More of the Same or Critical Juncture? The Impact of Brexit on the Consociational

Peace in Northern Ireland

By

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Abstract:

The 1998 Belfast Agreement brought an end to the contemporary phase of the conflict in Northern Ireland, The Troubles. This has been followed by 18 years of a peace process that was designed to move the politics of the province past its deep ethnonational divide but instead has seen the steady rise of the DUP and Sinn Féin, exclusive nationalist parties. This polarisation towards the radical ideological poles has accelerated in both post-Brexit referendum elections of 2017. The political and social dislocation caused by the Brexit referendum has thrown the power-sharing institutions, established in the 1998 Belfast Agreement, into turmoil and the outcomes are unclear. The dominant approach to studying Northern Ireland presently is through the debate on consociational power-sharing as a prescription for a divided society. This study proposes to surmount the question of polarisation using a historic institutionalism approach that conceptualises both the Belfast Agreement and the Brexit referendum as critical junctures. Treating polarisation as a process with a long historical trajectory may prove more useful in understanding how the Belfast Agreement, regarded in some sense as a model peace process, has seemingly failed to foster integration or reconciliation between both radically exclusive nationalisms in Northern Ireland.

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List of Abbreviations:

DUP – Democratic Unionist Party

IRA – Irish Republican Army

NIAP – Northern Ireland Alliance Party (Alliance Party)

PUP – Progressive Unionist Party

PSNI – Police Service Northern Ireland

SDLP – Social Democratic Labour Party

TUV – Traditional Unionist Voice

UDA – Ulster Defence Association

UKIP – United Kingdom Independence Party

UUP – Ulster Unionist Party

UVF – Ulster Volunteer Force

Introduction

The Brexit referendum has pushed Northern Ireland's power-sharing institutions into a critical juncture. They sit at a crossroads in which the previous 18 years of a peace process has the potential to culminate in a complete collapse of the Belfast Agreement. The institutions have in 2006, 2015 and 2016 been partially renegotiated. The Stormont Assembly with the help of outside influence been able to reinvent and reinvigorate itself. The fallout from the Brexit referendum has every potential to yield yet another renegotiation. Likewise, it has the potential to crash the entire project. This thesis seeks to interrogate this idea using a lesser applied methodology in historical institutionalism to illustrate the seemingly irreconcilable societal issues that are driving and sustaining polarisation.

On the 8th October 2016 drivers crossing the border at Carrickcarnon in County Donegal would be forgiven for thinking they had driven back in time. They were greeted by traditionally dressed customs officials complete with grey overcoats and road barricades. This was the case at six locations along Ireland and Northern Ireland's 500km border; and was part of a protest by the group "*Border Communities Against Brexit*". The performance was twofold; first to drag up memories of what is colloquially known as '*the bad old days*' when the borders between North and South Ireland were not just manned by customs officials but heavily militarised; secondly it was to project the contrast between '*the bad olds days*' and the contemporary period where since the Belfast Agreement in 1998 the border has been practically invisible save for the changes in road markings from white to yellow. The protest is a way of illustrating the continuities in the politics of the province, to highlight that despite this watershed moment in 1998 much remains the same, two nationalist aspirations remain, two separate identities and two versions of history. It is this continuity rather than change that is of primary interest to this research project as the hypothesis is to claim that the reactions of both minority nationalisms,

i.e. Nationalism and Unionism, that have led to further polarization are better explained by looking at their long-term trajectories.

Northern Ireland as a case study has been very well discussed in literature. The bulk of this work prior to 1998 was either on conflict or on violence itself. The 1990s shifted the focus toward conflict resolution with scholarship reflecting the real potential of a peace settlement. This was reflective of the post-Cold War world, it was reflective of peace movements in South Africa or in former Yugoslavia. The Belfast Agreement was born of this time. Since the 1998 Belfast Agreement the emphasis has been on consociationalism and its success in addressing the ethnonational cleavage. The debate is unique in scholarship as prescriptions for divided societies get translated from scholarship into real politics. To illustrate, John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, who will feature in this work a lot, had advisory roles and substantial influence in the shape of the eventual power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland. They inform the accommodationist side of the debate. Accommodationists sit in a juxtaposition to integrationists, as this distinction will be more fully discussed later.

This research is not designed to fall easily on either side of this debate. Instead it will critique quite strongly consociationalism as it has functioned but this is not necessarily to the benefit of the integrationist approach. The focus on path dependency is in an effort to identify the continuities that sustained polarisation prior to 1998 that were subsequently institutionalised in the Belfast Agreement and have allowed an electoral polarization toward the more radical DUP and Sinn Féin to become imbedded post-Agreement. This will have implications for Northern Ireland as a case-study in power-sharing.

The theoretical framework is heavily informed by historical intuitionalism as an appropriate means to identifying and examining long-term and historically contingent processes. A primary conceptual tool will be critical junctures, as related to institutional developments, these are

essentially periods of upheaval that have the potential to place institutional arrangements on dramatically different courses that, once imbedded, are very hard to change, (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 342). The causal preconditions to the critical juncture may, within the critical juncture itself, become imbedded and reproduce the very conditions that brought it about.

Critical antecedents are the causal preconditions contingent on historical path dependencies that inform the choices made within the critical junctures, (Slater & Simmons, 2010, p. 887), and it is the antecedents that can in some instances have much more to bear on the outcomes than the junctures themselves. Primarily a focus on critical antecedents and critical junctures is vindicated by the question it seeks to address. How has an 18-year long peace process produced as polarised a party-political system than it had at its conception.

Since the referendum a process of polarisation that has remained relatively constant since 1998 has accelerated. The idea of polarisation is in and of itself up for debate as integrationists or accommodationists perceive the movement toward Sinn Féin and the DUP to mean differing things, (Mitchell, et al., 2009), either benevolent electoral outbidding or malevolent ethnic outbidding. What can be observed is that the political landscape post-Brexit has been disproportionately beneficial to the more radical DUP and Sinn Féin, this has come at the expense of the moderate centre occupied by the SDLP, UUP and Alliance Party. Conversely the traditionally radical, arguably anti-system, parties in the DUP and Sinn Féin have had their strongest electoral showings ever. How then has an 18-year long peace process allowed radical ethnonational parties to become the dominant electoral forces in Northern Ireland?

The proposed approach will enable the location, description and explanation of the causes of a polarised political system. This is here hypothesised to be the conditions that sustained polarisation prior to the Belfast Agreement were unaddressed in that agreement, instead they were institutionalised and have helped sustain two mutually exclusive interpretations of

Northern Ireland which have once again come to the fore in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.

Polarisation in Northern Ireland's politics is already the basis for a large part of academic literature. This requires a setting of boundaries, or limitations, for how precisely this approach will contribute theoretically. Primarily this is to the timing of the project, the methodological approach taken and finally its value as a case-study.

The study is justified by its historical institutionalist approach. By including into the analysis, the underling mechanisms as claimed to be the critical antecedents conditioned by historically contingent and path dependent political developments the continued existence of polarisation in Northern Ireland in spite of the peace process will be better understood. Although Brexit is to all intents and purposes a shock to the political and social systems the reactions from political actors are to be drawn from an existing repertoire of responses.

The study will proceed in an approximately chronological fashion as this makes the tracing of critical antecedents easier to follow. This first chapter will focus mainly on polarisation as it is already conceptualised and dealt with academically. Much of the description and deeper analysis of the causes will come in later chapters. The second chapter deals with the conflict, its settlement in 1998 and the resulting peace process. Although much of the analysis on polarisation is centred on post-Agreement Northern Ireland the preceding conflict provides a means of contextualising identities and identifying some of the sources of current trajectories. The third chapter deals primarily with historical institutionalism as an alternative means of analysis. This chapter provides an opportunity to engage Northern Ireland's predominant academic debate, the accommodationist-integrationist debate, or consociational and centripetal debate. It will be argued that the long-term effects of division are having as big an effect on the outcomes of devolution as the prescription of Lijphartian consociationalism. The forth chapter

is primarily a conceptualisation of Brexit as a critical juncture and will allow the critical antecedents that have survived through the peace process to explain the reactions of the political parties to the collapse of the consociational institutions. This is concluded with an analysis of polarisation as it is measured in Northern Ireland but in the context of the post-Brexit referendum political terrain.

Chapter 1: Polarisation

Polarisation within this analysis has been identified as a means of linking the ongoing debate on consociationalism as a prescription for a divided society and the social realities of that society. Polarisation in itself will not necessarily provide the answers but rather will act as an indicator for the underlying assumption, namely, that the Belfast Agreement in its current form may not be suffice for moving Northern Ireland past the deep ethnonational cleavage that has plagued it since its inception in 1921. Polarisation is usually primarily concerned with party system polarisation. Party system polarisation could be interpreted as the symptoms of an ideologically polarised society. The most predominant scholarship on Northern Ireland currently, accommodationists, reject this. The goal is to locate the specific sites, or drivers, of polarisation in Northern Ireland and using them establish a critique of the current political system.

The Academic Debate in Northern Ireland

Polarisation is commonly taken for granted in scholarship on Northern Ireland. It is acknowledged to be there in variegated forms but the specific intensity of it or malevolency of it is questioned. The scholarly debate has basically three approaches. First is the accommodationists, or consociationalists, the most prominent in Northern Ireland are McGarry and O'Leary. They are generally supportive of the current political arrangements. Their base line of argumentation is that the power-sharing institutions established in 1998 have, in spite of growing electoral support for Sinn Féin and the DUP, actually led to a moderation of these parties. Second are integrationists, or centripetalists, of which Wilson, Wilford and Horowitz are the most prominent in scholarship on Northern Ireland. They are by and large critical of the power-sharing institutions. An integrationist claim is that these institutions have entrenched division and allowed the more radical Sinn Féin and DUP to flourish. Lastly is the class-based

critique proposed by, among others, Hayward, Komarova, Coulter, Holland and Rabrenovic. The basic concern of this last approach is that the available evidence supports the claim that a moderation of the middle and upper -classes has occurred but adds that polarisation within the working-class (*particularized* class, as referred to by Hayward and Komarova) is, if not growing, certainly not subsiding. The latter enables a neat distinction between vertical (socioeconomic) and horizontal (ethnic) polarization, the former of which compounds the latter.

Beginning then with the accommodationists and primarily with McGarry and O'Leary. Their approach to the analysis of polarisation is based upon two core aspects: party political and attitudinal. The former is in reference to party manifesto and policy positions, the latter concerned with survey data and perceptions of the general public. Sinn Féin and the DUP since 2003 have made very visible gains, which would suggest a growth in polarisation, this is dismissed by McGarry and O'Leary on the basis that Sinn Féin and the DUP have done so by moderating toward the centre and taking votes from the moderates within their electoral blocks (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 56). Simultaneously though hard-line identarian and cultural party policy has retained their traditional electoral base and encouraged young or non-voters to support them as well (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 57). This basic argument is labelled '*tribune voting*' (Mitchell, et al., 2009). The second aspect is that of attitudes, on which McGarry and O'Leary cite support for the 1998 Belfast Agreement. An annual survey, the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (aged 18+), in conjunction with the Young Life and Times Survey (aged 16) (running only since 2000), provide comprehensive statistical data for the period from 1989 to present. Support for the agreement has gradually risen, alongside support for the consent principle, policing, power-sharing and a number of other indicators (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 56), (Mitchell, et al., 2009). For accommodationists then, the political project instituted in 1998, although imperfect, is reaping some reward.

Two critiques of this analysis should be added before moving onto the integrationist argument. First is that McGarry and O'Leary primarily test their thesis against attitudes toward support for the Belfast Agreement itself as opposed to community relations. Taking survey data for the same period 1998–2003 as McGarry and O'Leary did (alongside Mitchell and Evans), (Mitchell, et al., 2009), there is a marked decrease in support for mixed housing or work places alongside a rise in pessimism for the future of community relations (Hughes, et al., 2003). There was in 2001 a particularly contentious episode around Holy Cross Primary School, a Catholic school in a predominantly Protestant area. This is not to claim that this has been the trend ever since as the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey data suggests that community relations presently are better than in 2003, rather it is to highlight that by holding the focus narrowly on support for the Belfast Agreement their analysis is ignoring wider societal issues and attitudes. The Belfast Agreement was monumental in its achievements and had for a generation whom had lived through a conflict removed violence by and large from politics. The agreement alone is I suggest not enough to capture wider attitudes as it represents a monumental product of community and state diplomacy that in itself is an aspiration but perhaps not entirely reflective of peoples lived experiences. To oppose the Belfast Agreement, in a sense Northern Ireland's founding document draws derision. The alternative is often characterised as a return to the past which ultimately is undesirably for most.

The second immediate critique of this approach is that 2007–2009 when much of the work on '*tribune parties*' was written was a comparatively more stable moment for Northern Ireland's devolved institutions. The DUP and Sinn Féin had in 2006 signed the St. Andrews Agreement and this second attempt at power-sharing and devolved government appeared to be working. Conversely 2003, just after the Holy Cross Dispute 2001 when community relations where suffering so too was the political atmosphere. In 2012-3 in the wake of the Flag Protests community relations went through another depression. It is not remarkable to point out that

when the political system is going through a turbulent period that community relations in a divided society may suffer.

Integrationists are the major academic critics of these power-sharing arrangements as they currently stand. Political instability especially at the outset of the peace process, provided ample grounds for criticism for scholars such as Wilford, Wilson and Horowitz (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 48). As noted before this can be supported by attitudinal surveys from the early years of the peace process. There was less evidence to support this attitudinal polarisation in the following years, although periods of instability, such as the Flag Protests or indeed Brexit, tend to precede a depression. The main argument though is that more radical political parties have profited most from the Belfast Agreement. There are more layers of analysis to consider, for example, immediately after the Brexit referendum Sinn Féin called for a border poll, (Barry, 2017, p. 52), thus affirming their credentials as a Nationalist party. The relegation of a United Ireland to a long-term political goal would have been claimed by accommodationists as evidence of a moderating political climate. The Brexit referendum has brought not just Unity but also a collapse of the institutions and unwillingness to compromise on issues such as an Irish Language Act, which is not exactly conducive to a moderating political climate. It sits at a critical juncture where a return to moderation is as likely as a redoubling toward polarisation.

