# Conflict Management in Northern Ireland*

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## Abstract

This article analyses the different policies employed by the British government to manage the conflict in Northern Ireland between the late 1960s and the conclusion of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Following an introduction to the nature of the conflict, its conflicting interpretations and their consequences for conflict management strategies, success and failure of individual British strategies to manage the conflict are judged by the objectives sought to be accomplished, and by the responses of paramilitary organisations and of the electorate. Taking account of wider contextual factors with an impact on the development of the conflict, the article presents a comprehensive picture of the success or failure of each strategy examined and of the reasons for such success or failure. A concluding section outlines the major developments since 1998 and assesses the likelihood of success for this latest attempt at resolving the conflict.

## Introduction

0.1. As a result of the partition of a formerly British colonial territory in 1920, Northern Ireland is constitutionally a part of the United Kingdom, yet geographically it is located on the island of Ireland. Consisting of six counties, its population is just over 1.5 million. Since partition, a conflict has existed between one section of Northern Ireland's population, which has sought the restoration of a united Ireland, and another section aiming to secure the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. This conflict about fundamentally different political aspirations has been exacerbated by inequalities between the two communities, by the wounds inflicted through violence, but also by increasing intra-communal diversity.

0.2. "Nationalist" and "Unionist" are terms that refer very broadly to the political divide in Northern Ireland. This political divide, to some extent, coincides with the religious divide into Catholic and Protestant congregations. Considering the conflict in Northern Ireland to be about conflicting notions of national belonging, I will generally refer to political rather than religious communities throughout the following.

0.3. Defining the Northern Ireland conflict thus as an ethnonational one has important implications for its analysis and for the assessment of various attempts to resolve it. Thus, causes for failure and success of such attempts need to be sought at more than one level. While the situation in Northern Ireland itself is of great significance, it must not be seen in isolation from the political processes in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Increasingly over the past two decades, factors in the international context have become more and more important as well – international connections of paramilitary groups, the influence of diasporas, and the consequences of European integration. The complex interplay between these four factors can explain the dynamics of conflict development and the successes and failures of attempts at resolving it.

0.4. This article analyses the different policies employed by the British government to manage the conflict in Northern Ireland over a thirty-year period. Following an introduction to the nature of the conflict and its conflicting interpretations (and their consequences for conflict-management strategies), the most significant British policies are analysed in their objectives and assessed in their efficiency: conflict-management approaches aimed at containment (deployment of the army, internment, Diplock courts, intelligence and security policy, criminalisation of politically motivated terrorism, punctual measures aimed at economic and social development) and at resolving the conflict (Sunningdale, the constitutional convention, "rolling" devolution, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and finally the peace process leading up to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement). Success and failure will be judged by the objectives sought with each policy, and by the response of paramilitary organisations (increase and decrease in conflict-related death tolls) and of the electorate (increase and decrease in votes for moderate and extremist political parties). In addition, the analysis will take account of other contextual factors having an impact on the development of the conflict so that a comprehensive picture emerges as to the success or failure of each strategy examined as well as to the reasons for such success or failure.

**1. The Conflict about the Conflict and its Solutions[1]**

1.1 The conflict in Northern Ireland is primarily caused by incompatible conceptions of national belonging and the means to realise them. These two different conceptions are the goal of a united Ireland, pursued by Nationalists and Republicans, and the goal of continued strong constitutional links between the province and the United Kingdom, desired by Unionists and Loyalists. Historically, these two traditions have been associated with two different religions – Catholicism and Protestantism. These labels have played a significant role in the conflict as they have made possible the systematic pursuit of discrimination and segregation. Yet, this has not made the conflict an ethno-religious one. The same holds true for the issue of language. Although less significant, the equality and preservation of Gaelic and Ulster Scots has mobilised some sections of the population in Northern Ireland, yet overall, the conflict is not ethno-linguistic in its nature either. Similar cases could be made for other dimensions of this conflict, such as class or culture. What they all have in common is that they have polarised Northern Irish society for decades, leaving little room for cross-cutting cleavages, and eventually aligning all these various dimensions of the conflict behind two fundamentally different conceptions of national belonging.

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[1] A more detailed overview of the various interpretations of the Northern Ireland conflict can be found in McGarry and O'Leary (1996).

1.2. Consequently, explanations of the Northern Ireland conflict vary widely between and within the two principal communities in Northern Ireland. Generally, a line can be drawn between external and internal accounts. The two external explanations are the Nationalist, and especially Republican, contention that the involvement of the British state into what is essentially described as internal Irish affairs is the major cause of the conflict; the alternative Unionist and Loyalist version is that the Republic of Ireland, in upholding its constitutional claim to the whole of Ireland in Articles 2 and 3 of its 1937 constitution, unnecessarily fuelled the existing tensions and encouraged the Nationalist/Republican tradition to strive for Irish reunification.[2]

1.3. Internal explanations, in contrast, see the roots of the conflict in a variety of factors within Northern Ireland itself by focusing on the implications of economic, religious, and/or cultural conditions in the province. Economically, deprivation and systematic discrimination of Catholics in Northern Ireland is the most common argument to account for the conflict alongside suggestions of economic opportunism of those who actually profit from the ongoing conflict. As an explanatory concept, religion is either seen as a phenomenon that deepens and aligns already existing social divides, making positive intercommunal relationships virtually impossible, or the religious fanaticism of certain sections within each community is interpreted as the driving force behind the conflict policies of each community. Cultural accounts, finally, treat the conflict as either inherited, that is, simply as the tradition of being in conflict with the other community and/or the authorities, or as an ethno-centrist clash of two fundamentally different cultures.

1.4. As a consequence of this conflict about the conflict, proposed solutions have differed as well. They range from full integration of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom, to devolution, independence, repartition, and eventually to Irish unification, with a variety of different models for each of the major proposals.

1.5. Integration into the United Kingdom, defined as direct government by Westminster, is an idea mostly supported by various streams within the Unionist community and based on an understanding of the conflict as caused by the "Irish dimension". Full integration, in one version, aims at making Northern Ireland part of the United Kingdom such that it would neither be treated any differently from any other part of the country, nor would it have separate, or independent, or different institutions. Supporters of electoral integration propose a slightly different model. According to this model, the main British political parties should expand into Northern Ireland to create a party-political "normality" above sectarian divisions and thus eliminate or at least gradually realign Northern Irish political parties on other issues. Both of these models of integration suggested a modification of the system of direct rule introduced in 1972. However, there is a third group of integrationists who argue that, instead of attempting to change this system, it should simply have been made permanent.

1.6. In contrast to the various types of integration, the idea of devolving powers held by the Westminster government, has been favoured, in its various forms, and each of them with different degrees of support, by sections of both communities. While a return to simple majority rule, as it existed between 1921 and 1972, was, and still is, favoured

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[2] As part of the Good Friday Agreement, the Irish Constitution has been modified in this respect.

among significant sections of the Unionist community, notably the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and some parts of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), this proposal enjoys no support from within the Nationalist camp. Majority rule with safeguards such as a bill of rights and an election system based on proportional representation is a more moderate approach which tries to take account of the historic concerns of the minority community. However, any significant support for such a solution has always been confined to Unionism. Another proposal for a devolutionist arrangement, supported by the explicitly cross-communal Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), and to some extent by sections of the UUP, was power sharing, giving political representatives from both communities the opportunity to be involved in the executive and legislative branches of a new system of government in Northern Ireland. While the moderate Nationalist community, primarily the Social Democrat and Labour Party (SDLP), supported the idea of power sharing, they wanted it to be qualified by some sort of executive and legislative involvement of the Republic of Ireland, which was unacceptable to Unionists before the 1990s.

