Party Competition and Voting Behaviour Since the Agreement

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Overview: The Old Guard Out-Flanked

The institutions created by the Belfast Agreement have spent more time in suspension than on active duty and thus (to date) have largely failed to transform Northern Ireland government and society in the manner hoped for during the spring and summer of 1998. It may be that verified IRA decommissioning during the summer of 2005 will eventually help create the conditions in which stable power-sharing governments can be created and sustained. There is no doubt, however, that the 'peace process' and Agreement have already transformed Northern Ireland's party system and voting behaviour. The party system of 2005 is virtually a mirror image of the pattern of competition in 1992.

It is well known that Northern Ireland has a dual party system in which each community effectively holds its own election to decide who will be its pre-eminent tribunes (Mitchell 1999; Mitchell, O'Leary and Evans 2001). Winning seats from the other communal bloc, happens occasionally, but is effectively a bonus; the more serious party competition takes place within each segmented community. Some things, such as the overall size of the Unionist bloc have changed very little: the average vote share of the unionist bloc was 50.5 percent during the 1990s (average of all eight elections) and has been 49.9 percent since then (average of six elections during 2001-5). The nationalist bloc expanded from an average of 38.4 per cent in the 1990s to 41.3 since the new millennium, reflecting the electoral surge of Sinn Féin since the middle of the 1990s. Thus while the relative balance of the two main communal blocs is slowly changing, the real transformation of Northern Ireland electoral politics is primarily within rather than across these blocs.

The transformation is most dramatically highlighted by reviewing relative party fortunes at Westminster elections. For example, in 1992 (the last election before the 'peace process' is officially launched via the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994), the long dominant Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) had 9 of its members elected as MPs and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) had 3 (from a total of 17 seats in Northern Ireland). In 2005 the UUP finally became a victim of the distorting single-member plurality (SMP) electoral system from which it had always previously been the principal beneficiary (see Mitchell and Gillespie 1999).[1] The UUP, which as recently as 1997 controlled 10 of

[1] The Gallagher index of disproportionality reveal that the 2005 results were 'typically disproportional' with a least squares (LSQ) index score of 14.9, following the aberration of the 2001 results which were surprisingly proportional for a Northern Ireland SMP election (7.3 in 2001). The 1983-2005 average level of disproportionality is 16.2. For an explanation of the index see Gallagher and Mitchell 2005 (Appendix B).

Northern Ireland's Westminster seats, was virtually wiped out in 2005 and managed to hold on to only a single seat; by contrast Ian Paisley's DUP won 9 seats (from a total of 18). The UUP's share of the vote was not of course quite as bad as a simple 'head count' of the MPs elected suggests. Still the fact that SMP greatly exaggerates a party's losses is likely to be of little comfort to the UUP: its share of the vote in 2005 at 17.7 percent is roughly half its total in 1992 (34.5 per cent). On the nationalist side the SDLP won 4 Westminster seats in 1992 and 3 in 2005. Meanwhile Sinn Féin went from no seats in 1992 to 5 in 2005.

While each party's number of Westminster MPs is a symbolically important means of 'signalling the score' in intra-bloc electoral competition, the sheer scale of the transformation in voting behaviour is revealed by the raw vote totals displayed in Figure 9.1 for the last four Westminster elections.

Figure 9.1 about here

In 1992 the UUP was by far the largest party and attracted just over 270,000 votes. By 2005 the party attracted less than half this number (47 per cent of the 1992 total).[2] By contrast, the DUP has grown from about 100,000 voters in 1992 to just under a quarter of a million in 2005 (see the darkest columns of Figure 9.1 to compare the 2005 results). Over the same time period Sinn Féin has more than doubled its raw vote total, while the number of people voting for the SDLP in 2005 is only 68 per cent of the number of those willing to do so in 1992, immediately prior to the ceasefires. If we look at the shape of Figure 9.1 (and especially the darkest columns which show the 2005 results) it can be seen that the much-touted centre ground of Northern Ireland politics, which began sinking in 2001 has now sunk even further. The Alliance party is increasingly in danger of not existing at all (in anything other than local government elections), while the long-dominant UUP and SDLP have been successfully outflanked by their more militant rivals in their respective communal blocs.

