

## Prospect Theory and the Framing of the Good Friday Agreement

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*We examine how supporters of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement tried to persuade their constituents to vote for ratifying the agreement. We argue that a “sales” message based on tenets of prospect theory—framing the preferred choice as less risky than the alternative—garnered more support for the initial vote and, more important, insulated the process to some extent from failures in implementation. For this article, we determine how political leaders supporting the agreement framed it, finding that they attempted to do so both positively toward a better future and as a better alternative to continued or renewed conflict.*

Peace processes face many daunting challenges. For spoilers and skeptics alike, making peace is no less complicated than making war. Much has been written about the trials and tribulations of peace processes and why they succeed or fail. Hampson (1996), for example, examines why peace agreements “stick,” and Zartman (1995) went so far as to name his book about peacemaking in civil wars *Elusive Peace*. Many factors have an impact on the success of a peace process, including whether all of the issues driving the conflict are addressed by the agreement, whether all the political constituencies are represented in the new dispensation, and perhaps least noticed, the level of popular support for the peace agreement shown by each community represented in the conflict.

The framing or “selling” of a peace agreement by the leaders who have taken the leap into peacemaking has garnered some attention in the literature on peacemaking, although less than the concerns expressed by different

constituencies and their impact on the peace process. However the problem is structured, the framing of an agreement is clearly felt throughout the process. For example, when South Africa was creeping toward a peace process in the early 1990s, expectations that an agreement would bring instant jobs and prosperity for the downtrodden in society were rampant (Darby, 2001). These expectations were partly due to the manner in which the agreement was sold to South Africans—so they would buy into it rather than plunge into a bloody civil war. But even as Mandela and De Klerk sold expectations and the overall process on one level, they attempted to caution against “irrational exuberance” on another. Their pleas for restraint, however, were lost in the euphoria of the moment. It was as if once they got the boulder of peace rolling, they attempted to slow its pace as it picked up steam. In short, their framing of the process may have been necessary to sell it to the public, but it may also have created problems from unrealistic expectations as time wore on.

### Problem Statement

The problem that we investigate is the dichotomy between the need for a leadership to sell an agreement aggressively to its own constituencies and the general public, and the danger that any such sales pitch may generate irrational exuberance or expectations that cannot be fulfilled by the agreement reached. The immediate postagreement ratification phase of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in Northern Ireland is our focus.

We believe that governmental actors and constituent leaders are those most likely to be held responsible for the design and implementation of a peace process, and so our analysis focuses on how political elites from both sides of a conflict attempt to persuade their constituencies and the general public that a proposed peace agreement or process is worth supporting. Speeches and other statements made by leaders (presidents, prime ministers, key cabinet ministers or spokespeople) supporting the GFA will be examined. Our primary focus is on what each leader says to his or her own constituents, with some examination of attempts to persuade the middle and the other side that an agreement is possible and desirable.

### Why Good Friday?

We chose the Good Friday Agreement because of three factors. The first is its unique status as a peace agreement that required public ratification through

a referendum process. The second factor is the drawn-out implementation period, and third, the fact that neither side returned to large-scale violence despite the difficulties of implementation. In this sense, the GFA is a successful incidence of peacemaking in a deep-rooted, identity-based conflict.

The conflict in Northern Ireland, popularly known as the Troubles, has the distinction of being one of the longest-running conflicts in modern history. From its flare-up in the late 1960s through the 1994 ceasefire, more than thirty-five hundred lives were lost and the threat of violence became a way of life for generations of Northern Irish Protestants and Catholics. Like the conflict, the Northern Irish peace process also has the distinction of longevity in terms of the time required to implement the agreement. From the signing of the GFA on April 10, 1998, to creation of the latest power-sharing executive in May 2007, the agreement was subjected to four suspensions of the Local Assembly, three elections, and the shift in majority electoral support from “moderate” parties to so-called “extremist” political parties (Hancock, 2008). This is of interest for our work because, despite the many setbacks to implementation and continuing low levels of intra-community and dissident violence, there are few signs that a majority of either community have completely rejected the agreement and there has been no return to large-scale intercommunity violence. In our analysis we seek to understand, and explain, the role that framing may have played in moderating the setbacks and failures of implementation.

