as they're both Irish nationalists.

community as their enemy to the following generations.

There was a growing displeasure that Ireland was controlled by London, regardless of the fact it had its own Parliament (Holloway, 2005, p. 9). During the 18th century revolutionary climate, the Society of United Irishmen was formed by Irish Protestants and Catholics. This cooperation is quite remarkable, as the conflict that will follow is often portrayed as one between the two religious groups. Holloway (2005, p. 9) states they failed to find a common cause which led to internal sectarian conflict.

Regardless of the rebellion, bit by bit the anti-Catholic measures were revoked during the early 19th century, in which the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829 played an important role. The 19th century was also characterized by an increased call for Home Rule, or the authority to elect an own government. This demand for independence was seen by some as a threat, which is the origin of Ulster unionism (Holloway, 2005, p. 10). This political ideology stands for the belief that Ireland should continue being a part of the United Kingdom. Both movements had their own paramilitary groups: the Irish nationalists founded the Irish Volunteers, while the loyalists founded the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).

When World War I broke out, members of both paramilitary groups were sent to the battleground. On returning home, the unhappiness with the situation was still ongoing, and the fight for Home Rule continued. On the 24th of April 1916 an armed rising in Dublin's General Post Office took place, which is now known as the Easter Rising. These rebels, who declared an Irish Republic, were quickly defeated by the British army. Even though the armed rising did not succeed, the execution of the leaders created a wave of sympathy for their cause (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 14). This was followed by the transformation of the Irish Volunteers into the Irish Republic Army (IRA) and a War of Independence, which eventually led to the Government of Ireland Act (1920) that divided Ireland in a southern and a northern part. In 1921, the state of Northern Ireland was born in a context of violence (Elliott, 2000, p. 373).

### 1.3. The Northern Ireland conflict

With the creation of Northern Ireland, Holloway (2005, p. 13) remarks many of the nationalists in Northern Ireland felt isolated and vulnerable, as there was a protestant majority. It must be noted that the feelings towards the partition were divided: some saw it as a betrayal to the nationalist cause (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, pp. 19-20). This caused a rupture in the nationalist movement and led to the Irish Civil War, which was won by the pro-treaty group.

The end of this civil war in 1923 did not put a stop to the conflict, but the decades following no other offensive action would equal the success of the 1916 Rising (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 32). These authors argue how the IRA was unable to mobilize popular support during that period. While many Catholics did not necessarily see the Northern Ireland state as a legitimate one until the sixties, there was little support for an armed movement intending to destroy it (Elliott, 2000, p. 396). The period between the partition and the Troubles is interesting, as the IRA did not enjoy a lot of support from its community, which Elliott (2000, pp. 404-406) sees as the cause of the failed Border campaign of 1956-1962.

### 1.3.1. Civil rights

In their article on the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) in Northern Ireland, Ellison and Martin (2000, pp. 683-684) point out two features that prevented the development of a perceived legitimacy of the Northern Ireland state. They argue that when this movement occurred, first of all the existence of the state depended on discrimination against the Catholic-nationalist minority, and secondly they point out the use of coercion by the government. This led to different kinds of deprivation, which will be dealt with in the following paragraphs. The literature on the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) and the CRM forms an interesting base, as they played an important role during the period this research focuses on and their origin is significant as they highlight the deprivations. Related to these deprivations, the United States Institute of Peace (1999, p. 5) argues that inequalities among groups could be a motivation for political violence when these groups have strong identities and grievances.

Firstly, there were political and legal deprivations: there was a great underrepresentation of Catholics in the judiciary and public bodies (Aretxaga, 1993, p. 222; Holloway, 2005, pp. 16-21). Terchek (1977, pp. 52-53) notes that not only they were excluded from local council elections (he speaks of about a quarter of those who are qualified to vote in the parliamentary elections), there was also judicial and police discrimination, as these institutions were generally staffed by Protestants, which led to a harsher treatment for the Catholics. Holloway (2005, pp. 17) illustrates this with the example of the Special Powers Act of 1922, which was mainly used against the nationalist population, and notes that in 1969 the police force consisted out of Protestants for 89%. These are just mere examples of how the legislation and the institutions maintained the inequalities that were at the root of these deprivations.

Secondly, there were economic deprivations, with the most important being the

housing and employment. While both Terchek (1977, p. 53) and Holloway (2005, pp. 16-21) agree on the inferior economic position of the Catholics in regards to these aspects, both Hewitt (1981, pp. 362-367) and Gudgin (1999, p. 100) argue that the housing and employment issues were exaggerated. Gudgin (1999, p. 101) adds that they were believed nonetheless; during the late sixties, just before the start of the Troubles, 74% of the Catholics believed that discrimination against their community existed in Northern Ireland (Rose, 1971, p. 272). The fact that the general population believed in their existence is more important than whether or not the claims of discrimination were justified, as it was the perception of deprivation that influenced events (*infra*).

The CRM was a mass movement that during the mid-60's, inspired by the civil rights era, was devoted to combatting the problems Northern Ireland faced due to it being a divided society. Purdie (1990, p. 121) argues the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was the most important organization in the movement, compared to various other ones. In their constitution NICRA stressed those rights one could label as basic human rights nowadays.

The impact of the CRM on the Northern Ireland conflict is significant, as it caused a shift which led to an increase in sectarian tensions (Purdie, 1990, p. 156). It should be noted that this was not the intention of the leadership of the movement, as Purdie (1990, p. 156) argues they condemned sectarian violence. This makes sense, as he adds that sectarian violence threatened the civil right to life. It cannot be said that the Unionist government under O'Neill ignored the deprivations experienced by the Catholics (Elliott, 2000, p. 415). There was an implementation of several reforms in response to the issues raised by the CRM, but as Purdie (1990) notes, this was "too little and too late to quench the anger of Catholics" (p. 250). The failure to respond adequately to the demands of the discontent Catholic community aggravated the movement (Aretxage, 1993, p. 222). When on the 5$^{th}$ of October in 1968 a march was organized in Derry, it was met with violence by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) (= the police force in Northern Ireland during that time), which according to Purdie (1990, p. 157) worsened the situation by increasing the feelings of polarization among the Catholics. There was an important turning point in the movement after the events of 1969, where the escalating conflict led to the deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland. When in January 1972 13 protesters died on what is now known as 'Bloody Sunday', the CRM stopped holding mass protests on the street. This was followed with the PIRA becoming the "leaders of opposition on the streets as well as the promoters of urban guerrilla warfare" (Purdie, 1990, p. 247). The CRM did not only have consequences for the polarization and

alienation of the Catholics. Among the Protestants the feeling existed that the people from the Catholic community were ungrateful for the reforms in the past by acting in a disloyal manner towards the state (Elliott, 2000, pp. 43-434).

Much debated was the relationship of the IRA with the CRM: Bishop and Mallie (1987, pp. 52-59) note that unionist politicians saw it as a front for the IRA. These authors conclude in consensus with the mainstream literature on this subject that this claim was untrue (Purdie, 1990, p. 251; Munck, 1992, p. 226; Ellison & Martin, 2000, p. 685). This can be explained by the disbelief of the Protestants in the veracity of the discrimination of the Catholics (Elliott, 2000, p. 395). According to Purdie (1990, p. 251) the CRM was seen as a possibility of getting closer to the goal of a united Ireland by the republicans. He argues that while the sectarian violence was condemned and NICRA was not controlled by the republicans, they did have influence in regards to encouraging public marches. It was on these marches that the IRA could show their presence, and assert their role of defenders against Protestant violence (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 59). So it can be concluded that while the CRM was independent from the republican movement, it did help their cause as the events in the late 60's mobilized numbers of Catholics and renewed the attention for the nationalist cause (Munck, 1992, p. 227). The way the state intervened only confirmed the image of repression (Ellison & Martin, 2000, pp. 691-692). However, as Munck (1992) states, "the civil rights movement can simply not be reduced to an IRA plot" (p. 226).

### 1.3.2. The Troubles

The literature does not seem to agree on the moment the Troubles began; Hepburn (2007, p. 393) refers to the deployment of British troops in 1969, while Holloway (2005, p. 17) points to NICRA's protest where a clash with the police took place. Taking the middle road, the start of the Troubles can be seen as a period of transition to which a build-up of events and contextual factors contributed. Regardless of how this start is interpreted, the period itself can be seen as one of heavy conflict characterized by an accumulation of different problems, including the deprivations mentioned previously (*supra*). The deprivations mentioned before were not the only strains experienced by the Catholic community during the period of the Troubles: the presence and actions of the British army, the actions of the RUC and internment could be seen as other factors which worsened the situation.

Firstly, the presence of the British army was ambiguous: in the very beginning, the army was welcomed by the members of the Catholic community, as they were seen as a

protector against Protestant mobs, from which the RUC and B-Specials could not (or did not desire to) safeguard them (McEvoy, 2001, p. 207). The relationship between the Catholic community and the British army quickly turned sour due to the methods used by the latter and due to key events (Holloway, 2005, p. 17; McEvoy, 2001, p. 207). One such method was the use of CS gas (or teargas). The use of CS gas was mainly problematic because of the indiscriminate effect it had. In some instances its primary aim was a small group, but due to this indiscriminate effect it only succeeded in mobilizing the community as it targeted the whole community (Orbons, 2011, pp. 474-475). Orbons (2011, p. 477) argues the use of this CS was quite negative for the relationship between the army and the Catholic community.

Secondly, the actions of the RUC are very interesting in the context of the Troubles: first of all, the activities of the RUC were focused on controlling and supervising the nationalist minority (Smyth, 2002, p. 299). Ruane and Todd (1996, p. 127) argue that even at the start of the CRM many members of the RUC "were defenders of the Protestant community first, defenders of the Protestant state second, and normal policemen third". As it has been discussed before, the RUC was responsible for an increased polarization and alienation of the Catholic community (Purdie, 1990, p. 157; Orbons, 2011, p. 470). Secondly, the RUC used certain interrogation techniques for which they were later reprimanded by the European Court of Human Rights (Walsh, 1982, pp. 37-38). Newberry (2009, p. 104) states that these techniques raised a wave of protest, not only because of the harshness, but also because of the fact they were taught to the RUC. She also argues this caused a change in the attitudes towards the security forces.

Thirdly, internment was the detention of suspected terrorists without a trial, legislation which had been used before under the Emergency Legislation, and was reintroduced in 1971 (Holloway, 2005, p. 17; McEvoy, 2001, p. 210). Both McEvoy (2001, p. 211) and Holloway (2005, p. 17) argue that when the British government reintroduced internment, it actually backlashed and generated support for the PIRA within the Catholic community, as those interned were generally Catholic, which had an alienating effect on the Catholic community as a whole. By alienating the Catholic community, Lowry (1973, p. 559) argues, the internment policy increased the resistance against the government. Zenker (2010, p. 239) notes this was translated in some sections of the community feeling that an armed campaign was necessary.

Fourthly, the juryless Diplock courts were introduced in 1973 as a reaction to the incapability of the courts (Carlton, 1981, pp. 230-231). These were introduced because the Diplock commission feared that juries were suffering from a sectarian bias and there was a

possibility that jurors were intimidated (McEvoy, 2001, p. 223; Jacobs, 2010, p. 656). When someone was suspected of having committed an armed robbery or a terrorist act, he or she was brought before a Diplock court (Rasnic, 1999, p. 246). Aside from the potential harms suffered by the individuals brought before the Diplock courts, Jacobs (2010, p. 662) argues that it negatively influenced the perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system in the eyes of the population in Northern Ireland.

By and large these factors which could have a negative effect on the situation can be divided in two categories: under the first category falls the actions of the army and the RUC, the second category contains the political decisions or repressive legislation.

In 1972, when an anti-internment march took place, several unarmed civilians were shot by the British army. This event would be known as Bloody Sunday. A few months after, this was followed by the abolishment of the Stormont government and the introduction of direct rule by the British government (Elliott, 2000, p. 422). This author argues this resulted in a vacuum which gave the contemporary perspective on Northern society a grim outlook by fueling people their fear.

A key event during the early years of the Troubles was Bloody Friday: on Friday the 21st of July in 1972 a burst of violence took place in Northern Ireland. The PIRA planted 36 bombs, of which 22 bombs were detonated in Belfast in the time span of 75 minutes, killing nine people. Bishop and Mallie (1987, pp. 180-181) argue that this was meant to demonstrate the IRA's determination, as they did not want to give the impression they were going to compromise in the ongoing negotiations with the British government. This had several consequences.

First of all, it led to the implementation of Operation Motorman: this was a military operation in which the British army moved into the no-go areas of Derry and Belfast. Bishop and Mallie (1987, pp. 181-182) argue that this was quite a loss for the IRA, as they fled over the border and thus lost control over the area. These authors see the control over a certain area by the republicans as a boost for their public image, which obviously took a hit upon losing control.

Secondly, and more important for this research, Bloody Friday was a tremendous hit to the IRA's public image due to the use of excessive violence (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 193). The several Irish newspapers on the subject (McKenna, n.d.) strongly condemned the violence; a few compare it to the atrocities in Nazi Germany during World War II. Many

articles stated the rhetorical question, how someone could support such violence (or the men behind it), with one article calling it a degradation of the human race. The then first chief of staff of the Provisionals Mac Stiofáin claimed the warnings they had given were deliberately ignored (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 181).

This begs the following question: how could the PIRA continue to exist and enjoy public support when their image had suffered such a hit within their community? While avoiding premature conclusions, it should be noted this was followed by an increase of sectarian assassinations by the Protestants, which gave the PIRA the opportunity to continue to label themselves as the defenders of the Catholic population (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 186).

