

Ethnonationalism and Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Marriage and Abortion in Northern Ireland

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Abstract

The issue of sexuality and human rights has generated increasing international attention in recent years. This is particularly the case in societies emerging from chronic ethnonationalist conflict, where scholarly debates over the impact of ethnonationalism on sexual rights, such as abortion and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people (LGBT), generate much controversy and division. It is with this disagreement in mind that this paper focuses on the influence of ethnonationalism on attitudes towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage and abortion. Using nationally representative data from Northern Ireland, the results suggest that while ethnonational identity is a significant positive determinant of attitudes towards same-sex marriage within both the Catholic population and among supporters of their main political party (Sinn Féin), it is also a key negative predictor of abortion, albeit solely among Sinn Féin supporters.

Key words: Ethnonationalism; Sexual rights; Abortion; LGBT community; Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin; Conflict.

Introduction

International human rights bodies, including those of the United Nations (UN), direct increasing attention to both the reproductive rights of women and the rights of the LGBT community.¹ As recently as September 2016, a group of UN human rights experts called on states to repeal restrictive laws and policies in relation to abortion (Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, 2016). Arguing that these ‘laws and policies violate women’s human right to health and negate their autonomy in decision-making about their own bodies’, they also expressed support for making 28th September an official UN day for safe abortion worldwide. Similarly, in October 2015, the UN in an unprecedented joint statement – ‘Leaving no one behind’ – called on states to act urgently to end violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) adults, adolescents and children. As the joint statement put it: ‘Human rights are universal – cultural, religious and moral practices and beliefs and social attitudes cannot be invoked to justify human rights violations against any group, including LGBTI [Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex] persons’ (Office of the High Commissioner, 2015).

Despite these demands for LGBT rights and women’s reproductive rights, not all citizens or their political leaders endorse such views. This is considered particularly so in nations emerging from deep-seated and violent ethnonational conflict. In such societies, not only is ethnonationalism profoundly intertwined with both gender and sexuality, but since the nation is symbolically imagined as a heteronormative and patriarchal family unit, it both reproduces and sanctions gender differences and sexual inequalities. As a number of scholars have noted, it is this link between heterosexuality as the dominant group norm and taken for granted attribute of the nation that lies at the heart of opposition by ethnonationalist movements to both LGBT and female reproductive rights (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989; Nagel, 2003).

The assumption that ethnonationalist movements are intrinsically resistant to gender equality and LGBT rights is contested. As some research demonstrates, many ethnonationalist movements can articulate a more civic and progressive variant of nationalism that advances rights for women and sexual minorities. Similarly, nationalist movements and their political leaders have also co-opted the discourse of a pro-female agenda and LGBT rights, albeit as a cynical tool to mask and further their

xenophobic ambitions (Puar, 2007; Farris, 2017). Yet, there are limits to this appropriation, especially when reproductive rights feature. Ethnonationalist movements, rather than co-opting women's rights by supporting reproductive rights, are much more likely to instigate policies to prohibit abortion as a mortal threat to the health and survival of the nation (Coakley, 2012; Gilmartin, 2017).

It is with this suggested differential impact in mind – the positive effect of ethnonationalism on LGBT rights versus its negative effect on female reproductive rights – that the present study focuses on the influence of ethnonationalism on attitudes towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage and abortion in Northern Ireland. The article proceeds in three stages. First, it discusses the link between ethnonationalism and female reproductive rights and LGBT rights. Second, building on this discussion, it outlines the political nature of the Northern Ireland Agreement, particularly in terms of its consequences for sexual minority rights and the rights of women. Third, using nationally representative data from the 2015 Northern Ireland General Election Survey,² it then examines the nature and extent of ethnonationalism, or the degree of congruency in religious, national, communal, and territorial identity,³ and its relationship to attitudes towards LGBT and female reproductive rights within both the adult population as well as among supporters of the two electorally dominant ethnonationalist parties of unionism (the Democratic Unionist Party, or DUP, who support the union with Britain) and nationalism (Sinn Féin, who advocate for the reunification of Ireland).⁴

The use of Northern Ireland as a case-study to investigate this issue may be considered particularly appropriate for the following reasons. First, Northern Ireland represents a paradigmatic case of a deeply divided society involving contending ethnonationalisms. As McGarry and O'Leary (1995: 855), in explaining the Northern Ireland conflict, put it: '[it] is fundamentally rooted in ethno-nationalist antagonism.' Second, it is often argued that this dominance of ethnonationalism makes Northern Ireland an extremely patriarchal and homophobic society. More so than any other factor, it is acceptance of the assumed link between the heterosexual family and the maintenance and perpetuation of ethnonational identity, a view reinforced via the intersection of ethnic and religious identity, which many commentators point to as the greatest impediment to the support for sexual minority rights and the reproductive

rights of women within this society (Horgan and O'Connor, 2014; Hayes and Nagle, 2016).

