NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY ELECTION STUDY **2022**

What Messages Were Voters Sending in the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly Election?

Exploring Attitudes to Power-Sharing, the Protocol, and a Potential Referendum on Irish Unification or Maintaining the Union

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About the report

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not those of the ESRC or the authors' academic institutions.

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Summary

Aim

We examine the nature of the mandates that the political parties in Northern Ireland received from voters in the May 2022 Assembly election.

Evidence

We use evidence from an in-depth face-to-face survey of a representative sample of 2,000 respondents from across Northern Ireland. The survey was conducted directly after the election, as part of the *Northern Ireland Assembly Election Study 2022* project, funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Approach

We investigate the signals that voters sent on three inter-related questions that remain crucial for the future of Northern Ireland: the 'Protocol', power-sharing, and a possible referendum on leaving the United Kingdom to unify with the Republic of Ireland.

We examine the extent to which party voters agree with their party's position on each of these three policy themes. If the vast majority of a party's voters hold the same views as the party leadership, the party has a strong mandate from its voters. In contrast, if party voters are quite divided on the issue, that suggests that the party does not have a strong mandate from its voters.

Findings: Protocol & power-sharing

Among Assembly 2022 voters for Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin there was a firm consensus…

- … that 'Brexit' was bad for the UK and for Northern Ireland;
- … in favour of re-joining the EU;
- … that checks on goods should be at the border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland rather than on the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;
- … that power-sharing should be maintained, even if there are difficulties with the Protocol;
- … in favour of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement.

Alliance, the SDLP and Sinn Féin therefore have a clear mandate from their voters on these issues.

Among Assembly 2022 voters for the DUP, TUV, or UUP there was no firm consensus in opposition to the Protocol and power-sharing. These parties therefore do not have a strong mandate from their voters to adopt a hardline anti-Protocol, anti-power-sharing position.

Among Assembly 2022 voters for any of the six main parties – Alliance, SDLP, Sinn Féin, TUV, DUP or UUP – no firm consensus exists in support of particular reforms to the power-sharing arrangements.

Findings: Potential referendum

Among Assembly 2022 voters for the DUP, UUP and TUV, there is an extremely strong consensus in favour of Northern Ireland staying in the UK. These parties have a very strong mandate from their voters to advocate maintaining the constitutional status quo.

Among voters for the nationalist parties, by contrast, there is not a consistent pro-Irish unification consensus. Pro-unification views are more prevalent among Sinn Féin voters than SDLP voters. Even among Sinn Féin voters, pro-unification views are less homogenous than the pro-Union views of DUP, UUP and TUV voters. And there is little agreement among Alliance voters on the issue.

On whether to hold a referendum on maintaining the Union or supporting Irish unification there is a firm consensus among nationalist voters in favour of holding a referendum (and also among Alliance voters on one of the two questions on this issue), while there is a lack of firm consensus among unionist voters in opposing the holding a referendum.

Introduction

We provide an account of voting at the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election, using evidence from an in-depth survey we designed that was conducted directly after the election.[1] We identify the signals that voters sent on three inter-related questions that remain crucial for the future of Northern Ireland: 'the Protocol', power-sharing, and a possible referendum on leaving the United Kingdom to unify with the Republic of Ireland. We begin by specifying our research questions related to this troika of issues, and then describe the data used in our analysis. Subsequently, we report our results, providing a breakdown of the views of voters for each of the principal parties as well as the views of the eligible electorate. In our conclusion we assess the implications of our findings for: (a) understanding the nature and strength of the mandate that each party acquired at the election on the issues of the Protocol, power-sharing, and a possible referendum on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland; and (b) understanding the extent to which there is, or is not, a consensus across the sets of party voters on these issues.

Issues

The Protocol

Following the UK's decision to leave the European Union (EU) after a consultative referendum in June 2016, the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, the official name of the legal text, was agreed by the UK and the EU[2] to

> '*address the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, to maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation, to avoid a hard border and to protect the 1998 Agreement in all its dimensions*' (Article 1(3)).

While Northern Ireland left the political institutions of the EU along with Great Britain, it has remained within the EU's single market for goods and agriculture. In line with the agreed Protocol, there are checks on goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland at ports and airports. These operate as the de facto customs and regulatory border between the EU and the UK for the affected goods. 'Grace periods' are in place before the Protocol is fully implemented.

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[1] Our preliminary appraisal of the election was published before the survey was available (Garry, O'Leary, and Pow 2022); for overviews of the election also see: Tonge (2022) and Russell (2022).

[2] The full text may be found at the website of the European Commission: The Ireland and Northern Ireland Protocol. It is one of three Protocols that are an integral part of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement: the others cover UK sovereign bases in Cyprus and Gibraltar, two other jurisdictions where UK sovereignty is exercised over territories adjacent to the land of EU member states. The UK left the EU officially on 31 January 2020, and negotiated an EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement which entered into force officially in May 2021.

In the lead up to the 2022 Assembly election, the issue of the Protocol was highly divisive. For some people, the Protocol was seen as a reasonable and acceptable necessity, especially in contrast to the alternative: a hardening of the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with the feared renewal of customs posts and regulatory checks. For others, the Protocol undermined the Union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, because it meant that Northern Ireland operated under different trading rules than Great Britain – and had no formal say in their development. Unionists and loyalists argued that the Protocol violated the Act of Union, and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.[3]

The Governments of the UK and Ireland, and the EU, rejected unionist claims that the Protocol violated the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.[4] A novel consent procedure, however, was devised to address legitimacy concerns. The Northern Ireland Assembly would in due course have an opportunity to assess the operation of Articles 5 through 10 of the Protocol, relating to checks on goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. A majority of Northern Ireland's elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) could decide, in a vote to be held at the end of 2024, to discontinue the relevant articles, opening a process of negotiations for their replacement.[5] Unless a majority so decided, however, the Protocol would continue to operate in full. The decision makers in this 2024 Assembly vote on the Protocol would be those elected in the May 2022 Assembly election (unless, of course, there were to be another intervening Assembly election).[6] The effect of these provisions was that the May 2022 Assembly election approximated, to some extent, a referendum on the Protocol. In this paper, we assess voters' attitudes to the Protocol, and the extent to which those attitudes are linked to party choice in the 2022 election. The mandate that parties received, or did not receive, from voters on matters related to the Protocol will be demonstrated.

Power-sharing

The question of the continuation, reform, or scrapping of the Protocol has become associated with the question of the continuation, reform, or terminal collapse of Northern Ireland's consociational power-sharing arrangements.[7] The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the leading unionist party in seats won in the Assembly between 2003 and 2017, and the holder of the position of First Minister

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[3] For a pioneering study of public knowledge of the Protocol, in contrast to strong and polarized opinions on its merits, see Hayward and Phinnemore (2022).

[4] In the Northern Ireland High Court, Justice Colton ruled that because it is part of a constitutional statute, the UK's European Union (Withdrawal) Act of 2018, the Protocol takes precedence over clashing provisions in the older constitutional statute, the Act of Union ((Colton 2021)). Colton's ruling has been upheld on appeal. Colton also ruled that the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is not violated by the Protocol. The Northern Ireland Assembly had no previous jurisdiction over the functions addressed by the Protocol, and therefore its cross-community consent provisions were not applicable to its ratification or operation. See also McGarry and O'Leary (2019) and O'Leary (2022a). His reasoning was upheld by the NI Court of Appeal and by the UK Supreme Court – though the latter may have put in doubt the concept of constitutional statutes.

[5] See the discussions in Fabbrini (2022) and McCrudden (2022).

[6] The UK Government's controversial Northern Ireland Protocol Bill was initiated in June 2022; it has not completed its progress through parliament. The EU has made clear its vehement objections. An appraisal of the bill's causes and consequences may be found in a report by team from the UK in Changing Europe (Barnard et al. 2022). Should the bill be enacted, and enter into force, it is unclear to what the Northern Ireland Assembly would be asked to consent in 2024.

[7] For these arrangements see Garry (2016), and O'Leary (2020).

in Northern Ireland's power-sharing executive between 2007 and 2022, chose to collapse the executive three months before the May 2022 Assembly election, in protest against the Protocol. The DUP insisted that any re-establishment of a power-sharing executive after the Assembly election would be contingent on major changes to the Protocol.

The DUP was also widely perceived[8] to be reluctant to ratify a post-election power-sharing executive if that meant the party would have to nominate a deputy First Minister to a First Minister nominated by Sinn Féin. In line with the St Andrew's Agreement of 2006, which amended the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement establishing Northern Ireland's power-sharing system, the premiership is shared between a First Minister, from the largest party, and a deputy First Minister, from the largest party of the next largest 'designation'.[9] The two First Ministers are constitutionally and legally equal. They both chair the executive and run a joint office. However, nominating the First Minister, and holding the role, is seen as symbolically important.

As well as the question of who would nominate the First Minister, the entire structure and rationale of power-sharing was at stake at the election. The power-sharing executive is made up of all sizeable parties, with ministerial portfolios distributed in line with how many seats each party wins, according to the d'Hondt formula.[10] In the 2017-2022 Assembly, an inclusive 'grand coalition' took office within the executive: the DUP, Sinn Féin, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), and the cross-community Alliance Party. Decision-making in the Assembly on the budget (and other controversial matters) requires cross-community support: MLAs who designate as 'unionists' or as 'nationalists' have a potential veto to protect the interests of their respective political community, provided their bloc remains cohesive on the subject in question.[11] The inclusive coalition and group veto rights were opposed by one unionist party in particular: Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV). Some other parties, and public figures, to varying extents, advocated a different form of power-sharing, usually based on coalitions of willing parties in government, facing other parties in opposition. For them, the executive should be formed by a simple majority coalition without MLAs having to designate as nationalist, unionist, or other. Generally, parties taking this stance also opposed group veto rights. All these proposals would require the formal amendment of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and its UK legislative enactment, the Northern Ireland Act 1998.[12]

We will present and evaluate the views of the electorate on the overall merits or otherwise of the existing power-sharing system and examine how these attitudes shaped voting behaviour at the May 2022 election. This analysis will help us understand what messages the electorate – or portions of it – sent on the existing power-sharing system, and the extent to which any parties received a

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[8] On public perceptions on this issue see, for example, LucidTalk (2022: 15-18).

[9] See McEvoy (2013); and see the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006.

[10] See O'Leary, Grofman, and Elklit (2005) and McEvoy (2006).

[11] There are two rules: 'parallel consent' (which requires a concurrent majority of designated nationalist and unionists and a majority overall for the passage of legislation); and 'weighted majority' (which requires a majority of 60% of MLAs to support a measure, including 40% of designated nationalists and unionists respectively).

[12] For a review of the difficulties with previous reform proposals see McCrudden et al. (2016).

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mandate to advocate reform, or to oppose the power-sharing system, or to suspend it unless and until the Protocol is amended (or scrapped).

A referendum on Irish unification or maintaining the Union

The two big subjects highlighted so far – the Protocol and power-sharing – were either directly caused by, or rendered highly salient by, Brexit. The third big question that Brexit has affected is the issue of potential Irish unification.[13] The salience of this question has risen since the referendum on EU membership, given the resulting uncertainties over a possible hard border with the South and the fact that those favouring EU membership in Northern Ireland experienced exit from the EU despite Northern Ireland voting to remain.[14] Although opinion polls and surveys between 2016 and 2022 showed a pattern of increasing support for Irish unification, evidence from these polls indicates that support – overall – is significantly short of a majority.

If a referendum were to occur, it would be initiated by the UK government, specifically through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. As well as having the discretion to call a referendum on Irish unification at any time, the Secretary of State has the duty, as laid out in the 1998 Agreement, to initiate a referendum if it is likely that a majority of voters in Northern Ireland would support Irish unification. The appropriate evidence for the Secretary of State to use when making this judgement is likely to include, in addition to evidence from opinion polls and attitude surveys, the level and nature of electoral support for pro-unification and pro-Union parties at the Assembly election.[15] The election results indicate the proportion of the electorate supporting parties formally advocating, or opposing, Irish unification, but are complicated by support for the Alliance party which is now formally neutral on the question of the Union or reunification.

We augment these aggregate election results with an examination of the extent to which the pro- or anti-unification positions of parties match the views of their voters. There may be voters who favour Irish unification, or a referendum on the subject, who do not vote for a nationalist party, including some who support a non-aligned party or even a small number who vote for a unionist party. Similarly, there may be some supporters of a nationalist party who are not in favour of Irish unification or the holding of a referendum. And many party voters may not have firm views either way on these issues.

We therefore provide evidence of the views of the electorate as a whole on the level (and intensity) of support for, or opposition to, Irish unification, as well as on whether or not a referendum ought to be held, and describe how these views vary across the voters for each party at the election. We

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[13] No less than five books on the subject have been published since the summer of 2022: Connolly (2022), Collins (2022), Meagher (2022), O'Doherty (2022), and O'Leary (2022b).
[14] For our previous research see Garry et al. (2020); Garry et al. (2018).
[15] For detailed discussion see Renwick et al. (2021).

will then be able to describe the nature of the mandate that parties may have received from voters at the Assembly election on the question of a referendum on unification or maintaining the Union.

Connection to the underlying ethno-national divide

These three issues – the Protocol, power-sharing, and a possible referendum on Irish unification – have key similarities. They are – to varying degrees – salient because of the UK's decision to leave the EU and the resulting Brexit negotiations. They are also significant and topical manifestations of the broader historical divide at play in Northern Ireland politics, variously referred to as the 'green-orange', 'nationalist-unionist' or 'ethno-national' divide – between people from a cultural Protestant background who identify as British and support the connection to Great Britain, and people from a cultural Catholic background who identify as Irish and support the connection to the Republic of Ireland.[16] Our examination of how attitudes to the Protocol, power-sharing and a referendum on Irish unification are related to voting, is set in the broader context of how these attitudes are linked to this underlying political divide. Specifically, in addition to examining how attitudes vary by party choice at the election we also aim to describe how attitudes vary by religious background (as well as understanding what the distribution of opinion is in the electorate as a whole).

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[16] For meta-reviews of this literature up until the 1990s see Whyte (1990), McGarry and O'Leary (1995), and Ruane and Todd (1996).

