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**Public Attitudes to Irish Unification:
Evidence on Models and Process from a Deliberative Forum in Ireland**

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ABSTRACT

We designed and conducted a (virtual) deliberative forum in the Republic of Ireland (n=50) on issues relating to potential Irish unification. We find that the Irish public, both before and after deliberation, prefers an integrated model of Irish unity in which Northern Ireland would be dissolved (the 'Integrated model') to a model of unity in which Northern Ireland persists as a devolved entity but now within a united Ireland (the 'Devolved NI model'). We find that deliberation on procedural matters produces a substantial increase in support for specifying the particular model of a united Ireland on offer *before* any referendum. We also find that deliberation results in a very substantial decrease in support for holding an immediate referendum (within two years), and substantially increased support for a five-to-ten-year time frame. These findings suggest that an Irish government that acted in line with the considered views of its citizens—at least as observed in this study—would explicitly indicate, significantly before any referendum, that an integrated united Ireland would follow from affirmative referendums in favour of unification.

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1. Introduction

We examine the considered views of the Irish public on issues relating to possible referendums, in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, on Irish unity. First, we examine people's views on the two most plausible possible *models* of Irish unity – specifically, an integrated model of Irish unity under which Northern Ireland no longer exists (the 'Integrated model') and a model of Irish unity under which Northern Ireland continues to exist as a devolved entity in a united Ireland (the 'Devolved NI model'). Second, we examine people's views on questions of *process*. At what point should the particular model of Irish unity under consideration be specified – *before* any referendum or *after* the referendums (if there is a pro-unity result in the referendums)? And when, if ever, should the referendums be held?

We gathered evidence from a deliberative forum that we planned, which brought together (virtually) a representative cross-section of the Irish population. The 50 participants listened to expert presentations on the two issues (models and process) and engaged in deliberative discussions. Here we deploy two types of evidence from the deliberative event. First, quantitative evidence, generated from a survey of participants conducted before and after the deliberations, that enables us to identify the views of the Irish public before and after "treatment," and lets us assess whether learning about and reflecting on the models and processes led to opinion shifts. Second, qualitative evidence from the transcripts of the discussions that participants engaged in at the deliberative forum is used. The quantitative data identifies the issues on which opinion changed and where it remained constant over the course of the deliberations, while the qualitative data helps unpack *why* some views remained constant, and other views changed.

We chose to plan a deliberative forum, funded by the Rowntree Foundation, rather than a conventional attitude survey to identify the public's views. The substantive issues we sought to examine (relating to models and process) were not, we believed, widely understood or discussed—yet (O'Leary, 2021). A deliberative forum facilitates participants learning novel and complex issues and allows for discursive reflection. This research design provides a quantitative insight into informed opinion development and a qualitative elaboration of emerging viewpoints. This study is also a replication and extension of previous work (Garry, O'Leary, Coakley, Pow, & Whitten, 2020) which focused on the considered views of the Northern Ireland population on questions relating to *models* of Irish unity. We replicate the examination of models on the Irish public, and additionally focus on the question of process. Including consideration of process, as well as models, is particularly important because their combination presents arguably the most formidable constitutional challenge to any Irish government over the next decade. The following question has to be address: Should the Irish government specify its preferred model of a united Ireland *before* any referendum (North or South) and, if so, which particular model should it specify? This question is not arcane. The power (and duty) to initiate a referendum in Northern Ireland, as determined by the 1998 Belfast or Good Friday Agreement, lies with the UK government, specifically the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland ([The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement], 1998 Constitutional Issues).

The Government of Ireland has no power of initiative or co-decision. The UK government may hold a referendum at any time, and is obliged to do so if there is evidence of a likely majority vote in Northern Ireland in favour of unity (Renwick et al., 2021 64-81). The scheduling of the Northern referendum is both uncertain and beyond the direct control of the Irish government. There are arguments for and against early, Irish governmental preparation and articulation of its preferred model of unity, before any referendum. Our purpose here was to generate evidence of the considered views of the Irish public on these matters, and thereby inform the position of the current or any future Irish government.

We found the following. The considered view of the participants in our deliberative forum was that the integrated model of a united Ireland is preferable to the devolved model. This preference was strong before the deliberations, and, during and after deliberative reflection, remained strong. Regarding process, the deliberations led to a substantial increase in support for specifying the particular model of a united Ireland on offer *before* any referendum. Support for holding a referendum and for Irish unification remained high but there was a very substantial decrease in support for holding an immediate referendum (within two years), and substantially increased support for a five-to-ten-year time frame. An Irish government that acted in line with the considered views of its citizens—at least as observed in this study—would explicitly indicate, significantly before any referendum, that an integrated united Ireland would follow from affirmative referendums in favour of unification.

In Section 2 the substantive issues relating to models and process are elaborated. Section 3 describes our methodological approach. Section 4 describes our results. Section 5 discusses the implications for policymakers, and for our understanding of public attitudes to Irish unification.

2. Models and Process

2.1 Models

We informed our participants that if there was a united Ireland, certain things would *stay the same* irrespective of which particular model of a united was implemented. For example, under any of the models of a united Ireland – either the Integrated or the Devolved NI models – the Common Travel Area between Ireland and Great Britain would remain the same. Irish people in Great Britain would keep the rights they have now, and British people in the Republic would keep the rights they have now. For people in today's Northern Ireland, some core arrangements provided for in the 1998 Belfast or Good Friday Agreement would remain the same. Notably, in relation to citizenship, people born in Northern Ireland would retain their right to British citizenship—and to British or Irish citizenship, or both. The protection of rights, especially the rights that currently exist in Northern Ireland (e.g., equality, employment, human rights, and religious freedoms) would continue. Also, current British-Irish institutional cooperation would continue—including the British Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

We also informed our participants that certain things would *change* irrespective of which model of a united Ireland was implemented. For example, under both the Integrated and Devolved NI versions of a united Ireland, the Constitution of Ireland would apply. Northern Ireland would return to being part of the EU, so that relevant EU law would apply, under the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the EU. Northern Ireland would no longer be part of NATO—Ireland is part of PESCO—and Northern Ireland would no longer be part of the Commonwealth, unless Ireland changed its mind about membership. The President of Ireland would be the Head of State for all of the island, TV licence fees would be paid to RTE rather than the BBC, an Irish honours system would operate, and there would be all-Ireland sports teams in international competitions. There would be a single Irish Army, but soldiers currently serving in the British Army would be able to apply. Independent public bodies, including the Irish Directorate of Military Intelligence and the Irish Central Bank, would have authority throughout the island.

We then explained to our participants the main *differences* between our two models of a united Ireland—the Integrated model and the Devolved NI—in order to explain the implications of choosing one model rather than another. The slide in Figure 1 was displayed.

