

**Consociational conflict transformation:  
Ethno-national identity in post-Good Friday Agreement  
Northern Ireland**

Submitted by Henry Jarrett, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Ethno-Political Studies, August 2015.

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**Abstract**

The case of Northern Ireland is heralded by many as a consociational success story. Since the signing of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement in 1998, significant conflict transformation has taken place in the form of a considerable reduction in levels of violence and the establishment of power sharing between unionists and nationalists. This thesis, however, asks whether consociational arrangements are transforming conflict in a different way: through mitigating the salience of ethno-national identities. It argues that if this is taking place, it would be demonstrated in the focus of the election campaigns of Northern Ireland's political parties, which would be almost exclusively based around socio-economic issues affecting the whole population, rather than narrow single identity concerns. Elections contested using Proportional Representation – Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) offer the greatest potential to induce moderation, as this electoral system is preferential and allows inter-party lower order preference votes (or transfers) to be cast. It should, therefore, be in the interest of parties to maximise their support by moderating their campaigns with the intention of attracting inter-bloc transfers. If this is occurring, it would demonstrate a shift from traditional unionist versus nationalist politics to a more inclusive political system that is less concerned with ethno-national divisions. On the whole, however, this has not been realised. Although election campaigns are today less strident than they were in the pre-1998 era, it remains the case that they usually foreground single identity symbolism, as it is this that resonates with voters. Whilst consociational power sharing has been very successful in reducing levels of violent conflict and facilitating elite level cooperation between unionists and nationalists, it has been much less successful in reducing divisions within wider society. This indicates a dissonance between 'high' politics and society in Northern Ireland. The conclusions of this thesis also highlight a disparity between what political theory argues may happen and what actually does, as demonstrated by the practice of politics. It is the novel way in which this research tests its hypothesis that makes an original contribution to knowledge. This is achieved through the unique application of ethno-symbolism to analyse political party election campaigns.

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Having grown up in rural Devon with, to my knowledge, no Irish or Northern Irish ancestry, my interest in the Northern Ireland conflict originates from a somewhat unprecedented source. During a family holiday to Scotland as a twelve year old in August 2002, I was taken to Ibrox to watch a 'friendly' association football match between Glasgow Rangers and Leeds United. Whilst the union flags and Scottish Saltires fluttering in the stands were to be expected, the presence of a third flag – the Ulster Banner – came as a surprise to someone unfamiliar with the link between sectarianism in Northern Ireland and football in Glasgow. Equally surprising to me were the exclamations of contempt that rang throughout the stadium whenever Leeds's Robbie Keane or Ian Harte – both Republic of Ireland international players at the time – were on the ball.

After a 1-1 draw, the home supporters showed further contempt outside the stadium towards a man with dyed green hair (the colour of Rangers's bitter cross-city rivals, Celtic) who, in a bizarre twist, later removed and proudly held up a scarf emblazoned with 'Ulster Volunteer Force'. It was these displays of Northern Ireland related sectarianism in Scottish football that first ignited my interest in the conflict. A fascination with the case of Northern Ireland and other ethnic conflicts continued through the negotiations culminating in the re-establishment of power sharing in 2007, and other events, such as the arrest of Radovan Karadzic, accused of committing war crimes in Bosnia during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, a year later. This interest was an important factor influencing my decision to pursue an undergraduate degree in International Relations in 2008 and a master's degree in Global Politics in 2011.

Although violent divisions in ethnically plural societies can be successfully regulated through the recognition and accommodation of opposing groups, as the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement and other conflict management settlements have shown, an important question is whether group identity can be overcome. If so, a more important question still is whether consociational institutions established by such settlements can work to facilitate moves away from narrow ethnic identification towards a shared identity. The case study of

Northern Ireland is significant as the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 is heralded by many as confirmation of the ability of consociationalism to provide successful conflict management in a divided society (Taylor, 2009a, p. 10). If consociational institutions can work to facilitate a shift from ethnic divisions to a unifying identity, it would, therefore, surely be Northern Ireland where this is most likely to take place. The hypothesis of this thesis is thus as follows:

*Due to the endurance of the consociational institutions implemented in Northern Ireland by the Good Friday Agreement, a common Northern Irish identity may, over time, come to be shared by the majority of the population (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 83).*

This research aims to test whether a genuinely shared identity is showing any significant signs of being realised. McGarry's and O'Leary's argument is interpreted as being based on the premise that because consociationalism facilitates cooperation between unionists and nationalists at the political elite level, this may have the ability to trickle down and engender greater inter-communal interaction within wider society. This may in turn bring about a common identity that transcends ethno-national divisions and is shared by most inhabitants. It is important to emphasise that McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 83) make no guarantee of this being achieved and argue that if it is, it will be the work of at least twenty years. They nevertheless offer no indication of the starting point for this prognosis (it could, for example, be the implementation of consociational arrangements in 1998 or the re-establishment of power sharing in 2007 after a five year suspension). It is, however, thought that if a common identity is likely to come about, Northern Ireland would be showing notable indicators of progress seventeen years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. To determine if this is so, this study asks the following research question as a proxy in order to test its hypothesis:

*Does the preferential method of the Proportional Representation – Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) electoral system induce political parties to moderate the single identity symbolism and rhetoric of their election campaign literature with the aim of attracting inter-communal lower order preference votes? (see, for example, McGarry and O'Leary, 2006b, p. 274).*

Rather than test the hypothesis using a primarily quantitative framework (see, for example, Nolan, 2012, 2013, 2014; Tonge and Gomez, 2015), this study seeks to do so through a qualitative analysis of electoral politics. The rationale for this is that the election campaigns of political parties are considered to be an effective indicator of public opinion. Indeed, as rational actors, parties seek to win widespread support by appealing to as many people as possible. It is, therefore, logical that election campaigns reflect the opinions of the people in order to achieve this. In ethnically divided societies such as Northern Ireland, most parties identify with one particular group, with their support derived almost exclusively from this respective community. It is argued that if ethnic identities in plural societies are being overcome, the link between political parties and a particular group would weaken and their election campaigns would reflect this by no longer being focused on divisions and being instead almost exclusively concerned with socio-economic issues affecting all members of society.

This thesis seeks to exploit a gap in the literature by providing a unique analysis of this within the context of the PR-STV electoral system, which is used for all elections in Northern Ireland except those to the Westminster Parliament (for which first past the post is used). The incentive for parties to moderate away from their traditional single identity symbolism and rhetoric is greater due to the possibility of attracting lower order preference votes under PR-STV, which is not a feature of most other electoral systems. The incentive for moderation is therefore enhanced as parties do not have to convince voters from outside of their traditional ethno-national bloc to vote solely for their candidates, which may be considered to be too great a task in a divided society, but rather only to give them a lower order preference vote. It is, therefore, argued that party election campaign moderation is most likely to be achieved under elections contested using a preferential electoral system. In Northern Ireland, it is expected that the incentives for this would be greatest for elections to the European Parliament, as the comparatively low district magnitude of three seats results in candidates needing to reach a higher vote threshold to be elected. With Northern Ireland electing as a single multimember constituency for these elections, the incentives for parties to moderate are enhanced due to the presence of an ethno-nationally diverse electorate, rather than a smaller

constituency, which is more likely to be comprised mostly of members of one particular community.

If present day campaigns for elections in Northern Ireland contested using PR-STV are based significantly on socio-economic issues, with little or no concern for ethno-national matters, it demonstrates that conflict transformation is taking place in the form of institutions implemented by the Good Friday Agreement facilitating moves away from unionist and nationalist divisions towards a shared and genuine Northern Irish identity. Conversely, if ethno-national issues take precedence, it indicates that divisions within wider society continue to be especially deep and override socio-economic concerns. If the latter is found to be true, it demonstrates that whilst consociationalism has facilitated many examples of interaction and cooperation between the two communities at the political elite level, the significantly ethno-national focus of party election campaigns indicates that there is little or no replication of this at a societal level. This would suggest the presence of a dissonance between 'high' politics and wider society in Northern Ireland.

In concluding that the latter is indeed true, in that party election campaigns remain primarily based around ethno-national issues, this thesis questions the profoundness of consociational theory. Whilst recognising that McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 83) provide no guarantee that the institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement will work to overcome the significance of unionist and nationalist identity, it is argued that the extent of consociationalism is its ability to mitigate violent conflict and facilitate inter-group power sharing. In coming to this conclusion, this research identifies an important middle ground between consociational proponents and its critics. On the one hand, it recognises that only consociationalism can achieve the successful management of violent conflict in divided societies. On the other, however, it is sympathetic to concerns that recognising and accommodating different groups simply freezes the conflict in time. It nevertheless concludes that identities in divided societies are too significant to be genuinely overcome.

This study applies an ethno-symbolist understanding of nationalisms as a framework in order to answer its research question and test its hypothesis. The



significance of this approach lies in its ability to explain the continued importance of national identity by claiming that it is myths, memories and symbols dating to the pre-modern era that link the (ethnic) past and the (national) present (Smith, 1998, p. 180. See also Smith, 2009; Githens-Mazer, 2006). It is these that political parties in Northern Ireland, and indeed in many other ethnically plural societies, utilise in order to identify with a particular community. In addition to providing the overall foundation of this study, an ethno-symbolist framework is employed to conduct a content analysis of the symbolism and rhetoric of party manifestos to determine changes over time and for different elections (for example, those to the Westminster Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly, European Parliament and local councils).

This analysis is complemented by interviews with more than thirty politicians and other political activists, community leaders, religious representatives and journalists. The purpose of these interviews is firstly to ascertain why the PR-STV electoral system was chosen as the main voting system for Northern Ireland and the potential impact that it was thought it may have. Secondly, they are intended to analyse how political actors and the parties they represent understand, interpret and use PR-STV and how this influences their election campaigns. Finally, interviews were conducted with community leaders and other such activists to gauge the extent of communal divisions in present day Northern Ireland in order to complement the manifesto analysis and research into PR-STV undertaken for this study. Data from a participant observation exercise and a comparative analysis will also be included, and is intended to strengthen the conclusions of this research.

This research makes an original contribution to knowledge by testing its hypothesis of whether consociational institutions may work to overcome unionist and nationalist identities in Northern Ireland using a novel research question. To analyse the effects of PR-STV on how parties campaign, this study makes a unique application of ethno-symbolism in order to determine whether any moderation is taking place. As it is largely not occurring, this indicates the existence of a disparity between the theory of political science and the practice of politics, in that whilst the former claims that consociationalism *may* work to break down identities, in practice this is not realised. This represents a

significant finding in highlighting limitations to the practical application of political theory. The findings of this research play an important role in demonstrating the practical impact of consociationalism in Northern Ireland, which can also be cautiously applied to other divided societies with these arrangements for conflict management.

### **Chapter outline**

Chapters One to Three constitute the literature review of this thesis, the aim of which is to locate this research within the context of existing work. Chapter One addresses theories of nationalism, defines ethno-symbolism, and provides a historical and contemporary background of the unionist and nationalist traditions. Chapter Two considers the ways in which divisions in plural societies can be effectively managed through an analysis of the largely opposing consociational and centripetal approaches. It then explores conflict management in Northern Ireland through an examination of the Good Friday Agreement and contemporary politics in the region. Chapter Three analyses electoral politics in divided societies through an exploration of voting systems that have been recommended for such cases and plays a particularly important role in defining PR-STV. It then provides an examination of electoral arrangements in Northern Ireland and of the present electoral environment. Chapter Four serves as a methodology and analyses the research methods employed by this study, in addition to ethical considerations.

Chapters Five to Seven are based primarily on empirical research and are designed to answer the research question and test the hypothesis of this study. Chapter Five seeks to determine why PR-STV was selected for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the process associated with this, before considering debates around the use of the system. It then uses data from interviews to analyse how political parties perceive and understand PR-STV, and examines transfer data to determine if there is any correspondence between how parties use the preferential electoral system and the levels of lower order preference votes they receive. Chapter Six provides a content analysis of election campaign literature from all major parties in Northern Ireland and is intended to analyse any changes in focus throughout the post-Good

Friday Agreement era. Chapter Seven examines party campaign strategies, consociationalism and present day communal divisions in Northern Ireland in order to explain why the two identities remain so significant. This is complemented by a brief comparative analysis of two other consociational cases: Brussels and Malaysia. Finally, this study concludes with an overview of its findings and identifies several potential avenues for further research.

## **Chapter One – Ethno-symbolism**

It is impossible to understate the role of ethnicity and nationalism as causes of division in many plural societies (see, for example, Guelke, 2012, p. 20). A clear example of this is the case of Northern Ireland, as whilst there is a religious dimension to its divisions, the major source of conflict is ethno-nationality between British unionists, who favour maintaining the present constitutional link with the United Kingdom, and Irish nationalists, who desire a united Ireland, although it should be noted that these ideals are not entirely universal within either community (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 31). This chapter is structured by firstly exploring the key characteristics of nationalism and why it is such a significant phenomenon in plural, or divided, societies, by analysing the characteristics of ethno-symbolism. It then turns its attention to the origins of divisions between unionists and nationalists on the island of Ireland, from the plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century, through to partition and the establishment of Northern Ireland in 1921, to the present day. Finally, an overview of unionism and nationalism is drawn, with particular focus placed on the political ramifications of these identities, including the ethno-symbolist characteristics of both. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the theoretical and historical framework that forms the foundation of this thesis.

### **Defining ethno-symbolism**

Githens-Mazer (2006, p. 4) identifies three broad fields of theories of nations and nationalisms – modernism, primordialism and perennialism. Firstly, the position of modernism is that the relationship between the state and the nation is fundamentally important, and this is brokered by elites and/or state institutions, the purpose of which is to establish a unifying political identity within the state (Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 5). Smith (1998, pp. 22-23) draws attention to a number of defining characteristics of the modernist approach. He asserts that for modernists the nation is a political community within a designated territory; it is a wholly modern product, 'both recent and novel'; it is created and deliberately constructed by elites who influence the masses to achieve their objectives, whilst 'possessing certain resources'; it is divided socially into a number of different groups; and, finally, the principles of the nation are to be found in citizenship and social communication. From these characteristics,

Smith (1998) highlights various fields of the modernist approach which seek to explain the establishment of nations and nationalisms – the role of industrialism (Gellner, 1964); capitalism (Nairn, 1977); the state and nation (Giddens, 1985; Breuilly, 1993); political messianism (Kedourie, 1960); and invention and imagination (Hobsbawm, 1990; Anderson, 1991).

According to Hutchinson (1994, p. 6), modernists reject the position of primordialists that nations are shaped by distinctive cultural attributes and argue instead that modernisation has encouraged the rise of nationalisms, with nationalist elites inventing nations. Modernists such as Gellner (1983, p. 138, quoted in Hutchinson, 1994, p. 6) are, however, willing to concede the existence of some nations prior to the modern era – England, for example – but argue that this was ‘merely accidental’. Although there are many different explanations for the rise of nations and nationalisms within modernism, such as those identified by Smith (1998), all modernists agree that nations are invented by nationalist elites (Hutchinson, 1994, p. 7). The form of nationalism most associated with modernism is civic democratic political, which uses a threshold principle to determine whether nations are large enough to support a capitalist market economy and, if so, are entitled to claim the status of a self-determining, sovereign, independent state (Hobsbawm, 1990, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 121). Breton (1988, pp. 99-102, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 212) extends this definition by claiming that membership of a civic nation is determined not by ethnic attributes but rather in terms of citizenship. Civic nationalism is based on the type of nation created as a result of the French Revolution, and which flourished in Europe between 1830 and 1870, with Germany, Hungary and Italy notable examples from this time (Hobsbawm, 1990, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 121).

The second broad field of theories of nations and nationalisms identified by Githens-Mazer (2006, pp. 4, 5-6. See also, Shils, 1995; van den Berghe, 1995; Grosby, 1995; Geertz, 1963) is primordialism. This approach suggests that the nation is either a result of enduring patterns of human culture, social and political organisation, or is based on ‘otherness’ and/or a number of conceptions of genetic fitness, which are socio-biological in character. The pre-modern/modern divide within theories of nations and nationalisms is therefore

irrelevant to primordialists, as it does not account for either of the aforementioned explanations of the establishment of nations. In defining primordialism, van den Berghe (1978, pp. 403-04, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 146) argues that not only is shared ethnicity and race important to bring about nationalisms and to establish nations, so also is kinship, as ethnic groups were 'inbreeding super-families for most of human history'. The form of nationalism most associated with primordialism is 'ethno-linguistic' (ethnic), with smaller groups entitled to establish their own states based on a shared ethnicity (including race) and/or language, which is in contrast to the civic vein of nationalism (Hobsbawm, 1990, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 121). Modernist and primordialist theories of nations and nationalisms are important as they are considered to be polar opposites, with perennialist theories such as ethno-symbolism bridging the gap between them (Githens-Mazer, 2006, pp. 7-15, 86-87).

The third broad field of theories of nationalisms is thus perennialism, which Githens-Mazer (2006, p. 7) defines as the belief that 'the phenomenon of the nation has occurred and/or recurred throughout history', and is part of recorded history rather than part of the human condition or nature. He argues that in order to '(re)construct, (re)invigorate, or transform' a community into a modern nation, some nations reach back to pre-modern era myths and memories of the collective, and these nations therefore bridge the gap between pre-modern and modern. Other communities utilise processes of '(re)discovery, (re)appropriation, (re)affirmation and (re)imagination' in order to demonstrate their cultural or political legitimacy, which is necessary for their transformation into a nation. Smith (1998, pp. 22-23) identifies a number of defining characteristics of perennialism. The nation is 'a politicised ethno-cultural community' with common ancestry; it is enduring and immemorial with a long history and has its roots in a historic homeland; it is 'a community of "the people"' and therefore reflects their needs, with members possessing particular qualities; it is a seamless whole; and, finally, its fundamental principles are an authentic culture and ancestral ties. On this basis, ethno-symbolism fits within a perennialist approach to nations and nationalisms (Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 7).

Whilst recognising the importance of politics, Hutchinson's (1994, p. 41, quoted in Smith, 1998, pp. 177-80) analysis of cultural nationalism argues that it is impossible to overlook the recurrent and continuous significance of culture. Hutchinson (1987, pp. 12-14, quoted in Smith, 1998, pp. 177-78) explains the cultural nationalist argument as being that 'the essence of a nation is its distinctive civilisation, which is the product of its unique history, culture and geographical profile', and the aim of cultural nationalism is to reunite the nation by reaching back to its creative life principle. As the nation is an organic entity, the state and its institutions are 'accidental' and a result of the processes of modernity (Hutchinson, 1987, p. 13, quoted in Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 86). Cultural nationalists are, however, keen to demonstrate that despite looking back to 'a presumed glorious past', their recurrent approach seeks to revive an ethnic historicist vision of the nation to construct a community which is both integrated and autonomous (Hutchinson, 1987, p. 34, quoted in Smith, 1998, pp. 178-79).

Hutchinson (1987, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 180; Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 86) also recognises the importance of memories and symbols in defining the nature and history of nations, and in attaching people to a particular nation, whilst reinforcing the role of historical memory. He makes three conclusions from his analysis of cultural nationalism (Hutchinson, 1987, pp. 29-30, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 178). The first is 'the importance of historical memory in the formation of nations' and the second 'that there are usually competing definitions of the nation', which is resolved by trial and error whilst interacting with other communities. The third is that due to the significance 'of their power to convey an attachment to a specific historical identity', cultural symbols are central to group creation. Hutchinson (1987, quoted in Smith, 1998, pp. 179-80) thus repudiates any primordialist theories of nations and nationalism, and also distances himself from modernist positions, as he rejects the idea that nations are invented and instead emphasises the importance of reaching back to the ethnic past and the revival of cultural traditions, whilst stressing the significance of historical memory and religion.

Although supportive of the emphasis cultural nationalists place upon the significance of, for example, a unique culture and history, historical memory and

the centrality of cultural symbols in explaining the creation of nations and nationalisms, Smith (1998, p. 180) criticises Hutchinson for focusing only on the movement back from the present to the (ethnic) past and argues for the need for this to be supplemented by an analysis of the movement forward from the past to the (national) present. To facilitate this, Smith (see, for example, 1986; 1998, ch. 8; 2009) formulated and founded the ethno-symbolist approach. Githens-Mazer (2006, p. 7) explains ethno-symbolism as recognising the modernity of nations, yet argues that some of the political and/or cultural characteristics of a nation pre-date this era. Furthermore, ethno-symbolists claim that some nations may in fact be 'based on pre-modern cultural, political and ethnic groups, which are (re)constituted in a modern period as nations'. This shared ethnic past is rooted in the ethnic group or *ethnie*, defined by Smith (1986, p. 32, quoted in 1998, p. 191) as 'named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and culture, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity'. At the heart of ethnicity is the 'myth-symbol complex' and the *mythomoteur*, which across generations and through the ethnic group diffuses the myths, memories and symbols associated with that group, which preserves and maintains the form of the group's identity over time, and the *ethnie* is distinctive because of those myths, memories, symbols and values (Smith, 1986, quoted in Githens-Mazer, 2006, pp. 7-8).

Smith (1986, p. 198, quoted in Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 8) argues that national myths, memories and symbols must be meaningful and potent enough to unite and excite the nation politically or culturally. He also asserts that 'the myth of a common origin in time and place' is vital to ethnic communities, as it marks 'the foundation point of the group's history, and hence its individuality', and identifies the importance of a collective name, association with a homeland, emblems, festivals, customs, etc (Smith, 1981, p. 66, quoted in 1998, p. 191; 2009, p. 25). Smith (2009, p. 25) outlines three general factors to explain the significance of these characteristics. Firstly, they play a crucial role in shaping social structures and cultures, and in defining and legitimising a community. Secondly, they provide communities with distinctive symbols, such as religion, language and customs, which enable their differentiation from other communities, and divide 'us' and 'them'. Finally, these characteristics have helped maintain continuity with past generations of the community, which has been enhanced by the



acceptance of collective symbols such as anthems, flags and national holidays – the form of which remains largely fixed, despite the possibility of their meanings changing over time.

These symbols create and maintain communal bonds and contribute to a sense of national identity. Therefore, whilst ethno-symbolists agree with modernists that nations are active communities rooted in a particular historical epoch, they disagree with modernist approaches over their failure to link ethnicity to the formation of nations (Smith, 2009, pp. 20-21). Ethno-symbolists also repudiate primordialist notions of nation and nationalism formation, and focus instead on cultural affinities, shared historical memories and ethnic symbolism, rather than physical kinship ties (Smith, 1998, p. 192). There is, nevertheless, the possibility of the meanings of collective identities changing over time, with this influenced by 'structural circumstances, strategic imperatives, and the social psychological needs of group members' (Smithey, 2011, ch. 2). For example, in post-Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland, some unionists report a change in their identity that has been brought about by former republican paramilitaries participating in a power sharing government within the jurisdiction of the UK (Hancock, 2013, pp. 63-64). Examples such as this do not, however, suggest moves away from a particular ethnic identity but rather that changes can take place within it, whilst the salience of identities mean that they are unlikely to ever be fully overcome. White et al (2013, pp. 240-41) argue that divided societies such as Northern Ireland struggle to overcome identity conflict because different groups feel threatened by each other and cooperation between them demands inter-ethnic trust, which is often not present due to the narratives of ethnic identities reinforcing negative stereotypes about the 'other'.

Ross (2009) explains why the culture and symbolism that ethno-symbolists consider to be so important in forming and defining nations and nationalisms often results in conflict in divided societies. He argues that it is not cultures or cultural differences that cause conflict, but they are rather 'the lenses through which the causes of conflict are refracted' (Ross, 2009, p. 5. See also Eller, 1999; Posner, 2004; Avruch and Black, 1993, pp. 133-34). Ross (2007, quoted in 2009, p. 5) states that these differences result in cultural contestation, which intensifies when fundamental group identity issues are involved, often polarising

participants. There are several ways in which this contestation is manifested in divided societies (Ross, 2009), which will be explored with a focus on their role in the Northern Ireland conflict. Firstly, symbolic landscapes are significant to a group's identity and include, but are not limited to, emotionally important public spaces and sacred sites, and representations in mass media, theatre and literature (Ross, 2009, p. 6). In Northern Ireland, the display of flags and emblems and the painting of murals are important ways in which both communities claim ownership of a particular area, establishing it as their own symbolic landscape (Bryan and Stevenson, 2009; Smithey, 2009).

Secondly, psychocultural narratives are emotionally powerful accounts of events that make judgments of the role of one's own group and that of opponents, often alternating in portraying one's own group as strong or vulnerable depending on the situation (Ross, 2009, p. 8. See also Kaufman, 2001). An example of this in Northern Ireland is unionists portraying themselves as triumphant over nationalists during the Twelfth of July commemorations of the Battle of Boyne of 1690, when Catholic King James was defeated by Protestant King William (Smithey, 2009, p. 96), but vulnerable to what they considered to be an affront to their culture by nationalists during the 2012-13 protests and riots against the decision to limit the flying of the union flag at Belfast City Hall (Devenport, 2012). Thirdly, collective memories that blend key events, metaphors, heroes and moral lessons connect group members through time and space, and are recited as narratives which serve as group memory repositories (Ross, 2012. See also Kaufman, 2001; Devine-Wright, 2003, p. 11; Halbwachs, 1980). Examples include important historical events such as the Battle of the Boyne for unionists and the Easter Rising for nationalists.

Finally, psychocultural dramas are conflicts emanating from differing opinions of the history and contemporary identity of a group, and can focus on material resource allocation or cultural differences such as religion, language and popular culture (Ross, 2009, p. 12. See also Ross, 2007). The competing constitutional claims of unionists and nationalists over Northern Ireland constitutes a psychocultural drama, with the former arguing that Ulster's unique geography and history marks it out as distinct to the rest of the island of Ireland, whilst the latter dispute this (Morag, 2008). These areas of cultural contestation

are important as they demonstrate the ways in which ethno-symbolic characteristics of nations and nationalisms can result in conflict in ethnographically divided societies, and are significant to this study as Northern Ireland is affected by many of these phenomena.

## **The island of Ireland – a divided society**

### *Pre-partition*

Despite Northern Ireland having existed as a political entity only since 1921, divisions have been present on the island of Ireland since well before the twentieth century (see, for example, O’Leary and McGarry, 1996, ch. 2; Connolly, 1996; Kennedy and Johnson, 1996). O’Leary and McGarry (1996, p. 54) note that nationalist history in Ireland began in 1169 with the first Norman invasion, which, as Clayton (1998, pp. 44-45) asserts, was authorised by the first and only English Pope with the aim of replacing Irish Catholicism with Roman Catholicism. Unionist history in Ireland began with the establishment of the first plantation in Ulster by English and Scottish settlers in 1609 – a significant event as it marks the beginning of the presence of two main traditions on the island (O’Leary and McGarry, 1996, p. 54). O’Leary and McGarry (1996, p. 55) argue that the plantations are the ‘one indisputable historic cause of the current conflict’ in the region, and without them ‘Northern Ireland would not exist’. Morag (2008, p. 264) draws attention to the unique position of the province of Ulster within Ireland, with mountains and lakes making it largely inaccessible from the rest of the island prior to the development of roads in the 1800s. Its coastal areas were, therefore, more easily accessible from Scotland, making it a convenient entry point to the province from the British mainland. The uniqueness of Ulster’s location on the island is one of a number of factors which has for centuries fuelled the perception amongst unionists that the region is closer in character to Britain than the rest of Ireland and thus provides them with a national homeland for their British cultural and national identity.

Despite the settlers consisting of two distinct ethnic and religious communities – the Anglican-English and Presbyterian-Scottish – they did not blend with the

indigenous Irish and, over time, merged to develop a unified Ulster-British identity (Morag, 2008, p. 265). The colonisers deprived the native Irish of their access to the land and by the eighteenth century the latter were almost completely landless, with Protestants being densely concentrated, and outnumbering Catholics, in Antrim, Down, Armagh and Londonderry, with significant populations in Tyrone and Fermanagh (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, pp. 56-57). In addition, the Catholic Church was disestablished (Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 2). The linkage between religion, ethnicity and politics has been apparent since the era of early modern Ireland, which Beckett (1981, quoted in Coakley, 2002a, p. 5) considers to have begun with the Renaissance in 1603. O'Leary and McGarry (1996, pp. 61-62) argue that 'to change one's religion... was to change one's ethnicity and one's political status', and few therefore did so (see also Coakley, 2002a).

The failure of the British to successfully penetrate the island of Ireland and establish a British national identity enabling Catholics and Protestants to transcend their differences is the ultimate factor behind the persistence of the two traditions and subsequent conflict (see O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, pp. 64-74, 101-02). Although the two islands were formally bound in the Act of Union of 1801, this was incomplete, with Ireland governed differently to the rest of the kingdom, and its legal and religious institutions organised in opposition to the interests of the nationalist majority, which resulted in rebellions against the union by nationalists and republicans throughout the nineteenth century (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, p. 73). It was the inequality faced by the native Irish population at the hands of the British and the Protestant minority, both before and after the Act of Union, which culminated in the rise within the majority group of a cultural nationalist movement on the island (see, for example, Githens-Mazer, 2006, ch. 4).

Hutchinson (1987, p. 50, quoted in Githens-Mazer, 2006, pp. 88-90) identifies three stages of the crystallisation of cultural nationalism in Ireland. The first occurred in the mid-1700s and was instigated by Irish antiquarians, which was followed by a movement of historical scholars and poets in the 1830s (the second stage). The intentions of these movements were to utilise a Gaelic past in order to unite Ireland's divided religious communities, and encourage the

establishment of an artistic and secular Irish nation. Githens-Mazer (2006, p. 88) argues that the second stage of cultural nationalism was a reaction to events such as the Act of Union and sought to distinguish an Irish nation from the British state. This movement was ultimately the result of the aforementioned failure of Britain to unite the inhabitants of Ireland under a single British identity, and serves to further demonstrate the existence of antagonism between the native Catholic Irish and the settler Protestant British on the island prior to partition.

Githens-Mazer (2006, pp. 90-91. See also Paul-Dubois, 1911; Mitchel, 1983; Morash and Hayes, 1996) emphasises the importance of the Famine to cultural nationalism in Ireland. He asserts that the native Irish generally blamed the Anglo-Protestant 'other' for its occurrence, which resulted in the perception of the union amongst the former as being 'inherently exploitative' – a position underpinned by the myths, memories and symbols of historic events such as the disestablishment of the Catholic Church. It was the Famine, coupled with initiations such as the Catholic Emancipation and the repeal movement, which led to the third and final stage of the crystallisation of cultural nationalism in Ireland, characterised as a 'movement of poets and folklorists' during the late 1800s (Githens-Mazer, 2006, pp. 89-90. See also Hutchinson, 1987). Despite Britain making a number of concessions to the native, Catholic Irish during the post-Famine era, including buying out Anglo-Irish landlords across Ireland – with the exception of east Ulster – and passing the land to Irish peasants, land questions persisted, which enabled nationalists to build up political support bases, winning a significant number of parliamentary seats in Ireland from the 1870s (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, pp. 85-87). This was achieved firstly due to the success of the Home Rule League and its successor, the Irish Parliamentary Party, and later Sinn Fein (see, for example, Foster, 1989, pp. 608-13).

Cultural nationalism also played a role in response to the land questions, with myths and memories of eviction and emigration before, during and after the Famine leading to the belief that land ownership would restore the nation and prevent a recurrence of past deprivations (Githens-Mazer, 2006, pp. 93-94). The unsatisfactory nature of land reform frustrated cultural nationalists and

facilitated their espousal of the ideal of a de-anglicised 'Irish Ireland', which was crystallised in institutions such as the Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) and the Gaelic League, which promotes the Irish language, and culminated in the Gaelic revival of the late nineteenth century (Githens-Mazer, 2006, pp. 84, 94. See also Hutchinson, 1987, p. 115). The GAA was instrumental in the revival of Gaelic sport, particularly hurling, linking athleticism with cultural nationalism (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, p. 224). This demonstrates the importance of cultural nationalism to understanding the struggle for home rule throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the recurrence of the myths, memories and symbols associated with Ireland's Gaelic past was used in order to unify the Irish nation around a common, shared heritage. Kennedy and Johnson (1996, pp. 44-47) state that the home rule movement towards the late nineteenth century was also being fuelled by the perception amongst the nationalist majority that they were being overtaxed by the British. Bew (2011, ch. 1) argues that the question of self-government for Ireland had a distinct religious/sectarian dimension, which was evident at the 1885 general election when candidates campaigning for home rule were victorious in every constituency with a Catholic majority, which is unsurprising given that this was, and remains, the predominant religious denomination of the native Irish population.

The issue of home rule divided the island. Whilst many nationalists were committed to the cause for aforementioned reasons, when the British prime minister at the time, William Gladstone, introduced the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, it was met in unionist majority Belfast with 'shock, dismay and even disbelief' (Bew, 2011, ch. 1). Unionists responded by stressing the benefits of the union, particularly to Ulster, which they argued home rule would undermine (Kennedy and Johnson, 1996, pp. 52-53). They continued to maintain this position when the British government introduced a further Home Rule Bill between 1912 and 1914, yet despite its implementation being delayed due to World War I, London's response to the republican-led Easter Rising in Dublin, which was ruthlessly put down and saw a number of leaders executed, resulted in a huge increase in sympathy for home rule activists (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, pp. 3-4). This culminated in the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, which was designed to satisfy the conflicting demands of unionists and nationalists

(McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 4). The Anglo-Irish Treaty of the following year established the Irish Free State, with dominion status within the British Empire, and allowed for Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK (see Anglo-Irish Treaty, 1921).

### *Post-partition*

It was decided that two home rule parliaments would be established: one in Dublin, as the capital of a twenty-six county Irish Free State, and the other in Belfast, the capital of a six county Northern Ireland (Ulster with the exception of the counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal to ensure a Protestant majority, as lobbied for by unionists) (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, pp. 98-100). Although unionists had long opposed home rule, they soon saw the benefits of having their own parliament, as it provided a 'bulwark against the untrustworthy intentions of London governments and the claims of Irish republicans', and facilitated the maintenance of their British cultural and national identity (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, pp. 98-100). The home rule movement in the Irish Free State became divided, and a civil war ensued throughout 1922 and 1923 between pro and anti-Anglo-Irish Treaty forces (see Foster, 1989, pp. 506, 511-15). The former was comprised of Irish nationalists, ultimately the Provisional Government and its state institutions, and the latter of republicans, most notably the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Fein, who were aggrieved at the failure of the Treaty to establish a republic entirely independent from Britain and its empire, from which the pro-Agreement forces emerged victorious. This demonstrates the presence of, and divisions between, nationalism and republicanism on the island of Ireland long before the outbreak of conflict in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s. A republic was later declared for the twenty six counties in the 1937 constitution, which was accepted by the UK and fully implemented in 1949 (see Coakley, 2002b, p. 4; Foster, 1989, pp. 566-67).

Northern Ireland's population ratio at the time of partition was two-thirds unionist and one third nationalist, and the 'imperfections' of the division of the island, particularly the inclusion of Fermanagh and Tyrone in the North, with their significant nationalist populations, resulted in unionist dominance of politics and wider society for half a century (see O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, pp. 100-01, ch. 3; McKittrick and McVea, 2001, pp. 7-13). Politically, this was achieved

through measures such as the revision of the local and national electoral system from PR-STV to first past the post and the gerrymandering of constituency boundaries in order to increase the likelihood of unionist victory (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, pp. 7-9). Unionists also used Northern Ireland's legal system to assert their dominance, with the implementation of measures such as legislation designed to outlaw symbolic displays by nationalists (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, pp. 127-28). The Flags and Emblems (Display) Act of 1954, for example, banned the display of all flags except that of the union and was not repealed until 1987 (Bryan and Stevenson, 2009, p. 71; Bryan et al, 2010, p. 7). Bryan and Stevenson (2009, pp. 70-71) refer to measures such as this as part of a wider regime of unionist control of Northern Ireland's public space, with the union flag flown all year round from many government buildings. Economically, nationalists were discriminated against in areas such as employment and public benefits, notably in housing, in which community segregation was enforced in order to prevent the establishment of mixed communities and to maintain electoral results favourable to unionists, which O'Leary and McGarry (see 1996, ch. 3) refer to as unionist 'hegemonic control'.

Some argue that the approach of nationalists and republicans in the Irish Free State (and, later, the Republic of Ireland), such as Michael Collins aiding IRA attacks on Northern Ireland during the early 1920s and the 1937 constitution asserting that the Irish national territory was the entire island of Ireland, aggravated unionist fears, strengthened loyalism and justified the discriminatory stance of Stormont against the Catholic minority in the eyes of Protestants (see, for example, Kennedy, 1988, quoted in Ruane and Todd, 1998, p. 59). The implementation of 'O'Neillism', in reference to the former Northern Irish prime minister, Terence O'Neill, which attempted to modernise the region and encourage better community relations during the 1960s, led to civil rights protests by nationalists and the eventual suspension of Stormont and implementation of direct rule in 1972 (see O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, ch. 4). O'Duffy (1999, p. 525) argues that it is the historic nature of ethnic and religious divisions in Ireland, and later in Northern Ireland, between British and Irish nationalisms that made it such a challenging case for conflict management. In providing an overview of the origins of the unionist and nationalist traditions on the island of Ireland, an ethno-symbolist approach has been utilised in order to



explain the historical character of divisions between the two, which culminated in Northern Ireland with the outbreak of violent conflict.

Kennedy-Pipe (2006, pp. 44-45) asserts that the first incident of violence during the unrest that was to later become known as the 'Troubles' occurred in Derry in October 1968 when civil rights activists clashed with police. The result was the separation of urban populations along ethno-national lines and intense sectarianism in the years that followed, which was met by the establishment, or in some cases reestablishment, of republican and loyalist paramilitary groups. British troops were deployed in Northern Ireland in August 1969 in attempt to stem the conflict and were initially welcomed by the nationalist population in the belief that they would provide them with some protection against the unionist-dominated government and police. However, events such as Bloody Sunday in January 1972, during which thirteen unarmed civilians were shot dead by soldiers of the Parachute Regiment in Derry, led to this being dispelled and to sympathy amongst many Catholics towards the aims of republican paramilitaries (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 76). The violence first seen in 1968 was to engulf Northern Ireland for the next thirty years, with republican and loyalist paramilitary groups, British troops and the police all belligerents contributing to the sectarian divisions that remain today. It was recognised almost from the outbreak of conflict that an agreement was necessary in order to manage the level of violence, however this was not achieved until 1998 and after the deaths of more than 3,500 people (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 325). Before Chapter Two analyses how this agreement was reached and the form it takes, this study will explore the characteristics of the two major ethno-nationalist communities in Northern Ireland.

## **Ethno-national identity in Northern Ireland**

### *Protestantism/Unionism/Loyalism*

The vast majority of Protestants in Northern Ireland are unionists and their ultimate objective is to maintain the current link between the region and Britain as part of the UK (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 2). They make up 48 per cent of the population (Devenport, 2012). Protestants mostly identify as British, with

63 per cent doing so in a 2009 survey (NILT, 2009), and fear the alternative to maintaining the link with Britain – a united Ireland in which they envisage Irish nationalists to attack their religious, political and economic interests (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 2). Furthermore, O'Dowd (1998, p. 77) argues that unionists have tended to define themselves in terms of what they are not rather than what they are (principally, not Irish Catholic or nationalist), and blame others for this negativity, from the aggressive nature of Irish nationalist politics to the inconsistency of British governments in their policy towards Northern Ireland. Porter (1996, quoted in Dixon, 2000, pp. 206-09) identifies three strands of unionism.

Firstly, 'cultural' unionism is an ideology based on 'common religious or cultural practices' and one which believes that Northern Irish politics 'should be shaped by a Protestant-British ethos' (Porter, 1996, quoted in Dixon, pp. 206-07). Proponents of this strand consider the values associated with British unionism, such as the defence of religious and civil liberties, to be superior to those of Irish Catholicism or nationalism. They are largely unwilling to grant any cultural concessions to, or accommodate within Northern Ireland, Catholics/nationalists and the ideology, Porter (1996, quoted in Dixon, pp. 206-07) argues, therefore 'relies on a notion of Britishness unrecognisable in Great Britain' and 'exaggerates the role of Protestantism in the maintenance of civil and religious liberty'. Smithey (2011, p. 57) claims that the difficulty that cultural unionists have in engaging with nationalists is a result of their 'intense focus' on Britishness and the UK, and a strong appreciation for their interpretation of British identity, which is not shared by nationalists. The ideology can be adapted to justify sectarian attitudes and, politically, has traditionally been associated with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) (Dixon, 2000, p. 206). Theoretically, cultural unionism conforms to Hobsbawm's (1990, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 121) aforementioned definition of ethnic nationalism and features both primordial and perennial characteristics.

Secondly, 'liberal' unionism is an ideology based on citizenship, as opposed to the need for a shared culture as argued for by cultural unionists, and offers 'a political vision without confessional bias' (Aughey, 1989, p. 19, quoted in Dixon, 2000, p. 207; Porter, 1996, p. 127). Porter (1996, pp. 127-28) states that this is

rooted in a 'British political way of life', which is culturally blind in political affairs, encourages plurality and therefore appeals across the sectarian divide. Liberal unionism focuses on Northern Ireland's position within the UK and its Britishness in common with the rest of the state, and the centrality of the Westminster government in upholding this (see Porter, 1996, pp. 129-37). Aughey (1995, p. 12, quoted in Porter, 1996, pp. 132-33) further defines the ideology as being based around a union comprised 'of citizens united not by creed, colour or ethnicity but by a recognition of the authority of the union', which is embodied by the British state. Liberal unionism therefore differs from cultural unionism as it is principally concerned with citizenship, whilst cultural unionism stresses the importance of a common religion and culture.

Politically, Porter (1996, p. 20) argues that liberal unionism is not confinable to a single unionist party but is most likely to attract support from within sections of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), and is advocated by the former UUP and later UK Unionist Party (UKUP) politician, Robert McCartney. Porter (1996, ch. 4, quoted in Dixon, 2000, pp. 207-08) makes two key criticisms of liberal unionism. Firstly, the British institutions and symbols that it supports are perceived by many nationalists to be exclusive and biased towards unionism, and, secondly, citizenship may not be a sufficient political identity for which to substitute religious and cultural institutions and to unite the two communities. Similarly, McGarry and O'Leary (1995, quoted in Smithey, 2011, p. 57) criticise liberal unionism for failing to take into account the impact of historic British colonialism in Ireland. O'Dowd (1998, pp. 80-81) also critiques Porter for not recognising that the approach is a form of nationalism itself – for example, it is nationalism which underpins issues such as identity and citizenship – and this is the very ideology it claims to wholeheartedly reject. On the basis of Porter's definition, liberal unionism is a form of civic nationalism (see, for example, Hobsbawm, 1990, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 121).

Finally, 'civic' unionism is explained by Porter (1996, p. 170) is an ideology which considers 'the quality of social and political life in Northern Ireland', and the inclusion within this of unionists, nationalists and other non-unionists, and is more important than the maintenance of the union. Porter (1996, ch. 5, quoted in Dixon, 2000, p. 208) identifies three key elements of this ideology. Firstly,

liberal unionism's support for British institutions is rejected in favour of Northern Irish institutions that both communities are able to pledge allegiance to. It is principally this that has led Dixon (2000, p. 208) to argue that civic unionist ideology anticipates to some degree the consociational Good Friday Agreement. Secondly, as a result of the position of the region as part of the UK, nationalist culture should be afforded 'due recognition' as opposed to 'parity of esteem' in order to reflect Northern Ireland's current constitutional status. Finally, civic unionists stress the need for the engagement of unionism in civil society, whereby both communities may be able to establish some common ground in order to overcome their differences.

Dixon (2000, pp. 208-09) makes two criticisms of civic unionism. Firstly, he argues that Porter exaggerates the potential of Northern Ireland's 'disappointing' civil society to transcend community divisions in the region and, secondly, suggests that the ideology suffers from a lack of a realistic political strategy from which to achieve its goals, and is threatened altogether as it does not share the priorities of cultural and liberal unionists. As a result, Porter's account of civic unionism is not wholeheartedly advocated by either of the two main unionist parties, the DUP or the UUP. However, as both now support Northern Ireland's power sharing institutions, elements of this ideology are undoubtedly incorporated within their positions. This indicates a moderation of political unionism throughout the ongoing peace process.

The UUP was founded in the pre-partition era and has strong connections to the Orange Order, a Protestant organisation which prohibits Catholic membership (Clayton, 1998, p. 41), and to the Ulster Unionist Council. The party governed continuously from the establishment of Northern Ireland as a political entity in 1921 until the dissolution of its parliament in 1972, whilst maintaining its position as the largest party until the early 2000s (see, for example, McKittrick and McVea, 2001). British political parties have played a minor role in Northern Irish electoral politics, with the Conservatives the only party of any significance. They have been allied to the UUP to varying degrees throughout each other's histories and have also single-handedly contested some elections in Northern Ireland, with very limited success, whilst the most recent UUP-Conservative alliance was formed in 2009 under the short lived Ulster Conservatives and

Unionists – New Force (UCUNF) banner (Tonge and Evans, 2010, p. 743). The Conservatives have traditionally been, and indeed arguably continue to be, the most pro-union of the mainstream British political parties (see, for example, Cameron, 2008; 2010).

