



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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1992 NI Westminster election results

Major developments

Turnout

1. The total valid poll was 790,423 or 71% of the electorate. The 1992 poll represents an increase of 62,321 (or 9%) on the 1987 turnout. It is however accepted that the 1987 turnout was deflated by the fielding of agreed Unionist candidates in most constituencies. The 1983 total poll of 764,925 (73.3%) may therefore be a more valid basis of comparison.
2. The total Unionist share of the poll was 440,256 or 55.7%. The Nationalist share was 274,976 or 34.1%. The Unionist/Nationalist % shares in '87 and '83 were 55/35 and 57/35 respectively. Alliance won 68,695 votes (8.6%) in this election. Their 1987 and 1983 % shares were 10% and 8%.

Nationalist results

SDLP

2. The election results represent a major success for the SDLP. The party polled 185,045 votes, its highest ever total. This represents an increase of about 20% over the 1987 result. The SDLP share of the total vote increased from 21.1% in 1987 to 24.3% in 1992. In each of the 13 constituencies contested, the party registered a significant improvement on its 1987 showing. The SDLP/Sinn Fein split of the Nationalist vote is now 70/30. In 1987, the split was 65/35; in '83, 53/47.
3. The most spectacular achievement was the victory of Joe Hendron over Gerry Adams in West Belfast. Hendron turned a deficit of 2,221 in 1987 into a majority of 589. In South Down, Eddie McGrady increased his 1987 majority

of 731 to 6,342 over his nearest Unionist rival. In Mid-Ulster, Denis Haughey expanded his 1,145 lead over Sinn Fein in 1987 to 6,744. The SDLP are now clearly established in Mid-Ulster as the only Nationalist party capable of defeating the sitting DUP MP. John Hume and Seamus Mallon both registered significant improvements on their 1987 results - Hume's vote increased by 12%, Mallon's by 6%.

4. It should not be assumed, however, that the SDLP fared well at the expense of Sinn Fein. This was the case in Mid-Ulster and (to a smaller extent) in Fermanagh South Tyrone, but in West Belfast Sinn Fein held its vote and in some other constituencies (i.e. Foyle) it increased its vote. The likeliest explanation for the increase in the SDLP vote, or at least for a significant part of it, is that the party attracted votes from nationalists who had never previously voted in any election. Other important factors were tactical voting by Unionists and the transfer of WP support.

Sinn Fein

5. The Sinn Fein vote was 78,636 or 9.9% of the electorate. This total represents a fall of 4,803 (or 5.7%) on the party's 1987 performance. The loss of Adams' seat is a significant psychological, as well as electoral, blow to the party.
6. However, Sinn Fein are trying to put the best possible face on this outcome by pointing out that their vote in Belfast (preponderantly concentrated in West Belfast) remained effectively unchanged over 1987 and by claiming that Hendron's victory was a consequence of Unionist tactical voting. Most of SF's overall decline results

from losses in Mid-Ulster and Fermanagh South Tyrone. In both constituencies it seems likely that former tactical Sinn Fein voters switched to the SDLP as offering the best prospect of eventually defeating the Unionist incumbents.

7. In general terms, Sinn Fein held their vote in urban areas but lost out significantly to the SDLP in rural areas.

Workers Party (Democratic Left/New Agenda)

8. Under whatever designation, the former Workers Party vote effectively collapsed in this election. The party polled a total of 6,495 votes, 0.8% of the total poll. By comparison, the WP vote in 1987 was 19,294 or 2.6% of the total. It is not clear what has happened electorally to the bulk of the 12,799 votes dropped by the WP.

Unionist results

General

9. In 1987, in most constituencies, the UUP and DUP ran agreed Unionist candidates. This had the immediate effect of bringing about a significant fall in the overall Unionist vote; and a sharp drop, in particular, in the DUP vote (from 20% in 1983 to 11.7% in 1987). On this occasion, there were alternative Unionist candidates (UUP, DUP, Conservative or Independent) in 11 of the 17 constituencies,

UUP

10. The UUP overall vote was 271,048 or 34.3% of the total poll. Their share of the Unionist vote was 62% (in 1987, 69% and in 1983, 57%). While their total this year represents a decrease of just over 5,000 votes on the 1987 result, it is probable that the UUP lost in the region of 20,000 former or potential votes to the Conservatives (see below) but that this loss was compensated in various ways e.g. by the retrieval of UUP voters who chose not to vote in 1987, and by the retention of many former DUP voters who had supported an "agreed" UUP candidate in 1986 and 1987.