The timing of the electoral surges by Sinn Féin and the DUP are related but not identical. Following its first electoral contest in 1982 Sinn Féin's vote was essentially flat-lining at around 11 per cent, its average performance during the ten elections between 1982-1994. The 1994 IRA cessation of its armed campaign was clearly the catalyst for Sinn Féin's renewed electoral advances. The ceasefire, Sinn Féin's de facto acceptance of the consent principle (i.e. that Irish unification requires the consent of majorities in both Irish jurisdictions), and later its enthusiastic participation in all of the Agreement's institutions, has rendered the party much more acceptable and attractive to wider groups of nationalist voters. Figure 9.2 shows that the Sinn Féin vote immediately jumped at the first post-ceasefire election in 1996, and has followed a consistently upward trajectory ever since.[3] While there is evidence that much of Sinn Féin's early electoral growth (in the 1980s and even 1990s) was achieved by mobilising nationalist non-voters and new

[2] This kind of raw comparison can of course be affected by different levels of turnout. However during the 1992, 1997 and 2001 elections roughly similar numbers of votes were cast (785,123, 790,889, and 810,833 respectively). The only large decline was in 2005 when only 717,502 votes were cast. Nevertheless, even *if* a sizeable proportion of non-voters are disillusioned former UUP supporters, the fact remains that they did not vote for the UUP in 2005.

[3] Sinn Féin's average pre-1994 vote was 11 per cent (with a standard deviation of only 1.2) whereas its average post-1994 is 20 per cent (SD of 3.4).

age cohorts rather than by directly winning over SDLP partisans (Mitchell 1999; McAllister 2004), this has began to change in the elections after the Agreement (see discussion below). The peace process has clearly been the handmaiden of Sinn Féin's electoral growth; its incorporation into 'ordinary politics' has undermined the distinctiveness of the SDLP's strategic position as the 'acceptable face' of nationalist politics, and its principal bargaining actor. Especially for many younger nationalist voters, the question increasingly arises: why not vote for the fresher and more assertive brand of nationalism?

Figure 9.2 about here

By contrast the DUP's electoral surge came later and has been even more dramatic. The DUP had long been the leading proponent of what can be characterised as the 'Ulster says No' policy position: 'No' to virtually any policy initiative by the UK government which involved concessions to nationalists. The DUP was of course vociferously opposed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993, and the Framework Documents of 1995. All of these were portrayed as 'betrayals' and 'capitulations' to the 'pan-nationalist front'. But almost three decades of stridently oppositional politics delivered only modest electoral growth for the DUP. The key event in explaining the DUP electoral surge has clearly been the 1998 Agreement: the implementation difficulties in the following years became a major electoral liability for the UUP and a great opportunity for the DUP, an opportunity that has been seized with relish. The average DUP vote before the Agreement (1973-97) was 15 per cent, whereas after the Agreement (1998-2005) it has been 25 per cent.[4] The DUP successfully took advantage of the UUP's internal difficulties after 1998 and received electoral benefits by moderating its policy position (Mitchell, O'Leary and Evans 2001). Far from calling for the Belfast Agreement to be scrapped, the DUP called for its renegotiation. The DUP's best-known rallying cries of '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 administration in Belfast. This more nuanced opposition to another Anglo-Irish initiative 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. The DUP was greatly aided by the plight of the UUP leader, David Trimble, continually trying to persuade his party to continue supporting the Agreement despite the failure of the IRA to start and then complete the decommissioning of its weapons. While the latter eventually occurred in late 2005, it all came too late for Trimble. In short, Figure 9.2 shows that since 1998 the DUP vote has steadily and sharply risen, whereas since 2003 the UUP vote has gone into a tail spin.

