Northern Irish Voters and the British–Irish Agreement: Foundations of a Stable Consociational Settlement?

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NORTHERN Irish politics is characterised by two distinct and polarised Nationalist and Unionist ethno-national blocs, and marked clearly by religious origin or affiliation. There is also a third, signi- ficantly smaller, 'other' quasi-bloc, that is more heterogeneous in nature, and lacks the ethno-national solidity of the two primary blocs. As is well known, the two primary blocs, their political representatives, and those who term themselves their military or paramilitary representatives, have remained at war, or at least at loggerheads, for many years. The British–Irish (or Good Friday) Agree- ment of April 1998 has been widely, and correctly, hailed as a major political breakthrough with reasonable prospects of transcending previous failed attempts to resolve an apparently intractable con- stitutional, party political and military stalemate.

The Assembly established by the Agreement is based upon a consocia- tional model of political regulation. A central plank of consociation is the belief that a legitimate government and govern- ability cannot be obtained in divided territories without the endorsement of (most of) each of the main communities within the relevant region.[1] Simple over- all majority support is not sufficient for stable and legitimate government in such regions; indeed consociational arrange- ments, in principle, are designed to work against the logic of simple major- itarianism in the electorate, the legislat- ure, the executive, the judiciary and the

bureaucracy. Consociational institutions therefore need to adopt procedures that rely on, create and sometimes formalise cross-community consensus. In short, to be workable, consociational institutions appear to require concurrent majorities.

The British–Irish (or Good Friday) Agreement was put to a referendum in both parts of Ireland. There were concur- rent majorities across the two territories, with a 95 per cent endorsement in the Republic of Ireland, and a 71 per cent endorsement in Northern Ireland. But were there concurrent majorities within Northern Ireland? Most local voters, most parties, and a majority of Catholic and Protestants endorsed the Agreement, but a substantial number of Unionists re- jected it—a bare majority of Unionists if we exclude supporters of the Alliance Party from the Unionist bloc. This anti- Agreement segment of the Unionist bloc presents a continued threat to the viabil- ity of the Assembly, and indeed to the overall Agreement: it can constantly challenge whether the Agreement, and its implementation, has the support of a majority of Unionists, as indicated most recently in the June 1999 European Par- liamentary elections.

The Agreement institutionalises two types of 'key' decision-making within the new Assembly.[2] One is an explicit operationalisation of the logic of concur- rent majoritarianism. All Assembly mem- bers must register as Nationalist, Unionist or 'other'. Under the 'parallel consent' procedure a key decision must

pass with the support of a majority of Assembly members, including a majority of registered Nationalists and registered Unionists. The second is a 'weighted majority' procedure. In this case a key decision requires the support of 60 per cent of Assembly members, including 40 per cent of registered Nationalists and 40 per cent of registered Unionists. So a stable Assembly appears to need a solid foundation in Nationalist and Unionist concurrent majorities. Formally, however, to be viable the Assembly needs concurrent majorities only for one key decision: only the election of the dual premiers, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, requires the use of the parallel consent procedure; in principle, all other key decisions may be made according to the weighted majority procedure.

The Assembly elections of June 1998 returned 108 members: 42 Nationalists (the SDLP winning 24 seats and Sinn Fein 18) willing to support the Agreement; 8 'others' (6 in the Alliance party and 2 in the Women's Coalition) willing to support the Agreement; and 58 Unionists. These 58 Unionists were narrowly divided: 30 were members of two parties that had endorsed the Agreement—the Ulster Unionist Party (28) and the Progressive Unionist Party (2); 28 were either members of parties who had argued for a 'No' vote in the referendum—namely the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP: 20) and the United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP: 5)—or independent or dissident Ulster Unionists (3). In short, the formal legislative arithmetic returned a narrow concurrent legislative majority of 30 'Yes' Unionists to 28 'No' Unionists, compared with a solid Nationalist concurrent majority. (Had all the 'others' registered as Unionists the formal size of the 'Yes' Unionist camp would have been bigger, but they preferred to retain their separate identity.) Such a narrow majority of 'Yes Unionists' immediately suggested that the Unionist bloc might be less capable

of working with the Agreement than the Nationalists. That said, the weighted majority rule procedure suggested a safeguard because, if necessary, most key decisions could be made with the support of 60 per cent of the Assembly and of 40 per cent of Unionists. The sole exception is the previously mentioned election of the dual premiers; but this decision, the first major action of the shadow Assembly, occurred with the requisite concurrent majorities supporting David Trimble and Seamus Mallon.

The evidence of our survey suggests strongly that the principal reason that the 'No' Unionist segment was unable to prevent a workable Assembly emerging from the 1998 elections was because of the adoption, or re-adoption, of the single transferable vote (STV) procedure for electing the Assembly.[3] The operation of STV prevented the narrow 'No' first-preference majority within the Unionist bloc of voters from being converted into a narrow 'No' majority among the Unionist legislative bloc; indeed, STV created a 'Yes' legislative majority among Unionists.

The use of STV in the Assembly elections is an important test of the system's capacity to mitigate entrenched ethnonational political cleavages, because it creates the possibility of cross-communal voting transfers; because it establishes other positive incentives; and because in 1998 it was being used after an inter-elite agreement reached through protracted negotiations. Our evidence strongly suggests that voters' lower-order preferences kept the Assembly on track by reducing the numbers of seats that the anti-Agreement Unionist parties won in the election.

Having been provisionally established, the Assembly is now confronted by many problematic issues—notoriously, the full formation of its executive is yet to be achieved, and numerous mutual confidence-building measures remain to be completed, few of which lie within the Assembly's present legal remit or de facto

power: for example, the release of prisoners, support for victims of the conflict, the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, police reform and demilitarisation. The full implementation of an array of external confederal relationships, especially the North–South Ministerial Council and the British–Irish Council, await the full formation of the Northern executive; as does the transformation of Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's constitution, which cannot be entrenched until the formal agreement of a British–Irish treaty confirming the full implementation of the constitutional and institutional settlement.

To address these confidence-building measures effectively, and given the need to ensure, on balance, the support of concurring majorities for the peace process and the new political settlement, the Assembly and its related institutions will continue to require endorsement from the two primary blocs and the active support of the 'other' quasi-bloc. In short, Northern Irish public opinion will continue to have clear implications for the viability of the new Assembly and its interdependent North–South Ministerial Council. We are not suggesting that public opinion will be decisive. Other bodies and organisations may well prove pivotal: the interested sovereign governments—British and Irish; the recalcitrant paramilitaries who might reject the emergent cross-communal consensus; and the activities of the local political parties that are clearly more than *merely* the instruments of bloc public opinion. Public opinion is just one factor affecting the prospective institutionalisation of the Agreement—external pressure and elite-level manoeuvring need to be considered in a fuller account that we do not articulate here. However, neither external pressures nor elite game-playing are immune to public opinion. And as for the small minorities who can so readily resort to political violence, we here assume a provisional

hypothesis: in the long run political violence in polyarchic systems cannot thrive unless it has some significant basis of support in at least one ethno-national bloc. Sustained political violence needs a social infrastructure—so public opinion remains a key factor even here.

