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Public Displays of Flags and Emblems in Northern Ireland

Survey 2006-2009

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Executive Summary

This research and report was commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and was undertaken by the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast. The aim of the research was to understand the practice of publically displaying large numbers of flags and other emblems in public spaces in Northern Ireland. The research was originally commissioned, in part, to evaluate *A Shared Future* policy (2005) and *The Joint Protocol in Relation to Flags Flown in Public Areas* (2005).

Surveys of political symbolism on all arterial routes in Northern Ireland in the first two weeks in July and last two weeks of September were conducted over a four-year period from 2006 to 2009. In addition we conducted surveys two weeks after Easter in 2008 and 2009. In each of the surveys we counted and mapped the different types of flags and other emblems on display. In addition we carried out eight case studies and utilised survey material collected by the *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey*.

We can make some broad conclusions about the display and regulation of political symbols on the main streets and arterial roads of Northern Ireland:

- The vast bulk of political symbols displayed on arterial routes and in town centres across Northern Ireland are flags. The total number of flags on display at the peak of the marching season in July remained very consistent over the four years at around 4,000 each year.

- The flags put up over the summer months are predominantly associated with the unionist/loyalist tradition and are most frequently put on lampposts and telegraph poles.

- The vast majority (over 80%) of these are national and regional flags, the majority of which are Union and Northern Ireland flags. At least 30% of these are left flying after September.

- Those flying on lampposts are less likely to be removed than those displayed on private houses.

- The numbers of flags flying are typically reduced by around 80% by Easter the following year, but still the greatest proportion of those flags flying are unionist (around 2/3 of more than 511 flags flying on arterial routes in 2009).

- There has been a reduction of paramilitary flags flying in July from 161 in 2006 to 73 in 2009. Those of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Young Citizen Volunteers (YCV) make up over 50% of the paramilitary flags still flying.

- There has also been a reduction in paramilitary flags remaining on arterial routes after September. However, paramilitary flags are less likely to be removed than most other types of flags.

- *The NI Life and Times* Survey results from 2006 to 2008 suggest that flags being left in place are generally very unpopular with people in Northern Ireland (around 80% objected) and that this affects people's economic behaviour making them less likely to shop in certain areas. A significant minority of people report feeling intimidated by these displays.

Whilst *The Joint Protocol in Relation to Flags Flown in Public Areas* has been utilised well in some areas, evidence suggests that, in overall terms, it has been largely ineffective. Whilst police officers and workers from many of the key agencies, such as the Housing Executive and Roads Service, have been involved in effective local projects, there remains a lack of 'joined-up' working by agencies in many places.

We recommend that the *Flags Protocol* be restructured to include District Councils and we believe strong consideration should be given to District Councils being the lead agencies. We strongly recommend that a revised *Flags Protocol* re-emphasise the need for displays of flags to be time bounded. As a long-term objective, flags should not be flying for more than two weeks after a particular festival or anniversary.

To further reduce paramilitary displays, particular effort should be made to reduce the number of UVF/YCV flags which are flying.

It would be helpful to develop a voluntary code of conduct for the displaying of flags and emblems to which local groups might adhere. In particular, encouraging people to treat their own flags with respect should enhance their feeling of displaying a valued identity as well as facilitating better regulation of these symbols.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of symbols, such as flags and emblems, as an expression of political and cultural identity is common throughout the world. It is a normal outworking of the identities groups of people hold. These identities are expressed through celebrations, commemorations and festivals, all of which involve displays of symbols. Such expressions of identity are also viewed as a human right, being protected in international law and in the legislation of the majority of countries throughout the world.

Given that conflict is present in all societies and that some conflict is a reflection of the differences within and between social groups, conflict over symbols, such as flags, is also common throughout the world (Ross 2007, 2009). In spite of a peace process leading to a significant reduction in organised political violence, agreement on political structures and policing, and decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, manifestations of Northern Ireland's violent conflict remain. Perhaps the most telling of these is the division of many rural and urban, residential and commercial areas into territories defined by the dominant political identities in the society; Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist (see Shirlow and Murtagh 2006).

Territorial differences are often manifested in an exaggerated use and proliferation of flags. In Northern Ireland, every July, on average, over 4,000 flags are displayed on main roads alone. This has personal, social and economic ramifications. The use of flags and emblems can appear to be threatening and discriminatory towards individuals; can amplify communal differences within society; and consequently have ramifications for national and local governance and the provision of services, including policing, community development and inward economic investment. *The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* findings that will be quoted in this report reveal that the flying of flags on lampposts is unpopular with the majority of people who live in Northern Ireland (see chapter 4).

The use of flags in Northern Ireland is connected to the legitimate expression of identity but also to the demarcation of territory through fear and intimidation. The economic consequences which arise out of the existence of these divisions, and the consequent inequalities that are sustained through them have made the territorial divisions in Northern Ireland a legitimate focus for government policy. In particular, *A Shared Future* (2005) policy document and *The Joint Protocol* In *Relation To The Display Of Flags In Public Areas* (see Appendix 2) departmental directive have attempted to put in place policies and practices that reduce the elements of territoriality created by the flying of flags in public spaces.

This report, using a range of research methodologies, explores attitudes towards the proliferation of public political symbols as well as how these symbols are actually displayed and regulated on the main arterial routes in Northern Ireland. In particular, the flags survey was designed with three main goals in mind:

- To conduct a systematic census of flags across Northern Ireland within a specific time-period in order to provide a benchmark for the assessment of the level of flag flying in future years.

- To determine the degree to which flags are left up after a festival period and hence can be taken to constitute territorial markers rather than festival symbols.

- To use the above results to assess the effectiveness of the relevant area of *A Shared Future* policy and in particular *The Joint Flags Protocol*.

A Brief Local History: Change and Continuity

The use of flags as public displays has a long history and we have many reports of flags being flown in nineteenth century Belfast. The Twelfth of July celebrations have long been associated with street decorations and many people in Ulster would put flags on their houses for weeks during the summer. Whilst displays representing Irish nationalism and Catholic feast days have been more restricted (see Jarman and Bryan 1998) nevertheless displays on St Patrick's Day and over the Easter period were not uncommon. People who live in Northern Ireland are no different than people in other parts of the world in wanting to demonstrate their allegiances and identity.

Picture 1: Flags displayed on houses

Flags and symbols, reflecting as they do community identities and loyalties, can often become a source of conflict in divided societies (Ross 2007, 2009). In Northern Ireland high-profile issues associated with flags led to the Flags and Emblems (Display) Act being introduced by the Unionist government in 1954 to protect the flying of the Union flag (see Patterson 1999). This proved to be a source of significant controversy before it was repealed in 1987. The Divis Street riots of 1964 which followed the removal of a Tricolour from republican political offices by the RUC, is just one of the more famous occasions of conflict.

The mass coverage of lampposts, telegraph poles and other items on main roads is a more recent phenomenon. The current form of the flags issue can perhaps be traced back to a number of developments in the 1990s. Despite the signing of the Multi-Party Agreement in 1998 insecurity and intimidation continued, and even, in some instances, increased. This was partly due to internal paramilitary rivalries, partly fall-out from communal tensions associated with parades disputes but also, ironically, a result of insecurities arising in response to how the Agreement was being implemented.

One significant issue which coincided with this development was the refusal of Sinn Féin members of the executive to allow the Union flag to be flown from departmental buildings for which they had responsibility. The issue was resolved (to some extent) by the introduction of the Flags (NI) Order 2000 giving the Secretary of State the authority to require the flying of the Union flag on government departmental buildings on specified dates. However, the dispute coincided with other developments involving flag flying and undoubtedly fed into the heated nature of the debate at this time (Bryan and Gillespie 2005).

The second event which gave the issue of the flying of flags greater prominence was the intra-loyalist feud of the summer of 2000. A simmering feud between the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), involving elements of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), came to a head in late August. During this tense period the UVF believed it had received assurances from the UDA/Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) that no LVF symbols would be displayed at a loyalist march. The displaying of an LVF flag at this march sparked an escalation in violence.

Loyalist spokesman Tommy Kirkham believed that the widespread use of paramilitary flags began in the Newtownabbey Borough Council area. He stated:

> The flag explosion happened in Newtownabbey before it happened everywhere else. What happened was that a lot of flags went up after the UFF issued a statement to the Newtownabbey Times (newspaper), that because of daily events and the need to promote Protestant culture in general, it was putting up 1,500 flags from Greymount to Ballymena. (BBC News website 'Loyalist Paramilitary Flag Explosion.' 21 June, 2000 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/799804.stm)

In the same report he estimated that the flags in question had cost £1,500-£2,000.

This underlines one of the important reasons for the increased number of flags. They can now be produced and purchased very cheaply. In the past people would buy a flag as a comparatively expensive item and display it on their house, but take it in to be re-used on future occasions. Now large numbers of cheap flags are purchased and left to become tattered on lampposts.

In the summer of 2000 and 2001 the perception was that the rival loyalist paramilitary groups, the UDA and UVF, each with their own associated groups were attempting to demarcate territory in Protestant working class areas by flying flags from lampposts and many other items along the main roads. Even in loyalist areas there was a significant degree of opposition to such high-profile displays of paramilitary symbolism.

Bannerettes

One attempt to deal with the growth in use of paramilitary flags was the creation of plastic Bannerettes. As far as we are aware the first use of this format was East Belfast in the summer of 2004.

Picture 2: Bannerettes in East Belfast

The widespread displays of paramilitary flags had clearly become an issue even in what would generally be regarded as loyalist areas. In one such area a novel approach was undertaken by the East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society. The Society decided to erect plastic bannerettes mounted on brackets to lampposts. The Society attempted to make the images on the bannerettes, from their perspective, 'a unifying symbol' and 'a symbol that no-one can complain about.' They produced four different images; the Queen on a Union Jack background; King William on an orange background; the Northern Ireland flag and the 36th Ulster Division. (East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society website; http://www.ebhcs.co.uk/) The vast majority of the banners were of the first two types. The banners were erected along Templemore Avenue and the Albertbridge Road, two of the main routes in the area for Orange parades, in the summer of 2004 and have been used in each subsequent year. Significantly the banners were sponsored by Orange Lodges, local businesses, local social organisations and unionist politicians and were removed at the end of the marching season to be erected again in late June of the following year. The use of this type of banner has subsequently spread to other loyalist areas of Belfast but also further afield, for example to areas of Armagh City, Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh and Bushmills, County Antrim.

In 2005 a different series of banners were erected on the Newtownards Road, these related to the 36th Ulster Division and Sir Edward Carson. However, one series of bannerettes drew a direct connection between the pre-World War I UVF and the post-1966 organisation of the same name and could be interpreted as directly supporting a paramilitary organisation. A placard-mural using the same image still remains in place in the same area.

The plastic bannerette format was also adopted by republicans and bannerettes featuring the images of republican prisoners who died during the 1981 Hunger Strike campaign were erected in some republican areas in 2006 - the 25th anniversary of the campaign.

Since then there have been bannerettes in a number of areas, but particularly on the Newtownards Road and in the Shankill, that have used a combination of first World War symbols and battle honours with those of the contemporary UVF. This is part of an increasing trend, represented in murals and different types of flags, of the contemporary UVF to 'badge' itself using the First World War.

Environmental Clean-up

A different response to the proliferation of paramilitary flags was that of the environmental clean-up. Initially this was a specific response to a situation in one area where some paramilitary imagery had been removed following a change in local leadership. Subsequently, however, local community pressure led to the removal of further imagery allied with a general 'tidy up' of the area which, among other things, included the removal of tattered flags. This approach proved successful as it involved local community representatives and representatives from local agencies. Additionally, since the removal of some symbols was conducted within the broader context of an environmental clean-up this was not viewed as a way of removing political or cultural symbols. (For further details see Bryan and Gillespie, 2005: 48-9 on the 'Spark' area 2004)

Parades, Re-Imaging, Memorials and Bonfires

As will be discussed briefly in the section on policy, the *Shared Future* agenda has been part of a larger attempt to engage with issues over the use of public space in Northern Ireland. Flags are displayed as part of a wide range of expressions of identity such as parades, murals, memorials and bonfires. Ongoing debates over the regulation of parades, though well beyond the scope of this report, are of obvious relevance given that the vast majority of flags are put up during the 'marching season'. Some of the controversies, such as the display of paramilitary flags, are central to this survey and to disputes over the right to parade. There has been a long term programme, running through the lifetime of this survey, to re-image communities by replacing sectarian or racist murals (see Northern Ireland Arts Council 2008; and Independent Research Solutions 2009). Many murals have displays of flags associated with them, as do the increased

number of memorials that have been erected across Northern Ireland since the 1990s. And it is clear from our research that flags are often put up by bonfire committees which organise bonfires on the eleventh of July. A number of District Councils have been running projects to deal with the environmental impact of bonfires and in some cases this has led to debates with organisers over the display of flags. The proliferation of flags does not take place in isolation but rather is part of a much broader engagement by people and groups with the places and spaces they live in.

Conclusion

Disputes about the flying of flags in Northern Ireland have stemmed from the divided nature of the society reflected in a long history of contested symbols (Bryson and McCartney 1994). The use of flags as symbolic markers of territory was given impetus after 1998 by an upsurge in both inter-communal tensions and intra-communal conflicts. While these conflicts were generally related to long-term issues, what was new was the manner in which flags were used in large numbers to demarcate territory – the widespread flying of specifically paramilitary flags were a particular cause for concern both within the unionist community and the community at large. The phenomenon of the flying of flags in large numbers was facilitated by developments in broader economic and technological changes which allowed flags, often imported from the Far East, to be produced in large numbers at low cost and used to 'carpet' a given area. Because the flags were cheap and of a comparatively low quality there was no great incentive for those who erected the flags to remove them for economic reasons. Technological advances have also allowed the development of a range of new flag designs.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

In March 2005 the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister published the core policy document, *A Shared Future* (2005), outlining a vision for the future of good community relations in Northern Ireland. The foreword, by Paul Murphy, the then-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, stated:

> The Government's vision for the future of Northern Ireland is for a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust and the protection and vindication of human rights for all. It will be founded on partnership, equality and mutual respect as a basis of good relationships. (p.3)

The Minister of State, John Spellar, promised that:

> …the new policy and strategic framework will provide a mechanism through which departments can more effectively mainstream good relations considerations into policy development. (p.4)

The overall aim of *A Shared Future* is:

> …to establish, over time, a shared society defined by a culture of tolerance: a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere, and where all individuals are treated impartially. A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence. (p.10, 1.2.1)

Amongst the impediments to a shared society are the territorial divisions that mark Northern Ireland. These are derived from sectarian communal demarcations resulting from years of political and sectarian violence. As such, rural and urban areas of Northern Ireland have both visible and invisible boundaries, or interfaces as they are locally termed, which are an impediment to shared public space. *A Shared Future* noted that:

> …the costs of a divided society - whilst recognising, of course, the very real fears of people around safety and security considerations - are abundantly clear: segregated housing and education, security costs, less than efficient public service provision, and deep-rooted intolerance that has too often been used to justify violent sectarianism and racism. Policy that simply adapts to, but does not alter these challenges, results in inefficient resource allocations. These are not sustainable in the medium to long term. (p.14, 1.4.1)

A Shared Future then sets out a number of priority areas in order to achieve progress on building a shared society. Two of these, which relate to the territorial nature of Northern Ireland, are:

2.1 Tackling the visible manifestations of sectarianism and racism

Freeing the public realm (including public property) from displays of sectarian aggression through:

active promotion of local dialogue involving elected representatives, community leaders, police and other

stakeholders to reduce and eliminate displays of sectarian and racial aggression; and

the police, in conjunction with other agencies, acting to remove such displays where no accommodation can be reached. (p.18)

and

2.2 Reclaiming shared space

Developing and protecting town and city centres as safe and welcoming places for people of all walks of life.

Creating safe and shared space for meeting, sharing, playing, working and living.

Freeing the public realm from threat, aggression and intimidation while allowing for legitimate expression of cultural celebration. (p.22)

A Shared Future particularly concentrates on the issue of flying flags. However, it is clearly the intent of the policy that this should cover a range of cultural/political expressions including murals, memorials, the painting of kerbstones, graffiti and the erecting of arches. Further to that, the issue of parades, festivals, demonstrations and bonfires should also be included. All of these cultural political expressions provide the context within which public space is managed.

A number of issues can be identified as important:

- Such cultural practices are part of local communal 'traditions' and are, to a degree, popular.

- Many of these cultural expressions are present all year round and thus also act as territorial markers.

- There is a relationship, either perceived or actual, between paramilitary groups and some of these displays.

- There is survey and anecdotal evidence that people feel intimidated by these displays.

- There is evidence from surveys that people are less likely to shop in areas with displays of flags.

- Inappropriate displays of flags and emblems can lead to economic damage.

- There can be problems with identifying which agencies have responsibility for dealing with such practices.

- Particular attention needs to be paid to making town centres safe and welcoming spaces for everyone.

Central to dealing with the marking and ownership of territory is an understanding of the local context. *A Shared Future* puts it like this:

> 2.1.4 Whilst many people would be in favour of clearer guidelines or rules of enforcement around the flying of flags or painting of kerbstones nearly all those interviewed stressed

the importance of changing the context within which displays of symbols take place. It is vital to understand why people feel the need to make symbolic displays. It has been clear in many of the cases studied that flag flying was part of a tit-for-tat display around territory. As such, improved relationships around interfaces can see the reduction of flags or changes in the murals. (p.19)

However, *A Shared Future* makes it clear that practices legitimising illegal organisations and effectively threatening communities are unacceptable (p.19, 2.1.4). The decommissioning processes that have been completed by the IRA (2005) and the UDA, and UVF (2009/10) have clearly gone some way to allay people's fears. However, the legacy of violent conflict remains.

