

An Unstable Peace: The Northern Irish Question

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Exploring the Question of Peace

The phrase “Northern Ireland” conjures up a variety of images for people around the globe, with the most immediate encompassing the association of long-standing feuds and extreme ethnic violence. There is hope, however, that Northern Ireland’s image of violence will be transformed to one of peace. Progress has been made in the past few years in the form of various agreements and cease-fires aimed at mitigating or ending the conflict between the Irish Republicans and Irish Unionists in this tiny corner of the world. One specific agreement, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, has received much press and acclaim as being a major step in the right direction, as it works to achieve a peaceful progression to finalizing the status of Northern Ireland, whether that status is to remain a part of the United Kingdom or to eventually separate. Individuals of diverse ideological persuasions both enthusiastically favor and vehemently reject the Good Friday Agreement and its various tenets, providing a mixed, and delicate, situation for lawmakers. This situation is puzzling, as one would think that all would be in favor of an agreement that is touted as having the potential to bring peace to the conflict-ridden region. It is not peace that individuals are opposed to, though. Instead, specific tenets of the agreement are called into question. For this paper, I will explore the variation in support of the tenet that allows for a possible split from the United Kingdom. Because not everyone supports such a split, an altogether unsurprising fact, an interesting question

comes to light: why is there variation in the amount of support for a continued union with the United Kingdom?

The Good Friday Agreement was passed in April of 1998, combining the various political entities of the United Kingdom, the Northern Irish Assembly, the Republic of Ireland, and even the United States and capping almost two decades of negotiations that were attempting to bring lasting peace to Northern Ireland. On May 22, 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was overwhelmingly confirmed by a referendum by 71% of the voting public in both Northern Ireland and the Republic (Mitchell, 2003). Its purpose was to not only initiate a cease-fire between militant Republican and Unionist groups, but was also designed to generate conditions for a lasting peace and establish the foundation for an eventual permanent situation of Home Rule for those in Northern Ireland. An additional tenet, and the one explored in this paper, includes the future possibility of a split from the United Kingdom and a reunification with the Republic of Ireland, a situation that continues to cause much discord not only in Northern Ireland, but in the UK and Republic of Ireland as well (Economist 2002, “Storm”).

The major terms of the agreement include the idea that no decision about governance will be made without the consent of the majority of the people. This includes pursuing either a continued union with the United Kingdom or joining with the Republic of Ireland to form a single and united Ireland. Also discussed in the agreement is a power-sharing government that is democratic, inclusive, and self-governing with the interests of giving the minority a voice and reducing violence at its core. Additionally, civil and human rights have become of the utmost importance to the government, anti-discrimination legislation comprising gender, race, religion, and disabilities was passed,

decommissioning of paramilitary organization weapons caches has become of the highest priority, security issues from court system reform to reforming the police force with a 50/50 recruiting system were implemented, the release of paramilitary prisoners was to coincide with the cease-fire, and support for victims of the Troubles was to be made available (Smith 2003).

Despite the strong support of both the governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland for the peace process in Northern Ireland, since the passage of the Good Friday Agreement, there have been varying levels of support within the population of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and the mainland of the United Kingdom for the agreement and its terms, specifically the tenet concerning whether or not Northern Ireland will remain a part of the United Kingdom (Barone 2003). For the purposes of this paper, support will be defined as the belief that Northern Ireland should remain a constituent element of the United Kingdom. The mixed success of the peace process in Northern Ireland (as evidenced in how well the cease-fire has been upheld, how integrated the police force has become, etc) has also varied, perhaps explaining this variation in support.

One example of this mixed success is that the agreement has not solved the problem of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. Just four months after the agreement was signed, a Provisional IRA bombing in the town of Omagh killed fifteen people. The elected leader of the Northern Irish Power-Sharing Executive, David Trimble, also resigned in a time of violence and slow IRA arms decommissioning (he was re-elected at a later date) (Economist 2002, "The peace"). Perhaps the biggest blow to peace was the discovery, shortly after September 11, 2001, that some IRA dissidents were aiding FARC

guerillas in Columbia (Barone 2003). Such a discovery demonstrated not only continued IRA terrorist activity in Ireland, but that the group was aiding terrorists in other countries. In a world that was still reeling from a major terrorist attack on the United States, this information was quite unsettling. For those involved with the agreement, all of these developments, in addition to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly by Tony Blair (Economist 2002, "Storm"), spelled defeat for a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Despite these negative developments, the agreement has achieved various levels of success. While all groups have not upheld the cease-fire, the IRA proper (as opposed to the Provisional IRA, or so-called Real IRA) has begun decommissioning their arms of late, a move that pleases Unionists and makes the chance for a more permanent Home Rule Assembly, as well as a step towards a possible split (something that Republicans favor), possible. Further attempts at reforming the almost exclusively Protestant police force have been undertaken, a major sticking point in the conflict between Unionists and Republicans. Finally, the Northern Ireland Assembly has been allowed to operate in times of peace since the passage of the agreement (Barone 2003). While the assembly is in session (and not suspended due to sectarian violence), the membership has demonstrated not only a commitment to peace, but also an ability to form and run a relatively effective government. Indeed, the number of political parties in the assembly's membership demonstrates movement to a more representative government, a necessity if the province ever did split from the United Kingdom. The disparity ranges from the more traditional Ulster Unionists to the progressive Social Democratic Labor Party to even including the controversial Sinn Fein, (which has declared it has cut ties with terrorist organizations, a claim that is under dispute). This diversity in the assembly membership

is one element that contributes to the creation of a lasting peace (Clinton 2000). To this day, the agreement is not completely successful, but the victories it has experienced are promising for the future of this region.

After examining the above analysis, one can identify several reasons why the levels of support for the agreement vary, from political ideological leanings to personal experience with the cyclical violence of the conflict. However, one hypothesis addressing the variance in support for the continued union of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom that stands out is that the level of support for the union depends upon an individual's ethnic identity. In effect, support for the union varies depending on how individuals identify themselves; those who identify themselves as British will be more likely to support the continued union, while those who identify themselves as Irish will be less likely to do so.

A Review of Relevant Literature

The current political situation in Northern Ireland is a delicate and complicated one, dominated by long memories, grudges, violence, and failed attempts to bring peace to the people of the region. Each of these factors has a different effect on how the people of the province of Northern Ireland view the peace process in general, and the continued union with the United Kingdom in particular. As one might expect, with a situation so multi-faceted as the one in Northern Ireland, there are several competing theories that might explain why support for the union varies among individuals. Some of the concerns that drive these theories include insecurity, upward mobility, as well as a general fear of violence and anxieties based on issues of tradition, betrayal and trust. There is also a

significant theory that examines the formation of group identity and how that identity affects one's perception of the peace process.

