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# representation

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## The 2001 Elections in Northern Ireland: Moderating 'Extremists' The Squeezing of the Moderate

**Paul Mitchell, Brendan O'Leary and Geoffrey Evans**

After signing the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement it was the considered policy sovereign governments to isolate what they called the 'political extremes' in Ireland and build up what they called the 'moderate centre-ground', from power-sharing government could be constructed. The policy did not work, quickly and not as intended, but the Agreement did generate the environment which came a peace process and eventually a political settlement. The peace turned the original logic on its head. The extremes were to be integrated, wanted to be. John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, kick-started the public process by talking with Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin in 1988 and again in the 1990s; and that eventually led to everyone (except some in Ian Paisley's DUP with Adams and his colleagues. In short, the paramilitary cessations of violence later the historic compromise, the Belfast Agreement of Good Friday 10 April were achieved by enticing political hard-liners into a political and institutional settlement in which they have a stake.

Politics is transformative of identities, as well as a mechanism for their and defence, and what was most fascinating about the 2001 Westminster election in Northern Ireland was the metamorphosis of both Sinn Féin and Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Despite misleading rhetoric to the contrary 'extreme' parties moderated their platforms, and may continue to do so, a softening of their positions partly explains their electoral successes. An era system politics which had seen the abstention and exclusion of Sinn Féin, a frequent self-exclusion ('Ulster just says "no"') of the DUP, is being succeeded era of active negotiations, legislative and committee room politics. These for the time being, have become stake-holders in the panopoly of institutions by the Belfast Agreement – the Northern Ireland Assembly and its novel Executive North-South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council, the British-Irish intergovernmental conference, the British-Irish inter-parliamentary body. The of these institutions, to put it mildly, were neither Sinn Féin's nor the DUP's preference, but their consociational and confederal logics (O'Leary, 1999; 2001) have given both sufficient incentives to participate in styles that are anti-system than their historic credentials would have suggested.

### Extremists into moderates?

The absolute – if ultimately futile – opposition of the DUP to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, and its more nuanced opposition to the Belfast Agreement, – working within (most of) its institutions, including its executive, but criticising Sinn Féin – led to subtle shifts in the DUP's position as the elections approached. Far from calling for the Belfast Agreement to be scrapped, the DUP called for its renegotiation. The DUP's best-known rallying cry ('No Surrender') and absolute opposition to any 'Dublin interference' in Northern Ireland had morphed by 2001 into a demand that any North-South institutional relationships be rendered more palatable by requiring that they be made more fully accountable to the devolved Assembly in Belfast. Such changes in its positioning, ably directed by DUP deputy leader and campaign manager, Peter Robinson MP, repositioned the party more competitively, especially in relation to the disaffected supporters of an openly fractious Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). The DUP had a long history as a party that favoured devolution, and neither the party nor many of its potential supporters wanted to bring down the new Assembly: they just wanted it run in a different manner, without Sinn Féin in government.

More obviously Sinn Féin has also progressively moderated its position. Since 1996 the party has been the principal electoral beneficiary of an end to active war. The IRA's cessation of its armed campaign, Sinn Féin's *de facto* acceptance of the consent principle (that is, that Irish unification requires the consent of majorities in both parts of Ireland) and its enthusiastic participation in all of the Agreement's institutions have rendered the party more acceptable to others and more relevant to nationalist voters. While the peace process was the handmaiden of Sinn Féin's electoral 'second coming' (O'Leary and Evans, 1997), the incorporation of Sinn Féin into 'ordinary politics' has undermined the distinctiveness of the SDLP's own strategic position faster than anticipated. Especially for younger nationalist voters, the question increasingly arises: why not vote for the fresher and more assertive brand? For them, the SDLP looks aged, and some of its Europeanist and 'post-national' talk cut little ice with voters focused on local issues and quarrels. While it is hard to imagine that the peace process could have been sustained without some electoral rewards for Sinn Féin, few expected the pace of its gains since 1994, and especially its breakout performance in 2001.

### Overview of the results

Nationalists went from holding five to seven of Northern Ireland's eighteen seats. The constituencies which border the Republic of Ireland are now entirely nationalist: southern and western Northern Ireland have nationalist MPs running in a swathe from Foyle, through West Tyrone, Fermanagh & South Tyrone, and Newry & Armagh, to South Down. The west has been 'deep greened', with three adjacent Sinn Féin constituencies (West Tyrone, Mid Ulster and Fermanagh & South Tyrone); and in the

Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, hold the two nationalist seats away from the border, in Mid Ulster and Belfast West.

