



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Research Paper

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# **Election Report: Westminster General Election, 12 December 2019**

**NIAR 180-19**

This paper presents an analysis of the Westminster General Election, held on 12 December 2019, and compares the outcome with that of the 2017 election. The paper also includes an analysis of voter turnout and results by party and constituency.



## Key Points

- The 2019 Westminster general election left the parties with the following number of seats:

Democratic Unionist Party	8
Sinn Féin	7
Social Democratic and Labour Party	2
Ulster Unionist Party	-
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	1
Independents	-

- The DUP lost two seats (Belfast North and Belfast South); the SDLP gained two seats (Foyle and Belfast South), Alliance gained one seat (North Down); while the Sinn Féin seat tally remained unchanged, with the loss of Foyle compensated for by the gain of Belfast North.
- The DUP had the highest share of the vote (30.6% - down from 36.0% in 2017); followed by Sinn Féin (22.8% - down from 29.4% in 2017); Alliance (16.8% - up from 7.9% in 2017); the SDLP (14.9% - up from 11.7% in 2017); UUP (11.7% - up from 10.3% in 2017).
- Of the 18 MPs elected in 2019, four are women (no change since 2017).
- Turnout in the election was 62.1 per cent (compared with 65.6% in 2017).
- A total of 102 candidates contested the election (compared with 109 in 2017).

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## 1 Introduction

On Thursday 31 October 2019, Parliament passed legislation to make provision for an early parliamentary general election, to be held on 12 December 2019.

The general election resulted in a victory for the Conservative party, with an overall majority of 80 seats. The result was: Conservative (365), Labour (203), SNP (48), Liberal Democrats (11), DUP (8) and Others (15). The Conservative vote rose by 330,000, from 13.637 million in 2017 to 13.967 million in 2019. The party received 43.6 per cent of the vote (compared with 42.4% in 2017), while the Labour share fell from 40.0 per cent in 2017 to 32.2 per cent in 2019, a decrease of 7.8 percentage points.

A total of 220 female MPs (33.8%) were elected, 12 more than in 2017.

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

## 2. The Candidates

A total of 102 candidates stood for the December 2019 election in Northern Ireland, 74 males and 28 females. This total compares with 109 in June 2017, representing a fall of 6.4 per cent (Table 2.1). The Alliance Party fielded candidates in all 18 constituencies, followed by the DUP (17), UUP (16), Sinn Féin (15) and the SDLP (15). Aontú were next with 7 candidates, followed by the Conservative and Unionist Party (4), Green Party (3), UKIP (2) and the People Before Profit Alliance (2). There were three Independents.

The number of female candidates fell from 36 in 2017 to 28 in 2019, against a backdrop of an overall fall in candidate numbers. The net effect was to decrease the proportion of female candidates, from 33 per cent in 2017 to 27 per cent in 2019. Alliance had the highest number of female candidates of the five main parties (9), followed by the SDLP (8) and Sinn Féin (4).

**Table 2.1 2019 Election Candidates by Party and Gender**

	Male	Female	Total
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	15	2	17
Sinn Féin (SF)	11	4	15
Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)	7	8	15
Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	15	1	16
Alliance Party (APNI)	9	9	18
Green Party	2	1	3
People before Profit Alliance (PBPA)	2	0	2
Conservative and Unionist Party	4	0	4
Aontú	5	2	7
UKIP	2	0	2
Independents	2	1	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>102</b>

### 3. Turnout

Table 3.1 (overleaf) presents the voting statistics for Election 2019. The total eligible electorate was 1,293,971 (compared with 1,242,698 in June 2017), a rise of 51,273 (4.1%). The total number of votes polled was 803,367, down from 815,260 in 2017, representing a decrease of 11,893 votes (1.5%) compared with the June 2017 parliamentary election. The official turnout <sup>1</sup> was 62.1 per cent of the eligible electorate, a decrease of 3.5 percentage points <sup>2</sup> on the June 2017 figure (65.6%).

<sup>1</sup> Turnout is calculated by taking the total number of votes cast (including invalid votes) and dividing by the eligible electorate.

