RESEARCH
SERIES
NUMBER 170
NOVEMBER 2023

CHANGING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES IN IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

JAMES LAURENCE, STEFANIE SPRONG, FRANCES MCGINNITY, HELEN RUSSELL AND GARANCE HINGRE

AN INSTITIÚID UM THAIGHDE EACNAMAÍOCHTA AGUS SÓISIALTA
ESRI ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

CHANGING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES IN IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

James Laurence
Stefanie Sprong
Fran McGinnity
Helen Russell
Garance Hingre

November 2023

RESEARCH SERIES

NUMBER 170

Available to download from www.esri.ie

https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170

ABOUT THE ESRI

The mission of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) is to advance evidence based policymaking that supports economic sustainability and social progress in Ireland. ESRI researchers apply the highest standards of academic excellence to challenges facing policymakers, focusing on 10 areas of critical importance to 21st Century Ireland.

The Institute was founded in 1960 by a group of senior civil servants led by Dr T.K. Whitaker, who identified the need for independent and in-depth research analysis to provide a robust evidence base for policymaking in Ireland.

Since then, the Institute has remained committed to independent research and its work is free of any expressed ideology or political position. The Institute publishes all research reaching the appropriate academic standard, irrespective of its findings or who funds the research.

The quality of its research output is guaranteed by a rigorous peer review process. ESRI researchers are experts in their fields and are committed to producing work that meets the highest academic standards and practices.

The work of the Institute is disseminated widely in books, journal articles and reports. ESRI publications are available to download, free of charge, from its website. Additionally, ESRI staff communicate research findings at regular conferences and seminars.

The ESRI is a company limited by guarantee, answerable to its members and governed by a Council, comprising up to 14 members who represent a cross-section of ESRI members from academia, civil services, state agencies, businesses and civil society. The Institute receives an annual grant-in-aid from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to support the scientific and public interest elements of the Institute's activities; the grant accounted for an average of 30 per cent of the Institute's income over the lifetime of the last Research Strategy. The remaining funding comes from research programmes supported by government departments and agencies, public bodies and competitive research programmes.

Further information is available at www.esri.ie.

THE AUTHORS

James Laurence is a Senior Research Officer at the Economic and Social Research Institute and an Adjunct Professor at Trinity College Dublin. Stefanie Sprong was a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Economic and Social Research Institute. Frances McGinnity is an Associate Research Professor at the Economic and Social Research Institute, Adjunct Professor at Trinity College Dublin and Visiting Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics. Helen Russell is a Research Professor at the Economic and Social Research Institute and an Adjunct Professor at Trinity College Dublin. Garance Hingre is a Research Assistant at the Economic and Social Research Institute.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research forms part of a research partnership between the ESRI and the Shared Island Unit of the Department of the Taoiseach on 'The Economic and Social Opportunities from Increased Cooperation on the Shared Island'. The purpose of the programme is to produce research outputs which will add to understanding of current and potential linkages across the island of Ireland in a range of economic, social and environmental domains. We would like to thank Dr Paula Devine, Queen's University Belfast and co-director of ARK, who acted as project advisor and provided useful comments on the report. We also acknowledge the comments of an external expert reviews, and our ESRI colleagues, both as internal reviewers and participants at an ESRI research seminar in June 2023.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS

A8	Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EC	European Commission
EEC	European Economic Community
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ESS	European Social Survey
EU	European Union
EU15	France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, UK, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Sweden
EVS	European Values Study
GNI	Gross National Income
HH	Household
HPTI	Housing Payment-to-Income ratio
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Funds
IPSOS	Institut Publique de Sondage d'Opinion Secteur
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRE/IE	Ireland
NI	Northern Ireland
NILT	Northern Ireland Life and Times survey
NISA	Northern Ireland Social Attitudes survey
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
SIU	Shared Island Unit
UK	United Kingdom
WVS	World Values Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The 21st century has seen significant social, political, and economic change on the island of Ireland. This report draws on multiple sources of high-quality, comparative social survey data to explore the development of social and political attitudes in Ireland, North and South, over the past 25 years. In Ireland, attitudes are tracked from 1998 to 2023. In Northern Ireland, more limited survey data sources mean most attitudes are tracked from 1998 to 2018 only.

This is the first study to compare and contrast trends in attitudes on the island of Ireland over the past two decades. In doing so, the report provides insight into how social and political attitudes have changed over the last 25 years ('overall trends'); whether different social groups are experiencing different trends in attitudes (especially those who finished education earlier or later); whether there are generational differences in attitudes, and how these are changing over time. This analysis can help policymakers and civil society understand what conditions lead to positive societal attitudes and perceptions of fairness, political efficacy, and trust.

The report investigates three sets of social and political attitudes:

- Satisfaction with democracy, perceived political efficacy and positive expectations of the future: indicating how well individuals believe their society (particularly the political system) is functioning, and the direction in which they feel their society is heading.
- Trust in institutions and trust in other people: indicating levels of social cohesion in society, particularly people's trust in institutions (political, judicial and media) and trust in other people.
- Attitudes towards income inequality and equal opportunities: indicating how fair people feel the socio-economic structure of their society is.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall trends

- Around the start of the 21st century, social and political attitudes were generally more positive in Ireland than in Northern Ireland (see Table 6.1 for full summary of findings). Satisfaction with democracy, trust in political, judicial and media institutions, and perceived political efficacy (the latter measured from 2007 onwards) in Ireland were generally higher compared to Northern

Ireland. However, levels of positive expectations for the future were similar in both jurisdictions around the beginning of the century.

- People in Ireland started and finished the study period (1998-2023) with some of the most positive social and political attitudes in Western Europe. Northern Ireland, on the other hand, had some of the least positive attitudes.
- Both jurisdictions have witnessed several longer-term changes in attitudes over the 21st century. In Ireland, positive expectations about the future have generally declined, never fully recovering to their Celtic Tiger boom period levels. Northern Ireland has seen a general rise in satisfaction with democracy since the start of the century, but political trust, media trust, and especially optimism have seen longer-term declines over the past 20 years or so.
- Attitudes in both Ireland and Northern Ireland over the past two decades appear to have been significantly shaped by the 2008/09 recession and the subsequent period of austerity and welfare reform, especially in Ireland. With the onset of the crash (2007/08), satisfaction with democracy, political trust, media trust, trust in other people and optimism all saw notable declines over the recession, while support for reducing income inequality increased. Attitudes then generally improved again in the post-recession period, and in Ireland these had largely returned to their pre-recession levels by around 2018.
- Changes in attitudes in Northern Ireland also coincided with periods of political instability and change. Between 1998 and 2007, satisfaction with democracy fluctuated significantly, and political trust and media trust declined steadily. This occurred alongside swinging perceptions of community relations, spikes in 'Troubles'-related violence and the suspension of the Stormont Assembly. The period of steady improvements in attitudes in the post-recession period coincided with a greater degree of political stability.
- In more recent years, both Ireland (up to 2023) and Northern Ireland (up to 2018) have seen some instability in societal attitudes. In Northern Ireland, satisfaction with democracy, optimism, political trust, and judicial trust all declined between 2016 and 2018 (our last datapoint), while perceived political efficacy stayed the same. These declines occurred at a time of renewed political instability, including the Brexit vote (and debates around its potential impacts on the border on the island of Ireland), and the recurrent suspension of power-sharing from 2017 onwards. This period also saw a widening gap in attitudes between Ireland and Northern Ireland again, which had shrunk considerably in the post-recession period.
- In Ireland, meanwhile, perceived political efficacy and optimism saw overall declines in the period since 2019, trust in the media began to decline in 2022, while beliefs that the government should reduce income inequality increased again from 2018/19 onwards. This may be the result of multiple sources of instability in recent years, including the pandemic, the onset of the global cost-of-living crisis, the housing crisis and healthcare strains, alongside potential

risks posed by disinformation spread online. It is too early to tell whether these declines represent a longer-term trend or whether they are a short-term dip. However, in spite of this recent instability, most attitudes in Ireland remain some of the most positive in Western Europe.

Differences across education

- The past 20 to 25 years have seen the emergence and widening of gaps in social and political attitudes between those who left education earlier (less educated) and later (more educated). While more educated groups generally have more positive societal attitudes, in both jurisdictions the size of this gap has grown (or recently emerged) for many attitudes. One explanation could be that more educated groups experienced less pecuniary hardship from the recession and recovered more quickly while less educated groups may have felt disenchantment due to greater and more prolonged hardship.
- Educational differences in trust in other people have significantly widened over the past 20-25 years across both jurisdictions. By 2022/23, social trust among the less educated group had still not recovered to its pre-recession high, while trust among the more educated group had returned, or even exceeded, its pre-recession levels.
- The exception to these widening educational gaps is in people's positive expectations for the future. Higher educated groups were more optimistic about their future than lower educated groups at the start of the century. However, in both jurisdictions this gap shrank in the post-recession period, driven by larger declines in optimism among the more educated group. This pattern is particularly strong in Northern Ireland, where optimism has more than halved in the more educated group over the past 20 years.

Generational differences

- In Northern Ireland, older generations tend to hold more positive social and political attitudes than younger generations. Over time, these generational differences in satisfaction with democracy, political voice, political trust, and social trust appear to have widened, due to larger improvements in attitudes among older cohorts, and stability or even declining attitudes among younger cohorts, particularly in the 2013-2018 period. The youngest cohort has the lowest social trust and highest belief that income inequality is too high.
- In Ireland, generational differences appear smaller and more stable. However, in recent years, among younger cohorts, trends in satisfaction with democracy, political trust, and judicial trust have remained stable (while increasing for older cohorts); their perceived political efficacy and media trust have begun to decline; and their social trust has remained low over the 21st century.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The report reveals important insights into the societal conditions that can build and maintain an engaged, optimistic, cohesive citizenry who are connected to and trusting of their society and its institutions on the island of Ireland.

- The health of the economy, and how governments respond to economic crises, appear critical in maintaining positive societal attitudes. This has been particularly evident in Ireland over the 21st century (although apparent in Northern Ireland too). While the 'lost decade' for Ireland's economy is often discussed, this report shows how Ireland experienced an attendant decline in positive social and political attitudes over the same decade, though these have recovered as the economy recovered.
- Governments themselves can also play a critical role in shaping societal attitudes, not least by maintaining a functioning political system in which the government is able to implement positive changes and is responsive to public needs and concerns. This appears particularly acute in Northern Ireland, given the severity of political instability that has taken place.
- Attention needs to be paid to growing gaps in societal attitudes between more and less educated groups. Efforts should be made to protect the more precarious groups in society, and to provide support for their equal economic and social participation, to help maintain cohesive and positive relationships between members of these groups and society at large.
- Ireland and Northern Ireland are also facing their own specific challenges, especially regarding expectations for the future. In Ireland in 2023, levels of optimism among the least educated group are as low as during the recession. In Northern Ireland, however, there is particular concern for the more educated group who have seen their optimism halve over the last 20 years.
- The instability in social and political attitudes in both Northern Ireland (between 2015 and 2018) and in more recent years in Ireland (2019-2023) indicate that periods of multiple and compounding societal strains can pose a particular challenge to maintaining positive societal attitudes, especially among more precarious segments of society, such as less educated groups.
- Both jurisdictions need to be aware that their youngest cohorts are becoming increasingly pessimistic about society and their place within it. While this may reflect short-term reactions to societal pressures, if it persists it may represent growing dissatisfaction among younger cohorts, leading to longer-term declines in these attitudes as younger, more dissatisfied cohorts replace older cohorts with more positive views.
- The report identifies the need for a regular social and political survey in Ireland, that can align with similar surveys in Northern Ireland, to provide detailed insights into changing societal dynamics on the island of Ireland.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 MOTIVATION

The last 25 years have seen considerable social and political change in Ireland, both North and South. In Northern Ireland (NI) the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 ushered in a period of relative political stability, although still punctuated by periods of instability and paralysis (Devine and Robinson, 2019). In Ireland,[1] changing attitudes and values are particularly evidenced by recent referenda on marriage equality and abortion (Elkink et al., 2020). Earlier in the 20th century, attitudes in Ireland were heavily informed by the Catholic Church; in Northern Ireland religious beliefs have also played a key role in informing social attitudes, but religious differences were much more prominent. However, recent decades have seen a significant decline in religious practice across the island, particularly in Ireland (Brewer, 2015; Greeley, 2017). Both jurisdictions have also seen a rapid rise in educational qualifications and access to higher education (Smyth et al., 2022). At the same time, several other transformations have occurred, such as rising standards of living (Bergin and McGuinness, 2021), increasing immigration and ethnic diversity (McGinnity et al., 2023), and the 2008/09 recession, the effects of which were far deeper in Ireland.[2]

In recent years, there have also been multiple and often compounding crises across the island, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the cost-of-living crisis. In Ireland, these have occurred across a backdrop of a housing crisis[3] and straining healthcare system.[4] In Northern Ireland, there has been renewed political instability, including prolonged periods of suspended power-sharing, perceptions that community relations are worsening,[5] fallout from the Brexit referendum, and growing pressures on public services, particularly health. This has led to growing concerns regarding the perceived efficacy of the Good Friday Agreement. For example, the share of citizens stating the need to reform the Agreement increased from 35 per cent in 2019 to 45 per cent in 2020 (Hayward and Rosher, 2021).

1 Throughout the report, 'Ireland' only refers to the 'Republic of Ireland', 'Northern Ireland' refers to 'Northern Ireland', and the 'island of Ireland' refers to both jurisdictions.

2 Ireland: https://data.cso.ie/table/QLF02; Northern Ireland: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/timeseries/zsfb/lms#.

3 https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/housing-planning/2023/03/23/irelands-housing-crisis-facts-and-figures-all-you-need-to-know/.

4 https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorials/2023/01/06/the-irish-times-view-on-the-healthcare-crisis/.

5 https://www.community-relations.org.uk/news-centre/perceptions-community-relations-ark-data-series-30-years.

Against this backdrop of societies in flux, this report aims to explore how social and political attitudes have changed in Ireland, North and South, over the past 20-25 years. In doing so, it will ask:

- Are social and political attitudes converging or diverging across the island?
- How are Ireland and Northern Ireland faring compared to Great Britain and average attitudes across the EU15?
- Are differences in attitudes growing or shrinking across social groups; in particular, across more and less educated groups?
- Do attitudes differ across generations, and have any generational differences grown or shrunk over time?
- And what are the possible drivers of changing attitudes across the island?

The report forms part of a broader collaboration between the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Shared Island Unit (SIU) which seeks to develop our 'understanding of current and potential linkages across the island of Ireland in a range of economic, social, and environmental domains'.[6] Prior research from the collaboration has largely focused on objective indicators of societal progress, such as education, employment, and economic outcomes such as productivity (Bergin and McGuinness, 2022; Smyth et al., 2022; McGinnity et al., 2023). However, more subjective appraisals of a society, derived from people's social and political attitudes, can capture dimensions of societal health and progress not easily measured by objective indicators; for example, social cohesion or how effectively governments are functioning for people. People's attitudes are also strong predictors of future actions and behaviours (Kaiser and Oswald, 2022).

Accordingly, this report will provide critical insights into the social, civic, and political health of Ireland, North and South, through an analysis of adults' views of their society, how it functions, and their role within it. The social and political climate provides important context for policymaking. For governments to effectively address the needs of their citizens, they need to understand citizens' issue-prioritisations, their experiences of society, their values, and their behaviours (Breen and Healy, 2016). Policymakers have the opportunity, for example, to address areas which suffer from lower trust among citizens and invest in social cohesion (Fahey et al., 2005).

By analysing the attitudes of citizens, this report will highlight similarities and differences across jurisdictions and assist in understanding social dynamics in Ireland, North and South. Identifying where attitudes are aligning can provide

6 https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/645ff-shared-island-research/#economic-and-social-research-institute.

insights into where jurisdictions can support one another and where future cross-border cooperation may be most fruitful (especially among younger cohorts). At the same time, it can shed light on what might be shaping these attitudes and how we got to where we are and also where we might be heading.

1.2 INDICATORS OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

This report will explore three key sets of attitudes:

- The first set sheds light on how well individuals believe their society is functioning, particularly its political system and their ability to participate in it, alongside a sense of the direction they feel their society is heading.
- The second set will provide a picture of social cohesion in society, particularly people's trust in their society's institutions and fellow members of society.
- The third set will generate insights into how fair people feel their society is through an analysis of their attitudes towards inequality and equal opportunities.

Together these will generate an overall picture of the social and political health of society, covering important dimensions of social cohesion, how well people believe the political system and its institutions are functioning, how fair it is, and their quality of life within it.

It should be stated that the aim of this report is not to investigate issues around unionism or nationalism, or constitutional preferences regarding Northern Ireland. Extensive research into these issues already exists (see Fahey et al., 2005; Devine and Robinson, 2019; Todd, 2021; Hayward and Rosher, 2020; 2021; 2023; Hayward et al., 2022). We summarise this work briefly in Chapter 2. In addition, many of these topics have particular salience to Northern Ireland, while little comparable data on these topics exist in Ireland over time. The novel contribution of this report is to undertake a direct comparison of trends in social and political attitudes between Ireland and Northern Ireland that have not been extensively studied. A major strength of this study is its use of survey data which asked identical questions at identical time-points to residents of both Ireland and Northern Ireland, allowing us to make direct comparisons in trends across jurisdictions (outlined in more detail below). In the following section we outline in detail these attitudes, what they capture and the insights they offer.

1.2.1 Democracy, political voice, and expectations for the future

1.2.1.1 Satisfaction with democracy

Satisfaction with democracy is an indicator of 'political satisfaction' but also, to some extent, of people's broad feelings about democracy itself. It is frequently measured by asking people 'how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country' (Singh and Mayne, 2023) and thus largely picks up on people's attitudes towards 'the performance of their country's political system, which happens to be democratic' (Tonon, 2014; Singh and Mayne, 2023, p.196). Higher satisfaction with democracy is associated with higher scores of democratic quality in a society and more effective democratic governance, alongside greater government legitimacy (Tonon, 2014; Ferrín, 2016). Where people are more satisfied with democracy in their country there is also less support for populist and more radical parties (Ramiro, 2016), less support for non-democratic forms of government (Walker and Kehoe, 2013), and less propensity to protest (Kostelka and Rovny, 2019).

1.2.1.2 Political voice

Whether people feel their voice counts in their country is a key component of people's perceived political efficacy – that is, the extent to which a person believes that political or social change can be affected by their efforts in, and engagement with, a society's political institutions (Rohrschneider and Loveless, 2010; McEvoy 2016, p.2,018). Perceived political efficacy is considered a key precondition for citizens' political participation in society, and vital to the health of democratic societies (Karv et al., 2022). An engaged, more politically active citizenry, meanwhile, can bring a host of benefits to societies. Societies with higher political participation tend to have better performing governments, improved policy outcomes, more accountable political institutions, as well as more engagement of people in local politics (Schneider and Ingraham, 1984; Galston, 2001; Dalton, 2017). In opposition to this, feeling one's voice is not heard can lead to marginalised sections of society, and greater support for populist and more extreme political movements (Spruyt et al., 2016; Rico et al., 2020).

1.2.1.3 Positive expectations about the immediate future

Whether people have positive or negative expectations about their 'life in general' for the coming year is a useful overall barometer of how they feel their quality of life will change in the coming years, and the overall direction they think society is heading (Bericat, 2021). It can be tied to how they feel their standard of living might change over the coming year. Those who feel their 'life in general' will be better in the future tend to also feel their financial and employment prospects are more secure as well (Bericat, 2021). However, positive expectations are also closely tied to people's general wellbeing and this kind of 'short-term' optimism about one's more immediate future can serve as an important foundation for happiness in life (Conversano et al., 2010; Clark and D'Ambrosio, 2020; Pleeging et al., 2021).

Feeling one's life situation is secure, or that it can improve, is also associated with more inclusive attitudes towards others, for example immigrants (Saxton and Benson, 2003; McGinnity et al., 2023), and less feelings of marginalisation (Bericat, 2021).

1.2.2 Trust in people and institutions

1.2.2.1 Trust in other people

How far people trust one another in a society is an important component of a socially cohesive society (Putnam, 2000; OECD, 2011; Fonseca et al., 2019). Higher levels of societal trust are believed to indicate a greater degree of shared goals, beliefs, and values among members. These are important for building reciprocity among people, enabling co-operation between groups (where people come together to help solve problems), and concern about more marginalised sections of society (Putnam, 2000; Uslaner, 2002). 'Generalised trust' in particular (as measured in this report) – that is, the extent to which people trust others they do not know personally – is especially important for societies. This is because people's feelings that strangers will act fairly towards them form an important foundation for the development of wider social interactions and relationships across societies[7] (Nannestad, 2008). In essence, trust is the bedrock of forming social networks and societies' capacity to co-operate (Nannestad, 2008). Trust is also a useful barometer of people's feelings towards those who are different from them (such as different ethnic groups or those with a different social status) in a society (Helliwell and Putnam, 2004; Khaile et al., 2022).

Studies have shown that, at the societal level, higher generalised trust is associated with multiple positive outcomes, including economic growth, government performance, and the support and maintenance of the state welfare system (Putnam, 2000; Rothstein, 2001; Uslaner, 2002; Nannestad, 2008). Among individuals, it is frequently associated with higher wellbeing, social integration, volunteering, the provision of public goods, and health (Kawachi, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Thöni et al., 2012; Sønderskov and Dinesen, 2016; Janmaat, 2019).

1.2.2.2 Trust in institutions (political, judicial, and media)

Institutional trust can be defined as the extent to which 'individuals accept and perceive institutions as benevolent, competent, reliable, and responsible toward citizens' (Spadaro et al., 2020, p.3). It provides a useful overall indicator of the extent to which people believe institutions in their society are functioning effectively, fairly and addressing their needs (Bornstein and Tomkins, 2015). Such institutional trust can be critical for the dissemination and belief in information,

[7] This is in contrast to what is known as 'particularised trust', which measures people's trust in particular groups e.g. neighbours, family members, co-ethnics etc.

such as what politicians and government tell us, or what we read in the media (Herreros, 2023). Institutional trust in political institutions can allow governments to effectively plan and execute policies and deliver services. This was particularly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which compliance with government ordinances was critical. For example, people with higher trust were more likely to participate in immunisation campaigns (Perry, 2021; Eurofound, 2022). Trust in the judicial institutions (e.g. the police or legal system) meanwhile is, for example, related to cooperation with authorities, or how far people will stay within the law (Tyler and Huo, 2002). Trust in the media is also critical given it is an essential way for societies to communicate information, while also helping hold governments to account to their electorates (Fisher, 2018; Schudson, 2022).

Institutional trust may also play an important role in sustaining trust among members of a society and broader societal cohesion (Stolle, 2003; Lo Iacono, 2019; Spadaro et al., 2020; Herreros, 2023). Higher institutional trust can create the perception that those who do not act fairly, or who take advantage of others, will be held to account by institutions, allowing people to act more fairly themselves (Herreros, 2023). People may also extrapolate from how fairly they think institutions will act to judge ordinary citizens' trustworthiness; if they experience unfair treatment at an institutional level this may become the norm by which they perceive society operates (Spadaro et al., 2020; Herreros, 2023).

1.2.3 Perceptions of inequality and equal opportunities

The extent to which people believe income inequality is too high, or that they do not have equal opportunities in society, are useful indicators of how fairly people feel the economic structure of society is (Reyes and Gasparini, 2022). Perceiving income inequality as too high, or that not everyone has an equal chance to get ahead in life, is associated with feeling less autonomy and agency (Aldama et al., 2021), that society is unfair (Du and King, 2022), and that there are restricted opportunities for social mobility (Heiserman et al., 2020). Such perceptions can affect people's wellbeing and health, for example, by increasing anxiety around one's status (Melita et al., 2021). It can reduce people's willingness to make longer-term decisions for financial stability, such as savings or retirement; for example, by making longer-term goals seem unachievable if one feels a system prevents attempts to improve their financial situation (Bak and Yi, 2020). They can also have knock-on effects for social cohesion, such as trust, or civic and political participation, and undermine people's willingness to engage in society, while leading to greater feelings of marginalisation and disempowerment (Han et al., 2012; Loveless, 2013; Engler and Weisstanner, 2021; Lee et al., 2021). Yet, it can also raise support for income redistribution and stronger welfare support (Gimpelson and Treisman, 2018).

1.3 METHODS AND OVERVIEW OF DATA USED

1.3.1 Data

This report draws on multiple sources of high-quality survey data to investigate how attitudes have changed in Ireland and Northern Ireland over the past 20-25 years. How people answer survey questions on their attitudes is highly sensitive to question wording, and even minor differences, or questions asked in different orders, can shape the answer they give (Schuman and Presser, 1996; Magelssen et al., 2016). Accordingly, to be able to infer that any differences in attitudes across jurisdictions reflect substantive differences among populations and to accurately track trends, we need people to be asked, as far as possible, identical questions, as part of an identical survey, ideally based on the same data collection methods (e.g. in-person interviews).

The main source of data that fulfils these requirements is the Eurobarometer, which is a series of public opinion surveys conducted regularly on behalf of the European Commission and other EU institutions. This dataset provides a unique opportunity to robustly study attitudes across the island of Ireland. It provides annual or biannual measures of attitudes since 1998 to finely track changes in attitudes over time. Identical survey questions (as part of identical surveys) were asked across jurisdictions which allow us to directly compare both trends in social and political attitudes but also differences in levels of attitudes. Perhaps most importantly, the Eurobarometer also undertook a booster sample of Northern Irish residents, separate from the rest of United Kingdom. This provides a large enough sample of residents from Northern Ireland to generate robust estimates of jurisdiction-wide attitudes in Northern Ireland.

One drawback to using the Eurobarometer survey is that the separate Northern Ireland sample ceased being collected after 2018 as a consequence of the UK's decision to leave the EU. Therefore, the most up-to-date, comparable readings we have for Northern Ireland are in 2018. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that trends in attitudes can only be directly compared between jurisdictions up to 2018. However, we will also analyse how trends have continued into 2023 for Ireland to create the most up-to-date picture possible of both jurisdictions given the data.

The report also draws on several other data sources when needed. This includes the European Social Survey (ESS), which provides biennial insights into social and political attitudes in Ireland[8] and the World Values Survey/European Values Study

[8] Unfortunately, the European Social Survey cannot be used to analyse attitudes in Northern Ireland given the small number of Northern Ireland residents sampled.

(WVS/EVS) which conducted a similar boosted sample of Northern Irish residents in 1999, 2008 and 2022. These datasets will be used to track social and political attitudes that are not available in the Eurobarometer survey but also to update, where possible, attitudes in Northern Ireland to 2022.

As a note, between July-August 2020 and June-July 2022, data collection methods were changed for several of the Eurobarometer surveys during the COVID-19 pandemic. These waves deviate from previous Eurobarometer waves in several aspects, including the mode of data collection and interview protocol variables (see EB technical reports of affected waves for full details). The primary difference was that, in different countries at different times during this period, computer assisted web interviewing was undertaken given restrictions to in-person interviewing.[9] Differences in survey mode applied for the Eurobarometer undertaken outside of the pandemic (face-to-face interviewing) and at periods during the pandemic (web-based interviewing) could affect people's responses to survey questions. For example, social desirability bias may be lower in web-based interviews (Kralj et al., 2019). As such, some care should be taken in interpreting trends during this period. Similar issues apply to the latest waves of the ESS and WVS/EVS surveys.[10]

Table 1.1 outlines in detail the datasets used in the report, the years available for each jurisdiction, and the measures drawn on.

1.3.2 Methods

The approach of this report is primarily descriptive, comparing trends and levels in social and political attitudes over time across jurisdictions. Interpretation of trends and their likely drivers will take a narrative approach. Potential explanations for the results will be suggested, drawing on a broad range of key events and longer-term societal transformations to inform the likely drivers of trends across jurisdictions. However, given the scope of the report, most explanations will not be tested empirically.

The report will test one set of explanations: that changes in social attitudes may be driven by the changing socio-demographic composition of societies over time. For example, changes in the occupational structure, such as the proportion in manual occupations, or changes in levels of education, over time. To do so, multivariate regression modelling is undertaken, and predicted levels of each attitude are

9 In addition, the sampling frame for computer assisted web interviews was landline and mobile telephone directories, derived from national telephone numbering plans (see for example: https://access.gesis.org/dbk/71058). This can affect coverage of which individuals are present in the survey e.g. by whether they have a telephone number registered in a directory.

10 Here, web-based surveys and paper surveys were used in nine countries in the ESS Round 10 (2020-2022) data, including: Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Israel, Latvia, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden.

calculated after controlling for age, gender, marital status, occupational status, employment status, and education. These predicted (adjusted) scores are compared to the unadjusted, raw levels of each attitude in each year. A comparison between the unadjusted and adjusted trends can shed light on the extent to which the compositional changes in each jurisdiction account for changes in attitudes over time. All descriptive statistics will be weighted to make estimates representative of the make-up of each jurisdiction.

In Northern Ireland, religious affiliation, or denomination (Catholic, Protestant) plays an important role in understanding social attitudes, though this effect is largely absent in Ireland (Fahey et al., 2005). While we acknowledge it may be important, there is no information on religious denomination in the main data source used in this report (Eurobarometer, see Table 1.1). Where possible (for example when using the World Values Survey/European Values Survey), differences in religious affiliation are mentioned, but for the most part considering the role of religious affiliation is beyond the scope of this study.[11]

[11] Ireland did not participate in the 2022 wave of the World Values Survey/European Values Study preventing the use of this dataset to compare attitudinal trends.

TABLE 1.1 SOURCES OF SECONDARY DATA AND MEASURES USED IN THE REPORT

Theme	Indicators	Measure	Name of dataset, sample and year
Optimism, satisfaction with democracy, and political voice	Satisfaction with democracy	'On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in (OUR COUNTRY)?'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland – 1998-2023 Northern Ireland – 1998-2018
	Positive Expectations for the future ('optimism')	'What are your expectations for the next 12 months: will the next 12 months be better, worse or the same, when it comes to... your life in general?'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland – 2007-2023 Northern Ireland – 2007-2018
	Perceived political efficacy	'Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements…My voice counts in (OUR COUNTRY)?'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland – 1998-2023 Northern Ireland – 1998-2018
Changes in Trust – social trust and trust in institutions	Trust in other people ('social trust')	'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you could not be too careful in dealing with people?'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland/Northern Ireland – 2017 **European Social Survey:** Ireland – 2002-2022 **World Values Survey/European Values Study:** Northern Ireland – 1999, 2008, 2022
	Trust in political institutions	'Tend not to trust/tend to trust' (mean score): - 'The government in (OUR COUNTRY)?' - 'The national parliament in (OUR COUNTRY)?' - 'Political parties?'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland – 1999-2023 Northern Ireland – 1999-2018
	Trust in judicial institutions	'Tend not to trust/tend to trust' (mean score): - 'The police' - 'Justice/legal system in (OUR COUNTRY)?' - 'The Army'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland – 1999-2023 Northern Ireland – 1999-2018
	Trust in the media	'Tend not to trust/tend to trust' (mean score): - 'Radio' - 'Television' - 'Written press'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland – 1999-2022 Northern Ireland – 1999-2018
Attitudes towards inequality and equal opportunities	Attitudes towards income inequality	Agree/Disagree – 'The government in (OUR COUNTRY) should take measures to reduce differences in income levels?'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland/Northern Ireland – 2017
	Attitudes towards equal opportunities	Agree/Disagree (mean score): - 'Nowadays in (OUR COUNTRY) I have equal opportunities for getting ahead in life, like everyone else - 'Compared with 30 years ago, opportunities for getting ahead in life have become more equal in (OUR COUNTRY)'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland/Northern Ireland – 2017
	Attitudes towards factors believed important for 'getting ahead in life'	'How important do you think each of the following are for getting ahead in life…?' - '…a good education' - '…coming from a wealthy family' - '…ethnic origin' - '…gender background' - '…political connections'	**Eurobarometer:** Ireland/Northern Ireland – 2017
	Attitudes towards income inequality	Agree/Disagree – 'The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels'	**European Social Survey:** Ireland – 2002-2022
	Attitudes towards income inequality	'How would you place your views on this scale…' (1) 'There should be greater incentives for individual effort' and the statement (10) 'Incomes should be made more equal'	**World Values Survey/European Values Study:** Northern Ireland – 1999, 2008, 2022

Notes: In Ireland, when respondents were asked about 'our country' they were asked about Ireland. In Northern Ireland, respondents asked about 'our country' were asked about the 'United Kingdom'.

The primary focus of this report is a comparative analysis of trends in attitudes in Ireland and Northern Ireland. For context and perspective, trends in both jurisdictions will also be compared to trends in Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales) and an average score for the EU15 countries (this includes Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom).[12] The EU15 average was selected as a comparison group, rather than the EU27, given the greater social and political similarities of Ireland/Northern Ireland with the EU15 countries, rather than the EU27. In particular, research demonstrates the history of countries in the EU27 under communism continues to shape political attitudes into the present, which countries in the EU15 did not experience (apart from East Germany) (Mieriņa and Edmunds, 2014; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017). This could be a key factor in driving differences in attitudes across these jurisdictions.

1.4 REPORT OUTLINE AND APPROACH

The report will proceed as follows. Chapter 2 will outline key events in the timelines of Ireland and Northern Ireland since 1998 that may play a role in shaping social and political attitudes. It will also highlight several longer-term processes of change occurring in each jurisdiction (e.g. rising levels of education) that might be driving longer-term patterns of attitudinal change across the island. It will conclude by reviewing the extant literature on trends in social and political attitudes in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The following three chapters (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) cover the three substantive chapters of data analysis. Chapters 3 and 4 will take the same, systematic approach to analyse each attitudinal indicator of societal health. Firstly, we will look at overall trends in an attitude over time in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and then compare these patterns to trends occurring in Great Britain[13] and an average score for EU15 countries.[14]

Secondly, we examine whether attitudinal trends differ between those who finished education later in life (aged 20 or more) and those who finished it earlier (aged 19 or less). Education is a key predictor of social and economic status and plays a key role in shaping people's attitudes. Recent work has also shown growing social gaps in attitudes and behaviours across levels of education (Putnam, 2016).

---

12 When the European Social Survey is used it is a selection of EU countries, not the full EU15 (as used for the Eurobarometer analysis) given not every country in the EU15 participated in the ESS every round.

13 That is, England, Scotland, and Wales.

14 Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and United Kingdom.

Thirdly, we will investigate whether there are any generational effects that may be driving changes in attitudes – that is, attitudinal differences determined by the generation someone was born in to – and whether any generational differences might be growing or shrinking. 'Generational effects' may emerge when people, by virtue of the shared period of time and kinds of environment they grew up in, may share similar attitudes and values, which can stay with them over their lives (Keyes et al., 2010; Schwadel, 2011). For example, people who reached adulthood at the start of the 21st century grew up in a very different social and cultural context compared to those who grew up in the 1950s, which may leave a lasting mark on their attitudes over their lives (Schwadel, 2011). To investigate this, we will compare trends in attitudes across different birth cohorts of people (from those born before 1929 up to those born after 1989). To test whether any 'generational effects' are simply driven by differences across people's age, we will also test how attitudes change as people get older.

Chapter 5 (attitudes towards income inequality and fairness) will also explore overall trends, educational divides, and generational effects. However, due to data limitations, it will also perform a more detailed, comparative analysis of attitudes in 2017 (the most recent year of data available for a cross-jurisdiction comparison). Chapter 6 will conclude the report with a discussion of the findings and key takeaways from the report that can help support building and maintaining an engaged, optimistic, cohesive citizenry, connected to, and trusting of, their society's institutions.

CHAPTER 2

Context and literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the economic, demographic, and political context in Ireland and Northern Ireland for the subsequent comparative analysis of social and political attitudes (Sections 2.1-2.4), as well as presenting previous work on attitudes in the two jurisdictions (Section 2.5).

2.1 ECONOMIC CONTEXT: IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

2.1.1 Ireland

For much of the 20th century Ireland lagged behind the UK and elsewhere in Europe in terms of living standards and economic development (Bradley, 2000; FitzGerald, 2000). Indeed FitzGerald (2000) describes the story of the Irish economy in the 20th century as 'a case study in failure'. While the Irish economy became more open to goods trade and developed industrially to a limited extent in the 1960s, the 1980s saw a prolonged recession and high emigration, this time dominated by outflows of highly skilled graduates, mainly to the UK (O'Connell, 2000).

Beginning in the early 1990s, and continuing until the mid-2000s, there was a period of rapid and sustained economic growth in Ireland, known as the 'Celtic Tiger'. Employment grew by over 30 per cent from 1999 to 2007, from 1.6 million people in employment to 2.1 million in 2007 (Barrett et al., 2011). Over this same period, the unemployment rate averaged just 4.4 per cent and average income was among the highest in the world. FitzGerald (2000) argues that the Celtic Tiger boom is best understood as a belated 'catching up' (Honahan and Walsh, 2002).

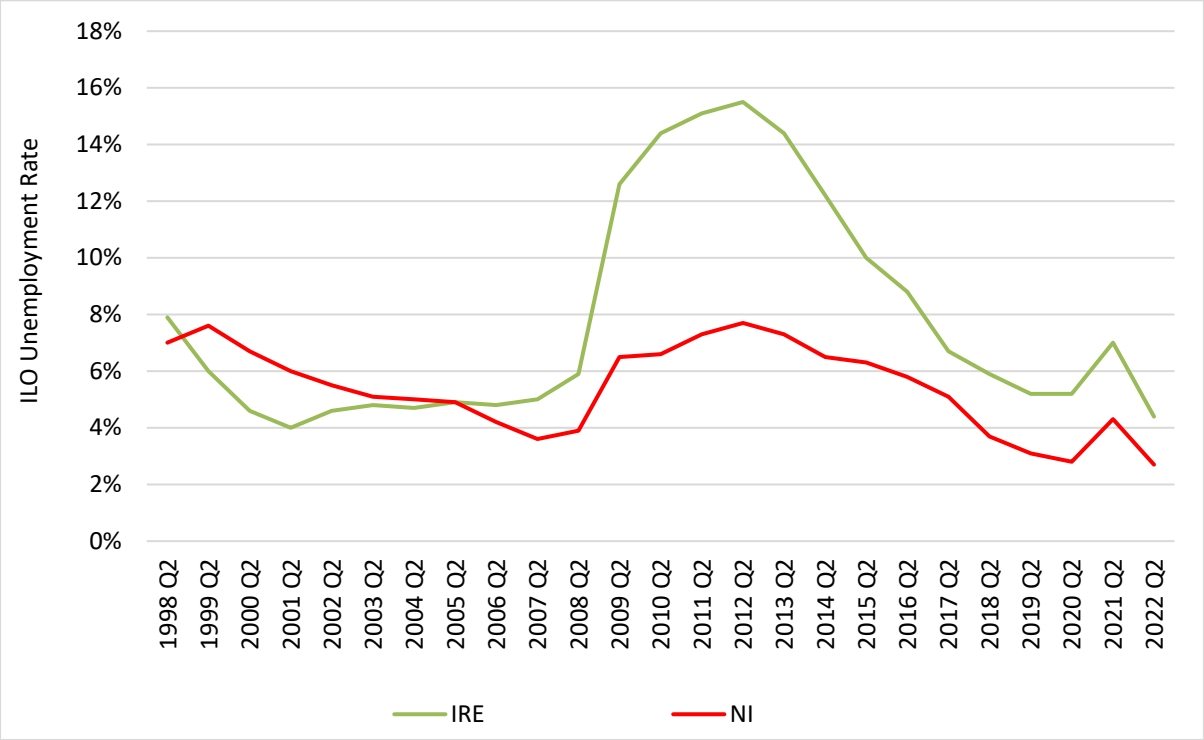
The boom had a transformative effect on the Irish economy and society. As Fahey et al. (2007, p.10) note in their assessment of the social impact of the Celtic Tiger:

> *subjective well-being and national morale are among the highest in Europe; living standards have risen and done so more or less for everyone; jobs have become increasingly abundant and have improved in quality; living standards have risen more or less for everybody; people are now flocking into rather than out of the country.*

While the pre-2007 period was marked by intense growth and elevation of living standards this boom was to abruptly come to an end. As Bergin et al. (2020) observe, as a small open economy, the business cycle is particularly pronounced in

Ireland, and the unprecedented boom was followed by a spectacular bust. Ireland was particularly exposed to the global financial crisis in 2008, which triggered a collapse in property prices and the construction sector, and generated a fiscal crisis (Bergin et al., 2020). Between 2007 and 2012, the unemployment rate soared from 5.0 per cent to 15.5 per cent, (see Figure 2.1). As Tahlin (2013) points out, Ireland was one of the hardest hit by employment losses in this economic crisis.

