

Did Brexit need a Peace Poll?

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Introduction

Prime Minister Cameron may have been persuaded to go for a referendum on Britain leaving or staying in the EU because the government's British Social Attitudes poll had been tracking the question since 1992 with consistent results for leave no higher than 30% in 2012 and only 22% in 2015 prior to the 2016 referendum (NatCen, 2018 p119). But these polls did not and possibly could not measure the impact that identity politics and UK/EU in-group/out-group behaviour would have on the referendum campaign in the hands of skilful ethnic entrepreneurs. With all the benefits of hindsight the National Centre for Social Research analysis of their data in 2018 drew the conclusion that the swing to leave was not driven by rational choices but emotive identity politics (NatCen 2018 p137).

The British Government signed Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty on 29 March 2017 signalling their intention to leave the EU and begin negotiations to that effect. Inevitably, as in any such negotiations each side set up a dynamic that polarised public opinion around their divergent negotiating positions. In this context those politicians and publics wishing to remain or leave the EU commissioned extensive programmes of polling to underscore their position with questions and methodologies biased to their partisan *Remainers* and *Leavers* agendas while carefully avoiding questions and methodologies that might produce a result that would be a threat to that agenda (For example The Lord Ashcroft 2018/19, People's Vote 2018/19 and Change Britain 2018/19)¹. While, at the same time, the major polling companies ran more objective tracking polls on a monthly basis to monitor public opinion on critical Brexit issues (For example ORB International, 2018/19). Additionally the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) commissioned a wide range of academic studies to examine all aspects of Brexit public opinion in coordination with a think tank established for this purpose, *The UK in a Changing Europe*, based at King's College London (For a review see: *The UK in a Changing Europe*, 2019).

Notable amongst the academic studies were two polls undertaken by researchers at University College London and King's College London in 2018 that attempted to determine shifts in public opinion on possible solutions to the Brexit problem since the referendum of 2016. But both of these studies were limited to rational choices between various options for a future relationship with the EU that a majority of UK citizens might find acceptable (Grant et al 2018) or lists of rational choice priorities that different demographics ranked as key concerns in their relationship with the EU (Pagel and Cooper 2018). In the latter case the researchers claimed that as much as 40 per cent of the public could be persuaded to vote remain or leave if a second referendum were held.

However, these researchers make the mistake that Cameron made in 2016 as they fail to take account of the political identity/emotive aspect of the choice the electorate would make in a

¹ Hundreds of polls on Brexit related issues were run between 2016 and 2019 consolidated by NatCen Social Research on their 'What UK Thinks' website at: <https://whatukthinks.org/eu/opinion-polls/>

contested referendum. Significantly, in this context if the UK and EU failed to reach an agreement on their future relationship then the *Leavers* would play the ‘blame game’ and persuade much of this 40 per cent swing vote that the EU is not the kind of institution that the UK should be a part of and given the polarising effect of the drawn out failed negotiations their argument could win the day in a second referendum if ‘No Deal’ was on the ballot. Conversely *Remainers*, with increasing veracity and good evidence, would make the case that the electorate had been deceived by the *Leavers* in the 2016 referendum and ‘now that the truth was known’ many, particularly younger voters (Alexander, 2019), would now vote to remain. Within this context party politics began to fail the mother of all Parliamentary democracies and on the 15th of January 2019 Prime Minister May’s proposals for her Withdrawal Agreement was voted down in the House of Commons by 230 votes, the largest vote against a sitting government ever. But did it have to be this way?

Firstly, instead of signing Article 50 and entering into combative negotiations with the EU the UK could have put in place a national unity agenda to find out what compromise the people of the UK would accept before they started to negotiate with the EU. In this context a UK wide peace poll to test all the options available could have made a useful contribution to such a process. Secondly, given the failure of the EU to persuade the UK to remain in the EU, while at the same time dealing with similar nationalistic movements in other member states that threaten the future integrity of the EU, the EU could have undertaken a similar EU wide peace poll. Critically such polls should use the well-tested methods of conflict resolution developed in Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine (Irwin 2002, PSR 2017).

With all these points in mind I applied to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) to run a Brexit peace poll as they had funded all my peace polling in Northern Ireland in support of the negotiation of the Belfast Agreement twenty years earlier (Irwin 2018a). But there was a fundamental difference between the situation I found myself in, in Northern Ireland in 1998 and the UK and EU in 2018. Significantly the Labour Party Government and Conservative Party Official Opposition were ‘on the same page’ regarding the Northern Ireland peace process in the 1990s. In that context everyone wanted a consensus peace agreement, but the Conservative Government of Prime Minister May in 2018 did not want a national EU Brexit consensus agreement as their political party was split between the Brexit *Leavers* that belonged to the European Research Group (ERG) of Conservative MPs and the *Remainer* Conservative MPs who had supported Cameron’s failed bid to stay in the EU. For Prime Minister May not splitting her Conservative Party was a higher priority than a national consensus, especially if that would entail a negotiated compromise with the opposition Labour Party now controlled by its left wing leader Jeremy Corbyn. So this particular political battlefield was probably too controversial for JRCT and my grant application was turned down in September 2018.

Lies, Damned Lies and Brexit Statistics

It was in this context that I was invited to make a presentation at the House of Commons to concerned MPs on the 14th of November 2018 along with the Director of *The UK in a Changing Europe* programme, Professor Anand Menon. The meeting was chaired by Alison McGovern MP who had been a personal friend of Jo Cox, the MP murdered by a right wing extremist at the time of the 2016 referendum campaign. The Government also published their 585 page Withdrawal Agreement on November 14th so running a peace poll on the

substantive elements of that agreement at that time would have served no useful purpose, but as we expected the agreement to fail in the House of Commons it would be possible to run a peace poll on the procedural issues that would have to be followed after the agreement was voted down. In the absence of a written constitution the UK Parliament could implement any number of procedural options. For example should the UK leave with no deal? Or should the government ask for more time with an Article 50 extension? Should the agreement be renegotiated? Or should the government call a general election? Or should there be a second referendum (People's Vote) and most critically of all what should the choices be for such a referendum and with what wording? In the Brexit context such a scenario was particularly problematic given the ambiguous meaning of 'no deal'.

With all these points in mind a peace poll that engaged with all the principal Parliamentary Brexit stakeholders to develop and test all the unresolved procedural issues, including those associated with a second referendum (franchise, timing, questions, meaning and understanding of options etc.) could have helped Parliamentarians reach an informed decision on these procedural issues. Additionally, it should be remembered that in Northern Ireland the parties to their peace agreement signed up to it because they had a stake in it, they took ownership of it through multiparty negotiations. So if no agreement was now reached the Government could take that lesson to heart and try a multiparty national consensus approach in the UK. Ananad Menon published my proposal to this effect on *The UK in a Changing Europe* website on November 19th (Irwin 2018b).

However, this proposal to take control of the public opinion research agenda was not taken up by Government leaving the field wide open to partisan pollsters in what was an increasingly hostile and contested public discourse (Irwin 2018c). For example in the heated discussion leading up to the Meaningful Vote on the Government's Withdrawal Agreement scheduled for Tuesday the 11th of December the *Express* reported, from an interview on the BBC's Andrew Marr show, that the 'Brexiteer Gisela Stuart masterfully shut down *Remain* campaigner Gina Miller after she suggested there is now increased support for a second Brexit referendum' (Bosotti 2018). Gina Miller cited a poll published in the *Independent* that said 'People were... for a new referendum by 46 per cent to 30 per cent' (Watts 2018), while Gisela Stuart cited research undertaken for the *Leave* campaign *Change Britain* noting that "The public want their MPs to vote against a second referendum" by 51 per cent to 45 per cent (BMG Research 2018). Additionally the *Change Britain* research also claimed a 'Canada Plus' agreement was the most 'strongly preferred' outcome while the *Independent* said a 'Majority of country now think Britain should remain in the EU'. Remarkably BOTH the *Independent* poll and the poll for *Change Britain* were carried out by the same company *BMG Research*. How could this be and how were Parliamentarians supposed to make sense of these diametrically opposed conclusions, and in so doing make what may be the most important decision of their political careers to guide the country forward for generations to come? What had gone wrong with the polling undertaken by *BMG Research* and others, and how could it be corrected?