The first theory focuses on the issue of insecurity. Officer and Walker (2000), Beggan and Indurthy (2002), Tonge (2000), and Lloyd (1998) examine the emotion of insecurity as shaping one's view of the peace process. This theory is mostly confined to Unionists (those loyal to the United Kingdom and who are predominantly Protestant). This situation might appear odd at first glance, given that Unionists comprise the majority of the citizens in Northern Ireland. However, with the passage of the Good Friday Agreement, a situation that had never before been possible was suddenly a very real possibility – that of eventual union with the Republic of Ireland (Officer 2000). In the Good Friday Agreement, there is a tenet that gives the majority of the population of Northern Ireland, if they and the population of the Republic of Ireland so choose, the right to join with the south after breaking their union with the United Kingdom (Smith 2003).

For many Unionists, such a situation is one that manifests their worst fears. First of all, Unionists' self-perceptions and political views are grounded in their British identity. To break with the United Kingdom and become a part of Ireland proper does not correspond well with this identity. In their mind, their entire identity would have to be reevaluated (Tonge 2000). Fears of discrimination based upon this identity crisis are also prevalent, and many Unionists feel that becoming the minority group in what would be an extremely Catholic country would be very undesirable (Lloyd 1998).

Accompanying this fear of minority status are concerns of representation. Under the Good Friday Agreement and how it works in the status quo, the Unionists still are

represented by Members of Parliament in Westminster. Unionists are also represented in the power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland. Despite assurances of equitable representation, many Unionists fear a potential loss of their political powers if a split were to occur, and “the selection of the electoral system used [is] perhaps a major component of the likely success or failure” of the agreement (Beggan 2001). With the passage of the Good Friday Agreement alone, many Unionists feel as though Britain is beginning to wash its hands of the province and pay less attention to it, suggesting the idea that the Unionist voice will not be well heard in the British Parliament (Beggan 2002). Add to this fear the idea of becoming a small minority within a new political context, and fears grow exponentially. Additionally, with the Catholic population nearly comprising equal numbers as Protestants (and growing daily), there is a fear that Catholic Nationalists will soon overtake the Unionists demographically, giving them more votes in the power-sharing executive, effectively curtailing the Unionist voice at home even if the province remained a part of the union (Lloyd 1998). These fears of governmental underrepresentation are not unfounded, and the Unionists’ lukewarm response to the peace agreement is certainly understandable when one thinks of the possibility that their opinion about and consent for certain issues – a key element to maintaining peace in the region – would not be heard or granted.

Nationalists, too, have feelings of insecurity, although they are not as prevalent as those of the Unionists. For the most part, Nationalists viewed the tenets of the Good Friday Agreement (especially the possibility of a split) as favorable (Officer 2000). However, Nationalists fear the increase of Unionist hostility, as demonstrated in increasing Protestant paramilitary action and Orange Order marches, if a split with the

United Kingdom occurred (Beggan 2002). As we have seen so often in the past in Northern Ireland, when insecurity mounts, violence usually follows. The insecurity is a catalyst for a downward spiral that moves the peace process a further step back. Despite their fears, the Nationalists gained much in the Good Friday Agreement, and the vast majority of them support it and the idea of an eventual split with the United Kingdom (Economist 2002, “Storm”). Most of their fears and insecurities are not found with the agreement itself, but instead with the Unionists and others on the other side of the dividing line who do not appear to completely support it.

This first theory generates a hypothesis that directly concerns the Unionists’ fear of lack of representation. A Unionist who feels as though a situation where Northern Ireland is no longer a constituency of the United Kingdom will lead to a lack of representation at the governmental level is less likely to support independence. Basically, if a Unionist is under the impression that splitting off from the United Kingdom will lead to a decrease or to a silencing of the Unionist voice in government, wherever that government may be convened, he or she will be less likely to support such a split than someone who does not identify representation as a problem.

The representation issue is not the only element contributing to political insecurity in Northern Ireland. One part of the insecurity felt by many in Northern Ireland concerns their lifestyle or status in the community, or the issue of upward mobility (Breen 2001). Those who are advancing within a society will view changes to the society differently than those who are not advancing. Advocated by Richard Breen, this theory discusses the idea of upward mobility within society as being a precursor to support for the tenets of the peace process. The theory examines the idea of “embourgeoisement” (Breen’s term

for gaining middle class status) as a way to achieve a more peaceful society. The theory explains that those who have more of what they want in life, mostly found within a middle-class lifestyle, are less likely to engage in acts that could undermine the peace process (Breen 2001).

The upward mobility theory argues that those in society who are being affected positively by the changes of the Good Friday Agreement, for instance in decreased job discrimination resulting in more employment opportunities and an increase in the potential to receive a better income, are less likely to turn to an extreme Nationalist or Unionist point of view. Instead, these individuals will be more likely to support the basic idea of peace in general, as well as a continued union, as opposed to the more radical idea of a split with the United Kingdom. It seems fairly self-evident and easy to understand that if one believes the status quo, with its current moves toward peace, will result in an improved personal economic situation, one will support it instead of a more drastic measure. However, the theory's consequences suggest that important aspects of Northern Irish society will determine whether or not lasting peace is achieved.

Most of the impact of the upward mobility theory concerns Catholics in Northern Ireland. For much of the twentieth century, Catholics were heavily discriminated against in Northern Ireland. This discrimination was broad in scope, covering everything from "the electoral system [to] the allocation of public authority housing [to] the labour [sic] market" (Breen 2001). Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, conditions improved, but discrimination was still evident (Breen 2001). With the passage of the Good Friday Agreement, however, all such discrimination is expressly forbidden, and great strides have been made in order to facilitate more integration of the two distinct

communities in the province. The increased upward mobility that the agreement has provided to groups in Northern Ireland definitely has affected support for it. Those who are positively affected, according to this theory, obviously will support the agreement. A split with the United Kingdom, as provided by the agreement, is also favored, as it will bring said individuals into the fold of the Republic of Ireland, where even *de facto* discrimination is less likely to occur. However, as with some whites who did not support the Civil Rights Movement in the United States for fear of losing job and housing opportunities (not out of an inherent hatred for or fear of minorities), some in Northern Ireland do not support the agreement, and the possible outcome of a split with the United Kingdom, because they see some of its conditions as threatening to their livelihood or opportunities (Breen 2001).

