

Devolution and the State of the Northern Ireland Peace Process

By Colin Irwin

About the Poll

This research was undertaken by Dr. Colin Irwin of the Centre for the Study of Ethnic Conflict in the School of Politics at Queen's University Belfast. The project was independently funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The public opinion survey work was conducted by Market Research Northern Ireland between January 31st and February 6th to produce 1000 'face to face' interviews that represented a cross section of the adult population of Northern Ireland in terms of age, gender, social class, religious affiliation and geographical area. In all respects the poll was undertaken within the guidelines set out by the Market Research Society (UK) and in accordance with their code of conduct. This poll is the ninth in a series published by the *Belfast Telegraph*. They are reviewed in the author's book *The People's Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (Palgrave) with full statistical reports available at <http://www.peacepolls.org>.

The Collapse of Middle Ground Politics?

The interviews for this poll seem to have been undertaken at a politically sensitive time. The 17 per cent refusal rate for the political support question is the highest recorded. If, as has happened in the past, Sinn Féin and DUP supporters are less inclined to declare their party of choice then Sinn Féin at 17 per cent could be 'neck and neck' with the SDLP at 19 per cent and the DUP at 16 per cent could be closing on the UUP at 21 per cent. A poll undertaken for the BBC *Hearts and Minds* programme last October put Sinn Féin ahead of the SDLP. That poll also placed Alliance at an all time low of just 3 per cent. Their situation has not improved and the PUP are down from 4 to 2 per cent and Women's Coalition down from 2 to 1 per cent. The UUP and SDLP may be feeling 'the squeeze' from the DUP and Sinn Féin but so too are all the smaller pro-Agreement parties. The people of Northern Ireland appear to be moving away from the voices of moderation and accommodation and back into their separate political camps.

Question - Which ONE of these Northern Ireland political parties do you support?

Per cent support - February 2003	
UUP/Ulster Unionist Party	21
SDLP/Social Democratic Labour Party	19
DUP/Democratic Unionist Party	16
Sinn Féin	17
Alliance	3
UKUP/United Kingdom Unionist Party	*
PUP/Progressive Unionist Party	2
Northern Ireland Women's Coalition	1
Other	4
Refused	17

* Less than half of one per cent

Support for the Agreement at all time low

Pollsters get nervous when they have to ask the people of Northern Ireland how they voted in the May 1998 referendum because the result will reveal any fundamental flaws in the quality of their research. On this occasion the response was 'spot on' at 71 per cent 'Yes'. But that is as far as the positive results for this poll and the fortunes of the Belfast Agreement go. Support for the Agreement has reached an all time low of 62 percent with only 36 per cent of Protestants saying they would still vote for it. Catholic support, however, remains high at 90 per cent. Protestant support for the Agreement hit its high point in May 2000 just after the IRA said they would 'completely and verifiably put their arms beyond use'. Could the IRA 'save' the Agreement again? Perhaps, but bringing back the Protestant pro-Agreement vote from a low of 36 per cent will not be an easy task without 'Acts of Completion'.

How did you vote in the referendum for the Belfast Agreement?

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	PUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	71	53	90	20	73	69	85	95	87
No	29	47	10	80	27	31	15	5	13

And if the Referendum was held today how would you vote?

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	PUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	62	36	90	11	49	18	81	94	89
No	38	64	10	89	51	82	19	6	11

Per cent	Date	All NI	Protestant	Catholic
Referendum for Belfast Agreement	May 1998	71	•	•
Would still vote for Belfast Agreement	October 1999	65	49	88
Would still vote for Belfast Agreement	May 2000	74	55	94
Would still vote for Belfast Agreement	October 2000	69	47	94
Would still vote for Belfast Agreement	November 2002	61	43	85
Would still vote for Belfast Agreement	February 2003	62	36	90

But unprecedented movement to full implementation of the Belfast Agreement could still restore confidence. Although the percentage of those wishing to see the Belfast Agreement work is also at an all time low of 75 per cent, down from a maximum of 93 per cent four years ago, a majority of Protestants, 60 per cent, are still willing to lend their support to the peace process providing, of course, the pro-Agreement parties and two governments can make it work.