In the rest of this article we examine the patterns of voting preferences in the referendum and the Assembly elections, and responses to questions on the wider experiences and attitudes of the Northern Irish electorate using information taken from the 1998 Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Survey (see Appendix for details).[4] We also use information from a survey conducted recently by Ulster Marketing Services (UMS), an organisation with which we worked previously in a study of the elections to the 1996 Forum, to assess the state of public response to the Assembly and the Agreement and the issues they have confronted some nine months after the June 1998 elections.

We first present some features of the social and political context which has seen the development of the consociational initiative: our aim here is to indicate why, from the perspective of public opinion, such an initiative was needed, and why it was the most viable route to a political settlement. Second, we examine the referendum vote, paying particular attention to the sources of the opposition 'No', and the reasons for the necessary but slim majority of 'Yes' votes among Protestants. We then move to consider the Assembly vote and how the STV procedure worked to ensure the Assembly had a workable proportion of pro-agreement Unionist members. Our focus then switches to the viability of the proposals embedded in the Agreement. Is there a cross-communal public mandate for the consociational, and other, policies in which the Assembly and others are engaged? Finally, we address whether the Assembly and the Agreement are still receiving support; are the difficult issues

they currently confront undermining their popular legitimacy?

The social and political context

Let us first examine some survey evidence on the social context in which the negotiation of the Agreement and its partial implementation have occurred.[5] The need for consociational dimensions to a solution to Northern Ireland's problems derives from 30 years of what has been termed 'low intensity civil war'. The critical questions may be formulated as follows: To what degree has the conflict left its imprint on the population? And to what degree do the primary blocs present us with irreconcilable differences?

Several indicators of the Northern Irish electorate's experience and attitudes at the start of the 'new era' are included in the Referendum/Election study. Table 1 presents the measures of self-reported 'experience of the troubles', to use the local euphemism. Clearly, many people can point to the direct effect of the troubles on their own lives.[6] In our survey, consistent with other data, Catholics report suffering more from the troubles—in experiencing violence and intimidation and most especially with respect to house searches—than do Protestants.[7] This differential experience may help account for the greater disposition of Catholics to be constitutionally and institutionally flexible that our data also suggest.

The events and experiences of the conflict cannot, of course, be expected to have softened communal relations between cultural Protestants and cultural Catholics. Table 2 shows what sorts of mixing are endorsed by the two communities. These data provide some evidence of a Protestant fear of assimilation. Protestants are far less integrationist in their attitudes to intermarriage than are Catholics—although there is less of a difference between the cultural communities on the desirability of living in a mixed neighbourhood, and no significant difference with respect to school choice. On balance, though, it appears that the Protestant community believes more strongly than the Catholic that it is important to patrol its social boundaries.[8] But even among Catholics the evidence of desire for integration or assimilation is by no means universal.

This resistance to either assimilation or integration itself points to the appropriateness of consociational strategies of conflict resolution in this region. Integration or assimilation work best where minorities wish to be integrated into common citizenship and are happy to be assimilated (acculturated or fused) into the dominant culture, and where the relevant minority is an immigrant minority. Integration or assimilation also work best when the dominant majority is open to integration and assimilation. These conditions have not existed and

Table 1: *During the troubles, were you ever. . .*

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
In explosion	25	26	24
In hijacking	8	11	7
In a riot	23	28	20
House searched	13	20	10
Relative killed/injured	20	22	20
Known killed/injured	55	58	55
Victim of violence	14	16	12
Intimidated	18	23	13
(N =)	(950)	(334)	(523)

Table 2: Communal divisions

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Would you mind or not mind if one of your close relatives were to marry someone of a different religion?			
Wouldn't mind	70	85	57
If you had a choice, would you prefer to live in a neighbourhood of only your own religion, or in a mixed-religion neighbourhood?			
Mixed religion	65	67	62
And if you were deciding where to send your children to school, would you prefer a school with children of only your own religion, or a mixed religion school?			
Co-education	49	49	47

do not exist in Northern Ireland. Consociation, by contrast, works best where communities wish to maintain their differences without having strong integrationist or assimilationist ambitions towards the respective others; where there is an existing (or emerging) balance of power between communities; where no community can successfully control or conquer the others through war; and where external parties to the region promote accommodation rather than antagonism.[9] Arguably these conditions are emerging in Northern Ireland.

A further condition pointing towards the need for a settlement that is linked to external, and not just internal, relations has been the strong resistance towards the adoption of more far-reaching constitutional change among the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland—its insistence on the Union; and the strong preference among Catholics and Nationalists for (at least) some linkages to the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland appears to require a consociational settlement that preserves the Union, so long as there is majority consent for the Union, while linking Northern Ireland to the Republic. During the intense phases of the conflict there have been several attempts to assess the viability of different constitutional settlements. Elsewhere we have developed a more complex instrument for assessing the public's views that was

used to assess constitutional preferences in surveys in 1994 and 1996.[10] These studies indicated that even when Protestant respondents were offered a wide range of options from which to choose, their preferred outcome was, overwhelmingly, continuation of the status quo. The question used to measure preferences with respect to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland in the 1998 survey includes only a limited set of explicitly offered choices, but it does have the benefit of long-term replication in other surveys. Table 3 shows that Protestants remain uncompromising on the constitution.

This is an old story; but, importantly, there is no change in this message even in the post-Agreement climate. Catholics, by contrast, vary, and are less sure of their constitutional preferences. There is a minority who support the Union; others are Nationalists; but there is no overall majority of opinion. Protestants are also a little more likely to explicitly declare themselves as 'Unionists' (75 per cent) than are Catholics to call themselves 'Nationalists' (66 per cent). The message from these and other data is clear: Protestants are implacable on the Union, not surprisingly because it is the status quo. This affirmation has not weakened even in the face of a much greater level of peace, the making of the Agreement, the emergence of the Assembly, and the

Table 3: What should the long-term policy for Northern Ireland be?

	1989	1991	1993	1994	1995	1998
Protestant (%)						
Remain part of the UK	93	93	89	89	86	87
Reunify with Ireland	3	3	9	9	6	7
Independent state	1	1	1	1	1	1
Majority choice	–	–	–	–	–	1
Other/Don't know		3	25	4	5	2/5
Catholic (%)						
Remain part of the UK	32	36	36	24	34	22
Reunify with Ireland	56	53	49	60	56	47
Independent state	0	0	0	1	1	3
Majority choice	–	–	–	–	–	5
Other/Don't know	11	10	15	14	8	5/19

development of a long-term *rapprochement* between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. (This does not mean, of course, that Unionists are a uniform bloc: we know from past work, including our own, that they are divided about how best to maintain the Union. Nor does it mean that Nationalists are intrinsically more satiable and malleable: we know from past work, including our own, that Nationalists' preferences are partly conditional upon their expectations.)

These patterns of preferences nevertheless clearly constrain the parties that represent the different segments of the electorate. There is a greater basis among the Catholic community for compromise on the part of their elected representatives, not least because any improvements in the position of Catholics and Nationalists can be seen as improvements on the status quo; Protestants, by contrast, are more likely to punish compromise from their representatives that appears to threaten the Union. Evidence supporting this interpretation is shown in Figure 1 and Table 4.