Data

Survey

The authors, with additional colleagues, were awarded funding from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to conduct a survey of a representative sample of the Northern Ireland adult population immediately after the May 2022 Assembly election. The fieldwork was conducted by Ipsos Northern Ireland. A two-stage sampling approach was adopted. In stage one, 250 sampling points were randomly selected from Northern Ireland's full set of electoral wards. Within these randomly selected geographical areas, quotas (age, gender, and social class) were then used to determine the selection of respondents. In total, 2,000 respondents were interviewed, and these respondents are representative of the general Northern Ireland electorate in socio-demographic characteristics and political characteristics. In line with many election surveys, our sample was somewhat under-representative of non-voters. We therefore apply a political weight to accommodate exact turnout level and exact share of first preference votes, as reported by the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland (EONI, 2022). Our weighting ensures that the sample in our analysis is representative of the wider electorate in terms of turnout and party choice.

The weight also adjusts for very small differences between our sample and known characteristics of the adult population in Northern Ireland, based on 2020 Mid-Year Estimates (NISRA, 2021). In line with the most recent British Election Study, the demographic adjustments are for gender, age group, and geographical location (see Ipsos, 2019). Table 1 summarises the structure of our unweighted sample, as well as the targets used to construct our weighted sample. The surveys were conducted between 6th May and 15th September 2022.[17] The average length of the interview was 43 minutes (excluding 33 outliers). Surveys were conducted face-to-face, in-home, and were computer-assisted. Ethical approval for the research was granted by Queen's University Belfast.[18]

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[17] Fieldwork for post-election surveys involving face-to-face interviews typically lasts multiple months. We have explored the potential for the distribution of responses to vary over the course of fieldwork. However, we find a high level of stability in responses across different quintiles. There are small number of instances where a cell value for a particular quintile deviates by ten or more percentage points from the corresponding cell value for overall responses. These are: attitudes towards the location of Protocol checks; evaluations of the handling of Brexit by the Irish government, the Alliance Party, Sinn Féin, the SDLP, and the UUP; and the level of opposition to Northern Ireland remaining in the UK. Such differences do not reflect any consistent pattern: we do not observe any substantial or systematic variation for any variable over time.

[18] The following are publicly available on our project website: the full questionnaire; the dataset (in SPSS and Stata format); a description of the technical details of the survey; and a description of the weighting variables. See: https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/the-democracy-unit/NorthernIrelandAssemblyElectionStudy2022/Data/

Table 1: Unweighted sample structure and population targets

		Unweighted Sample (%)	Target (%)
Gender	Male	48.0	48.7
	Female	52.0	51.3
Age group	18-29	20.5	18.9
	30-44	27.0	25.4
	45-59	24.0	26.2
	60+	28.6	29.5
Constituency	Belfast East	5.3	5.9
	Belfast North	5.1	5.5
	Belfast South	6.1	5.8
	Belfast West	5.1	5.6
	East Antrim	4.5	6.0
	East Londonderry	5.3	5.7
	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	6.1	5.3
	Foyle	6.2	5.5
	Lagan Valley	5.2	5.5
	Mid Ulster	5.1	5.4
	Newry & Armagh	6.4	5.0
	North Antrim	5.8	5.5
	North Down	4.9	6.0
	South Antrim	6.4	5.5
	South Down	6.9	5.2
	Strangford	4.8	6.0
	Upper Bann	6.0	5.0
	West Tyrone	5.1	5.7
Vote choice	Did not vote	30.0	36.4
	DUP	11.4	13.5
	SF	19.4	18.4
	UUP	7.6	7.1
	SDLP	7.8	5.8
	Alliance	12.6	8.6
	TUV	3.5	4.8
	Other party	7.7	5.3

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Measures

To measure vote choice at the election we asked respondents to complete a mock ballot paper containing the relevant candidates in their constituency. A battery of questions was included to measure attitudes to the Protocol: overall support or opposition; the desired way MLAs should vote in 2024; the choice between having the preferred post-Brexit trade border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the GB-NI 'sea border') or between Northern Ireland the Republic of Ireland (the NI-RoI land border); whether the Protocol and Brexit were good for the UK and Northern Ireland; and evaluations of how governments and parties handled issues relating to Brexit and the Protocol.

A battery of questions was included on power-sharing: overall support or opposition to the 1998 Agreement; evaluation of whether power-sharing has been good or bad for Northern Ireland; assessment of the rules relating to the First and deputy First Minister; cross-community consent; and coalition formation. Respondents were also asked a question which overlapped between the issues of the Protocol and power-sharing: specifically, choosing between scrapping the Protocol or maintaining power-sharing.

Finally, a battery of questions was included on the issue of a potential Irish unification referendum: should a referendum be held, and – if so – when?; voting intention in the possible referendum; the strength of support for and opposition to each referendum option; and the acceptability of each possible result of a referendum. The precise wording of each question is provided in the Tables described in the Results section.

Analytical approach

For each survey question in each of our three themes, we provide a tabular description of the opinion distribution for: all respondents, Catholics, Protestants, people from neither of the two main religious groups, and voters for each of the six main parties. We also provide a summary 'net score' which indicates a simple overall balance of opinion on a question, and – for ease of interpretation – we graphically illustrate these net scores.[19]

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[19] Due to rounding, on rare occasions the net score reported in the final row of a table deviates by one percentage point from the net score otherwise calculated by a simple subtraction from the percentages reported in the rows above it.

Results

Attitudes to the Protocol

Respondents' views on the Protocol are reported in Table 2. First, a general question of support for, or opposition to, the Protocol was asked. From the distribution of opinion that we report, we calculate a 'net score' for each question which provides a simple overall balance of opinion on that question. For example, in Table 2, 26 percent of all respondents support the Protocol (either fairly or very strongly) and 23 percent are either fairly or very strongly opposed, resulting in a net score of +3 percent. For ease of interpretation, these net scores are graphically illustrated in Figure 1. Among all respondents, there is slight overall support for the Protocol, with strong overall support from Catholics and from voters for Alliance, the SDLP, and Sinn Féin. There is net overall opposition from Protestants and from voters for the TUV, DUP, and UUP. When respondents were asked whether they would like MLAs to vote in favour of, or against, the full continuation of the Protocol, we observe a remarkably similar pattern (in Table 3 and Figure 2).

Table 2: Attitudes towards the Protocol (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Very strongly support	12		4	9	21		8	4	2	13	24	29
Fairly strongly support	14		9	9	21		4	7	8	30	30	23
Neither	33		31	41	33		19	22	34	34	19	31
Fairly strongly oppose	10		17	5	5		16	22	22	9	7	3
Very strongly oppose	13		23	10	6		41	33	24	6	6	4
Don't know	17		16	26	15		12	12	11	9	14	11
Net score	*+3*		*-27*	*+3*	*+30*		*-46*	*-44*	*-37*	*+28*	*+41*	*+45*

Question wording: *The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland was jointly agreed by the UK and the EU to "address the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, to maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation, to avoid a hard border and to protect the 1998 Agreement in all its dimensions" (Article 1(3)). The Protocol means that Northern Ireland has left the EU along with the rest of the UK, but there are checks on goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. What do you think of the Protocol?*

Figure 1: Net support for the Protocol (from Table 2)

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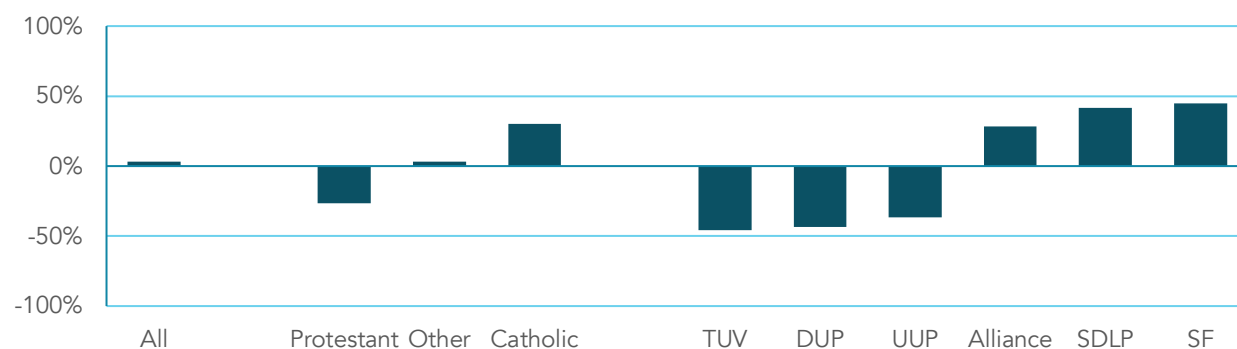
A strikingly high proportion of respondents, as reported in Tables 2 and 3, do not have a clear view on these two questions. Half of them indicate either 'neither' or 'don't know' on the Protocol approval question, and 56 percent state that they do not have enough information to make a decision on how MLAs should vote, and six percent responded 'don't know'. These figures are similar for Catholics and Protestants and are very high for respondents of neither of these religious backgrounds, approximately three quarters of whom have no clear position on these two questions. Unsurprisingly, the proportion with no clear view is lower when we focus simply on voters and examine the break down by supporters of each party.

We also asked respondents to choose, in perhaps a rather stark way, between having a post-Brexit trade border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland (a GB-NI 'sea border') or between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (a land border) – see Table 4. The net scores are illustrated in Figure 3. We see the same general patterns as in Figures 1 and 2. Catholics, and voters for Alliance, the SDLP, and Sinn Féin, are strongly in favour of the GB-NI trade border established by the Protocol. Protestants, and supporters of the TUV, the DUP and UUP, are much less in favour of the GB-NI trade border. However, compared to Figures 1 and 2, the balance for all sets of respondents is much more pro-Protocol. TUV and DUP voters on balance slightly favour the Irish land border option, but Protestants overall, including UUP voters, on balance slightly favour the GB-NI trade border when asked to choose between these two alternatives.

Table 3: Preferences for the 2024 Assembly vote on the Protocol (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Vote in favour	21	8	16	36	4	7	4	38	50	44
Vote against	16	30	11	5	47	39	34	10	5	2
Don't know	6	6	5	6	4	4	12	9	6	6
Not enough info	56	56	67	53	45	49	50	42	38	48
Net score	*+6*	*-21*	*+5*	*+31*	*-42*	*-32*	*-29*	*+28*	*+44*	*+42*

Question wording: *Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly (MLAs) are due to vote on the continued application of Articles 5-10 of the Protocol – those relating to the movement and regulation of goods to and from Northern Ireland – at the end of 2024. Based on what you currently know and are experiencing, how would you like the MLAs to vote in 2024 on the Protocol? In favour of continuing the full application of the Protocol, including Articles 5-10 / Against the continued application of Articles 5-10 of the Protocol / I don't know how the MLAs should vote / I don't know enough about the Protocol to make an informed decision.*

Figure 2: Net support for MLAs to vote in favour of the Protocol (from Table 3)
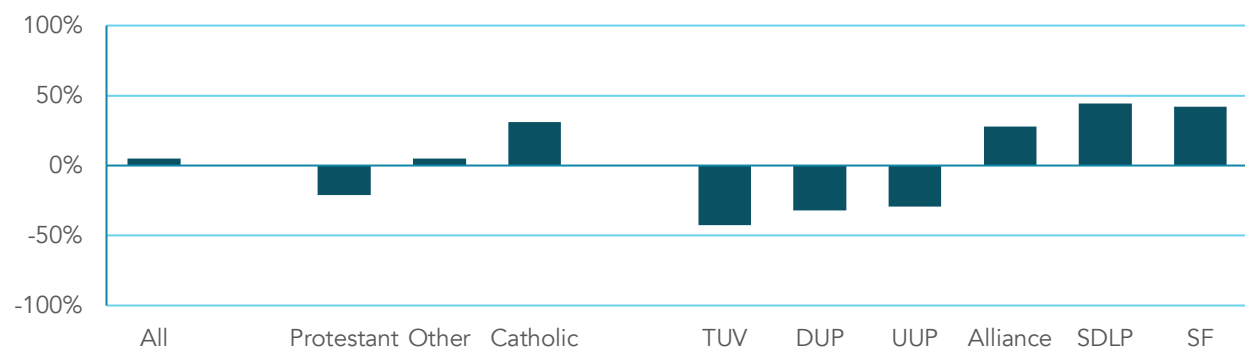
Table 4: Preferences for trade border location (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
GB-NI trade border	52		32	43	73		24	28	37	69	78	79
NI-RoI trade border	17		31	13	6		46	37	34	7	6	4
Don't know	31		36	44	21		30	34	29	24	16	17
Net score	*+35*		*+1*	*+30*	*+68*		*-22*	*-9*	*+3*	*+63*	*+73*	*+74*

Question wording: *The alternative to the Protocol is to have checks on goods on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. What would your preference be? As is, with checks between Great Britain and Northern Ireland / To change, so that checks are on the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland / Don't know.*

Figure 3: Net support for GB-NI vs NI-RoI trade border (from Table 4)
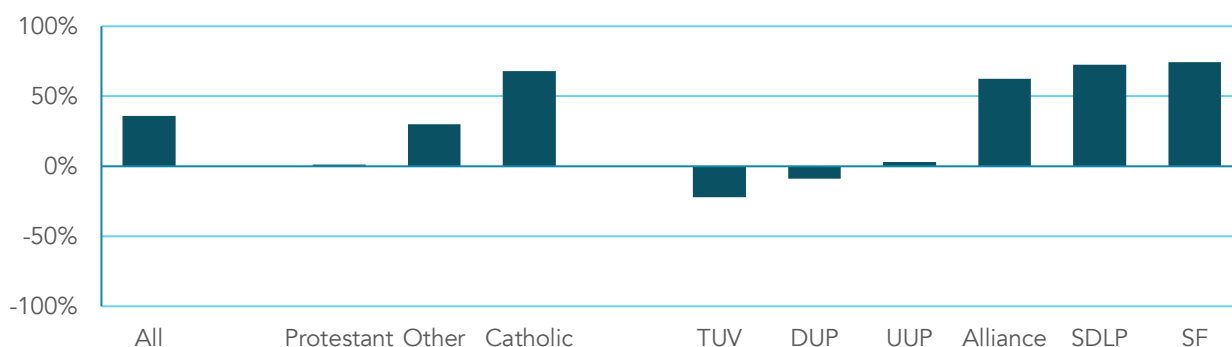
In Tables 5-8, we report responses to a battery of questions about the Protocol in the context of the backdrop issues of Brexit and the EU, with net scores illustrated in Figures 4-7. As shown in Figures 4 and 5, there is very little support for the idea that Brexit was either good for the UK or good for Northern Ireland. Net scores for all respondents, for Catholics, and for voters for Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin, are strongly anti-Brexit in both graphs. Protestants are on balance anti-Brexit in both, but more so regarding Brexit being bad for Northern Ireland. TUV, DUP, and UUP voters negatively evaluate Brexit for Northern Ireland, but are more evenly balanced on the impact of Brexit on the UK, with TUV voters positively disposed.

