

THE BELFAST AGREEMENT: HOW TO WIN A REFERENDUM AND THE NEXT ELECTION

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Dr. Colin Irwin

Institute of Irish Studies - University of Liverpool
E cirwin@liverpool.ac.uk - W <http://www.peacepolls.org>

Introduction

In Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Palestine and almost anywhere there is a peace process politicians are very reticent to sign agreements in fear of losing the next election. All too frequently peace processes are held hostage to electoral politics. But in Northern Ireland the politicians who 'signed up' to the Belfast Agreement knew from a public opinion poll published on 31 March 1998, 11 days before the deal was struck on Good Friday, 10 April, 1998; 53 days before the referendum on 22 May, 1998; and 87 days before the elections to the new Northern Ireland Assembly on 25 June, 1998, that they could win.

To lose the referendum would have been political and electoral suicide for any party supporting the agreement but a programme of public opinion research had been undertaken to refine and test the agreement at each stage of its development to make sure it would be both a political and electoral success. This paper details this process and suggests that if similar programmes of research were put in place in support of, for example, the proposed European Constitution or even the Final Status Agreement for Israel and Palestine then referendums on these contentious issues might meet with similar success and the parties to such agreements might also enjoy electoral success next time their constituents are asked to vote for them.

Nine surveys of public opinion were completed in support of the Northern Ireland peace process between April 1996 and February 2003. Critically the questions for eight of these polls were drafted and agreed with the co-operation of party negotiators to enhance the peace process by increasing party inclusiveness, developing issues and language, testing party policies, helping to set deadlines and increase the overall transparency of negotiations through the publication of technical analysis and media reports. The focus of this paper will be on polls four and five that refined and tested the agreement.

Poll 4 - In Search of a Settlement (Irwin 1998a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h and i)

The drafting of the questionnaire for this poll had been nearly a year in the making. Some issues, such as police reform, were meant to have been included in the March/April 1997 poll but were left out for lack of space. All the questions had been worked on through the UK General Election period of the spring and the summer break. Even when the talks were in recess the drafting and refining of the various options went ahead with the designated group of party negotiators.

Although the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP) would not go into the formal talks with Sinn Féin they both continued to work on the polls so that all the issues that had to be dealt with would be fairly tested against public opinion from the widest possible range of political perspectives. No one abstained themselves from the programme of research. In addition to being more inclusive than the talks proper the issues dealt with were also broader than the talks agenda agreed to with the two governments. Any serious matter of relevance to a settlement and the wider peace process could be raised. The only items not dealt with in this poll were the procedural questions so exhaustively tested against public opinion in the previous two polls. All the parties agreed it was time to move on to matters of substance.

Because it had to deal with all the elements of a comprehensive agreement the questionnaire for this poll was the most complex one of them all. The informant had to provide 273 responses on a wide variety of matters. The other polls were conducted as 'face to face' interviews but this one was a 24 page take home booklet (almost an exam!) that had to be filled out. The first important question in this survey asked the interviewee to rate the significance of 19 causes of the Northern Ireland conflict and 17 steps that could be taken towards a lasting peace. The second section contained 29 questions on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and the third section 25 questions on police reform. The questionnaire then went on to deal with the major political/institutional elements of the Belfast Agreement with 39 questions on Northern Ireland regional government, 56 questions on relationships within the island of Ireland, 20 questions which covered relationships between the British and Irish governments and an additional 16 questions on constitutional issues. By employing a method of analysis based on the voting system used in the talks a summary of what an acceptable agreement would look like was produced. This solution or 'package' proved to be very close to the deal struck on Good Friday and was used as a basis for testing a comprehensive settlement 'package' in poll number five.

The fieldwork for the poll was completed between 4 and 22 December 1997. The results were analysed over the Christmas holidays with the results being published in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 10, 12, 13 and 14 January 1998. Not to be outdone the two governments also published their 'Propositions on Heads of Agreement' document on the 12th of January but it was little more than a pale copy of the very comprehensive piece of research undertaken by the parties. The results of this collective enterprise are given below from the broadest of peace building concerns to the detail of the institutional and constitutional reforms that would be required if the Northern Ireland peace process was going to be a success, all as they appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph*.

STEPS WE NEED TO TAKE TO WIN PEACE

Today the Belfast Telegraph publishes the first of a four-part series from an opinion poll - 'in search of a settlement: the people's choice' - on the future of Northern Ireland. The Stormont Talks start up again on Monday but have the Governments and parties got their priorities right? What are the steps that have to be taken to secure a lasting peace? Is social justice or an end to partition the number one priority for Catholics and what do Protestants want out of a settlement?

People from different communities often hold very different views about the causes of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Additionally, perhaps the two governments who set up the Stormont Talks and the politicians elected to take part in the Talks are not focusing on the problems that are of the greatest importance to their respective constituencies. With these points in mind people were asked to indicate which issues they considered to be 'Very Significant', 'Significant', 'Of Some Significance', 'Of Little Significance' or 'Of No Significance' at all.

Catholics put a lack of equality and discrimination first (71 per cent said it is 'very significant') followed by sectarian politics at 66 per cent, the failures of the police service at 62 per cent and then Loyalist violence at 57 per cent (Table 2.3). Protestants place Republican violence at the top of their list at 87 per cent followed by more security issues and then the Republic's territorial claim in fourth place at 53 per cent. Both Catholics and Protestants place 'unaccountable and secretive government' eighth on their lists. Could it be that the Stormont Talks, with their emphasis on reforming the political institutions of government, have got it wrong? Even if these reforms can be agreed can they deliver the peace that everyone wants or are they simply a means to that end?

What then are the steps that have to be taken in an effort to secure a lasting peace. With this point in mind people were asked to indicate which options they considered to be 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable' as part of a lasting settlement.

Catholics placed a Bill of Rights first (78 per cent said it was 'Essential'), police reform second at 70 per cent followed by security issues (Table 1). For Protestants security issues were their first and second priority followed by an end to the Republic's territorial claim. 'Integration of Northern Ireland into the UK' was their seventh choice while Catholics ranked 'British withdrawal from Northern Ireland' as their ninth option. Both Catholics and Protestants placed, for example, 'A right to choose integrated education' (7th and 11th choice respectively) before 'Reformed and shared government' (12th and 14th choice respectively). Clearly the Stormont Talks with their the primary focus on the reform of the institutions of government have got it wrong or, at the very best, these reforms must be seen as a means to an end and not as an end in themselves.

Table 1 Protestant and Catholic priorities for peace in Northern Ireland

	Protestant per cent	Essential	Catholic per cent	Essential
1st	Disband all paramilitary groups.	70	A Bill of Rights that guarantees equality for all.	78
2nd	Stronger and effective anti-terrorist measures.	70	Completely reform the police service.	70
3rd	The Republic ends their claim on Northern Ireland.	62	A Bill of Rights that protects the culture of each community.	67
4th	A Bill of Rights that guarantees equality for all.	37	Disband all paramilitary groups.	67
5th	End the Anglo-Irish Agreement.	36	Return the army to their barracks.	61
6th	A Bill of Rights that protects the culture of each community.	36	Politics without a sectarian division.	59
7th	Integrate Northern Ireland into the UK.	35	A right to choose integrated education.	53
8th	A right to choose integrated education.	35	A right to choose integrated housing.	51
9th	Politics without a sectarian division.	32	British withdrawal from Northern Ireland.	46
10th	Separate politics and religion in Northern Ireland.	31	Open government and Freedom of Information Act.	46
11th	A right to choose integrated housing.	30	Stronger and effective anti-terrorist measures.	40
12th	Separate politics and religion in the Republic.	30	Reformed and shared government.	32
13th	Open government and Freedom of Information Act.	24	Separate politics and religion in Northern Ireland.	20
14th	Reformed and shared government.	12	Separate politics and religion in the Republic.	15
15th	Return the army to their barracks.	8	End the Anglo-Irish Agreement.	10
16th	Completely reform the police service.	7	The Republic ends their claim on Northern Ireland.	7
17th	British withdrawal from Northern Ireland.	1	Integrate Northern Ireland into the UK.	4

Having first prioritised the causes of the conflict and their potential solutions the next problem that has to be tackled is searching out the areas of policy and reform where agreement can be found. At the Stormont Talks such agreement is based on the principle of ‘Sufficient Consent’ which requires a simple majority (more than 50 per cent) from each of the two main traditions. If this same principle is applied to the results of the public opinion poll then it is possible to say what parts of a settlement are ‘Essential’, ‘Desirable’, ‘Acceptable’ or ‘Tolerable’ when total responses pass the 50 per cent mark for both communities. These responses are highlighted in **bold** (Table 2).

Both Catholics and Protestants consider a Bill of Rights to be ‘Desirable’ so making progress on this issue, which is the number one priority for most Nationalists, should not be a problem at the Talks. On the other hand complete reform of the police service, the second priority for Nationalists, is not acceptable to a majority of Protestants. But complete reform doesn’t mean no reform. What reforms, then, are acceptable? To explore this question, and many others, all the issues dealt with here must now be examined in greater detail.

Table 2 Protestant and Catholic support for peace process reforms

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
British withdrawal from Northern Ireland.	Protestant	1	7	15	27
	Catholic	46	69	86	94
End the Anglo-Irish Agreement.	Protestant	36	56	76	93
	Catholic	10	21	40	63
Integrate Northern Ireland into the UK.	Protestant	35	57	82	90
	Catholic	4	6	19	35
The Republic ends their claim on Northern Ireland.	Protestant	62	81	89	94
	Catholic	7	12	25	41
Reformed and shared government.	Protestant	12	22	53	73
	Catholic	32	50	73	90
Open government and Freedom of Information Act.	Protestant	24	52	76	91
	Catholic	46	69	91	97
A Bill of Rights that guarantees equality for all.	Protestant	37	65	88	98
	Catholic	78	91	99	100
A right to choose integrated education.	Protestant	35	60	91	97
	Catholic	53	74	96	99
A right to choose integrated housing.	Protestant	30	54	88	96
	Catholic	51	73	95	99
A Bill of Rights that protects the culture of each community.	Protestant	36	62	92	99
	Catholic	67	86	97	98
Politics without a sectarian division.	Protestant	32	63	88	97
	Catholic	59	86	96	98
Separate politics and religion in the Republic.	Protestant	30	53	80	92
	Catholic	15	36	62	80
Separate politics and religion in Northern Ireland.	Protestant	31	57	82	93
	Catholic	20	46	74	84
Disband all paramilitary groups.	Protestant	70	81	91	95
	Catholic	67	82	91	96
Return the army to their barracks.	Protestant	8	21	42	59
	Catholic	61	77	95	98
Completely reform the police service.	Protestant	7	15	30	47
	Catholic	70	83	94	97
Stronger and effective anti-terrorist measures.	Protestant	70	89	97	99
	Catholic	40	58	79	88

PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE

The European Convention on Human Rights protects individuals by guaranteeing each person the right to life; not to be tortured or subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment; to protection from slavery or forced work; not to be unlawfully arrested or detained; to a fair trial; to freedom of belief and expression; to free association; to privacy and family life; not to be discriminated against; to a remedy for breaches of human rights.

