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**Prospects for a Settlement of the
Falklands/Malvinas Dispute**

**An Analysis of Public Opinion in
Britain and Argentina***

by

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and

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INTRODUCTION

One of the research projects currently under way at the Institute is the monitoring of Anglo-Argentine relations after the 1982 war and the analysis of the protracted conflict over the South Atlantic islands, known in Buenos Aires as the "Malvinas" and in London as the "Falklands". [See an earlier product of this research in W. Little & C.R. Mitchell (eds) In the Aftermath, College Park, MD: University of Maryland Press, 1989.]

The original focus of our research was on the nature and causes of the conflict itself and on the efforts of the parties [the Argentines, the British and the Islanders] to rebuild relationships after the short, but violent war and to seek long term solutions to the fundamental issues in conflict. Recently, its focus has broadened to a more general consideration of alternative governance systems or "regimes" for small island communities and of innovative solutions for conflicts over such communities.

Whatever ingenious resolutions might be discussed or devised, however, there always remains the problem that options and agreements have to be "sold" to constituents and general publics, so that the process of arriving at a long term resolution of any conflict needs to take into account the barriers which public views and attitudes may [or may not] pose to policy changes. Accurate assessment of the "ripe moment" needs, therefore, to take into account both the flexibility or intransigence of public opinion as well as leaders' perception of their own room for maneuver within that range of opinion.

This present Occasional Paper throws considerable light on this issue by analysing the dynamics of public opinion in both Argentina and Britain in the period since the 1982 war. The Institute was fortunate that Dr. Noguera and Dr. Willetts were both interested in carrying out the survey they conducted in 1990 and agreeable to presenting their findings in both an Institute and in a South Atlantic Council Occasional Paper. We were able to support this work out of a grant from the Glad Foundation in New York. We would like to express appreciation to both researchers and to the Foundation for making the research and the publication of this paper possible.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A small group of islands in the South West Atlantic is known in the Spanish-speaking world as the Malvinas and in the English-speaking world as the Falkland Islands. They are nearly a thousand nautical miles from Buenos Aires, but less than two-hundred miles from the southern Argentine province of Tierra del Fuego. The temperate climate sustains an economy that used to be based on sheep farming. Since 1986, the main income has been derived from licensing international fishing fleets, in a Falkland Islands Interim Management and Conservation Zone (FICZ) covering the waters around the Islands.

There are just two thousand permanent inhabitants of British descent, with another thousand expatriate residents, consisting mainly of the British Army garrison at Mount Pleasant, plus small numbers of business people involved in the fishing industry and officials employed in government services. The Argentine government claims "Las Malvinas son Argentinas" by virtue of geography, history, and international law. It is argued that the Islands were a Spanish possession and that Argentina succeeded to the Spanish title until they were taken by the British by force in 1833. The British government claims that more than a century and a half of continuous, effective, peaceful control and the clear wishes of the inhabitants justify the Islands remaining British. The Argentine military dictatorship sought to end this dispute by an invasion of the Malvinas in April 1982, but were astonished to be faced with a British Task Force being sent to recapture the Falklands. The British victory in June 1982 concluded this stage of conflict for the immediate future, but the underlying issues still remain.

In the 1960's it appeared that Britain might transfer sovereignty over the Islands to Argentina. In 1964 Argentina brought its claim to the UN Special Committee on Colonialism

and in the following year the Committee's report placed the question before the General Assembly. The result was Resolution 2065 (XX) of 16 December 1965: it invited the two governments to negotiate "without delay", "bearing in mind ... the interests of the population of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)." The British only abstained on this resolution, so that it was passed unopposed, and then they proceeded to negotiate with the Argentinians. By August 1968 the two sides had agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding providing that "a final settlement will recognize Argentina's sovereignty over the Islands", "after four and within ten years." The combination of reactions from the Islanders, from Parliament and from the media led the British government to reject the Memorandum and Michael Stewart, then the Foreign Secretary, went as far as endorsing "the paramountcy of the Islanders' wishes." A similar process occurred in 1980 when negotiations between Britain and Argentina were moving towards the idea of a 'lease back' agreement. Under this proposal the British would have recognized Argentina's sovereignty claim, but the Argentinians would have agreed to allow the British to administer the Islands for a fixed period of years. (The British Foreign Office was envisaging a period of 99 years, whereas the Argentine Foreign Ministry wanted something nearer to five to ten years.) Again the Islanders' lobby and parliamentary opposition forced withdrawal of the compromise proposal.¹