In conclusion *A Shared Future* argues that 'we must continue to reclaim the public realm for people who are living and working in, or as visitors to, Northern Ireland…' (p.21, 2.2.2).

A range of actions are proposed in *A Shared Future*:

- In town and city centres and arterial routes and other main thoroughfares 'the display of any flags on lampposts should be off limits' (2.2.3)

- The removal of all paramilitary flags.

- The control of flags and emblems in sensitive areas (near buildings such as schools, hospitals and churches)

- That popular flying of flags for commemoration and celebration should be limited to particular times and dates.

The mechanisms proposed for undertaking this are:

- 'the development of an agreed protocol between PSNI and all key agencies outlining precise responsibilities for removing "inappropriate and aggressive" displays…' (2.1.5)

- 'the development of contact procedures for all agencies with responsibility for removing "aggressive" and "inappropriate" displays…' (2.1.5)

- 'increasing the number of individuals willing and able to mediate disputes involving symbols, whether flags, murals, memorials, racist graffiti, painted kerbstones or other forms of "marking"…' (2.1.5)

- 'sustained support for organisations engaged in transforming the environment in which people live…' (2.1.5)

- 'development of a more co-ordinated approach to the management of conflict and conflict transformation through the use of dedicated fieldworkers…' (2.1.5)

- 'enforcement by the police (acting jointly with key agencies)' (2.1.5)

- That the Community Relations Council will be asked to develop a triennial plan and local protocols in conjunction with other agencies. (2.1.6)

- The use of the Department of the Environment's statutory planning process to develop key themes in the Regional Development Strategy into local development plan policies. (2.2.4 and 2.2.5)

The above framework for dealing with flags, emblems and other cultural manifestations must be viewed in the context of other policy areas such as 'Reducing Tension at Interface Areas' (2.3), 'Shared Communities' (2.5), 'Supporting Good Relations through Diversity and Cultural Diversity' (2.6), and the delivery of Shared Services (2.10). It should also be viewed in the context of the obligation public authorities have under Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. In particular, this places Good Relations at 'the centre of policy, practice and delivery of public services' (3.1.2), with a commitment to develop support for 'an enhanced and more broadly representative Community Relations Council' (3.2.3). Additionally, the Review of Public Administration could lead to an enhanced role for a large District Council. District Councils will be required to prepare a Good Relations plan from April 2007 (3.3.3).

After direct rule came to an end following the St Andrews Agreement of May 2007 the Northern Ireland Executive began developing a replacement policy to *A Shared Future*, one that might be owned by the local political parties. A draft document, *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration*, is expected to be published in the summer of 2010. The existing policy has now been in place for five years.

Another significant policy document needs to be discussed. The PSNI are the lead agency in *The Joint Protocol In Relation To The Display Of Flags In Public Areas* (see Appendix Two) which aims to address:

- The removal of all flags and emblems from arterial routes and town centres;

- The removal of all paramilitary flags and displays;

- The control of displays of flags and emblems in particular areas e.g. mixed and interface areas and near buildings such as schools, hospitals, places of worship and community halls;

- Flag flying should be limited to particular times and particular dates and:

  - where flags are displayed for a festive or other occasion that the display is reasonably time bounded.

  - Flags, including plastic ties, tape and poles, should be removed by the community after the agreed period.

- To encourage communities to accept that flags displayed which are tattered, torn or discoloured do not enhance the environment and should be removed.

This policy guidance document has now also been in place for five years. In *A Shared Future: First Triennial Action Plan* 2006-2009 OFMDFM and the Police Service of Northern Ireland are

responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the flags protocol. Our research effectively evaluates the success of the *Protocol*.

These broad policy developments are only the latest attempts to engage with divisions in public space in Northern Ireland (see Independent Research Solutions 2009: 5) and have themselves led to much more focused projects. It is worth noting that the Re-Imaging programme (launched in July 2006 as part of the *Renewing Communities Action Plan*), is now led by the Shared Communities Consortium which is mainly run through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, but also includes a range of key agencies. The Arts Council describes the objectives in the following way.

> Re-imaging Communities is open to all communities which seek renewal and the reclamation of public space as well as arterial routes and public thoroughfares which belong to the wider community as a whole. The funding will be used to encourage local communities to work creatively with artists in tackling the issues described above, connecting the arts to areas not usually associated with them and allowing art to enrich communities. (Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2008: 1)

A detailed evaluation of this project (which included an initial spend of £3 million) and the associated policy implications has been undertaken (Independent Research Solution 2009). Whilst much of this work concentrates on displays of murals, and many projects involved murals that were not on arterial routes, it was, nevertheless, part of the broader thrust of *A Shared Future*.

There have been other creative projects which aim to change public space in Northern Ireland. For example, Belfast City Council ran the *Art for Arterial Routes* project and Derry City Council have an *Art and Regeneration Project*. However, the other key agency in public space policy has been the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). In particular, the Community Cohesion Unit aims to promote good relations and, where possible, mixed housing. They produced *A Good Practice Guide to Flags, Emblems and Sectional Symbols*: *'A Community Perspective'* (Northern Ireland Housing Executive 2006) which aims 'To create an environment where people feel safe to celebrate and respect culture within and between communities'.

Conclusion

There has been a very explicit policy framework since 2005 which has sought to substantially alter the way in which flags are flown in public spaces in Northern Ireland. A number of key agencies and local authorities have reflected this policy in their own projects. The research in this report is designed to identify how successful this policy strategy has been. This report explicitly looks at arterial routes and therefore does not cover many of the projects that have been undertaken through funding and work by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. However, it does cover some of the central aims of the *The Joint Protocol In Relation To The Display Of Flags In Public Areas*.

3. METHODOLOGY

Public display of political symbolism in Northern Ireland is a psychologically, culturally and politically complex phenomenon and researching this topic requires a clear conceptual and methodological approach. Our core concerns are to produce findings which build upon the previous research we have conducted in this area, which are accurate and valid representations of current flag flying practices and which will form the basis for the continued monitoring of the flags issue over the coming years.

Our core research questions are:

- What is the extent of the popular display of political symbols across Northern Ireland?

- Who displays these symbols, how are they displayed and what are the factors governing their regulation?

- What are the popular perceptions of these displays and their impact on the wider population?

- How are flags disputes managed at local level by the various community and government agency groups concerned?

- What has the impact of the *Flags Protocol* been on local flags disputes?

- What potential ways of reconceptualising these issues are available to enable constructive development of the issue of public displays of political symbols?

To address these questions our research employs a range of different quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys of the actual displays of flags across Northern Ireland, surveys of popular perceptions of public displays of political symbols and in depth case studies of examples of flag dispute management. Each method in its own right can only shed partial light on our research questions, but together they can be used to build up a comprehensive picture of the practice, management and impact of displays of political symbols.

Strand One: Survey of Flags and Emblems across Northern Ireland

Rationale

In order to assess the prevalence of displays of political symbols it is necessary to conduct a systematic survey of flags and emblems across Northern Ireland. Given the constraints of the present research it would be impossible to do this exhaustively and so a systematic sample of public space is necessary. This needs to be both accurate in the recording of all political emblems displayed in specific areas as well as replicable in order to be able to track the erecting and removal of political symbols across specific time periods.

Research aims

By quantifying the displays of flags and emblems across Northern Ireland, this approach establishes a baseline indicator for the flags issue. In effect, conducting this survey in subsequent years

will provide a gross measure of the efficacy of flags policy and local negotiation in reducing or managing the overall, level of public displays of political symbols. Moreover, the results can tell us much about the behaviour of symbol display: what types of symbols are displayed in which areas; how these symbols are displayed and to whom; and how symbols are regulated.

Limitations

While this survey tells us about the display of symbols, it does not answer questions about how the symbols are perceived or what their psychological or economic impact is on the local community or broader population. It cannot tell us conclusively who erects the symbols or how representative these symbols are of the sentiment of the local population.

Strand Two: The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey

Rationale

In order to assess the impact of political symbolism on the wider population, a survey of popular experience and perception is necessary. *The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* is an ideal tool for this as it assesses the views of a substantial, randomly selected proportion of the public and provides both face-to-face and self-completion modes of question asking, according to the sensitivity of the questions. It also affords a breakdown of respondents' opinions in terms of various other demographic and political information.

Research aims

In previous years questions have been asked as to the perceived prevalence of public political symbolism as well as their psychological and economic impact. Asking these questions allows us to assess whether people saw an increase or decrease in these displays and if their impact is likewise intensified or lessened.

These results can be matched to the ongoing array of political symbolism established in Strand One to see if popular perceptions match the reality of public symbol regulation or if symbols change their significance in light of the changing political context in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, we are interested in popular perceptions of who actually displays flags and emblems in public space and what support these symbols have. While those actually displaying the emblems may claim to represent their local communities, this may be far from the case.

Limitations

Opinion surveys are ideal in accessing popular opinion beyond the limited number of actors actually involved in the display and regulation of political symbols. However, the confidentiality of responses and anonymity afforded to participants in the survey means that it is not possible to identify where respondents live and what the particular significance and consequences of political symbolism is likely to be for them.

Strand Three: Case studies

Rationale

In-depth qualitative research into specific instances of flags disputes and negotiations is essential in order to understand both the mechanics of symbol display and the local context factors influencing symbol regulation. A strategic selection of sites can allow an appreciation of the differences between instances of republican and loyalist symbol display as well as an examination of how the dynamics of negotiations in disputes around political symbols vary according to the, historical, geographical and demographic composition of local areas.

Research aims

Talking to the people who put the flags in place is key to establishing the local significance of these displays, including who the groups claim to represent, as well as identifying barriers to successful regulation. Speaking with representatives of the various government agencies allows an insight into how issues around political symbols are managed between agencies and how the Flags Protocol is understood and employed in different areas.

Limitations

Case studies give a rich understanding of specific instances of the phenomenon of symbol display but are not representative of all cases across Northern Ireland. Moreover, interviewing those involved in flags disputes ignores the broader 'silent majorities' of the communities they claim to represent. Through triangulation of this data with the two previous strands of the research these case studies can be contextualised within the broader picture of the prevalence and popular perceptions of public displays of political symbols.

Flag Census: Method

Design

The flags survey was designed with two main goals in mind:

- To conduct a systematic census of flags across Northern Ireland within a specific time period in order to provide a benchmark for the assessment of the level of flag flying in future years.

- To determine the degree to which flags are left up after a festival period and hence might be taken to constitute territorial markers rather than festival symbols.

The focus of the flags issue has largely centred on the loyalist marching season of each year when the greatest number of flags are displayed. Two census dates were selected to capture the highpoint of flag display over this season and to assess the extent to which the flags had been removed afterwards.

Each census had to be conducted within as tight a timeframe as possible to ensure comparability of areas covered at the start and the end of each round.

As the highpoint of the season is generally taken to be 1 to 12 July, it is reasonable to assume that the vast bulk of loyalist flags will be displayed before this time. The first census in 2006 therefore took place between 29 June and 9 July.

The end of the marching season is usually considered to be the last Saturday of August. Allowing for a reasonable time during which to remove flags after the festival, the second census in 2006 took place from the 18 to 27 September.

These two survey dates also cover significant events within the nationalist/republican community. There are a number of festivals in August marking internment anniversary dates, and September is the conclusion of the GAA season for counties. In 2006, the survey dates also spanned a period in which events marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1981 Hunger Strikes took place.

Consequently the survey dates cover a period in which significant displays of communal identity would be expected throughout Northern Ireland.

In 2008, we added a third survey to be conducted two weeks after the Easter holiday. This allowed us to look at how many nationalist and republican symbols were being put up in a period which included St Patrick's Day and the commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising. It also allowed us to estimate how many flags might have been flying throughout the winter months.

Coverage

Within the constraints of the research it was logistically impossible to count all of the political symbols displayed in every location across Northern Ireland. The most practical and time-efficient way of providing a geographically comprehensive appraisal of the level of flag flying across Northern Ireland was to note all the political symbols on the main arterial routes across the area. Taking as a guide the Map of Protected Routes (Appendix 3), Northern Ireland was divided into manageable sections to be completed within a single day. This had the benefits of providing a clear delimited area to cover and, most importantly, a pattern of coverage that could be replicated on a second occasion in order to assess persistence or discontinuity in symbol display.

Covering the range of arterial routes was also important since *The Joint Protocol In Relation To The Display Of Flags In Public Areas* (see Appendix One) specifically aims at the 'the removal of all flags and emblems from arterial routes and town centres…'.

It is necessary, however, to appreciate that this strategy has implications for the inferences which can be drawn from the data. Given the volume of traffic passing along these roads, these flags and emblems are probably the most frequently viewed political symbols across Northern Ireland. On the other hand, however, it has been previously noted that the vast majority of symbols displayed around Northern Ireland occur within communities or at the interface between communities away from the main arterial routes. In effect the symbols counted

here are likely to be a small fraction of all the emblems on display throughout Northern Ireland.

Hence the monitoring of flags along arterial routes across Northern Ireland is best understood as providing a reliable index of the type, prevalence and regulation of displays of flags and emblems across Northern Ireland rather than an estimate of the scale of the phenomenon of symbolic display across all areas.

Coding frame

Our initial goal was to develop a coding frame detailed enough to capture all of the information relevant to the flags issue and which would be accurate and usable within the time constraints of the project. The frame was developed on the basis of previous research detailed in the *Transforming Conflict* report (Bryan and Gillespie, 2005) and refined through piloting in Belfast and surrounding areas.

Types of symbols included

The census set out to record all political or party symbolism on the main arterial routes. In addition to the national, regional, sporting and paramilitary flags of each community, all political murals, painted kerbstones and lampposts, bunting, placards and any other ad hoc manifestations of political symbolism were noted. Though the many modified forms of the Union Flag were counted together (due to the difficulty in distinguishing them at distance), all other flags and emblems were identified separately.

Examples of flags considered paramilitary

Picture 3: UVF flag

Picture 5 Red Hand Commando flag

Picture 4: UFF Flag

Picture 6: Starry Plough

Picture 7: Young Citizen Volunteers

Picture 8: UDA flag

Examples of sports flags

Picture 9: Armagh GAA flag

Picture 11: Glasgow Rangers flag

Picture 10: Fermanagh GAA flag

Picture 12: Northern Ireland Football flag

Frequency of symbols

Displays of bunting and kerbstones were noted as either present or absent within a single location, while all other symbols were counted individually. Thus for each area we have the total number of each different type of flag and other emblems present.

Manner of display

Emblems were overwhelmingly displayed on a variety of different structures as opposed to standing alone. We were particularly interested in whether the symbols were displayed from private residences, public buildings or public property as this has implications for which individuals or agency might be responsible for their regulation.

Picture 13 Flags displayed in a 'bunting style' junction of Belmont and Holywood Road, July 2008.

Age of flag

A second consideration in the description of political symbols was their appearance - an indicator of whether the symbols had been displayed recently or had been in place for much longer. Dulled colours were indicative of longstanding displays of painted kerbstones and lampposts, while greying flags with frayed edged had obviously been in place for many months. While very new and very old items were easily identified, this sometimes proved to be a very difficult judgement to make.

Picture 14: An example of a tattered old flag

Size of the flags

It was not possible to differentiate flags by size, however the vast majority of the flags are of a reasonably uniform dimension. They measure around 155 cm by 91 cm (60" x 36"). We did note when particularly large flags were being used.

What was counted

The recording was primarily concerned with flags and emblems which were physically located on the route itself. Those which were visible from the route, such as in nearby estates or on roads branching off from the main route, were noted (and where possible quantified) but classified as 'off-route' and do not form part of the final total. Exceptions were made when there was some evidence that the off-route symbol had been deliberately displayed so as to be visible from the route. For example, if a flag on a side street was mounted on a flagpole on top of a lamppost with the clear intention of being made visible to the adjacent arterial route, this was counted as 'on route'.

Location

The locations of flags and emblems were recorded in three ways. First, the route name was recorded along with a brief written description of where the emblem was located on the road. This was usually done in relation to the nearest town, but occasionally in relation to landmarks. Second, the estimated location was then marked on a road map of Northern Ireland (or main city). Third, the Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates of each location were recorded. As the recordings were often made inside a moving vehicle, the GPS coordinates cannot be taken to be exact, but we estimated that the accuracy of our recordings is within hundreds rather than thousands of meters.

Photographs

We took a range of digital photographs in all areas. In particular, displays which were unusual or novel were photographed.

What counted as a single location?

Flags and emblems could occur in isolation or as part of a bigger display. If emblems occurred in isolation, they were recorded as a single entry. If a series of emblems occurred together, they were recorded on the same sheet. Recording of new symbols on this sheet was then terminated when no further emblems were visible further along the route. Hence we can distinguish between the isolated use of single symbols and large numbers of particular types of emblems occurring in one place.

Town centres

In small villages, arterial routes often constitute the civic centre space and hence this poses little problem for noting symbols. However, in larger towns, the arterial routes often become immersed in the network of central roads and civic spaces. In these urban areas, a separate count was performed of the town centres (loosely defined as the continuity of shops and amenities constituting the 'central business district' of each town).