The final approach to polarisation in Northern Ireland is the class-based one. This approach attempts to distinguish between a vertical economic polarisation and a horizontal ethnic polarisation (Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017). This thesis as proposed by Holland, Rabrenovic, Coulter, Komarova and Hayward is essentially tied to the idea that since the end of the Troubles the '*peace dividend*' (Holland & Rabrenovic, 2017, p. 238), has disproportionately benefitted those of the middle and upper -classes. This disparity is compounded by the fact that those areas worst effected by conflict are increasingly those most marginalised socioeconomically. Hayward and Komarova refer to this as the *particularized* class, claiming that in sites such as

these a different interpretative horizon works to make sense of socioeconomic disadvantage (Hayward & Komarova, 2014, pp. 779-80). Membership of the *particularized* class in this analysis assumes the individual's belief that they are involved in a common struggle, here social capital holds more value, contentious events such as parades, symbols or even the removal of them (2012-3 Flag Protest) hold much more significance (Hayward & Komarova, 2014, p. 780). In sites of grass-roots polarisation such as here there exists political ideologies to explain deprivation, Nationalism and Unionism, (Frampton, 2010, p. 24), it is what Hayward and Komarova claim to be a lack of commonly derived legitimacy. There being no shared civic legitimacy people instead withdraw their political legitimacy from their respective ethnonational groups (Hayward & Komarova, 2014, p. 778). This I suggest is compounded by the nature of debate in Northern Ireland's devolved institutions, meaning that Stormont has few comprehensive policy areas outside of cultural matters and it is a focus on these policy issues that can feed into and exaggerate division for the *particularized* class.

The accommodationist-integrationist debate is in some sense irreconcilable in Northern Ireland as long as consociationalism exists as the modus operandi. Arguments against it can be counterfactual and arguments in support of it are in some sense undermined by the existence of no current viable alternative. Although it could be argued that a return to direct rule as threatened does indeed represent an alternative, if an undesirable one. The present analysis will instead use historical institutionalism and in particular critical antecedents to interrogate polarisation as a long-term and resilient phenomenon. This will lend valuable insight into the gaps in the literature left by a focus on the accommodationist-integrationist debate. This will make explicit the societal issues that continue to hinder a reconciled Northern Ireland. Locating polarisation in those places where there exist ideological explanations rooted in ethnic conflict. To further the exact understanding of polarisation as it is currently configured in Northern

Ireland a look into literature on polarisation more generally and its electoral manifestations in Northern Ireland will be apposite.

Illustrations of Polarisation

Scholarship on Northern Ireland as can be seen has its own nuanced means of identifying and addressing polarisation in its different variegations. As a means of understanding how this sits into more widely discussed measures of polarisation a theoretical review would be pertinent. This will proceed by first focusing on traditional measures of party and voter polarisation alongside an illustration of this in Northern Ireland through the period of the peace process. Secondly an assessment of attitudinal polarisation will be performed. The resulting lessons are broadly supportive of the fact that party polarisation has occurred. However, the picture when addressing attitudinal polarisation is somewhat less clear as perception of community relations retrospectively and in the near future are as positive as they were, or worse, nowadays as in 1998.

Polarisation of a party system really enters the political science lexicon with Anthony Downs (1957) and his economic theory of party competition. The basic premise of this rests on the fact that "*parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policy*" (Sartori, 1976, p. 289). Sartori's departure from this is on the basis that Downs, as opposed to explaining how a political system functions, is more closely explaining how one might deteriorate. Sartori's interest is where democracy is least functionable, in multiparty systems (Sartori, 1976, p. 290). Sartori's concept of polarised pluralism is the most amenable to the current undertaking, explaining polarisation in Northern Ireland's political system.

By defining first what would constitute a polarised political system in terms of vote share for radical parties is the theory of an effective party. That is to borrow the term from Laakso and

Taagepera, (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979), that the effective number of parties is those of roughly equal vote share allowing for the discounting of the smallest parties from calculations on polarisation. These smaller parties will appear in the analysis but will not be considered consistently as it is often the case that one or two seats may be one and similarly lost in the following election to be replaced by another, new, small party. Taking the number of *effective parties* as five (DUP, UUP, Alliance Party, SDLP, Sinn Féin) the system is characterised as multipolar, or at the minimum increasingly multipolar. The parameters here are not strictly defined but those parties who have been in government together as part of the grand coalition, and those who are currently in opposition having turned down their d'Hondt seat allocations for ministerial posts are accepted. There must also be a threshold for considering the system polarised and this will be taken to be a minimum of 50% of the vote share lying with a radical party (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979). Figure 3 and 4 bests illustrate how the shift toward the traditionally radical parties has occurred gradually since 1998, with Sinn Féin and the DUP now holding the lion-share of votes.

Sartori's concept of *polarised pluralism* and what constitutes a radical party within this is based upon eight criteria. *First*, the presence of anti-system parties, as Sinn Féin and the DUP had certainly represented in the past. To continue to define them as such depends on how one will treat Sinn Féin's secessionist aims and the DUP's anti-Belfast Agreement past. Accommodationists in Northern Ireland would confidently claim these moot points (Taylor, et al., 2009), but the Brexit referendum has forced a rethinking of this as a revival of absolutist constitutional stances has occurred. *Second*, bilateral oppositions, meaning the poles cannot join forces, a mandatory coalition turns this assessment into something rather more subjective. What can be said is that in the period following the Brexit referendum both parties have refused to share power with each other. *Third*, the occupation of the centre either by parties or a large section of the electorate, in this case it is consistently evident with the existence and growing

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success of the Alliance party but to a lesser degree is also represented by the SDLP and UUP. Conversely though it is a point claimed by accommodationists to represent a moderation by the DUP and Sinn Féin. A note I would make on the occupation of the centre is the very geographic and temporal location of moderate voting; geographically wealthier areas can afford to elect moderates unlike the particularized class; temporally when tensions are higher identities become more salient and moderation suffers. *Fourth*, polarisation of the system, Sartori here refers to anti-system bilateral oppositions that may accurately describe the current impasse but do less to describe previous periods. *Fifth*, centrifugal drivers, which are potentially present in ethnic outbidding. *Sixth*, ideological patterning, which essentially pertains to the space between the parties not just on policy but on very fundamental issues and principles, which is very characteristic of both the DUP and Sinn Féin. This is contested by accommodationists on account of acceptance by both the DUP and Sinn Féin of several key policies, policing for example (Taylor, et al., 2009). *Seventh* is irresponsible opposition which is perhaps more typical of the relationship of the DUP and Sinn Féin even if they are in government together. *Eighth*, is the politics of outbidding, a large part of the debate on consociationalism and an element obviously present in the system but contested as a meaning.

An illustration of polarisation as proposed by Sartori, Laakso and Taagepera is configured in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4. Figure 1 and 2 are the Stormont Assembly and Westminster Assembly elections results for the period immediately before the Belfast Agreement until the present day.
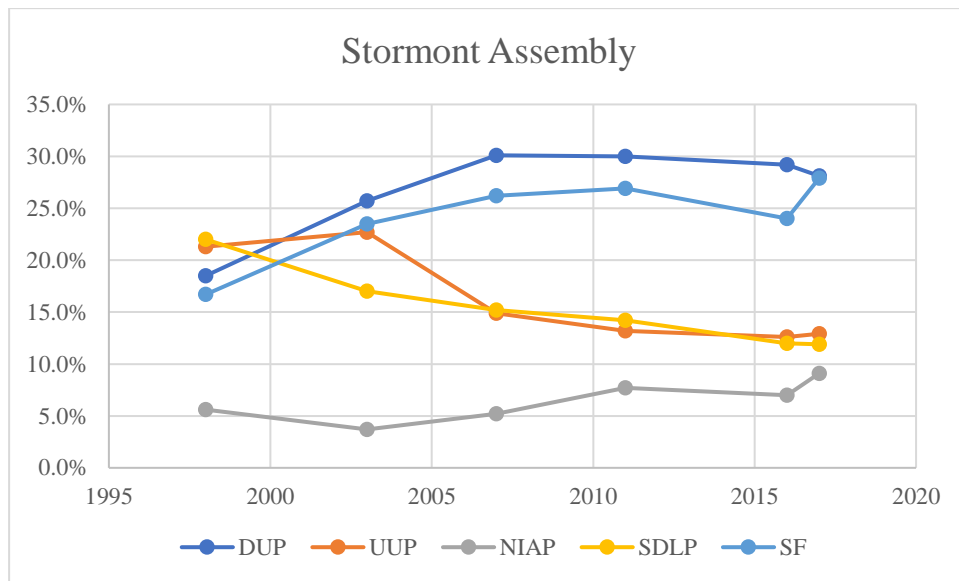
Figure 1 – Stormont Assembly – source: http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/
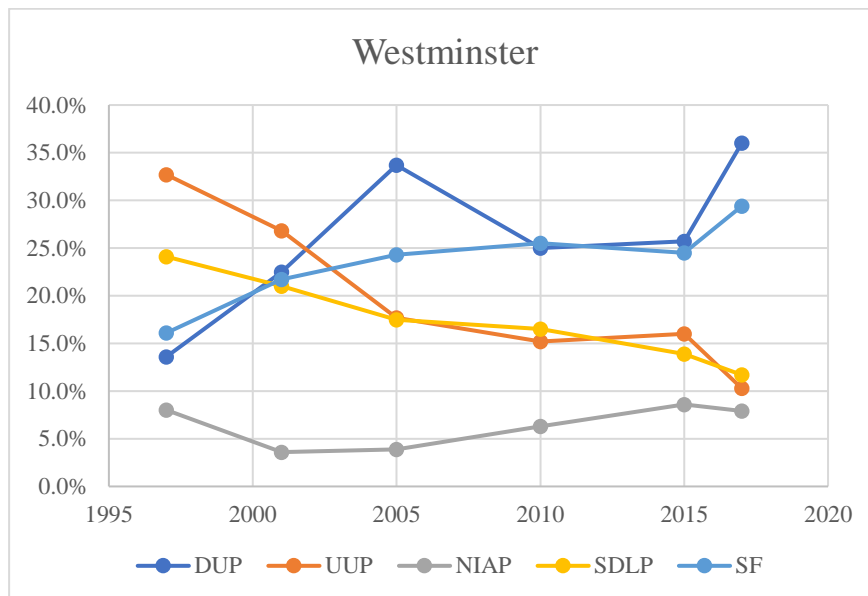
Figure 2 - Westminster Parliament – source: http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/

Figure 3 and 4 provide the vote shares as a percentage with the parties' accumulative vote shares on the right side of the table. The moderates comprising the UUP, SDLP and Alliance Party; the Extreme comprising the DUP and Sinn Féin. A steady reversal of the positions of the more moderate UUP and SDLP, the main architects of the 1998 Belfast Agreement is clearly visible. This is to the benefit of the DUP and Sinn Féin. One side note is that despite the Alliance Party's steady increase in vote share it has not necessarily been matched with a share of the seats.

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Party	DUP	UUP	NIAP	SDLP	SF	Extreme	Moderate
Year							
1998	18.5%	21.3%	5.6%	22.0%	16.7%	35.2%	48.9%
2003	25.7%	22.7%	3.7%	17.0%	23.5%	49.2%	43.4%
2007	30.1%	14.9%	5.2%	15.2%	26.2%	56.3%	35.3%
2011	30.0%	13.2%	7.7%	14.2%	26.9%	56.9%	35.1%
2016	29.2%	12.6%	7.0%	12.0%	24.0%	53.2%	31.6%
2017	28.1%	12.9%	9.1%	11.9%	27.9%	56.0%	33.9%

Figure 3 - Stormont Assembly – source: http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/

Party	DUP	UUP	NIAP	SDLP	SF	Extreme	Moderate
Year							
1997	13.6%	32.7%	8.0%	24.1%	16.1%	30%	65%
2001	22.5%	26.8%	3.6%	21.0%	21.7%	44%	51%
2005	33.7%	17.7%	3.9%	17.5%	24.3%	58%	39%
2010	25.0%	15.2%	6.3%	16.5%	25.5%	51%	38%
2015	25.7%	16.0%	8.6%	13.9%	24.5%	50%	39%
2017	36.0%	10.3%	7.9%	11.7%	29.4%	65%	30%

Figure 4 - Westminster Parliament – source: http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/

Looking again at the Downsian spatial voting model two important aspects of Northern Ireland's voting patterns can be identified. The problem with the traditional measurements is that they are not necessarily reflective of an ethnically divided society, especially Northern Ireland. The left-right continuum cannot accurately reflect the ideological make-up of entire electoral constituencies. Nationalist are traditionally more left-wing in their politics. There are historical contingencies on account of deprivation and a Unionist dominated state, all of which became visible in the politics of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement at the outbreak of The Troubles in 1969. The SDLP, a party born of the Civil Rights Movement, until 2017 when they lost their Westminster Parliament seats, sat in the Labour Party benches. Sinn Féin have likewise made gains in the Republic of Ireland, running as a strong left-wing alternative to the establishment parties associated with the 2008 crash and demise of the Celtic Tiger. In spite of this they have as Coulter points out been complicit in importing a neo-liberal programme into Northern Ireland (Coulter, 2014, p. 771).

