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The
Electoral
Commission



The Northern Ireland Assembly elections 2003

The official report on the Northern Ireland
Assembly elections 26 November 2003

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The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. We aim to gain public confidence and encourage people to take part in the democratic process within the UK by modernising the electoral process, promoting public awareness of electoral matters, and regulating political parties.

The Northern Ireland Assembly elections 2003
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Preface

The Electoral Commission is a relatively new organisation in Northern Ireland having only been established on a UK-wide basis in 2000. This is our first statutory report on elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and follows similar reports on elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly last year.

The Electoral Commission seeks to place the interests of the electorate at the centre of its thinking. Within the Northern Ireland context this means that registration and voting need to be made convenient and accessible to all, in an atmosphere free from any perceived intimidation and irregularity, while maintaining high levels of public confidence about the integrity of the electoral process. We believe that the publication of this report and the recommendations, taken together, provide the bedrock for the future integrity and effectiveness of elections in Northern Ireland.

The November 2003 elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly took place against a background of uncertainty about timing and whether a functioning devolved institution would emerge. Both these factors may partially explain why 122,000 fewer people voted in the election than in the first Assembly election in 1998. This challenges a general assumption that turnout rates in Northern Ireland have always been consistently high. This should be a matter of serious concern to all those interested in the issue of voter engagement.

This report has also focused on the impact of the provisions of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 during an election,¹ specifically in relation to each voter now having to present a prescribed form of photographic identification before being allowed to vote. Inevitably there were examples of voters not holding the correct or current photographic identification or being deterred from going to polling stations for this reason. However, the responses received from political parties in general, presiding officers and

¹ *The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002: an assessment of its first year in operation*, The Electoral Commission, December 2003.

material collected from other sources suggest that for the overwhelming majority of voters this aspect did not present any significant problems.

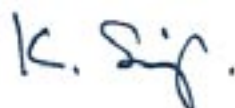
Various commentators have expressed the view that the election did not demonstrate any tangible evidence of fraud and that fraud was not perceived to be an issue. Negative perceptions of fraud can have a cynical and corrosive effect upon the democratic process if electoral systems are not seen as being fit for purpose. We note that there is evidence of a widespread perception that the advent of individual registration and requirement for photographic identification has instilled greater confidence in the electoral processes of Northern Ireland. There is a responsibility on all interested bodies, including The Electoral Commission, to ensure that all those eligible to vote are aware and confident that they can do so within the context of a secret balloting process and are understanding of the choices open to them. This means a sustained process of voter education.

This report fulfils our statutory duty to report on the administration of the Northern Ireland Assembly election as well as considering other matters such as media coverage and the views of the electorate. We did not come to review these elections with a blank sheet of paper in front of us. The Commission had already reported on the UK General Election in 2001, which, in turn, generated a series of reviews on electoral policy. The recommendations we have already made to Government for modernising the electoral system formed the backdrop to our approach and some of these recommendations are referred to in this report.

We acknowledge the difficult circumstances faced by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) in administering the election, which were in part caused by the repeated postponements. The election highlighted a number of issues relating to the role and activities of the EONI. We make a number of recommendations in this area and would encourage the Secretary of State and the Chief Electoral Officer to address them as a matter of urgency so that the high standard of electoral services rightly expected by the electorate and political parties can be maintained for the future.

The Commission would like to thank all those who have assisted us with information including members of the public, political parties, community groups, the media, research organisations and the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff. We draw heavily on the practical experiences of presiding officers in polling stations who provided an excellent response to a questionnaire on the conduct of the election. We had also commissioned research that was specific to Northern Ireland at this particular election.

On a personal note, I would also wish to record my appreciation for the hard work undertaken by Séamus Magee, Alex Tennant, Caralyn Morton and Raymond McCaffrey who are Commission staff based at our Belfast office. Additional contributions were also made by staff based at the Commission's Cardiff, Edinburgh and London offices.



Karamjit Singh CBE
Electoral Commissioner

Executive summary

This is the Commission's first report on a Northern Ireland election. We have a statutory duty to report on the administration of Northern Ireland Assembly elections and to keep under review a range of matters relating to elections. This report contains a number of recommendations aimed at improving the overall administration of elections in Northern Ireland.

Approach

In reviewing this election, the Commission has aimed to place the interests of the electorate at the centre of its consideration. To assist our analysis, we have drawn on specially commissioned public opinion research, academic analysis of the results, expert reports on media coverage of the election and a disability access audit. We have also reviewed commentary from a broad range of sources to inform our conclusions.

Background

Having been postponed twice, the second election to the Northern Ireland Assembly took place on 26 November 2003. Election day was a Wednesday instead of the traditional Thursday and the election was the first Northern Ireland-wide election to be held in the winter for almost 30 years. It was also the first election where the provisions of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 were tested across Northern Ireland.

The postponements, followed by the decision to hold an election in the middle of the annual registration period, caused major logistical difficulties for the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff. Work on the compilation of the annual register had to be suspended while staff turned their attention to the election. The Chief Electoral Officer feared that the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) would be unable to retain sufficient people to staff the election. He highlighted poor rates of pay, new regulations governing car insurance and a decision by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) not to have a permanent presence at polling places as barriers to recruitment. Consequently a

number of staff recruited to work at the election were inexperienced and some had received little or no training. This impacted on their ability to effectively carry out their duties. The Chief Electoral Officer claimed that these difficulties, coupled with a lack of resources and the timing of the election, could potentially have undermined the entire electoral process.

Following criticism after the 2001 combined election when a few hundred electors were refused a ballot paper because of queues at the close of poll, the Chief Electoral Officer revised the polling station scheme, increasing both the number of polling places and polling stations. This initiative appears to have been relatively successful, with electors and presiding officers experiencing few difficulties with overcrowding and queuing. However, the significant reduction in the number of people voting may have also contributed to this.

The main cause of complaint reported by presiding officers was from people turning up to vote but refused a ballot paper because their name was not on the electoral register. The register used for the election was published on 1 September 2003 but had largely been compiled in the autumn of 2002. Confusion arose from the fact that many electors who had completed their annual registration form in the weeks leading up to the election assumed their name would be on the register and that they would therefore be entitled to vote. Our public opinion survey revealed that 6% of people surveyed said the reason they did not vote was because their name was not on the register.

There is a widely held perception that turnout rates at elections in Northern Ireland are consistently high. However, the reality is somewhat different. Turnout at the November election was officially recorded at 64%, representing a drop of six percentage points from the 1998 Assembly election and four percentage points from the 2001 election. In terms of votes polled, over 122,000 fewer people voted in 2003 than in 1998 while the corresponding figure for 2001 was 115,000. This represents a 15% reduction in the number of people actually voting. In the report we explain that comparing turnout before and after the introduction of individual registration in 2002 gives a distorted picture because of the decrease in numbers registered. However, when turnout is measured against the voting age population it can be seen that just over half (56%) of those entitled to vote in Northern Ireland actually voted. Even taking account of the time of year the election was held and the problems encountered with the register, the overall drop in turnout is a cause for concern.

For the first time all electors had to present one of four forms of prescribed photographic identification before being issued with a ballot paper. According to the EONI, 3,493 people turned up to vote without valid or current identification. Overall, presiding officers reported that no significant problems were encountered at polling stations with identification and this aspect of the election appears to have gone well. However, we cannot be sure how many voters did not turn out to vote because they possessed none of the four forms of prescribed identification. We know from our public opinion survey that 2% of those interviewed said they had not voted for

this reason. Some political parties felt the current forms of prescribed identification were restrictive and should be expanded, a view shared by Disability Action, the organisation who conducted a polling place access audit on our behalf. We do not share this view and believe that the four forms of identification prescribed in the legislation are sufficient and do not need to be extended. However, opportunities to obtain a electoral identity card, free of charge, must continue to be made readily available.

On the wider issue of electoral fraud, the Commission has received no evidence to suggest that this was an issue at the election. Presiding officers, the police and the political parties were in agreement on this point. The view generally expressed was that individual registration and the requirement for photographic identification had instilled greater confidence in the democratic process in Northern Ireland. We have previously highlighted the adverse impact that individual registration appears to have had on disadvantaged, marginalised and hard to reach groups, including young people and people with disabilities.

Despite the fact that the Single Transferable Vote (STV) has been used in Northern Ireland for 30 years, over 10,200 invalid votes were cast at the election. According to EONI statistics, the vast majority of ballot papers were spoiled because of a lack of understanding of the STV system of voting. This highlights the need for continued voter education and awareness of electoral systems. The levels of privacy and secrecy of the poll were also highlighted as being far from ideal, with many of the difficulties encountered linked to the

design of the new polling booths. Access to polling places for older people and people with disabilities was considered inadequate, although problems were exacerbated by holding the election in late November.

We concluded that there should be a wide-ranging review of the systems and procedures used at the counts and that the electronic counting of votes should be explored. The media encountered significant difficulties in reporting at the counts and felt their role was not fully understood or appreciated. Comparisons with access granted to the media elsewhere in the UK and the Republic of Ireland supports this assertion and highlights the need for new arrangements to be established between the media and the EONI. The counting of votes was judged by many external observers to be a long and laborious exercise that was neither transparent nor in some cases particularly well managed. The Commission shares these concerns but acknowledges that no political party or candidate questioned the validity of the results either during or after the counts.

Recommendations

The build-up

- In order to maintain public confidence in the integrity of elections in Northern Ireland, we recommend that statutory dates set in advance for elections be changed only in exceptional circumstances.
- To avoid confusion about whether people are registered to vote we recommend to Government that elections are not held during the annual canvass period.

- We recommend that the Government should amend the law so that the timeframe for including names on the register be moved closer to election day.
- We recommend that the Government should amend the law so that the timetable for future elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly is set at 25 days.
- We recommend that the review of the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975 is completed by the Secretary of State.
- We will examine the application of the disqualification legislation across the UK within the current legal framework and will make recommendations to Government.
- We recommend to the EONI that all communications to electors clearly identify the name and address of the sender.
- We recommend that the EONI conducts a regular revision of its polling station scheme. Consultees should be given at least eight weeks to respond to the proposals outlined in the consultation paper.
- We will conduct a review of absent voting in Northern Ireland and will make recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
- The EONI, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), should conduct a review of the current arrangements for recruiting, retaining and paying staff for election duty.
- We recommend that the EONI should be funded by the NIO to employ a dedicated training officer to work with all staff. We recommend that all presiding officers and

poll clerks, especially newly appointed staff, be given comprehensive training in the practicalities of running polling stations. Furthermore, we recommend that the EONI conducts a review of the paperwork used at elections to ensure it is relevant and fit for purpose.

Public awareness and participation

- We intend, in conjunction with Royal Mail, to conduct a review of the current arrangements for freepost in Northern Ireland and issue good practice guidance to political parties, candidates and agents and other relevant stakeholders.
- Given concerns raised by the EONI we will conduct a review of the helpline and consider how best this service can be provided to the public in the future.
- We will take steps to ensure that the electorate is better informed about the arrangements for absent voting.
- We will increase our efforts to promote greater awareness and understanding of individual registration and the requirement for photographic identification.

Polling day

- We recommend to the EONI that for future elections polling clerks should be instructed to turn up for duty at the same time as presiding officers, in order to avoid any delay in the opening of the poll.
- Given that so many primary schools in Northern Ireland are considered inaccessible to people with disabilities, consideration should be given to alternative venues for polling places.

- Polling places should have an accessible entrance with either level or ramped access.
- All electoral staff should be given disability awareness training.
- Prior to election day the EONI should conduct an access audit of polling places in order to identify access issues that may prevent people with disabilities from voting.
- The EONI should consult with local disability groups about the measures needed to ensure local polling places are made more accessible.
- We will undertake a UK-wide review of the use of tendered ballot papers and will make recommendations on their future use at elections.
- We reaffirm our recommendation that the Government should amend the law to allow for the introduction of watermarks on ballot papers.
- We will conduct a UK-wide policy review of the use of serial numbers on ballot papers and will report separately on this issue.
- We reaffirm our recommendation that guidance notes explaining the voting system be made available both at polling stations and on ballot papers.
- We recommend that the EONI continues to liaise with manufacturers of voting equipment about the development of appropriate devices for use at STV elections for people with visual impairments.
- We will conduct a UK-wide policy review of the current assistance provided to voters in polling stations and will make recommendations.
- We recommend that the EONI should review the current layout of polling places to ensure the secrecy of the ballot is maintained and enhanced.
- We recommend to the EONI that estimated figures on turnout be made routinely available on request to candidates and agents during election day by presiding officers.
- We recommend to the Government that the law be amended for all UK elections to enable voters present inside polling places at the close of poll to be issued with a ballot paper.
- We recommend that EONI should develop and make available a complaints leaflet for use by presiding officers in polling places.
- We will undertake a UK-wide review of the role and function of polling agents and will make recommendations.

The count and thereafter

- We recommend that the EONI review the current location and suitability of count venues.
- We recommend that external consultants be appointed to conduct a review of the entire count process with the aim of increasing its efficiency. The review should also consider the scope for computerising all or part of the count.
- In order to ensure information on each stage of the count is effectively relayed to those present, we recommend that a modern public address system be a pre-requisite in the choice of a count venue.
- We recommend that steps should be taken to ensure that the transparency of the count is enhanced.

- We recommend that the EONI explores ways of making greater use of information technology at STV counts. We further recommend that the NIO put in place the necessary statutory provisions to ensure that the EONI is in a position to conduct a number of pilots in respect of electronic counting at the 2005 local council elections.
- We recommend that the EONI develop up-to-date guidelines on the processes to be adopted for rejecting ballot papers. Those who have the responsibility for recording and classifying rejected ballot papers should be trained in their use.
- We recommend to the EONI that it convenes a working group involving broadcasters, the Commission and other interested stakeholders with a view to developing and putting in place a code of good practice on media access for use at future elections in Northern Ireland.

Looking forward

- In order to benchmark performance and identify funding issues, we recommend that an audit of the efficiency, economy and effectiveness of the EONI be conducted by the National Audit Office.
- We strongly urge the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to take forward the recommendations outlined in our 2003 report *Funding electoral services*.

1 Introduction

This is The Electoral Commission's first report on the administration of an election to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The report seeks to fulfil our statutory duty and covers all aspects of the election within our remit, consistent with our independent status.

The Electoral Commission

1.1 The Electoral Commission is a UK-wide independent public body established on 30 November 2000 under Section 1 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA). The Commission is independent of Government and political parties and is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Commission is headed by a Chairman and five other Commissioners, none of whom has connections to any political party. It is responsible for overseeing a number of aspects of electoral law including the registration of political parties, monitoring and publication of significant donations to registered political parties and the regulation of political party spending on election campaigns.

1.2 The Commission has a role in advising those involved in elections on practice and procedure and is required to report on the administration of every major election. In Northern Ireland the Commission has a statutory responsibility to report on elections to the Westminster Parliament, the European Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Unlike many electoral commissions outside the UK, the Commission does not have a responsibility for maintaining and updating electoral rolls, employing electoral services staff, or conducting elections. In Northern Ireland these tasks are the statutory responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland.

1.3 The Commission's corporate aims are to:

- promote and maintain openness and transparency in the financial affairs of the

UK's political parties and others involved with elections;

- review the administration and law of elections and encourage good practice;
- encourage greater participation in and increase understanding of the democratic process;
- ensure that the Commission is able to undertake the effective conduct of a referendum;
- provide for electoral equality in each local authority area in England while also reflecting community identity and interests;
- carry out all the Commission's statutory functions impartially using resources efficiently, effectively and economically.

1.4 While the Commission's main office is located in London it has three other offices, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Commission's office based in Belfast has responsibility for delivering the corporate aims of the Commission in the context of Northern Ireland. It ensures that the Northern Ireland dimension is fully represented in the strategic thinking and operational planning of the Commission. The office works with the Chief Electoral Officer and the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). Important priorities for the Commission are developing relationships with the political parties, developing and advising on electoral policy and practice and raising awareness of electoral matters.

1.5 To this end, the Commission has established an Assembly Parties' Panel and a Commissioner takes a special interest in Northern Ireland affairs. The Panel meets on a quarterly basis and

all parties represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly are members. Minutes of the quarterly meetings are published on the Commission's website. The Panel acts as a forum for sharing information on electoral matters and has been central to developing good working relationships with all the political parties. The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland and his senior colleagues attend meetings of the Panel by invitation. In the run-up to the election this afforded the political parties and the Commission an opportunity to share information and discuss key aspects of the Assembly election with the Chief Electoral Officer.

Our role in reviewing elections

1.6 This report fulfils the Commission's statutory responsibility to report on the conduct of the Northern Ireland Assembly election held on 26 November 2003. We are also required to keep under review such matters relating to elections as the Commission may determine and submit responses to the relevant Secretary of State. In December 2003 we published a comprehensive research report assessing the impact of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. In that report we said that the November 2003 Assembly election would provide us with an opportunity to comment in detail on the provisions of the Act.

1.7 This report is not restricted solely to reviewing the administration of the election. Consistent with our remit to promote the modernisation of electoral law and practice and to raise public awareness of electoral systems we have considered issues relating to voter engagement, including the media's reporting of the election.

Information and sources

1.8 Our report has been informed by a large number of sources including research commissioned from external providers. It has also benefited from the input of key stakeholders whose views have made an invaluable contribution to our review of the election and for which we are particularly grateful. We sought comments from the Chief Electoral Officer on the factual accuracy of the report. However, it should be emphasised that the views and recommendations in this report are those of The Electoral Commission alone. The following sources were used to inform the report.

Public opinion surveys

1.9 The findings of a number of public opinion surveys informed our report.

- Millward Brown Ulster (MBU) was commissioned in October 2003 to conduct public opinion research about people's attitudes towards the Assembly election. A representative sample (1,026) of the Northern Ireland population aged 18+ was asked for its views. The survey had a sampling tolerance of +/- 3%. Interviewing was carried out face-to-face in people's homes between 29 November and 14 December 2003. This was supplemented with two 'booster' samples, one to increase the number of interviews with 18–24 year olds and the second to increase the number of interviews with those who said they had not voted. In the report we refer to this as the December 2003 public opinion survey.
- The MBU omnibus survey was used during November and December 2003 to assess public awareness of the Commission's publicity

campaign in respect of the election. A representative sample of the Northern Ireland population was asked for its views. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes. The sampling tolerance was +/- 3%. In the report we refer to this as the 'tracking research'.

Focus groups

1.10 Eight focus groups were conducted during December 2003. The structure of the focus groups was designed to allow for a particular focus on non-voters so that their attitudes to voting and politics generally could be thoroughly explored. The structure of the groups was as follows:

Table 1: Composition of focus groups

Gender	Age	SEG ²	Religion	Voter	Location
Male	18–24	ABC1	Protestant	No	Belfast
Female	25–49	C2DE	Protestant	No	Belfast
Male	50+	C1C2	Protestant	No	Ballymena
Female	18–24	C2DE	Protestant	Yes & No	Belfast
Male	18–24	C2DE	Catholic	Yes	Ballymena
Female	25–50	ABC1	Catholic	Yes & No	Londonderry
Mixed	25–50	C1C2D	Catholic	No	Portadown
Mixed	25–50	C1C2D	Protestant	Yes	Londonderry

Observation reports from election day and the count

1.11 Observers from The Electoral Commission visited 20% of polling places on polling day and also attended the counts on Thursday 27 and Friday 28 November. Detailed reports of their experiences have been used to inform our report. Observers from the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) also visited Northern Ireland for the election and, although not granted access to polling places, observed the counts and produced an independent report.³

1.12 The Scottish Parliament is considering introducing STV for local elections from 2007. To help inform their understanding of the process a large number of Returning Officers

² Respondents were categorised in terms of socio-economic group, based on the occupation of the chief income earner in the household. The main classifications are AB (middle class or professional), C1 (lower middle class or junior management), C2 (skilled manual workers) and DE (unskilled manual workers, the unemployed or those in receipt of state benefits long-term).

³ *Elections for the devolved administration in Northern Ireland*, OSCE/ODIHR assessment report, December 2003.

from Scotland observed at the counts and shared their experiences with us.

Access audit of polling places

1.13 Disability Action⁴ was commissioned to conduct an access audit of polling places. Questionnaires were made available in a number of formats and could either be completed online or by post within two weeks of election day. Altogether, 220 people who voted on election day responded to the Disability Action Survey.

Analysis of the media coverage

1.14 Democratic Dialogue, an independent ‘think-tank’ in Northern Ireland, was commissioned to conduct an analysis of the media’s coverage of the Assembly election and the political parties’ campaigns. The content of local newspapers, television and radio along with foreign and global media were monitored to inform its findings. An analysis of the political parties’ manifestos, campaign launches and party election broadcasts was conducted and

⁴ Disability Action are the lead charity in Northern Ireland representing the interests of people with disabilities.

interviews held with party communication directors and figures in the local media.

1.15 The print media, both local and UK-wide, were monitored from 1 November until 1 December 2003 for content relating to the Northern Ireland Assembly election.

Analysis of the election results

1.16 Professors Rallings and Thrasher from the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth, analysed the election results and, where appropriate, made comparisons with the first Assembly elections held in June 1998.

Presiding officer and candidate questionnaires

1.17 The Commission drafted and, with the assistance of the EONI, distributed a detailed questionnaire to all presiding officers who worked during the election. They were asked about a range of issues, including the training provided by the EONI, managing the polling place, opening and closing the polling station and completing the ballot paper account. Altogether, 1,500 postal questionnaires were issued of which 1,102 were returned, representing a response rate of 73%. A postal questionnaire was also sent to all 256 candidates who stood for election, of which 53 were returned, representing a response rate of 21%. Altogether, 14 responses were received from the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), 13 from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), six from Alliance, five from the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and two from Sinn Féin. The remainder were from the smaller parties and independent candidates.

Consultation

1.18 Two focus groups were held with staff from the EONI, one with senior management and another with area electoral office staff. We also sought the views of a large number of other stakeholders. These included the political parties, the voluntary sector including those representing the interests of minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland, the media, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), academics and local authorities. We received a number of written submissions which have informed the content of the report.

Stakeholder seminar

1.19 The Commission hosted a post-election stakeholder seminar on 8 January 2004 in Belfast. Over 70 delegates attended, representing a large number of voluntary and statutory organisations. Among the issues discussed were the media and the election, the count and turnout.

Other sources

1.20 A number of other sources were used including:

- statistical information and correspondence received directly from the EONI;
- correspondence from members of the general public following the publication of a letter in local newspapers inviting views on the Assembly election;
- information received on the nature and type of calls to the Commission's helpline;
- a log of complaints received by The Electoral Commission.

1.21 Copies of the full research reports funded by the Commission are available on The Electoral Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk or on request from the Commission's offices.

Priorities and principles

1.22 The interests of voters and the electorate are of paramount importance when considering the modernisation of electoral administration. This was emphasised in our report *Voting for change*,⁵ which set out proposals for changing electoral law and practice primarily for the benefit of the electorate in the wider UK context. Electoral arrangements must also create the best possible conditions for political parties and candidates to engage with the electorate and should enable electoral administrators to administer elections effectively and efficiently. In drafting our report, reaching our conclusions and making recommendations we have endeavoured to keep these priorities and principles to the fore.

Scope of report

1.23 Our report encompasses all matters within the remit of the Commission relating to the Northern Ireland Assembly elections, but excludes an analysis of election campaign expenditure by political parties and candidates (see 1.25). It gives an overview of the background to the election and the system of electoral administration in Northern Ireland. It comments on voter turnout and public attitudes to elections in Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, makes comparisons with England, Scotland and Wales.

It considers the administration of the election from a range of stakeholder perspectives and provides a detailed analysis of the results.

1.24 It should be noted that some issues arising in the context of the Northern Ireland Assembly election are not unique to Northern Ireland. A number of key electoral issues have already been reviewed by the Commission and are the subject of existing recommendations to Government. Others, however, were not considered in the context of Northern Ireland and will be reviewed separately on the basis of the conclusions and recommendations reached in this report.

Campaign expenditure

1.25 In Autumn 2004 we will publish a second volume of our report on the Assembly elections. It will cover in detail the expenditure incurred by parties and candidates on their election campaigns. The EONI published a notice requesting a return of election expenses by candidates and giving details of where returns could be inspected. The Commission now has a responsibility to review these returns and those from the political parties in accordance with PPERA. The returns submitted by political parties and candidates will be checked for completeness and accuracy. Meetings will be held with parties and agents to review the systems in place and to ensure compliance with the relevant financial controls.

Recommendations

1.26 This report is being published as a comprehensive account of the administration of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections held on 26 November 2003. It has been submitted to

⁵ *Voting for change – an electoral law modernization programme*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003.

the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in the context of his responsibilities for legislation relating to Northern Ireland elections. A copy has also been sent to the Chief Electoral Officer, given his central role in the administration of elections in Northern Ireland.

1.27 The Commission's role with regard to electoral law and administration is advisory only. It is for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to decide on any legislative changes in response to our proposals, and for the Chief Electoral Officer to consider the administrative implications.



2 The structure of electoral administration in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland electoral administration is the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer who acts as both the Returning Officer and Registration Officer for all elections.

2.1 The arrangements for electoral administration in Northern Ireland are different from elsewhere in the UK. The system in Northern Ireland is administered centrally by a Chief Electoral Officer and the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. The Chief Electoral Officer is both the Returning Officer and Registration Officer for all elections in Northern Ireland. The duties and responsibilities of the Chief Electoral Officer are conferred on him by the *Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962*.

Role of the Chief Electoral Officer

2.2 The Chief Electoral Officer is a Crown appointment, with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland taking responsibility for the recruitment process. The Northern Ireland Office's Accounting Officer is accountable to Parliament for EONI expenditure. The Chief Electoral Officer has summarised his duties as follows:⁶

- ensuring the smooth running of elections and referendums in Northern Ireland;
- maintaining the public perception of an impartial and independent electoral service;
- preparing and maintaining an accurate electoral register that also serves to select a panel for jury service;
- minimising the scope for electoral abuse;
- preparing a polling station scheme;
- providing advice to the Secretary of State on all electoral matters;
- providing advice to the Local Government Boundary Commission and the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland;

⁶ EONI, *Annual report 2002–03*.

- ensuring that services are delivered efficiently and effectively with due consideration to value-for-money.

2.3 The EONI is the organisation that supports the Chief Electoral Officer in carrying out his statutory duties. The EONI consists of a headquarters based in Belfast and nine area electoral offices. The Chief Electoral Officer has a permanent staff of around 40 and nine Area Electoral Officers. Their role is primarily to manage the compilation of the electoral register, while also acting as Deputy Returning Officers (DROs) for two constituencies each at election time.

2.4 As a designated public authority under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the EONI was obliged to produce an equality scheme. The scheme was approved by the Equality Commission on 10 June 2003. As part of the scheme the EONI announced on 7 October 2003 that it intended conducting an equality impact assessment of its polling station scheme. We understand the EONI intends reporting on its findings later this year.

Role of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

2.5 In Northern Ireland electoral matters, including law and policy, are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Electoral matters are reserved, meaning they have not been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Consequently, those elected to the Assembly have no authority over electoral matters. The Secretary of State is responsible for:

- maintaining the legal framework that is necessary for elections to the European Parliament, the Westminster Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and to local district councils;
- funding the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland;
- providing staffing and other resources necessary to maintain the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland;
- consulting as necessary with the Chief Electoral Officer and The Electoral Commission on legislation and policy proposals.

Elections in Northern Ireland

2.6 In Northern Ireland elections are held to:

- the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- the House of Commons, Westminster;
- the European Parliament;
- city, district and borough Councils, of which there are 26.

During the last 20 years there have been 16 Northern Ireland-wide elections and one referendum.

2.7 The Single Transferable Vote (STV) is a form of proportional representation and has been used in Northern Ireland for the last 30 years. Voters are asked to rate candidates in order of preference on their ballot papers by putting a '1' beside their first choice, a '2' beside their second choice, and so on down the ballot paper for as many – or as few – candidates as they wish. All elections in Northern Ireland, except those to the Westminster Parliament, use the STV system.

The Northern Ireland Assembly

2.8 Under Section 31(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly should be held every four years. However, to coincide with elections to the devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales, the duration of the first Northern Ireland Assembly was almost five years. Altogether, 108 members are elected to serve in the Northern Ireland Assembly, six for each of the 18 Westminster Parliamentary constituencies.

Eligibility to vote in Northern Ireland elections

2.9 In order to vote in Northern Ireland an individual must be:

- aged 18 or above;
- a citizen of either the United Kingdom, another Commonwealth state, or member state of the European Union; and
- listed on the relevant Northern Ireland register of electors for that election.

2.10 In order to be included on the electoral register an individual must also have either:

- been resident in Northern Ireland during the whole of the three month period prior to their application;
- made a service declaration;
- made an overseas citizen's declaration; or
- be a merchant seaman.

Eligibility to vote, however, is restricted in certain types of election in Northern Ireland by citizenship and/or residence. Anyone who met the above

criteria was eligible to vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly election 2003.

The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002

2.11 The Assembly election on 26 November was the first election at which the changes brought about by the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 were tested in full. The Act was primarily introduced to overcome widely held perceptions of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland and resulted in the most significant change to electoral law and practice for many years. It replaced household registration with a new system of individual registration. Under the new rules those wishing to have their name included on the register must provide personal identification information in the form of their date of birth, national insurance number and signature. Implementation of the Act also involved the introduction of prescribed forms of photographic identification at polling stations. The key elements of the Act are set out below.

Registration

2.12 Individuals wishing to register to vote in Northern Ireland must provide the following information on an annual basis:

- their signature (this requirement can be waived if it is not reasonably practicable for the applicant to sign in a consistent and distinctive way because of any incapacity or an inability to read);
- their date of birth;
- their national insurance number (or a signed declaration confirming they never had one);

- a statement confirming they have been resident in Northern Ireland for the whole of the three-month period prior to the date of application;
- details of any other addresses at which they have registered and/or applied to be registered.

In the event that a registration form does not include all of this information, or if the Registration Officer is not satisfied with the information, the person's name will not be included on the register.

Electoral identity card

2.13 A person whose name is included on the register can apply for a free electoral identity card which will be issued provided the necessary matching personal identifiers are submitted. The card contains a photograph, the applicant's full name, date of birth and the expiry date of the card. An electoral identity card is valid for 10 years.

National Insurance Number verification

2.14 Provision was included in the legislation for the Chief Electoral Officer to seek verification of national insurance numbers from the relevant authority. In the case of Northern Ireland the relevant authority is the Social Security Agency.

Absent voting

2.15 Those applying for an absent vote must provide additional information in the form of their date of birth, national insurance number and signature. This information is checked and verified against that provided at registration.

A third statutory question

2.16 Presiding officers at polling stations in Northern Ireland were given the authority to ask potential voters a third statutory question, namely 'What is your date of birth?' The answer can be verified against the date of birth recorded at the time of registration. This is in addition to the two existing statutory questions that presiding officers throughout the UK can ask. See paragraph 5.23 for further details on the statutory questions.

Offences

2.17 Those found guilty of knowingly providing false information are liable on summary conviction to a term in imprisonment of up to six months, or a fine up to £5,000, or both.

Impact of the Act on registration

2.18 Under the legislation the EONI has to compile a new register each year. Unlike the situation in England, Scotland and Wales there is no provision to carry names forward from one year to the next if individuals do not respond to the canvass. When the first individual register was published on 1 December 2002 it contained 119,790 fewer names than the previous register and it was estimated that 86% of the eligible population was registered. The reduction in the names on the register led to much speculation and debate. In order to shed light on the issue the Commission undertook to review the impact of the legislation and published an assessment of its findings in the report *The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002: an assessment of its first year in operation*.

2.19 In the report we identified the removal of the 'carry forward' facility as the main reason

for the reduction in names. Other contributory factors such as a general disengagement from politics, a lack of awareness of the new arrangements and a disinterest in voting were also identified. A particular area of concern highlighted was the impact of the legislation on marginalised and hard to reach groups. These included young people and students, people with learning disabilities and other forms of disability and those living in areas of high social deprivation. In this regard we welcome the NIO's recent decision to conduct an equality impact assessment into the workings of the Act.

2.20 The reduction in names on the December 2002 register was only partly redressed by the process of rolling registration, which provides people with a voluntary means of registering outside of the annual canvass. The May 2003 register showed a net increase of 26,380 names against the December 2002 register, equating to an overall increase of 2.1 percentage points. The register published on 1 February 2004 (postponed from December due to the election) contained 1,069,000 names, 3,500 fewer than appeared on the first individual register. This was 28,000 fewer names than were on 1 September 2003 register, the register used for the Assembly election. The Commission plans to conduct an analysis of 1 February 2004 and 1 December 2004 registers later this year.

Wider implications of the Act

2.21 A number of the changes introduced as a result of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 focused on ascertaining an individual's eligibility to vote. As a result, the impact of these measures could only be determined following

an election. Specific issues such as the use of photographic identification at polling stations are discussed in detail later in this report.

ELECTORAL IDENTITY CARD



Signature

DATE ISSUED
30/11/2014

3 The build-up to election day

Having been postponed twice the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland officially announced in the House of Commons on 22 October that the second election to the Northern Ireland Assembly would be held on 26 November 2003. In this chapter we comment on the impact of the postponements, the build-up to election day and the key issues that emerged as polling day approached.

The postponement of the May elections

3.1 The date for the second election to the Northern Ireland Assembly was set in legislation for 1 May 2003 to coincide with elections to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. However, following talks at Hillsborough between the British and Irish governments and the political parties, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced on 12 March that the election was being postponed until 29 May. Following further negotiations an announcement was made by the Secretary of State on 1 May that elections to the Assembly were being suspended until an unspecified date in the autumn.

The reimbursement of election expenses

3.2 To reimburse parties and candidates for expenditure incurred in respect of the postponed elections the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections (Registered parties and Candidates) Reimbursement Scheme 2003 was introduced. The scheme specified the type of expenditure for which parties and candidates could seek reimbursement, and outlined the criteria with which they had to comply in order to be reimbursed. The Electoral Commission was asked by Government to administer the scheme. The deadline for return of claims to the Commission's Northern Ireland office was 30 September 2003. In total, The Electoral Commission received 12 party claims and 92 candidate claims, amounting to just over £500K in respect of party claims and just over £85K in

candidate claims.⁷ The NIO was responsible for making the payments.

Reactions to the postponement

3.3 The postponement of the 29 May election was greeted in many quarters with disappointment and frustration. Sinn Féin condemned the postponement and called for a demonstration on the day the election was to have been held. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) suggested that the main motive for postponing the election was to ensure that the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) had sufficient support to remain the largest unionist party and strongly questioned the democratic nature of the decision. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) described the postponement of the election as a 'matter of profound regret'. The UUP came out in support of it.

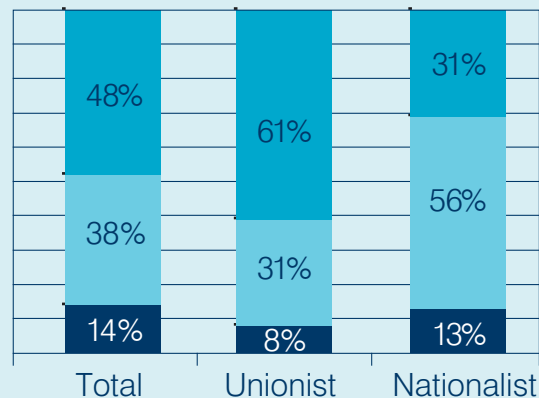
3.4 A public opinion poll conducted shortly afterwards suggested that, while around half the respondents felt that the postponement of the election had been justified, support for it differed between the two main communities.⁸ Unionist interviewees were twice as likely to feel that it was justified as their nationalist counterparts.

⁷ Details of how the scheme operated are available on www.electoralcommission.org.uk/your-area/nirs2003partyandcand.cfm

⁸ The survey was conducted on behalf of the *Newsletter* newspaper by Millward Brown Ulster. It involved 900 telephone interviews with a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population aged 18+ between 9 and 14 May. It was published in the *Newsletter* on 19 May 2003.

Figure 1: Public opinion support for postponement of the election

'Was the Prime Minister justified or unjustified in postponing the Assembly elections?'



Source: MBU / *News Letter*
Base: 900

■ Justified
■ Unjustified
■ Don't know

The announcement of the November election

3.5 The unofficial announcement of a November election was made from 10 Downing Street to a BBC journalist at 7.10am on Tuesday 21 October. The following day the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced in the House of Commons that an election to the Northern Ireland Assembly would take place on Wednesday 26 November.⁹ To facilitate the election a number of Orders in Council were made in Parliament. These included an Order specifying the date on which a person standing for election became a

⁹ The Northern Ireland (Date of Next Assembly Poll) Order 2003.

candidate,¹⁰ one which deferred the publication of the electoral register from 1 December 2003 to 1 February 2004¹¹ and another which gave observers from The Electoral Commission a statutory right of access to polling stations.¹²

The timing of the election

3.6 The decision to hold the election during the annual registration process had a significant impact on the work of the EONI. The timing of the election left the EONI with the difficult task of motivating staff to prepare for an election for the third time in six months. The Chief Electoral Officer said that staff were unable to focus on making the necessary preparations for the election because they were busy dealing with enquiries about registration. As a result many staff had no option but to work long hours of overtime.

3.7 The Chief Electoral Officer felt that the pressure on EONI staff in the lead-up to the election was exacerbated by the uncooperative attitude displayed by political parties and some members of the public. There was a suggestion that some parties did not appreciate the stress that area electoral staff were under. He also complained that the NIO did not seem to recognise or understand the resourcing requirements of the EONI.

In order to maintain public confidence in the integrity of elections in Northern Ireland, the Commission recommends to Government that statutory dates set in advance for elections be changed only in exceptional circumstances. Furthermore, to avoid confusion about whether people are registered to vote we recommend that elections are not held during the annual canvass period.

The relevant register

3.8 For the Assembly election the register used was the last one printed before the close of nominations. In the case of the November 2003 election this was the register published by the EONI on 1 September 2003. It largely comprised the names of those who had registered in the autumn of 2002 when the first individual register was compiled. When published on 1 December 2002 it contained 1,072,425 names. Under the system of rolling registration¹³ further names were added and removed, with the result that the total number of names on the register for the 2003 Assembly election had increased to 1,097,551. This compared to 1,191,009 on the register used at the 2001 election and 1,178,556 on the register used at the 1998 Assembly election.¹⁴

3.9 Under the system of rolling registration it can take up to six weeks for names to appear on the register. For inclusion on the 1 September

¹³ Rolling registration provides a voluntary means by which entries can be added, transferred or deleted from the register throughout the year rather than during the annual canvass.

¹⁴ The register used for both the 2001 combined election and the 1998 Assembly election was compiled under the old household canvass which was replaced in 2002 by individual registration. For further information see *The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002: an assessment of its first year in operation*, The Electoral Commission, December 2003.

¹⁰ The Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections and Periods of Suspension) Act 2003 (Consequential Modifications No. 2) Order 2003.

¹¹ The Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections and Periods of Suspension) Act 2003 (Consequential Modifications) Order 2003.

¹² The Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) (Amendment) Order 2003.

2003 register applications would have had to have been submitted to the EONI by the middle of July, four-and-a-half months before the election. Given concerns about the shortfall on the register, particularly among first-time voters, the Commission suggested to the EONI and the NIO that the creation of a supplementary register could help alleviate the situation. Although viewed sympathetically by some in the NIO, our suggestion was not pursued with on the basis that no precise date had been set for the election. Consequently, when a date was announced there was insufficient time to put a system in place to register people within a short timeframe. The ODIHR, in its report on the Assembly election, commented:

Ideally, the deadline and closure of the register period should be closer to election day... A deadline of no more than 30 days before an election is generally accepted as a 'best practice' standard.¹⁵

The difficulties created by the current closing date for registration are not unique to the Northern Ireland Assembly election. The wider issue was addressed in our 2003 report about electoral registration¹⁶ where we recommended that the latest date for registration at all UK elections should normally be the close of nominations. In circumstances where individuals could show they had been resident or had a local connection for three months, then registration would be allowed up to six days before an election. We reaffirm the recommendation from our earlier report.

¹⁵ OSCE/ODIHR Assessment Report, December 2003.

¹⁶ *The electoral registration process: report and recommendations*, The Electoral Commission, May 2003.

3.10 Calling an election towards the end of the annual registration canvass created confusion in the minds of some of the electorate as to whether or not they were registered to vote in the November poll. Many of those who completed registration forms in the autumn of 2003 automatically assumed they were registered. This is demonstrated by the fact that a significant number of electors turned up to vote only to discover they were not on the relevant register (see paragraph 5.51). Although presiding officers were not asked to record the actual number of people turning up to vote and not on the register, a quarter of those who responded to our survey identified this as a problem. Altogether, 6% of those questioned in our public opinion survey said the only reason they did not vote was because they were not on the register.¹⁷

Election timetable

3.11 Given the short timeframe between the announcement of the election and election day itself a 20-day timetable was used rather than a 25 day one. In reality, however, the timetable was effectively 23 days. This resulted from the fact that the publication of the notice of election was three working days earlier than required.

¹⁷ This represents 19% of non-voters interviewed. By way of context, at the 2001 general election a UK-wide MORI/Electoral Commission survey found 6% of non-voters giving 'not on the register' as an (unprompted) reason for not voting. (MORI, *Attitudes to Voting and the Political Process* (unpublished). This used two MORI surveys for The Electoral Commission: the Phase 1 survey involved interviews with 1,801 UK adults 18+ between 9–15 May 2001 and the Phase 2 survey involved recontacting 1,162 of the 1,472 Phase 1 respondents who agreed to be recontacted.)

