Nationalism and ethnic politics in Northern Ireland: The impact of PR-STV on European election campaigns.

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This paper utilises cultural nationalist and ethno-symbolist approaches to explore the European Parliament elections of 2004 and 2009 in Northern Ireland. The rationale behind analysing European elections is that they are neither British nor Irish with only three seats available, and therefore represent the greatest potential to incentivise political parties to moderate their nationalism to appeal to the widest possible audience. This paper specifically examines the electoral campaigns of the DUP and Sinn Fein in order to elucidate whether or not PR-STV encourages them to appeal to voters outside of their communal bloc by focusing their manifestos on specific understandings of EU politics. It is argued that this is not so, due to the entrenched nature of ethno-national divisions in Northern Ireland. It is, however, acknowledged that there has been a divergence in the European electoral strategies of the DUP and Sinn Fein, with the former maintaining highly charged ethno-nationalism as a key focus of its campaign, and the latter employing an election strategy of intertwining EU political issues with appeals for Irish unity. Nevertheless, it is argued that this is more a result of the need for Sinn Fein to appeal to a different electorate North and South.
Introduction

Politics in Northern Ireland has long been characterised as deeply sectarian and highly polarised due to the region’s historic ethno-national divisions between British unionism and Irish nationalism (see, for example, Mitchell, 1999). To gauge the extent of this after a period of power-sharing, this article will test the hypothesis that the Proportional Representation Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) electoral system used for all elections in Northern Ireland except those to the Westminster Parliament makes political parties more representative and less zero-sum in their objectives. We start from the argument of McGarry and O’Leary (2006, p. 274) that PR-STV can encourage political parties to moderate their positions in order to attract lower order preference votes from the opposite communal bloc, whilst recognising that it offers no guarantee of this. Despite a political system in which parties are organised primarily along socio-economic positions often considered to be at odds with deeply divided societies such as Northern Ireland, we argue that the preferential ranking method of PR-STV should encourage parties to appeal beyond their own ethno-national bloc at election time in attempt to maximise their share of the vote. We, therefore, contend that this electoral system certainly does offer incentives for parties to moderate the nationalist symbolism of their election campaigns to widen their electoral appeal and court votes beyond their own communal bloc, as any preferential voting system does. However, due to the presence of two distinct and largely opposing nationalisms, with limited significant inter-community interaction at grassroots level, on the whole this does not happen in Northern Ireland.

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available, and therefore have the greatest potential to incentivise political parties to moderate their nationalism to appeal to the widest possible audience. We specifically examine the electoral campaigns of the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein in order to elucidate whether or not the PR-STV electoral system encourages them to appeal to voters outside of their communal bloc by focusing their manifestos on nuanced and specific understandings of European Union politics and integration, and move beyond ethno-national issues concerning the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. We argue that this is not so, due to the entrenched nature of ethno-national divisions in Northern Ireland.

We do, however, recognise a divergence in European electoral strategies of the DUP and Sinn Fein, with the former maintaining highly charged sectarian ethno-national symbolism and rhetoric as a key focus of its campaign, and the latter employing an election strategy of intertwining EU political issues with appeals for Irish unity. Nevertheless, we argue that this is more a symptom of the need for Sinn Fein to appeal to a different electorate North and South than an attempt to encourage vote transfers from outside of the Irish nationalist bloc in Northern Ireland. The rationale behind analysing the 2004 and 2009 elections is that it allows us to test the potential moderating effect of the 2007 power-sharing pact between the DUP and Sinn Fein – whereby the parties must cooperate in government on a day-to-day basis – and whether this has had any impact on the focus of their campaigns at election time.

**The political context of Northern Ireland**

In 1998 the inhabitants of the island of Ireland, North and South, voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement, designed to regulate the violence arising from the conflicting objectives of British unionists and Irish nationalists in Northern Ireland since the late 1960s (O’Duffy, 2007). In short, it is a consociational agreement that
established a legislature comprised of members designated as ‘unionist’, ‘nationalist’ or ‘other’, in addition to a power sharing executive in which ministerial positions are decided using the d’Hondt method (McGarry and O’Leary, 2009). Opinion in some quarters contends that an integrative, rather than accommodative, approach would be more successful in encouraging meaningful and lasting peace (see, for example, Taylor, 2009a; Wilson, 2009). We, on the other hand, argue that due to the entrenchment of two diverse and competing nationalisms in Northern Ireland, only an agreement that recognises and accommodates these has any hope of successfully managing conflict between unionists and Irish nationalists (see McGarry and O’Leary, 2009).

