

## Extremist Outbidding in Ethnic Party Systems is Not Inevitable: Tribune Parties in Northern Ireland

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The ethnic outbidding thesis predicts centrifugal polarisation in ethnically divided party systems. We argue instead that the incentives of power-sharing institutions can encourage the development of electoral strategies based on ‘ethnic tribune appeals’ in which parties combine robust ethnic identity representation with increased pragmatism over 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 electoral success of the DUP and Sinn Féin can instead be explained by these parties’ ‘ethnic tribune’ appeals. Many voters simultaneously endorse peace, prosperity and (increasingly) power sharing but also want the strongest voice to protect their ethnonational interests. Identity voting for ethnic tribune parties implies a degree of resolve in advocating ethnic group interests, but does not entail the increased polarisation implied by outbidding models. Like their voters, ethnic tribune parties can be simultaneously pragmatic (with regard to resources) and intransigent (with regard to identity), so that despite appearances to the contrary, the power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland incentivise centripetal dynamics that inhibit outbidding.

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Societies that are deeply riven along a preponderant ethnic cleavage – as in many Asian and African states – tend to throw up party systems that exacerbate ethnic conflict. By appealing to electorates in ethnic terms, by making ethnic demands on government, and by bolstering the influence of ethnically chauvinist elements within each group, parties that begin by merely mirroring ethnic divisions help to deepen and extend them (Horowitz, 1985, p. 291).

Places deeply divided by ethnic cleavages often develop sharply opposed ethnic political parties. Since the appeals of such parties are ascriptive and exclusive, they may be less well placed to perform the aggregative functions conducive to democratic stability, or as Giovanni Sartori says, to ‘take a non-partial approach to the whole’ (Sartori, 1976, p. 26). Indeed, once an ethnic party system is fully mobilised the ethnic outbidding thesis predicts a contagion of extremist politics which destabilises and ultimately prevents conflict regulation within a democratic framework (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972).

But even in ethnic party systems, electoral competition is not inevitably and relentlessly centrifugal. Well-designed power-sharing institutions can provide electoral incentives towards inter-ethnic cooperation, provided that the parties making the centripetal moves believe that they can protect themselves against flanking by rival intra-ethnic parties and/or by new entrants.<sup>1</sup> Successful electoral mobilisation based on ‘ethnic tribune’ appeals – an ethnic valence<sup>2</sup> – in the

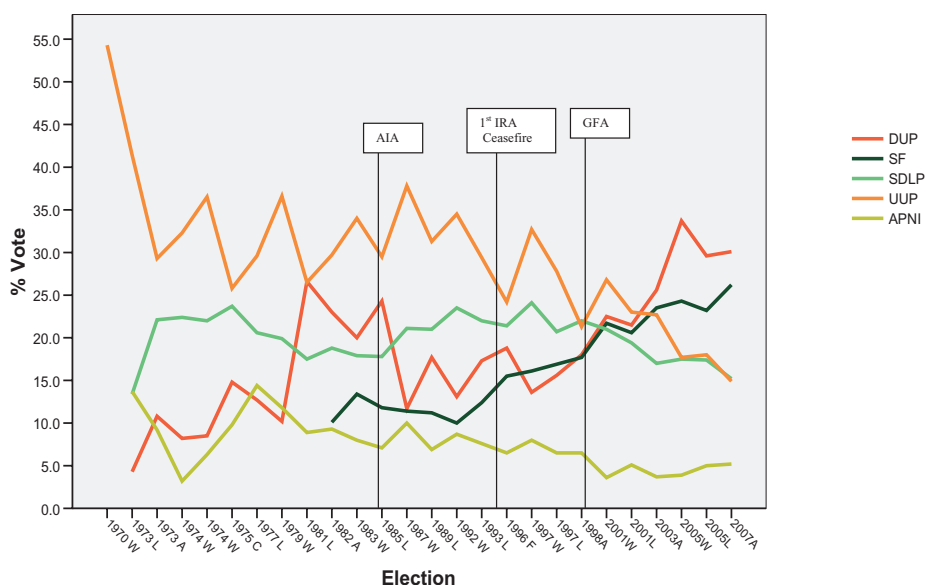


context of mandatory power sharing can explain the electoral success of formerly hard-line ethnic parties even as they moderate their policies.

This article is a case study of the transformation of the party system in Northern Ireland following an end to armed conflict in 1994,<sup>3</sup> which in turn facilitated the negotiation of a new power-sharing institutional framework, the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement of 1998. There had been a widespread expectation that the moderate Irish nationalist SDLP, as the principal architect of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, and the Ulster Unionist party (UUP), its 'partner in peace', would receive electoral rewards for reaching a historic compromise.<sup>4</sup> Their leaders did win the Nobel Peace Prize, but no comparable electoral prizes. It was mostly unanticipated that the hard-line parties (Sinn Féin among nationalists and the Democratic Unionist party [DUP] among unionists) would be the electoral beneficiaries of the peace process at the expense of the respective moderates in their own blocs. Indeed, the formerly extremist parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin, are now the dominant electoral forces in Northern Ireland (see Figure 1 and Table 1 for the extent of the transformation), so much so that on 8 May 2007 the allegedly 'impossible' happened: the DUP and Sinn Féin agreed to jointly lead a new power-sharing government.<sup>5</sup>

The article aims to explain this transformation of the party system and the underlying shifts in patterns of voting. The first section examines the logic of outbidding in ethnic party systems and the consequences for conflict regulation. The second

