

Monitoring is easy. Positive change, however, is another matter.

Colin Irwin

INTRODUCTION

We monitor change in societies in conflict with a view to reducing conflict and advancing peace. The change we seek is a reduction in, or end to violence, and all the benefits that peace can bring. To this end I worked as a social scientist based at the Queen's University of Belfast for nearly 20 years after which I worked more internationally. Having received the benefit of an interdisciplinary social science education from one of the top methodologists of his generation, Donald Campbell, I have been able to monitor the dynamics of the conflict in Northern Ireland and elsewhere with a wide variety of tools with reasonably good effect, but the desired change, to peace, has been far more problematic and in this regard I have been far less successful.

No doubt the reader will not be surprised by this disappointing outcome. Indeed Campbell would not have expected any other result. He took the view that political power within the scientific community and social-ideological commitments (national, political, religious, economic self-interest, etc.) were major obstacles to the achievement of an objective social science¹ and that applied social science was even more problematic, almost to the point of being impossible where matters of policy are concerned². Additionally, 'Since scientists have to live in the larger society and are supported by it in their scientific activity, it becomes probable that science works best on beliefs about which powerful economic, political, and religious authorities are indifferent'³. Clearly quite the opposite is the case when dealing with matters of state, waging war and making peace. In these circumstances, all too frequently, both domestic electoral imperatives and powerful international economic, political and religious interests are at work.

With all these points in mind this paper reviews my various attempts at measuring and monitoring social and political events in conflict settings and tries to draw conclusions as to why and when the desired positive social change was not achieved and why and when, occasionally, it was.

MONITORING INTEGRATED EDUCATION

With a Post Doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) I came to Northern Ireland in 1987 to make a comparative study of the education systems in Northern Ireland and Israel. The systems were highly segregated in both countries with numerous scholarly studies making the case that these divisions during child development had a significant negative impact on social relationships and the conflicts in their respective countries⁴.

Louis Guttman and his colleagues at the Israel Institute of Applied Social Research (IIASR) in Jerusalem had developed a sophisticated yet simple to use program that only required each child in a school class to list their three best friends in their class to generate a Smallest Space Analysis of their social relationships. This was done in Israel to track the integration of Eastern and Western Jewish immigrants and we used the same program to track the social relationships of children in what was then the most well known integrated school in Northern Ireland, Lagan College (see Figure 1). This research produced three very significant results. Firstly, that the Protestant and Catholic children in Northern Ireland were integrating better than the Eastern and Western Jewish children in Israel because the cultural and language differences were far less in Northern Ireland than they were for the immigrants in Israel. Secondly, the closer the ratio was to 50/50 for Catholics and Protestants in a given class the better was the social integration. Even if a school had a 50/50 ratio, if then a particular class did not, then in that class the opportunity for developing friends across the sectarian divide was significantly diminished. Thirdly, as boys play with boys and girls play with girls it was equally important for the Catholic and Protestant ratio to be as close as possible to 50/50 for both the Catholic and Protestant boys and girls. If all the boys in a class were from one denomination and all the girls from the other denomination social relationships would not develop across the sectarian divide⁵.