The hypothesis emerging from the theory is almost synonymous with the theory itself; individuals who are experiencing socio-economic gains in society will be more likely to support the status quo (rather than a split with the United Kingdom) than those who are either staying stagnant or experiencing loss. Additionally, those who merely *fear* such loss, but have not experienced it, will be less likely to support the current movements within society than those who view them as providing good opportunities to advance within society.

A third theory is presented by Monaghan (2002), Richards (2001), and Cairns, Crisp and Hewstone (2001) and concerns the general public's fear of violence. One might think that this theory is relatively self-explanatory. However, upon closer examination, we can see that the fear of violence theory has more to offer than a simple explanation of a human being's fear of being physically hurt. The situation in Northern

Ireland is quite unique. This region has had an extremely long cycle of ethnically driven violence and hatred. Two groups have remained distinct from each other for almost a century, and group identifications form quite early. The circumstances of long-standing feuds and early ethno-religious identification make the perpetuation of violence all too easy, as the idea of violence as a legitimate political tool can be forced upon the youth from an early age (Crisp 2001). Children imitate what they see and hear; when they see violence being called upon to solve problems from the very early stages of their life, it is understandable that many children in Northern Ireland grow up to become adults who also see violence as legitimate. Even after the passage of the Good Friday Agreement, violence continued between the two groups in Northern Ireland. It is important to note, however, that the majorities within the two groups, even individuals who had previously resorted to violence, spoke out against and condemned the violent actions as a betrayal of all the citizens of Northern Ireland (Monaghan 2002).

One of the most important facets of the fear of violence theory can be found within the tenets that set up the power-sharing executive that is supposed to rule over the province whether or not it remains a part of the United Kingdom. It allows for the inclusion of the Nationalist party of Sinn Fein in the executive. Indeed, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, both former members of the terrorist organization the IRA, are now occupying seats for Sinn Fein in the assembly (Richards 2001). When individuals from either group, whether they are Nationalist or Unionist, see two former terrorists holding power and representing a group that is said to still have ties to the IRA Army Council, fears of violence continuing are likely to occur (Richards 2001). This fear is understandable, because giving groups such as Sinn Fein legitimate power tacitly

condones their use of violence. One can only think that a party that has ties to terrorists will inevitably bring their interests, instead of the interests of peace, to the bargaining table (Monaghan 2002). When the very format of the peace process allows situations such as this to occur, it is no wonder that there is variation in support for a continued union with the United Kingdom. For many, a continued union provides a check of some sort against the idea of terrorists holding office, while a split would significantly reduce a check that is currently provided by the presence of the United Kingdom.

Also influencing the fear of violence that might occur from a split with the United Kingdom are concerns about the release of paramilitary prisoners in exchange for paramilitary groups' weapons (Smith 2003). While prisoners have been released, a situation that added to the fear of violence, decommissioning has yet to be completed (Smith 2003). Looking at this from a citizen's perspective, convicted terrorists are now walking about while their sponsoring organizations are still in possession of weapons caches. Clearly, the fears of continuing violence are not unfounded theoretically (the presence of arms is conducive to violence). They are not empirically unfounded either; since the passage of the Good Friday Agreement, and the idea of a split from the United Kingdom has become a reality, terrorist violence has continued, in the form of bombings, beatings, and shootings (Monaghan 2002). Some (mostly those who are of an extreme Nationalist viewpoint) see an eventual split from the United Kingdom as the event that will end this violence, while others see a split as only providing those paramilitary organizations on the Unionist side of the conflict an excuse to continue the violence. For many, it's a no-win situation, perhaps partially explaining the variation in support for a continued union with the United Kingdom.

Two hypotheses emerge from this theory. The first concerns violence itself, in that those individuals who have experienced violence since the idea of a split from the United Kingdom has become an actual possibility will be less likely to support the split than those who have not experienced violence. The second hypothesis concerns legitimacy, stemming from the inclusion of Sinn Fein members in government. This hypothesis is that those individuals who see Sinn Fein as a legitimate political actor in the power-sharing government will be more likely to support a split than those who view the group as a terrorist “front.”

Another theory is the theory of emotional influence. This theory is one that stems from the fear of violence theory. Additionally, it incorporates the issue of legitimacy, and is grounded in concerns about tradition, betrayal, and trust. Each of these three elements evoke powerful feelings and emotions in communities around the world, but especially in a community like Northern Ireland, where day-to-day interactions are based upon them. Tradition and trust are everything in this society. All of these feelings are major factors in the daily society of Northern Ireland, not to mention in the peace process, according to Clinton (2000), Dingley (1999), and McLernon, Cairns and Hewstone (2001), who present this theory as an explanation of variation in support for a continued union with the United Kingdom. As stated earlier, one of the major conditions of the Good Friday Agreement was the prisoners for weapons exchange. Only one side of the bargain has been upheld. A split with the United Kingdom could make it more difficult to not only prevent these individuals from committing additional acts of violence, but it could be more difficult to apprehend and punish those who act violently in the future as well. Many in Northern Ireland see supporting an agreement and a

situation that could allow those who killed innocents to be let free for nothing in return as a betrayal of lost lives (Dingley 1999).

In a more general sense, the very idea of simply walking away from a conflict that has been raging since the early parts of the twentieth century is quite difficult to take. Again, the idea of betrayal is prevalent; no one wants to turn his back on the community and the values he was raised with for what could be no more than empty promises. A mindset concerning the idea of remembering those who fought before you, sacrifices made, and staying true to the cause has been the dominant paradigm in Northern Ireland for a long time. However, this mindset is also competing with a strong desire to move beyond the past grievances and work towards a future peace (McLernon 2002). With two competing desires, many people in Northern Ireland on both sides of the issue have feelings of betrayal coursing through them. For Unionists, limiting support for the tenets of the Good Friday Agreement, most notably the one that allows for a split from the United Kingdom (while supporting peace in general), is an easy way of demonstrating support for both the future and the past, peace, and one's fallen comrades.

The element of tradition is also important when discussing this theory. As stated earlier, this region has experienced a cycle of violence and conflict for many years. Such violence, as discussed earlier, contributes to the formation of a group and individual identity. It is difficult to simply walk away from those identities and traditions and enter into a relatively new and unfamiliar territory of peace (Clinton 2000). When an individual has grown up seeing violence used as a legitimate tool for solving one's problems, whether they are personal or group-based, attempting to change those attitudes later in life can be quite daunting (Crisp 2001).