In our 2003 report *Election timetables in the United Kingdom*¹⁸ we concluded that there was a need for timetable consistency and that 25 days was the appropriate period required for the effective organisation and administration of an election.

We reaffirm the recommendation that the Government amend the law so that the timetable for future elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly is set at 25 days.

Table 2: Timetable for the election

Date	Event
23 October	Publication of notice of election
29 October	Last date for publication of notice of election Last date for registering a party with The Electoral Commission under PPERA
3 November	Delivery of nominations
4 November	Last date for delivery of nominations
6 November	Last date for applications for absent votes
18 November	Last date for receipt of late absent vote applications on health grounds
24 November	Last date for appointment of polling agents and counting agents and sub agents
26 November	Election day

Guide for candidates and agents

3.12 Prior to the postponed 1 May election the Commission, in consultation with the EONI, produced guidance to assist candidates and agents during the election. This was later updated for use at the November poll and was available on both the Commission's and the EONI's website.¹⁹ It set out the roles and responsibilities of both the candidates and

agents and aimed to ensure that they were familiar with all stages of the process, including the election timetable, nominations, campaigning, polling day, the count and election expenses.

¹⁸ *Election timetables in the United Kingdom*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003.

¹⁹ *Guide for candidates and agents*, The Electoral Commission.

Nominations

3.13 Nominations took place between 10am and 4pm on Monday 3 and Tuesday 4 November. Soon after the deadlines for nominations passed the EONI published a statement of persons nominated on its website. The evidence collated from the returned candidate questionnaires suggests that there was general satisfaction with the nomination procedures. Of the 53 candidates who responded to the Commission's questionnaire only two expressed dissatisfaction with the procedure.

3.14 The total number of candidates nominated to stand was 256, representing a decrease of 40 from the previous Assembly elections held in 1998. The largest number of candidates stood in North Down (19) and East Antrim (19) with the smallest number standing in Newry & Armagh (11). Of the 256 candidates nominated 49 were women, the same number that stood in the 1998 Assembly election.

3.15 Altogether, 17 political parties fielded candidates and five parties competed in all constituencies. In total, 22 independent candidates stood for election. All the parties standing were registered with The Electoral Commission in accordance with PPERA. A complaint was received from one party that the emblem being used by another party gave it an unfair advantage in a proportional representation election because the number '1' appeared at the end of the party name. The party emblem was registered by the Commission and in light of this complaint the position with regard to the registration legislation will be kept under review.

Table 3: Candidates at 2003 and 1998 elections by constituency

Constituency	Number of candidates June 1998	Number of candidates Nov 2003	Difference + / -
Belfast East	20	15	- 5
Belfast North	18	16	- 2
Belfast South	19	17	- 2
Belfast West	15	14	- 1
East Antrim	16	19	+ 3
East Londonderry	14	14	0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	14	12	- 2
Foyle	15	13	- 2
Lagan Valley	15	13	- 2
Mid-Ulster	13	12	- 1
Newry & Armagh	14	11	- 3
North Antrim	18	12	- 6
North Down	19	19	0
South Antrim	14	14	0
South Down	17	16	- 1
Strangford	22	13	- 9
Upper Bann	18	14	- 4
West Tyrone	15	12	- 3
Total	296	256	- 40

Source: EONI

3.16 Candidates had the responsibility for ensuring that their completed nomination papers were delivered to the appropriate DRO by the specified time and date. This had to be done in person at the relevant area electoral office and the nomination papers had to contain the candidate's name and home address in full. Those standing for a political party were permitted to use a description of not more than six words, but if standing as an independent only

the word 'independent' could be used. One independent candidate complained about not being able to use a description on the ballot paper and felt he was being disadvantaged by having to use the word 'independent'. The Commission has previously recommended to Government that independent candidates, subject to approval by the Returning Officer in each case, should be allowed to stand under descriptions of up to six words at all elections

held in the UK.²⁰ We await the Government's response to this and the other related recommendations contained in our report.

3.17 Candidates had to have their nomination papers signed by a proposer and seconder and by eight eligible electors all of whom had to be registered voters in the constituency. One candidate who was standing for the Vote For Yourself Party submitted nomination papers that had been signed by electors from outside the constituency, thus invalidating the nomination. The nomination papers of two independent candidates were rejected because they encountered difficulties with the subscriber system. Candidates paid a £150 deposit when submitting their nomination papers which was forfeited if the candidate failed to achieve, at any stage of the count, one quarter of the quota. The issue of deposits and subscribers was also addressed in our 2003 report on standing for election where we proposed two options. Option A recommended the abolition of deposits and subscribers for all elections in the UK whereas option B recommended a modified deposit and subscriber system. Again we await the Government's response to our recommendations.

Disqualifying posts

3.18 In a written submission to The Electoral Commission, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission expressed concern at the number of public sector employees and those holding public appointments who were disqualified from holding elected office. It cited as an example the

case of one of its own Commissioners who had to resign his post in order to stand for election.

3.19 Under Rule 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 applied (with modifications) by the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) Order 2001, a person shall not be validly nominated unless they consent to their nomination in writing. Paragraph 3 of that rule states:

A candidate's consent given under this rule... shall state

(i) that he is aware of the provisions of the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975; and

(ii) that to the best of his knowledge and belief he is not disqualified for membership of the Assembly.

3.20 The Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975 lists a large number of posts which, if held by an individual, disqualifies that person from being elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly. If a candidate holding one of these posts is nominated and is later elected, their election is void. Furthermore, if a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) takes up a disqualifying post when elected the seat is vacated.

3.21 Following a request from the Secretary of State in 2002, the Assembly established a committee to review the disqualification legislation. The Committee produced a report with recommendations which was submitted to the Secretary of State in June 2002.²¹

²⁰ *Standing for elections in the United Kingdom*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003.

²¹ The report of the Committee can be accessed at: www.ni-assembly.gov.uk/adhoc/disqualification/reports/3-01r.htm.

However, following the suspension of the Assembly this matter has not progressed.

We recommend that the review of the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975 is completed by the Secretary of State.

3.22 The Human Rights Commission suggested that it would be preferable if a person holding a disqualifying post could stand for election and only have to resign from their job if successful. The Commission notes that similar legislation exists for all elections in the UK and that it is applied in the same way. In our 2003 review of the nomination procedures this matter was not raised as a cause for concern.²² However, the issues identified in respect of Northern Ireland also apply throughout the rest of the UK.

The Commission will examine the application of the disqualification legislation across the UK within the current legal framework and make recommendations to Government.

Delivery of poll cards

3.23 Prior to polling day all electors normally receive a poll card which contains their number on the electoral register. It also displays the constituency name, date of the poll, location of the elector's polling place, the hours of polling and a brief explanation on how to vote. Polling cards distributed before the November Assembly election also reminded voters of the need to produce one of the four forms of specified electoral identification. The poll cards advised electors that they were from the Returning Officer

but no mention was made of the fact that the correspondence was from the EONI.

We recommend to the EONI that all communications to electors clearly identify the name and address of the sender.

3.24 Royal Mail collected polling cards from the data processing company between 12 and 17 November for distribution. There were shortages of poll cards in the Lisburn, Newtownards and Armagh areas. Royal Mail notified the EONI of this and special arrangements were made to distribute the outstanding cards prior to polling day. Although voters were not obliged to present a poll card at a polling station a number of people contacted the Commission before the election raising concerns that they had not received a poll card. They were advised to contact the EONI directly in order that the register of electors being used for the election could be checked.

Revised polling station scheme

3.25 Following the combined election in June 2001 a number of complaints were received from political parties and others about the number and location of some polling stations. It was felt that too many electors had been allocated to each polling station, with the result that staff were unable to cope with the large number of voters, particularly around the close of poll. In his statutory report to Parliament for 2001–2002 the Chief Electoral Officer acknowledged these difficulties and stated that between 200 and 300 electors had to be turned away by presiding officers when the polls closed at 10.00pm. He recognised that the number of polling places (582) and the number of polling stations (1,261)

²² *Standing for election in the UK*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003.

were insufficient to meet the needs of the electorate and undertook to review the position.

3.26 As a result the EONI devised a new polling station scheme in early 2003 and consulted key stakeholders on its contents. Some parties complained about the shortness of the two-week period given for public consultation. However, we understand that the EONI conducted the consultation in accordance with the Electoral Law (Northern Ireland) Act 1962. Following the revision of the polling station scheme, the number of polling stations increased to 1,532, and the number of polling places increased to 612. The impact of these changes is discussed in detail later in the report (see paragraph 5.22). The measures put in place appear to have been effective and we received no reports of electors being turned away at the close of poll.

We recommend that the EONI conducts a regular revision of its polling station scheme and rather than having a four-yearly review undertakes this on an incremental basis with a quarter of polling stations being reviewed annually. Consultees should be given at least eight weeks to respond to the proposals outlined in the consultation paper. The EONI should also employ a range of consultation techniques to ensure the views of relevant stakeholders are adequately reflected.

Absent voting

3.27 Absent voting is the term used at elections to describe postal and proxy voting. Postal voting on demand where no reason needs to be given was introduced in Great Britain under the

Representation of the People Act 2000. It was designed to make voting more convenient and to increase turnout. Postal voting on demand marked a significant change in the way in which absent votes could be obtained. For the first time voting away from a polling place was a choice open to any elector, without having to provide a reason. As long as an application for a postal vote contains all the relevant details and arrives no later than six days before polling day a postal vote is sent to the elector.

3.28 The availability of postal voting on demand was not extended to Northern Ireland, where the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2001 apply. A person applying for a postal vote in Northern Ireland must give a valid reason for their application. Valid reasons include the inability to attend the polling place due to illness, physical incapacity, absence on the day of the poll due to work commitments, holiday arrangements or having moved outside the locality of their previous polling place. Postal votes cannot be sent to voters registered in Northern Ireland but living outside the UK nor can they be handed in at polling places. Neither of these restrictions applies to postal voters in Great Britain.

3.29 A proxy voter is an elector who appoints another person to vote on their behalf. The proxy must either go to the elector's allocated polling station and vote on behalf of the elector or request a postal vote. This process then becomes a 'postal proxy'. Those wishing to avail themselves of a proxy vote in Northern Ireland must provide the EONI with a valid reason as to why they require a proxy vote. Valid reasons are the same as those applying for postal votes.

3.30 Electors applying for a postal or proxy vote must do so before 5pm on the 14th day before the date of the poll. There are two exceptions to this, namely electors taken ill after the 14th day and police officers or polling station staff on duty on polling day. In both cases, applications can be made up until 5pm on the sixth day before the date of the poll. For the November 2003 Assembly election the applicable dates were 5pm on 6 and 18 November respectively. During the course of the election campaign both the EONI and the Commission received complaints that the deadlines set for absent vote applications were too early and not sufficiently advertised.

3.31 To assist with the postal and proxy voting process the EONI issued each candidate with 100 postal vote application forms and 25 proxy

vote application forms. One party expressed dissatisfaction that the EONI was restricting the number of application forms and that the numbers issued were insufficient to meet the needs of those wishing to avail themselves of the absent vote facility. The EONI advised the Commission that had a party or individual candidate required additional application forms these were available on request from local area electoral offices.

3.32 At the November 2003 election the EONI issued a total of 24,253 absent votes (19,969 postal and 4,284 proxy). These comprised 14,233 new applications of which 10,751 were approved and 3,482 were rejected. The balance (10,020) comprised those on the permanent list of absent voters. The number of postal votes issued for the November election was just over half the number issued in 1998 and 2001.

Table 4: Number of postal votes issued and counted at the last three Northern Ireland-wide elections

Election	Number of postal votes issued	Number of postal votes returned	Number of postal votes included in count	% of total valid vote
1998 Assembly election	37,070	32,285	31,816 (86%)	3.9
2001 General election	31,111	26,541	26,078 (84%)	3.2
2003 Assembly election	19,969	17,563	16,437 (82%)	2.4

Source: EONI

Table 5: Reasons for rejecting absent vote applications (postal and proxy)

Reason	Number
Submitted late	1,006
Signature (none/incorrect)	748
Unsatisfactory reason why required	381
No declaration	313
Not registered	267
National Insurance Number not supplied/or incorrect	250
Date of birth not supplied/or incorrect	215
Attested own form	123
Multiple attestation	105
Incorrect attestation	47
Not eligible	15
Incorrect form	8
Attested by relative	4
Total	3,482

Source: EONI

3.33 Of the postal ballot papers issued 17,563 (88%) were returned. This compares positively to the postal vote return rate for the recent elections in Scotland and Wales – 75% and 63% respectively. The constituencies recording the biggest demand for postal votes were West Tyrone, Fermanagh & South Tyrone and Mid-Ulster. Together these three constituencies accounted for 41% of the total postal votes issued. These are largely rural constituencies necessitating further distances to travel to polling places. This may offer some explanation for the large number of applications in comparison to the four Belfast constituencies which accounted for just over 9% of the total issued. Altogether, 1,126 (6.4%) postal votes were rejected from the

count compared to 54 in 1998. The increase can be attributed to the additional checks on personal identifiers undertaken by the EONI as a result of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002.

Table 6: Summary of postal ballot papers issued, returned and rejected

Constituency	Total postal ballots issued	Number returned	% return	Number rejected	% rejection rate
Belfast West	446	388	87.0	45	11.5
Lagan Valley	798	682	85.5	76	11.1
Newry & Armagh	1,416	1,252	88.4	127	10.1
Mid-Ulster	2,174	2,009	92.4	133	8.5
North Antrim	893	780	87.3	65	8.3
Upper Bann	1,015	899	88.6	73	8.1
Foyle	1,091	926	84.8	48	5.2
Belfast South	502	427	85.1	22	5.2
East Antrim	397	333	83.9	17	5.1
Belfast North	503	412	81.9	21	5.1
Belfast East	446	367	82.3	17	4.6
West Tyrone	2,330	2,144	92.1	156	4.4
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	3,600	3,238	89.9	130	4.0
East Londonderry	1,288	1,103	85.6	41	3.7
North Down	496	366	73.8	9	2.5
Strangford	632	540	85.4	11	2.0
South Antrim	480	422	87.9	20	1.4
South Down	1,462	1,275	87.2	138	1.4
Totals	19,969	17,563	88.0	1126	6.4

Source: EONI

3.34 The total number of proxy votes issued by the EONI was 4,284. This compares to 8,831 issued for the 1998 Assembly election and 9,970 issued for the 2001 general election. The constituencies recording the highest demand for proxy votes were largely rural and included Fermanagh & South Tyrone, Mid-Ulster, West Tyrone and Newry & Armagh. Constituencies

recording the lowest demands were largely urban and included Belfast East, Belfast South, North Down, South Antrim, Strangford and East Antrim.

Explaining the decrease in absent vote applications

3.35 Possible reasons for the reduction in the number of absent vote applications include:

- The time of year that the election was held – people are more likely to be on holiday in May or June than November thus requiring an absent vote.
- The impact of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 – having to provide a number of personal identifiers on the application form may have acted as a deterrent against potential fraudulent applications.
- A general lack of public awareness about absent voting combined with insufficient advertising.
- The EONI reviewed its permanent absent voter list following the publication of the December 2002 register, reducing the number of names by 23%.
- The early cut-off date for applications for absent votes (20 days before the actual poll) may have affected the number of applications received. During the course of the election campaign a number of electors raised the short timeframe and questioned why the date had to be set so far in advance of the poll.
- Difficulties with Royal Mail deliveries – Royal Mail staff embarked on a series of strikes in Great Britain at the end of October. The backlog of mail generated by this industrial action took several weeks to clear and may have had some impact on absent vote applications, particularly from students. One political party raised concerns about the strike

with the EONI and highlighted the fact that applications for absent votes could be delayed.

3.36 In 2002 and 2003 the Commission conducted a review of absent voting in Great Britain.²³ Northern Ireland was not included because of the different legal framework for absent voting and because legislation in respect of electoral fraud was in the process of being introduced. The recommendations set out in the Commission's report on absent voting were aimed at meeting three key objectives:

- striking a balance between the expansion of postal voting and the need to safeguard against fraud and other abuses;
- establishing a greater degree of secrecy surrounding the postal vote while accepting the limitations of what can realistically be achieved in this area;
- ensuring the system of electoral administration is able to cope with a continual expansion of postal voting, while at no stage giving administrative efficiency a greater priority than the interests of voters.

Given the new electoral fraud legislation in Northern Ireland, a focus on encouraging wider participation and developments in postal voting elsewhere in the UK, we will conduct a review of absent voting in Northern Ireland and will make recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

²³ *Absent voting in Great Britain: report and recommendations*, The Electoral Commission, March 2003.

Distribution of electoral identity cards

3.37 The Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Variation of Specified Documents) Regulations 2003 removed all forms of non-photographic identification from the list of specified documents. To vote at an election in Northern Ireland an elector must present photographic identification in the form of a current British or Irish passport, or a passport of another EU state, a UK photographic driving licence, a Translink Senior SmartPass (bus pass) or an electoral identity card. These are the only forms of identification permissible.

3.38 The postponement of the Assembly elections resulted in electoral identity cards being issued in two distinct phases. The first phase covered the period from late January 2003 to the end of May 2003. The EONI organised a programme of mobile units to work alongside its fixed sites. The Commission sponsored and coordinated substantial newspaper advertising in support of both the fixed and mobile sites. By the end of May 2003 the mobile units had visited 85 towns and villages, providing 434 separate sessions at 174 locations. In addition, 229 sessions were provided at the three fixed sites. By the end of June over 78,000 cards had been issued.

3.39 Following the announcement of the November Assembly election a second concerted phase of processing and issuing electoral identity cards commenced. This ran from late October until 17 November 2003. A further 36 locations were visited by the mobile units and these, along with the fixed sites, were extensively advertised by the Commission.

Those requiring an electoral identity card were advised to apply before 17 November 2003. The EONI gave a guarantee that if applications were received by this date and were completed correctly then cards would be issued in time for the election. During the second phase a total of 5,520 cards were issued. The EONI guarantee was met, although approximately 800 applications were rejected because the data contained on the application forms did not match that contained on the electoral registration forms. The EONI advised us that it was generally happy with the implementation of the second phase of issuing electoral identity cards. Altogether, 86,746 cards have been issued since the scheme started in early 2003 and 7,783 applications in total have been rejected.

Table 7: Uptake of electoral identity cards by registered constituents (Register: 1 Sept 2003)

Constituency	Number issued	Percentage registered electorate with cards (%)
Belfast East	3,836	7.4
Belfast North	6,152	12.0
Belfast South	3,599	7.1
Belfast West	6,814	13.4
East Antrim	3,538	6.4
East Londonderry	4,637	8.3
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5,815	9.0
Foyle	7,595	11.6
Lagan Valley	4,472	6.6
Mid-Ulster	4,892	8.1
North Antrim	5,411	7.9
North Down	3,043	4.3
Newry & Armagh	4,394	7.7
South Antrim	3,763	5.9
South Down	4,573	6.5
Strangford	4,011	6.0
Upper Bann	4,343	6.3
West Tyrone	5,858	10.1
Total	86,746	8.0

Source: EONI

3.40 The political parties were generally critical of the arrangements made for the final distribution of electoral identity cards. A number of stakeholders, including political parties and members of the public, told us that they knew of people who had applied well in advance of the 17 November deadline but who did not receive a card in time for the election. One party suggested that if the card manufacturer had been based in Northern Ireland instead of England then the

difficulties encountered with people not getting cards in the run-up to the election could have been avoided. Another party commented that the prescribed forms of photographic identification were restrictive and the range should have been expanded to include such things as bus passes for people with visual impairments.

Recruitment and training of polling station staff

3.41 Due to the increase in the number of polling stations at the November 2003 election, additional staff had to be recruited for election day. The EONI estimated that it lost over half its original complement of presiding officers between the postponement of the May election and polling day on 26 November. The main reason cited by the EONI for this was the relatively low rate of pay. Senior presiding officers received £135, presiding officers £125 and poll clerks £90. The fees were 20% less than those paid for the 2001 combined elections. The Chief Electoral Officer commented that the level of pay was just above the minimum wage measured against a 16-hour day and felt the Government needed to be much more realistic when setting fees.

3.42 Holding an election in late November, the introduction of new regulations governing car insurance and the decision not to have a police presence at all polling places were given as further reasons why it had been difficult to recruit and retain staff.²⁴ Not holding the count on a Saturday also impacted on the availability of count staff as some regular staff were unable to take two days' leave. The high drop-out rate of staff led to concerns within the EONI that some polling stations would not be staffed. However, despite the recruitment difficulties, the EONI advised us that all polling places opened on schedule at 7.00am.

3.43 A small number of presiding officers who responded to the post-election survey also raised

²⁴ For the first time, presiding officers were required to insure their cars for business use for the day they were working at the election. For people who did not normally have this form of insurance, this required a payment of around £20.

concerns about the adequacy of the pay and said it was insufficient to attract competent staff:

On the issue of payment of staff, I believe that presiding officers are still £15–£25 underpaid. However, this would be due to the unsocial hours and not the complexity of the task. Poll clerks, I believe, are underpaid considerably and this in turn affects the calibre of the poll clerks with many rejecting the office due to the poor wage which leaves the Electoral Office in an untenable situation and increasingly vulnerable to employing a poorer quality of staff.

If presiding officers were better paid you might get more who would agree to do it again. £135 (minus tax) is not a lot for a sixteen-and-a-half-hour plus day. Plus all the reading up at home in advance!

The Electoral Commission believes that a fundamental prerequisite for the effective administration of elections has to be well resourced and effectively trained staff. It is vital for the administration of future elections in Northern Ireland that the problem of staff recruitment is resolved. The position the EONI found itself in was unsatisfactory and could potentially have undermined the entire election.

The EONI, in conjunction with the NIO, should conduct a review of the current arrangements for recruiting, retaining and paying staff for election duty. A range of options should be explored including the possibility of utilising civil service and/or local council staff.

3.44 All presiding officers received training in the run-up to the election. The materials used for the training included manuals, 'quick guides' and a video. These were produced by The Electoral Commission in conjunction with the EONI. Training was a key area addressed in the presiding officers questionnaire, the results of which are commented on below. Poll clerks received no official training but were sent a booklet before the election outlining their duties. A small number of poll clerks spoken to on election day said the booklet was too complicated and something much simpler was required to explain the duties of a poll clerk. Presiding officers were expected to conduct a brief training session with them on the morning of the poll. This arrangement proved unsatisfactory as presiding officers had little time to prepare polling places before opening at 7.00am. In a few instances poll clerks did not arrive at their polling station until after the poll opened.

3.45 In response to our survey the vast majority (93%) of presiding officers said they were satisfied with the training provided, although a significant number (376 out of 1,102) offered advice as to how training and support could be improved. There was a slight tendency for more experienced presiding officers to find the training less relevant, with much of it already being familiar to them. However, new recruits were sometimes daunted by the amount of information they were expected to absorb:

- 72 presiding officers felt the training session offered by the EONI needed overall improvement;
- 17 were of the opinion that the training manual and video needed to be revised;

- 84 were concerned that there was insufficient focus on practical issues such as paperwork;
- 14 commented on the need for practical demonstrations to be given during training.

3.46 The findings in respect of the presiding officers' training were endorsed in an independent evaluation conducted on behalf of Sinai Training Services,²⁵ who we contracted to develop training materials for use at the Assembly election. Altogether, 315 questionnaires were handed out by DROs at seven training events of which 306 were returned for analysis. Respondents were asked to rank what went well in the training and what could have gone better. The following were identified as positive aspects of the training:

- the video was very helpful;
- the training was very clearly presented;
- being able to see the ballot boxes, seals and what was in the envelope;
- all questions were answered satisfactorily;
- detailed instructions were given.

In respect of what could have been improved the following were identified:

- those attending the training should have been offered a cup of tea or coffee;
- difficulty hearing the questions asked or seeing the television;
- the closing of a ballot box was not covered in the training;
- the video could have been more informative;
- practical examples need to be given.

²⁵ McInnes, A. and T. Meaklim, *Training Evaluation Report for Sinai Training Services*, March 2004.

3.47 A number of presiding officers who responded to our survey said they found the organisation and execution of the training sessions lacking in one way or another. Analysis of the questionnaires appears to show that the quality of training and provision of basic information varied significantly between areas:

The use of a microphone would have helped. Many attending could not hear questions from the floor, and more importantly could not hear the answers given by EONI staff who didn't stand up to answer.

A more structured training session by a more knowledgeable lecturer.

Training could have been structured better. I was not confident that training staff were completely up to date with the necessary procedures.

The person chairing the training seemed to have no authority over the presiding officers ... she just let them control the meeting ... total waste of my time. I came out of the training feeling sick, not wanting to do presiding officer and full of worries.

3.48 There were more positive comments, with 50 presiding officers complimenting the training and the staff:

All areas were well covered.

The training was adequate. I felt well prepared for the task.

Training was excellent. All questions asked on the night were answered in full. I can't think of any areas which were not covered.

Very satisfied – training evening was very well planned and presented by the staff. Training has always been excellent. The electoral office on the day is responsive to any difficulties.

I feel I was fully trained and given more than adequate support for anything that might happen.

3.49 The training video was intended to assist presiding officers in 'visualising' the process by guiding them through the procedures and potential incidents that could occur on polling day. The manual and the quick guides were to be used as reference material both in the lead-up to the election and on election day itself. Although many positive comments were received about the video and training manual, a number of shortfalls were also identified:

The manual is very long-winded, clumsy and repetitive. Hard to find what you actually need.

Video should demonstrate in greater detail the various circumstances that can arise.

Manual was badly laid out. It was difficult to find a topic quickly and some information was repeated.

I don't know if the manual was piloted but I suspect not. It is not very user friendly.

3.50 Another concern highlighted was the lack of consideration given to certain basic practical issues at training sessions. Some presiding officers said that on polling day they did not know how to punch a ballot paper, how to extend

the ballot box, how to recognise the prescribed forms of electoral identification and what the procedures were for opening and closing the poll. There were also requests for mock election scenarios to be included in future training to allow presiding officers to visualise proceedings.

3.51 The responses received from presiding officers suggest a lack of consistency in the approach taken to delivering training to presiding officers. Some area electoral office staff appeared unable to deal confidently with questions from presiding officers at training sessions. A number of presiding officers came away from the training session feeling anxious and unsure of certain procedures. The organisation of the sessions seemed to fall short of many people's expectations. In some instances the lack of a microphone was a source of annoyance, as was the size of the group (too large) and the obstructed view of the training video. Some respondents were uncomfortable with the amount of paperwork they were expected to complete at the close of poll. The EONI advised us that much of the paperwork was now redundant but for legislative purposes had to be completed.

We recommend that the EONI should be funded by the NIO to employ a dedicated training officer to work with all staff. We recommend that all presiding officers and poll clerks, especially newly appointed staff, be given comprehensive training in the practicalities of running a polling station. Training should be evaluated and presiding officers should be accredited as professionally trained presiding officers. Regular refresher training should also be introduced to ensure that presiding officers and poll clerks have the necessary skills, competencies and

confidence to work at elections. Furthermore, we recommend that the EONI conducts a review of the paperwork used at elections to ensure it is relevant and fit for purpose. Given the shortcomings identified with some of the training materials produced for the Commission we will work with the EONI to improve the development of future training resources.

Conclusion

3.52 The postponement of the May elections and the uncertainty surrounding the prospects of an autumn election had repercussions for the EONI, the electorate and the political parties. The EONI was left with the difficult task of organising an election at short notice and at a time when it was compiling the annual register. The situation was exacerbated by problems in recruiting and retaining sufficient staff to work at the election. There was confusion among some of the electorate as to whether they were registered to vote and a number were denied a vote because their names were not included on the relevant register for the election.

4 Public awareness and the media

The media play a key role at election time not only by disseminating the views of political parties and candidates but also by providing the electorate with important practical information about the election. Here we analyse the findings of research into media coverage of the election and the impact of our own public awareness campaign.

Media research

4.1 Democratic Dialogue, an independent 'think-tank', was commissioned to undertake research and analyse the media coverage of the November election.²⁶ Its research was both quantitative and qualitative in nature and focused on the period between the publication of the notice of election on 23 October and election day itself. A wide range of media outlets were scrutinised, including:

- the three Belfast daily newspapers (*Irish News*, *Belfast Telegraph* and *News Letter*) and selected local weekly newspapers;
- BBC Northern Ireland and Ulster Television;
- BBC Radio Ulster and RTE Radio;
- the broadsheet Irish and British daily newspapers;
- foreign and global media.

In addition, the researchers conducted interviews with the political editor of the *News Letter* and the editors of the *Irish News* and (by email) the *Belfast Telegraph*, the Ireland editor of the Press Association, the political correspondent at Ulster Television and the Head of News and Current Affairs at Ulster Television. No one from the BBC was available for interview.

4.2 The key themes that emerged from the analysis of the coverage of the election campaign included the 'framing' of the election by the media, the dominance of constitutional issues over 'bread and butter' issues, the approach to the gender balance of candidates,

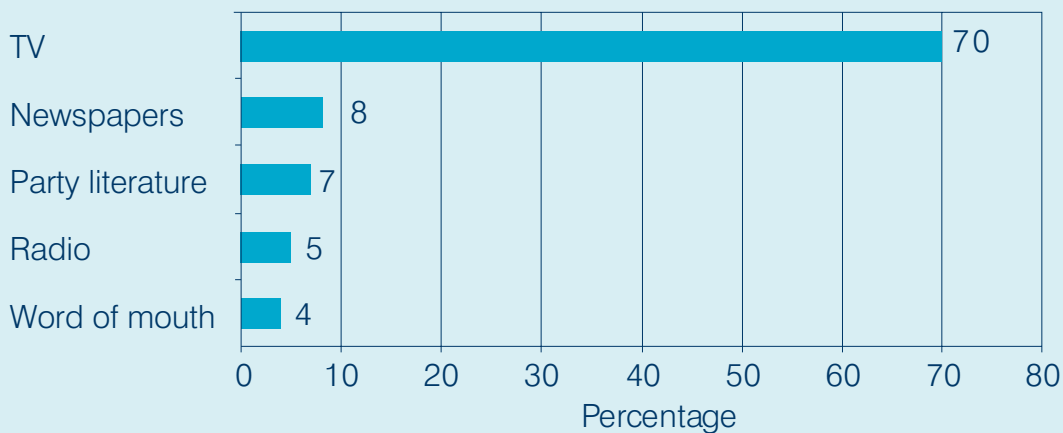
²⁶ The full report is available on the Commission's website: www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

attitudes towards the smaller political parties and the allocation of overall coverage by the print and broadcast media.

Sources of information about the election

4.3 The majority of respondents to our public opinion survey (70%) identified television as their most important source of information about the election. This compared to 8% who chose newspapers and 7% party political literature. Seven in 10 (70%) said they had received a leaflet from a candidate and four in 10 (40%) had received a visit or telephone call from a political representative. Fewer than one in 20 (3%) had used the internet to obtain information about the election and none of those interviewed had received a text message from a political party.

Figure 2: Most important source of information about the election



Source: MBU survey. Base: 1,444

Allocation of coverage

4.4 The election received considerable coverage in the local newspapers although election-related articles tended to be carried well inside the paper. Democratic Dialogue reported that the editor of a popular daily newspaper stated that leading with a political article could lose ‘hundreds of casual sales’.

Table 8: Newspaper coverage of Assembly election, 23 October–26 November 2003

Title	No. of articles	Average articles per day	Average page position in the newspaper
News Letter	242	8.1	13.8
Irish News	172	5.7	8.8
Belfast Telegraph	128	4.3	6.4
Irish Times	96	3.2	8.9
Irish Independent	72	2.4	10.9
Guardian	11	0.4	12.9
The Times	10	0.3	5.0
Daily Telegraph	9	0.3	10.9
Financial Times	9	0.3	5.5

Source: Democratic Dialogue

4.5 The flagship evening news programmes of both BBC Northern Ireland and Ulster Television carried more than one election item per evening over the course of the period analysed. However, BBC Northern Ireland devoted only one edition of the weekly Spotlight current affairs programme to the election. UTV’s equivalent, Insight, focused two of its four editions on the Assembly election. The BBC also broadcast an edition of Question Time from Omagh. However, the consistency of the coverage was greater

than the prominence afforded to it. The Democratic Dialogue report commented:

While the newspapers and the broadcasters gave over substantial column-centimetres and airtime to the election, it was clear that they did not see it, until the election day approached, as occupying a central position in the minds of their audiences. It was very rare for the story to be the lead. On BBC Newsline 6.30 it occupied the lead just twice, and just once on UTV Live.

‘Framing’ the election

4.6 The collapse of the choreographed sequence of events on 21 October that was intended to restore the Assembly meant that coverage of the election focused on constitutional issues rather than on the parties’ performance in the Assembly. The political fallout from the collapse of a potential deal between Sinn Féin and the Ulster Unionists meant that the focus shifted to the prospect of a review of the Good Friday Agreement, which was in any case due four years after it came into effect. The political correspondent at Ulster Television told Democratic Dialogue’s researcher that the ‘overriding factor’ governing the station’s treatment of the election was the review.

4.7 The Democratic Dialogue report concluded that the media depicted the election campaign as a communal ‘battle’ between the four main political parties – UUP, SDLP, Sinn Féin and the DUP – and in particular as an intracommunal contest to see who would emerge as the dominant parties of unionism and nationalism. The focus on the four largest parties was an issue that the Alliance Party raised with the Commission, as the party felt that the approach had an adverse impact on the electoral prospects of the smaller parties:

We were most dissatisfied with the approach adopted by the broadcast media. The concentration on the four main parties was a major contributory factor towards the result. The media are supposed to be reporting on the election campaign, not influencing its outcome ... The coverage of the election should have better reflected the diversity of opinion.²⁷

²⁷ Submission from Alliance Party, received 4 January 2004.

The gender balance

4.8 The lack of media coverage devoted to female candidates and party representatives during the election campaign was an area identified by the research. The lack of representation of women in media coverage was illustrated by breaking down the references to and quotations from party representatives by gender.

Table 9: Comparison between male/female representation in media coverage

Media	Male	Female	Ratio male: female
Regional dailies	363	59	6:1
Dublin broadsheets	169	23	7:1
Local weeklies	61	14	4:1
Regional broadcasters (news)	117	10	12:1
London broadsheets	45	1	45:1
International media	12	1	12:1
<i>Ratio male : female candidates</i>			4:1

Source: Democratic Dialogue

4.9 Altogether, 49 (20%) of the 256 candidates were women but according to Democratic Dialogue there was virtually no media coverage of this. Coverage of the election results also failed to mention this issue, even though less than 20% (18) of the successful candidates overall were female.

4.10 The repeated portrayal of the election as a ‘battle’ tended to reinforce the notion that politics in Northern Ireland is essentially a male domain. Both the broadcast and print media had a tendency to employ boxing metaphors in

describing certain aspects of the campaign such as ‘the main parties swapping late punches’ and ‘gloves off for last round of election battle’. The report also highlighted what it called ‘a sense of journalistic relish (at) the verbal fisticuffs’:

The Politics Show included a debate between Mr Adams and Mr Durkan. [The presenter] introduced it thus: ‘This week it’s a true gladiatorial battle between the leaders of nationalism’. And at the end of the programme he promised more of the same the following week, when the UUP and the DUP would ‘face each other for 20 minutes of mortal combat’.

The smaller parties

4.11 The Democratic Dialogue research identified a ‘clear distinction’ between the media coverage afforded to the ‘main’ parties and the ‘smaller’ parties, and between the latter and ‘minor’ parties. These categories were used by the BBC in its internal election coverage guidelines, but the media in general adopted the same criteria. The BBC identified as smaller parties those having, at the time of dissolution of the Assembly, more than one MLA and standing in at least three of the 18 constituencies. Minor parties were not required to have achieved previous electoral success but had to field candidates in at least three constituencies. The report concluded that the level of coverage afforded to the smaller parties was reasonable as illustrated by coverage on BBC Newsline 6.30.

4.12 The Democratic Dialogue report suggested, however, that the nature of the coverage served to delegitimise the smaller parties and their agendas, with party leaders and other representatives often having to justify the

Table 10: Number of references to political parties on BBC Newsline over election period

Party	BBC designation	Number of references
DUP	Main	13
UUP	Main	12
SDLP	Main	12
Sinn Féin	Main	11
Alliance	Smaller	3
Women’s Coalition	Smaller	3
PUP	Smaller	2
UKUP	Minor	1
Workers’ Party	Minor	1
Conservative	Minor	1
NIUP	Minor	1

Source: Democratic Dialogue²⁸

existence of the party. The focus on the main political parties and the predictions as to which of the four would emerge as the largest party within unionism and nationalism in effect became a self-fulfilling prophecy at the expense of the smaller parties. The researchers commented:

The first Inside Politics on BBC Radio Ulster at the start of the campaign showed that the issue was not exclusion of representation of the ‘smaller’ parties per se ... But BBC Northern Ireland’s political editor put it to the leader of the PUP ... that a vote for him would be ‘a wasted vote’, given that the election would be about whether Mr Trimble or Mr Paisley would be the post-agreement leader of unionism.

²⁸ There were no references to the other six parties. According to the BBC’s designation, the Green Party and the Vote For Yourself Party were ‘minor’ parties, and the remaining four were ‘other’ parties.

When the leader of the Women's Coalition was interviewed on the BBC's Hearts and Minds it was put to her that: 'Even the two governments excluded you ... from the recent round of negotiations ... So your voice isn't being heard at that level, is it? So why is a vote for you important?'

4.13 The Electoral Commission received written submissions from several political parties concerned at what they perceived to be an attempt on the part of the media to 'set the agenda' for the election campaign. The extent to which the media predicted the outcome of the election or were a key factor in determining the result was questioned. At the Commission's stakeholder seminar in January 2004 a representative of Ulster Television defended how the media had approached the election campaign and claimed that there was a limit to how much influence broadcasters and journalists could exert.

4.14 Analysis of the 53 candidates questionnaires received showed a balance between candidates who felt that the media hindered their campaign and those who were satisfied at the media coverage received. The more negative comments reinforced the perception that there was a tendency on the part of the media to concentrate on the four main parties at the expense of other parties and independent candidates. However, many candidates felt that a balanced approach had been adopted by broadcasters and journalists in terms of carrying press releases and other statements.

Constitutional issues versus 'bread-and-butter' issues

4.15 In its report on the 2001 Westminster election,²⁹ the Commission noted that while coverage by the Northern Ireland media had been 'wide-ranging and in-depth', there was 'some concern' that the constitutional issues were overplayed at the expense of social and economic policy issues. Democratic Dialogue highlighted the same concern at coverage of the Assembly election and illustrated the point by comparing the amount of coverage afforded constitutional issues over the performance of the parties in the previous assembly.

Table 11: References to constitutional issues and Assembly performance by media category

Media	Constitutional	Assembly performance
Regional dailies	277	234
Local weeklies	31	45
Regional news broadcasts	64	30
Dublin broadsheets	142	27
Regional current affairs programmes	7	1
London broadsheets	34	0
International media	9	0
Source: Democratic Dialogue		

²⁹ *Election 2001: the official results*, The Electoral Commission, 2001.

The electorate's perspective

4.16 In the public opinion survey carried out for the Commission voters were asked for their views on what they perceived the media and politicians had prioritised as the main issues for the election. They were then asked what the main issues of the election were for them. The results showed that politicians' priorities were perceived to be constitutional in nature with less emphasis on social and economic issues. The electorate's priorities were almost the opposite with ending violence being the only common priority in the top four. When non-voters were asked to identify their priorities the top five issues chosen were exactly the same as those chosen by voters and there was no identification with constitutional issues other than ending violence.

4.17 Democratic Dialogue suggests that the lack of focus on Assembly performance meant that the four main parties did not have to deal with issues relating to their record in the Assembly. However, one of the main political parties expressed its concern at the apparent unwillingness of the media to cover social and economic issues:

There is concern ... that the media try to control the political agenda at election times. Parties find it difficult to promote policy issues during the campaign ... On occasions the media have indicated that they will not cover policy press conferences.³⁰

Table 12: Ranking of issues perceived to be prioritised by politicians and the issues prioritised by the electorate

Perceptions of politicians' priorities			Electorate's priorities		
1	Decommissioning	33%	1	Health and social care	37%
2	Ending violence	29%	2	Ending violence	24%
3	Ending / changing the Agreement	29%	3	Education	21%
4	Restoring Government and Assembly at Stormont	26%	4	Crime	19%
5	Health and social care	25%	5	Care of elderly	14%
6	Preserving the Agreement	23%	6	Restoring government and Assembly at Stormont	13%
7	Education	19%	7	Ending sectarianism	11%
8	Keeping NI in the UK	18%	8	Jobs	10%
9	Policing	15%	9	Decommissioning	10%
10	Crime	14%	10	Drugs	9%
11	Ending sectarianism	13%	11	Keeping NI in the UK	9%
12	Care of elderly	11%	12	Preserving the Agreement	8%

Source: MBU. Base: 1,444

³⁰ Letter received from SDLP, 21 January 2004.