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Figure 1. Visualization of the two Models

We began by describing the *Integrated model*. Here, after the referendums, Northern Ireland would voluntarily be absorbed into a *unitary* Irish state, and Northern Ireland would be effectively dissolved. Laws, institutions, agencies and public services of the south would be extended to cover what is now Northern Ireland, but subject to new northern influence, and with some possibility of “pick and mix”, i.e., adopting the best of the North or the best of the South, or some fusion. The existing Irish statute book and EU laws would apply, except where transitional arrangements are needed. Symbols, the national flag and national anthem, language regulations would be subject to negotiation. All existing political institutions would be affected by the Integrated model. There would be an all-island Parliament in Dublin and government would operate on an all-island basis. An extension of southern political parties into North would likely follow, and an extension of some northern parties into South with the possible formation of new parties (or mergers). At a rough estimate, between 1 in 6 and 1 in 7 voters in a united Ireland would be cultural Protestants, most from the North. The provision of public services, major public policies, and the organization of security under the Integrated model would *become* the same across the island. A common civil service would fuse the existing services, pending a review of public administration. Competence-requirements in the Irish language would be reviewed. There would be an integrated health service (either the Northern or Southern health model), with a transition period. There would be common provision for Catholic, Protestant and non-denominational primary/secondary schools, and an integrated higher education sector (with a transition period). There would be a single social welfare

system: pensions, benefits (with a transition period), and common infrastructure, planning and environmental policies. Monetary, Fishing and Agricultural policies would be determined within the EU, as would issues relating to Single Market Regulation and Customs Union. Access to abortion and rights for same-sex couples would be subject to the Irish Constitution and Supreme Court decisions. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (the PSNI) would be merged into the Garda Síochána, with a common code respecting both traditions, and those outside the traditional nationalist and unionist blocs. The Irish Army would be recruited on all-Ireland basis, with no separate northern regiment.

We then described to our participants the *Devolved NI* model of a united Ireland. Under this model, Northern Ireland would continue to exist within a united Ireland (like Wales in Great Britain). Northern Ireland's devolved "statute book" would be preserved, except as modified by the Irish Constitution. Northern Ireland could have its own symbols, flag, and anthem, and could have different forms of autonomy expressed in sport (e.g., NI teams), the arts (e.g., the Ulster Orchestra), and the media (e.g., RTE Northern Ireland). Responsibility for foreign policy, the enforcement of EU law, criminal law, defence, foreign investment incentives, corporation tax, and major taxation would rest with the central government. The Northern Ireland Executive would continue as a power-sharing government—subject to a constitutional amendment.¹ Northern Ireland would continue to have its own judiciary, but the highest court would be the Supreme Court of Ireland. Other institutions of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement could remain intact, such as the North-South Ministerial Council, and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (Coakley & O'Dowd, 2007; Coakley, Ó Caoindealbháin, & Wilson, 2006). A distinct party system in Northern Ireland would be likely to persist. Political institutions in Northern Ireland would remain similar to today, but, just as Northern Ireland previously elected Westminster MPs, it would instead elect deputies to Dáil Éireann (TDs). The Dublin Parliament would have all-island powers, but specific responsibilities for the 26 counties. "Asymmetrical devolution," the technical name for the Devolved NI model, raises two possible voting difficulties. First, would deputies in Dáil Éireann vote in separate blocs for certain topics? If, for example, education is devolved to Northern Ireland, perhaps Southern deputies would not vote on education matters relating to Northern Ireland, and Northern deputies would not vote on education matters relating to the rest of Ireland. Second, there could sometimes be two different "majorities". One majority could have support in Ireland as a whole, and in the North, but not in the 26 counties. Another majority could have support in Ireland as a whole, and in the South, but not in the six counties.

In "the Devolved NI" model, the provision of public services, major public policies and the organization of security would be similar to today. The Northern Ireland Civil Service would continue but would report to the Northern executive. The devolved health service would be administered by existing health and social care trusts. There would be a devolved education system retaining

¹ Article 15.2.2. of the Constitution of Ireland currently allows the recognition of subordinate legislatures, but not executives (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937, as amended).

GCSEs, A Levels, and a devolved higher education sector. There would be devolved infrastructure, planning and environmental policies. Fishing and agricultural policies would be determined by the EU. Rights would be protected at all-island level: access to abortion, and rights for same-sex couples, would be subject to the Irish Constitution and Supreme Court decisions. The PSNI would continue to exist as a distinct police force, and a Northern Ireland regiment could be created within the Irish Army.

Importantly, in considering the two models we asked participants to assume that though there would be economic “winners and losers” from unification there would be no short term significant economic change for them or their family, *except* that the Euro (€) rather than the pound sterling (£) would be used across the whole island.

2.2 Process

If a referendum is held, *when* exactly would voters get to know what type of united Ireland is being considered? Our participants were asked to deliberate over two options. Namely, the type of united Ireland would be specified *before* any referendum, or *after* any referendums. We informed them that there are likely to be two referendums—one in the north and one in the south—and that the Northern referendum would likely precede the Southern one, but the two could be held on the same day (Renwick et al., 2021 130-94). We suggested that Southerners would need to decide whether they wanted to (a) define a specific type of a united Ireland *before* the first referendum, or (b) define a specific type of united Ireland *after* the two referendums, North and South, have favoured a united Ireland.

We described each approach and its main advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of specifying the particular type of united Ireland *before* the Northern referendum is that people would know which model they are voting on. For example, voters could be told: if you vote for a united Ireland, it will be an integrated united Ireland (with published details available). Or, alternatively, voters could be told: if you vote for a united Ireland, it will be a united Ireland with a devolved Northern Ireland (with published details available). Crucially, people will know exactly what they are voting on before they vote, leading to a high level of clarity about the outcome. How exactly would clarity be achieved? We informed participants that that is up to the Government of Ireland. It could prepare a specific and detailed national plan, with necessary and appropriate *contingent* constitutional amendments. It could properly assess public opinion beforehand, South *and* North. It could organize citizens assemblies, or other types of deliberative forums to consider the options in depth.

We also informed participants about important possible disadvantages to specifying the model of a united Ireland before any referendum. Crucially, this pre-referendum model specification would mean that only Southerners would pick the preferred type of united Ireland on offer. Northerners (nationalists, unionists, and others) would get no choice over the type, though once within a united Ireland they could, with others, propose changes to the constitution. We also

emphasized that Unionist leaders were unlikely to engage on their preferred model of a united Ireland until they had lost the Northern referendum.

A different approach would involve specifying the particular type of united Ireland *after* the Northern and Southern referendums are held. Here people would vote on the general principle of a united Ireland, North and South, in two referendums. They would support or oppose the principle, but without knowing exactly which type of united Ireland would emerge. Voters *will* be told, however, that a *process* will occur after the referendum to specify which type of a united Ireland would be created. There would be a commitment, made explicitly before any referendum, to have a post-referendum elected all-island constitutional convention (with approximately 150-200 elected delegates), *to propose amendments to or replace* the existing Irish constitution. The convention would bring a range of people and parties from across the island together to work out what type of united Ireland we would have.

We also informed participants of three key possible advantages to model specification by a constitutional convention after the referendums. First, Northerners (unionists, nationalists, and others) would get a proportionate say in designing the new united Ireland. Second, new voices and minority voices, including the New Irish, would get a say. Third, a fresh start in designing a common future could be positive.

We identified disadvantages to this approach. First, although there would be clarity on the process that would happen after the referendums, when voters vote, they would not know what model would materialize. Second, this promise of a new process might incentivize unionists to avoid discussing their preferred type of a united Ireland until they have lost in the Northern referendum. Third, there might be no agreement at the constitutional convention. Lastly, even if there is an agreement at the convention when that agreement [consisting of proposed amendments, or a replacement constitution] is put to the people of the whole island in a subsequent referendum they might not ratify it. We informed our participants that in our judgment if one of these last two scenarios occurred—i.e., no agreement, or the people rejected the agreement—then the expanded Dáil Éireann would decide whether there will be an integrated or devolved Ireland.