FIGURE 2.1 ECONOMIC CONTEXT: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN IRELAND/NORTHERN IRELAND 1998-2022



Sources: Ireland (Central Statistics Office); Northern Ireland (Office for National Statistics); ILO = International Labour Organization.

Russell et al. (2014) highlight variation in impact across the labour market: young people, particularly men, were some of the worst affected, partly because of their concentration in the construction sector (Bergin et al., 2020). Kelly et al. (2014) find it was low educated groups who bore the brunt of the unemployment crisis.

The hardships generated by the economic recession were augmented following a series of austerity measures introduced from 2009 onwards on the foot of a rapid deterioration in public finances (Russell et al., 2014). This resulted in stringent cuts to public sector pay, reductions in public services, as well as welfare cuts and tax increases which further pushed people into financial hardship (Kinsella, 2012). Increased emigration helped to lower unemployment but as the crisis deepened, long-term unemployment escalated and living standards dropped significantly.

By 2013, there were clear signs that the Irish economy was entering a period of recovery. As seen in Figure 2.1, unemployment began to fall rapidly, from over 12 per cent in 2013 to around 5 per cent by 2019. Gross National Income (GNI) continued to rise, as did wages and standards of living generally, although debate continues as to the causes of Ireland's recovery (Roche et al., 2016). As Roantree et al. (2022) discuss, following the recession Ireland has seen a significant improvement in financial wellbeing and reduction in inequality, although there has been some recent deterioration in this trend (Roantree and Doorley, 2023). Income growth has been progressive, and stronger at the bottom of the income distribution, and income inequality declined up to 2021. Measures of deprivation also declined in the period after the recession from 2013 to 2018 (CSO, 2020).

Despite the short-term impacts of the recession receding, it left significant scars on the employment and wage experiences of those who suffered its worst effects, especially younger cohorts who were just entering the economy at the time (Regan, 2020; Lozano and Rentería, 2021).

2.1.2 Northern Ireland

Following partition, the Northern Ireland economy was in a much stronger position than the Irish economy, and also benefited throughout the 20th century from being a regional economy within the UK, with substantial investment, particularly in public services. Yet unemployment remained stubbornly high, one of the highest in the UK regions, with Catholics having twice the unemployment rate of Protestants (Gudgin, 1999). By the mid-1990s, the NI unemployment rate had fallen considerably and had almost converged with the UK rate. Figure 2.1 shows that ILO unemployment fell from almost 8 per cent in 1998 to 3.6 per cent in 2007, in a period of labour market buoyancy; although Northern Ireland was one of the hardest hit regions of the UK as a whole during the recession that followed (MacInnes et al., 2014).

The Northern Irish labour market was also impacted by the 2008/09 recession, though as Figure 2.1 illustrates, the impact was far weaker than in Ireland: ILO unemployment peaked in Northern Ireland at just under 8 per cent in 2012 compared to 15.5 per cent in Ireland, with one potential reason for this being the overreliance of Ireland on construction employment pre-recession, which was particularly affected by the property crash of the recession. Nevertheless, the UK government enacted a programme of austerity measures from 2010 onwards too. This involved significant tax rises alongside cuts to public spending including education, health and social welfare. These policies had a significant impact on people's standard of living (Bergin and McGuinness, 2021), knock-on effects on levels of unemployment, particularly cuts in the public sector, as well as mental health (Wickham et al., 2020). The UK government also enacted a widespread

reform of the welfare system via the Welfare Reform Acts of 2012 and 2016, although their implementation was delayed due to impasses in the Stormont Assembly (Birrell and Heenan, 2017).[15]

The impact of austerity policies, and welfare reform especially, were not felt equally across society, with lower income groups and those in deprived areas especially affected (Barr et al., 2015; Lim and Laurence, 2015; Stuckler et al., 2017). In addition, as noted in Ireland, the recession left a lasting scar on the labour market outcomes of those groups hardest hit, particularly younger people entering the labour market at the time.

Two key features of the Northern Irish economy in the post-recession period warrant mentioning. The first is rates of economic inactivity.[16] Standing at 26.2 per cent, levels of inactivity in Northern Ireland are the highest across the UK,[17] and where data are comparable, are higher than in Ireland.[18] Secondly, as Bergin and McGuinness (2022) note, since 2001, rates of productivity in Northern Ireland have been steadily decreasing. Productivity levels in Northern Ireland are also the lowest across all regions of the UK.[19] In contrast, rates of productivity in Ireland were steadily increasing over this period. Lower proportions of post-secondary level education workers and lower levels of investment appear to be key drivers of this difference (Bergin and McGuinness, 2022).

2.2 POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT IN IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Following the partition of Ireland in 1922, Ireland became an independent political state and Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom. The independent Ireland was largely a religiously homogeneous society, overwhelmingly and actively Catholic. By contrast, in Northern Ireland there was a Protestant or unionist majority and a Catholic or nationalist minority which experienced political, economic, and social disadvantage (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995). Both societies have experienced significant transformations over the past 20-25 years, and these social and political dynamics in each jurisdiction may play a key role in shaping their recent trends in social and political attitudes.

---

15 The biggest impacts of these reforms involved a freezing of most working-age benefits, cuts to child tax credit, and the introduction of the less generous Universal Credit.

16 Those who are aged 16 and over without a job who have not sought work in the last four weeks and/or are not available to start work in the next two weeks (ONS).

17 https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/regionallabourmarket/latest#latest-headline-estimate.

18 'Fact check NI' 2023 – 'Does NI have the lowest wages, slowest economy, lowest productivity and highest economic inactivity in the UK and Ireland?' Retrieved 18 July 2023. https://factcheckni.org/.

19 https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/productivitymeasures/bulletins/regionallabourproductivityincludingindustrybyregionuk/2020.

2.2.1 Ireland political and social dynamics

Since 1998, the cultural and social change evident in Ireland during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s continued unabated. A referendum to introduce same-sex marriage in 2015 was passed by a majority of 62 per cent of voters on high turn-out of 62 per cent, and a referendum to repeal the constitutional ban on abortion in 2018 was passed by a majority of 66.4 per cent of voter on high turn-out of 64.1 per cent. The marriage referendum campaign was particularly vigorous and active (Dornschneider-Elkink, 2016), which may have influenced feelings of political efficacy among the population at large.

The 2018 referendum on abortion was passed by a majority of 66.4 per cent, representing a remarkable shift from the 66.9 per cent decision to insert the ban into the Constitution in 1983. Analysis by Elkink et al. (2020) finds that church attendance and age were the strongest predictors of the 2018 abortion vote suggesting a cohort effect as well as the influence of secularisation. In addition, throughout the mid-2010s, there was a series of widespread protests and civil actions against planned water charges throughout Ireland, culminating in the eventual U-turn of proposed charges in 2017. Such protests could shape political attitudes negatively, but also positively after the charges were dropped, as well as affecting people's perceived political efficacy and their feeling that their voices are heard in their country.

The political system in Ireland has been remarkably stable since 1998 (the period for which we examine attitudinal change) particularly given the scale of domestic change and international turmoil over the period. The government has largely alternated between the centrist parties of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, in coalition with smaller established political parties, Labour and the Green Party. The 2011 election following the financial crash led to the collapse of the Fianna Fáil vote but did not lead to any seismic change in voting patterns and power was transferred back to a Fine Gael and Labour coalition. The 2020 election represented a significant shift in voting patterns and saw Sinn Féin gaining the largest share of the vote (24.5 per cent). It resulted in Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil forming an unprecedented coalition with rotation of the Taoiseach's office. This election outcome led Field (2020) to conclude that Ireland was a 'two-and-a-half party system no more' and Elkink and Farrell (2021) to indicate the emergence of a left versus right divide in Irish electoral politics.

As discussed above, Ireland was among the countries most severely impacted by the 2008/09 recession, and implemented a significant austerity programme, agreed with the Troika of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the European Commission (EC). Roche et al. (2016) argue that while Ireland's return to economic growth in 2013 meant it was hailed a

'poster child for austerity' in Europe, the social costs were considerable. However, this did not result in the sort of social unrest and civil protest experienced in other countries such as Greece, Italy, and Spain[20] (Power, 2016; Power and Nussbaum, 2016). Layte and Landy (2018) argue the continued delivery of basic services and welfare (unlike in Greece) prevented the emergence of unrest in the immediate aftermath of the financial crash.[21] There were no widespread protests after the introduction of the substantial Universal Social Charge (USC) in 2011 or the highly-sensitive Local Property Tax (LPT) in 2013.[22] In fact widespread protests only emerged later in 2014, due to the occurrence of an 'incidental grievance' in the form of the introduction of water charges and the development of a coordinated political opposition with effective 'strategies of contention'.[23] This led to a series of large-scale protests in late 2014 and 2015, each involving tens of thousands of participants.

2.2.2 Northern Ireland political and social dynamics

Following 25 years of violent conflict, the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998 set up the NI Assembly based on the principle of power-sharing. While the period considered in this report is after this peace agreement, given the collective trauma of a violent conflict in Northern Ireland and resulting extremely tense relationships between the two communities (unionist and nationalist) (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995), it is likely that this conflict will influence the attitudes under investigation. This may be particularly true of older generations in Northern Ireland, but also younger generations, given the complex and, as some would argue, unfinished peacebuilding alongside the intergenerational legacy of the conflict on younger generations (Coulter et al., 2021; McAlister et al., 2021).

Despite the hope which followed the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the following years were marked by continued political instability in Northern Ireland. Following the first sitting of the Assembly in 1999, there were rising tensions in Northern Ireland. As Figure 2.2 shows, the number of 'security-situation' related shootings, bombings and deaths spiked again between 2000 and 2003, after a period of decline at the end of the 20th century.[24] This occurred alongside multiple periods of unrest, including rioting across Belfast in 2001 and 2002.[25] As Figure 2.3 shows, this period was also marked by worsening perceptions of community

20 https://www.theguardian.com/science/head-quarters/2016/mar/15/economics-as-a-morality-play-austerity-protest-in-ireland.

21 Although 2008 saw a protest over planned changes to the over 70s Medical Card Scheme.

22 Layte and Landy (2018) suggest that despite mobilisation by leftwing groups and attempts to organise non-compliance with the Universal Social Charge, the government responded by 'enacting powers to take the tax directly at source from wages and social welfare', to which campaigners failed to respond, leading to the movement's eventual collapse in mutual recrimination (Layte and Landy, 2018, p.51).

23 Incidental grievances are contrasted to structural grievances.

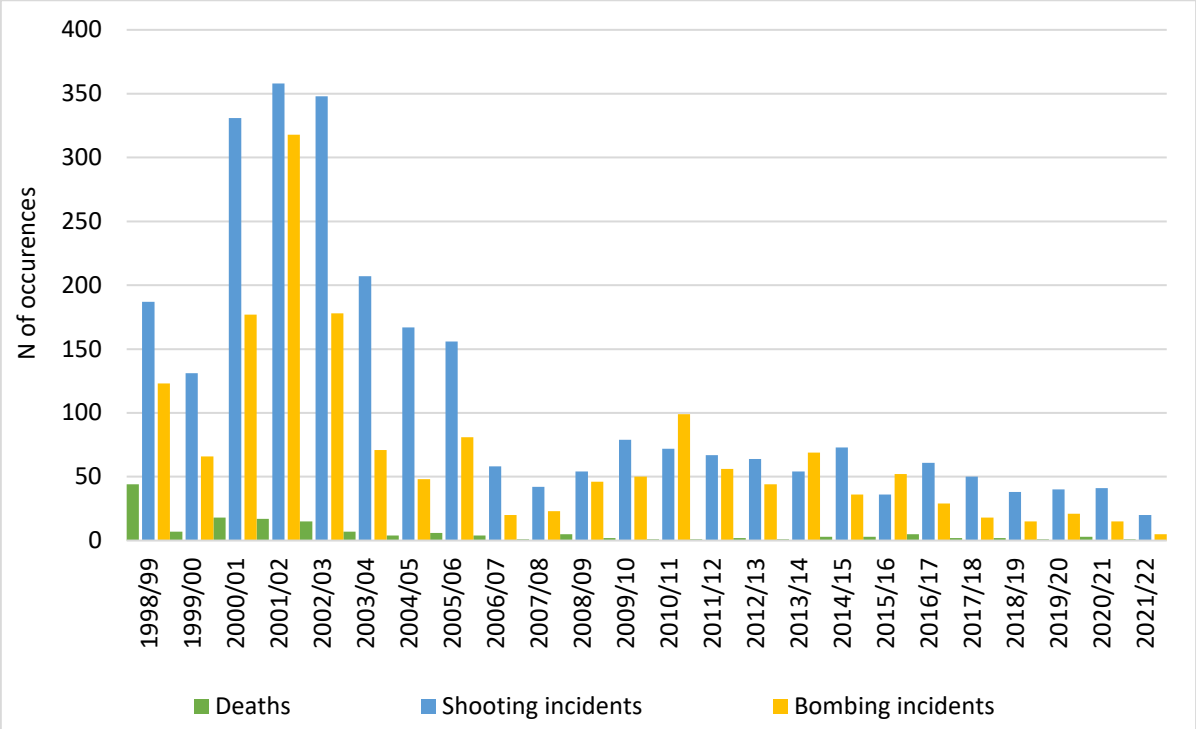
24 Although the Omagh bomb in 1998 was one of the deadliest during the 'Troubles'.

25 This was especially during the 'Holy Cross' dispute in 2001, when police were called in to protect pupils and parents at Holy Cross Catholic Girls' School in Belfast, following attacks from loyalist protesters.

relations from 2000 to 2002. The period culminated in the suspension of the Stormont Assembly in 2002, following the withdrawal of unionist parties in response to allegations of intelligence gathering on behalf of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). With the suspension of power-sharing in 2002, the UK government resumed direct control of Assembly's Northern Ireland government departments.

The post-2002 period was marked by a steady decline in rates of 'security-related' violence up to 2007/08 (Figure 2.2). In addition, perceptions of community relations in the jurisdiction also experienced a general improvement up to 2008 (Figure 2.3). Eventually, in 2007, the devolved power-sharing institutions were restored.

FIGURE 2.2 NUMBER OF 'SECURITY-SITUATION' RELATED KILLINGS, SHOOTING INCIDENTS AND BOMBING INCIDENTS – 1998 TO 2022



Source: Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)/Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).[26]
Notes: 'Security situation' relates to 'the security situation throughout the Troubles and up to the present day' as defined by PNSI/NISRA.

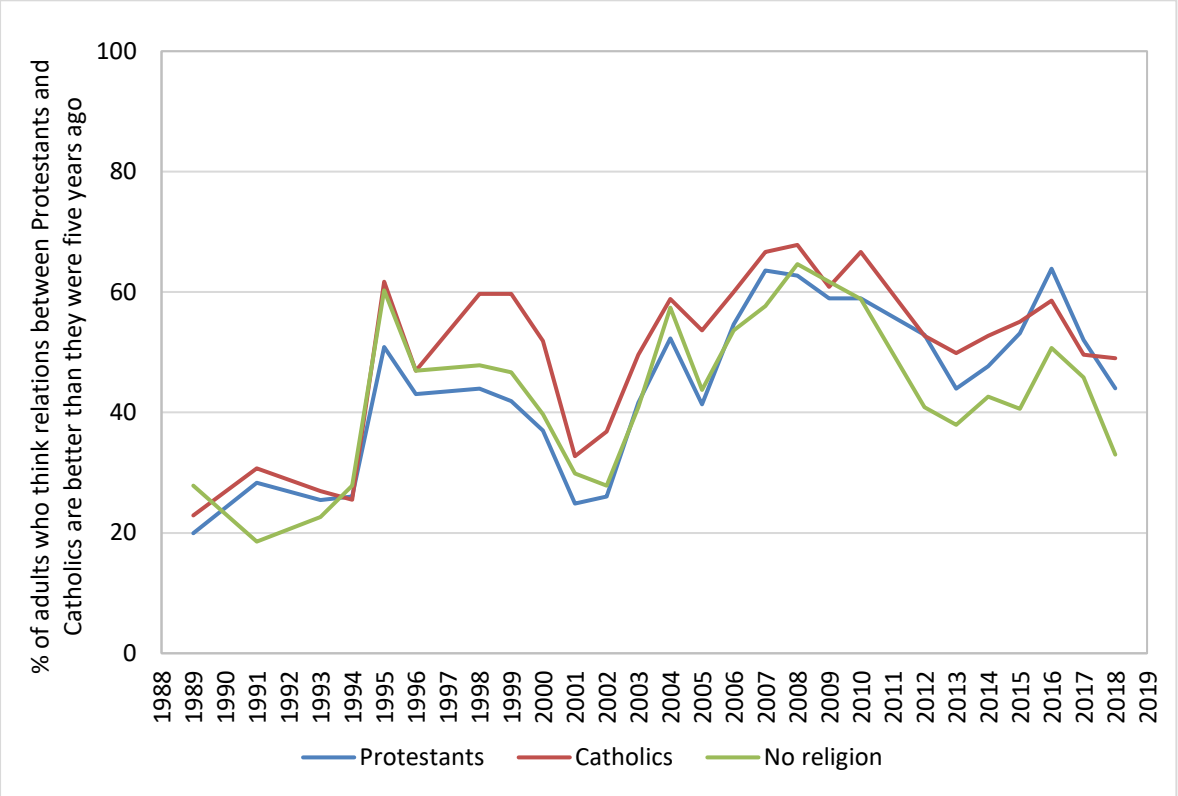
Following the reinstatement of the Assembly institutions, Northern Ireland experienced a period of relative political stability. There remained some continuation of 'security situation' related violence (Figure 2.2). In particular, 2010 saw several high-profile bombings,[27] but this was much less common compared to

[26] https://www.psni.police.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/Security%20Situation%20Statistics%20to%20March%202022v2.pdf.

[27] These included the Palace Barracks bomb (April 2010), the Newtown Hamilton Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) station bomb (April 2010), and the Strand Road PSNI station bomb (August 2010).

the start of the 21st century. In addition, perceptions of community relations remained generally positive from 2007 onwards. They worsened again somewhat, and civil unrest increased, around 2012/13 during flag disputes.[28] However, perceptions of community relations then improved again until 2016 and there was no attendant uptick in 'security-related' violence. This was likely buoyed by the 'Stormont House' and related 'Fresh Start' Agreement, aiming to maintain and build on the gains of the Good Friday Agreement (Coulter et al., 2021).

FIGURE 2.3 PROPORTION OF PEOPLE WHO THINK RELATIONS BETWEEN PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS ARE BETTER THAN THEY WERE FIVE YEARS AGO IN NORTHERN IRELAND



Sources: Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey, 1989-1996; Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 1998-2017. Reproduced from Devine and Robinson (2019).

Notes: Graph showing respondents' perception of community relations over previous five years (% of adults who think relations between Protestants and Catholics are better than they were five years ago, 1989 to 2017). Data on community relations were not gathered in 1990, 1992, 1997, and 2011.

2.3 BREXIT, COVID-19, AND OTHER RECENT CHALLENGES ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

Despite economies on the island having broadly recovered by the mid- to late-2010s, in recent years there have been multiple and, at times, compounding periods of social, political, and economic instability across Ireland and Northern Ireland, which may be highly salient for people's attitudes. The most potentially

[28] This followed the vote by Belfast City Council to fly the Union Jack flag over Belfast City Hall on 18 designated days, in line generally with other parts of the UK, rather than every day.

challenging period came at the start of 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged around the globe. Alongside the effects on morbidity and mortality (almost 3,500 people died in Northern Ireland and over 8,000 in Ireland),[29] there were huge social costs (from mobility restrictions and lockdowns), mental health costs, and economic costs, both to individuals and the economies at large (Kennelly et al., 2020; Croxford et al., 2021). The pandemic also led to public debates on the efficacy and necessity of lockdowns and restrictions which have continued to the present, affecting perceptions of governments (Eurofound, 2021; 2022).

Both societies have also experienced a cost-of-living crisis in recent years, especially from the end of 2021 onwards when prices for fuel, food and groceries, heating, accommodation, and leisure all began to increase significantly, having an impact on all aspects of people's lives and health.[30] This crisis has been generally widespread across society, with real incomes and standards of living slipping.[31] In Ireland, 77 per cent of people expressed worry about their finances due to the cost-of-living crisis in 2023,[32] while in October 2022, 94 per cent of people said they had made cutbacks in the last 12 months[33] (Central Statistics Office, 2022). In Northern Ireland, 44 per cent said they had cut back on *essentials* in 2023[34] (the highest levels across all regions of the UK). However, younger people, poorer families and renters have been particularly hard hit. Governments on both sides of the border have enacted policies to cushion the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.[35] These have gone some way towards alleviating the pain for many households. However, significant strains still exist.

Each jurisdiction has also been facing its own particular challenges in recent years. Following the prolonged period of recovery, 2019 marked the first year that deprivation in Ireland increased again since 2011.[36] In the post-recession period, Ireland has also seen a housing crisis, constituting rising housing costs, a shortage of affordable rental accommodation, declining rates of homeownership, and rising homelessness. For example, the rate of homeownership for younger cohorts has dropped precipitously in recent years which has left younger cohorts in particular more exposed to rapidly rising rents, particularly in urban areas (Roantree et al.,

29 https://ig.ft.com/coronavirus-chart/.
30 https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/release-pressure-survey-data/.
31 https://www.irishexaminer.com/business/economy/arid-41022938.html.
32 https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41054102.html.
33 https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/socialconditions/pulsesurvey-ourlivesourmoney/.
34 https://www.newsletter.co.uk/business/consumer/cost-of-living/northern-ireland-being-hit-harder-by-cost-of-living-crisis-than-other-parts-of-the-uk-as-more-forced-to-cut-back-on-essentials-which-research-shows-4020648.
35 These measures include help with energy bills, cost-of-living payments for those on benefits, support for pensioners and those with disabilities, or cutting fuel duty.
36 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/povertyanddeprivation/#:~:text=The%20increase%20in%20the%20enforced,and%202019%20was%20statistically%20significant.&text=The%20deprivation%20rate%20for%20those,high%20of%2025.8%25%20in%202013.

2021).[37] These issues of housing affordability continued to increase up to the pandemic, where about 'one-in-three households did not have sufficient income remaining after housing costs to cover a minimum standard of living expenditure before the pandemic' (O'Toole et al., 2020, p.v; see also Corrigan et al., 2019). Over the same period (2016-2020), the numbers accessing homeless services has also been steadily rising (Russell et al., 2021): by May 2023, 12,441 people were living in emergency homeless accommodation in Ireland.[38] This is reflected in an acute shortage of rental accommodation[39] (Waldron, 2023).

Ireland has also been experiencing rising strains in healthcare provision, which have becoming especially severe in recent years. This includes a shortage of available beds in hospitals,[40] rising waiting times for treatment,[41] and a social care system unable to provide people with support due to significant staff shortages.[42]

Northern Ireland has seen growing instability, particularly of a political nature, with a series of events putting significant strain on the political system. In 2015, the Northern Ireland Assembly almost collapsed for the first time since 2007. Although full suspension was avoided, a bigger challenge came the following year in the form of the UK Brexit vote to leave the EU, in which 53 per cent of Northern Ireland voted to remain. This had profound implications for politics in Northern Ireland and triggered a series of debates on the governance of Northern Ireland following the UK's exit from the EU, the most contentious of which was around how to avoid a 'hard border' on the island of Ireland (Gormley-Heenan and Aughey, 2017; McGinnity et al., 2023).

At a community level, there are fears that Brexit has restoked community tensions in Northern Ireland and it has coincided with a steady rise in feelings among the population that community tensions were worsening,[43] alongside riots in parts of Belfast in 2021 partly attributed to tensions of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland[44] (Teague, 2019; Hayward and Komarova, 2021). At a political level, this put severe strain on the Good Friday institutions, which was compounded in January 2017 by the 'cash for ash' scandal regarding a bungled green energy scheme, which led to the collapse of the power-sharing institutions. In 2018, the political crisis

37 Homeownership declined 'from over 60 per cent at age 30 for those born in the 1960s to less than 20 per cent for those born in the late 1980s' (Roantree et al., 2021, p.xii).

38 From around 4,000 in 2016 to close to 7,000 at the start of the pandemic. https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/80ea8-homelessness-data/.

39 https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/report-finds-persistent-shortage-of-rental-homes-as-market-rents-rise-13-1431753.html.

40 https://www.pbp.ie/health-crisis/.

41 https://www.irishtimes.com/health/2023/05/13/more-than-830000-patients-on-hospital-waiting-lists-last-month-figures-show/.

42 https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41146078.html.

43 https://www.community-relations.org.uk/news-centre/perceptions-community-relations-ark-data-series-30-years.

44 https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56276653.

continued as negotiations to restore the Stormont Assembly stalled. In 2019, the Northern Ireland Protocol was proposed, in which there would essentially be a Customs border across the Irish Sea, a move seen by the DUP as segregating Northern Ireland from the rest of the Union,[45] leading to greater opposition within the unionist community, and greater political tensions. There was hope of a resolution in 2020, and the 'New Decade New Approach' period saw the Assembly reconvene in January 2020. However, in February 2021, threats of resignation in response to the Northern Ireland Protocol rose again, and eventually in February 2022 the then First Minister, Paul Givan, resigned leading to the collapse again of the power-sharing institutions. In the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in May 2022, the DUP vote share dropped from 28.1 per cent in 2017 to 21.3 per cent in 2022. This meant that the position of First Minister falls to Sinn Féin, as the largest political party (with 29 per cent of the vote). This is the first time in the history of Northern Ireland that a unionist party was not the largest political party in Northern Ireland (Murphy, 2023).[46] However, at the time of writing (November 2023) the power-sharing institutions have remained suspended.

It is critical to note that alongside this political instability and fears of a backsliding into community tensions, has been the impact of the years during which Northern Ireland has had no functioning government. This has meant that decisions on addressing the needs of the people of Northern Ireland cannot be made, leading to growing frustration among the population towards the government. This has accentuated feelings of frustration, especially among younger people. There are feelings job opportunities are limited, leading to a significant number of young people (aged 14-25) planning on leaving Northern Ireland for work or further study (42 per cent)[47] (Pivotal, 2023). The paralysis of the Stormont institutions has led some young people to feel they are unable to address pressing needs in their lives (such as the cost-of-living or poor mental health) (Shared Island Unit, 2022; Pivotal, 2023). Northern Ireland has also seen the emergence of a healthcare crisis, with already high hospital waiting times climbing rapidly since the pandemic (Connolly et al., 2022).

Taken together, both Ireland and Northern Ireland have been experiencing periods of strain and crisis in recent years, especially from 2018/19 in Ireland and 2016 in Northern Ireland. These may play a key role in shaping the social and political attitudes of their citizenry.

45 https://mydup.com/policies/remove-ni-protocol.

46 Another notable feature of the May 2022 election was the electoral success of the middle ground Alliance Party, with 13.5 per cent of the popular vote (Murphy, 2023).

47 Based on a representative sample of 14–25-year-olds in Northern Ireland (Pivotal, 2023).

2.4 LONGER-TERM TRANSFORMATIONS OCCURRING ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND: RELIGIOSITY, EDUCATION, IMMIGRATION

Alongside the key social and political events and periods highlighted above, Ireland and Northern Ireland have both, to a greater or lesser extent, been undergoing similar longer-term societal transformations over the past two decades. This includes declining levels of religiosity and religious affiliation, increasing levels of educational attainment and third-level participation, and increasing levels of immigration and ethnic diversity.

2.4.1 Religion and secularisation

Religion was and still is the key symbol of difference in the dominant ethnonational traditions in Northern Ireland and has had profound effects on the social attitudes in both parts of the island for much of the 20th century (Fahey et al., 2005). Yet in recent decades, both Ireland and Northern Ireland are experiencing significant secularisation, albeit at a much slower pace than many other European countries. There was a long-term decline in church attendance in both jurisdictions from the 1970s (Fahey et al., 2005) which has continued apace over the last two decades. In Ireland, the European Social Survey (ESS) shows that the proportion who attended church weekly or more declined by 28 percentage points between 2002-2022, standing at 21 per cent of people attending church weekly or more.[48] In Northern Ireland, monthly church attendance among Catholics fell from 81 per cent in 1998 to 46 per cent in 2019, and among Protestants from 52 per cent in 1998 to 46 per cent in 2019 (Ganiel, 2022).

In Northern Ireland, the UK censuses also show the proportion who report either 'no religion' or 'do not state their religion' has been rising steadily since the 1960s and rose from 14 per cent in 2001 to 19 per cent in 2021, while the proportion who explicitly reported having 'no religion' increased from 10 per cent in 2011 to 17 per cent in 2021.[49] This has particular relevance to Northern Ireland as it tends to track growth in the middle ground of politics as well, demonstrating the emergence of a significant minority who do not align themselves with traditional identities or nationalist/unionist political parties (Murphy, 2023).

2.4.2 Rise in educational attainment

There has been a substantial rise in educational attainment on both sides of the border since the late 1990s. In Ireland, the proportion of the population aged 15 and over with third-level education increased from 19.7 per cent in 1996 to 42 per cent in 2016 (CSO, Census 2016). In Northern Ireland the proportion of the

48 Analysis authors' own.

49 https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-1-statistical-bulletin-religion.pdf.

population aged 16-74 with Level 4 qualifications or above rose from 15.8 in 2001 to 32.1 per cent in 2021.[50] At the same time, however, significant differences exist in educational attainment in Ireland and Northern Ireland even among younger age cohorts (Smyth et al., 2022; Devlin et al., 2023). In 2019, the proportion of young people aged 25-29 years with 'high' qualifications, was approximately 9 percentage points higher in Ireland, while the proportion with low qualifications was approximately 11 percentage points higher in Northern Ireland (Devlin et al., 2023).[51] This gap was found to be wider among the younger cohort than for the working age population as a whole, suggesting that there has been a divergence between the two jurisdictions over time. The authors also found that the link between social class and educational disadvantage is also stronger in Northern Ireland than in Ireland, which is attributed to the continued role of the selective grammar school system in Northern Ireland (Devlin et al., 2023; Smyth et al., 2022).

2.4.3 Increasing migration and ethnic diversity

For much of the 20th century, both Ireland and Northern Ireland remained relatively ethnically homogeneous, low-immigration societies. However, as documented in McGinnity et al. (2023) in the early 2000s before the recession, both jurisdictions saw a significant rise in rates of immigration driven, in part, by a rise in numbers from the new EU Accession countries.[52] These immigration rates were much lower in Northern Ireland, peaking at nearly 10,000 in 2007 compared to over 100,000 in Ireland. With the onset of the recession, rates declined significantly in both countries with Ireland eventually re-entering a period of net emigration again. Rates recovered somewhat in both jurisdictions, with yearly immigration of under 5,000 per year in Northern Ireland but increasing (especially from 2015 onwards) to over 30,000 per year in Ireland before the pandemic, although this has increased considerably since (McGinnity et al., 2023).

As a result of this immigration, the British (Office for National Statistics) and Irish (Central Statistics Office) censuses show that both jurisdictions have seen the share of their societies born abroad increase over the past two decades. In Northern Ireland, the proportion born outside of the UK has increased from 4.1 per cent in 2001, to 8.7 per cent in 2021. In Ireland, the foreign-born group compose a much larger share of society, and this has also increased substantially from 10.4 per cent in 2002 to 20 per cent in 2021. While around two-thirds of immigrants in both Ireland and Northern Ireland are from either the UK or other EU countries (McGinnity et al., 2023), both societies have also become more ethnically diverse.

---

50 Level 4+: Degree (for example BA, BSc), foundation degree, HND, HNC, NVQ Level 4-5, professional qualifications (for example teaching, nursing), or equivalent qualifications. Source: Census of population Northern Ireland, 2001 and 2021. www.nisra.gov.uk. Note 2021 figure is based on population aged 16 and over.

51 High qualifications are defined as post-secondary qualifications and low qualifications lower secondary level education or less.

52 These were migrants from Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania given the right to freely work and move when these countries joined the European Union (EU) on 1 May 2004.

Again, this transformation has been larger in Ireland. In Northern Ireland, 99.3 per cent of the population was ethnically White in 2001, and 96.7 per cent in 2021. In Ireland, the share of the White group was 94.8 per cent in 2006 and 87.4 per cent in 2022.

Immigration into Ireland has brought with it significant benefits (National Economic and Social Forum, 2015). While the majority of migrants come to work or study, in Ireland there has been a considerable increase in the number of humanitarian migrants in recent years. Persons fleeing Ukraine constitute a significant part of international migration to Ireland since February 2022, although this is not the case in Northern Ireland (McGinnity et al., 2023). Ireland and Northern Ireland have also both seen an increase in international protection applicants in recent years (see McGinnity et al., 2023 for further details).[53]

2.5 OVERVIEW OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE

This section reviews research on social and political attitudes in Ireland, North and South. However, as will become apparent, there is a lack of comparative research on how attitudes have developed across the island in recent decades. In its absence, this section will also draw on jurisdiction-specific research which tracks trends in social and political attitudes since the start of the 21st century and, where possible, draw cross-jurisdiction comparisons between these studies.

Despite the high societal value of tracking trends in political and social attitudes (Fahey et al., 2005), a lack of high-quality comparative data, captured over time, significantly constrains research opportunities for examining attitudes in Ireland and Northern Ireland (Breen and Healy, 2016). This data limitation is especially acute for Northern Ireland. Given its size and position in the UK, it is rare for a sufficient number of respondents to be sampled to generate robust estimates using most European data collections. In spite of this, some notable exceptions exist in the literature.

Regarding cross-jurisdiction comparative data on attitudes, only Fahey et al. (2005) provide a detailed exploration of changing political and social attitudes in Northern Ireland and Ireland from the 1980s up to the turn of the century at three points in time: 1981, 1990, 1999. However, beyond this research, studies of attitudes in the 21st century have relied on data confined to one jurisdiction. Breen and Healy (2016) explore trends in Ireland, between 2002 and 2012, using the European Social Survey (ESS) data. However, The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT)

[53] By June 2023, 84,613 Ukrainians had arrived under the Temporary Protection Directive[53] (Central Statistics Office, 2023). In Northern Ireland, an estimated 2,100 Ukrainian refugees had arrived by February 2023 https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-64751637.

survey, an annual survey conducted since 1998, does provide opportunities to investigate some trends in Northern Ireland (Bradley, 2020; Hayward and Rosher, 2021), either alone or in combination with election and opinion polls (Coakley, 2007; Fahey et al., 2005).

Across the literature reviewed, two common denominators emerged. The first is the need for long-term reliable data on the two jurisdictions (Breen and Healy, 2016). The absence of such data leads to research based on snapshots at a single point in time (Hayward and Rosher, 2021; Leahy, 2023), trends based on different data sources and survey questions (Fahey et al., 2005; Bradley, 2020), or simply a lack of comparative research across the island. The second is the agreement that individuals' socio-demographic characteristics influence their social and political views. Common across most analysis is the overview by age, religion, political party, and education. Additional factors may include gender, family structure, employment status (Fahey et al., 2005) and national identity (Bradley, 2020). In this report, age, birth-cohorts, and education are explored as individuals' main drivers of changing political and social attitudes.[54]

2.6 POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Based on the literature from Ireland and Northern Ireland, trust in institutions emerges as a main focus of political attitudes across the island, though in Northern Ireland, studies of political attitudes there appear equally concerned with constitutional questions, e.g. should Northern Ireland unite with Ireland or remain part of the UK? Do you agree with/support the Good Friday Agreement?

2.6.1 Ireland and Northern Ireland 1981-1999: trust in institutions[55]

Fahey et al. (2005) explore political attitudes across the island by looking at trends in institutional trust from 1981 to 1999, using EVS data. In 1981, trust in institutions in both jurisdictions was deemed high by European standards. Armed forces were the most trusted institution in both Northern Ireland and Ireland. Yet, trust declined in both jurisdictions from 1981 to 1999. The press was the least trusted institution in both Jurisdictions in 1981. Its trust level further declined, and the press remained the least trusted institution in Northern Ireland in 1999. In Ireland, it was overtaken by the strong decrease in Parliamentary trust during this period. This decline in Ireland is attributed to multiple scandals and controversies around the Parliament in the 1990s (Fahey et al., 2005). Trust also declined in the Parliament for Northern Ireland, while trust in the European Union also declined in this period in both jurisdictions. Trust in the police and in the judicial system

54 Although additional checks are conducted across gender, occupational status, urban/rural residence, employment status, children in the household and marital status.

55 The source for all the statistics in Section 2.6.1 is *Conflict and Consensus* by Fahey et al. (2005).

decreased significantly in Northern Ireland in the period 1981-1999 – during the Troubles – though it remained stable in Ireland.

Contrary to these declines, trust increased for trade unions and the education system in both jurisdictions. In addition, in Ireland, trust levels also increased for the civil service. These increases in trust in the education system, the trade unions, and the civil service in Ireland are attributed to citizens' perceptions that the institutions played a positive role in the transition from the economic crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s to the economic boom in the 1990s (Fahey et al., 2005).

2.6.2 Ireland 2002-2012: from political engagement to disenchantment[56]

To our knowledge, no study exists systematically comparing political attitudes in Ireland and Northern Ireland since Fahey et al.'s (2005) work which stops in 1999. Instead, to understand how political attitudes have fared on the island over the last two decades we turn to studies which have analysed specific jurisdictions.