**Table 1: The 2001 elections in Northern Ireland: Aggregate results and bloc, seat bonuses and (dis)proportionality**

Party	Westminster 2001 (compared to 1997 Westminster elections)				Local government (compared to local government elections)			
	Votes (V) % (+/-)	Seats (S) N (+/-)	Seats (S) (%)	Seats-Votes (S-V) (%)	Votes (V) % (+/-)	Seats (S) N (+/-)	Seats (S) (%)	Seats-Votes (S-V) (%)
UUP	26.8 (-5.9)	6 (+4)	33.3	6.5	23 (-4.9)	151 (-31)	33.3	-7.8
DUP	22.5 (8.9)	5 (3)	27.8	5.3	21.5 (5.9)	131 (+0)	27.8	6.3
LKUP	1.7 (0.1)	0 (-1)	-	-1.7	0.6 (-0.1)	2 (-2)	0.6	-2.3
PUF	0.6 (-0.8)	0 (-1)	-	-0.6	1.5 (-0.7)	4 (-2)	1.5	-0.9
Conservatives	0.3 (-0.9)	0 (-1)	-	-0.3	0.3 (-0.1)	0 (-3)	0.3	-0.4
NI Unionist	0.2 (-)	0 (-1)	-	-0.2	0.2 (-)	0 (-1)	0.2	-0.2
<b>Total U bloc</b>	<b>52.1 (1.6)</b>	<b>11 (-2)</b>	<b>61.1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>47.1 (-0.4)</b>	<b>290 (1)</b>	<b>61.1</b>	<b>-14.0</b>
Sinn Féin	21.7 (5.6)	4 (2)	22.2	0.5	20.6 (3.7)	108 (+34)	22.2	1.6
SDLP	21 (-3.1)	3 (-)	16.7	-4.3	19.4 (-1.2)	117 (-3)	16.7	-2.7
<b>Total N bloc</b>	<b>42.7 (2.5)</b>	<b>7 (2)</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>-3.8</b>	<b>40 (2.1)</b>	<b>225 (+3)</b>	<b>38.9</b>	<b>4.0</b>
APNI	3.6 (-4.4)	0 (-)	-	-3.6	5.1 (-1.5)	28 (-13)	3.6	-1.5
NWIC	0.4 (-)	0 (-)	-	-0.4	0.4 (-0.1)	1 (-)	0.4	-0.4
WP	0.3 (-)	0 (-)	-	-0.3	0.2 (-)	0 (-)	0.3	-0.1
Others	0.9 (-0.1)	0 (-)	-	-	7.3 (-1.1)	37 (-20)	0.9	-0.8
Disproportionality in 2001		7.3				3.1		
Disproportionality (average 1981-97)		18.7				3.6		

#### Notes:

1. The measure of disproportionality used is the least squares index (LSI) devised by Michael Gallagher (1991). Independents have been excluded from the calculations. The 'others' (0.9%) are excluded since they are not a bargaining actor. However, their inclusion would make only a marginal difference.

2. The LKUP vote can no longer be considered a 'party vote' – it is effectively a one-person party. All of the 11 Westminster votes were for Bob McCartney. In the District Council elections the LKUP's eleven candidates in

At the same time, the unionists' demographic grip on Northern Ireland is slipping – they are retreating into their heartlands of north Armagh, North Down, Antrim and East Londonderry. A ring of DUP seats now flanks this heartland. Belfast, the distinctive epicentre of conflict, is becoming increasingly green: the local government results held on the same day as the Westminster elections confirmed that Sinn Féin is the largest party in the city. But in 2001 unionists took three of its four Westminster seats (DUP: 2, UUP: 1). In the long run, with changing demography and with this electoral system, it seems feasible that Belfast South may go to the SDLP and possibly Belfast North to Sinn Féin.

The DUP had its best ever Westminster election, in seats and vote-share, and Sinn Féin for the fifth consecutive election had by far its strongest result. The much-touted moderate ground and the centre of 'others' of Northern Ireland politics appears to be sinking, as Table 1 reveals. While UUP shed nearly 42,000 votes compared to 1997, the DUP gained 75,000. Similarly, Sinn Féin gained 49,000 extra votes while the SDLP lost 21,000. The fact that the DUP and Sinn Féin have partly achieved such gains by stealing the moderates' positions is likely to be of limited comfort to the UUP and SDLP, the formerly pre-eminent parties in the unionist and nationalist blocs respectively, who are now left, if not naked, at least partially disrobed.

### Context and campaign

It was the first Westminster election since the Belfast Agreement. The referendum to ratify the Agreement in May 1998 led to almost unanimous endorsement by nationalists, North and South. By contrast, it split unionists evenly into 'Yes' and 'No' camps, and their parties likewise: the UUP was for the Agreement, as were the small loyalist parties, the PUP and the UDP; the DUP was against, as was the small UKUP. The pro-Agreement UUP was itself deeply divided. A majority of its Westminster MPs opposed the Agreement, isolating its party leader David Trimble, though as the First Minister of the Assembly he had much stronger support amongst his Assembly members (MLAs).