### 1.4. Political and militant actions in the Northern Ireland conflict

When trying to understand the public support for the (militant) republican movement, one must distinguish the different methods of achieving their goal, which is to have a united Ireland. In the Northern Ireland conflict, there were two types of organizations involved: political and militant organizations. Related to this, Hayes and McAllister (2005, p. 606) argue there were two traditions present in Northern Ireland, which resembled these two types of organizations. Firstly, the constitutional tradition wanted to achieve political change through a democratic process (involvement in politics and organizing political activities). Secondly, the extra-constitutional tried to achieve this change by the use of force. These obviously had a different method of achieving their goals, but their long term goals were by and large similar. It is plausible that the actions of one organization may have influenced the support base of the other, as they share the same goals. It should also be said these categories were not necessarily mutually exclusive, as for example the membership of Sinn Féin and the PIRA to an extent (*infra*).

The IRA was the republican paramilitary group in the Northern Ireland conflict whose aim it was to achieve the unification of Ireland. As was discussed before, the group origins from the transformation of the Irish Volunteers. Jackson (2007, p. 283) refers to the January 1919 as the date the organization became known as the IRA. In 1969 there was an IRA split which resulted in the 'Provisional' and the 'Official' IRA. They both had a political wing, being the Provisional and the Official Sinn Féin. Due to the 'Official' IRA's ceasefire in 1972 the term IRA is used for the Provisional IRA. As these things are often no black and white

matters, it could be assumed that both Official and Provisional IRA influenced the support base for the militant republican movement during the early years of the Troubles.

Interesting is the connection between the militant wing (the IRA) and the political wing (Sinn Féin) during the whole conflict. In their article Page and Smith (2000, pp. 99-100) discuss how both organizations have been connected with each other, despite the denial by Sinn Féin. These authors argue how to a certain extent there was cross-membership between the two organizations, and how Sinn Féin was likely in a subordinate position to the militant wing. Bishop and Mallie (1987, p. 263) argue that Sinn Féin was not exactly a powerful organization before the hunger strikes of 1981, which they illustrate with an interview with an IRA member who says that "in the early 1970s Sinn Féin was just a cover-up. The spokespeople were all IRA men acting in a Sinn Féin capacity" (p. 303). This is quite interesting, as the relationship between the two is inevitable important for understanding both organizations' actions. If Sinn Féin, the political wing, was subservient to the IRA (Page & Smith, 2000, pp. 90-91) and the political wing could be seen as a cover-up for the militant wing during the early 1970s (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 303), it can be argued that the IRA was aware of the importance of public support and actively tried to influence this.

Page and Smith (2000, pp. 90-93) claim that it was due to the lack of a thorough political understanding that Sinn Féin did not play an important role during the first years of the Troubles. It is important to note that Sinn Féin was not the only political movement: McAllister (2004, p. 126) argues how it was the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) whose support was influenced the militant actions. It seems plausible that other republican or nationalist political organizations have influenced the support for the IRA. By the early 80's there was a mixed use of violence and political action, which was referred to as 'the armalite and the ballot box'-strategy (Jackson, 2007, p. 284). Before this dualism, the focus on the political movement by the leadership of Sinn Féin and/or of the IRA can be seen as an attempt to "postpone military action to a future stage or to restrict it to a defensive context" (Hannigan, 1985, p. 34).

### 1.5. The relationship between the PIRA and the Catholic community: PIRA's role as an alternative criminal justice system

If the relationship between the PIRA and the Catholic community were only to be seen in the light of the general conflict, the focus would be too narrow. The PIRA was more than a

militant extremist group that executed politically violent acts to achieve the unification of Ireland: they were a multifunctional entity embedded in a community. In this paragraph, it will be argued that the PIRA did not operate in a vacuum, disconnected from the Catholic community. They were in a dynamic relationship with it.

The PIRA maintained an alternative criminal justice system since the start of the Troubles: they took up the role of a de facto police force by reserving the right to punish the criminals in their own communities (Hayes & McAllister, 2005, p. 602; Silke, 2007, p. 55). This form of paramilitary punishment took different forms, of which not all were violent (Feenan, 2002, p. 154). Silke (2007, pp. 55-71), who describes this behavior as 'vigilantism', notes that the vigilante activity during the early 1970s was primarily the task of the PIRA's youth wing, the Na Fianna Éireann. On discussing the relationship between Sinn Féin and vigilantism, he illustrates his point that they were closely involved by discussing the impact the creation of the incident centers in 1974 had. These were centers, manned by Sinn Féin members, to which information about inappropriate behavior of the members of the security forces could be report. Regardless, these centers became, what Silke (2007, p. 71) calls 'Provo Police Stations'.

There are many different reasons which can be used to explain the policing role of the PIRA. Firstly, it gave the PIRA the opportunity to test new recruits in a way that did not entail many risks (e.g. the infiltration of informers), as it indicated how committed the potential member to the Republican cause was (Silke, 2007, p. 61). Secondly, the relationship of the RUC with the Catholic community was fragile, as the RUC lacked legitimacy due to the perception of them as unwilling to operate in nationalist areas (Cavanaugh, 1997, p. 48; Feenan, 2002, p. 160). These authors argue the Catholic community was unwilling to contact the RUC when incidents occurred: the community was alienated from the official criminal justice system and there was a policing vacuum created by the political conflict. Thirdly, there was an actual demand of the community for the PIRA to take up such a role (Feenan, 2002, pp. 156-157; Silke, 2007, p. 77), which makes sense, as they were not willing to rely on the RUC. Fourthly, criminal behavior within the community entailed a certain risk for the success of the PIRA operations (Feenan, 2002, p. 163).

### 1.6. The conflict and the culture

Rowan (2004, pp. 29-30) remarks that because of the high number of people having suffered in the conflict and this conflict has been going on for a very long time, it can be argued that it

had become a part of the Northern Irish culture. It seems plausible that a tradition of violence and sectarianism influenced the public support, as violence became regarded as something which is not abnormal. This does not mean that people fully adapted to political violence and did not suffer from psychological or emotional problems. In his case study of Divis Flats, Sluka (1989, pp. 279-280) found that a lot of people suffered from anxiety, fear … at times the violence increased. The idea behind violence being a part of the Northern Irish culture is that it was more easily seen as a legitimate means in the fight against the RUC and army. Tölölyan's (1987, pp. 218-219) analysis of Armenian political violence forms an interesting perspective on this topic. This author believes that its roots of historical grievances and resistance have an influence on the psyche of the Armenians. The argument that something similar has taken place in the Northern Irish society can be easily made, as it has a history of resistance and experiencing deprivations (*supra*). Steenkamp (2005, pp. 253-254) argues that the values and norms in societies that have experienced violence are affected by this experience. This experience would lead to a greater tolerance of violence and due to the past conflict a culture of violence exists. In the light of this, Gurr (1970, pp. 168-177) describes how widespread discontent, anomie and frequent political violence can cause the expectancy of violence and justification of said violence. He furthermore explains the possibility of past political violence influencing the outlook on future violence. This is definitely important, not only because it seeks to explain how people can be attracted to commit political violence, but it can be argued that such a tradition of violence influences the tolerance of it. To illustrate the acceptance of violence in the Northern Irish culture, Moxon-Browne (1981, p. 62) points to a 1972 survey measuring the attitude of secondary school children (secondary school starts at the age of 12 in Ireland) to violence. The results of the survey showed that among Irish adolescents the violence could be justified due to the circumstances present at those times. More applicable to this research are the findings of Mullins and Young (2012, pp. 46-47): their results indicate a relationship between the culture and acts of terror. These authors argue that cultures in which violence is seen as legitimate (because e.g. they have recently experienced a war), are more likely to experience terrorism, as there is a 'legitimation-habituation' effect. They also find a relationship between the probability of political violence occurring and sociopolitical factors, being the presence of a stable economy and a strong, centralized government. They assume that this leads resistant political actors to use politically violent methods because they are facing a strong government.

### 1.7. Conclusion

Out of this brief overview of the different aspects related to the conflict it can be concluded that it was complex and had different layers. Before delving deeper into the actual conflict during the Troubles, the history preceding it deserves attention too, as it was responsible for shaping the situation and providing the context where it could take place. This includes both the contemporary history as the history predating the creation of the Northern Ireland state. While the former was responsible for creating the context wherein the conflict commenced, the latter was responsible for creating the relationships and identities which came into play during the conflict. Once the conflict arose, there were different factors during the early years that fueled it; the use of certain methods by the British army, the actions of the RUC, the introduction of internment … These factors were responsible for turning the already fragile relationship between the Catholic community and the governmental actors sour. The violent behavior was not limited to one party, as paramilitary groups like the PIRA carried out numerous violent attacks too, including the infamous events on Bloody Friday. To understand the conflict, it is necessary to overstep the boundaries of merely sticking to a narrative of the events. Firstly, there was an important political dimension to the conflict, in which Sinn Féin is a central actor when one focuses solely on the republican movement. Secondly, the relationship between the Catholic community and the PIRA is brought to attention too. The main idea behind this is that the PIRA was not merely a politically violent group, but offered the community an alternative criminal justice system. Thirdly, there was possibly a certain influence of the culture on how events that took place during the Troubles were perceived. The underlying argument is that the culture influenced the stance on political violence positively.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This chapter attempts to provide a basic understanding of the theoretical concepts that will be used throughout this research. It contains four main sections. In the first section, the political violent aspect of the PIRA is given a closer look and some relevant theoretical insights are mentioned. The second section revolves around how public support is defined in this research. Thirdly, attention is paid to theories on the role of mass communication in a conflict setting. The last section involves a few important sociological insights and elaborates on the concepts of legitimacy and strain.

### 2.1. Defining the concepts related to political violence

The literature on terrorism is diverse, but there seems to be one mutual aspect articles and books on this subject have: they all start with a debate on how hard it is to define terrorism and/or the pitfalls of using the label 'terrorist'. The literature on the PIRA is not excluded from this phenomenon, and is plagued by the 'terrorist vs. freedom fighter' debate too. It makes sense there is no consensus on the use of the label, as Schmid (2004, p. 393) points to its use as a way to de-legitimize and/or criminalize the conduct of a political opponent. Taking into account Weinberg, Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler (2004, p. 782) their academic consensus definition of terrorism, which sees terrorism as "a politically motivated tactic involving the threat or use of force or violence in which the pursuit of publicity plays a significant role" (p. 782), it could be applied to the PIRA. However, in this research the PIRA is not being referred to as a terrorist organization: firstly, there is no desire to de-legitimize PIRA's conduct (or legitimize it, for that matter). Secondly, it seems that the PIRA should not be simply reduced to a terrorist organization in this research, as this would deny its multi-functionality (e.g. PIRA serving as an alternative criminal justice system). This multi-functionality will be crucial for understanding their relationship with the community. Thirdly, terrorism can be seen as only a method or tactic (Saucier, Akers, Shen-Miller, Knežević, & Stankov, 2009, p. 256). In a sense this is related to the second argument for not using the label 'terrorist'. O'Brien (1983, pp. 93-94) argues that political violence within a democratic society, such as according to him the PIRA commits, should always be identified as terrorism. Crenshaw (1983, pp. 1-2) notes that O'Brien uses a normative definition, whereby he claims that the concept 'terrorism' should always be used when *unjustified* political violence is committed against a democratic regime. As the labeling of a group has to do with

legitimation, it was chosen not to delegitimize the interests of the PIRA, just as it was a conscious choice not to delegitimize the interests of the British regime and its actions. If Crenshaw's (1983, pp. 3-4) argument, of terrorism combatting injustice being more justifiable, is applied, one should ask himself or herself if the actions by the PIRA as a reaction to the grievances experienced by the community is not justifiable (Crenshaw, 1983, p. 31)? It seems one shoots himself or herself in the foot using the label terrorism when trying to combat it, as the reduction of such a group to a 'terrorist organization' seems to entail a denial of certain dimensions of its role in the conflict. Regardless of the decision to not label the PIRA as a terrorist organization, it is important to focus on the literature on terrorism as a better understanding of terrorism may generate a better understanding of the public support for the PIRA.

When looking at the literature on terrorism, one quickly becomes aware of the different sub concepts that are available for labeling groups who commit such acts, as they can refer to different structural elements or can refer to a different modus operandi. Hoffman (2006, pp. 35-37) makes the distinction between terrorism on the one hand, and guerrilla warfare and insurgence on the other hand. He states that guerrilla warfare refers to the use of military methods by a numerically large group, which has control over a certain territory. Insurgents are similar to the guerillas, but the insurgent also makes use of informational and psychological warfare. Hoffman (2006, p. 35) recognizes a considerable overlap between all these concepts, however, and with this in mind, it should be noted there is no right answer to the question what label to use. In multiple articles (Coulter & Mullin, 2012, p. 100; Feenan, 2002, p. 152) the PIRA is referred to as a 'paramilitary group': this concept refers also to an organization which has a military-like structure, but cannot be seen as the official institution in charge of defending the country. Initially, the term 'paramilitary group' was chosen, because it seems to have a less negative connotation.

When the PIRA's political violent conduct is being emphasized, it is necessary to use the right sub concept, as understanding the basics of their ideology and motivation seems necessary for understanding the public support for the organization. The PIRA is seen as a nationalist or separatist movement (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 40). This is important, as the modus operandi differs fundamentally from other groups: Hoffman (2006, pp. 230-243) argues that while nationalist/separatist groups like the PIRA frequently have been just as destructive (or more destructive), they direct their action mainly towards a specifically defined set of targets,

unlike terrorists who are motivated by a religious ideology. He discusses how these groups, while rarely realizing their goals of self-determination or nationhood, have better chance of survival as these have typically lasted the longest and have been the most successful in the history of modern terrorism. A few factors can be distinguished in his explanation of these groups' endurance: firstly, they are able to draw support from the fellow members of their nationalist group. Secondly, due to their endurance, they are able to appeal to the community's collective revolutionary tradition or predisposition to rebellion (which ensures them both new recruits and supporters). His last hypothesis is that their endurance can be explained by their goals: groups as the IRA have concrete and comprehensible goals, which can be very persuasive.

