# Westminster Election, 1997: Northern Ireland Constituencies Summary Analysis

- 1. A statement of the overall position of the parties, and an analysis of each constituency, including an indication of percentage changes in party performance in comparison to the 1996 Forum election and the 1992 General Election, are attached.
- 2. Total turnout, at 67.1%, was slightly below the recent average. However, this conceals substantial variation in the levels across the constituencies, which ranged from 57.8% (South Antrim) to 85.7% (Mid-Ulster). Average turnout in unionist-won constituencies was 64.2% (lower in the east), while it reached 75.3% in those won by nationalists. Even in those constituencies where keen intra-unionist battles were predicted (North Down, Strangford, East Belfast) turnout was not high.
- 3. The total percentage of the vote won by the two main nationalist parties, 40.2%, may have been slightly inflated by turnout factors, but it nonetheless breached the 40% barrier for the first time in any election. The combined vote of the two largest unionist parties fell slightly from 1992, to 46.3%. Sinn Féin, which contested a greater number of constituencies, for the first time came third ahead of the DUP.
- 4. Of the eighteen seats contested, 10 were won by the UUP (gain in West Tyrone), 3 by the SDLP (loss in West Belfast), 2 by the DUP (loss in Mid Ulster), 2 by Sinn Féin (gains in Mid-Ulster and West Belfast) and I by the UKUP (no change).
- 5. Undoubtedly the main focus of media attention will be on Sinn Féin's gains. In West Belfast, the redrawing of constituency boundaries had left Joe Hendron with a huge task, and despite tactical voting by unionists (the UUP vote collapsed), which pushed up Hendron's vote, Gerry Adams won comfortably. In Mid-Ulster, a combination of an extraordinarily high turnout and tactical voting by SDLP supporters saw Martin McGuinness oust William McCrea. Moreover, in overall terms, Sinn Féin not only held its 1996 share of the vote, but actually increased it by 0.6%, to 16.1%.
- 6. The most relevant basis for comparison of the votes of the SDLP and Sinn Féin is probably the 1996 election. In fact, despite Sinn Féin's high profile successes, the SDLP actually widened the margin between the two parties by 2.1%. Its total vote of 24.1% was its best ever performance in a Westminster election. Its three surviving MPs all polled well, and while Sinn Féin did better in each of these constituencies than in 1992 they fell back by comparison with 1996. The SDLP performed solidly in constituencies such as Upper Bann (Bríd Rodgers), South Belfast (Alasdair McDonnell) and South Antrim (Donovan McClelland). They will have been pleased that in North Belfast Alban Magennis came ahead of Gerry Kelly. The SDLP's major disappointment would be West Tyrone, where its failure to attract sufficient support to its candidate, Joe Byrne, as the leading nationalist, allowed the UUP's William Thompson to slip through.

- 6. On the unionist side, given the numerous constituency pacts between the parties in general elections, the 1996 Forum result is a less accurate basis of comparison than the 1992 Westminster election. By this latter measure, the UUP saw a fall of 1.8% in its vote, and the DUP a gain of 0.5%. However, David Trimble will be able to point to his gain of one seat, and the DUP's loss of Mid-Ulster, and this result represents a steadying of the ship for the UUP after the poor performance in 1996. The UUP managed to reassert itself in constituencies such as East Antrim and East Londonderry. However, hoped for gains at the expense of other unionist parties did not materialise.
- 7. None of the potentially close races in unionist seats actually produced an upset. Peter Robinson and John Taylor both won emphatically, while Robert McCartney's margin of 1500 votes, if not impressive, was more comfortable than rumour had suggested. In summary, therefore, the race on the unionist side was characterised by conservatism and a large measure of apathy.
- 8. Alliance, with 8.0%, fell short of its 1992 vote by 0.7%, but improved by 1.5% over 1996. It did not collapse in East Belfast or North Down, and did creditably in other parts of the east. Its best performance, in relative terms, was that of Séamus Close in Lagan Valley, but it will have been disappointed that Steve McBride could do no better than fourth in South Belfast.
- David Ervine did well to come third in South Belfast, but the two other PUP candidates did not make a significant impact - in East Antrim Billy Donaldson came behind the Conservative. The result in East Belfast suggests that supporters of the loyalist parties were disinclined to follow the advice of their leaders to support Reg Empey against Peter Robinson.
- 10. The Conservatives, who had virtually vanished at the Forum elections, did surprisingly well in some constituencies, with a selection of young, mostly British-based candidates, some of whom reached four figures. While a long way short of their 1992 high-water mark, they could be said to have provided the only swing towards their party in the whole election.
- 11. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition met their modest target of 1% of the vote in each of the three constituencies contested by them. The Workers' Party and other minor groupings did as poorly as in the Forum elections.

