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The Long View of Community Relations in Northern Ireland: 1989-2012

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Changes 1989-2012

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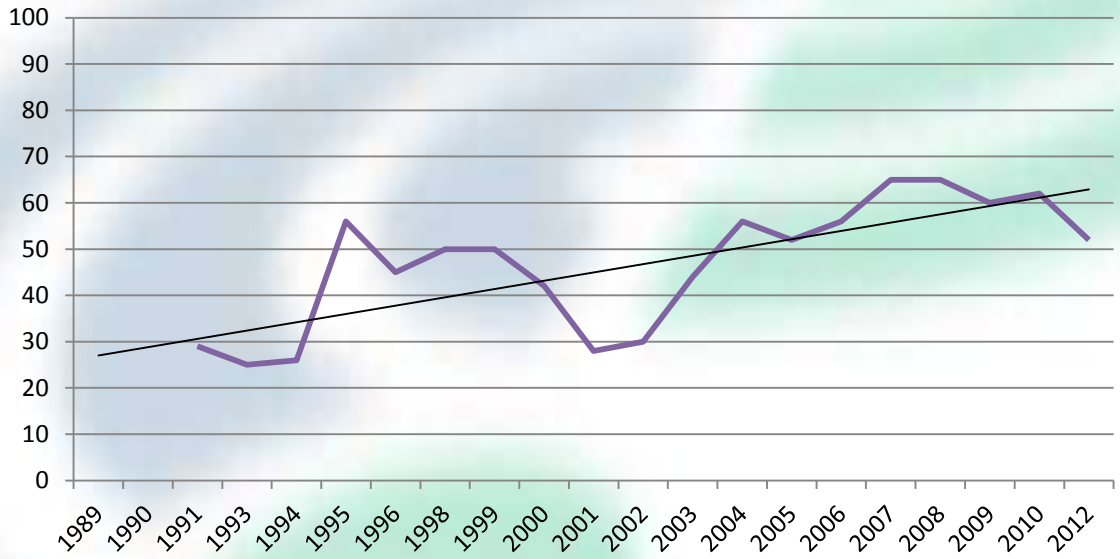
Figure 1.1: Percentage saying relations between Protestants and Catholics are better than they were 5 years ago



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Optimism?

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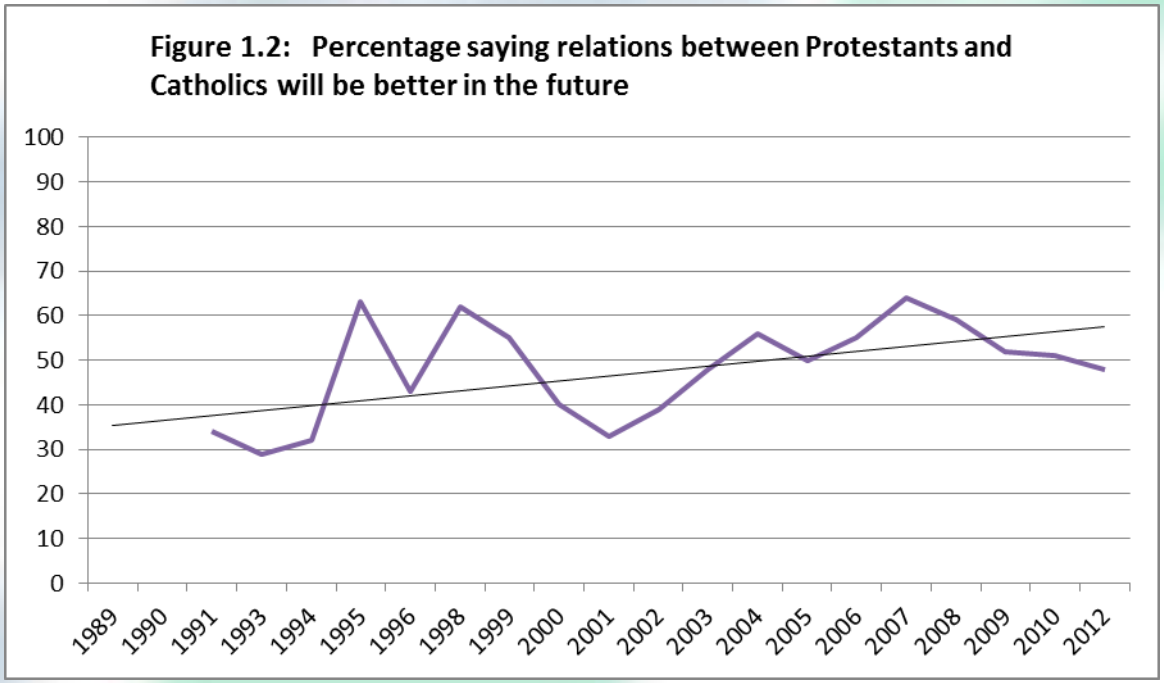

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Attitudes

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- The underlying 'climate' of approval for greater inter-community engagement and tolerance in Northern Ireland has gradually improved.
- Sustainable progress remains vulnerable to immediate political events.
- Over the last 20 years, by far the most negative period in public attitudes took place in the period following the Good Friday Agreement and symbolised in the Holy Cross dispute and its aftermath, the collapse of devolved institutions and polarisation over decommissioning.
- Confidence returned in both communities as a result of the restoration of devolution in 2007.
- Early evidence of deterioration in the perception of community relationships between 2010 and 2012 suggests that progress depends on a plausible holistic commitment to building a shared society that requires attention and cannot be taken for granted.

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Cath-Prot

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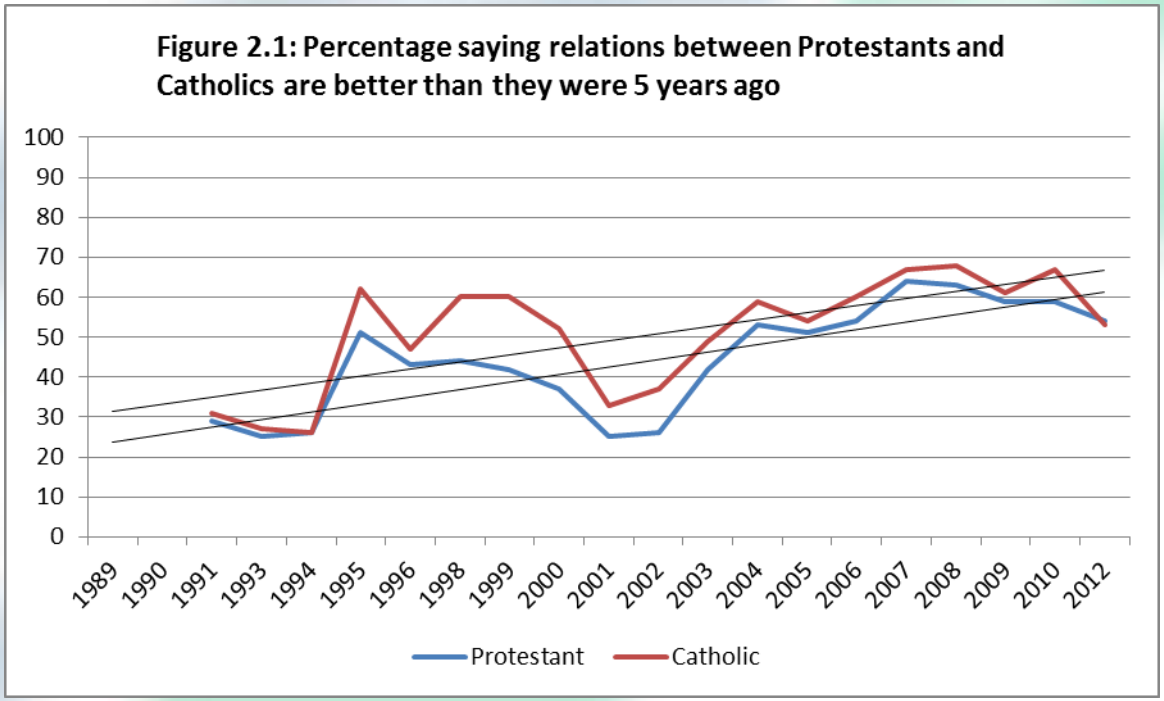

