

LOYALIST ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Protocol, Policing, and
Politics

AUGUST 2021

Let's Talk Loyalism



**LET'S TALK
LOYALISM**

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

**Kellie-Anne Shaw
Moore Holmes
Stacey Graham**

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“This society believed it was looking towards a new future, yet we consistently find ourselves being dragged backwards.”

David Irvine

**Let's Talk Loyalism
Communicating Loyalism, Enabling Change**

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Foreword

By Stacey Graham

When people don't listen carefully to others, they can easily make assumptions — too often the wrong assumptions — about what a community stands for, what is important to them, what their needs are and how we best meet those needs.

Think about a time you felt misheard and misunderstood by somebody. Did you defend yourself? Correct them? Or even disengage? Regardless of your response, you likely didn't feel comfortable or happy with the outcome.

It can be frustrating to feel like you're being ignored, or that your opinion is being disregarded, and you begin to wonder if people really care or are interested in what you're saying.

The feeling that no one is listening can be widely felt amongst Loyalist working class communities. Time and time again, our voices aren't being heard by politicians and policy makers, and even when we are being 'listened' to, it is often through a filter; a filter of the listeners own needs or views which can often distort what they are hearing. This has led to increased feelings of alienation and marginalisation.

The alienation and marginalisation of Loyalists has been compounded by the absence of any 'peace dividend' and consequently, as a new political and societal order is established, Loyalist communities are effectively left behind.

In recent months, I have seen a hardening of attitudes. I don't know how many times I've heard;

"I'll not be voting; they don't represent me."

"Nobody cares about us; no one is listening."

"Look at the state of our areas; we are being left to rot."

Loyalists are a people who are proud of our community, our identity, and our culture. What will it take for those in power to understand the realities of what is happening on the ground? One would wonder, are they simply out of touch or just blatantly ignorant?

Now, think how it feels to be heard and understood — you can relax; you want to open up; you feel more trusting.

If the issues we are facing are to be addressed successfully and to create an environment of trust and understanding; we need to listen to the voices of the people themselves. We need to regard people as active agents with their own concerns which should be respected and listened to. Decision makers must be capable of acting when the demands of our community changes especially when the assumptions about what is needed does not reflect the real needs.

I recognise effective engagement and communication is a reciprocal process. It is also up to us as a community to make sure we communicate correctly. By using surveys and drawing on data about what we really think, really want, and really care about; we can give our community an authentic voice and begin a process of change.

In all that we do, Let's Talk Loyalism strives to initiate positive change within the Loyalist community. We are an advocacy group comprised of genuine people that want to communicate the collective concerns of our community.

Together we must challenge the status quo and take action to tackle these issues once and for all. Those in power can no longer cover their ears and look the other way.

About Let's Talk Loyalism

Who we are?

Let's Talk Loyalism is a volunteer-based advocacy group which aims to articulate Loyalist perspectives and initiate positive change for the Loyalist community.

The initiative was launched in February 2021 by a small number of young Loyalists. Founding members believe the Loyalist community is often “misrepresented and misunderstood,”¹ therefore Let's Talk Loyalism aspires to be a vehicle through which Loyalists can have their voice heard.

Let's Talk Loyalism aims to:

- i. Educate, empower, and equip the next generation of Loyalists by articulating Loyalist perspectives in a rational and influential way.
- ii. Promote the advantages of Northern Ireland being and remaining an integral part of the United Kingdom.
- iii. Investigate and expose issues of injustice, inequality and disadvantage impacting on Unionist and Loyalist communities.
- iv. Research, recommend, and lobby for policy change which positively impacts the Loyalist community and Northern Ireland.
- v. Implement valuable initiatives focused on addressing needs within the Loyalist community.
- vi. Build relationships and engage with communities, community groups, media, political parties and other bodies in Northern Ireland and the wider United Kingdom.
- vii. Challenge outdated and inaccurate stereotypes of the Loyalist community. We will highlight talent, positive work and success within Loyalist communities.

Let's Talk Loyalism is divided into four action areas:

- **Perspectives** (*Let's Talk*)
A soapbox for Loyalism consisting of a variety of contributors articulating their perspectives on current affairs.
- **Broadcasts and Events** (*Let's Broadcast*)
Videos, interviews, podcasts, panel discussions and other organised events.
- **Publications** (*Let's Research*)
Reports, qualitative and quantitative research, surveys, letters, and statements.

¹ <https://letstalkloyalism.co.uk/welcome-to-lets-talk-loyalism>

- **Initiatives** (*Let's Initiate*)

Initiatives and projects which positively impact the Loyalist community.

Since Let's Talk Loyalism launched publicly in May of this year, we have published nine articles from various contributors such as Julie-Anne Corr-Johnston, Jamie Bryson and Glenn Millar.

We have also produced video interviews of Stacey Graham and created a short interview piece with residents in Tiger's Bay during the Tiger's Bay bonfire stand-off this year.

We have hosted online panel discussions on the Northern Ireland Protocol with high profile guests including Baroness Kate Hoey, TUV leader Jim Allister, UUP leader Doug Beattie and DUP MP Sammy Wilson.

The "Loyalist Engagement Survey: Protocol, Policing, and Politics" is the first in a series of online surveys that Let's Talk Loyalism intend to publish. Upcoming surveys will aim to ascertain Loyalist perspectives on housing, education, employment, culture and legacy in Northern Ireland.

You can follow Let's Talk Loyalism and read about the work we do on our website and social media channels.

Website: <https://letstalkloyalism.co.uk/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/talkloyalism?lang=en>

Facebook: https://en-gb.facebook.com/Lets-Talk-Loyalism-107914618004741/?ref=page_internal

Executive Summary

What are the key findings?

Let's Talk Loyalism's "Loyalist Engagement Survey: Protocol, Policing and Politics" was created to ascertain Loyalist perspectives pertaining to the Northern Ireland Protocol, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Loyalist voting intentions and to gauge support for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

The survey contained 19 questions and was completed by 1020 respondents.² Questions were subdivided into four main categories; About you; Protocol; Policing; and Politics. The survey was hosted by SurveyMonkey and all respondents completed the survey online.

The survey was circulated through social media platforms and directed toward individuals and groups within the Loyalist community. The survey was shared with several cultural and social organisations, charities, and sports clubs to ensure the breadth of the Loyalist community had an opportunity for input.

The survey is an authentic representation of Loyalist perspectives. However, because the survey is not weighted, the respondents' profile shows some imbalances. Most respondents were middle-aged, male and either from County Antrim, County Armagh or County Down.

More input from young people aged 18-24, females, and respondents living in County Fermanagh, County Tyrone and County Londonderry would produce more balanced and representative results.

Survey results also overrepresented Loyalist voters. Only 2.55% of respondents "Did not vote" at the last Northern Ireland Assembly Election. Voter/non-voter imbalance is to be expected however, for those unlikely to vote at an election, are equally unlikely to participate in an online survey.

A full comprehensive listing of survey results can be found in the "Summary Results with Key Findings" section on Page 11. A condensed list, as part of the Executive Summary, is provided below. The summary of results below has been selected by the authors and are referred to as "Key Findings."

² On three questions between 1-6 respondents did not answer. All respondent data is provided below.

Key Findings

Loyalist perspectives on the Northern Ireland Protocol

- Almost all Loyalists (98.3%) view the Northern Ireland Protocol as a threat to Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom.
- 9 out of 10 Loyalists (91%) want the Northern Ireland Protocol abolished. Only 7.7% would prefer it was amended to "make it tolerable."
- The Northern Ireland Protocol will have "a lot of influence" on how 3 out of 4 Loyalists (74.2%) vote.
- Most Loyalists (91.5%) think the Northern Ireland Protocol risks a return to violence in Northern Ireland. 8.54% think it does not.
- 8 out of 10 Loyalists (80.8%) think political Unionism should withdraw from "all North/South ministerial meetings due to the Irish Government playing an integral role in creating the Northern Ireland Protocol."
- More Loyalists support attending all North/South ministerial meetings (9.8%) than the current DUP approach of only not attending North/South meetings which pertain to the Northern Ireland Protocol. (9.4%)
- 89.5% of Loyalists support collapsing the Northern Ireland Assembly in protest against the Northern Ireland Protocol.
- Loyalists consider the British Government primarily, but not exclusively, responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol. The European Union are considered the second most responsible, the Irish Government third, the DUP fourth, and people who voted Leave in the 2016 Referendum fifth.
- When asked to rank in order of responsibility, over 70% of Loyalists consider the Irish Government within the top three most responsible for the Protocol (14.9% considered IG 1st most responsible, 27.6% considered IG 2nd most responsible, 28.1% considered IG 3rd most responsible).
- 11.8% of Loyalists think the DUP do not share any responsibility for the Northern Ireland Protocol.
- Over half (55.8%) of Loyalists would support and attend a protest in the Republic of Ireland over the Northern Ireland Protocol. 32.8% would support it but not attend, meanwhile 11.4% would not support it at all.