<sup>2</sup> Percentage points refer to the difference between two percentages, e.g. the difference between 40% and 50% is 10 percentage points.

**Table 3.1 2019 Voting Statistics by Constituency**

	Eligible Electorate	Votes Polled <sup>3</sup>	% Turnout
Belfast East	66,245	42,619	64.3
Belfast North	72,225	49,425	68.4
Belfast South	69,984	47,527	67.9
Belfast West	65,644	38,988	59.4
East Antrim	64,830	37,431	57.7
East Londonderry	69,246	39,495	57.0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	72,848	51,087	70.1
Foyle	74,346	47,370	63.7
Lagan Valley	75,735	45,589	60.2
Mid Ulster	70,449	44,968	63.8
Newry & Armagh	81,226	51,120	62.9
North Antrim	77,134	44,355	57.5
North Down	67,099	40,842	60.9
South Antrim	71,711	43,188	60.2
South Down	79,175	49,971	63.1
Strangford	66,928	37,669	56.3
Upper Bann	82,887	50,348	60.7
West Tyrone	66,259	41,375	62.4
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>1,293,971</b>	<b>803,367</b>	<b>62.1</b>

Table 3.2 (below) shows that, compared with 2017, turnout fell in 16 of the 18 constituencies. The only exceptions were Belfast North and Belfast South, which both registered small increases <sup>4</sup>.

The highest turnouts were in Fermanagh and South Tyrone (70.1%), followed by Belfast North (68.4%) and Belfast South (67.9%).

The largest drops in turnout were recorded in North Antrim (6.7%), followed by Belfast West, Fermanagh & South Tyrone and Newry & Armagh (all 6%).

<sup>3</sup> Votes polled includes invalid votes.

<sup>4</sup> 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 – 2019**

Constituency	2005 %	2010 %	2015 %	2017 %	2019 %	Diff 2017-19 (percent pts)
Belfast East	58.6	58.7	63.1	67.7	64.3	- 3.4
Belfast North	58.6	56.8	59.6	67.6	68.4	0.8
Belfast South	61.7	57.7	60.3	66.3	67.9	1.6
Belfast West	65.2	54.9	56.8	65.4	59.4	- 6.0
East Antrim	55.2	50.1	53.6	60.8	57.7	- 3.1
East Londonderry	61.3	55.5	52.2	61.6	57.0	- 4.6
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	74.3	69.3	73.0	76.1	70.1	- 6.0
Foyle	67.0	58.0	53.6	65.6	63.7	- 1.9
Lagan Valley	61.0	56.2	56.2	62.2	60.2	- 2.0
Mid Ulster	73.9	63.7	60.9	68.6	63.8	- 4.8
Newry and Armagh	71.5	60.9	64.8	68.9	62.9	- 6.0
North Antrim	62.5	58.1	55.5	64.2	57.5	- 6.7
North Down	54.7	55.2	56.1	61.0	60.9	- 0.1
South Antrim	57.3	54.2	54.5	63.4	60.2	- 3.2
South Down	66.5	60.5	57.2	67.5	63.1	- 4.4
Strangford	54.3	53.9	53.1	60.4	56.3	- 4.1
Upper Bann	62.5	55.8	59.3	64.2	60.7	- 3.5
West Tyrone	73.5	61.5	61.1	68.2	62.4	- 5.8
Northern Ireland	63.5	57.8	58.4	65.6	62.1	- 3.5

During the past five elections, turnout has fluctuated between a low of 57.8 per cent in 2005 to a peak of 65.6 per cent in 2017.

