



BRIEFING PAPER

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Northern Ireland Assembly Elections: 2016

By Richard Cracknell

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Tables and underlying data in this briefing are available as Excel files via:
<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7575>

Abbreviations:

Alliance – Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
DUP – Democratic Unionist Party
MLA – Member of the Legislative Assembly
SDLP – Social Democratic Labour Party
TUV – Traditional Unionist Voice
UKIP – UK Independence Party
UK Unionists – UK Unionist Party
UUP – Ulster Unionist Party
... - not applicable

Editor

Richard Keen

Contributing Authors:

Richard Cracknell

Matt Keep

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Summary

Elections on 5 May 2016 resulted in little change in the party composition of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Changes to the number of Members for individual parties comprised one or two seats.

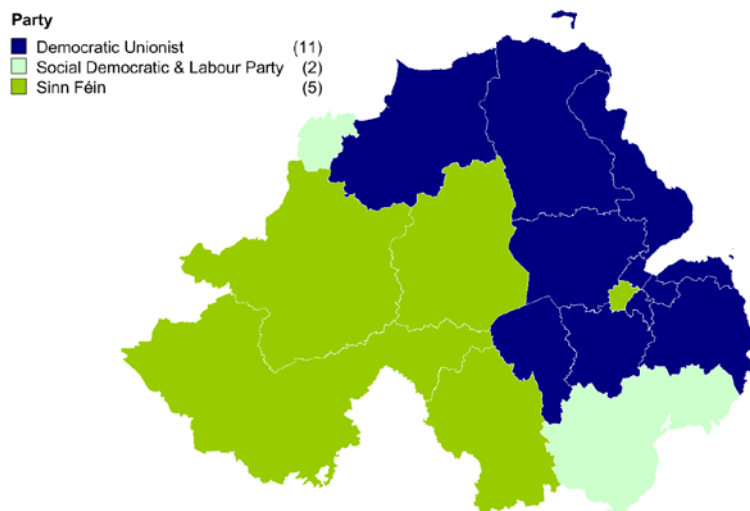
Following the 2016 elections the two largest parties in the Assembly remain the DUP (38 MLAs) and Sinn Féin (28 MLAs).

2016 Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly

	Seats won		1st preference votes		
	2016	Change from 2011	Number	%	Change from 2011 %pts
DUP	38	0	202,567	29.2%	-0.8%
Sinn Féin	28	-1	166,785	24.0%	-2.9%
UUP	16	0	87,302	12.6%	-0.7%
SDLP	12	-2	83,364	12.0%	-2.2%
Alliance	8	0	48,447	7.0%	-0.7%
People before Profit Alliance	2	2	13,761	2.0%	1.2%
TUV	1	0	23,776	3.4%	0.9%
Green Party	2	1	18,718	2.7%	1.8%
Independent	1	0	33,526	4.8%	2.0%
Total	108		694,310	100.0%	

108 Members were elected by Single Transferrable Vote, 6 Members for each of 18 constituencies. The Democratic Unionist Party had the highest share of first preference votes in 11 constituencies, Sinn Féin in 5 and the SDLP in 2.

Highest share of 1st preference votes



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30 women were elected to the Assembly; 27.5% of MLAs are women, the highest number and proportion ever

The People before Profit Alliance won two seats, their first in the Assembly.

Turnout was 54.2%, lower than any previous Assembly election since 1998 (based on valid votes).

1. Background

The Northern Ireland Assembly elections on 5 May 2016 were the second to take place following a full term of the Assembly. The first full term elections had been on 5 May 2011. Previously, there were Assembly elections in 2007, 2003 and 1998, but these had been against a backdrop of suspension of devolution and the Assembly not convening.

The Assembly was first elected in July 1998, but devolution was suspended on 14 October 2002. Under the terms of the *Northern Ireland Act 2000* Assembly elections took place on 26 November 2003. The Assembly elected then convened in May 2006 solely for the purpose of determining ministers, but without any legislative powers. The Assembly, elected on 26 November 2003, was dissolved on 30 January 2007 and elections took place in March 2007.