Loyalist perspectives on Policing in Northern Ireland

- 93.1% of Loyalists believe the PSNI discriminates or treats the Loyalist community unfairly.
- 94.8% of Loyalists believe the Republican community are given "preferential treatment" by the PSNI.
- 92.3% of Loyalists said the PSNI handling of Bobby Storey's funeral has decreased their confidence in the PSNI.
- 9 out of 10 (91.7%) Loyalists think the Chief Constable of the PSNI should resign.

Loyalist perspectives on Northern Ireland Politics

- If there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow, the TUV would be most popular party receiving 50% of Loyalist first preference votes. The DUP would be the second most popular party receiving 12.7% Loyalist first preference votes. The UUP would not far behind in third receiving 11.9% Loyalist first preference votes. The PUP would be the fourth most popular party receiving 7.2% of Loyalist first preference votes. 10.7% of Loyalist would vote for an independent candidate as their first preference.
- 3 out of 4 (75.9%) Loyalists voted DUP as their first preference at the last Northern Ireland Assembly Election. Only 12.7% of Loyalists say they would vote DUP as their first preference if there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow. This represents a 63.2 percentage point decrease in first preference votes for the DUP from Loyalists.
- If there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow, more Loyalists would vote UUP (+3.5pp) and PUP (+3.9pp) as their first preference than at the previous election.
- Half of Loyalists (50%) would vote TUV as their first preference if there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow. That represents a 42.7 percentage point increase from the last Northern Ireland Assembly Election.
- 1 in 10 Loyalists would vote for an independent Unionist/Loyalist candidate if there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow.
- A substantial majority of Loyalists (86.5%) are anti-agreement and would vote against the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement given the opportunity. 13.5% of Loyalists would vote for it.

Survey Results with Key Findings

What did the survey ask and how did respondents answer?

Survey results have been categorized into four sections: respondent profile, protocol, policing, and politics. The results of each section are summarised below:

Respondent Profile

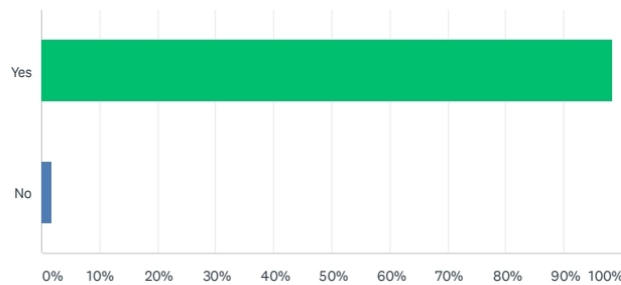
Who completed the survey?

What is your age?		
18-24	58	5.69%
25-34	178	17.25%
35-54	454	44.51%
55+	332	32.55%
	Total: 1020	
What is your gender?		
Male	887	86.96%
Female	133	13.04%
	Total: 1020	
Where do you live?		
Antrim	621	60.88%
Armagh	127	12.45%
Down	178	17.45%
Fermanagh	10	0.98%
Londonderry	40	3.92%
Tyrone	44	4.31%
	Total: 1020	
Would you describe the area in which you live as rural or urban?		
Rural	314	30.78%
Urban	706	69.22%
	Total: 1020	

Protocol

Loyalist opinion on the Northern Ireland Protocol:

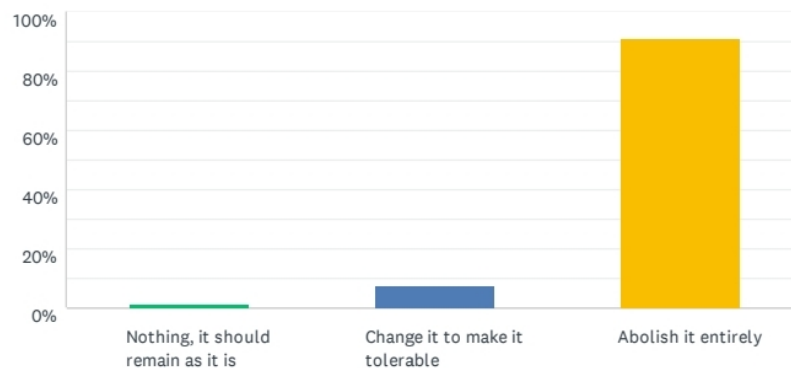
Q5 Does the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border threaten Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom?



Does the Northern Ireland Protocol threaten Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom?

Yes	98.33%	1,003
No	1.67%	17
		Total: 1020

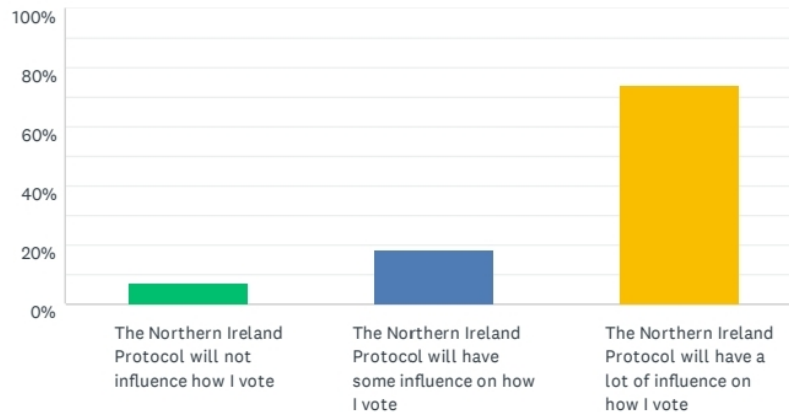
Q12 What would you like to see happen to the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border?



What would you like to see happen to the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border?

Nothing, it should remain as it is	1.27%	13
Change it to make it tolerable	7.65%	78
Abolish it entirely	91.08%	929
		Total: 1020

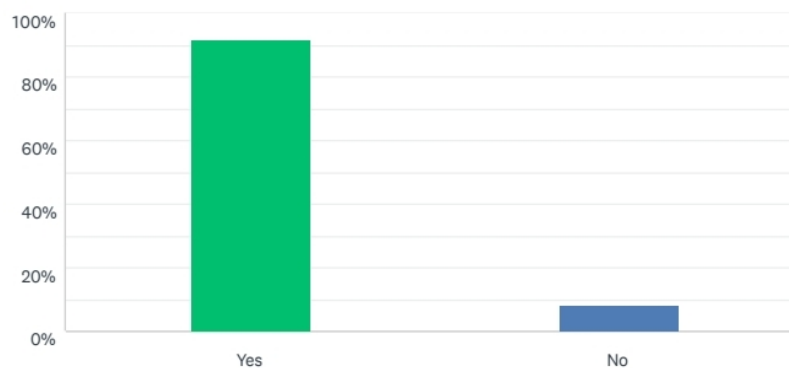
Q10 How much will the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border influence who you vote for in the next Assembly/Stormont election?



How much will the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border influence who you vote for in the next Assembly/Stormont election?

The Northern Ireland Protocol will not influence how I vote	7.25%	74
The Northern Ireland Protocol will have some influence on how I vote	18.53%	189
The Northern Ireland Protocol will have a lot of influence on how I vote	74.22%	757
		Total: 1020

Q7 Do you think the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border risks a return to violence in Northern Ireland?



