

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY/ ROWNTREE TRUST SURVEY IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE BELFAST TELEGRAPH AND UTV - DAY ONE

YES vote for talks



Dr COLIN IRWIN, of Queen's University, analyses the findings of an in-depth opinion poll undertaken on the eve of Monday's crucial Stormont talks

SUMMARY

98% of Catholics want the political parties that represent them to stay in the Talks. The SDLP and Sinn Fein have decided to do so. 86% of Protestants want the political parties that represent them to stay in the Talks. The loyalists and unionist parties have

difficult decisions to make. Whatever their reservations, or however unfairly they may feel they are being treated, a significant majority of unionist voters seem to have decided that they still want their elected politicians to represent their interests at the

Stormont Talks. How the leaders of these parties can best feel they are able to do this is, of course, a matter for them. But one thing seems to be quite clear. Their electorate desire them to find a way.

QUESTION 1

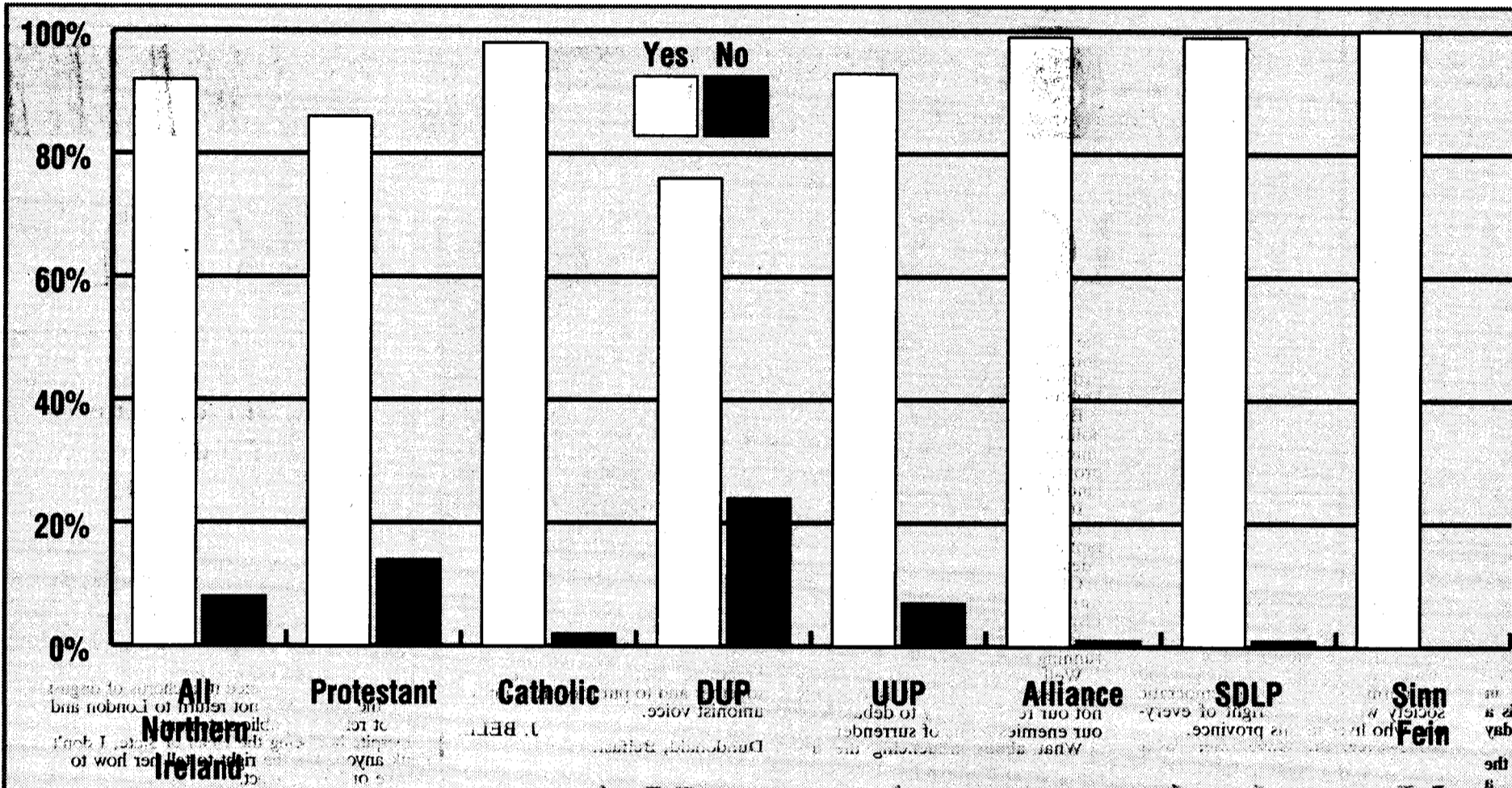
SHOULD YOUR PARTY STAY IN THE TALKS?