Also daunting is the idea of group interaction, something traditionally frowned upon in Northern Ireland. While in the past few years, indicators of interaction are increasing, as illustrated in the increase in integrated schools, intermarriage, and integrated neighborhoods, Unionists and Nationalists remain quite divided within society (Dingley 1999). This tradition of staying apart and viewing the other group with suspicion makes granting an agreement that applauds and requires (at least on the governmental level) peaceful interaction a tricky perceptual and actual task for many individuals. A split from the United Kingdom would compound the problems found within group interaction. With independence from the United Kingdom, the groups would be forced to interact in order to form a functioning society. It is much easier to maintain the current idea of separate but peaceful existence under the United Kingdom, as opposed to venturing into an unknown situation of necessary interaction, a situation that could increase tensions and violence (at least initially).

Finally, the issue of trust must be discussed in order to understand this theory. Again, the two distinct groups within Northern Ireland have lived almost exclusive of one another for nearly a century. During this time, extreme violence and bigotry has been exchanged between the groups and their members. While the Good Friday Agreement is founded upon the idea of trust, not only between groups within Northern Ireland, but between the various negotiating governments (the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and the United States), building that trust within the citizenry is certainly a feat. Those who have been affected directly by violence or by discrimination are most likely less inclined to put their faith in a part of the agreement that asks them to trust the group that was formerly their enemy (Dingley 1999). Instead, continued distrust, and its

consequences –discrimination, tense relations, even violence – are likely to continue. Even those who were not affected directly by the negative events of the twentieth century are likely to have trust issues as well, simply stemming from the continued presence of paramilitary groups, weapons, and inflammatory rhetoric. It is understandable, given these conditions, why not everyone in Northern Ireland is ready to place their complete faith in what the agreement has achieved so far and split from the United Kingdom.

As with the previous theory, this theory concerning traditional, betrayal, and trust generates multiple hypotheses. The first is that individuals who are better integrated with the other group will be more likely to support a split from the United Kingdom. This is plausible, as such individuals will most likely have more trust in the other group, due to the fact that they interact with each other on a daily basis. Another corresponding hypothesis could be that individuals who view a split as a betrayal of traditional values, customs, or actions will be less likely to support it than those who see it as a more progressive step towards peace. Both of these hypotheses, while stemming from the theory concerning betrayal, tradition, and trust, also have the very important element of group identity, an idea that is at the heart of the last theory to discuss.

Perhaps the most compelling theory, and one that in fact overarches many of the others, is one that encompasses the idea of group identification. Mitchell (2003), Smith (2003), O'Neill (1998), Crisp, Hewstone and Cairns (2001), and Ruane and Todd (2001) present a theory that examines how the two distinct groups (Unionists and Nationalists) have remained separate in Northern Ireland, despite recent steps toward integration. The theory points to the prevailing perception that the two groups are seen as separate communities. Both groups still have explicit community-centered tendencies, not only in

the political realms of voting and party identification for instance, but in social strata like housing, schooling, and basic interaction as well (Ruane 2001). As previously stated, group identifications form quite early in the youth of Northern Ireland, and are hard to displace or change.

The theory examines several issues concerning variation in support for a continued union with the United Kingdom, including some already discussed above. One of these ideas concerns representation of views in government. Both Nationalist and Unionist groups are concerned with the power-sharing government from a group-identification standpoint, as it forces the issue of integration in government (Mitchell 2003). While many Nationalists could see such power-sharing as a major step in what they would consider to be the right direction, some see it as still giving the Unionist side of the population too much say over their lives (Mitchell 2003). As mentioned earlier, Unionists fear a lack of representation in the new Northern Irish assembly or in the assembly in the Republic if the north ever splits from the United Kingdom (Officer 2000).

A second group identity issue stems from the idea of citizenship. This is related to the issue of representation, but differs slightly in that it is more concerned with the *idea* of what it means to be a part of Britain as opposed to what it means to participate in British politics (Smith 2003). Again, many Unionists see the Good Friday Agreement and its tenets as possibly “emptying Britain of its sovereignty over Northern Ireland” (Ruane 2001). Many Unionists are proud to be part of the United Kingdom and define themselves by their Britishness as opposed to Irishness. Because of this identification, many fear that a possible split spells an end to this form of identification and will force

them to redefine who they are (Irish) in a context and environment that is foreign to them (the Republic of Ireland) (O'Neill 1998). Nationalists, too, have identity issues, as some see a possible split as forcing interaction and possibly placing excessive emphasis on the British influence and identity in the province. Many of them, it is claimed, are "more Irish than the Irish" (Bloom 2003) and do not see a need to emphasize the British component of Northern Ireland as a way of maintaining the peace. When both groups take issue with the various identity questions that a continued union with the United Kingdom raises, it is easy to see why support for it is mixed.

Finally within the theory of group identification is the idea of "the other." For both Unionists and Nationalists, the other group is seen as foreign, as potentially dangerous, and, as such, not to be trusted easily (this is where the previous theory comes into play). Such a situation breeds uncertainty, a condition that makes maintaining peace quite difficult. It also makes simple interaction, both in the social realm and the political arena, complicated (O'Neill 1998). Indeed, even during the negotiations leading up to the passage of the Good Friday Agreement, some members of the Northern Irish government, namely the Democratic Unionist Party (led by hard-line Unionist Reverend Ian Paisley), would not participate while members of the other "camp" were included (Mitchell 2003). The ideas of tradition and trust are dominant in this example, as the DUP saw negotiating with those they regarded as terrorists (Sinn Fein) and those who worked with terrorists (the Social Democratic Labour Party, a Nationalist group) as a slap in the face to their fallen comrades. One must question how these groups would interact with each other if a split were to occur. From the events of recent history, the future does not look too bright.

This concept of “the other” pervades society as well. The two groups, while recently changing their attitudes somewhat towards “the other,” have kept themselves separated. Stereotypes abound, as do ethnic slurs. Even the resurgence of ethno-religious conflict around the world has perpetuated the idea of “the other” in Northern Ireland, as fears of violence and discrimination bubble up to the surface with every attack around the world that mirrors one found in the province (Ruane 2001).