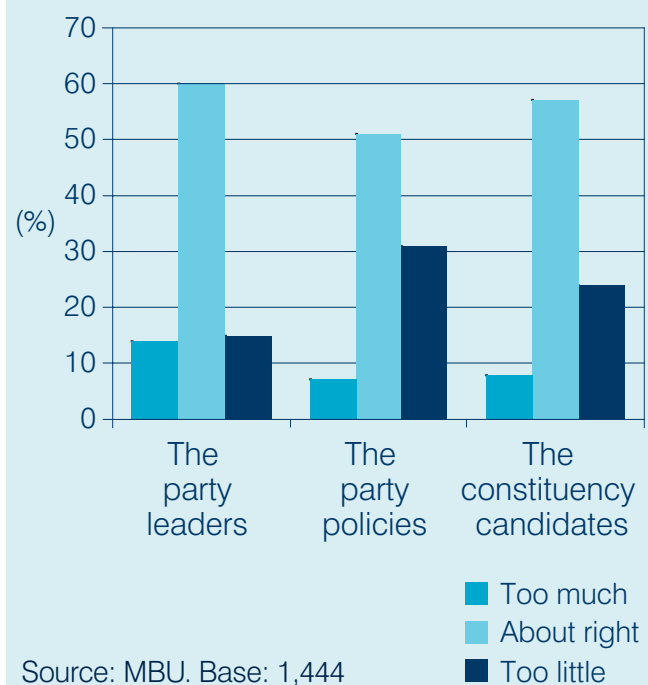
4.18 At the Commission’s post-election stakeholder seminar a senior UTV journalist responded to this criticism by claiming that political parties did not want to discuss policies, and that broadcasters covered social and economic issues, but not necessarily through party spokespersons. Democratic Dialogue identified only infrequent attempts on the part of broadcasters and journalists to give exposure to other issues such as health, water charges and taxes. However, these were apparently rare deviations from the focus on constitutional matters.

Public understanding of policies

4.19 In the public opinion survey conducted for the Commission respondents were asked how much information they had received about party leaders, party policies and candidates. The majority felt they received sufficient information on all three. A UK-wide MORI/Electoral Commission survey after the 2001 general election found people relatively less satisfied with information about the candidates in their constituency and policies, than they were with information about the party leaders. MORI reported to the Commission that while ‘the public does not necessarily want more information per se, they did want different types of information.’³¹

³¹ MORI, Attitudes to Voting and the Political Process (unpublished). This used two MORI surveys for The Electoral Commission: the Phase 1 survey involved interviews with 1,801 UK adults 18+ between 9–15 May 2001 and the Phase 2 survey involved recontacting 1,162 of the 1,472 Phase 1 respondents who agreed to be recontacted.

Figure 3: The amount of information participants said they received



4.20 Respondents were asked if they had a good understanding of where the parties stood on policies such as health, education, unemployment, rates and taxes. They were evenly divided, with half (50%) claiming they had not and just under half (43%) claiming they had. Young people were more likely to say that they had less of an understanding (66%) than older people aged 65 and over (45%). Female respondents (57%) tended to feel less informed than their male counterparts (44%). When compared to the pre-election survey it appeared that the election campaign had little impact on the public’s understanding of the parties’ policies.

Table 13: Public understanding of political party policies

	Before campaign	After campaign
Yes – understood policies	41%	43%
No – didn't understand policies	52%	50%
Don't know	7%	7%

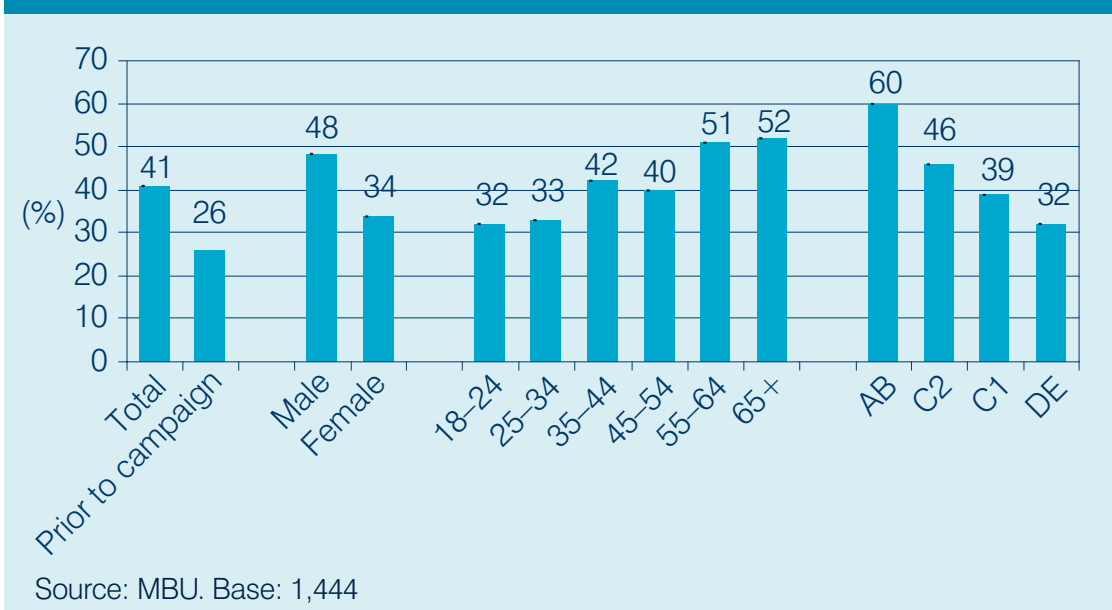
Source: MBU. Base: before 1,003, after 1,444

Interest in news about the election

4.21 Just over four in 10 respondents (41%) to the public opinion survey said that they had 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of interest in news about the election. Men were more interested than women and older people more interested than younger people. There was also a clear correlation with social class, with those

classified in social group AB being almost twice as interested as those classified in group DE. The same question was asked in our pre-election survey and the results showed that just under three in 10 (26%) had either 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of interest in news about the election, demonstrating that as the campaign progressed the level of interest in news about the election increased.

Figure 4: Proportion of survey participants saying they had 'a great deal' or 'a lot of interest' in news about the election



The parties' campaigns – getting the message across

Freepost

4.22 Under Section 91 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 every nominated candidate standing for election is entitled to send, free of charge, one piece of election literature to all addresses in the constituency where they are standing. Although the Royal Mail administers the scheme it is funded through the Exchequer. Royal Mail provides candidates and agents with written guidance to assist them in the use of the freepost facility. All items distributed through the scheme must bear the words 'Election Communication' and include the name and address of the printer and the publisher. The Royal Mail's deadline for the handover of items prepared and ready for delivery was 17 November, although candidates had been encouraged to post as early as possible.

4.23 The Royal Mail informed the Commission that one party complained that election literature did not reach some homes in the Bangor area. The complaint was investigated by Royal Mail and although no evidence to support it was found, a second leaflet drop was provided to the addresses highlighted by the party. The Commission's survey of candidates showed that a significant number of candidates were dissatisfied with the freepost arrangements. Candidates who responded to our survey reported instances of literature being delivered to wrong addresses, late deliveries, insufficient communication on the part of Royal Mail and some candidates being unaware that the freepost facility even existed.

We intend, in conjunction with Royal Mail, to conduct a review of the current arrangements for freepost in Northern Ireland and issue good practice guidance to political parties, candidates and agents and other relevant stakeholders.

Party election broadcasts

4.24 Party election broadcasts provide an opportunity for political parties to disseminate their message to a potentially large audience at election time. Paid political advertising by political parties is prohibited under law. Under the Broadcasting Act 1990 a legal framework was established for party political broadcasting. However, the criteria set for broadcasts is set by the broadcasters themselves. In Northern Ireland the present requirement for a political party to qualify for a party election broadcast is that the party fields candidates in at least one-sixth of the total constituencies. Following discussions between Ulster Television and the BBC, broadcasting slots were allocated on the basis of the political parties' relative electoral strength.

4.25 For the November 2003 election the UUP, the SDLP, the DUP and Sinn Féin were allocated three broadcasts each. The Alliance Party, the Progressive Unionist Party and the Women's Coalition were given two while the other minor parties were allocated one. Broadcasts commenced on Monday 27 October 2003.

Table 14: Allocation of political party broadcasts for the November 2003 election

Political party	Number of broadcasts
UUP	3
SDLP	3
DUP	3
Sinn Féin	3
Alliance	2
Women's Coalition	2
PUP	2
Conservative	1
Workers' Party	1
Green Party	1
Vote For Yourself Party	1

Source: BBC Northern Ireland

4.26 One party complained to the Commission that another party's election broadcast breached the Assembly's guidelines on election campaigns. It claimed that the party used Parliament Buildings, Stormont, in its footage thus giving the party an unfair electoral advantage. The guidelines state: 'No film footage may be recorded in Parliament Buildings or its precincts by or on behalf of former Members'.³² The complainant was advised that this was not a matter for the Commission and that the matter should be taken up with the Clerk of the Assembly.

Challenges to the BBC's election guidelines

4.27 The BBC produced internal guidelines for producers aimed at ensuring that its election

coverage was fair and balanced. These were made available on the BBC's website.³³ In the run-up to the election two political parties sought judicial reviews challenging the BBC's interpretation of the guidelines.

4.28 Sinn Féin sought a judicial review of the BBC's decision to count some of the air time given to Martin McGuinness' appearance at the Saville inquiry into Bloody Sunday as election coverage. The party complained that the Saville enquiry had nothing to do with the election. However, the BBC countered by saying that coverage had to be measured over the course of a week and not one day. The High Court ruled in favour of the BBC and concluded that it had adhered to its own guidelines.

4.29 The UKUP also lost a High Court action against the BBC. The party had applied for a judicial review challenging the BBC's decision to classify the UKUP as a minor political party instead of a smaller party which would have entitled it to more air time. After the 1998 Assembly election four members of the UKUP defected to join the Northern Ireland Unionist Party, leaving the UKUP with only one MLA. However, the party believed that election coverage in the build-up to the November poll should have been based on electoral strength at the last Assembly election rather than current strength. The BBC responded that previous electoral support was only one of several factors taken into account when allocating election coverage and that current levels of support and the number of candidates standing were also considered. Furthermore, the BBC

³² *Guidance for former members during an election campaign*, Northern Ireland Assembly.

³³ www.bbc.co.uk/info/policies/producer_guides/pdf/ni_elections.pdf.

said that the categories used to designate parties were used to determine the minimum levels of coverage afforded to parties.

Innovative methods for reaching voters

4.30 Democratic Dialogue analysed initiatives taken by the political parties to reach voters during the election campaign. The report concluded that the 2003 campaign was the most sophisticated to date in terms of methods used by parties disseminating their messages. Websites, email and text messaging were used alongside more traditional methods of canvassing. Each of the parties included in the analysis (UUP, SDLP, DUP, Sinn Féin, Alliance, Women's Coalition and PUP) had a website and the DUP had a separate election website. Several of the political parties offered visitors to their sites the chance to keep up to date with election issues by signing up to email and text message alerts.

4.31 The researchers found that some parties targeted first-time voters. The SDLP distributed 10,000 copies of a DVD entitled 'Rock Your Vote' which enticed viewers with the chance to win tickets to a pop concert. Sinn Féin chose to offer younger voters a credit-card sized calendar with the message 'sometimes it takes a four-letter word to be heard ... vote.' The UUP produced posters with the slogan 'You never forget your first time', while Alliance developed a mock fly poster in the style of a nightclub advertisement.

4.32 Democratic Dialogue outlined the key slogans that the political parties considered would encapsulate the essence of their campaigns. The DUP opted for 'Its Time for a Fair Deal' while the UUP asked people to

choose 'The Future not the Past'. The SDLP wanted people to vote for them 'Now More Than Ever', while Sinn Féin wanted people to join with them in 'Building an Ireland of Equals'. The Ulster Unionist Party sought to rebrand itself before the election with a new slogan – 'Simply British'.

Election posters

4.33 During the campaign period and in the days leading up to the election there were reports from across Northern Ireland of election campaign material being removed or defaced by supporters of other political parties or groupings. Many of these incidents were reported to the PSNI who advised that they would only intervene in circumstances where the removal of posters led to a breach of the peace and in other circumstances the removal of election material should be taken up with the EONI.³⁴ Two large supermarket chains were also forced to remove posters displayed in their stores following complaints from shoppers. The stores later apologised for any offence caused.

4.34 One political party 'fly posted' its own promotional material on advertising hoardings paid for by other advertisers. In one instance the party in question utilised a site purchased on behalf of The Electoral Commission to advertise its own message over the top of a poster promoting the four forms of prescribed photographic identification.

³⁴ *Irish News*, November 2003.

The Electoral Commission's public awareness campaign

No picture? No vote

4.35 Under Section 13 of PPERA, the Commission has a duty to promote public awareness of electoral and democratic systems and has an ongoing responsibility for ensuring that the electorate understands the electoral process. In the context of Northern Ireland our public awareness campaigns to date have been information-based with a particular emphasis on the requirements for individual registration and photographic identification.

4.36 Our campaign in respect of the election commenced soon after the date of the election was announced. It was entitled the 'turnout essentials campaign' and emphasised what documents were permissible to vote at the Assembly election. Another theme adopted in the advertising campaign was that of 'No picture? No vote'. The campaign was multi-media in nature and comprised:

- television advertising;
- radio advertising;
- regional and local newspaper advertising;
- outdoor advertising;
- a dedicated telephone helpline;
- information leaflet drop to 600,000 households;
- a dedicated website (www.secureyourvote.com).

4.37 This activity was supported by a range of public relations initiatives aimed at keeping the key messages of the campaign to the forefront of the electorate's mind in the run-up to the election.

Altogether, the Commission's public awareness campaign cost £400k of which almost 75% was spent promoting the prescribed forms of photographic identification. Other costs included the establishment of a helpline and sending a leaflet about the election to all households in Northern Ireland.

4.38 Tracking research was used to gauge the effectiveness of our public awareness campaign and questions were included in an omnibus survey in November and December. Altogether, 75% of those interviewed spontaneously recalled either seeing or hearing some advertising. Just under a half (46%) said the key message of the advertising was that you needed proper photographic identification to vote. Almost seven in 10 respondents (67%) said they saw the advertising on television while 14% saw newspaper advertising. When asked to comment on the advertising 67% said they found it informative, 35% that it held their attention, 32% that it made them think and 30% that it was humorous.

Helpline

4.39 The Commission established a helpline in September 2003 to offer general advice about annual registration. When the election was announced in late October 2003 a decision was made to continue with the helpline until after the election on 26 November. With the help of the EONI additional 'frequently asked questions' were identified and the answers made available to call handlers as well as being included on the secureyourvote.com website and the EONI website. Altogether, 9,959 calls were made to the call centre of which 9,031 were handled, representing a response rate of over 90%.

Table 15: Breakdown of calls handled by the helpline 1 September–26 November 2003

Nature of call	Number of calls
Routine enquiries	4,829
Requesting additional forms	1,839
Requesting an electoral identification form	921
Help with registration form	735
Referral to EONI	600
Requesting an information leaflet	78
Complaints	29
Total	9,031

Source: MM Group

4.40 Altogether, 600 calls were referred from the helpline to the EONI. These were calls relating specifically to the electoral register and included such questions as ‘can you tell me if my name is on the electoral register for voting at the November Assembly election?’ Those working in the call centre have no access to the electoral register and had to refer such calls to the EONI, which had also established its own separate advice line. Five operators staffed this service, with the result that only a limited number of calls could be handled. Some callers unable to get through to the EONI subsequently complained to the Commission about not being able to make contact with the EONI through its advice line.

4.41 For its part the EONI expressed dissatisfaction with the helpline operated on behalf of the Commission. It regarded this service as substandard and on occasions incorrect advice was given, which it later had to rectify.

The Commission’s helpline was contrasted with its own advice line and it was suggested by the EONI that in future the Commission should consider funding the EONI to provide this service.³⁵ Despite the concerns expressed by the EONI, the Commission itself received no complaints directly from the electorate about the level of service provided by the helpline. An analysis of the 29 complaints logged by the helpline revealed that these were mainly about operational matters.

Given the concerns raised by the EONI we will conduct a review of the helpline and consider how best this service can be provided to the public in the future.

Publicising absent voting

4.42 One aspect of the election process about which the Commission received complaints was absent voting. A number of complainants said that the deadline for applying for a postal or proxy vote was restrictive and that it was insufficiently advertised. Some of those who complained felt the Commission should have publicised the deadlines more extensively in local papers as well as on television and radio. The Commission acknowledges that the advertising and promotion of absent voting was insufficient and will address this issue in advance of future elections beginning with the European Parliamentary election in June 2004. The EONI also received complaints about the insufficient advertising of postal votes and contrasted the Commission’s efforts with those made by the NIO at previous elections when a leaflet on absent voting and STV was delivered to all households.

³⁵ Legislation does not allow the Commission to fund EONI activities.

The Commission will discuss with the EONI the future arrangements for publishing and advertising statutory deadlines. In the meantime the Commission will ensure that the electorate is better informed about the arrangements for absent voting.

Conclusion

4.43 The print and broadcast media devoted considerable coverage to the November election although there was a tendency to focus on constitutional rather than on socio-economic issues. The political parties adopted a number of sophisticated methods to target potential voters with increasing use being made of information technology. The electorate's interest in the election increased as polling day approached. The Commission's public awareness campaign was well received and recognition of the key messages was high.



5 Polling day

The second election to the Northern Ireland Assembly was the first major election in the UK where each elector had to present an approved form of photographic identification before being issued with a ballot paper. It was also the first election in Northern Ireland where the provisions of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 were fully tested.

What was different?

The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002

5.1 The election held on 26 November 2003 was unique in a number of ways. It was the first major election in Northern Ireland to be held in the winter for almost 30 years and was unusual in that polling day was a Wednesday. More significant, however, was the requirement that all electors had to present one of four forms of prescribed photographic identification before being issued with a ballot paper. Provision was made for presiding officers to ask an additional statutory question, namely: 'What is your date of birth?' (see paragraph 5.23). A separate register was made available to presiding officers by the EONI to check dates of birth against the information supplied at registration.

Revised polling station scheme

5.2 The number of polling stations in use increased from 1,261 in 2001 to 1,532 while the number of polling places increased from 582 to 612. This was judged necessary to avoid long queues developing, as had occurred at the 2001 elections when a significant number of voters were turned away at the close of poll. The increase in the number of polling staff required to run the extra polling stations, coupled with difficulties in recruiting staff, meant that many staff had little or no previous election experience.

Observers

5.3 For the first time in any part of the UK observers from The Electoral Commission had a statutory right to observe proceedings at polling stations. PPERA places an obligation on

the Commission to report on the administration of relevant elections including those to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Without access to polling stations it would have been difficult for us to carry out our statutory duty in any meaningful way. The introduction of the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) (Amendment) Order 2003 gave Commissioners, members of Commission staff and persons appointed by the Commission access to polling stations for the 2003 Assembly election. The Chief Electoral Officer, as Returning Officer, had already granted observers access to the count since the legislation in this area was not as restrictive as that applying to polling places.

5.4 Observers from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) were also in Northern Ireland to observe the election as they had done in May 2003 for elections to the Scottish Parliament and to the National Assembly for Wales. Although permitted to observe the counts they were not allowed access to polling stations under law. In our recent review of observers at elections in the UK³⁶ we argued that this legal obstacle to the presence of observers in polling places was not conducive to the transparency of elections. As a result we recommended an amendment to the current law. In our report *Voting for change: an electoral law modernisation programme* we stated:

... we believe it is essential in the interests of promoting the integrity of the democratic process that the UK gives effect to the range of international treaty obligations which relate to the observation of elections. We consider that the primary function of observers at UK elections would be to:

- promote the transparency of the democratic process;
- facilitate evaluation of our electoral processes; and
- provide opportunities for international electoral practitioners and experts to learn from the practices in the UK.³⁷

We await a response from Government to this recommendation but would emphasise that our experience of observing the election in Northern Ireland reinforces our view of the value of having a number of international and possibly domestic observers present.

Polling stations Staffing

5.5 Polling stations opened at 7.00am and closed at 10.00pm. Each polling station was staffed by a presiding officer and a poll clerk. In a small number of instances where a polling place accommodated several polling stations an additional presiding officer was assigned with overall responsibility for managing the polling place. All polling places had a designated senior presiding officer. Presiding officers were asked to arrive at the polling place by 6.20am at the latest, although some arrived earlier to give themselves adequate time for setting up the polling station. Poll clerks were asked to arrive by 6.45am.

5.6 An analysis of the questionnaires returned by presiding officers showed that just under

³⁶ *Observers at elections in the UK*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003.

³⁷ *Voting for change: an electoral law modernisation programme*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003, paragraph 2.7, p17.

two-thirds (65%) were female and a third male. Almost half (48%) were aged 50 and over while just over one-fifth (23%) were aged between 18 and 40. Those working in 2003 were less experienced than their counterparts who worked in 2001. In 2003, 58% had done the job previously whereas in 2001 the figure was 85%. Almost a quarter (22%) had never previously worked in any capacity at an election. Some inexperienced presiding and senior presiding officers said they felt quite daunted about what was expected of them on the day. Last minute changes in staffing due to people not turning up meant that some staff had their duties extended, for which they were not adequately prepared.

5.7 Polling stations comprised desks, ballot boxes, documentation for the day and polling booths. All equipment other than the ballot box was delivered to the polling place before election day by private contractors and stored securely within the building. The ballot boxes containing the ballot papers and stationery were stored either in local police stations or local area electoral offices. The method of delivery varied depending on local circumstances. Some boxes were collected by polling staff and others were delivered by police to polling places on the morning of the poll. In some instances presiding officers had to set up the polling station by themselves as poll clerks failed to arrive on time. This caused concern to some presiding officers because of their responsibility for training new poll clerks before the opening of the poll. Some felt that they had insufficient time to fulfill all the tasks required of them while a number reported that delays in delivering

ballot boxes had hindered their ability to prepare and open the poll by 7.00am.

Not really sufficient time between box arriving and opening the poll, particularly with new staff employed for the first time.

Presiding officer

Ballot boxes did not arrive until 6.50am and my poll clerk did not turn up until 7.40am with the results that I had approximately 10 minutes to set up before the first voter arrived and had to do this with no help. As this was my first time as presiding officer this caused me some concern.

Presiding officer

We recommend to the EONI that for future elections polling clerks should be instructed to turn up for duty at the same time as presiding officers in order to avoid any potential delay in the opening of the poll.

5.8 Despite a number of difficulties being encountered, the vast majority of presiding officers reported that they experienced no problems in setting up and opening their polling station at 7.00am. Observers reported that polling places in general had been laid out satisfactorily and that staff had done their best to set up the polling stations in accordance with the guidance given. It was noted that the rooms utilised in some facilities were of an insufficient size to accommodate adequately the number of polling stations located there.

Signposting

5.9 Observers noted that there were few, if any, directional signs indicating the exact location of a polling place. The large number of party campaign posters on perimeter fences and lampposts outside the polling places often provided the most obvious way of identifying their location. The majority of polling places were located in primary schools, church halls and community centres.

Unfamiliar polling places

5.10 As the number of polling places had increased some electors were allocated to unfamiliar polling places. When they turned up to vote at their usual venue some were upset when polling staff directed them to a different polling place. One local council³⁸ claimed that this acted as a deterrent to voters who were not prepared to travel up to four miles to another polling place.

The entrance to the polling station was not at the address shown on the polling card.

Presiding officer

The voter was not aware of Saintfield Road Presbyterian Church Hall. No number was given on the poll card, just Saintfield Road. The entrance to this hall is not on Saintfield Road.

Presiding officer

Overall, however, nine in 10 voters experienced no difficulty in locating their polling place and only a small proportion said they were dissatisfied with its location.³⁹

During the course of the day some presiding officers received specific complaints about the addresses of polling places not being correctly given on poll cards:

Numerous times during the day people complained about the location. Hill Strand Integrated School was fine for Portrush voters, not Portstewart! I believe that there are other halls in Portstewart which were not approached as to their availability.

Presiding officer

Person could not find polling station. A new school was used. He said the school was badly signposted.

Presiding officer

5.11 Several political parties expressed concern about the location of polling places at sectarian interfaces. One party said that a school used as a polling station for the first time was in a location that nationalists found intimidating. In circumstances where polling places are serving electors from a distinct religious or political background the need for a cross-community venue is less important. However, polling places serving both communities should be located, where possible, in a neutral environment. We understand the EONI was particularly mindful of this requirement when revising its polling station scheme.

5.12 Generally, observers found the atmosphere outside polling places good-humored and friendly. Only a small proportion of presiding officers (3%) said they were aware of intimidatory behaviour by party workers and this usually

³⁸ Submission from Newry & Mourne Council, received 8 December 2003.
³⁹ Base 667.

took place outside the perimeter of the polling place. However, one political party felt that insufficient emphasis had been given to such instances by the EONI.

Access to polling places

5.13 In order to assess the accessibility of polling places across Northern Ireland, Disability Action, an umbrella organisation representing the views of 180 member groups, was commissioned to conduct an access audit.⁴⁰ As they did not have access to polling stations because of the legal prohibition on observers, a postal survey of voters with disabilities was conducted. Respondents could also reply online or by telephone. In total, 220 responses were received with 105 polling places being audited. Although many commented on areas of good practice and the helpfulness of staff, no polling place was deemed entirely accessible to all people with disabilities.

5.14 A number of problems were identified outside the polling places some of which were exacerbated by the weather conditions and the time of year. Less than a third (31%) said that designated disabled parking spaces had been provided. One local council commented:

There were major problems with access, particularly for the disabled and elderly at polling stations throughout our Borough. Indeed at one station, an elderly person slipped and broke a limb. Of particular concern was the lack of adequate external lighting, with voters having to walk long distances through school playgrounds etc. with no lighting.

Additionally, the inclines at some locations were too difficult for people in wheelchairs and some problems were experienced with fallen leaves and frosty ground. The Electoral Office normally checks that buildings have disabled access, but it would appear that no consideration was given to approaches to the buildings through the school/hall grounds. Also at many locations, the disabled access point was not signposted.⁴¹

5.15 Over half of those who responded to the survey (54%) said that the entrance to the polling place was difficult to access, either because the building had no level access or its doors were too heavy to open. Although a number of polling places had a separate entrance door and this provided access when the main entrance was inaccessible, such alternatives cannot be considered a long-term solution. One voter, who was a wheelchair user, had to be carried up three steps to his polling place. He recounted his experiences in a local Sunday newspaper:⁴²

Without the kindness of some people who came to my help, I would probably still be trying to cast my vote. Access to polling stations is a joke. In this day and age these things could be put right very easily. Everybody should have the right to go along and cast their vote and then leave. I have as much right as anyone else [to vote]. I may have just one leg, but I am a complete person in my eyes. Access is one of the biggest obstacles in the way of people with disabilities. Even the idea of them bringing

⁴⁰ The full disability access report is available on the Commission's website.

⁴¹ Submission from Castlereagh Borough Council.

⁴² *Sunday Life* newspaper, 30 November 2003.

the ballot paper out to you is not right. If they were to do that they would be able to see my vote and that would do away with my right to a private vote.

5.16 Several political parties raised concerns about access in terms of disability and all agreed that buildings should not be used unless they provided adequate access for disabled voters. One political party commented on the fact that some voters were left with no option but to return home without voting when the local polling place proved inaccessible.⁴³ Observers who visited polling places also highlighted a range of access difficulties:

Many polling stations had very poor access, with steps (multiple sets), steep slopes and uneven surfaces. Polling staff had in many cases not identified alternative routes and were unprepared for the arrival of voters with access needs.

Electoral Commission observer

The nature of the buildings in some, especially rural areas, meant that accessibility was not totally in line with best practice and there were occasions where we felt accessibility could have been given more forethought. In one case a handwritten sign beside steps up to the polling station said 'please request disabled access'. However, the ink had run in the rain and it was not in a location where it would have been visible after dark. Anyone in a wheelchair or with a visual impairment would not have been able

to get up the stairs to make such a request of the elections staff inside.

Electoral Commission observer

5.17 Although many presiding officers raised concerns about access for people with disabilities, over half (56%) considered the polling place in which they worked to be accessible. It could be concluded that there was a 'mismatch' between what presiding officers perceived to be adequate access and what people with disabilities experienced. In our 2003 report *Equal access to democracy* we recommended that Returning Officers should be given statutory powers to use all accessible publicly owned buildings as polling stations to enable them to fulfil the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.⁴⁴ To date the Government has not responded but given the concerns raised about access in this report we suggest this be addressed as a matter of urgency. We concur with the following recommendations contained in the Disability Action report:

- Consideration should be given to alternative venues for polling places as a large proportion of primary schools in Northern Ireland are inaccessible to disabled voters. Accessible buildings such as some secondary schools, community centres and other public buildings, for example council offices, could be used as polling places.
- Polling places should have an accessible entrance which is either level or ramped. The ramp does not have to be permanent, but should not be too steep. Staff should not be put in a position where they have to lift a

⁴³ *Newtownards Chronicle*, 18 December 2003.

⁴⁴ *Equal access to democracy: report and recommendations*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003.

wheelchair user in and out of the polling place. This practice poses obvious risks to both the voter and the polling place staff.

- All electoral staff working with the general public from the registration process through to the voting process should be given disability awareness training. This would ensure that they have a clearer understanding of the varying requirements of people with a range of disabilities.
- The EONI should ensure that an access audit of polling places is undertaken prior to election day in order to identify access issues which may prevent people with disabilities from voting. Disability awareness training should highlight the issues that EONI staff need to take account of.
- The EONI should consult with local disability groups and gauge their views on measures needed to ensure that local polling places are made more accessible.

In our view it would also be beneficial for disabled voters to be able to obtain advance information from the EONI about the accessibility of each polling station and what measures will be taken to overcome any barriers to access. Information to this effect should be posted on the EONI website.

5.18 In response to concerns raised about access, the Chief Electoral Officer explained that every effort was made to find buildings that were both accessible and acceptable to the electorate. Very often, however, no viable alternatives could be identified, particularly in rural areas. He confirmed that when complaints were received about inaccessible polling places alternative venues were considered.

5.19 The Equality Commission has advised us that from October 2004 the EONI will be obliged under Part III provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to consider what can be done to provide accessible polling stations. Where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled voters to access a polling station, and where fully accessible alternative premises cannot be found, the EONI will have to take measures, where reasonable, to remove the feature, or alter it so that it no longer has that effect, or provide a reasonable means of avoiding the feature.⁴⁵

Inside the polling place

5.20 To gauge opinions about the experience of being inside polling places we sought the views of voters and presiding officers on a range of statements. Both groups felt that the polling places were relaxed and well ordered although the public was less inclined to say the atmosphere was 'good humoured'. Very few voters or staff found the polling station intimidating, chaotic or crowded. When the results were compared against a survey of presiding officers commissioned by the NIO in

⁴⁵ Correspondence received from Equality Commission, 16 March 2004.

2001⁴⁶ it showed that the atmosphere in polling places had improved significantly. While in 2001 60% of presiding officers found the atmosphere inside the polling place relaxed, this had increased to 90% in 2003. Similarly, the number of presiding officers finding the polling place well ordered had increased from 64% to 91%. However, one political party raised several instances of voter and staff intimidation by activists of another party in its discussion with the Commission.

Table 16: Agreement with statements about the atmosphere in polling places⁴⁷

'I found it:'	Public 2003 (%)	Presiding officers 2003 (%)	Presiding officers 2001 (%)
good humoured	61	89	76
relaxed	86	90	60
well ordered	94	91	64
intimidating	2	3	1
chaotic	1	2	1
crowded	4	6	(not asked)

Signage

5.21 Once inside the front door of the polling place the signage was generally considered to be good. However, where polling stations were located a long distance from the entrance hall there were insufficient signs to direct voters. In some polling places an extra member of staff was deployed in the hallway to direct electors to their polling station. A number of older voters in particular made complimentary remarks about this arrangement and said it made voting less

stressful. Disability Action suggested that some seating should be provided in polling places in order that older people and people with disabilities could rest if they needed to do so.

⁴⁶ NIO Research and Statistical Series (2002), *The Combined Election: An analysis of the combined Parliamentary and District Council elections in Northern Ireland on 7th June 2001*.

⁴⁷ Three sources were used in this table. The data in the 'public 2003' column is from the MBU public opinion research, and has a base of 1,444. The data in the 'presiding officers 2003' column is derived from the presiding officers survey conducted by The Electoral Commission in 2003 and has a base of 1,102. The final column draws data from the NIO survey of presiding officers in 2001 and has a base of 926.

Tackling queues

5.22 When the findings from the public opinion and presiding officer surveys were analysed the position with regard to crowding and queuing in polling places had improved considerably since the general election. In 2001, 77% of presiding officers felt that long queues were a problem, whereas this had reduced to 18% in 2003.

Similarly, the proportion of presiding officers saying they experienced problems with overcrowding and voters becoming impatient had also reduced.

One in 10 respondents to the public opinion survey said they had to queue before casting a vote. A third said they had to queue for between five and 15 minutes while two-thirds queued for less than five minutes. Overall, however, almost all respondents (99%) said they were satisfied with the length of time they had to queue.

- ‘Are you the person registered in the Register of Electors for this election as follows?’ **If they answered ‘yes’, the second question was asked:**
- ‘Have you already voted, here or elsewhere, at this election otherwise than by proxy for some other person?’ **If they answered ‘no’, the third question was asked:**
- ‘What is your date of birth?’

Where the third statutory question was asked the elector’s date of birth was checked against the date of birth register which was held separately by the presiding officer. In circumstances where the dates of birth did not match, or if the other questions were not answered to the satisfaction of the presiding officer, a ballot paper was not issued.

Table 17: Proportion of presiding officers identifying issues as problematic

	Presiding officers 2003 (%)	Presiding officers 2001 (%)
Long queues	18	77
Crowding in polling place	10	55
Impatience amongst voters	7	33
Confusion between queues for different boxes	36	49

Source: Electoral Commission survey (2003). Base: 1,102 / NIO survey (2001). Base: varies from 870–892

The voting process

An additional statutory question

5.23 Before issuing a ballot paper the presiding officer confirmed that each elector was on the register and checked that their photographic identification was valid. In circumstances where there was any doubt the presiding officer asked one or more of the following statutory questions:

Altogether less than one in 20 (4.4%) presiding officers had cause to ask the three statutory questions. Just under half (49%) of these asked the questions once whereas 6.1% asked the questions on up to 10 occasions. Polling agents present in the polling place also had the authority to intervene in circumstances where they suspected personation.

Electoral identification

5.24 The EONI asked presiding officers to keep a record of the forms of identification presented at polling stations, as well as the number of people turned away for not having one of the prescribed forms of identification. The vast majority of presiding officers maintained an accurate log but

some were unable to record the information fully at busy periods. Over half of all voters presented a driving licence (52.4%), while over a quarter (26.5%) used a passport. The third most commonly used form of identification was the Translink Senior SmartPass (11.8%) and almost one in 10 used an electoral identity card (9.3%).

Table 18: Valid forms of identification presented at polling stations by constituency

Constituency	Driving licence (%)	Passport (%)	SmartPass (%)	Electoral ID card (%)
Belfast East	42.0	29.1	20.0	8.9
Belfast North	33.9	31.5	20.1	14.6
Belfast West	32.9	33.0	15.1	19.0
Belfast South	43.8	31.4	16.9	7.9
East Antrim	47.9	28.0	15.8	8.3
East Londonderry	54.3	25.8	10.8	9.2
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	62.6	20.1	7.5	9.9
Foyle	46.4	29.8	9.9	13.9
Lagan Valley	56.1	26.6	11.9	5.5
Mid-Ulster	63.2	21.8	5.8	9.2
Newry & Armagh	59.2	25.1	8.2	7.6
North Antrim	57.9	23.4	10.1	8.6
North Down	48.5	29.3	16.4	5.9
South Antrim	53.5	27.7	12.0	6.8
South Down	55.7	25.4	10.0	8.9
Strangford	52.9	27.2	12.6	7.3
Upper Bann	54.0	27.2	11.5	7.3
West Tyrone	60.6	21.1	7.0	11.2
Total	52.4	26.5	11.8	9.3

Source: EONI

5.25 The constituency where the largest number of voters used an electoral identity card was Belfast West (19.0%) and the lowest was Lagan Valley (5.5%). The number of electoral identity cards used in Belfast West was over twice the average used elsewhere. The Senior SmartPass was used more extensively in urban constituencies than rural constituencies, which reflected existing patterns of public transport in Northern Ireland. Over one in five (20.1%) of those who voted in Belfast North used a Senior SmartPass whereas the figure for Mid-Ulster was less than one in 16 (5.8%). Those living in rural constituencies were more likely to use a driving licence than their counterparts in urban constituencies.

5.26 Altogether, 3,493 people (less than one per cent of the total number of people who voted) turned up and presented photographic identification that was either wrong or out of date. The EONI advised the Commission that many of these voters returned later in the day with the correct form of photographic identification, although no statistics were compiled. Of the 3,493 people who presented invalid identification the constituency of Newry & Armagh recorded the largest percentage (8.7%) followed by Mid-Ulster (7.6%) and Fermanagh & South Tyrone (7.3%). The constituencies with the lowest rates of invalid identification were North Down (3.6%) followed by Belfast East (3.7%) and Belfast South (4.0%).

5.27 The reason why four in 10 (38.6%) of the documents rejected at polling stations were unacceptable was that they were not current as the law requires. Others presented non-photographic forms of identification including

medical cards, allowance books and birth certificates. The range of invalid identification documents included:

Table 19: Invalid documents submitted at polling stations

Document submitted	Frequency (%)
Out of date driving licence	23.5
Out of date passport	15.1
Passes other than the Senior SmartPass	10.8
No document submitted	10.8
Allowance book	9.8
Others including birth certificates, etc.	8.6
Works Pass	8.0
Documentation held by people with disabilities	7.3
Medical card	3.4
Student ID	2.9
Source: EONI	
Base: 3,493	

5.28 Presiding officers found it much easier to administer the photographic identification requirements at the Assembly election than at previous elections where non-photographic identification was acceptable. Presiding officers spoken to on polling day by observers welcomed the new regulations on photographic identification and said they experienced much less 'hassle' than previously and that the extensive publicity campaign had helped clarify the position. A number of presiding officers found it helpful to tape to their desks the Commission's newspaper advertisement showing the valid forms of identification.

Observers who visited polling places during polling day found no significant problems with the use of photographic identification and reported that this aspect of the election had gone well. We believe that the four forms of photographic identification currently prescribed in the legislation are sufficient and do not need to be extended. However, opportunities to obtain an electoral identity card must continue to be made readily available to those without one of the other forms of prescribed photographic identification.

Tendered ballot papers

5.29 Tendered ballot papers should be issued in the following circumstances only:⁴⁸

- if an elector has been marked on the register as apparently already having voted;
- if a proxy has been marked on the register as apparently already having voted for an elector;
- if a proxy was appointed, but the elector has been marked as apparently already having voted, despite the proxy's insistence that they could not have done so;
- if there is reasonable doubt about the identity of the elector or proxy from the specified documents produced.

5.30 According to the EONI, 69 tendered ballot papers were issued at the November Assembly election. A similar number (70) were issued at the combined election in 2001 and 85 at the 1998 Assembly election. Almost one in 10 presiding officers (8%) had issued one or more

tendered ballot papers. The process of issuing tendered ballots seems confused and may be misleading to voters, given that tendered ballots are not normally included in the count except in circumstances where there is a challenge to an election result. The reasons given by presiding officers for issuing tendered ballots at the 2003 election were:

Table 20: Reasons given by presiding officers for issuing tendered ballots 2003

Ineligible reasons	
Elector made mistake on ballot	37%
Ineligible identification	13%
Not registered	11%
Avoiding harassment from voters	5%
Others	4%
Eligible reasons	
Vote already apparently issued	24%
Doubts over identification	5%

Source: Electoral Commission presiding officer survey. Base: 84

5.31 Although the overall number of tendered ballot papers issued was small in comparison to the total votes cast it appears that a large proportion of presiding officers (70%) who issued them did so inappropriately. Reasons included that the elector had made a mistake on the ballot paper (37%), the elector had ineligible identification (13%), the elector was not registered (11%), or to avoid harassment from voters (5%). Similar inappropriate uses were identified at the 2001 election when almost one in five presiding officers (16%) issued tendered ballots. At that election 62% were

⁴⁸ *Establishing poll position: A good practice guide for Deputy Returning Officers*, The Electoral Commission.

issued because the ballot paper was allegedly completed incorrectly. This is a cause for concern and highlights the need for additional training for presiding officers. ODIHR, in its report,⁴⁹ suggested that the use of tendered ballots should be reviewed to determine if they should be eliminated altogether.

We will conduct a UK-wide review of the use of tendered ballot papers and will make recommendations on their future use at elections.

Ballot paper perforation

5.32 To ensure the validity of a ballot paper for inclusion in the count it must be perforated with a stamping instrument by the presiding officer. In the vast majority of cases ballot papers were perforated correctly before being issued. Overall, however, 423 ballot papers were rejected for want of an official stamp, an increase of 80% on the 2001 election. This increase in numbers may be partly explained by the fact that the EONI had appointed a large number of new presiding officers, some of whom had not previously worked at an election. A greater proportion of ballot papers were not perforated at polling places where it was more difficult to recruit people for election duty. This increase is worrying and again identifies a training need for some presiding officers.

In order to avoid the disenfranchisement of voters through human error in polling stations we recommended in our 2003 report⁵⁰ on ballot paper design that alternatives to the current

official mark including watermarks should be introduced. The Government has yet to respond. We reaffirm our recommendation that the Government should amend the law to allow for the introduction of watermarks on ballot papers.

Secrecy of the ballot

5.33 A number of voters and presiding officers commented on the practice of recording the electoral number onto the ballot paper counterfoil, arguing that this practice compromised the principle of a secret ballot. As ballot papers and counterfoils are printed with matching numbers it would, in theory, be possible by court order to match the two and use the electoral number to determine how an individual voted. After the election a solicitor wrote to the Commission on behalf of a client questioning this practice.⁵¹ A candidate also raised concerns:

In other countries, once the ballot paper has been torn from the stub, there is no way it can be traced. Why, then, is it traceable here?