R. Bassett/R. Montgomery 2 May 1997

# Northern Ireland General Election 1 May 1997

#### **Overall Result**

Percentage

Total electorate: 1,177,969

Total Valid Turnout: 790,705

% Turnout: 67.1

Party	Votes	Seats	% Vote	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
UUP	258,352	10	32.7	+ 8.5	- 1.8
DUP	83,455	2	13.6	- 5.2	+ 0.5
SDLP	190,818	3	24.1	+ 2.7	+ 0.6
Sinn Féin	127,444	2	16.1	+ 0.6	+ 6.1
Alliance	62,975	0	8.0	+ 1.5	- 0.7
PUP	10,928	0	1.38	-2.09	N/A
UKUP *	12,817	1	1.62	-2.07	N/A
Workers' Party	2,766	0	0.35	- 0.12	- 0.25
Conservatives	9,858	0	1.25	+ 0.77	- 4.45
NIWC	3024	0	0.38	- 0.65	N/A
Others	4965	0	0.63	- 3.88	+ 0.03

<sup>\*</sup> The UKUP stood in one seat

## Northern Ireland General Election, 1 May 1997

### Results at a Glance

Seat	Elected MP	Vote	Percentage	Hold/Win?
East Antrim	Roy Beggs UUP	13,318	38.8	Hold
North Antrim	Ian Paisley DUP	21,495	46.5	Hold
South Antrim	Clifford Forsythe UUP	23,108	27.3	Hold
East Belfast	Peter Robinson DUP	16,640	42.6	Hold
North Belfast	Cecil Walker UUP	21,478	51.8	Hold
South Belfast	Martin Smyth UUP	14,201	36.0	Hold
West Befast	Gerry Adams SF	25,662	55.9	Win
North Down	Robert McCartney UKUP	12,817	35.1	Hold
South Down	Eddie McGrady SDLP	26,181	53	Hold
Fermanagh/ S. Tyrone	Ken Maginnis UUP	24,862	51.5	Hold
Foyle	John Hume SDLP	25,109	52.5	Hold
Lagan Valley	Jeffrey Donaldson UUP	24,560	55.4	Hold
East Derry	William Ross UUP	13,558	35.6	Hold
Newry/Armagh	Seamus Mallon SDLP	22,904	43.0	Hold
Strangford	John Taylor UUP	18,579	30.2	Hold
West Tyrone	William Thompson UUP	16,003	34.6	New Seat
Mid Ulster	Martin McGuinness SF	20,294	40.0	Win
Upper Bann	David Trimble UUP	20,836	43.6	Hold

#### East Antrim

Total Electorate: 59,032

Total Valid Poll: 34,347

% Turnout: 58.2

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Roy Beggs UUP	13,318	38.8	+ 8.7	- 4.5
Terry Dick Cons	2,334	6.8	+ 6.0	-1.8
Billy Donaldson PUP	1,751	5.1	- 1.7	N/A
Robert Mason Ind	1,145	3.3	N/A	N/A
Christine McAuley SF	543	1.6	- 0.3	N/A
Maura McCann NLP	69	0.2	+1.0	- 0.4
Jack McKee DUP	6,682	19.5	- 9.2	- 4.8
Seán Neeson All	6,929	20.2	+ 8.3	-3.1
Daniel O'Connor SDLP	1,576	4.6	- 2.0	N/A

The UUP's outgoing MP, Roy Beggs, had an easy win when the predicted threat from the DUP failed to materialise. In fact, the DUP candidate, Jack McKee, was pushed into third place by a strong performance from Sean Neeson of the Alliance party. The SDLP will be disappointed at its performance (a lost deposit) after a promising showing in the Forum election.