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Progress in CR

- Assessments of progress in the past and expectations of progress in the future in relation to community relations have proved to be closely tied to the absence or presence of social tension and violence and the perception that there has been political advance.
- Effectiveness in community relations is ultimately measured against these outcomes in popular opinion.
- This implies that the defining elements of community relations are strongly dependent on political agreement and the elimination of violence.
- Policy change may add or subtract from this wider perception but is ultimately subordinate to this wider threshold.

Stable preferences

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Figure 1.3: Percentage saying they would prefer to live in a mixed-religion neighbourhood

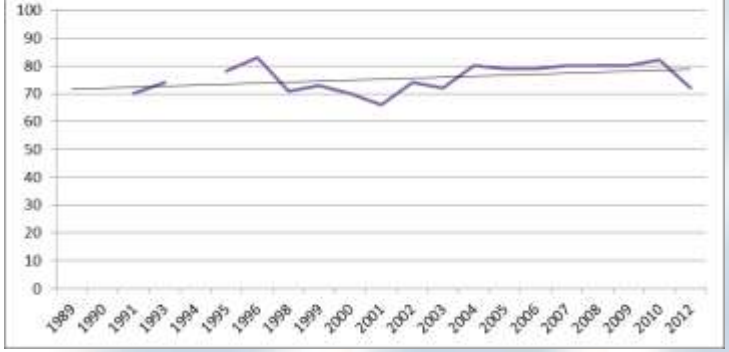


Figure 1.4: Percentage saying they would prefer a mixed-religion workplace

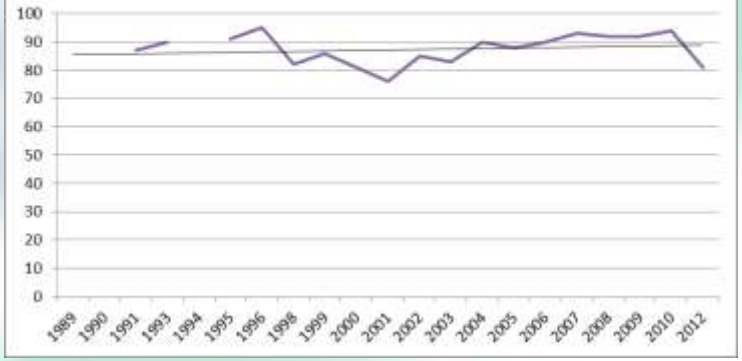


Figure 1.5: Percentage saying they would prefer a mixed-religion school

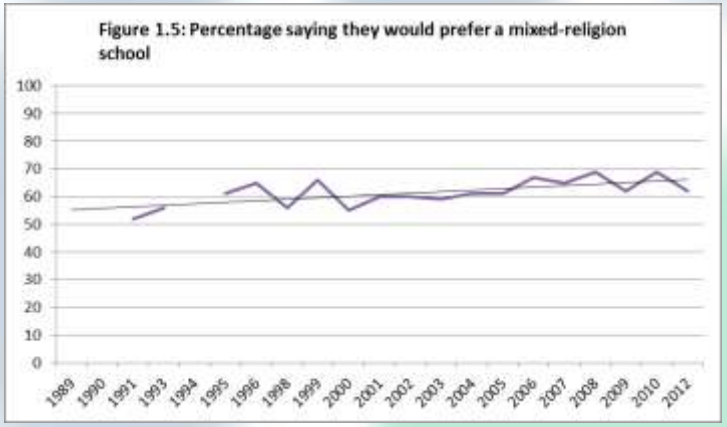
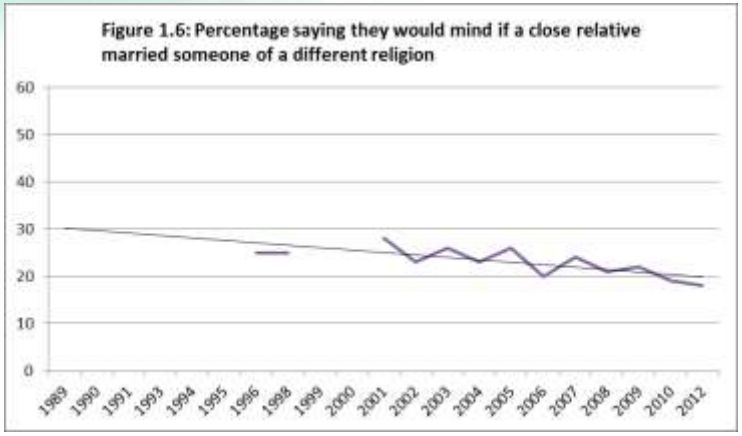


Figure 1.6: Percentage saying they would mind if a close relative married someone of a different religion



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Stable values?

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- Commitment to key community relations values and goals - such as shared housing, mixed workplaces and mixed marriage- has generally increased and grown over 20 years and has not proved susceptible to volatile political events.

- Attitudes supportive of 'sharing and mixing' has now reached over 70% of both Catholics and Protestants and is not volatile over time

- Since 2010 there is some evidence that support for these values may have weakened for the first time in many years.

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Education

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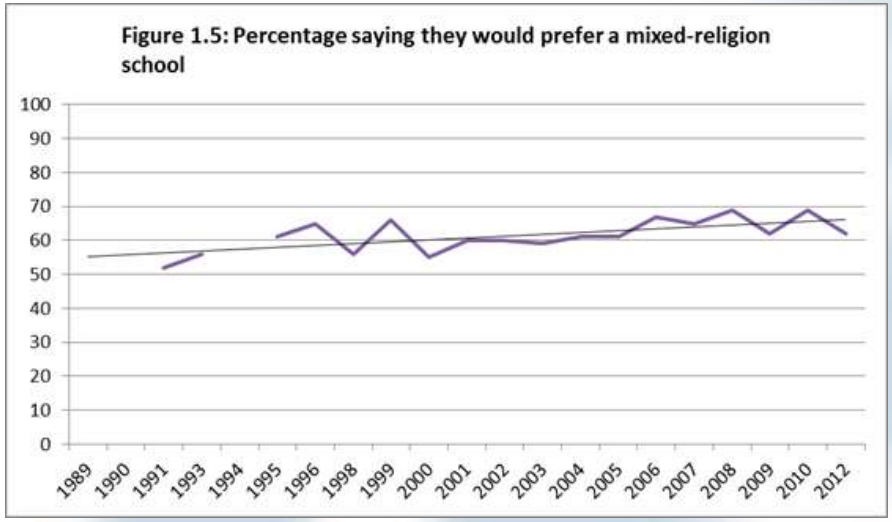