1.7. Somewhere between suggestions for integration into the United Kingdom and Irish reunification stand proposals for repartition along the major demographic divides in the west and southwest of the province, the independence of Northern Ireland from both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and joint authority of both states over Northern Ireland. With the exception of joint authority, which found significant support among Nationalists, none of these proposals was attractive to a majority within either of the two major traditions in Northern Ireland.

1.8. In contrast, the idea of a united Ireland has always been very popular as a long-term goal in the Nationalist community. While moderate Nationalists favour its achievement by consent and peaceful, constitutional and democratic means, Republican paramilitary groups, most notably the Irish Republican Army (IRA), have tried since 1921 to force the issue through violence. While this approach is rejected by large sections of the Nationalist community, a majority of the same community is nevertheless united over the desirability of the goal of Irish unification, which, in turn, is strongly opposed by Unionists and Loyalists.

1.9. Overall, this means that the demands made by both Unionists/Loyalists and Nationalists/Republicans stretch across the whole spectrum of output, regime, and community-oriented demands, which implies that government responses need to be similarly "comprehensive" and address these demands at all the levels at which they occur in order to achieve a sustainable settlement. As the following analysis will demonstrate, this is a lesson that has been learned the hard way by successive British governments, which at different times have emphasised different types of responses while sidelining or neglecting others.

**2. Settling the Conflict? Constitutional Reform, Institutional Change, Security Policy, and Economic and Social Development in their Effectiveness over Time**

2.1. Despite a number of relatively far-reaching reforms to combat inefficiency and discrimination introduced under the short-lived premiership of Terence O'Neill in Northern Ireland in the 1960s, community relations deteriorated quite rapidly. Despite these reforms, Unionist control of the entire state apparatus in Northern Ireland continued and meant that the evolving conflict was at the same time one between two

communities and between one community and the institutions of the state. The often barely disguised goal congruence between Unionist community and what was essentially a Unionist state, that is, to assure the continued membership of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom with all means available, clearly limited the possibilities of any successful conflict management within Northern Ireland. The violent escalation of the conflict in the late 1960s was ample evidence of that failure, and it prompted the British government to take a more active interest in the province. As it became clear that local security forces and policy were unable to deal with the increasing violence, in 1969 the British government deployed troops in Northern Ireland. Despite this extraordinary move, violence continued and, in fact, increased. This led to the introduction of internment in August 1971, that is, the mass detention without trial of all terrorist suspects, who happened to be almost exclusively Nationalists. The subsequent alienation of the entire Nationalist community in Northern Ireland provoked a further upsurge in violence and an increasingly heavy-handed police and army response, which culminated in thirteen civilians being shot dead by the army on "Bloody Sunday" in January 1972. When, after this unnecessary escalation, the Stormont government refused to hand over control of security matters to the British government in London, the then Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath, suspended the Northern Ireland legislature on 24 March, 1972 temporarily for one year. This marked the beginning of the British government's formally taking charge of conflict management and resolution policies in Northern Ireland.

*The Failure of the Sunningdale Process*

2.2. As direct rule had only been intended as a temporary measure, the government needed to develop an alternative system of government acceptable to both communities. In 1972 and 1973, it published *The Future of Northern Ireland: A Paper for Discussion* and subsequently constitutional proposals for the province. As a consequence, elections to a power-sharing assembly were held on 28 June 1973. Based on an electoral system according to which between five and seven candidates were elected by proportional representation in each of the parliamentary constituencies and on a turnout of 72.5 per cent, the elections returned 78 representatives of eight parties to the new assembly. The official Unionists won 29.3 per cent of the vote and sent twenty-four members to the assembly, followed by the SDLP with 22.1 per cent and nineteen successful candidates. Together with the APNI, which won 9.2 per cent of the vote and eight seats, they formed a coalition government (Northern Ireland executive), initially supported by fifty-two of the seventy-eight members of the assembly. The parties in the executive were generally in favour of both the idea of power-sharing in Northern Ireland and of a Council of Ireland to be established subsequently to address a long-standing demand by Nationalists for the recognition of the "Irish" dimension of the conflict.

2.3. Between 6 and 9 December 1973, representatives of the British and Irish governments and of the parties involved in the designated executive met at Sunningdale and discussed and agreed the setting up of the Council of Ireland. The provisions foresaw a Council of Ministers with executive, harmonising, and consultative functions, consisting of an equal number of delegates from the Northern Ireland executive and the Irish government, and a Consultative Assembly of thirty members from each of the parliaments, chosen by proportional representation on the basis of the single transferable vote system within each parliament. The council was to have executive functions, by means of unanimous vote in the Council of Ministers, in the fields of

environment, agriculture, cooperation in trade and industry, electricity, tourism, transport, public health, sport, culture, and the arts. The conference also agreed on closer cooperation in security-related matters, on inviting the Council of Ireland to draft a human-rights bill, and on the possibility of a future devolution of powers from the parliament in Westminster to the Northern Ireland assembly and the institutions of the Council of Ireland.

2.4. This relative quick success on the constitutional front, however, had not prevented the British government from recognising that it still had a very serious security situation on its hands. Already in November 1972, provisions had been made in the Detention of Terrorists (Northern Ireland) Order to replace and formalise earlier arrangements on internment that had had their basis in the 1922 Special Powers Act. This was followed in 1973 by the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act and the 1974 Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act (PTA). The 1973 act introduced trial without jury for so called scheduled offences (i.e., terrorist activities), allowed confessions made under psychological pressure as admissible evidence, and banned the IRA, Sinn Féin (SF), and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) as legal organisation in Northern Ireland. Less than a year later, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Merlyn Rees, announced that he would de-proscribe the UVF and SF (and phase out internment). The further tightening of anti-terrorist legislation in the 1974 PTA was a direct response to the Birmingham pub bombings, which had brought the conflict in Northern Ireland to Britain's doorstep. Under this 1974 act, the IRA was banned in the rest of the United Kingdom, it became possible to ban Northern Ireland residents from travelling to other parts of the United Kingdom, and police powers of search, detention and arrest were extended. Together, both acts provided the foundation of the government's criminalisation policy, that is, the attempt to treat politically motivated violence in Northern Ireland by means of the criminal justice system. In part, this was a recognition of the failure to address the violence-related aspects of the conflict through a wider framework of constitutional reform and institutional change only.

2.5. Ironically, the government's approach to security issues was subsequently vindicated, when the initially favourable situation for the implementation of the Sunningdale Agreement began to change dramatically early in 1974. The Westminster elections on 28 February had been turned into a referendum on power sharing and the Council of Ireland. Opponents of any change in the status quo united in a coalition called the United Ulster Unionist Council and won 51 per cent of the vote and eleven of the twelve seats in Northern Ireland, with the remaining seat going to the SDLP. Shortly afterwards, the newly established Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) called for new elections to the Northern Ireland assembly. When a motion against power sharing and the Council of Ireland was defeated in the assembly by forty-four to twenty-eight votes on 14 May 1974, the UWC called for a general strike. The following two weeks of the strike brought Northern Ireland to an almost complete standstill. The failure to break up the strike and the unwillingness to negotiate a settlement with the UWC, eventually, led to the resignation of the Northern Ireland executive on 28 May 1974. The assembly was prorogued two days later.

