

STV in Practice

A briefing on the Northern Ireland Assembly Election

21 March 2007

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Northern Ireland Assembly Election Briefing

Key Points

1. STV delivered what people voted for, with each party winning close to their fair share of seats – a good result for proportionality
2. Smaller parties and independent candidates made gains and breakthroughs in this election - a good result for independent voices
3. Turnout remained high, at 63.5%, despite political uncertainty about the future of the Assembly
4. The number of spoilt ballots fell dramatically, by 40% compared with the last Assembly election and only 60 more than in the last First Past the Post election – a success for voter education and empowerment
5. One quarter of candidates were elected at the first stage of the count, the remainder relied on transfers to reach the quota – transfers mattered and voters used them
6. There were very few wasted votes – the vast majority of votes contributed to the election of at least one candidate
7. Despite parties selecting few female candidates, the number of women in the Assembly increased by one, plus the first BME representative was returned – a good result for under-represented groups
8. The media and political parties played a key role in explaining the voting system and election results to the public

Background: The campaign

After four years of faltering political talks, this election was declared by the Secretary of State, Peter Hain, to give parties a renewed mandate to form a shared government. The Northern Ireland Assembly had met only in shadow form for a few months since voters had last elected Assembly Members in November 2003. Hain was determined that should no workable coalition be formed by 26 March, the Assembly would be permanently put on ice. This was the tenth election in as many years for Northern Ireland's electorate.

Standing for the Assembly requires a lower deposit (£150) than standing for Westminster or the Scottish Parliament (£500). Multi-member constituencies also boost the number of candidates standing, as parties put up several candidates in their strongest areas. Instead of marginal constituencies, there are marginal seats in each constituency. This means parties have a reason to campaign across the country at a grassroots level.

While Northern Ireland's parties have adopted more advanced campaign techniques, making use of the internet, blogs, phone canvassing and text messages, these have not replaced traditional methods of communicating with voters. In East Belfast, the small Progressive Unionist Party canvassed 13,000 households (*Belfast Telegraph* 9/3/07). Large numbers of party posters were hung on lamp posts across all 18 constituencies. A straw poll of voters carried out by ERS staff in Northern Ireland on polling day found that a majority felt they had plenty of information about parties, candidates and their manifestoes as well as how to cast their votes.



Background: the count

The count took place in eight centres across Northern Ireland. Nine constituencies were declared on the first day of counting and nine adjourned on Thursday evening and resumed counting on Friday. The media made much of the length of the count, perhaps not surprising as there were scores of journalists at the count centres over the two days with time on their hands between count stages! It is understandable that a hand-counted STV election will take longer as the count involves a number of different stages to ensure voters' views are fully taken into account. In Scotland, where electronic voting will be used, this will not be an issue.

Northern Ireland counts are notoriously slow, irrespective of what voting system is being used. Traditionally, counting does not begin until 9am on the day after polling day, due to the perceived risk of unrest within and outwith counting centres. In the 2005 General Election, it was almost 10pm on Friday before the final Northern Ireland result was known from this First Past the Post count.

Turnout and Valid Votes

Turnout

Turnout in the Assembly election was 63.5%, close to the 64% in the 2003 poll. Participation in Assembly elections has never dipped below 60%: considerably higher than the 49% Scottish Parliament turnout and the 39% Welsh Assembly turnout. The buoyant turnout figures are even more remarkable when the political backdrop of the two most recent Northern Ireland Assembly elections is considered: two out of three voters are prepared to take part in an election with no guarantee that those elected would form an executive or even take their seats.