The general election was called during a local crisis. Though the Agreement's institutions were functioning, deep fissures had erupted within the UUP and rendered Trimble very vulnerable (Tonge and Evans, 2001). To compel Sinn Féin to coerce the IRA to start decommissioning its weapons he had embarked on a series of political sanctions. First, he blocked the two Sinn Féin ministers in the power-sharing executive from participating in the North-South Ministerial Council. The Sinn Féin ministers and the SDLP Deputy First Minister, Seamus Mallon, promptly took Trimble to court, and won. Justice Kerr ruled his action 'unlawful' in January 2001. Trimble immediately appealed the decision, but lost. Then just before the UK general election began, Trimble repeated the tactic he had deployed in 2000; he wrote a post-dated resignation

the Agreement's institutions (Trimble's preferred default), or leaving the Assembly trigger fresh elections, because of its failure to replace the First and Deputy Ministers within six weeks (12 August 2001). His short-run calculation appeared to be that the resignation threat would immunise him, and his party's candid criticism from other unionists over their willingness to share government without the absence of IRA decommissioning.

Nationalists had spent much of the year before the election trying to redress government's failures to live up to its public promises faithfully to implement Report on policing, in letter and in spirit, as mandated by the Agreement. They were in turn used within the nationalist community to justify the IRA's failure to decommission weapons verifiably beyond use, though it had twice supervised international inspections of its arms-dumps as a confidence-building measure, and organised these just before the general election. The SDLP had done considerable work to amend what became the *Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000* (neither the Act nor the published implementation plans delivered the full 'Patten lite'). Sinn Féin and the SDLP therefore made police reform and the first report one of the central planks in their election campaigns – taking stances with both the UUP and the DUP. Feedback from constituencies in unionist strongholds suggested that the UUP lost support to the DUP because of the scale of police reform while the SDLP lost support to Sinn Féin amongst young nationalists because of insufficiency of police reform, and because the SDLP appeared more pliant.

The campaign was conducted according to the logic of a dual party system: competition within the unionist and nationalist blocs being much more important than competition across the blocs (Mitchell, 1991; 1995). Unlike all other elections in Northern Ireland – local government, Assembly and European – the Westminster election is held under single-constituency (first-past-the-post) plurality rule. Therefore we have expected to see some tacit agreement within the blocs to support leading candidates in each constituency, to prevent the other bloc from winning. That logic used to operate, especially within the unionist bloc, where the incumbent kept out nationalists had restrained the DUP from campaigning against incumbent in 1997. Yet within the nationalist bloc this logic had not operated because the SDLP had not been prepared to organise pacts with a party assenting to support for violence.

One might also have expected the fact that local government elections were held on the same day, under the single transferable vote (STV) system of proportional representation, to have restrained rhetorical criticism of rival parties within the system separately, seeking to win under plurality rule at Westminster, while maximise first preference and lower-order STV transfers in the local government

holding his seat. The DUP personally targeted Trimble as a vacillating traitor. Its cartoons lampooned him as a bent-over old man with a long flowing white beard and a resignation letter stuck in his pocket with the caption 'Trust me. I will not wait indefinitely for IRA decommissioning'; its web site mocked him as the IRA's delivery boy. For the local government elections the DUP advised its voters to give their lower-order preferences to 'like-minded', that is anti-Agreement, unionists. The DUP's combination of hard-hitting attacks on Trimble, and its offer not to cause chaos, merely to re-negotiate the Agreement, paid handsome dividends. Though it did not run candidates in four constituencies it came within a hair's breadth of becoming the largest unionist party in vote-share and seat-share in a Westminster general election. The party's one significant setback was to lose the seat it had gained in a by-election from the UUP, the Reverend William McCrea losing to David Burnside of the UUP.

The UUP leader managed to get all his party's candidates to stand uncomfortably behind a common pro-Agreement platform, albeit one that heavily emphasised the need to achieve IRA decommissioning. This fooled no one, as some of his incumbent MPs (especially William Ross, William Thompson, and the Reverend Martin Smyth) were known to be anti-Agreement, and they tried to stave off criticism from the DUP by emphasising their anti-Agreement credentials. This, of course, merely added to the party's public disarray, aggravated when one of its elderly incumbent MPs, Cecil Walker, put in an embarrassing television performance that threw away the North Belfast seat to the DUP's Nigel Dods. The UUP's solitary success in nomination strategy was to run a new pro-Agreement candidate, Lady Sylvia Hermon, in North Down, where she toppled McCartney. In the local government elections Trimble advised that voters should 'primarily consider pro-Union candidates after the UUP', rather than other pro-Agreement candidates (BBC website, 26 May), the line taken by the SDLP. This advice made it less likely that small numbers of pro-Agreement Catholics would vote tactically for pro-Agreement UUP candidates.