### 2.2. Public support

In the literature on political violence there are a lot of explanations on why someone would join such an organization (e.g. Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003; Victoroff, 2005). The main question behind our research, however, is how such organizations are supported by the community in which they are embedded. A relevant theory in regards to the public support for paramilitary groups is the so-called 'hearts and minds'-theory. Leites and Wolf (1970, p. 6) argue that in this theory popular support is actually seen as an activator of rebellion. These authors disagree with the notion that popular support is necessary to get the rebellion started and suggest an alternative system for understanding public support. What is interesting about their alternative system is that they argue that the behavior of the population depends on an interaction between supply and demand factors, whereas according to them the 'hearts and minds'-theory only focuses on the demand factors (Leites & Wolf, 1970, p. 28). In this context, demand means that the environment causes rebellion to surface and grow, whereas supply means that the costs of the rebellion have an influence on its survival. Leites and Wolf (1970, p. 28) note that their alternative system is based on an underlying assumption: humans behave in a rational manner and will make rational choices. This seems to underestimate somewhat the instrumentality of emotions: Petersen (2002, p. 23) argues with his model that emotions are of importance in explaining actions.

Davis, Larson, Haldeman, Oguz and Rana (2012, p. 12) distinguish different kinds of support such organizations can receive from external sources. Public support consists of two types of support according to them: active support and passive support. In this study, the scope is focused on both active and passive support. Assuming there is support for such

organizations within the community they operate in, an interesting question would be; why is it when people within the community have to endure the reactions to the organization's actions? Support is not something static however, there is a great variation at both the level of the community and the individual: Petersen (2001, p. 8) argues that rebellion is a process in which different individuals take on different roles. Petersen (2001, p. 296) developed a mechanism-based approach where certain causal patterns explain three roles of the individual who is supportive of rebellion: firstly, one can oppose the regime in an unorganized and unarmed way. Secondly, one can support or participate in an armed movement. Thirdly, one can help in allowing the organization to survive. This would lead to the conclusion that when one speaks about public support, the concept of public support needs to be thought of as a continuum through which the individual can move. What makes this interesting are the changes in the role an individual takes: what influences these shifts?

Building further on the work of Davis, et al. (2012, p. 13), public support is composed out of the following elements: manpower, funding, intelligence, providing sanctuary and tolerance of activities. These last three elements (intelligence, sanctuary and tolerance of activities) are also the ones used to define passive support. Both active and passive support are taken into account, as there is likely a thin line between the two in the operationalization.

### 2.3. Mass communication and social ties

The reporting by the media during the conflict is important, as it has different functions. Firstly, the media can be used as a tool for propaganda by both the government and terrorist groups (Tan, 1988, pp. 3-5). This author argues how newspapers are not necessarily supportive of political violence, but regardless can be an asset for groups who commit such acts. Secondly, communication during the conflict can also influence the acceptance of the use of political violence. Gurr (1970, pp. 223-229) notes that the representations of political violence during communication can influence the acceptance of political violence positively. The media plays an important role here, as it can contribute to a situation where people are continuously reminded of the conflict. Thirdly, it can lead to a reinforcement of beliefs (Vincent, 1997, p. 517).

It would be wrong to assume that only the media can affect the public support, as persuasive communications can take place via a variety of channels (Davis, et al., 2012, p. xxxii). These authors mention personal networks as a potential influence. These personal networks are

understood in a broad manner and are interpreted as 'social ties': this includes kinship, but also the way people identify with group members. These social ties might affect the public support, as the literature on social identity argues that the components of social identity are learned through various interpersonal interactions (Schwartz, Dunkel & Waterman, 2008, p. 542). On discussing the environmental sources of terrorist belief systems, Crenshaw (2011, p. 94) confirms there is an important influence of social learning. She argues narratives can play a role here, as they connect the past with the future. These are especially important in communities striving for autonomy or independence. Shared narratives may lead to an evaluation of own and other's actions (Sant Cassia, 1999, p. 22), which means that they may influence how the conflict is interpreted.

Concluding, one can distinguish two kinds of communication that are influential for the public support: mass communication (e.g. the media) and social ties.

### 2.4. Sociological theories: legitimacy and strain

Both the legitimacy perspective and the strain theory are discussed in the following chapters, as they will prove to be central themes in the discussion on public support. The perceived legitimacy of either the governmental actors or the politically violent organization might explain the public support either organization enjoys to an extent. Elaborating on the strain theory and its connection with the support of political violence is important as the experience of grievances is a central theme in the Catholic consciousness. Aside from potentially influencing the public support, the experience of these grievances did also succeed in mobilizing the Catholic community during the late 60's.

#### 2.4.1. Legitimacy perspective

Traditionally, legitimacy has been a very important concept in the literature on dealing with terrorist organizations, as the decision to use (or refrain from the usage of) the label terrorism is seen as potentially (de-)legitimizing of an organization's conduct (Schmid, 2004, p. 393). Toros (2009, pp. 407-408) argues that legitimacy is often being perceived as an obstacle in dealing with such organizations by both terrorism scholars and politicians, as governments do not want to give them recognition (and allow them to potentially gain support). Suchman (1995) has summarized the literature on the legitimacy, and adopts the following broad definition of legitimacy: "Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the

actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (p. 574). The concept of legitimacy can be approached from many angles, especially in the context of politically violent organizations. The emphasis here lies on the impact that legitimacy has on the support for an organization.

When discussing legitimacy in the context of political violence, it is important to go back to the sociological roots of this concept. Weber (in Kalberg, 2007, pp. 191-192) described the belief in legitimacy as an important factor that influences the basis of solidarity in a system. This means that the acceptance of the domination of or the obedience to a certain system, will normally only be guaranteed when the organization or system is perceived as legitimate. He adds that these systems explicitly claim legitimacy, and thus try to establish and develop the belief in it. A thorough analysis of Weber's concept of legitimacy is made by Bensman (1979, pp. 42-43): he distinguishes five meanings of legitimacy present in Weber's work. Legitimacy can take the form of a *claim* to power, a *justification* of a regime, a *promise* of a regime, a *self-justification* and a *belief* in the claims, promises and justifications. He adds that while the first three meanings refer to how legitimacy is communicated to outsiders, self-justification is about how it is referred to the self and the belief in legitimacy about how it is perceived in the population the organization communicates to. All these meanings seem to be interconnected with each other, but in this research there will be an emphasis on legitimacy as a belief. Bensman (1979, p. 37) also raises an important aspect in regards to doing research on legitimacy: it is empirically impossible to separate the different layers in the community whose causes for believing in the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of an organization may differ, as there are the 'real believers', the ones whose support is a result of the gratification of their instrumental needs, … He claims this is especially true in coercive environments.

It is important to not only look at the perceived legitimacy of the politically violent organization, but also take the perceived legitimacy of the governmental actors and its responses to the violence of the organization into account (LaFree & Dugan, 2009, pp. 8-10). In the past, researchers have argued that the perceived legitimacy of law and legal institutions correlates positively with the obedience to law and these institutions (Jaspaert, Matkoski, & Vervaeke, 2010, p. 12; Tyler, 2000, p. 120). When governmental actors lack this legitimacy, people will be less willing to consent with their policies and decisions (Tyler, 2000, p. 120). Applying Weber's premise on political violence, in combination with the arguments on the importance of legitimacy, one can distinguish two perspectives on the influence of the perceived illegitimacy of a regime: (a) the absence of legitimacy as a protective factor or (b) an incentive to disobey the law. From this last perspective the perceived illegitimacy of a

regime might influence the perceived legitimacy of, and thus the public support for, a politically violent organization.

One should not stop at making the distinction between the two kinds of perceived legitimacy (of the governmental actors and its actions and the politically violent organization) that might play a role in influencing the support for the organization, but one must also make a distinction in the potential outcomes. Similarly to LaFree and Dugan (2009, p. 10), who conclude that from a legitimacy perspective the government responses could arouse participation, support or people turning a blind eye towards the activities, in this research the distinction is made between active support (operational and financial support) and passive support (tolerance towards the organization's actions). Suchman (1995) illustrates the importance of this distinction with the following quote "To avoid questioning, an organization need only make sense. To mobilize affirmative commitments, however, it must also have value" (p. 575).

### 2.4.2. Strain theory

When discussing the strain theory, it is essential to at least mention the concept of anomie as it was introduced by Merton (1938, p. 674). This concept was not entirely new, as Durkheim (1897) used it before him, but Merton (1938) gave a different meaning to this concept. Whereas Durkheim (1897, pp. 104-106) saw it as a state of normlessness in which a society can find itself, and where a limited amount of delinquency is not necessarily bad, Merton (1938, pp. 674-676) described it as a state of discontent caused by the inability to achieve certain goals. He argues that when a society emphasizes the importance of goals, yet does not offer equal access to the means to achieve these goals, a state of anomie ensues. He describes five ways to deal with this state of anomie: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. It can be argued that the public support for ethno-political paramilitary can be explained through several motivations: both innovation (achieving the culture's goals through other means than the institutionalized ones) and rebellion (rejecting both the culture's goals as well as the institutionalized means) can be seen as a ground for support. There might have been people who simply support such a group because they want to end the (perceived?) discrimination, as there might be people who support it because they reject the culture's goals as well as the institutionalized means. It is however not the goal to explain the public support through Merton's theory on anomie, as it received the justified criticism it does not explain

the mechanisms of how anomie influences the individual's behavior well enough (Op de Beeck, 2012, p. 51).

A few very important contributions to the literature on strain were made by Agnew (1985, 1992). His general strain theory (GST) (1992, p. 48) is a social-psychological theory where the focus lies on the individual and his or her immediate environment. Agnew (1992, p. 72) adds that the macro level is sometimes explored too, but the structural role of society in explaining delinquency is being reduced in his GST, while it was of importance in the classic anomie theories (Op de Beeck, 2012, pp. 60-61). According to the GST, delinquency is influenced by the presence of certain strains, and is explained as a result of the negative emotional states caused by the individual's negative relationships (Agnew, 1992, p. 48-49). These emotional states, triggered by negative relationships (= relationships in which the individual is treated unfavorably), create a pressure for corrective action that may lead to delinquency. Agnew (2010, pp. 136-137) elaborates on this and adds that these strains appear when individuals endure a negative treatment by others, lose something valued and/or find themselves in a position where they are unable to achieve their goals. Agnew (1992, p. 59) notes that these sources of strain may overlap in practice and that these can lead to a range of negative emotions. He argues that anger is the most critical emotion when it comes to explaining delinquency, as it "creates a desire for retaliation/revenge, energizes the individual for action, and lowers inhibitions, in part because individuals believe that others will feel their aggression is justified" (p. 60). Finally, this author argues that when strain is repetitive or chronic, it creates a predisposition for delinquency.

Agnew (2010, p. 136) offers the general strain theory as a partial explanation for terrorism. Terrorism would be the result of collective strains: these are strains among the members of an identifiable group. He identifies a few mechanisms through which these collective strains can have an impact on the likelihood of terrorism.

First of all, just as in his work on the GST (1992), Agnew (2010, p. 140) sticks to the mechanism whereby delinquency is influenced by different negative emotional states, as these create a certain pressure for corrective action. He illustrates this point by saying that revenge is a leading motive for terrorist acts. Secondly, he adds that collective strains also have a negative impact on the ability to use legal coping strategies. These coping strategies will not likely be effective due to the little allurement for the source of strain to respond to the requests of those who endure the collective strains. Those who endure the collective strains are often not involved in the political system, and there is a significant discrepancy of power which

affects the effectiveness of the coping options negatively. Thirdly, there is also a negative impact of these collective strains on the social control, as the emotional ties of those enduring the strains and the source of these strains are weakened. He adds that the likelihood of the former sanctioning the terrorist is reduced, as the strains contribute positively to the tolerance, sympathy and support for terrorism. Fourthly, collective strains influence beliefs favorable to terrorism positively: terrorism is excused, justified, or even seen as required, and neutralization techniques are used by those in the strained collectivity. Fifthly, he points to the tendency of these collective ties to amplify the collective identity of those enduring the strains, which may lead to the perception of terrorism as a collective solution to the strains experienced by the strained group. His last mechanism is the function of the terrorist organization as comfort against the endured strains.

These collective strains are however not determining and thus do not guarantee terrorism. It can also be argued that the focus should be on the subjective perception of the strains by the collectivity, rather than objective strains, an assumption that is reinforced by Agnew (2010, p. 138). He gives a few characteristics of strains that are prone to contribute to terrorism: firstly, there is a high degree of harm suffered because of the strains, and the strains are widespread and know a long duration. There is also the expectation that the strains will continue in the future. Secondly, they are seen as unjust acts, by which social norms are voluntarily and intentionally violated. These strains must be seen as undeserved. Thirdly, the foundation of these strains lies in the weak relationship the collectivity has with 'others' who are more powerful, and commonly belong to a different group in some social dimension.

In line with the foundations laid by Agnew (1992, 2010, pp. 136-139), Gurr and Moore (1997, p. 1081) describe these collective strains as grievances, which are defined by them as "widely shared dissatisfaction among group members about their cultural, political and/or economic standing vis à vis dominant groups" (p. 1081). Gurr and Moore's (1997, p. 1081) definition seems to be a valuable addition to this debate, as it elaborates on the ontology of these collective strains, by making a distinction between the potential explanatory factors for the dissatisfaction. However, as Agnew (2010, p. 138) notes, it is the perception of strain which is important, so the situations themselves will only be considered as an indicator for these collective strains, and not as a causal factor. It is worth noting that making statements about hard casual relations is not the ambition of this research.