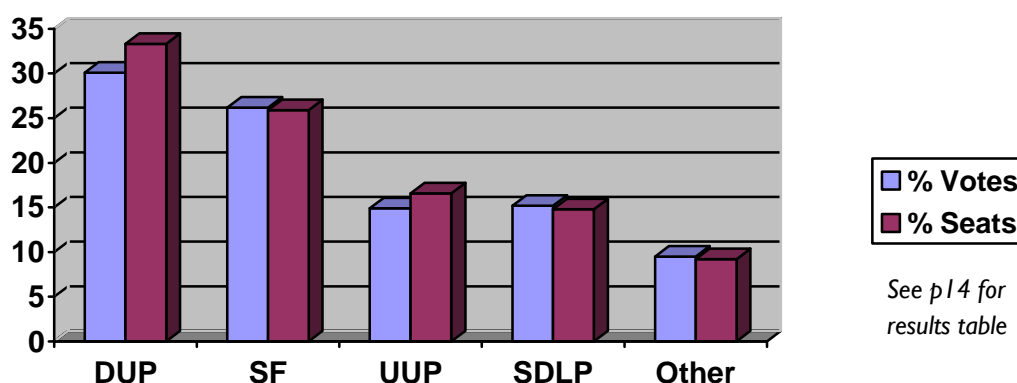
Spoilt ballots

The number of spoilt ballots fell significantly in every constituency without exception, with an overall reduction of 39%. The spoilage rate was down to 0.89% of all votes cast, in line with the proportion of spoilt ballots in the 2005 Westminster election, 0.85%.

Analysis of the spoilt ballots and public opinion won't be available for some time, but it is possible to spot some relevant factors. In 2003 and 2005, the public education campaigns focused on new identification rules for voters. In 2007, a key message was a reminder of how the STV system worked. There was significant coverage in newspapers and on broadcast media on the day before polling day, focusing on the mechanics of voting under STV. Also, the added sophistication of party information and campaign literature, in an effort to maximise the seats won, drew attention to the system itself. Traditionally, Northern Ireland elections have seen a small amount of deliberate spoilage of ballot papers. In 2007, there were a greater number of candidates standing against both the unionist and republican mainstream and these provided another home for protest votes.

Under STV, voters can express a preference for as many or as few candidates as they wish. A vote which is non-transferable, i.e. in which no further preferences are expressed, is not considered an invalid vote.

How Proportional Were the Results?



STV delivered what people voted for. The DUP, UUP and Alliance party secured slightly more seats than their share of first preference votes (3%, 1.5% and 1.3% respectively). This is because they received transfers in the later stages of the count. Sinn Fein received 26% of both first preference votes and seats. The SDLP slightly outpolled the UUP but received two fewer seats, due to some leakage from candidates to other parties and fewer transfers. However, when the difference in the SDLP share of votes (15.2%) is compared with its share of seats (14.8%), it's clear the result was very close to an accurate reflection of support for the party.

Smaller parties and independent candidates also made gains and breakthroughs in this election, showing that the Single Transferable Vote can help new political voices to gain representation. The Alliance Party once again did very well with their small vote share, winning one or two more seats than strictly proportional. In West Tyrone Independent Kieran Deeny secured his seat with transfers from across the political spectrum. Similarly, transfers helped the Greens win their first ever Assembly seat and ensured the PUP held on in East Belfast. Overall, the result was a good one for proportionality, for both the larger players and independent voices.

By way of comparison, the last First Past the Post election in Northern Ireland resulted in big differences between the share of votes and the share of seats. The DUP won half the seats with one third of the votes, while the UUP won just one seat with 17.7 per cent of the vote. Whereas the STV Assembly election results since 1998 have reflected accurately the growth in votes for the DUP and Sinn Fein, the Westminster election magnified the polarisation of politics in Northern Ireland. The north east of the province was left with no nationalist representation, with the exception of two Belfast seats, while the south west of the province was left with no unionist representation.