**Figure 1: Electoral Support in Northern Ireland, 1970–2007**



**Table 1: Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, 1998–2007**

|      | DUP        |       | UUP        |       | Sinn Féin  |       | SDLP       |       |
|------|------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|-------|
|      | Votes      | Seats | Votes      | Seats | Votes      | Seats | Votes      | Seats |
| 1998 | 18         | 18.5  | 21.3       | 25.9  | 17.7       | 16.7  | 22         | 22.2  |
| 2003 | 25.6 (+42) | 27.8  | 22.7 (+5)  | 25    | 23.5 (+33) | 22.2  | 17 (–23)   | 16.7  |
| 2007 | 30.1 (+67) | 33.3  | 14.9 (–30) | 16.7  | 26.2 (+48) | 25.9  | 15.2 (–31) | 14.8  |

*Note:* Figures show each party's first-preference percentage vote and seat shares (and in brackets the  $\pm$  percentage change relative to each party's 1998 vote).

section examines how ethnic party systems may be rescued from the centrifugal fate predicted by the outbidding thesis. We discuss the moderating incentives of institutionalised power sharing and outline our concept of the ethnic tribune party. The third section examines the survey evidence from the Northern Ireland Election Studies, which shows substantial 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 their gains are mostly explained by the DUP and Sinn Féin's 'ethnic tribune' appeals combined with likely compensational voting. The fourth section analyses whether popular attitudes on some of the major principles of the Good Friday Agreement have polarised. If the outbidding thesis is correct, increased electoral support for more extreme parties should be accompanied by increasing attitudinal polarisation 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? The fifth and sixth sections confront this puzzle. The fifth section presents evidence of the parties, especially the DUP and Sinn Féin, competing and being rewarded on the basis of 'ethnic tribune appeals'. The sixth section subjects this thesis to some stringent tests by placing it in a multivariate framework in which other variables known to be strong predictors of party support are controlled. We summarise the findings and policy implications at the end.

## The Logic of Outbidding 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, p. 86).

Once an ethnic party system is extensively mobilised it is made up primarily of 'ethnic parties'<sup>6</sup> that appeal almost exclusively to voters from their own group rather than (at least aspirationally) to all voters. Their mobilisation drives are 'catch-us' rather than 'catch-all'. Few voters 'float across' the primary political cleavage derived from the clash of ethnic identities. Elections resemble ethnic 'headcounts' or censuses. Party platforms are characterised by ethnic outbidding among rival parties within each ethnic bloc (Horowitz, 1985, pp. 349–60; Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972). Within-bloc competition may develop a centrifugal dynamic as parties mobilise 'their' community, engaging in extremist and emotive ethnic appeals that suggest that their group's vital interests are in danger of being 'sold out'. Any cooperative overtures to like-minded forces in other blocs immediately render politicians vulnerable to the accusation that they are naïve or treacherous.

Any inter-ethnic accommodating moves by the dominant ethnic parties render them vulnerable to counter-mobilisations within their own segments by self-styled hard-line 'saviours' of their cause. Then the once-dominant ethnic parties can no longer claim to speak unequivocally for their communities. They now have more intransigent intra-ethnic rivals mobilised in their electoral heartlands, threatening to denounce any further cooperative moves as 'betrayals' or 'capitulations'. The outcome seems familiar. Many ethnic party systems have developed this centrifugal dynamic, e.g. late-twentieth-century Sri Lanka and the former Yugoslavia. Some claim it is occurring in contemporary Iraq. 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, Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle (1972, p. 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 (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972, p. 217).

But what happens next?<sup>7</sup> The conventional rational choice prognosis, embedded in Rabushka and Shepsle's work, is that the centrifugal competitive dynamic of ethnic outbidding leads to ever-increasing polarisation between the communities so that little or no cooperative progress is feasible. Fierce intra-ethnic competition is 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 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 intransigence if they believe that this is where most of the voters are permanently located. They would have to believe there is an extreme bimodal distribution of voters' preferences, that becomes progressively ever more extreme. In such cases Anthony Downs predicted 'a reign of terror' and revolution (1957, p. 120). In ethnic conflicts, the operationalisation 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 outbidding thesis predicts.

### Centripetal Dynamics in Ethnic Party Systems?

There are a variety of means through which ethnic party systems may avoid the centrifugal fate predicted by the outbidding model.<sup>8</sup> A multidimensional and cross-cutting cleavage structure may permit enough 'fluidity' in ethnic relations to prevent the polarising consequences of a permanent 'minority-majority' structure. Or in the absence of substantial cross-cutting cleavages, the adoption of power-sharing institutions may lead to centripetal competition if the extremist parties can develop successful ethnic tribune appeals. We examine each of these possibilities.

#### *Cross-Cutting Cleavages and Ethnic Parties*

Some recent accounts of ethnic parties remind us that ethnic divisions and even ethnic parties need not be destructive of democracy. Kanchan Chandra 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' (Chandra, 2005, p. 235).<sup>9</sup> Using the example of politics in India, she argues that initial spirals of ethnic outbidding have typically given way, over time, to centrist behaviour. Chandra's interesting argument is premised on a development of cross-cutting cleavage theory, the idea that the institutionalisation of symmetric cross-cutting cleavages can produce centripetal party behaviour – in India policies of affirmative action, a generous language policy and recognition of statehood within the Indian Union have accomplished this regulation. 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 ... permanent majorities are virtually inconceivable' (Ahuja and Varshney, 2005, p. 264). In India cleavages are not one-dimensional, mutually reinforcing and cumulative. In Northern Ireland they (mostly) are.

