

# Social Mobility in Ireland: A Comparative Analysis

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## Introduction

IN THIS PAPER WE COMPARE PATTERNS OF SOCIAL MOBILITY between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in order to address four questions. First, how do the class structures of North and South differ from each other? Secondly, are there differences in relative mobility, such that class inequalities are greater in one part of the island than another? Thirdly, are differences in mobility according to gender more or less marked in one or other part of Ireland? And, finally, in the case of Northern Ireland, are mobility patterns also distinctive with respect to ethnicity?

In the next section of the paper we discuss the historical background relevant to these questions, and set out what we believe the answers to these questions are likely to be. The third section describes the data we use and the fourth reports our results. In the fifth section we examine the extent to which migration from both parts of Ireland might influence the conclusions we draw concerning patterns of social fluidity. The final section provides answers to our four questions and we discuss some implications of our findings.

## The Historical Background

The partitioning of the island of Ireland under the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 (and subsequently agreed in the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty) resulted not only in the formation of an overwhelmingly Catholic Free State (later the Republic of Ireland) and a mainly Protestant Northern Ireland, it also led to the former losing almost all of its industrial base. At the time virtually all of Ireland's industrial exports originated in the Belfast

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region (Cullen, 1972: 156–70). The effect of partition on the Southern economy, was, as one commentator later put it, ‘as if Scotland had obtained self-government with Glasgow and the Clyde left out’ (O’Brien, 1962: 11).

Thus, at the time of partition, despite having shared a common history as part of the United Kingdom, the two parts of Ireland were economically quite distinct, and this was reflected in substantial differences in their class structures. The Republic of Ireland had a predominantly rural, agricultural economy<sup>1</sup> and thus a class structure containing a very large proportion of farmers and agricultural workers. By contrast, Northern Ireland’s class structure approximated much more closely to that of an industrial society. But this difference was overlaid by another. Whereas the Republic of Ireland was religiously and ethnically homogenous (with over 90 per cent of the population Catholic) this was not the case in Northern Ireland. Although the border had been drawn so as to ensure a Protestant/Unionist majority, nevertheless Northern Ireland contained a substantial minority of Catholics, most of whom, it seems fair to assume, were Nationalists (roughly one-third of the population of 1.5 million was Catholic). Thus Northern Ireland was, and continues to be, an ethnically heterogeneous society, in which the two main ethnic groups<sup>2</sup> possess different (and, in this context, antagonistic) senses of national identity. The primary marker distinguishing members of these two groups is religious affiliation, though they also display a range of other cultural differences. But this ethnic distinction is not simply one of heterogeneity: it is also one of inequality, with the Catholic community suffering disadvantage relative to Protestants. There is widespread agreement that, under the Stormont regime (1922–72), Catholics were subject to discrimination in the allocation of public housing, in the electoral system and in the labour market (Smith and Chambers, 1991: 14–22).

The history of the class structures of the two parts of Ireland since partition has been one of very gradual convergence. The post-1958 industrialisation of the Republic, the decline in the importance of farming, and the growth of the service sector have acted to bring its class structure closer to that of Northern Ireland where recent industrial decline and the impact of ‘the Troubles’ have led to surprisingly little change. Table 1 compares the class structures of Northern Ireland and the Republic in 1961 and 1991.

<sup>1</sup> In the 1920s agriculture accounted for three-quarters of the Republic of Ireland’s exports.

<sup>2</sup> We refer to the two communities in Northern Ireland as ethnic groups since each comprises ‘a named human population, with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural elements; a link with a historic territory or homeland; and a measure of solidarity’ (Smith, 1993).

**Table 1.** Percentage distribution of men and women at work by class categories, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

	Men				Women			
	RoI		NI		RoI		NI	
	1961	1991	1961	1991	1961	1991	1961	1991
Employees and Self-Employed								
<b>Self-Employed</b>								
Agriculture	36.0	16.4	13.4	5.5	15.0	3.4	2.2	0.3
Non-Agriculture	7.9	13.1	4.8	13.3	7.6	6.0	3.2	3.2
<b>Employees</b>								
(i) Upper-Middle Class	7.6	19.2	11.5	21.0	14.8	28.3	14.7	26.7
(ii) Lower-Middle Class	15.6	21.9	10.6	10.5	42.7	48.8	29.1	34.9
(iii) Skilled Manual	12.0	16.8	27.1	27.9	5.8	2.8	13.0	3.2
(iv) Semi/Unskilled Manual	20.9	12.7	32.8	21.8	14.1	10.6	37.9	31.5
(a) Agricultural	8.4	2.8	6.2	1.2	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.4
(b) Non-Agricultural	12.5	9.9	26.4	20.6	13.9	10.2	37.6	31.4

*Note:* NI: Northern Ireland, RoI: Republic of Ireland.

*Source:* NI: Censuses of Northern Ireland, 1961 and 1991, recoding of socio-economic groups, omitting all those without a job for the last 10 years, members of the armed forces, those who did not state a job or whose job could not be classified and those on government training schemes. In the NI figures for 1961 some non-agricultural employers are included in the upper-middle class. RoI: O'Connell, this volume Table 3.

