

*Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey*  
*Occasional Paper 1*

**Ten Years of Social Attitudes to Community Relations in  
Northern Ireland**

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The *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey* (NILT) is carried out annually and documents public opinion on a wide range of social issues. The survey builds upon the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey, which ran from 1989 to 1996.

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The following symbols are used in all tables throughout this paper:

\* meaning 'less than 1'

- meaning '0'

## **Summary**

Internal efforts to resolve the Northern Ireland conflict can be considered at the macro, meso and micro levels. At the macro-political level, the British government, since the mid-1980s has directed significant effort towards reaching a balanced constitutional settlement that will appease both Unionists and Nationalists. Juxtaposed with this, a series of meso-level reforms have been introduced that aim to tackle inequality, disadvantage and other manifestations of a divided society (segregation, hostility and prejudice). Underpinning these developments has been a drive to improve relations at the micro-level between the main Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland. This report provides a résumé of changes in the political and infra-structural context over the last decade and notes some of the implications for community relations policy and practice. Specific emphasis is placed on the period following the signing of the Belfast Agreement which has seen the most profound reform in Northern Ireland for almost 30 years. Against this, recent demographic evidence is examined, which suggests that despite political developments, Northern Ireland at the micro-level, has become a more polarised society. Based on a longitudinal analysis of Northern Ireland Social Attitudes data from the 1989, 1996 and 1999 surveys, an assessment is then offered of changing patterns in attitudes to community relations over a ten year period. The central message is that whilst both communities accept that relations are likely to improve in the future, there is disparity between the extent to which Protestants and Catholics express willingness to embrace opportunities for cross-community contact, with evidence of growing insecurity in the Protestant response.

## **The Context: 1989-1999<sup>1</sup>**

### ***Macro-political reform***

The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 paved the way for a long and arduous talks process between the main political parties in Northern Ireland (NI) and, the British and Irish governments. There were many stalling points, but the talks were instrumental in achieving cease-fire declarations from the main Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organisations in 1994. Although broken in 1996, following the IRA bombing of Canary Wharf in London, the current cease-fires have been in place since July 1997. The talks process culminated in 1998 with the signing of the Belfast Agreement.

Supported by 71% of the NI electorate at a referendum on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1998, the Agreement has both inspired and reflected the emergence of a new macro-political culture in NI. This culture is explicitly driven by an identified need to address issues that have traditionally impeded the development of good community relations. Changes to the structures of government in conjunction with other measures designed to address sensitive policy issues such as policing, criminal justice, human rights and equality form the central tenets of the Agreement. The key macro level reform is the devolution of power to a locally elected 108 member Assembly. The Assembly is responsible for policy on devolved matters such as economic development, education and agriculture, environment, financial allocations, health, housing and social services. Under the terms of the Agreement, some decisions can only be taken on a cross community, consensual basis. An Executive of the Assembly is chaired by a First Minister (UUP leader, David Trimble) and Deputy First Minister (SDLP deputy leader, Seamus Mallon) and comprises up to 10 ministers each with departmental responsibilities<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Meso-institutional reform***

Concurrent with political developments, government introduced a series of equality and equity reforms in fulfilment of a commitment to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland enjoys “equality of opportunity and equity of treatment”. These included Fair Employment Legislation (1989) which aims to tackle disproportionate levels of unemployment within the Catholic community; a Targeting Social Need (TSN) policy initiative (1991) which targeted government resources at the most disadvantaged areas of NI, and Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT) guidelines (1994) which were introduced to ensure that all government policy was equality proofed. An infrastructure of support was also established through the Central Community Relations Unit of Government for projects that would increase cross community contact and promote greater mutual understanding and respect for diversity between Protestants and Catholics. Key developments were the establishment in 1990 of the Community Relations Council (CRC) and the District Council Community Relations Programme. CRC is an autonomous centrally located organisation which is fully funded by Government. It takes responsibility for delivering community relations policy

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<sup>1</sup> Social attitudes in Northern Ireland, the Seventh Report, provides a longitudinal analysis of the 1989 and 1996 data examined against political and infrastructural developments for that period (see Hughes and Carmichael, 1998). Although this report refers to data from 1989, there is little value in providing an in-depth rehearsal of contextual issues pertaining to the period 1989-1996 since this was compiled for the Seventh Report. Hence a summary only is presented here and the reader is referred to the Seventh Report for fuller details.

<sup>2</sup> Co-operation between politicians at the macro-level during the 1990s was mirrored in District Councils where “responsibility sharing” between the main political parties became the *modus operandi* (Knox, 1996). The atmosphere of greater political co-operation was further consolidated under the terms of the European Peace and Reconciliation Programme (1995) which is designed to foster cross-community partnership between the community/voluntary, statutory and private sectors in promoting participatory decision-making at local level.

objectives set by Government. The District Council Programme was designed to encourage the promotion of community relations at local level. Twenty-five of the twenty-six district councils in Northern Ireland are currently involved in the programme. Alongside these initiatives the Department of Education for Northern Ireland under the Education Reform Order (NI) (1989) made provision for integrated education. The Order also provided that two cross-curricular themes, namely Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage (CH) would become mandatory in the teaching of most academic subjects (see Hughes and Carmichael, 1998).

It is however, the period following the Belfast Agreement that has witnessed the most comprehensive institutional reform. Below is an overview of the key measures contained within the Agreement and a discussion of the implications for community relations policy and practice.