Agnew (1992, p. 48) emphasizes the variables at a social-psychological level, as he focuses on the individual and his or her immediate social environment, but does not completely exclude the variables which are situated at the macro level. He argues that the larger social environment may affect the probability of delinquent behavior in a variety of ways, e.g. by making it difficult to cope with the strains in a legal way. Agnew (2010, p. 134) does take the macro level into account, as he briefly mentions the weak link between terrorism and deprivation at the macro evel, but he certainly does not emphasize it. As the structural role of society might be of importance, attention should be paid to the possibility of institutional anomie as an influential factor. Messner & Rosenfeld (2001, p. 76-77) argue that the culture and social structure of a society may play an important role in influencing the probability of delinquency. While their analysis is limited to the American culture on one hand and the influence of material success goals on the other hand, it serves as a nice illustration of the importance of culture and social structure.

### 2.5. Conclusion

Concluding, it can be argued that due to its long survival a paramilitary group like the PIRA makes an interesting case study if one is interested in public support for such groups. Even the very nature of the paramilitary group can be seen as a potential indicator for its public support. Before analyzing what factors influenced the public support for the PIRA, however, one should ask him or herself what is meant by 'public support'. In this research, public support is understood as the dynamic support the PIRA enjoyed from the Catholic community. A distinction is made between both active and passive support; this forms an interesting continuum through which individuals can move and take on different roles.

In this chapter, several general theoretical insights are brought forward to shed light on the public support for paramilitary groups, before applying this on the conflict. Firstly, the roles of mass communication and social ties are given a closer look. These were responsible for creating and spreading certain narratives. Secondly, the legitimacy of both the governmental actors as the paramilitary group is considered as a central concept in the conflict. Thirdly, the strain theory is used to explain how collective strains can deliver certain mechanisms which enable a positive stance towards political violence.

## 3. Methodology

In this chapter, the reader is provided with an insight in the chosen methods and the reasons why they were chosen. It consists out of five main sections. The first section contains the definition of the central problem: the case is defined and the research questions that are underlying to this thesis are formulated. In the second section the choice for a literature review combined with expert and informant interviews is defended, just like the reason why was not opted for a quantitative research. In the third section, the reader finds more information on the sampling process used to find respondents. The fourth section briefly discusses the data collection and analysis. Finally, both the added value of the expert interviews and the research in general are evaluated against the concepts of validity and reliability.

### 3.1. Defining the central problem

A topic as the Northern Ireland conflict is often a sensitive one, where a lot of different perspectives account for just as many different truths. In this thesis it has been the objective to create a dialogue between the different viewpoints in the literature. This is not just limited to the literature on the Northern Ireland conflict, but also includes some of the literature which is the foundation for the underlying theoretical framework. The decision to focus on the PIRA, a republican paramilitary group, instead of a loyalist paramilitary group was purely a pragmatic one. During the phase where one gets more familiar with the subject, it became clear there was more relevant literature on the PIRA and the community it was embedded in. Anyone doing research on the Northern Ireland conflict will notice there is an abundance of literature present. As the critical reader might ask him or herself what this thesis will add to the available body of knowledge, the answer would be that it is an attempt to shed light on an aspect that seems to be rather taken for granted in some of the previous research. It seems that there is a lot of literature on how militant extremist organizations attract certain people, what their *modus operandi* is, but much less attention is being paid on why the community it is embedded in actively and passively supports it. It seems essential to understand public support for such groups, because it would allow for the development of more effective measures to combat political violence. The British government even acknowledged the need

to win the 'hearts and minds' of the population if it wanted to successfully combat the political violence in Northern Ireland (Dixon, 2009, pp. 446-447).

The case is defined in many ways: it is defined by a society, temporally and by a group (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 26). When looking for explanatory factors for the public support of paramilitary groups, there will be a focus solely on the PIRA and the Northern Irish society. Focusing on the PIRA is an interesting way of defining the case by a group, as it is a separatist and nationalist movement (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 40), which usually has a stronger chance of survival compared to other paramilitary groups, because it can draw support from its community more easily (Hoffman, 2006, pp. 242-243). Hoffman (2006, pp. 242-243) also argues that groups as the PIRA are able to appeal to the community's collective revolutionary tradition or predisposition to rebellion (which ensures them both new recruits and supporters) and have concrete and comprehensible goals, which can be very persuasive. The reason for defining the case by opting for the Northern Irish society, and neither focus on the Republic of Ireland nor compare both, is due to the fact there is not such a model available that explains the public support for the IRA in the Northern Irish society. It makes sense to focus on the Northern Irish society first, as the communities within this society had to endure the most violence. The case would also be defined temporally: the focus would be on the period of 1968 to sometime after Bloody Friday (1972). This narrowing down is done because it is likely there are different explanatory factors for the public support as time changes, and the casus of Bloody Friday forms an interesting puzzle. It should be noted that while the first stage in the research took place, two explorative conversations with academics from Northern Ireland took place. In these informal conversations, a few potential pitfalls and points of attention were pointed out to the researcher. The goal of these conversations was also to make contact with the field and exchange ideas, as this was mostly unknown territory. The first conversation took place when the research had just begun and stressed the need for properly defining the scope of the research on the one hand and a critical mindset when dealing with the literature on the other hand. The second conversation took place when the research had advanced a bit already and centered around the level of public support for the PIRA.

The central theme of this research focuses on the public support for the PIRA (this concept is elaborated on in the second section of the paper). The main purpose of this paper is to find an answer to the following research questions:

- How can the public support for the Provisional IRA be described?
    - How did it evolve over time?

    - How did it differentiate according to the different sections in the Catholic community?
- How can the public support for the Provisional IRA during the early years of the Troubles be explained?
    - What was the role of "community policing"?
    - What was the role of the actions by the Provisional IRA?
    - What was the role of the actions of the state and its actors?
    - What was the role of collective strains?
    - What was the role of fear or intimidation?
    - What was the role of social ties (e.g. kinship)?
    - Did the Provisional IRA change its *modus operandi*?

### 3.2. Justification of the method chosen

The chosen method to find an answer to the research questions was a combination of both a thorough literature review and expert and informant interviews which took place in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This means that it is not only a literature review, as there is a body of data that is being analyzed and used in the formulation of an answer (Silverman, 2010, p. 330), but the answer to the research questions is not only based on the empirical data either. The combination was needed, as basing the answer to the research questions only on interviews would have made the research weak: these were very long and not every subject was touched by the respondents. Then again, if the literature was the only source out of which data was gained, it would have been weak too in the sense that it would have been harder to formulate an answer to the research questions. The goal of these interviews was to gain new information and develop a more critical outlook of what has been read during the literature review. It may be strange to actually go to Northern Ireland for these interviews, a place where the conflict took place for so many years and in which these identities which were important back then still are (e.g. the recent flag protests). Yet, this was an immensely rich source, as many people with a different background were approached. There were different opinions and visions among the former volunteers just as there were among the academics. The interviews contributed in two ways: firstly, the data which they delivered was very valuable, as a lot of the previously held views were challenged (which was also the case between different interviews). Secondly, a few of the respondents recommended some articles to read which were quite helpful.

As Silverman (2010, p. 13) states, there are many different factors to take into account when deciding what type of method to use to conduct research. Taking into account these different factors, the following reasons could be used to defend the choice to do qualitative research instead of quantitative research. Firstly, the research questions themselves justify the choice, as they cannot be answered in quantitative terms. Secondly, the focus of the research is to study a situation in detail. Thirdly, there is not much literature on the topic of 'public support', therefore there is a lack of a strong base, which justifies the need for a more explorative research design. It would not be really appropriate to merely validate or falsify a theoretical model derived from the literature, but the research would be improved by knowing the reasoning of the experts and by collecting new information. Fourthly, the focus of the research would not really permit quantitative methods, as there would be many difficulties reaching the population. Quantitative research might have been helpful in measuring the actual level of support, but the scope of the research does not allow this as it is very retrospective. Measuring the support directly would not be really easy due to what Moxon-Browne (1981, p. 47) calls a schizophrenic attitude towards the PIRA: people who would even actively support the PIRA would not necessarily state this publicly or they would even go as far as condemning them. Aside from that, measuring it via indicators that do not measure the support directly but should be able to give some vague indication about it (e.g. the political support for Sinn Féin), are flawed too. These do not capture the complexity of the public support for the PIRA and would at best only represent a small section within the community.

### 3.3. Sampling process

The intention of this research was to combine a thorough literature review with expert interviews and informant interviews, where the potential respondents are people who have expert knowledge about the PIRA. Expert interviews (or elite-interviews) are interviews with people who are well informed about an organization or local community (Baarda, De Goede & Van der Meer-Middelburg, 2007, p. 19). These authors argue that due to their position, these interviewees are likely to be able to sketch an overall picture. A similar type of interview is the informant interview, where people are delivering information on something they are not part of (Baarda, De Goede & Van der Meer-Middelburg, 2007, p. 19). There are three types of interviewees who could undergo these interviews:

| Experts on the PIRA | | |
|---|---|---|
| Academics | Former PIRA volunteers | Members from governmental organizations and (former) Sinn Féin members |
| | | |

Figure 1. Sampling matrix

The first group of interviewees were academics that have publications about the PIRA, as it was easy to find them and make sure they have the needed expertise by judging their publications. The criterion has obviously been their expertise, but academics from different domains have been contacted: sociologists, historians, criminologists … These were quite easy to find, but not that easy to convince to give an interview and needed to be re-contacted the most as they usually had a very tight schedule. The second group of interviewees were former PIRA volunteers: these were harder to find, but due to their personal experience have a lot of valuable information to share. Even though they were harder to find, they were more ready to cooperate. The third group consisted firstly of people who have worked in governmental organizations that have dealt with the PIRA and the consequences of the conflict: this was not limited to the police or the army, but included members from governmental organizations as e.g. the Community Relations Council too. Even though there was an interview scheduled with someone from a governmental organization, this did not go through at the end, so no interviews with such respondents were held. Secondly, it included (former) Sinn Féin members, who could also have contributed because of their personal experience. These two groups are categorized into one category because if they were not necessarily involved directly in the armed conflict, they stood very close by.

Due to the fact there is no such thing as a list of 'people who have expertise on the PIRA', and not all types of interviewees are easy to find, a snowball sample seemed to be most fitting for this type of research (Mortelmans, 2010, p. 104). There was made contact already with a few people in the very early stages of the research and these were good gatekeepers to reach out to other people who may have valuable information on this topic. Nonetheless, it was important to not rely solely on gatekeepers, and contact had been made with organizations who deal with ex-political prisoners and academic institutions who study the conflict. By and large, the snowball sample was a good choice, as it allowed to reach a very big group of people. In total

ten interviews were conducted. A list of those interviewed is added to the appendices (see appendix IV). The names of the respondents were not included in this list, as this was not asked of them before the interviews and it would thus be unethical to include them without their prior permission.

### 3.4. Data collection and analysis

As has been discussed before, the methods of data collection used in this research were both qualitative interviews and a literature review. The choice for the method of qualitative interviews lies in the fact that this is a suggested method for answering questions seeking an answer to how a certain phenomenon can be explained (Beyens & Tournel, 2010, pp. 204-205). The specific type of interview was a half-open interview, in which a topic list was used that is based on the theoretical framework (see appendix III), which in its turn is based on the literature. Nevertheless, the interview started with open ended questions. The reason for this was to have a lot of different answers (Beyens & Tournel, 2010, p. 209), as it was the goal to collect as much new information as possible. The advantage of qualitative interviews was the possibility of learning something unexpected (Beyens & Tournel, 2010, p. 229), which actually happened in a quite a few instances. The reason for using a topic list based on the previously mentioned theoretical framework would be for the potential falsification and/or validation of these concepts; nevertheless, the mere falsification or validation of the theoretical framework which had been derived from the literature prior the interviews was not the primary goal of these interviews.

During the open coding phase it became clear that the data from the interviews affected the theoretical framework as they brought new information in. This change can be seen when comparing the *a priori* and *a posteriori* coding schemes (see appendix I and II). The *a priori* coding scheme reflected the topic list that was used in conducting the interviews and was solely based on the literature review, whereas the *a posteriori* coding scheme resulted out of the combination of the data from the interviews and the literature.

### 3.5. Validity and reliability

Validity as a measure of the methodological quality can be split up in internal validity and external validity, of which both will be discussed in this paragraph. First of all, on discussing the internal validity, it is interpreted as an indicator of the credibility of causal claims

(Maesschalck, 2010, pp. 128-129). The internal validity is intertwined with the research design (Baarda, De Goede & Teunissen, 2009, p. 198), which has already been dealt with in this chapter. This seems to be both the strength and weakness which come forth out of the data; even though the point of this research was explaining the public support, it seems that it is a very nuanced story where things may seem different depending on the perspective of the person. The factors which have been brought forward during the research are very likely explanatory factors for the public support, but the weight one gives to them or the mechanism one believes to be behind these factors differs hugely, which was also very noticeable during the interviews. Two essential factors that could influence the validity of research that is based on qualitative interviews are the position of the researcher and the way in which the interviews are conducted (Cambré & Waege, 2006, pp. 340-341). The position from which this research was conducted has in regards to validity a small advantage; as an outsider, there was no over-involvement present. The way in which the interviews were conducted invited the respondents to think critically and elaborate on their statements. This was of course needed if the data out of the interviews were to have an added value, but another reason for doing so was because it was feared there might be such a thing as a 'collective memory' about how the situation was. When these factors are interpreted as a whole, where the whole is greater than the sum, there is definitely internal validity. External validity is seen as the extent to which these results can be transferred to other cases (Baarda, et al., 2009, p. 199; Maesschalck, 2010, p. 130). It may be tempting to claim that the theoretical model which was constructed at the end is all-encompassing and can thus be applied on any conflict. Nothing could be more wrong, as it is essential to take so many contextual factors into account, that no model derived from one case is likely to be a perfect fit for others. There is however the sense that some of these factors can be found in other contexts. This does not necessarily have to lead to the support for an armed movement, but can out itself in another form of resistance.