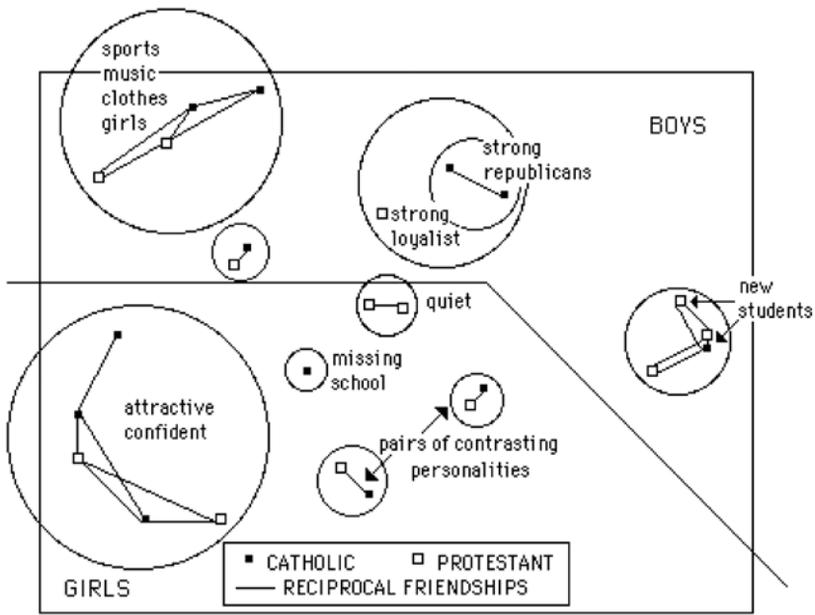


Figure 1. Smallest Space Analysis of social relationships in a 5th year group at Lagan College with denomination, gender and personality-interests indicated.

These changes in social relationships are easy to monitor and the conclusions to be drawn for integrated education policy are clear. Not only should integrated schools do their best to aim for a 50/50 ratio, but this ratio should be reflected in each class as much as possible, with careful attention being given not to split the religious denomination ratio along lines of gender. Regrettably these findings have been largely ignored in an effort to maximise the growth of the integrated education sector in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Belfast Agreement. Monitoring the changing social relationships of children in these circumstances is not difficult, but it is not systematically done because, no doubt, the results of such monitoring would not be compatible with the interests of the integrated education sector and their emphasis on growth. When this research was done the costs of the project, which required collecting the data in Northern Ireland and then running it through the computers in Jerusalem, was quite expensive. But any secondary school with an IT and maths department can do this now with SPSS on a desktop machine. So monitoring is now quite easy. Positive change, however, is another matter.

MONITORING SEPARATION AND SHARING

Professors Tom Hadden and Fred Boal at Queen’s University Belfast both played a significant role in the establishment of integrated schools in Northern Ireland. Fred Boal in the Department of Geography also wrote extensively on social segregation and housing⁶ while Tom Hadden in the Faculty of Law took a keen interest in all aspects of governance and law as they relate to separation and sharing in general⁷. In 1996, with a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT), we undertook a survey of public opinion on all the major aspects of social life and public policy in Northern Ireland with an emphasis on separation or sharing. Topics covered included: employment, housing, education, policing, parades, language rights and local government⁸.

When asked a general question: *‘Do you think it would be better if the people of Northern Ireland moved towards greater cooperation and sharing in many aspects of their daily lives or would it be better if the two communities established separate institutions to manage their own affairs?’* a huge majority of both Protestants (80%) and Catholics (94%) chose sharing rather than separation; only a tiny proportion (2% Catholics and 7% Protestants) chose separation (see Table 1 for Catholics and Table 2 for Protestants). Inevitably the responses to this general question fell when it was suggested that this could only be done at some cost, or when specific areas of policy were addressed, but on all these issues a significant majority in both communities still favoured sharing over separation (Tables 1 and 2).

Policy Area - Per cent	More Sharing	More Separation	Don’t know
In general	94	2	5
In general at some cost	70	9	20
Neighbourhoods	68	25	7
Schools	59	35	7
Workplaces	87	8	5
Unemployment schemes	70	20	9

Table 1. Catholic preferences for separation or sharing in different policy contexts

Policy Area - Per cent	More Sharing	More Separation	Don't know
In general	80	7	13
In general at some cost	50	24	24
Neighbourhoods	64	32	5
Schools	63	33	4
Workplaces	80	16	4
Unemployment schemes	56	31	14

Table 2. Protestant preferences for separation or sharing in different policy contexts