[4] All figures exclude European Parliament elections, which are a very misleading measure of relative party strengths.

In the next sections we will examine changing voter behaviour, first briefly on the question of the Agreement itself, and then more extensively on the fortunes of the parties themselves.

Voting Behaviour and the Belfast Agreement

Although the referendum approving the Agreement was passed with a 'yes' vote of 71 per cent on 22 May 1998[5], it is well known that this high overall support masks a sharp difference of opinion between nationalists and unionists. The 1998 Referendum and Election Study found that 99 per cent of Catholics voted for the Agreement but only 57 per cent of Protestants (Hayes and McAllister 2001). Thus nationalist voters are almost unanimously in favour of the Agreement whilst support among unionists has always been precarious, not least since both communities believe that nationalists have been the principal beneficiaries of the Agreement and its institutions.

Table 9.1 about here

Of course the overall support figures for Protestants also masks a sharp party political difference of opinion within the unionist community. The DUP had after all walked out of the negotiations that produced the Agreement and campaigned against it during the referendum and subsequent 1998 Assembly elections. The UUP delegation to the negotiations agreed to accept the Agreement, but only by a majority vote, which prompted several of its members to also walk out of the talks and to openly campaign for the Agreement's rejection in the referendum.[6] Table 9.1 shows that 82 per cent of DUP supporters say they voted against the Agreement in 1998, and their opposition has since grown. The biggest change appears to be among UUP voters: while 76 of them recall voting for the Agreement in 1998, their support for a new 'yes' vote had dropped to 58 per cent by 2003.[7] Table 9.1 reports contemporaneous views concerning the Agreement: how the respondents say they would vote at the point in time at which they were asked. But in order to track changing voting behaviour over time, it is useful to ask the same respondents how they voted in 1998 and whether they would now change their vote. For example if they were 'yes' voters in 1998, would they now vote 'yes' or 'no'? This is precisely what Table 9.2 does.[8]

Table 9.2 about here

In short what we see is that 60 per cent of UUP voters have consistently supported the Agreement, and an equal number of DUP voters have consistently opposed it. The data

[5] On a turnout of 81 per cent, the highest ever for a UK referendum

[6] In an early warning of worse things to come the acrimony within the UUP was such that some of its leading anti-Agreement members, such as Jeffrey Donaldson, were prevented from standing as official UUP candidates in the 1998 Assembly elections (Wilford 1999).

[7] Among Protestants as a whole (rather than just DUP and UUP supporters) only 40 per cent in 2003 said they would now vote for the Agreement (source: NILT survey 2003).

[8] The table is of a similar format to a table first used in Hayes, McAllister and Dowds (2005), although the classification there is by religion rather than party voting.

confirm that substantial numbers of the 1998 'yes' voters of both unionist parties report that they would change their vote if a new referendum on the Agreement was held. Of those unionists who voted 'Yes' in 1998, 24 per cent of UUP voters and 30 per cent of DUP voters say they would now vote 'No'.

The Demographics of Party Support

Despite pervasive electoral change, some things remain the same. Probably the single most 'stable' feature of Northern Ireland electoral politics is that the four main parties remain ethnically exclusive. Of those claiming to have voted in the 2003 Assembly elections, UUP and DUP partisans were almost entirely Protestant, while SDLP and Sinn Féin voters were overwhelmingly Catholic (see Table 9.3). Only the Alliance party attracts voters from both communities, though as we have seen, the party is of diminishing size and importance. While observers of Northern Ireland politics understandably tend to focus on the 'big constitutional and governance questions', there is greater social and attitudinal patterning to party support than is often realised (though see Evans and Duffy 1997). In the nationalist party system Sinn Féin voters are clearly much younger than SDLP partisans. Fifty-eight per cent of Sinn Féin voters are under 45 compared to less than 40 per cent of SDLP voters (see table 9.3). Sinn Féin voters are also more likely (than SDLP voters) to be male, to be less educated, less religious and are much more likely to be manual workers.

Table 9.3 about here.