Ethnonationalism, Gender, and Sexuality

The doctrine of ethnonationalism holds that the boundary of the nation-state must be coterminous with the *ethnie*. In so being, ethnonationalism is conceptualised as typically adhering to the ethnic rather than the civic variant. In the civic form, nationalism is constructed as relatively liberal and cosmopolitan, with nationality tied to citizenship, while ethnic nationalism is presented as the mirror image – combining conservatism with a propensity to xenophobia, and the national community imagined as bound by shared culture and ancestry (Smith, 1991). This imagined singularity between the ethnic group and nation is captured in the Latin origin of the word ‘nationality’ – *natio* – which means ‘to be born’, thus implying a common biological origin and descent of the people (Albanese, 2004). In framing the nation as a biological self-perpetuating group, ethnonationalists are seen to interlink national boundaries with sexual and gender ones (Nagel 2003).

Feminist scholars have long illuminated how women’s roles in ethnonationalist formations are often exalted as biological producers of members of ethnic collectivities (see Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989; Nagel, 2003). This valorisation of motherhood and control of female reproduction by ethnonationalist movements, or what Vickers (1990: 485) refers to as ‘the battle of the cradle’, results in norms and policies that simultaneously rewards reproduction and penalizes non-reproductive women. While the forms they take are historically specific and shaped by a number of factors, these pro-natalist policies range from the ‘restriction of contraceptive knowledge and techniques, denial of abortions, and provision of material rewards for bearing children’ (Peterson, 1999: 44). Thus, not only are women’s reproductive rights and health jeopardized under nationalist regimes to ensure the ‘good health’ of the nation but because women are charged as agents for the biological renewal of the nation their access to abortion is often framed as analogous to treason and ‘race suicide’ (Albanese, 2004: 12).

Male and female sexuality is also regulated by ethnonationalists. Non-heterosexuality destabilizes and threatens the narrative of the nation because it challenges the fixed categories of national identity; sexual minorities thus represent

pollutants to the idea of the national family (Hayes and Nagle, 2016). Ethnonationalist forms of hegemonic masculinity are strongly institutionalized and sexual minorities are denounced as either non-patriotic or a threat to the very survival and reproduction of the nation. Thus, as Friedland (2011:2) points out, many ethnonationalist movements ‘are preoccupied with the regulation of sexuality – homosexuality, abortion, marriage, divorce pre-and extra-marital sexuality’.

The assumption that ethnonationalist movements are intrinsically opposed to LGBT and women’s rights, however, obscures a more complex reality. Rather than being uniformly ethnic in character, a number of scholars note that some ethnonationalist movements have articulated a more civic variant of nationalism that includes progressive policies to advance rights for women and sexual minorities. This seems to be particularly the case when women have been involved as armed activists (Ashe, 2007; O’Keefe, 2013; Gilmartin, 2017). Similarly, nationalist movements have also co-opted the discourse of a pro-female agenda and LGBT rights, albeit as a tool to promote their putative liberal and progressive values in distinction to their rivals who are framed as backward and conservative. In particular, Puar (2007: 4) has coined the term ‘homonationalism’ to capture how nationalist movements, rather than being heteronormative, promote ‘acceptance’ and ‘tolerance’ for LGBT populations as the ‘barometer by which the legitimacy of, and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated’.

As noted earlier, however, there are boundaries restricting this process of co-option, especially in relation to reproductive rights. Ethnonationalist movements, rather than co-opting women’s rights by supporting reproductive rights, are much more likely to instigate policies to prohibit abortion as a mortal threat to the health and survival of the nation. This intractable resistance to reproductive rights cannot be purely explained as fundamentally due to the often religious leanings of ethnonationalist projects. As Albanese argues (2004), religious and nationalist opposition to abortion stem from different logics, which nevertheless can intersect within the same movement. While religious conservatives condemn abortion on the basis of the right to life of the foetus, ethnonationalists structure their opposition to abortion due to the nation’s need to proliferate.

The Northern Ireland Agreement, Sexual Minority and Abortion Rights

Signed in April 1998, the Northern Ireland Agreement sought to bring to an end almost 30 years of violent ethnonationalist conflict. Based on a liberal consociational model of conflict regulation and underpinned by the principle of ‘parity of esteem’ between the two ethnonationalist traditions of unionism and nationalism, a key assumption of the Agreement was that deep-seated communal divisions could be accommodated and eventually resolved through institutional power-sharing arrangements (Hayes and McAllister, 2013). Although the Agreement was primarily designed to manage and eventually resolve ethnonational conflict, it was also the first political initiative to commit the political parties to formally recognise women’s right to political inclusion. The Agreement requests: ‘the parties to affirm in particular:…the right of women to full and equal political participation’ (Northern Ireland Office, 1998: 20). In addition to the political inclusion of women, the Agreement also sought to safeguard the interests of members of society that subscribed to identities outside of the ethnonationalist framework. In particular, the Agreement stated that public authorities in Northern Ireland would: ‘promote equality of opportunity in relation to religion and political opinion; gender; race; disability; age; marital status; dependents; and sexual orientation’ (Northern Ireland Office, 1998: 20).