The new Labour government plan to introduce this Convention into the domestic law of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This will allow any complaints regarding failures to meet these minimum standards to be heard by courts in the UK and Northern Ireland. Both communities consider this option to be 'Desirable' (Table 3).

Table 3 Support for European Convention on Human Rights

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
The European Convention on Human Rights should be part of the domestic law of Northern Ireland.	Protestant	32	63	87	97
	Catholic	76	88	96	100

Some recent negotiated settlements have included a Bill of Rights to deal with many of the special political, social and cultural problems that lay at the heart of their conflict. Again both communities consider this option to be 'Desirable' (Table 4). With regard to the application and enforcement of Human Rights Catholics consider the establishment of a commission with powers to monitor, investigate and bring complaints to court to be 'Desirable'. Protestants consider these options to be 'Acceptable' (Table 5).

Table 4 Support for a special Northern Ireland Bill Rights

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
An additional Bill of Rights to address the special problems of Northern Ireland.	Protestant	27	58	83	94
	Catholic	54	83	92	98
No additional Bill of Rights, just new laws to address the special problems of Northern Ireland.	Protestant	10	25	66	85
	Catholic	16	33	59	72

Table 5 Support for the enforcement of Human Rights

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
A special Court to hear Human Rights complaints.	Protestant	21	41	82	93
	Catholic	51	79	95	98
A Commission to monitor, investigate and promote Human Rights.	Protestant	13	36	74	91
	Catholic	41	74	94	98
A Commission with powers to bring Human Rights complaints to court.	Protestant	21	41	80	91
	Catholic	50	80	96	99

In addition to the European Convention on Human Rights other international conventions include the right to food, clothing and shelter; health; education; work; safe and fair conditions of work; social security; cultural expression. Including these economic, social and cultural rights in a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights is also thought to be ‘Desirable’ by a majority in both communities (Table 6).

Table 6 Support for economic, social and cultural rights

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Economic, social and cultural Rights should be part of a Northern Ireland Bill.	Protestant	41	67	93	98
	Catholic	72	93	99	100

Some international conventions also include collective rights of peoples and members of minorities. Both communities consider the right to self-determination, parity of esteem and not to be treated as a member of a community against their will to be ‘Desirable’. Similarly religious, language, cultural, educational and democratic group rights are all ‘Acceptable’ and these rights should be introduced into Northern Ireland law as part of a Bill of Rights (Table 7).

Table 7 Support for collective rights

The right.....	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
To self-determination.	Protestant	32	62	87	95
	Catholic	63	86	95	96
To practise their religion, use their language and enjoy their culture.	Protestant	30	49	77	94
	Catholic	80	94	98	99
To be taught or educated in their distinctive language.	Protestant	11	24	54	83
	Catholic	55	78	98	99
To participate effectively in government on matters affecting them.	Protestant	23	43	80	92
	Catholic	61	84	96	99
To parity of treatment and esteem.	Protestant	26	51	78	93
	Catholic	68	88	97	99
Not to be treated as members of a distinct community against their will.	Protestant	32	56	82	91
	Catholic	76	90	96	98

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
A Bill of Rights that includes collective and minority rights.	Protestant	17	40	74	89
	Catholic	61	86	96	99
A British and Irish Treaty to protect minority rights.	Protestant	10	18	46	65
	Catholic	46	74	88	98
No Bill of Rights or Treaty to protect minorities, just new policies and laws.	Protestant	9	24	56	76
	Catholic	13	22	43	57

It may also be necessary to include some rights that deal specifically with some of the political, social and cultural problems that are distinctive features of the Northern Ireland

conflict. Both communities consider the right to peaceful demonstrations and parades, freedom of worship and religious expression, freedom from intimidation or incitement to hatred to be 'Essential' and freedom of political expression 'Desirable'. The right to choose integrated or single religion housing is 'Acceptable' as is the right to choose Catholic, Protestant or integrated education and although Catholics consider the right to use and be educated in the Irish language to be 'Essential' a majority of Protestants are willing to tolerate these rights as part of a lasting settlement (Table 8).

Table 8 Support for rights and freedoms of expression and association

The right to.....	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Freedom of political expression	Protestant	47	69	97	100
	Catholic	70	89	97	99
Freedom of religious expression	Protestant	53	74	97	100
	Catholic	76	91	98	100
Freedom from incitement to hatred	Protestant	57	80	96	97
	Catholic	82	89	95	96
Freedom of worship	Protestant	65	85	100	100
	Catholic	84	96	100	100
Freedom from intimidation	Protestant	73	87	99	100
	Catholic	88	94	98	99
Peaceful demonstrations and parades	Protestant	53	77	93	99
	Catholic	54	72	84	96
The right to use the Irish language	Protestant	8	20	47	81
	Catholic	63	84	98	100
Education in Irish language schools	Protestant	7	15	42	78
	Catholic	57	81	98	99
Education in Integrated schools	Protestant	23	48	76	96
	Catholic	55	83	97	99
Education in Catholic schools	Protestant	13	28	69	92
	Catholic	56	81	96	99
Education in Protestant schools	Protestant	22	46	87	98
	Catholic	54	75	94	98
Choose single religion public housing	Protestant	13	23	53	77
	Catholic	32	43	66	79
Choose mixed religion public housing	Protestant	22	47	79	92
	Catholic	47	73	92	97

Various British governments have taken several important steps in an effort to meet these demands for rights appropriate to the needs of Northern Ireland. For example, the establishment of the Fair Employment Commission (FEC), the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) and now the incorporation of the European Convention into domestic UK law. But still a very great deal more is required, by both Catholics and Protestants, as part of a lasting settlement. Perhaps the British government should instruct their staff to produce a provisional draft of the appropriate legislation with a view to placing it before the parties for their consideration.

However, the results of this section of the poll also present a challenge to the Irish government. If they do wish to satisfy local Nationalist aspirations in these matters they will have to make an effort to meet these reforms, measure for measure, in their own domestic law. Additionally any failure in these matters may well be met with cries of ‘double standard’ and ‘hypocrisy’ from Unionists who value these rights and want both communities to enjoy their benefits in the North.

REFORMING RUC QUITE 'ACCEPTABLE'

In a report commissioned by the government Dr. Maurice Hayes has recommended the establishment of a completely independent agency to deal with all aspects of investigations into complaints against the RUC. Both communities consider this proposal to be quite ‘Acceptable’ (Table 9) as is the recruitment of more Catholics. Special training in community relations and human rights, the rigorous monitoring of policing standards and the establishment of a policing charter are all considered to be ‘Desirable’ by a majority in both communities (Table 10). However the recent changes to the oath of allegiance is only ‘Tolerable’ for Protestants while other reforms targeted at the culture and character of the police force, such as a change of name and uniform, are not acceptable to a majority of Protestants although Catholics consider these reforms to be ‘Essential’.

Table 9 Support for independent investigation of complaints against the RUC

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Give the existing commission more scope to initiate and supervise complaints but maintain the role of the RUC in the investigation.	Protestant	22	44	83	94
	Catholic	12	19	34	51
Establish a completely independent agency to deal with all aspects of investigations into complaints against the RUC.	Protestant	13	37	69	83
	Catholic	75	90	95	98

Table 10 Support for RUC reforms

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Special training in community relations and human rights.	Protestant	30	64	98	100
	Catholic	65	87	98	100
A policing charter to set duties and responsibilities in law.	Protestant	24	55	90	98
	Catholic	52	78	95	99
Monitor policing standards and publish reports.	Protestant	23	58	90	99
	Catholic	61	84	94	99
Recruit more Catholics	Protestant	19	42	72	91
	Catholic	72	86	97	99
A new name for the RUC more acceptable across the whole community.	Protestant	3	10	25	41
	Catholic	59	77	92	96
New emblems and symbols more acceptable across the whole community.	Protestant	3	11	25	43
	Catholic	58	76	91	96
Require police to declare their membership of Loyal Orders.	Protestant	9	18	28	46
	Catholic	71	83	90	95
Do not allow police to be members of Loyal Orders.	Protestant	5	13	22	31
	Catholic	69	81	88	95
Make the Oath of Allegiance more acceptable across the whole community.	Protestant	9	24	38	53
	Catholic	57	73	84	89
The police should not normally be armed.	Protestant	5	17	30	38
	Catholic	34	65	82	91
Leave the police service as it is.	Protestant	28	54	77	90
	Catholic	2	3	9	21

At the present time the Royal Ulster Constabulary is a single force that has responsibility for providing all policing duties throughout the whole of Northern Ireland. Between the options of disbanding the RUC and creating a new force on the one hand and no change on the other the most acceptable reform for both Catholics and Protestants is the creation of a two tier service that includes new community policing units (Table 11). Perhaps this new service could benefit from a change of name and uniform as well as being disarmed so that their community role and duties can be seen to be very different from the established force.

Table 11 Support for changes to the structure of the RUC

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Create new community policing units as part of the RUC.	Protestant	12	40	76	88
	Catholic	23	46	63	73
Create new community policing units separate to the RUC.	Protestant	3	9	33	52
	Catholic	20	42	67	80
Disband the RUC and create a new single police force.	Protestant	1	3	9	18
	Catholic	47	68	85	94
Disband the RUC and create a number of regional and city forces.	Protestant	1	3	10	17
	Catholic	24	49	78	89
Leave current policing structures as they are.	Protestant	30	54	81	91
	Catholic	3	4	12	25

Present responsibility for policing in Northern Ireland is divided between the Secretary of State, the Chief Constable and the Police Authority of Northern Ireland. Community Police Liaison Committees, established by District Councils, also have a consultation role. Reform of these responsibilities could include giving more powers to any of these bodies or persons. However, the option that has the greatest cross community support is for a new Department of Justice in a new Regional Assembly to manage the provision of all policing services in Northern Ireland (Table 12).