Aughey (1990, p. 189. See also McIntosh, 1999; Farrington, 2001, pp. 50-52) cites Bruce's argument that 'the core of unionist ideology is evangelical Protestantism', which further indicates the inextricable link between unionism and religion in Northern Ireland. Wallis and Bruce (1986, p. 13, quoted in Aughey, 1990, p. 189) also stress the impact that this has had on unionist politics in the region and cite the mainstream DUP as an organisation to which Protestantism is of particular importance (see also Smyth, 2008). The party was co-founded by Ian Paisley in 1971 with strong links to the Free Presbyterian Church (of which Paisley was a founding member) and was established with the intention of challenging the UUP's fifty year dominance of Northern Irish politics by seeking to appeal to working class voters (Bew and Gillespie, 1993, p. 40). Bryan and Stevenson (2009, p. 81) emphasise Paisley's utilisation of his fundamental religious position to oppose the nationalist civil rights movement during its emergence in the late 1960s. These characteristics, along with the initially hard line stance of the DUP in opposing the peace process, have led to some defining the party's position as loyalist, despite an absence of links between the party and paramilitary organisations (see, for example, Smithey, 2011, ch. 3). Amid divisions within the UUP regarding support for the Good Friday Agreement, it was superseded by the DUP as the largest unionist party in the early 2000s, with the latter having since moderated its traditionally hard line stance and agreeing to share power with its republican opponents, Sinn Fein, in 2007 (de Breadun, 2008, pp. 379-83).

Loyalism is an important ideology of Northern Ireland's Protestant community and one that shares many similarities with cultural unionism. McAuley (2004, pp. 524-25) asserts that loyalism's defining characteristics are a strong sense of devotion to Northern Ireland, and loyalty to the British Crown and the union flag. He also stresses the commitment of loyalists to a distinctively British 'series of shared social norms, symbols and actions', and an attachment to their own interpretation of a 'British way of life'. Underpinning loyalism is a contractual

relationship between loyalists and the British state, complete with rights and duties. Although the British state and population does not always reciprocate this loyalty, this does not, however, mitigate the pro-unionism of loyalists (Miller, 1978; P. Mitchell, 1999; Shirlow and McGovern, 1997, quoted in McAuley, 2004, p. 525). Wright (1973, p. 233, quoted in Clayton, 1998, p. 43) also claims that the majority of loyalists are anti-Catholic and anti-Irish. These characteristics show clear links between loyalism and cultural unionism, however a defining difference between the two is the willingness of the former to use physical force in order to maintain and promote their objectives (see Ervine, 2002; Smithey, 2011; Bruce, 2001). Smithey (2011, p. 58) asserts that loyalists are to be found principally in working class areas and include evangelical Protestants, paramilitaries and loyal orders.

Loyalism has traditionally been associated with two main paramilitary organisations: the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) (Bruce, 2001). Established (in the case of the UVF in its contemporary form) in response to the outbreak of conflict, Ruane and Todd (1996, pp. 94-95, quoted in McAuley, 2004, pp. 525-26) state that the UVF and the UDA sought to offer the 'violence and militancy' at this time that many Protestants considered to be necessary in order to combat 'being pushed out of their traditional areas and workplaces', as this was a threat to their existence which was not being 'effectively met by the state'. McAuley (1995, quoted in 2004, pp. 526-27) argues that the core philosophy of loyalist paramilitaries was to offer a form of counter terrorism to republican paramilitaries, although ordinary Catholics were often targeted, until a loyalist ceasefire was achieved in 1994, which subsequently resulted in the gradual transformation of these organisations away from violence. Despite this, it is, for example, alleged that senior UVF members were involved in the instigation of rioting in response to the decision in 2012 to limit the flying of the union flag over Belfast City Hall (McDonald, 2013a).

The loyalist ceasefire coincided with the ascendancy of a 'new' form of political, as opposed to paramilitary, loyalism (see Ervine, 2002; McAuley, 2002; 2004; 2005; Bruce, 2001). This is most evident in the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), the political arm of the UVF, which despite being established in the

1970s, did not enjoy any significant electoral success until the mid-1990s, largely due to the release from prison of key UVF figures such as David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson, who, unlike their predecessors, were prepared to criticise unionism and the British state (McAuley, 2002, p. 108). Whilst maintaining an 'intensely unionist' focus, the PUP offers a socialist, working class alternative to the traditional right-wing/centre-right conservatism of the DUP and UUP (McAuley, 2002, pp. 109-13). A second loyalist party, the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), the political wing of the UDA, could trace its roots to the mid-1970s and, similarly to the PUP, sought to offer an alternative to the traditional unionist parties (see McAuley, 2005, pp. 234-37). The UDP based its appeal around providing the people with a voice and promised effective leadership, both of which it claimed the UUP and the DUP were failing to achieve (McAuley, 2005, p. 325). Aside from winning two 'top up' seats in the Forum election of 1996 and therefore being permitted to participate in the all-party peace negotiations, the UDP's electoral success failed to advance beyond local government level and it was subsequently dissolved in the early 2000s.

It is likely that the limited success of loyalist parties, in particular the PUP, during the mid to late 1990s can be at least partly attributable to the loyalist ceasefire of 1994, which encouraged more moderate unionists disillusioned with the UUP and the DUP to support them (Smithey, 2011, p. 59). Despite the failure of these parties to successfully penetrate the mainstream political arena, the shift in focus from paramilitarism to politics during the 1990s did, however, demonstrate a moderation of the traditionally hard line stance of loyalism. Although violent loyalist paramilitarism is today largely confined to the past, the decline of support within the loyalist community for the Good Friday Agreement during the post-1998 era culminated in events such as the aforementioned flag protests and riots of 2012-13, and is linked to the 'divided and dispirited' nature of loyalism (Gillespie, 2006, pp. 149-50). This suggests that loyalists do not share the optimism of republicans, which may be a result of – or indeed a contributing factor to – their lack of political success.

There are a number of cultural traditions and symbols that are used by the unionist community to demonstrate their Britishness and attachment to Britain. McAuley and Tonge (2010, pp. 269-70) recognise that a fundamental

characteristic of Britishness for unionists is the Protestant religion and that it is the evangelical values of this denomination of Christianity that make up a central thread in the ethnic identity of unionists in Northern Ireland. They also highlight the politicisation of Protestantism in the region, with, for example, churches influencing unionist political parties. Southern (2007, pp. 83-84) identifies other main sources of the Britishness of unionists as the union flag, the monarchy and the national anthem, as well as ceremonies commemorating those from Northern Ireland who fought in wars for Britain. This final point of identification is particularly salient and merits further discussion.

The primary example of this is the role of the Ulster Division in the Battle of the Somme during World War I (Officer and Walker, 2000, pp. 297-301). With at least five thousand men from the Division either dead or injured, this is a significant example of the willingness of people in Northern Ireland to make the ultimate sacrifice for Britain, and the event has remained on the consciousness of unionists ever since. As is the case in Britain, Armistice Day has become an important event within Northern Ireland's unionist community and has provided members with the opportunity to parade the union flag, reconvene the tradition of the British Army and demonstrate unity with Britain and its former empire. It is an example of a collective memory which has the ability to unite unionists across time and space. A further way in which unionists in Northern Ireland have been keen to highlight their Britishness is through utilising their connection with Scotland, primarily by emphasising the Ulster-Scots language and Presbyterianism in order to demonstrate this (Officer and Walker, 2000, p. 303). The examples included are evidence of the importance to unionism of a shared culture, symbols, myths and memories which ethno-symbolists argue play a crucial role in the formation of nations and ethnic communities.

The idea of Britishness, however, appears to have taken on a different meaning in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK. Officer and Walker (2000, pp. 294-95) argue that unionists struggle to convince people in Britain that they are not 'less than British' or 'semi-detached' from Britain. This problem, however, has never been resolved to the advantage of unionists, as they have often been labelled as 'not quite British' or 'unBritish' by those in Britain who fail to realise that Britishness means different things to different people and communities



(Officer and Walker, 2000, pp. 294-95). It is nevertheless true that unionists in Northern Ireland represent a particular form of Britishness which will now be explored in comparison to that usually associated with the island of Britain.

McAuley and Tonge (2010, p. 281) argue that Northern Ireland features an 'ultra' Britishness which is linked to a religious persuasion and political nationalism unrecognisable in the rest of the UK, and this explains the distinctive nature of the British identity of unionists. It must be questioned why the sense of Britishness felt by many unionists in Northern Ireland is so different to that in Britain and contributing factors for this will be now be considered. Southern (2007, pp. 73-74) identifies a first to be a result of the patriotic loyalty and strong sense of Britishness felt by unionists no longer being shared with those on the mainland due to the marginalisation of the importance of the Protestant religion and the monarchy having taken place in Britain but not in Northern Ireland. Similarly, Patterson (2012, p. 250) states that unionists have been accused by some of having a sense of Britishness which the multicultural, secular, liberal mainland has long since shed itself of. It has been suggested that this different conception of British identity may be due to the physical separation of Northern Ireland from the island of Britain and also its political separation until 1972 (Southern, 2007, p. 73). Furthermore, Officer and Walker (2000, p. 303) assert that it is this changing sense of Britishness in Britain which renders the basis of aforementioned attempts by unionists to draw similarities between themselves and the Scots to 'take little notice of the realities of contemporary Scotland'. This reinforces the argument of Weight (2002, p. 532, quoted in Southern, 2007, p. 73) that to people in Britain, unionism's sense of Britishness appears to be 'feverish and old fashioned'.

A further factor to explain why the sense of Britishness in Northern Ireland differs to that in Britain can be found in the keenness of unionists to differentiate themselves from Irish nationalists. Whilst nationalism in Britain is largely civic in form, in Northern Ireland many unionists feel the need to resort to culture and symbolism in order to demonstrate their British national identity. Despite a significant number of Protestants having identified as 'Irish' prior to the outbreak of the Troubles, Southern (2007, p. 77) considers the widespread decline in the years since to be a result of the association of this identity with a paramilitary

campaign designed to dissolve the union. Furthermore, McAuley and Tonge (2010, p. 280) assert that nationalists in Northern Ireland are still viewed by some in the unionist community as 'IRA sympathisers' and the Irish Republic is considered by these unionists to be 'a confessional and backward state'. These negative connotations explain why, since the outbreak of the Troubles, many unionists have shunned an Irish identity. Ignatieff (1993, pp. 177-78, quoted in McAuley and Tonge, 2010, p. 272) provides an example of unionists differentiating themselves from nationalists in the practice of painting kerbstones the colours of the union flag. He states that when asked why this was necessary in Northern Ireland and not in Britain, those responsible argued that the mainland British 'are not up against what we're up against' and that in Northern Ireland 'it's just us and the Taigs (Catholics)', hence the need to 'show our colours'. Participation in activities such as this is evidence of unionists conforming to cultural and ethno-symbolist accounts of nationalism in order to differentiate themselves from Irish nationalists, and their perceived need to do this goes some way to explaining why this sense of Britishness is so alien in Britain due to the mainland British not being confronted with a perceived 'other', or opposite, community and national identity.

Southern (2007) draws attention to the existence amongst unionists of an Ulster identity, which despite being linked to a sense of Britishness, possesses many unique characteristics. As is the case with Britishness in Northern Ireland, a range of cultural attributes and symbols are used in order to support this identity. Many are associated with loyalism and include, for example, the Ulster flag, flags of paramilitary organisations such as the UVF and the UDA, murals, bonfires, the Orange Order and Orange folk songs (Southern, 2007, pp. 85, 87). Others, such as painted kerbstones and murals depicting the Crown, are ultimately British symbols being utilised in a uniquely Northern Irish way (Southern, 2007, p. 86). Many cultural traditions and symbols of Ulsterness are thus used simultaneously with those of Britishness. The Orange Order is an example of an organisation which whilst being 'a potent institutional expression of Protestant culture and Ulster particularism', links the defence of the Faith with Britishness and the continuation of the union, and, as such, the Order parades the union flag alongside the Ulster Banner (Southern, 2007, p. 85; McAuley and Tonge, 2007, quoted in 2010, p. 270).

Bryan and Stevenson (2009, p. 71. See also Bryan, 2000) highlight the predominantly Protestant tradition of parading, which has become a potent symbol of the unionist community in Northern Ireland, with many parades orchestrated by the Orange Order and other fraternal organisations such as the Black Institution and the Apprentice Boys of Derry. The marching season culminates in the Twelfth of July celebrations, commemorating the Battle of the Boyne of 1690, in which Catholic King James was defeated by Protestant King William, and this date has assumed a deep symbolic significance within unionism (Bryan and Stevenson, 2009, p. 68). There is a traditional proliferation of the display of British, Ulster, unionist and loyalist flags and emblems during the summer months to coincide with this (Bryan et al, 2010, p. 7). The Twelfth commemorations are an example of a psychocultural narrative of a historical event being utilised by unionists to control the symbolic landscape, even if only in the temporary form of marches during July. McGarry and O'Leary (1995, p. 226) cite the British and loyalist flags and emblems displayed by supporters of the Northern Ireland association football team as a further example of the utilisation of a combination of both Ulster and British symbolism by Protestants, who make up a disproportionate number of the team's followers, in part due to Northern Ireland home matches being played at Windsor Park, the stadium of traditionally Protestant Linfield FC, although the club has had Catholic players.

Southern (2007, pp. 85-86) argues that rather than being contradictory, the co-presence of British and Ulster symbolism demonstrates the duality of cultural bonds amongst unionists in Northern Ireland. He suggests that this duality is a feature of the rest of the UK, with the existence of English, Scottish and Welsh identities, and regional dimensions of Britishness. Hill and White (2012, p. 73. See also Jarman, 1997, p. 215) draw attention to a revival of distinctly Ulster symbolism, particularly on murals, during the mid-1980s by the loyalist community in response to what they perceived to be a weakening of the British government's jurisdiction over Northern Ireland. Whilst this example supports Todd's aforementioned argument that it is loyalists, rather than unionists, who are most likely to identify with Ulsterness, this position is too simplistic as it is not only loyalists within the Protestant community who support, for example, Orange Order parades and the flying of the Ulster flag. Likewise, as

aforementioned, loyalist identification is not restricted to the culture and symbolism of Ulster, as that of Britain is also utilised. As such, Southern (2007, pp. 85-86) argues that a sense of Ulsterness alone does not define unionist identity as Britishness is also important, and as such many attach greater sentiment to British culture and symbols than to those of Ulster. Furthermore, he suggests that some unionists consider the use of Ulster symbolism alongside British to encourage division and to be an 'abomination' due to their belief in the predominance and cultural superiority of the latter, indicating a greater association with Britishness amongst these unionists. Ultimately, however, the British and Ulster cultures in Northern Ireland are not mutually exclusive, and both have played a crucial role in the formation, and maintenance, of unionist identity.

#### *Catholicism/Nationalism/Republicanism*

In seemingly direct contrast to unionists, the vast majority – 66 per cent (NILT, 2009) – of Northern Catholics identify as Irish and consider a united Ireland to be the 'natural political unit' of the island, whilst regarding the entity of Northern Ireland to be unsatisfactory and, to many, illegitimate (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 2). Catholics make up 45 per cent of the population (Devenport, 2012). It is, nevertheless, necessary to note that not all Catholics in Northern Ireland support a united Ireland. Whilst this is their traditional and historical position, recent opinion polls suggest that approximately half of the Catholic population would opt for Northern Ireland to remain in the UK in a referendum on its constitutional future (Devenport, 2013). This, however, does not demonstrate a softening of nationalist sentiment. Rather, it is likely a result of many considering the institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement to adequately represent and provide for them. As will be demonstrated, there is an ideological distinction between nationalist and republican ideology in Northern Ireland, which has its roots in the Irish Civil War. On the basis of Hobsbawm's (1990, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 121) aforementioned definitions, Irish nationalists subscribe to a civic form of nationalism, whilst republicanism is traditionally associated with ethnic nationalism. Mainstream republicanism is today, however, usually considered to be largely civic in character (see, for example, McLaughlin, 2002).

Todd (2002, p. 73) refers to the existence of a 'classic nationalism' amongst Northern nationalists after the establishment of Northern Ireland, which was characterised as being the nationalist ideology of the era prior to partition, and focused on an Irish nation of the entire island, and the sovereign statehood and right to self-determination of this nation. Northern nationalists thus consider the partition of the island to be unnatural and their primary aim, at least as a long term aspiration, is the reunification of Ireland independent of Britain (Todd, 2002, pp. 71, 73). From the outset of the establishment of Northern Ireland, nationalists refused to recognise its legitimacy. They boycotted its parliament upon its inauguration in June 1921, as well as every other state institution, and this refusal to participate undoubtedly contributed to the discrimination they were to be subjected to throughout the next fifty years, not least because it absolved Protestants of blame for developing Northern Ireland with a unionist bias, as nationalists had passed on the opportunity to influence this (Elliott, 2000, p. 383). They were, however, prepared to stand for election to the Northern Ireland Parliament and took their seats after 1925, leading to the establishment of the Nationalist Party in the North, which had ten MPs by 1927 (Elliott, 2000, p. 396).

The discrimination faced by nationalists took the form of unjust housing and employment allocation, and intimidation and cultural humiliation, and it is the prioritisation of principles of justice that distinguished Southern from Northern nationalism during the era of the unionist-dominated parliament (Todd, 2002, pp. 73-74). Initially, there was a greater desire to remedy this discrimination than to bring about a united Ireland (Todd, 2002, p. 74). Ruane and Todd (1998, p. 61) claim that the establishment of a welfare state after World War II and O'Neillism of the 1960s, during which the prime minister reconciled with nationalists by, for example, visiting a Catholic school and inviting two *taoisigh* to Stormont (Elliott, 2000, p. 409), resulted in a less intense form of nationalism in the North, with less of a focus on nationhood. Despite the Nationalist Party having fallen out of favour with the community during this period due to its frequent abstinence at Stormont and the 'sulking and whinging' of its MPs (Elliott, 2000, p. 397), the party responded to O'Neillism by accepting the role of official opposition in the Northern Ireland Parliament. This diminishment of

nationalist intensity in Northern Ireland was, however, short lived (Ruane and Todd, 1998, p. 61).

Todd (2002, p. 74) argues that the civil rights movement of the late 1960s resulted in a 'major ideological crisis' within Northern nationalism, presenting it with a choice between justice or nationalism. The community opted for the former, as opposed to unity, and in doing so led a movement which played a highly significant role in bringing down the Stormont regime. She argues, however, that events such as Bloody Sunday, when British soldiers shot dead fourteen unarmed Catholic civilians in Derry (see, for example, Elliott, 2000, p. 421), had the effect of reinvigorating a desire for Irish unity amongst the community. August 1970 saw the formation of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), which was nationalist, reformist and committed to a united Ireland as its long term, chief aim (Bew and Gillespie, 1993, p. 30). This, the party believed, should be achieved by consent, and unlike the Nationalist Party, its MPs were full-time politicians in the Northern Ireland Parliament prior to its dissolution in 1972 (Elliott, 2000, p. 423). It was a founding member, and later leader, of this party, John Hume, who provided the answers to nationalism's most pressing questions: 'Cooperation with or antagonism towards unionists and the British?', and 'A strong nationalism (which would provoke unionists and bring no immediate gains) or a moderate reformism (which was likely to be equally ineffective)?' (Todd, 2002, pp. 74-75).

Todd (2002, p. 75) states that Hume's response was to Europeanise and internationalise the problem by switching the arena from Northern Ireland and the UK to the EU, the island of Ireland and the United States, whilst formulating legitimacy principles which required nationalism and reform, as opposed to simply one or the other. Hume focused on an Irish national identity for Northern nationalists with a strong Irish dimension and role for the Republic in Northern Ireland, and a right to self-determination for the island. This not only shaped the ideology of the SDLP, but also came to make up significant principles of Northern nationalism, which later became key components of the Good Friday Agreement. Maginness (2002, p. 33) argues that Hume's approach also had implications for nationalism in the Irish Republic, changing constitutional

nationalist positions and thinking both amongst the population as a whole, and, more specifically, within political parties.

Todd (2002, pp. 77-79) further explores this new orientation of nationalism in Northern Ireland in order to determine how it can be categorised. She argues that it is not classic nationalism as it does not assume that the state and nation should coincide, and national self-determination is instead based on agreement. Neither is it pluralism, as this takes place within state boundaries and does not prioritise ethno-national groups. Todd (2002, pp. 78-79) instead suggests that it is possible that this new orientation of Northern nationalism is a combination of liberal nationalism, regionalism and republicanism as it includes characteristics of all three. Firstly, she argues that it supports the institutionalisation of national culture and the prioritisation of national rights required for nationalist consent and state legitimacy, whilst recognising the equality of other nations, which are inherent principles of liberal nationalism. Many within the SDLP subscribe to this and advocate the gradual weakening of the British state in Northern Ireland to ease its eventual transition to a united Ireland, should a majority support this. Secondly, she asserts that the new nationalism can be viewed as regionalism in that it emphasises multiple links, such as North-South bodies, and autonomy of the region, whilst lessening the focus on state sovereignty, which fits with Hume's aforementioned account of the Europeanisation and internationalisation of Northern nationalism.

Finally, Todd (2002, p. 78) identifies that the new nationalism includes elements of republicanism, with a principle of self-determination which must be satisfied by referendums in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, which was important to Hume. Maginness (2002, pp. 35-36), unsurprisingly as a senior member of the SDLP, is keen to highlight the 'outstanding achievement' of the party in ensuring that the fundamental principles of Hume's philosophy were included in the Good Friday Agreement. In many respects he is right to refer to it in these terms – after all, the Agreement was supported by a significant majority of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, demonstrating the resonance of Hume's ideology (Wilford, 1999, p. 300). The electoral fortunes of the party in the period since 1998 have, however, declined, with Sinn Fein superseding it as the Catholic community's largest party (see, for example, Mitchell et al, 2002).

The evolution of Irish nationalism in Northern Ireland from partition to the peace process and beyond has been traced in order to analyse the changing nature of the ideology and the impact that this has had on nationalist politics.

Irish republicanism is an important ideology for many Catholics in Northern Ireland. McLaughlin (2002, p. 41) identifies three core principles. First is a commitment to full democracy and the sovereignty of the people. Second is a rejection of sectarianism and a commitment to the unity of people of all religions. The third and final principle is a commitment to Irish unity and the establishment of a thirty two county sovereign Irish Republic with national self-determination. McLaughlin (2002, p. 41) broadens the definition of 'Irish republicans' from what he considers to be a term usually used to describe Sinn Fein's members and supporters, to one which includes all those who are committed to the 'complete freedom of the people of Ireland'. Based on this definition, there are clearly many parallels to be drawn with republicanism and Irish nationalism. However, as aforementioned, divisions between the two have a long tradition on the island, with opposing positions regarding the form of home rule an example of their ideological differences. Also, whereas nationalists are committed to achieving their objectives by peaceful means, this has not always been the case for republicans. Arthur (2002, p. 88. See also Tamir, 1995, p. 430) argues that for many years the outlook of republicanism was ethnocentric and as such it considered its nationalism to be superior to that of others, and was unwilling to recognise the 'other' and engage in dialogue with them, as this was 'drowned out' by 'the sound of the bomb and the bullet'.

Politically, MacGinty (2006, p. 133) argues that 'conventional wisdom' during the height of the conflict was that the SDLP attracted nationalist voters opposed to violence, whereas republicans voted for Sinn Fein and accepted the legitimacy of violence as a political strategy. Although he emphasises the dogmatism of this analysis, traditionally there has been a degree of truth to it, demonstrated by the significant increase in Sinn Fein's share of the vote after its decision to pursue its objectives by wholly peaceful means, which is at least in part due to the nationalist electorate considering Sinn Fein's eschewal of violence to legitimise the party (see, for example, Mitchell et al, 2002, p. 32). As the SDLP is traditionally nationalist and Sinn Fein traditionally republican, there



is a significant ethno-nationalist ideological distinction between the two largest parties representing the nationalist bloc, which is largely absent in the unionist rivalry between the DUP and UUP, as they are closer on the basis of their ethno-national positions (Tilley et al, 2008).

Republican paramilitary organisations, which were numerous and came to prominence around the outbreak of the conflict, were major perpetrators of violence. The most significant of these were the several groups styling themselves as the 'IRA'. The post-partition IRA fell out of favour amongst Northern nationalists during the 1950s and early to mid-1960s (see, for example, Elliott, 2000, pp. 402-06). The response to the outbreak of disorder from the Northern Irish authorities, however, particularly the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), revitalised support for the IRA, which was fuelled by injustices such as internment without trial (Elliott, 2000, pp. 420-21). In 1969 the IRA split, resulting in the formation of the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA (PIRA), with the latter disagreeing with, for example, what they considered to be the organisation's failure to adequately protect Catholics in Northern Ireland during August 1969 (Smith, 1997, pp. 86-87). Whilst the former was dissolved shortly after, the PIRA were arguably the most prominent republican paramilitary organisation throughout the conflict and led a campaign which included numerous bombings in Britain, such as that of the Grand Hotel in Brighton in 1984 (Smith, 1997, p. 177), designed to bring about a united Ireland and disrupt the peace process. Another important republican group was the Irish National Liberation Army, which notably assassinated Airey Neave, the Conservative spokesman on Northern Ireland, in March 1979 (Smith, 1997, p. 90).

The hunger strikes of 1980-81 against the conditions of political prisoners in Northern Ireland were hugely significant in demonstrating the political appeal of republicanism amongst Catholics, with prisoner and hunger striker Bobby Sands elected as MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone at a by-election in 1981 (Arthur, 2002, p. 91; McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 143). Despite being founded in 1905 (Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 152) and having gone through various incarnations before a split established the party as the political wing of the PIRA in 1970, Sinn Fein did not rise to prominence until the public outcry in

response to the Enniskillen bombing of 1987 challenged the principles of the PIRA (Arthur, 2002, p. 92). This led to the Sinn Fein-SDLP dialogue of 1988, which resulted in the party's ideological move towards peace and its subsequent inclusion in the negotiations culminating in the Good Friday Agreement (see, for example, Arthur, 2002, p. 92; McGarry and O'Leary, 2009, p. 23).

The transition of republicanism from paramilitary violence to politics was vital in achieving the PIRA ceasefire of 1994, renewed in 1997, and its full decommissioning of weapons, confirmed in 2005 (Smith, 1997, p. 212; de Breadun, 2008, pp. 58, 367-69). The INLA also announced a cessation of activities shortly after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, and today the comparatively small Real IRA and Continuity IRA are the only remaining republican paramilitary organisations (de Breadun, 2008, p. 171. See also MacGinty, 2006, p. 131). Despite these groups being responsible for attacks such as the Omagh bombing in 1998 and the Massereene Barracks shooting in 2009 (see, for example, de Breadun, 2008, pp. 168-69; Matthews, 2012, p. 343), the majority of republicans remain committed to achieving their objectives by peaceful, political means. Sinn Fein is today the second largest political party in Northern Ireland, having superseded its SDLP rivals in the early 2000s, and is a growing political force in the Irish Republic (see Mitchell et al, 2002). As such, MacGinty (2006, p. 129) asserts that republicanism is no longer defined by the 'zero-sum strategy of a united Ireland or nothing' as it was at the height of the conflict, but rather by its 'more complex issue agenda' and engagement in 'a new landscape of political environments and institutions'. The moderation of republicans has been met with unionist willingness to share power with them, as demonstrated by the DUP-Sinn Fein pact of 2007, with Martin McGuinness, previously a senior PIRA member, now serving as deputy First Minister (see, for example, Guelke, 2009; Bryan and Stevenson, 2009, p. 81).

The culture and symbolism which scholars such as Hutchinson, Smith and Githens-Mazer consider to be so influential to nationalism and nation building will now be explored in relation to Northern nationalism and republicanism. It is firstly important to note that many characteristics are shared with the Irish Republic (and indeed the wider Irish diaspora), and are therefore best

presented as a sense of Irishness. Additionally, however, there are aspects of these ideologies which are unique to nationalists and republicans in Northern Ireland. This duality is not dissimilar to that of unionism, which, as aforementioned, includes a sense of Britishness with links and similarities to Britain, and Ulsterness, which is uniquely Northern Irish. Just as unionists and loyalists consider Ulster to be their historic homeland, many nationalists and republicans both North and South believe that the island of Ireland is their ancestral home – their *insula sacra* (Smith, 2003, pp. 151-54). This derives from the island's pagan Celtic, and later monastic, culture, St Patrick, its beauty, and Irish art such as the Book of Kells (see also Sheehy, 1980).

Smith (2003, pp. 152-54) suggests that it was the pervasive and enduring nature of these characteristics, and of Ireland's Gaelic culture and language, which helped facilitate the revival of Gaelic society towards the late mediaeval period, and during subsequent aforementioned stages of cultural nationalism, culminating in the home rule movement. Smith (2003, p. 154) also argues that opposition to the Protestantism of British settlers on the island after the Reformation served to unite the native Irish and reinforce the perception of what they consider to be their territory as *insula sacra*. There is clear evidence of this cultural nationalist position being utilised by Northern nationalists and republicans today to depict the island of Ireland as a sacred place with a unique Gaelic culture. Examples include the use of the Irish Language on murals – for example, those demanding that the British Army *Fag ar sraideanna* (leave our streets) – and the depiction of culture such as Gaelic games. This use of symbolism indicates a sense of attachment amongst nationalists and republicans in Northern Ireland to the island of Ireland as their ancestral homeland, complete with a unique culture reaching back to the early first millennium (Smith, 2003, p. 154). This supports the enduring legacy of the island as *insula sacra*.

A fundamental defining characteristic of Irishness is religion and, more specifically, Roman Catholicism. Religious devotion in both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland is much higher than the European average, with a 1989 survey indicating that eighty six per cent of Roman Catholics in the latter attend church at least once a week, whilst the former has the highest level of church

attendance of all western polities (Rose, 1971, pp. 248, 264, 427, quoted in McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, pp. 173-74). The at least once weekly attendance of Catholics in Northern Ireland is significantly higher than that of Protestants, despite the latter's thirty nine per cent being higher than, for example, Britain's twenty one per cent at least once *monthly* attendance. Smith (2003, p. 152) argues that religious identity is a crucial component fuelling belief amongst the native Irish that their island is *insula sacra*. He claims that events such as St Patrick's mission in the fifth century were instrumental in the establishment of a distinct Christian Ireland, assuming a Catholic (and later Roman Catholic) character, resulting in the growth of a Gaelic-Catholic identity during the late mediaeval period.

The linkage between religion, culture and nationalism in Ireland has recurred throughout human history. Githens-Mazer (2006, p. 95. See also Smith, 2003, p. 18) argues that the political nationalism espoused by figures such as O'Connell and Parnell during the nineteenth century cannot be considered to be secular, as is common with many political ideologies, as their objectives 'transcended the political quest for human autoemancipation' due to the 'depth and dynamism' of the linkage between religion and the Irish nation during this era. The Famine played a pivotal role in the growth of myths, memories and symbols amongst the Catholic Irish, distinguishing their community from that of the 'non-Irish', non-Catholic Protestants, with widespread belief that the former were suffering at the hands of the latter and the British, which contributed to the rise of religious nationalism in Ireland at this time (Miller, 1973, p. 18, quoted in Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 97. See also Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 99). Collective memories of the Famine continue to provide a psychocultural narrative for nationalists that portrays them as vulnerable to the will of unionists.

White (2007, pp. 48-51) also links religion with Irish nationalism, and, similarly to Githens-Mazer, argues that religious and national identity effectively merged in the nineteenth century against British imperialism on the island. He speaks of the need at the time for the Irish people to be united by a common bond and asserts that Catholicism 'served this function perfectly' as it unified them in their devotion to the same faith. The unification of Catholics around their faith in opposition to the British – or indeed what they perceived to be the 'other' – has

been evident in Northern Ireland in, for example, the civil rights movement of the late 1960s against the discrimination of nationalists by unionists and the British state (O'Duffy, 2007, pp. 64-65). Although a degree of secularisation has taken place in the Republic throughout the mid to late twentieth and early twenty first centuries (see, for example, White, 2007; Foster, 2008), the impact and effects of the link between Catholicism and Irish nationalism is still evident today – an example being the role of Catholicism in the perception amongst the Irish of their cultural homogeneity (White, 2007, p. 50). It is therefore this religion that the majority of nationalists, both North and South, feel a dedication to as a defining characteristic of their cultural nationalism.

Language is a further area of identification for nationalists. Although the Irish language enjoyed a revival amongst the native Irish population during the home rule movement, with organisations such as the Gaelic League playing a crucial role, after partition there was limited promotion of the language in Northern Ireland, despite it being taught in Catholic schools (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, p. 221. See also, for example, MacDonagh, 1992, pp. 104-25; Brown, 1985, pp. 45-78). With English the first language of Northern nationalists, McGarry and O'Leary (1995, pp. 221-22) assert that Irish was treated with contempt by unionists who, prior to the implementation of direct rule in 1972, obstructed any potential of a Gaelic revival in Catholic schools and discouraged or prohibited the use of Irish names and street names. They argue that unionist disdain of the Irish language is due to their fear that Gaelicisation would be public policy in a united Ireland. However, McGarry and O'Leary (1995, p. 222) argue that this concern would be unlikely to materialise due to the bilingual status of the Republic of Ireland and, furthermore, suggest that the Irish language has more of a symbolic than practical relevance to the Irishness of Northern nationalists and republicans, with, for example, Sinn Fein's enthusiasm of Irish being at least partly as it is 'a badge of difference'. Language remains a bone of contention to this day, with SDLP and Sinn Fein proposals to give official recognition to Irish in Northern Ireland struggling to find support within unionism (Belfast Telegraph, 2011), and the issue epitomising the symbolic clash between British and Irish nationalisms (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, p. 223). This is an example of a psychocultural drama, in which the importance that one

group places on a particular characteristic – in this case language – is disputed by the other.

A further demonstration of a unique Irish culture is to be found in sport. McGarry and O'Leary (1995, p. 224) draw attention to the popularity of the GAA in the Irish Republic and amongst nationalists in Northern Ireland, and its role in the promotion of Gaelic games – for example, hurling (or camogie for females), handball and Gaelic football. They argue that the GAA is 'constitutionally committed to strengthening Irish national identity', and historically refused membership to members of the British security services, boycotted British sporting events and banned members from taking part in 'foreign games', all of which have since been revoked (McDonald, 2001). The traditional aim of the Association was the promotion of Irish culture in opposition to that of the British and Anglo-Irish Protestants, and it is claimed by McGarry and O'Leary (1995, p. 224) that the GAA is 'the most successful cultural nationalist organisation in Ireland', with its games taught in Catholic schools in Northern Ireland. Association football support also serves as an important area of identification on the island, with international teams divided between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, pp. 225-26). Whilst Northern Protestants overwhelming support Northern Ireland as their first preference, 91 per cent of Northern Catholics opt for the Irish Republic, according to a survey conducted in the early 1990s (Sugden and Bairner, 2003, p. 79, quoted in McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, p. 226). The examples of the importance of the GAA to Northern nationalists and their widespread support for the Republic of Ireland association football team serve to illustrate the cultural significance of sport to this community in Northern Ireland.

Until now sources of ethno-symbolism associated with a general sense of Irishness, applicable to both Northern and Southern nationalists, have been discussed. There are, however, a number of characteristics unique to Northern Ireland. Although the Irish tricolour flag, with green representing Catholics, orange Protestants and white harmony between the two, is the national flag of the Irish Republic, it is used in unique ways by Northern nationalists and republicans. An example is the painting of kerbstones with these colours in primarily working class, majority Catholic areas of Northern Ireland (Githens-

Mazer, 2005, p. 9). Other examples include the use of the colours of the tricolour, the shamrock, the Starry Plough and various Celtic symbols on murals in these areas (Githens-Mazer, 2005, p. 9). This enables nationalists and republicans to demonstrate control over the symbolic landscape in areas such as west Belfast.

However, the employment of symbols on murals such as illustrations of Bobby Sands and other hunger strikers from the 1980s, in addition to those associated with paramilitary organisations (Bryan et al, 2010, p. 26), indicates the existence of a Northern nationalist and, in particular, republican identity, which despite being inextricably linked to the culture of the Republic, utilises characteristics which are unique to Northern Ireland. These are examples of collective memories of key events with the ability to connect people over time and space being utilised to demarcate the symbolic landscape. Davies (2001, p. 158, quoted in Hill and White, 2012, p. 81) argues that murals serve as a means for the Catholic community to contest the control of the state over the visual environment. This is evidence of the distinctiveness of nationalists and republicans in the region and differentiates them from their Southern counterparts, which is likely to be beneficial in reassuring unionists of the potential for the preservation of Northern Ireland's confederal institutions should the unification of the island of Ireland occur (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009, pp. 83-84).

### *Northern Irish / 'Other'*

It is worth briefly mentioning that whilst unionism and nationalism constitute the two main national identities in Northern Ireland, there is the existence of a Northern Irish identity, which it is claimed up to 30 per cent of the population subscribe to (Nagle and Clancy, 2012, p. 88; NILT, 2009). It is based on the idea that both unionists and nationalists have 'shared values rooted in a common regional culture', which has the potential to establish a shared political culture (Finlay, 2006, p. 6, quoted in Nagle and Clancy, 2012, p. 88). There is some limited evidence of younger Protestant and non-religious members of society identifying as Northern Irish, as opposed to either British or Irish (Tonge and Gomez, 2015, p. 294). Politically, a shared Northern Irish identity is a concept often associated with the non-sectarian, cross-community Alliance

Party (Nagle and Clancy, 2012, p. 88). Alliance was formed in 1970 and seeks to highlight the financial cost of community divisions, for example through the duplication of services, and the inadequacies of Northern Ireland's consociational institutions, such as the Assembly favouring the votes of those designated as 'unionist' or 'nationalist' for legislation requiring cross-community support (Farry, 2009).

Electoral support for Alliance is, however, limited and, at 7.7 per cent of first preference votes at the 2011 Assembly election, falls significantly below the percentage of the population claiming their identity to be Northern Irish (Whyte, 2011). Nagle and Clancy (2012, p. 89) offer an explanation for this discrepancy in arguing that whilst there is undoubtedly some support for a Northern Irish identity, it is likely that the term means something different to a person of a unionist background than to one of a nationalist background. For nationalists, it may refer to a regional identity on the island of Ireland, whilst unionists may consider 'Northern Irishness' to be a regional identity within the UK. This is likely to explain the aforementioned evidence of younger members of the non-religious and Protestant communities identifying as Northern Irish, as they consider Northern Ireland's constitutional status within the UK to have been settled by the Good Friday Agreement (Tonge and Gomez, 2015, p. 294). Although a Northern Irish identity does indeed exist, it is currently showing few signs of significantly impacting upon the salience of unionism and nationalism (Tonge and Gomez, 2015, p. 294).

MacGinty (2001) argues that a consociational system that legitimises both unionism and nationalism struggles to establish shared symbols which resonate with both communities due to their continued existence and recognition. He makes two general observations to underpin this argument. Firstly, in the relatively few areas where new 'neutral' or 'inclusive' symbols have been developed, these have little history due to the long presence of two communities with their own sets of symbolism, and they therefore often find little inter-bloc empathy as a result of their non-organic nature (MacGinty, 2001, pp. 17-18). In support of this, it is very difficult to imagine, for example, an image of a flax plant – the symbol of the Northern Ireland Assembly – eliciting the same



empathy from unionists as the union flag or the affinity that many nationalists have with the Irish tricolour.

Secondly, and because of this and the continued existence of two distinct ethno-national blocs, it is symbols that are traditionally associated with the unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland that remain capable of mobilising people (MacGinty, 2001, p. 18). This is undoubtedly a contributing factor to explain the limited support garnered by the Alliance Party and also at least partly explains the continued utilisation of ethno-symbolist characteristics in election campaigns by the four major parties in the region. MacGinty's position on this issue is broadly in line with ethno-symbolist approaches, which posit, briefly, that nations and nationalisms emerge organically from an ethnic community with a unique history and culture, and reach back to pre-modern myths and memories in order to complete this transition (see, for example, Hutchinson, 1987; Smith, 1998; Githens-Mazer, 2006). As a common Northern Irish identity and the symbols associated with it are not rooted in a historical context, they are thus unlikely to find much resonance amongst the region's population.

## **Summary**

Whilst the characteristics of nationalisms often date back centuries or even millennia, it has been demonstrated that their significance remains to the present day, despite the meanings of cultural identity being malleable over time. This is often particularly acute in plural, or divided, societies in which nationalities can be considered to be distinctive and largely opposing, and where what a member of a certain nationality is not can be just as important as what they are. This chapter has explained the continued importance of nationalisms by applying an ethno-symbolic approach. It has then turned to the case study of Northern Ireland, providing a historical overview of divisions between unionism and nationalism firstly on the island of Ireland and later in post-partition Northern Ireland. Finally, the role of nationalisms in shaping politics and society in Northern Ireland has been demonstrated through an analysis of unionism and nationalism, with particular emphasis placed on the significance of ethno-symbolism to the two identities. This chapter ultimately

serves as a historical and theoretical framework for the thesis, which will be utilised throughout in order to explain the continued importance of unionist and nationalist identities in Northern Ireland.

## **Chapter Two – Politics in plural societies**

The way in which plural societies should be governed is a much contested field of political and social research. The purpose of this chapter is to explore existing literature around this debate in a way that allows for subsequent chapters to build on this by addressing the important issue of electoral politics in societies comprised of multiple groups. It begins by defining plural societies and analyses when they can be considered to be divided, before turning attention to conflict management, exploring the two major, largely opposing, debates of consociationalism and centripetalism. The focus then shifts to the need for conflict management in Northern Ireland and how this was achieved in the form of the consociational Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The provisions of the Agreement are analysed, along with debates around the most effective means of conflict management in Northern Ireland and subsequent developments. Finally, a summary is drawn with the intention of bringing together the positions expressed in the literature to enable important observations and arguments to be formulated.

### **Defining plural societies**

Lijphart cites Eckstein (1966, p. 34, quoted in Lijphart, 1977, pp. 3-4) to define a plural society in asserting that a particular society is plural if it is divided by segmental cleavages, which, amongst other characteristics, may be ethnic, racial, linguistic, cultural, religious, regional or ideological in nature. Furthermore, Eckstein suggests that segmental cleavages exist 'where political divisions follow very closely, and especially concern lines of objective social differentiation, especially those particularly salient in a society'. In order for societies to be considered plural they must of course feature a minimum of two segmental cleavages, or communities, but may be comprised of many more (Lijphart, 1977, pp. 3-5). Associated with some plural societies is the concept of a deeply divided society. Nordlinger (1972, p. 9, quoted in Guelke, 2012, p. 30) claims that a plural society can be considered to be deeply divided when 'a large number of conflict group members attach overwhelming importance to the issues at stake, or manifest strongly held antagonistic beliefs and emotions

towards the opposing segment, or both'. It is clear from these definitions that there is a distinction between plural and divided societies in that the latter is characterised by the presence of conflict, which may be violent or non-violent. When Nordlinger writes of the 'issues at stake', it is assumed that he is referring to the aforementioned segmental cleavage characteristics identified by Eckstein and interpreted by Lijphart in defining a divided society. It is, therefore, worth exploring the most salient of these in greater depth.

Guelke (2012, ch. 2) identifies and explores several key characteristics of plural societies, which often contribute to them being considered divided. It is important to note that those included are not exhaustive, and many cases are defined by more than one of these characteristics. Firstly, religion is a major source of division (Guelke, 2012, pp. 16-18). As with all segmental cleavages of plural societies, religious communities may be geographically concentrated within a particular area of a society or may be dispersed across it. Guelke (2012, p. 16), however, argues that conflict in religiously divided societies tends to occur in regions in which one religion predominates. He cites Nigeria as an example of a society divided by both religion and geography, with violence emanating from the existence of a Muslim dominated north and majority Christian south. Examples of religiously divided societies in which communities are much less clearly distributed include Lebanon and Northern Ireland, although in the case of the latter religion is ultimately an indicator of national or ethnic difference, rather than a source of division in its own right.

The example of Northern Ireland follows to a further potential characteristic of how a plural society may be divided: ethno-nationally. Whilst ethnicity and nationality can be considered to be two different characteristics, they will be explored in tandem due to their often inextricable connection with one another (Guelke, 2012, p. 20). Hutchinson and Smith (1996, p. 7, quoted in Guelke, 2012, pp. 20-21) identify several characteristics of an ethnic community, including a common name, ancestry and culture, and shared historical memories, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity. Race, as well as being a significant potential source of division in societies, is often (sometimes incorrectly) conflated with ethnicity (Guelke, 2012, p. 19). It is clear from this that ethnicity shares many commonalities with nationality. In emphasising the

significance of nationality as a major dividing characteristic in some plural societies, McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 26) have developed the concept of a 'pluri-national' society. They argue that in these cases national identity is durable and is politically salient, with major political parties and civic associations being nationalist in character. Northern Ireland can be considered to be divided along ethno-national lines, as it is comprised of (mostly British) unionists and (mostly Irish) nationalists, with the traditional position of the former being that the region should remain part of the UK and the latter favouring the political reunification of the island of Ireland. As the case of Northern Ireland is the centre piece of this research, great emphasis will be placed on ethno-nationalism as a source of conflict in divided societies.

