

A BELFAST TELEGRAPH/QUEEN'S SURVEY STILL POLLS APART

In the final part of the Belfast Telegraph/Queen's Survey, Colin Irwin reports on the key constitutional issues and discovers strong public support for referendums to move the Stormont talks forward.

People longing for real talks to start

EVEN if there is a ceasefire and even if the problems of decommissioning can be resolved, could the leading parties ever find some basis for agreement on the political future of Northern Ireland?

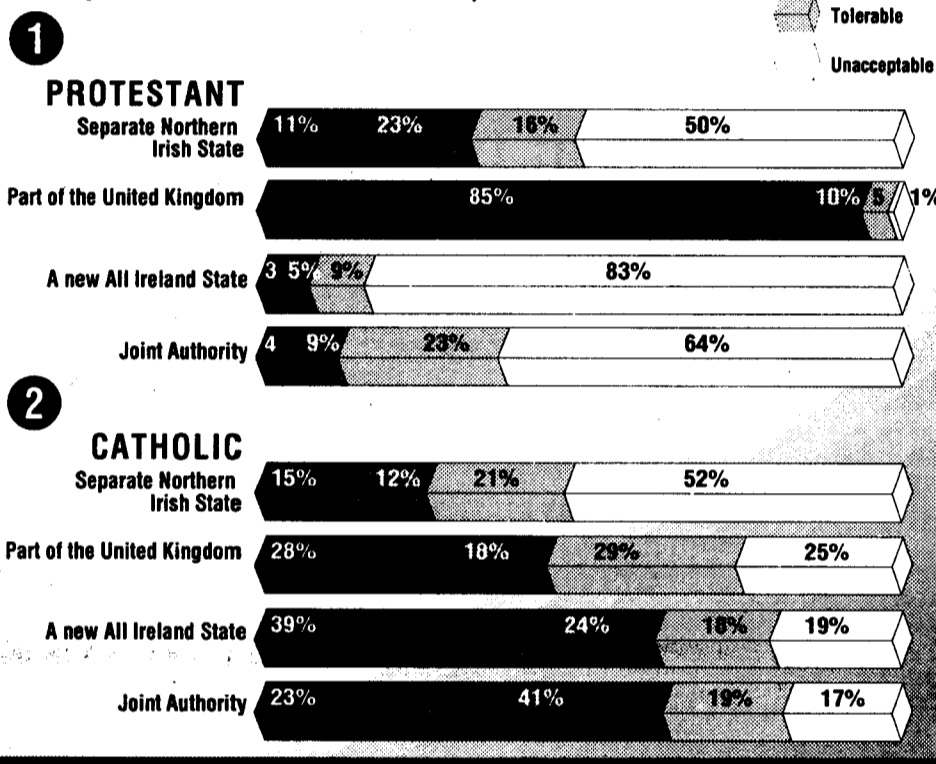
The results from the Belfast Telegraph/Queen's Survey suggest it is going to be very difficult to put certain parts of the constitutional puzzle together.

Protestants want to stay in the Union and have an end to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Catholics want North-South institutions and 'responsibility sharing'. Can these different views and aspirations be reconciled? No-one can say this strategy has worked. Perhaps it is time to try something new.