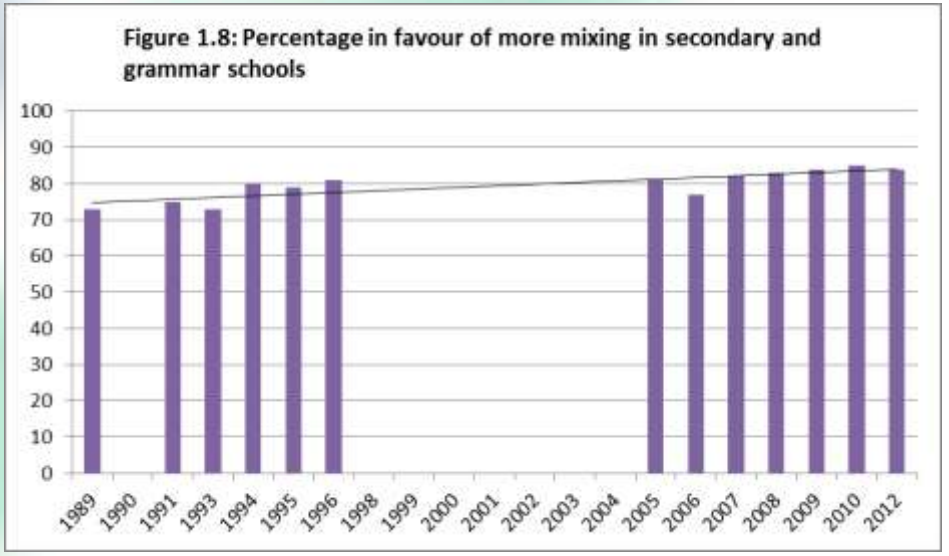

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- The evidence of the Life and Times Survey is of sustained majority support for integrated education.

- However there is some evidence that this has softened in recent years among Catholics and that support for 'more sharing' among young people is considerably greater among both Protestant and Catholic respondents is significantly greater.

- This may suggest that greater consensus could be achieved through a combined approach to shared education in coming years.

Religion and politics

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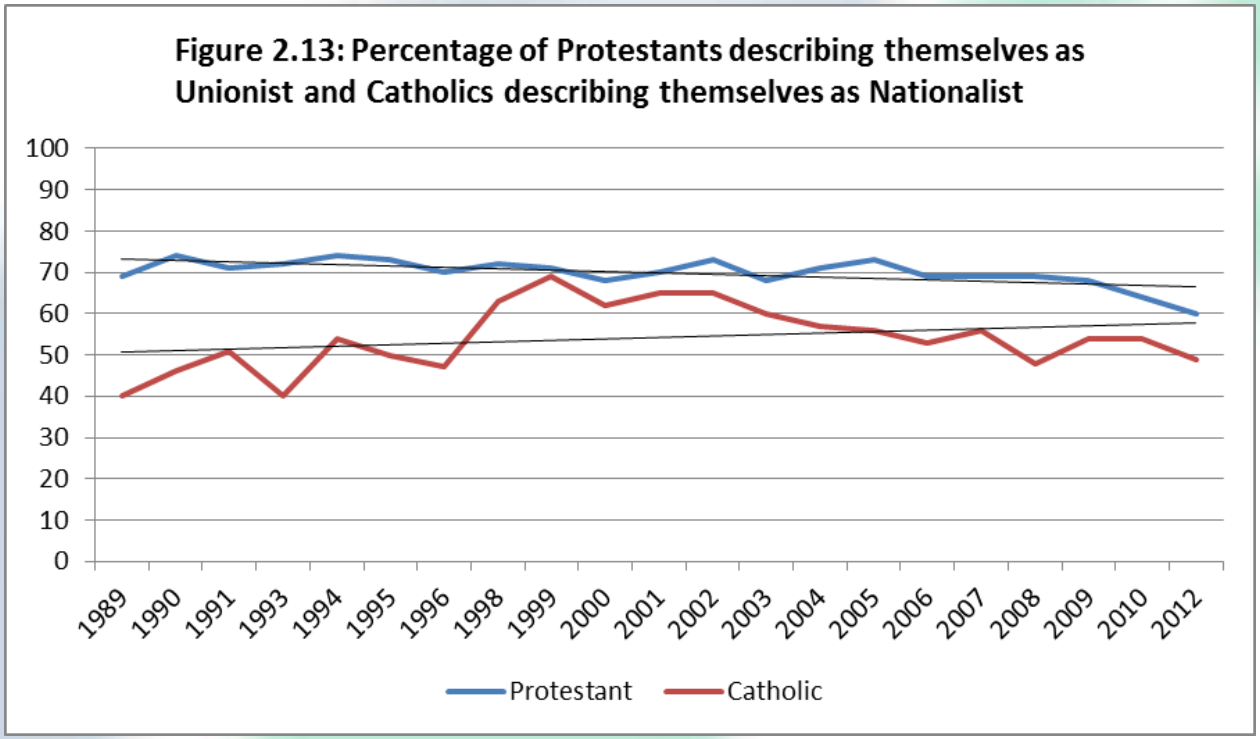

Protestant National Identity

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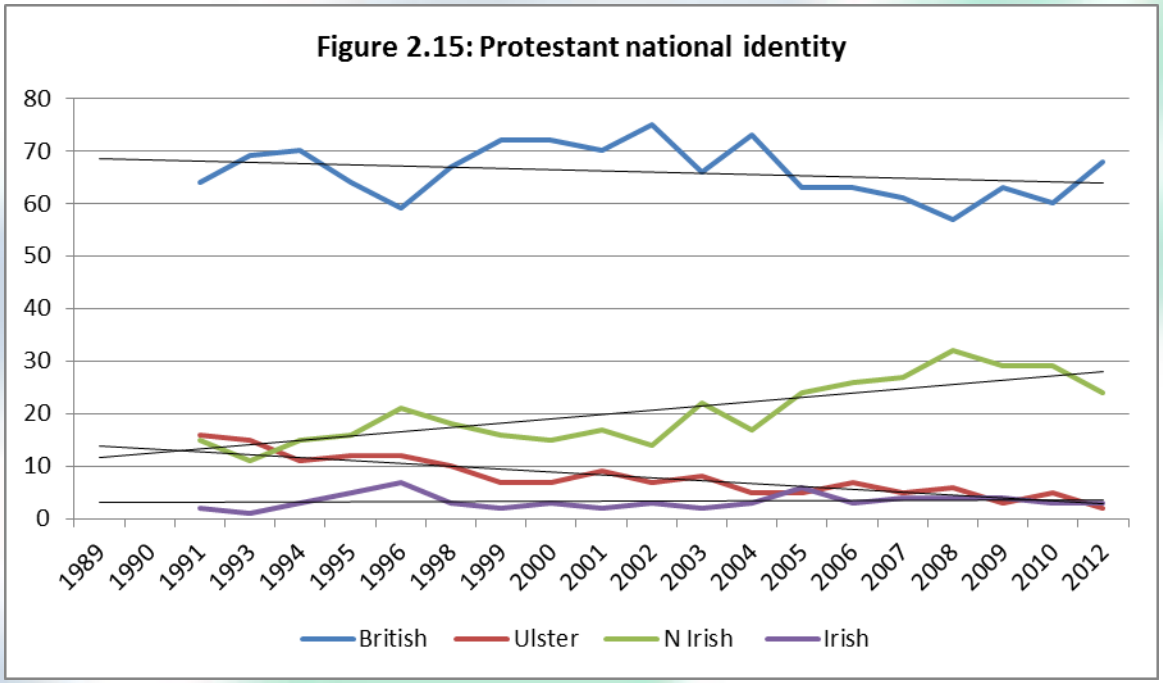