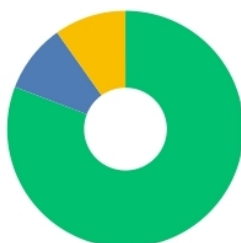
Do you think the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border risks a return to violence in Northern Ireland?

Yes	91.46%	932
No	8.54%	87
		Total: 1019

- Almost all Loyalists (98.3%) view the Northern Ireland Protocol as a threat to Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom.
- 9 out of 10 Loyalists (91%) want the Northern Ireland Protocol abolished. Only 7.7% would prefer it was amended to "make it tolerable."
- The Northern Ireland Protocol will have "a lot of influence" on how 3 out of 4 Loyalists (74.2%) vote.
- Most Loyalists (91.5%) think the Northern Ireland Protocol risks a return to violence in Northern Ireland. 8.54% think it does not.

What Loyalists believe Unionist leaders should do about the Northern Ireland Protocol:

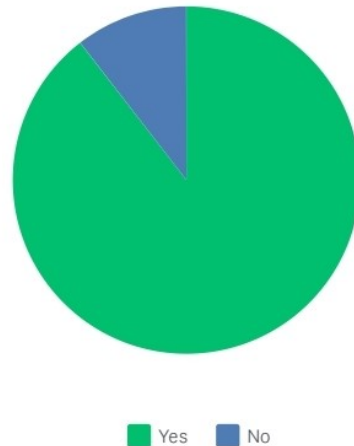
Q9 Should Unionism continue to participate in North/South ministerial meetings?



- Unionism should withdraw from all North/South ministerial meetings due to the Irish G...
- Unionism should attend all North/South ministerial meetings except those that relate ...
- Unionism should attend all North/South ministerial meetings

Should Unionism continue to participate in North/South ministerial meetings?		
Unionism should withdraw from all North/South ministerial meetings due to the Irish Government playing an integral role in creating the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border	80.78%	824
Unionism should attend all North/South ministerial meetings except those that relate to the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border	9.41%	96
Unionism should attend all North/South ministerial meetings	9.80%	100
		Total: 1020

Q11 Would you support collapsing the Northern Ireland/Stormont Assembly in protest against the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border?

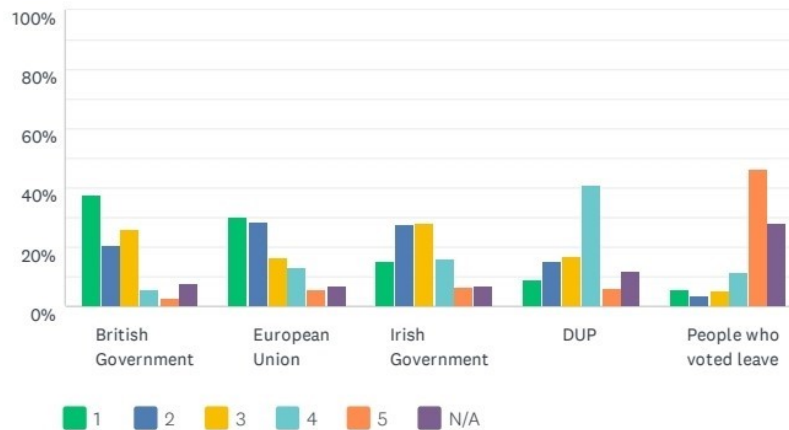


Would you support collapsing the Northern Ireland/Stormont Assembly in protest against the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border?		
Yes	89.51%	913
No	10.49%	107
		Total: 1020

- 8 out of 10 Loyalists (80.8%) think political Unionism should withdraw from “all North/South ministerial meetings due to the Irish Government playing an integral role in creating the Northern Ireland Protocol.”
- More Loyalists support attending all North/South ministerial meetings (9.8%) than the current DUP approach of only not attending North/South meetings which pertain to the Northern Ireland Protocol. (9.4%)
- 89.5% of Loyalists support collapsing the Northern Ireland Assembly in protest against the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Who Loyalists consider most responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol:

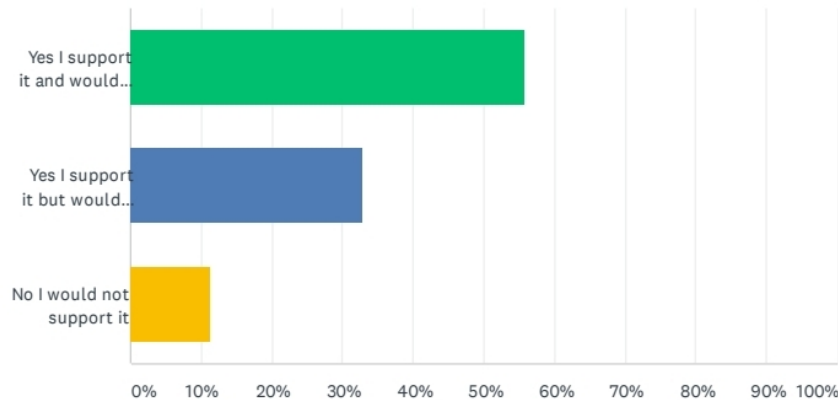
Q6 Who do you consider most responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border? Rank with 1- being the most responsible and 5- being the least responsible. If you consider any of the below answers not responsible, please select N/A.



Who do you consider most responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol/Irish Sea Border? Rank with 1- being the most responsible and 5- being the least responsible. If you consider any of the below answers not responsible, please select N/A.

	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
British Government	37.55% 383	20.59% 210	26.27% 268	5.49% 56	2.65% 27	7.45% 76
European Union	30.00% 306	28.24% 288	16.27% 166	12.94% 132	5.39% 55	7.16% 73
Irish Government	14.90% 152	27.75% 283	28.14% 287	16.18% 165	6.27% 64	6.75% 69
DUP	9.02% 92	14.80% 151	17.16% 175	41.08% 419	6.18% 63	11.76% 120
People who voted leave	5.69% 58	3.73% 38	4.80% 49	11.27% 115	46.47% 474	28.04% 286
Total: 1020						

**Q8 Would you support an anti-protocol protest in the Republic of Ireland?
If so would you attend?**



Would you support an anti-protocol protest in the Republic of Ireland? If so, would you attend?		
Yes I support it and would attend	55.78%	569
Yes I support it but would not attend	32.84%	335
No I would not support it	11.37%	116
		Total: 1019

- Loyalists consider the British Government primarily, but not exclusively, responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol. The European Union are considered the second most responsible, the Irish Government third, the DUP fourth, and people who voted Leave in the 2016 Referendum fifth.
- When asked to rank in order of responsibility, over 70% of Loyalists consider the Irish Government within the top three most responsible for the Protocol (14.9% considered IG 1st most responsible, 27.6% considered IG 2nd most responsible, 28.1% considered IG 3rd most responsible).
- 11.76% of Loyalists think the DUP do not share any responsibility for the Northern Ireland Protocol.
- Over half (55.8%) of Loyalists would support and attend a protest in the Republic of Ireland over the Northern Ireland Protocol. 32.8% would support it but not attend, meanwhile 11.4% would not support it at all.

Policing

Treatment of both the Loyalist and Republican community:

Q13 Is the Loyalist community discriminated against and treated unfairly by the PSNI?



Is the Loyalist community discriminated against and treated unfairly by the PSNI?		
Yes	93.14%	950
No	6.86%	70
		Total: 1020

Q14 Is the Republican community given preferential treatment by the PSNI?



Is the Republican community given preferential treatment by the PSNI?		
Yes	94.80%	967
No	5.20%	53
		Total: 1020

- 93.1% of Loyalists believe the PSNI discriminates or treats the Loyalist community unfairly.
- 94.8% of Loyalists believe the Republican community are given “preferential treatment” by the PSNI.

Bobby Storey funeral and PSNI confidence:

Q15 Has the PSNI handling of the Bobby Storey funeral affected your level of confidence in the PSNI?



Has the PSNI handling of the Bobby Storey funeral affected your level of confidence in the PSNI?		
It has had no effect in my level of confidence in the PSNI	4.02%	41
It has increased my level of confidence in the PSNI	3.73%	38
It has decreased my level of confidence in the PSNI	92.25%	941
		Total: 1020

Q16 Do you think the Chief Constable of the PSNI should resign?