Indeed, even the Good Friday Agreement itself has contradictory views of the two groups, demanding very different things of each as precursors to peace and a possible split with the United Kingdom. For instance, relatively little, in the eyes of Unionists, is asked of the Nationalists (simply that they give up their arms), in exchange for a great deal (including the political representation of a group they see as terrorists). With this contrast comes a sense within each group that the other group is giving up less and getting more. Many citizens do not feel as though they can put their full confidence into something that is potentially inequitable in the treatment of the two groups, when peace depends upon the very antithesis of such an action (Ruane 2001). Because of these feelings, many feel as though they must maintain a union with the United Kingdom in order to have some sort of a “check” on the actions and views of the other group.

Finally, the theory of group identification brings to light the very important issue of how each group views the idea of a split itself. For the most part, the Nationalists are heavily in favor of a split. With few exceptions, they see it as being very favorable (Ruane 2001). However, the Unionists take a very different view. While many Unionists do support the Good Friday Agreement in general and feel that most of its tenets and demands are both reasonable and necessary, others see the agreement as being very

unfavorable to their cause. Among the objections they raise include the release of paramilitary prisoners, the inclusion of Sinn Fein in the government, and, most notably, the idea of possibly relieving the United Kingdom of its sovereignty over Northern Ireland (Ruane 2001). These views are related to group identity, because each group views the agreement in very different terms. Both saw it as a means to peace; however, the Nationalists saw it as a potential way to either achieve full Home Rule or reunite with the Republic, while the Unionists viewed it as a chance for equal inclusion and representation while maintaining union with Britain. This dichotomy of interests and beliefs led to many feeling as though what they had originally agreed to had changed dramatically for the worse. It is evident that such a reaction will influence the level of support for a split in one direction or the other.

The hypothesis derived from this theory concerns the ideas of identification and fairness. Both Unionists and Nationalists have differing views of a possible split, with some viewing it as a win and others as a loss. Because of these views, an individual is more likely to support the union if he or she identifies himself or herself as British (a situation that is more likely to enforce the mindset that a union is favorable, as an advantage or a win for his or her group). Conversely, those who identify as Irish will be less likely to support the union (they see it as a loss or disadvantage for their group).

This review has looked at several different hypotheses concerning significant influences on individual support for Northern Ireland to continue its union the United Kingdom. These theories examine a variety of possible significant influences on that support, including such factors as socio-economic mobility, the power of group identity, issues of betrayal, tradition, and trust. While each of these hypotheses has merit in its

own right, and we will be testing them all, we will only be arguing for one in order to try to further understand the variation in support for the peace process as it currently stands in Northern Ireland.

We will argue for the last hypothesis discussed. This hypothesis concerns the issue of group identification and how that influences support of a continued union with the United Kingdom. The hypothesis states that an individual is more likely to support a continued union if he or she identifies as British, and therefore views its tenets as favorable, as an advantage or a win for his or her group. Various “winning” scenarios include issues that some of the other theories discussed, including representation and British influence in a Home Rule government, representation in the British Parliament at Westminster, or a British check on violence (Smith 2003).

Because it encompasses many of the other issues discussed above, the hypothesis seems to have the most merit; it is the strongest because it includes the question of representation, issues of fear, trust, betrayal, and group identification. One of the biggest fears of the Unionist bloc is that their voice will not be heard no matter what occurs in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. If they rejoin with the Republic, they will immediately be in the minority. Staying with Britain has its faults as well, as Westminster has already begun to ignore them to some degree. Finally, the Catholics are about to overtake them demographically, so even if Home Rule is maintained, they will no longer enjoy a majority and expect to be brushed to the wayside in political affairs (Officer 2000). Also, a split from the United Kingdom is seen by many as a betrayal of those who have come before and sacrificed much, including their lives, for the cause (Dingley 1999). Finally, the idea of group identification and interaction is important.

With a split, the two communities within Northern Ireland will be forced to interact in order to achieve a functioning society. Many are uncomfortable with this idea and would like to maintain the current idea of separate but peaceful existence (Mitchell 2003). Also, the split means that a majority of the people in Northern Ireland, those who are Unionists or identify themselves as British, will have to redefine themselves in the new, foreign context of Irishness. This is a daunting proposition for many, and it helps to explain why a large number of individuals do not support a split from the United Kingdom.

A Possible Solution? Hypothesis and Theory

In examining the variation in individual support for a continued union with the United Kingdom, many hypotheses can be derived from a variety of theories, as can be seen from the literature review. While many, if not all, of these ideas will be tested, I will argue that the most plausible explanation of the variation in support for this aspect of the Northern Irish peace process is that individuals who identify themselves as British (as opposed to Irish or Northern Irish) will be more likely to support a continued union with the United Kingdom.

This hypothesis is derived from a variety of theories, with each bringing a different facet of explanatory power to supporting this hypothesis. The first theory is that of national identity. Many in Northern Ireland see themselves as being a part of the British nation. They have been a part of the United Kingdom for centuries, are proud to be a part of that union, and identify with the national culture. To these people, a split, and a possible reunification with the Republic of Ireland, threatens all of this identification and pride (Officer 2000). For this reason, those who see themselves as

being British are more likely to support the union than those who identify themselves as Irish or Northern Irish.

This idea of group identification or national identity is also a significant dynamic when discussing the issue of representation in government. Currently, the Home Rule government in Northern Ireland is suspended due to sectarian violence. Instead of a parliament meeting at Stormont in Belfast, representatives of the various groups in Northern Ireland are sitting in Parliament at Westminster. For those who see themselves as British, this state of affairs is just fine. They are in the majority in this parliamentary body, their parties are holding seats in government, and their views are being heard. However, a split is a threat to this situation. This tenet of the Good Friday Agreement is the catalyst for Unionist displeasure with the agreement. If separated from the United Kingdom and reunified with the Republic of Ireland, those who identify themselves as British (the Unionists) would immediately shift from holding a slight majority (as they do now) to being a very small minority within the Republic (Beggan 2001).

The possibility of such a situation reinforces fears of lack of representation. Unionists feel as though their views would not be heard in the new system, as they see themselves as holding only a small number of seats in government (Beggan 2001). Clearly, the shift in the power structure is disheartening for the Unionists. When the shift is combined with these very real fears of non-representation, it is easy to understand why many Unionists support a continued union with the United Kingdom, as opposed to a possible split.