Figure 6 shows that Catholics, and voters for Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin, on balance agree that the Protocol is good for Northern Ireland, but Protestants are more strongly negative, particularly DUP, TUV and UUP voters.

When respondents were asked whether they would like to re-join the EU, or stay out of the EU, a quite strong balance of opinion is in favour of re-joining among all respondents, among Catholics, and among Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin voters. We find an equal balance of opinion among Protestants and find that TUV voters are the most negatively disposed to re-joining.

Table 5: Level of agreement that Brexit is a good thing for the UK (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	4		7	4	2		13	11	6	2	4	1
Agree	11		19	9	5		28	23	25	5	5	3
Neither	14		18	22	8		20	19	21	8	4	8
Disagree	30		31	26	31		23	25	26	33	27	30
Strongly disagree	30		14	27	45		11	10	12	49	55	51
Don't know	11		11	13	8		6	11	10	4	5	7
Net score	*-45*		*-19*	*-40*	*-69*		*+7*	*-1*	*-7*	*-75*	*-73*	*-77*

Question wording: *Brexit is on balance a good thing for the United Kingdom.*

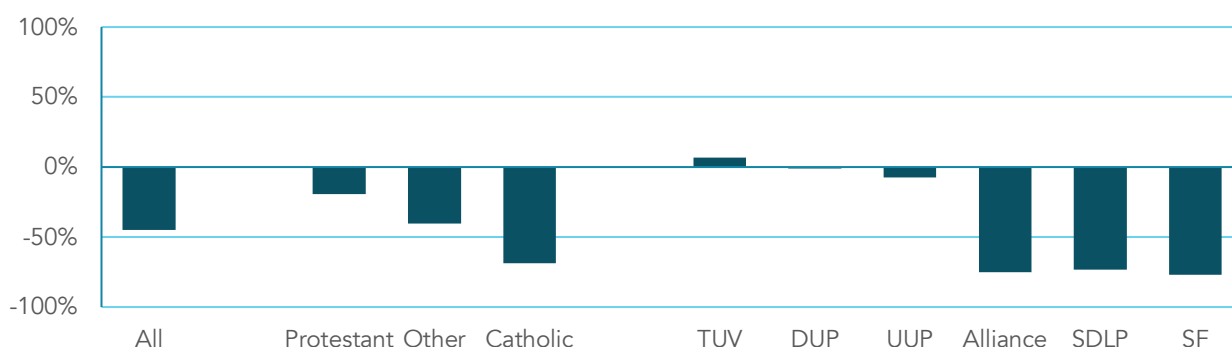## Figure 4: Net agreement that Brexit is a good thing for the UK (from Table 5)

Table 6: Level of agreement that Brexit is a good thing for Northern Ireland (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	4		6	3	2		13	9	6	0	3	2
Agree	10		14	8	8		18	16	19	10	6	7
Neither	14		17	22	9		14	21	20	11	6	8
Disagree	31		35	27	30		40	30	29	31	31	29
Strongly disagree	30		18	27	42		10	14	17	45	52	46
Don't know	11		11	13	9		6	11	9	3	3	7
Net score	*-47*		*-33*	*-43*	*-62*		*-19*	*-18*	*-21*	*-65*	*-75*	*-67*

Question wording: *Brexit is on balance a good thing for Northern Ireland.*

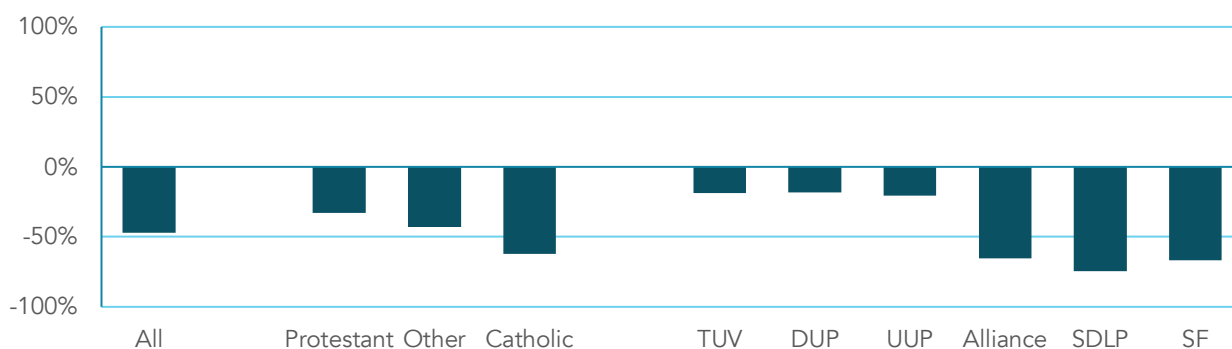## Figure 5: Net agreement that Brexit is a good thing for Northern Ireland (from Table 6)

Table 7: Level of agreement that the Protocol is a good thing Northern Ireland (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	6		2	4	10		1	1	2	7	16	15
Agree	16		9	10	25		7	5	7	32	36	29
Neither	25		22	37	25		22	23	25	25	20	23
Disagree	20		30	14	12		30	32	28	19	13	10
Strongly disagree	15		21	14	11		33	28	25	11	7	10
Don't know	18		16	21	17		8	12	14	6	9	13
Net score	*-13*		*-39*	*-14*	*12*		*-55*	*-55*	*-45*	*+10*	*+31*	*+24*

Question wording: *The Protocol is on balance a good thing for Northern Ireland.*

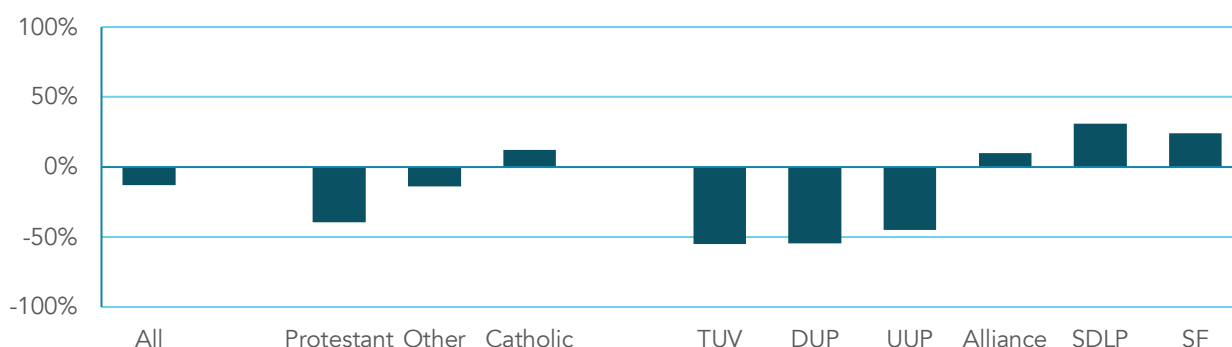## Figure 6: Net agreement that the Protocol is a good thing for Northern Ireland (from Table 7)

Table 8: Voting intention in any future referendum on EU membership (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Re-join	58		38	53	80		17	32	35	82	91	87
Stay out	24		42	16	10		66	51	50	12	5	7
Don't know	18		20	31	11		16	17	16	7	5	7
Net score	*+34*		*-4*	*+37*	*+70*		*-49*	*-19*	*-15*	*+70*	*+86*	*+80*

Question wording: *Imagine that there was another referendum on EU membership… If there was a referendum on whether the UK should re-join the European Union or stay out of the European Union, how would you vote?*

Figure 7: Net support for re-joining the EU (from Table 8)

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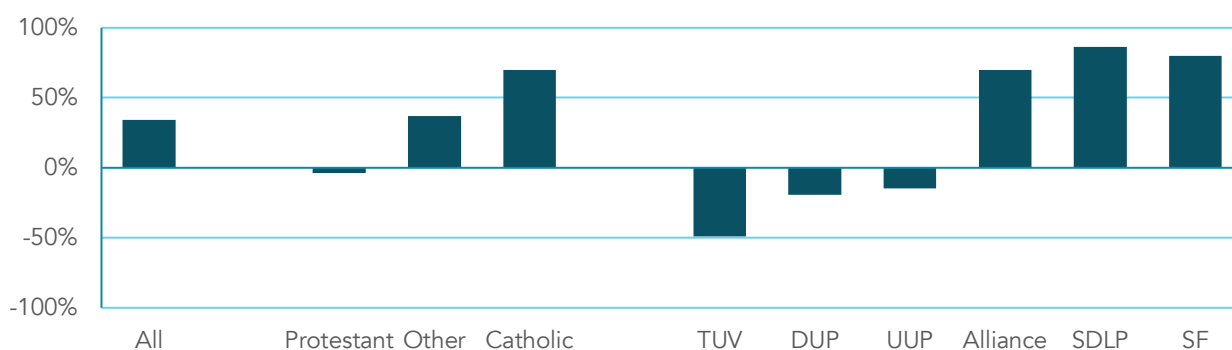
Respondents were also asked to assess how well or badly they think that a range of governments and parties have handled issues relating to the Protocol and Brexit (on a 1-5 scale, with higher scores indicating more negative evaluations). Table 9 reports the mean scores: for all respondents (also graphically illustrated in Figure 8); for respondents broken down by religious background (also graphically illustrated in Figure 9); and for respondents broken by the party they voted for in the Assembly election (also graphically illustrated in Figure 10). We highlight, in Table 9, the most negative evaluations (4.5 or higher) and the least negative evaluations (3.5 or lower). In the columns for Protestants, and DUP voters and UUP voters, we see that none of the scores are highlighted, indicating that Protestants, and DUP and UUP voters, did not evaluate any of the governments or parties either very positively or very negatively: they saw them all as equally fairly bad at handling Brexit and the Protocol. In contrast, almost all of the scores in the columns for Catholics, and voters for Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin, are either very negative or not particularly negative, indicating great variation in how these sets of respondents evaluate the different governments and parties.

Table 9 shows that 14 of the 15 most negative evaluations were made about the UK government, the DUP and the TUV, and 12 of these 15 evaluations were made by Catholics and by voters for Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin. Also, 20 of the 21 least negative evaluations were made about either the Irish government, the EU, the SDLP, Sinn Féin or Alliance, and all of these 20 evaluations were made by Catholics, and voters of the SDLP, Sinn Féin or Alliance. The outlier among unionist party voters is the TUV being somewhat more positively evaluated by TUV voters.

Table 9: Evaluations of how well or badly the governments and parties handled issues relating to Brexit and the Protocol (mean scores)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
UK government	4.5		4.3	4.4	4.7		4.5	4.2	4.3	4.6	4.7	4.8
NI Executive	4.4		4.3	4.3	4.4		4.5	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.4
Irish government	3.6		4.0	3.8	3.2		4.3	4.2	4.0	3.4	2.7	3.2
European Union	3.6		4.1	3.8	3.1		4.4	4.3	4.2	3.3	2.6	3.0
TUV	4.2		3.9	4.3	4.6		3.3	3.8	4.1	4.5	4.7	4.6
DUP	4.3		4.0	4.3	4.7		4.1	3.6	4.3	4.6	4.7	4.7
UUP	4.0		3.9	4.0	4.1		4.0	3.8	3.7	3.9	4.0	4.2
Alliance	3.6		3.9	3.8	3.4		4.2	4.0	3.9	2.7	3.1	3.4
SDLP	3.7		4.0	3.8	3.4		4.2	4.1	4.0	3.3	2.8	3.4
Sinn Féin	3.7		4.1	3.9	3.4		4.3	4.2	4.1	3.5	3.3	3.0

Note: *Reported are mean scores on a 1-5 scale, with higher scores indicating a more negative evaluation. For ease of interpretation high scores of 4.5 or greater (most negative evaluations) and low scores of 3.5 or lower (least negative evaluations) are highlighted.*

Question wording: *How well or badly do you think each of the following governments handled issues relating to Brexit and the Protocol? And how well or badly do you think each of the following political parties handled issues relating to Brexit and the Protocol?*

Figure 8: Evaluations of how well or badly the governments and parties handled issues relating to Brexit and the Protocol, all respondents (mean scores on 1-5 scale; higher scores = more negative)
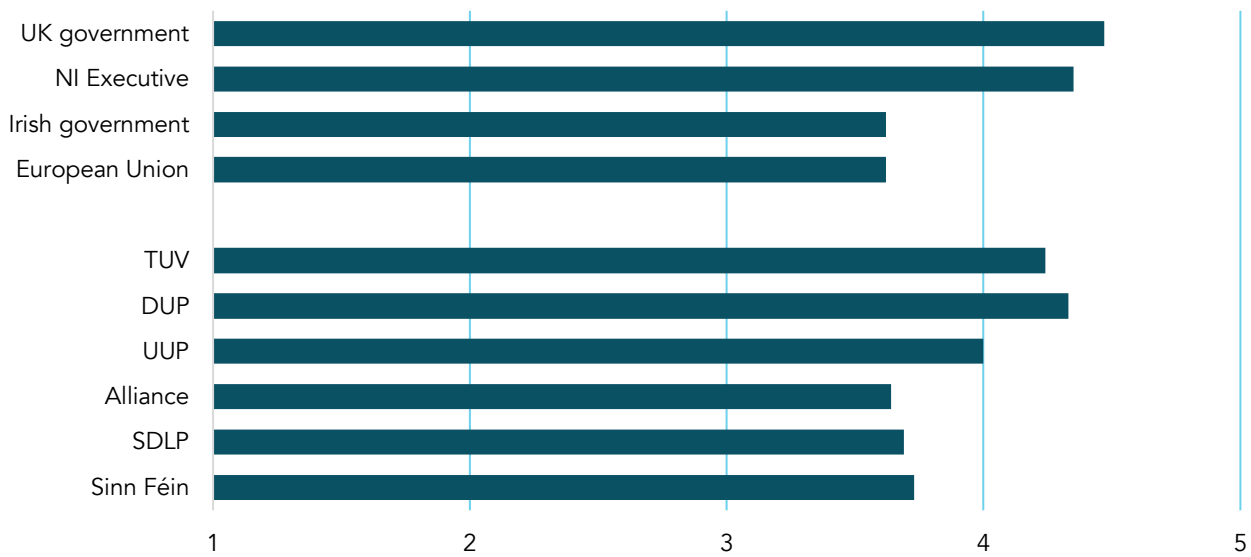

