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Paul Mitchell (LSE)

Geoffrey Evans (Oxford)

Brendan O'Leary (University of Pennsylvania)



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Paul Mitchell, Geoffrey Evans and Brendan O'Leary

Contacts:

Dr Paul Mitchell (all correspondence please)
Department of Government and the Methodology Institute
London School of Economic and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
UK
p.l.mitchell@lse.ac.uk
Tel: 44+207-79556340

Professor Geoffrey Evans
Director, Centre for Research Methods in the Social Sciences
University of Oxford
Official Fellow & Senior Tutor
Nuffield College, Oxford OX1 1NF
UK
Geoffrey.Evans@Nuffield.Oxford.ac.uk
Tel: 44+1865-278613

Professor Brendan O'Leary
Lauder Professor of Political Science Director of the Solomon Asch
Center for the Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict
University of Pennsylvania
3819-33 Chestnut Street, Suite 305, Philadelphia, PA 19104,
USA
boleary@sas.upenn.edu

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Abstract

Ethnic out-bidding models correctly suggest that democratic stability is much more difficult to achieve in divided societies with fully mobilised ethnic party systems. But they are not correct when they predict that ethnic party systems inevitably lead to perpetual extremist outbidding leading to inevitable democratic collapse. We argue that the incentives of power-sharing institutions combined with Downsian vote-seeking motivations can encourage the development of electoral strategies based on ‘ethnic tribunal appeals’, where parties combine robust ethnic identity representation with increased pragmatism over political resource allocation. We test these arguments in Northern Ireland and show that though evidence of direct vote-switching from moderate parties to ostensibly ‘extreme’ parties is *prima facie* consistent with the outbidding thesis, attitudinal convergence between the nationalist and unionist communities on the main political issues is not. The recent success of the DUP and Sinn Féin can instead be explained by these parties’ increased *moderation* in combination with their ‘tribune’ appeals.

The Changing of the Guards

In recent elections in Northern Ireland the UK and Irish governments' worst electoral nightmares materialized. Eleven years after the IRA officially launched the peace process in 1994 by announcing a 'complete cessation' of its military operations, Sinn Féin (SF) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), confirmed their new found respective domination of the 'nationalist' and 'unionist' party systems. The hard-line parties had won out from the peace process at the expense of their respective moderates in their own blocs. In the 2005 Westminster parliamentary elections Ian Paisley's DUP attracted 34 per cent of the vote, whereas the once dominant and more moderate Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), led by David Trimble, managed less than 18 per cent. The disproportional effects of single member plurality (SMP) elections had previously benefited the UUP since the formation of Northern Ireland. This time, however, the plurality electoral system almost wiped out the party's MPs. The UUP was left with one junior-ranked MP. But this swing in fortunes was not just an aberration produced by SMP. The DUP has been the leading unionist party in four successive elections (2003-2005), under proportional election systems as well as SMP. The displacement of the historically leading party has been very similar among Northern nationalists. Sinn Féin has now out-paced the more moderate Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in six successive elections (2001-05).

This was not what was supposed to happen. There had been a widespread expectation that the SDLP, as the principal architect of the 1998 Good Friday or Belfast Agreement, and the UUP, its 'partner in peace', would receive electoral rewards for reaching a historic compromise. Their leaders did win the Nobel peace prize, but no comparable electoral prizes came from the voters. The SDLP and UUP's negotiation of a historic compromise was widely held to presage a new era of internal power-sharing government and cooperative North-South relationships that would offer a brighter future for all in Northern Ireland. But, to date, the institutions negotiated in the Good Friday Agreement have spent more time in suspended animation than in active duty. Though the institutions

have not (yet) worked as intended, the ‘peace process’ and the Belfast Agreement (hereafter, the ‘Agreement’) have transformed Northern Ireland’s party system and voting behaviour.

Evaluating the prospects for an enduring settlement is not the main concern of this article¹. This article instead seeks to explain the transformation of the party system and the underlying shifts in patterns of voting. The argument is developed in six sections. Section 1 examines the logic of party competition in ethnic party systems. It examines the implications of the ethnic outbidding thesis, and considers how ethnic party systems may be rescued from their predicted centrifugal fate. A combination of Downsian vote-seeking motivations (within a bi-polar segmented electorate) and the incentives of power-sharing institutions may encourage the development of electoral strategies based on what we call ethnic tribune appeals. Section 2 examines the survey evidence of the Northern Ireland Election Studies which shows direct vote switches from the more moderate to the more extreme parties. Direct vote-switching from the moderate parties to the ostensibly ‘extreme’ parties is *prima facie* consistent with the outbidding thesis, but we argue that their gains are mostly explained by their increased moderation combined with their ‘ethnic tribune’ appeal. Section 3 analyses whether popular attitudes on some of the major principles of the Good Friday Agreement have in fact converged or polarised. If the out-bidding thesis is correct, increased electoral support for more extreme parties should be accompanied by increasing attitudinal polarization among voters on these principles. But we demonstrate striking evidence of attitudinal convergence. This presents a puzzle. Why do we see inter-ethnic attitudinal convergence on more moderate policy positions at the same time that we witness dramatically increased support for the more extreme parties? Sections 4 and 5 confront this puzzle. Section 4 presents evidence of the parties, especially the DUP and Sinn Féin, competing and being rewarded on the basis of ‘ethnic tribune appeals’. Section 5 subjects this thesis

¹ It remains possible that the IRA’s verified destruction of its weapons in the summer of 2005 will help create the conditions in which stable power-sharing arrangements can be sustained. Such at least is the hope of the two governments expressed in their April 2006 joint statement (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4883600.stm).

to some stringent tests by estimating multivariate models that control for other factors known to be strong predictors of party support. In Section 6 we discuss the general implications of our findings for the ethnic outbidding thesis.

Section 1: The Logic of Party Competition in Ethnic Party Systems

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

Once an ethnic party system is extensively mobilised it is made up primarily of 'ethnic parties'² that appeal almost exclusively to voters from their own ethnic group rather than as in non-segmented societies (at least aspirationally) to all voters. Their mobilisation drives are 'catch-us' rather than 'catch-all'. Loyalties may have a strongly ascriptive character so that few voters 'float across' the primary political cleavage derived from the clash of ethnic identities. Elections resemble ethnic 'headcounts' or censuses. Party platforms tend to be characterised by ethnic outbidding among rival parties within each ethnic bloc (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972, Horowitz 1985: 349-60). Within-bloc competition may develop a centrifugal dynamic as parties mobilize 'their' community, engaging in

² These are parties *either* based on ethnic appeals to communities of shared descent, *or* parties based on rival nationalist appeals – such nationalist appeals may have either an exclusive ethnic salience or be multi-ethnic in character (e.g. Eritrean nationalists comprised multi-ethnic coalitions in Ethiopia).

extremist and emotive ethnic appeals that suggest that their group's vital interests are in danger of being 'sold out'. Any co-operative overtures by a moderate party in one bloc to like-minded forces in other blocs immediately renders that party vulnerable to the accusation that it is naïve or treacherous.

Centrifugal Dynamics: The Politics of Outbidding

Many ethnic party systems have developed this centrifugal dynamic. It was evident in late-twentieth century Sri Lanka, Lebanon, and the former Yugoslavia. Some claim it is occurring in contemporary Iraq. The dynamic process begins in what we might call 'Phase 1 - ethnic mobilisation', the period when single ethnic parties emerge to represent each of the main ethnic groups, typically following a civil war, independence, decolonization, or some other regime change.³ These parties usually develop dominant, if not necessarily monopolistic, support in their respective communities. At some point the leading protagonists, either through calculated self-interest or external inducement, may be prepared to engage in inherently risky inter-ethnic compromises. As Rabushka and Shepsle (1972: 151) put it: 'From time to time, moderates appear in the electoral arena of plural societies but usually fail to retain long-run support from their constituents. Extremist entrepreneurs resort to ethnic demand generation and moderates are often compelled to adopt a less compromising stance to avoid defeat'. Thus the out-bidding thesis predicts that the one thing that inter-ethnic centripetal moves are almost certain to accomplish is to launch Phase 2 of the ethnic party system, namely the institutionalisation of intra-ethnic competition (see Horowitz 1985: 354-60).

³ In the older literature on ethnic party systems and democratisation earlier pre-independence stages of party development were analysed. The terminal stages of colonial rule incentivised the maintenance of independence parties with (at least some) multi-ethnic support (e.g. Horowitz 1985: 309). But post-independence, the multi-ethnic party or coalition is unstable, as the 'national' conflict against the colonial power loses salience and is replaced by intense distributive conflicts, led by ethnic entrepreneurs engaged in what Sartori calls the 'unfair competition' of out-bidding (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972: 82). But we are concerned with the dynamics of ethnic party competition once such a system has emerged, rather than on its genesis.

In Phase 2 the accommodating centripetal moves of the dominant ethnic parties render them vulnerable to counter-mobilizations within their own segments by self-styled hard-line ‘saviours’ of their cause. The once dominant ethnic parties can no longer claim to speak unequivocally for their communities. They now have more intransigent intra-ethnic rivals mobilizing in their heartlands, threatening to denounce any further cooperative moves as ‘betrayals’ or ‘capitulations’. Given that the costs of inter-ethnic concessions tend to be tangible and immediate (lost resources, symbols, or securities), whereas the benefits may be more elusive and future-oriented (peace, prosperity, or inward investment), in protracted conflicts the structure of incentives may be stacked in favour of the intransigent rather than the more moderate parties. The outcome is all too familiar. The party system increases in size and bargaining complexity, and the incentives and security of leaders to engage in meaningful compromises are severely undermined (Nordlinger 1972). Settlements are less likely to be attempted, become harder to reach, and if struck, are less likely to be stable. Indeed, Rabushka and Shepsle (1972: 86) despairingly reason that ‘democracy in plural societies is a casualty of communal politics’, so that ethnic conflict resolution is not manageable within a democratic framework (ibid: 217).