2.6. An analysis of the failure of this first attempt to settle the Northern Ireland conflict by means of constitutional and institutional change shows that the essential conditions for the success of power-sharing and a formal institutional involvement of the Republic of Ireland in the affairs of Northern Ireland had not been there, and even where they had

appeared to be present, they were not stable enough to endure the pressures exercised on them (see Table 1). Even though the initial elections to the Northern Ireland assembly seemed to be a clear vote in favour of the new constitutional status, the reality of the situation in the province betrayed this superficial impression. The cooperating élites had a rather secure two-thirds majority *in* the assembly, but their influence and control over their (former) electorate on the *outside* was far less permanent and stable, in particular as far as Unionists in favour of the new arrangements and the APNI were concerned.[3] Apart from this lack of popular support for the settlement, there was also an essential lack of institutional support and failure of politicians to implement counter-measures. While British government policy was not to negotiate with the UWC, there were no decisive steps taken to prevent the breakdown of public life in Northern Ireland, nor was enough done to counter the pressure from UWC activists on members of the Unionist community who were opposed to the strike or undecided about their role in it. Sunningdale was not a treaty between two states, but an agreement reached between two states and a selected number of political parties. In order to work, it would have required substantial support for those partners in the agreement who were most vulnerable to pressures from within their own communities. The pro-agreement parties in both blocs were vulnerable to outflanking by hard-core radicals. That this support for pro-agreement politicians was not forthcoming was one of the major reasons for the failure of this early attempt to resolve the Northern Ireland conflict.

Table 1: Conditions Accounting for the Failure of the Sunningdale Process

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| • In Northern Ireland: |
| ❑ Vulnerability of the pro-Agreement parties to out-flanking by radicals in both communities |
| ❑ Traditional mistrust of large sections of the Unionist community towards all issues involving cross-border cooperation |
| ❑ Recent high level of violent inter-ethnic conflict |
| ❑ Ability of the UWC to mobilise key sections of the Unionist community in a general strike against the agreement |
| ❑ Lack of popular and institutional support in defence of the agreement |
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| • In the United Kingdom: |
| ❑ Failure to take decisive measures in support of the pro-agreement parties in Northern Ireland and to defeat the general strike in its early stages |
| ❑ Public comments by leading government officials that fuelled anger and fear within the Unionist and Loyalist communities |
| ❑ Lack of effective responses to the Irish Constitutional Court's ruling on the compatibility of the Sunningdale Agreement with Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution |
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| • In the Republic of Ireland: |
| ❑ Irish Constitutional Court's ruling on the compatibility of the Sunningdale Agreement with Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution |
| ❑ Lack of sufficient assurances by the Irish government to respect the constitutional status of Northern Ireland |
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| • International context: |
| ❑ Lack of any pressure on, or incentives for, the conflict parties to resolve their differences through compromise |

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[3] The votes both received in the 1974 Westminster elections were cut down to one third of the results they had achieved in the 1973 assembly elections. Part of the explanation lies in the different voting systems applied in both elections – PR for the assembly and plurality rule for the Westminster elections.

2.7. After the failure of Sunningdale, the British government on the one hand continued its security policy alongside a number of programmes aimed at economic development and an improvement of community relations in Northern Ireland, such as the creation of a Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) and of the Fair Employment Agency (FEA) in 1975. On the other hand, it also initiated several initiatives aimed at a new constitutional status for Northern Ireland. In the wake of Sunningdale, these initiatives were either strictly limited to Northern Ireland itself, such as the 1974/75 constitutional convention, or, when they had cross-border implications, they did not involve any Northern Irish political parties, as with the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Council set up in 1981. Yet, none of these initiatives were succesful.

2.8. Between 1982 and 1984, another attempt was made to resolve the conflict by reintroducing devolution. A scheme of "rolling devolution" involving an assembly and a committee-style executive was proposed. The devolution of powers to elected representatives in Northern Ireland was supposed to be gradual and subject to seventy per cent agreement in the assembly to be elected. As, from their point of view, there was no adequate recognition of the Nationalist tradition in Northern Ireland, both Sinn Féin and the SDLP participated in the 1982 elections on an abstentionist platform and subsequently boycotted the assembly, which meant the failure of "rolling devolution".

2.9. In 1983 the Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour parties of the Republic of Ireland met with the Northern Irish SDLP in Dublin at the so-called New Ireland Forum to discuss the future of Northern Ireland from their viewpoint.[4] Until February 1984, eleven public meetings were held. In September 1983 delegates from the Forum visited Northern Ireland and in January 1984 the United Kingdom. In conclusion, the Forum produced a report, in which the members gave their analysis of the problem, examined the situation in Northern Ireland, and presented three potential solutions to the conflict – a unitary Irish state, a federal or confederate Irish state, and joint British-Irish authority over Northern Ireland. While this report represented a determinedly Nationalist interpretation of the conflict and its solutions, it nevertheless signalled to the British government that there was a certain basis for negotiation and compromise.

2.10. Given this and a British desire to involve the Republic of Ireland in the responsibility of running the province amid the continuously serious security situation, alongside a growing Irish interest to stabilise the situation in the north and to prevent a spill-over of violence and/or Republican influence, a new and joint approach to the conflict seemed possible. Furthermore, the British government realised that it had failed in its campaign to criminalise Republicanism, and both governments faced a growing appeal of Republican ideology within the Nationalist community, in particular after some highly publicised hunger strikes by Republican paramilitary prisoners in the early 1980s. Based on these considerations, both governments decided to enter into negotiations, which resulted in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

2.11. The agreement dealt with a variety of issues, including an intergovernmental conference, a human-rights bill for Northern Ireland, security and judicial policies, and

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[4] Invitations had also been issued to Unionist parties, who decided to boycott the event.

cross-border cooperation on economic, social, and cultural matters. The British attempt to address concerns of the Nationalist community was apparent, but as the implementation of the agreement did not effect any dramatic or even particularly noticeable change, the reward for the United Kingdom alienating the Unionist community was not forthcoming as expected. Although the influence of Sinn Féin within the Nationalist camp decreased towards the end of the 1980s, activities of the IRA did not decline. On the contrary, hard-line Republican opposition to the United Kingdom and IRA activity[5] increased. The declining electoral appeal of Sinn Féin in the mid-to-end 1980s set in motion a rethinking process among the leadership of the party. Eventually, the party moved away from its unqualified support for, or at least tolerance of, Republican violence to become one of the participants in the peace process(es) of the 1990s that finally brought about the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

2.12. The more severe repercussions, however, originated from within the Unionist community. In a survey of January 1988, 55.1 per cent of those who declared themselves as Protestants voiced their opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, compared with 7.9 per cent of those describing themselves as Catholics. Only 8.7 per cent of Protestants opted more or less in favour of the agreement, as compared with 31.8 per cent of Catholics who did so. Asked in the same survey for the biggest problem in Northern Ireland, only 8.6 per cent of Catholics, but 29.5 per cent of Protestants pointed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement (Hamilton 1990). Strong Unionist opposition failed to secure one of the central objectives of the British government, namely to strengthen moderate Unionism in the form of the UUP and marginalise the radicals of Ian Paisley's DUP. Similarly unsatisfactory were the working of the Inter-Governmental conference, the envisaged cross-border cooperation, and the hoped-for improvement in the security situation.[6] The latter especially prompted a further tightening of security policy on part of the British government. The 1989 revisions to the PTA introduced a variety of measures to enable security forces to combat money-laundering by terrorist organisations. Already in 1988, a broadcast ban had been pronounced against Sinn Féin, and the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Act of the same year had allowed judges trying terrorist offences without juries to draw, in certain circumstances, inferences from defendants' refusal to answer questions in court. This and the so-called supergrass trials of the early and mid 1980s were meant to make the judicial battle against terrorism in Northern Ireland more effective at a time when the government came under increasing criticism over an alleged "shoot-to-kill" policy by security forces in Northern Ireland.[7]

2.13. Although the Anglo-Irish Agreement had by no means failed as badly as Sunningdale, it did also not produce a significant breakthrough in the political stalemate in Northern Ireland (see Table 2). In some respects, such as the increasing alienation of parts of the Unionist community, it even worsened the situation and prevented major

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[5] This was also facilitated by a shipment of weapons and equipment from Libya.