On the other side of the ethnonational cleavage are the DUP and UUP. The UUP maintains their middle-class Unionist identity most visible in their electoral pact with the British

Conservative party in the 2010 election. They lost all of their incumbent Westminster seats. The DUP, who are currently in a confidence and supply arrangement with the British Conservative government, are primarily an economically conservative party. However, they draw a large vote from the working-class Loyalist areas of Northern Ireland. A constituency that historically had been the site or a process of deindustrialisation, (Long, 2018, p. 52), and as a consequence had effective representation from a progressive and socialist party in the PUP. They have primarily been beneficiaries of a form of intra-bloc populist outbidding.

On explanation of this is due to the peculiarities of both the Belfast Agreement and of devolution the issues are distorted as compared to other Western European political system. Devolution has been a staged process, most prominently the Department of Justice was only formally devolved in 2010 as part of this staged devolution. Other areas that Northern Ireland previously had less control in was Finance, or the Economy, as they could not set a corporation tax rate as different to that of the United Kingdom. This is considered an issue as the Republic of Ireland was deemed to be able to attract more business with a lower rate just across the border.

This has generally skewed the debate away from matters of the economy or other larger political projects in infrastructure and toward matters that had been devolved, cultural matters. This would include policy that is ethnically particular on account of the segmental autonomy offered by consociationalism, for example schooling, much of which in Northern Ireland remains segregated along religious lines and remains culturally sensitive. The most recent matter is the devolution of justice meaning Northern Irelands courts now have the power to pursue unpunished or unresolved crimes from the Troubles which in itself is hugely contentious, no least defining what exactly constitutes a '*victim*'. Largely though, the years up to 2007 were dominated by the implementation of the Belfast Agreement, as a document that struggled to

successfully become unambiguous for both communities, or otherwise was interpreted in two opposing ways.

In the class-based approach to polarisation it could be argued that the removal of conventional economic debates from politics has essentially stifled debate. Legacy issues, cultural matters or segregation, representing high value social capital in particularised communities is reinforcing horizontal polarisation whilst the vertical, economic aspects, of polarisation remain relatively intact both in terms of where these places sit geographically and politically. This has been argued to be the case in other case studies of ethnic conflict (Ostby, 2008), specifically the perception at least of relative deprivation between groups. A partial return to the Downsian spatial voting model illuminates this paradigm a little more.

There has thus been a restricted arena for party competition and focusing on issues of disagreement as opposed to those of agreement would enable a party to gain more popularity. To exaggerate the instances of the others community benefitting disproportionately from the Belfast Agreement is for example commonly employed by the DUP to drive support for their party. It is noted by Spoon and Klüver that parties will more regularly focus on areas of polarised opinion. Their research indicates that on areas of polarised public debate voters hold strong opinions in one particular direction where as in less contentious issues voters hold less of a preference (Spoon & Kluver, 2015, p. 343). A simple way for parties to capitalise on this is to put their support behind one of the sides of the debate. However, this focuses attention too squarely onto parties as responders to debate as opposed to manufacturers of the discourse. It is also rather close to endorsing what Sartori deemed, making policies to win elections, at the outset of this section. It will be evident throughout this study that there is much more than a one-way flow of ideas and opinions. The point still remains though that parties can gain a lot from accentuating divisive issues and this in particular is cited by centripetalists as an issue within consociationalism in a deeply divided society.

Party polarisation is thus open for debate by both consociationalists and centripetalists when applied to more conventional measurements of polarisation. A lot of sociological work in Northern Ireland is concerned with segregation, Allport's contact hypothesis for example. Surveys provide a means of testing outgroup prejudice and assessing polarisation. A deeply divided society as in Northern Ireland can be easily characterised as ethnically polarised. Drawing on previous research from Evans and Needs on ethnic polarisation in Eastern Europe it is possible to see that low levels of social distance between minority groups is the best indicator for low levels of polarisation (Evans & Need, 2002, p. 653). A further accurate indicator is cultural distance, which in Eastern Europe is more commonly associated with linguistic difference which in Northern Ireland is not very well pronounced. However, the ongoing dispute on the introduction of an Irish Language Act perfectly well emphasises the importance of cultural protections to both groups and serves as a polarising issue. Evans and Need's final findings is that economic and structural factors such as size are less prominent in polarising the groups.

To test these finding in Northern Ireland there is ample data provided by the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey and the Young Life and Times Survey. The most current available data is from 2015, and it only marginally supports a more positive outlook. Using annual measurements from 2000 for young people and from 1998 adults an accurate illustration of Northern Ireland's attitudes can be ascertained. First to be noted is that by and large support for shared education, integration and reconciliation have been steadily rising among young and old (Schubotz, 2017). These being core aims of the Belfast Agreement would then be supportive of the accommodationist thesis that moderation is occurring.

One other hypothesis the data confirms is that at times of increased community tension outlooks become more pessimistic. This is measured with the questions "*will relations between Protestants and Catholics be better in 5 years' time?*" and "*are relations between Protestants*

and Catholics better now than 5 years ago?" (Schubotz, 2017). The 2001 Holy Cross Dispute, 2012-3 Flag Protests as well as the post-Brexit referendum fallout are all examples of this pessimism being represented in the data. These questions enable the reader to ascertain two things: how the last five years of community relations have been perceived and how optimistic is the outlook for the future.

On the question of "*are relations between Protestants and Catholics better now than 5 years ago?"* there are a few points of interest. First that the results from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey that accounts for young and old in 1998 is the same as 2015. In both years 52% of those surveyed agreed with the statement. The lowest point was the 2001 Holy Cross Dispute and the high point was in 2007 after the St. Andrews Agreement. On the same measure the Young Life and Times Survey consistently polls less optimistically with for example 47% of 16-year olds agreeing with the statement in 2015 (Schubotz, 2017), as compared to 52% for adults.

The second question, "*will relations between Protestants and Catholics be better in 5 years' time?"*, presents more pessimistic data. The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey returned 62% in favour of the statement in 1998 at the signing of the Belfast Agreement as compared to 41% in 2015 (Schubotz, 2017). These measures in themselves do not provide empirical proof of increasing polarisation nor of the location of polarisation but they present a valuable barometer of social attitudes in Northern Ireland in response to the peace process and its perceived progress in the past and the future.

One further aspect that has remained fairly consistent is the belief among young people that religion will continue to affect people's attitudes toward each other. Over three quarters of 16-year olds believe religion will always affect people's attitudes toward each other (Schubotz, 2017). This could be interpreted as a validation of the integrationist claim that

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consociationalism by acknowledging identity in turn solidifies it. It remains an acute marker of identity and is almost representative of a sort of resignation to the entrenched nature of identity, despite the positive approach to integration exhibited by young people.

Finally, it is important to point out that the data specifically relating to geographic area or social class is not available. This means that the available data is representative of a mean average. Segregation is most acute in deprived areas, this is where social housing represents a higher proportion of the over-all stock and where a high concentration of one religious group is accompanied by more segregated schools by virtue of proximity of communities to educational provisions. The Young Life and Times Survey is highly supportive of that fact that contact with the outgroup reduces prejudice and has been seen to do so consistently by measuring attitudes toward both outgroups and the concept of shared education. However, this is an issue that is left unaddressed in more segregated areas.

The discussion on polarisation has enabled a broad overview of how polarisation is treated on literature on Northern Ireland and as a more general phenomenon. The next chapter will engage the conditions that sustain polarisation before and after the Belfast Agreement. This will lend description to what has so far been theoretical and statistical.

Chapter 2: Conflict, Settlement and the Peace Process

An overview of Northern Ireland's conflict, settlement and peace process is a necessary, if familiar, part of any analysis on the country. A largely descriptive account of Northern Ireland's political landscape enables for the location of specific phenomenon. What has been identified here in this descriptive account is of particular relevance to understanding what historical institutionalism has to offer to the accommodationist-integrationist debate.

Conflict Overview

The basis of conflict in Northern Ireland is the existence of two mutually exclusive nationalisms, Irish Nationalist and British Unionist. The former wish to secede to Ireland and the latter wish to maintain their position inside the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland was created in 1921 after the Irish War of Independence. It consisted of the six Protestant majority counties of Ulster, one of Ireland's four provinces. The state was created as a concession to the Protestant majority who saw their interests best served within the United Kingdom. It remained under majority Protestant and British Unionist control until the suspension of the Stormont Assembly at the outbreak of violence in 1969. The contemporary phase of the conflict began in 1969 with the emergence of the civil rights movement. This began as a protest to the sectarian allocation of public goods such as housing, and the gerrymandering of electoral constituencies. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was viewed by some in the Unionist majority as a front for the IRA. Although it was founded as a non-sectarian organisation it was Catholic grievances that were best represented by the organisation.

The Civil Rights Association's marches and the heavy-handed Unionist backlash served as a recruiting sergeant for the IRA. The violence that began in 1969 was eventually brought to an end with paramilitary ceasefires in 1994, and the 1998 Belfast Agreement brought political settlement. The intervening years though allowed an already deep division to crystalize further

between Protestant and Catholic, Unionist and Nationalist, Irish and British. There were some of the largest population movements in Europe, since the end of WWII and until the beginning of the break-up of Yugoslavia, as people sought to find safety and security among their own communities. As an intercommunal conflict there was partisan involvement from the British Army and Royal Ulster Constabulary, alongside violence committed by both the IRA and Protestant paramilitary groups, the UVF or UDA, all of which were guilty of leaving civilian casualties behind.

Settlement Overview

The 1994 ceasefires precipitated the eventual settlement in the Belfast Agreement of 1998. This was a movement spearheaded by the UUP and SDLP, who are Unionist and Nationalist parties respectively. There was involvement from a plethora of other parties across the political spectrum; Sinn Féin as the political wing of the IRA, the PUP as representative of the UVF, the Alliance Party a moderate non-denominational or non-sectarian party, and the Women's Coalition who were disbanded shortly after the Belfast Agreement. The notable absence was the DUP headed by Rev. Ian Paisley as they were opposed to the peace process, specifically, to the involvement of Sinn Féin.

The Troubles consumed a generation of Northern Ireland and have come to dominate their political outlooks. Those who had grown up before 1969, had known a very different Northern Ireland, one that had just come to terms with the partition and had witnessed the subsidence of the old IRA after the 1956-62 Border Campaign. The next generation would inherit a much more violent conflict precipitated by a split within the IRA which created the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA alongside a split in Sinn Féin. To counter this the DUP emerged, as did Loyalist paramilitary groups, a UVF revival alongside the establishment of the UDA. Likewise, liberal politics, in the form of the Alliance Party and the SDLP emerged at the onset of the Troubles. This generation, equally measurable for their role in the conflict as in their hand in

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peace, is the generation that is today slowly being superseded. Now Northern Ireland has one of the youngest populations in Western Europe. 24% of the population is under 16 years old and an accumulative 54% under the age of 35 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2014). This means that the country is moving toward a majority of the population with no real experience of conflict. A population who have grown up with no security checks, no bomb scares, no family members or friends lost, but still living with the long term and lasting effects of the conflict: segregation, unresolved legacy issues, a divided political system, for many deep socioeconomic effects and for some the continued existence of paramilitary groups within their communities. It is this latest generation that have inherited a hard-fought, but in some senses flawed, peace agreement. The lack of experience during the conflict perhaps makes the flaws more untenable for this new generation. It is by locating the source and continuation of these long-term effects of the conflict that the continued existence of polarisation in society can be better understood.

Traditional Identity Interpretations

Northern Ireland's identities are by no means clear cut, they are entangled and overlapping, where a catch-all denotation may be religion in one sense but irrelevant in others. Rather these overlapping identities can be broken down into more manageable constituencies. As progression through the rest of this analysis will require a more detailed understanding of both internal and external cleavages within both communities a short discussion on identities is necessary. Two emergent acronyms have come to dominate analysis recently: PUL and CRN. They refer to Protestant Unionist Loyalist and Catholic Nationalist Republican respectively. Although they represent two catch-all groupings it makes for a better analysis if they are deconstructed. As noted by O'Leary and McGarry, both communities lend their historic roots to two different times. For Nationalist 1169 and the Norman invasion is the start of 800 years of English oppression, to Unionists 1609 and the first Protestant plantations of Ireland (O'Leary

& McGarry, 1996, p. 54). Although there are historic dimensions to both causes the current phase is fought between two decidedly modern ideologies: Nationalism and Unionism (O'Leary & McGarry, 1996, p. 55). However, there is utility in understanding the internal and external cleavages that have historically marked the boundaries between and within the groups.

Protestant Unionist Loyalist

As taken from John Whyte (1990), the traditional Unionist interpretation of Ireland holds two core ideas. First, there are two distinct peoples in Ireland, Protestants and Catholics (Unionist and Nationalist). Secondly, the problem rests in the fact that Catholics refuse to acknowledge the same right to self-determination for Protestants as they do for themselves (Whyte, 1990, p. 146). Protestants first arrived en masse in Ireland in the 1600s with the Ulster plantations, a policy that was designed to force Crown loyalties and the Protestant religion on the otherwise unamenable Irish Catholic population (O'Leary & McGarry, 1996, p. 55). The plantations were successful to a point but required successive invasions by Oliver Cromwell (1649) and King William of Orange (1690) to cement Protestant domination. The '*Planters*' were predominantly Scottish (O'Leary & McGarry, 1996, p. 57), a connection that to this day forms the basis of the Ulster-Scots tradition in Northern Ireland, but most importantly loyal to the British Crown. Religion functions as something closer to an ethnic marker than a political one.

Loyalism is most commonly used to refer to working-class Protestants and Unionists. Moreover, throughout the Troubles it came to be associated most predominantly with those who were prepared to pursue armed resistance to remain within the United Kingdom. Loyalism is partially founded on an Ulster nativism, in which it is able to combine intense Loyalty to the British Crown whilst remaining outside of the British State apparatus as this is not always viewed as the most reliable defender of the British identity in Ireland. Loyalism throughout this text is used to refer to those communities and people who took up arms in a revival of the UVF,

or establishment of the UDA, those coming from working-class Protestant communities who supported tacitly or implicitly the violent defence of their communities.