Breen and Healy (2016) explored Ireland's political attitudes through trends in trust, turnouts, and satisfaction with democracy, between 2002 and 2012, using the ESS data. Firstly, in term of trust, levels remained stable for the police and the legal system, following the trends observed in 1981-1999 in the EVS. Trust levels in Parliament, political parties, politicians, and the European Parliament, were also relatively stable in the period 2002-2006. However, these declined around the onset of the 2008 economic crisis. Levels of trust showed signs of recovery only in the case of the European Parliament, while they continued to decline for national political institutions.

Secondly, regarding turnout, people's participation in elections appeared to decline between 2002 and 2012, reaching their lowest point in in 2010. Looking across age, the youngest age group (15-24) were the least likely to report having voted in the period 2002-2012, with the 55+ age group are the most likely.[57] People with lower secondary education were also systematically less likely to report voting in the 2002-2012 period.

Thirdly, exploring levels of satisfaction with their society in Ireland revealed the severity of the 2008 crisis. Prior to the crisis, satisfaction in Ireland was among the highest by European standards. Yet, satisfaction with various parts of society fell dramatically after 2008, including with government, the economy, and democracy.

---

56 The source for all the statistics in Section 2.6.2 is *Changing Values, Attitudes and Behaviours in Ireland: An Analysis of European Social Survey Data in Ireland, 2002-2012* by Breen and Healy (2016).

57 Though these age group differences are partly explained by the fact that the legal voting age is 18 years old.

If satisfaction with democracy had recovered by 2012, dissatisfaction in the government and the economy continued through 2008 to 2012. Thus, Ireland in 2012 had among the lowest levels of satisfaction in the government and the economy, by European standards. Confidence levels in public services remained relatively unaffected by the crisis. Ireland also maintained a relatively stable and high level of satisfaction with the education system, and a stable but low level of satisfaction with the health system.

2.6.3 Northern Ireland 1981-2020: the constitutional questions

Our search identified no corollary analysis of trends in similar political attitudes in Northern Ireland since 1999. Instead, the Northern Irish literature on political attitudes has focused more on constitutional questions. To briefly summarise this work, trends in people's preference for Northern Ireland's constitutional status reveal that, overall, across time, the majority favour remaining in the UK, despite an increasing share of citizens in favour of Irish unification.

Adding these recent trends on constitutional preference to trends from the 1978 to 2003 period in Fahey et al.'s (2005) study reveals discontinuities in citizens' preferences.[58] Part of these discontinuities may be explained by the lack of a consistent time-series in the data, but part likely lie at the intersection between civil unrests and political settlements. Overall, preference for remaining in the United Kingdom was the strongest in 1978 (76 per cent), and then declined between 1989 and 2001. Between 1998 and 2023, using the NILT data, Hayward and Rosher's (2023) analysis suggested a preference for Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK, but which decreased from a high 60 per cent in 2000 to below 40 per cent in 2022.[59] An opposite trend occurred for unification preferences, with rates ranging from a low of 17 per cent in 2000 to a high of 30 per cent in 2022. Trends do not mirror each other since the portion of 'don't knows' increased and has been systematically above 10 per cent since 2012.

2.7 SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Social attitudes can help get a picture of the health of the social fabric in a society, the values it holds, and people's wellbeing within it. Studies on social attitudes in Northern Ireland note the importance of considering the multiplicity of identities in Northern Ireland, including national (Devine and Robinson, 2019), political (Coakley, 2007), and especially religious (Coakley, 2007), which emerge as important features for group identity and for sustaining social capital more broadly. However as noted in Sections 1.2 and 1.3.2, given data limitations, the

58 Social Attitudes Survey, NISA, EVS, and NILT.
59 https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/sites/default/files/2023-04/update151.pdf.

role of religious denomination or national identity in understanding attitudes is not a focus of analysis in this report.

2.7.1 Ireland and Northern Ireland 1981-1999: wellbeing, trust in people, and values[60]

Fahey et al. (2005) again provide the only opportunity to directly compare trends in social attitudes across the island over time. Looking at trends in happiness and life satisfaction, there appears to be little difference in happiness across jurisdictions in 1981, 1990, and 1999. Trends in life satisfaction are also similar across jurisdictions. In Ireland, mean life satisfaction decreased from 1981 to 1990, attributed to societal effects of an economic recession during this period (Fahey et al., 2005), but then had increased by 1999. In Northern Ireland, mean life satisfaction also decreased from 1981 to 1990 before increasing in 1999.

Turning to trust in other people, in Ireland this increased from 1981 to 1990 before decreasing again in 1999. In Northern Ireland, trust remained stable between 1981 and 1990 before slightly decreasing in 1999 (Fahey et al., 2005). Lastly, there was no systematic shift towards post-materialist values (i.e. towards autonomy, equality, and self-expression, Inglehart, 1971) in either Ireland or Northern Ireland, over the 1973-1997 period.

2.7.2 Ireland 2002-2012: oscillating social cohesion[61]

Again, to our knowledge, no systematic comparison of social attitudes on the island has been undertaken post-1999. Instead, Breen and Healey (2016) explore trends in social cohesion in Ireland using indicators similar to those applied in Fahey et al. (2005), but using the ESS data. Social cohesion indicators include wellbeing, trust in people, and values.

Firstly, while wellbeing was stable in the period 1981-1999, it decreased in 2002-2012, leading Ireland to rank among the worst performers compared to the EU/UK in 2010-2012. In terms of life satisfaction, this similarly dropped from 2006 to 2010. An additional indicator of wellbeing was used to capture respondents' financial health. Prior to 2008, Ireland had a relatively low rate of people finding it difficult to make ends meet and borrow money. Yet, the rates worsened drastically with the onset of the recession, reaching one-third of households finding it difficult to make ends meet and two-thirds finding it difficult to borrow.

---

60 The source for all the statistics in Section 2.7.1 is *Conflict and Consensus* by Fahey et al. (2005).

61 The source for all the statistics in Section 2.7.2 is *Changing Values, Attitudes and Behaviours in Ireland: An Analysis of European Social Survey Data in Ireland, 2002-2012* by Breen and Healy (2016).

When it comes to social trust, from 2008 onwards the score decreased, reaching a low in 2010 (although despite the decline, by European standards, Ireland maintained high levels of trust).

2.7.3 Northern Ireland post-1999: an absence of data

Our review of the literature returned little research on trends in comparable dimensions of social capital for Northern Ireland. The work that is available is also focused on the period after 2010, making comparisons with Ireland in the period 1998-2009 difficult. Among the available evidence, wellbeing appears to have increased in Northern Ireland in the period 2011 to 2017.[62] Average life satisfaction increased from around 7.6 (on a 10-point scale) in 2011 to 7.9 in 2017, while happiness rose from 7.4 to 7.8 over the same period. At the same time, involvement in civic organisations (an alternative indicator of social capital) appears to have declined between 2001 and 2017 (from 64 per cent being involved in 2001 to 53 per cent in 2017).[63] While we were unable to find any information on trends in trust in other people in general ('generalised trust'), Northern Irish people's trust in their neighbours has declined significantly, from 79 per cent agreeing that 'most of their neighbours could be trusted' in 2014/15 to 57 per cent in 2021.[64,65]

2.8 SUMMARY: CHANGING SOCIETIES AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES

This summary sought to highlight some of the main social, political, and economic events and transformations across Ireland and Northern Ireland over the past 25 years or so, which we believe could be particularly salient for shaping people's social and political attitudes. In Ireland the period since 1998 covered a period of transformative economic growth followed by a deep sustained recession and, linked to that, stringent austerity measures, which were rolled back for the most part as the labour market and economy recovered remarkably prior to the COVID pandemic. Northern Ireland experienced this recession but to a much lesser extent, and austerity measures and welfare cuts continued well into the economic recovery period.

Following a protracted conflict, the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 ushered in a comparatively peaceful period in Northern Ireland. Yet for all the crucial successes, there have been many disputes and disruptions, in some cases leading to the prolonged suspension of the NI Assembly and power-sharing Executive and associated lack of decision-making (Coulter et al., 2021). The Brexit vote in 2016

62 https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/02/Happy-now-report.pdf.

63 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2022-a-fresh-approach-to-social-mobility/state-of-the-nation-2022-chapter-4-drivers-of-social-mobility.

64 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/socialcapitalheadlineindicators.

65 The year coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic which may have been particularly harmful to neighbourhood trust given the impact of the pandemic on social cohesion generally (Borkowska and Laurence, 2021).

and subsequent debates on the Northern Ireland Protocol have significantly challenged political relations in Northern Ireland, and further suspensions of the NI institutions have stymied decisions on key policy issues and have led to frustration among the population. In Ireland, the period since 1998 saw continued secularisation and decline in the role of the Catholic Church, important referenda on social issues and increases in political activism, but relative political stability, at least when compared to Northern Ireland. Other recent challenges in both jurisdictions include the COVID pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, a housing crisis (particularly in Ireland) and challenges in the health service and public budget (Northern Ireland).

A review of the existing literature on social and political attitudes in Ireland found a lack of systematic research comparing attitudes and their trends on the island of Ireland. The work that does exist primarily covers the 20-year period from the 1980s to the end of the 1990s. These tend to show a relative degree of similarity between the two jurisdictions. Trust in parliament, the armed forces, the press, and the EU decreased in both jurisdictions, while trust in the education system and trade unions also increased in both. Yet based on often stronger declines in Northern Ireland, attitudes across the island, including trust in the armed forces, press, police, civil service, judicial institutions, and parliament diverged, with a widening gap between Ireland (more positive attitudes) and Northern Ireland (less positive). Only attitudes to trust in the education system and to trade unions converged between North and South during the period. Comparing individual wellbeing, values and social trust, there was also much greater similarity in levels and trends across jurisdictions.

Since the start of the 21st century, there has been no research comparing attitudes across jurisdictions. Some detailed research exists on attitudes in Ireland since 2002. This generally shows a period of relatively high and stable attitudes prior to the 2008/09 recession but then a significant worsening leading to a period of depressed attitudes. However, this work ends around 2012, leaving a 10-year gap in our understanding of attitudes in Ireland. Furthermore, no comparable work has been done on Northern Ireland during this period, meaning we have no sense of how these kinds of social and political attitudes compare across jurisdictions across the 21st century. This report will therefore fill a critical gap in our understanding of social and political attitudes across Ireland and Northern Ireland from the start of the 21st century to the present.

CHAPTER 3

Satisfaction with democracy, optimism and political voice

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on people's attitudes toward the functioning of the political system and their optimism about the future. Each section first presents the overall time trends for both jurisdictions, and then explores these trends across different levels of education and birth cohorts.

3.2 SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY

3.2.1 Overall trends

This section focuses on satisfaction with democracy. Figure 3.1 shows the proportion of people who report being 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' with the way democracy works in their country.[66] The shaded areas surrounding the trend lines in all figures represent the '95 per cent confidence intervals' surrounding the estimates of people's attitudes. Confidence intervals give a range of values above and below the trend line to express how certain we can be in the estimates of people's attitudes. The actual level of people's attitudes is posited to lie somewhere between the upper and lower endpoints of the confidence intervals.

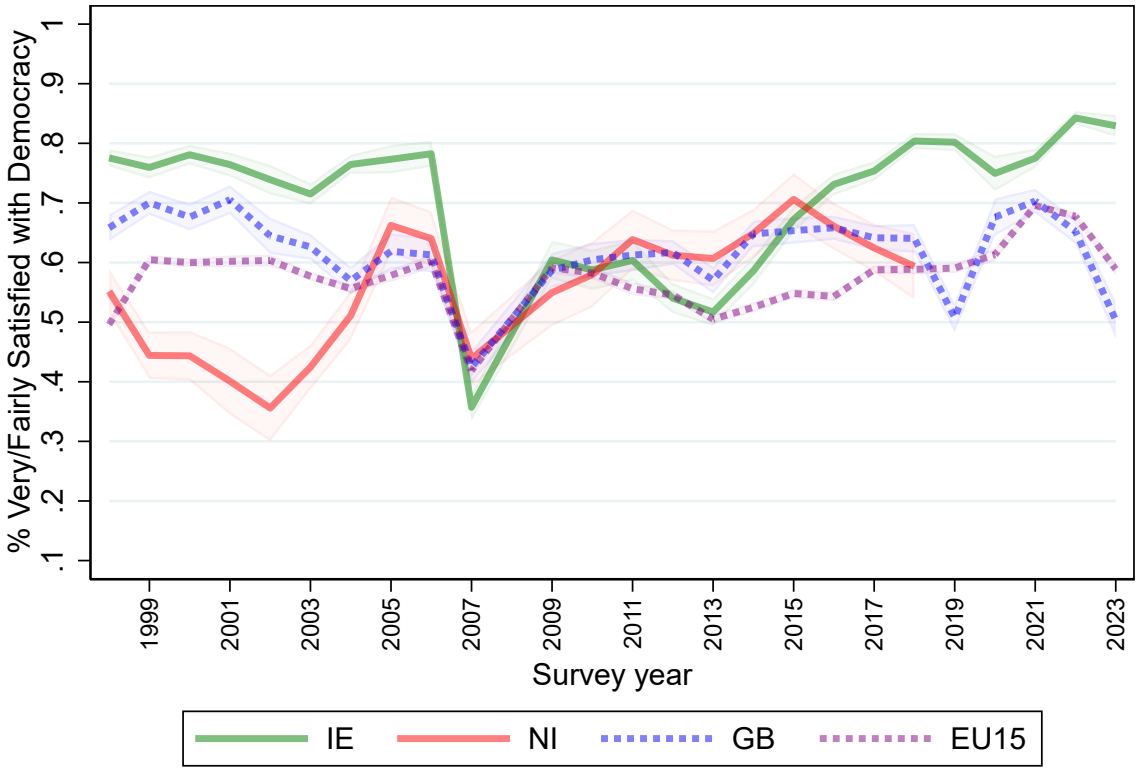
In Ireland, satisfaction with democracy was high and relatively stable (at around 70-80 per cent) at the start of the century (between 1998 and 2006). However, in 2007, it declined precipitously by over half (from around 80 per cent to under 40 per cent of people). Satisfaction with democracy recovered somewhat by 2009,[67] after which it remained lower and stable up until 2014 (with a slight dip in 2012/13). However, from 2015 onwards, satisfaction steadily increased up to January-February 2023 (with a slight dip around 2020/21), where it stood at its highest level (83 per cent) for the past 25 years.[68]

66 In Northern Ireland, people were asked 'how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the United Kingdom?' In Ireland, people were asked 'how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Ireland?'.

67 The Eurobarometer did not ask this question in 2008.

68 This trend of political satisfaction in Ireland is also evident in the European Social Survey (ESS 2002-2022). The trend for Northern Ireland cannot be cross-validated in the ESS due to small sample size.

FIGURE 3.1 TRENDS IN SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY ACROSS JURISDICTIONS – IRE, NI, GB, EU15



Source: Eurobarometer.
Notes: Eurobarometer 1998-2023 (IE, GB, EU15), 1998-2018 (NI).

At the start of the 21st century, satisfaction was much lower in Northern Ireland compared to Ireland (22 percentage points lower). Satisfaction then declined further in Northern Ireland up to 2002, further widening this gap. However, satisfaction then rose rapidly up to 2005/06 (increasing by nearly 30 percentage points). It then declined again around the time of the recession (by 20 percentage points), albeit less precipitously than in Ireland. From 2009, satisfaction entered a period of slow and sustained recovery, where levels of satisfaction were not too dissimilar from levels in Ireland. This persisted until 2015, after which trends between Ireland and Northern Ireland began to diverge again, with satisfaction beginning to decline once more in Northern Ireland up to 2018 but continuing to improve in Ireland over the same period. Satisfaction with democracy has therefore been much more volatile in Northern Ireland than in Ireland. However, over the 21st century, Northern Ireland saw satisfaction with democracy steadily improve.

Comparing these trends to Great Britain (GB) and the EU15 average, for much of the early period (pre-2007) satisfaction with democracy was comparatively highest in Ireland but lowest in Northern Ireland. However, in the post-2007 period, satisfaction in Northern Ireland was much closer to Great Britain and the EU15

average. Figure 3.1 also demonstrates that while all jurisdictions experienced a drop in satisfaction around 2007 it was around twice as large in Ireland. We also see that trends in satisfaction with democracy were generally more stable in Great Britain and the EU15 average than on the island of Ireland. Testing shows these trends in Ireland and Northern Ireland cannot be explained by longer-term changes in the composition of society.[69]

3.2.2 Trends among more and less educated groups

We next explore whether trends in satisfaction with democracy from 1998 onwards differed between those with more and less education. Figure 3.2 shows trends in satisfaction with democracy among higher educated individuals (those who finished education aged 20 and above – the green line) and lower educated individuals (those who finished aged 19 or below – the blue line) in Ireland (the left panel) and Northern Ireland (the right panel).

FIGURE 3.2 TRENDS IN SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY BY AGE FINISHED EDUCATION – IRE, NI

Sources: Eurobarometer 1998-2023 (IE, GB, EU15), 1998-2018 (NI).

69 Supplementary Online Appendix S3.1 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170) shows the trends in political satisfaction before and after controlling for changes in the socio-demographic composition of people in Ireland and Northern Ireland (including age, employment status, occupation, education, marital status, and gender).

Up until 2006, differences in satisfaction with democracy between more and less educated groups were small in both jurisdictions. In Ireland, more educated groups had slightly higher satisfaction than less educated groups, while in Northern Ireland there were generally no differences. However, there was an emerging and widening gap in satisfaction between more and less educated groups. While both education groups experienced a significant shock around the time of the recession (2007/08), more educated groups saw their satisfaction with democracy recover quicker than lower educated groups, especially in Northern Ireland where it quickly recovered to its pre-2007 level. In Ireland, this widened gap between education groups persisted for much of the latter half of the post-2007 period, only returning to pre-2007 levels around 2020.[70] In Northern Ireland, this gap persisted during the post-2007 period, at least up to 2018 (our last data-point for Northern Ireland).[71]

3.2.3 Differences across generations

As outlined in Chapter 1, changes in attitudes may be driven by generational change, where different generations of people are believed, by virtue of the shared period of time and environment they grew up in, to share similar attitudes and values. As older generations pass away, newer generations, with different attitudes, take their place which can drive longer term changes in attitudes. Figure 3.2 explores generational differences in satisfaction with democracy, where each coloured line on the graph represents attitudes among different birth cohorts of people. The top two panels of Figure 3.3 show trends in satisfaction with democracy over the study period (1998 onwards) for five different birth cohorts (from the oldest generation, born between 1900 and 1929, to the youngest, born between 1990 and 2006) in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

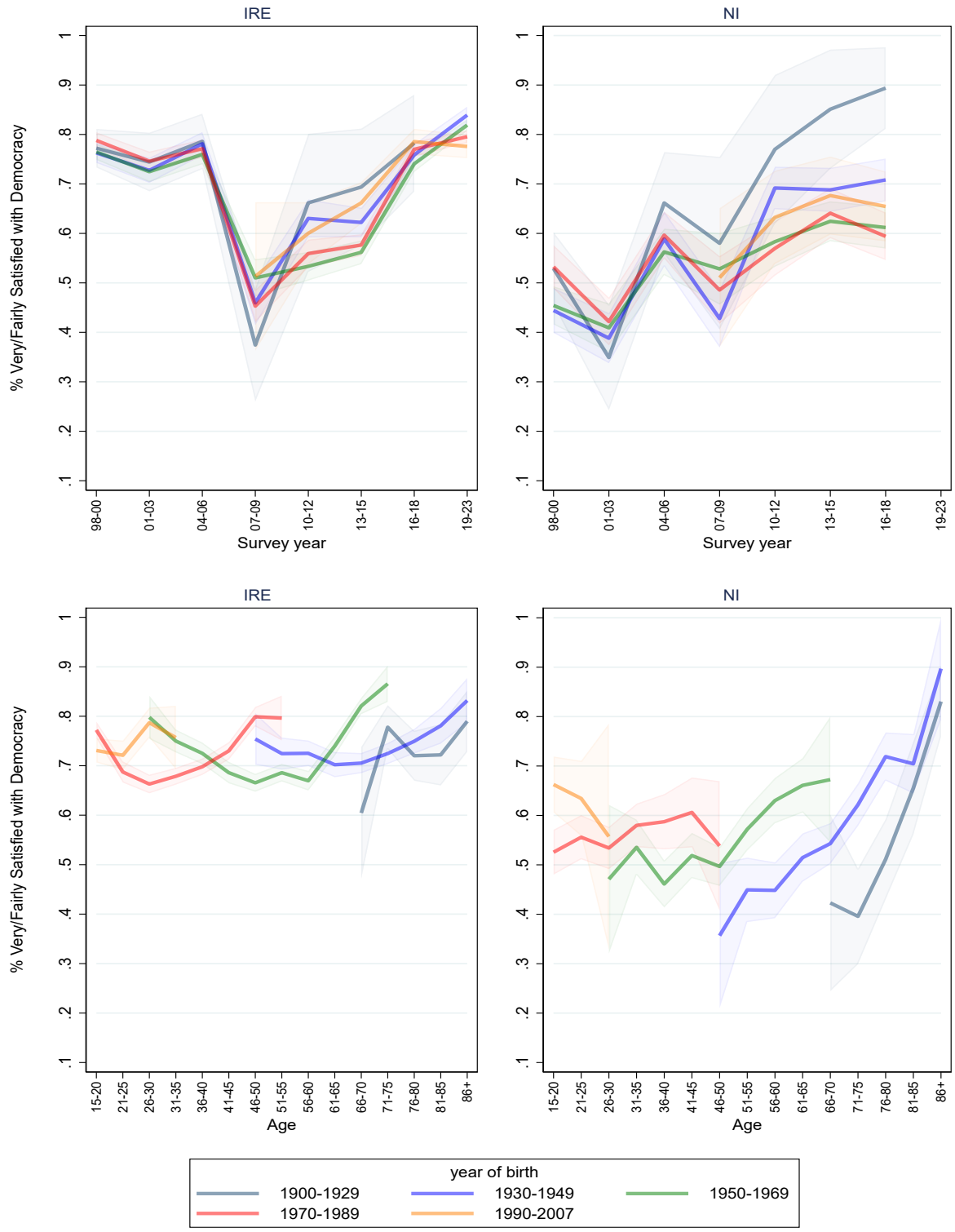
In Ireland (the top left panel), there is little evidence of substantial differences in satisfaction with democracy between different generations. Around the recession, (2007/09 onwards) some generational differences did emerge; largely that older generations showed higher satisfaction with democracy than younger generations. However, from 2016/18 onwards these differences shrank again.

---

70 The trend of a widening then subsequent shrinking gap in political satisfaction between more and less educated groups in Ireland is also evident in the European Social Survey (2002-2022).

71 No consistent difference in trends is observed across gender, urban/rural residence, having children in the HH, or marital status. However, there is some evidence that a post-2007 gap in satisfaction also emerged between the employed/inactive group and unemployed group, and non-manual and manual workers (although the difference in trends remains larger across education groups); see Supplementary Online Appendix S3.2-S3.3 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

FIGURE 3.3 TRENDS IN SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY AMONG BIRTH COHORTS BY (A) YEAR, AND (B) AGE GROUP – IRE/NI



Source: Eurobarometer.

A different story emerges in Northern Ireland (the top right panel). At the start of the 21st century, there was little difference in satisfaction with democracy across generations who all shared low levels of satisfaction. However, over time, satisfaction increased at a faster rate among older generations (especially those

born 1900-1929) compared to younger generations (particularly those born 1950-1969 and 1970-1989). The result is that in the more recent period (up to 2018), older generations tended to have higher satisfaction with democracy than younger generations (the exception being those born from 1990 onwards who lie somewhere in the middle). Of particular note is that the declining satisfaction with democracy in Northern Ireland seen from 2016 up to 2018 (see Figure 3.1) was largely concentrated among younger generations.

One issue with looking at generational differences in attitudes is that people's generation (defined by the year they were born) is closely associated with their age. As such, it may simply be that people's age (not their generation) shapes their attitudes, and generational differences are instead driven by differences in people's age. The two lower panels of Figure 3.3 help unpack this possibility by looking at the relationship between people's age (across the horizontal axis) and their satisfaction with democracy (the vertical axis) for different birth cohorts.

In Ireland (bottom left panel, Figure 3.3), there is little consistent difference in the average levels of satisfaction across people's age. Instead, the trend for each birth cohort generally exhibits the same dip and recovery in satisfaction with democracy over the life course. In Northern Ireland (bottom right panel), there is also little difference in the *average* satisfaction with democracy at different ages. However, this figure again demonstrates that satisfaction has increased more rapidly among older generations than younger generations.

3.3 POLITICAL VOICE

3.3.1 Overall trends

This section explores how far people feel that their 'voice counts' in their country[72] to gauge perceptions of political efficacy – henceforth referred to as political voice. Figure 3.4 shows the proportion of people who 'Tend to/Totally Agree' their voice counts in their country[73] (this question was only available from 2007 onwards).

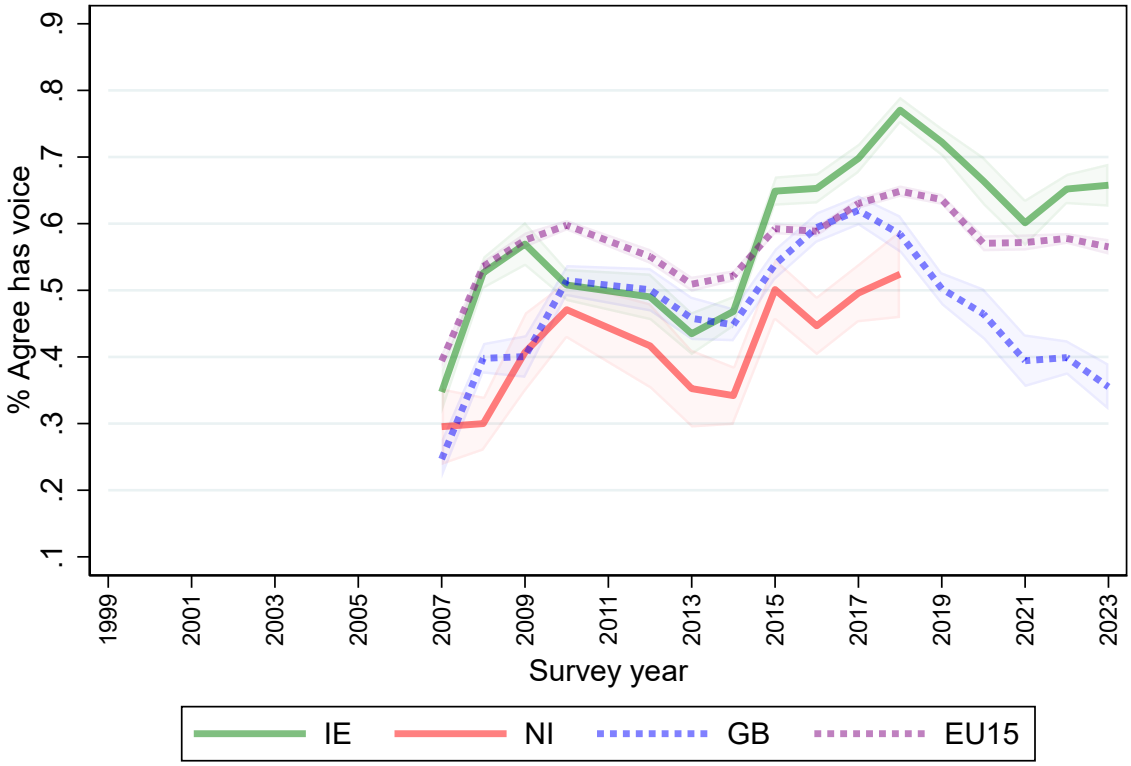
In Ireland, the proportion who believe their voice counts rose rapidly between 2007 and 2009 (increasing by 20 percentage points). It then gradually declined again until 2013, after which it increased again up to a high point of just under 80 per cent of people feeling their voice counts in 2018. From 2019 onwards, however, political voice declined again by between 15-20 percentage points.

---

72 In Ireland people were asked how far they feel their voice counts 'in Ireland'. In Northern Ireland people were asked how far they feel their voice counts 'in the United Kingdom' as discussed in Chapter 1.

73 The other response options were 'Tend to/Totally Disagree'.

FIGURE 3.4 TRENDS IN PERCEIVED POLITICAL EFFICACY ACROSS JURISDICTIONS – IRE, NI, GB, EU15



Sources: Eurobarometer 1998-2023 (IE, GB, EU15), 1998-2018 (NI).

In Northern Ireland, political voice was somewhat lower than in Ireland from 2007 onwards. However, the trend in political voice for Northern Ireland is broadly similar to Ireland, with an improvement (2007-2010), decline (2011-2014) and then subsequent improvement again in political voice up to 2015. However, as with satisfaction with democracy, trends in political voice began to diverge from 2016 up to 2018. Therefore, while it continued to improve in Ireland it remained stable in Northern Ireland up to 2018, widening the gap between the two jurisdictions.

Comparing these trends to Great Britain and the EU15 average, after 2015 political voice was highest in Ireland compared to other jurisdictions (although its gap with the average score for EU15 countries shrank from 2019 onwards). In fact, levels of political voice in Ireland were closer to the EU15 average than to Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In comparison, Northern Ireland had the lowest levels of political voice across jurisdictions and was closer to Great Britain than Ireland or the EU15 average. Interestingly, all jurisdictions had relatively similar trends up until 2015, suggesting wider regional factors may be more important during this period e.g. the legacy of the global recession. After this point, their trends diverged in different

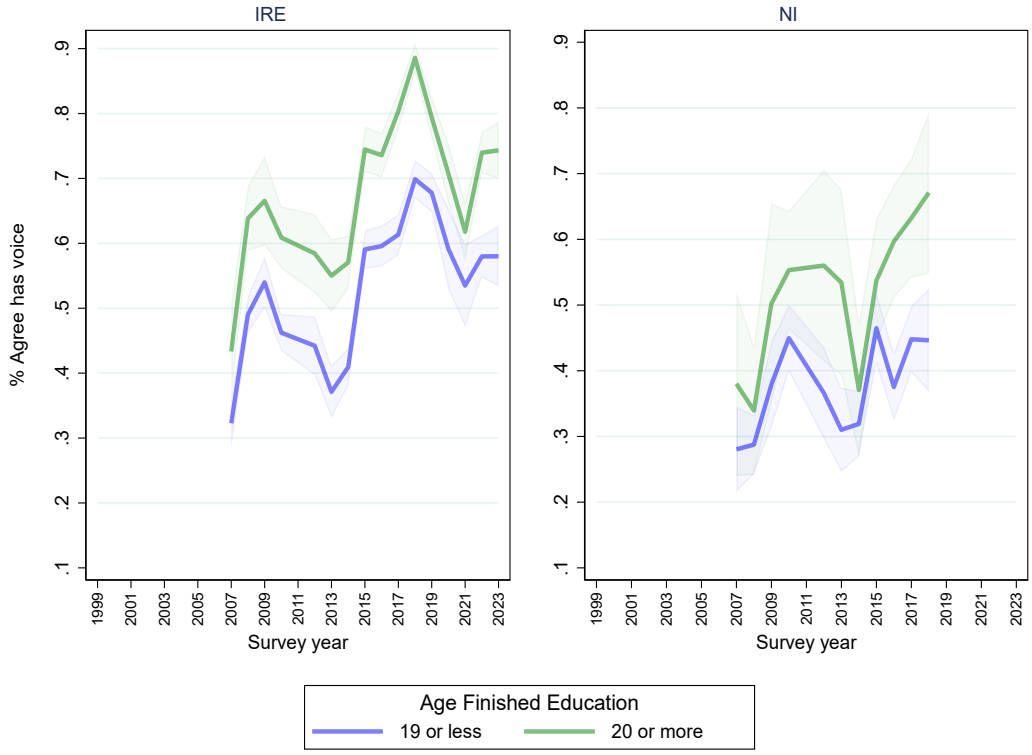
ways. Testing again shows these trends in Ireland and Northern Ireland are largely unexplained by longer-term changes in the composition of society.[74]

3.3.2 Trends among more and less educated groups

Figure 3.5 explores whether trends in political voice differed among more educated (green line) and less educated (blue line) groups, across Ireland (left panel) and Northern Ireland (right panel). In both jurisdictions, more educated groups are generally more likely to agree that their 'voice counts' compared to less educated groups.

In Ireland, both more and less educated groups experienced very similar trends in political voice, and the gap remained broadly similar in size from 2007 to 2018. As with satisfaction with democracy, there was some shrinking of the education gap in political voice from around 2019 onwards (although in 2022/23 it widened again with more educated groups seeing a larger increase in political voice compared to less educated groups).

FIGURE 3.5 TRENDS IN PERCEIVED POLITICAL EFFICACY BY AGE FINISHED EDUCATION – IRE, NI



Sources: Eurobarometer 2007-2023 (IE, GB, EU15), 2007-2018 (NI).

74 Supplementary Online Appendix S3.4 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170) shows the trends in political voice before and after controlling for changes in the socio-demographic composition of people in Ireland and Northern Ireland (including age, employment status, occupation, education, marital status, and gender).

In Northern Ireland, the more educated saw greater volatility in political voice than the less educated group, but generally, as with satisfaction with democracy, they saw their political voice increase at a faster rate than the less educated group. This led to a general widening of the gap between more and less educated groups in Northern Ireland. In 2018, the gap was at its largest since 2007.[75]

3.3.3 Differences across birth cohorts

Figure 3.6 examines whether there are any generational differences in political voice. The top panels explore differences in political voice across birth cohorts during the last 20-25 years. The lower panels show differences in political voice across birth cohorts by age. In Ireland (top left panel) there were very few differences in political voice between earlier and later generations, between 2007 and 2015. Only the earliest generation (born between 1900 and 1929) appear to hold different views, reporting higher political voice over time than other generations. Instead, there were bigger differences in attitudes over time than there were between generations, suggesting that period-effects (e.g. key events) play a much bigger role in driving the overall trends in political voice in Ireland.

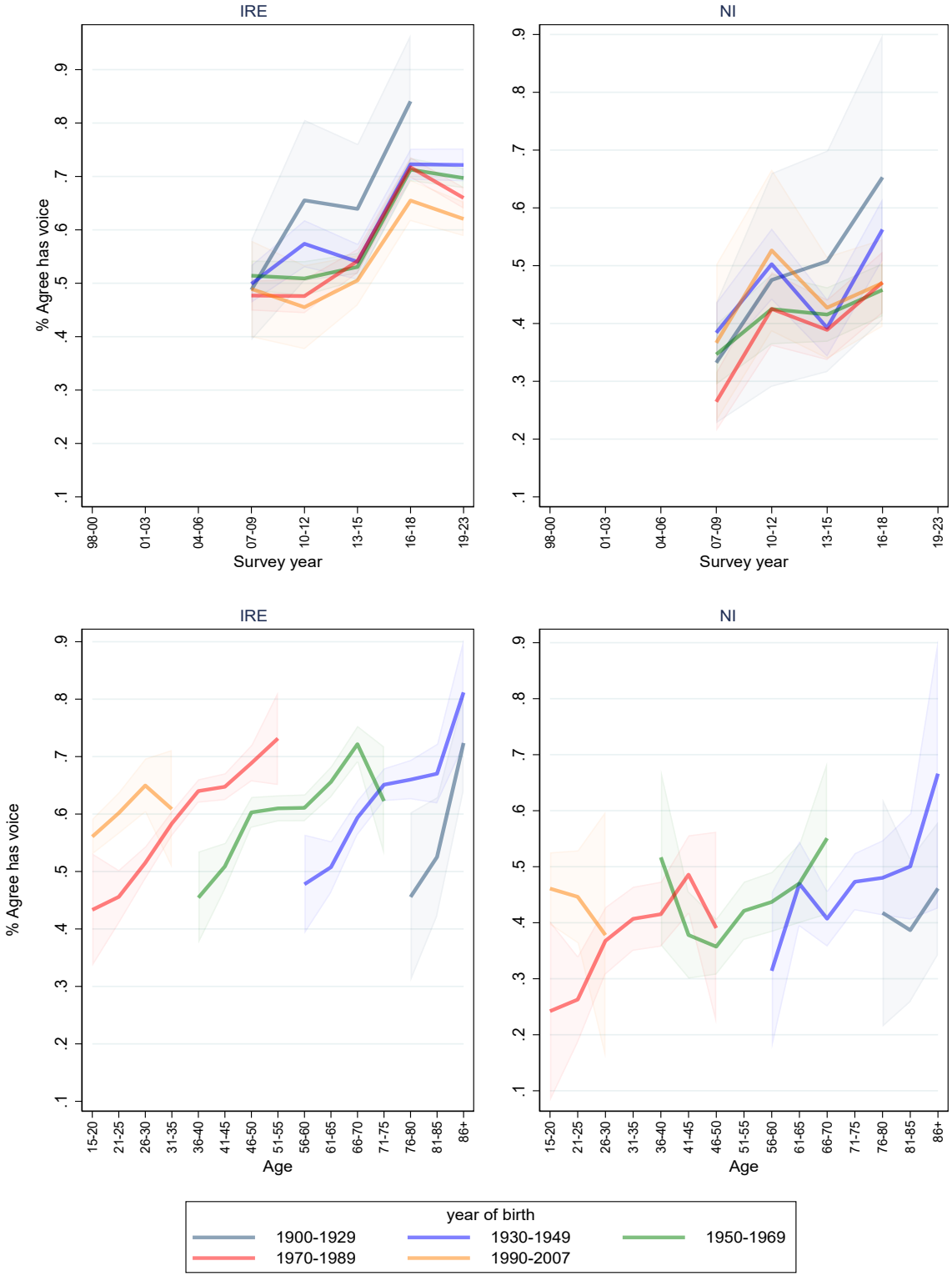
However, between 2016 and 2023, there was a slight emergence of generational differences, with older birth cohorts reporting greater political voice than younger cohorts. This is especially pronounced for those born after 1990, who had the lowest political voice of all generations in Ireland. In fact, the overall decline in political voice observed in Ireland in Figure 3.4 from 2019 onwards was largely concentrated among those born after 1970. This pattern could be driven by differences in people's age between generations. That is, younger people may feel their voice counts less than older people, which would explain why later cohorts have lower political voice. However, levels of political voice do not shift substantially across age (see Figure 3.6, lower left panel). This suggests that generational differences may be emerging in more recent years in Ireland.

The picture in Northern Ireland is more complex. As in Ireland, the biggest differences in political voice appear to emerge over time (period-effects) rather than exist between generations. However, where differences between generations do exist, generally, earlier generations reported greater political voice than later generations, although those born after 1990 are again the exception, landing somewhere in the middle (as with satisfaction with democracy). This difference has

[75] No consistent difference in trends is observed across gender, urban/rural residence, having children in the household, or marital status. However, there is some evidence that gaps have widened over time between manual/non-manual groups in both jurisdictions, with non-manual groups seeing their political voice increase at a faster rate. In addition, the unemployed group has seen smaller increase in political voice over time, compared to the employed/inactive group; see Supplementary Online Appendix S3.5-S3.6 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

also become more pronounced in Northern Ireland over time, with those born before 1949 seeing larger recent improvements (up to 2018) in political voice than those born afterwards.