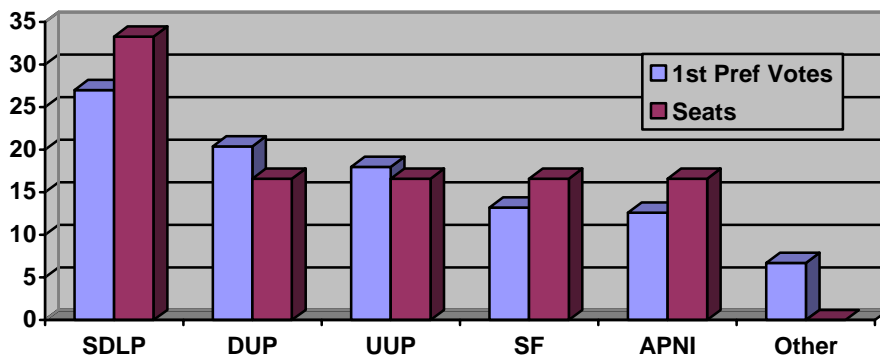
In the constituencies: Votes Counted

STV combines a fair proportional result across Northern Ireland with broadly proportional results at a local level. This means that in each constituency, the number of seats won was an approximate reflection of the votes cast in that local community and that the vast majority of voters ended up with some representation for their chosen candidate or party in their local area.

Across Northern Ireland, 75% of first preference votes were cast for winning candidates. A further 12% of first preferences were cast for parties which won some representation in a given constituency. That leaves just 12% of voters with no representation from their chosen candidate and party in their own constituency. An even smaller number, 5.5% of voters, cast first preference votes for parties or candidates that received no seats at all: 94.5% of voters backed a party which received some representation in Northern Ireland.

This shows that virtually all first preference votes counted under STV and there were few wasted votes. For the small minority who didn't see their first choice candidate elected, they had a second chance to ensure their vote counted by using lower preferences: the majority chose to do this. The proportional and preferential aspects of STV make it a system which ensures votes count very effectively.

Case Study: Few Wasted Votes in South Belfast

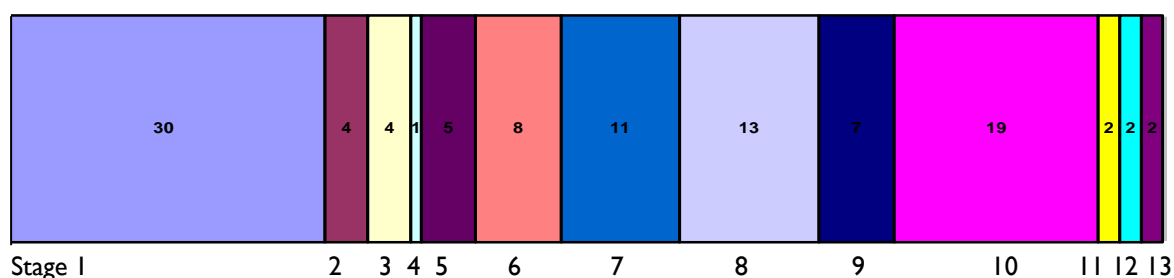


In South Belfast, the six seats were shared between five parties; the SDLP which had the largest votes share (27%) won two seats. Both the DUP and the UUP had more candidates standing than the number of seats they won, so some of these voters would not have seen their favourite representative returned. Three out of four South Belfast voters (77%) cast their first preference for a candidate who was eventually elected. A massive 93% of voters cast their first preference for a party which received some representation, even if their preferred candidate was not elected.

Only 6.7% of voters gave their first preference vote to parties or independents who won no representation in this constituency, and the majority of those transferred to other candidates after their first choice was excluded, so still had a say in the election result.

In this same constituency in the 2005 Westminster election, the SDLP candidate was elected with 32% of the vote. The remaining 68% of votes were essentially ineffective.

At what stage were candidates elected?



As the above graph shows, the final make-up of the Assembly evolved over the course of the count stages. Just over a quarter of candidates were elected on the first stage of the count; the rest were reliant on transfers to reach the quota.

The vast majority of those eventually elected were in the top six candidates on first preference votes. The standing after the first stage gave some indication of who would be the eventual winners, but it was no guarantee. It shouldn't come as a surprise that those popular candidates who attracted first preference votes should also attract transfers. Across the 18 constituencies, 5 candidates leap-frogged past higher-placed candidates to get elected from either seventh or eighth position. All of those who finished the first stage in first, second, third or fourth position were elected by the final stage of the count, but a few from fifth and sixth position were overtaken and missed out on a seat.