#### North Antrim

Total Electorate: 72,491

Total Valid Poll: 46,186

% Turnout: 63.7

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
David Alderdice All	2,845	6.2	+ 0.5	- 1.4
Seán Farren SDLP	7,333	15.9	- 0.3	+ 1.6
Bronagh Hinds NIWC	580	1.3	+ 0.7	N/A
James Leslie UUP	10.921	23.6	- 1.6	+ 5.5
James McCarry S.F	2,896	6.3	- 0.4	+2.0
Ian Paisley DUP	21,495	46.5	+ 9.5	- 3.4
John Wright NLP	116	0.3	N/A	N/A

The DUP leader, Ian Paisley, recovered from his party's relatively poor showing in the Forum elections to take the seat with a majority of over 10,000 votes. However, when the DUP's performance is compared with the last Westminster election, there was a swing of nearly 5% away from Paisley to James Leslie of the UUP. The SDLP failed to improve its position and actually fell back on its performance at the Forum election.

#### South Antrim

Total Electorate: 69,512

Total Valid Poll: 40,195

% Turnout: 57.8

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Barbara Briggs NLP	203	0.5	+ 0.5	N/A
Henry Cushnahan SF	2,229	5.5	+ 0.1	+ 2.6
David Ford All	4,668	11.6	+ 3.2	- 0.8
Clifford Forsythe UUP	23,108	57.5	+ 27.3	- 13.4
Donovan McClelland SDLP	6,499	16.2	+ 1.1	+ 3.4
Hugh Smyth PUP	3,490	8.7	+ 4.4	N/A

The UUP's Clifford Forsythe was returned with a huge majority in this safe seat. Donovan McClelland polled very well and consolidated the SDLP's position in South Antrim.

#### East Belfast

Total Electorate: 61,837

Total Valid Poll: 38,969

% Turnout: 63.0

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Joe Bell WP	237	0.6	+ 0.2	- 0.3
David Collins NLP	70	0.2	+01	- 0.2
Dominic Corr SF	810	2.1	- 0.2	- 0.2
Sarah Dines Cons	928	2.4	+ 1.6	- 6.9
Derek Dougan Ind	541	1.4	N/A	N/A
Reg Empey UUP	9,886	25.4	+ 2.9	N/A
Jim Hendron All	9,288	23.7	+ 5.1	- 6.1
Patricia Lewsley SDLP	629	1.6	- 1.8	N/A
Peter Robinson DUP	16,640	42.7	+ 13.3	- 8.8

The result was a triumph for the DUP's deputy leader, Peter Robinson, who was not extended by the UUP's Reg Empey. The call by the PUP to its supporters that they should transfer their votes to Empey failed to have the necessary effect and Robinson appears to have been backed by many of the voters who supported the Loyalist parties at the Forum election.

#### North Belfast

Total Electorate: 64,645

Total Valid Poll:41,452

% Turnout: 64.2

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Tom Campbell All	2,221	5.4	+ 1.3	- 0.9
Peter Emerson Green	539	1.3	+1.6	N/A
Andrea Gribben NLP	88	0.2	+ 0.2	- 0.4
Gerry Kelly SF	8,375	20.2	+1.2	+ 7.1
Alban Maginnis SDLP	8,454	20.4	+ 1.9	- 0.8
Paul Treanor WP	297	0.7	N/A	- 0.5
Cecil Walker UUP	21,478	51.8	+ 34.6	+ 3.8

The contest for this seat was decided before the election when the DUP withdrew its candidate, Nigel Dodds, and threw its weight behind the sitting UUP MP, Cecil Walker. Walker had a very comfortable win, taking over 50% of the total vote. Alban Maginnis of the SDLP managed to outpoll Gerry Kelly of Sinn Féin by a small margin and restored the SDLP's position as the leading nationalist party in North Belfast.

