

Attitudes to the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper

The Institute of Irish Studies and Professor Jon Tonge from the Politics Department at the University of Liverpool commissioned Social Market Research Belfast (SMR)ⁱ to conduct a public opinion survey on attitudes regarding the *Safeguarding the Union Command Paper*. The survey was conducted using an online panel methodology with the data weighted to be demographically representative of the NI adult population. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.1%. Fieldwork, which included 1206 respondents, was undertaken between 11th and 28th February.

A Command Paper outlining the deal – Safeguarding the Union – and accompanying draft Statutory Instruments were published on Wednesday 31 January. The deal comprises two main elements:

- Changes to the Internal Market Act/Windsor Framework
- Measures relating to Northern Ireland’s constitutional status

Within this survey we asked for opinions regarding the Safeguarding the Union Command paper and the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Executive Summary

- Generally, the majority of the respondents responded in terms of agreement or disagreement but in some cases there were statistically significant shares who stated they neither agreed or disagreed or did not know. The issues around trade and Brexit are complex and we were testing opinion before the effects of the Command Paper are known. In no question was the share who neither agreed nor disagreed higher than either the share who agreed or disagreedⁱⁱ.
- The most positive groups of electors regarding the Command Paper were DUP voters. This was to be expected given that the DUP were the sole negotiators with the UK government and indirectly with the EU. In overall terms the plurality of unionists (49.3% v 10.2% (Table 17)) considered post-Brexit trading arrangements to be a ‘good deal’.
- The data presented on voting intentions (Table 1) indicates that the DUP’s negotiation and support of the Command Paper that led to their return to the Assembly did not lead to a loss of support when compared to the council elections in 2023. It also did not impact in terms of defections to the TUV. Only the Alliance Party (+2.1%) potential vote share grew by more than 1%.
- As has been found previously, with the exception of TUV voters, there is majority support regarding the proposition that ‘access to both the EU and UK

markets is vital to the economy of Northern Ireland'. As indicated in Table 2 between 91.2% and 73.9% of voters agreed that such access is vital. Only 4.7% of DUP voters disagreed (Table 2). Table 15 shows unionist support above 75%. Only 5.4% of unionists disagreed ((Table 16).

- When respondents were asked if they accepted '... that there are issues within the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper that require resolution but these are not as important as restoring the Assembly (Table 3) 50% of TUV voters disagreed compared to 12% of UUP and 9.5% of DUP voters. DUP voters were 6 times more likely to agree than disagree. Over 5 times as many unionists agreed (62.5%) than disagreed (11.7%) (Table 16).
- The survey asked 2 questions (Tables 4 and 5) designed to directly measure opposition to the Command Paper. 50% of TUV voters agreed that the Assembly should not be restored compared to 12.3% of DUP voters. More SF and SDLP voters agreed than DUP voters..
- theTable 5 shows that almost half of TUV voters (48.8%) believe the Command Paper should be scrapped due to constitutional and sovereignty issues. The same table also shows a high (45.2%) level of support for scrapping the Command Paper among SDLP voters. This may be because of a belief (articulated by the SDLP leader) that the Good Friday Agreement had been undermined.
- The highest level of approval for the Command Paper was evident among DUP voters. Over 60% agreed that the DUP should re-enter the Executive and Assembly (Table 6), that the government's deal would facilitate a better flow of goods (Table 7), that the DUP had achieved a significantly positive deal for Northern Ireland (Table 8), that the Command Paper promotes and strengthens the UK internal market (Table 9) and the new East-West council was important (Table 10). Table 12 also records, among DUP voter, a near 8 fold agreement compared to disagreement that the Command Paper strengthens Northern Ireland's place in the UK. Excluding TUV voters the plurality of all other voters agreed more than disagreed regarding each of these questions.
- Overall, 56.1% of unionists (Table 16) agreed compared to 10.3% who disagreed that DUP should re-enter the Executive and Assembly.
- The majority of unionists (62.5%) agreed that there were issues with the Command Paper but these were not as important as restoring the Assembly. 11.7% disagreed (Table 16).

- 50.9% of unionists agreed that the DUP had achieved a significantly positive deal for Northern Ireland (Table 16) compared to 11.6% who disagreed.
- A similar share of unionists (53.1% versus 11.9%) agreed that the Command Paper strengthens NI place with the UK
- Table 16 also records, over 4 times more support, among unionists, that no single party should have the capacity to bring down the Executive and Assembly. The majority of all voters (Table 13) agreed that no single party should have the capacity to bring down the Assembly. This ranged from 94.2% (Alliance) to 55.8% (TUV) of voters.
- Table 14 indicates that the only voters who agreed in majority terms that the DUP deal was good were DUP voters. Only 2.8% of DUP voters disagreed. There was substantial opposition from SF (27.5%), SDLP (28.8%) and TUV voters (65.1%).
- Table 17 shows a 49.3% v 10.2% split between unionists who considered the deal to be good versus bad.

