Priced out of peace: the relationship between ethnonational and socioeconomic grievances in Northern Ireland

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After almost thirty years of conflict and 3000 fatalities, the Northern Ireland peace agreement promised peace. However, while there was a significant reduction in violence, the post-peace years were marked by increasing polarisation, low-level sectarian violence and outbreaks of rioting and unrest. The most recent outbreak was in Spring 2021 and is the case-study for this research. Using content-analysis of newspaper articles and interviews with local actors, this research investigates the relationship between ethnonational and socioeconomic grievances in violent collective action in Northern Ireland. It found that decremental and aspirational deprivation were present as grievances in the Spring 2021 riots, and further shows the impact of socioeconomic grievances on this instance of ethnonational collective action.

In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement promised peace, hope and prosperity for Northern Ireland (Coulter, 2019, p. 124). However, this is not yet a reality for working-class communities almost a quarter of a century later (Coulter, 2019, 2018; Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017; Mac Ginty, 2007). This was made clear in Spring 2021 when Northern Ireland experienced significant unrest, the latest in a pattern of rioting since 1998. Rioting involving petrol bombs, fireworks and the hijacking of a bus broke out among young people in loyalist communities (Kenny, 2021). Ethnonational grievances and socioeconomic grievances were frequently cited as reasons for the violence (Butterly, 2021; McGarvey & Sproule, 2021; Noonan, 2021b; O'Carroll, 2021). These grievances have long intersected in Northern Ireland. The Northern Irish conflict developed from a civil rights movement among working class Catholics (Tonge, 2002) and fatalities were predominately in working-class communities (Coulter, 2019, p. 124; Mesev et al., 2009). Existing research highlights the enduring strength of ethnonationalist sentiment in working-class communities and a feeling that the peace process has not yet reached them (Cassidy, 2008; Coulter, 1999; Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017; Mac Ginty, 2007). Similarly, the wider post-conflict and peacebuilding literature highlights the impact of class and socioeconomic deprivation in driving instability in post-conflict societies (Iñiguez de Heredia, 2018; Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017; Wade, 2008). The relationship between persistent socioeconomic grievances within working-class communities and outbreaks of unrest in Northern Ireland has not yet been explored. This

echoes questions in the wider literature on how socioeconomic grievances are expressed post-conflict. My research addresses this gap by asking; do socioeconomic grievances contribute to violent ethnonational collective action in Northern Ireland, through a case study of the Spring 2021 riots?

This research applies Ted Robert Gurr's theory of relative deprivation. Gurr argues that the greater the perception of deprivation in a population, the increased potential for collective violence (Gurr, 1970, p.18) By applying this theory to the Northern Irish Spring 2021 riots, I show that aspirational deprivation, in the form of the poor socioeconomic conditions in working-class communities, and decremental deprivation, in the form of the declining ethnonational power in unionist communities, both contributed to the outbreak of rioting. This thesis is divided into five sections. In section one, I will define the key concepts relevant to my research and provide a short overview of Northern Ireland post-conflict. The second section consists of the literature review. I will discuss the existing literature on socioeconomic and ethnonational grievances in post-conflict Northern Ireland, the wider literature on socioeconomic grievances, and outline my theoretical framework. Thirdly, I will describe my methodology. Finally, I will present and analyse my findings.

Concepts & Context

Ted Robert Gurr applies the concept of relative deprivation to explain violent collective action. Gurr defines relative deprivation as "a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities" (Gurr, 1970, p.13). Meaning the difference between what a group believes they deserve or earned and what they have or can realistically achieve. Grievances in more recent literature are defined in relation to horizontal inequalities, which is a material definition of grievances based on a group's objective inequality compared to a country's mean or another group (Siroky et al, 2020, p.696). This

fails to fully capture the role of grievances in collective action, as it does not account for a group's perception of their position within a society (Siroky et al., 2020, p. 697). Therefore this research relies solely on Gurr's concept of relative deprivation. Gurr also defines three dimensions of violent collective action. The dimension of turmoil is the most relevant to this research and is defined as relatively spontaneous political violence such as riots (Gurr, 1970, p. 11). Furthermore, as turmoil does not require extensive organisation my research does not focus on the opportunity and capacity aspect of collective action.

The dominant ethnonational identities in Northern Ireland are nationalists and unionists. Nationalists are predominately Catholic and aspire for Northern Ireland to integrate with the Republic of Ireland, while unionists are predominately Protestant and aspire for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom (McGarry & O'Leary, 2009; Tonge, 2002, pp.1-3). There is a subsection within unionism called loyalism, characterised by loyalty to the crown and the union, associated with working-class communities (Cassidy, 2008, pp. 411-412; Tonge, 2002, p. 3). There is also growing support for a neutral or Northern Irish identity, which is neither nationalist or unionist (Hayward & MacManus, 2019). This research uses the identifiers nationalist, unionist, loyalist or neutral however, in the case of literature which collects data along religious lines the identifiers Catholics and Protestants are used.

Who	**Constitutional Position**	**Religion**	**Political Parties and other groups**	**Paramilitaries**	**Post 1998**
Nationalist	Aspires for Northern Ireland to reunite with the Republic of Ireland	Predominately Catholic.	Sinn Féin and SDLP	Associated with the IRA. Associated with dissident Republican groups currently active.	Both middle and working class.
Unionist	Aspires for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom.	Predominately Protestant.	DUP, UUP, TUV, PUP Other: Orange	Associated with the UVF,UDA and UFF. Loyalist Community	Both middle and working-class.

			Order	Council speaks for paramilitary groups currently active.	
Loyalist	Same as above.	Same as above.	Same as above.	Same as above.	Working-class.
Neutral	Neutral on or does not prioritise the constitutional question.	Mixed.	Alliance, Green Party, People Before Profit.	No association with paramilitaries.	Predominately middle-class.