But what happens next? Grofman and Stockwell (2003:137) correctly point out that a weakness of the ‘plural society theory is that it predicts only one outcome: instability and the end of democratic rule. Therefore, plural society theory cannot explain successful democracy outcomes’. What are the implications for levels of polarization and the direction of party competition if there is an ethnic party system? Is there only one outcome? Perhaps intra-ethnic competition continues indefinitely and precludes progress, giving us a stalemated system, with minor intra-ethnic swings. Or perhaps the more extreme parties outflank and replace the once dominant parties, returning the party system essentially back to phase 1. That would then create the possibility of a repeat cycle. This cycle of former ethnic radicals moderating their stance, only to be attacked and displaced in their turn by newcomers who repeat the original transformation they denounced, would be reminiscent of Roberto

Michels' prediction in his *Political Parties* (1911) that the cruel game of leadership betrayal and replacement would continue without end.

The conventional prognosis, embedded in Rabushka and Shepsle's work, is that the centrifugal competitive dynamic of ethnic out-bidding leads to ever increasing polarisation between the communities so that little or no cooperative progress is feasible: Sri Lanka from the 1950s exemplifies the story. Fierce intra-ethnic competition is clearly a serious constraint on conflict-regulating endeavours. But it does not necessarily follow that the 'moderate ground' will be vacated by the main parties and that all electoral competition will therefore be relentlessly centrifugal. After all, it is only electorally rational for all or most of the main parties in each segment to move permanently to the extremes of ethnic intransigence if they believe that this is where most of the voters are permanently located. They would have to believe there is an extreme bi-modal distribution of voter preferences that becomes progressively ever more extreme. In such cases Downs predicted 'a reign of terror' and revolution (1957: 120). In ethnic conflicts, the operationalization of the 'reign of terror' would include the establishment of control systems, or inter-ethnic wars, or contested secession. Such outcomes are not rare. But equally, they are not as inevitable as the out-bidding thesis predicts.

Centripetal Dynamics in Ethnic Party Systems?

In principle there are a variety of means through which ethnic party systems may avoid the centrifugal fate predicted by the outbidding model⁴. First a multidimensional cross-cutting cleavage structure may permit enough 'fluidity' in ethnic relations to prevent the polarising consequences of a permanent 'minority-majority' structure. Second, even in the absence of substantial cross-cutting cleavages, the adoption of power-sharing institutions may lead to centripetal competition according to

⁴ We do not provide a full taxonomy of possible conflict-regulating elements in party systems, but rather focus on those relevant to the present case.

a Downsian logic, amended to take account of bipolar preferences. We examine each of these possibilities in turn.⁵

One recent account of ethnic parties reminds us that ethnic divisions and even ethnic parties need not be destructive of democracy. Chandra (2004; 2005) observes that ethnic divisions can be fluid and that it is ‘institutions that artificially restrict ethnic divisions to a single dimension [that] destabilize democracy, whereas institutions that foster multiple dimensions of ethnicity can sustain it’ (2005: 235). Chandra, using the example of politics in India, argues that initial spirals of ethnic out-bidding have typically given way, over time, to centrist behaviour. Chandra’s interesting argument is essentially premised on a development of cross-cutting cleavage theory, the idea that the institutionalisation of symmetric cross-cutting cleavages (in India through policies of affirmative action; language policy; recognition of statehood) can produce centripetal party behaviour. But clearly if politicians are capable of activating multiple dimensions of ethnic identity, and thereby producing centripetal outcomes, there must be more than one cleavage out of which alternative ‘majorities’ (or winning pluralities) can be constructed. India has at least four major aspects of ethnic diversity that substantially cross-cut: language, religion, caste and tribe. ‘There are so many ways to construct a majority in India, both in states and the nation as a whole, that remarkable fluidity is lent to the majority-minority framework of politics. In Indian politics, permanent majorities are

⁵ There are other perspectives. Philip Roeder and Donald Rothchild (2005) advocate power-dividing as an alternative to power sharing. They charge that the latter leads to an ‘ethnification of all policy disputes and elimination of crosscutting cleavages’ and the ‘concentration of institutional weapons in the hands of ethnopoliticians, providing them with the means to back up their escalating demands’ (Roeder 2005: 56). While this is not the place for a full evaluation of this approach it is worth noting that the power-dividing strategy is essentially an alternative means (an alternative to cross-cutting cleavages) of encouraging a multiple majorities strategy for de-escalating conflict (Roeder 2005:61). However, the Northern Ireland conflict has been defined by an essentially fixed single majority-minority relationship since the state was created on that basis in 1921.

virtually inconceivable' (Ahuja and Varshney, 2005: 264). Thus in India cleavages are not one-dimensional, mutually reinforcing and cumulative. In Northern Ireland they (mostly) are.

Thus, this potential source of centripetalism – symmetric cross-cutting cleavages – does not exist in Northern Ireland in any substantial fashion. Electoral competition there is contained within an ethnic dual party system; fierce party competition exists within the context of an overall bipolar constitutional cleavage (Diskin 1984; McAllister and Nelson 1979; Evans and Duffy 1997; Mitchell 1995, 1999; O'Leary and McGarry 1996; Tonge 2005). Party politics has been dominated primarily by ethnic parties, which seek only the support of the electorate on 'their side' of the constitutional divide. All surveys demonstrate the ethnically exclusive nature of support for the four main parties in Northern Ireland. For example, the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly election study (survey evidence) shows that only 1.4 per cent and zero per cent, respectively, of UUP and DUP voters were Catholic. In the nationalist party system, one per cent of Sinn Féin voters and 1.7 percent of SDLP voters were Protestant.⁶ Because very little 'normal' inter-bloc competition occurs, parties instead try to out-mobilise each other rather than genuinely appeal for cross-community votes. Within each bloc socio-economic cleavages have sometimes been relevant in explaining partisanship (especially within the unionist community – see Evans and Duffy 1997), but more recent work suggests that the cleavage structure has simplified (Tilley, Evans and Mitchell, typescript). Very few voters are not committed to one bloc or the other, so there have been few electoral incentives to be moderate.

But reflection should suggest that in many ethnic party systems, as in contemporary Northern Ireland, the goal of many rational voters will be to avoid a reign of terror, to avoid tyrannous majority control, violently contested secession, violent irredentism or repressive down-sizing, especially if any or all of these outcomes appear likely to be extremely costly. In Northern Ireland large and increasing proportions of voters want to see power-sharing across the British unionist-Irish

⁶ By contrast the bi-confessional but increasingly marginalized Alliance Party attracts more diverse support (in 2003 its vote was composed of 50 per cent Protestants, 29 per cent Catholics and 18 per cent who stated 'no religion').

nationalist divide, but without the need to abandon their ethno-national identities and aspirations. The 1998 Agreement, and its treaty form, the British-Irish Agreement ('the Agreement') institutionalised a set of power-sharing institutions and federal and con-federal arrangements that mandate that (a) executive power can only be devolved to the local parties if it is shared across both nationalities, and (b) make both ethno-national groups long-term constitutional preferences legitimate (O'Leary, 1999). To take just one example: in forming a Northern Ireland Executive (the name for the power-sharing government), the Agreement provided a sequential portfolio allocation procedure which meant that parties are 'entitled' to portfolios according to their respective electoral strength. While parties may opt-out of their proportional allocation, if the allocation proceeds this will have the direct effect of improving the allocations of their intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic rivals in other parties (O'Leary, Grofman and Elklit, 2005).

Ethnic outbidding implies a spatial model in which becoming the 'strongest defender' of an ethnic group necessarily involves incessant hard-line polarising behaviour. But in contexts in which the traditionally more moderate parties have moved further towards the centre to take advantage of power-sharing institutions (e.g. the UUP-SDLP 'moderate' coalition that led the Northern Ireland Executive between 1999 and 2002),⁷ it is possible for the traditionally more extreme parties to move to more accommodating positions⁸ and thus make themselves more 'relevant for governance', whilst simultaneously remaining the strongest 'defender' of the ethnic cause.⁹ Though it is true that the logic of competition in ethnic multi-party systems is substantially modified by the ascriptive nature of voters' resonant identities (in particular there continues to be very little cross-ethnic vote movement),

⁷ The UUP and SDLP held the key posts of First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and had three ministries each. Representatives of Sinn Féin and the DUP were also ministers in the Executive, the former much more enthusiastically than the latter.

⁸ This logic might not hold if the formerly extreme parties anticipate that their centripetal moves will result in flanking by new entrants.

⁹ We are *not* arguing that the 1998 Agreement is *the* origin or the only cause of centripetal moves by Sinn Féin and the DUP. We discuss the timing of these moves below.

the calculations that parties have to make within their respective segmented party systems are analogous to those faced by parties in conventional non-ethnic party systems. Sinn Féin and the DUP have increasingly calculated as Downs would predict. They are considering ‘how many extremists each loses by moving towards the center compared with how many moderates it gains thereby’ (Downs 1975: 117).

