



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Mr. Gallagher
Secretary
Barristers
Box

Belfast Telegraph/BBC Newsnight opinion poll.

1. The Belfast Telegraph this week published an opinion poll which it had commissioned in conjunction with BBC Newsnight. The poll, involving 1000 respondents, was conducted at 40 sampling points throughout Northern Ireland on 25 and 26 January; this note summarises and analyses the main findings, the full text of which is attached herewith.
2. Consideration of any opinion poll in Northern Ireland has to take account of the special circumstances obtaining there and the impact which these circumstances have on how people respond to such polls. For obvious reasons, people are wary about answering questions from a third party about their political affiliations and views without the confidentiality of the ballot box. The outcome is that opinion polls in Northern Ireland tend to reflect moderate, middle-of-the-road positions, with a reversal to more entrenched ground in subsequent elections (for instance Sinn Féin, as they have on this occasion, tend to do very badly in opinion polls but considerably better in elections proper). Overall, this appears to be the pattern of this poll also.

Main findings

3. The main findings of the poll are
 - The Northern Ireland Conservatives (with 11% support) continue to make inroads on the support of the two main Unionist parties and are now only 2% behind the DUP;
 - The decline in Sinn Féin's vote continues;
 - Regarding the future, no one option commands overwhelming support in either community as the most acceptable way forward, but full integration (at 28%) leads the way;
 - The picture on devolution is somewhat confused; while only 21% of the total population (and 25% of Catholics) see devolution with power-sharing as the most acceptable option, some 71% (75% of Protestants and 64% of Catholics) see it as an "acceptable" option, ie one they could live with;

- Among Catholics only 44% opt for a united Ireland as the ideal option, while 50% of Catholics favour a continuance of the Union in some form;
- Support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement among Catholics remains at the same level as last year, although down on the 1985 level. While only 41% actively support it, only 11% of Catholics strongly oppose the Agreement;
- Unionists are deeply divided on how to proceed with their protest campaign against the Agreement, with the UUP diverging strongly from the DUP line on the boycotting of Ministers and talks with other parties;
- Some 49% of all Unionists (60% of UUP supporters) believe that the UUP and DUP should enter talks with the other parties even while the Agreement remains in place.

Support for the parties

4. Table 1 outlines support levels for the parties at present. Among the Unionist parties, the Conservatives received a significant further boost. With 11% of the vote, they are now only 2% behind the DUP (13%). The latter's decline vis-a-vis the UUP continues. The UUP at 26% are now at twice the strength of the DUP, but even their vote is down 5% on the 31% they achieved at the local elections in 1989. The Conservatives would appear to be taking votes from both parties and clearly must be regarded by both (and perhaps particularly the UUP) as a now quite serious threat. The Conservatives however, received only 3% support from Catholics and whatever about threatening the mould of Unionist politics are clearly making no inroads into the nationalist community.
5. Among the nationalist parties, SDLP support at 19% is down 2% on its level at the local elections last year. Sinn Féin fare particularly badly, with support at 5% - down 6% on its local elections level. Among Catholics, Sinn Féin's support

is at 13%; at their peak during the early eighties they approached 40% of the Catholic vote. According to the poll, SDLP supporters now outnumber those of Sinn Féin by almost 4:1. While the caveat referred to in paragraph 2 is undoubtedly a factor, the poll findings will come as a further blow to Sinn Féin, in the aftermath of the Derry incident last Sunday and as they face what will probably be a difficult Ard Fheis this weekend.

Future of Northern Ireland

6. Tables 2 and 4 deal with options for the future of Northern Ireland. Table 2 relates to the option people find most acceptable. At 28%, full integration with the UK emerges as the most favoured option. This is followed by "Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK but with own power-sharing Government" (21%) and "Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK but with own majority Government" (21%).
7. Among Catholics, only 44% opt for a united Ireland, with 50% of Catholics opting for a continuance of the Union in some form. It is difficult to reconcile the Catholic figures in favour of the Union with the figures for Catholics supporting Unionist parties. (According to the poll only 5% of Catholics in all support the UUP, DUP and Conservatives, with a further 8% supporting Alliance). Clearly, there was some confusion in the minds of respondents as to precisely what the various options entailed.
8. Among Protestants, the most favoured option was integration (38%), with a Stormont-type arrangement attracting 31% and power-sharing 19%. The latter two options are, of course, devolutionary and to that extent "devolutionists" hold a 12% lead (50% to 38%) over the integrationists. However, such sizeable support for integration will no doubt be seen by the Conservatives as further encouragement to their efforts.