This potential source of centripetalism – symmetric cross-cutting cleavages – does not exist in Northern Ireland in any substantial fashion. Instead, electoral competition is contained within an ethnic dual party system; fierce party competition exists within the context of an overall bipolar constitutional cleavage (Evans and Duffy, 1997; McAllister and Nelson, 1979; Mitchell, 1995; 1999; O'Leary and McGarry, 1996; Tonge, 2005). Surveys demonstrate the ethnically exclusive nature of support for the four main parties in Northern Ireland.<sup>10</sup> Very little 'normal' inter-bloc competition occurs; instead, parties try to out-mobilise each other. Within each bloc socio-economic cleavages have been relevant in explaining

partisanship (especially within the unionist community – see Evans and Duffy, 1997), but more recent work suggests that by 2004 ‘ethno-national strategy is dominant and left–right divisions play no significant role in conditioning party support within the Protestant electorate’ (Tilley *et al.*, 2008, p. 712). Very few voters are not committed to one bloc or the other, so in the absence of power-sharing institutions there were few electoral incentives to be moderate.

### *Ethnic Tribune Parties and Power Sharing*

Well-designed power-sharing institutions can provide electoral incentives for inter-ethnic cooperation, provided that the parties making the centripetal moves believe they can protect themselves against flanking by rival intra-ethnic parties or by new entrants. Successful electoral mobilisation based on ‘ethnic tribune’ appeals – a kind of ethnic valence – combined with compensational voting (Kedar, 2005) in the context of mandatory power sharing can explain the electoral success of formerly hard-line ethnic parties.

Orit Kedar has argued that voters are concerned with projected policy *outcomes* rather than just policy *positions*. If so, they must incorporate into their decisions the manner in which institutions convert votes into policy. In majoritarian systems single-party governments can implement their policy positions with little or no inter-party compromise. Kedar provides an intuition to explain why (quoting the title of her paper) ‘moderate voters prefer extreme parties’. In consensual (proportional representation) systems, ‘since policy is often the result of institutionalised multiparty bargaining and thus votes are watered down by power-sharing, voters often compensate for this watering-down by supporting parties whose positions differ from (and are often more extreme than) their own’ (Kedar, 2005, p. 185). Other things being equal, the more that power sharing is facilitated by the electoral system, the more incentive there is for voters to engage in ‘compensational voting’.

The 1998 Agreement in Northern Ireland institutionalised power-sharing institutions that mandated that executive power (and hence policy outcomes) can *only* be achieved by sharing power across the nationalities. Given that the formation of a government and policy outcomes will inevitably involve inter-ethnic bargaining, voters will want to be represented by their ‘strongest voice’. Typically this will be parties with reputations for tough bargaining, and such reputations will partly be based on their past records of less-moderate policy positions. In short, moderate voters will vote for the more ‘extreme’ parties.

Each communal group – expected to be engaged in inter-ethnic power sharing – wants to be represented by its ‘strongest voice’. We label this ‘ethnic tribune’ voting. Tribunes in ancient Rome were elected or appointed by the plebeians to protect their interests against patricians, who usually monopolised 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, who were the consuls (Taylor, 1949). The concept of a 'tribune party' was used by Georges Lavau (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, p. 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 group's share of resources extractable from participation in the power-sharing institutions. The ethnic tribune party can be simultaneously pragmatic over resources and intransigent about identity.

Essentially, each community wants its 'strongest voice' to represent it, but sections of each community want this ethnic champion to act in a more cooperative fashion, or at least in a less 'anti-system' or 'rejectionist' manner – since nothing worthwhile can be gained by choosing to 'exit' the power-sharing framework, and perhaps much worse may happen by doing so.<sup>11</sup> Voting for ethnic tribune parties implies some intransigence in advocating the ethnic groups' interests, but does not necessarily entail the increased overall attitudinal polarisation implied by outbidding models. Voters in ethnic party systems faced with a power-sharing institutional structure have incentives to vote for their respective ethnic tribunes. The identity of this party is likely to be determined by a combination of ethnic valence judgements about which party is projected to be best able to deliver the community's interests, and compensational voting, i.e. knowing that all positional pledges will be 'watered down'.<sup>12</sup>

The DUP and Sinn Féin began life as anti-system parties but in a series of steps eventually decided to work within the power-sharing institutions because they both came to believe that they could secure their long-term aims by this means. According to Sartori (1976, p. 133), 'a party can be defined as being anti-system whenever it undermines the legitimacy of the regime it opposes'. Such a party is opposed in principle to the system of government that prevails. The 'system of government' that has prevailed in Northern Ireland since at least the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 was that local devolution of power could only be achieved on the basis of cross-community power sharing.<sup>13</sup> Provisional Sinn Féin clearly began life as an anti-system party refusing to recognise the state, and encouraging its supporters not to vote. Following its first electoral contest and breakthrough in 1982, Sinn Féin's vote flat-lined at around 11 per cent, its average performance during the ten elections between 1982 and 1994 (i.e. the elections before the Irish Republican Army's [IRA's] ceasefire), though it rose before and fell after the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 (see Figure 1).

