

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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## ATTITUDES IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND RELEVANT TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM (Vol. 1):

Publication of Paper by Professor Davis  
and Mr. R. Sinnott

This report, of which we have received an advance copy prior to publication on Tuesday next, 16th October, 1979 is published by E.S.R.I. It is understood that RTE are basing next Tuesday's 'Frontline' programme on the content of the report.

This report is described as the first of two reports of a major study of attitudes in the Republic relating to the Northern Ireland problem. While it deals mainly with attitudes in the Republic it also contains some comparisons with attitudes in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Data for the study was collected by trained interviewers of the E.S.R.I. in July/September, 1978 on the basis of a comprehensive questionnaire. The results are presented under the broad headings of choice of solution, policy preferences and attitudes. The authors have reserved their second report, data concerning attitudes towards the nature of Irish society and, with the exception of the attitudes to Northern Ireland Protestants, in specific contexts, data on inter-group attitudes.

### A. Choice of Solution

Some form of United Ireland was seen by a large majority of the people in the Republic (68%) as "the most workable and acceptable solution to the problem in Northern Ireland". This figure of 68% can be broken down into 41% who choose a unitary United Ireland ("Northern Ireland and the Republic to unite with one Government") and 27% who opted for a federal system which would provide for regional governments North and South as well as an overall central government. The majority choice in this instance was not made with any great degree of optimism. Some of those who favoured a United Ireland apparently acknowledged that it would never come about while others believing it to be achievable envisaged a considerable waiting period before it would be brought about.

### B. Comparison of Choice of Solution in the Republic, Northern Ireland and Great Britain

The survey results from Northern Ireland as might be expected are vastly different from those carried out in this State. 72% of those questioned in the North opted for solutions involving staying within the U.K. and only 16% choose some form of United Ireland. A United Ireland solution was chosen by only 39% of the Catholics in Northern Ireland as

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compared with 68% of the people of the Republic. Close to 50% of the Catholics interviewed expressed support for remaining part of the United Kingdom. As pointed out in the report, figures such as these cast doubt on the traditional assumption of a common viewpoint and purpose in an nationalist community defined as including Northern Ireland Catholics.

39% of the Northern Catholics interviewed choose as a solution "Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom with a devolved Government based on power sharing". In this choice they were in agreement with 35% of Northern Ireland Protestants. 38% of all Protestants in Northern Ireland opted for devolved Government based on majority rule. An independent Northern Ireland had the support of only 3% of each section of the community in the North. In this regard, however, it is only fair to mention that the U.D.A's policy document had not been launched at the time of the surveys. Support in Great Britain on the other hand for independence for Northern Ireland came to 24%. Other figures for British opinion were 25% in favour of Northern Ireland remaining part of the U.K., 21% supportive of a United Ireland and 13% favoured joint control of the North by the British and Irish Governments. The 'don't knows' in this context came to 17%.

## C. Policy Preferences in the Republic

On the question as to whether the claim to Northern Ireland so called should be removed from the Constitution 71% of those interviewed opposed this proposal. However further exploration of the issue in the form of a hypothetical question as to how voters would react in a Referendum on the removal of Article 2 and 3 seemed to indicate that support for keeping both Articles was 50%, for removing one or both 27% with 21% uncertain.

In response to a proposition that "the British Government should announce its intention to withdraw from Northern Ireland at a fixed date in the future" 78% of those interviewed here were in favour of such an announcement. There was a 71% agreement for a further hypothetical question to the effect that the British should declare their intention to withdraw whether the majority in Northern Ireland agreed or not. Paradoxically while 71% supported British withdrawal only 43% believed that such withdrawal would lead to an negotiated settlement and 60% felt that it would in fact lead to a great increase in violence. The authors conclude that expectations of the consequences of withdrawal, which on the whole are pessimistic, appear to be discounted by a substantial proportion of people when it comes to expressing a preference for this policy. They rightly make the point that this fact has to be taken into account in assessing the nature of a demand for British withdrawal.

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On security in general and border security in particular the survey here in this State shows that perception by the population of the Irish Government's efforts in both spheres is very poor. 53% of the people in the Republic support the view that the Government should take a tougher line with the IRA while 45% are of the view that the Government is not doing its best in relation to border security. In regard to extradition there was an almost even division between 46% in favour and 48% against extradition of people accused of politically motivated crimes.