Within the nationalist bloc Sinn Féin fought an energetic, disciplined, and well-funded campaign. It sought to increase its vote share (standing candidates in every one of the 18 constituencies), its seat-share, and to get the nationalist electorate's endorsement for the Agreement, and its stances on policing, demilitarisation and decommissioning. In the republican priority list, the latter was usually last amongst the matters needing to be implemented to fulfill everyone's obligations under the Agreement. Sinn Féin's success in achieving extraordinarily high turnouts, both in its safe and its target seats, is detailed below. Its vote-share rose in every constituency in Northern Ireland, except Belfast South, where it made no tactical sense to vote for the party's candidate. Sinn Féin appear to have won most of the new young nationalist voters, who endorsed the party even in locations where there was an SDLP incumbent or where the SDLP candidate appeared to have the better chance of winning. Sinn

The SDLP's strategy was to portray itself as the key pro-Agreement party that had made the peace process and the Agreement possible, and one with a democratic and good governance agenda. It trumpeted its successes in bringing together a programme of government out of the four parties in the Executive resisted appeals by the Alliance Party to form a pro-Agreement pact on behalf of the UUP. The SDLP hoped to hold and slightly expand its vote-share, and to win an additional seat. In fact its total vote fell, but not by that much, in comparison with 1997 – only approximately 21,000 across Northern Ireland. It targeted Westminster constituencies withdrawing precious resources from Belfast, to support its high profile Executive Minister for Agriculture Brid Rodgers against the Sinn Féin Vice President in the 2001 election to no avail.

The inter-ethnic or non-ethnic 'Others', principally the Alliance Party, were in 2001. By comparison with previous elections, not only did the flanking chunks from the moderates within their own blocs, but the moderates apperodded the support of the Others, who also made tactical decisions to sacrifice their own prospects. The Alliance's proposals to make pro-Agreement candidate arrangements were firmly rebuffed by the UUP and SDLP, who were determined to maximise their share of the vote (*Irish News*, 2001, 10 March; 3 April).

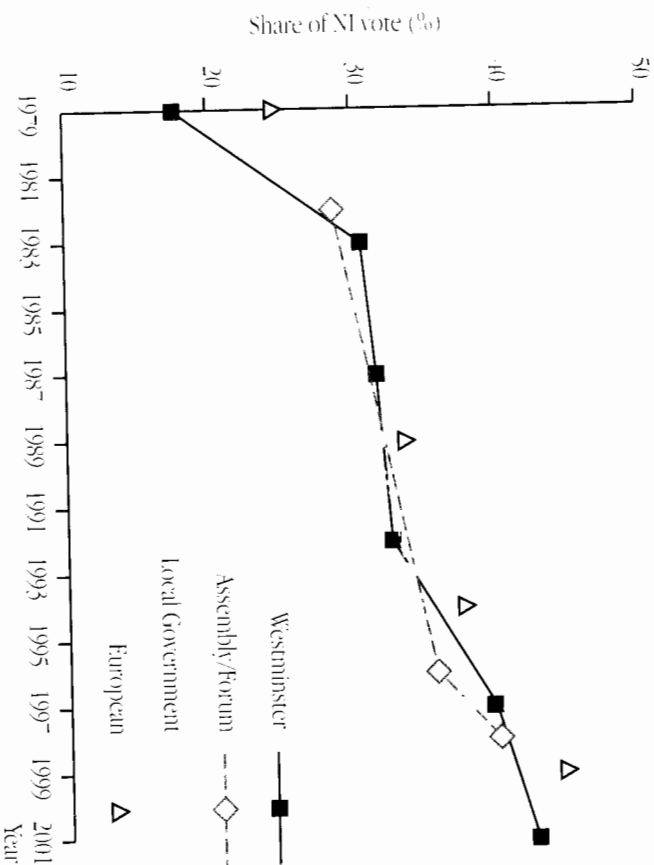
The campaign once again highlighted the unreliability of polls in Northern Ireland at least insofar as voters' intentions are concerned: they consistently underestimated the intensity of their political preferences. If the public had been anywhere near moderate as they have generally represented themselves to pollsters during the three decades there would not have been a Northern Ireland question. A *EA Telegraph/Irish Independent* poll conducted by Irish Marketing Surveys published in May suggested that the UUP, with 25% of respondents likely to vote for it, was 10 percentage points ahead of the DUP (14%), and that the SDLP (25%), was 10 percentage points ahead of Sinn Féin (16%). The poll did pick up two signpost pointers: young unionists are the most anti-Agreement, and in the 18-24 age group Sinn Féin is the most popular party with 24% (compared with 15% for the UUP and 13% for the SDLP, a portent of things to come).<sup>1</sup>