Figure 9: Evaluations of how well or badly the governments and parties handled issues relating to Brexit and the Protocol, by community background (mean scores on 1-5 scale; higher scores = more negative)

Catholic   Other   Protestant

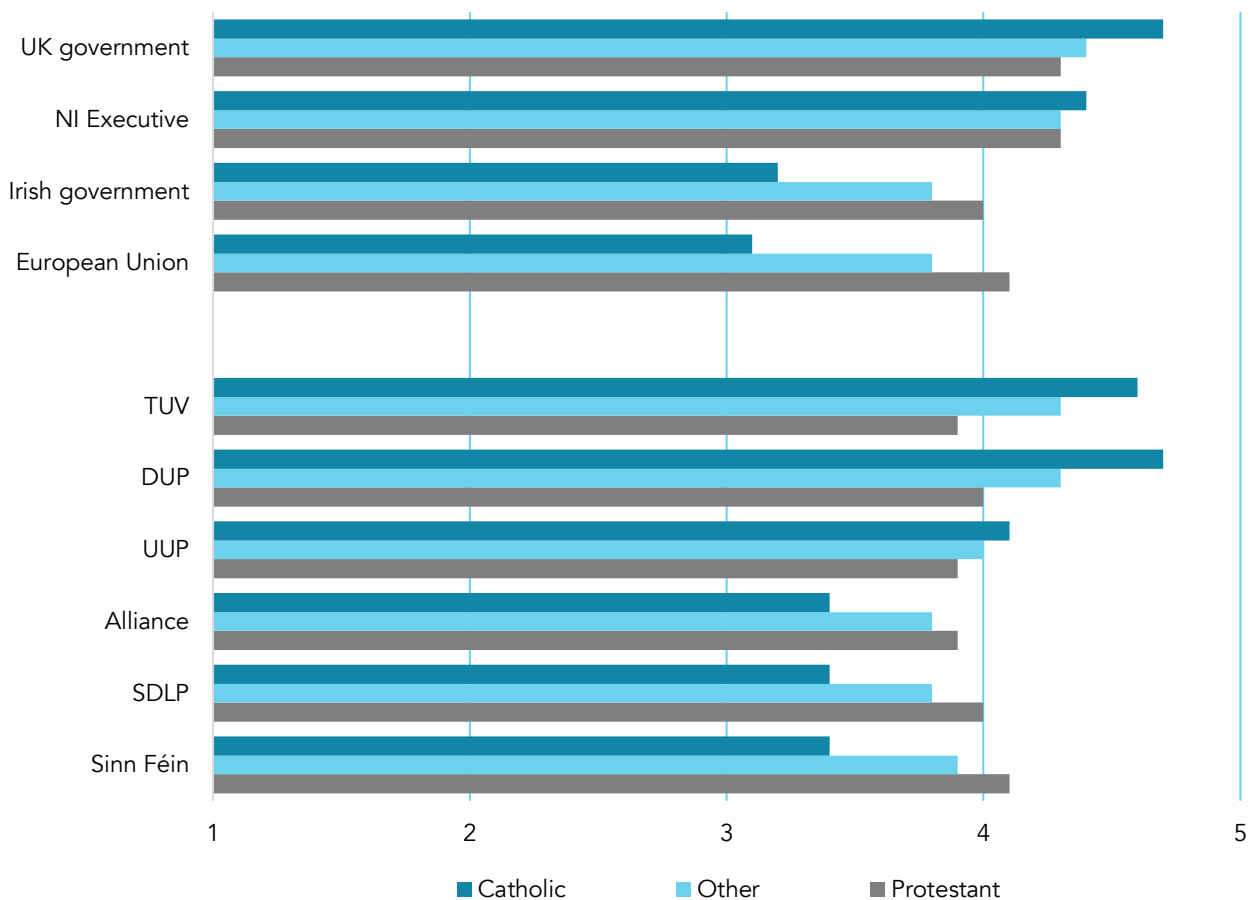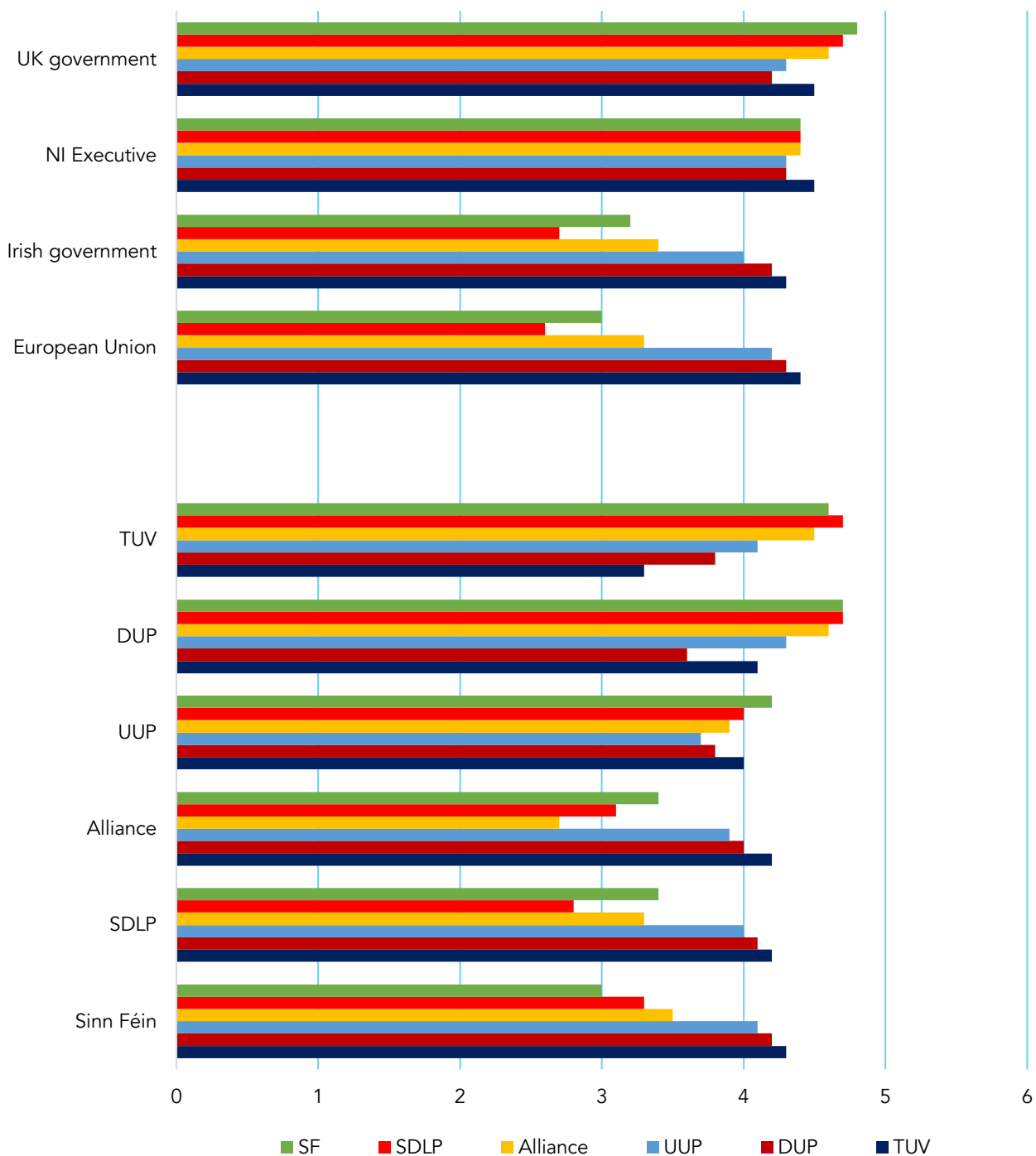NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
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Figure 10: Evaluations of how well or badly the governments and parties handled issues relating to Brexit and the Protocol, by vote choice (mean scores on 1-5 scale; higher scores = more negative)

Our final question on the Protocol overlaps with the subject of power-sharing. We asked respondents to choose between two options: 'The Protocol should be scrapped even if it means the end of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive' or 'The Northern Ireland Assembly

and the Executive should be maintained even if there are difficulties with the Protocol'. The responses are reported in Table 10 and net scores are graphed in Figure 11. The balance of opinion is very much against scrapping the Protocol if it means the end of power-sharing: among all respondents, strongly among Catholics, and very strongly among Alliance, the SDLP and Sinn Féin voters. Protestants and UUP voters are also on balance against scrapping the Protocol if it means the end of the devolved institutions. While DUP voters are more evenly split, they lean towards keeping power-sharing even if there are difficulties with the Protocol. Only among TUV voters is there net support for scrapping the Protocol even if it means the end of the Assembly and Executive.

Table 10: Preferences between scrapping the Protocol or keeping power-sharing (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Scrap Protocol	14	26	9	4	47	32	25	6	4	3
Keep power-sharing	54	42	43	70	33	39	47	79	83	77
Neither	10	9	18	9	6	9	12	6	6	8
Don't know	22	23	30	17	14	20	16	10	6	12
Net score	-40	-17	-34	-66	+14	-7	-22	-72	-79	-74

Question wording: *The Protocol should be scrapped even if it means the end of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive", "The Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive should be maintained even if there are difficulties with the Protocol", "neither" or "don't know".*

Figure 11: Net support for scrapping the Protocol vs keeping power-sharing (from Table 10)
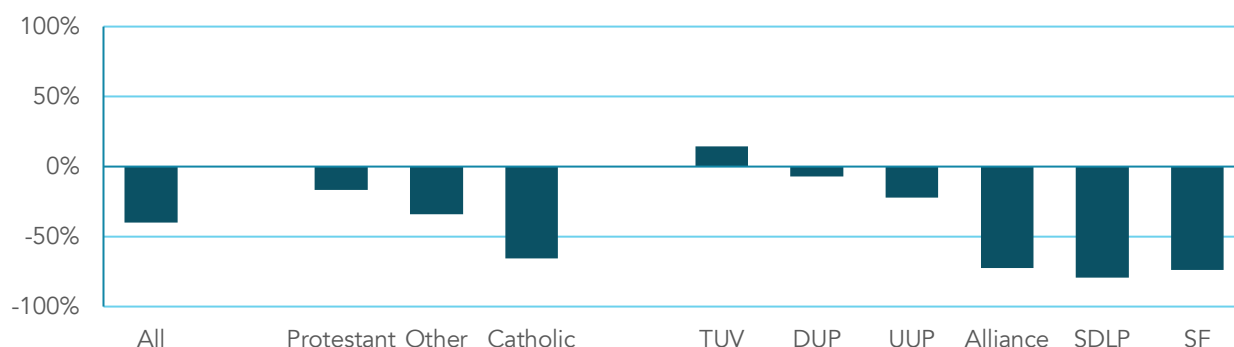
Discussion of findings on the Protocol

When examining the attitudes of the eligible electorate we found that while opinion is evenly balanced on general questions about the Protocol (Figures 1, 2 and 6), the balance of opinion is clearly in a pro-Protocol direction in the specific contexts of asking where the post-Brexit regulatory and de facto customs border should lie (Figure 3), and whether power-sharing and the Protocol should be scrapped or maintained (Figure 11). The electorate as a whole strongly believes that Brexit is bad for the UK (Figure 4), and for Northern Ireland (Figure 5), that the UK government has handled Brexit and the Protocol very badly (Figure 8), and would vote for the UK to re-join the EU (Figure 7).

Two distinct groups emerge from the analysis. Consistently supportive of the Protocol are Catholics, and voters for Alliance, the SDLP and Sinn Féin. And consistently much less supportive are

Protestants, and voters of the TUV, DUP and UUP. Also, Catholics, and voters of Alliance, the SDLP and Sinn Féin, are distinguished sharply in their evaluations of government and parties handling of Brexit and the Protocol. They tend to have the sharpest views in the sense that all of the net scores of greater magnitude than either plus 60 or minus 60 are derived from the responses of Catholics, or voters for Alliance, the SDLP, or Sinn Féin. In contrast, Protestants and voters for TUV, DUP and UUP tend to be more divided in their views.
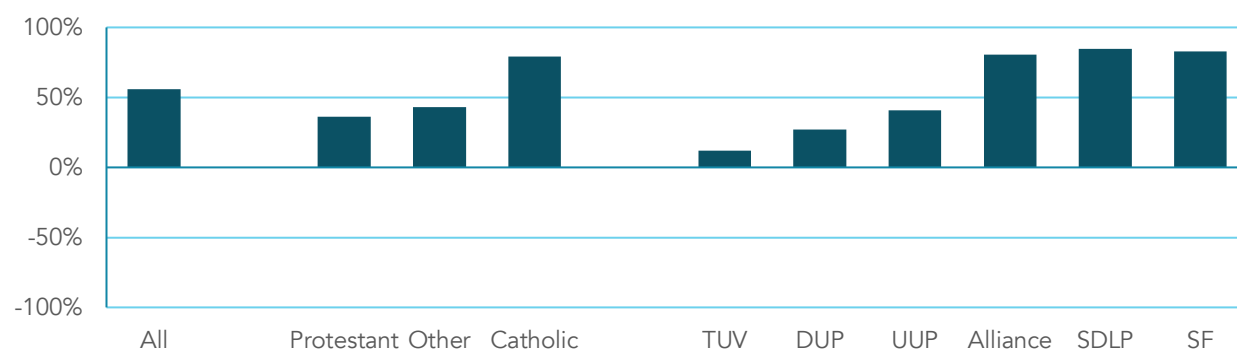
Attitudes to power-sharing

In Table 11, we report responses to a question about the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. We calculate 'net support' scores as the difference between those giving a broadly positive evaluation of the Agreement (either fine as is or needs minor change) and those giving a broadly negative evaluation (substantial change needed or it should be scrapped entirely). As illustrated in Figure 10, the overall balance is very much in favour of the Agreement. Only five percent of respondents think the Agreement should be removed – a minority position across all groups. It should be emphasised, however, that most of the positive evaluations are respondents saying it needs some minor changes.