Figure 1 shows where the electorate perceive themselves to stand in relation to their political representatives on the issue of the maintenance of the Union with the rest of the United Kingdom compared with reunification with the Republic.

This combined information on the placement of both self and party on the key constitutional dimension of Northern Irish politics provides a remarkably sharp picture of extreme Protestants and moderate Catholics. First, there is a well-defined and shared view of party positions on the union–unification dimension among all sections of the electorate. With respect to self-placement on this constructed scale, Catholics are far more centrist (as are self-declared Nationalists—to declare oneself a Nationalist does not necessarily imply a commitment to unification with the Republic of Ireland, either immediately or later). Indeed, Catholics, on average, are slightly more centrist than the SDLP is thought to be by Catholics—as are SDLP supporters themselves. By comparison, Protestants are extreme on the Union, and very close to where their parties are seen to lie. The preferred position of Protestants is therefore not one that would encourage their party representatives to engage in moderation of their position on the Union. This fact of political life in Northern Ireland is further indicated by the rather limited endorsement of compromise given to their political leaders by the Protestant electorate when compared
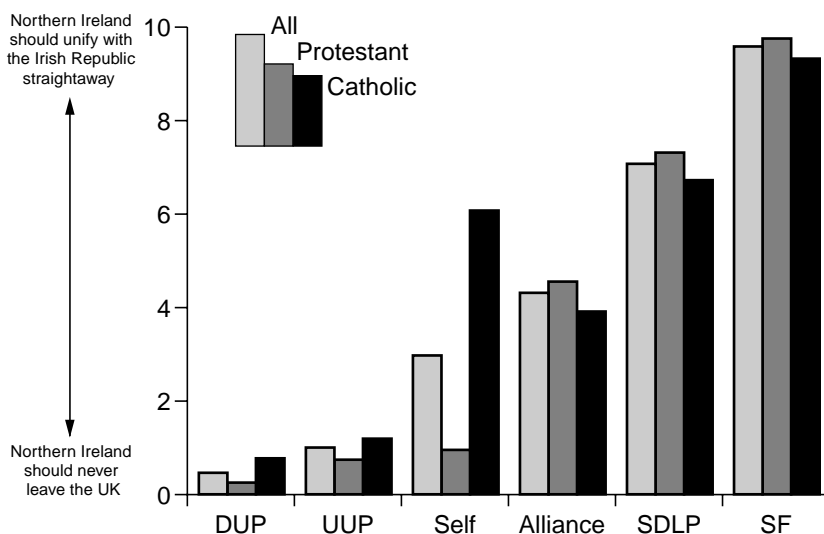
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Figure 1: Self and party placement on the national question: extreme Protestants and moderate Catholics

with that extended by Catholics, as shown in Table 4. On the question of principle or compromise, Protestant inflexibility is apparent: less than half would endorse compromise by their party representatives, compared with more than two-thirds of Catholics.

This, then, is the context within which the politicians had to construct an agreement. Promising, in so far as the publics were ready for peace, but unpromising in so far as Protestant intransigence on the Union placed limits on their politicians. In 1996, as the inter-party negotiations began, Catholics and Nationalists were significantly more likely to support the proposed negotiations than Protestants and Unionists.[11] We asked then: 'Why should moves for discussion be rejected in disproportionate numbers by Unionists?' We responded: 'The natural answer is that for some Unionists negotiations represent a path to compromise, and thus to unwanted concessions.' The same survey data showed significant evidence of differences between Protestants and Catholics on the substantive issues at stake in the negotiations—and across several issues the likely absence of concurrent majorities.

But an agreement was made, and then endorsed in a referendum. We believe

Table 4: Principle or compromise: Protestant inflexibility?

Do you think that generally speaking, the leaders of the party to which you gave your first preference vote should stick to their principles, or should they be willing to compromise?

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Stick to principles	40	28	50
Willing to compromise	55	69	44
Don't know	4	3	6

that what made the settlement viable on the Unionist side was the prospect of Nationalists, north and south, endorsing the legitimacy of Northern Ireland, and the Union—albeit subject to revision by a future majority; and what made it viable on the Nationalist side was the internal consociational deal, the linkage of the Agreement's institutions to the Republic, and the emerging prospect that Unionism could no longer be a dominant bloc within devolved institutions. In reviewing the pre-negotiation preferences of Northern Irish public opinion in 1996, we concluded that 'we do not think it is beyond the wit of politicians or policy-makers to bundle the issues considered separately here in such a way that the entirety of the relevant package might meet with majority non-rejection across both communities. But, for that to happen, party leaders . . . must have confidence that it will be worth their careers to sign up to such a package.'[12] We believe that these conditions were met during 1996–8. The process of negotiation helped shift some parties and their publics in the direction of historic compromises, and that suggests that politicians did manage to bundle issues together in creative ways. Let us turn to the referendum to see if this reasoning is justified.

The referendum

The hard-line views of most Protestants and Unionists in 1996 did not provide promising material on which to construct a consociational deal, in which they would be required not only to share power with Nationalists in Northern Ireland but to work within confederal relationships with the Republic of Ireland. The achievement of a cross-communal majority in the referendum was necessary for the establishment of the Assembly. What explains this—as we now know it to be—successful outcome?

First, a word of caution is necessary: as we might expect, Protestants were less supportive than were Catholics of the British–Irish (Good Friday) Agreement. In Table 5a we can see that, among Protestants, support was more likely to be partial than complete. Yet again, a substantial proportion of those who opposed the Agreement were also mixed in their views. Table 5b shows that even those Protestants who voted 'Yes' in the referendum were far more likely to have considered a different (i.e. No) vote (30 per cent compared with only 7 per cent of Catholics). Moreover, this Protestant scepticism was not based in ignorance: more Protestants read the Agreement than did Catholics, presumably reflecting, among other things, their greater concern about its implications for the Union. Table 6 shows the proportions of Protestants and Catholics who report reading the Agreement.

Despite their extra homework, Protestants on balance were a little less informed than Catholics, and Unionists were less informed than Nationalists; and 'No' voters were less informed than 'Yes' voters. Table 7 presents the results of a quiz about the contents of the Agreement

Table 5a: Endorsement of the Agreement

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Support all	15	33	4
Support but dislike some	53	58	49
Can't support but like some	18	3	28
Oppose all Agreement	8	0	13
Don't know	6	6	5

Table 5b: *Did you think seriously about voting differently?*

	'Yes' voters (%)		'No' voters (%)	
	Catholic	Protestant	Catholic	Protestant
Did not	90	39	–	32
Did	7	17	–	10

Table 6: Who has read the Agreement?

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
All in detail	20	17	23
Parts in detail	28	26	30
Skimmed through	24	23	25
Did not read	28	34	22

which asked whether the following statements were true or false:

- No key decision can be made by the Assembly unless 40 per cent of both Unionist and Nationalist representatives agree.
- Northern Ireland has the right to become part of a united Ireland if a majority of people in Northern Ireland vote to do so.
- Prisoners will *not* be released if the paramilitary organisations to which they belong have *not* decommissioned their weapons.
- Parties which win a significant number of seats in the Assembly are guaranteed a place in the Northern Ireland Executive so long as they keep to the conditions of the Agreement.
- The commission on policing could recommend the creation of a new police force to replace the RUC.
- Parties with links to paramilitary organisations that have not decommissioned their weapons are not allowed a place on the Northern Ireland Executive.