Firstly, with regards to support for a second referendum the result depends not only on when the poll was run but also on the question asked. For example Lord Ashcroft (2018) in his November poll asked 'Should there be a second referendum, to decide between leaving the EU on terms agreed in the draft Brexit agreement, or remaining in the EU?' resulting in 38

per cent ‘yes’ and 47 per cent ‘no’ because this question disenfranchises *Leave* voters. Conversely when asked ‘Should there be a second referendum, to decide between leaving the EU on terms agreed in the draft Brexit agreement, or leaving without a deal?’ the result was only 31 per cent ‘yes’ and 50 per cent ‘no’ because this question disenfranchises *Remain* voters. However, in a *Survation* poll (Walters 2018) also run in November the result was 48 per cent in support of a ‘People’s vote – a referendum – asking the public their view?’ and only 34 per cent opposed. In Northern Ireland and around the world people generally like to exercise their franchise and critically the *Survation* question does not disenfranchise anyone. Implicitly both *Remainers* and *Leavers* are invited to express ‘their view’. Interestingly the *BMG Research* question gets a result somewhere in-between the Lord Ashcroft and *Survation* questions as they ask ‘If there is a vote, should your MP vote FOR or AGAINST another referendum on whether to leave or remain in the EU?’ with an additional option for their MP to abstain.

These very different results now make sense and the correct approach to dealing with this issue was to either have the stakeholders, the Parliamentarians collectively agree what were the correct questions to ask or, alternatively, run the various alternate questions and then have a discussion as to why they produce different results. That is the discussion that should have taken place between Gisela Stuart and Gina Miller on the Andrew Marr show, but didn’t, and an opportunity to enlighten the public was lost. Statistics do not have to be lies they simply have to be understood. But what about the *BMG Research* result in the *Independent* that suggests the British public want to remain in the EU and their poll for *Change Britain* that suggests, given a choice, the British public would choose a Canada plus deal. What was happening here?

Regrettably, the polling organisations that have tried to differentiate the British public’s preferences for different Brexit outcomes have not used best practice in both the design and analysis of their questions, pioneered in Northern Ireland and tested in a dozen other countries around the world. Firstly the options used in Northern Ireland and elsewhere were drafted by constitutional lawyers who could write both accurate and clear proposals that could be tested against public opinion, while, at the same time not leaving any important options out (Table 1). The eight options tested by *BMG Research* did not meet these standards. For example, although they tested the ‘No Brexit’ option of remaining in the EU under current terms no one has tested what might be called a ‘No Brexit Plus’ option that would include increased restrictions on immigration in accordance with EU law and regulations (Clarke and Johnson 2018). Secondly *BMG Research* used a method that does not allow the informant to separately evaluate every option on offer against all other options by, for example, asking for only a first and last preference. Similarly although *YouGov* (Curtis and Smith 2018) used a simple question that asked the informant to rank order just three options, which works well with the Alternative Vote (AV) system, they then go on to analyse the same data using the Condorcet method that is far from transparent to the average reader. They would have done better to use the tried and tested methods that worked in Northern Ireland and published in the *Belfast Telegraph* for public diplomacy purposes using nothing more complex than simple percentages (Irwin 1996/2000). These points were emphasised in a second article on *The UK in a Changing Europe* website on 12 December... “The bottom line to all of this is that the British public and MPs are not enlightened by all this public opinion research but rather find themselves frustrated by a lack of clarity, objectivity and

transparency that only leads to the further confusion of Brexit in the minds of the British public. Arguably, the British Parliament has not served the British people well in resolving Brexit. Regrettably the British public opinion industry has not helped in this regard as much as they could. They could and should have done very much better. Independent research of a higher standard is required” (Irwin 2018c). But it did no good.

Table 1. Eight options for the political future of Northern Ireland (Irwin 2012 p9)

Rank Order from 1 to 8	1 to 8
<i>Separate Northern Irish State</i> - The complete separation of Northern Ireland from both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and the establishment of a separate state within the European Union.	
<i>Full incorporation into the British State</i> - Direct rule from Westminster and local government similar to the rest of the United Kingdom with <u>no</u> Northern Ireland Assembly or separate laws for Northern Ireland and <u>no</u> Anglo-Irish Agreement.	
<i>Continued direct rule (No change)</i> - The continuation of direct rule from London in consultation with the Irish government under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.	
<i>Power sharing and the Anglo-Irish Agreement</i> - Government by a Northern Ireland Assembly and power sharing Executive under the authority of the British government but in consultation with the Irish government under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.	
<i>Power sharing with North-South institutions but no joint authority</i> - Government by a Northern Ireland Assembly, power sharing Executive and a number of joint institutions established with the Republic of Ireland to deal with matters of mutual interest. (But these arrangements will not include joint authority between the British and Irish governments).	
<i>Joint authority and power sharing</i> - Government by joint authority between the British and Irish governments in association with an elected power sharing Executive and Assembly.	
<i>Separate institutions for the two main communities</i> - Creation of separate structures for the government of each of the two main communities in Northern Ireland, subject to joint authority by the British and Irish governments.	
<i>Full incorporation into the Irish State</i> - Full incorporation of Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland to create a single state within the European Union.	

Making peace in two deeply divided societies, Northern Ireland and Brexit UK

On January 15th 2019 Prime Minister May lost her historic vote in the House of Commons and on January 22nd in his keynote address at a conference on ‘Brexit and Public Opinion 2019’ organised by *The UK in a Changing Europe* Sir John Curtis quite rightly underlined the point that *Remainers* and *Leavers* are strongly polarised on issues concerning the future relationship of the United Kingdom and the European Union. In this context he also suggested that there was little or no support for any one solution to this problem as, like Parliament, there was not a clear majority of the British public in favour of one solution or another. Again the facts from the various public opinion surveys cited by Sir John suggested that he was right and in the following discussion he pointed out that even in Northern Ireland more than 50 per cent of Unionists voted ‘yes’ for the Belfast Agreement. True again but this fact missed the point that both Northern Ireland and Brexit UK are two ‘deeply divided societies’ and to get to a compromise in Northern Ireland in which both Unionists and

Nationalists / Protestants and Catholics agreed a political way forward we had to get them there from a base where support for that compromise was not 50 per cent plus but closer to 10 per cent. Critically, if we had used Sir John’s methods for analysing public opinion in Northern Ireland we would never have got to peace! Clearly this assertion needs to be supported with some public opinion facts.

Sir John cited the results of a poll commissioned by the pro-leave *Change Britain* campaign and completed by BMG. In this study eight options were tested ranging from leaving the EU on a Canada-style deal, to a Norway-style deal, the government’s Withdrawal Agreement and a second referendum with informants being asked to select their most preferred option. Firstly, with so many options on offer it is difficult to get above 50 per cent for any one option and, most importantly, we did not know what informants second and third choices might be and therefore did not know where a compromise might be found between *Leavers* and *Remainers* or between Conservative and Labour party supporters.