Table 11: Attitudes towards the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
To stay as it is	26		17	23	36		11	17	13	28	37	39
Some changes	44		44	33	49		40	40	53	59	53	49
Substantial changes	9		15	7	5		17	18	16	6	6	5
To be removed	5		10	6	1		22	12	9	1	0	1
Don't know	15		14	30	9		10	14	10	6	4	5
Net score	+56		+36	+43	+79		+12	+27	+41	+80	+85	+83

Question wording: *There are a number of different opinions on the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement, which was signed in 1998. Which one of these statements is closest to your view? The Agreement remains the best basis for governing Northern Ireland as it is / The Agreement remains the best basis for governing Northern Ireland but needs to undergo some changes to work better / The Agreement is no longer a good basis for governing Northern Ireland and should be substantially changed / The Agreement has never been a good basis for governing Northern Ireland and should be removed / don't know.*

Figure 12: Net support for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (from Table 11)

One of the core aspects of the Agreement relates to power-sharing arrangements. Respondents were asked to react to a statement that power-sharing has been good for Northern Ireland, and another saying that it has been bad. It is methodologically comforting that the responses to these two statements are mirror images of each other. The results are reported in Table 12 and net scores are illustrated in Figures 13 and 14. Most supportive of power-sharing are Catholics, and voters for Alliance, the SDLP and Sinn Féin. Protestants, those of other religious backgrounds, and voters for the DUP and UUP, are still supportive, but somewhat less so. Least supportive are TUV voters.

Table 12: Level of agreement that power-sharing has been good for Northern Ireland (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	13	9	12	16	4	9	12	24	25	18
Agree	41	44	30	43	29	42	50	56	45	47
Neither	17	15	27	16	17	18	15	7	8	13
Disagree	15	19	13	13	25	24	14	9	16	12
Strongly disagree	5	6	3	5	17	5	7	2	5	5
Don't know	9	7	16	7	7	4	2	1	3	4
Net score	+34	+28	+26	+41	-9	+22	+40	+70	+49	+48

Question wording: *Overall, power-sharing has been good for Northern Ireland.*

Figure 13: Net agreement that power-sharing has been good for Northern Ireland (from Table 12)
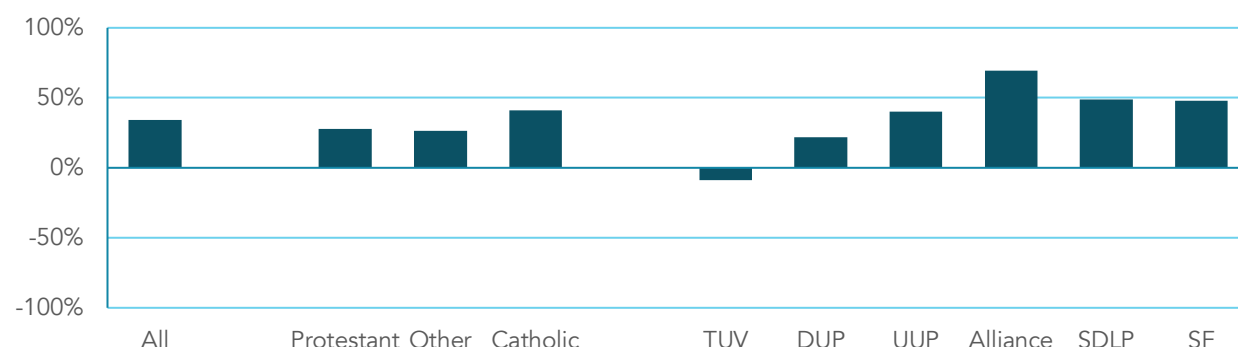

Table 13: Level of agreement that power-sharing has been bad for Northern Ireland (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	3	3	4	3	8	3	4	1	5	3
Agree	16	20	9	14	31	23	16	13	13	15
Neither	19	18	30	17	19	20	18	10	10	14
Disagree	43	45	32	45	29	43	50	58	49	51
Strongly disagree	11	8	10	14	7	7	10	18	22	15
Don't know	8	7	16	6	8	4	2	1	2	3
Net score	-35	-30	-29	-42	+3	-25	-39	-61	-54	-49

Question wording: *Power-sharing has been bad for Northern Ireland.*

Figure 14: Net agreement that power-sharing has been bad for Northern Ireland (from Table 13)
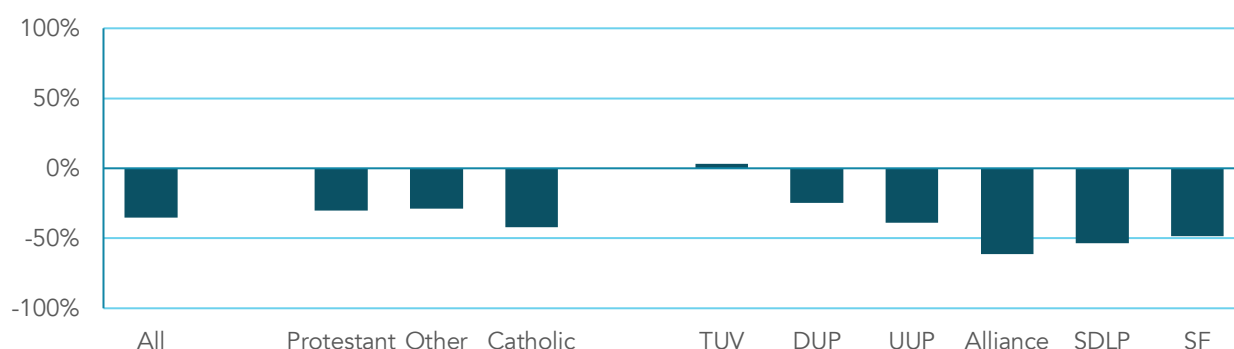
Given that many respondents indicate that minor (or indeed major) changes should be made to the Agreement, we now examine responses to specific elements of power-sharing. We begin by examining attitudes to the positions of First and deputy First Minister (see Tables 14 and 15).

There is quite strong agreement with the way in which First and deputy First Ministers are currently chosen. There is not much difference between Catholics and Protestants or between voters for the DUP, UUP, Alliance, Sinn Féin or the SDLP, though Sinn Féin voters are quite a lot more supportive than SDLP voters. TUV voters are also supportive, but the least so among voters of the six main parties. Also, there is a slight overall balance of opinion, among all respondents, in favour of changing the titles to 'Joint First Minister' (Table 15, Figure 16). Catholics are evenly divided, with Sinn Féin voters somewhat more negatively disposed than SDLP voters. Protestants are on balance somewhat positive, as are DUP and UUP voters. Most positive are Alliance voters.

Table 14: Level of agreement with the idea that "The largest party overall should provide the First Minister and the largest party from the other main community should provide the deputy First Minster" (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	11	8	9	15	4	9	12	13	18	21
Agree	46	52	29	47	47	55	54	53	44	49
Neither	17	16	28	14	9	17	14	13	10	11
Disagree	13	13	11	13	25	12	15	17	19	11
Strongly disagree	3	3	2	3	8	2	2	2	6	3
Don't know	11	9	21	9	7	5	4	2	3	5
Net score	*+41*	*+43*	*+25*	*+46*	*+19*	*+50*	*+50*	*+48*	*+36*	*+57*

Question wording: *The largest party overall should provide the First Minister and the largest party from the other main community should provide the deputy First Minster.*

Figure 15: Net agreement that the largest party overall should provide the FM and the largest party from the other main community should provide the deputy FM (from Table 14)
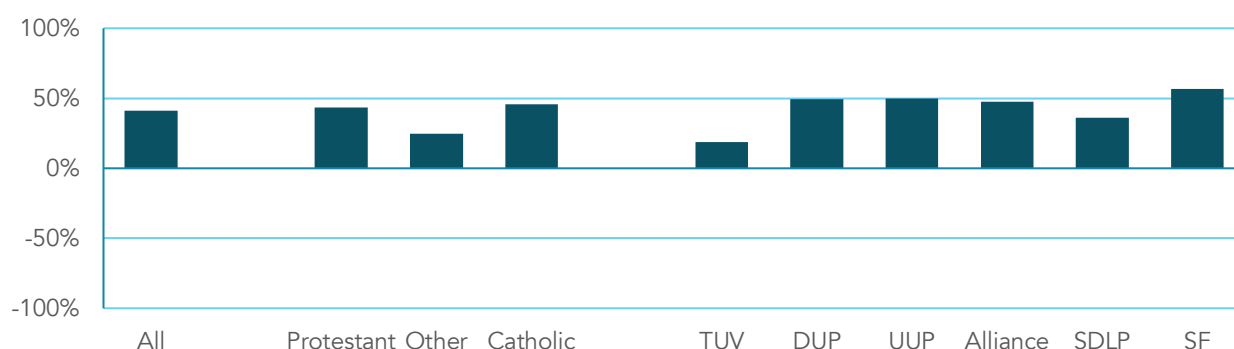

Table 15: Attitudes towards keeping the titles of First and deputy First Minister or changing them to 'Joint First Ministers' (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
'Joint First Minister'	38		41	33	36		39	38	44	46	42	30
Keep as is	31		28	23	37		32	28	34	25	34	45
Abolish and replace	18		18	15	19		24	20	13	21	17	19
Don't know	14		13	29	9		5	14	9	9	6	5
Net score	*+7*		*+14*	*+10*	*-1*		*+8*	*+11*	*+10*	*+22*	*+8*	*-15*

Question wording: *Currently the First Minister and Deputy First Minister have identical powers, they differ only in their titles. Which of the following options do you prefer? Their titles should be changed, so that both are called Joint First Minister / Their titles should stay as they are, with the First Minister being nominated by the largest party / These positions should be abolished and replaced by something else / Don't Know.*

Figure 16: Net agreement in favour of new 'Joint First Minister' titles (from Table 15)
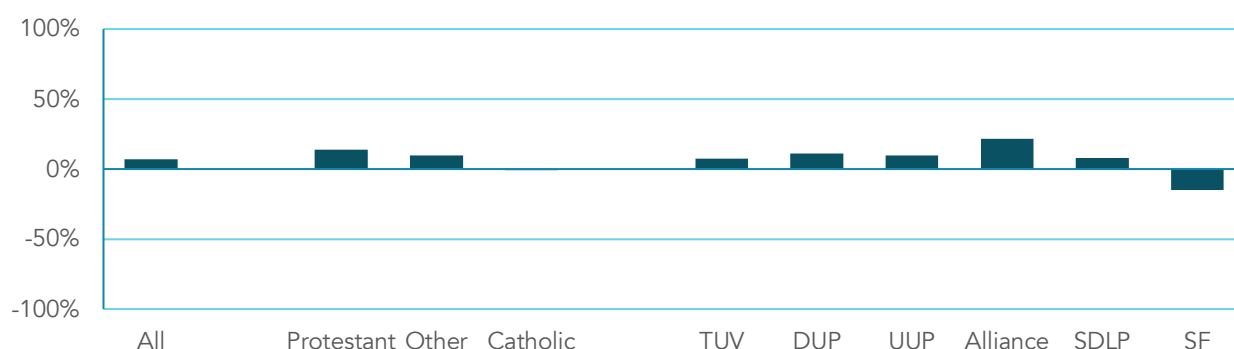
Respondents are very evenly divided on whether the current rules should be changed to allow a government to be formed by any coalition of parties that collectively has a majority of seats (Table 16 and Figure 17). There is a more pronounced overall balance of opinion – among all respondents, among both Catholics and Protestants and among all sets of party voters – in favour of there being a clear distinction between governing parties and opposition parties (Table 17 and Figure 18).

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Table 16: Level of agreement with the idea that "We should get rid of the power-sharing system of government altogether in Northern Ireland, and instead any combination of parties that together have a majority in the Assembly should be able to form a government" (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	5	4	7	5	5	4	6	6	9	5
Agree	31	30	20	36	19	28	26	43	40	37
Neither	18	18	29	16	23	20	16	11	9	13
Disagree	26	31	18	24	36	30	37	27	28	28
Strongly disagree	7	6	6	9	5	6	8	11	10	10
Don't know	13	12	21	10	12	12	8	2	4	7
Net score	*+3*	*-3*	*+2*	*+9*	*-17*	*-4*	*-13*	*+11*	*+12*	*+5*

Question wording: *We should get rid of the power-sharing system of government altogether in Northern Ireland, and instead any combination of parties that together have a majority in the Assembly should be able to form a government.*

Figure 17: Net agreement that the power-sharing system should be abandoned and coalitions permitted based on any combination of parties (from Table 16)
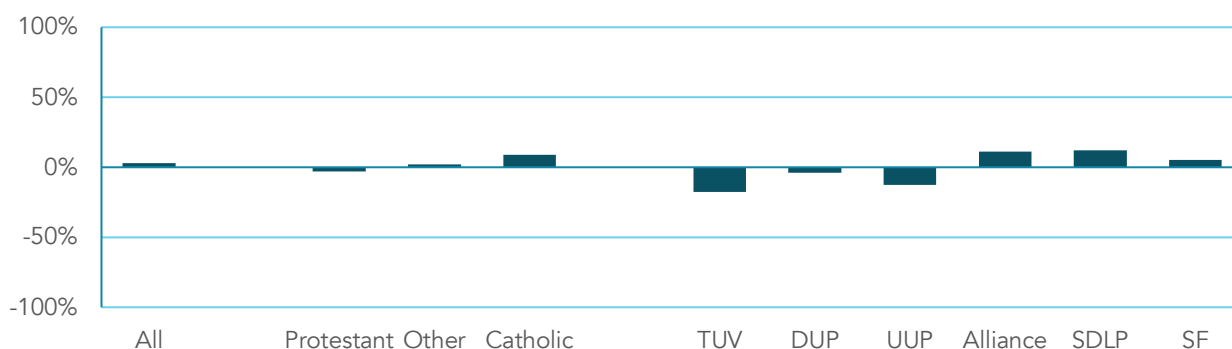