The differences between the two are readily apparent. For men the Republic has a much larger share of those at work in agriculture and a much smaller share in the skilled and semi/unskilled (non-agricultural) manual classes. These differences are much more pronounced in 1961. Between 1961 and 1991 the class structures have been subject to very similar change: a decline in the importance of agriculture and unskilled manual employment, and a growth in the middle classes. Nevertheless, both class structures continue to carry a strong historical imprint. Among men, Northern Ireland has a somewhat larger upper-middle class and substantially larger manual classes while in the South the agricultural classes and the lower-middle class are larger. Among women, the proportion in agriculture was much greater in the South than the North in 1961, but this difference had largely disappeared by 1991. The absence of opportunities for women in the South in traditional manufacturing industries is reflected in the much smaller percentage of women in the non-skilled manual classes than are found in the North, and although this difference has diminished over time it continues to be substantial, with the figure of over 30 per cent for the North being almost three times greater than that for the Republic of Ireland. In the former the lower-middle class dominates

with almost half of all women being found in this class. As Table 2 shows, in 1961 labour force participation for women was higher in Northern Ireland, particularly for married women. Married women's participation rates rose dramatically between 1961 and 1991 so that in both parts of Ireland the rates for all women and for married women are virtually identical, although with higher overall rates of women's labour force participation in the North.

We should expect quite substantial differences between North and South in absolute mobility flows, largely due to the very substantial contrasts in their class structures in earlier years and the persistence of these differences, albeit in a weaker form. In terms of patterns of relative mobility—or social fluidity—we should expect to see rather more openness in the North than the South. The distinction between absolute and relative mobility (or social fluidity) is commonly drawn. Absolute mobility refers to the size of the flows (possibly standardised as percentages) between various origin and destination classes. Social fluidity concerns the extent to which the chances of being found in one rather than another class destination differ between people according to the class from which they originated. If we look at the factors commonly supposed to influence social fluidity—such as class differences in educational attainment and the extent of equality in the distributions of income and wealth—then, at least as regards the former, a North-South comparison would lead us to suppose that the North would fare better. Northern Ireland has enjoyed free post-primary education since 1947—20 years in advance of the Republic—and, even though this was within the context of a selective educational system compared with a (nominally) non-selective system in the Republic of Ireland, research reported elsewhere in this volume (Breen, Heath and Whelan, this volume) shows that class inequalities in educational attainment are substantially less in Northern Ireland than in the Republic. In the latter such class differences are particularly marked and notably persistent over time (Breen and Whelan, 1993). In addition, it is well known that inequalities of income and wealth are particularly great in the Republic of

**Table 2.** Female labour force percentage participation rates, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

	NI		RoI	
	1961	1991	1961	1991
All Women	35.3	55.8	28.6	33.4
Married Women	19.5	55.0	5.2	31.3

*Source:* As for Table 1.

Ireland and are larger than in the UK, though it is less clear here whether a Republic of Ireland versus Northern Ireland comparison would show any substantial differences. The North has high levels of poverty while the middle classes, particularly those employed in the public sector or large companies and who are paid according to UK-wide salary scales, can enjoy a much higher standard of living than their counterparts in Britain.

On the other hand, it might be more judicious to expect that variation in such factors will have at best a minor impact on social fluidity. The results of the CASMIN project (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992) and other cross-national studies of mobility show that, although there are usually statistically significant differences in social fluidity between countries of the industrialised world, these tend to be relatively minor (Breen and Rottman, 1995: 114). As Erikson and Goldthorpe (1987: 162) conclude:

A basic similarity will be found in patterns of social fluidity . . . across all nations with market economies and nuclear family systems where no sustained attempts have been made to use the power of the modern state apparatus in order to modify the processes or outcomes of the processes through which class inequalities are inter-generationally reproduced.

One thing that both parts of Ireland share in common is the absence of such sustained attempts.

Turning to ethnic differences in social mobility within Northern Ireland, it is generally accepted that, while discrimination against Catholics in Northern Ireland in the electoral system and in housing has been eradicated, the degree of discrimination in employment continues to be a much debated issue among the public, politicians, policy makers and academics (see Cormack and Osborne, 1991, for a review of this debate; also Whyte, 1990: Chapter 3; Smith and Chambers 1991; Murphy and Armstrong, 1994; Gudgin and Breen, 1996). What is not in doubt is that Catholics suffer much higher levels of unemployment than Protestants and that there are also some differences in their class distributions. According to the 1991 Census, 49 per cent of Protestants are in one of the non-manual classes (using the Registrar General's classification), compared with 40 per cent of Catholics. This has shown some change from Aunger's (1975) study, which, using data from the 1971 Census of Population, revealed that 31 per cent of Catholics were in a non-manual occupation, as opposed to 41 per cent of Protestants. We might therefore reasonably expect to see some differences in absolute mobility patterns and in class structure between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, though whether this will also extend to patterns of social fluidity is not certain. This will depend on the extent of intra-ethnic-group class inequality, and very little is known about this. Recently much has been made of the growth of the new Catholic

middle class (Cormack and Osborne, 1994), suggesting increased upward mobility among this group, and thus, possibly, greater social fluidity.

