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“A sort of whirlwind’: Political Violence and Changing Patterns of Presbyterian Religious Observance in Ireland”,

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The online version of this article can be found at
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Summary

Since the European Reformation and the colonisations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Ireland has evolved a distinctive religious geography which had profound implications for its political development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leading ultimately to the division of the island along explicitly religio-territorial lines in 1921. Troubled Geographies, a major project funded under the auspices of the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s ‘Religion and Society’ programme was the first attempt to seek to understand patterns of change in the island’s complex geography of religious settlement in the period since the Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century up to the most recent published censuses for both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

This paper will present findings from a smaller spin-off project funded by the British Academy, which digitised records of attendance at Presbyterian churches across the island over the last 150 years, enabling us to assess how patterns of practice were affected by the momentous events of the period, including partition, civil war, two world wars, the vicissitudes of the global economy and the Troubles of the more recent past. In addition, the use of new quantitative materials such as those in the Presbyterian records enables us to reflect on how patterns of substantive religious practice reflect those on nominal religious affiliation available from successive censuses from either side of the border.