Cities

Given that a sizable proportion of the population of Northern Ireland live and work in the two main cities of Belfast and London/Derry, all the main routes within each of these urban centres were monitored. These were coded separately to allow comparisons of patterns of flag and emblem displays in urban and rural areas.

Procedure

The census was carried out by trained researchers operating in teams of two. This allowed one member to drive and the other to record the symbols encountered. On encountering a symbol, the various aspects of the manifestation were recorded and if more than one of the same symbol was present, a running total started. On completing the coding of each unit of symbol display, researchers agreed if they were confident about their recording and, if not, the unit was recounted. For most occasions a single pass was sufficient, though for more intensely saturated areas several passes might be needed to compile totals of all symbols.

Factors affecting the visibility of items included:

- Age: if flags were very old they were sometimes so greyed and tattered as to be less visible.

- Direction: most locations were approached from one direction only and hence symbols facing in the opposite direction (such as those on gable-end walls) may not have been recorded. For those locations traversed in more than one direction, this was not often found to have been the case.

- Temporary obstruction: occasionally we noted that symbols were almost entirely obscured by large vehicles or temporary structures such as hoarding.

- Size: there was some variability in size of flags and much more for other symbol types. We would expect a higher rate of detection for larger more lurid items.

- Elevation: flags on lampposts and flagpoles are more visible than those on the sides of building.

We conducted checks between researchers to assess the accuracy of our recordings. This revealed that for areas of high flag frequency the accuracy rate was approximately 95% for each emblem type. Given that the proportion of areas in which there was a very high level of saturation was quite low, we would expect our overall accuracy to be much higher than this.

For less visible items such as small memorials, plaques and graffiti we would expect this level of accuracy to be slightly lower, especially in areas of high symbol density. However for high priority items such as paramilitary flags we would expect the accuracy rates to be much higher and we would be surprised if our researchers had missed more than a very few of these items across Northern Ireland.

4 . ATTITUDES

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) data gives an indication of the broad attitudes that members of the public have towards flags. Most of the questions were asked during a three year period (2005 - 2008), and there has been a high level of consistency in the response over this time. All of the results can be found at the following web site: http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/. Key results for 2008 can be found in Appendix 1. What follows is an overview of the attitudes indicated by the survey in 2008.

Symbols do not contain innate meaning, rather it is individuals who give them meaning. Consequently, the same symbol can mean different things to different people. Symbols can also be said to be multi-vocal; they contain a range of meanings. And, in addition, those meanings can change over time. In trying to understand people's attitudes to symbols, such as flags, it is important to remember that context is vital. So a Union flag or a Tricolour on a lamppost will probably not resonate the same meaning as the same flag on the top of a Government building. And for many people it may not resonate the same meaning as it did thirty years ago. The meaning of a symbol is not static. It depends who is looking at it, when they are looking at it, and where they are looking at it (Bryan and Gillespie 2005: 14-16).

This said, people can invest great emotion in symbols. Emotions of pride and loyalty or fear and anger can be invoked through symbols. They are not simply epiphenomena or by-products of our identities but rather they can be vital ways in which we express identity. This makes symbols important in the world of politics and consequently politicians become adept in their use. For example, nearly all the political parties in Northern Ireland routinely use either pictures of the national flags, or use the colour schemes, to garner votes.

As we have pointed out in our methodology, we cannot know exactly the meanings that people apply to the displays that they see. It should also be noted, for example, that a large number of people in both Protestant and Catholic communities report being ambivalent to both the Union flag and the Tricolour (see discussion in Bryan and Gillespie 2005:10-11). It is reasonable to surmise, however, that attitudes towards the flags vary depending on the context in which they are viewed and the subsequent meanings and associations attributed to them.

For example, in our coding frame we have not categorised the Union flag, the Tricolour or the Northern Ireland (Ulster flag) as paramilitary. However, since these flags are frequently used in conjunction with paramilitary flags and murals in areas where paramilitary groups may hold particular sway it is widely believed that people with paramilitary connections put the flags up and these flags are likely to be popularly associated with the paramilitaries. In the 2008 NILT survey, questions concerning the hanging of Union flags and Tricolours on lampposts showed this to be the case. Sixty-six percent of people believed Union flags were put on lampposts by paramilitary groups, whilst 69% believed the same for Tricolours. As such, in this context the two national flags can be seen as markers of paramilitarism for many people.

Perhaps the most striking results came from the question of whether people support flag flying on lampposts in their area. In 2008 a resounding 84% said that they did not. If these figures are broken down, even among groups that might be expected to be supportive of such practices, such as people from Protestant working-class backgrounds, the majority of people said that they did not want flags in their area. This suggests that there are no areas of Northern Ireland where people are fully supportive of displays of flags on lampposts and that in most areas a majority, or large majority, of people would rather flags did not fly on lampposts.

Whilst this in no way delegitimises people's right to express their identity, it does remind us that community support for such practices is limited. Most people, in most areas, would rather there were no flags flying on lampposts, or that flag flying was limited to shorter periods of time.

This is reflected in figures that suggest nearly four in 10 people are less likely to shop in areas where they see such displays. In other words, survey evidence suggests that the flying of flags has a detrimental effect on the economic well-being of certain areas. Nevertheless, nearly half of those asked do seem to accept that people have the right to fly flags at important times of the year. Most people recognise two weeks as being a reasonable length of time for flags to be displayed.

Picture 15: Shankill Road, September 2009

It also appears that fewer people feel intimidated or annoyed by loyalist or republican murals or flags. This may well reflect the changing political context in Northern Ireland or changes in the nature of some of the murals. It may also reflect the belief that

republican and loyalist groups are less active. A section of the population - between 13% and 15% - does remain intimidated by loyalist and republican displays. This figure has decreased in recent years but it still means that at least one in 10 of the population expressed fears.

Other Evidence

In 2008 St Columb's Park House in Derry/Londonderry carried out a flags audit and household survey around the city (St Columb's Park House 2008). Unlike the NILT their survey was undertaken in five local housing estates: Ivy Mead, Gobnascale, The Fountain, Clooney and the Bogside. When people were asked if they supported the flying of flags on lampposts in their area, 64% said no with 27% saying yes. However, there were significant local differences. In the largely Protestant Fountain Estate 79% of people supported the flying of flags and 21% said they did not. Whereas in Gobnascale 76% did not support the flying of flags.

There was significant support in all five estates for flags to be flown for a shorter duration. Thirty-five percent of people wanted flags flown for a shorter period of time and 41% wanted no flags flown at all. Interestingly, in the Fountain Estate, whilst no one wanted flags completely removed and 42% were happy with the status quo, 42% of people wanted flags to fly for less time.

When asked if they would talk to a person putting a flag up if they objected to that flag, 32% of people said they would but 68% said that they would not. This suggests that there remains a significant level of intimidation around the displays of flags, between communities and within communities.

Lyn Moffett at the Ballymoney Resource Centre has produced a comprehensive report exploring the issue of 'visible manifestations of the conflict' in the areas of Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady and Moyle (Moffett 2010). The report notes the general increase in incidents and crimes with a sectarian motive between 2007 and 2009 and reviews the substantial amount of work taking place in the area (pp.5-9). In addition to flags, the report also looks at graffiti, the painting of kerbstones, bonfires, parades and the construction of memorials. She highlights the relationship between all of these manifestations by looking at some key incidents in Ballymena, Rasharkin and one striking example in Coleraine.

> In May [2009], the death of Kevin McDaid, and the attempted murder of Damien Fleming in Coleraine was reported all over the world, and has been attributed to sectarian hatred fuelled by alcohol, the results of 'old firm' football matches, and the flying of flags in the Somerset Drive area of the town. Of course, the background to the incident is much more complex than that, and issues around parades and flags on the one hand, and internment bonfires on the other dating back over several years have also played their parts in stoking the coals of community tension. (Moffett 2010: 6)

In March 2006 the *Coleraine Borough Council Good Relations Strategy Report* highlighted the problem of flags and emblems. The report summarises feedback from interviews and workshops. The issues at Somerset Drive had been identified three years earlier.

> The existence of flags and emblems in large parts of the Borough was a constant factor in interviews and workshop sessions. Other related factors raised included kerbstone painting and murals. Specific areas mentioned regarding flag flying, again on a consistent basis, included areas such as Windy Hall, Harpers Hill, Ballysally, the Heights, and Somerset Drive. Additionally Portstewart, Kilrea and Portballintrae were raised. While largely oriented to 'Loyalist' flags, the flying of an Irish Tricolour(s) in Kilrea was frequently raised by interviewees as causing antagonism, especially during the summer months. (p.37, 7.21)

The economic ramifications were recognised in the same report.

> Flag flying on arterial routes and in economically sensitive locations, given the economic and tourist drivers for the area was frequently raised as a source of frustration. Flag flying at venues of leading events organised by the Council was also criticised by many interviewees, including relevant to the Milk Cup competition. Several interviewees mentioned flag flying at civic buildings as lacking inclusion. (p.37, 7.23)

Like a number of local Councils, Coleraine has had an active Flags Forum, established in 2004, which facilitates significant inter-agency co-operation.

Conclusion

We can make some very broad conclusions. People feel somewhat less intimidated by displays of flags and murals than they did ten years ago. However, the flying of flags on lampposts is not popular with the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland. This is perhaps reflected in the commonly held opinion that Tricolours and Union flags are put up by paramilitaries. In addition, this makes people less likely to shop in areas which have such displays.

Evidence from a number of areas of Northern Ireland clearly shows that the widespread flying of flags, over significant periods of time, remains an issue for many people, a policy problem for government agencies and district councils, and often has a detrimental economic impact on many places. Above all it continues to be a significant irritant to good community relations.

5. THE SURVEY: ALL SYMBOLS AND EMBLEMS

In the tables that follow we look at all the symbols and emblems which we counted. For the purposes of reporting our findings we have developed a system of classification of symbols in terms of their form, content and how they are displayed. While some of these classifications are unproblematic (such as whether symbols are nationalist or unionist), others are more ambiguous (such as which flags are paramilitary or not). We would stress that our system of categorisation is transparent and we have retained

a high level of detail in the information reported here so that readers can determine for themselves how we have placed items in each category.

Table 1 looks at all displays of flags and emblems, including murals. It shows general trends in the type of displays that are taking place.

Table 1: Overview of the form of displays found on arterial routes during July, 2006-2009

	2006	% of July total	2007	% of July total	2008	% of July total	2009	% of July total	Average	Average %
Arch	26	**0.6%**	27	**0.6%**	19	**0.4%**	17	**0.4%**	23	**0.5%**
Bannerette	135	**3%**	80	**1.7%**	101	**2%**	129	**2.9%**	111	**2.4%**
Bunting	84	**1.9%**	82	**1.8%**	104	**2.1%**	93	**2.1%**	91	**1.9%**
Flag	3962	**87.7%**	4123	**89.1%**	4471	**88.4%**	3956	**87.9%**	4128	**88.3%**
Graffiti	15	**0.3%**	35	**0.8%**	23	**0.5%**	16	**0.4%**	22	**0.5%**
Kerbstones	27	**0.6%**	44	**1%**	43	**0.9%**	21	**0.5%**	34	**0.7%**
Lamppost	34	**0.8%**	57	**1.2%**	104	**2.1%**	76	**1.7%**	68	**1.5%**
Memorial	48	**1.1%**	27	**0.6%**	13	**0.3%**	8	**0.2%**	24	**0.5%**
Mural	99	**2.2%**	83	**1.8%**	103	**2%**	89	**2%**	94	**2%**
Placard	78	**1.7%**	44	**1%**	33	**0.7%**	48	**1.1%**	51	**1.1%**
Other	11	**0.2%**	27	**0.6%**	41	**0.8%**	49	**1.1%**	32	**0.7%**
Total	4519	**100%**	4629	**100%**	5055	**100%**	4502	**100%**	**4676**	**100%**

Over the course of the project, the number of symbols and emblems being displayed on arterial routes in the July period is quite consistent. There has not been a noticeable reduction of displays on arterial routes between 2006 and 2009. The smallest number of items displayed during June and July throughout the project was in the summer of 2009 with 4502 total items on display - 17 items less than in the first year of the project in 2006 and 553 less than the 2008 summer count (12% lower in summer 2009 than in summer 2008).

The clearest finding revealed by the breakdown of the forms of political display is the sheer number of flags on arterial routes during the month of July. This substantially overshadows any other form of political display. Flags make up the vast majority, just short of 90%, of the items counted. Taking into account bannerettes, which are also placed on lampposts, flags and bannerettes make up the most significant form of display. The number and proportion of these items remains remarkably constant over the years of the survey.

For reasons we have discussed in the methodology section some of the figures for other manifestations are less accurate than those for flags. As a consequence, the figures for murals,

memorials, graffiti and lampposts tend to fluctuate over the years of the survey, a pattern exacerbated by the relatively small numbers in these categories. On balance, we would suggest that the overall pattern of our findings indicates that these manifestations have remained relatively constant over these years. A more detailed account of the manifestation of murals is included in Chapter 8 of this report, while a comprehensive assay of memorials is available on the CAIN website (http://cain.ulst. ac.uk/viggiani/).

Table 2: Types of display during July, 2006 – 2009

	2006	% of July Total	2007	% of July Total	2008	% of July Total	2009	% of July Total	Average	% of July Total
National	2001	**44.3%**	2302	**50%**	2592	**51%**	2342	**52%**	2309	**49.4%**
Regional	1493	**33%**	1527	**33%**	1558	**30.8%**	1443	**32.1%**	1505	**32.2%**
Paramilitary	237	**5.2%**	213	**4.6%**	180	**3.6%**	135	**3%**	191	**4.1%**
Sport	128	**2.8%**	113	**2.4%**	290	**5.7%**	139	**3.1%**	168	**3.6%**
Commemorative	284	**6.3%**	76	**1.6%**	137	**2.7%**	191	**4.3%**	172	**3.8%**
Loyal Order	268	**5.9%**	250	**5.4%**	251	**5%**	202	**4.5%**	243	**5.2%**
Political Party/ Statement	43	**1%**	19	**0.4%**	16	**0.32%**	19	**0.4%**	24	**0.5%**
Other	65	**1.4%**	129	**2.8%**	31	**0.6%**	31	**0.7%**	64	**1.4%**
Total	4519	**100%**	4629	**100%**	5055	**100%**	4502	**100%**	4676	**100%**

Table 2 looks at the categories of total symbols in the month of July between 2006 - 2009.

While the number of displays of national emblems (such as the Union flag or Tricolour) increased by more than 300 between 2006 and 2009 (although fluctuating in the intervening period), displays of regional emblems (such as the Northern Ireland flag or flags of Scotland) remained relatively constant (an average of 1505 items every summer). Indeed, national symbols were the most numerous forms of display for each summer count between 2006 and 2009 constituting on average just under 50% of all symbols. Regional symbols accounted for almost a third of summer displays (32.2%). As we will discuss later, the vast majority of these flags are unionist/loyalist and by far the most numerous of national symbols displayed are Union flags.

The summer of 2008 saw the largest display of emblems at 5055 items. It is interesting to note that it was also the year which saw the largest display of sporting emblems at 290 items, compared to just 113 items in summer 2007 and 139 items in summer

2009. It is suggested that this development can be attributed to the success of local GAA clubsides such as Crossmaglen Rangers as well as the fact that County Tyrone won the Sam Maguire All-Ireland Gaelic football final in 2008.

It is not surprising that 2006 saw the largest display of commemorative and Loyal Order items given that the year marked the 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme (for example, there were 62 Somme Commemorative items in 2006 compared to just 13 in 2007, 6 in 2008 and 12 in 2009). The year 2006 was also the 25th anniversary of the Hunger Strikes.

It should be noted that there were fewer paramilitary displays each year between 2006 and 2009. The 2009 total of 135 items is 57% of the 2006 total of 237. Therefore paramilitary items have decreased by 43% in the four years since the beginning of the project.

Table 3 looks at the number of items displayed in the second half of September.

Table 3 Form of display during September, 2006 and 2009

	2006	%	2007	%	2008	%	2009	%	Average	Average %
Arch	4	**0.1%**	1	**0.06%**	3	**0.1%**	1	**0.06%**	2	**0.1**
Bannerette	72	**2.7%**	0	**-**	23	**0.7%**	10	**0.6%**	105	**4.5%**
Bunting	32	**1.2%**	23	**1.3%**	58	**1.9%**	48	**2.9%**	40	**1.7%**
Flag	2174	**80.1%**	1510	**84.1%**	2704	**86.7%**	1332	**80%**	1930	**83.4%**
Graffiti	23	**0.9%**	31	**1.7%**	31	**0.9%**	12	**0.7%**	24	**1%**
Kerbstones	39	**1.5%**	33	**1.8%**	33	**1%**	19	**1%**	24	**1%**
Lamppost	62	**2.3%**	44	**2.5%**	86	**2.8%**	59	**3.5%**	63	**2.7%**
Memorial	58	**2.2%**	22	**1.3%**	13	**0.4%**	11	**0.7%**	26	**1.1%**
Mural	120	**4.5%**	63	**3.5%**	93	**2.9%**	87	**5.2%**	91	**3.9%**
Placard	85	**3.2%**	38	**2.1%**	44	**1.4%**	44	**2.6%**	53	**2.3%**
Other	16	**0.6%**	28	**1.6%**	25	**0.8%**	41	**2.5%**	28	**1.2%**
Total	2685	**100%**	1793	**100%**	3113	**100%**	1664	**100%**	2314	**100%**

Table 3 clearly indicates the large number of items that remain on display on arterial routes after the summer months. Again flags are consistently the most widespread type of display accounting for over 80% of items. However, there are some significant differences with 2009 showing a lower overall number of flags than in previous years. The particularly high number of flags in 2008 was due to the number of Tyrone GAA flags flying during a year in which they won the All Ireland trophy.

