**Reporting Civic Unrest and Reconciliation: New Approaches**–Northern Ireland 2019Steven Youngblood, Center for Global Peace Journalism-- [steve.youngblood@park.edu](mailto:steve.youngblood@park.edu)

# MEDIA COVERAGE OF CIVIC UNREST News coverage of terror attacks and shootings increases anxiety rather than desensitising, study shows

By [Alex Matthews-King](https://www.independent.co.uk/author/alex-matthews-king) The Independent Wednesday 17 April 2019 20:28 

News bulletins during terror attacks, mass shootings and national disasters fuel people’s anxiety about future calamities, rather than leading to desensitisation as some have predicted.

Exposure to these bulletins has been linked to post-traumatic stress-like symptoms in the following months, researchers from the University of California, Irvine found.

It also led to higher anxiety about future events and made the public more likely to fixate on rolling news coverage of the next major disaster – creating a “cycle of high distress and media use”.

“Repeated exposure to news coverage of collective traumas has been linked to poor mental health consequences – such as flashbacks – in the immediate aftermath, said Dr Rebecca Thompson, lead author of the study, published in the journal *Science Advances.*

*“*And post-traumatic stress responses and physical health problems over time, even among individuals who did not directly experience the event.”

For the study they surveyed more 4,000 US residents in the wake of [Boston Marathon bombing](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/boston-marathon-bombing) in 2013, and at regular intervals up until the 2016 massacre at the [Pulse nightclub](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/pulse-nightclub) in Orlando, Florida.

The research found that those who followed the news of the marathon bombing were more likely to show signs of post-traumatic stress six months afterwards, and heightened anxiety about future negative events two years later.

When the [Pulse nightclub massacre](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/pulse-nightclub) occurred this group experienced much higher levels of acute stress, and were also more likely to watch the rolling coverage of the Orlando attack.

As the recent terrorist atrocity in [Christchurch](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/Christchurch), New Zealand, showed, media organisations in a [breaking news](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/breaking-news) scenario increasingly use sensational testimony and mobile footage to convey the situation.

More recently, the [reporting of the fire](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/notre-dame-cathedral-fire-pictures-interior-history-video-paris-gallery-a8871561.html) that gutted the [Notre Dame](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/notre-dame) in Paris this week also used accounts from social media to fill the information vacuum.

Instead, the authors recommend media reports adopt a more reserved and informative tone, rather than fixating on gory details.

“Our findings suggest that media organisations should seek to balance the sensationalistic aspects of their coverage, such as providing more informational accounts, as opposed to lengthy descriptions of carnage, as they work to inform the public about breaking news events,” Professor Roxane Cohen Silver, who led the research, said.

“This may lessen the impact of exposure to one event, reducing the likelihood of increased worry and media-seeking behaviour for subsequent events.”

CASE STUDY: FERGUSON, MISSOURI  
--Regarding the August 2014 media coverage, some critics argued that it was misleading. William Freivogel, in the *Gateway Journalism Review*, ticked off a number of media-produced misperceptions about Ferguson, including that Ferguson is an angry, mostly segregated black community; that Ferguson police shot an unarmed “gentle giant” about the go off to college; and that it was unusual that Officer Wilson (who shot Brown) wasn’t arrested at the scene of the shooting.

--In *Politico*, Dylan Byers and Hadas Gold wrote: “The line between news reporting and opinion is blurring in Ferguson, Missouri, as some national journalists inject their perspective and even themselves into the story. The conduct of a few prominent members of the press on the ground at the site of the police shooting of Michael Brown has drawn the attention of media observers and prompted the wrath of conservatives who see an anti-law enforcement bias in the Fourth Estate.”

**RTDNA guidelines-Covering Civic Unrest**  
--Observe and describe what is actually happening -- what you can see, hear, even smell or feel. --Do not assign motives to anyone; you cannot know what people think or feel, only what they say or do.

--Do not use words like protest and riot -- or protester and rioter -- interchangeably. Protest can be legal or not. Rioting is by definition a crime. -

--Be mindful of loaded language from all sides and skeptical of simplistic accounts: “Police were forced to fire on the crowd” -- according to whom? “Peaceful protesters were beaten by police” -- did you see that yourself, or are you reporting what you were told? “This is being called the biggest march in the city’s history” -- by whom is it being called that?