### Framing in Prospect Theory

Tversky and Kahneman’s prospect theory (1981) focuses on the links between the framing of choices and the subsequent decisions taken. They found that when the preferred choice was framed as a possible gain, most respondents chose the alternative, so as to avoid possible risks. Conversely, when the preferred choice was framed as an alternative to a possible loss, most respondents preferred to take the risk of the preferred choice. This preponderance of risk aversion or risk-seeking behavior is labeled the *certainty effect*, and they found that when facing gains people “overweight outcomes that are considered certain, relative to outcomes which are merely probable” (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979, p. 265). Because individuals overvalue losses, the certainty effect means that people will engage in more risk to avoid losses viewed as certain than to secure gains viewed as merely probable (Masters, 2004).

Levy (1992) gives an overview of *prospect theory*, which emphasizes that people tend to evaluate gains and losses with regard to a reference point rather than to overall costs or benefits. This means that selection or promotion of a particular reference point becomes the key to determining the relative preferences of policy or other choices (Maoz, 1990). A reference point for a particular individual might be the status quo, but this is not necessarily the case, leading to the issue of framing the choice as envisioned by Tversky and Kahneman.

If the reference point serves as our external process, the conventional notion of framing is conceptualized as an internal process, whereby an individual accepts information that leads to a decision or choice. The “frame” is the manner in which the information entering the cognitive and emotional structures of an individual emphasize one element over another—in effect, attempting to create a reference point. The original conception by Kahneman and Tversky of the “decision frame” refers to an internal conception of the “acts, outcomes, and contingencies associated with a particular choice” (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981, p. 453). Boettcher conceptualizes framing as being composed of three elements: actor perception of alternative courses of action, the outcomes of those courses of action, and the probabilities associated with the possible outcomes (Boettcher III, 2004).

Examinations of prospect theory and the role of framing have typically focused on the impact of framing on select decision makers in retrospective case situations, as with Bueno de Mesquita, McDermott, and Cope (2001), Farnham (1992), Masters (2004), McInerney (1992), Maoz (1990), and Fanis (2004). Others have analyzed framing and decision making in laboratory situations, as with work done by Druckman (2001), Druckman and McDermott (2008), Tourangeau and Cong (2009), Larrick, Heath, and Hu (2009), Gimpel (2007), and Pratto, Glasford, and Hegarty (2006). Examination of agents attempting to set the reference point has largely focused on the role of the media in framing, or agenda setting as it is known in the policy analysis sphere. Works by Gamson (Gamson, 1989; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989), Price (Price and Tewksbury, 1997; Price, Tewksbury, and Powers, 1997), Shah, Watts, Domke, and Fan (2002), Shinar (2000), Druckman and Parkin (2005), Spencer (2004), and Wolfsfeld (1997, 2001, 2004) all focus on some aspect of the media or media use in setting the frame for debate, analysis, or decision making—or setting the reference point from the view of prospect theory. Additionally, most authors tend to operationalize decision frames through quantitative data

analysis, at times employing formal models to statistically weight the frames presented and decision choices made.

Our research seeks to extend the literature on prospect theory by showing how elites themselves, rather than just media outlets, make use of the certainty effect—either consciously or unconsciously—in attempting to garner support for momentous policy options. We identify and analyze the manner in which political elites supportive of the peace process in Northern Ireland sought to create reference points to frame the agreement in question as either a possible gain or as a better alternative than a probable loss if the agreement was not supported. This application of prospect theory both to larger populations and to peace processes in particular represents a novel extension of the theory and, as we will show, adds to our understanding of framing and to its role in generating support for peace.

### *Methods*

As outlined above, one of the main differences between our use of prospect theory and typical uses is our focus on elites as framing agents, not simply as decision makers. We identify the reference points created by supporting elites as well as attempting to determine whether these frames were successful in garnering support from the general populace for the GFA. An in-depth examination of the GFA permits deeper and richer understanding of the framing process than would a broader content analysis or experimental study. Furthermore, given the extensive literature examining framing effects using experimental methods, we felt that a discursive analysis of framing effects would extend the research on prospect theory in new directions and add to the literature on the theory as well as to our understanding of one of the elements necessary for a successful peace process.

The data for our analysis consist of public statements made by political party leaders or by their spokespersons during a six-month period bracketing the signing of the GFA. We concentrated largely on statements made from January through July 1998, although a few important statements through early September of that year were also collected. These statements were taken mainly from mainstream news sources, although they were limited to print sources to facilitate coding and under the premise that audio and video statements would also be covered by print media or released directly in textual formats. We collected 128 documents, which were managed by electronic coding.

We initially interrogated the data with a series of questions designed to uncover the major thematic frames that were used to describe the GFA.