- *Human Rights and Equality:* The 1998 Northern Ireland Act made explicit provision for the development of a Human Rights Commission to extend and enhance the role of the existent Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights. The new Human Rights Commission has been functioning since March 1999. Its role is augmented by the establishment of a statutory Equality Commission which took up its functions in October 1999. The Equality Commission replaces the Fair Employment Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Council for NI. Furthermore, the Fair Employment Act of 1989 has been strengthened and the public sector is now bound by section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act to promote equality of opportunity. This obligation replaces the PAFT guidelines introduced by the Conservative Government (see above).
- *New TSN -* The new TSN initiative aims to tackle social need and social exclusion by targeting efforts and available resources on people, groups and areas objectively shown to be in greatest social need. There is an explicit acknowledgement, not clearly articulated in the previous TSN, that “the continuing unemployment differential between the communities is an indicator of Catholic socio-economic disadvantage” (Partnership for Equality, White Paper, 1998, para. 6.3). Under arrangements for devolved government individual Ministers have responsibility for departmental implementation of new TSN and in an effort to enhance public accountability of government in relation to the initiative, an annual report must be produced that outlines the steps taken by each Northern Ireland department to progress the initiative.
- *Victims:* To counterbalance the policy of accelerated prisoner release outlined in the Agreement, provision is also made for the victims of the troubles. The report of the Victim’s Commissioner was published on May 13 1998 and Adam Ingram (Minister of State for NI) was appointed Minister for Victims. Since his appointment a range of support measures have been announced including a Memorial Fund to provide support to those victims experiencing financial hardship and an Educational Bursary Scheme, to provide educational assistance to children who have lost a parent in the violence. In June 2000 a Victims Unit was established within the Office of the First Minister/Deputy First Minister to raise awareness of and co-ordinate activity on, issues affecting victims across the devolved administration (<http://www.nio.gov.uk/issues/victims.htm>).
- *Policing:* The Belfast Agreement also made provision for the reform of the Police Force in NI. The Police (NI) Act 1998, based on a paper from the Labour party in 1996, already provided for changes in the accountability mechanisms within the RUC. However the Agreement stipulated the need for an Independent Commission on policing to be established. The Patten Commission (named after Chris Patten, the Commission chairman) published its first report in September 1999. It recommended 175 changes to the Royal Ulster Constabulary including a new name -the Police Service of NI – a new police badge and a new police board which will include members of all parties entitled to seats in the Assembly including Sinn Fein. Recruitment to this new

service is to be carried out on a 50/50 Catholic/Protestant basis. On publishing the report Patten stated that its chief objective was to ‘depoliticise’ policing in Northern Ireland ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/in\\_depth/uk/2000/ruc\\_reform/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/in_depth/uk/2000/ruc_reform/default.stm)).

- The new police service is due to come into effect in autumn 2001 but it is presently deemed unacceptable by Sinn Fein and the SDLP who believe that the precise terms of the Patten Report have been ‘watered down’ in acquiescence to Unionist sensitivities ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/in\\_depth/uk/2000/ruc\\_reform/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/in_depth/uk/2000/ruc_reform/default.stm)).
- *Language Issues and Education:* The Agreement explicitly identified the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance of linguistic diversity in NI. By June 1999 both Irish and Ulster Scots were recognised as regional and minority languages for the purposes of Part II of the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. In recognition of the significance of the Irish language in NI, the Education (NI) Order 1998 placed a duty on the Department of Education to facilitate the development of Irish-medium schools.

### ***Implications for community relations policy and practice***

Central to the Agreement is the principle of equality and a commitment to promote a “culture of tolerance” (Belfast Agreement, 1998). The importance accorded to these values is underscored by the location of a Community Relations Unit (CRU) within the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers, and by a commitment from Government to have in place by 2002 a cross-departmental strategy that will lead to, “measurable improvements in community relations” (<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfga/ch2.htm>).

In the early 1990s, government policy on community relations placed emphasis on promoting greater cross-community contact. This approach was criticised at the time by those who believed that government was promoting an assimilationist/integrationist agenda that offered little more than a “sticking plaster” solution to the conflict (see Cairns and Hewstone, 2001 and Hughes, 2001). In the wake of political developments in the late 1990s, there are some signs that the impetus to address the root causes (disadvantage and discrimination) rather than symptoms (segregation and division) of conflict has begun to permeate the work of community relations providers. Current practice is less concerned with promoting cross-community contact *per se* than with promoting cultural, religious and political pluralism, and the equality agenda has begun to define the nature of some community relations activity. There have been two key developments in the approach adopted by CRC. Firstly, in 1998 the Council produced its Strategic Plan for 1998-2001. The title “Into the Mainstream” reflects a perceived need for change in practice that places community relations objectives at the centre of policy formulation and service provision:

The problem with community relations, of ensuring that people can live together in a society, is the central problem of government...If it fails in that, government has failed. Neither is there such a thing as a separate “community relations” policy. All the decisions of government, whether about education, the location of industry, housing or law enforcement, have an effect on the two communities (Hayes quoted in CRC’s Strategic Plan 1998-2001, 1998, p.7).

In acknowledgement of Section 75, CRC appointed a “mainstreaming officer” to take responsibility for advising government departments and other statutory agencies of their equality and good relations obligations under the Northern Ireland Act. To date a series of 47 workshops focussing on the implications of the new legislation have been facilitated by CRC. Consolidating this work, it is

expected that mainstreaming will form a central plank of CRC's new strategic plan due for release in the coming months<sup>3</sup>.

Secondly, influenced by a report published in 1997 that examined how groups and organisations in Northern Ireland were addressing the impact of community division through their organisation and practice<sup>4</sup>, CRC has reoriented its approach to reflect three "inextricably linked" principles. These are:

- *diversity* – respect for diversity affirms the value that can be derived from the existence, recognition, understanding and tolerance of difference (whether expressed through religious, ethnic, political or gender background).
- *Interdependence* – which requires a recognition by different interest or identity groupings of their obligations and commitments to others and of the interconnectedness of individual/community experiences and ambitions leading to the development of a society that is at once cohesive and diverse.
- *Equity* – a commitment at all levels within society to ensuring equality of access to resources, structures and decision-making processes and to the adoption of actions to secure and maintain these objectives ([http://www.community-relations.org.uk/community-relations/reports/online\\_resource.htm](http://www.community-relations.org.uk/community-relations/reports/online_resource.htm)).

CRC asserts that civil society "depends on a shared discourse which recognises and affirms differences but allows these to exist in constructive relationships with each other" ([http://www.community-relations.org.uk/community-relations/reports/online\\_resource.htm](http://www.community-relations.org.uk/community-relations/reports/online_resource.htm)). Based on this analysis, CRC has recently undertaken some work that adopts a long-term strategic approach to improving community relations. "Groundwork NI" is one such initiative that aims to tackle the problems of violence, intimidation and disputes over parades that are a consequence of segregated space and territory. The project promotes inter-agency co-operation with a view to assisting local communities "to develop their own solutions for problems of social, cultural and religious diversity" (CRC News, 2000). Central to this initiative is recognition of the value of building confidence within "**single identity**" communities that will enable them to engage with others on an equal footing, thus accepting inequality, both real and perceived, as a barrier to improved relations.

In education too there is evidence of a strategic review of community relations policy. Following the Belfast Agreement a working group was established to examine ways of enhancing the contribution of schools to the "culture of tolerance" referred to in the Belfast Agreement. The guiding principle of pluralism was outlined in a working party progress report which states that, "it is a seminal purpose of the Northern Ireland Education Service to promote a culture of tolerance and reconciliation and, for schools, to do so in keeping with the particular ethos and circumstances within which they operate" (Towards a Culture of Tolerance: Integrating Education Working Party Progress Report, 1998).

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<sup>3</sup> This information is based on informal conversations with senior staff in CRC.

<sup>4</sup> The report entitled "A Worthwhile Venture: Practically Investing in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence In Northern Ireland" was produced by K. Eyben, D. Morrow and D. Wilson and published by the University of Ulster.

The final report, published in September 1999, and accepted January 2001 recommended the following actions:

- The development of a mission statement for the Education Service in Northern Ireland that includes “reference to the promotion of core values that support pluralism, human rights and democratic freedom and full participation by everyone in the life of our society” (DENI, 1999, p.19).
- A holistic approach to EMU in schools where the core value of respect for diversity pervades the whole school ethos.
- A statement of aims and values underpinning the curriculum that is of practical value to teachers.
- The creation of an integrated strategy of support for teachers engaged in EMU that is “sustained and adequately resourced over the long term, so that teachers will be able to approach the issues with a sense of ownership and confidence” (1999, p.20).
- An “urgent evaluation” of the Schools Community Relations Programme that assesses impact and identifies effective practice. Key issues to be addressed include, the need for preparatory work in EMU/CH by schools prior to entering a fully developed contact programme, and, the recognition that should be given to single-school work on EMU.

Further endorsing the commitment to pluralism, DENI is also reviewing the viability criteria for Irish-Medium and Integrated Schools. A consultation report released in November 2000, suggested that in order to foster opportunities for the development of pluralism, initial thresholds for intake in the primary sector should be set at 15 for Belfast and Derry and 12 for developments elsewhere. This is a substantial reduction on the current requirement for new schools to achieve a pupil intake of 25 in the first year.

### ***Community Relations at the micro level***

A growing body of evidence suggests that community relations initiatives are having some positive impact at grass roots level<sup>5</sup>. Measured by outcomes such as greater understanding of cultural diversity, increased willingness to engage in shared working, and, in some cases, an ability to influence wider political processes<sup>6</sup>, the evidence in support of community relations interventions is substantial. Despite this, and against the support for local level power sharing and the principles of equality and equity<sup>7</sup>, some research indicates that Northern Ireland has become a more divided society.

In housing, for example, longitudinal research has shown progressively higher levels of residential segregation with a majority of people choosing to live in polarised districts (Poole and Doherty, 1996; Doherty and Poole, 1997). Although these data are based on the 1991 census and are therefore somewhat dated, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE, 1999) reports that currently 71% of public sector housing estates are segregated<sup>8</sup>. Allied to this, the continuing trend in some mixed housing estates is toward greater segregation (NIHE, 1999). Compounding the problem over the last few years, segregation has been accompanied by an increase in “chill factors”, referring to demarcation of sectarian boundaries with graffiti, flags, curb painting and other

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<sup>5</sup> See for example, Knox *et al.* (1994), Capita (1997), Deloitte and Touche (2001)

<sup>6</sup> See Deloitte and Touche (2001).

<sup>7</sup> As evidenced by the 71% who voted in favour of the Agreement at referendum.

<sup>8</sup> Using a threshold of 10% present for either religion.

manifestations of cultural/political identity and paramilitary association (NIHE, 1999). Interface estates have been particularly problematical. In 1999 NIHE reported that 20 estates in 9 districts were significantly affected by interface violence (NIHE 1999). Murtagh and McDaid (2000) also report that intimidation has increased in highly contested areas. In an effort to tackle the manifestations of internecine conflict, new peace walls have been erected and others strengthened, in the interface areas of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry (Murtagh and McDaid, 2000).

An increase in polarisation is also evident in voting behaviour where, in the period immediately following the signing of the Belfast Agreement, voting preference reflected increasing support for the political extremes with religion continuing to be the key determining factor (Knox and Carmichael, 1999). Nowhere was this more apparent than in the 1998 elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly where every constituency outside Greater Belfast, with the exception of one (Stangford) returned either Nationalist or Unionist members (Rural Community Network, 2000). Referring to the gains of the political extremes at the expense of the political centre, the leader of the Alliance Party, Sean Neeson made the point that “peace has come at the price of reconciliation” ([http://www.allianceparty.org/html/agreement\\_deepened\\_.html](http://www.allianceparty.org/html/agreement_deepened_.html)). More recently, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein made substantial gains in the 2001 parliamentary and local council elections. The swing in the Unionist vote from the pro-Agreement Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and Alliance towards the anti-agreement DUP party has been interpreted as reflecting a growing Protestant disillusionment with macro and meso level reforms (discussed below).

The strength of religious and political affiliations is also reflected in the separate cultural traditions that Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland have actively sought to maintain (Murray, 1995; Connolly, 1997). CRC, for example have recorded an increase in grant applications from “single identity” groups that seek to explore and examine their own cultural traditions. Of particular significance is the increase in demand from Protestant groups for funding to support Ulster/Scots initiatives.<sup>9</sup>

Juxtaposed with these developments, and undoubtedly linked to them, the on-going parades dispute between the Orange Order and residents of Catholic/Nationalist areas has continued to sour community relations. The latter have demanded re-routing of traditional Orange Order marches through Nationalist districts, regarding them as triumphalist and inciting. An increase in Orange Parades<sup>10</sup>, however, and the refusal of Orangemen to take alternative routes has resulted in some of the worst periods of civil unrest and disruption seen in over 30 years of conflict (Hughes, 1998).

It could be argued that increased polarisation is a logical outcome of a pluralist agenda which promotes and embraces diversity and difference. This does not, however explain on going inter-community tension, hostility and intimidation. A range of explanations is offered in support of this apparent paradox. Wilson, for example, argues that the Belfast Agreement, although affirming the “consent principle”<sup>11</sup>, has left in place “the polarised political battlefield” because the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom remains unchanged. On the one hand, Unionists continue to defend their Britishness, upheld by the Agreement. On the other, Nationalists contend that under the terms of the Agreement their “Irishness” must be given due expression.

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<sup>9</sup> Based on a review of CRC Annual Reports.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics collected by the Royal Ulster Constabulary between 1985 and 1995 show that “loyalist” parades have increased in number by 684 over the 10 year period (<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/parade/jarman.htm>).

<sup>11</sup> That there can be no change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, except by the consent of the majority.

Sectarian tension, manifest in the “profusion of flags on the street” is attributed to the conflict inherent in these positions.

Unionists perceive [the] Nationalist stance as reflecting a reluctance to genuinely accept the consent principle. Nationalists, in turn, perceive the Unionist stance as reflecting a reluctance genuinely to accept the new relationship of equality the agreement envisages (<http://www.democraticdialogue.org/working/flags.htm>)

Endorsing Wilson’s analysis, Neeson argues that the Agreement offers little scope for cross-community politics and “few incentives for moderation and the development of non-sectarian politics” ([http://www.allianceparty.org/html/agreement\\_deepened\\_\\_.html](http://www.allianceparty.org/html/agreement_deepened__.html)).

Focussing less on the Agreement *per se*, some academics have argued that increasing polarisation and sectarian tension, particularly with regards to the parades issue can be attributed to a growing sense of alienation within the Protestant community (Knox, 1995; Hughes, 1998; O’Neill, 2000). O’Neill argues that Unionists feel particularly insecure about their position within the United Kingdom because they perceive that Nationalists will ultimately accept nothing less than “political and cultural domination throughout Ireland”. This insecurity is intensified by British Government engagement with the Irish government since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 (O’Neill, 2000, p.27-28). Concessions made to Republicans during the implementation of the Belfast Agreement have exacerbated the problem. In particular, the British Government’s continued willingness to accommodate the demands of republicans<sup>12</sup>, against the repeated failure of republican paramilitaries to deliver decommissioning within stipulated timeframes, has caused ructions at both political and grass roots levels within the Protestant community that threaten to destabilise the peace process (Aughey, 2001, p.217). The theme of increasing Protestant marginalisation, implicit in this analysis, is reflected in the social attitudes data discussed below.

In summary, the last ten years have seen seismic changes in the political and policy landscape of Northern Ireland. The paramilitary cease-fires, new constitutional arrangements, and the establishment of a policy agenda and legal framework that uphold the principles of pluralism and equality for all, provide a context for community relations that is radically different to that which existed in 1989 at the time of data collection for the first Northern Ireland Social Attitudes survey. Alongside these political developments, there is evidence of increasing polarisation between the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland. The following section, which offers an analysis of social attitudes data from 1989, 1996 and 1999, reflects this and suggests that deepening division has intensified in recent years.

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<sup>12</sup> Aughey (2001) lists the concessions the British Government made to republicans in an effort to secure the latter would engage in “exclusively democratic” processes. These included, the continued early release of prisoners, the reduction of troop levels (despite continued paramilitary involvement in punishment beatings and intimidation), an agreement to meet a long-standing republican demand for an inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday, the acceptance of the central recommendations of the Patten Report on Police reforms (which were lambasted by Unionists), permission, against the advice of the Speaker, that Sinn Fein MPs should be allowed access the facilities of the House of Commons, without having taken an oath of allegiance, and, crucially, the persuasion of David Trimble that he should recommend his party share power with Sinn Fein. This was based on an understanding that the IRA would co-operate with an International Decommissioning Body and there would be some gesture on arms to satisfy Unionist sceptics. Neither happened, but devolved government went “live” in November 1999 (Aughey, 2001, p.217).

## Social Attitudes – Survey Evidence

Of the questions posed to respondents in 1989 and 1996 five could be compared with identical or virtually identical equivalents from 1999. In addition, we have provided an analysis of new questions in the 1999 survey that relate to the equality agenda. The 1999 survey results reveal an overall improvement in attitudes towards community relations, but Protestants have, over time, become less positive than Catholics. This is expressed in a variety of ways but is most apparent in the Protestant responses to questions that allude to rights, cultural traditions and compromise. Furthermore, Protestants have a slightly greater tendency than Catholics to express a desire for segregated living and working conditions, and are less likely to favour mixed religion schooling. In line with Aughey’s analysis above, the data reveal greater levels of polarisation and insecurity within the Protestant community.

### *Relations between Protestants and Catholics*

Respondents were asked whether relations between Protestants and Catholics were better, worse or the same as they were 5 years ago. In the period 1989 to 1996 there was a 25% increase in the numbers of Catholics and Protestants who believed that relations had improved. This is in contrast with the picture which emerges after 1996 where there was only a slight overall increase (4%). Of particular significance however is the growing disparity in attitude between Protestants and Catholics after 1996. In the period 1989 to 1996 those who thought that relations had improved increased from 20% to 44% and 23% to 47% for Protestants and Catholics respectively. From 1996 to 1999 the positive trend continued for Catholics with a further 13% indicating that relations had improved. Conversely the Protestant response to the same question indicated a decline of 2%.

**Table 1.1**

**What about relations between Protestants and Catholics? Would you say that they are better than they were 5 years ago, worse or about the same now as then?**

	1989			1996			1999		
	Total %	Cath %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %
Better	21	23	20	46	47	44	50	60	42
Worse	28	31	26	11	10	11	7	4	10
Same	47	44	50	42	41	43	41	33	46
Other	2	2	2	-	-	-	1	1	*
Don't know	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2
No answer	*	*	1	*	*	*	-	-	-

**Table 1.2**

**What about relations in 5 years time? Do you think relations between Protestants and Catholics will be better than now, worse than now, or about the same as now?**

	1989			1996			1999		
	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %
Better	25	30	22	43	48	39	56	67	46
Worse	16	16	16	8	4	10	4	2	6
Same	54	51	56	42	43	41	32	24	39
Other	*	*	1	2	1	3	*	*	1
Don't know	5	4	5	6	4	7	8	6	8
No answer	1	*	1	-	-	-	-	-	-

Similarly, when asked whether relations between Protestants and Catholics would be better, worse or the same in five years time the total numbers who believed that they would be better, increased from 25% to 56% in the period 1989 to 1999. Again, however Catholics are more favourable than Protestants in their assessments. Compared to 1996, the 1999 data show that 19% more Catholics and only 7% more Protestants believed that relations would improve.

The growing disparity between the Protestant and Catholic responses is perhaps an endorsement of a Catholic community growing in confidence and a Protestant community feeling increasingly marginalised by wider political developments. In the most recent elections, it is argued that the key deciding factors for those who changed their vote from UUP to DUP were the failure of the Belfast Agreement to deliver de-commissioning and the reform of the RUC (Belfast Telegraph, Leader Column, 9 June 2001). UUP party member John Taylor interviewed by Radio Ulster reported that at some polling stations RUC warrants were flashed at UUP candidates who were told that the holder would be voting DUP (Friday, 8 June 2001). Attempts to generate a political culture based on equality and fair treatment have been interpreted by the Protestant community as undermining their interests (Belfast Telegraph, 9 June 2001). This is likely to influence their attitudes to, and relations with, the Catholic community.

***Continuing segregation in housing, employment and education?***

Although the questions about relations may be relatively superficial because they are impressionistic, a series of questions that aim to gauge behaviour were also included. These refer to residential, workplace and educational segregation and the willingness of respondents to engage with the other community.

**Table 1.3**

**If you had a choice, would you prefer to live in a neighbourhood with people of only your own religion, or in a mixed-religion neighbourhood?**

	1989			1996			1999		
	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %
Only own	23	18	27	14	11	17	22	18	26
Mixed	70	75	67	82	85	80	73	78	68
Don't know	5	6	5	4	5	3	5	4	5
No answer	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Table 1.4**

**If you were working and had to change your job, would you prefer a workplace with people of only your own religion, or a mixed-religion workplace?**

	1989			1996			1999		
	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %
Only own	11	7	14	3	2	4	9	6	12
Mixed	83	86	81	96	97	95	86	91	83
Don't know	5	6	3	2	2	1	5	4	6
No answer	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-

The total number wishing to live in only their own neighbourhood increased from 14% in 1996 to 22% in 1999, whilst the total preferring to live in mixed religion neighbourhoods decreased from 82% to 73% in the same period. In 1999 more Protestants (26%) than Catholics (18%) prefer to live in neighbourhoods with only their own religion and there is a greater decline from 1996 to 1999 in the numbers of Protestants (80% to 68%) relative to Catholics (85% to 78%) who prefer to live in a mixed religion neighbourhood.

When asked the question 'if you had to change your job would you prefer a work place with people of only your own religion or mixed religion', the total proportion of respondents expressing a desire to work with only those from their own religion increased from 3% in 1996 to 9% in 1999. There was a greater tendency in 1999 than in 1996 for both Catholics and Protestants to express a desire to work in religiously segregated workplaces although this trend was more pronounced for Protestants. In 1999 10% fewer respondents overall suggested that they would prefer to work in mixed religion work places (when compared with 1996 data).

The proportions of both Protestants and Catholics preferring to live and work with only their own religious group fell in 1996, but has now more or less returned to the 1989 figures. In 1996 the marked increase in preference for living and working in mixed religion environments could be explained by the more congenial and sanguine atmosphere inspired by the 1994 cease-fires and the low level of violence in the inter-cess-fire period. However an increase in other forms of sectarianism since the cease-fires such as intimidation and harassment has meant that residential and work place segregation has become critical for some groups. Attention however must be drawn

towards the class issues that are hidden within these figures. There is, for example, some limited evidence which suggests that the degree of integration in middle class areas has increased over time (Gallagher et al., 1994).

Aside from residential segregation, community support for separate schools for Catholics and Protestants has traditionally been regarded as a barometer of the depth and breadth of social and cultural division in NI. Any movement towards greater educational integration is closely monitored and often interpreted as a sign of better relationships between the two communities. When respondents were asked about their preference of school the total proportion stating a preference to send their child to a mixed religion school increased slightly from 62% in 1996 to 66% in 1999. This is complemented by a decrease in the total preferring to send their child to a school with only those from their own religion from 34% in 1996 to 23% in 1999.

**Table 1.5**

**If you were deciding where to send your children to school, would you prefer a school with children of only your own religion, or a mixed religion school?**

	1989			1996			1999		
	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %
Only own	39	37	41	34	38	31	23	21	29
Mixed	53	54	52	62	57	65	66	72	57
Don't know	8	9	6	5	6	4	12	8	14
No answer	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-

However when the figures are broken down there are discernible differences between Catholic and Protestant views on mixed religion schooling. In the period 1989 to 1996 the numbers of Protestants preferring 'only own' schools decreased by 10% while the numbers of Catholics preferring their own schools remained fairly static. Between 1996 and 1999 the proportion of Catholics who would prefer to send their child to a Catholic only school fell by 17%, whilst the numbers of Protestants who would prefer to send their child to a Protestant only school fell by only 2%. Moreover, the percentage of Catholics (72%) who would prefer a mixed-religion school has increased by 15% since 1996, whilst the proportion of Protestants who would prefer integrated schools has decreased from 65% to 57% and is now only 5% higher than the figure recorded in 1989. The gap between the proportions of respondents expressing a desire for integrated education in NI and the numbers actually attending these schools has been well documented (see Hughes and Carmichael, 1998). This survey was however concerned about *attitudes* towards integration and it is significant that there has been a decline in the numbers of Protestants who would prefer to send their child to a mixed religion school.

This waning enthusiasm may be further evidence of increasing disenchantment with changes at the macro level. More specifically though, the reduced support for integration between 1996 and 1999 may be related to a perceived shift in government policy in the mid 1990s to prioritise the transformation of schools to integrated status rather than to support the development of new schools. Existing schools could 'transform' to Controlled Integrated status if a ballot indicated that there were sufficient levels of parental support and if the school could make a case that it would

attract ‘reasonable’ numbers of Catholics and Protestants. The way in which this policy of transformation has been interpreted has introduced differentials into the school system. To date, of those schools that have availed of the transformation option, all have been perceived as Protestant. Whilst this might indicate a greater preference for integration amongst Protestants than Catholics, it is perhaps a more accurate reflection of the greater influence which the Catholic authorities wield over individual Catholic schools. There is little evidence to suggest that Catholic schools are likely to transform to integrated status in the short term (McGrath, 2000).

The trend towards transformation in the Protestant controlled sector has encouraged some to lament the loss of “their” schools and has led to the development of a more defensive attitude towards ‘Protestant education’ (Stephen, 2000; McGrath, 2000). There is a tangible fear within the Protestant community that integrated schools are having a negative impact upon the viability of the State controlled school system. This is compounded by declining enrolments in controlled schools. The long-term effects are difficult to predict but as Smith (1999, p.9) suggests, the transformation of Protestant schools whilst Catholic schools remain largely intact, may have a ‘negative impact on relations between these two communities’.

Responses to the education question show that perceived inequality can be determinant of attitude. Although there are no longitudinal data to support this, a series of questions asked in the 1999 survey reveal division within the Protestant and Catholic communities as regards which group is perceived to be treated more equally.

### *Perceptions of Equality*

**Table 1.7**

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? It should be a top priority for government to make sure that Protestants and Catholics are treated equally.**

	<b>1999</b>		
	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cath. %</b>	<b>Prot. %</b>
Strongly agree	50	63	42
Agree	41	33	45
Neither agree nor disagree	6	2	8
Disagree	1	*	2
Strongly disagree	*	*	1
Can't choose	2	1	2

**Table 1.8**

**Do you think that, in general, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland are treated equally?**

	1999		
	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %
Yes	53	38	64
No	29	40	21
It depends	15	18	11
Other	*	1	*
Don't know	4	3	3

**Table 1.9**

**Who is usually treated better – Protestants or Catholics?**

	1999		
	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %
Protestant	46	73	11
Catholic	23	1	52
It depends	27	24	29
Other	1	*	2
Don't know	4	2	6

These figures reveal the continued importance attached to the equality agenda in NI. They also provide some grounds for cautious optimism. There was general agreement (91%) that equality *should* be a top priority for government, but just over half (53%) of respondents actually believed that Protestants and Catholics are treated equally. Nearly two thirds (64%) of Protestants believe that Protestants and Catholics. It is notable however that 38% of Catholics believe that there is equality (had this question been asked ten years ago this figure is likely to have been substantially less).

With respect to who is treated *better*, almost half of the respondents (46%) believe that it is Protestants. Almost three-quarters of Catholics (73%) believe that Protestants are treated better. However it is significant, given the legacy of discrimination against the Catholic community, that over half (52%) of the Protestant respondents believe that it is Catholics who receive better treatment. It is also particularly interesting that 21% of Protestants believe inequality to exist in NI. This could be interpreted in one of two ways. Either, that Protestants believe that Catholics continue to be unfairly disadvantaged in NI, or, that the tables have turned and Protestants now believe themselves to be treated more unfairly than Catholics. Taking into account the data presented below concerning rights and cultural traditions, it is more likely that the latter is the case.

***Perceived rights and cultural traditions***

As noted earlier, much of the policy change since the mid 1990s has been concerned with the development of a context wherein the rights and cultural interests of all communities are accepted and protected. However the survey evidence shows that Protestants are more likely than Catholics to see the environment as ‘de-emphasising’ their rights and are also more likely to believe that the rights of the ‘other community’ are talked about more than their own.

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that ‘there is always talk about the rights of Catholics but never about the rights of Protestants’. Ten per cent of Catholics and 53% of Protestants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Conversely, when respondents were asked whether there was always talk about the rights of Protestants but never about Catholics, a quarter of Catholics and 5% of Protestants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

**Table 1.10**

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? There is always talk about the rights of Catholics but never about the rights of Protestants.**

	<b>1999</b>		
	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cath. %</b>	<b>Prot. %</b>
Strongly agree	11	2	19
Agree	24	8	34
Neither agree nor disagree	23	18	25
Disagree	27	47	14
Strongly disagree	9	19	3
Can't choose	5	5	5

**Table 1.11**

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? There is always talk about the rights of Protestants but never about the rights of Catholics.**

	<b>1999</b>		
	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cath. %</b>	<b>Prot. %</b>
Strongly agree	3	5	1
Agree	10	20	4
Neither agree nor disagree	27	22	28
Disagree	43	37	49
Strongly disagree	11	9	13
Can't choose	6	6	5

More than twice as many Protestants than Catholics agreed or strongly agreed that the rights of the ‘other community’ were talked about more than their own. Although the numbers were small it is also significant that twice as many Catholics than Protestants agreed or strongly agreed that there was more emphasis on their own rights than those of the other community. Ostensibly these data may reveal nothing more than a tacit acceptance of macro-political processes that are addressing the differential socio-economic experience of Catholics. However the data below shows that this is unlikely to be the case.

**Table 1.12 Thinking about the real differences in viewpoints between the different cultural traditions my fear is that my own view will be lost among louder voices**

	1999		
	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %
Strongly agree	9	6	11
Agree	34	32	37
Neither agree nor disagree	17	13	20
Disagree	32	42	26
Strongly disagree	3	5	2
Don't know	4	3	5

Whilst 43% of the total believed that their views would be lost among louder voices it is significant that 10% more Protestants than Catholics agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Almost half (47%) of the Catholic respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their view would be lost compared with only 28% of Protestants.

Protestants are no more optimistic when it comes to future prospects for the universal acceptance of all cultural traditions.

**Table 1.13 At some time in the future the viewpoints of all cultural traditions will be accepted by everyone in NI<sup>13</sup>**

	1999		
	Total %	Cath. %	Prot. %
Strongly agree	8	9	7
Agree	39	51	31
Neither agree nor disagree	15	10	17
Disagree	27	23	30
Strongly disagree	5	1	8
Don't know	6	6	8

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<sup>13</sup> Although the question attempted to ascertain the extent to which *all* cultural traditions will be accepted it has been assumed that when answering respondents were referring to their own culture.

Only 38% of Protestants compared to 60% of Catholics agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that some time in the future the viewpoints of all cultural traditions will be accepted by everyone in NI. Just under a quarter (24%) of Catholics and over a third (38%) of Protestants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the viewpoints of all cultural traditions would be accepted in the future.

In general, it seems that Protestants are more likely than Catholics to express a lack of confidence that their rights and cultural traditions will be protected. This lack of confidence is further reflected in the responses to a question concerning accommodation and compromise.

**Table 1.14**  
**Compromise and accommodation simply means that everyone loses out**

	<b>1999</b>		
	<b>Total %</b>	<b>Cath. %</b>	<b>Prot. %</b>
Strongly agree	3	2	4
Agree	16	13	18
Neither agree nor disagree	14	7	19
Disagree	47	54	43
Strongly disagree	15	21	10
Don't know	5	4	6

Two thirds of respondents show some level of disagreement with the statement. More Protestants (22%) than Catholics (15%) agree that compromise and accommodation means that everyone loses out, however substantially more Catholics (75%) than Protestants (53%) do not believe that compromise or accommodation means that everyone will lose out.

In general, the evidence on rights, cultural traditions and compromise seem to indicate something of the success of recent measures to inspire confidence and reduce marginalisation amongst Catholics. However a different picture is emerging for Protestants where responses suggest that they see the environment as less sensitive to their rights and cultural traditions than those of the Catholic community. This perceived lack of sympathy seems to have influenced the negative reaction of Protestants to questions concerning compromise and accommodation.

## Conclusion

Although the 1999 survey evidence indicates a general improvement in attitudes towards community relations over the ten year period, the data have shown that, since 1996, the Catholic and Protestant community have developed notably different attitudes on a range of issues associated with improving community relations. In general, Catholics seem more amenable to efforts to promote cross community contact (demonstrated by their greater willingness to integrate). This complements other data which suggest that Catholics are more confident that their rights and cultural traditions will be protected. The general optimism inherent in Catholic responses is however tempered by a growing sense of mistrust and unease within the Protestant community. Protestants expressed less enthusiasm for inter-religious mixing, a pattern which becomes more pronounced after 1996. Taken together with evidence from the 1999 survey, where respondents were less confident than Catholics that their rights and cultural traditions will be protected, it is reasonable to assume that Protestants are experiencing greater difficulty than Catholics with the changes at the macro-political and the meso-institutional levels. Hence although the intention of the Belfast Agreement is to create an inclusive society (Belfast Agreement, 1998) the survey responses provide little evidence to suggest that this is the type of environment which is currently perceived by most Protestants. Disparity in Protestant and Catholic attitudes towards the Agreement have also been discussed by Evans and O' Leary (1999). They suggest that the more positive attitudes of Catholics towards the Agreement are related to their belief that the *status quo* in NI has improved. In contrast, Protestants are more likely to believe that the Agreement does not benefit them as much as it does Nationalists because they are resistant to anything which is perceived to threaten the Union and therefore the status quo (Evans and O'Leary, 2000:82).

It is not yet clear whether the Protestant responses recorded by our survey are a product of the 'transitional' period, which NI currently finds itself. However, in the light of growing frustration within the Protestant community (endorsed by the gains of anti-agreement unionists in the recent Westminster and local government elections), it would seem that Aughey's argument (2000), which highlights the fallacy of creating an agreement perceived to be based on concessions to Republicans, could prove prophetic.

The survey evidence, taken in conjunction with greater electoral polarisation, underlines the inherent tensions of aspiring to a pluralist model of government. At present the Protestant community's dissatisfaction appears to be rooted in its interpretation of the pluralist arrangements for government. Protestants seem to observe a *neo-pluralist* rather than a *pluralist* agenda at work. Neo-pluralism observes the state negotiating and according greater legitimacy and recognition to some groups and individuals more than others (Marsh, 2000). In such a context the loss of social cohesion and the alienation of particular sections of interests becomes inevitable unless particular efforts are made to engender confidence that the state will protect the interests of *all* groups (Marsh, 2000). Many Protestants it would seem do not believe that their rights and culture have been accorded the same degree of legitimacy as the Catholic community. This argument was put rather starkly by the newly elected DUP MP for East Londonderry, Gregory Campbell:

The Unionist community have given concession after concession to nationalists and Republicans ... now we're in the queue now we're going to the Prime Minister to say that we want equality and we want legitimacy for our cause. (Belfast Telegraph, 9 June 2001)

But what are the implications of these perceptions for the continued development of good community relations in Northern Ireland? It was argued earlier that following the Belfast Agreement there has been a distinct shift in the way that community relations have been approached. Greater emphasis has been placed on the pluralist model of developing community relations with more priority than hitherto accorded to promoting the equality agenda (Hughes, 2001). Whilst this arguably represents a more realistic and mature interpretation of the community relations problem, its success inevitably depends on the confidence which participating groups have that the macro and meso-environment will protect their interests.

We suggested earlier that the confidence of the Catholic community appears to be increasing whilst that of the Protestant community is on the decline. This confidence is still quite precarious as it remains that 62% of Catholics believe that there is not equality in Northern Ireland and 73% believe that Protestants are treated better than themselves. There is a clear need to develop a sense of trust and confidence within the Protestant community, but at the same time ensuring that the tentative optimism currently being expressed by the Catholic community is not diluted. At present the increased desire to live and work in isolation from the other community (particularly pronounced in Protestant responses) cannot be viewed as an unproblematic expression of a pluralist society but must be seen as a reflection of cultural defensiveness fuelled by Protestant perceptions of an inequitable society.

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