FIGURE 3.6 TRENDS IN POLITICAL EFFICACY AMONG BIRTH COHORTS BY (A) YEAR, AND (B) AGE GROUP – IRE/NI



Source: Eurobarometer.

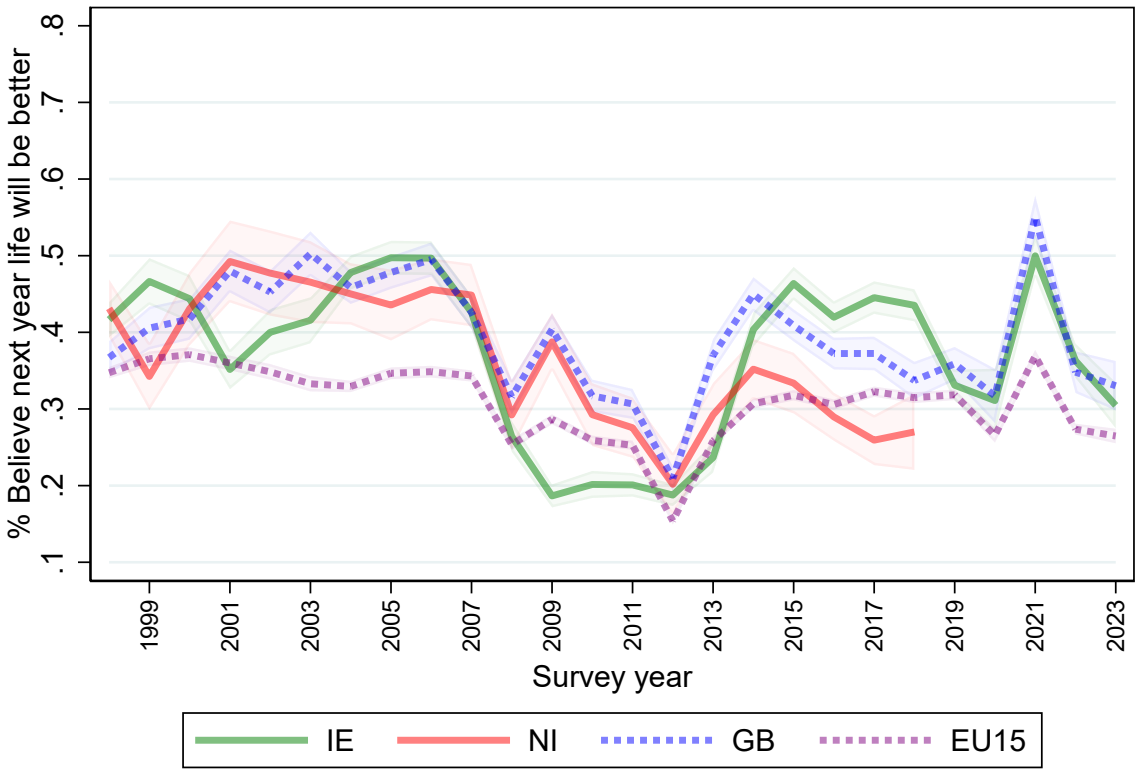
If we examine the relationship between age and political voice in Northern Ireland (lower right panel, Figure 3.6) there is a slight age gradient in political voice, with older people being somewhat more likely, on average, to agree their 'voice counts'. However, this is only small and unlikely to account for the generational differences observed in Northern Ireland. As in Ireland, therefore, earlier generations may be increasingly emerging in the post-2007 period, with earlier generations showing evidence of greater political voice than younger generations.

3.4 EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

3.4.1 Overall trends

The final section explores people's expectations for the future and how far they think their 'life in general' will be better over the next twelve months – henceforth referred to as their 'optimism'. Figure 3.7 shows the proportion of people who report feeling their life will be 'better' over the next twelve months.[76]

FIGURE 3.7 TRENDS IN EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE ACROSS JURISDICTIONS – IRE, NI, GB, EU15



Source: Eurobarometer 1998-2023 (IE, GB, EU15), 1998-2018 (NI).

[76] The remaining response options were 'Worse' or 'the Same'.

In Ireland, the pattern is broadly similar to people's satisfaction with democracy: optimism remained relatively high and stable with a slight increase between 1998 and 2006 (around 40-50 per cent of people felt optimistic about next year). However, in 2007, around the time of the recession, there was a precipitous drop in optimism (from around 50 per cent of people feeling optimistic to under 20 per cent). Optimism then remained depressed for four years until 2013, after which there was a rapid improvement between 2013 to 2015, where it remained relatively high and stable again. However, from 2019 onwards optimism in Ireland experienced greater volatility, declining in 2019 and 2020, rising again in 2021, before declining again into 2022 and 2023. Importantly, optimism in the latter half of the period never fully returns to its pre-2007 levels. In fact, excluding the 2021 bounce (potentially when expectations of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic were high), optimism in Ireland declined in 2019, and then remained stable at the same lower level onwards. It is also important to also note that when there is a decline in the proportion of people who think 'life will be better' it is not that more people are simply responding that 'life will be the same'. Instead, there is an accompanying increase in the proportion of people who think 'life will be worse'. Therefore, trends in optimism also show the inverse of trends in pessimism.

Optimism in Northern Ireland was also relatively high at the start of the 21st century. In fact, unlike satisfaction with democracy, levels of optimism in Northern Ireland started the century similar to those in Ireland. As in Ireland, these remained comparatively high and stable until 2007, after which, around the time of the recession, optimism declined. Although the rate of decline was slower and less linear, by 2012 optimism in Northern Ireland mirrored the trough in optimism experienced in Ireland (declining from 45 per cent to 20 per cent). Optimism then began to recover, as in Ireland, but by 2015 this recovery had stalled. After that, trends in optimism in Northern Ireland diverged again from Ireland's recovery and optimism in Northern Ireland subsequently declined into 2018, where it was at some of its lowest levels for the past 20 years.

This period of declining optimism in Northern Ireland (and widening gap with optimism in Ireland) also mirrors the declining satisfaction with democracy over the same period. However, in contrast to satisfaction with democracy which generally increased over the course of the 21st century, Northern Ireland has seen its optimism generally decline over the period. Testing again shows these trends in Ireland and Northern Ireland cannot be explained by longer-term changes in the composition of society.[77] As noted for Ireland, in periods where optimism decreased (or increased) in Northern Ireland, pessimism saw an accompanying increase (or decrease).

[77] See comparison of unadjusted and adjusted trends in optimism; Supplementary Online Appendix S3.7 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

Comparing these trends in personal optimism to those in Great Britain and the EU15 average, optimism in the pre-2007 period was higher in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Great Britain compared to the EU15 average. In addition, comparatively, Ireland saw the most precipitous drop in optimism during the recession. Comparing jurisdictions also shows how optimism in Northern Ireland tended to track optimism in Great Britain more closely than optimism in Ireland, although paths diverged from around 2015 and, by 2018 at least, Northern Ireland had some of the lowest levels of optimism of all jurisdictions.

3.4.2 Trends among more and less educated groups

Figure 3.8 looks at optimism across Ireland (left panel) and Northern Ireland (right panel) but compares trends among more educated (green line) and less educated (blue line) groups. More educated groups generally have greater optimism than those with less education. However, across both jurisdictions, this gap in optimism appears to have shrunk over the last 20-25 years.

In Ireland, pre-2007 there was a gap of around 10-15 percentage points between more and less educated groups. This gap gradually shrank over time, driven largely by a greater overall decline in optimism among the more educated group. However, this gap widened somewhat again in 2020, shrank again in 2021, but then began to widen once more in 2022/23. By 2023, the gap had further widened, with the less educated group being half as likely to report optimism (around 20 per cent) than the more educated group (around 40 per cent). In fact, excluding the bump in optimism in 2021, since 2020, the low educated group have had levels of optimism nearly as low as they were during the recessionary period.

A somewhat similar picture emerges in Northern Ireland. At the start of the 21st century, more educated groups also reported higher optimism than lower educated groups (a gap of 15-20 percentage points). However, over time, and particularly since 2008, optimism declined among both more and less educated groups in Northern Ireland but was particularly pronounced among the more educated group, where optimism dropped by almost 40 percentage points over 20 years. This resulted in the gap in optimism in Northern Ireland essentially closing completely by 2018.[78]

[78] No consistent differences in trends are observed across gender, urban/rural residence, having children in the HH, employment status, or marital status. However, there is some evidence that the gap in optimism between non-manual and manual workers has shrunk over time; see Supplementary Online Appendix S3.8-S3.9 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

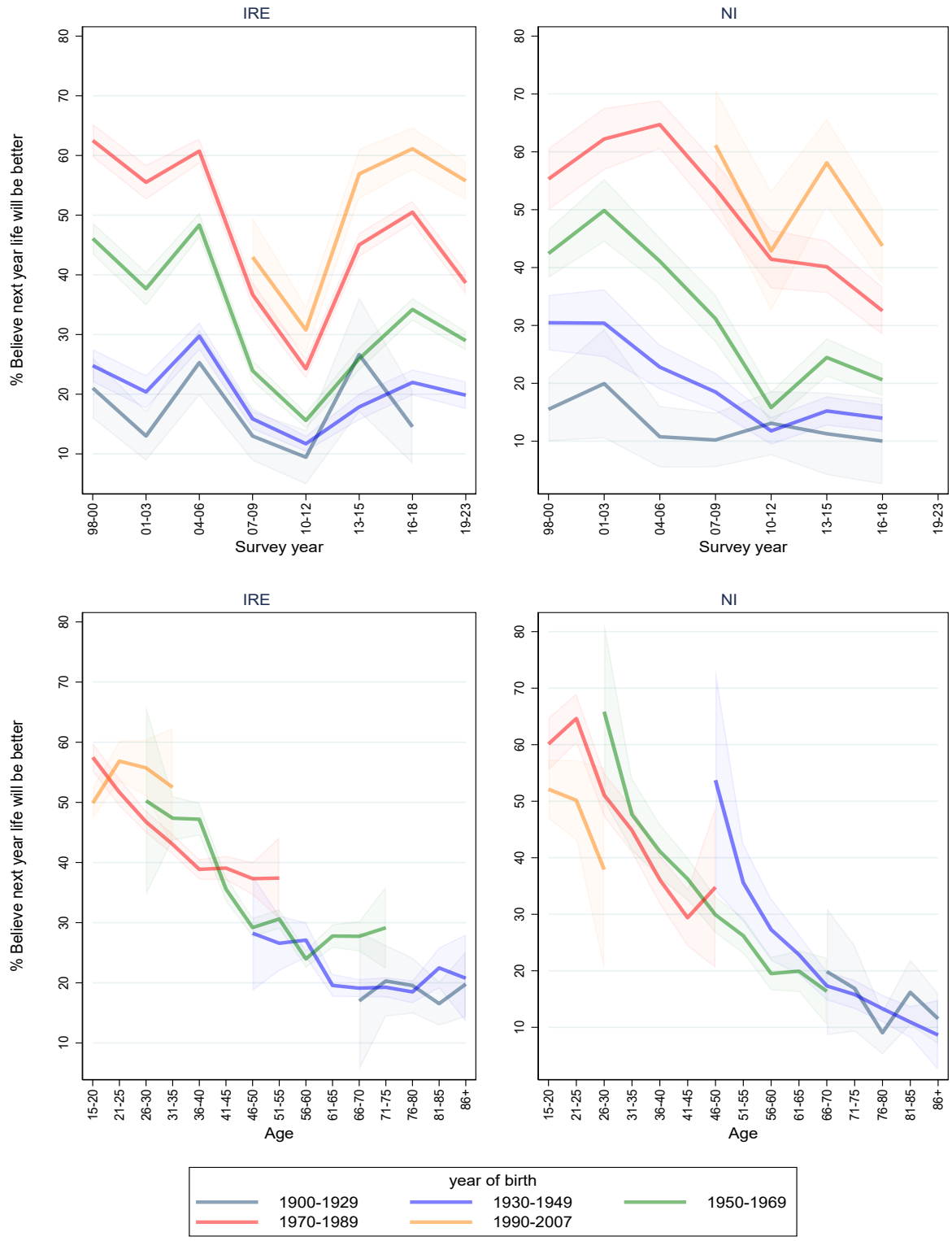
FIGURE 3.8 TRENDS IN EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE BY AGE FINISHED EDUCATION – IRE, NI

Source: Eurobarometer 1998-2023 (IE, GB, EU15), 1998-2018 (NI).

3.4.3 Differences across birth cohorts

Figure 3.9 explores whether there are any generational differences in optimism, where each coloured line on the figure again represents attitudes among different birth cohorts of people. We first look at differences in optimism across birth cohorts during the last 20-25 years (top panels). Later we then explore the relationship between age and optimism for each birth cohort (bottom panels).

FIGURE 3.9 TRENDS IN EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE AMONG BIRTH COHORTS BY (A) YEAR, AND (B) AGE GROUP – IRE/NI



Source: Eurobarometer.

In Ireland (top left panel) there are large differences in optimism between generations, with younger generations exhibiting much higher optimism than older generations. These differences are compressed around the time of the recession

(2007-2012), with the largest declines in optimism being among younger cohorts. However, the generational differences re-emerged in the later period, with optimism recovering fastest among younger generations. Although, in spite of this recovery, most younger generations have experienced the largest overall declines in optimism over the last 25 years.[79]

In Northern Ireland a somewhat different story emerges. At the start of the 21st century, a similar pattern of large generational differences in optimism existed, with later generations being more optimistic than earlier generations. However, since around 2007, there has been a decline in optimism, particularly among younger cohorts, which has led to a substantial shrinking of generational differences by 2016/18. The exception to this is those born after 1990, who have seen some volatility but overall stability in the latter part of the period.

As discussed, such generational differences could be driven by the relationship between age and optimism. The lower left panels in Figure 3.9 show that optimism declines significantly among older age groups before bottoming-out among the oldest in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. The large overall generational differences in optimism are therefore likely due to older people reporting less optimism about their future. However, in Northern Ireland, the shrinking of generational differences over the last 20 years continues to suggest later generations have experienced sharper declines in optimism in the 21st century compared to earlier generations, whose optimism has been generally lower and stable.

3.5 DISCUSSION

3.5.1 Overall trends

This chapter explored how satisfaction with democracy, feelings that people's voice counts in their country, and positive expectations of their future have developed since 1998 in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In Ireland, attitudes over the last 25 years appear to have been significantly shaped by the 2008/09 recession and subsequent austerity policies (see also Polavieja, 2013, for discussion of other European countries). Prior to 2007, both satisfaction with democracy and optimism were relatively high and stable. Optimism saw some declines around 2001 (coinciding with the September 11th attacks, the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, or the struggling peace process in Northern Ireland) but this had recovered by 2006. This period coincides with the 'Celtic Tiger' period when levels of employment were rising, and real household income was growing (Roantree et al., 2021). Between 2007 and 2008, however, around the onset of the recession, both

[79] We do not have pre-2007 data on the generation born 1990 onwards given their age at the time.

satisfaction with democracy and optimism collapsed, declining by over half, remaining depressed and significantly below their pre-recession levels until around 2013/14. Political voice (which started being measured in 2007) also mirrors this period of relatively stagnant and poor attitudes in the leeward side of the recession (potentially having also experienced a significant drop during the recession).

From around 2014/15, attitudes in Ireland saw a significant recovery, which continued up until 2018. This was rapid in the case of optimism and political voice[80] and more gradual in the case of satisfaction with democracy. This coincides with the significant improvements in the economy from 2014 onwards (see Figure 2.1), which likely particularly shaped improvements in optimism. Satisfaction with democracy, and especially political voice, may have been further buoyed by the 2015 and 2018 referenda in Ireland on marriage equality and abortion rights.

After 2018, however, patterns for different social attitudes in Ireland began to diverge. On the one hand, satisfaction with democracy remained high and stable, although there was a slight dip in 2020/21 potentially linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.[81] Yet, despite the post-2018 period being marked by a pandemic (and attendant restrictions), onset of the cost-of-living crisis, the emergence of the housing and healthcare crises, which have coincided with the arrival of large numbers of Ukrainian refugees and international protection applicants, satisfaction with democracy remained stable, and by January-February 2023 it was at its highest levels since 1998.[82] On the other hand, both perceived political voice and optimism have seen a general decline since 2018 (excluding the bounce in optimism in 2021 likely driven by expectations of the end of the pandemic). This decline in optimism has, as discussed, seen an accompanying increase in pessimism. It may be that the multiple and, at times, compounding sources of instability in recent years started to show up as a growing pessimism and powerlessness in Irish attitudes.[83] Indeed, optimism has never fully recovered to its pre-recession levels in Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, social attitudes were much more volatile over the 1998-2018 period. The results suggest that while the 2008/09 recession (and subsequent

---

80 The general improvement in political voice was not smooth, and despite an improvement in 2009 political voice worsened, particularly around 2013 and 2014, before rallying again in 2015. This period coincided with the flag disputes following the vote by Belfast City Council to fly the Union flag over Belfast City Hall on 18 designated days, rather than every day, before potentially being buoyed again by the 'Fresh Start' (Stormont House) Agreement in 2015.

81 This dip in political satisfaction was larger for some social groups in Ireland, including women, manual workers, and unmarried individuals; see Supplementary Online Appendix S3.2 and S3.3 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

82 During this period (July-August 2020 and June-July 2022) a number of Eurobarometer waves were also undertaken using web-based interviewing rather than in-person interviewing which could affect the trends, given people could respond differently to the same questions when asked in an online versus in-person interview.

83 2019 was also the first year since 2009 that the proportion of people who expected that their wealth assets would be higher in the following year saw a decline (https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/fintan-o-toole-in-today-s-ireland-happiness-is-a-tough-gig-1.3870128).

austerity measures by the UK government) likely played a role, several other factors (not least political instability around community relations) have probably had a significant impact on shaping attitudes in Northern Ireland as well.

Satisfaction with democracy was lower in Northern Ireland compared to Ireland at the start of the century, possibly as a legacy of the years of instability during the 'Troubles'. In the early 2000s, satisfaction decreased even more up to 2002, potentially driven by a flare-up in 'Troubles'-related violence (rates were increasing between 1999 and 2002), the 'Holy Cross dispute', perceptions that community relations were worsening, and when the power-sharing agreement was first implemented but struggling to bed in (see Chapter 2). Between 2002 and 2005/06, however, satisfaction with democracy rose significantly. This coincided with declining rates of 'Troubles'-related violence, perceptions that community relations were getting better, and, counterintuitively, the suspension of the power-sharing institutions. By contrast, over the same period, optimism in Northern Ireland was relatively high (at least as high as in Ireland) and stable, potentially driven by a strong performing economy in Northern Ireland at the time.

In 2007/08, satisfaction with democracy and optimism also saw sudden and significant declines around the build-up and onset of the 2008/09 recession, albeit smaller than what occurred in Ireland. These did not start to recover again until 2013 onwards into 2015/16. Meanwhile, satisfaction with democracy underwent a long, slow period of improvement from 2007/08 up to 2015. Political voice also saw a general improvement between 2007/08 and 2015[84] (that may also represent a period of post-recession recovery). These improvements across attitudes may have been driven by the slow recovery of the economy and the fading of the legacy of the recession in people's lives. It was also a period of relative political stability and the reinstatement of the power-sharing institutions from 2007 onwards (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

This upward trend stalled in 2015, after which political voice remained stable into 2018, while optimism and satisfaction with democracy began to decline again, up to 2018. A series of events during this period may have precipitated this decline, including the near collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2015, the Brexit vote of 2016 (and subsequent concerns around its impact on the border on the island of Ireland), and the suspension of power-sharing from 2017 onwards. The result was a growing gap in attitudes between Ireland and Northern Ireland that emerged from 2015 up to the last data-point for Northern Ireland in 2018. In spite of this decline around 2018, there has been a longer-term general improvement in satisfaction with democracy from 1998 onwards, and political voice since 2007

[84] The general improvement in political voice was not smooth, and despite an improvement between 2009 and 2010, political voice worsened up to 2014, before rallying again in 2015.

(although this may also be a post-recession recovery), up to 2018. Optimism in Northern Ireland however has seen a general decline between 1998 and 2018.

Finally, across jurisdictions, Ireland tends to have had some of the most positive attitudes towards society compared to Northern Ireland, Great Britain, and the average across EU15 countries. Northern Ireland, however, has had some of the lowest levels of optimism and political voice across jurisdictions, and, pre-recession, some of the lowest levels of satisfaction with democracy, although levels are now close to those of Great Britain and the EU15 average, suggesting a normalisation of political attitudes.

3.5.2 Differences across education

Educational differences in satisfaction with democracy and political voice widened in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. Given the timing of this emergent gap, one possible explanation is that more educated groups recovered faster economically from the recession and felt less of a scar on their lives, while less educated groups may have felt greater disenchantment with government due to greater economic hardship or perceived marginalisation, especially in light of the austerity driven welfare reforms. In Ireland, this gap did not close until around 2020. However, at least by 2018, the gap remained present in Northern Ireland.

At the same time, there has been a shrinking of the gap in optimism between more and less educated groups in both jurisdictions, particularly post-recession, driven primarily by a larger general decline over time among the more educated group. This decline is particularly pronounced in Northern Ireland where optimism among the more educated declined by more than half between 1998 and 2018. This may reflect a growing dissonance between expectations and reality among the more educated groups in NI as labour market opportunities and standards of living lagged behind Ireland and elsewhere in the UK (Bergin and McGuinness, 2021).[85] Alternatively, young people completing higher education in the post-recession period may compare their opportunities unfavourably to those in the pre-recession period. However, in Ireland, 2023 levels of optimism among the less educated are now as low as at the peak of the 2008/09 recession. This may reflect how the less educated group are more exposed to recent events such as the cost-of-living crisis.

[85] Additional analysis shows that the more educated group in both jurisdictions have also seen their optimism towards their financial situation and their job situation decline at a faster rate post-recession compared to the less educated group (analysis available on request).

3.5.3 Differences across generations

In general, there are larger differences in attitudes over time than between generations, suggesting that key events occurring in society (period-effects) are a more important driver of attitudes in the 21st century than generational effects.

In Ireland, younger generations were hit harder by the recession (O'Higgins, 2012; NYCI, 2013; Roantree et al., 2021) and this may have led to a greater impact on political attitudes. However, many of these generational differences have closed again by 2023. In Northern Ireland, there is evidence that earlier generations hold comparatively more positive attitudes than younger generations, especially in terms of satisfaction with democracy and political voice. One possibility is that those who experienced the worse period of the Troubles, or who were more likely to be adults during that time (such as the early 1970s), are still more likely to view the political instability of the post-Good Friday Agreement era more positively than what they lived through in the past, compared to younger cohorts. In addition, younger cohorts may have felt the pecuniary impacts and scarring of the recession more than older cohorts who were more economically established. The exception to this is those born after 1990 in Northern Ireland, whose attitudes tend to lie in the middle. This may be a consequence of them largely growing up during a period of relative political stability and not yet being in the labour market during the 2008/09 recession, shielding them from its harshest effects.

CHAPTER 4

Trust in people and institutions

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on people's trust in their society's institutions (including trust in political and judicial institutions alongside trust in the media) as well as their trust in other people in general. Each section first presents the overall time trends for both jurisdictions, and then explores these trends across different levels of education and birth cohorts.

4.2 TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

4.2.1 Overall trends

We begin by examining people's trust in political institutions. This is an average score (from 0-1) of how far individuals state they 'tend to trust'[86] 'political parties', 'the national government', and 'the national parliament'[87] – henceforth referred to as political trust. Figure 4.1 shows trends in people's mean levels of political trust across jurisdictions.

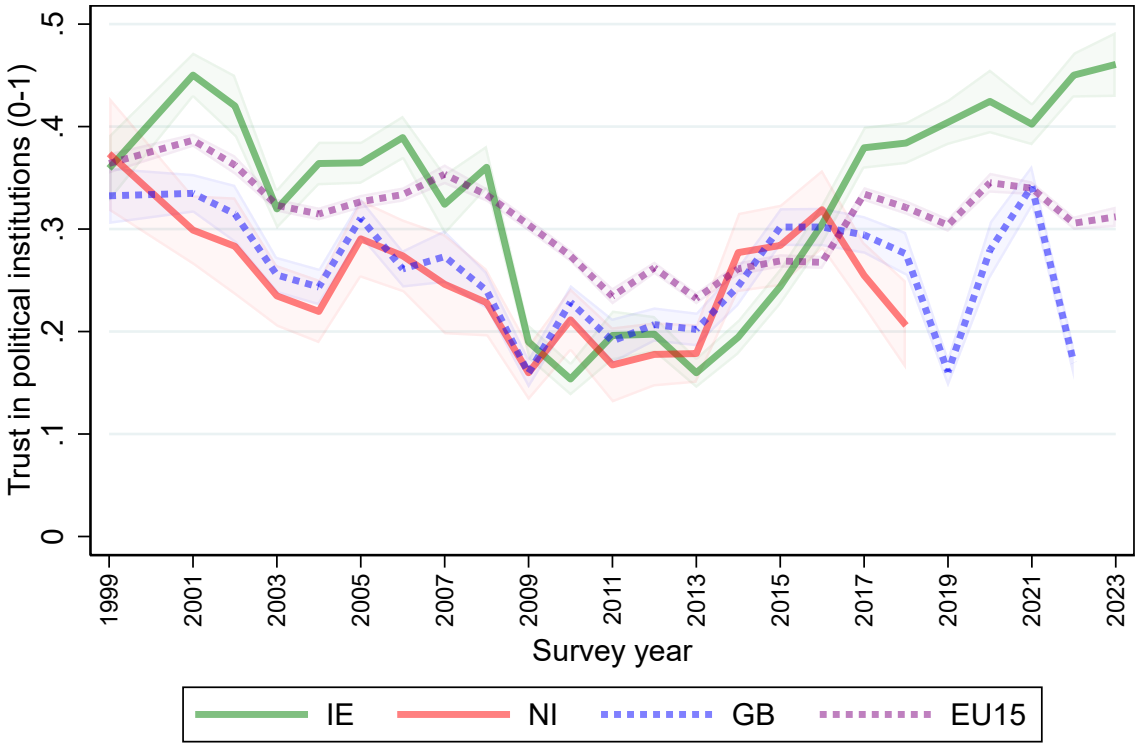
In Ireland, political trust fluctuated between 1999 and 2003 (rising by 10 percentage points before declining again by 15 percentage points). It then entered a period of relative stability between 2004 and 2008 (around 35 per cent) before dropping precipitously in 2009 and 2010 by over 20 percentage points to only 15 per cent of people holding political trust. Political trust then remained stagnant and low until 2013 before increasing relatively rapidly between 2014 and 2017 to return to pre-2009 levels. This recovery then slowed but political trust continued to improve and by 2023 it was at its highest level since 2001.[88]

86 The other response option was 'tend not to trust'.

87 In Ireland, this was 'The Irish Government' and 'The Dáil'. In Northern Ireland, this was 'The UK Government' and 'The House of Commons'. Factor analysis across jurisdictions and survey years demonstrates these measures load strongly on to a single dimension of political trust (see Chapter 1).

88 This trend of trust in political institutions in Ireland is also evident in the European Social Survey (2002-2022).

FIGURE 4.1 TRENDS IN TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS ACROSS JURISDICTIONS – IRE, NI, GB, EU15



Source: Eurobarometer.
Note: Mean trust in political parties, national government, national parliament.

In 1999, political trust in Northern Ireland was just as high as in Ireland (in contrast to satisfaction with democracy which started the century at a lower level in Northern Ireland).[89] However, levels of political trust then began to diverge between jurisdictions, seeing an almost linear decline from 2000 to 2004 of around 15 percentage points. Political trust then increased slightly into 2005 after which it decreased again into 2008 before seeing a larger decline into 2009 just as Ireland experienced its precipitous decline. Between 2009 and 2013, political trust also remained stagnant and low, with levels similar to those observed in Ireland. On the whole therefore, 1999 to 2013 was a period of general decline in political trust in Northern Ireland. Between 2013 and 2014 political trust saw a strong recovery of 10 percentage points and continued to improve into 2016. However, political trust then entered a period of sharp decline, dropping by 12 percentage points from 2016 to 2018. Looking at the WVS, it is likely that political trust in Northern Ireland

89 While the Eurobarometer data do not contain indicators of religious denomination, the World Values Survey has measures of trust in different institutions *and* denomination for Northern Ireland. In 2022, confidence in political institutions is higher among Protestants (27 per cent express 'quite a lot'/'a great deal' of confidence) compared to Catholics (11 per cent) and non-affiliated (10 per cent).

continued to decline into 2022, and by 2022 the WVS shows that political trust was at its lowest level since 1999.[90]

Comparing political trust across jurisdictions, Figure 4.1 reveals that at the start of the 21st century, levels were relatively similar across jurisdictions.[91] Interestingly, trends in political trust in Northern Ireland track trends in Great Britain relatively closely,[92] and levels were generally lower (and were some of the lowest across all jurisdictions). Much like the attitudes examined in Chapter 3, levels of political trust in Ireland were some of the highest across all jurisdictions, especially from 2017 onward. Testing shows the trends in political trust in Ireland and Northern Ireland cannot be explained by longer-term changes in the composition of society.[93]

4.2.2 Trends among more and less educated groups

Figure 4.2 next explores whether trends in political trust in Ireland (left pane) and Northern Ireland (right pane) differed for more educated groups (green line) and less educated groups (blue line). The pattern in Ireland corresponds to that previously seen for satisfaction with democracy and political voice of widening gaps in political trust. In the pre-2009 period, more and less educated groups tended to have similar levels of political trust. While both groups saw a precipitous decline in 2009/10, political trust recovered more quickly among more educated groups leading to the emergence of a gap between the more educated (expressing higher political trust) and less educated. This gap persisted until 2020/21, after which it closed completely before remerging in 2022/23 (as seen for political voice, optimism, and, to a lesser extent, satisfaction with democracy).[94]

---

90 The World Values Survey/European Values Study measured Northern Irish confidence in 'parliament' in 1999, 2008 and 2022, and confidence in 'government' and 'political parties' in 2008 and 2022. In 2022, the proportion who reported 'quite a lot'/'a great deal' of confidence in these political institutions was at its lowest level over the entire study period (with only 10-20 per cent of people expressing confidence) (results available on request).

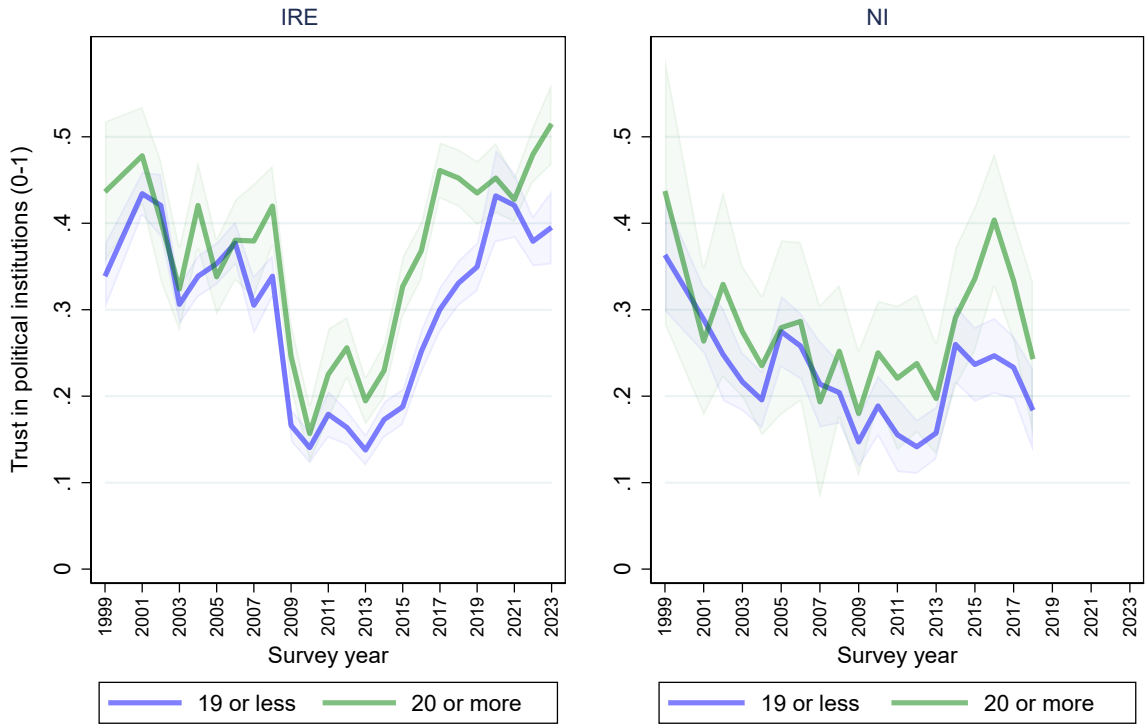
91 Looking at trends in trust in each political institution separately shows that trends follow the same pattern. However, while average trust in the national government and national parliament across the period are relatively high (at 37 per cent and 39 per cent respectively in Ireland, and 30 and 32 per cent in Northern Ireland), trust in political parties is much lower in both jurisdictions (23 per cent in Ireland and 16 per cent in Northern Ireland); see Supplementary Online Appendix S4.1 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

92 This may not be surprising given people in Northern Ireland are being asked about their trust in 'the UK government' and 'the House of Commons' (see Discussion).

93 Supplementary Online Appendix S4.2 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170) shows the trends in political trust before and after controlling for changes in the socio-demographic composition (including age, employment status, occupation, education, marital status, and gender). There is little difference between the adjusted trends in political trust controlling for socio-demographic composition and the unadjusted trends.

94 The trend of widening then subsequent shrinking gaps in trust in political institutions between more and less educated groups in Ireland is also evident in the European Social Survey (2002-2022) (results available on request).

FIGURE 4.2 TRENDS IN TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS BY AGE FINISHED EDUCATION – IRE, NI



Source: Eurobarometer.
Note: Mean trust in political parties, national government, national parliament.

A less clear picture is evident in Northern Ireland. Prior to 2009/10, there was little consistent difference in political trust between more and less educated groups. As in Ireland, a gap then emerged with more educated groups seeing their political trust stabilise while less educated groups saw it further decline. This gap widened especially between 2015 and 2016 driven by substantial increases in political trust among the more educated group (an increase of 11 percentage points). It then closed again into 2017 and 2018 due to a significant decline among the educated group (a decrease of 15 percentage points).[95]

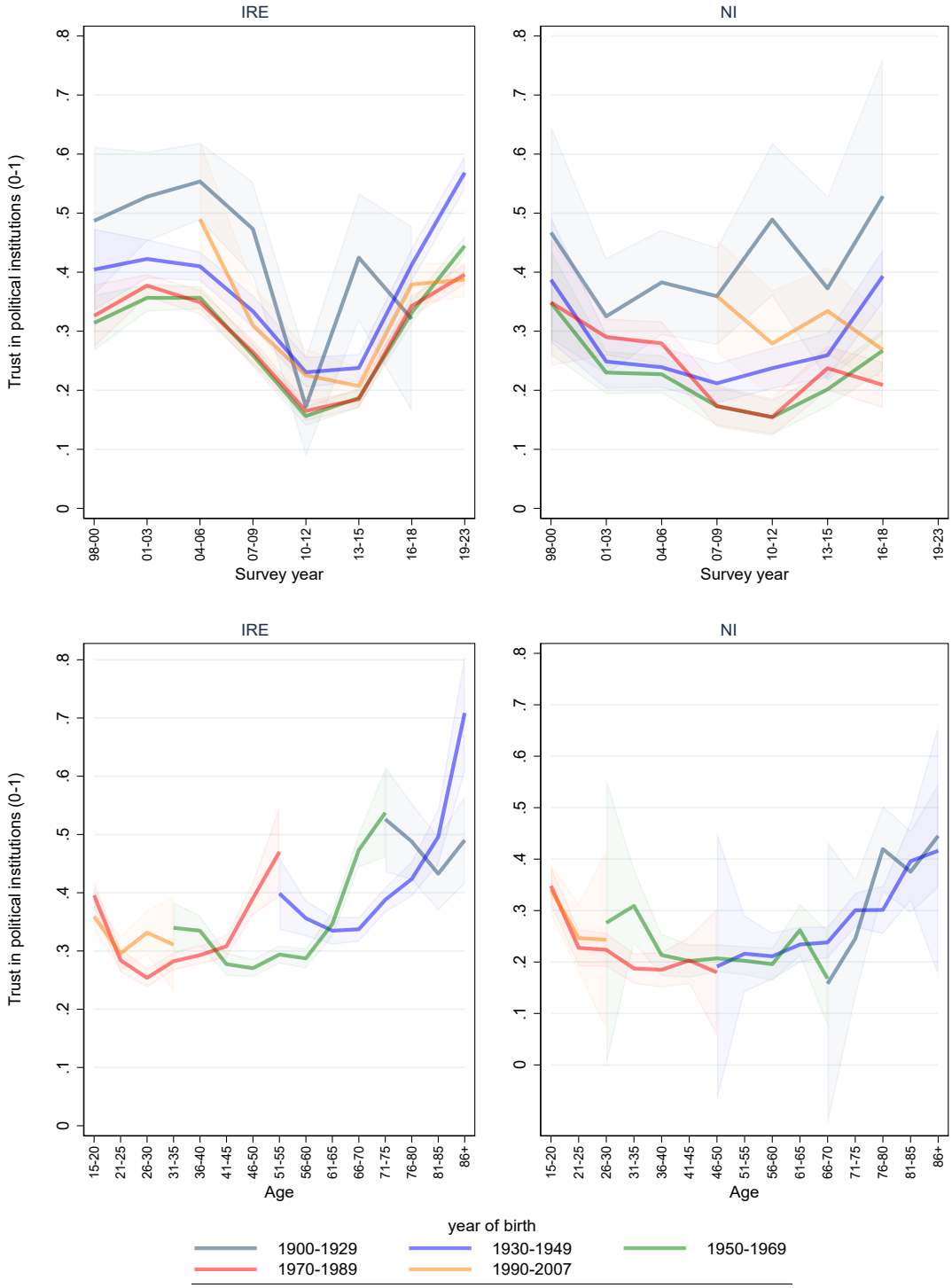
4.2.3 Differences across birth cohorts

Figure 4.3 examines whether there are any generational differences in political trust, where each coloured line on the figure represents attitudes among different birth cohorts of people. To do so, we look at trends in political trust among

[95] No consistent difference in trends is observed across gender, having children in the HH, or marital status. There are no differences between urban/rural areas in Ireland, but in Northern Ireland political trust has decreased more rapidly in urban compared to rural areas in recent years. There is also evidence that gaps have widened over time between manual/non-manual groups in both jurisdictions, with non-manual groups reporting comparatively higher political trust over time. In addition, the gap has also widened between the unemployed group (expressing lower trust) and the employed/inactive group in Ireland, and between the unemployed and employed groups (expressing lower trust) and the inactive groups in Northern Ireland in recent years; see Supplementary Online Appendix S4.3-S4.4 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

different cohorts over the study period (top panels, Figure 4.3), as well as the relationship between age and political trust across the cohorts (bottom panels). This is because differences across cohorts could be driven by differences in people's age.