Table 1. Party 1st preference votes May 2023 and intention to vote in next General Election

Party	1st preference vote share May 2023	% share intention to vote in next General Election
TUV	4.6	4.6
SDLP	8.7	8.1
UUP	10.9	11.1
Alliance	13.3	15.2
DUP	23.3	23.5
SF	30.9	31.1

Table 2: Access to both the EU and UK markets is vital to the economy of Northern Ireland?

	Agree	Disagree
Alliance	91.2	0.7
SDLP	86.1	2.8
UUP	84.0	0.0
Sinn Fein	77.9	2.5

DUP	73.9	4.7
TUV	44.2	27.9

Table 3: I accept that there are issues within the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper that require resolution but these are not as important as restoring the Assembly

	Agree	Disagree
Alliance	81.8	2.2
SDLP	68.5	9.6
Sinn Fein	64.6	10.4
UUP	61.0	12.0
DUP	60.5	9.5
TUV	33.3	50.0

Table 4: I am opposed to the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper and the Assembly should not have been restored

	Agree	Disagree
TUV	50.0	23.8
SDLP	36.1	51.4
Sinn Fein	12.5	58.1
DUP	12.3	55.0
UUP	8.9	66.3
Alliance	6.6	66.9

Table 5: Despite the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper, constitutional and sovereignty issues remain so problematic that it should be scrapped even if that means losing access to the single market?

	Agree	Disagree
TUV	48.8	20.9
SDLP	45.2	35.6
DUP	23.2	31.8
Sinn Fein	22.1	38.9
UUP	13.0	46.0
Alliance	9.6	45.6

Table 6: The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper secured sufficient concessions through the Windsor Framework/Protocol for the DUP to re-enter the Executive and the Assembly?

	Agree	Disagree
DUP	63.0	8.1
SDLP	55.6	9.7
UUP	55.6	6.1
Alliance	55.1	5.9
Sinn Fein	46.1	13.2
TUV	31.0	40.5

Table 7: The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper has improved previous trade issues between Britain and NI and will facilitate less paperwork and a better flow of goods?

	Agree	Disagree
DUP	65.4	3.3
SDLP	65.3	11.1
UUP	52.0	5.0
Sinn Fein	48.8	14.2
Alliance	47.1	3.7
TUV	31.0	33.3

Table 8: Via the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper the DUP have achieved a significantly positive deal for NI?

	Agree	Disagree
DUP	64.5	5.7
SDLP	43.1	18.1
UUP	43.0	13.0
Alliance	33.1	22.1
Sinn Fein	29.2	33.8
TUV	13.6	52.3

Table 9: The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper “promotes and strengthens” the UK internal market?

	Agree	Disagree
DUP	62.7	3.8
UUP	56.0	10.0
SDLP	52.8	2.8
Alliance	51.1	5.1
Sinn Fein	36.8	16.4
TUV	20.5	34.1

Table 10: The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper recognises "the importance of the connections" across the United Kingdom, chiefly via a new East-West Council?

	Agree	Disagree
DUP	62.6	4.3
UUP	57.0	2.0
SDLP	47.9	8.2
Alliance	45.3	3.6
Sinn Fein	41.3	12.1
TUV	34.9	18.6

Table 11: The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper will remove all checks (other than for smuggling, drugs, certain animal products) on goods travelling from Great Britain to Northern Ireland only?

	Agree	Disagree
SDLP	53.4	17.8
DUP	51.2	12.8
Sinn Fein	45.9	17.9
UUP	43.6	17.8
Alliance	43.4	15.4
TUV	33.3	35.7

Table 12: The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper strengthens Northern Ireland's place within the UK?

	Agree	Disagree
DUP	60.7	7.1
SDLP	55.6	15.3
UUP	50.0	12.0
Alliance	41.9	8.8
Sinn Fein	32.5	19.3
TUV	20.9	46.5

Table 13: No single party should ever have the capacity to bring down the Executive and Assembly?

	Agree	Disagree
Alliance	94.2	1.5
SDLP	83.3	1.4
Sinn Fein	78.9	4.6

UUP	72.3	8.9
DUP	58.0	16.5
TUV	55.8	34.9

Table 14: Overall, how do you regard the DUP's deal with the UK government on post-Brexit trading arrangements?

