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Assembly

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Election Report: Westminster General Election, 8 June 2017

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This paper provides an analysis of the Westminster General Election held on 8 June 2017, and compares the outcome with the 2015 election. The paper also includes an analysis of voter turnout and results by party and constituency.

Key Points

- The 2017 Westminster general election left the parties with the following number of seats:

Democratic Unionist Party	10
Sinn Féin	7
Social Democratic and Labour Party	-
Ulster Unionist Party	-
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	-
Independents	1

- The DUP gained two seats, one from the UUP and the other from the SDLP, while Sinn Féin gained three seats, one from the UUP and the others at the expense of the SDLP.
- The DUP had the highest share of the vote, (36.0% compared with 25.7% in 2015), followed by Sinn Féin (29.4% - up from 24.5% in 2015); UUP (10.3% - down from 16.0% in 2015) and the SDLP (11.7% - down from 13.9% in 2015). The Alliance Party share of the vote fell from 8.6% in 2015 to 7.9% in 2017.
- Of the 18 MPs elected in 2017, four are women (compared with two in 2015).
- Turnout in the election was 65.6 per cent (compared with 58.4% in 2015).
- A total of 109 candidates contested the election (compared with 138 in 2015).

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1 Introduction

Under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, the next general election was scheduled for May 2020¹. However, on 18 April 2017, The Prime Minister, Theresa May, announced that, subject to parliamentary approval, a general election would be held on 8 June 2017. A motion to that effect was passed by the requisite two-thirds majority in the House of Commons on 19 April 2017, and Parliament was dissolved on 3 May 2017.

The general election on 8 June 2017 resulted in a 'hung parliament', with the Conservatives as the largest party but without an overall majority. The result was: Conservative (318), Labour (262), SNP (35), Liberal Democrats (12), DUP (10) and Others (13). The Labour vote surged by over 3.5 million (38%), from 9.347 million in 2015 to 12.878 million in 2017. The Conservatives received 42.4 per cent of the vote, while the Labour share rose from 30.4 per cent in 2015 to 40.0 per cent in 2017, an increase of 9.6 percentage points.

The remainder of this Briefing Note will review the election in Northern Ireland.

2. The Candidates

A total of 109 candidates stood for the June 2017 election in Northern Ireland, compared with 138 in May 2015, a fall of 21 per cent (Table 2.1). Sinn Féin, the SDLP and Alliance fielded candidates in all 18 constituencies, followed by the UUP (14). Both the Conservative and Green Party fielded 7 candidates each, followed by The Workers Party (2) and People Before Profit Alliance (2). There was one TUV candidate, one CISTA candidate and four Independents.

The number of female candidates increased from 33 in 2015 to 36 in 2017, against a backdrop of an overall fall in candidate numbers. The net effect was to increase the proportion of female candidates, from 24 per cent in 2015 to 33 per cent in 2017. Alliance had the highest number of female candidates of the five main parties (9), followed by Sinn Féin (7). The Green Party and Conservatives (both 57%) had the largest proportion, followed by Alliance (50%), Sinn Féin (39%) and the SDLP (33%). One-in-seven UUP candidates (14%) and one-in-five (21%) DUP candidates were women.

¹ The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 has a major impact on the timing of parliamentary elections in the UK. It removed the prerogative power of the Queen, on the advice of the Prime Minister, to dissolve Parliament and trigger a general election. The Act set the date of the general election on 7 May 2015 and provided that thereafter general elections are scheduled to take place on the first Thursday in May in every fifth year. The next election was scheduled to take place on 7 May 2020.

Table 2.1 2017 Election Candidates by Party and Gender

Party	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	15	2	17	11.8
Sinn Féin (SF)	11	7	18	38.9
Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)	12	6	18	33.3
Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	12	2	14	14.3
Alliance Party (APNI)	9	9	18	50.0
Green Party	3	4	7	57.1
Conservative	3	4	7	57.1
Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV)	1	0	1	0.0
People before Profit Alliance (PBPA)	2	0	2	0.0
The Workers Party	1	1	2	50.0
Citizens Independent Social Thought Alliance	1	0	1	0.0
Independents	3	1	4	25.0
Totals	73	36	109	33.3

3. Turnout

Table 3.1 (overleaf) presents the voting statistics for Election 2017. The total eligible electorate was 1,242,698 (compared with 1,236,765 in May 2015), a rise of 5,933 (0.5%). The total number of votes polled was 815,260, up from 722,904 in 2015, representing an increase of 92,356 votes (12.8%) compared with the May 2015 parliamentary election. The official turnout ² was 65.6 per cent of the eligible electorate, an increase of 7.1 percentage points ³ on the May 2015 figure (58.5%).