Table 17: Level of agreement with the idea that "Instead of all the main parties being in government, we should have a form of government in which there's a very clear distinction between some parties being in government and others being in opposition" (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	9	9	7	10	13	6	15	10	11	12
Agree	36	39	25	37	37	42	39	48	41	38
Neither	20	19	31	18	23	19	21	11	9	18
Disagree	16	16	11	17	13	16	18	20	26	17
Strongly disagree	4	3	4	5	3	3	3	6	5	5
Don't know	15	14	21	14	11	14	4	6	8	9
Net score	*+25*	*+28*	*+17*	*+25*	*+34*	*+28*	*+32*	*+33*	*+21*	*+27*

Question wording: *Instead of all the main parties being in government, we should have a form of government in which there's a very clear distinction between some parties being in government and others being in opposition.*
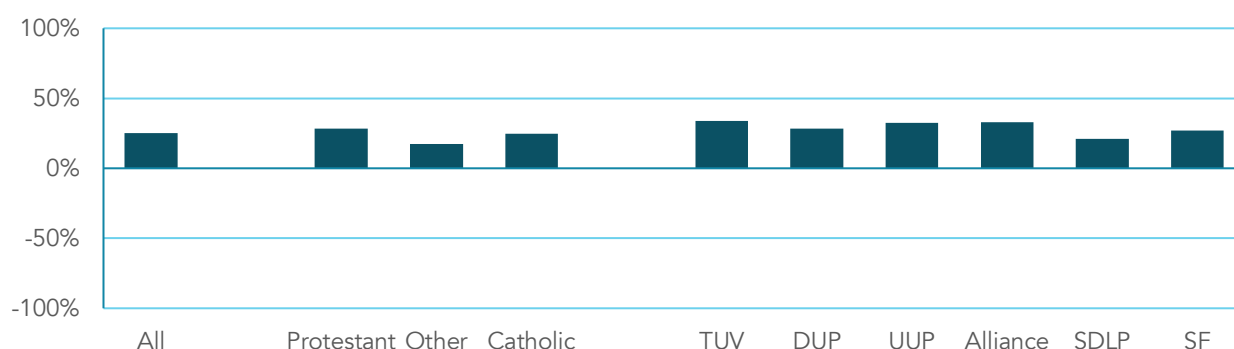
We also examine attitudes to the cross-community consent voting arrangements, as reported in Tables 18-19, with net scores illustrated in Figures 19 and 20. There is considerable support for the general idea of needing a majority in each of the nationalist and unionist blocs, except among Alliance voters who are almost exactly evenly balanced (Table 18, Figure 19). Support is much lower when the question highlights the tendency for this voting rule to 'just let one side or other … block key decisions'. There is an even balance of opinion on this version of the question, except for Alliance voters, and to some extent SDLP voters, who agree with changing the rule when the question is phrased in this way (Table 19, Figure 20).

Table 18: Level of agreement with the idea that "Legislation should require the consent of a majority of Unionist AND Nationalist Assembly Member (MLAs) before it can be passed" (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	8		7	6	11		5	9	12	4	11	15
Agree	47		53	31	47		52	55	56	42	51	49
Neither	17		15	26	15		13	16	16	14	12	12
Disagree	13		12	11	14		15	11	12	28	19	14
Strongly disagree	4		3	7	4		5	3	2	10	5	5
Don't know	11		9	19	9		9	7	3	2	3	5
Net score	*+38*		*+45*	*+19*	*+40*		*+37*	*+50*	*+55*	*+9*	*+39*	*+45*

Question wording: *Legislation should require the consent of a majority of Unionist AND Nationalist Assembly Member (MLAs) before it can be passed.*

Figure 19: **Net agreement that legislation should require cross-community consent** (from Table 18)

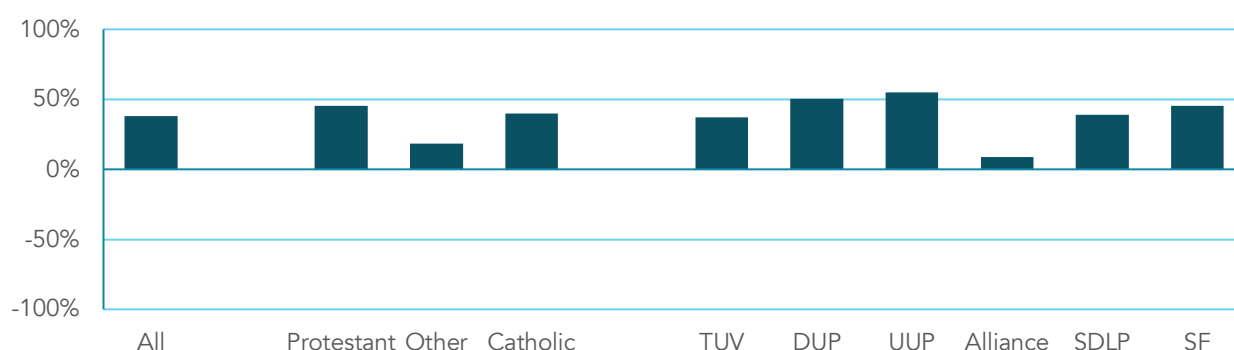NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
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Table 19: Level of agreement with the idea that "There should be no cross-community vote because it just lets one side – either unionist or nationalist – block key decisions being made" (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Strongly agree	7		6	6	9		10	6	6	12	11	8
Agree	34		36	22	36		33	34	36	45	41	38
Neither	18		17	31	15		15	17	18	15	15	14
Disagree	25		27	19	25		35	33	28	21	23	28
Strongly disagree	4		4	3	5		1	2	7	4	6	5
Don't know	12		10	20	11		6	8	5	4	5	7
Net score	+12		+11	+7	+16		+7	+5	+7	+33	+23	+13

Question wording: *There should be no cross-community vote because it just lets one side – either unionist or nationalist – block key decisions being made*

Figure 20: Net agreement that cross-community voting should not be used in the Assembly (from Table 19)
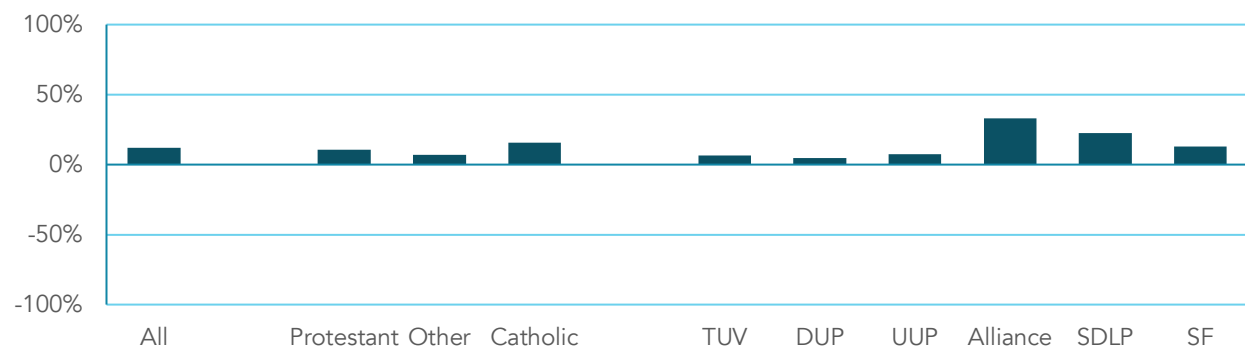
Discussion of findings on power-sharing

In the eligible electorate as a whole, there is broad support for the 1998 Agreement, though within that broad support recognition that changes may be needed. Support for the Agreement and power-sharing is much stronger among Catholics, and voters for Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin, than among Protestants and voters for the TUV, DUP or UUP – but only for TUV voters are attitudes towards power-sharing more negative than positive.

There is broad agreement with how the First and deputy First Minister are chosen and, on balance, slight support for amending the titles to 'Joint First Minister'. There is support for cross-community consent procedures, but much less so (particularly among Alliance and SDLP voters) when its use as a blocking device is emphasised. There is not clear support for replacing power-sharing arrangements and permitting the formation of governments based on any combination of parties, similar to the way governments are formed in many European parliamentary democracies, but there

is consistent support for there to be a clear distinction between government and opposition parties within the Assembly.[20]

Attitudes towards a potential Irish unification referendum

Among the whole electorate the balance of opinion is in favour of holding a referendum on a united Ireland: 53 percent in favour and 32 percent against, resulting in a net support score of +21 (see Table 20 and Figure 21). Unsurprisingly, Catholics are very strongly in favour, as are voters of the SDLP and, particularly, Sinn Féin. Alliance voters are also in favour. Protestants are, on balance, opposed (by 54 to 34 percent). TUV, DUP and UUP voters are opposed, with TUV respondents most strongly so and UUP voters least strongly so.

An accompanying question posed the subject of timing: when, if ever, do people think a referendum should be held? We can identify those who favour one relatively soon (in the next 10 years or less) and those who say 'never' and calculate a net score (see Table 21 and Figure 22). Support for a referendum at some point within the next 10 years is high among the whole electorate (a net score of +36), with extremely high net scores among Catholics, and voters for Alliance, the SDLP and (particularly) Sinn Féin. Protestants, on balance, are slightly in favour of holding a referendum within a decade than never, UUP voters are exactly equally balanced on the issue, and voters of the TUV and DUP tend to favour never holding a referendum.

Table 20: Attitudes towards holding a referendum on a united Ireland (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Yes, should be one	53	35	45	72	23	26	36	62	78	85
No, should not be one	32	53	25	14	74	64	56	21	14	8
Don't know	15	12	30	14	3	10	7	17	7	7
Net score	*+21*	*-18*	*+20*	*+58*	*-51*	*-38*	*-20*	*+41*	*+64*	*+76*

Question wording: *Do you think there should be a referendum in Northern Ireland asking people whether they want Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom or to unify with the Republic of Ireland?: Yes, there should be a referendum / No, there should not be a referendum / Don't know.*

Figure 21: Net support for a referendum (from Table 20)
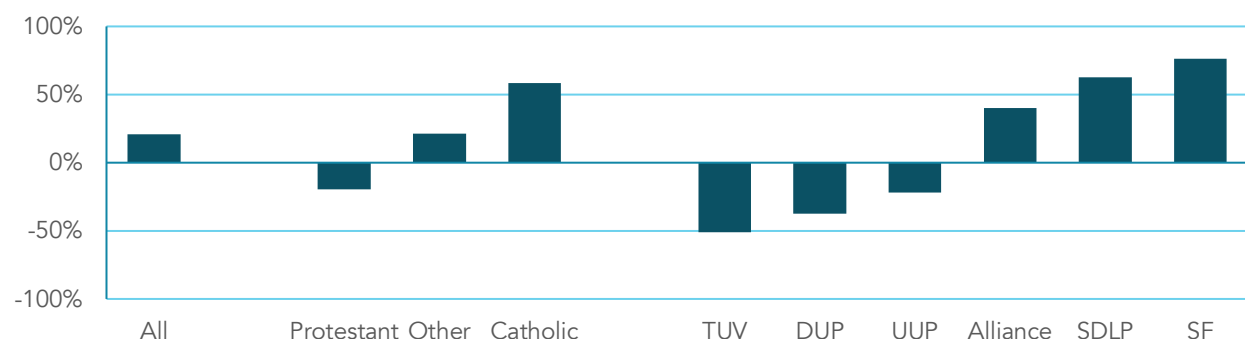
[20] Drawing on public opinion evidence from a deliberative forum, Haughey and Pow (2022) also find a great deal of caution about abandoning or replacing power-sharing institutions. In addition, they find significant support for extensive public consultation on any possible reforms, including careful consideration of any trade-offs involved.

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Table 21: Preferences regarding the timing of a referendum on a united Ireland (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Within 2 years	17	12	18	21	12	11	7	8	15	26
Within 5 years	22	15	17	32	4	12	15	28	32	37
Within 10 years	19	16	13	24	8	13	16	35	36	24
Within 20 years	5	6	4	4	12	6	8	9	3	4
More than 20 years	4	7	2	2	7	8	7	3	5	1
Never	21	35	18	8	48	45	38	9	6	3
Don't know	13	10	28	10	10	7	7	9	4	5
Net score	*+37*	*+7*	*+30*	*+69*	*-24*	*-10*	*+1*	*+63*	*+77*	*+84*

Question wording: *Do you think there should be a referendum in Northern Ireland asking people whether they want Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom or to unify with the Republic of Ireland?: Yes, there should be a referendum / No, there should not be a referendum / Don't know.*

Figure 22: **Net support for a referendum within 10 years versus never** (from Table 21)
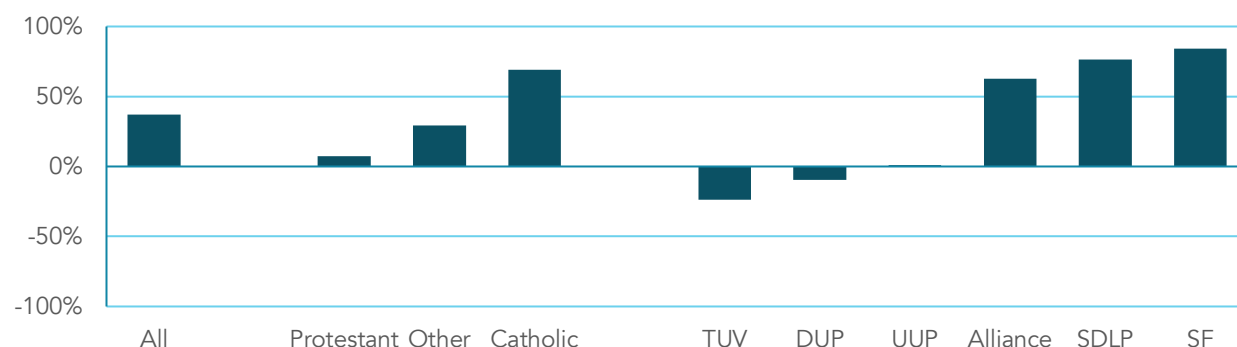
Respondents were also asked how likely they would be to vote if a referendum on Northern Ireland's constitutional future were held. We found that people are highly likely to vote, and that there is very little difference between Catholics and Protestants or between any of the sets of party voters regarding likelihood of turning out (see Table 22). However, people from neither a Catholic nor a Protestant religious background were the least likely to say they will turn out.

