

## Sneak Peeks at Insurrection: Portrayals of the Irish Republican Army in Film Trailers

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The Irish Republican Army (IRA) has historically enjoyed a degree of romantic sympathy from many supporters in the United States. To explore speculation that this patronage is mirrored by favorable IRA depictions in the entertainment media, this study describes a content analysis of trailers for 18 movies that feature the IRA in their plots. A comparison of featured character portrayals and violence depictions between U.S. and international films, using nation of production origin and nation of director origin alternately to identify comparison groups, fails to indicate any such pro-IRA Hollywood bias and may actually suggest the reverse.

Real politics is messy and morally ambiguous and doesn't make for a compelling thriller. But the black-and-white world of the true believer does, especially when it's festooned with the trappings of Irish romanticism.

*Slate* columnist James Surowiecki (1998)

Especially in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, political groups who employ terrorist tactics have been met with increasing contempt in the United States (Stevenson, 2002). Historically, however, some terrorist entities have enjoyed considerable support from numbers of U.S. sympathizers, perhaps none more so than the Irish Republican Army (IRA). A number of organizations, some more notably than others, have claimed the IRA name since the 1916 declaration of Irish independence from Great Britain, all with the aim of a

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united Ireland independent of British governance and most advocating violent means to that end. Both financial and material support for the IRA has been long-standing and extensive over the course of the paramilitary group's existence (Taylor, 1997, p. 79), largely due to the sympathies of millions of Americans with Irish ancestry (Neville, 2001, p. 35).

Despite the traditional and cultural interest in the IRA's historical goal, however, background knowledge about the political climate of Ireland is sparse in the United States: Even major newspapers have been found to misreport facts regarding key figures in the Irish dispute (Dettmer, 1994). Much of the sympathy in the United States for the IRA, therefore, has likely stemmed from the prevalence of emotional and romantic affinity for the Irish "Home Rule" movement rather than from well-informed political opinions. This source of support is no accident; the Home Rule effort has relied heavily on appeals to tradition and Ireland's predominant religion of Catholicism since Ireland's 1916 revolt (Newsinger, 1978, pp. 609–616). If this is the case, however, what impetus has maintained a trend of affective compassion for the IRA over a period of over 9 decades? One hypothesis comes from *Slate* columnist James Surowiecki (1998), who argued that Hollywood films glorify terrorist activity of IRA members by tapping popular impulses to "imagine the striving, suffering Irishwomen and the hard-drinking, hard-fighting, working-class Irishmen to be the sort of people who founded, and now form the backbone of, our own country" and commonly portraying them as "ascetic and hard-nosed, men you can respect even if you don't agree with them."<sup>1</sup>

In political climate where terrorism is perhaps more salient to U.S. denizens than ever before, such a proposed link between entertainment offerings and sympathy for real paramilitary causes involved in terrorist activity merits investigation. The research presented here is an attempt to do so via a content analysis that measures portrayals of characters and depictions of violence in movie trailers for 18 films that involve IRA members in their plots, then compares these results by the films' country of origin to determine what difference, if any, is evident between results for Hollywood films and those from other nations.

### THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY, U.S. SUPPORT, AND MEDIA

The Irish Republican Army, or *Óglaigh na hÉireann* (MacEoin, 1997), has more or less existed in one or another of its permutations since the Irish Revolt of

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<sup>1</sup> Surowiecki acknowledged the existence of negatively portrayed IRA characters in Hollywood films but noted that these counterexamples are maverick IRA members not following the group's agenda: "In every case, the villains are not true IRA members but loose cannons who have broken away from the organization. The IRA doesn't favor random terrorist activity; splinter groups do."

1916, with the aim of liberating the entire Irish land mass from British rule. With the notable exception of the Clinton administration's efforts to secure a peace agreement in Northern Ireland in the early 1990s (Chace, 1995), the U.S. government has held a long-standing policy of eschewing intervention in the conflict (McElrath, 2000, p. 7). However, the existence of popular support in the United States for the "Home Rule" position advocated by the IRA and its political arm, the Sinn Féin Party, cannot be denied. An official Irish American lobby in Washington emerged almost immediately after World War II (Patterson, 2002, p. 132), and unofficial Irish American support for Irish nationalists dates back to at least the 1860s (Guelke, 1996, p. 522). The most commonly known entity claiming the IRA name in recent years, the Provisional IRA, announced an end to its armed campaign in 2005 and has since been largely recognized as having abandoned terror activity entirely in favor of peaceful political means (Lyll, 2006; Stobart, 2006). These steps by the Provisional IRA, though, have been met by violent terror activity from other IRA splinter groups, such as the Real IRA and Continuity IRA (O. Craig, 2006; Peterkin, 2006), leaving both the IRA name and the potential for clandestine support from American sources very much alive.

