European Journal of Political Research **47**: 766–793, 2008
doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.2008.00824.x

Ethnic competition and the logic of party system transformation

JOHN COAKLEY
School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin, Ireland

Abstract. This article adapts and expands a recent model of ethnic competition by exploring its implications over a long period spanning crucial stages in the modernisation of the political system. It illustrates the model by reference to developments in Northern Ireland since its modern party system was launched in the 1880s. This offers an exceptionally clear example of the interaction of central elements of the model: the initial bedding down of a system of bipartisan ethnic competition, with two parties having a remarkable capacity to resist ethnic outbidding; the fragmentation of this system following the introduction of a set of major institutional forms that facilitated ethnic outbidding; and the continuing resilience of ethnically based parties in warding off challenges from groups seeking to prioritise other political dimensions. The model's implications are tested against a comprehensive collection of ecological and survey data.

Party systems in long-established democracies tend, as is well known, to be stable and predictable in their patterns of evolution. There are occasions when, under pressure from political shock and institutional redesign, they may collapse and give way to scarcely recognisable successors, as in Italy in the early 1990s. Ethnic-type revolt may have similarly far-reaching consequences, as in Belgium and Northern Ireland in the 1970s. In many respects, the impact of ethnic tensions is more predictable than that of purely political crises. In particular, given the relatively stable patterns of support for ethnic parties, it is important to examine the modalities by which ethnically based party systems are transformed in response to the challenge of new forms of ethnic protest.

The object of this article is to assess the extent to which the fragmentation of the party system in divided societies is a response to an inherent logic in the life cycle of ethnic party competition. This issue may be tackled by looking first precisely at this logic: the options open to competing elites in a modernising, ethnically divided society. In the most straightforward di-ethnic context, it is argued, this will tend to produce a simple two-party system. Over time, and depending on changes in the system of incentive structures (in particular, electoral law), this is likely to be challenged from three rather different directions: ethnic outbidders from within each ethnic community, ethnic underbidders who define themselves as centrist and abjure all ethnic loyalties, and nonethnic counterbidders who seek to impose an alternative, nonethnic

Published by Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA

cleavage to replace the existing one. Following an elaboration of the logic behind these positions, the article explores the extent to which the evolution of party politics in an illustrative case – Northern Ireland – has conformed to this logic. The discussion is reinforced by analysis of almost all available ecological and survey data.[1]

The dynamics of ethnic politics

It is instructive to begin with a recent application of important strands of the older literature on ethnic mobilisation in a model designed to explain patterns of ethnic party competition. Drawing on a tradition stretching back to Rabushka and Shepsle (1972), but extending also to the comprehensive analysis of Horowitz (1985), Chandra (2005) suggests that the realities of ethnopolitical geography determine the options that are taken up by party elites in ethnically divided societies. The starting point in her model is summarised in Figure 1(a), which superimposes two cleavage structures (and for convenience, but at some violence to Venn diagrams, two sets and their complements): a societal division between two ethnic groups, A and B; and a second crosscutting division along a non-ethnic cleavage line (such as class, though there are many alternatives), D and E; in the case of each cleavage, the first group is larger than the second. As Chandra shows, when certain assumptions widely shared in the literature on ethnic competition are accepted, we may predict the probable shape of the party system. Under the plurality electoral system, if party 1 bids unchallenged for support from group A, it will win. Its rival, party 2, will be consigned to long-term minority status if it defines itself primarily as

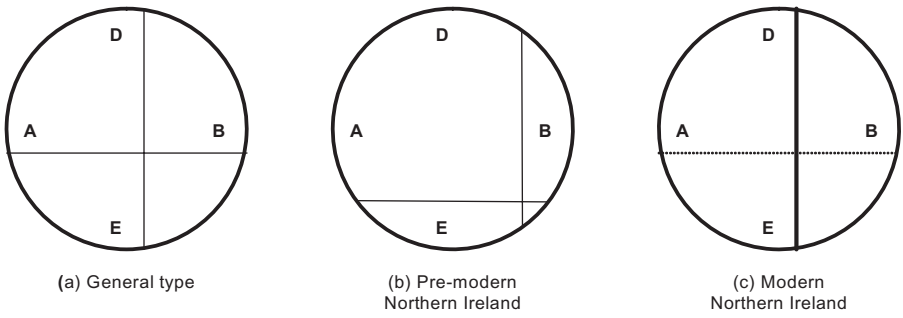

Figure 1. Hypothetical patterns of party mobilisation.
Note: Each circle is divided into two pairs of crosscutting segments: A and B (ethnic) and D and E (nonethnic).
Source: Type (a) derived from Chandra (2005).

defender of the alternative, group B; but it may succeed in mobilising the alternative cleavage line, bidding for support from group D. If we assume equal salience of the two cleavages, then we may, following Chandra, predict support of the two parties as follows (where P_1 and P_2 refer to their respective support bases):

$$P_1 = ((A \cap D)/2) + (A \cap E) \quad (1)$$

$$P_2 = ((A \cap D)/2) + (B \cap D) \quad (2)$$

The remaining group (B ∩ E), a minority on both cleavages, is marginalised, indifferent to two hostile parties and impotent under the plurality system; its members may either support a token protest party, vote for the least undesirable of the dominant parties, or abstain. Chandra shows persuasively how 'centrism' (essentially, competition for the middle ground) will result when the two cleavages are symmetric: when A's majority over B is the same as D's majority over E (and, by implication, of equal salience), the outcome will be a draw. She illustrates this by reference to the party system of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s.

For present purposes, it is useful to take Chandra's model in a different direction, exploring its implications over a long time span in which sociopolitical conditions and constitutional structures are transformed. In fact, the starting point will commonly resemble not the pattern of Figure 1(a), but rather that of Figure 1(b). Before the era of mass suffrage, the societal cleavage structure was largely absent from the restricted electorate: marginal ethnic groups and subordinate social groups were substantially excluded from the franchise. Commonly in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, though, the political weight of the ethnic dimension increased even more rapidly than did that of nonethnic cleavages, such as class politics; we need to modify the relative strength of the two original parties by taking account of this. We may imagine a weighting factor, W, that sums to unity for the two cleavages, allowing us to redefine the relative strength of the two original parties as follows:

$$P_1 = ((A \cap D) * W_{ab}) + (A \cap E) \quad (3)$$

$$P_2 = ((A \cap D) * W_{de}) + (B \cap D) \quad (4)$$

This will give a clear advantage to party 1 over party 2, given the enhanced salience of ethnicity (W_{ab} will be greater than W_{de}). Where society is divided ethnically as well as socially, franchise extension is hugely disruptive,

fundamentally transforming the arithmetic of party competition. As groups A and D shrink proportionally, the options for the parties that rely on their numeric superiority narrow. The excluded double minority group is suddenly empowered, resulting in the appearance of a new party with the capacity to win a parliamentary majority, whose support is as follows:

$$P_3 = (B \cap E) \tag{5}$$

Further stages in party system evolution depend both on social structure and on constitutional factors. If, in addition to franchise extension, the plurality electoral system is retained, party 2 will come under big pressure; its supporters will divide between party 1, which will receive portion $((A \cap D) * W_{de})$, and party 3, which will receive $(B \cap D)$, resulting in a simple assertion of the dominance of the ethnic cleavage, A versus B, as illustrated in Figure 1(c):

$$P_1 = ((A \cap D) * W_{ab}) + (A \cap E) + ((A \cap D) * W_{de}) = A \tag{6}$$

$$P_3 = (B \cap E) + (B \cap D) = B \tag{7}$$

This need not end the pattern of party system evolution. As Chandra (2005: 237) puts it:

> When there is even a slight difference in the numerical strength of groups A and B, the result should be either or both of two destabilising outcomes: the party bidding for the support of majority group A should win the election and subvert the democratic process by stripping minority B of all rights, or the minority group B should engage in destabilising violence to preempt such exclusion.

Internal fissures created by this outcome may well be disguised by retention of the plurality system, which offers a powerful incentive to bloc unity. But this incentive is removed if proportional representation is introduced, as it commonly was in twentieth century Europe. This permits the emergence of three new processes which have implications for the party system; in addition to the well-established concept of ethnic outbidding, the metaphor of the auction-room suggests two others. These three options may be defined as follows:

- *Ethnic outbidding*: a spiralling process of intra-bloc competition in which the traditional party is forced to compete with a new party or parties; each claims to be the most effective defender of bloc interests; its target support base is (A) or (B).