Fig. 1: Northern Irish Identities

The Northern Irish conflict was essentially a struggle between two opposing ethnonational ambitions; unionism and nationalism. It developed out of a civil rights movement against Catholic discrimination in the majority Protestant Northern Ireland. The conflict ended in 1998 when the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement (GFA)[1], passed with 71.1% in support (Tonge, 2002, pp. 190-191). Many within the unionist community opposed the agreement however significantly, loyalist communities predominately supported the agreement (Tonge, 2002, p. 191). After almost thirty years of violence and over 3600 fatalities (Tonge, 2002, p. 1) the conflict ended ushering in an uneasy peace.

Since then, policies aimed at tackling the socioeconomic disparity between Catholics and Protestants have been largely successful and led to the emergence of a Catholic middle-class. However, literature has repeatedly highlighted the marginalisation of both nationalist and unionist working-class communities due to neoliberal economic policies and austerity (Coulter, 2014, 2018; Tomlinson, 2016, Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017). Policies aimed at attracting substantial foreign investment have failed and the foreign companies that have invested post-conflict have largely been temporary, with low job creation and low pay (O'Hearn, 2008). Similarly public-sector and welfare cutbacks due to austerity have profoundly impacted Northern Ireland, as many of the population are highly reliant on these

[1] It is also referred to as the Belfast Agreement or Peace Agreement.

services due to legacies of the conflict (Tomlinson, 2016). This economic marginalisation impacts unionist and nationalist communities differently. Today, the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland are still predominately Catholic (Knox, 2016, p. 489; Mohan et al.; 2020, p. 796), however, Protestants have higher levels of educational underachievement and young working-class Protestant men are more likely to be unemployed than young working-class Catholic men (Knox, 2016, p. 489; Tomlinson, 2016 p. 109).

Finally, while violence overall has decreased since the GFA, there have been persistent outbreaks of disorder, such as riots in 2009, 2012, 2014 and 2019, and continued low-level sectarian violence particularly in interface areas, meaning borders between Catholic and Protestant populations, and working-class communities (Balcells et al., 2016; Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017, p. 233; Knox, 2016, p. 488; McDonald, 2014; O'Neill, 2019). It is in this context that the Spring 2021 riots took place.

The unrest began on Monday the 29th March in loyalist communities in Derry/Londonderry and continued until the 9th April across at least seven towns and urban areas in Northern Ireland (Kenny, 2021). There was rioting and violence, as well as non-violent collective action in the form of parades and peaceful protests. The violence was predominately involving young people in loyalist areas although from the 7th April onwards rioting involving both nationalist and loyalist young people broke out along interface areas (Kenny, 2021). Bricks, fireworks and petrol bombs were used to target police officers and vehicles, as well as people and property in the wider vicinity (Kenny, 2021). This clearly falls into the category of turmoil, as defined by Gurr.

There are divisions regarding the reasons for the rioting. Unionist political parties repeatedly emphasized anger at the Northern Irish Protocol[2] and the decision not to prosecute attendees of the Bobby Storey funeral[3] (Hirst, 2021; O'Carroll, 2021). Following the decision not to prosecute on 29th March, there were widespread protests from Unionist communities, some of which led to outbreaks of violence (Castle, 2021; Kenny, 2021; Simpson, 2021; Black et al. 2021). The concentration of the rioting in working-class areas suggests that socioeconomic factors played a role, and this is reflected in many commentors references to the socioeconomic conditions of the communities, the impact of austerity and political alienation as drivers of the riots (Butterly, 2021; Forrest, 2021; Noonan, 2021b; McGarvey & Sproule, 2021). The presence of both ethnonational and socioeconomic grievances in commentator's explanations for the riots, the concentration of sustained violence along interface areas, as well as the large amount of media coverage and resources available, make this a strong case-study to examine the impact of socioeconomic grievances on violent ethnonational collective action in Northern Ireland.

Literature Review

The first section of the literature review will address the relationship between socioeconomic and ethnonational grievances in Northern Ireland and will briefly outline the wider literature on the impact of socioeconomic deprivation on conflict. I will then discuss the theoretical framework for this research.

Since 1998, a number of authors have raised concerns regarding post-conflict development in Northern Ireland. A common observation is growing disengagement among working-class communities with the peace process (Coulter, 2014, 2018; Holland &

[2] This is an aspect of the Brexit withdrawal agreement that came into effect in January 2021, it implemented a customs border between Britain and Northern Ireland

[3] This was the funeral of a former IRA member attended in large numbers by Sinn Féin in 2020, despite Covid-19 restrictions (Hirst, 2021; O'Carroll, 2021).

Rabrenovic, 2017; MacGinty, 2006). Holland and Rabrenovic describe "ritualistic sectarian battles" as a result of boredom and hopelessness among young people in working-class communities (Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017, p. 233). This sectarian violence occurs to a lesser extent in nationalist communities than in loyalist communities (Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017, p. 238). This echoes a trend in the literature. Loyalist communities feel that they have not benefitted from the peace process in the same way that nationalist communities have and this sentiment drives ethnonational tensions (Knox, 2016, pp. 488-489; MacGinty, 2006, p. 9; O'Hearn, 2008, p. 104; Tomlinson, 2016, p. 109).

However, the strength of this sectarian sentiment is not universal. Non-sectarian identity is growing in Northern Ireland (Hayward & MacManus, 2019; Tonge, 2020). There are significant middle-class signifiers among those who support a non-sectarian identity. Those identifying as neither unionist or nationalist are more likely to have a qualification, be in paid employment, and earn a high income than those who identify as nationalist or unionist (Hayward & MacManus, 2019, pp. 145-148). However, the data also shows that 41% of those who identify as neither unionist or nationalist left school before their A-levels (Hayward & MacManus, 2019, p. 146). Similarly, one third of Alliance voters in the 2017 election were working-class (Tonge, 2017, p. 463). This suggests a rejection of sectarian sentiment among some in working-class communities.

This is strengthened by research on growing class-based identities within loyalism (Cassidy, 2008). Interviewees suggest that this has emerged due to dissatisfaction with unionist elected officials who some feel have abandoned the working-class unionist communities (Cassidy, 2008, pp. 416-417). This new class-based identity has led to increased cross-community initiatives and identification with working-class nationalist communities (Cassidy, 2008, pp. 426-428). However, it is important to note that it doesn't necessarily replace ethnonationalist identity. For those interviewed, class identity is another form or

aspect of their loyalist identity (Cassidy, 2008, p. 415). However, one that is less overtly sectarian and recognises that in working-class areas, regardless of nationalist or unionist, "people all have the same problems" (Cassidy, 2008, p. 426). This reveals a complex relationship between socioeconomic and ethnonational grievances among loyalists.