As part of the Belfast Agreement concluded on 10 April 1998,¹ the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system was adopted for the Northern Ireland Assembly. STV was already in use for local and European Parliament elections in Northern Ireland.

How many representatives are elected?

There are 108 Members of the Assembly (MLAs); six for each of 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland. These areas are the same as the current constituencies used to elect the 18 Northern Ireland Members of the UK Parliament.

A party standing in an Assembly election can put forward as many candidates as it wants per constituency.

What is the system used to elect MLAs?

Under the system of Single Transferrable Vote, voters have as many preferences as there are candidates. They mark the candidates 1, 2, 3, etc. in order of preference. Voters do not have to state a preference for all candidates – they can choose as many or as few as they like.

A candidate is elected as soon as they reach the 'quota' computed according to a particular formula, known as the 'Droop' Quota²:

$$\text{Droop quota} = \frac{\text{Votes}}{\text{Seats} + 1} + 1$$

For NI Assembly elections, the top line of this formula is the total number of valid ballot papers; the bottom line is seven (six seats per constituency plus one). A candidate who has reached or exceeded the quota is deemed elected. Any surplus votes are then redistributed fractionally to the other candidates on the basis of the second choices expressed by electors. The same operation is carried out in the case of candidates placed last, who are eliminated. If there are still seats to be filled after the second count, the process continues.

¹ Cm 3883 1998 Otherwise known as the 'Good Friday Agreement'

² Devised in 1868 and named after the English lawyer and mathematician Henry Richmond Droop

STV in practice:

1 The ballot paper lists the names of the candidates from each party. Voters put a '1' next to the name of their favoured candidate, a '2' next to the name of their next favoured candidate and so on. They stop when they cannot decide between the candidates - they do not need to vote for them all.

2 The number of votes which candidates need to be elected (the 'quota') is calculated by dividing the total number of valid ballot papers by the number of people to be elected plus one.

3 The ballot papers are sorted into piles according to the first preferences. If any candidate has more first preference votes than the quota, they are elected.

4 The next stage is to transfer any surplus votes for these elected candidates, i.e. the difference between their vote and the quota needed to be elected. To avoid the problem of deciding which of the votes are surplus, all ballot papers are transferred but at a reduced value so that the total adds up to the number of surplus votes.

5 After all the surpluses have been transferred, more candidates might have achieved the quota to be elected. If they have not, then the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded and their votes are transferred to the voters' second preferences.

6 This process of transferring surpluses and excluding candidates continues until enough candidates have reached the quota to fill all the places to be elected.

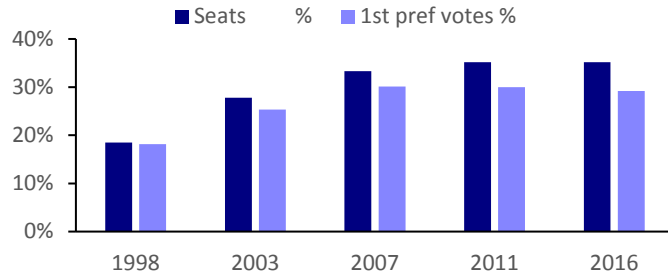
[Adapted from: ERS [What is STV?](#)]

Democratic Unionist Party

- In 2016, the DUP retained its position as the largest Party in the Assembly, which it had been since 2003.
- In 2016 DUP candidates had 29% of first preference votes, down slightly on 2007 and 2011.
- Just over 1 in 5 (21%) of DUP MLAs are women; up on 13% in 2011, but a lower ratio than any of the other main parties.