Catholic National Identity

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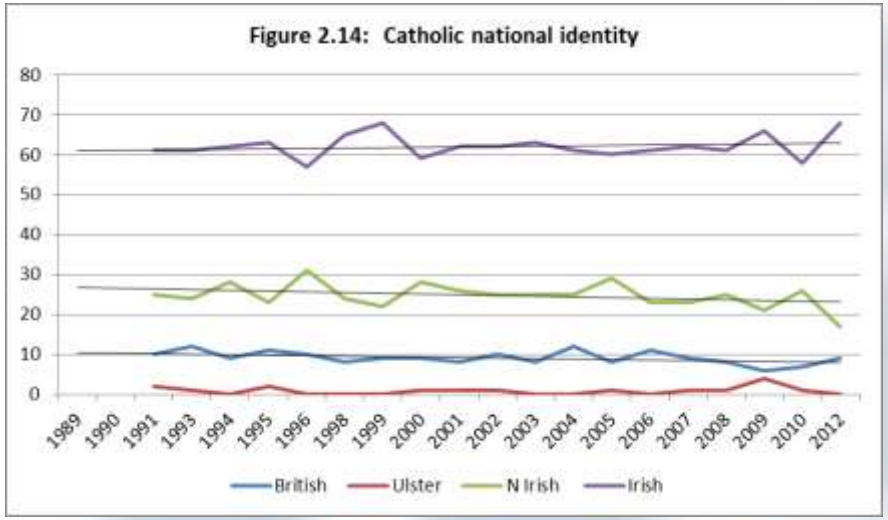
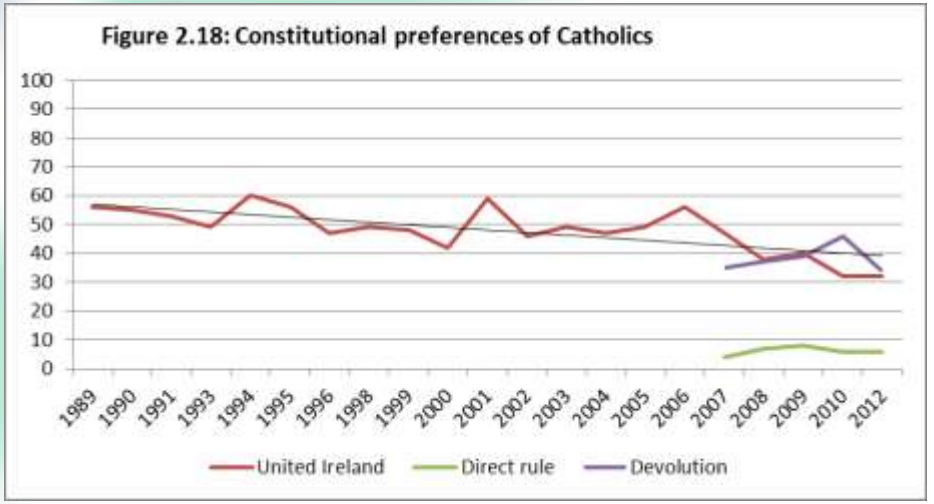




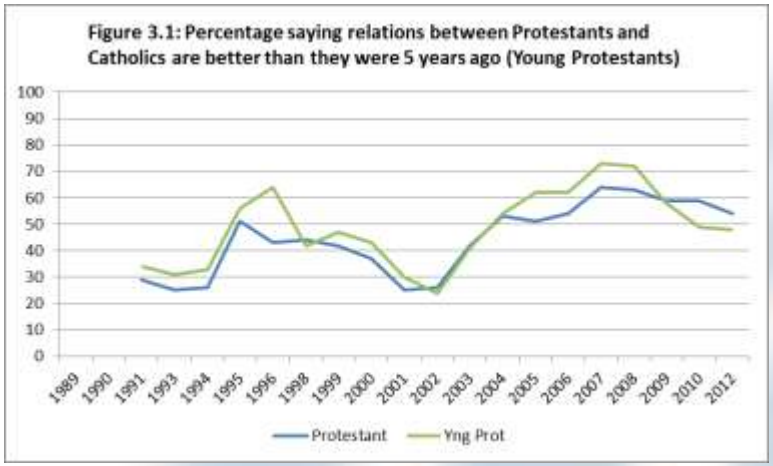
- Political and national identity has been subject to change over 20 years.

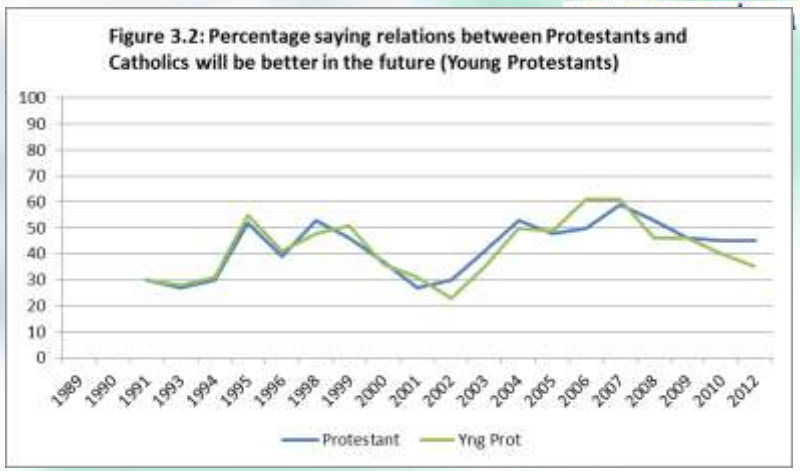
- Very few Protestants consider themselves to be Irish while few Catholics describe themselves as British.

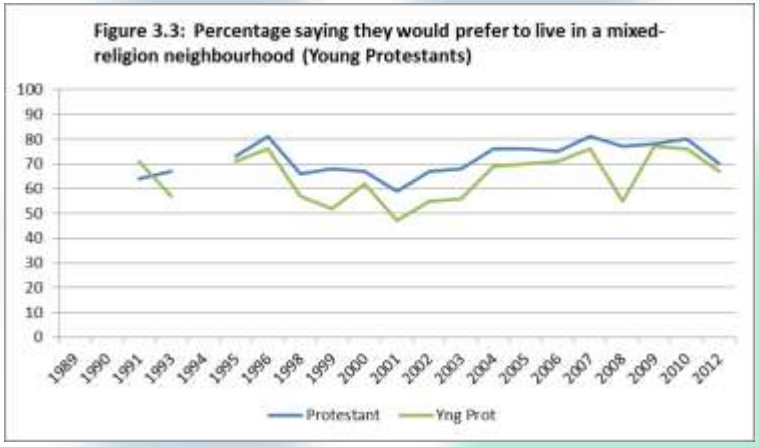
- The numbers describing themselves as 'Northern Irish' have varied over time, and appear to be affected by changes in political events.