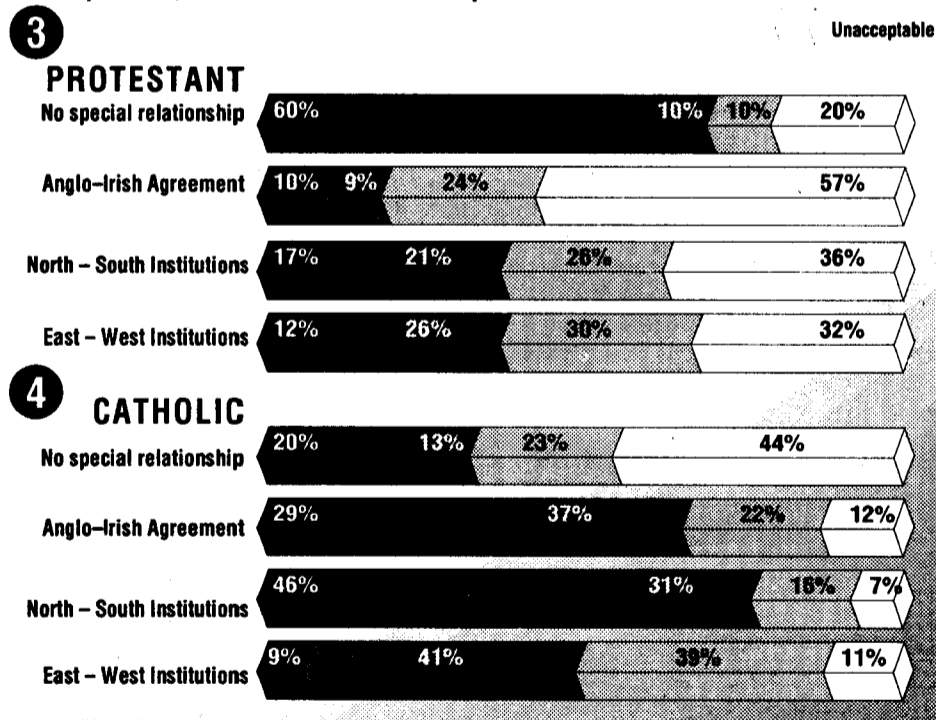
Protest rally 1986: Protestants remain opposed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

With regard to the status of Northern Ireland please indicate which of the following options you consider to be "Preferred", "Acceptable", "Tolerable" or "Unacceptable"



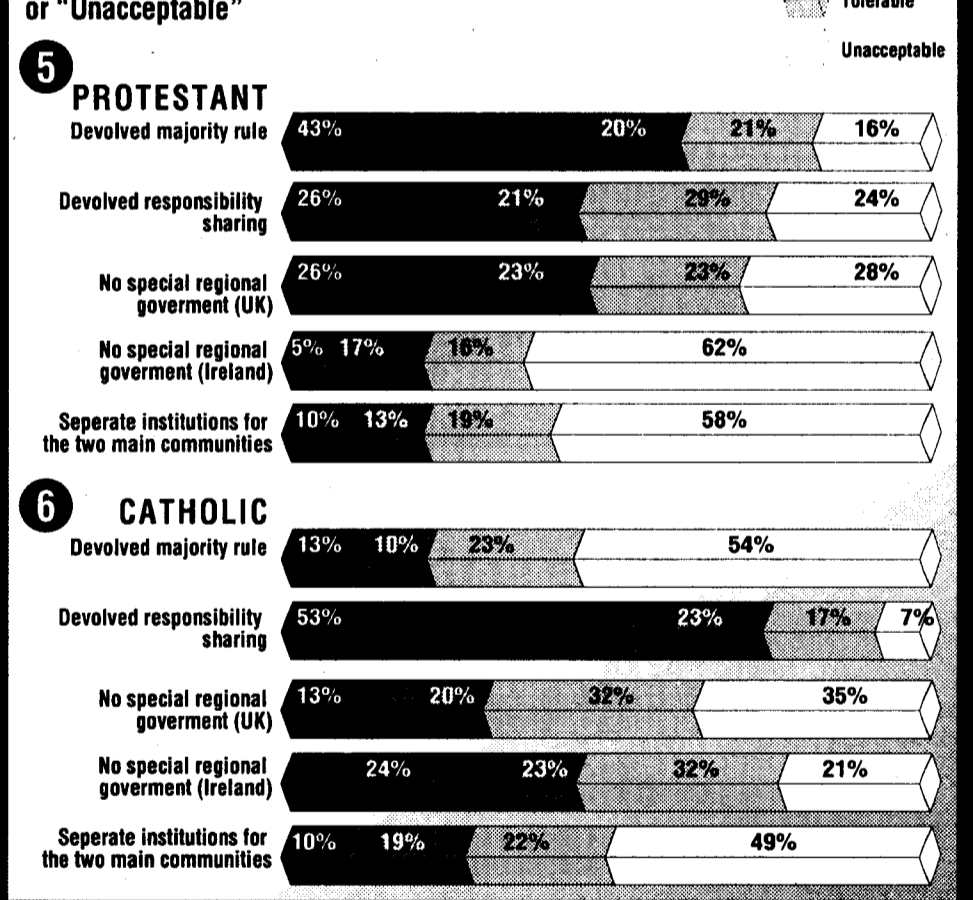
For the purposes of the poll these terms have the following specific meanings: Preferred - This may not be exactly what you want but this option, or something very similar to it, would be your first choice. Acceptable - This option is not what you would prefer if you were given a choice but you could certainly live with it. Tolerable - This option is not what you want. But, as part of a lasting peace settlement for Northern Ireland, you would be willing to put up with it. Unacceptable - This option is completely unacceptable under any circumstances. You would not accept it, even as part of a peace settlement.