- *Ethnic underbidding*: an explicit effort to undermine ethnic polarisation by mobilising the possibly unstable terrain between the two blocs; the nominal target support base of such parties is commonly too broad to be realistic; it is defined as $(A \cup B)$, rather than as $(D \cup E)$: societal unity is the aim.
- *Nonethnic counterbidding*: an effort to mobilise support around an alternative line of cleavage, typically one that would bring together members of the two ethnic blocs; the target support base of parties of this kind is normally explicitly defined as $((D \cap A) + (D \cap B))$, or as $((E \cap A) + (E \cap B))$.

In a nutshell, the three approaches are differentiated by their target support base: respectively, an ethnic bloc, the 'middle ground' lying between or straddling the blocs, and an alternative line of cleavage that cuts across the ethnic one.

The extent to which these pressures modify the party system depends on the shape of the dominant cleavage. Some possible configurations are illustrated in Figure 2. Figure 2(a) illustrates the 'normal' pattern (the word is used not only to indicate that, despite its leftward tilt to indicate the dominance of position A, this is the 'typical' position on political issues, as well as approximating a normal curve). This obviously promotes 'centrism'. The situations of ethnic competition analysed by Chandra are better described by Figure 2(b), which shows opinion clustered not in the middle, but at the poles. Yet is this likely to be the characteristic position in a binational society? We may suggest an alternative, Figure 2(c). Here the modal points of the two groups are far apart, but each has its 'radical' and its 'moderate' fringe; and the centre ground is not absent. This pattern is conducive both to ethnic outbidding and to ethnic underbidding; the logic of Downsian competition reasserts itself, with outbidders clustering around either modal point and underbidders trying to straddle

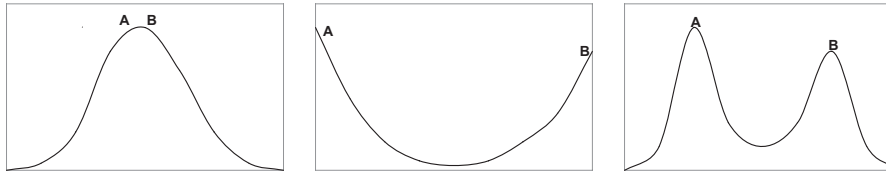

Figure 2. Hypothetical patterns of electoral distribution along one dimension.
Note: It is assumed in each case that one tendency, A, is slightly more popular than the other, B.

the two. If institutional incentives permit, this may also be compatible with nonethnic counterbidding, an attempt to countermobilise along an issue whose distribution resembles Figure 2(a), since by definition it is less socially divisive than the primary source of conflict.

At first sight, the electoral history of Europe is full of material of potential value for the testing of this model over the long, characteristic process of democratisation and political modernisation. However, prolonged periods of communist or right-wing authoritarian rule disrupted the pattern in some of the most promising cases (such as most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the Spanish regions). This still leaves three possible cases. First, the impact of ethnic politics in Belgium is well known; but its advent followed a path entirely different from the one explored here. Initial mobilisation took place along the important secular-clerical axis, and the initial challenge to the traditional hegemony of the Liberal and Catholic parties came from class-centred counterbidding, with the rise of the Socialist Party. When the new salience of ethnic politics was confirmed in the 1970s with the bifurcation of each of the three old parties, it could be argued that it represented a form of ethnic counterbidding; but it is clear that this was a case where the classical order of mobilisation (beginning with the ethnic dimension) was reversed.[2]

Second, Finland is a fascinating example, with the nineteenth-century rise of the Finnish Party to challenge the traditional dominant interests represented by the Swedish Party in the four-chamber diet subjected eventually to ethnic counterbidding by the Young Finns. The form of radical democracy (including proportional representation) introduced in 1906 permitted effective counterbidding by agrarian interests, but in particular by a powerful social democratic movement, which managed to win not just massive support from the Finnish-speaking working class, but also some support from Swedish-speaking workers. The 'problem' with the Finnish case is that the story practically ends just after 1906: the remarkably early introduction of universal suffrage and proportional representation quickly created a party system that, with the important exception of the rise and decline of the communist strand, has substantially persisted ever since.

The third case is Northern Ireland, an autonomous political entity for most of the period since 1921, but one where religion rather than language has been the key marker of ethnic differentiation. This has the disadvantage that, like Slovakia, Estonia or Latvia, it did not exist even as a notional entity before the First World War; but it has the great advantage of presenting, over a long time period, continuous electoral data that allow us to explore the interplay between the dynamics of ethnic politics and the incentive structure offered by changing provisions of electoral law (and, in particular, by the belated introduction of proportional representation in 1973).

In the next three sections, three points that emerge from this discussion are developed by reference to the electoral history of Northern Ireland. The first is the process by which, with an expanding electorate under the plurality system, a form of ethnopolitical consolidation took place and a clearly defined two-party system emerged. The longevity of this system was extraordinary; it survived not just modest challenges from ethnic underbidders and nonethnic counterbidders, but in particular a very forceful challenge from one powerful ethnic outbidder. Second, we consider the consequences of electoral reform in 1973 and especially of the transformation in the institutional incentive structure at that point: the new success of ethnic outbidding in transforming the shape of the party system. Finally, we consider the implications of the dominance of the ethnic issue for the opening of 'new fronts' by would-be counterbidders on other dimensions.

Emergence of ethnic bipolarism

The early stages in the evolution of party politics in Ireland are a textbook illustration of the model described above. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Irish sections of the two great British parties adapted quickly to the different political culture of the smaller island. The Conservatives made an initial and successful bid for defence of the existing constitutional order; the Liberals became the party of limited religious and agrarian reform. In the context of a restricted electorate this resulted in relative stability at the level of the island of Ireland; but since these two positions were associated, respectively, with Protestantism and Catholicism, the balance between the two sides was strongly articulated spatially, with Conservative strength concentrated in the northern, Protestant counties. In the southern counties, Liberals fell victim to outbidding on the agrarian issue, and then on the issue of constitutional reform (with the growth in demand for Irish self-government). The introduction of substantial manhood suffrage in 1884 permitted these conflicts to be translated into party politics: a transition similar to that between Figure 1(b) and Figure 1(c) occurred, with the Liberals squeezed between a vibrant Nationalist Party and a Conservative Party that was rapidly redefining itself as the party of the pro-British Protestant community, symbolised in its new name: the Unionist Party.

The extent of the shift in the balance of political power that took place at the 1885 general election is illustrated in Table 1, which summarises election results before and after this date in the territory that was later to become Northern Ireland, distinguishing between Catholic and Protestant constituencies, and pushing the comparison forward in time.[3] The top section of this table

Table 1. Distribution of parliamentary seats, Northern Ireland, 1832–1965

Constituency type	Conservative/Unionist Party	Other unionists	Centre/others	Nationalist Party	Other nationalists	Total seats	Cramer's V
1832–1880							
Protestant	80.1	1.9	17.9	0.0	0.0	156	0.07
Catholic	76.7	4.2	19.2	0.0	0.0	120	
All	78.6	2.9	18.5	0.0	0.0	276	
1885–1910							
Protestant	89.2	9.2	1.7	0.0	0.0	120	0.77*
Catholic	23.8	3.8	3.8	62.5	6.3	80	
All	63.0	7.0	2.5	25.0	2.5	200	
1920–1965							
Protestant	90.4	3.6	5.1	0.0	0.9	333	0.94*
Catholic	2.0	1.0	5.1	77.8	14.1	99	
All	70.1	3.0	5.1	17.8	3.9	432	
Belfast							
Protestant	*74.6*	*9.5*	*13.5*	*0.0*	*2.4*	*126*	*0.81**
Catholic	*0.0*	*0.0*	*22.2*	*38.9*	*38.9*	*18*	
Total	*65.3*	*8.3*	*14.6*	*4.9*	*6.9*	*144*	
Rural							
Protestant	*100.0*	*0.0*	*0.0*	*0.0*	*0.0*	*207*	*0.98**
Catholic	*2.5*	*1.2*	*1.2*	*86.4*	*8.6*	*81*	
Total	*72.6*	*0.3*	*0.3*	*24.3*	*2.4*	*288*	

Note: Data refer to elections to the United Kingdom House of Commons (1832–1910) and to the Northern Ireland House of Commons (1929–1965). 'Centre/others' refers mainly to the Liberal Party up to 1910, and to the Northern Ireland Labour Party from 1929. * $p < 0.001$.
Source: Derived from Walker (1978, 1992); Elliott (1973). Constituencies classified on the basis of census and other data.

highlights Conservative domination in Northern Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century: even in constituencies with a mainly Catholic population, the restricted franchise gave Protestants an electoral advantage because of their disproportionate representation in the higher social classes. The 1884 reform act, by enfranchising most adult males, Catholic and Protestant alike, tilted the political balance in predominantly Catholic constituencies by reducing the gap between the distribution of the electorate and the distribution of the population. The result was a new relationship between politics and religion: the party vote in the 1885 election may be predicted almost perfectly from the results of the census question on religious affiliation (Coakley 2002).