Despite these obligations and commitments in the Agreement, not all political analysts are supportive of such consociational power-sharing arrangements in addressing gender inequality and the lack of sexual minority rights. Proponents of this position point to the negative aspects of consociationalism, namely its tendency to reify communal division at the expense of other forms of social inequality, such as those based on gender, class, or sexual orientation (Taylor, 2009). Feminist scholarship, in particular, has been highly critical of consociational power-sharing arrangements, pointing not only to the systematic marginalisation of women and their collective interests but also to the reproduction of patriarchal privilege in these institutions and practices (Kennedy *et al.*, 2016). Even feminist scholars who endorse consociationalism suggest that women and their interests are ill-served by such political arrangements. As Byrne and McCulloch (2012: 566, 568) put it: ‘[while] there is nothing inherent in power-sharing that cannot be made more democratic and

inclusive of women...the failure to theorize gender and recognize gender power relations means that women remain invisible in the literature's prescription for conflict resolution and in power-sharing practices.'

Previous research lends support to this feminist view. Despite the various commitments to gender equality and sexual minority rights and notwithstanding the recently assumed female leadership of both the DUP and Sinn Féin in the Assembly, the post-Agreement period has not proved conducive to the advancement of women or LGBT rights. As a number of scholars have noted, not only has the political arena remained a cold house for the advancement of women's issues, but women have also been disproportionately negatively affected by the previously highly 'militarised nature' of Northern Ireland, such as the dramatic rise in domestic violence and a lack of reproductive rights (Hayes and McAllister, 2012; O'Keefe, 2013; Horgan and O'Connor, 2014; Kennedy *et al.*, 2016). For example, unlike Britain, which allows for abortion up to 24 weeks with the permission of two doctors under the aegis of the 1967 Abortion Act, abortion remains highly restricted in Northern Ireland and is permissible only in circumstances where a woman's life is at risk or there is a risk of permanent or serious damage to her mental or physical health (Bloomer and Fegan, 2013).⁵

There is also evidence to suggest that the various political parties are united in their opposition to the liberalisation of female reproduction rights, namely the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. Although a devolved matter since 2010, all attempts to extend the 1967 Abortion Act have been unsuccessful (Thomson, 2016). In 2007, for example, all the major parties, including Sinn Féin, supported a motion proposed by the DUP to oppose any extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. Moreover, despite a Belfast High Court ruling in November 2015 that the abortion ban breached human rights, in February 2016 members of the Northern Ireland Assembly voted against an amendment to a Justice Bill to permit abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality, rape and incest.⁶ Of the two main ethnonational parties, while the DUP voted against the amendment, Sinn Féin endorsed it.⁷ It is important to note, however, that although Sinn Féin supported abortion rights under these circumstances the party is far from being resoundingly pro-choice and rejects any major liberalisation in abortion laws, including the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland.⁸ This is not to discount the

recent decision by Sinn Féin during its 2017 Ard Fheis (an annual party conference), to support the extension of access to abortion where there is a serious risk or grave danger to the health of the woman, although it should be noted that the motion to extend the availability of abortion, which was proposed by the party's ruling executive (ard comhairle), did not allow Sinn Féin members a conscience vote on the issue and some members, including a senior figure in the party, spoke passionately against it.⁹

A similar lack of progress is evident when LGBT rights are considered. Despite the commitment to sexual minority rights enshrined in the Agreement, there is evidence to suggest that homophobic attacks and sentiment have increased markedly in the post-Agreement period (Hayes and Nagle, 2016). In contrast to the relative cross-cleavage consensus on abortion, however, elected representatives of the two main ethnonationalist parties are sharply divided in their attitudes towards sexual minority rights. While Sinn Féin has sought to support sexual minority rights, namely by conflating their struggle as a minority movement struggle,¹⁰ the DUP have adopted an extremely negative stance in relation to the LGBT population (Hayes and Nagle, 2016).¹¹ This sharp division in attitudes is evident in their views on the legalisation of same-sex marriage, where the DUP have on five separate occasions used their position as a leading partner in the power-sharing government to impede such legislation. By triggering a petition of concern in each instance – such that the motion can only be passed if a majority of unionists and nationalists support it – not only did the DUP exercise the ‘communal’ veto to block legislation to further equality for a non-ethnonationalist grouping, in this case sexual minorities, but in doing so they used a mechanism originally designed to negate majoritarian ethnonational politics.¹²

In summary, there is now a growing body of evidence to suggest that Northern Ireland remains a deeply homophobic and patriarchal society. Despite the promise of a new beginning, the post-Agreement environment has proved to be an inhospitable place for either the advancement of women's rights – including their reproductive rights – or those of the LGBT community. To what extent is this lack of progress linked to the increasing legitimisation and entrenchment of ethnonationalist identity both within political structures and wider society? Moreover, are there some notable differences between the two main religious communities – Protestant and Catholic – as well as between supporters of the two electorally dominant ethnonationalist parties

– the DUP and Sinn Féin – in relation to this matter?¹³ It is to an empirical investigation of this issue – the relationship between ethnonationalist identity and attitudes towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage and abortion – that we now turn.