This situation suggests some important developments. As with a possible reunification with the Republic of Ireland, lack of Unionist control or majority in

Northern Ireland could signify a lack of representation for the Unionist voice in government. More importantly, however, if Republicans do become the majority in Northern Ireland, as they are expected to do within the next decade or so, and do gain control of government at Stormont, it would be more likely that reunification with the Republic of Ireland would occur (Officer 2000). Obviously, those who hold the power are most able to influence the direction in which a country is headed, and if the majority are of the mindset that reunification should occur, it is no wonder that Unionists have the fears they do.

A final facet of this hypothesis that must be discussed concerns the interaction of groups within Northern Irish society. For decades, two main groups have existed in Northern Ireland: those who identify themselves as British and those who identify themselves as Irish. Traditionally, these two groups have experienced poor relations. From the early 1900s, extreme violence has occurred between the two groups, with the peak of violence occurring in the early 1970s. (The 1990s also witnessed a resurgence of violence between the two groups.) This long history of violence understandably influences how one group views the other (Dingley 1999). Indeed, the phrase “the other” sums up the view quite nicely, in that members of the opposite group are seen as being foreign, not to be trusted, and not suitable to interact with. While attempts to integrate the two groups have been made, and many successfully so in the form of schools, neighborhoods and associations, much of society remains divided along group identification lines (McLernon 2002). However, the Good Friday Agreement calls for an end to such a division. Instead of maintaining a separate identity, the agreement calls for increased interaction between the two groups and a shared identity of Northern Irish.

Through tenets concerning power sharing in government, integrating schools and neighborhoods, and anti-discrimination laws, the agreement hopes to foster a single and shared identity in Northern Ireland. Additionally, a split from the United Kingdom would force such interaction to occur, as a functioning society could not develop without it.

While many would see a formation of such an identity as a major step toward peace, many in Northern Ireland in both communities see it as a betrayal of who they are. Decades of group identification and socialization make it extremely difficult to simply give up an identity focused on differences rather than similarities. (Dingley 1999). Many find it difficult to argue for a continued union while at the same time forming a distinct identity that is not based upon Britishness.

Additionally, working with “the other,” or those who have been labeled, as the enemy until quite recently is difficult for many on both sides of the debate to do. The Good Friday Agreement asks the citizens of Northern Ireland to get along, to lay down their arms and embrace peace. However, when violence from radical groups continues, convincing moderates that they will be safe in doing so is a difficult thing to do (Crisp 2001). Additionally, when the agreement calls for those who have been perpetrators of violence to be released from prison (paramilitary members mostly of the Republican persuasion), Unionist fears of continued violence are increased (Monaghan 2002). Add to these fears the idea that the check and force of the British army (which occupies Northern Ireland to help with security) would no longer be available if a split from the United Kingdom occurred, and it becomes easy to see why many who identify

themselves as British support a continued union; they see anything else as being a danger to themselves, their family, and their group.

There are many facets to the explanation of variation in support for a possible split from or continued union with the United Kingdom. However, the theories we have discussed provide us with some very important information. Issues of nationhood, representation, and group identity are all important to understanding why there is variation in support for this part of the peace process in Northern Ireland. After discussing the theories, it becomes clear that a common element among them is the idea that British or Unionist identity influences how an individual feels about the status of Northern Ireland as a political entity. Because of this common thread, we can derive the following hypothesis: individuals who identify themselves as British/Unionist are more likely to support a continued union with the United Kingdom than those who identify themselves as Irish/Republicans.

Data and Method

The data used in the analysis is contained in the 1998 United Kingdom Social Attitudes Survey (Study Number 3309, ICPSR). The dependent variable (OneState, number 467) measures the support of the individual for maintaining the United Kingdom as a single political entity. It is measured on a five-point scale, ranging from, strongly agree, to 5, strongly disagree. Table 1 displays the frequencies of this variable. A vast majority of the respondents are in favor of the union (20.0 percent strongly agree, and 46.4 percent agree). Some are neutral (17 percent), while a minority of the respondents disagree (10.5 percent). Only a very small percentage of respondents (1.3 percent) strongly disagree that the United Kingdom should remain united.

Table 1: Should the United Kingdom Remain as One, Unified State?

| <u>Opinion</u> | <u>Percentages</u> |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 20.9 |
| Agree | 46.4 |
| Neutral | 17.0 |
| Disagree | 10.5 |
| Strongly Disagree | 1.3 |

The independent variable measures ethnic identification. Two variables, Does R think of self as British (469a) and Does R think of self as Irish (469b), will be recoded into a single variable, Ethnicity, where 1 equals British, 2 equals other, and 3 equals Irish. Looking at Table 2, the reader can see that the vast majority of respondents, 71.8 percent, identify themselves as British. Hardly any, 0.7 percent, identify themselves as Irish, and a good portion (27.5 percent) identify themselves as Other. These results are interesting, in that they suggest that the opinions represented concerning our dependent variable will be heavily slanted toward the British view. This slant means that the views of Republicans (those who are in favor of splitting from the United Kingdom), who are almost always Irish, are unlikely to be represented in this analysis. While this situation is not ideal for this particular analysis, bivariate relationships nonetheless emerge. For instance, it might turn out that some British hold the same views as the self-identified Irish in regards to the peace process, when traditionally these groups have been seen as holding views that are polar opposites of each other.

Table 2: How Do Individuals Identify Themselves?

| <u>Ethnicity</u> | <u>Percentages</u> |
|------------------|--------------------|
| British | 71.8 |
| Other | 27.5 |

Irish 0.7

I will test other hypotheses found in the literature review as well. The independent variables are: party identification (dvQ/PartyID), effectiveness of laws against discrimination (number 503, EffectLaw), social class (number 587, SocClass), efficacy of the current government (number 604, GovWork), income (number 856), and religious affiliation (number 936).

While all of these variables are helpful, none of them are useful as they currently exist in the data set. I recoded party identification into a five-point scale called Party, with the ideology of the parties moving from conservative to liberal. In this new variable, 1 equals Conservative, 2 equals Liberal Democrat, 3 equals Labour, 4 equals Green Party, and 5 equals Other. The original values of “other,” “refused,” and “don’t know” will be treated as system missing data. The reader should refer to Table 3 for the percentages concerning this variable. What is particularly interesting is the heavy slant in favor of the Labour party; in fact, over 70 percent of the respondents identified themselves with Labour. This situation means that the results of this analysis will be much more representative of one part of the community (those in favor of Labour) at the expense of others (those who identify with another party).