[6] According to RUC statistics, the three years prior to the Anglo-Irish Agreement produced 195 deaths, 2,342 injuries, 716 shooting incidents, 607 explosions, and 1,708 armed robberies. The respective figures for 1986-1988 are: 247 deaths (+27 per cent), 3,661 injuries (+56 per cent), 1,132 shootings (+58 per cent), 661 explosions (+9 per cent), and 2,253 armed robberies (+31 per cent). This increase was not necessarily a direct effect of the Anglo-Irish Agreement as O'Leary and McGarry (1993, 270-273) have shown.

[7] An inquiry set up to investigate this accusation found evidence that there was a conspiracy within the security forces to pervert the cause of justice, but no charges against anyone were ever brought.

progress for years to come. However, although the stalemate continued, it did so on a different level. The agreement had shown that solutions were possible to which the two governments and a significant part of the Nationalist community could agree. This had a positive long-term effect on the opportunities to reduce the level of violent conflict and to increase the chances of achieving an inclusive agreement for the future of Northern Ireland, because it made uncompromising, hard-line Unionism less credible as a strategy to preserve Northern Ireland's link with the United Kingdom and, similarly, indicated that there was overwhelming support for constitutional, non-violent politics within the Nationalist community, the latter finding its expression in the poor electoral performance of Sinn Féin in the late 1980s, early 1990s. The limited success that the Anglo-Irish Agreement had in the short term was mostly a consequence of it being reached and implemented at intergovernmental level.[8] This being a recognition of the situation in the mid 1980s, in which cross-communal agreement was virtually impossible, the British and Irish governments also had to accept that no stable and durable solution would be possible without the involvement and consent of the parties representing the two traditions in Northern Ireland. However, despite continued economic and social-development programmes administered in the province, there is little evidence that the British government made any significant progress throughout the 1980s to facilitate such involvement and consent. On the other hand, the more decisive move towards a bilateral approach in the 1980s did provide part of the foundation upon which the peace process in the 1990s could be built.

Table 2: Conditions Accounting for the Limited Success of the Anglo-Irish Agreement

- In the United Kingdom:
  - Deliberate attempt to address concerns of the Nationalist community, even at the price of alienating sections within the Unionist community
  - Failure to deliver on key aspects of the agreement, such as the Inter-governmental Conference, cross-border cooperation, and an improved security situation

- In the Republic of Ireland:
  - Upholding of the constitutional claim to Northern Ireland and its perception by Unionists as a threat to a non-negotiable aspect of their identity
  - Failure to deliver on key aspects of the agreement, such as the Inter-governmental Conference, cross-border cooperation, and an improved security situation

- In Northern Ireland:
  - Exclusion of the political parties in Northern Ireland from the formal negotiation process
  - No opportunity for the people of Northern Ireland to approve of, or reject, the agreement
  - Disappointment among Nationalists and Republicans about the lack of visible improvements in their situation
  - Increased hard-line Republican resistance against British policy
  - Radicalisation of the Unionist community in opposition to the "Irish" dimension of the agreement
  - Continued high levels of violent inter-ethnic conflict

- International context:
  - Lack of any pressure on the conflict parties to resolve their differences through compromise
  - Support of the IRA through Libyan arms shipments

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[8] It needs to be mentioned, however, that the Irish government continuously consulted with the SDLP, while the British government had no contact with Unionists during the negotiations. This contributed to the strengthening of Unionist fears and the weakening of moderates. At the same time, this Irish policy was not unanimously embraced in the Republic either – both Ian Gow and Mary Robinson resigned over this issue. (Personal communication from Antony Alcock.)

2.14. The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s signalled new opportunities to move towards an inclusive settlement of the Northern Ireland conflict. In 1988, the UUP, the DUP, the APNI, and the SDLP had met in Germany without achieving any breakthrough. Talks had also been held between the SDLP and Sinn Féin in the first half of 1988. More significant than these talks, however, was an announcement by Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams in March 1989 that he sought to establish Sinn Féin as a democratic political movement in pursuit of self-determination. This and the public acknowledgement by the then Northern Ireland secretary Peter Brooke that the IRA could not be defeated militarily, that he would not rule out talks between the government and Sinn Féin should IRA violence cease, and that the British government had no selfish strategic or economic interests in Northern Ireland paved the way for the Brooke/Mayhew talks, involving the UUP, the DUP, the APNI, and the SDLP. These talks were held between March 1991 and November 1992 during a break in the operation of the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference to ensure the participation of the Unionist parties. The arrangements for the talks provided for three different strands – relationships in Northern Ireland, between the province and the Republic, and between the two governments. While talks about the relationships in Northern Ireland came to a standstill in June 1992 because there was little sign of compromise and the gap between the different positions seemed, at the time, impossible to bridge, the parties nevertheless agreed to move on to talks about Strand 2. With no major progress made, and decreasing willingness to cooperate on the part of the DUP, the process eventually collapsed when the resumption of the Maryfield secretariat[9] prompted the Unionists to withdraw from the talks.

2.15. In April of the following year it was revealed that Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin and John Hume of the SDLP had held a series of talks for two years discussing the contributions their parties could make to bringing about peace. After their talks had become public, they issued a first joint statement in April and a second one in September, which became known as the Hume/Adams Initiative, and outlined the Nationalist and Republican views of a road to peace. Unionist opposition to the Hume/Adams Initiative coincided with a new series of violent attacks by and against both communities, of which an IRA bomb on the Shankill Road in Belfast was the most costly in human casualties.[10] It was also revealed that there had been secret talks between the British government and Sinn Féin. At the end of the year, following a series of meetings Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds and British Prime Minister John Major issued the Joint Declaration.

2.16. The significance of the declaration, and the single most important difference to the Sunningdale and Anglo-Irish Agreements, was the fact that the British government acknowledged that it was "for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish". The explicit reference to the notion of self-determination

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[9] This was part of the permanent institutional framework set up by the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

[10] On Thursday 21 October 1993, ten people (nine civilians and one IRA member) were killed when a bomb exploded prematurely in a fish shop on the Shankill Road in Belfast.

had a highly symbolic value, positively connoted for the Nationalist community, with more negative implications for the Unionist tradition.

2.17. The Joint Declaration and its emphasis on inclusiveness was, to some extent, not an entirely new policy. However, it had been reinvigorated at the beginning of the 1990s with the creation of the Community Relations Council and the inauguration of "Education for Mutual Understanding" and revised curricular guidelines emphasising the cultural heritage of both communities. Also falling in this period was the launch of another initiative – Targeting Social Need – which required all departments of the Northern Ireland Office to monitor policy impacts and distribute their funds in a way that, wherever possible, those areas and communities most in need of social and economic development would benefit most. Further confidence-building measures followed early in 1994 when the broadcast ban on Sinn Féin was lifted in the Republic of Ireland, when Gerry Adams was given a visa to enter the USA, and when the Northern Ireland Office issued a statement in which it addressed questions by Sinn Féin concerning the Joint Declaration. Although Sinn Féin remained critical of the Declaration, a secret meeting was held between the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, and a Sinn Féin delegation in August, which was followed by an IRA announcement about a "complete cessation of all military activities" on 30 August.