Summary 1998 to 2016

		1998	2003	2007	2011	2016
Seats	No.	20	30	36	38	38
	%	18.5%	27.8%	33.3%	35.2%	35.2%
1st pref votes	No.	146,917	177,944	207,721	198,436	202,567
	%	18.1%	25.3%	30.1%	30.0%	29.2%
Women MLAs	No.	1	3	3	5	8
	%	5%	10%	8%	13%	21%

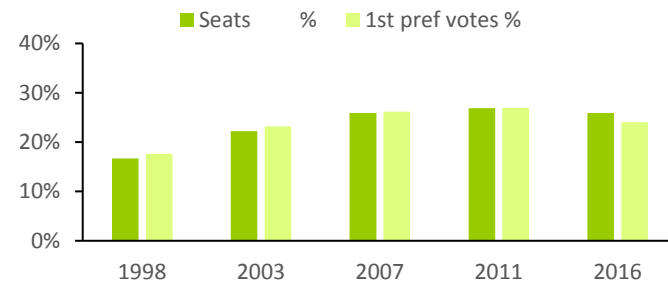


Sinn Féin

- In 2016, Sinn Féin remained the second largest Party in the Assembly.
- Sinn Féin's 24.0% share of 1st preference votes was 2.9% points less than 2011.
- Over one-third (36%) of Sinn Féin MLAs are women.

Summary 1998 to 2016

		1998	2003	2007	2011	2016
Seats	No.	18	24	28	29	28
	%	16.7%	22.2%	25.9%	26.9%	25.9%
1st pref votes	No.	142,858	162,758	180,573	178,222	166,785
	%	17.6%	23.2%	26.2%	26.9%	24.0%
Women MLAs	No.	5	9	8	8	10
	%	28%	38%	29%	28%	36%

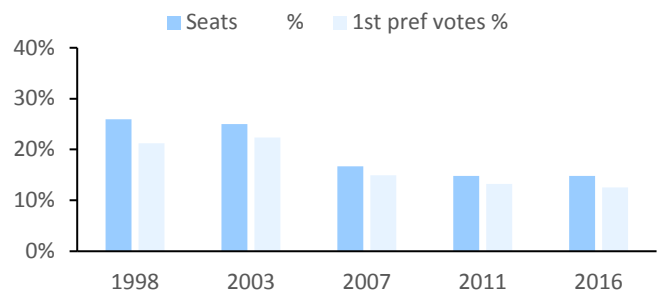


Ulster Unionist Party

- In 2016, the UUP's share of first preference votes fell to 12.6%, its lowest ever.
- The UUP won 16 seats in 2016, the same as in 2011.
- One-in-four (25%) of UUP MLAs are women, the highest proportion ever.

Summary 1998 to 2016

		1998	2003	2007	2011	2016
Seats	No.	28	27	18	16	16
	%	25.9%	25.0%	16.7%	14.8%	14.8%
1st pref votes	No.	172,225	156,931	103,145	87,531	87,302
	%	21.3%	22.3%	14.9%	13.2%	12.6%
Women MLAs	No.	2	1	0	2	4
	%	7%	4%	0%	13%	25%

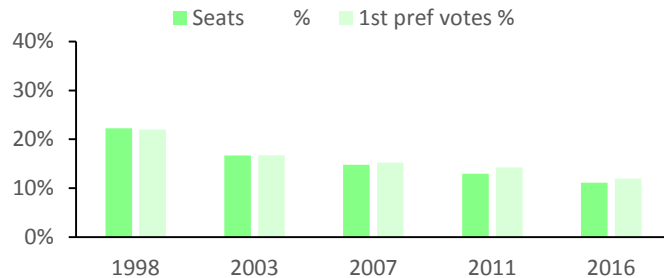


Social Democratic & Labour Party

- In 2016, the decline in the SDLP seats continued. Its 12 seats are half the 24 it had at the start of the Assembly in 1998.
- The SDLP's share of 1st preference votes was 12.0% in 2016, 10% points less than in 1998.
- The SDLP has three women MLAs. This is similar in absolute terms to earlier elections, although as a proportion women have risen as a percentage of a declining total.