The effects of these changes were remarkably long-lasting, as the powerful association between religion and party support (as measured by Cramer's V) in the later periods shows. Figure 3 reinforces the message of Table 1 by reproducing election results by constituency for two periods: 1885–1910 and 1929–1965.[4] The mere fact that it is possible to reproduce the results of so many elections on one map is convincing evidence of the remarkable stability of voting patterns; in fact, had constituency boundaries remained stable it is likely that a single map could have been used to cover both periods. As will be seen by comparing the two electoral maps with the two showing religious composition, the religious profile was simply translated into a political one.[5]

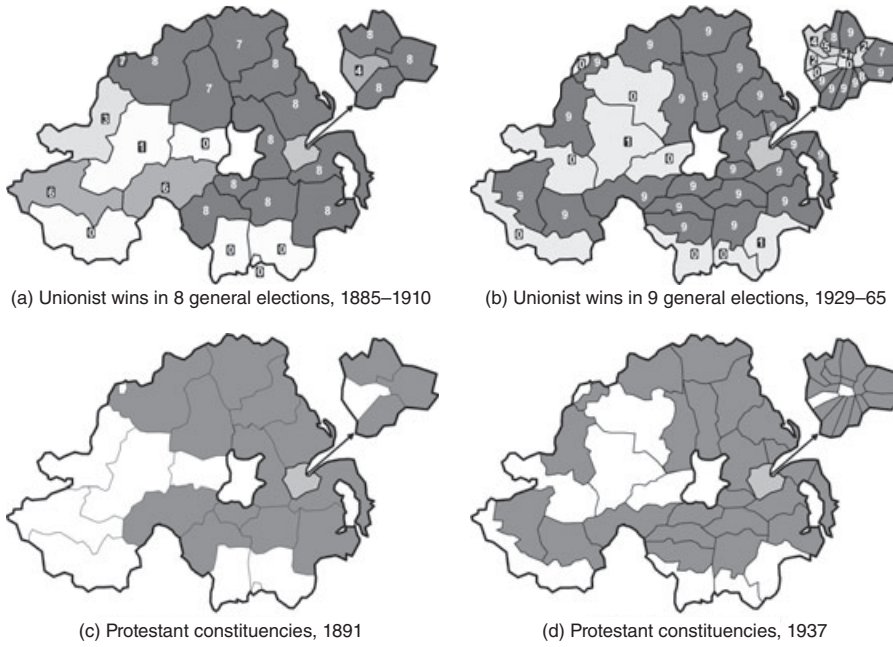

Figure 3. Religion, political power and territory, Northern Ireland, 1885–1965.

After 1921, there was some redefinition of the incentive structure, reinforcing the imperative of unity, particularly on the unionist side. The Ulster Unionist Party moved from being a reactive, local annex of the British Conservative Party to being a party of government in one of the United Kingdom's regions (though remaining formally linked to the Conservative Party until 1986). The Nationalist Party ceased to be an all-Irish one, and was now confined entirely to Northern Ireland (see Phoenix 1994; Staunton 2001; Lynn 1997). In this new context, though, the same kind of electoral competition continued, as Table 1 has shown.

The capacity of the new party system to resist outbidding, underbidding and counterbidding challenges was impressive. Underbidding was entirely ineffective. The small, self-consciously centrist Liberal Party maintained a fitful existence, but its modest successes before 1885 (represented in the 'centre/others' column in Table 1) evaporated after that date. There were more positive prospects for nonethnic counterbidding. The Northern Ireland Labour Party sought to give substance to the Marxist dream of uniting workers across the religious fault-line. In practice, it performed well only in Protestant working-class constituencies in Belfast, where it mounted a considerable challenge to Unionists. In working class Catholic Belfast, a rather different pattern asserted itself. The Nationalist Party never won a seat there after 1945. In a form of class-based counterbidding, it was replaced by a range of small parties that rarely returned more than one member to the House of Commons, and that bore left-sounding names: 'Independent Labour', 'Irish Labour', 'Socialist Republican' and 'Republican Labour'.

Ethnic outbidding offered a potentially more serious challenge. Given Protestant control of the state, there was little reason for such mobilisation on the unionist side (though there are examples: the election of a small number of independent unionists, many of them supporters of fundamentalist Protestant principles). Yet on the side that 'lost' in Northern Ireland, the nationalist side, the potential for outbidding was greater: if the Nationalists had failed to prevent partition, were there other parties that might offer a more promising path? Outside Northern Ireland, Irish voters believed there were: at the general election of 1918, the Nationalist Party's dominance was overturned by the radical nationalist Sinn Féin, which won 69 of the 72 seats in the area that now constitutes the Republic of Ireland, led that area to independence, and itself broke up to become the parent of a new party system (Coakley 1994). In Northern Ireland, however, this clear case of successful ethnic outbidding was not reproduced: Sinn Féin was able to win only three of the eight seats in Catholic constituencies, and the Nationalist Party recovered subsequently to become the primary voice of the Catholic community. Sinn Féin enjoyed limited success later in elections to the British House of Commons, but the

evidence suggests that voters had little taste for its militant programme. Outbidders can ultimately stand for a position too remote from the modal point in their own community to give them a realistic prospect of success.

Intra-communal fragmentation

Chandra's prescient assessment of the outcome of ethnic competition of the kind that has characterised Northern Ireland has been illustrated vividly since 1968. In bicommunal ethnic competition, the winning community may take strong measures to protect its hegemony, perhaps bypassing democratic norms to marginalise its opponents; but the minority may, as we have seen, 'engage in destabilising violence to pre-empt such exclusion'. This is precisely what happened in Northern Ireland: beginning in 1968, a widely supported civil rights movement, a civil disobedience campaign and an upsurge in violence by a rejuvenated Irish Republican Army (IRA) ultimately caused the collapse of the existing constitutional system in 1972. This had two important consequences for the pattern of subsequent ethnic outbidding: the disappearance of the Northern Ireland House of Commons undermined the imperative of cohesion on the unionist side (since formation of a parliamentary majority was no longer crucial); and the introduction in 1973 of proportional representation in all elections except those to the British House of Commons reduced the costs of intercommunal division, opening the door to a new wave of ethnic outbidding.

The broad trends of subsequent developments are illustrated in Figure 4, based on the results of local elections from 1973 to 2005, as these offer the most accurate indicator of electoral opinion.[6] While Figure 4(a) shows the continued dominance of two major blocs, Figures 4(b) and 4(c) indicate the extent to which each is internally divided – with ethnic outbidding the primary cause.