Language is the final characteristic of plural societies to be explored, although there are many others, including class, ideology and regionalism. Guelke (2012, pp. 18-19) notes that as is the case with many of the aforementioned characteristics, language may in some case be a marker of division, which has given rise to the concept of an 'ethno-linguistic' society. This may be more acute in some plural societies than in others. For example, Belgium's linguistic divisions are largely geographical, with the state split between Flemish speakers in the northern region of Flanders, French speakers in the southern region of Wallonia and bilingual Brussels (Pilet, 2005, p. 399). In this case, language is clearly a key source of division. In Northern Ireland, however, language is much more a characteristic of ethno-nationality, as despite nationalists identifying with the Irish language and unionists with Ulster-Scots, English is the principal language of both communities (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, p. 207). As has been demonstrated, the characteristics of plural societies can often become sources of division and conflict, which may be violent, as in the cases of Nigeria, Lebanon and Northern Ireland, or non-violent, as in Belgium. Attention will now turn to ways in which this conflict can be managed.

### **Defining conflict management**

Yakinthou and Wolff (2012, p. 1) define conflict management as 'a process that aims at channelling the violent manifestation of an incompatibility of goals between two or more parties into a political process where their disputes can be

addressed by non-violent means'. Whilst recognising that conflict management may eventually lead to conflict resolution, for example when the dispute becomes less politically salient, they argue that the main objective 'is to find and sustain an institutional arrangement in which conflict parties have greater incentives to abide by political rules of dealing with their dispute than to use, or revert to, violence in pursuit of their incompatible objectives'. McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 16-18) identify two options for conflict management in plural societies. The first is integration, the proponents of which consider identities to be malleable and transformable, and oppose political mobilisation around ethnic, national, cultural or religious divisions. It is often preferred by majority communities within states but also by small minority groups, such as immigrants.

A second option is accommodation. Accommodationists often view identities as fixed and inflexible, and strive to encompass 'dual or multiple public identities in many-roomed political mansions'. In deeply divided societies, McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 17-18, 83) consider an integrationist approach to be unsuitable as a means of conflict management, as accommodation and the clearly designated representation that it offers is usually the preferred choice of minorities. Similarly, Lijphart (1977, quoted in Taylor, 2009a, p. 4) argues that accommodation offers 'a far more realistic democratic option for deeply divided societies' than integration or majoritarian rule. Two major arms of the accommodation approach are consociational and centripetal power sharing, which are usually considered to be opposing methods. Given their salience as a potential means of conflict management in divided societies, the two will be explored and compared.

### *Consociationalism*

McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 16-17) define consociationalism as an accommodative arrangement for power sharing which includes all significant groups in legislative and executive institutions, and one which promotes proportionality within public administration, with a preference for proportional electoral systems. It is an elite-orientated, 'top down' model (Dixon, 1997, p. 1). The origins of consociationalism are to be found primarily in the work of Lijphart (see 1969; 1977). Although a system for managing divided societies based on

this theory had been in place in the Netherlands since 1917 (Lijphart, 1968) – and a number of other states thereafter – he is largely credited with having formulated its characteristics into an approach for fragmented, but stable, states (Lijphart, 1969). Lijphart (1969) refers to this theory as ‘consociational democracy’ and first applied it to cases such as Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands. Lorwin (see 1971) also applies the concept of consociationalism to states featuring ‘segmented pluralism’, and, similarly to Lijphart at the time, focuses exclusively on democratic states and nations, therefore neglecting deeply divided societies (Lorwin, 1971, p. 144).

Lijphart (1977, pp. 25-44) identifies four defining characteristics of consociational democracy. Firstly, ‘government by a grand coalition’, which includes the political elites of all significant segments within a society, is necessary to ensure inclusiveness and representation, and is argued to be the most important element of consociationalism. Secondly, a ‘mutual veto’ is required in order to provide political protection for minority segments and facilitate their continued participation in a grand coalition. Thirdly, ‘proportionality’, in which segments are represented in government and society based upon their population size, is necessary. Whilst opinion differs over which electoral system is most conducive to consociational societies, such as party list PR or PR-STV (Mitchell, 2014), most consociationalists agree that some form of proportional representation is needed (Wolff, 2012, pp. 24-25). Finally, ‘segmental autonomy’ is needed to allow segments to exercise decision making power over areas concerning only their members.

Lijphart (1969, pp. 217-19) identifies three factors that are conducive to the successful implementation and operation of consociationalism. Firstly, the existence of an external threat is necessary in order to encourage cooperation between elites from different segments. Secondly, a multiple balance of power is needed, as this reduces the probability that a particular segment will aim to dominate, as is likely in societies with two evenly matched segments or in those in which one segment has a majority. Finally, it is argued that it is important that the decision making apparatus is not overloaded, as burdens on this may hinder the successful maintenance of consociational power sharing. Over time,

however, these favourable factors for the establishment of consociational settlements have been amended, with some removed and others included.

By the mid 1980s, Lijphart (1985, pp. 119-28, quoted in Bogaards, 1998, p. 478) had amended his aforementioned second factor from the requirement of a multiple balance of power to the need for there to be no majority segments and for groups to be of a similar size. He removed the necessity for the decision making apparatus to not be overloaded but the requirement of an external threat remained. Lijphart (1985, pp. 119-28, quoted in Bogaards, 1998, p. 478) additionally added several other factors that he considered necessary for consociationalism to be sustained. These included a geographical concentration of segments, a small population size, the existence of overarching loyalties, a tradition of elite accommodation, socioeconomic equality and a small number of segments. These amendments reflect the change over time in Lijphart's application of consociational democracy to include situations requiring conflict management, rather than only European democracies (see Lijphart, 1985, 1996).

Rather than focusing on the presence of an external 'threat', for example one which recommends partition, McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 37-38, 42) argue that benign external intervention can facilitate the implementation of a consociational agreement in divided societies, despite early work on the approach neglecting this. They highlight that methods such as mediation and the use of pressures or incentives can play a crucial role in encouraging parties to reach agreement. McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 38-42) cite Northern Ireland as an example of where external input has been vital in achieving a settlement, not only from the British and Irish governments but also the United States. This demonstrates that conflict management is not always solely internal, as outsiders can play a positive role in its implementation and operation. Consociational agreements, or at least settlements with significant consociational elements, have been credited with achieving conflict management in societies such as Lebanon, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Northern Ireland (Taylor, 2009a, p. 6).



Consociationalism is not, however, without its critics. The main critique levelled against it is that this form of power sharing entrenches ethno-national divisions at the expense of the rights and identities of individuals, and does not offer a stable, lasting settlement (Wolff, 2012, p. 40). Wolff (2012, p. 40) argues that this criticism is unsubstantiated as it refers to corporate, rather than liberal, consociationalism, which accommodates communities based on an ascriptive criteria (McGarry, 2007, p. 172). He cites the works of Lijphart (1995) and McGarry and O'Leary (2008a; 2008b) in demonstrating that contemporary consociationalism 'favours self-determined over predetermined groups in its institutional prescriptions and arrangements'. Wolff (2012, p. 40) supports this with recent evidence by arguing that whilst the 1995 Dayton Agreement in Bosnia-Herzegovina is corporate to some extent, most other consociational settlements (for example, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the 2006 St Andrews Agreement in Northern Ireland, and the 2005 Iraq constitution) are inherently liberal as defined by McGarry and O'Leary (2008a; 2008b). Despite Lijphart (see, for example, 1977) proposing consociationalism as a means of achieving democracy in plural societies, Wolff (2012, pp. 42-43) claims that in divided societies, liberal consociationalism is a theory of conflict management, rather than democracy. This is significant as many critics focus their argument on their perception of the approach as undemocratic. Attention will now be turned to a rival method of accommodative conflict management.

### *Centripetalism*

Centripetalists, like consociationalists, are largely supportive of the need for accommodative power sharing to manage conflict in divided societies (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, pp. 16-17). Where the two approaches differ, however, is in the centripetalist argument that power sharing should not be solely accommodative and should also include some integrationist principles, as accommodation and integration are not mutually exclusive (see, for example, Horowitz, 2003; O'Flynn, 2009). This disagreement is rooted in the belief that intergroup divisions in plural societies are not as fixed and entrenched as consociationalists claim (Nagle and Clancy, 2012, p. 83). Reilly (2012, p. 57) asserts that centripetalists consider the most effective means of conflict management not 'to replicate existing ethnic divisions in the legislature and other representative organs, but rather to put in place institutional incentives for

cross-ethnic behaviour in order to encourage accommodation between rival groups'. The approach is, therefore, critical of elite-driven methods such as consociationalism, which centripetalists believe entrenches divisions. Both Horowitz (2003) and O'Flynn (2009) argue that executives would better serve democracy and conflict management if they were to be comprised of a voluntary intergroup coalition of moderates, as opposed to a mandatory coalition selected using the d'Hondt procedure, as prescribed by many consociationalists and in place in Northern Ireland.

Reilly (2012, p. 62) argues that centripetalism is of most benefit to societies in which demographics favour inter-party and inter-communal vote-pooling, such as those where communities are numerous and small in size, and where they are regionally spread and intermixed. To facilitate this, centripetalists reject proportional representation for divided societies as they argue that it encourages smaller parties that are more likely to base their appeal around narrow ethno-national issues. Instead, they recommend non-proportional electoral systems such as the Alternative Vote (AV), as parties and their candidates are required to garner a higher percentage of votes in order to be elected, which incentivises a broader appeal and vote-pooling (see, for example, Horowitz, 2003). Reilly (2012, p. 57) suggests that this is 'perhaps the clearest distinction between centripetalism and other approaches' to conflict management, as proportional representation is often considered to be a cause of, rather than a solution to, ethno-national politics. Fiji is perhaps the most significant example of a society in which a centripetal approach to power sharing has been implemented, with elections contested using AV (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, pp. 62-63).

The main critique of centripetalism as a means of conflict management in divided societies is that it is ultimately majoritarian in nature (Reilly, 2012, p. 63). In support of this, Bingham Powell (2000, p. 26, quoted in Reilly, 2012, p. 63) argues that the approach is focused on the aggregation of votes, parties and opinions, whilst other methods stress the importance of the proportional representation of all points of view in legislative arrangements. Although he acknowledges that centripetalism is a majoritarian model, Reilly (2012, p. 63) asserts that its majoritarianism is focused on broad-based parties and inclusive

coalitions, rather than majorities and minorities formed around ethno-national divisions. As such, he does not consider the majoritarian nature of centripetalism to impact upon its ability to deliver successful conflict management.

### **Establishing consociationalism in Northern Ireland**

Due to the presence of two distinctive and largely opposing ethno-national communities in Northern Ireland, many consider a wholly accommodative approach such as consociationalism to have the greatest potential to succeed in regulating inter-bloc conflict (see, for example, McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a; O'Neill, 2009; Lijphart, 1996). In the mid 1970s, however, Lijphart (1975, pp. 105-06) rejected consociational democracy as a means achieving conflict management in Northern Ireland and instead suggested partition as an alternative which he considered to be more likely to succeed. Lijphart believed the region did not conform to enough of his aforementioned favourable characteristics for the implementation of consociationalism, in addition to three other factors (see Lijphart, 1975, pp. 99-100). Firstly, in the mid 1970s there was an imbalance of power in Northern Ireland between the Protestant majority and Catholic minority. Secondly, Lijphart believed the idea of a grand coalition government to be unacceptable to Protestants due to their ties with the UK providing them with 'normative standards of governmental organisation', which is 'competitive not coalescent', and they would therefore reject this as it would not offer a majoritarian system with an opposition.

Finally, Lijphart stressed the need for 'some degree of national solidarity', which he believed to be lacking in Northern Ireland due to the allegiance of Catholics to the Republic of Ireland and the loyalty of Protestants to the British Crown. He considered all of these factors to be an affront to the potential success of consociationalism. Lijphart's position at this time is further underpinned by the failure of the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, which implemented a consociational power sharing executive between unionists and nationalists, and was brought down by a strike by Protestant workers within just five months (Fisk, 1975, quoted in Taylor, 2009a, p. 8). Despite being unsuccessful, the

Agreement is evidence of a consociational settlement for conflict management being considered during the early days of the Northern Ireland conflict.

Although supportive of consociationalism as a means of managing divided societies, McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 26-28) criticise Lijphart's foundational work for not focusing on pluri-national places comprised of more than one significant national identity, such as Northern Ireland. They draw attention to the fact that none of the aforementioned states which Lijphart initially applied consociational democracy to are pluri-national and all are instead divided along religious, linguistic or political lines. McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 31) argue that this approach was problematic, as when Lijphart (1975; 1977, pp. 134-41) came to provide an analysis of the potential for consociationalism to manage Northern Ireland's divisions, he inaccurately explained the conflict as being rooted in religion, as opposed to nationality. They consider the issue of Lijphart overlooking pluri-national places in his foundational work to be instrumental in his failure to initially see the importance of nationality when considering consociationalism for Northern Ireland (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 31).

By the 1990s, however, Lijphart (1996) had changed his opinion that a consociational settlement would be unsuccessful as a means of conflict management in Northern Ireland and now considered it to be the only realistic means of achieving this. The rationale behind this significant change of position can be attributed to the region now featuring many of the aforementioned favourable factors which he identified to be necessary for its successful implementation. Northern Ireland already featured some of these factors, for example, being a small region it has a small population size and a geographical concentration of segments. It additionally has a small number of segments – primarily unionism and nationalism – with overarching loyalties. By the 1990s, however, the existence of an 'external threat' to Northern Ireland was present in the form of partition of the region in an agreement between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, which O'Leary (1989, p. 588, quoted in Bogaards, 1998, p. 486) considered to be the only alternative for conflict management should consociationalism fail.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, although at first Northern Ireland had a Protestant majority and Catholic minority, by the time of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 this majority-minority population ratio had narrowed, with 53 per cent of the population Protestant and 44 per cent Catholic (Taylor, 2009a, pp. 8-9). Therefore, despite the existence of a majority group – which Lijphart (1985, pp. 119-28, quoted in Bogaards, 1998, p. 478) claims is detrimental to the successful implementation of consociational power sharing – it has only a small majority and the aforementioned figures indicate that the region features segments of relatively equal size, which he considers to be a favourable condition in order for consociationalism to succeed. This also addressed the first specific concern of Lijphart (1975, pp. 99-100) that consociationalism was not suited to Northern Ireland due to the imbalance of power between the Protestant majority and Catholic minority. As McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 31) highlight, this additionally overcame Lijphart's second concern that Protestants would be unable to accept a grand coalition government, as once their demographic hegemony was reduced, their British cultural preferences would wane. All of these factors explain why Lijphart considered a consociational power sharing agreement to be essential for conflict management in Northern Ireland at this time.

As is the case with many conflict management settlements, an additional factor which was required in order to establish, and continues to be necessary in order to maintain, consociational power sharing in Northern Ireland is external input. Guelke (2009, pp. 104-05) argues that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was instrumental in institutionalising British-Irish intergovernmentalism, which was key to facilitating negotiations between Northern Irish political parties during the 1990s. He asserts that the Agreement encouraged the close relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland which saw the two states jointly launch the peace process in the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993, and sustain their cooperation and commitment through to the agreement upon and implementation of a consociational peace settlement in the form of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, and its reinforcement in the St Andrews Agreement of 2006. McGarry and O'Leary (2009b, p. 337) also argue that intergovernmental relations between the UK and the Republic of Ireland were fundamental to the facilitation of an agreement between unionists and

nationalists. They cite the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 as a treaty between the two states which 'created strong incentives to induce internal power sharing (consociation)', as it recognised that cooperation between unionists and nationalists was necessary for devolution to be achieved, and established the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, which was designed to 'accommodate the rights and identities' of both communities in Northern Ireland and for the first time offered the Republic of Ireland an input in Northern Ireland's affairs (McKenna, 2012). This is an early example of the governments of the UK and the Republic of Ireland recognising the potential of consociationalism as a means of conflict management in the region.

McGarry and O'Leary (2009b, p. 337) additionally cite the publication of the joint Framework Documents by the UK and the Irish Republic in 1995 as being vital to the development of consociational power sharing in Northern Ireland, as they prefigured the majority of the content of the Good Friday Agreement, offering protections and incentives for unionists and nationalists willing to engage in peace negotiations. There are a number of ways in which the Documents achieved this (Melaugh, 2012). Firstly, they committed the governments of the UK and the Republic of Ireland to support devolution in Northern Ireland based on the consociational model. Secondly, they also included important provisions such as offering Northern Ireland the ability to determine its own future constitutional status, the commitment of the British government to Irish self-determination, and the pledge of the Irish Republic to amend its territorial claim over Northern Ireland. Finally, the Framework Documents pledged the commitment of the UK and the Irish Republic to support and ensure equality for unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland, which was particularly significant in assuring the latter that the inequality they faced during unionist majoritarian rule, and which was a major contributor to the outbreak of the conflict, would be overcome.

McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 32-33, 41) argue that this is important as these proposals created the conditions necessary for the facilitation of a peace agreement in the region, as successful negotiations between unionists and nationalists would have been unlikely had these assurances not have been in place, and external influence was crucial to this, particularly in garnering

unionist support. They additionally assert that the proposals played a significant role in facilitating the paramilitary ceasefires and decommissioning which were necessary in order for the peace agreement to succeed (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009b, p. 337). Cash (2009, pp. 243-44) and Morison (2009, p. 282) also highlight the role played by the US and the European Union in encouraging and supporting the UK and the Irish Republic in their attempts to facilitate a resolution to the conflict. The US was particularly important throughout the peace process, from pressuring the British government to involve the Irish Republic in Northern Ireland's affairs during the early 1980s, to providing a Special Envoy for Northern Ireland in the mid 1990s, headed by George Mitchell who would later chair the negotiations culminating in the Good Friday Agreement (MacGinty, 1997, pp. 2, 4, 8-9).

It is important to consider why the Good Friday Agreement succeeded where the Sunningdale Agreement had failed. After all, both were consociational settlements with cross-border dimensions (Wolff, 2001, p. 11) and the Good Friday Agreement was famously referred to by the then deputy leader of the SDLP, Seamus Mallon, as 'Sunningdale for slow learners' (O'Duffy, 2007, p. 167). Many contributing factors for its success have already been addressed, such as entrenching the principle of self-determination, recognising both identities and establishing North-South bodies, as well as the existence of a close British-Irish intergovernmental relationship, all of which were absent from the Sunningdale Agreement (Wolff, 2001, p. 11). Indeed, Kerr (2006, p. 87) argues that there was no great public shift in favour of a consociational settlement leading up to the Good Friday Agreement. Rather, it was an 'overriding unity of purpose' of the British and Irish governments to achieve power sharing in Northern Ireland, which was absent at the time of Sunningdale, that was instrumental to its success.

A further important factor to explain the success of the Good Friday Agreement is the British government's abandonment of its 'twin track' approach to conflict management in Northern Ireland, which O'Duffy (2007, p. 90) explains as being designed to defeat paramilitaries *and* encourage power sharing between moderate unionists and nationalists. Whilst this had been its policy at the time of the Sunningdale Agreement, and as such only the UUP, SDLP and Alliance

were signatories, by the 1990s it was recognised that the inclusion of political parties with links to paramilitaries, in particular Sinn Fein, was vital to the achievement of a sustainable consociational settlement (O’Kane, 2004). The prospect of a place at the negotiating table in turn facilitated republican and loyalist ceasefires, as a cessation of violence was a necessity in return for participation, which was absent at the time of the Sunningdale Agreement. The specific provisions of the Good Friday Agreement will now be explored in greater depth.

### **The Good Friday Agreement**

The Agreement (officially the Belfast Agreement) was signed on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998 by the British and Irish governments and all significant political parties in Northern Ireland (except the DUP and UKUP, who voluntarily withdrew from negotiations) (Kerr, 2006, p. 87). It was divided into three distinct strands, as follows.

#### *Strand One*

This dealt with internal democratic institutions and established a legislative Assembly comprised of 108 members elected in Northern Ireland’s existing eighteen Westminster constituencies (Kerr, 2006, p. 88). Although each constituency was originally going to return five members, this was raised to six in order to give smaller parties a greater opportunity to gain representation (*Hansard*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2013 cols 316-18). Elections to the Assembly are contested using PR-STV, a proportional system in which candidates are numerically ranked in order of preference, as this is conducive to the election of smaller parties and minorities, and allows for voters to transcend parties and blocs, should they choose to do so (McGarry and O’Leary, 2006b, p. 274). Members are required to designate as ‘unionist’, ‘nationalist’ or ‘other’, and the two former designations are provided with vetoes, as passage of key legislation requires cross-community support, by either ‘parallel consent’ – a majority of both unionists and nationalists – or a ‘weighted majority’ – two fifths of both unionists and nationalists, and a three fifths majority of the Assembly (McGarry and O’Leary, 2009a, p. 34).



Interestingly, executive ministerial positions are decided using the d'Hondt method sequencing procedure, with posts allocated proportionally on the strength of parties' representation in the Assembly – d'Hondt being more commonly used in the division of seats in a legislature (Kerr, 2006, p. 88; O'Leary et al, 2005). Executive selection is, however, flexible, with this being demonstrated in 2010 when the newly created position of Justice Minister was allocated to the Alliance Party, despite the default d'Hondt mechanism dictating that the post should be awarded to a different party (BBC, 2010). This occurred because the selection of Justice Minister was politically sensitive and none of the candidates put forward by other parties achieved the necessary cross community support, as the devolution of policing and justice powers was designated as a key piece of legislation and therefore required this. The executive is headed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, who, despite their names, operate as a diarchy, and it was decided during negotiations that they would be elected jointly in proportion to party strengths (the First Minister coming from the largest party and the deputy from the second largest) by mutual agreement of at least half of both unionists and nationalist members of the Assembly (Kerr, 2006, p. 88). The election procedure for this office was, however, amended in 2006 and this will shortly be more thoroughly explored. It has been clearly demonstrated that Northern Ireland's internal institutions are consociational in character, with its accommodative principles inherent to both the legislature and the executive.

### *Strand Two*

It is important to note that the confederal provisions of both Strands Two and Three of the Good Friday Agreement are not traditionally associated with consociational settlements (O'Leary, 2001, pp. 62-69), which has led to some (see, for example, Dixon, 2005) to argue that the Agreement is not actually consociational. Others, however, recognise that liberal consociationalism can go beyond purely accommodative principles to include elements of integration and power dividing, which O'Leary (1999) refers to as 'power sharing plus' and Wolff (2009) terms 'complex power sharing'. The need for this is based around the argument that power sharing and territorial self-governance are not, on their own, able to provide sufficient conflict management and further dimensions are

therefore necessary to address the complexities of the competing demands of parties involved in a conflict (Wolff, 2009, p. 120).

In light of this, the emphasis of Strands Two and Three was on external linkages and roles for external actors. Within Strand Two, this took the form of the North-South Ministerial Council, the aim of which Kerr (2006, p. 89) explains as being to bring together ministers in Northern Ireland with their counterparts in the Irish Republic to consult and cooperate on several areas of all-Ireland interest. O'Leary (2001, p. 63) identifies a dilemma in that unionists were concerned that if the North-South Ministerial Council could continue after the collapse of the Assembly, nationalists would aim to bring about this; whilst nationalists worried that if the Assembly could survive without the North-South Ministerial Council, this would be a target for unionists. The solution was to ensure that neither could function without the other; that they were to be 'mutually interdependent'. The main function of the North-South Ministerial Council is to link Northern nationalists to their preferred nation state, the Republic of Ireland, and to provide a vehicle through which they can hope to persuade unionists of the benefits of Irish reunification (O'Leary, 2001, p. 63).

### *Strand Three*

A second confederal component of the Good Friday Agreement is the British-Irish Council, which links the British and Irish governments, all of the UK's devolved governments, and those of its Crown dependencies within the British Isles (O'Leary, 2001, p. 65). Its aim is to 'promote harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of the relationships among the peoples of the UK and the Republic of Ireland' (Kerr, 2006, p. 89). O'Leary (2001, p. 65) argues that the Council provides unionists with a further link to the rest of the UK and is a mechanism through which they could retain a connection to their state of preference in the future, should a reunited Ireland be realised. He also asserts that despite being 'weaker' than the North-South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council is intended to compensate unionists for any ground they may consider to have conceded to nationalists through the establishment of the former (O'Leary, 1999, p. 26; 2001, p. 65).

Kerr (2006, p. 89) highlights the irony that when such a body was proposed under the terms of the Sunningdale Agreement it was met with opposition from unionists, yet they were supportive of it during the Good Friday negotiations as it provided them with a balance to the North-South Ministerial Council. The British-Irish Council, nevertheless, is afforded less importance than its counterpart, as it is not mutually interdependent of the Assembly and is, therefore, a voluntary body (O'Leary, 2001, p. 65). The provisions of Strands Two and Three are an example of a strong intergovernmental relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland facilitating conflict management in Northern Ireland that goes beyond regulating national self-determination to include integrative and power dividing principles (see, for example, O'Duffy, 2007, ch. 8). It is also necessary to highlight this as an example of a 'trade off' facilitates by British-Irish intergovernmentalism, whereby nationalists are compensated for their compromise on the sovereignty of Northern Ireland by North-South bodies and vice versa for unionists.

#### *Other provisions*

The Good Friday Agreement, for the first time, safeguards the religious, national and political rights and liberties of all in Northern Ireland in a bill of rights, and promised the establishment of an Equality Commission (Kerr, 2006, pp. 89-90). Despite being vague on the issues of decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and the release of paramilitary prisoners, the Agreement did provide for the reform of policing, which resulted in the publication of the Patten Report, designed to enhance the acceptability of policing amongst all communities, and its partial implementation (Kerr, 2006, p. 90; McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, pp. 33-34).

#### **Consociational debates in Northern Ireland**

Centripetalists argue that intergroup divisions in Northern Ireland are not as fixed and entrenched as consociationalists claim and believe that executives would better serve democracy and conflict management if they were to be comprised of a voluntary intergroup coalition of moderates with an opposition (Nagle and Clancy, 2012, p. 83; Horowitz, 2003; O'Flynn, 2009). It is important to note that, although for different reasons, some political parties favour a switch

to voluntary coalition executive formation. The Alliance Party, for example, believes that this would encourage greater moderation and aid the creation of a shared society in Northern Ireland (Farry, 2009). Horowitz (2003) and O'Flynn (2009) do nevertheless recognise that ethno-national political parties are inherent to Northern Ireland and, therefore, the electoral system that would best facilitate the formation of a moderate voluntary coalition is very significant.

It is, however, on this issue that Horowitz and O'Flynn differ. Horowitz (2003, pp. 93, 99) argues against the use of PR-STV in Northern Ireland, as implemented by the Good Friday Agreement, as although it is a preferential system, elections are contested in multimember constituencies and candidates have low quotas to reach to win a seat, resulting in some seats being won on first preference votes alone, which reduces the incentives for candidates and parties to moderate to appeal beyond their own bloc. He instead recommends AV, a non-proportional preferential system that uses single member constituencies in which candidates must achieve more than 50 per cent of the vote to win the seat (Hain, 1997, pp. 124-26). This requirement, Horowitz (2003) claims, can encourage candidates and parties to moderate in the hope of attracting support from outside of their own communal bloc, which in turn can facilitate, through vote pooling, the formation of an intergroup coalition of moderates and the exclusion of 'hard liners' from government. Conversely, O'Flynn (2009, pp. 271-73) argues that PR-STV 'has not led to a hardening of political attitudes' or increased polarisation, and instead agrees with McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 55-56) that there has been a noticeable moderation of Sinn Fein policy since the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Although O'Flynn accepts that PR-STV is more geared towards the principle of accommodation than that of integration, he is unconvinced of the merits of AV – chiefly due to concerns that it can prevent the electorate from voting for 'representatives who share their views or who are capable of arguing on their behalf'. A consociationalist response to the centripetalist position will now be presented.

On the issue of executive formation, McGarry and O'Leary (2009b, p. 379) disagree with Horowitz's and O'Flynn's critique of the d'Hondt procedure. They argue that if a coalition is to be constructed on the basis of a weighted majority

of 60 per cent, it would be possible for one of the two largest parties – currently the DUP and Sinn Fein – to be excluded. Participants in the executive would therefore be subjected to outflanking, which could impede upon their ability to cooperate. They also claim that weighted majority executive formation would not facilitate moderation amongst parties, as this procedure does not provide them with incentives to do so, whereas the d'Hondt method and its guarantee of ministerial positions to parties achieving a certain quota of seats in the legislature, does. Lastly, McGarry and O'Leary (2009b, pp. 360-61, 379) support d'Hondt over a weighted majority as it is democratically just: it combines proportionality with inclusiveness, whilst incentivising parties to assume executive responsibilities through participation in government.

Proponents of consociationalism also reject Horowitz's support for the use of AV in Northern Ireland. Critics suggest that there is no evidence to indicate that the system incentivises vote pooling and facilitates support for moderate parties, and this outcome is certainly not guaranteed (see, for example, Fraenkel and Grofman, 2007). In addition to this, McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 62) argue that it is flawed to believe that a non-proportional system would have been agreed upon during the Good Friday negotiations by parties who stood to lose out by it, in particular those associated with paramilitary organisations – Sinn Fein, the PUP and the UDP – whose inclusion was vital to the success of the Agreement. Therefore, they claim that AV is not a realistic option in the case of Northern Ireland, not least because its exclusionary character also has the potential to reignite intergroup conflict. The merits and demerits of PR-STV and other electoral systems relevant to Northern Ireland will be explored in greater depth in subsequent chapters.

Taylor (2009b, p. 312) argues that consociationalism does not sufficiently address the 'sectarian dualism' between unionists and nationalists which continues to form the basic structure of Northern Ireland's society, and is considered by some to be problematic. This position is also supported by Dixon (2011, pp. 310-11), who claims that consociationalism is 'a kind of voluntary apartheid', as its instruments 'reinforce' the 'antagonistic communal identities' that he believes policy makers should seek to diminish. The primary factor behind why Taylor considers a peace agreement based upon consociational

power sharing that does little to address the 'sectarian dualism' between communities that is rooted in Northern Irish society to be so problematic is the inequality and injustice which he believes it is contributing to (Taylor, 2009b, p. 312). This, he argues, facilitates the continuation of the inequality suffered by Catholics since the partition of Ireland in 1921 and which was a major contributor to the outbreak of the Troubles in the late 1960s, and cites a 2007 report indicating that Catholics have 'lower levels of employment, lower levels of economic activity and higher representation in workless households' than their Protestant counterparts (CAJ, 2007, p. 2, quoted in Taylor, 2009b, pp. 312-13, 316). Taylor (2009b, p. 320) claims that this is due to the Good Friday Agreement reinforcing and perpetuating sectarian divisions, and failing to challenge inequality, rather than establishing a 'non-sectarian era'. This has the effect of freezing the conflict as it is, rather than providing any meaningful conflict transformation away from traditional sectarian divisions.

Taylor (2006, pp. 218-19. See also O'Flynn, 2003, p. 144) also criticises the use of the community designation system for MLAs to demonstrate how Northern Ireland's consociational political arrangements are perpetuating divisions, as it is argued that it does not permit individual thinking and leaves the votes of those designated as 'others' carrying less weight on legislation requiring cross-community support. McGarry and O'Leary (2009a) discredit Taylor's critique of consociationalism for three reasons. Firstly, they argue that he fails to recognise that as Northern Ireland is a deeply divided society with sectarianism and segregation still a feature of everyday life for many (see Nolan, 2012; 2013; 2014), a peace agreement that fails to accommodate the two major communities would be highly unlikely to succeed (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 83). Secondly, and more specifically, he does not mention that consociational power sharing has provided political representatives of nationalists in Northern Ireland with direct access to government that they did not have prior to 1998, which has undoubtedly put them in a position from which to address the highlighted inequalities against Catholics (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009b, p. 387). Finally, McGarry and O'Leary (2009b, p. 385) discredit Taylor's claim that consociationalism is reinforcing and perpetuating sectarian divisions by citing a survey indicating that support for residential integration had increased by nine per cent between 1998 and 2007, and stood at 80 per cent at this time.

A further criticism of Northern Ireland's consociational settlement is the argument that it is not achieving its objective of facilitating a peaceful environment in the region. This position is advocated by Wilson (2009, p. 229), who makes a connection between the implementation of power sharing arrangements and an increase in violence in Northern Ireland. He justifies this link by arguing that violence increased during the late 1990s and early 2000s in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement and decreased after the suspension of power sharing in 2002 (Wilson, 2009, p. 229). This position is also supported by Taylor (2009b, p. 325), who cites articles by Wilford and Wilson (2003, p. 8, quoted in Taylor, 2009b, p. 325), and Jarman (2005, p. 4, quoted in Taylor, 2009b, p. 325) as evidence that violence has increased since the implementation of the Agreement in 1998. McGarry and O'Leary (2009b, pp. 369-70), however, counter this argument by asserting that it is flawed as violence has continued to decrease since power sharing was re-established in 2007, which therefore discredits Wilson's and Taylor's claim that consociationalism is failing to facilitate peace in Northern Ireland.

It is clear from the literature reviewed that there is an epistemic division in positions on the Good Friday Agreement. Pluri-nationalists, such as McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 25-28, 83), argue that accommodation is the only realistic means of managing conflict in divided societies and may have the ability bring about a shared identity. In contrast, post-structuralists, such as Taylor (2006, 2009b) and MacGinty (2001), argue that integration would be a more effective approach to establishing a genuinely inclusive Northern Ireland. This has important ramifications when applying an ethno-symbolic approach. For pluri-nationalists, there is an assumption that ethno-national symbolism may be malleable to changing political institutions, such as those implemented by the Good Friday Agreement that facilitate elite level cooperation, and this may come to transcend identities. For post-structuralists, however, the Agreement allows for unionists and nationalists to maintain their 'exclusive world-views' by legitimising them in politics, which prevents symbols of unity becoming meaningful (MacGinty, 2001, p. 18). This is an important epistemic distinction within the context of this study.

## **Since the Good Friday Agreement**

The Agreement was put to the electorate by referendum in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland – in the latter to ratify the constitutional amendment of Articles Two and Three, effectively surrendering the state's territorial claim over the North (O'Donnell, 2007, pp. 141-44). Predictably, 94 per cent voted for the amendment, whilst in Northern Ireland 71 per cent supported the Good Friday Agreement (Mitchell, 2001, pp. 30-31). It is worth noting, however, that it achieved significantly less support amongst unionists than nationalists. Exit polls indicated that only a slim majority within the unionist community voted in favour of the Agreement, with Ian Paisley's North Antrim constituency voting against, the only constituency to do so (Mitchell, 2001, pp. 30-31). The Agreement officially came into force in late 1999 (Wilford, 2001, p. 1).

It was, nevertheless, beset with difficulties resulting in five suspensions by the British government due to disagreement over paramilitary decommissioning and divisions within unionism, with the final suspension in 2002 being in place for almost five years (O'Duffy, 2007, pp. 180, 183). The unilaterality of the UK's actions in suspending the Agreement, amid private objections by the Irish government (O'Duffy, 2007, p. 180), has led some to question the symmetry of British-Irish intergovernmental relations with regard to Northern Ireland, and to cast doubt on its continued effectiveness in regulating conflict (Bew, 2006, p. 67, quoted in O'Duffy, 2007, p. 189). O'Duffy (2007, p. 189), however, argues that this underestimates the salience of the relationship and its ability to incentivise unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland to accept the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. Despite political instability during the early years of the Agreement, the ceasefires of the major paramilitary groups have largely remained intact and decommissioning has been implemented. The Agreement has also facilitated a significant reduction in lethal violence in the years since 1998 (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009b, pp. 370, 385-86).

The continued importance of a close British-Irish relationship was once again demonstrated during negotiations culminating in the St Andrews Agreement of



2006 to re-establish the principles of the Good Friday Agreement by creating the conditions necessary for the DUP and Sinn Fein, by now the largest parties in Northern Ireland, to share power (O'Duffy, 2007, pp. 189-93). O'Duffy (2007, pp. 190-91) draws attention to the way in which both governments balanced the incentives of agreement against the disincentives of disagreement – for example, a financial package to alleviate deprivation in working class unionist and nationalist areas was pitted against increased water charges and property taxes that the parties would undoubtedly have been held responsible for by the public in Northern Ireland.

There are two particularly salient provisions of the St Andrews Agreement. Firstly, the selection procedure for the positions of First Minister and deputy First Minister was amended to no longer require cross-community support, which dealt with the DUP's refusal to approve a Sinn Fein deputy First Minister and alleviated the incentive for either the First Minister or deputy to resign in order to bring about a collapse of power sharing, as the two largest parties could simply nominate replacements (O'Duffy, 2007, p. 192). Secondly, the Agreement saw Sinn Fein commit to support policing and the rule of law in Northern Ireland for the first time in the party's history, which was considered by the DUP to be a pre-requisite to entering into power sharing, in return for the devolution of policing and justice powers to Belfast (O'Duffy, 2007, p. 191). This decision was duly approved at the party's *Ard Fheis* (annual conference) and powers were devolved in April 2010 after negotiations culminating in the Hillsborough Agreement, despite initial disagreement between the DUP and Sinn Fein over when this should take place (O'Duffy, 2007, p. 191; Perry, 2011). Power sharing has continued, without suspension, since the implementation of the St Andrews Agreement in May 2007.

A major development of the reestablishment of power sharing is the interaction and engagement between unionist and nationalist political elites who were formerly staunch opponents. This is demonstrated in the cordial relationship between the then First Minister, the DUP's Ian Paisley, and deputy Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein, with commentators branding them 'the chuckle brothers' (Dixon, 2012, p. 273). Elite level interaction is not confined to working relationships between political leaders, however, and has also manifested itself

in engagement with the opposite community's culture and traditions. Examples include the current DUP leader and First Minister, Peter Robinson, attending a Gaelic football match with McGuinness, with the sport a defining example of Irish nationalist culture; and McGuinness meeting the Queen, who is traditionally considered by republicans to illustrate British imperialism in Ireland (Belfast Telegraph, 2012; Greenslade, 2012). This engagement is not confined to Stormont: in 2013, Mairtin O Muilleoir became the first Sinn Fein mayor of Belfast to attend an Armistice Day service, a British tradition in remembrance of those who fought in World War I (Kearney, 2013). Despite interaction between political elites of opposite communities occurring on a daily basis in Northern Ireland, the situation is altogether different within many areas of society. 'Peace walls', designed to separate communities in an attempt to limit inter-communal conflict, continue to divide some lower socio-economic urban areas, whilst recent reports indicate that 93 per cent of children are educated in segregated schools (Nolan, 2014). It is clear that although substantial violent conflict is largely confined to the past and elite level political cooperation has taken hold, Northern Ireland is yet to make significant progress in overcoming staunch communal divisions between unionists and nationalists.

Recent political issues in Northern Ireland have focused on two major themes – the impact of dissident republicanism, and dealing with flags, parades and the legacy of the past. Firstly, small paramilitary groups which reject the Good Friday Agreement, such as the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA, continue the republican 'armed struggle'. Whilst their support and ability remains limited, these organisations have launched several attacks, including the 2011 killing of a PSNI constable in Omagh and the shooting of a prison officer in County Armagh in 2012 (Tonge, 2014, pp. 14-17). This has led scholars such as Tonge (2014, p. 14) to describe dissident republicanism as 'the greatest threat to stability in Northern Ireland' and mitigating this is undoubtedly a key challenge. In 2014, dissidents achieved political success, with the election of a 32 County Sovereignty Movement member, thought to be the political wing of the Real IRA, to Derry and Strabane Council (Deeney, 2014). Although their political impact is limited, this is the first example of a dissident republican being elected, which demonstrates that there is some support for their objectives within communities.

A second current political issue of salience in Northern Ireland is how to deal with flags, parades and the legacy of the past. This is largely borne out of the aforementioned 2012-13 union flag protests and riots, and has remained an important issue since. As the Good Friday Agreement was more focused on managing violent conflict, these issues were largely ignored and it was decided that all-party talks, chaired by American diplomat Richard Haass, were to be held in late 2013, with a view to resolving them. These, however, broke up without agreement when unionist parties were unwilling to accept the proposals (McDonald, 2013b). In late 2014 the talks reconvened, now primarily chaired by the current Secretary of State to Northern Ireland, Teresa Villiers, and culminated in the Stormont House Agreement in December of that year. The Agreement established a Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition to be in place by June 2015, amongst other provisions concerning, for example, fiscal policies and welfare reform (Stormont House Agreement, 2014). Although these issues are far from being fully resolved, the Agreement provides a foundation from which to achieve this.

## **Summary**

This chapter has dealt with the issue of governing plural societies, with particular emphasis placed on conflict management in societies considered to be divided. By making reference to the case study of this research, Northern Ireland, it has demonstrated how entrenched divisions between different communities can result in (often violent) conflict and the need for this to be managed in order to bring about a more peaceful political and social society. Through analysing existing literature, this chapter has shown that an accommodative approach such as consociationalism is necessary in order to achieve this in deeply divided societies, as only an approach that recognises the existence of distinct, and often opposing, communities has the potential to successfully manage violent conflict. It has nevertheless noted that consociational settlements can require the inclusion of principles of integration and power dividing, such as the external dimensions of the Good Friday Agreement, which recognises that power sharing agreements are often not purely accommodative. As consociational power sharing facilitates cooperation

between political actors at the elite level, it is thought that this may, over time, trickle down and contribute to a reduction in the salience of ethno-national identities within wider society (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 83). Using the case of Northern Ireland, later chapters of this thesis seek to determine whether this phenomenon is indeed taking place.

## **Chapter Three – Electoral politics in divided societies**

Having explored the continued salience of nationalism and the politics of conflict management in divided societies, attention will now turn to electoral politics. This chapter analyses existing literature on elections in divided societies and, more importantly, debates around which electoral system is most conducive to conflict management. It begins with an overview of electoral characteristics, with particular emphasis placed on the importance of ethnic party systems in divided societies, before providing a comparison of the most significant electoral systems that have been recommended as being conducive to managing conflict in these societies. Particular prominence will be placed on analysing PR-STV, as the system is the focus of this research. Attention then turns to the case study of Northern Ireland, with a history of its voting systems, before discussing the post-Good Friday Agreement electoral environment. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the necessary background in order for this research to fulfil the aim of determining whether the preferential PR-STV electoral system is facilitating any erosion in the significance of ethno-national identities at election time, and therefore within wider society, in Northern Ireland.

### **Electoral characteristics of divided societies**

Horowitz (1985, pp. 291-92) argues that 'the main element that ethnic conflict introduces into party politics is the ethnically based party', which 'derives its support overwhelmingly from an identifiable ethnic group (or cluster of ethnic groups) and serves the interests of that group'. He elaborates to suggest that parties must serve the interests of the community they intend to represent or their support will diminish. Ethnic parties, therefore, often utilise aforementioned ethno-symbolic characteristics such as particular flags and emblems as this is a crucial way in which they can identify with the community they seek to represent and maximise their electoral support from it, as will be demonstrated by the case of Northern Ireland. Although it is logical to suspect that this would damage a party's overall electoral prospects as they are tailoring their appeal to one particular section of population, maximising support from one community is

usually essential to the success of parties in divided societies as many voters engage in ethnic voting (P. Mitchell, 1999, pp. 101-03).

Horowitz (1985, pp. 298-302) identifies three types of political parties in divided societies: ethnic, multi-ethnic and non-ethnic. Ethnic parties are those which seek to represent one particular community within a society, such as the DUP in Northern Ireland. However, as Horowitz (1985, p. 299) argues, the language parties use to describe themselves is often more aspirational than realistic. He cites the case of Malaysia, where several parties catering for the Chinese community have described themselves as multi-ethnic on the basis that they occasionally enlist Malays and elect them to party office. They are, however, ultimately Chinese parties. When truly multi-ethnic parties do exist, such as the *Parti Democratique de Cote d'Ivoire* during the Ivory Coast's fight for independence, they often attempt to adopt a non-ethnic focus, usually with little success (Horowitz, 1985, p. 300). Horowitz (1985, p. 301) argues that non-ethnic parties rarely exist in plural societies, except in those where divisions are not deep or communities are so thinly dispersed that it is unfeasible. It is clear that in deeply divided societies, ethnic parties are paramount.

Whilst this is the case, it is nevertheless important not to oversimplify the assumption that identity, which may be ethnic, national, linguistic or other, cannot influence the party system in societies that are not divided and, conversely, that left-right ideology – social liberalism or conservatism, for example – cannot be a point of identification for parties in divided societies. In support of this, in Northern Ireland the DUP and the UUP are traditionally considered to represent a centre-right to right wing, conservative position, whereas the SDLP and Sinn Fein take a more socially liberal, centre-left to left wing approach to everyday politics. In the Republic of Ireland, which unlike Northern Ireland is not affected by ethnic divisions, electoral competition has traditionally been based around positions during the Irish Civil War, with anti-Anglo-Irish Treaty, republican Fianna Fail and pro-Treaty, nationalist Fine Gael. This demonstrates that whilst identity may be the main influence on parties in divided societies, party systems are not entirely binary (see, for example, Horowitz, 1985, ch. 8).