It is unlikely that kerbstones, graffiti and particularly murals and memorials actually did increase/decrease year on year as substantially as the data would appear to suggest. It is more likely that the difficulty in identifying these items has contributed to some degree of fluctuation in these figures across years.

Other fluctuations in table 4 are clearly explicable in terms of the events occurring in each year. For example, the 2008 overall removal figure for flags was just 39.4% compared to a higher rate of removal in other years. This is due to the 709 GAA items that were erected over the summer for the All Ireland celebrations. In general, arches and bannerettes are most likely to come down by the end of September.

Graph 1: Total forms of display figures for July and September 2006-2009.
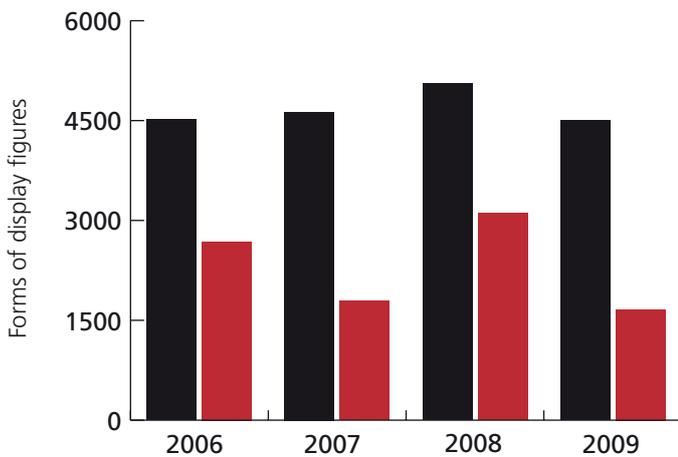
Total figures for forms of display,
July and September 2006 - 2009

Table 4: Removal rates for forms of display between July and September, 2006 – 2009

	2006	% Change Between Rounds	2007	% Change Between Rounds	2008	% Change Between Rounds	2009	% Change Between Rounds
Arch	-22	**-84.6%**	-26	**-96.3%**	-16	**-84.2%**	**-16**	**-94.1%**
Bannerette	-63	**-46.7%**	-80	**-100%**	-78	**-77.2%**	**-119**	**-92.2%**
Bunting	-52	**-61,9%**	-59	**-72%**	-46	**-44.2%**	**-45**	**-48.4%**
Flag	-1788	**-45.1%**	-2613	**-63.4%**	-1767	**-39.5%**	**-2624**	**-66.3%**
Graffiti	+8	**+53.3%**	-4	**-11.4%**	+8	**+34.8%**	**-4**	**-25%**
Kerbstones	+12	**+44.4%**	-11	**-25%**	-10	**-23.3%**	**-2**	**-9.5%**
Lamppost	+28	**+82.4%**	-13	**-22.8%**	-18	**-17.3%**	**-17**	**-22.3%**
Memorial	+10	**+20.8%**	-5	**-18.5%**	-	**-**	**+3**	**+37.5%**
Mural	+21	**+21%**	-20	**-24.1%**	-10	**-9.7%**	**-2**	**-2.2%**
Placard	+7	**+9%**	-6	**-13.6%**	+11	**+33.3%**	**-4**	**-83.3%**
Other	+5	**+45.5%**	+1	**+3.7%**	-16	**-64%**	**-8**	**-16.3%**

Table 5 looks at the changes in the type of display which take place between the July and September surveys.

Paramilitary symbols have lower rates of removal, sometimes half that of Loyal Order symbols. This is probably because the figures include murals which are more permanent. There are of course fewer paramilitary symbols than other categories. The fluctuation in commemorative symbols (a 45% increase in 2006) reflects the 2006 commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Hunger Strike. Many of the flags and bannerettes remained in place during the September survey.

The high number of sporting symbols in 2008 (244% increase) reflects Tyrone winning the All Ireland GAA football final in early September. Loyal Order items were the items most likely to have been removed by the second count (on average a 79% reduction from the first count).

Table 5: Changes in types of display between July and September 2006 – 2009

	2006 Items	% Change between Rounds	2007 Items	% Change between rounds	2008 Items	% change between rounds	2009 Items	% change between rounds
National	-827	**-41.3%**	-1542	**-67%**	-1358	**-52.4%**	-1497	**-63.9%**
Regional	-866	**-58%**	-966	**-63.2%**	-973	**-62.5%**	-1021	**-70.8%**
Paramilitary	-42	**-17.7%**	-92	**-43.2%**	-61	**-33.9%**	-44	**-32.6%**
Sport	-5	**-3.9%**	+60	**+53.1%**	+709	**+244.5%**	-2	**-1.4%**
Commemorative	+128	**+45%**	-25	**-32.9**	-66	**-48.2%**	-90	**-47.1%**
Loyal Order	-211	**-78.7%**	-206	**-82.4%**	-197	**-78.5%**	-178	**-88.1%**
Political Party/ Statement	+12	**+27.9%**	-1	**-5.3%**	+10	**+62.5%**	-4	**-21.1%**
Other	-23	**-35.4%**	-63	**-48.8%**	-6	**-19.4%**	Same	**-**

In order to differentiate the number of items in terms of their political identification it is worth looking at removal rates identifying symbols as unionist and nationalist.

Table 6 is important for two reasons. Since events that we might designate as nationalist, such as the commemoration of the Hunger Strikes and the All Ireland finals, take place in August and September there is often a rise in the number of items in the September count. In 2006 it was the 25th Anniversary of the Hunger Strike (rise of 87%) and in 2008 it was the All Ireland Final (largely accounting for the rise of 422%). As we will discuss later, there are a relatively small number of nationalist/republican symbols displayed in the summer months compared to those designated as unionist.

Given the number of items that are put up for the period of the Twelfth of July it is the unionist figures that are key to how many flags are still flying after September. Since the autumn count takes place in the third and fourth week in September many of these items have been up for nearly 3 months. The removal rate in 2009 (69%) was better than in 2006 (59%) but there is not a significant trend given that 2008 (62%) was similar to 2006. Overall, more than 1/3 of items remain on arterial routes at the end of the summer.

Table 6: September removal rates of unionist and nationalist symbols 2006 - 2009

Unionist removal 2006 - 2009				Nationalist removal 2006 – 2009			
2006 removal	2007 removal	2008 removal	2009 removal	2006 removal	2007 removal	2008 removal	2009 removal
-59.8%	-67.9%	-61.5%	-69.2%	+87.6%	+1.3%	+422.8%	+3.2%

Paramilitary Symbols

Table 7 looks at the categories of paramilitary symbols.

Table 7: Paramilitary symbols displayed in July 2006 – 2009[1]

	2006	% of Total	2007	% of Total	2008	% of Total	2009	% of Total	Average	Average %
IRA	7	**2.9%**	15	**7.1%**	13	**7.3%**	7	**5.2%**	11	**5.8%**
Red Hand Commando	9	**3.8%**	8	**3.8%**	4	**2.3%**	3	**2.2%**	6	**3.2%**
Starry Plough	9	**3.8%**	34	**16%**	26	**14.7%**	3	**2.2%**	18	**9.5%**
UDA	24	**10.1%**	19	**8.9%**	28	**15.8%**	16	**11.9%**	22	**11.5%**
UFF	39	**16.4%**	21	**9.9%**	15	**8.5%**	11	**8.2%**	22	**11.5%**
UYM	2	**0.8%**	3	**1.4%**	0	**-**	0	**-**	1	**0.5%**
UVF	78	**32.9%**	69	**32.5%**	42	**23.7%**	58	**43.2%**	62	**32.6%**
UVF SOMME	12	**5%**	1	**0.5%**	7	**3.9%**	1	**0.7%**	5	**2.6%**
YCV	55	**23.2%**	39	**18.4%**	37	**20.9%**	30	**22.4%**	40	**21%**
LVF	1	**0.4%**	3	**1.4%**	2	**1.1%**	1	**0.7%**	2	**1%**
IRSP/INLA	0	**-**	0	**-**	3	**1.7%**	3	**2.2%**	1.5	**0.8%**
Sunburst	1	**0.4%**	0	**-**	0	**-**	1	**0.7%**	0.5	**0.3%**
Total	237	**100%**	212	**100%**	177	**100%**	134	**100%**	191	**100%**

Graph 2: Total number of paramilitary symbols 2006-2009.

Number of paramilitary symbols

Paramilitary symbols 2006-2009
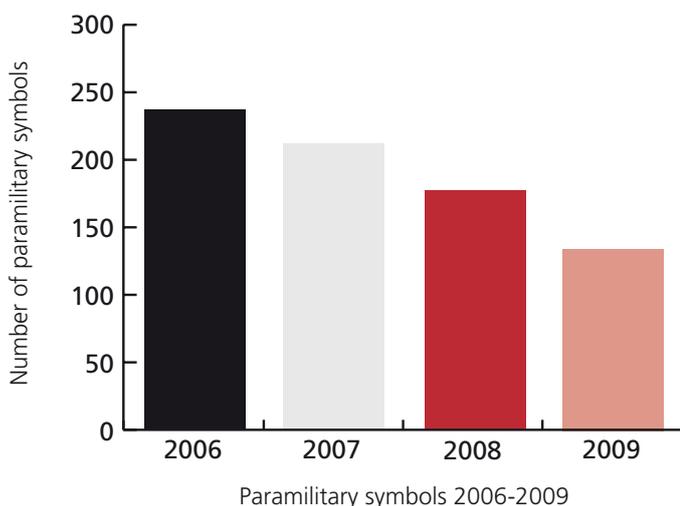
There are some general trends which can be identified. There has been a reduction in paramilitary symbols on arterial routes during the period 2006-2009 (from 237 to 134). Loyalist symbols remain the most significant in number accounting for, on average, over 75% of the displays. Within that figure there has been a reduction in the numbers of items for most of the groups. By far the largest number of emblems remaining are associated with the UVF and YCV.

1   These figures vary slightly from previous figures as they do not include paramilitary items classified as 'Unionist Other' or 'Nationalist Other'. For example, in 2007 there was one paramilitary item which was classified as 'Unionist Other', in 2008 there were two 'Nationalist Other' and one 'Unionist Other' paramilitary symbols and in 2009 there was one 'Unionist Other' paramilitary symbol.

Table 8: Paramilitary symbols displayed in September, 2006 – 2009[2]

	2006	% of Total	2007	% of Total	2008	% of Total	2009	% of Total	Average	Average %
IRA	9	4.6%	18	15%	12	10.3%	10	11.1%	12	9.2%
Red Hand Commando	8	4.1%	6	5%	1	0.9%	2	2.2%	4	3.1%
Starry Plough	18	9.2%	21	17.5%	28	24.1%	4	4.4%	18	13.8%
UDA	21	10.7%	11	9.2%	12	10.3%	5	5.6%	12	9.3%
UFF	43	22.1%	13	10.8%	10	8.6%	9	10%	19	14.7%
UYM	2	1%	1	0.8%	-	-	-	-	1	0.8%
UVF	54	27.7%	32	26.7%	28	24.1%	41	45.6%	39	30%
UVF SOMME	8	4.1%	0	-	1	0.9%	0	-	2	1.6%
YCV	29	14.8%	14	11.7%	21	18.1%	15	16.7%	20	15.4%
LVF	1	0.5%	3	2.5%	0	-	0	-	1	0.8%
IRSP/INLA	-	-	-	-	3	2.6%	3	3.3%	2	1.5%
Sunburst	2	1%	1	0.8%	-	-	1	1.1%	1	0.8%
Total	195	100%	120	100%	116	100%	90	100%	130	100%

Table 8 shows that a significant number of paramilitary symbols remain in place in September. However, the number has been decreasing (191 down to 89), a decrease of 53.4% over the four years of the project. By far the largest category of paramilitary symbols and emblems remaining on arterial routes are those of the UVF and YCV.

Displays at Easter

In 2008 and 2009 we surveyed the same arterial routes to see what material had been left up after displays at Easter. This also gave us some indication of how much material had been left up over the winter months.

Table 9: Types of symbol on display during Easter, 2008 and 2009

	Easter 2008	% of Total	Easter 2009	% of Total	Average	Average %
National	441	56.1%	481	56%	461	56%
Regional	98	12.5%	97	11.3%	98	11.9%
Paramilitary	115	14.6%	98	11.4%	107	13%
Sport	40	5.1%	55	6.4%	48	5.8%
Commemorative	61	7.8%	70	8.1%	66	8%
Loyal Order	11	1.4%	10	1.2%	11	1.4%
Political Party/ Statement	17	2.2%	19	2.2%	18	2.2%
Other	3	0.4%	29	3.4%	16	1.9%
Total	786	100%	859	100%	823	100%

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2   Again these figures vary slightly from previous figures as they do not include paramilitary items classified as 'Unionist Other' or 'Nationalist Other'. For example, in 2007 there was one paramilitary item which was classified as 'Unionist Other', in 2008 there were two 'Nationalist Other' and one 'Unionist Other' paramilitary symbols and in 2009 there was one 'Unionist Other' paramilitary symbol.

There were 73 more displays during Easter 2009 (859 items) than during Easter 2008 (786 items), an increase of 9.3%. As with the summer figures, paramilitary items decreased by 14.8% between Easter 2008 and Easter 2009. However, paramilitary displays appear to make up a larger proportion of the total number of displays at Easter than in the summer or in September. Paramilitary items were 14.6% of the Easter displays in 2008 and 11.4% in 2009 compared to an average of 4.1% for the summer totals between 2006 and 2009. The number of paramilitary items is comparable to the summer figures so it is likely that the difference is that many fewer national and regional flags and emblems are displayed at Easter, making paramilitary displays a higher proportion of the total. The Easter displays in 2008 were 16% of the 2008 summer total of items while in 2009 the comparable figure was slightly higher at 19%.

Table 10 shows that the majority of symbols at Easter were flags (with an average across the two years of 57.8%). This figure is much lower than the summer figure of 88.3% as murals represent a much higher percentage of the Easter statistics given that they are more permanent.

Table 10: Forms of symbols at Easter 2008 and 2009

	Easter 2008	% of Total	Easter 2009	% of Total	Average	Average as a %
Arch	2	**0.3%**	0	**-**	1	**0.1%**
Bunting	6	**0.8%**	6	**0.7%**	6	**0.7%**
Flag	441	**56.1%**	511	**59.5%**	476	**57.8%**
Graffiti	23	**2.9%**	15	**1.7%**	19	**2.3%**
Kerbstones	35	**4.5%**	37	**4.3%**	36	**4.4%**
Lamppost	98	**12.5%**	155	**18%**	127	**15.4%**
Memorial	16	**2%**	11	**1.3%**	14	**1.7%**
Mural	83	**10.6%**	85	**9.9%**	84	**10.2%**
Placard	34	**4.3%**	32	**3.7%**	33	**4%**
Other	48	**6.1%**	7	**0.8%**	28	**3.4%**
Total	786	**100**	859	**100**	823	**100%**

Table 11: Nationalist and Unionist Easter Displays in 2008 and 2009

	2008	% of Total	2009	% of Total	Average	% of Overall Easter Total
Unionist	537	**68%**	522	**60.7%**	529	**64.3%**
Nationalist	228	**29%**	320	**37.3%**	274	**33.3%**
Other	21	**2.7%**	17	**2%**	19	**2.3%**
Total	786	**100%**	859	**100%**	823	**100%**

Although Easter is traditionally associated with nationalist/ republican commemorations, during both Easter 2008 and 2009 unionist displays were more prevalent than were nationalist or republican displays. Of the overall figure of 1645 items displayed during both Easters, 64.3% were unionist/loyalist and 33.3% were nationalist/republican. This suggests a significant number of unionist flags had been flying throughout the winter.

6. THE SURVEY: DISTRIBUTION OF FLAGS

This research was chiefly designed to map the use and distribution of flags on arterial routes. In this section we have removed all other items and produced statistics looking at flags only.

Table 12: How flags were displayed in July, 2006 – 2009

	2006	% of Total	2007	% of Total	2008	% of Total	2009	% of Total	Average	% of Total
From Arch	25	**0.6%**	46	**1.1%**	51	**1.1%**	26	**0.7%**	**37**	**0.9%**
From Building	219	**5.5%**	221	**5.4%**	395	**8.8%**	246	**6.2%**	**270**	**6.5%**
Bunting-style	16	**4%**	3	**0.1%**	91	**2%**	0	**-**	**28**	**0.7%**
From Flag-pole	87	**2.2%**	138	**3.3%**	130	**2.9%**	63	**1.6%**	**105**	**2.5%**
From Lamppost	3383	**85.4%**	3256	**79%**	3328	**74.4%**	3287	**83.1%**	**3314**	**80.3%**
On Mural	10	**0.3%**	22	**0.5%**	18	**0.4%**	9	**0.2%**	**15**	**0.4%**
From Private House	219	**5.5%**	423	**10.3%**	426	**9.5%**	277	**7%**	**336**	**8.1%**
Other	3	**0.1%**	14	**0.3%**	32	**0.7%**	48	**1.2%**	**24**	**0.6%**
Total	3962	**100%**	4123	**100%**	4471	**100%**	3956	**100%**	**4128**	**100%**

Table 12 indicates the high percentage of flags that are displayed on lampposts (including telegraph poles), indeed around 80% of flags are flown from lampposts during the summer months.