In the wider literature, one of the most prominent theorists on the impact of socioeconomic grievances on peace and post-conflict societies is Johan Galtung. In 1969, Galtung defined the concept of structural violence. This is violence that is built into the structure of society and manifests itself through unequal life chances (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). Galtung recognised this as a significant disruptor to peace, even in societies where there is little to no physical violence. A similar concept is echoed by Edward Azar in relation to conflict in the Middle East. Azar argued that the failure to reduce inequalities in society during and post-conflict will undermine peace efforts (Azar, 1979). More recent research recognises a similar pattern in post-conflict El Salvador (Wade, 2008). Wade argues that neo-liberal policies have failed to address poverty and inequality in the country leading to the undermining of peace in the region (Wade, 2008, p. 29). Research by Marta Iniguez de Heredia in 2018 shows that class inequalities can undermine peace-building efforts by motivating conflict, although this conflict is not necessarily expressed along class lines (Iñiguez de Heredia, 2018). Christopher Cramer (2003) goes further in explaining the causal link between socioeconomic grievances and conflict. Cramer focuses specifically on economic inequality; he argues that economic inequality linked to a country's social, political and cultural history; is more likely to explain conflict than macrolevel income inequality (Cramer, 2003, pp. 405, 409).

Ted Robert Gurr's theory of relative deprivation provides a way to link the ethnonational and socioeconomic influences of the Northern Irish conflict. Relative deprivation is the gap between what a group believes they deserve and what they can

realistically achieve (Gurr, 1970, p. 13). Gurr's theory predicts that intensity of perceived deprivation increases the potential for violent collective action (Gurr, 1970, p. 23). He outlines three patterns of relative deprivation, two of which can be easily mapped onto the Northern Irish context; decremental deprivation and aspirational deprivation.

Decremental deprivation is defined as a group's value expectations (what they believe they deserve) remaining stable over time, while their attainable value (what they can realistically achieve) decreases over time (Gurr, 1970, p. 46). This mirrors the ethnonational grievances of unionist communities in Northern Ireland. The outbreaks of rioting in 2009, 2012 and 2014 largely occurred in response to attempts to limit the prevalence of unionist iconography and traditions such as reducing the number of days per year the Union Jack is flown on government or council buildings and rerouting parades away from nationalist communities (Balcells et al., 2016; Knox, 2016; McDonald, 2014). The expectations of the unionist community regarding expressions of their ethnonational identity has remained stable, while power-sharing has frustrated and diminished it's attainability. This is not mirrored among nationalist communities, as their ability to express their ethnonational identity has strengthened since the GFA. Thus decremental deprivation is applicable to the ethnonationalist grievances of the unionist community post GFA.

Aspirational deprivation is the second pattern of relative deprivation. This is defined as an increase in a group's value expectations without any change in their attainable value (Gurr, 1970, p. 50). This may reflect the socioeconomic grievances among working-class communities in Northern Ireland. As previously stated the GFA promised a peace dividend; increased investment and prosperity in Northern Ireland (Coulter, 2018; Knox, 2016). There was an increase in expectations among the people of Northern Ireland following almost thirty years of violence. However, in working-class communities these expectations have not been met (Coulter, 2014, 2018; Knox, 2016; Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017; Tomlinson, 2016).

Thus the socioeconomic grievances of both unionist and nationalist working-class communities post GFA, can be understood as aspirational deprivation.

The presence of either of these patterns of deprivation can increase a group's capacity for collective action (1970, pp. 46 – 52). Thus, according to this theoretical framework working-class unionists (or loyalists) have the highest potential for collective action as they are subject to both aspirational and decremental deprivation, which reflects trends in the literature as cited above. By applying this to the Spring 2021 riots, I have formulated the following hypotheses:

H1 : The declining ethnonational power of unionism post-GFA was a grievance among unionists in the Spring 2021 riots.

H2: The stagnation of socioeconomic circumstances post-GFA was a grievance among working-class communities in the Spring 2021 riots.

H3: The declining ethnonational power of unionism post-GFA and the stagnation of socioeconomic circumstances post-GFA were grievances among working-class, unionist communities in the Spring 2021 riots.

There are two limitations to Gurr's theory which must be addressed; multiple grievances and the collective action problem. I firstly address multiple grievances. The intersection of decremental and aspirational deprivation in loyalist communities reveal two potential drivers of collective action. Gurr's framework does not directly address how grievances may overlap or intersect. Theories of collective action which cite multiple or intersecting grievances often argue that elite manipulation explains the dominance of one grievance or the incorporation of multiple grievances under one ideology (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). In Roger Petersen's 2017 theory on the interaction of emotions and ideology, he emphasizes the role of leadership in framing emotions and thus shaping ideology and

collective action (Petersen, 2018, p. 935). However, emphasizing the role of elites collective action suggests a lack of agency on the part of the mobilised group. This contradicts Gurr's theory, which centres a group's perceptions of their position within society as drivers of collective action. It also contrasts with existing literature on Northern Ireland which shows an indication of distrust among working-class unionists with the political elite (Cassidy, 2008).

Stathis Kalyvas' theory on political violence presents an alternative to elite manipulation. Kalyvas criticises the tendency to infer the binary dynamics of a master cleavage onto all instances of political violence (Kalyvas, 2003, p. 487). In doing this, observers fail to acknowledge that motivations driving political violence are inherently complex and ambiguous (Kalyvas, 2003, p. 476). Kalyvas' argument focuses exclusively on the role of local dynamics and feuds in driving political action, however, it is possible to adapt this theory to other potential grievances. In Northern Ireland the master cleavage is opposing ethnonational ideologies. However, as the literature reveals; socioeconomic grievances may also be a factor. Frustrations with unemployment and a lack of hope for the future within working-class communities may be potential drivers of collective action. Actors may be driven by grievances outside the master cleavage, or actors may be driven by both the master cleavage and separate grievances (Kalyvas, 2003, p. 475). Thus, political violence in Northern Ireland, even violence between nationalists and unionists, is not automatically driven by or an expression of ethnonational grievances. In order to test if this theory explains how grievances are expressed in the Spring 2021 riots and to rule out elite manipulation, I have formulated this theory into the following hypothesis:

H4: Elites and local actors will cite different grievances as reasons for the Spring 2021 riots.