3. Methodology

We adopted the same methodological approach as in our recent studies in Northern Ireland (Garry, McNicholl, O’Leary, & Pow, 2018; Garry, O’Leary, Coakley, et al., 2020; Garry, O’Leary, McNicholl, & Pow, 2020). The main difference was that, because of pandemic public health restrictions, the deliberations were online rather than face to face. For a full list of the survey questions and response options in the pre-deliberation and post-deliberation survey that participants completed see Appendix A (at the foot of this document). For the schedule of the day see Appendix B. For the full details of the guidelines for the moderation of the small group discussions see Appendix C. For the full anonymised transcripts of the small group discussions see Appendices D1-D7.

To interpret the qualitative transcripts, we proceeded as follows. The authors read and reflected upon the full set of transcripts. Independently, the market research company commissioned to generate the sample of participants, and facilitate the group discussions, IPSOS MORI, generated a summary report for the authors.² Based on the authors' reflections on the transcripts and the authors' reading of the independently produced IPSOS summary, we present our interpretation below. The transcript material is very extensive; here we focus on how the qualitative data can most usefully complement the quantitative data. Specifically, in our Results section (section 4) we draw on the participants' discussions to help us address the following questions. Why do participants robustly prefer the integrated model to the devolved model? Why do participants move substantially in favour of pre-referendum model articulation? Why do participants move away from an imminent referendum to one between 5 and 10 years?

Our deliberative forum met core criteria of high-quality deliberation-based research designs, often referred to as deliberative mini-publics, (Garry et al., 2021). Specifically, we address whether the participants were representative of the wider population; whether the participants become more informed about the issues under consideration; and whether participants perceived that the deliberations were respectful and facilitated the free articulation of their views?

3.1 Are the participants representative of the wider Irish population?

Our participants were representative of the wider Irish population and were in line with demographic quotas that we set based on official data. The breakdown of our participants is detailed in Table 1, in terms of gender, age, socio-economic group and region.

Table 1: Characteristics of the 50 participants

Gender	
Male	25
Female	25
Age	
18-34	14
35-54	20
55+	16
Socio-Economic Group	
ABC1	22
C2DE	24
F50+/F50-	4
Region	
Greater Dublin counties	16
Border counties	4
Rest of Connaught	6
Munster	14
Rest of Leinster	10

² The authors thank Karen Paden, Lauren Elliot and Vanessa Martinez of IPSOS MORI Northern Ireland for their enormously helpful work.

3.2 Did the participants become more informed?

Table 2 reports the extent to which participants felt informed about the referendum-related issues before the deliberations and after the deliberations. The number who felt very well informed increased from 0 to 7 and those who felt fairly well informed increased from 19 to 27. Conversely, there was a precipitous decline in those reporting that they were not very well informed (from 25 to 11).

Table 2
In general, thinking about the issues relating to having a referendum and the choice between Northern Ireland staying in the UK and a United Ireland, how informed do you think are about the issues right now?

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
Very well informed	0	7
Fairly well informed	19	27
Not very well informed	25	11
Not at all informed	5	2
<i>Don't know</i>	1	2
<i>Missing</i>	0	1
Total (n)	50	50

We examined these data more closely in order to identify individual level change (for clarity excluding the missing and don't know data and recoding the data into relatively lowly or highly informed). As reported in Table 3, of the 46 participants included in this analysis, 28 indicated before the deliberations that they were either not at all or not very well informed, whereas 21 of the 28 indicated after the deliberations that they were either fairly or very well informed. There was also some change in the opposite direction, though of much lower magnitude: 5 of the 18 participants who initially indicated that they were fairly or very well informed reported after the deliberations that they were not at all or not very informed.

When, if ever, do you think the referendums should be held?: Individual-level change		<i>PRE-</i>		Total
		Not at all or not very well informed	Fairly or very well informed	
<i>POST-</i>	Not at all or not very well informed	7	5	12
	Fairly or very well informed	21	13	34
Total		28	18	46

Table 3. Individual-level impact of expert information

Note: individual level change is statistically significant at .002 level (McNemar Test)

A substantial amount of change in self-reported knowledge level was therefore observed, mostly in the direction of participants becoming more informed, but also some in the opposite direction. The data thus suggest that the deliberations increased the subjective evaluation of being informed, but also perhaps corrected for some initial over-confidence of some participants.

3.3 Did the participants positively evaluate the deliberative quality of the event?

We also examined how the participants evaluated the deliberative process (see Table 4). Of the 48 participants who answered the question, 47 strongly agreed that ‘in general, everyone showed respect for the others in the discussion’ and the other participant indicated ‘tend to agree’. Also, of the 48 participants who answered the question, 46 agreed that they had ‘ample opportunity to express my opinion during the discussions’ (with 41 of the 46 ‘totally’ agreeing). There were diverse responses to the question of whether participants in the deliberative forum had similar views or not: 33 agreed, 9 disagreed and 6 were in the neutral category: a supermajority agreed a broad consensus tended to exist among the participants. Participants were also asked to evaluate the extent to which they may have changed their mind over the course of the deliberations: 11 agreed that they had changed their minds, 24 disagreed and 13 were in the neutral category. Our task now is to examine this question of opinion-shift in more detail and to identify the particular issues on which there may have been opinion shift.

Table 4: Participant evaluations of the deliberative process

	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree / disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	Don't know	Missing	Total (n)
a. I had ample opportunity to express my opinion during the discussions.	0	1	1	5	41	0	2	50
b. The opinions of the other participants did not differ so much from my own opinions.	0	9	6	21	12	0	2	50
c. In general, everyone showed respect for the others in the discussion.	0	0	0	1	47	0	2	50
d. I have changed my mind as a result of the discussions.	12	12	13	11	0	0	2	50

4. Results

4.1 Models

4.1.1 Quantitative evidence

We do not find, over the course of the deliberations, any statistically significant shift in opinion on the two different models of Irish unity. Before the deliberations our participants preferred, to a statistically significant extent, the integrated model over the devolved model. On a 1-7 scale, with a higher score indicating a higher level of support, the Integrated model is scored 5.16 and the Devolved NI model is scored 3.84 (the mean difference is statistically significant at .005). We also found that after the deliberations our participants (continued to) prefer, to a statistically significant extent, the integrated model to the devolved model, 5.48 compared to 3.33 (the mean difference is statistically significant at .001). The magnitude of the preference for the integrated model over the devolved model increased over the course of the deliberations but not to a statistically significant extent.³ Similarly, we found that to a statistically significant extent, participants have a greater level of acceptance of the integrated model than the devolved model before the deliberations. Also, post-deliberation, the participants, to a statistically significant extent, had a greater level of acceptance of the integrated model than the devolved model. There was no statistically significant change over the course of the deliberations in the magnitude of participants' preference for accepting the integrated rather than devolved.⁴

We now exploit the transcripts from the discussions at the deliberative event to shed light on why the participants preferred, and robustly so, the Integrated model to the Devolved NI model. This examination identifies the features of each model that were approved of and the features that were discussed negatively.

4.1.2 Qualitative evidence

Generally, the participants were surprised to learn that there are different possible versions of a united Ireland. Participants typically thought that if a united Ireland occurred, it would be strongly in line with how the Integrated model was described. Participants were much less familiar with the idea of a united Ireland which contained a devolved Northern Ireland, and some reacted with some scepticism and incredulity to the idea, especially as they believed it would be divisive, and contrary to the notion of unity and togetherness that they associated with the Integrated model.

“I thought [it would be] be the [integrated] option. If there was a referendum it would be for completely united.”