Candidate

This issue was also addressed in the ODIHR observation report and the recommendation made that other ballot tracking alternatives be considered to protect the secrecy of the poll.

We will conduct a UK-wide policy review of the use of serial numbers on ballot papers and will report separately on this issue.

⁴⁹ ODIHR, Assessment report, December 2003.

⁵⁰ *Ballot paper design: report and recommendations*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003.

⁵¹ Solicitors letter, received 10 December 2003.

Understanding the voting system

5.34 Despite STV being the system of voting used at all elections in Northern Ireland (except Westminster Parliamentary elections) since 1973, the Commission notes there is confusion among some sections of the electorate about how the proportional representation system of voting operates. Although posters were clearly displayed in polling places explaining the STV system of voting, presiding officers encountered voters who did not understand the system. Two-thirds (67%) of presiding officers said that some voters had difficulty understanding the STV system and that this was more prevalent among older voters. According to the EONI, over 10,200 votes were spoiled at the election, a significant increase on previous elections. The vast majority were spoiled because the elector had not completed the ballot paper correctly. Observers noted that presiding officers endeavoured to explain the voting system to electors when issuing ballot papers. However, this was not always possible particularly when polling stations were busy. Some presiding officers explained the voting system more accurately than others. A number advised voters that they should mark the ballot paper '1,2,3', but did not always explain that they could vote for as many, or as few, candidates as they wished. One presiding officer was heard by an observer to advise voters to mark the ballot paper with an 'X'.

5.35 Most parties fielding more than one candidate in a constituency provided leaflets resembling ballot papers with the names of their candidates highlighted and preferences written alongside. Voters brought these into the polling

places and in many instances the preferences were copied directly onto the actual ballot paper. One presiding officer said that when she tried to explain the voting system to an elector a polling agent interrupted and advised the elector not to worry but to follow the preferences listed on the party leaflet. In some polling stations observers noted that previous voters left these leaflets in the polling booths. Some presiding officers cleared these leaflets regularly.

5.36 A submission from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission said that ballot papers should carry a reminder of the voting system. This issue was addressed last year in the Commission's review of ballot paper design.⁵²

In our report we recommended that guidance notes clearly explaining the voting system should be available both at polling stations and on ballot papers.⁵³ We have yet to receive a response from Government to this recommendation. We reaffirm our recommendation that guidance notes explaining the voting system be available both at polling stations and on ballot papers. More information needs to be made available to the electorate both in the run-up to the election and in polling stations. We will address this issue on an ongoing basis as part of our wider remit for voter education and awareness. We will work in partnership with the EONI in fulfilling this objective.

⁵² *Ballot paper design: report and recommendations*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003.

⁵³ *ibid.*

Assisting voters

5.37 Presiding officers can assist voters but cannot offer any guidance or influence how a person votes. In addition to explaining the voting system they can also read out the names of candidates and mark the ballot paper on behalf of the voter. Just over two-thirds (68%) of presiding officers surveyed said that there had been instances where they had provided help with understanding the system, 15% provided help with reading ballot papers and a further 15% provided assistance in actually marking the ballot papers. In circumstances where a presiding officer assists in marking a ballot paper the details of the voter should be recorded.

5.38 A selector device for visually impaired voters was available at each polling station, although observers commented that they were not always clearly displayed. Presiding officers were required to offer this facility to blind or visually impaired voters as an alternative to voting with the aid of a companion. Only a small proportion (2%) of presiding officers surveyed had used the device. A number commented that they had not been trained to use it while others said it was more appropriate for use at first past the post elections than STV elections. The effectiveness of the device is largely determined by the voter's ability to memorise the names of candidates and the order in which they appeared on the ballot paper. This is not an easy task when there can be as many as 19 candidates.

We acknowledge that the tactile voting device was a step forward for voters with visual impairments. However, we recommend that the EONI continue to liaise with manufacturers of

voting equipment about the development of appropriate devices for use at STV elections.

5.39 Voters with disabilities were entitled to vote with the assistance of a companion. Permission had to be obtained from the presiding officer and the voter's companion had to complete a written declaration to this effect. Observers and presiding officers noted that, on occasions, voters offered each other assistance and discussed how they were voting. Although some presiding officers intervened others felt it more appropriate not to do so. In circumstances where presiding officers intervened alternative assistance was not always offered. One presiding officer commented:

No one apart from me appeared to understand or perhaps feel the need to apply the restrictions applying to help from a companion. The assumption was often made, most frequently it appeared by the voter himself, that fathers and mothers could help children, children their older parent. I explained the restriction and relevant formalities on two occasions invoking marked consternation in both voters and companions and what seemed like amazement in the other staff and voters ... I think the law seems to be a bit irrelevant and unnecessarily restrictive in this area – and is probably ignored or unenforceable in most cases. If the Presiding Officer was charged merely with confirming (by observation and/or oral investigation) that the voter was not under duress that would be a more manageable and realistic arrangement.

5.40 Observers noted that polling staff generally carried out their duties in a friendly and helpful manner. This was further supported by the public opinion survey which revealed that 95% of voters were satisfied with the helpfulness of staff. A number of presiding officers said that at times people were confused about whom to speak to in the polling station and often approached the polling agents with their poll card.

5.41 Observers also reported that some voters found the voting system daunting and this appeared to be exacerbated by the large number of candidates listed on the ballot paper. When informal assistance was given it was welcomed by the recipient, who appeared to lack confidence in how to proceed. Presiding officers felt that asking people to complete the relevant form in circumstances where a voter had genuinely attempted to assist another was counter-productive. A submission from a local council⁵⁴ suggested that an independent person should be appointed to each polling place to assist voters who may have difficulties reading or writing or in understanding how to vote:

When asked to fill in a form having assisted another voter the helper was annoyed at having to fill it in. [This was] more to do with embarrassment than anything else.

Presiding officer

The voters insisted on friends/family assisting them in the poll booth even if they (the voters) had no physical or mental disabilities.

Presiding officer

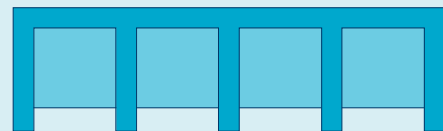
We will conduct a UK-wide policy review of the current assistance provided to voters in polling places and will make recommendations after consultation with political parties, candidates and agents and other relevant stakeholders. The review will include the development of good practice guidance.

Polling booths

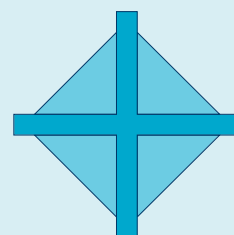
5.42 The new polling booths, initially introduced for the 2001 combined election, were rolled out for use at all polling places for the November 2003 election. These are easily stored and can be assembled quickly. Each booth has a section designed for use by wheelchair users. The design is different from the traditional-type polling booth. Some presiding officers found the design made the management of the polling place more difficult because the room could no longer be effectively sub-divided. The design of the new booths caused problems in ensuring that voters returned papers to the correct ballot box.

Figure 5: Design of polling booths – view from above

Previous design



New design



⁵⁴ Submission from Newry & Mourne District Council, received 3 December 2003.

5.43 Concerns were expressed by a number of stakeholders that the new booths did not provide voters with the same degree of privacy as the old-style booths. In correspondence to the Commission a member of the public stated:

While waiting to have my photographic identity checked I was standing quite close to the polling booth where an elderly gentleman was completing his ballot paper and I was able to see quite clearly his choice of candidates. I found this quite disturbing and was even more concerned when it became obvious that other people in the queue were able to see this ... The shape of the booth allows for electors to see how other people are voting as they walk to and from it.⁵⁵

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission commented:

The new polling booths may have interfered with the secrecy of the ballot in that people may have been able to see parts of their neighbour's [ballot] paper. Standing at an open booth is also likely to have been more stressful for some electors than using the old-style curtained or box booths, and people who felt that they were being observed may have felt under pressure to complete the marking of their ballot more quickly ... If these open booths are to be retained for general use, curtained or box booths should also be available for those who prefer them, and/or the open booths should be redesigned to provide more privacy.⁵⁶

5.44 Ballot papers ranged in length from between 30cm to 50cm depending on the number of candidates standing. Many voters found the size of the shelf in the booth inadequate for displaying and marking their ballot paper. While some voters attempted to remedy this by folding the ballot paper this was a less than ideal solution. The string attached to the pencil was also criticised for being too short to mark preferences effectively. Presiding officers also received a number of complaints about the use of pencils to mark ballots rather than pens. Some voters felt that preferences marked in pencil could be changed. As an alternative many voters used their own pens to mark their ballot papers.

We recommend that the EONI should review the current layout of polling places to ensure the secrecy of the ballot is maintained and enhanced. Alternatives or modifications to the current booths should be considered. The provision of pens in polling booths should also be explored.

Ballot boxes

5.45 New ballot boxes were used at all polling stations at the November 2003 election. These were much lighter and more compact than the older boxes and could be concertinaed flat for storage purposes. They could also be extended to accommodate additional ballot papers, although some staff seemed unaware of this. Observers noted that some ballot boxes filled up quite quickly with the result that some papers protruded from the flap on the top and papers had to be pushed down into the box with a ruler. Presiding officers received a number of complaints about this issue.

⁵⁵ Correspondence received from member of the public, 23 January 2004.

⁵⁶ Submission from The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 23 December 2003.

It was also reported that voters, on a number of occasions, got their fingers trapped in the opening of the ballot box as they attempted to push their ballot well into the box.

Sharing information

5.46 Confusion appears to surround the issue of providing turnout figures and percentages throughout the course of election day to candidates and polling agents. Presiding officers recounted several instances where they refused to reveal such information, with one presiding officer saying that they had been instructed to withhold such data during the course of their training. One political party complained that basic information in respect of turnout figures was refused. Candidates and agents should bear in mind that the primary responsibility of the presiding officer is to ensure the efficient administration of the polling station.

We recommend to the EONI that estimated figures on turnout be made routinely available on request to candidates and agents during election day by presiding officers.

The close of poll

5.47 Polls closed at 10.00pm and observers noted that there appeared to be no problems with presiding officers closing polling stations on time. Only one presiding officer who participated in the survey had problems closing the poll compared to 12% in 2001. However, 6% said they had to turn some people away at the end of the night without issuing them with a ballot paper. This was a slight percentage reduction from 2001 when 8% had to turn voters away. In 2001 the Chief Electoral Officer

estimated that around 300 people had to be turned away. Evidence from our presiding officers survey suggests that a similar number of electors were turned away in 2003.

We recommend to Government that the law be amended for all UK elections to enable voters present inside polling places at the close of poll to be issued with a ballot paper.

5.48 After all the necessary documentation had been completed ballot boxes were escorted to the count centre in the presence of a senior presiding officer. Where the police were not present the senior presiding officer delivered the ballot boxes to the count centre.

Voter satisfaction

5.49 Overall, voters in the public opinion survey found the process of voting at polling stations positive. Over eight in 10 (84%) said they were very satisfied while 15% were fairly satisfied and less than 1% dissatisfied. When all those not very satisfied were asked to explain their reasons, 38% mentioned a lack of access for people with disabilities, 14% cited a lack of privacy while 7% felt that staff had been rude or unhelpful. When we surveyed candidates about their perceptions of how well the polling places were staffed and organised 80% said they felt that they were efficiently run while 12% disagreed.

5.50 Disability Action's audit showed that people with disabilities did not find their experience of voting at polling stations as positive as that of the general public. About a third (29%) of those who took part in its survey found the voting experience either excellent or good, while a

similar number (28%) found it poor or very poor. The remainder (43%) found their experience of voting average.

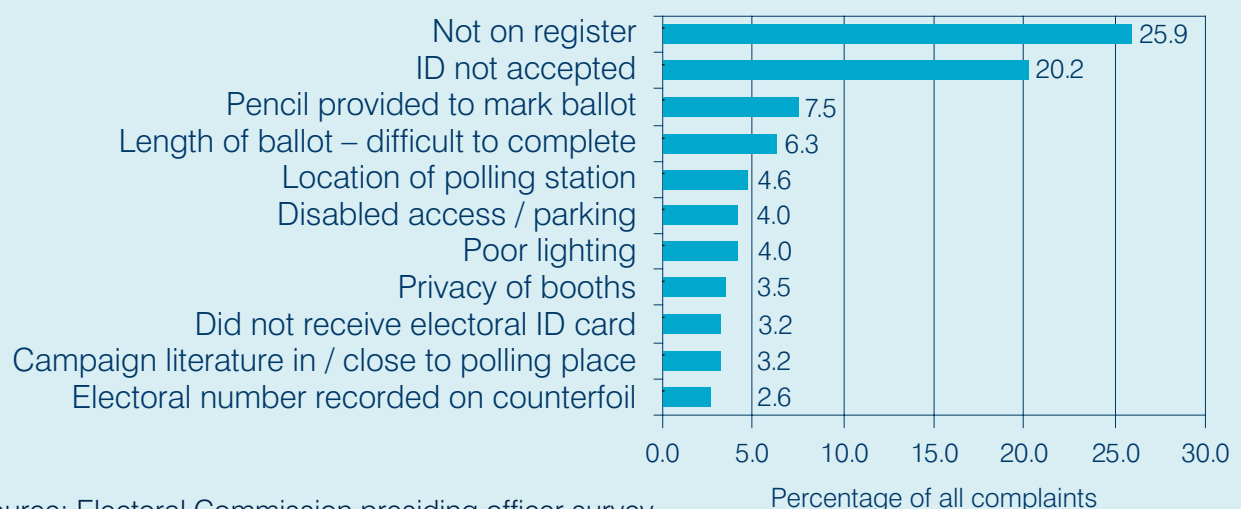
Complaints

5.51 Although no formal mechanism existed whereby voters could make a complaint in a polling place a large number of issues were raised with presiding officers. Just over one in five (21%) said they had received complaints from electors during the course of the day. This had more than doubled from 2001 when 10% received complaints. The biggest area for complaint was from people who turned up to vote only to be advised that they were not registered. This was followed by people presenting invalid identification documents.

One young person emailed the Commission with the following comments:

I was denied my vote in the recent elections. I arrived at the polling station to find I had not been registered, despite having returned the registration papers delivered to my home within a week of receiving them. I was told that last year's electoral list was being used. ... I think this is very unfair, particularly for those young people who turned 18 in the past year. Many comments are made regarding the apathy of young people in relation to voting. The experience that I and many others have had recently certainly does not encourage young people to participate in the process.

Figure 6: Breakdown of main complaints received by subject



Source: Electoral Commission presiding officer survey
Base: 231

5.52 A number of presiding officers indicated that they found having to deal with such complaints stressful, particularly when they were frequent or where the complainant was angry. A presiding officer suggested that difficult situations could be defused by having a complaints leaflet that could be given to those expressing dissatisfaction.

We recommend that the EONI should develop and make available a complaints leaflet for use by presiding officers in polling places. The number of and nature of complaints received should be recorded and reported on publicly by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Policing the election

5.53 For decades in Northern Ireland the police have played a major role on polling day. This level of involvement is not replicated elsewhere in the UK or the Republic of Ireland where policing of elections is generally a low-key affair. The PSNI advised us that the reasons for this were largely historical stemming from perceived fears about personation at polling stations and the belief that a police presence acted as a deterrent. Prior to the November Assembly election there was a permanent police presence at all polling places at each election for the last 35 years.

5.54 The PSNI advised us that a number of factors influenced their decision to develop a new policy regarding the policing of the 2003 election. Key among these were the improved security situation and the Chief Constable's policy of devolving operational responsibility to the 19 District Command Units (DCU) at local

level. In late October 2003 the PSNI issued a press statement outlining its arrangements for policing the election. It read:

Policing arrangements for the elections will be informed by the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000; namely to protect life and property, preserve order and prevent the commission of offences, and where an offence has been committed, to take measures to bring the offenders to justice. A series of assessments have been carried out by police relating to each polling station and as a result each location will be provided with the appropriate deployment to fulfil policing obligations. There has been liaison throughout this process with the Electoral Office.

5.55 District Commanders were required to conduct formal risk assessments in respect of each polling place and the count centres within their areas. The following criteria were used in the assessment process:

- the level of threat to public safety;
- the level of threat to electoral staff and the police;
- the likelihood of public disorder;
- the specific history of a venue with regard to issues such as offences of personation.

Pre-election planning

5.56 Prior to the election the PSNI liaison officer attended a steering committee chaired by the Chief Electoral Officer. The main function of the liaison officer was to ensure effective communication between the police service and

the EONI. Details of local police liaison officers were provided to all area electoral offices and there were discussions to identify potential problems. Local police also attended training sessions for presiding officers to explain how their polling places would be policed.

Election day

5.57 Altogether, 2,129 police officers were used to service the 612 polling places. This comprised a permanent police presence at more than a third of locations and a dedicated mobile response unit at the remainder. In areas without a permanent police presence the presiding officer was visited on the morning of the poll and provided with police contact details. Mobile units visited polling places hourly to check there were no problems. In some areas mobile crews dropped police officers off to provide a permanent presence. The EONI also employed, for the first time, over 160 private security staff to work at polling stations.

5.58 Altogether, 40% of presiding officers who returned completed questionnaires about their experience of working at the election said their polling place had a permanent police presence, while almost six in 10 (58%) said this was not the case. About a third of those with a permanent police presence said police officers were present inside the polling place while 5% said the police remained outside. Six in 10 (60%) indicated that police officers were present both inside and outside the polling place.

5.59 One political party contacted Commission observers on polling day to highlight what it considered an excessively large police presence

at some polling places in Belfast West. The party alleged that the police presence was intimidatory and that some voters were harassed entering and leaving a polling place. A number of presiding officers also informed observers that they felt there were far too many police officers present in some polling places. Commission observers noted a number of polling places with up to six police officers present. From our observation reports and presiding officers questionnaires it appeared that a permanent police presence was much greater in nationalist than in unionist constituencies.

5.60 The vast majority of presiding officers (77%) who worked on polling day considered the police presence was 'about right' whereas almost one in five (20%) considered that there was 'too little' police presence. A small number (1.7%) said the police presence was 'too much'. Presiding officers working in the constituencies of Belfast West (6%), Foyle (7%), Newry & Armagh (5%) and West Tyrone (6%) were more inclined to say the police presence was 'too much'. On the other hand, those working in Belfast East (37%), East Londonderry (28%), Lagan Valley (26%), North Down (33%), Strangford (44%) and Upper Bann (31%) were of the opinion that the police presence was 'too little'. This was a view shared by one political party which felt that police officers should have been located at all polling places.

Security incidents

5.61 On election day itself there was a number of incidents which the PSNI described as 'minor'. None had any direct impact on the election or polling day itself and were mainly hoax bomb scares. A more serious incident,

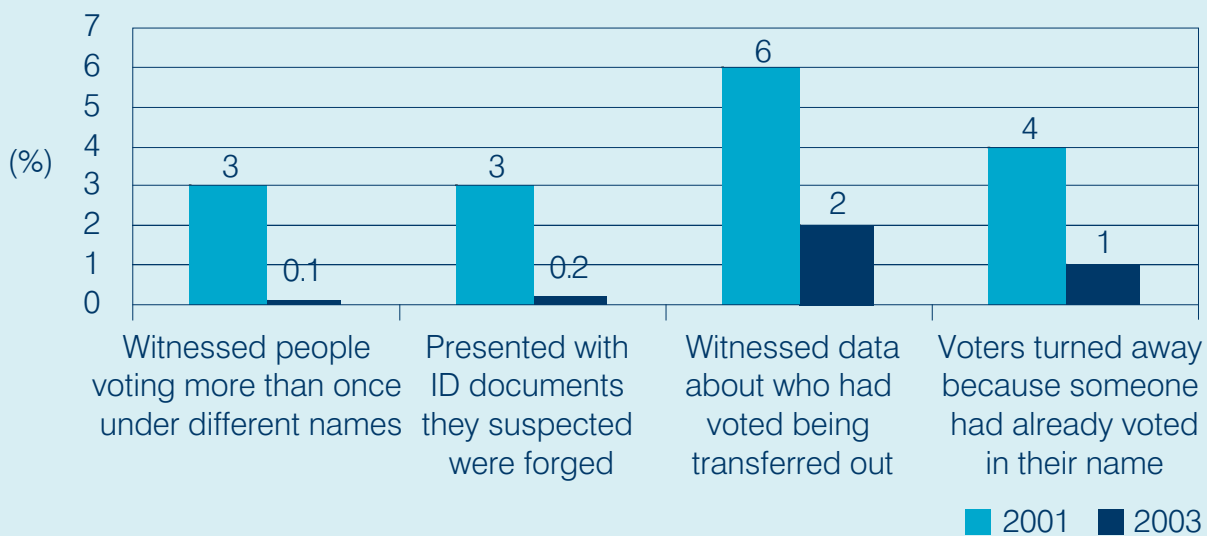
however, was recorded in the Foyle constituency. According to the PSNI, from 7.00pm until after the close of poll police in Foyle DCU were subjected to sporadic petrol and paint bomb attacks at Shantallow Community Centre, St Joseph's Youth Club, St Therese's Primary School and St Eithne's Primary School. School windows were broken and private homes and cars damaged. These incidents received widespread publicity and although no staff were injured they caused a great deal of anxiety and upset to those working there.

Evidence of electoral fraud

5.62 The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 was primarily introduced to overcome personation and electoral abuse, which were

widely perceived to occur in Northern Ireland. It followed the publication of a number of reports between 1997 and 2001 all of which concluded that electoral fraud was a major issue in Northern Ireland and needed to be addressed if confidence in the democratic process was to be maintained. However, the extent of fraud has been difficult to quantify and conclusive evidence for it hard to obtain. In light of such circumstances the impact of the Act on actual levels of fraud cannot be gauged, as there is no readily available benchmark against which to measure. The only significant data we have been able to identify are from a survey of presiding officers conducted after the 2001 election. The questions asked in this survey were repeated after the 2003 election.

Figure 7: Proportions of presiding officers who suspected malpractice



Source: Electoral Commission survey (2003). Base: 1,102 / NIO survey (2001). Base: varies from 870–892

5.63 The findings illustrate that suspicions of electoral fraud among presiding officers had reduced dramatically. This view was endorsed by a number of parties and candidates who felt the election was fair and free. One political party said they believed the election held in November 2003 was probably the ‘cleanest and fairest’ ever held in Northern Ireland. The PSNI confirmed that they had received no reports of attempted personation at any of the polling stations during election day. This was in direct contrast to previous elections when a small number of incidents of personation were reported directly to the police.

5.64 Our public opinion survey also revealed that almost two-thirds (65%) of those surveyed agreed that ‘new laws about registering and voting have helped to overcome electoral fraud’, with 7% disagreeing. However, only about one-third (35%) agreed that electoral fraud had been eliminated. Overall, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the new legislation has instilled greater confidence in the democratic process. However, in making this comment, the Commission notes that the reduction in the number of people on the electoral register remains a cause for concern and at least one large political party remains opposed to the legislation.

The role of polling agents

5.65 Polling agents are appointed by candidates to perform a number of duties on election day. However, their principal function is to aid in the detection of personation at polling stations. Polling agents can challenge voters they suspect of personation before they leave the polling station and the person may be arrested by police.

To assist in the detection of personation, polling agents mark off on their copy of the register voters who have been issued with ballot papers. Agents leaving the polling station during the hours of polling must leave their copy of the marked register behind to ensure that secrecy requirements are not breached. Polling agents are prohibited from giving information to anyone regarding who has or has not voted. Polling agents also assist by giving candidates information on how the poll is progressing. At the close of poll the polling agent may attach their seal to any packets made up by the presiding officer, including the ballot box.

5.66 Polling agents are more common at elections in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK. According to the EONI all the main parties had polling agents, although the number varied across constituencies. Although appointed to most polling stations it was the experience of observers that many did not show up. At least one political party organised agents on a rota basis and provided them with refreshments at various stages throughout the day. Some presiding officers complained about large numbers of polling agents being in close proximity to some polling stations, on occasions several from one party.

5.67 Although the main role of polling agents is to detect personation, only one of the 1,102 presiding officers who participated in our survey said that an agent had actually challenged a voter at the polling station. The vast majority of presiding officers had little contact with polling agents and experienced no difficulty with them. However, there were a number of instances

where their presence and behaviour were considered to have adversely affected the running of the poll. About one in 10 (8%) said that the presence of polling agents had caused them problems and that agents had displayed an uncooperative or intimidatory attitude when interacting with polling staff and voters. One of the most common complaints was about polling agents using mobile phones in polling stations, even though they had been told by presiding officers that their use was banned:

Polling agents used mobile phones throughout the day.

Presiding officer

The polling agents present would not agree to sit a reasonable way back from the poll clerk and presiding officer. They wished to be as near the table as possible which as presiding officer I found very intimidating.

Presiding officer

A polling agent persisted in distributing party leaflets despite being requested politely not to do so ... the same polling agent had to be escorted away by police.

Presiding officer

5.68 Before assuming their duties all polling agents were reminded of their obligations under Section 66 of the Representation of the People Act which states that:

Every candidate or election agent or polling agent ... shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of voting and shall not ...

communicate to any person before the poll is closed any information as to the name of any elector or proxy for an elector who has not applied for a ballot paper or voted at a polling station.⁵⁷

Some presiding officers commented that this requirement was ignored. They said that polling agents attempted to remove the marked register during the course of the day and to relay the information contained in it to party workers outside the polling place. Presiding officers also highlighted the fact that some voters were concerned at their name and electoral number being called out for the benefit of polling agents. Observers also noted that party agents went in and out of the polling place to speak with colleagues:

I was concerned that a 'certain party' was removing written details from the polling station, in relation to absent voters [voters who had failed to show].

Presiding officer

I had to challenge polling agents who were attempting to communicate information in written form from the polling station.

Presiding officer

5.69 Voters also raised some concerns about the presence of polling agents and questioned their role. One political party raised concerns with us about the activities of polling agents belonging to another political party. Issues in respect of the use of mobile phones and taking information out of polling places were highlighted.

⁵⁷ Section 66, Representation of the People Act 1983.

When voters were at the table – their number and name had to be called out for the polling agent to hear and around 20 people commented on this and did not seem to be pleased about someone else other than election staff knowing who they were.

Presiding officer

Voters did not appreciate polling agents marking off their names on identical register lists, especially if they were not a supporter of that party.

Presiding officer

The introduction of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 and the requirement that voters must present prescribed photographic identification raises questions about the primary role of polling agents. We will undertake a UK-wide review of their role and function and will make recommendations. We will also publish good practice guidance following consultation with relevant stakeholders including the political parties.

Conclusion

5.70 Overall election day ran smoothly and no major problems were identified. The revised polling station scheme had the effect of minimising queues and made the management of the poll more straightforward. The vast majority of voters presented one of the four forms of prescribed identification and presiding officers commented that the new identification requirements made their job easier. The most consistent complaint made to presiding officers was from people who thought they were

registered to vote but were not actually registered for the election. Much of the confusion stemmed from the fact that the annual registration process had coincided with the build-up to the election.



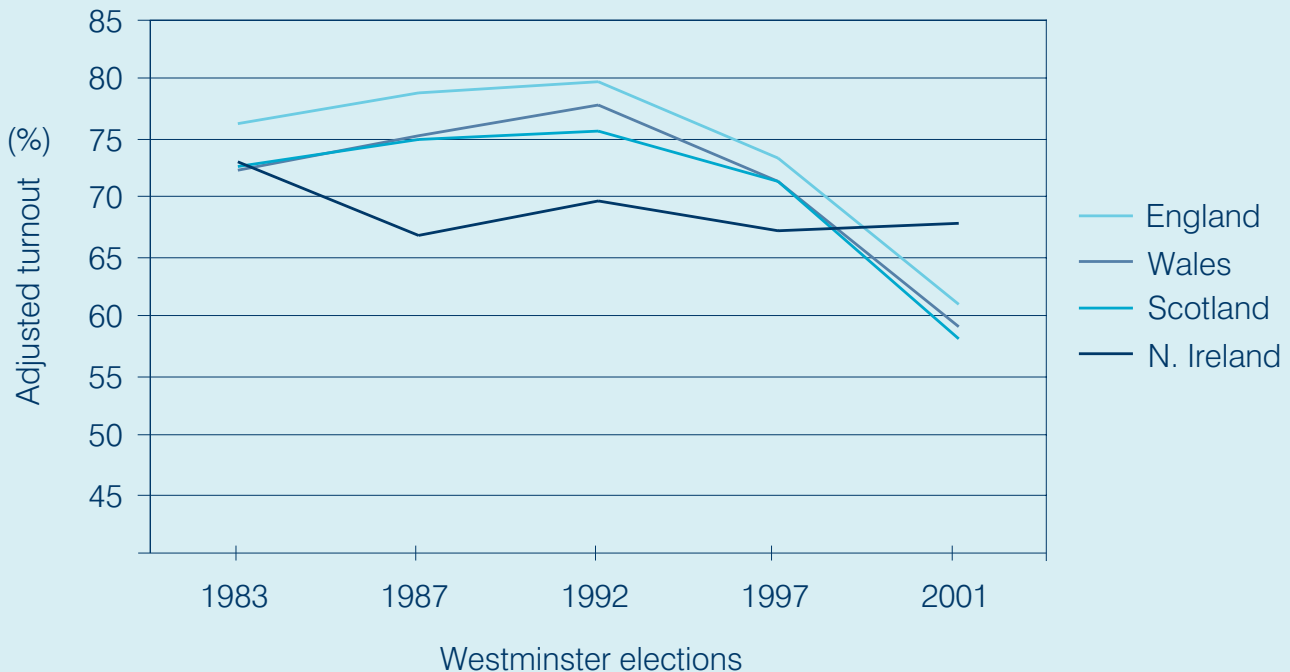
6 Participation

Turnout at the November 2003 Assembly election was 64%, a figure higher than some commentators had predicted given the time of year and the uncertainty of political progress in Northern Ireland.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it was six percentage points down from the 1998 Assembly election and four percentage points down from the 2001 Westminster Parliamentary election. Altogether, 122,000 fewer people voted in 2003 than in 1998.

Turnout trends in Northern Ireland

6.1 Political parties and commentators have expressed concern for some time about the steady decline in turnout at elections in the UK. This phenomenon is not unique to the UK as other democracies in Western Europe have also witnessed a similar decline. There is a widely held belief that turnout for all elections in Northern Ireland is high in contrast to England, Scotland and Wales but in the Commission's view this assumption requires further analysis. Turnout in Northern Ireland has tended to remain reasonably consistent despite the dramatic reduction witnessed at the 2001 general election in the rest of the UK and the pattern of falling participation in elections.

⁵⁸ 'Voters to shun elections', *Belfast Telegraph*, October 15, 2003.

Figure 8: Turnout (%) at Westminster elections: 1983–2001⁵⁹

Turnout at the 2003 Assembly election

6.2 Following the announcement of the November 2003 election a number of factors were identified as potentially having an adverse impact on turnout:

- The timing of the election – late November is not considered the ideal date for an election. Restricted daylight hours and bad weather limit the time available for campaigning.
- Registration – some of the electorate were uncertain if their names were on the register.

- The requirement for photographic identification – disadvantaged and marginalised groups were less likely to have an acceptable form of photographic identification.⁶⁰
- Uncertainty about the political situation – the slow progress in restoring devolution following suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly in October 2002.

⁵⁹ Taken from House of Commons Research Paper 03/59, 1 July 2003, *UK Election Statistics: 1945–2003*, p.16. In this table, turnout is calculated by showing total valid votes as a percentage of the electorate (i.e. adjusted turnout). Elsewhere in this report, turnout will be calculated by expressing the total vote as a percentage of the number of people registered to vote (i.e. unadjusted).

⁶⁰ *The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002: an assessment of its first year in operation*, The Electoral Commission, December 2003.

Despite these factors turnout at the election was 64.0%, a figure higher than at elections to the devolved institutions in Scotland and Wales, where turnout was 49%⁶¹ and 38.2%⁶² respectively.

Calculating turnout

6.3 A key factor in calculating turnout is the rate of registration. In the context of Northern Ireland this has been fundamentally changed as a result of the provisions contained in the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. Direct comparisons about turnout before and after the introduction of the Act are misleading. Turnout is customarily calculated by expressing the number of people voting as a proportion of the registered electorate.

$$\text{Turnout} = \frac{\text{number of votes cast}}{\text{number of people on electoral register}} \times 100$$

6.4 Turnout can be expressed in one of two ways – adjusted and unadjusted. When calculating adjusted turnout only valid votes are counted, whereas unadjusted turnout includes all votes cast, even those judged invalid.⁶³ Turnout is not a measure of the proportion of the population who cast a vote, but rather the proportion of the registered electorate who voted. When the gap between these is small the impact on percentage turnout figures is less significant. However, when the

difference between the two is significant, as in the case of Northern Ireland, the actual percentage turnout is inflated.

The impact of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 on the registration rate

6.5 Our report *The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002: an assessment of its first year in operation* investigated how the new system of individual registration impacted on the number of people registered across Northern Ireland. When the first electoral register was published in December 2002, we estimated it contained the names of 86% of the 18+ population.⁶⁴ We concluded that the removal of the ‘carry forward’ was the major contributory factor in reducing the number of names on the register.

6.6 The removal of the ‘carry forward’ meant that people who had not completed and returned an annual registration form were not included in the new register. This is not the situation in England, Scotland or Wales where names are carried forward for one year. By September 2003 we estimated that the registration rate had increased to just over 88% as a result of the rolling registration process (people can apply to have their names added to or taken off the register between December and August). Since turnout reflects the number of people voting as a proportion of the number of people registered, a significant proportion (12%) of the population are excluded from the turnout calculation.

61 *Scottish elections 2003: the official report on the Scottish Parliament and local government elections 1 May 2003*, The Electoral Commission, November 2003.

62 *The National Assembly for Wales elections 2003: the official report and results*, The Electoral Commission, November 2003.

63 Unless stated otherwise, turnout figures used in this report are unadjusted.

64 Population figures are taken from the 2001 Census.

Decrease in number of people voting

6.7 Just over 122,000 fewer people voted in November 2003 than voted at the Assembly election in 1998, a decrease of around 15%. This decrease was not reflected in similar terms in the published turnout figure which showed a reduction of 6% from 1998. It could be argued that it is the absolute number of people voting that gives the best indication of interest in and commitment to the electoral process.

Table 21: Reduction in the number of votes cast between the 1998 Assembly election and 2003 Assembly election

Election	Total number of votes cast
Assembly election 1998	824,391
Assembly election 2003	702,249
Difference 2003 - 1998	-122,142

Source: EONI official results

Voting age population

6.8 An alternative approach to analysing turnout is to present the number of people who voted as a percentage of the estimated voting age population. This methodology allows useful comparisons to be made in circumstances where there are considerable variations in registration rates.⁶⁵ As the following table shows, the proportion of the voting age population who voted at the 2003 election was 56.2%, compared to the published turnout figure of 64%.

⁶⁵ This method does not account for a small proportion of people who will not be eligible to vote due to factors such as mental incompetence, non-citizenship or imprisonment. However, these factors, if taken into account, are unlikely to significantly impact on the overall figures.

Table 22: Comparison between turnout and proportion of voting age population (VAP) voting at Northern Ireland elections 1994–2003

Year	Election	Published turnout (%)	% VAP voting	Difference (%)
2003	NI Assembly	64.0	56.2	7.8
2001	Westminster	68.0	66.0	2.0
2001	Local council	68.7	65.4	3.3
1999	European Parliamentary	57.7	56.4	1.3
1998	Assembly	70.0	67.9	2.1
1998	Referendum	81.1	78.5	2.6
1997	Westminster	67.1	65.9	1.2
1997	Local council	55.1	53.9	1.2
1996	Forum	64.7	63.1	1.6
1994	European Parliamentary	49.4	48.4	1.0

Source: EONI official results, NI Census 2001

Turnout across constituencies

6.9 Turnout in the November 2003 election varied across the 18 Northern Ireland constituencies, ranging from 74.9% in Mid-Ulster to 54.5% in North Down. However, if turnout is expressed using the voting age population the variations become much greater, as illustrated by the situation in Belfast South and Mid-Ulster. In the constituency of Belfast South where the registration rate is low, a turnout of 41.7% was recorded, almost 21 percentage points lower than the published turnout figure of 62.6%. In contrast, the Mid-Ulster constituency, with a high registration rate, shows a differential of just over 2% when using the voting age population.

Table 23: Turnout by constituency and voting age population

Constituency	Turnout (%)	VAP (%)	Difference (%)
Belfast South	62.6	41.7	20.9
Belfast North	62.3	51.2	11.1
Belfast West	65.9	56.3	9.3
Belfast East	60.7	51.5	9.2
East Londonderry	61.8	52.7	9.1
South Antrim	59.5	50.6	8.9
North Down	54.5	46.4	8.1
Foyle	63.5	55.7	7.8
East Antrim	56.5	49.1	7.4
Lagan Valley	61.4	54.3	7.1
Strangford	57.1	50.7	6.4
Upper Bann	64.2	58.3	5.9
West Tyrone	73.2	68.1	5.1
South Down	65.6	60.6	5.0
North Antrim	63.3	58.4	4.9
Newry & Armagh	70.2	66.8	3.4
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	72.9	69.9	3.0
Mid-Ulster	74.9	72.7	2.2
Total	64.0	56.2	7.8

Source: EONI official results, NI Census 2001

Factors affecting turnout

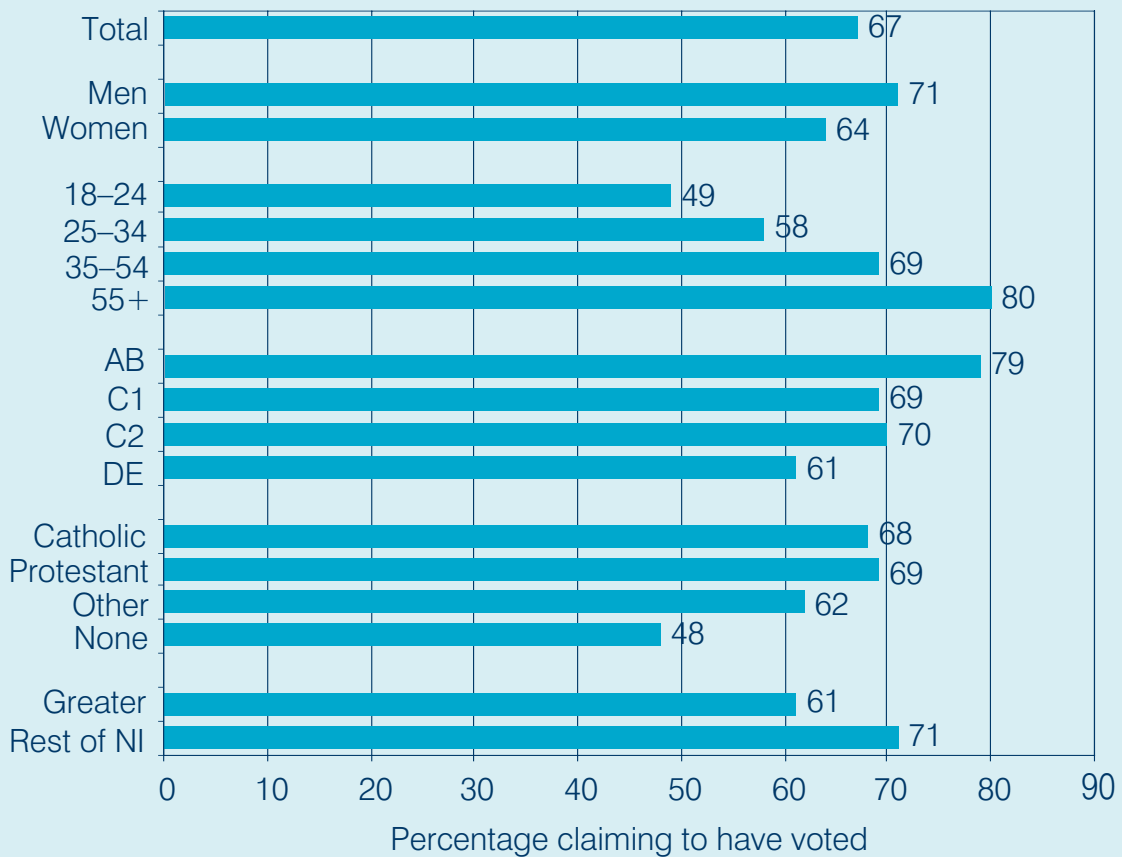
6.10 In order to assess what factors impacted on turnout, we commissioned quantitative and qualitative public opinion research. As well as interviews with over 1,000 adults, a ‘booster’ sample was used to ensure that the views of non-voters were adequately represented. The final numbers of interviews with non-voters was 622. In order to get an insight into attitudes about voting and politics generally, eight focus groups were conducted during December 2003. The groups were structured to allow for a particular focus on non-voters.

The demographics of voting

6.11 Just over two-thirds (67%) of those interviewed for the public opinion survey said they had voted.⁶⁶ Men (71%) were more likely to have voted than women (64%). Age was the main determinant as to whether people voted, with less than half (49%) of those aged between 18–24 voting compared to 80% of those aged 55 and over. There was also a clear correlation between socio-economic groups, with those classified in group AB more likely to have said they voted than their counterparts in group DE.

⁶⁶ The proportion of people claiming to vote in our survey is considerably higher than the proportion of the 18+ population who actually voted. This disparity is a recognised phenomenon in public opinion surveys about voting. It would seem that a proportion of non-voters feel a sense of embarrassment about not voting, and so are not entirely truthful in their response.

