

GENERAL ELECTION NORTHERN IRELAND: JUNE 1983

Introduction

The votes cast for each of the major Northern Ireland parties at the general election were as follows:-

Party	Total Vote	% of Total Vote
UUP	259,952	34.0%
DUP	152,749	20.0%
UPUP	22,861	3.0%
SDLP	137,012	17.9%
Sinn Fein	102,681	13.4%
Alliance	61,275	8.0%
Others	28,075	3.7%
Total	764,605	100.0%

Total Electorate	1,050,136
Spoiled Votes	4,358
Total Turn Out	768,963
% Turnout	73.2%

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2. As has been the pattern in nearly all elections in Northern Ireland in the last ten years, unionist candidates won nearly 60% of the overall vote; nationalists around 30% and the so-called centre parties (Alliance, Workers Party etc) about 10%. Within this overall pattern there were some interesting regional variations as the following table demonstrates:

	<u>Unionists</u>	<u>Nationalists</u>	<u>Others</u>
East of the Bann (North Antrim, South Antrim, East Antrim, Lagan Valley, Upper Bann, Newry and Armagh, North Down, South Down and Strangford)	70%	20%	10%
West of the Bann (Foyle, East Londonderry, Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and South Tyrone)	56%	43%	3%
Belfast	50%	28%	22%
Total:	57%	31.3%	11.7%

3. Despite their failure to achieve an electoral pact, the two main unionist parties won 14 of the 17 new seats. The results are a major boost for the UUP which more than doubled the size of its Westminster team and, as Mr Molyneux has already pointed out, is now the fourth largest party in Parliament with a total of 11 seats. The DUP will be disappointed to have taken only three seats: they safely held on in North Antrim and East Belfast; lost North Belfast to the Official Unionists but picked up an extra seat in Mid Ulster. Mr Kilfedder (UPUP) added a 15th seat for the unionist group. Despite taking over 30% of the vote between them, the SDLP and Sinn Fein could win only one seat each and suffered narrow defeats in Mid Ulster, South Down and Newry and Armagh. Indeed, one of the features of this election was the way in which unionist supporters voted tactically to defeat nationalist candidates: as Mr Robinson has said, "the electorate made the pact".
4. A full list of Northern Ireland's 17 MPs is at Annex A. Of the 12 former MPs, nine are returning to Westminster for a further spell (Mr Dunlop and Mr McQuade retired from politics before the election: Mr Fitt was defeated by Gerry Adams in West Belfast). All but three of the new MPs are members of the Assembly, the exceptions being Messrs Ross, Powell and Walker of the Official Unionists. All three of Northern Ireland's Euro MPs, Messrs Hume, Paisley and Taylor, now have a seat at Westminster.

Analysis of Results

Unionist Parties

5. The battle for the unionist vote was won decisively by the UUP who polled over 100,000 more votes than their DUP rivals. Their share of the unionist vote, at over 60%, was far and away their best electoral performance in recent years and all the Official Unionist candidates who had any chance of success were returned. Clearly, the results were a major disappointment for the DUP whose share of the overall vote has fallen steadily in the last four years from a peak of 30% at the European elections in 1979 to 26.6% in the 1981 council elections, 23% at last year's Assembly elections and 20% on this occasion. The Official Unionist vote has shown a corresponding increase.
6. The failure by unionists to secure an electoral pact in three of the six nationalist seats had no effect on the results. In West Belfast, even an agreed unionist candidate would have had no chance of taking the seat especially since a very large number of loyalists decided to support Gerry Fitt in an effort to prevent a Sinn Fein victory. In South Down, the DUP candidate polled badly allowing Mr Powell to scrape home with a majority of 547 and in Mid Ulster, the nationalist vote split more evenly than the unionist vote handing victory to the DUP by just 78 votes. Meanwhile, the UUP took full advantage in the two seats from which the DUP had withdrawn, returning Ken Maginnis in Fermanagh and South Tyrone and Jim Nicholson in Newry and Armagh. Finally, the agreed DUP candidate in Foyle had no chance against Mr Hume who polled 46% of the total vote.
7. For the DUP, their most disappointing performance was in the new East Antrim constituency where the party's Assembly chief Whip, Jim Allister, was confidently expected to win. In the event, he was beaten by Roy Beggs, a former member of the DUP, in one of the closest results of the election. Strangford, another seat where they were expected to do well, was easily won by John Taylor for the UUP and North Belfast, held in the last Parliament by John McQuade, reverted to the UUP, a result which was always likely given the internal disputes inside the DUP in this part of the City. Mr McCrea's narrow victory in Mid Ulster saved the DUP from a completely humiliating performance.