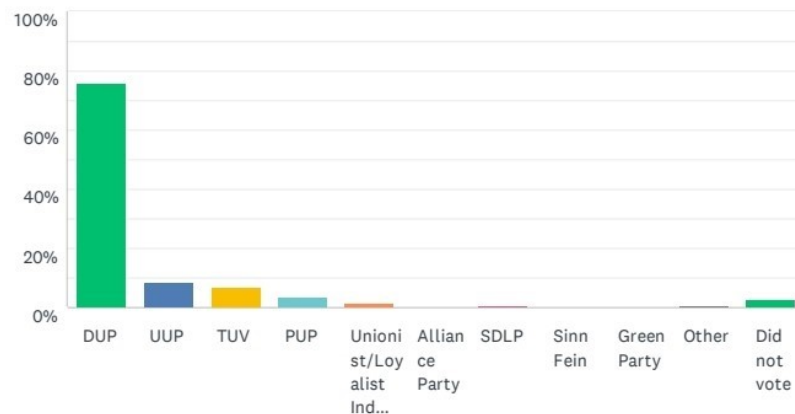
Do you think the Chief Constable of the PSNI should resign?		
Yes	91.67%	935
No	8.33%	85
		Total: 1020

- 92.3% of Loyalists said the PSNI handling of Bobby Storey’s funeral has decreased their confidence in the PSNI.
- 9 out of 10 (91.7%) Loyalists think the Chief Constable of the PSNI should resign.

Politics

Voting history and voting intention:

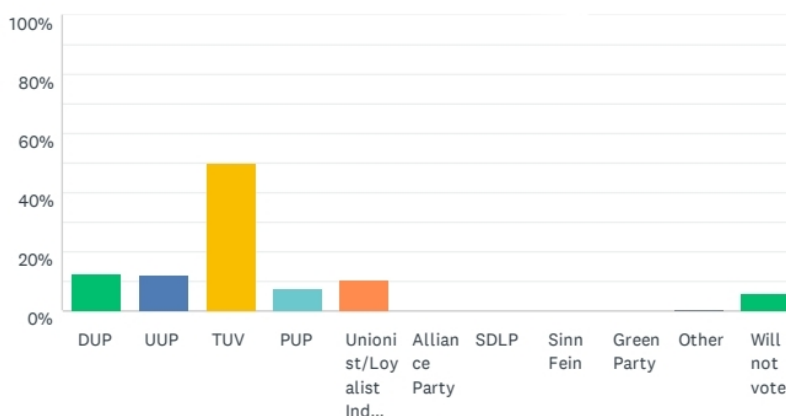
Q17 In the last Northern Ireland Assembly/Stormont election, which political party/candidate received your first preference vote? (If you cannot remember who you voted for please click here for the list of candidates in your constituency)



In the last Northern Ireland Assembly/Stormont election, which political party/candidate received your first preference vote? (If you cannot remember who you voted for please click here for the list of candidates in your constituency)

DUP	75.98%	775
UUP	8.43%	86
TUV	7.25%	74
PUP	3.33%	34
Unionist/Loyalist Independent	1.37%	14
Alliance Party	0.10%	1
SDLP	0.29%	3
Sinn Féin	0.00%	0
Green Party	0.10%	1
Other	0.59%	6
Did not vote	2.55%	26
		Total: 1020

Q18 If there was a Northern Ireland Assembly/Stormont election tomorrow, which political party/candidate would you give your first preference vote to?



If there was a Northern Ireland Assembly/Stormont election tomorrow, which political party/candidate would you give your first preference vote to?

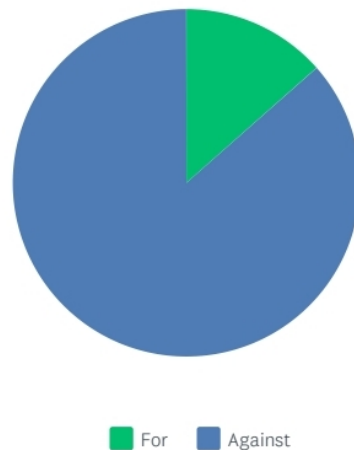
DUP	12.71%	129
UUP	11.92%	121
TUV	50.05%	508
PUP	7.19%	73
Unionist/Loyalist Independent	10.74%	109
Alliance Party	0.20%	2
SDLP	0.20%	2
Sinn Fein	0.00%	0
Green Party	0.20%	2
Other	0.69%	7
Will not vote	6.11%	62
		Total: 1015

- If there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow, the TUV would be most popular party receiving 50% of Loyalist first preference votes. The DUP would be the second most popular party receiving 12.7% Loyalist first preference votes. The UUP would not be far behind in third receiving 11.9% Loyalist first preference votes. The PUP would be the fourth most popular party receiving 7.2% of Loyalist first preference votes. 10.7% of Loyalist would vote for an independent candidate.
- 3 out of 4 (75.9%) Loyalists voted DUP as their first preference at the last Northern Ireland Assembly Election. Only 12.7% of Loyalists say they would vote DUP as their first preference if there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow. This represents a 63.2 percentage point decrease in first preference votes for the DUP from Loyalists.
- If there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow, more Loyalists would vote UUP (+3.5pp) and PUP (+3.9pp) as first preferences than at the previous election.

- Half of Loyalists (50%) would vote TUV as their first preference if there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow. That represents a 42.7 percentage point increase from the last Northern Ireland Assembly Election.
- 1 in 10 Loyalists would vote for an independent Unionist/Loyalist candidate if there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow.

Loyalist support for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement:

Q19 If there was a vote on the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement today would you vote for or against it?



If there was a vote on the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement today would you vote for or against it?		
For	13.51%	137
Against	86.49%	877
		Total: 1014

- A substantial majority of Loyalists (86.5%) are anti-agreement and would vote against the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement given the opportunity. 13.5% of Loyalists would vote for it.

Method

How did we do it?

This study was carried out by Let's Talk Loyalism with the objective of assessing opinion from the Loyalist community on the Northern Ireland Protocol, Policing and Politics.

Activists held a meeting and concluded that the most suitable way to gauge this opinion and conduct research was by designing and distributing a short online questionnaire. It was agreed that an online survey would:

- I. Gather a large amount of information in a shorter period of time compared to other methods of primary data collection unlike observation as a research method.
- II. Allow members of the sample group to remain anonymous unlike for instance interviews or focus groups.
- III. The results allow for straightforward analysis given the large amount of quantitative data gathered.

When considering the survey values the creators established a core set of values to guide best practice. Members were consistently guided by and adhered to the following principles:

- I. Confidentiality

Survey administrators have no knowledge of how any individual respondent answered the questionnaire as is established practice for this type of research.

- II. Anonymity

No personal or identifiable information was collected from survey answers. The questionnaire did contain an 'About You' section, however, these were generic representative questions such as age, gender, location, and geographical region. This data enabled us to break statistics down into variables based on answers selected. Participants did not have the opportunity to omit these questions.

- III. Loyalist Participants

The survey was intended to be completed by individuals from Northern Ireland who identify as being Loyalist. This is an important annotation as the questions are designed to gauge perspectives from only the Loyalist community.

IV. Authenticity

The reason behind this survey was to evaluate how Loyalists consider the aforementioned issues in Northern Ireland. By verifying or disproving notions, we believed we could authentically identify how this community thinks and feels regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol, Policing and Politics. For this reason, the questions were devised to be non-presumptuous.

To reach our target audience as outlined above we made the following decisions:

- Research was hosted by Survey Monkey using an online questionnaire and was active on 17th August 2021 opening at 1pm and closing at 7.30pm.
- Invitations containing the online survey link were sent out by Let's Talk Loyalism members. Invitations were sent to individuals within the community, and cultural, social, historical and community groups to be completed by individuals within said groups. These invitations were sent out by Facebook, SMS and WhatsApp. The intention behind not sharing the survey publicly was to avoid having the survey exposed outside of the target audience for the reasons already explained above.
- The survey contained 4 sections titled: About You, Northern Ireland Protocol / Irish Sea Border, Policing and Politics. It included 19 questions and took approximately 3 minutes to complete.
- The questionnaire contained various formats of questions: yes/no, multiple choice and ranking.
- A total of 1020 surveys were completed and all surveys have been used for the results.