#### South Belfast

Total Electorate: 63,633

Total Valid Poll: 39,484

% Turnout: 62.01

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
James Anderson NLP	120	0.3	N/A	N/A
Annie Campbell NIWC	1,204	3.0	+ 0.5	N/A
Myrtle Boal Cons	962	2.4	+1.7	- 7.6
Niall Cusack Labour	292	0.7	- 0.2	N/A
David Ervine PUP	5,687	14.4	+ 8.2	N/A
Seán Hayes S.F	2,019	5.1	- 1.4	- 1.8
Patrick Lynn WP	286	0.7	- 0.4	- 0.4
Steve McBride All	5,112	12.9	+ 0.5	- 2.1
Alasdair McDonnell SDLP	9,601	24.3	+ 3.3	+ 5.6
Martin Smyth UUP	14,201	36.0	+ 13.2	- 15.5

The result represents a good performance by the incumbent MP, Martin Smyth, in this seat. The SDLP's Alasdair McDonnell continued to push up the SDLP vote without ever threatening Smyth. David Ervine of the PUP will be happy to have taken over 5,000 votes and move ahead of the Alliance party.

#### West Belfast

Total Electorate: 61,920

Total Valid Poll: 45,885

% Turnout: 74.3

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Gerry Adams SF	25,662	55.9	+ 2.5	+ 13.8
Mary Daly NLP	91	0.2	N/A	N/A
Joe Hendron SDLP	17,753	38.7	+ 13.2	+ 3.1
John Lowry WP	721	1.6	N/A	- 0.3
Fred Parkinson UUP	1,556	3.4	- 0.2	- 8.5
Liam Kennedy Ind *	102	0.2	N/A	N/A

<sup>\*</sup> Liam Kennedy withdrew after the close of official nominations, so his name appeared on the ballot paper

Much of the media coverage of the election will focus on the return of Sinn Féin's leader, Gerry Adams as MP for West Belfast. He amassed well over 50% of the vote and had a comfortable win. The outgoing MP, Joe Hendron, managed to push up the SDLP vote by over 12% when compared with the Forum election. Hendron polled very well in the Shankill and probably captured in the region of 4,000 unionist votes.

#### North Down

Total Electorate: 63,101

Total Valid Poll: 36,556

% Turnout: 57.9

Candidate	Votes	% age	% change on 1996	% change on 1995*
Marietta Farrell SDLP	1,602	4.4	- 0.6	N/A
Leonard Fee Cons	1,810	5.0	+ 3.8	+ 2.9
Robert McCartney UKUP	12,817	35.1	+ 14.2	- 1.9
Alan McFarland UUP	11,368	31.1	+ 5.5	+ 4.7
Robert Mooney NIP	57	0.2	N/A	N/A
Jane Morrice NIWC	1,240	3.4	+ 2.0	N/A
Thomas Mullins NLP	108	0.3	N/A	N/A
Oliver Napier All	7,554	20.7	+ 3.6	- 4.7

<sup>\*</sup> June 1995 by-election NIP = Northern Ireland Party

The maverick UKUP MP, Robert McCartney, was returned in this constituency with a majority close to 1,500. This result was a disappointment for David Trimble who had hoped to see his party's candidate, Alan McFarland, defeat the sitting MP. McFarland was a weak candidate who failed to mobilise the anti McCartney forces in the constituency. The Alliance vote held up fairly well

#### South Down

Total Electorate: 69,977

Total Valid Poll: 49,486

% Turnout: 70.7

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Julian Crozier All	1,711	3.5	- 0.1	+ 1.0
Eddie McGrady SDLP	26,181	52.9	+ 9.6	+ 1.7
Rosaleen McKeon NLP	219	0.4	N/A	N/A
Mick Murphy S F	5,127	10.4	- 2.7	+ 7.6
Dermot Nesbitt UUP	16,248	32.8	+ 10.6	- 8.1

A good performance from the SDLP chief whip, Eddie McGrady, who increased his majority to almost 10,000 and captured over 50% of the total vote. The SDLP organisation in South Down is very strong and the seat can be regarded as safe for the party. Boundary changes have considerably reduced the unionist vote in the area.