The DUP and Sinn Féin have increasingly become what we call ‘ethnic tribune parties’, parties that combine robust ‘ethnic identity mobilization’ with increased pragmatism over political resource allocations (further incentivized by the power-sharing framework). Tribunes in ancient Rome’s republic were officials elected by the plebeians to protect their interests against patricians, who usually monopolized the consulate. Tribunes had the right to veto legislation – as well as to propose it, but they were not the key executive officers of the Republic; the two consuls were (Taylor 1949). The concept of a ‘tribune party’ was used by Lavau (1969; 1975) to characterise the French Communist Party, a party that continued ‘to play the part of tribune, laying stress on its defensive role’ (Johnson, 1981: 151). Our term ‘ethnic tribune party’ combines the traditional expressive feature of tribune politics (the most robust defender of the cause) with an emphasis that such a party can seek to maximise the ethnic group’s share of resources extractable from political participation. The ethnic tribune party can be simultaneously pragmatic (with regard to resources) and intransigent (with regard to identity). In short, ethnic party systems, just like non-ethnic party systems, may contain both centripetal and centrifugal dynamics (Adams, Merrill and Grofman 2005). Large sections of Northern Irish voters want peace and cooperation without abandoning their ethno-national identities. That is not irrational or logically contradictory. Essentially, each community wants its ‘strongest voice’ to represent it, but sections of each community wants this ethnic champion to act in a more cooperative fashion, or at least in a less ‘anti-system’ or ‘rejectionist’ manner. Voting for ethnic tribune parties implies a certain level of intransigence in advocating the ethnic groups’ interests, but does not necessarily entail the increased overall polarisation implied by outbidding models.

Ethnic Tribune Parties: Success with Moderated Platforms

Provisional Sinn Féin began its life as an abstentionist protest party, refusing to recognize the state, and encouraging its supporters not to vote. Its entry into the electoral arena followed the unplanned success of hunger-striking political prisoners in winning votes and seats in both parts of Ireland in 1980-1. Following its first electoral contest and breakthrough in 1982, Sinn Féin's vote essentially flat-lined at around 11 per cent, its average performance during the ten elections between 1982-1994 (i.e. the elections before the IRA's ceasefire), though it rose before and fell after the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 (see Table 1).

[Table 1 and Figure 1 about here]

During this period the SDLP had almost double the electoral strength of Sinn Féin, and appeared not to be directly losing votes to its new rival. This was possible because of the overall growth of the nationalist bloc, which expanded from about 30 per cent of Northern Irish voters in 1982 to just over 40 per cent by 2005.

There is some evidence that much of Sinn Féin's early electoral growth (in the 1980s and early 1990s) was achieved by mobilising nationalist non-voters and new age cohorts rather than by directly winning over SDLP partisans (O'Leary 1990; McAllister 2004; Mitchell 1999; Tonge 2005). The 1994 IRA cessation of its armed campaign was clearly the catalyst for Sinn Féin's renewed electoral advances. The ceasefire, Sinn Féin's *de facto* acceptance of the 'consent principle' (that Irish re-unification requires the consent of majorities in both Irish jurisdictions), and later its enthusiastic participation in all of the Agreement's institutions, rendered the party much more acceptable and attractive to wider groups of nationalist voters. Sinn Féin's vote immediately jumped at the first post-ceasefire election in 1996 (see figure 2), and has followed a consistently upward trajectory ever since. The peace process has clearly been the handmaiden of Sinn Féin's electoral growth; its incorporation into 'ordinary politics' has undermined the distinctiveness of the SDLP's strategic position as the 'acceptable face' of nationalist politics, and its principal bargaining actor. At elections since 1996 the

SDLP has been losing an average of 0.4 per cent per election, whereas Sinn Féin has been gaining 1.2 per cent at each election. Sustained over a decade the net changes have amounted to an almost complete reversal of fortunes (see table 1). To put this policy movement in perspective, Sinn Féin went from being a party 'violently opposed to consociation' in the 1980s (O'Leary 1989: 583), to a party that in 2006 nominated the leader of the DUP to be First Minister of Northern Ireland. While the symbolism was extraordinary, it was an obligatory tactical move by Sinn Féin. It wanted to see its nominee installed simultaneously as Deputy First Minister. The positions of First Minister and Deputy First Minister have equal power, like the consuls of ancient Rome.

Since its foundation in 1971 as a party which opposed an earlier generation of inter-ethnic compromises, the DUP developed a brand identity as the party of 'No Surrender'; the 'Ulster says No' party: 'No' to virtually any policy initiative by the UK government which involved concessions to nationalists (see for example, Smyth 1987; Bruce 1986; Cochrane 1997; Tonge and Evans, 2001). But three decades of stridently oppositional politics delivered only modest electoral growth for the DUP. The key event explaining the recent DUP electoral surge has clearly been the 1998 Agreement. The implementation difficulties in the following years became a major electoral liability for the UUP and a great opportunity for the DUP, one that has been skilfully exploited to maximum partisan advantage. The DUP received clear electoral benefits, however, by moderating its policy position (Mitchell, O'Leary and Evans 2001). Far from calling for the scrapping of the Belfast Agreement, which had been endorsed by Northern Ireland's voters, including a small majority of Protestants, the DUP called for its 'renegotiation'. This more nuanced opposition to yet another British-Irish initiative repositioned the party more competitively, especially with disillusioned UUP voters. The DUP took advantage of the UUP's internal haemorrhages and was greatly aided by the plight of the UUP leader, David Trimble, continually trying to persuade his party to continue supporting the Agreement despite the failure of the IRA to start and then complete the decommissioning of its weapons. While the IRA finally undertook its 'acts of completion' in late 2005, it came too late for

Trimble, and his party. The DUP surged past its old rivals at the 2003 Assembly elections, and consolidated its dominance in subsequent elections. (see Figure 1).

Thus, before the onset of the ‘peace process’ and the Agreement, both of the more extreme parties discovered real limits to their electoral growth. They were important electoral niche players, to be sure, but not the dominant parties in their respective blocs that they aspired to become. The DUP was primarily a defensive ‘ethnic tribune party’, a party of protest that was simultaneously pragmatic (with regard to political resources) and intransigent (with regard to ethnic identity), while Sinn Féin moved from being an abstentionist protest party toward being an ethnic tribune party. The changed context of an end to the IRA’s long war and the new institutional incentives provided by the 1998 Agreement facilitated carefully calculated strategic moves by both the DUP and Sinn Féin to moderate their platforms whilst promoting their positions as their communities pre-eminent tribunes.

Section 2: Vote-Switching from the ‘Moderate’ to the ‘Extreme’ Parties

Aggregate electoral results show that the moderate parties have declined and suggest that the more extreme parties have gained at their expense. We first examine the sources of the increased votes for the DUP and Sinn Féin. Evidence of significant direct vote-switching from the moderate parties to the ‘extreme’ parties is *prima facie* consistent with the outbidding thesis, though their gains are mostly explained by their increased moderation combined with their ‘ethnic tribune’ appeal. Survey data from the Northern Ireland Election Studies of 1998 and 2003 are used to try to find direct evidence of the success of Sinn Féin’s and the DUP’s electoral strategies.¹⁰ Tables 2a and 2b present evidence of direct vote-switching between the principal parties both before and after the Agreement.¹¹

¹⁰ Unfortunately no panel-study data is available for Northern Ireland; we are therefore restricted to cross-sectional analyses.

¹¹ The 1998 Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Study and the 2003 Northern Ireland Election Survey were both representative post-election surveys conducted immediately after the

[Table 2a about here]

Before the Agreement there was much less evidence of the ‘moderate’ parties losing their partisans directly to their more ‘extreme’ rivals. Table 2a summarises respondents’ votes in the 1998 Assembly election, compared to their recalled vote in the 1996 Forum election. Among unionists (see Table 2a) between 1996 and 1998 there was very little net gain from direct switches between the UUP and DUP. Each party lost 13 per cent of its 1996 vote directly to its main rival (though given that the UUP was the larger party at this time its losses to the DUP were greater than vice versa; compare the cell figures for total %). The DUP vote appeared more ‘solid’, it retained 80 per cent of its 1996 voters, whereas the UUP managed to hold on to only 68 per cent of its 1996 voters. Indeed in 1998 the biggest UUP losses were to small unionist parties and independent unionists. In 1998 the UUP lost 13 per cent of its 1996 voters to the DUP and 17 per cent to small unionist parties and independent unionists. On the nationalist side there was a modest trend: the SDLP lost 11 per cent of its 1996 vote to Sinn Féin, but in turn Sinn Féin lost 8 per cent to the SDLP. Thus, there was only a small Sinn Féin net gain in direct switches of party preference.

The very significant alteration in party fortunes between the first and second Assembly elections suggests that this pattern of modest net change cannot have been maintained. In 2003 the DUP became the biggest party in Northern Ireland by gaining nearly 8 percent of the overall vote, a 42 per cent increase on its 1998 vote. The UUP slipped to third position, although its first preference vote was not as bad as widely expected, and even increased slightly. Given this reversal of fortunes in the unionist party system we may ask where did all these new DUP voters come from, and if they came from the UUP why did the latter party’s vote not correspondingly decline? Table 2b shows that

respective NI Assembly elections of June 1998 and November 2003. Representative samples of 948 (1998) and 1000 (2003) adults were interviewed in their own homes by face-to face interviews. The questionnaires and data sets are publicly available and can be downloaded from <http://www.ark.ac.uk.nilt>. Both surveys were funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council.

the UUP lost a massive 22 per cent of its 1998 voters to the DUP in 2003. By contrast to earlier trends, in 2003 the traffic was mostly one-way: the DUP lost only 4 per cent of its 1998 voters to the UUP, a net gain to the DUP of 18 per cent.¹² Examining the total per cent cell entries 5.2 per cent of the entire sample switched from the UUP to the DUP, whereas only 0.8 per cent switched in the opposite direction. While there was much discussion in 1996 of a ‘shredding of the unionist vote’, by 2003 it had consolidated behind the two principal unionist parties, with the DUP as its pre-eminent voice. The DUP extended these electoral gains in 2005.