Survey Results and Commentary

What did the survey say?

Let's Talk Loyalism is proud and excited to publish the findings of our first online survey called 'Loyalist Engagement Survey: Protocol, Policing, Politics.'

The objective of the survey was to ascertain Loyalist perspectives pertaining to the Northern Ireland Protocol, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Loyalist voting intentions and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

The survey contained 19 questions and was made using SurveyMonkey. Circulation began online on Tuesday 17th August 2021 at 2pm. Within hours, to the surprise of Let's Talk Loyalism members, the survey account reached maximum capacity for respondents and therefore had to officially close on the same evening.

A total of 1020 respondents completed the survey. It was exclusively circulated through social media platforms WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter, and deliberately targeted individuals and organisations within the Loyalist community, such as cultural and community groups, charities and sports clubs.

Respondent Profile

Loyalist respondents to the survey were mostly middle-aged. Just under half (44.5%) were aged between 34-54, whereas a further 32.6% were over 55. In total, over three quarters of respondents (77%) were over 34 years old.

A substantial number of respondents were young adults aged 24-34 (17.3%), however under 6% were aged 18-24. That means only 58 from 1020 respondents born after the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. This survey would be more representative if it had greater input from young people in Loyalist communities.

Another identity category in need of greater representation in this survey is female. Of the 1020 respondents 133 of them were female (13%) and 887 were male (87%). This shows an imbalance between male and female engagement.

Although this discrepancy is partly explained by a predominantly male membership of the cultural organisations the survey was distributed to, future research efforts will prioritise achieving greater balance in respect of gender and consider a weighted approach.³

Three out of five respondents were from County Antrim (60.9%), suggesting a majority of respondents are likely based in Belfast. Respondents from County Down (17.5%) and County Armagh (12.45%) made up most of the remaining respondents. 94 from 1020 respondents derived from County Fermanagh (1%), County Tyrone (4.3%) and County Londonderry (3.9%).

The survey has considerable participation from Loyalists who live in both rural and urban areas. This was deliberately asked as to conduct comparative analysis between Loyalists living in the countryside alongside responses from those living in a city. 69.2% of respondents classed themselves as living in an urban area whereas the remaining 31.8% said they were from a rural area.

The majority of Loyalists who completed this survey are voters. 97.4% of respondents stated they voted at the last Northern Ireland Assembly Election.

On average around 40% of the electorate often do not turn out to vote, and evidence suggests that the number is significantly higher within Unionist and Loyalist communities.⁴

Although this denotes an underrepresentation of Loyalist non-voters, it is somewhat understandable that those who are not willing to come out to vote in elections are equally less likely to take part in an online survey.

Let's Talk Loyalism will endeavor to achieve a more balanced representation right across the Loyalist community in future projects.

In the development and distribution of additional surveys, and in any other consultative exercises which ascertain Loyalist perspectives on critical issues, Let's Talk Loyalism will specifically target females, young people, and non-voters respectively.

³ While monitoring data from the survey when it was active, Let's Talk Loyalism members became aware of a widening gender imbalance in respondents. Members resolved to directly target female Loyalist organisations to achieve greater input. Unfortunately, maximum capacity for respondents had been reached within a number of hours of the survey being launched which meant efforts to redress this imbalance could not be executed to full effect.

⁴ Pg3, <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/research/heroimages/The-University-of-Liverpool-NI-General-Election-Survey-2019-March-20.pdf>

Protocol

The Protocol section of the survey contained eight questions. The questions can be divided into three sub-categories. Questions about Loyalist opinion of the Northern Ireland Protocol; what Loyalists believe Unionist leaders should do about the Northern Ireland Protocol; and who Loyalists consider most responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Loyalist opinion of the Northern Ireland Protocol

The most uniform response to any of the survey questions pertained to the Protocol threatening Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom.

It will come as no surprise that against the backdrop of civil unrest, sporadic grassroots protests, and major political criticism, a comprehensive 98.3% of Loyalists believe the Northern Ireland Protocol threatens Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom.

Loyalists are demonstrably looking at the Northern Ireland Protocol through a constitutional lens and determine it to pose a threat to Northern Ireland's constitutional future.

When asked what one would like to see happen to the Northern Ireland Protocol 91% of Loyalists want to "abolish it entirely," whereas under 8% think it should be changed "to make it tolerable."

This confirms the popular "Protocol must go" messaging often heard from members of the Loyalist community and reiterated by Unionist politicians.⁵

While a small section of the sample would prefer to see amendments to the Northern Ireland Protocol, the overwhelmingly dominant sentiment currently within the Loyalist community is one which demands its total abolition.

The only path currently available to permanently disapply parts of the Northern Ireland Protocol is found in Article 18 "Democratic Consent" of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Article 18 provides the Northern Ireland Assembly with "an opportunity for democratic consent in Northern Ireland for the continued application of Articles 5-10 of the Northern Ireland Protocol."⁶ The

⁵ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/dup-delegation-tells-lord-frost-that-ni-protocol-must-go-40468365.html>

⁶ Article 18, paragraph 1, Revised Northern Ireland Protocol. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840230/Revised_Protocol_to_the_Withdrawal_Agreement.pdf

first democratic exercise on the Northern Ireland Protocol by Members of the Legislative Assembly will take place in 2024.

This means, if all goes to schedule, those elected at the next Northern Ireland Assembly election will vote on the continued application of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Within this context, as one would perhaps expect, nearly 3 out of 4 (74.2%) Loyalists stated the “Northern Ireland Protocol will have a lot of influence on how I vote” at the next Stormont election.⁷

This is not to say the Northern Ireland Protocol would not have had an influence in the absence of a vote on the Northern Ireland Protocol, but it is likely there is significant corroboration.

18.5% said the Northern Ireland Protocol would have “some influence,” while 7.3% said it would have “no influence.”

According to these results, one can state with reasonable confidence that the Northern Ireland Protocol will play an instrumental role in Loyalist voters’ decision-making at the next Northern Ireland Assembly election.

What Loyalists believe Unionists leaders should do about the Northern Ireland Protocol

Respondents were also asked about what action political Unionism should take in response to the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Respective questions evaluated Loyalist opinion on the prospect of collapsing the Northern Ireland Assembly and political Unionism’s continued participation in North-South Ministerial Meetings.

Both questions returned substantial majorities in favour of political Unionism collapsing the Northern Ireland Assembly “in protest against the Northern Ireland Protocol” (89.5%) and withdrawing from North-South Ministerial Meetings “due to the Irish Government playing an integral role in creating the Northern Ireland Protocol.” (80.7%)

Support for the DUP’s current stance of limited non-attendance to North-South Ministerial Meetings which relate to the Northern Ireland Protocol was the least popular approach (9.4%), fractionally behind Unionism continuing to “attend all meetings” (9.8%).

⁷ This is not to say the Northern Ireland Protocol would not have had an influence on Loyalist voting, in the absence of a Northern Ireland Assembly vote on the Northern Ireland Protocol, but it is likely there is significant corroboration.

Who Loyalists consider most responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol

Most Loyalist respondents, as expected, consider the British Government primarily, but not exclusively, responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol.

When asked to rank in order of responsibility who is most responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol, nearly 40% of respondents put the British Government first. The most common ranking thereafter placed the European Union second most responsible, the Irish Government third most responsible, the DUP fourth most responsible and “people who voted Leave” in the 2016 Referendum fifth most responsible.

Since the publication of the Revised Northern Ireland Protocol in October 2019 Loyalists have been intensely critical of the Prime Minister for negotiating it and the British Government for supporting it.⁸

Loyalists renamed the Withdrawal Act, of which the Northern Ireland Protocol is a part of, “The Betrayal Act,”⁹ as many protested at how the Prime Minister, who promised Unionists and Loyalists alike that an Irish Sea Border would not happen over his dead body had now in fact agreed to one.¹⁰

A “Non-Applicable” option to exclude any of the choices was provided to allow respondents the opportunity to absolve each option of responsibility if they wished to do so.