In qualitative research, the reliability of the research is an indicator of its transparency and verifiability (Baarda, et al., 2009, p. 193). This can also be split up in both internal and external reliability. Internal reliability means the extent to which the same results can be produced by other researchers (Maesschalck, 2010, p. 131). External reliability refers to the extent to which the same results can be gotten from new data (Maesschalck, 2010, p.133). The first method which was used to increase the reliability was a detailed transcribing of the interviews, as this will less likely lead to a loss of data or the misinterpretation of it (Silverman, 2005, p. 222; Silverman, 2010, p. 287). These were recorded and during the interviews notes were taken; due to the heavy accents of some respondents it was sometimes

necessary to ask what the respondent meant. Secondly, it was the goal to report as transparently on the whole research process as possible. To the extent to which it is possible, this methodological section serves this purpose, but the debriefing to the promoter of this research improves the transparency and forces the researcher to be critical (Maesschalck, 2010, pp. 142-143).

### 3.6. Conclusion

The central matter in this research revolved around the public support enjoyed by the PIRA during the early years of the Troubles. This can be split in two different approaches; the first approach sought to uncover how the public support presented itself. The second approach sought to examine the reasons for that public support. To find an answer to both questions, a thorough literature review was held and expert interviews were held with academics, former PIRA volunteers and a former member of Sinn Féin. To find respondents, the snowball sample was used, which resulted in ten interviews conducted. A topic list was used in these qualitative interviews, which was based on the preceding literature review. To judge the methodological quality of the research, the criteria validity and reliability were used. Validity was split up in internal and external validity. While the internal validity seems to be decent overall, the specificity of the context dictates one to be wary to transfer these results to other cases. The reliability was increased by the detailed transcribing of the interviews and the transparent reporting to the reader and promoter.

## 4. Public support for the Provisional IRA

This chapter contains two main sections. In the first section the reader is provided with an overview of the extent to which the PIRA enjoyed public support. This mainly attempts to answer the first research question, which broadly speaking means that it tries to describe the support. An answer is provided to the question how it evolved over time and how it differentiated according to the different sections within the community. The second section has a more explanatory nature: it deals with the different factors that may potentially explain the public support for the PIRA. This deals with the second research question, which means that it tries to explain the public support for the PIRA.

### 4.1. The level of public support for the PIRA

It seems to be almost guaranteed that an organization that has been able to survive for such a long time enjoys a minimum support from the community it is embedded in. Sluka (1989, p. 65) argues in his work, which is an ethnography focusing on the public support for the IRA and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) in 1981, that the IRA and INLA are in a battle for legitimacy (and support from the community) with both the Catholic hierarchy and the governmental actors. This does not necessarily mean that the PIRA felt bound by the opinion of the Catholic community: historically this was not the case (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 20).

In discussing the extent to which the PIRA enjoyed public support during the early years of the Troubles, there seems to be a consensus among most respondents that it did enjoy a significant amount of support. A few of them support this claim by arguing that the fact they were able to survive as long as they did, even when confronted with a very powerful opponent, was only possible due to the level of public support they enjoyed. This is similar to Sluka's (1989, p. 65) argument, in which he claims that for movements like the PIRA public support is vital, as otherwise it would not survive due to the hostility towards them. One respondent does argue that right at the start of their formation in 1969, their support base was still small due to the on-going feud between them and the Official IRA. Another respondent argues that while not many people would have actively supported the PIRA, there would have certainly been a significant level of passive support among the members of their community. Some respondents argue this level of passive support is mainly due to the lack of legitimacy the Northern Irish and/or British state enjoy, which will be discussed later when attempting to

explain the public support.

In dealing with public support for the PIRA one would have to stress the dynamic nature of support: this means that, depending on certain factors, the public support may know highs and lows (Moxon-Browne, 1981, p. 50; Sluka, 1989, p. 66). Seven out of ten respondents also discussed the nature of the support; they all agreed on public support not being a static factor, but rather as something fluid, something which fluctuates. Hayes and McAllister (2005, p. 606) mention the importance of particular circumstances on the support. Moxon-Browne (1981, p. 50) mentions the influence of the way British rule is perceived on the support for the PIRA: at times British rule is perceived as more unjust, the IRA can expect a greater amount of public support. Similar to Moxon-Browne's (1981, p. 50) hypothesis, O'Brien (1983, p. 101) argues there is a positive relationship between the rage caused by PIRA's hostile activities and the need felt by the Catholic ghettos for the PIRA as its defender against a possible attack. On discussing the ups and downs of the public support, Anthony McIntyre notes that "between 1973-1981, while there was support, it was neither significant nor substantial. It looked more as if the IRA were in revolt and not the nationalist / working-class community". The main reason given for the fluid nature of the public support is the role of certain incidents; it is argued it was very event-driven. These key events are seen as influential for both the ups and downs in the public support.

Just like the public support is generally not seen as something static by the respondents, it is not seen to be evenly spread according to the different sections of the Catholic community either. Nine out of ten respondents were asked how they would differentiate according to the different sections of the community and a few types of differentiation can be drawn out of their answers. Firstly, all of them agreed to some extent that the support mainly stemmed from the working class sections of the community, which is in consensus with Sluka's (1989, p. 64) work on public support. Some argued that this is because the class dynamic was connected to the experience of the conflict: Catholics from the working class sections were much more likely to encounter the army and directly experience the violence. People in the working class were also much more affected by the economic strains experienced by the Catholic community, which will be discussed later on. One respondent argued that another explanation for the difference according to class could be explained by the lesser investment in society made by the working class, or rather, less possibilities to invest given by society. This class dynamic is not seen as determining, as some argued that there would have been middle class people supporting the IRA, but that there is a significant difference in the number of people. A second way of differentiating would be the

way it was spread on geographical terms (Sluka, 1989, p. 63). In a sense this is related to the differentiation according to class; some respondents argued that the people from the middle class community often not resided within the geographical areas that endured the conflict the most. Stephen Ryan captured the sentiment around differentiation in the following quote: "If you were a Catholic living in County Down, no violence around you, good relations between Protestants and Catholics, you didn't have the police kicking in your doors, all those things, you were less likely to support the IRA". A third way of differentiating would be according to political ideas: a few respondents argued that the people who might not have actively supported the armed campaign, but rather the constitutional nationalism, would also have been unwilling to report incidents to the state.

While it was initially not included in the topic list as a separate topic, during the interviews some respondents made remarks concerning the agency of the members of the community. The opinions on this topic were a bit divided: there is a respondent who argued that the agency of the individual was very important, as the individual choices should not be overlooked. Others said that the culture and group dynamics were more important, as the individual needs to be seen as a member of his or her community, influenced by the broader context. Tommy McKearney argued the following:

> "[…] hence, almost whether you wanted it or not, you found yourself on this side or that side. It wasn't always everybody's choice, but you found yourself, a lot of people found themselves on one side or the other. So a lot of those that ended up giving passive support to the PIRA did so because they had de facto set in that position."

### 4.2. Explanatory factors for the public support

As has been mentioned before, the purpose of this section is to answer the second research question and find out how the public support for the PIRA can be explained. There are nine possible influential factors offered to the reader. These factors have been derived from the literature review which preceded the interviews, but due to the limited amount of space it was chosen to not discuss certain applied factors mentioned in this chapter separately in the first chapter. As no such list as the one used was available beforehand, it is the result of approaching the literature in an analytical way. All these factors will be presented in a schema at the end of this chapter on the basis of the following disquisition (see figure 2).

### 4.2.1. PIRA's policing role

The PIRA maintained an alternative criminal justice system within their community and took upon itself a policing role during the Troubles (Hayes & McAllister, 2005, p. 602; Silke, 2007, p. 55). With regards to PIRA's role as a sort of vigilante police, opinions seemed to be quite diverse. Interestingly, one respondent noted that it was not just policing, but rather management of the community which was a consequence of them having support. The underlying idea behind this is that the policing role was inseparable from the other factors present in the community and the broader context. Determining whether or not it influenced their public support in a positive way is hard, as it was both demanded of the PIRA but could have had negative consequences due to the possible alienation of members of their community (Cavanaugh, 1997, p. 49; Feenan, 2002, pp. 156-158; Silke, 2007, p. 84). When questioned about the extent to which this may have influenced the public support, mainly two types of answers were given by the respondents. The first group of respondents argued that the policing of the community actually entailed risking to lose support from the community. The same argument present in the literature was made; they argued that when you punish people, you tend to alienate them and their relatives. A few respondents said that this was seen as a huge risk, because of the large extended families in Northern Ireland and the close-knit community. The second group of respondents argued that they were seeing to be doing the community a service by punishing criminals. Anthony McIntyre noted that if they had not taken up that role, they would have actually alienated more people from the community and "the community might have just not opened their doors". The views found in the literature and interviews overlapped strongly.

Aside from having potentially influenced the public support for the PIRA directly, it could also be that it had an indirect effect by influencing the perceived legitimacy of the PIRA (Cavanaugh, 1997, p. 49; Feenan, 2002, p. 157). This means that by maintaining law and order within their community, the legitimacy and standing of the PIRA within their community was improved. No one who was interviewed argued that the PIRA gained legitimacy by policing the Catholic community, mainly because of the possible alienating effect it had on people.

Several authors (Cavanaugh, 1997, p. 49; Feenan, 2002, pp. 156-158; Silke, 2007, p. 84) agree on the policing role being a double-edged sword: on the one hand, the community required it of the PIRA to take up the role and it was forced to if it wanted to maintain credibility, but on the other hand it risked reducing the support base by alienating the victim

and its friends or family. This argument was also found in the conversations with the respondents. They argued the PIRA was faced with a no-win situation: at one hand the community demanded from them to punish criminals, due to the policing vacuum, but on the other hand they risked alienating people. This caused the policing function to be seen as rather bothersome for the PIRA, as it was something which needed to be done, but tied down a lot of its resources. One respondent also noted that it allowed its opponents to depict the organization as brutal.

### 4.2.2. Fear and intimidation

When formulating the definition for intimidation used by Darby (1986, p. 53) in a more general sense, it can be seen as a process in which force or (the perception of) threat leads to individuals feeling pressured to behave in a certain way. The intimidation theory is based on the hypothesis that the majority of the community would be forced to endure their presence (Sluka, 1989, pp. 164-165). Sluka (1989, pp. 164-166) does not agree with the intimidation theory, as he argues that the IRA would not have been able to maintain its public support if it intimidated the Catholic community. It does seem important, however, to take the possibility of fear and intimidation into account as influential factors. Feenan (2002, p. 64) argues that even though they might not operate on the base of intimidation or coercion, the violence against some political opponents could have contributed to fear about speaking out against the movement (Feenan, 2002, p. 164). Some respondents argued there was a certain level of intimidation: a distinction was made by them between overt and covert intimidation. Overt intimidation would be mainly experienced by other republican organizations, like the Official IRA or the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). The intimidation experienced by the community would be covert intimidation: this means that it was conducted in rather concealed manner. The argument behind this is that if the intimidation towards the community were overt, the PIRA would risk losing support. Other respondents argued that it was not really intimidation, as the PIRA did not rule by fear. They rather argued that, if there was anything the people feared it was opposing the PIRA, rather than the PIRA as an organization. In regards to the possibility of intimidation, Stephen Ryan explained it in the following way:

> "The IRA didn't pose on the community through intimidation – put it this way, people would have to think in certain ways: if I did this, how would the IRA react? I'm sure that went on. Whether that's intimidation, or whether that's something else, I don't know, but you know, there was this sense that "we have to be careful, we certainly

can't call the police, we can't be seen talking to the police, we can't do any of those things normal societies do"."

By arguing that the PIRA did not rule merely by fear or intimidation, one seems to acknowledge the possibility that additional influential factors on the public support existed. Interestingly, the British government attempted to portray the Catholic community as being intimidated by the PIRA and as not supportive at all of this organization (Aretxaga, 1993, pp. 234-235). From the British government's point of view this is understandable, as it can both deny the legitimacy of the PIRA and the legitimacy of the struggle by arguing it has no support base. Therefore intimidation interpreted as something that by and large subconsciously influenced the actions of the people in the Catholic community, rather than something that actively forces people to support the PIRA, seems to be more veracious. This is not to say there was no overt intimidation of the community, but it needs to be more nuanced.

### 4.2.3. Culture and the role of Catholicism

Crenshaw (2011, p. 37) argues that the Irish tradition of using violence against the government both inspired and excused the actions by the PIRA. Tölölyan (1987, p. 221) makes a similar observation, where he argues the combination of a collective memory of grievances and the memory of past resistance forms 'projective narratives' through which the present and future are interpreted. Horowitz (2002, p. 157) also notes that historical relationships are not that quickly forgotten, and might be triggered later. He also argues that this plays a role in violent behavior. Culture was mentioned as a possible influence on the public support by a number of respondents. The main argument behind the possible positive influence was that it could increase the acceptance of violent means to reach a goal. One respondent argued that the passive acceptance of violence was "almost genetically encoded". This does not necessarily mean that Catholic culture equaled one of violence: Elliott (2000, p. 441) argues that it was the increase of violence that made the republican campaign lose legitimacy. She sees the Catholic culture as one of grievances, where the perception of victimhood is determining for the Catholic collective identity. This perception was endangered when the level of violence rose. This is not to argue that violence was always seen as illegitimate by the members of this community; a potential explanation for the dynamic of violence can be found in the legitimacy of targets which will be discussed when mentioning the influence of the actions of the PIRA.