2.18. While relations between the Nationalist community and its representatives, on one side, and the Irish government, on the other, grew closer, the increasing degree of alienation between the DUP, which represented the more radical sections of Unionism and Loyalism, and the British government became apparent when John Major cut short a meeting with DUP leader Ian Paisley on 6 September 1994. Ten days later, the British government lifted the broadcast ban on Sinn Féin. On 13 October 1994, the Combined Loyalist Military Command announced its own ceasefire. At the end of the year, the British government, represented by officials of the Northern Ireland Office, began a series of talks with those political parties of Northern Ireland that had affiliations with paramilitary organisations, namely Sinn Féin (9 December 1994), the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) (both on 15 December 1994).

2.19. Thus, within a year of the Joint Declaration, ceasefires had been announced by the major paramilitary organisations which did not cover a specified period of time (as they had in the past), but seemed, if not permanent, at least longer-term. In addition, the British government had entered into official and formal talks with representatives of the paramilitary organisations of both communities, and Sinn Féin was heading back into the political process, being recognised as a necessary partner by both governments. Although Unionist opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Joint Declaration remained, the conditions to move forward towards a lasting settlement seemed rather good.

2.20. Realising that, despite these favourable conditions, the causes of conflict in Northern Ireland had not been removed, the British and Irish governments developed *A New Framework for Agreement*, which proposed structures for North–South (or, Northern Ireland – Republic of Ireland) and East–West (British–Irish) institutions and sought to integrate the earlier suspended three-strand talks with a new effort of peacemaking (O'Leary 1995, 867). Both governments recognised that a settlement

would not be possible without significant and substantial compromise from all parties to the conflict and reaffirmed the basic positions of the Joint Declaration – the principles of self-determination and consent, peaceful and democratic means as the only acceptable political strategies and tactics, and the recognition of the fundamental "rights and identities of both traditions". In addition, the British government proposed its own ideas for a possible solution of the conflict within Northern Ireland in a document called *A Framework for Accountable Government in Northern Ireland.*

2.21. Throughout 1995, contacts and official talks continued between the British government and Sinn Féin, and although no major progress was achieved an eventual settlement seemed to have come closer.[11] However, the end of the IRA ceasefire in February 1996 and the resumption of (Republican) violence throughout the region, primarily targeting the security forces, and in England, proved to be a major setback. Despite this, the British and Irish governments announced the beginning of all-party talks, following elections to them in May, for June 1996. Although Sinn Féin polled a record 15.5 per cent of the vote in these elections, the party was not allowed to take its seats at the negotiation table,[12] because IRA violence continued and the party did not sign up to the Mitchell principles of non-violence.[13] The multi-party talks commenced as planned but did not bring about any significant results in their first year.

2.22. The election of a Labour government in the general elections in May 1997, the emphasis Labour put on reaching a settlement in Northern Ireland, and the perception, especially among the Nationalist community, that there was a new approach in Northern Ireland policies opened new possibilities. In July 1997, the IRA renewed its ceasefire. After Sinn Féin had signed up to the Mitchell Principles, the party was allowed into the multi-party talks at Stormont, which, however, resulted in the DUP and the United Kingdom Unionist Party walking out. After more than six months of intensive negotiations with several setbacks, eight political parties in Northern Ireland and the British and Irish governments agreed to what has become known as the Good Friday Agreement.

2.23. This agreement established a 108-member legislative assembly elected by popular vote in Northern Ireland according to the Single Transferable Vote system. From within this assembly, an executive is elected according to the d'Hondt principle. A First Minister and a Deputy First Minister, who are also elected by the assembly, lead this executive. The assembly has legislative powers in a wide variety of areas, ranging from economic policy and health care to education and tourism. The Northern Ireland

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[11] Part of the reason for the lack of progress was the British insistence that the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons had to precede Sinn Féin's admission to formal multi-party talks. This pre-condition was set by the Tory party after the negative response by Unionists to the Framework Documents. It somehow reflects the wider problems of the Conservative government and its decreasing majority in Westminster (O'Leary 1997, 672).

[12] The Conservative Party (by then in office for seventeen years) had suffered for a long time from what O'Leary calls the "talking and not talking to terrorists syndrome". However, under the government of John Major, parts of the Tory elite became more flexible. While they did not effectively exclude the possibility of negotiations with Sinn Féin (before the 1997 elections were called), their initial over-extensive talks about talks and the burdening of the latter with the decommissioning issue did not have a positive impact on the peace process. (O'Leary 1997, 672f.).

[13] Former US Senator George Mitchell played a major role a chair of the negotiation process. In general, American influence (both the Irish-American lobby and the Clinton Administration), and pressure, on all negotiating parties was among the facilitating factors of the Good Friday Agreement.

Secretary retains a certain measure of power, most crucially in the area of security and justice policy. Within the assembly, qualified majority voting procedures can be invoked on critical issues. The assembly can also veto any proposal by the North–South Ministerial Council that was set up by the Good Friday Agreement to coordinate cross-border cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. A new British-Irish Council operates on a similar premiss and includes delegates from the two national governments and the three regions within the United Kingdom that have devolved powers (Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales). The British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, subsuming both the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council and the Intergovernmental Conference established under the 1985 Agreement, was given the task to promote broad and substantial bilateral cooperation between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.[14]

2.24. Despite the apparent comprehensiveness of the Good Friday Agreement and its endorsement by what, at the time, looked like overwhelming majorities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the question remains whether it provides an effective framework for a permanent resolution of the conflict. In order to answer this question, it is useful to compare the Good Friday Agreement to previous settlement attempts both in terms of their content and the context of their implementation.

2.25. Starting with the first of these issues, a comparison between the Sunningdale Agreement, the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Good Friday Agreement reveals that there is a core of issues dealt with by all or some of these agreements in a similar manner (see Table 3).

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[14] A more detailed discussion of the Good Friday Agreement can be found in O'Leary (1999).

Table 3: Agreements on and in Northern Ireland, 1973–98

| | Sunningdale Agreement | Anglo-Irish Agreement | Good Friday Agreement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Signatories | United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, UP, SDLP, APNI | United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland | United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, UUP, UDP, PUP, NIWC, L, APNI, Sinn Féin, SDLP |
| Consent principle | X | X | X |
| Self-determination | O | O | X |
| Reform of the policing system | X | X | X |
| Early release of prisoners | X | (X) | X |
| Bill of Rights | X | X | X |
| Abandonment of violence Required | X | X | X |
| Security cooperation | X | X | X |
| Cross-border cooperation | X | X | X |
| Recognition of both identities | O | X | X |
| Intergovernmental cooperation | X | X | X |
| Institutional role for the Republic of Ireland | X | X | X |
| Cooperation between Unionists and Nationalists required | (X) | X | X |
| Inter-island cooperation | O | (X) | X |
| | Devolution of powers | X | X |

Key: X – issue addressed; (X) – issue implicitly addressed; O – issue not addressed.