28% selected non-applicable for “people who voted Leave” whereas 11.7% exercised the same option for the DUP. The reverse reading of this statistic suggests nearly 9 out of 10 Loyalists believe the DUP share a portion of responsibility for the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Most of the blame however is shared by the British Government, the European Union, and the Irish Government. Over 70% of respondents placed the Irish Government within the top three most responsible for the Protocol (1st 14.9%, 2nd 27.6%, 3rd 28.1%).

Hostile attitudes toward the Irish Government is further demonstrated by Loyalist support and willingness to attend a protest in the Republic of Ireland because of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

⁸ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/loyalists-gather-at-con-club-to-discuss-brexit-act-of-betrayal-38616918.html>

⁹ <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/17983902.loyalists-northern-ireland-will-not-tolerate-boris-johnsons-betrayal-act/>

¹⁰ <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2020-08-13/irish-sea-trade-border-over-my-dead-body-says-johnson>

Protests have been taking place in Northern Ireland regularly throughout the year and when asked if a protest was to take place south of the border over half of respondents (55.7%) said they would support and attend it. Just under a third would support a protest but not attend, meanwhile 11.4% did not support it.

This is consistent with some of the public commentary made by Loyalists such as Jamie Bryson and Jim Wilson.¹¹ Loyalist criticism of the Irish Government has led to considerations and conversations about taking protests to the Irish Republic, and according to the survey over half of Loyalists may be willing to attend.

One popular criticism of the Irish Government's involvement in creating the Northern Ireland Protocol, is former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's alleged use of the threat of Republican violence for political gain.¹²

Former Vauxhall MP Baroness Kate Hoey said, "the threat of IRA bombs was unfortunately used by Taoiseach Varadkar as political leverage which led to the Protocol."¹³

As a consequence of accepting Varadkar's concerns, the Northern Ireland Protocol was agreed in part to "avoid a hard border,"¹⁴ and by implication avoid the possibility of a return to violence.

However, the results of this survey show that the very agreement which sought to avoid a return to violence may in fact do more to encourage it.

A huge majority (91.5%) of Loyalist respondents answered "yes," when asked if the Northern Ireland Protocol risks a return to violence.

¹¹ <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/06/16/news/loyalists-entitled-to-hold-dublin-protest-2356844/>

¹² <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/06/30/news/claim-that-former-taoiseach-leo-varadkar-used-threat-of-violence-to-influence-eu-leader-angrily-dismissed-2372320/>

¹³ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1429747/brexit-news-leo-varadkar-kate-hoey-northern-ireland-protocol-IRA-terror-eu-trade-update>

¹⁴ Article 1 *Objectives*, paragraph 3, Revised Northern Ireland Protocol. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840230/Revised_Protocol_to_the_Withdrawal_Agreement.pdf

Policing

For the “Policing” section of the survey we asked Loyalist respondents four questions. The first two questions referred to PSNI treatment of both the Loyalist and Republican communities; and the second two questions concerned the PSNI’s handling of the Bobby Storey funeral and the tenableness of the current Chief Constable, Simon Byrne.

Allegations of two-tier policing resurfaced with extra vigor in the aftermath of the controversial Bobby Storey funeral in June 2020.¹⁵

At the peak of the Covid pandemic, Sinn Fein organised a publicly attended funeral for IRA anarchist Bobby Storey which commanded over 2000 Republicans onto the streets of Belfast.¹⁶

PSNI handling of the funeral came under intense scrutiny with allegations of bias toward Sinn Fein and members of the wider Republican community.

Loyalist respondents reflected this viewpoint when asked, “Is the Republican community given preferential treatment by the PSNI?” A conclusive 94.8% of Loyalists responded “Yes.”

Conversely, when asked, “Is the Loyalist community discriminated against and treated unfairly by the PSNI?” A marginally fewer, but equally decisive majority (93.8%) responded “Yes,” again.

Both questions illuminate the double-edged nature of two-tier policing allegations. For it is abundantly clear, according to the results in this survey, that Loyalist respondents do not just consider the Republican community to be treated preferentially by the PSNI, but simultaneously the Loyalist community feel they are treated unfairly by the same police force.

After the Public Prosecution Service cited police engagement with funeral organisers as among the reasons why prosecution would likely fail, all Unionist Party leaders demanded the Chief Constable, Simon Byrne’s resignation.¹⁷

They argued the PSNI’s handling of Bobby Storey’s funeral had created a “crisis of confidence in police service.”¹⁸

¹⁵ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/perception-of-two-tier-policing-over-bobby-storey-funeral-must-be-addressed-39852476.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/06/26/news/fall-out-from-bobby-storey-funeral-caused-a-political-furore-for-almost-a-year-2367839/>

¹⁷ <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/04/03/news/unionists-calls-for-chief-constable-to-stand-down-branded-kneejerk--2277014/>

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-northern-ireland-56584608>

It should be said that criticism of the PSNI approach to Storey's funeral was by no means exclusive to the Loyalist community. Yet given long-standing allegations of two-tier policing from Loyalists, it was confirmation to many what they had previously claimed.

Without prior analysis, it is hard to say how much confidence Loyalists had in the PSNI before the Bobby Storey funeral. Nonetheless, results showed that 92.3% of Loyalists now had decreased level of confidence in the PSNI following the Bobby Storey funeral debacle. Claims of a "crisis in confidence," according to this survey, are well founded.

More than a year has passed since the funeral took place and it has been nearly five months since a period of intense pressure from Unionist leaders publicly declaring Byrne's position as untenable. However, results show demand for the Chief Constable to step aside has not subsided. A widespread majority of Loyalist respondents think the Chief Constable should step aside (91.7%).

Despite independent reports proclaiming an "unbiased"¹⁹ PSNI approach to Bobby Storey's funeral, their management of the affair has critically damaged confidence in the force and many still consider the Chief Constable should resign.

¹⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-57134874>

Politics

Included in the politics section of the survey were three questions about voting history at the last Northern Ireland Assembly election, voting intention if there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow, and Loyalist support for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

Voting history and intention

Both questions regarding voting history and intention are best analysed alongside one another for comparative results and to demonstrate any change in voting preference. Respondents were first asked which political party received their first preference vote in the 2019 Northern Ireland Assembly Election. The second comparative question asked if there was a vote “tomorrow,” which party/candidate would receive your first preference vote? Increase or decrease in voting preference per political party reasonably indicates popularity within the Loyalist community and priority voting if there was a snap election.

Results to both questions are highlighted in the Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Answer choice	1 st Pref at last NI Assembly Election	1 st Pref if NI Assembly Election were tomorrow	% Change
DUP	75.9%	12.7%	- 63.2pp
UUP	8.4%	11.9%	+ 3.5pp
TUV	7.3%	50%	+ 42.7pp
PUP	3.3%	7.2%	+ 3.9pp
Independent Unionist/Loyalist	1.4%	10.7%	+ 9.3pp
Did/Will Not Vote	2.6%	6.1%	+ 3.5pp

An analysis of the six answers referred to in Figure 1. has been provided below. Each analysis discusses the results but also provides commentary on contextual challenges and insight into each answer.

Democratic Unionist Party

The task before new DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson is far from straightforward. Poor election results and fractious leadership challenges demonstrate an ongoing decline in public support and internal divisions within the party.

Electoral losses in both the 2019 Local and General Election signals a worrisome trend for the DUP.

Despite enjoying a 1 percentage point increase in first preference vote share, the party returned 8 fewer seats in the Local Election.

As for the Westminster election, a 5.4 percentage point vote share decrease in combination with electoral pacts between Pro-Remain candidates was enough for the DUP to lose two Members of Parliament and fail to make an expected seat gain in North Down.

Donaldson will be hopeful he can steer the DUP toward better electoral performances but voting intention data thus far suggest that things could go from bad to worse.

A LucidTalk poll in May of this year indicated support for the DUP had halved since the Westminster elections of 2019.²⁰ After the appointment of Poots as leader, surveys showed support dropped a further 3 percentage points. This survey's results tell a similar story.