One of the fundamental aims of the Good Friday Agreement is to establish a political and social environment in Northern Ireland that promotes cooperation and mutual respect between unionism and nationalism, and attempts to mitigate the entrenched divisions between the two (McGarry and O’Leary, 2009). In order to facilitate this, PR-STV – already used for European and local government elections in the region – was chosen for Assembly elections due to the inclusivity it offers and the moderating effect that it is believed to have on political parties (McGarry and O’Leary, 2006, p. 274; 2009, pp. 62-64). It was intended that PR-STV could go some way to normalising politics by allowing the electorate to vote for more than one party, encouraging them to consider issues beyond the constitutional question, and thus bring about significant change to the way people vote in Northern Ireland.

The reality is that this has not been the case. Politics in the region has undergone considerable changes, with a power sharing executive established in 2007 between two parties traditionally thought to represent the ‘extremes’ of their communities – the DUP and Sinn Fein (Mitchell, Evans and O’Leary, 2006) – and the acceptance, and even embracement, of the opposite
community’s culture by political leaders. Examples of this include the DUP leader and First Minister, Peter Robinson, attending a Gaelic football match with Sinn Fein deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, with the sport a defining image of Irish nationalist culture; and McGuinness meeting the Queen, who has long been considered by republicans to be an example of British imperialism in Ireland. There is, however, limited indication that this is having a significant meaningful impact beyond the circle of political elites, with continued segregation in areas such as education and evidence that sectarianism in Northern Ireland is in fact increasing (see, for example, Nolan, 2012).

This limited engagement with the opposite community has also manifested itself electorally, as beyond the limited pro-Agreement transfers between Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) voters during the early days of the Agreement (Wilder, 1998, p. 104), there have been few inter-communal vote transfers.Whilst the Good Friday Agreement has ultimately facilitated more peaceful relations in Northern Ireland, its focus of recognising and accommodating, rather than overcoming, the two distinctive ethno-national blocs has not as of yet encouraged significant everyday cross-community interaction between them, although this may occur in the future when the agreement is more embedded. As such, despite PR-STV having the potential to encourage moves towards a political system in which parties are defined primarily by their socio-economic positions, this is unlikely to happen in the near future in Northern Ireland, owing to the presence of two largely detached and opposing ethno-national blocs. However, we argue that this is not a failure of the consociational Good Friday Agreement, as due to Northern Ireland’s deeply entrenched divisions only a peace deal that recognises the need to accommodate the two distinctive blocs has the potential to succeed, and, moreover, the organisation of the political system in the region along sectarian lines is a product of these deep divisions.
European Elections and PR-STV

From the first European election in 1979 through to 2004, Ian Paisley of the DUP and John Hume of the SDLP held two of the three available seats. This meant that for twenty five years the European election in Northern Ireland was for the third seat. This has always been held by the UUP, with Jim Nicholson the incumbent since 1989. Hume and Paisley were hugely popular political figures, and the European election was for many years the only contest that the DUP was confident of winning, even when the party was going through a moderate decline in the late 1980s/early 1990s. It is, therefore, difficult to determine whether the electoral success of these two politicians is attributable to their actions as MEPs, to the sectarian politics of Northern Ireland, or to their eminence as two of the most recognisable politicians in the region.

Voting systems are important mechanisms of ‘engineering for accommodation and harmony in severely divided societies’ (Horowitz, 1991, p. 163), and within a PR-STV system ‘votes are cast for individual candidates in a rank order according to the preferences of the voter’ (Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 74). This makes for quite a complex system when it comes to the election count, if not in the polling booth, and we will attempt an explanation of its intricacies.