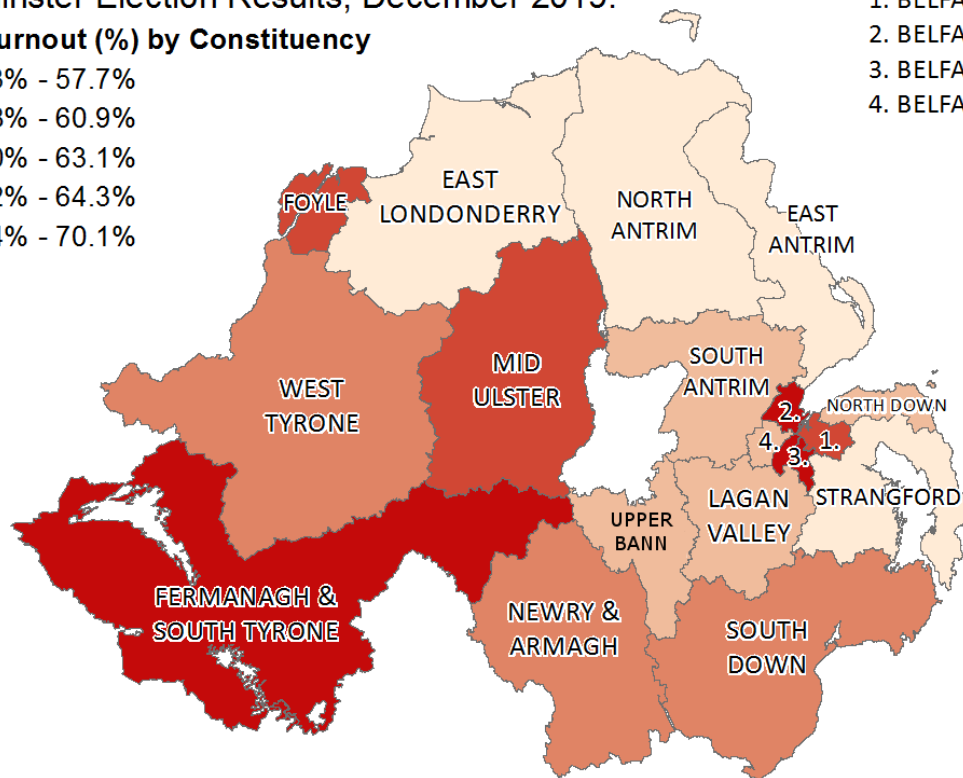
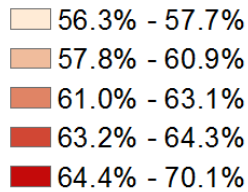
Map 3.1 (below) illustrates turnout by constituency, with the darker colours reflecting higher turnout.



### Map 3.1 Turnout (%) by Constituency, December 2019

Westminster Election Results, December 2019.

#### Voter Turnout (%) by Constituency



1. BELFAST EAST
2. BELFAST NORTH
3. BELFAST SOUTH
4. BELFAST WEST

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## 4 Overall Results

Tables 4.1 and 4.2, plus Fig 4.1, present the results of the 2019 general election in Northern Ireland. Overall, there was a marked decline in support for the largest parties (DUP and Sinn Féin), coupled with a strong surge in backing for the Alliance and SDLP. The UUP also improved its vote share without gaining any seats.

Four seats changed hands in the election, two in Belfast, one in Foyle, and the other in North Down. All were captured by the smaller parties at the expense of the DUP and Sinn Féin.

The DUP lost two seats, for a total of 8, while Sinn Féin finished with 7 seats. Alliance gained one seat (North Down) and the SDLP took Belfast South and Foyle. Overall, there are now nine seats at Westminster held by nationalist parties, compared with eight for unionists, a novel feature of this election.

In terms of vote share, Table 4.1 reveals that, of the five main parties, Sinn Féin and the DUP were the only ones to experience a fall in their share of the vote [compared with 2017]. Sinn Féin saw a drop of 6.7 percentage points (pps.) in their share, followed by the DUP (5.4 pps.). In contrast, Alliance more than doubled their vote share, from 7.9 per cent in 2017 to 16.8 per cent in 2019, a rise of 8.9 pps. This

represents Alliance’s largest share of the vote in any election since the formation of the party in 1970 <sup>5</sup>. The SDLP also improved on their 2017 performance, with an increase of 3.1 pps., while the UUP share rose by 1.4 percentage points.