Figure 9: Who voted? Analysis of those who voted in the 2003 Assembly election



Source: MBU. Base: 1,444

Reasons for voting

6.12 All those who said they voted were asked to choose from a list which reasons had been the most important to them when deciding to vote. Almost four in ten (39%) chose the statement 'it is my duty vote' as their main reason. When focus group participants were asked to say why they had voted, a number suggested that voting was almost a sub-conscious habit.

I do it out of duty, I suppose you would call it ... duty to my family, country, whatever you like.

Focus group, December 2003

I have always voted and I see no reason to stop now.

Focus group, December 2003

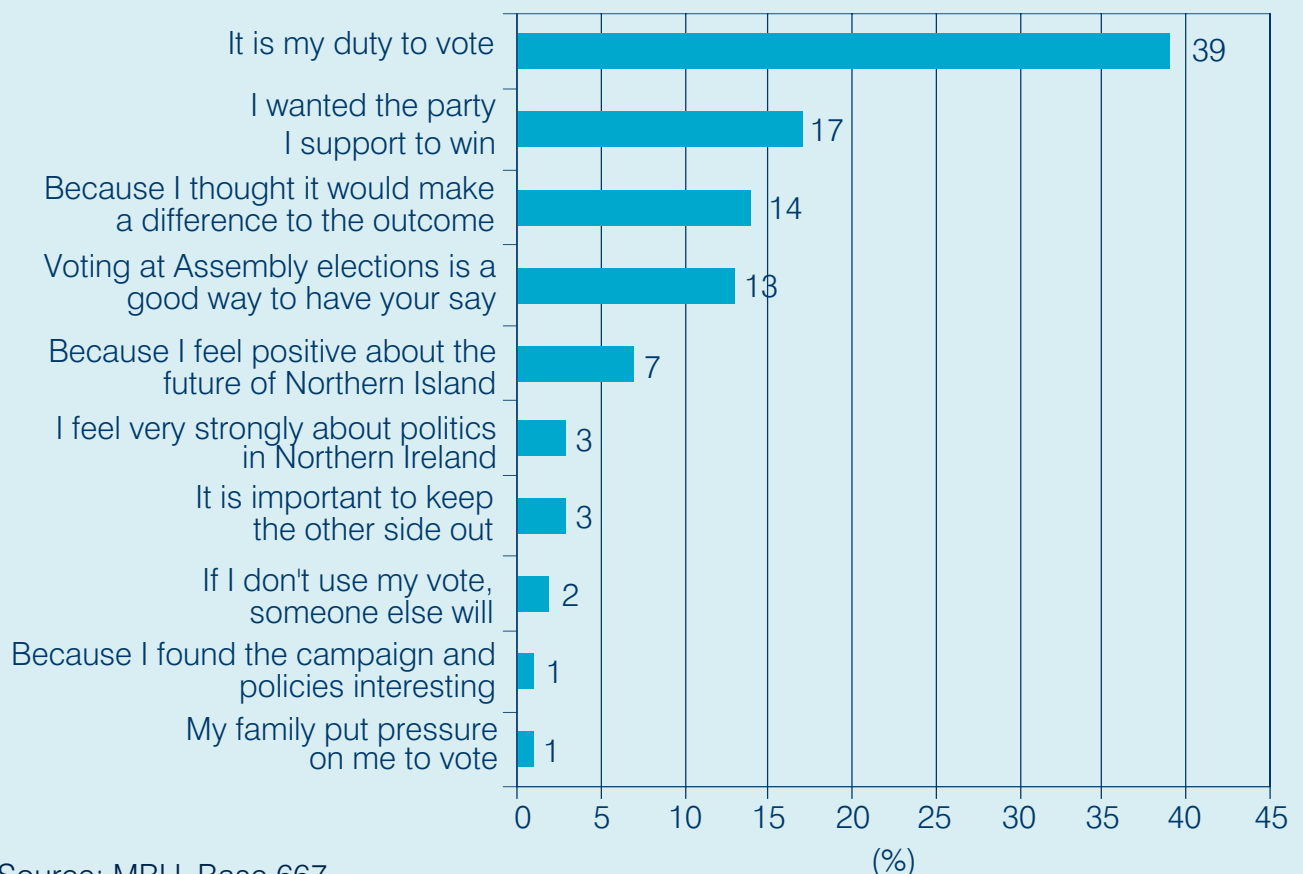
6.13 The second most commonly chosen reason for voting was 'I wanted the party I support to win' (17%). This was followed by 'I thought it would make a difference to the outcome' (14%) and 'voting at Assembly elections is a good way to have your say' (13%). Two per cent said their main reason for voting was to ensure no one else used their vote. When prompted about the wider reasons for voting, just over one in five (21%) said the

fear of someone else using their vote was a motivating factor when deciding to vote. This suggests that the issue of electoral fraud remains a concern for some voters.

If you don't vote there is always the fear that someone else will ... though I don't think that's happening as much nowadays.

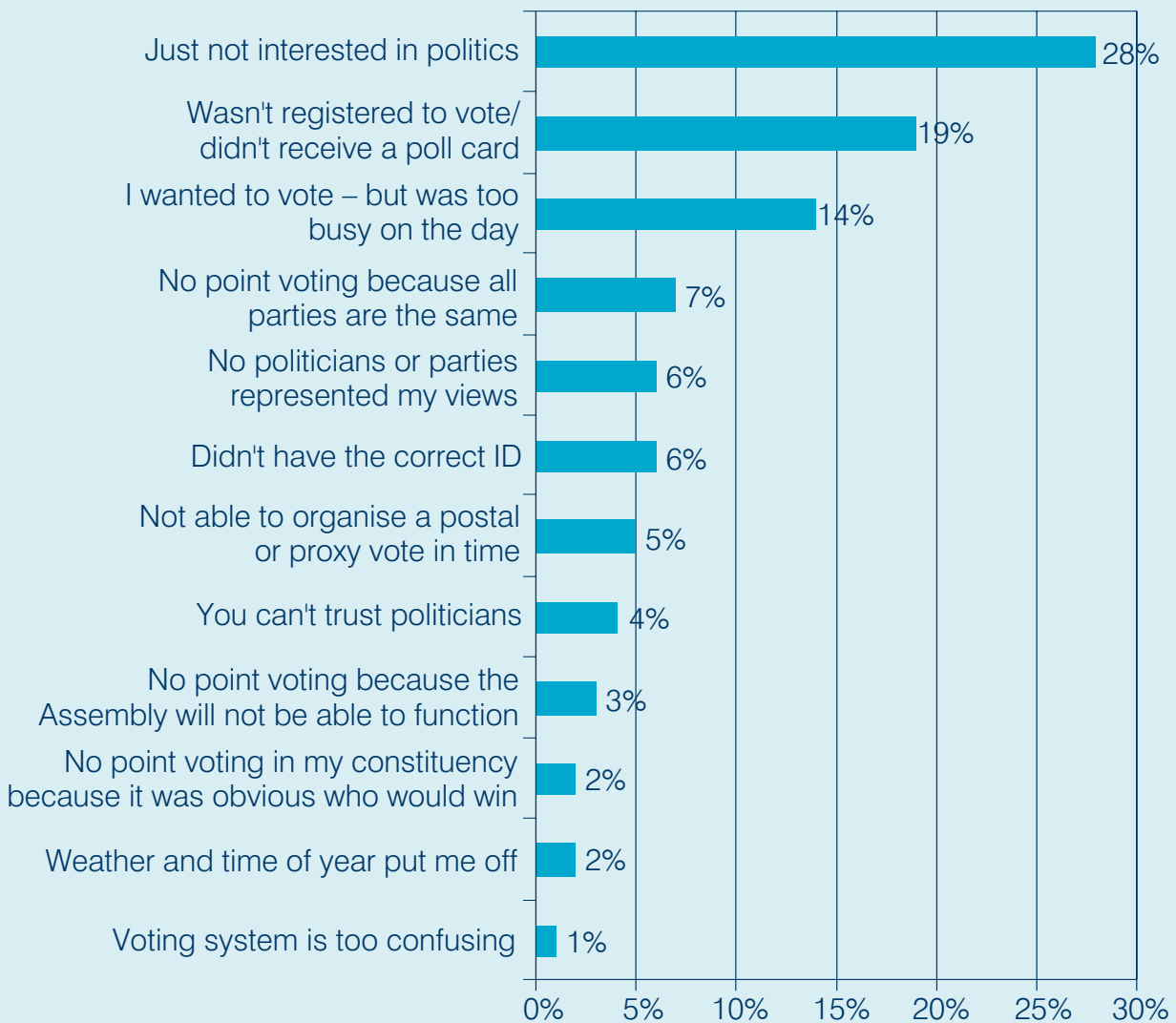
Focus group, December 2003

Figure 10: Reasons identified for voting at the Northern Ireland Assembly election 2003



Source: MBU. Base 667

Figure 11: Reasons identified for not voting at the Northern Ireland Assembly election



Source: MBU December 2003. Base 622

Reasons for not voting

6.14 Non-voters were asked to identify their main reason for not voting. The reasons given can be split between two categories: those who made a deliberate choice not to vote (52%) and those who said that circumstances had prevented them from doing so (48%).⁶⁷ The main reasons given for deliberately not voting included not being interested in politics or not trusting politicians. Circumstantial reasons included being too busy, not being registered or not having the correct photographic identification.

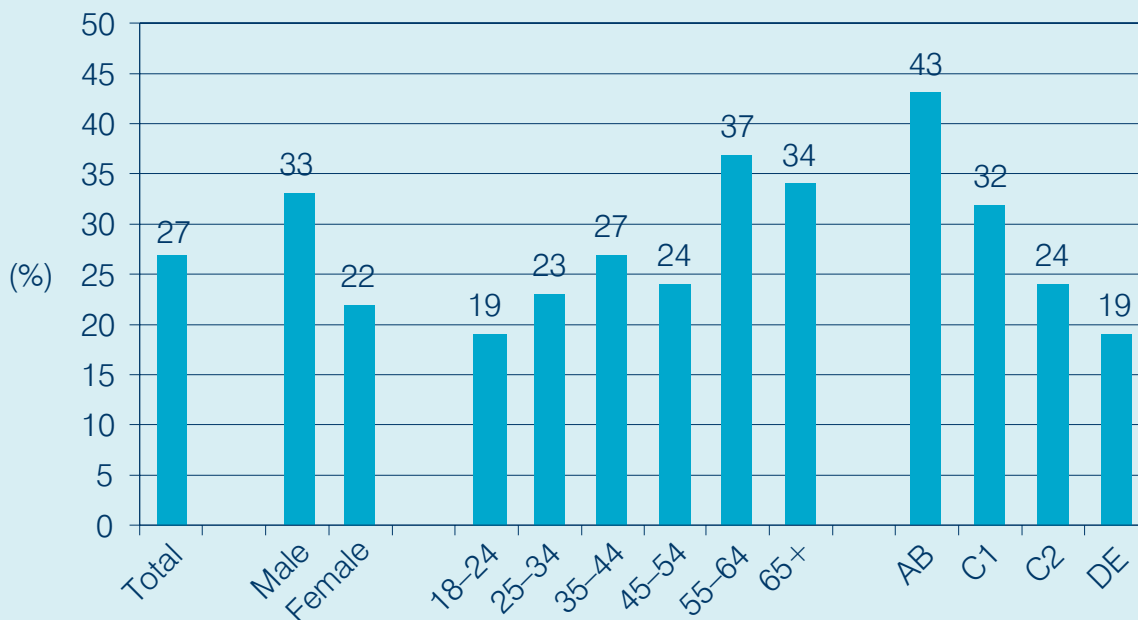
whereas our survey showed that this figure was now 46%. This endorses some of the focus group findings which concluded that the lack of political progress was considered a factor contributing to a disengagement from politics.

Deliberate reasons for not voting

6.15 To gauge the level of interest in politics all participants in our public opinion survey were asked for their views. The findings showed that just over a quarter (27%) said they had a 'great deal' or 'quite a lot of interest' in politics while less than half (46%) said they had 'not much' interest or 'none at all'. There was a direct correlation with age and socio-economic group, with younger people and people from lower socio-economic groups appearing to be less interested in politics. When these findings were compared to the Northern Ireland *Life and Times* survey, interest in politics in Northern Ireland appears to have declined. In 1998 less than one in three (32%) of those interviewed said they had little or no interest in politics

⁶⁷ Much academic research on turnout has sought to draw a distinction between 'deliberate' (or voluntary) and 'circumstantial' (or involuntary) non-voters. See R. Johnston and C. Pattie (2002) Voters and non-voters in 2001, paper presented at The Electoral Commission / Constitution Unit 'Turnout' conference, June 2002. (It should be recognised that labelling reasons for non-voting in such a way is difficult, not least because a sense of duty, and other factors, may cause some survey respondents to cite circumstantial rather than deliberate reasons for their abstention.)

Figure 12: Percentage of people surveyed saying they had ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of interest in politics – by demographic grouping



Source: MBU. Base 1,444

6.16 Altogether, 28% of non-voters said that the reason they did not vote was because they were not interested in politics. Some of those who took part in the focus group discussions blamed the confrontational nature of politics in Northern Ireland for this stance.

I used to be interested but the lack of progress made me angry at first then I just felt bad, but now I don't care anymore.

Focus group participant, December 2003

How would I describe it? Well, it feels like nothing will ever happen.

Focus group participant, December 2003

The level of disengagement appeared to be more prevalent among younger members of the focus groups. For these participants, politics was lower down their list of priorities and issues such as school/university examinations, employment, family and entertainment were of greater importance to them.

6.17 Researchers who conducted the focus group discussions found that non-voters tended to start the discussion by saying that they were uninterested in politics and were sceptical of the nature of politics in Northern Ireland. However, as the discussion progressed, it became clear that the problem was not so much a lack of interest, but rather a lack of confidence in their ability to make an informed decision about how and for whom to vote. This lack of confidence was particularly evident among young people, women and people from lower income families.

I just don't think it's right to vote for something I don't really understand. ... I might be responsible for putting someone in who takes away education or something like that.

Focus group participant, December 2003

6.18 Other reasons given for not voting reflected a general disaffection with politics. Seven per cent of non-voters said the main reason they didn't vote was that they considered all the political parties to be the same, while 6% said that no politicians or parties had represented their views and a further 4% said that politicians couldn't be trusted. Evidence from the focus groups tends to support these findings.

They're all the same, looking for the same thing ... there's no difference between them ... why should I vote for a party when it isn't talking to me about anything that's, well, important.

Focus group participant, December 2003

... if they were going to make a difference to me in my everyday life then maybe I would consider voting ...

Focus group participant, December 2003

They don't listen, they get your vote because you have to vote for them. [Interviewer: Why do you feel that you have to vote for them?] Who else is there ... you can't vote for the other side.

Focus group participant, December 2003

6.19 Three per cent of those interviewed said that they felt there was no point in voting because the Assembly would remain suspended. This was also cited in the focus group discussions as one of the main reasons for not voting.

... but you're not voting for an Assembly, are you? You're voting for them to argue about it again and when they get it going again they'll have forgotten what they promised.

Focus group participant, December 2003

Circumstantial reasons for not voting

6.20 Concern had been expressed by a number of stakeholders prior to the election that a significant number of people would be unable to vote because their names were not on the register. Altogether, one in five non-voters (19%) and 6% of the overall sample said the main reason they did not vote was because they were not registered or did not receive a poll card. This equates to around 75,000 potential voters.⁶⁸

6.21 A further 5% of non-voters (2% of the total sample) said that the main reason they had not voted was because they did not possess any of the prescribed forms of photographic identification. This equates to around 25,000 potential voters.⁶⁹ The previous chapter showed that almost 3,500 people were initially refused a vote because they did not present an acceptable form of photographic identification. The research suggests that a substantial number of people may have realised that they did not possess a suitable form of identification and so did not turn out to vote.

6.22 Other reasons given for not voting were that people were too busy on the day (14%), they were unable to arrange an absent vote in time for the election (5%) or because they found the voting system too confusing (1%).

6.23 The findings from the public opinion survey suggest that a significant number of people who wanted to vote, either were not registered or did not possess the necessary photographic identification. We consider it very important that all those wishing to vote have the opportunity to do so.

Given the numbers not registered and without the necessary forms of identification we will increase our efforts to promote greater awareness and understanding of individual registration and the requirement for photographic identification. We will work in partnership with the EONI in fulfilling this objective.

Conclusion

6.24 When measured in percentage terms the published turnout at the election was not significantly down from the previous Assembly election. However, the actual number of people voting decreased by 122,000 – a figure representing almost 15% of the electorate. This anomaly is explained by the fact that individual registration masked this sharp decrease. When compared against the voting age population, turnout at the election was just over 56%. Our public opinion research findings show that a large proportion of the population did not vote because they were not registered or were not in possession of one of the four forms of prescribed identification.

⁶⁸ As the survey had a sampling tolerance of +/- 3%, this figure may be more accurately described as falling within the range of 37,500–112,500.

⁶⁹ As the survey had a sampling tolerance of +/- 3%, this figure may be more accurately described as falling within the range of 0–62,500.

7 The count and thereafter

Proportional representation in the form of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1973. Today STV is generally accepted by all the political parties in Northern Ireland as the fairest electoral system for use in a divided society. All elections in Northern Ireland, with the exception of those to Westminster, are conducted using STV.

Introduction

7.1 The Single Transferable Vote (STV) was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1973 in the expectation that it would produce a closer relationship between votes polled and seats won, an expectation that has largely been fulfilled.⁷⁰ The legislation governing STV is contained in the Representation of the People Act 1983 applied with modifications by the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) Order 2001. The operational aspects of an STV count are complex and have changed little in the last 30 years and many of the systems and procedures in use today have largely evolved from custom and practice. To our knowledge, no quality assurance standards have been developed for counts in the UK and no mechanisms are in place to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of a count.

7.2 The count has two distinct phases, namely, the verification phase and the count phase. Altogether, about 1,000 staff were employed across Northern Ireland to count the votes polled on 26 November. Deputy Returning Officers are responsible for the recruitment of count co-ordinators, count controllers, calculators, supervisors, count clerks and security personnel. On average about 55 staff were employed to cover each of the 18 constituency counts.

⁷⁰ Dr Sydney Elliott, Senior Lecturer School of Politics, Queen's University Belfast, lecture on STV at the Constitution Unit, London, January 2004.

7.3 A large proportion of the count staff were current or retired employees of local councils (authorities) in Northern Ireland and had experience of running counts at local government elections. Many were considered by the EONI to be very experienced practitioners in the field of STV. The EONI relies heavily on this external resource. Prior to each election the EONI organises refresher training for count co-ordinators and controllers who, it is understood, cascade training to count supervisors. No formal training was provided to count clerks in advance of the election. However, they were briefed on the morning of the count on what they were expected to do. Upon completion of a count staff depart and go their separate ways with the result that there are no opportunities to discuss the count or how it could have been done better or differently.

7.4 Each count centre is divided into two areas, namely the counting area and the observation area. Tables are normally arranged to provide a physical barrier between count staff and those observing the count. Those planning the layout ensure that counting agents can observe the process without becoming too obtrusive. Staff are instructed to unfold and count the ballot papers face upward in the same direction. Full details about the count and the layout of a model count centre are contained in the Guide for Count Staff.⁷¹

Count venues

7.5 Votes polled were counted at eight separate venues.

Table 24: Count venues used at the November 2003 Assembly election

Constituency	Count venue
Belfast East	Alexander Hall, Belfast
Belfast West	
Belfast North	
Belfast South	
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Omagh Leisure Centre, Omagh
West Tyrone	
Foyle	Templemore Sports Complex, Derry
Mid-Ulster	
North Antrim	The Joey Dunlop Centre, Ballymoney
East Londonderry	
Upper Bann	Banbridge Leisure Centre, Banbridge
Newry & Armagh	
South Down	Dromore Community Centre, Dromore
Lagan Valley	
East Antrim	Valley Leisure Centre, Newtownabbey
South Antrim	
Strangford	Ards Leisure Centre, Newtownards
North Down	

Source: EONI

⁷¹ *A guide for count staff – establishing poll position*, Module 3, The Electoral Commission.

7.6 Prior to the election taking place the PSNI informed the EONI that the Mid-Ulster count had to be transferred from the Joey Dunlop Centre in Ballymoney to the Templemore Sports Complex in Derry City with the East Londonderry count being transferred to the Joey Dunlop Centre. This decision was taken on security grounds and followed difficulties encountered by the MP for Mid-Ulster when he visited the Ballymoney area earlier in the year.

7.7 All the count venues used by the EONI, except for the one in Belfast, had been used previously and were considered suitable by the EONI. Given the uncertainty about the timing of the election, identifying a suitable venue for the Belfast counts proved problematic. The intended venue, the King's Hall, was unavailable because it was being used for a motorcycle show. As a result a large agricultural out-building close to the intended venue was hired and renovated to accommodate the four Belfast counts. The Chief Electoral Officer acknowledged that the venue used for the Belfast counts was not ideal. However, he stressed that nothing suitable was available in the Belfast area at short notice.

7.8 In the circumstances the Belfast count centre proved far from ideal and the facilities both inside and outside the main count area were criticised during the course of the count by those present, including candidates and representatives of the media. Adverse comments included:

- insufficient toilet facilities;
- poor heating and lighting;
- insufficient accommodation for the media;
- cramped, overcrowded, narrow corridors;
- insufficient catering facilities;
- a shortage of seating;
- no public address system;
- inadequate facilities for people with disabilities;
- concerns over health and safety in the event that the building had to be vacated in an emergency.

One newspaper described the Belfast count venue in the following terms:

The bathroom is grotty, with no hot water or towels, the heat is provided by an industrial blower in one corner of the building, which works intermittently and leaks gas. There is a tea stand, but no hot food.⁷³

7.9 No adverse comments were received in respect of the accommodation used for the other count venues although some observers noted that on occasions some facilities could have been better utilised. Staff were not allocated any suitable storage facilities where their belongings could be kept safely for the duration of the count. As a result personal belongings were kept under count tables, potentially compromising the integrity of the count as well as being a health and safety hazard.

⁷³ 'Democracy in the King's Hall sheep pen', *Sunday Business Post*, 30 November 2003.

7.10 A number of comments were received about the location of some count venues and suggestions were put forward for their relocation. Newry and Mourne Council argued that the Newry & Armagh count should be relocated from Banbridge to Newry Leisure Complex. The Council emphasised that the counting of votes should be done in the constituency and not outside it. The recent recognition of Newry as a city was also cited as a reason for moving the count. A Sinn Féin candidate who was allegedly intimidated by loyalists at the Dromore count also asked for the count to be relocated. Further details of this incident are given in paragraph 7.55. Calls were also made for the South Down count to be relocated from Dromore to the county town of Downpatrick.⁷³ The Ulster Unionist Party also requested the relocation of the Mid-Ulster count from Derry to Cookstown.⁷⁴

Given the disquiet expressed about the count venues we recommend that the EONI reviews the current location and suitability of count venues. Consultation should take place with all interested stakeholders including the political parties, local councils and the media.

Access to the count

7.11 Rule 44 of Schedule 1 of the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) Order 2001 states that:

No person other than (a) the Returning Officer and his clerks, (b) candidates and their wives or husbands (c) the election

agents (d) the counting agents may be present at the counting of votes, unless permitted by the Returning Officer to attend.⁷⁵

This advice was included in the Guide for candidates and agents⁷⁶ which had been issued to all candidates at the time of nomination. A candidate for the Socialist Environmental Alliance raised the issue of the attendance of his partner of 20 years at the count in the Foyle constituency.⁷⁷ He said that when he brought the matter to the attention of the Electoral Office in Londonderry he was told that ‘husbands and wives’ meant what it said and that the only way his partner could attend the count was either as a counting agent or under some other heading. The candidate in question alleged that such a ruling discriminated against people in stable relationships who had not gone through a marriage ceremony and similarly affected gay and lesbian partners of candidates. He copied his correspondence to both the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

7.12 At the request of the candidate we raised the matter with the Chief Electoral Officer who said his understanding of the legislation was that only spouses of candidates were permitted access to the count and that common law partnerships did not fall within the legislation. Following contact with the Equality Commission the Chief Electoral Officer wrote to the candidate before the election stating that he was now

⁷⁵ Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) Order 2001.

⁷⁶ *Guidance for candidates and agents*, The Electoral Commission, November 2003.

⁷⁷ Letter received from Socialist Environmental Alliance, 17 November 2003.

⁷³ *Down Recorder*, 3 December 2003.

⁷⁴ Letter from UUP, 28 January 2004.

content that the term 'husbands and wives' should be interpreted more liberally. He confirmed that Deputy Returning Officers had been instructed that candidates could be accompanied at the count by their partners, including same sex partners.

Number of votes cast

7.13 Counting of votes for all constituencies commenced at 9.00am on Thursday 27 November. Unlike the rest of the UK counting does not commence immediately after the close of poll in Northern Ireland. This approach

Table 25: Summary of the number of votes polled per constituency, 26 November 2003

Constituency	Votes polled	Valid votes	Number of counts	Number of candidates	Time (hours) ⁷⁸
Strangford	37,838	37,250	11	13	23
East Antrim	31,343	30,952	15	19	23
Foyle	41,436	40,806	9	13	22
North Down	31,316	30,835	14	19	21
South Antrim	37,858	37,421	11	14	20
West Tyrone	42,328	41,729	8	12	20
Upper Bann	44,145	43,482	11	14	19
South Down	46,012	45,346	9	16	19
North Antrim	44,632	44,099	9	12	18
Mid Ulster	45,023	44,362	8	12	17
Belfast South	31,330	31,290	12	17	17
Lagan Valley	41,724	41,254	10	13	17
Belfast North	31,997	31,532	12	16	17
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	46,873	46,160	8	12	17
East Londonderry	34,703	34,273	12	14	16
Newry & Armagh	48,233	47,378	5	11	14
Belfast East	31,524	30,965	6	15	14
Belfast West	33,527	32,854	8	14	13
Total	702,249	692,028	178	256	327

Source: EONI official results

⁷⁸ These figures assume a 9.00pm finish for all counts on Thursday 27 November. Actual figures were unavailable.

was complimented by Scottish Returning Officers as being a much more user-friendly approach to staff in the counting of votes. Altogether, 702,249 votes were counted over the two days of which 692,028 were deemed valid. This represented a drop of 122,142 (15%) from the 1998 Assembly election and 115,163 (14%) from the 2001 Westminster Parliamentary election.

Management of the count

Time taken to count the votes

7.14 A major theme that emerged from the counts and which was the subject of much comment by independent observers, the media and the political parties was the length of time taken both to verify the number of votes cast and the time taken to complete the counts. Despite the significant reduction in the number of ballot papers at the election the time taken to complete the count increased overall by 20 hours when compared to the 1998 Assembly election. Counts in 12 of the 18 constituencies took longer to complete than in 1998 even though there were 40 fewer candidates and 122,000 fewer votes. In its submission to The Electoral Commission the BBC claimed that the slowness of the counts was a recurring theme at all Northern Ireland elections, whether PR or first past the post.⁷⁹

7.15 The longest counts were in the Strangford and East Antrim constituencies which lasted 23 hours. This was followed by Foyle (22 hours) and North Down (21 hours). Two of the Belfast constituencies recorded the least time taken to complete the count with Belfast West taking

13 hours and Belfast East 14 hours. On average 2,147 votes were counted per hour although this varied between constituencies with the average in Newry & Armagh being 3,445 and North Down 1,491. There appears to be little correlation between the length of time it takes to complete a count, the number of count stages and the number of candidates standing for election. In 1998 a number of constituencies counted throughout the night but this was not repeated in November 2003.

7.16 We received a wide range of views about the time taken to complete the count:

A number of constituency representatives complained that the count was too slow.

Political party

The count can be characterised in a simple word – slow. The overriding impression was that everyone there knew it was going to take two days so it took two days. There was no sense of urgency at any time.

Electoral Commission observer

The length of the counts was far too long. STV is by far the best and fairest electoral system for Northern Ireland. However, the slowness of the count gives opponents of the system and some in the media the opportunity to undermine it. The progress of subsequent stages was painfully slow. For example, it should not take over an hour to redistribute a few hundred votes at full value.

Political party

⁷⁹ Letter from BBC Northern Ireland, received 23 December 2003.

I had read various academic articles on STV most of which had some reference to the complexity of the count process. My favourite quote was that 'the counting of votes can occasionally take on epic and labyrinthine proportions'. I would have to say that this is a pretty apt description of what I and my colleagues witnessed with only 3 constituencies having declared at the end of the first day. Taking 1 or 2 days to count 30,000 to 40,000 votes does seem on the face of it to be excessive.

Scottish Returning Officer

The employment of experienced counting staff would assist in the reduction of the length of time required to complete a count while ensuring its accuracy.

Local district council

7.17 In response to criticism that the counts took too long the Chief Electoral Officer told the media that the EONI would rather get the results right than rush and get them wrong. Area electoral office staff said the number of transfers coupled with the fact that so many candidates could not be excluded quickly added to the time taken.⁸⁰ There are clearly issues in respect of the time taken to complete counts that need to be addressed.

We recommend that external consultants be appointed to conduct a review of the entire count process with the aim of increasing its efficiency. The review should also consider the scope for computerising all or part of the count.

Verification of votes

7.18 As with any count, verification of the number of ballot papers against the ballot account was completed first. In the majority of counts the verification process progressed smoothly although none was completed until lunchtime or beyond. One observer noted that ballot box totals were checked on average at least three times and this, coupled with the commencement of staff breaks at 10.30am, impacted on the efficiency of the count. It was estimated that this added at least an hour to the verification process.

7.19 At some counts candidates and party agents were able to observe the verification process at close quarters and there were no barriers between them and the count tables. In others, barriers were in place and these were located about four feet from the counting tables. This ensured that counting agents were kept a short distance back, thus putting less pressure on those verifying the ballots. The maintenance of a reasonable distance between count staff and those entitled to observe is considered sensible.

Candidates and agents were permitted within the central counting area during the verification process. This was a contributory factor to the verification process taking much longer than I would have expected. The counting area was far too busy with people milling around and was not conducive to an effective verification process. Colleagues reported that even in counts where agents were not admitted into the count area the verification process appeared to take longer than expected.

Returning Officer from Scotland

⁸⁰ Meeting with Area Electoral Staff 19 February 2004.

7.20 Information about the actual number of votes cast and the percentage poll was not readily accessible. Some observers reported that no public announcements were made at the end of the verification stage.

Verification was a slow process with each count not completing this stage before lunchtime. I had expected that an announcement would be made at this stage to indicate total votes cast and percentage poll but nothing was forthcoming. Instead both counts went on to sort first preference votes between candidates.

Electoral Commission observer

Turnout figures were mostly not available until around 6.00pm on day one – 9 hours after the start of counting. This appears to have been much slower than in previous elections.

BBC Northern Ireland

7.21 Political parties claimed that some counters verified ballot papers face-down and not face-up and that requests had to be made for the verification process to be conducted in accordance with the legislation.⁸¹ A number of party agents commented that some counters simply did not understand the verification process.

Management and utilisation of staff

7.22 Over 1,000 people were used to manage and count the votes at the eight count venues. A number of those who participated in the count had never done so before, while a proportion

had worked the previous day either as presiding officers or poll clerks. Supervisors spoken to said the low rate of pay was insufficient to attract good quality staff. One local council in a written submission to the Commission said that there was a need to conduct some research to find out why experienced staff from local councils no longer made themselves available for either the poll or the count.⁸²

7.23 Consistent themes that emerged from the evidence collated were shortcomings in the management of staff and instances of staff not being used to their maximum capacity. Overall there appeared to be a lack of communication between count supervisors and count staff, with supervisors either unable or unwilling to exert control over their staff. A local council commented that supervisors in particular would benefit from having their roles clearly defined. The importance of good communication channels between count controllers and supervisors was emphasised:

Count staff were not adequately controlled. The ratio of supervisors to staff should be examined and supervisors should concentrate on controlling staff and not have other assigned tasks. Staff should wait for the supervisors instructions and not, as was witnessed, do what they wished. At various stages staff were seen deciding for themselves which ballot papers to count next. Staff also decided for themselves when to leave the room and too much staff movement was observed.

Electoral Commission observer

⁸¹ Rule 44B(5) in Schedule 1 of the Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) Order 2001.

⁸² Submission received from Newtownabbey Borough Council.

Very little control was exerted during the count. The area of most concern was ballot paper control. Ballot papers were left unattended and candidates and counting agents were observed touching and sorting through them. This level of laxity was surprising and could have served to undermine the entire process.

Electoral Commission observer

7.24 The apparent lack of a chain of command resulted in decisions being made by staff without consultation with their supervisors. For example, there did not seem to be any procedure in place for allowing staff to take breaks at designated times, with many appearing to leave and enter the count hall as they pleased. This served to slow the process further:

Whilst ballots were counted in an orderly and secure manner, there were some interesting examples of what I would consider lax practice. Counting clerks seemed to decide for themselves when to go to the toilet or café without anyone saying anything to them. I saw ballot papers left unattended on the table, which concerned me.

Electoral Commission observer

7.25 Observers commented on the long and frequent periods of inactivity experienced by counters once the count process started. Many reached the conclusion that there was scope to make better use of staff on the day.

An experienced electoral administrator [from overseas] was surprised at the levels of inactivity displayed by many of the count staff at various stages throughout the count. When staff had finished counting their assigned candidates' ballots, no effort was made to assist other staff with theirs. This seemed to slow the entire process.

Electoral Commission observer

7.26 A party agent approached an observer at one count and highlighted a number of issues with which he was unhappy. These were:

- general concerns at the casual atmosphere;
- materials being moved in and out of the count venue;
- rubbish being bagged up in the same area as the votes;
- staff coming and going too much;
- open bags and other belongings under count tables.

7.27 The level of training given to count staff also raised concerns. A local council commented that all staff involved in the decision-making process should have a knowledge of the relevant electoral legislation. An experienced observer from Scotland commented that the view amongst him and his colleagues was that some of the counters were not best suited to the tasks they were being asked to undertake. He also questioned the selection processes used for appointing count staff and the training they received.

7.28 One political party said there were major questions regarding the resourcing of counts, the efficiency with which resources were used and the training given to counters.⁸³ *The Belfast Telegraph*, in an editorial on 1 December 2003, said that a better way had to be found to count votes, especially in complex PR elections.

Public announcements

7.29 Most observers noted that the use of a public address system at count venues was for the most part non-existent. When Deputy Returning Officers and count supervisors made announcements they were mainly made to small groups of candidates and agents who happened to be close at hand. Only rarely were advance warnings given of impending announcements. In the four Belfast counts staff had no access to a public address system throughout the two days of the count. As a result candidates and agents strained to hear results and what decisions had been made in respect of the count. This led to much frustration about what was happening. The importance of a good public address system is underlined by the fact that candidates and agents can only query the latest stage in an STV count.

The PA system (a portable unit) was extremely poor and meant that it was difficult to hear announcements. Although candidates and agents were gathered together to hear what the results of each stage were before they were announced over the PA system (presumably to allow

them to query the stage result and ask for a recount) many found it difficult to hear and note down the results. As a result they had to wait until count staff updated the results board before they had the full picture.

Electoral Commission observer

The microphones simply did not work. You could not hear the DRO who was quietly spoken. The microphone in the second count produced feedback. Given that the count took place over 2 days a tradesman could have been called to fix them.

Electoral Commission observer

In a submission to The Electoral Commission one political party stated:

Candidates expressed concern that there was no communication system to call all candidates to the meeting room with officials. As a result, in certain count centres, declarations were not made in the presence of all the relevant candidates.

7.30 At the post-election stakeholder seminar organised by the Commission, the EONI made the point that candidates were only 'deemed' elected until all six seats had been filled – hence the reason no announcements were made until the end of the count. With regard to the availability of public address systems the EONI confirmed that it did its best to source these but because of budgetary constraints was not in a position to supply its own.

⁸³ Submission received from Alliance Party, 4 January 2004.

In order to ensure information on each stage of the count is effectively relayed to those present we recommend that a modern public address system be a prerequisite in the choice of a count venue. Those with a responsibility to inform candidates and agents of progress must ensure that such facilities are employed to their maximum effect.

Transparency and understanding of the count

7.31 Each of the counts was managed overall by a DRO. DROs are employed in a full-time capacity by the EONI and manage area electoral offices. Despite the key role the EONI plays in the count, there was no information at any of the counts to suggest that the overall management of the count was the responsibility of the EONI:

There was no corporate image projected throughout the two-day process. If I had not known that EONI were running the count, I would never have found out. Even when the declarations were eventually made, the DRO stood in front of a City of Derry sign rather than an EONI one.

Electoral Commission observer

7.32 Calculators appeared to have a good understanding of what they were doing although their work was largely conducted away from the view of candidates and agents and could not be described as transparent. Most of the calculations were worked out manually using pencils and electronic calculators although there was a limited use of laptop computers at some

counts. The calculations were not made available for scrutiny and it was unclear if and when the calculations were checked or validated by a third party. It was also noted that calculators, from time to time, got into 'huddles' with the count controller to consult the legislation and supposedly check the next step in the process. None of the decisions emerging from such consultations appeared to be explained to candidates or agents:

It is difficult to follow a system that seems to elect people who have fewer first preference votes than someone who is not elected. The transfer of votes is very difficult for the man in the street to follow and it gives him the idea that the counting system is such that mistakes can be made and the wrong people elected. How is one to check to one's satisfaction that the count, although monitored, has been fair?

Letter from an elector

Key staff did not seem to understand the voting system, relying instead on forms and manuals to tell them what to do. The local candidates were also surprisingly casual; a more heated debate could lead to challenges on procedures and the conduct of the count.

Electoral Commission observer

7.33 Although candidates and agents appeared reasonably content with the counting system their overall knowledge and understanding of it was limited. Those spoken to at the Belfast count said they had full confidence and faith in the system and encountered no difficulties with how the votes were counted or surpluses distributed.

Nobody raised any particular concerns about the transparency of the count or that the paperwork was not available for scrutiny. When questioned about the counting process some of the candidates and agents said they knew something about the counting system but tended to leave the 'finer detail' to the experts.

7.34 Information on the progress of the count was written onto pre-prepared boards covered in white paper. These contained a lot of information and some candidates and agents said they had difficulty reading the information because of the size of the writing and the location of the boards. No information was projected onto screens for viewing purposes and no printouts were generated.

We recommend that the EONI should take steps to ensure that the transparency of the count is enhanced. Decisions made throughout the count process need to be explained to candidates and agents in a clear and concise manner.

Information technology

7.35 The use of information technology to assist in the counting process was minimal. There was a suggestion that future counts should be done electronically and that computers at count centres should be networked so that progress at all the counts could be relayed on overhead screens:

With all the advantages of modern technology it should be possible to speed up the entire process.

Political party

Electronic counting needs to be introduced.

Local district council

The count process is so bureaucratic and mechanistic that it is ideally suited to computerisation.

Scottish Returning Officer

At the post-election stakeholder seminar the EONI representatives confirmed that they would also like to see developments with regard to electronic counting and were keen to see some systems piloted during the 2005 local council elections.

7.36 The Commission is committed to promoting the modernisation of electoral practices across the UK, and to this end has evaluated pilot schemes testing a number of innovative voting methods including all-postal voting and electronic voting. Given the particularly complicated process for counting at STV elections, the Commission feels that it would be beneficial to investigate how different forms of information technology might assist in counting at STV elections in Northern Ireland. Options range from using information technology to calculate results, produce printouts and display results, to the use of innovative electronic counting technology.

We recommend that the EONI explores ways of making greater use of information technology at STV counts. We further recommend that the NIO put in place the necessary statutory provisions to ensure that the EONI is in a position to conduct a number of pilots in respect of electronic counting at the 2005 local council elections.

Ballot papers not included in the count

7.37 In an STV election ballot papers are rejected and classified under the following headings:

- No official mark;
- No first preference indicated;
- First preference given for more than one candidate;
- Voter can be identified;
- Unmarked or void for uncertainty.

7.38 Despite STV being in place for 30 years the total number of ballot papers rejected at the counts was 10,221, representing approximately 1.5% of the total votes polled. This compares to 7,038 at the Westminster election in 2001 when 0.86% were rejected. The 2001 poll was a combined Westminster and local government election with the STV system and first past the post being used together. Altogether, 115,163 fewer people voted at the 2003 Assembly election than voted at the 2001 Westminster election. The significant increase in the number of spoiled votes is of particular concern.

Table 26: Summary of rejected ballot papers – Northern Ireland Assembly elections 2003

Constituency	Total ballot papers	No official mark	No first preference indicated	First preference for more than one candidate	Voter can be identified	Unmarked or void for uncertainty	% of poll rejected
Belfast West	673	0	153	520	0	0	2.0
Belfast East	559	0	0	530	0	29	1.8
Newry & Armagh	855	64	613	99	0	79	1.8
Strangford	588	80	459	3	0	46	1.5
Belfast North	465	0	0	158	0	307	1.5
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	713	55	303	271	0	84	1.5
Foyle	630	6	491	72	0	61	1.5
Upper Bann	663	49	516	52	0	46	1.5
North Down	481	61	360	10	0	50	1.5
South Down	666	0	159	486	0	21	1.4
West Tyrone	599	0	217	311	0	71	1.4
Belfast South	407	0	28	362	0	17	1.3
East Antrim	391	5	0	382	0	4	1.2
East Londonderry	430	18	2	389	0	21	1.2
South Antrim	437	19	1	380	0	37	1.2
North Antrim	533	3	474	27	26	3	1.2
Lagan Valley	470	0	107	323	0	40	1.1
Totals	10,221	423	4,381	4,424	26	967	1.5

Source: EONI

7.39 The constituency recording the largest percentage of rejected ballot papers was Belfast West (2%), followed by Newry & Armagh (1.8%) and Belfast East (1.8%). The constituencies recording the lowest number were Lagan Valley (1.1%) followed by East Antrim, East Londonderry, North Antrim and South Antrim all at 1.2%.