² Turnout is calculated by taking the total number of votes cast (including invalid votes) and dividing by the eligible electorate.

³ Percentage points refer to the difference between two percentages, e.g. the difference between 40% and 50% is 10 percentage points.

Table 3.1 2017 Voting Statistics by Constituency

	Eligible Electorate	Votes Polled ⁴	% Turnout
Belfast East	63,495	42,994	67.7
Belfast North	68,249	46,107	67.6
Belfast South	66,105	43,851	66.3
Belfast West	62,423	40,830	65.4
East Antrim	62,908	38,269	60.8
East Londonderry	67,038	41,278	61.6
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	70,601	53,714	76.1
Foyle	70,324	46,136	65.6
Lagan Valley	72,380	45,044	62.2
Mid Ulster	68,485	46,975	68.6
Newry & Armagh	78,266	53,908	68.9
North Antrim	75,657	48,580	64.2
North Down	64,334	39,268	61.0
South Antrim	68,244	43,292	63.4
South Down	75,685	51,082	67.5
Strangford	64,327	38,826	60.4
Upper Bann	80,168	51,431	64.2
West Tyrone	64,009	43,675	68.2
Northern Ireland	1,242,698	815,260	65.6

Table 3.2 shows that, compared with 2015, turnout increased significantly in every constituency and was the highest recorded since 2005. The increase was especially notable in Foyle (12 percentage points); South Down (10.3), East Londonderry (9.4) and South and North Antrim (8.9 and 8.7 percentage points respectively). Even in North Down, which traditionally records the lowest turnout, the 2017 figure (61.0%) was almost five percentage points higher than in May 2015 (56.1%) ⁵.

⁴ Votes polled included invalid votes.

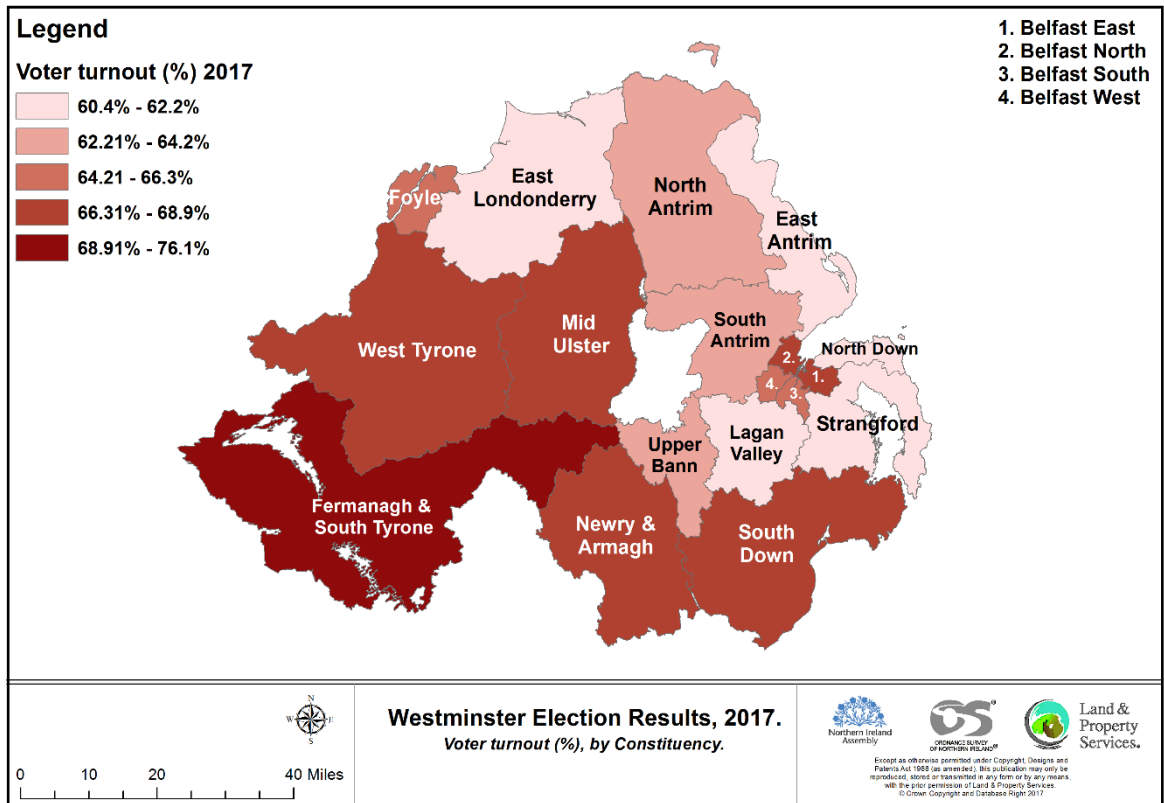
⁵ Percentage points refer to the difference between two percentages, e.g. the difference between 60% and 55% is five percentage points.