FIGURE 4.3 TRENDS IN TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AMONG BIRTH COHORTS BY (A) YEAR, AND (B) AGE GROUP – IRE/NI (EUROBAROMETER)



Source: Eurobarometer.

In Ireland (top left panel, Figure 4.3), on the whole there are greater differences in political trust over time than between generations. This suggests again that period-effects are a stronger driver of change in political trust over the period than generational differences. There is some evidence that older cohorts (especially those born 1900 to 1929) express higher political trust. However, this may be because as people age, they are more likely to trust political institutions. There is a relatively strong age gradient in political trust, with older age groups reporting higher trust (bottom left panel, Figure 4.3). It is therefore likely that the apparent generational differences in Ireland are driven primarily by age differences. The exception to this, at least prior to 2013, is the latest cohort (born after 1990) who despite being the youngest group express higher political trust than those born between 1950-1969 and 1970-1989.

In Northern Ireland (top right panel, Figure 4.3), political trust tends to be relatively similar across most birth cohorts (1930-1949, 1950-1969 and 1970-1989). Only those born 1900-1929 express higher political trust than other groups. In addition, this gap has widened since 2001, similar to the pattern observed for satisfaction with democracy. As in Ireland, the most recent generation (born 1990 onwards) are the exception to this, expressing higher political trust than those born between 1930 and 1989, but lower trust than those born before 1929. The lower right panel (Figure 4.3) shows a somewhat curvilinear relationship between age and political trust, decreasing in people's early years before beginning to increase again as they get older. This could partly explain why we find the youngest and oldest cohorts generally reporting higher political trust than the middling cohorts. However, in spite of this, given the generational divide between those born in 1900-1929 and other cohorts widens over time suggests generational differences are emerging in recent years, as seen for satisfaction with democracy in Northern Ireland.

4.3 TRUST IN JUDICIAL INSTITUTIONS

4.3.1 Overall trends

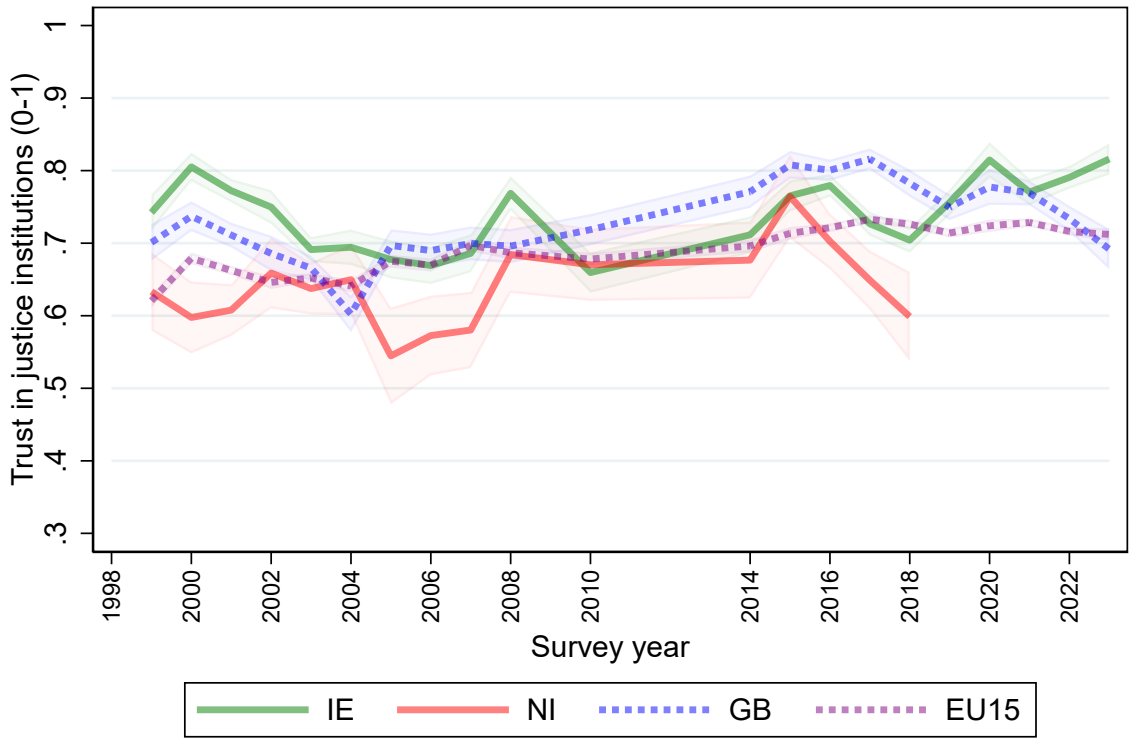
The following section explores people's trust in judicial and security institutions. This is an average score (from 0-1) of how far individuals state they 'tend to trust' 'the police' and 'the legal system', as well as their trust in 'the army'. This measure contains both classically conceived judicial institutions, such as the police and courts, but also the army as an alternative security related institution, given how highly related trust across these institutions is in the data.[96] For parsimony, we will henceforth refer to these judicial and security institutions (trust in the police,

[96] In Ireland, this was 'justice/the Irish legal system'. In Northern Ireland, this was 'justice/the UK legal system'. The argument could be made that 'the army' should be excluded from this measure and studied separately. However, factor analysis across jurisdictions and survey years demonstrates that trust in the army is closely related to trust in the police and legal system, loading on to a single dimension of political trust (see Chapter 1). For parsimony, we therefore study the three together but discuss later differences in trust between them.

courts, and army together) as 'judicial trust'. Figure 4.4 shows trends in people's mean levels of judicial trust across jurisdictions.

In Ireland, judicial trust decreased slightly from the start of the 21st century to 2003, after which it remained stable until 2014 (with a slight bump in 2008), although data are not collected in 2011-2013. From 2014 onwards, there was a general increase in judicial trust of around 10 percentage points (with some slight volatility during the period). On the whole, however, judicial trust remained high and generally stable over the period (between 70-80 per cent of people).[97]

FIGURE 4.4 TRENDS IN TRUST IN JUDICIAL INSTITUTIONS ACROSS JURISDICTIONS – IRE, NI, GB, EU15



Source: Eurobarometer.
Note: Mean trust in army, police, legal system.

In Northern Ireland, trust in the judiciary was around 10 percentage points lower than in Ireland at the start of the study period. Levels remained stable until 2004 after which they dropped by 10 percentage points in 2005, remaining lower, before recovering in 2008. Between 2008 and 2014 (excluding 2011, 2012 and 2013 when data were not collected) judicial trust remained stable before increasing slightly into 2015. However, from 2016, it steadily declined again into 2018, as seen in

97 This trend of trust in judicial institutions in Ireland is also evident in the European Social Survey (2002-2022) (results available on request).

political trust. Analysis of the World Values Survey suggests feelings towards judicial institutions may have improved again into 2022.[98,99]

Figure 4.4 also shows generally smaller gaps in judicial trust across jurisdictions over the period compared to other attitudes.[100] Ireland also tended to have comparatively some of the highest judicial trust while Northern Ireland had some of the lowest across jurisdictions. Testing shows the trends in judicial trust in Ireland and Northern Ireland cannot be explained by longer-term changes in the composition of society.[101]

4.3.2 Trends among more and less educated groups

Figure 4.5 turns again to looking at whether trends in judicial trust differ among more educated (the green line) and less educated (the blue line) groups, in Ireland (left panel) and Northern Ireland (right panel). As with political trust, the gap in judicial trust between more educated groups (who are more trusting) and less educated has generally widened over time.

In Ireland, prior to 2004, judicial trust was similar between the more and less educated. However, from 2004 onwards a gap emerged across education (barring a brief shrinkage in 2008), driven primarily by worsening trust among less educated groups. This gap emerged sooner than for political trust (which largely occurred from 2010 onwards). As with political trust, this gap closed again in 2020/21, although there is a similar re-emergence of the gap in 2022/23.[102]

---

98 The World Values Survey/European Values Study measured Northern Irish confidence in 'the police', 'the justice system' and 'the army' in 1999, 2008 and 2022. Between 1999 and 2022 confidence in the police and army remained essentially unchanged. Confidence in the justice system actually saw an improvement between 2008 and 2022 (results available on request).

99 Again, we can examine whether denominational differences exist in Northern Ireland in 2022 using the World Values Survey. Large differences exist in confidence in the army between denominations in 2022 (85 per cent of Protestants express 'quite a lot'/'a great deal' of confidence in the army while 39 per cent of Catholics do and 67 per cent of non-affiliated do). Large differences also exist in confidence in the police (Protestants: 80 per cent, Catholics: 54 per cent, and non-affiliated: 57 per cent). However, the gap is much smaller for confidence in the judicial system (Protestants: 74 per cent, Catholics: 62 per cent, and non-affiliated: 54 per cent).

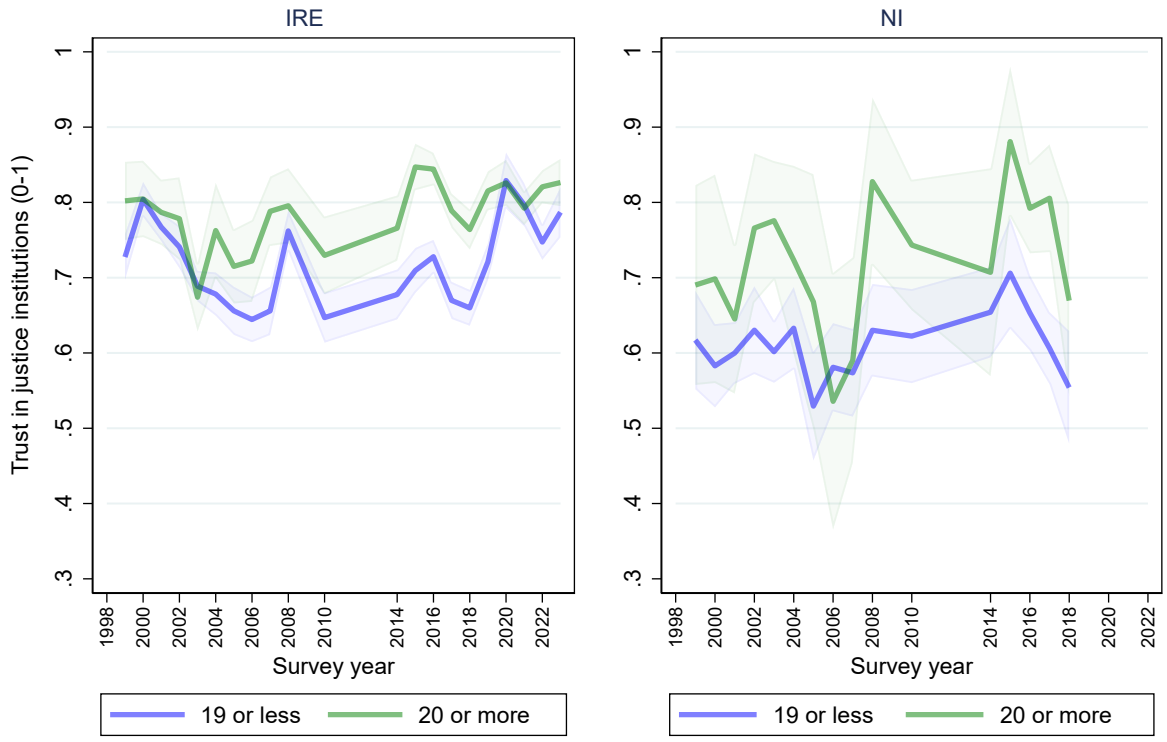
100 The trends for each judicial institution show they are similar across all institutions. However, trust in the legal system is the lowest of all types, with, on average, 59 per cent expressing trust in Ireland and 53 per cent in Northern Ireland over the study period. Trust in the police is somewhat higher, with, on average, 73 per cent expressing trust in Ireland and 69 per cent in Northern Ireland. In Ireland, trust in the army is even higher, with average levels of trust over the period of 88 per cent. In Northern Ireland, however, average trust in the army is the same as trust in the police: 69 per cent.

101 Supplementary Online Appendix S4.6 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170) shows the trends in judicial trust before and after controlling for changes in the socio-demographic composition of people in Ireland and Northern Ireland (including age, employment status, occupation, education, marital status, and gender). There is little difference between the adjusted trends in judicial trust controlling for socio-demographic composition and the unadjusted trends.

102 The trend of widening then subsequent shrinking gaps in trust in police/courts between more and less educated groups in Ireland is also evident in the European Social Survey (2002-2022) (results available on request).

In Northern Ireland, more educated groups have tended to have greater judicial trust over the entire period. This has variably widened and shrunk since 1999, driven by much greater volatility among the more educated group. The gap has shrunk slightly between 2016 and 2018, driven by primarily by greater declines in judicial trust among the more educated group.[103]

FIGURE 4.5 TRENDS IN TRUST IN JUDICIAL INSTITUTIONS BY AGE FINISHED EDUCATION – IRE, NI



Source: Eurobarometer.
Note: Mean trust in army, police, legal system.

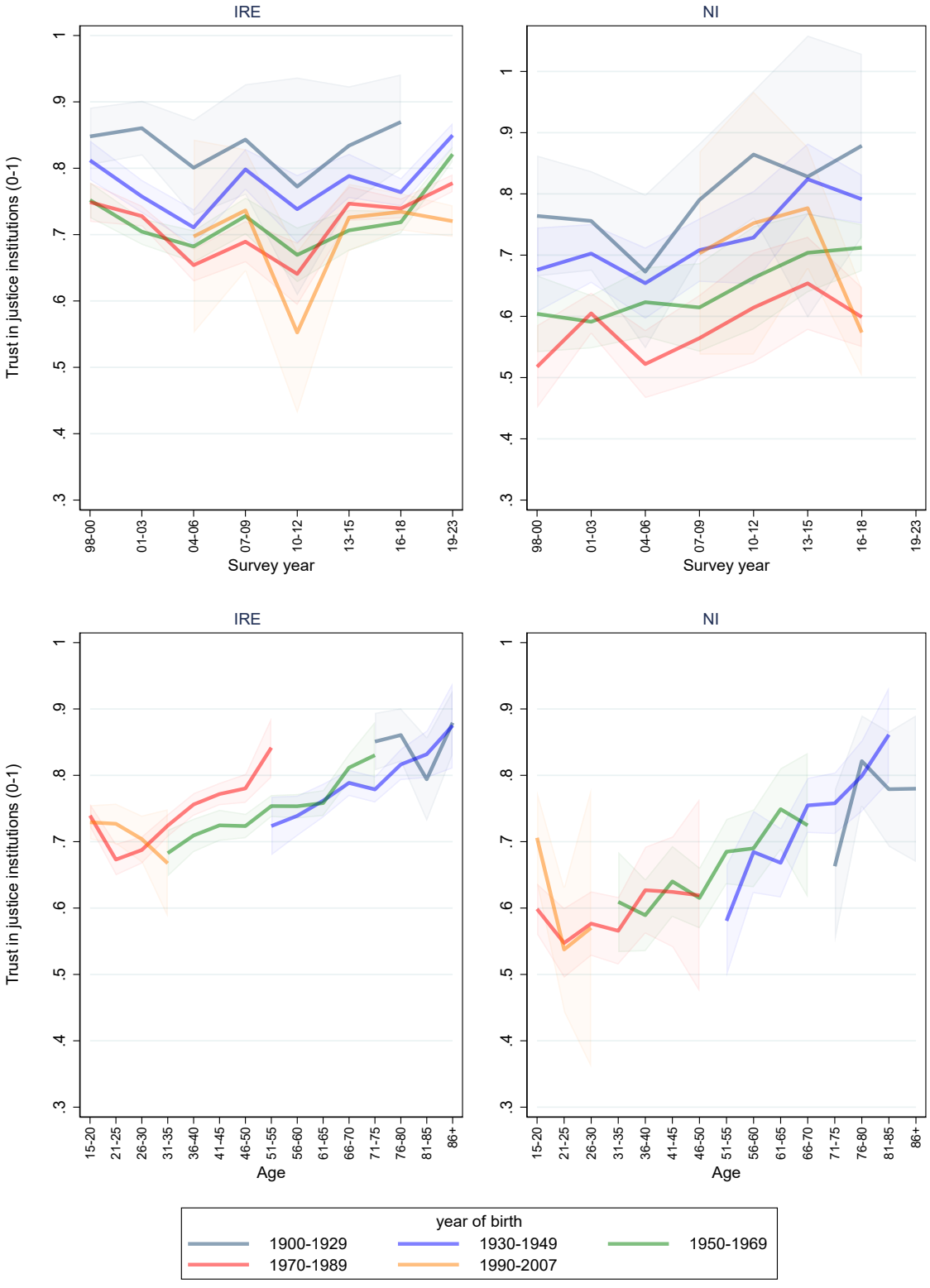
4.3.3 Differences across birth cohorts

Figure 4.6 tests whether there are generational differences in judicial trust in Ireland and Northern Ireland, where again each coloured line on the figure represents attitudes among different birth cohorts of people. Looking first at trends in judicial trust for each birth cohort in Ireland (top left panel, Figure 4.6) across the period, older generations appear to express greater judicial trust than younger generations. However, such differences could stem from the effect of age on judicial trust. Indeed, the relationship between people's age and their judicial trust in Ireland (bottom left panel) shows that older people are more likely to trust

[103] No consistent difference in trends is observed across gender, having children in the HH, or employment status. There are no differences between urban/rural areas in Ireland, but in Northern Ireland political trust has decreased more rapidly in urban areas in recent years. The recent decline in judicial trust in Northern Ireland is concentrated among the unmarried and manual workers; see Supplementary Online Appendix S4.7-S4.8 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

judicial institutions than younger people, suggesting people's age (and not when they were born) may account for the generational differences in Ireland.

FIGURE 4.6 TRENDS IN TRUST IN JUDICIAL INSTITUTIONS AMONG BIRTH COHORTS BY (A) YEAR, AND (B) AGE GROUP – IRE/NI (EUROBAROMETER)



Source: Eurobarometer.

In Northern Ireland a similar pattern emerges. Relatively large generational differences exist over the study period, with older generations expressing higher judicial trust than younger generations (top right panel, Figure 4.6). However, we also see a strong age gradient (and stronger than in Ireland), where judicial trust is much higher among older age groups than younger ones (bottom right panel). However, as with political trust, the most recent cohort, born after 1990, have comparatively high judicial trust given their age, although they have also seen a precipitous drop in judicial trust between 2013/15 and 2016/18 (20 percentage points) compared to smaller recent changes among other birth cohorts.

4.4 TRUST IN THE MEDIA

4.4.1 Overall trends

The third dimension of trust examined is trust in media institutions. This is an average score (from 0-1) of how far individuals state they 'tend to trust'[104] 'radio', 'television', and 'written press' – henceforth referred to as media trust. Figure 4.7 displays trends in people's mean levels of media trust across jurisdictions.

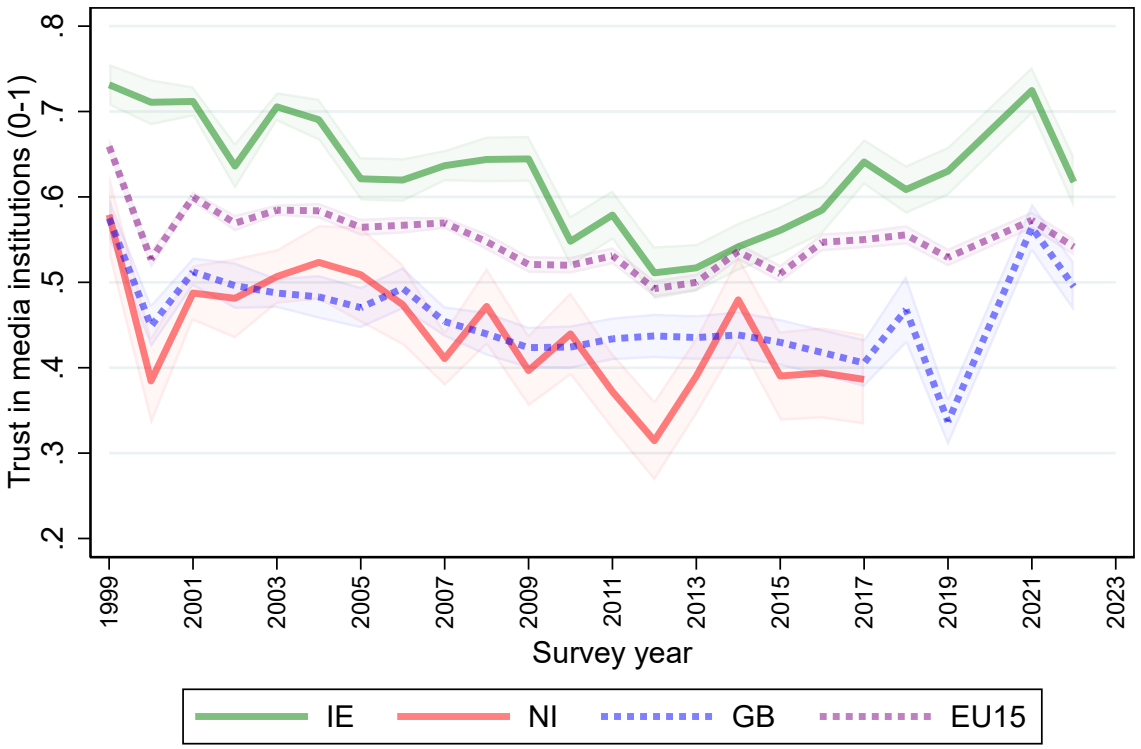
In Ireland, there was a gradual decline in media trust between 1999 and 2009 (from 73 per cent to 64 per cent of people). This decline then accelerated from 2010 onwards into 2012-2013, where media trust reached a low of 51 per cent of people expressing trust. Media trust then made a gradual recovery over the next eight years, increasing by 20 percentage points, to reach its second highest level over the past 20 years or so. However, in 2022, media trust experienced a sudden drop of 10 percentage points.

Trust in the media in Northern Ireland was 16 percentage points lower at the start of the century than in Ireland. This gap increased to 33 percentage points in 2000, as media trust dropped suddenly in Northern Ireland in 2000 (by 20 percentage points) before recovering slightly by 2001. Media trust then remained somewhat stable into 2006, after which, from 2007 to 2010, media trust began to decline again, which sped up in 2011 and 2012 to reach a low of 31 per cent. Over the next two years (2013-2014) media trust recovered but declined again into 2015 and remained low and stable into 2017. Over the same period media trust increased in Ireland leading to a widening gap in trust between jurisdictions. Over the entire study period therefore, Northern Ireland has seen a general decline in media trust.

[104] The other response option was 'tend not to trust'.

Using the World Values Survey, we can see that this decline has likely continued somewhat into 2022.[105,106]

FIGURE 4.7 TRENDS IN TRUST IN THE MEDIA ACROSS JURISDICTIONS – IRE, NI, GB, EU15



Source: Eurobarometer.
Note: Mean trust in radio, TV, written press.

Compared to more traditional media, trust in newer forms of media tends to be lower and declining in both jurisdictions.[107] For example, trust in the written press in Ireland was at 55 per cent in 2022 and 24 per cent in Northern Ireland in 2017. However, in Ireland in 2022, trust in social media was 19 per cent while trust in the internet was 29 per cent. In Northern Ireland in 2017, trust in social media was at only 8 per cent, while trust in the internet was 19 per cent. In addition, while trust in more traditional forms of media increased in Ireland in recent years, trust in social media and the internet continued to decline.[108]

105 The World Values Survey/European Values Study measured Northern Irish confidence in 'the press' in 1999, 2008 and 2022. By 2022, confidence in the press was at its lowest level between 1999 and 2023 (results available on request).

106 We can again examine whether denominational differences exist in confidence in 'the press' in Northern Ireland in 2022 using the World Values Survey. Overall, differences across denominations are quite small. In 2022, 16 per cent of both Catholics and Protestants express 'quite a lot'/'a great deal' of confidence in the press, while 11 per cent of non-affiliated do.

107 Trust in each type of media (radio, TV, and written press) follow similar trends as the overall score of average media trust. However, people express different average levels of trust in each type of media over the period. Radio and TV are the most trusted forms of media. Trust in the written press, however, is lower on average (see Figure A4.9).

108 Trust in the internet was asked from 2006 onwards in the Eurobarometer and trust in social media was from 2014 onwards (results available on request).

Comparing media trust across jurisdictions, much like other attitudes across the island, attitudes were most positive in Ireland compared to Great Britain and the EU15 average. At the same time, Northern Ireland had some of the lowest media trust across jurisdictions. In addition, its media trust was much closer to that of Great Britain than the EU15 average or Ireland. Testing shows the trends in media trust in Ireland and Northern Ireland cannot be explained by longer-term changes in the composition of society.[109]

4.4.2 Trends among more and less educated groups

Figure 4.8 explores whether these trends in media trust differ at all between more educated (the green line) and less educated (the blue line) groups, in Ireland (left panel) and Northern Ireland (right panel). As with other forms of trust in Ireland, the latter half of the period is marked by the emergence of a gap in media trust between more educated (who exhibit greater trust) and less educated groups; in this case from about 2012 onward. However, this gap is somewhat smaller and less consistent than trust in judicial and political institutions in Ireland. The gap then closed again around 2020 before emerging once more into 2022.

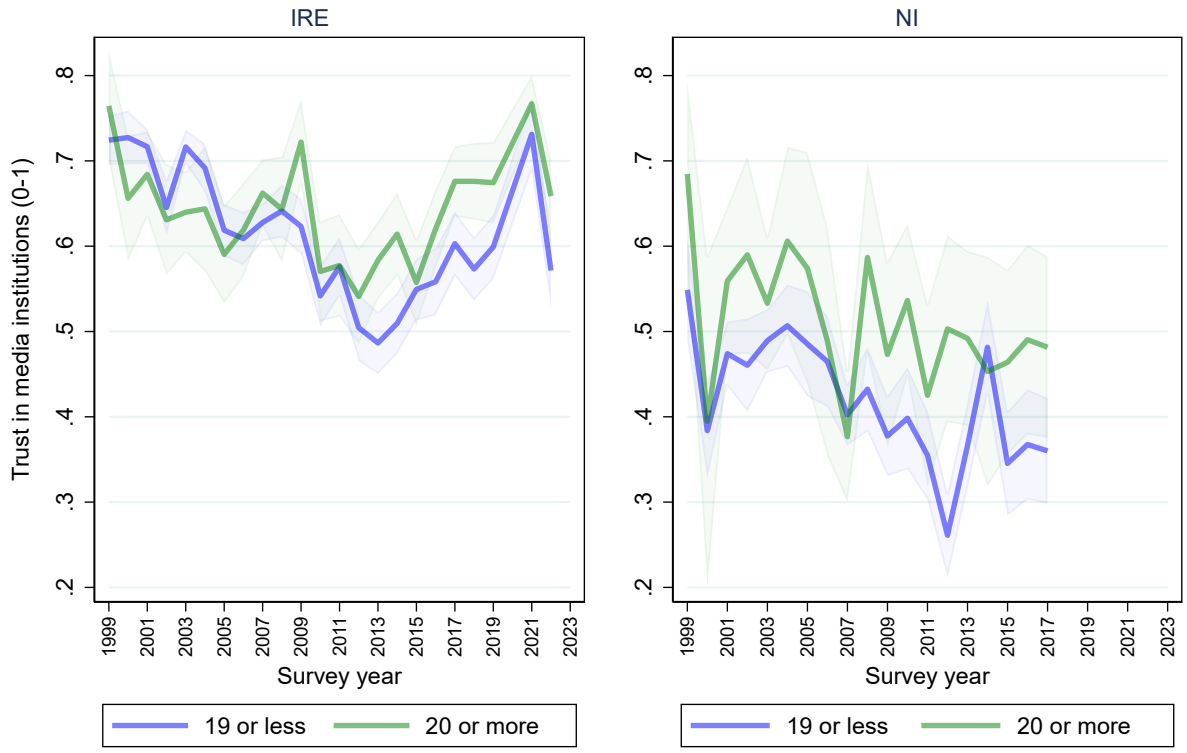
In Northern Ireland, media trust among more and less educated groups is more similar to judicial trust than political trust. More educated groups have tended to have greater media trust than less educated groups over the entire period. This gap has again widened and shrunk at various points since 1999. On the whole, however, less educated groups saw a somewhat greater decline in media trust since 1999 than more educated groups.[110]

---

109 Supplementary Online Appendix S4.10 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170) shows the trends in media trust before and after controlling for socio-demographic factors (including age, employment status, occupation, education, marital status, and gender). There is little difference between the adjusted trends in media trust controlling for socio-demographic composition and the unadjusted trends.

110 No consistent differences in trends are observed across gender, having children in the household, urban/rural status, or marital status. In both Ireland and Northern Ireland, gaps have emerged in media trust between the employed/inactive groups and the unemployed group (who report lower media trust). In Ireland a larger gap in media trust between manual and non-manual workers has emerged, driven by larger improvements among the non-manual group; see Supplementary Online Appendix S4.11-S4.12 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

FIGURE 4.8 TRENDS IN TRUST IN THE MEDIA BY AGE FINISHED EDUCATION – IRE, NI

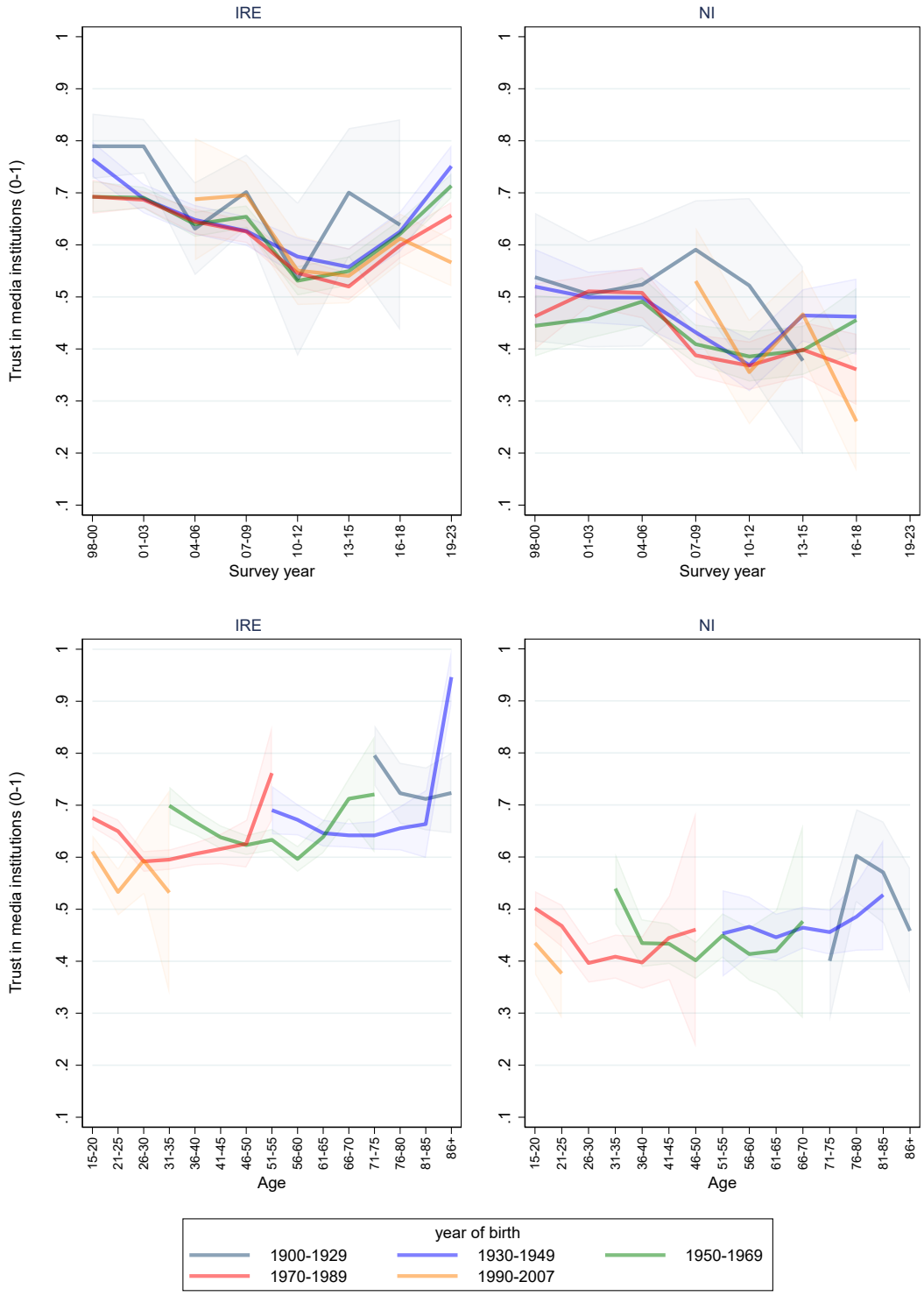


Source: Eurobarometer.
Note: Mean trust in radio, TV, written press.

4.4.3 Differences across birth cohorts

To explore whether there are any generational differences in media trust, Figure 4.9 looks at media trust across different birth cohorts where each coloured line on the figure represents attitudes among different birth cohorts of people. The top panels of Figure 4.9 look at look at trends in media trust across the study period for each birth cohort. In both Ireland (top left) and Northern Ireland (top right) there is little consistent difference in media trust between different birth cohorts: for much of the period, all trend lines tend to be grouped together. There is some evidence that, in Ireland since 2019 and in Northern Ireland since 2016, younger generations report somewhat lower media trust than older generations. This is particularly evident among those born after 1990, who have seen their media trust decline in recent years in both jurisdictions. Also it does not appear that there are large differences in media trust across different age groups in Ireland (lower left panel) and Northern Ireland (lower right panel). The recent emergence of generational differences is therefore unlikely to be solely driven by age effects.

FIGURE 4.9 TRENDS IN TRUST IN THE MEDIA AMONG BIRTH COHORTS BY (A) YEAR, AND (B) AGE GROUP – IRE/NI (EUROBAROMETER)



Source: Eurobarometer.

4.5 TRUST IN OTHER PEOPLE

4.5.1 Overall trends

This final section explores differences in people's trust in other people – henceforth referred to as social trust. The Eurobarometer survey did not collect long running measures of social trust to directly compare levels of trust across jurisdictions over time. Instead, two different datasets are used. To examine social trust in Ireland we use the European Social Survey (ESS), which conducted biannual surveys from 2002 onwards. To look at social trust in Northern Ireland we use the World Values Survey/European Values Study (WVS/EVS), which surveyed residents of Northern Ireland in 1999, 2008 and 2022.

Crucially, both surveys used an identical survey question to measure social trust: 'generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?' However, people were provided with different response options. In the ESS, respondents were asked to report their trust on a 0-10 scale, where 0 was 'You can't be too careful' and 10 was 'Most people can be trusted'. In the WVS/EVS, respondents were given a binary option of (0) 'Need to be very careful' versus (1) 'Most people can be trusted'. Using these separate datasets, we can compare the direction of trends in social trust across jurisdictions. However, we cannot directly compare levels of social trust between Ireland and Northern Ireland, given the differences in response categories. We do recode the ESS responses into three categories: 'not trusting' (scores of 0-3), 'neither trusting nor distrusting' (scores of 4-6), and 'trusting' (scores of 7-10), and report levels of 'trusting' in Figures 4.10, 4.12 and 4.13, so scores across all jurisdictions are percentages.[111]

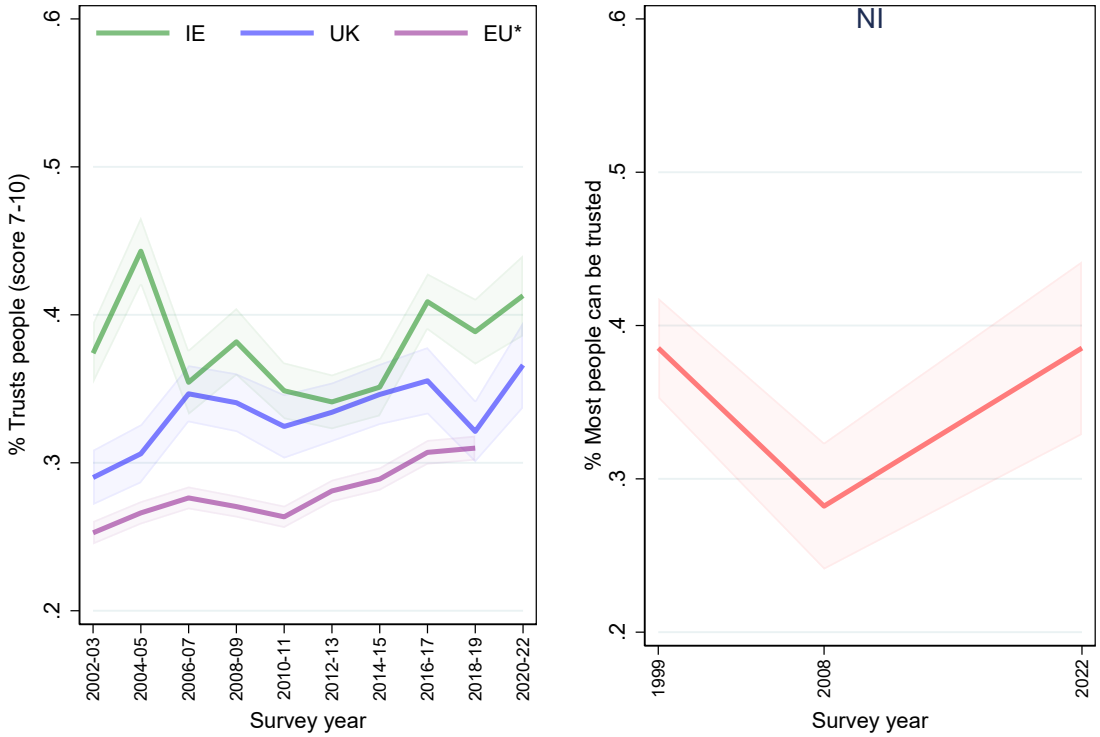
Figure 4.10 shows that, in Ireland, the proportion of trusting people increased at the start of the period, from 37 per cent in 2002/03 to 44 per cent in 2004/05. However, social trust then significantly declined into 2006/07 by nearly 10 percentage points. It then remained comparatively depressed until 2014/15, after which, it recovered by 5 percentage points to 40 per cent of people expressing trust by 2016/17. It remained stable thereafter. Across the three years of data for Northern Ireland, a similar pattern emerges. Social trust decreased between 1999 and 2008 but then increased again between 2008 and 2022.[112] Testing shows the

111 Alternative categorisations yield highly similar trends. The applied coding was replicated from coding used in the 2014 Eurobarometer which contained measured social trust using the 10-point scale and contained a derived measure in which scores of 7-10 were classified as 'trusting'.