The candidate who topped the poll in a given constituency received a little extra media attention during the count, but the spotlight tended to be short-lived as the final results emerged. Looking at who topped the poll could be misleading in terms of overall party support, as parties stood different numbers of candidates. For example in South Antrim, the Sinn Fein candidate came first in first preference votes, but the party was third overall.

Transfers matter

With just 30 candidates reaching the quota on first preference votes, the second and lower preferences came into play and had an impact on the final election result. An ERS straw poll of voters on polling day found that those questioned had expressed a preference for on average six candidates, though a number had taken the opportunity to rank all the candidates standing.

Across the 18 constituencies, a massive 97% of votes were available for transfer at the first re-distribution of votes. These transfers mostly came from candidates elected at the first stage with many more votes than they needed. In four of these counts the candidates with surplus or excluded did not have other running mates to transfer to and yet the vast majority of voters still chose to express a preference for a candidate from another party. At later stages, transfer rates remained high, as the example from Upper Bann below shows. As the count progressed, some ballot papers may have moved several times as transfers were redistributed. Some preferences could not have been transferred because the candidate next in line was already elected or eliminated.

Who transferred to whom?

Of those elected at the first stage, a majority of transfers went to party colleagues where there was one. From DUP winners, 83% of transfers went to DUP running mates. Sinn Fein and SDLP candidates elected at the first stage had smaller surpluses, but passed on transfers to party colleagues at a rate of 79%. Most of the UUP winners were elected at the later stages of the count and were more likely to be in receipt of transfers than distributing them.

A majority of voters continued to express preferences after all the candidates from the top party had been elected or eliminated (indicated as transferable in the table below). Non-transferable votes are those in which no further preference is expressed or in which none of the candidates for whom a further preference is expressed is still in the race (they may already be elected or excluded).

Party	Transferable Votes	Main Beneficiaries
DUP	71%	UUP received two thirds
Sinn Fein	97%	SDLP received 80%
SDLP	92%	Alliance and Sinn Fein
UUP	78%	DUP received two thirds

Source: BBC1 Vote 07 programme, Friday 9 March 2007

Examples from further constituencies of transfers affecting outcome

East Antrim	The UUP won two seats only because they attracted more Alliance and UKUP transfers than the DUP
East Londonderry	The SDLP candidate Dallat did not reach the quota with transfers from his eliminated party colleague – Sinn Fein and Alliance transfers made the difference
Foyle	The rate of transfers from outside the party determined which of the SDLP candidates was elected
Lagan Valley	Alliance candidate would have lost out to a fourth DUP seat had he not received SDLP transfers
North Down	Green candidate would not have been elected if he had not picked up at least 400 transfers from excluded SDLP and independent candidates
South Antrim	SDLP candidate came from 7 th place to take a seat with transfers from his party colleague, plus Sinn Fein, UUP and Green transfers.
Strangford	SDLP candidate narrowed the gap between 6 th and 7 th place from 400 votes to just 31 after attracting 1480 transfer votes over the course of the count. Had the 43 non-transferable votes from the excluded Sinn Fein candidate instead gone to him, he would have won the seat.
West Belfast	SDLP candidate Attwood could not have won with transfers from his eliminated party colleague alone – Sinn Fein transfers made the difference
West Tyrone	Independent Kieran Deeny relied on transfers from both sides of the political divide, while the second DUP candidate was elected with the eliminated UUP transfers.

Case Study: Upper Bann Transfers

At least two thirds of ballot papers at each stage of the count could be transferred, in other words a further preference was listed and the vote could be transferred after the elimination or election of a candidate. This meant when a candidate was elected with more votes than they needed or excluded because they were in last place, their supporters could still influence the outcome of the election.

Stage	Transferable Votes
2	96%
3	97%
4	77%
5	99%
6	95%
7	87%
8	68%
9	94%
10	99%
11	92%
12	99%

Stages 4,6 and 7 represent the exclusion of independent candidates, or candidates who were the only ones from their party, yet the vast majority of voters still express further preferences. By the later stages, some ballot papers will have a number of preferences counted already, so it is striking that the transfer rates remain so high to the end of the count.