Although it is plausible that terrorist activity in the United States like the events of September 11, 2001, might curb support for the IRA in the United States, it is also reasonable to expect some remaining allegiance to the paramilitary group as distinctions are drawn between "new" terrorists such as those responsible for attacks on U.S. soil and older groups like the IRA. For example, a 2003 *Brookings Review* article cites "Messianism and in some cases an apocalyptic vision of the future" as a key feature of "new" terrorism not shared by paramilitary groups of longer standing, including the IRA (Simon, 2003, p. 18). Tow (2003) further articulated such a distinction with additional criteria, asserting that characteristics such as unstable goals and global organization and targets clearly separate "new" groups such as Al Qaeda from terrorist predecessors:

This sets them apart from such traditional terrorist groups as the Irish Republican Army [and others], which operate in very specific locales, adhere to distinct but limited social revolutionary objectives, and project a discrete set of generally negotiable and consistent political demands. Traditional terrorists desire to obtain power within existing policies and frameworks. New terrorists wish to radically transform all existing political frameworks, often yearning to convert them to rigidly theocratic autocracies. (p. 317)

Given this continuing demarcation between "old" and "new" terrorism, continued support for IRA incarnations in the United States remains plausible.

Media campaigning and coverage have consistently been an issue in the Irish Republican Army's campaign for support over the years, both within the British Isles and abroad. Frank Gallagher's publication of newspapers and books

supporting the early Irish revolutionary movement secured him the ambiguous moniker "The Irish Dr. Goebbels" (Walker, 1992, p. 150). Efforts in the British media to reduce the IRA's presence also underscore the importance of media portrayal to the group's political goals. Broadcasters have deliberately avoided airing television imagery conducive to criticism of the Northern Irish government (Curtis, 1998), and the British government forbade airing the voices of any IRA or Sinn Féin advocates on radio or television stations for nearly 6 years beginning in 1988 (Kirtley, 2001, p. 66).<sup>2</sup> Accounts of skewed media portrayals also extend to entertainment media, such as stereotypically negative portrayals of Irish revolutionaries found in British 'Troubles Fiction' (McGee, 2001).

Similarly, the U.S. government and press appear to have exercised some influence-intentional or otherwise-over portrayal of the IRA at times over the past century. Some Irish American newspapers were censored under espionage law during World War I for criticizing British policy in Ireland (Mulcrone, 1994, p. 15); conversely, British journalists accused the U.S. press of pro-IRA bias for inaccurately describing Sinn Féin head Gerry Adams as a "peacemaker" and an opponent of the IRA's violent activity during his 2-day visit to the United States (Dettmer, 1994). Speculation about the role of media in the IRA's struggle for support has therefore spanned outlets, decades, and continents.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FILM TRAILER PORTRAYALS

Considering claims that the U.S. news media have influenced portrayals of the IRA, Surowiecki's (1998) editorial argument begs the question, Is there really a pro-terrorist bias in Hollywood's coverage of the paramilitary group? If present, such a slant might have interesting implications for future study of a relationship between entertainment media and the IRA's popularity in the United States and would illuminate the larger issue of entertainment media portrayals of terrorism in the United States. However, support for a pro-IRA bias in film is thus far anecdotal, lacking empirical evidence or in-depth investigation.

Although some content analyses of cinematic themes and depictions have examined entire films (e.g., Cowan & O'Brien, 1990; Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993; Sapolsky, Molitor, & Luque, 2003; Weaver, 1991), others have alternatively used film trailers (e.g., Oliver & Kalyanaraman, 2002) or even rental box covers (Oliver, Banjo, & Kim, 2003) as units of analysis. In an exploration of how the IRA is portrayed in films from the United States and elsewhere, movie trailers

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<sup>2</sup>The precision of this regulation was perplexingly technical and painstaking: Video of IRA and officials giving speeches could be shown, but captioning or voiced-over speech was substituted for the speaker's own audio to prevent, quite literally, the voices of the IRA from being heard.