On the unionist side the patterns are similar, with DUP voters tending to be younger than their UUP rivals. However, although the DUP and Sinn Féin are more attractive to younger voters, younger people as a group are much less likely to vote. In the 2003 survey 37 per cent of those under 45 said they did not vote in the 2003 Assembly election, compared with 28 per cent across all age groups. DUP voters are much less likely to be educated, with 58 per cent having no formal qualifications, compared to 38 per cent among UUP voters. It is not surprising then that UUP voters are much more likely to be from professional and managerial occupations (see table 9.3). Finally, there is one question at the bottom of Table 9.3 which relates to one aspect of a socio-economic left-right dimension (whether governments should be tasked with reducing income differentials). This suggests that both nationalist parties take a more 'left-wing' position than the unionist parties, and that among unionists the DUP are to the left of the UUP (see also Evans and Duffy 1997 pp.65).

Voting Behaviour and Changing Party Fortunes

Largely because it feared victories by the DUP and SF in their respective blocs, the UK government twice postponed the 2003 Assembly election which should have been held by June (which marked the end of the Assembly's regular 5 year term). After no

breakthrough in negotiations, the government eventually allowed the elections to be held on 26 November, after which they expected a quite different bargaining context to emerge. The election took place during a period in which the 'peace process' was clearly stalled. The optimism of 1998 was either gone, or severely dented – given that durable power-sharing had not been established during the intervening 5 years. Also since the Assembly and its Executive had been suspended for over a year before the election, there was little prospect of further development of the Pro-Agreement versus Anti-Agreement division, which might encourage electoral cooperation between the UUP, SDLP and SF. Partly because the innovative inter-ethnic pro-agreement coalition had collapsed, it was always likely that the 2003 contest would revert to the traditional mould of Northern Ireland elections: a fierce intra-ethnic battle within the main blocs, with the rival parties mainly focused on emerging as their communities pre-eminent party.

There was indeed a very significant alteration in party fortunes between the first and second Assembly elections. The aggregate results are summarised in Table 9.4. Thus in 2003 the British governments recurring nightmare came to pass: the two 'extremist' parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin came to dominate their respective communities. The DUP became the biggest party in Northern Ireland by gaining 7.5 percent, a 42 per cent increase on its 1998 vote. The UUP slipped to third position, although its first preference vote was not as bad as widely expected, and even increased slightly. Nevertheless, the ratio of DUP to UUP voters was 53:47, the first time that the DUP had overtaken its rival in anything other than the unrepresentative European Parliament elections. The DUP won 30 seats in the Assembly, the number required to invoke the de facto 'minority veto' provision of the consociational architecture – 'the petition of concern'. In reality of course, reaching this threshold would not now be so important since no government could be formed without the DUP's participation. Indeed, the election results underestimate the extent of the DUP's current dominance because following the election three anti-Agreement candidates (Norah Beare, Jeffrey Donaldson and Arlene Foster), who had just been elected on the UUP ticket, resigned and joined the DUP. Thus the DUP now has 33 MLA's to the UUP's 24.

Table 9.4 about here

Given this reversal of fortunes in the unionist party system, a key question emerges: where did all these new DUP voters come from, and why did the UUP vote not correspondingly decline? The answer is that of those who voted for the UUP in 1998, just over one-fifth of them defected in 2003 to the DUP (Hayes, McAllister and Dowds 2005; Mitchell, Evans and O'Leary). The UUP managed to maintain its first preference vote in 2003, despite these direct losses to the DUP, because it gained 16 per cent of its 2003 vote from those who had supported the 'other' small unionist parties in 1998, especially the UK Unionist Party (UKUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). All of these smaller parties declined in 2003 (with the UDP even failing to contest the election), as reflected in the index of the effective number of elective parties (ENEP) declining from 6.1 in 1998 to 4.9 in 2003. Given that these minor unionist parties no longer have any electoral strength (for example the strongest of them, the Progressive Unionist Party, managed only 0.7 per cent in the 2005 local government elections), the electoral lifeline they provided for the UUP in 2003 was a one-time shift in support that

cannot be repeated. Thus, while there was much discussion in 1996 of a 'splintering of the unionist vote', by 2003 it had consolidated with the DUP as its leading voice.