The voter is not obligated to rank, and therefore vote, for any candidates beyond their first preference, however if they choose to rank candidates, votes may be transferred over the course of the count. Through an entrenched mechanism, a quota is established for the number of votes necessary for a candidate to win a seat. Candidates who achieve this quota with first preference votes are duly elected. If all of the seats have not been filled, the votes of those candidates who cannot win are redistributed. If these redistributed votes still do not produce a
candidate who fulfils the quota, the votes of the largest vote winner are transferred. The votes for this candidate above and beyond the set quota are then recounted, so that those that indicate no second or further preference are deemed ‘non-transferable’ and a percentage of how many ballot papers indicated various second choices is determined. This percentage is then multiplied by the overall number of ‘excess votes’ and these votes are transferred. If a candidate then achieves the required quota, they are duly elected. Depending on the number of seats available, this process may be repeated several times, with the excess votes of the second highest candidate, etc, being transferred until all of the seats have been filled by candidates who have achieved their quotas (Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999).

The advantages of PR-STV are manifold, the most relevant to deeply divided societies such as Northern Ireland being that it allows voters to express complex notions of vote preference and gives them the opportunity to transcend communal blocs (Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, pp. 79-80). The demerits of using PR-STV in Northern Ireland are highlighted by, for example, Horowitz (1989, pp. 177, 189-91) and O’Flynn (2009, pp. 272-73) who argue that it encourages the electorate to transfer within their communal bloc before considering candidates beyond it, and this does little to facilitate electoral integration between the two communities. The intended effect of the system is, nevertheless, to encourage ‘freer competition within the unionist and nationalist party systems’ because it does not force voters to choose one side or the other alone, allowing voters to ‘cross party lines and vote for candidates of more than one party’ (Mitchell and Gillespie, 1999, p. 86). Due to the entrenched tradition of voting along communal lines in Northern Ireland, the extent to which the blocs have been transcended is, however, limited. Despite PR-STV offering incentives for parties to moderate the nationalist focus of their election campaigns and encourage this, we
argue that their failure to seize upon it is the electoral ramification of the presence of two distinct and competing ethno-national communities in the region.

Cultural nationalism and ethno-symbolism

Due to the inherent importance of identity, nationality and ethnicity in Northern Irish politics, this article uses cultural nationalism and ethno-symbolism to analyse European election campaigns. Whilst recognising the relevance of politics to nationalism, Hutchinson’s (1994, p. 41) analysis of cultural nationalism argues that it is impossible to overlook the recurrent and continuous significance of culture. Hutchinson (1987, pp. 12-13) explains the position of a cultural nationalist as being that ‘the essence of a nation is its distinctive civilisation, which is the product of its unique history, culture and geographical profile’, and that the aim of cultural nationalism is to reunite the nation by reaching back to its creative life principle. As the nation is an organic entity, the state and its institutions are ‘accidental’ and result from the processes of modernity (Hutchinson, 1987, p. 13). Cultural nationalists are, however, keen to demonstrate that despite looking back to ‘a presumed glorious past’, their recurrent approach seeks to revive an ethnic historicist vision of the nation to construct a community which is both integrated and autonomous (Hutchinson, 1987, p. 34). Hutchinson (1987) also recognises the importance of memories and symbols in defining the nature and history of nations, and attaching people to a particular nation, whilst reinforcing the role of historical memory.

Although broadly supportive of the emphasis cultural nationalists place upon the significance of, for example, a unique culture and history, historical memory and the centrality of cultural symbols in explaining the creation of nations and nationalism, Smith (1998, p. 180) criticises Hutchinson for focusing only on the movement back from the present to the (ethnic) past and
argues for the need for this to be supplemented by an analysis of the movement forward from the past to the (national) present. In order to achieve this, Smith (see, for example, 1986; 1998, ch. 8; 2009) formulated and founded the ethno-symbolism. Githens-Mazer (2006, p. 7) explains this approach as one which recognises the modernity of nations, yet argues that some of a nation’s political and/or cultural characteristics pre-date the modern era. Furthermore, ethno-symbolists claim that some nations may in fact be ‘based on pre-modern cultural, political and ethnic groups, which are (re)constituted in a modern period as nations’. Smith (1986, p. 198; 2009, p. 25) argues that national myths, memories and symbols must be meaningful and potent enough to unite and excite the nation politically or culturally, and stresses the importance of collective symbols such as a flag and anthem which contribute to the maintenance of a sense of national identity.