are an excellent initial target of scrutiny. The brief trailers present only a brief and intense representation of the films' plots and characters, leaving little room for subtlety and ambiguity in defining the previewed films' heroes and villains. If Hollywood's portrayals of the IRA are, as has been asserted, unfairly and unrealistically positive, these biases should come forward in the extremely parsed depictions presented in short movie trailers. Film trailer portrayals of real-world entities such as the IRA also have potential for impact because of features such as excessive loudness ("In Brief," 1999) designed to capture moviegoers' attention, as well as broad distribution that allows them potential to reach a much larger audience than the films they advertise. A testament to the ubiquity of film trailers is the amount of financial commitment invested in movie trailers by the industry: The Motion Picture Association of America members spent an average of more than \$1.2 million in advertising monies per film on theatrical trailers alone<sup>3</sup> (Motion Picture Association of America, 2002).

Given a history of speculation about the role of media coverage in shaping attitudes toward the Irish troubles, further investigation of how entertainment media portray the Irish Republican Army is required. If U.S. films indeed depict the historically violent IRA more favorably than do films from other nations, it is possible that Hollywood films could serve to both reflect and promote compassion for the paramilitary group. Before any relationship between portrayals and real-world support of the IRA is examined, though, the claim that the IRA is portrayed more favorably in U.S. films than in films from other nations requires investigation. To investigate the presence of such a bias, this study examines two dimensions of trailer content, portrayals of characters and depictions of violence, in its dependent variables. To create a comparison between Hollywood films and other offerings, nation of origin for film and director are treated as independent variables.

### Research Questions

The following research questions are posed:

- RQ1: Do character portrayals in trailers for U.S. films featuring the IRA differ from character portrayals in trailers for films from other nations featuring the IRA?
- RQ2: Do character portrayals in trailers for films by U.S. directors featuring the IRA differ from character portrayals in trailers for films by directors from other countries featuring the IRA?

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<sup>3</sup>This sizable figure does not appear to include network television advertising or other exposure similar to film trailers.

- RQ3: Do depictions of violence in trailers for U.S. films featuring the IRA differ from depictions of violence in trailers for films from other nations featuring the IRA?
- RQ4: Do depictions of violence in trailers for films by U.S. directors featuring the IRA differ from depictions of violence in trailers for films by directors from other countries featuring the IRA?

## METHOD

### Sample

Two resources were used to assemble as exhaustive a list of films featuring the IRA as possible. The Internet Movie Database, a site that compiles cast, production, plot, box office, and other information about thousands of films and other productions, was used extensively because of a feature allowing its plot summaries and keywords to be searched (Internet Movie Database, n.d.). This search yielded 21 cinematic films wherein the IRA was identified as a plot component, whether centrally or more tangentially. To check the reliability of the Internet Movie Database results and to ensure the most complete film sample possible, a "The IRA in Film" (Amazon.com, n.d.) list from the Amazon.com commercial site was also consulted. Of the 11 movies on the Amazon.com list, 5 were unique from the larger Internet Movie Database roll and were thus added. Although this preliminarily identified group was not guaranteed to be completely exhaustive, it represents the results of multiple resources used to compile a cumulative list of films featuring the IRA.

From this preliminary list of 26 movies featuring the IRA, 8 were excluded from further analysis. Two films *The Quiet Man* (1952) and *The Informer* (1935), were excluded to reduce skew in the chronological time frame of the sample because they were the only films more than 50 years old. Six more—*Danny Boy* (1982), *Cal* (1984), *Eye of the Storm* (1995), *My Brother's War* (1997), *Borstal Boy* (2000), and *Rising of the Moon* (2002)—were eliminated because box office information could not be obtained for these films, preventing evaluation of whether the films had been theatrically released. The remaining 18 films selected as the sample for this study were *Blown Away* (1994), *The Boxer* (1997), *The Crying Game* (1992), *The Devil's Own* (1997), *An Everlasting Piece* (2000), *The General* (a.k.a. *I Once Had a Life*; 1997), *A Fistful of Dynamite* (a.k.a. *Giù la Testa*; 1971), *Hennessy* (1975), *Hidden Agenda* (1990), *In the Name of the Father* (1993), *The Jackal* (1997), *The Last September* (1999), *The Long Good Friday* (1980), *Michael Collins* (1996), *Patriot Games* (1992), *A Prayer for the Dying* (1987), *Ronin* (1998), and *Some Mother's Son* (1996).