Sinn Féin marginally overhauled the SDLP in both the Westminster and local government elections of 2001 when the ratio between the two parties was 51:49 (Mitchell, O'Leary and Evans 2001). Among nationalists Sinn Féin was clearly the party with the electoral wind in its sails and it sought to confirm its dominance in 2003. Sinn Féin surpassed expectations by gaining 23.5 per cent of the first preference vote (a 33 per cent increase on its 1998 Assembly vote), while the SDLP vote declined by 23 per cent (compared to its 1998 vote) to produce a new two-party ratio of 58:42 in Sinn Féin's favour. While it has long been shown that much of Sinn Féin's electoral growth prior to the Agreement was achieved by mobilising prior non-voters and new voters, rather than directly attracting SDLP partisans, the scale of the apparent 'swing in the two-party vote' in 2003, renders this explanation much less credible for the most recent elections.[9] Sinn Féin must have won over prior SDLP partisans in order to fuel an electoral surge of this magnitude.[10] Survey evidence demonstrates that this is indeed what happened. Of those who voted for the SDLP in the 1998 Assembly election almost one fifth defected to Sinn Féin in 2003. By contrast 94 per cent of those who voted for Sinn Féin in 1998 continued to do so in 2003. Another way of looking at this is to consider the composition of the Sinn Féin vote in 2003: it contained 28 per cent who had been SDLP voters in 1998 (Mitchell, Evans and O'Leary). There is no question that recent Sinn Féin electoral growth has been principally at the SDLP's expense.

Party Political Attitudes to the Agreement and its Institutions

These changes in voting behaviour, mostly in favour of the DUP and Sinn Féin (and which have continued since the election of 2003), would be much less likely if voters did not perceive that the parties in each bloc are adopting distinctive policy positions. Table 9.5 reviews voters attitudes to the Agreement and its institutions classified by partisan affiliation (based on the most recent evidence which is from 2003).[11] Some quite clear patterns emerge.

Table 9.5 about here

When asked to rate the overall achievements of the last Northern Ireland Assembly between two-thirds and three-quarters of the voters of the three principal pro-Agreement parties believed that such achievements were evident. Sinn Féin voters are the most enthusiastic about the assembly but by contrast almost half of DUP voters believed that it had achieved nothing at all. There is strong (81 per cent) overall and cross-party support for mandatory power-sharing between Catholics and Protestants: even 62 per cent of DUP voters agreed with this (see question 5 in Table 9.5). There continues to be less

[9] Especially since there were no minor nationalist parties from which the SDLP might seek to offset any losses of its partisans to Sinn Féin.

[10] Assuming that significant numbers of unionists had not suddenly found the SDLP attractive! This is a safe assumption, confirmed by the data.

[11] The fieldwork for the 2003 NILT survey was carried out from October 2003 until February 2004.

consensus on North-South relationships. Faced with the question 'to what extent do you think the Republic of Ireland should be involved in Northern Ireland's affairs', 82 per cent of DUP voters in 2003 replied 'not at all'. UUP voters were evenly divided on the subject (see question 9 in Table 9.5), while as expected virtually all nationalists feel that Dublin should have a role, with Sinn Féin voters feeling it should have a much bigger role than SDLP voters. Policing is well known to be a contentious issue and most unionists feel that reform of the police has 'gone too far', while of course Sinn Féin supporters argue that it has not gone far enough. Overall voters of the DUP and Sinn Féin are the most likely to believe that the United Kingdom government cannot be trusted to work in Northern Ireland's long-term interest.