	Good Deal	Bad Deal
DUP	61.1	2.8
UUP	44.0	6.0
SDLP	34.2	28.8
Alliance	30.7	13.1
Sinn Fein	28.9	27.5
TUV	7.0	65.1

Table 15: % Agreement by identity

	Unionist	Nationalist	Neither Unionist or Nationalist
Access to both the EU and UK markets is vital to the economy of Northern Ireland?	77.2	83.2	74.7
No single party should ever have the capacity to bring down the Executive and Assembly?	65.9	83.1	74.8
I accept that there are issues within the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper that require resolution but these are not as important as restoring the Assembly	62.5	66.2	62.5
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper has improved previous trade issues between Britain and NI and will facilitate less paperwork and a better flow of goods?	56.3	56.3	34.9
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper secured sufficient concessions through the Windsor Framework/Protocol for the DUP to re-enter the Executive and the Assembly?	56.1	47.6	39.5

The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper “promotes and strengthens” the UK internal market?	53.9	37.9	34.6
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper recognises “the importance of the connections” across the United Kingdom, chiefly via a new East-West Council?	53.9	17.6	37.2
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper strengthens Northern Ireland's place within the UK?	53.1	34.2	31.1
Via the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper the DUP have achieved a significantly positive deal for NI?	50.9	32.1	22.1
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper will remove all checks (other than for smuggling, drugs, certain animal products) on goods travelling from Great Britain to Northern Ireland only	48.8	50.1	34.5
Despite the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper, constitutional and sovereignty issues remain so problematic that it should be scrapped even if that means losing access to the single market?	21.5	26.5	17.1
I am opposed to the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper and the Assembly should not have been restored	15.1	18.1	9.6

Table 16: Unionists: % share by Agreement or otherwise (excluding do not knows)

	Agree	Neither Agree/Disagree	Disagree
Access to both the EU and UK markets is vital to the economy of Northern Ireland?	77.2	12.2	5.4
No single party should ever have the capacity to bring down the Executive and Assembly?	65.9	14.3	15.0
I accept that there are issues within the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper that require resolution but these are not as important as restoring the Assembly	62.5	17.5	11.7

The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper has improved previous trade issues between Britain and NI and will facilitate less paperwork and a better flow of goods?	56.3	20.0	8.3
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper secured sufficient concessions through the Windsor Framework/Protocol for the DUP to re-enter the Executive and the Assembly?	56.1	20.7	10.3
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper "promotes and strengthens" the UK internal market?	53.9	21.1	9.1
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper recognises "the importance of the connections" across the United Kingdom, chiefly via a new East-West Council?	53.9	20.4	5.5
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper strengthens Northern Ireland's place within the UK?	53.1	20.5	11.9
Via the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper the DUP have achieved a significantly positive deal for NI?	50.9	22.1	11.6
The Safeguarding the Union Command Paper will remove all checks (other than for smuggling, drugs, certain animal products) on goods travelling from Great Britain to Northern Ireland only	48.8	17.7	14.5
Despite the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper, constitutional and sovereignty issues remain so problematic that it should be scrapped even if that means losing access to the single market?	21.5	22.1	35.8
I am opposed to the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper and the Assembly should not have been restored	15.1	17.4	55.6

Table 17: Overall, how do you regard the DUP's deal with the UK government on post-Brexit trading arrangements?

	Good Deal	Bad Deal
Unionist	49.3	10.2
Nationalist	32.4	26.0
Neither Unionist or Nationalist	18.9	18.6

ⁱ The research was conducted in line with ISO20252 of which Social Market Research (SMR) is fully accredited. The survey is based on 1206 interviews with Northern Ireland adults aged 16+. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.1%. Interviews were conducted using an online panel methodology with quotas set for: age; gender; SEG; and, area of residence. All members of the panel have registered through the double opt-in method i.e. each panel member signs up to the panel with an email then forwarded asking them to confirm and consent to their participation as a panel member. As well as using double opt in, the panel recruits members via a range of different affiliate websites. Using a variety of sources to populate the panel ensures good representation across key segments (e.g. age, gender, SEG and area of residence). The analysis was weighted by these segments. It was noted that additional analysis with weighting by religion would be undertaken

ⁱⁱ The majority of Tables exclude those who stated they neither agreed or disagreed or did not know. This was undertaken as a concern with style and making data complex to read. Graphs prepared for social media will host that data.