9. One of the poll questions (Table 4) dealt with options for the future of Northern Ireland which people found "acceptable" (that is, which they could "live with" as distinct from their ideal option). A power-sharing administration within the UK was deemed acceptable by 71% of the respondents, followed by integration at 70%.
10. This Table threw up some rather odd findings in regard to Catholic attitudes. Seven options were listed from full integration, through Stormont-type administration, to united Ireland, to independence; according to the Table a substantial number of Catholics found them all acceptable! No option received less than 29% support. Full integration was regarded as acceptable by 44% of Catholics. Most extraordinary of all, a return to a Stormont-type regime ("Northern Ireland to remain part of UK but with its own majority Government") was considered acceptable by 35% of Catholics. Again, question marks have to be raised about confusingly worded options (eg did such an option include an "Irish dimension" etc). It has to be said also that the credibility of this Table as a whole must be called into some question by a response which suggests that 35% of Catholics would be happy with a return to Stormont.
11. Responses to this question also revealed some interesting attitudes on the Protestant side. While it is no surprise that 88% should find integration acceptable and 81% a return to a Stormont-type situation, eyebrows will be raised at the suggestion that as many as 10% of Protestants would regard an independent, federal Ireland as acceptable. There will also be some surprise at the high level of "acceptance" (22%) among Protestants of a continuation of direct rule with the Anglo-Irish Agreement in place.

Devolution

12. Extracting the findings on devolution from the foregoing, the picture which emerges is a rather confused one. Devolution with power-sharing attracts only 21% support as the ideal option (19% of Protestants and 25% of Catholics). Devolution with majority rule also attracts 21% support as the ideal option (31% of Protestants and 8% of Catholics). On the other hand, in terms of options which people find "acceptable" 71% (75% of Protestants and 64% of Catholics) indicated support in that context for devolution with power-sharing, while 63% (81% of Protestants and 35% of Catholics) say that they could live with devolution of the Stormont variety. In summary therefore, while there appears to be substantial acceptance of devolution in both communities, support for it as the ideal option is relatively low among both Catholics and Protestants.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

13. Tables 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 deal with attitudes to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. In summary, support for the Agreement remains roughly at its level of a year ago. A total of 47% (27% of Protestants and 80% of Catholics) either support or do not oppose the Agreement. Among the Catholic community, the figures are less favourable to the Agreement when broken down between strong support, "tend to support" and "neither support nor oppose". Only 9% of Catholics strongly support the Agreement, 32% "tend to support it" and 39% neither support nor oppose it.
14. As against that, it should be pointed out that active support for the Agreement among Catholics has never been particularly strongly reflected in opinion polls. For instance, in December 1985, in the immediate aftermath of the signing of the Agreement, with its attendant high media profile, only 22% of Catholics strongly supported the Agreement. On the other hand, in all elections since the

signing of the Agreement, the SDLP, largely on a pro-Agreement platform, have substantially increased their vote, tripling their Westminster representation and increasing their number of local Council seats by over 20%. Clearly, therefore some caution is required in interpreting poll findings on support for the Agreement.

15. In addition, it has to be borne in mind that Catholic support for the Agreement tends to be reflected in negative form - one of the points frequently made by contacts is that while Catholics may not be particularly enamoured of the Agreement in an active sense, in no way did they wish it to be abolished either. In a sense, this attitude is reflected in Table 8, which shows that while, as mentioned, only 9% of Catholics strongly support the Agreement, only 11% strongly oppose it.
16. Table 7 deals with Unionist views on protests against the Agreement. A majority of those Unionists polled (56%) believe that the boycott of Ministers should be ended. There is a significant divergence between the UUP and the DUP on the matter, with 67% of UUP supporters feeling that the boycott should be ended compared to 36% of DUP supporters.
17. A similar disparity is evident in the responses to a question on talks with other parties while the Agreement remains in place; 60% of UUP respondents felt that talks with the other parties should be commenced as against 28% of DUP supporters. This will provide considerable food for thought for the UUP leadership in the light of their continued insistence that the pre-condition of suspension of the Agreement must be met before talks begin. Some 60% of their supporters, according to the poll, disagree with them.

18. The findings of Table 7 reflect the continuing and deepening tensions between the UUP and DUP and have obvious implications for the future of the anti-Agreement Pact between the two parties. They also compound the difficulties facing Mr. Molyneaux, as he seeks to find a path between satisfying the increasingly impatient demands of his own party to commence dialogue on the one hand and at the same time retaining some semblance of cohesion with Ian Paisley whose hard line appears to have strong support within the DUP.