Overall, when asked how they would vote in such a referendum, 49 percent of respondents said they would vote in favour of staying in the UK, 28 percent would vote to leave the UK and unify with the Republic of Ireland, 5 percent state that they would not vote, and a remarkably high 17 percent responded that they 'don't know' (see Table 23). Catholics favour unity by a proportion of 54 percent to 20 percent, while a much stronger tendency in the opposite direction is observed among Protestants: 82 percent support staying in the UK and five percent favour Irish unification. As we see in Figure 23, the balance of opinion among TUV, DUP and UUP voters is, unsurprisingly, extremely strongly in favour of staying in the UK, while Sinn Féin voters are strongly in favour of Irish unification. Voters for the SDLP, on balance, support Irish unification but are much more lukewarm than Sinn Féin voters. Alliance voters are split three ways, with a plurality in favour of staying in the UK, but a striking 28 percent in the 'don't know' category.

## Table 22: Likelihood of voting in a referendum (mean scores)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Likely to vote (1-7)	6.3		6.5	6.0	6.3		6.8	6.8	6.8	6.7	6.8	6.7

Question wording: *If there was a referendum, how likely is it that you would turn out to vote in the referendum? Please use this scale where '1' means you definitely would not vote and '7' means you definitely would vote. Please pick any number between 1 and 7.   .*

Table 23: Vote intention in a referendum (%)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Remain in UK	49		82	46	20		96	89	91	42	27	9
Unify with RoI	28		5	16	54		2	2	2	29	51	76
Would not vote	5		3	9	6		1	2	2	1	5	2
Don't know	17		10	30	19		1	7	6	28	18	13
Net score	*+21*		*+76*	*+30*	*-34*		*+93*	*+87*	*+90*	*+13*	*-24*	*-67*

Question wording: *If there was a referendum in Northern Ireland asking people whether they want Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom or to unify with the Republic of Ireland, how would you vote in that referendum?   Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom / Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom and unify with the Republic of Ireland / I would not vote (spontaneous) / don't know.*

Figure 23: Net support for Northern Ireland to stay in the UK versus joining a united Ireland
(from Table 23)
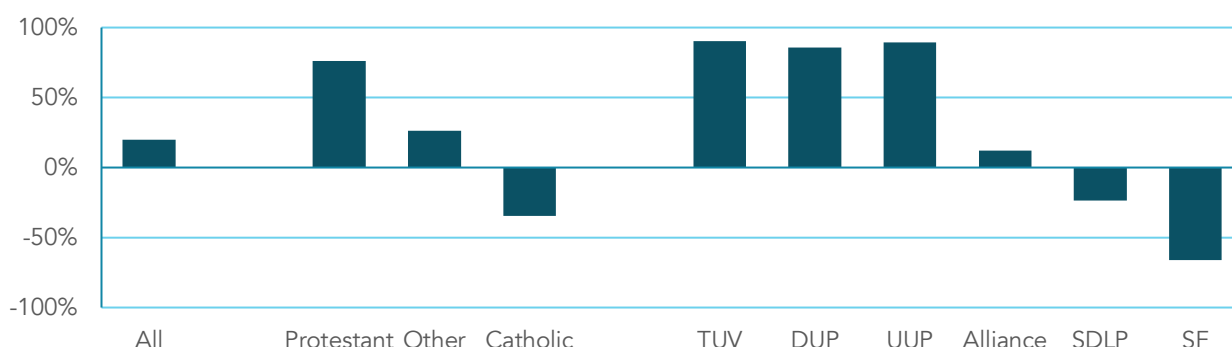
We also asked respondents how strongly they supported or opposed each option (staying in the UK and Irish unification) on 1-7 scales where higher scores indicate greater support (mean scores reported in Table 24 and graphed in Figures 24 and 25). Consistent with our previous discussion, Protestants, and voters for the TUV, DUP and UUP, are very strongly in favour of staying in the UK (Figure 24) and very strongly opposed to Irish unification (Figure 25). In contrast, Catholics and supporters of the SDLP are closer to the centre of the scale on both questions. Sinn Féin voters are notably opposed to staying in the UK and in favour of Irish unification, but the intensity of their views is somewhat less than responses among TUV, DUP and UUP voters.

We also asked about the extent to which people would find the result of a possible referendum acceptable (see Tables 25 and 26, with net scores illustrated in Figures 26 and 27). If the result of a referendum was that Northern Ireland would remain in the UK, there would be high levels of acceptance of this result. The proportion of respondents who would find this result 'almost

impossible to accept' is negligible, with the highest proportion at five percent among Sinn Féin voters. It is, after all, the status quo. In contrast, if a referendum resulted in Irish unification, one in 10 would find this 'almost impossible to accept', rising to one in five Protestants and almost three in 10 DUP voters.

Table 24: Level of support for each possible referendum outcome (mean score)

	All		Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Pro-UK	4.8		6.3	5.0	3.2		6.8	6.7	6.6	4.5	3.3	2.3
Pro-united Ireland	3.4		1.9	3.2	5.0		1.3	1.5	1.5	3.9	5.0	5.9
Net support for UK	*+1.4*		*+4.4*	*+1.8*	*-1.9*		*+5.5*	*+5.2*	*+5.2*	*+0.7*	*-1.7*	*-3.5*

Note: *Net support is calculated by subtracting row 2 from row 1. If these net scores are recalibrated to fit the same metric as the other net support scores (i.e. running from -100 to +100) the scores for the parties are: +92, +85, +85, +10, -18, and -60 respectively. Note that these recalibrated scores are used in Table 16.*

Question wording: *For each of the following options, please indicate the extent to which you would be opposed or in favour, using this 1 to 7 scale, where '1' means you are strongly opposed and '7' means you are strongly in favour… Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom / Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom and unify with the Republic of Ireland.*

Figure 24: Outcome favourability: Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom (mean scores on 1-7 scale; higher scores = more in favour) (from Table 24)
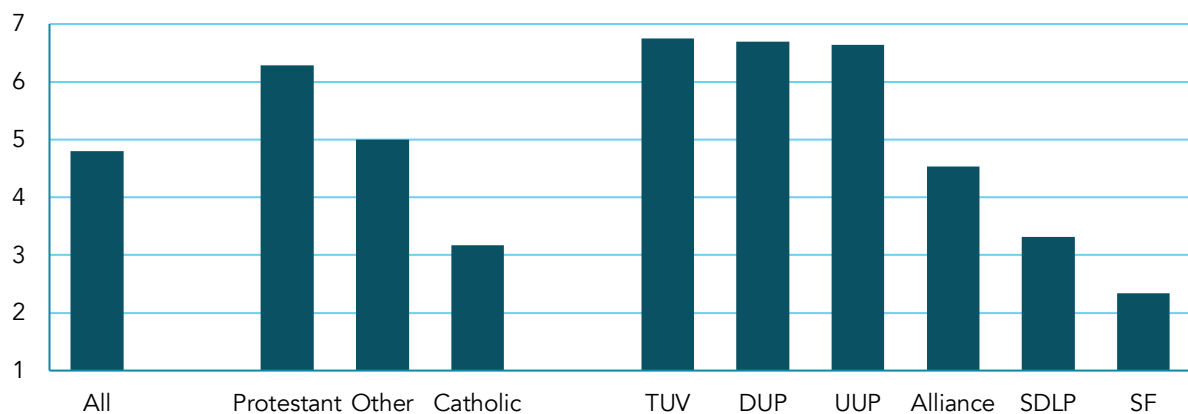

Figure 25: Outcome favourability: Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom to unify with the Republic of Ireland (mean scores on 1-7 scale; higher scores = more in favour) (from Table 24)
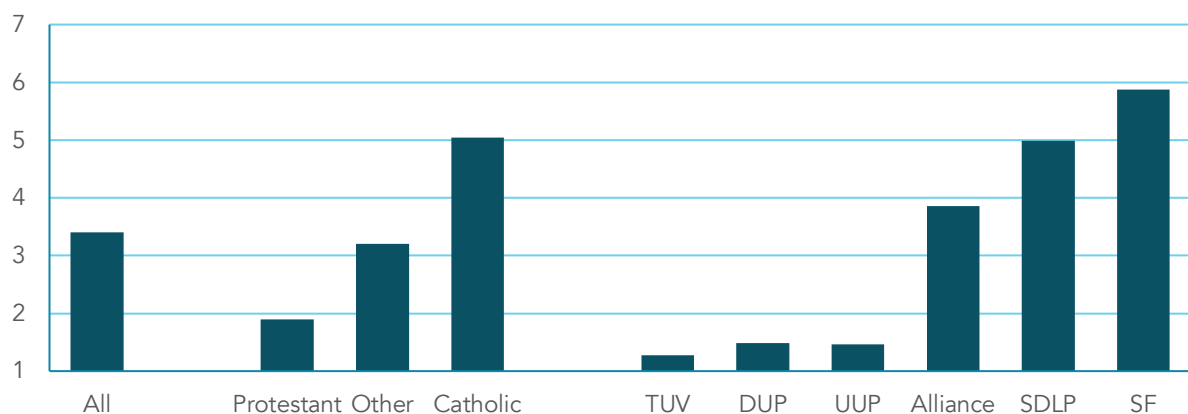
Table 25: Acceptability of result: Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Impossible to accept	2	0	1	3		0	0	1	0	2	5
Not happy	20	4	13	38		8	4		15	32	57
Happy	73	94	69	55		92	94	97	80	62	36
Don't know	5	2	17	4		0	2	2	6	4	3
Net score	*-71*	*-93*	*-68*	*-52*		*-92*	*-94*	*-96*	*-80*	*-60*	*-31*

Question wording: *Imagine there was a referendum in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and a majority in both places voted for Northern Ireland to remain in the UK. Please indicate what your reaction would be: I would find it almost impossible to accept / I would not be happy, but could live with it / I would happily accept it / don't know.*

Figure 26: Net unacceptability if result is Northern Ireland remaining in the United Kingdom
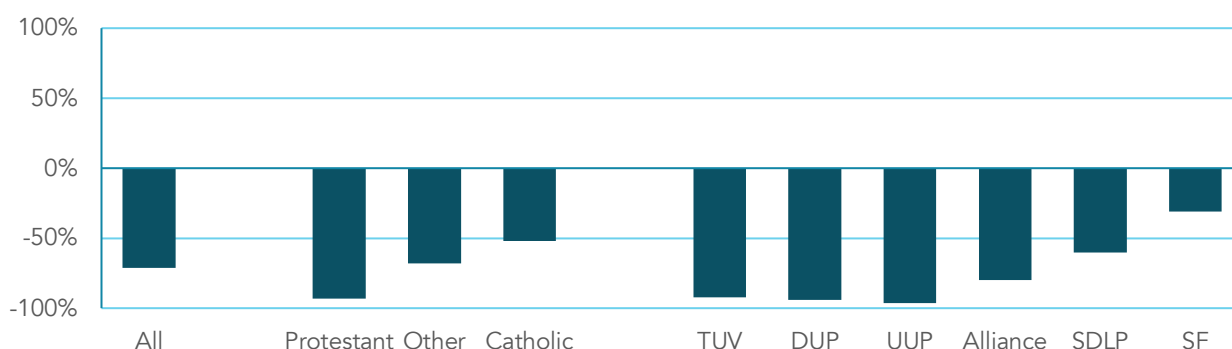(from Table 25)

Table 26: Acceptability of result: Northern Ireland leaves the United Kingdom to unify with the Republic of Ireland (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath		TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Impossible to accept	10	20	6	2		25	29	18	2	1	1
Not happy	32	53	22	16		66	56	58	22	15	7
Happy	52	24	53	78		7	12	19	69	81	90
Don't know	6	3	19	4		2	4	4	7	4	3
Net score	*-42*	*-5*	*-47*	*-76*		*+19*	*+17*	*-1*	*-67*	*-80*	*-89*

Question wording: *Imagine there was a referendum in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and a majority in both places voted for Northern Ireland to unify with the Republic of Ireland. Please indicate what your reaction would be: I would find it almost impossible to accept / I would not be happy, but could live with it / I would happily accept it / don't know.*

Figure 27: Net unacceptability if result is Northern Ireland joining a united Ireland
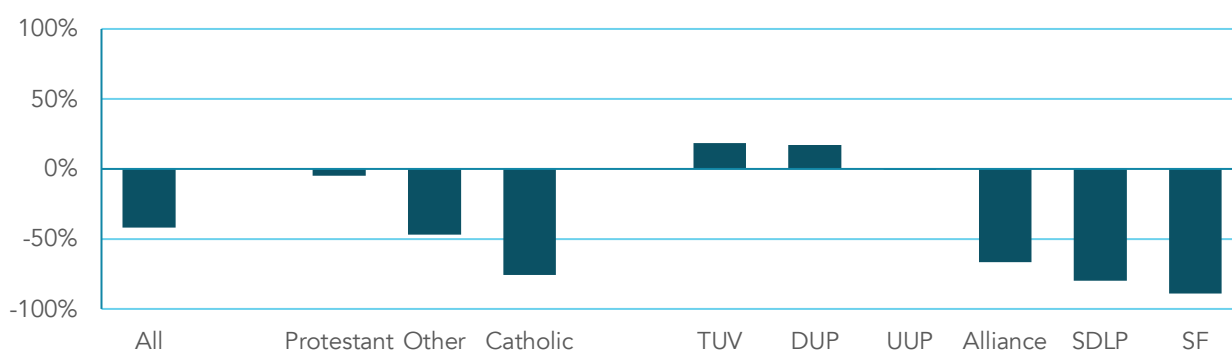
Discussion of findings on a potential Irish unification referendum

Protestant opposition to a united Ireland is currently stronger than Catholic support for it.[21] TUV, DUP and UUP voters share intense opposition to Irish unification, and SDLP voters' support for constitutional change is only lukewarm. This asymmetry helps to account for the lack of overall support for Northern Ireland to leave the UK and unify with the Republic of Ireland. In addition to being opposed to Irish unification, Protestants are also largely opposed to holding a referendum, but their opposition to a referendum is much less than their opposition to unification. In fact, by one measure – comparing those who 'never' wish to have a referendum to those who would support a referendum within 10 years or so – Protestants overall are, on balance, slightly supportive of holding a referendum (though TUV and DUP voters, on balance, are opposed). What is remarkable, however, given the historic salience of the ethno-national divide is the high proportion of 'don't knows' in response to the referendum voting intention question.

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[21] This result has been found in many surveys and polls since shortly after the 1998 Agreement – see Evans and O'Leary (2000).

Conclusion

We now collate all the results we have presented in this report to address five concluding questions, and then offer a brief summary.