Do you want the Belfast Agreement to work?

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	PUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	75	60	92	29	75	53	96	95	91
No	22	37	5	67	22	47	0	4	6

Per cent	Date	All NI	Protestant	Catholic
Want Belfast Agreement to work	February 1999	93	89	97
Want Belfast Agreement to work	October 1999	83	72	98
Want Belfast Agreement to work	May 2000	85	74	98
Want Belfast Agreement to work	February 2003	75	60	92

Decommissioning back at the top of everyone's 'To Do Lists'

In October 1999, May 2000 and February 2003 the people of Northern Ireland were asked to pass judgement on the different parts of the Belfast Agreement and say which ones they were 'Very satisfied' with, 'Satisfied' with, 'Only just satisfied' with, 'Not satisfied' with or 'Not satisfied with at all'. It will come as no surprise that the level of dissatisfaction for the Protestant community has risen to an all time average high of 62 per cent 'Not satisfied' or 'Not satisfied at all'. But for Catholics the picture is very different. Their level of dissatisfaction has fallen steadily across all three polls from an average of 51 per cent 'Not satisfied' or 'Not satisfied at all' in 1999 to 44 per cent in 2000 and 42 per cent in the most recent poll. Why? The explanation is simple. For Protestants 'Decommissioning of paramilitary weapons' was always at the top of their 'to do list' and that item has not begun to be addressed to their satisfaction. For Catholics, however, many of the top items on their 'to do list' are getting dealt with. Police reform, for example, has moved from being their number one priority in May 2000 down to number eight. Decommissioning was their main concern in October 1999 at 63 per cent 'Not satisfied' or 'Not satisfied at all'. It fell to a low of only 38 per cent in May 2000 after the IRA pronouncements but it is back up to 60 per cent in this poll. Sinn Féin are skilled negotiators and many would say they have served their community well in recent years but perhaps, with decommissioning back at the top of both communities 'to do lists' they are now running the risk of over playing their hand. It should also be noted, however, that a new item introduced for this poll, 'The stability of the institutions of government', is number two on the Catholic list and number three for Protestant's. Political instability is clearly, almost universally, unpopular.

	Protestant Per cent not satisfied*	Oct. 1999	May 2000	Feb. 2003		Catholic Per cent not satisfied*	Oct. 1999	May 2000	Feb. 2003
1	Decommissioning of paramilitary weapons.	88	74	84	1	Decommissioning of paramilitary weapons.	63	38	60
2	The reform of policing.	69	69	74	2	The stability of the institutions of government.	-	-	55
3	The stability of the institutions of government.	-	-	70	3	The full implementation of all parts of the Agreement together.	56	47	54
4	The reform of the criminal justice system.	65	65	70	4	Demilitarisation and Normalisation.	59	56	53
5	Demilitarisation and Normalisation.	66	59	70	5	Support for victims of the 'Troubles'.	48	41	49
6	The North/South Ministerial Council.	52	49	68	6	Obligations to non-violence, peace and democracy.	52	43	48
7	The British/Irish Council.	55	51	67	7	The present status of Northern Ireland as part of the UK.	42	50	47
8	Support for victims of the 'Troubles'.	74	66	65	8	The reform of policing.	61	61	44
9	Obligations to non-violence, peace and democracy.	74	65	65	9	The reform of the criminal justice system.	56	61	44
10	The full implementation of all parts of the Agreement together.	63	57	63	10	Reconciliation and improved community relations.	-	-	44
11	The Civic Forum.	52	51	62	11	The Northern Ireland Executive.	57	44	40
12	The Northern Ireland Assembly.	30	52	61	12	The Northern Ireland Assembly.	49	41	38
13	The Northern Ireland Executive.	58	56	61	13	A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.	52	38	38
14	Reconciliation and improved community relations.	-	-	61	14	The Principle of Consent of NI people to decide their Status.	40	34	36
15	The Equality Commission.	47	49	58	15	The Civic Forum.	47	39	35
16	A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.	50	50	57	16	The British/Irish Council.	49	42	35
17	Cultural and language rights.	50	50	55	17	The Equality Commission.	45	40	34
18	The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.	47	49	54	18	The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.	45	39	34
19	Social and economic programs.	-	-	52	19	Cultural and language rights.	50	46	34
20	The Principle of Consent of NI people to decide their Status.	53	49	51	20	Social and economic programs.	-	-	32
21	North/South implementation bodies.	56	51	50	21	The North/South Ministerial Council.	48	36	31
22	The present status of Northern Ireland as part of the UK.	43	39	40	22	North/South implementation bodies.	49	38	31
	Average	58	55	62		Average	51	44	42