As a tool for conflict resolution analysis this methodology is worse than useless as it highlights differences without identifying common ground. Similarly when eight options for the resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict were tested against public opinion only 11 per cent of Protestants and 10 per cent of Catholics accepted the power sharing compromise that became the Belfast Agreement. For Protestants remaining in the United Kingdom without sharing power with Catholics was their number one choice at 49 per cent but it was also the last/eighth choice for Catholics at 33 per cent (Table 2). So power sharing was the way forward.

Table 2. Percentage preference for Northern Ireland options in 1996 (Irwin, 2012 p11)

Catholics	Independent State	British State	Direct Rule	Anglo-Irish Agreement	Power Sharing	Joint Authority	Separate Institutions	Irish State
1st Pref.	8	3	6	14	11	24	2	32
2nd Pref.	9	5	9	17	16	26	9	9
3rd Pref.	2	4	10	21	22	23	11	6
4th Pref.	4	4	18	21	23	11	12	6
5th Pref.	8	9	17	18	14	10	15	9
6th Pref.	14	10	19	8	10	5	21	12
7th Pref.	15	29	18	2	3	1	19	12
8th Pref.	34	33	5	1	3	1	11	12

Protestants	Independent State	British State	Direct Rule	Anglo-Irish Agreement	Power Sharing	Joint Authority	Separate Institutions	Irish State
1st Pref.	10	49	14	7	10	6	2	2
2nd Pref.	14	19	34	13	13	3	2	1
3rd Pref.	19	8	26	25	11	7	2	1
4th Pref.	10	9	11	28	26	9	4	2
5th Pref.	13	8	6	14	28	19	9	3
6th Pref.	13	5	4	6	7	40	24	2
7th Pref.	11	3	3	6	3	15	51	8
8th Pref.	10	2	5	6	5	7	9	57

But in the real negotiations of the Belfast Agreement we had to deal with literally hundreds of issues and test them against public opinion to help the negotiators come to a compromise

and it simply was not possible to rank order hundreds of options. So we came up with a qualitative scale that would achieve the same result for each and every item. The negotiators wanted to know what their publics considered to be ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’ or ‘acceptable’ or ‘tolerable’ or definitely ‘unacceptable’ and when we used this five point scale the politicians could see exactly what each side needed in an agreement and what they would never agree to. A settlement of the Northern Ireland problem was the result with more than 50 per cent of Protestants voting ‘Yes’ for power sharing and the Belfast Agreement. Exactly the same could be done for Brexit to find out what *Remainers* and *Leavers*, as well as Conservative and Labour supporters, could compromise on to mend the divisions in the UK body politic. With this point in mind this analysis was published as a third article on *The UK in a Changing Europe* website (Irwin, 2019a), along with a set of draft questions to illustrate the methodology, in the hope that the UK polling industry would now do this (Table 3).

Table 3. Solving the Brexit problem² (Working Draft)

Question: *Parliament is presently trying to solve the Brexit problem. Listed below are the different options that have been made law or proposed as law along with the amendments tabled by MPs to change the law. Please indicate which options to solve the Brexit problem you consider to be ‘Essential’, ‘Desirable’, ‘Acceptable’, ‘Tolerable’ or ‘Unacceptable’.*

	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
The PMs Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration – Negotiated and agreed with the European Union to settle the terms of the UK leaving the EU and outlining the terms of a future trading arrangement. ³					
The PMs Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration – But with an expiry date for the Northern Ireland backstop or no backstop. ⁴					
The PMs Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration – But with alternative arrangements to the Northern Ireland backstop to avoid a hard border. ⁵					
Indicative Votes – By MPs in the House of Commons on a variety of alternatives to the PMs Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration. ⁶					
A permanent customs union – For trade with the EU and strong relationship with the single market underpinned by shared institutions, obligations and alignment on rights and standards. ⁷					

² This ‘working draft’ questionnaire is written in the style of those used to help resolve the Northern Ireland problem during the negotiation of the Belfast Agreement. A book explaining the methodology is available here: <http://www.peacepolls.org/peacepolls/documents/002539.pdf>

³ It is not possible to reduce the contents of the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration to a single sentence or two so it is captured here as simply the PMs negotiated agreement with the EU. However we are told by the EU that this is not possible!

⁴ This amendment is placed here as it follows on from the PMs Withdrawal Agreement and covers a number of amendments with different dates and mechanisms.

⁵ Another amendment on the Northern Ireland backstop.

⁶ This procedural amendment seems to work well here as an introduction to the substantive amendments that follow.

⁷ This amendment is not one of the four items noted in the indicative vote amendment but seems to fit

Norway-style deal – Including a customs union with the EU and membership of the European Economic Area with Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Iceland. ⁸					
Canada-style deal – A free trade agreement with the EU to include arrangements made between the EU and Canada and other trading partners. ⁹					
Status quo – Remain in the EU on present terms by revoking Article 50. ¹⁰					
A public vote/referendum – On any deal that has the support of the majority of MPs in the House of Commons. ¹¹					
No Deal – To leave the EU on 29 March 2019 with no agreement on future relations in place and with no transition/implementation period. ¹²					
Reject leaving the EU – Without a withdrawal agreement and a framework for the future relationship. ¹³					
Parliament Decides – If the Government can not get a majority for their proposal to withdraw from the EU then for one day only the House of Commons can make proposals and vote them into law. ¹⁴					
Special EU Committee – Establish a special all-party representative House of Commons committee to manage the EU withdrawal negotiations. ¹⁵					
Extension to Article 50 beyond two years – If the PMs Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration is not passed in the House of Commons by 26 February 2019. ¹⁶					
A Citizen’s Assembly – Of 250 members, comprising a representative sample of the population to consider and make recommendations to the House of Commons on the process of withdrawal of the UK from the EU. ¹⁷					
A public vote/referendum – On any deal or to stay in the EU. ¹⁸					

well here as the first of the substantive amendments.

⁸ This is one of the four indicative vote options.

⁹ This is one of the four indicative vote options

¹⁰ This option has not been tabled as an amendment but I have included it as it is legal in this form and completes the ‘shopping list’ of options available to the UK.

¹¹ This option is not exactly one of the indicative vote options but is a tabled amendment and seems to fit well here as it follows on from the ‘shopping list’ of substantive options to be voted on.

¹² This is one of the four indicative vote options.

¹³ It seemed logical to put this amendment here as we are now getting into what happens if nothing has been agreed.

¹⁴ This option is the most difficult to write as it is an interpretation of the intent of various procedures in Parliament. I hope I have not got it too wrong!

¹⁵ This option is a variant of the previous option.

¹⁶ Again this is another amendment to deal with the failure of the Parliamentary process, amended or otherwise and includes the date.

¹⁷ This amendment seems to follow on naturally from a need for an extension.

¹⁸ This option is one of the indicative vote options and is placed at the end as it could also deal with options proposed by the Citizens’ Assembly, although, in practice, such suggestions would have to go to the Commons.

A Brexit Pilot Peace Poll

Funding for Brexit polling continued to follow the political agendas of the *Leavers* and *Remainers* camps supported by their separate NGOs. No one was then ready to fund research on a Brexit compromise so I undertook to do the work myself using Google Surveys to run UK pilots with the results published in my fourth article for *The UK in a Changing Europe* website (Irwin 2019b). I pointed out that ideally the questions in a peace poll should be agreed and drafted with the cooperation of the parties to the conflict. In this case that should be the Parliamentarians elected to the House of Commons. But for the purposes of this pilot I simply took the relevant items from the House of Commons Order Paper No. 239 Part 1 that listed the Governments European Union (Withdrawal) Act, and all the amendments proposed by Parliamentarians (page 26-38) for selection by the Speaker on Tuesday the 29th of January.