The drafting of a policing charter and the appropriate legislation needed for the implement of these reforms would be welcomed by Nationalists and provide an acceptable basis for discussion by Unionists. Clearly setting up a Department of Justice can not proceed in the absence of an overall settlement but perhaps some of the proposals reviewed here could be implemented as confidence building measures before the coming marching season.

Table 12 Support for responsibility for policing options

Give more responsibility for the management of the police services to:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
The Secretary of State.	Protestant	8	16	39	62
	Catholic	11	23	53	73
A new Department of Justice and Northern Ireland Assembly.	Protestant	5	22	51	74
	Catholic	25	52	76	87
The Chief Constable.	Protestant	23	49	81	94
	Catholic	5	11	35	54
The Police Authority of Northern Ireland.	Protestant	17	40	78	90
	Catholic	5	10	34	54
A number of regional and city Police Authorities.	Protestant	3	9	37	66
	Catholic	11	32	64	83
Community Liaison Committees.	Protestant	4	14	40	61
	Catholic	22	49	77	90
Or no change - leave the responsibility for the police service as it is.	Protestant	22	48	77	88
	Catholic	2	3	8	23

WHY ULSTER NOW WANTS TO HAVE NEW ASSEMBLY:

WIDE CROSS SECTION QUIZZED FOR
VIEWS ON REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Today the political parties returned to the Stormont Talks after a stormy, political recess. The first item on their agenda was Strand one, which deals with regional government. In other words who wants an assembly and in what form would it be acceptable to both unionists and nationalists.

At the present time Northern Ireland is governed under Direct Rule from Westminster with many important decisions being made by the Northern Ireland Office. Most of these decisions could be made by a democratically elected assembly. Approximately 50 per cent of both Catholics and Protestants consider this option to be 'Desirable' (Table 13). An appointed second chamber, powers to administer, initiate and develop new policies, powers to make new laws and alter taxes and the establishment of committees that shadow and monitor the departments of the Northern Ireland Office are all 'Acceptable'. But how can an assembly be structured so that these powers will be used for the benefit of everyone and avoid the dangers of majoritarianism or what Nationalists call 'A return to Stormont'.

Table 13 Support for the different powers of a devolved assembly

Establish a Northern Ireland Regional Assembly with:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
An elected assembly	Protestant	24	48	86	94
	Catholic	25	50	80	91
An appointed second chamber or senate.	Protestant	3	17	57	79
	Catholic	7	25	62	81
Powers of administration.	Protestant	17	35	70	86
	Catholic	26	49	80	91
Powers to initiate and develop new policies.	Protestant	18	39	77	91
	Catholic	15	39	81	92
Powers to make new laws.	Protestant	16	40	75	90
	Catholic	24	46	79	91
Powers to alter taxes.	Protestant	15	36	68	84
	Catholic	24	46	75	87
Committees that shadow and monitor the departments of the Northern Ireland Office.	Protestant	10	23	56	75
	Catholic	16	32	68	82
Or no assembly - Northern Ireland should not have a regional assembly.	Protestant	6	15	29	52
	Catholic	7	19	34	57

EXECUTIVE TO BE ONLY FROM PARTIES
COMMITTED TO NON-VIOLENCE

Catholics would prefer for the appointments in an assembly to be assigned equally between the two main traditions and for voting by weighted majority or ‘Sufficient Consensus’ - which requires a majority from both of the main traditions (Table 14). Protestants would prefer for appointments to be made in proportion to the representation of each party in the assembly and for voting to be by simple majority. The clear compromise on these points is for appointments to the executive, the chairs and membership of committees to be proportional to the representation of each party in the assembly and for voting to be by weighted majority or ‘Sufficient Consensus’.

Table 14 Support for committee appointments and cross community voting

Chairpersons and the membership of committees are assigned:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
In proportion to the representation of each party in the assembly.	Protestant	27	50	78	92
	Catholic	18	38	63	83
Equally between the two main traditions.	Protestant	13	26	42	69
	Catholic	52	77	88	95

Voting in the Assembly is by:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Simple majority for all business.	Protestant	24	49	85	91
	Catholic	7	22	46	61
‘Weighted’ majority to ensure the support of both of the main traditions for all business.	Protestant	9	21	52	75
	Catholic	27	52	80	89
‘Weighted’ majority for <u>contentious</u> business only.	Protestant	3	11	40	69
	Catholic	9	24	55	76
‘Sufficient Consensus’ which requires a majority from <u>both</u> of the main traditions for all business.	Protestant	6	20	49	74
	Catholic	27	59	85	93
‘Sufficient Consensus’ for <u>contentious</u> business only.	Protestant	2	11	40	70
	Catholic	13	26	63	82

Additionally a majority from both communities believe the members of the executive should only come from parties committed to principles of democracy and non-violence and that they should be voted in by the members of the assembly (Table 15). With regards to the leadership in an assembly a majority of both Catholics and Protestants find in quite ‘Acceptable’ that there should be a leader and deputy leader representing the two main traditions and they also consider it ‘Desirable’ to be able to directly vote for these leaders.

Table 15 Support for Leader, Deputy Leader, Executive and their appointment

Members of the Executive are appointed:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Equally between the two main traditions.	Protestant	11	23	47	71
	Catholic	60	82	92	95
In proportion to the representation of each party in the assembly.	Protestant	21	45	74	90
	Catholic	16	38	67	86
From the party or coalition that can form a majority.	Protestant	6	20	52	77
	Catholic	5	14	33	51
Only from parties committed to principles of democracy and non-violence.	Protestant	64	82	92	97
	Catholic	34	55	72	82

And the Executive in the Assembly is:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Appointed by the Secretary of State.	Protestant	5	13	40	59
	Catholic	7	17	41	69
Nominated by the Secretary of State for approval by the assembly.	Protestant	5	20	52	76
	Catholic	8	29	57	81
Voted in by the members of the assembly.	Protestant	20	46	80	92
	Catholic	18	41	75	91
Made up from the Chairpersons of each committee in the assembly.	Protestant	4	17	61	85
	Catholic	11	30	68	87
Or no executive - All the business of government is conducted by the various committees.	Protestant	2	8	30	60
	Catholic	4	17	42	72

The Assembly should have:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
A leader and deputy leader representing the two main traditions.	Protestant	15	39	64	83
	Catholic	28	61	86	92
A 'Panel' of three prominent politicians sharing power.	Protestant	7	18	54	75
	Catholic	13	30	65	84

And they should be:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Appointed by the Secretary of State.	Protestant	5	11	35	56
	Catholic	10	19	43	68
Nominated by the Secretary of State for approval by the assembly.	Protestant	8	17	46	72
	Catholic	9	25	58	81
Voted in by the members of the assembly.	Protestant	16	35	73	88
	Catholic	15	36	75	91
Voted for directly by the people of Northern Ireland.	Protestant	49	70	86	93
	Catholic	38	57	84	94

Or no leader, deputy leader or 'panel':	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
All the business of government is conducted by the executive and/or committees.	Protestant	3	13	41	72
	Catholic	12	25	62	88

THE REFORM OF LOCAL BODIES IS FAVOURED BY BOTH TRADITIONS

When it comes to local government reform a majority of both Catholics and Protestants find such a prospect quite 'Acceptable' and would be willing to have a new assembly decide how this should be done. For example there could be fewer councils with more powers. But reforms could go further (Table 16). A majority from both communities are willing to accept the introduction of new laws to ensure that the views of representatives from the whole community are taken into account, that political and administrative responsibilities are shared, that power can not be abused by one group over another, and that independent committees or courts of arbitrators are established to resolve problems that become intractable (Table 17). Indeed most of these reforms are considered to be 'Desirable' by both Protestants and Catholics.

Table 16 Support for reform of local government

More powers and responsibilities should be given to local government:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Even if there is no Northern Ireland Assembly.	Protestant	15	39	74	89
	Catholic	17	37	70	87
But a new Northern Ireland Assembly should decide how this is done.	Protestant	13	34	79	91
	Catholic	14	37	78	88
To replace the work presently undertaken by various boards.	Protestant	7	30	70	87
	Catholic	10	34	80	92
And combine some of the smaller 26 District Councils to create larger units of local government.	Protestant	5	24	58	81
	Catholic	12	32	68	84

Table 17 Support for measures to prevent abuse of power

All levels of government in Northern Ireland should be protected by laws that ensure:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
The views of representatives from the whole community are taken into account	Protestant	34	63	87	93
	Catholic	75	94	100	100
Political and administrative responsibilities are shared.	Protestant	18	45	78	90
	Catholic	65	85	97	98
Power can not be abused by one group over another.	Protestant	47	71	96	98
	Catholic	81	92	98	99
And independent committees or courts of arbitrators should be established to resolve problems that become intractable.	Protestant	24	51	82	92
	Catholic	61	82	96	100

SURPRISE IN THE LATEST FINDINGS:

CONCLUSION

Given the reservations Nationalist politicians have about ‘A return to Stormont’ and the strong desire on the part of Unionist politicians for a new regional assembly the results of this part of the survey are slightly surprising. Perhaps Protestants are not as enthusiastic about the prospects of establishing another layer of government as their political leaders seem to think and perhaps Catholics desire for accountable government is stronger than their political leaders have judged to be the case. Providing adequate safeguards can be put in place to prevent abuse of power then an assembly could be a welcome part of an overall settlement package in both communities.

FEASIBILITY AND REALITY OF NORTH-SOUTH BODIES:
FISHERIES COMMISSION SEEN AS ACCEPTABLE ROLE MODEL

Today, the focus from the opinion poll is on North-South relationships, the bodies that should be set up to deal with them, their responsibilities and powers. North-South bodies are contentious - while nationalists consider them to be an essential part of an overall settlement, unionists do not want them to develop into an 'unofficial' all Ireland government. How can these aspirations and concerns be reconciled?

