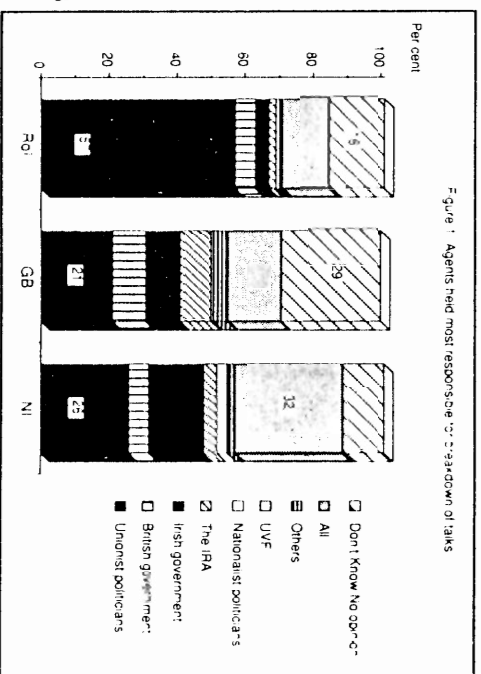


Then talk Some more

A little-noticed poll (it was published on July 12th) after the Brooke talks ended showed support throughout these islands for their renewal—and scepticism about their chances of success. BRENDAN

O'LEARY analyses this three-way survey, which shows a widening gulf between majority opinion in Northern Ireland and that in Britain and the republic.

Figure 1 Agents held most responsible for breakdown of talks



TRIPARTITE POLL on 'The Future of Northern Ireland', conducted in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as the Brooke initiative collapsed in July, produced a fascinating snapshot of opinion. It suggested widespread support throughout these islands for reopening talks on a grand constitutional settlement, for changing articles two and three of the republic's constitution, and introducing bills of rights.

The poll also showed that public opinion in Britain and the republic strongly favours a major role for the republic's government in the future of Northern Ireland, but that opinion within the north itself remains sharply polarised over the region's British and Irish dimensions. Opinion in Britain and the republic, however, is not dissimilar to that of SDLP supporters—which puts the SDLP leadership in a happy position.

In all three jurisdictions there is overwhelming backing for the renewal of talks between the constitutional parties: the poll found that this was endorsed by 87 per cent of respondents in the republic, 79 per cent in Britain and 73 per cent in Northern Ireland. In both parts of Ireland the majority (72 per cent in the south, 61 per cent in the north) think it 'very important' that talks should resume in the near future. But in all three jurisdictions this attitude is tempered by intelligent pessimism: 66 per cent in Britain, 60 per cent in Northern Ireland, and 54 per cent in the republic rate the chances of success for future talks at 'less than 50:50'.

In the republic, unionist politicians are perceived as having been most responsible for the breakdown of talks, with a clear majority (57 per cent) holding this view (Figure 1). In Britain nearly a third of the sample (29 per cent) did not know who to blame, but twice as many (21 per cent) blamed unionist politicians as blamed either the British or Irish governments (each held culpable by 10 per cent). In Northern Ireland nearly a third (32 per cent) spread the blame equally across all parties, but unionist politicians were held responsible more than any other agent: 26 per cent blamed them, compared with 16 per cent who pointed the finger at the republic's government.

In all three jurisdictions, including Northern Ireland, nationalist politicians (ie John Hume and the SDLP) almost escaped any cen-

sure. A mere 7 per cent of DUP voters and just 6 per cent of DUP voters held nationalist politicians or Mr Hume most responsible for the breakdown on July 3rd. Unionist voters were far more inclined to blame the republic's government or all parties combined.

Respondents were asked their personal first- and second-preference solutions for Northern Ireland. They were permitted seven options: full integration into the UK; an independent Northern Ireland; a power-sharing devolved government within the UK; full integration into the republic; unification; a devolved government jointly guaranteed by and responsible to the British and Irish governments (a minimum); and re-partition, with a smaller Northern Ireland integrated into the UK.

The first-preference responses (Figure 2) show that unification is the most favoured first preference in the republic (41 per cent) and Great Britain (21 per cent), whereas integration of Northern Ireland into the UK is the most favoured first-preference in the north (39 per cent). If British and Irish policy-makers were to count equally, the first preferences of people across the three jurisdictions, then a united and independent Ireland would be the most favoured option in these islands, although this option does not command majority first-

preference support in any of the three!