The Internet Movie Database was also used to identify production year, financial figures, and film and director origin for each film. Genres of these films

were diverse, including action, drama, romance, and comedy films. Production dates spanned a period of 29 years (1971–2000). The films' reported budgets and box office revenues also varied widely: Budgets ranged from less than \$1 million to almost \$50 million, and gross box office figures ranged from less than \$1 million to nearly \$200 million worldwide.<sup>4</sup> The films' primary nations of origin (the first independent variable; defined as location of production company) were the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Italy. Directors' locations of origin (the second independent variable; defined as director's birthplace, unless biographical information on the Internet Movie Database site indicated another long-standing primary home country) included the United States, the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland,<sup>5</sup> Ireland, Italy, and Australia.

Although the Internet Movie Database site offered many trailers for the films sampled, some were not available from the archive. Therefore, a third site, Videodetective.com, (Video Pipeline, n.d.) was used for this analysis because it contained a trailer for every film here selected in its self-proclaimed "largest preview archive on the Web!" Trailers were viewed by coders using high-speed streaming video embedded in Web browser windows on the Videodetective.com site. Director and film origin information, obtained from the Internet Movie Database, were used as independent variables, and coding of content was used to provide operational data for the dependent variables pertaining to character portrayals and violence.

### Units of Analysis

Two units of analysis were employed. First, character portrayals in the trailers were analyzed. To determine which characters were portrayed prominently enough to merit evaluation, a modified version of S. R. Craig's (1992a, 1992b) definition of "Primary Visual Character" (PVC) was utilized. S. R. Craig's criteria, adapted from Bretl and Cantor's (1988) earlier scheme, defined a PVC as whichever character in a presentation appears on the screen for the longest time, that time no less than 5 sec. This analysis further adapted these criteria in two ways. First, any characters who were featured speaking onscreen were coded in addition to those featured visually for at least 5 sec to compensate for the trailers' short length and rapid cuts.<sup>6</sup> Second, all characters meeting this new standard were coded, rather than only one per trailer, to provide a larger character sample and avoid difficulties in determining a trailer's primarily

<sup>4</sup>The nature of budget and box office reports varied, and in some cases not all information was reported. However, some amount of financial information was available from the Internet Movie Database for all 18 films included in the final sample.

<sup>5</sup>Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom but was included with Ireland for these purposes because of their relatively closer geographic and political proximity to the IRA's campaign.

<sup>6</sup>In addition, one trailer did not feature spoken roles, necessitating the modified criteria.

featured character. This selection method resulted in a total of 106 characters for coding.

Second, each violent act in every trailer was identified for coding, using a definition created exclusively for this study with insight from Oliver and Kalyanaraman's (2002) study of movie previews. As with Oliver and Kalyanaraman's violence definition, violent acts here included "intentional aggression" but excluded "accidental aggressive acts" and "acts of nature" (p. 287). Also consistent with Oliver and Kalyanaraman, "multiple acts of aggression were counted as separate only if the perpetrators or victims changed within the scene," and explosions and gunfire were included as aggressive acts (p. 288). However, the violent act definition used here varied from the Oliver and Kalyanaraman version in that aggressive threats and the mere presence of weapons were not counted as violent acts. The final violent act definition used in this analysis, therefore, was provided in the coding instructions as "an overt depiction of a cinematic setting containing one or more attempts, successful or unsuccessful, to physically harm one or more other human beings with or without the use of weapons." This method yielded 115 violent acts for coding.

### Coding Scheme

Analysis of characters used two coding dimensions: character portrayal and character affiliation.<sup>7</sup> The character portrayal variable used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *very negative* (1) to *very positive* (5), but values were collapsed into a dichotomous negative and non-negative measure after initial coding to reduce discrepancies between coders. Character affiliation categories were police/military/authority, paramilitary, nonparamilitary criminal, civilian, and an "other" category.