Levels of knowledge about the Agreement were rather high given the difficult nature of some of the questions asked in

Table 7: Knowledge of the contnts of the Agreement

	% correct answers		
	All	Catholic	Protestant
40% rule	53	60	49
United Ireland	68	74	64
Prisoner releases/decommissioning	30	31	29
Assembly seats/Executive formation	70	72	71
Policing commission	29	27	29
Paramilitaries/Executive	47	45	51
Mean score correct	2.95	3.18	2.85

our quiz![13] Some validation of the quiz's status as a measure of knowledge was given by the presence of a reasonably strong and positive relationship between quiz scores and the possession of higher educational qualifications, having a professional or managerial occupation, being male rather than female, and being 'interested in politics'—background variables that successfully predict scores on similar quizzes about political knowledge administered to the British electorate. Reassuringly, respondents who reported having read the Agreement achieved much higher scores on the quiz than those who did not.

We can therefore argue that the idea that if Protestants knew what was actually in the Agreement they would have been even more sceptical than they were (and are) is not supported: 'Yes'-voting Protestants were a little more informed than 'No' voters, as were those who switched from a 'No' to a 'Yes' vote during the run-up to the referendum. This is consistent with an analysis of those who switched to 'Yes' compared with those who stayed with 'No': this change occurred most frequently among educated and middle-class respondents.

The reasons for Protestant reticence and doubt are not difficult to ascertain from our survey evidence: Protestants simply see far more benefit for Nationalists from the Agreement than for Unionists (see Table 8). The reasons for Protestant endorsement of the Agreement can better be identified by considering the likely consequences—for peace and affluence—of an Agreement compared to conditions in a world without one. Table 9 shows that substantial proportions of both Catholics and Protestants—though more of the former than the latter—believe the Agreement will bring peace and prosperity. Table 10 shows referendum votes by views on the benefits from the Agreement. It can be seen that Catholics voted 'Yes' regardless—support was not conditional, at least in the terms examined here (peace and prosperity).[14] In contrast, Protestant 'Yes' voting was strongly related to belief in a positive pay-off. Without it, support was weak. Thus perceived collective self-interest appeared to play some role in swinging Protestants behind the 'Yes' camp.[15]

The Assembly vote of June 1998

The positive referendum outcome provided the mandate for the Assembly elections. However, it did not guarantee that any resulting Assembly would have a composition that enabled it to function effectively. The Assembly election result was subject to considerable uncertainty, given the closeness of the referendum vote among the Protestant population, the obvious doubts about the implications of the Agreement held by that section of the electorate, and the ensuing strident

Table 8: Who benefits from the Agreement?
Question: Thinking about the Good Friday Agreement, would you say that it benefits Unionists more than Nationalists, Nationalists more than Unionists, or that Unionists and Nationalists benefit equally?

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Unionists a lot more	2	2	2
Unionists a little more	3	6	2
Nationalists a lot more	24	5	37
Nationalists a little more	12	10	14
Equal benefit	46	66	33
Don't know	11	11	11

Table 9: The perceived benefits of the Agreement

Statement: The Agreement will
(a) lead to a lasting peace in Northern Ireland

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Strongly agree	3	5	2
Agree	30	44	20
Neither	22	23	20
Disagree	26	14	35
Strongly disagree	8	2	13
Don't know	11	12	10

(b) bring prosperity

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Strongly agree	7	10	5
Agree	48	58	41
Neither	17	15	18
Disagree	14	6	20
Strongly disagree	4	1	6
Don't know	9	9	9

opposition to the Agreement among prominent 'No' Unionists—not to mention that the election was held in the 'marching season', and that the referendum turnout (especially among generally more moderate non-voters) was higher than for the Assembly election.

The use of STV re-introduced an intriguing element of guesswork into the assessment of the outcome of the election: how would lower order transfers affect the respective blocs and the larger parties? On the Nationalist side the SDLP informally recommended that voters should transfer their lower-order preferences to pro-Agreement parties, as did some prominent individuals and civil society organisations. But there was no formal pre-election agreement between party elites that attempted to encourage transfer agreements among voters, either within blocs or across blocs—with the partial exception of the 'No' Unionist parties, Ian Paisley's DUP and Robert McCartney's UKUP.

What was the outcome? First, the electorate did use the STV system to express second and lower-order preferences, and

Table 10: The benefits of the Agreement and voting

	Catholic		Protestant	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
The Agreement will:				
lead to a lasting peace in Northern Ireland				
Agree	100	–	84	15
Not agree	98	–	50	49
bring prosperity				
Agree	100	–	77	22
Not agree	98	–	39	59

this was reflected in our sample. Only 8 per cent of voters (5.5 per cent of the sample) were 'plumpers' who opted for one party choice only. The median number of votes cast was four and the modal number was three. So people used their ability to express preferences beyond their first choice party or candidate, but how? Genuine cross-communal transfers, i.e. a Nationalist first preference followed by a lower-order pro-Agreement Unionist preference, or a pro-Agreement Unionist first preference followed by a lower-order pro-Agreement Nationalist preference occurred, though not on a massive scale.[16] About 10 per cent of the voters made a transfer from Unionist to Nationalist, and vice versa, at one or more points in their preference order. Unsurprisingly, 'Yes' voters were those who switched across blocs. Transfers were far more numerous, however, within blocs, and from pro-Agreement Unionist and Nationalist parties to the Alliance party and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

This picture should not surprise us. STV played a modest role in 'vote-pooling', encouraging some inter-ethnic accommodation, with voters in one bloc rewarding moderation in the other bloc, or rewarding the 'other bloc' in preference to hard-liners within their own bloc. But much more fascinating in this particular election was the extent of transfers among Unionist voters between pro- and anti-Agreement party candidates. This was far more prevalent than any other

form of transfer among Unionists (see Table 12).