Nations and nationalisms are often split into two broad varieties – ethnic and civic. An ethnic nation is based on culture handed down over time and is an ascriptive phenomenon into which one is born (Esman, 1994). Ethnic nationalism is broadly defined as a variety of nationalism that assumes an organic aspect of the nation – that it is somehow in the blood of its members or arises from the very soil on which the nation exists and its members live upon. Ethnic nationalism tends to be highly exclusionary and emotionally charged, and this often means, in practice, that it is difficult, if not impossible, for outsiders to ever fully become a part of the ethnic nation. Ethnic nationalism is often contrasted with civic nationalism. Civic nationalism is defined as ‘an attachment to public culture, way of life, territory, and political institutions, shared by the community created through residence in a common territory rather than through heredity’ (Brown, 2000, p. 51). The factors that determine the civic nation are not organic but, rather, are mantles that can be taken up by those who are born, or those who live, outside of the nation (Buckley and Kenney, 1995). These two distinctive varieties of
nationalism are important to this article as they allow us to determine whether party election campaigns are moving from an exclusive, ethnic focus towards a more inclusive, civic appeal.

Nationalism in Northern Ireland

Nationalism, identity and ethnicity are inherently important in Northern Ireland due to the presence of two main distinctive, diverse and, in many respects, opposing communities. Both British unionism and Irish nationalism have radical and moderate proponents of their respective views – those who espouse civic and ethnic varieties of nationalism. In short, unionists seek to maintain the status of Northern Ireland as a province of the UK. They consider their attachment to this state to secure their political rights and personal safety in the face of perceived threats from Irish nationalists, Catholics and the Republic of Ireland. Some unionists couch this argument in the maintenance of liberal political values, and in this way portray unionism as a benevolent variety of civic nationalism that ensures the continuation of the national status quo, and which provides equality and freedom for all those under its auspices, protecting the Protestant population of Northern Ireland from what they perceive to be the illiberal, ethno-nationalist intentions of the Irish nation (McGarry and O’Leary, 1995, pp. 97-105).

Other unionists (often described as loyalists) take an ethnic-nationalist viewpoint, in that they see unionism as a variety of nationalist movement carried by the Protestant community that has been placed under an imminent threat of annihilation and extermination at the hands of their opponents. Some varieties of Orangeism and loyalism typify this viewpoint (see, for example, McAuley, 2004, pp. 524-25; Smithey, 2011). All variations of unionism seek to maintain a derivative of the political status quo. Rather than struggling to attain a new
congruence between nation and state, unionists seeks to prevent constitutional or institutional reforms that they feel would endanger the political, economic and cultural position of their community in Northern Ireland and/or in the UK.

The union flag, the colours of red, white and blue, the orange sash, bowler hat and umbrella, depictions of King William of Orange (‘King Billy’), the provincial flag of Northern Ireland, and the Red Hand of Ulster are some of the main cultural nationalist and ethno-symbolist characteristics employed by unionists. Others include myths and memories of nationhood, from the Orange Order to the Battle of the Boyne, to the losses of the Ulster Volunteer Force who fought at the Somme, and more recent events such as the Remembrance Day bombing at Enniskillen and the Royal Ulster Constabulary as an institution. Amongst loyalists and more ethnic unionists, depictions of paramilitary struggles typify this outlook (Southern, 2007; Bryan and Stevenson, 2012).

Contrastingly, members of the Irish nationalist community traditionally seek an end to the partition of Ireland and the reunification of the Irish nation. Within the Irish nationalist community, as in the unionist community, the varieties of nationalism run the gamut from civic to ethnic. For civic nationalists, the culmination of Irish nationalism would be the reunification of Ireland under the rubric of an Irish state, and this state would guarantee the rights of all those who would live within its borders. Civic Irish nationalists often cite historical examples of non-sectarian nationalism in Ireland, such as Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, and strive to dispel fears that Irish nationalism seeks to endanger or eradicate unionism. Rather, they seek an end to British rule on the island, and believe that British ‘interference’ prevents the expression of the democratic mandate of all Ireland for national self-determination and, therefore, reunification. Ethnic Irish nationalists (often
referred to as republicans), on the other hand, harbour a belief that Protestants and unionists are foreigners or outsiders on the island of Ireland and that unionism is ultimately bent on the destruction of the Irish nation. In this view, every aspect of unionism and Britishness is to be doubted in its sincerity and intention (see, for example, McGarry and O’Leary, 1995, pp. 17-19, 25-35).