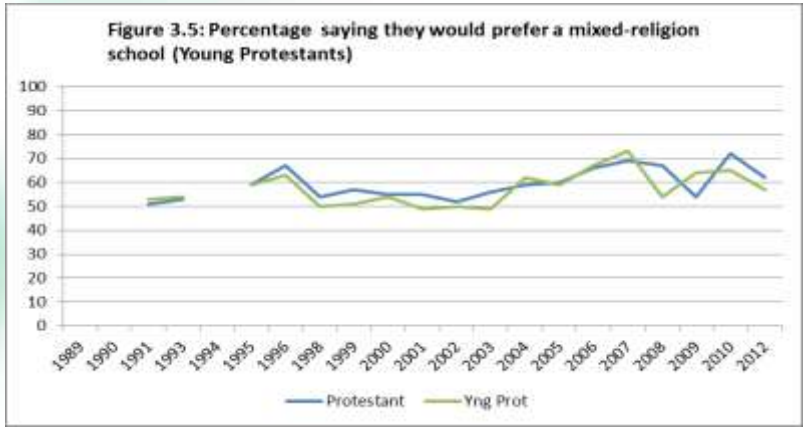
- Attitudes to constitutional outcomes have changed dramatically among Catholics with a drop of 50% among those believing that the best long-term future for Northern Ireland was in a United Ireland. This too may reflect changing political and economic circumstances or it may reflect increasing willingness and ability among those identifying themselves as Irish to realise this within the setting of Northern Ireland.

Young Protestants









Young Catholics

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Figure 4.1: Percentage saying relations between Protestants and Catholics are better than they were 5 years ago (Young Catholics)

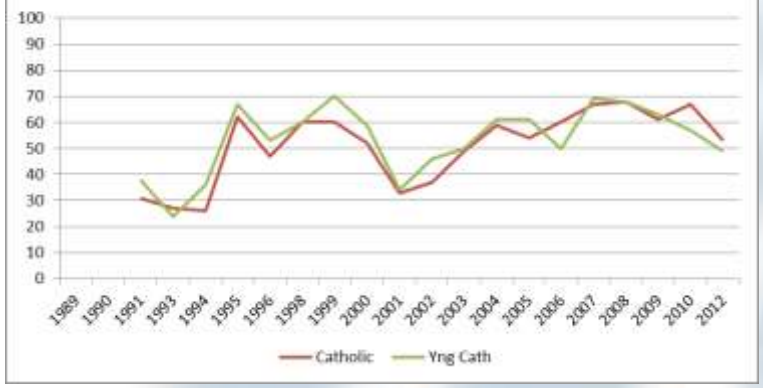


Figure 4.2: Percentage saying relations between Protestants and Catholics will be better in the future (Young Catholics)

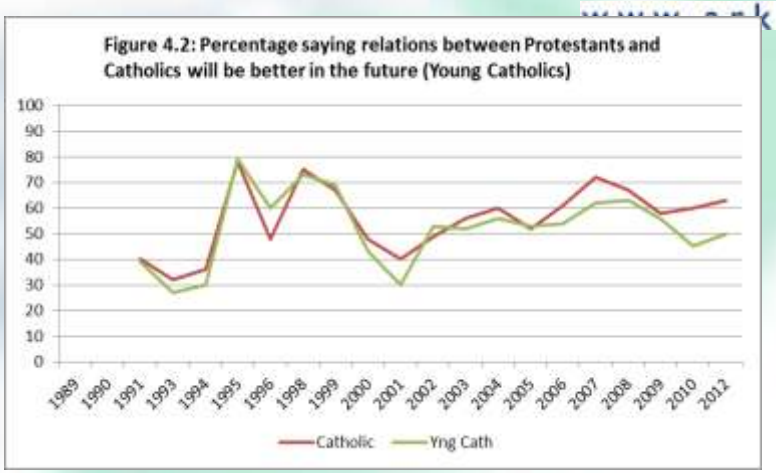
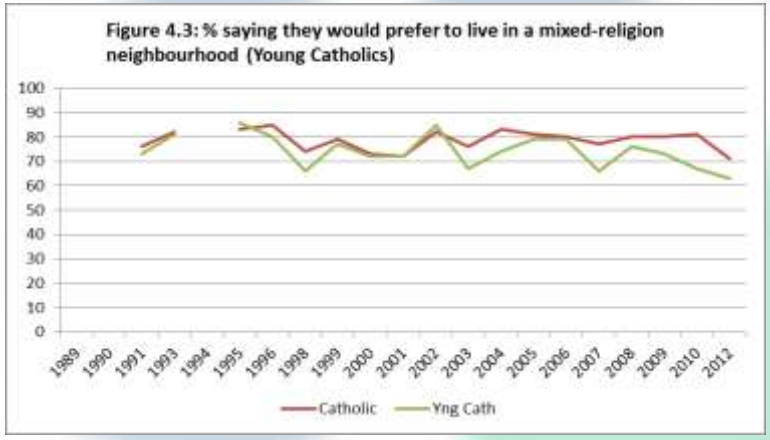


Figure 4.3: % saying they would prefer to live in a mixed-religion neighbourhood (Young Catholics)



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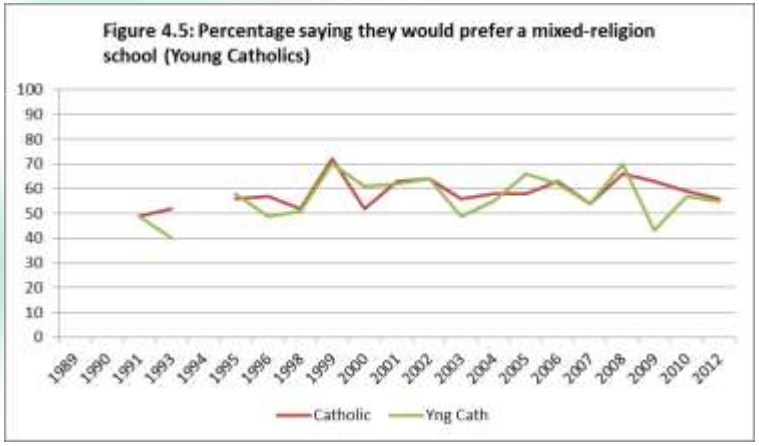

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Changing youth identity

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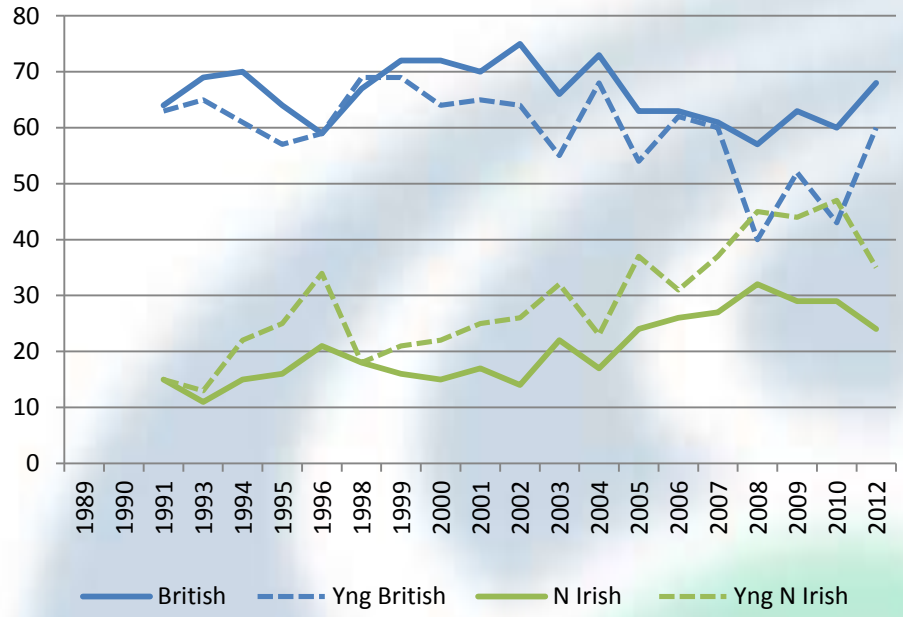
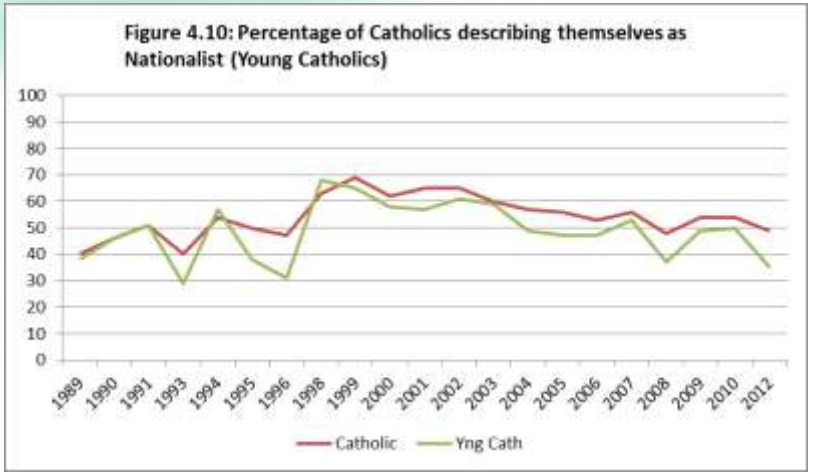
Protestant national identity (Young Protestants)