Unsurprisingly, the presence of ethnic parties in divided societies results in ethnic voting. P. Mitchell (1999, p. 101) states that two types of competition exist within an ethnic party system: between blocs and within them. He argues that this results in elections having a 'census-type quality' in which electoral trends are determined by demographics, rather than one community seeking to win votes from the other. As such, the main party competition is intra-bloc. Mitchell et al (2009, p. 400) claim that ethnic party mobilisation is based on a 'catch us' rather 'catch all' appeal to voters, as few cross the inter-bloc divide. As Horowitz (1985, p. 291) suggests, in ethnic party systems it is therefore essential that parties serve the interests of the community they seek to represent, or face the prospect of losing their support to a rival party. It has been argued that this results in 'ethnic outbidding', whereby parties engage in 'extremist and emotive ethnic appeals' that imply that the core interests of their community are under threat of being 'sold out', in order to mobilise the group they strive to represent (Mitchell et al, 2009, p. 400. See also Horowitz, 1985, pp. 349-60; Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972). It is claimed that this leads to increased political polarisation as parties seek to present themselves as the stoutest defenders of their ethnic bloc and adopt ever more hard line positions to secure this portrayal (Mitchell et al, 2009, p. 400).

Whilst one could be forgiven for thinking that this political polarisation would inevitably result in the collapse of democratic institutions, Mitchell and Evans (2009, p. 149) argue that there are two ways in which this can be avoided within an ethnic party system. First is the existence of a 'multidimensional and cross-cutting cleavage structure' that is ethnically fluid and prevents a 'winner takes all, loser gets nothing' situation. Chandra (2005, p. 235, quoted in Mitchell and Evans, 2009, pp. 149-50) uses the case of India to illustrate how ethnic divisions can, over time, become multidimensional, resulting in centripetal party behaviour through, for example, a generous language policy and statehood recognition. This, however, is unlikely to occur in deeply divided societies due to the absence of any potential for cross-cutting cleavages to be established (Mitchell and Evans, 2009, p. 150).

In these societies, Mitchell and Evans (2009, pp. 149, 151-53) argue that 'power sharing institutions may lead to centripetal competition if the extremist parties

can develop successful ethnic tribune appeals', and this explains the electoral success of formerly hard line parties in divided societies such as Northern Ireland. Kedar (2005, p. 185) argues that this occurs due to voter recognition that policies are often only implemented after multiparty bargaining during which positions are likely to become watered down. In divided societies voters, therefore, often opt for who they perceive to be the stoutest defender of their ethno-national bloc, despite that party's positions being more extreme than their own. Mitchell and Evans (2009, pp. 151-52) term this 'compensational voting' and argue that it is crucial for 'ethnic tribune' parties to resist intra-bloc outflanking from more extreme parties in order to maintain their status. This goes some way to explaining why many parties in divided societies continue to utilise ethno-symbolism to seek to identify with the community they strive to represent and maximise their electoral support from it.

In continuing with this theme, Horowitz (1985, p. 365) draws attention to the existence of multi-ethnic coalitions in divided societies, arguing that there is ostensibly great strength in the opinion that inter-communal coalitions have the potential to mitigate ethno-national divisions. These coalitions, however, can take several different forms, which often depends on the electoral arrangements in place and the exact nature of conflict in a particular divided society. The cases of Northern Ireland, Malaysia and Lebanon will be briefly explored in order to illustrate this. As aforementioned, in Northern Ireland executive formation is by mandatory coalition depending on the strength of parties in the legislature elected using proportional representation, which offers few incentives for parties to build pre-election inter-bloc alliances. It does, however, mean that unionist and nationalist parties must cooperate in government to facilitate the effective operation of governmental institutions.

The arrangements in Malaysia and Lebanon, where elections are contested using first past the post, are altogether different. In Malaysia, consociationalism is played out within the ruling coalition, *Barisan Nasional*, which has been in power since independence in 1957 and is comprised of three main parties representing the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities, in addition to numerous others (Brown, 2005). This arrangement facilitates cooperation between these parties not only in government but also at election time in order



to maximise support for the coalition. In Lebanon, a multipolar society, two multi-ethnic coalitions have been organised since 2005 around party positions on the Cedar Revolution of the same year (Haddad, 2009, p. 406). In short, the March 8 Alliance is pro-Syrian and friendly towards Syrian intervention in Lebanon, whilst the March 14 Alliance takes the opposite view, with both being named after events of the Revolution: the pro-Syrian demonstration and expulsion of Syria from Lebanon respectively (Haddad, 2009, p. 406). Most importantly, these coalitions transcend ethno-national divisions, with parties representing most communities being present within both (Haddad, 2009, p. 406). This demonstrates that it is possible for issues of great significance to go beyond the salience of communal identity in some divided societies, although the significance of the latter is not necessarily reduced. As coalitions are often a feature of such societies, the way in which they should be formed is a source of debate amongst consociationalists and centripetalists in terms of which offers the greatest potential for successful conflict management, which will later be referred to in greater depth.

### **Electoral systems and conflict management**

As aforementioned, the consociational/centripetal debate over the most effective method of conflict management in divided societies also manifests itself electorally. Whilst consociationalists favour proportional representation systems, there is discord within the approach over whether PR-STV or party list PR is most effective (Mitchell, 2014). For centripetalists, there is a preference for plurality systems, in particular AV (Reilly, 2012). Each will be explored and analysed in turn, with particular focus on PR-STV, as this is the electoral system under study in this research.

#### *PR-STV*

PR-STV is a proportional electoral system which is currently used for Assembly elections in Northern Ireland, local government elections in Scotland, and lower chamber elections in the Republic of Ireland and Malta (Grofman and Bowler, 1996/97, p. 43; Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 79; Clark, 2013). Importantly, votes cast in elections contested using PR-STV are for candidates rather than political parties, therefore the system neither requires nor prevents party voting,

as explained by Mitchell and Gillespie (1999, pp. 74-75). As with all PR electoral systems, multimember constituencies in which seats are allocated based on the proportion of the vote each candidate receives is an essential component of PR-STV.

Ballot papers feature candidates listed alphabetically, and can include, for example, several candidates representing the same party, only one candidate representing a party and independent candidates not affiliated to any party. Voters are required to rank candidates in order of preference, starting with the number '1' for their most preferred option and continuing to however many candidates are included on the ballot. They are not obliged to give every candidate a preference and may stop at whatever point they choose; this may be after ranking only one candidate, they may choose to vote for five, or indeed every candidate on the ballot, in order of preference. Crucially, however, only one vote on each ballot paper is transferable. From the perspective of the voter, PR-STV is a relatively straightforward system provided they remember that votes are cast for candidates and not parties, using numbers in order of preference and not an 'X' as is common with non-preferential electoral systems (Sinnott, 1993, p. 69, quoted in Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 75).

A more comprehensive understanding of PR-STV is, however, required by election strategists, analysts and those involved in the counting of votes. Mitchell and Gillespie (1999, pp. 75-79) offer a guide to its intricacies. The first stage of the count is to determine the quota, which is the number of votes required by a candidate in order to guarantee election, and is calculated using the following formula (also known as the droop quota):

$$\text{Quota} = \frac{\text{Total number of valid votes}}{\text{Number of seats} + 1} + 1$$

The case study of Northern Ireland is a worthy example of how PR-STV quotas are determined in practice. For Assembly elections, which have a district magnitude, or number of seats per each of the 18 constituencies, of six, the quota is the total number of votes divided by seven (14.3 per cent) plus one. This relatively low quota increases the likelihood of independent candidates and

those representing small parties gaining representation, as the lower the quota is the more proportional the result is likely to be. However, for European elections, which are also contested using PR-STV, Northern Ireland elects as a single constituency and, with only three seats available, has a much lower district magnitude than elections to the Assembly and a quota of 25 per cent of the vote plus one, thus increasing the potential for disproportionality in the result. Local government elections in Northern Ireland are also contested using PR-STV, although quotas for these elections cannot be uniformly determined, as district magnitudes vary from ward to ward within each council, though district magnitudes are usually comparatively high (Elliott, 1998).

As demonstrated by Mitchell and Gillespie (1999, pp. 75-79), once a quota has been calculated a first count is made and any candidate who exceeds the quota with first preference votes is duly elected. Any first preference votes of elected candidates that exceed the quota are considered to be surplus and are redistributed to other candidates based on order of preference to avoid wasted votes. For example, if a quota is 1,200 and a candidate is elected at the first count with 1,350 first preference votes, the 150 votes between these two figures are considered to be surplus and are therefore reallocated at the second count. Any ballot papers that do not indicate a second preference are deemed to be non-transferable. This process continues, with preferences further down the ballot often playing a role, until all of the available seats have been allocated. When candidates are unable to win representation they are eliminated and their next preferences are transferred. Once there are no more candidates left to be eliminated, the remaining candidates can be elected without reaching the required quota to guarantee this. This makes for a particularly complex electoral system for those who require a comprehensive understanding of its intricacies.

Mitchell and Gillespie (1999, pp. 79-80) identify three main merits of the PR-STV electoral system. First, it is largely proportional and therefore does not result in the hugely disproportionate outcomes often associated with the first past the post plurality system, whilst virtually eliminating wasted votes as there is no harm done in giving first preference votes to candidates with little likelihood of winning due to second preferences being transferred after their elimination (Grofman and Bowler, 1996/97, pp. 45-46). Second, PR-STV allows

voters to cross party lines and vote for candidates of more than one party, which is particularly important in Northern Ireland and a point that will later be returned to. Finally, under the system voters have a degree of control over how their votes will be used in the count, safe in the knowledge that a lower preference vote can never be used against a candidate to whom the voter has given a higher preference (Gallagher et al, 1995, p. 287, quoted in Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 80). These merits give PR-STV some advantages over, for example, first past the post and party list PR systems, and this will later be returned to in providing a comparison of PR-STV with other electoral systems.

Despite these merits and the benefits they offer, Mitchell and Gillespie (1999, p. 79. See also Gallagher et al, 1995, p. 288) nevertheless highlight two main criticisms of PR-STV. First, as voters can vote for candidates representing more than one party, it has been argued that this can cause each candidate to make appeals to the centre ground, which can result in less distinctive parties and representatives. Due to the particular salience of this in Northern Ireland, a fuller explanation and analysis will later be made. Second, it is a requirement of PR-STV that constituencies have low district magnitudes, which may result in disproportionality when compared to other PR systems, such as party list. Evidence suggests, however, that this argument has not been realised in election results in the Republic of Ireland and Malta.

### *Party list PR*

Whilst there are numerous variations of party list PR, the focus in divided societies is on 'closed' list PR, as this can 'encourage the formation and maintenance of [the] strong and cohesive political parties' that Lijphart (2008, p. 79, quoted in Mitchell, 2014, p. 247) considers to be essential for the successful application of consociationalism. It is a system in which parties list their candidates in order of preference and these candidates are duly elected should the party reach the required quota for one or more of its candidates to gain representation. Therefore, voters vote for a party rather than a candidate, with one vote, denoted by an 'X'. The system is widely used throughout mainland Europe (Hain, 1997, p. 122). Seats are often allocated using the d'Hondt formula, in which representation is determined based on the number of votes a party receives and aims to ensure that the number of votes for each seat is

equalised (Wilder, 1999, pp. 232-33). For example, should a party receive double the quota of votes necessary to win a seat, it will gain two representatives, which will be the first two names on its list. One critique that has been made of the d'Hondt method is that its highest averages formula tends to favour larger parties (Gallagher, 1996, p. 8, quoted in Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 81).

Grofman and Bowler (1996/97, p. 43) argue that one of the major advantages of party list PR over PR-STV is that it is more proportional, though they recognise that large, multimember constituencies are necessary for this. Evidence of disproportionality in elections contested using party list PR can be found in the 1996 Northern Ireland Peace Forum election when small, five seat constituencies resulted in, for example, Sinn Fein winning four of West Belfast's five seats with just 53 per cent of the vote and the DUP taking all five seats in Lagan Valley with less than three-fifths of the vote (Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 81). As this example suggests, it is impossible to claim that PR-STV is more disproportionate than party list PR and vice versa, as this depends on the district magnitude in place.

A major contrast between 'closed' party list PR and PR-STV is that the former is very much a party-centred system (Grofman and Bowler, 1996/97, p. 44). With party list PR, the chances of a candidate being elected is largely in the hands of the party, as it is the party that decides where candidates will be listed, in order of party preference. This is particularly true of large parties who are often guaranteed of winning at least one seat in a constituency. Therefore, candidates for elections contested using party list PR are much more likely to adhere to party politics and positions than seek to differentiate themselves to cultivate the personal vote, as it is probable that party elites will select those who toe the line for the top positions on the ballot. This is a direct contrast with PR-STV, whose candidate-centred attributes often make it necessary for candidates to seek the personal vote when faced with intra-party competition from those offering very similar policy positions. Likewise, a further related difference between PR-STV and party list PR is that the latter, like first past the post, reinforces party divisions as voters can only vote for one party or one candidate representing a party, whereas PR-STV has the potential to encourage candidates to make

cross-cleavage appeals, as the systems allows vote transfers (Grofman and Bowler, 1996/97, p. 46). One critique levelled at party list PR is that it can break the link between constituencies and representatives that is much supported by proponents of first past the post, and its often high district magnitude has the potential to do this to a greater extent than PR-STV (Hain, 1997, p. 122). Despite party list PR and PR-STV both being considered to be proportional electoral systems, this analysis indicates that there are significant differences between the two.

As the founder of the consociational model for governing plural societies such as Northern Ireland, Lijphart (2008, p. 79; 1991, pp. 98-99, quoted in 2008, pp. 188-89, quoted in Mitchell, 2014, p. 247) argues that 'closed' party list PR is a more suitable electoral system than PR-STV and makes four criticisms of the latter to support his claim. First, he argues that the comparatively small constituency size needed in order for PR-STV to be effective makes the system more conducive to gerrymandering than party list PR, which uses larger constituencies. Second, the preferential method of PR-STV, in which voters rank candidates, is claimed to be too confusing. Third, voting for candidates rather than parties is argued to weaken party cohesion, which could threaten inter-party negotiations. Fourth, the small constituency size required by PR-STV is claimed to increase disproportionality, and leave minorities and smaller parties unelected. Overall, Lijphart (1991, p. 99, quoted in Mitchell, 2014, p. 247) argues that 'these many disadvantages of STV clearly outweigh the advantage of reciprocal agreements to exchange second preferences', and therefore recommends the use of party list PR in plural societies.

Mitchell (2014, pp. 249, 255-56), however, claims that the disadvantages of PR-STV identified by Lijphart are either not applicable or not as serious as suggested. He argues that gerrymandering can occur under any electoral system, regardless of the size of constituencies, and that PR-STV is not confusing from the point of view of the voter. Furthermore, despite being a candidate-based system, PR-STV offers incentives for candidates to cooperate with parties as they often require transfers in order to secure election. Finally, although it may be less proportional than party list PR, PR-STV ensures that the most favoured candidates are elected, disputing the argument that the system

disadvantages minorities and smaller parties. Therefore, Mitchell (2014, p. 247) argues in contrast to Lijphart that PR-STV is at least as compatible as the party list PR system for plural societies.

### *Plurality systems*

There are two major plurality systems: first past the post and AV. Whilst first past the post is not often recommended for divided societies, it is used in some, such as Malaysia, and therefore merits a mention. It is a majoritarian, plurality system and usually features small, single member constituencies in which the candidate with the most votes wins, regardless of the share of the vote they have received. In contrast to PR-STV, voters can only vote for one candidate, denoted by an 'X'. It is for this reason that elections contested using first past the post are prone to high levels of disproportionality and this is the main way in which the system differs to PR-STV (Bogdanor, 1997, pp. 80-81). As Bogdanor (1997, pp. 80-81) argues, the disproportionality of first past the post often results in a single party forming a government at Westminster with more than half of all seats but with significantly less than 50 per cent of the popular vote, eliminating the need to form a coalition of parties, which would be inconceivable in elections contested using PR-STV. This disproportionality is, however, considered by some to be an advantage as it increases the potential for the election of a strong, decisive government (Norton, 1997). Unlike PR-STV, first past the post also fails to ensure the fair representation of minorities, as small, single member constituencies require candidates representing such groups to have a large concentration of support within a district in order to win the seat. Due to the particular importance of minority representation in divided societies such as Northern Ireland, this is a significant shortcoming of first past the post, as is the single party executive that elections contested using this system often bring about.

Despite these inherent differences, there are some similarities between the two systems. The most notable is that voters vote for a candidate as opposed to a party, although candidates standing for election under either system often represent a party. Grofman and Bowler (1996/97, pp. 44-46) argue that the principal ramification of this is that it encourages candidates to seek the personal vote by pursuing the interests of their constituents, making them less

likely to stick rigorously to party positions and ultimately results in them being more accountable to the electorate. However, where PR-STV differs to first past the post in this respect is that whereas in elections contested using the latter only one candidate is selected to represent each party to avoid potential vote splitting, the preferential method of the former encourages parties to nominate more than one candidate, particularly those parties with a large support base. As Martin (2010) argues, this clearly marks out PR-STV as a candidate-centred system and intra-party competition makes it more likely that candidates will seek the personal vote and potentially deviate from party positions, whilst there is a reduced likelihood of this in elections contested using first past the post. The candidate-centred focus of both systems is not suggested to be an advantage or disadvantage, although the need to cultivate the personal vote, which is particularly important under PR-STV, is likely to increase the accountability of representatives and this is no doubt considered to be a merit by constituents.

Despite being used in only a small number of states (most notably Australia), AV was brought to the attention of the British public in 2011 when the government held a referendum to replace first past the post with the system – a motion that was resoundingly defeated by the electorate (Lundberg and Steven, 2013). As demonstrated by Hain (1997, pp. 124-26), the system has similarities with both PR-STV and first past the post. Like the former, AV employs a numbering method which allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference should they choose to do so; however, in common with first past the post, elections contested using AV are done so in single member constituencies and with parties nominating only one candidate.

Under AV, votes are counted using a similar method to PR-STV but with only one seat available, whilst the fundamental principal of the system is that the candidate who wins does so with more than 50 per cent of the vote, therefore making the result more proportional, despite AV not being considered to be a proportional system. As such, if a candidate receives more than half of all first preference votes on the first count, they are duly elected. If not, the candidate with the lowest share of the vote is eliminated and their second preference votes are redistributed. This process can be repeated several times, with lower



order preference votes playing a role, until a candidate achieves the required quota. As is the case with PR-STV, AV can increase incentives for candidates to transcend party lines in order secure enough lower preference votes to win the seat and it minimises the likelihood of wasted votes as it allows voters to express their genuine preference. AV would therefore appear to be a bridge between PR-STV and first past the post in not being as proportional as the former but having a higher degree of proportionality than the latter.

One of the reasons why the PR-STV electoral system is recommended by some for divided societies is because it allows both intra-bloc and inter-bloc vote transfers, which has the potential to encourage parties to moderate both their policy positions and election campaigns in attempt to attract transfers from beyond their own voters (McGarry and O’Leary, 2006b, pp. 269, 274). Horowitz (2003), however, argues that PR-STV does not go far enough by simply being a system that *should induce* this – rather, he recommends AV for plural societies such as Northern Ireland, as he claims this *would require* moderation, and would therefore be more effective. The rationale behind his position is that under PR-STV the quota of votes needed for election is too low to incentivise candidates to seek transfers from beyond their own party, and certainly from beyond their own bloc (Horowitz, 2003, p. 99). Horowitz (2003, p. 99) argues instead that AV would be more effective in inducing parties to moderate their policies and election campaigns in order to attract lower order preference votes, as under the system elections would be contested in single member constituencies in which a candidate would be required to reach a quota of 50 per cent to be elected, thus increasing the salience of transfers. Under AV, parties would not only be incentivised to behave more moderately, especially in espousing the nationalism of the community they represent, in attempt to attract inter-bloc transfers, but would also be encouraged to enter into deals with parties from the opposite bloc to direct their voters to transfer to one another and this is argued to be easier for moderate parties, thus incentivising ‘hard liners’ to moderate (Horowitz, 1991a, p. 171; 1997, pp. 24, 26, 33, quoted in Fraenkel and Grofman, 2006, pp. 626-27).

Horowitz (1989; 1991a; 1991b; 1997, quoted in Fraenkel and Grofman, 2006, p. 627) identifies two necessary preconditions in order for AV to successfully

achieve this. First, constituencies must be sufficiently heterogeneous in that they are comprised of significant numbers of members of two or more ethno-national blocs for it to be 'politically rewarding' for parties to seek to attract lower order preference votes from the opposite community. Second, there is a necessity for multiple political parties because there must be more than one party representing the majority community in a constituency in order to incentivise the attraction of transfers from minority blocs. If only one party represents the majority community it is highly likely that that party will achieve the required 50 per cent quota on first preference votes alone, and thus elections may as well be contested using a non-preferential majoritarian system such as first past the post. If these preconditions are present, Horowitz (2003, p. 93; 2002, pp. 213-14, quoted in Coakley, 2009, p. 130) argues that AV would be likely to encourage more centre ground politics and incentivise inter-bloc vote pooling, which would in turn facilitate the formation of a cross-community coalition of moderate parties.

To support his argument, Horowitz uses the case of Fiji to demonstrate the moderating impact of AV in divided societies (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 62-63). In short, Fiji is comparable to Northern Ireland in that most constituencies have a majority of members from one community and the state has two similarly sized communities: indigenous Fijians, who make up 52 per cent of the population, and Indians, with 44 per cent (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 63; Fraenkel and Grofman, 2006, pp. 631-32). A period of political instability during the late twentieth century led to the establishment of a constitutional review commission designed to seek academic opinion on how best to manage Fiji's divisions, with Horowitz's recommendation of using the AV electoral system endorsed in the 1997 constitution (Fraenkel and Grofman, 2006, p. 632). The results of the first election in 1999 indicated a success for AV, with two multi-community coalitions contesting the election, both of which agreed to reciprocate transfers and share seats, resulting in a prime minister from the Indian community presiding over an executive mostly comprised of indigenous Fijians (Fraenkel and Grofman, 2006, pp. 633-34). Fraenkel and Grofman (2006, pp. 634-36) argue that the success of AV in incentivising moderation in Fiji was short lived with the election in 2001 of a hard line Fijian dominated government made up of parties that had very low levels of electoral

support from the Indian community, and even Horowitz himself has acknowledged that AV failed to achieve its intended outcome at the 2001 election (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, pp. 62-63). As such, despite advocating AV in societies with weak communal divisions and those with extreme ones, Reilly (nd, quoted in McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 63) does not recommend AV for bipolar societies such as Fiji and Northern Ireland. The factors which influence opinion against the use of AV in such cases will now be considered.

McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 63) argue that as AV is non-proportional, it can have significant drawbacks for plural societies, as electoral outcomes are often disproportionate, and the inclusion of minorities and smaller parties in these cases is crucial. Their concern is that, being a majoritarian system using small single member constituencies, elections contested under AV would be likely to return representatives from the majority community, who would not necessarily be moderate, and in common with all plurality systems it is probable that AV would result in electoral outcomes that favour larger parties. McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 63-64) also argue that the fabled moderating effect of AV is unproven, and using the system in divided societies may actually result in parties hardening their single identity, nationalist appeals in attempt to secure more intra-bloc first preference votes, rather than encouraging them to moderate in order to attract transfers from the opposite community. They argue that this may lead to the continuation of ethnocentrism, xenophobia and extremism by political parties, all of which impact negatively on societies divided by conflict.

## **History of electoral systems in Northern Ireland**

### *1921-72*

With the partition of the island of Ireland in 1921, the Government of Ireland Act implemented PR-STV for parliamentary and local government elections both North and South, whilst first past the post was retained for Westminster elections in Northern Ireland (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, p. 121). As McKittrick and McVea (2001, p. 8) explain, the rationale behind this decision was that the system offered a safeguard for the Catholic minority in Northern

Ireland and the Protestant minority in what was then known as Southern Ireland, and indicated respect for their positions. This was comparatively trouble free in the Republic of Ireland, with the continued use of PR-STV for all elections to the present day (Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 67). However, the Government of Ireland Act included a subclause that allowed Northern Ireland to amend the electoral system for parliamentary elections after three years, despite unionists having already made clear their opposition to PR-STV (Mansergh, 1936, p. 133, quoted in O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, p. 121). It is important to note that this requirement was not in place for local government elections and, therefore, the recently established Government of Northern Ireland was free to amend the electoral system for these as and when it saw fit. This it did in 1922 when, threatened with some nationalist run councils refusing to recognise the partition of Ireland, the unionist government abolished PR-STV and implemented first past the post, as McKittrick and McVea (2001, p. 8) assert. They draw attention to the discriminatory character of this decision, with nationalists losing their majorities in thirteen of the twenty four councils they had previously controlled and, for example, Derry moving to the unionists despite the city having a clear nationalist population majority.

As permitted under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act, the Northern Ireland Government abolished PR-STV for parliamentary elections in time for the 1929 contest, which O'Leary and McGarry (1996, p. 121. See also Mansergh, 1936, p. 133) argue would have been done sooner were it not for unionist fears of a British response. The Government defended its decision by claiming that PR-STV was 'not British, was undemocratic, prevented strong government, and contributed to indecisiveness and inefficiencies by enhancing the prospect of 'hung parliaments'', in addition to being costly and confusing (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, p. 121). There is, however, debate over whether this amendment was designed to strengthen the position of the UUP by weakening labour movements and independent unionist candidates, or was simply a measure intended to increase unionist hegemony (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 9; O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, pp. 122-25; Whyte, 1983). The plurality of first past the post meant that in almost every constituency the contest was between a UUP candidate and a non-unionist candidate, with

independent unionists denounced as running the risk of splitting the vote and allowing a nationalist to be elected (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 9).

The amendment certainly succeeded in weakening non-UUP unionists and labour representatives, whose number of seats decreased from eight in 1925 (contested using PR-STV) to four in 1929 (under first past the post), despite an increase in their share of the vote (Elliott, 1973, pp. 89-90, quoted in Whyte, 1983). The move to first past the post did not, however, significantly disadvantage nationalists, with the bloc losing only one seat in 1929 of the twelve it won in 1925 (Whyte, 1983). Whether the abolition of PR-STV for parliamentary elections was intended to weaken the nationalist bloc or shore up support for the UUP away from independent unionist and labour movement candidates is inconclusive, although on the basis of this evidence there is perhaps greater strength to be found in the argument for the latter. By adopting first past the post the UUP did of course succeed in its objective of a 'British' electoral system for Northern Ireland that was likely to create a strong government and enhance its hegemony as the largest party in the region, which was to continue until the suspension of Stormont in 1972 (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, p. 125). It is clear that the unionist majority at the time considered the use of first past the post to be a fundamental component of British political culture and a way in which to demonstrate the synonymy of Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK (Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 67).

### *1972-present*

With the implementation of Direct Rule from London, the British government set about determining how Northern Ireland should be governed in the future, with PR-STV implemented by the Northern Ireland Assembly Act of 1973 as the voting system for elections to any new Assembly and to local councils (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 91; O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, p. 194). In common with the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, PR-STV was chosen as it was considered to be 'fairer' than the plurality of first past the post (Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 68). Likewise, O'Leary and McGarry (1996, p. 194) claim that the system was opted for 'as an act of fairness' to nationalists, who had been discriminated against by the first past the post system, particularly in local government elections, with allegations of unionist gerrymandering to ensure a

majority abound (Whyte, 1983). They also argue that the British Government intended for PR-STV to reduce the UUP's fifty year hegemonic grip on power in Northern Ireland, perhaps to encourage more independent unionist and cross-community candidates to stand for office, and, more broadly, to facilitate power sharing between unionists and nationalists under what was to become the short lived Sunningdale Agreement. Despite the failure of power-sharing in 1973, PR-STV has since been used as the electoral system for all regional and local elections in Northern Ireland, as well as for all European Parliament elections since the first in 1979 (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, p. 185). The only exception to this is the Peace Forum election of 1996 to determine the participant parties in what were to become the Good Friday negotiations, for which party list PR was used. Further exploration of this decision and the outcome will now be provided.

The rationale behind the decision of the British Government to use party list PR for these elections arose from differing party positions on how candidates should be elected, as explained by Evans and O'Leary (1997, p. 25). The UUP and the Alliance Party wanted the election to be contested under PR-STV, with seats allocated using the droop quota in the eighteen Westminster constituencies which would each return five members. From the perspective of the UUP, this would prevent the DUP leader, Ian Paisley, from heading a regional party list and minimise the party's potential of benefitting electorally from his personal popularity and charisma that had served it so well in European elections (see also Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 80). Alliance considered its best opportunity to do well to be under a system in which the election was contested in the eighteen Westminster constituencies, as it feared being squeezed by the unionist and nationalist ethno-national blocs in a single Northern Ireland constituency. In contrast, both the DUP and the SDLP favoured party list PR in a single constituency with seats allocated using d'Hondt, as this would enable their leaders to head the list in attempt to reap the benefits of the successful formula employed for European elections. Sinn Fein did not express a preference for how the election should be contested. The two small loyalist parties, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), whose representation at the peace talks many considered to be essential in order for them to have a chance of succeeding,

believed that they would benefit most from the use of party list PR with a high district magnitude (see also Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 81).

The resulting electoral system has been described by Mitchell and Gillespie (1999, p. 81) as a 'fudged compromise formula', and by Gallagher (1996, p. 8, quoted in Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 80) as a 'unique method' that 'should probably remain unique'. As Evans and O'Leary (1997, pp. 25-27) assert in their analysis of the formula and the election, the response by the then British prime minister, John Major, was to 'split the differences' between the parties and adopt a complex and confusing system. To appease the UUP and Alliance, elections were to be contested in the eighteen Westminster constituencies with the droop quota used to allocate seats in the first stage. In a concession to the DUP, the SDLP, the PUP and the UDP, party list PR was opted for and the d'Hondt method was to be used to determine the remaining seats in the second stage. Each constituency returned five members and each voter had one 'X' vote, with independent candidates treated as 'parties'. This was used for the allocation of ninety seats. To ensure the representation of the smaller parties at the peace talks who had been unable to win one of these seats, in particular those representing the loyalist community, a further twenty seats were allocated to the ten parties that received the most votes with each assigned two members from a regional list. This brought the total number of seats to 110.

As previously mentioned, the election results indicated that the formula used did not score particularly highly in terms of proportionality. For example, despite the SDLP securing a total of 160,000 votes, the DUP won three seats more with 141,000 votes (Evans and O'Leary, 1997, p. 27). The system has been described by Evans and O'Leary (1997, p. 25) as 'comic', and by others as 'a dog's breakfast', although the then leader of the Liberal Democrats, Paddy Ashdown, referred to it as 'the best dog's breakfast available in the circumstances'. In echoing the position of Evans and O'Leary, Mitchell and Gillespie (1999, p. 82) argue that a formula for contesting elections which is based on making compromises to appease the opinions of political parties is no substitute for one designed with the will of the electorate in mind. It is difficult to disagree with this observation and despite the method succeeding in ensuring the representation of small parties at the peace talks, it is nevertheless a

complex and confusing electoral formula, and it is hard to envisage any situation in which it would be implemented again in the future. As part of the Good Friday Agreement, PR-STV has been used to elect members to the Northern Ireland Assembly since 1998 (Kerr, 2006, p. 88). As primary research into this decision has been undertaken with political actors present at the negotiations, the circumstances of its selection will be analysed in Chapter Five. Focus will now turn to the contemporary electoral environment.

### **The present electoral environment in Northern Ireland**

Despite the significant success of the Good Friday Agreement in managing violent conflict and establishing power sharing between communities, sectarianism and segregation still exist in Northern Ireland (Nolan, 2012; 2013; 2014), and this is reflected in the party system. Electoral support is concentrated on parties representing one of the two main communities, with the unionist DUP and UUP, and nationalist Sinn Fein and the SDLP securing a cumulative 84 per cent (43 per cent to the former and 41 per cent to the latter) of first preference votes at the 2011 Assembly election (Whyte, 2011). On the basis of Horowitz's (1985, pp. 291-92) aforementioned definition, Northern Ireland fulfils the criteria of an ethnic party system. Critics of consociationalism, such as Taylor (2006, pp. 218-19. See also O'Flynn, 2003, p. 144), argue that the perpetuation of this is a result of the community designation system used in the Assembly favouring the votes of those designated as unionist or nationalist for legislation requiring cross-community support. However, due to Northern Ireland's deep communal divisions, the designation system is considered by many to be a necessary provision to ensure that each bloc is represented and to uphold the mutual veto (Lijphart, 1977; McGarry and O'Leary, 2009). Within nationalism, electoral support lies almost exclusively with Sinn Fein and the SDLP, with republican dissident parties Eirigi and Republican Sinn Fein currently having no representation.

In the unionist bloc, however, electoral support is more fragmented. Whilst the DUP and UUP dominate, smaller parties are also represented, such as the loyalist PUP and the more hard line Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV), established in 2007 by former DUP MEP Jim Allister as a rival to his former



party (Hainsworth and McCann, 2010, p. 304). Although these parties do not pose a significant threat to the electoral dominance of the DUP and UUP, the TUV succeeded in splitting the unionist vote at the European elections of 2009 and 2014, impacting significantly on the DUP and contributing to Sinn Fein topping the poll on both occasions (Whyte, 2009; 2014). Mainland UK parties, the Conservatives and the UK Independence Party, also play a minor role in unionist politics, and independent unionist candidates, such as Lady Sylvia Hermon in North Down, have enjoyed some electoral success. Although the majority of parties are organised as either unionist or nationalist, some do strive to represent cross-communal interests. The most significant of these is the Alliance Party, which was formed in 1970 as a non-sectarian party and is currently the only cross-community party to be represented alongside the DUP, UUP, Sinn Fein and the SDLP in the Northern Ireland executive. Its electoral support is, however, limited in comparison to that of the four main ethno-national parties, securing eight per cent of the popular vote at the 2011 Assembly election (Whyte, 2011). Other cross-community parties, notably the Green Party in Northern Ireland, receive nominal shares of the vote. The comparatively low levels of support for cross-community parties demonstrates that electoral politics in Northern Ireland remains heavily polarised around the unionist and nationalist blocs in the post-Good Friday Agreement era of power sharing.

The most significant electoral development since 1998 is undoubtedly the rise of the DUP and Sinn Fein, both of whom prior to the Agreement were considered to represent the extremes of their respective unionist/loyalist and nationalist/republican communities. It was initially thought that the more moderate UUP and SDLP would be rewarded for their role as the main political party protagonists of the Agreement (Mitchell et al, 2009, p. 398). Whilst these parties did enjoy some electoral success during the early years of the Agreement (Whyte, 1998), Sinn Fein superseded the SDLP as the largest nationalist party at the 2001 Westminster election (Whyte, 2001), whilst the DUP displaced the UUP as the largest representative of the unionist bloc at the 2003 election to the Assembly (Whyte, 2003). It is evident that the electoral rise of these parties was ultimately at the expense of their more moderate intra-bloc rivals, with data from elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly indicating that

between 1998 and 2003 the DUP made a net gain of 18 per cent of the vote on the UUP, whilst Sinn Fein enjoyed a 14 per cent net vote gain on the SDLP (Mitchell et al, 2009, pp. 407-08). It is, however, important to note that the DUP candidate, then party leader Ian Paisley, topped the Northern Ireland poll in every European election since the first in 1979. This, however, is more likely a result of Paisley's charismatic persona resonating amongst the unionist electorate than any genuine preference for the UUP ahead of the DUP (Githens-Mazer, 2005). The factors behind the electoral rise of the DUP and Sinn Fein at the expense of their more moderate rivals in the post-Good Friday Agreement era will now be considered.

Critics of consociationalism, such as Taylor (2009b, pp. 320-21), argue that the success of these hard line parties is the result of the Good Friday Agreement entrenching, encouraging and rewarding 'those who pursue strategic sectarian ethno-national calculations and interests'. He cites Aughey (2005, quoted in Taylor, 2009b, p. 321) in claiming that the rise of the DUP and Sinn Fein is a product of the Agreement's maximisation of 'ethno-national group advantage'. Whilst consociationalist critiques of the argument that the Agreement has entrenched and perpetuated communal divisions in Northern Ireland have been referred to in greater depth in Chapter Two, Mitchell et al (2001; 2002) present an alternative explanation for the success of these parties. They argue that whilst the institutional arrangements resulting from the Good Friday Agreement were not of preference to either the DUP or Sinn Fein (indeed, the former did not partake in the negotiations), the incentives of consociational power sharing sufficiently encouraged their participation (Mitchell et al, 2001, p. 726). The moderation of both parties has been crucial to their democratic engagement in both the peace process and in Northern Ireland's governmental institutions (Mitchell et al, 2001, pp. 726-27). In the case of the DUP, its traditional hard line position of staunch opposition to any role for the Irish Republic in Northern Ireland had by 2001 been mitigated to a requirement that the North-South relationship, as provided by the Good Friday Agreement, be more accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Sinn Fein's moderation was clearly demonstrated in its support for the IRA ceasefires and later decommissioning, and recognition of the principle of consent that a united Ireland would require majority support in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

There are of course other contributing factors to the electoral rise of the DUP and Sinn Fein in the post-Agreement era. Mitchell et al (2002, p. 24) argue that the UUP and SDLP may have been victims of their own success, in that they ultimately fulfilled their *raison d'être* in their role as the main protagonists of the Agreement, which is particularly acute in the case of the latter. They suggest that younger nationalists have found greater appeal in the 'fresher and more assertive' Sinn Fein, whilst the SDLP is aged. Likewise, it has been argued that the pro/anti Agreement divisions that plagued the UUP during the early years of the Agreement turned many unionists towards the DUP (Mitchell et al, 2002, p. 24). It is also likely that the aforementioned 'ethnic tribune appeals' approach has had an impact in Northern Ireland. In arguing that this is indeed so, Mitchell and Evans (2009, pp. 152-53) reject the notion that voters have become more extreme in the era since the Good Friday Agreement and instead opt for who they perceive to be the strongest defender of their community in the knowledge that party positions will become watered down as a result of multiparty bargaining associated with power sharing institutions.

Tilley et al (2008) highlight that whilst intra-bloc competition within nationalism is distinctively ethno-national between the traditionally nationalist SDLP and republican Sinn Fein, within unionism there has been a shift from the socio-economic left-right focus of the DUP and UUP respectively. This is reflected in intra-bloc voting patterns. They demonstrate that since the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement party competition within the unionist bloc has been much more heavily focused on the extent of unionist ideology of the UUP and DUP being the key determiner of voter choice. This supports the 'ethnic tribune appeals' thesis in that ideology is fundamental as voters seek to elect the strongest defender of their community to represent them in a power sharing government. The Good Friday Agreement, with the removal of the Republic of Ireland's constitutional claim over Northern Ireland and the granting of national self-determination, has led to party competition being based on the management of compromise. Emphasising unionist or nationalist ideology therefore continues to be a fundamental way in which respective political parties can continue to project substantive power by symbolically highlighting their ethno-national credentials. Whilst the electoral rise of the DUP and Sinn Fein is

likely to be a combination of many of the factors explored here, there is great strength in the 'ethnic tribune appeals' argument that is supported by evidence.

## **Summary**

The role of elections in divided societies has been analysed, with particular emphasis placed on exploring debates around which electoral systems are most conducive to successful conflict management. What is perhaps most clearly evident is the continued significance of ethnic parties in societies divided by ethno-national conflict, which is a phenomenon that often remains even after the successful management of violent conflict and the implementation of power sharing. The case study of Northern Ireland supports this argument. Whilst it was thought by many that the Good Friday Agreement would bring about a shift to a more non-sectarian, centre ground party system, this has not been realised (Mitchell et al, 2009). Instead voters have been drawn to parties traditionally considered to represent the extremes of their respective unionist or nationalist communities, with several arguments put forward to explain this. Although recognising that there is no guarantee that it will occur, McGarry and O'Leary (2006, p. 274) argue that one of the main benefits of the PR-STV electoral system is its facilitation of both intra-bloc and inter-bloc vote transfers, which has the potential to induce political parties to moderate the single identity focus of their election campaigns. Chapter Six will determine whether or not this phenomenon is taking place.

## Chapter Four – Methodology

Bryman (2012, p. 380) identifies three main facets of qualitative research. Firstly, it is 'an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, whereby the former is generated out of the latter'. Secondly, it is an interpretivist method, which stresses 'the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants'. Finally, qualitative research is constructionist and 'social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals', rather than being 'separate from those involved in its construction'. Bryman (2012, pp. 399-404) also identifies several key preoccupations of qualitative researchers. Firstly, 'the social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied' who can 'attribute meaning to events and to their environment'. Secondly, qualitative researchers are concerned with description and context, with the contextualisation of a study being achieved through 'thick descriptions of social settings, events and often individuals'. This is necessary as social research must be understood in context. Qualitative researchers also emphasise the role of processes in social life due to the need to demonstrate how patterns and events pan out over time, often years. Finally, they stress the need for flexibility in research, as this enhances the potential to genuinely reveal the perspectives of the people under study. Through an examination of the research methods applied to this research project, it will be shown that its research design adheres to all of these characteristics.

This study's research question serves as a proxy in order to test its hypothesis, as explained in the Introduction. The ethno-symbolic characteristics of unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland, explored in Chapter One, will be used as a theoretical and historical framework in order to answer this question. Chapters Two and Three have explained the political and electoral characteristics of divided societies, with a particular focus on Northern Ireland. All of these chapters constituting the literature review play an essential role in contextualising this study by establishing and examining the research that has already been undertaken in this field, and by enabling the determination of a gap in the literature. This research aims to fill this gap and contribute to existing

work by employing an ethno-symbolic framework to analyse party election campaign literature in a unique way in order to test the hypothesis of this study. The significance of this framework lies in its ability to explain the importance of particular symbols and rhetoric to national identity, which is especially salient in divided societies such as Northern Ireland.

## **Methods**

### *Content analysis*

To answer its research question, this study provides a content analysis of campaign literature. This method is defined as ‘an approach to the analysis of documents and texts (which may be printed or visual) that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner’ (Bryman, 2012, p. 289). This is applied to analyse trends and changes in symbolism and rhetoric in political party manifestos in Northern Ireland, with the intention of determining if the preferential method of the PR-STV electoral system is having any impact on this. As they are primary documents, those analysing manifestos are required to interpret them through ‘an understanding of individual concepts, appreciation of the social and cultural context through which the various concepts are related in a particular discourse, and a judgment of the meaning and significance of the text as a whole’ (Scott, 1990, p. 31, quoted in Burnham et al, 2004, pp. 187-88). The researcher is, therefore, required to ascertain as much as possible about the conditions under which the document was produced and the author’s intentions (Burnham et al, 2004, p. 188).

The rationale behind exploring manifestos as opposed to other forms of campaign literature – leaflets or posters, for example – is that they allow for more systematic analysis, providing greater reliability. This is due to them being issued by all major parties for all elections on a nationwide basis. In contrast, leaflets and posters are usually produced by local party branches and can be irregular, with regional differences and inconsistency having the potential to distort conclusions. It is, however, important to note that there are limitations to manifestos. Their appeal amongst the electorate is low, with just 27 per cent of

respondents to a *Guardian* poll in the run up to the 2010 UK general election stating that they read them (Guardian, 2010). It is, therefore, likely that parties write manifestos with the media, academics and practitioners more in mind than the general public. Whilst this may have some potential to impact upon the results of this study, manifestos are nevertheless considered to offer the greatest reliability, for the aforementioned reasons, of all forms of campaign literature and have, therefore, been utilised for this research.

The manifestos included in this project were accessed from archives, either online or in libraries. The Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) website of the University of Ulster provides online access to many manifestos, particularly those of the post-Good Friday Agreement era, of all significant political parties in Northern Ireland. Manifestos were also accessed in person at The Linenhall Library in Belfast, the London School of Economics library and the British Library in London. Given this project's hypothesis and research question, the analysis of manifestos is divided into two eras: before and after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. As this research focuses on the impact of the Agreement on ethno-national identity, greater emphasis is placed on the analysis of post-Agreement manifestos of the current power sharing era from 2007. Publications from three sets of elections have been selected for this study: the 2010 Westminster Parliament election, the 2011 Northern Ireland Assembly and local government elections, and the 2014 European Parliament and local government elections. The rationale behind these choices is that, as of March 2015, all are the most recent elections to their respective parliaments, assembly or local council. This enables this study to provide an up to date response to its research question, whilst also enabling a comparison of manifestos from elections using different electoral systems, as Westminster elections are contested using first past the post, whilst all others in Northern Ireland use PR-STV. This offers a useful indicator of the impact of PR-STV on party election campaign moderation.

Whilst post-Good Friday Agreement campaign literature constitutes the main focus of this research, manifestos predating this era are also analysed as a comparative means of demonstrating any similarities and differences over time. This, however, is intended to offer a guide to the focus of pre-1998 election

campaigns, rather than a definitive study. In keeping with the contemporary character of this research, most pre-Good Friday Agreement manifestos analysed are for elections contested during the 1990s, such as the 1992 and 1997 Westminster Parliament elections, and the 1994 European Parliament election. Whilst this project aims to be as systematic as possible in its analysis, there are occasions when manifestos for certain elections are not available. This is either because a respective party did not publish one for a particular election – in the case of minor parties, this is often due to them not contesting all elections – or because they were unavailable in all of the three archives utilised. There is, therefore, some flexibility in which manifestos are included in this analysis, particularly for pre-1998 elections. Whilst some may argue that this impacts upon the internal validity of the results (Bryman, 2012, p. 47), where manifestos for a particular election are unavailable it is necessary to include an alternative or be forced to exclude, often significant, political parties from this study.