During this period the SDLP had almost double the electoral strength of Sinn Féin, and appeared not to be losing votes directly to its new rival. 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 (McAllister, 2004; Mitchell, 1999; O'Leary, 1990; 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', namely, that Irish reunification requires the consent of majorities in both Irish jurisdictions, and later its enthusiastic participation in all of the Agreement's institutions, combined to render the party much more attractive to wider groups of nationalist voters. Sinn Féin's vote immediately jumped at the first post-ceasefire election in 1996 (see Figure 1), and has since followed a consistently upward trajectory.<sup>14</sup> While the process of evolution away from anti-system politics is clearly gradual, Sinn Féin only unequivocally ceased being an anti-system party once it contested elections and pursued solely democratic means, which was signalled when it signed up to the Mitchell Principles in 1997.<sup>15</sup>

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 (Bruce, 1986; Cochrane, 1997; Evans and Tonge, 2007; Tonge and Evans, 2001). But three decades of stridently oppositional politics delivered only modest electoral growth for the DUP. What explains the DUP's recent electoral surge is clearly the 1998 Agreement. Its implementation difficulties 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 by moderating its policy position (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). The DUP surged past its old rivals at the 2003 Assembly elections, and consolidated its dominance in subsequent elections (see Figure 1 and Table 1). After the 1998 Agreement the DUP tried to combine ethnic tribunal appeals with an attenuated anti-system position when it agreed to join the Northern Ireland Executive, but attempted to avoid any direct contact with Sinn Féin and boycotted any North-South meetings. The DUP only unequivocally ceased its anti-system behaviour in May 2007 when it agreed to lead a power-sharing government with Sinn Féin.<sup>16</sup>

Thus before the onset of the 'peace process' and the Agreement, both the more extreme parties discovered real limits to their electoral growth. They were important electoral niche players, but not the dominant parties in their respective blocs that they aspired to become. The 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 while promoting their positions as their communities' pre-eminent tribunes.

### 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. Evidence of significant direct vote switching from the moderate parties to the 'extreme' parties



is at least *prima facie* consistent with the outbidding thesis. Survey data from the Northern Ireland Election Studies of 1998 and 2003 enable us to find evidence of the success of Sinn Féin's and the DUP's electoral strategies.<sup>17</sup> Table 2a and b presents evidence of direct vote switching between the principal parties both before and after the Agreement.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 2a: Before the Agreement: Party Switches between 1996 and 1998**

|                                     |                   |        | 1998 Vote (NI Assembly election) |      |      |      |     |                   |       |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------|----------------------------------|------|------|------|-----|-------------------|-------|-------|
|                                     |                   |        | Alliance                         | UUP  | DUP  | SDLP | SF  | Other<br>unionist | Other | Total |
| 1996 Vote<br>(NI forum<br>election) | 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<br>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<br>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<br>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     |       |
|              |                 | 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  |       |       |
|              | 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          | N       | 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    |       |
|              |                 | 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.

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; the shaded cells show vote switches between the four main parties) 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 per cent). The DUP vote appeared more 'solid'; it retained 80 per cent of its 1996 voters, whereas the UUP managed to hold only 68 per cent of its 1996 voters. In 1998 the biggest UUP losses were to small unionist parties and independent unionists: 17 per cent to small unionist parties and independent unionists, compared with losing 13 per cent of its 1996 voters to the DUP. On the nationalist side there was a modest shift. 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, i.e. a small Sinn Féin net gain.<sup>19</sup>

The very significant alteration in party fortunes between the first and second Assembly elections (see Table 1) suggests that this pattern of modest net change cannot have been maintained.<sup>20</sup> In 2003 the DUP became the biggest party in Northern Ireland by gaining nearly 8 per cent of the overall vote, a 42 per cent increase on its 1998 vote. The UUP slipped to third position, though its first-preference vote increased slightly. Given this reversal of fortunes in the unionist party system we may ask, where did all these new DUP voters come from? Table 2b shows that the UUP lost a massive 22 per cent of its 1998 voters to the DUP in 2003 and 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.<sup>21</sup> 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 and 2007.

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 (McAllister, 2004, p. 140; O'Leary, 1990, pp. 345–8). However, the scale of the swing in the two nationalist parties' vote in 2003 means that this explanation cannot account for the most recent elections. In 2003 Sinn Féin surpassed its own 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 its electoral surge. 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 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.<sup>22</sup> If we look at the composition of the Sinn Féin vote in 2003 it contained 24 per cent who had been SDLP voters in 1998 and 14 per cent who had been non-voters, or who do not recall how they voted in 1998, clear 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.<sup>23</sup> 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 outbidding 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.

### Converging Attitudes to the Agreement since 1998

The full implementation of the Agreement was stalled when the second election to the Northern Ireland Assembly was eventually held in November 2003.<sup>24</sup> The 'mixed record' of the Agreement's institutions since 1998 (McGarry and O'Leary, 2004, ch. 1) meant that the limited experience of them was unlikely to have induced widespread and profound attitudinal changes. So it is perhaps surprising that we can detect some quite sharp attitudinal shifts between the first two Assembly elections, despite the institutions' failure to work before 2007. 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.