92% of the people of Northern Ireland want the party they support to stay in the Talks. But, as might be expected, Protestants are less enthusiastic than Catholics on this point. Between 99 and 100% of Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Fein supporters said 'Yes'. This almost unanimous vote of

confidence in their parties policy does not carry over into the unionist camp. Although 93% of Ulster Unionist supporters want their party to stay at the Talks only 76% of Democratic Unionists share this view.

Clearly unionists, and in particular the Rev Ian Paisley's electorate, harbour some reservations about the peace process that may not be shared by the other sections of Northern Ireland's society.

QUESTION - 'IN TODAY'S CIRCUMSTANCES DO YOU WANT THE POLITICAL PARTY YOU SUPPORT TO STAY IN THE TALKS?'



QUESTION 2

IS THE PEACE PROCESS BIASED?

Although each of the two main communities believe the other is being treated better than themselves, Protestants feel this apparent injustice more strongly than their Catholic counterparts.

58% of Protestants think republicans are favoured 'A lot' by the peace process. 9% of Catholics share this view.

On the other hand only 21% of Catholics think loyalists are being favoured 'A lot' while only 2% percent of Protestants would agree.

The statistics break down in a similar way for all the groups and political parties much as might be expected. Protestants clearly feel hard done by and a smaller but significant percentage of Catholics would seem to have some sympathy for their plight.

QUESTION - 'HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK THE HANDLING OF THE PEACE PROCESS BY THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT FAVOURS THE REPUBLICANS, NATIONALISTS, UNIONISTS, LOYALISTS AND POLITICAL PARTY YOU SUPPORT?'

The options were - 'A lot', 'A little', 'No strong views', 'Not very much' or 'Not at all'?

BY RELIGION	Protestant		Catholic	
	'A lot'	'A little'	'A lot'	'A little'
Republicans	58	21	9	2
Nationalists	53	21	8	2
Unionists	3	2	2	1
Loyalists	2	1	21	1
Party you support	1	1	6	1

BY PARTY	DUP		UUP		All		SDLP		SF	
	'A lot'	'A little'	'A lot'	'A little'	'A lot'	'A little'	'A lot'	'A little'	'A lot'	'A little'
Republicans	66	24	60	21	19	9	9	2	8	1
Nationalists	60	21	52	21	13	9	9	2	7	1
Unionists	1	1	7	1	7	1	48	1	48	1
Loyalists	1	1	4	1	4	13	45	1	45	1
Party you support	1	1	1	1	2	7	9	1	9	1

QUESTION 3

HOW IMPORTANT IS DECOMMISSIONING?

Similar questions were asked in the poll published in the Belfast Telegraph on May 7. Although the wording and results have changed a little the conclusions to be drawn remain the same.

A majority of Catholics, 52%, find prior decommissioning unacceptable while a majority of Protestants, 65%, find Talks without a cease-fire unacceptable. As before the only possible compromise seems to be some sort of parallel decommissioning.

The poll run earlier in the year also demonstrated clear public support for the problem of decommissioning to be handed over to a sub-committee so that the Talks could not be held up.

The need for the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, as proposed by the British and Irish governments, probably can not be overstated.

For many unionists the road to successful talks may well depend on their active participation in, and a successful working of, this key institution.

With regard to Talks, cease-fires and decommissioning, everyone polled was presented with four options and asked which ones they considered to be 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' as part of a lasting settlement or 'Unacceptable' under any circumstances.

(The same options apply to the remainder of the questions in the poll).

QUESTION - 'ALL THE PARTIES SHOULD BE PREPARED TO TALK TO EACH OTHER; EVEN IF THE CEASE-FIRES DO NOT HOLD; SO LONG AS THE CEASE-FIRES HOLD; SO LONG AS THE CEASE-FIRES HOLD AND THERE IS ALSO SOME DECOMMISSIONING; ONLY AFTER DECOMMISSIONING HAS BEEN COMPLETED.'

BY RELIGION	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Protestant				
Even if the cease-fires do not hold.	11	13	11	65
So long as the cease-fires hold.	25	30	29	16
So long as the cease-fires hold and there is also some decommissioning.	25	46	19	10
Only after decommissioning has been completed.	46	24	14	16
Catholic				
Even if the cease-fires do not hold.	45	26	17	12
So long as the cease-fires hold.	44	33	15	8
So long as the cease-fires hold and there is also some decommissioning.	27	40	16	17
Only after decommissioning has been completed.	16	16	16	52

QUESTION 4

IS THE IRISH CONSTITUTION AN OBSTACLE?