Ethnonationalism and Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Marriage and Abortion

The conflict in Northern Ireland has been characterised as a long-standing dispute over two contested ethnonational identities: those who identify as British and wish to retain the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain versus those who identify as Irish and aspire to see the two parts of the island of Ireland united (McGarry and O’Leary, 1995). While the terms ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ serve as important boundary-markers, the conflict cannot be reduced to religious terms or even to a clash between two opposing and uniform ethnonational identities. As previous research has shown, both within and between the dominant ethnonational traditions – British-unionist and Irish-Nationalist – there are also important intra-religious differences in national, communal and territorial identity (Coakley, 2007; Hayes and McAllister, 2013).

The results in Table 1 lend further support to these findings. Although national identity, communal affiliation and territorial identity overlap in both religious communities, they are not coterminous. For example, while around eight out of every ten Protestants see themselves as British, around seven out of ten adopt a unionist label, and an overwhelming majority support remaining part of the UK, only three-fifths endorse all three identities. A similar pattern emerges when the Catholic community is considered. Although around six out of every ten Catholics see themselves as Irish, seven out of ten are willing to adopt a Nationalist label and just under eight out of ten want Ireland reunited, only about half, or 52 per cent, are willing to endorse all three labels. Thus, for both religious communities, there is evidence to suggest that although there is a strong reinforcement between national identity, communal affiliation and territorial allegiance, they are not interchangeable.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

To what extent does this unity in ethnonational self-identification lead to differential support for same-sex marriage and female reproductive rights within this society? Moreover, are there differences between the two main religious communities as well as supporters of the two main ethnonationalist parties in relation to this issue? Table 2 addresses these two questions. Focusing initially on the two main religious communities – Protestant and Catholic – the results are clear. While ethnonationalism, or congruency in national, communal and territorial identity, has a negative influence on attitudes towards same-sex marriage and abortion rights among Protestants, its impact in terms of the Catholic community is consistently positive.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

As the data in Table 2 demonstrates, whereas around a third, or 36 per cent, of Protestants who viewed themselves as both British and Unionist and wished to remain part of the UK supported the legalisation of same-sex marriage, the equivalent proportion among those who rejected an ethnonational label was 13 percentage points higher at 49 per cent. A similar and even more marked division, albeit in the opposite direction, occurs when the Catholic community is considered. More specifically, while the overwhelming majority, or 81 per cent, of those who were congruent in their ethnonationalist identity approved of same-sex marriage the equivalent proportion among those who did not express this tripartite identity was 25 percentage points lower at 56 per cent. These patterns are reversed when opposition to same-sex marriage is considered. Here, it is individuals who conform to an ethnonationalist label within the Protestant community but who reject such a label among the Catholic community that emerge as the most willing to express this negative view.

These results are replicated when party support is considered. While congruency in ethnonationalism has a negative influence on attitudes towards same-sex marriage among DUP supporters, its impact among those who support Sinn Féin is notably positive. For example, whereas approval of same-sex marriage was 14 percentage points lower – 43 per cent versus 29 per cent – among DUP supporters who endorsed an ethnonational identity as compared to those who did not, it was 23 percentage points higher – 86 per cent as compared to 63 per cent – among Sinn Féin supporters. Thus, at least as far as the relationship between ethnonationalism and

same-sex marriage is concerned the views of supporters of the DUP and Sinn Féin are not only sharply divided but they are also in line with their respective broader Protestant and Catholic communities.

A somewhat different result emerges when attitudes towards abortion are considered. Although the influence of ethnonationalism on support for abortion replicates that of same-sex marriage within the two main religious communities, among DUP and Sinn Féin supporters, however, our earlier pattern is reversed. Focusing initially on religious differences, the results are clear. Whereas 44 per cent of Protestants who were congruent in their ethnonational identity expressed support for the legalisation of abortion the equivalent proportion among those who were not was 11 percentage points higher at 55 per cent. A less marked division, albeit in the opposite direction, occurs when the Catholic community is considered; at 45 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively, it is Catholics who endorse an ethnonational label who are the more positive in their views.

A similar, although reverse, pattern emerges when party support is considered. While congruency in ethnonationalism has a slightly more positive influence on attitudes towards abortion among DUP supporters, its impact among those who support Sinn Féin is notably negative. While 42 per cent of DUP followers who endorsed this ethnonationalist identity voiced their support for the legalisation of abortion, the equivalent proportion who rejected such a label was marginally lower at 38 per cent. Among Sinn Féin supporters, by contrast, it was those who rejected this triple-identity position – 52 per cent versus 42 per cent – who are the most negative in their views. Thus, contrary to our previous examination of same-sex marriage where the opinions of party supporters are in line with their respective broader Protestant and Catholic communities, this is not the case in relation to abortion, where the views of party supporters, particularly those of Sinn Féin, are sharply at odds with those of the general Catholic population.