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 setting up a Northern Ireland Assembly – there has been very little change, and both propositions continue to have strong support. 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 (all relationships mentioned in the text in this section are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.0001$  level). 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

**Table 3: Change in Attitudes to some Main Features of the Agreement between the First (1998) and Second (2003) Assembly Elections (%)**

| Election year      | DUP |           | UUP |           | Sinn Féin |           | SDLP |           | Protestants |           | Catholics |           | Total |           |
|--------------------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------|-----------|
|                    | 98  | 03        | 98  | 03        | 98        | 03        | 98   | 03        | 98          | 03        | 98        | 03        | 98    | 03        |
| NI remain in UK    | 98  | 96        | 98  | 98        | 55        | 66 (+11)* | 77   | 79        | 97          | 94        | 70        | 70        | 86    | 84        |
|                    | 1   | 1         | 1   | 1         | 19        | 16        | 15   | 18        | 1           | 3         | 16        | 19        | 7     | 10        |
|                    | 0   | 2         | 0   | 1         | 21        | 14 (-7)*  | 4    | 3         | 1           | 2         | 8         | 7         | 3     | 4         |
|                    | 1   | 1         | 1   | 0         | 5         | 4         | 4    | 0         | 1           | 1         | 6         | 4         | 4     | 2         |
| NI Assembly        | 57  | 70 (+13)* | 86  | 89        | 76        | 94 (+18)* | 95   | 88 (-7)*  | 79          | 77        | 87        | 86        | 82    | 79        |
|                    | 18  | 14        | 9   | 5         | 9         | 3         | 3    | 7         | 10          | 12        | 4         | 7         | 8     | 11        |
|                    | 22  | 13 (-9)*  | 3   | 4         | 5         | 2         | 0    | 3         | 8           | 8         | 2         | 3         | 5     | 7         |
|                    | 3   | 3         | 2   | 2         | 10        | 1         | 2    | 2         | 3           | 3         | 7         | 4         | 5     | 3         |
| North-South bodies | 17  | 35 (+18)* | 53  | 63 (+10)* | 85        | 94 (+9)*  | 90   | 89        | 46          | 49        | 86        | 88        | 63    | 66        |
|                    | 20  | 24        | 19  | 21        | 4         | 3         | 5    | 9         | 18          | 22        | 5         | 7         | 13    | 16        |
|                    | 58  | 33 (-25)* | 25  | 12 (-13)* | 7         | 2 (-5)*   | 1    | 1         | 31          | 22 (-9)*  | 3         | 2         | 19    | 14 (-5)*  |
|                    | 5   | 8         | 3   | 4         | 4         | 1         | 4    | 1         | 5           | 7         | 6         | 3         | 5     | 5         |
| Remove ROI's claim | 82  | 81        | 82  | 76 (-6)*  | 24        | 14 (-10)* | 47   | 30 (-17)* | 78          | 75        | 41        | 25 (-16)* | 63    | 53 (-10)* |
|                    | 10  | 9         | 7   | 15        | 12        | 21        | 19   | 34        | 9           | 15        | 16        | 33        | 13    | 23        |
|                    | 4   | 5         | 5   | 6         | 49        | 60 (+11)* | 23   | 33 (+10)* | 6           | 6         | 28        | 36 (+8)*  | 14    | 18        |
|                    | 4   | 5         | 5   | 3         | 15        | 5         | 11   | 3         | 7           | 4         | 15        | 6         | 10    | 5         |
| Decommissioning    | 90  | 97 (+7)*  | 95  | 99 (+4)*  | 63        | 85 (+22)* | 91   | 98 (+7)*  | 94          | 98 (+4)*  | 81        | 93 (+12)* | 89    | 95 (+6)*  |
|                    | 4   | 1         | 3   | 0         | 12        | 7         | 5    | 1         | 3           | 1         | 7         | 2         | 5     | 2         |
|                    | 4   | 1         | 1   | 1         | 17        | 7 (-10)*  | 1    | 0         | 2           | 0         | 6         | 3         | 3     | 2         |
|                    | 2   | 1         | 1   | 0         | 8         | 1         | 3    | 1         | 1           | 1         | 6         | 2         | 3     | 2         |
| Power sharing      | 32  | 65 (+33)* | 69  | 87 (+18)* | 84        | 96 (+12)* | 90   | 97        | 61          | 76 (+15)* | 85        | 96 (+11)* | 71    | 84 (+13)* |
|                    | 33  | 15        | 17  | 8         | 8         | 3         | 4    | 2         | 19          | 11        | 6         | 3         | 13    | 8         |
|                    | 27  | 15 (-12)* | 10  | 4 (-6)*   | 1         | 0         | 0    | 1         | 14          | 8 (-6)*   | 1         | 0         | 8     | 5         |
|                    | 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: \* $p < 0.01$ .

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

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 embodiment of the 'Irish dimension'. Nationalists overwhelmingly favour such links, but for unionists, and for the DUP in particular, strident opposition to 'Dublin interference' 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, 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 to the Republic of Ireland's constitutional claim to Northern Ireland.<sup>25</sup> Catholic support for removing the former irredentist claim dropped from 41 per cent to 25 per cent. We suspect this shift probably reflected nationalist frustration at the failure to implement the Agreement fully before 2007.

The 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, 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 consociation is the need for significant sections of the main protagonists to be *willing* to share power, and the most dramatic shift of opinion revealed in Table 3 concerns support for mandatory power sharing between the parties. Overall support for power sharing 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 parties with pronounced shifts among Sinn Féin supporters (+12), the UUP (+18) and a truly dramatic rise of plus 33 per cent among DUP voters. Despite all the difficulties of the intervening five years, with the Executive and Assembly repeatedly suspended, popular support for mandatory sharing of executive power was overwhelming, and on the increase.

There has therefore been 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?

