

**The Post-Brexit Security Field
on the Island of Ireland:
The Role of Civil Society in
Everyday Security**

**Workshop Summary Report
From City Hotel Event on
16 February 2024**

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For more information please visit: www.bordexproject.com

OVERVIEW

This report documents the discussions of participants during a workshop at the City Hotel, Derry/Londonderry, that was held on 16 February 2024. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce the BORDEX project in the Western fieldwork site, learn about safety and security in local communities, and gain an understanding of the organisations involved in producing and maintaining security, often in informal ways. Additionally, the event was intended to develop new connections and provide networking opportunities. Attendees represented a diverse range of community groups from both the north and south, Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) communities, as well as minoritised groups.

The BORDEX team provided an overview of the project, which was proceeded by a number of break-out sessions to discuss particular topics. The first session addressed defining the geographic area that would be covered by the research on the western side of the Island, with feedback from participants focusing on the main concerns and safety practices in the region. The second session concerned the conceptualisation of a 'security field', and participants were able to discuss the key organisations and actors within the area, as well as the relationships between community-based groups and statutory organisations. This report summarises the issues raised and key points of discussion and feedback provided by the participants.

Introduction to the BORDEX Project

BORDEX is a research project funded by the Shared Island Initiative North-South Research Programme which supports collaborations between university-based researchers. The full title of the project is 'The Post-Brexit Security Field on the Island of Ireland: The Role of Civil Society in Everyday Security'. This means that the research is focused on the role of community-based actors in producing safety and security.

The BORDEX project is primarily focused on informal (non-state) agencies and groups that play a role in maintaining civic peace, often beside and sometimes independently of the formal police service (either north or south) or other statutory organisations. The research seeks to identify how these processes play out and aims to explore the future of formal and informal relationships in a Shared-Island context with respect of producing 'safe communities'. Additionally, the research is keen to discover more about the security experiences of marginalised groups and to understand how people of different genders and identities experience security. Further information about BORDEX can be found on the project's website <https://www.bordexproject.com/>

Key Research Questions

1. What and who are the key social, cultural and economic institutions involved in security production? How are they critical to maintaining everyday peace and security? How are community-based actors valued and supported relative to more institutionalised forms of security governance?
2. What are the security futures facing the island of Ireland, particularly in a shared Island context? What role should these formal and informal institutions play?
3. In our research questions, how do different genders and marginalised groups experience engagements in the security field, and do actors' reflections on the situation vary by gender or identity?

Concept of Security

To create a foundation for the discussions in the workshop, the research team first reflected on the concept of security and its meaning within the project. Participants were asked to define 'security' from their own perspective in a brainstorm session. Their understandings are outlined in Box 1:

Box 1: What does security mean to you?

- Feeling safe in your own community.
- Being able to live in our own homes without fear of crime.
- Knowing that if something does happen there are adequate supports and services in place.
- Preference to use the word safety instead of security as it appears more human-focused. The word security carries a harshness and is associated with law enforcement, crime, and punishment.
- Means a friendly and non-threatening environment.
- Having a good relationship with agencies.
- Community alert schemes, especially in rural and isolated areas.
- House alarms.
- Ensuring safety in all communities.
- Community advocates might not see themselves as contributing to security, but they do.
- Support doesn't exist for minority groups.
- Community groups being forced to deal with more areas of safety as police limit their responses to certain issues (i.e. mental health calls no longer handled by PSNI).

From Box 1 it is clear that security is closely associated with safety for participants. It covers a breadth of levels (i.e. the individual, the home, the community), as well as physical and mental dimensions (i.e. feeling safe, being without fear, home protection, etc.). Part of security entails having services and supports in place to respond to insecurity. This was also described as being a responsibility for not only statutory agencies, but also local communities and informal institutions. Participants specifically mentioned that often community actors involved in the production of security do not see themselves in this capacity, but that their contributions are very important when examined in this way. They noted that relationships between those providing security is essential and that actors must work together to be effective.

The BORDEX project works with a definition of security that is broader than that typically used by state organisations such as the police, or private security companies. These more traditional conceptualisations often conjure up militaristic responses, international security, the use of force, or technological intelligence. However, we recognise that in a more contemporary sense, security is often considered more broadly because state organisations increasingly form partnerships with civil society groups (NGOs, community groups, grassroots movements, etc.) on particular crime, safety and security issues. This project takes this understanding a step further, by contending that security should not be limited to these state-centric conceptualisations, and instead should be thought of as a state of trust, confidence, and wellbeing, of feeling secure or ‘being without a care’ or ‘carefree’. Central to our project is the idea of *everyday security*. This means activity that is beyond the formal official processes—instead, we are concerned with the lived realities of the practice of security, either those practices which the community actively undertakes in order to build security or those practices to which it is opposed.