Cultural nationalist and ethno-symbolist characteristics of Irish nationalism include myths, symbols and images denoting the nationalist community, ranging from the Irish language and ‘Celtic culture’, along with traditional symbols such as the colours orange, white and green of the tricolour flag, and the Shamrock, to more highly charged imagery such as the Starry Plough and representations of early and latter twentieth century hunger strikers, as well as depictions of other ‘national struggles’. The Irish language plays a prominent role in distinguishing the Irish nation, with murals bearing the term Saoirse (‘freedom’) being a common example of interplay between nation and language (McGarry and O’Leary, 1995, ch. 1; Smith, 2003, pp. 152-54. See also Hutchinson, 1987; Githens-Mazer, 2006). The use of unionist and nationalist symbolism in election campaigns, both visually and in discourse, is important to this article as it is a means of analysing the continued significance of the presence of two distinct ethno-national communities in Northern Ireland.

Results

We will now test our hypothesis that PR-STV incentivises parties to moderate the nationalism of their campaigns towards real world policy proposals to widen their appeal for transfer votes beyond their own community, and European elections represent the most potential to encourage this as they are neither British nor Irish, thus less nationalist and more inclusive, with only three seats available. On the basis of our results, we argue that this has
not been the case and attribute this to Northern Ireland’s entrenched communal divisions, despite PR-STV offering incentives for parties to exploit its preferential ranking method to their benefit.

With the guaranteed poll toppers of the past twenty five years, Paisley and Hume, having stood down, the 2004 election represented the best chance yet for Sinn Fein to secure European representation in Northern Ireland. The party’s campaign continued the transition from Euro-scepticism in the 1980s towards a more critical engagement with the EU, which is seen as an institution through which to encourage Irish unity, as the open borders it promotes are considered to be ‘at odds with a divided Ireland’ (Sinn Fein, 1999). However, as for European elections Sinn Fein publishes only one manifesto for the island of Ireland, the need to appeal to voters both North and South ensured that the campaign was not confined to the constitutional question, not least because this is much less likely to resonate with voters in, for example, County Cork than in party’s traditional heartland of west Belfast. The manifesto is thus short on Irish nationalist and republican imagery, save for its front cover featuring the Sinn Fein logo of the colours of the Irish tricolour projected onto an image of map of a united Ireland, with an overall green and orange colour scheme (Sinn Fein, 2004). Use of the Irish language is also limited; confined to Gerry Adams ending his ‘welcome message’ with Is mise (‘I am (yours’)”). This is in contrast to previous European election manifestos, in particular those prior to the Good Friday Agreement, which often made heavy use of Irish (see, for example, Sinn Fein, 1994). As McGarry and O’Leary (1995, p. 222) argue, and the low number of speakers – especially in the North – attest, for Sinn Fein language is as much a ‘badge of difference’ as a genuine means of communication.
The content of the manifesto supports the assertion of a Sinn Fein MLA, that rather than setting out the constitutional position of the North and bread and butter issues separately, the party seeks to demonstrate that these are intertwined.\textsuperscript{iv} Despite the very detailed European focus of the policies included, the united Ireland/real world policy weighting does, however, vary throughout. Whilst the manifesto sets out Sinn Fein’s position on, for example, poverty, public services and the environment with little or no reference to the constitutional question, elsewhere this is much more pronounced, with a ten page section on ‘The EU and the Republican Agenda’ (Sinn Fein, 2004). This is largely dedicated to the way in which future EU PEACE funding is managed, such as through greater recognition of the Irish speaking community, and also a result of the need to promote moves towards Irish unity within the EU by, for example, Northern Ireland adopting the Euro currency and the recognition of Ireland as a single economic unit. It is, therefore, likely that despite the very detailed and largely civic nationalist policies presented by Sinn Fein, the heavy peppering of references to Irish unity and other republican discourse throughout the manifesto would in the North have little appeal outside of the Irish nationalist community, and thus the preferential ranking method employed by PR-STV had little impact on the way the party presented its campaign.

