



Northern Ireland
Assembly

25 YEARS

A New Beginning

What the Northern Ireland public thinks about power-sharing under current devolution arrangements

John Garry

Professor of Political Behaviour
Queen's University Belfast

Power-Sharing

- “Power-sharing” = core component of Belfast / GFA
- In all democratic systems, power is “shared” to some extent
- But “consociational” power-sharing in Northern Ireland is distinct
- Formal categorisation of elected politicians: into “unionist” or “nationalist”
- This “designation” drives the sharing of power

1/ First Minister and deputy First Minister

2/ Legislation

3/ All-inclusive coalition via “D’Hondt” mechanism for portfolio allocation



Debating Power-Sharing

- Arguments in favour and against power-sharing in general...
- ...and about these three elements in particular
- ...FM/dFM, cross-community vote, and structure of governing coalition
- Support: include rival groups, protect group interest, inclusive coalition
- Criticisms: accountability? gridlock? instability?
- 25th anniversary: good time for people to look back on power-sharing...
- ...and look forward and assess support or any need for reform

Assess Public Views

- 1/ Overall evaluations of the 1998 Agreement?
- 2/ Has power-sharing been good or bad for Northern Ireland?
- 3/ Views on the First Minister and deputy First Minister positions?
- 4/ Views on cross-community vote?
- 5/ Views on make-up of the government?

Survey Data

- Evidence from Northern Ireland Assembly Election Study, 2022
- Post-election survey directly after May election
- 2000 respondents from across Northern Ireland
- Representative of general adult population in Northern Ireland in terms of:
 - Demographics such as age, region and gender
 - Political participation in the election
 - Party choice in the election

Table 1: Attitudes towards the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement (%)

	All	Prot	Other	Cath
To stay as it is	26	17	23	36
Some changes	44	44	33	49
Substantial changes	9	15	7	5
To be removed	5	10	6	1
Don't know	15	14	30	9
Net score	+56	+36	+43	+79

Table 2: Power-sharing is a good thing?

	All	Prot	Other	Cath
Strongly agree	13	9	12	16
Agree	41	44	30	43
Neither	17	15	27	16
Disagree	15	19	13	13
Strongly disagree	5	6	3	5
Don't know	9	7	16	7
Net score	+34	+28	+26	+41

Table 4: Support current way of choosing FM/dFM?

	All	Prot	Other	Cath
Strongly agree	11	8	9	15
Agree	46	52	29	47
Neither	17	16	28	14
Disagree	13	13	11	13
Strongly disagree	3	3	2	3
Don't know	11	9	21	9
Net score	+41	+43	+25	+46

Table 5: Changing to ‘Joint First Ministers’?

	All	Prot	Other	Cath
‘Joint First Minister’	38	41	33	36
Keep as is	31	28	23	37
Abolish and replace	18	18	15	19
Don't know	14	13	29	9
Net score	+7	+14	+10	-1

Table 6: Support for cross-community vote?

	All	Prot	Other	Cath
Strongly agree	8	7	6	11
Agree	47	53	31	47
Neither	17	15	26	15
Disagree	13	12	11	14
Strongly disagree	4	3	7	4
Don't know	11	9	19	9
Net score	+38	+45	+19	+40

Table 7: Cross community vote just blocks key decisions

	All	Prot	Other	Cath
Strongly agree	7	6	6	9
Agree	34	36	22	36
Neither	18	17	31	15
Disagree	25	27	19	25
Strongly disagree	4	4	3	5
Don't know	12	10	20	11
Net score	+12	+11	+7	+16

Table 8: Support for clear distinction between government and opposition?

	All	Prot	Other	Cath
Strongly agree	9	9	7	10
Agree	36	39	25	37
Neither	20	19	31	18
Disagree	16	16	11	17
Strongly disagree	4	3	4	5
Don't know	15	14	21	14
Net score	+25	+28	+17	+25

Table 9: Support for any coalition?

	All	Prot	Other	Cath
Strongly agree	5	4	7	5
Agree	31	30	20	36
Neither	18	18	29	16
Disagree	26	31	18	24
Strongly disagree	7	6	6	9
Don't know	13	12	21	10
Net score	+3	-3	+2	+9

Table 10: Summary of 'net scores'

	All	Prot	Other	Cath
Belfast/Good Friday Agreement	+56	+36	+43	+79
Support for FM/dFM	+41	+43	+25	+46
Cross-community vote	+38	+45	+19	+40
Power-sharing bad	-35	-30	-29	-42
Power-sharing good	+34	+28	+26	+41
Govt & opp distinct	+25	+28	+17	+25
Anti cross-community vote (blocks)	+12	+11	+7	+16
Change to 'joint first ministers'	+7	+14	+10	-1
Support for any coalition	+3	-3	+2	+9