Unionism although functioning as an umbrella term for the political aspirations of most Loyalists is in some sense distinct. Unionism is an aspiration with associations that transcend class distinctions. McGlynn, Tonge and McAuley are among scholars who adhere to the populist characterisation of the DUP and have gone as far as to draw the distinction between the UUP's civic nationalism and the DUP's cultural nationalism (McGlynn, et al., 2014, p. 276). Although analytically offering little value, this has strong descriptive utility in Northern Ireland. The Unionism of the UUP tends to be considered as civic whereas the Unionism of the DUP is more cultural. Loyalism as representative of the particularized class has long been associated with a cultural Unionism. Increasingly it is cultural nationalism that is of highest political value in Northern Ireland.

This reached new heights during the 2012-3 Flag Protests in which Unionist and Loyalist opposed the decision by Belfast City Council to limit the number of days the Union Flag was flown over City Hall. The decision was initiated by Sinn Féin as a complete removal of the flag but the Alliance Party tabled, and passed, a motion to only reduce the number of days (Halliday & Ferguson, 2015, p. 526). They did so as part of the vision for a '*shared future'* (Komarova, 2008). The protests drew a lot of derision from moderate liberals and Irish Nationalists alike, they were easily characterised as cultural in a country moving towards civic nationalism (Long, 2018, p. 43). It marks an important departure in Loyalist politics as it made clear the difference between the DUP and grass-roots Loyalism that had since the Belfast Agreement been relatively unclear.

The flag above City Hall was largely unnoticed and had never before now been recognised as part of Loyalist discourse, its removal however came to represent much wider discontent, its

acted as the cipher, (Miller-Idriss & Fox, 2007, p. 15) through which Loyalist dissatisfaction with the new Northern Ireland would be channelled. The accusation can be levelled at mainstream Unionism for tapping into the insecurities prevalent in Loyalist society in order to mobilise support when they require it (Halliday & Ferguson, 2015, p. 536), arguably Loyalism is more susceptible to this as it is lacking the adequate political representation, they also lack the discursive repertoire to respond to their specific situation (Hayward & Komarova, 2014, p. 788). I would then claim that the Flag Protests would not necessarily have been such a seminal event without the mobilisation by the mainstream elite Unionist politicians, it could also be argued that the Unionist politicians did not necessarily have control over the protests once they began. Instead the grass-roots of Loyalism were made available an opportunity to express their grievances, grievances that are not necessarily mainstream Unionisms grievances. It highlighted the gulf between the Unionist elite and grass-roots. This episode was the beginning of a new, more cultural and identarian Unionism and Loyalism. The economic arguments for supporting the Belfast Agreement had proven not to be for the working-class and the narrow confines that political debate is channelled into through the Belfast Agreement, the lack of a peace dividend, and exasperation of cultural debate culminated in this episode of rioting.

The second grouping to consider in the Brexit vote is the Orange Order. This is a fraternal religious organisation, established 100 years after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 to protect the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. Precise membership figures are hard to ascertain but they sat at approximately 70000 in the late 1990s, which accounts for one in four protestant males (Evans & Tonge, 2007, p. 157). They were since the foundation of Northern Ireland in 1921 officially aligned with the UUP, a relationship that would end in 2005 (Evans & Tonge, 2007, p. 156). The Orange Order opposed the Belfast Agreement and has been a much more socially conservative force than the post-Belfast Agreement UUP (Evans & Tonge, 2007, p. 158), all of which increasingly pushed the Orange Order and its membership ideologically closer to the

DUP. Moreover, the Flag Protests were addressed by members of the Orange Order, most specifically one of the leaders of the Protest, William Frazer. According to Evans and Tonge it is the Orange Order's working-class and younger membership that has moved more discernibly toward the DUP (Evans & Tonge, 2007, pp. 160-1). Further bolstering the new more culturally driven Orangeism, Unionism and Loyalism that defines post-Belfast Agreement Northern Ireland.

Catholic Republican Nationalist

The Nationalist interpretation of Northern Ireland sits as the antithesis of the Unionist one. First, Ireland is a nation consisting of one people. Secondly, it is the British who are maintaining this artificial divide (Whyte, 1990, p. 117). This is problematic when considering that through the Belfast Agreement the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland have officially withdrawn from any partisan involvement in Northern Ireland. This leaves Unionists as the strongest defenders of British interests in Ireland which is significant when considering that Nationalism since the Belfast Agreement has failed to win any Unionist support for a United Ireland. Ultimately this leaves the impression that it is Ulster Unionists and not the United Kingdom that maintain this divide which is a feeling Ulster Unionists are acutely aware of.

Similarly, to Loyalism and Unionism, the Catholic religion is but an ethnic identifier now. Sinn Féin and the IRA have always been socialist and officially non-religious, however when their main constituency and membership are Catholic it becomes harder to separate the layers of identity. The ongoing debates around abortion are an interesting insight into Sinn Féin's theology and only serves to test their resolve toward a non-religious party line with a strongly Catholic electoral base.

Republicanism and Nationalism however can more easily be separated by drawing the distinction between Sinn Féin and the SDLP. Nationalism, as pursued by the SDLP, is constitutional nationalism, meaning it is pursued through entirely peaceful means. Sinn Féin,

despite resorting to entirely peaceful means now, was supportive of violent nationalism. Republicanism is a term associated with violent nationalism but not exclusively. It is also associated with the rejection of the British monarchy. The difficulty in drawing as clear a line between civic and cultural Nationalism here is a consequence of the professionalisation of both parties, but in particular of Sinn Féin.

Democratic Unionist Party

The DUP entered into the wider British political sphere in 2017 when their 10 MP's elected to the Westminster Parliament secured a confidence and supply deal that would prop up the Conservative government. Also making the DUP the only officially pro-Brexit party not just sitting in Westminster but with an influence in the government. This sent a shock through the British political system and a scramble to find out who exactly the DUP were. A party that sat on the periphery of British politics for so long, known best for their late founder, the fire-brand preacher, Rev. Ian Paisley, was now in the spotlight. Mostly this focused on their social conservatism, opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion, which due to the devolved powers, is an internal matter for Northern Ireland as opposed to the whole United Kingdom. Social conservatism is one aspect but not the whole picture.

Cas Mudde describes the DUP as a populist radical right party. As Northern Ireland's politics is effectively partitioned into two ethnic tribunes this description is limited to the Unionist electoral block (Mudde, 2014, p. 220). As described briefly before, they succeeded as an anti-Agreement party in post-Agreement Northern Ireland precisely because they could outflank the pro-Agreement UUP. One can also return to the civic and cultural divide as another contributing factor to the DUP's success as a populist party. This is because the Belfast Agreement has exaggerated debate on cultural issues as one of the only areas the devolved Assembly has full legislative control over. The success of the DUP has been predicated on a party

professionalisation that has accompanied hard identarian and cultural appeals (Gormley-Heenan & MacGinty, 2008, p. 58).

DUP party membership is drawn largely from the congregation at the Free Presbyterian Church, a denomination founded by the late party founder Rev. Ian Paisley. This section comprises around one third of the membership, (Hayward, 2018), and includes many of the party leaders. Another overlapping aspect is the Orange Order, a protestant fraternal organisation that comprises members at every level of Protestant and Unionist society. The Orange Order had been officially associated with the UUP since the partition of Ireland in 1921, (Evans & Tonge, 2007), this changed in 2005 and many members of the Orange Order defected to the DUP. Importantly this includes some leading figures within the UUP. Analytically though this link between influential Protestant churches and organisations deepens the understanding of where DUP support is derived from.

Alongside support from both of these strong organisations the DUP has profited from its professionalisation in very practical ways, namely it has been able to reach out to the Unionist and Loyalist grass-roots electorate through a large expansion of walk-in constituency offices which has also allowed them to consult their grass-roots support on party policy (Ganiel, 2007, p. 316). More controversially they have been linked to paramilitary groups as part of a government-initiated grass-roots social investment fund (Barry, 2017, p. 51). These organisations have as their CEOs people who are either still connected to or are still members of Loyalist paramilitary groups such as the UDA or UVF. This could be argued to be a form of clientelism supported by government resources.

Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin was founded in 1905 and has remained at the heart of the Republican movement since. Their longevity and historical roots have enabled them to dominate the historical narrative of Republicanism in Ireland. The party has always been closely connected with the

IRA but the Sinn Féin that is being dealt with now should be taken to begin in 1969 with the split between the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA, the latter of which Sinn Féin were aligned with. Their journey from radical outsider to the largest Nationalist party in a power-sharing executive with the DUP is littered with important internal shifts. The 1994 cease-fire and 2005 decommissioning are perhaps the most significant for this study.

In terms of organisation Sinn Féin have a very well controlled and orchestrated party internally and externally. Externally their media presence is comparatively sophisticated in Northern Ireland. According to Graham Spencer this has developed as a response to their limited media space during the Troubles (Spencer, 2006, p. 355). It forced them into producing their own content and disseminating it to their grass-roots as a means of promoting their agenda. One example of this is *An Phoblacht*, an independent Republican newspaper run by Sinn Féin, which carries a large readership in Republican areas and grants Sinn Féin the ability to offer a sophisticated narrative to their grass-roots support.

The party leadership has enjoyed an incredible longevity having been there since the early days of the Troubles. Take for example Gerry Adams, who only stepped down this year (2018), but who served continuously as party leader since 1983, an enviable tenure for any politician. Partially symbolised by the continuity of personnel, the party has been accused of maintaining an autocratic intra-party framework, (Whiting, 2016, p. 541), which as Whiting remarks feeds into its perception as a clandestine revolutionary party, something more akin to an IRA command structure than a mainstream democratic political party. The personnel have been changing recently with a younger generation emerging. This is noticeable in that they have women in key leadership roles.

Prior to the Belfast Agreement Sinn Féin had a more radical feminist Women's Department which has since been subsumed by the broader more mainstream Equality Department

(Gilmartin, 2017, p. 288). They still however maintain a good record at promoting women to important roles in the party. The party is the only one whose organisation straddles the Irish border, meaning they are the 2nd largest party in Northern Ireland and the 3rd largest in the Republic of Ireland. Only one other party, People Before Profit, has a similar transborder structure but it is much smaller.

This expanse across the border is supplemented by its strong activist elements of which the party has a privileged amount in comparison to its rivals (Whiting, 2016, p. 550). There is a contradiction inherent in the tight-knit revolutionary leadership and bottom-up grass-roots but the point to gleam from both is that it is in some sense a complete structure, it is well balanced and can drive Nationalist public opinion in a way that the DUP is perhaps less adept at.

Abstentionism is a long-standing policy of the party and essentially means they will fight elections but will not take up their seats in the Parliament or Assembly. The history of Republicanism is littered with internal party splits when the abstentionist policy is relaxed, (Taylor, 1997, pp. 336-8), but the one remaining sight of this policy is in the Westminster parliament. As briefly discussed, the SDLP have always been able to profit from Sinn Féin's refusal to take up their seats. It meant a tactical voter who may choose Sinn Féin in a local Assembly election would likewise choose the SDLP as providing the strongest Nationalist voice in Westminster. The 2017 Westminster General election however saw Sinn Féin replace the SDLP in every one of their previously held seats. This was fought on an abstentionist ticket. It comes just a few months after Unionists lost an overall majority of seats in the Stormont Assembly election. Furthermore, the DUP helped the Conservative Party remain in power by a slim majority in at the Westminster Parliament where seven Sinn Féin seats could hold a lot of power.

The Peace Process and the Peace Dividend

The 1998 Belfast Agreement is considered to represent the beginning of what is called the peace process. It as with most things in Northern Ireland is a contested concept. It has been referred to by Peter Robinson a DUP politician and former First Minister of Northern Ireland, as a "*United Ireland Process*" (Ganiel, 2007, p. 305), demonstrating that for time it represented a psychological loss for some Unionists (McAuley, 2004, p. 189). A sentiment replicated in the Nationalist community with internal splits in the IRA resulting in the formation of the Real IRA. Moreover, there has from the outset been a strand of scholarship who doubted if it is fit for purpose. The Belfast Agreement thus has its supporters and detractors. The Agreement was designed to represent a definitive break from the violent past, that would place Northern Ireland onto a new trajectory where each community might reconcile. This has to some extent happened but it needs to be heavily qualified first. In this analysis the view taken is in line with other historical institutional analyses, (Ruane & Todd, 2007), (Ruane & Todd, 2001), that suggested that the Belfast Agreement as opposed to representing a complete break from the past marks a more transient moment of conflict management that set Northern Ireland onto a different trajectory, (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 263), (Ruane & Todd, 2001, p. 935), however it has retained much of the character and underlying issues that sustained polarisation before. The new trajectory is not necessarily characterised by stabilised or normalised politics. The view favoured by historical institutionalist such as Jennifer Todd, Joseph Ruane and Adrian Little, on Northern Ireland is that events buried deep in the history of the conflict, milestones, may be just as fruitfully employed to explain the state of the current political impasse as how the new institutions have reorganised society.

The DUP and Sinn Féin have risen to power through some very turbulent years of the peace process. Instability is in some sense how the Assembly has come to function and when this instability leads to a collapse in the devolved institutions then an Agreement will precipitate

their reinstatement. The Stormont Assembly itself had as the Brexit referendum passed just completed its first full term without political break-down. This is a significant improvement on the previous 10 years. The Assembly has been suspended four times since its beginning in 1998, the fourth of which, in 2002, lasted until 2007. Since the St. Andrews Agreement in 2006 a further two agreements have been negotiated, the Stormont House Agreement in 2015 and the Fresh Start Agreement of the following year, 2016, that was designed to implement the previous Stormont House Agreement.