After the cease-fire in 1982, a debate on the future of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands continued in many forums. At the official level the British government confidently assumed the continuation of the current status quo, while the Argentine government with equal confidence asserted its claim to sovereignty. The clash was most evident in the 1980's at the annual debates of the United Nations General Assembly and in the two mini-crises over the declaration of the

fishing zone around the Islands in October 1986 and over the British "Fire Focus" military exercises in March 1988. At the same time there was an implicit desire by both sides in the 1980's for relations to improve, as evidenced by the attempt at talks in Bern in July 1984, the British lifting of trade restrictions in July 1985, President Alfonsin's conciliatory proposals of November 1986, the exchanges via Washington in 1987-88, President Menem's offer to put sovereignty "under an umbrella" in July 1989 and the talks in Madrid that led to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations in February 1990. Since the exchange of ambassadors there has been a rapid improvement in bilateral relations, but no attempt to work towards an agreed future for the Islands.

Within Britain two groups have put pressure on the government to shift the emphasis on policy. On one side the Falkland Islands Association has promoted the rights of the Islanders, been cautious about contacts with the Argentines and argued for a strong unilateral policy to regulate fishing in waters around the Falklands. On the other side the South Atlantic Council has promoted contacts with Argentina, supported long-term settlement of the dispute and put forward the case for a multilateral regime for fishing around the Falklands. In Argentina the main lobbying has come from the various groups representing those who were wounded or bereaved as a result of the war, and from several research institutes.² None of these have sought any change in Argentine government policy on the future of the Islands. However, there have been disputes between some relatives of the soldiers who died in 1982 and the government, with the relatives wanting the bodies returned for burial at home and the government objecting to a transfer from the Malvinas to the mainland. In addition business interests have been keen to promote the resumption of economic relations with Britain.

The debate about the future of the Islands has produced a variety of creative solutions.³

In both Britain and Argentina lease-back still has some adherents, notably among active and retired diplomats.⁴ In Argentina the emphasis has usually been upon recognition of the Malvinas as an Argentine province, with it being granted a special autonomous constitutional status, so that the Islanders could maintain control over their way of life.⁵ No problems arise over the Islanders maintaining their religion, their educational system, use of English and driving on the left-hand side of the road. Somewhat more controversial are the questions of whether they would retain a separate currency and local control over immigration from the mainland. In Britain the idea of an autonomous province has been explored by the South Atlantic Council, in a paper analysing similar provisions that have operated since 1921 in the Aland Islands.⁶ Some of the more internationally minded have advocated the territory coming under the UN Trusteeship System. One variant of this idea is that the Falklands could be designated a "strategic area" under the Security Council, in which the British government would have the right to veto any decisions, rather than under the Trusteeship Council, in which the British could be outvoted.⁷

The problem with the UN Trusteeship is that it is regarded in the UN Charter as a temporary system pending "progressive development towards self-government or independence."⁸ However, a new form of permanent UN administration could be established by the Security Council or the General Assembly under provisions for the "Pacific Settlement of Disputes."

Martin Dent, from the University of Keele, has been a persuasive advocate of Argentina and Britain sharing sovereignty over the Islands and leaving the day-to-day decision-making to a Governor and local Council.⁹ Edna Lemle, a New York business woman with a commitment to conflict resolution, has proposed a "pentocracy" for the Islands, consisting of five elements:

the two external disputants, the local community, business interests and the UN as the voice of the international community. This scheme is designed as a model for resolving many regional disputes.¹⁰ Occasionally there are hints from the Islands that independence might be a desirable option, though that would be meaningless unless it was either accepted by the Argentine government or guaranteed by a continued British military presence.¹¹

The debate at both the official level and among private groups has been, exclusively within Britain and predominately with Argentina, a debate within two small elites consisting of individuals who each have very personal reasons for the issue being salient to them. This paper will examine opinion poll data in Britain and Argentina to see how the general public in each country responds to the concerns of the two elites. First we will analyse public attitudes to the improvement of bilateral relations between Britain and Argentina. Secondly, it is important to know whether attitudes towards changes in the status quo are inflexible or whether a negotiated settlement to the Falklands/Malvinas dispute might be acceptable.