Table 3.2 Turnout in Westminster Elections 2005 – 2017

Constituency	2005 %	2010 %	2015 %	2017 %	Diff 2015-17 (percentage points)
Belfast East	58.6	58.7	63.1	67.7	4.6
Belfast North	58.6	56.8	59.6	67.6	8.0
Belfast South	61.7	57.7	60.3	66.3	6.0
Belfast West	65.2	54.9	56.8	65.4	8.6
East Antrim	55.2	50.1	53.6	60.8	7.2
East Londonderry	61.3	55.5	52.2	61.6	9.4
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	74.3	69.3	73.0	76.1	3.1
Foyle	67.0	58.0	53.6	65.6	12.0
Lagan Valley	61.0	56.2	56.2	62.2	6.0
Mid Ulster	73.9	63.7	60.9	68.6	7.7
Newry and Armagh	71.5	60.9	64.8	68.9	4.1
North Antrim	62.5	58.1	55.5	64.2	8.7
North Down	54.7	55.2	56.1	61.0	4.9
South Antrim	57.3	54.2	54.5	63.4	8.9
South Down	66.5	60.5	57.2	67.5	10.3
Strangford	54.3	53.9	53.1	60.4	7.3
Upper Bann	62.5	55.8	59.3	64.2	4.9
West Tyrone	73.5	61.5	61.1	68.2	7.1
Northern Ireland	63.5	57.8	58.4	65.6	7.2

While turnout rose substantially in all areas, Table 3.2 reveals that the highest rates were recorded in the predominately nationalist constituencies of Fermanagh and South Tyrone (76.1%), Newry and Armagh (68.9%). Mid Ulster (68.6%) and West Tyrone (68.2%) – also see Map 3.1.

Map 3.1 Turnout (%) by Constituency, June 2017



4 Overall Results

Table 4.1 and Fig 4.1 present the overall results of the 2017 general election in Northern Ireland. The DUP recorded a net gain of two seats for a total of 10, and Sinn Féin finished with seven seats, a net gain of three. The five gains by the largest two parties were at the expense of the SDLP (3 losses) and the UUP (2 losses) ⁶. The Alliance party failed in its bid to regain Belfast East, which was retained by the DUP.

⁶ One consequence of the SDLP losses, when combined with the abstentionist policy of Sinn Féin, will be the absence of any Irish nationalist MPs in the House of Commons for the first time since 1966. In the general election of 31 March 1966, the Republican Labour candidate, Gerry Fitt, beat the sitting Member, James Kilfedder, Ulster Unionist Party, to take the Belfast West seat.

Table 4.1 Westminster Election 2017 – Overall Results

Party	Seats	+/-	Valid Votes	Vote Share (%)	+/- (pp)
DUP	10	+2	292,316	36.0	+10.3
Sinn Féin	7	+3	238,915	29.4	+4.9
SDLP	0	-3	95,419	11.7	-2.2
UUP	0	-2	83,280	10.3	-5.8
Alliance Party	0	0	64,553	7.9	-0.6
Green	0	0	7,452	0.9	0.0
TUV	0	0	3,282	0.4	-1.9
Others	1	0	26,966	3.3	-1.8