With regard to the relationships between Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, please indicate which of the following options you consider to be "Preferred", "Acceptable", "Tolerable" or "Unacceptable"



With regard to regional government within Northern Ireland please indicate which of the following options you consider to be "Preferred", "Acceptable", "Tolerable" or "Unacceptable"

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Referendums could bypass politicians

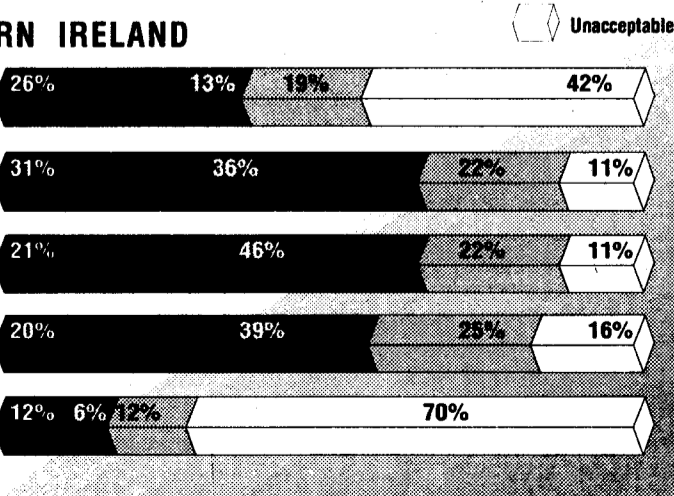
THE political vacuum created by the frustrations of little or no progress at the Stormont talks has very nearly plunged Northern Ireland back into the Troubles at their bloodiest and most violent. Intransigence and its companion dangers cannot be risked again. When all else fails do the people of Northern Ireland want to be consulted and given an opportunity to play their part in referendums?

or religious denomination. Everyone in Northern Ireland seems to be of a single mind. Only 12% of the population want to leave the future of Northern Ireland entirely in the hands of politicians. Seventy per cent find this option unacceptable. But 42% also find the option of replacing the talks by a referendum unacceptable.

Referendums to endorse, advise or advance the talks appear to be the most acceptable options. And of these the most popular overall is a referendum to advance the talks. This proposal is very clear and to the point - If the talks become stalled by serious difficulties a few key issues could be placed before the people in a referendum.

The politicians have now been fairly warned. If they can not decide the outstanding matters that prevent the establishment of real talks the people of Northern Ireland will be very pleased to do it for them. It should be remembered that 69% of the people surveyed for this poll were will-

Here are some options for the use of referendums in Northern Ireland. Please indicate which of the following options you consider to be "Preferred", "Acceptable", "Tolerable" or "Unacceptable"



A full 94% also want a negotiated settlement. Armed now with both the legal powers and public support to use a referendum, to resolve a few key issues, there is surely no reason why that most modest of aspirations, a lasting peace, should continue to be denied.

HOW THE POLL WAS CONDUCTED

This poll has been commissioned by the Belfast Telegraph in collaboration with the Institute of Irish Studies at The Queen's University of Belfast. The project has also been supported by a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. With the co-operation of members from the ten leading political parties in Northern Ireland the research was carried out by Dr Colin Irwin of the Institute with the additional assistance of Professor Tom Hadden of the Law School and Professor Fred Boal of the Geography Department. Market Research Northern Ireland (MRNI) conducted the fieldwork for the survey between March 12-26 and 932 face-to-face interviews were completed from 32 points across Northern Ireland to give a representative quota sample of the population. 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. The opinions expressed in the survey and the conclusions reached are not those of Queen's University.