From a conflict resolution/negotiations perspective this Act and amendments can be loosely characterised as being ‘substantive’ elements of an agreement or ‘procedural’ elements for getting to an agreement. Using Google Surveys I was able to test nine solutions for resolving Brexit against each other, with a tenth question asking the informant if they would vote *Leave* or *Remain* if a referendum was held today (Table 4). I would then be able to compare the opinions of *Leavers* and *Remainers* on these issues, and see if a compromise could be found anywhere, that they might be able to agree to. The same was done for nine procedural issues (Table 5).

From Table 4 we can see *Leavers* do not want to stay in the European Union at 79.9 per cent ‘unacceptable’, while *Remainers* do not want to leave the EU without an agreement at 71.8 per cent ‘unacceptable’, and *Leavers* do not want a referendum to leave or remain in the European Union at 81.8 per cent ‘unacceptable’. So nothing to agree to there at this time. But if we take a look at the other end of this five point scale, at what *Remainers* and *Leavers* consider to be ‘essential’ (Table 6) then we get a slightly different picture. The number one priority for *Remainers* is ‘*a permanent customs union for trade with the EU, strong relationship with the single market, shared institutions and alignment on rights and standards*’ at 47.6 per cent ‘essential’. The same item is third on the *Leavers* list at 17.5 per cent ‘essential’ but significantly it is only 20.2 per cent ‘unacceptable’ so perhaps something could be done with this.

Other options include a Canada-style deal and a Norway-style deal and they are possibly ‘doable’ but they presently require a Northern Ireland backstop, which *Leavers* wanted removed at 45.4 per cent ‘essential’ while *Remainers* considered it ‘unacceptable’ at 26.8 per cent. On the other hand the ‘permanent customs union’ approach did not need a backstop so perhaps this was ‘the lesser of the evils’ in this case given its otherwise more general ‘acceptance’ by *Leavers* at 30.8 per cent.

Table 4. Substantive Brexit issues with Remain and Leave breakdown for per cent ‘essential’, ‘desirable’, ‘acceptable’, ‘tolerable’ and ‘unacceptable’.¹⁹

To Resolve Brexit?		Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable	NA
2. Are the terms of the PM's Withdrawal Agreement and Political Settlement for the UK leaving the EU...	Remain	11.2	4.7	5.5	21.3	32.3	25.1
	Leave	11.3	7.0	27.8	3.9	34.4	15.6
3. Is having a time limit or removing the Northern Ireland backstop...	Remain	9.3	4.1	10.5	17.9	26.8	31.5
	Leave	45.4	10.1	16.7	3.7	10.4	13.7
4. Is replacing the Northern Ireland backstop with alternative arrangements to avoid a hard border...	Remain	28.0	11.7	14.5	11.3	10.1	24.4
	Leave	8.7	30.9	14.2	12.9	18.3	15.1
5. Is a permanent customs union for trade with the EU, strong relationship with the single market, shared institutions and alignment on rights and standards...	Remain	47.6	12.9	11.5	2.7	5.9	19.4
	Leave	17.5	15.2	30.8	3.1	20.2	13.2
6. Is a Norway-style deal including an EU customs union and membership of the European Economic Area with Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Iceland...	Remain	16.4	30.7	17.2	6.9	9.0	19.9
	Leave	14.0	24.1	27.2	7.0	20.2	7.5
7. Is a Canada-style trade deal between the UK and the European Union on terms negotiated by Canada and other non EU member states...	Remain	12.9	19.7	21.6	12.1	13.8	19.9
	Leave	18.9	26.3	25.0	6.0	14.9	8.9
8. Is the United Kingdom remaining in the European Union on their present terms...	Remain	42.3	13.3	14.4	7.7	8.9	13.3
	Leave	1.4	0.0	7.0	4.9	79.9	6.8
9. Is leaving the European Union on 29 March 2019 with no deal for a Withdrawal Agreement, future arrangements and transition/ implementation period...	Remain	2.7	0.0	5.3	6.8	71.8	13.3
	Leave	7.0	9.9	37.3	21.7	16.6	7.5
10. Is a public vote/referendum on a deal to leave the European Union or to remain in the European Union...	Remain	44.3	17.0	12.5	10.0	3.9	12.3
	Leave	3.5	3.7	7.1	0.0	81.8	3.9

¹⁹ This sample was collected between 2 and 4 February 2019 using the Google Android App. All the responses included the option ‘I prefer not to say’ to produce a Brexit breakdown of Remain 57.6%, Leave 31.7% and ‘I prefer not to say’ (No Answer) 10.7%.

Table 5. Procedural Brexit issues with Remain and Leave breakdown for per cent ‘essential’, ‘desirable’, ‘acceptable’, ‘tolerable’ and ‘unacceptable’.²⁰

To Resolve Brexit?		Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable	NA
2. Is having the House of Commons MPs freely vote on all the different possible solutions...	Remain	42.7	16.0	11.8	9.8	6.6	13.1
	Leave	16.0	15.3	35.8	10.6	22.3	0.0
3. Is a public vote/referendum on a deal that has the support of a majority of MPs in the House of Commons...	Remain	45.5	30.5	11.2	2.4	3.0	7.4
	Leave	9.8	8.9	11.0	10.6	48.5	0.0
4. Is rejecting leaving the European Union without first agreeing a withdrawal agreement and framework for the future relationship...	Remain	37.0	14.9	7.3	3.7	23.5	13.6
	Leave	9.6	11.0	19.7	3.8	56.0	0.0
5. Is giving powers to the House of Commons to make and pass their own proposals for withdrawal from the EU...	Remain	9.5	7.2	21.7	17.4	22.6	21.6
	Leave	12.0	10.5	21.5	10.9	45.0	0.0
6. Is establishing a special all-party representative House of Commons committee to manage the EU withdrawal negotiations...	Remain	15.3	30.3	14.5	11.3	13.0	17.2
	Leave	11.9	9.0	8.6	6.6	57.4	6.4
7. - if the PMs Withdrawal Agreement is not passed in the House of Commons, then an extension of Article 50 beyond the two years is...	Remain	29.3	17.7	16.2	2.4	17.2	17.2
	Leave	11.9	9.0	8.6	6.6	57.4	6.4
8. Is establishing a Citizen's Assembly of 250 representative members of the UK populations to consider and make recommendations on withdrawal from the EU...	Remain	10.7	18.6	23.5	5.1	19.7	22.5
	Leave	8.0	8.1	24.1	6.9	46.4	6.4
9. Is ruling out a no-deal scenario and respecting the wishes of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales as a partnership...	Remain	36.1	20.1	8.7	3.6	4.8	14.0
	Leave	0.0	4.8	8.9	6.3	73.6	6.4
10. Is ruling out a no-deal scenario and preparing for a People's Vote with an option to remain in the European Union...	Remain	41.9	18.7	17.1	3.4	4.8	14.0
	Leave	17.5	55.6	9.2	0.0	17.6	0.0

²⁰ This sample was collected between 2 and 4 February 2019 using the Google Android App. All the responses included the option ‘I prefer not to say’ to produce a Brexit breakdown of Remain 60.2%, Leave 30.1%, and ‘I prefer not to say’ (No Answer) 9.7%.

Table 6. Rank order for Remain and Leave substantive issues as per cent ‘essential’.