Female, 40, D, Rest of Leinster, no party ID

³ See Q6 in Appendix A for the frequency distributions pre- and post- deliberation.

⁴ See Q7 and Q8 in Appendix A for the frequency distributions pre- and post-deliberation.

“An integrated Ireland is basically a united Ireland. If you have a devolved Ireland, there’s still a border there, with different parts of the country. If you want to go for it properly, do it all out of Dublin.”

Male, 24, Munster, Sinn Fein

Clarity was perceived by the participants to be a main advantage of the Integrated model, as it would minimise ambiguities over how society, government, culture and the economy would operate. There was also a sense that because the Integrated model would involve significant change, the effort – in terms of time and resources – involved in organising and holding a referendum would be worthwhile. Conversely, many participants felt that the Devolved NI model may simply not be worth all the effort given that it would not amount to a very significant change.

“I’m 100% for an integrated Ireland...It’s just a change of flag if it’s devolved. I just don’t agree with that at all.”

Female, 37, B, Greater Dublin, Sinn Fein

The reactions of participants to the Integrated model seemed quite similar to their general reaction to the broad notion of a united Ireland, suggesting a close overlap between the general principle and this particular model. For many participants, an integrated model was ideal because it suggested unity and a strong sense of national pride. Some participants did, however, acknowledge that idealism may prove complicated in practice.

“I like the fact that if you looked at the idealism on paper, this is it. This is it, but again it’s idyllic.”

Female, 48, C2, Rest of Leinster, Independent

Being able to deliver a single consistent and comprehensive approach to economic policy, health policy and education across the whole island was seen by many participants as an important and very sensible beneficial feature of the Integrated model. Some participants did, however, recognise that actually negotiating and achieving such all-island policies could be difficult, and time-consuming.

“The whole Ireland make sense. It’s very simple saying it like this, but if you have one Ireland, it makes sense to have policies around one area only, not two. On the other side of it, I think this will take a very long time to implement. Thinking of schools, education, whether the Irish language is part of the North. It’ll be a changeover from trusts to the HSE for healthcare. I think it’s a good thing but not without its hiccups.”

Female, 57, DE, Munster, Independent

While not many participants felt that there were unacceptable aspects of the Integrated model, some elements were seen as potentially problematic – for example, the idea that there could or would be negotiations on symbols, the national flag and national anthem. For some this idea

clashed with their sense of national identity and pride, and other participants felt that such negotiation and change might be hard for many Irish people to accept.

“The symbols and national anthem and everything would be subject to negotiation. Why? If they think we’re going to change our anthem and flag they’ve got another thing coming, so I don’t know how they could even think about that.”

Female, 55, C2, Greater Dublin, Fianna Fáil

Other participants, however, felt that it was appropriate to have negotiations on these cultural symbols to take on board views from Northern Ireland and ensure symbolic representation for the island as a whole. For some, the current Irish national anthem is divisive, and does not represent the whole island, and discussion of this issue was particularly deeply felt and emotional.

“I think something like the national anthem, it’s written from a very much us versus them mentality, because of when it was written. It is about the Ireland not being a whole, and I can’t see that existing.”

Male, 39, B, Rest of Connaught, Fine Gael

Some participants highlighted that a possible barrier to any united Ireland is the British national identity held by many people in Northern Ireland. Importantly, this problem was recognized as more acute in the Integrated than Devolved NI model because Northern Ireland would cease to exist in an Integrated united Ireland and there would be an associated perceived erasure of the distinctive national identity and culture of some.

“There is another side to it too. It’s not on here, it may seem a silly thing to say, the fact that in an integrated Ireland and they say, ‘Northern Ireland would no longer exist.’ You can’t tell something it doesn’t exist. It has existed for years. I love the idea of the integrated one, it’s just a huge thing to say.”

Female, 48, C2, Rest of Leinster, Independent

Other potential problems with the Integrated model included how the health services would operate. Some participants highlighted the potential difficulties of negotiating an all-island integrated health service. There may be low levels of acceptability among people in Northern Ireland for a possible HSE-based all-Ireland system. Many participants felt, however, that Irish people tend to see the NHS as a better health system and the integrated model could thus be an opportunity to improve the Irish health system.

Integrating the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) with the Garda Síochána was highlighted by some participants as a possible difficulty, if some people in Northern Ireland refused to accept the Garda as the legitimate law enforcers. Conversely, some participants felt that the Garda would struggle to incorporate the PSNI, and that some Irish people may find this change hard to accept. Some saw the PSNI as an armed force in contrast to the typically unarmed Garda and would be a difficult difference to reconcile. Some other participants, however, felt that the Garda would have to

'modernise' and effectively incorporate the PSNI in order to produce an an-Ireland police force that respects all traditions.

“The PSNI merging with the Garda would cause issues down the line. It’s not that I could [not] live with it, but I’d just be conscious of all the big change so quickly and what it could potentially lead to.”

Female, 35, B, Rest of Leinster, Green Party

Generally, participants were less supportive of the Devolved NI model than the Integrated model. While the integrated model was associated with the notion of unifying, the devolved model was seen as divisive and continuing separation which seemed to many to clash with the aim of a united Ireland. For many, maintaining a distinct Northern Ireland seemed to undermine the idea of reconciliation and resolving conflict and division; it would simply serve to continue to keep people separate across a range of aspects of life – politically, ideologically, economically and culturally.

“I don’t see how we move on as a people on the island if we just adopt the status quo with a different flag. We need to integrate the political system and that’s the only way we integrate the people.”

Male, 46, C2, Greater Dublin, Labour

Many participants felt that the current devolved model in Northern Ireland is not operating very effectively and would be unlikely to function effectively in a united Ireland. Some felt that it would be challenging to achieve agreement on what elements of the current devolved arrangement in Northern Ireland should remain and which should be changed. Some participants wondered whether the Irish government would be able to do a better job at playing the role than the British government is currently playing.

“I agree, we’d be taking over Britain’s role as whatever the devolved is, and that’s not working well from my perspective for Northern Ireland. It’s like they’re an afterthought for Britain. It’s not working... Look at how Britain are doing it and I don’t think they’re doing it very well. I don’t know if we’ll do it any better than them.”

Female, 32, C2, Rest of Leinster, Sinn Fein

In contrast to the perceived clarity of the Integrated model, many participants felt that under the devolved model it would be difficult to understand where exactly responsibility lay. For example, some participants felt that the justice system would be ambiguous. There would be problems in identifying who was legally responsible on key issues, given that some issues would be the remit of the Northern Ireland Assembly, others the responsibility of the Irish government, and still others would be under the authority of the EU.

“It would have a judiciary, but the highest power would be the Supreme Court of Ireland. Are they allowed judges from Northern Ireland in the Supreme Court of Ireland? If they have their judiciary, but the highest power if the Supreme Court of Ireland, it’s a bit airy fairy.”⁵

Female, 48, C2, Rest of Leinster, Independent

Although few participants saw the devolved model as ideal, some did suggest that it may be a more acceptable option for people in Northern Ireland, especially unionists. The devolved model was seen as creating less change, and would facilitate a greater continuity of aspects of Northern Ireland’s culture and society. Some felt that the devolved model would thus be more likely to attract support for a united Ireland than the integrated model.

Some participants, unprompted, felt that a ‘transition’ approach to achieving a fully integrated united Ireland could be facilitated by the devolved model. The devolved model could be put into effect first, and would be more likely to be accepted by people in Northern Ireland. Under the devolved model there could be a period of some changes being implemented and accepted. This would allow time for people to adjust to the changes, as part of a two-stage approach which would lead to full integration.