#### Fermanagh & South Tyrone

Total Electorate: 64,740

Total Valid Poll:

% Turnout: 74.5

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Stephen Farry All	977	2.0	+ 0.3	+ 0.3
Tommy Gallagher SDLP	11,060	22.9	+ 1.5	- 0.3
Simeon Gillan NLP	217	0.4	N/A	N/A
Ken Maginnis UUP	24,862	51.5	+ 19.2	+ 0.1
Gerry McHugh SF	11,174	23.1	- 1.1	+ 0.2

The decision of the two nationalist parties to field their separate candidates meant that Ken Maginnis was safe in this constituency. The SDLP's Tommie Gallagher fared better than anticipated and came very close to pushing the Sinn Féin candidate Gerry McHugh into third place.

#### Foyle

Total Electorate: 67,905

Total Valid Poll: 47,815

% Turnout: 70.7

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Eileen Bell All	817	1.7	- 0.11	- 1.0
Donn Brennan NLP	154	0.3	N/A	N/A
William Hay DUP	10,290	21.5	+ 10.3	- 4.9
John Hume SDLP	25,	52.5	+ 7.2	+1.0
Mitchel McLaughlin SF	11,	23.9	- 1.8	+ 6.3

The SDLP leader, John Hume, enjoyed his best ever result in this election, taking 52.5% of the total vote in Foyle. Sinn Féin managed to move into second place ahead of the single unionist candidate, William Hay.

### Lagan Valley

Total Electorate:71,341

Total Valid Poll: 49,310

% Turnout: 62.1

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Seamus Close All	7,635	17.2	+ 6.8	+ 4.5
Jeffrey Donaldson UUP *	24,560	55.4	+ 17.7	- 5.4
Hugh Finlay NLP	149	0.3	N/A	N/A
Dolores Kelly SDLP	3,436	7.8	- 1.4	- 1.7
Francis McCarthy WP	203	0.5	+ 0.2	- 0.7
Edwin Poots DUP	6,005	13.6	- 8.5	N/A
Sue Ramsay SF	1,220	2.5	- 0.1	- 4.3
Stuart Sexton Cons	1,212	2.7	+ 2.2	- 6.3

<sup>\*</sup> Sir James Molyneaux retired at the election

One of the safest UUP seats in Northern Ireland returned Jeffrey Donaldson as its MP. The Alliance party's Seamus Close improved the party's position and pushed the DUP's Edwin Poots out of second place. The SDLP had hoped for a better result here.

## East Londonderry

Total Electorate: 58,938

Total Valid Poll: 38,102

% Turnout: 64.6

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Ian Anderson Nat. Democrat	81	0.2	N/A	N/A
Yvonne Boyle All	2,427	6.4	+ 0.7	- 0.5
Gregory Campbell DUP	9,764	25.6	+1.8	N/A
Arthur Doherty SDLP	8,273	21.7	+ 1.4	- 0.8
Clare Gallen NLP	100	0.3	N/A	N/A
James Holmes Cons	436	1.1	N/A	- 1.9
Malachy O'Kane SF	3463	9.1	- 0.2	- 1.0
William Ross UUP	13,558	35.6	+ 4.6	- 22.0

The result here was entirely predictable, with the long serving Willie Ross back as MP. Gregory Campbell of the DUP will be satisfied with his 25% share of the vote in Derry East.

#### Newry & Armagh

Total Electorate: 70,807

Total Valid Poll: 53,278

% Turnout: 75.2

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
David Evans NLP	123	0.2	+ 0.1	N/A
Danny Kennedy UUP	18,018	33.8	+11.3	- 2.3
Seamus Mallon SDLP	22,904	43.0	+ 8.9	- 6.6
Pat McNamee SF	11,218	21.1	- 4.5	+ 8.7
Pete Whitcroft All	1,018	1.9	- 0.2	+ 0.1

The SDLP vote in this constituency had fallen heavily in the Forum election, with Sinn Féin the main beneficiary. However, sitting MP, Seamus Mallon recovered strongly in this election to have a majority of close to 5,000. However, his vote is down on the 1992 result and Sinn Féin has established a strong base in the area.