Some interesting patterns emerge when voters were effectively asked 'what should be done about the Agreement?' (question no.3 in Table 9.5). The answers suggest a close congruence between the respective parties current policy positions and the views of their voters. Surely the mantra of Sinn Féin leaders in recent years has been that the Agreement is basically right and 'just needs to be implemented'. Sixty-two per cent of Sinn Féin voters picked this option when faced with the survey question, more than double the number of SDLP voters who thought likewise, whereas very few unionists thought this was the solution to the impasse. SDLP voters certainly think that the Agreement is 'basically right' but half of them thought that some of its specifics need to be renegotiated. There is a dramatic contrast between the two unionist parties: 64 per cent of UUP voters believe that the Agreement is 'basically right', while only 24 per cent of DUP supporters share that opinion. Indeed 72 per cent of DUP voters said that the Agreement was 'basically wrong', with a large proportion believing that it should be abandoned altogether. Nevertheless, if one wanted to attempt to distil some optimism, although 36 per cent of DUP voters opted for abolition, 60 percent thought that the best course of action was to renegotiate either the Agreement or some of its specifics. 'Renegotiate' is a significantly different policy position from the DUP's pre-Agreement mantra of simply 'Ulster says no'.

Conclusion

The elections of 2003 and 2005 confirm quite decisively that the DUP and Sinn Féin are now the leading parties representing the unionist and nationalist communities. For now the electoral verdict 'is in': the once 'extreme' parties have successfully out-flanked and partially replaced their more moderate intra-ethnic rivals. For two years following the 2003 Assembly election the DUP was able to avoid the tough question of whether they would lead a new government containing Sinn Féin, because of the IRA's failure to decommission its weapons. The IRA's announcement of the end of its armed campaign in July 2005, followed by the judgement of the 'Independent International Commission on Decommissioning' in September that the IRA had decommissioned 'the totality of the IRA's arsenal', will make it progressively more difficult for the DUP to avoid negotiations on forming a new government and/or renegotiation of the Agreement. Based on current electoral strength, the DUP has some substantial incentives to lead a new coalition. In addition to selecting the First Minister, the D'Hondt portfolio allocation

procedure means that the DUP would be entitled to four other Executive members (with two each for the UUP, Sinn Féin and the SDLP). Elections are not just about representing opinion; they are intrinsically about acquiring bargaining strength to be deployed during government formation, so that ultimately party policies can be implemented. It remains to be seen whether the DUP is willing to use its new found electoral strength to become Northern Ireland's leading party of government.

