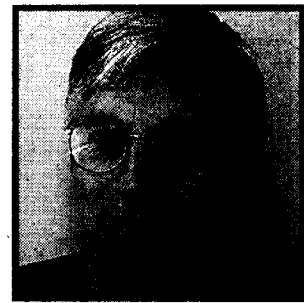


EXCLUSIVE : Today the Belfast Telegraph publishes the first of a two-part Queen's University/Rowntree Trust opinion poll on the crisis ridden peace process. Dr Colin Irwin reports on the findings of the research



Guns, trust and the Agreement

The State of the Peace Process

IN the referendum of May 22, 1998 the people of Ireland, North and South, agreed on how they should live together on the island of Ireland in partnership with the peoples of the British Isles.

Eighteen months later the implementation of that Agreement continues to move from one crisis to the next with no guarantee of success clearly in view. The people of Northern Ireland who voted for the

Agreement could not be blamed for losing all hope. Remarkably they have not done so.

On the contrary if the Agreement could be made to work many people who voted against it would be

persuaded to give it their support. But dashed hopes, false expectations, distrust and fear of failure have all combined to unsettle the implementation of the Belfast Agreement and very nearly destroy it.

AT the heart of the failure to get an Executive up and running is a very different set of expectations about decommissioning.

Although 90% of Ulster Unionists and 86% of Sinn Fein voters believe the Belfast Agreement requires 'All parties to cooperate with the Independent Commission

and use any influence they may have to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms by May 2000 in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement', it is right there that the similarity ends.

Eighty percent of Ulster Unionists also believe that there should be 'No

Executive' without an end to IRA violence and a start on decommissioning. However only 28% of Sinn Fein voters share this view.

But in a different question only 3% of Sinn Fein voters and 18% of Ulster Unionists said they believed decommissioning can be completed without Sinn Fein being in the

Executive.

So a clear majority of both Ulster Unionists and Sinn Fein supporters believe the formation of an inclusive Executive is a necessary part of the decommissioning process. Perhaps that, at least, is something that can be built upon in the search for a resolution of this problem.

Support for the Belfast Agreement

IN last year's referendum 71% of the people of Northern Ireland voted Yes for the Belfast Agreement. In the poll 74% said they voted Yes which is just inside the 'margin of error' for this kind of research. However, when asked how they would vote if the referendum was held today support dropped to 65% Yes. There was almost no change in the Catholic vote from 89% Yes down to 88% but the Protestant vote fell from 64% to 49%.

ranging from a current low of 31% for DUP supporters to a high of 56% for the UUP electorate.

But when people are asked 'Do you want the Belfast Agreement to work?' 83% said Yes, down from 93% when this same question was asked last March before the political failures of the Hillsborough and Way Forward proposals.

Catholic support is holding up rising from 97% to 98% while Protestant support has fallen from 89%

to 72%. DUP support is now split 50/50, it was 73%. But UUP support has only fallen from 94% to 87%.

Mr Trimble's voters still want the Agreement to work so most of the shift to No must be seen as a protest vote - a 'midterm' expression of frustration with the implementation of the Belfast Agreement.

When it comes to apportioning blame for the political failures of the summer 73% of the people of Northern Ireland thought the political parties were

not doing enough ranging from a high of 89% for Sinn Fein voters to 74% for the SDLP and Alliance, 73% DUP, 70% PUP and 64% DUP.

Similarly 56% of the people of Northern Ireland did not think the two Governments were doing enough ranging from a high of 69% for Sinn Fein and DUP voters down to 55% for the UUP, 54% PUP, 47% Alliance and 40% SDLP. Everyone, it would seem, should be trying harder.

False Expectations

SAID YES

Do you believe IRA decommissioning can be completed without...?

	UUP	Sinn Fein
An end to Loyalist violence	18%	15%
Full implementation of all of the other parts of the Belfast Agreement	45%	28%

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

	ALL OF NI	Protestant population	Catholic population	DUP	UUP	PUP	ALLIANCE	SDLP	SINN FEIN
Yes	74%	64%	89%	32%	82%	85%	90%	96%	89%
No	26%	36%	11%	68%	18%	15%	10%	4%	11%
And if the Referendum was held today, how would you vote?									
Yes	65%	49%	88%	31%	56%	56%	79%	95%	90%
No	35%	51%	12%	69%	44%	44%	21%	5%	10%
Do you want the Belfast Agreement to work? - October 1999									
Yes	83%	72%	98%	50%	87%	91%	98%	98%	97%
No	17%	28%	2%	50%	13%	9%	2%	2%	3%

Dashed Hopes

ALTHOUGH 83% of the people of Northern Ireland still want the Agreement to work it is important to remember that the Agreement makes many compromises and contains elements that have been included for one community or the other in the hope that the overall package might eventually lead to peace.

In today's poll people were asked how important they thought each part of the Agreement was and how satisfied they were with its implementation.

As with polls published in the Belfast Telegraph on January 10, 1998 and March 3, 1999 decommissioning is still the number one priority

for Protestants - it is the 12th priority for Catholics. But reform of the RUC has slipped to number two for Catholics topped now by 'Commitments to non-violence, peace and democracy'. Significantly this element of the Agreement comes in at number two for Protestants.