“It would be a steppingstone, and I think a softly-softly approach might be the way to go with the troubles we’ve had.”

Female, 35, B, Rest of Leinster, Green Party

“I would agree to it if it were a transitional way forward. And if it were used as a transitional period towards a fully integrated Ireland, I’d be in favour of going down that route. Otherwise, I’d be against it.”

Male, 48, Farmer, Rest of Leinster, Sinn Fein

4.2 Process

4.2.1 When should the model of a united Ireland be specified?

4.2.1.1 Quantitative evidence. As reported in Table 5, before the deliberative event 28 of the 50 participants favoured telling voters before the referendum the specific model of a united Ireland that was on offer whereas a much larger number (42 out of 50) did so after the deliberations. Similarly, before deliberation 18 of the 50 favoured specifying the model after the referendum but only 3 out of 50 did so after the deliberations.

Table 5:
Should the model of a united Ireland be specified before or after a referendum?

Response options	PRE-	POST-
Option 1 (Before)	28	42
Option 2 (After)	18	3
<i>Don’t know</i>	4	3
<i>Missing</i>	0	2
Total (n)	50	50

⁵ They were told there would be Northern judges on the Supreme Court but not emphatically.

Note: Question wording – “Imagine that there will be a referendum and the choice is between ‘Northern Ireland stays in the UK’ and a ‘United Ireland’. What do you think voters should be told before the referendum? Please choose one option...**Option 1:** Before the referendum, voters should be told exactly what type of united Ireland would be implemented if there is a majority vote for a united Ireland. **Option 2:** Before the referendum, voters should be told that if there is a majority vote in favour of a united Ireland there will be a Constitutional Convention after the referendum which will seek to agree what type of united Ireland to implement. The Constitutional Convention would be made up of politicians from all across the island, from all the parties in the North and the South.”

Individual level views are examined more closely in Table 6, for simplicity excluding the ‘don’t know’ and ‘missing’ data. Of the 25 “pro-before” participants, only one changed their minds over the course of the deliberations. However, of the 17 “pro-after” participants, fully 15 changed their minds during the deliberation process. This individual level-change is statistically significant at the .001 level.

Should the model of a united Ireland be specified before or after a referendum?: Individual-level change		<i>PRE-</i>		Total
		Before	After	
<i>POST-</i>	Before	24	15	39
	After	1	2	3
Total		25	17	46

Table 6. Individual Change on Process

Note: individual-level change is statistically significant at .001 level (McNemar Test)

4.2.1.2 Qualitative evidence. Many participants highlighted the need to avoid being asked to vote on something unless they knew what the outcome would mean, which meant citizens would need to know the model in advance. Participants concerns were driven in large part by the “Brexit” experience, and they thought the lessons from that experience needed to be learned.

“The lack of information has come back to bite us on other occasions. All the information and all aspects should be out there before we make any decisions, so we make a decision on all the information. It happened with the UK with Brexit. People are now saying they didn’t understand what is going on, and it’s turned into a disaster. Getting all the information before we do anything, people have to be informed. There will be people who’ve always had the idea that a united Ireland would be great, but do we have the facts of what the consequences are? The amount of time and the costs of integration, we need to know exactly what we’re getting ourselves into.”

Male, 57, C2, Greater Dublin, Fianna Fáil

Overall, there was a clear preference among participants for detailed communication in advance of a referendum on the model of unity being proposed, irrespective of whether the model was devolved or integrated. Many participants felt that it was important that all voters make an informed decision based on details of the Referendum process and what the outcome will mean, instead of simply voting on a ‘principle’.

“Yes, people voted for Brexit as a principle, but they didn’t know what they were voting for. A lot of people may regret voting for Brexit because of what Brexit has come to be. It’s better to have the proposition of that.”

Male, 60, C2, Greater Dublin, Fine Gael

“I would do an option one [Before the referendum], because I think it would be incumbent on the Government of Ireland to know what people wanted and do their research. If people know what they are voting for at the start, and if the research had been done well at the start, they could also have consultation with people in the north if they wanted to as well. I would lean strongly for option one so that people know what they’re voting for.”

Male, 36, B, Munster, Fine Gael

Many participants believed that detailed information on what Irish unification would mean should be provided and that it should be simple and clear to ensure widespread understanding. Some participants were worried that in previous referendums, advance information on the vote and on possible outcomes was too complex and technical.

“Going by previous referendums, when we do get the booklets in it comes in civil service language, not in English. Very difficult to understand exactly what the stuff means. It has to be very clear, black and white, written in common language. Fine if you need the legislative speak but then you need to explain what that means in common English.”

Male, 56, C2, Munster, Fine Gael

"This is a huge thing for Ireland, and even this booklet you gave us with the slides, this is really well done, and a lot of the questions people would ask are answered in this. If something like this is done in plain English, then people can understand and read and can Google if they don't."

Female, 55, C2, Greater Dublin, Fianna Fáil

Many participants felt that it is not simply a case of providing the model of unification but also the detailed implications of each model: what exactly would stay the same, and what exactly would change on the economy, citizenship, rights, health and social care, and education. There was also, however, an understanding that not all the details would be available before any referendum and that many areas would still require negotiation following the vote.

"...you can't cross every T and dot every I. But you can have an outline of what Ireland is going to look at. You're always going to have the grey areas to sort out. You do need a brief outline; you can't go down the Brexit route as it'll cause chaos."

Male, 46, C2, Greater Dublin, Labour

Many participants highlighted the benefits of being transparent in the provision of detail in advance because it would encourage trust and participation and minimise perceptions of the process being politicised. The "Brexit" errors should be avoided, especially given the very sensitive nature of the unity issue and potentially destabilising effect that problematic delivery and implementations could have on Northern Ireland's peace and stability.

"All you have to look at the mess Brexit created, just voted leave, or remain, there was nothing set out. We need to know what we're voting on, first."

Male, 55, B, Greater Dublin, Sinn Féin

"The lesson from Brexit is people didn't have the details spelled out when they went to vote. They disagree with what they were voting for, we want to avoid that."

Male, 60, C2, Greater Dublin, Fine Gael

"I was surprised they were talking about not informing people before. Have they not learned the lessons from Brexit? People are paranoid that someone might be trying to pull the wool over their eyes. I can't imagine that they would actually think of doing it that way."

Female, 57, DE, Munster, Independent

Some participants perceived that referendum communications previously in Ireland had been problematic and had led to multiple referendums being needed on the same issue. Participants felt that the need for multiple referendums should be avoided by providing proper information in advance, so people know what they are voting on.

"I agree exactly. There's no point in us going in blind. The way we were presented with this information today, it's what the public needs. I touched on it before. There was a referendum years ago and we weren't given proper information and we said no as a Republic, only for the government to come back and say they needed to reword it and then we voted what would have been the right answer."

Female, 32, C2, Rest of Leinster, Sinn Féin

The difficult conundrum relating to timing was raised by participants. Informing voters about the specific model in the Republic of Ireland would not allow for significant input from people in Northern Ireland as to which model was considered. But such input was needed. Many participants were alarmed by this difficulty as it was felt the impact of unification would be felt most by people in Northern Ireland, and so it was seen as unfair that Northerners would not influence the shape of a united Ireland while southerners would.

"There would be a problem if only southerners get to pick because it will cause tension. Will people opt into something they didn't have a choice in? Up north, they're not getting the choices around this."