	To Resolve Brexit?	Remain Essential	To Resolve Brexit?	Leave Essential
1st	5. Is a permanent customs union for trade with the EU, strong relationship with the single market, shared institutions and alignment on rights and standards...	47.6	3. Is having a time limit or removing the Northern Ireland backstop...	45.4
2nd	10. Is a public vote/referendum on a deal to leave the European Union or to remain in the European Union...	44.3	7. Is a Canada-style trade deal between the UK and the European Union on terms negotiated by Canada and other non EU member states...	18.9
3rd	8. Is the United Kingdom remaining in the European Union on their present terms...	42.3	5. Is a permanent customs union for trade with the EU, strong relationship with the single market, shared institutions and alignment on rights and standards...	17.5
4th	4. Is replacing the Northern Ireland backstop with alternative arrangements to avoid a hard border...	28.0	6. Is a Norway-style deal including an EU customs union and membership of the European Economic Area with Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Iceland...	14.0
5th	6. Is a Norway-style deal including an EU customs union and membership of the European Economic Area with Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Iceland...	16.4	2. Are the terms of the PM's Withdrawal Agreement and Political Settlement for the UK leaving the EU...	11.3
6th	7. Is a Canada-style trade deal between the UK and the European Union on terms negotiated by Canada and other non EU member states...	12.9	4. Is replacing the Northern Ireland backstop with alternative arrangements to avoid a hard border...	8.7
7th	2. Are the terms of the PM's Withdrawal Agreement and Political Settlement for the UK leaving the EU...	11.2	9. Is leaving the European Union on 29 March 2019 with no deal for a Withdrawal Agreement, future arrangements and transition/ implementation period...	7.0
8th	3. Is having a time limit or removing the Northern Ireland backstop...	9.3	10. Is a public vote/referendum on a deal to leave the European Union or to remain in the European Union...	3.5
9th	9. Is leaving the European Union on 29 March 2019 with no deal for a Withdrawal Agreement, future arrangements and transition/ implementation period...	2.7	8. Is the United Kingdom remaining in the European Union on their present terms...	1.4

With regards to the procedural issues (Table 7) it was interesting to note that *Remainers* did want them ranging from a high of 45.5 per cent ‘essential’ for a vote on any deal agreed to by MPs, to 42.7 per cent for MPs to vote on various deals (an *Indicative Vote*) to ‘ruling out a no-deal scenario and preparing for a People’s Vote with an option to remain in the European Union’ at 41.9 per cent ‘essential’. When phrased in this way *Leavers* considered this form of referendum to be 55.6 per cent ‘desirable’ so if the Brexit process had to go ‘down that road’ then perhaps this was the way to go. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, *Leavers* were far less enthusiastic about the various procedural options on offer as they want Brexit.

Table 7. Rank order for Remain and Leave procedural issues as per cent ‘essential’.

	To Resolve Brexit?	Remain Essential	To Resolve Brexit?	Leave Essential
1st	3. Is a public vote/referendum on a deal that has the support of a majority of MPs in the House of Commons...	45.5	10. Is ruling out a no-deal scenario and preparing for a People's Vote with an option to remain in the European Union...	17.5
2nd	2. Is having the House of Commons MPs freely vote on all the different possible solutions...	42.7	2. Is having the House of Commons MPs freely vote on all the different possible solutions...	16.0
3rd	10. Is ruling out a no-deal scenario and preparing for a People's Vote with an option to remain in the European Union...	41.9	5. Is giving powers to the House of Commons to make and pass their own proposals for withdrawal from the EU...	12.0
4th	4. Is rejecting leaving the European Union without first agreeing a withdrawal agreement and framework for the future relationship...	37.0	6. Is establishing a special all-party representative House of Commons committee to manage the EU withdrawal negotiations...	11.9
5th	9. Is ruling out a no-deal scenario and respecting the wishes of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales as a partnership...	36.1	7. - if the PMs Withdrawal Agreement is not passed in the House of Commons, then an extension of Article 50 beyond the two years is...	11.9
6th	7. - if the PMs Withdrawal Agreement is not passed in the House of Commons, then an extension of Article 50 beyond the two years is...	29.3	3. Is a public vote/referendum on a deal that has the support of a majority of MPs in the House of Commons...	9.8
7th	6. Is establishing a special all-party representative House of Commons committee to manage the EU withdrawal negotiations...	15.3	4. Is rejecting leaving the European Union without first agreeing a Withdrawal Agreement and framework for the future relationship...	9.6
8th	8. Is establishing a Citizen's Assembly of 250 representative members of the UK populations to consider and make recommendations on withdrawal from the EU...	10.7	8. Is establishing a Citizen's Assembly of 250 representative members of the UK populations to consider and make recommendations on withdrawal from the EU...	8.0
9th	5. Is giving powers to the House of Commons to make and pass their own proposals for withdrawal from the EU...	9.5	9. Is ruling out a no-deal scenario and respecting the wishes of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales as a partnership...	0.0

This Google survey of 100 interviews was collected between February 2 and February 4. It is only a pilot costing a very modest £160. Clearly a larger survey was needed with input from the Parliamentarians who wrote the draft law and amendments tested here. However, although the pilot only had an N=100 sample I was used to working with small samples around the world as I am generally working on conflicts where such samples are often very hard to get. The thing then is to know what one can draw conclusions from and what one can not. With this point in mind although the overall sample may not be as good as we would like by taking out the most polarised groups (in Northern Ireland Protestants and Catholics for example and in Brexit Britain *Remainers* and *Leavers*) we can compare the differences between these two groups with some certainty.

The level of ‘unacceptable’ for Protestants for the Power Sharing option that became the

Belfast Agreement was 52 per cent (Table 8) and I suspected that the level of Conservative ‘unacceptable’ for a permanent customs union or Norway-style deal would be less than 20 per cent (Table 4) as not all Conservatives were Leavers. It therefore followed that resolving Brexit was arguably easier than reaching the Belfast Agreement. But I did not want to say too much about this from the pilot as these differences and similarities were all within the margins of error. So someone really should run these polls again to the best possible polling standards with a bigger sample. But again no one did, at least not publically, so I ran one more pilot to better define the parameters of an acceptable Brexit compromise.

Table 8. Percentage acceptability for the future of Northern Ireland options in 1997

All of Northern Ireland	Independent State	British State	Direct Rule	Anglo-Irish Agreement	Power Sharing	Joint Authority	Separate Institutions	Irish State
Essential	3	13	2	3	3	4	3	14
Desirable	8	14	8	8	11	13	5	12
Acceptable	17	18	21	24	23	20	17	9
Tolerable	15	16	25	23	23	14	20	9
Unacceptable	57	39	44	42	40	49	55	56

Catholics	Independent State	British State	Direct Rule	Anglo-Irish Agreement	Power Sharing	Joint Authority	Separate Institutions	Irish State
Essential	3	1	1	5	3	10	6	34
Desirable	7	3	4	13	13	27	7	24
Acceptable	13	9	12	33	31	31	25	18
Tolerable	12	12	32	30	26	13	26	14
Unacceptable	65	75	51	19	27	19	36	10

Protestants	Independent State	British State	Direct Rule	Anglo-Irish Agreement	Power Sharing	Joint Authority	Separate Institutions	Irish State
Essential	3	23	3	0	4	0	0	1
Desirable	8	21	12	3	8	2	2	1
Acceptable	20	23	27	17	17	13	12	2
Tolerable	17	18	20	20	19	13	16	6
Unacceptable	52	15	38	60	52	72	70	90

Brexit: Finding the best possible compromise

When politicians fail to bring peace to their society ravaged by the forces of bloody conflict they always blame ‘the people’ saying they wanted a deal that would bring peace but that ‘their people’ could not accept it. Most of the time such claims are lies, people generally do want peace and all the benefits that flow from peace and the problem really is that the peace deal ‘on the table’ is not in the interests of the political elites and their allies charged with negotiating a peace agreement. And so goes the world (Irwin, 2012), is Brexit any different?