If there was an NI Assembly Election tomorrow only 12.7% of Loyalist respondents would give their first preference vote to a DUP candidate. This is a substantial drop-off from the 3 out of 4 (75.9%) Loyalist respondents who voted for a DUP candidate as their first preference at the last NI Assembly Election.

In total, according to this survey, if there was an NI Assembly Election tomorrow, the DUP would suffer a massive 63.2 percentage point decrease in first preference votes from within the Loyalist community.

The DUP have certainly made a persuasive and effective case against the Northern Ireland Protocol. Which in turn perhaps makes it all the more confusing for those that agree with them, that they have not taken more drastic and robust action to stifle its implementation and success.

²⁰ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/belfast-telegraph-opinion-poll-northern-irelands-changing-political-landscape-as-support-for-parties-revealed-40453232.html>

The DUP have made numerous threats in response to the Northern Ireland Protocol. Party leader Jeffrey Donaldson MP, has threatened to cease implementing checks;²¹ to collapse the Northern Ireland Assembly;²² and walk away from all North-South institutions.²³ DUP MP Sammy Wilson even threatened to wage “guerilla warfare”²⁴ on the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Until any of these threats materialise however it is hard to envisage how the DUP can recover support within the Loyalist community.

Ulster Unionist Party

Former military man and new leader Doug Beattie MLA will be hopeful that the UUP can increase their vote share in any upcoming election.

A more progressive outlook together with fresh appointments, such as former PUP Councilor Julie-Anne Corr-Johnston²⁵, will engender optimism within UUP quarters that they can increase support from the Loyalist community. Feedback from this survey suggests that some of that optimism is justified.

If there was an NI Assembly Election tomorrow, the UUP would make slight but significant first preference gains within the Loyalist community, compared to their first preference vote share in the last NI Assembly Election.

8.4% of Loyalist respondents named a UUP candidate as a first preference on their ballot paper in 2017, whereas 11.9% would do so if there were an NI Assembly Election “tomorrow.” This shows a small increase in first preference vote share by 3.5 percentage points.

Overall, a 40% increase in first preference votes will be good news to UUP hopefuls. Yet when compared to TUV gains it could alternatively be viewed as underwhelming. With DUP votes seemingly up for grabs, and with so much ground for the UUP to recover within Loyalist communities, a 3.5 percentage point increase could otherwise indicate a missed opportunity.

The UUP have also been hugely critical of the Northern Ireland Protocol. In an opinion piece for the Irish Times in May, UUP leader Doug Beattie said, “as a unionist I cannot sit idly by and watch the Belfast

²¹ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/dup-ministers-may-refuse-to-conduct-ni-protocol-checks-if-changes-unacceptable-warns-donaldson-40682672.html>

²² <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/dups-donaldson-slammed-for-claims-he-will-risk-stormont-collapse-over-ni-protocol-protest-40421774.html>

²³ See previous.

²⁴ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/dup-declares-guerrilla-warfare-on-northern-ireland-protocol-1.4497441>

²⁵ <https://www.irishnews.com/news/politicalnews/2021/06/02/news/julie-anne-corr-johnston-joins-uup-2342279/>

Agreement be undermined with a border in the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.”²⁶

The party have published a “Practical Solutions”²⁷ paper and have been involved in negotiations with the European Union and British Government representatives to voice their concern.

However, as shown by this survey, the majority of Loyalists want political unionism to go a step further and withdraw from North-South ministerial bodies and collapse the NI Assembly if necessary. Both of which the UUP do not support.²⁸

Traditional Unionist Voice

Jim Allister’s outspoken role in criticising the Northern Ireland Protocol has undoubtedly struck a favourable chord with members of the Loyalist community. His attendance at public protests and prominent role in a judicial review of the Northern Ireland Protocol presents him as a leading figure in the fight against it.

This, at the same time of periods of intense criticism and internal turmoil within the DUP, has developed a window of opportunity for TUV popularity growth at the DUP’s expense, with the potential to evolve into electoral gains.

It remains to be seen however if the TUV can position itself as a viable Unionist alternative. Recent defectors from the DUP have chosen to sit as independents, or join the UUP, instead of finding a home in Allister’s party. An interesting contrast to the defectors the DUP enjoyed when the UUP lost of support after signing the Belfast Agreement.

Nonetheless, previous polls have shown support for the TUV is growing and it is of little surprise that this survey’s results demonstrate much the same pattern, if not on an even larger scale.²⁹

7.3% of Loyalist respondents gave their first preference vote to the TUV at the last NI Assembly Election. If there was an NI Assembly Election tomorrow half of Loyalists (50%) would vote TUV as their first preference. A gain of 42 percentage points signals a monumental growth in support for the TUV within the Loyalist community.

²⁶ <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/doug-beattie-i-want-to-promote-a-progressive-and-inclusive-unionism-with-a-welcoming-approach-1.4579236>

²⁷ <https://uup.org/assets/images/UUP%20NI%20Protocol%20solutions%20paper.pdf>

²⁸ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/stormont-on-brink-of-collapse-but-we-will-work-to-save-it-vows-new-uup-leader-doug-beattie-40434450.html>

²⁹ <https://sluggerotoole.com/2021/02/01/the-twin-surges-of-the-alliance-party-and-the-tuv-threaten-to-redraw-northern-irelands-electoral-map/>

Clues as to why exactly Loyalists are enticed by Allister's party may be gleaned in respondents' answers to some of the other survey questions.

Loyalist respondents were overwhelmingly in favour of Unionist withdrawal from North-South ministerial meetings and collapsing the Assembly in protest against the Protocol. As early as January 2021 TUV's Allister was directly called for "freezing" North-South institutions,³⁰ and when talking about whether the Assembly could collapse in resistance to the Northern Ireland Protocol, Allister pointedly remarked, "so be it" at a protest in Newtownards.

Support for the TUV is all the more interesting considering Loyalists have often criticised the party for having a cold and disapproving attitude toward members of the Loyalist community.

At the time of writing, there has never been a publicly reported meeting between Jim Allister and the Loyalist Communities Council. Whether that speaks to an official TUV position is unclear. It certainly stands in contrast however to reported meetings between the LCC and the DUP,³¹ and the willingness expressed by that of the UUP.³²

Nonetheless, Allister has been both complimentary and critical of Loyalist protests against the Northern Ireland Protocol. One such protest carried a banner that stated, "Peace or Protocol," to which Allister, when asked, described as "inappropriate."³³ Overall however, he praised the work of grassroots Loyalists, saying "by their peaceful protests, social media platforms and engagement, grassroots Loyalists are streets ahead of politicians."³⁴

Allister has been consistently calling for the very action Loyalists want to see. The longer the DUP decide to go in a different direction, the longer it may sustain or perhaps further increase popularity growth for the TUV from within the Loyalist community.

Progressive Unionist Party

The PUP is often referred to as the only political party in Northern Ireland which primarily self-identifies as Loyalist and avows to uphold Loyalist values.

³⁰ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/jim-allister-northern-ireland-should-freeze-co-operation-with-republic-40018454.html>

³¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56201532>

³² <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/uups-beattie-would-ask-loyalist-communities-council-when-they-will-disband-if-he-becomes-leader-40412273.html>

³³

<https://www.irishnews.com/paywall/tsb/irishnews/irishnews/irishnews//news/northernirelandnews/2021/06/22/news/tuv-leader-jim-allister-has-condemned-a-threatening-loyalist-banner-2362744/content.html>

³⁴ <https://tuv.org.uk/grassroots-loyalists-doing-more-against-protocol-than-many-politicians/>

The party's historical links with the Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commandos, along with former Loyalist prisoner Billy Hutchinson as party leader rightly sustains this association.

Interestingly however, the 2016 revised PUP constitution does not once mention the word "Loyalist."³⁵ Instead, their constitution emphasises the socialist, labour and unionist values upon which it is built.

The PUP enjoys Loyalist support in areas of Shankill, East Belfast and Coleraine. In the 2019 local government elections they returned three councilors in each of those respective areas,³⁶ one less than they attained in 2014.

Despite grassroots Loyalist support, the party have not had a candidate in the Northern Ireland Assembly since former leader Dawn Purvis was elected in 2007. At the last NI Assembly Election, the party received a small 5,590 first preference votes.³⁷ A smaller number of votes than David Ervine received himself in the 1997 General Election.