We therefore visualise everyday security as ‘...the lived realities of practical security measures, including the diverse ways in which programmes, strategies and techniques for governing security are experienced, taken up, resisted, and even augmented by different individuals and groups within society...’ particularly ‘beyond the formal, official processes of national government and other political authorities’.

— Crawford, A. and Hutchinson, S. 2016. *Mapping the Contours of ‘Everyday Security’: Time, Space and Emotion*. *British Journal of Criminology*, 56, 1184-1202 (p.1185).

CONCEPTUALISING THE WESTERN SITE

In the next session of the workshop, participants were asked to outline their areas of work and their major concerns in respect of safety and security in the region. In the previous site, the team had initially suggested a ‘corridor’ as a potential means of capturing the movement and transfer of ideas, goods, people, and crime in the area. However, feedback at the time made it clear that although this resonated with statutory approaches concerning major infrastructure and motorways, participants felt that ‘crime’ and ‘security’ did not align to such a rigid format. They expressed greater complexity to the issues and areas. Therefore, in moving to the Western Site, researchers did not presuppose any structure to the site and generally asked participants to identify key areas of concern (i.e., where there were examples of safety issues), as well as areas of best practice (i.e., where there were examples of good safety practices) in order to define the region of study. These results are discussed in Section 3.

Outlining the Research Area

To begin, participants noted where they provided their services and which areas they covered (Box 2):

Box 2: Participants' Primary Areas of Work

- Levels of immediate area (neighbourhood), wider area (city), and regional area identified.
 - Most participants worked within Derry/Londonderry, with others working in Letterkenny, Strabane, Donegal, as well as wider regional areas.
- Some attendees identified working both North and South of the border.
- Some organisations work across all of Northern Ireland or all Island.
- Both rural and urban areas identified.

From these responses, we see that many participants cover large areas, often engaging with specific communities as well as governmental initiatives across the whole Island. This was especially true of organisations that provided services in rural environments. Some participants stated that they were not restricted to any particular locality and that they covered all of Northern Ireland, or the entire Island of Ireland.

Participants recommended that researchers consider the wider Derry/Londonderry area, as well as Donegal, and Tyrone, with understanding that many security issues and services spanned even larger geographic areas.

Identifying the Key Security Issues

Next, participants discussed the primary safety and security concerns in their communities, which they identified as follows (Box 3):

Box 3: Participants' Primary Concerns

- Anti-social behaviour.
- Illegal drug use, sale, and transport.
- Illegal car racing.
- Break-ins.
- Scams.
- Fox hunting and agricultural crimes in rural areas.
- Legacy-related issues.
- Wide-spread mental health issues.
- Lack of state resources, especially for rural areas.
- Rise of right-wing extremist groups having a negative impact and generating insecurity.
- Hate crimes targeting minority communities, in particular asylum seekers and LGBTQI+ individuals.
- Shift of paramilitary groups into criminal gangs with drug involvement.

One of the main issues participants raised concerned drugs and alcohol. This included a range of concerns, such as drug and alcohol use, addiction, drug dealing, crime associated with drug dealing and drug debts, and the involvement of paramilitary groups and organised crime groups. They noted increasing use of and dependence on drugs in particular, and that the need for supports and treatment exceeded what current organisations are able to provide. They noted that gaps in provision and response can have a range of knock-on effects, including forced transportation, debt, family fear, threats,

vehicle burning, and relocation. They also suggested that Brexit has caused a change in drug transportation pathways in the area, resulting in a shift from supplies coming from England to a greater connection with the south of Ireland. While paramilitary groups are increasingly being associated with drugs in the North, it was felt that the South had greater problems with organised crime and drug gangs. It was expressed that this is becoming more of a reality for the North as well.

There were also substantial concerns raised around right-wing groups and the rise of hate incidents and scaremongering (whether related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.). People belonging to minority and targeted groups are feeling very unsafe. It was noted that often right-wing groups were being influenced from afar, with examples of funding coming from the United States. Participants were concerned that policy and state-led approaches were not addressing the root cause of the issue, and were instead seeking to resolve tension by moving targeted individuals, which placed the burden on victims and failed to resolve the problem. There was also a sense that many victims of hate crimes were being directed to specific community and voluntary organisations for support, and that statutory organisations were relying on these community organisations as fix-all solutions. They noted that there were trust issues with statutory partners, historical legacy issues, and failure of statutory groups to respond.