[Table 2b about here]

Much of Sinn Féin’s electoral growth before the Agreement was achieved by mobilising prior non-voters and new voters, rather than directly attracting SDLP partisans (see for example O’Leary 1990: 345-8, and McAllister 2004: 140). However, the scale of the apparent ‘swing in the two-party vote’ in 2003 means that this explanation cannot account for the most recent elections. Among nationalists Sinn Féin was the party with the electoral wind in its sails and it sought to confirm its dominance in 2003. In fact Sinn Féin surpassed all expectations by gaining 23.5 per cent of the first preference votes (a 33 per cent increase on its 1998 Assembly vote), while the SDLP’s vote declined by 23 per cent (compared to its 1998 vote). Sinn Féin’s breakout performance in 2003 cannot be explained solely by its better performance among new cohorts of voters and historic abstentionists. It must have converted previous SDLP partisans to fuel an electoral surge of this magnitude. Survey evidence demonstrates that this is indeed what happened. Of those who voted for the SDLP in the 1998 Assembly election almost one fifth (19 per cent) defected to Sinn Féin in 2003 (Table 2b). By contrast only 5 per cent of 1998 Sinn Féin voters switched to the SDLP in 2003, a direct net gain to

¹² The UUP managed to maintain its first preference vote in 2003, despite these direct losses to the DUP, because it gained 14 per cent of its 2003 vote from those who had supported the ‘other’ small unionist parties in 1998, especially the UK Unionist Party (UKUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). The minor unionist parties no longer have any electoral strength. Thus, the electoral lifeline that their erosion provided for the UUP in 2003 was a one-time shift in support, unlikely to be repeated.

Sinn Féin between the two Assembly elections of 14 per cent. Examining the total per cent cell entries (to control for the different size of the parties in the different time periods) 4 per cent of the entire sample switched from the SDLP to Sinn Féin, whereas only 0.5 per cent switched in the opposite direction. Another way of looking at this is to consider the composition of the Sinn Féin vote in 2003. In addition to prior Sinn Féin voters it contained 24 per cent who had been SDLP voters in 1998 and 14 per cent who had been non-voters (or who don't recall how they voted in 1998). This is compelling evidence that recent Sinn Féin electoral growth has been principally at the SDLP's expense.

Thus both of the ostensibly extreme parties gained in 2003 from substantial direct vote-switches from former partisans of the more moderate parties. This is consistent with what the ethnic outbidding thesis predicts. But the outbidding thesis explains the increased popularity of the more ethnically intransigent parties (and hence centrifugal competition) as the result of leaders of the outbidding parties profiting from increased segmental polarisation, or ethnic entrepreneurs engaging in ethnic demand generation that develops more extremist politics. So if the out-bidding thesis is correct, increased electoral support for more extreme parties should be accompanied by increasing attitudinal polarisation among voters on the major questions at stake.

Section 3: Converging Attitudes to the Agreement Since 1998

The full implementation of the Agreement was already stalled when the second election to the Northern Ireland Assembly was eventually held in November 2003.¹³ The dual premiership had

¹³ The United Kingdom government had twice postponed the scheduled second Assembly election which should have been held by June 2003. The postponements were ostensibly to allow more time for a much hoped for breakthrough in negotiations, but were widely interpreted as a misguided attempt to 'put off the inevitable': the UK Government correctly foresaw big electoral gains for the DUP and Sinn Féin, and feared that outcome would create an even more difficult bargaining context.

proven unstable and the Assembly had been suspended on numerous occasions (McGarry and O'Leary 2004). The 'mixed record' of the Agreement's institutions since 1998 meant that the limited experience of working with them was unlikely to have induced widespread and profound positive attitudinal changes. Given this context it is perhaps surprising that we can detect some quite sharp attitudinal shifts between the first two Assembly elections, despite the institutions' failure to deliver on expectations. While the Agreement involved a complex bundle of new institutions, procedures and expectations, some of its core features are contained in the survey questions reported in Table 3. The same questions were asked in 1998 and again in 2003.

[Table 3 about here]

On the first two questions in Table 3 - the constitutional guarantee that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK as long as this is the wish of a majority in Northern Ireland, and support for the setting up a Northern Ireland Assembly - there has been very little change, and both propositions continue to have strong support. Levels of active support for setting up the Assembly actually rose among Sinn Féin and DUP supporters. Among Sinn Féin partisans support for the Assembly increased from 76 per cent in 1998 to 94 per cent in 2003, whereas support among DUP partisans increased from 57 to 70 per cent (all relationships mentioned in the text in this section are statistically significant at the $p < 0.0001$ level; see Table 3 for details). It is interesting, and consistent with the observation that Sinn Féin's leaders have moderated their policy stances, to see that support for the 'consent principle' among Sinn Féin's supporters increased by 11 per cent. Thus, by 2003 two-thirds of self-identified Sinn Féin partisans supported 'the guarantee that Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom as long as a majority of the people in Northern Ireland wish it to be so'.

One of the most contentious aspects of the Agreement for many unionists was the provision of 'North-South bodies', the North-South Ministerial Council and a number of executive agencies designed to coordinate policy between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This was a prominent part of the symbolically important institutional embodiment of the 'Irish dimension'. Nationalists are overwhelmingly in favour of such links, but for unionists, and for the DUP in

particular, strident opposition to ‘Dublin interference’ in Northern Ireland, had long been an important principle and a prominent rallying cry. Strikingly, despite its huge symbolic resonance for many unionists, the experience of North-South bodies appears to have been much less threatening in practice. Over five years opposition to North-South bodies declined by 13 per cent among UUP supporters (who were much less opposed to begin with), *and* by 25 per cent among DUP partisans (see table 3). One perhaps surprising and countervailing trend is the sharp drop in nationalist support for the amendment the Republic of Ireland’s constitutional claim to Northern Ireland.¹⁴ Catholic support for removing the former irredentist claim dropped from 41 per cent to 25 per cent. We suspect this shift probably reflects frustration at the failure to fully implement the Agreement. Nationalist Ireland had delivered on its side of the bargain, and some may feel the concession has not been reciprocated.

The most positive findings – and strongest evidence of converging popular attitudes - can be found in the last two items in table 3: support for decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and mandatory power-sharing. While support for the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons was high in 1998 and has increased among all sections of the population, the most notable change is a substantial rise in Catholic support for decommissioning from 81 to 93 per cent. This movement particularly reflects opinion-shift among Sinn Féin supporters – their active support for decommissioning increased by 22 points from 63 to 85 per cent.

A defining feature of any consociational political arrangement is the need for significant sections of the main protagonists to be *willing* to share power. It is thus encouraging that the most dramatic shift of opinion revealed in Table 3 concerns support for mandatory power-sharing between the parties. Overall support for power-sharing has increased by 13 per cent, and by 15 per cent among Protestants. Active support for power-sharing increased between 1998 and 2003 across all major

¹⁴ The new Article 3 of Ireland’s Constitution recognises ‘that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island’.

parties with pronounced shifts among Sinn Féin supporters (+12), the UUP (+18) and a truly dramatic rise of plus 33 per cent amongst DUP voters. Despite all the difficulties of the intervening five years, with the Executive and Assembly repeatedly suspended, and each parties hopes put on hold, popular support for mandatory sharing of executive power is overwhelming, and on the increase.

Therefore there is substantial convergence in popular attitudes to the main features of the Agreement, rather than the increased attitudinal polarisation that the outbidding thesis leads us to expect. What can explain this apparent paradox of inter-ethnic attitudinal convergence on more moderate policy positions, with at the same time dramatically increased support for the more extreme parties?

Section 4: Voting for Ethnic Tribune Parties: ‘Who best stands up for us?’

While attitudes to the individual components of the Agreement have converged on more moderate policy positions, as detailed above, overall approval of the Belfast Agreement sharply divides the principal communities, substantially on the basis of perceptions of each community’s relative gains and losses from the Agreement and its on-going implementation. While the Agreement continues to attract the support of two-thirds of the Northern Ireland population, this overall popularity is due to its virtually unanimous support among nationalist voters. By 2003 68 per of UUP supporters (down 21 points) said they would still vote ‘yes’ if a new referendum on the Agreement was held, whereas only 23 per cent of DUP supporters (down 13 per cent) said they would support the Agreement.¹⁵ Overall, by 2003 of the supporters of either unionist party who voted ‘yes’ in 1998, just over one-fifth had

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of diminishing unionist support for the Agreement see Hayes, McAllister and Dowds (2005).

changed their vote to 'no'.¹⁶ In addition, since the Agreement was signed Unionists increasingly perceive that nationalists have been the main beneficiaries of the Agreement (see figure 2).

[Figure 2 about here]

The pattern is very clear: there is a pronounced 'funnel effect' in Figure 2. In 1998 quite large minorities of unionists (39 per cent of UUP supporters) were willing to believe that the Agreement might benefit unionists and nationalists more or less equally. But this perception changed quite quickly: the proportion that believed that nationalists were benefiting much more than unionists steadily rose, so that by 2003 three-quarters of UUP supporters and virtually all DUP partisans perceived nationalists as the primary beneficiaries of the Agreement.

Thus, in the five years prior to the 2003 elections, inter-ethnic negotiations over the implementation of the Agreement (for example, the struggle to form and re-form an Executive; the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons; reform of policing; conflict over flags, symbols and language) were on-going and divisive. Partly because the innovative inter-ethnic pro-agreement coalition had broken down, it was always likely that the 2003 contest would revert to a fierce intra-ethnic battle within the main blocs, with the rival parties mainly focused on emerging as their community's pre-eminent tribune party.