The Stormont Talks have been divided into three parts called strands. Strand Two covers relationships within the island of Ireland and deals with North/South bodies. For example the Foyle Fisheries Commission has been established as a 'North/South Body' between the former Northern Ireland parliament at Stormont and the Republic of Ireland to jointly manage the waters of the Foyle estuary. Similar bodies, or a single body, could be established to deal with other matters of mutual concern.

These bodies could be set up to deal with various aspects of government policy with different powers or functions. Responsibilities to consult and co-operate on matters of mutual interest are 'Acceptable' to a majority in both communities and powers to administer laws made by the separate governments in the North and the South of Ireland are 'Tolerable' (Table 18). Stronger powers to develop plans and laws for the island of Ireland as a whole are not acceptable to Protestants.

Table 18 Support for powers of North/South bodies

On matters of mutual interest North/South bodies should:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Be required to consult.	Protestant	16	33	58	71
	Catholic	56	80	95	98
Be required to co-operate.	Protestant	16	35	54	68
	Catholic	57	82	96	99
Have powers to administer laws made by the separate governments in the North and the South of Ireland.	Protestant	3	17	33	51
	Catholic	36	67	88	93
Have powers to develop and execute forward planning for the island of Ireland as a whole.	Protestant	3	12	25	37
	Catholic	46	76	92	96
Have powers to make laws which would apply to the island of Ireland as a whole.	Protestant	3	8	20	30
	Catholic	44	68	88	95
Or there should not be any North/South bodies with any powers or functions.	Protestant	27	40	53	71
	Catholic	4	7	15	31

AREAS WHERE ACTION COULD BE TAKEN

Apart from managing the waters of the Foyle estuary, what other areas of common concern could become candidates for co-operation in North-South bodies?

Catholics would like 'matters of mutual interest' to apply to all areas of government policy but Protestants would like to restrict the mandate of North/South bodies to exclude taxation, local government and planning, policing and security, defence and foreign policy (Table 19). All the other 'matters of mutual interest' are either 'Acceptable' or 'Tolerable'. In the survey this covered twenty areas of policy where action could be taken.

The 'Acceptable' areas of policy were the environment, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, medical care and research, roads and public transport, water gas and electricity, communications, trade and culture and sports.

The 'Tolerable' areas were industrial development boards, the regulation of financial institutions, economic development in general, training and employment, joint representation in Europe, broadcasting and film, minority languages, social services, human rights and education.

Table 19 Support for functions of North/South bodies

And what areas of government policy should North/South bodies deal with?	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
The environment	Protestant	24	47	65	79
	Catholic	63	86	96	100
Agriculture	Protestant	22	40	61	74
	Catholic	66	87	96	99
Fisheries	Protestant	21	40	63	77
	Catholic	62	86	96	99
Tourism	Protestant	26	43	65	77
	Catholic	71	91	97	99
Medical care and research	Protestant	23	39	58	70
	Catholic	57	81	95	98
Roads and public transport	Protestant	17	32	56	69
	Catholic	60	83	95	98
Water, gas and electric	Protestant	14	30	53	65
	Catholic	53	82	94	99
Communications	Protestant	15	32	56	68
	Catholic	57	83	97	100
Industrial development boards	Protestant	12	25	47	65
	Catholic	54	83	97	100
Financial institutions	Protestant	7	17	41	59
	Catholic	50	76	94	99
Economic development in general	Protestant	11	25	49	66
	Catholic	57	85	95	100
Training and employment	Protestant	11	27	47	61
	Catholic	55	81	95	98
Joint representation in Europe	Protestant	11	23	42	61
	Catholic	61	85	97	99
Trade	Protestant	13	27	50	66
	Catholic	62	84	96	98
Taxation	Protestant	6	13	29	44
	Catholic	43	62	82	95
Broadcasting and film	Protestant	7	20	43	66
	Catholic	43	69	92	100
Minority languages	Protestant	6	13	34	60
	Catholic	52	76	94	100
Culture and sport	Protestant	9	23	50	68
	Catholic	59	82	96	99
Local government and planning	Protestant	8	14	30	45
	Catholic	49	72	91	97
Social services	Protestant	9	16	34	51
	Catholic	49	72	87	95
Human rights	Protestant	18	31	45	60
	Catholic	75	89	97	99
Education	Protestant	13	20	38	52
	Catholic	58	78	90	98
Policing and security	Protestant	14	20	31	40
	Catholic	61	83	92	96
Defence	Protestant	12	18	30	40
	Catholic	58	79	93	97
Foreign policy	Protestant	9	16	30	46
	Catholic	53	79	91	98

REFORM OF CONSTITUTION NEEDED
TO PUT DOWN A FOUNDATION

Just as Catholics do not want a regional assembly to be ‘A return to Stormont’ and majoritarian politics, Protestants, do not want North/South bodies to be a ‘backdoor’ to an all Ireland government. With this point in mind no one should be surprised to discover that Protestants would prefer a North/South body for each issue and for these bodies to be established (or dissolved) and controlled by elected politicians from the Northern Ireland Assembly, Dublin and Westminster (Table 20).

Table 20 Support for who should control North/South bodies

Matters of mutual interest should be dealt with by:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
One North/South body for everything.	Protestant	4	11	28	45
	Catholic	32	59	84	95
A separate North/South body for each issue.	Protestant	8	26	49	66
	Catholic	12	31	64	80

Powers to establish and dissolve North/South bodies should be given to:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
A Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Dail (Parliament).	Protestant	5	11	28	46
	Catholic	26	51	80	92
Westminster and Dublin.	Protestant	1	5	17	32
	Catholic	6	25	57	79
Westminster, Dublin and a Northern Ireland Assembly.	Protestant	9	21	40	59
	Catholic	19	44	77	88

North/South bodies should be:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Able to act independently.	Protestant	9	19	37	55
	Catholic	18	47	79	88
Controlled by and responsible to the respective governments, parliamentary bodies and N.I. Assembly who establish them.	Protestant	15	30	51	69
	Catholic	21	46	78	92

The management of North/South bodies should be undertaken by:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Elected politicians.	Protestant	14	27	56	75
	Catholic	24	41	77	91
Civil servants.	Protestant	2	7	32	53
	Catholic	7	18	43	68
Both elected politicians and civil servants.	Protestant	3	15	43	66
	Catholic	9	29	69	86
Representatives of business, trade unions, local government etc. as and when required.	Protestant	8	25	48	69
	Catholic	24	52	82	94

Additionally while dealing with all aspects of government business is just 'Tolerable' for a majority from both communities (50 per cent for Protestants and 96 per cent for Catholics) Protestants are more willing to accept specific projects and policies selected for action by their politicians (Table 21). Protestants would also like appointments to North/South bodies to be made in proportion to the representation of each party in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Finally a majority of both communities are willing to accept the restriction that business in a North/South body must be passed unanimously - everyone has to agree.

Table 21 Support for control options for North/South bodies

North/South bodies should:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Only deal with specific projects agreed to by the politicians who set up the bodies.	Protestant	12	23	49	72
	Catholic	10	23	62	86
Only deal with policies agreed to by the politicians who set up the bodies.	Protestant	7	15	41	68
	Catholic	8	25	62	85
'Harmonise' their actions, policies and laws in the areas of policy they are responsible for.	Protestant	3	16	46	69
	Catholic	23	50	84	98
Only deal with policies the European Union is responsible for.	Protestant	1	10	35	61
	Catholic	3	12	42	70
Only do business with the European Union.	Protestant	1	8	30	54
	Catholic	3	10	33	60
Deal with all aspects of government business.	Protestant	4	11	30	50
	Catholic	31	56	82	96

Appointments to a North/South body should be made:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
In proportion to the representation of each party in the Northern Ireland Assembly.	Protestant	17	34	60	77
	Catholic	12	31	59	81
Equally between the two main traditions in the North.	Protestant	6	17	39	63
	Catholic	39	66	87	96
Equally between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.	Protestant	5	13	29	48
	Catholic	39	62	88	97

Voting on business in a North/South body requires:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
A simple majority only.	Protestant	10	25	47	64
	Catholic	6	20	48	67
A weighted majority.	Protestant	5	16	42	64
	Catholic	9	30	64	79
A majority from <u>both</u> of the main traditions in the North.	Protestant	9	19	47	71
	Catholic	29	56	82	91
A majority from <u>both</u> Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.	Protestant	8	19	34	53
	Catholic	31	58	86	93
Unanimity - Everyone has to agree.	Protestant	21	39	53	66
	Catholic	22	45	67	81

Without North/South bodies it is difficult to see how any settlement package can receive the support of the Nationalist community. However, with all the safeguards proposed here in place Unionist politicians should have little to fear providing all of this is done in good faith. But good faith alone is not the stuff that good law is made of. For Unionists and Nationalists constitutional reform and an acceptable replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement are required to provide the bedrock and context in which all the other reforms can be seen to be and are made safe.

WHAT HOPE FOR COUNCIL OF THE ISLES?

Is a Council of the Islands or Isles an acceptable replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement? In the fourth and final article from the poll this question is examined and the need for constitutional reform.

Prime Minister Tony Blair at the weekend put forward his proposals for a Council of the Isles in a bid to move the Talks process forward. For most people in Northern Ireland, it is probably the first time that they heard the phrase but is the idea workable and what support would such a body command?

Over the years a number of different institutions have been mooted, including a Council of Ireland, a Council of the British Isles, a British-Irish Council, a Council of the Islands and now a Council of the Isles. However, the only body that ever saw the light of day was the Anglo-Irish Agreement and Secretariat. Could a Council of the Islands or Isles be the replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement that is needed to establish a new east-west relationship in Strand Three of the Stormont Talks?

Most international treaties are based on a number of principles and the Anglo-Irish Agreement is no exception to this rule. Which of these principles, if any, could be a basis for a new treaty? With this question in mind people were asked to indicate which principles they considered to be 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable' as part of a lasting settlement. All of the principles, ranging from the promotion of peace, stability and equality in Northern Ireland to a recognition of its constitutional status were considered 'Acceptable', 'Desirable' or 'Essential' by a majority from both communities (Table 22).