Conclusion

19. While the Colin Wallace affair quickly overtook the poll as the week's main story - and as a result reaction from the parties has so far been somewhat muted - it is clear that the poll will be studied with considerable interest in the various party Headquarters. The scope for "interpretation" is rather wide and the sense is of no clear pictures emerging. What the poll does make clear is that there is no overwhelming support in either community for any one way forward and it further underlines the difficulties attaching to the negotiation of a settlement that will enjoy broad support across both communities. The fragmentation within the Unionist community appears particularly deep-seated.

loc

T. O' Connor

2 February, 1990.

BELFAST TELEGRAPH —BBC NEWSNIGHT POLL



How the results were obtained

The survey, commissioned by the Belfast Telegraph and the BBC television programme Newsnight, was carried out by Ulster Marketing Surveys Ltd.

A total of 1,000 respondents, aged 18 and over, were interviewed on Thursday and Friday of last week at 40 sampling points throughout Northern Ireland.

Those interviewed were selected by quota procedures to be fully representative of the total electorate in terms of sex, age, area and social class.

The results will be discussed on the Newsnight programme on BBC-2 tonight at 9.30.

(C) ULSTER MARKETING SURVEYS LTD.

QUESTION: Which of the following parties would you vote for in an election?

TABLE 1

	Basis 1000 %	Protestant 500 %	Catholic 500 %
Alliance	9	8	9
Conservative	11	16	3
DUP	13	21	1
Ulster Unionists	26	43	1
Sinn Féin	6	0	13
SDLP	19	1	48
Workers Party	4	1	7
Other	1	1	2
Wouldn't vote	6	5	7
Undecided	6	4	10

QUESTION: Which of the following political options for the future of Northern Ireland would you find MOST acceptable?

TABLE 2

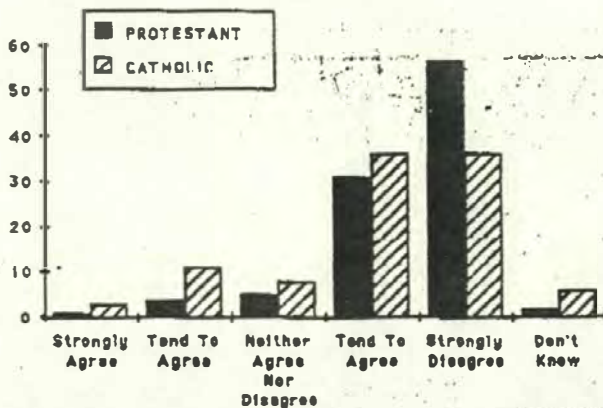
	Total %	Protestant %	Catholic %
Fully integrated with rest of UK	28	38	10
N.I. to remain part of UK with own power sharing government between Nationalists and Unionist parties	21	18	25
N.I. to remain part of UK, but with own majority government	21	31	8
N.I. to become part of Republic of Ireland	11	1	28
N.I. to be part of Federal Irish State but with its own Assembly	8	1	18
Continuance of Direct Rule through a Secretary of State and with the Anglo-Irish Agreement	4	2	7
N.I. to be an Independent State	2	2	2
Don't know	5	6	4

QUESTION: Do you Agree or Disagree with this statement — "The Anglo-Irish Agreement has improved relations between Protestant and Catholic in Northern Ireland"

TABLE 3

	Total %	Protestant %	Catholic %
Strongly agree	2	1	3
Tend to agree	7	4	11
Neither agree/disagree	6	5	8
Tend to disagree	33	31	36
Strongly disagree	48	56	38
Don't know	4	2	6

IMPROVED RELATIONS



Question: Which of the following political options would you find acceptable for the future of Northern Ireland?