This sporadic history of devolved government is highlighted to demonstrate that it has not been an uncomplicated peace process and when there is a breakdown in trust or confidence between coalition partners the institutions are at risk of falling. As noted by Todd the agreement has very little internal momentum, rather it has tended to rely upon input from international political actors (Todd, 2016, p. 12). This is also to demonstrate that this instability, or protracted negotiations are also to some extent how the Assembly has come to function. This arguably demonstrates that the parties do not necessarily view the devolved institutions as the most adequate means of pursuing their goals. Neither Sinn Féin nor the DUP are prepared to compromise with each other in a bilateral negotiation.

As the goal is to interrogate the extent of polarisation in Northern Ireland's political system the remainder of this chapter will seek to identify four key long-term processes, critical antecedents, that have contributed both to the success of the DUP and Sinn Féin as well as to the continued existence of polarisation particularly at the grass-roots level, within the *particularized* class. By focusing on the critical antecedents, it is the intention to better understand Northern Ireland's post-Brexit referendum political reality. It will also enable a breaking from the accommodationist-integrationist paradigm that has dominated much of the scholarship written during the peace process. The idea is not to reject this but to lend alternative means of understanding the issues effecting the successful implementation of the Belfast Agreement.

More significantly though this will have implications for understanding not just Northern Ireland as it stands at a critical juncture currently but also to lend understanding to other divided societies. The problems Northern Ireland faces are perhaps less unique when contextualised within the class-based analysis of scholars such as Colin Coulter. This break from a purely ethnic conflict-based analysis will lend a framing to the conflict and its residual effects that is more recognisable to readers unfamiliar with the province.

The Peace Dividend

The absence of a peace dividend has polemically featured in discussions on Northern Ireland for a number of years now. Scholarly work is no different but there is a lack of systematic analysis. This makes the work of Colin Coulter, Mike Tomlinson and Colin Knox of particular importance. The Assembly is just part of the wider societal peace process. There are two aspects to this that deserve highlighting. The peace dividend as Coulter points out was received mostly by the middle-class, and arguably the ones who suffered least from the conflict (Coulter, 2014, p. 763). Secondly, working-class or less socioeconomically developed areas, and usually areas that were the scene of most of the violence through the conflict, appear to have gained least from this process. This it will be argued is accounted for by the last effects of polarisation that survived through the Belfast Agreement.

Socioeconomic Conditions

If paramilitary guns remain silent, if the cease-fire holds, then multinational funding will be able to begin to flow into Northern Ireland. This, according to Coulter, (Coulter, 2014, p. 766), was the most recurrent pledge informing official discourse on the peace process. It was a promise to the generation of the Troubles, and those of the post-Agreement Northern Ireland, that the material deprivation that plagues the province could be lifted if peace could be agreed.

The peace agreement was partially born of the global peace of the 1990s and catapulted into existence by 'Third Way' politicians in Tony Blair and Bill Clinton (Coulter, 2014, p. 764).

Peace would open the door for an increasingly globalised economy and investment would bring prosperity. However, Northern Ireland's economy was not necessarily prepared to profit from this increased investment. The economy is heavily reliant on funding from the United Kingdom. 30% of employment is within the public sector with two thirds of all economic activity originating from public expenditure (Coulter, 2014, p. 770). A heavy reliance on government funding meant that following the 2008 financial crash the newly elected coalition government in Westminster embarked on the largest cuts to public sector jobs and funding since the Conservative government of the 1980's (Coulter, 2014, pp. 769-70). Northern Ireland, having been spared from those cuts under Margaret Thatcher, would be disproportionately affected.

The workforce was and still remains similarly ill-equipped to profit from foreign direct investment. This is on account of high levels of worklessness, meaning long-term sick or unemployed, where one third of 16-64-year-olds are out of work and 23% of working age people are in receipt of social welfare whereas the United Kingdom average is 17% (Coulter, 2014, p. 767). The high dependence on social welfare sparked a political conflict in 2014 with the attempted introduction of the Welfare Reform Act. The coalition government were pushing to reform and limit the provision of welfare payments. As eluded to before, Northern Ireland, would on account of its high dependence be disproportionately affected (Tomlinson, 2016, p. 105). This very nearly brought the devolved institutions and would contribute to the 2015 Stormont House Agreement.

Tomlinson uses data on conflict exposure and compares this to welfare provision. Using survey data, he establishes the basic claim that those who have experienced the highest amount of conflict related incidence; this could be bombings, shootings, loss of friends or loved ones; are at a much higher likelihood of being in the category of long-standing illness or disability (Tomlinson, 2016, p. 113). The conflict was not geographically distributed, certain areas where by far and away the most exposed to violence, it is in these areas, some of the most

impoverished wards not just in Northern Ireland but in the wider United Kingdom that were the site of so much violence.

This all establishes a convincing narrative as to how badly disadvantaged some parts of Northern Ireland are but it still remains to be established where exactly, if at all, the peace dividend was felt. The answer to this rest largely with the middle-class and top few percentage points of income holders in Norther Ireland. According to Coulter, over the decade preceding the Belfast Agreement one half of all income increases that happened in Northern Ireland happened specifically in the most affluent fifth of society (Coulter, 2014, p. 767). This makes it easier to situate Northern Ireland into much bigger global trends of income inequality. In Northern Ireland this income inequality is served, ideologically speaking, by an ethnonational cleavage that still disproportionately affects those in the lowest income brackets.

Segregation

No discussion on Northern Ireland's socioeconomic particularities can be exhaustive without the inclusion of segregation. Segregation between Protestant and Catholic areas remains an acute problem. The oft quoted statistic is that more '*Peace Walls*' (large metal hording erected at interfaces between Protestant and Catholic communities) have been built since the Belfast Agreement than were there during the conflict. This is not because violence has increased but rather that there is no obvious solution to the low-level violence that persists.

The basic premise of the peace process is to reconcile to communities who have been engaged in a conflict with each other for almost half a century. Segregation goes beyond physical borders, as Stephan Farry notes it is the norm within leisure pursuits, schooling and especially public housing, (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 172). There exists a huge duplication of services, if a new sports facility is built in a Catholic area then a similar one may be required in the neighbouring Protestant area. This embodies the economic cost of segregation which is particularly acute for a society that as has been established is not especially wealthy.

The segregation that is being discussed here should be understood to be through choice (Borooah & Knox, 2017, p. 319). That is to say that the break down in trust and relationships that occurred through the violence of the Troubles has pushed people to seek security within their own communities. It is not a particularly favourable decision to make but it is worth drawing the distinction between segregation through overt government policy and segregation as a result of a neutral housing policy. This is representative of the cognitive effects of segregation that as the sociological research into Northern Irish society expands is becoming an ever more apparent problem. As a means of socialising young people into a divided society the prevalence of segregation in the schooling system is perhaps the most effective.

Schooling in Northern Ireland as with most else is divided along religious lines. There are Catholic '*Maintained*' schools and Protestant '*Controlled*' schools. There also exists a much smaller '*Integrated*' sector and a smaller yet '*Shared*' education initiative. Borooah and Knox correctly point out that many of these schools would reject a segregated label, however, it is still a matter of fact that despite many schools being well mixed religiously, the majority of children in Northern Ireland still pass through a religiously divided system on their way to adulthood. Leaving school many will have had little or no meaningful interaction with someone from the other tradition (Todd, 2018, p. 142), further compounding communal isolation and potentially prejudice.

One further point on schooling is that of educational attainment. This is somewhat more concerned with socioeconomic issues as discussed before. Although comparisons are hard to make across the four different education systems of the United Kingdom equivalences can be expressed. When doing this it appears that Northern Ireland is below the United Kingdom standard (Borooah & Knox, 2017). What can be seen is that two ideal types exist: the highest performer is a Female, Catholic from a more socioeconomic well-off area; the other end of the scale is a Male, Protestant from a socioeconomically deprived area. Browne and Dwyer with

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their research into the risks to young people in post-conflict Northern Ireland show horribly high rates of mental health and substance abuse as well as continued poverty and low educational attainment rates in some of the most marginalized communities, (Browne & Dwyer, 2014, pp. 792-4). Material and social deprivation in the worst affected areas in Northern Ireland may serve to further reinforce a horizontal polarisation between Loyalist and Republican.

Ceasefire to Decommissioning

An official IRA cease-fire was called in 1994, which would eventually help to facilitate Sinn Féin's involvement in the Belfast Agreement peace talks, albeit on the periphery of those talks whilst the IRA maintained their arms. Sinn Féin's tacit support for the Agreement and involvement in politics thereafter was granted conditionally on the grounds that the IRA would decommission. There are then two aspects to this process. Firstly, eventual decommissioning would be a concession by the IRA to Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Republican movement, essentially establishing Sinn Féin's dominance over the IRA and the wider movement. The second aspect is the politicisation of decommissioning as Sinn Féin were able to hold the British Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary to their promises to demilitarise. This issue would help Sinn Féin to lead the Nationalist side in the 2006 St. Andrews Agreement that restored devolved government to Northern Ireland. David Mitchell asserts that this successful politicisation of decommissioning would enable Sinn Féin to firstly side-line their more moderate opponents for the Nationalist vote, the SDLP, (Mitchell, 2010, pp. 348-9), secondly to allay any anxiety within the militant wings of Republicanism, finally it was to become their strongest negotiating chip. Sinn Féin on the issue of decommissioning became the most significant party in the post-Belfast Agreement Northern Ireland.

The DUP profited similarly from the IRA's failure to decommission. A majority of Unionists supported the Belfast Agreement, but not a sizeable majority. The DUP represented the only effective anti-Agreement party in the Assembly. Their opposition to Sinn Féin's involvement

in politics before the IRA had decommissioned proved hugely popular and helped them toward becoming the biggest party in Northern Ireland by the Assembly elections of 2003, they did this by outflanking the more moderate UUP who they branded as '*sell outs*' to the Republican agenda (McAuley, 2004, p. 196). This ultimately necessitated their place at the negotiating table in 2006 with the St. Andrews Agreement. Essentially the DUP were able to profit from growing discontent within Unionism toward the Agreement and the IRA's failure to decommission. The UUP conversely were subject to scrutiny for their role in facilitating Sinn Féin's involvement in the power-sharing government whilst the IRA had still failed to decommission. Both these incidences illustrate how an approach that accounts primarily for long-term trajectories can prove fruitful in understanding contemporary Northern Ireland.

Legacy Issues

The nature of conflict in Northern Ireland was in most part intensely parochial and in many cases between communities who live alongside each other but remain starkly separate. The combatants were of the communities they fought in bar the British Army who for the most part spent their time within their barracks only engaging local people whilst on patrol. Paramilitary groups were not as formalised as a professional army and thus the best accounts of conflict related events are from the perpetrators themselves. Many people served time for crimes committed and many were subsequently released as part of the Belfast Agreement. However, a reluctance to discuss what occurred through the violence is still tangible and this is most acutely affecting those who lost loved ones but know very little of the circumstances in which it happened.

Reconciliation through truth was an important aspect of the Belfast Agreement. However, a combination of circumstances is holding this back. Two of these are most pertinent: break-downs in devolved government and historical revisionism. The former was primarily a consequence of the turbulent early years of the peace process and suspensions of Stormont

government (McGovern, 2008, p. 43). In 2010 after the successful implementation of the St. Andrews Agreement the Justice Ministry was devolved to Stormont. The position was taken up by the non-partisan Alliance Party as a workable solution to Sinn Féin and DUP unease with the other party holding this position.

The second and much harder to resolve issue is that the implementation of any truth and reconciliation initiatives are the two incompatible historical narratives held by Sinn Féin and the DUP. Unionism and Loyalism are intensely suspicious of Sinn Féin taking the opportunity to '*abuse*' a truth and reconciliation process (McGovern, 2008, p. 42), two rewrite the narrative or two absolve Republicanism of its sins. This is particularly acute presently with the potential trial of British soldiers for incidents during the Troubles. This underscores the Belfast Agreements accommodation of two irreconcilable interpretations of Northern Ireland that is particularly acute when it is less moderate parties who are required to compromise on their own narratives.

Chapter 3: Breaking the Accommodationist-Integrationist Paradigm

Having established a largely descriptive account of Northern Ireland throughout the conflict, settlement and peace it should now be theoretically engaged. This chapter will begin first with the accommodationist-integrationist debate as an abstract theoretical one but also with consideration to its empirical record in Northern Ireland. Building on the previous chapter the historically contingent issues related to the conflict and peace process, here conceptualised as critical antecedents, will be seen to have an enduring effect on polarisation within Northern Ireland.

The Accommodationist-Integrationist Debate and the Peace Process

The peace process has been defined on the political level by the implementation of power-sharing but on the societal level it becomes harder to place. With regards to polarisation it will be argued that a distinction must be made between vertical and horizontal polarisation. The vertical representing socioeconomic inequalities and the horizontal representative of an ethnic polarisation. A lot of academic work on Northern Ireland is primarily concerned with the specific model of power-sharing government established in 1998. To this end Northern Ireland does indeed provide an excellent case study in power-sharing. However, it is my assertion that this debate is somewhat limited if proper consideration is not payed to this vertical and horizontal distinction. The peace process is not often set into a global economic context. Despite the excellent work documenting this there is not often adequate connections drawn between political stalemate and the socioeconomic hardships of a post-conflict society. By shifting the focus toward what are identified here as critical antecedents the accommodationist-

integrationist debate gains a better contextualisation which will serve to enhance the understanding of Northern Ireland as a case-study in power-sharing in a deeply divided society.