Here are the guiding questions:

- How do leaders and their respective parties describe the agreement? (an end point, a beginning point, an interim point)
- How do leaders and their respective parties describe the implementation of the agreement? (easy, difficult, impossible)
- How do leaders and their parties describe the perceived benefits and costs of the agreement? (i.e., the selling of the agreement)

Implicit in these three questions are notions of how leaders and parties attempt to manage the expectations of their constituents. Within each question we analyze statements regarding expectations for the future on individual and social bases. These expectations include peace dividends, existential and material benefits, and description of future relations among the parties and with other societies.

### *Analysis*

The peace talks that produced the GFA were some of the most comprehensive and detailed ever, in terms of their structure. Likewise, the decision to ratify the agreement through popular votes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland offers a unique opportunity to examine how those in favor and those opposed to the agreement attempted to sell their vision of the agreement to the general population.

### *How Is the Agreement Described?*

Clearly, each group frames their support for the agreement differently in order to appeal to the interests of their constituents.

***Pro-Agreement Forces: Unionist/Loyalist.*** Of the several Unionist and Loyalist political parties that supported the agreement, none staked the future of their party and its leadership on the GFA more than the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) under David Trimble. Trimble had been forced to walk a fine line between supporters and opponents of the agreement, asserting that the agreement itself represented the best chance for peace in Northern Ireland, while keeping pressure on Republicans, most notably Sinn Féin and the IRA, to concretely renounce violence and decommission all paramilitary weapons. In his first description of the agreement, in an April 10 *Associated Press* report, Trimble noted: “We in the Ulster Unionist

Party rise from this table knowing that the union is stronger than it was when we sat down. . . . I see a great opportunity for us to start the healing process here in Northern Ireland.”

This quote focuses on Trimble’s main argument and sales pitch for the agreement, namely, that it strengthens the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Trimble expanded on this frame in an interview published in the *Belfast News Letter* on May 9, 1998:

There is no aspect of the Agreement that weakens the Union. What the Agreement does is say very clearly that the constitutional destiny of Northern Ireland is in the hands of Northern Ireland alone, that in terms of deciding it’s our choice as a people. The old Downing Street Declaration had some ambiguities and some people thought that somehow the votes of the people in the Republic of Ireland would matter. They don’t. The Republic of Ireland is completely out of the picture and Dublin is completely out of the picture as far as Northern Ireland’s destiny is concerned.

In this quote, the main thread of strengthening the union is partnered with reference to the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA)—much loathed by unionists who believed that it would cede some portion of sovereignty to the Republic—in effect implying that rejection of the GFA could strengthen the Irish dimension of the AIA.

In a speech given shortly after the conclusion of the negotiations, Trimble clearly paints the agreement as a starting point for the peace process, alluding to the difficulties in GFA implementation by saying that “whether it succeeds depends on what happens in succeeding days, but like the talks it will not fail for want of effort on our part” (Trimble, 2001).

Two of the smaller Unionist/Loyalist parties, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the now defunct Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), also expressed support for the agreement, although at times their support seemed more restrained than that of Trimble and the UUP. The UDP’s David Adams made an abbreviated statement on April 10, essentially asking the question, “Isn’t it far better we are spilling sweat than spilling blood?” The PUP’s leader, David Ervine, commented that “something amazing has happened. . . . I never thought I would see it in my lifetime; it genuinely is a new and golden opportunity.” Additionally, Ervine predicted that the referendum would pass, noting “all that is being offered by the alternative is more of the same pain, sadness and depression” (Fletcher, 1998).

The significance of these quotes is that all three parties' leaders are not only presenting the agreement as a possible gain but also making the point that the agreement is far better than the alternative of no agreement because of what would be lost. They are framing the agreement as an alternative to a loss by setting the reference point on what would be surely lost—the ceasefire itself—rather than on the possibility that the agreement would not deliver.

Trimble and other unionists and loyalists also emphasized that the agreement would return management of Northern Ireland's government and affairs to the people, through their elected representatives. This is important given Arthur's definition (1999) of the Protestant population as "demotic" in the sense of highly valuing local control of institutions and having felt deprived of that control by direct rule from London. Trimble is pointing to an opportunity cost in voting no on the referendum, namely, that a highly valued cultural good—local control of the institutions of government—would continue to be in the hands of appointees from London. In effect, these two frames of a no vote leading to resumption of violence and denying local control over the institutions of government emphasize the risks of the alternative to the preferred choice. Consciously or not, pro-agreement unionist and loyalist political leaders followed the strategy outlined by prospect theory as the one most likely to garner support.