In Britain, first-preference support for an independent Northern Ireland (20 per cent) comes just behind support for a united Ireland, suggesting widespread enthusiasm to be rid of the north but indifference as to means or consequences. A mere 1.3 per cent in Britain favour the most preferred unionist option of full integration into the UK. The second most favoured option in the republic is a condominium, whereas in Northern Ireland the second most favoured option is a power-sharing devolved government within the UK (19 per cent).

Despite conflicting preferences across the jurisdictions, there is some agreement. Thus there is little first-preference support for re-partition—or indeed for the *status quo* (direct rule tempered by the Anglo-Irish Agreement).

Figure 3 displays the combined tally of those who named any of the seven options as either their first or second preference. In Great Britain, integration of Northern Ireland into the republic and an independent Northern Ireland are given first- or second preference support by the same proportion of respondents (33 per cent). A condominium is the next most favoured option (26 per cent), outranking both full integration into the UK and a devolved government with power-sharing (21 per cent). In Britain, then, the three most favoured options entail public willingness to accept British sovereignty over Northern Ireland being terminated or shared equally with the republic.

In the republic, again combining first and second preferences, unification wins most support (55 per cent), followed by high support for a condominium (44 per cent) and an independent Northern Ireland (35 per cent). Again, in the republic, the three most favoured options entail a desire either to end British sovereignty over the north or for the two governments to share authority on an equal basis.

This convergence of opinion in Britain and the republic is also evident across political affiliations (Table 1). In Britain Labour supporters are marginally more likely to support unification, but Conservative supporters are as eager as Labour's to relinquish sovereignty, either through an independent Northern Ireland or unification. Indeed, Conservative supporters are less in favour of integrating Northern Ireland into the UK than Liberal Democrat

Table 1. First-preference solution by voting intention (%)

| (a) Great Britain (Source: Gallup, No=955) | | | | |
|--|------|-----|---------|-------|
| Solution | Cons | Lab | Lib Dem | Other |
| Integration | 15 | 11 | 17 | 4 |
| Independence | 20 | 17 | 26 | 22 |
| Power-sharing | 7 | 8 | 12 | 5 |
| Status quo | 9 | 4 | 7 | 7 |
| Unification | 20 | 24 | 14 | 38 |
| Condominium | 11 | 11 | 11 | 1 |
| Repartition | 5 | 6 | 3 | 6 |
| DK/No opinion | 13 | 19 | 10 | 16 |

| (b) Republic of Ireland (Source: IMS, No=1057) | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|-----|----|----|-------|
| Solution | FF | FG | Lab | PD | WP | Green |
| Integration | 7 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| Independence | 13 | 20 | 12 | 21 | 19 | 24 |
| Power-sharing | 8 | 11 | 8 | 12 | 5 | 8 |
| Status quo | 6 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 12 | 8 |
| Unification | 46 | 36 | 37 | 34 | 44 | 32 |
| Condominium | 17 | 18 | 26 | 22 | 7 | 21 |
| Repartition | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 3 |
| DK/No opinion | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Figure 2 First Preference Solutions - NI, ROI, and GB