2.26. However, there are also a number of differences between the agreements. These relate, in the first place, to the signatories of each of the agreements. While the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland have signed all of them, the prior negotiation process did only on two occasions (Sunningdale and Good Friday Agreements) involve political representatives from the communities in Northern Ireland. Clearly, the participation has been far broader in the 1997/98 talks process and, even more significantly, included representatives of paramilitary organisations alongside the mainstream constitutional parties.

2.27. A second difference concerns the comprehensiveness and detail of the arrangements. Here the Good Friday Agreement, as it is based on an inclusive negotiation process, addresses the greatest number of issues and lays down, for most of these issues, in great detail the operational procedures for their implementation.

2.28. A third difference is the character of the implementation process. Only the Good Friday Agreement was proposed to the people in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland in a referendum, while all the others were more or less implemented by government decree, thus giving the people a sense of imposition. The majority with which the Good Friday Agreement was endorsed by the population north and south of the border and across the communities in Northern Ireland is so far unprecedented in the history of the conflict. However, it remains to be seen how long this majority will persist under the strains to which the agreement has been, and continues to be, subjected. At present (summer 2001) these pressures seem to have become

overwhelming, and the future of the institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement is in serious doubt.

2.29. Fourth, since the beginning of the final round of the negotiation process in the autumn of 1997, the major paramilitary organisations on both sides have upheld their ceasefires.

2.30. Fifth, there is the question of what alternative arrangements would be put in place in case the Good Friday Agreement fails. A comparison with the situation that existed after Sunningdale reveals that the incentives for both communities to find a *modus vivendi* within the agreement structure are more compelling than they were before. The failure of Sunningdale meant the reintroduction of direct rule, an outcome that many in the Unionist community preferred to power sharing. A failure of the Good Friday Agreement, however, will most likely mean that the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland will move towards a form of shared sovereignty over Northern Ireland. Clearly, this is not an outcome that Unionists would prefer. Nationalists, however, would also lose out, as the influence of both communities on the decision-making in Northern Ireland would decrease to a level well below to what they have at present achieved. In particular, Sinn Féin, unless the party substantially increases its representation in the Irish parliament would lose an unprecedented power base.

2.31. Finally, the international context, especially the involvement of the United States, has been a critical factor in the success of the Good Friday Agreement to date. In particular, the international mediation of the talks process and the simultaneous and subsequent American pressure on, and incentives for, all parties in the process to come to an agreement and to implement it has played a significant role in the maintenance of the peace process. The vital role of former U.S. Senator George Mitchell in brokering the Belfast Agreement in 1998 and in overcoming the decommissioning impasse in 1999, as well as the support from the European Union must not be underestimated in their importance. The early endorsement of the post-agreement peace process in the form of the award of the Nobel Peace Price to John Hume and David Trimble was similarly significant. It assisted in encouraging the pursuit of a long-term and stable peace in Northern Ireland and in putting the spotlight on the developments in the province in which the major protagonists can less and less afford to fail in their efforts to seek accommodation. The involvement of the European Union since the mid 1990s has made a positive contribution to economic development and, through various development projects, to an improvement of inter-communal relations.

2.32. The conflict in Northern Ireland in all its different aspects and dimensions and in its dependence on factors that can be influenced only to a limited degree by the political actors in Belfast, London and Dublin is not certain, but also not unlikely, to be resolved within and by the institutional framework set out in the Good Friday Agreement (see Table 4). The reason for this uncertainty is that the Good Friday Agreement, as any other agreement reached before, is dependent upon the cooperation and compromise of two communities with fundamentally different political aspirations and identities. These, of course, may change over time provided opportunities and incentives for such change exist, at present, however, there is little indication that such change has in fact taken place.

Table 4: Conditions Accounting for the Possibility of the Good Friday Agreement

- In Northern Ireland:
- ❑ Inclusion of all parties in the negotiation process based on a prior election
- ❑ Opportunity for the people of Northern Ireland to approve the agreement
- ❑ Protection mechanisms built into the agreement to address concerns of both communities
- ❑ Ceasefires of all major paramilitary organisations considerably reducing the level of violent inter-ethnic conflict

- In the United Kingdom:
- ❑ Change in government, fresh and more determined approach to achieve an inclusive settlement
- ❑ Pressure on all sections of the communities in Northern Ireland to compromise
- ❑ Greater degree of flexibility on key issues, such as Sinn Féin participation in the negotiation process, decommissioning, early release of prisoners, etc.
- ❑ Negotiation of a new Anglo-Irish Agreement
- ❑ Reiteration that any change in the constitutional future of Northern Ireland was subject to the approval of the people of Northern Ireland
- ❑ Close cooperation with the government of the Republic of Ireland and the international chairmanship of the talks

- In the Republic of Ireland:
- ❑ Preparedness to withdraw the constitutional claim to Northern Ireland
- ❑ Pressure, particularly on Sinn Féin and the IRA, to appreciate the opportunity presented by the multi-party negotiations in 1997/98
- ❑ Active steps to address concerns of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland
- ❑ Close cooperation with the government of the United Kingdom and the international chairmanship of the talks
- ❑ Opportunity for the citizens of the Republic of Ireland to approve the agreement

- International Context:
- ❑ International, particularly American, involvement in the talks process, including official and unofficial pressure on both communities to come to a settlement and on the IRA to maintain its ceasefire

## 3. Assessing the Success and Failure of British Conflict Management and Resolution Policies in Northern Ireland

3.1. The overwhelming evidence from the previous discussion suggests that conflict management, that is, the containment of the conflict at a low intensity level, has been successful, while at the time of writing this essay (spring 2002) an actual resolution of the conflict seems as far away as ever before. In other words, punctual policy measures in the areas of economic, social and education policies in combination with an increasingly sophisticated and successful, albeit not uncontroversial, security policy has managed to keep levels of violence and civil unrest low. At the same time constitutional reforms and institutional changes have not been able to foster a common vision of Northern Ireland's future acceptable to both communities so that, measured in terms of support for political parties, unification with the Republic of Ireland remains the goal of a majority of people within the Nationalist community. Taken together, punctual policy measures and the failure of constitutional and institutional changes have hardened and deepened the existing divisions in Northern Ireland.

*Reducing the Level of Violent Conflict*

3.2. By global standards of death tolls in violent inter-ethnic conflicts, the one in Northern Ireland has not been very intense. Between 1969 and 1994, when the first IRA and Loyalist ceasefires were announced in the current peace process, about 3,200 people had been killed.[15] Yet, these statistics tell only half the story. Apart from killings, paramilitaries have committed many more acts of violence, ranging from beatings, to kneecappings, to intimidation and directed both at the alleged "enemy" and at members of their own communities. These many forms of violence have had a significant impact on community relations in Northern Ireland, whose examination can provide a good understanding of the degree to which the conflict as a whole has affected society, and thus in turn has created the very conditions under which governments had to formulate and implement policies aimed at conflict resolution.

3.3. As Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix indicate, British government policy has largely succeeded in reducing the level of violence, especially of fatalities, in Northern Ireland. Despite some setbacks, this has been the predominant trend since the mid-1970s. Yet, the impact of violence on the conflict cannot only be measured in these terms. Used by the paramilitary groups of both communities to realise their goals as well as by the British state and its institutions to preserve the status quo and prevent further escalation, violence has not only been a symptom of the incompatibility of communal identities in Northern Ireland, but has also intensified existing tensions and kept them at a high level for the past thirty-some years. Violence in Northern Ireland is not only a matter of paramilitary groups, the army and the police. It also occurs in the form of spontaneous and organised rioting and clashes between infuriated mobs and between them and the security forces. While these are better understood in terms of occasionally deteriorating relationships between sections of the two communities, the campaigns of Loyalist and Republican paramilitary organisations are a valuable source for analysing the reasoning of the radical factions in each community.[16] This will provide a deeper understanding of how the conflict as such is perceived and how the actions of the respective "other" side are interpreted. Such an analysis can then be used as a further element in an informed assessment of the situation in Northern Ireland and the reasons for success and failure of various government policies to find a solution.