DUP

11. The DUP vote was 103,039 (or 13% of the total poll). The DUP share of the Unionist vote was 23% (1987, 21%; in 1983, 35%.) The DUP may be paying a longer-term price for the decision to field agreed Unionist candidates in 1986 and 1987. It is noteworthy, for example, that the party chose not to contest overwhelmingly Unionist constituencies such as South Antrim and Derry East where, in 1983, DUP candidates each polled over 10,000 votes.

Conservatives

13. The party polled 44,608 votes, 5.7% of the total poll and 10% of the Unionist vote. In North Down the party vote of 14,371 almost exactly duplicates the performance of an independent Unionist, pro-integrationist candidate (Robert McCartney) in 1987. Elsewhere, the party polled 15% of the vote in Strangford, and close to 10% in Antrim East, Belfast South and Lagan Valley. In general, the bulk of the Conservatives support is confined to an affluent segment on, or close to, the eastern seaboard of Northern Ireland.

Ulster Popular Unionist Party

14. Contrary to speculation, James Kilfedder of UPUP held his North Down seat with ease. The only other significant Independent Unionist (Dorothy Dunlop in East Belfast) polled 2,256 votes, failing to make any real dent in Peter Robinson's vote.

Alliance

15. Alliance polled 68,695 votes or 8.7% of the vote. This total compares with 72,671 (10%) in '87, and 61,275 (8%) in '83. In general, therefore, the party vote held up. However, John Alderdice failed to improve on his 1987 performance in East Belfast, the constituency to which Alliance had attached most expectations.

Anglo-Irish Division
April, 1992.

British General Election April 1992

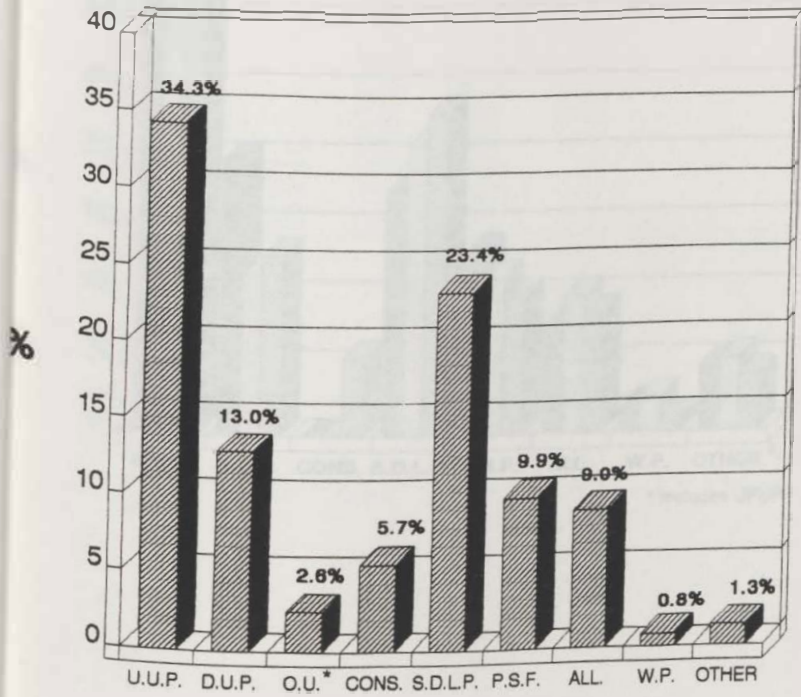
1. Northern Ireland: % Results
2. Northern Ireland: Parties % Vote
3. Northern Ireland: % Change in Parties Vote
4. Northern Ireland: % Change in Total Unionist and Nationalist Vote
5. Northern Ireland: Votes Cast for Unionists and Nationalists Parties
6. Northern Ireland: Trends in Voting for all Nationalist Parties
- 7(a) Northern Ireland: Nationalist Vote: SDLP/SF Split
- 7(b) Northern Ireland: Nationalist Vote: SDLP/SF Split
- 8(a) Northern Ireland: Breakdown of Unionist Vote by Party
- 8(b) Northern Ireland: Unionist Vote: Breakdown by Party

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% SUPPORT IN WESTMINSTER ELECTIONS
1979-1992