To what extent do these differences remain when a range of potentially confounding variables, such as gender, religious belief and practice, age and educational attainment, are included in the analysis? It is to this, our final question – the net impact of ethnonationalism on attitudes towards same-sex marriage and abortion – that we now turn.

The Effect of Ethnonationalism on Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Marriage and Abortion

To investigate this question, Tables 3 and 4 present the results for a series of binary logistic regression models which focus on the net effect of congruency in ethnonationalism on attitudes toward the legalisation of same-sex marriage (Table 3) and abortion (Table 4). Given the overwhelming level of support for same-sex marriage among both Sinn Féin supporters and within the Catholic population, and to allow for a direct comparison of the results, logistic regression analysis was chosen as the method for analysis in this instance.¹⁴ For the purposes of this investigation, attitudes towards same-sex marriage and abortion have been recoded to the following two categories: strongly agree/agree (coded 1) and neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree (coded 0). The included potentially confounding background control variables are: gender, age, educational attainment, and religious belief and practice. There is now a considerable body of research both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere to indicate that women, the young, the well-educated and the more secular members of society are more supportive of both same-sex marriage and abortion rights than men, older individuals, the lesser educated and those of religious faith (Froese and Badar, 2008; Hayes and Dowds, 2015; Evans and Tonge, 2016; Jelen, 2017). With the exception of age (coded in terms of years), all control variables were included as a series of dummy variables (coded 0 and 1) in the analysis.¹⁵

Turning now to the results, multivariate analysis lends some further, albeit partial, support to our earlier bivariate findings. Even when a range of background variables are controlled for in the analysis, ethnonationalism emerged as a significant net predictor of attitudes towards same-sex marriage and abortion, albeit solely within the Catholic community and among Sinn Féin supporters (see Tables 4 and 5). Moreover, and in further confirmation of our earlier findings, while congruency in ethnonational identity was a positive net predictor of attitudes towards same-sex marriage within both the Catholic community and among Sinn Féin supporters, it also emerged as a significant, albeit negative, predictor of attitudes towards abortion rights among supporters of Sinn Féin.

Focusing initially on religious and party differences in attitudes towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage the results in Table 4 are conclusive. Whereas congruency in ethnonationalist identity failed to emerge as a significant predictor of

attitudes towards same-sex marriage either within the Protestant community or among DUP supporters, its differential effect on attitudes within both the Catholic population and those who supported Sinn Féin was consistently positive. As a group, it is both members of the Catholic community and Sinn Féin followers who identify themselves as both Irish and nationalist and want the re-unification of Ireland that are significantly more likely, net of other factors, to support the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland. More specifically, Catholics who expressed congruence in ethnonational identity were three and a half times more likely – the odds ratio is 3.547 – to support same-sex marriage than those who did not. An identical, though somewhat slightly more pronounced, pattern emerged when Sinn Féin supporters were considered; individuals who endorsed an ethnonationalist identity in this instance were nearly four times more likely to support same-sex marriage – the odds ratio is 3.996 – than those who did not.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

This is not to suggest, however, that ethnonationalism is the sole predictor of attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Other noteworthy determinants within both religious communities, as well as among DUP and Sinn Féin supporters, include the relatively consistent positive effect of education as well as the negative effect of age. While those with educational qualifications are notably more likely to support same-sex marriage than the lesser educated in both communities and among Sinn Féin supporters, it is older individuals who stand out – Sinn Féin supporters being the one notable exception – as the least supportive in their views. Other less consistent but notable determinants include the negative effect of church attendance both within the Catholic community as well as among Sinn Féin voters. In both instances, it is those who attend church on a regular basis who are the least supportive in their views.

These results are only partially replicated when views concerning abortion are examined (see Table 4). While congruency in ethnonationalist identity also emerged as a significant determinant of attitudes towards the legalisation of abortion, its effect in this instance was solely limited to Sinn Féin supporters. As a group, Sinn Féin supporters who endorsed an ethnonationalist identity were, net of other factors, notably less likely to support abortion than those who did not. Or to put it in a positive direction for ease of interpretation: Sinn Féin supporters who did not endorse an

ethnonational label were twice as likely (the inverse of $\exp[B]$ or $1/0.48$) to support abortion than those who did. Again, this is not to suggest that ethnonationalism is the sole predictor of attitudes even among Sinn Féin supporters. Other noteworthy determinants across both religious communities, as well as among DUP and Sinn Féin supporters, include the consistently negative effect of religious faith. More specifically and again to put in a positive direction for ease in interpretation, while those who did not definitely believe in God were twice as likely – the inverse of $\exp[B]$ or $1/0.47$ and $1/0.49$, respectively – to support abortion within both the Protestant and Catholic population, they were also twice more likely – the inverse of $\exp[B]$ or $1/0.47$ and $1/0.43$, respectively – to do so among DUP and Sinn Féin supporters.