**Table 4.1 Westminster Election 2019 – Overall Results**

Party	Seats	+/-	Valid Votes	Vote Share (%)	2017-19 +/- (pp)
DUP	8	- 2	244,128	30.6	- 5.4
Sinn Féin	7	0	181,853	22.8	- 6.7
Alliance Party	1	+ 1	134,115	16.8	+ 8.9
SDLP	2	+ 2	118,737	14.9	+ 3.1
UUP	0	0	93,123	11.7	+ 1.4
Aontú	0	0	9,814	1.2	
Green	0	0	1,996	0.2	- 0.7
PBPA	0	0	7,526	0.9	+ 0.2
Others	0	- 1	7,743	1.0	- 0.7

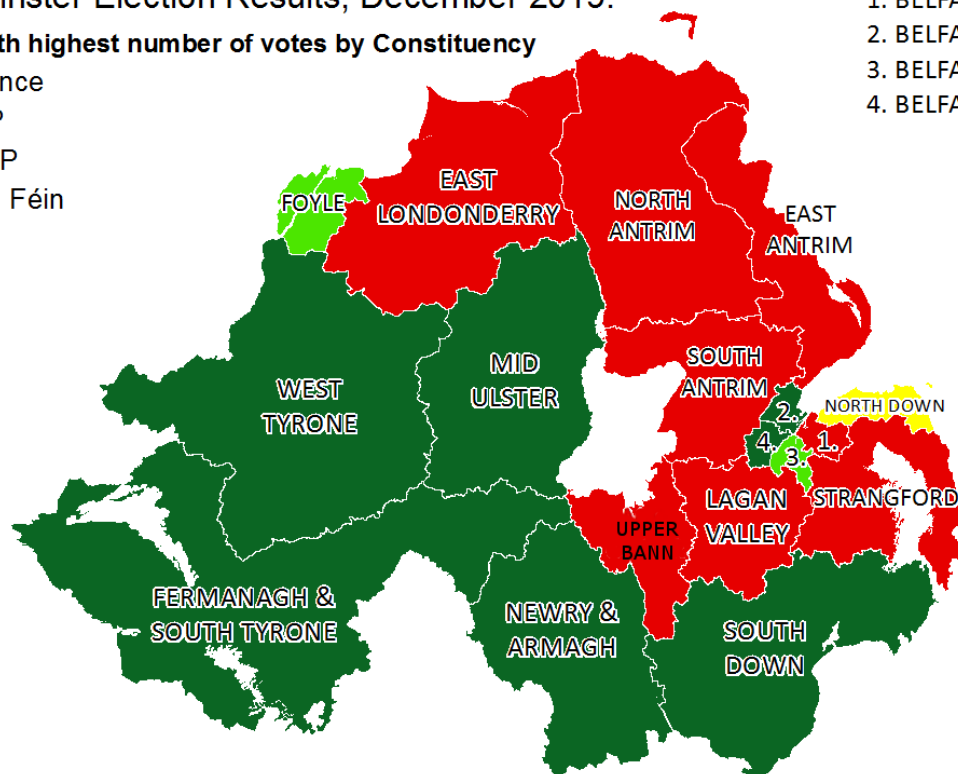
**Fig 4.1: Constituency Results by Party**

Westminster Election Results, December 2019.

Party with highest number of votes by Constituency

- Alliance
- DUP
- SDLP
- Sinn Féin

1. BELFAST EAST
2. BELFAST NORTH
3. BELFAST SOUTH
4. BELFAST WEST



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<sup>5</sup> The Alliance Party’s previous peak share of the vote occurred in the 1973 Local Government Elections, when they obtained 13.7 per cent of the vote.

Table 4.2 shows the votes obtained by the main parties in 2017 and 2019. In spite of the smaller turnout, three of the five main parties – Alliance, SDLP, and the UUP – recorded an increase in their vote, largely at the expense of the DUP and Sinn Féin.

In terms of votes cast, the largest beneficiary was Alliance (see Table 4.2). Compared with 2017, the party more than doubled its tally, from 64,500 to 134,100, a rise of 69,600 (108%). The SDLP also performed well, with their vote increasing by a quarter (24%), from 95,400 in 2017 to 118,700. The UUP recorded a 12 per cent rise in their tally, from 83,300 to 93,100.