*'Not satisfied' or 'Not satisfied at all'

The Northern Ireland Blame Game

One of the most popular cross community activities in Northern Ireland is playing the 'Blame Game'. It is difficult to understand why when matches nearly always seem to end in a draw. In this poll 61 per cent of the people of Northern Ireland thought it 'very probable' or 'probable' that the Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse if 'Devolved Government is not restored to Northern Ireland or if Sinn Féin are excluded from holding Ministerial posts in the Executive'. Sixty one per cent believed this would happen 'because Unionists will not work the Agreement in good faith' and 61 per cent thought it was the fault of the Republicans. These figures rose to 84 per cent of Sinn Féin supporters blaming Unionists and 82 per cent of DUP supporters blaming Republicans. SDLP supporters thought the UUP could have done more to work with them while UUP supporters thought the SDLP had not done enough. But everyone was quite even handed when it came to blaming the two governments at 58 per cent for Protestants, 56 per cent for Catholics, 55 per cent for DUP supporters, 60 per cent for the UUP, 51 per cent for the SDLP and 60 per cent for Sinn Féin.

The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse.....

Per cent - 'Very probable' or 'probable'	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	SDLP	Sinn Féin
Because Unionists will not work the Agreement in good faith.	61	44	82	45	46	85	84
Because Republicans will not work the Agreement in good faith.	61	73	48	82	71	62	26
Because the SDLP have not done everything they could to work with the UUP.	42	53	31	58	55	30	29
Because the UUP have not done everything they could to work with the SDLP.	51	41	64	43	39	63	72
Because of the lack of co-operation and determined commitment by the two governments.	57	58	56	55	60	51	60

When the question of 'blame' is looked at over time, like so many other statistics reported in this poll, the level of 'blame' is up from the lows of May 2000. But so too, more seriously, are fears about increased paramilitary activity - particularly Loyalist paramilitary activity. Seventy two per cent of UUP supporters now think it 'Very probable' or 'Probable' that 'Dissident Loyalist paramilitary groups will become more active' compared to 59 per cent in May 2000 and 83 per cent of Sinn Féin supporters share this view compared to 61 per cent in May 2000. Concerns about Dissident Republicans remain unchanged for Ulster Unionists at 68 per cent but it is on the rise for Sinn Féin supporters from 45 per cent in May 2000 to 53 per cent for this poll.

Per cent - 'Very probable' or 'probable'	UUP March 99	UUP Oct. 99	UUP May 2000	UUP Feb. 2003
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because Unionists will not work the Agreement in good faith.	23	59	38	46
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because Republicans will not work the Agreement in good faith.	49	78	59	71
Dissident Republican paramilitary groups will become more active.	69	85	68	68
The IRA and other Republican groups will break their cease-fires and return to war.	66	84	64	65
Dissident Loyalist paramilitary groups will become more active.	65	79	59	72
The UVF, UFF and other Loyalist groups will break their cease-fires and return to war.	57	71	56	69