This will first require a brief outline of the specific model of power-sharing adopted in Northern Ireland in 1998. By doing so it will be highlighted that Northern Ireland does not necessarily represent a clear-cut example of either Lijphartian consociationalism nor is it centripetalists in character. Specific focus will be laid on identity as a rigid or malleable concept because the enduring value attached to group identities is an issue hypothesised to have been partly enabled by the Belfast Agreements failure to produce at best, a common civic identity, or at least two cohabitating identities. This is important for engaging the core of the accommodationist and integrationist arguments. It is also important as identity has not necessarily remained stagnant, rather new identities that have constituted themselves since the Belfast Agreement and have taken on a new character throughout the peace process but also in post-Brexit referendum Northern Ireland the saliency of identity has the potential to increase. This will clarify the space for contribution from a historical institutionalist approach.

Northern Ireland's Mixed System or Gold Standard?

These core tenants of consociational theory are in varying degrees manipulated in a case-by-case basis. Northern Ireland in spite of its theoretical irregularities is considered to be a gold standard of Lijphartian consociational democracy (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 10). If Lijphart is the progenitor of consociationalism as a prescription for a deeply divided society then John Whyte is its importer to Northern Ireland in the 1970s (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 145), with John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary its contemporary champions (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 300). They are regarded as having had the biggest effect on its practical prescription in the 1998 Belfast Agreement.

Northern Ireland's consociationalism as suggested is Lijphartian at its core with some added irregularities. This is represented by four basic pillars that constitute the Lijphartian

consociational model: a proportional voting system, preferably proportional representation; grand coalitions of the plural segments; segmental autonomy referring to the protection of minority cultures; and minority vetoes to avoid the tyranny of the majority (Lijphart, 1977). These all survive in variegated forms throughout the Stormont Assembly.

The primary deviations, or modifications, to traditional consociational theory in this regard are first the voting system that has remained since the 1974 Sunningdale Agreement. It is a transferable voting system where candidates may be marked from first preference right down the list to the last candidate. In Northern Ireland it is the Single Transferable Vote. Transferable voting is at the core of the integrationist position as a means of encouraging moderate, or centripetal, voting (Lijphart, 2012). It is in fact the most important aspect of centripetalists prescription.

Integrationists view the degradation of division as the primary objective thus their response is predicated primarily on their choice of electoral system; on the desire to encourage centripetal as opposed to centrifugal voting behaviour. Horowitz formulates this as not a choice between democracy and majority rule, but between two kinds of majoritarian rule, exclusive as in Westminster and first-past-the-post and inclusive. Centripetalism achieves moderation through its encouragement of pre-election pacts, and cross-cleavage appeals. The primary attribute of centripetalism is thus the '*vote-pooling*' effect, (Bogaards, 2001, p. 5), this claims that in order to gain majority support politicians must make cross-community appeals whether this is as a pre-electoral pact with an opposing party or as part of a non-partisan party. It could then be debated precisely where the moderation has occurred in Northern Ireland's power-sharing system, via the moderating drive of a centripetal voting system where by the electorate are demanding moderation from their representatives, or, as a result of elite level compromise post-election. The actual effect of either consociationalism or transferable voting remains empirically unclear in Northern Ireland.

The second modification is the undeniable importance of external influence of the eventual 1998 Belfast Agreement and the ensuing peace process. There was international backing from: The United States, both kin-states in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom working together as guarantors to the agreement and finally, the European Union who had not just contributed monetarily but also provide an ideological safety net through the degradation of significance of borders within the single market. These externalities are generally considered to be moderating forces in Northern Ireland's nationalism. One aspect to consider is the claim from Todd that power-sharing in Northern Ireland lacks any significant internal momentum (Todd, 2016, p. 12), rather changes, compromise and agreement has come as a result of external influence.

Identity as Rigid or Malleable

One further aspect to consider is on identity and its rigidity. Integrationists often use the primordialist label to define accommodationists approach to identity. This is slightly unfair as Lijphart, (Lijphart, 1995), supports a more liberal attitude toward groups self-determining their identity as opposed to inheriting pre-determined ones. Practically this means that when a peace agreement is reached the institutions will have constitutionally determined space for pluralistic identities, which is only partially the case in Northern Ireland with the requirement to select a designation as Unionist, Nationalist or Other in the Assembly. This is something of a moot point as both integrationists and accommodationists can agree on the need to degrade the salience of identity in a society where such a cleavage is damaging. The divergence comes in the timescale for the shifting of identity. Accommodationists view their approach as being realistic to the facts of entrenched and crystallised division and argue that power-sharing will reduce the salience of these identities over a longer horizon (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 17). Integrationists argue that an electoral system can from the outset encourage moderation and centripetal movements in voting and begin immediately to redress this.

Consociationalism's Empirical Record

The empirical record for any major decline in the saliency of identity or moderate voting is still debatable. It could be argued that the Belfast Agreement has not just retained these exclusive identities in their pre-Agreement character but that the turn in fortunes for Sinn Féin and the DUP might signal newly constituted forms of those identities based primarily into a rights based and democratic struggle. Furthermore, if the analysis in the previous chapter on the socioeconomic issues and continued segregation are to be taken as serious challenges to the goals of the Belfast Agreement then what does that mean for consociationalism's theoretical application.

Returning first to the concept of '*tribune voting'* it could be suggested that instead of it working to moderate the electorate in its entirety it has enabled the more radical parties to promote different messages to different groups. On the vertical dimension of polarisation, a message of political stability, only achievable by electing the most hard-line parties, will in turn bring economic stability allowing the middle and upper -classes to continue to benefit from the peace dividend. On the horizontal dimension hard-line identarian messages ensures the support of the *particularized* class who respond best to issues affecting their cultural capital.

On the issue of identity and its rigidity it is still palpably important but it is perhaps too soon in a power-sharing arrangement to expect wholesale change. One barometer of this is the emergence of a Northern Irish identity. Tonge and Gomez note that it has not been endorsed by either of the largest parties in Sinn Féin or the DUP, (Gomez & Tonge, 2015, p. 276), choosing instead to promote the sperate but equal Irish and British identities. Where the Northern Irish identity has seen most growth is within younger and non-religious groups. Significant because Northern Ireland has an extremely youthful population. It is also growing in popularity among Unionist (Gomez & Tonge, 2015, p. 294). One aspect that is problematic to Nationalists is that to be Northern Irish would to in part acknowledge Northern Ireland as a legitimate state.

Furthermore, Irish has become increasingly visible since the Belfast Agreement enshrined the expression of cultural identity into law.

Younger, non-religious and Unionist support for the identity is representative of a constitutional moment (Todd, 2017, p. 2), where the Belfast Agreement created a dislocation from the past into which new identities emerged. Catholic rejection of the Northern Irish identity demonstrates the ambiguity inherent in the Belfast Agreement as a constitutional moment. For Unionist it had secured Northern Ireland's place within the Union and for Nationalists it had legitimised their claim to secede from the United Kingdom when the majority of people in Northern Ireland wished to do so.

Northern Ireland's system is thus predominantly consociational but with the most important aspect of centripetal theory in a transferable electoral system. This makes the drivers of moderation harder to place. In spite of this polarisation has not subsided to any great degree and specifically not in those areas it was felt most acutely. External influence drove the peace process on at times of difficulty but without this there appears to be little internal drive to moderate, reconcile and accommodate. Critical antecedents may thus hold the key to understanding how polarisation has stubbornly survived varied attempts to degrade it.

Historical Institutionalism

Historical institutionalism is essentially the study of institutional development. That is historical tracing of developments within institutions. There is a focus on critical junctures as moments of dramatic institutional change in which new self-reinforcing path dependencies will emerge (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 342). A crucial conceptual addition is that of the critical antecedent on which this study relies. They are defined as "*factors or conditions preceding a critical juncture that combine with causal forces during a critical juncture to produce long-term divergence in outcome*" (Slater & Simmons, 2010, p. 889). These are the conditions that

had sustained polarisation during the conflict and have survived the Belfast Agreement. Primarily though historical intuitionalism as a theoretical framework allows for a more flexible approach to the puzzle of lasting polarisation. While engaging directly with the theoretical application of consociationalism or centripetalism is illuminating it is also narrowly focused on institutional choices. Historical institutionalism allows for the tracing of long-term processes that are as observable in the Northern Ireland of the 1960s as of today.

Historical institutionalism offers a means of exploring contemporary Northern Ireland as a consequence of longer term processes and in particular the direction these processes take in critical junctures such as the Belfast Agreement. It allows for a different reading of the Belfast Agreement, not as the beginning of new institutions but rather as a transformation of previously existing ones, permitting a partial escape from the accommodationist-integrationist paradigm in explaining the resistance of polarisation to moderation. Further polarisation is by no accounts purely as a result of the Belfast Agreement, rather the Belfast Agreement was the only recourse to institutionalising the polarisation, this is exemplified in the continued existence of polarisation after 18 years of the peace process.

For Capoccia and Kelemen, this represents a dual model of institutional development, long periods of path dependent institutional stability punctuated by a brief period of institutional flux (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 341). This means the conflict served as a long period of institutional stability, however counterintuitive this may seem; this is then punctuated by a brief period of institutional flux in the Belfast Agreement. What the agreement attempted but could not do was integrate two entirely different interpretations of Northern Ireland. It could not invent a common civic identity that would derive any widespread support outside of those who do not require cultural capital to create their social capital. That is the deriving of civic legitimacy from two different sources has continued after the agreement and specifically is still the primary basis of social capital within the *particularized* class (Hayward & Komarova,

2014). The power-sharing institutions mirror this accommodation as opposed to integration and this has allowed two entirely different interpretations of Northern Ireland and of the Belfast Agreement to continue to survive.

The significance of a critical juncture for institutional development is that it can have very dramatic and lasting effects by creating self-reinforcing path-dependent process of its own (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 341). The range of possible actions open to political actors increases (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 343), the repertoire of potential tools a political actor has to pursue their goals may change. Conversely though a critical juncture may just as likely lead to no institutional change, a period of flux may be restored to normality (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 348). The Belfast Agreement is somewhere in between both of these possibilities, the political landscape was changed dramatically, but much of what maintained the ethnonational cleavage was left intact. It represents what Todd refers to as a '*thin'* agreement (Todd, 2016, p. 2). This is partly because the cleavage is so severe that it would be otherwise impossible to negotiate away any of what sustained it.

Defining the Critical Antecedents

Dan Slater and Erica Simmons attempt to shift the focus from critical junctures as the primary explanatory force toward critical antecedents, specifically they say, to repair the critical juncture framework as opposed to rejecting it (Slater & Simmons, 2010, p. 887). They acknowledge that different contexts may result in the critical juncture itself being the most import causal factor of institutional change or even that they remain equal in causation. However, they note that a critical antecedent if identified may have much greater comparative utility in political science (Slater & Simmons, 2010, p. 912). The lessons here may be related to the application of consociationalism to a society that is still exhibiting all the characteristics of an intractable ethnic conflict.

Slater and Simmons, concerned with the question of infinite regress in tracing causal preconditions to a juncture, suggest regressing far back enough until causal factors become difficult to pin down (Slater & Simmons, 2010, p. 888). There is also the less ambitious option of narrowing the analysis down to the researcher's specific theoretical interest. Polarisation is a relatively expansive interest in a deeply divided society. Thus, the antecedents are those that have been identified as acting negatively on society both before and after the Belfast Agreement.

Identifying the Critical Antecedents

The hypothesis argues that the critical antecedents that had sustained polarisation throughout the conflict survived through the Belfast Agreement. The Belfast Agreements most positive contribution was to remove guns from Northern Irelands politics. This violent manifestation of polarisation is thus consigned to history, similarly it was the aspect of polarisation that the vast majority of people agreed should be consigned to history. This is not to say that other mechanisms driving polarisation were similarly consigned to history. The critical antecedents combined with causal forces inside the critical juncture, namely the huge grass-roots, diplomatic and international effort to bring about peace, to produce a new means of inter-communal competition based on consociational rules. Contained within the Belfast Agreement are mechanisms of reproduction: minority cultural protections, recognition of parity of esteem (meaning separate but equal) (Todd, 2016, p. 2); and these have worked to reproduce the polarised society that existed pre-Agreement.

Historical institutionalism utility comes in its ability to test empirical outcomes against their intended theoretical outcomes (Thelen, 1999). This allows for the testing of Northern Ireland's specific configuration of consociationalism and its primary goal, moderation. With hindsight then some of the defining characteristics of Northern Ireland's political and social spheres

before the Belfast Agreement and before power-sharing, the critical antecedents, remain the most predominant factors shaping post-Agreement Northern Ireland.

First, the crystallization of segregation in both the population movements and government policy from the outset of the Troubles. A crystallization that has remained relatively stubborn in the face of attempts to degrade it. The previous chapter demonstrated the pervasiveness of segregation that has continued to exist through the peace process. This is in social housing, schooling, leisure pursuits and sports and in the worst affected areas the existence of peace walls. This process of segregation was demonstrated to have developed as a result of the conflict. The Belfast Agreement acknowledged this aspect of division and enshrined it into law thus enabling it to continue to reproduce and replicate itself.

Second, is Northern Ireland's continued socioeconomic underdevelopment. The historical contingencies here are obviously conflict related, capital would struggle in an economy torn by ethnic conflict. It is as Coulter argued the protections to public sector jobs and funding that was afforded by the conflict that has suppressed what should have been a peace dividend to be enjoyed at all levels of society. The 2008 financial crisis is thus an exogenous shock that would disproportionately hit Northern Ireland. The end of violence in 1998 allowed capital to begin to flow into Northern Ireland, this was first received by those best placed to profit from it but the exogenous shock in 2008 would further cripple those less equipped. It is thus argued that this vertical dimension representative of socioeconomic polarisation, exaggerated since 1998, has further reinforced the horizontal dimension of polarisation that already had a firm basis in socioeconomic deprivation.