As the stages of the count progressed, the order of the remaining candidates changed several times. The fortunes of Sinn Fein candidate, Dessie Ward demonstrate this. In first preferences, Ward came in sixth place, but well below the quota. When his running mate was elected, a majority of his surplus votes went to Ward, enough for him to overtake the DUP's Stephen Moutray to take fifth place. His vote tally crept up at stages four and five when other nationalist candidates were excluded. It was only at stage 7 when an independent unionist candidate with more than 2,000 votes was excluded that Moutray drew even with Ward again, with just three votes between them. Ward remained in sixth place until the final stage of the count, when DUP transfers took the UUP's George Savage past him. Had DUP voters failed to transfer to the remaining UUP candidate, Ward would have been returned as the last candidate.

Dolores Kelly was elected after receiving transfers from her excluded running mate, Pat McAleenan, but it wasn't enough on its own to bring her across the threshold. Her position was only secure when she received more transfers from the excluded Green candidate than any other candidate.

UUP candidate George Savage was next in line to be eliminated at stage 9 when transfers from his party colleague Samuel Gardiner took him past the DUP's McCrum. In the end, Savage would not have been elected without transfers from the DUP's Stephen Moutray, passed on to him as the last unionist candidates in the race.

Parties standing more than one candidate

With six seats up for grabs in each constituency, parties can hope to pick up multiple seats in their strongest areas. This maximises voter choice, because voters can choose between candidates as well as parties. As party strategists work out how many candidates to stand, they'll consider how much support they have in the constituency: support is not limited to first preference votes as transfers also contribute towards a candidate reaching the quota. Just as the quota is the target that each candidate will be striving for to secure a seat, so the share of the vote needed to achieve a number of quotas is the target for a party hoping to pick up multiple seats.

In six-seat constituencies, the quota is the total number of votes cast divided by seven and rounded up. It represents 14.3% of the vote in any given constituency. If a party is hoping to win two seats, its target would be 29% of the vote. Three seats would be within reach if a party won three quotas or 43% of the vote. Four seats would require 57% (four times the quota) while five quotas or 71% is a remarkable level of support for any party.

Below are the seats in which a party picked up three or more of the six seats:

Party	Constituency	% 1 st Preference Vote	Seats Won
Sinn Fein	West Belfast	70%	5
DUP	Strangford	50%	4
DUP	North Antrim	49%	3
DUP	Lagan Valley	49%	3
Sinn Fein	Mid Ulster	48%	3
DUP	East Antrim	45%	3
Sinn Fein	West Tyrone	45%	3
Sinn Fein	Newry & Armagh	42%	3
DUP	East Londonderry	40%	3
DUP	East Belfast	38%	3
SDLP	Foyle	37%	3

With the exception of the Sinn Fein candidates and the DUP in Strangford, in each of these examples, the party stood one more candidate than the number elected. During the count, the candidates from each party picked up support in the form of transfer votes passed on from other candidates to reach the quota. (Those candidates who fall short of the quota and do not have wider support, thereby attracting quotas, do not get elected).

The number of seats won was affected by the following variables:

- Number of candidates standing for the party
- Number of first preference votes received
- how many transfers were received from other parties and independents
- how other parties and candidates polled
- how the party's vote was divided between its candidates

Vote Management

The art of managing the distribution of votes between candidates from the same party is called vote management. While even the most efficient vote distribution cannot generate seats where there are not sufficient votes, it can stretch a party's support just enough to bring an extra candidate over the quota. In the examples on the previous page, the parties have won enough first preference votes to be within reach of three quotas but it is not guaranteed.

This election demonstrated new levels of vote management sophistication for Northern Ireland's parties. Their experience demonstrated the key rules of vote management are:

- Divide the vote between your candidates as evenly as possible: this protects candidates from the risk of elimination before they have picked up transfers
- Persuade the right number of supporters to transfer first preference votes from high-profile candidates to new runners
- Know your vote with precision: how many votes you expect to get in each part of the constituency from canvass returns and ballot box-by-ballot box tally returns from previous elections
- Divide the constituency into zones with roughly the same number of party votes – each candidate campaigns vigorously in their zone
- Tailor posters, literature and doorstep messages to what you need voters in each zone to do - Informing your electorate of your strategy is essential: most party supporters will want to see the party win as many seats as it can, but they will also want to vote for their favourite candidate.