--Be as precise as possible in describing crowds and their actions. Words like riot, mayhem and thug may carry unintended meaning to various audiences. Avoid subjective language like huge, scary, ugly, etc. -

--Be skeptical of crowd estimates. Organizers of an event have an agenda. So do their opponents. --Recognize that, even with press credentials on display, journalists may be treated no differently than protesters in some situations. Follow police directives, but record as much as possible without endangering your own safety or interfering in police activity.

--Weigh carefully the decision to report live from active scenes of ongoing violence. Similarly consider carefully the impact of using bright lights and other obtrusive equipment.

--Remember that there are not just two sides to every story; in most cases, there are far more than two sides. Resist false dichotomies suggesting that everybody is on “one side or the other.”

**NI media teaches lesson on coverage of Lyra McKee murder**  
By Steven Youngblood, Peace Journalism Insights http://stevenyoungblood.blogspot.com

In any conflict or post-conflict zone, the hundreds of journalists I’ve worked with agree that they bear a particular responsibility to serve their communities by not exacerbating ongoing conflicts or re-ignite simmering ones.

Sadly, this point was driven home (in April) with the murder of 29-year old journalist Lyra McKee during civil unrest in Derry.

It would have been understandable, if regrettable, if the press in Northern Ireland had gone on a rampage after the murder, making false accusations, inflaming sectarian passions, using extreme and demonizing language, and generally pouring gasoline on the fire.

A small study of reporting about McKee’s murder shows that this did not happen, and that instead Northern Irish media actively sought to not make a bad situation even worse.

I randomly chose 15 articles about the murder and its aftermath, and analyzed them using a content analysis rubric developed by my students at Park University and I. 8 of the 15 articles were classified as non-inflammatory journalism; 5 of the 15 showed some characteristics of inflammatory and traditional (inflammatory) journalism; and only 2 were considered traditional journalism.

One of the two traditional journalism stories was an opinion column that appeared in the Independent. (<https://www.independent.ie/opinion/comment/ian-odoherty-lyra-mckees-death-was-murder-not-just-a-tragic-accident-as-saoradhs-dinosaurs-try-to-claim-38041198.html>) Especially noteworthy was its angry tone, name calling (“dinosaurs”), and homage to the Troubles (“blood spattered past.”)

Otherwise, the reporting worked hard to remain informative and objective without exacerbating the situation. Sectarian bias was seldom on display. Many voices across the political spectrum were heard, and they universally condemned the murder. Most of the language used in the articles was measured, although overly sympathetic, victimizing language (seem in 9 of 15 articles) was hard for many writers to avoid.

One key point: Historical wrongs (the Troubles, in this instance) were mentioned in only four of the 15 articles. Imagine covering every contemporary Northern Irish news story, like this murder, through the prism of the Troubles. The impact, to continuously re-open wounds and re-stoke the flames of sectarianism, could be devastating to peace.

Many of the stories analyzed featured portrayals of McKee—an emphasis aligned with responsible journalism that focuses on victims instead of perpetrators. There were several excellent articles featuring memories from McKee’s partner (<https://www.derryjournal.com/news/crime/it-has-left-me-without-the-love-of-my-life-lyra-mckee-s-partner-1-8898302>) , and one other article about the outpouring of support McKee’s family has received. (<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/crime/lyra-mckee-journalist-s-grieving-family-touched-by-outpouring-of-support-and-love-1-8901609>) In addition, her picture, and links to her outstanding Ted Talk (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ymU-5Y3rkY>) were posted everywhere.

How could this reporting be even better? I would have liked to see a few more of the articles look forward, the way that Alex Kane’s column does in the News Letter. (<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/opinion/the-task-of-change-now-falls-to-lyra-s-generation-1-8899797> ) Is this murder, and the underlying unrest and political turmoil, part of a growing trend? What lessons can be learned from this tragedy, and how can it be a gateway to a more peaceful future for Northern Ireland? In fact, this theme was prevalent in coverage of McKee’s funeral in Belfast. (<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/lyra-mckee-murder-can-be-doorway-to-new-beginning-for-northern-ireland-mourners-told-at-belfast-funeral-38045297.html> ). More of the coverage could have examined solutions, especially those that transcend merely catching and punishing the perpetrator(s).

I will be in Northern Ireland in May, working with journalists and students on a State Department project that deals with just these issues of responsible, non-inflammatory reporting. Based on the coverage of this incident, it looks like my Northern Irish colleagues will be teaching me a thing or two.

\*Articles analyzed from *Irish News, Independent, Derry Journal, Belfast Telegraph*

**TIPS: COVERING CIVIC UNREST**1. Report on the “them” respectfully and with empathy  
2. Report on the invisible causes and effects of the conflict and violence  
3. Use precise language  
4. Report objectively and fairly  
5. Report counter narratives that offer different, unique perspectives on the protesters, the police, and the community  
6. Consider the consequences of your reporting  
7. Report with reconciliation in mind  
8. Give voice to peacemakers on all sides before, during, and after the conflict  
9. Monitor, moderate, debunk rumors, and correct social media during a crisis.   
*--Steven Youngblood, Peace Journalism Principles and Practices, 2016*

**SECTARIAN COVERAGE-NI**By David Ferman, A Parade or a Riot, Journal of Media and Religion, 2013.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15348423.2013.811367>

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The *News Letter* devoted much of its Twelfth coverage to stories of successful, peaceful, and well-attended parades; the large amount of time and effort members of the Orange Order lodges and, moreover, the popular bands that annually play during the marches spent during the season; the air of celebration and togetherness that the parades brought to Northern Ireland; and how the parades heightened the Protestant/loyalist perspective on the history and current social/political situation in Northern Ireland.

… Moreover, the newspaper promoted several perspectives on the violence that traditionally surrounds marching season. A July 5 story, “Orangemen just want a peaceful Twelfth,” begins with the sentence “When unrest occurs around the Twelfth period and marching season, the very last people who want to see it are the Orange Order”

… Notable among the stories that promote the perspective that marching season is an important, positive event for Northern Ireland’s residents and a fun way for members of the community to participate in a time-honored tradition are three feature stories about various members of the Orange Order.

…The *Irish News*, by contrast, devoted the vast majority of its coverage to the violence and civil unrest that accompanied the season, including numerous stories that quoted public officials on the need for the parades to not descend into riots and mayhem; assaults of Catholics and nationalists by loyalists; loyalists targeting a specific Catholic for death; the cost to the public for the cleanup of the parades and the loyalist bonfires; the need for increased police presence along parade routes; injuries to police.

Two other facets of the newspaper’s overall coverage are worth noting. The first is the omission of the story about McAleese’s Twelfth party which, as previously noted, when printed in the News Letter, underscored the idea that marching season is a peaceful event that promotes good relations between Ireland and the United Kingdom, and is even endorsed by the president of the largely Catholic Republic of Ireland. The second is that virtually all of the stories about marching season in the newspaper between July 11 and July 16 were printed under one of three headings that heightened the sense that the parades were the source of riots, crime, and civil unrest. officers in connection with the parades; injuries to citizens in Northern Ireland; and the large number of people brought to court for violent offenses during the season.

**RECONCILIATION**

**What is reconciliation?**A very general definition would suggest that reconciliation is about building or rebuilding relationships damaged by violence and coercion, not only among people and groups in society, but also between people/citizens and the state. It is also important to give specific consideration to societal stakeholders that have a great interest in reconciliation and peacebuilding, without having a strong or organized voice, e.g., victims, youth, ex-combatants, displaced people, diasporas, women, etc.An open brainstorming session at the beginning of the workshop revealed a large number of interpretations of and elements in the term “reconciliation”, including:

**•** trauma healing at all levels of society (personal, community-based and national);

**•** truth-telling and thus assuming responsibility for crimes;

**•** providing reparations to victims;

**•** forgiveness;

**•** transitional justice (restorative, retributive, distributive, economic and/or social);

**•** trust building and dialogue generation;

**•** eliminating the use of violence as a political tool by the country’s elite;

**•** addressing ethnic, social, and identity-based cleavages and polarisation;

**•** defining a shared vision for the country (nation building);

**•** addressing imbalances such as political exclusion; and

**•** power-sharing as a way to start building trust at the highest levels.

**Thematic areas of reconciliation:**

Healing

Trauma and healing should be approached holistically. Trauma should not merely be understood as the psychological result of an event, but rather as a process that may change before, during and after the conflict.

Truth, justice and reconciliation

Reconciliation is both a goal and a process. There are four key elements to a successful reconciliation: (i) an inclusive national dialogue; (ii) political will; (iii) security and freedom to speak and move; and (iv) a national vision of the nation’s end state as defined by its citizens. Transitional justice is necessary, but not sufficient in itself to achieve reconciliation. For instance, truth commissions that are not based on an inclusive national dialogue rarely serve their purpose beyond revealing facts and providing

some criminal accountability.

Reparation

Establishing the truth about previous violations and responding to the consequences of the violence affecting victims’ lives are both crucial for reconciliation. Reparation belongs to the latter and is usually either individual/judicial or massive/restorative.

**Media’s Role in Reconciliation**

Media plays a vital role in conflict and post-conflict situations. In Liberia, the media had, at times, acted as a propaganda tool.  At other times, the media reported objective and important information, and courageous individuals put their lives on the line in defense of freedom of expression and for the people of Liberia. Many journalists were killed, harassed or forced to flee their country during the civil conflict.  –UNESCO.org

**RECONCILIATION STRATEGIES…**  
Promoting understanding through media  
a. Documentaries and films promoting mutual understanding  
b. Peace radio and television  
c. Professionalization of media, both print and electronic  
d. Institutional infrastructure for independent media (OECD.org)

**Media’s Role in promoting understanding**

<https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/reljic_handbook.pdf>

In an ideal world, the media should at least attempt to orient its reporting style towards the creation of peace, instead of intensifying prejudices that in turn heighten conflict. Such ideal journalism is a critical part of the consensus democracy concept, and represents the proper role of the media in conflict prevention and resolution. Despite this, the media is often perceived as giving priority to negative aspects in its reporting of conflicts, with a suspicion that they do this consciously because it ‚sells better‘. Demands are often made upon the media to adopt a more constructive role in conflict prevention and experienced journalists are frequently accused of being innately sceptical. Nevertheless, it is too simplistic to expect the media as an entity to feel collectively obliged to actively promote the peace and development of civil societies.

Time and again, international state and non-state organisations, as well as other institutions, have issued statements expressing the view that the media could have an important role to play in constructively reporting about conflicts and combating the propaganda of hate. For example, in the closing declaration of the European Conference on Conflict Prevention (Amsterdam, 27-28 February 1997), the EU was called upon to examine how they might support the reporting efforts of independent local media in societies prone to conflict. In addition, special education was proposed for local and European journalists working in conflict regions. Journalists would be urged to convince the general public and politicians in power of the need to invest in conflict prevention. It was further suggested that this could begin with emphasis being drawn to the considerable humanitarian and material costs of conflict management.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) remains convinced that the media can not only help to defuse conflicts, but also that it is uniquely positioned to encourage coexistence and co-operation between people of different origins. „By practising objective, fact-based reporting that avoids stereotypes or stirring up rumours, individual journalists and the media as a whole have a tremendous potential to contribute to understanding and bridge-building“, was the view taken by IFJ in a manual addressing this topic (IFJ 1997). In the course of a debate about the reporting of ethnic conflicts in Africa, this organisation also drafted detailed and practical recommendations for more balanced and objective media reporting on such events. Neither is there any lack of sophisticated suggestions from other important players on the international stage as to the precise nature of positive or constructive journalism. Besides the classic five ‚w‘s, (why, what, who, where, and when) which should be covered in news items, for instance, demands from the United States of America (USA) also call for an ‚s‘ (solutions) as well as a ‚c‘ (common ground).

It has even been suggested that the media may well be the most powerful means available for the resolution of future conflicts or even for the prevention of wars. Furthermore, journalists are well supplied with well-intended proposals to help them realise these expectations. Johan Galtung (1997) for instance suggests that journalists should:   
• illuminate the story in detail from all sides;   
• be careful to draw from diverse sources;   
• restrict overuse of elites as sources, but should make use of different experts;   
• avoid glorifying the technology of war;   
• also use dramatic imagery to portray the horrors of war;   
• offer sensible and well-written reports about ordinary people;   
• supply more background reports;   
• be aware that news makers (spin doctors) are out to manipulate them;   
• avoid treating their work itself as a story;   
• give ample coverage to and promote peace initiatives.

**REPORTING ON RECONCIIATION, PEACE, PEACE PROCESSES IN NI**

**Fact checking as tool for reconciliation in NI**

<https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2016/a-new-website-in-northern-ireland-hopes-fact-checking-will-be-a-tool-for-reconciliation/> --- <https://factcheckni.org/> AND <https://factcheckni.org/category/facts/peace/>

Historically, print media consumption in Northern Ireland was connected to religious affiliation. The Belfast Telegraph and the News Letter were the newspapers of choice of the Protestant population while the Irish News predominantly catered to Catholic readers.