### Voting for Ethnic Tribune Parties: 'Who Best Stands Up for Us?'

While attitudes to the components of the Agreement have converged and moderated, as detailed above, overall approval of the Agreement sharply divided

the principal communities. While the Agreement attracted the support of two-thirds of the Northern Ireland population in 2003, its overall popularity was owed to virtually unanimous support among nationalist voters. By 2003 68 per cent 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.<sup>26</sup> By 2003, of the supporters of either unionist party who voted 'yes' in 1998, just over one-fifth had changed their vote to 'no'.<sup>27</sup>

Thus in the five years before the 2003 elections, inter-ethnic negotiations over the implementation of the Agreement (forming and re-forming the Executive; decommissioning paramilitary weapons; reform of policing; conflict over flags, symbols and language) were ongoing 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 on relative perceptions of how *effective* each party was, or projected to be, in representing ethnonational interests. Our ethnic tribune variable (*effectiveness* in representing an ethnic community) combines 'ethnic valence': 'people's judgements of the overall competence of the rival political parties' (Clarke *et al.*, 2004, p. 9) in representing their ethnic community, with the desire to vote for parties with a reputation for tough ethnic bargaining stances (due to likely compensational voting). Fortunately a new question in the 2003 election study allowed us to measure directly each party's 'ethnic tribune appeal'. The question asks: 'which party do you think has been the *most* effective voice for unionists/nationalists (separate questions) in Northern Ireland?' (emphasis in original). The results in Table 4 are striking.

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. The only party that was substantially divided on the subject was the moderate 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 explain the undermining of 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



**Table 4: Ethnic Tribune Voting. Which Party has been the Most Effective Voice: (a) for Nationalists and (b) for Unionists?**

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

effectiveness of each party 'in standing up' for their community's ethnonational 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 in which other variables known to be strong predictors of party support are controlled for.

### 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.<sup>28</sup> Each table follows a common strategy and format. Model 1 enters a small set of attitudinal variables 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.

A number of attitudinal variables sharply differentiate between Sinn Féin and SDLP voters (fuller descriptive statistics are available from the authors on request). 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'. Perhaps most revealing is that much greater numbers of SDLP identifiers (54 per cent) report that they are 'fairly satisfied' with democracy in

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

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

Notes: Logistic regression models predicting voting Sinn Féin 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 respondent's 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 available from the authors.

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

Table 6: Voting DUP at the NI Assembly Election 2003

|  | Model 1:<br>'Attitudes only' |           | Model 2: Attitudes<br>+ 'DUP most effective' |           | Model 3:<br>+ DUP vote '98 |           | Model 4:<br>+ Trust variables |           | Model 5:<br>+ DUP party ID |           |
|--|------------------------------|-----------|--|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|
|  | L                            | p-value   | L  | p-value   | L                          | p-value   | L                             | p-value   | L                          | p-value   |
| GFA                                      | 1.01<br>(0.23)               | <0.001*** | 0.94<br>(0.23)                               | <0.001*** | 0.67<br>(0.25)             | 0.009**   | 0.54<br>(0.26)                | 0.037*    | 1.07<br>(0.39)             | 0.007**   |
| Nationalists more content to stay in UK  | -0.29<br>(0.13)              | 0.031*    |  |           |                            |           |                               |           | 1.56<br>(0.44)             | <0.001*** |
| Schools: 'prefer own religion only'      | 0.59<br>(0.27)               | 0.026*    | 0.59<br>(0.29)                               | 0.04*     |                            |           |                               |           | 0.93<br>(0.35)             | 0.008**   |
| Police reform 'gone too far'             | 0.62<br>(0.30)               | 0.038*    | 0.83<br>(0.32)                               | 0.01**    | 0.87<br>(0.36)             | 0.016*    |                               |           |                            |           |
| Role of IRL govt 'no say'                | 0.45<br>(0.27)               | 0.091     |  |           |                            |           |                               |           |                            |           |
| DUP 'most effective voice for unionists' |                              |           | 2.27<br>(0.35)                               | <0.001*** | 1.62<br>(0.38)             | <0.001*** | 1.04<br>(0.38)                | 0.006**   | 1.07<br>(0.39)             | 0.007**   |
| Vote 1998 DUP                            |                              |           |  |           | 2.56<br>(0.39)             | <0.001*** | 2.17<br>(0.40)                | <0.001*** | 1.56<br>(0.44)             | <0.001*** |
| Trust Ian Paisley                        |                              |           |  |           |                            |           |                               |           |                            |           |
| Trust David Trimble                      |                              |           |  |           |                            |           |                               |           |                            |           |
| DUP party ID                             |                              |           |  |           |                            |           |                               |           |                            |           |
| Constant                                 | -2.61<br>326                 |           | -4.74<br>326                                 |           | -4.13<br>326               |           | -3.03<br>326                  |           | 2.07<br>(0.37)             | <0.001*** |
| $R^2$ (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.  
Source: 2003 Northern Ireland Election Study, funded by the UK's ESRC.

Northern Ireland compared to only 27 per cent of Sinn Féin partisans. 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 had become the mantra of their leaders: 'the Agreement is right and just needs to be implemented in full'.