In summary, although they occupy the same island, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are in many ways quite different societies. One might expect two societies that were originally part of the same state to have diverged from a common starting point: yet the Irish experience has, if anything, been the opposite of this. In terms of their class structure the two parts of Ireland have become more alike while still retaining some substantial differences. To the extent that their mobility regimes will show any particular similarity over and above that which appears to characterise all industrial societies there is some reason to suppose that Northern Ireland may display a somewhat more open pattern of social fluidity than the Republic.

## Data

In order to examine patterns of social mobility in the two parts of the island of Ireland we form six separate mobility tables, cross-classifying an individual's class of origin (defined as the social class position of his or her father during the respondent's mid-teen years) by his or her current or most recent class position. In this we use the CASMIN class schema<sup>3</sup> and we here identify, in both origins and current class, five categories as follows:

- 1 Professionals, administrators and managers (the 'service class' comprising classes I+II of the CASMIN schema);
- 2 Routine non-manual employees (class III);
- 3 The petty bourgeoisie, of small proprietors and farmers (class IV);
- 4 Skilled manual workers and supervisors of manual workers (classes V+VI);
- 5 Unskilled manual workers (class VII).

The six mobility tables that we form using this classification are for men and women in the Republic of Ireland; Catholic men and women in Northern Ireland; and non-Catholic (henceforth 'Protestant') men and women in Northern Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

The data we use come from two sources. For the Republic of Ireland they come from the Living in Ireland Survey conducted in 1994 by the

<sup>3</sup> The Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations project made comparable and analysed social mobility collected, for the most part, in the 1970s from a number of European countries (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> We assign individuals to a religion in Northern Ireland on the basis of the religion in which they were brought up, rather than their current religion.

Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin. This yields a random sample of households and of individual adults resident within them. For the purposes of these analyses the total sample size is 3,000 men and 1,425 women aged between 21 and 65. For Northern Ireland the data come from a mobility survey carried out in 1996 and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.<sup>5</sup> This survey yields a random sample of adults aged 21–65 years from the population of Northern Ireland. In the data used in this paper the sample sizes are 538 Catholic men, 816 Protestant men, 587 Catholic women and 801 Protestant women.<sup>6</sup>

## Analyses

We begin our analysis by examining the class structures of Ireland, North and South. These are shown in Table 3 which reports the percentage distribution of respondents to our surveys according to their origin class and their current class position, distinguishing the six groups for which we have formed mobility tables. One simple means of judging the degree to which these distributions differ is to calculate the percentage of one distribution who would have to be allocated to a class other than the one in which they are found in order to make that distribution identical with another. This measure is termed the 'index of dissimilarity' or delta. Turning first to the origin distributions, perhaps the most interesting difference is between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. For men delta has a value of 15 and for women 10. In their class origins Protestants are over-represented relative to Catholics in the professional and managerial classes and in the skilled manual class, while Catholics are more numerous in the petty bourgeoisie and the non-skilled manual class. The larger share of Catholics in the non-skilled manual class and the greater proportion of Protestants in the service class and the skilled manual and supervisory class, indicate the disadvantaged position that Catholics held in Northern Ireland during the period when our respondents were teenagers. However, for women, this contrasts sharply with the distribution of current class position where hardly any differences between Protestants and Catholics can be discerned and the value of delta falls to one. Catholic men, on the other hand, continue to be under-represented in the service class relative to

<sup>5</sup> The data were collected under ESRC grant R000235397, *Social Mobility, Political Preferences, Attitudes and Behaviour in Northern Ireland*.

<sup>6</sup> Because of the traditionally low rates of female labour force participation in the Republic of Ireland we have restricted our analysis to women who are currently in the labour force. However, the data for Northern Ireland refer to all women. As we note below, defining the Northern sample in the same way as the Southern leads to results that do not differ at all from those presented in this paper.

**Table 3.** Percentage distributions in class origins and current class.

Class	RoI		NI			
	Men	Women	Catholics		Protestants	
			Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>Class origins</b>						
I+II	9	14	15	12	20	18
III	9	14	3	3	5	4
IV	32	31	28	24	21	22
V+VI	21	19	21	25	29	28
VII	28	23	33	36	25	28
<b>Current Class</b>						
I+II	20	27	28	25	32	25
III	15	49	7	32	7	32
IV	19	4	18	4	16	4
V+VI	25	8	25	8	24	10
VII	20	12	26	30	20	29

*Note:* Key to classes: I+II Professionals, administrators and managers (the 'service class'), III Routine non-manual employees, IV The petty bourgeoisie, V+VI Skilled manual workers and supervisors of manual workers, VII Unskilled manual workers.