No official mark

7.40 Altogether, 423 ballots were rejected for want of an official mark (no perforation on the ballot paper). This varied by constituency with none rejected in any of the four Belfast constituencies, Lagan Valley, South Down or West Tyrone. The constituency with the highest rejection rate was Strangford (80), followed by Newry & Armagh (64), Mid-Ulster (63) and North Down (61). The number of ballot papers rejected for this reason almost doubled (+80%) from the 2001 Westminster election where the number rejected was 234.

No first preference indicated

7.41 Altogether, 4,387 ballot papers were rejected because no first preference was indicated. This equates to 42% of the total ballots rejected. The number varied significantly, with none recorded for Belfast East, Belfast North or East Antrim while Newry & Armagh (613), Upper Bann (516), Mid-Ulster (498), Foyle (491) and North Antrim (474) recorded the highest number of ballots rejected for this reason.

First preference for more than one candidate

7.42 A slightly higher number, 4,424 (43%), were rejected because the first preference was given to more than one candidate.

Again numbers varied significantly between constituencies with three ballots being rejected for this reason in Strangford and with Belfast East (530), Belfast West (520) and South Down (486) recording the highest number of votes rejected for this reason.

Voter could be identified

7.43 In total 26 ballot papers were rejected for the reason that the voter could be identified from the ballot paper. All were recorded in the constituency of North Antrim. According to the EONI, the reason the papers were rejected was that the electoral number had been written onto the ballot paper by the voter. This is more likely to be explained by a presiding officer or officers being unclear about recording electoral numbers.

Unmarked or void for uncertainty

7.44 Just less than 10% of the rejected ballot papers were unmarked or void for uncertainty. Again numbers varied from constituency to constituency with none being recorded for Belfast West while Belfast North recorded a total of 307, far in excess of any other constituency. After Belfast North, the constituencies of Fermanagh & South Tyrone (84), Newry & Armagh (79) and West Tyrone (71) recorded the largest number of ballot papers rejected for this reason.

7.45 An analysis of the statistics on the number of ballot papers rejected demonstrates that there is no consistency in how rejected ballot papers are recorded and classified. It appears that count controllers adopt different practices in different areas. The EONI has advised us that no guidance on how to categorise rejected ballot papers was issued for the election and

that discretion was left to the count controllers who were considered very experienced in this area. Accurate information on the reasons why ballot papers are rejected is vital to ensuring the transparency of the count and for identifying underlying problems.

We recommend that the EONI develop up-to-date guidelines on the processes to be adopted for rejecting ballot papers. Those who have the responsibility for recording and classifying rejected ballot papers should be trained in their use.

The media and the count

7.46 The print and broadcast media were present at all the count venues on both the 27 and 28 November. Both BBC television and radio and Ulster Television gave widespread coverage to the results and broadcasted special results programmes. Both networks had correspondents present at all the count venues. The election was also extensively covered by RTE television and radio, Sky News and a number of independent radio stations. International media were also represented. Local newspapers gave extensive coverage to the counts held in their areas.

7.47 Prior to the election BBC Northern Ireland and UTV had some informal contact with the EONI about arrangements for the media at the count venues. Despite these contacts journalists and broadcasters reported being generally unhappy with how they had been treated at the counts and felt that the restrictions put in place inhibited them from providing a public service and doing their jobs effectively.

7.48 In its submission to The Electoral Commission the BBC contrasted the less than satisfactory arrangements made for broadcasters in Northern Ireland with the more favourable arrangements in place for Westminster counts in Britain, those to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and to the Dáil in the Republic of Ireland. At these counts broadcasters were routinely given access to restricted areas such as balconies within the counting halls subject only to providing a list of names for accreditation. To demonstrate the point the BBC in Northern Ireland provided the Commission with video tapes showing coverage of the counts for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh National Assembly elections held in May 2003. The level of access afforded to broadcasters was significantly greater than that granted to the media for the Northern Ireland Assembly election. The access given to broadcasters at the time of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement referendum count at the King's Hall in Belfast was put forward as an example of how things should be done.

7.49 In their submission to the Commission the respective Head of News and Current Affairs for BBC Northern Ireland and Ulster Television claimed that the EONI seemed to have a lack of understanding of the role and requirements of broadcasters. BBC Northern Ireland flagged up the following issues:

- Journalists were refused even limited access to the counting halls either to make contact with electoral staff or candidates.

- Cameras were barred from the counting halls except for a short period to obtain shots of the boxes being opened.
- In one count plastic bags were taped over windows to prevent television pictures being taken of the inside of the hall.
- In another count police were posted at a doorway to prevent access to a balcony overlooking a count.⁸⁴

The submission from UTV highlighted several areas of concern. It felt that:

The Electoral Office ... considers the media to be something of an irritant that has to be accommodated.

It went on to contrast arrangements in Northern Ireland with those in the Republic of Ireland and questioned the continued need for restrictions on media access:

In the Republic, the relationship between broadcaster and the Department of Environment officials was such that you felt that that you were a welcome and essential part of the electoral process, that your contribution was valued ... Throughout the Troubles, [UTV] would have had some sympathy for the Electoral Office's attitude to the media given the considerable security implications of allowing television cameras into the count areas ... I can see no good reason why we continue to be excluded while in every other election in these islands, cameras are permitted to film in counting areas.⁸⁵

84 Letter received from BBC Northern Ireland, 19 December 2003.

85 Submission received from Ulster Television, 17 February 2004.

7.50 Lack of information in respect of the dissemination of results was another area highlighted by the BBC:

- There was no easy access to election staff to check such matters as apparent discrepancies in figures or rumours of a recount.
- There were frequently long delays between stage results being announced to candidates and the figures being written-up outside the count centre.
- In one count, staff stood in the doorway of a counting hall with the apparent intention of preventing journalists hearing the result of a stage as it was read out to candidates. In another centre, doors were closed for the same reason.
- Journalists in one centre were restricted to press rooms or a corridor some distance from the counting hall, making communication still more difficult.
- In one constituency when the count had finished the electoral officer would not post the details on the board because the staff were dealing with a problem in the adjacent count.
- In one constituency a results board was not provided until Thursday afternoon.

7.51 Similar concerns were raised by a UTV journalist who covered the North Down and Strangford counts. The MP for North Down, when expressing her disquiet at the time taken to complete the count, also highlighted the difficulties encountered by the press and broadcast media and said that these were

unacceptable. Concerns were also raised by representatives of the main political parties who felt that the exclusion of the media from the count areas was not in the interests of democracy or public accountability.

7.52 One observer described the arrangements for the media thus:

The media centre was located in the foyer of a sports complex. The media simply decamped into the foyer and that was it – everyone clambered over them every time they wanted to go anywhere. There were lots of rooms available which could have been made into a media centre. No thought was put into this. Amazingly, the journalists seemed to accept this.

Electoral Commission observer

Another observer reported that a makeshift studio was set up in the canteen of a count centre which restricted access to anyone not part of the media entourage.

7.53 The Chief Electoral Officer felt that much of the media's annoyance stemmed from the fact that there was a lot of airtime to fill and consequently the media became frustrated when nothing appeared to be happening. At the post-election stakeholder conference a representative from the EONI said that while the office did its best to facilitate the media its function was primarily to run the election and all other matters were secondary. However, a commitment was given that the EONI would put media liaison officers in place for future elections. Their remit would be to work with

broadcasters and journalists to ensure that their reasonable requirements were met.

7.54 The arrangements currently in place for the print and broadcast media to cover counts in Northern Ireland are far from satisfactory. Democracy is best served if candidates and voters have complete confidence in the electoral process and when there is transparency in the counting of votes. Broadcasters have a vital role in ensuring these fundamental objectives are seen to be met. The EONI's acceptance of a suggestion from broadcasters that they put media liaison officers in place is welcomed. However, there is a need for the EONI and the broadcasters to agree the 'ground rules' well in advance of future elections. The development of a code of practice between the EONI and the print and broadcast media would be a useful initiative.

We recommend to the EONI that it convene a working group involving broadcasters, the Commission and other interested stakeholders with a view to developing and putting in place a code of good practice on media access for use at future elections in Northern Ireland.

Policing the count

7.55 The PSNI provided a static police presence at all the count centres with the exception of Dromore. The Dromore count was policed by a dedicated mobile response crew. The PSNI advised that there were no incidents at any of the count centres except Dromore where a group of loyalists confronted a Sinn Féin candidate. A Commission observer saw a number of young men dressed in football shirts, identified with one section of the

community, enter the count centre. None appeared to have been given permission to enter and nobody challenged their presence. The observer had noted that there was no security on the door of the count from around 8.00pm onwards. The following day a related incident was also witnessed at the Dromore count centre. This was reported in the media and involved a group of about 10 supporters of the Sinn Féin candidate. The group allegedly arrived to escort the candidate and his colleagues from the count centre. Upon leaving, the PSNI intercepted a car driven by one of the candidate's supporters and a 20 minute confrontation ensued before the car was allowed to leave the scene. The PSNI later apologised for intercepting the car in the mistaken belief that it had been stolen.

7.56 After the election the Sinn Féin candidate in question wrote to both the EONI and the Commission asking for the incidents to be recorded and investigated and for future counts to be held in what was described as a 'neutral and safe location'. In response to the candidate's complaint, the Chief Electoral Officer said that at no time did any unauthorised persons gain access to the Dromore count. He also advised the candidate that responsibility for maintenance of security and order outside the count centre was a matter for the police. A copy of the candidate's letter of complaint was passed to the Chief Constable of the PSNI by the Chief Electoral Officer for investigation.

7.57 The Commission's observer at the East Antrim count in Newtownabbey leisure centre received complaints from Sinn Féin candidates

and agents that they had been intimidated and attacked on arrival at the count centre, which they claimed was not located in a neutral environment. The observer also recorded that a group of about 20 people gathered outside the entrance to the count centre on the first morning of the count and obstructed access. Apparently the group was there to picket politicians about an industrial dispute at the Bombardier aircraft factory in Belfast.

7.58 The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland advised the Commission that no complaints had been received from the public relating to the policing of the November election.

Table 27: Results of the Northern Ireland Assembly Election 2003

	1st preference votes	% share of first preference votes	Number of candidates	Number of seats won	% share of seats
Alliance Party	25,372	3.7	21	6	5.6
Conservative Party	1,604	0.2	6	-	0
Democratic Unionist Party	177,944	25.7	40	30	27.8
Green Party	2,688	0.4	6	-	0
Independents	19,328	2.8	22	1	0.9
NI Unionist Party	1,350	0.2	2	-	0
Women's Coalition	5,785	0.8	7	-	0
Progressive Unionist Party	8,032	1.2	11	1	0.9
SDLP	117,547	17.0	36	18	16.7
Socialist Environmental Alliance	2,394	0.3	2	-	0
Sinn Féin	162,758	23.5	38	24	22.2
Socialist Party	343	0.0	2	-	0
UK Unionist Party	5,700	0.8	6	1	0.9
Ulster Third Way	16	0.0	1	-	0
United Unionist Coalition	2,705	0.4	2	-	0
Ulster Unionist Party	156,931	22.7	43	27	25.0
Vote For Yourself	124	0.0	3	-	0
Workers Party	1,407	0.2	8	-	0
Total	692,028		256	108	

Results

7.59 Just under 700,000 valid first preference votes were cast at the Northern Ireland Assembly election. The DUP won the largest number of seats, with just over a quarter of the valid first preference votes. Sinn Féin was the second largest party in terms of vote share, although the UUP won three more seats, with the SDLP winning 18 seats. Other than the Alliance Party for Northern Ireland, which retained its six seats, only two smaller parties won one seat each. An independent candidate,

Dr. Kieran Deeney, was elected in West Tyrone on a single issue ticket of health provision in the west of Northern Ireland.⁸⁶

Post-election issues

Return of deposits

7.60 Candidates who had achieved one quarter of the quota in the count were entitled to have their £150 deposit returned. Altogether, 83 candidates (32%) forfeited their deposits at a cost of £12,450. A number of political parties, including the Green Party, Conservative Party and the Workers' Party, lost all their deposits whereas the main parties lost relatively few. The Alliance Party forfeited 13 deposits out of 21. Of the 22 independent candidates all but six forfeited their deposits.

Table 28: Seats won by party at the Northern Ireland Assembly Election, 1998–2003

	Seats won (2003)	Seats won (1998)	Change seats
Alliance Party	6	6	-
Democratic Unionist Party	30	20	+10
Independents	1	-	+1
NI Women's Coalition	-	2	-2
PUP	1	2	-1
SDLP	18	24	-6
Sinn Féin	24	18	+6
UK Unionist Party	1	5	-4
Ulster Unionist Party	27	28	-1
Others	-	3	-3
Total	108	108	-

⁸⁶ See Appendix 1 for full details on the election results.

Table 29: Return of deposits and forfeiture of deposits, November 2003 Assembly election

Party (if any)	No. of candidates	No. of deposits returned	Total amount returned (£)	No. of deposits forfeited	Total amount forfeited (£)
Independent	22	6	900	16	2,400
Alliance	21	8	1,200	13	1,950
PUP	11	2	300	9	1,350
Workers' Party	8	0	0	8	1,200
Conservative Party	6	0	0	6	900
Green Party	6	0	0	6	900
Women's Coalition	7	2	300	5	750
UKUP	6	2	300	4	600
Sinn Féin	38	34	5,100	4	600
Vote For Yourself	3	0	0	3	450
Socialist	2	0	0	2	300
UUP	43	42	6,300	1	150
SDLP	36	35	5,250	1	150
DUP	40	39	5,850	1	150
Ulster Third Way	1	0	0	1	150
SEA	2	1	150	1	150
UUC	2	2	300	0	0
Total	256	173	25,950	83	12,450
Source: EONI					

Removal of election posters

7.61 All campaign material must be removed within 14 days of an election. A number of enquiries and complaints were made to us about the apparent unwillingness of political parties to remove their campaign posters. Complainants were advised in the first instance to contact the political party or independent candidate directly and if the matter was not satisfactorily resolved to contact the Department of Regional Development who had the legal responsibility to take enforcement action under The Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992. Most election posters were removed by January 2004.

Conclusion

7.62 Two full days had been set aside for the counting of votes at the November election and in the majority of cases two days were required to complete the counts. Although the validity of the election results were not challenged by any political party or individual candidates, there was general consensus that the count took longer than necessary. Shortcomings were identified in the overall management and utilisation of staff at some counts and the transparency of the proceedings was questioned. Many stakeholders, including the EONI, are of the view that greater use could be made of information technology in the counting of votes. In this regard the piloting of e-counting should be taken forward as a means of modernising the count.



8 Looking forward

In the last 20 years there have been 16 Northern Ireland-wide elections and one referendum. In this final chapter we explore some of the key issues for the future of elections in Northern Ireland, focusing on funding, registration and public participation.

8.1 Despite the difficulties encountered in the lead-up to the election, the EONI expressed satisfaction that things had generally gone well on the day. The Chief Electoral Officer emphasised, however, that no future election should ever have to be run in the way the November 2003 election was. He said that the EONI needed much greater certainty about election dates, more resources for running elections and more realistic expectations on the part of the NIO. He highlighted the disparate and contradictory strands of electoral legislation and said that the legislation needed to be streamlined and consolidated as a matter of priority.

8.2 The Commission concludes that despite these problems the EONI administered the election in a manner that was broadly satisfactory. Nevertheless, a number of important issues arise from our assessment that have wide-ranging implications for the future of elections in Northern Ireland. These are outlined below.

Funding electoral services in Northern Ireland

8.3 The EONI budget for 2003–04 included a projected spend of £3m in respect of the Northern Ireland Assembly election. We understand from the EONI that the total actual expenditure fell just short of £3m. This equates to just under £3 per registered elector and just over £4 per voter. Given that the EONI is the sole provider of electoral services, it is impossible to make direct cost comparisons with other providers in Northern Ireland. However, it would be useful to benchmark electoral services with providers elsewhere in

the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The EONI has consistently highlighted to us that they are under-funded both for running their area offices and their headquarters on a day-to-day basis and for administering elections.

In order to benchmark performance and identify funding issues we recommend that an audit of the efficiency, economy and effectiveness of the EONI be conducted by the National Audit Office.

8.4 The present arrangements for funding electoral services in the UK have developed on an ad hoc and piecemeal manner without any clear underpinning rationale or principles. In this regard Northern Ireland has been no different with electoral services being perceived by some as less of a priority than other public services. The current system of funding has generally been built around an administrative approach to expenditure and there has been no strategic view of the investment needed for the future delivery of electoral services in Northern Ireland.

8.5 The Commission's 2003 report *Funding electoral services*⁸⁷ made a number of recommendations about the funding of the EONI which remain valid. The EONI is funded by the NIO for all expenditure, except that relating directly to elections, the costs of which are met by HM Treasury from the Consolidated Fund. Our report pointed out that for historic reasons the baseline budget had been set at a level that meant considerable time and effort was spent each year in putting forward the case for funds simply to meet the minimum requirements.

8.6 Respondents to the consultation paper,⁸⁸ which preceded the publication of our final report on funding electoral services, did not challenge our assertion that in Northern Ireland there had been 'a lack of infrastructure investment, little or no training for staff, poor control of money and a run down in the level of service to voters'. Our report concluded that the EONI faced a funding problem – namely, that its baseline did not meet core costs while there were only limited funds available to address the under investments of the past.

8.7 The report noted that the financial pressures on the EONI might increase, rather than diminish, as a result of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. According to the EONI, this is exactly what has happened. Although the Commission acknowledged in its report that there were good working relationships between the EONI and the NIO, it concluded that there was a need to establish a more stable longer-term financial arrangement which would allow the EONI to be independent from Central Government and allow it to plan in a more measured way.

8.8 The issue of whether the EONI should continue to be funded by a Government department was also considered in our report. An alternative would be for the EONI to be funded from the Consolidated Fund via Parliament, in the same way as The Electoral Commission. At present the EONI, although constitutionally independent of the government of the day, is financially dependent on the NIO.

⁸⁷ *Funding Electoral Services: report and recommendations*, The Electoral Commission, June 2003.

⁸⁸ *Funding democracy: providing cost-effective electoral services*, Consultation paper, September 2002.

In light of the EONI experience of administering the November Assembly election, we strongly urge the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to take forward the recommendations outlined in our 2003 report *Funding Electoral Services*.

Electoral registration

8.9 In the course of compiling our election report a number of political parties and other stakeholders raised the issue of electoral registration and how it had impacted on the election. Reference has already been made to difficulties encountered by the EONI in holding the election in the middle of an annual canvass and the confusion caused in the minds of some voters as to whether they were registered or not.

8.10 Following the introduction of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 we undertook to review the impact of the legislation in Northern Ireland. In December 2003 we published a detailed analysis of the impact of the Act during its first year of operation.⁸⁹ We concluded that the register published under individual registration was both accurate and robust and contained the names of those entitled to be registered. However, we acknowledged that individual registration tended to have an adverse impact on disadvantaged, marginalised and hard to reach groups.

8.11 We intend publishing two further updates examining the impact of the Act on electoral registration. An analysis of the February 2004 register and the register to be published in

December 2004 will be conducted. This should provide us with a comprehensive overview of the impact of the legislation on three full electoral registers. This research will better inform us of what changes, if any, should be recommended to the process of individual registration, including the frequency of registration cycles.

8.12 In the course of discussions with the main political parties on the administration of the November election all parties commented to varying degrees on the new registration process and how well they perceived it had worked. There was general agreement that individual registration was acceptable provided greater efforts were made to ensure that disadvantaged and marginalised groups were effectively targeted. A particular issue of concern was the fact that under the new system people are required to register every year, even though for the vast majority of people their personal circumstances have not changed. The EONI is also concerned that annual registration as currently applied is unsustainable in the longer-term and that it needs to better target its resources.

Participation

8.13 The numbers of people voting at the 2003 Assembly election was significantly down from the 2001 combined election and the 1998 Assembly election. This was not reflected in the published turnout figure as it was skewed by a much lower registration rate resulting from the new system of individual registration. When examined in the context of the voting age population, turnout at the election was 56% and in one constituency was just over 40%. This is a

⁸⁹ *The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002: an assessment of its first year in operation*, The Electoral Commission, December 2003.

particular cause for concern given that turnout in Northern Ireland was always considered healthy.

8.14 Given the decline in turnout, we will endeavour through our voter education and public awareness strategies to develop new and innovative ways of engaging with the electorate. However, this cannot be the responsibility of the Commission alone and other stakeholders including the political parties and the media have an important role to play in redressing this decline.

8.15 Public opinion research commissioned for this report and our report on the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 suggests that the new electoral fraud legislation has instilled a greater confidence in the integrity of the democratic process in Northern Ireland. Given this positive development we will further promote the modernisation agenda in Northern Ireland with a view to making voting easier and more convenient for a 21st century electorate.

Conclusion

8.16 The Commission will take forward the recommendations in this report, pressing those to whom recommendations are directed to act swiftly and decisively. We believe that our recommendations, taken together, provide the bedrock for the future integrity and effectiveness of elections in Northern Ireland.

Appendix 1

Commentary on the election results

Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher
Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre
University of Plymouth⁹⁰

Distribution of votes and seats across Northern Ireland

Slightly fewer than 0.7 million valid first preference votes were cast in the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) election of 2003 (Table A1; but see also Tables A7, A3 and A4). This is approximately 120,000 fewer votes than were recorded at the first NIA election in 1998. The most popular choice was the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), whose candidates received more than one in four first preference votes. The second largest party in vote share was Sinn Féin (SF) with 23.5% of the vote. It finished 15,000 votes behind the DUP. Overall, fewer than 6,000 votes separated SF and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), which received 22.7% of first preferences. The fourth largest party was the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), which polled 17% of first preference votes. The four main parties (DUP, UUP, SDLP and SF) were separated by a mere 60,000 votes, with less than a nine percentage point gap separating the DUP and the SDLP. Combined, these four parties captured 88.9% of the vote, compared with the 79% share that they obtained in 1998. The difference between the two main unionist parties, at just over 21,000 votes, was half that separating SF and the SDLP. Votes for all unionist parties combined comprise 50.9% of the total (49.9% in 1998) while the combined share for SF and the SDLP is 40.5% (39.6% in 1998).

The largest number of Assembly seats was won by the DUP, whose 30 seats comprise 27.8% of the total. The second largest party in the new Assembly is the UUP, which won three fewer seats than the DUP. Although SF received a larger percentage of first preferences than did the UUP, the party won three fewer seats, and six fewer than the DUP. The fourth largest party, in terms of both votes and seats is the SDLP, which now has 18 Assembly members.

The most successful party, measured by the ratio of successful to unsuccessful candidates, was the DUP. Three-quarters (0.75) of its candidates were elected compared to 0.6 for both the UUP and SF and 0.5 for the SDLP. The four main parties returned 99 of the Assembly's 108 members, 91.7% of the membership. Among the smaller parties, the Alliance party performed best. It won six seats, slightly less than one in three fought by the party.

Proportionality and the electoral outcome

The electoral system, the Single Transferable Vote (STV), helped to ensure that there was a strong correlation between vote and seat shares. The largest party in vote share, the DUP, also won the largest share of seats. This had not happened in 1998. Then, the SDLP won the most first preference votes with the UUP in second place, but these positions were reversed when seats were allocated. The combined vote share of the minor parties, which did not win a seat and excluding independents, was just 2.7%.

One useful method for assessing the operation of the electoral system is to measure the ratio

⁹⁰ This is an extract from a longer commentary on the election results produced by Professors Rallings and Thrasher. The full report and tables are available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

between votes and seats for each party. When that ratio equals one, a party's seat and vote shares are identical; when the ratio is above one then the party is relatively advantaged by the system, and when it falls below that figure it is disadvantaged. The seats to votes ratios for the four main parties were very close in 2003. Both the DUP and the UUP had ratios of 1:1, but each of these parties benefited from transfers from among other unionist candidates. Although both SF and the SDLP had seats to votes ratios below one (0.94 and 0.98 respectively) the difference from equality was negligible. The Alliance Party was the biggest beneficiary of the electoral system. Although it won 3.7% of first preference votes the party won six seats, 5.6% of the total. This is a seats to votes ratio of 1:5.

A second useful measure for assessing the impact of the electoral system upon the Assembly's composition is to use an index of proportionality. The most commonly used measure of proportionality is referred to as the Loosemore-Hanby index. The index is calculated as follows: for any election the absolute values of the differences between vote and seat shares for each competing party are summed, with that total then divided by two. Thus, if every party's seat share is an exact reflection of its vote share then the value of the index would be zero; the outcome would be proportional. As a general rule of thumb an election result that has a Loosemore-Hanby index of above 10 is regarded as having an outcome that is disproportional. In the case of the 2003 Assembly result the calculated index is 6.4. This compares with an index score of 6.1

for the 1998 election outcome. For comparative purposes, the Loosemore-Hanby index scores for the last two UK general elections were 21.1 and 21.9 respectively.

Comparison of vote and seat shares, 1998–2003

A comparison of vote shares with 1998 shows that the two parties that advanced most were the DUP and SF. The vote of the former rose by 7.6 percentage points whilst there was a 5.9 point rise for SF. Although the overall result for the UUP was considered by some to be disappointing the party's vote share rose, albeit by a modest 1.4 percentage points. The biggest loss of vote share was that for the SDLP. Its vote, measured as a share of first preferences, declined by five percentage points. There was a drop in support also for the UKUP, from 4.5% in 1998 to just 0.8% in 2003, although the party fielded half the number of candidates than it had done in 1998. Another party in decline was Alliance whose vote fell by 2.8 percentage points. That said, Alliance did succeed in retaining all of its seats – an achievement given the size of its vote. Undoubtedly, this outcome followed the receipt of transfer votes from those whose first preference was for another party.

The DUP increased its share of seats by half (from 20 to 30) while SF's share increased by a third (from 18 to 24). The biggest loser amongst the major parties, in absolute terms, was the SDLP, which lost a quarter of its Assembly strength (from 24 to 18). Despite the modest rise in support for the UUP it was unable to prevent the loss of one of its seats (from 28 to 27).

The fewer number of candidates and decline in support for the UKUP contributed to the loss of four of its five seats. The two seats won in 1998 by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition were both lost as was one of the two seats won by the Progressive Unionist Party.

Women candidates

Of the 108 Assembly members elected in 2003, 18 (16.6%) were women (Table A14). This proportion compares with the UK Parliament (17.9% women elected in 2001), the Scottish Parliament (39.5%) and Welsh Assembly (50%). In five of the 18 constituencies, no women were elected. In addition to West Tyrone, where none had stood, the others were East Antrim, East Londonderry, North Antrim, and South Antrim. Five constituencies (Belfast West, Fermanagh & South Tyrone, Foyle, Lagan Valley and South Down) each returned two women to the Assembly, the maximum number at this election.

Overall, the two main parties of the nationalist community, SF and the SDLP returned seven and five women respectively, three-quarters of all women Assembly members. In percentage terms, women comprise 29% and 28% respectively of the parties' legislative membership. Both the DUP and the UUP had two of their women candidates elected (6.7% and 7.4% of their total Assembly membership), as did the Alliance Party (33.3%).

Incumbents seeking re-election

Of the 108 Assembly members elected in 1998, no fewer than 87 (80.6%) fought the 2003 election. Two members switched to fight other

constituencies. Sammy Wilson, elected to Belfast East in 1998, fought East Antrim in 2003. This brought the number of incumbents challenging in the Antrim constituency to six. Similarly, Alex Maskey switched from Belfast West to Belfast South but this move meant that in South there were now seven incumbents competing for the six available seats. The only other constituency where six incumbents sought re-election was Belfast North. The constituency which potentially offered the best opportunity for a non-incumbent to win was Belfast East where only three incumbents sought re-election.

In fact, all three incumbents in Belfast East were safely returned. A similar level of success was only achieved in one other constituency, Foyle, where all four members that stood again were re-elected. It was inevitable, of course, that one incumbent should be defeated in Belfast South, but a single incumbent defeat occurred in a further nine constituencies. The largest number of losses for incumbents occurred in Upper Bann where only David Trimble, among the four sitting Assembly members, was re-elected. Overall, 64 members won a second term of office but 23 (26.4%) were defeated leaving 44 new members of the Assembly.

Candidates and the electoral system

One in four candidates (27) exceeded the electoral quota with first preference votes and was elected at the first count stage. By the end of the sixth counting stage some 59 candidates were elected, more than half the total. The perception of STV, certainly among parts of the UK media, is that the counting process may

sometimes appear arcane and time-consuming. It is certainly true that counting an STV election takes longer than one employing a simpler counting method, such as first past the post (Westminster elections) or PR-List (European Parliament elections). The 18-stage count undertaken in Strangford in 1998 was not surpassed in 2003. However, in North Down no winner at all was declared until the twelfth stage, then one more by the thirteenth stage, and the final four elected at the fourteenth stage. In East Antrim, although two seats were declared at the first stage, it was not until the fifteenth stage that the final four seats were determined.

The DUP and the UUP had 10 and nine of their candidates returned after the first count. Six SF candidates passed the electoral quota with first preference votes alone but only one from the SDLP was similarly successful. The sole victory for an Independent, Kieran Deeny in West Tyrone, was secured at the first stage. Only one woman, Iris Robinson (DUP, Strangford), was elected solely by first preferences. Twenty-three of the 26 Assembly members elected by first preference votes alone were incumbents seeking a second term.

The UUP won the largest number of first places, eight from 18 constituencies. This was one more than achieved by the DUP, while SF and the SDLP each had one first place. Deeny, in West Tyrone, was the one remaining first-placed candidate. The DUP won eight second and six third places. The UUP won two second, but seven third places. While SF secured the second seat four times and the third seat a total of five times, the SDLP won three second places. A third of the SDLP's

18 seats were the sixth and final ones to be allocated, although five of SF's 24 seats were also the last to be decided. By contrast, just three of the DUP's and two of the UUP's seats were the final ones settled. One Alliance candidate was the second to be elected but the remaining five were elected later once transfers became effective.

Party competition

The operation of STV means that a party may not benefit from fielding a large number of candidates, indeed in some circumstances that might prove counter-productive. There were few constituencies where one of the main parties stood more than three candidates. In Lagan Valley, the UUP had four candidates and the SDLP fielded the same number in two constituencies, Foyle and South Down. In Mid-Ulster, SF fielded four candidates but in Belfast West, the party leader's constituency, there were five candidates representing the party.

In Belfast West, SF won four of the six Assembly seats available in that constituency, while in both Mid-Ulster and Newry & Armagh the party captured three seats. Seven of SF's seats were drawn from three of Belfast's four constituencies. The SDLP's most successful constituency was Foyle where half the seats were won, and in each of Belfast South and South Down two SDLP candidates won through. Although the DUP could not match SF in Belfast West it did win three seats in East Antrim, North Antrim and Strangford. Across Belfast it won one seat more than did SF. Alone among the parties, the DUP was able to win at least one seat in all 18 constituencies (the values for the UUP, the SDLP and SF were 16, 14 and 12 constituencies

respectively). The UUP won half the seats in one constituency, Lagan Valley, but that feat was rather overshadowed by the subsequent defection of two of the three elected (Jeffrey Donaldson and Norah Beare) to the DUP. Across the Belfast constituencies, the UUP won five out of 24 seats.

At least one seat changed hands in 14 of the 18 constituencies. In both East Antrim and North Down, the DUP captured two new seats and there were single seat gains in a further six constituencies, including Belfast West and North as well as Upper Bann. Although the UUP gained a seat in Lagan Valley, seats were lost in North Antrim and North Down. Two of the six gains made by SF were in Belfast (one each in North and South). Two more gains were made on the north coast (North Antrim and East Londonderry) while the remaining two were in constituencies that border the Irish Republic, Newry & Armagh and South Down. There was some, though not complete, overlap between SF gains and SDLP losses. The SDLP now holds only one of six Assembly seats in Newry & Armagh, a constituency it holds at the Westminster Parliament. In West Tyrone, the SDLP was the victim of Deeny's success, while in East Antrim and West Belfast the seats lost by the SDLP were won by the DUP. Among the minor parties, the UKUP was the biggest loser, declining from five seats to just one seat, while the PUP's representation was cut from two to one seat. Assembly seats that had been won by the NIWC, NIUP and UUC in 1998 all changed hands.

Party quotas and the allocation of seats

One measure of the efficiency of a party's performance is the extent to which first preference vote support is finally translated into seats. When the size of the electoral quota for each constituency is known (the number of votes a candidate requires in order to be guaranteed of winning a seat) then it becomes simple to calculate the number of quotas won after first preference votes are summed for each party. Thus, if say the electoral quota is 5,000 and party A's three candidates together win 10,000 first preference votes, the party has achieved two quotas. This is not the same as saying that two of those three candidates will necessarily win seats, but rather that they might, once votes are transferred.

Most of the main parties can highlight some constituencies as 'near misses' and others as evidence of 'astute campaigning'. In Belfast East, for example, the DUP won the equivalent of 2.7 quotas but finished with two seats. In neighbouring Belfast South it achieved 1.5 quotas but won a single seat. By contrast, it won three seats in East Antrim, despite polling the equivalent of 2.4 quotas. The UUP performed well in East Londonderry, winning two seats whilst polling 1.6 quotas. But in Antrim North it was unable to capitalise further on 1.5 quotas and won a single seat. Belfast West might have provided SF with five seats (4.6 quotas) but that was thwarted by the DUP, which won one seat despite achieving just half a quota of first preferences. Similarly, in both Upper Bann and West Tyrone, SF fell short,

polling 1.5 quotas and one seat in the former constituency, and 2.7 quotas and two seats in the latter. The SDLP converted 1.6 quotas into two seats in Belfast South but in South Down failed to improve on 2.5 quotas and finished with two seats. However, in Foyle and Lagan Valley, fractional quotas for The SDLP were converted upwards in the allocation of seats.

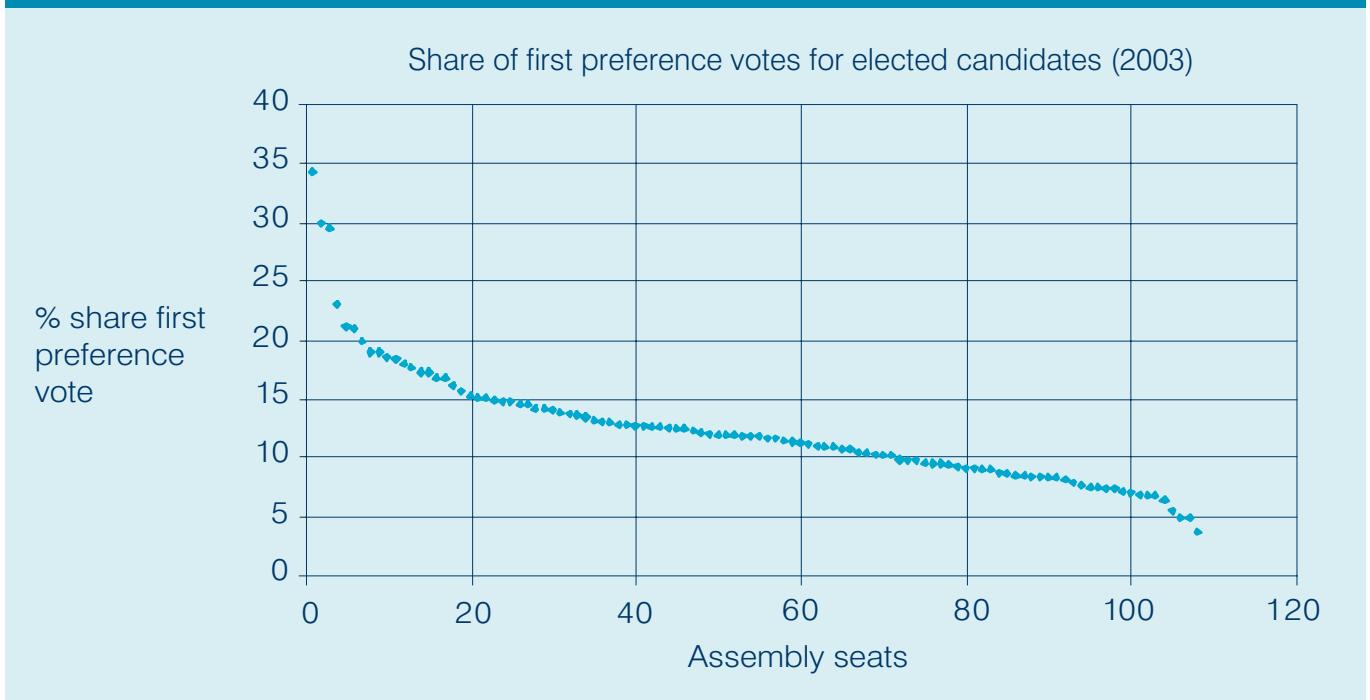
The personal vote

What of the personal vote for newly elected Assembly members? Although first preferences under STV are not as clear a guide to a candidate's popularity as are votes in, say, a first past the post election, they do provide a measure of how support divided. We should not expect, however, that any candidate will win a substantial share of first preferences; there are many more candidates than one would expect to find in a conventional Westminster-style election; it may not be in a party's interest to have all of its supporters voting for a single candidate. Nevertheless, there are some interesting aspects of the distribution of first votes for elected candidates (Figure A1). Just six of the 108 new Assembly members were supported by 20% or more of constituency voters. The clear leader in popular vote was Jeffrey Donaldson, with 34.2% of first preferences in Lagan Valley. He was more than four percentage points ahead of the next individuals on the list, Peter Robinson (Belfast East) and Nigel Dodds (Belfast North). Iris Robinson, DUP Strangford, was not only the sole woman elected at the first stage but also the only woman to receive more than one in five first preference votes. Reg Empey, too, won more than one in five first votes (20.9%) and together

he and Peter Robinson received more than half of first preferences cast by Belfast East's voters. The most popular politician amongst nationalist supporters was Gerry Adams in Belfast West who won 18.9% of first votes.

There were 37 candidates elected who received less than 10% of first preference votes cast in their constituencies. The two most numerous parties in this category were the UUP (12 elected with less than 10%) and the SDLP (11 elected). By comparison, five DUP and three SF members were returned having won less than one in 10 first preferences. All but one of the six successful Alliance Party candidates was similarly supported. The lowest share of first preferences for a successful candidate, 3.7%, went to Donaldson's running mate, Norah Beare, UUP, who benefited from the transfer of intra-party surplus votes. More than half the women returned to the Assembly (10/18) received fewer than 10% of first votes in their constituencies.