Summary 1998 to 2016

		1998	2003	2007	2011	2016
Seats	No.	24	18	16	14	12
	%	22.2%	16.7%	14.8%	13.0%	11.1%
1st pref votes	No.	177,963	117,547	105,164	94,286	83,364
	%	22.0%	16.7%	15.2%	14.2%	12.0%
Women MLAs	No.	3	4	3	3	3
	%	13%	22%	19%	21%	25%

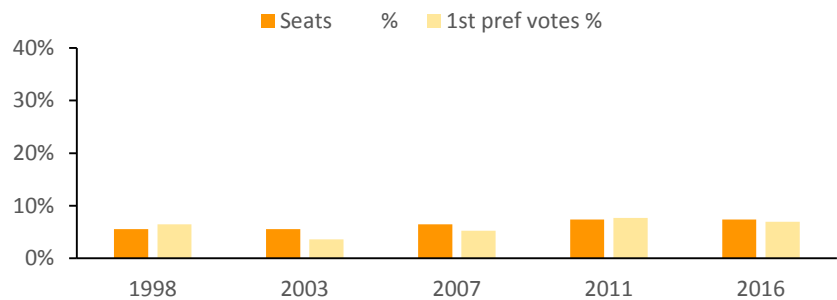


Alliance Party

- In 2016, the Alliance Party had 8 MLAs, the same number as in 2011.
- The Alliance Party's 7.0% vote share in 2016 was lower than in 2011, but was higher than 1998, 2003 or 2007.
- Three of the Alliance's 8 MLAs are women.

Summary 1998 to 2016

		1998	2003	2007	2011	2016
Seats	No.	6	6	7	8	8
	%	5.6%	5.6%	6.5%	7.4%	7.4%
1st pref votes	No.	52,636	25,372	36,139	50,875	48,447
	%	6.5%	3.6%	5.2%	7.7%	7.0%
Women MLAs	No.	1	2	2	2	3
	%	17%	33%	29%	25%	38%



3. Candidates and MLAs

In the 2016 elections, 76 (27.5%) of the 276 candidates were women. The percentage of women candidates rose for all the main parties and overall was 11% points higher than in the 2011 elections. The number of women MLAs after the 2016 election rose in line with the number of candidates so that 27.7% of MLAs are women. Both the number and proportion of women candidates and MLAs were higher in 2016 than ever before.

Gender of candidates & MLAs 1998 to 2016

	Men	Women	Men %	Women %
Candidates				
1988	249	47	84%	16%
2003	207	49	81%	19%
2007	209	47	82%	18%
2011	180	38	83%	17%
2016	200	76	72%	28%
Members				
1998	94	14	87%	13%
2003	90	18	83%	17%
2007	90	18	83%	17%
2011	88	20	81%	19%
2016	78	30	72%	28%

Note: MLAs are at election; no account is taken of substitutions between elections

Sources: Thrasher & Rallings British Electoral Facts 1832-2012
 CAIN Web Service - [Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland - University of Ulster](#)
 Democratic Dashboard [More female candidates in 2016 is positive, but not the full story](#)
 NI Assembly [Female Members of the NI Assembly 1998-2016 Briefing Paper 30/16](#)

The Alliance Party's Anna Lo was first elected to the Assembly in 2007; she was re-elected in 2011, but did not stand for re-election in 2016. She is believed to be the first ethnic Chinese person to be elected to a legislature in Europe and is the only minority ethnic Member of the Assembly to date.³

37 of those elected in 2016 had not been Members in the previous Assembly; this was a higher turnover than in 2011 when there had been 24 newly-elected MLAs.

Half of the 30 women elected to the Assembly in 2016 were new MLAs. Of the 78 men elected, 22 (28%) were new in 2016.