On the unionist side, the full costs of outbidding became apparent in the 1970s (and especially after the institutional changes of 1972–1973 redefined the incentive structure). Following deep fragmentation in the middle of the decade, a dual internal structure had appeared by 1981: in a pattern that has continued to the present, the old Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) found itself forced to share its support base with an outbidding opponent, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) of Reverend Ian Paisley. This internal dualism was matched on the nationalist side. As we have seen, the Nationalist Party had virtually disappeared in and around Belfast. The general election to the Northern Ireland House of Commons in 1969 dealt it a devastating blow. It was replaced by the new Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), which, in a dramatic illustration of the success of this form of outbidding, quickly became

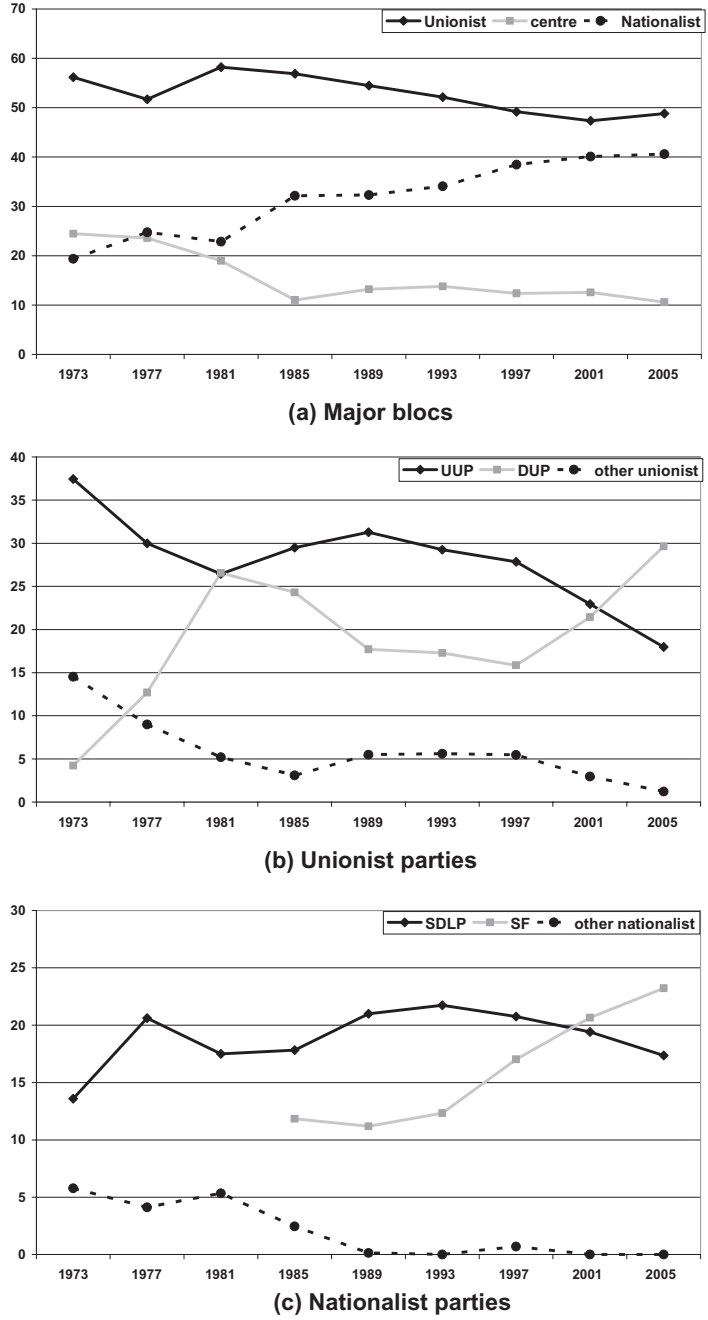

Figure 4. Party support in local elections, Northern Ireland, 1973–2005.

the dominant voice of nationalism. As Figure 4(c) shows, the SDLP was able to withstand a powerful challenge in the early 1980s from a new electoral force, Sinn Féin, whose sudden entry into electoral politics in 1982 was another clear instance of successful ethnic outbidding under proportional representation.[7]

The extent of nationalist-unionist polarisation emerges with striking clarity from ecological data, which permit analysis over a long time-span. The near-perfect correlation between religion and party support since 1885 has been confirmed in the data already discussed in this article, and especially in Table 1. Analysis of more recent electoral data confirms this: at local elections from 1993 to 2005, support for the two nationalist parties combined may be explained entirely by the religious composition of electoral areas. The relationship emerges so strongly that there is little point in reproducing regression equations, but it should be noted that for the four elections of 1993, 1997, 2001 and 2005, the respective R^2 values when the combined nationalist vote is explained by the proportion of Catholics are 0.90, 0.92, 0.95 and 0.98 ($N = 101$).[8] The pattern is illustrated vividly in Figure 5, which plots each contested electoral area's support in 2005 for Sinn Féin, and for the combined Sinn Féin-SDLP grouping, against the percentage of Catholics.

This picture is reinforced by major studies based on survey data from 1968 (Rose 1971), 1978 (Moxon-Browne 1983) and 1989–1991 (Evans & Duffy 1997), and is confirmed in more recent surveys. Only insignificant proportions of Catholics (typically, 3 per cent or less) say that they vote for a unionist party, and an even lower proportion of Protestants say that they vote for a nationalist party. There is thus almost no leakage from one bloc to the other, if by 'leakage' is meant a disposition on the part of Catholics to vote unionist or of Protestants to vote nationalist. This pattern has been stable over time, as may be seen from Table 2.

Explaining divisions within blocs offers a bigger challenge than accounting for differences between them. Are parties bidding against each other on the same issue, or do other issues intervene? The content of recent election manifestos makes clear the dual character of intra-bloc competition: the DUP and Sinn Féin claiming sounder policies and promising more effective delivery than their rivals in defending the community against the demands of the other bloc, but at the same time stressing their distinctive positions on other dimensions (such as issues of public morality or of socio-economic policy). Analysis of the social background of party supporters within blocs does little to displace the notion that the parties are appealing to relatively cohesive groups. One careful analysis of survey data from 1989–1991 concluded that religious affiliation (and especially adhesion to denominations outside the mainstream), church attendance, level of education and age were of particular importance on the unionist side, though perhaps surprising in their effect (in that DUP

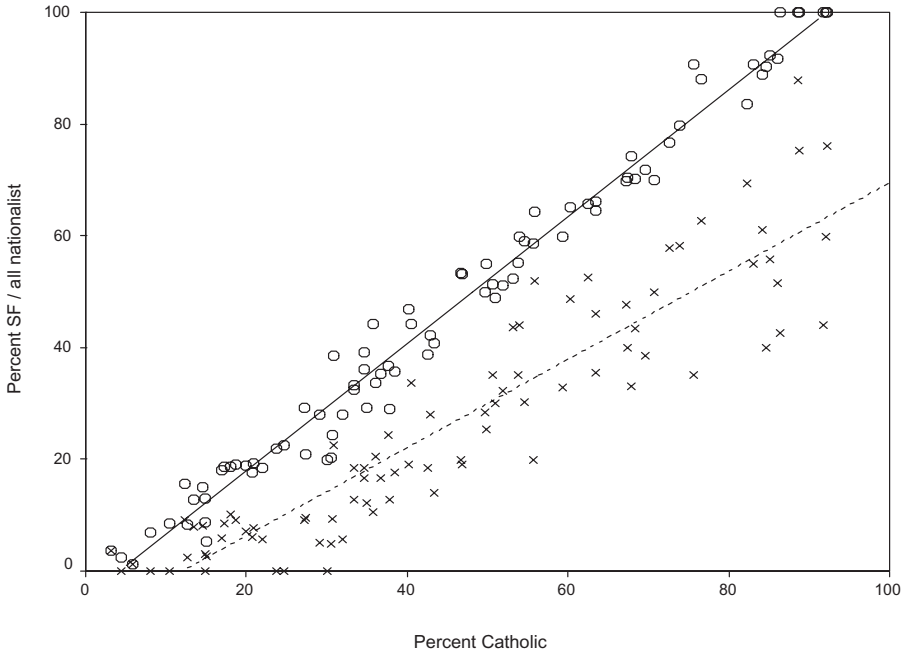

Figure 5. Sinn Féin and total nationalist support, 2005, by per cent Catholic, 2001 (local electoral areas).
Note: Circles represent total nationalist support and Xs Sinn Féin support; the vertical distance between each circle and the corresponding X represents support for the SDLP. The continuous regression line refers to total nationalist support ($R^2 = 0.98$) and the broken line to Sinn Féin support ($R^2 = 0.85$). Data points represent 86 local electoral areas contested by nationalists (in the remaining 15 there was no nationalist candidate).

support was associated with *lower* levels of church attendance). Even more surprisingly, left-right placement was more important than unionist commitment in distinguishing between supporters of the two parties (Evans & Duffy 1997).