ENSURE ALL 3 DUP CANDIDATES ARE ELECTED

The PR voting system works best if we can evenly share the total party vote over our three candidates. We have taken professional advice and weighted the number of polling stations among our candidates to produce a result which will maximise our opportunity of having all three elected.

While, of course, every DUP voter is free to vote for his or her own preference of candidate we would urge everyone to vote as set out below in order to help get all our candidates elected.

WE URGE YOU TO VOTE FOR ALL THREE

IF YOU VOTE AT THE FOLLOWING POLLING STATIONS:	IF YOU VOTE AT THE FOLLOWING POLLING STATIONS:	IF YOU VOTE AT THE FOLLOWING POLLING STATIONS:
Strand Primary School St Joseph's Primary School Bloomfield Methodist Hall St Christopher's C of I Hall St Matthew's Boys Primary School Belmont Primary School Greenwood Primary School Knock Presbyterian Church Hall St Moluag Church Hall Dundela Infants' School <i>we ask that you vote</i> 1 BROWNE 2 NEWTON 3 ROBINSON	Tullycarnet Primary School Gilnahirk Primary School Braniel Primary School Leadhill Primary School Knockbreda Primary School Cregagh Primary School Lisnasharragh Primary School <i>we ask that you vote</i> 1 ROBINSON 2 NEWTON 3 BROWNE	Beechfield Primary School Ashfield Girls' High School The Aslan Centre (Church of Ireland Hall), Knocknagoney St Donard's Youth Hall Clara Park Tenants' Hall Euston Street Primary School Orangefield Primary School Elmgrove Primary School Avoniel Primary School <i>we ask that you vote</i> 1 NEWTON 2 BROWNE 3 ROBINSON

Getting it Right

Case Study: Sinn Fein Vote Management in West Belfast

Sinn Fein has established itself as the expert in vote management in a convincing fashion. Perhaps the most remarkable result came in West Belfast. While this constituency is a fervent stronghold for Sinn Fein they targeted five of the six available seats. In the 2003 elections, Sinn Fein secured four seats but to take another would be quite a feat, not least because West Belfast encompasses a significant portion of the staunchly loyalist Shankill, whose voters had contributed to the successful election of the DUP's Diane Dodds last time around. The strategy in West Belfast would only be successful if the huge personal vote of Gerry Adams could be diluted and shared evenly among his four running partners. The results demonstrated that the strategy had worked almost flawlessly. With a quota of 4,828, Sinn Fein achieved the following in the first stage of the count:

SINN FEIN CANDIDATE	FIRST PREFERENCE VOTES
GERRY ADAMS	6,029
SUE RAMSAY	4,715
PAUL MASKEY	4,368
JENNIFER McCANN	4,265
FRA McCANN	4,254

Thus, Gerry Adams was elected on first preferences and the redistribution of his surplus brought Ramsay over the quota and added to the totals for the other three candidates. By the end of the count all five Sinn Fein candidates had been successfully returned with Sinn Fein surpluses transferring from one candidate to the others with relatively little leakage to other parties.



Although a very successful election for the DUP, better vote management might have resulted in more gains. The party seems to have been less effective at ensuring a spread of support for all their candidates standing in a constituency. Their highest profile candidates attracted more votes than they needed, but this left some of their lower placed candidates too far below the quota to catch up. In Lagan Valley, Jeffrey Donaldson's personal vote (the highest first preference vote across Northern Ireland) was a whopping 9,793, passing the quota of 5,976 with ease. His three running partners lagged behind however with 3,471, 3,457 and 3,377 respectively. While there was no guarantee that the DUP could take four of the seats, had Donaldson's personal vote been less emphatic, the chances of this happening would have been greater.

Good vote management is particularly important for the DUP and Sinn Fein as they have in the past received fewer transfers while centre ground parties may pick up transfers from a wider range of candidates.