The parties were competing not so much on the basis of a traditional 'strength of unionism/nationalism dimension',¹⁷ but on relative perceptions of how *effective* each party has been in representing the community's ethno-national interests. The former are 'spatial location' variables (dimensions running from 'very strong unionist/nationalist' to 'not very strong unionist/nationalist', whereas the latter (our ethnic tribune variable, to be examined below) is an ethnic 'valence' variable:

¹⁶ The data from which these figures are drawn are not reproduced here but are available from the authors on request.

¹⁷ While there are significant associations (Chi square tests) between cross-tabulations of party support and the 'strength of unionism/nationalism' variables, the latter are not significant in any of our regression models and thus were dropped.

‘people’s judgements of the overall competence of the rival political parties’ (Clarke et al 2004: 9) in representing their ethnic community. Fortunately a new question in the 2003 election study allows us to directly measure each parties ‘ethnic tribune appeal’. The key question asks ‘which party do you think has been the *most* effective voice for unionists / nationalists (separate questions) in Northern Ireland?’ (emphasis in original question wording). The results in Table 4 are striking.

[Table 4 about here.]

Three times as many respondents perceived Sinn Féin rather than the SDLP to be the most effective party in representing the interests of nationalists. Self-identified partisans of *every* party placed Sinn Féin first in their evaluations. Sinn Féin supporters unanimously picked their party as the most effective. Indeed the only party that was substantially divided on the subject was the SDLP, and even a bare majority of its partisans (53 per cent) judged that Sinn Féin was more effective in representing nationalists! A modicum of normality is restored when we turn to perceptions of representing unionists, at least in the sense that the partisans of each of the two main parties judge their own party as being the most effective defender of the union. Nevertheless, the findings are worrying for the UUP. Even among its own supporters only 60 per cent judged it the most effective voice for unionists, while 40 per cent picked the DUP as most effective. DUP partisans are not divided on the subject: 93 per cent pick their own party as most effective.

Thus, the cross-tabulation of partisan support and the ethnic tribune variable contained in Table 4 strongly suggests that relative judgements of the perceived *effectiveness* of each party ‘in standing up’ for their communities ethno-national interests may be a major factor in accounting for the shifts in electoral support to Sinn Féin and the DUP. The next section tests the ethnic tribune variable in a multivariate framework for which other variables known to be strong predictors of party support are controlled.

Section 5: Testing the Ethnic Tribune Voting Thesis

Separate models predicting voting for Sinn Féin among Catholic voters (Table 5) and voting for the DUP among Protestant voters (Table 6) are shown below. Each table follows a common strategy and format. Model 1 enters a small set of attitudinal variables that were found to be the best predictors of SF/DUP voting. Model 2 introduces the ethnic tribune variable. Models 3 and 4 then sequentially add variables known to be powerful predictors of current voting (namely, voting in the prior 1998 election in Model 3; and then ‘trust’ in the relevant party leaders in Model 4).

Before examining the models we should note that estimating party support in Northern Ireland has always been somewhat problematic, given that some respondents tend to claim to be more moderate than they really are (e.g. Whyte 1990: 4-5). In particular all surveys underestimate, often dramatically, the levels of true support for Sinn Féin (see Breen 2000). The estimate of party support used here¹⁸ are a significant improvement on the estimates from party identification which are often used as a proxy for voting intention. Nevertheless, levels of Sinn Féin support continue to be understated in the survey, even using mock ballots. It seems likely that some actual Sinn Féin voters claim to pollsters that they vote for the more moderate SDLP. This under-representation of the Sinn Féin vote probably means that the effects observed in the analyses could have been even stronger than those reported here.

A number of attitudinal variables sharply differentiate between Sinn Féin and SDLP voters (fuller descriptive statistics are available from the authors but are not reproduced here to save space). Sinn Féin supporters were much more likely to take the view that reform of the police has ‘not gone far enough’, whereas levels of IRA decommissioning are ‘about right’. A survey question which asks respondents about their levels of satisfaction with democracy in Northern Ireland is perhaps the most revealing. Much greater numbers of SDLP identifiers (54 per cent) report that they are ‘fairly satisfied’ with democracy in Northern Ireland compared to only 27 per cent of Sinn Féin partisans.

¹⁸ The Northern Ireland Election Studies (of 1998 and 2003) attempted to ameliorate this problem by simulating the voting process by means of presenting each respondent with a mock STV ballot paper of the actual candidates in their constituency which respondents are invited to complete in private.

This basic pattern of SDLP supporters being more content with the status quo and less likely to believe that a united Ireland is a serious prospect is repeated across a wide range of survey questions. While both nationalist parties are overwhelmingly in favour of the Belfast Agreement, SDLP supporters are much more willing to take the view that some of its details could benefit from renegotiation, whereas Sinn Féin partisans agree with what has become the mantra of their leaders: 'the Agreement is right and just needs to be implemented in full'

[Table 5 about here]

Model 1 shows Sinn Féin voters are much more likely to be generally dissatisfied with democracy in Northern Ireland (indeed this variable remains significant in all of our models). They are also much more likely to subscribe to an 'Irish' identity, than a 'Northern Irish', 'Ulster' or 'British' identity. Reform of policing has been and remains a highly emotive issue in Northern Ireland, and Sinn Féin voters believe that police reform has 'not gone far enough'. They also believe (perhaps rather optimistically) that the experience of power-sharing has made a majority of unionists more reconciled to Northern Ireland one day joining the Republic of Ireland ($P=0.051$). Finally those who believe that Westminster Governments should have 'no say at all' in Northern Ireland affairs are more likely to be Sinn Féin voters.

Our ethnic tribune variable – 'Sinn Féin has been the most effective voice for nationalists' – is introduced in Model 2 and is significant at $p<0.001$. The attitudinal variables remain significant. Model 3 in a further test of the ethnic tribune variable introduces prior voting for Sinn Féin in the 1998 Assembly elections: this is in effect a vote switching model. Again the tribune variable remains significant indicating that it is not simply a consequence of prior political orientations.¹⁹ Model 4 by entering controls for 'Trust in Gerry Adams' and 'Trust in Mark Durkan', is an especially tough test for the ethnic tribune variable²⁰ but it remains significant at $p=0.025$. It is also interesting that in the

¹⁹ In Model 3 two of the attitudinal variables lose significance and are dropped from the equation.

²⁰ The Pearson correlation between 'Sinn Féin the most effective voice for nationalists' and 'Trust Gerry Adams' is 0.403.

final model those generally dissatisfied with democracy in Northern Ireland and with policing reform remain more likely to vote Sinn Féin, despite the controls for prior Sinn Féin voting and trusting Gerry Adams.

It might reasonably be expected that the unionist ethnic tribune variable ('DUP the most effective voice for unionists') will have an even stronger effect than its nationalist analogue given that divisions among the unionist parties in 2003 were fiercer than among nationalists. After all although we have seen in Table 4 that most nationalists viewed Sinn Féin as the more effective voice for nationalists, few believed that the SDLP had 'sold-out' the ethno-national cause. By contrast the DUP has consistently alleged that the UUP was engaged in protracted capitulation to the Irish Republican movement.²¹

[Table 6 about here]

As expected DUP supporters are much more likely (62 per cent) to believe that the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) is 'basically wrong and should be abandoned', compared to only 21 per cent of UUP partisans who take that view. DUP voters are also much more likely (61 per cent) to *disagree* with the statement that 'the experience of power-sharing has meant that nationalists are now more content that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK' (compared with 39 per cent of UUP supporters). There is some evidence of a preference for ethnic segmentation. DUP voters are more likely to object to a close relative marrying someone of another religion, and they are much more likely (than UUP supporters) to prefer to send their children to single-religion schools.²² DUP partisans generally believe that police reform 'has gone too far', do not agree with any statements that

²¹ Prominent among DUP election posters are slogans such as 'David Trimble – the IRA's Delivery Boy' and 'Ulster Unionism: Delivering Terrorists in Government', and a series of cartoons titled 'David [Trimble] the Incompetent'. These and an assortment of other posters can be viewed at <http://www.dup.org.uk/>.

²² Sixty per cent of DUP supporters prefer single religion schools for their children compared with 34 per cent of UUP supporters.

Sinn Féin have become more compromising towards unionists, and do not believe that the government of the Republic of Ireland should have any say in internal Northern Ireland affairs.

Model 1 shows that DUP voters are strongly opposed to the Belfast Agreement. The ethnic tribune variable ('DUP the most effective voice for unionists') is introduced in Model 2 and is significant at $p < 0.001$. As before Models 3 and 4 sequentially add the variables 'voting behaviour in 1998' and 'Trust Ian Paisley / Trust David Trimble'. It is striking that the 'DUP the most effective voice for unionists' variable remains significant even in Model 4 at $p = 0.006$. Indeed in a further especially tough test of the ethnic tribune variable Model 5 controls for DUP party identification.²³ The result is that even having controlled for 'Vote DUP in 1998', 'Trust Ian Paisley' and 'DUP Party ID', the ethnic tribune variable remains a significant predictor of DUP voting in 2003 at $p < 0.001$.

Thus even when subjected to demanding multivariate controls the evidence is consistent with the argument that ethnic tribune appeals contribute significantly to the new found dominance of the DUP and Sinn Féin.