Female, 48, C1, Border counties, Sinn Féin

Although not many participants favoured the post-referendum Constitutional Convention approach, a major advantage was that citizens in Northern Ireland would indeed be able to have a say in the type of United Ireland that would be established. Many participants felt that engagement with politicians from Northern Ireland, and especially those from the Unionist community, would be a crucial pre-requisite for the success of any unified Ireland as it would help enable including all citizens on the island. Many participants felt that it was important to include the views of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community not only in relation to issues of citizenship, rights and identity, but also on matters such as health and education that would likely have a substantial impact on their day to day lives

"Mine would be option two [post-Referendum Constitutional Convention], when you consider the fact that people up the North have a say, and people from all different walks of life are involved, when it came to the referendum it might be more palatable to people. When you look at Brexit just being stay or leave, and they heard about all the points after, I think the second option would [be] better."

Male, 40, D, Greater Dublin, Fine Gael

However, while some participants could see the value of including all voices in discussions on a United Ireland, some recognised that in any Constitutional Convention actually reaching decisions could be a challenge. There was therefore a concern that lengthy and complex negotiations could lead to some issues not getting resolved, a concern partly driven by witnessing the protracted

“Brexit” negotiations which have had, with the introduction of the Northern Ireland Protocol, a destabilising effect on Northern Ireland.

“We have to know we exactly what’s going to happen in advance. Otherwise, in 100 years’ time we’d still be thrashing it out.”

Female, 57, C1, Greater Dublin, Social Democrats

As a result of this concern, it was suggested that Convention should have a time limit in order to achieve completion of post-referendum negotiations by a specified date. The perceived value of setting a date was prohibiting a lengthy delay to unification and minimising the risk of a prolonged state of uncertainty for both southerners and northerners.

“The difficulty [of pre-referendum model specification] would be that it would be in the South only. The second option [post-referendum Constitutional Convention] allows them [Northerners] to actually have a say in it. There would have to be a time limit. If you haven’t reached an agreement by a certain date, this is what happens next.”

Male, 61, C1, Rest of Leinster, Fine Gael

A perceived disadvantage of the post-referendum Constitutional Convention approach was that it relied on trusting elected representatives effectively to interpret what citizens want and represent them accordingly. Many participants felt that – given low levels of trust in politicians – citizens simply would not vote if they did not know exactly what they were voting for; citizens may not have faith that the politicians would not simply follow personal, or party aims rather than appropriately representing the people.

“I don’t think people will vote if they don’t understand what they’re voting for. They’ll vote against it because they won’t understand it. This is such a big subject that it needs to be prepared well, information sent out well. Every household should get a booklet on it and let people decide for themselves.”

Female, 55, C2, Greater Dublin, Fianna Fáil

“Elected delegates, it’s not the people’s voice, really. A very dangerous route.”

Female, 60, C2, Rest of Connaught, Fine Gael

“I know personally I would like to know what I am voting for, because politicians make these promises and they’ll do this or that and it never happens.”

Female, 55, C2, Greater Dublin, Fianna Fáil

There was a perception among some participants that the post-referendum Constitutional Convention approach could encourage a pro-unity vote, because many voters may have romantic

or idealised ideas of a united Ireland and vote in favour of them if they don't have to explicitly face the practical difficulties of actually implementing a unified Ireland. There was also a recognition that this approach, of voting on the matter of principle, could alienate particular groups in Northern Ireland and perhaps lead to disruption and violence, and also simply lead to voting on simple traditional unionist/nationalist lines.

“The advantage would be that would we sway more towards yes than no because people wouldn’t understand what they’re voting on or what the process would be after. I suppose that would be the advantage, but it would cause trouble after the referendum, by keeping people in the dark. That would be the disadvantage.”

Female, 37, B, Greater Dublin, Sinn Féin

“You could end up with voting on traditional green and orange tribal lines. You’re trying to get away from that and persuade people one way or the other, whichever way you lean. You need to give people some idea. If you keep them in the dark, they’ll go the traditional orange and green.”

Male, 46, C2, Greater Dublin, Labour

4.2.2 When should the referendum be held?

4.2.2.1 Quantitative evidence. Table 7 reports a substantial shift in the distribution of opinion on the timing of a possible referendum. Before the deliberative event, 24 of the 50 participants favoured an imminent referendum—within the next two years. However, after the deliberation, only 3 of the 50 participants favoured a referendum within two years. Similarly, those favouring a referendum in about 10 years time increased from 5 participants (before the deliberations) to 21 participants (after the deliberations).

Table 7: When, if ever, do you think the referendums should be held?

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
Within the next 2 years	24	3
In about 5 years’ time	17	22
In about 10 years’ time	5	21
In about 20 years’ time	0	1
More than 20 years’ time	1	1
There should never be a referendum	1	0
<i>Don’t know</i>	2	2
Total (n)	50	50

In a closer examination we focus not on the overall distribution of opinion, but on the individual-level shift in position. The data is recoded to compare those who favoured a referendum within two years versus those who favour a later referendum or never having a referendum (with participants who responded ‘don’t know’ at either moment excluded from analysis). Table 8 shows that the 46 participants included in this analysis were, before the deliberative event, evenly divided between having a referendum within two years (23) and having a referendum later or never (23). After the deliberative event, only 3 of the 46 participants favoured an imminent referendum within two years and 43 favoured a referendum later or never.

When, if ever, do you think the referendums should be held?: Individual-level change		PRE-		Total
		Longer than two years or never	Within two years	
POST-	Longer than two years or never	23	20	43
	Within two years	0	3	3
Total		23	23	46

Table 8. Timing of the referendums

Note: Individual-level change is statistically significant at .001 level (McNemar Test)

None of the 23 who initially favoured a referendum later than two years or never shifted over the course of the deliberations into the ‘within two years’ position. In stark contrast, 20 of the 23 who initially favoured a referendum within two years shifted as a result of the deliberations into the later or never position. This individual-level opinion shift is statistically significant at the .001 level.

4.2.2.2 Qualitative evidence. The immediate reaction of many participants to the issue of referendum timing was that the Republic of Ireland should recover from Covid before beginning any serious discussions about Irish unity. “Brexit” was also highlighted by many participants who wished to ‘let the dust settle’ on the matter before engaging with the unity issue. Many participants argued that they thought the limitations of the EU referendum campaign, such as a lack of proper information, meant that a unity referendum on the island should not be rushed into and could take several years to ‘get right’.

“Whenever the correct information is ready and everybody is ready, that would be the right time.”

Female, 26, B, Rest of Connaught, Fine Gael

Some argued that an imminent referendum should be avoided because of the complexity of the issue and that it would be useful to wait to see how much support there actually was, both North

and South, for unity. Some participants felt that a negative response from voters could be prompted if a referendum were held too soon.

"A bit of a slower approach rather than a knee-jerk reaction. The handbrake goes up if you try to push a referendum on people straight away."

Male, 42, Farmer, Greater Dublin counties, Fine Gael

Some participants felt it was difficult to put a precise date on when a referendum should be held given the complexity of the unification issue, and the need to plan out all significant elements. Some were concerned about how quickly time can pass and that while 2-5 years may appear a long time it actually is not.

"You'd have to be careful putting a time frame on it because 5 years can go very fast."

Male, 49, B, Munster, Sinn Féin

In contrast, some participants believed that two years was enough time to deal with COVID-19 and Brexit and should be long enough to deal with any preparations required for a referendum.