Tom Hadden pointed out that with the encouragement of the Irish Government the British Government had already implemented a set of formal guidelines, *Policy Appraisal for Fair Treatment* or PAFT, designed to achieve equality of treatment and parity of esteem for the two communities. In this context, given the results of our research, Hadden proposed the establishment of a new form of these guidelines, *Policy Appraisal for Separation and Sharing* or PASS, in parallel to PAFT, to ensure that all official policies were assessed for their contribution to communal sharing and the avoidance of any increase, whether intended or not, in the extent of communal separation in Northern Ireland. At the time this did not happen but after the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 the Alliance Party proposed the introduction of policies for *A Shared Future*, which the Northern Ireland Office developed into a policy document in 2005⁹. Regrettably, the implementation of these policies has not gone well, being frustrated by interests of the dominant political divisions in the Northern Ireland body politic. Again the measuring and monitoring is relatively simple but positive social change, however, is far more problematic.

MONITORING INTEGRATED EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Given the dynamics of the political divisions in Northern Ireland it seemed very likely that, following the signing of the Belfast Agreement and the devolution of education policy to Northern Ireland, the local politicians might try to reverse policies that supported the establishment of integrated schools¹⁰. Armed now with the survey results of the study undertaken with Hadden and Boal¹¹ that clearly indicated that a majority of parents in Northern Ireland supported choice in education with a preference for mixed religion schools

(Table 3) and, armed also with case studies of children who had been denied places at integrated schools due to lack of capacity, I was now able to take the matter up as a breach of both the parent's and child's human rights.

Per cent	Mixed Religion	Own Religion	Don't know
Protestant	63	33	4
Catholic	59	35	7
Other	60	29	11
All	61	33	6

Table 3. Per cent preference for mixed or own religion schools¹²

In this context the *Committee on the Rights of the Child* gave careful consideration to the question of integrated education in Northern Ireland when they examined the report of the United Kingdom in January 1995¹³. I had been able to meet with T. Hammarberg, the Chairman of the *Committee on the Rights of the Child*, and discuss with him at some length the problems of peace building and education in Northern Ireland¹⁴. Subsequently Hammarberg questioned the United Kingdom government on the lack of provision for integrated education in Northern Ireland and in their concluding observations the Committee suggested that the State party provide further support to integrated education schooling¹⁵.

Although the attention given to Northern Ireland by the *Committee on the Rights of the Child* was welcome these issues could not be raised with them again for another five years under its reporting procedure and the issue of integration was but one of many that received a mention in the Committee's concluding observations sent to the United Kingdom government. Additionally, it is interesting to note that although the Northern Ireland NGO, the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) generally supported the development of integrated schools in Northern Ireland¹⁶ they chose only to support Irish language education in their submission to the *Committee on the Rights of the Child* on this occasion¹⁷. This may illustrate one of the weaknesses with human rights reporting procedures and their reliance on NGO lobbying. In this case monitoring is relatively easy but it does have to be done with consistency if it is to have the desired impact for positive change¹⁸.

MONITORING POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS

At the end of our report on *Separation or Sharing* we ran a question on all the major possible constitutional futures for Northern Ireland in an effort to determine the most widely acceptable political arrangements for conflict resolution¹⁹. With this methodology as a starting point a program of research and public diplomacy was undertaken in cooperation with the parties elected to negotiate the Belfast Agreement, again supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust²⁰. It was then and possibly still is, the most comprehensive programme of its kind, resulting in two polls that dealt with procedural options for the talks process or ‘shape of the table’ issues in April and September 1997; two polls that examined all the questions of substance that became the Belfast Agreement in January and March 1998; and four polls that dealt with problems associated with implementation of the Agreement in March and October 1999, May 2000 and February 2003.

In so far as it was possible the political parties were given ‘ownership’ of the research so that they would take the results seriously. Each party to the negotiations nominated a member of their team to work with the facilitator on the polls. Questions were designed to test party policies as a series of options or preferences from across the social and political spectrum. The moderating voice of ‘the silent majority’ was thus given expression while extremist positions were demonstrated to be marginal with little cross community support. All questions, options and preferences had to be agreed as not being partisan or misleading. From the drafting of these questions to sample design, ethics, timing and publication, the program of research was decided by all the parties and they were encouraged to take the work in any direction that they believed would be helpful to the peace process.