In contrast to Sinn Fein’s attempt to intertwine European policies with the constitutional question, the DUP campaigned as though this election was a border poll, with party positions on the EU featuring towards the end of the manifesto (DUP, 2004). Within this, much of the rhetoric includes undertones of, for example, defeating global terrorism and maintaining British sovereignty, such as linking the IRA to other paramilitaries, including ETA and FARC, and keeping the pound sterling in the UK. The use of British and Ulster symbolism is commonplace throughout, with the union flag featured in watermark-style on many of its pages – including the front cover – and the prevalent use of the colours red, blue and orange.
What is perhaps most interesting with this magazine-style publication is the number of pages dedicated to areas outside of the remit of the EU. The need for the DUP to top the poll ahead of Sinn Fein is made clear from the offset and the election is presented as a choice between ‘Unionism or terrorism’. This theme continues throughout the manifesto, peppered with references to ‘Sinn Fein/IRA’ and featuring sections such as ‘Keeping Unionism Ahead’, which focuses on the need for a unionist party to top the poll in order to continue to ‘represent Northern Ireland across the world’. With two further sections focusing on strengthening unionism, another calls for ‘Devolution now’ and details the DUP’s proposals for re-establishing government in Northern Ireland, without any reference to the EU. However, the manifesto leaves the reader in no doubt that the main aim of the party’s campaign is to prevent Sinn Fein from topping the poll.

The DUP’s 2004 campaign did, nevertheless, represent a departure from 1999, which saw the party’s manifesto released as a one page leaflet focused primarily on criticising the Good Friday Agreement by, for example, accusing the then leader of the UUP, David Trimble, of ‘surrendering to Dublin’, and calling for the abolition of the Parades Commission, which was established to regulate (predominantly unionist) marches (DUP, 1999). This left little room for EU policies, save for those firmly rooted in the upholding of British sovereignty and in reference to the Republic of Ireland, such as ‘Europe takes your British pound and gives it to Dublin’. The 2004 manifesto does at least offer some relatively detailed policies on European issues in areas such as farming, the environment and fishing, despite its overall largely ethnic nationalist message of maintaining the number one status of unionism in Northern Ireland. It is, therefore, very unlikely that the party’s highly sectarian stance as the defender of unionism would find any more than a negligible level of appeal amongst Irish nationalists, which is neither helped by the DUP presenting itself as a party of the unionist community rather than
simply a pro-union party. This further restricts its appeal to those in the nationalist bloc who wish for Northern Ireland to remain in the UK for economic reasons, for example, and who may be inclined to give the DUP lower preference order votes in respect of that position. As such, we argue that the preferential method employed by PR-STV is clearly not incentivising the party to moderate its campaigns away from an ethnic nationalist focus in the hope of attracting votes from outside of the unionist community further down the ballot.

In the event, the DUP topped the poll with Paisley’s replacement, Jim Allister; Sinn Fein candidate, Bairbre de Brun, came second and secured the party’s first European Parliament seat in the North; the Nicholson of the UUP retained third place position; and the SDLP fell to fourth place with Hume’s replacement, Martin Morgan, losing its EU representation for the first time (McCann and Hainsworth, 2004, p. 105).

Having secured its position as the largest Irish nationalist party in the North at the 2004 election and with a three way split emerging within unionism, the 2009 contest presented Sinn Fein with the opportunity to top the poll and become the largest party in Northern Ireland by votes in a European election. As usual the party chose to publish a single manifesto for the island of Ireland, which despite largely continuing the theme of its 2004 publication, features two main differences (Sinn Fein, 2009). Firstly, the aforementioned party logo of a map of a united Ireland is absent and the only imagery used that could be considered to be Irish nationalist and/or republican is the green, white and orange of the front cover, and the use of a subtle green throughout. Also, the second half of the manifesto features a complete translation of the first into the Irish language. Elsewhere, however, little has changed in the party’s approach of intertwining policies and republican rhetoric, except for a diminished focus on the peace process, which is likely to be due to the re-establishment
of power-sharing in 2007. One section of this very EU policy specific publication is dedicated to ‘Building Support in Europe for Irish Re-unification’, and includes proposals such as persuading the EU to support moves to allow the Northern electorate to be represented in the *Oireachtas* (Irish Parliament) and the ‘all-Ireland harmonisation’ of, for example, taxes and employment regulations.