***Pro-Agreement Forces: Nationalist/Republican.*** One of the first things to note about the support for the agreement in Northern Ireland's Catholic community is that it was overwhelming. The two largest political parties in this community are the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP), at that time led by John Hume, and Sinn Féin, led by Gerry Adams. Hume, who later won the Nobel Peace Prize along with Trimble, has often been described as the architect of the Northern Irish peace process. Hume greeted the agreement warmly, expressing his thanks to the Blair and Major governments and stating his belief that "the next century will be the first in our island [sic] history in which there will be no killings on our streets and no emigration of our young to other lands to earn a living" (Cordon and Graham, 1998). In a news conference on April 29, reported by the *Belfast News Letter*, Hume declared:

We share the opportunity and the responsibility to create new agreed political structures where we can work together rather than against each other. The Agreement challenges all of us but threatens none of us.

Nobody's identity is diminished by the Agreement, nobody's rights are threatened, and nobody's aspiration is thwarted. The integrity of nobody's position has been surrendered in this Agreement.

Hume echoed the unionist sentiment that the agreement represented a starting point, indicating that "it offers everyone participation and challenges all of us to partnership," and called for a strong yes vote to give the agreement the strength necessary to withstand the difficult issues ahead.

Adams and Sinn Féin also expressed support for the agreement, although the tone was somewhat different than that of Hume and the SDLP. In an April 10 postsigning statement reported by the *Associated Press*, Adams said:

Sinn Féin has a vision of the future, of an Ireland free from division and conflict, a society in which there is equality for all citizens and where all our people can live together in peace. And we believe this can be achieved in our lifetime.

His deputy, Martin McGuinness, indicated that "fundamental and transforming change" had taken place, but Adams, like Hume and Trimble, indicated that the signing of the agreement was only a first step, stating in an *Agence France Presse* report on April 10 that "we have a long way to go if we are to achieve a durable and a lasting peace and I think all of us have shared a very unique experience here in the [Stormont] Castle Buildings." And: "Clearly there is still a huge gap of distrust between [Catholic] nationalists and [Protestant] unionists. It must be bridged on the basis of equality."

In the same report, Adams indicated that the goals of Sinn Féin and the Republican movement had not changed and that he and they were still "absolutely committed" to the goal of a unified Irish Republic. In his words, "We will continue to pursue these objectives in the months and years ahead."

Here too, it is clear that Republican and Nationalist leaders view the agreement as a starting point rather than an end point, noting that much work would need to continue to ensure successful implementation of the agreement. However, neither party focused on the agreement as an alternative to continuing the struggle. As such the political leaders attempted to set the reference point as an aspiration, tempered by the necessity for a long, and possibly difficult, implementation. Contrary to the advice of

prospect theory, nationalist and republican leaders largely did not focus on the agreement as better than the alternative. Hume and the SDLP's focus was on the bright future that lay ahead, with most references to the past asserting that violence was finished and that there would be no major killings in the future. Adams and Sinn Féin, by contrast, focused on the agreement as a continuation of the struggle, emphasizing that they had not given up the republican goal of a united Ireland, but had merely traded in Armalite for the ballot box. In their appeals to voters, Adams and Sinn Féin also extolled the end of the conflict and the chance for peace and equality for all citizens of Northern Ireland. Neither party framed the agreement as better than the alternative. For the nationalist and republican communities, who voted in excess of 90 percent for the GFA, this approach may have entailed less risk of a no vote than for the unionist and loyalist communities, whose yes vote reached only 55 percent. Additionally, as the leader of a party aligned with—and some contend the same as—a paramilitary movement, framing the agreement as better than the alternative of continued conflict might have sounded like lack of commitment to the struggle on Adams's part to his constituents and, quite possibly, might have sounded like a threat to his unionist and loyalist opponents, making a strategy based on prospect theory perhaps riskier for Adams than the aspirational framing that he followed.

***Pro-Agreement Forces: Others.*** In addition to the Unionist/Loyalist political parties and Nationalist/Republican political parties, there are a number of cross-communal parties, such as the Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, that backed the agreement and played a part in its negotiation. In addition to these groups, a nonparty group, the "Yes Campaign," was formed to sell the agreement in the period between the April 10 signing and the May 22 referendum. Despite this group not being made up of politicians and not representing a political party, its goal of persuading the populace to support the agreement by voting yes in the referendum places them at the center of our analysis. The director of the Campaign, Quintin Oliver, stated: "Our job is to persuade them to come with us. The indications are that a majority of them will. Many will decide to vote Yes with the ballot paper in front of them and a pencil in their hand" (Mullin, 1998).