In summary, the results are clear. Even when a range of background variables are controlled for in the analysis, ethnonationalism emerged as a significant net predictor of attitudes towards same-sex marriage and abortion, albeit solely both within the Catholic community and among Sinn Féin supporters. Moreover, while congruency in ethnonational identity was a positive predictor of attitudes towards same-sex marriage within the Catholic community and among Sinn Féin supporters, it also emerged as a significant but a negative determinant of attitudes towards abortion rights, albeit exclusively among supporters of Sinn Féin.

Conclusion

The impact of ethnonationalism on sexual rights, such as abortion and the rights of LGBT people, is both complex and much contested. While some scholars point to the highly regressive and punitive effect of ethnonationalist movements on female reproductive rights and sexual minority rights, others suggest that some ethnonationalisms, particularly non-state nationalist movements in which women have been armed activists, can also produce positive results for both LGBT people and women, although the extent to which they extend to female reproductive rights is open to much dispute. The results of this study lend much support to this complex and variable view. As the findings from this investigation show clearly, while congruency in ethnonational identity was a positive predictor of attitudes towards same-sex marriage, albeit within the Catholic community and among Sinn Féin

supporters, it also emerged as a significant but a negative predictor of attitudes towards abortion rights among supporters of Sinn Féin.

What may explain these various differences in findings? Part of an explanation we suggest lies with the fact that while LGBT rights have become entangled with the struggle for ethnonational rights within both communities, this is not the case when abortion rights are considered. As noted earlier, Sinn Féin, the dominant Irish ethnonationalist party, has sought to support sexual minority rights by conflating it with their demand for nationalists, or members of the Catholic community, to be given greater minority rights. A view, it should be noted, that is also supported by the wider Catholic community. This sharp division in attitudes is most evident in terms of their attitudes toward the legalisation of same-sex marriage, which Sinn Féin ardently supports and the DUP fundamentally oppose. And, while the DUP's opposition towards same-sex marriage can partly be explained by its evangelical roots (Evans and Tonge, 2016), many unionists, however, see Sinn Féin's co-option of LGBT rights as a ploy to undermine the Protestant community and further their own interests. As McCulloch (2017), in reporting the view of one unionist Member of the Assembly (MLA) during the marriage debate on equality, put it: '[the LGBT community] is being deliberately used by some parties in the House for perceived political advantage.'

This is not the case when the advancement of abortion is considered, where all the main political parties remain firmly opposed to full reproductive rights for women. Even Sinn Féin, long champions of equality legislation, have refused to endorse abortion as a woman's right to choose or even as a citizen's rights issue. It is this factor – the singular recognition of LGBT rights as a citizenship rights issue by Sinn Féin supporters as well as the wider Catholic community – which we suggest explains not only the differential support between the two religious communities and their respective ethnonationalist parties in relation to the legalisation of same-sex marriage but also the lack of support for the legalisation of abortion among supporters of Sinn Féin.

These results have a number of important implications for societies emerging from ethnic conflict. First, the relationship between ethnonationalism and abortion and LGBT rights is both complex and variable. While there is evidence to suggest ethnonationalism, particularly non-state nationalist movements, adopt a more

progressive stance on sexual minority rights, this is not the case when abortion rights are considered. As the findings of this analysis shows, despite both the rhetoric of the Agreement and Sinn Féin's stated support for gender equality and women's rights, many party members remain firmly opposed to a pro-choice position fearing that it would result in a backlash from their more conservative and religious voters.

Second, the results also some lend support to the regressive nature of post-conflict ethnonationalist movements, particularly when the question of women's rights is considered. As a number of scholars have noted, not only has the political activism of Sinn Féin become increasingly formalised and hierarchical since the signing of the Agreement in 1998 but many of the avenues previously open to women to influence and shape policy – such as the highly influential Sinn Féin's Women's Department which advocated for both LGBT rights and the full reproductive rights of women in the 1980s – have now been dissolved (Gilmartin, 2017). Moreover, at least as far as reproductive rights are concerned, there is evidence to suggest that abortions are now even more restrictive than in the past (Whitaker and Horgan, 2017).

Finally, the results also point to the ability of competing ethnonationalist movements to co-opt and manipulate sexual rights both as a source of unity (lack of reproductive rights) as well as a source of division (sexual minority rights) in the post-conflict period. It is to this question – the manipulation of sexual rights by ethnonationalist movements for political expediency and gain in the post-accord period – that future research should be addressed. This is especially so in post-conflict societies based on power-sharing agreements such as Northern Ireland where debates over sexual rights and the use of communal vetoes can be used to perpetuate the war by other means.