Violent acts were coded along two dimensions: violence type and apparent violence target. Violence types listed were physical without weapons (e.g., punching), use of improvised or hand weapons (e.g., clubs, stones), use of firearms (e.g., firing a pistol), use of explosives (e.g., a vehicle bomb), heavy military weaponry in operation (e.g., a firing cannon), and an "other" category. Violence targets included were military/police/authority personnel, paramilitary persons, civilian adults, civilian children, other persons, structures and vehicles, other objects, unknown targets off-camera, and an "other" category.<sup>8</sup> A given

<sup>7</sup>Character age group and gender were also coded, but the items were not used in analysis. Items regarding characters' indulgence in violence and specific paramilitary membership (for identified paramilitary characters) were also initially coded, but unacceptable intercoder reliability scores precipitated their removal. A religious symbolism dimension was also included in coding of both characters and violence, but these items also yielded insufficient intercoder reliability—a shortcoming that was likely due to the low prevalence of coded symbolism overall.

<sup>8</sup>Some of these categories did not occur in coding and therefore do not appear in the Results section.



violent act as defined might have more than one target, so all of the targets just listed were treated as separate variables coded for presence or absence for each act.

### **Coding Reliability**

All of the trailers were coded by the author, and a colleague independently coded a random sample of 15 characters (14.1% of the sample) and 15 violent acts (13.0% of the sample) to check the reliability of coding decisions. Scott's Pi values were computed for items from the four character portrayal and violent act dimensions (for a description of this procedure, see, e.g., Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998, pp. 129–131; Wimmer & Dominick, 2000, pp. 152–154). The character portrayal variable, using the collapsed negative and nonnegative categories, produced a Scott's Pi of .811, and the character affiliation item yielded a value of .769. Perfect agreement on all violence type items resulted in a Scott's Pi of 1, and violence target items yielded a value of .719. Although some of these values might be considered low enough to bring into question their usability in this analysis, the reliability figures were deemed acceptable considering the amount of discrepancy to be reasonably expected from the somewhat superficial and ambiguous nature of information provided in brief film trailers.

### **Analysis**

Chi-square analyses (for a description of this procedure, see, e.g., Wimmer & Dominick, 2000, pp. 269–270) were used to compare character portrayals, proportions of violence types, and violence targets between U.S. and overseas films. Separate comparisons were computed for each dependent variable, using categories defined first by production origin and then by director origin. For both independent variables, original categories used were the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Northern Ireland (if applicable), and "other" to examine trends, but the chi-square analyses used a dichotomous U.S. origin/non-U.S. to allow a dichotomous test for differences between Hollywood depictions and those originating elsewhere. In addition to these three groups of analyses, another set of chi-square analyses compared U.S. and non-U.S. character portrayals for a subsample of only identified paramilitary characters.

## **RESULTS**

### **Character Portrayals**

Chi-square analyses of character portrayals, alternately using the dichotomous U.S./non-U.S. production origin variable and U.S./non-U.S. director origin

variable as independent variables, failed to indicate any differences between portrayal tendencies of U.S. and non-U.S. films. Distributions of character portrayals by nation of production origin and nation of director origin are shown in Table 1. U.S.-produced films generally portrayed characters negatively with more frequency than did films produced elsewhere, but the difference was not significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 106) = 3.127, p = .077$ . Contrary to what would be seen if there were a pro-IRA bias in U.S. films, U.S.-produced films also tended to portray paramilitary characters more negatively than did films produced elsewhere, but the difference was again not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 14) = 1.750, p = .186$ . Using the director's country of origin as the independent variable for comparison, films by U.S. directors featured proportionally less frequent negative portrayals overall than did films by other directors, but the difference was not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 106) = .005, p = .945$ . As seen with the results for paramilitary characters seen with the production origin independent variable, films by U.S. directors featured proportionally more frequent negative portrayals of paramilitary figures than did films by other

TABLE 1  
Character Portrayals in Film Trailers by Nation of Primary Production  
and Director's Nation of Origin

	US	Total Non-US	UK	Ireland	Other
Film origin					
General portrayal					
Negative	12 (22.2)	5 (9.6)	3 (7.7)	2 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
Nonnegative	42 (77.8)	47 (90.4)	36 (92.3)	8 (80.0)	3 (100.0)
Total	54	52	39	10	3
Paramilitary portrayal					
Negative	6 (50.0)	0 (42.9)			
Nonnegative	6 (50.0)	2 (57.1)			
Total	12	2			
Director origin <sup>a</sup>					
General portrayal					
Negative	2 (15.4)	15 (16.1)	7 (15.9)	6 (18.8)	2 (11.8)
Nonnegative	11 (84.6)	78 (83.9)	37 (84.1)	26 (81.3)	15 (88.2)
Total	13	93	44	32	17
Paramilitary portrayal					
Negative	1 (100.0)	5 (38.5)			
Nonnegative	0 (0.0)	8 (61.5)			
Total	1	13			

Note. Numbers represent simple frequencies; parenthetical figures represent column percentages. One percentage column totals more than 100% due to rounding. US/Total non-US comparison was used for all chi-square analyses.  $N = 106$ .