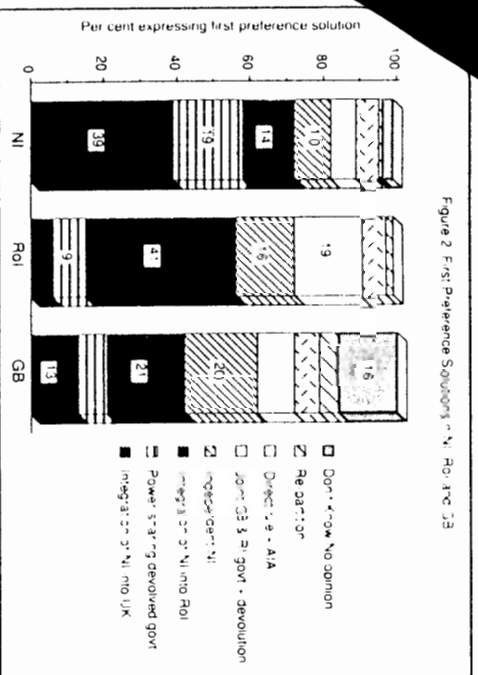
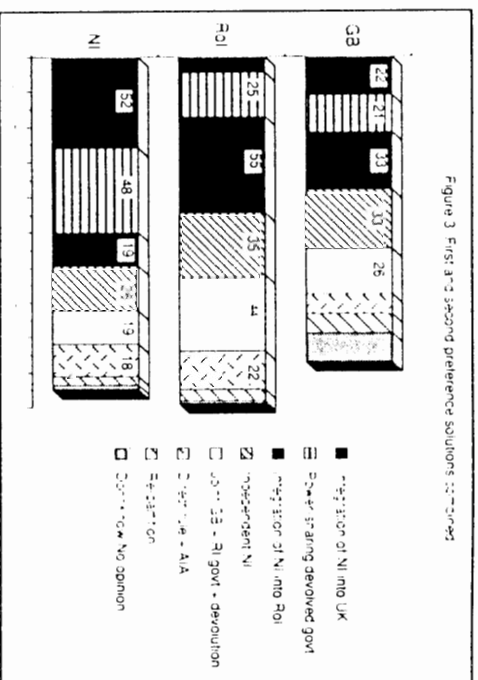


Figure 3 First and Second Preference Solutions - NI, ROI, and GB



supporters (Table 1a). In the republic, Fianna Fáil supporters are more nationalist than those of the other parties. But the latter are equally keen on removing British sovereignty over the north or reducing it (see Table 1b).

Since creating a condominium is much less of a departure from the *status quo* than a united Ireland or an independent Northern Ireland, it is a more likely option for future British and Irish governments. Unionist politicians should prepare to consider the evidence from these polls before any new bout of intransigence during negotiations. The polls suggest that the British and Irish governments would face no obstacles from their electorates if they decided to negotiate a new agreement which established a condominium or a system of joint authority.

Within Northern Ireland, when first and second preferences are combined, integration into the UK remains the most favoured option (52 per cent), just beating power-sharing devolution (48 per cent), but well ahead of an independent Northern Ireland (26 per cent) and unification (19 per cent). Predictably, religious denomination is an excellent guide to people's first preferences (see Table 2).

Again combining preferences, 79 per cent of Protestants favour integration into the UK,

Table 2. First-preference solution by religious denomination (%)

(Source: UMS, No=802)

| Solution | Prot | Cath | Other | Refused |
|---------------|------|------|-------|---------|
| Integration | 61 | 8 | 19 | 50 |
| Power-sharing | 17 | 23 | 24 | 0 |
| Unification | 2 | 33 | 14 | 0 |
| Independence | 8 | 12 | 10 | 50 |
| Condominium | 2 | 14 | 19 | 0 |
| Status quo | 4 | 9 | 10 | 0 |
| Repartition | 2 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| DK/No opinion | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

50 per cent favour power-sharing devolution, 26 per cent an independent Northern Ireland, 13 per cent the *status quo*, 7 per cent a condominium, 6 per cent repartition and a minuscule 3 per cent unification. Amongst Catholics, the combined preferences indicate that 43 per cent favour power-sharing devolution, 42 per cent unification, 35 per cent a condominium, 26 per cent an independent Northern Ireland, 25 per cent the *status quo*, 14 per cent full integration into the UK and 4 per cent repartition.

The support registered for a devolved power-sharing government amongst Protestants and Catholics—and amongst 'others' and those who wouldn't say—is only mildly heartening

for the Northern Ireland secretary, Peter Brooke. With the first-preference support of only 19 per cent of the electorate—albeit 48 per cent support when preferences are combined—there is little prospect of any power-sharing government being voluntarily negotiated. Even if it came into existence it would require very strong support by the British government (and the republic's government) to keep it stable.

This impression is confirmed when the data are broken down by voting intention (see Table 3). DUP, ULP and SF supporters are mostly hardline supporters of their preferred form of integration (with Britain or the republic). And the second-preference options (Table 4) show that ULP and DUP supporters remain hostile to any involvement of the republic's government in the north, whereas SF voters remain hostile

Table 3. First-preference solution by voting intention (%)

(Source: UMS, No=802)

| Solution | UUP | DUP | Ind U | Con | All | WP | SDLP | SF |
|---------------|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----|----|------|----|
| Integration | 66 | 73 | 49 | 34 | 20 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Power-sharing | 19 | 11 | 13 | 15 | 39 | 20 | 24 | 2 |
| Unification | 1 | 2 | 13 | 12 | 7 | 0 | 28 | 68 |
| Independence | 8 | 8 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 40 | 14 | 11 |
| Condominium | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 10 | 18 | 11 |
| Status quo | 3 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 5 |
| Repartition | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| DK/No opinion | 1 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 |

to any involvement of the British government. There is a much greater spread of opinion, though, amongst other parties' supporters.

Taking first and second preferences together, ULP supporters (55 per cent) are more willing than DUP supporters (26 per cent) to countenance power-sharing devolution. Perhaps surprisingly, at this level it is difficult to distinguish Alliance supporters from Northern Ireland Conservatives—though the latter are more likely to support integration or repartition—

which suggests the Conservatives may pose an electoral threat to Alliance as well as the ULP.

Amongst SDLP supporters, meanwhile, combined first and second preferences suggest that the options of a united Ireland (44 per cent, condominium (43 per cent) and power-sharing devolution (41 per cent) are equally attractive.

At this level SF supporters strongly prefer a united Ireland (75 per cent)—but not as much as ULP and DUP voters prefer full integration into the UK. A high proportion of SF voters, however, would accept a solution with an Irish dimension: 31 per cent favour a condominium as first or second preference.

Bear in mind that in Northern Ireland opinion polls respondents underestimate their extremism. DUP and SF supporters are less willing to declare themselves and their interests and nationalists underplay their support for fully British or fully Irish solutions. Also, in this poll unionists were not offered the option of supporting majority-rule devolution within the UK but

Table 4. Second-preference solution by voting intention (%)

| Solution | UUP | DUP | Ind U | Con | All | WP | SDLP | SF |
|---------------|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----|----|------|----|
| Integration | 19 | 16 | 13 | 17 | 15 | 10 | 3 | 0 |
| Power-sharing | 36 | 25 | 13 | 46 | 28 | 20 | 22 | 18 |
| Unification | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 10 | 11 | 7 |
| Independence | 19 | 25 | 25 | 7 | 10 | 20 | 10 | 32 |
| Condominium | 3 | 5 | 25 | 7 | 18 | 20 | 25 | 20 |
| Status quo | 8 | 6 | 13 | 12 | 13 | 10 | 22 | 5 |
| Repartition | 5 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| DK/No opinion | 9 | 17 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 6 | 9 |

without the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Moreover, when respondents were asked which option they felt would gain the widest support amongst the population of Northern Ireland as a whole, the spread of answers within Northern Ireland was remarkably similar to people's personal first preferences: 35 per cent thought full integration of Northern Ireland into the UK would be most widely accepted, followed by 26 per cent who believed that to be true of power-sharing devolution.

The poll thus provides little comfort for policy-makers trying to promote fundamental internal compromises.

To be concluded next issue

Acknowledgments. The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (JRR) commissioned polls to be carried out on 'The Future of Northern Ireland' in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The surveys were carried out between July 2nd and July 8th by the affiliates of the Gallup International Research Institute (Gallup UK, Irish Market Surveys (IMS), and Ulster Marketing Surveys (UMS)). The base of the Gallup poll was 875, and the UMS poll was 802, and that of the IMS poll was 187 people. All the polls are subject to a margin of error of plus or minus 3 per cent. Dr O'Leary and *Faithright* express their thanks to Prof Trevor Smith, JRR's chair for making the data-set available.

¹ The proposition that integrating Northern Ireland into the republic is the most favoured solution in the British Isles holds true whether we weight the preferences in the three jurisdictions or not, and where we use what political scientists call the Borda or Condorcet methods of counting preferences.

² However, the question was an 'open' one. Which solution do you feel would gain the widest support amongst the population of Northern Ireland as a whole? may be legitimately interpreted as questioning whether you would enjoy highest numerical support or which option would attract most cross-community or cross-denominational support.