According to Maggie Swarbrick, the course director of the M.A. in Journalism at Ulster University, television news has tried to remain impartial, while it is “harder to quantify the religious breakdown of the consumers of less traditional media.”

Peace is one of the four themes that FactCheckNI monitors, alongside crime, the economy and Europe. [**One of the first fact checks**](http://www.factcheckni.org/facts/more-residents-want-peace-walls-to-stay/) on the site examined community support for the so-called “peace walls” that separate many neighborhoods.

Viral memes carrying misleading information are a problem across the globe, but they can be particularly pernicious in a combustible political environment like Northern Ireland’s. The raising or burning of flags in the province can stoke serious tensions — even if these images are actually of flags being burned in other parts of the world. Beyond correcting the record, simple tools like reverse image search can therefore help avoid violence.

For this reason, FactCheckNI will also be providing interactive fact-checking training sessions to communities across the province, led by Enda Young, a mechanical engineer turned conflict mediator, who is the co-founder of Transformative Connections.

**Reporting peace processes in NI**

Denis Murray <https://www.osce.org/networks/98116?download=true>

Good Friday and after

This brings me on to how covering a peace process works. At Stormont a media centre was eventually set up in a car park, cabins, portable loos and all. A decision had been taken to exclude the media from the talks, but not from the proximity of where they were taking place. Towards the end, it became rather ludicrous, with politicians emerging to talk to the cameras half an hour before bulletin time. One of the most regular of these serial ”spinners” was John Taylor, deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist party, who memorably remarked that he wouldn’t touch the deal on offer with a 40 foot bargepole. This led to endless fun for the hacks, with cries of “how long is your bargepole today, John?”  Another important element was the phone (obvious but vital).

Very quickly, journalists attending the talks on a more or less permanent basis got the direct-line numbers of the various delegations, and they had our mobile numbers, which meant no party or government could control the flow of information. This modus operandi continued throughout the talks that led to agreement, and then afterwards in other talks aimed at implementation. The only exception to this was at the US Ambassador’s residence during the Mitchell Review of autumn 1999. Former US senator George Mitchell, having admirably performed his role as independent chair of the Good Friday process, was invited back to break the deadlock which had followed. The residence is in Regent’s Park London, and unsurprisingly, very well protected. Here came the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP, the main players of the time. And they were simply locked away. One reporter who was there said it was the only time it was made clear that the media were not welcome and not tolerated. Here then, we come to the balance. For this tactic worked.

In an interview at the successful end of the review, I asked Senator Mitchell just how important these talks had been. Absolutely crucial was his view, and not just the content but the circumstances. The two sides didn’t engage except to indulge in hostile “whataboutery”4 , until at one point one Unionist and one SDLP delegate went to the table with the tea and coffee. One offered to pour the milk for the other, the ice was broken and progress made. So to keep the media away, have them nearby, or involve them?

Much as I’m in favour of disclosure, talks in public are unlikely to work – who is going to negotiate in public? For instance, I once asked the post-apartheid ANC Deputy South African High Commissioner to London, what they had done when even being seen to talk about something would have been political suicide. “We went out in the bush”, was the reply. Negotiators (one suspects it was the two chief negotiators) would simply vanish off somewhere, thrash out a deal and bring back a solution. Help or hindrance, and the journalist as citizen So is having the media to hand during peace processes a help or a hindrance? Firstly, in my view, it is not the job of a reporter to be concerned with being either helpful or unhelpful, just to report and analyse. Reporting to the world that the IRA had called a “complete” ceasefire, did, however, almost certainly give the process an added impetus. On the other hand, the revealing of the so-called Framework Documents by the Daily Telegraph (which was almost certainly done to be unhelpful) didn’t stop the process. Then-Prime Minister John Major and then-Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) John Bruton would undoubtedly have preferred they hadn’t been leaked, but does anyone remember lasting damage being done?

Lessons learned? I am convinced that the coverage of the Troubles and of the peace process helped bring the conflict to an end, simply by telling the truth. Senator Mitchell sent a letter, post-Good Friday, to all the correspondents who covered the duration of the talks, thanking them for making a contribution simply by telling the truth.