An additional factor that has the potential to impact upon the internal validity of conclusions is that Sinn Fein's manifestos for elections to the European Parliament are published on an all-Ireland basis. This has the potential to affect their focus due to the need to appeal to electorates in two different sovereign states, one of which is deeply divided along ethno-national lines and one that is not. This, however, is discussed and taken into consideration in the analysis. Furthermore, the UUP's manifesto for the 2010 Westminster election was published under the wider UCUNF banner due to the party's electoral alliance with the Conservative Party at the time. It is nevertheless important to note that the Conservatives and UCUNF published two different manifestos for Great Britain and Northern Ireland respectively. Although there is a possibility of this electoral pact impacting upon the focus of the manifesto, this is accounted for during the analysis to ensure that results are not misrepresented.

The decision of which parties to include has been largely influenced by the ability to conduct interviews with their representatives. Whilst it would be impossible to exclude the DUP, Sinn Fein, the UUP and the SDLP from this research, the inclusion of minor parties is subject to the availability of party members during fieldwork. This is ultimately due to interviews playing a crucial



role in understanding a party's perception of PR-STV and how it uses it to maximise its electoral potential, which a content analysis of manifestos alone is unable to achieve. This explains, for example, the inclusion of the PUP, as an interview with a party representative was undertaken, and the exclusion of the TUV, with whom no such interview was obtained. There is also a need for the Alliance Party to be included in this study as a means of comparing the campaigns of ethno-nationally based and non-sectarian parties. Manifestos are analysed through an ethno-symbolic lens to elucidate whether there have been any changes in their focus over time. This study is primarily concerned with changes in discourse and symbolism away from ethno-nationalism towards an almost exclusively socio-economic appeal. If this is taking place, particularly in elections contested using PR-STV and not those using first past the post, it would suggest that this system's preferential ranking method is influencing how parties focus their campaigns. The manifesto analysis constitutes Chapter Six of this thesis.

### *Interviews*

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 1) define the importance of interviews to qualitative research as being explained through the need to 'understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences [and] to uncover their lived world'. Given the essence of the research question, interviews are essential to this study, as the question is concerned with how political actors perceive, interpret and behave, often within the wider context of their respective political party. In order to obtain information on why PR-STV was chosen for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, how parties understand and use the system, and to gauge the extent of communal divisions, it was decided that approximately 30 to 40 interviews would be conducted. The rationale behind this choice is that they allow for tailored questions to be asked, whilst providing access to directly involved actors. All interviews undertaken can be considered to be 'elite', as many were with actors with, for example, policy making power, which is essential as this study is ultimately political research (Burnham et al, 2004, p. 205).

Elite interviews tend to be semi-structured (Burnham et al, 2004, p. 205), with preparation based around several main topics to be discussed and suggested

questions that adhere to this (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 130). The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they are more likely than unstructured interviews to enable most, if not all, of the discussion topics to be addressed, whilst offering more flexibility than fully structured interviews (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). All interviews conducted were, therefore, semi-structured, as whilst there was a need for certain issues to be referred to, there is also a necessity for fluidity when, for example, important information is raised that the interviewer has not previously considered or is not aware of. A potential disadvantage of this form of interviewing is that because the balance of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee usually lies with the latter, as they hold the knowledge sought by the former, the quality of data obtained often depends on the management skills of the interviewer in, for example, ensuring that all topics are covered within an often limited timeframe (Burnham et al, 2004, pp. 205, 219). Due to the nature of this research, it was decided that elite interviewing is nevertheless the only effective way of obtaining the data required.

Interviews were primarily solicited by email, after carrying out online research into suitable interviewees, and on rare occasions by telephone. Several were also solicited through contacts, either academic or previous interviewees, as all who were interviewed were asked if they could suggest other suitable actors who may be willing to participate. Whilst it was necessary to conduct interviews with a wide range of actors, especially from different political parties and communities, there was no overriding strategy employed when soliciting interviews, beyond the inclusion of as diverse a range of opinions as possible. Ultimately, however, there was a limited strategy, to the extent that the project was influenced by the actors with whom interviews were successfully solicited. In total, 32 interviews were carried out between June 2013 and December 2014. All but one of the interviews were conducted face to face, with the exception by telephone, and lasted between fifteen minutes and one hour, which was largely dependent on the quality of responses received. Their relatively short length was dictated by most elite actors having only a finite amount of time to devote to participating in interviews.

For all but three interviews there was one interviewee, with there being two for one case, three for the other and four for the final. With three or four interviewees the interview assumed an almost focus group atmosphere, with participants sharing their opinions, and influencing, and being influenced by, each other (Krueger and Casey, 2000, quoted in Burnham et al, 2004, p. 106). Due to it being questionable whether the limited number of participants in these interviews qualifies them as focus groups and as they were not explicitly intended to be used as a research method for this study, these cases are considered to be interviews with multiple interviewees. The majority of interviews were undertaken during four research visits to Northern Ireland, with all but one carried out during these visits taking place in Belfast. The exception was a single interview in Derry. Whilst this geographical scope could be criticised for being too narrow, this was a result of not only limited time and resources, but also the political nature of this research dictating that much of the focus was on Belfast, as the seat of the Northern Ireland Assembly and other political institutions. Other interviews were conducted in London, Salisbury and Dublin. They were, with the interviewees consent, recorded on a Dictaphone. All but one gave consent to this. Recorded interviews were later transcribed.

This project utilises three broad, overlapping categories of interviews, conducted in no particular order. The first is designed to establish why the PR-STV voting system was chosen as part of the Good Friday negotiations for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and is, therefore, intended to obtain the information necessary in order to answer this project's research question. In total, three interviews were carried out with the specific aim of determining this – two with British government officials and one with an Irish civil servant, all of whom were present at the Good Friday negotiations. In three further interviews with politicians present at the talks, however, interviewees were asked for their opinions on the selection of PR-STV, within the context of a wider overall scope. The questions asked were based around why the system was chosen for elections to the Assembly, what it was intended to achieve, whether there was any disagreement over the choice and, if so, how this was resolved. The purpose of these interviews was to determine whether the potential for PR-STV to induce moderation was a factor which influenced its selection. This constitutes the first part of Chapter Five.

The second category of interviews forms the main basis of this project and is designed specifically to answer the research question by obtaining data on the perception of PR-STV amongst representatives of political parties. In total, twenty two interviews with political actors (politicians and activists) were conducted with this purpose. Interviews were carried out with actors engaged in 'high' politics – MLAs, MPs and senior party officials, for example – and 'low' politics, such as local councillors and student activists. This was done in order to elucidate any difference in responses between these two political realms. Interviewees were asked which voters the party that they represent seeks to appeal to at election time and, more specifically, whether this includes everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of whether they are unionist or nationalist. They were then asked whether they perceived the main issue to voters to be the constitutional future of Northern Ireland or socio-economic policy.

Interviewees were also asked if they campaign differently for elections contested using first past the post and those contested using PR-STV, with a particular focus on how they advise voters to use their preferences. Respondents were then asked if the preferential method of PR-STV induces moderation of the single identity symbolism of their election campaigns, if applicable, with the intention of attracting inter-party and inter-bloc transfers. Finally, the focus shifted to the areas of Northern Ireland in which parties campaign, with the aim of establishing whether unionist parties canvass majority nationalist areas and vice versa. The rationale behind this choice of questions was to obtain detailed knowledge of how parties understand PR-STV and use it, and how they focus their campaigns in an ethno-nationally divided society. The information obtained from these interviews forms the second part of Chapter Five and complements the manifesto analysis of Chapter Six.

Rather than being a means of answering this project's research question, the third category of interviews refers to its hypothesis. Whilst the research question is the primary means of testing the hypothesis, it is necessary to 'bridge the gap' between the two in order to ensure accuracy in conclusions. As interviews with political actors progressed, it became clear that PR-STV is not, on the whole, inducing parties to moderate their election campaigns. It was, therefore,

necessary to determine why this is the case. To do so, six interviews were conducted with community activists, religious representatives and journalists, whilst some questions on this issue were also put to political actors active in local communities. The aim was to ascertain the extent of communal divisions between unionists and nationalists within wider society. Interviewees were asked what the main issues are within the community in which they operate, primarily if they are based around the constitutional future of Northern Ireland or are socio-economic. They were also asked about the community's opinion of the police and paramilitary organisations, and how willing the public are to engage in inter-communal cooperation. Information from these interviews forms the basis of Chapter Seven.

The intention of these interviews was to use the responses as a means of explaining why PR-STV is not inducing parties to moderate their election campaigns to appeal for inter-bloc transfers. Whilst focus groups with members of local communities may have offered a greater insight into the opinions and perceptions of the public, their use was unfeasible. This was principally due to an absence of the means needed to organise them, such as contacts, and time constraints associated with fieldwork. Instead, elite interviews with community activists and other such actors were considered to be a sufficient way of obtaining the data sought. It should be noted that almost all interviewees were asked about their opinion of future prospects for Northern Ireland, in terms of the continued significance of the two ethno-national communities. This served the purpose of providing an insight into how different actors envisage this, and if there is any difference in the opinions of unionists and nationalists.

#### *Participant observation*

Bryman (2012, p. 432) defines participant observation as a research method in which the researcher 'immerses him- or herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions'. The attractiveness of participant observation in social (and political) research lies in the ability of the researcher 'to collect a great deal of information in an informal and relaxed way, then use these observations to analyse and explain the situation under investigation' (Burnham et al, 2004, p. 234). The main limitation

of this method, however, is that it is difficult to record proceedings and relying solely on memory can be problematic (Burnham et al, 2004, p. 233). The inclusion of participant observation in this study is, nevertheless, unintentional.

The opportunity arose when conducting an interview with two SDLP student activists in December 2013, who asked afterwards if I would like to canvass with them and other party representatives for the then upcoming European and local elections in May 2014. Whilst actual canvassing never materialised, I spent around four hours with several members of the SDLP Queen's University Belfast branch stuffing envelopes with campaign literature to send to voters. This provided a useful insight into how the party prioritises which parts of Northern Ireland and which voters to send literature to in order to maximise its potential for electoral success, in terms of both the ethno-national and socio-economic composition of these areas and the ethno-nationality of voters. It is important to emphasise that participant observation was not intended to be a research method used for this study. Rather, the opportunity arose with the SDLP but was not solicited with other parties due primarily to difficulty of access and time constraints. It is, therefore, impossible to wholeheartedly generalise the findings beyond the SDLP to other parties in Northern Ireland.

### *Comparative analysis*

Whilst not intended to be the focus of this study, Chapter Seven includes a content analysis of recent election campaign literature of political parties in Malaysia and Brussels. The purpose of this is to draw a comparison between Northern Ireland and these two cases, as all three are divided societies with some form of consociational power sharing government. The rationale behind the selection of Brussels and Malaysia is that both have a longer experience of consociationalism than Northern Ireland, which is intended to offer an insight into the longer term prospects of the potential for Northern Ireland's consociational institutions to work to overcome the importance of ethno-national identity, as dictated by this project's hypothesis. The significance of including a comparative analysis in this research is, therefore, that it enables predictions to be made about the future of ethno-national identity in Northern Ireland (Burnham et al, 2004, p. 70). It also enables a degree of external validity to be granted to this study, as it verifies its conclusions using cases beyond Northern

Ireland (Bryman, 2012, pp. 47-48). It is, however, not without significant limitations. The ability of 'a concept to stay constant across time and space' is questionable (Burnham et al, 2004, p. 72), especially as Northern Ireland, Brussels and Malaysia all employ institutionally different forms of consociationalism.

It is important to note that no elections in Brussels and Malaysia are contested using PR-STV, which prevents the exact research question of this study being applied to these cases. Instead, the comparative analysis tests this study's hypothesis by arguing that if divisions were being overcome, most parties would seek to maximise their electoral support by making almost exclusively socio-economic appeals to the electorate, which would be reflected in their campaign literature. Thus, the PR-STV dimension of the potential for the acquisition of transfer votes which is applied to Northern Ireland has been removed. An ethno-symbolist framework is applied to the analysis of *Parti Socialiste* and *Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (Open VLD)* manifestos for the 2014 election to the Parliament of the Brussels-Capital region, and campaign literature published by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) for the 2013 Malaysian general election. This provides for a recent examination of the impact of consociationalism over a significant length of time. The rationale for analysing these particular parties is that their campaign literature is readily available online from respective party websites. Given time and financial constraints, it has not been possible to conduct empirical fieldwork into these cases. It is important to emphasise that this comparative analysis is intended only as an indication of the potential generalisability of conclusions from Northern Ireland and future prospects for ethno-national identity in the region.

## **Ethics**

A fundamental ethical concern of social research is the requirement of the informed consent of participants (Bryman, 2012, pp. 318-40). Interviewees participating in this research were, therefore, presented with an information form, which provided a brief synopsis of the project, and asked to read and sign a consent form prior to the interview commencing. Whilst there are concerns that the form instigates rather than mitigates concerns of participants, the

advantages are that it fully informs interviewees of the nature of the research and provides the researcher with a signed record of consent should any subsequent concerns be raised (Bryman, 2012, p. 140). The consent form informed participants that data collected – either recordings, transcripts or notes – is to be held confidentially under the Data Protection Act, will not be shared with any third party, and that interviewees reserve the right to request interview transcripts to comment on and edit as they see fit. The majority of participants requested that data acquired from interviewees be approved by them before being publicised. Avoiding harm to participants, whether physical, a loss of self-esteem, stress or harm to their development, is paramount to social research (Bryman, 2012, p. 135). Given the nature of this project and the actors interviewed, avoiding harm primarily takes the form of the need for confidentiality (Bryman, 2012, p. 136), and it was therefore crucial that these measures were enforced. When information obtained from interviews is referred to in this thesis, the names of the interviewees are not included in order to ensure anonymity.

The requirement of informed consent is also important in social research (Bryman, 2012, pp. 138-40). Participation in this project was voluntary and participants reserved the right to anonymity, as stated on the consent form. They were also able to withdraw consent during or after the interview for any reason, by contacting the researcher at the email address provided on the form. Finally, all interviewees were asked to consent to having the interview recorded by Dictaphone and reserved the right to decline. One former paramilitary member did decline, citing the PSNI's acquisition of recordings as part of Boston College's 'Belfast Project' on the Northern Ireland conflict as his rationale for doing so (BBC, 2014). For the participant observation exercise, I was introduced to other participants by the person who invited me to take part, and they were provided with a brief description of my background and this project. It was agreed that I should seek consent from the person who invited me to participate prior to any information obtained from the exercise being publicised. All of these ethical considerations have been adhered to in order to ensure that no harm comes to participants and their right to informed consent is respected.



## **Chapter Five – PR-STV in Northern Ireland**

Utilising a combination of information obtained during interviews with political actors and activists, electoral results data and secondary sources, this chapter fulfils three main objectives. Firstly, it determines why the PR-STV electoral system was chosen during the Good Friday negotiations for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the disagreements and debates around this choice. Whilst PR-STV has a history in Northern Ireland dating back to partition, which has been explored in Chapter Three, the factors behind its selection for Assembly elections is important as this effectively established PR-STV as Northern Ireland's principal electoral system, used for all elections except those to the Westminster Parliament. Secondly, the chapter analyses information obtained from interviews with political party actors and activists on how parties perceive and understand the preferential ranking method of PR-STV, and how this influences their election campaigns and strategies. Finally, transfer data from elections in Northern Ireland is explored and analysed in order to determine any correlation between party perception of the role of lower order preferences and electoral outcomes. The purpose of this chapter is to extend knowledge of the influence of PR-STV on how political parties campaign for elections in Northern Ireland and to serve as a precursor to the following chapter, an interpretive analysis of election literature with the aim of determining whether the system is inducing parties to moderate their campaigns in attempt to attract inter-bloc transfers.

### **PR-STV for Northern Ireland Assembly elections**

#### *Selecting an electoral system*

Deciding on a voting system for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly fell within the remit of 'Strand One: Democratic Institutions in Northern Ireland' of the negotiations and became enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. Provided the system chosen was proportional, the British government was willing to allow the Northern Irish political parties participating in the negotiations to decide upon it themselves and, furthermore, this willingness was shared by

the Irish government (personal interviews, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2013; 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014). There are a number of factors behind the decision to use PR-STV. Firstly, in any divided society a proportional electoral result and the need for adequate minority representation is essential, as exclusion is a cause of conflict (McGarry and O'Leary, 2004, p. 32, quoted in Coakley, 2009, p. 144). Lijphart (1977, pp. 38-39. See also Steiner, 1971) also stresses the importance of proportionality to consociational democracies, arguing that it ensures that the influence an ethno-national bloc has is determined by its size, which aids decision making by reducing the number of potentially divisive issues. As previously mentioned, PR-STV has the potential to achieve this necessary proportionality, whilst plurality systems such as first past the post would be likely to result in disproportional outcomes and greater minority exclusion.

In support of this claim, the rationale behind opting for PR-STV at the Good Friday negotiations was that it would facilitate an Assembly with 'a broad representation of political views in Northern Ireland', as many parties and individuals with different positions could be elected (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013). Furthermore, the system was chosen due to the need for 'pluralism and the plurality of ideas' in the Assembly, and for the engagement and representation of smaller parties (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). The latter argument is particularly important as it would have been impossible to achieve the support of the smaller parties at the Good Friday negotiations for an electoral system under which they had little or no likelihood of winning a seat, such as first past the post, thus jeopardising the entire peace agreement (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 62). The smaller parties included the cross-community Alliance Party, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, and the Labour Party (unrelated to the British party of the same name); the UK Unionist Party; and the loyalist PUP and UDP (Mowlam, 2002, pp. 145-52). All of these were successful in winning seats in the first Assembly, with the exception of Labour and the UDP (Wilder, 1998, p. 101). It is clear from this evidence that a fundamental factor behind this choice of electoral system was the need for proportional and representative electoral outcomes, in which minorities and smaller parties are adequately represented in the Assembly.

Although it has been argued that the *raison d'être* of opting for PR-STV was not to encourage the electorate to vote for moderate parties, which indeed it was not, the potential for the preferential method system to facilitate and reward centre ground politics and electioneering was nevertheless at the back of the minds of the negotiators (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013. See also McGarry and O'Leary, 2006b; Dixon, 2005, p. 365). PR-STV has the ability to encourage parties to moderate in attempt to maximise their share of the vote on two levels. Firstly, it is in the interests of parties to attract intra-bloc transfers in order to increase the likelihood of their candidates being elected. Sinn Fein was acutely aware of this during the 1980s when its candidates often secured large numbers of first preference votes but very few transfers, as moderate nationalists who voted for the SDLP would not transfer to what they perceived to be 'hard line' Sinn Fein, and they then remained unelected (McGarry and O'Leary, 2006b, p. 269). Secondly, as it could be expected that any rational political party would seek to maximise the potential for its candidates to win election regardless of the origin of votes, PR-STV also has the potential to induce parties to moderate the single identity nationalist symbolism and rhetoric of their campaigns in attempt to attract inter-bloc transfers. This is therefore a second factor behind the decision to use PR-STV for Assembly elections, as a system which facilitates more moderate politics and electioneering by allowing voters to rank each candidate and cross party and communal lines undoubtedly has the potential to bring about a normalised political system common in most Western democracies, and ultimately a transformation of elections and politics as a whole in Northern Ireland. This differentiates the system from other forms of PR, such as party list, which allows voters to vote for only one party and, therefore, prevents them from giving lower order preference votes to candidates from outside of their own ethno-national bloc.

A final major factor behind the decision to choose PR-STV for Assembly elections is its aforementioned usage on the island of Ireland, and particularly in Northern Ireland for European Parliament and local government elections. The system was chosen because Northern Ireland was 'used to it' and, from a nationalist perspective, it was used in the Republic of Ireland, and this was a way in which nationalists could express their Irishness and their links to that state (personal interviews, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). Unionists, however,

have not traditionally been as supportive of PR-STV. They are, on the whole, 'more inclined to the Westminster first past the post system', largely as it is considered to be British and, therefore, a way in which unionists can demonstrate both their own Britishness and the Britishness of Northern Ireland (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). Despite this, the unionist parties participating in the Good Friday negotiations nevertheless accepted the need for a PR system in order to ensure a proportional Assembly with adequate representation of smaller parties, not least because the loyalist PUP and UDP fell into this category (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). On this basis, it is evident that the parties to the Good Friday negotiations concluded that the voting system for elections to the Assembly should be one of the two – PR-STV and first past the post – already in use in Northern Ireland, as the electorate would be familiar with it. As first past the post would be unable to provide the proportionality and minority representation required to adequately elect a chamber in a divided society, only PR-STV fulfilled the necessary criteria.

### *Disagreements*

There were two main disputes concerning the choice of electoral system for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The first was a relatively subtle, underlying disagreement between the two major political parties at the talks, with the UUP having a preference for first past the post and the SDLP favouring PR-STV. In addition to the UUP's aforementioned perception of first past the post as being more British than PR, there are two further factors behind the party's opposition to PR-STV (personal interview, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2013). Firstly, it was concerned that the system would result in too many seats being won by minorities and smaller parties, and, secondly, due to the UUP's position at the time as the largest party in Northern Ireland, it had a preference for systems such as first past the post that increase the probability of a majoritarian government (see, for example, Norton, 1997). It is likely that historical context had a role to play in the rationale behind this position, with the party at the time having always been the largest in Northern Ireland and having governed the entity single-handedly for the first fifty years of its existence (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996; McKittrick and McVea, 2001). The UUP was, nevertheless, more inclined towards PR-STV than party list PR due to the diminishment of its share of first preference votes in the Peace Forum election of 1996, which was

contested using the latter system (O’Leary and Evans, 1997, quoted in McGarry and O’Leary, 2006a, p. 60). Indeed, it is little wonder that the party opposed party list PR for Assembly elections: had it been used for the 1998 election it would have won fewer seats than the SDLP, which would have threatened the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement as the largest party of the largest ethno-national bloc would not have been the largest party overall (P. Mitchell, 1999, quoted in McGarry and O’Leary, 2006a, p. 60).

Despite the UUP’s preference for first past the post, it is arguable that this position was never likely to threaten the peace negotiations, as it and the other unionist parties present accepted that an agreement could only be achieved if a PR system was to be used for elections to the Assembly, due to the need for the adequate representation of minorities and smaller parties that is essential in divided societies such as Northern Ireland (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). It is also probable that PR-STV having a history in the region and already being used for European and local government elections, as well as a general need for compromise in negotiations for conflict resolution, impacted upon the UUP’s acceptance of the system for Assembly elections. The overall context of a peace process allowed the party to present the package as a whole to the unionist community and whilst the choice of system may have been perceived by some as a concession to nationalists, this could be offset by ways in which the Agreement benefitted unionism, such as by nullifying the Republic of Ireland’s territorial claim over Northern Ireland (see, for example, G. Mitchell, 1999, ch. 15; Godson, 2004, ch. 24). This is evidence of a ‘trade-off’ between unionists and nationalists, which may also have been driven by factors such as the decision to use d’Hondt in executive formation as the system favours large parties like the UUP.

The second, and potentially more problematic, disagreement focused on the concern of the smaller parties at the Good Friday negotiations that it would be difficult for them to secure representation in the Assembly under the proposed electoral arrangement and they were therefore reluctant to support it (*Hansard*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2013 cols 316-18; personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). The importance of this concern is highlighted by Gary McMichael (1999, p. 222), the UDP leader at the time of the peace talks, who argues that his party, and the other small

parties, were going to have difficulty competing in elections to the Assembly and that this would be particularly acute in unionist areas where there were numerous unionist parties fielding candidates. The specific concern of the smaller parties was that the initial plan for each of Northern Ireland's eighteen Westminster constituencies to return five members using PR-STV, with a total of ninety seats in the Assembly, did not provide a high enough district magnitude to sufficiently guarantee their representation, despite this proposal being the preferred choice of most of the parties at the talks (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). To compensate for this, it was suggested that a regional top up of ten seats be added, the allocation of which was to be determined using party list PR, in addition to PR-STV in five-seat constituencies, bringing the total number of elected representatives in the Assembly to 100 (*Hansard*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2013 cols 317-18; personal interviews, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013; 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013).

The ten seat top up suggestion was the preferred option of the smaller parties, who stood to be most advantaged by it, but it was rejected for two reasons. Firstly, it faced resistance from the larger parties, particularly the UUP, who considered this method to disadvantage them by ensuring that the smaller parties gained representation, possibly at its expense (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). This is especially important, as the Good Friday Agreement would have been unachievable without the support of the large parties. Secondly, the top up of ten suggestion faced opposition from the British government and was rejected as it was claimed 'it would be too complicated to work out all the different permutations of top-ups' (*Hansard*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2013 col 318). It is possible to draw parallels with this and the aforementioned difficulties associated with the method of party list PR used for the Peace Forum elections, which employed a complicated formula described by Mitchell and Gillespie (1999, p. 81) as 'not well thought out or even properly understood by its architects'. It is therefore unsurprising that the use of a voting system for Assembly elections which included top up seats found little support beyond the smaller parties at the Good Friday negotiations that stood to gain the most from it.

Although the Northern Ireland political parties participating in the peace talks were largely responsible for deciding on a voting system for elections to the Assembly, this particular dispute, which was ongoing until 3am the day before

the Good Friday Agreement was reached (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013), was eventually settled by the British government (*Hansard*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2013 col 317). This is significant as it is an example of the fundamental role played by external actors in the negotiations. With the top up seats suggestion rejected and PR-STV established as the only system likely to be accepted by the larger parties at the talks, there was a dilemma of how to keep the smaller parties onboard *and* have members elected using only PR-STV (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). Appeasing the small parties was important for two reasons. Firstly, with the absence of the DUP and UKUP at the negotiations, who despite winning seats in the 1996 Peace Forum election to determine participants chose to leave the talks in protest against Sinn Fein's inclusion, support for an agreement from the loyalist PUP and UDP was necessary in order to demonstrate that a majority of the unionist political bloc backed the deal (McGarry and O'Leary, 2006b, pp. 260, 269). This is significant as without this support pro-Agreement unionist politicians would have undoubtedly struggled to convince the unionist community of its merits when faced with the subsequent referendum.

Secondly, there was a need to appease the wishes of the smaller parties as they deserved every reasonable opportunity to be represented in the Assembly due to the role that they had played in the Good Friday negotiations (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). It was these considerations combined with the need for elections to be contested using PR-STV that informed the response to the dilemma. It was proposed that the number of seats per constituency be increased from five to six, resulting in an additional eighteen members in the Assembly and a higher district magnitude, which increased the potential for the smaller parties to gain representation (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). Although they did not consider this option to advantage them as much as the ten top up seats suggestion, the small parties agreed, possibly through recognition of the need for compromise in peace processes and out of fear of allowing the issue to jeopardise the achievement of a peace deal, and this dispute was duly settled (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013).

## **The case for and against PR-STV in Northern Ireland**

The major contemporary alternative voting system that has been suggested for Northern Ireland is AV, which Horowitz (1985; 2003) recommends for divided societies in general. To recap, his argument is that under PR-STV the quota of votes needed for election is too low to induce parties and candidates to seek inter-party lower order preference votes, and certainly inter-bloc transfers (Horowitz, 2003, p. 99). AV would, therefore, be more suited to Northern Ireland as it would induce moderation due to candidates needing to reach a quota of 50 per cent in order to be elected, which would entrench the need for them to make inter-party, if not inter-bloc, appeals (Horowitz, 2003, p. 99). Critiques of Horowitz's argument will now be considered.

There is no guarantee that AV offers greater potential to induce moderation than PR-STV (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, pp. 62-63). As elections contested under AV use small single member constituencies, this increases the incentives for parties to engage in intra-bloc electoral pacts whereby they agree to not field candidates against each other in order to shore up support from one community. Under AV it is also probable that voters are even less likely to make inter-party, and especially inter-bloc, transfers out of fear of their preferred candidate not being elected. Despite the quota candidates need in order to be elected being lower in elections contested using PR-STV, due to the use of larger multimember constituencies this factor is significantly reduced. It is, therefore, multimember constituencies with a low district magnitude, such as European elections in Northern Ireland, that offer the greatest potential for party election campaign moderation. McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, pp. 62-64) make two arguments against the use of AV with specific reference to Northern Ireland. First, they argue that the conditions required for AV to successfully achieve its objectives do not exist because most voters transfer first to candidates within their own bloc, regardless of how moderate (or not) the parties they represent may be. In support of this, they cite the claim of Fraenkel and Grofman (2006, pp. 627-31) that a majority of the electorate must favour moderation and voters must be willing to transfer to candidates outside of their own bloc before transferring to those within it in order for AV to produce results that favour moderate parties.



Second, McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 62) argue that AV would never have been endorsed by the hard line and smaller parties at the Good Friday negotiations because as previously mentioned, they would not approve a majoritarian system that would be likely to have a negative impact on their potential electoral success. They assert that the use of AV was also unlikely to have been agreed upon as the participants at the negotiations owed their positions to a proportional system, as party list PR was used for the 1996 Forum election to allocate places at the talks, and it could therefore only have been imposed by an external actor, as was the case in 2000 when AV was implemented in the Republika Srpska. The position of McGarry and O'Leary is supported by aforementioned evidence obtained from interviews with actors present at the Good Friday negotiations.

McGarry and O'Leary (2006b; 2009a) are, therefore, wholeheartedly supportive of the use of PR-STV in Northern Ireland due primarily to its status as a proportional voting system – which unlike first past the post and AV, guarantees the fair inclusion of minorities and smaller parties – and because PR-STV employs the preferential method of ranking candidates. They argue that proponents of PR-STV in Northern Ireland and other divided societies have been proven correct in that the system has incentivised 'hard line' parties to moderate their positions (McGarry and O'Leary, 2006b, p. 269). Using Sinn Fein as an example, they claim that the party responded to its aforementioned struggle to attract transfers during the 1980s by moderating its policies, facilitating the PIRA ceasefires and participating in the Good Friday negotiations, and are now reaping the rewards of receiving lower order preference votes from SDLP voters. McGarry and O'Leary (2006b, p. 269) argue that this example demonstrates that PR-STV assists accommodative moves by parties and candidates in situations where there is more than one party within an ethno-national bloc. Whilst other aforementioned factors have undoubtedly been instrumental in facilitating party moderation, it is possible that the desire of parties to obtain inter-bloc lower order preferences has also played a role in this.

## **Political party perception of PR-STV**

Having explored the factors which influenced the choice of PR-STV for elections in Northern Ireland, focus will now turn to how political parties perceive the system and how they campaign in attempt to maximise their potential for electoral success. Although this research is centred on attempts by parties to attract transfers to them, the information included on lower order preference votes focuses on how parties understand and perceive transfers both to *and* from them, as this furthers understanding of how parties perceive PR-STV and strengthens conclusions. It is based primarily on information obtained from interviews with politicians, party activists and community leaders. Whilst PR-STV is also used for elections to the European Parliament in Northern Ireland, much of the data referred to has greater relevance to Assembly and local government elections, as for European elections Northern Ireland is a single constituency with only three seats, which inevitably results in campaigns being fought differently than in geographically smaller constituencies with a greater number of seats. Some reference will, nevertheless, later be made to the impact of PR-STV on how parties campaign at European elections. Party perception of the electoral system will be addressed within four key areas – intra-party transfers, inter-party transfers, inter-bloc transfers and transfers at European elections – which will each be addressed in turn.

### *Intra-party transfers*

Perhaps the most significant way in which the electoral system influences campaigning is the need for parties to ensure that they receive intra-party transfers. As ‘major’ parties, such as the DUP, Sinn Fein, the UUP, the SDLP and the Alliance Party, often field more than one candidate in a particular constituency, parties are acutely aware of the important necessity of balancing constituencies in order to maximise the potential for all, or as many as possible, of their candidates standing to win election. This is significant as it is usually perceived that a candidate will need to secure in first preference votes around half of the quota required for election to avoid early elimination (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). It is, therefore, not in the interest of a party hoping to win more than one seat in a particular constituency to have one of its candidates obtaining a large first preference vote with few first preferences for its other candidates, unless it can be absolutely sure that transfers from its

candidate with the large first preference vote will be received by its other candidates during subsequent counts.

The main way in which parties achieve this is by dividing constituencies into areas with comparable population sizes and advising potential voters in different areas to utilise the preferential ranking system of PR-STV by voting for their own candidates in a different order (personal interviews, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013; 4<sup>th</sup> November 2013). For example, in one area of a constituency a particular party may advise potential voters to vote '1 Brown, 2 Dawson, 3 O'Neill', yet in another area this order may be reversed. Usually a constituency is divided between candidates in a way which is roughly proportional with a comparable electorate size in each area, however well known candidates will often campaign for first preferences within a considerably smaller area, as it is likely that their prominence will result in them receiving a greater number of first preference votes across the constituency (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013).

There are a number of ways in which parties campaign once they have divided a constituency between their candidates. Campaign literature in the form of leaflets delivered through doors is a very significant method utilised by all major parties, as is displaying placards on lampposts, traffic lights and other such prominent locations within communities. It is, therefore, very common when travelling through a constituency to see placards of a particular party advising the electorate to vote for its candidates in a different order in different areas. A further means is through the use of mock ballot papers issued by parties at polling stations to advise potential voters of the order in which they would like them to vote for their candidates, which will differ depending on the area of a constituency in which the polling station is located (personal interviews, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013). These methods are designed to maximise the likelihood that first preferences and transfer votes for a particular party's candidates are evenly distributed, increasing the potential for all of the candidates it has fielded to be elected. Parties may also devise a general slogan, such as 'DUP 1,2,3', that is designed to be memorable and increase the probability that voters will make intra-party transfers, although this is unrelated

to the need to balance votes within a constituency and the DUP, for example, will in some constituencies put forward more than three candidates.

It is clear that for the largest parties – the DUP and Sinn Fein – ensuring voter discipline by campaigning for intra-party transfers is more important than attracting lower preferences from voters of other parties. This is especially acute in constituencies with a large majority of members belonging to one community in which one party traditionally outperforms the others by a significant margin. In the Lower Falls ward of Belfast City Council, for example, Sinn Fein will field as many candidates as there are seats in local government elections. In these circumstances, the party knows that if its voter discipline is strict in terms of intra-party transfers, it will win all five seats, as was the case in 2005 (personal interview, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013). In situations where Sinn Fein fields as many candidates as there are seats within a constituency, the party does not feel it necessary to advise its voters to transfer to any other party's candidates, as its own candidates need the transfers in order to ensure their election (personal interview, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013). This is further supported by Sinn Fein sources stating that as it is a major political party in Northern Ireland, its primary focus is on the acquisition of first preference votes in order to maximise its electoral success (personal interview, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014). Given the importance of intra-party transfers, particularly to the DUP and Sinn Fein, election campaigns in Northern Ireland can be considerably party exclusive, despite PR-STV allowing parties to encourage transfers from voters of other parties *and* advise their own voters on which other party's candidates to transfer to.

### *Inter-party transfers*

Whilst it has been demonstrated that for the two largest parties in Northern Ireland the most salient aspect of the preferential ranking method of PR-STV lies in the management of intra-party transfers, the DUP and Sinn Fein are by no means ignorant to the potential benefits of attracting transfers from other party's voters, particularly within their own respective communal bloc. As has been previously suggested, it is likely that the need for Sinn Fein to acquire transfers, especially from SDLP voters, contributed in some way to the moderation of the party, as at local elections during the 1980s its candidates often remained unelected despite winning a large first preference vote (McGarry

and O’Leary, 2009a, p. 64). However, as research by Tilley et al (2008) indicates, the ideological distinction between traditionally republican Sinn Fein and the traditionally nationalist SDLP has influenced party support. This distinction has also impacted upon how both of these parties perceive the significance of intra-bloc inter-party transfers to and from their candidates. Indeed, in interviews neither party suggested that they actively appeal to the other party’s voters for transfers, nor advised their own voters to transfer to the other party’s candidates.

Whilst if Sinn Fein or SDLP voters do choose to engage in making inter-party transfers they are most likely to remain in-bloc and therefore be between the two as they are the only significant nationalist parties (Barry and Love, 2011), that the parties themselves do not even claim to actively encourage intra-bloc transfers to their own candidates from the other party or from their voters to the other party’s candidates indicates little electoral unity within the nationalist bloc. This is attributed to the historical ideological distinction between Sinn Fein and the SDLP having an acute ethno-national dimension, which has in turn impacted upon the way in which these parties perceive the preferential ranking method of PR-STV (Tilley et al, 2008). As research has demonstrated that there is considerable voter fluidity within the nationalist bloc (see Mitchell et al, 2009, pp. 407-08), this is an interesting finding as it is thought that there is a potential electoral benefit for Sinn Fein and the SDLP to attempt to attract transfers from each other.

There is greater electoral unity within the unionist bloc in terms of how parties perceive lower order preference votes. Although it is of paramount importance to the DUP that its voters make intra-party transfers, the party actively encourages its voters to transfer to other unionist candidates, particularly those that share the DUP’s ideals (personal interview, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013). The UUP’s approach is much the same, with the party policy being to advise its voters to make intra-party transfers first before transferring to other unionist candidates in order of preference (personal interview, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). Whilst the DUP and the UUP ultimately campaign against each other for the same unionist votes, they are in many ways united around ensuring that the unionist

bloc remains the largest political community in Northern Ireland, with this intra-bloc unity largely absent within nationalism, as previously demonstrated.

Although unrelated to the workings of PR-STV, the existence of greater unity within unionism is corroborated by unionist parties, particularly the DUP and the UUP, agreeing at times to field a single candidate under a unionist unity banner in Westminster seats in which they believe they can win (see, for example, BBC, 2015). Whilst it has been known for the SDLP or Sinn Fein to not field a candidate in certain marginal constituencies to enhance the potential of the other winning election (BBC, 2010b), a united nationalist or republican candidate agreed on by both of these parties is yet to happen. This is supported by aforementioned research by Tilley et al (2008) claiming that unionist politics has not been subjected to the traditional ideological division that exists within nationalism. Although the influence of ethno-nationalism as a determiner of voter choice in unionism has become more important in the post-Good Friday Agreement era, it has not been as divisive as it does not have the historical roots of the nationalist SDLP/republican Sinn Fein distinction.

In terms of attracting transfers, within the DUP there is a perception that voters of other parties are united in their detestation of it, to the effect that the DUP will fail to receive many transfers and it is thus not in the party's interest to actively court them (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013). As is the case with Sinn Fein, the primary electoral strategy of the DUP for elections contested using PR-STV is often to ensure its voters transfer to all other DUP candidates. For the DUP and Sinn Fein, elections are therefore largely party exclusive, with the preferential ranking method of PR-STV having little impact on campaigns beyond the need to balance constituencies between candidates in order to maximise their potential to be elected. An exception to this rule is the DUP advising its voters to transfer to other unionists once they have given preferences to DUP candidates, which is evidence of the party considering the wider ramifications of elections and demonstrates that electoral competition in Northern Ireland exists between blocs as well as within them (P. Mitchell, 1999, p. 101).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, transfers are clearly of greater significance to smaller parties, both in terms of receiving them *and* advising their voters of where to transfer to. It is nevertheless important to note that parties do not, on the whole, campaign with the specific intention of attracting transfers – intra or inter bloc. Rather, it is largely the case that transfers are considered to be a ‘better than nothing’ alternative for voters unwilling to give the party their first preferences, as will later be demonstrated. Perception of PR-STV differs from party to party. For the SDLP, transfers clearly play an important role in its electoral strategy. When canvassing constituencies such as Belfast South, party activists note that whilst many nationalists vote for Sinn Fein as they perceive it to be the only nationalist party with the potential to supersede the DUP as the largest party in Northern Ireland, the SDLP are eager to receive transfers from these voters, as the party recognises that they can make a considerable difference to its electoral fortunes (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). The SDLP will, therefore, canvass districts in which it has little potential of obtaining a significant number of first preference votes, such as the Sinn Fein dominated Creggan and Bogside areas of Derry (participant observation, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014). Whilst the primary aim of the party is undoubtedly to attract first preferences, it recognises that transfers can make a significant difference in areas such as these. Despite being a nationalist party, the SDLP also believes that it has the potential to attract transfers from unionist voters (personal interviews, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013), and its campaigns, as will be shown in Chapter Six, are arguably the least sectarian of the four largest parties.

Whilst the SDLP does issue mock ballot papers at polling stations advising potential voters of the order in which they should vote for the party’s candidates, the party is happy for its voters to then transfer to candidates representing other parties, which is different to Sinn Fein’s position on lower order preferences in west Belfast, for example (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013). However, unlike unionist parties such as the DUP and the UUP, the SDLP does not advise its voters on which party’s candidates they should transfer to, ultimately because it believes that they should be free to decide themselves but also to avoid a ‘sectarian headcount’ in which elections are strictly intra-bloc (personal interviews, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013; 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). This fits with the SDLP’s view that it is not simply a party for the nationalist community. It is

evident that the SDLP perceives the preferential ranking method of PR-STV to be something to engage with and utilise to maximise its potential for electoral success, both in giving *and* receiving transfers.

Like the SDLP, the UUP can be considered to be a transfer friendly party. As aforementioned, it advises its voters to make intra-party transfers first before transferring to other pro-union parties. The rationale behind this is that it will be reciprocated by other parties and the UUP will benefit from transfers from their voters (personal interview, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). The party is not only transfer friendly in terms of advising its voters of who to give their lower preferences to. When canvassing, it is keen to ask voters unwilling to give the UUP a first preference vote to transfer to the party further down the ballot (personal interview, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). As is the case with most other parties, the need to balance constituencies between candidates and ensure that voters make intra-party transfers is the major factor in the UUP's interpretation of PR-STV, however intra-bloc lower preferences do also nevertheless play a role (personal interview, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

Lastly, it is clear that intra-bloc transfers are important in explaining how minor parties perceive PR-STV. The PUP, who are not currently represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly and have only a handful of local government seats, is keen to encourage voters to rank all of the candidates on the ballot, regardless of their constitutional position, and wants other parties to advise their voters likewise (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013). That way, a comparatively minor party such as the PUP can be sure of receiving a transfer, which is likely to be electorally beneficial. Although it is not possible to wholly generalise this argument, on the basis of this evidence it is apparent that the smaller a party is, the more important it will consider lower order preference votes to be.

#### *Inter-bloc transfers*

As the focus of this research is to determine whether the preferential ranking method of PR-STV is inducing parties to moderate their campaigns in attempt to attract lower order preference votes from outside of the ethno-national bloc they represent, it is necessary to analyse how parties in Northern Ireland perceive and interpret inter-bloc transfers. Starting with the larger parties, the DUP



argues that it is not on its agenda to campaign with the intention of attracting many transfers from Sinn Fein or SDLP voters, as the effort would be too great and may undermine its unionist appeal (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013). The impression is often given in interviews that the DUP do not consider inter-party transfers to play any significant role in the planning of its campaigns. For example, the party has recently made clear its wish to attract more votes from conservative Catholics who it believes would support its positions on certain social issues, such as its opposition to gay marriage (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013). Although it is important not to wholeheartedly conflate Catholicism and nationalism, despite clear parallels between the two, it could be thought that the obvious starting point would be to attempt to attract transfers from these voters, although the distinction between first and lower preferences is not made. This indicates that the DUP views elections as largely party exclusive, with transfers playing a very limited role beyond the intra-party level.

There are similarities with the way in which Sinn Fein perceives inter-bloc transfers. The party recognises that it does not have a tradition of receiving votes from the unionist community but claims that non-nationalist voters may find common ground with its positions on everyday issues, such as its promotion of LGBT rights, which may result in some unionists voting for the party (personal interview, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). This, nevertheless, does not influence how Sinn Fein presents its campaigns and, as is the case with the DUP, little distinction is made between first and lower preference votes. It is clear that making explicit intra and/or inter bloc appeals for transfer votes is not on the agenda for the party. The 'ethnic tribune appeals' thesis, which claims that parties strive to portray themselves as the stoutest defender of their respective community in order to maximise their electoral support as voters are drawn to these parties in power sharing arrangements, goes some way to explaining why the DUP and Sinn Fein are reluctant to significantly tone down their campaigns, as they fear outflanking from intra-bloc rivals. From the perspectives of both of these parties, the preferential ranking method of PR-STV is having little effect on how they plan their campaigns.

Evidence from interviews suggests that smaller parties show greater interest in attracting, and advising their voters to give, inter-bloc transfers. As

aforementioned, whilst the SDLP is a nationalist party, it is keen to emphasise what it considers to be its non-sectarian credentials, and this manifests itself in the party's understanding of PR-STV. In support of this, the SDLP does canvass some majority unionist areas, although it is not clear whether the aim of this is to attract first preferences, transfers, or both (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). Perhaps most significantly to this research, at the 2003 Assembly election, the party claims to have actively campaigned for SDLP voters to transfer to other pro-Good Friday Agreement candidates, notably those of the UUP, which had the potential to create a new political cleavage in Northern Ireland not based on ethno-nationalism (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013). This, however, was not realised as the UUP did not reciprocate this lower preference advice and instead urged its voters to transfer to other pro-union candidates (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013). Whilst the SDLP does not claim to explicitly moderate its message in the hope of attracting inter-bloc lower preference votes, that it was willing to advise its voters to transfer across the ethno-national divide indicates a preparedness to use the preferential ranking method of PR-STV in a way which is unique amongst the four largest parties in Northern Ireland.