On the nationalist side, the clash between Sinn Féin and the SDLP is technically more recent, but its roots lie deep in Irish history, as we have seen, and the difference between the perspectives with which the parties have traditionally been associated are much more profound than in the case of unionism (see Bric & Coakley 2004; Murray & Tonge, 2005). It is to be presumed that perspectives on the legitimacy of paramilitary violence play a major role in differentiating Sinn Féin from SDLP supporters (though data limitations prevent us from testing this). Analysis of the contrasting backgrounds of supporters of the two main nationalist parties, based on pooled survey data from 1989–1991, showed class, age and intensity of nationalist commitment as

Table 2. Religion and party support, Northern Ireland, 1968–2006

Year	Denomination	Unionist	Centre	Nationalist	Number of cases	Cramer's V
1968	Protestant	86	14	1	713	
	Catholic	6	37	57	484	0.82*
1978	Protestant	79	20	1	674	
	Catholic	1	35	64	306	0.82*
1989	Protestant	82	18	1	400	
	Catholic	2	21	77	214	0.87*
1998	Protestant	82	16	2	791	
	Catholic	2	10	88	562	0.90*
2006	Protestant	84	13	3	452	
	Catholic	6	11	83	340	0.85*

Note: Figures refer to percentages of the religious groups, excluding those not indicating which party they would support. 'Unionists' refers to the Ulster Unionist Party and also, later, to the Democratic Unionist Party and smaller unionist groups. 'Centre' refers to the Northern Ireland Labour Party and the Liberal Party in 1968, and to the Alliance Party subsequently; the Workers' Party and the Women's Coalition have also been included in this category. 'Nationalists' refers to the Nationalist Party in 1968, and to the SDLP and Sinn Féin subsequently. * $p < 0.001$.

Source: Computed from Northern Ireland Loyalty Survey, 1968; Northern Ireland Political Attitudes Survey, 1978; Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey, 1989; Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 1998, 2006.

helping to explain differences between the two (Evans & Duffy 1997). Later analysis of pooled surveys over the period 1989–1999 confirms the importance of education and age for Sinn Féin support, but also identifies occupational class as significant (McAllister 2004).

It is important to revisit these conclusions about the character of intra-bloc divisions in the light of more recent data. The paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 redefined the conflict in political rather than military terms, and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 changed the incentive structure: parties were now to be represented in government in proportion to their Assembly strength, and therefore in proportion to their electoral strength – changes likely to have a big impact on intra- as well as inter-bloc relations by lowering the costs of intra-bloc competition. Furthermore, we might expect the advent of peace and the spread of secular values to have a significant impact on attitudes, especially in the case of younger voters.

Table 3 offers some insight into the character of the breakdown in support within blocs – necessarily limited because of the restrictions of multivariate analysis on the basis of contingency tables.[9] The combined effect of church

Table 3. Social characteristics of supporters of major parties, Northern Ireland, 1998–2004

Community	Church attendance	Occupational group	SDLP	SF	UUP	DUP	Other	Number of cases
Catholic	Regular	Middle class	76	15	1	1	9	1,068
		Working class	69	25	1	0	5	1,060
	Irregular	Middle class	58	24	3	0	15	581
		Working class	54	35	2	1	8	655
Protestant	Regular	Middle class	1		63	21	14	915
		Working class	1	0	58	33	8	625
	Irregular	Middle class	3	0	54	24	19	1,693
		Working class	3	1	46	38	13	1,473
Total	All	All	29	11	31	17	12	9,231

Note: Figures refer to percentages of the respective categories. The summary data in the last row include cases missing from the other rows.
Source: Pooled data from Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys, 1998–2004.

attendance and occupational status on inter-party divisions within blocs is striking, as may be seen from the symmetrical profiles of party support (with SDLP and UUP declining steadily as we move from the church-going middle class to the non-practicing working class within the respective communities, and Sinn Féin and the DUP reversing this trend). The number of cases is sufficiently large to assess the impact of other variables such as age, level of education and nationalist-unionist commitment, using a large number of control variables. For example, on the Catholic side, if nationalist-unionist commitment is considered alongside the variables reported here, support for Sinn Féin rises to 61 per cent among nationalist, working-class, irregular church-attenders (N = 202), while support for the SDLP rises to 80 per cent among moderate, middle-class regular church-attenders (N = 640).[10]

How can we generalise about the cumulative impact of these factors on party support within blocs? Table 4 seeks to do so by using logistic regression analysis to examine the impact of a range of theoretically important variables on the more radical party within each bloc (Sinn Féin and the DUP, respectively). The models include almost all variables that might be expected theoretically to be significant, or that have been identified in earlier research: religious denomination (not applicable on the Catholic side) and religiosity (measured by frequency of church attendance); class-related indicators, including occupational group (white-collar workers versus others), educational level (those who have some formal second-level educational qualification versus others) and income level (distinguishing those above median income from those below this level); two general background variables, age and sex, whose significance for electoral support is known from comparative research; and one attitudinal variable, position on a nationalist-unionist scale. A further variable whose importance has been demonstrated in earlier analysis has not been included; because of a change in the set of questions asked, it has not been possible to construct a left-right scale with an adequate level of reliability.[11]

The column reporting logistic regression coefficients in respect of Sinn Féin shows the predictable impact of both occupational group and educational status (with Sinn Féin supporters more likely to be found among manual workers and those scoring low on educational attainment); they are also more likely to be male and to be younger than SDLP supporters; and they are less likely to be regular church-goers. The nationalism-unionism scale is also of great significance, with Sinn Féin supporters strongly associated with more nationalist positions – an outcome that broadly matches the earlier conclusions of McAllister (2004) and especially of Evans and Duffy (1997).

The DUP shows a rather similar social and age profile in respect of its unionist competitors (though lower income replaces lower occupational status in predicting support for the party). However, religious denomination also

Table 4. Estimated impact of selected variables on intra-bloc support for Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party, 1998–2004

	Sinn Féin		DUP	
Variable	Estimate	(SE)	Estimate	(SE)
Denomination (minor Protestant)	–	–	0.399***	(0.070)
Church attendance (regular)	–0.207*	(0.085)	0.038	(0.071)
Occupational group (middle class)	–0.335***	(0.063)	–0.083	(0.048)
Education level (high)	–0.267**	(0.098)	–0.519***	(0.070)
Income level (above median)	–0.007	(0.054)	–0.126**	(0.039)
Sex (male)	0.211*	(0.082)	0.107	(0.062)
Age	–0.020***	(0.003)	–0.017***	(0.002)
Nationalism-unionism scale (high = unionist)	–0.826***	(0.042)	0.695***	(0.038)
Constant	2.359***	(0.201)	–4.409***	(0.268)
Number of cases	4,087		6,983	
–2 log likelihood	3,767		6,520	
Nagelkerke's R^2	0.235		0.141	

Note: The table reports logistic regression estimates of the likelihood of support for Sinn Féin among those of Catholic community background and for the DUP among those of Protestant community background. The first six variables are dichotomous, where 'minor Protestant' refers to Protestants other than members of the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian church, 'regular' refers to weekly church attendance and 'high' education refers to those with at least a minimum second-level qualification. Age, a continuous variable, refers to age in years; and the nationalism-unionism scale is a 7-point one. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Source: Pooled data from Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys, 1998–2004.

matters: adherence to 'other Protestant' denominations has a big effect, no doubt reflecting the importance of Ian Paisley's own Free Presbyterian Church.[12] The significance of church attendance – so obvious in Table 3 – disappears once the effect of other variables is controlled for; but commitment to unionism (as measured by the nationalism-unionism scale) is very significant. These findings resemble earlier assessments of the character of political divisions within unionism (Evans & Duffy 1997), but suggest that unionist ideology now counts for more, and religiosity for less, in explaining differences between the two main unionist parties.