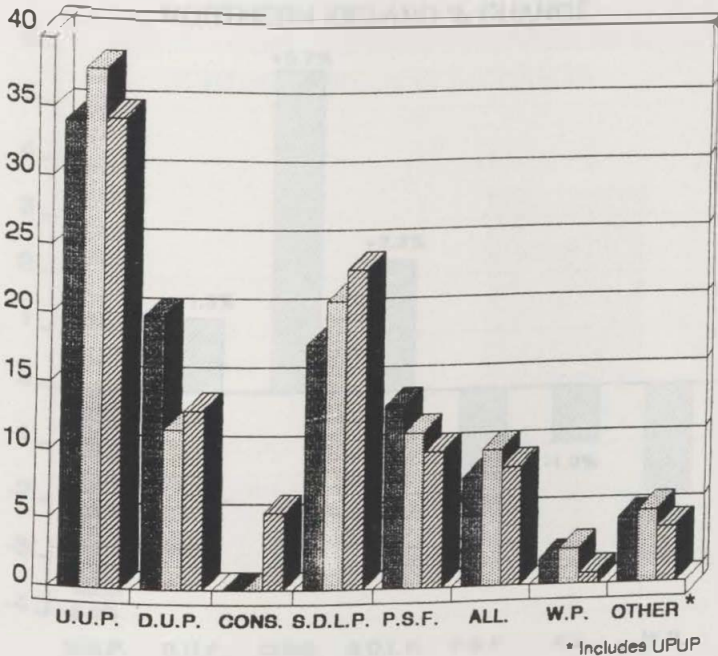
BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION APRIL 1992 NORTHERN IRELAND % RESULTS



1992

*: UPUP & Indep.
Unionists.

% SUPPORT IN WESTMINSTER ELECTIONS 1983-1992

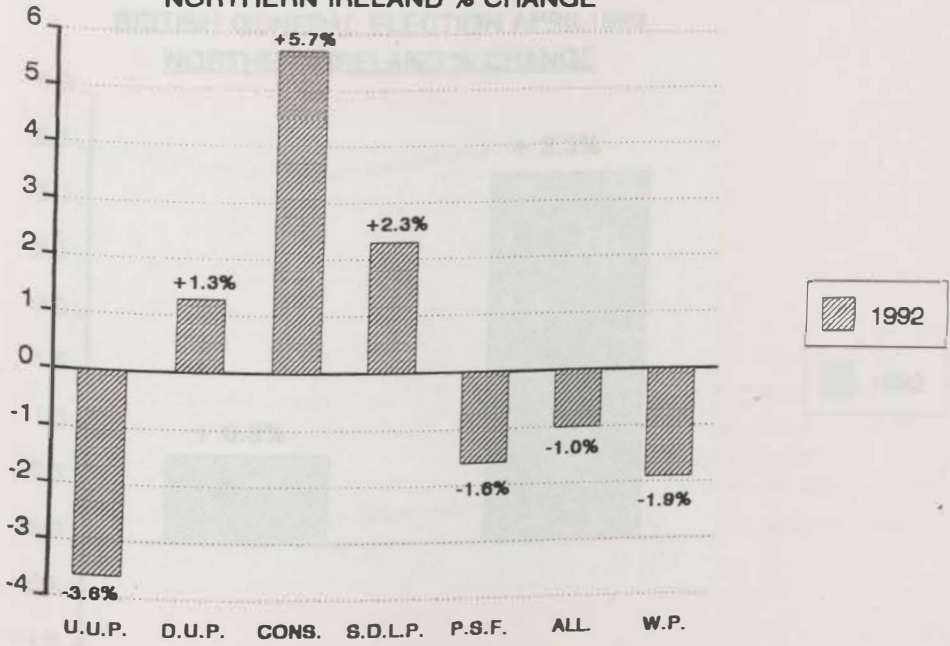


Legend:

- 1983 (Solid black)
- 1987 (White)
- 1992 (Hatched)