Fig 4.1: Constituency Results by Party

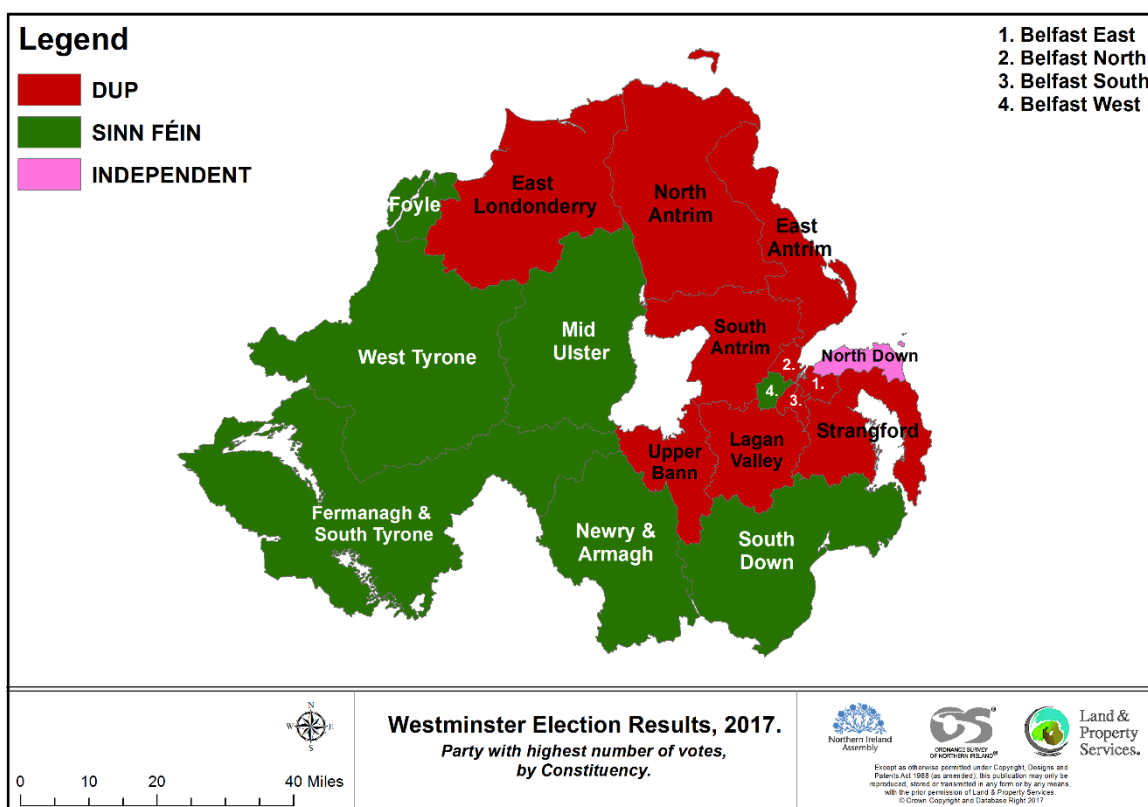


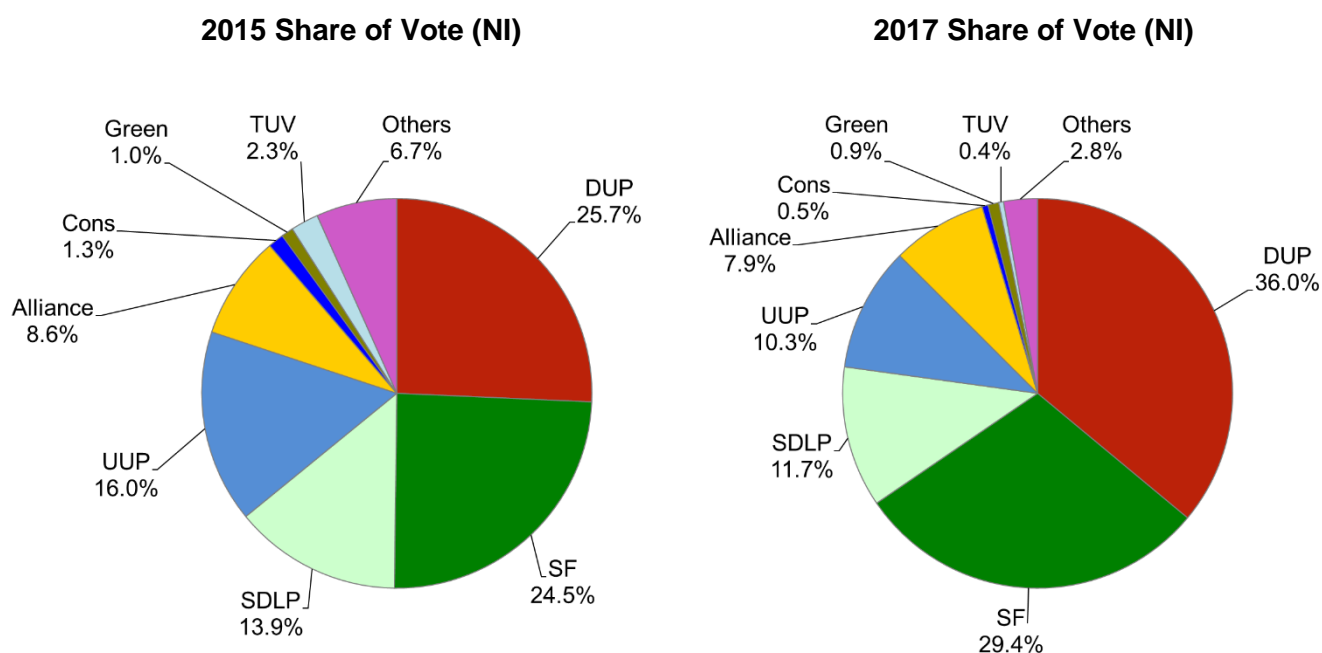
Table 4.2 (overleaf) presents the votes obtained by the main parties in 2015 and 2017. The table reveals that, in line with the increased turnout, three of the five main parties recorded an increase in the number of votes cast. Compared with 2015, the DUP added an additional 108,000 votes to their tally, a rise of 59 per cent, while Sinn Féin gained nearly 63,000 extra votes, an increase of 36 per cent. The Alliance Party recorded a modest upturn in their performance (3,000 votes, 4.9%). In contrast, the UUP vote fell by nearly 32,000 (28%) while the SDLP vote declined by 4,400 (4.4%).