I will now address the second limitation of Gurr's theory; it does not include a mechanism which resolves the collective action problem. The collective action problem states that "rational, self-interested individuals" will participate in collective action as it is easier to do nothing while others act (Olson, 2016; p.60). Although, the unit of analysis for my research is the group and the collective action problem focuses on the individual, resolving this problem is important to understanding why and how these grievances led to violent collective action. Thus, increasing the explanatory power of my theory. The most prominent theory is rational choice theory which argues that coercion or selective incentives must be present to explain collective action (Olson, 2015, pp. 60, 63). Thus, grievances alone cannot explain the Spring 2021 riots, rioters must be either coerced or incentivised to riot. However an alternative theory from Sidney Tarrow (2012), emphasizes repertoires of collective action. He argues that particular groups have a culturally resonant forms of collective action and that these as well as dense social networks lower the costs of collective action (Tarrow, 2012, pp. 19, 20,114). Tarrow's theory focuses largely on organised social movements however, the mechanism motivating collective in social movements may still be present in disorganised collective action, such as riots.

In summary, I expect aspirational (socioeconomic) and decremental (ethnonational) deprivation to be present as grievances in the Spring 2021 riots (H1, H2 and H3). As Gurr's theory is based on perceived deprivation, validating the legitimacy of these grievances is beyond the scope of my research. Kalyvas' theory on political violence is used to understand how aspirational and decremental deprivation interact, with the expectation that local actors and elites will cite different grievances as reasons for the riot (H4). Finally, understanding the mechanism which led to mobilisation will be necessary in order to determine how it interacts with aspirational and decremental deprivation. This approach will guide my methodology and subsequent analysis, I will now outline the methodology for this research.

Methodology

I will test these hypotheses using qualitative content analysis, relying on media coverage of the riots supplemented by interviews with local actors. In this section I will firstly outline how I have operationalised these hypotheses. I will then discuss the data collection methods and limitations to my research. Finally I will describe my approach to qualitative content analysis.

Testing the first three hypotheses requires me to determine if the grievances and actors hypothesized were present in the riots. As previously mentioned, media coverage of the riots repeatedly stated that they occurred predominately in working-class areas and predominately involved unionists. Due to limited data on the riot participants themselves, I consider the area in which rioting occurred as an indicator of the rioters' background. To determine the socioeconomic status of an area, I use the Northern Irish Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)'s multiple deprivation measure, this measure ranks 890 areas in Northern Ireland from most to least deprived (NISRA, 2017a). I will also take into account informal indicators of deprivation by local actors.

In order to determine if aspirational and decremental deprivation were grievances in the Spring 2021 riots, I must address their temporality. Gurr's concept of relative deprivation is temporal, as are my hypotheses which refer to 'declining' and 'stagnating'. Therefore, I will use attitudes towards the GFA in the media coverage and interviews as indicators of decremental and aspirational deprivation. I will compare grievances with the GFA with grievances cited during the riots, to identify patterns between the grievances. As mentioned above, there is limited data on riot participants, therefore I use the grievances of local actors as indicators of the grievances of the riot participants. Local actors are defined as persons whose work is directly based in the community or are resident in the community where

rioting occurred, this includes riot participants themselves, community workers, teacher, political councillors, or clerics. The area where they are from, as well as ethnonational indicators such as party-support or ethnonational grievances are used as indicators of the ethnonational identity of the actors. Newspapers that have an explicit ethnonational identity such as the Belfast News Letter (Unionist) and the Irish News (Nationalist) are coded as such.

To test H4, I compare the grievances expressed by local actors with elites. Elites are defined as persons who are in high-paying or high-profile jobs, such as members of the Northern Irish Parliament or high-profile civil servants.

In this section I outline my data collection method and approach to qualitative content analysis. Due to limited resources, I chose to conduct an analysis of media and first-hand accounts of the riots supplemented by interviews with local actors. The large amount of media attention the riots attracted provide ample resources for analysis. However, the data was often repetitive and prioritised the views of political elites. To address this, I limited my search to articles which include interviews with local actors and prioritised local media written during the period of the riots. I sourced media through Factiva, Google, Google Scholar and YouTube. Details of the search parameters are available in Appendix 1.

Media accounts of events can often be biased and skew towards sensationalist stories. I attempt to address this by including interviews with six local actors in my research, their details are in the table below.[4] I identified local actors through the media coverage and used the snowball method to contact further actors. I employed a semi-structured interview style and adopted Beth Leech's (2002) approach to question order. You can find the interview questions in Appendix 2. I began by asking descriptive questions about the riot to situate the interviewees in that period, I asked potentially sensitive questions, such as opinions on the

[4] Interviewees without a last name are pseudonyms.

GFA towards the end of the interview. It is important to note that as I am Irish, local actors may automatically designate me as belonging to a particular side. This may have impacted how interviewees perceived and answered questions however, I attempted to address this by making it explicit to interviewees that my priority was understanding their experiences and opinions.

Interview No.	**Name**	**Occupation**	**Present at riots**	**Ethnonational identity**
1	Alan	Religious leader, Shankill	Yes	Not disclosed
2	Beth	Religious leader, Shankill	Yes	Unionist
3	Charles	Councillor, Londonderry	Yes	Unionist
4	Daniel	Councillor, North Belfast	No	Nationalist
5	Levi Mann	Community Worker, Shankill	Yes	Loyalist
6	David Devlin	Community Worker, Springfield Rd.	Yes	Not disclosed

Fig. 2: Interviewees

The data collection had some limitations. Firstly, the media coverage of the riots has a strong geographical bias; with coverage focusing predominately on urban areas such as Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Second, is the lack of data from nationalist areas where rioting occurred. Both of these limitations are also reflected in the fewer responses from non-urban and nationalist local actors to interview requests. The scarcity of data on grievances in nationalist and non-urban areas where rioting occurred may impact the transferability of my results.