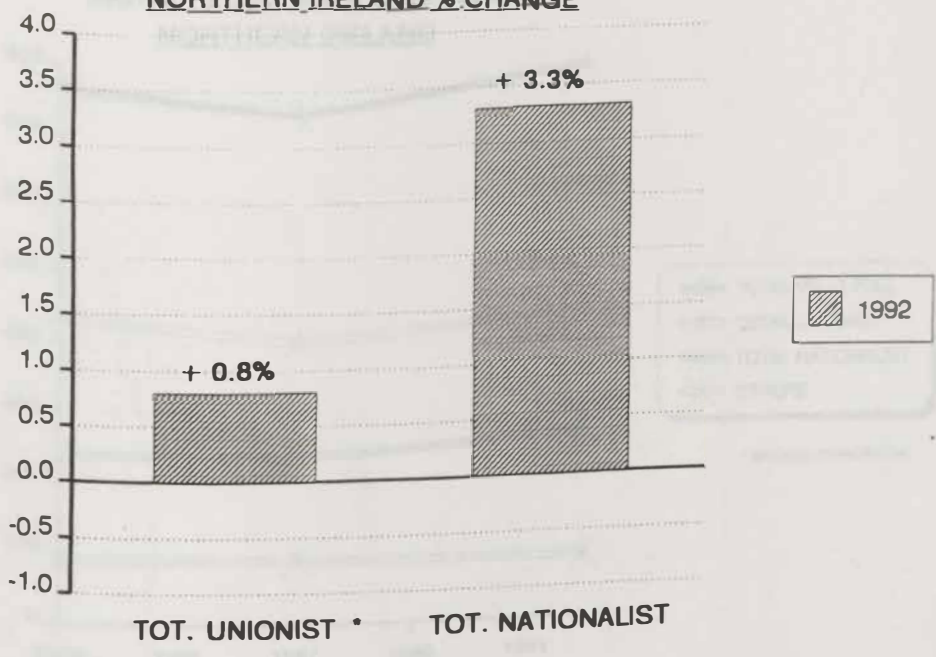
* Includes UPUP

BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION APRIL 1992 NORTHERN IRELAND % CHANGE



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BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION APRIL 1992
NORTHERN IRELAND % CHANGE

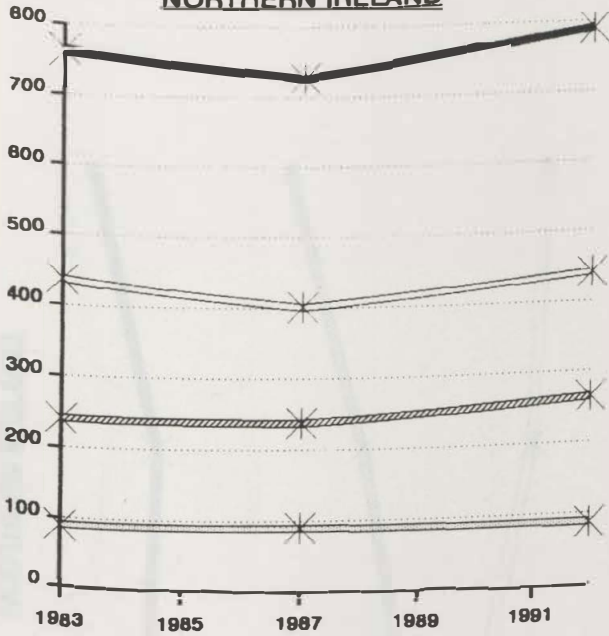


* Including Conservatives

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BRITISH ELECTIONS 1983-1992 NORTHERN IRELAND

THOUSANDS



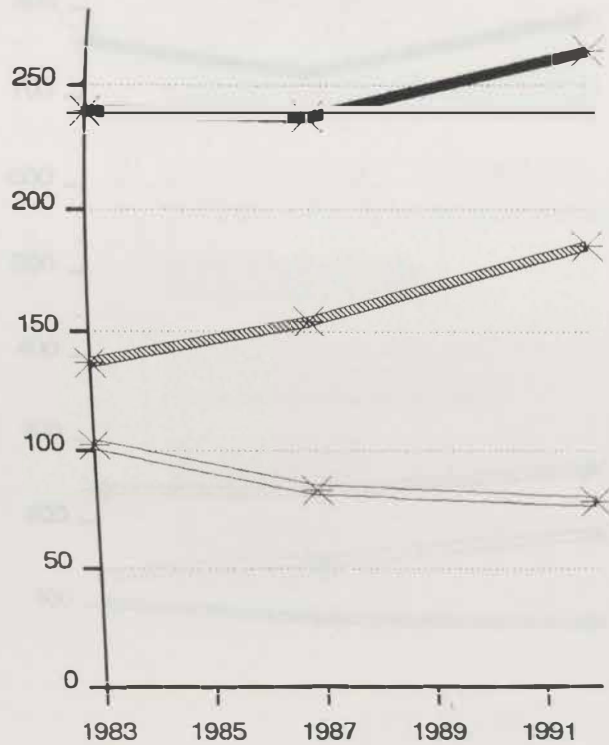
- TOTAL VALID POLL
- TOTAL UNIONIST*
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* INCLUDES CONSERVATIVE