Per cent - 'Very probable' or 'probable'	Sinn Féin March 99	Sinn Féin Oct. 99	Sinn Féin May 2000	Sinn Féin Feb. 2003
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because Unionists will not work the Agreement in good faith.	83	88	61	84
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because Republicans will not work the Agreement in good faith.	44	19	13	26
Dissident Republican paramilitary groups will become more active.	72	40	45	53
The IRA and other Republican groups will break their cease-fires and return to war.	39	27	14	35
Dissident Loyalist paramilitary groups will become more active.	81	76	61	83
The UVF, UFF and other Loyalist groups will break their cease-fires and return to war.	61	64	52	75

Trust in 'Free Fall'

Starting with the poll done for the Mitchell Review in October 1999 people were asked to indicate which of the governments and parties who agreed to the terms of the Belfast Agreement they: 'Trust a lot', 'Trust a little', are 'Not sure about', 'Do not trust' or 'Do not trust at all'. The same question was asked again in May 2000 and in this poll. Trust, quite simply, is in 'free fall' for all the pro-Agreement parties, and for the British and Irish governments, in both the Protestant and Catholic communities. For Protestants 'Trust a lot' or 'Trust a little' has fallen from 37 per cent on average in 1999 to 30 per cent in 2000 and 17 per cent in 2003. For Catholics the average has fallen from 48 per cent in 1999 and 2000 to 34 per cent in 2003.

Protestant – Per cent - 'Trust a lot' or 'Trust a little'	Oct. 1999	May 2000	Feb. 2003
The British Government.	48	42	27
The Irish Government.	35	27	9
The Ulster Unionist Party.	60	51	33
The Progressive Unionist Party.	49	37	26
The Alliance Party.	40	28	14
The Women's Coalition.	30	23	14
The SDLP.	30	26	11
Sinn Féin.	5	8	3
Average	37	30	17

Catholic – Per cent – 'Trust a lot' or 'Trust a little'	Oct. 1999	May 2000	Feb. 2003
The British Government.	48	42	26
The Irish Government.	48	68	39
The Ulster Unionist Party.	29	28	12
The Progressive Unionist Party.	27	20	11
The Alliance Party.	46	36	32
The Women's Coalition.	55	45	44
The SDLP.	77	78	62
Sinn Féin.	51	69	48
Average	48	48	34

Still the 'Government and Guns' Problem

People from different communities often hold very different views about the causes of continued conflict in Northern Ireland and suspension of the Assembly. From a list of eighteen frequently referred to sources of failure people were asked to indicate which ones they considered to be 'Very Significant' 'Significant', 'Of Some Significance', 'Of Little Significance' or 'Of No Significance' at all. These causes of political failure are listed in the table in their order of significance. Although both Protestants and Catholics now place Decommissioning at the top of their 'to do lists' they clearly see this issue in very different terms as problems. For Protestants the failure of Republicans to abandon violence comes first at 42 per cent 'Very significant' followed by the failure to put Sinn Féin out of the Executive at 36 per cent and Loyalist violence at 27 per cent. For Catholics the threat of suspension comes first at 43 per cent 'Very significant' followed by the UUP threat to 'walk out' and no penalty for doing so at 38 per cent. For Catholics these political failures are the causes of continued violence coming in fourth at 37 per cent 'Very significant'. This same item is eighth on the Protestant list at only 20 per cent. But isn't this just the 'Government and Guns' problem looked at in a slightly different way? Surely by now the political leaders in each community understand this dynamic very well. It has to be fixed. It is destroying the peace process.