*Source:* NI: 1996 Northern Ireland Mobility Survey. ROI: 1994 Living in Ireland Survey.

Protestants, though the differences are less than in the origin distributions and the value of delta declines to 8.

There are substantial differences between the class origin distributions in the South and the North. The former has a larger petty bourgeoisie class and smaller manual classes. In addition in the North the professional and managerial class is larger and the routine non-manual class smaller than in the South.<sup>7</sup> A good deal of convergence is evident in the current class distributions, notably in respect of the size of the petty bourgeoisie and the manual classes, while the number of women in routine non-manual work also displays a dramatic increase in both countries. However, the rather different distributions of respondents between the non-manual classes persists. In the case of women we also observe some divergence with a significantly greater decline in the numbers in non-skilled manual work in the South with the consequence that women in the North are almost two-and-a-half times more likely to be found in this class.

As we might have anticipated, however, it is in the comparison between

<sup>7</sup> The size of the routine non-manual class for women in the Republic of Ireland is consistent with the historical absence of opportunity in manufacturing industries. The relatively high figure for men may be related to the low rates of participation of married women in the labour force which prevailed until recent years.



men's and women's current class distributions that the greatest differences are evident. In the Republic of Ireland the index of dissimilarity between men and women is 40; in Northern Ireland it is 30 among Catholics and 34 among Protestants.<sup>8</sup> In both parts of the island women are over-represented in class III and under-represented in classes IV and V+VI. Gender differences are exacerbated in the Republic of Ireland by the under-representation of women in class VII—a phenomenon not evident in Northern Ireland for reasons already referred to.

### **Absolute Social Mobility**

From Table 4 we can see that overall levels of absolute mobility do not differ across the countries. In both cases, consistent with evidence from other studies, we find that the level for women is higher than that for men (Breen and Whelan, 1995; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). Focusing on mobility into the professional and managerial class, we find that, while there is relatively little difference between women North and South, for men such mobility is significantly higher in the North with 21 per cent of Protestants and 18 per cent of Catholics moving up the hierarchy compared to 15 per cent of men in the South. If we restrict our attention to mobility from the working class into the professional and managerial class the contrast between North and South is even more striking. Only 6 per cent of men and women in the South achieve such mobility but in the North the figure rises to 11 per cent for men and 9 per cent for women. Finally, long-range downward mobility shows little variation by country for men, and is higher for women (although this pattern is clearer in the North.) The improvement in the situation of Catholic women suggested by the earlier analysis employing the dissimilarity index is supported by the findings relating to upward and downward mobility. Among Catholic women 6 per cent more had been mobile into the professional and managerial class than had been downwardly mobile into the non-skilled working class; for Protestant women the figure is one per cent. Among men, however, the advantage lies with Protestants for whom the figure is 10 per cent compared with 5 per cent for Catholics.

### **Relative Mobility**

Now we turn from an examination of absolute mobility to an analysis of the pattern of association between class origins and current class position,

<sup>8</sup> It should be kept in mind that while the figures in Table 1 for the Republic of Ireland exclude the unemployed they are included here on the basis of their last occupation. Thus the survey figures show a larger manual class than is evident in the census data.

**Table 4.** Absolute class mobility levels in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

	Republic of Ireland		Northern Ireland			
	Men	Women	Protestants		Catholics	
			Men	Women	Men	Women
Mobile	62.0	76.4	62.0	75.2	65.5	75.1
Mobile into the Professional and Managerial Class (I+II)	14.9	20.6	21.3	17.4	18.4	21.0
Mobile into the Professional and Managerial Class from the Working Class (V, VI, VII)	6.5	6.2	11.3	8.7	10.6	10.9
Mobile into the Non-Skilled Working Class (VII)	11.2	12.7	11.4	16.4	13.0	15.2

*Note:* Key to classes as Table 3.

*Source:* NI 1996 Northern Ireland Mobility Survey. ROI: 1994 Living in Ireland Survey.

or 'social fluidity' as it is usually termed. By social fluidity we mean the degree to which there is a statistical association between the class a person was born into and the class they currently occupy. Were there no such association then the percentage distribution of people across the current class categories would be the same, irrespective of the class from which they originated. This state of affairs is called 'perfect mobility' and it would represent complete openness in social fluidity. Needless to say, this is never observed, and there is always some relationship such that there are patterns of association between being born into particular classes and being found in particular classes. Perhaps the strongest association in many mobility tables is found in the propensity of people to remain in their class of origin. This is particularly marked where the class in question is one where the requirements for entry can be directly inherited and is most apparent in the petty bourgeoisie where the means of production can be passed from a parent to a child. However, mobility tables generally tend to display a clustering of cases in the cells on the main diagonal recording the number of people who are in the same class as the one in which they were brought up.