Table 3: What is the Individual’s Party Identification?

| <u>Party</u> | <u>Percentages</u> |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| <u>Conservative</u> | <u>9.2</u> |
| <u>Labour</u> | <u>73.8</u> |
| <u>Lib. Democrat</u> | <u>4.0</u> |
| <u>Green</u> | <u>0.3</u> |
| <u>Other</u> | <u>1.0</u> |

Effectiveness of laws against discrimination was recoded into a four-point scale where 1 equals very effective, 2 equals fairly effective, 3 equals not very effective, and 4 equals not at all effective. As with party identification, the values of “don’t know” and “not answered” will be treated as system missing. Table 4 reports the percentages for this variable. The reader should note that roughly equal percentages of respondents feel that the government’s laws are either fairly effective or not very effective (35.7 percent and 36.5 percent, respectively). Very small percentages are either highly supportive or highly critical of the effectiveness of the government’s current anti-discrimination laws.

Table 4: Are the Government’s Current Anti-Discrimination Laws Effective?

| <u>Opinion</u> | <u>Percentages</u> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| <u>Very Effective</u> | <u>6.0</u> |
| <u>Fairly Effective</u> | <u>35.7</u> |
| <u>Not Very Effective</u> | <u>36.5</u> |
| <u>Not at all Effective</u> | <u>11.8</u> |

Social class was recoded into a two-point variable, where 1 equals middle class, and 2 equals working class. “Other,” “no,” “don’t know,” and “not answered” are treated as system missing data. The reader should refer to Table 5 for exact percentages, noting that 18.7 percent identify themselves as middle class, while 29.6 percent identify themselves as working class.

Table 5: What is the Individual’s Social Class?

| <u>Class</u> | <u>Percentages</u> |
|----------------|--------------------|
| <u>Middle</u> | <u>18.7</u> |
| <u>Working</u> | <u>29.6</u> |

Efficacy of the current government was recoded into a four-point scale, where 1 equals extremely well, 2 equals could be improved slightly, 3 equals could be improved quite a bit, and 4 equals needs much improvement. “Don’t know” and “not answered”

are system missing. Table 6 reports the percentages for this variable (GovWork). As with the variable concerning the effectiveness of current anti-discrimination laws, the percentages for this variable are clustered around the middle two responses, “could be improved slightly” (41.6 percent) and “could be improved quite a bit” (30.9 percent). Only very small percentages feel as though the government is working “extremely well” (6.2 percent) or that it “needs much improvement” (12.6 percent).

Table 6: How Well is the Current Government Doing Its Job?

| <u>Opinion</u> | <u>Percentages</u> |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| <u>Extremely Well</u> | <u>6.2</u> |
| <u>Improved Slightly</u> | <u>41.6</u> |
| <u>Quite a Bit</u> | <u>30.9</u> |
| <u>Much Improvement</u> | <u>12.6</u> |

Income, originally a variable with 18 points, was recoded into a three-point variable. In this variable, 1 is equal to less than 3,999-22,999, 2 equals 23,000-40,999, and 3 equals 41,000 or more. “Refusal” and “Don’t know” are system missing. Table 7 indicates the percentages for the new variable. What is interesting to note is that the vast majority of the respondents, 27.8 percent, claimed to earn less than 3,999 to 22,999 pounds per year before taxes. The next highest percentage was 6.1 percent, representing those who make 23,000 to 40,999 pounds per year before taxes. These results are interesting, as they suggest the data are slanted in the direction of the viewpoints of those in the lower income brackets. If one looks to both this slant and the slant of party identification, a possible theme emerges, in that those who are of lower incomes will also be more likely to identify with the Labour party.

Table 7: What is the Individual’s Income?

| <u>Income</u> | <u>Percentages</u> |
|----------------|--------------------|
| <u>0-22999</u> | <u>27.8</u> |

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| <u>23000-40999</u> | <u>6.1</u> |
| <u>41000 or more</u> | <u>2.0</u> |

Finally, Religion was recoded into a four “dummy variables”: Anglican, Catholic, Other Christian, and Non-Christian. For each variable, 1 equals the specific religion, and 0 equals all other responses (example: Anglican: 0 = all other responses, 1 = Anglican). The reader can find the percentages for each of these religions in Table 8. After looking at the frequencies analysis, the readers should see that the percentages are spread fairly evenly between religions, with one exception. The reader should note the high percentage of non-Christian respondents (53.6 percent) in this particular data set.

Table 8: What is the Individual’s Religious Identification?

| <u>Religion</u> | <u>Percentages</u> |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| <u>Anglican</u> | <u>6.4</u> |
| <u>Catholic</u> | <u>10.2</u> |
| <u>Other Christian</u> | <u>14.2</u> |
| <u>Non-Christian</u> | <u>53.6</u> |

Using these variables, I will construct a multi-variate regression in which the continued unity of the United Kingdom (OneState) is the dependent variable and the above stated variables are the independent variables. Ideally, I hope to find an association level of 25% or more. In order to achieve these results, I will look to the Adjusted R-square to determine how the well the variables would predict change in the dependent variable. I will also analyze the standardized coefficient Beta and its significance for each independent variable to see which variable has the biggest impact on the dependent variable. In addition, I will examine the T-values of the standardized coefficient. T should be higher than ± 1.96 with a significance value lower than .05. This value will allow me to have a 95% confidence interval in order to reject the null hypothesis. Such results, combined with proper significance levels (lower than .05), will

allow me to confidently reject the null hypothesis, which claims that one's ethnicity has no effect on support for a continued union with the United Kingdom.

Putting it all together: Results

After running a multi-variate regression with the variables, we can now determine if any of the hypotheses tested are valid. By examining the results of this regression, as found in Table 9, we can immediately see that the hypothesis that individuals who identify themselves as British will be more likely to support a continued union with the United Kingdom is not significant. This becomes apparent by looking to the t-test. Recalling that we required a t value of ± 1.96 , by looking at the t value of Ethnicity, which is 1.265, it is apparent that this variable falls short. Additionally, its significance level is .209, meaning that this variable only allows us to be 79.1 percent sure that we can reject the null hypothesis that ethnicity has no impact upon an individual's support for a continued union. This percentage is much too small for us to be confident in rejecting the null, forcing us to reject our main hypothesis.