The Yes Campaign was well organized and financed, operating at multiple levels with contacts among all of the supportive political campaigns (Oliver, 1998). In addition to their efforts, Prime Minister Tony Blair

made several trips to the province, and support for the agreement was expressed by former Prime Minister John Major and U.S. President Bill Clinton. One event of note was a concert featuring the Irish rock group U2 and a local act, Ash. There was a joint appearance by Trimble and Hume, who shook hands on stage and were joined by Bono of U2 in an appeal to the youth of Northern Ireland, who were expected to vote overwhelmingly for the agreement.

The framing by the Yes Campaign mirrored that of the political parties (albeit with more flair). The Yes Campaign's focus was less on the desired end state—whether Northern Ireland should remain in the Union or unify with the Republic—and more on the prospect for long-term peace and a better environment for all citizens in Northern Ireland. Themes such as “The Agreement Is a Fresh Start” and “Yes, the Way Ahead” focused on the positive aspects of having a peace agreement. These were mirrored by statements that the No Campaign had no viable alternative and that rejection of the agreement could lead to another cycle of violence.

The Yes Campaign focused more on traditional costs and benefits than did many of the political parties. Much of their emphasis on the benefits was framed as aspirations for peace and for its benefits, while much of their emphasis on costs was framed in accordance with prospect theory. Costs were largely described in terms of the opportunity costs that would ensue if the GFA were not ratified. This approach was specifically laid out in the Yes Campaign's eleven-point plan for selling the agreement. Points six and seven focused on making the alternative to the agreement seem riskier, detailing a vision for describing the agreement as “a unique opportunity that would not come again” and trying to convince voters that “there was no alternative” to the agreement for reaching peace (Oliver, 1998, p. 26). There is evidence that those involved with the Yes Campaign consciously understood that the agreement had to be framed as both a positive and the only viable alternative to a future of continued conflict and uncertainty. A large UK advertising firm—Saatchi and Saatchi—did pro bono work for the Yes Campaign, including strategizing and designing many of its most successful and memorable logos and motifs, most notably the “Yes, it's the way ahead” arrow next to the “No through road” T poster. Oliver (1998) notes that a cohort of unionists who had been answering interview questions for the Yes Campaign indicated they were fearful of a majority no vote, confirming for Oliver the advice of Alan Bishop, the Saatchi executive assisting the campaign, that “people know what they don't like” and that includes “looking over the abyss” (Oliver, 1998, p. 88). This understanding of certainty effect,

even if phrased in layman's terms, helps to explain the impact of the Yes Campaign and its ability to help mobilize enough unionist and loyalist votes to win a slim majority of that community.

***How Is Implementation Described?*** As we shift attention to our next question, we begin to focus more on how the level of perceived difficulty in implementing the GFA is described. Our question is designed to more explicitly address how pro-agreement elites tried to garner support for the agreement *and* manage expectations in an attempt to avoid a loss of support when the agreement, inevitably, failed to deliver all that had been promised.

Overall it appears that most of the parties supporting the agreement described its implementation as difficult, but not impossible. Such statements were issued from all sides, from an *Agence France Presse* report of Adams's statement on April 10 that "[w]e have a long way to go if we are to achieve a durable and a lasting peace" to Trimble's comments that "nobody said that life was going to be easy, nobody going into the future can say that they do so with every aspect of that guaranteed and with no uncertainty at all" (Pauley, 1998a), and that as of April 20, there were "considerable difficulties" ahead if the agreement was to work (Corden and Graham, 1998). Hume echoed these sentiments in his May 27 statement, reported in the *Belfast Telegraph*, noting that "we will not change overnight. There is no magic wand. But we can begin the process of change."

Additionally, as reported in the *Belfast News Letter* on April 21, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Marjorie (Mow) Mowlam—addressing the House of Commons—indicated that implementation would not be easy: "We thought it was tough up to Good Friday. We are going to have some tough times in the months ahead." Others, including then leader of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition Monica McWilliams, praised the agreement but cautioned that "we all recognise that a lot of work is still to be done. We are still a deeply divided society" (Zapf, 1998).