The focus of the research was on problems, solutions and policies for conflict resolution. All the results were made publicly available, effectively giving the wider community a ‘seat at the negotiating table’ and exposing the research to the highest standards of peer review and public scrutiny. There was no ‘cherry picking’ of the results. Everyone had to deal with all the issues that were raised. This inter-track activity, that extended across the political spectrum to all the major parties, civil society and the public at large, helped to build a consensus for the Belfast Agreement that led to a successful referendum and subsequent period of increasing stability and peace.

Significantly, by involving all the stakeholders in this program of monitoring and testing all the essential elements of the peace agreement against public

opinion, we were following Campbell's solution to the difficult problem of political interests and questions of methodology:

‘There should be *adversarial stakeholder* participation in the design of each pilot experiment or program evaluation, and again in the interpretation of results. We should be consulting with the legislative and administrative opponents of the program as well as the advocates, generating measures of feared undesirable outcomes as well as promised benefits.’²¹

But this kind of pro-active social and political engagement in applied social research is the exception rather than the rule. When the Belfast Agreement was negotiated public opinion polls were run and the results published with a view to the parties making decisions - which they did. Unfortunately, no such polls accompanied the failed Richard Hass negotiations in late 2013 and early 2014. Or, if they were run, they were not made public.

Interestingly in early 2014 ‘On the Runs’ or OTRs (republican activists sought by the police in Great Britain or Northern Ireland in connection with crimes committed during the Troubles) became an issue when the case against a past member of the IRA collapsed because he had received a letter from the British Government informing him that he was no longer wanted for past IRA crimes. The Unionist parties in Northern Ireland were outraged and said they knew nothing about such arrangements but in the last poll done with them in 2003 the question of what to do with OTRs was explored in some detail²².

Per cent ‘unacceptable’ for OTR policy options	All NI Unacceptable	Protestant Unacceptable	Catholic Unacceptable	Sinn Féin Unacceptable
Paramilitaries should allow all exiled persons to ‘come home’ before the question of their fugitives is dealt with.	31	42	20	9
Paramilitaries should complete all necessary steps to secure public confidence in a lasting peace before the question of their fugitives is dealt with.	28	39	17	17
Paramilitary fugitives should be given amnesty.	44	59	29	12

Paramilitary fugitives should only be given amnesty after they have given an account of their activities to the authorities.	39	49	29	35
Paramilitary fugitives should be processed through the courts and then 'released on license'.	37	43	32	40
Security Service and other state offenders should be treated the same as paramilitary offenders.	23	29	18	15

Table 4. Per cent 'unacceptable' for policy options to deal with 'On the Runs' (OTRs) in Northern Ireland in 2003²³.

The results of this poll clearly point to the solution to this problem (Table 4), namely that 'Security Services and other state offenders should be treated the same as paramilitary offenders' with levels of 'unacceptable' at 23% for Northern Ireland as a whole, 29% for Protestants, 18% for Catholics and only 15% 'unacceptable' for Sinn Féin supporters. But the Sinn Féin leadership are opposed to this option. They want security service and other state offenders to be prosecuted²⁴. However, people all over the world have an innate sense of fairness and that is why the Sinn Féin supporters are willing to go along with this policy. Regrettably political elites in Northern Ireland seem to have reverted to the 'behind closed doors' paradigm of political negotiations. They seem to have forgotten how well transparent objective monitoring, testing and publishing opinion on these issues served them as a vehicle to decision-making and positive political change in the past.