The Sinn Féin vote dropped by 57,000, representing a decrease of almost a quarter (24%) on their 2017 performance. The DUP vote fell by 48,200, a reduction of 17 per cent compared with 2017.

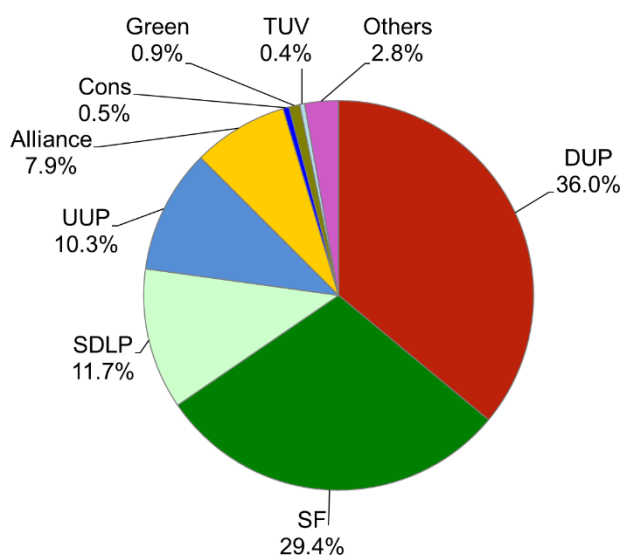
**Table 4.2 Valid Votes by Party – Comparison with 2017**

	2017	2019	Difference	% change
DUP	292,316	244,128	-48,188	-16.5
Sinn Féin	238,915	181,853	-57,062	-23.9
Alliance	64,553	134,115	69,562	107.8
SDLP	95,419	118,737	23,318	24.4
UUP	83,280	93,123	9,843	11.8
Green	7,452	1,996	-5,456	-73.2
TUV	3,282			
Aontú		9,814		
PBPA	5,509	7,526	2,017	36.6
Others	21,457	7,743	-13,714	-63.9
<b>Totals</b>	<b>812,183</b>	<b>799,035</b>	<b>-13,148</b>	<b>-1.6</b>

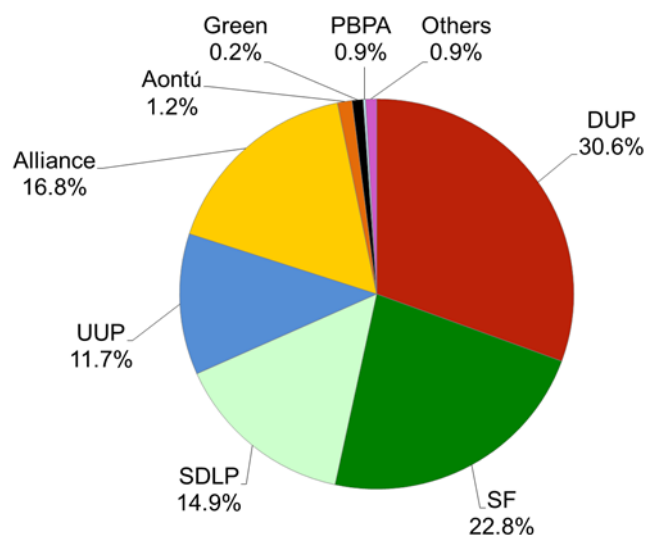
## 5 Individual Party Performance

This section analyses the performance of the main political parties. While the emphasis is on comparisons between 2017 and 2019, Tables 5.1 and 5.2 also contain data on the last five Westminster elections.

**2017 Share of Vote (NI)**



**2019 Share of Vote (NI)**



The **Democratic Unionist Party** (8 seats) returned to Westminster with two fewer seats than before, having lost Belfast North to Sinn Féin, and Belfast South to the SDLP. The party held Belfast East, with a reduced majority over their Alliance challenger.