Poor Vote Management also gets the blame where parties appeared to win fewer seats than might have been expected. In reality poor vote management cannot really lose a party seats that it should have won; it can only fail to win them more. Where parties fell short of expectations, it tended to be that their vote was lower than predicted or they failed to attract transfers to make up the shortfall. Another factor is poor relations between the party's candidates: this reduces the number of transfers to party colleagues and increases leakage to other candidates.

Case study: SDLP miss out in West Tyrone

In 2003, the SDLP won 14.6% of the vote in West Tyrone: around one quota and one candidate was elected. The sitting candidate was de-selected in favour of two other candidates. Then the incumbent was imposed by the central party, creating some bad feeling and rivalry among the three candidates.

In 2007, the vote dipped slightly to 14.5%, again around one quota but the party missed out on winning a seat. When the two lower placed candidates were eliminated, the remaining SDLP candidate did pick up a majority of transfers, but more than 1,000 leaked away to other candidates or were not transferable. Had the votes stayed within the party, she would not have missed out on a seat.

Excerpt from the local paper: "This was not a case of vote mismanagement, it wasn't even a case of vote wandering (which would possibly have registered as votes for Dr Deeny), this was simply Strabane -v- Omagh - bad feeling as expressed by some 500 plumpers in the Strabane area." Ulster Herald 15 March 2007 ('Plumpers' refers to voters who vote for only one candidate and don't use further preferences)

Case Study: South Belfast unionist votes

Poor vote management was blamed for the failure of both unionist parties to pick up a second seat in South Belfast. Two quotas is equivalent to around 28.5% of the vote: this is the target for winning two seats. In reality, both parties were quite far short of this. The DUP's two candidates attracted 22% of the vote between them, and perhaps could have won a second seat with transfers from other parties. The UUP's three candidates won only 18% of the vote between them, so had little chance of a second seat.

Vote Shares for winning and losing candidates

The first stage of the count involves the calculation of the quota which candidates need to reach to get elected. The quota figure is a useful guide to how many seats a party can hope to secure. With six Assembly Members to be returned, one quota is around 14% of votes polled in each constituency. This share of the vote guarantees election, but candidates who almost reach that level are well placed to secure a seat on transfers.

Every candidate who polled 11% or more of first preferences in their constituency was elected. The highest first preference vote shares that did not result in election were as follows:

Name	Constituency	Share of First preference votes	Impact of votes
Diane Dodds	West Belfast	10.8%	No running mate
Sean Lynch	Fermanagh South Tyrone	10.1%	Running mates elected
Sharon Haughey	Newry & Armagh	9.1%	Running mate elected
Derek Hussey	West Tyrone	8.9%	No running mate
Joe Boyle	Strangford	8.5%	No running mate
Paul Givan	Lagan Valley	8.1%	Running mates elected

In half these cases, the candidate's transfers at least contributed to the election of one or more party colleagues. While these candidates polled moderately well in first preference votes, they failed to attract sufficient transfers to reach the quota.

On the other hand, a candidate who attracts substantial transfers from party colleagues or others can be elected from a low number of first preference votes. This tended to happen where a high-profile party colleague received more votes than they needed to be elected or where a party runs more candidates than the number of seats they expect to win. These candidates benefited from the transfer of surplus votes from party colleagues (indicated below with 'surplus'), the transfer of votes from eliminated party colleagues (elimination) or both:

Name	Constituency	1 st Preference votes before transfers	Type of transfers received
George Savage	Upper Bann	5.1%	Surplus/elimination
Ken Robinson	East Antrim	6.3%	Surplus/elimination
Mary Bradley	Foyle	7.0%	Mainly transfers from outside the party
Tommy Burns	South Antrim	7.1%	Elimination
Alan McFarland	North Down	7.3%	Elimination
Alban Maguinness	North Belfast	7.4%	Elimination

Who was elected?

The result saw a small increase in the number of women in the Assembly, up from 18 to 19. There were two different stories, though: in some areas women were the front runners, flying the flag for their parties and topping the poll. In some other constituencies, parties failed to select women in winnable seats so the voters had no chance to elect them.