What other problems stand in the way of all party Talks? The Constitution of the Republic of Ireland makes a claim on the territory of Northern Ireland in Articles 2 and 3.

The Republic of Ireland have said they are willing to introduce and support appropriate changes to their constitution to address this issue as part of an agreement reached at the Stormont Talks. Some unionists would like this done before Talks start.

The vast majority of people in Northern Ireland want to 'Keep the Talks going', 77% considered this option 'Desirable' or 'Acceptable' while only 10% found it 'Unacceptable'. Even Protestants favoured this option over the alternative of delaying the Talks.

Two options were put on offer in the poll:

QUESTION - 'KEEP THE TALKS GOING - DO NOT DELAY THE TALKS, LET REFORM OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND'S CONSTITUTION BE DEALT WITH AT THE SAME TIME AS ALL THE OTHER ISSUES THAT MUST BE PART OF AN OVER ALL SETTLEMENT.'

DELAY THE TALKS - UNTIL THE REFORM OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND'S CONSTITUTION HAS BEEN DEALT WITH.'

ALL NI	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Keep the talks going	48	29	13	10
Delay the talks	11	14	20	55

BY RELIGION	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Protestant				
Keep the talks going	36	29	18	17
Delay the talks	18	19	19	44
Catholic				
Keep the talks going	63	28	6	3
Delay the talks	3	6	20	71

QUESTION 5

IS THE FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT ACCEPTABLE?

Even if the unionists do enter the talks some take the view that the Framework Document should not be used as a basis for a final settlement. The poll included three options on this issue.

By far the most popular is for all the parties to negotiate the Framework Document and try to reach an agreement on what they want to keep, change or add.

The second most popular option is to accept it. Even Protestants slightly favour this over outright rejection.

QUESTION - 'ACCEPT THE FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT - AS A BASIS FOR A FINAL SETTLEMENT ON THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRELAND'

NEGOTIATE THE FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT - ALL THE PARTIES SHOULD NEGOTIATE THE FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT AND TRY TO REACH AN AGREEMENT ON WHAT THEY WANT TO KEEP, CHANGE OR ADD.

REJECT THE FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT - AS A BASIS FOR A FINAL SETTLEMENT ON THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRELAND.'

ALL NI	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Accept the Framework Document	17	29	27	27
Negotiate the Document	31	31	25	13
Reject the Document	9	12	22	57

BY RELIGION	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Protestant				
Accept the Framework Document	14	21	25	40
Negotiate the Document	30	28	26	16
Reject the Document	14	17	21	48
Catholic				
Accept the Framework Document	20	39	29	12
Negotiate the Document	32	36	22	10
Reject the Document	4	6	21	69

QUESTION 6

IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE TALKS?

Some Unionists (and some political commentators) take the view that the Talks process has a destabilising influence on the Province. There may be some truth in this observation but how do the people of Northern Ireland regard alternatives to the Talks. Again two options were put on offer in the poll:

Only 12% of the people of Northern Ireland considered either of these options to be 'Desirable'. Most Catholics, about 65%, found the options 'Unacceptable' and a smaller but significant percentage of Protestants shared their views. These alternatives to the Talks just do not seem to command a great deal of support.

QUESTION - 'STOP ALL NEGOTIATIONS AND GOVERN - THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT SHOULD BRING AN END TO THE CURRENT TALKS PROCESS AND SIMPLY TRY TO GOVERN NORTHERN IRELAND.'

INTRODUCE DEVOLUTION - THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT SHOULD BRING AN END TO THE CURRENT TALKS PROCESS AND INTRODUCE DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT TO NORTHERN IRELAND SIMILAR TO THE PROPOSALS FOR SCOTLAND AND WALES.'

ALL NI	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Stop an end to negotiations and govern	12	23	17	55
Stop an end to negotiations and introduce devolution	12	15	18	55

THE POLL

This poll was undertaken with the support of a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust in association with the Belfast Telegraph and UTV. 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 of Irish Studies at The Queen's University of Belfast.

Market Research Northern Ireland (MRNI) conducted the fieldwork for the survey between Tuesday and Thursday last week. Nine hundred and ninety two 'face to face' interviews were completed from 48 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.

TOMORROW: THE THORNY ISSUE OF CONSENT