Supporters' descriptions of the agreement reflect the sense of realism that each of the parties had about their differing end goals for the agreement. Given that the main groups, Unionist and Nationalist, had diametrically opposed goals for the end state of Northern Ireland, implementation of the agreement as a structure by which future disagreements could be worked out peacefully in essence ensured that any implementation would be difficult. Since so many issues—decommissioning, policing, implementation of the Local Assembly—had yet to be worked out, the implication arose that

the process would continue to be challenging, but that it would not be impossible. Some even characterized the Good Friday Agreement as not the end but “the end of the beginning” of the peace process, reflecting the notion of a long, drawn-out process that would take many years of hard work to reach fruition.

Although all of the parties supporting the agreement attempted to manage expectations to a greater or lesser degree, it is a fact in any peace process that in order to garner support its costs, and more important its benefits, are going to have to be described to those who would be ostensibly gaining or losing. We now turn our attention to this question.

### How Are the Costs and Benefits Described?

This final segment addresses the specifics of how costs and benefits for the agreement were described. In some senses this question is similar to our first; however, the focus on the descriptions of pros and cons associated with the agreement drills down to some of the rewards for making peace and the sacrifices people would have to make. As such, this section is where we examine most clearly the balance between selling the agreement through a combination of aspirational and risk aversion frames and the need to manage expectations in order to attempt to check irrational exuberance.

There are two strands of thought with respect to the perceived benefits and costs of the Good Friday Agreement. One is exemplified by the leaders of pro-agreement local political parties, who tended to focus more on the social benefits of an end to the violence and achievement of their respective long-term goals, with Trimble accentuating the preservation and strengthening of the Union and Hume accentuating the benefits of an absence of violence for the next generation in Northern Ireland. Adams and Sinn Féin, by contrast, adopted a more skeptical tone, which observers believe was necessary to convince the IRA that—even though the armed conflict may have been at an end—Adams and Sinn Féin would continue to fight for the Republican community and eventual reunification of the north with the Republic of Ireland. In a statement commemorating the 1916 Easter Rising, Adams commented on the agreement, admonishing members of Sinn Féin: “It is your responsibility to assess this document, each and every one of you, not to consider it through a Unionist filter . . . but in the context of our future strategy, policy, and objectives. In other words, has the struggle been advanced, and how can it be advanced further?” (Cullen, 1998).

The second group of proponents consisted mostly of external leaders, largely represented by the British, Irish, and U.S. governments. These individuals and groups tended to focus on the benefits to ending the violence and on the perceived economic benefits of a “peace dividend” in terms of increased investment in the province. The description of costs and benefits by the outside proponents of the agreement tended to focus more on the benefits of the agreement than on its costs. These outside supporters instead shifted their focus on costs to the opportunity costs of a no vote, reinforcing the aspirational message of the benefits with the setting of the reference point toward the costs of the alternative: voting against the agreement. In a May 22 statement at Hillsborough Castle, Blair implored unionists to vote for the agreement and not to “squander the best chance in generations for a decent future” (Pauley, 1998b). Major explicitly used this formulation as reported in a May 2 *Press Association* preview of a speech in Northern Ireland: “Mr. Major will argue that successful implementation of the Good Friday deal would have huge benefits for the Province’s people. But he will warn that a rejection of it in the May 22 referendum would risk condemning the whole community to a continuation of the miseries of the past 30 years.”

The piece noted that Major would hammer at these points:

A “no” vote, Mr. Major will say, would be a rejection of an end to violence and of the possibility of peace and reconciliation. . . . Rejection of the deal would leave the Province dotted with the military paraphernalia . . . and cost it the new inward investment. . . . Mr. Major will predict that a resolution of the conflict would prompt a wall of investment into Ulster from Britain, the US, Europe and the rest of the world.

President Clinton echoed some of these sentiments on April 10 and May 7. In the first statement, he did not make specific promises of economic aid to the province, but rather stated that he believed “there will be very significant economic benefits flowing to the people of Ireland, both Protestant and Catholic, in Northern Ireland and in the Republic, if this peace takes hold.” By May 7, Clinton announced “a series of actions to bolster the foundations of peace.” His actions consisted of several projects, including continuation of funding for the U.S.-sponsored International Fund for Northern Ireland. Specific monies were earmarked for the Springvale campus in west Belfast; for institution building for the new, devolved government; and for a welfare-to-work program for the province.