"When I was saying my initial thoughts, I was thinking on a 2-year scale, I wasn't saying let's have it in a month. I'm both with you on this that there needs to be a settle-in time of Brexit and things need to fall in place... What's Scotland going to do?...But also my initial thought is that I'm in agreement with a time scale of two to five years."

Male, 35, C1, Rest of Connaught, No party preference

Some participants felt that a referendum was 'inevitable' but likely over a longer period, such as 10 years. Some felt it would be a lengthy period because it might be more difficult to 'convince' those in Northern Ireland. For some, the timing issue was a strategic matter: one participant advocated waiting until there was a better chance of a vote in favour of Irish unity and suggested that it could be a 'hard sell' to those in Northern Ireland.

"No, I think it would be a bad idea to run a referendum now if the result were "no." We'd have to choose our time so it would have a good chance of success."

Male, 60, C2, Greater Dublin counties, Fine Gael

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpreting the findings

Learning and deliberation do not change the Irish public's views on the relative merits of the different possible models of Irish unity. Our participants were more in favour of the integrated model than

the devolved model both before and after deliberation; perhaps, however, they felt better informed about why this preference is the better one. Many of our participants changed their minds regarding *when* a model should be specified. There was a majority both before and after deliberation preferring model specification *before* any referendum. But the majority in favour of specification before the first referendum was much larger after the participants had learned about and discussed the issues. Learning and reflecting on the issues relating to a possible referendum did not make our Irish public less in favour of holding a referendum or less in favour of a united Ireland, however. It did make them much less in favour of holding an imminent referendum – within two years. A five-to-ten-year time frame is much more popular after deliberation.

The qualitative evidence helps us understand these findings about the robustness and resilience of views (model preference), and the evolution of views under deliberative conditions (model specification timing and referendum timing). In contrast to the Devolved model, the Integrated model was seen as consistent with the conventional understanding of a united Ireland, was clear in political responsibility, provided beneficial all-island policies, and did not continue a divisive border. The perceived advantages of the Devolved model (potentially more acceptable to some Northerners) were not sufficiently persuasive to dampen participants' strong preference for the Integrated model (though for several participants thought that if a Devolved model was proposed a transitional path to the Integrated model, it may be more acceptable). Similarly, while there were some perceived advantages to post-referendum model specification (most notably that it might be more inclusive of, and acceptable to, Northerners) these opinions were not sufficiently strong to stop a substantial increase in support for pre-referendum specification, which was seen to have the crucial and over-riding advantage of providing clarity in what was involved in the vote. The prioritisation of clarity was also the key feature emphasised in discussions on referendum timing, with participants highlighting the need to spend sufficient time moving on from Brexit and Covid, preparing, and providing relevant details to voters.

From the quantitative and qualitative evidence, the following pattern emerges. The southern Irish public appear to prioritise clarity of model (Integrated rather than devolved) and the early specification of model (before rather than after referendums), even if these decisions may appear to come at the expense of Northerners' preferences and input. They did, however, believe that the Government of Ireland should plan and prepare—including finding out about Northern preferences. From their own thinking, some participants saw merit in a two-stage process: a devolved model as a transition toward an integrated Ireland

5.2 Policy implications

These findings—on models, process and timing—pose major questions of policy and strategy for the Irish government. In policy terms, what model of a united Ireland does the government—or the opposition—actually prefer, and how and when does it prepare for it? Strategically, *when* should the Irish Government reveal its institutional preference—before or after any referendum? And how

should it test and check that preference? Judging by our mini-public, there is a strong preference for an integrated model of Irish unification, so any sudden announcement in favour of a devolved model would likely meet resistance, and a drop in enthusiasm.

The 'what model?' and 'when to choose it?' are distinct questions, but crucially overlap to form a formidable policy challenge for the government, and its successors. If an Irish government acted in line with the considered views of the Irish people (at least as observed in this study) it would explicitly indicate, significantly before any referendum, that if people (in the North and South respectively) voted for Irish unity, the form of unification would be an integrated united Ireland. The Government of Ireland (a coalition), and its successors (likely to be a coalition), may have a constrained opportunity, if it wishes, to try to lead its public toward the idea of a devolved model, as a compromise, but it would likely have to promise that it would be transitional toward an integrated Ireland.

If the Government of Ireland, and its successors, were to remain silent on the 'what?' and 'when?' questions, that would implicitly position them in favour of a vote on the broad principle of a united Ireland, rather than on a specific model, and that would also position them in favour of post-referendum specification of the specific model—a constitutional convention. There are valid possible arguments in favour of such an approach. However, we suggest that the government—and the opposition parties—should be conscious of the arguments against such an approach, arguments which our participants, upon considered reflection, found persuasive: namely, the dangers of people not knowing what they are voting for; and the danger of a model of a united Ireland emerging (a Devolved NI) with much less support and enthusiasm among citizens of the existing Republic than the Integrated model.

A last comparative word. In a previous study, conducted by two of the four authors of this article, an integrated Ireland was preferred to a devolved Northern Ireland among cultural Catholics in Northern Ireland (Garry, O'Leary, Coakley, et al., 2020; Garry, O'Leary, McNicholl, et al., 2020). In the same forum, obliged to choose which model of a united Ireland they would prefer—an unpalatable choice for most of them—cultural Protestants generally supported a devolved Northern Ireland, the option which promised or threatened less change. So far, no surprise. Unexpectedly, however, *after* deliberation, support for the devolved option fell among cultural Protestants. What appeared to drive the shift was recognition of the dysfunctionality and division that characterized contemporary Northern institutions—the forum took place when the Assembly and Executive were not functioning. What may also have mattered, at the margin, was that in a devolved Northern Ireland inside a united Ireland cultural Protestants would be a double minority. They would be a minority inside the North, and in Ireland as a whole. Confronted by this scenario, some cultural Protestants, likely able to elect one seventh of a future Dail Éireann, may prefer the more fluid coalition politics of an integrated Ireland, including the possibility of alliances with Southern parties, perhaps especially the more conservative of these parties. In short, two things are clear. Cultural Catholics across the island prefer an integrated Ireland. Cultural Protestants, obliged to choose,

prefer a devolved Northern Ireland within the UK to any model of a united Ireland, but their views on this matter may be more amenable to discussion and modification than currently assumed. Could there be a future convergence, a sweet-spot, namely, a devolved model as a transitional arrangement, provided that it is intended to lead to an integrated Ireland? That remains to be seen, and it would have its own numerous complexities. A devolved Northern Ireland within a united Ireland may reduce cultural Protestant antipathy to a united Ireland, but at the cost of reducing the enthusiasm for Irish unification among cultural Catholics, North and South.

6. Conclusion

We welcome replications and extensions of our study in Ireland, Northern Ireland, or indeed on the island as a whole. We suggest that deliberative forums—and larger citizens' assemblies—can usefully contribute to the emerging debate about the future of the island. They can help to generate informed and considered views of the public, clarify choices, and reduce surprises when big choices have to be made.

DRAFT ONLY - NOT FOR REPUBLICATION

APPENDIX A

TABLES 1-16

1. Do you think there should be referendums in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland asking people whether they want Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom or to re-unify with the Republic of Ireland?

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
Yes, there should be referendums	41	45
No, there should not be any referendums	5	4
<i>Don't know</i>	4	1
Total (n)	50	50

2. When, if ever, do you think the referendums should be held?

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
Within the next 2 years	24	3
In about 5 years' time	17	22
In about 10 years' time	5	21
In about 20 years' time	0	1
More than 20 years' time	1	1
There should never be a referendum	1	0
<i>Don't know</i>	2	2
Total (n)	50	50

3. If there was a referendum in the Republic of Ireland asking people whether they want Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom or to re-unify with the Republic of Ireland, how would you vote in that referendum?