³ <http://www.annalo.org/about>

4. 2016 Results

Elections on 5 May 2016 resulted in little change to the political composition of the Assembly:

- The Democratic Unionist Party remained the largest party with 38 seats, the same number as before the election.
- Sinn Féin remained the second largest party with 28 seats, one fewer than before the election.
- Gains were made by the People before Profit Alliance (+2 seats), its first in the Assembly, and the Green Party which won two seats, one more than in 2011.
- The SDLP had two fewer seats than in 2011.
- The DUP won the highest share, 29.2% of first preference votes, compared to 30.0% in 2011.

NI Assembly election results: 5 May 2016

	Seats won		1st preference votes		
	Change from		Number	%	Change
	2016	2011			from 2011
					%pts
 DUP	38	0	202,567	29.2%	-0.8%
 Sinn Féin	28	-1	166,785	24.0%	-2.9%
 UUP	16	0	87,302	12.6%	-0.7%
 SDLP	12	-2	83,364	12.0%	-2.2%
 Alliance	8	0	48,447	7.0%	-0.7%
 People before Profit Alliance	2	2	13,761	2.0%	1.2%
 TUV	1	0	23,776	3.4%	0.9%
 Green Party	2	1	18,718	2.7%	1.8%
 Independent	1	0	33,526	4.8%	2.0%
Total	108		694,310	100.0%	

Source: Electoral Office for Northern Ireland www.eoni.org.uk

The system of single transferrable vote elects six MLAs for each of the 18 constituencies. The DUP has MLAs in all but one constituency, Belfast West. Four of the MLAs in Belfast West are Sinn Féin Members. The People Before Profit Alliance won two seats (one in each of Belfast West and Foyle), its first in the Assembly. Independent Unionist, Claire Sugden, won a seat in East Londonderry, prior to the election she had been co-opted in to replace David McClarty in the same seat following his death in April 2014

The party distribution of the six seats in each constituency by party is set out below:

Assembly seats by party & constituency 2016

	DUP	Sinn Féin	UUP	SDLP	Alliance	People Before Profit	TUV	Green	Independent	All
Belfast East	3		1		2					6
Belfast North	3	2		1						6
Belfast South	2	1		1	1			1		6
Belfast West		4		1		1				6
East Antrim	3	1	1		1					6
East Londonderry	3	1		1					1	6
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2	2	1	1						6
Foyle	1	2		2		1				6
Lagan Valley	3		2		1					6
Mid Ulster	1	3	1	1						6
Newry & Armagh	1	3	1	1						6
North Antrim	3	1	1				1			6
North Down	3		1		1			1		6
South Antrim	3	1	1		1					6
South Down	1	2	1	2						6
Strangford	3		2		1					6
Upper Bann	2	2	2							6
West Tyrone	1	3	1	1						6
Total seats	38	28	16	12	8	2	1	2	1	108
% of seats	35.2%	25.9%	14.8%	11.1%	7.4%	1.9%	0.9%	1.9%	0.9%	100.0%

Source: Electoral Office for Northern Ireland www.eoni.org.uk

5. Turnout

Turnout by constituency 2016

	Valid votes / Electorate
Belfast East	56.5%
Belfast North	51.6%
Belfast South	53.6%
Belfast West	56.7%
East Antrim	50.5%
East Londonderry	50.1%
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	63.5%
Foyle	55.3%
Lagan Valley	52.7%
Mid Ulster	57.9%
Newry & Armagh	58.4%
North Antrim	52.3%
North Down	49.0%
South Antrim	50.4%
South Down	53.1%
Strangford	49.7%
Upper Bann	53.6%
West Tyrone	59.1%
Northern Ireland	54.2%

The number of valid votes was 694,310. This equates to a turnout of 54.2% based on valid votes as a proportion of those eligible to vote (the electorate).

Invalid votes numbered 9,430.

Total votes cast (valid and invalid) are equivalent to 54.9% of the electorate.

Turnout in 2016 was lower than in any previous Assembly election⁴.