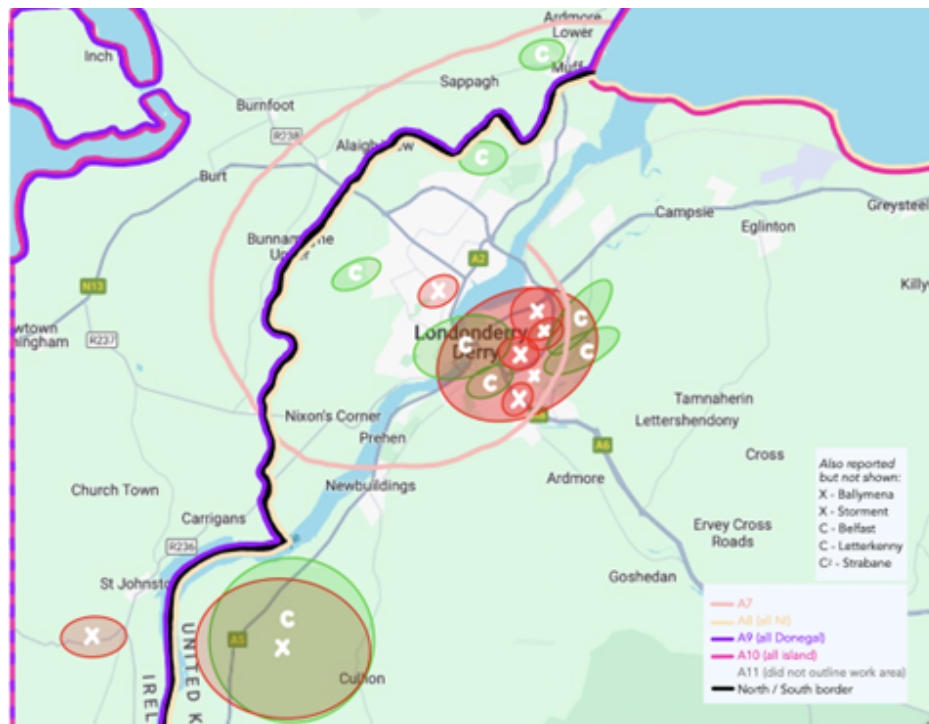
Another theme that came through very strongly was the identification of mental health as a major security issue. In particular, participants noted that suicide and self-harm were very common and that existing organisations did not have the capacity to provide support to everyone who needs it. Participants also emphasised that poor mental health and mental illness often co-existed with drug and alcohol use and addiction.

Another dynamic participants discussed concerned the urbanisation of rural areas. They noted that many new homes are being built, which is resulting in less familiarity between neighbours and less integration, which is changing the safety context in rural regions. They are worried that programmes and resources are often directed at cities rather than rural communities. They also noted a number of legacy concerns, including the formation of single-identity communities, which can cause tensions, especially around the time of bonfires and parades or other cultural events. The focus of cross-community work as a result of the conflict has also limited the focus of funding, and has forced groups to concentrate on particular issues at the sake of other issues. They noted that while there is a need for cross-community work, the exclusive focus on it in the wake of the conflict has meant that intra-community development has suffered. Paramilitary activity also remained a worry, with participants noting the link between class and paramilitary involvement.

Most agreed that the most serious threat to security was coming from the government and, specifically the lack of leadership. This workshop was held around the time the two-year DUP boycott ended and was fresh in participants' minds. Even when in session, some participants noted that the government was responsible for policies that failed to protect or created insecurity for some members of society (including for instance the continued legality of conversion therapy for LGBTQI+ individuals). Beyond identity issues, participants also commented that more general policies could threaten safety, such as housing policies and point systems that resulted in new housing developments having high rates of anti-social behaviour. These types of issues, combined with feelings that statutory agencies sometimes fail to adequately address safety issues, meant that participants were concerned about the substantial responsibility placed on community groups and the sustainability of their programmes due to funding.

They also identified examples of good practice, in which groups were successfully contributing to the security context, which are discussed further in Section 3.

Figure 1: Maps - Participants were asked to highlight areas where they worked, areas of concerns (red), and areas of good practice on a map (green). These images depict their combined responses (one covering the larger area, and one in further detail).



CONCEPTUALISING THE SECURITY FIELD

The remainder of the workshop focused on the concept of a 'security field'. This idea draws on Bourdieu's theory of a *field* as a network or configuration of actors, with tensions sometimes arising between powerful actors and dominated actors over access to resources. We therefore envision the security field as a multi-level arena, based upon actors' positions in relation to resources and power, who help contribute to the maintenance and provision of everyday safety, including both statutory and non-statutory actors. The research team was interested in hearing participants' ideas about which organisations and actors might exist and interact within this field.