As was the case with Sinn Fein’s 2004 manifesto, references to Irish unity are peppered amongst policies on bread and butter issues – for example, campaigning for the Northern electorate to be granted voting rights in any future referendum on the Lisbon Treaty held by the government of the Irish Republic and the reiteration of the need for all-Ireland tax harmonisation in a section entitled ‘Sustainable Prosperity With Equality’. On the whole, however, these references are less commonplace than they were in the party’s 2004 manifesto. It is, nevertheless, difficult to determine whether these relatively limited differences represent an increased civic nationalist outreach to the non-nationalist community in Northern Ireland or are a result of the need to appeal to a different electorate North and South. As a senior Sinn Fein member points out, what Northern Ireland needs from the EU may be very different to what the Irish Republic needs.\(^{v}\) It is thus clear that the party’s European manifesto has become a balancing act between these two different sets of electorate. On this evidence, we are inclined to err towards the need to appeal both North and South as the determining factor. Either way, it is highly unlikely that the party’s frequent all-Ireland and Irish unity references would resonate with the non-nationalist community, which is evidence of the ranking method of PR-STV having little or no incentivising effect on the party to appeal for vote transfers from this section of the electorate.
An immediately noticeable way in which the DUP’s 2009 manifesto differs in comparison to previous European election publications is its more traditional style and increased length, which provides greater opportunity for the inclusion of more detailed policy positions (DUP, 2009). To an extent this has been seized upon, however proposals for the EU are once again mostly confined to towards the back of the publication, with some reasonably detailed policies concerning, for example, health and agri-food. There is also a noticeable decrease in the high levels of Eurosceptic, pro-British sovereignty rhetoric of previous manifestos, but the need for the UK to retain the pound sterling again features. As was the case with the DUP’s 2004 manifesto, the first half is almost entirely comprised of party positions and rhetoric concerning issues outside of the remit of the EU. The majority of these refer to the success of the party in participating in power-sharing, and its proposals for the devolution of policing and justice powers to Belfast, whilst stressing that the DUP has the best interests of unionism at heart. Unionism is presented by and large as a rival to Irish nationalism/republicanism, with promises to ‘take republicans on’ and to have ‘control over decisions of nationalist/republican ministers’.

Elsewhere, however, there is a sense that the party considers itself under threat from two fronts – outflanking by other unionists, particularly former DUP MEP Allister’s new party, the TUV, and Sinn Fein topping the poll as a result of a three-way split within unionism. It has attempted to prevent this firstly by including a poster-style double page featuring five images of DUP supporters – running the gamut from teenager to pensioner – who offer several reasons why they will be giving the party their first preference vote. The majority of these centre around what the party candidate, Diane Dodds – ‘the only unionist who can top the poll’ – can offer the unionist community, often with no reference to the EU, such as maintaining ‘a unionist agenda in government’ and ‘control over our [unionism’s] future, not
Dublin interference or Sinn Fein chipping away at Direct Rule’. There is also a section on ‘Keeping Unionism Number One’, which further highlights the DUP’s concerns over unionist vote splitting allowing Sinn Fein to top the poll by recommending that unionists ‘vote DUP number 1 and then transfer to other unionist candidates’. The imagery of the manifesto continues the theme of using the party colours, red and blue, and the union flag features on numerous occasions throughout. The manifesto also dedicates a page to ‘Promoting Local [Orange] Bands’, which includes proposals to further unionist culture in Northern Ireland against an image of an Orange Order march.

It will come as little surprise that the focus of the DUP’s 2009 manifesto is largely unchanged when compared to that of 2004. If anything, faced with potential unionist vote splitting and outflanking by the TUV, the party has intensified its ethnic nationalist battle cry to the unionist community and staked its claim to be the stoutest defender of unionism in the face of Sinn Fein topping the poll. The exclusively unionist approach of the DUP’s election campaigns is confirmed by a senior party MLA, who asserts that planning manifestos with the hope of attracting transfers from Sinn Fein and SDLP voters is not on the agenda, whilst stressing the significant effort it would take for the DUP to appeal beyond the unionist electorate. Despite moves away from magazine-style manifestos towards more detailed policy positions, on the basis of its 2009 effort it is difficult to imagine the DUP having any significant appeal amongst the non-unionist electorate and European elections clearly remain a unionism vs. Irish nationalism border poll for the party. On this evidence, the DUP fails to act upon the incentives offered by PR-STV to tone down its appeal in the hope of attracting lower order preference votes.
The results saw the DUP’s concerns realised with Sinn Fein comfortably topping the poll and the DUP relegated to third place on first preference votes, and UCUNF (‘Ulster Conservatives and Unionists – New Force’; the UUP’s short lived merger with the Conservative Party) coming second. The DUP’s poor showing has been attributed to significant outflanking by the TUV, which ran an anti-power-sharing campaign designed to challenge the DUP as the strongest defenders of the unionist bloc (Hainsworth and McCann, 2010. See also TUV, 2009).