Now that we have determined that we cannot accept our main hypothesis, we must look to the rest of the results, found in Table 9, to see if there is a better explanation for the variation in support for a continued union with the United Kingdom. Indeed, there is one variable that has both an acceptable t value and significance level, as well as the largest Beta value. Party, with a t value of 2.125, a significance level of .036, and a Beta value of .209, allows us to accept the idea that an individual's party affiliation affects support for a continued union with the United Kingdom. In fact, in looking at the direction of the relationship between party affiliation and support for a continued union (which is positive), we can determine that the more conservative an individual is in their

party affiliation, the more likely they will be to support a continued union. The significance level of this relationship is such that we can be 96.4 percent sure that we can reject the null hypothesis, a level of confidence that is extremely high.

Table 9: Regression

| Variable | Beta | T-Test | Significance |
|----------------------|-------|--------|--------------|
| <u>Ethnicity</u> | .127 | 1.265 | .209 |
| <u>SocClass</u> | -.193 | -1.818 | .072 |
| <u>GovWork</u> | .027 | .278 | .781 |
| <u>Income</u> | .132 | 1.272 | .206 |
| <u>Party</u> | .209 | 2.125 | .036 |
| <u>EffectLaw</u> | .129 | 1.306 | .195 |
| <u>Anglican</u> | -.177 | -1.478 | .143 |
| <u>Catholic</u> | -.189 | -1.508 | .135 |
| <u>Other</u> | .110 | .893 | .374 |
| <u>Non-Christian</u> | -.284 | -1.967 | .052 |

Unfortunately, none of the other variables tested have sufficient t values or significance levels for us to accept the hypotheses to which they are related and reject the null hypotheses. Social Class has a t value of -1.818, which comes close to our designated value of +/- 1.96, but not quite close enough. Its significance level is also close, at .072, but is still not small enough for us to confidently reject the idea that social class has no effect on an individual's support of a continued union. If we changed our significance level to .1, however, Social Class would be significant. Yet, the t-value would still not be appropriate.

Additionally, GovWork does not allow us to reject the null, as its t value is only .278, a value much less than +/- 1.96. Its significance level of .781, as with Social Class, is much too large for us to confidently reject the null. It only allows us to be 21.9 percent sure that we can reject the null. Income also does not appear to have a significant effect on an individual's support of the continued union, with a t value of 1.272 and a

significance level of .206. EffectLaw is also not acceptable, as its t value is 1.306, and its significance level is .195.

An examination of the dummy variables concerning religious affiliation reveals that only one of them, Non-Christian, even comes close to being acceptable. It has a t value of -1.967, which is acceptable given the aforementioned boundaries. However, its significance level of .052 is slightly too large for the boundary of .05. Although it slightly exceeds the 95% confidence interval, I believe it to be acceptable to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that as one becomes Non-Christian, they are less likely to support a continued union. This is a very interesting result indeed, as one would think (given the demographics of this dispute) that as individuals became Catholic, they would be more likely to support a split. However, this result does not manifest itself in this regression. The other variables concerning religion are insignificant. Anglican only has a t value of -1.478 and a significance of .143 (much too large to reject the null). Catholic is somewhat closer to the boundary with a t value of -1.508, but its significance level (.135) is still too large to confidently reject the null hypothesis. Other does not even come close to achieving the barrier, with a t value of .893. Additionally, its significance level of .374 is monstrous.

We must now look to our adjusted R-square to see just how much of the variation in support for a continued union is caused by the variables we selected. As stated above, the ideal R-square was to be .25 or more. In other words, the variables tested would ideally provide 25 percent or more of the explanation as to why there is variation in support for a continued union with the United Kingdom. As the reader can see, the actual R-square value is .126. This result means that only 12.6 percent of the variation in

support for a continued union is explained by the variables tested. Clearly, this is quite a small number (half of what our ideal percentage would be). Indeed, when looking to the f-statistic, which is 2.532, the results of the R-square value are validated, meaning that there are other, more relevant variables that better explain this variation.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this regression are quite interesting. Common sense might suggest that ethnicity and religion would play much bigger roles in explaining the variation in support for a continued union with the United Kingdom than they do, given the history of the conflict and peace process in Northern Ireland. However, given their lack of explanatory power, in addition to the small total explanatory power of all the data tested, we can deduce some implications and draw some conclusions from these results. First of all, as noted in the discussion about the frequencies of the data, this data set was heavily skewed towards individuals who identified themselves as British, as non-Christians, with the Labour party, and the lower income brackets. Perhaps using a data set that was more evenly representative of the citizens of Britain, including Northern Ireland, would provide results that are more in line with common sense.

Compilation of a better data set could be accomplished in a number of ways. More polling in Northern Ireland specifically would perhaps garner a sample of the population that more evenly identified itself as either British or Irish. Also, the data set used in this analysis was not very large, only around 750 people or so; a larger sampling pool would undoubtedly affect the results. Additionally, more specific questions about the Good Friday Agreement, instead of questions that are tangentially related to it might provide a better idea of what individuals really think about the peace process and how it

relates to the future of their country. For instance, instead of asking "Should the United Kingdom remain one, unified state," surveys could ask "Do you support the Good Friday Agreement?"

What this data set does tell us, though, is important. It allows us to understand that party identification has, to some degree, an effect on an individual's opinion about the nature of the United Kingdom. By looking to the relationship between party identification and support for a continued union, we can see that individuals who belong to more conservative parties are more likely to support a continued union. This result affirms what is occurring in the real world, as the Labour government has proven itself to be more open to negotiating with certain members of Northern Irish society and supporting decisions that allow for a possible split with the UK than the conservatives have been. Political scientists doing future research should take note of this fact; a study that tracks the relationship between the ideology of the party in control of government and individual opinion about the peace process or specific tenets of peace agreements would be interesting.

Finally, from the results of the data tested, we can see that there are significant pieces of the puzzle missing. This situation lends itself to further study. Given the importance of this issue to those living in Northern Ireland, as well as the importance to the United Kingdom and United States, further studies must be done in order to begin to understand which issues are of most importance to individuals most affected by the peace process and, more importantly, how they believe those issues should manifest themselves in a public policy framework. We can see from the study conducted in this paper that certain segments of society do significantly influence the variation in opinion about the

Northern Irish union with the United Kingdom. What policy makers should do, then, is to determine what influences these social groups and what contributes to their attitudes and behaviors. A possible connection between party ideology and variation in support has already been discussed, but other examples can be found. For instance, what factors contribute to Non-Christians (the only other variable to come close to being significant) that causes them to be less likely to support a continued union? These opinions and characteristics would be interesting to learn, and would undoubtedly provide policy makers with a way to move forward and address these concerns through political debate and action, perhaps helping to mitigate conflict.

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