1. Taking each party in turn, on what issues is there a consensus among voters of that party?

The issues on which voters of a particular political party are firmly in agreement with each other can be observed in the net scores in the tables and graphs throughout this paper. Broadly speaking, if a party has a very high or very low net score, this suggests that most of that party's voters share the same view on the issue. In contrast, a net score that is closer to zero suggests that party voters are evenly split on the issue and/or a lot of party supporters have no view either way on the issue.

We collate all the 'net scores' from all of our questions in Table 27. We suggest that a net score of plus or minus 60 indicates a firm consensus among voters of that party and we highlight the scores passing this threshold. Further, we distinguish between intensities of consensus. Scores between 90 and 100 indicate extreme voter homogeneity and the highest possible level of consensus. Scores between 80 and 90 suggest an extremely high level of consensus; scores between 70 and 80 suggest a very strong consensus; and scores between 60 and 70 suggest a strong consensus. In total, 138 party net scores (based on responses to 23 questions by six sets of party voters) are reported in Table 27. Forty-one (30 percent) of these net scores are (plus or minus) 60 or greater, indicating a reasonably high frequency of consensus views among party voters.

Strikingly, the highest level of consensus is among voters of the TUV, DUP and UUP, on support for the Union with the UK. On the three questions capturing attitudes to the Union, pro-Union homogeneity levels are extraordinarily high and range from +85 to +96. Without doubt, the three unionist parties have an extremely strong mandate from their voters for the parties' pro-UK position on the constitutional question.

Also, there is a consensus among Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin voters on a range of issues. Supporters of all three parties agree that border checks should occur between Great Britain and Northern Ireland rather than on the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, that power-sharing should be maintained even if there are difficulties with the Protocol, and that the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement should be supported. Voters of these three parties are also very pro-European. They all strongly agree that Brexit is neither good for the UK nor for Northern Ireland and they support the UK re-joining the EU. Furthermore, there is a consensus among voters of Alliance, SDLP and Sinn Féin that a referendum on the future of Northern Ireland should be held (within 10 years rather than never) and that if referendums were to produce a pro-unification result

the outcome should be accepted. Among Sinn Féin voters there is a strong consensus in favour of voting for Irish unification and strongly supporting the idea of unification (though consensus levels are lower than for unionist party support for the Union).

Table 27: Summary of net scores for each question, highlighting highest levels of consensus among each set of party voters

	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Protocol						
Net support for the Protocol	-46	-44	-37	+28	+41	+45
Net support for MLAs to vote to keep the Protocol	-42	-32	-29	+28	+44	+42
Net support for GB-NI vs land border checks	-22	-9	+3	+63	+73	+74
Net agreement that Brexit is good for the UK	+7	-1	-7	-75	-73	-77
Net agreement that Brexit is good for NI	-19	-18	-21	-65	-75	-67
Net agreement that the Protocol is good for the UK	-55	-55	-45	+10	+31	+24
Net support for re-joining EU in future referendum	-49	-19	-15	+70	+86	+80
Net support for scrapping Protocol vs power-sharing	+14	-7	-22	-72	-79	-74
Power-sharing						
Net support for Belfast/Good Friday Agreement	+12	+27	+41	+80	+85	+83
Net agreement that power-sharing has been good for NI	-9	+22	+40	+70	+49	+48
Net agreement that power-sharing has been bad for NI	+3	-25	-39	-61	-54	-49
Net agreement in favour of 'Joint First Ministers'	+8	+11	+10	+22	+8	-15
Net agreement in favour of current FM/DFM rules	+19	+50	+50	+48	+36	+57
Net agreement in favour of simple coalition, not power-sharing	-17	-4	-13	+11	+12	+5
Net agreement that govt./opp. should be distinct	+34	+28	+32	+33	+21	+27
Net agreement that legislation needs cross-community vote	+37	+50	+55	+9	+39	+45
Net agreement that legislation doesn't need cross-community vote	+7	+5	+7	+33	+23	+13
Future of NI						
Net support for referendum on Irish unification vs remaining in UK	-51	-38	-20	+41	+64	+76
Net support for referendum within 10 years vs never	-24	-10	+1	+63	+77	+84
Net remain in UK vs Irish unification vote intention	+93	+87	+90	+13	-24	-67
Net strength of support for remain in UK vs Irish unification	+92	+85	+85	+10	-18	-60
Net acceptance of result if remain in UK	+92	+94	+96	+80	+60	+31
Net acceptance of result if Irish unification	-19	-17	+1	+67	+80	+89

Note: *For ease of interpretation, net scores depicting the highest levels of intensity (positive or negative) are highlighted:* between 60 and 69, between 70 and 79, between 80 and 89, *and* between 90 and 100.

2. Taking each party in turn, on what issues is there a lack of consensus among voters of that party?

We highlight, in Table 28, instances in which there are low levels of agreement among a party's voters. For the unionist parties, there are weak levels of agreement among the sets of party voters on the question of whether the Protocol should be scrapped even if this meant the demise of power-

sharing, on the question of whether border checks should be GB-NI or NI-RoI, and on whether Brexit is good for the UK or Northern Ireland.

There are also weak levels of agreement among voters of all six parties on the way power-sharing works or could be reformed: the subjects of 'Joint First Ministers', simple coalitions, more distinct government and opposition, and opposition to the cross-community vote when used for blocking purposes.

Table 28: Summary of net scores for each question, highlighting lowest levels of consensus within each set of party voters

	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Protocol						
Net support for the Protocol	-46	-44	-37	+28	+41	+45
Net support for MLAs to vote to keep the Protocol	-42	-32	-29	+28	+44	+42
Net support for GB-NI vs land border checks	-22	-9	+3	+63	+73	+74
Net agreement that Brexit is good for the UK	+7	-1	-7	-75	-73	-77
Net agreement that Brexit is good for NI	-19	-18	-21	-65	-75	-67
Net agreement that the Protocol is good for the UK	-55	-55	-45	+10	+31	+24
Net support for re-joining EU in future referendum	-49	-19	-15	+70	+86	+80
Net support for scrapping Protocol vs power-sharing	+14	-7	-22	-72	-79	-74
Power-sharing						
Net support for Belfast/Good Friday Agreement	+12	+27	+41	+80	+85	+83
Net agreement that power-sharing has been good for NI	-9	+22	+40	+70	+49	+48
Net agreement that power-sharing has been bad for NI	+3	-25	-39	-61	-54	-49
Net agreement in favour of 'Joint First Ministers'	+8	+11	+10	+22	+8	-15
Net agreement in favour of current FM/DFM rules	+19	+50	+50	+48	+36	+57
Net agreement in favour of simple coalition, not power-sharing	-17	-4	-13	+11	+12	+5
Net agreement that govt./opp. should be distinct	+34	+28	+32	+33	+21	+27
Net agreement that legislation needs cross-community vote	+37	+50	+55	+9	+39	+45
Net agreement that legislation doesn't need cross-community vote	+7	+5	+7	+33	+23	+13
Future of NI						
Net support for referendum on Irish unification vs remaining in UK	-51	-38	-20	+41	+64	+76
Net support for referendum within 10 years vs never	-24	-10	+1	+63	+77	+84
Net remain in UK vs Irish unification vote intention	+93	+87	+90	+13	-24	-67
Net strength of support for remain in UK vs Irish unification	+92	+85	+85	+10	-18	-60
Net acceptance of result if remain in UK	+92	+94	+96	+80	+60	+31
Net acceptance of result if Irish unification	-19	-17	+1	+67	+80	+89

Note: *For ease of interpretation, net scores depicting the highest levels of intensity (positive or negative) are highlighted: between 0 and 9, between 10 and 19, between 20 and 29, between 30 and 39, between 60 and 69, between 70 and 79, between 80 and 89, and between 90 and 100. Deeper shades of yellow indicate lower levels of consensus; deeper shades of blue indicate higher levels of consensus.*

3. On what issues are voters of different parties most similar?

In Table 29 we rank order the issues according to the amount of similarity across the full set of party voters. Specifically, we rank – in ascending order – by 'standard deviation' which is a statistical measure of how much difference there is between the net scores for the set of party voters on each question. The six questions at the top of the table, with low standard deviations (indicating that on these question party voters are similar) all relate to power-sharing rules and possible reforms. Thus, on the theme of power-sharing the different groups of party voters are similar to each other.

Table 29: Summary of net scores for each question, highlighting consensus and divisions between each set of party voters

	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF	S.D.
Net agreement that govt./opp. should be distinct	+34	+28	+32	+33	+21	+27	5
Net agreement that legislation doesn't need cross-community vote	+7	+5	+7	+33	+23	+13	11
Net agreement in favour of 'Joint First Ministers'	+8	+11	+10	+22	+8	-15	12
Net agreement in favour of simple coalition, not power-sharing	-17	-4	-13	+11	+12	+5	12
Net agreement in favour of current FM/DFM rules	+19	+50	+50	+48	+36	+57	14
Net agreement that legislation needs cross-community vote	+37	+50	+55	+9	+39	+45	16
Net agreement that power-sharing has been bad for NI	+3	-25	-39	-61	-54	-49	23
Net acceptance of result if remain in UK	+92	+94	+96	+80	+60	+31	26
Net agreement that Brexit is good for NI	-19	-18	-21	-65	-75	-67	27
Net agreement that power-sharing has been good for NI	-9	+22	+40	+70	+49	+48	27
Net support for Belfast/Good Friday Agreement	+12	+27	+41	+80	+85	+83	32
Net support for scrapping Protocol vs power-sharing	+14	-7	-22	-72	-79	-74	40
Net support for MLAs to vote to keep the Protocol	-42	-32	-29	+28	+44	+42	40
Net agreement that Brexit is good for the UK	+7	-1	-7	-75	-73	-77	41
Net agreement that the Protocol is good for the UK	-55	-55	-45	+10	+31	+24	41
Net support for GB-NI vs land border checks	-22	-9	+3	+63	+73	+74	44
Net support for the Protocol	-46	-44	-37	+28	+41	+45	44
Net support for referendum within 10 years vs never	-24	-10	+1	+63	+77	+84	48
Net acceptance of result if Irish unification	-19	-17	+1	+67	+80	+89	50
Net support for referendum on Irish unification vs remaining in UK	-51	-38	-20	+41	+64	+76	55
Net support for re-joining EU in future referendum	-49	-19	-15	+70	+86	+80	60
Net strength of support for remain in UK vs Irish unification	+92	+85	+85	+10	-18	-60	64
Net remain in UK vs Irish unification vote intention	+93	+87	+90	+13	-24	-67	68

Note: *Statements are ranked by the standard deviation of net scores for each set of party voters (from low to high). For ease of interpretation, the direction of net scores is summarised by colour. Positive net scores are highlighted in blue: blue. Negative net scores are highlighted in yellow.*

4. On what issues are voters of different parties most different?

In contrast, the six questions at the bottom of Table 29 – with high standard deviations, indicating significant distinctions between voters of the different parties – relate to the constitutional question and the issue of EU membership.

5. Are there some issues on which (almost) all voters agree?

In Table 30 we identify issues on which all, or almost all, sets of party voters agree. Specifically, net scores for at least five of the six sets of party voters must be pointing in the same direction. We rank these issues by the size of the fifth-largest net score (and limiting to a net score of 20 or greater, positive or negative). Here we are identifying the set of issues on which (almost) all sets of party voters agree, and do so at least somewhat firmly.

Five of these six issues relate to power-sharing. Voters across the party spectrum largely agree that power-sharing is positive for Northern Ireland, support the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, agree with cross-community voting procedures in the Assembly and the current FM/dFM rules and desire that certain aspects of the existing rules are utilised (the government and opposition distinction). So, insofar as voters of the distinct set of parties agree – at least somewhat – on anything, it is on supporting power-sharing.

Table 30: Summary of net scores for each question, highlighting consensus between each set of party voters

	TUV	DUP	UUP	APNI	SDLP	SF
Net acceptance of result if remain in UK	+92	+94	+96	+80	+60	+31
Net agreement that legislation needs cross-community vote	+37	+50	+55	+9	+39	+45
Net agreement in favour of current FM/DFM rules	+19	+50	+50	+48	+36	+57
Net agreement that govt./opp. should be distinct	+34	+28	+32	+33	+21	+27
Net support for Belfast/Good Friday Agreement	+12	+27	+41	+80	+85	+83
Net agreement that power-sharing has been bad for NI	+3	-25	-39	-61	-54	-49
Net agreement that power-sharing has been good for NI	-9	+22	+40	+70	+49	+48

Note: *All statements are included where net scores for at least five sets of party voters are in the same direction, positive or negative. Statements are ranked by the size of the fifth-largest net score (positive or negative).*

Summary

Among 2022 Assembly election voters for Alliance, the SDLP and Sinn Féin there was a firm consensus…

- … that 'Brexit' was bad for the UK and for Northern Ireland;
- … in favour of the UK re-joining the EU;
- … that checks on goods should be between Great Britain and Northern Ireland rather than on the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;
- … that power-sharing should be maintained, even if there are difficulties with the Protocol;
- … in favour of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

Alliance, the SDLP and Sinn Féin therefore hold a clear mandate from their voters on these subjects.

Among 2022 Assembly election voters of the DUP, TUV and UUP there was no firm consensus in opposition to the Protocol and power-sharing. These parties therefore do not have a strong mandate from their voters to adopt a hardline anti-Protocol, anti-power-sharing position.

Among 2022 Assembly election voters for any of the six main parties – Alliance, SDLP, Sinn Féin, TUV, DUP or UUP – there was no firm consensus in support of particular reforms to the power-sharing arrangements.

Among 2022 Assembly election voters of the DUP, UUP and TUV, there is an extremely strong consensus in favour of Northern Ireland staying in the UK, suggesting that these parties have a very strong mandate from their voters to advocate maintaining the constitutional status quo.

In contrast, among voters for the nationalist parties, there is not a consistent Irish unification consensus. Being pro-unification is more prevalent among Sinn Féin voters than SDLP voters. Even among Sinn Féin voters, being pro-unification unity is less homogenous than the pro-Union views of DUP, UUP and TUV voters. And there is little agreement among Alliance voters on the issue.

On whether to hold a referendum on Northern Ireland's constitutional status there is a firm consensus among nationalist party voters in favour of holding a referendum (and also among Alliance voters on one of the two questions on this issue). And there is a lack of firm consensus among unionist party voters in opposition to holding a referendum.

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