MONITORING CONFLICTS INTERNATIONALLY AND COMPARATIVELY

What are now referred to as 'peace polls' have subsequently been employed to bring the views of critical populations into peace processes in a number of conflicts around the world. The Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe (CDRSEE) commissioned me to undertake peace polls in Macedonia as a prelude to free and fair elections in 2002; in Bosnia and Herzegovina to analyse the state of their peace process in 2004; and in Kosovo

and Serbia as a prelude to the negotiation of a 'final status' agreement for Kosovo in 2005. This was followed up with a poll of British Muslims in the context of what George Bush was calling the 'War on Terror' in 2006. With the *Cyoter Foundation* in Delhi a peace poll was completed in Kashmir in 2008 with follow ups in Pakistan, and that same year a three year programme of peace polling in Sri Lanka was initiated, supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After Barack Obama was elected President and George Mitchell was appointed his Special Envoy to the Middle East I was asked to complete a peace poll in Israel and Palestine for *OneVoice* in 2009 and this was followed by a project in Darfur, Sudan funded by the US State Department. Finally I was able to visit Egypt during their revolution in early 2011 but no polling work was undertaken there due to legal restrictions. These polls are reviewed in detail in my book *The People's Peace*²⁵.

Without exception the peace polls identified the problems that had to be resolved at the heart of each conflict and the solutions needed to end the conflict. When this was done and acted on peace was achieved but when this was not done the peace processes continued to fail. The polls also identified repetitive conflict themes: discrimination, bad policing, violent insurgencies, poor governance, corruption, failing economies, lack of democratic accountability and interference by third parties/states. The importance of these conflict elements changed with the cycle of the violence: pre-war, war, post-war. Critically the peace polls could help people achieve peace if the political elites and those responsible for peace used the work constructively to that end. Regrettably this was the exception rather than the rule. All too often the interests of spoilers coincide with the maintenance of the status quo of on-going war, occupation or violence directed against their own people.

For example, with regards to the negotiation of a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine and the peace poll I was able to complete there in 2009²⁶, Table 5 faithfully reproduced the top requirement of Palestinians for their own state and Israelis need for security. These priorities are well known, but when the question was phrased as problems in the peace process, a slightly more immediate set of concerns was produced that underscore the Palestinian need for a state and Israeli need for security (Table 6). The top priorities for the Palestinians was now freedom from occupation, the Israeli settlements, siege of Gaza and security wall, while Israelis placed terrorism and the need to maintain a Jewish majority at the top of their peace process problems list.

	Palestinian per cent	Very Significant	Israel per cent	Very Significant
1st	Establishing an independent sovereign state of Palestine	97	Security for Israel	77
2nd	The rights of refugees	95	Agreement on the future of Jerusalem	68
3rd	Agreement on the future of Jerusalem	94	Rights to natural resources	62
4th	Agreement on managing Holy sites	91	Agreement on managing Holy sites	57
5th	Security for Palestine	90	Agreeing borders for Israel and Palestine	49

Table 5. Top 5 of 15 problems of ‘substance’ for Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate

	Palestinian per cent	Very Significant	Israel per cent	Very Significant
1st	The freedom of Palestinians from occupation/Israeli rule	94	Terror has reinforced the conflict	65
2nd	The settlements	89	Maintaining a Jewish majority in Israel	62
3rd	The substandard living conditions of the people in Gaza	88	Incitement to hatred	52
4th	The security wall	88	Weak Palestinian government	52
5th	The Independence of the Palestinian economy	87	Islamic extremists are changing a political war into a religious war	52
	Terror has reinforced the conflict	61	The freedom of Palestinians occupation/Israeli rule	30

Table 6. Top 5 of 56 problems to be resolved in the peace ‘process’ for Israelis and Palestinians

Finally these same sets of issues emerge as solutions in Table 7. Palestinians want the check points removed followed by the lifting of the siege of Gaza and a freeze on settlement construction, while Israelis want an end to suicide attacks and rockets being fired from Gaza. These three tables map out the way forward in the Israel/Palestine peace process. All that had to be done was to implement the top solutions in Table 7, which in turn would address the problems in Table 6, which again, in turn, would make significant progress towards the top priorities for negotiation of a peace agreement in Table 5.