The two models thus help in explaining Sinn Féin support within the Catholic community and DUP support within the Protestant community (as the modest but respectable Nagelkerke's R^2 statistics suggest), but they are not intended simply to do this. A more parsimonious model in each case generates

statistics for goodness of fit that are almost as satisfactory as those reported in Table 4; but the focus in that table is on the effect (or otherwise) of theoretically important variables, and not just on an efficient explanation of party support. These findings are consistent with the conclusion of Lutz and Farrington (2006) on the basis of a survey of candidates in the 2003 Assembly election; there were significant differences within blocs on moral-religious issues (with the SDLP and the DUP taking the more conservative position) and on social and economic ones (with the SDLP and the UUP as the more conservative). Overall, there is little evidence that generational change or secularisation have had much effect. The impact of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement on the party system appears to have been slight, though it may have resulted in an accentuation of ideological differences within the unionist family – a conclusion that broadly matches the analysis by Tilley et al. (2008) of long-term trends in partisanship over the period 1982–2004.

Alternatives to ethnic politics

The intense patterns of ethnic outbidding already described suggest that little space remains for alternative approaches to party competition. It is nevertheless important to consider the experience of ethnic underbidders and nonethnic counterbidders. We may do this first by looking at their overall profiles, and then by examining revealing evidence about inter-party electoral relationships: data on lower preference votes (possible because of the single transferable vote). Discussion of two other important factors lies beyond the scope of this article: willingness to vote tactically (encouraged by the plurality system, and permitting us to consider party-voter relationships) and differential turnout levels (abstention is a form of electoral rebellion notably on the Protestant side; see Knox & Carmichael 1998).

The redefinition of the political centre – the terrain not just of underbidders, but also of counterbidders – represents a dramatic change over time. Of 29 MPs elected over the period 1921–1969 classified as falling in the 'centre', 20 (69 per cent) were members of the Northern Ireland Labour Party or independent labour MPs. Yet of the 698 'centrist' local councillors elected between 1973 and 2005, only 16 (2 per cent) used a 'labour' label, and of these only seven were official candidates of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. The party's promising performance in the 1960s came to an abrupt end with the polarisation of working-class areas in the 1970s. Its effective replacement in the middle ground was the Alliance Party, which accounted for 385 (55 per cent) of all councillors not affiliated to one or other of the two main blocs. Most of the rest were independent candidates running on local issues – several of

Table 5. Denominational breakdown in support for centre parties, Northern Ireland, 1968–2007

Party	Period	Catholic	Protestant	Other	Number of cases
Liberal Party	1968	79	18	4	28
Northern Ireland Labour Party	1968	63	36	1	234
	1978	40	49	11	57
Alliance Party	1978	42	49	9	204
	1989–1996	29	55	16	706
	1996–1997	32	64	4	279
	1998–2002	29	54	17	466
	2003–2007	23	57	20	411
Workers' Party	1989–1996	60	19	21	109
	1996–1997	57	33	10	21
Green Party	1989–1996	33	36	32	79
	1996–1997	33	53	14	43
Women's Coalition	1996–1997	49	39	12	37
	1998–2002	34	38	28	122
	2003–2006	42	47	11	71

Note: Figures in the three denominational columns are percentages of the party subsamples, and refer to current reported denomination. Total numbers of cases from which these subsamples are drawn are: 1968: 1,291 (41 per cent Catholic, 58 per cent Protestant, 1 per cent other); 1978: 1,267 (32, 62 and 7 per cent, respectively, for the three denominational groups); 1989–1996: 7,252 (36, 53, 11); 1996–1997: 2,997 (42, 54, 4); 1998–2002: 9,206 (39, 51, 10); 2003–2007: 7,135 (39, 51, 10). Chi^2 tests for goodness of fit (Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests when the number of cases was very small) based on the absolute numbers of cases show all of these patterns as being significant at the 1 per cent level or better, except for the Women's Coalition, 1996–1997 (significant at the 5 per cent level), and the Northern Ireland Labour Party, 1978; Workers' Party, 1996–1997; Women's Coalition, 2003–2003 (not significant).
Source: Northern Ireland Loyalty Survey, 1968; Northern Ireland Attitudes Survey, 1978; Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Surveys, 1989–1996; Northern Ireland Social Mobility Study, 1996–1997; Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys, 1998–2007.

them unionists forced to drop the 'independent unionist' label by a change in electoral law in 2001 – but a few (10) belonged to the Workers' Party, an offshoot of Sinn Féin that had migrated to the middle ground by the 1980s. Among new counterbidders in the 1990s, the Women's Coalition and the Green Party were of some importance (see Porter 1996).

Table 5 summarises the denominational composition of support for those parties that were explicitly biconfessional in appeal, whether as nonethnic counterbidders seeking to impose an alternative, cross-denominational issue dimension (class in the case of the Northern Ireland Labour Party and the

Workers' Party, the environment in the case of the Green Party, and gender in the case of the Women's Coalition) or as ethnic underbidders presenting themselves self-consciously in a bridge-building role (the Liberal Party and the Alliance Party). Table 5 deliberately identifies a third 'denominational' group: those stating that they adhere to a non-Christian denomination, or to none (the other religious labels refer to self-professed Catholics and Protestants). This is because those opting out of religious identification have been attributed a particular significance as politically detached or non-partisan, and therefore as potential supporters of parties outside the two blocs (Breen & Hayes 1997) – though analysis of 1991 survey data provides no evidence that they disproportionately support the main party of the centre, the Alliance Party (Hayes & McAllister 1995: 75).

The high percentages in Table 5 of those not belonging to the two main religions who support parties of the centre is noteworthy. So, too, is the tendency for these parties to be tilted in the direction of one religion rather than another, as is clear from high Chi^2 values, which measure deviations from the outcome if support for a party was drawn from the religious groups in proportion to their distribution in the overall sample. When a decaying Nationalist Party was the only alternative for Catholics, the Catholic bias of the old Liberal Party and of the Northern Ireland Labour Party is not surprising, but in the case of the latter it represented a significant breaking out of that party's traditional Protestant, working-class support base. Neither is the Workers' Party's stronger support among Catholics surprising, given its origins. In the other cases, statistically significant relationships are not necessarily of great substantive importance: the Green Party and the Women's Coalition draw a reasonable measure of support from both main religions, but Catholics tend to be slightly under-represented in the Alliance Party in more recent surveys.[13]

The use of the single transferable vote system of proportional representation provides further evidence of willingness to cross the communal gap – at least in respect of lower preference votes. Analysis of transfer patterns in the 1998 Assembly election showed predictably high levels of bloc solidarity, but also pointed towards a 'modest but significant sign of the growth of centrist politics', as measured by UUP-SDLP transfers (Sinnott 1998). Analysis of transfer patterns reported in a 1998 post-election survey suggested that such relationships indeed existed, but transfers within blocs were more striking, with moderate unionists gaining from transferred votes from their more militant rivals (Evans & O'Leary 2000: 89–90). These data are re-analysed systematically in Table 6, where they are juxtaposed with the outcome in respect of similar data from 2003.

Two points emerge strongly, though they must be interpreted in the light of the probable short-cuts that respondents took in filling out mock ballot

Table 6. Reported inter-party transfers in Northern Ireland Assembly elections, 1998 and 2003

	Next party preference outside own party (%)								
First preference	DUP	UUP	Other unionist	Alliance Party	Other centre	SDLP	Sinn Féin	No further preference	Number of cases
1998									
DUP	–	33	38	1	0	1	0	27	111
UUP	21	–	29	19	3	3	1	24	179
Other unionist	29	25	22	7	7	0	0	10	72
Alliance Party	2	24	6	–	14	22	0	31	49
Other	0	8	4	29	13	42	0	4	24
SDLP	0	4	3	21	16	–	22	34	152
Sinn Féin	0	1	0	4	10	47	–	38	72
Total	9	12	18	12	8	9	5	26	659
2003									
DUP	–	46	12	2	1	0	0	39	161
UUP	39	–	16	10	5	7	0	24	147
Other unionist	64	32	0	0	0	0	0	5	22
Alliance Party	0	41	3	–	16	28	0	13	32
Other	0	21	0	16	16	26	5	16	19
SDLP	0	7	1	18	8	–	36	29	107
Sinn Féin	0	2	1	0	7	47	–	43	91
Total	12	19	8	7	6	12	7	30	580

Note: Except for last column, figures represent distribution of support for second party after first switch from 'own' party (as measured by reported first preference vote). One 'other nationalist' supporter in 2003 has been dropped from the table.
Source: Derived from Northern Ireland Election Study, 1998 and 2003. As the original data, especially for 2003, do not lend themselves to analysis of this kind, individual cases were manually recoded.

papers. First, many respondents indicated that they did not continue expressing preferences outside their own party, as the penultimate column of Table 6 shows: in 2003, 43 per cent of Sinn Féin supporters indicated that they did not give lower preferences to any other party, and the other big parties showed a similar if less marked tendency. Second, when voters did move outside their own party, they tended to stay within their own bloc and to move no further than the centre. In 2003, no DUP respondent gave his or her next preference to either of the nationalist parties, and only 7 per cent of UUP supporters did so; while only 8 per cent of SDLP supporters and 3 per cent of Sinn Féin supporters gave their next preferences to a unionist party. Even as we move further down the preference rankings, the data show this striking reluctance to cross the inter-communal barrier. In 1998, only 8 per cent of unionists and 17 per cent of nationalists were prepared to pass *any substantive* lower preference to the other bloc; in 2003 the corresponding proportions were 11 and 16 per cent. This reinforces the image of party competition structured by a bimodal electoral distribution, as in Figure 2(c), and, indeed, of an electorate reluctant to exploit the full potential of the single transferable vote system.