While the PUP is quite some distance from the electoral heights achieved during the years of Ervine and Purvis, the party will be hopeful the current political climate could mark a change in fortune and help them take steps forward in future elections.

PUP have been critical of the Northern Ireland Protocol. Both party leader Billy Hutchinson and East Belfast Councilor Dr John Kyle have appeared before the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee outlining their concerns. In his oral evidence session, Dr Kyle described Unionists as being "sacrificed" by the UK for the Northern Ireland Protocol.³⁸

Party leader Billy Hutchinson has also led calls for a "Unionist Convention."³⁹ However, the PUP have stopped short of calling for Unionist withdrawal from North-South Ministerial meetings and not made any comment about Unionism stifling implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

According to this survey, if there was an NI Assembly Election tomorrow the PUP would receive a larger amount of first preference votes from the Loyalist community. An increase of 3.9 percentage points will be encouraging to PUP members and demonstrates that support for the PUP is growing.

³⁵ <http://pupni.com/history/post/constitution-of-the-progressive-unionist-party>

³⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cj736r74vq9t/northern-ireland-local-elections-2019>

³⁷ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2017-2022/2017/general/2217.pdf>

³⁸ <https://www.irishnews.com/paywall/tsb/irishnews/irishnews/irishnews//news/brexit/2021/05/26/news/identity-of-the-unionist-community-sacrificed-for-the-ni-protocol-pup-tells-northern-ireland-affairs-committee-2335806/content.html>

³⁹ <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2021/01/26/news/loyalists-threaten-to-withdraw-support-for-the-gfa-2197896/> <https://mobile.twitter.com/officialpup/status/1186314784796565504>

Much like the UUP however, one could ask why their gains are so few. If 63.2% of Loyalist voters indicate they will no longer vote DUP as their first preference, why are the DUP only picking up 3.9% of them? Again, despite the welcome gains, this could equally be viewed as an opportunity missed.

Independent Unionist/Loyalist

Independence within politics could be on the rise in Northern Ireland. Although, it may not look that way after a quick glance at the current NI Assembly MLA roster. There are currently only two independent Unionists. MLAs Alex Easton, who resigned from the DUP in 2021, and Claire Sugden, who was convincingly elected in East Londonderry in 2017 make up the Unionist independents.

The 2019 local government elections tell a different story however.⁴⁰ An additional 9 independents (not all Unionist) were elected throughout Northern Ireland increasing their overall vote share by 2.2 percentage points (second only to Alliance).⁴¹

Of course, the very nature of being independent means candidates should not be viewed as a collective. Yet signs of increased voter appetite for independent candidates could encourage those to step forward under an "Independent" title.

If independent Unionists/Loyalists were to step forward, this survey suggests some Loyalists would be more supportive of the idea.

At the last NI Assembly Election, a fraction of Loyalist respondents (1.4%) voted for an independent Unionist/Loyalist as their first preference. If there were an NI Assembly Election "tomorrow," that number could increase to 10.7%.

A substantial increase of 9.3 percentage points marks a shift in support for independence within the Loyalist community.

Did/Will Not Vote

The previous five years of public voting in Northern Ireland show a degree of inconsistency in voter turnout. It is hard to detect any sort of pattern emerging when comparing referendums and elections for the different strands of government, other than reinforcing the notion that voter turnout is often more reflective of political context at the time.

⁴⁰ <https://sluggerotoole.com/2019/05/05/who-are-the-new-independent-councillors-le19/>

⁴¹ <https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/flg19.htm>

Voter turnout has been a long-standing issue within the Unionist and Loyalist community. In 2019, the Northern Ireland General Election Survey reported, “76.9% of non-voters who stated a preference are pro-remain within the UK...Unionism has a significant problem in not attracting pro-union members of the electorate to vote compared to nationalists and republican parties.”⁴²

One could reasonably expect however, with the next Northern Ireland Assembly Election set to determine which MLAs vote for the first time on the Northern Ireland Protocol, the political context may drive a greater voter turnout within the Unionist and Loyalist electorate.

Contrarily, this survey suggests, rather than incentivising Loyalists to get out to the ballot box, issues around the Northern Ireland Protocol could in fact serve as a deterrent.

Those Loyalist respondents who said they “Will not vote” if there was a Northern Ireland Assembly Election tomorrow was up 3.5 percentage points from those who “Did not vote” at the last election.

An increase of “Will not vote” could be linked with Loyalist support for “collapsing the Assembly in protest against the Northern Ireland Protocol.” Those who do not think Unionism should partake in institutions are less likely to vote for it.

Alternatively, it could be an indication of political apathy and general fatigue toward Unionist parties and/or institutions of government in Northern Ireland.

In either scenario, the prospect of a small but noteworthy decrease in Loyalist voter turnout should be cause for concern for all Unionist parties. With Unionism needing all the help it can get to regain an Assembly majority, any decrease in turnout does not bode well for returning a maximum amount of pro-Union or anti-Protocol MLAs.

Loyalist support for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement

Loyalist support for the Belfast Agreement has always been a point of controversy. Despite prominent dialogue with Loyalist paramilitaries during its inception the wider Unionist and Loyalist community were effectively split into pro and anti-agreement categories.

Although the overwhelming mandate the Agreement received in 1998 muted any significant protest, within three years of the Agreement being signed and supported, Deputy Leader of the DUP Peter Robinson alleged it did not have support of “three quarters” of the Unionist community.⁴³ Since then,

⁴² <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/research/heroimages/The-University-of-Liverpool-NI-General-Election-Survey-2019-March-20.pdf#page=5>

⁴³ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/belfast-agreement-has-no-credibility-dup-1.260443>

support for anti-agreement parties such as the DUP and its 2007 breakaway party the TUV, has increased.

The pivotal role the Agreement played in the Brexit negotiations, and ultimately creating the Northern Ireland Protocol, will have done nothing to increase support within the community.

In March of this year the Loyalist Communities Council penned a letter to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, officially withdrawing support for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.⁴⁴

David Campbell, Chairman of the LCC wrote, "I have been instructed to advise you that the Loyalist Groupings are herewith withdrawing their support for the Belfast Agreement until our rights under the Agreement are restored and the Protocol is amended."⁴⁵

He went on to say that the Protocol is at "variance with the Agreement it purports to uphold and undermines the basis upon which the Combined Loyalist Military Command agreed their 1994 ceasefire and subsequent support for the Agreement."⁴⁶

The same message was communicated in another letter to the Prime Minister in May, only this time from Unionist negotiators of the Belfast Agreement. In a letter signed by David Trimble, the leader of the UUP in 1998, said that the Protocol, "breached...core guarantees and safeguards of the agreement."⁴⁷ It contained the allegation that "the status of Northern Ireland is not what it was prior to the Protocol taking effect, therefore it has changed, and changed without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland."⁴⁸

It is unsurprising therefore that this survey demonstrates very low levels of support for the Belfast Agreement. If there was a vote on the Belfast Agreement "today," 86.5% of Loyalist respondents would vote "against," in contrast to a mere 13.5% who would support it.

A "would not vote" option was deliberately excluded from the selection to extract a dichotomy of support, but survey authors admit this does not reflect the entirety of options available to someone if there was another vote on the Belfast Agreement.

⁴⁴ [Loyalist group withdraws support for Good Friday Agreement - BBC News](#)

⁴⁵ <https://www.dalaradia.co.uk/?p=1971>

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/unionist-negotiators-of-good-friday-agreement-call-for-suspension-of-ni-protocol-40400032.html>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

It is hard to know exactly if support for the Belfast Agreement has ever been high within the Loyalist community, and if low levels of support, as indicated in this survey, are a consequence of recent events or a general stance developed over the years.

What is clear however, is that support for the Belfast Agreement within the Loyalist community is critically low. What ramifications that has for our political institutions and Loyalist participation in them will be a point of interest and concern going forward.



**LET'S TALK
LOYALISM**

**Loyalist Engagement Survey:
Protocol, Policing, and Politics**
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info@letstalkloyalism.co.uk
www.letstalkloyalism.co.uk