By contrast, the more traditional way of displaying flags, from houses, makes up on average 8.1% of flag displays. This disparity is partly explained by the survey covering only arterial routes.

Table 13: Types of flag display during July, 2006 – 2009

	2006	% of July Total	2007	% of July Total	2008	% of July Total	2009	% of July Total	Average	% of R1 Total
National	1814	**45.8%**	2086	**50.6%**	2310	**51.7%**	2092	**52.9%**	**2076**	**50.3%**
Regional	1483	**37.4%**	1516	**36.8%**	1546	**34.6%**	1434	**36.2%**	**1495**	**36.2%**
Paramilitary	161	**4.1%**	117	**2.8%**	111	**2.5%**	73	**1.8%**	**116**	**2.8%**
Sport	122	**3.1%**	102	**2.5%**	271	**6.1%**	124	**3.1%**	**155**	**3.8%**
Commemorative	157	**3.9%**	24	**0.6%**	59	**1.3%**	96	**2.4%**	**84**	**2%**
Loyal Order	183	**4.6%**	177	**4.3%**	162	**3.6%**	122	**3.1%**	**161**	**3.9%**
Political Party/ Statement	0	**-**	2	**0.05%**	1	**0.02%**	0	**-**	**1**	**0.02%**
Other	42	**1.1%**	99	**2.4%**	11	**0.2%**	15	**0.4%**	**42**	**1%**
Total	3962	**100%**	4123	**100%**	4471	**100%**	3956	**100%**	**4128**	**100%**

Table 13 indicates the type of flags on display during the summer months of July and August each year between 2006 and 2009. The number of flags on arterial routes has remained strikingly constant averaging just over 4100 a year. The vast majority of the flags on display in July are of a national and regional nature. National flags make up around 50% of the annual total. By far the most common of these are the Union flag and the Northern Ireland flag.

It is noteworthy that the number of paramilitary flags halved between 2006 and 2009 and now makes up, on average, just 2.8% of the total number of flags on arterial routes. The large number of commemorative flags in 2006 (157) reflected the 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme.

Table 14: Types of flag displayed during September, 2006 – 2009

	2006	% of Sept Total	2007	% of Sept Total	2008	% of Sept Total	2009	% of Sept Total	Average	% of R2 Total
National	1016	**46.7%**	642	**42.5%**	1077	**39.8%**	696	**52.3%**	858	**44.4%**
Regional	607	**27.9%**	558	**37%**	572	**21.2%**	418	**31.4%**	538.75	**27.9%**
Paramilitary	107	**4.9%**	53	**3.5%**	57	**2.1%**	34	**2.6%**	63	**3.3%**
Sport	116	**5.3%**	164	**10.9%**	937	**34.7%**	112	**8.4%**	333	**17.2%**
Commemorative	279	**12.8%**	10	**0.7%**	18	**0.7%**	35	**2.6%**	86	**4.5%**
Loyal Order	37	**1.7%**	38	**2.5%**	34	**1.3%**	24	**1.8%**	33	**1.7%**
Political Party/ Statement	1	**0.05%**	1	**0.1%**	1	**0.04%**	0	**-**	1	**0.05%**
Other	11	**0.5%**	44	**2.9%**	8	**0.3%**	13	**1%**	19	**1%**
Total	2174	**100%**	1510	**100%**	2704	**100%**	1332	**100%**	1930	**100%**

Graph 3: Total number of flags displayed in July and September 2006 – 2009 and Easter 2008 - 2009

July - September 2006 – 2009
Easter 2008 - 2009
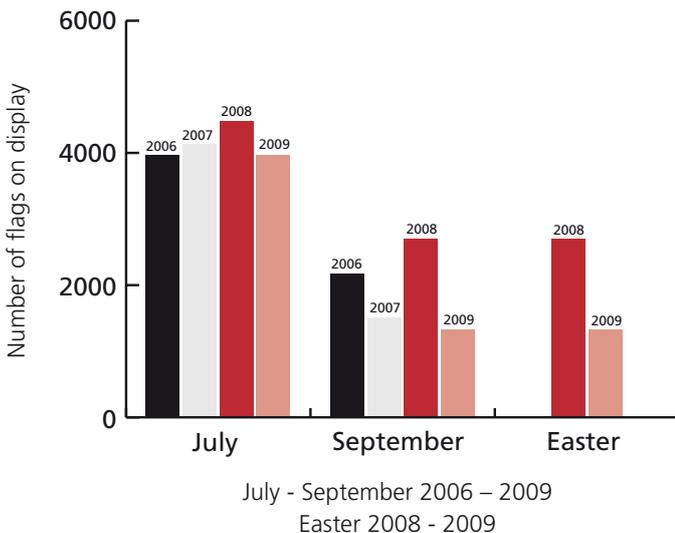
The pattern of types of flags that remain flying in September again reveals that the most significant number are national and regional flags of which the vast majority are Union and Northern Ireland flags. The significant rise in flags in the sports category in 2008 was due to the success of Tyrone in the GAA All Ireland final.

It is noticeable that whilst there has been a significant fall in the number of paramilitary flags they are slightly more likely to be left up than other types of flag. This is indicated by their rise as a percentage of total flags compared to the summer.

The high number of commemorative flags in 2006 was due to the 25th Anniversary of the Hunger Strikes and the 90th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme earlier in the summer.

Perhaps the key issue in terms of flags being used to demarcate territory is what is left flying and where. The vast majority of flags left flying in September on arterial routes are Union flags and Northern Ireland flags. There is a particular rise in commemorative and sporting flags of a nationalist/republican nature, but these are proportionally fewer in number and most are put up in August and September therefore flying for a shorter period of time.

Table 15: Average rates of removal of unionist and nationalist flags, 2006 - 2009

	Unionist Removal 2006 – 2009			Nationalist Removal 2006-2009		
	July Average	Sept Average	%Change between rounds	July Average	Sept Average	%Change between rounds
National	1990	748	**-62.4%**	74	100	**+35.1%**
Regional	1493	537	**-64%**	1	1	**Same**
Paramilitary	98	45	**-54%**	18	18	**Same**
Sport	28	15	**-46.4%**	126	316	**+150.8%**
Commemorative	60	18	**-70%**	24	68	**+183.3%**
Loyal Order	161	33	**-79.5%**	-	-	**-**
Political Party/ Statement	0.5	0.25	**-50%**	0.25	0.5	**+100%**
Other	37	15	**-59.5%**	1.25	1.5	**+20%**
Total	3868	1411	**-63.5%**	245	505	**+106.5%**

Table 15 gives a clear indication of which flags are left flying on arterial routes into the winter months: 748 Union flags and 537 Northern Ireland flags compared to 100 Tricolours. The average number of unionist flags left in September was 1411 compared to 505 nationalist. We know that a large number of those nationalist flags are GAA flags which are removed in October.

Table 16: Overall rates of removal of unionist and nationalist flags, 2006 – 2009

Unionist removal 2006 - 2009				Nationalist removal 2006 – 2009			
2006 removal	2007 removal	2008 removal	2009 removal	2006 removal	2007 removal	2008 removal	2009 removal
- 57.6%	**- 67%**	**- 59.9%**	**-69.6%**	**+ 127.8%**	**+5.4%**	**+207.8%**	**-0.6%**

These tables show the most important figures in terms of the number, type and distribution of flags left flying in autumn. In sheer percentage terms there is a massive rise in nationalist flags in 2006 and 2008. This is because commemorative and sporting dates arise in August (Hunger Strike) and September (All Ireland final) and the 2006 and 2008 figures reflect this. However, in gross numbers these remain small, averaging around 300 in the case of sporting flags, and most of the GAA flags had been removed by October.

The unionist figures are important as they account for the greatest number of the total of flags and have often been flying since June. The highest removal rate was in 2009 and the lowest in 2006. Broadly speaking, however, there does not seem to be a great change across the years of the survey. The average number of unionist flags flying in September is just over 1,400. The rate of removal reached nearly 70% in 2007 and 2009, but this still left a large number of flags in place. There has been a slight increase in removal rates in unionist flags since 2006, but given that 2008 also had a lower removal rate it is not clear if the increase in 2009 shows a trend, or perhaps rather a rise and fall depending on wider political conditions.

Table 17: Average flag removal rates, 2006 - 2009

	2006 - 2009 Summer Average	2006 - 2009 Autumn Average	Average Removal rate %
From Arch	37	3	**-91.9%**
From Building	270	199	**-26.3%**
Bunting-style	28	24	**-14.3%**
From Flag-pole	105	73	**-30.5%**
From Lamppost	3314	1476	**-55.5%**
On Mural	15	7	**-53.3%**
From Private House	336	137	**-59.2%**
Other	24	11	**-54.2%**

Table 17 illustrates, that numerically speaking, by far the largest number of flags left flying are on lampposts and telegraph poles. Over the four years, 7720 were still left flying at the end of September. As we have discussed above, some years saw higher removal rates than others. Interestingly, flags on private houses were more likely to be removed than those flying from lampposts (59.4% compared to 55.4% removal rates respectively). Flags on arches were most likely to be taken down (92% removal rate) usually because the arch had been removed.

Table 18: Overall flag removal rates/changes between July and September, 2006 – 2009

	2006 Flags	% Change between Rounds	2007 Flags	% Change between Rounds	2008 Flags	% Change between Rounds	2009 Flags	% change between rounds
National	-798	**-43.9%**	-1444	**-69.2%**	-1233	**-53.4%**	-1396	**-66.7%**
Regional	-876	**-59%**	-958	**-63.2%**	-974	**-63%**	-1016	**-70.9%**
Paramilitary	-54	**-33.5%**	-64	**-54.7%**	-54	**-48.6%**	-39	**-53.4%**
Sport	-6	**-4.9%**	+62	**+60.7%**	+666	**+245.8%**	-12	**-9.7%**
Commemorative	+122	**+77.7%**	-14	**-58.3%**	-41	**-69.5%**	-61	**-64.2%**
Loyal Order	-146	**-79.8%**	-139	**-78.5%**	-128	**-79%**	-98	**-80.3%**
Political Party/ Statement	+1	**+100%**	-1	**-50%**	-	**Same**	-	**Same**
Other	-31	**-73.8%**	-55	**-55.6%**	-3	**-27.3%**	-2	**-13.3%**

Table 18 shows interesting differences in the types of flags left flying. Removal rates for paramilitary flags are much lower than for national or regional flags. In contrast, removal rates for Loyal Order flags are very high over the same period of time. Overall there was a removal rate of 53.2% for flags between summer and autumn across the four years of the project. We also carried out surveys two weeks after Easter in 2008 and 2009. This was to identify which flags were being displayed at that period of time particularly after St Patrick's Day and the Easter commemorations. However, as noted above the larger percentage of flags symbols at this period of time were unionist in orientation.

Table 19: Types of flags displayed in September and Easter, 2007/2008 - 2008/2009

	Autumn 2007	Easter 2008	Difference	% Change	Autumn 2008	Easter 2009	Difference	% Change
National	642	252	-390	**-60.7%**	1077	283	-794	**-73.7%**
Regional	558	95	-463	**-82.9%**	572	90	-482	**-84.2%**
Paramilitary	53	43	-10	**-18.9%**	57	48	-9	**-15.8%**
Sport	164	30	-134	**-81.7%**	937	45	-892	**-95.2%**
Commemorative	10	9	-1	**-0.1%**	18	24	+6	**+33.3%**
Loyal Order	38	9	-29	**-76.3%**	34	6	-28	**-82.4%**
Political Party/ Statement	1	1	-	**-**	1	1	-	**-**
Other	44	2	-42	**-95.5%**	8	14	+6	**+75%**
Total	1510	441	-1069	**-70.8%**	2704	511	-2193	**-81.1%**

There was a greater reduction in flags between autumn 2008 and Easter 2009 than there had been the previous year (-81.1% compared to -70.8%). We can also see that between autumn 2007 and Easter 2008, 'other' and 'regional' flags (-95.5% and -82.9%) were most likely to have been removed the following Easter.

Table 19 also illustrates that national flags were more likely to be removed at Easter 2009 compared to the previous year (although there were more overall in 2009 than in 2008). Sports flags were also likely to come down by the following Easter, with more being removed in 2009 than in 2008 (95.2% down at Easter in 2009 and 81.7% down at Easter 2008). This almost certainly reflects most GAA flags being removed after September.

In contrast, commemorative and paramilitary flags were the least likely to come down. In fact, at Easter 2009 a third more commemorative items went up than had been on display the previous September. Loyal Order removal rates were higher in 2009 than they were in 2008 (-82.4% compared to -76.3%).
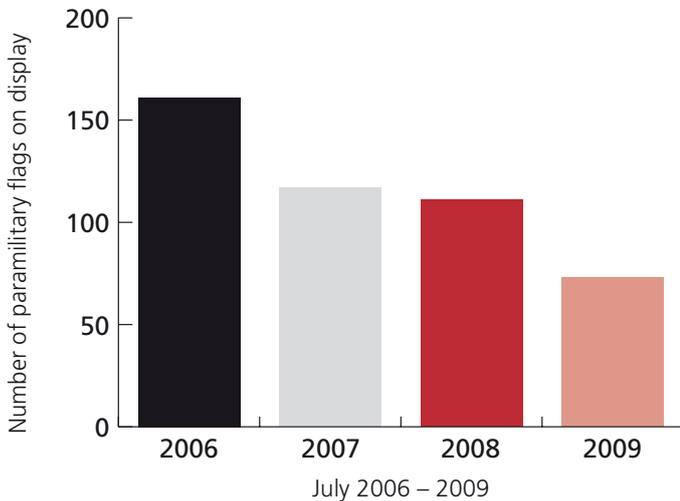
Paramilitary Flags

It is interesting to look at a breakdown of paramilitary flags as they are likely to account, in part, for people's negative attitudes towards the flying of flags. It is important to remember that the total number of paramilitary flags on arterial routes is relatively low. However, they are often associated with other displays such as murals.

Table 20: Paramilitary flags on display in July, 2006 – 2009

	2006	% of Total	2007	% of Total	2008	% of Total	2009	% of Total	Average	Average %
Red Hand Commando	4	**2.5%**	2	**1.7%**	2	**1.8%**	1	**1.4%**	**2**	**1.7%**
Starry Plough	9	**5.6%**	34	**29%**	26	**23.4%**	3	**4.1%**	**18**	**15.5%**
UDA	12	**7.5%**	5	**4.3%**	17	**15.3%**	11	**15.1%**	**11**	**9.5%**
UFF	26	**16.1%**	14	**11.9%**	6	**5.4%**	3	**4.1%**	**12**	**10.3%**
UVF	49	**30.4%**	38	**32.4%**	24	**21.6%**	32	**43.8%**	**36**	**31%**
UVF SOMME	12	**7.5%**	1	**0.9%**	6	**5.4%**	1	**1.4%**	**5**	**4.3%**
YCV	48	**29.8%**	23	**19.7%**	30	**27%**	22	**30.1%**	**31**	**26.7%**
LVF	1	**-**	0	**-**	0	**-**	0	**-**	0.25	**0.2%**
Total	161	**100%**	117	**100%**	111	**100%**	73	**100%**	**116**	**100%**

Graph 4: Total number of paramilitary flags on display in July, 2006 – 2009.

We can note in the July period a steady decline in paramilitary flags from 161 to 73. There has been a particular decline in Ulster Freedom Fighter (UFF) flags, from 26 being flown in the summer of 2006 (of which 25 remained at the end of September) compared to just 3 flags in the summer of 2009 (of which 2 were still up in September). By far the biggest proportion of paramilitary flags on display are UVF/YCV.

If we then examine the September distribution figures (table 21) we get an idea of what is being left up.

Table 21: September paramilitary flags 2006 – 2009

	2006	% of Total	2007	% of Total	2008	% of Total	2009	% of Total	Average	Average %
Red Hand Commando	0	-	1	**1.9%**	0	-	0	-	**0.25**	**0.4%**
Starry Plough	18	**16.8%**	21	**39.6%**	28	**49.1%**	4	**11.8%**	**18**	**28.6%**
UDA	8	**7.5%**	2	**3.8%**	0	-	3	**8.8%**	**3**	**4.8%**
UFF	25	**23.4%**	5	**9.4%**	1	**1.8%**	2	**5.9%**	**8**	**12.7%**
UVF	25	**23.4%**	14	**26.4%**	11	**19.3%**	16	**47.1%**	**17**	**27%**
UVF SOMME	8	**7.5%**	-	-	-	-	-	-	**2**	**3.2%**
YCV	21	**19.6%**	9	**17%**	17	**29.8%**	9	**26.5%**	**14**	**22.2%**
Sunburst	1	**1%**	1	**1.9%**	0	-	0	-	**0.5**	**0.8%**
LVF	1	**1%**	0	-	0	-	0	-	**0.25**	**0.4%**
Total	107	**100%**	53	**100%**	57	**100%**	34	**100%**	**63**	**100%**

There has been a steady decrease in the number of paramilitary flags flying in September. The total number in 2009 (34) is less than half that of 2006 (107). Again, by far the largest number left flying were UVF/YCV flags (54 in 2006 and 25 in 2009).