Overall, the party’s share of the vote declined by 5.4 percentage points, from 36.0% in 2017 to 30.6% in 2019 (Table 5.2). At an individual constituency level, the DUP’s vote share fell in 15 out of the 17 constituencies contested.

**Table 5.1 Seats by Party**

	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019
DUP	9	8	8	10	8
Sinn Féin	5	5	4	7	7
UUP	1		2	-	-
SDLP	3	3	3	-	2
Alliance	-	1	-	-	1
Independent/Others	-	1	1	1	-
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>

**Table 5.2 Share of Votes by Party**

	2005 %	2010 %	2015 %	2017 %	2019 %	2017 – 19 (+/- pp.)
DUP	33.7	25.0	25.7	36.0	30.6	- 5.4
Sinn Féin	24.3	25.5	24.5	29.4	22.8	- 6.6
UUP	17.8	15.2	16.0	10.3	11.7	+ 1.4
SDLP	17.5	16.5	13.9	11.7	14.9	+ 3.2
Alliance	3.9	6.3	8.6	7.9	16.8	+ 8.9
Independent/Others	2.8	11.5	11.3	4.7	3.2	- 1.5
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

**Sinn Féin** finished the election with seven seats, the same as in 2017. However, the party's overall share of the vote fell by 6.6 percentage points, from 29.4 per cent in 2017 to 22.8 per cent. With the exception of Belfast North, the party's vote share declined in every constituency, including Foyle, which they lost to the SDLP (17,000 SDLP majority).

Based on votes cast, **Alliance** emerged as the third largest party in 2019. They took one seat (North Down) and were the main challengers in a number of others, including Belfast East, Lagan Valley, East Antrim, and Strangford. Their overall share of the vote more than doubled, from 7.9 percentage points in 2017 to 16.8 per cent in 2019. Their performance in the Westminster poll is the continuation of an upward trend which was evident in both the 2019 local council and European elections <sup>6</sup>. An indication of the scale of the Alliance surge can be seen in a comparison with Sinn Féin, the second largest party: In 2017, Alliance were 174,362 votes behind Sinn Féin; by 2019, the gap had closed to 47,738 (see Table 4.2 above).

The **SDLP** (2 seats) also had a successful election, with the gain of Belfast South (from the DUP) and Foyle (from Sinn Féin). The party's overall share of the vote improved by 3.2 percentage points, from 11.7 per cent in 2017 to 14.9 per cent. The SDLP made advances in a number of areas, including Foyle, Belfast South, East Londonderry, Mid Ulster and West Tyrone <sup>7</sup>.

While the **UUP** failed to make any gains, its vote share improved from 10.3 per cent to 11.7 per cent, a rise of 1.4 percentage points. The party improved its position in, among other constituencies, East Antrim, Lagan Valley, North Antrim, and South Down.

**Aontú**, which fielded candidates in seven constituencies, obtained a total of 9,814 votes (1.2%). The People Before Profit Alliance (**PBPA**) ran in two constituencies

<sup>6</sup> The Alliance share of first preference votes was 11.5% in the May 2019 local council elections, and 18.5% in the European election

<sup>7</sup> The SDLP majorities in Foyle (17,110) and Belfast South (15,401) were the largest of any party in the election.

(Foyle and Belfast West), harvesting 7,526 votes overall, and achieving a 16 per cent share of the poll in Belfast West.

## 6 Women in the 2017 Westminster Election (NI)

There were 28 female candidates (27%) and a total of four female MPs (22.2%) were elected from Northern Ireland on 12 December 2019 (Table 6.1). Sinn Féin has two female Members, with one each from the DUP and SDLP.

**Table 6.1 Seats by Party and Gender**

Party	Male	Female	Total	% Female
DUP	7	1	8	10.0%
SF	5	2	7	33.0%
SDLP	1	1	2	50.0%
Alliance	1			0.0%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22.2%</b>

The Northern Ireland figure of 22 per cent is identical to Dáil Éireann, where 22 per cent of TDs are also female (February 2016 election). The National Assembly of Wales currently has the highest percentage of women representatives in UK parliaments (47%), followed by the Scottish Parliament (36%) and the House of Commons (32%).