112 Again, we can examine whether denominational differences exist in Northern Ireland in 2022 using the World Values Survey. Compared to institutional trust, there are only small differences in levels of social trust between denominations. In 2022, 34 per cent of Protestants reported that 'most people can be trusted', 40 per cent of Catholics and 43 per cent of unaffiliated people.

trends in social trust in Ireland and Northern Ireland cannot be explained by longer-term changes in the composition of society.[113]

FIGURE 4.10 TRENDS IN SOCIAL TRUST ACROSS JURISDICTIONS – IRE, NI, UK, EU* (IRE, UK, EU* – ESS; NI – WVS/EVS)



Sources: European Social Survey and WVS/EVS.
Notes: EU* contains Belgium, Germany, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal.

While we cannot compare the trends in social trust across jurisdictions, we can directly compare *levels* of social trust between Ireland and Northern Ireland at a single time point, using the 2017 Eurobarometer survey (the latest Eurobarometer survey that asked a question on social trust to people in Ireland and Northern Ireland). Respondents were asked how far they agreed or disagreed with the statement: 'generally speaking, most people in (OUR COUNTRY) can be trusted'.[114]

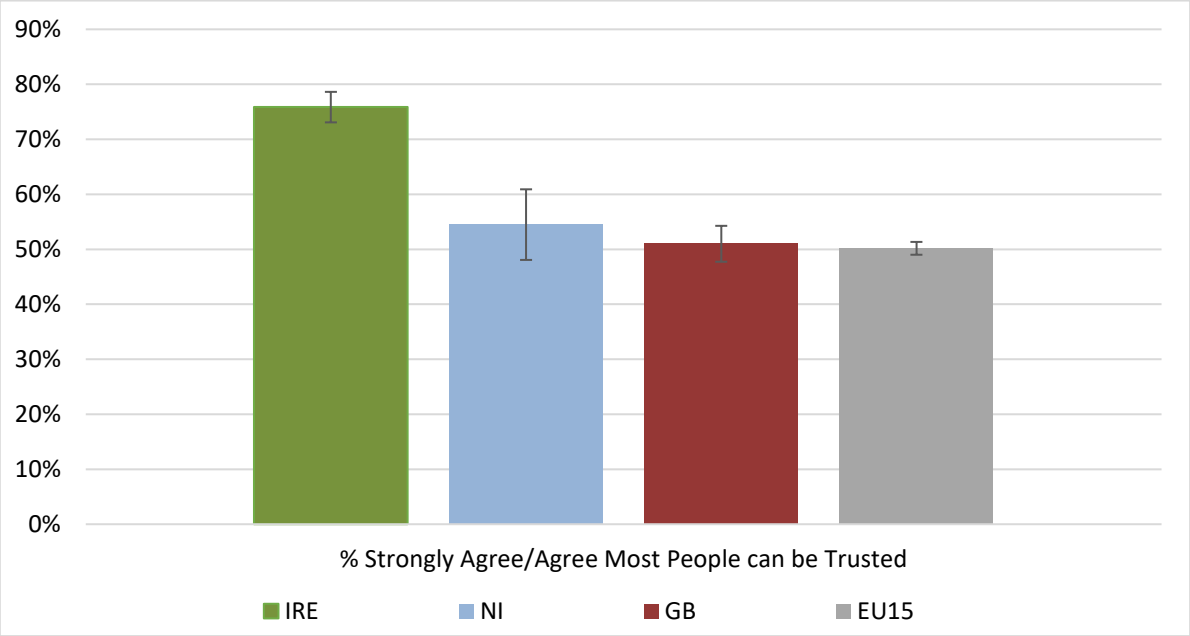
Figure 4.11 shows the proportion of people who 'strong agree'/'agree' that most people in their country can be trusted. In 2017 at least, social trust was 20 percentage points higher in Ireland, where 76 per cent reported trusting most people, compared to Northern Ireland (54 per cent). However, social trust was

113 Supplementary Online Appendix S4.13 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170) shows the trends in social trust before and after controlling for changes in the socio-demographic composition of people in Ireland and Northern Ireland. There is little difference between the adjusted trends in social trust controlling for socio-demographic composition and the unadjusted trends.

114 In Ireland, respondents were asked about 'most people in Ireland' and in Northern Ireland, respondents were asked about 'most people in the UK'.

similar across Northern Ireland, Great Britain (51 per cent), and the EU15 average (52 per cent), making Ireland the outlier with its higher levels of social trust.

FIGURE 4.11 LEVELS OF SOCIAL TRUST IN 2017 ACROSS JURISDICTIONS – IRE, NI, GB, EU15



Source: Based on 2017 Eurobarometer data (survey 88.4).

Note: The lines above and below the top of the bars represent the '95 per cent confidence intervals' surrounding the estimates of people's attitudes.

4.5.2 Trends among more and less educated groups

Figure 4.12 looks again at trends in social trust in Ireland (using the ESS data, left panel) and Northern Ireland (using the WVS/EVS data, right panel). However, it looks at these trends separately for more educated groups (tertiary education, green line) and less educated (primary/secondary education, blue line). In both jurisdictions a striking gap has emerged between more and less educated groups.

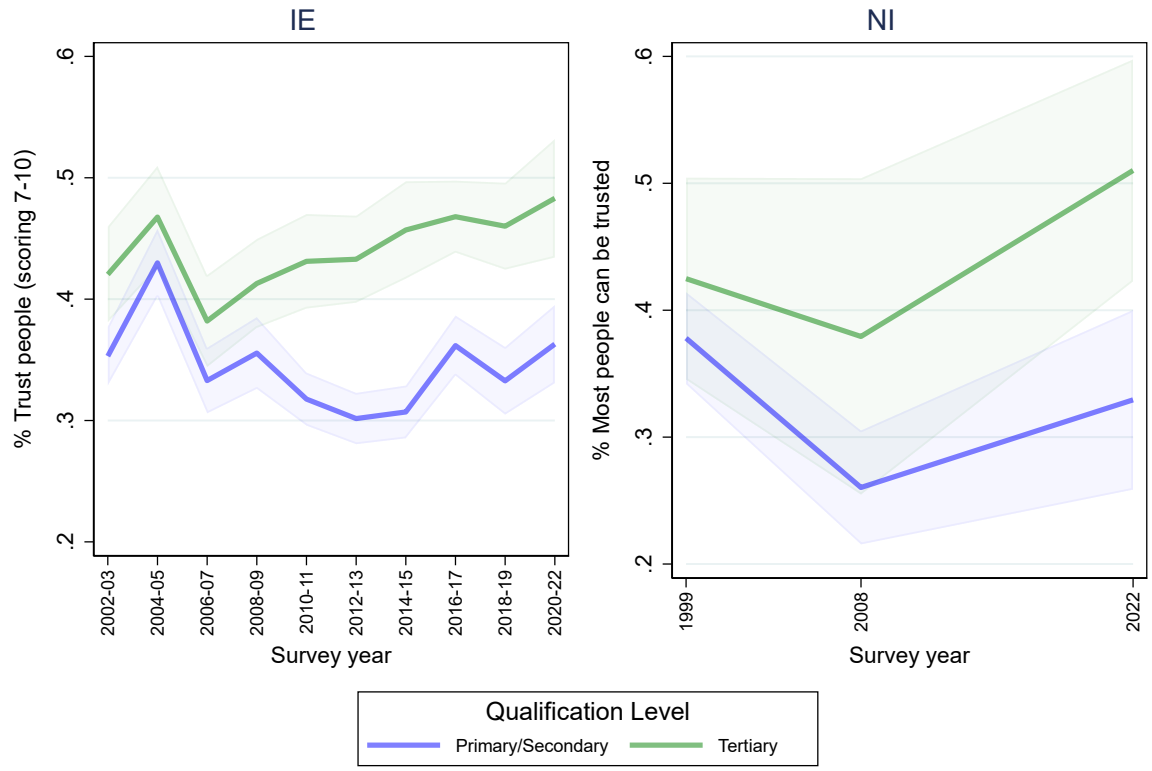
In Ireland, pre-2006/07, there was only a small gap in trust, with the more educated group reporting slightly greater social trust than the less educated group. However, from 2006/07 there was a growing gap in social trust between more and less educated groups. In 2006/07, both the more educated group and less educated group saw their trust decline. However, this decline was smaller for more educated groups. Furthermore, trust in other people recovered again in 2008/09 among the more educated group and steadily increased up to 2020/22, at which point social trust among the more educated was at its highest point over the entire period. By contrast, less educated groups saw a somewhat larger decline in 2006/07. However, their social trust broadly continued to decline into 2014/15, leading to a growing gap in social trust with more educated groups. From 2016/17 onwards, trust has begun to increase again. However, in 2020/22 a substantial gap

remained. In addition, social trust for the less educated group in 2020/22 is below its pre-recession high and is now at a similar level to 2002/03.

A similar pattern exists in Northern Ireland. In 1999, there was a marginal gap in social trust between more and less educated groups. However, the more educated group saw a smaller decline in social trust into 2008, after which they experienced an improvement in social trust and by 2022 their social trust was at its highest level over the entire period (around 10 percentage points higher than in 1999). The less educated group, however, saw a much steeper decline in social trust between 1999 and 2008 (a drop of 12 percentage points), leading to a substantial gap in trust emerging with the more educated group. Since that time, their social trust has experienced a slight recovery into 2022. However, this has been at a slower pace compared to the more educated group, leading to a consistent widening in the trust-gap since 1999. Furthermore, as in Ireland, social trust among the less educated group remains below what it was in the pre-2008 period.[115]

115 The ESS and WVS/EVS has fewer comparable socio-demographic characteristics across which to compare trends in social trust. However, there are no consistent differences in trends between men/women and married/unmarried across jurisdictions. In Ireland, there are also no consistent differences in trends between urban/rural status or employment status. However, in Northern Ireland, there has been an emerging gap between urban and rural residents, with urban residents seeing their social trust stagnate over time. There is also a widening gap between the employed and inactive groups and the unemployed group who have seen their social trust steadily decline over time; see Supplementary Online Appendix S4.14-S4.15 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

FIGURE 4.12 TRENDS IN SOCIAL TRUST BY AGE FINISHED EDUCATION – IRE, NI

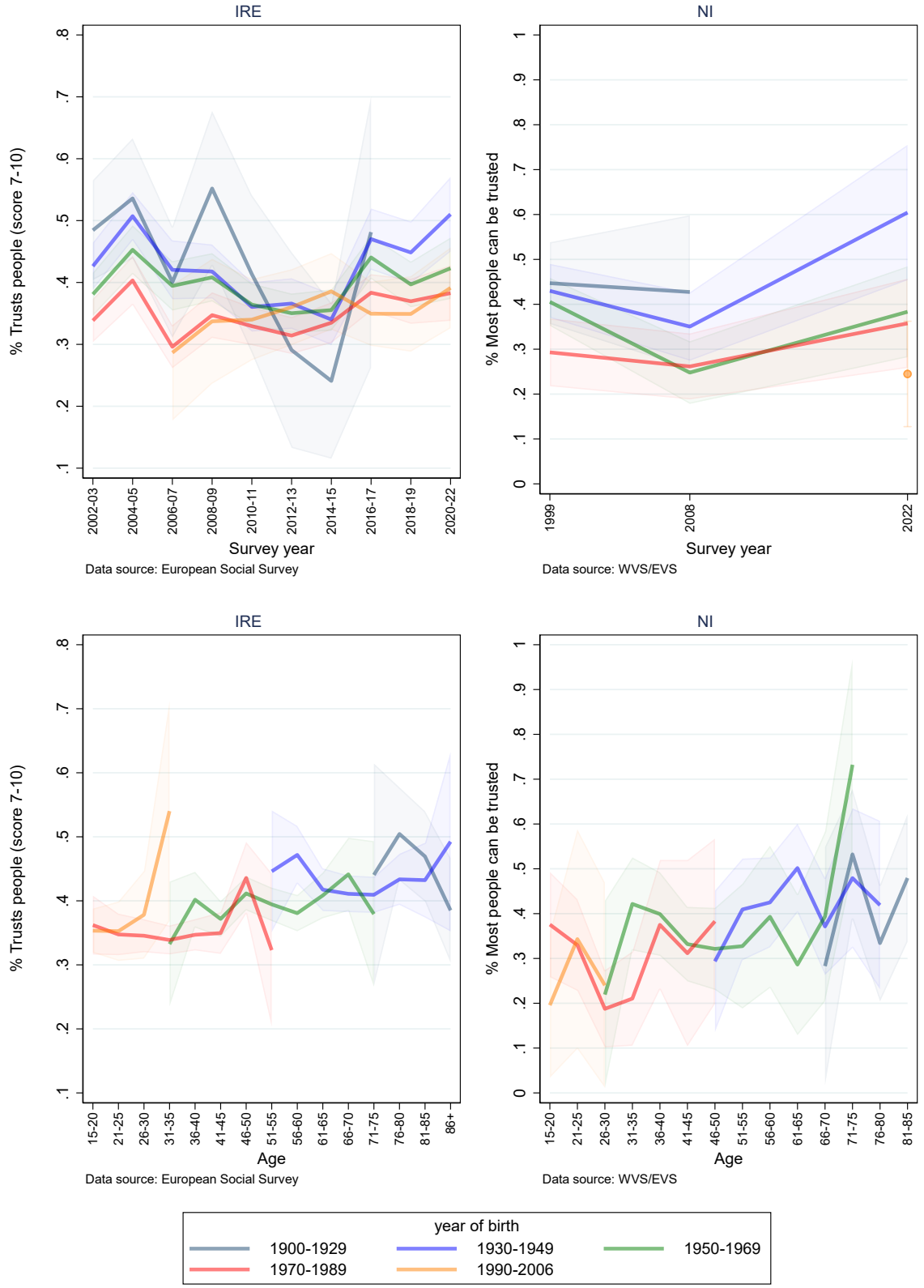


Source: IRE based on ten rounds of ESS data; NI based on three rounds of WVS/EVS data.

4.5.3 Differences across birth cohorts

Figure 4.13 explores generational differences in social trust, where each coloured line on the figure again represents attitudes among different birth cohorts of people. To examine this, Figure 4.13 first looks at trends in social trust among different cohorts over the study period. In Ireland (top left panel), older cohorts tend to exhibit higher social trust than younger cohorts (a gap of around 10-15 percentage points). As with optimism, these differences shrank in the middle period (between 2008 and 2017) but emerged again from 2018 onwards. In fact, social trust among those born after 1970 has generally remained low and stable. It was older cohorts who saw their social trust decline then increase again over the period.

FIGURE 4.13 TRENDS IN SOCIAL TRUST AMONG BIRTH COHORTS BY (A) YEAR, AND (B) AGE GROUP – IRE/NI (IRE – ESS; NI – WVS/EVS)



Source: Eurobarometer; ESS for Ireland; WVS/EVS for Northern Ireland.

A similar pattern emerges in Northern Ireland (at least based on the three available time-points from the WVS/EVS data). Older generations appear to have higher social trust than younger generations. In addition, those born after 1970 have stable but low social trust while older cohorts experienced the decline and subsequent recovery in social trust over the study period.

Again, these generational differences could be driven by age differences between individuals. For example, older cohorts may contain more older people who might report higher social trust by virtue of their age (not the generation in which they were born). The bottom left panel and bottom right panel (Figure 4.13) shows the relationship between age and social trust for each birth cohort in Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively. In both jurisdictions, there is evidence that older people exhibit somewhat more social trust than younger people. At least part of the generational differences in social trust could be accounted for the fact that earlier generations are older aged than more recent generations.

4.6 DISCUSSION

4.6.1 Overall trends

This chapter examined how trust in institutions (political, judicial, media) and social trust in other people have developed since the start of the 21st century in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Ireland tended to have some of the highest trust in people and institutions compared to Northern Ireland, Great Britain, and the average across EU15 countries. Northern Ireland again had some of the lowest levels of trust across jurisdictions. However, trust in Northern Ireland was much closer to trust in Great Britain over the study period, suggesting trust may be more reflective of national dynamics.

In Ireland, we again see the key role the 2008/09 recession and subsequent policies of austerity likely played in shaping social and political attitudes over the past 25 years. Around the build-up and onset of the recession and austerity (2007-2010), political trust and social trust saw their biggest declines over the period, while media trust and judicial trust saw noticeable but smaller declines as well. This led to a protracted period of depressed attitudes (especially political and social trust), at a time when the economy remained stagnated, and unemployment remained high (see Figure 2.1). This persisted until 2013/14 when attitudes began to recover, coinciding with the slow recovery of the Irish economy. In addition, social trust, and particularly political trust, may have been buoyed during this period by the passing of the 2015 and 2018 referenda in Ireland on marriage equality and abortion rights by significant majorities.

By the end of the study period (2020-2023), attitudes such as political trust and judicial trust had finally recovered to their pre-recession levels. Furthermore, despite the onset of multiple and compounding problems in recent years (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, housing and healthcare crises, and the arrival of large numbers of Ukrainian refugees and international protection applicants) political trust, social trust, and judicial trust have remained notably stable, or in the case of political trust, further improved.[116] Potentially, blame for these events may have not been levelled at the state's institutions, or people may, up to 2023, be comparatively positive about the handling of these events, leading to a more robust reaction of these attitudes compared to the recession. However, as with optimism and perceived political efficacy (see Chapter 3), we do see media trust has seen a decline in recent years, suggesting these events may be starting to impact people's perceptions of their country's institutions while concerns regarding 'fake news' and the spread of disinformation, particularly online, might also be affecting media trust as well.

At the same time, attitudes in the pre-recession period did not remain wholly stable. Between 2001 and 2003 political trust experienced a noticeable decline (especially 2002 to 2003) while judicial trust also saw a more gradual decline from 2000 to 2003. During this period, the referendum on removing the threat of suicide as a ground for legal abortion was narrowly defeated (2001). In addition, concern was growing about rising house prices and increasing job losses.[117] However, the declines in political trust in Ireland follow a similar trajectory to the declines observed in Northern Ireland over the period, and potentially rising rates of 'Troubles'-related violence and the suspension of power-sharing in the North may have shaken Irish trust in political institutions as well.

Trust in Northern Ireland over the period appears to be, comparatively, less shaped by the 2008/09 recession. Political trust started the period (1999) with comparable levels to Ireland, potentially reflecting an optimism around the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the beginning of the power-sharing agreement in 1999. However, between 1999 and 2004, political trust steadily declined, leading to a widening gap in political trust with Ireland. Although it recovered slightly in 2005 (potentially driven by the 2005 UK general election), this decline resumed until 2009. As outlined in Chapter 3, this was a period of political instability in Northern Ireland. 'Troubles'-related violence had been increasing at the start of the 21st century, perceptions of community relations worsening (at least until 2002/2003), and from 2002 to 2007 the nascent power-sharing agreement was suspended. Between 2008 and 2009, political trust declined at an even faster pace

116 During this period (July-August 2020 and June-July 2022) a number of Eurobarometer waves were also undertaken using web-based interviewing rather than in-person interviewing which could affect the trends, given people could respond differently to the same questions when asked in an online versus in-person interview.

117 https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/2003-was-a-year-filled-with-shock-and-aah/26238471.html.

(as it also did in Ireland), coinciding with the onset of the recession.[118] The trend in, and levels of, political trust in Northern Ireland, however, are highly similar to that of Great Britain. Given the measure of political trust in asking about trust in 'political parties', 'the House of Commons', and 'UK Government', events occurring in the UK as whole may also play as important a role in shaping Northern Irish political trust in UK-wide institutions. Over the same period (1999 to 2008), social trust follows a similar pattern of decline, potentially also driven by political instability and the recession.

In the post-recession period (2009 onwards), political trust in Northern Ireland remained depressed and stable up to 2013 (as in Ireland), when unemployment was still relatively high and austerity measures were likely being felt especially acutely. Political trust then follows the path of optimism, satisfaction with democracy and political voice, experiencing a period of recovery up to 2015/16, before seeing trust decline again, and a widening of the gap in attitudes with Ireland up to 2018. As outlined, the near collapse of the Northern Ireland assembly in 2015, the Brexit vote of 2016 (and subsequent debates of a border on the island of Ireland), and the suspension of power-sharing from 2017 onwards likely play a role in this decline in political trust. Social trust, meanwhile, similarly experiences a recovery which continues into 2022.

In comparison, judicial trust remains largely stable over the study period. There is a dip in judicial trust between 2005 and 2007, particularly towards the police and army. However, stability then resumes up until 2015, after which judicial trust begins to decline again along with most other attitudes in Northern Ireland. Media trust in Northern Ireland is lower than in Ireland and exhibits a general decline over the study period. However, its trends and levels are very close to those of Great Britain and may be shaped by a potentially more politically polarised media in Great Britain.

4.6.2 Differences across education

Gaps in social and institutional trust between the more educated group (who generally express higher trust) and less educated groups in Ireland and Northern Ireland have widened for much of the study period. In Ireland, however, the widening occurred at different points in time for different dimensions of trust. Social trust and political trust saw the gap emerge around the onset or in the wake of the 2008/09 recession, driven by a smaller drop in attitudes, in the case of social

[118] Interestingly, the broadly consistent decline in political trust in Ireland (1999-2009) is different to the more volatile trend in satisfaction with democracy over the same period. This may be because political trust asks people about their trust in specific components of a political system (parties, House of Commons, UK Government), which may be more susceptible to their year-on-year performance, while the democracy question is about the 'the way democracy works in the United Kingdom' which may be more responsive to the overall state of the functioning of society.

trust, and faster recoveries in attitudes among the educated group. One possibility is that the social and economic status of more educated individuals protected them from the harsher pecuniary impacts of the recession. The Irish education gap in judicial trust, however, emerged much earlier, in 2004. Meanwhile, the education gap in media trust did not emerge until 2012.

For institutional trust, this gap persisted until around 2020/21 after which it closed to early 21st century levels, driven primarily by increases in trust among the less educated group. This may be because the COVID-19 pandemic had a unifying impact on institutional trust in Ireland, raising trust during the time of crisis, at least in the short term, because of the need for a co-ordinated response for the public good (Eurofound, 2021). However, since 2022, there is evidence this gap is re-emerging, potentially as a consequence of the cost-of-living crisis affecting less educated groups more who have less capacity to absorb the financial costs of rising food, accommodation, and energy prices. Trust in other people in Ireland is the exception to this, with the education gap widening over time, which remained large even into 2020-2022.

In Northern Ireland, political trust follows a similar pattern of an emerging gap in the wake of the recession which remained present into 2018 (although it shrank somewhat towards 2018). The gap in judicial and media trust between more and less educated groups tended to remain relatively stable over the study period. However, as in Ireland, there was a significant increase in the social trust gap between the more and less educated since 1999. This has again been driven by a steeper decline and slower recovery among the less educated. This pattern among the less educated group could be a consequence of being more exposed to the harm of crises over the past 20 years or so. For example, they suffered more during the recession and suffered greater social dislocation (O'Higgins, 2012; Lim and Laurence, 2015), experienced the harsher consequences of austerity and welfare reform (Barr et al., 2015), and faced greater social withdrawal during the pandemic (Borkowska and Laurence, 2021), which likely culminates in depressed social trust in the post-2008 period.

4.6.3 Differences across generations

For political, media, and social trust, there are much larger differences in attitudes over time than between generations, suggesting again that key events occurring in society (period-effects) are more important drivers of attitudes in the 21st century than generational differences in both jurisdictions. There are few consistent generational differences in media trust across jurisdictions, nor with political trust in Ireland. In addition, the higher judicial trust among older generations across jurisdictions is more likely to be a consequence of older people (regardless of their generation) expressing more trust in the police, legal system, and army. In

Northern Ireland, however, there is evidence that older generations express greater political trust, especially up to 2018. As with satisfaction democracy, it may be that, despite growing political instability, especially from 2016 onwards, older cohorts still view the political situation in Northern Ireland as more positive compared to the past.

Across both jurisdictions, however, the most recent cohort (born after 1989) exhibit different patterns to preceding generations. On one hand, they have higher levels of trust, especially of political institutions, than their age would suggest. This may be, as noted in Chapter 3, a consequence of them largely growing up during a period of relative political stability (particularly in Northern Ireland) and not yet being in the labour market during the 2008/09 recession, shielding them from its harshest effects. However, on the other hand, there are also signs that this cohort is becoming less trusting than other generations. In Ireland, the 1990+ generation has seen their political trust stabilise while other generations have seen it increase, and in Northern Ireland the declines in political trust up to 2018 are concentrated among the 1990+ generation. The generation born from 1990 onwards has also seen declines in both judicial and media trust across both jurisdictions (between 2013/15 and 2016/18 in Northern Ireland and between 2016/18 and 2019/23 in Ireland). Furthermore, their social trust has remained stable and low across the study period. With the onset of crises for the most recent years studied, be it political paralysis in Northern Ireland (2016/18) or growing precarity in Ireland from 2021 onwards, affecting younger cohorts especially, the group may be becoming increasingly disillusioned and distrustful of society.

CHAPTER 5

Attitudes towards income inequality and fairness

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates people's attitudes towards income equality and equal opportunities. The chapter begins by comparing a broader set of attitudes across jurisdictions in 2017. It then presents the overall time trend in attitudes towards income inequality, before exploring this trend across different levels of education and birth cohorts.

5.2 INCOME INEQUALITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN 2017

5.2.1 Attitudes towards income inequality and equal opportunities in 2017

We begin by examining two dimensions of attitudes towards inequality. Firstly, how far individuals agree governments should reduce income inequality. Secondly, whether individuals believe they have equal opportunities and that opportunities have improved over the past 30 years. This is a mean score of how far people agree or disagree (1='Strongly disagree' to 5='Strongly agree') with the following statements: 'Compared with 30 years ago, opportunities for getting ahead in life have become more equal in (our country)', 'Nowadays in (our country) I have equal opportunities for getting ahead in life, like everyone else'.[119] Scores of 4 to 5 on this average measure were coded as 'high agreement' that equal opportunities exist and are better than 30 years ago.

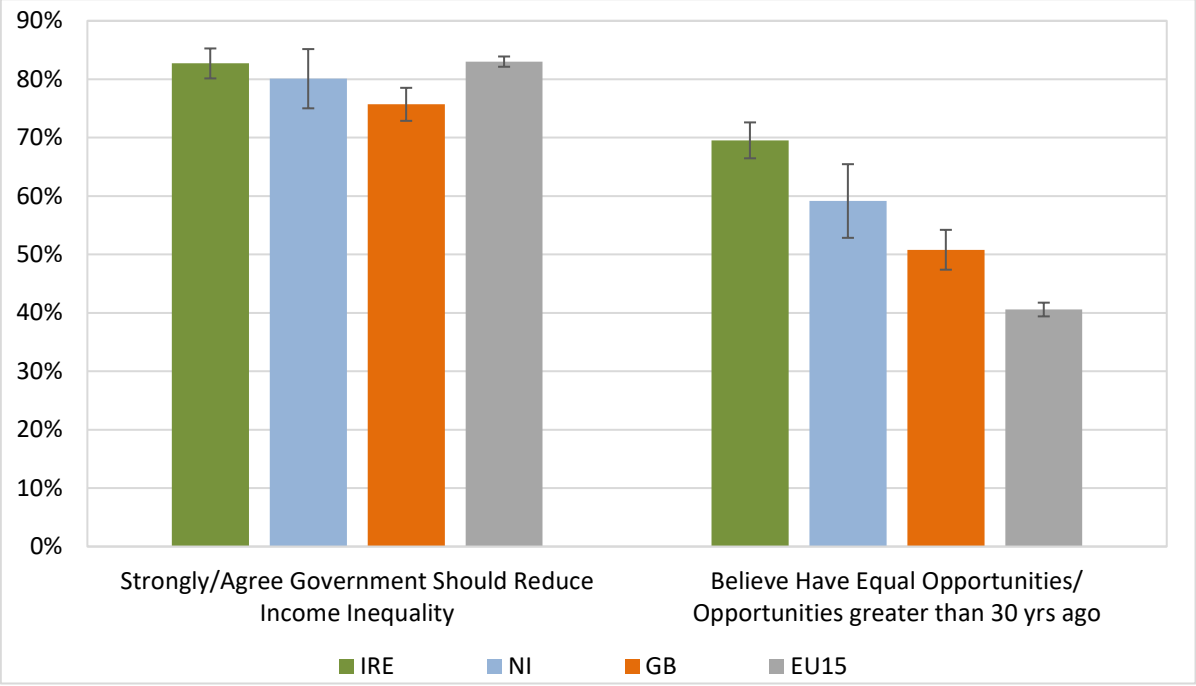
Unlike previous chapters, the Eurobarometer does not contain repeated measures of attitudes towards inequality over the study period to allow us to directly compare trends in how inequality attitudes have changed over time. Instead, we use 2017 Eurobarometer data to provide the most up-to-date picture possible of inequality attitudes across jurisdictions (given this is the most recent year available that contains inequality attitudes for both Ireland and Northern Ireland).

Figure 5.1 shows the proportion of people across jurisdictions who 'agree'/ 'strongly agree' that the 'government should reduce income inequality' and the proportion with 'high agreement' that they have equal opportunities, and their opportunities are greater than 30 years ago – henceforth referred to simply as equal opportunities. There was little difference in the proportion of people in

[119] In Ireland, people were asked about the situation in 'Ireland' and in Northern Ireland, people were asked about the situation in the 'United Kingdom'.

Ireland (83 per cent) and Northern Ireland (80 per cent) who believe their governments should reduce income inequality. These levels are not dissimilar from the EU15 average (83 per cent). Only people in Great Britain reported less support for governments to reduce income inequality (75 per cent). Still, support was generally high across all jurisdictions. Larger differences existed in people's beliefs their country has equal opportunities. People in Ireland had the strongest belief their country has equal opportunities (70 per cent agree), which is 11 percentage points higher than in Northern Ireland (59 per cent). However, people in Northern Ireland also had a stronger belief than those in Great Britain (51 per cent). Belief was weakest across the EU15 as a whole, with only 40 per cent exhibiting high agreement that their country has equal opportunities.

FIGURE 5.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCOME INEQUALITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN 2017 – IRE, NI, GB, EU15



Source: Eurobarometer 88.4 (2017); weighted.

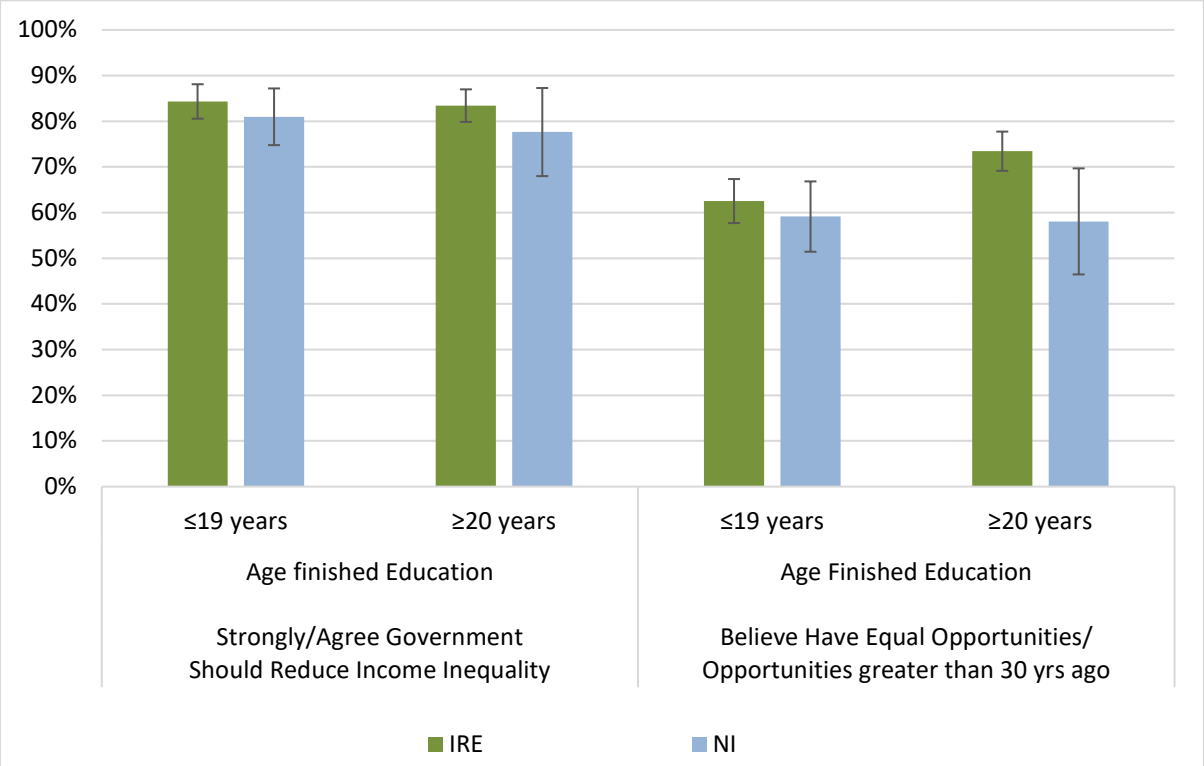
Note: The lines above and below the top of the bars represent the '95 per cent confidence intervals' surrounding the estimates of people's attitudes.

5.2.2 Attitudes towards income inequality and equal opportunities in 2017 among more and less educated groups

Figure 5.2 examines whether there were differences in inequality attitudes between more educated (who finished education aged 20 and above) and less educated (who finished aged 19 or below) groups in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In Ireland, there was no difference in feelings government should reduce income inequality between more (83 per cent) and less (84 per cent) educated groups. However, more educated groups were more likely to see equal opportunities in

their country (73 per cent with 'high agreement') compared to less educated groups (63 per cent). In Northern Ireland, we also find no substantial difference in attitudes towards the government's role in reducing income inequality between more (81 per cent) and less (78 per cent) educated groups. However, in Northern Ireland, we also find no differences in peoples' perceptions of equal opportunities in their country between more educated (58 per cent) and less educated (59 per cent) groups, who both had comparatively less positive attitudes.

FIGURE 5.2 ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCOME INEQUALITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN 2017 BY AGE FINISHED EDUCATION – IRE, NI



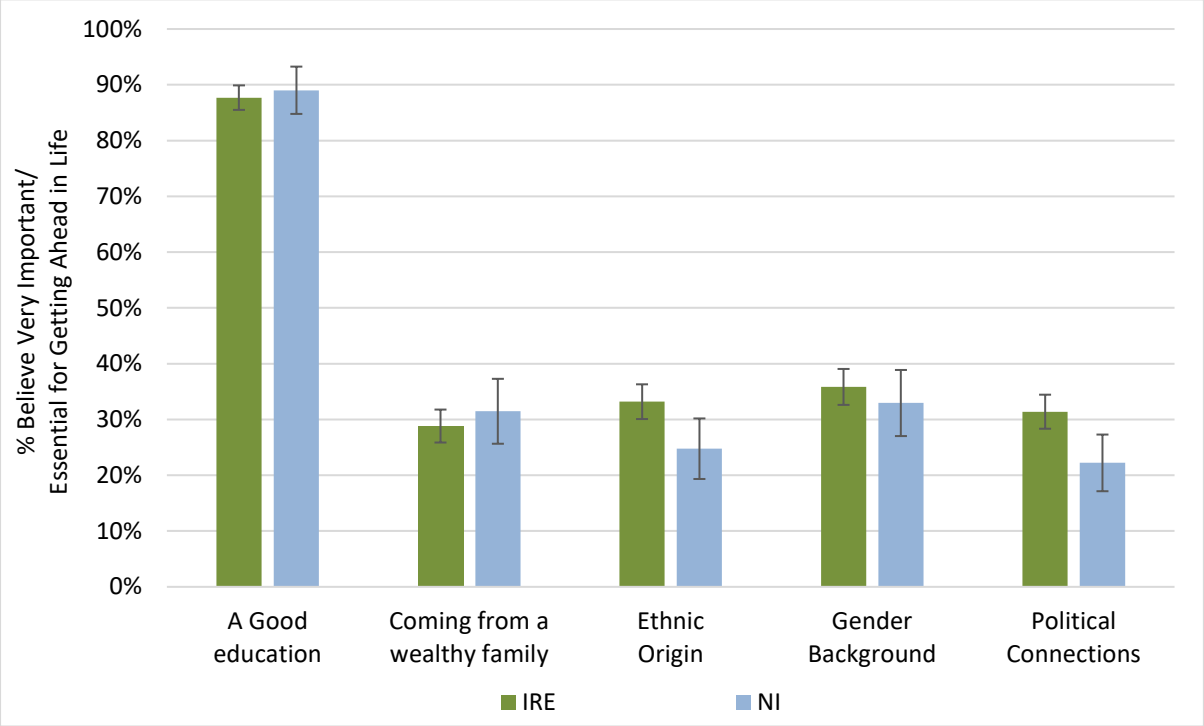
Source: Eurobarometer 88.4 (2017); weighted.

Note: The lines above and below the top of the bars represent the '95 per cent confidence intervals' surrounding the estimates of people's attitudes.

5.2.3 What factors are believed to be essential for getting ahead in life in 2017?

The next section examines whether there are differences across the island of Ireland in the factors people believe are important for 'getting ahead in life'. Individuals were asked 'how important do you think each of the following are for getting ahead in life', and asked about different factors in their lives, such as 'having a good education' or 'ethnic origin'. Figure 5.3 shows the proportion who responded a factor was 'very important' or 'essential' for success.

FIGURE 5.3 HOW IMPORTANT ARE DIFFERENT FACTORS FOR GETTING AHEAD IN LIFE IN 2017 – IRE, NI



Source: Eurobarometer 88.4 (2017); weighted.

Note: The lines above and below the top of the bars represent the '95 per cent confidence intervals' surrounding the estimates of people's attitudes.

The vast majority of people in both Ireland and Northern Ireland strongly believed a 'good education' is critical for getting ahead in life (88 per cent and 89 per cent respectively). Far fewer people thought one's background characteristics play an important role, and there was little difference between jurisdictions. We find that 29 per cent and 31 per cent of Irish and Northern Irish believed coming from a wealthy background is important, while 36 per cent and 33 per cent believed one's gender is important. There are differences between jurisdictions in how important people believe ethnic origin is for success. While 33 per cent believed it is important in Ireland, only 25 per cent thought it is in Northern Ireland. People in Ireland were also more likely to believe 'political connections' are important (31 per cent) compared to Northern Ireland (22 per cent).[120] Ireland is therefore interesting in that while people were more likely to agree their country has equal opportunities than in Northern Ireland, Irish residents were also more likely to feel background characteristics such as ethnicity, and non-effort related factors such as 'political connections', were more important for getting ahead than people in Northern Ireland.

120 There are also no differences between Ireland and Northern Ireland in the proportions of people who believe 'working hard' (IRE: 92 per cent; NI: 91 per cent), 'knowing the right people' (IRE: 57 per cent; NI: 59 per cent), and 'having good health' (IRE: 90 per cent; NI: 89 per cent) are important for success in life (data excluded from the Figure for parsimony).