This is an empirical question. What compromise on Brexit could the people of the United Kingdom accept given the political will of their leaderships to take them down that road? In my first Brexit pilot peace poll I tested the views of Leavers against Remainers using the conflict resolution techniques that worked so well in Northern Ireland (Irwin 2019b). But in the UK it is not the Protestant/Unionists and Catholic/Republicans that have to make peace it is the Conservative and Labour Party supporters. So in my second Brexit pilot peace poll I asked what political party the informant generally supported in addition to their preference to leave or remain in the European Union (Irwin 2019c). Table 9 lists the results for *Leavers*

and *Remainers* and Table 10 lists the results for Conservative and Labour Party supporters for eight different options: the PMs Withdrawal Agreement, No-Deal, a Permanent Customs Union, a Norway-Style Deal, a Canada-Style Deal, Remaining in the EU, a Compromise Agreement, and a ‘People’s Vote’ Referendum.

Table 9. Leavers and Remainers per cent ‘Essential’, ‘Desirable’, ‘Acceptable’, ‘Tolerable’ or ‘Unacceptable’ for different options to resolve Brexit

Leave	No Deal	Canada Style Deal	PMs Deal	Compromise Deal	Customs Union	Norway Style Deal	Remain In EU	People’s Vote
Essential	14.4	5.0	7.0	8.4	5.5	2.6	0.0	2.6
Desirable	4.8	11.7	5.0	30.2	1.2	6.7	2.6	1.2
Acceptable	26.4	27.2	12.5	13.2	22.5	22.5	0.0	2.9
Tolerable	14.7	20.4	23.6	4.9	12.0	17.4	7.6	2.6
Unacceptable	16.3	8.2	42.0	18.4	31.7	25.5	80.5	81.4
NA	23.5	27.5	10.0	25.0	27.2	25.3	9.3	9.3

Remain	No Deal	Canada Style Deal	PMs Deal	Compromise Deal	Customs Union	Norway Style Deal	Remain In EU	People’s Vote
Essential	24.4	21.4	29.2	15.5	43.5	2.4	54.5	55.2
Desirable	9.5	15.1	4.2	26.0	16.7	46.6	19.8	15.5
Acceptable	0.0	20.0	5.3	6.1	18.0	24.9	1.6	10.9
Tolerable	0.0	17.0	2.7	32.2	1.3	4.1	5.3	0.0
Unacceptable	52.5	13.0	39.5	6.5	4.1	13.6	5.0	15.6
NA	13.5	13.5	19.1	13.6	16.4	8.3	13.8	2.7

Table 10. Labour and Conservative per cent ‘Essential’, ‘Desirable’, ‘Acceptable’, ‘Tolerable’ or ‘Unacceptable’ for different options to resolve Brexit

Labour	No Deal	Canada Style Deal	PMs Deal	Compromise Deal	Customs Union	Norway Style Deal	Remain In EU	People’s Vote
Essential	30.5	30.5	22.8	0.0	21.5	0.0	51.0	37.6
Desirable	1.0	13.8	5.3	29.5	4.3	36.6	1.7	6.0
Acceptable	7.5	0.0	0.0	11.8	30.2	17.7	13.8	13.8
Tolerable	0.0	8.4	7.5	13.8	1.7	1.7	0.0	0.0
Unacceptable	28.9	15.2	25.6	6.1	3.4	11.9	15.2	17.6
NA	32.1	32.1	38.8	38.8	38.8	32.1	18.3	25.0

Conservative	No Deal	Canada Style Deal	PMs Deal	Compromise Deal	Customs Union	Norway Style Deal	Remain In EU	People’s Vote
Essential	27.5	0.0	12.6	27.9	19.0	5.4	5.4	17.2
Desirable	11.8	24.0	15.9	27.5	5.4	11.5	0.0	9.6
Acceptable	6.3	34.9	12.6	19.7	5.4	23.4	3.5	0.0
Tolerable	6.3	18.7	23.6	0.9	18.8	24.2	11.8	6.4
Unacceptable	42.7	10.7	29.1	24.1	45.3	34.5	73.2	66.8
NA	5.4	11.7	6.1	0.0	6.1	0.9	6.1	0.0

As with the first pilot the individual results can not be taken too seriously as the sample contains only one hundred interviews using Google Surveys and the level of ‘No Answer’ is rather high. But this problem can be mitigated by not looking at the raw per cent results but

rather at the rank order of the results. In my experience when working on conflicts these rank orders do not change very much between small difficult to get samples and larger samples providing the samples are representative of the groups being compared. This is done in Table 11 for Conservative and Leave voters and for Labour and Remain voters and the results are very revealing.

Table 11. Rank order for Labour and Conservative options [per cent ‘Essential’ + ‘Desirable’ + ‘Acceptable’ + ‘Tolerable’] for resolving Brexit²¹

	To Resolve Brexit?	Labour	To Resolve Brexit?	Remain
1st	Remain in EU	66.5	People’s Vote	81.6
2nd	Customs Union	57.7	Remain in EU	81.2
3rd	People’s Vote	57.4	Compromise Deal	79.8
4th	Norway-Style Deal	56.0	Customs Union	79.5
5th	Compromise Deal	55.1	Norway Style-Deal	78.0
6th	Canada-Style Deal	52.7	Canada-Style Deal	73.5
7th	No Deal	39.0	PMs Deal	41.4
8th	PMs Deal	35.6	No Deal	33.9

	To Resolve Brexit?	Conservative	To Resolve Brexit?	Leave
1st	Canada-Style Deal	77.6	Canada-Style Deal	64.3
2nd	Compromise Deal	76.0	No Deal	60.3
3rd	PMs Deal	64.7	Compromise Deal	56.7
4th	Norway-Style Deal	64.5	Norway Style-Deal	49.2
5th	No Deal	51.9	PMs Deal	48.1
6th	Customs Union	48.6	Customs Union	43.4
7th	People’s Vote	33.2	Remain in EU	10.2
8th	Remain in EU	20.7	People’s Vote	9.3

For the Labour party supporters the top three priorities are ‘Remain in EU’, a ‘Customs Union’ and a ‘People’s Vote’ with a ‘Norway-Style Deal’ and some sort of ‘Compromise Deal’ fourth and fifth. The pattern of the rank order for Remainers is almost identical with a ‘People’s Vote’ and ‘Remain in EU’ first and second but with a ‘Customs Union’ now down to fourth perhaps because, for Labour voters, a ‘Customs Union’ is party policy and that is why it is second on their list. Significantly ‘No Deal’ and the ‘PMs Deal’ is at the bottom of both the Labour party and Remainers lists with a ‘Canada-Style Deal’ just above them at sixth position.

However, a ‘Canada-Style Deal’ is first on both the Conservative and Leave lists this being the preferred option for so-called hard line Brexiters. So not much chance of a compromise there. But the second choice for Conservatives is a ‘Compromise Deal’ and for them this would be the ‘PMs Deal’ third or a ‘Norway-Style Deal’ fourth. Interestingly the ‘PMs Deal’ drops to fifth place in the Leavers list as they are not always loyal Conservatives and hard line Leavers are content with ‘No Deal’ which is second on their list behind a ‘Canada-Style

²¹ This Brexit Pilot Peace Poll was collected between 17 February and 19 February 2019 using the Google Surveys UK representative sample methodology. The full data files for all three of these polls are available here: <https://peacepolls.etinu.net/cgi-bin/publications?instanceID=1>

Deal'. Significantly a 'Norway-Style Deal' is fourth on both the Leavers and Conservative lists and also fourth on the Labour list so, if this were a conflict resolution exercise to stop a violent conflict, then I would conclude that a 'Norway-Style Deal' could form the basis for a compromise peace agreement. Interestingly Grant, Rohr, Howarth, Lu and Pollitt (2018) come to essentially the same conclusion in their study of these issues using a cost benefit analysis approach. Given that these rather different methodologies come to the same conclusion perhaps the results of these analysis should be taken more seriously as a solution to the Brexit problem now.