Figure 2: A depiction of the multi-level security field with example actors and organisations.



Key Community Actors and Examples of Good Practice

In this session, participants were asked to identify existing initiatives, projects, and services which they considered to be models of good practice in dealing with the issues and challenges identified in earlier sessions. Their responses are set out in Box 4 below.

Box 4: Participants' Examples of Good Practice

- Range of ongoing preventative and proactive work.
- Strong community relationships.
- Property marking to reduce theft and increase identification of stolen property.
- Non-security organisations (youth clubs, sport clubs, etc.) providing support and maintaining community wellbeing.
 - Particular emphasis on youth clubs being proactive around preventative work

- Community forums that tackle local issues as well as migrant and victim support forums.
- HIVE cancer support hub.
- Integrated education and sports.
- Strong preventative and diversion projects.
 - Festival committee that helps address potential issues (like safety and ASB) relating to bonfires in surrounding areas.
- Working with paramilitary groups to make communities less threatening by removing murals and flags.
 - Desire to see paramilitary leaders take positive role in community by becoming community leaders or youth leaders.
- Importance of safety wardens.
- Normalising relationships with police.
- Investment and funding key.

Participants emphasised that collaboration is key to enhancing security and noted that informal links across communities and organisations was very important to generating safety. This could include between community groups, between individuals in community forums, between communities and paramilitary groups, or between state institutions and community groups. Most of their examples of best practice centred on groups committed to proactive and preventative work, with several examples of youth clubs in particular. They noted that it is very important to have neutral spaces where integration can occur (whether through sports, schools, city centres, etc.). They also underscored the value of diversionary projects to generate alternatives to anti-social behaviour and promote the reduction of tension. They provided examples of festivals that take place during the time of cultural bonfires to encourage residents to attend positive family events rather than activities that often generate insecurity. They noted the importance of working with paramilitary groups on issues of safety, including, for instance, gaining paramilitary support in regenerating areas by repainting paramilitary murals with welcoming messages or removing flags.

Relationships with Statutory Organisations

During this final group discussion, the participants were asked to identify their links to statutory agencies. They considered the nature of their relationships, which agencies they interacted with most commonly, and whether the collaboration was effective. They were also asked to think of any challenges or areas for improvement. Responses are set out in Box 5 below.

Box 5: Participant links and relationships with statutory agencies

- Perception of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) varied between attendees, some stated the agency was very proactive however some challenges of working with the PSNI were also identified:
 - Lack of trust and legacy concerns for historically marginalised groups like the LGBTQI+ community and CNR communities.
 - Responsibility often lies with the community organisation.
 - Feeling that community organisations are being forced to deal with more issues as PSNI limit the issues they respond to (such as mental health calls).

- High police employee turnover makes relationship building difficult.
- Counterintuitive policing actions that do not support the community.
- Growing strain with PUL communities since Brexit.
- An Garda Síochána (AGS) were identified as having positive working relationships with organisations that attended. They offer drop-in services and community meetings to address local issues which helps with community-state relations.
 - However, sometimes still a sense that nothing results from reports to AGS.
- Some stated that (ex)paramilitary-affiliated groups/members still perceive themselves as 'policing' the community/being protective of community members.
- Generally good relationships with City Council, NI Housing Executive, PCSP, Community Safety Wardens, GUM, Victim Support, political representatives, and regional forums.
- Issues with certain organisations gatekeeping communities (have created an industry of peacekeeping and want to guard funding), renders statutory dependence on certain groups to access communities.

When asked about their relationships with statutory agencies, the majority of the discussion related to their relationships with the police (both the PSNI and AGS). There was a significant amount of variation in the perception of the PSNI. Some PUL communities felt that their previously positive relationship with the PSNI became strained after Brexit, particularly due to the perception of 'two-tier policing', this led to a reduction in willingness to engage with the police, a lack of reporting crime, and in some cases, a turn to 'alternative sources' to resolve issues they faced. Specifically, participants noted that some community members choose to go to Loyalist paramilitaries instead of the police, and also that Loyalist paramilitaries continue to view themselves as having a policing role within the community. Within minoritised communities, concerns were raised about the policing failing to address issues related to intersectionality and to repair their relationship with the LGBTQI+ community. Participants also identified that there are two levels of policing: activities aimed at safety (such as community policing) and that aimed at security. The central issue raised in relation to 'security policing' was that it was not always undertaken with consultation of community groups or with sensitivity to the context. For example, participants raised the issue that searches and operations are conducted in the summer or at times when young people are not in school, which increases disruption and the likelihood of community clashes with the police. Due to these complex relationships between communities and police, some participants noted that those who work with the police are at threat within their community and feel that they are in danger. Despite these concerns, participants highlighted the importance of daily working and personal relationships and emphasised the need to continue to work towards normalising policing and building stronger and more effective relationships based on trust and honesty with the police.