### Analysis of the results

The 2001 Westminster election was the most exciting and dramatic that had occurred in Northern Ireland. While political scientists and journalists are fond of saying that a particular election was 'dull', Westminster elections in Northern Ireland have often seemed like a contest of the moribund. With only a small number of seats available, incumbents generally well 'dug in', little partisan change and few voters in an ethnic party system, change has appeared glacial (Mitchell, 1999). It is not to say that alignments have been frozen and that nothing interesting has

successive elections was 7% in 1987, 5.2% in 1992, 7.2% in 1997, but then doubled in 2001 to 14.5%.<sup>10</sup> To put this in perspective, the average net volatility for nineteen European countries in the 1980s and 1990s was 9.2% and 11.5% respectively (for the UK alone, 3.3% and 9.3% in the same periods) (Gallagher *et al.*, 2001: 263). Similarly, seats very rarely changed hands between parties,<sup>11</sup> whereas in 2001 seven seats changed partisan control and three incumbents survived by narrow margins. In short, in 2001 Northern Ireland had a genuinely competitive and perhaps a watershed election.

**Figure 1: The growing Nationalist vote in Northern Ireland, 1979-2001**



#### Bloc performance

Before considering the performance of parties in detail, let us take stock of the overall bloc changes. In previous work, two of the present authors began with what they called a bold and falsifiable prediction. This was that the 1997 Westminster election would likely be the last in which the Unionist (with a capital 'U') bloc would win an overall majority of the votes cast in Northern Ireland (O'Leary and Evans, 1997). At the 1997 general election the total U bloc (the UUP, DUP, UKUP, PUP, UDP and Conservatives) had managed just 50.5% of the total vote, compared with 40.2% for the Nationalist bloc, comprising the SDLP and Sinn Féin. Although the small Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) supports the Union, it is usually not defined as part of

1979. However, in 2001 the prediction was falsified, although the logic behind prediction is likely to prove accurate in respect of future trends. In 2001 the actually improved its position to 52.1%, though the nationalist bloc grew by more to 42.7% (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The interesting question is: why bloc not only hold its own but even manage a modest improvement?

Especially since 1996, unionist politicians and commentators have often unionists' less than optimal performances as due to differential abstentionism: absence of a full-scale election study (estimating which individual voters act to the polls) we have no direct information on the differential turnout of the and nationalist blocs. Indirect analysis confirms that turnout does appear to in unionist strongholds (Mitchell, 2001). As explained in the note to Table 2, Westminster constituencies (which in the 1998 Assembly elections served as member constituencies, returning six members each) can be categorised as predominantly 'unionist', 'nationalist' or 'balanced' on the basis of the 1998. For example, a predominantly 'unionist constituency' for the purposes of Table in which at least four of the members returned to the 1998 Assembly self-identified 'unionist'. The results in 1998 were clear and quite dramatic: the average turnout in 'unionist constituencies' was 64.6%, just over 10% lower than in 'nationalist constituencies'. Differential turnout is of course an important competitive dynamic in ethnic party systems, and these results may suggest that the unionist vote has been depressed by a lower willingness of unionists to turn out and vote, partly because there has often been a safe incumbent and no intra-unionist competition. The plausible explanation of the U bloc's improved position in 2001 is that the unionist parties were more successful in mobilising some of their more apathetic part in the context of a Westminster election that everyone believed would be the most competitive ever. After all, fear of losing seats to ethnic rivals is one of the classic motivators in such segmented party systems. But plausible as this proposition seem, Table 2 indicates that it is incorrect. In 2001, as in previous elections, the U bloc won the turnout wars: indeed the N bloc was even further ahead of the U bloc on occasion (a lead of 10.7%).

So how did the U bloc vote stay above 50%? The simplest explanation is that more prosaic than complex considerations of differential constituency turnout simply the U bloc in 2001 had one significant competitor missing: the Alliance Party deployed candidates in only ten constituencies, seven fewer than in 1997, in sacrificing itself. The Alliance Party, in attempting to maximise the chances of leading pro-Agreement candidate in several constituencies, paid the price of own percentage vote cut in half (see Table 1). In several constituencies the U bloc major beneficiary. Indeed, if most of Alliance's 7,553 votes in 1997 in North C historically the Alliance's strongest constituency, transferred to the UUP candi

**Table 2: The turnout wars**

Number	Unionist	Nationalist	Balanced	N Lead
Average turnout in 1998 Assembly election (%)	64.6	74.9	72.5	10.3
Average turnout in 2001 Westminster election (%)	63.6	74.3	70.9	10.7

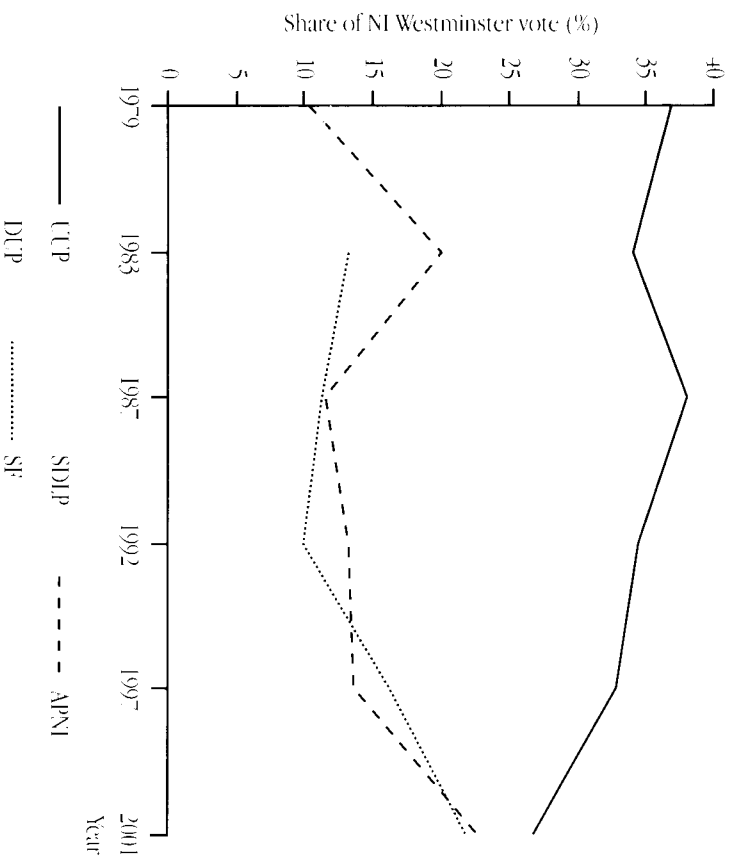
*Notes:* The table shows average turnout by constituency type. 'Unionist' constituencies are those in which at least four of the elected assembly members in 1998 self-identified as unionists in the Assembly (TUP, DUP, DUP, DUP, DUP or independent unionist). Similarly 'nationalist' constituencies are those in which at least four of the elected members belonged to either the SDLP or Sinn Féin. This leaves two 'balanced' constituencies: Fermanagh & South Tyrone elected 3 nationalists (2 SF, 1 SDLP) and 3 unionists (2 TUP, 1 DUP); Belfast South elected 3 unionists (2 TUP, 1 DUP), 2 nationalists (2 SDLP) and one 'other' (NIWC). The comparison is possible because the constituencies have not changed geographically (the Assembly election involved selecting members from each Westminster constituency), though of course we are comparing across electoral systems.  
*Source:* Adapted and updated from Mitchell, 2001.

The results in 2001 were a triumph for the DUP and Sinn Féin, but big winners also began to be big losers. The biggest of the losers was the UUP, now merely a front-runner compared with its former hegemonic domination of Northern Ireland politics. While 2001 certainly constituted the UUP's worst-ever Westminster election, in which for the first time in the modern party system it plummeted significantly below the 30% barrier to only 26.8%, it can be seen from Figure 2 that this is just the latest dip in a long term decline.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, the trend line for the other big loser in 2001 – the SDLP – had been a gentle but steady incline, benefiting from a growing Catholic population and a progressively more nationalist electorate. While the SDLP vote continued to rise, its rate of growth slowed appreciably as the 'peace process' continued, with most nationalist gains going to Sinn Féin. For example, as Figure 2 shows, the SDLP vote in 1997 was barely up (by just 0.6%) on its 1992 Westminster performance. Over the same time period Sinn Féin's vote jumped by 6.1% to a total of 16.1% in 1997. Sinn Féin's accelerated growth continued in 2001 with a further gain of 5.6% to a new total of 21.7% (a 35% increase on its 1997 vote), thus capturing the long sought symbolic prize of becoming the largest nationalist party. Sinn Féin has gone from being an abstentionist party, as it was before 1982, to being the largest nationalist party today and probably the party with the greatest share of young voters, in less than 20 years. The answer to the question 'Who has benefited electorally from the peace process and Belfast Agreement?' could not be clearer.

Attempts to resolve protracted ethno-national conflicts tend not to be universally popular – if they were that would constitute proof that the conflict was not 'deep' or 'protracted'. Thus, while Sinn Féin has captured most of the electoral gains from nationalist enthusiasm for a long overdue process of institutional and policy change, the DUP appears to have ridden the tiger of opposition to these same changes. 'Just saving

oppositional stance with partial co-operation with the new devolved governing arrangements, which are locally popular. With the UUP sharply divided over the Agreement many UUP voters decamped to the DUP. Nevertheless, the DUP's 18.9% (a 65% increase on its 1997 vote) was much further than optimistic DUP members could have hoped for.

**Figure 2: Vote share in Northern Ireland Westminster elections, 1979-**



While winning the percentage battle for votes is undoubtedly very important, of course are the actual jobs at stake. Northern Ireland voters, long accustomed to seeing about 17 of their 18 incumbent MPs returned in an election, struck for a change in 2001, though their desired changes were often diametrically opposed. The net result however was that seven seats changed partisan control, and seven other MPs survived narrowly. The UUP was the only major party to lose seats in 2001. The DUP won its single seat; this became the UUP's sole gain.<sup>10</sup> The UUP lost five seats (net four); of these three were lost to the DUP (Strangford, East Londonderry and Belfast North) and two to Sinn Féin (West Tyrone and Fermanagh & South Tyrone).



In 2001 three of the new MPs are women (17%). While hardly reaching Scandinavian levels of gender representation this is novel for Northern Ireland. No woman had been elected at any Northern Ireland Westminster election since Bernadette Devlin was returned in 1970.

If the 1998 Assembly results, held under STV (PR), are taken as a reasonably faithful reflection of overall ethno-national bloc divisions, then the 2001 Westminster seat allocations were a much more faithful reflection of overall bloc divisions than was the previous Westminster contest in 1997. In other words, the 'appropriate' bloc won all of the seats in 2001, whereas in 1997 two 'nationalist constituencies' returned UUP MPs (Fermanagh & South Tyrone and West Tyrone). The other four seats that changed hands in 2001 were simply changes in the balance of power *within* the unionist bloc (three UUP losses to the DUP, marginally compensated by one UUP gain from the UKUP). In other words the 2001 Westminster results were more proportional with respect to parties *and* ethnic blocs than 1997. Indeed, it is worth highlighting (see Table 1) that the disproportionality figure of 7.3 (on the least squares index) is by a massive margin the most proportional outcome of a Westminster election in Northern Ireland (the average for 1983-97 is 18.7). The decline of the UUP (and hence fall in its average seat bonus from a massive 23% in 1997 to only 6.5% in 2001) is the largest contributory factor.<sup>11</sup> This is not a commercial for the Westminster electoral system, which is highly inappropriate for the genuine multi-party system in Northern Ireland.

### Electoral prospects

The next big electoral test for the parties in Northern Ireland will be the second elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, which must be held by the early summer of 2003, marking the expiration of a five-year term. Simply surviving to reach a second regularly scheduled election would be a major triumph for the Assembly and the peace process, and not something that any earlier Assemblies, Conventions, or Forums have managed since the end of the UUP's *ancien régime* in 1972. Given the results of the 2001 elections, the once dominant parties in their respective blocs, the UUP and SDLP, must view the crucial 2003 elections with some trepidation. The DUP will be in a good position to challenge for the leading position among unionists and most of its campaign appeals of 2001 are likely to still have resonance. Yet another threat of resignation by David Trimble is likely to cut little electoral ice with disaffected unionist voters. Among nationalists the SDLP have a new leader and will once again claim to be the authors of the peace process and its institutions and the custodians of good governance. This in itself is a far from exciting electoral pitch. Sinn Féin is clearly the party with the electoral wind in its sails, in Northern Ireland as we have seen, and now also in the Republic of Ireland, where in May 2002 it more than doubled its vote from 2.5% to 6.5% and increased its number of TDs from one to five (see Gallagher *et al.*, 2003 forthcoming). However, the analysis in this article suggests that the DUP and

The two parties have to choose between stealing their opponents' clothes and usurping their positions, or showing that they remain wolves in sheep's clothing.

### Postscript

At the time of going to press, Northern Ireland's devolved institutions had just suspended by the UK government for the fourth time. It is unclear whether a vote for the Northern Ireland Assembly will take place in May 2003, as scheduled.

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The authors would like to thank Leigh Somerville, Gitta Frank and Simone Leiringer for research assistance, and Jane Pugh of LSE's drawing office. Brendan O'Leary's research in Northern Ireland were supported by the United States Institute of Peace and the Fulbright Commission. Paul Mitchell thanks the Fulbright Commission for a scholarship during which this paper was written, and Ken Shepsle for hosting his stay in Harvard. The authors would also like to thank the anonymous referees for their comments on this article.