The net result of transfers among Unionists appears to have benefited the pro-Agreement parties. As we can see from Table 13, the benefits of STV for pro-Agreement Unionist parties are shown in the changing distribution of votes as we move from first to fourth choices.[17] STV plainly aided ethno-national accommodation in the way intended by its advocates: it enabled a minority of Nationalists and Unionists to transfer lower-order preferences to respectively pro-Agreement Unionists and Nationalists, and enabled moderate Nationalists and moderate Unionists to transfer lower-order preferences to the 'others'—the Alliance party and the Women's Coalition. STV also aided the consolidation of this settlement in another way. The existence of STV means that Nationalists have been able to reward Sinn Fein for becoming more moderate by giving them first-preference votes that they would never have won when the Republican movement was still fully committed to war, and also by giving them lower-order preferences that they would otherwise not have received at any point from SDLP voters. (SDLP voters now transfer to Sinn Fein in significant numbers—45 per cent of their terminal transfers go to Sinn Fein when that party is still in the running—whereas in the past the Alliance party could expect to pick up most of the SDLP's voters' lower-order preferences.) In the long run, this change in

Table 11: Preferences (at any point in the preference schedule) by community

Voted for	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
UUP pro	31	9	47
UUP anti	10	<1	16
DUP	22	3	38
Alliance	22	21	21
SDLP	27	58	7
Sinn Fein	15	38	2
No vote	30	31	29

Table 12: Transfers from first preferences

Transferred to	First preference votes (%)					
	UUP pro	UUP anti	DUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
UUP pro	73	60	44	33	17	4
UUP anti	23	–	9	12	2	–
DUP	31	27	78	1	6	–
Alliance	37	–	3	27	35	12
SDLP	13	6	3	31	88	56
Sinn Fein	4	–	1	1	41	84
None	6	4	5	25	10	1
(No)	(144)	(26)	(110)	(45)	(160)	(69)

Table 13: The consequences of transfers for the anti-Agreement Unionist bloc

	Votes					
	1st pref.	2nd pref.	3rd pref.	4th pref.	5th pref.	6th pref
Unionist pro	25.8	24.4	23.3	15.4	9.2	7.5
Unionist anti	27.5	23.8	21.1	9.5	4.9	4.4
No preference	–	7.6	17.7	46.8	64.0	74.8

electoral logic may prove very important in locking Sinn Fein into the Agreement—though at the cost of squeezing the Alliance, the major party of the 'others'. In so far as STV works to reward moderate and accommodating behaviour, this pattern may nevertheless be seen to be a vindication of its capacity to ameliorate ethno-national cleavages.

But the real surprise was the unintended impact of STV: the transfers from 'No' Unionist party candidates to 'Yes' Unionist party candidates, which explains much of the success in creating the requisite Unionist concurrent majority in the Assembly. How should this be interpreted? In one sense, it could be construed as rational voting by 'No' Unionist voters: they used their preference schedules to say they preferred 'Yes but sceptical' Unionist candidates to Nationalist candidates of whatever kind. But rationality at the level of their voting preference schedules did not take into account the rules of the Assembly: from

the perspective of 'No Unionists' who want to destroy the Agreement it would have been better to have had more 'Yes Nationalists' in the Assembly and fewer 'Yes Unionists'. In another sense, this pattern might even be construed as hyper-rational: by making some elected 'Yes Unionists' know that their election depended upon transfers from 'No Unionist' voters, the said candidates are likely to prove less accommodating to Nationalists in the Assembly. This effect may well be happening, but we are sceptical of whether it was intended by the relevant voters. There is at least one other possibility: 'No Unionist' voters, habituated to transferring between the major Unionist parties, did not calculate the unintended consequence of their transfers to 'Yes Unionists'. That is our surmise, though we cannot prove it.

The long-run consequence of this event is likely to be threefold. First, if the Assembly survives, the 'No Unionist' parties will encourage their voters to

plump for 'No Unionist' candidates only. Second, 'No Unionist' parties are likely to run more candidates to give their voters more people to whom to transfer—though this may backfire on them if it spreads their vote too thinly. Lastly, 'No Unionist' parties will particularly target those members of the UUP and the PUP whom they think were dependent, or might be dependent, upon 'No Unionist' transfers for their election. But, if all this happens as suggested, pro-Agreement parties and candidates will also have incentives to respond equally strategically. In short, the institutional impact of STV may not have worked in quite the way intended, but it resulted in a positive outcome for the Assembly, and may do so again.

So can the Assembly work? Are its concurrent majorities viable?

Public opinion and the viability of a consociational arrangement

As we have made clear, a central feature of consociation is cross-communal consensus; without this, any proposed institutions and practices would lack legitimacy and probably prove ineffectual. To relate these ideas to the patterns of response we previously used the idea of looking for the presence, or otherwise, of 'concurring majorities' across the two main blocs in public opinion polls or surveys.[18] Where both blocs agree we can infer that there is a concurring majority. However, we took an additional step, first adopted in our paper assessing the extent of concurring majorities on a wide range of issues relevant to consociational arrangements. This is as follows. Given the presence of sizeable proportions of 'Don't know/Can't choose' responses among samples of voters, a simple majority within a bloc is likely to be an unnecessarily harsh test of concurrence: 'Don't know' and 'Can't choose' *may*

indicate an openness on the part of respondents that is clearly not the same as a straightforward rejection—though it may mask many things other than 'openness'. Our argument is this: given negotiations, and compromises in the formulation of the options for the region, it may well be that the 'Don't knows' might be persuadable in the direction of compromise—though we recognise that they may equally be amenable to the intransigents within their own ethno-national bloc. We therefore use a further measure of concurrence in addition to that of majority agreement across both communities: the presence of a majority that is not opposed to an idea across both communities (which we label 'majority non-opposition'). Rather neatly, perhaps too neatly, we would claim this measure gives us an approximation at the electoral level of the weighted majority rule that can be used in the Assembly if there is no concurrent majority.[20]

Inevitably, the sophisticated, nuanced and legalistic nature of the British–Irish (Good Friday) Agreement does not translate easily to a set of survey questions. There has to be a process of simplification, which in turn introduces a potential lack of validity into the items used to measure public views on the proposals. As with all surveys conducted by CREST, however, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on a number of respondents, and their reactions and those of the interviewers to the problems encountered in the interview were addressed before the main survey was fielded. This is no guarantee of validity, but it safeguards against the more obvious pitfalls the survey might encounter.

Respondents' views on the issues arising from the British–Irish Agreement were addressed by the following question:

'Now I would like to ask you about your own views on some of the proposals contained in the Good Friday Agreement . . .

- 'the guarantee that Northern Ireland will remain part of the UK for as long as a majority of people in Northern Ireland wish it to be so;
- 'the creation of North–South bodies;
- 'the setting up of a Northern Ireland Assembly;
- 'the removal of the Republic of Ireland's constitutional claim to Northern Ireland;
- 'the creation of a commission into the future of the RUC;
- 'decommissioning of paramilitary weapons;
- 'the early release of prisoners;
- 'the requirement that the new Executive is power-sharing;
- 'that nobody with links to paramilitaries that still have weapons should be allowed to be a government minister;
- 'that prisoners should not be released until the paramilitaries have handed in their weapons.'

The pattern of cross-communal concurrence with the relevant issues, whether in agreement or in non-opposition, can be seen in Table 14.

The answers to these questions can be interpreted as follows. First, most of these propositions—the guarantee that Northern Ireland will remain part of the UK as long as a majority so wish; the setting up of a Northern Ireland Assembly; the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons; the requirement that the new Executive be power-sharing; that nobody with links to paramilitaries that still have weapons should be allowed to be a government minister; that prisoners should not be released until paramilitaries have handed in their weapons—received clear concurrent majority support. Second, the creation of North–South bodies received majority agreement among Catholics and majority non-opposition among Protestants (only 29 per cent were opposed), as did the creation of a commission into the future of the RUC (40 per cent of Protestants were opposed). Third, the removal of the Republic of Ireland's constitutional claim to Northern Ireland received majority agreement among Protestants and majority non-opposition among Catholics (28 per cent opposed). Lastly, on the early release of prisoners Catholics were evenly split—35 per cent vs 33 per cent—while Protestants were strongly opposed.