Protestant and Catholic perceptions of the causes of political failure

	Protestant per cent	Very Significant	Catholic per cent	Very Significant
1st	The failure of Republicans to abandon violence.	42	The peace process is threatened by suspension.	43
2nd	The failure to exclude Sinn Féin from the Executive.	36	The UUP threat to 'walk out'.	38
3rd	The failure of Loyalists to abandon violence.	27	No political penalty for withdrawing Ministers.	38
4th	The British have failed to honour their commitments.	22	The failure to create a political environment to end violence.	37
5th	The Irish have failed to honour their commitments.	21	The failure of the Executive to work together and lead.	36
6th	The peace process is threatened by suspension.	21	The failure of Loyalists to abandon violence.	36
7th	The failure of the Executive to work together and lead.	20	The DUP are not behind the Belfast Agreement.	33
8th	The failure to create a political environment to end violence.	20	Community leaders failure to deal with sectarianism.	32
9th	Police reform has gone too far.	20	Government failure to deal with sectarianism.	30
10th	The DUP are not behind the Belfast Agreement.	18	The Security Services failure to abandon illegal methods.	29
11th	Government failure to deal with sectarianism.	17	The British have failed to honour their commitments.	27
12th	Community leaders failure to deal with sectarianism.	17	The failure of Republicans to abandon violence.	25
13th	No political penalty for withdrawing Ministers.	14	Police reform has not gone far enough.	25
14th	The Security Services failure to abandon illegal methods.	13	The failure to exclude Sinn Féin from the Executive.	18
15th	Loyalists excluded from the political process.	13	The Irish have failed to honour their commitments.	18
16th	Nationalist and Unionist blocks of votes maintain divisions.	13	Nationalist and Unionist blocks of votes maintain divisions.	15
17th	The UUP threat to 'walk out'.	12	Loyalists excluded from the political process.	12
18th	Police reform has not gone far enough.	12	Police reform has gone too far.	6

Who Wants Devolution and Accountable Democracy?

The two governments have set the pro-Agreement parties a task. Come up with a plan for full implementation of the Belfast Agreement by March 3rd and then have Assembly elections on May 1st. But even if a deal can be struck do the people of Northern Ireland still want one or has this experiment in devolution and accountable democracy run its course?

With these points in mind people were asked, 'Do you think Direct Rule or Devolved Government is best for Northern Ireland?' Sixty six per cent said 'yes' to devolved government and 31 per cent 'no' (the remaining 3 per cent were non-responses). But only a narrow majority of Protestants said 'yes', 49 per cent to 47 per cent 'no'. Catholics came in at 84 per cent 'yes', SDLP 88 per cent, Sinn Féin 82 per cent, Alliance 76 per cent, PUP 53 per cent, UUP 50 per cent and DUP 34 per cent. In general people do want Devolution but, at present, Protestants could 'take it or leave it', or so it would seem.

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	PUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Féin
Direct Rule	31	47	13	63	46	47	24	10	14
Devolved Government	66	49	84	34	50	53	76	88	82

With regard to elections three different options were put to the people of Northern Ireland and they were invited to say which one's they considered to be 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable'. 'Elections only when agreement is reached and devolution restored...' was the least popular option at 50 per cent 'Essential' or 'Desirable'. Then came elections instead of suspension at 53 per cent and elections on the agreed date next May at 60 per cent. There was very little difference between the two communities and various parties on this issue. People would prefer to exercise their democratic rights in accordance with the law. But none of the options were strongly opposed with large percentages of 'Unacceptable'.

All Northern Ireland - Per cent	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Elections should only be held when agreement is reached and devolved powers are restored to the Northern Ireland Assembly.	25	25	27	9	14
Elections should be held on the agreed date next May.	31	29	26	8	6
Elections should be held instead of suspension.	27	26	30	6	11

The outcome of a May election is too close to call. The gap between the UUP and DUP is closing and the gap between the SDLP and Sinn Féin may have already closed. But people want greater political certainty in their lives and with this point in mind they were asked which combination of First and Deputy First Minister they thought would produce the greatest stability for Northern Ireland? The results are unambiguous. Forty three per cent thought a UUP/SDLP 'ticket' would be best with the DUP/SDLP coming in second at 11 per cent followed by a UUP/SF 'ticket' at 9 per cent and lastly the DUP and Sinn Féin sharing power at just 2 per cent. Sixty eight per cent of UUP supporters and 76 per cent of SDLP supporters thought the UUP/SDLP 'ticket' was a good idea. Party strategists may wish to give this result some thought.