Following this, I used qualitative content analysis to analyse the data. Qualitative content analysis involves "systematically describing the meaning of qualitative data" (Schrier, 2014, p. 170). This requires building a coding frame, trialling the frame and modifying it based on this trial; before conducting the main analysis (Schrier, 2014, p. 174). Through content analysis of fifty texts I trialled and developed my final coding frame to

identify the specific attitudes and grievances expressed, and to locate these in the context of my research. You can find the final coding frame in Appendix 3.

Findings & Analysis

I now discuss the results of my content analysis and interviews. This section consists of four parts. Firstly, I determine if the rioting occurred among working-class unionists as is posited by media accounts. Secondly, I identify attitudes towards the GFA. Thirdly, I address what grievances drove the riots. Lastly, I address the mechanisms that overcome the collective action problem as discussed in my theoretical framework.

The areas in which media articles indicate unrest include three urban areas: the Waterside area of Derry/Londonderry; Shankill and Woodvale in West Belfast; Tigers Bay and New Lodge in North Belfast; and the five towns or suburbs of Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus, Ballymena, Coleraine and Larne (Black et al., 2021; Hancock, 2021; Line et al., 2021; Kenny, 2021; Kula, 2021b). The Waterside area in Derry/Londonderry was where the unrest first began (Kenny, 2021; Nikolic, 2021). The rioting lasted at least a week, and led to calls for protests elsewhere in Northern Ireland – many of which descended into violence (Butterly, 2021; McBride, 2021; Morris, 2021a; Murray, 2021). Rioting was localised in specific areas of the Waterside, predominately in Tullyally and Nelson Drive (Beesley, 2021). The multiple deprivation measure for these areas are 101 and 287 respectively (NISRA, 2017a). Considering the NISRA scale divides Northern Ireland into 890 areas, these positions constitute considerable deprivation. The demographic of the rioters was reflective of the predominately unionist Waterside (Int.3; Nikolic, 2021). This contrasts with Belfast where the rioting was located at interface areas.

All four of the rioting areas in Belfast are in the top-100 most deprived areas in Northern Ireland (NISRA, 2017b, pp. 25-26). Shankill includes areas which are the 18th and 28th most deprived, Woodvale the 8th, 12th and 17th most deprived, Tigers Bay the 49th and 53rd most deprived, and New Lodge includes the 7th, 25th and 32nd most deprived (NISRA, 2017b, pp. 25-26). The rioting in Belfast was the most populated in this period of unrest, with several hundred people from both communities participating over several nights (Black, 2021a; Channel 4 News, 2021b; Morris, 2021e).

Calculating the multiple deprivation measure outside of urban areas is more challenging. The NISRA figures are very localised however, media coverage often fail to mention specific localities where rioting occurred. Areas mentioned are North Rd. in Carrickfergus, Cloughfern Roundabout and Rathcoole in Newtownabbey and Ballykeel Estate in Ballymena, which are ranked 173rd, 117th, 135th and 91st in the deprivation measure (Black, 2021b; Kula, 2021b; NISRA, 2017a; Simpson, 2021). The media coverage repeatedly refers to the rioting occurring in loyalist areas or following loyalists protest, with no mention of rioting from nationalist communities (Channel 4 News, 2021b; Noonan, 2021b).

The make-up of the areas where rioting occurred are predominately in the top-200 most deprived areas in Northern Ireland; the rioting predominately occurred among unionists. This was expected, as Gurr's (1970) theory of relative deprivation suggested that working-class, unionist communities had the highest potential for collective action. Interestingly, the only nationalist areas where rioting occurred, Woodvale and New Lodge, are two of the most-deprived areas mentioned. This strengthens H2, suggesting that socioeconomic deprivation in working-class communities was a grievance driving the rioting. However, in order to further confirm these hypotheses, I now discuss attitudes towards the GFA.

Understanding attitudes towards the GFA is necessary to determine the presence of aspirational or decremental deprivation in Northern Ireland. I firstly discuss negative attitudes toward the GFA due to ethnonational grievances, following this I discuss socioeconomic grievances.

"It is a pernicious agreement and promotes the aspirations of one side of a divided society, whilst eroding the identity, and threatening the very existence of the other side" (Ross, 2021). This sentiment expressed in a letter printed in the unionist Belfast News Letter is an extreme example of an attitude towards the GFA prevalent among unionists which I term 'republican appeasement'. Unionist councillor Charles (Int.3) explained it as a widely shared feeling that unionists sacrificed more than nationalists in the GFA while receiving less in return. A local community worker quoted in the media speaks of a "chipping away" of identity due to regulation of parades, "the flags coming down" and the Irish Sea Border (O'Dowd, 2021). Another community-worker speaks of efforts to "subdue" the loyalist community and Beth (Int.2), a unionist religious leader, speaks of unionist culture being "denigrated" (BBC, 2021). This captures a feeling of declining ethnonational power which nationalist councillor Daniel (Int.4) argues is unionists' frustration "that things have changed and that they're not in charge the way they were". This is further epitomised by frequent use of phrases such as the 'tables-turning' on the unionist community, the 'U-turn' against loyalists, and exchanging "one ascendancy for another ascendency" (Int.2; Int.5; O'Dowd, 2021). This sense of declining ethnonational power includes socioeconomic aspects. Beth (Int.2), and Levi Mann (Int.5), a community worker, both compare the development of their local Shankill to neighbouring nationalist areas with Levi terming loyalist areas "derelict land". Shankill resident Stacey speaks of the GFA delivering economically for other communities but not Shankill (ITV, 2021). Unionist elites speak of perceptions of republican appeasement, rather than explicitly supporting or opposing this view (Bain, 2021; Castle,

2021). This suggests loyalist views on the GFA are not necessarily linked to the views of political elites. This argument is strengthened by references to anger and disdain for the political elite in interviews with Beth (Int.2) and Levi (Int. 5), and references by councillor Charles (Int.3) to anger at political elites in loyalist communities.

