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## A Reply

Rory Montgomery

Irish Studies in International Affairs, Volume 32, Number 2, 2021, pp. 115-116  
(Article)

Published by Royal Irish Academy



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## A REPLY

Rory Montgomery

I am very appreciative of Oran Doyle's positive and thoughtful response to my article. He focusses mostly on what I say about a possible sequencing of referendums and negotiations. While applauding my emphasis on maximising unionist engagement in the shaping of a stable and peaceful united Ireland, he questions the workability of what I sketch out (preliminary thinking to which I am not wedded).

To clarify, in no way would I require 'people to vote blind'. I emphasise the necessity for the two governments to set out clearly in advance the process to follow votes in favour of a united Ireland, and for the Irish government in particular to set out its general thinking on the many substantive questions—constitutional, legal and other. But within this context it would be reasonable for voters to understand that much might have to be settled subsequently.

Professor Doyle and I agree that it is unlikely that unionists will engage in 'design work' for a united Ireland ahead of a referendum in Northern Ireland. I also acknowledge in the article that there is a risk that at least some of them would continue to refuse to engage subsequently. I agree that it would be necessary for the governments to set out in advance the general parameters of default arrangements which would apply in the absence of agreement, and also that in the end unification would have to proceed.

However, given the primary importance I give to making every possible effort to create a sense of unionist co-ownership of a shared home, even though this may well require much time and patience, I do not think it would be wise or necessary to be unduly specific about those default arrangements. Moreover, while leaving the design work until after unification, a possibility

Author's e-mail: [rmontgomery1959@icloud.com](mailto:rmontgomery1959@icloud.com)

doi: <https://doi.org/10.3318/ISIA.2021.32b.7>

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mentioned by Professor Doyle, might in some ways be neater, I think this is more likely to promote resistance and instability by stoking unionist fears of their being rushed into a united Ireland before having any chance to shape it, and with no certainty that they could do so afterwards. As he suggests, in the absence of agreement there might be some risk that Westminster would refuse to give effect to unification, creating constitutional chaos, but I think that this would be unlikely, and a risk worth taking, if the British government had in advance agreed to the post-referendum process.

These are complex questions and, as the recently published *Interim Report of the Working Group on Unification Referendums on the Island of Ireland* makes clear, none of the range of configurations which can be envisaged might fully meet all desiderata. They all involve risks of one kind or another. The choices to be made, within legal constraints, are very political, and would in the end need to be settled politically, but it is good that they are starting to be explored.

Read the article by Rory Montgomery,  
‘The Good Friday Agreement and a United Ireland’,  
<https://doi.org/10.3318/ISIA.2021.32b.5>,  
and the response by Oran Doyle,  
‘Configuring Irish Unification Processes’,  
<https://doi.org/10.3318/ISIA.2021.32b.6>