There are other examples of media influencing by not trying to influence: the Vietnam War for instance. I once heard a former US television network news chief say “the more your audience doesn’t want to hear it, the more you gotta keep telling them”. Does anyone doubt that American public opinion about the war was changed by nightly coverage? I think the public has every right to be informed about talks as they progress, but in the interests of ending conflicts, those talks should not be held in completely open parliament-style forums.

**Reporting the troubles**

# Introducing new datasets on Northern Ireland’s media in the peace process and a test of newsworthiness in times of ‘troubles’

By [Maria Armoudian](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1750635216643112) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1750635216643112>

During the Northern Ireland conflict and peace process, eight interviewed journalists said they focused most on republican activities – the IRA and its affiliated party, Sinn Fein (personal interviews, 2009, 2010). They also, however, expressed a deep interest and enthusiasm about the activities of John Hume and his party, the SDLP, and admitted that unionist and loyalist parties captured their imaginations the least (personal interviews 2009, 2010). This may reflect the standards of newsworthiness – after all, it was the republicans (Sinn Fein) and the SDLP who were seeking change, while the goal of unionists and loyalists was continuing the status quo. And the means by which republicans sought change was dramatic, conflict-ridden and a violation of societal values.

The dataset corroborated this news focus (see [Figure 3](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1750635216643112)). Of the four political parties under study, Sinn Fein, the change-pursuing, drama and conflict-creating party, appeared in the articles most frequently across all publications. Among the three traditional, daily newspapers, the nationalist *Irish News* sample included Sinn Fein in 45 percent of the articles, while the two unionist newspapers, the *Ulster News Letter*, and the *Belfast Telegraph* both included Sinn Fein in 41 percent of the sample’s articles. In its own ideological publication, the republican *An Phoblacht*, Sinn Fein dominated coverage, appearing in nearly 72 percent of the sampled articles. The loyalist publication, *Combat*, included Sinn Fein the least of the publications – a total of 37 percent of the articles sampled. But even so, it featured its foe more frequently than its own party, the PUP.

Northern Ireland is another region in which research has suggested media’s role in supporting the peace agreement’s acceptance. For example, [Gadi Wolfsfeld (2004)](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1750635216643112) focused primarily on editorials in the daily newspapers, analyzing them for support or opposition to the peace process. When comparing editorials in Northern Ireland to those in the Middle East, Wolfsfeld found that the op-eds in Northern Ireland overall supported the peace process, ultimately aiding the Belfast Peace Agreement’s ratification. In contrast, the media articles in the Middle East exacerbated the conflict between Israel and Palestine, contributing to the breakdown of the peace process (ibid).

**SECTARIAN COVERAGE-NI**By David Ferman, A Parade or a Riot, Journal of Media and Religion, 2013.  
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… Notable among the stories that promote the perspective that marching season is an important, positive event for Northern Ireland’s residents and a fun way for members of the community to participate in a time-honored tradition are three feature stories about various members of the Orange Order.

…The *Irish News*, by contrast, devoted the vast majority of its coverage to the violence and civil unrest that accompanied the season, including numerous stories that quoted public officials on the need for the parades to not descend into riots and mayhem; assaults of Catholics and nationalists by loyalists; loyalists targeting a specific Catholic for death; the cost to the public for the cleanup of the parades and the loyalist bonfires; the need for increased police presence along parade routes; injuries to police.

Two other facets of the newspaper’s overall coverage are worth noting. The first is the omission of the story about McAleese’s Twelfth party which, as previously noted, when printed in the News Letter, underscored the idea that marching season is a peaceful event that promotes good relations between Ireland and the United Kingdom, and is even endorsed by the president of the largely Catholic Republic of Ireland. The second is that virtually all of the stories about marching season in the newspaper between July 11 and July 16 were printed under one of three headings that heightened the sense that the parades were the source of riots, crime, and civil unrest. officers in connection with the parades; injuries to citizens in Northern Ireland; and the large number of people brought to court for violent

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND PJ**

Social media have created platforms for misinformation. In turn, this misinformation has led to violence in several locales worldwide, including France, Mexico, and India. <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2019/misinformation-is-inciting-violence-around-the-world-and-tech-platforms-dont-have-a-plan-to-stop-it/>

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND PJ IN NI**

IRISH TIMES: SINN FEIN WON THE SOCIAL MEDIA WAR  
…Irish republicans from Sinn Féin, to dissidents like the 32 County Sovereignty Movement and the newer socialists of éirígí, were forging an ecosystem online, using free spaces to hammer out the structural transformations of a political worldview being dynamically remoulded by internal change and the effects of the peace process.