## Strangford

Total Electorate: 70,073

Total Valid Poll: 41,619

% Turnout: 59.4 %

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Chall Cons	1,743	4.2	+ 3.2	- 10.9
Gilbert Chalk Cons Kieran McCarthy All	5,467	13.1	+ 1.6	+ 2.0
Jack Mullins NLP	121	0.3	+ 0.3	N/A
Garret S. O'Fiachtna SF	503	1.2	- 0.6	N/A
Peter O'Reilly SDLP	2775	6.7	- 0.6	N/A
Iris Robinson DUP	12,579	30.2	+1.3	+ 6.3
John Taylor UUP	18,431	44.3	+13.0	+ 0.7

The Iris Robinson challenge to John Taylor faltered and the incumbent MP was returned with a substantial, if somewhat reduced, majority. The DUP failed to improve on its good showing at the Forum election while the UUP's vote was up by over 13%.

#### West Tyrone

Total Electorate: 58,428

Total Valid Poll: 46,275

% Turnout: 79.65%

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	
Joe Byrne SDLP	14,842	32.1	+ 3.7	
Pat Doherty SF	14,280	30.9	+ 2.8	
Ann Gormley All	829	1.8	- 0.8	
Robert Johnstone NLP	91	0.2	N/A	
Tommy Owens WP	230	0.5	N/A	
William Thompson UUP	16,003	34.6	+ 16.7	

The result here represents a huge disappointment to the SDLP who were confident that Joe Byrne would be successful. This was an extremely hard fought contest between the two nationalists which ended with Byrne only marginally ahead of Pat Doherty of Sinn Féin. This allowed Willie Thompson of the UUP to slip through and take the seat. The gain of this seat is a boost for David Trimble's leadership.

## Mid Ulster

Total Electorate: 59,086

Total Valid Poll: 50,669

% Turnout: 85.7%

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Candidate		0.9	- 0.4	- 1.9
Ephrem Bogues All	460	0.5	- 0.1	- 0.1
Marian Donnelly WP	238		- 6.4	+ 8.9
Denis Haughey SDLP	11,205	22.1	+ 19.8	- 6.0
William McCrea DUP	18,411	26.3	+11.4	+21.4
Martin McGuinness SF	20,294	-	N/A	- 0.2
Martin McGaman Maureen Murray NLP	61	0.1	1077	+1.0

The election of Martin McGuinness in place of Willie McCrea represents a major boost for Sinn Féin. The Sinn Féin organisation managed to greatly increase its vote in this constituency which recorded an extraordinarily high turnout of 86%. The SDLP managed to hold onto its core vote but suffered in the tight contest between McCrea and McGuinness. The loss of McCrea is a blow to the DUP which is now reduced to two MPs, Paisley and Robinson, at Westminster.

## Upper Bann

Total Electorate: 70,503

Total Valid Poll: 47,787

% Turnout: 67.8

Candidate	Votes	Percentage	% change on 1996	% change on 1992
Mervyn Carrick DUP	5,482	11.5	- 4.1	N/A
Tom French WP	554	1.2	+ 0.5	- 1.3
Jack Lyons NLP	108	0.2	N/A	N/A
Bernadette O'Hagan SF	5,773	12.1	- 0.2	+ 6.0
Brian Price Cons	433	0.9	N/A	- 2.5
William Ramsay All	3,017	6.3	+ 1.6	- 0.7
	11,584	24.2	+2.7	+1.0
Bríd Rogers SDLP  David Trimble UUP	20,836	43.6	+ 7.3	- 15.7

A good performance from UUP leader David Trimble who managed to increase the party's share of the vote by 7.3%, compared with its performance at the Forum election. The SDLP will be satisfied with the showing of Brid Rogers who pushed up the party's vote to 11,584. Sinn Féin will also be content with its performance which saw it pass out the DUP and secure third place.