Section 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Once an ethnic party system is fully mobilised the outbidding thesis predicts a contagion of extremist politics which destabilises and ultimately prevents ethnic conflict regulation within a democratic framework (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972). In Northern Ireland, it is clear that both of the ostensibly extreme parties gained in 2003 from substantial direct vote-switches from former partisans of the more moderate parties. Although this is *prima facie* consistent with the outbidding thesis we have argued that their gains are mostly explained by their increased moderation combined with their 'ethnic tribune' appeal. Moreover, the outbidding thesis explains the increased popularity of the more

²³ This is a tough test because valence judgements are usually 'arrived at through two principal and related shortcuts: leadership evaluations and party identification' (Clarke et al 2004: 9). In our data 'DUP Party Identification' and 'DUP most effective voice for Unionists' correlate at 0.46.

ethnically intransigent parties (and hence centrifugal competition) as being due to entrepreneurs engaging in ethnic demand generation that develops more extremist politics. Thus if the out-bidding thesis is correct, increased electoral support for more extreme parties cannot be accompanied by increasing attitudinal convergence among voters on the major questions at stake. But substantial popular convergence in attitudes to the main features of the Agreement is exactly what we found. We then asked: what can explain this apparent paradox of inter-ethnic attitudinal convergence on more moderate policy positions, with at the same time dramatically increased support for the more extreme parties?

Our answer is that while most voters want peace and power-sharing they simultaneously also want their strongest tribune to protect their ethno-national interests. Identity voting for ethnic tribune parties – a kind of ethnic valence appeal - implies a certain level of intransigence in advocating the ethnic group's interests, but does not necessarily entail the increased overall polarisation implied by outbidding models. Electoral strategies based on 'ethnic tribune appeals' combine the traditional expressive feature of tribune politics (the most robust defender of the cause) with a concern to maximise the ethnic group's share of political resources that can be derived from on-going inter-ethnic negotiations and policy implementation. Thus the ethnic tribune party can be simultaneously pragmatic (with regard to resources) and intransigent (with regard to identity), so that ethnic party systems, just like non-ethnic party systems, contain both centripetal and centrifugal dynamics.

The out-bidding models derived from plural society theory correctly suggest that democratic stability is much more difficult to achieve in divided societies with fully mobilised ethnic party systems. But they are not correct when they predict that ethnic party systems inevitably lead to perpetual extremist outbidding that in turn leads to inevitable democratic collapse. There are some grounds for optimism. The incentives of well designed power-sharing institutions, may induce even formerly 'hardline' ethnic parties to moderate their platforms and compete centripetally, providing they can protect themselves from the charge of 'sell-out' (and hence new entrants) by developing an ethnic tribune appeal. Northern Ireland is one illustration of how this might happen in a region well

known to have suffered from decades of outbidding party behaviour. Thus, even in ethnic party systems there *can* be electoral incentives towards moderation, providing that the parties making the centripetal moves believe that they can protect themselves against flanking by new entrants. Successful electoral mobilisation based on ethnic tribune appeals help guard against potential flanking by new entrants. So far, the DUP has not been seriously challenged by an ultra-loyalist movement - though this could change if it ever joins a power-sharing government with Sinn Féin). And so far Sinn Féin has not been challenged by a new 'more republican' electoral entrant to the nationalist party system.

Before the onset of the peace process both of the more ostensibly 'extreme' parties had discovered real limits to their electoral growth. The changed context of an end to war and the new institutional incentives provided by the 1998 Agreement, facilitated carefully calculated strategic moves by the DUP and Sinn Féin to moderate their platforms while retaining their base electoral support. We have not suggested that the historically hard-line ethnic parties are becoming unalloyed vote-seekers. Like other parties they also seek office and policy benefits (Muller and Strom 1999). They know they are unlikely to become and remain electorally dominant by maximising 'ultra' policy positions within their segmented electorates. The logic of the institutions of power-sharing implies that executive power can only be acquired through multi-ethnic agreements and de facto or full coalitions. Thus, both motivations, electoral and office-seeking, with the right institutional incentives, may propel even ethnic parties toward moderated platforms.

With appropriate power-sharing institutions even ethnic parties can derive electoral rewards by competing on more moderate platforms, providing they can develop an 'ethnic tribune appeal', that is the perception that they most effectively represent their groups ethno-national interests. Therefore, out-bidding models may predict incorrectly. Of course, consociation requires that successful ethnic tribune parties must become willing to become parties of government, to take the joint premiership, in other words, to become the consuls. In Northern Ireland Sinn Féin is clearly

willing to take one consulate, it remains to be seen whether the Democratic Unionist Party is willing to take the other: it has indicated conditions under which it may do so.²⁴

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²⁴ Days after we completed this paper the St Andrews Agreement of 13 October 2006 provided a framework and new momentum for re-establishing a fully inclusive power-sharing government, with the DUP and Sinn Fein projected to take joint leadership. The framework involves a sequence of confidence building moves projected to lead to full resumption of power-sharing by March 2007.