Third, the 1994 cease-fires that would eventually culminate in the 2005 decommissioning, but not before Sinn Féin and the DUP were able to rise to power. The involvement of extremists in the Belfast Agreement is broadly considered to have been an appropriate decision. This I would

not necessarily dispute as they were the ones best enabled to sustain polarisation in Northern Ireland. To marginalise this group could be to the detriment of the entire Agreement as was the case in Sunningdale 1974 (Doyle, 2018, p. 3). However, conditional decommissioning as it was in the Belfast Agreement granted the strongest bargaining chip to the most extreme parties in post-Agreement Northern Ireland. A process that allowed Sinn Féin to consolidate their control over the wider Republican movement leaving only the most marginalised dissidents to oppose the Belfast Agreement. Simultaneously it led to defections from the UUP to DUP of some of their most influential politicians. Also, the resignation of the UUP's leader David Trimble whom alongside Seamus Mallon would depart from politics whilst the DUP and Sinn Féin were growing in influence. The tumultuous process of decommissioning side-lined the moderate SDLP and UUP and would eventually culminate in the 2006 St. Andrews Agreement and the hegemony of hard-line secessionists and anti-Agreement Unionists.

Fourth, and much more broadly are conflict legacy issues relating to justice and victimhood, that since the 2010 devolution of the Justice Ministry to the Northern Ireland Assembly, has become a central area of contention. It is an area in which two competing versions of history are at work. Unionist who seek to gather information surrounding IRA killings that have previously gone unpunished. Whilst Nationalism seeks to have British soldiers answer for killings of Catholic civilians or IRA members that have similarly gone unpunished. Setting the definition for what defines a '*victim',* be it an unarmed IRA volunteer or off duty police officer, both sides are seeking to legitimate their past through the current institutional arrangements. The violence that effectively served to polarise Northern Ireland throughout the conflict is serving the same function in the Peace Process as both communities come to terms with their shared violent past.

Toward Brexit as a Critical Juncture

One key point of conceptual clarification is to identify exactly how the current political impasse represents a critical juncture. This is to some extent is a matter of justifying how politically tumultuous an event is, how deeply does it affect political, social and economic spheres (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 349). In this instance it can be confidently claimed that Northern Ireland is experiencing a critical juncture. The Belfast Agreement based on previous scholarship, (Ruane & Todd, 2007), can be taken to be representative of a critical juncture. It is revealing to look at the similarities and differences between Northern Ireland of the 1990s and of today.

Ruane and Todd in their exploration of the causal factors behind the eventual Belfast Agreement suggest it is not so much a matter of *what* brought peace but *when* (Ruane & Todd, 2007, p. 453). They suggest a unique set of circumstances including the long-term processes of political development, (Ruane & Todd, 2007, p. 442), meaning a growing movement in Northern Ireland for settlement, in conjunction with wider geo-political movements, meaning changes of leadership in the United Kingdom and Ireland that with the United States were able to push the parties in Northern Ireland toward settlement. Little, Ruane and Todd identify this critical juncture as a more transient moment of relatively successful conflict management, (Taylor, et al., 2009, p. 263), (Ruane & Todd, 2001, p. 935). That fundamentally altered the means in which each community engaged with each other but doing little to alter the roots of the conflict, the very things on which drove the conflict.

The substantial international push for peace is no longer present. The United States has no substantial role and the previously amenable British, Irish and European governments are in a period of serious difficulty. Likewise, the moderate parties that once drove the movement for peace, pulling with them the radicals in Sinn Féin or the PUP, are no longer the dominant political force. Finally, as has been the theme throughout the societal architecture sustaining

polarisation has remained intact. The final chapter on will analyse these critical antecedents as they have affected polarisation in post-Brexit Northern Ireland.

Chapter 4: Brexit the Critical Juncture

On the 24th of June 2016 the people of Northern Ireland were greeted by the news that they along with the rest of the United Kingdom would be leaving the European Union. Northern Ireland voted to Remain with 55.78% to 44.28% on a turnout of 62.7%. Not an overwhelming majority but one that becomes much more significant when the vote is analysed along religious or ethnonational identities. The primary aim in this closing chapter is to make explicit the links between the present politically polarised situation and the historically contingent path dependencies identified in the previous two chapters. The hypothesis is that polarisation can be much better explained by understanding critical antecedents than by framing this as part of the accommodationist-integrationist debate.

As with most elections in Northern Ireland religion is still the most reliable indicator of voting direction, 60% of Protestants supporting Leave and 80% of Catholics supporting Remain. The religious divide translates into an ethnonational cultural divide and in post-Brexit Northern Ireland the DUP and Sinn Féin have all but consolidated their hegemony within their respective electoral blocks. DUP voters at a rate of 75% voted to leave the European Union, this compares to 58% of UUP voters as representative of a more moderate Unionism and 91% of TUV voters as representative of the radical Unionism (Barry, 2016-7, p. 6). In the Nationalist voting block 84% of Sinn Féin voters supported Remain as compared to 95% of SDLP voters (Barry, 2016-7, p. 6). Party political partisanship is clearly evident.

It is my assertion that the meaning of Brexit, what those in Northern Ireland were voting on, was much more tangible that in other places across the United Kingdom. There was a patent rejection of the European Union by Unionism and an endorsement from Nationalism. Research carried out after the referendum suggested that a '*European*' identity had struggled to take hold in Northern Ireland as against British and Irish (Divine & Gray, 2017). When filtered through

the lens of Northern Ireland's specific allegiances and ideologies the meaning of the vote is much more accessible.

British Brexit negotiations with the European Union and the Republic of Ireland will ultimately decide the future of the province. The peace process is in a state of inertia having now been suspended in negotiations to restore the devolved institutions. The current break-down was trigger by the resignation of Martin McGuinness, Sinn Féin leader in Northern Ireland and Deputy First Minster of Northern Ireland. This was in protest at the DUP's failure in handling the Renewable Heating Incentive Scheme. The restoration of devolved government is at least rhetorically supported by both Nationalist and Unionist sides but is simultaneously undergoing a reinterpretation.

The state of Northern Ireland itself is undergoing a process of reinterpretation. The Belfast Agreement set the constitutional future, purposely, into ambiguity, it is this ambiguity where minorities are placing their demands in the current critical juncture. This to some, means the constitutional future of Northern Ireland could be settled as a result of Brexit. The reinterpretations are attempting to remove the ambiguities of the Belfast Agreement. The effects of Brexit have been to remove the ethnonational divide from the institutional confines of the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly and bring it directly into kin and minority state bilateral bargaining.

2017 brought with it two historic elections in Northern Ireland. The first was the 2nd March Stormont Assembly election triggered after the resignation of Martin McGuinness as Deputy First Minister. The election was remarkable as Unionism for the first time lost their overall majority. Sinn Féin made substantial gains and the DUP widely expected to lose seats on account of a reduction of Assembly seats from 108 to 90 (Evans & Tonge, 2007, p. 144), managed to consolidate their overall loses with an increased vote share.

The second election was the 8th June Westminster Parliament snap election. The DUP profited from the British Conservative Party's poor performance. A confidence and supply deal at a cost of £1billion in extra funding for Northern Ireland in return the DUP support enabled the Conservatives to remain in power with a slim majority. This brought the pro-Brexit DUP and Conservative Party into a relationship just short of a formal coalition that arguably has some serious implications for British neutrality in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin equally profited as they managed to win a Westminster seat of all of the incumbent SDLP MPs. This is even more remarkable as Sinn Féin won this running on a policy of abstentionism. Meaning that for the first time since the 1970s the Westminster Parliament has no sitting Irish Nationalists. Furthermore, it means that the Nationalist community of Northern Ireland choose to withdraw from Westminster.

On leadership both the DUP and Sinn Féin have experienced historic shifts in 2016 and 2017. First Arlene Foster would replace Peter Robinson as First Minister in 2016. This is significant because Peter Robinson was one of the generation involved in the 1998 Belfast Agreement negotiations and the latter St. Andrews Agreement of 2006. Martin McGuinness who had been ill would remove himself from politics to be replaced by Michelle O'Neill in 2017. Gerry Adams likewise announced his retirement in 2017 to be replaced by Mary Lou McDonald as party president. This is being highlighted as it is representative of a new generation of party leaders, one not just with less internal control over their parties; Adams having been party president since 1983; but of leaders with less of a history rooted into the Troubles.

In both elections the more radical DUP and Sinn Féin have made steady progress at the expense of the more moderate SDLP and UUP. There has been no successful agreement on re-entering into a coalition at the Stormont Assembly. This has meant Northern Ireland remains officially with no voice in the Brexit negotiations. However, the retreat toward kin-states is reflective of the fact that if there was a functioning executive in Northern Ireland they would be unlikely to

speak with one voice. However, the DUP have been using their privileged position with the Conservative Party to influence proceedings whilst Sinn Féin has similarly withdrawn to the Irish Nationalist's kin-state, the Republic of Ireland, where Sinn Féin are the third largest party. Not only has the polarisation toward the extremes continued but the political situation currently resembles a withdrawal from the Northern Irish state altogether. A withdrawal from coalition government and the increasingly partisan involvement of kin-states.

Brexit and Northern Ireland at a Critical Juncture

The referendum result presently leaves Northern Ireland at an institutional, and constitutional, cross-roads. The huge multi-governmental and cross-communal initiative that brought the Belfast Agreement into existence is not present in this current instance. Rather the United Kingdom has a much more confrontational relationship not just with the rest of the EU27 but most importantly with the Republic of Ireland. The diplomatic work that processed the conflict into an institutional settlement in 1998 is at risk of unravelling. There are thus a multitude of potential outcomes from this impasse, one of which is allowing the continued existence of two mutually exclusive national identities to foment again. The removal of the power-sharing institutions risks doing so but also reveals what has or has not been achieved and how much of the polarised politics has remained intact.

Continued polarisation it is argued has contributed to the current political impasse. In this critical juncture the devolved Stormont Assembly has been suspended awaiting successful negotiations between the two largest parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin, to re-enter into a power-sharing government together. The outcomes of this current political impasse are potentially extremely divergent. There may be a re-negotiation of the Belfast Agreement to accommodate the re-negotiation of Northern Ireland constitutionally, which Brexit may necessitate. What can be feasible achieved here is to outline the positions taken by both the DUP and Sinn Féin, to understand their heterogenous support and, importantly, to understand their competition.

Unionism Post-Referendum

It was asserted that Unionists voted for Brexit as a rejection of the fluid vision of Northern Irish sovereignty enabled by the European Union. Indeed, UKIP's departure from parliamentary politics renders the DUP the only consistently Pro-Brexit party in Westminster. This will be substantiated by addressing the support base of the DUP. The idea underpinning this is that the European Union had offered a means for Sinn Féin to pursue a United Ireland via the backdoor. They had used the Belfast Agreement's North-South bodies to promote the integration of the Northern and Southern economies especially in the Agri-food sector, Ireland and Northern Ireland's largest industry. They had used the new borderless Ireland to ignore the presence of an existent national border between the United Kingdom and Ireland. The European Union was allowing backdoor nationalism, (Fox & Vermeersch, 2010). The North-South Ministerial bodies established in the Belfast Agreement are a structure that the DUP has either boycotted or reluctantly engaged. They are viewed as either unnecessary or an encroachment of Dublin on Belfast. This provides an example of how Sinn Féin were able to pursue one interpretation of Northern Ireland's constitutional setting whilst the DUP could simply ignore it.

The Belfast Agreement was not legally dependent on European Union membership but implicitly it was essential. It is thus certainly undermined in spirit by Brexit, (Soares, 2016, p. 839). The pooling of sovereignty away from the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland itself undermined more absolutist claims of national belonging. However, to a Unionist audience this was an effect of European Union membership that needed to be countered.

To begin to deconstruct the DUP's response to the referendum is to first turn back to the accommodationist-integrationist debate. That is to say the electoral system can be criticised for over-exaggerating division for a section whilst economic moderation and the desire to uphold the Belfast Agreement draws a different section of the electorate. The DUP are thus profiting

from both the disenfranchised and the enfranchised of the Belfast Agreement. They are able to exploit difference for gains at both the top and bottom of society. Thus, a section of the DUP electorate is moderate, middle-class and less concerned with identarian politics than they are with stability. Stability that was provided by European Union membership. However, there is another sizable section of the DUP electorate, representative of new Loyalism, which emerged post-Belfast Agreement and specifically during the 2012-3 Flag Protests. This is the section that were disenfranchised by the UUP for accommodating Sinn Féin in government before the IRA had decommissioned. It is also a section that if the Flag Protests can demonstrate are not necessarily beholden to the DUP but rather have no other viable option in defence of their identities. They more ardently rejected European Union membership.

Nationalism Post-Referendum

Nationalism almost exclusively supported the Remain side of the Brexit referendum. In spite of the fact that Sinn Féin did not put a huge amount of effort into the campaign to Remain. In comparison to their current campaign against the return of a hard border in Ireland it could be described as lukewarm. Despite their campaign leading up to the Brexit referendum Sinn Féin have further consolidated their hegemony over the nationalist block and the SDLP in particular. They have done so whilst still maintaining an abstentionist policy toward the Westminster Parliament and continue to do so despite the collapse of the Stormont Assembly.

The picture is slightly different when the framing is extended beyond electoral politics to anti-Agreement dissident Republicanism (Frampton, 2010, p. 3). Sinn Féin have for years now benefitted from drawing traditionally non-voting Nationalists out to vote. This in combination with an increasingly younger electorate is swelling their votes. Northern Ireland has an increasingly younger population presently, with 33% of the population having now been born after the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2014). Although Sinn Féin are performing well at attracting the increasingly young electorate

it is still revealing to examine who is not voting for Sinn Féin to understand further the growing dissatisfaction with the Belfast Agreement most usually associated with Unionism.