Patterns of association between origins and current class are modelled using odds-ratios. An odds, in this context, is measured by the proportion of people from a given class origin who are found in one, rather than another, class destination, and an odds-ratio, as its name suggests, is the ratio of odds as between people of two different class origins. If an odds-ratio is equal to one, the relative chances of being found in one rather than another destination class are the same regardless of which of the two origin

classes in question an individual came from. Odds-ratios less than or greater than one arise when these relative chances differ. Thus odds-ratios capture the pattern of association between origins and destinations, net of the marginal distributions of these variables. Equally, we can say that they measure the degree of inequality in access to more, rather than less, desirable class destinations as between people of different class origins; or, again, that they capture the pattern of social fluidity. In analyses of social mobility we are usually more interested in social fluidity than in studying the distributions of class origins and current class position. This is because the extent of social fluidity is taken as an indicator of the degree of equality of opportunity or 'openness' in a particular society. Clearly, not all inequality in the chances of access to desirable class positions arise as the result of inequalities of opportunity, but research suggests that a substantial part of it does (e.g., Marshall and Swift, 1993; 1996; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1999).

In comparing Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, men with women and Catholics with Protestants, our starting point is the assumption that social fluidity is common. That is to say, we allow the marginal distributions of origins and destinations to differ as between our six mobility tables but we assume that they all show the same pattern of social fluidity. As with all the models we fit, we assess the plausibility of the assumptions that underlie it by assessing how closely the expected frequencies generated by the model match the actual frequencies in our mobility tables.

It is perhaps not surprising that the common social fluidity model does not provide a statistically adequate fit to the data, returning a deviance of 183.72 with 80 degrees of freedom, but what is surprising is how small this deviance is given the strength of the assumption of common social fluidity.<sup>9</sup> If we then allow social fluidity to differ by nation, this yields a deviance of 98.27 with 64 degrees of freedom ( $p = 0.0038$ )—a reduction in deviance of 85.45 with 16 df ( $p < 0.0001$ ).<sup>10</sup> In other words, patterns of social fluidity are clearly different in the Republic of Ireland than they are in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, if we then allow social fluidity to differ by religion within Northern Ireland the effect is not significant (the change in deviance is 23.69 with 16 df,  $p = 0.097$ ). Patterns of social fluidity of Protestants are no different from those of Catholics. If, however, we allow social fluidity to

<sup>9</sup> The deviance, when considered in relation to the degrees of freedom, provides a measure that tells us whether or not a given model provides an adequate account of, or fit to, the observed data.

<sup>10</sup> That is to say, under this model social fluidity is the same among men and women in the Republic of Ireland, and it is also the same in the four Northern Ireland tables—for Catholic men and women and for Protestant men and women.

differ by gender we find a significant effect (the change in deviance is 29.29 with 16 degrees of freedom,  $p = 0.0225$ ). However, these gender differences arise for three specific reasons. First, women in the Republic of Ireland are less likely than men to enter class IV from an origin in class III; Protestant women in Northern Ireland are less likely than Protestant men to enter class V+VI from an origin in class III, or to remain in class V+VI having been born into it; and, thirdly, Catholic women in Northern Ireland are less likely than Catholic men to be upwardly mobile from origins in class V+VI into class I+II. If we replace the gender difference in social fluidity by four dummy variables (which we can label 'affinity terms' to adopt the terminology of Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992) that capture these effects we find that the model yields an acceptable fit to the data (deviance of 74.86 with 60 degrees of freedom,  $p = 0.0938$ ).<sup>11</sup>

Thus a rather clear picture emerges of differences in social fluidity in our data. There is no significant difference in social fluidity between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. This result echoes findings based on the only other social mobility data set for Northern Ireland which was collected in 1973 (Miller, 1983; Hout, 1987: Chapter 7). There are some specific and relatively minor differences in social fluidity between men and women both North and South, but substantively, social fluidity is virtually the same among men as among women. However, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland there is a substantive difference in patterns of social fluidity. Now we turn to the question of the nature of this difference.

One parsimonious way of modelling differences in social fluidity between two or more mobility tables is the so-called 'unidiff' model (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Xie, 1992). This model posits that the pattern of association between origins and destinations is the same among the different tables, but it allows the strength of this association to differ by a uniform amount, so allowing for more or less marked inequality in social fluidity. To apply this model we first fit the model of common (across all six tables) social fluidity to our data, but also including the affinity terms that capture gender differences. This yields a deviance of 160.22 with 76 degrees of freedom. We call this model A. As we have already seen, allowing the pattern of social fluidity to vary between North and South yields a model with deviance of 74.86 and 60 degrees of freedom. The difference in deviance between this latter model and model A—namely 85.36 with

<sup>11</sup> If we omit women in Northern Ireland who were not currently in the labour force, so defining the samples of women North and South in exactly the same way, this particular model returns a deviance of 75.18 with 60 df. In general, changing the criteria for our Northern sample in this way has no effect on our results.