The hostility of the Catholic church towards the IRA arose quite quickly at the start of the Troubles (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 115). Some respondents discussed the role the Catholic church and Catholicism played in the public support for the PIRA. With regards to the role of the Catholic church, there was a consensus between the respondents and the view portrayed in the literature: they all said that the Catholic hierarchy condemned the PIRA for use of its violent methods, as Catholicism traditionally condemns violence[4]. Rafferty (2008, pp. 109-110) notes there is an interesting relationship between the church and the community: as the church's support for the Stormont government increased, it effectively alienated certain parts of the Catholic community, but its image improved when the said government was hostile towards the church. At a certain stage, when the Catholic community was confronted with the violence of the British government, the Catholic hierarchy did condemn this violence, which temporally bonded the community (Rafferty, 2008, p. 112). A few respondents did say that there were individual priests who were sympathetic to the PIRA, but this was definitely not supported (or condoned, for that matter) by the church. With regards to the influence of the Catholic church, Tommy McKearney said the following:

> "There's a tradition in Ireland of separating politics from religion. You mightn't think this from the outside, but the old phrase is from Daniel O'Connell, who was a nationalist, that we take our religion from Rome and our politics from home. […] The Catholic church doesn't have as much influence, and certainly not over republicanism or Nationalism, it doesn't have the same influence – people are very quick to use it if it's to their advance. If the Bishop agrees with what you're saying, you'll say "yes, the Bishop is right", and if he disagrees with what you're saying "he's wrong", and that's what has happened for a long time in Ireland."

This seems to suggest that, even though religion was an important aspect in the conflict, the Catholic church's influence on controlling the political visions in their community should not be overestimated (Rafferty, 2008, p. 111). It can be argued that the Catholic hierarchy was aware of this, as they did not excommunicate militant Republicans during the Troubles out of fear that they would severely alienate their members (Sluka, 1989, p. 242). Such actions, where IRA volunteers are excommunicated or banned from receiving other theological services, had been futile in the past (Elliott, 2000, p. 472).

Even when by and large there was no support from the hierarchy, this does not exclude

[4] Sluka (1989, p. 239) notes that around the start of the 18th century this was different when the freedom to practice Catholicism was briefly endangered.

a potential influence of Catholicism on the public support. Rafferty (2008, pp. 101-102) notes that Catholicism in Northern Ireland had an important effect on the culture of its community, as the church had been responsible for many educational and social services since many decades at that time. A few respondents agreed that it is possible that the 'culture of religion' had a positive influence: it was responsible for creating a sense of unity and instilling certain ideas on martyrdom and sacrifice in people (which according to the respondents was important later on during the Hunger strikes). Another respondent argued that the ideas of Catholicism actually caused some people to be against violence. It can be argued that because of the way in which it united the Catholic community (Ruane & Todd, 1996, p. 74), the socialization of the people by the Catholic community contributed to the collective identity. In terms of ideology, there was an interesting conflict between the two opposing moral frames in regards to violence provided by both the Catholic and Republican ideologies; while the former saw violence as morally unjustifiable, the latter saw the use of violence in a just war as a moral right (Sluka, 1989, pp. 237-238).

### 4.2.4. The PIRA as the defender of its community

It can be argued that, just like the policing role, the role of defender was demanded of the IRA by the community. Before the split between the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA, the IRA was not really present anymore in the Catholic community. As a reaction to the IRA not being there to defend its community, people sprayed graffiti on the walls that said "IRA = I Ran Away" (Aretxaga, 1993, pp. 226-228). This author argues that there was an actual demand from the community of the IRA to go out and defend it, which resulted in the IRA reluctantly taking up this role. The role of the PIRA as the defender of the Catholic community was mentioned by most respondents as a potential influence. Most of them agreed that this role had a positive impact on the public support, as its early actions were mainly about protection. Broadly speaking, the community could be defended against two different forms of violence: violence by governmental actors and violence by loyalist paramilitary groups. The first type, violence by the governmental actors, is about the actions by the RUC and the army that were perceived as repressive: most respondents agreed that this was an important influential factor on the support. Paddy Molloy, a former volunteer, argued that this had an important effect on both the active as the passive support:

> "In 1970, they became aggressive towards us, and it was a situation where you were getting harassed by the army. Searches against the wall, houses getting raided, people

> getting beat up, stuff like that, yeah. And you'd sort of say to yourself "well, where do you get the guns?" **laughs** "Who's got the guns?""

Discussing the second type of violence triggered more different opinions. A few of the respondents argued that the PIRA's defense against loyalist attacks was important. One respondent noted that the community would rather ask the PIRA to defend them if they had known a loyalist attack was planned, even though such prior knowledge would have been rare. Anthony McIntyre was even more critical of the PIRA's role against loyalist attacks:

> "Well, this was more myth than real. See the type of loyalist attacks that the IRA could defend against was when a loyalist crowd would enter an area and try and burn it. The IRA would come out, fire shots in the air, fire above their heads, shoot one of them, and then the crowd would go and run back. That defense didn't work against the strategy the loyalists used of targeting individual Catholics from passing cars or motorbikes, or throwing bombs in the pubs. All the IRA could really do then was retaliate, and break down the willpower of loyalist organizations, which it didn't really do. […] How can the IRA protect Catholics working in Protestant areas? How did the IRA protect Catholics drinking in a bar? […] On occasion we did, we put people in a bar with a weapon. But what use is that of having a gun when somebody throws a bomb in the bar?"

A distinction must be made between the role of the capability of the PIRA to defend its community against loyalist attacks, and the role of fear for loyalist paramilitary groups on its own. This last concept is drawn from the literature on sectarian violence, e.g. Bishop and Mallie's (1987) work. These authors argue the sectarian assassinations gave the PIRA the opportunity to take up the role as defenders of the Catholic population. Sluka (1989, p. 84) too argues in his case study of the Divis Flats that this fear influenced the support for the IRA positively. It is the fear of the other community's actions and the expectations that go hand in hand with it that mattered (Elliott, 2000, p. 432). While there was no real consensus on the influence of the PIRA's role as a defender against loyalist attacks, some respondents did argue that the fear for loyalist paramilitaries did cause the PIRA to gain more support. A possible explanation for this can be found in the differentiation in Catholic and Protestant violence: while the former was mainly oriented towards state actors responsible for maintaining security, the latter was mainly oriented towards Catholic civilians (Terchek, 1977, p. 50).

### 4.2.5. Actions of the PIRA and its strategy

Horowitz (2002, p. 498) argues that violence against civilians was not condoned by the Catholic community and that therefore the PIRA's actions were restrained by a rationale of legitimate targets. Sànchez-Cuenca (2007, p. 300) argues that organizations like the PIRA are conscious of the possible consequences of their actions in regards to public support and therefore are selective in their violent acts. However, Sluka (1989, p. 97) notes that the policy to only kill military or political targets was not that well enforced during the early 70s. These different point of views were also found in the interviews. Whereas a few respondents argued the PIRA was wary of not crossing certain lines, and thus was conscious of how violence was being used, one respondent did argue that during the early years the Provos did not seem that concerned, as they saw themselves as an urban guerilla group which wanted to get its message across.

Certain targets were not deemed to be legitimate, and if attacked they would actually cause a decline in the public support for the PIRA (Sànchez-Cuenca, 2007, p. 300; Townshend, 2010, pp. 335-336). Among the couple of respondents who did mention the consequences of the PIRA's actions, there was a consensus that the actions of the PIRA did have an impact on the public support. The main argument behind also centers around the legitimacy of targets: attacks where a lot of civilians lost their lives would have had a negative impact, as they were not seen to be involved in the conflict. A few respondents said that this is part of the reason why Bloody Friday was perceived as such a disastrous event by the public.

This does not deny the potential moral dimension to not perceiving civilians as legitimate targets, which is often discarded by critics of the PIRA (Sluka, 1989, pp. 96-97). A possible explanation for this legitimacy of targets is that civilians were not seen as part of the source of the frustrations, but the governmental actors were. Horowitz (2002, pp. 155-156) argues that those who are the source of the frustration and those who provoke are more easily targeted. Townshend (2010, p. 336) does not quite agree with the claim that the PIRA would have been selective in their targets to foster public support, as he claims that they were not that sensitive to the public opinion and that the latter would rather give in to the former than the other way around.

A question that was raised during the interviews was whether or not the PIRA was being perceived as being one of the causes of the violence experienced by the community in the conflict. Some argued they were not, even though some elements in the community tried to build up such an image. One respondent argued that the reason for this is that the violent

behavior by the others will rather reinforce your assumptions of them, and thus possibly feed the support. Peter Shirlow did not completely agree with that notion, and argued there were also people who did see it like that:

> "So, you get people in communities going "you bastards are bringing that violence in our community. If you go out and shoot a British soldier, especially when you go out and bomb the Shankill or a Protestant area, or you shoot Protestants, they go out and kill Catholics"."

### 4.2.6. Collective strains

The concept of collective strains is taken into account as another potential factor, because the literature shows it is a very important concept (Gurr & Moore, 1997, p. 1081). Two types of collective strains can be distinguished in this research: historical strains and contemporary grievances. The main idea behind the influence of the historical strains on the public support is that it was part of the collective identity of the Catholic community which could be turned on and mobilized. History in general can enable people to perform political actions as key events in Irish history have contributed to the cultural consciousness (Aretxaga, 1993, p. 224). Crenshaw's (2011, p. 94) notion on social learning seems to be applicable on the communities in Northern Ireland, as analogies serve as a reminder of the collective historical memory of the Catholic community (Moxon-Browne, 1981, p. 52). A few respondents argued how these historical strains contributed to the contemporary feelings of the Catholic community during those years. It was argued there was some sort of folk memory of the history present, which is seen to have reinforced the feelings of repression and alienation which are already there because of the contemporary grievances.

This forms an interesting link between the historical grievances and the contemporary strains: history may have contributed to the construction of a narrative through which the present could have been interpreted. One respondent argued that this history was only important when it fused with the other factors present at that time. This makes sense, because if historical strains would have been one of the primary influences in the public support, then why did the Troubles not start earlier? This is not to underestimate the strong reinforcing power of history, however. O'Brien (1983, p. 101) argues that the PIRA was durable due to its ability to appeal to the historical background of the conflict. While a few respondents agreed that the PIRA appealed to the historical grievances (or historical tradition), there was no consensus on the motivation to do this. One respondent argued that it was more important

in terms of legitimizing the violence for the active volunteers. The contemporary grievances seem to be much more important in regards to the public support: after all, it was these grievances that resulted in the civil rights movement which mobilized sections of the Catholic community and renewed the attention for the nationalist cause (Munck, 1992, p. 227). These contemporary grievances experienced by the Catholic community during the early 1970s alienated the Catholic community further and helped the PIRA to increase its support base (*supra*). Most respondents agreed that the Catholic community was aware of these grievances, which can be summarized as structural discrimination. It is difficult to argue that the whole Catholic community was aware of this structural discrimination; during an interview, a former volunteer illustrated this by arguing that he was only aware of this when he started reading up on the discrimination when imprisoned. This is very interesting, but it could be that it is more an exception to the rule, as the CRM probably contributed to the Catholic consciousness. This structural discrimination does not necessarily explain the support for an armed movement on its own: one respondent noted that these circumstances existed for quite some time but that the difference lies in the global political period which might have served as stress factors that had an impact on the mobilization of the Catholic community and the public support.

### 4.2.7. Social ties

Davis, et al. (2012, p. 77) mention social ties as an influential factor; these are distinguished in the two sub concepts 'kinship' and 'identification with group members'. Kinship came into play in three different ways. First of all, it can be argued that this facilitated the passive support. One respondent noted that it was much easier to approach a family member when on the run from the army. Secondly, a lot of the families were affected during the conflict. This is basically the same argument that surfaced in the discussion on the role of PIRA's policing: due to the extended families in Northern Ireland, certain actions could have alienated a family (from the governmental actors, the PIRA …). A few respondents argued that this could have served as a motivation for either joining or helping the movement in a different way (e.g. going on marches). Thirdly, kinship may have affected the public support by the way in which it is responsible for constructing the social identity. While some respondents agreed with that notion and argued that it must have been an important socialization agent, one respondent argued this was not quite the case for the first generation, as there were only few families in the Catholic community still dedicated to the republican ideology. In the armed movement they also made the distinction between people who became active in 1969: these were 'sixty-

niners' (Bishop & Mallie, 1987, p. 116). Then again, the socialization by the family reached further than just the potential spreading of the republican ideology.

The second sub concept, identification with group members, was mentioned by some respondents. The main argument behind this was that the institutional structure of the Northern Ireland society (e.g. segregated schooling) reinforced the polarized perception on society. As has been mentioned before, the Catholic church was responsible for delivering educational and social services to its community (Rafferty, 2008, pp. 101-102). This will also be mentioned in the paragraph of collective identity.

### 4.2.8. Actions of the state and its actors

The actions of the state and its actors have been discussed briefly in the literature review, out of which can concluded they had certain consequences in regards to public support. This includes both the systematic repressive methods as the behavior of the individual soldier or member of the RUC. A distinction is made between on one hand the actions of the army and the RUC and on the other hand the political decisions made.