Model 1 (of Table 5) shows Sinn Féin voters are much more likely to be generally dissatisfied with democracy in Northern Ireland – 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 a highly emotive issue in Northern Ireland, and Sinn Féin voters believe that police reform has 'not gone far enough'. They also believe (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 previous voting for Sinn Féin in the 1998 Assembly elections: the tribune variable remains significant.<sup>29</sup> Model 4, by entering 'Trust in Gerry Adams' and 'Trust in Mark Durkan',<sup>30</sup> is an especially tough test for the ethnic tribune variable<sup>31</sup> but it remains significant at  $p = 0.025$ . It is also interesting that in the final model those generally dissatisfied with democracy in Northern Ireland and with policing reform remain more likely to vote for Sinn Féin, despite the controls for previous 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 ethnonational cause. By contrast the DUP has consistently alleged that the UUP was engaged in protracted capitulation to the Irish Republican movement.<sup>32</sup>

As expected DUP supporters were 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 took that view. DUP voters were 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 were more likely to object to a close relative marrying someone of another religion, and much more likely (than UUP supporters) to prefer to send their children to single-religion schools.<sup>33</sup> DUP partisans generally believed that police reform 'has gone too far', and did not agree with statements that Sinn Féin have become more compromising towards unionists or that the government of the Republic of Ireland should have any say in Northern Ireland's internal affairs.

Model 1 shows that DUP voters were 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'.<sup>34</sup> 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 we introduced DUP party identification in Model 5.<sup>35</sup> The result is that even having controlled for 'Vote DUP 1998', 'Trust Ian Paisley' and 'DUP Party ID', the ethnic tribune variable remains a significant predictor of DUP voting in 2003 at  $p < 0.01$ .

Thus the evidence is convincing that ethnic tribune appeals significantly contribute to the new-found dominance of the DUP and Sinn Féin.

## 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 their gains are mostly explained by their 'ethnic tribune' appeals. The outbidding thesis explains the increased popularity of the more ethnically intransigent parties (and hence centrifugal competition) as caused by entrepreneurs engaging in ethnic demand generation that develops more extremist politics. If it is correct, increased electoral support for more extreme parties cannot be accompanied by increasing attitudinal convergence among voters on the major political questions at stake. But substantial popular convergence in attitudes to the main features of the Agreement is what we found. What explains this apparent paradox of inter-ethnic attitudinal convergence on more moderate policy positions, with simultaneously dramatically increased support for the more extreme parties? Our answer is that while most voters want peace and power sharing they simultaneously want their strongest tribune to protect their ethnonational interests. Voting for ethnic tribune parties – an

ethnic valence appeal combined with likely compensational voting – implies some intransigence in advocating the ethnic group's core identity interests, but does not necessarily entail increased overall polarisation. Electoral strategies based on 'ethnic tribune appeals' combine the traditional expressive feature of tribune politics with a concern to maximise the ethnic group's share of resources from inter-ethnic power sharing.

Before the onset of the peace process both of the more ostensibly 'extreme' parties had discovered real limits to their electoral growth. The end to war and the new institutional incentives provided by the 1998 Agreement facilitated calculated strategic moves by the DUP and Sinn Féin to moderate their platforms while retaining their base electoral support.<sup>36</sup> We have not, however, suggested that the historically hard-line ethnic parties are becoming unalloyed vote seekers. They seek both office and policy benefits (Müller and Strøm, 1999), and know they are unlikely to 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 'extremist' ethnic parties towards moderated platforms.

With appropriate power-sharing institutions ethnic parties derive electoral rewards by competing on more moderate platforms, providing they reinforce an 'ethnic tribune appeal', i.e. the perception that they most effectively represent their group's ethnonational interests. Outbidding models may therefore predict incorrectly. Of course, consociation requires that successful ethnic tribune parties must be willing to become parties of government, in other words, to become consuls. On 8 May 2007, nine years after the Agreement was signed, the formerly 'extremist' parties, Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist party, agreed to become the consuls.

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### Notes

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for their helpful comments. In addition we would like especially to thank Bernie Grofman and Jonathan Tonge. This article uses data from the Northern Ireland Election Surveys and we thank our co-investigators Lizanne Dowds, Bernadette Hayes and Ian McAllister. The data and variables used in this article are available at <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/mitchepl/Data.htm>