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Endnotes

- 1 Given its dominance in the research literature and associated legislative and policy initiatives, we use LGBT rather than LGBTQ or LGBTQI, although it should be noted that debates about bisexual and transgender concerns have received much less attention than those related to lesbian and gay rights.
- 2 The 2015 Northern Ireland Election Survey was a nationally representative post-election survey of adults aged 18 or over conducted immediately after the May 2015 general election. Using face-to-face interviews and with a response rate of 68.3 per cent, the survey was based on a random sample of 1,810 adults.
- 3 While national identity refers to identification with labels such as ‘British’ and ‘Irish’, we refer to whether an individual identifies as being a ‘unionist’ or ‘nationalist’ as communal identity, otherwise known as political identity in much of the literature. Finally, territorial or state identity refers to constitutional preferences, or whether an individual favours maintenance of the union with Britain or seeks the re-unification of Ireland.
- 4 In the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly election, Sinn Féin – viewed as the political wing of the IRA – overhauled the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) as the largest nationalist party and the DUP became the dominant unionist party by overtaking the relatively moderate Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). While this so-called ‘triumph of the extremes’ came about through a classic case of ‘ethnic outbidding’ – a dynamic in which parties outdo intrabloc rivals in demonstrating their suitability to defend their ethnic community – their electoral success was also due to their ability to moderate on key areas (Mitchell *et al.*, 2009).
- 5 Currently, Northern Ireland has one of the harshest criminal penalties for abortion in Europe, up to life imprisonment for both the woman having the procedure and anyone assisting her. It is estimated that more than 1,000 women a year travel from Northern Ireland to England and paid £2,000 pounds to obtain an abortion privately as they were not entitled to publicly funded (National Health Service) abortion in England. This situation changed in 2017 when Northern Irish women were given access to free terminations on the NHS in England, Scotland, and Wales.

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- 6 While members voted 59 to 40 against allowing abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality, they voted 64 to 30 against abortion in the cases of rape and incest.
- 7 In terms of the position of the other main unionist and nationalist parties, while the UUP has left abortion as a matter of personal conscience for its elected representatives, the SDLP describes themselves as pro-life and are opposed to abortion (Thomson, 2016).
- 8 This is not to deny, however, some historically important divisions within the party in relation to this issue. For example, in 1985, a feminist faction involving female ex-combatants within the party, led by the Sinn Féin Women's Department, won a resolution at the Ard Fheis (annual party conference) to support a woman's right to choose an abortion, only to have it rescinded within days at the bequest of the Sinn Féin leadership. This reversal in policy was not so much driven by ideological concerns but rather by the desire of Sinn Féin to widen its electoral base and enter mainstream politics (O'Keefe, 2013).
- 9 Sinn Féin also supports the removal of the 8th amendment, which protects the life of unborn children, from the constitution of the Republic of Ireland.
- 10 Sinn Féin has a long history of supporting equality for LGBT people as a minority rights issue. Linking the lack of equality for sexual minorities to second-class citizenship, in 1980, Sinn Féin passed a motion at the Ard Feis to oppose the criminalisation of homosexuality, the first party to do so on the island of Ireland. Much of the impetus for promoting the equality of LGBT people was again instigated by feminists within the Sinn Féin Women's Department (O'Keefe, 2013). However, there is some evidence to suggest that although Sinn Féin was more supportive of equality discourses for sexual minorities than their unionist/loyalist opponents many gay and lesbian activists within the nationalist community felt the need to hide their sexual orientation for fear of being ostracised by Sinn Féin as well as the broader republican movement (O'Keefe, 2013: 178).
- 11 In terms of the position of the other main unionist and nationalist parties, while the UUP has left same-sex marriage as a matter of personal conscience for its elected representatives, the SDLP are vocally supportive of the issue (Thomson, 2016).
- 12 The most recent vote on same-sex marriage in the Northern Ireland Assembly occurred in November 2015 where despite majority support for the first time – 53 members supported the motion in favour of the legalisation of same-sex marriage while 52 voted against – it failed to achieve the required cross-

community majority – only four unionists supported the motion as compared to 41 nationalist – and was not passed. Currently, Northern Ireland is the only region within the United Kingdom that has not introduced legislation to permit same-sex marriage.

- 13 Differences in religious denomination are examined here not to emphasise any theological differences but as a means to investigate the two main religious communities – Protestant and Catholic – in terms of their distinct ethnonational identities and political affiliations.
- 14 While 67 per cent of the Catholic population supported the legalisation of same-sex marriage the figure among Sinn Féin supporters was notably higher at 76 per cent. The equivalent figures among the Protestant population and DUP supporters were markedly lower at just 41 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively.
- 15 Additional bivariate analysis demonstrates that while some of the control variables are significantly associated with each other, in no instance are the zero-correlations greater than 0.6, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a problem in this instance. The variance inflation factor (VIF) for each of the analyses – less than 2.64 in all instances – further supports this finding.

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Table 1: Religious Denomination and Identity Preferences

	(Percentages)	
	Protestant	Catholic
National Identity:		
British/Irish	84.0	63.4
Communal Identity:		
Unionist/Nationalist	69.5	71.7
Territorial Identity:		
UK/Republic of Ireland	95.6	77.4
Congruency in identity:		
British-Unionist-UK/Irish-nationalist-RoI	59.7	51.5
[Base N]	[835]	[629]

The questions were: ‘Which of these best describes the way you think of yourself?’ Responses were: British, Irish, Northern Irish or Other’; ‘Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a unionist, a nationalist or neither?’; And what do you think the long-term policy for Northern Ireland should be? Responses were: To remain part of the United Kingdom, To reunify with Ireland, Other.