*Republican Violence*

3.4. Violence by Republican paramilitaries has accounted for the greatest number of deaths by far in Northern Ireland as a whole. This overall picture, however, needs to be clarified in a number of important ways. Between 1969 and 1994, the time when the first ceasefires were announced in the recent peace process, Republican paramilitaries were responsible for more than half of all lives lost in the Northern Ireland conflict (58.8 per cent), and killed more than twice as many people as their Loyalist counter-parts, and about six times as many as the security forces. Almost exactly one half of their victims (50.7 per cent) were members of the security forces, about half from within and half from without Northern Ireland, but more than one-third (37.1 per cent) were

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[15] According to Fay et al. (1998) the death toll was 3,225.

[16] According to O'Duffy (1995, 741f.), "changes in the intensity and targets of Republican violence can best be explained by three instrumental factors related to political context: strategic objectives, the effects of security policy (upon opportunity structures), and the organisational strength of each paramilitary group."

civilians, including not only innocent bystanders but, for example, also contract workers for the "Crown forces". Loyalist paramilitaries, apart from the security forces, the other direct adversaries of Republican paramilitaries, accounted for only 1.5 per cent of their victims, while infighting among Republican paramilitary organisations and splinter groups caused significantly more casualties (10.7 per cent).[17]

3.5. As regards the religion of Republican paramilitaries' civilian victims, the greatest number of their victims were Protestants (37.4 per cent), which amounts to almost three-quarters of all Protestant deaths in the conflict. At the same time, they were responsible for most of the deaths among people whose religion could not be established (89.4 per cent) or among people from outside Northern Ireland (94.6 per cent).A quarter of all Catholics killed between 1969 and 1994 died as a direct consequence of Republican paramilitary action.

3.6. Even though the status of victims – civilian, Loyalist or Republican paramilitary, security forces – suggests a non-sectarian campaign against selected target groups with a high number of civilian bystanders killed, a look at the religion of these victims reveals that, in its results, Republican paramilitary warfare had a sectarian outcome.

*Loyalist Violence*

3.7. Loyalist paramilitaries have also contributed significantly to the overall death toll in Northern Ireland since 1969. Of all victims killed in the conflict, Loyalist paramilitary violence has accounted for 29 per cent of them, of which 87.5 per cent were civilians. The next highest percentage of victims were from within the Loyalist paramilitary community itself (6.5 per cent), followed by Republican paramilitaries (4.3 per cent), and members of the security forces (1.2 per cent), most of them (91 per cent) from Northern Ireland.

3.8. As regards the religion of their victims, Loyalist paramilitaries killed almost half of all Catholic victims in the conflict (49.6 per cent), which equals more than three quarters (75.5 per cent) of all victims of Loyalist paramilitary violence.

3.9. These figures qualify the Loyalist campaign "in defence of their ancient rights" as one that has been strongly sectarian and very indiscriminate in the selection of targets and demonstrates the very wide concept of who and what is perceived as threatening.

3.10. The three major Loyalist paramilitary organisations are the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), which has also operated under the cover name Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), and the only recently founded Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF). UDA and UVF have operated under the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) and generally coordinated their strategy. However, during the final months of the talks process in 1997/98 the joint Loyalist command structure collapsed.[18]

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[17] A part of this high number of self-inflicted casualties has also been caused by prematurely exploded bombs and accidents in the production and handling of explosives.

[18] This has also resulted in the emergence of splinter groups that have not called ceasefires, such as the Red Hand Defenders.

3.11. Violence, and its increasing acceptance as a means to achieve political objectives among some sections of both communities, has had an impact on community relations and vice versa at three levels – segregation, polarisation, and alienation.[19] Violence may not be the primary cause for, or result of, any of these three dimensions of community relations, yet there is a strong interrelation between them.

3.12. Segregation, although it has been a long-term trend, has increased as a result of inter-communal violence. This was the case especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but on a lower level it has continued in subsequent decades. While intimidation from the "other" community and fear of violence have contributed to increasing residential segregation, peer pressure from within one's own community has also played a role in establishing the largely segregated structure of residence in Northern Ireland today. Segregation has important consequences in societies affected by inter-ethnic conflict because it makes it easier to develop and maintain stereotypes about the other community and its intentions towards one's own community. Because of this, there will be even less understanding for the position of the other community, which, in its rejection, increases homogeneity and solidarity within one's own community. On this basis, violence against this other community becomes more easily acceptable and justifications for its use are more readily available.[20]

3.13. This is also the basis upon which polarisation grows. The degree to which both communities differ in their perceptions of the nature of the Northern Ireland conflict and its potential solutions is influenced by more or less informed judgements about the other community and its political agenda. Violence and the interpretation of violent acts is likely to reinforce polarisation. At the same time, the stark polarisation between the two communities over what could be an acceptable and desirable future for Northern Ireland, and the inability to reach an agreement by peaceful means increased the preparedness of some sections within each community to engage in violence to either achieve their goals or, at least, prevent the other community from achieving theirs.

3.14. The lack of political progress over almost thirty years of violent conflict and the inability of the security forces to provide protection from acts of terrorist violence has also contributed, though unequally, to an increasing alienation of both communities from the British state and its institutions. While this has always been a feature of the relationship between the Nationalist community and the Stormont and later the British political systems, alienation has also affected the Unionist community, especially after the Anglo-Irish Agreement and after the recent Good Friday Agreement. The sense of being left alone with unresolved problems has triggered processes in both communities in which paramilitary organisations have partly replaced organs of the state. This is more obvious and widespread within sections of the Nationalist community, where paramilitaries not only "protect" their community from sectarian attacks, but also police it and provide a number of community "services". Unionist alienation from the United Kingdom has its origins in the early days of partition in the 1920s when national political parties withdrew from campaigning in Northern Ireland, thus encouraging the

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[19] For a specific case study on these three aspects of community relations see Hamilton (1990).

[20] One other feature of segregation in Northern Ireland is the maintenance of a confession-based school system with only few opportunities for integrated schooling.

build-up of an almost exclusively sectarian party system for decades to come. Likewise, the creation of a parliament in Northern Ireland was not the preferred option of Unionists because it marked Northern Ireland as different from the rest of the United Kingdom,[21] yet having a parliament elected by popular vote was at the same time perceived as a safeguard against a British sell-out, and thus still an option with a fairly positive connotation.

3.15. Community relations that are based on the historic experience of inequality, deprivation and discrimination are more likely to form the background against which intercommunal violence can develop and escalate. In general, the acceptability of violence has not only affected inter- but also intracommunity relations. Feuds between rival paramilitary groups in each community, such as the Loyalist turf wars of summer 2000, and punishment beatings, expulsions of individuals and entire families, intimidation, etc., have contributed to a deterioration of social relations, decline in trust in the effectiveness of state institutions to perform essential functions, and widespread disillusionment with the political process in Northern Ireland for several decades. With regard to civil society, Northern Ireland shows levels of social and political participation, cooperation and trust *within* each community that are quite high compared to those *across* the communities, that is, civil society is similarly polarised and organised along the fundamental ethno-nationalist fault line as the rest of society. In fact, one can speak of two separate civil societies in Northern Ireland. This, too, is part of the complicated sociopolitical background against which conflict resolution policies in Northern Ireland must be judged.