The actions of the army and the RUC alienated certain sections of the Catholic community from them and were responsible for an increase in the public support for the PIRA (Purdie, 1990, p. 157; Orbons, 2011, pp. 470-475). Among the respondents there was a consensus that the actions of the army made the relationship between the army and the Catholic community quickly deteriorate. A few respondents argued that once they had committed the actions that alienated the community from them (e.g. massive house searches, use of CS gas …) they were seen as another element of repression. While Sluka (1989, p. 231) strongly disputes the notion that the PIRA used that against the army by tricking them into committing actions that would harm their image, one respondent disagreed and said:

> "One of the ways in which the Provisionals were able to get public support in the ghetto, was that they would send false messages to the British. Saying that "if you go down to this address, you'll find dangerous IRA men". So the British would send in the paratroopers, the paratroopers did everything that they shouldn't do and the people that they were trying to arrest were in fact people who were physically disabled. Now, the Provisionals knew what they were doing, and they knew that the outcome would be that there would be greater public support for them. So yeah, they were very, very clever I think."

Sluka (1989, pp. 170-172) argues it's possible that the presence of the army influenced the public support positively, as he argues that the soldiers were a daily irritant for Catholics in certain districts. Similarly, some respondents noted that the presence of the British army itself must have played upon the consciousness and thus have led to an increase in the public support for the PIRA: one respondent noted how they were seen as a foreign occupier. This can be seen as a consequence of both the political decisions (to send the army to Northern Ireland) and the actions of the army (as it is said they were first welcomed and their relationship turned sour once they committed certain actions). There was one of the respondents that did not really agree with the notion that the presence or actions of the army fully explains the support for the PIRA: he argued that while the two are related, there was a mediation of the relationship by war weariness, fatigue and lack of hope. He illustrated this with the decline in support for the PIRA in the mid-70s; the repressiveness was present, but it did not drive the support up. This interesting nuance shows that these factors should always be interpreted in their own, unique context. As has been discussed before in the part on PIRA's policing role, the RUC did not enjoy legitimacy in some sections of the Catholic community and their actions only alienated the community further. There is a consensus among the respondents they were seen as a sectarian force during the early years of the Troubles, one respondent even argued there was no need for loyalist paramilitaries at the start, as there was the RUC, B-specials and the army to carry out attacks on nationalist areas.

Interestingly enough, the classical British counter-insurgency theory was based on the assumption that the battle for the hearts and minds of the local population should be won through a minimal use of force, psychological operations (incl. the tactical use of propaganda) and constructive governance (Dixon, 2009, p. 454). It is interesting to evaluate the army's actions by these concepts. Firstly, it is questionable whether the army's use of force was really minimal. Even though there was an understanding of the potential alienation of the Catholic community by using excessive force, the operations of the army (incl. the house searches) were counterproductive (Dixon, 2009, pp. 455-456). The usage of CS gas by the army and the consequences of its discriminate effect deserve to be mentioned here too (*supra*). This excessive usage of CS gas and the massive house-search operations were minimalized later in time because of their effect on the population's support of the army, but the abusive behavior of the individual soldier did not change (Sluka, 1989, p. 172). Secondly, Dixon (2009, p. 461) argues that the British army actually lost credibility once it was revealed they were holding a propaganda campaign. Finally, since the start of the army's campaign a part of their good

governance was the engagement in projects in which they would improve their image by helping the community (Dixon, 2009, p. 463). It is not sure how long the army maintained this policy (Sluka, 1989, p. 172).

In the literature review it is discussed how the answer of the unionist government to the demands of the CRM was seen as much too little, way too late (Purdie, 1990, p. 250). Some respondents saw the inability to answer properly to the demands by any of the two governments (Northern Irish or British) as a potential factor that could have influenced the support for the PIRA. Adrian Guelke argued that this led to a radicalization of the Catholic community, as they feared "the pieces would be put back in the box and they'd be kind of isolated from the rest of the world for another fifty years".

### 4.2.9. Collective identity

Crenshaw (1983, p. 22) argues that politically violent activities may reinforce the group boundaries, increase the cohesion within a community and widen the gaps between groups. She argues that it is responsible for isolating one group from another by breeding "ignorance and suspicion". While there is intuitively a certain logic to this, one could not explain the situation just by viewing the group dynamics as a result of the political violence. As Terchek (1977, pp. 51-52) notes, there were a lot of factors in the Northern Irish society that reinforce both the ethnic identities of the communities, as the grievances these communities have towards each other. Indeed, there were different processes within these communities that not only reinforce the collective identities, but also the boundaries of these communities. Elliott (2000, pp. 432-439) speaks of a "mutually agreed distance" which made it hard for members to overstep the communal barrier so to speak. She illustrates this by arguing there was a certain amount of uneasiness in regards to selling property to people from the other community or having cross-community marriages[5]. Besides marital and residential segregation, other forms of segregation took place at school, work, sports … (Hughes, Campbell, Hewstone & Cairns, 2007, p. 35). Hughes, et al. (2007, p. 38) speak of a collective fear of the other community and anxiety in regards to inter-communal relations as deciding factors in the social arena. The lack of contact across the communities was important in regards to the segregation, and thus the construction of the collective identity as one Catholic community separate from the Protestant community, as cross-community friendship reduces

[5] Of course, this does not mean this did not happen, but there was only a small number of mixed marriages during the Troubles (and there still is, but it is slowly increasing) (Hughes, et al., 2007, p. 36).

the prejudice towards the other community (Pettigrew, 1997, pp. 180-181).

This taken into account, it does not seem to be correct to see the political violence in Northern Ireland only seen as an influential factor on the collective identity, but perhaps the collective identity played a role in the political violence. Some respondents argued that the collective identity could have contributed to the public support as it contributed to the polarization and alienation of the Catholic community from the Protestant community. There were several mediating factors present in the Northern Irish society that played a role in the construction of the collective identity. Firstly, there was Catholicism, which role in regards to constructing a collective identity has already been discussed. Secondly, there was the ethnic memory of the historical grievances which may have influenced the collective identity too. Thirdly, the influence of the media should be taken into account. Vincent (1997, p. 517) argues how two Belfast newspapers reflected the biases that lived in the communities of their readers, and thus might have led to the reinforcement of existing stereotypes. When being asked about the possible influence of the media, it would be argued there was a strong divided media present in Northern Ireland during that time. A few respondents argued this tends to strengthen the division between the different groups and the collective identity, as one respondent noted that people are attracted by the media outlets that reflect their ideas. Collective identity has a dual function however; aside from separating the different communities, it can also unite members of one community.

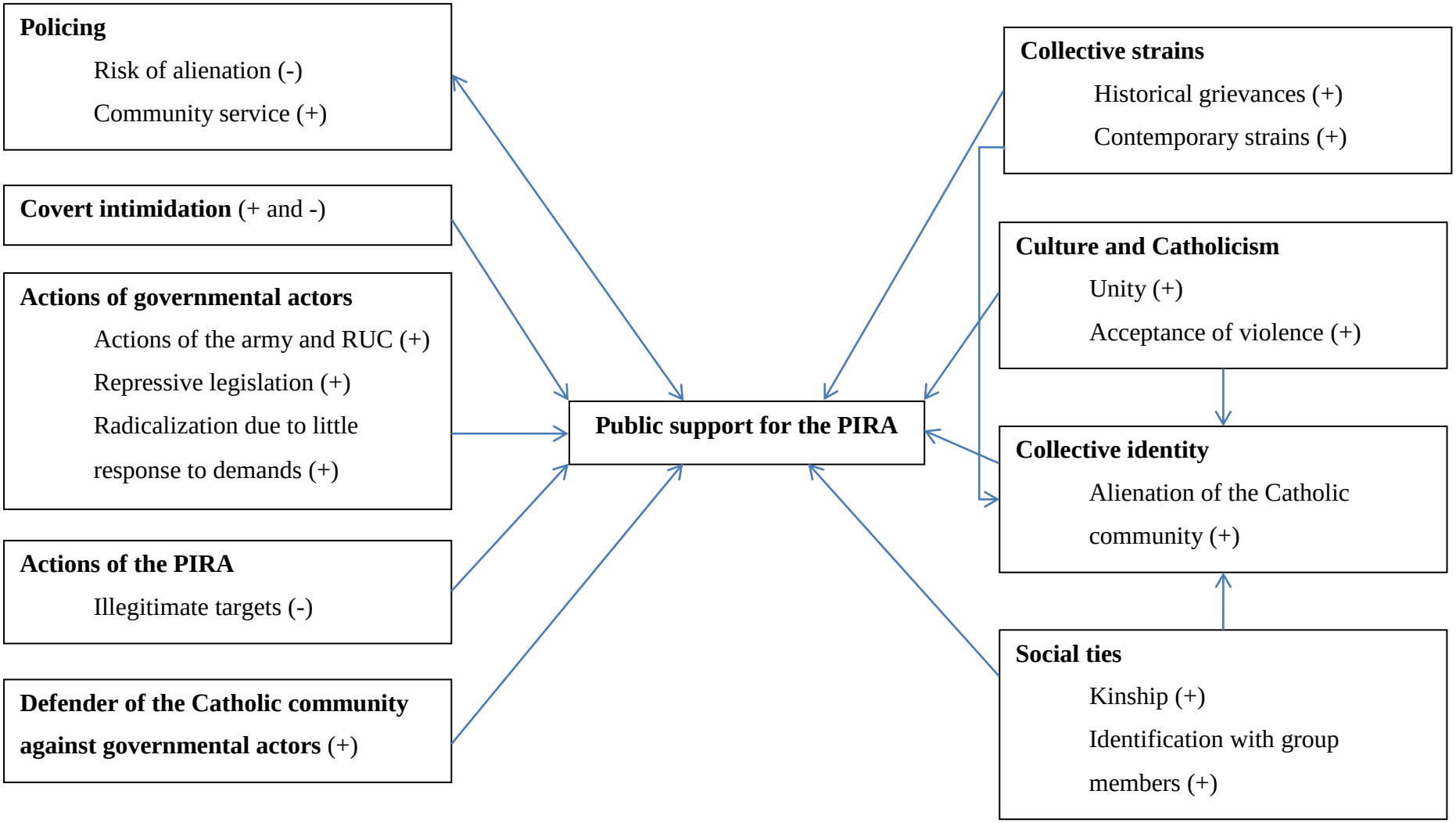
Aside from factors related to the conflict, it could also be argued that the Irish culture gave the Catholic community a certain collective identity. Elliott (2000, p. 369) remarks that at the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century the Irish culture became the Catholic culture and enabled the members of the Catholic community to distance themselves from out-group members. The question is to what extent this Irish culture was still important at the early stages of the Troubles. Some respondents noted that the Irish culture, just like the Republican ideology, only became really important once the conflict was on-going. This was illustrated with political prisoners only learning the Irish language once they were in prison.

### 4.3. Conclusion

During the early years of the Troubles, the PIRA did seem to enjoy a significant amount of support, which had a very dynamic nature. This means that it was not a static value within the community wherein the PIRA was embedded, but it had its ups and downs. There were also different ways in which the supported differentiated within the Catholic community: it mainly

stemmed from the working-class community, it depended on the geographical area people lived in and the kind of support the PIRA would enjoy from a certain individual depended on his or her political ideas.

This public support was influenced by several factors. Firstly, there was the policing role of the PIRA which had a dual relationship with the public support; on the one hand, they risked alienating people by punishing those close to them, but on the other hand, they could be seen as doing the community a service. Secondly, fear and intimidation might have played a role in the community's stance towards the PIRA. While it is not at all the hypothesis that the PIRA ruled the community through intimidation, as this would effectively have crippled their support, but there was a certain covert intimidation in the sense that people would sometimes be cautious to oppose the PIRA. Thirdly, culture and Catholicism was important, in the sense that the former influenced the acceptance of political violence as a legitimate means and the latter united the Catholic community to a certain extent. Fourthly, the role of the PIRA as a defender of the Catholic community was a crucial element of the public support, as this was actually demanded from the PIRA by its community during the early years. Fifthly, the actions of the PIRA were also influential on the public support, in the sense that it could drop when the chosen targets were seen to be illegitimate by the public. Basically, this can be boiled down to civilians being deemed to be not legitimate targets because they were not seen to be involved in the conflict. The sixth factor, the collective strains, can be distinguished in historical grievances and contemporary strains. Whereas the historical grievances were not primary influences on the public support, like the contemporary strains, they did have a reinforcing power. The seventh factor, social ties, also consists of two sub concepts. The first sub concept, kinship, may influence the public support positively by facilitating the passive support, through alienation by the governmental actors and by influencing the socialization processes. The second sub concept, identification with group members, means that through the institutional structure of the Northern Irish society the polarization grew. The eight factor, the actions of the governmental actors, can be distinguished in both the systematic repression of the Catholic community and the behavior of the individual soldier or member of the RUC. Nonetheless, these two factors influenced the public support in a similar way; as these were responsible for the further alienation of the Catholic community, they influenced the public support positively. The ninth factor is the collective identity, which was determined by the collective strains, Catholicism and the social ties. This was responsible for isolating the communities from each other and uniting the members of each community.




+ meaning the factor has a positive influence on the public support, - meaning it has a negative influence

Figure 2. Scheme of the explanatory factors for the public support enjoyed by the PIRA

## 5. Discussion

This chapter, where the research is discussed, consists out of three sections. Firstly, the results are briefly discussed and an attempt is made to view them in a more abstract manner. The explanatory factors are analyzed and put in perspective. Secondly, the value of this research and similar research is evaluated. Thirdly, suggestions for follow-up research are made.