In their normal coverage of public attitudes in Britain to a wide range of issues, the Gallup Poll asked a limited number of questions on British-Argentine relations on three occasions in July 1984, October 1984 and February 1986. Meanwhile, in Argentina SOCMERC have held a regular series of polls and in March 1990 it was commissioned by the South Atlantic Council to ask the same questions of the Argentine electorate as Gallup was asking that month in Britain. Thus the March 1990 polls in each country give a basis for direct comparisons of attitudes in the two countries. A further poll in Argentina in August 1990 updated some of the March 1990 results.¹²

2. ATTITUDES TO IMPROVED ARGENTINE-BRITISH RELATIONS

If we consider, first of all, what were British attitudes to five specific steps that might be taken to normalize relations, we find there was overwhelming approval for better relations between Britain and Argentina and no suggestions that the breaks caused by the war should have continued. Those interviewed were asked whether they would have approved or disapproved "if the government decided to do the following: resume trade between Britain and Argentina; allow relatives of dead Argentinean soldiers to visit the graves in the Falklands; reach an agreement with the Argentineans on fishing in the seas around the Falklands"; or "resume diplomatic relations between Britain and Argentina."¹³

It is striking that on each occasion more than 60% of the British electorate said they "approve" or they "strongly approve" of each measure, while less than a quarter said they "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove". Although one might have thought it was the least sensitive step to take, the resumption of trade relations received the least approval and the most disapproval. Support for a fishing agreement fluctuated, with a dip in February 1986 and an increase in March 1990, for which there seem to be no obvious explanations. The establishment of diplomatic relations received somewhat higher levels of approval, though there was less approval when relations were re-established after eight years than in the earlier period shortly after the war. The variation in responses to these three steps is essentially little more than sampling fluctuations against a uniform pattern of high approval. When we come to the question of whether the public would approve if the government decided to allow visits to the war graves, the difference was dramatic: approval for the visits was absolutely overwhelming.

TABLE 1

Britain: Percentage approval of steps to improve relations with Argentina
(Figures in brackets give the percentage who said "strongly approve")

Steps	July 1984	October 1984	February 1986	March 1990
Resume trade	69 (19)	65 (10)	-	68 (14)
Allow direct air flights	-	-	-	69 (13)
Agreement on fishing	69 (18)	70 (10)	62 (11)	74 (19)
Diplomatic relations	76 (22)	74 (12)	70 (13)	70 (17)
Visits to war graves	94 (42)	92 (31)	87 (26)	90 (36)

The results do not show any significant variation between Conservative and Labour voters.¹⁴ This is contrary to what might have been expected from the idea of a 'Falklands factor' sustaining support for the Conservative Party. A long debate has raged in the academic journals between those who argue that the Conservative government's popularity increase in 1982 can be explained by the economy moving out of the 1981-82 recession and those who argue that there was in addition a substantial benefit to the Conservatives from public support for fighting and winning the Falklands war. What is common to all those in the debate is that unemployment made the government unpopular in 1980-81 and it continued to be important during and after the 1982 war. It also must be agreed that the Falklands factor emerged in May and June 1982 and declined thereafter. (Some of the early writers, using data just for 1982-83, gave the impression that the Falklands factor was "permanent", but that should now be interpreted as "a substantial effect continuing until the 1983 general election." Clearly, with the Conservative government having recorded in early 1990 the lowest level of support since polls began, it would be preposterous to suggest there had been a truly permanent effect.) An Essex University team argued that the government was only boosted by four percent in the polls and this effect

evaporated rapidly. Norpeth estimated the gain was 11% in June 1982 decaying to five or six percent by the end of 1985. Either way the Falklands factor was no longer significant in the late 1980's and thereafter.¹⁵ Nevertheless, to say that the Falklands factor ceased to explain support for the Conservative Party, when the war was supplanted by other issues, does not automatically mean that there will be no variation in attitudes by party on questions that invoke the Falklands dispute. Yet, in practice in the British Gallup surveys, memories of the war or loyalties to Mrs. Thatcher scarcely differentiated the attitudes of Conservative supporters from those of Labour supporters towards improving relations with Argentina.

TABLE 2

Party choice and support for improving relations, March 1990

% that "Agree strongly" or "Agree" with each point	UK Total	Cons	Lab	Argentine Total	PJ	Rad	DP+ UCD	Left
Ending trade restrictions	68	66	70	75	76	79	93	63
Direct air flights	69	67	69	78	73	85	93	74
Fishing agreement	74	73	75	71	74	73	71	63
Diplomatic relations	70	69	70	81	81	79	89	67
Visits to war graves	90	88	91	95	95	97	96	94

{Figures are given for the main parties; Conservative; Labour; Partido Justicialista (Peronist); Union Civica Radical (Radical); the Democrat Party and the Union of the Democratic Centre (right wing); and the Movement for Socialism, the Intransigents and other left parties. In both countries there were also minor parties and those who made no choice.}

Nor is there any variation in attitudes when the results are broken down by the sex or the age of the respondent. The first impression from the results might be that men were more in favor of improving relations than women were. However, women were markedly more inclined to answer "Don't Know". When the percentages are re-calculated excluding those who said

"Don't Know", the differences become minimal. There was some impact of class in the March 1990 survey, though less in the previous ones. "Strong agreement" with the measures was about 10% less in the lower D/E class category than in the higher A/B/C1 category. In the July 1984 survey, Gallup also asked the voters a battery of eighteen questions about Mrs. Thatcher's image. Again, if Mrs. Thatcher's personal standing had been enhanced permanently by her leadership during the Falklands war, attitudes to questions on Argentine-British relations might be expected to have related to whether she was accorded a positive or a negative image. None of the eighteen questions on Mrs. Thatcher's image correlated even minimally with any of the four questions on Argentine-British relations.¹⁶

Attitudes in Argentina in March 1990 were very similar to those in Britain; all the measures to improve relations received majority support, with trade, direct air flights, diplomatic relations and visits to the war graves each obtaining 7-11% more support in Argentina than in Britain. Only on the questions of reaching "an international agreement, including Britain, Argentina, Uruguay and the other fishing countries, to manage and conserve the fish in the South West Atlantic" did the level of Argentine support fall below the British level and then only marginally. The difference on this point may be explained by the lower saliency of the economic and environmental aspects of the conservation of fisheries in Argentina and the higher sensitivity to the sovereignty aspects of the fishing question. As in Britain there were no significant differences between the two main parties, the Justicialistas (commonly known as the Peronists) and the Radicals. (There was just one curious anomaly that a greater proportion of the Radicals wished to see direct air links). Nor were there differences in attitudes based on sex or age, except that, again, women were slightly more likely to reply "Don't Know". In contrast to Britain, the results for Argentina showed a definite effect of class upon responses. There was

a very big increase in the "Don't Know" reply in the lower class category, reaching 27% on trade, 35% on fishing and 38% on air flights. This inevitably reduced the proportion in the approval categories. Nevertheless at least half of the lower class approved of each of these measures. The drop in the level of approval compared to the other classes was still apparent in the lower class, albeit to a lesser extent, even after re-percentaging excluding the "Don't Know" category.

When we consider the minor Argentine parties, there are distinct differences in the responses. The right-wing parties, the Union of the Democratic Centre and the Democrat Party, which support free enterprise and a greater integration with the West, but also number some nationalists among their supporters, managed to produce even bigger proportions approving three of the measures. Their supporters showed 8%, 15%, and 18% more than the national average approving of resuming, respectively, diplomatic relations, air flights and full trade relations. On the other hand, supporters of the Movement for Socialism, the *Intransigents* and other small left-wing parties have been both strongly anti-business and highly nationalist. Their supporters showed a lower average proportion approving any of the measures, particularly being 8% down on a fishing agreement, 12% down on trade and 14% down on diplomatic relations. Nevertheless, considered on their own, the figures for the hard left in Argentina still show high approval for all the measures to improve relations between the two countries.

Thus, neither the British government nor the Argentine government has anything to fear from any sector of their electorates. All the variation in attitudes towards improvements in bilateral relations is simply between high levels and overwhelming levels of approval. The results are particularly striking when one considers the points that might have evoked a more emotional response. In both countries humanitarian concerns for the families that suffered

bereavements during the war override nationalist antagonisms that can be invoked over soldiers' graves. In Britain, media coverage of the visit to the Falklands by two members of the Gimenez family in October 1986 for the funeral of Lt. Miguel Gimenez displayed some of the tabloid press at their worst.¹⁷ A few Islanders then and since have expressed misgivings about Argentine people coming to the Islands, even for the purpose of visiting the war cemetery.¹⁸ Similarly in Argentina, the Gimenez family received only discouragement from the government over their desire to go to the funeral and the organizations for the relatives of the war-dead have been caught up in political divisions. Soon after the 1982 war a nationalist figure, Snr. Di Stefano, tried to exploit the question by taking a ship full of relatives to challenge the British exclusion of Argentine shipping from the Falkland's waters. Public opinion as measured in these polls show that such excesses made the politicians more cautious than they needed to be in forming policy on visits to the war-graves.¹⁹

It could be argued that the questions considered so far have not shown any relationship with party preferences in Britain, because they did not touch on 'political' contacts between the two countries. During 1985 real progress began to be made in the non-official relations between Britain and Argentina, particularly in the work of the South Atlantic Council, the World Council of Churches and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The public occasions of most note were the meetings between Mr. Neil Kinnock and President Alfonsin at the Socialist International conference in Paris in September 1985 and the meeting between Mr. David Steel and President Alfonsin at the Liberal International in Madrid in October 1985. The first visit by any Argentine politicians to London then came in February 1986, when four Congressmen - Senator Adolfo Gass, the Radical Party Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and Senator Julio Amoedo, with Deputy Federico Storani and Deputy Julio Bordon for the Lower House - were

guests of the South Atlantic Council and met members of the British Section of the IPU in the Palace of Westminster.²⁰ In the February 1986 Gallup survey, respondents were asked about their attitudes to these events.

When they were asked whether they thought the meetings of Kinnock and Steel with Alfonsin were a good or a bad idea, two-thirds of the sample responded positively. This time there were differences between supporters of the different parties: 70% of Labor supporters and 75% of those who said they were Alliance, Liberal or SDP thought the meetings were a "very good idea" or a "good idea", whereas only 49% of the Conservative supporters approved. The idea that the Argentinean Congressmen should meet British Members of Parliament gained higher approval, 76% on average. However, on this question there were only minimal differences between the parties. On neither question was there any difference by sex, but on both there were reductions in approval of the meetings among those aged 65 or more. On just the question of parliamentary contacts, there was a drop in approval of 17% from the A/B/C1 class group to the D/E group. For the party leaders meetings, no sex, age or class category dropped below 53% approval and for the parliamentary meetings no category dropped below 66% approval. Thus the largest effect was the difference between the parties on the first question. However, it is difficult to see the party differences on the first question as more than a response to the names of Kinnock and Steel being invoked, because the effect disappeared when such a closely related question as approval of parliamentary contacts is asked.

TABLE 3

British Reactions to political contacts, February 1986

	<i>Kinnock/Steel-Alfonsin meetings</i>				<i>Congressmen's visit to London</i>			
	Total	Cons	Lab	Lib/SDP	Total	Cons	Lab	Lib/SDP
Very good idea	11	5	15	11	13	10	14	14
Good idea	54	44	55	64	63	66	60	66
Bad idea	17	26	13	15	11	11	13	10
Very bad idea	5	11	4	2	4	5	4	3
Don't Know	13	13	14	7	10	8	10	7

If the topic of political meetings is taken one step further with a question on attitudes to contacts at the governmental level, then in the February 1986 survey the proportion approving actually moved to a higher level. The fact that the same group of Conservatives (who gave less approval to the Kinnock/Steel meetings than Labour supporters) now showed a slightly higher than Labour approving of governmental contacts, sustains the argument that the previous party differences were not the result of fundamental attitudes to the Falklands dispute. A very similar question asked in March 1990 does show some party differences in the United Kingdom sample, but this is mainly the result of more Labor supporters being conciliatory four years later, rather than Conservatives reducing approval for governmental contacts. Curiously, there were some differences between the responses in the three categories used by Gallup in 1986, but these differences were not evident in 1990. As with all the comparisons made so far, the results in Argentina and Britain were remarkably similar to each other. (The class differences in Argentina

TABLE 4

Reactions to governmental meetings

Do you think a government minister should or should not be willing to meet the Argentinean Congressmen when they are in London?

(UK, February 1986)

	Occupational Class						
	Total	Cons	Lab	Lib/SDP	A/B/C1	C2	D/E
Should	78	78	75	84	84	76	72
Should not	12	13	15	10	10	11	16
Don't Know	10	9	10	6	5	13	12

Do you think that British government ministers should be willing to meet Argentine ministers face to face?

(UK, March 1990)

	Occupational Class						
	Total	Cons	Lab	Lib/Dem	A/B/C1	C2	D/E
Yes	84	75	89	87	84	83	84
No	7	14	5	2	7	8	7
Don't Know	9	11	6	11	9	9	8

Do you think that ministers from Argentina and Great Britain should be willing to talk directly to each other?

(Argentina, March 1990)

	Total	PJ	Rad	DP/ UCD	Left	Upper/ U Mid	Middle	Lower Middle	Lower
Yes	74	73	79	75	83	79	76	76	56
No	10	10	8	21	11	10	9	12	8
Don't Know	16	17	13	4	7	11	15	12	36

were again the effect of variation in the number saying "Don't Know" and the differences in the levels of approval for governmental contacts disappear after excluding the "Don't Know" group.)

The conclusive evidence that political relationships between the two countries are not a problem for public opinion in either country comes with a question that was deliberately biased by an emotional argument against having contacts. The results show that the suggestion that "it is disloyal and disrespectful to those who died in the war, if we have contacts" with politicians from the other country, is rejected by a substantial margin in each category among the electorates of the two countries. A slight party difference was found on this question in Britain in February 1986, but in the opposite direction to that expected: Conservative supporters were more likely to disagree with the charge of disloyalty. In Argentina the supporters of the main parties, but not the minor parties, are again remarkably close to those in Britain, with the right-wing being noticeably more conciliatory toward the British and the left being somewhat less conciliatory. In both countries there is a definite expression of class differences in the responses, with slight differences based on sex and age: the working class, women and older people being the less likely to reject the charge of disloyalty.

TABLE 5

Reactions to charges of disloyalty

Some people say that it is disloyal and disrespectful to those who died in the war, if we have contacts with Argentine politicians. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with this?

(UK results, February 1986)

	Occupational Class						
	Total	Cons	Lab	Lib/ SDP	A/B/C1	C2	D/E
Strongly agree	4	5	7	2	4	4	6
Agree	18	19	20	16	11	23	22
Disagree	54	59	48	61	64	53	43
Strongly Disagree	12	10	12	13	15	10	11
Don't Know	11	8	13	8	5	10	18

Some people say that it is disloyal and disrespectful to those who died in the war, if we have contacts with Argentine politicians. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with this?

(UK results, March 1990)

	Occupational Class						
	Total	Cons	Lab	Lib/ Dem	A/B/C1	C2	D/E
Strongly agree	5	11	4	2	5	7	5
Agree	17	15	17	16	12	17	22
Disagree	52	57	50	48	55	53	48
Strongly disagree	15	9	18	24	18	11	14
Don't Know	11	8	11	9	10	11	11

Some people say that it is disloyal and disrespectful to those who died in the war, if we have contacts with English politicians. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with this?

(Argentine results, March 1990)

	Total	PJ	Rad	DP+ UCD	Left	Upper/ U Mid	Middle	Lower Middle	Lower
Strongly agree	5	4	4	4	9	5	3	4	8
Agree	20	20	21	14	13	14	24	21	23
Disagree	56	51	62	71	63	64	50	54	47
Strongly Disagree	7	11	4	11	0	8	11	4	3
Don't Know	13	13	9	0	15	9	12	16	19