We can conclude that, on the whole, and rather remarkably—especially given the evidence of intransigence we have seen on the part of the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland—the main points of the Agreement receive a high degree of concurrent endorsement. This is even more surprising when we remember that fieldwork took place around the time that Drumcree IV was in full swing. There is positive agreement with everything, except on releasing prisoners and decommissioning—and both Catholics and Protestants in general rejected the relevant components of the Agreement, so that even when opposing the implications of the Agreement there was concurrence between the views of the two communities![21]

The data also suggest that David Trimble's insistence that the IRA decommission its weapons before the Northern Executive can be formed including Sinn Fein members, though textually unwarranted by the Agreement, was tapping into both Unionist and Nationalist support at the time of our survey, though, as we shall see, this concurrence did not last.

Though the Assembly is one device for managing ethno-national difference, much of its routine functioning will address 'normal' public policy questions; and in this respect it can be seen that in many ways the Northern Irish electorate—Catholic, Protestant and others—is rather unexceptional in its expectations of and involvement with the Assembly. Table 15 shows that the issues considered important for the Assembly to tackle are rather like those in Great Britain—they

Table 14: Views on propositions contained in the Agreement

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
NI remain in UK			
Agree	86	71	96
Neither	11	22	3
Disagree	3	8	3
North/South bodies			
Agree	64	86	47
Neither	18	11	23
Disagree	18	3	29
NI Assembly			
Agree	83	88	80
Neither	12	10	13
Disagree	6	2	8
Republic's constitutional claim			
Agree	63	42	78
Neither	23	31	16
Disagree	14	27	6
Policing commission			
Agree	50	74	34
Neither	25	21	26
Disagree	25	5	40
Decommissioning			
Agree	89	83	93
Neither	7	12	4
Disagree	3	5	2
Prisoner release			
Agree	18	34	7
Neither	22	32	15
Disagree	60	33	77
Power sharing			
Agree	72	86	62
Neither	20	13	25
Disagree	8	1	13
Paramilitaries/ministers			
Agree	75	53	88
Neither	13	22	6
Disagree	13	24	5
Prisoners/decommissioning			
Agree	74	57	84
Neither	12	23	10
Disagree	11	20	5

are domestic (jobs, health education and the like), not obviously constitutional or concerned with national or sectarian issues—though the question-design may be the key factor in getting this result.

These issues can provide part of the explanation for Protestant and Unionist involvement in, and acceptance of, power-sharing arrangements, which for many of them is a major concession to the Nationalist community. The promise of the Assembly, especially in the light of devolution elsewhere in the United Kingdom, can be sold to them on grounds of good governance, normality, and even new Britishness.

Table 15: What is important to Assembly voters?

| | Importance (%) | | | | | |
| | 1st pref. | | 2nd pref. | | 3rd pref. | |
	Cath.	Prot.	Cath.	Prot.	Cath.	Prot.
Improve NHS	37	41	20	29	24	17
Reduce Protestant discrimination	0	5	5	8	4	5
NI leave UK	6	0	6	1	3	0
Improve education	11	6	26	27	26	27
Stronger voice in UK	3	11	3	12	6	16
Reduce Catholic discrimination	11	2	17	4	7	2
Increase employment	31	35	23	19	28	31
Don't know	–	0	–	1	2	1

(Almost) one year on: appraisal

Some may say: 'But that was then; what about now?' What has happened to public opinion in the dispute-strewn months that have passed since the remarkable summer of 1998? How has support for the Agreement and the Assembly fared in the light of protracted negotiations which have failed to see the Agreement delivered in full, or on time?

In the wake of the 1998 elections Protestants/Unionists expressed low levels of satisfaction and considerable disillusion with the workings of the political system in Northern Ireland. Table 16 shows that as many as 20 per cent fewer Protestants than Catholics thought the

Assembly election was conducted fairly. They were also less likely to agree that parties 'care what ordinary people think' and more likely to feel that voting 'won't make a difference'. Moreover, there were higher levels of dissatisfaction with the workings of democracy in Northern Ireland among Protestants; a quite different pattern from that observed in previous surveys.

To add to this gloomy picture, Table 17 shows that Protestants were far less optimistic about the impact of the Assembly on long-term peace in Northern Ireland than were Catholics. But were they right? Have the months since the summer of 1998 undermined popular endorsement of the Agreement? Has the

Table 16: Political alienation among Protestants?

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
The last election was conducted fairly			
Agree*	70	83	63
Political parties in Northern Ireland care what ordinary people think			
Agree	45	48	40
Who people vote for won't make a difference			
Agree	21	14	25
On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland?			
Not satisfied	42	35	48

*Agreement = score 1 or 2 on 5-point scale

Table 17: Protestant pessimism about the future of the Assembly and its impact on the 'political deadlock in Northern Ireland'

	All (%)	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
The Agreement has finally broken the political deadlock in Northern Ireland			
Agree	46	69	41
Disagree	29	15	40
The Assembly will never last			
Agree	25	14	34
Disagree	42	54	34

Table 18: Confidence that there will be long and lasting peace in Northern Ireland

	Protestant (%)		Catholic (%)		Total (%)	
	Apr 99	Jun 98	Apr 99	Jun 98	Apr 99	Jun 98
Very confident	2	3	6	16	4	8
Fairly confident	17	32	37	66	26	47
Not very confident	45	43	41	15	43	31
Not at all confident	32	20	13	2	24	12
Don't know	4	2	3	1	4	2

Base: All respondents.

Table 19: Who has gained most from the Northern Ireland Agreement?

	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)	Total (%)
Unionists	2	7	4
Nationalists	53	10	35
Both gained equally	25	43	37
Neither	17	22	19
Don't know	4	6	5

Base: All respondents.

Assembly lost its lustre in the eyes of the Northern Irish electorate? On 22 and 23 April 1999 Ulster Marketing Services carried out a survey of a 'fully representative' sample of 1,052 adults chosen at 50 randomly selected locations in Northern Ireland. From their results we can discern some important messages.

First, the population of Northern Ireland are generally less confident of peace in 1999 than they were in 1998. Table 18 shows that members of *both* communities had become more doubtful that the Assembly would guarantee long-term peace by April 1999. Moreover, the majority of Protestants still perceive that Nationalists have gained more from the Agreement than have Unionists (see Table 19).

There are, of course, difficult questions facing the Agreement, in particular the decommissioning of weapons. Again, as in 1998, there was a concurrent majority agreement on the need for decommissioning. But, by contrast, letting Sinn Fein members into the Executive without prior decommissioning is supported by Catholics in the face of overwhelming Protestant opposition (see Table 20).[22] An Executive without Sinn Fein is not likely to serve a useful consociational

Table 20: Does a Sinn Fein member of the Assembly have the right to be a member of the Executive?

	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)	Total (%)
If no IRA decommissioning has taken place	11	77	39
Only if IRA has decommissioned weapons or explosives	70	19	48
Not under any circumstances	18	2	12
Don't know	1	2	1

Base: All respondents.

Table 21: Voting inclination if a referendum were to be held tomorrow

	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)	Total (%)	How voted last May (%)	
				Yes	No
Yes to accept Agreement	58	92	73	91	19
No to reject Agreement	39	5	25	7	80
Don't know	2	2	3	2	1

Base: All respondents.

Table 22: Views on your politician's policy concerning the Assembly

Party support	Total (%)	DUP (%)	PUP (%)	UUP (%)	Alliance (%)	SDLP (%)	Sinn Fein (%)
Work to ensure survival of Assembly as an institution	73	55	65	77	84	89	82
Co-operate with Assembly only when it advances their own principles	15	19	28	15	10	7	13
Work to bring the Assembly to an end	6	15	3	3	0	2	3
Don't know	7	11	5	4	6	2	2

Base: All respondents.

role. The resolution of this issue is fundamental to the effective continuation of the Assembly, and public opinion does not point towards any immediately likely concurrent agreement.

The problems confronting the new Assembly would appear to abound. None the less, despite these difficulties, and rather intriguingly, there has been increased support for the Agreement among Protestants: we can see from Table 21 that between 1998 and 1999 there were far more switchers to support than away from it. Even more impressively, as Table 22 shows, there is cross-communal majority agreement on the importance of working to ensure the survival of the Assembly—even DUP supporters gave majority support (55%) to this aim![23]

On the positive side, we can add to this the high levels of satisfaction expressed by both communities with the dual premiers, Seamus Mallon (57% from Protestants and 81% from Catholics) and David

Table 23a: Level of violence if . . .

	Agreement remains in place (%)			Agreement is brought to an end (%)		
	Total	Protestant	Catholic	Total	Protestant	Catholic
Increase	13	17	8	71	71	70
Stay the same	56	58	52	19	20	18
Decrease	25	18	34	7	5	9
Don't know	6	7	5	4	4	4

Base: All respondents.

Table 23b: Future prosperity if . . .

	Agreement remains in place(%)			Agreement is brought to an end (%)		
	Total	Protestant	Catholic	Total	Protestant	Catholic
More prosperous	55	50	59	6	6	7
Remain the same	35	39	31	25	29	21
Less prosperous	6	6	6	63	60	67
Don't know	4	5	4	6	5	5

Base: All respondents.

Trimble (61% and 65%), and of dissatisfaction with Paisley (52% and 84%). These results indicate cross-community satisfaction with the major pro-Agreement leaders, and concurrent majorities dissatisfied with the major anti-Agreement leader.

There is also continuing cross-communal agreement that the Agreement promises relative peace and wealth. Table 23a shows a dramatic though not unexpected difference in expectations of peace with and without an Agreement. Even more interestingly, Table 23b shows that Northern Ireland's prosperity is also perceived to depend crucially on the maintenance of the Agreement. And there is an overwhelming cross-communal majority in favour of the appointment of an Executive. When asked if it was acceptable 'that an Executive should not be formed at all', almost no one (9 per cent of Protestants and 3 per cent of Catholics) expressed agreement.

All of these indicators suggest that popular endorsement and legitimacy of the Assembly and the Agreement appear to be extremely robust. Moreover, even some of the apparently tricky issues are not perhaps as divisive as could be expected. Although *replacement* of the RUC is not supported with a concurrent majority—because of overwhelming Protestant opposition—its *restructuring* is, in principle, a possible strategy: this obtains majority agreement among Catholics and at least majority non-opposition among Protestants (though 44 per cent were opposed). The question-wording on the prospects for police reform could have been better, but we can conclude that although the Independent Commission on Policing established by the Agreement will have its work cut out, it will not be impossible to propose reforms to policing that have some prospects of producing concurrent non-majority opposition in both blocs.

Conclusions

What, then, are the implications of the state of public opinion for elite pact-makers and the two governments? The themes that have emerged from this extensive assessment of Northern Irish public opinion and voting behaviour over the last year are numerous, but the first, in particular, is evident: among the general public, the Nationalists are not the problem with respect to stabilising the Agreement. Catholics and Nationalists may report having suffered more in the 'troubles', but they are more ready to compromise; and consequently they constrain their parties to compromise significantly. Secondly, Protestants and Unionists, by contrast, are more exclusivist, more extreme in their nation-state identification, less supportive of compromise, and, in the wake of the Assembly election, more politically alienated. They give no impetus for their parties to compromise on the Union. They believe that the Agreement does not benefit them as much as Nationalists. They are divided, but they are pragmatic: on balance they see the Agreement as bringing prosperity, and peace.

Third, and remarkably, most of the issues negotiated and agreed in the Agreement turn out to be viable, that is they enjoy cross-communal public support. The Assembly itself may also be workable as long as STV transfers keep the 'No' segment in a legislative minority among Unionists. Certainly, the finding of more support for the Assembly among Protestants in 1999 than in 1998 is a healthy sign. So public opinion provides clear pointers about what will and won't work, though it will not and does not determine measures in any direct fashion. In the main, it is positive towards the Agreement: Protestants, who are *comparatively* more stubborn, exclusionist and extreme, and do not constrain their parties to adopt centrist positions, *may* buy into the pay-offs of an Agreement. And they appear to be willing to do so to a greater extent over time—on the basis of two points of comparison. The major bone of contention among the public, as in the parties, is on the linkage of Executive formation to prior decommissioning of weapons by paramilitaries. Public opinion offers no guide to resolving this impasse. It does suggest that if the impasse is resolved then the choppiest waters will have been successfully navigated. And if the shifts in public opinion between 1996 and 1998 are anything to go by, some further creative bundling of the issues surrounding Executive formation, decommissioning and demilitarisation *may* be able to make this consociational settlement more durable than its predecessor, the ill-fated Sunningdale Agreement of 1973–4.

Ten years ago one of us highlighted the obstacles to a successful consociational settlement in Northern Ireland:

(i) the absence of the necessary motivations among political elites;
(ii) the absence of sufficient autonomy of political elites from their supporters necessary to make compromise possible; and
(iii) the absence of intra-bloc stability which might underpin the willingness of political elites to make and sustain compromises.[24]

Since then, condition (i) has materialised: hard-line republicans and hard-line loyalists have accepted the premises of a consociational settlement, though the Unionist bloc is divided on this choice. Condition (ii) has partly been bypassed because some of the public, especially among Nationalists, have wanted their leaders to compromise, and some of the public, especially among Unionists, have been persuaded that the alternatives to consociation are worse. It is condition (iii) that remains most problematic. The Nationalist bloc does not display straightforward internal stability, for there is significant competition between Sinn

Fein and the SDLP; but unlike ten years ago, it occurs in a world of a moderated Sinn Fein platform. The Unionist bloc, by contrast, has become more fragmented and is still characterised by high levels of intra-bloc electoral competition, which does not facilitate making and sustaining compromises. The stabilisation of the pro-Agreement Unionists is vital to the maintenance of this settlement. The difficulty is that it cannot be obtained by unwinding those features of the settlement, both procedural and substantive, that have made it acceptable to Republicans.