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The youth of today

- Over 20 years young people have proved more responsive to changes, both positive and negative in perceptions of community relations.

- Young people have often been more reticent to support mixed religion neighbourhoods while supportive of shared schooling, mixed marriage and shared workplaces.

- Attitudes may be rooted in real fears and the risks which some young people run in relation to violence.

- There has been a sharp decline in the perceptions and attitudes of young people towards improving community relations in recent years suggesting an increase in anxiety in youth culture, dashing hopes that the peace process would liberate young people from the fears of the past.

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Qualifications

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Figure 4.40: Percentage saying they would prefer to live in a mixed-religion neighbourhood (Catholics - no ed quals)

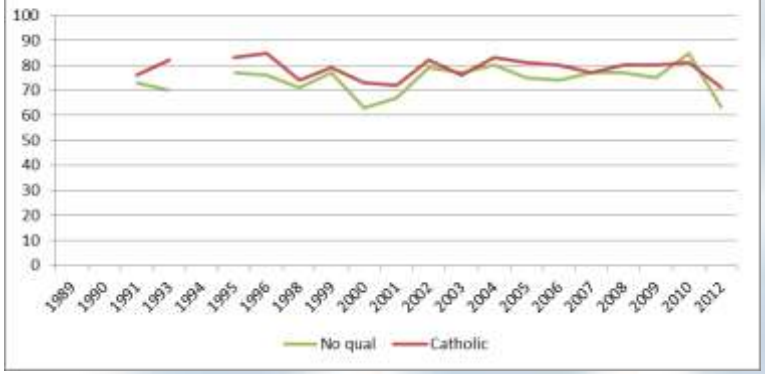


Figure 3.34: Percentage saying they would prefer to live in a mixed-religion neighbourhood (Protestants - no ed quals)

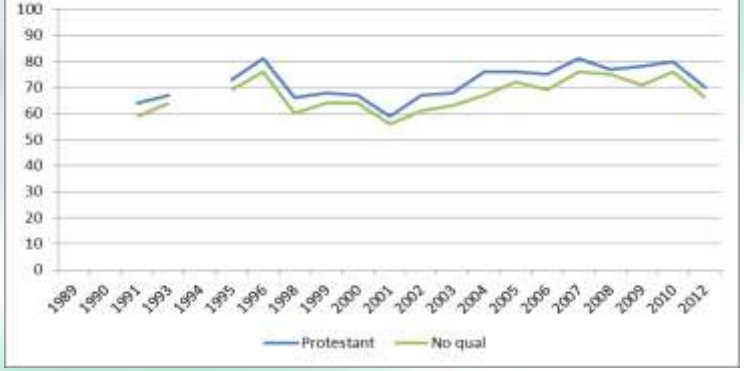


Figure 4.43: Percentage saying they would mind if a close relative married someone of a different religion (Catholics - no ed quals)

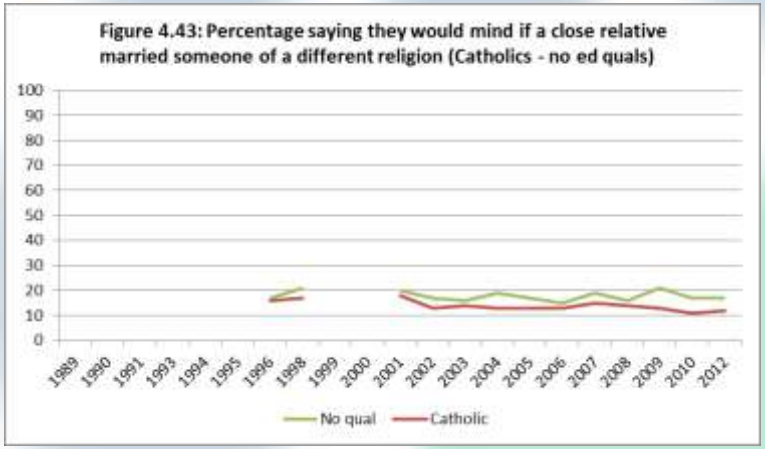
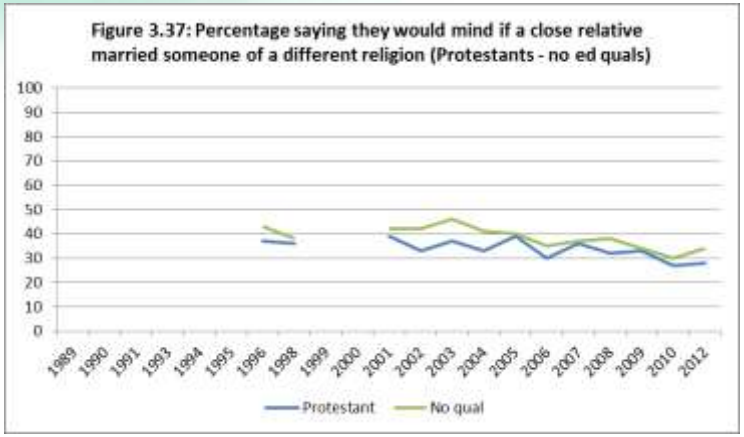


Figure 3.37: Percentage saying they would mind if a close relative married someone of a different religion (Protestants - no ed quals)



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Deprivation

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The Life and Times Survey suggests that attitudes towards community relations, divisions over nationality and politics and hostility to sharing with others are not defined by poverty, educational attainment or social housing. Indeed it is clear that core issues such as national identity, attitudes to mixed marriage and living in shared neighbourhoods and perceptions of progress or otherwise vary only in their intensity in any given social sub section. Over twenty years the Life and Times Survey has not identified any social cohort in which questions of separation and sharing do not arise. Furthermore, at the most intimate level, in attitudes to mixed marriage or to people from another ethnic group, there is very little evidence that educational attainment, age or housing tenancy is decisive. However, it is clear that young people in urban environments and in areas of concentrated social housing are particularly vulnerable to issues of fear and threat issues which impact on attitudes to some degree in relation to questions of sharing neighbourhood and friendship. The Survey suggests that deprivation may therefore be understood as an important aggravating factor in the impact and intensity of sectarianism which creates greater risks to community relations and to the perceptions of and possibilities for sustainable progress.