There was an increase in republican paramilitary flags, particularly the Starry Plough, between 2006 and 2008. This, as we have

suggested before, partly reflects republican commemorative events in August. Although quite a high number of Starry Ploughs were also flying in July 2007 and 2008 (34 and 26 respectively), only three Starry Ploughs were flown in the summer of 2009.

Table 22: Paramilitary flag removal rates 2006 – 2009

	2006 R1	2006 R2	% Change	2007 R1	2007 R2	% Change	2008 R1	2008 R2	% Change	2009 R1	2009 R2	% Change	Average R1	Average R2	% Change
RHC	4	0	-100%	2	1	-50%	2	0	-100%	1	0	-100%	2	0.3	-85%
Starry Plough	9	18	+100%	34	21	-38.2%	26	28	+7.7%	3	4	+33.3%	18	17.8	-1.1%
UDA	12	8	-33.3%	5	2	-60%	17	0	-100%	11	3	-72.7%	11.3	3.3	-70.8%
UFF	26	25	-3.8%	14	5	-64.3%	6	1	-83.3%	3	2	-33.3%	12.3	8.3	-32.5%
UVF	49	25	-48.9%	38	14	-63.2%	24	11	-54.2%	32	16	-50%	35.8	16.5	-53.9%
UVF SOMME	12	8	-33.3%	1	-	-100%	6	-	-83.3%	1	-	-100%	5	2.3	-54%
YCV	48	21	-56.3%	23	9	-60.9%	30	17	-43.3%	22	9	-59.1%	30.8	14	54.5%
Sunburst	0	1	+100%	0	1	+100%	0	0	-	0	0	-	0	0.3	0
LVF	1	1	Same	0	0	-	0	0	-	0	0	-	0.3	0.3	-

Both the summer and autumn surveys have seen a decline in the number of paramilitary flags. This decline is more significant than the figures of all items in earlier tables as those included more permanent manifestations such as murals and memorials.

On average over the four years, Starry Ploughs were the most likely flags to still be on display in September/October (change of just -1.1%).The highest removal rate on average of a paramilitary organisation were UDA flags at 70.8% removal rate, and indeed in 2008 all 17 UDA flags displayed in the summer had been removed by the time of the second count in September.

UFF flags also decreased significantly between 2006 and 2009, which may be linked to the 'standing down' of the organisation in November 2007. However, it is worth bearing in mind that in 2009 the UDA clearly replaced some of their flags with those having Ulster Defence Union (UDU, an organisation which was founded in 1893) displayed upon them. Since these flags had virtually no symbols that linked them with the UDA, we have chosen to define these as commemorative.

Between 2006 and 2009 in rounds one and two, over half of the paramilitary flags flying belonged to the UVF and YCV.

Conclusions

1. Flags make up by far the largest number of political symbols displayed on arterial routes in Northern Ireland (just under 90%)

2. There has been no reduction in the number of symbols displayed on arterial routes in the July period from 2006 to 2009.

3. The vast majority of flags displayed on arterial routes in Northern Ireland are unionist/loyalist. Even during the Easter period unionist/loyalist symbols make up over 60% of symbols displayed on arterial routes.

4. The vast majority of flags displayed are placed on lampposts and telegraph poles (80%). By contrast, the more traditional way of displaying flags, from private houses, now makes up only around 8% of the total. This disparity is partly explained by the survey taking in only arterial routes.

5. The rate of removal of the large number of unionist flags in 2009 was just below 70%. Whilst this is an increase on the 58% removal in 2006 it still means a large number of flags remain flying for more than 3 months of the year.

6. The number of paramilitary flags halved between July 2006 and July 2009 and now make up, on average, 2.8% in the summer months and 3.3% (in September/October) of the total number of flags on arterial routes. In July 2009, 73 paramilitary flags were displayed on arterial routes.

7. There has been a steady decrease in the numbers of paramilitary flags flying in September. The total number in 2009 (34) is one-third that of 2006 (107). Again, by far the largest number left flying were UVF/YCV flags (54 in 2006 and 25 in 2009).

8. Paramilitary flags are more likely to be left up than other types of flags. By contrast Loyal Order flags are more likely to be removed by the autumn.

7. Flags Monitoring Project: Case Studies

In the early stages of the project we conducted a number of case studies in areas where disputes over the use of flags had arisen. As such, the details below involve circumstances in years 2006 and 2007, two years after the Flags Protocol had been introduced. The names of places and people have been changed.

Case 1: Coney

Coney is a town with approximately 40,000 residents. More than 90% of the population would be perceived as belonging to the Protestant community. From the late 1990s the flying of loyalist paramilitary flags as well as other unionist-loyalist flags had become more common in the area. For a number of years prior to our survey, loyalist paramilitary flags were displayed in significant numbers on arterial routes and in housing estates in the area. In 2004 inter-agency work to address the issue began. Those involved included; the Community Safety Partnership, DOE Roads Service, Environmental Health, NIHE representatives, PSNI, CRO and community representatives. Elected representatives were not directly involved in the process at this stage, however, two councillors did assist the Community Relations Officer in negotiations with the Orange Order.

The NIHE District Manager noted that in this unionist-loyalist area there was little objection to Union flags or even paramilitary flags and murals and the main concern was towards more violent visual images. However, there had been a move away from this type of militaristic image. There have been unwritten agreements that no paramilitary flags will be displayed on arterial routes. At this time paramilitary flags were still flown at bonfire sites in the days leading up to 11 July bonfires and for several days after the Twelfth and paramilitary flags appeared to be primarily associated with bonfires. Some of the improvements which had taken place had come as a result of dealing with the broader environmental aspects of bonfires.

Although community involvement was not consistent in all areas of the town, agreements in some areas meant that fewer flags were displayed and for a shorter time. Discussions were also held to begin the collection of materials for bonfires in June rather than in April. The view of the NIHE District Manager was that agreement was needed before action could be taken on flags, murals and other symbols and that confrontation over such issues was counter productive.

Many of the developments in Coney preceded the introduction of the Flags Protocol in 2005 and those involved in the interagency work described much of the work and the agreements reached as 'unwritten'. The main approach was to 'build trust and negotiate contentious issues.' The Flags Protocol does not appear to have influenced the agencies subsequent approach. In particular, flags were not removed from arterial routes unless it was agreed 'by the communities' that they could be removed.

Case 2: Red Hook

Red Hook is a town of less than 4,000 residents with an arterial route running through the town centre. The population would be perceived as belonging to the Catholic community. Politically, they would be seen as republican. Although there has been a reduction in the number and duration of flags on display these are still used on St Patrick's Day, at Easter and at Gaelic sporting events. Additionally a republican memorial is located in the centre of the town and displays are also connected to this memorial. Republicans argue these symbols are expressions of culture while unionists argue that they are political. Black Hunger Strike flags were also viewed as commemorative by republicans but as political by unionists. A local republican councillor stated that while his party had a 'no flags' policy it was acceptable for people to fly flags provided they were not provocative and that there would be no such displays without discussion with residents. Multi-agency working rarely seemed to take place in Red Hook on this issue.

Where the Flags Protocol was concerned, the local District Police Partnership (DPP) manager believed that it was perceived as a Belfast document which had not come to the local District Council. One police officer felt that although the protocol was known about multi-agency working was essential in regulating displays of flags and emblems. The involvement of NIHE and DRD Roads Service was curtailed because of fears of intimidation of staff. The PSNI considered their role was to engage through community policing and consultation so that flags were not separated from other community issues and could be seen as an issue relating to the quality of everyday life for local people. Representatives from the PSNI, NIHE and DRD did not regard flags as a major issue in the area and regarded it as 'self-regulating'.

Case 3: Park Slope

Park Slope is set in a largely urban or suburban council area serving more than 100,000 people. Two-thirds of its council representation is unionist. The popular flying of flags, including in the town centre, is common during the summer months. In a number of places in the council area the flying of flags, both nationalist and unionist, has caused concern. Overall, unionist flags predominate. In recent years, the Park Slope area east of the main town, which has two main roads and a railway line running through it, has seen disputes over the flying of flags. The area has an effective interface created by a major transport link, and there have been disputes over the flying of flags which have been highlighted by councillors. The intra-loyalist feud of 2000 and loyalist insecurity surrounding the Multi-Party Agreement were suggested as reasons for the increased incidence of flag flying at this time. Discussions concerning the erecting of flags appears to have emerged following health and safety discussions about the bonfire in Park Slope. A local community worker noted that money for the flags (Union and Northern Ireland) was raised

locally and that the main local concern was the way in which the flags became tatty and were not treated with respect. Some UDA flags were flown on houses and nearby lampposts. And, in 2005 police issued some direct warnings to people that they could be prosecuted for putting flags up. In the same year, action by the police led to discussions with community groups. The PSNI and Council subsequently issued a statement saying that flags not removed by a given date would be removed by them. Eventually a private contractor was employed to remove the flags. In 2006 the PSNI and local community representatives agreed that the flags would be removed by an agreed date in September, and the flags were not forcibly removed.

The local Councils set up an ad hoc steering group to look at issues involving flags. However, some councillors were reticent about becoming involved as they believed that this might lead to the politicisation of disputes. Despite this the council has been involved in formulating a strategy with the PSNI and DRD Roads Service in the area. In addition, the PSNI in the council area, and especially in Park Slope, have been proactive in developing relationships. Flags left unclaimed or unaccounted for are removed across the council area in September. A question still remains, however, as to what should be deemed a reasonable time for the removal of flags.

Interestingly, there is also a difference of opinion as to the reasons for the changes which have occurred. From the agencies' perspective their proactive approach, in part spurred by the Flags Protocol, has led to a reduction in the flying of flags and a reduction in the number of paramilitary flags. From the perspective of those involved in parades, bonfires and flags, progress has come from within their community, particularly in regard to the issue of cleaning up areas around bonfires. A local community worker noted that the issue underlined the need for good networks and relationships to be developed in dealing with these issues.

Case 4: Williamsburg

Williamsburg is an urban working class area in an area which would be perceived as unionist or loyalist. A main road runs through the area which provides access to a hospital and a college. There is an increasingly diverse migrant population in the surrounding area and a number of hotels as well as a youth hostel. Members of the established community feel they are under threat as the area has seen an outflow of population and businesses. This has undoubtedly been a factor in maintaining the flying of flags as a form of territorial marking. There is a long history of flag displays in the area. An Orange Arch is no longer erected but loyalist paramilitary flags and murals have become more common. In the last four years, however, the number of paramilitary flags has declined and Union, Northern Ireland and Scottish flags have become more widespread. Nevertheless, paramilitary flags were displayed opposite a new residential development with diverse occupancy which had been the focus of demonstrations regarding development in the area.

When disputes over flags occurred these were mainly in more middle-class areas surrounding Williamsburg, where there were complaints that flags were erected in areas they had not been before and were left up long after the marching season.

The Orange Order in the area erected flags on the Orange Hall and used bannerettes on lampposts in the area, partly as an attempt to replace paramilitary displays. These are removed at the end of the marching season and stored away for the following year. Although most of those involved in the issue believed that flags should be removed after a certain period there was not a consistent consensus as to when this should be. Many flags were not removed until October and even then some were left flying.

Case 5: Melrose

Melrose is an urban residential area in a large metropolitan conurbation. The main arterial route running through the area is a busy commercial district with a major shopping area located a mile from the area. In 2001, almost 60% of the five thousand-plus residents identified themselves as Catholic and almost 35% as Protestant or other Christian while 2% belonged to ethnic minorities. At one end of the area was a housing estate viewed as loyalist where a paramilitary group was believed to have a significant presence. In other areas many streets have mixed occupancy though some areas were viewed as being specifically Protestant or Catholic.

Since the 1990s there have been significant disputes over the route of Orange parades but the area itself is viewed as being a relative success in terms of mixed residential communities. Community workers have noticed a decline in the number of loyalist flags (particularly paramilitary flags) and symbols in the area since the late 1990s. However, some loyalists saw the general reduction in the number of flags as a negative development. Within the Catholic community there was a tacit acceptance of the flying of flags for a limited period, and the removal of flags at the end of the parading season was often seen as the most important issue. However, one nationalist representative noted that unionists had complained strongly when GAA club flags had been erected on lampposts in a nearby area. This led to the flags being removed. Police in the area emphasised the importance of maintaining contact with key individuals in the community as an important way of managing tensions but noted that under the wrong circumstances trust built up over years could be broken in a short period of time.

The police noted that the Flags Protocol itself had little impact on what occurred on the ground. Instead, the police contacted those putting up flags, secured dates for when the flags would go up and come down and provided an increased police presence during tense periods of the year. They also worked with other agencies and agreed to provide a police presence if necessary when flags were being removed by DRD Roads Service or other agencies. A local Roads Service representative

believed that the Flags Protocol had been useful in making the PSNI the lead agency on the issue and helped clarify responsibility in negotiations. However, it has not in itself brought changes on the ground – rather these have come from within the local community.

Case Studies: Overview

The overall decline in paramilitary activity during the last decade has been accompanied by a reduction in more overt paramilitary symbolism such as the number of paramilitary flags flying or paramilitary murals in evidence. While this has had some impact in reducing community tensions it has done little to move us towards a cohesive, shared and integrated society.

In general where inter-agency work has been tried it has been successful, particularly where an inclusive cooperative approach is adopted. Where flags become a disputed issue it is preferable to look at their removal in the context of improving the environment for local residents. However, this may not be possible in every circumstance. A question remains as to who should be responsible for removing flags - those who put them up in the first place or the local District Council or other agencies?

The Orange Order have removed flags which they have erected at the end of the marching season. But this does not deal with many others erected by loyalists. In contrast, the Orange Order has been criticised by loyalists for not putting up enough flags during the marching season. The Orange Order's use of plastic bannerettes, partly in an attempt to displace paramilitary displays, has been a small, but positive step. However, there are now lampposts with both bannerettes and flags displayed.

The Role of the Flags Protocol

The Flags Protocol has had only a limited impact. In general the importance of personal contacts in dealing with these issues was emphasised. In some instances ad hoc arrangements were agreed whereby flags would be erected and removed around approximate dates. This approach might be seen as managing disputes rather than taking a broader approach consistent with the cohesion, sharing and integration of society as a whole. One agency spokesperson commenting on the Protocol noted that the PSNI was the lead agency in the area and that this had helped clarify lines of responsibility. Another view was that the Flags Protocol needed to be seen as more inclusive rather than PSNI driven.

Additionally, while the Flags Protocol called for flags to be removed from major arterial routes as a way of preventing territorial marking, some of those who erected flags noted that this was precisely their intention in putting flags up in those areas. In general many people believed that the Flags Protocol

had been ineffective. Some felt that if those responsible for erecting flags did not support it then it would remain ineffective irrespective of action taken by statutory bodies. It remained striking that many people did not know that the Protocol existed at all.

Where disputes surrounding the flying of flags had decreased there remained divergent attitudes as to whether this was the result of changes within the community involved in erecting flags or was a result of external pressure. It might be suggested that both internal and external factors played some part in each situation though the perception of the actors involved varied as to their significance.

A number of comments focussed on the fact that flag disputes were linked to other symbolic disputes over murals, memorials, bonfires and parades. While flags represent the most common form of symbolic display on main arterial routes, it is important to view this in the broader context, particularly since the same individuals may be involved in erecting flags, participating in parades and organising bonfires and that parades may be connected to specific memorials.

One of the points which comes across quite often is that those dealing with flag issues often walk a tightrope whereby a misunderstanding, changes on the ground or external factors can exacerbate an already sensitive issue. Political representatives are aware of the fact that while their role as public representatives may suggest that they should play a part in any dispute over symbols, in the wrong circumstances this may develop into a political dispute with negative results on the ground.

There remains a gap in perception between unionists and nationalists on the issue of the displaying of flags both at the local level, as illustrated by the case studies, and across Northern Ireland. Broadly speaking many unionists see nothing wrong with displaying the Union or Northern Ireland flag on main roads. Nationalists may acquiesce in these displays, provided they are time limited, but cannot be said to be comfortable with them. At best such displays may serve to provide reassurance within communities but do little to improve relations across the community as a whole.

8. MURALS

Compared to the number of flags that are displayed on arterial routes there are far fewer murals. The vast majority of the murals on arterial routes are in the Belfast area and in the Bogside area of Derry/Londonderry. Rather than make quantitative statements we felt it better to identify significant areas where paramilitary murals remain highly visible and, just as importantly, areas where there have been dramatic changes.

Picture 16 and 17 UFF/UDA Mural, Newtownards Road, April 2008

Pictures 18 and 19: UVF/Red Hand Commando murals – Glenwood Street, Shankill Road, April 2008.

Pictures 20 and 21: UVF Murals, Mount Vernon, Shore Road, Summer 2009

On the main arterial routes in Belfast it is possible to identify key areas where significant displays of paramilitary murals have been ever-present throughout this research. In some cases, the paramilitary nature of the murals is very explicit, usually in the form of hooded gunmen. This is true of loyalist murals found on the Newtownards Road, the Shankill Road, the Ballysillan Road, and the Mount Vernon area of the Shore Road.

Picture 22: Ballysillan Road, Opposite Boys Model School, April 2008

However, there are many other images displayed around Belfast that, whilst they are not explicitly paramilitary, carry great resonance. For example, on the rooftops of the New Lodge flats in North Belfast are images of Hunger Strikers.