### 5.1. Discussion of the results

All of the explanatory factors which have been mentioned in the fourth chapter can be grouped in three categories (see figure 3). The underlying ground to categorize used here is the source which this comes out forth. Firstly, the internal factors are related to the behavior of the PIRA and include PIRA's policing role, fear and intimidation, the PIRA as a defender of its community and the PIRA's actions. These seem to have had a direct influence on the public support for the PIRA. Secondly, the external factors are related to the behavior of other actors than the PIRA and include the collective strains and actions of the state and its actors. The external factors also seem to have had a direct influence on the public support. Thirdly, the contextual factors are related to the broader context and include the culture and Catholicism, social ties and the collective identity. Unlike the external and internal factors, the contextual factors do not seem to have had a direct influence on the public support. This is not to underestimate their importance; they were mainly responsible for allowing certain sections of the community to be mobilized. They did not only exist within the conflict, but it can be argued that they have been molding the outlook of the community long before the actual conflict and were important conditions.

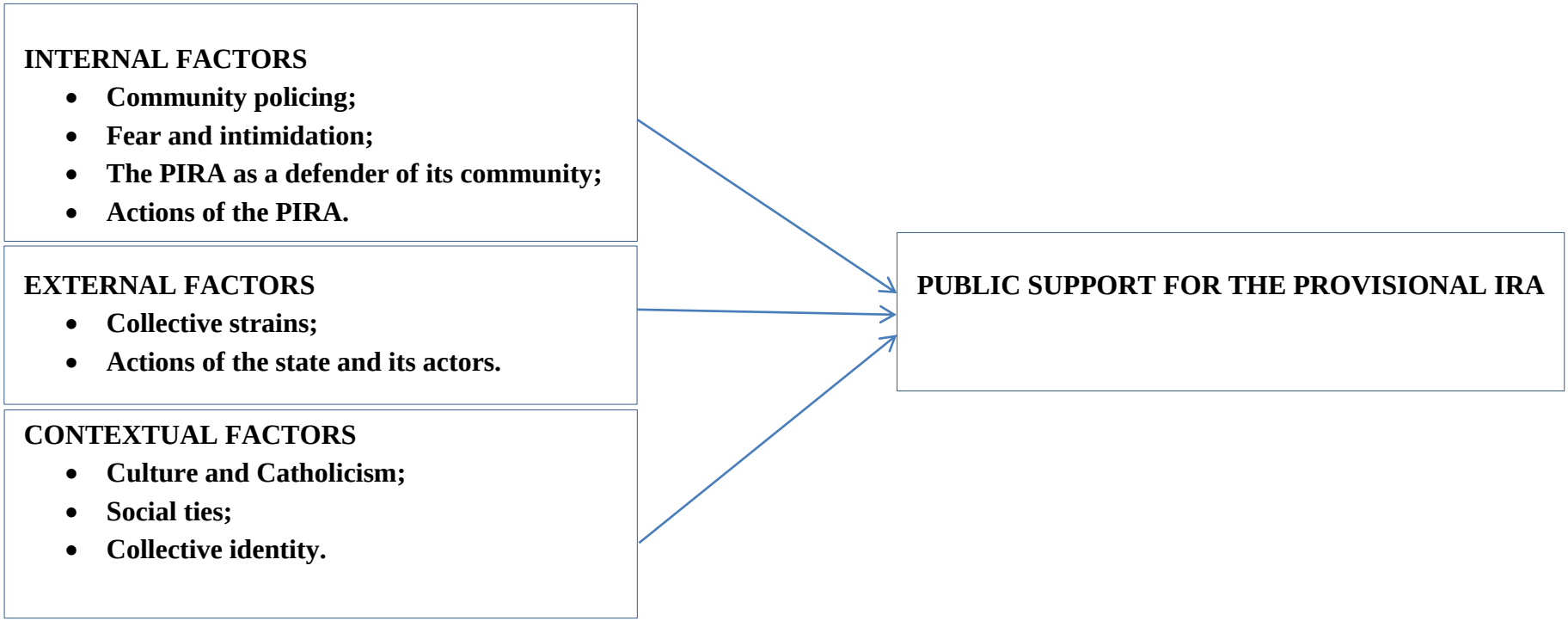



Figure 3. Scheme depicting the explanatory factors for the public support enjoyed by the Provisional IRA

One of the recurring themes throughout this research was the importance of legitimacy. Two kinds of legitimacy can be distinguished: the perceived legitimacy of the PIRA and the perceived legitimacy of the governmental actors (LaFree & Dugan, 2009, pp. 8-10). This seems to narrow down the role legitimacy might have played though. The concept of legitimacy seems to be intertwined with the concept of public support: one can argue this seems to provide the necessary conditions for the public support to take place. As has been discussed in the fourth chapter, the legitimacy of the governmental actors may have been undermined by their relationship with the community, where the army and the sectarian police played an important role in (Cavanaugh, 1997, p. 48; Feenan, 2002, p. 160). As to the PIRA, the policing role might have had a positive effect on its legitimacy (Cavanaugh, 1997, p. 49; Feenan, 2002, p. 157), even though that is doubtful as it potentially alienated people. What is more interesting is that their actions also seemed to be influenced by a rationale of legitimate targets (Horowitz, 2002, p. 498). This means that the role of legitimacy was two-fold. On the one hand it can be seen as a mediating factor between the public support for the PIRA and the actions of both the governmental actors and the PIRA. On the other hand legitimacy can be interpreted as some collective consciousness that influenced the PIRA to an extent. This would mean that its relationship with the public support was more complex and the concept did not solely play a role as a characteristic of the actors in the conflict.

### 5.2. Value of this research

Before discussing the value of this kind of research, the limitations of this specific research must be mentioned. There are two main limitations: the lack of quantitative data and the retrospective focus of the research. First of all, the lack of quantitative data makes the chapter on the level of public support fragile. Even though the limitations of quantitative research methods in this context are known as they have been discussed in the chapter on methodology, it would still have provided an added value. Secondly, the research has a strong retrospective focus, as it seeks to explore a situation which demonstrated itself forty years ago. Knowing that the results presented in this research are partially based on expert interviews, one must take into account the consequences a retrospective focus may have for the data flowing forth out of these interviews. The danger with interviews in such a research is that, as Silverman (2010, p. 192) states, the perception of the past is influenced by the present. Not only does the present may come into play as an interfering factor, but the past itself might influence the perception too; one must not forget that the Troubles continued for about 30

years.

As has been discussed before, the chance of survival of a paramilitary group is influenced a lot by the public support it enjoys. It is a rather simple statement to make, but it seems essential to understand the public support for such a group if one wants to combat the political violence caused by said group. The classical British counter-insurgency theory dating from the sixties is based on the belief that such insurgent groups cannot be defeated through military action alone (Dixon, 2009, p. 448). It seems that there was such an understanding when the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 was introduced, as it addressed a lot of the grievances experienced by the Catholic community. One of the things the results indicate is that a half-hearted attempt at addressing the grievances is not advisable either, as Guelke argued this actually led to a radicalization of the Catholic community. Maras (2013, pp. 318-319) notes that opinions are divided in regards to negotiation in a politically violent context; one side argues it legitimizes the violent activities, the other side argues that not negotiating might lead to an escalation of violence.

There were also some topics that were not integrated in this research, but which could help explain the public support. First of all, the influence of the internal British affairs were not discussed. It would have been interesting to take into account the effect of the support for the withdrawal out of Northern Ireland in Great Britain (Dixon, 2009, p. 453). Secondly, while the global influences were considered as a possible influential factor, it was a conscious choice not to include this out of fear that it might be too much for a small piece of research like this thesis. Thirdly, there was no mention of the influence of republican ideology: this is because there seemed to be a consensus among the respondents and literature that it had little influence on the public support during the early years.

### 5.3. Suggestions for follow-up research

It might be interested to continue looking at paramilitary groups from the same perspective that has been present in this research. Therefore, a few suggestions are made, notwithstanding that someone could attempt to perform research on this exact topic that also fills the gaps caused by this research its shortcomings. Firstly, it would be interesting to look how the public support for the PIRA evolved during the whole period of the Troubles. This would allow the researcher to see what explanatory factors seem to be consistent over time and what the influence of the peace accords is on the perceived legitimacy of the PIRA (as looking if the argument for not dealing with politically violent groups upholds would be valuable). A

second way in which to deal with this topic in the future would be to do a comparative study of the public support for different kinds of politically violent groups. One way to look at it would be to categorize them according to type: how does the public support differ for separatist/nationalist movements, religious movements, anarchist movements …? It would also be very interesting to find out whether the explanatory factors differ according to the different type of movement. Thirdly, it would be interesting if research was done on the effects of solving politically violent conflicts by tackling the reasons for supporting politically violent organizations. One can argue that this is what the Good Friday Agreement attempted to do; giving in to some of the claims of the Catholic community which then results in a drop in support. The question is not whether it is a successful approach or not, but what context allows it to be successful.

## 6. Conclusion

This research was driven by two main research questions: how can the public support for the PIRA during the early years of the Troubles be described and how can it be explained? As a manner of summarizing, it can be concluded that the public support for the PIRA was a dynamic force that evolved over time, mainly due to key events. The support also differentiated a lot according to the different sections of the Catholic community; to an extent it were those on whom the explanatory factors had the biggest impact are seen as those who were the most supportive of the PIRA. Clearly, there were a lot of factors that influenced the PIRA's support, which broadly speaking fit in the three categories of internal, external and contextual factors.

The set of internal factors includes those that were directly related to the behavior of the PIRA. The first factor within this set is PIRA's policing of its community. This may have influenced the public support positively, as it might have been seen as them doing the community a service, but it might have also influenced it negatively as it entailed the risk of alienating people. The second factor, fear and intimidation, is now interpreted to be mainly covert intimidation: ruling by fear would have likely driven people away. The third factor, PIRA as the defender of its community, was definitely a positive factor as there was a demand from the community for the PIRA to step up and defend them during the early years. The fourth factor, the PIRA's actions, was related to this as its support was influenced by the extent to which its actions were perceived to be legitimate. When attacking targets that were seen to be illegitimate, the support would have gone down.

The set of external factors includes those that were influenced by other actors than the PIRA, mainly being the state and its governmental actors. The first factor within this set is the collective strains experienced by the Catholic community. This includes the contemporary strains and the historical grievances. The latter influenced the public support positively because of its reinforcing nature and the extent to which it contributed to a collective identity.

The set of contextual factors includes the factors that were related to the broader context of the conflict. The first factor within this set is culture and Catholicism: this was a positive influence for the public support as it united the Catholic community and increased the acceptance of violence as a legitimate means. The second factor is social ties, which includes both group identification and kinship. Both had a positive influence on the support, but worked in a different way. The last factor is collective identity: this was shaped by different factors and allowed the community to be mobilized behind an armed movement.

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## Appendices

Appendix I: A priori coding scheme

00 [GEN] Public support
   a. Differentiation
   b. Ups and downs
01 Actions of the PIRA - strategy
02 Actions of the state
03 Collective strains
   a. Contemporary strains
   b. Historical grievances
04 Community policing
   a. Fear
   b. Legitimacy
05 Culture
06 Defender of the community
07 Fear of loyalist paramilitary groups
08 Legitimacy of the governmental actors
   a. Actions of the army and the RUC
   b. Political decisions
09 Legitimacy of the PIRA
10 Mass communication
11 Social ties
   a. Identification with group members
   b. Kinship

Appendix II: A posteriori coding scheme

00 [GEN] Public support
   a. Agency
   b. Differentiation
   c. Ups and downs
01 Actions of the PIRA - strategy
02 Actions of the state
03 Collective strains
   a. Contemporary strains
   b. Historical grievances
04 Communal solidarity and collective identity
05 Community policing
   a. Fear
   b. Legitimacy
06 Culture
07 Defender of the community
08 Fear and intimidation
09 Fear of loyalist paramilitary groups
10 Global influences
11 Legitimacy of the governmental actors
   a. Actions of the army and the RUC
   b. Political decisions
12 Legitimacy of the PIRA
13 Mass communication
14 Role of the Catholic Church and Catholicism
15 Social ties
   a. Identification with group members
   b. Kinship

Appendix III: Topic list (including the open-ended questions asked at the start of the interview)

- To what extent do you believe the PIRA enjoyed public support from the communities it was embedded in?
    - How would you differentiate according to the different communities? (e.g. working class vs. higher class, geographical differences, gender, age …)
- How can the public support be explained? Or: What do you think are the influential factors on the public support?

The following topics could be discussed with the respondents following the second open-ended question:

- The influence of social ties;
    - Kinship;
    - Identification with group members.
- The influence of collective strains;
    - Historical grievances;
    - Current strains (during the early years of the Troubles).
- The influence of mass communication.
    - Tool for propaganda;
    - Potentially increases the acceptance of violence;
    - Reinforcement of beliefs.
- The influence of community policing;
    - Legitimacy;
    - Fear.
- The influence of the perceived legitimacy of the PIRA;
- The influence of the perceived legitimacy of governmental actors;
    - Actions of the army/police;
    - Political decisions.
- The influence of fear for loyalist paramilitary groups;
    - The PIRA as ‘defender of the Catholics’.

Appendix IV: List of respondents

| **Background** | **Date** | **Place** |
|---|---|---|
| Former volunteer | 4th of March 2013 | Republic of Ireland |
| Academic | 5th of March 2013 | Northern Ireland |
| Academic | 5th of March 2013 | Northern Ireland |
| Academic | 6th of March 2013 | Northern Ireland |
| Academic | 6th of March 2013 | Northern Ireland |
| Former Sinn Féin member | 7th of March 2013 | Northern Ireland |
| Former volunteer | 8th of March 2013 | Republic of Ireland |
| Academic | 11th of March 2013 | Northern Ireland |
| Former volunteer | 11th of March 2013 | Northern Ireland |
| Academic | 12th of March 2013 | Northern Ireland |