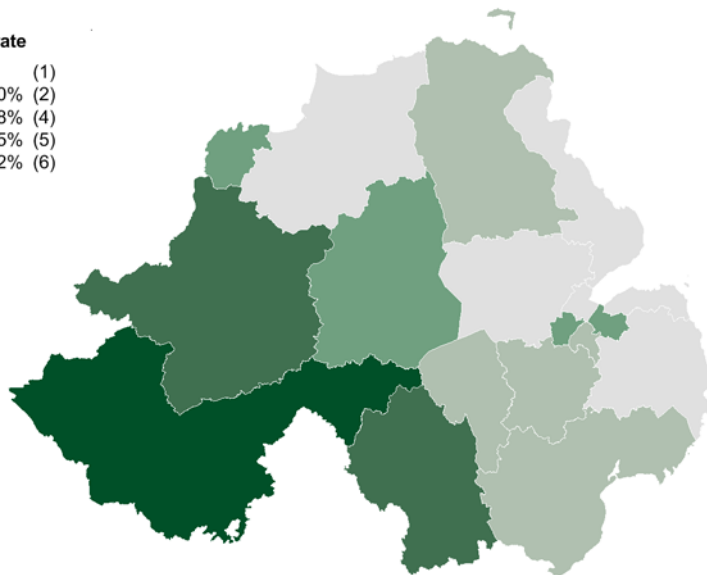
By constituency, turnout ranged from 49.0% in North Down to 63.5% in Fermanagh and South Tyrone:

Source: EONI

2016 NI Assembly elections: turnout by constituency

% of electorate

- 60% + (1)
- 58% to 60% (2)
- 55% to 58% (4)
- 52% to 55% (5)
- 49% to 52% (6)



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⁴ based on valid votes.

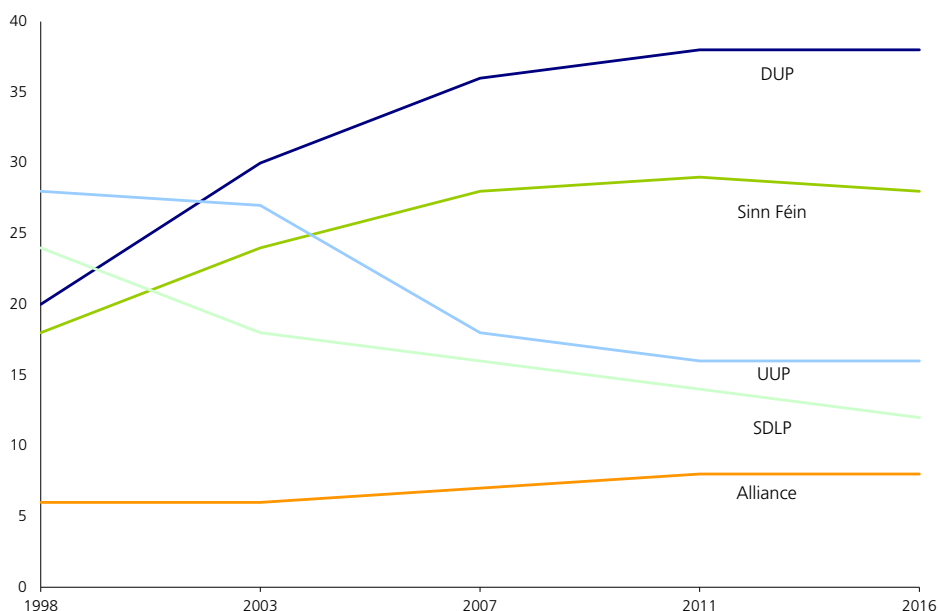
6. NI Assembly 1998 to 2016

Party composition

The political composition of the Assembly elected in 2016 is similar to that previously elected in 2011 and 2007. The DUP continues to be the largest Party, followed by Sinn Féin. These two parties have replaced the SDLP and the UUP which were the largest two parties in the first Assembly, in 1998.