Per cent	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	SDLP	Sinn Féin
UUP - SDLP	43	44	44	20	68	76	20
UUP - SF	9	1	17	2	1	5	37
DUP - SDLP	11	16	7	40	4	8	5
DUP - SF	2	2	3	4	0	1	6
None of them	34	35	27	33	24	10	31

Steps Towards a Lasting Peace and Political Stability

People from different communities often hold very different views about the steps that need to be taken in order to secure a lasting peace and political stability in Northern Ireland. For every problem dealt with in this poll solutions were also tested by asked everyone interviewed which one's they considered to be 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable'.

With regard to the Belfast Agreement and institutional stability a clear majority of the people of Northern Ireland still think it is a good idea to fully implement the Belfast Agreement at 33 per cent 'Essential', 22 per cent 'Desirable', 17 per cent 'Acceptable, 11 per cent 'Tolerable' and 16 per cent 'Unacceptable'. Of those strongly opposed to the Agreement they were 60 per cent 'Unacceptable' for the DUP, 29 per cent for Protestants and 15 per cent for the UUP. New measures introduced to help improve stability were even more acceptable across both communities. Implementation reports were 81 per cent 'Essential', 'Desirable' or 'Acceptable'; commitments to stability 84 per cent; exclusion for threatening stability 86 per cent and exclusion for not adhering to exclusively peaceful means 84 per cent. Only 16 per cent of Sinn Féin supporters found this option 'Unacceptable'.

All Northern Ireland - Per cent	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Fully implement all aspects of the Belfast Agreement.	33	22	17	11	16
The Implementation Committee should report regularly to the people of Northern Ireland.	34	27	20	11	9
All Assembly parties should make a commitment to the stability of all the institutions and exclusively democratic and peaceful means.	40	25	19	10	6
The Government and Parties should clearly say when a party can be excluded from the Executive for threatening the stability of the institutions.	38	30	18	7	7
The Government and Parties should clearly say when a party can be excluded from the Executive for not adhering to exclusively democratic and peaceful means.	39	27	18	8	7

More people now think making changes to the Belfast Agreement to ensure its political stability (53 per cent 'Essential' or 'Desirable') would be a better course of action than making no changes at all (37 per cent 'Essential' or 'Desirable'). Policies for increased women in government comes in at 50 per cent 'Essential' or 'Desirable' while opinions on changing the Unionist and Nationalist system of block votes and rotating Ministerial posts with smaller parties has less support at 39 per cent and 42 per cent respectively. Views are 'mixed' on these issues.

All Northern Ireland - Per cent	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Make appropriate changes to the Belfast Agreement to ensure political stability.	27	26	21	10	16
Voting should not be exclusively organised around Unionist and Nationalist blocks.	17	22	34	14	12
Some Ministerial and senior Committee posts should be rotated between the smaller Assembly parties.	17	24	32	12	14
Policies should be put in place to increase the representation of women in government.	22	28	28	16	6
Or make no changes to the Belfast Agreement at all.	18	19	20	17	25

But there is a strong consensus when it comes to putting in place new policies to deal with the problems of community relations. Establishing an Assembly Committee to monitor the management of community relations, equality and Human Rights is 28 per cent 'Essential', 34 per cent 'Desirable', 25 per cent 'Acceptable', 8 per cent 'Tolerable' and only 4 per cent 'Unacceptable'. More effective policies to deal with the problems of community division and integration are likewise strongly supported and it is difficult to understand, given this consensus, why such a committee and policies have not been put into action.

All Northern Ireland - Per cent	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Establish an Assembly Committee to monitor the management of community relations, equality and Human Rights.	28	34	25	8	4
All government policies should be screened for their impact on community divisions.	31	36	21	9	2
It should be the duty of all government departments and agencies to provide opportunities for community integration.	33	35	22	8	2

When it comes to questions of justice and reconciliation the consensus is even stronger. Seventy two per cent of the people of Northern Ireland believe it is 'Essential' or 'Desirable' for the two governments and all the parties to the conflict to make an honest and full accounting of any past misdeeds and abuses. Similarly 79 per cent want them to stop blaming others and say what role they played in the Troubles and 80 per cent want them to co-operate with all relevant public inquiries.