BRITISH ELECTIONS 1983-1992

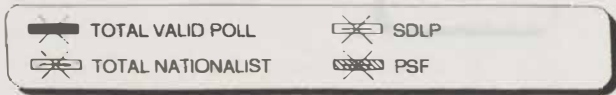
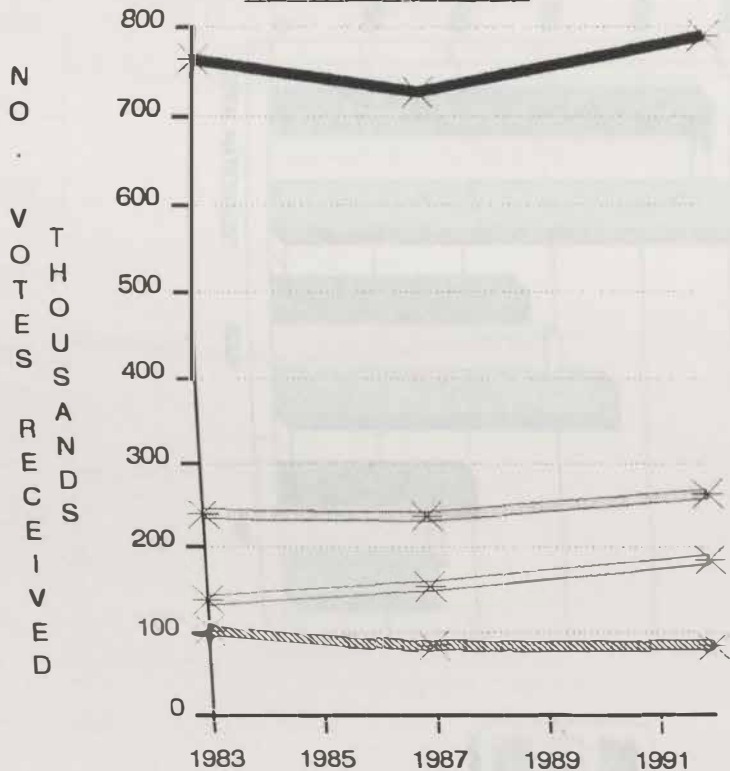
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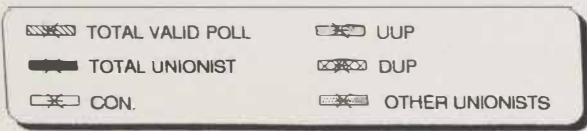
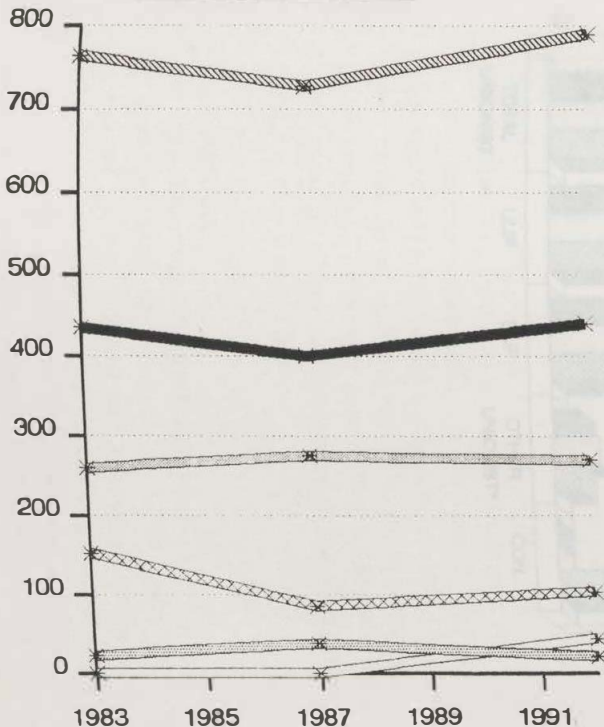
BRITISH ELECTIONS 1983-1992 NORTHERN IRELAND