Another approach to resolving this problem proposed by a number of Labour and Conservative party MPs is to combine the top preference for Labour party supporters with one of the top preferences for the Conservative party supporters namely a 'People's Vote' to remain in the EU against the 'PMs Deal' approved in the House of Commons (Helm 2019). From a conflict resolution perspective, in a 'fighting killing war' this strategy probably would not work, as we could not expect the parties to that war to respect the result. But it might work for Brexit. Certainly it is worth a try and if it doesn't work and if everyone is still dissatisfied with the result then they can always fall back on the 'Norway-Style Deal' compromise.

Yes – Brexit did need a peace poll

Prime Ministers are always concerned about their legacy and how history will regard them after they have left office. For Prime Minister Tony Blair his most significant policy failure was the Iraq War and for David Cameron it was losing the EU referendum. For Prime Minister May, above every thing else, she did not want to be remembered as the Prime Minister that split the Conservative Party condemning them to years in opposition or split the Union with the loss of Scotland or Northern Ireland. So she wanted a EU Withdrawal Agreement that would satisfy Conservative MP ERG *Leavers* while also avoiding a second EU referendum that might be a prelude to a second Scottish referendum in which the Scots would vote for independence and continued EU membership. So both a national consensus Norway style deal and/or a People's Vote were never going to be her preferred policy options. It was her deal or no deal. The Prime Minister's interests and the interests of the Conservative Party were placed above the national interest and in this context research and research funding was dominated by the NGOs that supported the *Remain* and *Leave* camps and by the agenda of Prime Minister May's Government. Support for a national consensus would only come when and if the Prime Minister's option totally failed. On Tuesday the 12th of March, the Government's proposals for leaving the EU were voted down for a second time by a margin of 149 votes and the Prime Minister in her statement to the House of Commons said the other options of no deal, a second referendum or some form of soft Brexit were now "choices that must be faced." Clearly public opinion research and public diplomacy was now needed in support of this new agenda and on March 20th May's Government asked the EU for an extension to Article 50 which would give time for such research.

The five short articles and three Brexit pilot peace polls published on *The UK in a Changing Europe* website were restricted to the format for Google Surveys. On the plus side they were very inexpensive and easy to run but were limited in style and word length as they were run on an Android app platform. Significantly the questions were also limited to blocks of ten short questions. However, the questionnaire, *In Search of a Settlement*, used to detail all the

elements of the Northern Ireland Belfast Agreement contained 252 questions and was run as a small booklet in face-to-face interviews (Irwin, 2002). None of the polling done in an effort to resolve Brexit was undertaken to this level of sophistication to detail all the possibilities for the future arrangements for the UK and EU because that was not part of the Withdrawal Agreement. But this bridge now has to be crossed with all the possibilities for trading and other social and security arrangements being tested against public opinion ranging from World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements, to Canada-style deals, to a Customs Union and/or Single Market arrangements, similar to a Norway-style deal with perhaps elements taken from existing European Economic Area (EEA) and European Free Trade Area (EFTA) treaties to produce some kind of European Community 2.0 type deal, or more, or less? (For recent reviews on these options see Wallace, 2019 and Trefgarne 2019). The *A New Framework Agreement* (1995) was used to set an agenda for both the *In Search of a Settlement* Northern Ireland peace poll and subsequent Belfast Agreement. Similarly the *Political Declaration* (2018) can do the same for a UK/EU agreement with each element unpacked and tested against public opinion for all the possible options available.

This was not done to resolve Brexit because the Government only wanted their deal and no other deal. But that is ‘water under the bridge now’ and in an effort to mitigate the inevitable Parliamentary party political dysfunction over the future UK/EU relationship a programme of research that addresses all these issues should be undertaken proactively with willing Parliamentarians, as was done in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the hundreds of polls on Brexit that are in the public domain are, to some extent, just the tip of the iceberg of the polling completed with significant amounts of polling undertaken privately by the major political parties and UK Government. But the degree of sophistication achieved in Northern Ireland by engaging with the politicians from all the parties elected to the negotiations has never been duplicated elsewhere and, most importantly, all the results of all those peace polls were made public to both inform the public and bring the public with the politicians to an agreed consensus on the way forward. The same now needs to be done for Brexit. Critically, such public diplomacy peace polling will not only inform the British public and their elected representatives what they want but also those in Brussels and across the EU with whom the future arrangements have to be negotiated. To date the Brexit negotiations have been a resounding failure consuming and paralysing Parliamentary politics to the exclusion of other domestic and foreign policy issues that should have rightfully been addressed since the referendum of 2016. This paradigm needs to change with the future research serving the needs of the nation, not the government alone and not the narrow interests of *Leave* or *Remain* lobbyists.

Indicative Votes

On Monday March 25th amendment (a) moved by Sir Oliver Letwin in the House of Commons was passed by 329 votes in favour to 302 votes against and the main Motion (as thereby amended) was then passed with 327 votes in favour to 300 against. It provided for a procedure to allow ‘the House to debate and vote on alternative ways forward, with a view to the Government putting forward a plan for the House to debate and vote on...’ This was done to allow MPs to complete a series of ‘Indicative Votes’ on options chosen by the Speaker of the House that reflected the kinds of options for resolving Brexit tested here. However, the methods used here are designed to ‘square the circle’ between the wishes and opinions of Parliamentarians and the wishes and opinions of the people they represent. It has not been

used to provide Parliamentarians with a method of voting for various options although it would be most interesting to try it and see how it worked out. Accordingly, in the first instance, Parliament should use voting methods they are familiar with and trust.

To this end, Sir Oliver Letwin suggested in the debate leading up to the vote on his amendment that the first vote should be for Members' first choice only, to discover and reveal the political topography of the House on all the options available. This seemed to be most sensible but then, as several members pointed out and as the research reviewed here indicates, this might not bring the House to a resolution of the issues at hand and certainly would not identify the best possible compromise. With this point in mind the voting system used in the House of Commons to select Members of Select Committees was proposed but there was then some discussion as to how many options should be rank ordered to do this. Again experience from Northern Ireland might help here where those Members are familiar with the single transferable vote system (STV) that allows any number of candidate options to be rank ordered as illustrated in Table 1.

In the Northern Ireland Assembly Members there can also designate their political identity as Unionist, Nationalist or Other. Similarly Members of the House of Commons could designate themselves as *Leavers* or *Remainers* having voted Leave or Remain in the 2016 referendum. A conflict resolution analysis from this perspective, as well as political party analysis, would also be most revealing and as an academic exercise would have been tried if research funding for such an exercise had been made available in 2018. It would also be interesting to see how such a method, analysis and outcome would compare with Members noting the value of each option on the five point 'essential', 'desirable', 'acceptable', 'tolerable' and 'unacceptable' scale used in Northern Ireland and around the world. Even if this is not done to help resolve these issues in Parliament it still can be done for all the issues that remain unresolved and are yet to be negotiated and settled between the UK and EU as was done in Northern Ireland between Unionists, Nationalists and Others. Finally, it should be remembered, to take one more lesson from Northern Ireland, that the Belfast Agreement was tested in a referendum to give it political legitimacy. Likewise the Brexit peace process may still have some way to go.