Questions on a post settlement amnesty by the Irish Government and the granting by the British Government of political status to prisoners claiming political motivation were put in the course of the survey in the Republic. There was 55% support for the amnesty proposal and 60% for the political status proposal. On the question of a political role for the IRA 49% were against this as opposed to 44% in favour. On the issue of media access for IRA spokesmen 56% were against as compared with 39% for.

## D. Comparison of policy preferences in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Great Britain

Highlights of this section include:

(i) 69% of people in Northern Ireland feel that the Irish Government should remove from the Constitution the claim to Northern Ireland. Interestingly, however, while 88% of Protestants in Northern Ireland favour removal of the this "claim" support for removal from Northern Catholics is only 30%. This contrasts with the figure of 50% support from the Catholic community for remaining part of the United Kingdom which is mentioned earlier.

(ii) On the issue of unilateral British withdrawal there is a contrast in attitudes to this question between people in the Republic, 71% of whom supported the proposal and people in Northern Ireland 74% of whom opposed the proposal. As expected the division of opinion is most pronounced between people in the Republic and Northern Ireland Protestants 86% of whom are against the idea. It is interesting to note that when the proposal of British withdrawal is put with an emphasis on the longer term and without mention of any unilateral aspect support among Catholics in Northern Ireland rises to 64% from 49% who would support unilateral withdrawal. (iii) On the consequences of withdrawal 88% of Northern Protestants and 67% of Northern Catholics believe that this would lead to a great increase in violence. As already mentioned 59% of people in the Republic take this view also. (iv) Finally in this section the point is made that the Irish Government need to communicate its policies on security issues to the Northern

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Ireland Protestant community, 96% of whom feel that a tougher line must be taken by the Government here against the IRA and 89% of whom feel that our Government is weak in the area of cross border security. As the report puts it the Irish Government needs to "more successfully communicate its position to people in Northern Ireland".

## E. Attitudes relevant to Northern Ireland

On attitudes on IRA activities the majority of people here (61%) are opposed to these activities, a further 19% are neutral while the remaining 21% express support for IRA activities. The authors point out this stark fact but add that they have no evidence that an attitude of support for IRA activities leads to any actions in support of the IRA campaign. They go on to make the point that it must be acknowledged that opposition to IRA activities is not overwhelming and certainly does not match the strong opposition often articulated by public figures. In the course of this section the authors state that a plurality of respondents (42%) sympathise with the motives of the IRA, the 25% are neutral and the minority (34%) reject their motives. The point is made that sympathy for motives may lead to an attitude of support for activities and as such presents a problem for political and opinion leaders concerned to condemn IRA activity and diminish support for it.

It is difficult to reconcile the figures in this section of the report with the overwhelming response to the Holy Father's plea for an end to violence at Drogheda recently. At the time of the survey the H Block campaign was very much in the news particularly in the light of Archbishop, as he was then, O'Fiaich's statement of 1 August, 1978. Whether this campaign or the statement in question, which was manipulated here and abroad by the Provisional IRA for progaganda purposes, had any effect on public opinion is a matter for conjecture.

## S. Relationship between attitudes and social demographic and political characteristics

In relation to newspapers the authors conclude from their findings that Irish Press readers are consistently highest on each of the attitudes (anti-partition, support for IRA activities, sympathy for IRA motives and anti-Northern Ireland Protestants) while Irish Times readers are consistently lowest. There are two qualifications: Irish Press readers are on the opposed side of the mid-point of the attitude scale and secondly one cannot conclude that reading a particular paper causes certain attitudes as mentioned in the report the influence could just as easily be in the opposite direction.

In relation to political parties the authors conclude from their research that differences exist on each of the four attitudes between Fine Gael Party identifiers on the one hand

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and Fianna Fail and Labour Party identifies on the other. They conclude that Fine Gael identifiers are less anti-partitionist, less supportive of IRA methods, less sympathetic to IRA motives and less opposed to Northern Ireland Protestants. They make the point, however, that there is an inter-party consensus for instance on anti-partitionism and on opposition to IRA activities and also that one cannot make inferences from the attitudes of party identifiers or supporters to the positions of the parties as organisations.

In concluding the report the authors draw attention to the fact that a study of attitudes does not enable one to prescribe solutions. They see the job they have done as a contribution towards clarification of the problem which hopefully in turn will make some small contribution to the process of debate and discussion not only here but within each of the other communities concerned and ultimately between all of the parties involved.

*Ah.*

15th October, 1979.