5.3 TRENDS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS INEQUALITY

As outlined, the Eurobarometer does not contain repeated measures of attitudes towards inequality to directly compare trends over time across Ireland and Northern Ireland. However, some indication of whether inequality attitudes have shifted over time can be garnered from two different datasets. For Ireland, we use the European Social Survey (ESS) (biennial surveys from 2002 onwards) and for Northern Ireland we use the World Values Survey/European Values Study (WVS/EVS) (1999, 2008 and 2022). In the ESS, inequality attitudes are measured with the question: 'the government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels' (from 'agree strongly' to 'disagree strongly'). In the WVS/EVS, individuals were asked where they place themselves on a 1 to 10 scale between two statements: (1) 'There should be greater incentives for individual effort' and the statement (10) 'Incomes should be made more equal'.

There are two issues that arise in using these questions. The first is that while the ESS question asks about government intervention in reducing income inequality the WVS/EVS question does not specify the role that government should play in equalising incomes; only that incomes should be made more equal. In theory, one could believe incomes should be more equal but not that governments should be the one to do it.[121] The second issue is that, while the ESS question is a measure of agreement with a single statement on government intervention in income inequality, the WVS/ESS question is a self-placement between two opposing statements on whether income inequality should be reduced or whether it is actually good for society. While the former may be tapping attitudes towards income inequality in general, or the role of government in reducing it in particular, the latter could be tapping perceptions on how far some income inequality is good for society.

Given these issues, we therefore cannot directly compare *levels* of inequality attitudes across jurisdictions as people were asked different questions. Furthermore, these limitations also mean some caution needs to be taken in comparing the direction of *trends* across jurisdictions, given cross-jurisdiction differences may be driven by the different nature of the questions. In spite of this, these questions are (to our knowledge) the only opportunity to compare long-running trends in inequality attitudes across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

[121] The 2017 Eurobarometer contains a question on whether people believe 'income differences are too great in their country' and whether 'government should take measures to reduce income inequality'. These are strongly correlated at r= .65 suggesting those who believe income inequality is too great in general are also very likely to believe government should intervene to reduce it. This provides some evidence the ESS and WVS/EVS questions are comparable.

5.3.1 Overall trends in attitudes towards inequality

Figure 5.4 shows trends in attitudes towards inequality across jurisdictions. In Ireland (alongside the UK and a selection of EU countries), it shows the proportion of people who 'agree'/'strongly agree' that government should reduce income differences. In Northern Ireland, it shows the proportion of people who scored between 6 and 10 on the question of whether they believe incomes should be made more equal.[122]

In Ireland, between 2002 and 2007 people became somewhat less supportive of reducing income inequality (with a reduction of 4 percentage points). However, support for reducing inequality rose somewhat in 2008/09 (4 percentage points) before rising significantly in 2010/11 to stand at 81 per cent of people supporting government intervention to reduce income inequality. Between 2010/11 and 2014/15 support gradually dropped by 7 percentage points before more rapidly declining and returning to pre-2008/09 levels by 2016/17. In more recent years, however, support for reducing inequality started to increase again, rising by 6 percentage points to stand at 76 per cent by 2020/22.

A broadly similar trend emerges in Northern Ireland in that support for reducing income inequality was higher in 2008 compared to 1998/early 2000s. Between 1999 and 2008, belief that income should be made more equal increased by 14 per cent. However, after 2008 support waned again, dropping by 18 percentage points, and by 2022 support for reducing inequality was slightly lower than at the outset of the period. Testing shows the trends in inequality attitudes in Ireland and Northern Ireland cannot be explained by longer-term changes in the composition of society.[123]

Comparing Ireland to the UK and an average across a selection of EU countries, support for reducing inequality was generally much closer to the EU15 average than to Great Britain.[124] However, the UK saw a substantial increase in support for addressing inequality, and in the most recent period there was little difference between Ireland, the UK and EU countries in terms of supporting reductions in inequality.

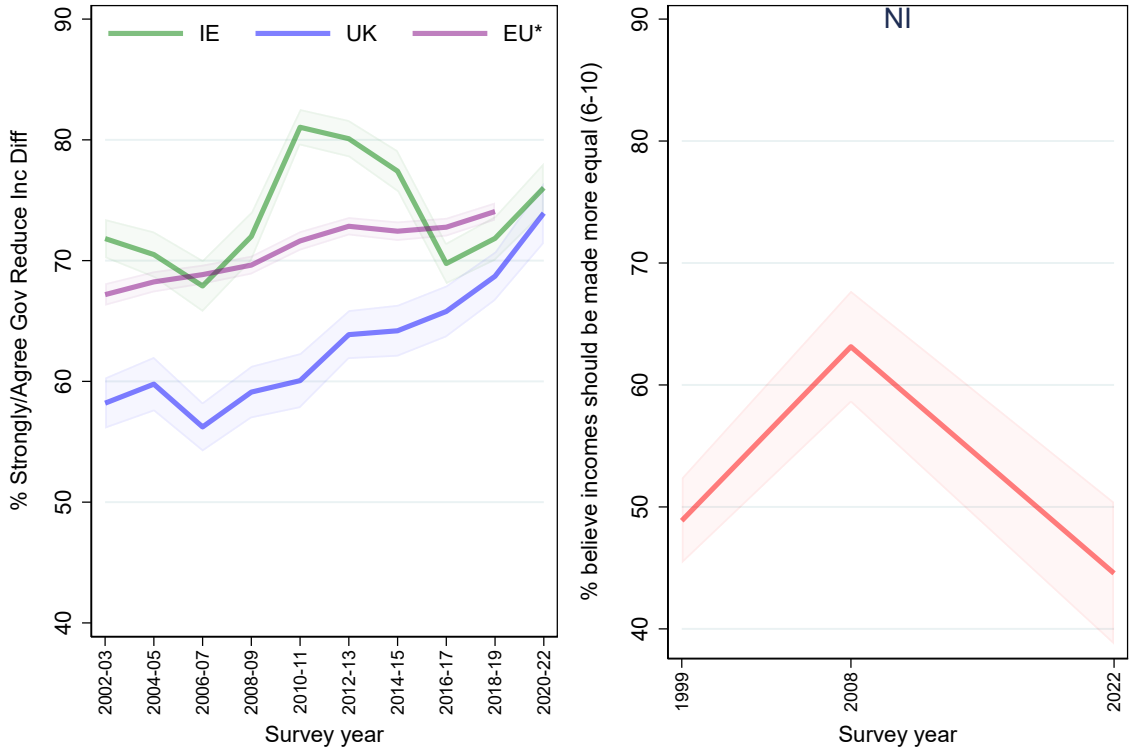
---

122 This cut-off was selected as it was above the half-way point between believing incomes should be made more equal and there should be incentives for individual effort. Alternative cut-offs yield substantively similar conclusions.

123 Supplementary Online Appendix S5.11 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170) shows the trends in inequality attitudes before and after controlling for changes in the socio-demographic composition. There is little difference between the adjusted trends in inequality attitudes controlling for socio-demographic composition and the unadjusted trends.

124 We cannot directly compare these jurisdictions to Northern Ireland using the ESS data given the very small sample of Northern Irish present in the ESS.

FIGURE 5.4 TRENDS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS INEQUALITY ACROSS JURISDICTIONS – IRE, NI, UK, EU* (IRE, UK, EU* – ESS; NI – WVS/EVS)

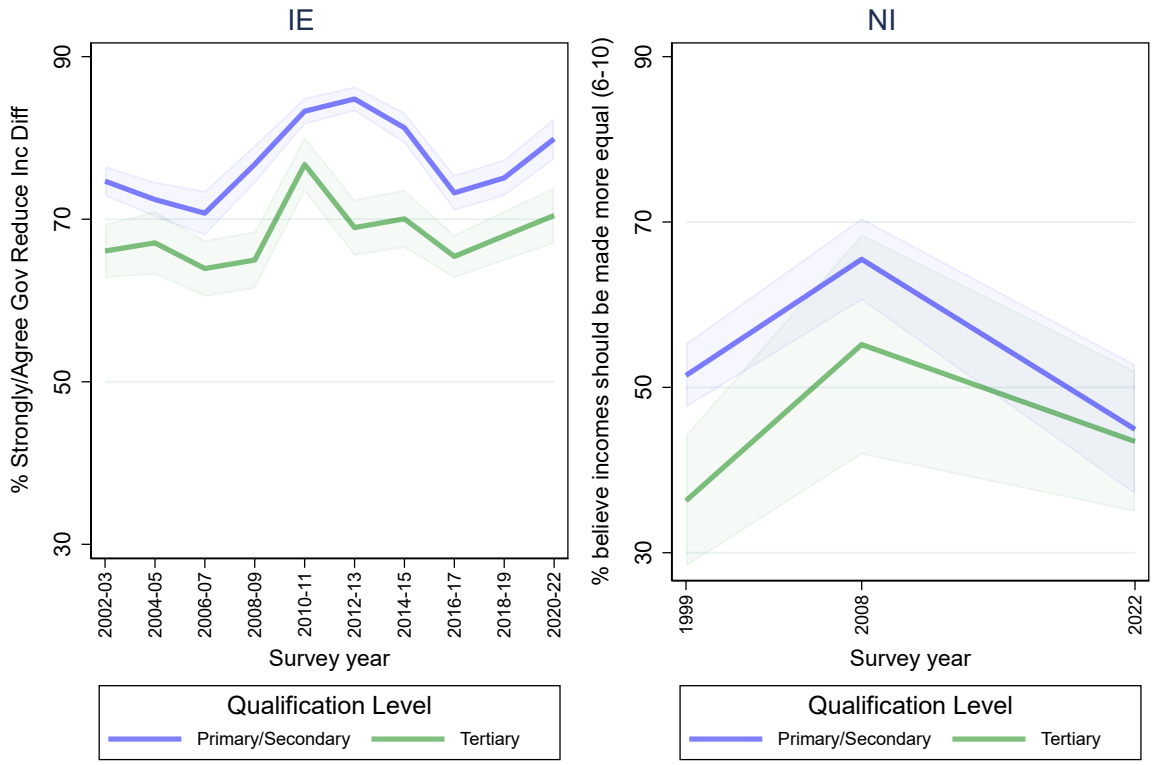


Source: IRE based on ten rounds of ESS data; NI based on three rounds of WVS/EVS data.
Notes: EU* contains Belgium, Germany, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal.

5.3.2 Trends among more and less educated groups

Figure 5.5 explores trends in inequality attitudes in Ireland (using the ESS data, left panel) and Northern Ireland (using the WVS/EVS data, right panel), among more educated individuals (with a tertiary qualification, the green line) and less educated individuals (primary/secondary qualification, the blue line). In Ireland, less educated individuals tend to express more support for reducing income inequality. This gap shrank briefly in 2010/11 but became even wider between 2012 and 2015, driven primarily by a quicker return to pre-2010/11 levels among the more educated group. However by 2016/17, the education gap had broadly returned to its pre-2012 size. Interestingly, the 2017 Eurobarometer did not pick up a gap in education between those who finished full-time education before/after age 20 but in the ESS a gap is present between tertiary qualification and non-tertiary qualification holders. This may be driven by the latter being a more accurate measure of level of education than age finished education.

FIGURE 5.5 TRENDS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS INEQUALITY BY AGE FINISHED EDUCATION – IRE, NI (IRE – ESS; NI – WVS/EVS)



Source: IRE based on ten rounds of ESS data; NI based on three rounds of WVS/EVS data.

In Northern Ireland at the start of the 21st century, less educated individuals also reported more support for reducing inequality than more educated individuals. However, this gap got smaller by 2008, driven by a larger increase in support among the educated group. The gap then continued to decrease into 2022, driven by a larger decline in support for reducing inequality among the less educated group.[125]

5.3.3 Differences in attitudes towards inequality across birth cohorts

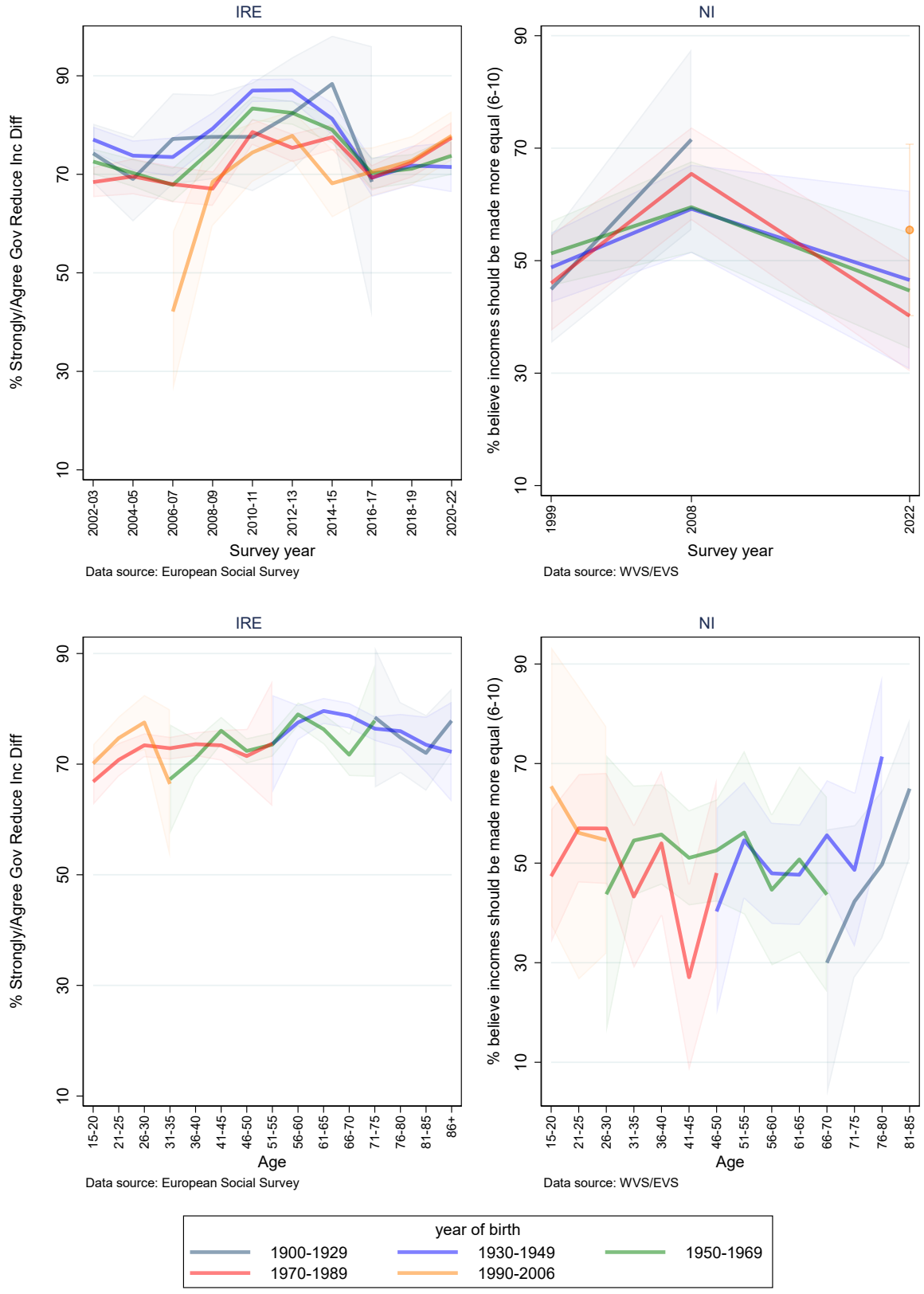
Figure 5.6 explores generational differences in inequality attitudes, where each coloured line on the figure represents inequality attitudes among different birth cohorts. To investigate this, we first look at trends in inequality attitudes among different cohorts over the study period.

[125] The ESS and WVS/EVS has fewer comparable socio-demographic characteristics across which to compare trends in social trust. However, there are no substantial differences in trends between men/women, employment status, and married/unmarried across jurisdictions. In addition, trends are similar in urban/rural areas of Ireland. In Northern Ireland, support for reducing inequality decreased at a faster rate in rural than urban areas (2008-2022); see Supplementary Online Appendix S5.2-S5.3 (https://doi.org/10.26504/rs170).

In Ireland (top left panel), there is some indication that, among those born after 1929, older generations are more likely to support reducing income inequality than younger generations; at least before 2016. Those born before 1930, however, tend to lie somewhere in the middle. After 2016, however, generational differences tend to disappear completely, driven more by declining support for reducing inequality among older birth cohorts. Examining the relationship between age and inequality attitudes in Ireland (bottom left panel) shows almost no age gradient in attitudes. Accordingly, the differences observed across birth cohorts are likely to reflect generational differences in attitudes.

In Northern Ireland (top right panel, Figure 5.6), there do not appear to be substantial differences in inequality attitudes across generations over the period. In addition, there is also no pronounced age gradient in attitudes in Northern Ireland (bottom right panel). The only exception is the youngest cohort, born after 1989, who appear to be more supportive of reducing income inequality than other generations.

FIGURE 5.6 TRENDS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS INEQUALITY AMONG BIRTH COHORTS BY (A) YEAR, AND (B) AGE GROUP – IRE/NI (IRE – ESS; NI – WVS/EVS)



Source: Eurobarometer; ESS for Ireland; WVS/EVS for Northern Ireland.

5.4 DISCUSSION

5.4.1 Overall levels and trends

This chapter examined patterns of attitudes towards inequality and equal opportunities in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In 2017, both Ireland and Northern Ireland had high support for government intervention in reducing income inequality in their jurisdictions. This may reflect the fact that levels of income inequality are broadly similar in Ireland and Northern Ireland (Bergin and McGuinness, 2021).

Yet the two jurisdictions differ in their perceptions of equal opportunities, where people in Ireland were more likely to believe they have equal opportunities and that opportunities were better than 30 years ago. This puts Ireland in the position of having equally strong beliefs that income inequality needs to be reduced as in Northern Ireland but feeling that they have more equal opportunities compared to people in Northern Ireland. This could reflect people's perceptions of what they have relative to where they have come from. As discussed in Chapter 2, over the past 30 years, Ireland has seen significant improvements in its economy, employment, and standard of living. Accordingly, people in Ireland may feel they have more equal opportunities, given the improvements in their lives (barring the 2008/09 recession). Alternatively, despite income inequality being broadly comparable, rates of relative poverty (after taxes and transfers are considered) are substantially lower in Ireland than Northern Ireland (Bergin and McGuinness, 2021). As such, greater experiences of poverty in Northern Ireland may drive lower beliefs in equal opportunities compared to Ireland.

When it comes to perceptions of what is important to get ahead in life, a large majority of people in Ireland and Northern Ireland reported similarly strong convictions that a good education is important, and people's backgrounds are considered less determinant of success. However, despite people in Ireland having more positive views of equal opportunities than in Northern Ireland, they were also somewhat more likely to believe one's ethnic background and political connections shape chances to get ahead compared to people in Northern Ireland.

Over the past 20 years or so, attitudes towards inequality have tended to follow a similar trend, in all likelihood driven primarily by the 2008/09 recession. Although attitudes were somewhat less supportive in the pre-recession period, as the recession struck from around 2008 onwards, people became much more supportive of reducing income inequality, likely driven by the hardship of the recession and also its unequal impact across the more precarious in society. After this, support for reducing inequality then receded to return to pre-recession levels,

potentially reflecting people's return to pre-recession living standards and opportunities.

However, support for reducing inequality has started to rise again in Ireland since 2018.[126] This corresponds to the general worsening in positive expectations for the future, political voice, and media trust around the same period. As detailed, this period coincides with the onset of multiple and compounding problems (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, housing, and healthcare crises). The financial strains these problems have brought, alongside things like the pandemic revealing the consequences of social and economic inequalities for people's lives, may have led to increasing support for redistributive policies in Ireland.

5.4.2 Differences across education

In recent years, more educated groups in Ireland tended to feel more strongly their country provides equal opportunities and were also less supportive of reducing inequality (at least in the ESS data). In Northern Ireland, however, more educated groups held the same views as the less educated group. These findings correspond to differences in positive future expectations ('optimism') across jurisdictions. In Ireland, the more educated were therefore both more likely to feel their country has equal opportunities and were more optimistic about their future than less educated groups. In Northern Ireland there was no difference across education.

These differences in how education is associated with attitudes toward inequality and equality across the jurisdictions could signify the relative success of the more educated group in Ireland. In Northern Ireland, however, the more educated group are not more likely than the less educated to feel optimistic about their future or that their country has equal opportunities, potentially signifying a worse perceived situation relative to their qualifications. As previously suggested in Chapter 3, in the post-recession period, the gap between the expectations and reality (especially around job opportunities and financial situation) among more educated groups may have grown larger than for the less educated group. Alternatively, young people completing higher education in the post-recession period may be increasingly pessimistic about their life compared to those in the pre-recession period.

In Ireland, this gap in inequality attitudes between more and less educated groups has tended to remain largely stable over the study period, apart from a brief widening in the wake of the recession. In Northern Ireland, however, this gap has

126 During this period (July-August 2020 and June-July 2022) a number of Eurobarometer waves were undertaken using web-based interviewing rather than in-person interviewing which could affect the trends, given people could respond differently to the same questions when asked in an online versus in-person interview.

shrunk over time, such that by 2022 there was no education gap in inequality attitudes between more and less educated groups. In part, this is a product of support for a reduction in inequality remaining higher among the more educated group post-recession in Northern Ireland, potentially suggesting their situation never returned to its pre-recession levels.

5.4.3 Differences across generations

As evidenced in prior chapters, the largest differences in attitudes towards inequality appear over time rather than between generations, again signifying the stronger role that key events (e.g. the 2008/09 recession) have likely played in shaping attitudes over the past 20 years or so, rather than generational effects driving changing attitudes.

Furthermore, in Northern Ireland there is little evidence of substantial differences in attitudes across generations. The exception to this is the most recent cohort (born after 1989) who appear to be more supportive of reducing income inequality than other generations. This cohort also saw the largest recent declines in optimism about their future, in their trust in institutions, and the lowest levels of social trust, suggesting an increasingly pessimistic outlook of this group towards society and its fairness. This may be driven, in part, by an increasing frustration at the ability of the Northern Ireland government to address numerous societal issues due to the continued paralysis in the Northern Ireland assembly (see Chapter 6). In Ireland, generational differences in attitudes towards inequality are largely absent, especially after 2016. In particular, the youngest cohort (born after 1989) exhibit no difference in inequality attitudes with other generations, unlike in Northern Ireland.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and key implications

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This report draws on high quality survey data to compare social and political attitudes in Ireland and Northern Ireland over the past 20 to 25 years. This is the first attempt to provide a detailed comparative analysis of social and political attitudes on the island over the past two decades. It extends our comparative understanding of attitudes which Fahey et al.'s (2005) seminal work on 'Conflict and Consensus' examined pre-2000.

The report reveals several areas in which trends in attitudes in Ireland and Northern Ireland differ markedly, pointing to various factors within each jurisdiction that have shaped attitudes over the past 20-25 years. Negative attitudes about the operation of democracy, pessimism for the future, and lack of trust in institutions and other people can undermine the legitimacy of the State, reduce social cohesion, and provide space for populism to thrive (see Chapter 1). These findings provide important insights from which governments and civil society on each side of the border can draw on to build societies that citizens feel function effectively and fairly, and which allow trust to flourish, on the island of Ireland. In the following section we will summarise the main findings of the report before discussing the key implications from the report.

6.2 ATTITUDES ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES

Table 6.1 summarises the main trends in social and political attitudes, and patterns in attitudes across education and generations, in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The table discusses periods of change around key events (e.g. the recession and subsequent austerity, the pandemic) to make the table more intuitive. However, as outlined, multiple factors alongside these events may be shaping trends.

TABLE 6.1 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS ACROSS IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

	IRELAND			NORTHERN IRELAND			
Indicators	**Overall Trends**	**Gaps across education**	**Generational differences**	**Overall Trends**	**Gaps across education**	**Generational differences**	**IRE cf. NI**
Satisfaction with democracy	Stable and high pre-recession. Decline during recession. Slow post-recession recovery to pre-recession levels	More educated more positive. Post-recession widening of gap. Pandemic-period shrinking. Education gap widening post-pandemic	No differences pre- and post-recession but emergence during recession (younger cohorts less positive)	Volatility pre-2007. Decline during recession. Slow recovery. Decline from 2016-2018	No pre-recession gap. Post-recession emerging gap – more educated more positive	Growing differences over time – older cohorts more positive. Recent declines among younger cohort(s)	More positive in IRE
Political voice	Steady post-recession improvement (2007-2018). Recent decline (2019-2023)	More educated more positive. Post-recession period widening. Pandemic-period shrinking. Education gap widening post-pandemic	Recent emergence of generational differences – older cohorts more positive. Recent declines among younger cohort(s)	General post-recession period improvements, stalling from 2016-2018	More educated more positive. General post-recession period widening of gap but volatility in gap size	Growing differences over time – older cohorts more positive	More positive in IRE
Positive expectations of future	Stable and high pre-recession. Decline during recession. Post-recession recovery. Recent decline (2019-2023)	More educated more positive. Post-recession period gap shrinking but significant gap widening post-pandemic	Generational differences likely due to age	Stable and high pre-recession. Decline during recession. Post-recession recovery. Decline from 2016-2018	More educated more positive. Post-recession period gap shrinking, closing completely 2018	Shrinking generational differences over time driven by sharper declines among younger cohorts	More positive in IRE
Political trust	Stable and high pre-recession. Decline during recession. Post-recession recovery to pre-recession levels	No pre-recession gap. Post-recession period emergence – more educated more positive. Pandemic shrinking. Education gap widening post-pandemic	Generational differences likely due to age	Pre-recession period decline, sharpened by recession. Post-recession recovery. Decline from 2016-2018	No pre-recession gap. Small post-recession emerging gap – more educated more positive	Growing differences over time – older cohorts more positive. Recent declines among younger cohort(s)	More positive in IRE

Contd.

TABLE 6.1 CONTD.

	IRELAND			NORTHERN IRELAND			
Indicators	**Overall Trends**	**Gaps across education**	**Generational differences**	**Overall Trends**	**Gaps across education**	**Generational differences**	**IRE cf. NI**
Judicial trust	Broadly stable across period	Gap emerges in 2003 – more educated more positive. Pandemic-period shrinking. Small gap widening post-pandemic	Generational differences likely due to age but cohort differences emerge during recession (younger less positive)	Broadly stable across period. Decline from 2016-2018	More educated more positive. General post-recession period widening of gap but volatility in gap size	Generational differences likely due to age but recent declines among younger cohort(s)	Slightly more positive in IRE
Media trust	Small pre-recession period decline, sharpened by recession. Post-recession recovery. Recent decline (2021-2022)	No pre-recession gap. Small post-recession period emergence – more educated more positive. Pandemic-period shrinking. Education gap widening post-pandemic	Little difference across generations. Recent declines among younger cohort(s)	Pre-recession period decline, sharpened around recession period. Post-recession recovery stalling from 2015-2018	More educated more positive. Gap has remained similar but volatile over the period	Little difference across generations. Recent declines among younger cohort(s)	More positive in IRE
Trust in other people*	Higher pre-recession. Decline during recession. Slow post-recession recovery to pre-recession levels	Small pre-recession gap – more educated more positive. Post-recession period emergence and widening over period	Older cohorts more positive but partly due to age effects	Higher pre-recession. Decline during recession. Post-recession recovery to pre-recession levels	Small pre-recession gap- more educated more positive. Post-recession period emergence and widening over period	Growing differences over time – older cohorts more positive but partly due to age effects	More positive in IRE (2017)
Income inequality should be reduced*	Lower pre-recession period support. Recession period increase and post-recession decline. Recent increase (2018-2022)	Pre-recession gap – more educated less supportive. Recession period widening and post-recession period shrinking	Older cohorts somewhat more supportive (especially during recession) but closing generational differences over time	Lower pre-recession support. Increase during recession. Post-recession recovery to pre-recession levels of support	Pre-recession gap – more educated less supportive. Gap has shrunk over period	Few generational differences but youngest cohort most supportive	The same (2017)
Attitudes towards equal opportunities	-	In 2017, more educated believed equal opportunities have improved	-	-	In 2017, no difference between more/less educated	-	More positive in IRE (2017)

Source: * IRE findings based on ten rounds of ESS data; NI findings based on three rounds of WVS/EVS data.

The story of attitudes in Ireland over the last two decades largely follows the trajectory of the Irish economy and the 2008/09 recession, along with the subsequent period of austerity policies. Pre-recession, attitudes in Ireland were largely positive and, comparatively speaking, some of the most positive across jurisdictions (including Northern Ireland, Great Britain, and the EU15 average). However, around the onset of the crash (2007/08), attitudes in Ireland worsened significantly. Satisfaction with democracy, political trust, trust in other people and optimism all declined precipitously, often in the space of a year, while trust in the media, already declining since 1999, worsened further. The sheer scale of the decline relative to other jurisdictions (the decline was often twice as large as elsewhere in the EU) indicates just how deeply the recession impacted Irish society. It is also consistent with previous research on attitudes to immigration in Ireland, which showed a sharp fall in support for immigration to Ireland during the 2008/09 recession, much more dramatic than in many other European countries (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017; McGinnity et al., 2018).

During the period of recession and austerity, attitudes remained relatively depressed, before entering a period of recovery, coinciding with the recovery of the Irish economy. This too parallels evidence on attitudes to immigration in Ireland, which became more positive as the labour market recovered (McGinnity et al., 2018; Creighton et al., 2022). Feelings that the government should reduce income inequality substantially increased over the same period before declining again, while political voice (measured from 2007 onwards) followed a similar pattern of post-recession improvement. This recovery of attitudes in Ireland may have been buoyed by the relatively smooth passing of the 2015 and 2018 referenda in Ireland on marriage equality and abortion rights, as well as the reversal of planned water charges, partly in response to significant public mobilisation.

Most attitudes in Ireland generally returned to their pre-recession levels by 2018 (although optimism never fully recovered to its pre-recession high). However, there were worrying signs this recovery may have reversed. Political voice, media trust, and (excluding the post-pandemic bounce) optimism have all declined in recent years, while beliefs that the government should reduce income inequality were steadily increasing again. Potentially, the multiple and, at times, compounding sources of instability since 2019 – including the COVID-19 pandemic, onset of the cost-of-living crisis, the emergence of a housing crisis and healthcare strains – which have coincided with the arrival of increased numbers of refugees and international protection applicants, may all have started to show up as feelings of growing pessimism, powerlessness, and perceived unfairness. In addition, the spreading of disinformation via social media may be beginning to erode institutional trust, especially in the media, but also more generally.

Compared to Ireland, attitudes in Northern Ireland over the past two decades saw greater volatility. While the recession (and subsequent austerity and welfare reform in Northern Ireland) also likely shaped Northern Irish attitudes, several other factors, such as political instability around community relations, and prolonged periods where the NI Assembly and Executive were suspended probably had a significant impact as well.

Prior to the recession, satisfaction with democracy saw significant volatility, while political trust and media trust were already experiencing steady declines. This coincided with a period of some political instability and change in Northern Ireland (1998-2007), as outlined in Chapter 2, which likely shaped the early 21st century volatility in attitudes (Devine and Robinson, 2019). From 2008 onwards, Northern Ireland experienced relative political stability, with lower levels of 'Troubles'-related violence, the reinstatement of the power-sharing institutions, and comparatively positive perceptions of community relations, although not without issues[127] (Robinson and Devine, 2017; Devine and Robinson, 2019). This, in turn, coincided with a period of relative stability and improvement in attitudes in Northern Ireland.

Satisfaction with democracy, optimism, social trust and, to a lesser extent, political and media trust, saw notable declines around the onset of the recession (albeit smaller than in Ireland), followed by periods of improvement coinciding with a recovering economy. Similarly, the proportion who believe incomes should be made more equal rose by the time of the recession before declining again into 2022. The improvement in political voice (post-2007) again mirrors this post-recession recovery.

During the most recent available years of data for Northern Ireland (2016-2018), however, there were worrying signs that Northern Irish society was also under growing strain. Since 2016, satisfaction with democracy, optimism, political trust, and judicial trust were all simultaneously declining, and this decline continued for political trust into 2022 (WVS/EVS data). Meanwhile, the improvement in political voice appeared to stall. This potentially highlights how important the role of politics is in shaping social and political attitudes in Northern Ireland. This period witnessed the near collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2015, the Brexit vote of 2016 (and subsequent debates of a border on the island of Ireland), and the suspension again of power-sharing from 2017 until 2020, and from 2022 onwards, possibly compounding a growing dissatisfaction and pessimism in Northern Ireland towards society and its institutions. This has also led to a widening

127 For example, perceptions of community relations deteriorated again, and civil unrest increased, around 2012-2013 during flag disputes following the vote by Belfast City Council to fly the Union flag over Belfast City Hall on 18 designated days, rather than every day.

gap emerging again between Ireland and Northern Ireland (at least up to 2018 when the NI data end) in satisfaction with democracy, political, judicial, and media trust, political voice and optimism, which had shrunk considerably in the post-recession period.

Unlike in Ireland, social attitudes in Northern Ireland have also been undergoing longer-term changes alongside shorter-term variation. On one hand, there has been a general improvement in satisfaction with democracy since the start of the century. However, political trust, media trust, and especially optimism have seen longer-term declines over the past 20 years or so. Why satisfaction with democracy should be slowly improving but political trust slowly declining in Northern Ireland is unclear. One possibility is that the former asks about 'the way democracy works in the United Kingdom' while the latter asks about 'political parties', 'The UK Government' and 'The House of Commons'. It may be that people are increasingly positive about the political system as a whole (relative to the pre-Good Friday Agreement situation), but they are increasingly dissatisfied with the way its constituent parts and political institutions (especially the UK-wide legislative bodies) function, as well as which specific party is in government.[128]

On the whole, around the start of the 21st century, societal attitudes were generally more positive in Ireland. However, the recession and subsequent years of economic contraction in Ireland collapsed this gap and the people of both Ireland and Northern Ireland generally held similar views. By 2016 however, the jurisdictions were once again diverging, and while Ireland continued to see its attitudes improve up to 2018 (and beyond), attitudes in Northern Ireland began to worsen (at least up to 2018 – our last data point for Northern Ireland).

6.3 GROWING (AND SHRINKING) SOCIAL GAPS IN ATTITUDES

The past two decades on the island have been marked by the emergence and widening of gaps in social and political attitudes between social groups; especially between those who left education earlier (less educated) and later (more educated). Generally speaking, in both Ireland and Northern Ireland, more educated groups hold more positive attitudes towards society. However, the size of this gap has grown (or emerged where once there was none) for satisfaction with democracy, political voice, trust in political institutions, trust in other people, and, to a lesser extent in Ireland, media trust and judicial trust. Most of these gaps emerged in the wake of the 2008/09 recession, with attitudes among the educated group often recovering faster compared to the less educated group. Given the

128 There has also been, at least since 2007, a general upward trend in feeling one's voice counts in politics. However, given data for this variable only started to be collected in 2007 it is difficult to discern whether this is a part of a longer-term trend in improving perceived political efficacy or part of a recovery to pre-recession levels observed for other indicators in the study.

timing of this emergent gap, one likely explanation is that more educated groups experienced less pecuniary hardship from the recession and recovered more quickly (see Chapter 2) (Cutler et al., 2015; Nolan and Voitchovsky, 2016).

In Northern Ireland, many of these gaps across education were still present in 2018. In Ireland, most attitudinal gaps across education closed somewhat with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021). The pandemic may have had a unifying impact on society, and between people and their institutions, during a time of a global health crisis. However, worryingly, many of these education gaps have re-emerged again in the post-pandemic period in Ireland. The most disconcerting education gap has been in trust in other people. In both Ireland and Northern Ireland, a post-recession gap emerged between more and less educated groups. However, this gap has continued to widen over the past 20-25 years, and by 2022/23 social trust among the less educated group had still not recovered to its pre-recession period high point while trust among the more educated group had returned, or even exceeded, pre-recession levels.

The exception to this pattern of widening gaps across education is in people's positive expectations for the future. While more educated groups were initially more optimistic about their future, in both jurisdictions this gap shrank in the post-recession period, driven by larger declines in optimism among the more educated group. In Ireland, although the more educated group have seen larger overall declines in optimism since the recession, a large gap between more and less educated groups re-emerged in 2020 and then widened in 2022/23, driven by sharp declines in optimism among the less educated group.

In Northern Ireland the pattern is different: it is the higher educated group that have seen their optimism more than halve over the past 20 years. While the proportion of the most educated group that were optimistic for the future was 20 percentage points higher than their less educated counterparts in the early 2000s, by 2018 there was almost no difference between the two groups. This 'collapse of optimism' among the more educated group may partly reflect the lower levels of wage returns to higher education in Northern Ireland, and perceived limited job opportunities, especially compared to their neighbours in Ireland (Smyth et al., 2022; Pivotal, 2023). It may also be reflected in the fact that many university graduates in Northern Ireland leave for job opportunities outside of Northern Ireland, or study away and do not return (Pivotal, 2021; Smyth et al., 2022). The more educated group who remain may be increasingly pessimistic about their life chances. In addition, more educated groups may have become especially disillusioned by the recent political instability in Northern Ireland, leading to their greater declines in optimism (while less educated groups already had comparatively lower optimism to begin with).

6.4 GENERATIONAL DIVIDES?

By far the largest differences in attitudes over the past 20-25 years are across time and much smaller differences are evident across generations. In other words, 'period-effects', such as periods like the recession and austerity, are much greater drivers of changes in attitudes than generational differences. In spite of this, there are several areas where people's generation appears to matter. In Northern Ireland, generational differences in satisfaction with democracy, political voice, political trust, and social trust appear to have widened over time, due to improvements in attitudes among older cohorts and more stability or even declines among younger cohorts. One driver of this may be that older cohorts, who experienced the worst period of 'The Troubles', or who were more likely to be adults during that time (such as the early 1970s), are still more likely to view the political instability of the post-Good Friday Agreement era more positively than what they lived through in the past (see Chapter 2). In Ireland, generational differences appear smaller and more stable, although the attitudes of younger cohorts were more affected by the recession.

There are however worrying signals that the youngest generations, particularly those born after 1989, on the island of Ireland may be becoming more disillusioned with their societies than older cohorts. In Ireland, their trends in satisfaction with democracy, political trust, and judicial trust have flatlined; their political voice and media trust have begun to decline; and their social trust remains low. In Northern Ireland, the younger cohort have started to see their satisfaction with democracy and political trust begin to decline, but also quite significant declines in judicial trust, media trust and optimism, along with flatlining political voice (at least up to 2018). They also have the lowest levels of social trust and highest belief that income inequality is too high. In fact, most of the declines in overall trends in attitudes witnessed in recent years across the island (specifically 2015/16 to 2018 in Northern Ireland and from around 2019 onwards in Ireland) have been concentrated within younger cohorts.