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Figure 9.1

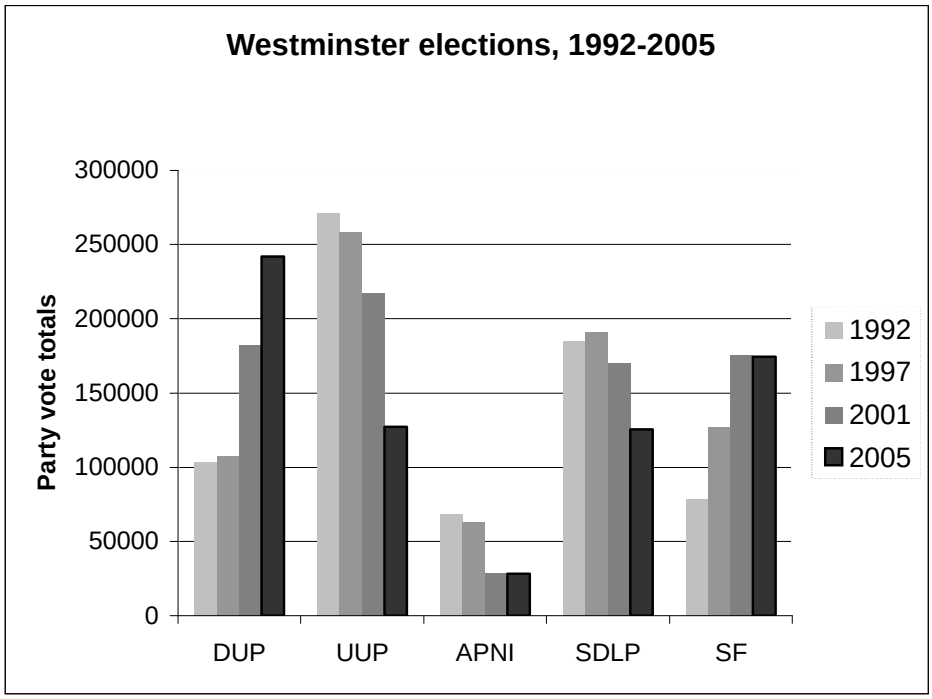

Figure 9.2

Changing party fortunes before and after the 'peace process' and Agreement
Westminster and Assembly Elections

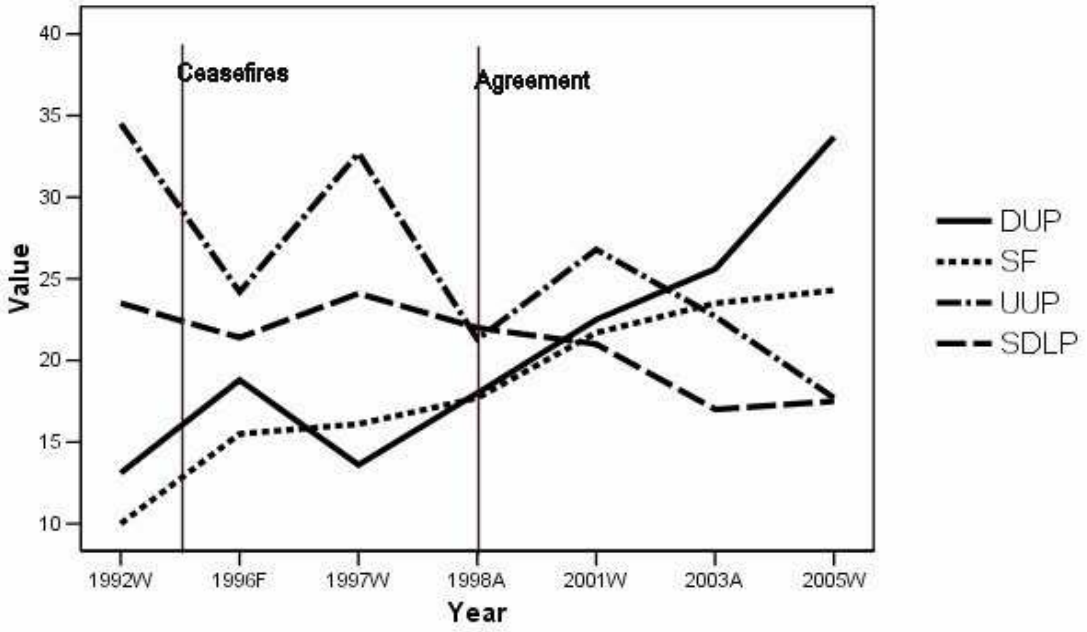

Table 9.1 Vote on the Belfast Agreement by Party Classification (%)

	UUP		DUP		APNI		SDLP		SF		Total	
	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003
Yes	76	58	18	12	95	86	99	96	97	97	78	65
No	24	42	82	88	5	14	1	4	3	3	22	35

Notes: Estimates are % of respondents who say they would vote 'yes' or 'no' and exclude non-voters, the unregistered and don't knows. The 2003 survey question was 'If the vote on the Good Friday Agreement was held again today, how would you vote?'. The classification by party is based on party identification. The 1998 figures are based on a question in the 1999 survey asking respondents how they voted in the actual 1998 referendum.

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 1999 and 2003.

Table 9.2 Change in vote on the Belfast Agreement from 1998 to 2003 by Party (%)

	UUP	DUP	APNI	SDLP	SF	Total
Consistent Yes	60	8	88	97	95	59
Consistent No	15	60	12	1	1	23
Yes to No	24	30	-	2	4	18
No to Yes	1	2	-	-	-	1
(N)	(151)	(155)	(24)	(107)	(81)	(543)

Notes: Question for 2003 as above; and party classification is based on voting at eh 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly election and excludes non-voters and don't knows. For 1998: 'And how did you vote in 1998 when the referendum on the Agreement was held?'.