Table 22 Support for the principles of a new Anglo-Irish Treaty

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Co-operation in Europe	Protestant	16	40	73	92
	Catholic	40	72	94	98
Peace and stability in Northern Ireland.	Protestant	55	81	94	96
	Catholic	79	91	99	100
Equal rights of the two major traditions.	Protestant	31	53	79	91
	Catholic	76	90	99	100
Rejection of violence for political objectives.	Protestant	65	81	95	97
	Catholic	68	85	97	100
Reconciliation between unionists and nationalists.	Protestant	33	57	81	89
	Catholic	60	85	96	98
Respecting the identities of the two communities.	Protestant	34	61	84	91
	Catholic	74	88	96	98
A society free from discrimination and intolerance.	Protestant	50	79	95	96
	Catholic	83	93	98	99
Both communities to participate fully in the structures and processes of government.	Protestant	33	56	78	88
	Catholic	71	89	96	98
The consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland is required for any change in it's status.	Protestant	68	82	93	96
	Catholic	27	49	73	85
The recognition of the present status and wishes of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland.	Protestant	66	84	93	95
	Catholic	21	41	66	84
The right of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to establish a united Ireland in the future.	Protestant	29	38	57	77
	Catholic	45	66	85	93

In contrast to the principles that underpin the workings of the Anglo-Irish Agreement the institutions of government that it created, the Anglo-Irish Secretariat and their offices in Belfast, did not fair so well (Table 23). Although most Catholics considered them to be 'Acceptable' or even 'Desirable' most Protestants only found them 'Tolerable' and even a proposal to extend these facilities to include London and Dublin did not receive any better support.

Fortunately one new proposal was 'Acceptable' to a majority from both communities. The establishment of a regional 'Council of The Islands' that would facilitate co-operation between Scotland, Wales, England, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This proposal could not have even been given serious consideration under the previous Conservative government. It is a clear break with the Frameworks Document and it is only with the creation of a Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly by the Labour government that such an option can come into play. It is imaginative and bold. It could mark the beginning of a new relationship for everyone on these islands, British and Irish, into the next millennium. A relationship built on consent as a region in Europe that attempts to put aside the past failures of borders, partition and competing nation states. The 'ball' is now clearly in the courts of the London and Dublin governments.

Table 23 Support for the institutions of a new Anglo-Irish Treaty

As part of a new treaty that replaces the Anglo-Irish Agreement the British and Irish governments should establish:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
A special organisation for consultation between the two governments on Northern Ireland issues only.	Protestant	5	17	44	61
	Catholic	17	49	81	93
Offices in Belfast for consultation between the two governments on Northern Ireland issues only.	Protestant	4	16	45	63
	Catholic	16	41	80	93
A special organisation for consultation between the two governments on any issues of mutual interest.	Protestant	4	13	44	65
	Catholic	19	51	86	96
Offices in London, Dublin and Belfast for consultation between the two governments on any issues of mutual interest.	Protestant	4	18	43	68
	Catholic	22	54	86	96
An Inter-parliamentary body to promote good relations between Dublin and Westminster.	Protestant	3	17	40	70
	Catholic	23	52	85	97
An Inter-parliamentary body responsible for all agreements made between London and Dublin.	Protestant	3	11	32	58
	Catholic	21	43	81	94
A regional ‘Council of The Islands’ that facilitates co-operation between Scotland, Wales, England, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.	Protestant	6	25	52	75
	Catholic	14	33	72	89
Or the Anglo-Irish Agreement should be brought to an end and should not be replaced.	Protestant	31	45	61	75
	Catholic	5	12	29	47
However the Republic of Ireland should rejoin the Commonwealth.	Protestant	9	19	52	75
	Catholic	6	10	31	50

CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

In an effort to meet the concerns of the different communities in Northern Ireland several possibilities are available for the modification of the constitutional relationships that exist between the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. This can be done by modifying the Constitution of the Republic of Ireland and the various Acts of Parliament in Westminster that establish the constitutional status of Northern Ireland (Table 24).

The complete deletion of the Republic of Ireland’s constitutional claim over Northern Ireland is considered to be ‘Essential’ by 63 per cent of Protestants while 70 per cent of Catholics consider such a deletion to be ‘Unacceptable’ as part of a lasting settlement. Is this where the Stormont Talks founder or can a compromise be found? Fortunately the answer to this apparently intractable problem is a very strong ‘yes’.

A majority of both Catholics and Protestants find it quite ‘Acceptable’ for both the Republic of Ireland’s constitution to be modified to only allow for a united Ireland with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland and for the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom to be subject to the same principle of consent - which it presently is. And if this were not good news enough both the British and Irish governments

jointly agreed to these principles of consent when they signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Additionally, as part of any balanced constitutional reform, it should also be noted that a majority of both Catholics and Protestants are willing to accept or tolerate both the British and Irish governments having a responsibility for the well being of their citizens in both Northern Ireland and on the island of Ireland as a whole and that all their rights of British or Irish citizenship should be guaranteed. Perhaps these rights should be extended to Irish citizens in England, Scotland and Wales - but this question was not asked.

Finally, although a majority of Catholics considered joint authority to be ‘Acceptable’ this option was ‘Unacceptable’ to Protestants and neither community wanted to consider repartition as the way forward.

Table 24 Support for various constitutional reforms

The Republic of Ireland’s Constitutional claim over Northern Ireland should:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Be completely deleted.	Protestant	63	83	91	95
	Catholic	5	9	18	30
Be modified to only allow for a united Ireland with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.	Protestant	22	37	56	72
	Catholic	19	37	59	77
Be replaced with an ‘aspiration’ for a united Ireland.	Protestant	1	5	16	35
	Catholic	8	26	57	78
Be replaced with a responsibility for the well being of the Nationalist Community in Northern Ireland.	Protestant	3	7	25	51
	Catholic	13	25	54	74
Be amended to reflect any new agreements reached at the Stormont Talks.	Protestant	4	15	36	64
	Catholic	7	27	59	81
Be replaced with full and guaranteed rights of Irish citizenship for all members of the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland.	Protestant	5	10	27	50
	Catholic	27	43	67	81
Or the Republic of Ireland’s Constitution should not be changed at all.	Protestant	4	6	12	28
	Catholic	25	40	61	78

The Constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom should:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Be completely removed.	Protestant	2	4	11	16
	Catholic	44	66	77	89
Only allow for a united Ireland with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland (No change).	Protestant	42	60	73	86
	Catholic	14	31	54	74
Be replaced with an ‘aspiration’ for a single state comprised of the whole of the British Isles and Ireland.	Protestant	2	8	26	43
	Catholic	2	17	34	53
Be replaced with a responsibility for the well being of the Unionist Community in Northern Ireland.	Protestant	10	18	38	60
	Catholic	6	19	46	71

Be amended to reflect any new agreements reached at the Stormont Talks.	Protestant	7	16	41	63
	Catholic	9	28	63	83
Be replaced with full and guaranteed rights of British citizenship for all members of the Unionist community on the island of Ireland.	Protestant	21	33	51	62
	Catholic	9	25	57	75
Or the constitutional status and boundaries of Northern Ireland should not be changed at all.	Protestant	51	70	84	90
	Catholic	5	8	21	38
Alternatively both governments could provide for Joint Authority, or Repartition.	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Shared authority and sovereignty of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland.	Protestant	2	5	15	25
	Catholic	20	48	78	88
Redefine the boundaries of Northern Ireland so that a maximum of Unionists are in the 'North' and a maximum of Nationalists are in the 'South'.	Protestant	2	7	18	32
	Catholic	2	8	18	31

Many Nationalists and Unionists also find the language used in section 75 of the British 1920 Government of Ireland Act and the 1937 Constitution of the Republic of Ireland to be a little outdated. While introducing balanced reforms that fully embrace the principle of consent any other redrafted sections and articles should pay close attention to the use of modern phrases and terms that avoid giving offence. Many of the new agreements reached at the Stormont Talks will provide opportunities for this kind of legal 'housekeeping'. If the two governments can get it right then they will be able to cast the foundation upon which a lasting settlement can be built. Their citizens, both British and Irish, eagerly await the outcome of their constitutional labours.

A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT

In broad terms the major elements of a lasting settlement that seem to emerge from this opinion poll can be summarised as follows:

- A Regional Assembly made up from elected members who share responsibilities in proportion to their representation and employing a voting system with other checks and balances to ensure the fair participation of both communities in government and the prevention of abuse of power.
- North/South bodies strictly controlled by the elected politicians who establish them to deal with a wide range of issues using various functions and powers appropriate to the areas of government policy being managed.
- Replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement with a Council of the Islands to establish a new relationship between London, Dublin, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast appropriate to the needs of the region as a part of Europe.
- Constitutional reform that embraces the principle of consent and other balanced changes required to implement the various agreements made at the Stormont Talks.
- A Bill of Rights that deals specifically with the political, social and cultural problems that have aggravated the conflict and a Human Rights Commission with responsibilities and powers to educate, monitor standards and bring cases to court.
- A reformed two tier police service restructured with a view to recruiting more Catholics and improving community relations under the authority of a new Department of Justice in a Regional Assembly.

Perhaps the parties and governments can improve on this 'package', particularly the detail. But any radical departure from these basic arrangements will require sound reasons if it is to be acceptable to a majority from both communities. Certainly these proposals should be more widely acceptable than the Frameworks Document.

IMPLEMENTATION

A comprehensive settlement has to deal with many changes to political life. These reforms could be introduced all at once, or gradually over a period of time, perhaps as a final or interim agreement that may be subject to periodic review. Although Protestants would prefer the settlement to be final all these options are ‘Acceptable’ to them while Catholics consider an interim agreement that can be reviewed after a set period of time to be their most ‘Acceptable’ choice (Table 25).

Table 25 Support for implementation options

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
The settlement should be final with no more changes allowed.	Protestant	17	37	58	72
	Catholic	8	19	36	53
The settlement should be final but changes could be introduced over an agreed transitional period.	Protestant	3	17	54	79
	Catholic	11	32	67	86
Allow for an interim agreement that can be reviewed after a set period of time.	Protestant	5	15	51	78
	Catholic	14	39	79	96
Introduce reforms slowly subject to periodic assessment and review.	Protestant	8	23	51	77
	Catholic	15	39	68	90

Even if an overall settlement can be agreed and does receive consent intractable disputes may arise or parts of the settlement may need to be radically reformed at some time in the future. Of the two proposed mechanisms that could be put into place to deal with such eventualities the establishment of an international court with the responsibility of ruling on disputes is ‘Acceptable’ to a majority from both communities while allowing voters to initiate a change after a minimum period of ten years is less ‘Acceptable’ to Catholics and only ‘Tolerable’ for Protestants (Table 26).