<sup>a</sup>Ireland values include Northern Ireland.

directors, but this difference was not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 14) = 1.436, p = .231$ .

### Violence Type and Target

Chi-square analyses of violence type and target, alternately using the U.S./non-U.S. production origin variable and U.S./non-U.S. director origin variable as independent variables, found few significant differences. Distributions of violence type and target by nation of production origin and nation of director origin are shown in Table 2. Comparison of violence depictions by nation of production origin failed to yield any statistically significant differences in proportions of violence type between U.S. and non-U.S. films. Comparisons of violence target proportions by nation of production origin tended to be similarly inconclusive, with only the higher U.S. film prevalence of antiparamilitary violence meeting the threshold for statistical significance,  $\chi^2(1, N = 115) = 7.404, p = .009$ . When comparisons were repeated, substituting director origin as the independent variable, similar results were found: No statistically significant differences in violence type were observed, and the higher proportion for U.S. film depictions of unknown off-camera violence targets was the lone statistically significant violence target comparison,  $\chi^2(1, N = 115) = 9.554, p = .002$ .

### Summary of Results

In sum, there were almost no statistically significant differences in measured character portrayals and violence depictions between U.S. films and those from other nations, whether nation of production origin or nation of director's origin was used as the independent variable to identify comparison groups. Only one difference in violence target items was statistically significant for each independent variable comparison, and this difference was not consistent between independent variables chosen. Character portrayals appear to show nonsignificant trends toward more negative portrayals of characters by Hollywood than the comparison group, especially for paramilitary characters. The distributions for nonsignificant violence type and target categories seem to show no consistently observable trends concerning the U.S./non-U.S. comparisons when viewed together.

## DISCUSSION

Findings here provide no strong support for arguments such as Surowiecki's (1998) claim that Hollywood portrays IRA characters favorably, at least in comparison to films from other nations. In fact, of the two statistically significant

TABLE 2  
Violent Act Depictions in Film Trailers by Nation of Primary Production  
and Director's Nation of Origin

	US	Total Non-US	UK	Ireland	Other
Film origin					
Violence type					
No weapons	12 (25.0)	19 (28.4)	12 (26.7)	7 (70.0)	0 (0.0)
Hand/Improvised	4 (8.3)	8 (11.9)	6 (13.3)	2 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
Firearms	15 (31.3)	19 (28.4)	15 (33.3)	0 (0.0)	4 (33.3)
Explosives	16 (33.3)	20 (29.9)	12 (26.7)	1 (10.0)	7 (12.0)
Other	1 (2.1)	1 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (8.3)
Total	48	67	45	10	12
Violence target					
Military/Police	4 (8.3)	9 (13.4)	8 (17.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.0)
Paramilitary*	7 (14.6)	1 (1.5)	1 (2.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Civilian adults	13 (27.1)	28 (41.8)	20 (44.4)	6 (60.0)	1 (8.3)
Civilian children	2 (4.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Structure/Vehicle	13 (27.1)	16 (23.9)	11 (24.4)	1 (10.0)	5 (41.7)
Target unknown	17 (35.4)	13 (19.4)	4 (8.9)	3 (30.0)	6 (50.0)
Director origin <sup>a</sup>					
Violence type					
No weapons	2 (15.4)	29 (43.3)	5 (19.2)	18 (41.9)	6 (18.2)
Hand/Improvised	1 (7.7)	11 (16.4)	3 (11.5)	5 (11.6)	3 (9.1)
Firearms	6 (46.2)	28 (41.8)	8 (30.8)	6 (14.0)	14 (42.4)
Explosives	3 (23.1)	33 (49.3)	10 (38.5)	14 (32.6)	9 (27.3)
Other	1 (0.0)	1 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.0)
Total	13	102	26	43	33
Violence target					
Military/Police	0 (0.0)	13 (11.3)	4 (15.4)	1 (2.3)	8 (24.2)
Paramilitary	0 (0.0)	8 (7.0)	2 (7.7)	2 (4.7)	4 (12.1)
Civilian adults	3 (23.1)	37 (32.2)	13 (50.0)	18 (41.9)	6 (18.2)
Civilian children	0 (0.0)	2 (1.7)	1 (3.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.0)
Structure/Vehicle	5 (38.5)	25 (21.7)	5 (19.2)	13 (30.2)	7 (21.2)
Target unknown*	8 (61.5)	23 (20.0)	5 (19.2)	7 (16.3)	10 (30.3)