16 degrees of freedom—is a measure of how much of the variation in social fluidity between the six tables this latter model explains. If we now apply the unidiff model to the same data we find that it yields a deviance of 115.84 with 71 degrees of freedom ( $p = 0.001$ ). Clearly this model does not fit the data. However, if we take the difference between its deviance and that of model A, the result (44.38 with 5 degrees of freedom) is equal to 52 per cent of the total variation in social fluidity that we have been able to explain.<sup>12</sup> The failure of the unidiff model to fit the data statistically shows that the difference between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in their social fluidity is not simply due to their having the same pattern but a different level of inequality. Nevertheless, the unidiff model explains about half of the difference in social fluidity between North and South.

Since the unidiff model allows only for uniform differences, variation in social fluidity is captured by a single parameter for each table. In our case, if we express these parameter values relative to the value for men in the Republic of Ireland we find that the values for the other five tables are as set out in Table 5. Since negative values indicate more openness than is found among men in the Republic of Ireland these results are very clear cut. There is no difference between men and women in the Republic of Ireland, nor are there any differences between any of the four groups in Northern Ireland. However, these four display patterns of social fluidity that are significantly more open than those found in the Republic of Ireland. On average, odds-ratios in the Northern Ireland tables are around two-thirds of the magnitude of those found in the Republic. Of course, this is not the whole story, because the unidiff model leaves unexplained about half of the difference in social fluidity between the two parts of Ireland, and a more detailed investigation into the pattern of differences and similarities in social fluidity is an issue we hope to address in later work. However, one possible explanation for the differences which are not captured by the unidiff model concerns the larger role played by property ownership in the origin distribution of the Republic of Ireland than in the North: in other words, the petty bourgeoisie (class IV) is much larger in the former's origin distribution than in the latter's. Given that it is in this class that family advantage takes a very concrete form in the ability of parents to pass on the means of production to their children, we might expect that some part of the lower level of social fluidity in the South would be due to the greater influence of the petty bourgeoisie. And, accordingly, if we rerun our analyses omitting all those who were born into that class, we do indeed find

<sup>12</sup> The unidiff model reduces the deviance compared with model A by 44.38 while the model that allows social fluidity to vary between North and South in an unrestricted fashion reduces it by 85.36, 44.38 is then 52 per cent of 85.36.

**Table 5.** Uniform difference parameters relative to men in the Republic of Ireland.

	Unidiff Coefficient	Standard Error
Men in Republic of Ireland	0.000	
Women in the Republic of Ireland	-0.043	0.11
Catholic Men in Northern Ireland	-0.511	0.11
Catholic Women in Northern Ireland	-0.484	0.13
Protestant Men in Northern Ireland	-0.373	0.09
Protestant Women in Northern Ireland	-0.430	0.11

*Source:* NI: 1996 Northern Ireland Mobility Survey. ROI: 1994 Living in Ireland Survey.

that while there are still differences in social fluidity between North and South (the model of common social fluidity still fails to fit returning deviance of 88.52 with 56 df,  $p = 0.0036$ ) the unidiff model now very nearly fits the data (deviance of 69.22 with 51 df,  $p = 0.0456$ ). There still remains a statistically significant difference between the unidiff model and the observed data, but it is clear that this is now relatively minor. There seem, therefore, to be two main ways in which social fluidity differs between North and South. The Republic of Ireland is a less open society, and competition for more desirable class positions is more heavily biased by class origins than it is in the North. This gives rise to the differences in parameter values in the unidiff model. But the unidiff model fails to fit the data because of another source of difference in social fluidity between the two parts of the island which arises as a compositional effect. The class in which class position can most readily be inherited—namely the petty bourgeoisie—makes up a larger share of the class origin distribution in the South than in Northern Ireland.

As is usual in comparative studies of social mobility, variation in absolute mobility patterns owes more to differences between marginal distributions than to differences in social fluidity. We can see this more clearly if (following Breen, 1985) we decompose the total mobility variation in our data into that which arises from marginal differences and that which is due to differences in social fluidity. We define the total mobility variation as equal to the difference in deviance between our best fitting model for the data (74.86 with 60 df as above), and a model which sets social fluidity and all marginal distributions to be identical across our six mobility tables (though allowing for differences in sample sizes). Such a model yields a deviance of 1893.4 with 120 df. Table 6 then shows how this total mobility variation is partitioned into that due to differences in the class origin distribution, the current class distribution and social fluidity. As Table 6 shows, much more of the difference in mobility patterns is due to marginal effects than to social fluidity, and, indeed, as we have seen,

**Table 6.** Partitioning of total mobility variation.

	Deviance	df	Percentage of total mobility variation <sup>1</sup>
1. Common margins and social fluidity	1893.4	120	
2. + differences in origins	1553.4	100	18.7
3. + differences in current class	183.72	80	75.3
4. + differences in social fluidity	74.86	60	6.0

*Note:* 1 Total mobility variation is defined as the difference in deviance between model 1 and model 4.

*Source:* NI: 1996 Northern Ireland Mobility Survey. ROI: 1994 Living in Ireland Survey.

almost all of the within-country variation in mobility patterns derives from the former source. Within the former it is differences in the current class distribution that are of overwhelming importance.