Residual dissident threats have been a feature of Northern Ireland's political landscape since the singing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Republicanism is prone to splits when the policy of abstentionism is relaxed. This was the case with Republican Sinn Féin and the Continuity IRA in 1986 or the Real IRA in 1997, (Frampton, 2010), there are also the incidences of new dissident organisations forming: the 32 County Sovereignty Movement 1997, Óglaigh na hÉireann in 2009, Saoirse na hÉireann or Republican Action Against Drugs (both formed after the Belfast Agreement but with no specific date), Éirígí formed in 2010 and most recently Saoradh 2016. These groups have as a common thread, opposition to the Belfast Agreement. Dissident violence remains an issue in Northern Ireland, in 2016 there were 142 failed, foiled or completed terrorist attacks across the European Union, over half of these were in Northern Ireland (Cobain, 2018). The threat of violence is predicted to move toward critical if there were to be customs infrastructure erected along the Irish-Northern Irish border. These groups represent a strand of Republicanism that is still opposed to the police, the now reformed PSNI who Sinn Féin have officially pledged their support to.

The size of dissident support is harder to ascertain but what can be determined is that dissident groupings remain active and are still being formed. Martyn Frampton asserts an explanation as to why a portion of the youth of socially deprived areas of Northern Ireland continue to be drawn toward dissident groups and ideology. He claims that despite the fact that the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland are similarly deprived as other parts of the United Kingdom, in Nationalist areas of Northern Ireland there is a narrative to explain their bleak prospects. That is that the continued British presence in Northern Ireland keeps them in their poor socioeconomic position (Frampton, 2010, p. 24). This is a dangerous narrative and does not necessarily stop at dissident Republicanism but it can just as easily fit with Sinn Féin's

narrative, one that still maintains that the British presence in Northern Ireland prevents the natural praxis of the all-Ireland economy and society.

Despite the continued existence of dissidents Sinn Féin has been able to sustain their hegemony over the Nationalist electoral block. Primarily they have achieved this by outflanking the more moderate SDLP, in line with the ethnic outbidding thesis proposed by Mitchell, O'Leary, Evans, Gormley-Heenan and MacGinty, (Mitchell, et al., 2009) and (Gormley-Heenan & MacGinty, 2008). This thesis is partially one dimensional as it considers predominantly the competition between Sinn Féin and the SDLP whilst neglecting competition from dissidents whom largely do not contest elections, choosing instead to follow a policy of abstentionism. It also considers Sinn Féin and Nationalist voters to be moderating whilst simultaneously pursuing hard-line policy. The reality is somewhere between both.

Sinn Féin is held to account in traditionally hard-line Nationalist areas by the even more radical dissidents. They have successfully convinced the majority of the Republican movement to move away from violence but they can only maintain this by maintaining a radical stance themselves. This radical stance is likewise maintained by continued socioeconomic deprivation, by the lack of a peace dividend for those worst affected by the Troubles. The check on Sinn Féin's hegemony is less visible and remains understudied but as it does not register in election results it becomes much harder to quantify. Similarly, though, Sinn Féin are in a position to take credit for the peace dividend received by middle-class Nationalists fuelled in part by the protection of catholic schools that segmental autonomy offers and the opening of the economy to inward investment that the holding peace has enabled.

The SDLP losing votes has still clearly been to the benefit of Sinn Féin and it is here that their move toward a mainstream nationalist party is crucial. Whiting notes that there still exists a perception from Nationalists that prejudice exists against them; 55.4% adhering to this view in

2010, rising to 64.2% by 2015, (Whiting, 2016, p. 546); however, this must go along with actual policy success. Sinn Féin to be successful must demonstrate that they are both providing for their electorate whilst maintaining strong defenders of their interests. Sinn Féin have successfully modernised, professionalised and reformed, seemingly to the detriment of their primary political aspiration, Irish reunification (Whiting, 2016, p. 548). Brexit has jolted them out of complacency on the constitutional question, it has demanded a re-radicalising of Sinn Féin as it presents a very viable opportunity to change the constitutional future of Northern Ireland. There no longer exists a status-quo where Sinn Féin may pursue backdoor nationalism via the European Union but instead they have been forced to more ardently defend the openness of the border. This has configured itself in three degrees of policy: an open call for a border (unification) poll, special designated status for Northern Ireland to remain within the European Union, or for the United Kingdom to remain within the single market and customs union.

Post-Referendum Polarisation

The political terrain following such a monumental dislocation to Irish and British affairs is unsurprisingly turbulent. There is a paradox in fortunes as Nationalism seems closer now to a tangible move toward Irish unification or at least remaining inside the European Union as Britain moves outside of it, meanwhile Unionism that voted with a majority to Leave seems to have made Northern Ireland's constitutional future ever more precarious. What then, is to be made of Northern Ireland post-Brexit referendum? The analysis has relied on historical institutionalism to elaborate on this. The actual impact of power-sharing is precisely hard to triangulate and especially as with its removal there appears to be no moderation in nationalistic claims, Sinn Féin are pushing ever harder for unification, whilst the DUP have the potential to drive if not a physical border between North and South but at least a mental one. They may succeed in closing the Nationalist backdoor.

Returning to the initial assessment of polarisation and its measurement in Northern Ireland's scholarship. There are three aspects to consider: the analysis of party positions and ideology, survey data tracking community relations, and the horizontal polarisation of the particularized class manifest as ethnic polarisation. There are some gaps in data but related material goes some way to bolstering the assertion that polarisation has not simply increased as a result of the Brexit referendum but that this increase has been manifest in the Belfast Agreements failure to tackle the issue in 1998.

Sinn Féin and the DUP have in some sense been jolted from inertia on the constitutional question. As explained previously, the power-sharing institutions, the fluidity of sovereignty in Northern Ireland have enabled not simply two nationalisms to coexist but two different interpretations of the agreement were able to coexist. This is an aspect of which consociationalism has failed to address, accommodation existed beyond that of party politics. The Belfast Agreement transformed the existence of Nationalism and Unionism from a violent conflict into an institutional one and eventually into an institution dominated by the extremes of the Agreement.

An interesting structural element of the current political impasse is the partial evacuation of minority politics to their kin-states. The fluid nature of sovereignty over Northern Ireland that was established under the Belfast Agreement has facilitated this retreat. The Republic of Ireland can confidently claim to represent the Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland and especially their citizens of which there are over 350,000 of a population of 1.8million. The Belfast Agreement made a legal right for those in Northern Ireland to be entitled to British, Irish or both citizenships. The DUP through their confidence and supply deal with the Conservative Party are able to continue to influence politics in Northern Ireland, a factor that may be inhibiting the reintroduction of direct rule in place of the devolved assembly, that in other times

may have already been initiated as a result of the Stormont Assembly having been collapsed for over a year.

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey previously used to analyse community relations has yet to publish substantial data on community relations post-referendum. However, two points of comparison may be drawn, first the depression relations usually take around times of acute political turbulence and secondly an interpretation of the Leave and Remain vote.

Previous survey data published by ARK-NI demonstrates that at times of particularly high-tension, community relations are negatively affected (Schubotz, 2017). This is evident in 2001 during the Holy Cross Dispute or during the Flag Protests 2012-3 and could be expected to be true of Northern Ireland in the wake of a turbulent 2017. As compared to 2015 when expectations and perceptions of community relations were similar to that at the beginning of the peace process, the outlook may be somewhat more pessimistic.

The suspicion has been that the Brexit referendum was primarily driven by partisan nationalistic ideals. A means of confirming that is to revisit the voters after the referendum to see who would vote in the same direction again. The significance in this is that in the immediate wake of the referendum result when the impact on Northern Ireland and specifically on the border was much clearer there was a consistency in voting direction. 1% of Remain voters changed their minds as compared to 7% of Leave voters, (Gormley-Heenan, et al., 2017), which still leaves a remarkably high percentage of voters who are confirmed in their choice. What can be suggested from this is that in spite of the immediate aftermath of the referendum people where confident in their original decision and in what way it might affect Northern Ireland.

The last consideration in polarisation should be the grass-roots or *particularized* class. Unionism and in particular Loyalism's disaffection with the Belfast Agreement is easily quantified by observing the rise of the anti-Agreement DUP. What is more significant is the

emergence of the new Loyalism and Unionism after the Flag Protests. Although Nationalism in an overwhelming majority voted to Remain the growth of dissident Republicanism is something to note. This could be perceived as opportunism from older anti-Agreement Republicans who left Sinn Féin after the singing of the Belfast Agreement. However, their ability to attract younger Republicans should be something to note in what is a critical juncture in Northern Ireland's politics that has very many possible avenues.

The conditions that pre-existed the Belfast Agreement or were otherwise transformed and institutionalised are of prime importance to understanding the political response to the Brexit referendum. The accommodationist-integrationist debate does not go as far as to give a satisfactory account for the residual effects of the conflict. It has narrowed the focus onto cultural matters, however, it is the structural characteristics of polarisation in Northern Ireland that had survived the Belfast Agreement; continued segregation and socioeconomic deprivation; that have continued to shape society. The benevolence of tribune voting asserted by consociationalists has been not just a function of the Stormont Assembly but with the most recent 2017 Westminster election a sectarian carve-up, a balkanisation (Tonge & Evans, 2018, p. 147), of Northern Ireland has occurred where the majority Nationalist counties along the Irish border returned Sinn Féin MPs, whilst the North-East of the country returned DUP MPs.

Conclusion

Northern Ireland went through its first critical juncture in 1998 at the signing of the Belfast Agreement. The antecedent conditions that in the first place necessitated a critical juncture were ultimately allowed to continue to reproduce themselves in the peace process. The Belfast Agreement was characterised as a more transient moment of conflict management as opposed to a complete transformation. Within the Belfast Agreement mechanism of reproduction, specifically the recognition of two mutually exclusive nationalistic goals and safeguards for two minority cultures, have allowed the antecedent conditions underpinning polarisation to continue to reproduce. The Belfast Agreement set in motion a path-dependent logic of division that would eventually resurface in 2016.

This was not however immediately clear, the continued positive external influence from the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and the European Union provided momentum. The peace process at first was primarily concerned with the full implementation of the Belfast Agreement and especially the conditionalities, like decommissioning, that had not yet been achieved. The 2006 St. Andrews Agreement was thus a much more positive moment that looked as though the peace process was now on the right path.

Since this there has been a long-term decline in outside influence which has revealed the lack of internal momentum within the peace process. This is compounded by the exogenous external shock in the 2008 global financial crisis. There has also been a long-term decline in community relations since the St. Andrews Agreement, which is most visible in moments such as the 2012-3 Flag Protests. Socioeconomic issues in conjunction with segregation were important elements of sustaining the deep ethnonational cleavage. Furthermore, the issue of decommissioning, ended in 2005, has come to be replaced by conflict legacy issues specifically related to truth and reconciliation. These have surfaced at a time when Sinn Féin and the DUP, whom represent

two ends of the ideological pole in Northern Ireland, are the largest parties. The new focus on legacy issues has brought with it deep fear and suspicion that truth and reconciliation will be used by the other side as a means of rewriting the history of the conflict.

The Flag Protests also reveal another aspect of the Belfast Agreement, that is the focus on matters of cultural identity. Northern Ireland has had less legislative competency in matters of economic policy, acting as rule takers from Westminster, which in itself revealed the deep split in allegiances between the ruling parties in Sinn Féin and the DUP. A focus on cultural and identarian issues has exaggerated the irreconcilable differences in the conflict and this, it has been hypothesised, disproportionately effects the *particularized* class in Northern Ireland. It stokes horizontal polarisation.

Consociationalism in conjunction with the centripetal electoral system have so far failed to degrade the existence of polarisation. Specifically, the focus was on the ambiguities inherent in the Belfast Agreement that enabled two divergent interpretations of the agreement to continue to exist. The electoral system similarly enabled the DUP and Sinn Féin to become hegemonic within their respective ethnonational electoral blocks. The deep ethnonational cleavage was too much to be negotiated away through this first critical juncture in 1998 and this failure has resurfaced 18 years later in strong ethnically determined support from Remain and Leave.

The second critical juncture, the Brexit referendum, has triggered some of the more damaging centrifugal forces and has eventually led to political break-down. The breakdown is still ongoing with no real initiative to address this. Both minority communities, or at least their largest representatives in the DUP and Sinn Féin, seem as content with a withdrawal to their kin-states in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland where they both enjoy considerable political representation. There could be a suspicion that a dysfunctional Northern Ireland makes

the prospects of a whole scale change or renegotiation to the Belfast Agreements constitutional settlement more likely.

Direct rule that would have in any other circumstance have been reintroduced has so far failed to materialise. This is likely in large part a consequence of the DUP and Conservative Party's confidence and supply deal. Where if direct rule was introduced there would be serious concerns for the impartiality of the British government's action in Northern Ireland.

An important aspect is both the DUP and Sinn Féin's redoubled efforts at pushing to remove the ambiguity of Northern Ireland's constitutional future in this current juncture. Sinn Féin have called for a border poll and the DUP have an opportunity to close the European backdoor through which Sinn Féin have been operating. The absolutist constitutional stances that the Belfast Agreement sought to negotiate away have re-emerged.

The relationship between critical junctures and critical antecedents is well demonstrated by the Belfast Agreement. That is that the Belfast Agreement was a product of the critical antecedents to which it was seeking to respond. Likewise, those critical antecedents changed in their functioning but not their overall character. It is as likely now that the same issues; continued segregation, socioeconomic deprivation, legacy issues, and above all the polarisation they have sustained; will shape the outcomes of the current critical juncture.

The future of Northern Ireland will remain undecided until the official withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Any '*easy*' fix might not be sensitive enough to the existent ethnonational identities. However, any workable solution may require ever more fluid definitions of sovereignty and representation in a country that has not necessarily embraced the open-ended questions of identity that the Belfast Agreement provided. Rather the space remained open for mutually exclusive nationalisms to pursue their own goals.

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