Table 26 Support for mechanisms to manage disputes

As part of a settlement:	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
An international court should be established with the responsibility of ruling on disputes.	Protestant	6	21	56	73
	Catholic	38	62	90	97
A mechanism should be put in place that will allow voters to change the terms of the settlement after a minimum period of 10 years.	Protestant	2	17	46	69
	Catholic	18	37	69	91

Balancing the needs for future political stability and the very real fears of both communities faced with radical political change is not going to be easy. But a lasting settlement seems to be what is really important. Providing the parties at the Stormont Talks can reach an agreement then both communities appear to be willing to accept whatever arrangements have to be made to make it work.

Poll 5 – In Search of a Settlement (Irwin 1998j, k, l and m)

Following the publication of the results of the 'In Search of a Settlement' poll the eight parties still in the talks started to negotiate the details of an agreement in earnest. Some parties even requested electronic copies of the statistics so that they would be able to undertake further analysis. All the major elements of a comprehensive settlement, and public attitudes towards them, were now plainly visible for everyone to see.

But the individual parts of an agreement are not the same thing as a balanced set of compromises taken as a whole. How would the public react to an overall package? Would they vote for it in a referendum and would they continue to support their political leaders if they made such a deal? There really was no reason why the parties should not now reach an agreement if they had a mind to do so and that, essentially, was the final question that had to be addressed. Did the parties have the political will to see it through? Or, put another way, from a public opinion perspective, would the public stick with the parties and the difficult decisions they had to make or would the public desert their leaders if they accepted the deal now on the table?

An outline of a final agreement was drafted and circulated to all the parties with a view to testing it, as a comprehensive settlement 'package', against public opinion. But it proved to be quite impossible to get all the parties to reach an agreement on a single text on this occasion. The DUP and UKUP (who remained outside the talks) wanted too many changes, particularly to power sharing and North/South bodies, while Sinn Féin (who were still in the talks) would not put their name to a partitionist settlement that recognised the division of the island of Ireland into the North and South. So a 'package', very similar to the one drawn up from the previous poll, was agreed and tested by the seven remaining parties while the DUP, UKUP and Sinn Féin were given an opportunity to test their own alternative proposals against this carefully thought out compromise. Here again are the articles as they appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph*. However, I have now also coded the elements of the agreement made by the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), Alliance Party, Woman's Coalition and Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in RED; and the 'rejectionist' Unionists, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in BLUE; and the non-partitionist Irish Republicans, Sinn Féin in GREEN.

MAJORITY SAY YES TO THE SEARCH FOR SETTLEMENT

Today, the Belfast Telegraph publishes the first of a two-part opinion poll on the key issues of a referendum package. The majority of people in Northern Ireland are behind the politicians at the Talks in their search for a comprehensive settlement, according to the survey. The poll reveals that if the parties can agree a settlement, then a strong vote of support from the people seems to be assured. But, if that agreement cannot be reached and the backing of the major parties is lost, the yes vote drops to 50 per cent from 70 per cent.

Nearly a year ago, just before the general election, in the first public opinion poll in this series, the people of the province were asked 'Do you support the principle of a negotiated settlement for the political future of Northern Ireland?' 94 per cent said 'Yes' ranging from a high of 99 per cent for Alliance voters to a low of 90 per cent for DUP supporters.

But anyone could read what they wanted to into this question - for themselves or their own community. It did not test what could be a real comprehensive settlement. Now, a year later, that has been done and it includes a regional assembly, North/South bodies, a 'Council of the Isles', constitutional reform, a Bill of Rights and reform of the RUC. All the major elements of what the people of Northern Ireland might be asked to vote on in a referendum on May 22nd - See panel.

This was the question that was asked - 'If a majority of the political parties elected to take part in the Stormont Talks agreed to this settlement would you vote to accept it in a referendum?' (Table 27). 77 per cent said 'Yes' ranging from a high of 96 per cent for Alliance voters to a low of 50 per cent for DUP supporters.

Table 27 Support for a comprehensive settlement with party approval

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	77	74	81	50	68	83	96	95	61
No	23	26	19	50	32	17	4	5	39

But some of the parties elected to take part in the Stormont Talks may oppose a comprehensive settlement so a second question was also asked - 'If you said 'Yes' would you still accept these terms for a settlement even if the political party you supported was opposed to them?' (Table 28). This time the 'Yes' vote fell to 50 per cent ranging from a high of 87 per cent for Alliance voters to a low of 22 per cent for Sinn Féin supporters.

Table 28 Support for a comprehensive settlement with party opposition

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	50	46	53	24	24	50	87	70	22
No	50	54	47	76	76	50	13	30	78

Clearly, if the government tries to go over the heads of all the political parties at the Stormont Talks then the possibilities of securing a ‘Yes’ vote in a referendum would be very close indeed. However, the support of the major centre parties, the UUP, Alliance and SDLP, should ensure a positive outcome.

The DUP seem to have arrived at a cross roads with 50 per cent saying ‘Yes’ and 50 per cent saying ‘No’. Evidently the leadership of this party is in a position to take their electorate in either direction but their current ‘No’ campaign would appear to have the potential to reduce their parties support for a comprehensive settlement to 24 per cent. The Loyalists seem to be in a some what similar situation with PUP and UDP support for a ‘Yes’ vote also falling to 24 per cent if the endorsement of their parties are withdrawn. However, quite unlike the DUP, their ‘Yes’ vote rises to 68 per cent if the Loyalist leadership are willing to support a comprehensive settlement. Similarly the Sinn Féin ‘Yes’ vote falls from a high of 61 per cent to a low of 22 per cent when the backing of their party is removed.

Apparently Republicans and Loyalists have something in common. Although their electorate may have deep misgivings about a comprehensive settlement they seem willing to place their trust in the leadership of their parties and, for the most part, will vote ‘Yes’ if encouraged to do so.

A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT

- A REGIONAL ASSEMBLY made up from elected members who share responsibilities in proportion to their representation and employing a voting system, with other checks and balances, to ensure the fair participation of the whole community in government and the prevention of abuse of power.
- NORTH/SOUTH BODIES strictly controlled by the elected politicians who establish them to deal with a wide range of issues using various functions and powers appropriate to the areas of government policy being managed.
- Replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement and establish a ‘COUNCIL OF THE ISLES’ to create a new relationship between London, Dublin, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast appropriate to the needs of the region as a part of Europe.
- CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM that embraces the principle of consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to keep or change its status, guaranteed rights of British and/or Irish citizenship, and any other balanced changes required to implement the various agreements made at the Stormont Talks.

- A BILL OF RIGHTS that deals specifically with the political, social and cultural problems that have aggravated the conflict and a Human Rights Commission with responsibilities and powers to educate, monitor standards and bring cases to court.

- REFORM THE RUC to create community policing units as part of a two tier service restructured with a view to recruiting more Catholics and improving community relations under the authority of a new Department of Justice in a Regional Assembly.

COMPROMISE OR COMMON GROUND?

Some recent commentators have suggested that this comprehensive settlement represents a three all draw with a regional assembly, Council of the Isles and changes to Articles 2 and 3 a win for Unionists and North/South bodies, a Bill of Rights and police reform a win for Nationalists. The ‘spin doctors’ may see it this way but what is the reality on the ground. To measure public opinion on this issue everyone interviewed was asked to say which parts of a comprehensive settlement they considered to be ‘essential’, ‘desirable’, ‘acceptable’, ‘tolerable’ or ‘unacceptable’ (Table 29).

A regional assembly is almost equally acceptable in both communities with only 11 per cent of Protestants and 15 per cent of Catholics considering this part of an overall package to be ‘unacceptable’. North/South bodies are ‘essential’ for 33 per cent of Catholics and ‘unacceptable’ for 40 per cent of Protestants while a ‘Council of the Isles’ gets only a warm response from Protestants and is ‘unacceptable’ to 30 per cent of Catholics. Constitutional reform has the highest support from both communities with 36 per cent of Protestants and 20 per cent of Catholics saying it is ‘essential’ and only 7 per cent and 9 per cent respectively saying it is ‘unacceptable’. A Bill of Rights is also equally acceptable in both communities although a high 48 per cent of Catholics consider it to be ‘essential’. Finally reform of the RUC is ‘essential’ for 40 per cent of Catholics and ‘unacceptable’ for 48 per cent of Protestants.

Table 29 Protestant and Catholic support for the different parts of a comprehensive settlement

Per cent	Religion	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
A REGIONAL ASSEMBLY	Protestant	19	16	40	14	11
	Catholic	13	16	36	20	15
NORTH/SOUTH BODIES	Protestant	3	10	19	28	40
	Catholic	33	26	23	10	8
COUNCIL OF THE ISLES	Protestant	4	20	38	21	17
	Catholic	6	12	30	22	30
CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM	Protestant	36	18	27	12	7
	Catholic	20	25	33	13	9
A BILL OF RIGHTS	Protestant	12	23	36	20	9
	Catholic	48	23	20	6	3
REFORM THE RUC	Protestant	3	8	19	22	48
	Catholic	40	21	21	9	9

In all of this there seems to be as much common ground as there is compromise. The reality is not a simple three three draw. Additionally, the levels of ‘unacceptable’, which can be considered to be equivalent to a ‘No’ vote, rise to 30 per cent for Catholics and 48 per cent for Protestants on some issues. But, with the agreement of a major of the parties at the Talks, only 19 per cent of Catholics and 26 per cent of Protestants said ‘No’ to the total package as a comprehensive settlement. A negotiated settlement seems to be what is really important and many of those who said ‘Yes’ were willing to do so while considering many parts of the package to be ‘unacceptable’ from their point of view. Under the right circumstances the whole can become more significant than the sum of its constituent parts.

ALTERNATIVES TO A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT

Some Unionists do not want a comprehensive settlement along the lines of the one reviewed here. Some of them do not want devolution either but some of them do. With this point in mind everyone polled was asked - ‘Do you want Northern Ireland to have a devolved parliament similar to those planned for Scotland and Wales?’ 58 per cent said ‘Yes’ ranging from a high of 78 per cent for UUP voters to a low of 23 per cent for Sinn Féin supporters (Table 30).