In the first Indicative Vote held on Wednesday March 27th 16 motions were proposed and 8 selected by the Speaker of the House of Commons. These are listed in Table 12 along with the results for the three attempts by the Government to pass their Withdrawal Bill. The motions rejected by the Speaker tended to be duplicates of those selected, or 'aspirational' motions such as '(A) Constitutional and accountable government' which in public opinion terms would be characterised as 'motherhood and apple pie' and therefore meaningless, or items that could not be realised as they had already been rejected in negotiations. Parliamentarians were characterising these motions as 'unicorns'.

The two motions that came closest to passing were a 'customs union' having lost by only 8 votes, and a 'confirmatory public vote', which lost by 27 votes. Both of these motions failed by fewer votes than the Government's Withdrawal Bill, which, even on its third attempt lost by 58 votes. In Northern Ireland this outcome would have been seen as a clear victory for potential compromise and a way forward. But the UK public had not been properly prepared for Indicative Votes with a programme of public opinion research and public diplomacy so even *The Guardian* (2019), a liberal newspaper, reported this outcome as a failure with the

headline “Parliament finally has its say: No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No” and “Commons rejects all eight alternatives in indicative votes” when in fact it was a success to be built on from a conflict resolution perspective.

Table 12. Results for Indicative Votes made in the House of Commons on Wednesday March 27th 2019 and Governments Withdrawal Bill rank ordered by ‘Votes Lost’.

	Motion	Yes	No	Votes Lost	Date
1st	(J) Customs union	264	272	8	27 Mar 19
2nd	(M) Confirmatory public vote	268	295	27	27 Mar 19
3rd	PMs Withdrawal Bill 3	286	344	58	29 Mar 19
4th	(K) Labour’s alternative plan	237	307	70	27 Mar 19
5th	(L) Revocation to avoid no deal	184	293	89	27 Mar 19
6th	(D) Common market 2.0	188	283	95	27 Mar 19
7th	PMs Withdrawal Bill 2	242	391	149	24 Feb 19
8th	PMs Withdrawal Bill 1	202	432	230	15 Jan 19
9th	(B) No deal	160	400	240	27 Mar 19
10th	(O) Contingent preferential arrangements	139	422	283	27 Mar 19
11th	(H) EFTA and EEA	65	377	312	27 Mar 19
--	(A) Constitutional and accountable government	0	0	Not Selected	27 Mar 19
--	(C) Unilateral right of exit from backstop	0	0	Not Selected	27 Mar 19
--	(E) Respect the referendum result	0	0	Not Selected	27 Mar 19
--	(F) Participation in customs union	0	0	Not Selected	27 Mar 19
--	(G) Revocation instead of no deal	0	0	Not Selected	27 Mar 19
--	(I) Consent of devolved institutions	0	0	Not Selected	27 Mar 19
--	(N) Malthouse compromise plan A	0	0	Not Selected	27 Mar 19
--	(P) Contingent reciprocal arrangements	0	0	Not Selected	27 Mar 19

Table 13. Results for Indicative Votes to April 1st 2019 and Governments Withdrawal Bill rank ordered by ‘Votes Lost’.

	Motion	Yes	No	Votes Lost	Date
1st	(C) Customs Union	273	276	3	1 Apr 19
2nd	(J) Customs Union	264	272	8	27 Mar 19
3rd	(E) Confirmatory public vote	280	292	12	1 Apr 19
4th	(D) Common Market 2.0	261	282	21	1 Apr 19
5th	(M) Confirmatory public vote	268	295	27	27 Mar 19
6th	PMs Withdrawal Bill 3	286	344	58	29 Mar 19
7th	(K) Labour’s alternative plan	237	307	70	27 Mar 19
8th	(L) Revocation to avoid no deal	184	293	89	27 Mar 19
9th	(D) Common Market 2.0	188	283	95	27 Mar 19
10th	(G) Parliamentary Supremacy	191	292	101	1 Apr 19
11th	PMs Withdrawal Bill 2	242	391	149	24 Feb 19
12th	PMs Withdrawal Bill 1	202	432	230	15 Jan 19
13th	(B) No deal	160	400	240	27 Mar 19
14th	(O) Contingent preferential arrangements	139	422	283	27 Mar 19
15th	(H) EFTA and EEA	65	377	312	27 Mar 19

This supposed political ‘failure’ was further reinforced by Sir John Curtice (2019) in his review of public opinion polling on the Common Market 2.0 or Norway-style Brexit option published on March 29th. Critically he selectively cited data that supported his conclusion that “a Norway-style Brexit could find itself in much the same position as Mrs May’s deal

proved to be – with few friends who are willing to take it to heart” while ignoring research that came to the conclusion that it was potentially the most preferred Brexit outcome (Grant et al 2018). But the Government failed to support this compromise when it was brought to the House for a second time on April 1st. However with Labour Party support it now lost by only 21 votes while the Customs Union proposal narrowly lost by only 3 votes (Table 13). Accordingly the proposer of the Common Market 2.0 compromise, Nick Boles MP, resigned from his party and joined the opposition benches.

Conclusion

On April 2nd, following an eight hour cabinet meeting Prime Minister May announced that she would now seek to negotiate a compromise to her Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration, with the Opposition, in an effort to draft legislation that would pass in the House and facilitate the UK leaving the EU. But the polarised politics of the past two years had not prepared the British public for that compromise and the research and polling community had similarly failed in this regard. In this context the ‘Father of the House’ (its longest standing Member) Ken Clarke MP (2019) recommended that the country now needed a long extension so as not to rush the negotiations for new arrangements between the UK and EU and also to start to mend relations between *Leavers* and *Remainers* in both Parliament and the wider UK public.

When Theresa May lost her majority in the House of Commons in the General Election of 2017 she was advised by her Conservative Party Chief Whip, Julian Smith MP (2019) that she should seek a compromise on her Brexit deal if it was to pass in the House of Commons. But she did not, believing that by will of personality she could overcome the facts of Parliamentary arithmetic. Such misplaced self-confidence and hubris is characteristic of many political leaders that ‘soldier on’ against the realities of their circumstances, unwilling to compromise with opposition forces in numerous unresolved conflicts around the world. In the end all such politicians and their societies have to come to terms with the necessities of managed conflict resolution or remain destined to become frozen conflicts. Arguably the divisions over Europe in the British Conservative Party are a frozen conflict and until that fact is recognised and addressed history may continue to repeat itself with ethnic entrepreneurs in the body politic all too willing to play the populist, narrow nationalist, ‘identity card’ for short term electoral advantage.

On April 10th the European Union granted Britain an extension until October 31st 2019. But in the context of contested EU elections on May 23rd the prospect of using that extension to mend the divisions between *Leavers* and *Remainers* would be more than problematic. A longer extension was probably needed to undo the damage done over the past several years (Renwick, 2019). But even so the prospect of using Citizens Assemblies (Jayanetti, 2019) and peace polls to mend those divisions would be very challenging in the absence of a proactive approach to conflict resolution. In Northern Ireland the British and Irish Governments opposed the use of independent peace polling there, but the ten political parties elected to negotiate the Good Friday Agreement overruled the two governments in their negotiations business committee and went ahead with the peace polls against the two governments wishes. Similarly the Parliamentarians in Westminster should form an all-party business committee (Lucas, 2019) in the House of Commons to manage and implement a programme of Brexit reconciliation, and by taking ownership of it ensure its success in the

National interest. Finally the EU should complement these efforts with a programme of their own to deal with the negative effects of identity politics at the core of Brexit politics in the UK and elsewhere. Like Britain the EU had experimented with Citizens Assemblies (Butcher and Stratulat, 2018), but like the UK they had also prevented those researchers from running and publishing effective peace polls (EUSurvey, 2019)²². Objective independent polling and transparency is needed on both sides of the Channel.

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