Note. Numbers represent simple frequencies for presence of category; parenthetical figures represent column percentages. Percentages need not add up to 100% because one act can fall in more than one category. US/Total non-US comparison was used for all chi-square analyses.  $N = 115$ .

<sup>a</sup>Ireland values include Northern Ireland. \* $\chi^2$  test  $p < .01$ .

differences found in the many chi-square analyses conducted here, the higher prevalence of violence toward paramilitary members in U.S. films may suggest the contrary. This, however, would depend on whether the violent acts toward paramilitary groups in the trailers were depicted as justified or not, which was not measured in this analysis. The other statistically significant finding, that

violence toward off-camera characters is more frequently depicted in films by U.S. directors than in films by directors of other national origin, is even more difficult to interpret. However, this could more plausibly be interpreted indicating a general tendency toward comparatively more ambiguous depiction of violence targets in U.S.-directed films than as any indicator relevant to IRA portrayals.

If the nonsignificant findings regarding character depictions are also considered, arguments claiming a pro-IRA bias in U.S. films lose even more veracity. The U.S. films and films from U.S. directors featured proportionally more frequent negative portrayals of paramilitary characters than did their overseas counterparts, though again, these results were not significant. Although it is difficult to come to any strong conclusions from these nonsignificant results, they fail to support any partiality toward the IRA on the part of Hollywood.

### **Future Study**

This study's failure to support claims of favorable IRA portrayals in Hollywood, however, does not comprise a definitive refutation thereof. This study's operationalized coding of violence does not provide a full account of the trailers' depictions. For example, research showing whether specific acts of violence by or against characters or groups are positively or negatively portrayed would more clearly show what meaning can be assigned to observed differences in violent depictions. The sample of 18 films is also by no means a large one. A study identifying more films, perhaps by exploring bias in a less specific context, might produce stronger and more generalizable results. Obviously, quantitative content analysis is not the only way to address this issue as well. Qualitative examination of trailers might provide insight unavailable to coding schemes, though the potential for interpretive skewing in analysis would increase in the absence of the systematic and objective protocols of content analysis (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000, p. 135).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The issue investigated here is obviously a difficult one, and definitive statements that prejudicial portrayals of the IRA are nonexistent in Hollywood films should not be made carelessly on the support of these results alone. However, this study serves as evidence that arguments for the existence of a pro-IRA bias in Hollywood might also be specious without empirical support. If indeed the United States remains a relative stronghold for IRA support, it is difficult to claim a corresponding trend in U.S. films based on these findings. This is perhaps a comforting result, as contrary findings suggesting that Hollywood

favors an illegal and historically violent group might prompt concern. Although it would be problematic to see evidence that the trailers in a movie house might be complimentary toward a terrorist group, there does not appear to be anything in these results, suggesting this sort of surreptitious political leverage on Hollywood's part.

This method of inquiry might also serve to inform myriad other claims of media bias. Newspapers, television news networks, and other media outlets are constantly assaulted with accusations that they favor a political party, candidate, or issue stance. These claims, though, are rarely presented with support of any kind beyond anecdotal evidence. Taking the largely null results of this study into consideration, how many other such claims of favorability and bias would fail to endure empirical testing? The answer to such a question is not here evident, but these results failing to support claims that Hollywood glorifies the IRA suggest that other accusations of bias or undue favorability toward a group could be supported or refuted with a comparative content analysis.

As the IRA approaches a century of existence with an uncertain future, it is unclear how the citizens of the United States, still reeling from previously unfamiliar experiences with terrorism on their own soil, will regard the group. Perhaps romantic sympathies will remain despite terrorism's increased salience. After all, Surowiecki (1998) argued that the IRA is viewed as a classically archetypal group: "The IRA, you might say, already lives in a Hollywood movie, with its noble heroes, amoral enemies, and glorious deaths. It's no surprise that moviemakers figured that out."

But what makes us so sure that Hollywood filmmakers have "figured that out" after all?

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