### Notes:

- 1 The poor election result for the SDLP hastened the long expected retirement of Finian and Malachy leader and Deputy First Minister, respectively (though they retained their seats at Westminster). A by-election was held for the posts they vacated.
- 2 The First and Deputy First Ministers are equal in powers and rank both, and often solely in their own right. The death or resignation of one immediately triggers the other's loss of office, and fresh elections without a by-election are held.
- 3 Here the DUP decided not to stand for fear of fragmenting the unionist vote – instead it backed a candidate for a local anti-Agreement candidate, M. Jim Dixon.
- 4 One of *Representator's* referees points out that the British Election Study and an even worse job of estimating voting intentions in Northern Ireland.
- 5 The figures are a slight adjustment to the well-known Pedersen volatility index. This is the sum of gains made by all winning parties, or cumulative losses made by all losing parties, in net percentage points.

Pedersen, M. (1979). 'The dynamics of European party systems: changing patterns of electoral volatility and fusion'. *European Journal of Political Research* 7: 1-26. Although often all parties are included in the calculation, since small 'parties' are frequent vehicles in Northern Ireland they have been excluded in this calculation. We thus have a comparison from 1987-2001 of aggregate partisan vote change among main parties. These are the only parties with even a remote chance of winning a Westminster seat (aside the unusual case of North Down which has effectively elected independent members). Besides these five parties accounted for 95.6% of the votes cast in 2001.

7 The only purpose of Table 2 is to provide an approximate guide to differential turnout in the absence of more direct information. No other assertions are being made here. In total, sixteen of the eighteen constituencies can easily be distinguished on this basis.

8 The combined APNI vote in 1997 in the seven constituencies not contested in 2001 was 16,073. If this had been repeated in 2001 it would have constituted 1.98% of the total votes cast. It cannot be assumed that all of these potential Alliance votes were cast for the U bloc instead, but most of these 'missing Alliance' party votes were accumulated in three predominantly unionist constituencies in 1997 (North Down, 7,553; North Belfast, 2,221; and Upper Bann, 3,017, which incidentally is much more than David Trimble's margin of victory in 2001). Exactly 80% of these 'missing Alliance' votes were cast in 1997 in these three constituencies.

Consider the following simulation: if Alliance had fielded candidates in these three constituencies in 2001 and achieved its 1997 level of support and if, as seems likely, these votes would have been 'reclaimed' from the U bloc, they would have constituted exactly 1.58% of the total vote in 2001. And recall that the U bloc's improved position in 2001 was a gain of 1.6%. Thus, the suggestion is that with Alliance party competition in 2001 the total vote of the U bloc would have been approximately 50.5%, i.e. unchanged from 1997.

9 It should be noted that the recent growth of the much smaller unionist parties (the UKUP, PUP, UDP, and Northern Ireland Conservatives) is over. At their high point they had collectively taken 8.3% of the vote in the 1998 Assembly elections; in 2001 they managed only 2.8% in the Westminster election and 2.6% in the district council elections. Indeed, in an extraordinary example of organisational disarray the UDP failed to register in time for the 2001 elections – its leaders could stand only as independents.

10 David Burnside's victory over William McCrea of the DUP in South Antrim was a second UUP victory, though it did not count as a gain in relation to 1997. This former UUP seat had been won by McCrea in a by-election.

11 Sinn Féin's modest 0.5% seat bonus is the first ever positive figure for the party across all elections types and systems. For example their average Westminster 'bonus' for 1983-97 is -7%.

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# 'England Belongs to Me': The Extreme Right in the UK Parliamentary Election of 2001

Cas Mudde

*Years of being told  
you ain't as good as us  
join the line,  
sign your name  
and they all said  
that our country's going bust  
but no-one's fooling us again*

*England belongs to me  
a nation's pride  
the dirty water on the river  
no one can take away our memory  
England belongs to me*

*We'll show the world  
that the boys are back to stay  
and you all know  
what we can do  
heads held high,  
fighting all the way,  
for the red, white, and blue.*

Cock Sparrer, 'England Belongs to Me', *Shock Troops*, 1982.

#### Introduction

In the shadow of Labour's historic second landslide victory, the 2001 British general election had a second 'success' story to tell. In Oldham West & Royton Nick Griffin received 6,552 votes, or 16.4%, the third biggest share. In itself this might not seem remarkable, were it not for the fact that Mr Griffin was a candidate for the extreme right British National Party (BNP), in a city which was the scene of violent 'race riots' a few weeks before the elections. In the other city district, Oldham East & Saddleworth, Mick Teacy, did almost as well, gaining 5,091 votes (11.2%) and finishing in second place.