Nationalist Parties

8. Predictably, media attention has focussed on the result in West Belfast and the defeat of the sitting MP, Gerry Fitt, by Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams. Although the result in this constituency was not as overwhelming as Mr Adams has claimed (his share of the vote was just under 37%), the fact remains that, overall, Sinn Fein comfortably exceeded their declared target of increasing their support by 50% (to 90,000) from their Assembly election base. The total nationalist vote rose from 183,000 in the Assembly election to 240,000 and Sinn Fein succeeded in increasing their share of this larger total from 35% to 43%. In terms of the total vote, they

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closed the gap with the SDLP (SDLP 17.9%: Sinn Fein 13.4%). Despite this, the party's narrow defeat in Mid-Ulster and Mr Carron's failure in Fermanagh must have come as a disappointment. Complaints about the SDLP "splitting" the nationalist vote have already been levelled.

9. Despite polling much better than Sinn Fein in both constituencies the SDLP must be regretting their failure to capture the seats of South Down and Newry and Armagh. But the victory of John Hume in Foyle was clear cut: outpolling McGuinness by more than 2:1 and the SDLP candidate's performance in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, polling 9,900 votes must have encouraged the Party locally and Province wide. Overall, the Party received nearly 20,000 more votes than at the Assembly though on an increased electorate their share of the total vote declined by about 1%.

Other Parties

10. With only 8% of the total vote, the Alliance Party have had their most disappointing result for several years. David Cook and John Cushnahan failed to make any sort of impact in South Belfast and North Down and party leader, Oliver Napier, was beaten into third place in East Belfast. Mr Napier has been putting a brave face on the results but the fact is that Alliance have, once again, found it impossible to secure an electoral breakthrough. The publicity gained by the party's leading spokesman through their participation in the Assembly seems to have had no effect on the level of their public support.
11. Following his success in the Assembly elections, Mr Kilfedder has confirmed his remarkable personal popularity in North Down, polling more than 50% of the vote in this new constituency and inflicting a humiliating defeat on the Official Unionist candidate, Robert McCartney. He will continue to be the highest paid politician in the UK.
12. Mr Fitt's performance in West Belfast was something of a surprise. He polled over 10,000 votes - at least half of them gained at the expense of the two unionist candidates - and probably picked up most of the Alliance Party's support in this constituency. He must also have won a number of SDLP votes but the size of Mr Adams' majority suggests that Sinn Fein would have won the seat even if Mr Fitt had chosen not to stand. Fearing a predicted landslide for Sinn Fein early in the count Mr Fitt announced his retirement from local politics. But when he saw the figures, an emotional Mr Fitt said that he would be reconsidering his decision.
13. The Workers Party won less than 2% of the vote with a total of 14 candidates. They will continue their efforts to introduce class politics to the electorate but these will always be surrounded by a faint air of musical comedy.

Implications of the Result

14. SDLP/Sinn Fein

The assessment must be that the SDLP have done well enough to keep the Party together for the immediate future and certainly for the lifetime of the Forum. The confidence the latter gave to the leadership was clearly apparent in the way the Party took the fight to Sinn Fein on the hustings. But there is no evidence to suggest that the issue was one which made a major impact on their electorate. The party managed to retain its position but no more. Nonetheless, post-election, the party leaders will exude an air of satisfaction and confidence which is not misplaced.

15. On the other hand, Sinn Fein has portrayed the result as a major success though the overall increase in their vote since the Assembly's elections is not surprising given that they fought 14 constituencies. Their additional 40,000 votes appear to come from new, young voters or supporters of traditional hardline nationalist policies in areas where Sinn Fein has not stood before. But they have not made any real inroads into SDLP support. It is difficult to see where they could make further advances and it is probably fair to say that the party has now reached its electoral plateau. But, they have passed the 100,000 barrier and Adams has said that he intends to carry his message to London.