The two governments and all the parties to the conflict should:

All Northern Ireland - Per cent	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Make an honest and full accounting of any past misdeeds and abuses.	48	26	15	7	4
Stop simply blaming others and say what role they played in the Troubles.	53	26	11	7	3
Fully co-operate with all relevant public inquiries.	54	26	12	6	3

Not unexpectedly this consensus breaks down when it comes to the politically difficult issues of justice and policing. Thirty six per cent of Protestants consider it 'Unacceptable' to complete the process of police reform rising to 62 per cent for DUP supporters but falling to 29 per cent for the UUP. Similarly 38 per cent of Protestants do not want Sinn Féin on the Policing Board rising to 72 per cent of DUP supporters but falling to 24 per cent for the UUP. However, in this case, 30 per cent of Sinn Féin supporters also consider having their party take up their seats on the Policing Board to be 'Unacceptable'. This is a sensitive issue for everyone but having responsibility for justice and policing devolved to the Assembly is less problematic with only 14 per cent of the people of Northern Ireland rejecting such a move as 'Unacceptable'.

Per Cent 'Unacceptable'	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	SDLP	Sinn Fein
The reform of the PSNI should be completed.	20	36	2	62	29	2	4
All parties with seats on the Policing Board should take up their posts including Sinn Féin.	27	38	14	72	24	1	30
Responsibility for Justice and Policing should be devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly.	14	17	11	31	10	7	20

The people of Northern Ireland, particularly the Protestant community, do not like the idea of offenders being set free or given amnesty, they never did. But if paramilitaries allow exiled persons to 'come home' then only 42 per cent of Protestants would consider making a deal on paramilitary fugitives, or 'On the Runs' (OTRs), to be 'Unacceptable'. If paramilitaries could also secure public confidence in a lasting peace then so much the better at 39 per cent 'Unacceptable'. However, it is interesting to note that this Protestant resistance to dealing with offenders drops to just 29 per cent 'Unacceptable' when members of the State Security Services are included. This, of course, is largely a matter for the British Government and if any dealing is done on this issue it will probably be done behind closed doors. But in the absence of an end to all paramilitary activity no one can reasonably expect Unionist politicians to accept any changes to the status of OTRs without the strongest of complaints.

Per Cent 'Unacceptable'	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Paramilitaries should allow all exiled persons to 'come home' before the question of their fugitives is dealt with.	31	42	20	49	51	30	9
Paramilitaries should complete all necessary steps to secure public confidence in a lasting peace before the question of their fugitives is dealt with.	28	39	17	45	46	22	17
Paramilitary fugitives should be given amnesty.	44	59	29	66	66	41	12
Paramilitary fugitives should only be given amnesty after they have given an account of their activities to the authorities.	39	49	29	54	57	26	35
Paramilitary fugitives should be processed through the courts and then 'released on license'.	37	43	32	47	52	29	40
Security Service and other state offenders should be treated the same as paramilitary offenders.	23	29	18	33	32	23	15

Needless to say almost everyone wants an end to all paramilitary activity. So the very practical question that must be answered here is where the points of least and greatest difficulty lies for those paramilitaries. The Ulster Democratic Party is no more and the PUP are not as large a party as they once were so this poll is not able to provide much reliable information on Loyalist thinking beyond saying that most PUP supporters interviewed did not oppose an end to paramilitary activity as 'Unacceptable'. The statistics for Sinn Féin, however, are far more reliable. When it comes to ending any involvement in organised crime, targeting, paramilitary attacks, punishment beatings and intelligence gathering operations there does not seem to be a problem with only between 2 and 5 per cent of Sinn Féin supporters opposing such policies as 'Unacceptable'. But 21 per cent consider decommissioning all paramilitary weapons to be 'Unacceptable' and 27 per cent are similarly opposed to disbanding their organisation while 28 per cent are opposed to 'Standing Down'.