Assembly seats by party 1998 to 2016

	Seats won				
	1998	2003	2007	2011	2016
DUP	20	30	36	38	38
Sinn Féin	18	24	28	29	28
UUP	28	27	18	16	16
SDLP	24	18	16	14	12
Alliance	6	6	7	8	8
UK Unionists	5	1	0	...	...
PUP	2	1	1	0	0
People before Profit Alliance	...	...	0	0	2
TUV	...	...	...	1	1
UKIP	...	...	...	0	0
Green Party	0	0	1	1	2
Others	5	1	1	1	1
Total	108	108	108	108	108



Note: MLAs are shown by party at election; no account is taken of subsequent party changes.

Votes by party

First preference votes 1998 to 2016

	First preference votes					% first preference vote				
	1998	2003	2007	2011	2016	1998	2003	2007	2011	2016
DUP	146,917	177,944	207,721	198,436	202,567	18.1%	25.3%	30.1%	30.0%	29.2%
Sinn Féin	142,858	162,758	180,573	178,222	166,785	17.6%	23.2%	26.2%	26.9%	24.0%
UUP	172,225	156,931	103,145	87,531	87,302	21.3%	22.3%	14.9%	13.2%	12.6%
SDLP	177,963	117,547	105,164	94,286	83,364	22.0%	16.7%	15.2%	14.2%	12.0%
Alliance	52,636	25,372	36,139	50,875	48,447	6.5%	3.6%	5.2%	7.7%	7.0%
UK Unionists	36,541	5,700	10,452	...	...	4.5%	0.8%	1.5%	...	...
PUP	20,634	8,032	3,822	1,493	5,955	2.5%	1.1%	0.6%	0.2%	0.9%
People before Profit Alliance	...	...	774	5,438	13,761	...	...	0.1%	0.8%	2.0%
TUV	...	...	...	16,480	23,776	...	...	...	2.5%	3.4%
UKIP	...	...	...	4,152	10,109	...	...	...	0.6%	1.5%
Green Party	510	2,688	11,985	6,031	18,718	0.1%	0.4%	1.8%	0.9%	2.7%
Others	59,961	45,277	30,538	18,790	33,526	7.4%	6.4%	4.4%	2.8%	4.8%
Total	810,245	702,249	690,313	661,734	694,310	100%	100%	100%	100.0%	100.0%

Sources:

Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-2006*Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, www.eoni.org.uk