It is clear that whilst it is undoubtedly a pro-union party, the UUP believes that it has the potential to appeal to voters outside of the unionist community and considers everyone in Northern Ireland 'to be a potential unionist' (personal interview, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). At the 2014 local government election, a party candidate in East Belfast canvassed the predominantly nationalist/republican Short Strand area and expected to attract around 40 votes, most of which the party believed would be first preferences (personal interview, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014). Whilst this may or may not be related to the workings of the preferential nature of PR-STV, evidence from both the SDLP and the UUP suggests that the system can induce parties to canvass areas in which they have little potential to obtain first preference votes in the hope of attracting transfers, although it is difficult to gauge the true extent of the occurrence of this. Although the UUP may believe that it has the ability to attract support from pro-union voters outside of the unionist community, that it advises its voters to transfer only to other pro-union candidates indicates that the party still considers elections to

have a particular 'unionism v nationalism' dimension, which remains the most important cleavage.

As the Alliance Party is the only significant cross-community party in Northern Ireland, its perception of the preferential ranking method of PR-STV is largely inter-bloc, if those designated as 'others' are to be treated as a distinct community. The issue of transfers can, therefore, present difficulties in upholding Alliance's non-sectarian position. For this reason, whilst Alliance is happy for its voters to transfer to other parties' candidates, it does not advise them on where to transfer to, as the party does not wish to endorse politics based on sectarianism (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). The party is, however, willing to admit that it hopes its voters will transfer to parties that share its agenda and outlook, which includes, to some degree, the nationalist SDLP due to its centre-left progressive ideology (personal interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014). In terms of receiving transfers, Alliance claims that it is transfer friendly (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). Although, like most other parties, the primary way in which Alliance perceives the preferential method of PR-STV is the need to divide and manage constituencies between candidates, and ultimately ensure that its voters make intra-party transfers, if it cannot obtain a first preference vote from a voter the party will ask for a transfer (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). Alliance, nevertheless, is not immune to first preferences carrying greater weight than transfers and ultimately considers lower order preferences to be the first step towards obtaining a first preference vote (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2013). The party thus does not campaign specifically for transfers when targeting voters of other parties, as it claims that it is often in competition with these parties and first preferences are, therefore, 'what matter' (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2013).

As a significantly smaller party than the four largest in Northern Ireland, Alliance is aware of the type of voter who is likely to support the party: well educated, middle to upper class, but not always high income, residents of suburban Belfast, and also minorities residing in areas with a large majority community (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2013). The party ultimately tailors its campaigns to appeal to this support base and is largely unique in Northern Irish politics in that its canvass strategy is, on the whole, not constricted by ethno-

national divisions, enabling it to potentially canvass every street in Northern Ireland (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). It is apparent from this analysis that whilst Alliance is indeed transfer friendly in both giving and receiving lower order preference votes, the party has an acute perception of who is likely to vote for it and targets first preference votes from this cohort. As such, aside from the need to divide and balance constituencies between candidates, PR-STV does not have a hugely significant impact on how Alliance campaigns. This is attributed to the difficulties posed by PR-STV for cross-community parties, in that they do not wish to inadvertently endorse sectarian politics by attracting transfers from other parties and in advising its voters on where to transfer to. This is a particular problem for Alliance, as save for the minor Green Party, some independents and perhaps NI21, there are no other cross-community parties in Northern Ireland.

Lastly, it is clear that the PUP is a party that has given consideration to attracting transfers from outside of the unionist bloc. Whilst arguing that this is impossible to achieve amongst voters towards the lower end of the socio-economic scale, the PUP believes that it has the potential to attract transfers from non-unionist middle class voters (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013). It is evident, however, that moderating its unionist/loyalist stance has little role to play in achieving this. Rather, like many other parties, it is the party's positions on socio-economic issues that it believes have the potential to attract transfers from beyond its traditional electorate (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013). Nevertheless, as the PUP is ultimately a minor party, it is undoubtedly seeking to maximise its support from whichever possible source. As such, whilst it may surprise some that a traditionally staunch loyalist party refers to a desire to attract non-unionist transfers, it is firmly rooted in maximising the PUP's currently very limited electoral success. As evidence from the DUP and Sinn Fein shows, it is likely that references to attracting lower preferences from across the divide would diminish the larger the party became.

#### *Lower order preference votes and European elections*

European elections in Northern Ireland are unique among those contested using PR-STV in that, with the exception of Sinn Fein in 1994 (Whyte, 1994), parties only field one candidate. Unlike at Assembly and local government

elections, all transfers are therefore inter-party. This is due to Northern Ireland electing as a single constituency for European elections, returning only three seats. This comparatively low district magnitude results in a high quota that candidates need to reach in order to be elected. This, coupled with the European Parliament being neither British nor Irish and thus free of ethno-national baggage, means that European elections offer the greatest potential for parties to moderate their single identity symbolism and rhetoric in the hope of maximising their electoral support by appealing for transfers from the widest possible audience. In the interests of being elected, it is thought that parties would indicate a greater willingness to do this at European elections than at Assembly and local government elections, given the significantly higher quota of the former.

The reality is that this, on the whole, is not happening, at least in terms of inter-bloc transfers. Within unionism there has been some attempt to facilitate intra-bloc lower order preference votes between parties. At the 2014 European election, for example, the DUP advised its voters to give their second and third preferences to the UUP and UKIP in their order of choice (Clarke, 2014). This has its roots firmly in the desire of the DUP to ensure that the unionist bloc does not become fragmented, which may allow nationalism to gain the upper hand, demonstrated by the party arguing that unionists should not vote for Alliance (presumably by way of first preferences *and* transfers), as it is no longer 'a small 'u' unionist party' (Clarke, 2014). In the nationalist bloc, whilst Sinn Fein's European campaigns do appear to express its republican ideals a little more moderately than they do for other elections (Githens-Mazer and Jarrett, 2014), the party indicates that there is a need to balance issues of salience in the Irish Republic with those of importance in the North, which in some cases are different (personal interview, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014). It is clear that this has little to do with any attempt to attract inter-bloc transfers from unionists. As in common with other elections contested using PR-STV, unlike within unionism, neither Sinn Fein nor the SDLP advise their voters on which parties to transfer to. When asked in interviews, no representative of any party suggested that the higher quota needed to win a seat at European elections made any difference to the way in which parties attempted to sell their positions and policies to the electorate. This suggests that the preferential ranking method of PR-STV is

having little impact on how parties present their campaigns, particularly in reference to inter-bloc transfers.

### *Summary*

From the evidence presented, it is clear that the primary way in which most, if not all, parties in Northern Ireland understand PR-STV for Assembly and local elections is in the need to divide and balance constituencies by ensuring that their voters make intra-party transfers. In terms of inter-party lower order preferences, there is demonstrable strength in the argument that the smaller a party is, the more transfer friendly it will be. This is ultimately a result of smaller parties perceiving the need to appeal to a wider audience to win election. As has been demonstrated, the DUP and Sinn Fein place a limited emphasis on attracting transfers from voters of other parties, which is especially true of the latter. For the UUP and the SDLP, inter-party transfers play a greater role, with both asking voters not willing to give their first preference votes to their candidates to instead give them a transfer when canvassing. Whilst unionist parties often advise their voters to make intra-bloc transfers to other parties, this is absent within nationalism, largely due to historical ideological distinctions, as aforementioned.

Although it claims to be transfer friendly, the cross-community Alliance Party struggles with inter-party transfers as it does not want to be seen as endorsing sectarian politics, particularly in terms of advising its voters on who to give their lower order preferences to. On the whole, parties have given little thought to inter-bloc transfers and any potential role for them, which is ultimately the result of operating within a deeply divided society. An exception to this rule is the previously referred to example of the SDLP appealing for its voters to transfer to other pro-Good Friday Agreement candidates at the 2003 Assembly election, which was aimed in particular at the UUP. However, as this call was not reciprocated by the UUP, this sole example of a party making explicit reference to inter-bloc lower order preference votes has since petered out. Finally, despite having a lower district magnitude, with candidates therefore requiring a higher quota in order to be elected, European elections are having no greater success than other elections contested using PR-STV in influencing the way in which parties understand transfers.

### **Transfer vote data**

Whilst this study is not intended to be a quantitative analysis of the origins and destinations of lower order preference votes, it is beneficial to briefly explore recent transfer data in order to draw parallels or differences with party understanding and perception of the preferential ranking method of PR-STV. Although this research recognises the potential for different outcomes at different elections contested using the system, it refers primarily to data presented in the studies undertaken into transfers at the 2007 and 2011 Northern Ireland Assembly elections (NIA, 2007; Barry and Love, 2011), as they are comprehensive, whilst other research into this is mostly skeletal. On the basis of evidence from interviews, it is expected that transfer friendly smaller parties, especially the UUP and SDLP, will receive the most inter-party transfers. In contrast, it is expected that the DUP and Sinn Fein will receive fewer lower preference votes, as they are less transfer friendly by their own admission, which is particularly true for Sinn Fein, as it presents an image of being uncomfortable with its voters transferring to other parties and indicates a limited interest in attracting inter-party transfers itself. In terms of inter-bloc transfers, although these are likely to be negligible, it is thought that the more moderate UUP and SDLP would perform best, which is especially true for the latter, as it has expressed an interest in using transfers in a way which goes beyond the traditional ethno-national cleavage in Northern Ireland.

On the whole, this analysis is accurate when applied to the most recent Northern Ireland Assembly election of 2011. Unsurprisingly given that they are the two largest parties, the DUP and Sinn Fein received the highest number of intra-party lower order preferences, with 16,835 and 19,738 respectively (Barry and Love, 2011, pp. 8-9). When intra-party transfers are excluded, the UUP received the highest number of transfers from other party's voters, with 21,110, and the SDLP a close second, with 19,409 (Barry and Love, 2011, pp. 8-10). This supports the claims of these parties to be transfer friendly. The DUP performed moderately well in attracting inter-party lower preferences, obtaining 16,416, but nevertheless was behind the UUP and the SDLP (Barry and Love, 2011, pp. 8, 10). Perhaps unsurprisingly given that previous analysis has

demonstrated that it is the least transfer friendly of all the major parties in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein attracted the fewest number of inter-party transfers of the four largest parties, with just 7,149, and substantially less than the DUP (Barry and Love, 2011, pp. 8, 10). As Sinn Fein obtained the highest number of intra-party transfers but the lowest number of inter-party transfers of the four largest parties, it indicates that its voters have a high level of voter discipline and Sinn Fein relies on this, rather than making inter-party appeals, for its electoral success. This reflects data obtained from interviews, during which party sources were keen to stress its achievement of winning all five seats in the Lower Falls electoral ward at the 2005 election to Belfast City Council (personal interview, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013).

More important to this study is the issue of inter-bloc transfers. Research by Mitchell (2014) indicates that whilst the majority of lower order preference votes remain in-bloc, there has been an increase in inter-bloc transfers as the peace process has progressed into the post-Good Friday Agreement era. It is useful to compare the 1982 election to the shortlived Northern Ireland Assembly with the 2011 Assembly election. In 1982, one per cent of DUP voters' transfers were to the SDLP, with no transfers to Sinn Fein (Mitchell, 2014, p. 254). Similarly, 0.7 per cent of Sinn Fein voters' lower preference votes were to the DUP, with 0.4 per cent to the UUP, which was perhaps a result of the latter being the most significant unionist party at the time, despite adopting a more moderate position than the DUP (Mitchell, 2014, p. 254). No transfers from UUP voters were to Sinn Fein and only 0.5 per cent went to the SDLP (Mitchell, 2014, p. 254). Finally, the data indicates that at the 1982 election there was no incidence of SDLP candidates standing against DUP candidates, however SDLP transfers to the UUP were negligible at 0.9 per cent (Mitchell, 2014, p. 254). It is important to note that this data references lower order preference vote destination levels only when voters were able to transfer to a particular party, as not all parties fielded candidates in all constituencies for the 1982 election.

When inter-bloc transfer destination levels at the 1982 Assembly election are compared with those at the 2011 Assembly election, it is clear that there have been some changes. Transfers received by the DUP from nationalist party voters and by Sinn Fein from unionist party voters, however, remain negligible,



at 2 per cent and 2.2 per cent respectively, with intra-party transfers excluded (Barry and Love, 2011, p. 8). Similarly, only 2 per cent of inter-party transfers to the UUP were from nationalist party voters (Barry and Love, 2011, p. 9). Of the four largest parties, it was the SDLP who received the highest percentage of inter-bloc transfers, with 16 per cent of its inter-party transfers coming from unionist voters (Barry and Love, 2011, p. 9). As has been illustrated, this is perhaps unsurprising given the party's keenness to emphasise its non-sectarian credentials, although it is important not to overstate the significance of this relatively low figure. It is worth briefly mentioning transfers to the Alliance Party at the 2011 Assembly election. With intra-party transfers excluded, 50 per cent of lower order preferences to Alliance came from voters of parties designated as 'others', with an almost equal percentage from unionist and nationalist party voters – 24 per cent and 26 per cent respectively (Barry and Love, 2011, p. 9). The vast majority of transfers to Alliance were inter-party (Barry and Love, 2011, p. 9). This indicates that whilst the party's appeal is ultimately non-sectarian, it does have some, albeit limited, success in obtaining transfers from unionist and nationalist party voters, despite not making active appeals to them for fear of endorsing sectarian politics.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored the decision to use the PR-STV electoral system for elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the disagreements and debates around this choice. It has drawn on information obtained from interviews with political actors and activists to analyse how parties perceive, understand and utilise PR-STV's preferential ranking method with regard to their election campaign strategy. Finally, a brief analysis of transfer data has been included in order to demonstrate a correlation between how parties claim to understand lower order preference votes and actual electoral outcomes. Whilst the focus of this research is on attempts by parties to attract transfers *from* voters of other parties, reference has also been made to whether they advise their voters, or potential voters, on which parties to transfer *to*, and it has been shown that there is a correlation between the two. Although the most significant way in which most parties perceive PR-STV is in the need to ensure their own voters make intra-party transfers, it has been demonstrated that smaller parties are

more transfer friendly than larger parties, in both receiving and in advising voters where to transfer to, in terms of inter-party lower order preference votes. Attracting inter-bloc transfers has been shown to be absent from most parties' campaign strategies, despite the potential for this having been a factor behind the choice of PR-STV, although there is no guarantee of this occurring. This has served as a precursor for the following chapter to analyse election campaign literature through an ethno-symbolist lens to elucidate whether PR-STV has induced moderation in an attempt by parties to attract inter-bloc lower order preference votes.

## Chapter Six – Manifesto analysis

Through the application of content analysis, this chapter examines the election campaigns of political parties in Northern Ireland using an ethno-symbolic lens in order to elucidate the extent of any moderation in the post-Good Friday Agreement era. Its foundations lay in the claim of McGarry and O’Leary (2006b, p. 274) that ‘PR-STV provides an opportunity, though no guarantee, of both inter-communal and trans-communal transfer of lower-preference votes’. If there is any potential for this to take place, it is expected that this prospect would induce political parties to tone down the single identity symbolism and rhetoric of their election campaigns and focus almost exclusively on socio-economic issues affecting everyone in Northern Ireland, with the intention of maximising their potential electoral appeal and, therefore, success.

With each party analysed in turn, first a general overview of pre-Good Friday Agreement manifestos will be included to provide an indication of the focus of these campaigns. Then manifestos from the 2010 Westminster Parliament election, the 2011 Northern Ireland Assembly and local elections, and the 2014 European Parliament and local elections will be analysed. This will firstly allow for the examination of manifestos from more than a decade after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, with its provisions having had a significant amount of time to have become entrenched. Secondly, analysing manifestos for these elections will enable the exploration of campaign literature for elections to all levels of government in Northern Ireland, including those contested using PR-STV and those that are not. The purpose of this chapter is to gauge the extent to which many of the ethno-symbolic characteristics identified in Chapter One are utilised by parties in their election campaigns.

### **Democratic Unionist Party**

#### *Pre-Good Friday Agreement*

The focus of the DUP’s pre-1998 election campaigns is especially strident and largely populist in its unionist appeal. Often the party’s manifestos were

published as short leaflets or booklets, rather than more traditional longer, policy driven documents. The election and electoral system used appear to make little difference to the way in which the DUP presents its positions, save for when explicit references are made to the parliament for which the respective election is being contested. The language and symbolism of the party's manifesto for the 1992 Westminster election is particularly strident, with the need to 'tackle terrorism' (in this case Irish republican paramilitarism) foregrounded (DUP, 1992). It states that 'nothing short of the elimination of the IRA shall suffice... they must be militarily defeated'. This theme is continued throughout, with calls for Sinn Fein to be proscribed and for the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) to be 'given a meaningful role in the defence of Ulster'. It is also keen to highlight the link between Sinn Fein and IRA, and to present the two as synonymous.

The manifesto emphasises the DUP's opposition to a role for the Republic of Ireland in Northern Ireland's affairs and claims to speak for the unionist community in doing so. There is, nevertheless, some discussion of policies, though these are usually pro-union and focused explicitly to the unionist bloc, such as opposing 'the ban on the display of the union flag and portraits of the Royal Family in the workplace'. The party clearly draws a distinction between pro-union and pro-British government, however, with some criticisms made of the latter. For example, it accuses the government of 'turning Sunday into a working day' as part of its 'Sunday is Special' campaign against what was to become the Sunday Trading Act of 1994. This is evidence of the DUP's religious foundations continuing to have a key impact on its policy formation during the early 1990s. The visual symbolism of the manifesto is profoundly unionist, with a red and blue colour scheme throughout and the inclusion of the red hand of Ulster on the party emblem.

Whilst this particularly strident presentation of its unionist credentials is perhaps to be expected for campaigns for elections to the Westminster Parliament, it is thought that this may be toned down for European and local elections contested using PR-STV, as the DUP was a comparatively small party at the time and it would have been in its interest to attract transfers from the more moderate UUP. This incentive, however, was evidently not realised, with campaigns for

these elections demonstrating little deviation from those for Westminster elections in terms of their single identity focus. The DUP's 1994 European election manifesto is intensely unionist in focus and foregrounds preventing 'Dublin interference' in Northern Ireland, an issue largely outside of the remit of the EU (DUP, 1994). It presents what the party perceives as the 'emboldened' and 'more united than ever before' Irish Republic as a threat to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, which is further emphasised in statements such as 'the SDLP leader (John Hume) and the leader of IRA/Sinn Fein (Gerry Adams) have joined forces with Dublin to pursue their common goal of a united Ireland'. This demonstrates a determination to emphasise what the party perceives to be the Republic of Ireland's congruence with the nationalist community in the North and to package this as a combined threat to unionism.

Opposition to the Irish Republic is also demonstrated in its discussion of EU issues, with a section dedicated to 'Our money given to Dublin', which argues that taxpayers' money from Northern Ireland is transferred 'into Dublin's coffers'. Whilst some reference is made to specific European policies, much of the focus of the manifesto is on issues outside the remit of the EU, with calls for voters to 'deliver their verdict on the Downing Street Declaration and the process to bring IRA/Sinn Fein to the negotiating table' by voting for the DUP. Whilst the manifesto's visual symbolism is perhaps less strident than that of the party's 1992 Westminster election campaign, with a blue colour scheme throughout, its language and focus remain particularly hard line unionist, indicating that the use of PR-STV had little impact on DUP campaign moderation at this time.

Neither can it be suggested that PR-STV had any significant impact on how the DUP campaigned for local elections in the pre-Good Friday Agreement era. The party's 1997 local government election manifesto makes little reference to specific socio-economic policies affecting local areas and is instead largely focused on issues rooted in the Northern Ireland conflict (DUP, 1997). It includes a section dedicated to opposing 'IRA/Sinn Fein' that makes statements emphasising the DUP's opposition to Sinn Fein's presence in council chambers and reiterates calls for its proscription. The manifesto also asserts the party's support for Articles 2 and 3, which set out the Republic of Ireland's territorial claim to Northern Ireland, to be removed from the state's Constitution, claiming

that they are 'immoral, irredentist and illegal'. When socio-economic policy is discussed, it is focused on what the party can do for the unionist community, rather than the entire Northern Ireland population, regardless of their ethno-national background or beliefs. For example, it states that the DUP will support 'Fair funding for unionist areas', arguing that statutory agencies are neglecting unionists in need in favour of nationalists. This is an example of a political party utilising a psychocultural narrative, as identified by Ross (2009, pp. 8-10), to portray the ethno-national group it seeks to represent as vulnerable against the opposing community.

The manifesto also emphasises the DUP's unionist credentials in stating that the party 'puts the interests of Ulster and the unionist people above any sectoral or party advantage', whilst also reiterating its opposition to involvement from the Irish government in Northern Ireland's affairs. Although the largely neutral blue colour scheme is again utilised, the language of the manifesto does not indicate that PR-STV is having any meaningful success in inducing the DUP to tone down its single identity symbolism in the hope of attracting inter-party transfers, even from more moderate voters within the unionist bloc. This analysis has demonstrated that the intention of the party in the pre-Good Friday Agreement era was to mobilise hard line unionist voters by focusing its electoral appeal specifically to this section of the community. It is evident that use of the PR-STV electoral system made little difference to the way in which the DUP focused its campaigns, as the party's European and local election manifestos from this time do not indicate any significant moderation in its unionist symbolism, suggesting that attracting inter-party transfers was not a priority for the party.

### *Post-GFA*

Two significant ways in which the DUP's 2010 Westminster Parliament election manifesto differs from the party's pre-Good Friday Agreement publications is its increased length and greater discussion of socio-economic issues (DUP, 2010). It includes several sections dedicated to bread and butter issues such as the economy, business, health, education and agri-food, with specific policies outlined for each. The language of the manifesto is more focused on what the party can do for Northern Ireland overall, rather than just the narrower unionist community. It is not, however, completely devoid of specific appeals to this

cohort. The introduction by the current party leader, Peter Robinson, makes reference to obtaining 'key strategic gains for unionism' and states reasons why the electorate should vote for the DUP, two of which are because it provides 'unionist unity' and 'strong positive unionist leadership'. This indicates that whilst the party is keen to stress its credentials on everyday issues affecting all of Northern Ireland's population, whether unionist, nationalist or other, it considers it necessary to situate its appeal within the unionist community.

The manifesto also demonstrates this appeal in its discussion of certain socio-economic issues. For example, a section entitled 'Tackling Disadvantage' refers to the DUP being 'particularly concerned about the often overlooked deprivation within Ulster's Protestant Unionist and Loyalist communities'. Similarly, within 'Crime and Policing' the manifesto states that the devolution of these powers has 'always been considered essential by Unionists'. Furthermore, a section dedicated to 'Culture' refers only to that of unionism, arguing that the DUP 'has worked to promote and develop the roles of the Loyal Orders, marching bands and Ulster-Scots heritage', and claims, for example, that the party has obtained 'greater funding for the Twelfth and other Orange activities'. This is evidence of the DUP utilising the collective memories that ethno-symbolists, and Ross (2009), consider to be so important to national identity in order to attract support from unionists. Some of the DUP's pledges are focused not just on what the party can achieve for the unionist community but what it can implement in opposition to nationalists: 'there will be no Irish Language Act', for example. The visual symbolism of the manifesto supports the party's unionist appeal, with images of the union flag, the British Army and the Orange Order included. Whilst this literature demonstrates some moderation of the DUP from the pre-Good Friday Agreement era, with greater discussion of socio-economic issues, its appeal is still very much aimed towards the unionist community.

If PR-STV, with its preferential ranking system allowing candidates to receive inter-party transfers, is having a significant impact on the DUP's election campaigns the post-1998 era of inter-communal power sharing, it is expected that the party's 2011 Northern Ireland Assembly and local government manifesto would demonstrate moderation of the staunchly unionist appeal of its Westminster election publication of the previous year. There is, indeed, some

evidence of this. The 2011 manifesto follows a similar theme to that of 2010, with party positions set out on a range of issues, including the economy, health and education, and some specific policies pledged (DUP, 2011). Where they differ, however, is in the language used to make their appeals. Whilst the DUP's 2010 manifesto is explicit in its appeal to the unionist community, its 2011 publication does demonstrate some movement towards appeals to the broader population of Northern Ireland. For example, when addressing cultural issues, the manifesto uses language such as 'delivering for unionism and the broader community'. In comparison to 2010, this section is more focused on discussing culture that applies to both communities in Northern Ireland, such as supporting libraries, the arts and museums, as well as common sporting events such as the Olympics and Paralympics. Significantly, the 2011 manifesto pledges that the DUP will invest in regional stadium development for the GAA, a key sporting organisation for nationalists and a defining example of their cultural heritage.

Unionist discourse and symbolism is not, however, entirely absent. The party, for example, proposes working alongside Loyal Orders to bring about the abolition of the Parades Commission and pledges its commitment to 'strengthen the Union'. In a similar vein, the manifesto's visual symbolism includes images of the union flag, the British Army and the Queen. Despite the party making a specific pledge to nationalists in GAA investment, the inclusion of explicitly unionist symbolism and discourse makes it impossible to argue that the manifesto has been designed with attracting votes, either first preferences or transfers, from nationalists in mind. It is more probable that this moderation in comparison to its 2010 manifesto is an attempt to attract support from more moderate unionists who may traditionally vote for the UUP, for example. As Assembly and local government elections are contested using PR-STV, the DUP has an added incentive to present its appeal in this way as if moderate voters are not prepared give their first preferences to party candidates, they may be inclined to transfer to them further down the ballot. Whilst this does not demonstrate that PR-STV is facilitating DUP election campaign moderation in the hope of attracting *inter*-bloc transfers, it may indicate moderation in attempt to attract *intra*-bloc lower order preferences.



If this appeal is a lasting strategy for the DUP, it is expected that the party's 2014 European Parliament and local government election manifesto would demonstrate a continuation of this moderation, as the high threshold of European elections offer the greatest incentive for this. On the whole, however, this is not so. Whilst the 2014 manifesto addresses specific EU and local issues such as agriculture, fishing, the environment and the economy, much of its focus is rooted in appealing to the narrow unionist community (DUP, 2014). There are many examples of this. Within a section entitled 'Northern Ireland Moving Forward', the party states that 'Unionism united at every level of government is Unionism that is confident and strong. In this election it is important that the Unionist vote is not shredded and a strong Unionist voice is heard. Only the Democratic Unionist Party offer a united Unionist voice'. This suggests that the DUP is placing the interests of the unionist community at least on par with those of the party, and indicates that it perceives the 2014 elections as 'unionism vs nationalism' contests. Further examples of the party presenting its appeal in an exclusively unionist way are to be found in pledges such as supporting the year round flying of the union flag, and 'defending the symbols and emblems of our nation' in the face of nationalists and republicans waging a war against them. The manifesto's visual symbolism includes British and unionist images, such as those of the union flag and the British Army.

There are two main factors behind the DUP's decision to run a highly charged unionist campaign for the 2014 European and local government elections. Firstly, as five unionist candidates (six if NI21 is considered to be unionist) contested the European election, the party was keen to avoid unionist vote splitting which had the potential to result in nationalist candidates winning two of the three seats. In the event, this outcome was not realised but Sinn Fein, nevertheless, topped the poll on first preference votes, ahead of the DUP (Whyte, 2014). Secondly, the party was keen to avoid intra-bloc outflanking by the more hard line Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV), which is led by the former DUP MEP, Jim Allister, and won 14 per cent of first preferences in the 2009 European election (Whyte, 2009). The DUP, therefore, considered it necessary to run a campaign aimed almost exclusively towards the unionist community in 2014 in order to maintain its 'ethnic tribune' status within unionism and to ensure that support was not lost to the TUV. This suggests that when it

perceives the electoral strength of unionism or its 'ethnic tribune' status to be threatened, the preferential method of PR-STV makes little difference to the way in which the DUP presents its campaigns, as it resorts to the widespread use of exclusively unionist symbolism and discourse in attempt to prevent this.

### *Summary*

This analysis has demonstrated that there has been a moderation of the DUP's election campaigns in the post-Good Friday Agreement era towards a greater focus on socio-economic issues. Party representatives identify three main factors to explain this (personal interviews, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013; 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014). Firstly, the advent of a more peaceful environment in Northern Ireland since the 1990s, in which people have almost entirely turned their backs on paramilitarism and have endorsed the peace process, means that parties must place greater emphasis on real world politics, as opposed to conflict related issues such as anti-terrorism policies. Secondly, as parties traditionally considered to be 'hard line' expand, as has been the case with Sinn Fein and the DUP, they attract a wider range of people and ideas, which can often result in moderation. Finally, being in government has the potential to incentivise parties to moderate as there is a necessity to deliver on their pledges and be held to account, whereas prior to the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly parties were effectively in a permanent state of opposition and were not responsible for policy implementation. These factors explain the DUP's rationale for moving away from its populist elections campaigns of the 1990s, towards ones which place greater emphasis on key socio-economic issues in the 2010s.

The DUP argues that one of its recent campaign strategies is to attract support from Catholic voters who may agree with the party's conservative positions on social issues such as gay marriage and abortion (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013). Whilst it is unclear whether the party seeks first or lower order preferences from this electorate, as the DUP does not have a tradition of support from the Catholic community, it is thought that a transfer would be the most obvious starting point, with the potential for this to later translate into a first preference vote. On the basis of the manifestos analysed, there is little evidence of the party making any significant appeals to Catholics. Although the

DUP's 2011 Assembly and local government manifesto demonstrates some degree of moderation, its British and unionist visual symbolism, combined with the staunchly and largely exclusively unionist appeal of its 2014 European and local government elections manifesto, indicates that the DUP is not interested in appealing for inter-bloc transfers.

The party, however, suggests that Catholics who are interested in voting for the DUP will accept the utilisation of British and unionist symbolism in its campaigns, provided that it is not presented in an aggressive way (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). Whilst it is important not to wholeheartedly conflate Catholicism and nationalism, it is the case that most Catholics in Northern Ireland are nationalist, and although they may not favour a united Ireland at present, it is likely to be at least a long term aspiration (McKittrick and McVea, 2001, p. 2). In its campaign literature, the DUP appears to conflate being presently pro-union with being a member of the unionist community. It is improbable that the party will receive any significant support from Catholics as they are likely to be discouraged by the DUP's staunch and largely exclusive appeal to the unionist community. Indeed, it has been suggested that the party's claim that it hopes to attract votes from Catholics is an attempt to convince moderate unionists that it has shed its traditional hard line position (Devenport, 2011). The DUP, nevertheless, is willing to admit that sections of its manifesto, such as those on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland and cultural affairs, are unlikely to resonate beyond the unionist community, although it does claim that its policies on socio-economic issues are formulated with all of Northern Ireland's population in mind (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

It has been demonstrated that the DUP has shown little interest in moderating its unionist discourse and symbolism in the hope of attracting inter-bloc transfers. As its 2014 European and local government elections manifesto indicates little deviation in terms of this from its 2010 Westminster election publication, it is clear that use of the PR-STV electoral system has little or no meaningful impact on the way in which the party focuses its appeal to the non-unionist electorate. Whilst the DUP's 2011 Assembly and local government elections manifesto does demonstrate some moderation of its traditional staunchly unionist discourse and symbolism, which may be an attempt to attract

intra-bloc transfers from moderate unionists, this moderation is not implemented when the party perceives its 'ethnic tribune' status to be threatened. In these circumstances, as its 2014 manifesto suggests, the DUP resorts to a largely exclusive unionist appeal in order to prevent outflanking by intra-bloc rivals and to present itself as the stoutest defender of the unionist community. Based on Porter's (1996, quoted in Dixon, pp. 206-07) aforementioned definition, it has been demonstrated that the DUP's outlook is cultural unionist, with particular emphasis placed on Protestantism, Britishness and Ulsterness in shaping political life in Northern Ireland, which heavily influences its election campaigns.

It is also important not to overlook the wider ramifications of the 'ethnic tribune' appeals thesis in explaining why the DUP continues to make ethno-symbolic electoral appeals. In assuming this position, the party has transformed itself from one which rejected the Good Friday Agreement, including power sharing with Sinn Fein and a role for the Irish government in Northern Ireland, to one which accepts these principles. The DUP, therefore, considers it necessary to project its substantive power in ethno-symbolic terms in its campaign literature by, for example, emphasising how it is using its position in government to support unionism and uphold unionist principles. This supports the argument that whilst consociationalism and its 'complex' principles, such as British-Irish interdependence, is having some impact on political parties in Northern Ireland, this, on the whole, is not being replicated in their election campaigns. Overall, the analysis suggests that PR-STV is having little meaningful impact on the way in which the DUP presents its election campaigns in terms of moderating its unionist appeal in attempt to attract inter-bloc transfers. This reflects aforementioned data indicating that the party places only a limited emphasis on attracting inter-party lower order preference votes.

## **Ulster Unionist Party**

### *Pre-GFA*

An immediately noticeable way in which the UUP's pre-Good Friday Agreement election campaigns differ from the DUP's is in their staunchly liberal unionist focus, which is based on citizenship and a 'British political way of life', as

previously defined by Porter (1996, pp. 127-28). The party's 1992 Westminster Parliament election manifesto is, therefore, heavily focused on demonstrating what it considers to be Northern Ireland's integral position as a constituent part of the UK (UUP, 1992). As such, many of the policies and proposals it discusses are designed to uphold this and to ensure that the constitutional link is maintained. Indeed, a section is dedicated to this and includes statements such as 'we cannot accept as stable any system of governance which could not be equally applied to any other regional entity within the UK' and 'citizens of Northern Ireland are... citizens of the UK with all the rights and obligations which go with that status'. The use of language such as this suggests that at the time the UUP considered the future of Northern Ireland's constitutional position to be threatened, which is further demonstrated by the manifesto asserting that 'we desire the active support of the government in removing the constitutional claim [of the Republic of Ireland] to this part of the Kingdom'. It also indicates a commitment to uphold Northern Ireland's institutions, demonstrated by statements such as 'the welfare of the RUC... and UDR are of paramount importance'.

The choice of visual symbolism is also intended to emphasise Northern Ireland's position within the UK, with an image of the union flag on the manifesto's cover, and the use of the colours red and blue throughout. It is not devoid of imagery unique to Northern Ireland, however, as the red hand of Ulster features on its cover. Unlike the DUP's campaigns, which are often tailored to the narrow unionist community, the UUP's electoral focus is aimed towards pro-union voters in Northern Ireland, regardless of their ethno-national community background (personal interview, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). This distinction is significant as this cohort may include Catholics who do not consider themselves to be part of the unionist community but favour the maintenance of the current constitutional arrangement. When discussing socio-economic policy issues, the UUP undoubtedly has all of Northern Ireland's population in mind, which is also demonstrated in its 1997 Westminster Parliament election manifesto (UUP, 1997). The party, nevertheless, does not shy away from emphasising its support for institutions that were traditionally considered by many to be almost exclusively unionist, such as the RUC and the UDR, and this is likely to impact upon the party's ability to win support from outside the unionist community.

In order to maximise its electoral support by attracting lower order preference votes from the widest possible audience, it is thought that the UUP's 1994 European Parliament election manifesto would demonstrate moderation when compared to its 1992 Westminster publication due to the high vote quota of European elections under PR-STV offering the greatest incentive to court inter-bloc transfers. This, however, was not realised and the UUP's 1994 European manifesto is focused in much the same way as its Westminster manifesto of two years previous (UUP, 1994). Whilst socio-economic EU issues are discussed, it is again designed to demonstrate Northern Ireland's constitutional position and includes statements such as the UUP 'continue to defend the integrity of the UK', albeit with a more European focus. Furthermore, some of the language of the manifesto is unlikely to sit well with Catholic/nationalist voters, for example a 'negative attitude plays into the hands of the IRA and the Republic's government'.

Whilst not suggesting that any IRA sympathiser would have considered giving the UUP a preference vote, it is thought that some moderate nationalists in agreement with the party's socio-economic positions may have been inclined to. It is, however, likely that they would be dissuaded from doing so by the UUP's detrimental reference to the government of their traditional state of preference. This is significant as it is probable that many pro-union Catholics would still consider the reunification of the island of Ireland to be a long term aspiration. On the basis of this analysis, it is evident that the use of the PR-STV electoral system did not induce the UUP to tone down its pro-union appeal in the hope of attracting inter-communal transfers, as its European election manifesto demonstrates little divergence from its publication for the 1992 Westminster election. Although both are ultimately liberal unionist in focus, much of the language used is unlikely to find significant appeal beyond the unionist community.

#### *Post-GFA*

The UUP's post-Good Friday Agreement election campaigns are presented in much the same vein as those for the 1992 and 1997 elections. In analysing the party's 2010 manifesto, it is clear that the UUP remains keen to emphasise

Northern Ireland's integral position within the UK, and its attempts to uphold and maintain this (UCUNF, 2010). It should be noted, however, that the UUP contested this election in alliance with the Conservative Party under the UCUNF banner. This presented the party with another avenue to sell itself as 'truly British', as it had joined forces with the only major British political party active in Northern Ireland, with the publication of a single manifesto. This alliance facilitated the inclusion of statements such as 'a country is at its best when the bonds between people are strong and when the sense of national purpose is clear', which is designed to suggest that the UCUNF pact will bring Northern Ireland closer to the centre of the political life of the UK. As such, the focus of the manifesto is rooted in socio-economic issues, with specific policies proposed in areas such as the economy, job creation, the environment, health and education.

Whilst some proposals, such as education, are aimed specifically at Northern Ireland, most are presented in a UK-wide context. Much of the manifesto, therefore, is focused on opposing not Irish nationalism or the Republic of Ireland, but the then incumbent Labour Party at Westminster and what UCUNF perceived to be the DUP-Sinn Fein coalition at Stormont. The manifesto's visual symbolism is thus largely neutral, with images of the then UUP leader, Reg Empey, and the Conservative leader, David Cameron, and the Palace of Westminster, for example. Although some may argue that this approach indicates moderation when compared to the UUP's 1992 and 1997 Westminster election campaigns, this is likely to be a more out of necessity due to the party's electoral alliance with the Conservatives in 2010 than any genuine attempt to appeal to the nationalist community in Northern Ireland.

At the 2011 Assembly election, the UUP was no longer engaged in an electoral alliance with the Conservatives, which may have resulted in a return to the party's pre-Good Friday Agreement campaign approach of demonstrating Northern Ireland's integral position within the UK due to the absence of the moderating influence of the Tories. It is, however, clear that the UUP considers the constitutional position of Northern Ireland to have been settled by the Agreement and, therefore, the need to demonstrate this, which was central to its pre-1998 campaigns, has been significantly reduced (UUP, 2011). As such,

the party's 2011 manifesto is heavily focused on socio-economic issues affecting all of Northern Ireland's population, whether unionist, nationalist or other. These include the environment, health, tourism, the economy and education, with detailed party policies provided for each.

Discussion of these issues is not, however, entirely devoid of all reference to unionism. Within a section dedicated to culture, arts and leisure, the UUP claims that it will not impose its party political ideology on any of these issues but later presents its opposition towards an Irish Language Act. Although the party states that this is due to it considering the Act to be 'unwarranted, costly and overtly divisive', it is difficult to believe that its opposition is not influenced by its unionist heritage. The manifesto also states the UUP's desire 'to advance international understanding and appreciation of the contribution of those of Ulster Scots (or Scotch-Irish) origin', which further demonstrates its appeal to the unionist community. Its visual symbolism features a red and blue colour scheme throughout, and an image of the union flag in watermark-style on each page. Similar to the approach of the DUP, this is evidence of the party utilising the symbolic landscape in order to make appeals to voters (Ross, 2009, p. 6). Whilst the UUP continues to present its election campaigns using a liberal unionist approach, with socio-economic policies aimed at all citizens of Northern Ireland, it is clear that the party is not focusing its appeal in the hope of attracting significant support from beyond the unionist community, as several aforementioned inclusions are highly unlikely to resonate with nationalist voters. This suggests that, on the whole, PR-STV is not inducing the UUP to moderate the unionist rhetoric and symbolism of its election campaigns with the intention of attracting inter-bloc transfers.

If PR-STV is having this effect on the way in which the UUP campaigns, it is thought that it would be most evident in its manifesto for elections to the European Parliament due to factors already specified. Whilst other parties, such as the DUP, choose to devote sections of their European manifestos to issues beyond the remit of the EU, the UUP's 2014 manifesto is almost entirely dedicated to European affairs (UUP, 2014). As is the case with the party's publications for other elections, most are presented with all of Northern Ireland's voters in mind, with issues such as the economy, crime and the environment



discussed, and specific policies on, for example, the need for a referendum on the UK's continued EU membership and for it to retain the pound sterling as its currency. As European elections are to a legislature outside of Northern Ireland, however, the UUP takes a UK-wide approach to the presentation of many of its policies, as it does for elections to Westminster. For example, in addition to stating that the UK should remain out of the Eurozone and hold a referendum on EU membership, the manifesto makes observations such as 'the Rural Development allocation secured by the UK Government is but a fraction of the available budget' and refers to 'the UK's current differentiated status' within the EU.

Whilst some referral to this is to be expected due to Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the UK, it appears that the UUP sometimes overestimates the importance of this link when the opportunity to do so presents itself. This can give this impression that the UUP at times overlooks its position as a Northern Irish party and instead considers itself to be representing and appealing to a UK-wide electorate, despite contesting elections only in Northern Ireland. Although the manifesto's visual symbolism is largely neutral, it does make some reference to issues which are clearly designed to garner support within the narrow unionist community. The party argues, for example, that 'the allocation of PEACE III funds to the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze, caused not only unnecessary distress to innocent victims, but it also deprived many more worthy projects of funding'. As this issue is particularly important to many within the nationalist/republican community, the inclusion of this statement suggests that the UUP is not planning its election campaigns with the intention of winning support from this section of the electorate. This, along with the party's frequent emphasis of Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the UK, indicates that the preferential ranking method of PR-STV is not inducing the UUP to tone down the single identity focus of its election campaigns in the hope of attracting inter-bloc transfers.

### *Summary*

It is clear from this analysis that the UUP's election campaigns have undergone fewer changes in the post-Good Friday Agreement era than the DUP's. It should of course be noted that much of this is due to the latter's traditionally

hard line unionist position being more malleable to moderation as Northern Ireland moved away from violent conflict. The electoral rise of the DUP in the early 2000s presented the UUP with a choice in how to focus its appeal: 'out-unionist' the DUP in attempt to reclaim its position as the community's 'ethnic tribune' party or stick to its more moderate principles. The party opted for the latter. Whilst it is evident that it no longer uses the maintenance of Northern Ireland's constitutional position as a major focus of its campaigns, recent manifestos have demonstrated that the UUP remains keen to emphasise what it considers to be the integral position of the region within the UK. The party's justification for this is that everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of their background, is a potential unionist and it, therefore, has the ability to appeal to all sections of the community, as it is pro-union, rather than only a party for the unionist bloc (personal interview, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

Although this may explain the UK-wide focus of its campaigns and even its utilisation of British visual symbolism, it does not explain the party's use of rhetoric that is unlikely to resonate beyond the narrow unionist community, such as its opposition to the Irish Language Act. It is therefore questionable whether the UUP does strive to attract support from beyond its traditional unionist constituency in the post-1998 era. On the basis of this analysis, it would seem that this appeal is largely absent, which is supported by the party's Assembly and European election campaigns indicating little divergence from those for the Westminster Parliament in terms of their espousal of unionist symbolism and rhetoric. This suggests that PR-STV is having little moderating effect on the way in which the UUP campaigns by way of attracting non-unionist lower order preference votes.

## **Sinn Fein**

### *Pre-GFA*

Prior to the Good Friday Agreement, in a similar vein to those of the DUP, Sinn Fein's election campaigns were particularly strident in their explicit appeal to the nationalist/republican community it seeks to represent. The party's manifesto for the 1997 Westminster Parliament election demonstrates this with inclusions

such as 'nationalist voters can send a clear message to the new British government that genuine peace talks must be all-inclusive and without preconditions', and 'Sinn Fein has highlighted the importance of maximising the nationalist vote' (Sinn Fein, 1997). This specific referral to the nationalist community demonstrates that Sinn Fein has little intention of appealing beyond this electorate. This theme is continued throughout, with references to the 'Irish' peace process and calls for the Irish language to be given equal status with English in Northern Ireland. The party argues that the language 'is marginalised in the school curriculum' and emphasises its role in the Gaelicisation of street names in Northern Irish cities. This is evidence of Sinn Fein utilising a primary ethno-symbolic characteristic in attempt to maximise its electoral appeal (Smith, 2009, p. 25). The manifesto presents a stoutly republican image of the party, much of which is profoundly anti-British, demonstrated by statements such as 'our objective is to end British rule in Ireland' and to end 'British government support for Orange domination'. It is also peppered with references to how decisions taken by the Westminster government are having a negative impact in Northern Ireland, for example 'farmers in the six counties are being penalised because of British government incompetence' and accuses it of lacking 'the political will' to tackle discrimination. The manifesto also emphasises what Sinn Fein considers to be the unsatisfactory treatment of Irish republican prisoners.

Where it differs from pre-Good Friday Agreement DUP campaigns, however, is in its comparatively extensive referral to socio-economic policy issues in areas such as the environment, education, the economy and social justice. The manifesto also sets out Sinn Fein's willingness to engage with the unionist community in order to bring about an agreement for conflict management and 'a process of national reconciliation', whilst stressing that the party 'is not the IRA'. It is nevertheless likely that this has more to do with demonstrating the party's commitment to the peace process than any attempt to win electoral support from the unionist bloc. The manifesto features little visual symbolism, save for an image of Sinn Fein's logo – an orange 'SF' projected onto a green map of a united Ireland – on the first page. It is clear from this analysis that the purpose of the party's 1997 Westminster election campaign was to maximise its support from within the nationalist community, rather than attempt to attract inter-bloc votes. In emphasising its distance from violent republican paramilitarism and

stressing its engagement with the peace process, however, it is likely that Sinn Fein was thinking beyond its traditional republican electorate with the intention of attracting support from nationalists who may previously have voted for the SDLP.