A large amount of the criticism of the GFA was related to socioeconomic issues; this is epitomised by the interview with local religious leader, Beth (Int.2). When the GFA was implemented "everything looked promising" but in the last twelve years that hope "has faded fast" (Int.2). She blames socioeconomic factors saying that Shankill has not seen "any dividend of the peace process" (Int.2). This is supported by Levi (Int.5) who speaks of loyalist communities being "left behind in every single avenue", by Northern Irish religious leaders who reference "persistent levels of socioeconomic inequality in the areas worst impact by violence" and by journalists (Breen, 2021; Bruce et al., 2021; Morris, 2021c; Noonan, 2021b). One Shankill resident expresses frustration that the Shankill is "still living in poverty and deprivation" (ITV, 2021). This suggests aspirational deprivation is present, as their hope for better socioeconomic circumstances has faded and been replaced by frustration at "still" being deprived. There is little data on working-class nationalist attitudes towards the GFA however, the belief that deprivation is worse in unionist communities is refuted by nationalists (Gant & Riddler, 2021; Irish News, 2021a). Daniel (Int.4), a nationalist councillor referred to this theory as resulting from the "siege mentality of political unionism" and speaks of far greater deprivation of Catholics than Protestants. The debate over which community is more deprived reflects the ethnonational aspects of the socioeconomic deprivation in Northern Ireland, which introduces an unexpected, additional element of cross-community comparison to the aspirational deprivation hypothesis.

I now discuss the grievances present during the riots. Firstly, I outline the ethnonational grievances present (Northern Irish Protocol and PSNI discrimination). Secondly, socioeconomic grievances (deprivation). Thirdly a mixed grievance (isolation).

The ethnonational grievances cited as reasons for the Spring 2021 riots resemble the grievances with the GFA, predominately accusations of republican appeasement. Isaac Andrews, a community worker, describes anger that a land border was not considered for the Protocol due to fears of a republican violence, saying loyalists "feel that threat was appeased" (Belfast News Letter, 2021). Anger that the border is not "where it's supposed to be", as one teenaged loyalist discussed, feeds into unionist anxiety around a united Ireland (Noonan, 2021b). Beth (Int.2) says that for many "the protocol means nothing. United Ireland means everything". Social media and posters encouraging protests refer to keeping Northern Ireland British, and local residents refer to feeling like their Britishness is being taken away from them (Irish News, 2021b; Line et al., 2021). David Devlin (Int.6), a cross-community youth worker, describes the feeling that the Protocol put a wall between Northern Ireland and Britain. Thus while the Protocol is viewed as an appeasement of republicans, it is also an identity issue that signals the declining ethnonationalist power of unionism and as one local said a "stepping stone towards a united Ireland" (AFP, 2021).

The lack of prosecutions at the Bobby Storey funeral is further evidence for unionists of republican appeasement and discrimination, within the PSNI specifically. One Shankill resident cites the "PSNI and judiciary system's appeasement of republicans" as the direct reason for the riots (Aleem, 2021). A Carrickfergus councillor describes a real perception within the loyalist community of "two-tier policing", this is supported in interviews with riot participants (Kula, 2021e; Walsh, 2021, p. 27). Beth (Int.2) speaks of the PSNI being perceived as a hostile organisation towards unionists, Charles (Int.3) describes PSNI over-policing in loyalist communities and Levi (Int.5) describes a loss of support for the PSNI

following rioting in 2005. However, both Charles and Levi describe frustrations with policing in loyalist areas that are not explicitly ethnonational. Unionist councillor Charles (Int.5) describes a feeling "that the police don't do enough" in loyalist and nationalist areas, and a lack of trust between communities and the police. Similarly, Levi (Int.5) emphasizes how the PSNI don't feel like a part of the community and believes "they have no support in either community". David Devlin (Int. 6) agrees, saying both communities feel that the PSNI discriminates against them. In Lanark Way, he observed that the initial rioting started as conflict against the police (Int.6). Outside of Belfast, violence was predominately directed at police (Int.3). This is reflected in interviews with riot participants; "it wasn't the two communities that were looking to get at each other. I think it was mainly the police they were after" (Walsh, 2021, p. 26). Hence, although PSNI discrimination is often framed along ethnonational lines, mirroring grievances against the GFA, it does have a socioeconomic dimension.

Expression of socioeconomic grievances was often along ethnonational lines. There is little data on nationalist grievances although one community worker speaks of lack of educational attainment in working-class communities leading to low aspirations for young people (Noonan, 2021b). Many, loyalists compare development in nationalist communities to their own. One riot participant compares their area to the nationalist Ardoyne saying; "they've got all the good pitches, they've got all the youth clubs, they've got places to go. We don't." (ITV, 2021). Levi (Int.5) compares the old Shankill leisure centre with two new leisure centres in the nationalist Falls area as well as the large amounts of derelict land in Shankill, and Charles (Int.3) speaks of how young people in the Waterside compare their services to other areas which contributes to a feeling of neglect. Beth (Int.2) explains that young people feel that "themuns get everything. We get nothing", and rioting is someone to take their anger out on. When asked who "themuns" referred to she (Int.2) initially said Catholics however

she also said it is anyone who " lives on that other side of the wall [peace wall]" as their [loyalist youths] "anger was at that geographical part of the community". David (Int.6) believes deprivation has a massive impact on collective action particularly if people think that the reason is because one community is getting more. He stated that this could lead to "outright animosity towards each other" , and is present in both communities (Int.6). This comparative aspect to grievances of deprivation could be a factor in aspirational deprivation, as they see other communities developing in ways that they hoped their community would. It also echoes Christopher Cramer's theory that economic inequality leads to conflict if it links to a country's social, political and cultural history (Cramer, 2003, pp. 405, 409).