- 1 'If intra-ethnic competition provides each ethnic group with its own two party system, the centrifugal character of the competition may so increase the distance between the positions of the groups as to propel them toward violent outcomes, including secession' (Horowitz, 1985, p. 358).
- 2 'Valence' issues refer to areas of policy where there is widespread agreement about the desirability of general goals, and a party advantage is gained by establishing a reputation for being best able to deliver these goals (Stokes, 1963). In segmented electorates the ethnic valence issues are within each segment.
- 3 The IRA's ceasefire of 1994 was broken in 1996 with large bombs in London and Manchester, but was restored following the election of the Labour government in 1997.
- 4 The UUP had been the dominant (British) unionist party at all domestic (i.e. non-European Parliament elections) from 1920 until the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly elections.
- 5 See <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/>
- 6 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; for example Eritrean nationalists comprised multi-ethnic coalitions in Ethiopia.
- 7 Grofman and Stockwell (2003, p. 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'.
- 8 For brevity we do not provide a taxonomy of possible conflict-regulating elements in party systems, but focus on those most relevant to the present case.
- 9 Birnir (2007) analysing new democracies argues that ethnic parties decrease volatility in the first two elections (by providing convenient information short cuts to new voters), and that in the longer term ethnic cleavages need not destabilise democracy if groups enjoy adequate representation in government.
- 10 For example, the 2003 Northern Ireland Assembly election study shows that 1.4 per cent and 0 per cent, respectively, of UUP and DUP voters were Catholic, while 1 per cent of Sinn Féin voters and 1.7 per cent of SDLP voters were Protestant.
- 11 For unionists it might mean the British government granting more power and authority to the government of Ireland; for nationalists it might mean a return to British direct rule.
- 12 Establishing an ethnic tribunal appeal also guards against potential flanking by new entrants, which is always a danger whenever leaders engage in risky inter-ethnic compromise.
- 13 The Anglo-Irish Agreement was a treaty signed by the British and Irish governments and lodged with the United Nations. Article 4(c) states: 'Both Governments recognise that devolution can be achieved only with the cooperation of constitutional representatives within Northern Ireland of both traditions there'.
- 14 The new power-sharing institutions did not exogenously cause the origin of SF's electoral growth. Sinn Féin became more attractive to nationalist voters immediately after the IRA ceasefire precisely because such voters wanted to encourage a peaceful power-sharing strategy. The ceasefires in turn gave Sinn Féin access to the negotiations that would eventually lead to the Agreement of 1998.
- 15 The 'Mitchell Principles', the common name for a Report of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (January 1996) ask all parties to commit themselves to 'exclusively peaceful methods'.
- 16 Bernie Grofman (in a private communication) and one of this journal's referees rightly point out that the forces propelling the DUP and Sinn Féin to abandon anti-system politics are somewhat different and that there is thus some 'asymmetry' in the ethnic tribunal explanation. But this of course reflects the wider asymmetry of 'majority-minority' bipolar conflicts: Sinn Féin as a representative of a local minority demands change, while the DUP as a representative of a local majority is in favour of the status quo. Given a (rightly) imposed decision rule (now accepted by all parties) of 'there is no power until you agree to share it', what we argue is that voters of both communities increasingly saw reasons to support the DUP and Sinn Féin, both because of their positional stances of being less accommodating and because they were perceived as being more effective in representing communal interests.
- 17 No panel-study data are available for Northern Ireland; we are therefore restricted to cross-sectional analyses.
- 18 The 1998 and 2003 Northern Ireland Election Surveys were both representative post-election surveys conducted immediately after the respective NI Assembly elections of June 1998 and November 2003. Representative samples of 948 (1998) and 1,000 (2003) adults were interviewed in their own homes by face-to face interviews. The questionnaires and data sets can be downloaded from <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt>. Both surveys were funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council. No equivalent election study was conducted in 2007.



- 19 The odds ratio for SDLP voters in 1996 switching to Sinn Féin in 1998 (vs. switching in the other direction) is 4. The odds ratio for UUP voters in 1996 switching to the DUP in 1998 (vs. switching in the other direction) is 1.8. Thus there is evidence of moderate voters switching to more extreme parties in both communities.
- 20 Tonge and Evans (2005) rightly point out that there has also been an asymmetry of mobilisation across the two principal communities: for example at the 2005 Westminster elections turnout was 11 per cent lower in unionist-won seats. This reminds us that differential turnout is itself an important competitive dynamic in ethnic party systems.
- 21 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.
- 22 The odds ratio for SDLP voters in 1998 switching to Sinn Féin in 2003 (vs. switching in the other direction) is 8. The odds ratio for UUP voters in 1998 switching to the DUP in 2003 (vs. switching in the other direction) is 6.5. Thus there is growing evidence of moderate voters switching to more extreme parties in both communities.
- 23 In a pooled analysis of voters for moderate parties (SDLP and UUP) and 'extreme' parties (DUP and Sinn Féin), we find that the odds ratio of switching from moderate to extreme parties (vs. switching in the other direction) is 2.37 for the first time period (1996–8), but grows to 7.07 for the second time period (sig. at  $p < 0.05$  [one-tailed test]).
- 24 The United Kingdom government had twice postponed the scheduled second Assembly election which should have been held by June 2003, ostensibly to allow more time for a much-hoped-for breakthrough in negotiations. But the postponements were widely interpreted as a misguided attempt to 'put off the inevitable': big electoral gains for the DUP and Sinn Féin were foreseen and many feared that outcome would create an even more difficult bargaining context. They were wrong.
- 25 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'.
- 26 For a detailed analysis of diminishing unionist support for the Agreement see Hayes *et al.* (2005).
- 27 The data from which these figures are drawn are not reproduced here but are available from the authors on request.
- 28 Given that Northern Ireland has a multiparty system with four main parties and several much smaller parties it would be possible to use multinomial models. But electoral competition (at least for the four main parties analysed here) is sharply segmented into two separate sets of two-party contests for the unionist and nationalist vote (see Note 10). Thus binomial logit models are appropriate.
- 29 In Model 3 two of the attitudinal variables lose significance and are dropped from the equation.
- 30 The party leaders of Sinn Féin and the SDLP, respectively.
- 31 The Pearson correlations between 'Sinn Féin the most effective voice for nationalists' and (a) 'Trust Gerry Adams' is 0.403, (b) 'Vote 1998 SF' is 0.37.
- 32 Prominent among DUP election posters were 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/>
- 33 Sixty per cent of DUP supporters preferred single-religion schools for their children compared with 34 per cent of UUP supporters.
- 34 The leaders of the DUP and UUP, respectively.
- 35 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, p. 9) In our data the Pearson correlation between 'DUP most effective voice for Unionists' and (a) 'DUP Party Identification' is 0.46, and (b) 'Trust Ian Paisley' is 0.41, and (c) 'Vote 1998 DUP' is 0.46.
- 36 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. Indeed successful electoral mobilisation based on ethnic tribune appeals helps 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 now that it has joined 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.

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