And Irish republicans were more ideally suited to, pardon the pun, the guerrilla nature of the net, because they had been engaged in such countercultural media practices for more than 200 years.

Sinn Féin was an instinctively successful and engaged presence online – former senior party activist and current Dublin West TD Eoin Ó’Broin said republicans had been producing countercultural literature dating back to the newspapers of the United Irishmen in the late 18th century.

…When framed by nearly two centuries of highly productive and dynamic activist communication, it should come as no surprise that republicans have become an adept and strong presence in the Northern Irish and Irish social media spheres, but it is not as a result of these spaces opening up.

Journalists and politicians decry the so-called “Shinnerbots”, the multitudes of Sinn Féin supporters who are said to police online communication and bully anyone daring to challenge the party’s agenda. There is ample evidence to support this, despite some Shinnerbots’ claims that this is fake news.

But another reading of this phenomenon is that it reveals the young, engaged and dynamic membership and support that the party enjoys among millennial digital natives as well as those forced to seek out alternative forms of communication while marginalised from the mainstream. Writing and communicating from the margins can be said to be central to their DNA.

However, the potential of the internet as a space of meaningful political engagement has withered as social media shattered the Northern Irish political public sphere across a multiplicity of competing channels and accounts.

Social media’s relatively limited capabilities in terms of form means that the quality of writing has declined – how much can you really say in 280 Twitter characters? Twitter has made stars of controversialists whose shock value is forced to escalate as their last utterance becomes tired and quickly forgotten. It has also been the birthing ground of an anonymous army of trolls who hit and run, leaving destruction in their wake.

On Facebook, with its smaller, more private networks, there has been much less inter-community political engagement than there was in the 2000s. Many more people might be tweeting and commenting, but it has coarsened discourse, made it more ghettoised and rendered it ineffective for articulate political debate.

Sinn Féin’s political power and adept social and activist media strategies won the internal republican ideological battles begat by the peace process 25 years ago and there is little sustained countercultural opposition to the project in the dissident organisations. Other than Anthony McIntyre’s Pensive Quill blog there’s not much high-quality dissenting writing remaining. Social media was a zero-sum battleground and the Shinners comprehensively won it.

Republicans across its political spectrum put in hard, often-ignored yards in political communication before the net made it easy for everyone. Consequently, it can be argued, they were uniquely placed to make ideological hay online while the others were still snoozing. Shinners, Dissos and Dissenters: Irish Republican Media Activism since the Good Friday Agreement by Dr Paddy Hoey is published by Manchester University Press.

**Responsible Journalism and Social Media  
Peace Journalism and Social Media**Ideas for responsible use of social media

1. Use SM to offer counternarratives that debunk stereotypes, myths, and misperceptions.  
2. Use SM as a tool to hold the powerful (governments, businesses, etc.) to account for their actions.  
3. Use SM to broaden societal conversations so that they include (and indeed, are led by) the traditional voiceless: the poor and disadvantaged, victims, marginalized communities, etc.  
4. Use SM to call out irresponsible traditional media when it stigmatizes, “us vs. them” narratives, scapegoats, or uses hateful or inflammatory language, etc.

5. Use SM to connect and mobilize like-minded peace journalists.  
6. Use SM as a tool to analyze and deconstruct the causes of violent conflict and to connect with all conflicted parties.  
7. Use SM to disseminate peace journalism reporting, thus sidestepping profit-driven traditional media.  
8. Use SM to fact check, crowd source, and lead discussions about solutions, without advocating any one solution.

**SHAREDFUTURE.NEWS**

[Shared Future News](https://sharedfuture.news/) is an online publication dedicated to providing news, information, and personal stories on the topics of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and diversity. Posts are published at least once weekly to an audience interested in the history and politics of Ireland and Northern Ireland. We believe that it is important to spread the news of those working for a shared future in Northern Ireland.

Our vision is a shared Northern Irish society where peace is improved by reporters and storytellers.

Our mission is to develop peace journalism in the province of Ulster.

Our objective is to provide depth and context to peacebuilding activities in Northern Ireland and border counties. <https://sharedfuture.news/>

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