The final grievance frequently referenced was a feeling of isolation. Beth (Int.2) describes it as loyalists feeling that "they're losing any sense of identity, any sense that anybody cares about them and actually is hearing them". The loss of identity corresponds to declining ethnonational power, the belief that nobody cares about them is likely due to stagnating socioeconomic circumstances and the feeling of not being heard is culmination of the two. This isolation is profound within the loyalist community particularly. Unionist councillor, Charles (Int.3) speaks of young people feeling that "their own people have let them down."Their area is being neglected and feel that unionist politicians don't listen to their concerns (Int.3). However, this also extends beyond unionist politicians. Young loyalists speak about being treated like "dog's dirt" by "DUP, Sinn Féin, Alliance" as well as the United Kingdom (ITV, 2021). Loyalist Stacey speaks of feeling left behind and like nobody is listening despite just wanting "to thrive and be living in peace" (ITV, 2021). Alan (Int.1), Beth (Int.2) and Levi (Int.5) speak of anger on the ground for the DUP and also anger at Sinn Féin for going "too far too quickly" (Int.2). This translates into violence because in the words of one young loyalist "you have to be violent to be heard" (Noonan, 2021b). Levi Mann (Int. 5) calls it a "way of life in Northern Ireland" when you don't get something you "wreck the

place". While one loyalist youth complained saying "if people want a voice to be heard, it shouldn't be us to resolve it. There's adults that can do it and do it peacefully anyway. It shouldn't be us" (ITV, 2021).

Explanations for the rioting diverge among elites. Unionist elites repeatedly expressed similar grievances with all unionist parties expressing anger at the Protocol and calling for the removal of the PSNI Chief (Kula, 2021d; Ward et al., 2021). They also directed blame for the riots at Sinn Féin for their stoking up of tensions (Black, 2021b; Kula, 2021d). Nationalist elites criticised the DUP in turn, for their inflammatory language and were also far more likely to highlight the deprivation in communities where rioting occurred (BBC, 2021; Bimpe, 2021). As previously stated local actors often expressed anger at both parties, with this view summarised by Beth (Int.2) in that "they're as bad as each other". Elites across all political parties emphasized rioters manipulation by criminal or paramilitary gangs (Morris, 2021b; Ward et al., 2021). This is supported in some accounts from local actors but views are far more divergent. This is reflected in interviews also; Charles (Int.3), a councillor in Waterside suggested criminal elements sparked the rioting there however it developed into recreational rioting as days went on. Nationalist councillor Daniel (Int.4) predominately blamed paramilitaries for all instances of rioting, arguing that they used recreational rioting as a tool to give an impression of unionist discontent. However, Alan (Int.1), Beth (Int.2) and Levi Mann (Int.5) all mention not observing paramilitary involvement at the Lanark Way riots.

I will now discuss the mechanisms that overcame the collective action problem. Recreational rioting was the most common explanation given for the violence among interviewees. Alan (Int.1) said that national identity or deprivation wouldn't be in "anyone's head". Interviews with Beth (Int.2), Charles (Int.3), Levi (Int.5) and David (Int.6) and media coverage reference recreational rioting or the adrenaline rush that young people get while

rioting (Noonan, 2021b). One riot participant mentioned the “buzz” and “nothing else to be doing” as their reason for rioting, while many mention not knowing what the rioting (protest) was about until the next day (Walsh, 2021, pp. 19,22,23). Cross-community worker David (Int.6) describes past violence occurring when “people who know each other across the interfaces have got bored and messaged each other, being like, let's start something”. Levi (Int.5) similarly speaks of people throwing petrol bombs at each other on a Saturday night but walking to school together on a Monday morning. A common thread throughout explanations of recreational rioting is boredom. Joel Keys, a young loyalists references young people’s boredom (Channel 4, 2021). Young people in the Shankill describe derelict land with nothing to do (ITV, 2021). Deprivation further lowers the cost of collective action, as young people’s lack of hope for the future lowers the risk involved in rioting. Laura Noonan (2021b) describes appeals by politicians for young people to think of their futures being met with “what future” by young people in loyalist communities. Thus the collective action problem is resolved as the impact of socioeconomic deprivation provides an incentive for young people to riot in the form of an adrenaline rush, and lowers the cost, due to little hope for their future anyway.

Interestingly, there is also an indication that Tarrow’s theory of repertoires of collective action was a factor in the riots. One loyalist describes a culture of civil disobedience (Noonan, 2021b). Alan (Int.1) describes the rioting as a spectator sport, with “young women out with kids” to see what’s happening. This is also present in accounts from young people who participated in the rioting, with one young person saying ““the whole community was out” with “wee grannies and all just standing there watching them” (Walsh, 2021, pp. 22). The legacy of the conflict also plays a role as young people saw “their fathers and their grandfathers, their uncles who all fought in these paramilitaries” (Noonan, 2021b). Youth worker Levi Mann (Int.5) explains that for loyalists and nationalists the glorified story

of the conflict influences young people to want to “defend their community”. David Devlin (Int.6) describes people having “protectiveness” over their community. There is also a dense social network within these areas, as Alan (Int.1) puts it if “somebody at one end of the Shankill sneezes then somebody at the other end catches the cold”. He speaks of news of unrest spreading quickly throughout the community, this is echoed by Charles (Int.3) in the Waterside who describes a very tight-knit community. This is evidenced by accounts from rioters, who speak of social pressure and familial or friend bonds influencing them to participate in unrest (Walsh, 2021). Thus two key aspects of Tarrow’s theory are present a culture of defensiveness and the normalisation of rioting alongside a dense social network. Socioeconomic deprivation is not explicitly present in this theory however, there is some indication that it impacts the defensiveness of the community as youth worker Levi (Int.5) states “people from a loyalist background aren't rich in wealth…but what they are rich in is their culture and their history if you threaten that you are going to get a reaction”.