Appendix – 2016 Assembly Members by party

Name	Party	Constituency	Name	Party	Constituency
Kellie Armstrong	Alliance	Strangford	Colum Eastwood	SDLP	Foyle
Paula Bradshaw	Alliance	Belfast South	Claire Hanna	SDLP	Belfast South
Stewart Dickson	Alliance	East Antrim	Nichola Mallon	SDLP	Belfast North
Stephen Farry	Alliance	North Down	Daniel McCrossan	SDLP	West Tyrone
David Ford	Alliance	South Antrim	Patsy McGlone	SDLP	Mid Ulster
Naomi Long	Alliance	Belfast East	Colin McGrath	SDLP	South Down
Trevor Lunn	Alliance	Lagan Valley	Justin McNulty	SDLP	Newry & Armagh
Chris Lyttle	Alliance	Belfast East	Richie McPhillips	SDLP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Sydney Anderson	DUP	Upper Bann	Gerry Mullan	SDLP	East Londonderry
Jonathan Bell	DUP	Strangford	Caoimhe Archibald	Sinn Féin	East Londonderry
Paula Bradley	DUP	Belfast North	Cathal Boylan	Sinn Féin	Newry & Armagh
Maurice Bradley	DUP	East Londonderry	Michaela Boyle	Sinn Féin	West Tyrone
Keith Buchanan	DUP	Mid Ulster	Linda Dillon	Sinn Féin	Mid Ulster
Thomas Buchanan	DUP	West Tyrone	Megan Fearon	Sinn Féin	Newry & Armagh
Joanne Bunting	DUP	Belfast East	Michelle Gildernew	Sinn Féin	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Pam Cameron	DUP	South Antrim	Chris Hazzard	Sinn Féin	South Down
Trevor Clarke	DUP	South Antrim	Declan Kearney	Sinn Féin	South Antrim
Sammy Douglas	DUP	Belfast East	Gerry Kelly	Sinn Féin	Belfast North
Gordon Dunne	DUP	North Down	Seán Lynch	Sinn Féin	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Alex Easton	DUP	North Down	Alex Maskey	Sinn Féin	Belfast West
Arlene Foster	DUP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Declan McAleer	Sinn Féin	West Tyrone
Paul Frew	DUP	North Antrim	Fra McCann	Sinn Féin	Belfast West
Paul Girvan	DUP	South Antrim	Jennifer McCann	Sinn Féin	Belfast West
Paul Givan	DUP	Lagan Valley	Raymond McCartney	Sinn Féin	Foyle
Brenda Hale	DUP	Lagan Valley	Barry McElduff	Sinn Féin	West Tyrone
Simon Hamilton	DUP	Strangford	Martin McGuinness	Sinn Féin	Foyle
David Hilditch	DUP	East Antrim	Daithí McKay	Sinn Féin	North Antrim
William Humphrey	DUP	Belfast North	Oliver McMullan	Sinn Féin	East Antrim
William Irwin	DUP	Newry & Armagh	Ian Milne	Sinn Féin	Mid Ulster
Emma Little Pengelly	DUP	Belfast South	Conor Murphy	Sinn Féin	Newry & Armagh
Carla Lockhart	DUP	Upper Bann	Carál Ní Chuilín	Sinn Féin	Belfast North
Phillip Logan	DUP	North Antrim	Máirtín Ó Muilleoir	Sinn Féin	Belfast South
Gordon Lyons	DUP	East Antrim	John O'Dowd	Sinn Féin	Upper Bann
Nelson McCausland	DUP	Belfast North	Michelle O'Neill	Sinn Féin	Mid Ulster
Michelle McIlveen	DUP	Strangford	Caitriona Ruane	Sinn Féin	South Down
Adrian McQuillan	DUP	East Londonderry	Catherine Seeley	Sinn Féin	Upper Bann
Gary Middleton	DUP	Foyle	Pat Sheehan	Sinn Féin	Belfast West
Maurice Morrow	DUP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Jim Allister	TUV	North Antrim
Robin Newton	DUP	Belfast East	Steve Aiken	UUP	South Antrim
Edwin Poots	DUP	Lagan Valley	Andy Allen	UUP	Belfast East
George Robinson	DUP	East Londonderry	Rosemary Barton	UUP	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Alastair Ross	DUP	East Antrim	Doug Beattie	UUP	Upper Bann
Christopher Stalford	DUP	Belfast South	Roy Beggs	UUP	East Antrim
Mervyn Storey	DUP	North Antrim	Robbie Butler	UUP	Lagan Valley
Peter Weir	DUP	North Down	Alan Chambers	UUP	North Down
Jim Wells	DUP	South Down	Jo-Anne Dobson	UUP	Upper Bann
Steven Agnew	Green Party	North Down	Ross Hussey	UUP	West Tyrone
Clare Bailey	Green Party	Belfast South	Danny Kennedy	UUP	Newry & Armagh
Claire Sugden	Independent	East Londonderry	Harold McKee	UUP	South Down
Gerry Carroll	People Before Profit	Belfast West	Mike Nesbitt	UUP	Strangford
Eamonn McCann	People Before Profit	Foyle	Sandra Overend	UUP	Mid Ulster
Alex Attwood	SDLP	Belfast West	Jenny Palmer	UUP	Lagan Valley
Sinead Bradley	SDLP	South Down	Philip Smith	UUP	Strangford
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