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Figure 1

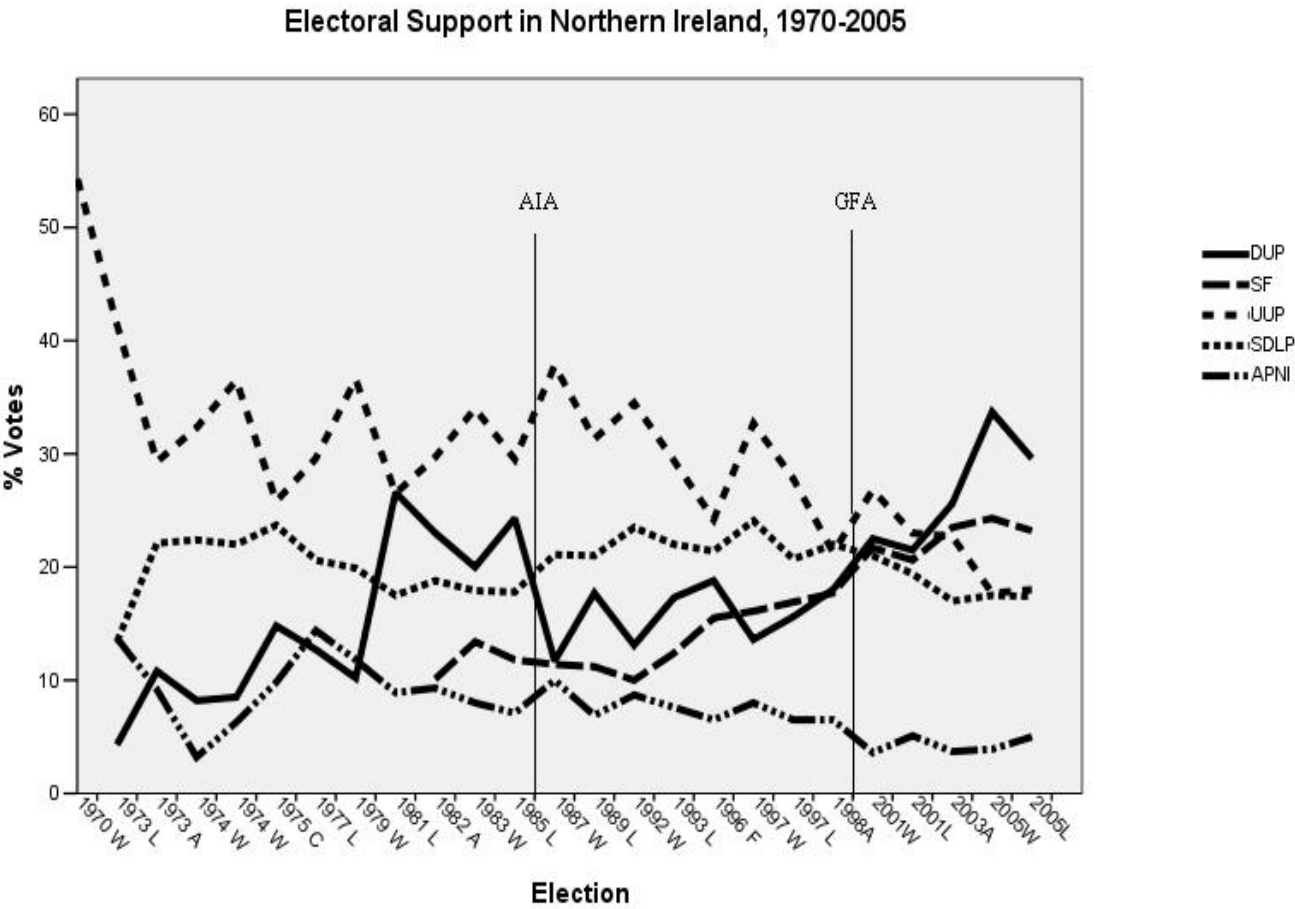


Figure 2: Unionist perceptions of who has benefitted most from the Agreement

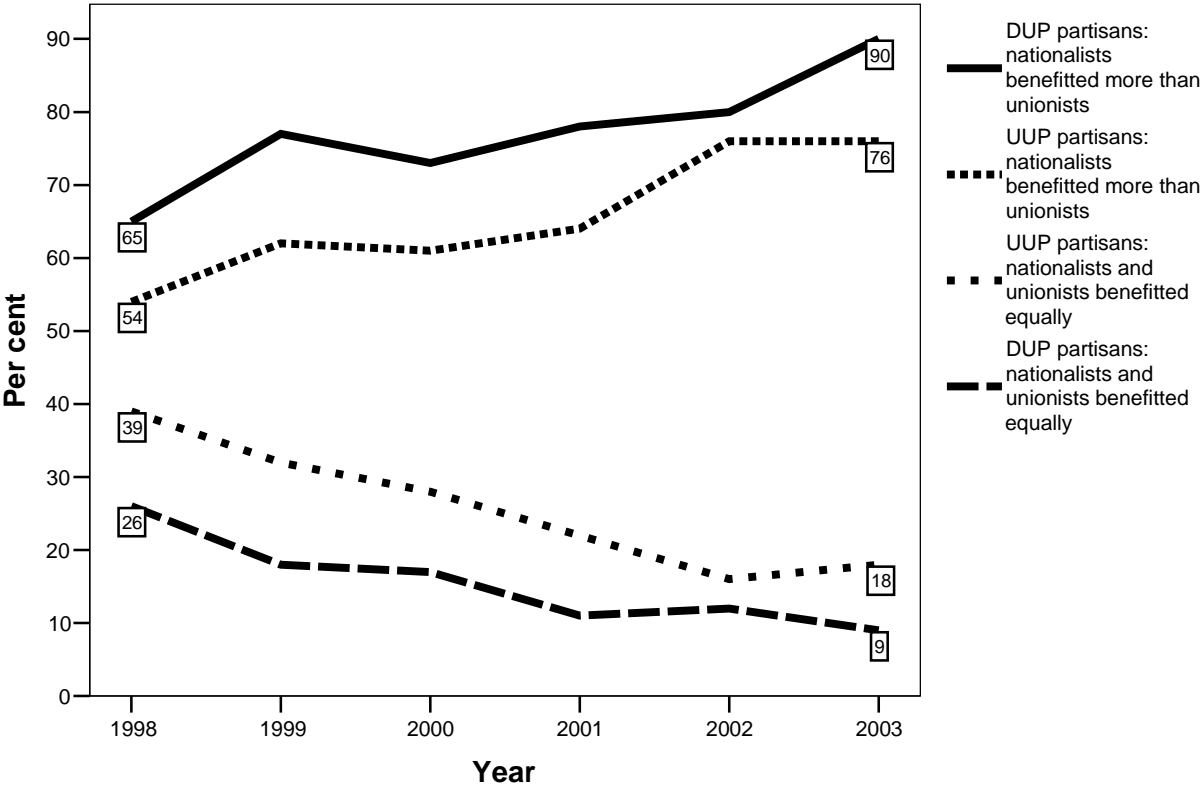


Table 1: Electoral Fortunes by Period, 1973-2005

	Period	Average (SD)	Inter-election gain (mean)
SDLP	1973-81 (n=8)	20.2 (3.3)	0.6
	1982-93 (n=7)	20.3 (2.2)	0.8
	Since Ceasefires 1996-05 (n=9)	20.1 (2.4)	-0.4
	Since Agreement, 1998-2005 (n=6)	19.1 (2.1)	-0.4
Sinn Fein	1973-81 (no elections contested)		
	1982-93 (n=7)	11.5 (1.2)	0.4
	Since Ceasefires 1996-05 (n=9)	19.9 (3.4)	1.2
	Since Agreement, 1998-2005 (n=6)	21.8 (2.4)	1.1
UUP	1973-81 (n=8)	32.3 (5.5)	-3.1
	1982-93 (n=7)	32.3 (3.2)	0.4
	Since Ceasefires 1996-05 (n=9)	23.8 (4.8)	-1.3
	Since Agreement, 1998-2005 (n=6)	21.6 (3.4)	-1.6
DUP	1973-81 (n=8)	12 (6.7)	3.2
	1982-93 (n=7)	18.1 (4.7)	-1.3
	Since Ceasefires 1996-05 (n=9)	22.1 (6.6)	1.4
	Since Agreement, 1998-2005 (n=6)	25.1 (5.7)	2.3
APNI	1973-81 (n=8)	9.7 (3.7)	-0.7
	1982-93 (n=7)	8.2 (1.2)	-0.2
	Since Ceasefires 1996-05 (n=9)	5.4 (1.5)	-0.6
	Since Agreement, 1998-2005 (n=6)	4.6 (1.1)	-0.6

Note: includes all elections in Northern Ireland except those to the European Parliament; the latter give a highly misleading impression of relative party strengths, mainly because only three seats are available.

Table 2a: Before the Agreement: party switches between 1996 and 1998

		1998 Vote (NI Assembly Election)								
1996 Vote (NI Forum Election)			Alliance	UUP	DUP	SDLP	SF	Other unionist	Other	Total
	Alliance	N	26	9	1	3	1	2	2	44
		Row %	59	21	2	7	2	5	5	
		Col %	53	5	1	2	1	4	4	
		Total%	4	1.4	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.3	
	UUP	N	3	115	22			13	16	169
		Row %	2	68	13			8	9	
		Col %	6	64	20			68	53	
		Total%	0.5	17.5	3.3			2	2.4	
	DUP	N		12	75	1	2	1	3	94
		Row %		13	80	1	2	1	3	
		Col %		7	68	1	3	6	10	
		Total%		1.8	11.4	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.5	
	SDLP	N	4			128	16		3	151
		Row %	3			85	11		2	
		Col %	8			84	22		6.7	
		Total%	0.6			19.5	2.4		0.5	
	SF	N				4	46			50
		Row %				8	92			
		Col %				3	64			
		Total%				0.6	7			
	Other unionist	N	2	6		1		18	3	30
		Row %	7	20		3		60	10	
		Col %	4	3		1		36	7	
		Total%	0.3	0.9		0.2		2.8	0.5	
	Others	N	1	1		1		1	6	10
		Row %	10	10		10		10	60	
		Col %	2	1		1		2	13	
		Total%	0.1	0.1		0.1		0.1	0.9	
	Didn't vote / DK	N	13	36	13	14	7	15	12	110
		Row %	12	33	12	13	6	14	11	
		Col %	26	20	12	9	10	30	27	
		Total%	2	5.5	2	2.2	1.1	2.3	1.8	
Total			49	179	111	152	72	50	45	658

Note: For the 1998 vote, respondents were asked to complete a mock ballot paper of the actual candidates contesting their own constituency. For 1996, the question asked was: 'Thinking back to the Forum election, that is the one that took place in 1996 and decided who would be represented in the peace talks, you could cast just one vote for one party list. May I just check, which party did you vote for then, or perhaps you didn't vote in that election?'. *Source:* Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Study 1998.

Table 2b: After the Agreement: party switches between 1998 and 2003

			2003 vote						
			Alliance	UUP	DUP	SDLP	SF	Other	Total
1998 Vote	Alliance	N	21	2	1	4	1	1	30
		Row %	70	7	3	13	3	3	
		Col %	75	1	1	3	1	2	
		Total %	3.5	0.3	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.2	
	UUP	N	2	101	31	1		5	140
		Row %	1	72	22	1		4	
		Col %	7	72	19	1		12	
		Total %	0.3	17	5.2	0.2		0.8	
	DUP	N		5	108			6	119
		Row %		4	91			5	
2003 Vote		Col %		3	65			14	
		Total %		0.8	18.2			1	
	SDLP	N	1		2	92	24	7	126
		Row %	1		2	73	19	6	
		Col %	4		1	79	24	17	
		Total %	0.2		0.3	15.5	4	1.2	
	SF	N	1			3	59		63
		Row %	2			5	94		
		Col %	4			3	59		
		Total %	0.2			0.5	10		
2003 Vote	Other U	N	1	20	6	1		10	38
		Row %	3	70	16	3		26	
		Col %	4	14	4	1		24	
		Total %	0.2	3.4	1	0.2		1.7	
	Others		1		1	1	2	4	9
		Row %	11		11	11	22	44	
		Col %	4		1	1	2	10	
		Total %	0.2		0.2	0.2	0.3	0.7	
	Didn't vote /DK	N	1	13	17	15	14	9	69
		Row %	1	19	25	22	20	13	
2003 Vote		Col %	4	9	10	13	14	21	
		Total %	0.2	2.2	2.9	2.5	2.4	1.5	
	Total		28	141	166	117	100	42	594

Note: For the 2003 vote, respondents were asked to complete a mock ballot paper of the actual candidates contesting their own constituency. For 1998, the question asked was: 'Thinking back to the 1998 Assembly election, that is the one that took place in June 1998 to elect the first Northern Ireland Assembly. Can you tell me to which party you gave your first preference vote?'

Source: Northern Ireland Election Study 2003.

Table 3: Change in attitudes to some main features of the Agreement between the first and second Assembly elections (%)

	DUP		UUP		Sinn Féin		SDLP		Protestants		Catholics		Overall total	
	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003
<i>NI Remain in UK</i>														
Support	98	96	98	98	55	66***	77	79	97	94	70	70	86	84
Neither	1	1	1	1	19	16	15	18	1	3	16	19	7	10
Oppose	0	2	0	1	21	14***	4	3	1	2	8	7	3	4
DK	1	1	1	0	5	4	4	0	1	1	6	4	4	2
<i>NI Assembly</i>														
Support	57	70***	86	89	76	94***	95	88***	79	77	87	86	82	79
Neither	18	14	9	5	9	3	3	7	10	12	4	7	8	11
Oppose	22	13***	3	4	5	2	0	3	8	8	2	3	5	7
DK	3	3	2	2	10	1	2	2	3	3	7	4	5	3
<i>North-South bodies</i>														
Support	17	35***	53	63***	85	94***	90	89	46	49	86	88	63	66
Neither	20	24	19	21	4	3	5	9	18	22	5	7	13	16
Oppose	58	33***	25	12***	7	2***	1	1	31	22***	3	2	19	14*
DK	5	8	3	4	4	1	4	1	5	7	6	3	5	5
<i>Remove ROI's Claim</i>														
Support	82	81	82	76*	24	14***	47	30***	78	75	41	25***	63	53***
Neither	10	9	7	15	12	21	19	34	9	15	16	33	13	23
Oppose	4	5	5	6	49	60***	23	33***	6	6	28	36***	14	18
DK	4	5	5	3	15	5	11	3	7	4	15	6	10	5
<i>Decommissioning</i>														
Support	90	97***	95	99**	63	85***	91	98***	94	98***	81	93***	89	95***
Neither	4	1	3	0	12	7	5	1	3	1	7	2	5	2
Oppose	4	1	1	1	17	7***	1	0	2	0	6	3	3	2
DK	2	1	1	0	8	1	3	1	1	1	6	2	3	2
<i>Power-Sharing</i>														
Support	32	65***	69	87***	84	96***	90	97	61	76***	85	96***	71	84***
Neither	33	15	17	8	8	3	4	2	19	11	6	3	13	8
Oppose	27	15***	10	4***	1	0	0	1	14	8***	1	0	8	5
DK	8	5	4	1	7	1	6	0	6	5	8	1	8	3

The significance tests are two sample z -tests comparing proportions across two independent samples: * $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.001$; *** $p<0.0001$.