TABLE 4

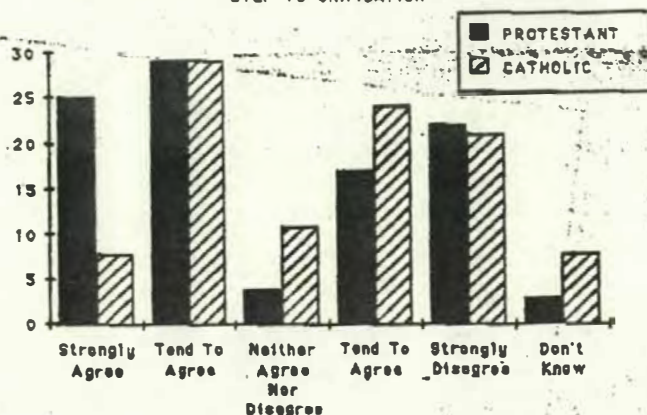
	Total %	Protestant %	Catholic %
Full integration with rest of UK.....	70	88	44
N.I. to be independent state	25	23	29
Continuance of direct rule through Secretary of State and with Anglo-Irish Agreement	34	22	53
N.I. to be part of Federal Irish State with its own Assembly	31	10	60
N.I. to be part of Republic of Ireland	26	3	60
N.I. to remain part of UK, but with its own power-sharing government between Nationalist and Unionist parties	71	75	64
N.I. to remain part of UK but with its own majority government.....	63	81	35

QUESTION: Do you Agree or Disagree with this statement — "The Anglo-Irish Agreement is a step on the road towards the unification of Ireland?"

TABLE 5

	Total %	Protestant %	Catholic %
Strongly agree	18	25	9
Tend to agree	29	29	29
Neither agree/disagree	7	4	11
Tend to disagree	20	17	24
Strongly disagree.....	21	22	21
Don't know.....	5	3	8

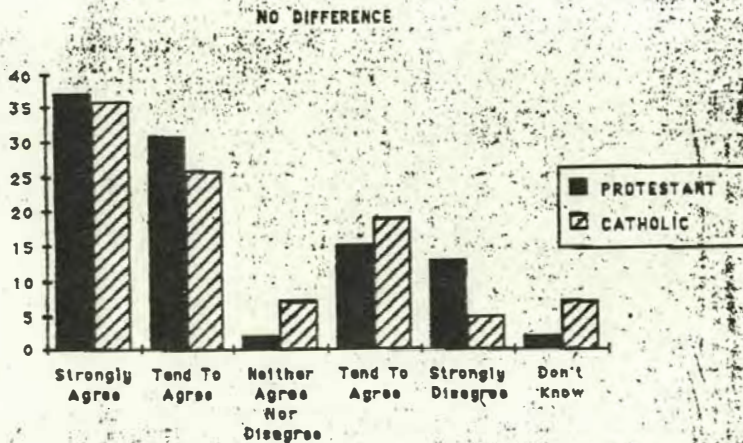
STEP TO UNIFICATION



QUESTION: Do you Agree or Disagree with this statement— "The Anglo-Irish Agreement has not made any difference to the political situation in Northern Ireland?"

TABLE 6

	Total %	Protestant %	Catholic %
Strongly agree	36	37	36
Tend to agree	29	31	26
Neither agree/disagree	4	2	7
Tend to disagree	17	15	19
Strongly disagree.....	10	12	5
Don't know.....	4	2	7



UNIONIST VIEWS ON PROTESTS AGAINST ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

Boycotting of Westminster ministers assigned to N.I.

Refusing to enter talks with other political parties

	Base Total 383 %	DUP 128 %	Ulster Unionist 255 %		Base Total 383 %	DUP 128 %	Ulster Unionist 255 %
Should continue.....	31	48	22	Should continue.....	41	58	32
Should stop.....	56	26	67	Should stop.....	49	28	60
Don't know.....	13	16	11	Don't know.....	10	14	8

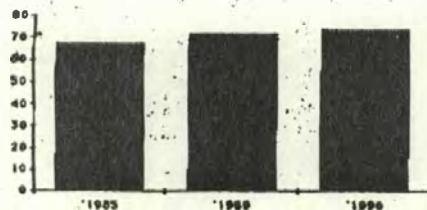
TABLE 7

TRENDS IN SUPPORT FOR AND OPPOSITION TO ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT.

	Total			Catholic			Protestant		
	Dec 1985 %	Feb 1989 %	Jan 1990 %	Dec 1985 %	Feb 1989 %	Jan 1990 %	Dec 1985 %	Feb 1989 %	Jan 1990 %
Strongly support.....	10	9	4	22	17	9	2	3	1
Tend to support.....	23	12	17	38	24	32	12	5	7
Neither support or oppose.....	22	26	26	29	37	39	17	20	19
Tend to oppose.....	14	18	20	6	14	10	19	20	26
Strongly oppose.....	31	35	33	5	8	11	49	52	48

TABLE 8

Protestant opposition to Agreement



Catholic support for Agreement.