Table 4.2 Valid Votes by Party – Comparison with 2015

	2015	2017	Difference	% change
DUP	184,260	292,316	108,056	58.6
Sinn Féin	176,232	238,915	62,683	35.6
SDLP	99,809	95,419	-4,390	-4.4
UUP	114,935	83,280	-31,655	-27.5
Alliance Party	61,556	64,553	2,997	4.9
Green	6,822	7,452	630	9.2
TUV ⁷	16,538	3,282	-13,256	-80.2
Others	57,951	26,966	-30,985	-53.5
Totals	718,103	812,183	94,080	13.1

5 Individual Party Performance

This section analyses the performance of the main political parties. While the emphasis is on comparisons between 2017 and 2015, Tables 5.1 and 5.2 also contain data on the last four Westminster elections.



The **Democratic Unionist Party** (10 seats) returned to Westminster with two new Members, having gained South Antrim from the UUP and Belfast South from the SDLP (Table 5.1). The party's share of the vote increased by over 10 percentage points, from 25.7% in 2015 to 36.0% in 2017 (Table 5.2).

⁷ The TUV fielded only one candidate in 2017, compared with seven in 2015.

Table 5.1 Seats by Party

	2005	2010	2015	2017
DUP	9	8	8	10
Sinn Féin	5	5	4	7
UUP	1		2	-
SDLP	3	3	3	-
Alliance	-	1	-	-
Independent/Others	-	1	1	1
Northern Ireland	18	18	18	18

Table 5.2 Share of Votes by Party

	2005 %	2010 %	2015 %	2017 %	2015 – 17 (+/- %)
DUP	33.7	25.0	25.7	36.0	+10.3
Sinn Féin	24.3	25.5	24.5	29.4	+4.9
UUP	17.8	15.2	16.0	10.3	-5.7
SDLP	17.5	16.5	13.9	11.7	-2.2
Alliance	3.9	6.3	8.6	7.9	-0.7
Independent/Others	2.8	11.5	11.3	4.7	-6.6
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

Sinn Féin (7 seats) gained three seats, and its share of the vote rose by 4.9 percentage points. The party gained Fermanagh and South Tyrone at the expense of the UUP, and Foyle and South Down from the SDLP.

The **SDLP** lost all its three seats and the party's share of the vote fell by 2.2 percentage points, from 13.9% in 2015 to 11.7%.

Similarly, the **UUP** lost both of its two seats and its vote share dropped from 16% to 10.3%, a fall of 5.7 percentage points..

The **Alliance Party** failed to retake Belfast East, and their overall share of the vote declined marginally by 0.7 percentage points.

There was one seat won by an **Independent** (Sylvia Hermon in North Down).

6 Women in the 2017 Westminster Election

There were 36 female candidates (33%) and a total of four female MPs (22.2%) were elected from Northern Ireland on 8 June 2017 (Table 6.1). Sinn Féin has two female

Members, followed by the DUP with one, and an Independent Member (Sylvia Hermon, North Down).