Several factors might be shaping this more negative turn among younger cohorts. Younger cohorts experienced a more negative impact of the pandemic on their education, labour market participation and job opportunities, as well as experiencing a particularly acute mental health impact (ILO, 2020; Eurofound, 2021; Roantree et al., 2021; Smyth and Nolan, 2022). Younger cohorts are also still carrying a lasting impact on their economic opportunities from the 2008/09 recession and its subsequent years (the 'lost decade') (Roantree et al., 2021). The pandemic may have therefore further compounded their more precarious economic situation. Younger cohorts may also be experiencing thwarted aspirations, driven especially by housing costs and their ability to own their own home (Roantree et al., 2021; Slaymaker et al., 2022). In Northern Ireland, thwarted

aspirations may also be coming more through the declining returns to higher education (Smyth et al., 2022), as well as feeling job opportunities are limited, leading to a significant number of young people (aged 14-25) planning on leaving Northern Ireland for work or further study (42 per cent)[129] (Pivotal, 2023). In addition, there is also growing frustration at the perceived paralysis of the Stormont institutions and inability to address pressing needs in young people's lives (such as the cost-of-living or poor mental health) and a belief that politics in Northern Ireland does not represent the issues most important to young people, such as climate change[130] and diversity (Shared Island Unit, 2022; Pivotal, 2023).

6.5 LIMITATIONS

Despite the insights garnered from this analysis, there are several limitations. Firstly, the Eurobarometer only tracks attitudes in Northern Ireland up to 2018. Apart from a small number of indicators available in the World Values Survey/European Values Study, no additional comparative data were available to take our understanding of attitudes in Northern Ireland up to the present. In Northern Ireland high-quality information on attitudes is regularly collected through the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, but no equivalent data are collected in Ireland. Given the recent significant events occurring in Northern Ireland, including the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, alongside the continued suspension of the power-sharing agreement, Stormont elections, and proposal of the Windsor Framework to resolve issues associated with the Northern Ireland Protocol, it is difficult to predict how social and political attitudes may have changed over the past five years.

A second issue with the analysis of Northern Ireland is that survey questions which asked respondents questions regarding 'their country' or 'their government' specified the UK or UK institutions, given Northern Ireland formed part of the UK survey. However, we cannot explicitly separate out Northern Irish attitudes towards the UK and its institutions and the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, such as the power-sharing assembly. Instead, the dynamics of both national and devolved institutions in the last two decades likely play a role, as flagged in the report.

Thirdly, the report did not set out to directly test through statistical modelling the drivers of trends in social and political attitudes over time. Such an approach was beyond the scope of this report. Instead, a narrative interpretation approach was taken where the factors (e.g. key events) most likely to be playing a role in attitudes

129 Based on a representative sample of 14–25-year-olds in Northern Ireland (Pivotal, 2023).

130 Although research has shown in Ireland that younger people perceive older people to care less about climate change than they actually do: https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/WP731.pdf.

were highlighted. As such, the key drivers posited here are those we believe are the most likely candidates driving change. However, they are not an exhaustive list.

Fourthly, this report did not systematically consider differences in attitudes by religious affiliation as the main data source used, the Eurobarometer, does not collect data on religious affiliation. Given the rapid fall in religious practice and a continuing decline in the role of the Catholic Church in Irish society during the period (see Chapter 2), combined with previous evidence (Fahey et al., 2005), religious affiliation is unlikely to be so important in understanding social and political attitudes in Ireland.[131] However, despite increasing secularisation in Northern Ireland (see Chapter 2), religious affiliation is almost certainly playing a role in social and political attitudes there, particularly as it remains, for many, an important marker of ethnic identity (Fahey et al., 2005; Devine and Robinson, 2019). That said, the growth in Northern Ireland of those reporting 'no religion' in 2021 – almost 20 per cent of the population – suggests that this may be changing. Future work could usefully consider the role of religious affiliation (and religious practice) in informing social and political attitudes in both parts of the island.

Fifthly, the link between attitudes and behaviour is complex and it is beyond the scope of the current study to investigate the impact of changes in societal attitudes on actions such as voting behaviour, protest, or social unrest. For example, during the 2008/09 recession, Ireland witnessed a rapid and substantial worsening of social and political attitudes. However this did not appear to manifest as substantial political or social turmoil,[132] such as a rise in right-wing populist parties or anti-EU sentiment witnessed in other European countries (O'Malley and Fitzgibbon, 2015; Elkink et al., 2020; Layte and Landy, 2018). The connection between the attitudinal trends outlined here and collective action warrants further research.

Lastly, it is important to keep in mind Eurobarometer surveys conducted between July-August 2020 and June-July 2022 were, at times, collected via web-based interviewing as opposed to in-person interviewing. These differences in survey mode could affect how people responded to the same question within and outside of this period. As such, some care is needed when examining trends during this period.

131 Recent work on attitudes to Muslim immigrants in Ireland finds that it is religious practice (e.g. weekly church attendance versus never attending) that tends to influence attitudes to immigrants, particularly towards Muslim immigration but also towards White immigration (Fahey et al., 2019). They find no evidence of an association between religious affiliation and attitudes to immigration, though the number of non-Catholics in their sample is very small.

132 Although the water charges protests around 2015 could be said to have been driven, in part, by the consequences of the recession (Layte and Landy, 2018).

6.6 KEY IMPLICATIONS FROM THE FINDINGS

As discussed in Chapter 1, the social and political attitudes studied here capture important dimensions of social cohesion, how well people believe their political system and jurisdictions' institutions are functioning, how fair their societies are, and their perceptions of the direction they feel their quality of life is headed within their society. Studying how such attitudes have changed over the past 20-25 years provides important insights into what the main drivers of change may be, what helps explain current attitudes on the island, while also providing clues as to where societies might be heading. While there are limits as to how government policy can directly influence social and political attitudes, the following section outlines key takeaways from the report on the societal conditions that appear to help build and maintain an engaged, optimistic, cohesive citizenry, connected to, and trusting of, their society and its institutions:

- The health of the economy, and how governments respond to economic crises, appear critical in shaping perceptions of society. This has been particularly acute in Ireland over the 21st century (although apparent in Northern Ireland too). While the 'lost decade' for Ireland's economy is often discussed, this report shows how Ireland experienced a corresponding 'lost decade' of trust and political satisfaction. The depth of the recession's impact on Irish attitudes compared to Northern Ireland highlights the potential social costs of the Irish economic model, relative to Northern Ireland's. Ireland's greater openness to the global economy brings benefits but also renders it vulnerable to global economic crises (McGuinness and Bergin, 2020a), which can have severe knock-on effects on the social and political health of society.

- Governments can also play a critical role in shaping societal attitudes, not least by maintaining a functioning political system in which governments are able to implement positive changes and are responsive to public needs and concerns. This appears to be particularly important for attitudes in Northern Ireland, given the severity of political instability that has taken place (e.g. prolonged periods of suspended government) but also because instability may trigger lasting anxieties regarding backsliding into conflict (e.g. worries about the knock-on effect of Brexit for community relations in the wake of the referendum). At the same time, developing political agendas to reflect concerns expressed among younger generations in particular (e.g. climate change, access to job opportunities/housing, mental health support) can be important to prevent negative attitudes and disengagement bedding-in over the long-term.

- Attention needs to be paid to growing divides in societal attitudes between more and less educated groups. Across both jurisdictions, less educated groups have become increasingly less positive about their societies relative to more educated groups, especially in the post-recession period (although for optimism in Northern Ireland the gap has shrunk). Potentially, long-term economic scars from the recession, falling returns to education, beliefs that

equal opportunities are fewer, thwarted aspirations, and greater vulnerability to crises such as the pandemic or cost-of-living crisis may be disproportionately born by less educated groups, who often have more precarious economic situations. Continued efforts to both protect such groups from crises and provide support for equal economic and social participation in society is necessary to maintain cohesive and positive relationships with their societies.

- The recent widening educational divide in optimism in Ireland points to the need to ensure that the benefits of recovery are spread more equally across society, for example through widening access to training and employment opportunities and ensuring that the standard of living of those with lower levels of education, including those dependent on welfare, does not fall further behind the rest of society through welfare and minimum wage policies. The falling optimism of better educated groups in Northern Ireland and their poorer perception of equal opportunities to get ahead (compared to higher educated in Ireland) points to a need for creating more high skilled employment opportunities. The decision of many graduates to move out of Northern Ireland for work, or not return after completing their studies, could be abated by such efforts (Smyth et al., 2022).
- Across both jurisdictions, there are positive signals regarding equal opportunity, given the vast majority believe 'a good education' and 'hard work' are important for 'getting ahead in life' (around 90 per cent of people hold this view). However, it is also concerning that a sizeable minority of people feel one's background (such as gender and ethnicity, coming from a wealthy family or having political connections) is also very important (around 30 per cent of people in more cases). These beliefs are also somewhat higher in Ireland.[133]
- Attention should also be paid to the finding that both jurisdictions appear to have experienced instability in the most recent periods available to study, with stalling and worsening attitudes reversing many of the gains made post-recession, especially among younger cohorts and less educated groups. In Northern Ireland (around 2015 to 2018), this has occurred alongside increasing political instability, the Brexit referendum, and the absences of the power-sharing Institutions. In Ireland (2019-2023), this has coincided with multiple societal challenges, such as the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis, housing crisis, and straining healthcare, as well as risks posed by disinformation spread online. Such worsening attitudes may not necessarily manifest as wider societal instability or disengagement, and simply reflect unease with the situation people are currently facing. However, they show how periods of multiple and compounding societal strains can pose a particular challenge to

[133] This could be for several reasons. Social background may indeed be more important in Ireland for 'getting ahead in life'. There could also be greater awareness in Ireland that certain groups (e.g. less wealthy, ethnic minorities, women) face greater challenges in life. Indeed, while people in Ireland are more likely to believe their country provides equal opportunities for getting ahead in life, they are also somewhat more likely to believe one's background can hold people back.

maintaining positive societal attitudes, especially among more precarious segments of society.

- Governments in both jurisdictions need to recognise evidence that their youngest cohorts appear to be becoming increasingly pessimistic about their society. This may reflect a growing dissatisfaction among younger cohorts regarding their place in society and their future opportunities. This may be a short-term dip in response to their immediate situation, such as frustration with the political situation in Northern Ireland (up to 2018) or the legacy of the pandemic and current cost-of-living and housing pressures in Ireland (up to 2023). However, it may reflect the beginning of broader, longer-term declines in societal attitudes among younger cohorts which, if they persist among these cohorts as they age, may lead to more negative attitudes overall in the future.
- Finally, this report demonstrates the value that having ongoing, comparable data on social and political attitudes can have for informing our understanding of society and societal change on the island of Ireland. Ireland has never had an ongoing survey of social and political attitudes, such as the British Social Attitudes survey or the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey. Much of what we know about attitudinal change in Ireland has been from ongoing European surveys, such as the Eurobarometer survey on which this report is based (see Fahey et al., 2019 for further details on these surveys). Yet most surveys which involve both Ireland and the United Kingdom do not collect a large enough sample of people from Northern Ireland to analyse independently (e.g. the European Social Survey). The Eurobarometer, which provided the best opportunity for cross-jurisdiction comparative analysis, stopped collecting a boosted sample of Northern Irish residents in 2018, following the Brexit referendum.[134] In addition, in Ireland, while European surveys of attitudes allows for excellent cross-national comparisons, there is little or no scope for fielding questions that are particularly relevant for Ireland. Ad hoc surveys of attitudes towards particular topics are useful for 'snapshots', but do not allow for tracking social change. All this points to the need for an independent, government financed, ongoing attitudes survey, that is independent of political changes and less reliant on ad hoc participation by non-governmental institutions, to provide detailed monitoring into social dynamics. By coordination with the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey – having common question modules, or some going identical questions – this survey would have the potential to track and understand convergence or divergence on the island.

[134] The World Values Survey/European Values Study, which does collect a separate booster sample of Northern Irish residents, is only collected every ten years or so and was not undertaken in Ireland in the most recent wave (2022).

REFERENCES

Aldama, A., C. Bicchieri, J. Freundt, B. Mellers and E. Peters (2021). 'How perceptions of autonomy relate to beliefs about inequality and fairness', *PloS one*, *16*(1), e0244387.

Bak, H. and Y. Yi (2020). 'When the American dream fails: The effect of perceived economic inequality on present-oriented behavior', *Psychology & Marketing*, *37*(10), 1321-1341.

Barr, B., P. Kinderman and M. Whitehead (2015). 'Trends in mental health inequalities in England during a period of recession, austerity and welfare reform 2004 to 2013', *Social Science & Medicine*, *147*, 324-331.

Barrett, A., A. Bergin and E. Kelly (2011). 'Estimating the Impact of Immigration on Wages in Ireland', *The Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1, Spring, 2011, pp. 1-26.

Bergin, A., E. Kelly and P. Redmond (2020).' The labor market in Ireland, 2000–2018: A remarkable turnaround in the labor market went hand in hand with economic recovery', *IZA World of Labor.* 2020: 410(2).

Bergin, A. and S. McGuinness (2021). 'Who is better off? Measuring cross-border differences in living standards, opportunities and quality of life on the island of Ireland', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, *32*(2), 143-160.

Bergin, A. and S. McGuinness (2022). *Modelling Productivity Levels in Ireland and Northern Ireland*. Economic and Social Research Institute.

Bericat, E. (2021). *Towards the future of Europe: Social factors shaping optimism and pessimism among citizens.*

Birrell, D. and D. Heenan (2017). 'The continuing volatility of devolution in Northern Ireland: The shadow of direct rule', *The Political Quarterly*, *88*(3), 473-479.

Bond, L., F. McGinnity and H. Russell (2010). *Making equality count*. Liffey Press: Dublin.

Borkowska, M. and J. Laurence (2021). 'Coming together or coming apart? Changes in social cohesion during the Covid-19 pandemic in England', *European Societies*, *23*(sup1), S618-S636.

Bornstein, B.H. and A.J. Tomkins (2015). 'Institutional trust: an introduction', *Motivating Cooperation and Compliance with Authority: The Role of Institutional Trust*, 1-11.

Bradley, C. (2020). *Changes in national and religious identity of 16 year olds over time*. ARK Research Update, No. 132.

Bradley, J. (2000). 'The Irish economy in comparative perspective', *Bust to boom*, 4-26.

Breen, M.J. and A.E. Healy (2016). *Changing values, attitudes and behaviours in Ireland: An analysis of European social survey data in Ireland, 2002-2012*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Brewer, J. (2015). 'Northern Ireland: Religion, religiosity and politics in a changing society', in *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity* (pp. 208-227). Brill.

Brown, S., A. Kontonikas, A. Montagnoli, M. Moro and L. Onnis (2021). 'Life satisfaction and austerity: Expectations and the macroeconomy', *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics*, *95*, 101780.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2020) 'Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2019, Poverty and Deprivation'. Weblink: https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/povertyanddeprivation/.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2023). *Arrivals from Ukraine in Ireland Series 10*. https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/p-aui/arrivalsfromukraineinirelandseries10/#:~:text=There%20were%2084%2C613%20Personal%20Public,Central%20Statistics%20Office%20(CSO).

Clark, A.E. and C. D'Ambrosio (2020). 'Economic Inequality and Subjective Well-Being Across the World', *Inequality in the Developing World*, 233-256.

Coakley, J. (2007). 'National identity in Northern Ireland: stability or change?', *Nations and Nationalism*, *13*(4), 573-597.

Connolly, S., A. Brick, C. O'Neill and M. O'Callaghan (2022). *An analysis of the Primary care systems of Ireland and Northern Ireland.* ESRI Research Series 137, Dublin: ESRI.

Conversano, C., A. Rotondo, E. Lensi, O. Della Vista, F. Arpone and M.A. Reda (2010). 'Optimism and its impact on mental and physical well-being', *Clinical practice and epidemiology in mental health: CP & EMH*, *6*, 25.

Corrigan, E., D. Foley, K. McQuinn, C. O'Toole and R. Slaymaker (2019). 'Exploring affordability in the Irish housing market', *The Economic and Social Review*, *50*(1, Spring), 119-157.

Coulter, C., N. Gilmartin, K. Hayward and P. Shirlow (2021). 'Northern Ireland a generation after Good Friday: Lost futures and new horizons in the 'long peace'', in *Northern Ireland a generation after Good Friday*. Manchester University Press.

Creighton, M., E. Gusciute and F. McGinnity (2022). 'Austerity, Short-term Economic Recovery and Public Perception of Immigration in Ireland', *Society*, *59*(4), 349-358.

Croxford, S., E. Emanuel, A. Ibitoye, J. Njoroge, C. Edmundson, M. Bardsley, ... and E. Phipps (2021). 'Preliminary indications of the burden of COVID-19 among people who inject drugs in England and Northern Ireland and the impact on access to health and harm reduction services', *Public Health*, *192*, 8-11.

Cunniffe, E., K. Murphy, E. Quinn, J. Laurence, F. McGinnity and K. Rush (2022). 'Explaining recent trends in international protection applications in Ireland', *Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Research Series*.

Cutler, D.M., W. Huang and A. Lleras-Muney (2015). 'When does education matter? The protective effect of education for cohorts graduating in bad times', *Social Science & Medicine*, *127*, 63-73.

Dalton, R.J. (2017). *The participation gap: Social status and political inequality*. Oxford University Press.

Darmody, M. and E. Smyth (forthcoming). *Student mobility in Ireland and Northern Ireland.* Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

Devine, P. and G. Robinson (2019). 'A Society Coming out of Conflict: Reflecting on 20 Years of Recording Public Attitudes with the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: Social and Behavioural Sciences', *Research Data Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, *4*(1), 1-12.

Devlin, A., S. McGuinness, A. Bergin and E. Smyth (2023). 'Education Across the Island of Ireland: Examining Educational Outcomes, Earnings and Intergenerational Mobility', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 34(2), *Analysing and Researching Ireland, North and South 2023*, pp. 30-47.

Disch, W. and R. Slaymaker (2023). *Housing affordability: Ireland in a cross-country context*. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Research Series 164.

Dornschneider-Elkink, J.A. (2016). 'Understanding the 2015 marriage referendum in Ireland: context, campaign, and conservative Ireland', *Irish Political Studies* 32(3):1-21.

Du, H. and R.B. King (2022). 'What predicts perceived economic inequality? The roles of actual inequality, system justification, and fairness considerations', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *61*(1), 19-36.

Elkink, J.A. and D.A. Farrell (2021). 'Predicting vote choice in the 2020 Irish general election', *Irish Political Studies*, 36:4, 521-534, DOI: 10.1080/07907184.2021.1978219.

Elkink, J.A., D.M. Farrell, S. Marien, T. Reidy and J. Suiter (2020). 'The death of conservative Ireland? The 2018 abortion referendum', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 65, 102142.

Engler, S. and D. Weisstanner (2021). 'The threat of social decline: income inequality and radical right support', *Journal of European Public Policy*, *28*(2), 153-173.

Eurofound (2021). *Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the EU*.

Eurofound (2022). *Maintaining trust during the COVID-19 pandemic*.

European Commission (2023). *Public Opinion in the European Union: Standard Eurobarometer 98; Winter 2022 - 2023*. Brussels: European Commission.

Fahey, É., F. McGinnity and R. Grotti (2019). 'Irish attitudes to Muslim immigrants', *The Economic and Social Review*, *50*(3, Autumn), 491-514.

Fahey, É., D. O'Brien, H. Russell and F. McGinnity (2019). 'European Survey Data on Attitudes to Equality and Human Rights Technical Paper', *Research Series*.

Fahey, T., H. Russell and C. Whelan (2007). *Best of times?: the social impact of the Celtic Tiger*. Institute of Public Administration.

Fahey, T., B.C. Hayes and R. Sinnott (2005). *Conflict and consensus: A study of values and attitudes in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland*. Institute of Public Administration.

Fahey, T. and E. McLaughlin (1999). 'Family and the State', *Ireland North and South: Perspectives from Social Science*, eds. London, UK: The British Academy, 117-40.

Ferrín, M. (2016). 'An empirical assessment of satisfaction with democracy' in Ferrín, M. and H. Kriesi *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ferrín, M. and H. Kriesi (Eds.) (2016). *How Europeans view and evaluate democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Field, L. (2020). 'Irish general election 2020: Two-and-a-half party system no more?', *Irish Political Studies*, *35*, 615-636.

Fisher, C. (2018). 'What is meant by 'trust' in news media?', *Trust in media and journalism: Empirical perspectives on ethics, norms, impacts and populism in Europe*, 19-38.

FitzGerald, J. and E.L. Morgenroth (2019). 'The Northern Ireland economy: problems and prospects', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, *49*, 64.

FitzGerald, J. (2000). 'The story of Ireland's failure–and belated success', *Bust to boom*, 27-57.

Fonseca, X., S. Lukosch and F. Brazier (2019). 'Social cohesion revisited: a new definition and how to characterize it', *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, *32*(2), 231-253.

Galston, W.A. (2001). 'Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4(1), 217-234.

Ganiel, G. (2022). 'Highly religious young Catholics in Northern Ireland: Renewing the Catholic landscape?', *Sociology Compass*, e13065.

Garry, J. and B. O'Leary (2023). 'Big division across North and South remains national identification', *The Irish Times.*

Gimpelson, V. and D. Treisman (2018). 'Misperceiving inequality', *Economics & Politics*, *30*(1), 27-54.

Gormley-Heenan, C. and A. Aughey (2017). 'Northern Ireland and Brexit: Three effects on 'the border in the mind'', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *19*(3), 497-511.

Gudgin, G. (1999). *Ireland North and South: Perspectives from Social Science*.

Greeley, A.M. (2017). *Religion in Europe at the end of the second millennium: A sociological profile*. Routledge.

Hamilton, C. (2022). 'Crime, justice and criminology in the Republic of Ireland', *European Journal of Criminology*, 14773708211070215.

Han, C., A. Green, B. Hoskins and J.G. Janmaat (2012). *Perceptions of Inequalities: implications for social cohesion*. LLAKES Centre, Institute of Education, University of London.

Hayward, K. and M. Komarova (2021). *The Border after Brexit: Experiences of Local Communities in the Central Border Region of Ireland/Northern Ireland*. Irish Central Border Area Network.

Hayward, K. and B. Rosher (2020). *Political attitudes at a time of flux*. ARK Research Reports; No. 133. ARK. https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/sites/default/files/2020-06/update133.pdf.

Hayward, K. and B. Rosher (2021). *Political Attitudes in Northern Ireland in a Period of Transition*. ARK Research Update, No. 142.

Hayward, K. and B. Rosher (2023). *Political Attitudes in Northern Ireland 25 Years after the Agreement*. ARK Research Update, No. 151. https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/sites/default/files/2023-04/update151.pdf.

Hayward, K., M. Komarova and B. Rosher (2022). *Political Attitudes in Northern Ireland after Brexit and under the Protocol*. ARK.

Heath, A., R. Breen and C. Whelan (1999). *Ireland North and South: perspectives from social science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy.

Heiserman, N., B. Simpson and R. Willer (2020). 'Judgments of economic fairness are based more on perceived economic mobility than perceived inequality', *Socius*, *6*, 2378023120959547.

Helliwell, J.F. and R.D. Putnam (2004). 'The social context of well-being', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences*, *359*(1449), 1435-1446.

Herreros, F. (2023). 'The State and Trust', *Annual Review of Political Science*, *26*.

Honohan, P. and B. Walsh (2002). 'Catching up with the leaders: the Irish hare', *Brookings papers on economic activity*, pp.1-57.

ILO (2020). *Youth and Covid-19: Impact on Jobs, Education, Right and Mental Wellbeing*. Brussels: International Labor Organization.

Inglehart, R. (1971). 'The silent revolution in Europe: Intergenerational change in post-industrial societies', *American political science review*, *65*(4), 991-1017.

Inglis, T. (1998). *Moral monopoly: The rise and fall of the Catholic Church in modern Ireland*. Univ. College Dublin Press.

Janmaat, J.G. (2019). 'The development of generalized trust among young people in England', *Social Sciences*, *8*(11), 299.

Kaiser, C. and A.J. Oswald (2022). 'The scientific value of numerical measures of human feelings', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(42), e2210412119.

Karv, T., M. Lindell and L. Rapeli (2022). 'How context matters: The significance of political homogeneity and language for political efficacy', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *45*(1), 46-67.

Kawachi, I. (1999). 'Social capital and community effects on population and individual health', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *896*(1), 120-130.

Kelly, E., S. McGuinness, P.J. O'Connell, D. Haugh and A.G. Pandiella (2014). 'Transitions in and out of unemployment among young people in the Irish recession', *Comparative Economic Studies*, *56*, 616-634.

Kennelly, B., M. O'Callaghan, D. Coughlan, J. Cullinan, E. Doherty, L. Glynn, ... and M. Queally (2020). 'The COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland: An overview of the health service and economic policy response', *Health Policy and Technology*, *9*(4), 419-429.

Keyes, K.M., R.L. Utz, W. Robinson and G. Li (2010). 'What is a cohort effect? Comparison of three statistical methods for modeling cohort effects in obesity prevalence in the United States, 1971–2006', *Social science & medicine*, *70*(7), 1100-1108.

Khaile, F.T., N.V. Roman, K.R. October, M. Van Staden and T.V. Balogun (2022). Perceptions of trust in the context of social cohesion in selected rural communities of South Africa', *Social Sciences*, *11*(8), 359.

Kinsella, S. (2012). 'Is Ireland really the role model for austerity?', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, *36*(1), 223-235.

Kostelka, F. and J. Rovny (2019). 'It's not the left: Ideology and protest participation in old and new democracies', *Comparative Political Studies*, *52*(11), 1677-1712.

Kralj, M., M. Zaletel, D. Lavtar and T. Zupanic (2019). *Do respondents answer differently in web survey than in face-to-face interview: field work experiment from the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS)*.

Layte, R. and D. Landy (2018). 'The Fighting Irish? Explaining the Temporal Pattern of Social Protest during Ireland's Fiscal Crisis 2008–2014', *Sociology*, 52(6), 1270-1289.

Leahy, P. (2023). 'Northern and southern voters have similar views on wealth redistribution', *The Irish Times*. Tuesday, January 31, 2023. https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/01/31/northern-and-southern-voters-have-similar-views-on-wealth-redistribution.

Lee, D., C.Y. Chang and H. Hur (2021). 'Political consequences of income inequality: assessing the relationship between perceived distributive fairness and political efficacy in Asia', *Social Justice Research*, *34*, 342-372.

Lim, C. and J. Laurence (2015). 'Doing good when times are bad: Volunteering behaviour in economic hard times', *The British journal of sociology*, *66*(2), 319-344.

Lo Iacono, S. (2019). 'Law-breaking, fairness, and generalized trust: The mediating role of trust in institutions', *Plos one*, *14*(8), e0220160.

Loveless, M. (2013). 'The deterioration of democratic political culture: Consequences of the perception of inequality', *Social Justice Research*, *26*, 471-491.

Lozano, M. and E. Rentería (2021). *Trends in the length of long-term unemployment in Europe: an approach using working life tables, 2000-2018*.

MacInnes, T., S. Bushe, A. Tinson, T.B. Born and H. Aldridge (2014). *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2014*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Magelssen, M., M. Supphellen, P. Nortvedt and L.J. Materstvedt (2016). 'Attitudes towards assisted dying are influenced by question wording and order: a survey experiment', *BMC medical ethics*, *17*(1), 1-9.

McAlister, S., M.L. Corr, C. Dwyer and O. Drummond (2021). *It Didn't end in 1998: Examining the Impacts of Conflict Legacy Across Generations*. Belfast: Commission for Victims and Survivors.

McEvoy, C. (2016). 'The role of political efficacy on public opinion in the European Union', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *54*(5), 1159-1174.

McGarry, J. and B. O'Leary (1995). *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images*.

McGinnity, F. and G. Kingston (2017). 'An Irish welcome? Changing Irish attitudes to immigrants and immigration: The role of recession and immigration', *The Economic and Social Review*, *48*(3, Autumn), 253-279.

McGinnity, F., R. Grotti, H. Russell and É. Fahey (2018). *Attitudes to diversity in Ireland*. ESRI and The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

McGinnity, F., S. Enright, E. Quinn, B. Maître, I. Privalko, M. Darmody and M. Polakowski (2020). *Monitoring report on integration 2020*. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Research Series.

McGinnity, F., J. Laurence and E. Cunniffe (2023). *Comparing migrant integration in Ireland and Northern Ireland*. Economic and Social Research Institute.

McGuinness, S. and A. Bergin (2020a). 'The political economy of a Northern Ireland border poll', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 44(4), 781-812.

McGuinness, S. and A. Bergin (2020b). *Existing evidence and continued uncertainties surrounding a Northern Ireland border poll* (No. RB202017).

Melita, D., G.B. Willis and R. Rodríguez-Bailón (2021). 'Economic inequality increases status anxiety through perceived contextual competitiveness', *Frontiers in psychology*, *12*, 637365.

Mieriņa, I. and C. Edmunds (2014). 'Is Communism to Blame for Political Disenchantment in Post-Communist Countries? Cohort Analysis of Adults' Political Attitudes', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 66:7, 1031-1061,

Murphy, M.C. (2023). 'The Rise of the Middle Ground in Northern Ireland: What does it Mean?', *The Political Quarterly*, *94*(1), 95-103.

Nannestad, P. (2008). 'What have we learned about generalized trust, if anything?', *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.*, *11*, 413-436.

National Economic and Social Forum (2015). *Managing Migration in Ireland: A Social and Economic Analysis*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Nolan, B. and S. Voitchovsky (2016). 'Job loss by wage level: lessons from the Great Recession in Ireland', *IZA Journal of European Labor Studies*, *5*, 1-29.

Nolan, B., P. O'Connell and C. Whelan (2000). *Bust to boom?: the Irish experience of growth and inequality*. Dublin Institute of Public Administration.

NYCI (2013). *Young People Hit Hardest by Recession.* Dublin, Ireland: National Youth Council of Ireland.

O'Connell, P.J. (2000). 'The dynamics of the Irish labour market in comparative perspective' in *Bust to boom*. pp.58-89. Institute of Public Administration, Dublin.

OECD (2011). *Perspectives on global development 2012: Social cohesion in a shifting world*.

O'Higgins, N. (2012). 'This time it's different? Youth labour markets during 'the Great Recession'', *Comparative Economic Studies*, *54*, 395-412.

O'Malley, E. and J. FitzGibbon (2015). 'Everywhere and nowhere: Populism and the Puzzling Non-Reaction to Ireland's Crises', Chapter 17 in Kriesi, H. and T.S. Pappas (eds) *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*, ECPR Press.

Orviska, M. and A. Caplanova and J. Hudson (2014). 'The impact of democracy on well-being', *Social indicators research*, *115*, 493-508.

O'Toole, C., R. Slaymaker, K. McQuinn, C. Coffey and E. Corrigan (2020). *Exploring the short-run implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on affordability in the Irish private rental market* (No. 108). Research Series.

Page, D. (2018). 'When Does Sexuality-Based Discrimination Motivate Political Participation?', *Political Psychology*, *39*(5), 1013-1030.

Perry, J. (2021). *Trust in public institutions: Trends and implications for economic security.* Geneva: United Nations: Division for Inclusive Social Development.

Pivotal (2021). *Should I Stay or Should I Go? Reasons for Leaving Northern Ireland for Study or Work*. Belfast, Northern Ireland: Pivotal.

Pivotal (2023). *Youth Voices: Life, Work and Study in Northern Ireland*. Belfast, Northern Ireland: Pivotal.

Pleeging, E., M. Burger and J. van Exel (2021). 'The relations between hope and subjective well-being: A literature overview and empirical analysis', *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *16*, 1019-1041.

Polavieja, J. (2013). 'Economic crisis, political legitimacy, and social cohesion', *Economic crisis, quality of work and social integration: The European experience*, 256-278.

Pop-Eleches, G. and J.A. Tucker (2017). *Communism's shadow: Historical legacies and contemporary political attitudes (Vol. 3)*. Princeton University Press. Princeton, NJ.

Power, S.A. (2016). 'A violent past but a peaceful present: The cultural psychology of an Irish recession', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 22(1), 60-66.

Power, S.A. and D. Nassbaum (2016). '"You reap what you sow": the psychology of Irish austerity protests', *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/science/head-quarters/2016/mar/15/economics-as-a-morality-play-austerity-protest-in-ireland.

Putnam, R.D. (2016). *Our kids: The American dream in crisis*. Simon and Schuster.

Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon and Schuster, New York.

Ramiro, L. (2016). 'Support for radical left parties in Western Europe: Social background, ideology and political orientations', *European Political Science Review*, *8*(1), 1-23.

Reyes, G. and L. Gasparini (2022). 'Are fairness perceptions shaped by income inequality? evidence from Latin America', *The Journal of Economic Inequality*, *20*(4), 893-913.

Regan, M. (2020). 'Wage scarring among unlucky European cohorts' (No. 668). ESRI Working Paper. https://www.esri.ie/publications/wage-scarring-among-unlucky-european-cohorts.

Rico, G., M. Guinjoan and E. Anduiza (2020). 'Empowered and enraged: Political efficacy, anger and support for populism in Europe', *European Journal of Political Research*, *59*(4), 797-816.

Roantree, B., B. Maître, A. McTague and I. Privalko (2021). *Poverty, income inequality and living standards in Ireland*. Economic and Social Research Institute.

Roantree, B., M. Barrett and P. Redmond (2022). *Poverty, income inequality and living standards in Ireland: Second annual report,* Jointly-published Reports 1, Dublin: ESRI and The Community Foundation for Ireland, https://doi.org/10.26504/jr1.

Roantree, B. and K. Doorley (2023). *Poverty, income inequality and living standards in Ireland: Third annual report.* Jointly-published Reports 4, Dublin: ESRI and Community Foundation Ireland.

Robinson, G. and P. Devine (2017). *Bonfires, Flags, Identity and Cultural Traditions.* ARK Research Update 199. Belfast: ARK.

Roche, W.K., P.J. O'Connell and A. Prothero (Eds.) (2016). *Austerity and Recovery in Ireland: Europe's Poster Child and the Great Recession*. Oxford University Press.

Rohrschneider, R. and M. Loveless (2010). 'Macro salience: How economic and political contexts mediate popular evaluations of the democracy deficit in the European Union', *The Journal of Politics*, *72*(4), 1029-1045.

Rothstein, B. (2001). 'The universal welfare state as a social dilemma', *Rationality and society*, *13*(2), 213-233.

Russell, H., F. McGinnity and G. Kingston (2014). *Gender and the quality of work: From boom to recession*. Equality Authority and Economic and Social Research Institute.

Russell, H., I. Privalko, F. McGinnity and S. Enright (2021). *Monitoring adequate housing in Ireland*. Economic and Social Research Institute.

Saxton, G.D. and M. Benson (2003). 'The origins of socially and politically hostile attitudes toward immigrants and outgroups: Economics, ideology, or national context?', *Journal of Political Science*, *31*, 101-137.

Schneider, S.K. and P. Ingraham (1984). 'The impact of political participation on social policy adoption and expansion: A cross-national, longitudinal analysis', *Comparative Politics*, *17*(1), 107-122.

Schudson, M. (2022). 'What Does "Trust in the Media" Mean?', *Daedalus*, *151*(4), 144-160.

Schuman, H. and S. Presser (1996). *Questions and answers in attitude surveys: Experiments on question form, wording, and context*. Sage.

Schwadel, P. (2011). 'Age, period, and cohort effects on religious activities and beliefs', *Social Science Research*, *40*(1), 181-192.

Shared Island Unit (2022). *Identities on a Shared Island - New Generation Perspectives*. Dublin, Ireland: Shared Island Unit - Shared Island Dialogue Series.

Shirlow, P. (2021). *The Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol: Consensus or Conflict?*. University of Liverpool.

Singh, S.P. and Q. Mayne (2023). 'Satisfaction with Democracy: A Review of a Major Public Opinion Indicator', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *87*(1), 187-218.

Simpson, M., A. Gray, G. Horgan and S. Bunyan (2022). *The other division in Northern Ireland: public attitudes to poverty, economic hardship and social security.* ARK Research Update, No. 146.

Slaymaker, R., B. Roantree, A. Nolan and C. O'Toole (2022). *Future trends in housing tenure and the adequacy of retirement income* (No. 143). Research Series.

Smyth, E., A. Devlin, A. Bergin and S. McGuinness (2022). *A North-South comparison of education and training systems: lessons for policy* (No. 138). Research Series.

Smyth, E. and A. Nolan (2022). *Disrupted transitions? Young adults and the COVID-19 pandemic*. Research Series No. 142.

Sønderskov, K.M. and T. Dinesen (2016). 'Trusting the state, trusting each other? The effect of institutional trust on social trust', *Political Behavior*, *38*, 179-202.

Spadaro, G., K. Gangl, J.W. Van Prooijen, P.A. Van Lange and C.O. Mosso (2020). 'Enhancing feelings of security: How institutional trust promotes interpersonal trust', *PloS one*, *15*(9), e0237934.

Spruyt, B., G. Keppens and F. Van Droogenbroeck (2016). 'Who supports populism and what attracts people to it?', *Political Research Quarterly*, *69*(2), 335-346.

Stolle, D. (2003). 'The sources of social capital', in *Generating social capital: Civil society and institutions in comparative perspective* (pp. 19-42). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Stuckler, D., A. Reeves, R. Loopstra, M. Karanikolos and M. McKee (2017). 'Austerity and health: the impact in the UK and Europe', *The European Journal of Public Health*, *27*(suppl_4), 18-21.

Tahlin, M. (2013). 'Economic crisis and employment change: the great regression' in Gallie (ed) *Economic crisis, quality of work and social integration: The European experience*, 30-57.

Tc'ihlin, M. (2013). 'Economic crisis and employment change: The great regression', *Economic Crisis, Quality of Work, and Social Integration: The European Experience*, 30.

Teague, P. (2019). 'Brexit, the Belfast Agreement and Northern Ireland: Imperilling a fragile political bargain', *The Political Quarterly*, *90*(4), 690-704.

Thöni, C., J.R. Tyran and E. Wengström (2012). 'Microfoundations of social capital', *Journal of Public Economics*, *96*(7-8), 635-643.

Todd, J. (2021). 'Unionism, Identity and Irish Unity: Paradigms, Problems and Paradoxes', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Analysing and Researching Ireland, North and South 2021, pp. 53-77.

Tonon, G. (2014). 'Democracy, Satisfaction With', in Michalos, A.C. (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. 1541-43.

Tyler, T.R. and Y.J. Huo (2002). *Trust in the law: Encouraging public cooperation with the police and courts*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Uslaner, E.M. (2002). *The moral foundations of trust*. Available at SSRN 824504.

Waldron, R. (2023). 'Generation rent and housing precarity in 'post crisis' Ireland', *Housing studies*, *38*(2), 181-205.

Walker, L.D. and G. Kehoe (2013). 'Regime transition and attitude toward regime: The Latin American gender gap in support for democracy', *Comparative Politics*, *45*(2), 187-205.

Wickham, S., L. Bentley, T. Rose, M. Whitehead, D. Taylor-Robinson and B. Barr (2020). 'Effects on mental health of a UK welfare reform, Universal Credit: a longitudinal controlled study', *The Lancet Public Health*, *5*(3), e157-e164.

Whitaker Square,
Sir John Rogerson's Quay,
Dublin 2
Telephone **+353 1 863 2000**
Email **admin@esri.ie**
Web **www.esri.ie**
Twitter **@ESRIDublin**

AN INSTITIÚID UM THAIGHDE EACNAMAÍOCHTA AGUS SÓISIALTA
ESRI ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE