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Electoral Systems and Ethnic Conciliation:
A Structured, Focused Analysis of Vote-Pooling in Northern Ireland Elections 1998-2011

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Master of Arts

by
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Abstract

This research project examines the role of electoral system rules in affecting the extent of conciliatory behavior and cross-ethnic coalition making in Northern Ireland. It focuses on the role of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system in shaping party and voter incentives in a post-conflict divided society. The research uses a structured, focused comparison of the four electoral cycles since the Belfast Agreement of 1998. This enables a systematic examination of each electoral cycle using a common set of criteria focused on conciliation and cross-ethnic coalition making. Whilst preference voting is assumed to benefit moderate candidates, in Northern Ireland centrist and multi-ethnic parties outside of the dominant ethnic communities have received little electoral success. In Northern Ireland the primary effect of STV has not been to encourage inter-communal voting but to facilitate intra-community and intra-party moderation. STV has encouraged the moderation of the historically extreme political parties in each of the ethnic bloc. Patterns across electoral cycles suggest that party elites from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein have moderated their policy positions due to the electoral system rules. Therefore they have pursued lower-preference votes from within their ethnic bloc but in doing so have marginalized parties of a multi-ethnic or non-ethnic orientation.
Acknowledgements

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<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>Alternative Vote</td>
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<tr>
<td>DUP</td>
<td>Democratic Unionist Party</td>
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<td>FPTP</td>
<td>First Past the Post</td>
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<td>GBP</td>
<td>Great British Pound</td>
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<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
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<td>MI5</td>
<td>Military Intelligence, Section 5</td>
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<td>MLA</td>
<td>Member of Legislative Assembly</td>
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<td>MMD</td>
<td>Multi-Member District</td>
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<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
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<td>NIUP</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Unionist Party</td>
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<td>NIWC</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition</td>
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<td>PIRA</td>
<td>Provisional Irish Republican Army</td>
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<td>PR</td>
<td>Proportional Representation</td>
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<td>PSNI</td>
<td>Police Service of Northern Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUP</td>
<td>Progressive Unionist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUC</td>
<td>Royal Ulster Constabulary</td>
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<td>SF</td>
<td>Sinn Fein</td>
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<td>SDLP</td>
<td>Social Democratic and Labour Party</td>
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<td>SNTV</td>
<td>Single Non-Transferable Vote</td>
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<td>STV</td>
<td>Single Transferable Vote</td>
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<td>TUV</td>
<td>Traditional Unionist Voice</td>
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<td>Ulster Defence Association</td>
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<td>Ulster Democratic Party</td>
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Introduction

A decision on December 3 2012 by Belfast City Council to limit the number of days in which the Union flag would be flown by the council\(^1\) resulted in widespread disorder through December and into January, as loyalist and unionist protestors clashed with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the offices of the multi-ethnic Alliance Party were attacked (BBC, 2012). Days later, then United States Secretary of State Hilary Clinton visited Belfast and declared the violence “a sad reminder, unfortunately, that – despite how hardy the peace has been – there are still those who not only would test it, but try to destroy it” (Morris, 2013).

Northern Ireland is the epitome of a post-conflict society that can be characterized as being in a state of “no war, no peace” more than fifteen years after the formal end of conflict (Mac Ginty, 2006). The legacies of conflict continue to be ever-present in Northern Irish society. The education system operates on a highly sectarian basis through mono-ethnic schools, communities continue to reject plans to tear down ‘peace walls’ separating rival communities, and security threats persist despite the lack of societal violence.

In the education sector, 93 per cent of children attend segregated schools, with most schools funded by the state being either Protestant or Catholic (O’Sullivan, 2013).

\(^1\) Prior to this vote the flag had been flown every day since 1906.
In 2010, DUP leader and First Minister Peter Robinson declared the education system as a ‘benign form of apartheid which is fundamentally damaging to our society’ (Belfast Telegraph, 2010). In June 2013, President Obama stated in a Town Hall meeting in Northern Ireland that:

> Because issues like segregated schools and housing, lack of jobs and opportunity — symbols of history that are a source of pride for some and pain for others — these are not tangential to peace; they’re essential to it. If towns remain divided — if Catholics have their schools and buildings, and Protestants have theirs — if we can't see ourselves in one another, if fear or resentment are allowed to harden, that encourages division. It discourages cooperation (White House, 2013).

The most recent annual Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey found that 68 per cent of respondents would prefer to send their child to a mixed-religion school (Life and Times Survey, 2012). Despite this, there has been little advancement in efforts to develop multi-ethnic schools. Recent practice has focused on seeking to develop ‘shared education’ whereby students from different schools have one lesson or extracurricular activities together. This effort however has only reached 10,000 out of Northern Ireland’s 330,000 school-age students (NISRA, 2013). Despite the support for multi-ethnic schools in opinion polls there is little progress towards the advancement of integrated schools, even though it is estimated that the separate education system inflates the cost of Northern Ireland’s education by 1 billion GBP a year (1.68 billion USD) and results in a surplus of 85,000 school places each year (TES, 2013).

In Northern Ireland, ‘peace’ walls that communities erected during ‘the Troubles’ continue to separate ethnic communities, particularly in Belfast and Londonderry. Such
walls are intended to keep ‘peace’ between antagonistic communities, but continue to provoke stone throwing by youths either side of the wall. In Belfast alone, there are currently 99 different walls and barriers separating unionist and nationalist communities, with some of these barriers being more than 10 metres high (O’Hagan, 2012). Many of those living by the walls continue to support their retention, and more walls have been built since the signing of the Agreement than were during the Troubles (McDonald, 2013). The Northern Irish government recently announced a goal to remove the walls by 2023, something that many commentators saw as too optimistic (Belfast Telegraph, 2013).

Public housing, traditionally a source of tension due to its discriminatory provision, remains segregated. 90 per cent of public housing is currently segregated, whilst the most polarized housing estates have more than 80 per cent of one community living there (Madden, 2011). Despite these figures, 80 per cent of people say that they would prefer to live in a mixed housing area, yet progress remains slow. The Northern Irish Housing Executive recently announced a plan for 30 new mixed housing areas (Madden, 2011) but efforts to integrate pre-existing housing communities remains absent.

In June 2013, rioting and disorder reemerged in response to a decision by the PSNI, in accordance with the Parades Commission, the body that regulates marches and parades in Northern Ireland, to block an Orange Order Parade from passing through the nationalist Ardoyne area (BBC, 2013). Rioting and disorder involving the burning of property, cars and attacks on police that lasted for a week and resulted in 1,300 additional
police officers being deployed in Belfast from England, Scotland and Wales under the emergency “mutual aid” agreement (BBC, 2013a).

As a result of the violence, the First and Deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland invited United States diplomat Richard Hass, who served as President George W. Bush’s envoy to Northern Ireland, to chair talks between unionist and nationalist leaders (CFR, 2013). The talks sought to tackle some of the most divisive and pressing issues facing society, including parades, symbols and ‘matters stemming from the past’ (CFR, 2013). After six months of talks discussions collapsed at 4am on Christmas Eve. A resumed set of talks collapsed on New Year’s Eve 2013, despite an intervention by U.S. Vice President Joe Biden in the final days of the talks (Clarke, 2014).

Fall 2013 saw continued media interest on issues relating to those who had “disappeared” during the course of the Troubles. Attention focused on the killing of Jean McConville by the Provisional IRA (PIRA) in 1973. McConville was a mother of ten suspected by the PIRA of providing information about republican activities to the British Security Services (McDonald, 2013). Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams faced media and civil society pressure over accusations that he personally authorized her abduction and killing (McDonald, 2013). Amidst this, the suggestion of the Northern Irish Attorney General that there should be an end to prosecutions for Troubles-related killings provoked outrage in both the unionist and nationalist communities (Independent, 2013).

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2 The BBC, for instance, produced a 90 minute documentary ‘The Disappeared’ that focused on the continuing trauma of the relatives of those taken, killed and buried. It also investigated the alleged involvement of Republican leader Gerry Adams in one of the killings. (BBC, 2013b).
DUP Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Jeffrey Donaldson declared in response “you cannot say that murder is not a crime – it is” (BBC, 2013).

Security threats remain ubiquitous within Northern Ireland. Recent figures released by the PSNI showed that on average bomb disposal officers were called out more than once a day to disable explosive devices within Northern Ireland (Kilpatrick, 2013) At the end of November 2013 for instance, a 60 kg bomb partially exploded near Belfast’s Victoria Square shopping center (Sky, 2013). Two weeks later on December 13, a bomb exploded in Belfast’s Cathedral Quarter as the police were clearing the area (Kilpatrick, 2013).

Today, inter-communal relations remain tense. Issues involving rituals and symbols remain particularly contentious. Tensions over flags and parades remain unresolved, and the two communities largely operate separately of each other. In the face of these societal issues presented above, this thesis will examine the sphere of Northern Ireland’s politics, in particular its electoral processes since the signing of the 1998 Agreement.

In recent years, considerable attention has turned to the role of electoral systems in shaping the ‘rules of the game’ in post-conflict societies, particularly given that different electoral systems can change the incentives for voters and political elites within a society. Given that politicians can be seen as actors who seek to maximize their vote and as such are likely to respond to the incentives of the electoral society in which they operate, then this paper analyzes the role of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral
system in Northern Ireland. In doing so it will examine the extent to which it has provided incentives for conciliation, and encouraged multi-ethnic and non-ethnic parties within Northern Irish politics since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998.

As this paper will show, the incentives of electoral systems can be significant and can encourage groups to engage in ‘bridging’ or ‘bonding’ strategies, the former encouraging politicians to build a broad coalition of support whilst the latter encourage politicians to focus on gaining support from a narrow basis of the electorate. Such incentives are indicative of larger power-sharing debates in the post-conflict literature. The first dominant approach, consociationalism, seeks to elevate ethnic groups into a grand governing coalition through the explicit recognition and representation of ethnically based political parties (Lijphart, 1991). The other approach, centripetalism, seeks to encourage inter-ethnic cooperation through the development of parties with cross-cutting social cleavages, that are often dependent on votes from a number of different sections of society (Reilly, 2001; Sisk, 1995). This seeks to focus political competition by actors within the moderate middle of politics.

Northern Ireland’s political development since 1998 represents a puzzling case. Key debates in the literature have focused on consociationalism and centripetalism, outlined above. Northern Ireland has a consociational system of governance, yet an electoral system expected to provide centripetal incentives. Despite this paradox, the expected centripetal dynamics of the electoral system have failed to support the development of multi-ethnic centrist parties in Northern Ireland and instead Northern
Ireland’s ‘extreme’ parties have come to dominate political life, despite what supporters of centripetalism and advocates of proportional representative electoral systems might expect.

The choice of electoral system is a key contributor to aiding inclusion, and it has been noted that ‘the foundations of democratic stability rest on inclusion’ (Reynolds, 2011: 31). It has been argued that several elections under the same rules need to take place before their systematic effects stabilize and both parties and voters learn to use them to their best advantage (Taagepera, 2004). With the completion of four election cycles in Northern Ireland since the Belfast Agreement, an analysis of Northern Ireland’s election cycles is timely.

The electoral incentives of STV provides the possibility to ensure that ethnic voting cannot dominate politics and that voting does not simply become an ‘ethnic census’, as has been the case in recent elections in Iraq and Lebanon, where subsequent polls within each country returned near identical results. In contrast, STV provides political elites electoral incentives to appeal outside of their narrowly defined ethnic constituencies and engage in ‘vote-pooling strategies’ (Reynolds, 2011: 21). The proportionality of the STV system also aids stability and political competition. However, despite the incentives that STV provides there exists a paradox. Since 2003, Northern Ireland’s historically extreme parties, the DUP and Sinn Fein have flourished, whilst the traditionally more moderate parties, the SDLP, the UUP and multi-ethnic and centrist

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3 Vote pooling is explained by Donald Horowitz as when ‘electorally, the way to induce politicians to be moderate is to structure voting arrangements so politicians must rely, in part, on votes delivered by members of a group other than their own. Such incentives are effective because those votes will not be forthcoming unless the candidates receiving them can be portrayed as being moderate on inter-ethnic issues’ (Horowitz, 1997: 24).
parties have declined, despite the incentives STV provides to voters to vote beyond their own ethnic community. This paper therefore examines the puzzle as to why the traditionally extreme parties have performed more successfully than moderate parties, despite the electoral incentives STV provides to the voter.

The importance of research on institutions is highlighted by the call for ‘new institutionalism’ within the field of comparative politics given the importance of the organization of political life (March and Olsen, 1984). In societies emerging from inter-communal conflict, such as Northern Ireland, the electoral system is one of the most important and fundamental institutions within society, and has a deep impact on future political life (International IDEA, 2005). Discussion of electoral systems often seems “mechanistic, abstract and highly technical” (Norris, 2004: 64).

The reality however is that the choice of electoral system has a profound and visible impact. This is particularly true given that electoral systems tend to remain untouched once adopted and actors come to respond to the incentives they provide (International IDEA, 2005). The behavior of political elites, the policies they advocate, and the extent to which voters accept or reject them, have a significant role in either contributing to or impinging upon efforts to improve social cohesion within society. The electoral system is therefore ‘perhaps the most powerful instrument available for institutional engineering with far-reaching consequences for party systems, the composition of legislatures, and the durability of democratic arrangements’ (Lijphart and Waisman, 1996, quoted in Reynolds 2002: 207). Given this, this research will examine the extent of conciliatory campaigning behavior and the extent to which campaigning is
marked by efforts by politicians to attract votes outside their traditional core base through a repositioning on the political spectrum and the moderation of policy, in comparison to rival parties.

Despite the recent focus on the role of electoral systems and elections in a post-conflict environment, others are more skeptical of this approach. Perhaps the most common approach to conflict management is to regulate the operation of political parties in divided societies (Reilly, 2006). In some cases this includes the banning of ethnic parties in order to block small or regionally based parties from getting electoral representation. In Nigeria, parties have to display a ‘federal character’ through two-thirds of states being represented on party executives and by law parties are not permitted to have a name, symbol or motto with ethnic connotations (Reilly, 2006: 816). In Southeast Asia it is common to place cross-regional thresholds on party formation. In the Philippines parties cannot compete unless they have regional offices in at least 9 of the 16 regions of the country (Reilly, 2006: 817). Beyond those who focus on institutional forms of conflict management, others examine other modes of encouraging conciliation. This includes approaches focused on political elites, culture and political economy, amongst others. Analyzes of ‘bottom-up’ grassroots peacebuilding initiatives and their potential impact on ‘everyday life’, such as Paula Pickering’s *Peacebuilding in the Balkans: The View from the Ground Floor*, have also emerged in response to the focus of much of the political science literature on political elites.

Northern Ireland serves as the seminal test case for examining the impact of STV in a post-conflict society given that Northern Ireland is the only such society where STV
is used. To rigorously examine the impact of STV in Northern Ireland, this project employs a structured, focused comparison of each of the election cycles for Northern Ireland’s Assembly since 1998. Within the single country case, a comparison of the four different event cycles will be used. It will seek to understand under what conditions electoral system rules affect the extent of conciliatory campaigning behavior and cross-ethnic coalition making in Northern Ireland elections in the four electoral cycles since the Belfast Agreement of 1998.

Northern Ireland represents a theory testing case (Bennett and George, 2005: 74) that seeks to assess the validity of competing theories related to the operation of STV. Benjamin Reilly argues that electoral incentives under preferential electoral systems will lead to the development of a political system of “centrist, aggregative and multi-ethnic political parties” (Reilly, 2006: 816). In contrast, Donald Horowitz critiques STV for having the potential for reducing the prospect for inter-ethnic cooperation given the low threshold needed to win a seat in six-member constituencies. This paper seeks to examine the extent to which an analysis of the four election cycles since Northern Ireland’s 1998 peace agreement confirm or disconfirm Reilly’s theory. This study operates under the assumption of rational-choice institutionalism, that is that the rules adopted in a political system have the capacity to shape the electoral incentives facing politicians (Norris, 2004: 8). It also assumes that those same political operators are vote-maximizers who participate in elections in order to win political office.

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4 STV is used for national level elections in the Republic of Ireland, Australia and Malta, which are all notable for their ethnic/identity homogeneity.
With increasing awareness about the role of the electoral system in aiding proportionality, ensuring representation of minorities and using incentives to help ‘engineer’ cooperation and accommodation within deeply divided societies, this examination of STV will provide important scrutiny of one of the electoral systems available to societies seeking to move beyond division and the reminders of war. This thesis finds that the evidence suggests that party elites from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein, the historically extremist parties, have moderated their policy positions due to the incentives of electoral rules. Therefore the DUP and Sinn Fein have pursued lower-preference votes from within their ethnic bloc in pursuit of electoral success. In doing so parties that have a multi-ethnic or non-ethnic orientation have been marginalized electorally. Therefore the case of Northern Ireland is a theory disconfirming case given that electoral incentives have failed to lead to electoral success for the development of a political system of centrist, aggregative and multi-ethnic political parties. Where vote pooling has occurred, it has predominantly been within an ethnic community, rather than across ethnic lines.

The nature of the operation of STV in a post-conflict society, and the completion of four election cycles in Northern Ireland since the termination of conflict warrants close examination. This is particularly true given that Stefan Lindberg has noted that a learning process occurs both for political elites and voters through repeated democratic behavior (Lindberg, 2006). The next section provides an overview of the salient electoral literature related to election rules in deeply divided societies. The third section examines the history of conflict in Northern Ireland and its electoral system history. The fourth
section analyzes each of the election cycles in Northern Ireland since 1998. The final section makes a number of principal findings.

The data used in this study has been accumulated from numerous sources including the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service and the Northern Ireland ARK, a joint resource of Queen’s University Belfast and the University of Ulster focused on political and social life in Northern Ireland.

**Structured Focused Questions**

This paper identifies a number of theoretically motivated critical variables to be analyzed across the four election case studies. It will ask the following questions of each election case study.

1) What was the preceding context to the election?
2) What were the results of the election?
3) Providing Incentives for Conciliation

To what extent has STV provided incentives for conciliation within Northern Ireland?

a) To what extent has STV encouraged political parties to make more inclusionary political appeals?

b) To what extent has STV encouraged voters to vote for parties that have traditionally represented a different societal group? Under what circumstances do voters use their lower preference votes?
c) To what extent has STV facilitated cross-community vote transfers and what significance have such votes had?

4) Encouraging Multi-ethnic and Non-ethnic Political Parties

To what extent has STV encouraged broad based, cross-cutting political parties within society/affected party formation?

a) Non-ethnic and multi-ethnic parties

b) Independent candidates
Electoral Systems And Deeply Divided Societies

Power Sharing After Conflict and the Role of Post-Conflict Elections For Peace Consolidation

Electoral systems play a fundamental role in the political development of any society. As a core component of the constitutional framework, electoral systems have proved to be particularly intractable and sticky. As such, electoral systems tend to lead to institutional inertia and institutional path dependency (North, 1981), with such institutions becoming embedded within society, and often not being subject to reform given the difficulty in reaching the consensus needed to fundamentally reshape the incentives of political life.

In post-conflict societies, electoral systems develop even greater importance given that a particular electoral system can promote and incentivize certain behaviors. Some systems provide greater incentives for the development of cross-cutting cleavages, thereby encouraging conciliation and enhancing social cohesion. Other systems may encourage political elites to gain power through ethnic outbidding, risking an escalation into insecurity and heightened tension. Thus, “institutional engineering” can potentially contribute to shaping the dynamics of political life in a post-conflict society (Reilly, 2001).
In other circumstances, societies simply continue with their pre-existing electoral system with little or no thought given to the issue of how it might affect future politics or modes of inclusion and exclusion within a society. Yet, either way, the electoral system can be critical in supporting or undermining the ‘strategic imagination’ of groups as they envision how the political system will operate once conflict is over. Not only this, but the electoral system can be of fundamental importance given the extent to which it creates an inclusive system of government, such as the degree to which it may or may not facilitate the inclusion of extremists, and the impact that this can have on spoiler violence. Consequently, there exists considerable debate about which electoral systems represent the best opportunity for a particular society to consolidate peace, and in some cases, democracy at the same time (Jarstad, 2008).

Amidst the debate to select a particular electoral system as best for post-conflict societies, critical to choosing the right system is to have a clear sense of the needs and priorities of that particular society. Thus, societies face a number of dilemmas as they emerge from civil war (Sisk, 2008). Competing goals are numerous. Are effective government and the implementation of policy the aim, or is inclusion through proportional representation important, particularly as it enables voters to see the value of each of their votes? In some societies, fears of electoral violence in the aftermath of the election might necessitate a system that enables electoral results to be published quickly and in a transparent manner. In societies with more complex electoral systems, counting may require a much more extensive procedure. Thus issues of proportionality, accountability, representation, stable party systems and stable governing coalitions are
important in shaping electoral system choice (International IDEA, 2005). The full choice of electoral systems is illustrated by Figure 1, below. The development of electoral system reform, particularly through increased adoption of PR, is highlighted by a comparison of Figure 1, (1997) and current electoral system use in Figure 2.

**Figure 1: World Electoral System use for lower house of parliament (1997)**
(Source: Norris, 2004: 113)
Electoral System Choice as a Path-Dependent Outcome of Peace Negotiations

Despite the wide debate about the best electoral choice to use in post-conflict societies, recent evidence shows that Proportional Representation (PR) is now the ‘standard choice’ in post-conflict societies, particularly in elections held under UN supervision (Bogaards, 2013: 71). This is because PR is generally seen to work as intended and helps to secure peace through an inclusive legislature, reducing the risk of an inflammation of violence like those associated with a ‘winner takes all’ electoral contest. However, it is important to note other factors are also important in its choice. PR is also usually preferred is because it enables the rapid holding of elections in the wake of a peace agreement due to the ease of vote counting and voter registration procedures (Reilly, 2008).

Bogaards’ findings support Borman and Golder’s landmark 2013 study that surveyed the use of electoral systems in democracies around the world between 1946 and
2011 (Borman and Golder, 2013). The authors found that PR and mixed systems are increasingly being adopted whilst the number of elections held with majoritarian systems has fallen significantly. Given the role of exclusion as a contributing dynamic in escalation to conflict, the desire to ensure inclusion through the electoral system is unsurprising. However, there exists little empirical evidence that PR has a positive impact on democracy and development.

Despite more than 30 comprehensive peace agreements being signed in recent years, only 12 peace agreements reference the electoral system (Bogaards, 2013: 79). When the peace agreement does specify the electoral system to be used, it is always a PR-based system (Bogaards, 2013: 82). The use of PR systems though does clearly deliver an inclusive parliament. Such work builds on Lijphart’s attempts since 1991 to advocate for the adoption of PR systems, arguing that they were superior in “democratic performance” than majoritarian systems based on eight variables, including the inclusion of minorities.

Despite the widespread use of PR systems in post-conflict states, many authors critique this trend. Bogaards notes that “despite the obvious popularity of PR, it has been hard to prove – even for its most ardent advocates – that PR has a positive impact on peace and democracy, especially in the context of post-conflict societies” (Bogaards, 2013: 75).

In contrast, Donald Horowitz is a fierce supporter of the use of the Alternative Vote (AV) electoral system. He argues that despite it being a majoritarian system, it is
significantly different to a Single Member Plurality system (Horowitz, 1991). In Fiji, AV was introduced to ameliorate ethnic divisions within the country. The intention was that AV, used in heterogeneous constituencies, would encourage vote pooling and the emergence of more moderate parties, particularly given the high electoral threshold of 50 per cent of the vote plus one vote (Horowitz, 1991).

The advantage of such a system is that a preferential ballot may also “flush out” second or third choices that traverse the ethnic divide (Horowitz, 1991: 178). The basis for this therefore is for each political party to be incentivized to encourage inclusion, therefore inducing centripetal appeals. This is rather different to Lijphart, who sees the *raison d’être* of the electoral system as ensuring straightforward proportionality and fairness between groups, enabling political stability through power-sharing (Mitchell, 2013:4-5). It also has the benefit of encouraging political elites to make electoral pacts, enabling the exchange of lower vote preferences between supporters. Therefore, in preferential systems the incentivization benefits that are provided can affect both the behavior of voters and the behavior of political elites. Overall the basis of AV for Horowitz is:

The approach I have advocated is to adopt an electoral system that will make moderation rewarding by making politicians reciprocally dependent on the votes of members of groups other than their own. The dependence is only marginal, of course, but it will sometimes be the margin of victory. Since the parties must pool votes rather than merely pool seats, they must find ways before the election to communicate their ethnically and racially conciliatory intentions to the voters. After the election they must deliver on those commitments or risk electoral retribution (Horowitz, 1991:196).
Critics of proportional systems highlight that such systems risk the institutionalization of societal cleavages (Cohen, 1997: 613). Further, given the ease of representation they can encourage polarization and fragmentation (Lardeyret, 2006). In particular these systems usually allow small, regional and more specialized parties to achieve electoral success. Proponents however argue that this is the very benefit of such systems given that this aids ethnic and identity conflict management by including groups from across the political spectrum. Under proportional systems, those previously excluded have a realistic expectation of achieving representation within political institutions (Cohen, 1997: 627). To some extent, this therefore represents an ‘institutionalism of conflict’ as part of a conflict management approach (Cohen, 1997: 614), at least in the short term. As such, a fine balance exists in societies that use proportional systems to ensure that they do not exacerbate ethnic tensions within society. As Reilly has noted, due to this concern the electoral system is often supplemented by additional electoral rules, such as minimum thresholds (Reilly, 2013: 94).

Andrew Reynolds, reflecting these wider debates, advocates PR systems on the basis of four reasons. First, he argues that they are the ‘fairest’ method of electing representatives, particularly compared to those with single-member constituencies. Second, they are most likely to be inclusive. Third, as Lijphart argues, PR is more likely to encourage power-sharing governments and fourth, because of the first three reasons, PR is likely to enhance prospects for democracy in the country in question (Reynolds, 2006: 121-134).
Finally, authors such as Joel Barkan are concerned about the absence of a clear link between a single representative and each voter, particularly given its absence in party list regional systems of PR operating in predominantly agricultural societies (Barkan, 2006: 136). Barkan instead prefers majoritarian systems, such as First Past The Post (FPTP), which have a clear geographical link between voter and representative. Such a clear link ensures enhanced modes of accountability and representation.

Electoral systems in general are ‘sticky’ and once adopted are difficult to reform. The self-interest of political parties is at the heart of this difficulty. Moving from a majoritarian to a proportional system requires the dominant (usually two) parties to resolve to give up their power. The 2011 referendum in the United Kingdom on the issue of whether the Alternative Vote system should be adopted for Westminster elections highlighted this. The two largest parties did not support the change. The Conservative Party campaigned against the change and the Labour Party took no official position due to divisions within the party on the issue. Smaller parties, such as the Liberal Democrats, the anti-European Union United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Green Party, all campaigned in favor. In contrast, any attempt to move from a proportional system to a majoritarian system requires smaller parties to accept a reduced possibility of electoral success in future elections, or as Lardeyet put it, ‘doing so requires independent parties to cooperate in their own liquidation’ (Lardeyet, 1991: 34).
Debates within the electoral system literature on choice and incentives

Many scholars argue that democracy and peace “in ethnically-diverse societies are likely to be fostered by the development of broad-based, aggregative, and multi-ethnic political parties, rather than fragmented, personalized, or ethnically based party systems” (Reilly, 2006: 816). Others disagree, and much debate exists as to how such party systems can be sustained. Arend Lijphart, for example, proposes a party-list form of proportional representation within a consociational system of politics (Lijphart, 2008).

Benjamin Reilly and Timothy Sisk place greater emphasis on the power of centripetalism in promoting and sustaining such multi-ethnic political parties. Reilly argues that a system where:

The provision of electoral incentives for campaigning politicians to reach out to and attract votes from ethnic groups other than their own, thus encouraging candidates to moderate their political rhetoric on potentially divisive issues and forcing them to broaden their policy positions (Reilly, 2006: 816).

Reilly argues that these electoral incentives will lead to the development of a political system of “centrist, aggregative and multi-ethnic political parties” (Reilly, 2006: 816). This is particularly important because such inclusive political parties play an important role not just in advocating the interests of their supporters but also in achieving peaceful conflict resolution and managing the conflict through peaceful means itself. Vote pooling incentives, such as through electoral systems can encourage cross-party

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5 Centripetalism is a system where “the explicit aim is to engineer a centripetal spin to the political system – to pull the parties towards moderate, compromising policies, and to discover and reinforce the center of a deeply divided political spectrum” (Sisk, 1995:19).
inter-ethnic cooperation, in contrast to the ethnic outbidding that can prevail in societies using FPTP, or a ‘winner takes all’ electoral system.6

In contrast to centripetalism, some scholars see consociationalism as the most effective means of managing conflict within politics. There are four components of Lijphart’s consociationalism (Lijphart, 1969). This includes a grand coalition of all the major political parties through power-sharing within the Executive, proportional inclusion of political parties, provisions for cultural autonomy and self-government, and group vetoes within the Assembly in order to ensure that key decisions are made with sufficient cross-community consent.

Pippa Norris frames the debate in this area into two schools, focusing on rational-choice institutionalism and cultural modernization. Rational-choice institutionalism argues that by creating new electoral rules with new incentives this provides reformers with the capacity to alter the behavior of parties, politicians and citizens, potentially mitigating the risk of social conflict (Norris, 2004). In contrast, the cultural modernization school adopts a much more cautious approach and instead argues that formal rules merely adapt to deeply embedded patterns of human behavior, rather than changing them (Norris, 2004: i).

Arend Lijphart advocates for the use of closed list party-list systems in post-conflict societies (Lijphart, 2008). Lijphart sees the power this gives political elites as essential within his larger consociational model of managing inter-communal conflict.

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6 Electoral systems are not the only institutions capable of moving politics beyond a ‘winner takes all’ system. The legislature, the judiciary, anti-corruption organizations, and formal electoral rules all have a role in limiting such politics.
Thus, in consociational systems of a grand coalition of ethnic parties from across the spectrum, he argues that the party-list electoral system is key to making party leaders more powerful within their party. This is because they are better able to sustain inter-ethnic consociational deals.

A key debate at the center of electoral system choice focuses on inclusion, and the extent to which it may impinge on effective governance. Majoritarian systems tend to create a “manufactured” majority, which is a one-party government with an effective working parliamentary majority, whilst minor parties, particularly those with geographically dispersed support are penalized (Norris, 2004: 43). Thus the aim is to enable the government to push through its policy agenda rather than ensuring the representation of minority party views within the legislature. Majoritarian systems such as these can then be divided into two further categories. These are electoral systems where the winner must gain an absolute majority of votes in order to win and those where a simple plurality of voters is sufficient to be declared the winner (Norris, 2004: 43). Majoritarian systems tend to be conflict-inducing given that they increase the threshold of votes each candidate needs to secure and at the same time decrease the opportunities for political victory (Cohen, 1997: 612).

The most common plural system is FPTP, commonly used in the United Kingdom and the United States. Under FPTP the country is divided into single-member constituencies. Voters in each constituency cast a single vote for one candidate only. Consequently, the candidate with the largest share of the vote in each constituency is elected with the party with the largest number of parliamentary seats, then forming the
government. The nature of the “winner’s bonus” means that the winning party gains an exaggerated number of seats when compared to the percentage of the vote that they received. This allows the governing party to have sufficient a majority to enable them to govern effectively even in the context of a close election when looking at the percentage of the vote received.

Under FPTP there is rarely an electoral threshold that needs to be passed, and candidates do not need an absolute majority to be elected. Consequently, a candidate may win with, for instance, only 30 per cent of the vote if there are a number of other candidates running against the candidate. On the same basis, governments are often formed without a plurality of votes. In the United Kingdom no governing party has won as much as half the popular vote since 1935 (Norris, 2004: 44). The impact on minor parties is substantial, given that those with a relatively large but dispersed support may finish in second or third position in a large number of constituencies, but achieve little parliamentary representation.

A less commonly used plurality electoral system is the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV). SNTV was used in Japan from 1948 to 1993 and adopted in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 2001 U.S.-led state-building project (International IDEA, 2013). It is also used for parliamentary elections in Jordan and Vanuatu. Under this system, multiple candidates, including from the same party, compete with each other for support within a particular district (Norris, 2004: 48). Candidates run as individuals (although they can list a party affiliation), and only require a simple plurality in order to win office.
Each voter can vote for one candidate, despite the fact that constituencies often elect multiple representatives. Those with the highest number of votes are elected. Therefore, if a constituency was electing four candidates, one candidate could be elected with 90 per cent of support, and the other three with 3 per cent support each (Reynolds, 2006: 105). The system encourages independents to run in a party-dominated system and can boost turnout given voters are voting for a particular candidate, rather than a closed party list.

The use of SNTV in Afghanistan since 2005 has been much criticized (Rubin, 2005). SNTV is associated with causing voter confusion, and a highly fragmented parliament. Its use went against the trend since the 1990’s of using list-PR systems in post-conflict states. Although SNTV has been used on a very limited basis in new democracies, the experience of Jordan since 1993 provided a clear indication of what the result of its implementation would be. The use of SNTV in Jordan was deliberately intended to maintain fragmentation within the legislature, preventing the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood (Reynolds, 2006: 75).

In Afghanistan, the large number of candidates running meant that many candidates were elected despite receiving only a small number of votes. This had the unintended effect of encouraging vote buying given the benefits of gaining just a few extra votes. A third of Afghanistan’s constituencies had more than 9 seats, with the highest having 33. In the Kabul constituency, 400 candidates contested 33 seats, with the last winning candidate winning with only 0.5 per cent of the vote in Kabul (Reynolds, 2006: 113).
Once in office, there was little incentive for these representatives to cooperate given that they had achieved election by running on an independent platform (Rubin, 2005). Thus, the electoral system impinged upon the development of a stable, accountable party system and instead created a system of “independent MPs allied with regional and national strongmen” with little coherent ideological platform (Reynolds, 2006, 111). Given this, the Karzai administration has been forced to cobble together ad hoc coalitions for each piece of legislation it has sought to pass. The large number of candidates also meant that there was a large number of “wasted votes” given to candidates who did not win.

Within the majority branch of the electoral family, there exist two further systems. Second ballot elections ensure that the winning candidate has gained an overall majority of votes. This occurs through two means – an automatic victory for candidates winning an absolute majority of 50 per cent or more in the first round, or through a second round of elections held between the two candidates with the highest share of the vote in the first round. However, these rules inhibit the success of minor parties and demands that citizens attend the polls twice, which may affect turnout (Norris, 2004: 49). In societies with few resources for elections, the cost involved may also be prohibitive.

The other system used is AV. In this system, voters rank their preferences among candidates using the 1,2,3 scale. In order to win, a candidate needs to achieve an absolute majority of votes. If no candidate has scored more than 50 per cent of the vote after the first preferences are counted, then the candidate with the least votes is eliminated and their votes are redistributed to the other candidates. This process continues until one
candidate has an absolute majority. As a majoritarian system, this process provides a winners bonus and can convert a closely fought election into giving the winner a significant parliamentary bonus. Consequently, critics such as Arend Lijphart have argued that AV is no more likely to reward moderation than FPTP.

Despite the variances of majoritarian systems, the concern remains that majoritarian systems risk creating a system whereby ‘political minorities are persistent electoral losers’, and therefore are excluded from representative institutions, thereby reducing support for political institutions as a whole (Norris, 2004: 213).

In contrast to many majoritarian electoral systems, PR systems provide incentives for consensus and the inclusion of all voices on the basis that this will lead to compromise and bargaining within the legislature. This is achieved because these systems reduce the threshold of votes needed in order to get an individual candidate elected.

The most commonly used form of PR system is the party list system. Norway, Finland and the Netherlands use open list systems, whilst in closed list systems, as used in Portugal, Spain and Germany voters only vote for a party to support and the individuals elected are determined by their rank on each party’s list. In open list systems the electorate can express a preference for particular candidates and a party preference (Norris, 2004: 51). In some systems a threshold is set in order to ensure that parties have sufficient support in order to be able to achieve representation. In the Netherlands this is only 0.67 per cent of the national vote, the lowest, whilst in Turkey it is 10 per cent
(Reilly, 2013: 94). Within PR, generally the larger the district size, the more proportional the result thereby reducing the barriers for smaller parties (Norris, 2004: 55).

Within the electoral systems literature, there exists considerable debate about the relative advantages of multi-member and single-member districts. This debate reflects wider debates about proportionality and the nature of the relationship between the elected representative and the voter. In deeply divided societies emerging from the context of inter-communal conflict, single member districts are often not regarded as appropriate. Large parties are more likely to benefit from such systems, yet this is particularly the case given post-war conditions. Parties emerging during a democratic transition are often poorly organized and under resourced, enabling success for larger parties, particularly those representing incumbent elites who held office prior to the conflict (Birch, 2005: 286).

Given that systems with single-party districts generally create one-party majorities, critical to ensuring that the government governs in a capacity conducive to democracy is the ability to have a well-organized opposition, with sufficient strength to stay ‘in the game’ (Birch, 2005: 286). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the adoption of electoral systems varied considerably, yet a trend was the move from single district systems to multi-member districts. This could be explained by either representing a reversion to a previous experience with multi-member districts or a desire to ensure that
democratic practices remained assured as part of a wider move towards European Union membership (Birch, 2005: 296).\textsuperscript{7}

\textit{The Theory and Concept of STV}

The other main type of PR system is the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system. STV has been used in legislative elections in Northern Ireland since 1973, the Republic of Ireland since 1992, Malta since 1921 and the Australian Senate since 1949, reflecting the fact that STV was devised in Britain in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{8} Although a detailed explanation of how STV operates is included in the next chapter, it is worth noting that STV provides much greater freedom of choice than other electoral systems because it allows the voter to vote for multiple candidates, including from different parties, representing a deviation from the norm of PR.

Consequently, STV encourages parties to engage in bridging or ‘vote-pooling’ strategies, whereby their victory might be reliant on votes outside of their core support. This is in contrast to PR systems, which can encourage bonding strategies, given the low electoral thresholds. Therefore under PR, parties may seek to gain votes from a narrow, segmented part of the electorate, typically from groups with clear exclusionary boundaries (Norris, 2004: 10).

\textsuperscript{7} These include Armenia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and the Russian Federation.

\textsuperscript{8} The other notable use of STV has been Estonia’s experimentation with it in first post-Soviet election in 1990. Given the stark divides between majority Estonians and the Russian-speaking minority, in this founding election there was little centripetal behavior. Consequently, STV was not used in subsequent elections due to the mistaken belief that it did not encourage centripetal behavior. It was replaced with list PR which contains even fewer such incentives.
The incentive that ‘vote-pooling’ encourages is a major advantage for a deeply divided society (Horowitz, 1985, 628). The proportionality that STV provides is particularly important in enhancing the legitimacy of those elected, in contrast to the illegitimacy often associated with those elected by anomalies in majoritarian systems. Supporters also argue that STV enables parties with cross-cutting cleavages to develop.

STV’s ability to aid ‘inter-ethnic’ and ‘cross-ethnic’ voting seems well-suited to Donald Horowitz, a strong critic of consociationalism. However, Horowitz instead prefers AV and critiques STV for having the potential for reducing the prospect for inter-ethnic cooperation, given the low threshold needed to win a seat in six-member constituencies. With a 14.3 per cent threshold that needs to be met for a candidate to be elected in a constituency, it is easy for hardline candidates to be successful. However, critically it is important to note that the extent to which STV encourages inter-ethnic voting is in part dependent on the level of heterogeneity within each constituency. When the constituencies are more heterogeneous and not subject to gerrymandering, then the greater the propensity for STV’s inter-ethnic incentives to take hold.

Instead, Horowitz advocates for the use of AV in single member constituencies in post-conflict states, given the much higher threshold of 50 per cent of the votes +1, in order for a candidate to be elected in a constituency. This requirement ensures that predominantly moderate and cross-ethnic candidates win election to office. However, the threshold may also risk majoritarianism and the under-representation of minority voices. Therefore Michael Gallagher argues that ‘those prioritizing proportionality, a high degree of voter participation, and personal accountability of MPs will logically gravitate towards
PR-STV or open-list PR’ (Gallagher, 2005: 575). With regard to deeply divided societies, Paul Mitchell notes that STV many ‘offer the best of both worlds’ by combining the overall fairness of proportionality with some preferential inter-ethnic vote pooling, countering a critique of PR systems at large (Mitchell, 2013: 2). Simply put:

Electoral systems in which politicians depend on votes only from co-ethnics tend to reward ethnic extremists who assert maximal demands. Systems in which politicians seeking election must appeal to members of more than a single ethnic community and depend on their electoral support generally produce more moderate politics and reward accommodative politicians with cross-ethnic appeals (Esman, 1994: 258).

The rare adoption of STV can be attributed to its rarity, which doesn’t encourage further adoption (Bowler and Grofman, 2000: 18). There exists little understanding about the full consequences of STV, as results vary across context. In Ireland, STV is blamed for intraparty factionalism and an ‘excessive attention to localist, particularistic concerns’ (Bowler and Grofman, 2008: 18). However, these characteristics are largely representative of Irish politics, and are likely to be true regardless of the electoral system used due to the nature of the development of Irish politics.

Although there have been some moves to replace STV in the Republic of Ireland, these have failed. Such has been the support for change amongst political elites twice the government has introduced a referendum on the issue in 1959 and 1968 (Gallagher, 2005). Governing party Fianna Fail introduced the referendum on both occasions, arguing that FPTP would lead to more effective governance through the ‘winner’s bonus’ it provides to the largest political party. On both occasions the public voted in support of STV (Gallagher, 2005).
With regard to STV, the ballot requires a numerate electorate able to access it. In some post-conflict societies this and an explanation as to the operation of the ballot may prove challenging, particularly in rural areas. Supporters of STV however argue that voting is no more complicated than explaining the d’Hondt formula or the operation of the Electoral College in the United States. Indeed, a detailed understanding of the operation of the electoral process may not be necessary if voters are able to understand the transparency of the system and that it gives greater voter choice and produces results that are proportional. The reality of course is that ‘different levels of understanding’ exist with different stakeholders with any electoral system.

The infrequent use of STV may also be explained by the complexity of the vote count procedures. In Northern Ireland’s elections, vote count times have consistently come under significant criticism. In the 2011 election, vote counting continued over two days with the first result being declared at 7pm, nine hours after voting closed. Voting in the Mid-Ulster constituency took 27 hours, despite only counting 43,522 votes (BBC, 2011). In total the process of counting the 2 million ballots, based on a turnout of 54.1 per cent, took two days. This highlights the challenges that could exist in other societies, in ensuring effective and accurate counting procedures. A failure to achieve these would have the potential to risk election related violence. The period between voting and proclamation of results is ‘especially perilous’ (UNDP, 2010: 21). In particular such violence can involve armed clashes among political parties, violent clashes among groups of rival supporters and attacks on the property of opponents.

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9 Lijphart observed ‘STV is considerably more complicated for the voters than list PR: this is… a considerable problem in developing societies with large numbers of illiterate or semi-literate voters’ (Lijphart, 1991: 99).
Conclusion

Moderation on the ethnic issue is a viable strategy only if ethnicity is not salient. Once ethnicity becomes salient and, as a consequence, all issues are interpreted in ethnic terms, the rhetoric of cooperation and mutual trust sounds painfully weak. More importantly, it is strategically vulnerable to flame fanning and the politics of outbidding. Ceylon and Ulster provide recent examples of the vulnerability of moderates . . . In Ulster, Protestant extremists, led by the Reverend Ian Paisley, have held the governing Unionist party in check, rendering moderation impossible’ (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972: 86).

As Rabushka and Shepsle highlight, the dominance of ethnic identity makes electoral choice even more challenging. This chapter has highlighted many of the dilemmas of electoral system choice. Different systems shape different electoral incentives and have different impacts and provide greater or smaller incentives on issues such as stability, efficiency, proportionality, and minority representation, amongst many others.

The next chapter examines the focus of this paper, the STV electoral system in Northern Ireland. It will examine Northern Ireland’s history and the impact that it and current societal challenges have had in shaping the development of Northern Ireland’s electoral processes.
A History Of Northern Ireland

This chapter begins by examining Northern Ireland’s history of inter-communal conflict including the phases of conflict. It demonstrates the challenges that exist in easing tensions between Northern Ireland’s communities, and promoting the cause of societal conciliation. The second section examines the post-1998 constitutional consociational framework and the incentives that it might have on political and voter behavior.

The third section of this chapter examines the application of STV. It looks at the history of the operation of STV within Northern Ireland, before then examining the mechanics of how the STV voting system works in Northern Ireland. The chapter concludes by setting out the structured, focused questions that form the basis of the examination of each of the four elections in the subsequent chapters.

‘The Troubles’

Over the course of ‘the Troubles’ more than 3,600 people were killed. Of these, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) killed approximately 1,800, including 465 British army soldiers, 272 members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and 133 Protestant civilians (Mulholland, 2002: 76). Other republican factions killed 231 people. Loyalist individuals and groups killed 990 people, with 708 targeted as Catholic civilians. Government forces killed 363 people, 145 of whom were republican paramilitaries, and

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192 civilians (Ibid). Over 1,500 of the total number of victims were killed in Belfast. More than 600 of these deaths occurred within a small radius of just a few miles of North Belfast.

In addition to the 3,600 killed, more than 40,000 were injured, 3 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland (Ibid). By 1998, one in seven members of the Northern Irish population had been the victim of a violent incident, with this disproportionately affecting the Catholic community (Ibid). In total since 1972, 17,000 people have been charged with terrorist offences within Northern Ireland (Ibid).

**Phases of Conflict**

Northern Ireland’s ‘Troubles’ began in the late 1960’s and continued until the 1998 signing of the Belfast Agreement. Gerrymandering skewed political representation, such that Londonderry, a city with a two-thirds Catholic population, was still represented by a clear majority of Protestants (Coogan, 2003: 473). Amidst anger from the Catholic community about sustained discrimination by Protestant-dominated governing institutions against Catholics, civil rights protests began in 1964.

Focal points for protests occurred around employment discrimination against Catholics, the unfair distribution of social housing by local authorities in Northern Ireland and discriminatory policing by the RUC. The police were accused of sectarian policing and were dominated by Protestants, who frequently colluded with unionists.¹⁰ The

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¹⁰ One of the most notable killings of the Troubles was the murder of Patrick Finucane, a Catholic solicitor who had successfully challenged the British government in several human rights cases in the 1980’s. This included representing hunger striker Bobby
overlap of the economic inequalities with identity represented a clear case of Northern Ireland’s Catholic community being subject to ‘horizontal inequalities’ (Stewart, 2000).

One such example was the 1965 decision by the Lockwood Committee on Higher Education to recommend that a new university should be built in Coleraine (population 12,000), rather than Londonderry (population of 54,000), despite Londonderry only having one 200-person university. The Lockwood Committee did not contain a single Catholic, and the Committee therefore took a political (ethnic) decision rather than a decision based on the academic merits of choosing where to locate the university. The move resulted in a one-day shutdown of every Catholic school and business in Londonderry, to no avail (Coogan, 2003: 472-473). As Irish historian Tim Pat Coogan notes, ‘it struck me that the whole purpose of the northern state was to keep the Unionist foot firmly down on the Catholic, and that any attempt to remove it would be fiercely resisted’ (Coogan, 2003: 485).

Whilst ‘The Troubles’ began as a conflict between Catholics and the Protestant-dominated state over civil rights, it ultimately escalated into a deep conflict between unionists and nationalists about the ultimate status and sovereignty of Northern Ireland.

Amidst these protests, the Ulster Volunteer Force, a group of Loyalists, emerged and used violence, including targeting Catholic civilians as a means to try and achieve its aims. The civil rights marches, described above, increasingly came under attack by

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Sands. Finucane was murdered by loyalist paramilitaries. The British Government’s Stevens Report (2003) subsequently found that the British security services colluded in the murder.

11 Ulster Loyalism is a form of ethnic nationalism that manifested itself as a political ideology. It was found amongst working-class Protestants in Northern Ireland who opposed a united Ireland and promoted loyalty to the monarchy of the United Kingdom.
Loyalists, in part due to collaboration with the RUC. A burgeoning civil rights movement developed, including iconic figures such as Bernadette Devlin, a political activist who would later become an MP in the House of Commons. A 1968 march in Londonderry was banned by the Northern Irish government and suppressed through the use of violence by the RUC. 100 people were injured and the images were broadcast on television, sparking rioting between the Catholic community and the RUC. From this point onwards, violence escalated with clashes continuing periodically between members of the Catholic community and the RUC.

Conflict Escalation

Violence escalated considerably between 1970-72, reaching its peak in 1972 when 500 people were killed, half of these being civilians. The formation of the Provisional IRA in 1970, a group committed to armed struggle, marked a new level of escalation and replaced the old IRA that had been committed to non-violence. Under growing pressure, the British government introduced internment in 1971 within Northern Ireland. Between 1971 and 1975, 1,981 people were interned with 1,874 of these being members of the Catholic and republican communities. 107 were Protestant (Melaugh, 2013). There were widespread allegations of abuse within the internment facilities, something which fuelled further radicalization within marginalized communities.12 On 30 January 1972, 14 unarmed nationalist civil rights demonstrators were shot fatally by the British Army in Londonderry, a critical moment for the Catholic community.13 The

12 The techniques used, particularly the “Five techniques” were later ruled to be illegal by a British government inquiry.
13 The events in Londonderry of that day were subject to a public inquiry by the British Government that ran from 1998 to 2010. The inquiry cost 195m GBP (320m USD) and was the longest ever inquiry in British history. As a result of the inquiry, British Prime
events of that day, known as ‘Bloody Sunday’, led many Catholics to turn further away from the British Army.

The PIRA became the primary defenders of the Catholic community and mounted attacks against the British army, carrying out 1,300 bombings in 1972 alone, and also killing 100 soldiers and wounding 500. The PIRA used bomb attacks primarily to target citizens, for instance, on “Bloody Friday”, 21 July 1972, when 21 bombs were set off in Belfast city center alone (Coogan, 2003: 567). The UVF and UDA, unionist and loyalist paramilitary organizations, responded by targeting Catholics, and citizens were increasingly forced to ‘self-segregate’ away from mixed areas. Consequently ‘no-go areas’ sprang up across Northern Ireland. This violence between paramilitary organizations and the history of discrimination against Catholics led to a “conflict about the conflict” with a narrative of mutual victimization and perceptions of vulnerability.

The escalation in violence led the British government to introduce direct rule from London in 1972, suspending the Northern Irish government in order to improve the security situation. Anger and radicalization in the nationalist communist increased further, with hunger strikes held by detained nationalist prisoners spurring demonstrations of nationalist community support (Coogan, 2003: 588). Following the death of the detained Bobby Sands during his hunger strike, over 100,000 people attended his funeral (Coogan, 2003: 588).

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Minister David Cameron made a formal apology to Parliament about the actions of the British Army that day, noting that the killings were ‘unjustified and unjustifiable’.
Violence continued into the 1980’s. In 1983 the PIRA political wing Sinn Fein took on new impetus as Gerry Adams became leader (Coogan, 2003: 206). It sought a negotiated end to the conflict, with the conflict increasingly seen as a mutually hurting stalemate for both sides. After a prolonged period the first ceasefires were agreed in 1994 after a particularly bad year of casualties. Although it initially failed, in part due to IRA bombings in London and Manchester, it was followed by a second ceasefire in 1997.

Throughout the conflict there were iterative peace making efforts. Since the introduction of direct rule, there were only two significant peace initiatives that led to formal agreements. The first was the Sunningdale Agreement which was an attempt to form a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland and a cross-border Council of Ireland. It sought to introduce a 78 seat devolved regional Assembly to Northern Ireland, elected by PR, with the British government retaining control over policing and finance (Coogan, 2003: 572). The cross-border Council of Ireland would act consultatively on a small number of policy issues working towards harmonization between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Its members would be made up of a small number of members of the Northern Irish and Irish Assemblies and equal numbers from the respective executive bodies (Mulholland, 2002: 96).

The SDLP, UUP and Alliance supported the agreement but other unionists opposed the agreement. Consequently, the UUP, SDLP and Alliance agreed to form a power-sharing government (Mulholland, 2002: 95). However, by January 1974 deep splits within the UUP put the agreement in jeopardy and by May it collapsed following a
fourteen day general strike led by loyalist organizations in opposition to the Agreement, which led the UUP members of the Executive to resign (Coogan, 2003: 576). The brief attempt at devolved government was over and direct rule from London was resumed. The Sunningdale Agreement would be remarkably similar to the eventual peace agreement in 1998.

In 1985, the Anglo-Irish Agreement between the British and Irish governments sought to increase cooperation as a means to begin trying to renew the process of bringing ‘the Troubles’ to an end (Mulholland, 2002: 117). It gave the Irish government an advisory role in relation to the resolution of conflict in Northern Ireland and stated that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom unless a majority of its people agreed to join the Republic of Ireland (Mulholland, 2002: 117). Unionists were firmly opposed this agreement given the role that it gave the Republic of Ireland in Northern Irish affairs, Consequently, elements of the unionist community engaged in rallies and civil disobedience in opposition to the Agreement. Addressing a large rally outside Belfast City Hall on 23 November 1985, DUP leader Ian Paisley summed up opposition to the Agreement:

Where do the terrorists operate from? From the Irish Republic! That's where they come from! Where do the terrorists return to for sanctuary? To the Irish Republic! And yet Mrs Thatcher tells us that that Republic must have some say in our Province. We say never, never, never, never! (Paisley, 1985).

Ultimately the Agreement did not result in an end to violence or lead to reconciliation between the two communities. However, it was the first step in ensuring
enhanced coordination between the British and Irish governments, which was a key factor in the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998.

The Belfast Agreement and the Referendum

In 1998 the Belfast Agreement was a multi-party agreement signed by most of Northern Ireland’s parties, and the British and Irish governments on Good Friday, 10 April. The Agreement acknowledged that the majority of the people of Northern Ireland wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom, but that a substantial amount of people in Northern Ireland and the majority of the island of Ireland wanted a united Ireland (Belfast Agreement, 1998). Consequently, it was agreed Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom until a majority of Northern Ireland and the Republic agreed otherwise.

The Agreement restored self-government to Northern Ireland through a devolved regional Assembly with a power-sharing executive body and a normalization of the security situation, including the decommissioning of weapons held by paramilitary groups (Belfast Agreement, 1998). The Agreement was dubbed ‘Sunningdale for Slow Learners’ by SDLP Deputy Leader Seamus Mallon, given the basis of Sunningdale and later agreements for developing consensus around what should constitute the eventual agreement (Downey, 2012). Ultimately, the Ango-Irish cooperation in support of the peace process, building from the 1985 agreement was a fundamental part of the process.
Following the Agreement, referendums were held in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland on May 22nd 1998. In Northern Ireland 71.1 per cent of the population voted in support of the Agreement, whilst in the Republic 94.3 per cent supported it (ARK, 1998). The results in Northern Ireland however saw a significantly higher level of Catholic rather than Protestant support for the Agreement.

The period 1998-2007 was dominated by stop-start implementation and gridlock due to the slow-scale of the decommissioning of weapons and some small-scale ongoing paramilitary activity. Consequently, the Assembly was suspended from 2002 to 2007 with Northern Ireland being ruled from London. Then in 2007, following the St Andrews Agreement, a ‘post-conflict settlement settlement’ (Du Toit, 2004) after years of instability and uncertainty, the Assembly was restored. Consequently, the DUP supported power-sharing for the first time and Sinn Fein supported the PSNI for the first time, overcoming their historic distrust of policing in Northern Ireland (Owen, 2006). Further, Sinn Fein and the DUP, traditionally the extremist political parties from the two communities agreed to a power-sharing government. Consequently, the DUP filled the position of First Minister and Sinn Fein filled the position of Deputy First Minister. The power-sharing government became the first administration in post-Agreement Northern Ireland to complete a full term of office. In 2011, after a four year term of office, a new election was held.

Given this Northern Ireland’s recent history has been dominated by the legacy of horizontal inequalities within society and the need for their remediation. With this and the
depth of inter-communal violence over 30 years, particularly through the explicit targeting of civilians from both communities, the lack of social cohesion was severe, and politics was dominated by deeply polarized political parties. Amidst this context, was the development of the electoral process.

**A History of STV in Northern Ireland**

STV was first introduced in the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland in 1920 by the departing British administration, in order to protect minority populations, particularly Catholics. In Northern Ireland, STV was used for local elections and for elections in what was then called the ‘House of Commons of Northern Ireland’, a regional devolved body, which was subsequently abolished in 1973.

The use of STV did not last long. By 1929, STV had been replaced by FPTP for Northern Ireland’s elections and was used until 1973 (Coakley, 2009: 253). The introduction of FPTP served to relegate Northern Ireland’s Catholic population to that of permanent opposition given that Northern Ireland’s Protestant electorate outnumbered Catholics by two to one for most of the period (Reilly, 2002: 135). Consequently, Protestant administrations always dominated the governing bodies, resulting in decades of discrimination being practiced by Northern Ireland’s governing and administrative bodies against Catholics in sectors such as employment, education, housing, amongst many others (Reilly, 2002: 135).
The British Government reintroduced STV in 1973 for elections to the devolved administration in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{14} Between 1972 and 1998, only two elections were held given the levels of violence and inter-communal tensions. The first took place in 1973 and the other in 1982.\textsuperscript{15} The STV electoral system is currently used for elections to the Northern Irish Assembly, Local Government (District Council) elections and elections to the European Parliament.

During the 1998 peace talks the decision was taken to continue using STV predominantly for two reasons. First, the reaffirming of STV ensured harmony with the Irish Republic, something that ensured the support of the SDLP, the key nationalist actor at the negotiations in 1998. It also ensured that clear accountability between representatives and voters would exist, like the FPTP system used for Westminster elections, which ensured the support of the UUP, the key unionist actor at the negotiations (Horowitz, 2002: 213).

Second, the experience of the 1996 Forum election, the election which determined representation at the peace talks, was formative in encouraging the larger parties to support STV. The 1996 special election was conducted with a top-up form of PR and led to smaller cross-ethnic parties such as Alliance, the Women’s Coalition and the Worker’s Party being represented due to the top-up nature of the electoral system which rewarded

\textsuperscript{14} STV was re-introduced in 1972 as part of the British government’s response to the Northern Ireland crisis. This included devolution and power-sharing under the Sunningdale Agreement, which envisioned a power-sharing executive body which would include Protestant and Catholic interests.

\textsuperscript{15} The 1973 election saw parties form along ethnic lines and there was no attempt to appeal for votes from the other community. The basis for winning votes was by appearing ‘hard’ on ethnic issues and any attempts to win votes from the other community would risk being dubbed ‘soft’. Ultimately, 0.25 per cent of votes crossed the ethnic divide. The power-sharing government fell apart in months amidst rising violence.
the 10 largest political parties with a top up seat, enabling parties with geographically dispersed support to have electoral success. The use of PR resulted in a significant fall in first preferences for the UUP and the success of many smaller parties, fragmenting political divisions even further.

Thus, in 1998 the decision to confirm the use of STV was made on the basis of the perceived complexity of list-PR and the perceived ‘messiness’ of PR in the 1996 elections, given that it was perceived to have ensured the presence of ‘too many’ different voices at the talks. Critically, this meant that the adoption of STV was not made in order to induce intergroup accommodation. Instead it was purely seen as a system able to foster proportional office holding (Horowitz, 2002: 213). Brendan O’Leary argues that had AV been adopted in Northern Ireland, particularly with a region-wide list system, then the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) would have won fewer seats than they did under STV in 1998. 16 If the nationalist SDLP had come first, the entire agreement would have been more difficult to implement, particularly given deep unionist concerns about the agreement, even after a unionist party was elected as the largest political party in the 1998 election (O’Leary: 2002, 313).

The ratification of the use of STV represents a form of path dependence. STV’s introduction by the British government in both Ireland and Northern Ireland in 1920 meant that STV became associated with accommodative regimes. Although STV was abandoned in the North in the late 1920’s as the declining unionist population began to

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16 In 1998, under STV, the UUP was the largest unionist party and won the most seats, beating the SDLP, the largest nationalist party by four seats.
fear for their electoral power, in Ireland, the dominance of nationalists meant that STV continued to be used (Horowitz, 2003: 212). Given these legacies, and the fact that in the North both nationalists and unionists associated it with minority office holding, its use was supported by both sides. Thus by 1998 ‘STV was the natural choice’ for Northern Ireland given its use in the Republic of Ireland and its perception as historically facilitating accommodative administrations (Horowitz, 2003: 213).

The decision to use STV after the Agreement was included in the peace agreement, a rarity, given that only a minority of peace agreements include reference to the electoral system for the national parliament, as noted in the previous chapter (Bogaards, 2013: 79). The electoral system choice proved particularly contentious, and the choice of electoral system was subject to intense negotiations in the early morning of Good Friday before the announcement of the Agreement. This was largely because the smaller parties retained a strong preference for constituency-list PR. Ultimately, however the compromise of increasing the number of representatives in each constituency from five to six was agreed as a means of lowering the electoral threshold, aiding the potential for smaller parties to get candidates elected. Nonetheless, there was no difference in level of support for STV based on group affiliation, with objections to STV only coming from smaller parties with geographically dispersed support (Horowitz, 2003: 212). Thus, in Northern Ireland the SDLP, UUP and Alliance all supported STV, whilst smaller parties preferred a top-up form of PR which had boosted the inclusion of smaller parties, including loyalist and non-ethnic parties at the peace talks. Thus the focus of discussions
around STV focused on proportionality, rather than efforts to induce moderation or inter-ethnic cooperation.

STV’s operation is aided by Northern Ireland’s heterogeneous constituencies. Currently, there are only 5 out of the 18 constituencies where the respective minority community makes up less than 20 per cent of the district (Mitchell, 2013: 6). The lack of gerrymandering in Northern Ireland since the Agreement is key to the effective operation of the ‘vote-pooling’ incentives that it can encourage.

**STV in practice in Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, voters are able to vote for as many candidates as they wish in order of preference. Voters declare these preferences numerically, giving a “1” to their most favored candidate, a “2” for their second most favored candidate and so on.

In order to be elected, a candidate must receive a minimum number of votes. This minimum is known as ‘the quota’ and is set according to the following formula in each constituency: dividing the total number of votes cast in each constituency by the number of seats available to be filled, plus one.

\[
\text{Quota} = \frac{\text{total number of valid votes cast in constituency}}{\text{Number of Seats} + 1} + 1
\]

---

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland states that it is an ‘independent and impartial body’. It does not use previous election results or the consideration of future possible voting patterns in its decision-making. It determines the boundaries of the 18 Westminster seats. These same boundaries are used for Northern Irish Assembly elections to elect six members.
Therefore in the Lagan Valley constituency in the 2011 Assembly election this was as follows (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2013):

35,847 total valid votes were cast in the constituency.
6 seats up for election.

\[
\frac{35487}{6 + 1} + 1 = 5070
\]

Voting papers are initially sorted according to first preferences. Any candidate exceeding the quota on first preferences alone, 5070 votes in Lagan Valley in 2011, are elected automatically.

The next stage of the election count is then to transfer the surplus votes of any candidate who has exceeded the quota, starting with the candidate with the largest number of votes. This surplus is the number of votes that exceeds the quota. All the ballots for this winning candidate are examined in order to determine the second preferences listed on each ballot, so that these can be distributed amongst the other candidates. The surplus votes are transferred at a fractional value.

In Lagan Valley, the candidate who received the largest number of first preference votes was Edwin Poots (DUP). Poots received 7329 votes, exceeding the quota by 2259 votes. These 2259 votes were then redistributed at a fractional value. This value is determined by calculating the surplus divided by the original number of votes. In Lagan Valley this meant that:
\[
\frac{2259}{7239} = 0.312
\]

Therefore, 0.312 would be multiplied against the total number of second preference votes that each of Poots’ first preference voters had given to each other candidate. These second preference votes from Poots are then added to the first preference votes of each of the other candidates. The votes are then calculated again to determine whether any of these candidates now have more votes than the original quota needed.

If after this process, all the seats are still not filled, then the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated and their votes are transferred and redistributed based on the second preference votes of those ballots. This process then continues until all the seats have been filled. Each stage of the counting process is known as a ‘count’.

Given the nature of this process, counting can be long. The vote counting in the Strangford constituency in the 1998 election went through 18 different counts before the six candidates were elected. The length of voting in Northern Ireland has been a source of frequent frustration amongst politicians and voters.

**STV within the Consociational Framework**

STV operates within the wider context of Northern Irish politics. The 1998 Agreement introduced a system of governance that is ‘strongly consociational’ (Horowitz, 2002: 194). Thus the institutional nature of the Agreement means that
Northern Irish politics operates with a political framework that meets the four components of Lijphart’s consociationalism.

This system of governance has a number of important ramifications. Key Assembly decisions can only be approved on a cross-community basis. This means that they require either ‘parallel consent’, that is the support of majorities of both unionist and nationalist delegations within the Assembly or a ‘weighted majority’, comprising at least 60 per cent of all members voting, in addition to at least 40 per cent of each of the nationalist and unionist delegations (Horowitz, 2002: 194). Given this, MLAs are required to join one of three blocs upon entering the Assembly – ‘unionist’, ‘nationalist’ or ‘other’. This consociational provision makes it significantly more rewarding to be a member of two of the named communities, and places pressure on those comprising the ‘others’, such as multi-ethnic or non-ethnic parties like the Alliance Party or the Women’s Coalition (Horowitz, 2002:195). This may affect voter behavior and prove a consideration for voters in incentivizing them not to vote for multi-ethnic or non-ethnic parties given the lesser influence they have in the Assembly.

Critics argue that STV may also weaken the intended effects of consociationalism (Lijphart, 1991). As some candidates under STV come to rely on vote-pooling to ensure election, STV impinges on the key thinking of consociationalism, the inclusion of extremes within the system.

In a scenario where a consociational system was designed to include participants from Party A, Party B, Party C and Party D, STV would affect governing and power
dynamics. If Party A and Party D represent polar extremes on a political spectrum yet
some candidates from Party A owed their electoral victory to transfer votes from the
more moderate Party B, then this would reduce the very inclusion of extremes from each
party intended by consociationalism. It would also weaken the power of political elites
within the system, reducing their ability to control party candidates, impinging upon the
notion of a ‘cartel of elites’ that Lijphart famously said consociationalism requires
(Lijphart, 1969: 207).

Given the existence of a grand coalition within Northern Ireland, this may also
disincentivize voters from voting for more moderate parties at elections. The position of
First Minister is held by the party with the largest number of Assembly seats, while the
Deputy First Minister is the leader of the second largest party. Given current voting
patterns, this means the First Minister position is held by the leader of the largest unionist
party, while the Deputy First Minister position is held by the leader of the largest
nationalist party.¹⁸

This may therefore encourage voters to use their lower order preference votes to
ensure the dominance of their favored party from their own community. Consequently,
this may disincentivize voters from voting for smaller parties given the electoral and
political benefits accrued by ensuring that the largest party in your community maximizes
the number of seats it gains.

¹⁸ The First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland are diarchal and the two positions have equal power.
Consociationalism also limits the opportunities for voters to hold political elites to account. Currently, Sinn Fein, the DUP, SDLP, UUP and Alliance Party, together all form Northern Ireland’s government. In total, this means the government controls 102 of the 108 seats in the Assembly. The opposition controls six seats encompassing five different political parties, with the largest having two seats.

Therefore it seems that the consociational institutional framework may have a profound impact in influencing voting behavior and voting preferences. Given the increasing hybridity of consociational and centripetal institutions and incentives in recent peace agreements, Northern Ireland provides important lessons for societies facing similar such challenges.
Analysis Of The Election Cycles

This section analyses the four election cycles since 1998 using the structured, focused questions outlined in the methodology section of the introduction. For each election this includes an examination of the preceding context, the election results, the extent to which political parties engaged in conciliatory and cross ethnic campaigning as well as an examination of how small parties performed given the electoral rules. Figure 3 below illustrates the boundaries of Northern Ireland’s 18 constituencies. These boundaries were consistent for the 1998, 2003 and 2007 elections, and subject to minor changes for the 2011 election.

Figure 3: Northern Ireland Constituency Map
(Source: Northern Ireland Assembly, 2007)

1998 Election

Preceding Context
Prior to 1998, most electoral competition had been contained within an ethnic dual party system. Given voters were committed to either one ethnic bloc or the other, there were few reasons for parties to moderate, and instead competition occurred within bloc through ethnic outbidding.

The June 1998 election was the first following the April 1998 Belfast Agreement and was the first within Northern Ireland’s new post-conflict institutional framework. Nominations for candidates for the election opened just nine days after the referendum results were announced approving the peace agreement on May 22, and closed two days later (Elliott, 1999:145).

Given the proximity to the referendum results, the campaign was largely a rerun of the arguments that had played out in the debate on the referendum. Therefore the DUP and UKUP campaigned on their opposition to the Agreement, in particular emphasizing the ‘moral aspects’ it contained. This centered on anger at the release of prisoners who had been convicted due to paramilitary activity in exchange for these groups respecting the ceasefire.

The UUP predominantly campaigned based on its support for the Agreement. However, of its 48 candidates, six were described as either ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ opponents of the Agreement (Elliott, 1999: 146). The PUP and UDP, loyalist parties, also competed for unionist votes, meaning that there was vast competition amongst unionist parties, with five significant unionist parties competing. In the east of the province, competition was particularly fierce. Within the unionist community there was considerable concern about
the implementation of the peace agreement including concerns about the timetable for weapons decommissioning by nationalist paramilitary groups and the role of republican armed groups in the peace process at large.

The SDLP and Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, known previously for its ‘armalite and ballot box strategy’19 both supported the Agreement and campaigned based on this. Prior to the election, the SDLP rejected a proposal from Sinn Fein for an electoral pact on the basis that both parties were pro-Agreement and that a formal pact was unnecessary given the preferential nature of the electoral system (Elliott, 1999:146).

The Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC) both campaigned to try to win the center ground. It was notable that five of the NIWC’s eight candidates ran in strong areas of Alliance support, highlighting that their campaigning was centered on intra-centrist competition.

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19 The strategy emerged in 1981 with Sinn Fein contesting elections in the Irish Republic and the Republic of Ireland, whilst the IRA continued armed struggle.
Election Results

Table 1: 1998 Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Percentage of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Number of Seats Won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDLP</td>
<td>177,963 votes</td>
<td>21.97%</td>
<td>24 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUP</td>
<td>172,225 votes</td>
<td>21.25%</td>
<td>28 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUP</td>
<td>146,989 votes</td>
<td>18.14%</td>
<td>20 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinn Féin</td>
<td>142,858 votes</td>
<td>17.63%</td>
<td>18 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>52,636 votes</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>6 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKUP</td>
<td>36,541 votes</td>
<td>4.51%</td>
<td>5 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUP</td>
<td>20,634 votes</td>
<td>2.55%</td>
<td>2 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIWC</td>
<td>13,019 votes</td>
<td>1.61%</td>
<td>2 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Unionist Candidates</td>
<td>23,089 votes</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
<td>3 seats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Percentage of First Preference Votes (1998)
The election produced a pro-peace power-sharing government. 75.5 per cent of votes cast went to candidates who supported the peace agreement, a four per cent increase from the referendum. This 75.5 per cent of the vote converted into 80 of the 108 seats. 28 seats went to anti-Agreement candidates, all of who were unionists (Mulholland, 2002: 146). The 28 seats won was two short of the number required to be able to veto within the Assembly. The 28 elected consisted of 20 DUP candidates, five UKUP candidates and three independents. As a result, anti-Agreement unionists had won the same number of seats as the pro-Agreement UUP won.

Splits within the UUP and unionism as a whole on support for the Agreement meant that they had been unable to maintain a united front, contributing to the UUP’s
second place finish based on the number of first preference votes. Furthermore, the large number of unionist parties meant that there was fierce competition for votes and SDLP’s first place finish was largely enabled by what UUP leader David Trimble called ‘vote shredding’ within unionism. The term ‘vote shredding’ emerged in the 1996 elections to the peace talks when there was considerable concern about the ‘shredding of the unionist vote’ due to the depth of intra-unionist competition that reduced the electoral success of the UUP.

The UUP won one per cent fewer votes than the SDLP, the first time a unionist party had not won the most votes. This seemed to support the view of Lijphart that the intra-party choices allowed by STV ballots ‘negatively affects party cohesion, which in turn negatively affects interparty negotiations’ (Lijphart, 1991: 99). Their larger seat tally however allowed them to secure the position of First Minister. The small loyalist parties, such as the UKUP and the PUP, a working-class, pro-agreement unionist party won a small number of seats. UKUP won five seats, the PUP two.

On the nationalist side, the SDLP was the largest party receiving six seats more than Sinn Fein’s 18. Overall, Catholic voter turnout was significantly higher than previously. In 1992, the ratio between Protestant-Catholic voting was 70:30, in 1998 it was 55:45 (McGrattan, 2010: 166). Finally, the multi-ethnic Alliance Party won six seats and the NIWC two seats.

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20 This would be one of the few cases where there would be clear intra-party competition. In contrast, one of the biggest complaints of the operation of STV in the Republic of Ireland is the extent of competition between candidates of the same party.
The implementation of the peace agreement was of deep concern to both communities. Unionists were deeply unhappy with the early release of prisoners and ‘horrified’ at the ‘rebranding’ of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Northern Ireland’s police force, including the use of positive discrimination to ensure Catholic representation in the police (Mulholland, 2002: 146). The IRA did not want to appear the defeated party, and therefore refused to ease unionist concerns through the early decommissioning of weapons (Mulholland, 2002: 146).

**Conciliation**

In the election, 26 of the 108 Assembly members were elected on first preference votes alone. Therefore, 76 per cent of Assembly members needed lower preferences in order to be elected (Mitchell, 2013: 7).  

During the campaign, there had been talk about the development of a pro versus anti-Agreement cleavage. Seamus Mallon, deputy leader of the SDLP, had said that voting for other pro-Agreement parties, including unionist parties, had to be considered (Elliott, 1999: 148). However, analysis of the vote transfer pattern revealed it to be a traditional election and possibly the most communal voting pattern since the reintroduction of STV in 1973 (Elliott, 1999: 148). Despite this 1998 saw a 5 per cent increase in unionist transfers to the SDLP, with a similar increase in SDLP transfers to pro-peace UUP candidates (Tonge, 2005: 113), showing that a small number of voters did seek to reward moderates and those who supported peace.

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21 In subsequent elections on average 30% of MLA’s have been elected on first preferences alone.
Preferential voting facilitated moderation within the unionist community. Anti-Agreement unionist voters were able to initially vote for the DUP (the anti-agreement unionist party), but then use their lower preference votes to support other members of the unionist community who were pro-Agreement. This effect reduced the number of seats that anti-Agreement unionist parties won in 1998. The lower order preferences of those voters initially supporting anti-Agreement candidates served to reinforce more moderate candidates. Given this, STV proved to be the principal reason that a workable assembly emerged from the 1998 elections (Evans and O’Leary, 1999: 3-4) as demonstrated by Table 2 below, and the subsequent pie charts in Figures 6 and 7. STV transfers turned a 0.5 per cent lead in support for anti-Agreement candidates in the first preference count of unionists against the agreement into a 1.8 per cent pro-Agreement Assembly majority of unionist representatives.

Table 2: Assembly Results by Support for the Belfast Agreement. (Source: O’Leary, 1999: 297)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloc</th>
<th>Percentage First Preference Vote</th>
<th>Number of Assembly Seats</th>
<th>Percentage of Assembly Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Nationalists</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All others</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 'Yes' Unionists</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 'No' Unionists</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vote transfer patterns emerged largely from voters themselves, rather than being dictated by party elites. Although some pro-agreement parties, particularly on the

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22 This is in contrast to the operation of STV within the Republic of Ireland, where cooperative campaign strategies featuring reciprocal preference-swapping between candidates, sometimes as part of pre-election vote-pooling deals, can be a key part of the election campaign.
nationalist side, did advocate for transferring votes to pro-peace candidates, there were no
pre-election pacts like those that operate in other countries. There was no formal
agreement between the SDLP and Sinn Fein, despite Gerry Adam’s call for one
(Mitchell, 2013: 9). This however is unsurprising. As Horowitz has noted the threshold
for winning a seat in a multi-member STV constituency is usually too low to encourage
parties to promote preference swapping as a strategy (Horowitz, 1991: 191). Nonetheless,
given the stakes of the 1998 election there was some informal messaging by political
elites as to how to use preferences despite the lack of formal electoral pacts.

In 1998 there was some evidence of voters using their lower preference votes to
support pro-peace parties. Overall however there was little evidence of a willingness to
cross the confessional line and instead voting patterns remained ‘highly communal’
(Elliott, 1999: 149). However, the SDLP suggested to supporters that they should use
their transfers to support pro-Agreement parties rather than allowing anti-Agreement
parties such as the DUP and UKUP to increase their representation (O’Leary, 2002: 316).
In a speech at Belfast’s Clarendon dock during the week of the election SDLP leader
John Hume remarked:

Your transfers to other `Yes' (pro-Agreement) candidates will keep the wreckers
out because those who have said `No' provide no alternative. They are yesterday's men
(BBC, 1998).

Given the strong competition between the DUP and the UUP and the risk of
ethnic outbidding, the UUP did not recommend transfers to the SDLP. Instead, UUP
leader David Trimble suggested that UUP voters should make up their minds based on local circumstances (Breen, 1998). Although the key element in the signing of the peace agreement had been the cooperation between SDLP and UUP, vote transfers between the two were not substantial. A RTE/UMS exit poll revealed that only 1 per cent of SDLP voters would give a second preference to another party and only 4 per cent would give a third preference (Eliott, 1999: 148). For UUP voters the figures were 1 and 3 per cent respectively.

There were six terminal transfers from SDLP candidates to UUP candidates.\(^2\) The unionists received on average 10.3 per cent of the transfer vote. There were six terminal transfers from UUP candidates and on average SDLP candidates received 24.4 per cent of the transfers. The constituency results show that no UUP candidates were elected as a direct result of SDLP transfers. However, the election of Danny O'Connor (SDLP) in East Antrim was the direct result of a favorable set of terminal transfer votes from Ken Robinson (UUP), which left DUP candidate Jack McKee, as runner up. In Newry and Armagh, the redistribution of Danny Kennedy's (UUP) surplus assisted John Fee and Frank Feely (SDLP).

Given this, Reilly has argued that there was ‘striking evidence that the representation of moderate sentiment in the Assembly was greatly assisted by Northern Ireland’s STV electoral system’ in 1998 (Reilly, 2001: 137), something that is supported by the evidence outlined above. Overall though, intra-bloc transfers dominated. SDLP

\(^2\) A terminal transfer is ‘a situation in which the party of the candidate whose vote is being transferred no longer has a candidate available to receive transfers (i.e., the parties’ other candidates have all either already been elected or eliminated’) (Mitchell, 2013: 8).
terminal transfers to Sinn Fein averaged 56 per cent, whilst 70 per cent of transfers from Sinn Fein candidates went to SDLP candidates (Elliott, 1999: 148).

STV also enabled voters who supported ethnic sectarian parties such as DUP and Sinn Fein, to give transfers to more moderate political parties. DUP terminal transfers to UUP were 4 per cent for instance, whilst UUP transfers to DUP were 31 per cent. The transfers from loyalist parties such as PUP and UDP went predominately to the moderate UUP. Hence, overall votes were highly communal, with little sense of the new political cleavage of pro- and anti-Agreement. However, such transfer patterns did benefit moderate candidates within each community, while also showing that some UUP voters were willing to reinforce the more extreme DUP.

Given these effects, vote transfers in the 1998 election served to provide a ‘seat-bonus’ to more moderate ethnic political parties, particularly the SDLP and UUP, who came to be ‘over-represented’ in the Assembly in comparison to their vote share. This was particularly clear in the case of the UUP, which won 21 per cent of the vote, but 26 per cent of the seats. Therefore this provides clear evidence that:

Some of the SDLP’s and Sinn Fein’s voters found it rational to reward David Trimble’s UUP for making the agreement by giving its candidates their lower-order preferences […] likewise, some of the UUP’s and PUP’s voters transferred their lower-order preferences to pro-agreement candidates within their own bloc, amongst the others, and amongst nationalists […] Within bloc rewards for moderation also occurred (O’Leary, 1999: 10).

In East Antrim, the biggest shock of the election was the successful election of Danny O’Connor (SDLP). O’Connor was the only SDLP local councilor and there was
little nationalist support in the constituency. O’Connor initially finished in eighth place on first preference votes, but ultimately finished in sixth due to transfers and was elected. It was the closest of the entire election and O’Connor edged out the next candidate by just 49 votes, highlighting the closeness of the race. An analysis of the vote shows that transfers from the sole Sinn Fein candidate, the elimination of the Alliance candidate, and from the elimination of UUP candidates helped O’Connor to win.

The East Antrim race demonstrates a number of different aspects of voter behavior. O’Connor was aided by intra-bloc transfers following the elimination of the Sinn Fein candidate. O’Connor was aided by transfers following the elimination of the multi-ethnic Alliance candidate. Finally, he benefited from cross-community transfers in support of moderation from vote transfers from eliminated UUP candidates. Such voter behavior is suggestive of strategic voting within the constituency. East Antrim is a unionist stronghold, and in this race four of the remaining five seats went to unionist politicians. O’Connor’s victory edged out a DUP candidate. Given the anti-Agreement campaign platform of the DUP it is unsurprising that moderates such as UUP and Alliance supporters and nationalists would seek to deny a DUP candidate from electoral success.

Although transfer patterns in East Antrim helped to moderate the winning candidate slate, in the Strangford constituency such patterns were less successful. Sole SDLP candidate Danny McCarthy polled strongly in first preference votes, finishing seventh. However, he failed to gain many transfer votes, and McCarthy finished in
seventh place, even after lower-order transfers from 18 different candidates had been transferred to him. Instead, two DUP, two UUP, a UKUP candidate and an Alliance Party candidate were elected. In this constituency, unionists used their transfers to secure enough votes to deny the SDLP winning a seat. In this instance, there was clearly no appetite for using transfers to support a SDLP candidate, most likely due to the lack of a credible threat from a Sinn Fein candidate.

In many constituencies transfers were used predominantly to support-intra party candidates. In East Belfast, Sammy Wilson (DUP) was elected after initially winning just 633 first preference votes. However, he was able to rely on 3,853 transfer votes from then DUP Deputy Leader Peter Robinson given that DUP supporters had stacked many of their first preference votes on Robinson. The next largest number of transfers Wilson received was 87.

**Cross-Ethnic Coalition Building**

Table 3: Performance of Small Parties in 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Percentage of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Number of Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>52,636 votes</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>6 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKUP</td>
<td>36,541 votes</td>
<td>4.51%</td>
<td>5 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUP</td>
<td>20,634 votes</td>
<td>2.55%</td>
<td>2 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIWC</td>
<td>13,019 votes</td>
<td>1.61%</td>
<td>2 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDP</td>
<td>8,651 votes</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
<td>0 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>2,729 votes</td>
<td>0.34%</td>
<td>0 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind Unionists</td>
<td>23,089 votes</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
<td>3 seats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A number of smaller parties ensured electoral success, as demonstrated by Table 3 and Figure 8. Alliance won six seats and NIWC two with both benefiting from transfers from both sides of the political divide. Fringe ethnic parties such as the UKUP, PUP and three independent unionist candidates also achieved electoral success. Alliance and NIWC were the clear recipient of transfer votes from each side of the sectarian divide such that they received far more transfers than there were transfers across the divide (Reilly, 2001: 138). Overall, the election was seen as a breakthrough for the UKUP and NIWC, but a disappointment for Alliance.

- **Alliance**

  Alliance won six seats in the election, a disappointing result, as they picked up just three thousand more first preference votes than they had in the 1996 election that determined representation at the peace talks. It was also notable that Alliance didn’t win a seat in a constituency where nationalists won more than one of the six seats. Of those
constituencies where Alliance won one seat with a single nationalist representative, it was always an SDLP rather than Sinn Fein candidate.

In East Belfast and in Lagan Valley, Alliance won a seat by exceeding the electoral quota purely with first preferences. In East Belfast, the other five winners were two DUP candidates, two UUP candidates and a PUP candidate. With only one SDLP candidate running, and one Sinn Fein candidate, many nationalist voters may have supported APNI with their first preference vote given a lack of credible likelihood of a nationalist candidate winning. Instead the evidence is suggestive that they voted in order to partially moderate the slate of winning candidates.

In contrast, in South Antrim, Alliance’s David Ford was reliant on UUP transfers to win as the UUP sought to hold off a nationalist challenge. In Strangford, Kieran McCarthy of Alliance was also elected by pulling in a large number of unionist transfers. Having initially come fourth on first preferences with 2,947, McCarthy received a steady number of transfers from across the community, before receiving a large 2,298 transfers from the elimination of Peter Osborne, his running mate. This enabled the defeat of Danny McCarthy (SDLP), the only credible nationalist candidate in the constituency, who came seventh, as mentioned above.

• Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition

The Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition was ‘the most widespread beneficiary of lower-order preferences’ winning two seats, despite a very low first-preference vote (O’Leary, 2002: 316). The NIWC benefited from transfers because of its inclusive
orientation towards both republicans and loyalists leading it to reap a more diverse array of transfers than Alliance, who predominantly gained transfers from middle class UUP and SDLP supporters. Instead, Monica McWilliams and Jane Morrice received transfers from supporters of every party (O’Leary, 2002: 316).

Monica McWilliams won a seat in South Belfast after winning only 3,912 first preference votes, in a constituency where the electoral quota proved to be 5,898. McWilliams benefited most greatly following the elimination of Sinn Fein’s Sean Hayes, the only Sinn Fein candidate in the constituency, which resulted in the transfer of 516 votes to McWilliams. Given that in the event the UUP won two seats, DUP one and SDLP two, in addition to the NIWC’s seat, such voting is suggestive of a clear use of lower order votes by some voters to support NIWC rather than a party from across the divide once their own preferred candidate was elected.

After all the transfer votes had been taken into account, Steve McBride of Alliance finished seventh, just fifty votes behind McWilliams, and Myreve Chambers finished in eighth place. The result highlighted the extent of NIWC-Alliance competition and also that nationalist voters had a preference for transferring their votes to NIWC over Alliance candidates given NIWC’s status as a non-ethnic party in comparison to Alliance’s implicit endorsement of unionism. This transfer pattern took root after Sinn Fein supporters had initially used their subsequent preferences to try to support SDLP candidates. The two SDLP candidates benefited from the elimination of Sinn Fein’s Sean Hayes with Alasdair McDonell receiving 890 transfers and Carmel Hanna 823.
The victory of Jane Morrice in North Down is also suggestive of this. North Down is a unionist stronghold and the election resulted in the best UUP performance in the entire election. Three UUP candidates, a UKUP candidate, an Alliance candidate and Morrice were elected. Given unionism’s strength, no Sinn Fein candidates ran and only one SDLP candidate did. Morrice polled only 1,808 first preference votes in the election. Given this, patterns of strategic voting are clear. Following the elimination of SDLP candidate Marietta Farrell, 1811.89 of her 2458.10 votes transferred to Morrice, resulting in her election rather than Alan Graham of the DUP. Morrice was elected with 4897.71 votes. Although Morrice received diffuse support from a number of other candidates, the scale of the lower-transfers from supporters of SDLP candidates provided her significant support. Although she received 1277.82 other lower order transfers, these came from 12 other candidates representing 15 different political parties.

- UKUP

The UKUP was formed in 1995. Unlike other unionist parties, the UKUP was fully opposed to devolution and believed Northern Ireland should be ruled from London. It was fiercely critical of the decision of the British government to allow Sinn Fein to participate in the Northern Irish government prior to disarming. The UKUP also opposed reforms to policing in Northern Ireland. It won five seats, with each win occurring predominantly in unionist strongholds. In each of the five constituencies where they picked up a single seat, other unionist parties won at least three of the six seats. Supporters of UKUP and DUP candidates frequently engaged in vote-swapping given both held an anti-Agreement orientation.
• Independent Unionists

Three independent dissident unionist candidates won election by running on an anti-Agreement platform. Once in power, they formed the United Unionist Coalition. In Upper Bann, Denis Watson won and became leader of the UUC, a loose movement rather than a conventional political party. In 2000 he joined the DUP whilst still retaining leadership of the UUC. This move epitomized the manner in which in just four years the DUP became the standard bearer for the unionist community. Critical to the success of these candidates was their ability to glean unionist transfers, as in the case of Boyd Douglas in East Londonderry and Fraser Agnew in North Belfast, who defeated Martin Morgan of the SDLP by just 289 votes in North Belfast. Critical to Agnew’s victory was the transfer of 1117.13 transfer votes following the elimination of Eric Smyth (DUP).

• PUP

The pro-agreement PUP was a political party intended to represent the interests of loyalist working-class communities and the party enjoyed strong links with the Ulster Volunteer Force, a loyalist paramilitary group.\(^{24}\) The PUP won two seats. It had been formed in 1996 and criticized the DUP and UUP for their abandonment of the Protestant working-class. It sought to promote a policy of holistic conflict transformation. The PUP benefited from transfers from other moderate unionists given its moderate policy positions. In contrast, rival loyalist party, the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) failed to win any seats. The UDP had traditionally advocated independence for Northern Ireland, separate from the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, the only unionist party to

\(^{24}\) The UVF only disarmed and decommissioned its weapons in 2009.
do so. Splits within the UDP and the number of other unionist parties meant that the UDP was marginalized electorally.

**Summary Analysis**

As expected, STV produced a highly proportional result. In 1998, there was some evidence of STV aiding pro-peace agreement candidates through transfers within each community. STV was particularly effective in encouraging political inclusion both in voter turnout and representation. Thus it allowed unionist voters to back an anti-agreement candidate with their first preference vote and then a pro-agreement candidate with a subsequent vote. This ensured voter turnout whilst also reinforcing the political center, ultimately proving critical by transforming a slight first preference vote plurality amongst unionists favoring anti-Agreement candidates, into a slight bias in seat representation towards pro-Agreement unionists through the transfer process.

Transfers between SDLP and UUP candidates also occurred on a small scale, supporting pro-Agreement politicians, conforming with the inter-ethnic vote pooling that Donald Horowitz would envision through a preferential electoral system. Despite the relatively small scale of such patterns, these should not be underestimated given the proximity to the Belfast Agreement. Such behavior most prominently occurred in a strategic ethnic context, with the clearest examples of SDLP-UUP vote swapping occurring as a means to cooperate in order to deny a more extreme candidate such as from Sinn Fein or the DUP from power. Sinn Fein attracted few transfer votes even from other nationalists, with its 19 per cent of the first preference vote only translating into 17
per cent of the Assembly’s seats. This is unsurprising given continuing concern about Sinn Fein’s role in the peace process and the role of the IRA.

Transfers enabled smaller parties to enjoy limited success in 1998. Alliance relied on transfers from unionist candidates for much of its success, whilst the NIWC enjoyed transfers from nationalist supporters once their candidates were eliminated, particularly as they sought to strategically deny unionists from gaining further political representation. The 1998 election proved the best for the smaller parties before the consolidation of the political spectrum by the larger parties. Thus, whilst voters remained wedded to their ethnic identities and voted for ethnic political parties, preferential voting did enable transfers to support more moderate candidates as a means of denying political parties from the other community from gaining further representation.

Thus, this suggests that voting patterns are reliant on a pool of accommodative voters willing to transfer lower-preference votes outside of their core support in support of centrist candidates from within and outside the community who have a clear political space to operate in, as Reilly argues (Reilly, 2001, 139). However, in some cases these patterns were more reflective of calculated strategic voting, rather than truly accommodative behavior.
2003 Election

Preceding Context

The period 1998 to 2003 was marked by several disruptions to the activities of the assembly due to the refusal of unionists to participate in the government until the IRA had discontinued its paramilitary activities. Further, it took more than a year between the election and the appointment of the Northern Irish Executive.

The Assembly and Executive were eventually established in December 1999 on the understanding that the decommissioning of weapons would begin immediately. The lack of progress on decommissioning saw the Assembly suspended just two months later for a period of three months. Continued paramilitary activity associated with the Provisional IRA continued to damage the image of Sinn Fein, particularly as IRA members continued to engage in organized crime and extra-judicial violence.

Given these developments, approval of the Agreement within the unionist community was threatened significantly. In 2002, the UUP resigned from the power-sharing government following the arrests of a number of Sinn Fein personnel for gathering information at the Stormont Parliament to be used for terrorism. Uncertainty and the mistrust of nationalists by many in the unionist community was something that the DUP seized on during the 2003 election.
Election Results

Table 4: 2003 Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Percentage of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Percentage Change in Vote Since 1998</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Change in Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DUP</td>
<td>177470</td>
<td>25.60%</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>162758</td>
<td>23.50%</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUP</td>
<td>156931</td>
<td>22.70%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDLP</td>
<td>117547</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
<td>-0.0005</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>25372</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>-0.00028</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+/- 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUP</td>
<td>8032</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>-1.40%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kieran Deeny</td>
<td>6158</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIWC</td>
<td>5785</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>-0.80%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKUP</td>
<td>4794</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>-3.80%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2003 election marked the beginning of the transformation of Northern Irish politics as can be seen in Table 4 above. After the introduction of the consociational constitutional framework, the ethno-national cleavage had ensured its primacy as the dominant vote determining cleavage in the unionist bloc, reducing further the role of other factors such as class, or social background (Tilley et al., 2008) The suspension of the Assembly four times between 1998 and 2003 served to increase polarization further.
The 2003 election was a critical juncture in the Northern Irish peace process. Overall support for the Agreement amongst Protestants had fallen from 57 per cent in the
1998 referendum to one-third (Tonge, 2006: 199). The election saw voters reward the ‘extremist’ parties, and the DUP and Sinn Fein became the largest political parties in the Assembly. In the election, the DUP gained a further ten seats and Sinn Fein six seats. The DUP’s gains predominantly came from smaller unionist parties rather than from the UUP but it was the first time ever in a Northern Irish election that the DUP had beaten the UUP.25 The UUP’s percentage share of the vote nonetheless increased slightly, although they lost one MLA. On the nationalist side, the SDLP’s performance was the worst since 1973. The increase in support for the DUP and Sinn Fein further reduced the size of the center ground, with the Northern Ireland Woman’s Coalition drastically losing their support.

Sinn Fein finished second with a big increase in its vote, increasing its first preference vote by 33 per cent from 1998. The SDLP lost 23 per cent of its first preference vote compared to 1998. The UUP and the SDLP were relegated into third and fourth place, a remarkable fall from grace. Northern Ireland’s smaller parties were decimated; the Women’s Coalition, the United Unionist Coalition and the Northern Ireland Unionist Party lost most of their support, whilst the Progressive Unionist Party and UK Unionist Party won just one seat each. The Alliance Party saw its vote halved, though it retained six seats, the same number as in 1998. After the election, the Assembly remained suspended until 2007. However, the 2003 election did result in Sinn Fein

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25 In 1998, UKUP had won five seats, PUP one and Independent Unionists three. This time those parties won two seats. The NIWC won two seats in 1998 but none in 2003.
ministers being appointed to the Education and Health departments, something which was too much for many DUP supporters (Tonge, 2006: 199).  

**Conciliation**

The implementation difficulties of the 1998 Agreement became an ‘electoral liability’ for the UUP and an opportunity for the DUP (Mitchell et al: 2009, 404). The DUP’s behavior by 2003 was a combination of anti-system behavior and a desire to amplify its ethnic tribune appeal. This anti-system behavior only ended in 2007 when the DUP agreed to lead a power-sharing government with Sinn Fein. Ultimately, relative perceptions of the effectiveness of each party in representing ethno-national interests was important in the electoral emergence of the historically extreme political parties.

After coming close to outright rejectionism, the DUP achieved its electoral success in 2003 by focusing predominantly on elements of the Agreement that were opposed by a majority of pro-Agreement UUP members. These included policing reforms and prisoner releases. Rather than moderating as Sinn Fein had done, instead the DUP achieved success by blaming the UUP for weaknesses in the implementation of the agreement, in particular for the concessions that had been made to the IRA and nationalist paramilitaries. Instead, the DUP portrayed itself as the defender of Unionism, whilst also subtly moderating its campaign messaging, for instance calling for renegotiation rather than rejection of the Belfast Agreement.

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26 In Northern Ireland since 1998, the number of Cabinet positions held by each party has been decided using the d’hondt formula and a similar process is used for determining which department they run.
By 2003, only 10 per cent of Protestants agreed with the statement that ‘the Agreement is basically right and just needs to be implemented in full’ (Kennedy and Farrington, 2005: 103-4). A BBC poll in October 2002 found that only 33 per cent of Protestants backed the Belfast Agreement overall (BBC, 2002). Finally, the 2003 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey found that only 32 per cent of respondents felt that unionists and nationalists had benefited equally. 48 per cent believed nationalists had benefited more than unionists, and only two per cent felt unionists had benefited more than nationalists (Life and Times Survey, 2003).

The anger within the unionist community about the lack of a peace divided for the unionist community was highlighted by the PUP’s 2003 election manifesto, entitled ‘How long are you prepared to wait for the benefits for our community?’ (PUP, 2003). This stemmed from a clear sense that the Agreement was predominantly delivering benefits to the nationalist community. The DUP subsequently capitalized on this, including through the use of scare tactics in the campaign, such as the DUP’s statement that ‘we are closer to a united Ireland than we have ever been’ (Tonge, 2006: 204). This appeared a gross mischaracterization of the reality. The DUP also proposed seven ‘principles’ and ‘tests’ for a new agreement, which struck a chord with many in the unionist community. This built on the DUP’s pre-existing reputation as a party with the ‘brand identity’ of ‘no surrender’ and more broadly, ‘no’ on policy concessions to nationalists (Mitchell et al, 2009: 404).
The DUP and Sinn Fein began as anti-system parties but over the course of the 1990’s and early 2000’s transitioned into parties willing to work within the power-sharing institutions as the best means of ensuring their long-term success (Mitchell et al, 2010: 403). Sinn Fein’s experience in local elections during the 1980’s was key in encouraging this process. Frequently, Sinn Fein candidates with a high number of first preference votes were usurped by other candidates who received a smaller number of first preferences but much more cross-community support, particularly SDLP candidates (Taylor, 2007: 64). As a result, the failure to achieve electoral success encouraged Sinn Fein to moderate including by supporting the peace process and the decommissioning of the IRA. By 2003, 70 per cent of SDLP first preference supporters transferred their lower preferences to support Sinn Fein candidates (Tonge, 2006: 170). In 2003, both the DUP and Sinn Fein gained from substantial vote transfers and first preference switching from members of the moderate parties in their respective communities (Mitchell et al, 2010: 407). The 2003 election would represent the beginning of the marginalization of the UUP and SDLP by DUP and Sinn Fein success. The strengthening of Sinn Fein was unsurprising given the success that the nationalist community had achieved between 1998 and 2003.

For the UUP, their decision to enter government after 1998 with Sinn Fein ‘proved catastrophic’ (Tonge, 2006: 177), and led many who had supported to start voting for the DUP. Despite divisions within unionism, unionists kept their transfers within the unionist bloc even if it meant pro-Agreement supporters supporting anti-Agreement candidates. Of unionist voters, DUP voters were extremely loyal. In the 1998
and 2003 elections approximately 80 per cent of their lower-order votes went to other DUP candidates (Tonge, 2006: 178).

The DUP sought to bolster its position as the defender of unionism by appealing to all unionists, not just its traditional supporters. In 2003, the DUP’s election manifesto entitled ‘Towards A New Agreement?’ highlighted the DUP’s anger at the current state of the Agreement, something that resonated with the unionist community as a whole. This was a critical policy change. Whilst previously the DUP had rejected the Agreement, in 2003 it called for ‘renegotiation’, enabling it to mobilize the base but also woo disenchanted UUP voters not willing to countenance full rejection of the Agreement. At the same time the UUP leader David Trimble continued to support the Agreement despite the failure of the IRA to start and subsequently complete weapons decommissioning (Mitchell and Evans, 2009: 157).

The DUP focused on opposition to moral elements of the Agreement, including prisoner exchanges and the inclusion of ‘terrorists’ in the new government. It also criticized the all-Ireland elements of the Agreement. The DUP also weakened the position of the UUP and PUP by accusing them of undermining the political process (Frost, 2006: 19). The DUP was also aided by its ability to capitalize on the rivalry between and within other unionist parties. The UKUP was marred by splits that saw four of the five MLA’s resign from the party. They subsequently failed to achieve re-election.

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27 On 5 January 1999, all four UKUP MLA’s except leader Kieran McCartney resigned and formed the Northern Ireland Unionist Party, leaving McCartney as the sole UKUP representative in the assembly. This move in response to McCartney’s proposal that if
Amidst the DUP’s increasing prominence within the unionist community, Sinn Fein sought to assert its position within the nationalist community. Its manifesto entitled ‘Agenda for Government’ demonstrated its centrality to the peace process. The first line epitomized what would come to be the key means of carrying Sinn Fein to electoral success for the next decade. Under the title ‘Making a difference’ it read,

Over the last five years, Sinn Fein has consistently delivered in government, in our communities and in negotiations on the peace process (Sinn Fein, 2003).

The focus on ‘consistent delivery’ and standing up for nationalism enabled Sinn Fein to dominate nationalism over the years to come. Whilst republicans had been able to delay weapons decommissioning in full until 2005, at the same time Sinn Fein had secured significant concessions on police reform, prisoner exchanges and the reduction of British troops based in Northern Ireland.

On police reform, Sinn Fein secured numerous concessions despite it refusing to officially support the PSNI until after the 2007 St Andrews Agreement. By 2001 the RUC had been renamed the PSNI to reflect a more community-focused model of policing, and the uniform, badge, and symbology of the PSNI had been transformed to demonstrate a commitment to cross-community equality. New oversight mechanisms of the police were introduced as part of nearly 200 recommendations being implemented to transform the RUC. Thus, not only did Sinn Fein have clear accomplishments to stand on but also the ability to campaign on the need for future reforms, such that the first 33

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Sinn Fein took up its seats in the power sharing executive without prior Provisional Irish Republican Army decommissioning of weapons then the UKUP members should resign their seats in protest.
pages of its manifesto were devoted to its response to the Agreement. Education, health and the economy combined together comprised a further 20 pages. In contrast, the 2003 SDLP manifesto was seen by many as ‘post-nationalist’, focused on government services, with its key priorities being public services, growth, developing employment skills, and job creation, rather than the constitutional change emphasized by Sinn Fein.

This divergence in both nationalist messaging and DUP’s messaging was the beginning of the development of ‘tribune parties’ in Northern Ireland (Mitchell et al, 2009). Rather than increasing attitudinal polarization in Northern Ireland, there is evidence of increasing attitudinal convergence amongst voters, particularly within each community, ruling out ethnic outbidding as a credible party strategy (Mitchell et al, 2009: 399). Instead, whilst the 2003 election demonstrated increased voter attitudinal convergence, it also saw enhanced support for the traditionally extremist parties. The emergence of ethnic tribune political parties helps to explain why moderate voters may prefer extreme parties in consociational systems of government (Mitchell et al, 2009: 402). This voter behavior occurred due to ‘compensational voting’, where moderates vote for those with stronger or more extreme policies, knowing that in consensual systems of government the process of bargaining and negotiating will lead the policies of ‘extreme’ parties to be watered-down (Mitchell et al, 2009: 402). Consequently, voters vote for the ‘strongest voice’ to represent them in this process.

By 2004 Tilley finds that ‘ethno-national strategy is dominant and left-right divisions play no significant role in conditioning party support within the Protestant
electorate’ (Tilley et al, 2008: 712). The effectiveness of Sinn Fein’s defense of nationalism was demonstrated by a survey that found that of those surveyed, self-identified supporters of every party named Sinn Fein as the most effective party in representing their supporters interests (Mitchell et al, 2009: 411). For Sinn Fein, the focus on delivery and the protection of nationalist interests was successful and Sinn Fein was no longer perceived merely as a republican party but the ‘communal standard bearer’. This enabled Sinn Fein to attract new supporters from within the nationalist community in addition to mobilizing its traditional base. For the DUP, the aim was to protect unionism from Sinn Fein ascendancy.

The level of cross-communal transfers in the 2003 Assembly election was low. As such, the 2003 election served as a rebuke to those who thought the sectarian divide could be eased. The number of transfers within the unionist and nationalist blocs hardened (Tonge, 2006: 175). In 1998, there had been a 5 per cent increase in unionist transfers to the SDLP, with a similar increase in SDLP transfers to pro-peace UUP candidates (Kelly and Doyle, 2000). However, due to the failure of the first term of office of the Assembly, cross-community transfers were less frequent in 2003 and preferential voting provided few incentives for cross-community voting (Tonge, 2006:175).

Instead, voters continued to predominantly remain loyal within their bloc. In West Belfast, Gerry Adams received the largest number of first preference votes and was elected. Of his redistributed votes, 82.7 per cent then went to Sinn Fein running mates. However, the preferential nature of the ballot enabled 13.5 per cent of his transfers to go
to the SDLP, 0.3 per cent to the UUP and smaller percentages yet to other minor parties.
No votes went to the DUP.

In the rest of the West Belfast race, four other Sinn Fein members were elected, and one SDLP candidate. The only unionist representative elected was Diane Dodds. Having received 2544 first preference votes, Dodds received 1513.24 votes when Chris McGimpsey and High Smyth of the UUP and PUP were eliminated. This vast number of transfers enabled Dodds to be elected and is evidence of bandwagoning as other unionist voters corralled behind the ‘most likely’ unionist winner having given their first preferences to their own party initially. Ultimately Dodds beat the final Sinn Fein candidate by just 87 votes, the closest inter-party race of the whole election. Dodds was the first unionist elected to a regional assembly from West Belfast in 20 years.

In 2007, the loss of Dodds’ seat was the only seat DUP lost in the election. This occurred despite a big increase in the DUP first preference vote to 3661. In this election, Dodds received few transfer votes, given that there was no PUP candidate and only one UUP candidate. Consequently, after all transfer votes were taken into account Dodds had 4166 votes in seventh place, 481 short of sixth place. Overall, this performance suggested low unionist turnout was instrumental in failing to allow Dodds to benefit from transfer votes. In contrast, Sinn Fein was also extremely successful in balancing their votes across their candidates.
In other instances, transfers had a more limited impact. In Upper Bann, where two DUP, two UUP candidates, a SDLP candidate and a Sinn Fein candidate were elected, John O’Dowd (Sinn Fein) gained few transfers yet managed to be elected in the final round. The manner in which O’Dowd edged out incumbent Sinn Fein representative Dara O’Hagan for the constituency Dara O’Hagan highlighted the power STV gives voters to choose individual candidates within the same party.

Table 5: Performance of Small Parties (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Percentage of First Preference Vote</th>
<th>Percentage Change of First Preference Vote</th>
<th>Number of Seats</th>
<th>Change in Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>25372</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>-0.00028</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+/- 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUP</td>
<td>8032</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>-1.40%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kieran Deeny (West Tyrone)</td>
<td>6158</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIWC</td>
<td>5785</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>-0.80%</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKUP</td>
<td>4794</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>-3.80%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cross-Ethnic Coalition Building

In 2003, candidates from smaller parties were decimated, as highlighted by Table 5.

The NIWC, the United Unionist Coalition and the Northern Ireland Unionist Party lost

88
most of their support, whilst the Progressive Unionist Party and UK Unionist Party won just one seat each. The Alliance Party saw its vote half, though it retained its six seats. The poor results reflected the marginalization of smaller parties from continued talks since 1998. By focusing on the larger parties continuing talks to resolve the stop-start nature of the Assembly served to delegitimize the voices of those from smaller parties, despite preferential voting aiding their representation in 1998.

- Alliance

In 2003 Alliance owed its seat retention to the transfers it received. This was demonstrated by the fact it received 3.7 per cent of the overall first preference vote, but a considerable 5.6 per cent of the seats. Alliance’s performance seemed poor given that in a 2002 Life and Times Survey, 35 per cent of the population had stated that they did not identity with nationalism or unionism, showing that there was considerable potential for Alliance’s growth (Life and Times Survey, 2002). However, the consociational constitutional framework may have limited Alliance’s performance through the desire of voters to support a ‘tribune’ party who can stand up for community interests. Dominant discourse within the political process was on the inclusion of ‘both’ communities, largely ignoring those who identified outside of unionism and nationalism.\(^{28}\) Alliance may also have been damaged their reputation given that in 2001 three Alliance members re-designated themselves within the Assembly, dropping their categorization as ‘other’ and re-categorizing as ‘unionist’ in order to secure the re-election of David Trimble, the UUP

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\(^{28}\) One example would be a shift to positive discrimination within Northern Irish society. The PSNI implemented a 50/50 recruitment quota into the police for ‘both’ communities (Catholics and Protestants), but no reference was made to those who didn’t identify with either community.
leader, as First Minister, a move that enabled the UUP to return to the power-sharing government.  

Alliance won six seats, on average winning each seat after the tenth count in each ballot, highlighting their dependence on transfer votes. Two of its successes occurred after Alliance initially came seventh in the first preference votes, highlighting its dependence on transfer votes. This is further supported by evidence that four of Alliance’s winning candidates won after being lower in first preference votes than rivals who were not elected (SDLP two, Sinn Fein and UUP) (Tonge, 2006: 186).

In Strangford, Kieran McCarthy of Alliance, won by 291 votes, attracting transfers from across the political spectrum despite a strong challenge from Joe Boyle (SDLP). This represented a clear case of STV enabling voters to reward a more centrist candidate. McCarthy gained similar levels of transfer votes from the Conservative candidate, independents, UKUP supporters and Sinn Fein, before gaining the largest pool of transfer votes following the elimination of the Green Party candidate. The willingness of Sinn Fein and the Greens to support Alliance here is unsurprising, apart from McCarthy, the other five successful candidates were all unionists.

A similar effect was demonstrated in South Antrim, where four unionist candidates, one SDLP candidate and Alliance’s David Ford were elected. Unionist voters seeing a threat from the Sinn Fein candidate used their transfers to ensure Ford’s victory. Ultimately, Ford won by just 180 votes. Thus, the Alliance Party largely remains a buffer

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29 Some media, such as the Guardian, took a more positive view, ‘Alliance saves Stormont from collapse’ (Hunter, 2001).
between the two communities. This is supported by the finding that cross-community voting increases when there is no Alliance Party candidate present (Tonge, 2006).

- **Other Parties**

  Although the Alliance Party managed to retain its six seats despite their first preference vote halving, all the other small parties suffered. The NIWC and other smaller unionist parties saw their support fall dramatically, whilst the PUP and UKUP won just one seat each. The NIWC lost the two seats they had held since 1998. Although in 1998 when they won 13,018 votes (1.6% per cent of the vote), in 2003 the party secured 3,301 votes (0.4 per cent). Monica McWilliams in South Belfast lost her seat by only 127 votes to Alasdair McDonnell of the SDLP, perhaps suggesting a slight preference of the constituency towards the bigger parties and not the smaller ones. In North Down, Morrice polled only 1,181 votes, the tenth largest number of first preference votes in North Down. Few voters used their lower order transfer preferences to support her and she failed to be elected.

  The PUP and UK Unionist Party each won one seat. For the PUP, David Urvine won in East Belfast. The PUP’s message was clear. Its manifesto entitled, ‘How long are you prepared to wait for benefits for our community?’ was a further attack on the perceived abandonment of the loyalist working-class, and sought to address the ‘gross misrepresentation and under-representation of the loyalist working-class’ (PUP, 2003). Finishing fourth initially in first preference votes, with 2990, he gained 4.6 per cent of votes from Peter Robinson (DUP), 8.3 per cent of the transfers from Reg Empey (UUP)
and with that secured enough to be elected following the redistribution of votes from a number of smaller candidates. Thus, Urvine’s progressive and moderate appeal encouraged support through transfers. Overall though, the PUP vote had halved since 1998. Ultimately, in East Belfast two DUP, two UUP, and an Alliance candidate were elected highlighting East Belfast’s position as a unionist stronghold.

For the UK Unionist Party, Robert McCartney continued a second term in office in North Down. North Down’s role as a unionist stronghold aided his performance clearly, with the final slate of winners including two DUP candidates, two UUP candidates and an Alliance candidate in addition to McCartney. The constituency dynamics were very similar to the neighboring constituency of East Belfast. McCartney finished fourth on first preferences, with 3374 votes. The election was close, going to 13 counts with four of the eventual winners only being declared winners on the 13th count.

The weak performance of the PUP and UKUP was unsurprising given the failure of the UUP to deliver the promised peace dividends to the unionist community. Amidst the context of a weak UUP performance, the PUP and UKUP candidates were seen as increasingly peripheral to the political process. Their positions were weakened further due to the lack of engagement they received from the DUP and UUP. Further, the PUP and UKUP were ignored from key talks aimed at restarting the peace process in 2001 at Weston Park in England following the resignation of UUP leader David Trimble as First Minister (BBC, 2001). The stop-start nature of the Assembly meant that there was little record in office for parties such as the NIWC to run on. This in conjunction with the
focus of continuing talks on the larger parties meant that there was little incentive to vote for the smaller parties, particularly given it was more rewarding to be one of the two named communities in the Assembly, putting pressure on those politicians and parties aiming to be multi-ethnic or non-ethnic.

The NIWC’s campaign was also out of touch with the nature of a post-conflict society. Its 2003 manifesto entitled ‘Changing the face of Politics’ included calls for further positive discrimination towards women across society rather than taking on some of the most contentious challenges stemming from the peace process (NIWC, 2003).

- Kieran Deeny (Independent)

One of the biggest talking points of the 2003 election was the winning candidacy of independent candidate Dr Kieran Deeny, a doctor who campaigned on the single issue of keeping intact hospital provision in Omagh. In West Tyrone, Deeny finished in first place in first preferences, with 6158, exceeding the election threshold of 5962.

Prior to the election, the media forecast that one of the two SDLP seats was vulnerable to Sinn Fein but the seat instead went to Deeny. Deeny argued that his election was “a significant message from West Tyrone that people demand things other than green and orange politics” (BBC, 2001). Once Deeny’s surplus votes were redistributed, 47.2 per cent transferred to two SDLP candidates and 29.4 per cent went to Sinn Fein candidates (ARK, 2003) highlighting Deeny’s dependence on voters who had a clear preference for nationalist candidates. Of the other candidates, those who lived in Omagh also benefited given the salience of the hospital issue.
Summary Analysis

The 2003 election witnessed the beginning of the development of ‘tribune parties’. With plummeting support amongst the unionist community for the peace agreement, the DUP positioned itself as the defender of unionism, shifting its position on the political ground to appeal to new unionist voters whilst continuing to mobilize its base. Thus, for the 2003 election it made a subtle policy shift moving beyond the rejection of the 1998 Belfast Agreement and instead calling for its renegotiation. Despite this moderation, the move represented a form of ethnic outbidding, particularly given the dominance of claims that the UUP had been weak in protecting the interests of unionism. This strategic move sought to gain transfer votes from traditional supporters of other unionist parties such as the UUP, UKUP and PUP who wanted a much stronger assertion of unionist interests.

Sinn Fein continued to play a central role in delivering the peace process. It used its campaign to outline a comprehensive agenda for government, promoting itself as the party best able to deliver for nationalists. This strategic positioning enabled it to mobilize its base but also appeal to SDLP supporters who wanted nationalist interests to be protected and who saw the SDLP’s move to ‘post-nationalism’ as premature.

Rather than a party strategy of moderation to occupy the center ground, as seen in some majoritarian electoral systems, Sinn Fein’s strategy was nuanced, positioning itself as a defender of nationalism. While its policy positions were more moderate than pre-Agreement, it remained more nationalist than SDLP. In contrast, the SDLP advocated a
form of post-nationalism focused on public good delivery rather than constitutional issues. The SDLP’s attempt to move beyond nationalism saw it lose six seats in the Assembly.

Amidst this context, smaller unionist parties saw their representation fall significantly, with unionist interests instead being aggregated by the DUP. Consequently, smaller unionist parties, such as UKUP, PUP and the independent unionist candidates lost eight of the ten seats they had won in 1998. Multi-ethnic and non-ethnic parties failed to benefit in the election. Although the success of independent Kieran Deeney entirely on first preference votes showed that STV was capable of delivering success for independents in the right circumstance, Alliance’s failure to add any seats and the loss of both of NIWC’s seats showed that there was no evidence of centrist, or aggregative parties coming to the fore.
2007 election

Preceding Context

Between 2003 and 2007 the Assembly failed to meet due to a negotiations impasse. The 2003 elections began the process of cementing the dominance of the DUP and Sinn Fein as the largest parties within each community. Thus the basis for the formation of the Executive would need to be an agreement between the DUP and Sinn Fein, yet a willingness by the DUP to contemplate power-sharing meant that there was little progress towards a power-sharing government. However, the Northern Bank robbery in 2005\(^{30}\) and Robert McCartney’s murder the same year\(^{31}\) removed any prospect of a deal to form a government. For the DUP, their position remained that power-sharing was ‘out of the question’ (DUP, 2005).

After talks at St Andrews, Scotland in October 2006 focused on power-sharing and policing, a timetable was agreed for the restoration of power-sharing. In January 2007, Sinn Fein announced that it would support the Police Service of Northern Ireland following the approval of more than 90 per cent of party delegates at a special conference (BBC, 2007).

In the event, the election saw a new focus on ‘bread and butter’ issues that hadn’t been seen in post-Agreement Northern Ireland. This shifted the focus away from the

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\(^{30}\) The Northern Bank robbery was the robbery of 26.5m GBP (44.5m USD) of pounds, euros, and dollars from the Northern Bank Headquarters in Belfast. The PSNI, British and Irish Governments all hold the PIRA responsible, with the money seen as a “pension fund” for former PIRA paramilitaries.

\(^{31}\) The murder was believed to have been carried out by members of the IRA and Sinn Fein, who then used their paramilitary muscle to intimidate witnesses. The campaign of the McCartney family led to international support and was publicly backed by President George W. Bush when the family visited the White House.
dominance of deeper questions on communal politics or constitutional questions. Instead, water rates, corporation tax, health, education, and the cost of housing played a large part in the campaign (McEvoy, 2007: 369). Whilst much of the media dubbed the election ‘lacklustre’, most saw it as a return to normalcy. The Irish Times declared the election ‘boring’ as firebrand DUP leader, Ian Paisley, famous for his slogan of ‘no surrender’ was ‘reduced to cheery photo opportunities with old ladies and funny props’ (Irish Times, 2007).

The DUP’s election manifesto, ‘Getting It Right’, in which it outlined the conditions under which it would share power with Sinn Fein, highlighted the evolution of DUP’s approach to post-conflict politics (DUP, 2007). The UUP itself directly used the language of normalcy declaring in its election manifesto that it was now time for ‘normal politics’ (UUP, 2007).

Thus, the 2007 election was the first where all of the five biggest political parties broadly supported the Belfast Agreement and consequent peace process, and saw the DUP and Sinn moderate their policies further.

The DUP adopted explicit messaging designed to stop unionists from voting for anyone other than the DUP. Ian Paisley, and other senior DUP figures, warned unionists that votes for unionist parties other than the DUP would risk allowing Sinn Fein’s Martin McGuinness to become First Minister, a prospect that was unthinkable for many unionists (Moriarty, 2007). More subtly, the party’s election manifesto noted that the DUP was the only unionist party ‘realistically capable of winning more seats than Sinn
Fein to stop them being nominated for the post of First Minister’ (DUP, 2007). Such messaging would be repeated at the 2011 election.

Election Results

Table 6: 2007 Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Percentage of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Percentage Change in Vote</th>
<th>Number of Seats</th>
<th>Change in Seats since 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DUP</td>
<td>207,721</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>+4.4%</td>
<td>36 seats</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>180,573</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>+2.7%</td>
<td>28 seats</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDLP</td>
<td>105,164</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>-1.7%</td>
<td>16 seats</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUP</td>
<td>103,145</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>-7.7%</td>
<td>18 seats</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>36,139</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>+1.6%</td>
<td>7 seats</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Party</td>
<td>11,985</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>+1.3%</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKUP</td>
<td>10,452</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>+0.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Sinn Fein</td>
<td>3,880</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUP</td>
<td>3,822</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>+/-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kieran Deeney (West Tyrone)</td>
<td>3,776</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>-0.3%</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>+/-0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2007 election saw the DUP and Sinn Fein further increase their support and was an endorsement of the St Andrews Agreement’s restoration of devolved government as illustrated in Table 6. The DUP won 36 votes and Sinn Fein 28, making the election ‘hugely successful’ for them (McEvoy, 2007: 373). The results gave Sinn Fein the right to the post of Deputy First Minister and three executive seats. The Alliance Party gained an extra seat and increased their share of the vote.
The SDLP and UUP suffered further and for the UUP it was their worst electoral performance ever. The UUP lost nine seats, one-third of the number of seats they had in
the Assembly. In East Belfast, a unionist stronghold, the UUP lost 11 per cent of the vote and UUP party leader Sir Reg Empey was returned with just 14 per cent of the vote on the third count, a vast reduction in performance compared to the 23 per cent he received in the same seat in 2003. UUP woes were compounded by the performance of Arlene Foster for the DUP. Foster had defected from the UUP and switched to DUP. As a result, her first preference count increased by 2000 votes simply by changing party, indicative of the impact of ‘tribune parties’ and the role of the DUP within unionism. The UK Unionist Party lost its representation in the Assembly. Overall, unionist parties were collectively down 4 seats, nationalist parties were collectively up 2 seats, and ‘others’ were up 2 seats.

Under considerable pressure from the British and Irish governments, the DUP and Sinn Fein agreed to a power-sharing government to begin in May 2007, resulting in remarkable images of Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams sitting side by side in the Stormont Parliamentary Building. Whilst the process of splitting up ministerial portfolios in 1998 took 18 months, this time it was agreed quickly. Using the d’Hondt formula, the Executive was comprised of four DUP members, three Sinn Fein members, two UUP members and 1 SDLP member, in addition to giving it a DUP First Minister and a Sinn Fein Deputy First Minister. Consequently, there was a 7:5 unionist-nationalist split within the Executive and therefore a grand coalition government. In total DUP/UUP filled 54 assembly seats, and Sinn Fein/SDLP 44.
Conciliation

2007 marked the continuation of an emphasis on moderation by Sinn Fein and the DUP. Sinn Fein made further ‘radical’ moves into the ideological space occupied by the SDLP. Sinn Fein encroached on the position of the ‘moderate’ SDLP by facilitating the decommissioning of IRA weapons in 2005 and also accepted the legitimacy of the PSNI in January 2007 for the first time since the Agreement. Sinn Fein critic, Ruairi O’Bradaigh, the President of Republican Sinn Fein, argued that by the 2007 Assembly election Sinn Fein was ‘rapidly becoming indistinguishable from the SDLP’ (McGarry and O’Leary, 2009: 55–56). This moderation however was largely a continuance of gradual Sinn Fein behavior since 1994.

Having held total opposition to power-sharing in 1998 and 2003, the DUP now supported power-sharing in the aftermath of the St Andrews Agreement, something that fundamentally affected the dynamics of political competition. Since 2004, the DUP had demonstrated a new willingness to engage with the Assembly, in part due to the fact it was able to see the opportunities that came with its support for power-sharing, in particular that it would likely fill the position as First Minister. Therefore, its role came to be a combination of at times a confrontational attitude towards republicans and a defense of the unionist community through full participation in the Assembly.

As a result, both of the historically extreme political parties now supported power-sharing. Due to the level of moderation during the 2007 election, unionist and nationalist intra-bloc disagreement was so minimal that the media complained that the election was a
'humdrum’ affair and lacked ‘oomph’ This was because ‘the extremes had moved to the centre ground, leaving it a very crowded place for the old moderates, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists’ (McGarry and O’Leary 2009: 56). As a result of this ideological squeezing, there was a new emphasis on issues affecting everyday life, rather than the dominance of constitutional questions like in the previous two elections. McEvoy summarizes the tone of the election:

An interesting aspect of the election campaign was the greater discussion of more normal ‘bread and butter’ issues rather than communal positions on the Good Friday/ Belfast Agreement or Northern Ireland’s constitutional status. Throughout the campaign the parties focused on policy issues such as water rates, corporation tax, health, education and the cost of housing. The media repeatedly reported that the electorate was concerned first and foremost with the prospect of water charges, which became the number one issue on the doorsteps. The focus on such issues led commentators to pronounce that the campaign was low-key. For instance, the election was described as ‘one of the oddest and strangest elections in the history of Northern Ireland’ and ‘a sense of political quiet’ had taken hold. (McEvoy, 2007: 369).

Furthermore, a 2007 survey found that there was little perceived difference in the desired policies of SDLP and Sinn Fein voters. Instead, it was the constitutional question that continued to shape the vote choice of potential nationalist voters. SDLP voters were much more likely than Sinn Fein to state that they were ‘Northern Irish’, whilst Sinn Fein voters were much more likely than SDLP voters to indicate that they were ‘Irish’. Similarly, Sinn Fein voters were more likely than SDLP voters to indicate that they were nationalist and SDLP voters were more likely to be in favor of devolution than unification with Ireland (Garry, 2007: 465)
On the unionist side, the survey found that there was no statistically significant
difference between DUP and UUP voters on any of the political cleavage measures.
Instead, UUP and DUP voters were equally likely to prefer devolution rather than direct
rule and equally likely to indicate a British rather than Northern Irish national identity
(Garry, 2007: 463). As a result, Garry argues that ‘the DUP has encroached so far onto
the UUP’s position that the ethno-national conflict cleavage has effectively disappeared
as a driver of vote choice between the parties’ (Garry, 2007: 464). Given this, the
emergence of ‘bread and butter’ issues in the campaign was unsurprising, particularly on
the unionist side where a focus on ‘effective delivery’ is perhaps a more significant
explainer of DUP success. Instead there exists a ‘glaring asymmetry’ relating to the very
strongly ethno-national cleavage basis to nationalist party competition and the absence of
an ethno-national cleavage basis to unionist party competition (Garry, 2007: 465).

Given this survey, fears that the implementation of consociational arrangements
in deeply divided societies would increase the salience of the conflict cleavage for party
competition and voting behavior may well be overstated. Given the convergence on the
unionist side, the parties instead focused on issues that affect voters and the effectiveness
of the delivery of promises made. However, despite the findings of this survey, the reality
is likely to be a more nuanced picture than the survey presents. Northern Ireland’s
opinion polls have historically over-stated the level of pluralistic opinion, and the use of
coded and at times explicit ethnic messaging by the parties suggests that the findings of
the survey were optimistic. Instead, in a society seeking to overcome deep divisions,
rhetoric and symbolism continue to play an important role in campaigns and mobilizing turnout.

Changes in ideological outlook within the nationalist community were not one-directional. The SDLP became ‘greener’ and more nationalist ahead of the 2007 election. In 2005, the SDLP issued a document, ‘A Better Way’, outlining its continued desire for a united Ireland and urging action by the government of the Republic of Ireland towards a united Ireland (SDLP, 2005). This included calls for a roadmap to unity, including the holding of a referendum. The document was notable for its statement that once a majority in Northern Ireland supported a united Ireland, then a unified Irish state should be formed irrespective of continuing opposition from a minority (Tonge, 2006: 202).

In 2007, following the decision that MI5 would take over counter-intelligence matters from the PSNI as part of a further normalization of security policy in Northern Ireland, the SDLP made a number of publically critical remarks. In the Assembly, the SDLP even asked for senior MI5 figures working in Northern Ireland to be named. Such concerns came at the same time that Sinn Fein had accepted the role of PSNI in Northern Irish society and was an effort by SDLP to reaffirm its republicanism. With these developments, the SDLP was clearly engaging in more nationalist messaging for the 2007 election.

Overall, there was little evidence of transfers between DUP and Sinn Fein supporters with only 0.1 per cent of DUP surpluses transferring to Sinn Fein and vice versa. There continued to be little reason for the two parties to seek to appeal outside of
their community for votes, given the negative repercussions this would have in mobilizing their base. Despite this, there were infrequent demonstrations of outreach across the divide by the two parties. Rather than a genuine appeal to voters in the other community, these moves were predominantly intended to appeal to the more liberal-minded voters within each party’s bloc.

The 2007 election demonstrated further evidence of ‘institutional learning’, with Sinn Fein in particular being praised for its ‘successful and sophisticated vote management’ (McEvoy, 2007:35). In West Belfast the party balanced five candidates, resulting in all five being elected. This was achieved by Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams’ personal vote being managed down to just over 6,000 first preferences. This allowed the four other candidates to come in just under the quota on the first count, whilst in bloc nationalist transfers then enabled each of them to be elected. As a result, Sinn Fein was the first party to have five candidates elected in the same constituency. The final seat in the constituency was won by the SDLP. Sinn Fein’s success occurred even though the DUP increased the size of their vote in the constituency (McEvoy, 2007: 375).

DUP incumbent Diane Dodds failed to be reelected. Although Dodds had more than 625 first preference votes than the SDLP winner, Alex Atwood, Dodds lost out by her failure to attract as many transfers. Therefore this constituency served to demonstrate that when managed effectively by party political elites, STV rather than encouraging the moderation of candidates within a constituency could facilitate a more exclusive rather than inclusive result (BBC, 2007).
In contrast, the SDLP demonstrated its weak party management in the constituency of West Tyrone. The SDLP ran three candidates, who together received enough first preferences to exceed the electoral quota. However, none of the candidates were able to attract sufficient transfers to be elected. In contrast, Kieran Deeny received transfer votes across the political spectrum and retained his seat.

Multi-ethnic coalition building

Table 7: Performance of Small Parties (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Percentage of First Preference Vote</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
<th>Number of Seats</th>
<th>Change in Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>36,139</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
<td>7 seats</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Party</td>
<td>11,985</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKUP</td>
<td>10,452</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
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<td>1 seat</td>
<td>+/-0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 15: Small Party First Preference Vote

Table: Percentage of First Preference Votes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Sinn Fein</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUP</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinn Fein</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16: Small Party Percentage of Seats

Table: Percentage of Seats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>6.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Party</td>
<td>0.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUP</td>
<td>0.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kieran Deeney (West Tyrone)</td>
<td>0.93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• UKUP

The 2007 election saw a number of ‘dissident’ candidates run because of their opposition to the evolved policies of the DUP and Sinn Fein (McEvoy, 2007: 371). Challengers included Robert McCartney of the UKUP who ran in six constituencies on a unionist ‘anti-Agreement’ platform seeking to prevent an Executive featuring republicans. The UKUP’s campaign was subject to DUP messaging, with the DUP manifesto explicitly noting that ‘votes for independents or fringe Unionist candidates endanger a Unionist majority on the Executive, regardless of the size of the Unionist majority in the Assembly’ (DUP, 2007). In the election, UKUP struggled. McCartney polled badly in all of the constituencies he contested and lost his own Assembly seat. In total the UKUP managed to attract just over 10,000 votes.

• Republican Sinn Fein

On the nationalist side, Sinn Fein also faced competition from a range of independent candidates opposing their willingness to share power, particularly the ‘Republican Sinn Fein’. However the campaign performed poorly. In Mid-Ulster the Republican Sinn Fein candidate received 437 first preference votes and in North Antrim Paul McGlinchey, opposed to Sinn Fein’s policy on policing, obtained only 383 first preference votes. This was in contrast to Sinn Fein’s Daithi McKay who won purely on first preferences, finishing behind DUP leader Ian Paisley who topped the poll (McEvoy, 2007: 374).
• Alliance

Alliance was the only other Assembly Party beyond Sinn Fein and the DUP to make gains. It gained one additional seat, but in key constituencies its vote was up significantly. In East Belfast its vote increased by 9.9 per cent and by 6.7 per cent in South Belfast. The Progressive Unionist Party retained their seat with a new candidate and party leader, with an increased share of the vote in East Belfast.

• Kieran Deeny

While in 2003 Deeny was elected on the first count, this time the campaign was much tougher and Deeny was elected on the seventh count with 3,776 first preference votes. Deeny campaigned again on a single issue, the impending closure of the local Sion Mills medical practice. Given the dysfunctional nature of the 2003-7 Assembly, Deeny never had a chance to impact the closure of services in Omagh. Further, a leaked 2005 letter by Deeny in which he had approached the SDLP with a view to joining the party may have also harmed his support amongst voters.

• Green Party

The Green Party won its first Assembly seat ever, increasing its first preference vote fourfold from 2003. The scale of the increase in the Green vote had been dramatic. In 1998, the Greens had received just 710 votes, 0.09 per cent of the vote. This time they won 1.7 per cent of the vote. Transfers were critical to Green Party candidate Brian Wilson’s victory. Wilson received 2,839 first preference votes and the fifth seat in North Down. Although Wilson received transfers from across the community, the elimination
of the only nationalist candidate in the constituency, William Logan (SDLP) resulted in 641.11 of Logan’s transfers going to Wilson, and another 591 of Logan’s transfers going to Alliance indicating an attempt by nationalists to seek to prevent another unionist being elected. Logan’s transfers were clearly the most significant for Wilson, the next largest number he received were 263.33 following the elimination of independent candidate Brian Rowan.

**Summary Analysis**

The 2007 election underlined a new wave of moderation by both Sinn Fein and the DUP, with Sinn Fein accepting the PSNI for the first time and the DUP demonstrating its willingness to consider power-sharing with Sinn Fein. The DUP’s positioning as the most effective standard bearer for unionist interests was reflected in the election results. It received 30.1 per cent of the first preference vote, but 33.3 per cent of Assembly seats, demonstrating the ‘bump’ it was gaining through transfer votes. Sinn Fein’s strategic positioning as a communal standard bearer resulted in the SDLP repositioning itself with a stronger nationalist orientation. The move was premised on an attempt to keep transfers within the party, but in fact had little impact.

The performance of the smaller parties remained weak and they continued to operate on the fringes of politics. There was no evidence of the development of centrist or multi-ethnic candidates. The Alliance Party gained only one seat despite major developments in the peace process. The Green Party, the PUP and Kieran Deeny each picked up a single seat demonstrating that progressive opinion could be represented, but
this was reliant on the right constituency circumstances, including a narrow cluster of geographic support and a permissive strategic context. It was notable, for instance, that the Green candidate received a considerable pool of transfers following the elimination of the only nationalist candidate in the constituency. This was indicative of strategic attempts to deny unionists from gaining a further seat. Ultimately, the success of centrist parties often came at the expense of other centrist parties, rather than from nationalist or unionist candidates. This highlights that rather than the development of broad cross-cutting centrist parties, instead those parties that did have a multi-ethnic or non-ethnic orientation remained weak and engaged in competition with each other, separate from the rest of the political parties.
2011 Election

Preceding Context

The 2011 election was the first time a devolved government in Northern Ireland had sought re-election since 2007. The 2007-11 administration was the first unsuspended administration since the 1998 Agreement and was completed due to the cooperation of the DUP and Sinn Fein.

Against expectations, Ian Paisley, the firebrand leader of the DUP whose slogan throughout ‘the Troubles’ had frequently been ‘No surrender’ had become First Minister and Martin McGuinness, a former senior member of the IRA, Deputy First Minister. The governing coalition also included the SDLP and UUP. Two years into the term, the Alliance Party was added to fill the contentious Justice and Policing Portfolio. For most commentators, the single biggest achievement of the Assembly was that it ‘lasted the distance’ (BBC, 2011). The sharing of power by Sinn Fein and the DUP however had been unthinkable during 2005, let alone during the depth of inter-communal hatred during ‘the Troubles’.

Despite what many feared, the 2007-11 administration was completed and only saw a sparing use of the minority veto that each community was provided with as part of the consociational framework. Only 20 such vetoes were used over the four year period, ten by each community and these vetoes were largely restricted to contentious issues such as Irish language and education (Conley, 2013: 21). The two communities did not consistently vote in a monolithic bloc, whilst the DUP and Sinn Fein were able to
cooperate on non-controversial issues (Conley, 2013: 21). The threshold for a community veto remained 30 seats, thus delegitimizing the Alliance Party and minor parties within each community.

The 2011 campaign continued a number of recent trends in Northern Irish Politics. The focus on ‘bread and butter’ issues continued from the 2007 election. Despite this the legacies of the conflict retained a role in the election campaign and coded messages were used to ensure voter turnout. The threat of a potential Sinn Fein politician as First Minister was a key strategy used by the DUP to encourage preference voting and turnout on electoral day.

Despite the success of the Assembly in completing its term, the administration still suffered from governance challenges. In 2008, the DUP and Sinn Fein failed to meet for 154 days due to disagreement about the devolution of justice and policing powers from Westminster (Matthews, 2012: 341). Public dissatisfaction with the Assembly was high and the institution was not perceived to have worked well for the population from a governance perspective. This led to concerns about a low turnout of 56 per cent, compared to 70 per cent in 1998. Some argued that the low turnout supported those who argued the Assembly was failing to serve the interests of its citizens, while others argued low turnout reflected satisfaction with the current nature of politics.

There were other sources of tension prior to the election. In 2010, MLA Declan O’Loan (SDLP), for instance, advocated a merger between the SDLP and Sinn Fein, to

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32 Agreement was eventually reached with the new Executive post of Minister of Justice awarded to the Alliance Party leader David Ford on 12 April 2010.
instead form a single nationalist party. O’Loan’s statement prompted anger given that the SDLP had earlier criticized the proposed fielding of a unionist unity candidate (DUP and UUP) in the 2010 Westminster election in Fermanagh and South Tyrone as a sectarian carve-up. The move served to highlight some of the division within the SDLP, and the depth of the dominance of Sinn Fein as the voice of the nationalist community.

Some sections of Northern Ireland remained angry about the ‘unprecedented cordial relationship’ between Sinn Fein and the DUP (Matthews, 2012: 342). The UUP made continued reference to the DUP–Sinn Fein axis as a ‘carve-up’. Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) leader Jim Allister who opposed power-sharing also used this to try to add an electoral mandate to his public profile (Matthews, 2012: 342).

In the run up to the election dissident activity risked further instability. On April 2, 2011, less than four weeks prior to the election, a Catholic police officer, Constable Ronan Kerr, was murdered by dissident republicans in Omagh as part of a continuing campaign of terrorism against the security services. All the major political parties condemned the killing.

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33 O’Loan was suspended from the SDLP.
Election Results

Table 8: 2011 Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of First Preference Votes</th>
<th>Percentage Share of First Preference Vote</th>
<th>Percentage Change in First Preference Vote since 2007</th>
<th>Number of Seats</th>
<th>Seat Change since 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DUP</td>
<td>198,436</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>-0.10%</td>
<td>38 seats</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinn Fein</td>
<td>178,224</td>
<td>26.90%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>29 seats</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDLP</td>
<td>94,286</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
<td>-1.00%</td>
<td>14 seats</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UUP</td>
<td>87,531</td>
<td>13.20%</td>
<td>-1.70%</td>
<td>16 seats</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance Party</td>
<td>50,875</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>8 seats</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUV</td>
<td>16,480</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Party</td>
<td>6,031</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>-0.80%</td>
<td>1 seat</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2011 election largely replicated the results of the 2007 election and was regarded as an endorsement of the previous administration’s power-sharing government. With this election, the DUP had achieved twice the vote of the UUP in two successive elections. Overall changes in representation were minimal, as illustrated in Table 8. The DUP gained two seats, Sinn Fein one, whilst the UUP and SDLP each lost two seats from a body of 108 seats. The election served to cement the dominance of the DUP and Sinn Fein in politics. As the largest party, the DUP took the seat of First Minister, alleviating fears that had been played up by unionists during the campaign that a unionist might have to serve under a Sinn Fein First Minister.
Religion and constitutional preference remained a strong predictor of vote choice in the election. Very few Catholics (3.4 per cent) gave first preference votes to the DUP or UUP, as can be seen in Table 9. Similarly, few Protestants gave first preference votes to Sinn Fein or SDLP (0.3 per cent). Critical for explaining voter choice within each
community remains its constitutional preference. Catholics who prefer a united Ireland in the long term vote for Sinn Fein rather than the SDLP. Protestants who prefer direct rule from London in the long term rather than the continuance of devolution vote for the DUP rather than the UUP. Thus, elections in Northern Ireland largely continue to comprise two different elections, one within each community.

Table 9: Religion and Voting
(Source: Garry, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sinn Fein</th>
<th>SDLP</th>
<th>Alliance</th>
<th>UUP</th>
<th>DUP</th>
<th>TUV</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The election saw the Alliance Party gain one further seat, taking its total to eight. It received the largest increase in the percentage of the vote, 2.5 per cent. Thus, ethnic parties continued to dominate the political spectrum, despite the new prominence and importance the Alliance Party gained by being given the contentious Justice and Policing Ministerial Portfolio. After the 2011 election there was the quickest turnaround in the formation of a new Executive, and the new Executive was announced within a week.

Conciliation

Despite the seeming greater focus on ‘bread and butter’ issues, the election results were very similar to 2007. Due to the ethnic nature of political parties, little attempt was made to appeal to those across the divide. Given the nature of the power-sharing
government, having an effective voice to represent the interests of your community seemed to remain a key factor in determining vote choice with voters continuing to see it as rational to support ‘hardline’ parties, given the perception that they were ‘more robust defenders of their respective communities’ (Garry, 2011:18). Consociationalism itself may incentivize voters to vote for the strongest voice for the community. However, in this case it may have been that more traditional ‘voter bandwagoning’ effects that can explain the result. Voters, sensing the high probability of a DUP-Sinn Fein dominated government were more likely to support those candidates than the UUP or SDLP. Sinn Fein and the DUP are also generally favored as better able to represent voters due to their organizational capabilities.

Sinn Fein and the DUP continued to pursue a more moderate track politically. This was facilitated by the fact that they faced little ethnic outbidding. For the DUP, the threat of losses on its extreme right-flank to the TUV was minimal. Consequently, senior politicians such as leader Peter Robinson were able to moderate the DUP’s message. At the DUP Party Conference in 2010 Robinson advocated the construction of ‘a shared society’ and called for the abandoning of DUP’s long-held zero-sum attitude towards its constitutional rivals (BBC, 2010). Such language has accompanied talk by senior DUP figures of the need to move Northern Ireland forward and the DUP’s rhetoric with regard to integrated education has become much more progressive. This progressive rhetoric was interpreted by many as representing the party moving beyond the legacy of Ian Paisley as part of an attempt to win more lower preference votes from UUP voters.
At the same time and despite the focus of DUP’s manifesto on the economy, the DUP continued to use ethnic and sectarian messaging. The ‘unpalatable’ prospect of a Sinn Fein First Minister was not referenced in party materials, but was used by politicians as they campaigned to drive turnout, as it had been in 2007, despite this being a remote possibility. One outgoing DUP Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) explained: ‘We [DUP] haven’t made it a fear factor, but we have made it an issue’ (Matthews, 2007: 344). It would also feature in local electoral literature and appeared implicit in the DUP slogan on posters across the province: ‘Only One Unionist Party Can Win’.

Similarly, Sinn Fein also engaged in ethnic messaging. Key campaign pledges in its 2011 manifesto included seeking a referendum on Irish unity, calling for tax and borrowing powers to be devolved from London to the Assembly and for people in Northern Ireland to be allowed to vote in Irish presidential elections. The centrality of this messaging was clearly designed to highlight Sinn Fein’s brand as the promoter of the nationalism cause after the first term of power-sharing. Despite this messaging, these campaign pledges were unachievable given the consociational governing structure and the depth of unionist opposition.

Although Sinn Fein and the DUP have moderated their ideology and are constructive members of the power-sharing institutions, these parties have still managed to combine this with a reputation for defending the interests of their respective communities (Garry, 2011, 19). Broad satisfaction within the nationalist community was further demonstrated by the strong rejection of the small number of dissident republican
candidates who ran, opposed to Sinn Fein’s moderation. John O’Dowd’s clear victory, in a hotbed for dissident republican activity epitomized this.

The SDLP and UUP sought to criticize the weakness of Sinn Fein and the DUP in an attempt to win back voters. However, given the consociational grand coalition, which included UUP and SDLP within the Executive, attempts to distance themselves from Sinn Fein and the DUP failed. Due to this behavior DUP leader and First Minister Peter Robinson referred to the SDLP and the UUP as ‘the awkward squad at Stormont’ (McDonald, 2011). Further, given this was the first successful term of government since the 1998 Agreement there was little appetite to change approach given the stability the government had delivered. The slogan of DUP’s election campaign, ‘Let’s Keep Moving Northern Ireland Forward’, aptly tapped into this sentiment (DUP, 2011).

Overall, there was very little change in the nature of the appeals used by the political parties and this was reflected in the election results. The constituency of West Tyrone would be the only district where there were two changes in party representation.

The election was notable for ‘the continued elusiveness of the ‘floating’ cross-community voter’ which meant the fiercest battles for votes remained intra-communal in nature (Matthews, 2012: 343). As a result, the most intense political competition continued to take place between two clear factions in each bloc, the ‘progressive partners’ (DUP, Sinn Fein and Alliance) and the ‘internal opposition’ within the government, the UUP and the SDLP (Matthews, 2007:344).
Peter Robinson’s reinvention as a ‘peacetime unionist’ meant that the DUP had moved from being an anti-Belfast Agreement party in 1998, to a party now firmly in the middle ground of unionism. Once UUP heartlands, such as Lagan Valley, North Down and Strangford, were now overwhelmingly supporting the DUP’s progressive platforms.

An analysis of the election results finds that 74 per cent of transfers from unionist parties went to other unionist parties (Barry and Love, 2011). Only 12 per cent of transfers from unionist candidates went to nationalists (Barry and Love, 2011). Rather than seeing cross-community votes, instead the DUP was so successful by being able to attract transfers within unionism, such that it gained a disproportionate 38 of the seats, from 30 per cent of the vote.

On the nationalist side, 64 per cent of transfers from nationalist parties went to other nationalist parties (Barry and Love, 2011). Only 6 per cent of nationalist voters transfers went to unionists, a decrease from 13 per cent in 2007, refuting those who claimed nationalists might be willing to cross the divide with transfers and support the pro-power sharing DUP. In fact, the DUP only received 2 per cent of the transfers from nationalist voters, whilst Sinn Fein received 2 per cent of the transfers of unionist voters (Barry and Love, 2011). Transfers between the communities remain low, particularly to the historically extreme parties.

In the Belfast West constituency, Alex Atwood (SDLP) was the only non-Sinn Fein candidate elected to the Assembly. Whilst, Sinn Fein candidates filled the five other seats elected in Belfast West, the success of Atwood was dependent upon transfers from
the Alliance Party, UUP, the Socialist Party and the Worker’s Party to win in an election that reached the final ninth possible stage. Atwood’s victory is a clear case of supporters of other political parties engaging in strategic voting through their preference voting by preferencing a credible, non-Sinn Fein candidate in order to limit Sinn Fein’s electoral success.

In 2011, there were three DUP terminal transfer situations, in which no other unionist candidates were available. In these situations, DUP terminal transfers were 58 per cent for the SDLP, 1 per cent for Sinn Fein and 25 per cent of voters did not use another transfer vote (Mitchell, 2013: 10). This is suggestive of DUP voters crossing the divide to aid the SDLP in order to deny Sinn Fein from power. One example of this would be the race in the Foyle constituency.

In the Foyle constituency in the North West of Northern Ireland, there was only one DUP candidate with a credible chance of winning a seat. This is unsurprising given that according to the 2001 census, 75.3 per cent of voters in Foyle had a ‘Catholic-community background’. DUP supporters used their first preference votes to ensure the election of one DUP candidate with the DUP's William Hay being comfortably elected on first preferences alone. With no UUP candidate running, more than 1100 of his 1600 vote surplus then transferred to the SDLP, ensuring that their third seat was safe, contributing to the success of three SDLP candidates. This proved a rare case of DUP voters supporting SDLP candidates, as opposed to the more common practice of UUP voters supporting SDLP candidates. This case is suggestive of DUP voters engaging in strategic
voting in order to moderate the representatives of the nationalist community from Foyle. Here DUP voters used their lower order preferences to aid the election of more moderate nationalist SDLP candidates, rather than allowing the election of more extreme Sinn Fein candidates.

The case of Ruth Patterson, an MLA candidate in the constituency of Belfast West, highlights the intra-party centripetal effect that STV can encourage under some circumstances. Patterson had gained a reputation for contentious behavior during 10 years as a DUP local councilor in Belfast, in particular making remarks in 2004 that were regarded as an incitement to violence against both Catholics and ethnic minority community members. In the 2011 election, despite receiving a high number of first preference votes (the fifth highest in the Belfast South constituency), Patterson failed to attract sufficient transfer votes to be elected as she proved to be regarded as too extreme for voters outside of her core base. Ultimately she was beaten by fellow DUP candidate Jimmy Spratt by just 35 votes.

2011 saw further growing success of Sinn Fein and the DUP in managing their vote at the election, particularly in their core constituencies. Sinn Fein’s performance in its stronghold of West Belfast was the epitome of its ‘learning’ of the electoral system since 1998. As a result of its vote management, it returned all five candidates, despite this being the first election where its President Gerry Adams did not contest a seat in West Belfast. Similarly, in Lagan Valley the DUP capitalized on Edwin Poots’s huge 20.7 per cent first preference vote share to bring home four candidates overall. In three other
constituencies (Lagan Valley, Strangford, East Antrim), the DUP also secured a ‘1-2-3’ finish, something Sinn Fein only achieved in two constituencies (West Belfast, West Tyrone).

Encouraging multi-ethnic coalition building

Table 10: 2011 Small Party Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percentage Share of First Preference Vote</th>
<th>Percentage Change in First Preference Vote since 2007</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Change in Seats since 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance Party</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>8 seats</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Unionist Voice</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1 seats</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Party</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>-0.80%</td>
<td>1 seats</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Before Profit Alliance</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Independence Party</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David McClarty (E Londonderry)</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan McFarland (N Down)</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Chambers (N Down)</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn Purvis (E Belfast)</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Unionist Party</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>-0.30%</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Alliance Party gained an extra seat in the 2011 election after continuing to market itself as a change agent in Stormont. More significant though was a 2.5 per cent gain of the vote, representing a continued increase since 2003 and 2007. Its return of
eight seats was proportional with eight seats equating to 7.4 per cent of the seats in the Assembly, against Alliance’s actual vote of 7.7 per cent. Alliance campaigned on the election slogan ‘Leading Change’ and its election manifesto continued to demonstrate its call for inclusion:

We have been at the forefront of standing up for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We have pioneered power-sharing and integrated education, and been the staunchest and clearest advocates of building a shared future (Alliance, 2011).

Furthermore, its statement, “Rising above the unionist-nationalist divide, we welcome people from all backgrounds” (Alliance, 2011) suggested the sort of possibility for a future of Northern Irish Politics not focused on sectarianism. Nonetheless, its electoral performance only represented a moderate improvement. Despite the emergence of ‘bread and butter’ issues and a seat on the Executive, a one-seat gain highlights the nature of the entrenched voting patterns in Northern Ireland, whilst in North Down candidate Anne Wilson narrowly lost to the Green Party.

The PUP, TUV, Green and one independent each won one seat. Such parties were very much on the fringe of Northern Irish politics. The TUV, a staunchly anti-power-sharing breakaway group won its first seat, with party leader Jim Allister pledging to be a “thorn in the flesh” of the DUP and Sinn Fein (BBC, 2011). It opposed both the St Andrews Agreement and DUP power-sharing with Sinn Fein. The fringe nature of its appeal was demonstrated by its election manifesto which noted that TUV’s key campaign
promises included ‘Unionism that sticks to its word’, ‘Standing resolutely against the IRA’s wreckers agenda’ and ‘Refusing to reward terrorism’ (TUV Manifesto, 2011).

The Green Party retained its one seat in North Down, albeit with a new candidate. Overall North Down saw three DUP candidates, a UUP candidate and an Alliance candidate also elected, an exact replica of the 2007 results in this constituency. The Green candidate narrowly edged out a second Alliance candidate by just 99 votes, however overall the election demonstrated the swell of voters willing to support the centrist policies in this particular constituency.

**Summary Analysis**

The 2011 election demonstrated that despite the settling of many of the constitutional issues with the St Andrews Agreement, the 2007 election, and the successful first full administration from 2007-11, ethnic voting remained dominant and there was only limited evidence of inter-ethnic vote-pooling. Despite election rhetoric focusing on public good provision and the economy, underlying electoral dynamics still reflected ethnic biases. Thus, accompanying policies on public goods provision was ethnic messaging.

The DUP, for instance, relied on the inflated prospect of Sinn Fein’s Martin McGuinness becoming First Minister, as they had in 2007, and which again did not happen. This strategy however enabled them to mobilize their own supporters and encourage supporters of other unionist parties to vote for them through first preference or
lower-vote transfers to support the DUP. Ultimately, the DUP won 35.2 per cent of the Assembly’s seats with only 30 per cent of first preference votes, suggesting that transfers helped to inflate its seat total. Sinn Fein also used ethnic messaging. It used the campaign to promise to hold a referendum on Irish unity, an unachievable aim but something that sought to rally nationalist voters.

Sixteen years after the election, intra-bloc transfers continued to dominate. Although, the fact that 12 per cent of transfers from unionist candidates went to nationalists represents a moderate form of inter-ethnic cooperation, it also highlights the dominance of intra-bloc transfer patterns (Barry and Love, 2011). Only 6 per cent of nationalist voters transfers went in the opposition direction and notably there was very little transfer of votes between the DUP and Sinn Fein, the two most significant parties.

The moderate ethnic parties, the UUP and SDLP, sought to criticize the DUP and Sinn Fein for perceived ‘weakness’ through power-sharing demonstrating that they had been forced to move further away from the center to try and reap electoral success. However, given the inclusiveness and stability that the first power-sharing government had delivered, such messaging was likely to have little impact.

The Alliance Party gained one seat in the election despite holding the high profile Justice and Policing Executive Portfolio since 2009. The one seat gain gave it eight seats in the 108 member Assembly. The TUV, independent David McClartey, and Green Party were the only other small parties to win a seat in the Assembly. Thus, any improvement in fortunes for multi-ethnic and non-ethnic parties is likely to only be gradual and four
election cycles after the Belfast Agreement there remained no evidence of the significant development of the multi-ethnic centrist parties that might have been expected to emerge.
Discussion

In the case of Northern Ireland, this paper has demonstrated that the choice of electoral system plays an important contribution to inclusion and conciliation. Given this, the paper makes the following principal findings:

1. **STV has aided the moderation of ethnic political parties in Northern Ireland**

   The evidence above is suggestive that preferential incentives have encouraged the narrowing of Northern Ireland’s political spectrum through the moderation of the previously extreme political parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein. Whilst one of the key critiques of centripetalism has been the lack of supporting empirical evidence, this paper provides clear evidence of limited centripetalism through an examination of the four election cycles since the Agreement.

   Through an analysis across electoral cycles this research finds that preferential voting has not encouraged the development of broad-based multi-ethnic political parties, as many such as Benjamin Reilly argue (Reilly, 2006). Instead, it has enabled voters to remain loyal to the political party that they have traditionally supported whilst giving lower order preferences to other political parties. This has encouraged political parties such as the DUP and Sinn Fein to engage in political moderation rather than ethnic outbidding as an electoral strategy in order to win votes from other intra-community supporters. Such moderation has enabled Sinn Fein to mobilize its base whilst also
attracting new voters and gleaning lower-order preference votes from voters who support the SDLP. Sinn Fein’s moderation has been ‘spectacular’ (Tonge, 2006: 176):

Political U-turns since the 1990’s, usually initially denied to the grass roots, have included the disavowal of violence, entry to Stormont (the Northern Irish Assembly), removal of the demand for British withdrawal from Northern Ireland within a specified time frame, tacit acceptance of the principle of consent for constitutional change to Northern Ireland, support for power-sharing, acceptance of the European Union and eventually support for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (Tonge, 2006: 176).

The moderation of political parties was not only intended to pick up the first preference votes of voters but also their lower order transfer votes. The incentives provided by preferential voting reduced the divisiveness and exclusionary modes of unionism, instead consolidating unionist voices into a more unifying and inclusive DUP. Limited moderation by the DUP and Sinn Fein has been critical for conflict management within Northern Irish society and for consolidating the progress of the peace process, particularly given the implementation difficulties of the Belfast Agreement in the years 1998 to 2007. Thus, the DUP’s moderation has risked the scope for ethnic outbidding within unionism. The anti-power-sharing UKUP now has no electoral support, and the anti-power-sharing TUV hold only one seat.

This research demonstrates that STV can induce moderation through intra-party and inter-party transfers. Such moderation enabled parties who engaged in accommodative behavior to receive clear electoral rewards by positioning themselves as the defender of community interests, thus enabling them to continue to mobilize their base but also to attract a greater number of lower preference votes from more moderate
voters. Such strategy represents a ‘nested game’ (Tsebelis, 1990). Although it might seem ‘suboptimal’ for more moderate voters within each ethnic community to reward more extreme parties through preference votes, such voting is a part of a network of games in order to determine effective representation for that voter’s community within the wider consociational framework, whilst often also trying to deny candidates from the other ethnic bloc from being elected.

Strategic positioning by Sinn Fein and DUP has limited opportunities for electoral success by multi-ethnic and non-ethnic parties. The most successful multi-ethnic party has been the Alliance Party. In each of the elections it received the following percentage of first preference votes:

- 1998: 6.5%
- 2003: 3.7%
- 2007: 5.2%
- 2011: 7.7%

These performances suggest that there is little indication of growing moderation within the electorate’s voting behavior. Instead, the moderation of DUP and Sinn Fein has enabled the parties to pick up lower preferences from within community voters who already belonged to the more moderate parties in their communities. The Alliance Party’s struggles are representative of those of other multi and non-ethnic parties. The NIWC managed to win two seats in 1998 but none subsequently after initially winning two seats, with the party’s vote halving in 2003 and the non-ethnic Green Party has won one seat in the last two elections.
Some authors, particularly Donald Horowitz, have argued that STV is not suited to a deeply divided society because the incentives for cross-ethnic vote swapping are insufficient. However, this research finds that in this case this same impact has enabled intra-bloc moderation providing crucial benefits to Northern Ireland’s peace process and increasing stability and inclusion within its politics. Nonetheless, in constituencies that lack sufficient heterogeneity Horowitz’s argument has been demonstrated. Horowitz critiqued STV given that its low electoral threshold was insufficient to encourage parties to engage in vote-pooling strategies. This paper has found that in constituencies where one community represents less than 20 per cent of the population that both unionists and nationalists have been able to dominate through in-bloc transfers. West Belfast represents a clear example of this where successful party management means that in the last two elections Sinn Fein have won five of the six seats.

2. Intra-Community and Inter-Community Vote Pooling

Although preferential voting has encouraged some inter-ethnic voting, particularly in the 1998 ‘founding’ election, STV’s principal impact has been in encouraging intra-bloc moderation. Once these effects manifested themselves from the 2003 election onwards and particularly in 2007, it contributed to a significant stabilization within politics and the Assembly moved beyond its stop-start nature to be an effective governing body.
Given the severity of the division between the two communities, there has been little significant voting across the divide, although there is evidence of some SDLP and UUP supporters swapping transfers in order to seek to prevent the DUP and Sinn Fein from winning seats. This has been aided by the development of centrist multi-ethnic/non-ethnic parties such as the NIWC and the Alliance Party. Although some argue that the level of inter-bloc voting should call into question whether STV is the best system (McEvoy, 2007: 376), this fails to recognize the intra-bloc benefits it has had.

This paper has identified patterns of strategic voting under preferential voting. In certain circumstances, voters used their preferences in order to deny a candidate perceived to be unappealing from power. This research has found voter behavior suggestive of this practice. This evidence suggests that such behavior is particularly likely to occur in constituencies dominated by an ethnic bloc. Supporters of candidates from outside the bloc may then engage in strategic voting using their preferences to deny another candidate from the dominant ethnic bloc being elected.

3. Lessons for Institutional Engineering

Consociationalists are often characterized as prioritizing inclusion rather than moderation, whilst critics of consociationalism are often regarded as prioritizing moderation rather than inclusion. However, the case of Northern Ireland should provide further consideration of the merits of combining modes of consociationalism and centripetalism in future post-conflict constitutional frameworks.
The experience of Northern Ireland over the last four election cycles highlights the complexity of institution building in post-conflict states. In this case, while consociational institutions such as the Executive have favored inclusion, the electoral system has promoted centripetalism within each community, helping to moderate the divergent viewpoints within the Executive. Thus, both inclusion and moderation have been encouraged, and now all major parties are included in a power-sharing executive.

This case has important ramifications for the wider debate with regard to electoral systems in deeply divided societies. As noted earlier, Lijphart advocates for the use of closed party-list systems in post-conflict societies given his belief that this electoral system will give party leaders more power within their party, aiding the sustenance of inter-ethnic consociational deals. However, in Northern Ireland, STV did not impact on the ability of party leaders to control their parties and direct their future direction. In contrast, Horowitz’s preference for the use of AV is based on a desire to encourage inter-ethnic vote pooling and the emergence of more moderate parties. Yet, as demonstrated above STV can also encourage moderation and inclusion whilst also having a much lower electoral threshold than AV enabling the representation of diverse views and minority parties.

4. Lessons for a divided society

The nature of the division within society has an important impact on the operation of STV. Northern Ireland’s dyadic divisions have meant that STV has aided the development of a dominant two party ethnic system, with one large party in each
community, in addition to a smaller party within each community. The impact of preferential voting outlined in this paper means that there has been a predominant unwillingness of voters within each community to cross the sectarian divide, despite growing attitudinal convergence.

This underlies the need for a careful assessment of prevailing social and political conditions when choosing a new electoral system. This should include an evaluation of the potential development of multi-ethnic or non-ethnic parties operating in society. Similarly, if a society were to have a tripartite division, the mechanics of STV would also need careful consideration given the potential for strategic cooperation between two of the three communities, which could affect dynamics of marginalization and exclusion of others within society.

The case of Northern Ireland disconfirms theoretical notions that STV is likely to lead to party fragmentation given that voters vote for individuals rather than parties. The analysis of Northern Ireland’s electoral cycles found little evidence of this, beyond splits within the UUP in 1998. Instead candidates typically appeal for personal support whilst also operating as a party team within a constituency. This is because when one candidate is eliminated from the count or has a surplus of votes distributed, it is important for party strategy that the redistribution of votes within the party is maximized and that as many as possible of his or her votes transfer to the party's other candidates, hence benefiting party cohesion.
The performance of smaller parties beyond the two primary ethnic parties within each community provides important lessons for understanding modes of inclusion and conciliation within society. Performance in the 108-seat Assembly can be summarized as follows:

1998 – 15 seats (Alliance 6 seats, UKUP 5, PUP 2, NIWC 2)
2003 – 9 seats (Alliance 6, PUP 1, Kieran Deeny 1, UKUP 1)
2007 – 10 seats (Alliance 7, Green 1, PUP 1, Kieran Deeny 1)
2011 – 10 seats (Alliance 8, TUV 1, Green 1)

With an electoral threshold of 14 per cent, smaller parties have struggled electorally. Although there was evidence of ethnic bloc fragmentation in the political sphere in 1998, in subsequent election cycles small parties have struggled to retain their presence in the Assembly. Voters have continued to predominantly support ethnically based parties and the performance of Sinn Fein and the DUP have been aided through ‘institutional learning’, as the parties have become increasingly successful in managing their approach to elections over election cycles.

Since 2003, the performance of the smaller parties has been capped at 10 seats and has been dominated by Alliance, which has typically won 6 or 7 seats. Despite the scale of government dysfunction between the years 1998 and 2007 there was little public appetite to turn to multi-ethnic parties such as Alliance and instead Alliance tends to predominantly perform well when nationalists are unable to get their own preferred candidates elected. Although a future move away from consociational governing structures could aid the development of multi-ethnic parties in the short and medium
term, a preference for ethnic-based parties is likely to remain. Preferential voting has aided the growth and maintenance of strong and effective ethnic political parties, and has aided a move away from bloc fragmentation, but it has been the DUP and Sinn Fein that has primarily benefited from this effect.

The operation of STV and the extent to which it encourages centripetal activity is dependent on the level of heterogeneity within a constituency, like many electoral systems. Parties with a geographically dispersed support have largely failed to benefit due to the constituency nature of STV compared to a list-system of PR such that parties with geographically dispersed support, such as the NIWC, have failed to maximize their representation. In constituencies with a dominant population from one community, STV can produce electoral results in a manner reminiscent of FPTP. For instance, the dominance of people in West Belfast who self-identify as having a Catholic-community background, has been reflected in voting results with five of the six representatives in the last two cycles being elected from Sinn Fein, particularly aided through intra-bloc transfers. Five of Northern Ireland’s 18 constituencies lack sufficiently heterogeneity such that one community represents less than 20 per cent of the total population in each of the constituencies.

The struggles that small parties have faced electorally has occurred despite the compromise agreed as part of the Good Friday negotiations. This compromise saw the number of representatives in each constituency increased from five to six, reducing the electoral threshold needed to win a seat and also reducing the need to appeal to voters
from outside of a candidate’s core base. Thus, those parties that have managed to break the barrier have done so predominantly through geographically narrow and focused support. It was notable however that in order to win in 2011, the Green Party candidate narrowly squeezed out an Alliance Party candidate, highlighting the level of intra-centrist competition.

The extent to which the current electoral threshold will continue remains uncertain. Both the SDLP and Alliance included provisions in their 2011 election manifestos advocating for reductions in the number of MLAs amidst grumblings about the cost of politics. The SDLP called for a cut from six to five MLAs in each constituency whilst Alliance proposed a deeper cut to the number of MLA’s leaving a total of 80, rather than the current 108. Amidst this discussion, little focus has been paid to the negative repercussions that this would have on the issue of inclusion given that the reduction would lead to elevated electoral thresholds. The focus on the cost of politics ignores the rational for the initial increase from five to six seats per constituency in 1998 that was to enhance inclusion and the representation of smaller political parties and the views they represented.
Conclusion

This study has examined political and voter behavior across Northern Ireland’s four election cycles since 1998. Northern Ireland is the seminal case study for examining whether STV encourages ‘vote-pooling’ behavior in a post-conflict society. This study examined Northern Ireland amidst the puzzle that Northern Ireland has not seen the development of a system of ‘centrist, aggregative and multi-ethnic political parties’ (Reilly, 2006: 816). There has been limited inter-ethnic cooperation despite what some supporters of STV expected and centrist, aggregative multi-ethnic political parties have failed to achieve the electoral success expected. Instead, Northern Ireland’s historically ‘extreme parties’, Sinn Fein and the DUP have benefited at the expense of more moderate parties within the political system.

Although there is little evidence at large as to how the incentives of electoral systems take effect, this research posits that the preferential electoral system has encouraged intra-community moderation, rather than encouraging inter-ethnic cooperation through the rise of multi-ethnic centrist, aggregative parties. Preferential voting has provided electoral incentives for Sinn Fein and the DUP to moderate from their previously extreme positions. In 1998, the DUP was a political party that rejected the Belfast Agreement. Sinn Fein supported the Agreement but did not support the civilian police force in Northern Ireland. With these political positions strategies of ethnic outbidding, each party achieved limited electoral success with the DUP winning the third
largest number of seats in the 1998 election and Sinn Fein the fourth largest number of seats.

Over subsequent election cycles, the incentives of preferential voting have encouraged Sinn Fein and the DUP to moderate in order to maximize their opportunities for electoral success. In the period 1998 to 2007 there was increasing dissatisfaction amongst unionists with the Belfast Agreement but little appetite for its rejection. Consequently, the DUP subtly moderated its messaging. Rather than arguing for rejection of the Belfast Agreement as it had previously, instead it called for renegotiation in order to attract the preference votes of disenchanted UUP supporters while also mobilizing the DUP base. A failure to do so and a continued inability to attract lower order preferences from within the unionist community would have risked further electoral marginalization.

Amidst the stop-start implementation of the Belfast Agreement, Sinn Fein positioned itself as the ‘defender’ of the interests of the nationalist community. Thus, Sinn Fein moderated a number of its policy positions after 1998 culminating in its acceptance of the PSNI in 2007. Its ‘defender’ role enabled it to mobilize its base whilst also attracting transfers from SDLP supporters who wanted to ensure that the nationalist community realized the benefits of the Belfast Agreement and who found Sinn Fein’s policies more attractive and pragmatic during a process of post-conflict transition than the SDLP’s attempts, particularly at the 2003 election, to move nationalism to a post-nationalist agenda.
Amidst this, Northern Ireland’s multi-ethnic and non-ethnic parties have failed to achieve electoral success. The Alliance Party achieved 7.7 per cent of first preference votes in 2011, its best performance in post-Belfast Agreement Northern Ireland. Although, preferential voting is expected by some to incentivize voting for multi-ethnic candidates, there been little support for such candidates. With the exception of a number of small geographic clusters of moderate opinion, Alliance has predominantly benefited electorally when voters have engaged in strategic voting in order to deny a candidate from the other community from electoral success, particularly when such voters are in the clear minority in that community.

The difficulty of establishing how political elites and voters respond precisely to electoral incentives is well known. Nonetheless, this paper has demonstrated patterns of intra-bloc conciliation but limited cross-ethnic campaigning across elections. Although this research has not been able to demonstrate a systematic pattern of behavior, the patterns found provide the basis for important future research in this area given the continuing puzzle of how elites and voters respond to electoral incentives. The findings of this research suggest that such research could consist of a systematic pattern of interviews with political elites about the nature of campaign strategizing and coalition making across the four Assembly elections in post-Belfast Agreement Northern Ireland. The patterns across cycles demonstrated in this research also suggest that a second research project focused on running experiments to measure voting behavior would provide further clarity as to how preferential voting incentives shape voter behavior. This would be particularly valuable when voters were faced with strategic ethnic voting
dilemmas of the type documented above. Such research would enable a greater and more nuanced understanding of the operation of conciliation and cross-ethnic campaigning in response to the incentives of the electoral system.

Given how rarely STV is used in national level elections, we must be cautious in understanding its implications and we cannot be sure what STV’s ‘general’ effects are (Gallagher et al, 2011: 389). However, this paper does provide an important analysis of the impact of STV in the only divided society in which it is currently used. As Horowitz himself notes, the role of a political scientist should not be to give ‘off the shelf’ recommendations with regard to electoral systems (Horowitz, 1991: 165). Yet, what is clear is that electoral systems should not be seen as “mechanistic, abstract and highly technical” (Norris, 2004: 64) but instead as something that can have a fundamental impact on conciliation and moderation in a post-conflict society, as in the case of Northern Ireland.
Bibliography


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