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
Northern Ireland to stay in the United Kingdom	7	4
Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom and re-unify with the Republic of Ireland	34	38
<i>Don't know</i>	9	8
Total (n)	50	50

4. Imagine there was a referendum in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and a majority in both places voted for Northern Ireland to stay in the UK. Please indicate what your reaction would be:

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
I would find it almost impossible to accept	1	4
I would not be happy, but could live it	25	22
I would happily accept it	21	20
<i>Don't know</i>	3	4
Total (n)	50	50

5. Imagine there was a referendum in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and a majority in both places voted for Northern Ireland to unify with the Republic of Ireland. Please indicate what your reaction would be:

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
I would find it almost impossible to accept	1	1
I would not be happy, but could live it	11	5
I would happily accept it	35	42
<i>Don't know</i>	3	2
Total (n)	50	50

6. If a majority in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland did vote for Northern Ireland to unify with the Republic of Ireland, there are two different possible types of united Ireland that could result from this:

i. **An integrated United Ireland**, which would mean Northern Ireland would no longer exist, and decisions would be made by an all-island parliament and government in Dublin

OR

ii. **A devolved United Ireland**, which would mean Northern Ireland would continue to exist, but as a devolved region within a United Ireland. Northern Ireland would keep its own Assembly and power-sharing executive, and power over policy areas such as health, education and policing.

For each of these options, please indicate the extent to which you would be opposed or in favour:

	1 Strongly opposed	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly In favour	Don't know	Missing	Total (n)
a) Integrated United Ireland										
<i>PRE-</i>	2	3	4	9	10	5	17	0	0	50
<i>POST-</i>	0	5	1	6	8	10	18	1	1	50
b) Devolved United Ireland										
<i>PRE-</i>	9	5	7	8	10	4	6	1	0	50
<i>POST-</i>	10	7	8	13	5	4	2	0	1	50
c) Northern Ireland stays in the UK										
<i>PRE-</i>	7	11	13	9	2	4	2	2	0	50
<i>POST-</i>	13	10	10	9	3	1	2	1	1	50

7. Imagine there was a referendum in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and the choice was between Northern Ireland staying in the UK or an integrated United Ireland. Imagine that in the referendums a majority in both places voted for an integrated United Ireland. How do you think you would react?

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
I would find it almost impossible to accept	1	0
I would not be happy, but could live it	9	6
I would happily accept it	39	41
<i>Don't know</i>	1	2
<i>Missing</i>	0	1
Total (n)	50	50

8. Imagine there was a referendum in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and the choice was between Northern Ireland staying in the UK or a devolved United Ireland. Imagine that in the referendums a majority in both places voted for a devolved United Ireland. How do you think you would react?

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
I would find it almost impossible to accept	4	4
I would not be happy, but could live it	20	21
I would happily accept it	24	21
<i>Don't know</i>	2	3
<i>Missing</i>	0	1

Total (n)	50	50
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9. In general, thinking about the issues relating to having a referendum and the choice between Northern Ireland staying in the UK and a United Ireland, how informed do you think are about the issues right now?

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
Very well informed	0	7
Fairly well informed	19	27
Not very well informed	25	11
Not at all informed	5	2
<i>Don't know</i>	1	2
<i>Missing</i>	0	1
Total (n)	50	50

Politics and democracy in Ireland

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements:

	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree / disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Missing</i>	Total (n)
a. Politicians in the Dáil must be guided by the opinion of the people.								
<i>PRE-</i>	0	4	4	25	17	0	0	50
<i>POST-</i>	0	0	5	18	26	0	1	50
b. Politicians talk too much and take too little action.								
<i>PRE-</i>	2	2	7	30	9	0	0	50
<i>POST-</i>	0	5	8	22	12	2	1	50
c. I would rather be represented by an ordinary citizen than by a professional politician.								
<i>PRE-</i>	7	12	12	16	2	1	0	50
<i>POST-</i>	5	12	12	14	4	2	1	50

11. On a scale of 0-10, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Ireland in general?

	Very dissatisfied											Very satisfied	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Missing</i>	Total (n)
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10				
<i>PRE-</i>	1	0	3	2	5	6	7	10	9	3	3	1	0	50	
<i>POST-</i>	0	1	1	2	4	5	4	21	5	1	5	0	1	50	

12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements:

	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree / disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	Don't know	Missing	Total (n)
a. Co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland should be strongly encouraged and promoted								
<i>PRE-</i>	1	0	0	10	39	0	0	50
<i>POST-</i>	0	0	1	4	43	1	1	50
b. Ireland should start detailed preparation for a possible referendum on Irish unity which may be held by 2030								
<i>PRE-</i>	3	1	2	17	25	2	0	50
<i>POST-</i>	1	0	1	16	28	2	2	50
c. Encouraging reconciliation in Northern Ireland should be a top priority for the Irish government								
<i>PRE-</i>	3	5	9	16	16	1	0	50
<i>POST-</i>	1	1	6	21	18	1	2	50

13. Have you heard about the “shared island unit” recently established by the Taoiseach?

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
Yes	10	13
No	40	35
<i>Don't know</i>	0	0
<i>Missing</i>	0	2
Total (n)	50	50

14. Imagine that there will be a referendum and the choice is between ‘Northern Ireland stays in the UK’ and a ‘United Ireland’.

What do you think voters should be told before the referendum? Please choose one option...

Option 1: Before the referendum, voters should be told exactly what type of united Ireland would be implemented if there is a majority vote for a united Ireland

Option 2: Before the referendum, voters should be told that if there is a majority vote in favour of a united Ireland there will be a Constitutional Convention after the referendum which will seek to agree what type of united Ireland to implement. The Constitutional Convention would be made up of politicians from all across the island, from all the parties in the North and the South.

<i>Response options</i>	<i>PRE-</i>	<i>POST-</i>
Option 1 (Before)	28	42
Option 2 (After)	18	3
<i>Don't know</i>	4	3
<i>Missing</i>	0	2
Total (n)	50	50

15. Imagine that there will be a referendum and the choice is between 'Northern Ireland stays in the UK' and a 'United Ireland'.

Also imagine that before the referendum happens, Scotland has a referendum and votes to leave the UK and become an independent country.

Do you think that Scotland becoming independent would make you more in favour of a united Ireland or less in favour of a united Ireland?

Response options	PRE-	POST-
A lot more in favour of a united Ireland	11	14
A little more in favour of a united Ireland	12	9
It would not change my view either way	23	20
A little more opposed to a united Ireland	0	0
A lot more opposed to a united Ireland	1	1
<i>Don't know</i>	3	4
<i>Missing</i>	0	2
Total (n)	50	50

The Table Discussions

In this last section, we would like to hear your thoughts on the discussions you had with the other participants (the discussions in the small group).

16. Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Totally disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree / disagree	Tend to agree	Totally agree	Don't know	Missing	Total (n)
a. I had ample opportunity to express my opinion during the discussions. POST-	0	1	1	5	41	0	2	50
b. The opinions of the other participants did not differ so much from my own opinions. POST-	0	9	6	21	12	0	2	50
c. In general, everyone showed respect for the others in the discussion. POST-	0	0	0	1	47	0	2	50
d. I have changed my mind as a result of the discussions. POST-	12	12	13	11	0	0	2	50

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