Notes: respondents were asked 'Looking back on some of the proposals contained in the Good Friday Agreement, could you tell me how you now feel about . . .' (all coded on an ordinal 5 point scale from strongly support to strongly oppose, with 'don't know' as a residual sixth category). *NI remain in UK*: 'the guarantee that NI will remain part of the UK for as long as a majority of the people in NI wish it to be so'. *NI Assembly*: 'the setting up of a NI Assembly'. *North-South bodies*: 'the creation of North-South bodies'. *Remove ROI's claim*: 'the removal of the Republic of Ireland's constitutional claim to Northern Ireland'.

Decommissioning: 'decommissioning of paramilitary weapons'. *Power-Sharing*: 'the requirement that the Executive is power-sharing'. Party affiliation is by a standard party identification question.

Sources: The Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Study 1998; The Northern Ireland Assembly Election Study 2003.

Table 4: Ethnic Tribune Voting. Which party has been the most effective voice
(a) for nationalists and (b) for unionists?

		(a) Voice for nationalists (%)		(b) Voice for unionists (%)	
		SF	SDLP	DUP	UUP
Party identification 2003	Alliance	77	23	42	58
	DUP	83	17	93	7
	UUP	71	29	40	60
	SDLP	53	47	41	59
	SF	100	-	64	36
	Other	81	19	59	41
	<i>Total</i>	75	25	61	39

Voice for Nationalists / Party ID cross-tabulation: Pearson Chi-Square of 87 significant at $P < 0.001$. $N = 774$, $df = 5$.

Voice for Unionists / Party ID cross-tabulation: Pearson Chi-Square of 169 significant at $P < 0.001$. $N = 747$, $df = 5$.

Note: (a) Which party do you think has been the most effective voice for nationalists in Northern Ireland? (code only one). (b) Which party do you think has been the most effective voice for unionists in Northern Ireland? (code only one).

Source: Northern Ireland Election Study 2003.

Table 5: Voting Sinn Fein at the 2003 NI Assembly Election

	Model 1: 'Attitudes only'		Model 2: Attitudes + 'SF most effective'		Model 3: + SF Vote '98		Model 4: + Trust variables	
	L	P-value	L	P-value	L	P-value	L	P-value
Dissatisfied with NI democracy	0.50 (0.15)	0.01**	0.55 (0.16)	0.001**	0.54 (0.17)	0.002**	0.56 (0.22)	0.009**
Identity: 'Irish'	2.13 (0.44)	<0.001***	2.24 (0.48)	<0.001***	1.92 (0.49)	<0.001***	1.75 (0.59)	0.003**
Power-sharing has made Unionists more reconciled to ROI	-0.27 (0.14)	0.051	-0.33 (0.16)	0.034*				
<i>Police Reform</i> 'Not gone far enough'	0.94 (0.38)	0.013*	0.99 (0.41)	0.017*	0.77 (0.44)	0.08	1.39 (0.55)	0.011*
<i>How much Say Should Westminster Govt have:</i> 'No Say'	2.13 (0.53)	<0.001***	1.87 (0.57)	0.001**				
SF 'most effective voice for nationalists'			2.56 (0.51)	<0.001***	1.81 (0.51)	<0.001***	1.34 (0.59)	0.025*
Vote 1998 SF					3.19 (0.58)	<0.001***	2.72 (0.73)	<0.001***
Trust Gerry Adams							2.83 (0.58)	<0.001***
Trust Mark Durkan							-2.61 (0.64)	<0.001***
Constant	-3.74		-5.71		-6.08		-5.58	
N	213		213		213		213	
R ² (Nagelkerke)	0.43		0.56		0.64		0.77	
Baseline % Correctly Predicted	58.5		58.5		58.5		58.5	
Final % Correctly Predicted	73		80.9		83		87.6	
-2 Log Likelihood (change)	89.7		124.8		152.6		197.7	

Notes: Logistic regression models predicting voting Sinn Fein at the 2003 NI Assembly election among Catholics who voted. The dependent variable is first preference votes as indicated by marking replica STV ballot papers, of the candidates who actually stood in the respondents constituency. Voting for SF is coded as 1, Others as 0. Results columns show logit coefficients (their standard errors) and the exact P-Value. For convenience asterisks highlight: significance at * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Variables and codings. *Dissatisfied with NI democracy*: with five point scale from 'very satisfied' to 'not at all satisfied'; Irish identity: coded 1= 'Irish', 0= 'British', 'Northern Irish' or 'Ulster'; *power-sharing*: 'the experience of power-sharing has meant that one day a majority of unionists will agree to Northern Ireland joining the Irish Republic', coded on five point scale 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'; *police reform*: a categorical variable asking 'do you think that reform of the police in Northern Ireland has gone too far, has not gone far enough, or is about right'; *How much Say*: 'how much say do you think a Westminster government of any party should have in the way Northern Ireland is run? Coded on a four point scale from 'a great deal of say' to 'no say at all'.

SF most effective: 'Which party do you think has been the most effective voice for unionists in Northern Ireland'. The *Vote 1998* variables are coded (0, other; 1, SF), and refer to the NI Assembly election of 1998). The *Trust* variables are coded (0, no; 1, yes) to the questions 'Here is a list of some of the main political leaders in Northern Ireland. Which of them, if any, would you generally trust to act in the best interests of all the people in Northern Ireland'.

Source: The 2003 Northern Ireland Election Study, funded by the UK's ESRC.

Table 6: Voting DUP at the NI Assembly Election 2003

	Model 1: 'Attitudes only'		Model 2: Attitudes + 'DUP most effective'		Model 3: + DUP Vote '98		Model 4: + Trust variables		Model 5 + DUP Party ID	
	L	P-value	L	P-value	L	P-value	L	P-value	L	P-value
GFA	1.01 (0.23)	<0.001***	0.94 (0.23)	<0.001***	0.67 (0.25)	0.009**	0.54 (0.26)	0.037*		
Nationalists more content to stay in UK	-0.29 (0.13)	0.031*								
<i>Schools:</i> 'Prefer own religion only'	0.59 (0.27)	0.026*	0.59 (0.29)	0.04*						
<i>Police Reform</i> 'Gone too far'	0.62 (0.30)	0.038*	0.83 (0.32)	0.01**	0.87 (0.36)	0.016*				
Role of IRL Govt 'No Say'	0.45 (0.27)	0.091								
DUP 'most effective voice for Unionists'			2.27 (0.35)	<0.001***	1.62 (0.38)	<0.001***	1.04 (0.38)	0.006**	1.07 (0.39)	0.007**
Vote 1998 DUP					2.56 (0.39)	<0.001***	2.17 (0.40)	<0.001***	1.56 (0.44)	<0.001***
Trust Ian Paisley							1.32 (0.32)	<0.001***	0.93 (0.35)	0.008**
Trust David Trimble							-0.90 (0.33)	0.006**		
DUP Party ID									2.07 (0.37)	<0.001***
Constant	-2.61		-4.74		-4.13		-3.03		-2.68	
N	326		326		326		326		333	
R ² (Nagelkerke)	0.31		0.44		0.57		0.60		0.64	
Baseline % Correctly Predicted	52.6		52.6		54.2		54.2		52.6	
Final % Correctly Predicted	71.4		76.1		82.0		83.5		86.9	
-2 Log Likelihood (change)	84.4		129.3		180.3		195.5		214.5	

Notes: Logistic regression as in Table 5. Voting for DUP is coded as 1, Others as 0. Results columns show logit coefficients (their standard errors) and the exact P-Value. For convenience asterisks highlight: significance at * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Variables and codings: *GFA*: Which is closest to your own opinion of the Agreement? (1, 'The Agreement is basically right and just needs to be implemented in full'; 2, 'The Agreement is basically right but the specifics need to be renegotiated'; 3, 'The Agreement is basically wrong and needs to be abandoned or renegotiated'). *Nationalists UK*: 'The experience of power-sharing has meant that nationalists are now more content that Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK' (1, disagree/strongly disagree; 2, neither; 3, agree/strongly agree). *Schools*: 'If you were deciding where to send your children to school, would you prefer a school with children of only your own religion, or a mixed-religion school?' *Police reform*: 'Do you think that the reform of the police in Northern Ireland has gone too far, has not gone far enough, or is it about right?' *Role of IRL govt*: 'How much say do you think an Irish government of any party should have in the way Northern Ireland is run?'

The other variables, SF most effective, Vote 1998 and the 'trust' variables are coded in the same manner as in Table 5.

Source: The 2003 Northern Ireland Election Study, funded by the UK's ESRC.