



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

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# Women in the General Election in Northern Ireland 2015

## 1 Introduction

This paper briefly summarises the results of the UK General Election 2015 in Northern Ireland by gender. The paper is written in the context of the approval by the Northern Ireland Assembly on 9 March 2014 of the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly, which recommends that political parties consider measures to increase the representation of women in politics.

This paper supplements a previous paper on candidates for the election, *General Election 2015: Gender Representation*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Research and Information Service Briefing Paper 43/15 *General Election 2015: Gender Representation*, 14 April 2015: [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2015/exec\\_review/4315.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2015/exec_review/4315.pdf).

## 2 Women and the General Election 2015

<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Candidates</b>		<b>Elected</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Share</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>			
Belfast East	4	2	Gavin Robinson (DUP)	19,575	49.3%
Belfast North	5	1	Nigel Dodds (DUP)	19,096	47%
Belfast South	6	3	Alasdair McDonnell (SDLP)	9,560	25.5%
Belfast West	9	0	Paul Maskey (SF)	19,163	54.2%
East Antrim	6	2	Sammy Wilson (DUP)	12,103	36.1%
East Londonderry	4	3	Gregory Campbell (DUP)	14,663	42.2%
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	2	3	Tom Elliott (UUP)	23,608	46.4%
Foyle	6	1	Mark Durkan (SDLP)	17,725	47.9%
Lagan Valley	8	1	Jeffrey Donaldson (DUP)	19,055	47.9%
Mid Ulster	7	2	Francie Molloy (SF)	19,935	48.7%
Newry and Armagh	4	1	Mickey Brady (SF)	20,488	41.1%

North Antrim	7	2	Ian Paisley (DUP)	18,107	43.2%
North Down	8	2	Sylvia Hermon (Ind)	17,689	49.2%
South Antrim	6	1	Danny Kinahan (UUP)	11,942	32.7%
South Down	5	2	Margaret Ritchie (SDLP)	18,077	42.3%
Strangford	6	2	Jim Shannon (DUP)	15,053	44.4%
Upper Bann	5	3	David Simpson (DUP)	15,430	32.7%
West Tyrone	7	2	Pat Doherty (SF)	16,807	43.5%

Of the 24% of candidates that were female, two were elected (11%), compared with four elected in 2010 (22%). This is in contrast to the UK trend, which has seen an increase in female MPs from 23% in 2010 to 29% in 2015<sup>2</sup>. However, it should be noted that Northern Ireland is a small region with 18 seats, therefore relatively small changes have a large impact on percentages compared with the UK as a whole.

One Northern Ireland constituency had more female candidates than male (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) and one had no female candidates at all (West Belfast).

The successful female candidates were:

- Sylvia Hermon (Independent), North Down
- Margaret Ritchie (Social Democratic and Labour Party), South Down

Potential explanations for the low representation of women are as follows:

- Candidate selection – while 24% of candidates were women, and the trend has been for the same approximate proportion of women being elected as there are women candidates, two of the four parties that had MPs returned had a lower

<sup>2</sup> 'Election 2015: Number of women in Parliament rises by a third', *BBC News* 8 May 2015: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-32601280>.

proportion of female candidates than the average (the DUP and UUP), the DUP, the largest party, having no female candidates at all

- Incumbency – while there was considerable change in the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland had a high proportion of sitting MPs returned (14 out of 18), which narrowed the potential for more women to be elected
- Winnable seats – fewer women were selected as candidates in safe seats

The map below summarises the Northern Ireland election results by constituency.