Much of the talk about benefiting from the peace process was aimed specifically at the paramilitary groups, both to remind supporting groups to keep their commitments to nonviolence and to encourage opposing groups to join the process so they too could benefit from the early-release program for paramilitary prisoners. Like many of the other messages, this focus had a carrot-and-stick aspect to it, with Blair and others indicating that groups not signing up to the agreement or committing acts of violence after April 10 would not have “the benefit of any of the parts of the agreement, in respect of seats in the executive of Northern Ireland or accelerated prisoner release” (Mason, 1998).

The overall message was that the agreement represented the best, and perhaps only, chance for ending the conflict and that the benefits of peace, although nonspecific in terms of the much vaunted peace dividend, were far superior to the fear of losing the relative normalcy that had been gained after the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 and 1997. The combination here is of two reference points: the first focused on the losses that would be incurred by rejection, and the second reinforced the first by focusing on the benefits as opportunity costs of a no vote. These themes were most forcefully articulated by UK leaders, past and present, and also by the Yes Campaign, which, as outlined above, explicitly sought to frame the GFA as the best alternative to a return to violence while pressing ahead on the benefits that the agreement would bring. For his part, Hume focused less explicitly on the dangers of a no vote, but he did push the alternative-to-a-loss theme when he indicated that the GFA meant not returning to a past filled with violence. These actions, particularly by the Yes Campaign, show that the strategy advocated by prospect theory as having the most promise in garnering support was, in fact, followed by several of the major supporters of the agreement.

## Discussion

The overall pattern that we have seen in our analysis is that many of those who supported the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland did what prospect theory predicts they ought to do: they promoted the agreement as better than the alternative of continued conflict. In doing so, local political leaders tended to stress the difficulties inherent in implementing the agreement. They also emphasized the fact that the agreement should be characterized as a starting point rather than an ending point. The Yes Campaign, along with UK leaders, also emphasized the agreement as better than

the alternative of continued conflict. However, these groups, along with U.S. and Republic of Ireland leaders, tended to promote the benefits of the agreement rather than attempting to reduce expectations by emphasizing the difficulties of implementation. This strategy is not directly addressed here, but we believe that the framing of the agreement according to the recommendations of prospect theory may have, to some extent, insulated the agreement from the disappointment that certainly resulted from the failure to meet some promised expectations. In other words, even though the populace may not have received all of the peace dividend that was promised, they were reminded that the one main benefit of the peace agreement was peace and not a return to war.

Many expectations about the peace have not been met, but the level of dissatisfaction has remained relatively low. Polls conducted following the GFA by Colin Irwin at Queen's University in Belfast show that during the many ups and downs in the peace process, support for the agreement remained strong in both communities. Catholic support for the agreement in February 1999 was at 97 percent, falling to 92 percent by February 2003. Protestant support for the agreement over the same period started at 89 percent and fell to 60 percent by February 2003. Overall belief that full implementation of the agreement was "essential" started at 37 percent (59 percent when added to "desirable") and stayed fairly steady throughout the four polls, falling to only 33 percent essential (55 percent when added to desirable) by February 2003 (Irwin, 2009). This analysis begs the question as to why unionist voters replaced the UUP with the DUP if they were not fed up with the terms of the GFA. Reconciling these two positions is complicated, and though there is considerable evidence that unionists, especially working-class loyalists, felt left out in terms of receiving the benefits of the agreement, this does not mean they simply chose to reject it. As Chris Gilligan puts it, people shifted their votes because the DUP articulated their sense of dissatisfaction, not because they felt that the DUP's policies would be radically different from the UUP's (Gilligan, 2005).

There is a question as to how much of an effect the framing of a peace agreement will have on popular support over time, as opposed to other factors. Some of these other factors could arguably be more important, such as the degree to which the agreement is implemented, the extent to which violence dies down, and the extent to which civilian populations on both sides are able to go about their everyday lives and experience improvements. However, we argue that even though framing cannot substitute for these factors, it can help people try to make sense of the improvements,

or especially their absence. By focusing on the argument that, as flawed as it was, the Good Friday Agreement was far superior to the alternative of descending back into violence, supporters of the agreement insulated it to an extent from the vicissitudes of the implementation process with its many suspensions and delays. In other words, the focus on the dangers of the agreement's failure may have ameliorated some of the failures of implementation.