Although the election took place prior to the 1997 Westminster election, at a time when the peace process was less embedded, it is thought that Sinn Fein's 1994 European election campaign would demonstrate some moderation of its staunchly republican message due to the incentives offered by PR-STV. This, on the whole, is not so (Sinn Fein, 1994). As it does for all European elections, the party published a single manifesto for the island of Ireland in 1994. It is focused on placing the need for Irish unity within a European context, which is demonstrated by statements such as the constitutional position of Northern Ireland is a European issue 'due to the existence of a border' and 'the concept of the EU and open borders is at odds with a divided Ireland'. As it is an island-wide publication, this manifesto places greater emphasis on all-Ireland issues than does that for the 1997 Westminster election – for example, 'Sinn Fein seeks the establishment in Ireland of national democracy'. It also suggests ways in which the government of the Republic of Ireland can bring about the party's republican ideals, such as stressing the need for 'an agreement between London and Dublin to end partition', and calling on the Irish government 'to ratify its signing of the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners... to ensure the return of Irish prisoners'. Whilst the manifesto includes Sinn Fein's position on several European policy issues, many of these are presented in a way in which emphasises the party's republican ideal of a united Ireland. As this manifesto does not demonstrate any substantial deviation from the explicit appeal to the nationalist community in Northern Ireland of Sinn Fein's 1997 publication, it cannot be suggested that PR-STV induced the party to appeal for transfers from beyond this electorate, as its focus is firmly intra-bloc in nature.

#### *Post-GFA*

Despite having become the largest party of the nationalist bloc in Northern Ireland in the years following the Good Friday Agreement, Sinn Fein's 2010 Westminster election manifesto demonstrates little divergence from the party's 1997 publication (Sinn Fein, 2010). There remains a heavy focus on the peace

process, although much now refers to what the party *has* achieved, as opposed to what it *hopes* to. These achievements are often presented using republican language, for example 'by the end of the year there will also be the transfer of powers from London to Belfast to deal with the issue of parades. More powers moving from England to Ireland'. It is clear from statements such as this that Sinn Fein is keen to stress that the Good Friday Agreement has not settled the constitutional future of Northern Ireland, as unionist parties claim, and instead portray it as ongoing, albeit neglecting that the Assembly, like the Westminster Parliament, falls under the jurisdiction of the UK. As did its 1997 publication, the party's 2010 manifesto takes the approach of discussing socio-economic issues but often places them within an all-Ireland context. For example, a section entitled 'Getting Ireland back to work' claims that 'Ireland cannot afford partition. All-Ireland development and harmonisation should advance in a planned way', and calls for Northern Ireland to adopt the Euro in order 'to create a single island currency'. This approach of intertwining the party's perceived need for greater all-Ireland cooperation with bread and butter issues is also demonstrated in statements such as 'our vision is of a seamless all-Ireland health service', and 'Sinn Fein has been at the forefront of demanding an all-Ireland suicide prevention strategy'.

The 2010 manifesto, as did Sinn Fein's 1997 publication, also pushes for the furtherance of Irish culture in Northern Ireland and includes a sub-section on the Irish language, in which the party pledges to continue the development of teaching through this medium and support the introduction of an Irish Language Act. This is an example of the existence of what Ross (2009, p. 12) refers to as a psychocultural drama, with Sinn Fein supporting the introduction of an Act as a cultural necessity, whilst many unionist parties are opposed on the grounds that it is 'pointless' and is being advocated as part of a nationalist political agenda to 'erode the Britishness of Northern Ireland (News Letter, 2015). The issue of Irish unity is a key focus and the manifesto is peppered with references to this, in addition to a section dedicated to it. For example, the opening message from party president, Gerry Adams, states that 'this election is about leadership. It is about peace. It is about equality. It is about jobs and it is about unity'.

More specifically, the manifesto states that for a united Ireland to be achieved, the British government needs to push for an end to partition, the Irish government need to increase its planning for this and unionists need to be engaged in the type of Ireland they want to reside in. References to the party engaging with unionism are made throughout, for example 'we want to work with unionists' and 'unionists will form 20 per cent of the new [united] Ireland with all of the additional rights and safeguards of the Good Friday Agreement, rather than remaining two per cent of a population ruled by Westminster'. In similarity with the party's 1997 manifesto, however, it is likely that inclusion of statements such as this is more a result of the need for Sinn Fein to demonstrate its continued commitment to the peace process than an appeal for votes from beyond the nationalist electorate.

One major way in which the manifesto differs from Sinn Fein's pre-Good Friday Agreement publications is that a significant amount of it has been translated into the Irish language. As there are relatively few fluent Irish speakers in Northern Ireland and the vast majority of these are also fluent in English, it is clear that Sinn Fein use the language as 'a badge of difference' rather than out of practical necessity (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, p. 222). It is, nevertheless, a fundamental way in which the party can demonstrate its cultural links and heritage with the community that it seeks to appeal to and represent. Although visual symbolism remains limited, the manifesto includes an image of a rally for Irish unity in addition to the party logo of the letters 'SF' projected on to an image of a map of a united Ireland. It is evident from this analysis that Sinn Fein's participation in the Good Friday Agreement and the power sharing government established as a result of this has had little impact on the way in which it presents its Westminster election campaigns, which remain heavily focused on attracting support from, and resonating within, the nationalist community. It is, nevertheless, important to note that it does demonstrate a continuation of attempts to appeal to the broader nationalist bloc, as opposed to simply republicans, which is likely done in the hope of attracting more support from those who previously voted for the SDLP.

Due to the aforementioned potential of PR-STV to facilitate a moderation of election campaigns, it is thought that Sinn Fein's 2011 Assembly election

manifesto may demonstrate if not a toning down to attract inter-bloc lower preference votes, at least an increased appeal for transfers from the wider nationalist community. Instead, however, the party's 2011 manifesto bears a significant resemblance to its 2010 publication (Sinn Fein, 2011). A key focus is again the need to emphasise how Sinn Fein is using the peace process to aid the interests of the nationalist community, by, for example, overcoming direct rule from London and supporting the devolution of powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. As it did in 2010, the party's 2011 manifesto takes the approach of claiming that socio-economic issues and Irish unity, or at least greater all-Ireland cooperation, are inextricably linked. For example, it pledges to 'develop an all-Ireland economic recovery plan' and 'harmonise all-Ireland taxation and regulation policies'. The manifesto features a section dedicated to achieving Irish unity, entitled 'There is a better way', which pledges support for representation for MPs from Northern Ireland in the Irish Republic's *Dail* and for a referendum on Irish unity. A section on the Irish language, culture, arts and leisure is also included, in which Sinn Fein promises to uphold the rights of Irish speakers and create new *Gaeltacht* (Irish speaking) areas in Northern Ireland, in addition to policies in this field affecting all communities.

One way in which this manifesto differs to the party's 2010 publication is that it is not translated into the Irish language. Given its overall staunchly nationalist and republican focus, however, this is unlikely to be an attempt to attract support from beyond this electorate. A further way in which it diverges from Sinn Fein's Westminster manifesto is that reference to engagement with the unionist community is largely absent. This comes across as somewhat idiosyncratic given that the party makes this outreach during a campaign for a non-preferential Westminster election but not for an Assembly election that allows the party to obtain transfers from voters who may give their first and other higher preferences to unionist party candidates. This suggests that Sinn Fein did not have the intention of attracting unionist transfers in mind when planning this campaign. The manifesto's visual symbolism is, once again, heavily nationalist and republican in focus, with images of Irish language and pro-unity events abound. This suggests that the use of the PR-STV electoral system is not inducing Sinn Fein to moderate its campaigns in attempt to attract inter-bloc

transfers, as its manifesto for the 2011 Assembly election demonstrates no significant divergence from its Westminster manifesto of the previous year.

It is expected that if PR-STV is having any moderating effect on Sinn Fein's election campaigns in the post-Good Friday Agreement era, this would be most evident in the party's manifestos for elections to the European Parliament. In a similar vein to its 2010 and 2011 publications, Sinn Fein's 2014 manifesto continues the approach of intertwining socio-economic issues with calls for Irish unity and greater all-Ireland cooperation, demonstrated by, for example, supporting 'maximum all-Ireland cooperation on planning in the spending of funds' and 'the adoption of an all-Ireland Charter of rights to harmonise guarantees' (Sinn Fein, 2014). It is, nevertheless, very heavily focused on EU policy issues, to a greater extent than the party's manifestos for the Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster Parliament are focused on issues within the remit of these respective legislatures. Whilst a section of the 2014 manifesto is dedicated to promoting Irish unity, it is focused on how the European Parliament can be used as a vehicle through which to raise awareness of, and ultimately achieve, this.

The approach of discussing ethno-national issues within the context of the EU is also applied to a section entitled 'Promoting Irish at home and in the EU' and, for example, calls for the temporary derogation of the Irish language in European institutions to be lifted to create jobs for Irish speakers. It is again surprising that there is no reference to engagement with unionists, as European elections, with their low district magnitude, should present the greatest incentive of all elections in Northern Ireland for parties to attract support from beyond their traditional community. The only reference that this manifesto makes to unionism is to allege that unionist parties are pro-economic cuts, asserted in statements such as 'the only disagreement which the unionist parties in the North and the Conservative-led government in London have is about who should impose the austerity measures – Brussels or London'. This is further evidence of Sinn Fein seeking to link bread and butter and ethno-national issues.



The manifesto's visual symbolism is often associated with a united Ireland, such as a front cover image of party delegates with a placard declaring 'Your all-Ireland team. Vote Sinn Fein', in addition to images emphasising socio-economic issues, for example a protest against cuts. The document is entirely translated into the Irish language. However, as the party publishes a single European manifesto for the island, this is likely to be more so due to the need for it to be accessible to *Gaeltacht* communities, particularly on the west coast, than any active attempt to identify with a particular target audience in the North. Although the manifesto certainly does not make any intended appeal to the unionist community in Northern Ireland, calls for Irish unity are less foregrounded than in Sinn Fein's campaigns for other elections. This, however, is attributed to the need for the party's European campaigns to balance issues affecting the South of Ireland with those affecting the North, with those concerning a united Ireland likely to be less important in the former. It is therefore apparent that use of the PR-STV electoral system is not inducing Sinn Fein to tone down the nationalist and republican symbolism and rhetoric of its campaigns in the hope of attracting inter-bloc transfers, even for elections with a low district magnitude where it is thus necessary to achieve a higher vote threshold in order to win a seat.

### *Summary*

It is evident from this analysis that Sinn Fein's election campaigns have undergone few changes in the post-Good Friday Agreement era. There has been no significant moderation of the party's republican image and little change in the overall focus of Sinn Fein's manifestos. This, however, is likely to be a result of the party presenting campaigns prior to 1998 that were already heavily focused on socio-economic policy issues, albeit often intertwined with ethno-national concerns over the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. Therefore, when compared to the DUP, for example, it has been less of a necessity for Sinn Fein to moderate in order to adapt to the post-Good Friday Agreement era. Whilst retaining its republican focus, the party has, however, demonstrated a willingness to expand its appeal to reach out to members of the broader nationalist community during recent campaigns by, for example, referring to outreach to unionism to further the peace process. This is evidence of Sinn Fein attempting to entrench its status as the largest party representing the nationalist

bloc by winning over voters who would previously have been likely to vote for the SDLP. This also suggests that Sinn Fein may have become more receptive to the need to attract intra-bloc transfers in order to maximise its potential for electoral success, despite not making an explicit acknowledgement of this. As such, whilst the party is keen to maintain its 'ethnic tribune' appeal by presenting itself as the stoutest defender of nationalism, it attempts to balance this with an appeal to the wider nationalist community, many of whom would never have considered voting for Sinn Fein pre-1998 due to its links with the IRA, that stresses its full commitment to democratic politics and the peace process.

By and large, the focus of Sinn Fein's campaigns is congruent with the way in which the party claims it seeks to present its appeal. A key focus of this is to demonstrate the inextricable link between socio-economic issues and the need for Irish unity, or at least greater all-Ireland cooperation (personal interview, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). The aim of this is to attempt to convince voters that their everyday interests would be better served within a united Ireland and, ultimately, that partition is detrimental to them. In this respect, Sinn Fein's campaigns adhere to a civic form of nationalism that although unlikely to find significant appeal beyond the nationalist community, is geared towards what the party considers to be in the interests of all in Northern Ireland. In other areas, however, Sinn Fein resorts to symbolism and rhetoric usually associated with ethnic nationalism, such as the Irish language, to make its appeals. As it is for the DUP, the 'ethnic tribune' appeals thesis is useful in explaining why Sinn Fein focuses its election campaigns in this way. Whilst the DUP's transformation may be more profound, in assuming this position Sinn Fein has had to accept compromise on the continued UK sovereignty of Northern Ireland, meaning that one way in which it can persist in projecting power substantively is through emphasising its republican credentials in its election campaign literature.

It has been made clear in interviews that the party does not expect to receive a significant amount of support from unionists and does not actively campaign for this, despite making some non-electoral attempts to reach out to the unionist community (personal interviews, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). Sinn Fein nevertheless believes that it has the potential to win a few votes from unionists

due to its representatives' constituency work and its socio-economic policies (personal interviews, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). For example, whilst the DUP assumes that its conservative stance on issues such as gay marriage may have the ability to attract support from Catholics, Sinn Fein believes that its liberal position on the same issue may win the party votes from unionists. It is therefore clear that parties in Northern Ireland consider their ability to make electoral inroads into the opposite bloc to lie in their policies on socio-economic issues, rather than any moderation of their nationalist or unionist appeal.

This analysis demonstrates that the Sinn Fein position of inter-party lower order preference votes being more significant in the South than the North, as it is an established party in the latter and a relatively new political force in the former, is reflected in its election campaigns (personal interview, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014). Whilst its 2011 Assembly manifesto, to an election contested using PR-STV, indicates little divergence from its Westminster election campaign of the previous year, the party's 2014 European manifesto, published as a single document for the island of Ireland, does demonstrate *some* moderation. Although it is likely that this is at least partly due to Irish unity being a more significant issue north of the border, the need to attract inter-party transfers in the South may also be a factor. PR-STV, therefore, may be having an impact on how Sinn Fein presents its campaigns to the Southern electorate. The party has identified that different issues have different levels of salience in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, which has impacted on the focus of its European election campaigns. In the North, the party interprets the most important issue for the electorate to be the stability of the peace process and the ability of the Assembly to deliver. In the South, however, it is the Eurozone crisis and the EU-IMF bailout that is most significant, which reflects the absence of ethno-national divisions in that state (personal interview, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014). Hence, its European manifesto is a balancing act between what the North needs and what the South needs (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013), and its moderation when compared to Assembly and Westminster manifestos is attributed to this, rather than any active appeal for unionist transfers in Northern Ireland.

As Sinn Fein places such limited emphasis on attracting inter-party transfers in the North, which is corroborated by the focus of its Northern election

campaigns, it is clear that PR-STV is not inducing the party to moderate with the intention of attracting lower preferences from unionists. Although its campaigns demonstrate some attempt to broaden its appeal to the wider nationalist community, it is clear that this is done primarily with the intention of acquiring first preference votes. This is reflected in transfer data from the 2011 Assembly election, which indicates that Sinn Fein received the fewest inter-party transfers of all the four largest parties in Northern Ireland by a significant margin (Barry and Love, 2011).

## **Social Democratic and Labour Party**

### *Pre-GFA*

As aforementioned, whilst the SDLP identifies as a nationalist party and draws the majority of its support from this community, it is perhaps the least strident of all the four largest parties in Northern Ireland in terms of its single identity symbolism and rhetoric. SDLP campaigns, therefore, are traditionally heavily policy focused, with limited use of nationalist imagery. Its 1992 manifesto for the Westminster Parliament election addresses several key policy areas, such as tourism, education and EU policy (SDLP, 1992). Unlike the campaigns of its nationalist bloc rivals, Sinn Fein, the SDLP is willing to engage in UK-wide issues, such as the National Health Service, whilst the manifesto's visual symbolism is entirely devoid of any Irish nationalist or republican characteristics. It is not, however, completely free of indicators that the SDLP seeks to appeal primarily to the nationalist community. For example, it calls for 'support for Irish medium education... where parental demand exists' and asserts that 'one of Ireland's greatest assets is scenery'. This suggests that whilst the SDLP does not wish to portray itself as a party of and for only the nationalist community, it recognises that some references to nationalist ethno-symbolic characteristics and all-Ireland rhetoric is necessary in order to attract support from this bloc.

This theme is continued in the party's 1994 manifesto for the European Parliament election (SDLP, 1994). Whilst it is heavily focused on EU issues with little reference to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, some inclusions clearly identify the SDLP as a nationalist party. For example, it refers to cross-

border initiatives such as improving the Belfast to Dublin rail line and argues that the British government cannot be trusted to defend the interests of Northern Ireland in the EU. As was the case with the party's 1992 manifesto for the election to the Westminster Parliament, its European publication is neutral in its visual symbolism. The significant similarities of the two manifestos suggest that the preferential ranking method used for European elections had a limited impact on the way in which the SDLP focused its campaigns in the pre-Good Friday Agreement era.

### *Post-GFA*

If anything, the post-Good Friday Agreement era has heralded SDLP campaigns that are more geared towards making explicit appeals to the nationalist community than the party's pre-1998 efforts. This is at least partly a result of the SDLP seeking to win back support from voters who have switched to Sinn Fein and amongst whom the latter's comparatively hard line approach clearly finds appeal. The SDLP's 2010 Westminster election manifesto is, nevertheless, heavily focused on socio-economic policy issues affecting all in Northern Ireland, regardless of their ethno-national identity (SDLP, 2010). These include, for example, issues concerning the environment, the economy, the elderly and international affairs. A community-wide appeal is also demonstrated in the statement that the SDLP 'will continue to take our seats in Westminster and work hard to defend and promote your interests'. Several references in the manifesto are made to opposing the actions of the 'DUP/Sinn Fein led Executive' by, for example, arguing that the two parties 'actively rejected [SDLP] proposals to create jobs and cut the cost of government'.

Elsewhere, however, certain proposals are clearly tailored to appeal to the narrower nationalist community, such as 'restarting the forum for unity and establishing a northern panel in the *Seanad Eireann*', and several pages are dedicated to bringing about a united Ireland. This section proposes policies such providing party leaders in Northern Ireland with 'attendance and speaking rights in *Dail Eireann* on Northern Ireland and cross border issues'. In other areas the SDLP's 2010 manifesto takes the approach of intertwining socio-economic issues with calls for Irish unity, in much the same vein as Sinn Fein's campaigns. For example, it proposes all-Ireland sustainable jobs and

corporation tax. Its visual symbolism, in common with pre-Good Friday Agreement publications, is largely neutral and not designed to make a specific appeal to a certain community. Whilst English is the predominant language of the manifesto, some statements are made in Irish. This evidence demonstrates that on the basis of the party's Westminster election campaigns, the SDLP has increased its call to the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, which is largely due to it having lost considerable support to its intra-bloc rival, Sinn Fein, in the post-1998 era.

It is thought that the SDLP's 2011 Assembly and local government elections manifesto, for elections contested using PR-STV, would demonstrate moderation of the single identity symbolism and rhetoric included in the party's 2010 publication. Instead, however, it bears significant resemblance to its predecessor, albeit with policies more focused at the levels of the Assembly and local councils (SDLP, 2011). The manifesto makes significant reference to socio-economic issues, with specific policies proposed in areas such as crime, healthcare, agriculture and the environment. It also demonstrates a willingness to engage in UK-wide issues, with a focus of the manifesto being to encourage the electorate to vote in favour of the introduction of AV for elections to the Westminster Parliament. A section on achieving a shared future is also included, which makes proposals such as addressing 'the corrosive relations in our community' and 'the deep segregation in housing'. In a similar vein, it calls for cross-community representation in top council positions and 'safeguards against partisan or sectarian decision-making'. This suggests that whilst the SDLP designates as a nationalist party, it does have all of Northern Ireland's population in mind when presenting policies on issues such as the ongoing peace process.

In other areas, however, the manifesto makes considerable reference to nationalist symbolism and rhetoric. As was the case with the SDLP's 2010 publication, much of this is intertwined with socio-economic issues. For example, it calls for an all-Ireland economic review and healthcare service, in addition to an island-wide rate of corporation tax, an all-Ireland sustainable transport strategy and the promotion of teaching through the Irish medium in Northern Irish schools. Elsewhere, however, nationalist positions are included

on largely isolated issues, such as a section dedicated to bringing about Irish unity and the promotion of the GAA in Northern Ireland. Statements made in the Irish language are also included throughout. As is common with all SDLP manifestos, its visual symbolism is largely neutral and does not indicate identification with any particular community. This evidence suggests that the preferential ranking method of PR-STV is having little impact inducing the SDLP to tone down its utilisation of ethno-symbolism in the hope of broadening its electoral appeal and attracting transfers from beyond the nationalist bloc.

The European election of 2014 offered the SDLP significant incentive to reach out for transfers from across the ethno-national divide in Northern Ireland and win a seat in the European Parliament for the first time since losing one in 2004. Its manifesto, published as a joint document with local government elections held on the same day, continues the party's usual theme of being heavily focused on socio-economic issues facing Northern Ireland (SDLP, 2014). Many of these are within the remit of the EU, such as how the institution can assist with job creation and placing unemployment within a European context. In other areas, however, references are made to national issues affecting Northern Ireland, within the context of the UK, for example the party's opposition to the so-called bedroom tax. Furthermore, the manifesto calls for 'a deep accommodation between unionism and nationalism', and for a shared future and identity, although it is clear that this has less to do with a shared Northern Irish identity, such as that advocated by the Alliance Party, and is more about recognition and understanding of the two ethno-national blocs. Once again, it is discussion of policies such as these that demonstrates that the SDLP has all of Northern Ireland's population in mind on certain issues.

Elsewhere, however, the party employs its familiar technique of intertwining calls for greater all-Ireland cooperation with socio-economic policies. For example, the manifesto pledges to support greater EU investment in the Belfast to Dublin rail line 'between our island's two major cities'. It also calls for 'the maximisation of North-South cooperation in the whole field of agriculture and food processing' and for cross-border cooperation in health. Nationalist symbolism and rhetoric is also to be found in the party's promotion of the Irish language, both in pushing for an Irish Language Act in the Northern Ireland

Assembly, and promoting its use in the European Parliament and other EU institutions. The manifesto also includes a page translating its main policies into Irish, whilst its visual symbolism is largely neutral and does not make an explicit appeal to any particular community in Northern Ireland. On the basis of this analysis, it is clear that despite PR-STV providing incentives for the SDLP to moderate its single identity symbolism in attempt to attract transfers from beyond the nationalist bloc, the party has not acted upon this. Instead, its Assembly, European and local elections manifestos bear a stark resemblance to its Westminster publications, with the latter election contested using first past the post and therefore without transfers.

### *Summary*

Whilst the SDLP's desire to not define itself as simply a nationalist party has continued to influence its election campaigns into the post-Good Friday Agreement era (personal interview, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013), the loss of its hegemonic position within the bloc has impacted upon the way in which the SDLP campaigns. This is largely due to the party's need to win back support from nationalist voters who have switched allegiance to Sinn Fein since the signing of the Agreement. Whilst the SDLP's campaigns remain heavily focused on socio-economic issues, the party has placed an increased necessity on emphasising its nationalist credentials, often by intertwining bread and butter policies with ethno-symbolic characteristics, such as calls for greater North-South cooperation. Furthermore, the SDLP has demonstrated a tendency to 'out green' Sinn Fein on certain issues in recent years, such as campaigning for the release from custody of Marian Price, who was later convicted of offences relating to paramilitary activity (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). This also suggests that the SDLP recognises that transfers from Sinn Fein first preference voters may be important to its electoral fortunes. It is nevertheless evident from this analysis that the SDLP is significantly less strident in its espousal of single identity symbolism and rhetoric than Sinn Fein. The way in which the SDLP presents its election campaigns is largely congruent with the type of voter that the party seeks to appeal to: someone primarily concerned with socio-economic issues rather than the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, whilst recognising that this voter is most likely to be a member of the Catholic/nationalist community (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013).



It is clear that the party is not moderating the nationalism of its campaigns with the intention of attracting lower order preference votes in the post-Good Friday Agreement era. This is demonstrated not only by the continued inclusion of single identity ethno-national characteristics but also by whether the election is contested using first past the post or PR-STV making little difference to the focus of the party's campaign. As aforementioned, the SDLP does, however, attract the largest percentage of transfers from voters giving their first preference votes to a party from the opposite community of all of the four largest parties in Northern Ireland, at 16 per cent (Barry and Love, 2011, p. 9). Whilst it is important not to overstate the significance of this relatively low figure, it does nevertheless demonstrate that the SDLP has the ability to attract inter-bloc transfers, despite not moderating the nationalism of its campaigns to appeal for them.

### **Progressive Unionist Party**

As the only significant loyalist party in Northern Ireland, it is worth briefly analysing the way in which the PUP presents its election campaigns. Given the party's links to the UVF, it may come as some surprise that even prior to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement its campaigns were focused to a considerable extent on socio-economic issues. The PUP's 1997 Westminster election manifesto makes significant reference to bread and butter policies in areas such as the economy, health, housing and education, and presents these in a way that pays scant regard to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland (PUP, 1997). That is not to say that the manifesto is entirely devoid of ethno-symbolic references. Its front cover displays the union flag, whilst the first section, entitled 'The Union', pledges to ensure that the party is opposed to any changes in Northern Ireland's status as a constituent part of the UK, either through the unification of the island of Ireland or by way of any dilution of the union. These references, however, do not form the bedrock of the manifesto and, rather, it is its positions on socio-economic issues that the PUP emphasises.

With Northern Ireland's constitutional future effectively settled by the Good Friday Agreement, it is thought that post-Agreement PUP campaigns would be almost entirely focused on bread and butter policies. This, however, is not so. The party's 2007 Assembly election manifesto follows the PUP's pre-Agreement theme of foregrounding its perceived need for the maintenance and strengthening of Northern Ireland's position within the UK (PUP, 2007). Elsewhere it is very heavily focused on presenting the party's policies on socio-economic issues, from human rights to housing. The manifesto does demonstrate a degree of outreach to the nationalist community by stating that 'We recognise the importance of North/South cooperation to develop our economy'. The importance of this should not, however, be overstated, as issues such as 'conflict transformation' are discussed with the loyalist community firmly in mind.

The PUP's manifesto for the 2011 Assembly and local government elections indicates an increased focus on meeting 'the needs of working class unionism' (PUP, 2011). This manifesto is longer than those for previous elections, which allows for greater discussion of socio-economic issues such as the economy, business, health and the elderly, with many policy specific proposals included. It also, nevertheless, features several sections clearly designed to appeal largely exclusively to the unionist community, addressing, for example, the union and the armed forces. The visual symbolism of the manifesto is also more unionist in focus, with images of the British Army, the Northern Ireland association football team and the Ulster Banner. Whilst it includes statements emphasising the need for tolerance and respect of all cultures in Northern Ireland, this increased unionist outlook indicates that the PUP is certainly not moving towards planning its campaigns with the intention of attracting transfer votes from the non-unionist electorate. That this claim is more effectively supported on the basis of a manifesto for an election contested using PR-STV after several years of power sharing is a significant finding which rails against the hypothesis of this research. Although the PUP argues that it is a transfer friendly party (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013), it is evident that attracting lower order preference votes from beyond the unionist bloc is not one of its main aims in the 2010s. This finding is corroborated by figures indicating that just two per cent of inter-party transfers received by the PUP at the 2011

Assembly election were from voters who gave their first preferences to a nationalist party, with 73 per cent of the party's lower preferences coming from unionist party first preference voters (Barry and Love, 2011, p. 9).

### **Alliance Party**

Whilst Alliance is a cross-communal party and is, therefore, unconcerned with the single identity symbolism associated with the other five parties explored in this chapter, its conclusion is merited for means of comparison. As such, Alliance provides an opportunity to demonstrate how non-sectarian parties campaign in Northern Ireland, although it is important to recognise the limitations it faces working within an ethno-nationally dominated political system. Prior to the Good Friday Agreement, Alliance's campaigns were heavily focused on how the party offered an alternative to sectarian politics. In its 1997 Westminster election manifesto, this is demonstrated by statements such as 'If you vote for 'not an inch' politicians you will get 'not an inch' politics. If you want to change things for the better, then you will have to vote Alliance' (APNI, 1997). Unsurprisingly, given the prominence of the peace process at the time, its 1997 manifesto foregrounds the need for an agreement to end sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, and avoids favouring or blaming one community over the other in the ongoing conflict. This is indicated by assertions such as 'We have seen the IRA cynically abandon their cease-fire' and 'have seen the loyalist cease-fire slip away'. Alliance's campaigns at this time were, therefore, ultimately focused on the equal apportion of blame on each community, with the party presenting an image of offering an alternative. Whilst issues surrounding the then forthcoming Good Friday Agreement are foregrounded in its 1997 manifesto, it is not devoid of references to socio-economic issues, with the inclusion of detailed sections on areas such as health, the economy and energy.

An immediate way in which Alliance's 2010 Westminster election manifesto differs from its pre-1998 publications is in the diminished focus on ending violent conflict (APNI, 2010). Instead, this focus has switched to overcoming divisions between unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland. It foregrounds that Alliance works 'on behalf of all the citizens in our community, irrespective of

religion, class, physical or mental ability, race, gender or sexual orientation', and focuses on the creation of a 'shared future'. Elsewhere the manifesto is very heavily focused on bread and butter issues, with specific policies included in areas such as defence, justice and immigration, amongst many others. Alliance's strategy of combining the need for a shared future for all in Northern Ireland with policies on socio-economic issues is continued in the party's 2011 Assembly and local elections and 2014 European and local elections manifestos (APNI, 2011; 2014a; 2014b). Specific pledges of this nature, for example achieving '20 per cent of children in integrated schools and 40 per cent in mixed schools by 2020' (APNI, 2011) and removing divisive sectarian murals (APNI, 2014a; 2014b), are commonplace throughout.

Alliance's post-1998 campaigns also demonstrate the party's perceived need to refer to issues relating to Northern Ireland's current constitutional position within the UK but also recognise nationalist aspirations of a united Ireland, or at least greater North-South cooperation. For example, the party's 2011 Assembly and local elections manifesto stresses the need for a greater UK-wide regional policy whilst also calling for corporation tax in Northern Ireland to be set at a level comparable to that in the Irish Republic (APNI, 2011). Aside from each manifesto addressing issues specific to the legislature for which the respective election is to, there is little difference in the way in which Alliance campaigns for Assembly, Westminster, European and local elections in the post-Good Friday Agreement era. Whilst this study's research question cannot be applied to a cross-communal party and it is included purely for comparative reasons, this demonstrates that the use of different voting systems has little or no impact on the party's campaign strategy.

It has been demonstrated in this analysis that Alliance's campaigns have moved from foregrounding the need to end conflict to focus on bringing together all communities in Northern Ireland. The party recognises that its greatest potential lies in appealing to middle class voters who may be more accommodating to greater cross-communal interaction and cooperation (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2013). It is, therefore, unlikely that Alliance would receive any significant electoral support from voters strongly identifying as unionist or nationalist. As ethno-nationally based parties attracted more than 85 per cent of

first preference votes cast at the 2011 Assembly election (Whyte, 2011), this creates a difficulty for Alliance in terms of receiving transfers, as most voters do not transcend blocs, as previously shown. Whilst the party is keen to present a transfer friendly image, its ability to attract them is limited, with only half of its intra-party transfers at this election being from those who gave their first preference votes to unionist or nationalist candidates (Barry and Love, 2011, p. 9). Although on the surface Alliance's manifestos are arguably the most 'catch all' of the six parties analysed, they are more accurately described as 'catch few' as most voters stay within either the unionist or nationalist bloc. This demonstrates the significant difficulty faced in running a cross-communal election campaign in Northern Ireland. Whilst electoral literature is devoid of any ethno-symbolism, therefore offering the greatest potential to attract transfers, it has only a narrow appeal as many voters find few sources of identification.

## **Summary**

Through the analysis of political party manifestos, this chapter has demonstrated that election campaigns in Northern Ireland are today, on the whole, less strident than they were prior to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This is particularly true for the DUP, whose campaigns indicate some moderation, but also Sinn Fein, as although its pre-1998 manifestos were arguably not as strident as the DUP's, the party has recognised the electoral gains to be made by widening its appeal from the narrow republican to the broader nationalist community. This moderation can be attributed largely to the cessation of violent conflict in Northern Ireland facilitating a more peaceful political arena, which unionists and nationalists are willing to share power and cooperate within. Participation in government has encouraged parties to place greater emphasis on socio-economic issues affecting everyday life and has induced some limited moderation of symbolism and rhetoric concerning the constitutional position of Northern Ireland in their election campaign literature. This is an example of the malleability of collective identities over time and their responsiveness to changing circumstances (Smithey, 2011, ch. 2). This moderation also suggests that whilst parties such as the DUP and Sinn Fein are primarily concerned with the acquisition of first preference votes, they may have nevertheless become more receptive to the

need to attract intra-bloc transfers in the post-Good Friday Agreement era, despite manifestos for elections contested using PR-STV demonstrating little deviation from those to the Westminster Parliament.

It is, however, important not to overstate the extent of this moderation. As this manifesto analysis has demonstrated, the election time utilisation of the ethno-symbolic characteristics of the communal bloc they claim to represent is, to varying degrees, a strategy employed by all ethno-nationally based parties in Northern Ireland. For the DUP and Sinn Fein, and perhaps to a lesser extent the UUP and the PUP, this is a very important aspect of their campaigns and is clearly designed to mobilise voters from their own communities. Whilst the SDLP claims to have the ability to appeal across the two blocs and its manifestos are arguably the least strident in terms of single identity symbolism of all of the parties included in this study (with the obvious exception of the Alliance Party), its campaigns have, if anything, made greater use of nationalist symbolism and rhetoric in recent years in attempt to win back voters who have defected to Sinn Fein. The inclusion of Alliance in this study has served two important roles. Firstly, it has provided an indication of how election campaigns could be fought if parties were to focus almost exclusively on socio-economic issues whilst continuing to recognise the existence of two ethno-national communities in Northern Ireland. Secondly, it has highlighted the difficulties faced by cross-communal parties operating in a largely ethnically-based party political system.

The important role that single identity symbolism continues to play in election campaigns in Northern Ireland suggests that parties perceive there to be very little practical significance to the claim of McGarry and O'Leary (2006b, p. 274) that 'PR-STV provides an opportunity, though no guarantee, of both inter-communal and trans-communal transfer of lower-preference votes'. The conclusion that parties are not planning their election campaigns with the intention of attracting inter-bloc lower order preference votes is supported firstly by aforementioned information obtained from interviews and transfer data included in both this chapter and in Chapter Five. It is secondly corroborated by the levels of unionist and nationalist symbolism employed by parties being comparable regardless of whether an election is contested using PR-STV or

first past the post. This is particularly significant in the context of European elections, as even campaigns for these, with the lowest district magnitude of all elections contested using PR-STV in Northern Ireland, do not demonstrate the foregrounding of socio-economic issues by many parties. This chapter has considered the role of the 'ethnic tribune' appeals thesis in the continued utilisation of ethno-symbolism in election campaigns by the DUP and Sinn Fein, through compromise facilitated by consociationalism and 'complex' aspects of the Good Friday Agreement, such as British-Irish interdependence, resulting in the persistence of this means of projecting substantive power.

The following chapter will explore factors influencing the continued utilisation of ethno-symbolic characteristics by political parties, and how this can be explained by the extent of ethno-national divisions between the two communities in Northern Ireland.

## **Chapter Seven – Towards conflict transformation?**

This research has demonstrated, through an analysis of political party manifestos and interview data, that despite PR-STV offering incentives for parties to make almost exclusively socio-economic appeals, election campaigns remain largely focused on attracting support from the ethno-national community the respective party is affiliated with. This chapter explains why this is the case. It argues that there is little or no benefit in parties making more inclusive electoral appeals, as most voters are drawn to those who they consider to most effectively represent the interests of their own bloc and do not, on the whole, base their vote on socio-economic issues. This is ultimately the result of Northern Ireland remaining deeply divided into the post-Good Friday Agreement era due to the continued salience of the ethno-symbolic principles of unionism and nationalism. Despite the effectiveness of consociational power sharing as a means of managing violent conflict, it has been less successful in facilitating conflict transformation away from the significance of the two distinct ethno-national communities, although proponents of the theory make no guarantee that any mitigation towards a shared identity can be achieved (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 83). The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of two other cases of where consociationalism has been employed in a divided society – Brussels and Malaysia. Evidence from these corroborate conclusions from Northern Ireland and allow for their cautious application to divided societies in general.

### **Political party electoral strategy**

It has been claimed that the need for political parties in ethnically divided societies to target their election campaigns specifically to their own community is the result of 'ethnic outbidding', in which parties adopt increasingly hard line positions to avoid outflanking by intra-bloc rivals, which serves to escalate polarisation (Mitchell et al, 2009, p. 400. See also Horowitz, 1985, pp. 349-60; Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972). This argument, however, is flawed as this research has demonstrated that party positions and campaigns have, on the whole, become less strident in the post-Good Friday Agreement era, whilst still



maintaining their ethno-national focus. This phenomenon is more convincingly explained by the 'ethnic tribune appeals' thesis, which argues that voters opt for the party they perceive to be the strongest defender of their community as they recognise that positions will become watered down during the process of multiparty inter-ethnic bargaining (Kedar, 2005, p. 185). This, nevertheless, suggests that whilst voters may not hold the hard line views of the parties they are voting for, they still want ethno-nationally based parties to represent them and therefore engage in ethnic voting.

Whilst this thesis disagrees with the 'ethnic outbidding' argument that parties in divided societies adopt increasingly extreme positions, it nevertheless recognises that this can occur when parties feel the threat of outflanking by a more hard line intra-bloc rival. Due to the fractured nature of unionism, this phenomenon is particularly acute within this bloc, an example of which can be found in the DUP's aforementioned decision to run an especially hard line campaign when it feared being outflanked by the TUV at the 2009 and 2014 European elections. It is clear that this is a realistic concern of parties, as community activists concede that it is very likely that they will lose support from more uncompromising members of their respective community if they tone down their campaigns (personal interview, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014). It is thus in the interests of parties to run highly charged, exclusive and largely sectarian campaigns in order to maximise their electoral potential.

This approach is reflected in the geographical areas that parties canvass. It is firstly important to stress that parties operating in Northern Ireland have significantly less resources than those in, for example, the rest of the UK and there is, therefore, a greater need for them to target their campaigns with a view to maximising their potential for electoral success. However, whilst ethno-nationally based parties do cover some mixed areas, which are most likely to be middle class, they almost exclusively only canvass areas with a majority of voters from the community they are affiliated with. Unsurprisingly, this strategy is perhaps most acute amongst the traditionally more hard line DUP and Sinn Fein. The DUP is a party that focuses its appeal on the basis that elections in Northern Ireland are yet to move away from the traditional unionism versus nationalism split (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013). Therefore, whilst the party

canvasses mixed areas, even those with a slight nationalist majority, it does not do so in staunchly republican areas such as the Falls in Belfast and the Creggan in Derry, as it is 'common sense' that there would be 'no point' due to the party having little appeal in these areas (personal interview, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013).

This approach has been justified by comparing campaign techniques in Northern Ireland to those in the rest of the UK, with the argument put forward that the Conservative Party would not canvass former mining communities (personal interview, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013). Whilst this may or may not be the case, for the Labour Party there are no 'no-go' areas and whilst greater resources are likely to be concentrated in working class areas, the party does indeed canvass more middle class, traditionally Conservative neighbourhoods. Although much of the DUP's campaign strategy is based on the need to effectively deploy resources, as the party believes that there are few votes to be obtained from majority nationalist areas (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013), its approach is also the result of concerns for personal safety and historical factors, as the party does not have a tradition of receiving votes – for elections contested using PR-STV, either first preferences or transfers – from the nationalist community (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2014). Whilst it is important not to wholly conflate Catholics and nationalists/republicans, it is interesting that the DUP has demonstrated an explicit interest in attracting more support from the Catholic community (personal interview, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013), yet does not canvass majority nationalist areas. This is further evidence that the DUP, by and large, has only unionists and loyalists in mind when planning its election campaigns.

Sinn Fein's approach bears many similarities in that it tends to only canvass predominantly nationalist/republican areas. Firstly, the party recognises that it garners little trust from the unionist community, which has not been helped by issues such as it supporting the restricted flying of the union flag on Belfast City Hall, and it is highly unlikely that this will translate into any significant electoral support from unionists (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013). Whilst Sinn Fein claims that its elected representatives do indeed carry out work for unionists, it nevertheless believes that even this is at present unlikely to achieve anything

more than a handful of votes from this community (personal interviews, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013; 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014). The party, therefore, considers canvassing loyalist areas such as the Shankill in Belfast to be a 'pointless' exercise that may jeopardise the personal safety of its members, though it does express an interest in making inroads into the loyalist Blacks Road area of west Belfast in the future (personal interview, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013). In addition to concerns for the safety of party members, Sinn Fein also highlights its duty to ensure the safety of voters residing in mixed areas who may be threatened if they are seen to be engaging with a party representative, even if the voter in question is a Sinn Fein supporter (personal interview, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014). This indicates that whilst Sinn Fein may demonstrate a willingness to canvass beyond its traditional nationalist/republican constituency, current conditions in Northern Ireland mean that this is largely not possible.

The situation with smaller parties is a little different in that there is a greater willingness from the parties themselves to canvass areas beyond their traditional unionist or nationalist support base. Whilst the UUP focuses the vast majority of its resources on unionist areas, its candidates do canvass some republican communities, such as the Short Strand in east Belfast, where a party candidate hoped to attract around forty votes at the 2014 local elections (personal interview, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014). Although the support the UUP receives from this area is very limited, it is worth mentioning as an example of an ethnographically based party campaigning in an area mostly populated by the opposite community. A desire to canvass areas where the opposite community make up the majority of voters is also prevalent within the SDLP, although the party recognises that it is rarely able to do so (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). An activist recalls a rare occasion when she canvassed a loyalist estate in south Belfast and was chased out, with one member of the campaign group being assaulted, and the party attracted just 18 votes out of around 1,100 registered voters in the area (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). This further demonstrates how both concerns of personal safety and the need to effectively deploy resources play a significant role in election campaigns in Northern Ireland. The SDLP does nevertheless canvass mixed areas, even those with a composition weighted 60 per cent to 40 per cent in favour of unionists (personal interview, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013).

When participating in an exercise with the SDLP group at Queen's University Belfast for the 2014 European and local elections, I was instructed not to send campaign leaflets to areas that were known to be largely unionist and was instead asked to look for Irish names on an address list (participant observation, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014). Whilst it is probable that the SDLP would like to send a leaflet to every voter in Northern Ireland, this is an example of a party attempting to maximise its electoral success by targeting its resources on the community it is traditionally affiliated with. It is interesting to compare the canvassing strategies of ethno-nationally based parties with those of the cross-communal Alliance Party. Whilst the party will canvass areas that are traditionally considered to be either loyalist or republican, it recognises that it has the greatest electoral potential in middle class areas of suburban Belfast, that are often shared between unionists, nationalists and ethnic minorities, and Alliance, therefore, concentrates much of its resource pool there (personal interviews, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2013; 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013; 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014). It would thus appear that whilst personal safety is less of an issue for Alliance than it is for ethno-nationally based parties, there is a certain constituency that the party is most likely to focus its campaign activities on.

To summarise, this interview data has demonstrated that parties in Northern Ireland perceive there to be little electoral benefit in canvassing areas comprised primarily of voters outside of the ethno-national bloc they are affiliated with. Whilst most parties claim this to be a cost/benefit issue in that it requires too great an effort for too few votes, there are also significant personal safety and historical context dimensions to this. Traditionally more moderate parties, such as the UUP and the SDLP, nevertheless indicate a willingness to canvass mixed areas, however as these are most likely to be middle class, it is improbable that their members face any significant safety threat in doing so. This suggests the presence of an often overlooked cleavage between working class and middle class communities in Northern Ireland, which manifests itself in electoral politics and has some impact on the way in which parties campaign.

The DUP, for example, tailors its canvass techniques to each community. In working class areas it emphasises its 'pro-British, anti-Irish nationalist rhetoric',

whilst in middle class areas the focus is on more on bread and butter issues, as it is argued that those in the latter are more likely to be sure of their British unionist identity and the former less so due to the probability of this being challenged by republicans in interface areas (personal interview, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013). Sinn Fein also acknowledges that some voters are more interested in socio-economic issues, whilst others are more concerned with what the party is doing to achieve a united Ireland, and this impacts upon how it canvasses (personal interview, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013). The argument has also been made that ethno-symbolism, such as flags, are not needed in order for candidates to be elected in largely middle class, single community constituencies such as North Down (personal interview, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2013). Whilst the middle class/working class cleavage does in some cases defy divisions between unionists and nationalists, demonstrated by, for example, mixed residential areas in some middle class communities, its existence does not indicate a mitigation of the importance of ethno-national identities due to consociationalism as this cleavage predates the Good Friday Agreement and is in any case far less significant than the unionist/nationalist divide in Northern Ireland.