**Analysis and summary**

Despite European elections in Northern Ireland having the most potential to incentivise the DUP and Sinn Fein to tone down their cultural and ethno-nationalist symbolism in the hope of attracting lower order transfer votes from the widest possible audience, there is little or no evidence that this has taken place. Neither can it be said that working together in government has encouraged this at election time, as the parties’ 2009 campaigns demonstrate little meaningful deviation from their 2004 efforts. The DUP clearly remains concerned with issues of sovereignty and the effect that any adjustments to this would have on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. It is also a party that is highly sensitive to the needs and desires of its (unionist) electorate, and attempts to present itself as the stoutest defender of the unionist community. Its manifesto is more populist than policy driven, and its ethnic nationalist focus leaves little or no room for appeals to non-unionist voters. It must be acknowledged, however, that whilst the DUP continues to mobilise voters along communal lines, this appeal is today more moderately expressed than it was during the 1990s, although the party increasingly relies upon its staunchly unionist appeal when faced with outflanking within the unionist bloc.
In comparison to the DUP, Sinn Fein’s European election campaigns place far greater emphasis on policy issues, with its manifesto mostly comprised of detailed proposals of direct relevance to Europe. That is not to say that it is completely devoid of Irish nationalist/republican symbolism. Indeed, the document usually includes at least one section dedicated to Irish unity and how support for this can be encouraged through EU institutions, and has frequent references to the need for a greater number of all-Ireland areas of cooperation throughout, as well as often being translated into the Irish language. We argue, however, that the toning down of Sinn Fein’s campaigns towards a more civic nationalist focus has more to do with the need to appeal to different sets of electorate North and South than any conscious attempt by the party to widen its appeal beyond the nationalist bloc in Northern Ireland. In support of this, it is difficult to believe that the frequent references to Irish unity and all-Ireland cooperation would attract any significant transfers from the unionist community.

European elections in Northern Ireland thus remain glorified border polls, preoccupied with sectarian issues and intra-bloc competition for domination and eradication, rather than inter-bloc contests based on European policy issues. On the basis of the evidence presented, there is little room for inter-bloc debate and discussion, at least in the public sphere. This remains the case despite the obvious benefits for electoral gains by utilising the positions of policy convergence and divergence with regard to Northern Ireland’s engagement with the EU, whilst toning down the employment of cultural and ethno-nationalist symbolism, which is facilitated by the use of a preferential electoral system that has the ability to encourage voters to transcend communal blocs. We attribute this conclusion to the continued presence of two largely competing and opposing nationalisms in the region, with little meaningful cross-community interaction at grassroots level, having failed to bring about elections contested
primarily around socio-economic issues, which is further compounded by evidence of resignation amongst many parties that they are unable to attract votes from outside of their bloc regardless of how they focus their campaigns.

What has the potential to be even more interesting than the effect of cooperation within a power-sharing government on the way parties perceive PR-STV at election time is a threat to the future of Northern Ireland’s position within Europe. With the Conservative Party having pledged its support for a referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU by 2017 (BBC, 2013), the 2014 European election in Northern Ireland represents the only opportunity for parties to set out their positions in response to this within an election campaign. We hope to see a contest more heavily centred on the position of Northern Ireland within Europe, with voters responding accordingly. In reality, however, the 2014 election is likely to be yet another border poll, due not only to Northern Ireland’s deep ethno-national divisions but also the need for Sinn Fein to also appeal to an electorate in the South not facing uncertainty over its position in the EU.

References


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*Consociational Theory: McGarry and O’Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 221-36.

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i For data on vote transfers, see NIA, 2011; Whyte, 2004; 2009.

ii For a comprehensive debate on consociationalism in Northern Ireland, see Taylor (ed.), 2009(b).

iii For an overview of unionist and Irish nationalist cultures, see, for example, McGarry and O’Leary, 1995.

iv Interview with Sinn Fein MLA.

v Interview with Sinn Fein member.

vi Interview with DUP MLA.