These findings have shown that socioeconomic grievances influenced the ethnonational collective action in Spring 2021. Decremental deprivation is present among attitudes towards the GFA as well as grievances during the riots, evidenced by references to frustration at unionism’s weakened position within Northern Ireland and anger at the perceived appeasement of republicans. Deprivation was also a consistent grievance referenced in relation to the GFA and as a driving factor in the Spring 2021 riots. Mentions of socioeconomic stagnation and a loss of hope since the GFA suggest the presence of aspirational deprivation. The mechanisms towards collective action are also shown to be strongly influenced by socioeconomic circumstances which further highlights the influence of socioeconomic grievances on ethnonational collective action. Thus, H1, H2 and H3 can all be accepted. There were mixed results for H4. Although elite and local grievances diverged on attitudes towards the GFA, there was some similarity in grievances expressed during the

riots. The ethnonational split among elites with unionists emphasizing ethnonational grievances as reasons for the riots and nationalists emphasizing socioeconomic grievances was not present among local actors. Loyalists frequently referenced both grievances as present in the riots. This suggests that elites framed the riots along a master cleavage that was political beneficial to them, while local actors were in reality influenced by both grievances. However, the ethnonational aspect of socioeconomic grievances prevents me from accepting H4, as it socioeconomic grievances still falls under the master cleavage of opposing ethnonational identities.

Discussion & Conclusion

The limitations of this research including the lack of data from nationalist and non-urban communities and the small pool of interviewees weaken the transferability of this research. However, what has been shown is that this is a topic deserving of wider research. A large-N study examining attitudes towards the GFA across ethnonational and socioeconomic classes, as well as research examining why and how socioeconomic grievances are still expressed along ethnonationalist line would greatly benefit our understanding of Northern Ireland post-conflict.

This research has attempted to solve the puzzle of persistent outbreaks of ethnonational conflict in Northern Ireland since 1998, alongside a growing-class consciousness in loyalist communities. The patterns of rioting in Northern Ireland since the GFA are a threat to the stability of the peace process and has a profound impact on the young people and communities involved. Understanding the relationship between socioeconomic and ethnonational grievances in this violent collective action is essential to a sustainable peace.

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Appendix 1

Search parameters for media articles:

Factiva

Search 1:
Search words: ‘Riot’ or ‘unrest’ or ‘violence’ and ‘Northern Ireland’
Date parameters: 29.03 until 21.04

Search 2:
Search words: ‘Riot’ or ‘unrest’ or ‘violence’ and ‘on the ground’ and ‘Northern Ireland’
Date parameters: 29.03 until 21.04

Search 3:
Search words: ‘Riot’ or ‘unrest’ or ‘violence’ and ‘Northern Ireland’
Date parameters: 29.03 until 21.04
Papers: Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, Belfast News Letter, Irish Republican News,

Google, Google Scholar, YouTube

Search 1: riot Northern Ireland 2021

Search 2: unrest Northern Ireland 2021

Appendix 2

Interview questions:

- Were you aware of any build-up of tension or anger before the rioting started?
- Can you tell me about what happened during the riots?
    - Who was rioting?
- What do you think were the reasons people were rioting? / What was driving people to riot?
- I noticed some references to the peace agreement over the course of my reading of media articles.
    - What do you think are the perceptions of the peace agreement is among those rioting?
    - What does peace look like for this community?
- There was a lot of reference to manipulation as a factor driving the riots, do you think this is the case?
- There was some reference to local adults encouraging rioting from the side-lines, why do you think this would be the case?
- Is there anything you think the media got wrong or misrepresented?

Appendix 3

Coding Frames developed in the trial analysis:

Attitudes towards peace agreement

Category	Name	Definition	Example
Negative	Ethnonational	References to the GFA or past that mention appeasing of one group and/or weakening of one group's culture.	"Ever since the 1998 peace deal there has been dissatisfaction among some Unionists "and a perception that it was a victory for the Republicans, that they have all the benefits and the Loyalists haven't got anything"
Negative	Socioeconomic	References to the GFA or past that mention poor socioeconomic conditions in comparison to other communities/expectations.	"the persistent levels of socio-economic inequality in the areas worst impacted by violence, over two decades after the signing of the GFA, demand more sustained attention and meaningful intervention by political leaders"
Positive	Prosperity	References to the GFA or past that mention economic success.	"Since the GFA Northern Ireland has won a hard-fought prosperity its companies are desperate to maintain"
Positive	Peace	References to the GFA or past that emphasize peace and an end to violence and hatred.	"I meet three Protestant youth workers who tell us they do not want to return to the hatred of the past"

Fig. 3 : Attitudes towards GFA

Grievances

Category	Name	Definition	Example
Ethnonational	Appeasing Republicans	Reference to a culture or practice of giving in to demands of Nationalists	“ When that investigation was over and no prosecutions followed, it was seen as another appeasement”
Ethnonational	PSNI Discrimination	Reference to PSNI favouring of Nationalists	“people shout at them, accusing them of being “Provo-loving bastards” “
Ethnonational	Unionist Anxiety	Reference to threat of a united Ireland, demographics change and undermining of Unionism.	"A border down the Irish sea is another stepping stone towards a united Ireland"
Socioeconomic	Poverty and lack of hope	Reference to lack of opportunities or hope for the future, explicit linking of deprivation with the riots.	“Young people feeling that they have no stake in society or hope for the future”
Ethnonational and Socioeconomic	Community not being listened to	References to not being heard or listened to, irrespective of references to ethnonational and socioeconomic grievances.	“The grassroots unionists, loyalists, don’t feel there’s anybody else really sticking up for them”
Other	Consociationalism	References to disconnect from political leaders.	“Regrettably, it arises because they're in a vacuum, and there is undoubtedly a vacuum of the leadership”
Other	Covid	References to frustrations following Covid.	‘He blames the unrest on the Covid lockdown. "Young men are letting off steam"’

Fig 4 : Grievances

Mechanisms for mobilisation

Category	Name	Definition	Example
Unclear	Recreational Rioting	References to rioting as a past-time, thrilling, and references to the normalisation of violence.	“Aye, it was a bit of a buzz, so it was … because there was nothing else to be doing”
Ethnonational	Cultural pressure	References to unionist culture and pride in defending communities.	“They want to look up. They see their fathers and their grandfathers, their uncles who all fought in these paramilitaries, but they fought for a cause”
Unclear	Social pressure	References to friends or the community pressuring young people into rioting	“We saw a mixture of young people and some children, as young as 13 and 14, who were encouraged and supported by adults who stood by and clapped"
Other	Manipulation and coercion	References to young people being coerced or manipulated into rioting.	“Those involved in violence, criminal damage, manipulation of our young people and attacks on the police must stop.”

Fig. 5 : Mechanisms for mobilisation