Figure A1: Share of first preferences for elected candidates



The results: by party

Table A1: Results of the Northern Ireland Assembly Election 2003, by party					
Party	Numbers of 1st pref votes	Percentage share 1st pref votes	Number of candidates	Number of seats won	Percentage seats won
APNI	25,372	3.7	21	6	5.6
Con	1,604	0.2	6	-	0
DUP	177,944	25.7	40	30	27.8
Green	2,688	0.4	6	-	0
Ind	19,328	2.8	22	1	0.9
NIUP	1,350	0.2	2	-	0
NIWC	5,785	0.8	7	-	0
PUP	8,032	1.2	11	1	0.9
SDLP	117,547	17.0	36	18	16.7
SEA	2,394	0.3	2	-	0
SF	162,758	23.5	38	24	22.2
SP	343	0	2	-	0
UKUP	5,700	0.8	6	1	0.9
UTW	16	0	1	-	0
UUC	2,705	0.4	2	-	0
UUP	156,931	22.7	43	27	25.0
VFY	124	0	3	-	0
WP	1,407	0.2	8	-	0
Total	692,028		256	108	

Table A2: Seats won by party at the Northern Ireland Assembly Election, 1998–2003

Party	Seats won 2003	Seats won 1998	1998–2003
APNI	6	6	-
DUP	30	20	+10
Ind	1	-	+1
NIWC	-	2	-2
PUP	1	2	-1
SDLP	18	24	-6
SF	24	18	+6
UKUP	1	5	-4
UUP	27	28	-1
Others	-	3	-3

Table A3: First preference votes by party 2003

Constituency	Quota	APNI	Con	DUP	Green	Ind	NIUP	NIWC	PUP	
Belfast East	4,424	2,774	232	12,132	-	72	-	-	2,990	
Belfast North	4,505	305	-	10,776	261	687	-	467	1,358	
Belfast South	4,476	1,849	116	6,529	308	-	-	2,150	495	
Belfast West	4,694	75	-	2,544	-	211	-	-	813	
East Antrim	4,422	3,372	196	10,563	165	3,172	-	307	534	
East Londonderry	4,897	762	-	11,091	-	-	-	-	-	
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	6,595	243	-	8,630	-	-	-	650	-	
Foyle	5,830	227	-	6,101	-	939	-	-	-	
Lagan Valley	5,894	4,408	395	8,475	-	2,223	-	-	212	
Mid-Ulster	6,338	166	-	9,240	-	-	-	-	-	
Newry & Armagh	6,769	311	-	8,599	-	632	-	-	-	
North Antrim	6,300	867	-	20,235	-	623	-	-	230	
North Down	4,406	2,655	491	7,245	730	2,964	-	1,181	316	
South Antrim	5,346	3,393	174	11,452	-	-	774	465	311	
South Down	6,479	489	-	6,789	799	162	-	565	-	
Strangford	5,322	2,741	-	17,857	425	319	576	-	540	
Upper Bann	6,212	571	-	12,400	-	1,166	-	-	-	
West Tyrone	5,962	164	-	7,286	-	6,158	-	-	233	
Total		25,372	1,604	177,944	2,688	19,328	1,350	5,785	8,032	

	SDLP	SEA	SF	SP	UKUP	UTW	UUC	UUP	VFY	WP	Total
	967	-	1,180	176	-	-	-	10,252	65	125	30,965
	5,294	-	8,514	-	-	-	802	2,961	17	90	31,532
	7,176	-	3,933	167	-	-	-	8,469	42	96	31,330
	6,250	-	21,368	-	-	16	-	1,170	-	407	32,854
	2,428	-	768	-	564	-	-	8,883	-	-	30,952
	5,584	137	6,121	-	906	-	1,903	7,769	-	-	34,273
	7,507	-	15,901	-	-	-	-	13,229	-	-	46,160
	14,746	2,257	13,214	-	-	-	-	3,322	-	-	40,806
	3,133	-	3,242	-	-	-	-	19,069	-	97	41,254
	8,138	-	20,194	-	-	-	-	6,394	-	230	44,362
	11,637	-	18,852	-	-	-	-	7,347	-	-	47,378
	6,009	-	6,195	-	402	-	-	9,538	-	-	44,099
	1,519	-	264	-	3,583	-	-	9,887	-	-	30,835
	5,403	-	4,295	-	-	-	-	11,154	-	-	37,421
	15,922	-	12,007	-	245	-	-	8,253	-	115	45,346
	2,906	-	1,105	-	-	-	-	10,781	-	-	37,250
	6,818	-	9,494	-	-	-	-	12,786	-	247	43,482
	6,110	-	16,111	-	-	-	-	5,667	-	-	41,729
	117,547	2,394	162,758	343	5,700	16	2,705	156,931	124	1,407	692,028

Table A4: Percentage share of first preference votes by party 2003

Constituency	APNI	Con	DUP	Green	Ind	NIUP	NIWC	PUP	
Belfast East	9	0.7	39.2	-	0.2	-	-	9.7	
Belfast North	1	-	34.2	0.8	2.2	-	1.5	4.3	
Belfast South	5.9	0.4	20.8	1	-	-	6.9	1.6	
Belfast West	0.2	-	7.7	-	0.6	-	-	2.5	
East Antrim	10.9	0.6	34.1	0.5	10.2	-	1.0	1.7	
East Londonderry	2.2	-	32.4	-	-	-	-	-	
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	0.5	-	18.7	-	-	-	1.4	-	
Foyle	0.6	-	15	-	2.3	-	-	-	
Lagan Valley	10.7	1	20.5	-	5.4	-	-	0.5	
Mid-Ulster	0.4	-	20.8	-	-	-	-	-	
Newry & Armagh	0.7	-	18.1	-	1.3	-	-	-	
North Antrim	2	-	45.9	-	1.4	-	-	0.5	
North Down	8.6	1.6	23.5	2.4	9.6	-	3.8	1.0	
South Antrim	9.1	0.5	30.6	-	-	2.1	1.2	0.8	
South Down	1.1	-	15.0	1.8	0.4	-	1.2	-	
Strangford	7.4	-	47.9	1.1	0.9	1.5	-	1.4	
Upper Bann	1.3	-	28.5	-	2.7	-	-	-	
West Tyrone	0.4	-	17.5	-	14.8	-	-	0.6	
Mean	4.0	0.8	26.1	1.3	4.0	1.8	2.4	2.2	

	SDLP	SEA	SF	SP	UKUP	UTW	UUC	UUP	VFY	WP	Total
	3.1	-	3.8	0.6	-	-	-	33.1	0.2	0.4	100
	16.8	-	27.0	-	-	-	2.5	9.4	0.1	0.3	100
	22.9	-	12.6	0.5	-	-	-	27	0.1	0.3	100
	19	-	65.0	-	-	0	-	3.6	-	1.2	100
	7.8	-	2.5	-	1.8	-	-	28.7	-	-	100
	16.3	0.4	17.9	-	2.6	-	5.6	22.7	-	-	100
	16.3	-	34.4	-	-	-	-	28.7	-	-	100
	36.1	5.5	32.4	-	-	-	-	8.1	-	-	100
	7.6	-	7.9	-	-	-	-	46.2	-	0.2	100
	18.3	-	45.5	-	-	-	-	14.4	-	0.5	100
	24.6	-	39.8	-	-	-	-	15.5	-	-	100
	13.6	-	14.0	-	0.9	-	-	21.6	-	-	100
	4.9	-	0.9	-	11.6	-	-	32.1	-	-	100
	14.4	-	11.5	-	-	-	-	29.8	-	-	100
	35.1	-	26.5	-	0.5	-	-	18.2	-	0.3	100
	7.8	-	3.0	-	-	-	-	28.9	-	-	100
	15.7	-	21.8	-	-	-	-	29.4	-	0.6	100
	14.6	-	38.6	-	-	-	-	13.6	-	-	100
	16.4	3.0	22.5	0.6	3.5	0	4.0	22.8	0.1	0.5	

Table A5: Number of electoral quotas by party 2003

Constituency	Quota	APNI	Con	DUP	Green	Ind	NIUP	NIWC
Belfast East	4,424	0.6	0.1	2.7	-	0	-	-
Belfast North	4,505	0.1	-	2.4	0.1	0.2	-	0.1
Belfast South	4,476	0.4	0	1.5	0.1	-	-	0.5
Belfast West	4,694	0	-	0.5	-	0	-	-
East Antrim	4,422	0.8	0	2.4	0	0.7	-	0.1
East Londonderry	4,897	0.2	-	2.3	-	-	-	-
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	6,595	0	-	1.3	-	-	-	0.1
Foyle	5,830	0	-	1.0	-	0.2	-	-
Lagan Valley	5,894	0.7	0.1	1.4	-	0.4	-	-
Mid-Ulster	6,338	0	-	1.5	-	-	-	-
Newry & Armagh	6,769	0	-	1.3	-	0.1	-	-
North Antrim	6,300	0.1	-	3.2	-	0.1	-	-
North Down	4,406	0.6	0.1	1.6	0.2	0.7	-	0.3
South Antrim	5,346	0.6	0	2.1	-	-	0.1	0.1
South Down	6,479	0.1	-	1.0	0.1	0	-	0.1
Strangford	5,322	0.5	-	3.4	0.1	0.1	0.1	-
Upper Bann	6,212	0.1	-	2.0	-	0.2	-	-
West Tyrone	5,962	0	-	1.2	-	1.0	-	-

	PUP	SDLP	SEA	SF	SP	UKUP	UTW	UUC	UUP	VFY	WP
	0.7	0.2	-	0.3	0	-	-	-	2.3	0	0
	0.3	1.2	-	1.9	-	-	-	0.2	0.7	0	0
	0.1	1.6	-	0.9	0	-	-	-	1.9	0	0
	0.2	1.3	-	4.6	-	-	0	-	0.2	-	0.1
	0.1	0.5	-	0.2	-	0.1	-	-	2.0	-	0
	-	1.1	0	1.2	-	0.2	-	0.4	1.6	-	0
	-	1.1	-	2.4	-	-	-	-	2.0	-	0
	-	2.5	0.4	2.3	-	-	-	-	0.6	-	0
	0	0.5	-	0.6	-	-	-	-	3.2	-	0
	-	1.3	-	3.2	-	-	-	-	1.0	-	0
	-	1.7	-	2.8	-	-	-	-	1.1	-	0
	0	1.0	-	1.0	-	0.1	-	-	1.5	-	0
	0.1	0.3	-	0.1	-	0.8	-	-	2.2	-	0
	0.1	1.0	-	0.8	-	-	-	-	2.1	-	0
	-	2.5	-	1.9	-	0	-	-	1.3	-	0
	0.1	0.5	-	0.2	-	-	-	-	2.0	-	0
	-	1.1	-	1.5	-	-	-	-	2.1	-	0
	0	1.0	-	2.7	-	-	-	-	1.0	-	0

Table A6: Constituency results by party 2003

	Party	2003	1998
Belfast East	APNI	1	1
	DUP	2	2
	PUP	1	1
	UUP	2	2
Belfast North	DUP	2	1
	SDLP	1	1
	SF	2	1
	UUP	1	1
	Ind	-	1
	PUP	-	1
Belfast South	DUP	1	1
	SDLP	2	2
	SF	1	-
	UUP	2	2
	NIWC	-	1
Belfast West	DUP	1	-
	SDLP	1	2
	SF	4	4
East Antrim	APNI	1	1
	DUP	3	1
	UUP	2	2
	UKUP	-	1
	SDLP	-	1

	Party	2003	1998
East Londonderry	DUP	2	1
	SDLP	1	2
	SF	1	-
	UUP	2	2
	Ind	-	1
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	DUP	1	1
	SDLP	1	1
	SF	2	2
	UUP	2	2
Foyle	DUP	1	1
	SDLP	3	3
	SF	2	2
Lagan Valley	APNI	1	1
	DUP	1	1
	SDLP	1	1
	UUP	3	2
	UKUP	-	1
Mid-Ulster	DUP	1	1
	SDLP	1	1
	SF	3	3
	UUP	1	1

Constituency results by party 2003 cont.			
	Party	2003	1998
Newry and Armagh	DUP	1	1
	SDLP	1	2
	SF	3	2
	UUP	1	1
North Antrim	DUP	3	3
	SDLP	1	1
	SF	1	-
	UUP	1	2
North Down	APNI	1	1
	DUP	2	-
	UKUP	1	1
	UUP	2	3
	NIWC	-	1
South Antrim	APNI	1	1
	DUP	2	1
	SDLP	1	1
	UUP	2	2
	UKUP	-	1
South Down	DUP	1	1
	SDLP	2	3
	SF	2	1
	UUP	1	1

	Party	2003	1998
Strangford	APNI	1	1
	DUP	3	2
	UUP	2	2
	UKUP	-	1
Upper Bann	DUP	2	1
	SDLP	1	1
	SF	1	1
	UUP	2	2
	Ind	-	1
West Tyrone	DUP	1	1
	Ind	1	-
	SDLP	1	2
	SF	2	2
	UUP	1	1

The results: by candidate

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003

42 Belfast East Electoral Quota 4424						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Robinson*	Peter	DUP	9,254	29.9	1	1
Empey*	Reg	UUP	6,459	20.9	2	1
Ervine*	David Walter	PUP	2,990	9.7	4	6
Long	Naomi Rachel	APNI	2,774	9.0	5	6
Copeland	Michael Stewart	UUP	2,291	7.4	6	6
Rodgers	Jim	UUP	1,502	4.9	-	-
Newton	Robin	DUP	1,475	4.8	3	6
Toan	Harry	DUP	1,403	4.5	-	-
O'Donnell	Joseph	SF	1,180	3.8	-	-
Van Es	Leo Hubert	SDLP	967	3.1	-	-
Dick	Terence Stanley (Terry)	Con	232	0.7	-	-
Black	Thomas Edward	SP	176	0.6	-	-
Bell	Joseph	WP	125	0.4	-	-
McBlain	John Anthony	Ind	72	0.2	-	-
Weiss	George Rainbow	VFY	65	0.2	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

43 Belfast North Electoral Quota 4505						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Dodds*	Nigel Alexander	DUP	9,276	29.4	1	1
Kelly*	Gerry	SF	5,524	17.5	2	1
Maginness*	Alban	SDLP	3,186	10.1	5	12
Stanton	Kathy	SF	2,990	9.5	6	12
Cobain*	Fred	UUP	2,961	9.4	4	10
Convery	Pat	SDLP	2,108	6.7	-	-
McCausland	Nelson	DUP	1,500	4.8	3	3
Hutchinson*	William	PUP	1,358	4.3	-	-
Agnew*	Fraser	UUC	802	2.5	-	-
McCoubrey	Frank Samuel	Ind	469	1.5	-	-
Byrne McCullough	Eliz	NIWC	467	1.5	-	-
Hawkins	Margaret Julia	APNI	305	1.0	-	-
Emerson	Peter	Green	261	0.8	-	-
McCord	Raymond Irvine	Ind	218	0.7	-	-
Delaney	Marcella	WP	90	0.3	-	-
Gallagher	John Leo	VFY	17	0.1	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

44 Belfast South
Electoral Quota 4476

Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
McGimpsey*	Michael	UUP	5,389	17.2	1	1
Robinson*	Simon Mark Peter	DUP	3,991	12.7	2	11
Maskey*	Alex	SF	3,933	12.6	5	12
Hanna*	Carmel	SDLP	3,910	12.5	4	12
McDonnell*	Alasdair	SDLP	3,266	10.4	6	12
Patterson	Ruth Frances	DUP	2,538	8.1	-	-
Birnie*	John Esmond	UUP	2,311	7.4	3	11
McWilliams*	Monica	NIWC	2,150	6.9	-	-
Rice	Geraldine	APNI	1,185	3.8	-	-
Hiddleston	John Andrew	UUP	769	2.5	-	-
Ekin	Tom	APNI	664	2.1	-	-
Morrow	Thomas John	PUP	495	1.6	-	-
Wright	John Robert	Green	308	1.0	-	-
Barbour	James Eamonn	SP	167	0.5	-	-
Lomas	Roger	Con	116	0.4	-	-
Lynn	Patrick Joseph	WP	96	0.3	-	-
Steven	Lindsay Michelle	VFY	42	0.1	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

45 Belfast West Electoral Quota 4694						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Adams*	Gerry	SF	6,199	18.9	1	1
McCann	Fra	SF	4,263	13.0	4	6
de Brún*	Bairbre	SF	4,069	12.4	3	6
Ferguson	Michael	SF	3,849	11.7	5	8
Attwood*	Alex	SDLP	3,667	11.2	2	5
Ramsey*	Sue	SF	2,988	9.1	-	-
Hendron*	Joe	SDLP	2,583	7.9	-	-
Dodds	Dianne	DUP	2,544	7.7	6	8
McGimpsey	Chris	UUP	1,170	3.6	-	-
Smyth	Hugh	PUP	813	2.5	-	-
Lowry	John	WP	407	1.2	-	-
MacVicar	John Leslie	Ind	211	0.6	-	-
Ayers	Mary Kathryn	APNI	75	0.2	-	-
Kerr	David	UTW	16	0	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

13 East Antrim

Electoral Quota 4422

Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Beggs*	Roy	UUP	5,175	16.7	1	1
Wilson*	Sammy	DUP	4,544	14.7	2	1
Dawson	Thomas George	DUP	3,163	10.2	6	15
Hilditch*	David William	DUP	2,856	9.2	5	15
O'Connor*	Daniel Gabriel	SDLP	2,428	7.8	-	-
Neeson*	Sean	APNI	2,180	7.0	4	15
Robinson	Ken	UUP	2,062	6.7	3	15
McCune	Roy	UUP	1,646	5.3	-	-
McKee	Jack	Ind	1,449	4.7	-	-
Dickson	Stewart Clyde	APNI	1,192	3.9	-	-
Hutchinson*	Roger Norman	Ind	1,011	3.3	-	-
McMullan	Oliver	SF	768	2.5	-	-
Robinson	Thomas Daniel	UKUP	564	1.8	-	-
Howarth	Carolyn	PUP	534	1.7	-	-
Mason	Robert Lindsay	Ind	364	1.2	-	-
Anderson	John Hugh	Ind	348	1.1	-	-
Monaghan	Anne	NIWC	307	1.0	-	-
Greer	Alan James	Con	196	0.6	-	-
Frew	Andrew Robert	Green	165	0.5	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

382 East Londonderry Electoral Quota 4897						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Campbell*	Gregory Lloyd	DUP	4,789	14.0	2	5
McClarty*	David	UUP	4,069	11.9	1	4
Brolly	Francis R. G.	SF	4,019	11.7	3	7
Robinson	George H.	DUP	3,466	10.1	4	10
Dallat*	John James	SDLP	3,190	9.3	6	12
Bradley	John Maurice	DUP	2,836	8.3	-	-
Coyle	Michael	SDLP	2,394	7.0	-	-
Hillis	Norman Frederick	UUP	2,292	6.7	5	11
O'Kane	Cliona	SF	2,102	6.1	-	-
Douglas*	Boyd	UUC	1,903	5.6	-	-
Stevenson	Edwin Arthur	UUP	1,408	4.1	-	-
Armitage*	Pauline	UKUP	906	2.6	-	-
Boyle	Yvonne	APNI	762	2.2	-	-
Baur	Marion	SEA	137	0.4	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

382 Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Electoral Quota 6595

Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Gildernew*	Michelle	SF	6,489	14.1	3	5
Elliott	Thomas Beatty (Tom)	UUP	6,181	13.4	1	3
Morrow*	Maurice	DUP	5,536	12.0	5	6
O'Reilly	Hugh Thomas	SF	5,019	10.9	6	8
Foster	Arlene Isobel	UUP	4,938	10.7	4	5
Gallagher*	Tommy	SDLP	4,735	10.3	2	5
McHugh*	Gerard James Joseph	SF	4,393	9.5	-	-
Johnston	Robert John (Bert)	DUP	3,094	6.7	-	-
Britton	Frank James	SDLP	2,772	6.0	-	-
Mulligan	Robert Louis	UUP	2,110	4.6	-	-
McNulty	Eithne	NIWC	650	1.4	-	-
Cleland	Linda	APNI	243	0.5	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

258 Foyle Electoral Quota 5830						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Durkan*	John Mark	SDLP	6,806	16.7	1	1
Hay*	William	DUP	6,101	15.0	2	1
McLaughlin*	Mitchel	SF	6,036	14.8	3	1
McCartney	Raymond	SF	3,679	9.0	-	-
Nelis*	Mary	SF	3,499	8.6	6	9
Bradley	Mary	SDLP	3,345	8.2	4	8
Hamilton	Mary Scott	UUP	3,322	8.1	-	-
Ramsey	Pat	SDLP	2,826	6.9	5	9
McCann	Eamon	SEA	2,257	5.5	-	-
Diver	Gerald Martin	SDLP	1,769	4.3	-	-
Courtney	Annie	Ind	802	2.0	-	-
Castle	Alan Martyn	APNI	227	0.6	-	-
McBrearty	Danny	Ind	137	0.3	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

353 Lagan Valley Electoral Quota 5894						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Donaldson	Jeffrey Mark	UUP	14,104	34.2	1	1
Poots*	Edwin Cecil	DUP	5,175	12.5	2	2
Close*	Seamus Anthony	APNI	4,408	10.7	4	7
Hunter	Andrew Robert Frederick Ebenezer	DUP	3,300	8.0	-	-
Butler	Paul Anthony	SF	3,242	7.9	-	-
Lewsley*	Patricia	SDLP	3,133	7.6	5	9
Bell*	Billy	UUP	2,782	6.7	3	6
Davis*	Ivan	Ind	2,223	5.4	-	-
Beare	Norah Jeanette	UUP	1,508	3.7	6	10
Kirkpatrick	Jim	UUP	675	1.6	-	-
Johnston	Joanne Claire	Con	395	1.0	-	-
Park	Andrew	PUP	212	0.5	-	-
McCarthy	Frances	WP	97	0.2	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

594 Mid-Ulster Electoral Quota 6338						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
McCrea*	Robert Thomas William	DUP	8,211	18.5	1	1
McGuinness*	Martin	SF	8,128	18.3	2	1
Dougan	Geraldine Mary	SF	5,827	13.1	4	4
Molloy*	Francis Joseph	SF	5,255	11.8	3	3
Armstrong*	Billy	UUP	4,323	9.7	5	7
McGlone	Patsy	SDLP	4,295	9.7	6	8
Haughey*	Dennis	SDLP	3,843	8.7	-	-
Wilson	Trevor James	UUP	2,071	4.7	-	-
Millar	Alan	DUP	1,029	2.3	-	-
Groogan	Cora Mariah	SF	984	2.2	-	-
Donnelly	Francis	WP	230	0.5	-	-
Holmes	James Dominic Rupert	APNI	166	0.4	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

426 Newry & Armagh Electoral Quota 6769						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Berry*	Paul Leslie	DUP	8,125	17.1	1	1
Murphy*	Conor Terence	SF	7,595	16.0	2	1
Kennedy*	Danny	UUP	7,347	15.5	3	1
Hyland	Davy	SF	5,779	12.2	5	5
O'Rawe	Patricia (Pat)	SF	5,478	11.6	6	5
Lennon	Jim	SDLP	4,116	8.7	-	-
Bradley	Dominic	SDLP	4,111	8.7	4	5
Fee*	John Fitzgerald	SDLP	3,410	7.2	-	-
Frazer	William	Ind	632	1.3	-	-
Donnelly	Freda Emma	DUP	474	1.0	-	-
Whitcroft	Peter William Russell	APNI	311	0.7	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

14 North Antrim Electoral Quota 6300						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Paisley*	Ian Richard Kyle	DUP	8,732	19.8	1	1
Paisley*	Ian Jnr	DUP	7,898	17.9	2	1
Coulter*	Robert James	UUP	6,385	14.5	3	1
McGuigan	Philip	SF	6,195	14.0	5	9
Farren*	Sean	SDLP	3,648	8.3	6	9
Storey	Mervyn	DUP	3,605	8.2	4	3
Currie	James Kerr Fulton	UUP	3,153	7.1	-	-
O'Loan	Declan	SDLP	2,361	5.4	-	-
Dunlop	Jayne	APNI	867	2.0	-	-
Kane*	Gardiner	Ind	623	1.4	-	-
Small	Nathaniel James	UKUP	402	0.9	-	-
McCaughey	William	PUP	230	0.5	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

201 North Down
Electoral Quota 4406

Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Cree	Robin Leslie	UUP	3,900	12.6	1	12
Weir*	Peter James	DUP	3,675	11.9	5	14
Easton	Alex	DUP	3,570	11.6	6	14
McFarland*	Alan Robert	UUP	3,421	11.1	3	14
McCartney*	Robert Law	UKUP	3,374	10.9	4	14
Peacocke	Diana Louise	UUP	2,566	8.3	-	-
Bell*	Eileen	APNI	1,951	6.3	2	13
Logan	William Patrick	SDLP	1,519	4.9	-	-
Wilson	Brian	Ind	1,350	4.4	-	-
Morrice*	Jane Elizabeth	NIWC	1,181	3.8	-	-
Chambers	Alan Albert	Ind	1,077	3.5	-	-
Barry	John Joseph	Green	730	2.4	-	-
Farry	Stephen Anthony	APNI	704	2.3	-	-
Robertson	Julian Jeffrey	Con	491	1.6	-	-
Field	Alan	Ind	428	1.4	-	-
Rose	David Vincent	PUP	316	1.0	-	-
George	Maria Theresa	SF	264	0.9	-	-
Sheridan	Thomas Dalzell	UKUP	209	0.7	-	-
Carter	Chris Charles	Ind	109	0.4	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

15 South Antrim Electoral Quota 5346						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Burnside	David Wilson Boyd	UUP	7,066	18.9	1	1
Clyde*	Samuel Wilson	DUP	5,131	13.7	2	5
Girvan	Paul	DUP	4,820	12.9	3	6
Meehan	Martin Paul	SF	4,295	11.5		
Ford*	David R. J.	APNI	3,393	9.1	6	11
Wilson*	Jim	UUP	3,135	8.4	4	9
Burns	Thomas	SDLP	2,732	7.3	5	11
McClelland*	Donovan	SDLP	2,671	7.1	-	-
Smyth	John	DUP	1,501	4.0	-	-
Cochrane-Watson	Adrian David	UUP	953	2.5	-	-
Boyd*	Norman Jonathan	NIUP	774	2.1	-	-
Cosgrove	Joan	NIWC	465	1.2	-	-
Wilkinson	Kenneth	PUP	311	0.8	-	-
Docherty	Jason	Con	174	0.5	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

202 South Down
Electoral Quota 6479

Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Wells*	Jim	DUP	6,789	15.0	1	1
Nesbitt*	Dermot	UUP	5,368	11.8	3	8
Bradley*	P. J.	SDLP	5,337	11.8	2	5
Ruane	Caitriona	SF	5,118	11.3	4	9
Ritchie	Margaret	SDLP	4,261	9.4	6	9
Clarke	Wille	SF	4,083	9.0	5	9
O'Neill*	Eamonn Gerrard	SDLP	3,942	8.7	-	-
Donaldson	Jim	UUP	2,885	6.4	-	-
McConvey	Eamonn Willam	SF	2,806	6.2	-	-
Fitzpatrick	Marian	SDLP	2,382	5.3	-	-
Blaney	Raymond	Green	799	1.8	-	-
Miller	Trudy	NIWC	565	1.2	-	-
Powell	Neil Anthony	APNI	489	1.1	-	-
Wharton	Nelson	UKUP	245	0.5	-	-
Curran	Malachi	Ind	162	0.4	-	-
O'Hagan	Desmond	WP	115	0.3	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

547 Strangford Electoral Quota 5322						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Robinson*	Iris	DUP	8,548	22.9	1	1
Kilclooney*	John David	UUP	5,658	15.2	2	1
Shannon*	Jim	DUP	4,703	12.6	4	2
Ennis	George	DUP	4,606	12.4	3	2
McNarry	David Mason	UUP	3,000	8.1	5	10
Boyle	Joe	SDLP	2,906	7.8	-	-
McCarthy*	Kieran	APNI	2,741	7.4	6	11
Little	Robert Charles Lewis	UUP	2,123	5.7	-	-
Kennedy	Dermot	SF	1,105	3.0	-	-
Wilson*	Cedric	NIUP	576	1.5	-	-
Neill	Colin George	PUP	540	1.4	-	-
Orr	Philip Thomas	Green	425	1.1	-	-
McCarthy	Danny	Ind	319	0.9	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

596 Upper Bann Electoral Quota 6212						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Surname	Forename					
Trimble*	David	UUP	9,158	21.1	1	1
Simpson	David	DUP	5,933	13.6	2	5
O'Dowd	John	SF	5,524	12.7	6	11
Moutray	Stephen	DUP	4,697	10.8	3	6
O'Hagan*	Dara	SF	3,970	9.1	-	-
Kelly	Dolores	SDLP	3,661	8.4	5	11
Corr	Kieran Peter	SDLP	3,157	7.3	-	-
Gardiner	Samuel	UUP	2,359	5.4	4	9
Watson*	Denis	DUP	1,770	4.1	-	-
Savage*	George	UUP	1,269	2.9	-	-
Jones	David	Ind	585	1.3	-	-
Anderson	Sidney	Ind	581	1.3	-	-
McQuaid	Francis	APNI	571	1.3	-	-
French	Thomas	WP	247	0.6	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A7: Constituency results by candidate 2003 cont.

593 West Tyrone Electoral Quota 5962						
Candidate		Party	1st pref votes	% share 1st pref votes	Order elected	Stage elected
Deeny	Charles Kieran	Ind	6,158	14.8	1	1
Doherty*	Pat	SF	6,019	14.4	2	1
McElduff*	Barry	SF	5,642	13.5	5	8
Buchanan	Thomas Ernest	DUP	4,739	11.4	3	5
McMahon	Brian	SF	4,450	10.7	-	-
Hussey*	Derek Robert	UUP	3,733	8.9	4	6
McMenamin*	Eugene Anthony	SDLP	3,465	8.3	6	8
Byrne*	(Mark Joseph) Joe	SDLP	2,645	6.3	-	-
Reaney	Derek William Charles	DUP	2,547	6.1	-	-
Wilson	Robert Daniel (Bert)	UUP	1,934	4.6	-	-
Reid	Samuel Roy	PUP	233	0.6	-	-
Alexander	Steven John	APNI	164	0.4	-	-

* Incumbents

Table A8: Elected members in rank order of percentage share of first preference votes 2003

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Party	Share %
Lagan Valley	Donaldson	Jeffrey Mark	UUP	34.19
Belfast East	Robinson	Peter	DUP	29.89
Belfast North	Dodds	Nigel Alexander	DUP	29.42
Strangford	Robinson	Iris	DUP	22.95
Upper Bann	Trimble	David	UUP	21.06
Belfast East	Empey	Reg	UUP	20.86
North Antrim	Paisley	Ian Richard Kyle	DUP	19.80
South Antrim	Burnside	David Wilson Boyd	UUP	18.88
Belfast West	Adams	Gerry	SF	18.87
Mid-Ulster	McCrea	Robert Thomas William	DUP	18.51
Mid-Ulster	McGuinness	Martin	SF	18.32
North Antrim	Paisley	Ian Jnr	DUP	17.91
Belfast North	Kelly	Gerry	SF	17.52
Belfast South	McGimpsey	Michael	UUP	17.20
Newry & Armagh	Berry	Paul Leslie	DUP	17.15
East Antrim	Beggs	Roy	UUP	16.72
Foyle	Durkan	John Mark	SDLP	16.68
Newry & Armagh	Murphy	Conor Terence	SF	16.03
Newry & Armagh	Kennedy	Danny	UUP	15.51
Strangford	Kilclooney	John David	UUP	15.19
South Down	Wells	Jim	DUP	14.97
Foyle	Hay	William	DUP	14.95
Foyle	McLaughlin	Mitchel	SF	14.79
West Tyrone	Deeny	Charles Kieran	Ind	14.76
East Antrim	Wilson	Sammy	DUP	14.68
North Antrim	Coulter	Robert James	UUP	14.48
West Tyrone	Doherty	Pat	SF	14.42
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Gildernew	Michelle	SF	14.06

Table A8: Elected members in rank order of percentage share of first preference votes 2003 cont.

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Party	Share %
North Antrim	McGuigan	Philip	SF	14.05
East Londonderry	Campbell	Gregory Lloyd	DUP	13.97
South Antrim	Clyde	Samuel Wilson	DUP	13.71
Upper Bann	Simpson	David	DUP	13.64
West Tyrone	McElduff	Barry	SF	13.52
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Elliott	Thomas Beatty (Tom)	UUP	13.39
Mid-Ulster	Dougan	Geraldine Mary	SF	13.14
Belfast West	McCann	Fra	SF	12.98
South Antrim	Girvan	Paul	DUP	12.88
Belfast South	Robinson	Simon Mark Peter	DUP	12.74
Upper Bann	O'Dowd	John	SF	12.70
North Down	Cree	Robin Leslie	UUP	12.65
Strangford	Shannon	Jim	DUP	12.63
Belfast South	Maskey	Alex	SF	12.55
Lagan Valley	Poots	Edwin Cecil	DUP	12.54
Belfast South	Hanna	Carmel	SDLP	12.48
Belfast West	de Brun	Bairbre	SF	12.39
Strangford	Ennis	George	DUP	12.37
Newry & Armagh	Hyland	Davy	SF	12.20
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Morrow	Maurice	DUP	11.99
North Down	Weir	Peter James	DUP	11.92
East Londonderry	McClarty	David	UUP	11.87
Mid-Ulster	Molloy	Francis Joseph	SF	11.85
South Down	Nesbitt	Dermot	UUP	11.84
South Down	Bradley	P. J.	SDLP	11.77
East Londonderry	Brolly	Francis R. G.	SF	11.73
Belfast West	Ferguson	Michael	SF	11.72

Table A8: Elected members in rank order of percentage share of first preference votes 2003 cont.

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Party	Share %
North Down	Easton	Alex	DUP	11.58
Newry & Armagh	O'Rawe	Patricia (Pat)	SF	11.56
West Tyrone	Buchanan	Thomas Ernest	DUP	11.36
South Down	Ruane	Caitriona	SF	11.29
Belfast West	Attwood	Alex	SDLP	11.16
North Down	McFarland	Alan Robert	UUP	11.09
North Down	McCartney	Robert Law	UKUP	10.94
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	O'Reilly	Hugh Thomas	SF	10.87
Upper Bann	Moutray	Stephen	DUP	10.80
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Foster	Arlene Isobel	UUP	10.70
Lagan Valley	Close	Seamus Anthony	APNI	10.69
Belfast South	McDonnell	Alasdair	SDLP	10.42
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Gallagher	Tommy	SDLP	10.26
East Antrim	Dawson	Thomas George	DUP	10.22
East Londonderry	Robinson	George H.	DUP	10.11
Belfast North	Maginness	Alban	SDLP	10.10
Mid-Ulster	Armstrong	Billy	UUP	9.74
Mid-Ulster	McGlone	Patsy	SDLP	9.68
Belfast East	Ervine	David Waiter	PUP	9.66
Belfast North	Stanton	Kathy	SF	9.48
South Down	Ritchie	Margaret	SDLP	9.40
Belfast North	Cobain	Fred	UUP	9.39
East Londonderry	Dallat	John James	SDLP	9.31
East Antrim	Hilditch	David William	DUP	9.23
South Antrim	Ford	David R. J.	APNI	9.07
South Down	Clarke	Willie	SF	9.00

Table A8: Elected members in rank order of percentage share of first preference votes 2003 cont.

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Party	Share %
Belfast East	Long	Naomi Rachel	APNI	8.96
West Tyrone	Hussey	Derek Robert	UUP	8.95
Newry & Armagh	Bradley	Dominic	SDLP	8.68
Foyle	Nelis	Mary	SF	8.57
Upper Bann	Kelly	Dolores	SDLP	8.42
South Antrim	Wilson	Jim	UUP	8.38
West Tyrone	McMenamin	Eugene Anthony	SDLP	8.30
North Antrim	Farren	Sean	SDLP	8.27
Foyle	Bradley	Mary	SDLP	8.20
North Antrim	Storey	Mervyn	DUP	8.17
Strangford	McNarry	David Mason	UUP	8.05
Belfast West	Dodds	Dianne	DUP	7.74
Lagan Valley	Lewsley	Patricia	SDLP	7.59
Belfast East	Copeland	Michael Stewart	UUP	7.40
Belfast South	Birnie	John Esmond	UUP	7.38
Strangford	McCarthy	Kieran	APNI	7.36
South Antrim	Burns	Thomas	SDLP	7.30
East Antrim	Neeson	Sean	APNI	7.04
Foyle	Ramsey	Pat	SDLP	6.93
Lagan Valley	Bell	Billy	UUP	6.74
East Londonderry	Hillis	Norman Frederick	UUP	6.69
East Antrim	Robinson	Ken	UUP	6.66
North Down	Bell	Eileen	APNI	6.33
Upper Bann	Gardiner	Samuel	UUP	5.43
Belfast East	Newton	Robin	DUP	4.76
Belfast North	McCausland	Nelson	DUP	4.76
Lagan Valley	Beare	Norah Jeanette	UUP	3.66

Table A9: List of candidates 2003

Surname	Forename(s)	Party	Constituency	Press Association number
Adams	Gerry	SF	Belfast West	45
Agnew	Fraser	UUC	Belfast North	43
Alexander	Steven John	APNI	West Tyrone	593
Anderson	John Hugh	Ind	East Antrim	13
Anderson	Sidney	Ind	Upper Bann	596
Armitage	Pauline	UKUP	East Londonderry	382
Armstrong	Billy	UUP	Mid-Ulster	594
Attwood	Alex	SDLP	Belfast West	45
Ayers	Mary Kathryn	APNI	Belfast West	45
Barbour	James Eamonn	SP	Belfast South	44
Barry	John Joseph	Green	North Down	201
Baur	Marion	SEA	East Londonderry	382
Beare	Norah Jeanette	UUP	Lagan Valley	353
Beggs	Roy	UUP	East Antrim	13
Bell	Billy	UUP	Lagan Valley	353
Bell	Eileen	APNI	North Down	201
Bell	Joseph	WP	Belfast East	42
Berry	Paul Leslie	DUP	Newry & Armagh	426
Birnie	John Esmond	UUP	Belfast South	44
Black	Thomas Edward	SP	Belfast East	42
Blaney	Raymond	Green	South Down	202
Boyd	Norman Jonathan	NIUP	South Antrim	15
Boyle	Joe	SDLP	Strangford	547
Boyle	Yvonne	APNI	East Londonderry	382
Bradley	Dominic	SDLP	Newry & Armagh	426
Bradley	John Maurice	DUP	East Londonderry	382
Bradley	Mary	SDLP	Foyle	258
Bradley	P. J.	SDLP	South Down	202
Britton	Frank James	SDLP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252

Table A9: List of candidates 2003 cont.

Surname	Forename(s)	Party	Constituency	Press Association number
Brolly	Francis R. G.	SF	East Londonderry	382
Buchanan	Thomas Ernest	DUP	West Tyrone	593
Burns	Thomas	SDLP	South Antrim	15
Burnside	David Wilson Boyd	UUP	South Antrim	15
Butler	Paul Anthony	SF	Lagan Valley	353
Byrne	(Mark Joseph) Joe	SDLP	West Tyrone	593
Byrne McCullough	Eliz	NIWC	Belfast North	43
Campbell	Gregory Lloyd	DUP	East Londonderry	382
Carter	Chris Charles	Ind	North Down	201
Castle	Alan Martyn	APNI	Foyle	258
Chambers	Alan Albert	Ind	North Down	201
Clarke	Wille	SF	South Down	202
Cleland	Linda	APNI	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
Close	Seamus Anthony	APNI	Lagan Valley	353
Clyde	Samuel Wilson	DUP	South Antrim	15
Cobain	Fred	UUP	Belfast North	43
Cochrane-Watson	Adrian David	UUP	South Antrim	15
Convery	Pat	SDLP	Belfast North	43
Copeland	Michael Stewart	UUP	Belfast East	42
Corr	Kieran Peter	SDLP	Upper Bann	596
Cosgrove	Joan	NIWC	South Antrim	15
Coulter	Robert James	UUP	North Antrim	14
Courtney	Annie	Ind	Foyle	258
Coyle	Michael	SDLP	East Londonderry	382
Cree	Robin Leslie	UUP	North Down	201
Curran	Malachi	Ind	South Down	202
Currie	James Kerr Fulton	UUP	North Antrim	14
Dallat	John James	SDLP	East Londonderry	382

Table A9: List of candidates 2003 cont.

Surname	Forename(s)	Party	Constituency	Press Association number
Davis	Ivan	Ind	Lagan Valley	353
Dawson	Thomas George	DUP	East Antrim	13
de Brun	Bairbre	SF	Belfast West	45
Deeny	Charles Kieran	Ind	West Tyrone	593
Delaney	Marcella	WP	Belfast North	43
Dick	Terence Stanley (Terry)	Con	Belfast East	42
Dickson	Stewart Clyde	APNI	East Antrim	13
Diver	Gerald Martin	SDLP	Foyle	258
Docherty	Jason	Con	South Antrim	15
Dodds	Dianne	DUP	Belfast West	45
Dodds	Nigel Alexander	DUP	Belfast North	43
Doherty	Pat	SF	West Tyrone	593
Donaldson	Jeffrey Mark	UUP	Lagan Valley	353
Donaldson	Jim	UUP	South Down	202
Donnelly	Francis	WP	Mid-Ulster	594
Donnelly	Freda Emma	DUP	Newry & Armagh	426
Dougan	Geraldine Mary	SF	Mid-Ulster	594
Douglas	Boyd	UUC	East Londonderry	382
Dunlop	Jayne	APNI	North Antrim	14
Durkan	John Mark	SDLP	Foyle	258
Easton	Alex	DUP	North Down	201
Ekin	Tom	APNI	Belfast South	44
Elliott	Thomas Beatty (Tom)	UUP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
Emerson	Peter	Green	Belfast North	43
Empey	Reg	UUP	Belfast East	42
Ennis	George	DUP	Strangford	547
Ervine	David Waiter	PUP	Belfast East	42
Farren	Sean	SDLP	North Antrim	14

Table A9: List of candidates 2003 cont.

Surname	Forename(s)	Party	Constituency	Press Association number
Farry	Stephen Anthony	APNI	North Down	201
Fee	John Fitzgerald	SDLP	Newry & Armagh	426
Ferguson	Michael	SF	Belfast West	45
Field	Alan	Ind	North Down	201
Fitzpatrick	Marian	SDLP	South Down	202
Ford	David R. J.	APNI	South Antrim	15
Foster	Arlene Isobel	UUP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
Frazer	William	Ind	Newry & Armagh	426
French	Thomas	WP	Upper Bann	596
Frew	Andrew Robert	Green	East Antrim	13
Gallagher	John Leo	VFY	Belfast North	43
Gallagher	Tommy	SDLP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
Gardiner	Samuel	UUP	Upper Bann	596
George	Maria Theresa	SF	North Down	201
Gildernew	Michelle	SF	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
Girvan	Paul	DUP	South Antrim	15
Greer	Alan James	Con	East Antrim	13
Groogan	Cora Mariah	SF	Mid-Ulster	594
Hamilton	Mary Scott	UUP	Foyle	258
Hanna	Carmel	SDLP	Belfast South	44
Haughey	Dennis	SDLP	Mid Ulster	594
Hawkins	Margaret Julia	APNI	Belfast North	43
Hay	William	DUP	Foyle	258
Hendron	Joe	SDLP	Belfast West	45
Hiddleston	John Andrew	UUP	Belfast South	44
Hilditch	David William	DUP	East Antrim	13
Hillis	Norman Frederick	UUP	East Londonderry	382
Holmes	James Dominic Rupert	APNI	Mid-Ulster	594

Table A9: List of candidates 2003 cont.