Picture 23: Hunger Strike Murals on the New Lodge Flats, September 2009

This could equally be said to be true of commemorative murals where individuals are displayed carrying guns. One of the noticeable changes to republican murals is not that the guns have disappeared but rather that the people displayed are no longer wearing hoods.

There have been some very noticeable changes during the period in which we have been surveying flags. We are aware of work being undertaken to reimage some areas. The lower part of the Shankill Road has undergone a dramatic transformation.

Similarly paramilitary murals have gone from North Queen's Street in Tigers Bay.

Pictures 25 and 26: The lower part of the Shankill, as it is in 2010 and as it was in 2008.

There are some examples of reimaging, however, where, using displays of flags, the paramilitary element has been re-introduced. There has been a significant attempt by both loyalist paramilitary groups to use historical imagery. The UVF has utilised the Somme and the UVF of 1912 whilst the UDA has increasingly restyled itself as the Ulster Defence Union, an organisation dating from 1893.

Pictures 27 and 28: Donegall Pass in July 2009 and again in September 2009 with added UVF flags and memorial.

It is not the remit of this report to examine either the new murals or the reimaging projects taking place. We recognise that all the major paramilitary groups have gone through a process of decommissioning. This, of course, makes a difference. However, displays of flags are closely connected with murals as they are with memorials. The context in which flags are flown will influence the meanings people attach to the flags. The Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys (Appendix 1) make it clear that many people associate displays of flags on lampposts with areas that have paramilitary influence. In creating places and spaces that can be shared by all, the continued existence of images that project violence remains problematic.

Conclusions

The murals provide a backdrop on which large numbers of flags are displayed. During the period of this survey there have been some significant changes to the murals displayed on arterial routes in Northern Ireland. The vast majority of these images can be found in Belfast. There remain some very explicit paramilitary images on the arterial routes of the city. The most visible are those on the Newtownards Road, Mount Vernon, the Shankill Road and Sandy Row, where hooded gunmen still stare from the wall. However, we recognise that many other images, including those deemed to be found commemorative and historical may be viewed by some people as threatening. Thus murals found on the Falls Road, in the New Lodge and in the Bogside could be viewed as threatening whilst not projecting the same explicit menace of the image of a hooded gunman.

9. A SHARED FUTURE AND THE FLAGS PROTOCOL

The key policy arena which this report explores is that of *A Shared Future*. Whilst the Northern Ireland Executive has suggested that a replacement policy would be forthcoming, as of May 2010 no such policy has been published. Our research was designed to explore section two of *A Shared Future* (2005):

2.1 Tackling the visible manifestations of sectarianism and racism

Freeing the public realm (including public property) from displays of sectarian aggression through:

active promotion of local dialogue involving elected representatives, community leaders, police and other stakeholders to reduce and eliminate displays of sectarian and racial aggression; and

the police, in conjunction with other agencies, acting to remove such displays where no accommodation can be reached.

and

2.2 Reclaiming shared space

Developing and protecting town and city centres as safe and welcoming places for people of all walks of life.

Creating safe and shared space for meeting, sharing, playing, working and living.

Freeing the public realm from threat, aggression and intimidation while allowing for legitimate expression of cultural celebration.

Picture 29: Orange Arch and Flags, Scotch Street, Armagh City, July 2009

Whilst it is a matter of judgement as to what could be seen as displays of 'threat, aggression and intimidation', it is quite clear from the *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* (Appendix 1) that in the 2008 survey 13% of people felt intimidated by republican murals, kerbstones or flags and 15% by similar loyalist displays. Eighty-four percent of people said that they did not support the flying of flags on lampposts in their area and over 50% of people believe that flags are sometimes put up by paramilitary groups. Thirty-eight percent of people are not willing to shop in neighbourhoods with displays of loyalist flags or murals a figure that rises to 46% for republican displays. This suggests that the aspirations identified in *A Shared Future* are some way from being achieved.

The Flags Protocol (see Appendix 2) is designed to allow better working between government agencies to deal with displays of flags. This contains some very specific objectives:

2.1 To provide a proactive approach, with the support of communities and their representatives, to address:

- The removal of all flags and emblems from arterial routes and town centres;

- The removal of all paramilitary flags and displays;

- The control of displays of flags and emblems in particular areas: e.g. mixed and interface areas and near buildings such as schools, hospitals, places of worship and community halls;

- Flag flying should be limited to particular times and particular dates; and that:

  - where flags are displayed for a festive or other occasion, that the display is reasonably time-bounded and that:

  - flags, including plastic ties, tape and poles, should be removed by the community after the agreed period;

- To encourage communities to accept that flags displayed which are tattered and torn or discoloured do not enhance the environment and should be removed.

Looking at these aims, which are now five years old, our survey provides evidence of the performance of this protocol.

1. '**The removal of all flags and emblems from arterial routes and town centres'**. The Protocol does not make it clear whether the aspiration is that flags should never appear in these areas or whether this refers to removal at the end of a given time. Clearly if the protocol means that arterial routes should always be clear of flags and emblems then there has been no substantive improvement in five years. We counted 4519 items in July 2006 and 4502 in July 2009. If, as seems more realistic, the aspiration is to see the removal of flags and emblems after a time bound period, then our research suggests there are some limited improvements. Unionist flags make

up by far the largest number of flags and are put up in the June and July period. The number taken down by the end of September increase from 57.6% in 2006 to 69.6% in 2009. However, over the four years the average number of unionist flags remaining was over 1400 (compared to just over 500 nationalist). In 2009, there were still 500 flags flying at Easter. Of the overall number of displays at Easter, 60% were unionist in nature. As such, whilst there is some evidence of efforts to remove flags and emblems from arterial routes, and we believe many town centres are free of flags by September, a large number of flags remain flying throughout the winter. Flags placed on lampposts are removed less consistently then those on private houses.

2. '**The removal of all paramilitary flags and displays'**. Our survey suggests significant improvements in the removal of paramilitary flags from arterial routes. We counted 161 in July 2006 and 73 in July 2009. Whilst paramilitary flags were slightly less likely to be taken down by September than other types of flags, in 2009 they were down to 34 in September. Whilst reimaging projects have seen paramilitary murals being removed from some areas (such as Tigers Bay and the lower Shankill in Belfast), there are still significant displays of flags and murals on the Newtownards Road, the Shankill and Mount Vernon. Our survey shows that by far the largest number of paramilitary flags are now displayed by the UVF/YCV (55 flags in July 2009 compared to 14 UDA/UFF).

3. '**The control of displays of flags and emblems in particular areas: e.g.: mixed and interface areas and near buildings such as schools, hospitals, places of worship and community halls**' This can be informed as much by our observations in conducting the survey as through the statistical results. We are aware of examples where agreements have led to flags being kept away from some of these areas. However, frequently flags demarcate interface areas, and there are very striking examples of displays of flags around hospitals, schools and other facilities such as leisure centres.

4. '**Flag flying should be limited to particular times and particular dates; and that: where flags are displayed for a festive or other occasion, that the display is reasonably time-bounded and that; flags, including plastic ties, tape and poles, should be removed by the community after the agreed period.**' We have provided significant evidence as to the time bound nature of flag flying. We know that the largest number of flags are put up between early June and mid-July. Three months later many of these are taken down (in 2009 nearly 70% of unionist flags were taken down). However, on average 1400 of those unionist flags remained flying after September. Our experience of both the summer

months and Easter is that republican and nationalist flags are more usually taken down after a number of weeks.

Of course we cannot know if the limited improvements that have been seen are due to the working of the *Protocol*. We were struck by how few people know of the *Protocol*'s existence, including some police officers. *The Flags Protocol* has not been publicised and only appears on an old government *Shared Future* web site. None of the agencies that are part of the Protocol seem to display it on their web sites.

The case study and survey work leads us to the following conclusions:

1. *The Protocol* has engaged the PSNI to take a leadership role in a number of areas and we are aware of examples where this has clearly been successful. However, many people, including police officers, remain unaware the *Protocol* exists. It seems to us inexplicable that it does not appear on the web sites of all the agencies involved. The impression given remains that agencies are not committed to dealing with the issue. **Information on the Protocol should be much more readily available to the public**.

2. We are aware of examples of improved inter-agency partnership work, however, we were still made aware of cases where agencies fell short of their responsibility under the *Protocol*. In some areas inter-agency work is good, in others it is non-existent. In particular the involvement, or lack of involvement, of District Councils seems crucial. **We recommend District Councils become partners in the Protocol and that they are potentially best placed to co-ordinate agencies**.

3. A core aim of The Protocol is the removal of flags and emblems from arterial routes and town centres. Our surveys in 2006 to 2009 suggest there has been little change. However, between 2006 and 2009 there was an increase in the number of flags removed by the second census date in mid-September. **We recommend that the central strategy of the Protocol should not be the removal of flags from arterial routes and town centres, but a continued reduction in the time the flags are left flying**. Flags should be used to commemorate and celebrate, not to demarcate boundaries over significant periods of time.

4. Overwhelmingly, flags are not put up by communities, but by groups and individuals. The NILT survey suggests that most people only tolerate the practice and often would prefer flags were not put up on lampposts. Over 50% of people believe flags (the Union flag and the Tricolour, as well as paramilitary flags) on lampposts demarcate paramilitary areas. **We recommend that the language used in The Protocol is amended to remove the idea that 'communities' put up flags**.

5. Because most police officers believe that their intervention should only take place if there is a potential breach of the peace then the status quo remains that flags are left flying even when there is evidence that people are intimidated by the displays. In other words, the status quo is sometimes being dictated by paramilitaries and groups of young men.

6. **To develop a sense of responsibility in those putting up displays they should be asked to provide contact details. Areas in which flags are left on display for an excessively long time should be targeted by agencies in the following year.**

7. We have found some reduction in the displays of paramilitary flags. In addition, the NILT survey does show a reduction in the sense of intimidation over these displays and anecdotal evidence we have suggests that paramilitary flags are not being ordered in by suppliers. The nature of the UVF (1912) displays remains a problem. There has been a lack of clarity on this despite almost everyone agreeing these displays are being made by the contemporary UVF. **We recommend that more clear statements are made on what constitutes a paramilitary flag – and that if there is doubt the flag should be removed. Policies on this should be worked in conjunction with those on parades, murals and memorials**.

8. **We suggest that a standard of conduct document might accompany the Flags Protocol making clear what is and is not acceptable in relation to the display of flags in public areas**.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The broad range of qualitative and quantitative research that has been undertaken for this and previous research reports gives us a good picture of the practice of popular flag flying and other political and cultural displays in Northern Ireland. Over the last four years we have conducted eight case studies and gained knowledge of many other areas besides. From 2006 to 2009 we conducted ten large surveys of all arterial routes in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey has for some years asked attitude questions about flags and other public manifestations of culture and politics in Northern Ireland and from 2006 to 2008 there were more specific questions asked about attitudes to the flying of flags.

In the main we know who puts flags up, why and when they put the flags up, where flags are taken down, why and when they are taken down. We know that a range of flags are left up permanently or until they become tatty and fade. We have evidence as to why some of these practices take place as well as the type of flags flying, and the changes over the last fifteen years. We also have strong evidence from both the NILT survey and from the case studies of the attitudes of people in communities, politicians, workers for public agencies and the general public towards the practice of flag flying. We have some evidence on the way the practice effects local communities and economic centres. We also have evidence as to the relative effectiveness of policies and law enforcement in relation to the popular flying of flags.

Before looking at some of the conclusions it is worth repeating two fundamental aspects of the practice of flying flags which we highlighted in our previous reports.

- The practices of flying flags, painting murals and displaying banners are expressions of political and cultural identity, common all over the world, and such expressions of identity, accepting that they bring with them responsibilities, are a basic human right.

- Given that such expressions of identity can create difficulties, particularly in a society with particular political divisions like that in Northern Ireland, the most effective means by which to change what takes place is to work in partnership with people in communities to alter the nature and context of their displays of identity.

An enormous number and range of flags are flown from flag poles, buildings and lampposts in Northern Ireland. They are often displayed along with murals, memorials, bunting and bannerettes and are put up over the spring and summer months in recognition of a range of commemorations, celebrations and festivals which form part of cultural and political life in Northern Ireland.

In the last three decades there has been a shift away from the Ulster tradition of hanging a flag on the house to putting it on lampposts. We think it is important to note that cheaply produced flags are readily available. There is therefore less reason for people to look after their flags.

It is not accurate to say 'communities' put up displays although such displays may carry some significant community support. It is groups and individuals that put up displays of flags. Irish nationalist and republican flags and symbols are put up by a range of political, cultural and commemorative groups connected to the republican movement. St Patrick's Day, Easter Sunday and the commemoration of the Hunger Strikes are the key dates around which displays appear. Particularly in years in which Ulster counties have been successful, displays of GAA flags can also become significant in certain areas.

Whilst displays of flags and emblems of both the loyalist/unionist and republican/nationalist tradition are frequent there can be no doubt that more long term displays around arterial routes and town centres derive from the loyalist/unionist tradition. By far the greater number of flags are put up by loyalist and unionist cultural groups in the months of June, July and August through what is commonly called 'the marching season'. There are a range of groups involved. Although the reason for putting flags up are often parading dates such as the commemoration of the Battle of the Somme (1 July), the Battle of the Boyne (12 July) and the Siege of Derry (12 August), members of the Loyal Orders have a rather limited role in putting up displays of flags. They are usually responsible for displays around Orange halls, Orange arches and memorials. We believe that displays of flags are more commonly organised by local groups within communities, particularly bonfire committees as part of the preparation for the eleventh night, and sometimes by groups connected to the UVF and UDA.

Picture 30: Mullaghglass, September 2009

Evidence from the NILT survey suggests that more than half of the general public think that it is paramilitary groups that put Union flags and Tricolours on lampposts.

It is possible to identify places where displays of flags and emblems are more likely to take place.

• Displays on arterial routes can be found most commonly at road junctions, in town centres and where the route goes to, or close to, areas that might routinely be defined as housing estates.

• Displays sometimes reflect the existence of a nearby interface. Some flags are clearly placed in a position of such prominence so that they are designed to be seen by others outside a particular area.

• Displays appear in working-class areas rather than middle-class areas.

• Certain buildings and structures are the focus for displays – most obviously Orange halls, but also memorials, arches, bars and churches.

Whilst some displays on arterial routes are there simply because that route goes through a particular estate or town centre or past an important site, on other occasions the displays are clearly designed so all on that route should see them. This is particularly true of loyalist flags around road junctions and a number of Hunger Strike memorials designed to face on-coming traffic.

Flags and emblems frequently appear near schools and other places of education, places of worship (in some instances on the buildings themselves) and other public amenities. In particular there were a number of examples of displays of both republican and loyalist symbols outside schools and further education colleges. Flags were found around other facilities such as swimming pools and leisure centres. Some of these buildings have Union flags on them as well in accordance with existing District Council policies (see Bryan and Gillespie 2005: 35-43). We also noted a number of instances when flags were positioned in close proximity to newly built houses.

Picture 31: Flag placed near newly built houses

Picture 32: Painted Kerbstones visible outside a Primary School, Easter 2008

The case studies revealed a range of motives for the expression of identity through the displays of flags and emblems. Expressions of commemoration and tradition were clearly important and many of the practices involved offered a sense of community to those taking part. The displays were closely connected to commemorative dates and the ritual parades and bonfires with which they are associated.

There was no doubt that there was a sense of threat amongst some of the loyalists to whom we spoke. They felt that their culture and traditions were in some sense under attack. Many people that we have spoken to date an increase in flags flying to the period in the mid-1990s when disputes over parades were particularly prominent. Then from 2000 onwards the intra-loyalist feud led to an increase in paramilitary flags. In Belfast displays were clearly about demarcating UVF and UDA areas.

It is interesting that a number of loyalists we interviewed were quite frank that displays of flags were about marking territory. When we discussed why flags were put on the main roads and in the centre of town it was clear that expressions of identity were important away from the residential areas in which they lived. For example, in the area we called Park Slope, people from the nearby estate wanted to put displays in the centre of their town. It was not simply about putting displays in their area, or, to put it another way, the town centre of Park Slope was 'their' area. In Melrose, it was even suggested that given that the residential areas were mixed, the arterial route which traversed the area was the better place for displays during the marching season.

What was quite clear from the case studies was that attempting to differentiate arterial routes and town centres from residential areas was problematic and somewhat arbitrary. It was precisely the town centre which was seen to be the important site for expressions of identity. And of course the right of people to express their identity in civic area of towns and cities is a fundamental part of democracy.

As we have discussed above, what was agreed by almost everyone was that displays of flags and emblems for commemorative and festive occasions should be for a time-limited period and that to leave flags up for a long period of time, letting them become tatty and torn, was to treat important symbols with disrespect. This said, and as the survey evidences, many flags are being left up, or the time period in which they are up remains a very long one.

The displays of identity thus have both spatial and temporal aspects to them. Both of these aspects appear in the *Flags Protocol*. We suggest that the replacement policy to *A Shared Future* may be best served by concentrating on the temporal rather than the spatial aspect. In other words, to quote one of our case studies, the problem is not that there are Union flags in the town of Park Slope but that they are there for weeks and months, well beyond any period of time that could reasonably be called festive or commemorative.