	Palestinian per cent Essential or Desirable	Per Cent	Israeli per cent Essential or Desirable	Per Cent
1st	Remove check points	100	Stop all suicide/ attacks against civilians	90
2nd	Lift the siege of Gaza	99	Stop firing rockets from Gaza	87
3rd	Israel should freeze settlements as a first step to deal with the settlements	98	Release Gilad Shalit	85
4th	Fatah and Hamas should reconcile their differences before negotiations	98	Prohibit all forms of incitement to hatred	81
5th	Release Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons	98	Achieve peace through negotiation	79

Table 7. Top 5 of 70 solutions of ‘process’ for Israelis and Palestinians to resolve

But this process did not get the support it needed from the American Administration in Obama’s first term. George Mitchell resigned his post and Secretary of State John Kerry tried again in Obama’s second term with little more success. Critically the methods used during the negotiation of the Belfast Agreement in Northern Ireland were not deployed in Israel and Palestine²⁷. The US facilitators, for largely domestic political reasons, preferred to manage the negotiations ‘behind closed doors’ and did not engage with the Palestinian and Israeli publics as equal partners in what should have been ‘their peace process’²⁸.

Regrettably, the application of these methodologies has only been implemented on an ad hoc basis. This issue is well understood by the UN²⁹ but in their review of UN peacekeeping operations around the world the Senior Advisory Group

noted that the views of local people were not systematically being sought³⁰ to help resolve conflicts and they strongly recommended that this omission should be rectified. The policies of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations are presently under review to address this issue³¹. A way forward must be found to mainstream this approach to comprehensive monitoring and positive change so that both politicians and their publics come to expect nothing less - in both Northern Ireland and around the world.

Notes

- ¹ Campbell, 1986
- ² Campbell, 1984
- ³ Campbell, 1986
- ⁴ Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1937; Akenson, 1973
- ⁵ Irwin, 1991
- ⁶ Boal, 2000
- ⁷ Boyle and Hadden, 1996
- ⁸ Hadden, Irwin and Boal, 1996
- ⁹ OFMDFM, 2005
- ¹⁰ Irwin, 1991
- ¹¹ 1996
- ¹² Hadden, Irwin and Boal, 1996
- ¹³ HMSO, 1994
- ¹⁴ Meeting with T. Hammarberg (Sweden) and Y. Kolosov (Russian Federation), members of the *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*, at the UN Centre for Human Rights in Geneva during the 44th Session of the International Conference on Education, organised by UNESCO and the International Bureau of Education (IBE), 3-8 October, 1994
- ¹⁵ UN, 1995
- ¹⁶ CAJ, 1993; Moffat, 1993
- ¹⁷ CAJ, 1994
- ¹⁸ Irwin, 1996
- ¹⁹ Hadden, Irwin and Boal, 1996
- ²⁰ Irwin, 2002
- ²¹ Campbell, 1984
- ²² Irwin, 2003a
- ²³ Irwin, 2003b
- ²⁴ BBC, 2014
- ²⁵ Irwin, 2012a. See also Shamir and Shikaki (2010) for Israel and Palestine, and Lordos, Kaymak and Tocci (2009) for Cyprus.
- ²⁶ The fieldwork to develop the questionnaires was undertaken in Israel and Palestine in November and December 2008. The fieldwork for the public opinion polls was undertaken by AWRAD of Ramallah and Dahaf of Tel Aviv following the elections in Israel in February 2009.
- ²⁷ Irwin, 2012a
- ²⁸ Irwin, 2012b and 2013
- ²⁹ For example, the 'Report of the Secretary General on peacebuilding in the immediate

aftermath of conflict, A/63/881-S/2009/304, (2009)' notes that 'Local and traditional authorities as well as civil society actors, including marginalized groups, have a critical role to play in bringing multiple voices to the table for early priority-setting and to broaden the sense of ownership around a common vision for the country's future.'

³⁰ In the 'Letter from the Chair to the Secretary General---Civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict: Independent report of the Senior Advisory Group A/65/747 S/2011/85 (Feb 2011)' the Senior Advisory Group note that 'the international response to conflict is often supply-driven, with international actors focusing on what they can provide, rather than listening to the real needs of those they serve.'

³¹ DPKO/NUPI, 2013

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