## 7 Summary

The Westminster general election of 12 December 2019 resulted in a large, overall majority for the Conservative party. Compared with the position in 2017, in Northern Ireland, Alliance and the SDLP were the main winners, with a gain of one seat for Alliance (North Down) and two for the SDLP (Foyle and Belfast South). Leaving aside the capture of Belfast North by Sinn Féin, the two main parties (DUP and Sinn Féin), both saw a drop in support across most constituencies.

### Annex A. No. of Valid Votes by Party and Constituency

	DUP	SF	UUP	SDLP	Alliance	Green	PBPA	Aontú	Indep.	Others	Totals
Belfast East	20,874		2,516		19,055						42,445
Belfast North	21,135	23,078			4,824						49,037
Belfast South	11,678		1,259	27,079	6,786			550			47,352
Belfast West	5,220	20,866		2,985	1,882		6,194	1,635			38,782
East Antrim	16,871	2,120	5,475	902	10,165	685				1,043	37,261
East Londonderry	15,765	6,128	3,599	6,158	5,921			1,731			39,302
Fermanagh & South Tyrone		21,986	21,929	3,446	2,650				751		50,762
Foyle	4,773	9,771	1,088	26,881	1,267		1,332	2,032			47,144
Lagan Valley	19,586	1,098	8,606	1,758	13,087					1,270	45,405
Mid Ulster	10,936	20,473	2,611	6,384	3,526				690		44,620
Newry & Armagh	11,000	20,287	4,204	9,449	4,211			1,628			50,779
North Antrim	20,860	5,632	8,139	2,943	6,231				246		44,051
North Down	15,390		4,936		18,358					1,959	40,643
South Antrim	15,149	4,887	12,460	2,288	8,190						42,974
South Down	7,619	16,137	3,307	14,517	6,916			1,266			49,762
Strangford	17,705	555	4,023	1,994	10,634	790				1,784	37,485
Upper Bann	20,501	12,291	6,197	4,623	6,433						50,045
West Tyrone	9,066	16,544	2,774	7,330	3,979	521		972			41,186
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>244,128</b>	<b>181,853</b>	<b>93,123</b>	<b>118,737</b>	<b>134,115</b>	<b>1,996</b>	<b>7,526</b>	<b>9,814</b>	<b>1,687</b>	<b>6,056</b>	<b>799,035</b>

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

	DUP	SF	UUP	SDLP	Alliance	Green	PBPA	Aontú	Indep.	Others	Totals
Belfast East	49.2		5.9		44.9						100.0
Belfast North	43.1	47.1			9.8						100.0
Belfast South	24.7		2.7	57.2	14.3			1.2			100.0
Belfast West	13.5	53.8		7.7	4.9		16.0	4.2			100.0
East Antrim	45.3	5.7	14.7	2.4	27.3	1.8				2.8	100.0
East Londonderry	40.1	15.6	9.2	15.7	15.1			4.4			100.0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone		43.3	43.2	6.8	5.2				1.5		100.0
Foyle	10.1	20.7	2.3	57.0	2.7		2.8	4.3			100.0
Lagan Valley	43.1	2.4	19.0	3.9	28.8					2.8	100.0
Mid Ulster	24.5	45.9	5.9	14.3	7.9				1.5		100.0
Newry & Armagh	21.7	40.0	8.3	18.6	8.3			3.2			100.0
North Antrim	47.4	12.8	18.5	6.7	14.1				0.6		100.0
North Down	37.9		12.1		45.2					4.8	100.0
South Antrim	35.3	11.4	29.0	5.3	19.1						100.0
South Down	15.3	32.4	6.6	29.2	13.9			2.5			100.0
Strangford	47.2	1.5	10.7	5.3	28.4	2.1				4.8	100.0
Upper Bann	41.0	24.6	12.4	9.2	12.9						100.0
West Tyrone	22.0	40.2	6.7	17.8	9.7	1.3		2.4			100.0
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>30.6</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>