Source: Northern Ireland General Election Survey, 2015.

Table 2: Religion, Party Support and Congruency in Ethnonational Identity and Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Marriage and Abortion

	(Percentages)									
	Religion				Party Support					
	Protestant		Catholic		DUP		Sinn Féin			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Same-Sex Marriage:										
Agree	36.2	49.4	81.0	56.0	28.9	42.5	85.7	62.7		
Neither	18.8	26.0	7.1	17.1	18.6	20.0	4.5	14.9		
Disagree	45.0	24.7	11.9	27.0	52.5	37.5	9.7	22.4		
(N)	(458)	(308)	(268)	(252)	(194)	(40)	(154)	(67)		
Abortion:										
Agree	44.0	55.3	44.8	38.6	41.5	37.5	42.2	52.2		
Neither	19.6	21.7	31.7	23.5	15.4	12.5	35.7	14.9		
Disagree	36.4	23.0	23.5	37.8	43.1	50.0	22.1	32.8		
(N)	(459)	(309)	(268)	(251)	(195)	(40)	(154)	(67)		

Questions: Same-sex marriage should be made legal in Northern Ireland; Abortion should be made legal in Northern Ireland.

Source: Northern Ireland General Election Survey, 2015.

Table 3: Religion and Party Differences in the Impact of Ethnonationalism on Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Marriage

	(Logistic Regression Coefficients)							
	Religion				Party Support			
	Protestant		Catholic		DUP		Sinn Féin	
	Parameter Estimate	(SE)	Parameter Estimate	(SE)	Parameter Estimate	(SE)	Parameter Estimate	(SE)
Control variables:								
Female	0.07	(0.18)	0.87**	(0.45)	0.46	(0.35)	0.52	(0.45)
Belief in God (definite)	-0.23	(0.19)	0.08	(0.46)	-0.15	(0.37)	-0.68	(0.46)
Church attendance (regular)	-0.35	(0.23)	-1.03**	(0.49)	-0.69	(0.44)	-0.99*	(0.49)
Age (years)	-0.04**	(0.01)	-0.02*	(0.02)	-0.05**	(0.01)	-0.02	(0.02)
Education								
Tertiary	-0.19	(0.29)	1.95**	(1.00)	0.33	(0.60)	2.20*	(1.00)
Secondary	0.49*	(0.23)	1.54**	(0.63)	0.90	(0.47)	1.38*	(0.63)
No qualification	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Ethnonationalism:								
Congruency in identity	-0.23	(0.18)	1.27**	(0.45)	-0.40	(0.47)	1.39**	(0.45)
Constant	1.598		-0.026		1.546		1.027	
Nagelkerke R-squared	0.221		0.371		0.319		0.429	
(N)	(698)		(488)		(211)		(208)	

Note: Attitudes towards same-sex marriage are coded 1 (strongly agree/agree) and 0 (other); *, significant at the 0.05 level; **, significant at the 0.01 level; ^a, missing category for comparison. Standard errors are in parenthesis.

Source: Northern Ireland General Election Survey, 2015.

Table 4: Religion and Party Differences in the Impact of Ethnonationalism on Attitudes Towards Abortion

	(Logistic Regression Coefficients)							
	Religion				Party Support			
	Protestant		Catholic		DUP		Sinn Féin	
	Parameter Estimate	(SE)	Parameter Estimate	(SE)	Parameter Estimate	(SE)	Parameter Estimate	(SE)
Control variables:								
Female	0.53**	(0.17)	-0.03	(0.11)	0.59	(0.31)	0.15	(0.30)
Belief in God (definite)	-0.75**	(0.18)	-0.71**	(0.22)	-0.76*	(0.32)	-0.83*	(0.36)
Church attendance (regular)	-0.54**	(0.21)	-0.48*	(0.23)	-0.62	(0.37)	-0.43	(0.38)
Age (years)	-0.02**	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)
Education								
Tertiary	0.16	(0.27)	0.52	(0.37)	0.66	(0.50)	0.64	(0.66)
Secondary	0.47*	(0.22)	0.64*	(0.31)	0.44	(0.39)	0.74	(0.54)
No qualification	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Ethnonationalism:								
Congruency in identity	-0.06	(0.18)	-0.01	(0.19)	0.44	(0.44)	-0.73*	(0.33)
Constant	0.779		-0.213		-0.170		-0.552	
Nagelkerke R-squared	0.191		0.107		0.163		0.103	
(N)	(700)		(487)		(212)		(208)	

Note: Attitudes towards abortion are coded 1 (strongly agree/agree) and 0 (other); *, significant at the 0.05 level; **, significant at the 0.01 level; ^a, missing category for comparison. Standard errors are in parenthesis.

Source: Northern Ireland General Election Survey, 2015.