BRITISH ELECTIONS 1983-1992

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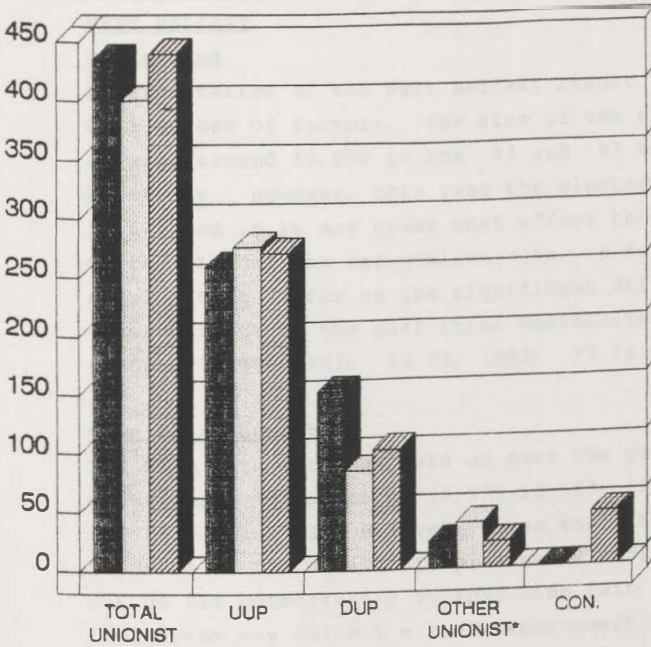
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BRITISH ELECTIONS 1983-1992 NORTHERN IRELAND

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* INCLUDES UPUP

KEY CONSTITUENCIES

1. WEST BELFAST

Background

Interpretation of the West Belfast result is complicated by a number of factors. The size of the electorate had hovered around 59,000 in the '83 and '87 Westminster elections. However, this year the electorate fell to 54,644 and it is not clear what effect this reduction had on the size of the nationalist vote. A further complicating factor is the significant differences in voter turnout in the past three Westminster elections (1983: 74.3%; 1987: 69.4%; 1992: 73.1%).

Sinn Fein support

The Sinn Fein vote has held up over the past three elections. Adams polled 16,379 in '83; 16,862 in '87; and 16,826 in '92. However, given that the reduction in the size of the electorate presumably reflects movement out of the constituency by some Sinn Fein voters, Adams' 1992 total may reflect a real improvement on the 1987 vote. On the other hand, given that Sinn Fein made strenuous efforts to mobilise their vote this year (and that there have been allegations of widespread personation), it seems reasonable to assume that Adams 1992 vote is close to the maximum now available for Sinn Fein in the constituency.

SDLP results

In this election, Hendron polled 17,415 votes. This figure reflects an increase of 2,784 (or 19%) on his 1987 total of 14,641. Where did the extra votes come from? The SDLP may have gained up to (say) 500 former WP voters. SDLP candidates in North and South Belfast managed to mobilise substantial new support - Hendron too may have attracted some new votes in West Belfast, possibly from middle-class areas. However, these sources

of votes would not by themselves explain Hendron's success.

Hendron's success due primarily to Unionist votes?

Sinn Fein claim that Hendron's victory arose from substantial tactical voting by Unionists in the constituency. The Unionist vote in this election declined by 2,880. Sinn Fein argue that this decline can be entirely accounted for by Unionist voters supporting Hendron so as to defeat Adams.

Abstentions by former Gerry Fitt in the 1987 election

A more plausible explanation exists for Hendron's success. The SDLP estimated that up to 3,300 former Gerry Fitt supporters, from a Nationalist background, did not vote in the 1987 election. During the campaign, the SDLP believed it could mobilise a substantial portion of these 3,300 votes, particularly if there was a chance of defeating Adams. The high 1992 percentage poll suggests that a significant proportion of voters who abstained in 1987 this time went to the polls.

Conclusion

Therefore, the SDLP victory in West Belfast seems most comprehensible in the context of a) the reclaiming of a significant percentage of the 3,300 nationalist voters who supported Gerry Fitt in 1983 but who apparently abstained in 1987; b) the mobilisation of new support as occurred elsewhere in Belfast (and indeed throughout Northern Ireland); and c) some transfers from former WP voters.