It is clear that voters are, on the whole, drawn to parties that base their election campaigns around largely exclusive 'ethnic tribune' appeals, as they want the stoutest defender of their community to represent them in government, which has been demonstrated in previously mentioned election results data. It is, therefore, in the interests of parties to continue making highly charged, sectarian appeals, instead of focusing their campaigns solely on socio-economic issues, as divisions between unionists and nationalists remain more significant than the working class/middle class cleavage in Northern Ireland. Although this thesis disagrees with the arguments of scholars such as Aughey (2005, quoted in Taylor, 2009b, p. 321) and Taylor (2009b, pp. 320-21) that the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement have aided the electoral fortunes of the political extremes in Northern Ireland, it nevertheless recognises that the Agreement has not yet brought about any significant shift away from predominantly unionist versus nationalist elections. This is corroborated by the election results analysis of Chapter Five demonstrating that very few inter-bloc transfers are being cast, which is an interesting finding as PR-STV undoubtedly

has some potential to transform elections beyond a sectarian headcount. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that the Agreement made no guarantee that this would happen, it has been argued that its consociational character *may* help to overcome the two ethno-national blocs in Northern Ireland (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 83). The comparatively low levels of support for cross-communal parties also corroborates this finding, as at the 2011 Assembly election Alliance Party candidates received 7.7 per cent of first preference votes, whilst over 85 per cent of first preferences were cast for candidates of unionist or nationalist parties (Whyte, 2011). Consideration will now be given to factors explaining why ethno-national identities remain so salient in Northern Ireland.

### **The continuation of divisions in Northern Ireland**

It is firstly important to mention that since the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement there have been some, albeit small, efforts to bridge divisions between unionists and nationalists in grassroots society. Nolan (2014, p. 14) argues that there is greater evidence of reconciliation at this level than at the higher levels of society. The opening of an Irish language centre on the predominantly working class loyalist Newtownards Road and collaboration between the women of Falls *Culturlann* and the Shankill Women's Centre are cited as examples to support the argument that grassroots reconciliation is taking place in Belfast. Whilst moves such as these are occurring, it is important not to overestimate their extent. Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society. Although sectarian incidents in interface areas – where one community meets the other – have been much commented on, they are by no means restricted to these areas and segregation is the norm for many, particularly in housing and education (Farry, 2009, p. 172). Some working class residential areas in cities such as Belfast and Derry remain divided by 'peace walls' designed to keep the two communities apart and prevent violence, with reports that eleven new walls have been erected since the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 (Jarman, 2006, p. 5, quoted in Wilson, 2009, p. 222). Whilst it is not the intention of this thesis to claim that polarisation has increased since the Good Friday Agreement, this is nevertheless an important finding, although it is likely

to be more a result of an increase in low level crime due to paramilitary organisations losing their foothold in some areas than an increase in divisions.

Housing in Northern Ireland remains significantly segregated, with the 2011 census indicating that 37 per cent of local government wards are 'single identity' (comprised of more than 80 per cent of residents from one religious background) (Nolan, 2014, p. 115). Whilst this represents a decline from 55 per cent in 2001, it is probable that this is more so due to Catholics being required to take housing in predominantly unionist areas as a result of changes in the Protestant/Catholic population ratio and the impact of immigration than any conscious attempt at community integration (Nolan, 2014, p. 115). Despite this decline, between 2010 and 2013 the percentage of the population preferring to reside in a neighbourhood comprised only of people of their own religion increased from 12 to 20 per cent (NILT, nd), which supports this assumption, although more research would need to be conducted in order to test its accuracy. Segregation is not limited to housing and is also prevalent in areas such as education, with 93.5 per cent of children of school age attending non-integrated schools (Nolan, 2014, p. 120). This evidence suggests that within grassroots society Northern Ireland remains segregated in the post-Good Friday Agreement era and divisions between unionists and nationalists retain their salience at this level.

There is a perception, particularly in working class areas, that the Good Friday Agreement has brought very little beyond a significantly reduced threat of bombings (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014). This belief is especially acute amongst loyalists, many of whom feel that they have got a raw deal from the Agreement and have ceded too much ground to nationalists (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014). The aforementioned flag protests of 2012-13 demonstrate this sentiment, as whilst they were organised in opposition to limiting the number of days on which the union flag is flown on Belfast City Hall, the protests were ultimately the result of loyalists perceiving their culture to be threatened. It is widely believed that a lack of emphasis on education and an inability to find work are the main contributors to why some loyalists consider it necessary to 'cling to a flag' and engage in this behaviour, as they consider it to provide them with a purpose (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014). This

phenomenon is compounded by the perception amongst many that nationalists/republicans have superseded unionists/loyalists as the more successful ethno-national bloc, particularly in terms of education and employment, with members of the former often being higher academic achievers, which translates into enhanced career prospects (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014). The protests have, unsurprisingly, had a detrimental impact on inter-communal relations at grassroots level, with the effect of establishing no-go areas more associated with the pre-Good Friday Agreement era (personal interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014). Prior to the protests, representatives of the republican community would go into the loyalist Sandy Row area of south Belfast to meet with their counterparts, however this activity has now ceased due to concerns over personal safety (personal interview, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013).

Whilst violent bombing campaigns have largely ceased, loyalist paramilitaries, although perhaps not as strong as they once were, continue to operate in many working class areas and undertake illegal activities such as extracting protection money from local businesses, dealing drugs and carrying out punishment beatings (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014). Although some loyalist community leaders encourage local residents to engage with the PSNI, many remain reluctant to do so as they perceive the police to be ineffectual and powerless (personal interview, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013), with some going as far to claim that the PSNI do not represent loyalists and notices in some shops in the Shankill area of west Belfast stating that they do not serve police officers (personal interview, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013). Many in the loyalist community are instead inclined to turn to paramilitary organisations as they believe that they can provide the summary justice they seek (personal interview, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013), which demonstrates some appetite for the continued operation of these organisations. Whilst this focuses on the working class level of society, it is a significant demonstrator of unionist/loyalist opinion of the Good Friday Agreement, their perception of the nationalist/republican community and of post-Agreement institutions in Northern Ireland. The evidence here suggests that very little has changed in these communities in the post-Agreement era.



There is a general consensus that the nationalist community has benefitted more from the Good Friday Agreement than unionists, with a 2005 questionnaire indicating that 49 per cent of respondents considered this to be so, whilst only five per cent believed the opposite to be true (NILT, 2005). Whilst this may indeed be the case and is unsurprising given the aforementioned unionist dominance of Northern Ireland until at least the suspension of Stormont in 1972, the nationalist bloc nevertheless faces many of the difficulties experienced by unionists, particularly in working class areas. There is a widespread perception in, for example, Ballymurphy in west Belfast that the Good Friday Agreement has brought very little change: levels of deprivation remain high and the community is still without essential services such as a café, a free cashpoint or an evening bus service (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013). As is common in many loyalist communities, there is also an unwillingness to engage with the PSNI as it is seen as ineffectual, and this sentiment is perhaps even more acute in nationalist areas due to the force being perceived by many to have made little transition from the unionist dominated RUC (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013). Whilst it is now official Sinn Fein policy to engage in policing, some of the party's local councillors do not believe that they are in a position to advise residents to do this as they do not consider the PSNI to be effectively tackling crime (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

There is, therefore, a belief that the community was safer prior to the Good Friday Agreement, as paramilitary organisations such as the IRA and the INLA were more efficient in dealing with criminal activity (personal interview, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013). Whilst the operations of dissident republicans are limited, their presence and potential recruitment power nevertheless poses a threat in republican communities. This demonstrates that although nationalists are considered by many to have benefitted from the Good Friday Agreement more than unionists, they do nevertheless face many similar difficulties, which are especially acute in working class areas. The experiences and opinions of both unionists and nationalists included is evidence of the Agreement having had little impact at the grassroots society level, not least in overcoming the salience of the two identities, as Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided place.

In interviews undertaken for this research, most participants were asked the broad and unspecific question 'What do you think the situation in Northern Ireland will be like in 25 years' time?'. The responses demonstrate how important the constitutional position of the region still is, as almost all interviewees referred to it in some context. Despite the Good Friday Agreement clearly setting out how the constitutional future of Northern Ireland will be determined, it remains a highly divisive issue. For unionists there is no question that Northern Ireland will still be part of the UK in 25 years' time, despite aforementioned demographic shifts indicating that nationalists may have surpassed unionists as the largest bloc by this time and the Agreement requiring only a 50 per cent plus one 'Yes' vote in referendums in the North and South of Ireland to bring about a united Ireland (personal interviews, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013). On the other hand, Sinn Fein representatives believe that in 25 years' time the island of Ireland will either be reunified or well on its way to being so (personal interviews, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 13<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013).

Representatives of other parties, such as the SDLP and Alliance, are, however, less concerned with the constitutional position of Northern Ireland in their responses and instead draw greater attention to the importance of reconciliation between unionists and nationalists, regardless of whether that is in the UK or in a united Ireland (personal interviews, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013; 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013). Moving away from representatives of political parties, interviewees active in local communities hope that ethno-national divisions will be less salient in 25 years' time but are, on the whole, cynical about the prospects of this being realised (personal interviews, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013; 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2014; 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014). The responses to this question are a useful indicator of the current state of divisions in Northern Ireland and the importance of its constitutional position. That so many chose to focus on this demonstrates that there is very little vision for the region beyond whether it will remain part of the UK or whether a united Ireland will be realised. This is further evidence of the continued salience of ethno-national identity in Northern Ireland, which is so far showing few signs of abating.

Having already explained that parties continue to base their election campaigns around making appeals to the ethno-national bloc they are affiliated with because voters are still drawn to these parties to represent them, this chapter has considered why this is the case. Ultimately it is due to divisions between unionists and nationalists remaining strong well into the post-Good Friday Agreement era. A number of factors are behind this and have already been explored, however most are tied to the identities proving to be largely impossible to surmount. On the whole, this is a result of the competing collective identities and historical memories of unionists and nationalists, which are explored in depth in Chapter One. It is clear from this analysis that both continue to feel in opposition to one another, whilst historical events such as the plantation of Ulster, the Battle of the Boyne, the Easter Rising, the partition of the island of Ireland and the legacy of the 'Troubles' remain very much in the minds of the people. It is this divisive and insurmountable collective identity and historical memory that is the driving force behind the continued salience of ethno-national identities in Northern Ireland and which explains why they are not showing any meaningful signs of diminishing.

### **What does this tell us about consociationalism?**

As has been reiterated throughout this thesis, the Good Friday Agreement has been very successful in achieving what it was designed to achieve. In the seventeen years since its implementation, the paramilitary ceasefires have been maintained, despite the continuation of comparatively low level activity by some groups, and there has been a significant reduction in violent conflict (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009b, pp. 369-70). Notwithstanding several suspensions of the Northern Ireland Assembly whilst it was in its infancy, the Agreement has also been very effective in establishing and maintaining power sharing and the elite level cooperation between unionists and nationalists that is necessary for this, much of which would have been unprecedented prior to the Agreement. The significance of this cross-communal interaction has been discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two. Consociationalists such as McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 83) are also accurate in their assertion that only an accommodative approach to conflict management, which recognised the significance of the unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland, had

any possibility of success. However, although this thesis disputes the claims of some critics of consociationalism that it has brought about an increase in incidents of violence (Wilson, 2009, p. 229), it does nevertheless agree with Taylor (2009b, p. 312) that the Good Friday Agreement has not overcome what he calls 'sectarian dualism' between the two main ethno-national blocs in Northern Ireland, and considers it to be highly unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future.

It is first important to emphasise that this is not a failure of consociationalism, as it was not designed with transcending ethno-national blocs as its main purpose. However, McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 83) argue that because consociational power sharing facilitates cooperation between unionist and nationalist political actors at the elite level, it is thought that this *may*, over time, trickle down and contribute to reducing the salience of ethno-national identities within wider society, although they provide no guarantee that this will occur. This thesis considers this prognosis to be too optimistic. It also disagrees with Nolan's (2014, p. 14) argument that there is greater evidence of reconciliation at grassroots level than at the higher levels of society. Many in local communities are very sceptical of the elite level cooperation and interaction that has become commonplace today, and instead view it only as a necessity in order to ensure the continued maintenance of power sharing and to present Northern Ireland in a positive light internationally (personal interviews, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013; 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014).

This alone does not necessarily indicate that local people consider interacting with the opposite community to be a negative activity, only that they are cynical when political leaders engage in it. However, many who are active in local communities report that there is very little or no willingness, particularly in working class areas, to engage in inter-communal interaction (personal interviews, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013; 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013; 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014). Whilst there is recognition that this willingness may be greater within, for example, universities (personal interview, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013), its absence in working class communities is ultimately due to an inherent fear of 'the other' that has often been ingrained in people's minds from a young age (personal interview, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014). This is evidence to suggest that although

unionists and nationalists are willing to cooperate and interact at the political elite level, this is showing few signs of trickling down to grassroots society as McGarry and O'Leary predict may happen.

The Good Friday Agreement has clearly had much greater success in facilitating cooperation and engagement between the two communities in Northern Ireland amongst elite actors than it has within wider society. Whilst this phenomenon is not a failure of consociationalism, it does raise the question of whether the Agreement has provided a transformative solution to the conflict, as is argued by scholars such as McGarry and O'Leary (2009a), or whether it is simply frozen it in time, as suggested by, for example, Taylor (2009b, p. 320). This thesis errs towards the latter, as it ultimately argues that no method of conflict management would have the ability to transform Northern Ireland's ethno-national divisions away from conflict and towards a genuinely shared, Northern Irish national identity in which being a unionist or nationalist no longer has any significance. The consociational arrangements implemented by the Good Friday Agreement, despite their imperfections, are nevertheless the most effective means of managing conflict, as the two distinct ethno-national blocs are too salient to be overcome in the foreseeable future. McGarry's and O'Leary's prognosis that consociationalism may have the potential to achieve this is simply too optimistic, as there have been few signs of this occurring thus far. It could of course be argued that an insufficient amount of time has elapsed since the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement to effectively determine whether unionist and nationalist ethno-national identities will become all but irrelevant in the future. It is expected, however, that much greater progress would have been made in seventeen years if the salience of the two distinct blocs is indeed likely to be overcome.

This conclusion indicates the presence of a dissonance between elite level, high politics and grassroots, low politics in Northern Ireland. At the level of the former, unionist and nationalist political actors cooperate and engage on a daily basis. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, this activity is not restricted to the Northern Ireland Assembly, as it also involves engagement in each other's culture and heritage at, for example, ceremonial and sporting events. Within wider society, however, the situation is altogether different. Through the

analysis of interview data and secondary sources, this chapter has shown that there is very little engagement and cooperation between unionists and nationalists at local community level, nor any significant willingness for this to take place. Some communities remain divided by 'peace walls', with residents using different services and children attending different schools than their unionist or nationalist counterparts. Political parties are still unable to canvass some areas that are predominantly populated by members of the opposite community to that which the party is affiliated with, often out of concern for personal safety. It is for these reasons that Northern Ireland continues to have an ethno-nationally based political system and why parties continue to base their campaigns around ethno-national and constitutional issues, whilst making largely exclusive appeals to one community. This is a necessity as voters are, on the whole, drawn to the party that they believe will most effectively represent the interests of their ethno-national community in a multi-party, multi-ethnic coalition. Whilst the consociational Good Friday Agreement has provided exemplary management of violent conflict in Northern Ireland, it has not brought about conflict transformation of traditional identities, which this thesis has demonstrated through an analysis of how parties present their election campaigns.

### **Comparative analysis**

Whilst it has been shown that the Good Friday Agreement has not brought about any meaningful mitigation of the salience of ethno-national identity in Northern Ireland, it will be demonstrated that consociationalism does not have the ability to achieve this in any divided society. A comparative element is necessary in part to refute the probable argument of potential critics that consociational power sharing has not been operational in Northern Ireland long enough to accurately test whether unionist and nationalist identities are showing any significant signs of mitigation. It is also necessary to enable conclusions drawn from an analysis of Northern Ireland to be generalised to other divided societies where a consociational model has been implemented, or recommended, as a means of conflict management. The cases of Malaysia and Brussels will, therefore, be analysed in order to support these conclusions. The rationale behind the choice of these is principally because they both have a

comparatively long experience of consociational government relative to that of Northern Ireland.

Consociationalism in Malaysia began in 1957 with independence from Britain (Brown, 2005). Brussels's consociational history, which should be understood within the wider context of Belgium, dates from 1918 but its current form is largely the result of the constitutional amendments of 1970, which divided the state into three federal regions along linguistic lines (Taylor, 2009a, p. 6; Deschouwer, 2006, pp. 901-02). The cases of Malaysia and Brussels have also been selected because, as in Northern Ireland, there is little strict territorial organisation to the distribution of respective ethnic, ethno-linguistic and ethno-national communities. There are, nevertheless, significant differences between all three cases, as it is impossible to find identical cases of divided societies and models of consociational power sharing. Firstly, Northern Ireland and Brussels are divided between two communities, unionists and nationalists, and French speakers and Flemish speakers respectively. Malaysia, however, is multi-ethnic and includes the majority indigenous Muslim Malays, and the migrant Buddhist Chinese and Hindu Indians, in addition to numerous smaller indigenous groups (Brown, 2010, p. 33). Secondly, Northern Ireland and Malaysia have some history of inter-ethnic violence, which is largely absent in Brussels.

Regarding the consociational arrangements of each, in Northern Ireland and Brussels these are enshrined in an agreement or constitution, whilst in Malaysia they are exercised within the governing coalition, *Barisan Nasional*. Within these arrangements there are different methods of coalition formation, with Northern Ireland exercising a post-election mandatory executive configuration and Brussels a post-election voluntary formation, whilst Malaysia has in recent years featured two pre-election multi-ethnic coalitions. The three cases also use different electoral systems. PR-STV in multimember constituencies is used for most elections in Northern Ireland, semi-open list PR is employed in Brussels as a single multimember constituency, with Malaysia using first past the post in single member constituencies. Finally, although the number of seats that can be won by a certain community is fluid in Northern Ireland and Malaysia, it is fixed in Brussels based on the population size of the respective linguistic groups. These differences will later be explored in greater depth and whilst they could

be considered to be limitations to the generalisability of conclusions drawn from the case of Northern Ireland, they nevertheless allow for it to be demonstrated that consociational power sharing does not facilitate the overcoming of identities in divided societies regardless of their context or the consociational arrangements in place.

### *Brussels*

In order to sufficiently explore consociationalism in Brussels, it is first necessary to consider it within the context of Belgium. The country has experienced primarily non-violent ethno-linguistic conflict since its inception as a state in 1830 between Flemish speakers in the northern region, Flanders, and French speakers in the southern region, Wallonia, with the capital, Brussels, bilingual despite its geographical location within Flanders (Deschouwer, 2004, pp. 1-9). This was ultimately a result of the predominance of the French language in public life. After the language issue gained salience in the post-World War II era, Belgium was territorially divided in 1970 into three federal regions: Flemish Flanders, French Wallonia and bilingual Brussels, each with their own regional parliament alongside a federal parliament, with the latter featuring an equal number of government ministers from both linguistic communities, with legislature seats allocated proportionally from each of the three regions (Deschouwer, 2004, pp. 14, 17).

The vast majority of political parties in Belgium are strictly organised along ethno-linguistic lines and identify with one of the main two communities, with only Flemish-speaking parties contesting elections in Flanders and only French-speaking parties standing in Wallonia, but with all contesting bilingual Brussels (Deschouwer, 2004, pp. 9-11). It is for this reason that the focus is on Brussels rather than the wider example of Belgium, as only in this region do voters have the option to transcend their linguistic community and vote for a party not belonging to it, should they choose to do so (Pilet, 2005, p. 403). Although most parties are ethno-linguistically based, it is important to mention *Pro Bruxelles*, a minor party exclusive to Brussels, which has been hailed as 'the first and only bilingual political party in Belgium' and which contested the 2009 and 2014 Brussels regional elections (Euractiv.com, 2009). Despite its bilingual status, due to Belgium's strict linguistic electoral requirements the party must submit



lists to both Brussels's French and Flemish linguistic group electoral designations, the mechanisms of which will shortly be explained in more depth.

Whilst in Northern Ireland parties form a post-election mandatory coalition, at both federal and regional levels in Belgium parties form a voluntary post-election coalition, with the aforementioned ethno-linguistic executive designation in Brussels ensuring that both communities are represented (Deschouwer, 2004, pp. 19-20). Legislature seats are proportionally pre-allocated to both communities depending on their numerical size, whilst consociationalism is also a feature of the cabinet of the Brussels Government, with the prime minister elected by a majority of both language groups in the parliament (in practice this position is occupied by a member of the French speaking community), with two further ministers for each of the two linguistic groups and a simple majority required for the passage of legislation on regional matters (Deschouwer, 2004, pp. 19-20). Consociational arrangements in Brussels, and in the wider context of Belgium, are thus highly complex, due to the complicated ethno-linguistic composition of the state.

In Brussels, and in the wider context of Belgium, elections are contested using PR with semi-open lists, in which voters have a degree of intra-party candidate choice, with Brussels a single multimember constituency (Pilet, 2005, p. 406). The electorate can, therefore, vote for one party's list or indicate intra-party preferences for candidates. Significantly, however, they can only cast a vote for one party and/or candidates representing that party. This differs to Northern Ireland, which uses PR-STV for most elections, allowing voters to transcend party lines. Most importantly, for all elections in Belgium there are no bilingual lists (Pilet, 2005, p. 406). In the Brussels-Capital region, voters are presented with a ballot paper that includes parties that are designated as Flemish-speaking and as French-speaking, with this distinction indicated, and are able to select a party from either designation, as there is no linguistic pre-identification for voters (Pilet, 2005, p. 403). However, whilst in Northern Ireland the electorate can make inter-party votes on a ballot paper, meaning they can vote for candidates both in and out of their own communal bloc, this is not possible in Brussels as voters must choose only one party, which is likely to impact upon whether parties appeal beyond their own community. Unlike in Northern Ireland,

seats in the Brussels regional parliament are proportionally pre-allocated on an ethno-linguistic basis, with 72 assigned to the French-speaking community and 17 to the Flemish-speaking (Deschouwer, 2004, p. 19). There are, therefore, limits to the number of seats each party can win, regardless of how many votes it manages to attract.

Despite Brussels's strict consociational arrangements in comparison to those of Northern Ireland, it is nevertheless in the interest of parties to seek to maximise their electoral support and win as many seats as possible, regardless of the source of its votes. As aforementioned, there are no obstacles to a French speaker voting for a Flemish language party and vice versa. If consociationalism is overcoming ethno-linguistic identities in Brussels, it would be expected that party election campaigns would be almost exclusively concerned with socio-economic issues affecting all members of society, with little or no reference to linguistic differences. This argument will be tested by analysing the manifestos for the 2014 election to the Parliament of the Brussels-Capital region of the largest French and Flemish speaking parties in Brussels: *Parti Socialiste* and *Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (Open VLD)* respectively. The manifesto of *Parti Socialiste* is a highly policy specific document with great emphasis placed on socio-economic issues (Parti Socialiste, 2014). This includes proposals on broad areas such as health, education and the economy, and also policies on more nuanced issues, for example private rental housing and the promotion of sustainable waste management.

The party, nevertheless, makes significant reference to the promotion of the French-speaking community and its language, and in common with many parties in Northern Ireland, often intertwines this focus with socio-economic issues. The manifesto, for example, refers to the need for non-Belgian citizens of Brussels to speak French as a prerequisite for employment and social integration, and calls for the abolition of fees imposed on Belgian booksellers to stock French-language texts published in France. It also emphasises a perceived sense of 'otherness' towards the Flemish-speaking community by stressing links with Wallonia, the French-speaking region of Belgium, and making reference to, for example, the Belgian Francophone population. *Parti*

*Socialiste* does, however, indicate some, albeit limited, support for integrative measures, such as encouraging citizens to learn Flemish and English. It is evident from this analysis that the party's election campaigns are geared almost exclusively to appeal to the French-speaking community and demonstrate little interest in attracting support from beyond this cohort.

The approach of *Open VLD* is similar. Its manifesto is very policy specific and focuses on many of the socio-economic issues emphasised by *Parti Socialiste* (Open VLD, 2014). It nevertheless makes significant reference to the needs of the Flemish-speaking community in Brussels. As is the case with *Parti Socialiste*, many of *Open VLD*'s policies in this area are intertwined with bread and butter issues, such as the need for Flemish language schools, libraries and community centres. It also stresses the need for Flemish to be spoken in hospitals to improve the service offered to patients. The manifesto does, however, make limited reference to some integrative policies. These include the need for Flemish-speaking children to learn French and vice versa, and the establishment of a 'culture dome' to bring together cultural organisations of all communities in Brussels. As is the case with *Parti Socialiste* and its almost exclusive appeal to the French-speaking community, it is clear that *Open VLD* plans its election campaigns primarily with Brussels's Flemish speakers in mind and meeting the needs of this community is the ultimate objective of the party.

Whilst the potential to maximise their share of the vote has the ability to induce parties to appeal to all members of society regardless of their ethno-linguistic group, in practice this is not occurring. Although data detailing the number of voters from the French-speaking community who voted for a Flemish-speaking party and vice versa is not available, at the 2014 election to the Parliament of the Brussels-Capital region the cross-communal *Pro Bruxsel* party received just 1.24 per cent of the French linguistic group vote and 0.72 per cent of the Flemish linguistic group vote (Elections 2014, 2014). This demonstrates that there is very little appetite for non-ethnically based parties, as is also the case in Northern Ireland. The lack of support for cross-communal parties and the continued single identity focus of parties affiliated to one community suggest that consociationalism is not facilitating a mitigation of ethno-linguistic identities

in Brussels, despite its comparatively long history of this arrangement of governance.

### *Malaysia*

Consociationalism in Malaysia differs from Northern Ireland in that rather than being constitutionally enshrined, it is exercised within the governing multi-party coalition, *Barisan Nasional*, which has been in power since independence in 1957 (Brown, 2005). The need for consociational structures arose as a result of the presence of three main ethnic groups: the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians, with the majority of the latter two ethnicities having settled during the era of British rule (Brown, 2005, p. 430; 2010, p. 33). Similarly to Northern Ireland, there is little strict territorial organisation to the distribution of Malaysia's ethnic communities, with Malays comprising around two-thirds of the population, the ethnic Chinese approximately a quarter and ethnic Indians making up seven per cent (Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, 2011). Despite the dominance of the Malay majority in executive arrangements, the minority ethnic Chinese and Indians do participate in cabinet and have a degree of influence over legislation, although this is much more malleable than the consociational executive formation procedures in place in Northern Ireland (Mohd Sani, 2009, p. 99). As is the case in Northern Ireland, there is no stipulation of how many seats in the national parliament must be occupied by members of a particular community. Consociationalism in Malaysia is, however, less strictly structured, as it is exercised only within the ruling coalition.

Elections in Malaysia are contested using first past the post in single member constituencies, a legacy of British colonialism (Loh, 2013). As aforementioned, first past the post is not recommended by consociationalists as an appropriate voting system for plural societies, as it fails to guarantee minority and smaller party representation, and does not offer as many incentives as preferential systems to facilitate the transcendence of ethnic blocs (Mitchell, 2014). Whilst centripetalists argue that non-proportional electoral systems are more effective in divided societies, the preferential AV is usually recommended ahead of first past the post, as candidates are often required to reach a higher quota to be elected, increasing incentives for parties to embrace inter-ethnic campaigning (Horowitz, 2003).

The ethnic composition of political parties in Malaysia is complex, with some identifying with a particular community and others claiming to be multi-ethnic (Mohamad, 2008, pp. 444-45). Most parties subscribe to a pre-election coalition: either the incumbent *Barisan Nasional* or, between 2008 and 2015, the oppositional *Pakatan Rakyat*. The former has governed in the federal parliament since independence in 1957 and operates as a consociational structure of many parties, of which three have traditionally been dominant – the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), who each represent their respective communities (Brown, 2005, pp. 430-31; Mohamad, 2008, pp. 444-46). Whilst oppositional coalitions in Malaysia have a shorter history than the incumbent, *Pakatan Rakyat* was, until its dissolution in 2015, a successor to *Barisan Alternatif*, an informal grouping of parties established in 1999 to challenge the dominance of *Barisan Nasional* (Mohamad, 2008, pp. 444-45; Liow, 2015, pp. 101-02). As is the case with *Barisan Nasional*, the parties that made up *Pakatan Rakyat* are ethnically based, with the opposition coalition comprising the *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) and the Democratic Action Party (DAP), who respectively represent the Malay and Chinese communities, in addition to the multi-ethnic *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR). These former constituent parties continue to operate despite the dissolution of *Pakatan Rakyat*.

In contrast to Northern Ireland, electoral competition in Malaysia is, therefore, ultimately between two inter-ethnic coalitions, comprised of many different parties. Candidates are fielded strategically depending on the ethnic composition of a constituency, which often results in a candidate from a party representing a particular community from one coalition pitted against a counterpart from the other (Balasubramanim, 2006, p. 82, quoted in Mohamad, 2008, p. 445). This is not always the case, however, as many constituencies have no dominant community, which can impact upon this strategy and result in candidates from different communities contesting a seat (Mohamad, 2008, p. 446). As in Northern Ireland but unlike in Brussels, seats are not pre-designated to a particular community, meaning that there is no fixed representation for each.

Although parties campaign alongside their coalition partners, some nevertheless also publish their own literature. For example, several months before the 2013 Malaysian general election, the *Barisan Nasional* affiliated MCA published a document comparing its policies to its Chinese community rival, the DAP, at the time a constituent party of the oppositional *Pakatan Rakyat* coalition (MCA, 2013). The literature is dedicated to emphasising the ways in which the MCA's policies further Chinese needs and interests, such as by providing scholarships for ethnic Chinese students and promoting Chinese languages in schools. In contrast, the MCA argues that the DAP is not encouraging Chinese ideology and interests. Whilst inter-coalition competition is undoubtedly important, this example demonstrates the significance of intra-communal party competition, with parties keen to demonstrate that they are the stoutest defender of their community due to a fear of outflanking by intra-ethnic rivals. Evidence suggests that these fears are not unfounded. In 1986, for example, a crisis within the MCA led to a significant rise in the DAP's share of the vote and seats won, at the expense of the MCA (Brown, 2005, p. 440). This demonstrates that despite the presence of multi-ethnic coalitions, there is considerable intra-bloc party competition in Malaysia. The PKR are the only significant multi-ethnic party and won just 30 of the 222 seats in the *Dewan Rakyat*, or lower house, at the 2013 general election (Khoo, 2013, p. 1). The low level of support for cross-communal parties and the continued use of ethno-symbolism by ethnically based parties indicate that despite Malaysia having a history of consociationalism dating back to 1957, ethnic identities retain their salience.

### *Summary*

This comparative analysis has expanded research beyond Northern Ireland to divided societies more generally. Whilst it is not intended to be a comprehensive study of ethnic identities and politics in Brussels and Malaysia as this would require the work of a much larger and more in depth project, it has nevertheless made some interesting findings. Despite the existence of incentives to encourage ethnically based parties in Brussels to make almost exclusively socio-economic appeals to all members of society and maximise their electoral potential, this, on the whole, is not happening. Neither are voters

opting for cross-communal parties in any significant numbers, as the example of *Pro Bruxsel* demonstrates. Similarly, although electoral competition in Malaysia is ostensibly between two multi-ethnic coalitions, in practice the parties that make up these coalitions compete with their opposite ethnic counterparts for support, as shown by the way in which the MCA presents its campaign literature. Electoral support for the PKR demonstrates that, by and large, voters are not being drawn away from ethnically based parties. The conclusions from both Brussels and Malaysia that elite level cooperation between political actors from different ethnic backgrounds is not trickling down to wider society are attributable to the insurmountable character of identities.

It is, however, important to note that the prognosis of McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 83) that consociationalism *may* work to overcome the significance of divisions and bring about a shared identity is only applied to Northern Ireland's consociational arrangements and not necessarily to those of divided societies in general. Their form in Brussels and Malaysia is different to that in Northern Ireland, despite the three cases sharing many similarities, as has been demonstrated. Although this could be considered to be a limitation to this comparative analysis, there is strength in the argument that its findings ultimately support the conclusion from Northern Ireland that whilst consociationalism has been very effective in managing violent conflict between different communities, it has not facilitated conflict transformation towards a shared identity. As McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 83) believe that this phenomenon *may* happen *over time*, it has been useful to consider the cases of Brussels and Malaysia, which have a longer history of consociational power sharing than Northern Ireland. This is evidence to suggest that this prognosis is too optimistic, as the salience of ethnic identity persists even after a long association with consociationalism due to communal blocs being largely insurmountable. Whilst having recognised several limitations to this comparative analysis, it is nevertheless possible to cautiously apply the conclusion that consociational power sharing has not facilitated conflict transformation away from the importance of identities in Northern Ireland to divided societies in general.

## Summary

Through an analysis of election campaign strategies, it has been demonstrated that, on the whole, political parties in Northern Ireland perceive there to be little electoral benefit in canvassing beyond the ethno-national bloc they are affiliated with. For the few who demonstrate a willingness to do so, concerns for personal safety are usually too significant for this to be done. This is ultimately due to divisions between unionists and nationalists retaining their salience into the post-Good Friday Agreement era. It has been shown that Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided place, with segregation permeating almost every aspect of society. In working class areas in particular, there is a perception that the peace process has brought about few changes, with paramilitary organisations still active, despite ceasefires, and the belief of many that the PSNI are ineffectual in tackling crime. For many in these areas there is no greater willingness to cooperate and interact with the opposite community than there was prior to the Good Friday Agreement. This can be explained by the principles of ethno-symbolism explored in Chapter One. The phenomenon is due to the competing nationalisms, identities and collective historical memories of unionists and nationalists, which, although malleable over time, cannot be overcome. For this reason voters, on the whole, remain drawn to parties that stoutly represent and defend their respective ethno-national community. This explains why parties consider it to be of little electoral benefit to tone down the ethno-symbolic characteristics of their campaigns towards an almost exclusively socio-economic focus and attempt to appeal beyond their own bloc, as demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six, despite the incentives provided by PR-STV for them to do so.

The continued significance of divisions in Northern Ireland, which are showing few meaningful signs of subsiding, indicate that the argument of McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 83) that consociationalism *may* work to overcome conflict and unite the two communities around a common identity is simply too optimistic. As they argue that this could happen *over time*, a comparison with Brussels and Malaysia has been drawn to enable this argument to be tested, as both have a considerably longer experience with consociational arrangements than Northern Ireland. Although it has been recognised that there are limitations to this comparative analysis and that more in depth research would need to be



undertaken in order to verify the findings, neither case has demonstrated any significant moves away from the salience of distinct ethnic communities. This has led to the conclusion that whilst consociationalism offers a very successful means of managing violent conflict by enabling elite level inter-communal cooperation, it does not provide conflict transformation through the facilitation of a shared identity.

## Conclusion

### PR-STV

Through an analysis of political party manifestos and data obtained from interviews, it has been demonstrated that, on the whole, the PR-STV electoral system is not inducing political parties to significantly moderate the ethno-symbolism of their election campaigns that the architects of the Good Friday Agreement thought it may do. Despite the potential to attract inter-bloc transfers, this analysis has shown that there is little or no difference between how ethno-national parties campaign for elections contested using PR-STV or first past the post in terms of the symbolism and rhetoric of their literature. Although the campaigns of some parties, particularly the DUP, have become less strident in the post-Good Friday Agreement era, whilst maintaining a significant ethno-nationalist focus, this is not due to any potential moderating effect of PR-STV to attract inter-bloc transfers and, rather, is attributable to a significant reduction in violent conflict and the participation of these parties in government.

It is, however, important to note that although there is no significant difference in how parties campaign for elections contested using PR-STV and those to the Westminster Parliament, parties such as the DUP may have become more receptive to the need to attract intra-bloc transfers in the post-Good Friday Agreement era. Whilst Horowitz (2003) argues that AV offers greater potential than PR-STV for campaign moderation due to the system requiring candidates to reach a higher vote threshold in order to be elected, this thesis disagrees with this prognosis primarily because smaller, single member constituencies are more likely to be made up of a large majority of people from one community, which could actually work to strengthen the ethno-national appeals of parties. In any case, AV is not proportional. Proportionality is essential in divided societies as there is a need for as many groups as possible to be represented. Exclusion, after all, is a cause of conflict (McGarry and O'Leary, 2004, p. 32, quoted in Coakley, 2009, p. 144).

In defence of PR-STV, unlike most other forms of PR and first past the post, it at least allows the electorate to vote for candidates of more than one party and ethno-national bloc, even if this often does not happen in practice. Elections in Northern Ireland, therefore, offer greater potential for inter-bloc voting and campaign moderation than those in other consociational societies, such as Belgium, where elections are contested using semi-open list PR, with voters only being able to vote for one party. That PR-STV uses multimember constituencies is also significant, as it reduces the incentive for parties to engage in 'sectarian pacts' whereby one candidate is selected by two or more parties to stand for election and represent their respective ethno-national bloc. Unionist pacts have been used for some constituencies in elections to the Westminster Parliament and were a feature of the 2015 general election, with pacts agreed in four constituencies where the DUP and the UUP did not field candidates against each other (BBC, 2015). The use of PR-STV in Northern Ireland should not, therefore, be changed. It is just the case that no electoral system is able to induce parties to significantly moderate their campaigns to make almost exclusively socio-economic appeals, as the importance of ethno-symbolism is simply too great.

### **Consociationalism**

Consociational power sharing is the most effective means of managing violent conflict in divided societies. In Northern Ireland, it has successfully achieved a reduction in levels of violence, and has facilitated elite level cooperation between unionists and nationalists. Whilst the Good Friday Agreement includes provisions that are beyond the remit of traditional consociationalism, such as institutionalising British-Irish intergovernmental regulation through North-South and East-West bodies, it is ultimately an accommodative settlement. This research has, however, demonstrated that the prognosis that consociationalism may work to overcome the salience of ethno-national blocs and bring about a genuine Northern Irish identity that is shared by the majority of the population is simply too optimistic (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009a, p. 83). By using the focus of party manifestos as a proxy, this study has concluded that no significant moves towards this are taking place and nor are they likely to in the future. Whilst recognising that further, more substantial, research is required and that their

forms of consociationalism are not identical to Northern Ireland's or to each other's, results from Brussels and Malaysia indicate that a shared identity has not been achievable in either case, despite comparatively long experiences of consociational power sharing.

It is improbable that any of the suggested amendments to Northern Ireland's governmental arrangements, such as the abolition of the community designation system and mandatory coalitions, and the introduction of the requirement of a weighted majority of MLAs for the passage of legislation in the Assembly (Farry, 2009, pp. 175-79), would facilitate any significant moves away from the importance of unionism and nationalism. Consociationalism in Northern Ireland has, nevertheless, brought about some moderation of political parties, primarily the DUP and Sinn Fein. This, however, principally takes the form of a willingness to negotiate and cooperate with representatives of the opposite bloc within a power sharing government. As most parties continue to make substantial use of ethno-symbolism in their election campaign literature and do not canvass areas that have a majority of members from the opposite community suggests that this cooperation is not being replicated within wider society. This indicates a dissonance between 'high' and 'low' politics in Northern Ireland.

In testing the important hypothesis of whether consociationalism has the potential to significantly reduce the salience of group identities in divided societies, this research questions the profoundness of consociational theory. It argues that whilst the approach can be highly successful in managing violent conflict, as the case of Northern Ireland demonstrates, this is, by and large, the extent of its abilities. Beyond this, it does little to break down divisions between different groups and does not have the ability to bring about a genuinely shared identity that transcends these divisions. In reaching this conclusion, this thesis identifies a middle path between consociational proponents and its critics. On the one hand, it recognises that only consociationalism can achieve the successful management of violent conflict in divided societies. On the other, however, it is sympathetic to concerns that recognising and accommodating different groups simply freezes the conflict in time. This research nevertheless

argues that identities in divided societies are too great to be successfully overcome and therefore does not propose ways in which this may be achieved.

### **Ethno-symbolism and national identity**

An ethno-symbolist approach to nationalism effectively explains the continued importance of national identity in divided societies. Nations and nationalisms are not solely a product of contemporary movements that are deliberately constructed by elites, as modernists claim (Smith, 1998). Neither are they simply 'inbreeding super-families', as argued by primordialists (van den Berghe, 1978, pp. 403-04, quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 146). Rather, their roots lie in a perennial process whereby the nation has occurred and/or recurred throughout history, with pre-modern era myths and memories of the collective bridging the gap, both forward and back, between pre-modern and modern (Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 7). Meaningful and potent collective myths, memories and symbols, such as language, religion, flags and historical events, play a crucial role in uniting people around a common culture and identity, and remain significant to the present day (Smith, 1986, p. 198, quoted in Githens-Mazer, 2006, p. 8).

These characteristics are especially important in divided societies as they are a means of identifying one group ('us') from the other ('them') (Smith, 2009, p. 25). This study has shown that nationalist history in Ireland dates back to the first Norman invasions in 1169 and unionist history to the beginning of the plantation of Ulster in 1609 (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, p. 54), although both groups utilise myths, memories and other characteristics that pre-date these years. It is the endurance of ethno-symbolism that explains the continued salience of unionism and nationalism in Northern Ireland to the present day. Ethno-national identifiers, such as religion, language, flags, myths and memories, have the ability to unite people in a way that political institutions, for example, are unable to. It is, therefore, simply too optimistic to believe that a genuine Northern Irish identity may come to be shared by a majority of the population as a result of consociationalism, as it underestimates the power of nationalisms. Whilst they are malleable over time, their perpetual salience means that they are highly unlikely to ever be fully surmounted (Smithey, 2011,

ch. 2). Conflict transformation in Northern Ireland, in the form of moving beyond the salience of unionism and nationalism, is thus not taking place.

It is through the application of ethno-symbolism to demonstrate that the preferential method of PR-STV is not inducing party campaign moderation, which in turn demonstrates the continued salience of ethno-national identities in Northern Ireland well into the post-Good Friday Agreement era, that this study makes an original contribution to knowledge. This research has demonstrated the existence of a disparity between what the theory of political science considers to be possible and what actually happens in the practice of politics. Whilst some believe that a consociational approach to conflict management has the potential to break down communal identities in divided societies, the practical reality is that it is unable to do so. This conclusion demonstrates the practical impact of consociationalism in Northern Ireland and can also be cautiously applied to other divided societies with this arrangement for conflict management. It is a significant finding, as it is a clear example of divergence between the academic study of political theory and the real world practice of politics.

### **Further research**

It is possible that political party election campaign literature *may* continue to move in a less strident direction, with increased emphasis on socio-economic issues. It is, however, highly unlikely that campaigns will come to be almost exclusively based around non-ethno-national issues with little or no utilisation of ethno-symbolic characteristics. As the 'ethnic tribune appeals' thesis suggests, it is the ability of parties to successfully present themselves as the stoutest defender of their respective bloc that maximises their electoral support (Mitchell et al, 2009). Reaching out to a particular community by using ethno-national flags, emblems, history, memories and other attributes remains, and is highly likely to remain, an essential component of the effectiveness of this appeal. As this study has demonstrated, voters have not yet shown any significant signs of moving away from ethno-nationally based parties in the post-Good Friday Agreement era. It is still, therefore, in the interest of parties to retain their distinctive unionist or nationalist identity and this is unlikely to fade.

It will, nevertheless, be interesting to see how changes in Northern Ireland influence politics and the impact that this may have on party election campaigns in the future. With the 2011 census indicating that Protestants have lost their numerical majority, with 48 per cent of the population to Catholicism's 45 per cent, there is a genuine possibility that Sinn Fein could soon unequivocally be the largest party in Northern Ireland (Devenport, 2012). This would undoubtedly increase the likelihood of a united Ireland being achieved. How unionism and nationalism would respond to this prospect, both politically and socially, remains to be seen. It would, however, be interesting to analyse the effect of potentially seismic events such as this on party election campaigns as a gauge of their impact on communal relations in Northern Ireland. Future analysis of the electoral trends of cross-communal parties such as Alliance would be a useful indicator of whether a Northern Irish identity is coming to be shared by the population. Whilst evidence from the post-Good Friday Agreement era does not suggest any significant increase in support for these parties (see Whyte, nd) and it is thought that this will be unlikely to occur, ascertaining this will nevertheless be the work of future examination. These, therefore, constitute avenues of further research.

In order to increase the generalisability of the results of this study, it would be beneficial to undertake empirical research, in the form of interviews, in other consociational societies. Whilst Chapter Seven includes a comparative analysis of Brussels and Malaysia, this draws only on secondary sources and political party election campaign literature, and is only intended to provide an indication of how results from Northern Ireland may also be evident in these cases. It is, however, important to reiterate that the prognosis of McGarry and O'Leary (2009a, p. 83) that consociational institutions may work to reduce the salience of ethnic divisions and bring about a genuinely shared identity is only applied to Northern Ireland. Given the comparatively short period of time since the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, it would, nevertheless, be interesting to conduct a comprehensive study into the impact of consociational institutions in other such societies, whilst recognising that there are likely to be many differences to the arrangements in Northern Ireland. Consociational institutions in Brussels and Malaysia not only differ to those in Northern Ireland

but also to each other's, and both cases have a comparatively long history of power sharing. Examining divisions in both within the context of consociational arrangements would increase the generalisability of this study's results from Northern Ireland and this, therefore, constitutes a particularly important avenue of further research.



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