The IRA and Loyalist paramilitaries should:

Per Cent 'Unacceptable'	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	SDLP	Sinn Fein
End any involvement in organised crime.	2	2	2	1	1	1	2
End all targeting.	2	2	2	2	1	0	2
End all paramilitary attacks and 'punishment beatings'.	2	1	2	0	1	0	3
End all their intelligence gathering operations.	2	2	2	1	1	0	5
Require their members to 'Stand Down'.	6	2	11	1	0	2	28
Decommission all their weapons.	5	3	8	1	2	1	21
Disband their paramilitary organisations.	6	3	11	1	1	1	27

But when it comes to more general policies to help ensure peace and security the Northern Ireland consensus is restored. Nearly everyone wants normalisation at 41 per cent 'Essential', 32 per cent 'Desirable', 21 per cent 'Acceptable', 4 per cent 'Tolerable' and only 3 per cent 'Unacceptable'. Similarly almost everyone supports an independent monitor to report on all aspects of violence and an independent commissioner to draw up plans and monitor progress towards normalisation and peace. They also want the British and Irish governments to direct their security services to end all paramilitary activity and would like programs of regeneration and transformation to assist communities with paramilitary links to achieve 'normalisation'. Three million pounds has already been allocated to this end.

All Northern Ireland - Per cent	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
The British Government should take all necessary steps to normalise security arrangements in Northern Ireland.	41	32	21	4	3
An independent monitor should report on all aspects of violence in Northern Ireland and who was responsible.	34	36	23	4	2
An independent commissioner should draw up plans for and monitor progress towards normalisation and peace.	33	35	24	5	3
The British and Irish governments should direct their security, police and legal services to use all possible means to end all paramilitary activity.	40	30	24	5	4
Programs of regeneration and transformation should be established to assist communities with paramilitary links to achieve 'normalisation'.	36	34	22	6	2

No one will be surprised at the resistance of some Protestants to continued police reform and the reticence of some Sinn Féin supporters to go beyond a simple end to paramilitary activity. And the question of OTRs, like early prisoner releases, was always going to be controversial. But what is perhaps surprising is the almost unanimous acceptance, across both communities, of all the other proposals put forward to make the Belfast Agreement work. In this context it is difficult to understand why the two governments and pro-Agreement parties have waited until now to tackle questions of stability, community relations and normalisation in a more engaged way. It would seem to be the case that the people have got ahead of the politicians. Hopefully, now, the two governments and pro-Agreement parties will do what has to be done to catch up.

What can be Done if the Negotiations Fail

If the negotiations on the future of the Belfast Agreement fail what should the Governments and parties do? A series of options were put to the people of Northern Ireland on this issue and here it may be helpful to put them in order of least resistance as percentages of 'Unacceptable'. As the table shows no one seems to be willing to quite give up on the Belfast Agreement yet and the new institutions it has created.

Per Cent 'Unacceptable'	All of NI
The Civic Forum should be maintained as a public voice.	7
A Shadow Executive should be established to advise the Government.	9
The Assembly Committees should be re-established to advise each Government department.	9
Bring in an electoral system that more evenly distributes seats and power between the small and large parties.	11
The two Governments should move quickly and decisively to fill the political vacuum.	12
End suspension and have fresh elections.	12
The British and Irish governments should implement as much of the Belfast Agreement as they possibly can.	14
Joint Authority in combination with a Northern Ireland Assembly.	16
Continuation of Direct Rule from London with no Northern Ireland Assembly.	25
Bring in an electoral system that distributes more seats and power to the largest parties.	29
Joint Authority by Direct Rule from both London and Dublin.	30
Scrap the Belfast Agreement and negotiate a new agreement.	39
A new Anglo-Irish Agreement.	43
Negotiate a united Ireland.	47