The Good Friday Agreement: Is it still fit for purpose?

Wednesday 14th March 2018
4:30pm - 6:30pm

Hosted by
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#DemocracyDay
@OpenGovNI
IS IT TIME TO REFORM THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT?

Democracy Day, 2018
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## The calls for reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The collapse of power-sharing in Northern Ireland shows the Good Friday Agreement has outlived its use.</td>
<td>Owen Paterson MP, Twitter, 16 February</td>
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<td>The Belfast Agreement is often spoken about in quasi-religious terms. … But its flaws have become clearer over time.</td>
<td>Daniel Hannan MEP, <em>The Daily Telegraph</em>, 17 February</td>
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<td>I think there is a need for a cold, rational look at the Belfast Agreement.</td>
<td>Kate Hoey MP, <em>The Huffington Post</em>, 19 February</td>
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Reform what?

1. Declaration of Support
2. Constitutional Issues
3. Strand One: Democratic Institutions in NI
4. Strand Two: North/South Ministerial Council
5. Strand Three: British-Irish Council; British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference
6. Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity
7. Decommissioning
8. Security
9. Policing and Justice
10. Prisoners
11. Validation, Implementation and Review
Reform what?

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Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way Northern Ireland MLAs are doing their job?

Source: NILT (Ark, 2016)
Why reform?

- Continue talks about restarting the NI Executive and NI Government institutions: 53.0%
- Joint Authority by the British and Irish Governments: 20.6%
- A Temporary period of Direct Rule (eg 1-2 years) with party talks on future NI Government structures: 19.7%
- Direct Rule - Permanently (for at least 5 years): 6.7%

Source: LucidTalk (2017)
Why reform?

Preferred way forward

- **Continue talks about restarting the NI Executive and NI Government institutions**
  - Sept 2017: 53.0%
  - Feb 2018: 19.1%

- **Joint Authority by the British and Irish Governments**
  - Sept 2017: 20.6%
  - Feb 2018: 36.6%

- **A Temporary period of Direct Rule (eg 1-2 years) with party talks on future NI Government structures**
  - Sept 2017: 19.7%
  - Feb 2018: 31.6%

- **Direct Rule - Permanently (for at least 5 years)**
  - Sept 2017: 6.7%
  - Feb 2018: 12.7%

Source: LucidTalk (2017; 2018)
Rethinking consociationalism?

Rethink *proportional representation in elections*?

• Plurality-based?
• Majoritarian-based?

But potential applicability at local government-level?
Rethinking consociationalism?

Rethink *inclusive coalition after elections*?

- Voluntary coalition?
- Government/opposition dynamic?
- Fixed terms?
- FM/dFM appointments?
Rethinking consociationalism?

Rethink *community designation & petitions of concern?*
Rethinking consociationalism?

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a unionist, a nationalist or neither?

Source: NILT (Ark, 2018)
Rethinking consociationalism?

Rethink community designation & mutual vetoes?

• Qualified majority votes?
• Defining the scope of the veto?
• Subjecting veto to review?
Trade-offs of reform?

Consociationalists: in deeply divided societies the choice is “between consociational democracy and no (worthwhile) democracy at all” (O’Leary, 2005: 9).


Key question: how rigidly should we stick with consociationalism in its current form? Could its procedures and institutions be reformed without diluting its objectives?
The process of reform

Governance has been heavily elite-centric.

Assembly Election Turnout (%)

Source: EONI (2018)
The process of reform

Governance has been heavily elite-centric.

Assembly Election Turnout (%)

Source: EONI (2018)
Citizen-led reform?
Thank You

Any questions?
What's the best TV comedy show ever written?

- Father Ted: 15 votes
- Monty Python's Flying Circus: 13 votes
- Fawlty Towers: 8 votes
- The Nolan Show: 9 votes
- Other / don't know: 3 votes

[48 responses]
I think the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement should be...

- Kept and implemented in its current form: 3
- Reformed substantively: 38
- Repealed: 3
- Not sure: 2
What is your view on each of the following elements of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement
Petition of Concern

- Keep it in current form: 0
- Replace with NI Bill of Rights: 23
- Get rid of it: 11
- Other/not sure: 13

Total respondents: 47
Preferred rules for government formation

- All parties above seat threshold have right to join (current) - 3
- European consensual-style coalition formed around PfG - 17
- Voluntary, cross-community coalition - 13
- Westminster model - 2
- Not sure - 10

Total respondents: 45
Community Designation for MLAs

- Keep: 3
- Abolish: 37
- Not sure: 3

Total respondents: 43
Voting system

- Single Transferable Vote (current): 6
- Additional Member System (as per Wales & Scotland): 24
- First past the post: 4
- Other: 7
- Not sure: 4

Total: 45
How should any changes to the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement be negotiated & approved

- Inter-party talks alone: 2
- Inter-party talks then referendum: 8
- Citizens' Assembly then legislation: 23
- Other: 9
- Not sure: 2

Total: 44
Thank you!