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2003.

Table 9.3 Patterns of Party Support in 2003

	Total	UUP	DUP	SDLP	SF	APNI
Catholic	35	1	1	90	94	17
Protestant	61	95	97	8	-	55
No religion	4	4	2	2	6	28
18-44	42	**32**	**44**	**39**	**58**	30
45-65	39	39	37	44	36	47
65+	19	29	19	17	6	23
Male	47	50	46	**43**	55	53
Female	53	50	54	**57**	45	47
A' Level or higher	23	29	12	27	19	44
No formal qualifications	46	**38**	**58**	43	55	16
Professional/managerial/ Skilled non-manual	56	**68**	**51**	**58**	**33**	70
Manual (skilled, partly skilled and non-skilled)	44	**32**	**49**	**42**	**67**	30
Church attendance: Once a month or more	58	49	49	84	73	37
Less than once a month or never	42	51	*51*	16	27	63
Reduce Income Differentials: Strongly agree/ agree	53	41	*50*	63	71	31
Strongly disagree / disagree	15+	29	*15*	20	10	35

Note: Party Support question was 'Which party did you vote for as your first preference in the recent [2003] Northern Ireland Assembly elections'. Non-voters and don't knows are excluded.
Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2003.
The income differential question was: 'It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes'. Response categories were a five point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Table 9.4 The 2003 and 1998 Assembly Elections

Party	2003 % votes	1998 % votes	2003 Seats (n)	1998 Seats (n)
DUP	25.6 (+7.5)	18.1	30 (+10)	20
SF	23.5 (+5.8)	17.7	24 (+6)	18
UUP	22.7 (+1.4)	21.3	27 (-1)	28
SDLP	17.0 (-5.0)	22.0	18 (-6)	24
APNI	3.7 (-2.8)	6.5	6 (0)	6
PUP	1.2 (-1.4)	2.5	1 (-1)	2
NIWC	0.8 (-0.8)	1.6	0 (-2)	2
UKUP	0.7 (-3.8)	4.5	1 (-4)	5
Others	4.8	5.9	1 (-2)	3
Total	100	100	108	108
Turnout	64.0%	69.9%		

Table 9.5 Political Attitudes to the Agreement

	Total	UUP	DUP	SDLP	SF
1. *Overall, the last NI Assembly achieved . .*					
A lot or a little	63	66	50	68	75
Nothing at all	34	31	47	31	22
2. *How good a job did the Assembly and Exe in the ordinary day-to-day running of NI*					
A good job	27	22	11	41	53
A bad job	22	16	40	19	10
3. *What should be done about the Agreemen*					
Basically right and just needs to be imple in full	23	14	1	35	62
Basically right but the specifics need to b renegotiated	38	50	23	50	27
Basically wrong and should be renegotia	19	21	36	2	2
Basically wrong and should be abandone	13	8	36	2	2
5. *Any NI government should have to ens Protestants and Catholics share power*					
Strongly agree/agree	81	85	62	95	89
Disagree	8	5	19	2	5
6. *Should parties linked to paramilitaries involved in violence be allowed in any fu Executive?*					
No	77	93	95	63	36
7. *Do you think that reform of the police*					
Gone too far	44	64	81	3	2
Not gone far enough	25	9	5	41	76
About right	24	25	11	44	15
8. *Trust in the UK government to work in long-perm interest*					
Always / most of the time	25	27	11	45	10
Only some of the time	45	53	46	39	36
Almost never	29	20	41	12	50
9. *To what extent should ROI be involved affairs?*					
A lot	17	2	1	24	69
A little	38	47	16	65	28
Not at all	42	50	82	6	3

Note: party classification is by voters in the NI Assembly election 2003.
Source: NILT 2003.