

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2022/84/9
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

12 FEB 1999

(51) Copy (2) Mr McCarthy passed on to the Taoiseach

Belfast Telegraph opinion poll - 8 February 1999

The opinion poll was conducted by Market Solutions (NI) on behalf of the Belfast Telegraph. 1,117 people were interviewed at 44 randomly selected locations across Northern Ireland during the period 28 January to 1 February 1999.

The respondents answers were examined by age, religion, party affiliation and how they had voted in the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement. The following were the main findings:

The poll asked two questions:

1. When do you think the IRA and the loyalist paramilitaries should start decommissioning?

84% of the total population think decommissioning should start immediately, 11% think it should start by May 2000, and 2% think decommissioning should never happen.

93% of the Protestant population think decommissioning should start immediately, 5% think it should star by May 2000, and 1 % think decommissioning should never happen.

68% of the Catholic population think decommissioning should start immediately, 22% think it should start by May 2000, and 5% think decommissioning should never happen.

There is very little divergence of opinion by age. Those who voted "No" in the referendum are slightly more emphatic about wanting an immediate start to decommissioning (94%) than those who voted "Yes" (80%), with 14% of "Yes" voters and 4% of "No" voters wanting decommissioning to start by May 2000. 3% of "Yes" voters and 2% of "No" voters think the paramilitaries should never decommission.

Some divergence of opinion emerged when respondents were broken down by party affiliation. 97% of UUP voters back David Trimble's demands for an immediate start to decommissioning as do 91% of DUP voters. On the Nationalist side, 70% of SDLP voters and 58% of Sinn Féin voters think that an immediate start should be made to decommissioning, while 24% of SDLP

©TSCH/2022/84/9

voters and 23% of Sinn Féin voters believe a start should be made by May 2000. Sinn Féin voters are the only group of which a significant portion (12%) believe that paramilitaries should not decommission, altough it must be noted that UDP and PUP supporters are not indicated in the opinion poll findings. Sinn Fein also registered the highest amount of undecided responses (8%) in the poll which indicates the variety of opinion among party members on this subject.

2. Should Sinn Féin be allowed to take their seats on the Executive without IRA decommissioning?

29% of the total population think that Sinn Féin should be allowed to take their seats on the Executive without decommissioning, while 60% of the population disagree, with 11% undecided.

Opinions on this subject show a large deal of divergence between the two communities with 85% of the Protestant population opposed to Sinn Féin membership of the Executive prior to decommissioning, and only 7% in favour and 8% undecided. On the other hand, 63% of the Catholic population think that Sinn Féin should be allowed to take their seats on the Executive without decommissioning, with 22% opposed and 15% undecided.

Summary

The vast majority of the Protestant population believe that Sinn Féin should not be allowed to take their seats on the Executive without decommissioning, which they believe should start immediately.A clear majority of the Catholic population believe that Sinn Féin should be allowed to take their seats on the Executive without decommissioning, altough they also believe that an immediate start should be made to decommissioning.

Gerry Kelly
Anglo-Irish Division
11 February 1999

©TSCH/2022/84/9