Surname	Forename(s)	Party	Constituency	Press Association number
Howarth	Carolyn	PUP	East Antrim	13
Hunter	Andrew Robert Frederick Ebenezer	DUP	Lagan Valley	353
Hussey	Derek Robert	UUP	West Tyrone	593
Hutchinson	Roger Norman	Ind	East Antrim	13
Hutchinson	William	PUP	Belfast North	43
Hyland	Davy	SF	Newry & Armagh	426
Johnston	Joanne Claire	Con	Lagan Valley	353
Johnston	Robert John (Bert)	DUP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
Jones	David	Ind	Upper Bann	596
Kane	Gardiner	Ind	North Antrim	14
Kelly	Dolores	SDLP	Upper Bann	596
Kelly	Gerry	SF	Belfast North	43
Kennedy	Danny	UUP	Newry & Armagh	426
Kennedy	Dermot	SF	Strangford	547
Kerr	David	UTW	Belfast West	45
Kilclooney	John David	UUP	Strangford	547
Kirkpatrick	Jim	UUP	Lagan Valley	353
Lennon	Jim	SDLP	Newry & Armagh	426
Lewsley	Patricia	SDLP	Lagan Valley	353
Little	Robert Charles Lewis	UUP	Strangford	547
Logan	William Patrick	SDLP	North Down	201
Lomas	Roger	Con	Belfast South	44
Long	Naomi Rachel	APNI	Belfast East	42
Lowry	John	WP	Belfast West	45
Lynn	Patrick Joseph	WP	Belfast South	44
MacVicar	John Leslie	Ind	Belfast West	45
Maginness	Alban	SDLP	Belfast North	43
Maskey	Alex	SF	Belfast South	44

Table A9: List of candidates 2003 cont.

Surname	Forename(s)	Party	Constituency	Press Association number
Mason	Robert Lindsay	Ind	East Antrim	13
McBlain	John Anthony	Ind	Belfast East	42
McBrearty	Danny	Ind	Foyle	258
McCann	Eamon	SEA	Foyle	258
McCann	Fra	SF	Belfast West	45
McCarthy	Danny	Ind	Strangford	547
McCarthy	Frances	WP	Lagan Valley	353
McCarthy	Kieran	APNI	Strangford	547
McCartney	Raymond	SF	Foyle	258
McCartney	Robert Law	UKUP	North Down	201
McCaughey	William	PUP	North Antrim	14
McCausland	Nelson	DUP	Belfast North	43
McClarty	David	UUP	East Londonderry	382
McClelland	Donovan	SDLP	South Antrim	15
McConvey	Eamonn Willam	SF	South Down	202
McCord	Raymond Irvine	Ind	Belfast North	43
McCoubrey	Frank Samuel	Ind	Belfast North	43
McCrea	Robert Thomas William	DUP	Mid-Ulster	594
McCune	Roy	UUP	East Antrim	13
McDonnell	Alasdair	SDLP	Belfast South	44
McElduff	Barry	SF	West Tyrone	593
McFarland	Alan Robert	UUP	North Down	201
McGimpsey	Chris	UUP	Belfast West	45
McGimpsey	Michael	UUP	Belfast South	44
McGlone	Patsy	SDLP	Mid-Ulster	594
McGuigan	Philip	SF	North Antrim	14
McGuinness	Martin	SF	Mid-Ulster	594
McHugh	Gerard James Joseph	SF	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252

Table A9: List of candidates 2003 cont.

Surname	Forename(s)	Party	Constituency	Press Association number
McKee	Jack	Ind	East Antrim	13
McLaughlin	Mitchel	SF	Foyle	258
McMahon	Brian	SF	West Tyrone	593
McMenamin	Eugene Anthony	SDLP	West Tyrone	593
McMullan	Oliver	SF	East Antrim	13
McNarry	David Mason	UUP	Strangford	547
McNulty	Eithne	NIWC	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
McQuaid	Francis	APNI	Upper Bann	596
McWilliams	Monica	NIWC	Belfast South	44
Meehan	Martin Paul	SF	South Antrim	15
Millar	Alan	DUP	Mid-Ulster	594
Miller	Trudy	NIWC	South Down	202
Molloy	Francis Joseph	SF	Mid Ulster	594
Monaghan	Anne	NIWC	East Antrim	13
Morrice	Jane Elizabeth	NIWC	North Down	201
Morrow	Maurice	DUP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
Morrow	Thomas John	PUP	Belfast South	44
Moutray	Stephen	DUP	Upper Bann	596
Mulligan	Robert Louis	UUP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
Murphy	Conor Terence	SF	Newry & Armagh	426
Neeson	Sean	APNI	East Antrim	13
Neill	Colin George	PUP	Strangford	547
Nelis	Mary	SF	Foyle	258
Nesbitt	Dermot	UUP	South Down	202
Newton	Robin	DUP	Belfast East	42
O'Connor	Daniel Gabriel	SDLP	East Antrim	13
O'Donnell	Joseph	SF	Belfast East	42
O'Dowd	John	SF	Upper Bann	596
O'Hagan	Dara	SF	Upper Bann	596

Table A9: List of candidates 2003 cont.

Surname	Forename(s)	Party	Constituency	Press Association number
O'Hagan	Desmond	WP	South Down	202
O'Kane	Cliona	SF	East Londonderry	382
O'Loan	Declan	SDLP	North Antrim	14
O'Neill	Eamonn Gerrard	SDLP	South Down	202
O'Rawe	Patricia (Pat)	SF	Newry & Armagh	426
O'Reilly	Hugh Thomas	SF	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	252
Orr	Philip Thomas	Green	Strangford	547
Paisley	Ian Jnr	DUP	North Antrim	14
Paisley	Ian Richard Kyle	DUP	North Antrim	14
Park	Andrew	PUP	Lagan Valley	353
Patterson	Ruth Frances	DUP	Belfast South	44
Peacocke	Diana Louise	UUP	North Down	201
Poots	Edwin Cecil	DUP	Lagan Valley	353
Powell	Neil Anthony	APNI	South Down	202
Ramsey	Pat	SDLP	Foyle	258
Ramsey	Sue	SF	Belfast West	45
Reaney	Derek William Charles	DUP	West Tyrone	593
Reid	Samuel Roy	PUP	West Tyrone	593
Rice	Geraldine	APNI	Belfast South	44
Ritchie	Margaret	SDLP	South Down	202
Robertson	Julian Jeffrey	Con	North Down	201
Robinson	George H.	DUP	East Londonderry	382
Robinson	Iris	DUP	Strangford	547
Robinson	Ken	UUP	East Antrim	13
Robinson	Peter	DUP	Belfast East	42
Robinson	Simon Mark Peter	DUP	Belfast South	44
Robinson	Thomas Daniel	UKUP	East Antrim	13
Rodgers	Jim	UUP	Belfast East	42
Rose	David Vincent	PUP	North Down	201

Table A9: List of candidates 2003 cont.

Surname	Forename(s)	Party	Constituency	Press Association number
Ruane	Caitriona	SF	South Down	202
Savage	George	UUP	Upper Bann	596
Shannon	Jim	DUP	Strangford	547
Sheridan	Thomas Dalzell	UKUP	North Down	201
Simpson	David	DUP	Upper Bann	596
Small	Nathaniel James	UKUP	North Antrim	14
Smyth	Hugh	PUP	Belfast West	45
Smyth	John	DUP	South Antrim	15
Stanton	Kathy	SF	Belfast North	43
Steven	Lindsay Michelle	VFY	Belfast South	44
Stevenson	Edwin Arthur	UUP	East Londonderry	382
Storey	Mervyn	DUP	North Antrim	14
Toan	Harry	DUP	Belfast East	42
Trimble	David	UUP	Upper Bann	596
Van Es	Leo Hubert	SDLP	Belfast East	42
Watson	Denis	DUP	Upper Bann	596
Weir	Peter James	DUP	North Down	201
Weiss	George Rainbow	VFY	Belfast East	42
Wells	Jim	DUP	South Down	202
Wharton	Nelson	UKUP	South Down	202
Whitcroft	Peter William Russell	APNI	Newry & Armagh	426
Wilkinson	Kenneth	PUP	South Antrim	15
Wilson	Brian	Ind	North Down	201
Wilson	Cedric	NIUP	Strangford	547
Wilson	Jim	UUP	South Antrim	15
Wilson	Robert Daniel (Bert)	UUP	West Tyrone	593
Wilson	Sammy	DUP	East Antrim	13
Wilson	Trevor James	UUP	Mid-Ulster	594
Wright	John Robert	Green	Belfast South	44

**Table A10: Number of candidates
by constituency 2003**

Constituency	Total
East Antrim	19
North Down	19
Belfast South	17
Belfast North	16
South Down	16
Belfast East	15
Belfast West	14
East Londonderry	14
South Antrim	14
Upper Bann	14
Foyle	13
Lagan Valley	13
Strangford	13
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	12
Mid-Ulster	12
North Antrim	12
West Tyrone	12
Newry & Armagh	11
Total	256

Table A11: Candidate characteristics by constituency, 2003

Constituency	Gender				Fate of incumbents		
	Number female	% female	Number male	% male	Number Standing	Re-elected	Defeated
Belfast East	1	6.7	14	93.3	3	3	-
Belfast North	4	25.0	12	75.0	6	4	2
Belfast South	5	29.4	12	70.6	7	6	1
Belfast West	4	28.6	10	71.4	5	3	2
East Antrim	2	10.5	17	89.5	6	4	2
East Londonderry	4	28.6	10	71.4	5	3	2
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	4	33.3	8	66.7	4	3	1
Foyle	4	30.8	9	69.2	4	4	-
Lagan Valley	4	30.8	9	69.2	5	4	1
Mid-Ulster	2	16.7	10	83.3	5	4	1
Newry & Armagh	2	18.2	9	81.8	4	3	1
North Antrim	1	8.3	11	91.7	5	4	1
North Down	4	21.1	15	78.9	5	4	1
South Antrim	1	7.1	13	92.9	5	3	2
South Down	4	25.0	12	75.0	4	3	1
Strangford	1	7.7	12	92.3	5	4	1
Upper Bann	2	14.3	12	85.7	4	1	3
West Tyrone	-	0	12	100.0	5	4	1
Total	49		207		87	64	23

Table A12: Gender of candidates by party, 2003

Party	Number female	% female	Number male	% male	Total
APNI	8	38.1	13	61.9	21
Con	1	16.7	5	83.3	6
DUP	4	10.0	36	90.0	40
Green	-	0	6	100.0	6
Ind	1	4.5	21	95.5	22
NIUP	-	0	2	100.0	2
NIWC	7	100.0	-	0	7
PUP	1	9.1	10	90.9	11
SDLP	6	16.7	30	83.3	36
SEA	1	50.0	1	50	2
SF	12	31.6	26	68.4	38
SP	-	0	2	100.0	2
UKUP	1	16.7	5	83.3	6
UTW	-	0	1	100.0	1
UUC	-	0	2	100.0	2
UUP	4	9.3	39	90.7	43
VFY	1	33.3	2	66.7	3
WP	2	25.0	6	75.0	8
Total	49	19.1	207	80.9	256

Table A13: Women candidates by constituency 2003

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Party
Belfast East	Long	Naomi Rachel	APNI
Belfast North	Byrne McCullough	Eliz	NIWC
Belfast North	Delaney	Marcella	WP
Belfast North	Hawkins	Margaret Julia	APNI
Belfast North	Stanton	Kathy	SF
Belfast South	Hanna	Carmel	SDLP
Belfast South	McWilliams	Monica	NIWC
Belfast South	Patterson	Ruth Frances	DUP
Belfast South	Rice	Geraldine	APNI
Belfast South	Steven	Lindsay Michelle	VFY
Belfast West	Ayers	Mary Kathryn	APNI
Belfast West	de Brun	Bairbre	SF
Belfast West	Dodds	Dianne	DUP
Belfast West	Ramsey	Sue	SF
East Antrim	Howarth	Carolyn	PUP
East Antrim	Monaghan	Anne	NIWC
East Londonderry	Armitage	Pauline	UKUP
East Londonderry	Baur	Marion	SEA
East Londonderry	Boyle	Yvonne	APNI
East Londonderry	O'Kane	Cliona	SF
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Cleland	Linda	APNI
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Foster	Arlene Isobel	UUP
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Gildernew	Michelle	SF
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	McNulty	Eithne	NIWC
Foyle	Bradley	Mary	SDLP
Foyle	Courtney	Annie	Ind
Foyle	Hamilton	Mary Scott	UUP
Foyle	Nelis	Mary	SF

Table A13: Women candidates by constituency 2003

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Party
Lagan Valley	Beare	Norah Jeanette	UUP
Lagan Valley	Johnston	Joanne Claire	Con
Lagan Valley	Lewsley	Patricia	SDLP
Lagan Valley	McCarthy	Frances	WP
Mid-Ulster	Dougan	Geraldine Mary	SF
Mid-Ulster	Groogan	Cora Mariah	SF
Newry & Armagh	Donnelly	Freda Emma	DUP
Newry & Armagh	O'Rawe	Patricia (Pat)	SF
North Antrim	Dunlop	Jayne	APNI
North Down	Bell	Eileen	APNI
North Down	George	Maria Theresa	SF
North Down	Morrice	Jane Elizabeth	NIWC
North Down	Peacocke	Diana Louise	UUP
South Antrim	Cosgrove	Joan	NIWC
South Down	Fitzpatrick	Marian	SDLP
South Down	Miller	Trudy	NIWC
South Down	Ritchie	Margaret	SDLP
South Down	Ruane	Caitriona	SF
Strangford	Robinson	Iris	DUP
Upper Bann	Kelly	Dolores	SDLP
Upper Bann	O'Hagan	Dara	SF

Table A14: Women elected 2003

Forename	Surname	Party	Constituency
Norah Jeanette	Beare	UUP	Lagan Valley
Eileen	Bell	APNI	North Down
Mary	Bradley	SDLP	Foyle
Bairbre	de Brun	SF	Belfast West
Dianne	Dodds	DUP	Belfast West
Geraldine Mary	Dougan	SF	Mid Ulster
Arlene Isobel	Foster	UUP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Michelle	Gildernew	SF	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Carmel	Hanna	SDLP	Belfast South
Dolores	Kelly	SDLP	Upper Bann
Patricia	Lewsley	SDLP	Lagan Valley
Naomi Rachel	Long	APNI	Belfast East
Mary	Nelis	SF	Foyle
Patricia (Pat)	O'Rawe	SF	Newry & Armagh
Margaret	Ritchie	SDLP	South Down
Iris	Robinson	DUP	Strangford
Caitriona	Ruane	SF	South Down
Kathy	Stanton	SF	Belfast North

Table A15: Incumbents re-elected 2003

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Title	Party
Belfast East	Empey	Reg	Sir	UUP
Belfast East	Ervine	David Waiter	Mr	PUP
Belfast East	Robinson	Peter	Mr	DUP
Belfast North	Cobain	Fred	Mr	UUP
Belfast North	Dodds	Nigel Alexander	Mr	DUP
Belfast North	Kelly	Gerry	Mr	SF
Belfast North	Maginness	Alban	Mr	SDLP
Belfast South	Birnie	John Esmond	Mr	UUP
Belfast South	Hanna	Carmel	Ms	SDLP
Belfast South	Maskey	Alex	Mr	SF
Belfast South	McDonnell	Alasdair	Mr	SDLP
Belfast South	McGimpsey	Michael	Mr	UUP
Belfast South	Robinson	Simon Mark Peter	Mr	DUP
Belfast West	Adams	Gerry	Mr	SF
Belfast West	Attwood	Alex	Mr	SDLP
Belfast West	de Brun	Bairbre	Ms	SF
East Antrim	Beggs	Roy	Mr	UUP
East Antrim	Hilditch	David William	Mr	DUP
East Antrim	Neeson	Sean	Mr	APNI
East Antrim	Wilson	Sammy	Mr	DUP
East Londonderry	Campbell	Gregory Lloyd	Mr	DUP
East Londonderry	Dallat	John James	Mr	SDLP
East Londonderry	McClarty	David	Mr	UUP
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Gallagher	Tommy	Mr	SDLP
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Gildernew	Michelle	Ms	SF
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Morrow	Maurice	Mr	DUP
Foyle	Durkan	John Mark	Ms	SDLP
Foyle	Hay	William	Mr	DUP

Table A15: Incumbents re-elected 2003 cont.

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Title	Party
Foyle	McLaughlin	Mitchel	Mr	SF
Foyle	Nelis	Mary	Ms	SF
Lagan Valley	Bell	Billy	Mr	UUP
Lagan Valley	Close	Seamus Anthony	Mr	APNI
Lagan Valley	Lewsley	Patricia	Ms	SDLP
Lagan Valley	Poots	Edwin Cecil	Mr	DUP
Mid-Ulster	Armstrong	Billy	Mr	UUP
Mid-Ulster	McCrea	Robert Thomas William	Rev	DUP
Mid-Ulster	McGuinness	Martin	Mr	SF
Mid-Ulster	Molloy	Francis Joseph	Mr	SF
Newry & Armagh	Berry	Paul Leslie	Mr	DUP
Newry & Armagh	Kennedy	Danny	Mr	UUP
Newry & Armagh	Murphy	Conor Terence	Mr	SF
North Antrim	Coulter	Robert James	Mr	UUP
North Antrim	Farren	Sean	Mr	SDLP
North Antrim	Paisley	Ian Jnr	Mr	DUP
North Antrim	Paisley	Ian Richard Kyle	Rev	DUP
North Down	Bell	Eileen	Ms	APNI
North Down	McCartney	Robert Law	Mr	UKUP
North Down	McFarland	Alan Robert	Mr	UUP
North Down	Weir	Peter James	Mr	DUP
South Antrim	Clyde	Samuel Wilson	Mr	DUP
South Antrim	Ford	David R. J.	Mr	APNI
South Antrim	Wilson	Jim	Mr	UUP
South Down	Bradley	P. J.	Mr	SDLP
South Down	Nesbitt	Dermot	Mr	UUP
South Down	Wells	Jim	Mr	DUP
Strangford	Kilclooney	John David	Lord	UUP

Table A15: Incumbents re-elected 2003 cont.

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Title	Party
Strangford	McCarthy	Kieran	Mr	APNI
Strangford	Robinson	Iris	Mrs	DUP
Strangford	Shannon	Jim	Mr	DUP
Upper Bann	Trimble	David	Mr	UUP
West Tyrone	Doherty	Pat	Mr	SF
West Tyrone	Hussey	Derek Robert	Mr	UUP
West Tyrone	McElduff	Barry	Mr	SF
West Tyrone	McMenamin	Eugene Anthony	Mr	SDLP

Table A16: Incumbents defeated 2003

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Title	Party
Belfast North	Agnew	Fraser	Mr	UUC
Belfast North	Hutchinson	William	Mr	PUP
Belfast South	McWilliams	Monica	Professor	NIWC
Belfast West	Hendron	Joe	Dr	SDLP
Belfast West	Ramsey	Sue	Ms	SF
East Antrim	Hutchinson	Roger Norman	Mr	Ind
East Antrim	O'Connor	Daniel Gabriel	Mr	SDLP
East Londonderry	Armitage	Pauline	Ms	UKUP
East Londonderry	Douglas	Boyd	Mr	UUC
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	McHugh	Gerard James Joseph	Mr	SF
Lagan Valley	Davis	Ivan	Mr	Ind
Mid Ulster	Haughey	Dennis	Mr	SDLP
Newry & Armagh	Fee	John Fitzgerald	Mr	SDLP
North Antrim	Kane	Gardiner	Mr	Ind
North Down	Morrice	Jane Elizabeth	Ms	NIWC
South Antrim	Boyd	Norman Jonathan	Mr	NIUP
South Antrim	McClelland	Donovan	Mr	SDLP
South Down	O'Neill	Eamonn Gerrard	Mr	SDLP
Strangford	Wilson	Cedric	Mr	NIUP
Upper Bann	O'Hagan	Dara	Dr	SF
Upper Bann	Savage	George	Mr	UUP
Upper Bann	Watson	Denis	Mr	DUP
West Tyrone	Byrne	(Mark Joseph) Joe	Mr	SDLP

Table A17: New members 2003

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Title	Party
Belfast East	Copeland	Michael Stewart	Mr	UUP
Belfast East	Long	Naomi Rachel	Ms	APNI
Belfast East	Newton	Robin	Mr	DUP
Belfast North	McCausland	Nelson	Mr	DUP
Belfast North	Stanton	Kathy	Ms	SF
Belfast West	Dodds	Dianne	Ms	DUP
Belfast West	Ferguson	Michael	Mr	SF
Belfast West	McCann	Fra	Mr	SF
East Antrim	Dawson	Thomas George	Mr	DUP
East Antrim	Robinson	Ken	Mr	UUP
East Londonderry	Brolly	Francis R. G.	Mr	SF
East Londonderry	Hillis	Norman Frederick	Mr	UUP
East Londonderry	Robinson	George H.	Mr	DUP
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Elliott	Thomas Beatty (Tom)	Mr	UUP
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Foster	Arlene Isobel	Ms	UUP
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	O'Reilly	Hugh Thomas	Mr	SF
Foyle	Bradley	Mary	Ms	SDLP
Foyle	Ramsey	Pat	Mr	SDLP
Lagan Valley	Beare	Norah Jeanette	Ms	UUP
Lagan Valley	Donaldson	Jeffrey Mark	Mr	UUP
Mid-Ulster	Dougan	Geraldine Mary	Ms	SF
Mid-Ulster	McGlone	Patsy	Mr	SDLP
Newry & Armagh	Bradley	Dominic	Mr	SDLP
Newry & Armagh	Hyland	Davy	Mr	SF
Newry & Armagh	O'Rawe	Patricia (Pat)	Ms	SF
North Antrim	McGuigan	Philip	Mr	SF

Table A17: New members 2003 cont.

Constituency	Surname	Forename	Title	Party
North Antrim	Storey	Mervyn	Mr	DUP
North Down	Cree	Robin Leslie	Mr	UUP
North Down	Easton	Alex	Mr	DUP
South Antrim	Burns	Thomas	Mr	SDLP
South Antrim	Burnside	David Wilson Boyd	Mr	UUP
South Antrim	Girvan	Paul	Mr	DUP
South Down	Clarke	Wille	Mr	SF
South Down	Ritchie	Margaret	Ms	SDLP
South Down	Ruane	Caitriona	Ms	SF
Strangford	Ennis	George	Mr	DUP
Strangford	McNarry	David Mason	Mr	UUP
Upper Bann	Gardiner	Samuel	Mr	UUP
Upper Bann	Kelly	Dolores	Ms	SDLP
Upper Bann	Moutray	Stephen	Mr	DUP
Upper Bann	O'Dowd	John	Mr	SF
Upper Bann	Simpson	David	Mr	DUP
West Tyrone	Buchanan	Thomas Ernest	Mr	DUP
West Tyrone	Deeny	Charles Kieran	Dr	Ind

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Registered electorate and turnout

Table A18: Electorate, vote and turnout, 2003

Constituency	Seats	Electorate	Total vote	Total valid vote
Belfast East	6	51,937	31,524	30,965
Belfast North	6	51,353	31,997	31,532
Belfast South	6	50,707	31,737	31,330
Belfast West	6	50,861	33,527	32,854
East Antrim	6	55,473	31,343	30,952
East Londonderry	6	56,203	34,703	34,273
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	6	64,336	46,873	46,160
Foyle	6	65,303	41,436	40,806
Lagan Valley	6	67,910	41,724	41,254
Mid-Ulster	6	60,095	45,023	44,362
Newry & Armagh	6	68,731	48,233	47,378
North Antrim	6	70,489	44,632	44,099
North Down	6	57,422	31,316	30,835
South Antrim	6	63,640	37,858	37,421
South Down	6	70,149	46,012	45,346
Strangford	6	66,308	37,838	37,250
Upper Bann	6	68,814	44,145	43,482
West Tyrone	6	57,795	42,328	41,729
Total		1,097,526	702,249	692,028

Total rejected votes	Electoral quota	Unadjusted turnout %*	Adjusted turnout %*
559	4,424	60.7	59.6
465	4,505	62.3	61.4
407	4,476	62.6	61.8
673	4,694	65.9	64.6
391	4,422	56.5	55.8
430	4,897	61.8	61.0
713	6,595	72.9	71.7
630	5,830	63.5	62.5
470	5,894	61.4	60.7
661	6,338	74.9	73.8
855	6,769	70.2	68.9
533	6,300	63.3	62.6
481	4,406	54.5	53.7
437	5,346	59.5	58.8
666	6,479	65.6	64.6
588	5,322	57.1	56.2
663	6,212	64.2	63.2
599	5,962	73.2	72.2
10,221		64.0	63.1

*See paragraph 6.4 for explanation of 'unadjusted' and 'adjusted' turnout.

Table A19: Change in electorate, 1998–2003

Constituency	Electorate 2003	Electorate 1998	Change 1998–2003	Change (%) of 1998 register
Belfast East	51,937	60,562	-8,625	-14.24
Belfast North	51,353	62,541	-11,188	-17.89
Belfast South	50,707	61,209	-10,502	-17.16
Belfast West	50,861	60,669	-9,808	-16.17
East Antrim	55,473	59,313	-3,840	-6.47
East Londonderry	56,203	59,370	-3,167	-5.33
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	64,336	65,383	-1,047	-1.60
Foyle	65,303	68,888	-3,585	-5.20
Lagan Valley	67,910	71,661	-3,751	-5.23
Mid-Ulster	60,095	59,991	+104	+0.17
Newry & Armagh	68,731	71,553	-2,822	-3.94
North Antrim	70,489	73,247	-2,758	-3.77
North Down	57,422	62,942	-5,520	-8.77
South Antrim	63,640	69,426	-5,786	-8.33
South Down	70,149	71,000	-851	-1.20
Strangford	66,308	70,868	-4,560	-6.43
Upper Bann	68,814	70,852	-2,038	-2.88
West Tyrone	57,795	59,081	-1,286	-2.18
Total	1,097,526	1,178,556	-81,030	-6.88

Table A20: Change in turnout, 1998-2003

Constituency	2003 turnout %	Adjusted 1998 turnout %	Difference 1998–2003	2003 turnout %	Unadjusted 1998 turnout %	Difference 1998–2003
Belfast East	60.7	66.6	-5.9	59.6	65.4	-5.8
Belfast North	62.3	67.3	-5.0	61.4	65.8	-4.4
Belfast South	62.6	67.4	-4.8	61.8	66.5	-4.7
Belfast West	65.9	70.5	-4.6	64.6	68.9	-4.3
East Antrim	56.5	60.9	-4.4	55.8	60.0	-4.2
East Londonderry	61.8	67.7	-5.9	61.0	66.6	-5.7
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	72.9	79.4	-6.6	71.7	78.1	-6.3
Foyle	63.5	72.0	-8.6	62.5	70.8	-8.3
Lagan Valley	61.4	65.7	-4.2	60.7	64.9	-4.2
Mid-Ulster	74.9	84.4	-9.5	73.8	83.0	-9.2
Newry & Armagh	70.2	77.3	-7.1	68.9	75.7	-6.7
North Antrim	63.3	69.0	-5.7	62.6	67.8	-5.3
North Down	54.5	60.2	-5.6	53.7	59.3	-5.6
South Antrim	59.5	64.2	-4.7	58.8	63.4	-4.6
South Down	65.6	73.7	-8.1	64.6	72.3	-7.7
Strangford	57.1	61.6	-4.5	56.2	60.6	-4.4
Upper Bann	64.2	72.3	-8.1	63.2	71.1	-7.9
West Tyrone	73.2	79.4	-6.2	72.2	77.8	-5.6
Total	64.0	69.9	-6.0	63.1	68.8	-5.7

Table A21: In-person turnout, 2003

Constituency	Electorate registered to vote in person	Total votes polled	Total valid votes	Total invalid votes	Unadjusted turnout %	Adjusted turnout %
Belfast East	51,491	31,157	30,615	542	60.5	59.5
Belfast North	50,850	31,585	31,141	444	62.1	61.2
Belfast South	50,205	31,310	30,925	385	62.4	61.6
Belfast West	50,415	33,139	32,511	628	65.7	64.5
East Antrim	55,076	31,010	30,636	374	56.3	55.6
East Londonderry	54,915	33,600	33,211	389	61.2	60.5
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	60,736	43,635	43,052	583	71.8	70.9
Foyle	64,212	40,510	39,928	582	63.1	62.2
Lagan Valley	67,112	41,042	40,648	394	61.2	60.6
Mid-Ulster	57,921	43,014	42,524	490	74.3	73.4
Newry & Armagh	67,315	46,981	46,253	728	69.8	68.7
North Antrim	69,596	43,852	43,384	468	63.0	62.3
North Down	56,926	30,950	30,478	472	54.4	53.5
South Antrim	63,160	37,436	37,019	417	59.3	58.6
South Down	68,687	44,737	44,209	528	65.1	64.4
Strangford	65,676	37,298	36,721	577	56.8	55.9
Upper Bann	67,799	43,246	42,656	590	63.8	62.9
West Tyrone	55,465	40,184	39,680	504	72.4	71.5
Total	1,077,557	684,686	675,591	9,095	63.5	62.7

Table A22: Postal voting and turnout 2003

Constituency	Postal ballots issued	Postal ballots returned	Number included in count	Number rejected	Unadjusted turnout %	Adjusted turnout %
Belfast East	446	367	350	17	82.3	78.5
Belfast North	503	412	391	21	81.9	77.7
Belfast South	502	427	405	22	85.1	80.7
Belfast West	446	388	343	45	87.0	76.9
East Antrim	397	333	316	17	83.9	79.6
East Londonderry	1,288	1,103	1,062	41	85.6	82.5
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	3,600	3,238	3,108	130	89.9	86.3
Foyle	1,091	926	878	48	84.9	80.5
Lagan Valley	798	682	606	76	85.5	75.9
Mid-Ulster	2,174	2,009	1,838	171	92.4	84.5
Newry & Armagh	1,416	1,252	1,125	127	88.4	79.4
North Antrim	893	780	715	65	87.3	80.1
North Down	496	366	357	9	73.8	72.0
South Antrim	480	422	402	20	87.9	83.8
South Down	1,462	1,275	1,137	138	87.2	77.8
Strangford	632	540	529	11	85.4	83.7
Upper Bann	1,015	899	826	73	88.6	81.4
West Tyrone	2,330	2,144	2,049	95	92.0	87.9
Total	19,969	17,563	16,437	1,126	88.0	82.3

Table A23: Postal voting and turnout 1998–2003

Constituency	2003			Electorate with postal vote %
	Electorate with postal vote %	Turnout postal voters (unadjusted)%	Turnout postal voters (adjusted)%	
Belfast East	0.9	82.3	78.5	2.1
Belfast North	1.0	81.9	77.7	1.7
Belfast South	1.0	85.1	80.7	2.4
Belfast West	0.9	87.0	76.9	1.4
East Antrim	0.7	83.9	79.6	1.7
East Londonderry	2.3	85.6	82.5	3.6
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5.6	89.9	86.3	7.6
Foyle	1.7	84.9	80.5	2.3
Lagan Valley	1.2	85.5	75.9	2.5
Mid-Ulster	3.6	92.4	84.5	6.1
Newry & Armagh	2.1	88.4	79.4	4.3
North Antrim	1.3	87.3	80.1	2.2
North Down	0.9	73.8	72.0	2.4
South Antrim	0.8	87.9	83.8	1.7
South Down	2.1	87.2	77.8	3.8
Strangford	1.0	85.4	83.7	2.4
Upper Bann	1.5	88.6	81.4	3.1
West Tyrone	4.0	92.0	87.9	5.4
Overall	1.8	88.0	82.3	3.1

1998		Change in 1998–2003		
Turnout postal voters %	Turnout postal voters (adjusted) %	Electorate with postal vote	Postal voter turnout (unadjusted)	Postal voter turnout (adjusted)
84.3	83.1	-1.3	-2.0	-4.6
80.0	79.0	-0.7	1.9	-1.2
86.2	85.8	-1.4	-1.1	-5.2
83.7	82.3	-0.5	3.3	-5.4
81.3	80.4	-1.0	2.6	-0.8
86.1	84.4	-1.3	-0.5	-2.0
91.2	89.8	-2.0	-1.3	-3.5
90.2	88.3	-0.6	-5.3	-7.8
79.4	78.4	-1.4	6.0	-2.4
94.1	93.0	-2.5	-1.7	-8.5
85.8	84.4	-2.3	2.6	-5.0
84.7	83.7	-1.0	2.7	-3.6
81.1	80.6	-1.5	-7.3	-8.7
84.6	83.9	-1.0	3.4	-0.1
88.1	86.8	-1.7	-0.9	-9.0
82.3	81.9	-1.5	3.1	1.8
85.7	83.4	-1.6	2.9	-2.0
91.6	89.9	-1.4	0.4	-2.0
87.1	85.8	-1.3	0.9	-3.5

Table A24: Difference in turnout between postal and in-person voting 2003

Constituency	Unadjusted			Adjusted		
	Postal %	In person %	Difference	Postal %	In person %	Difference
Belfast East	82.3	60.5	21.8	78.5	59.5	19.0
Belfast North	81.9	62.1	19.8	77.7	61.2	16.5
Belfast South	85.1	62.4	22.7	80.7	61.6	19.1
Belfast West	87.0	65.7	21.3	76.9	64.5	12.4
East Antrim	83.9	56.3	27.6	79.6	55.6	24.0
East Londonderry	85.6	61.2	24.5	82.5	60.5	22.0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	89.9	71.8	18.1	86.3	70.9	15.4
Foyle	84.9	63.1	21.8	80.5	62.2	18.3
Lagan Valley	85.5	61.2	24.3	75.9	60.6	15.4
Mid-Ulster	92.4	74.3	18.1	84.5	73.4	11.1
Newry & Armagh	88.4	69.8	18.6	79.4	68.7	10.7
North Antrim	87.3	63.0	24.3	80.1	62.3	17.7
North Down	73.8	54.4	19.4	72.0	53.5	18.4
South Antrim	87.9	59.3	28.6	83.8	58.6	25.1
South Down	87.2	65.1	22.1	77.8	64.4	13.4
Strangford	85.4	56.8	28.7	83.7	55.9	27.8
Upper Bann	88.6	63.8	24.8	81.4	62.9	18.5
West Tyrone	92.0	72.4	19.6	87.9	71.5	16.4
Overall	88.0	63.5	24.4	82.3	62.7	19.6

Table A25: Invalid votes 2003

Constituency	Invalid postal		Invalid in person		Total invalid	
	Number	% of total postal	Number	% of total in person	Number	% of total poll
Belfast East	17	4.6	542	1.7	559	1.8
Belfast North	21	5.1	444	1.4	465	1.5
Belfast South	22	5.2	385	1.2	407	1.3
Belfast West	45	11.6	628	1.9	673	2.0
East Antrim	17	5.1	374	1.2	391	1.2
East Londonderry	41	3.7	389	1.2	430	1.2
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	130	4.0	583	1.3	713	1.5
Foyle	48	5.2	582	1.4	630	1.5
Lagan Valley	76	11.1	394	1.0	470	1.1
Mid-Ulster	171	8.5	490	1.1	661	1.5
Newry & Armagh	127	10.1	728	1.5	855	1.8
North Antrim	65	8.3	468	1.1	533	1.2
North Down	9	2.5	472	1.5	481	1.5
South Antrim	20	4.7	417	1.1	437	1.2
South Down	138	10.8	528	1.2	666	1.4
Strangford	11	2.0	577	1.5	588	1.6
Upper Bann	73	8.1	590	1.4	663	1.5
West Tyrone	95	4.4	504	1.3	599	1.4
Total	1,126	6.4	9,095	1.3	10,221	1.5

Table A26: Spoilt ballots 2003

Constituency	Total ballot papers rejected	No official mark	No first preference indicated	First preference for more than one candidate	Voter can be identified	Unmarked or void for uncertainty
Belfast East	559	-	-	530	-	29
Belfast North	465	-	-	158	-	307
Belfast South	407	-	28	362	-	17
Belfast West	673	-	153	520	-	-
East Antrim	391	5	-	382	-	4
East Londonderry	430	18	2	389	-	21
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	713	55	303	271	-	84
Foyle	630	6	491	72	-	61
Lagan Valley	470	-	107	323	-	40
Mid-Ulster	661	63	498	49	-	51
Newry & Armagh	855	64	613	99	-	79
North Antrim	533	3	474	27	26	3
North Down	481	61	360	10	-	50
South Antrim	437	19	1	380	-	37
South Down	666	-	159	486	-	21
Strangford	588	80	459	3	-	46
Upper Bann	663	49	516	52	-	46
West Tyrone	599	-	217	311	-	71
Total	10,221	423	4381	4424	26	967

Table A27: Change in percentage rejected votes 1998–2003

Constituency	2003	1998	Change 1998–2003
	Rejected votes %	Rejected votes %	
Belfast East	1.8	1.9	-0.1
Belfast North	1.5	2.2	-0.8
Belfast South	1.3	1.3	0.0
Belfast West	2.0	2.2	-0.2
East Antrim	1.2	1.4	-0.1
East Londonderry	1.2	1.5	-0.3
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	1.5	1.7	-0.2
Foyle	1.5	1.6	-0.1
Lagan Valley	1.1	1.2	-0.1
Mid-Ulster	1.5	1.6	-0.2
Newry & Armagh	1.8	2.1	-0.3
North Antrim	1.2	1.7	-0.5
North Down	1.5	1.5	0.1
South Antrim	1.2	1.4	-0.2
South Down	1.4	1.9	-0.4
Strangford	1.6	1.7	-0.1
Upper Bann	1.5	1.6	-0.1
West Tyrone	1.4	2.1	-0.6
Overall	1.5	1.7	-0.3

Table A28: List of parties and abbreviations

Party name	Abbreviation
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	APNI
The Conservative and Unionist Party	Con
Democratic Unionist Party	DUP
Green Party	Green
Independent	Ind
Northern Ireland Unionist Party	NIUP
Northern Ireland Women's Coalition	NIWC
Social and Democratic Labour Party	SDLP
Sinn Féin	SF
Socialist Environmental Alliance	SEA
Ulster Third Way	UTW
Ulster Unionist Party	UUP
United Kingdom Unionist Party	UKUP
United Unionist Coalition	UUC
Vote For Yourself	VFY
Workers Party	WP

Appendix 2

The establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Following the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont in 1972 and its replacement with direct rule from Westminster repeated efforts have been made to devolve power to Northern Ireland through a power-sharing arrangement.

The ceasefires in 1994 marked a new phase in the long and difficult process of peace negotiations, culminating in April 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement. This was signed on 10 April 1998 and allowed for:

- the setting up of a Northern Ireland Assembly;
- the establishment of bodies dealing with the internal government of Northern Ireland;
- the creation of other bodies dealing with relationships between the British and Irish governments.

Referendums on the Agreement

The Agreement was ratified by the electorate of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in separate referendums held on 22 May 1998. Voters in Northern Ireland were asked:

Do you support the agreement reached in the multi-party talks on Northern Ireland and set out in Command Paper 3883?

The turnout (81.1%) was unprecedented in the history of Northern Ireland. Altogether, 71.1% voted 'Yes' and 28.9% voted 'No'.

As part of the Agreement, the Republic of Ireland was required to drop its constitutional claim to

the territory of Northern Ireland. This was put to the electorate of the Republic of Ireland in a referendum in which the following question was asked:

Do you approve of the proposal to amend the Constitution contained in the under mentioned Bill? Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 1998.

In the Republic of Ireland there was a 56.3% turnout and 94.4% of those who voted supported the proposed changes to the Constitution.

The Northern Ireland Assembly

Legislation was quickly put in place to allow for elections to what was to be known as the New Northern Ireland Assembly. The Northern Ireland (Elections) Act 1998 received Royal Assent on 7 May, and facilitated an election to a Northern Ireland Assembly. Altogether, 108 members were to be elected, six for each of Northern Ireland's 18 Westminster constituencies. The electoral system to be used was the Single Transferable Vote system (STV).

On 25 June 1998 an election was held to the new Assembly. The UUP emerged with the largest number of seats – 28 in total. The SDLP emerged as the largest nationalist party with 24 seats, also achieving the largest proportion of the first preference votes of any party. Sinn Féin won 18 seats while the DUP won 20 seats and the Alliance Party won six seats. The Assembly met for the first time on 1 July 1998 and worked in 'shadow' form, electing a First Minister designate and a Deputy First Minister designate.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998

The Northern Ireland Bill was introduced into the House of Commons on 15 July 1998 and received Royal Assent on 19 November 1998. It established the following institutions:

- Northern Ireland Assembly;
- Executive Committee of the Assembly;
- 10 government departments;
- departmental committees;
- North/South ministerial council;
- British-Irish Council;
- British-Irish intergovernmental conference;
- civic forum.

The First and Deputy First Ministers head the Executive Committee of Ministers. Appointments to the Executive Committee are apportioned in accordance with the D'Hondt system. The parties in the Assembly choose the Ministers according to their party size with the largest party having the first choice of ministerial portfolios. Departmental committees support Ministers in drafting legislation for their particular department and are accountable to the Assembly for their performance.

The Executive Committee forms the government of Northern Ireland. The Executive Committee and its ministers are answerable to the Assembly for their performance. There are 10 Northern Ireland Departments, each headed by a Minister.

- Agriculture & Rural Development;
- Culture, Arts & Leisure;
- Education;
- Employment & Learning;
- Enterprise, Trade & Investment;
- Environment;
- Finance & Personnel;
- Health, Social Services & Public Safety;
- Regional Development;
- Social Development.

Under devolution, the Northern Ireland Assembly has full legislative and executive powers for all matters that are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Government Departments. However, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland retains responsibility for 'excepted and reserved matters' that have not been devolved to the Assembly. These include policing, security, prisons, criminal justice, international relations, taxation, national insurance, regulation of financial services, the regulation of telecommunications and broadcasting and electoral matters.

Although an Executive was formed, the institutions proved unsustainable and the Assembly was suspended on a number of occasions. Following each suspension talks commenced to re-establish the institutions. On 14 October 2002 the most recent suspension of the Assembly began and direct rule was restored. Since then talks have continued with the objective of restoring devolution.

The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. We aim to gain public confidence and encourage people to take part in the democratic process within the UK by modernising the electoral process, promoting public awareness of electoral matters and regulating political parties.

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