## The Effects of Migration

Since the mid-nineteenth century the island of Ireland, and particularly the Republic of Ireland, have been notable for high levels of emigration. This raises the question of how, if at all, this might have affected patterns of social fluidity. In general, migration per se will have no such effect unless it is differentiated in some way with respect not simply to class origins, but also to those factors that more directly influence an individual's mobility chances. Consider, for example, a situation in which people from one class origin were substantially more likely to migrate than people from other classes. Of itself this would not have any impact on observed patterns of social fluidity, providing that the migrants from this class were a random sample of everyone who originated in that class. In this case we can conclude that the social fluidity experiences of those who remained in Ireland was what those who emigrated would also have experienced had they not done so.<sup>13</sup> But suppose, instead, that those who migrated from this class were those who were most likely to be downwardly mobile in Ireland because they lacked some particular resource associated with mobility: they might, for example, have particularly low levels of educational attainment. In this case the migrants would not be a random sample of everyone originating from that class, and so the observed experiences of the non-migrants could not be assumed to be indicative of what would have happened to them had they chosen to remain in Ireland. Rather, had

<sup>13</sup> In fact, we do not require the migrants to be a random sample in an absolute sense. Rather they should be a random sample with respect to the factors that influence mobility chances.

they remained we would have observed less upward mobility from this class than we in fact saw. Suppose now that the class in question were the service class: then observed social fluidity will be rather less than it would have been had there been no emigration. This is because, in the absence of migration, the service class would have contained a larger proportion of people who were likely to be downwardly mobile and so the advantaged position of this class, vis-à-vis the others, would be somewhat eroded. Conversely, if the class in question were the skilled manual class, say, then the migration of those with the fewest mobility resources will cause observed social fluidity to be somewhat greater than it would be were the migrants to have remained within an Irish mobility regime. However, suppose that these patterns of selective migration were true of all classes. Then social fluidity would be unaffected because, in this example, those with the poorest mobility chances would be removed from consideration in all classes.

So, for emigration to affect our conclusions about social fluidity we require that two conditions be met. First, migration should be selective within classes with respect to the factors that influence mobility chances; and secondly, this selective migration must operate differently among people from different class origins. In this chapter, however, our concern is with a comparison of social mobility and social fluidity between the two parts of Ireland and we therefore need to ask not only whether emigration affects conclusions about fluidity but also whether this operates in different ways in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. If it does, then the results of a comparison based, as ours is, on only non-migrants will have to be treated with some care. Thus a third condition is needed. If migration is to cast doubt on the results of our North/South comparative analysis, then differences in the operation of selective mobility as between classes must themselves be different in the two parts of the island.

To test whether any of these conditions are met we therefore require data on the class origins and the mobility resources possessed by individuals in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and by migrants from these two jurisdictions. We have, in fact, already analysed such data in the chapter in this volume dealing with education (Breen, Heath and Whelan, this volume). Given that educational qualifications are possibly the most important resource for social mobility, we here return to the data set used in that chapter to answer the question of whether any of these conditions are met. Here we compare data from the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS) with that from the British General Household Survey (GHS) (for details of these data sources see Breen, Heath and Whelan, this volume) and the ESRI's Living in Ireland Survey. We draw on the GHS data to form tables of class origin by highest



educational qualification (using the same four levels of educational qualification as in the earlier chapter) for migrants to Britain from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; and we use the CHS and Living in Ireland data to form tables of class origins by highest educational qualification for respondents living in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, respectively. Overall, this yields a five class by four educational levels by two migrant status cross-tabulation for both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

When we analyse these two cross-tabulations we find a quite striking result: namely, that educational fluidity is constant among migrants and non-migrants in Northern Ireland (deviance = 13.65 with 12 df,  $p = 0.324$ ), whereas it is not for those who originated in the Republic of Ireland (deviance = 53.36 with 12 df,  $p < 0.0001$ ). This means that, so far as people born in Northern Ireland are concerned, the relationship between class origins and education is the same among migrants and non-migrants. In this case, it appears that migration is not likely to have had any biasing effect on conclusions about social fluidity based on data for non-migrants only. But in the Republic of Ireland this is not so. The failure of the common educational fluidity model to fit the data points to a different relationship between class origins and educational attainment among those who remained in Ireland, compared with those who migrated to Britain. And, further analyses show that there is rather more educational fluidity among the migrants than the non-migrants: that is to say, educational qualifications are less closely tied to class origins among migrants than among those who did not migrate. The evidence for this is twofold. First, the pattern of residuals from the model of common educational fluidity shows a clear tendency for cells that associate more advantaged class origins and lower levels of qualification, or less advantaged origins and higher levels of qualification, to be under-fitted by the model among migrants. Secondly, if we fit the unidiff model to the Southern data we find that it fails to fit the data (deviance = 25.96 with 11 df,  $p = 0.007$ ) but the unidiff parameter shows that the association between class origins and education among migrants (as measured by odds-ratios) is significantly less than among non-migrants.