16. The implications for HMG's policy from all this are:

- (i) There is nothing to suggest that either Party will change its attitude to the Assembly;
- (ii) For the SDLP, the emphasis remains on the Forum. Hume will be an effective addition to Westminster but with his triple responsibility (Forum, Europe, Westminster), he may not be able to attend Westminster often until the New Year.

We will need to:

- (a) maintain our efforts to keep the SDLP informed and consulted;
- (b) keep our options open with regard to the Forum so as not to preclude an eventual return by the SDLP to the mainstream of politics in the Province.
- (iii) Despite their increased vote, we have nothing to lose by maintaining our firm attitude to Sinn Fein. The lifting of the exclusion ban has denied Adams a propaganda point in Northern Ireland and, given the qualified success of the SDLP, Adams is unlikely to have an unchallenged platform from which he can make an impact for his cause in the rest of the UK.

UUP/DUP

17. The UUP inflicted a major defeat on the DUP and will now present themselves clearly as the voice of the majority. Neither the role nor the future of the Assembly figured as issues in the campaign. Nonetheless, the success of the UUP, given their equivocal attitude to the Assembly, must bring that body's future into question. After a pause to gauge the new Government and the NI Ministerial team, we could well be faced with increased pressure in Westminster and/or Stormont from Messrs Molyneaux and Powell to move towards either integration or majority rule. It is too early to say how much support the DUP leaders could command from their Party. Differences of opinion, highlighted in the Assembly May devolution debate, remain. Our best guess is that the Party will work the existing system for the rest of the year but will use any opportunity to test our continued commitment to the 1982 Act. The first indication of likely attitudes will come soon. One of the first items to be considered by the Assembly Business Committee next week is likely to concern the establishment of a committee to consider devolution.
18. The DUP position is now hard to gauge. Their defeat at the hands of "the wreckers and slackers" might lead Mr Paisley further to intensify his efforts to boost the DUP position in the Assembly. If this proves to be the case, we can anticipate proposals for "legislative" devolution; question times, more powers for the Security Committee etc. On the other hand, the scale of their electoral defeat could drive the DUP back to its previous more extreme and erratic positions. Certainly, Mr Paisley's immediate public response to the election results does nothing to inspire confidence in the chances of his continuing his more recent constructive and relatively low-key approach to problems in the Province. On the other hand, Mr Robinson's reactions were more measured and he might begin to exert a greater influence in the Party in the months ahead.

Alliance

19. Nothing in the election results (and for the duration of Forum) will affect the Alliance Party's approach to the Assembly and the question of "power-sharing" devolution.

Summary

By winning 15 of the 17 new seats, the unionists have significantly increased their representation at Westminster. The results are a major victory for the Official Unionists and a set-back for the DUP. Although disappointed that they narrowly failed to secure more seats, the SDLP will be pleased with their performance. They remain the major spokesmen for

the minority community. Sinn Fein have achieved their target of over 90,000 votes and will use Mr Adams' election as a major plank in their propaganda effort. They have maximised the hard-line nationalist vote without making any significant inroads into SDLP support. Finally it is encouraging that, on both sides of the community, the parties which represent the less extreme approach to political development have been the more successful.

Political Affairs Division

11 June 1983

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C O N F I D E N T I A L

NORTHERN IRELAND MPs

Name	Party	Constituency	Majority
James Molyneaux	UUP	Lagan Valley	17216
Harold McCusker	UUP	Upper Bann	17081
Martin Smyth	UUP	South Belfast	9724
John Taylor	UUP	Strangford	7370
William Ross	UUP	East Londonderry	7262
Enoch Powell	UUP	South Down	547
Cecil Walker	UUP	North Belfast	7079
Roy Beggs	UUP	East Antrim	367
Ken Maginnis	UUP	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	7676
Jim Nicholson	UUP	Newry and Armagh	1554
Clifford Forsythe	UUP	South Antrim	6847
Ian Paisley	DUP	North Antrim	13173
Peter Robinson	DUP	East Belfast	7989
William McCrea	DUP	Mid Ulster	78
James Kilfedder	UPUP	North Down	13846
John Hume	SDLP	Foyle	8148
Gerry Adams	Sinn Fein	West Belfast	5445