Table 6.1 Seats by Party and Gender

Party	Male	Female	Total	% Female
DUP	9	1	10	10.0%
SF	5	2	7	28.6%
Independents	0	1	1	100.0%
Totals	14	4	18	22.2%

The Northern Ireland figures compare with Dáil Éireann, where 22 per cent of TDs are female (February 2016 election). The National Assembly of Wales has the highest percentage of women representatives in UK parliaments (41.7%), followed by the Scottish Parliament (34.9%) and the House of Commons (31.8%).

7 Summary

The Westminster general election of 8 June 2017 resulted in a 'hung parliament', with the Conservatives as the largest party but without an overall majority. In Northern Ireland, the two main parties (DUP and Sinn Féin) had a successful poll, with both recording their largest ever vote in a Westminster election. The DUP, in particular, had a noteworthy performance, gaining two seats and increasing their vote count by 108,000, 58 per cent higher than in 2015. Sinn Féin also performed well, with a 35 per cent increase in their vote (62,700) reflected in an additional three seats. The UUP and SDLP lost all their five seats to their larger rivals. The Alliance Party saw a small rise in their overall vote (3,000) but failed to gain any seats.

Annex A. Valid Votes by Party and Constituency

	DUP	SF	UUP	SDLP	Alliance	Green	Cons	PBPA	TUV	Others	Totals
Belfast East	23,917	894	1,408	167	15,443	561	446			54	42,890
Belfast North	21,240	19,159		2,058	2,475	644				360	45,936
Belfast South	13,299	7,143	1,527	11,303	7,946	2,241	246				43,705
Belfast West	5,455	27,107		2,860	731			4,132		348	40,633
East Antrim	21,873	3,555	4,524	1,278	5,950		963				38,143
East Londonderry	19,723	10,881	3,135	4,423	2,538		330				41,030
Fermanagh & South Tyrone		25,230	24,355	2,587	886	423					53,481
Foyle	7,398	18,256		18,087	847			1,377			45,965
Lagan Valley	26,762	1,567	7,533	3,384	4,996		462			222	44,926
Mid Ulster	12,565	25,455	3,017	4,563	1,094						46,694
Newry & Armagh	13,177	25,666	4,425	9,055	1,256						53,579
North Antrim	28,521	7,878	3,482	2,574	2,723				3,282		48,460
North Down	14,940	531		400	3,639	2,549	941			16,185	39,185
South Antrim	16,508	7,797	13,300	2,362	3,203						43,170
South Down	8,867	20,328	2,002	17,882	1,814						50,893
Strangford	24,036	1,083	4,419	2,404	5,693	607	507				38,749
Upper Bann	22,317	14,325	7,900	4,397	2,319						51,258
West Tyrone	11,718	22,060	2,253	5,635	1,000	427				393	43,486
Northern Ireland	292,316	238,915	83,280	95,419	64,553	7,452	3,895	5,509	3,282	17,562	812,183

Annex B. Share of Vote (%) by Party and Constituency

	DUP	SF	UUP	SDLP	Alliance	Green	Cons	PBPA	TUV	Others
Belfast East	55.8	2.1	3.3	0.4	36.0	1.3	1.0			0.1
Belfast North	46.2	41.7		4.5	5.4	1.4				0.8
Belfast South	30.4	16.3	3.5	25.9	18.2	5.1	0.6			
Belfast West	13.4	66.7		7.0	1.8			10.2		0.9
East Antrim	57.3	9.3	11.9	3.4	15.6		2.5			
East Londonderry	48.1	26.5	7.6	10.8	6.2		0.8			
Fermanagh & South Tyrone		47.2	45.5	4.8	1.7	0.8				
Foyle	16.1	39.7		39.3	1.8			3.0		
Lagan Valley	59.6	3.5	16.8	7.5	11.1		1.0			0.5
Mid Ulster	26.9	54.5	6.5	9.8	2.3					
Newry & Armagh	24.6	47.9	8.3	16.9	2.3					
North Antrim	58.9	16.3	7.2	5.3	5.6				6.8	
North Down	38.1	1.4		1.0	9.3	6.5	2.4			41.3
South Antrim	38.2	18.1	30.8	5.5	7.4					
South Down	17.4	39.9	3.9	35.1	3.6					
Strangford	62.0	2.8	11.4	6.2	14.7	1.6	1.3			
Upper Bann	43.5	27.9	15.4	8.6	4.5					
West Tyrone	26.9	50.7	5.2	13.0	2.3	1.0				0.9
Northern Ireland	36.0	29.4	10.3	11.7	7.9	0.9	0.5	0.7	0.4	2.2