Conclusion

This article has considered the circumstances in which a long-established, ethnically based party system may be challenged by three types of new parties. The most formidable challenge is offered by ethnic outbidders, since they tackle established parties on their own terms, presenting themselves as more committed and authentic alternatives to the tired parties of the past. The prospects for ethnic underbidders (who seek to mobilise the ethnically uncommitted) and for nonethnic counterbidders (who invite supporters to abandon ethnic loyalty for class solidarity or some other nonethnic priority) are poor at times of ethnic tension, when the very constituency they seek to cultivate is at its weakest. Ethnic tensions may, of course, easily be heightened and manipulated by existing ethnic parties, giving an inbuilt advantage to members of the established party system, but the prospects for all challengers are enhanced when the incentive structure facilitates party fragmentation, in particular as a consequence of electoral reform, but also because of provisions for government formation.

The Northern Ireland case illustrates this process vividly. There, the ethnic dimension forced itself centre-stage in the 1880s, where it has remained ever since. Its bipolar form structured a sharply defined two-party system that saw off all challengers, whether ethnic underbidders or nonethnic counterbidders.

Until the 1970s, it managed, with the assistance of the plurality electoral system and the majoritarian principle in government, to resist the most vigorous forms of ethnic outbidding. This was a notable achievement on the nationalist side, where the ineffective Nationalist Party survived until 1970. Its complete replacement then by the SDLP mirrored Sinn Féin's success in ousting its counterpart in southern Ireland in 1918, and the dramatic, 'winner-takes-all' character of these processes is entirely compatible with the logic of ethnic outbidding under the plurality system: the challenger is either crushed, or gains total victory. The introduction of proportional representation in 1973 and the replacement of majority rule by the power sharing principle (articulated most formally much later in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998) redefined the incentive structure. This created new prospects for challenging parties; but proportional representation, in addition to guaranteeing Sinn Féin and the DUP a foothold, protected the older parties, the SDLP and the UUP, from annihilation.[14]

Although they paved the way for ethnic outbidding, the 1973 institutional reforms offered little to underbidders or counterbidders. The Alliance Party registered modest success in appealing to the whole community to abandon ethnic confrontation, but counterbidding efforts were almost entirely unsuccessful. The future lay with ethnic outbidding, whose consequences outlasted the end of the worst episodes of civil unrest in 1994, following the paramilitary ceasefires. The end of violence, clearly, did not lead to a restoration of the party political *status quo ante*, but there is no reason why, if we follow the logic of the model described here, it should have done so.

Ultimately, civil unrest and ethnic violence are expressions of deep-seated intercommunal tensions, not the forces that provoke these; and, as pathologists agree, resolving symptoms will not necessarily remove underlying causes. The bitter intercommunal hostilities that were aggravated by civil unrest lay behind the evolving party system, but there is no reason why an end to their expression through violence should be matched by a similar transformation of ethnic politics. On the contrary, ethnic parties, like their nonethnic counterparts, tend to acquire a life of their own, and to outlive the issues that generated them. When these issues are still alive, the parties can feed off them; and of their continuing vigour in Northern Ireland there can be little doubt. Ethnic conflict, then, is not so much a determinant of the party system as a parallel mode of political expression that may, depending on the circumstances, evoke corresponding echoes in the party system. Where its ripples disturb the party system, as in Northern Ireland, we may detect another logic that drives party political evolution: it is institutional incentives that shape the options open to ethnic outbidders and other challengers to established parties, and help to determine their long-term electoral prospects.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to John Garry, Claire Gormley, Michael Marsh and anonymous referees for comments on an earlier draft of this article.

Notes

1. The survey data on which this article is based include the Northern Ireland Loyalty Survey, 1968 (sample 1,291; ICPSR, study 7237); Northern Ireland Attitudes Survey, 1978 (sample 1,277; UK Data Archive, study 1347); Northern Ireland Social Attitudes surveys, annually, 1989–1991, 1993–1996 (samples approx. 800, except in 1994 and 1995 – 1,500; UK Data Archive, studies 2792, 2841, 2953, 3440, 3590, 3797, 4130); Northern Ireland social mobility study, 1996–1997 (sample 3,023; UK Data Archive study 3928); UK election studies, Northern Ireland, 1992 and 2001 (samples 1,947 and 1,053; UK Data Archive studies 3720, 4622); Northern Ireland Life and Times surveys, annually, 1998–2007 (samples approx. 1,800, except in 1999 (2,200), 2005 (1,200), 2006 (1,230) and 2007 (1,179); available from ARK – Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive: www.ark.ac.uk/nilt); Northern Ireland Assembly election studies, 1998 and 2003 (samples 950 and 1,000; available from ARK); European Election Study, Northern Ireland, 2004 (sample 1,582; UK Data Archive, study 5311).
2. The older form of socio-political segmentation that marked electoral politics before the 1970s in Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, and in certain respects Switzerland (with echoes in Italy), bore some resemblance to the ethnic basis of politics in certain other societies; the crucial missing ingredient was the clear reliance on a single differentiating characteristic such as language.
3. Except where otherwise stated in this article, the terms 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' refer to community background, not necessarily belief, with the non-affiliated assigned to one community or another on the basis of family religion (for a discussion of this approach, see Coakley 2007: 577–579).
4. The first two elections to the Northern Ireland House of Commons (in 1921 and 1925) have been omitted since they were contested by proportional representation in large constituencies; but this system was abolished before the third election in 1929. Its introduction did not have any obvious impact on the party system, but the two elections were in any case untypical because of the political turmoil of the early 1920s.
5. There was a similar pattern in general elections to the British House of Commons, 1922–1966, where Unionists won 123 out of 124 seats in Protestant constituencies (the only exception being an independent Labour victory in West Belfast in 1945). In Catholic constituencies, Nationalists won 16 of the 32 available seats, to 12 for Unionists, two for Sinn Féin, and two for others.
6. Elections to the British House of Commons (under the plurality system) do not reveal 'sincere' preferences because of the extent to which they promote tactical voting, while elections to Northern Ireland assemblies since 1973 have taken place only irregularly. The evolution of the party system is analysed in McAllister (1983) and Mitchell (1995, 1999); for general political background, see Aughey (2005); McGarry & O'Leary (2004); Tonge (2002).