And here lies what we see as the key issue provided residual displays of paramilitarism are dealt with. For how long should the flags be left flying? At the moment, even in areas where successful projects have been undertaken, or the PSNI have been involved in the removal of flags, this is often taking place in September, October and November. The marching season appears to have grown in length and it seems to be accepted that displays should at least encompass June, July and August and some claim Ulster Day (28 September).

There is, we think, a good argument for saying that flags put up over the summer months should be removed by the end of the school holidays. It could be argued that in most cases two weeks is more than enough for a reasonable recognised display of identity. If such displays were reduced to these sort of periods, then issues of arterial routes seem to us to be of lesser importance

One of the aims of this research has been to examine the workings of the *Joint Protocol in Relation to the Display of Flags in Public Areas*. This Protocol (see Appendix 2) is led by the PSNI and includes the Department for Social Development, Department for Regional Development (Roads Service), Department of the Environment – Planning Service, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. It was introduced in 2005 and was necessitated because of a lack of policy guidance over the issue of flags, a lack of co-ordinated inter-agency work, and most particularly the need to have a lead agency offer some co-ordination. Given the aims of *A Shared Future,* the *Flags Protocol* has become an important tool in achieving objectives of 'freeing the public realm from threat, aggression and intimidation while allowing for legitimate expression of cultural celebration' and 'creating safe and shared space for meeting, sharing, playing, working and living' (2.2).

*The Protoco*l has undoubtedly offered clearer guidance on the role agencies are to play in terms of dealing with issues over flags. The PSNI are the lead organisation in co-ordinating the policy. We have heard very contrary arguments as to whether the PSNI are, or are not, the best agency to fulfil this function. It has been suggested to us that given the PSNI's role in community policing, its intelligence on particular areas, the need for leadership and the potential need to have recourse to the law to stand up to levels of threat, the PSNI are clearly the most suited agency.

However, we have also heard arguments against this, including from some police officers themselves. It is argued that changes in practice over flying flags is about 'carrot and stick', and the PSNI only really wield the stick. It has also been suggested that the PSNI are not best placed to organise inter-agency work in particular areas and this is a function much better suited to

District Councils. It is pointed out in the *Protocol* itself that the police are mainly concerned with displays of flags supporting proscribed organisations or those likely to cause a breach of the peace.

What can be said is that the working of the *Protocol* can at best be described as patchy. In a number of the case studies we looked at the *Protocol* has had little or no influence on what was taking place. In some instances, as in Coney, it was because discussions were already underway with bonfire committees. However, there are other cases, such as Williamsburg where no inter-agency work had taken place even though there were good reasons, looking at the aims of the *Protocol*, to say that such work should be taking place. In this case, it was the lack of complaints which seem to be the reason for inaction.

As we have suggested before, the most successful changes take place through working with groups to alter the way they conduct displays of identity and impact on their local environment. Such projects and expertise usually involves resources, skill and time that is not open to the PSNI.

On the other hand we found some examples where the *Flags Protocol* has provided impetus for some excellent work, particularly on the part of the PSNI. In Park Slope, and indeed in that District Council generally, a number of officers had built strong relationships with local groups and had created an environment whereby it became accepted that flags be taken down after a particular period of time.

We would suggest the following weaknesses in the present running of the Protocol:

• There is still a surprising lack of knowledge over the existence of the Flags Protocol. We met people who were not aware of the Protocol and politicians that told us that their constituents remain unsure as to who they should contact regarding fears they had over displays of flags.

• The emphasis on arterial routes is over-stated and it is the time-bound nature of displays that should be concentrated upon.

• There was simply no organising mechanism at the local level. The agencies might all have been part of the agreement but frequently were not working at the local level. There were of course notable examples of inter-agency working and some particularly good projects involving the NIHE.

• The Protocol did not include District Councils. We know of at least two District Councils where ad-hoc sub-committees have played an important role in coordinating and encouraging inter-agency working.

As important as these issues are however, and for the reasons stated above, we wonder whether it is worth revisiting the aims of the *Protocol* in light of a more complex reading of *A Shared Future*. In particular, that less importance is placed on certain spatial aspects – arterial routes and town centres – but much more stress is placed on the temporal aspects – the times and dates – of displays.

We recommend that Flags Protocol be restructured to include District Councils and we believe strong consideration should be given to local councils being the lead agencies. We strongly recommend that a revised Protocol re-emphasise the need for displays of flags to be time bound. As a long-term objective, flags should not be flying for more than two weeks after a particular festival or anniversary. To further reduce paramilitary displays particular effort should be made to reduce the number of UVF/YCV flags that are flying. It might be helpful to develop a voluntary code of conduct for the displays of flags and emblems to which local groups might adhere.

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Appendix 1: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2008

Has there been any time in the last year when you personally have felt intimidated by republican murals, kerb paintings, or flags?

	%
Yes	13
No	86
Don't know	1

Results for people of different religions

	%		
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion
Yes	9	16	13
No	90	83	87
Don't know	1	1	1

And has there been any time in the last year when you personally have felt intimidated by loyalist murals, kerb paintings, or flags?

	%
Yes	15
No	84
Don't know	1

Results for people of different religions

	%		
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion
Yes	20	11	18
No	79	89	81
Don't know	1	1	1

In general, would you, or do you support flag flying on lampposts in your own neighbourhood?

	%
Yes	11
No	84
Other...	1
Don't mind/don't care	3
Don't know	1

Results for people of different religions

	%		
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion
Yes	7	14	10
No	89	81	85
Other...	1	2	0
Don't mind/ don't care	3	3	3
Don't know	1	1	3

Thinking about flags being flown on lampposts in Northern Ireland, in your opinion, who usually puts Up Union flags on lampposts?

	% identifying each group
Town councils	9
Political parties	20
Cultural groups	20
Paramilitary groups	66
Other community groups	13
Isolated individuals	27
Don't know	6

Thinking about flags being flown on lampposts in Northern Ireland, in your opinion, who usually puts up Irish Tricolour flags on lampposts?

	% identifying each group
Town councils	3
Political parties	24
Cultural groups	20
Paramiltary groups	69
Other community groups	14
Isolated individuals	27
Don't know	6

Thinking about flags flown on lampposts on main streets in Northern Ireland, when do you think it is legitimate to display Union flags on main streets?

	%
All year round	5
Only for a few weeks round special events	44
For the months around special events	11
Never	29
It depends	8
Can't choose	4

And thinking about flags flown on lampposts on main streets in Northern Ireland, when do you think it is legitimate to display Irish Tricolours on main streets?

	%
All year round	3
Only for a few weeks around special events	31
For the months around special events	7
Never	45
It depends	10
Can't choose	4

Would you be less willing to shop in neighbourhoods with displays of loyalist flags or murals, more willing or would it make no difference?

	%
Less willing	38
More willing	4
Would make no difference	53
Can't choose	5

Results for people of different religions

	%		
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion
Less willing	56	26	37
More willing	0	7	5
Would make no difference	39	63	52
Can't choose	5	5	7

Would you be less willing to shop in neighbourhoods with displays of republican flags or murals, more willing or would it make no difference?

	%
Less willing	46
More willing	3
Would make no difference	46
Can't choose	5

Results for people of different religions

	%		
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion
Less willing	32	58	44
More willing	6	1	1
Would make no difference	56	38	49
Can't choose	5	3	6

Appendix 2: Joint Protocol in Relation to the Display of Flags in Public Areas

Agencies:

Police Service of Northern Ireland
Department for Social Development
Department for Regional Development, Roads Service
Department of the Environment – Planning Service
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

1.0.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The display of flags, in the Northern Ireland context, is an emotive issue, which has existed for some time. Flags may be used for many purposes which can include:

    (a)   celebration of cultural identity;
    (b)   marking a festive event;
    (c)   sectarianism or intimidation;
    (d)   marking out of territory.

1.2   The use of flags in instances such as celebration or festivity are not normally an issue. However, the use of flags for other more sinister purposes is of more concern and is unacceptable in a peaceful and tolerant society.

1.3   The issue of flags supporting proscribed organisations is clearer in that the display of such flags is illegal. What can be less clear is what constitutes such a flag, in the eyes of the law.

1.4   Often the reason for the display of flags is perceived in different ways by different members of the community. What seems perfectly acceptable to one side is an insult or worse, to the other side.

1.5   There are often misconceptions regarding the powers of police and other agencies in dealing with flags issues. In particular, police are mainly concerned with the display of flags supporting proscribed organisations, where flags are likely to cause a breach of the Peace or for other possible criminal intent. It is reasonable to say that in recent times, there has been a willingness, in some areas, to adopt a new attitude to the display of flags and related issues, which has helped improve the environment in these areas. However, there are many examples of aggressive displays, which aim to intimidate and harass.

1.6   This protocol sets out an agreed partnership approach in dealing with flags issues between the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Department of the Environment, Department for Regional Development, Department for Social Development, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. In time it is hoped that all local councils will examine this protocol and adopt it as a way forward for the community in Northern Ireland.

2.0   JOINT AIMS

2.1   To improve the environment by removing the display of paramilitary flags or flags of a sectarian nature.

2.2   To develop a partnership approach, which allows the agencies involved to impact on the flags issue in a cohesive manner.

2.3   To develop a strategic and graduated response to the flags issue which involves consultation, shared understanding, negotiation and, if necessary, proportionate and legal use of enforcement methods.

2.4   To provide a proactive approach, with the support of communities and their representatives, to address:

- The removal of all flags and emblems from arterial routes and town centres;

- The removal of all paramilitary flags and displays;

- The control of displays of flags and emblems in particular areas: e.g.: mixed and interface areas and near buildings such as schools, hospitals, places of worship and community halls;

- Flag flying should be limited to particular times and particular dates; and that:

    - where flags are displayed for a festive or other occasion, that the display is reasonably time-bounded and that:

    - flags, including plastic ties, tape and poles, should be removed by the community after the agreed period;

- To encourage communities to accept that flags displayed which are tattered and torn or discoloured do not enhance the environment and should be removed.

3.0   CORE ISSUES

3.1   This protocol and any actions arising therefrom will take cognisance of the contents of the Human Rights Act 1998 and, in particular:

Article 5 - Right to liberty and security.
Article 6 - Right to a fair trial.
Article 7 - No punishment without law.
Article 8 - Right to respect for private and family life.
Article 9 - Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
Article 10 - Freedom of Expression.
Article 14 - Prohibition of Discrimination.
Protocol 1 of Article 1 - Protection of Property.

3.2   In particular, any actions under this protocol must be necessary, proportionate and legal in line with the general principles of Human Rights.

3.3 Whichever agency is placed in the most effective position to consult, negotiate or resolve situations, will take the lead and will be supported by the other partners within their remit and specialism. Where the display is one that is causing community tension or is affecting the quality of life for a community, then the police will take the lead.

3.4 In addition, in carrying out their functions under this protocol, the various partners will take cognisance of their statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and, in particular, their duty of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

3.5 Each partner agrees to keep other partners abreast of changes in policy, operations or actions, which may affect this protocol or operational decisions deriving from it.

3.6 Each partner will provide its support or services, for operational action, within its own budgets in a spirit of mutual operational support.

4.0   KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 The Police Service will support partners and, where best placed, will take forward consultation and negotiation with local community representatives where the display of flags is an issue.

4.2 Where necessary, the Police Service will take the lead in the removal of flags where the partner agency is unable to take action, and where negotiation and consultation have failed or where such items must be seized as evidence for Court purposes.

4.3 Where other partners seek to remove flags and any disorder or other criminality is evident or likely to occur, the Police Service will provide support or take the lead, where appropriate.

4.4 Where the Police Service seek to take action or initiate prosecution regarding flags issues, partner agencies will provide any evidential material, which they have, to support such action or prosecution.

4.5 Roads Service, when called upon by a lead Agency, will provide partnership support facilities such as Mobile Extendable Working Platforms ('Tower Wagons') to take down unwanted flags that have been agreed but not removed by the community themselves.

4.6 The Northern Ireland Housing Executive will take the lead where it is proposed to address the removal of flags as part of a broader environmental improvement project; or where requested by local community representatives.

4.7 The role of the DOE Planning services in relation to flags will stem from the application of the Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations (NI) 1992 and action will be taken, in consultation with the PSNI and other partner agencies, where circumstances permit.

5.0   INFORMATION EXCHANGE

5.1 Each partner agrees to provide relevant and necessary information to other partner agencies, to support actions being taken in relation to flags issues.

5.2 The exchange of information will be subject to confidentiality, where so indicated.

5.3 No exchange of information will take place where this is likely to contravene the Data Protection Act, or similar legislation or a confidentiality agreement.
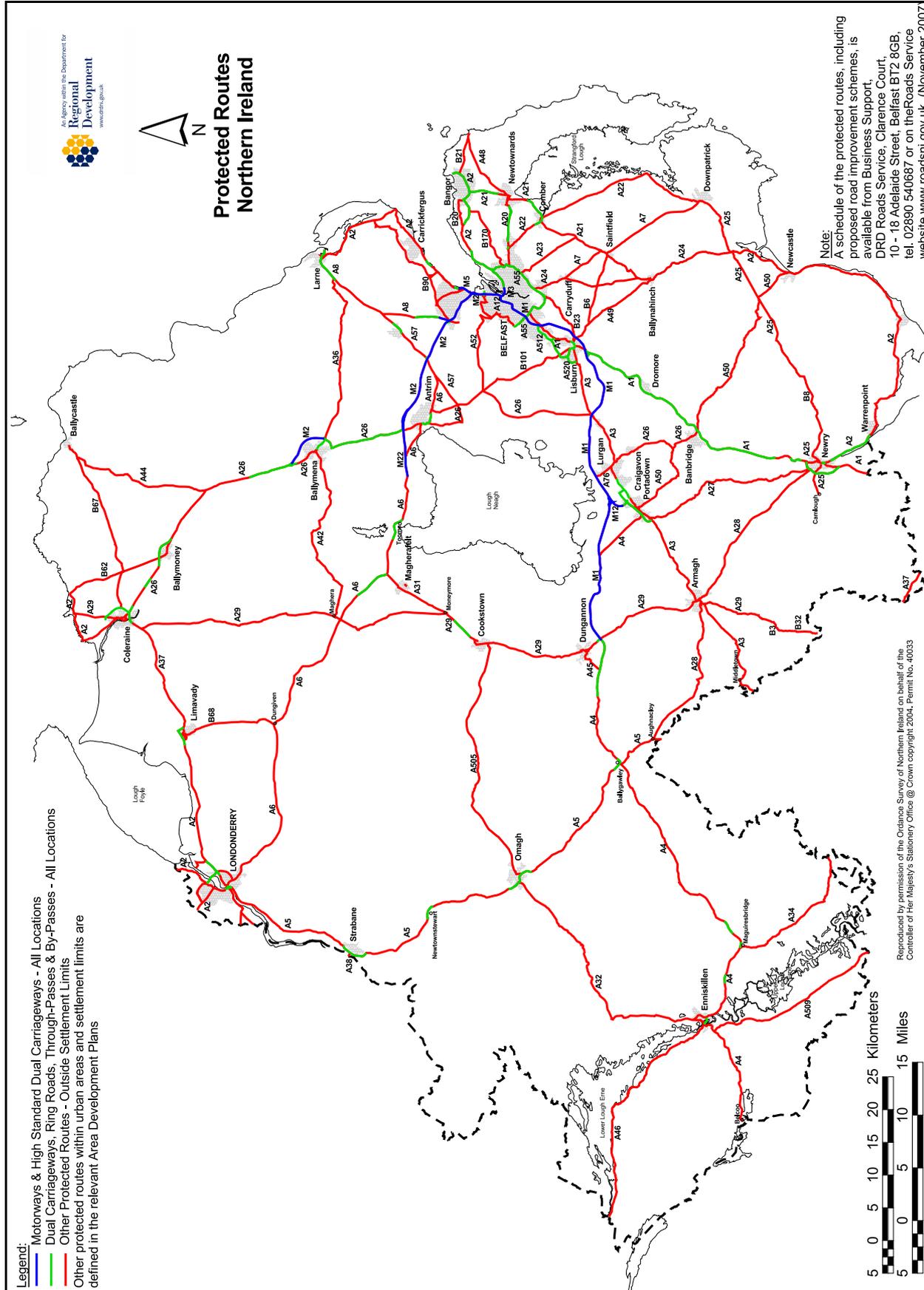
6.0   MEASURING SUCCESS

6.1 It is difficult to measure success in these matters as a result of this protocol and its operation. There are many extraneous factors, which can influence these situations.

6.2 The qualitative measure of success will be an improvement in the environment leading towards a more peaceful and tolerant society.

6.3 Quantitative measures may include the number of complaints regarding flags; the number removed voluntarily, the number removed by enforcement, and the number of prosecutions.

7.0   REVIEW

7.1 This protocol will be subject to review after its first year or earlier if necessary.

Appendix 3: Protected Routes in Northern Ireland (2005)

Protected Routes
Northern Ireland

Legend:
Motorways & High Standard Dual Carriageways - All Locations
Dual Carriageways, Ring Roads, Through-Passes & By-Passes - All Locations
Other Protected Routes - Outside Settlement Limits
Other protected routes within urban areas and settlement limits are
defined in the relevant Area Development Plans

Note:
A schedule of the protected routes, including
proposed road improvement schemes, is
available from Business Support,
DRD Roads Service, Clarence Court,
10 - 18 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8GB,
tel. 02890 540687 or on theRoads Service
website www.roadsni.gov.uk. (November 2007)

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