Rural-Urban (P)

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Figure 3.56 Percentage saying they would prefer a mixed-religion workplace (Urban Protestants)

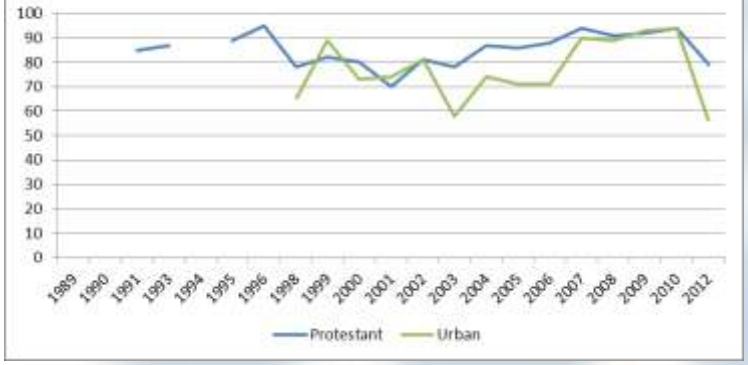


Figure 3.46: Percentage saying they would prefer a mixed-religion workplace (Rural Protestants)

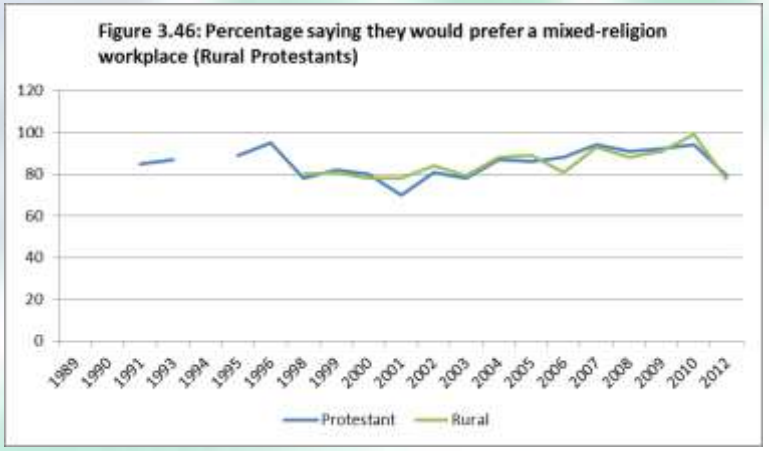


Figure 3.55 : Percentage saying they would prefer to live in a mixed-religion neighbourhood (Urban Protestants)

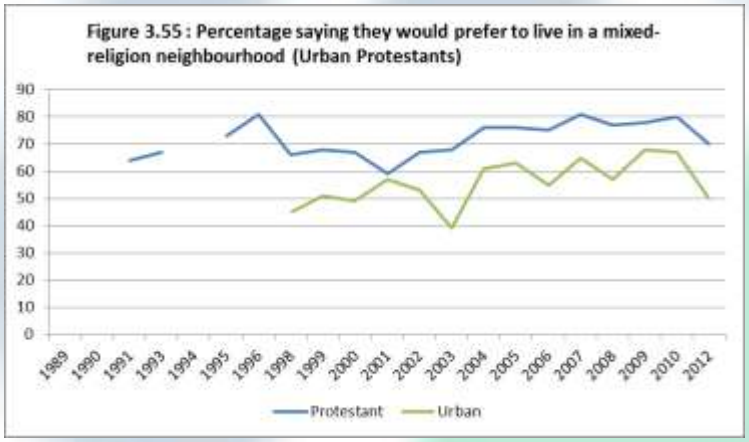
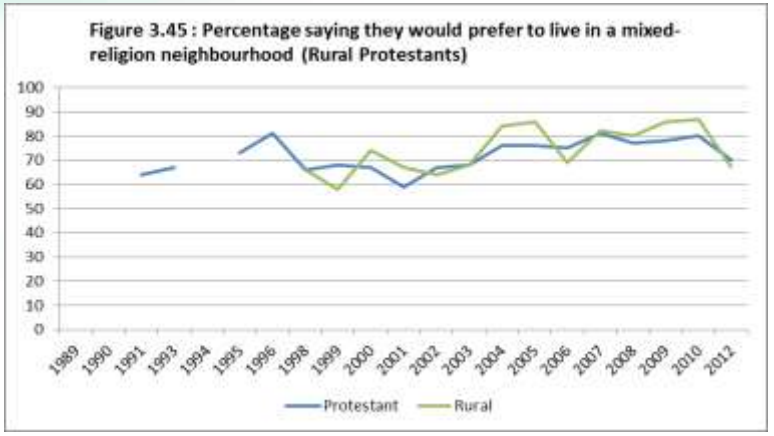


Figure 3.45 : Percentage saying they would prefer to live in a mixed-religion neighbourhood (Rural Protestants)



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Rural-Urban (C)

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Figure 4.63 : Percentage saying relations between Protestants and Catholics will be better in the future (Urban Catholics)

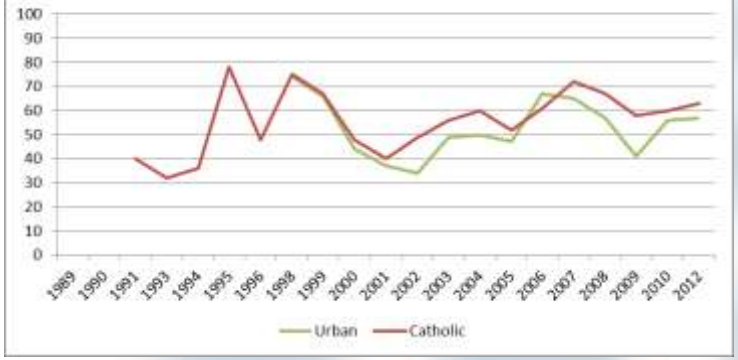


Figure 4.52: Percentage saying relations between Protestants and Catholics will be better in the future (Rural Catholics)

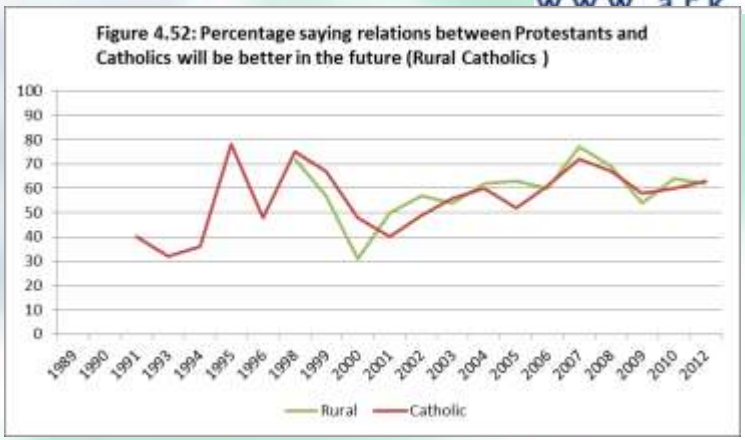


Figure 4.64 : Percentage saying they would prefer to live in a mixed-religion neighbourhood (Urban Catholics)