Of course, as the analyses reported in the education chapter of this volume show, the distribution of educational qualifications is quite different among migrants and non-migrants from both parts of the island. But here our focus is on whether the pattern of association between qualification levels and class origins shows comparable differences. Our conclusion is that there is such a difference in the case of the Republic of Ireland, but not for Northern Ireland. This gives us strong evidence to suspect that conclusions about social fluidity in the Republic, but not the North,

drawing on data only for respondents who did not migrate, might have been rather different had there been no migration.

Such differential effects of migration then need to be taken into account in our comparison of social fluidity in the two parts of Ireland. Greater educational fluidity among migrants from the Republic implies a weaker relationship between class origins and the major proximate factor influencing social mobility (namely, educational qualifications). Had migrants been included in the Southern mobility data we may well have seen rather more social fluidity than we in fact observed and the difference in social fluidity between the two parts of Ireland would then have been rather less—though, given the data at our disposal, it is not possible to quantify this.

Several caveats must be entered when drawing conclusions from these findings. The data relate only to migrants to Britain and, although this has been the main destination for Irish emigrants during the post-war period there have nevertheless been significant migratory flows to other destinations. Furthermore, our data only relate to one mobility resource, namely educational qualifications, and this is a fairly obvious limitation since we know that patterns of social fluidity far from simply reflect the differential distribution of educational qualifications. Nevertheless, our results do lead us to suspect that the lower level of social fluidity found in the Republic of Ireland may owe something to the effects of selective migration.

## **Conclusions**

We set out to address four questions concerned with differences and similarities in patterns of class structure and social fluidity in Ireland, North and South. For the most part our results have been surprisingly clear-cut. Our analyses of class structure showed a general trend towards convergence in the two parts of the island, albeit with the persistence of the kind of gender differences which are familiar from previous research in many other countries. But perhaps the most striking finding here was the convergence in the class distributions between Protestant and Catholic women in Northern Ireland, and the advantage enjoyed by the latter in relation to long-range upward and downward mobility. Among men, while there has also been some convergence, Catholics are still disadvantaged, being less likely to be found in the professional and managerial class and more likely to be located in the non-skilled manual class, and the advantage in relation to long-range mobility continues to lie with Protestants. However, the magnitude of these ethnic difference pales when set against the

extent of gender difference in the current class distribution which is far larger in both the North and South and among Catholics and Protestants.

The bulk of our analysis focused on patterns of social fluidity. Differences between men and women in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland certainly exist, but they are small relative to the degree of commonality between them. In Northern Ireland (and in common with studies using data from the early 1970s) we could find no difference in social fluidity between Protestants and Catholics of the same gender. The one clear source of variation in social fluidity in our data is cross-national: the Republic of Ireland is substantially less open than is Northern Ireland. That is to say, mobility chances are more closely tied to class origins in the former and, we can infer, equality of opportunity is less.

This finding should come as no surprise in the light of earlier research which has shown the Republic of Ireland to have class inequalities considerably greater than most other European countries including England and Wales.<sup>14</sup> As we have seen, there are two sources of difference between the two parts of Ireland in their pattern of social fluidity. On the one hand there is a compositional effect: class origins in the petty bourgeoisie are much more numerous in the South, almost inevitably leading to less openness in social fluidity. But, on the other hand, even taking this into account, social fluidity among people of other class origins is uniformly less in the South than in the North. However, further analyses suggest a third factor that might be acting to accentuate differences in social fluidity between North and South. In the Republic of Ireland, though not in Northern Ireland, selective migration had the effect of removing a disproportionate share of better qualified people from less advantaged class origins. The effect of this would be to increase the association between class origins and educational qualifications among those who remained, probably leading to lower rates of social fluidity. Such conclusions, however, are necessarily tentative.<sup>15</sup>

Patterns of social fluidity are primarily shaped by three considerations: the relative desirability of different class destinations; the barriers to mobility into particular classes; and the resources available to individuals to allow them to overcome these barriers and enter the more desirable class destinations (Goldthorpe, 1980/87: 99). Since we can reasonably assume that the relative desirability of different classes is common to both parts of

<sup>14</sup> For a summary see Breen and Whelan (1996).

<sup>15</sup> Of course, one might equally well argue that, far from selective migration being the cause of lower social fluidity it was the consequence, in as much as well-qualified people from less-advantaged classes migrated precisely because they believed that low social fluidity would prevent them securing the returns on their qualifications that they might obtain elsewhere.

Ireland, the reasons for lower social fluidity in the South must be sought in an examination of differential barriers and the differential distribution of resources. Both issues may be important. On the one hand, since odds-ratios are uniformly higher in the Republic, rates of class inheritance must also be higher: thus, insiders appear better able to retain their class position here than in the North. On the other, evidence presented by Breen, Heath and Whelan (this volume) shows that class inequalities in education are more substantial in the South than in the North. In so far as educational attainment is a resource for social mobility, it follows that some of the difference in social fluidity may arise from this source.

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