The clear conclusion to be drawn from this result is that if the persistent focus on the issue of decommissioning were shifted to give more emphasis to the 'Mitchell Principles of Democracy and Non-violence' then perhaps a consensus might more easily be attainable where there is presently only disagreement.

'Support for victims of the Troubles' is the third priority for both Catholics and Protestants followed by the new Human Rights Commission, the Assembly and Executive for Catholics and the Principle of Consent and present status of Northern Ireland as part of the UK for Protestants.

Levels of satisfaction with the implementation of the Agreement are not good. Both Protestants and Catholics are most disappointed with the lack of progress on decommissioning at 88% and 63% respectively.

Catholics are then least satisfied with the reform of the RUC with 61% saying they are 'Not satisfied' or

'Not satisfied at all'. For obviously very different reasons Protestants are even more dissatisfied with progress on RUC reform with 69% saying they are 'Not satisfied' or 'Not satisfied at all'.

Clearly the implementation of the Belfast Agreement is going to be subject to many difficulties and disappointments over the coming years until such time as the parties can learn to better appreciate and understand the priorities and concerns of the 'other' community. The new Secretary of State, Peter Mandelson, does not have an easy task ahead of him.

A Lack of Trust

IT might be convenient to think that places like Northern Ireland can be governed without trust. But some trust, just a little, is probably a necessary part of doing business and running a government.

In the poll 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'.

Ninety nine percent of Sinn Fein supporters said they

trust their party but only 10% of them trust the Ulster Unionist Party 'a lot' or 'a little'. Conversely 72% of Ulster Unionists trust their party but only 5% of them trust Sinn Fein 'a lot' or 'a little'.

This amount of trust just

may not be quite enough. This is something that probably has to be worked on. The peace process needs time - what Americans call 'quality time' - as demonstrated by the progress made in the Ambassador's residence this past week.

The Fear of Failure

THE Executive is an essential part of the workings of all the new institutions of government created under the terms of the Belfast Agreement. From a range of possibilities every one interviewed was asked what they thought would happen if the Executive is not established or if Sinn Fein are excluded from it.

Specifically what options did they consider to be 'Very probable', 'Probable', 'Not sure' about, 'Improbable' or 'Very improbable'.

The results tell a depressing story. More than 70% of the people of Northern Ireland, across both communities and the different political parties,

believe the economy will suffer, community relations will deteriorate and more young people will leave the province.

Similarly the dangers of increased paramilitary activity remain central to people's fears. But the picture is a little more complex here.

While 85% of Protestants believe republican paramilitaries will become more active only 43% of Catholics share this view and while 73% of Protestants believe loyalist paramilitaries will become more active, 67% of Catholics would agree.

Catholics, particularly Sinn Fein supporters, seem to have more confidence in the IRA

ceasefire. Only 27% of them think it will be broken. But that is still 27% too much.

When these questions were asked last March Ulster Unionists were not nearly so concerned about these affairs. At that time only 23% of them thought Unionists would not work the Agreement and collapse the peace process. Now 59% of them take this view.

Similarly 78% of UUP voters now think republicans will bring the peace process forward, up from 49% in March. And, 84% of Ulster Unionist supporters believe the IRA will return to war, up from 66% in March.

As for Sinn Fein voters 88%

of them would now blame Unionists for the failure of the peace process - up from 83% in March. But only 19% of Sinn Fein supporters would blame republicans for such a failure, down from 44% in March.

The Sinn Fein electorate, it would seem, believe their party did the best that they could this past summer to move the peace process forward. Their concerns about dissident republican paramilitaries returning to violence are also down from 72% in March to 40% now.

But, of course, another Omagh bomb could change all that in literally seconds.

Very probable or probable

	ALL NI	PROTESTANT	CATHOLIC	UUP	SINN FEIN
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because Unionists will not work the Agreement in good faith.	62%	55%	73%	59%	88%
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because Republicans will not work the Agreement in good faith.					
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because SDLP and UUP will not work the Agreement in good faith.	44%	52%	33%	56%	27%
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because of the lack of cooperation and determined commitment by the two governments.					
Dissident Republican paramilitary groups will become more active	72%	85%	43%	85%	40%
The IRA and other Republican groups will break their cease-fires and return to war.					
Dissident Loyalist paramilitary groups will become more active.	70%	73%	67%	79%	76%
The UVF, UFF and other Loyalist groups will break their cease-fires and return to war.					
The Northern Ireland economy will suffer and unemployment will rise.	71%	82%	72%	75%	76%
More young people will leave Northern Ireland.					
Divisions in Northern Ireland society will deepen and community relations will continue to deteriorate.	72%	73%	73%	77%	75%

About the Poll

THIS research was undertaken by Dr Colin Irwin of the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University of Belfast in collaboration with representatives of the 'Yes Parties'.

The project was independently funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The public opinion survey work was conducted by Market Research Northern Ireland between October 8

and October 15 to produce 1,000 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 geo-

graphical area. In all respects the poll was undertaken within the guidelines set out by the Market Research Society (UK) and in accordance with its code of conduct.

TOMORROW: The poll's findings on possible solutions

Very important	Not satisfied
60%	88%
54%	74%
49%	74%
45%	53%
44%	43%
38%	66%

*Not satisfied or Not satisfied at all

Very important	Not satisfied
50%	52%
45%	61%
43%	48%
42%	45%
41%	49%
40%	57%

*Not satisfied or Not satisfied at all