Table 30 Support for devolution similar to Scotland and Wales

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Féin
Yes	58	74	41	66	61	78	76	51	23
No	42	26	59	34	39	22	24	49	77

In an effort to mirror the recent Scottish referendum everyone who said ‘Yes’ to a devolved parliament was also asked - ‘Do you want a Northern Ireland parliament to have powers to alter taxes?’ Only 38 per cent said ‘Yes’ ranging from a high of 51 per cent for UUP voters to a low of 15 per cent for Sinn Féin supporters (Table 31).

Table 31 Support for local powers to alter taxes

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Féin
Yes	38	49	27	44	40	51	50	34	15
No	62	51	73	56	60	49	50	66	85

The Scottish ‘Yes - Yes’ campaign was very well organised with all the major political parties speaking with one voice. If the same were done here perhaps a ‘Yes - Yes’ campaign for devolution in Northern Ireland could succeed. But it is very unlikely that the SDLP, let alone Sinn Féin, would support such a vote. It should also be noted that the ‘Yes’ vote for a devolved parliament is only 58 per cent while the support for a Northern Ireland Assembly as part of a comprehensive settlement is 77 per cent. Clearly a settlement is the way forward in this matter.

Some Unionists would also like to have a ‘Border Poll’. With this point in mind everyone interviewed was asked - ‘Do you want Northern Ireland to be part of the United Kingdom?’ 97 per cent of Protestants and 33 per cent of Catholics said ‘Yes’ to give a total of 69 per cent for Northern Ireland as a whole (Table 32).

Table 32 Support for maintaining the Union with Britain

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	69	97	33	99	100	98	93	41	7
No	31	3	67	1	0	2	7	59	93

And just to be double sure the same question was asked the other way around - 'Do you want Northern Ireland to be part of the Republic of Ireland?' 2 per cent of Protestants and 70 per cent of Catholics said 'Yes' to give a total of 32 per cent for Northern Ireland as a whole (Table 33).

Table 33 Support for a united Ireland

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	32	2	70	0	0	1	11	63	90
No	68	98	30	100	100	99	89	37	10

Although nearly a third of the Catholic population (mostly SDLP voters) are presently willing to lend their support to the continuation of the Union it should not be forgotten that most of these Catholics also support a comprehensive settlement. Undoubtedly any failure to reach a settlement, or a concerted effort designed to undermine a settlement, will alienate these Catholics and their present good will for the constitutional status quo of the Province as a part of the United Kingdom.

LITTLE SUPPORT FOR SF AGENDA

The final part of the opinion poll on a referendum package deals with outstanding issues to be resolved during the last nine days of negotiations. The survey shows a lack of cross-community support for Sinn Féin's non-partitionist agenda of no local assembly, completely independent North-South bodies, no Council of the Isles, consent on an all Ireland basis and replacing the RUC. But everyone wants a Bill of Rights and there is an overwhelming desire, from all sections of the community, for responsible government institutions that can make a settlement work.

In part one of the survey published yesterday, 77 per cent of those polled said they would vote yes for a comprehensive settlement agreed to at the Talks. But this support for a referendum package fell to 50 per cent when backing of the political parties was removed. Today each of the six parts of the settlement is tested to see how it stands up against proposed alternatives. And a range of other issues, for fine tuning an agreement, is examined. This was done by asking everyone interviewed to say which options they considered to be 'essential', 'desirable', 'acceptable', 'tolerable', or 'unacceptable.'

- **A REGIONAL ASSEMBLY made up from elected members who share responsibilities in proportion to their representation and employing a voting system, with other checks and balances, to ensure the fair participation of the whole community in government and the prevention of abuse of power.**

Table 34 Support for proposed regional assembly or no assembly

Per cent	Religion	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
A REGIONAL ASSEMBLY	Protestant	19	16	40	14	11
	Catholic	13	16	36	20	15
Northern Ireland should not have a regional assembly.	Protestant	3	8	20	21	48
	Catholic	10	9	23	23	35

The 'non-partitionist' option of not having a regional assembly at all is not very popular in either the Catholic or Protestant communities (Table 34). A majority of both Catholics and Protestants consider an assembly with powers to monitor and administer the Northern Ireland Office, make new laws and alter taxes to be 'acceptable' (Table 35). Similarly the options of having a second chamber with legislative powers or responsibilities to provide expert advice and reports on all aspects of business undertaken by the assembly, or a special committee to do this work, are all 'acceptable'. Clearly the politicians at the Stormont Talks are free to choose between these various options for an assembly without prejudicing the proposal.

Table 35 Support for different assembly powers and structures

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
Powers to monitor and administer the NIO	Protestant	19	41	78	90
	Catholic	10	32	66	84
Powers to make new laws.	Protestant	7	28	66	81
	Catholic	6	24	59	76
Powers to alter taxes.	Protestant	4	15	51	72
	Catholic	5	20	52	70
A legislative second chamber.	Protestant	3	14	53	77
	Catholic	6	23	63	83
A consultative second chamber.	Protestant	3	14	58	79
	Catholic	8	26	65	84
A special committee.	Protestant	4	19	62	85
	Catholic	11	34	70	85
No assembly.	Protestant	3	11	31	52
	Catholic	10	19	42	65

* * * * *

• **NORTH/SOUTH BODIES** strictly controlled by the elected politicians who establish them to deal with a wide range of issues using various functions and powers appropriate to the areas of government policy being managed.

Table 36 Support for proposed North/South bodies and a Council of Ministers

Per cent	Religion	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
NORTH/SOUTH BODIES	Protestant	3	10	19	28	40
	Catholic	33	26	23	10	8
A 'Council of Ministers' appointed from the Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Irish Dail.	Protestant	3	6	16	23	52
	Catholic	14	24	39	13	10
A 'Council of Ministers' directly elected by proportional representation North and South.	Protestant	3	7	19	23	48
	Catholic	21	25	38	9	7

Although 40 per cent of Protestants consider this proposal for North/South bodies to be 'unacceptable' by itself (Table 36) 74 per cent of Protestants are willing to accept it as part of a comprehensive settlement. Protestants consider the 'non-partitionist' option of a directly elected 'Council of Ministers' to be 'tolerable' but they would like a Northern Ireland Assembly to have the final responsibility for decisions taken by North South bodies (Table 37). Catholics would prefer to have the final responsibility for decisions given to both the Northern Ireland Assembly and Irish Dail, or the 'Council of Ministers', or the North/South bodies when given permission to act independently. A majority of Protestants consider all these options to be 'tolerable' but will not accept North/South bodies acting independently at

all times. This seems to be the ‘bottom line’ on this issue and possibly defines the limits of executive powers from a Unionist point of view.

Table 37 Protestant and Catholic views on responsibility for North/South bodies

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
The Northern Ireland Assembly.	Protestant	19	36	69	81
	Catholic	4	14	42	62
The Irish Dail.	Protestant	1	1	7	16
	Catholic	3	9	34	59
Both the N.I. Assembly and Irish Dail.	Protestant	3	8	24	52
	Catholic	13	38	82	94
The ‘Council of Ministers’.	Protestant	1	6	33	58
	Catholic	3	22	71	88
The North/South with permission.	Protestant	0	5	29	51
	Catholic	5	34	77	90
The North/South body at all times.	Protestant	3	9	25	44
	Catholic	6	29	66	85
Civil Servants from the North and South.	Protestant	0	3	15	50
	Catholic	2	10	42	70

* * * * *

• REPLACE the Anglo-Irish Agreement and establish a ‘COUNCIL OF THE ISLES’ to create a new relationship between London, Dublin, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast appropriate to the needs of the region as a part of Europe.

Table 38 Support for proposed Council of the Isles and its alternative

Per cent	Religion	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
COUNCIL OF THE ISLES	Protestant	4	20	38	21	17
	Catholic	6	12	30	22	30
No ‘Council of the Isles’ - the Anglo-Irish parliamentary body as it now exists should assume responsibility for issues of common interest throughout the two islands.	Protestant	3	4	13	27	53
	Catholic	5	15	30	17	33

While 30 per cent of Catholics consider this proposal for a ‘Council of the Isles’ to be ‘unacceptable’ by itself 81 per cent of Catholics are willing to accept it as part of a comprehensive settlement. The ‘non-partitionist’ option of limiting the responsibility for East/West relationships to the existing Anglo-Irish parliamentary body is ‘unacceptable’ to 53 per cent of Protestants (Table 38). Catholics do not seem to have any strong views on this matter, one way or the other, so establishing a ‘Council of the Isles’ should not present any serious difficulties, at least, for the people of Northern Ireland.

When it comes to the relationship between a ‘Council of the Isles’ and North/South bodies both Catholics and Protestants would prefer for them to work along side each other and for neither of them to be subordinate to the other (Table 39). Hopefully this clear consensus will help to resolve this issue.

Table 39 Support for status of the Council of the Isles

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
North/South bodies subordinate to ‘Council of Isles’.	Protestant	10	19	38	60
	Catholic	1	3	23	41
North/South bodies and ‘Council of Isles’ along side each other.	Protestant	4	16	46	69
	Catholic	10	32	68	82
‘Council of Isles’ subordinate to North/South bodies.	Protestant	1	4	22	43
	Catholic	10	21	53	68
No ‘Council of Isles’ just Anglo-Irish parliamentary body.	Protestant	3	7	20	47
	Catholic	5	20	50	67

* * * * *

• CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM that embraces the principle of consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to keep or change its status, guaranteed rights of British and/or Irish citizenship, and any other balanced changes required to implement the various agreements made at the Stormont Talks.

Table 40 Support for proposed constitutional reform and its alternative

Per cent	Religion	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM	Protestant	36	18	27	12	7
	Catholic	20	25	33	13	9
The people of the island of Ireland as a whole should decide the status of Northern Ireland	Protestant	1	2	4	9	84
	Catholic	31	24	23	11	11

A majority of both Catholics and Protestants consider this proposal for dealing with constitutional reform to be ‘acceptable’ (Table 40). The balance between the principle of consent, on the one hand, and guaranteed rights of citizenship, on the other hand, seems to have been struck just right. The ‘non-partitionist’ option of extending the principle of consent to the island of Ireland as a whole is more acceptable to Catholics but 84 per cent of Protestants consider this option to be ‘unacceptable’. Clearly this proposal, if accepted, could undermine the viability of a comprehensive settlement.