In rural areas, both north and south, some participants feel that the police are not responsive. Participants cited a range of examples of incidents that the community consider to be police failures. They also identified that in rural areas, this may be largely attributed to resourcing issues. Despite issues in relation to responsiveness, in the south of Ireland, the relationship between AGS and the community appears to be more positive. Participants highlighted more friendliness between community members and the police and a greater willingness to speak to police. A range of examples of good practice in relation to relationship building were provided, including drop-in sessions and crime prevention focused meetings.

In addition to police, participants also listed generally positive relationships with a range of statutory organisation, including Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP), NI Housing Executive, Community Safety Wardens, City Council, Department for Communities, Housing Networks, Political Representatives, GUM clinics, and Victim Support. The NI Housing Executive was repeatedly identified as one of the better state bodies to work with. Specifically, they were labelled as being very proactive in

the north and as regularly attending community meetings. Participants specifically identified the relationship with Social Services as needing improvement due to their lack of engagement. One of the issues that consistently arose was in relation to collaborative working. For example, participants raised the lack of collaborative engagement in relation to mental health and providing adequate support to those in need. Due to this lack of collaboration, community organisations are having to take on more than they should. Another issue raised in relation to collaboration was the existence of gatekeepers in certain communities. Participants contended that organisations have built an industry of peace building and it's in their interest to keep that going, which prevents collaboration with other community groups. In addition to lack of collaboration, participants also noted that some statutory organisations treat them with distance, disdain, and suspicion and that the burden of collaboration lies on them.

In the south of Ireland, participants stated that they do not have a positive working relationship with the local housing authorities (such as Approved Housing Bodies or Local Authorities responsible for housing). Further some said that their relationships with political representatives and local councillors are not based on collaboration and respect. Some examples that were provided included councillors scoffing at the suggestions raised by community groups and representatives, and councillors treating community groups with resentment when they try to get involved with local issues. These groups state that political representatives act as though they are superior and therefore treat community groups poorly.

Some broader issues were also raised. One of the most significant was that some government policies and practices threaten safety and security and can cause friction in the community, that community groups are then left to deal with. Some examples of these policies and practices included moving families on very short notice or at strange hours and relocating refugees instead of addressing the actual issue of racism and right-wing hostility.

Overall, community groups articulated a want and willingness to collaborate more consistently and effectively with statutory bodies. Like with the police, they highlighted the need to work together in order to implement effective strategies to improve safety and security.

CONCLUSION

Participants and researchers were in broad agreement that 'security' has a wider and deeper meaning than that often attributed to it by state authorities and security interests. It includes quality of life, wellbeing, safety, support, and positive relationships. They also articulated both physical and mental components of safety, identifying both as important. Participants also highlighted that the role of providing safety and security in the community should be on a range of actors, including statutory bodies, community organisations, and community members.

Participants also felt that the idea of the Western Site should include Derry/Londonderry as well as the larger area of Donegal and parts of Tyrone. This was based on both consideration of where community organisations work as well as where security issues and services span.

The workshop participants identified a range of security challenges ranging from anti-social behaviour to paramilitary and organised crime. One of the issues that was discussed at length were the range of security concerns related to drugs and drug use. This included not only use and addiction, but also the crime and anti-social behaviour resulting from drug use and drug dealing, and the involvement of

paramilitary organisations and organised crime. Another key theme was the rise of right-wing groups and increasing incidents of hate crime and inflammatory rhetoric. A further security issue that was felt to be particularly acute in Derry/Londonderry and the wider area was mental ill health and suicide. Participants also discussed concerns specific to rural areas and the lack of adequate investment in programmes and services in these areas. Finally, participants also raised the issue of the lack of government, and when government was sitting, a lack of political leadership.

Participants noted that while relationships between the community organisations and the state are generally positive and collaborative, more work is needed to deepen cooperation and therefore improve safety and security. This collaboration should be built on a foundation of trust and honesty and respect for the work that community groups are doing and the specialised community expertise that they bring to the table. Community groups highlighted the police and social services in particular as needing to work towards improving collaboration in the north, and political representatives and the Housing Executive in the south.

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