7. Comparison of the results of the 1985 local elections, when Sinn Féin made its first major strides at this level, with the earlier elections in 1981 suggests that initial Sinn Féin support was at the expense mainly of smaller nationalist parties, with a limited level of defections by former SDLP supporters. Contrary to the view expressed by many commentators, there is little evidence that previously alienated habitual radical nationalist abstainers were mobilised in large numbers, though Sinn Féin made a specific bid for this support base.
8. Models that include additional variables result in only minor improvement to these R^2 values. The lower figure for 1993 may be accounted for in part by population change since 2001 census data on religion have been used.
9. There is a further difficulty: survey respondents tend to exaggerate the extent to which they support 'moderate' parties (see Mitchell et al. 2001: 732; Coakley 2008).
10. These data do not confirm the pronounced internal structuring of urban Catholic electoral behaviour identified by Graham and Shirlow (1998: 250), who found a very strong relationship between class and support for Sinn Féin in a large (N = 1,000) pilot survey in Belfast, Derry and Newry in 1997, with respective support levels of 11, 28 and 29 per cent among the manufacturing/professional class, and 78, 65 and 68 per cent among the working class. These cities cannot be identified in the data used here, but among urban Catholics 20 per cent of the professional-managerial category and 44 per cent of manual workers supported Sinn Féin in pooled data, 1998–2004 (N = 1,063) – a large difference, but not as impressive as that identified by Graham and Shirlow. This refers to those living in, or in the suburbs of, 'a big city'; the data show no systematic change over time (year to year).
11. The nationalist-unionist scale was devised by combining the following question: 'Do you think the long-term policy for Northern Ireland should be for it to remain part of the United Kingdom or to reunify with the rest of Ireland?' Those opting for 'the United Kingdom' were trichotomised on the basis of their response to a further question: 'How would you feel if the majority of people in Northern Ireland ever voted to become part of a united Ireland?', with those who 'would find this almost impossible to accept' occupying the most 'unionist' position, followed in turn by those who 'would not like it, but could live with it if [they] had to' and, closer to the centre, those who 'would happily accept the wishes of the majority'. Those opting for Irish unity were similarly trichotomised on the basis of their response to the question 'How would you feel if the majority of people in Northern Ireland *never* voted to become part of a united Ireland?', with responses ranging from most to least nationalist; and those not accepting either option were placed on the mid-point of the 7-point scale. The left-right scale described in Duffy and Evans (1996: 136) and Evans and Duffy (1997: 81) could not be reproduced with the data used here. The set of questions intended for such a scale was changed, and although these possess a high level of theoretical plausibility, the resulting scale shows a low level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.48), much lower than the coefficient in the case of Evans and Duffy (alpha = 0.81). While other combinations of questions yield higher values, no combination results in a value close to that which is conventionally seen as acceptable (0.80).
12. This reinforces findings based on 1991–1994 data, which showed 'mainline' Protestants as being more likely to support the UUP (see Breen & Hayes 1997). However, there is little evidence that evangelical Protestantism, as such, helps to explain DUP support (see Mitchell & Tilley 2004).
13. These findings match the conclusions of Evans and Tonge (2003: 31), whose survey of Alliance Party members placed the proportion of Catholics at 20 per cent, and of

Wilford (1999), whose survey of Women's Coalition candidates in the 1996 elections to the Northern Ireland Forum reported 45 per cent of them as Catholics, 37 per cent as Protestants and 18 per cent as having no religion.

14. The Ulster Unionist Party also sought in the early twenty-first century to distance itself from a powerful Protestant organisation, the Orange Order, in a move likely to help to win support from outside its traditional ethnic base (see Evans & Tonge 2005).

References

Aughey, A. (2005). *The politics of Northern Ireland: Beyond the Belfast Agreement*. London: Routledge.

Breen, R. & Hayes, B.C. (1997). Religious mobility and party support in Northern Ireland. *European Sociological Review* 13(3): 225–239.

Bric, M. & Coakley, J. (eds) (2004). *From political violence to negotiated settlement: The winding path to peace in twentieth-century Ireland*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Chandra, K. (2005). Ethnic parties and democratic stability. *Perspectives on Politics* 3(2): 235–252.

Coakley, J. (1994). The election that made the First Dáil. In B. Farrell (ed.), *The creation of the Dáil*. Dublin: Blackwater Press.

Coakley, J. (2002). Religion, national identity and political change in modern Ireland. *Irish Political Studies* 17(1): 4–28.

Coakley, J. (2007). National identity in Northern Ireland: Stability or change? *Nations and Nationalism* 13(4): 573–597.

Coakley, J. (2008). Militant nationalist electoral support: A measurement dilemma. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 20(2): 224–236.

Duffy, M. & Evans, G. (1996). Building bridges? The political implications of electoral integration for Northern Ireland. *British Journal of Political Science* 26(1): 123–140.

Elliott, S. (1973). *Northern Ireland parliamentary election results, 1921–1972*. Chichester: Political Reference.

Evans, G. & Duffy, M. (1997). Beyond the sectarian divide: The social bases and political consequences of nationalist and unionist party competition in Northern Ireland. *British Journal of Political Science* 27(1): 47–81.

Evans, G. & O'Leary, B. (2000). Northern Irish voters and the British-Irish agreement: Foundations of a stable consociational settlement? *Political Quarterly* 71(1): 78–101.

Evans, J.A.J. & Tonge, J. (2003). The future of the 'radical centre' in Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement. *Political Studies* 51(1): 26–50.

Evans, J.A.J. & Tonge, J. (2005). Problems of modernizing an ethno-religious party: The case of the Ulster Unionist Party in Northern Ireland. *Party Politics* 11(3): 319–338.

Graham, B. & Shirlow, P. (1998). An elusive agenda: The development of a middle ground in Northern Ireland. *Area* 30(3): 245–254.

Hayes, B.C. & McAllister, I. (1995). Religious independents in Northern Ireland: Origins, attitudes and significance. *Review of Religious Research* 37(1): 65–83.

Horowitz, D.L. (1985). *Ethnic groups in conflict*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Knox, C. & Carmichael, P. (1998). Making progress in Northern Ireland? Evidence from recent elections. *Government and Opposition* 33(3): 372–393.

Lutz, K.G. & Farrington, C. (2006). Alternative Ulster? Political parties and the non-constitutional policy space in Northern Ireland. *Political Studies* 54(4): 715–742.

Lynn, B. (1997). *Holding the ground: The Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland, 1945–1972*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

McAllister, I. (1983). Territorial differentiation and party development in Northern Ireland. In T. Gallagher & J. O'Connell (eds), *Contemporary Irish studies*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

McAllister, I. (2004). 'The Armalite and the ballot box': Sinn Féin's electoral strategy in Northern Ireland. *Electoral Studies* 23(1): 123–142.

McGarry, J. & O'Leary, B. (2004) *The Northern Ireland conflict: Consociational engagements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, C. & Tilley, J.R. (2004). The moral minority: Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland and their political behaviour. *Political Studies* 52(3): 585–602.

Mitchell, P. (1995). Party competition in an ethnic dual structure. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18(4): 773–793.

Mitchell, P. (1999). The party system and party competition. In P. Mitchell & R. Wilford (eds), *Politics in Northern Ireland*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Mitchell, P., O'Leary, B. & Evans, G. (2001). Northern Ireland: Flanking extremists bite the moderates and emerge in their clothes. *Parliamentary Affairs* 54(4): 725–742.

Moxon-Browne, E. (1983). *Nation, class and creed in Northern Ireland*. Aldershot: Gower.

Murray, G. & Tonge, J. (2005). *Sinn Féin and the SDLP: From alienation to participation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Phoenix, E. (1994). *Northern nationalism: Nationalist politics, partition and the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, 1890–1940*. Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation.

Porter, E. (1996). Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. *Australian Feminist Studies* 11(24): 317–320.

Rabushka, A. & Shepsle, K.A. (1972). *Politics in plural societies: A theory of democratic instability*. Columbus, OH: Charles E Merrill.

Rose, R. (1971). *Governing without consensus: An Irish perspective*. London: Faber & Faber.

Sinnott, R. (1998). Centrist politics makes modest but significant progress. *Irish Times*, 29 June.

Staunton, E. (2001). *The nationalists of Northern Ireland, 1918–1973*. Dublin: Columba Press.

Tilley, J., Evans, G. & Mitchell, C. (2008). Consociationalism and the evolution of political cleavages in Northern Ireland, 1989–2004. *British Journal of Political Science* 38(4): 699–717.

Tonge, J. (2002). *Northern Ireland: Conflict and change*, 2nd edn. Harlow: Longman.

Walker, B.M. (1978). *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801–1922*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.

Walker, B.M. (1992). *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918–1992: Irish elections to parliaments and parliamentary assemblies at Westminster, Belfast, Dublin, Strasbourg*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.

Wilford, R. (1999). Women's candidacies and electability in a divided society: The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the 1996 Forum election. *Women and Politics* 20(1): 73–93.

Address for correspondence: John Coakley, School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin, Ireland. E-mail: john.coakley@ucd.ie