Appendix: The Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Survey

The Northern Ireland Referendum and Election survey was conducted by RES. Surveying started on 30 June 1998, five days after the Assembly elections. Approximately 40 experienced interviewers were used. Respondents were selected using the Postal Address File (PAF) in conjunction with a Kish grid for within-household selection. The final response rate was a reassuringly high 71 per cent.

Table A.1: Technical details of the sampling and response rates

	No.	%
Total addresses issued	1,539	
Vacant, derelict and other out of scope	183	
In scope	1,356	
Interview achieved	965	71.2
Interview not achieved	391	28.8
Refused	188	13.9
Non-contacted	165	12.2
Other non-response	38	2.8

Notes

1 More generally, consociation involves the following institutional arrangements: executive power-sharing; proportionality rules throughout political institutions and the public sector(s); community self-government in cultural, educational and religious (or non-religious) matters; and minority veto-rights. See Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977.

2 For full details see Brendan O'Leary, 'The Nature of the British–Irish Agreement', *New Left Review*, 233, 1999, pp. 66–96.

3 Descriptions of the workings of the single transferable vote (a system of preferential voting in multi-member constituencies) can be found in most guides to electoral systems; see e.g. Rein Taagepera and Matthew Soberg Shugart, *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 26–8, or David Farrell, *Comparing Electoral Systems*, Hemel Hempstead, Prentice-Hall, 1997, ch. 6. It was a 're-adoption' because in the 1996 election to the Northern Ireland Peace Forum the Conservative government chose an electoral formula that was truly byzantine—a pure region-wide party-list system (with a Droop quota followed by a d'Hondt divisor—mathematically equivalent to pure d'Hondt) topped up with 20 reserved seats, with two to be given to each of the parties that finished in the top ten of the region-wide vote-share. It was widely criticized, though it did facilitate the election of Loyalist parties (the PUP and the UDP) and the Women's Coalition—parties that played a constructive role in the inter-party and inter-governmental negotiations. Since 1973 STV has been use in Northern Ireland for local government and assembly elections, and

since 1979 it has been used for elections to the European Parliament. What was novel about the June 1998 elections was that STV was being used after an agreement had been reached by Nationalist and Unionist political elites.

4 This study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and conducted through the auspices of the Centre for Research into Elections and Social Trends (CREST). The questionnaire and survey were designed by Geoffrey Evans in collaboration with John Curtice of CREST, and Bernadette Hayes and Lizanne Dowds of the Queen's University, Belfast, together with advice from a range of experts on the region, including Brendan O'Leary.

5 We use the terms Catholic and Protestant to refer to cultural Catholics and cultural Protestants—these labels imply no suggestion that the conflict is primarily religious; indeed we would argue vigorously against this thesis.

6 Such experience not only tells its own story, but can be expected to affect attitudes towards the treatment of prisoners who have been sentenced for 'scheduled offences' and the vexed issue of decommissioning.

7 Despite this, Catholics are more likely to understand the reasons behind Loyalist violence than vice versa: Catholics are almost as likely to say they have 'sympathy with reasons for the violence' with respect to Loyalist paramilitaries (20 per cent) as they are for Republican paramilitaries (27 per cent)—a gap of only 7 per cent— whereas Protestants are more one-sided: 30 per cent have 'sympathy with' the reasons for Loyalist violence, but only 12 per cent report having some sympathy for Nationalist violence—a gap of 18 per cent.

8 The greater exclusionist and anti-integrationist/assimilationist disposition among Protestants occurs despite the generally more negative experiences associated with the troubles reported by Catholics, which correlate at the individual level with opposition to integration.

9 For a discussion of the difference between difference-elimination and difference-management approaches to conflict-regulation see John McGarry and Brendan

O'Leary, *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, ch. 1.

10 Geoffrey Evans, 'Northern Ireland during the Cease-fire', in R. Jowell, A. Park, L. Brook and K. Thomson, eds, *British Social Attitudes*: *The 13th Report*, Aldershot, Dartmouth, 1996, pp. 117–40; Geoffrey Evans and Brendan O'Leary, 'Frameworked Futures: Intransigence and Flexibility in the Northern Irish Elections of May 30 1996', *Irish Political Studies*, 1997, pp. 23–47.

11 Evans and O'Leary, 'Frameworked Futures', p. 29, Table 2.

12 Ibid., p. 44 (italics in original).

13 The summated quiz scores have an alpha of 0.61, which for 6 items with dichotomous response categories is acceptable.

14 The survey did not include a question on whether people thought the Agreement made the Union safe/unsafe or a unified Ireland more likely/unlikely.

15 More detailed multivariate analyses identified which aspects of the Agreement most differentiated 'Yes' and 'No' voters. These will be considered elsewhere.

16 Our sample results are consistent with the provisional analysis of actual votes by Richard Sinnott, who argues that the 'key tests here are UUP to SDLP transfers when the Alliance Party was not available, and SDLP to UUP transfers when Sinn Fein was not available. In the former case 36 percent of UUP terminal transfers went to the SDLP. Unfortunately [because of the counting data] there is no direct measure of SDLP to UUP transfers . . . [but one indirect measure suggests a] rate of transfer [that exactly matches that] going in the opposite direction': Richard Sinnott, 'Centrist Politics makes Modest but Significant Progress: Cross-community Transfers Were Low', *Irish Times*, 29 June 1998. Our sample transferred less (an effect of the artificial ballot in our design?), but in the cross-communal matching fashion suggested by Sinnott.

17 An analysis of the possible sources of full cross-communal (Unionist to Nationalist and vice versa) switching in Assembly voting indicates that such voters are different in their attitudes towards the release of prisoners and the Republic's constitutional claim from non-switchers.

They are also more middle-class, educated and supportive of compromise by their leaders.

18 An idea first advanced by Richard Rose, Ian McAllister and Peter Mair, *Is There a Concurring Majority in Northern Ireland?*, Glasgow, Strathclyde Papers in Public Policy no. 22, 1978.

19 Evans and O'Leary, 'Frameworked Futures'.

20 In our earlier study we included the even weaker criterion of plurality agreement rather than simple majority agreement within both communities as an option—which again might approximate weighted majority support in the Assembly. No issue in this study required us to use this weaker criterion to generate something approximating cross-community consensus, so it is not employed here.

21 The Omagh bombing occurred almost at the end of fieldwork, so it will not have affected the vast majority of responses to these questions: after the bombing 26 addresses in the Omagh area were withdrawn from the survey and recorded as 'out of scope'.

22 In 1998 Catholics did *not* in general endorse this practice. It could be that the Catholic position has changed since 1998, but it is more likely that this issue has become explicitly focused on Sinn Fein—who are explicitly referred to in the UMS question—rather than on the general principle of decommissioning and Executive membership examined in the 1998 survey.

23 This level of support compares favourably with the answers to a similar question asked in 1998.

24 Brendan O'Leary, 'The Limits to Coercive Consociationalism in Northern Ireland', *Political Studies*, 1989, pp. 562–88; cf. Erik A. Nordlinger, *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies*, Occasional Papers in International Affairs, no. 29, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Centre for International Affairs, 1972.