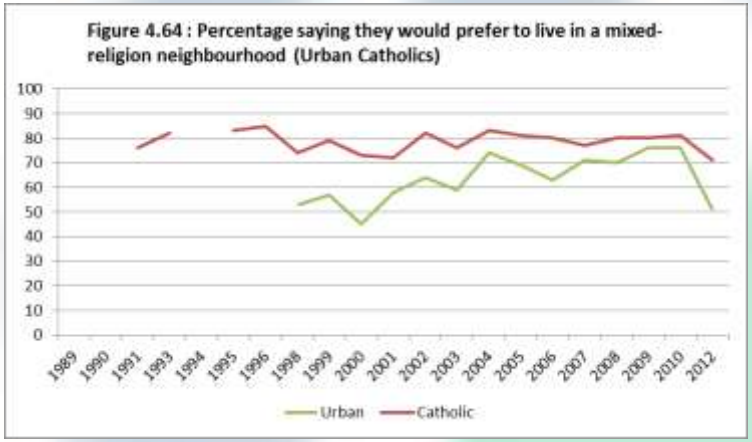
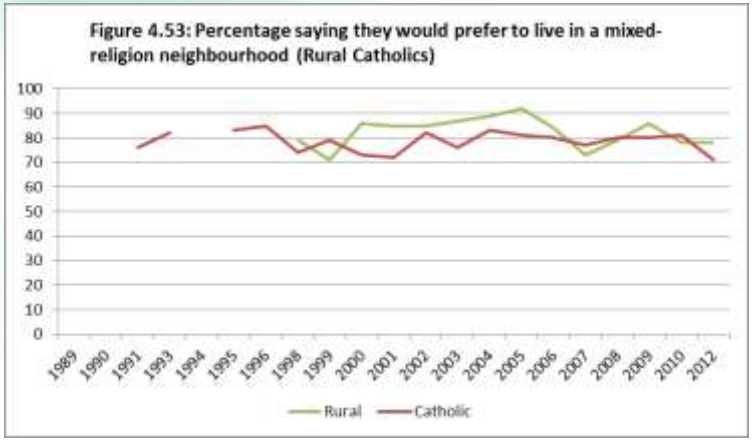


Figure 4.53: Percentage saying they would prefer to live in a mixed-religion neighbourhood (Rural Catholics)



Rural-urban

The evidence of gradual improvement evident in rural communities has not been reproduced in urban areas in recent years. What is not clear is whether this is a permanent change, as there is evidence from press reports that local events can make a rapid and significant difference.

We can suggest a number of reasons for this.

1. territorial disputes in rural areas are less marked than in some of the inner city parts of Belfast.
2. Violence in many rural areas was dominated by conflict between the security forces and republicans rather than involving loyalist paramilitaries. There have been real and lasting changes in the police and army in recent decades and major change in IRA activity since 2005.
3. The concept of 'rural' may simplify a very complex and locally variable picture which does not accurately reflect the threats to stability for specific communities.

Policy in each context may need to be refined and that issues around interfaces, urban space and cultural disputes require greater attention.

Ethnic Minorities

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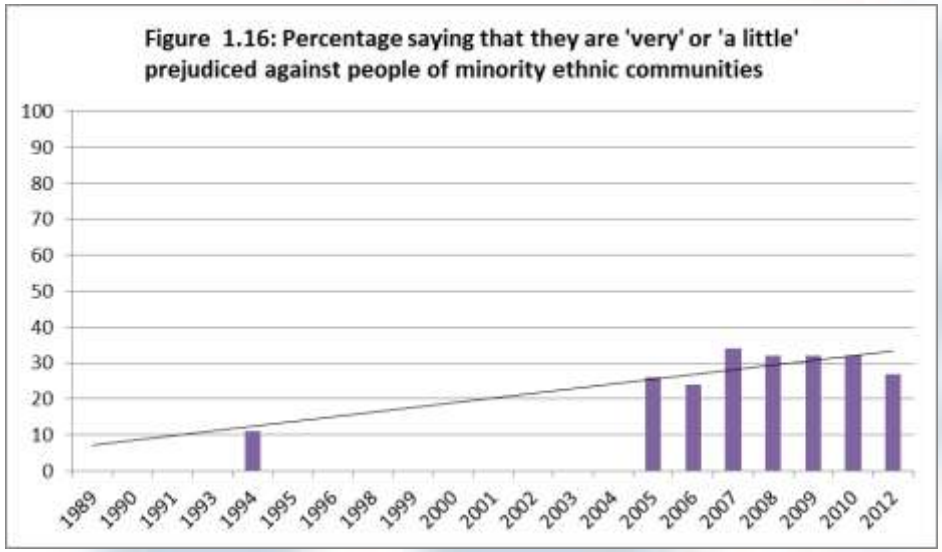

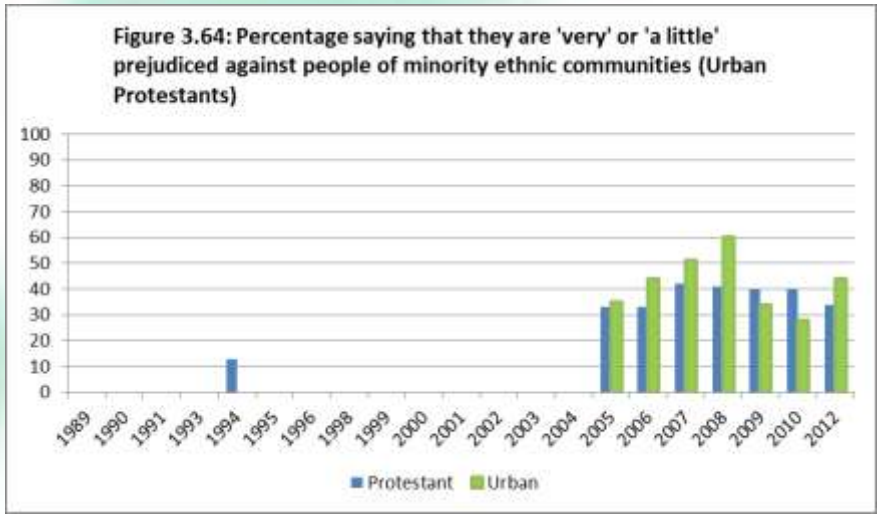

Ethnic Minorities

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- Evidence gathered by the Life and Times Survey since 2005 suggests that prejudice against ethnic minorities is widespread and sustained.

- Although there is a clear association with economic change, this does not account for the level or spread of prejudice over time. There is evidence that prejudice extends into all communities, but is greatest where interaction has been closest, among urban Protestants.

- Attitudes to ethnic minorities are markedly more hostile among Protestants than among Catholics and appear to be affected less by educational qualification and age than by location.

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Policy Priorities?

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1. Efforts to sustain political agreement, cultural pluralism and community co-operation
2. Development of mechanisms to tackle flashpoints and manage trigger events
3. New policy to address issues of threat and safety, especially for young people and in urban areas.
4. Policy to promote cultural and national accommodation to promote interaction and to address fears.
5. Policy to promote greater sharing and integration in education.
6. Policies to address issues of territorialism and fears of sharing in areas of social housing.
7. Policy to tackle racism and to reduce hostility to those from ethnic minorities.
8. Policy to promote improved relationships between young people.

Provocations

- Security is the absolute priority. Attitudes to community relations are profoundly responsive to the level of fear, which is connected to violence and political progress. (Hunkering down)
- Confidence can easily be derailed. People still need to be convinced that things are resolved. Attitudes supportive of sharing are persistent but are not translated into practice- they are secondary and negotiable in the face of security concerns and do not translate into behaviour because they are subordinate to perceived risk.
- There is no 'peace process generation': violence has ebbed but suspicion remains?
- Protestants do not identify with Ireland in general. Catholics do not identify with Britain but their political project is more nuanced.
- Inter-community hostility is not simply a matter of deprivation but ethnic leadership.
- Hostility to outsiders is translating to ethnic minorities also where there is a measurable presence.

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