* * * * *

• A BILL OF RIGHTS that deals specifically with the political, social and cultural problems that have aggravated the conflict and a Human Rights Commission with responsibilities and powers to educate, monitor standards and bring cases to court.

Table 41 Support for proposed Bill of Rights

Per cent	Religion	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
A BILL OF RIGHTS	Protestant	12	23	36	20	9
	Catholic	48	23	20	6	3

A Bill of Rights is broadly accepted as one of the strongest areas of ‘common ground’ by the politicians at the Stormont Talks (Table 41). Quite a few technical/legal issues will have to be resolved but given the good will of both the Protestant and Catholic communities for a Bill of Rights its development will undoubtedly be a welcome addition to a comprehensive settlement.

* * * * *

• REFORM THE RUC to create community policing units as part of a two tier service restructured with a view to recruiting more Catholics and improving community relations under the authority of a new Department of Justice in a Regional Assembly.

Table 42 Support for proposed RUC reform and its alternative

Per cent	Religion	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
REFORM THE RUC	Protestant	3	8	19	22	48
	Catholic	40	21	21	9	9
A new policing service reflective of the community as a whole and accountable to an all island body.	Protestant	1	1	10	11	77
	Catholic	41	19	22	10	8

While 40 per cent of Catholics consider reform of the RUC to be ‘essential’, 48 per cent of Protestants consider these same proposals to be ‘unacceptable’ (Table 42). But it should be stressed again that, as part of a comprehensive settlement agreed at the Talks, these reforms are acceptable to 74 per cent of Protestants. The ‘non-partitionist’ proposal for ‘a new policing service reflective of the community as a whole and accountable to an all island body’ does not receive significantly more support from the Catholic community than the proposal on offer so there seems to be little to be gained from pursuing this option as it is ‘unacceptable’ to 77 per cent of Protestants.

MAKING THE SETTLEMENT WORK

All of these political reforms will have to deal with many different issues and it is entirely possible that some of the new institutions created as part of a comprehensive settlement will not deliver the hoped for changes. Several proposals were put forward to deal with this problem. Firstly it was suggested that all the executive members of a Northern Ireland Assembly, ‘Council of Ministers’, North/South bodies or ‘Council of the Isles’ should agree to a ‘Duty of Service’ that includes ‘a commitment to undertake and fulfil the responsibilities of their office’ (Table 43). A majority of both Protestants and Catholics considered this option to be ‘desirable’ and they also took the view that ‘a commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence’ was ‘essential’. This strong positive vote sends a clear message to the politicians. The people of Northern Ireland are not only weary of the violence but they are also fed up with party antics, wrecking tactics and abstentionism.

Table 43 Support for commitments to a ‘Duty of Service’ and non-violence

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
A commitment to their office.	Protestant	36	58	84	95
	Catholic	46	74	94	99
A commitment to non-violence.	Protestant	56	70	89	97
	Catholic	63	84	96	99

With regard to any failure to comply with this ‘Duty of Service’ a majority of both Protestants and Catholics considered it ‘acceptable’ for complaints and appeals to be dealt with by an Ethics Committee of a Northern Ireland Assembly, a court of law, a special constitutional court or the voters at an election (Table 44). By way of contrast having the Secretary of State or British and Irish Governments make decisions on these matters was only ‘tolerable’. Legal and democratic procedures, it would seem, are to be preferred over mechanisms that invite political intervention.

But will proportionality, responsibility sharing and a ‘Duty of Service’ backed up with appropriate legal sanctions lead to good governance and the smooth working of these new institutions. Sinn Féin have their doubts and perhaps that is why they cling so tenaciously to their ‘non-partitionist’ agenda and seek bilateral negotiations with Unionists. But even negotiations are not a substitute for good will. Perhaps what is really needed are assurances made in good faith - on both sides. Without that, all of this may be worth nothing at all.

Table 44 Support for enforcement options for a ‘Duty of Service’

Accumulated percentage	Religion	Essential	Plus Desirable	Plus Acceptable	Plus Tolerable
An Ethics Committee of a N.I. Assembly.	Protestant	11	31	64	82
	Catholic	6	18	52	72
The Secretary of State.	Protestant	4	15	46	73
	Catholic	1	6	32	60
The British and Irish Governments.	Protestant	3	10	30	63
	Catholic	7	24	69	90
An all Ireland ‘Council of Ministers’.	Protestant	1	4	18	43
	Catholic	7	33	81	92
The ‘Council of the Isles’.	Protestant	2	13	45	72
	Catholic	2	9	41	60
A Court of Law.	Protestant	8	26	67	87
	Catholic	8	22	59	78
A Special Constitutional Court.	Protestant	11	22	56	82
	Catholic	14	24	60	80
A Special International Court.	Protestant	4	13	38	69
	Catholic	20	39	74	89
The voters at an election.	Protestant	16	35	66	85
	Catholic	13	32	61	83

The Northern Ireland peace agreement and elections

The fieldwork for this poll was conducted between 12 - 22 March and published on Thursday 31 March and Friday 1 April. The results were a great encouragement to the parties in the talks as it was now clear that they could 'win the day'. Even Sinn Féin, who had little support for their own proposals outside their own constituency, were pleased with the results. But the DUP and UKUP were not at all pleased prompting complaints to both myself and the *Belfast Telegraph*. There was also much mischief making going on with leaked documents from the Northern Ireland Office suggesting that I and the *Belfast Telegraph* might some how be working for the British Government establishment. Fortunately all the mischief making and complaints of the DUP and UKUP were in vain. They had absented themselves from the talks and the Agreement was made in Belfast on Good Friday 10 April 1998.

Table 45 brings together the results of this poll, the referendum of 22 May, the elections to the new Northern Ireland Assembly on 25 June and subsequent elections in 2003 and 2007. As an additional 26 per cent of the DUP electorate said they would not vote for the Belfast Agreement if their party did not support it (50%-24%) then the difference between the public opinion poll and referendum results can be calculated with some precision. With the DUP taking about 18 per cent of the vote a reduction of about 6 per cent from 77 per cent in the poll to 71 per cent in the referendum was to be expected. These results are all within the margins of error.

Table 45 Support for the Belfast Agreement, referendum and elections

Question: 'If a majority of the political parties elected to take part in the Stormont Talks agreed to this settlement would you vote to accept it in a referendum?' March 1998.

Percent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	77	74	81	50	68	83	96	95	61
No	23	26	19	50	32	17	4	5	39

Question: 'If you said 'Yes' would you still accept these terms for a settlement even if the political party you supported was opposed to them?' March 1998.

Percent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	50	46	53	24	24	50	87	70	22
No	50	54	47	76	76	50	13	30	78

Referendum: 22 May 1998.

Percent	All of NI
Yes	71
No	29

Elections to Northern Ireland Assembly

Percent of total vote	DUP	UUP	Alliance	Others	SDLP	Sinn Fein
25 June 1998	18	21	7	-	22	18
26 November 2003	26	23	4	-	18	24
7 March 2007	30	18	5	-	16	26

Unfortunately the pro-Agreement parties did not hold together as well as they could have and failed to capitalize on the benefits of the Agreement over the coming years (Irwin 2001a, 2001b and 2002). They played the 'blame game' and Sinn Féin were able to increase their electoral standing by not decommissioning their weapons and then blaming the Unionists for not going into government with them and the SDLP for not being sufficiently firm on the pace of reform. While, at the same time the DUP were able to increase their electoral standing by accusing Sinn Féin of breaking the Agreement and the UUP for entering into a bad agreement. But the people wanted the Belfast Agreement to work (Irwin 2001a, 2001b and 2002) and it survived in-spite of the failures of the new institutions of government, which the British Government periodically had to suspend.

However, when the DUP and Sinn Féin saw their opportunity to take power they cut a deal. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) decommissioned their weapons, Sinn Féin recognised the authority of the new Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Ian Paisley accepted power sharing with his old enemy Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin/IRA. In May of this year Ian Paisley of the DUP replaced David Trimble and Sir Reg Empey of the UUP as First Minister and Martin McGuinness, a previous commander of the IRA in Derry, replaced Seamus Mallon and Mark Durkan of the SDLP as Deputy First Minister. With a little 'tweaking' of the Belfast Agreement at St. Andrews to help Ian Paisley 'save face' the people's agreement 'won out' and the rest, as they say, is history. The war was over.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to illustrate how polling organisations, the news media, academics and the parties elected to negotiate a peace agreement can work together to develop a comprehensive settlement that has the support of the people and can survive the electoral politics of implementation failures and the 'blame game'. It should be stressed that this informal peace process worked under a different set of rules to the formal process. With the consent of the parties all those elected to take part in negotiations remained part of this informal process even when they walked out of the formal talks or when they broke their cease-fires and were excluded from the formal talks. By arranging matters this way the views of all parties, peace-makers and spoilers alike could be included in the programme of public opinion research, public diplomacy and peace-making. Having successfully replicated these methods in a number of other states (Irwin, 2005) it is now possible to say what the most important characteristics of these polls are (Irwin, 2006a) and I would urge all states and parties wishing to engage in peace processes to abide by them:

1. All the parties to a conflict should draft and agree all the questions.
2. All the communities and peoples to the conflict should be asked all the questions.
3. All the results should be made public.

And if such polls are to be undertaken in support of negotiations, as was done in Northern Ireland, then the timing and publication of the polls should be managed to coincide with the critical decision making events in the negotiations. These principles of polling and public diplomacy in conflict settings may appear to be

very simple. Perhaps they are. But they are rarely followed and done (Irwin, 2005).

Following the presentation of a comparative paper on this topic in Jerusalem in May 2006 (Irwin, 2006b), I invited the major Palestinian and Israeli polling and peace research organisations if they would like to engage in a joint project to introduce best practice from Northern Ireland into their work. All the Palestinian organisations welcomed such an opportunity, some even offered funding, but all the Israeli institutions declined. Negotiations, of any kind, it would seem, were not then part of their agenda. In June 2006 Israel invaded Gaza and in July 2006 they invaded Lebanon. These military adventures do not seem to have advanced the cause of peace in the Middle East. My offer to work with Palestinian and Israeli polling organisations still stands.

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