*Implications: Theoretical and Practical*

The power of prospect theory to help us understand decision framing and choices is applicable to a number of instances outside the referendum structure for the GFA. In terms of selling peace agreements, we have elsewhere examined the framing of the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accords of 1993, finding that the failure of proponents to focus on the costs of failure rather than the rewards of success led to disillusionment in both populations and ultimately contributed to the return to violence in September 2000. Additionally, Masters's examination of the decision to join radical movements is another example of prospect theory's utility in explaining something other than elite behavior.

Theoretically and morally, although one might criticize a prospect theory approach to policy framing as fearmongering, it is, at least in its practical application to peace referenda, much more nuanced and balanced. The natural inclination that individuals have for risk aversion means that to get people to take a chance for peace, they need to be aware of all of the possibilities associated with their choices. In an interview for another project, Oliver, the managing director of the Yes Campaign, indicated that one needs to balance the negatives with the positives and not descend into scaremongering; one also has a duty to "test the negative" by asking what will happen if a no vote wins. Oliver defends this view: "You may characterize that as negative but in a way it's just giving the voter more information on which to make their choice, and therefore, if you can paint the picture that voting no will keep the status quo and that it's bad and damaging to the interests of the voter, then that may be helpful in persuading them to move to yes" (Quintin Oliver [Director, Yes Campaign], interview by Landon Hancock, January 14, 2010).

The use of prospect theory in peace agreements has implications for conflict resolution practice as well. In this article, we focused on the roles played largely by partisan political leaders and some interlocutors, notably President Clinton and the leaders of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

However, the lessons of attempting to focus a population's attention on the risks of failure extend far beyond the officials of Track I diplomacy. The role played by the nonparty Yes Campaign, made up of self-appointed individuals from Northern Ireland's NGO community, shows the impact that a dedicated group of individuals can have on the success or failure of a peace process if they follow the tenets of prospect theory. This lesson is one that can be learned by peace activists in other conflict zones, who can use their influence to shift perceptions of peace efforts after an agreement has been reached. Alternatively, as was done in Colombia's Citizen Mandate for Peace in 1997 and suggested by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for a Palestinian referendum on the two-state solution in 2006, grassroots activists can strengthen the hands of those working for peace by showing substantial support for peace efforts before any agreement is signed.

Furthermore, the unique aspect of the GFA—namely, its public ratification requirement—may become less unique as other peace processes move forward. Bearing in mind the rapid diffusion of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions following South Africa's truth and reconciliation process, Oliver foresees expanded use of referenda as a method for “sealing the deal” and giving agreements the stamp of democratic approval—many of which are negotiated in secrecy. The use of a referendum has been suggested in many quarters as a method for legitimizing any future agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. In December 2009, the Israeli Knesset gave preliminary approval to a new law requiring public approval of any peace process in which Israel forfeits territory, and there have been calls for a similar referendum on the Palestinian side. Some suggest that such restrictions might limit peacemaking, but the requirement for public referenda in future peace processes means that elites and other interveners will need to come to grips with the realities of public campaigns and the best ways of persuading voters to support the unknowns inherent in any peace process.

A final element that conflict interveners would do well to remember is the necessity of keeping people's focus on the main benefit of any peace agreement: the fact that it will deliver peace instead of conflict. Track I interveners, such as the U.S. government, tend to see, and be seen, as some form of “sugar daddy” who will sweeten unpopular deals with economic assets, cash investments, and the like. Although some of these benefits may be necessary to entice politicians into supporting specific agreements, this type of largesse is unlikely to make itself felt across the spectrum and will not guarantee continued support for an agreement that is seen as unpopular. Additionally, by making people aware of the costs of failure, interveners at

any level can help to insulate an agreement from rejection by reminding the populace, much as the Yes Campaign did in Northern Ireland, that as much as success requires everyone to work for it, failure is also the responsibility of all involved (Oliver, 1998).

Overall, we believe that how a peace process is framed can have an impact on the longevity and possibly the success of that process. By following the recommendations of prospect theory, those who supported the Good Friday Agreement helped constituents to keep their eyes focused on the long-term view of peace as preferable to an alternative framed as a return to violence and war. The risk of returning to conflict was, in fact, less real than the framing might have suggested; we think that this is so precisely because that framing insulated the agreement from the disappointment stemming from the many suspensions and failures in implementation. The lesson that other peace supporters and interveners should take home from the GFA referendum is that because the populace remained largely behind the agreement and supportive of its implementation, political leaders from the more extreme parties were finally able to come together in 2007, nine years after the signing of the GFA, to start another round of implementation.

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