Some good news stories:

- In Fermanagh South Tyrone two prominent women were leading the field and were elected ahead of male party colleagues and any other candidates.
- The same happened in the South Down constituency.
- The DUP's Iris Robinson topped the poll in Strangford and the party returned another woman on transfers.
- Seven out of the 24 Assembly Members for Belfast constituencies are women.
- Women were particularly prominent in East Belfast with the Alliance deputy leader Naomi Long and PUP party leader Dawn Purvis both polling well.
- The election saw Anna Lo returned in South Belfast, as the Assembly's first representation from an ethnic minority community and the first Chinese-born person elected to any UK Assembly.
- Two women were elected in Foyle, West Tyrone returned its first ever female MLA and Mid Ulster also returned one woman.

In other constituencies, women were all but absent from the campaign and the results. Lagan Valley, North Down, Newry and Armagh, East Londonderry and the three Antrim seats did not return any women. In Newry & Armagh, North Antrim, South Antrim and East Londonderry, the SDLP women selected missed out to male party colleagues. The UUP's only female candidate, Marion Smith in North Down, suffered a similar fate. In East Antrim no women were selected at all. Parties need to look again at selecting women in winnable seats and then backing them during the campaign, so they are not simply token or 'sweeper' candidates, put on the ballot paper just to get the vote out to transfer to party colleagues.

Of the 108 Assembly Members elected, 29 will be new to Stormont. Seventy-six were elected in 2003 (though two switched constituencies) while three joined the Assembly as substitutes part way through.

The youngest Assembly Member is 25 year old Daithi Mackay (Sinn Fein), elected in North Antrim. He almost topped the poll, challenging the Assembly's oldest Member, DUP leader Ian Paisley (81 years of age). The youngest candidate was 19 year old Sean Mitchell, who challenged the law to be able to stand. He was not elected.

Reporting on the election results

Both the election campaign and the results received substantial coverage in the Northern Ireland press and broadcast media. The BBC had live TV and radio coverage throughout the first day and half of the count and had a presence at each counting centre. The BBC also provided a text message service with election results, the first time the broadcaster has done this for a UK election.

Daily newspapers gave constituency-by-constituency coverage of the results, with first preference votes for each candidate and the eventual winners as well as colour pieces from the counting centres.

- The News Letter gave over 28 pages to election results and analysis on Friday and Saturday, including the first preference vote, stage elected and percentage vote share for every candidate and 2003 election results
- The Irish News produced an 8 page pullout on Saturday with results and analysis from each constituency
- The Belfast Telegraph's morning and evening editions (of which there are three) were updated throughout the two days of the count to give details of first preference votes for each candidate, turnout and quota, plus an account of which candidates were elected and excluded at each stage of the count.
- The Irish Times had the most detailed coverage, publishing tables with the number of transfers and vote totals at each stage of the count in every constituency, with an 8 page pull out in the Saturday edition
- Irish broadcaster RTE likewise published stage-by-stage figures for each stage of the count in every constituency on its website <http://www.rte.ie/news/nielections2007/>
- The BBC published first preference votes, percentage vote shares and who was elected in each constituency (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2007/nielection/html/main.stm>)
- Ulster Television's website carried up-to-date news about how each count was progressing (see: <http://u.tv/featuresite/indepth.asp?pt=n&id=80390&siteid=17>)

Results by party

Party	First Preference Votes	Percentage	Seats Won	% Seats
DUP	207,721	30.1%	36	33.3%
Sinn Fein	180,573	26.2%	28	25.9%
SDLP	103,145	15.2%	16	14.8%
UUP	105,164	14.9%	18	16.7%
Alliance	36,139	5.2%	7	6.5%
Green	11,985	1.7%	1	0.9%
PUP	3,822	0.6%	1	0.9%
UKUP	10,452	1.5%	0	0
Conservatives	3,457	0.5%	0	0
Other/Independents	27,855	4.0%	1	0.9%
Total	690,313		108	