Why then did the 1992 Unionist vote decline by 2,880 over its 1987 total? It may be that the fall in the size of

the electorate reflects a proportionately higher drop in the Unionist community (perhaps particularly in areas close to the centre of Belfast.) Another factor may have been general Unionist apathy in the constituency.

However, it is also the case that about 2,800 of Gerry Fitt's 1983 vote appear to have supported the UUP candidate in the 1987 election. It is possible that some of these former UUP supporters voted for Hendron in this election in an effort to unseat Adams - a switch by one in five of these voters would account for Hendron's majority of 589.

To sum up, it seems likely that Hendron's election was mainly due to attracting substantial numbers of former Nationalist supporters of Gerry Fitt who abstained in 1987. However, tactical voting by unionists was probably also a factor in Hendron's success.

2. SOUTH DOWN

Background

Following a major effort in 1987, McGrady had polled 26,579 votes. In this election, however, he increased his vote by 4,944 to 31,523. In doing so, McGrady extended his majority over the UUP candidate from 731 in 1987 to 6,342. While the valid poll in the constituency increased by 5,043, McGrady's performance in the election was exceptional. Below is an examination, necessarily somewhat speculative, of some of the factors which might explain his performance.

Size of Unionist/Alliance vote

Unlike 1987, the UUP candidate in this election did not run on an agreed Unionist platform. On this occasion, the Conservatives ran a candidate who polled 1,488. The

combined UUP and conservative vote in the constituency increased by 821 to 26,669 over the 1987 total. Furthermore, the Alliance vote increased by 473 votes. Given the nature of the constituency, it is plausible to suggest that these voters lie at the Unionist end of the Alliance spectrum. Altogether, therefore, the evidence suggests that, in a broad sense, the Unionist vote increased by 1,294 in the constituency.

Was the pool of Nationalist voters available to McGrady larger than could reasonably have been expected?

The very high turnout suggests the Nationalist electorate took seriously SDLP warnings that the seat could be lost through apathy. It is therefore possible that the majority of the 500 vote decline in the Sinn Fein vote transferred to the SDLP. It is also possible that the 675 votes cast for the WP transferred to the SDLP (who had targeted working class areas which had voted WP in the past.) On these assumptions, an increase in McGrady's vote of about, say, 1100 could be accounted for.

How can the remaining 3,800 votes of McGrady's increased vote be explained? As indicated earlier, the valid poll increased by 5,043 in 1992 when compared with 1987. Assuming the Unionist share of this increase was around 1,294, then the balance of McGrady's increased majority could be explained if he received virtually all the remaining 3,749 extra votes. Put another way, 3 out of 4 of the extra voters in the constituency would have supported the SDLP.

The SDLP made a sustained drive to ensure that all possible supporters living in the constituency were on

the register. In addition, they believed they had succeeded in ensuring that large numbers of Nationalist emigrants to Britain were registered for postal votes. It may be that the Unionist parties were less well organised in having all potential Unionist voters register. Demoralisation following the loss of the seat may have sapped the UUP's enthusiasm to do the necessary groundwork to maximise their potential vote.

In addition, in this election, the SDLP won significant numbers of new voters in almost all constituencies the party contested. On this analogy, it may be that the party this time gained support from voters who, in the past and despite strenuous canvassing, had stayed at home on election day. McGrady's high profile and outstanding constituency service may have played a part in attracting these voters (as well as very high levels of former Sinn Fein and WP supporters.)

Did significant numbers of Unionists vote for McGrady?

The other possible explanation for McGrady's large increased vote is that significant numbers of Unionists supported him. While possible, a high level of Unionist cross-overs seems unlikely. Unlike West Belfast, there was no tactical reason (the removal of Gerry Adams) even to tempt Unionist voters to switch sides. It is accepted that the UUP candidate Drew Nelson is neither particularly charismatic nor dynamic as a politician. At the same time, he is regarded (including by the SDLP) as a decent and reputable public figure. Further, Unionist voters had the option of voting for the Conservative (or Alliance) candidate if dissatisfied with Nelson.

Thus, the only obvious reason for Unionists to support McGrady would be in recognition of his personal work in serving his constituents from the Unionist community. Significant Unionist support for McGrady for this reason would however be unprecedented in Westminster elections which are universally seen as first and last "constitutional" in nature. It may be that detailed SDLP analysis of the results will reveal that significant cross-overs occurred. However, it seems more likely at this stage that the factors explaining McGrady's success were primarily organisational, as suggested above.

Anglo-Irish Section

April, 1992.