3.16. The declaration of ceasefires by the major paramilitary organisations on both sides in 1994 and 1997 and their continuation despite opposition to the Good Friday Agreement from sections within both communities indicates that there is a growing understanding that it will not be possible to achieve any stable settlement of the conflict through violence. This, however, does not mean that the structure of community relations in Northern Ireland could not facilitate a renewed violent escalation of the conflict despite the settlement achieved in the Good Friday Agreement. Even though this may not lead to the same degree of guerrilla and sectarian warfare as before 1994, community relations could continue to deteriorate further as a result of, and cause for, violent eruptions. As the Good Friday Agreement is built largely on the assumption of the possibility and desirability of intercommunal cooperation, and as its implementation crucially depends upon the cooperation of both communities, violence has the potential to destroy the agreement, mostly because of the structure of communal interests and the design of the institutional process envisaged by the agreement.

*Establishing the Conditions for an Inclusive Political Process?*

3.17. Any durable solution, except for partition and/or resettlement (inasmuch as these can be considered durable), for a conflict such as the one in Northern Ireland requires a minimal, but broad consensus among political leaders and the population at large about the desirability of a common future.

3.18. The balance sheet of British government policy in this respect is very mixed, and at the bottom line has not achieved its main goal. Despite managing to achieve fairer

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[21] Personal communication from Antony Alcock.

representation of both communities at all levels of the political process, government policy over the past thirty-some years failed to create the foundation upon which such a broadly supported political consensus could emerge. On the contrary, an analysis of the electoral process provides evidence, especially from recent elections, which suggests that the two communities as a whole support more hardline political parties and are politically moving even further apart (see Figures 3 and 4 in the Appendix).

*The Balance of Political Power between and within the Communities*[22]

3.19. The two most important trends in relation to the balance of political power in Northern Ireland over the past thirty years are that the political influence[23] of Nationalist parties has grown at the expense of the Unionist community and that, at the same time, the diversity of political parties within all the three party blocs – Nationalist, Unionist, and cross-communal – has increased.

3.20. The Unionist bloc consists of the UUP, the DUP, and a number of smaller, and over time different, Unionist parties. The two main contenders for the Nationalist vote have been, since 1982, the SDLP and Sinn Féin. Between 1973 and 1982, the SDLP competed with a number of smaller Nationalist parties. Before 1973, the Nationalist Party, the Republican Labour Party, and occasional independent candidates ran in elections. The most persistent element of the cross-communal bloc has been the APNI. Until 1977, its main competitor was the Northern Ireland Labour Party, after 1981, it was the Worker's Party, and more recently the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. Other parties whose position can not be determined on the confessional/non-confessional scale, such as the Natural Law Party, have also contested elections. The general trend of vote distribution among the three major blocs is exemplified in Graph 3 in the Appendix.

3.21. The increasing diversification within each of the blocs has had different effects. In the Unionist bloc, it has meant that the UUP, although it has just managed to retain its leading position (except in European elections, where the DUP has always been the strongest party), has lost votes and seats, mostly to its main contender, the DUP. This split of Unionist votes had the effect that the SDLP, for a brief but significant moment in Northern Ireland's recent history, became the party with highest percentage share of votes in the 1998 assembly elections.

3.22. In the Nationalist camp, the SDLP was unquestionably the stronger performer in elections until 2001, and has always, with some exceptions in the 1980s, won more than 20 per cent of the vote. Sinn Féin after a good performance in the early 1980s, lost significant electoral support after the Anglo-Irish Agreement, but could regain most of it and win new voters from the early 1990s onwards when the party managed to establish itself more credibly as a democratic, non-violent political force.[24] In both the 2001

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[22] All data from http://cain.ulst.ac.United Kingdom/issues/politics/election/elect.htm. A good overview of party-political developments between 1969 and 1989 is O'Leary and McGarry (1993, 185ff.).

[23] Measured in seats won in elections at local, provincial, and parliamentary level.

[24] Evans and O'Leary (1997, 674) identify two sources of Sinn Féin support – politically the party has benefited from being identified with the "first peace process", demographically Sinn Féin's strength is that a large number (60 per cent) of voters belong to the 18-34 age cohort.

Westminster and local-government elections, Sinn Féin has out-polled the SDLP and has become the strongest political force in the Nationalist community.

3.23. The APNI has always been the dominant party in the cross-communal sector, yet its electoral performance has only been satisfactory at local and provincial level and after the introduction of the Single Transferable Vote system (STV). The Worker's Party never had a share of more than 3 per cent of the valid vote. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, however, has managed to win seats both in the 1996 Forum and in the 1998 assembly elections.

3.24. In general, the balance of power has been altered at local and provincial levels towards fairer representation of the Nationalist and cross-communal vote with the introduction of STV. In parliamentary elections, the plurality system is still in operation for the eighteen Northern Ireland constituencies, but the overall increase in Nationalist votes has brought about a more balanced representation of the electorate in Westminster as well. On the other hand, the success of Sinn Féin and the DUP at the expense of the more moderate and consensus-oriented SDLP and UUP suggests that attitudes towards the most recent settlement attempt – the Good Friday Agreement – are hardening in both communities. Against this background it is unlikely that the Good Friday Agreement will become the long-term acceptable framework in which the Northern Ireland conflict will finally be resolved for good.

**4. Afterword: Northern Ireland since the Beginning of IRA Decommissioning**

4.1. Faced with the imminent collapse of the political institutions created by the Good Friday Agreement, and under considerable national and international pressure following the terrorist attacks on the USA and the arrest of three alleged IRA members in Colombia, Sinn Féin publicly called on the IRA in October 2001 to begin decommissioning its weapons, which was followed by a subsequent announcement of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning that a first set of arms and other equipment had been put beyond use. The importance of this development can hardly be overestimated for the future of the peace process in Northern Ireland. While it remains to be seen whether this momentum in decommissioning can be sustained and whether it alone is enough to bring the peace process to a successful conclusion, there is some evidence in other recent developments that strongly suggests so. It is also significant, and indicative of further progress on the decommissioning front in the near future, that the British government proposed an amendment to the current decommissioning legislation, extending the amnesty period from the end of February 2002 initially until 2003, with possible further extensions until 2007. Despite Unionist and Conservative concerns that this would take the pressure off the paramilitary groups, the Northern Ireland Decommissioning (Amendment) Bill was passed in the House of Commons on 9 January 2002 and sent to the House of Lords.

4.2. The overall trend of decreasing violence has been reversed since 2001 with acts of spontaneous and organised mob and paramilitary violence once again becoming a feature of Northern Irish politics. The months-long stand-off and clashes between Catholics and Protestants around the Holy Cross Girls' Primary School in the Ardoyne area of North Belfast, the murder of a Catholic postal worker and the, subsequently withdrawn, UDA threat against Catholic schoolteachers and postal workers, as well as the threat by the Republican paramilitary group INLA against the Protestant staff at a

Marks & Spencer distribution centre testify to the persistence of sectarian divisions and mindsets in Northern Ireland. However, what is equally, if not more significant, is that the murder of the Catholic postal worker was not only widely condemned by representatives from all major political parties in Northern Ireland, but also led to thousands of people from both communities participating in rallies against hatred and sectarianism. By the same token, it is interesting to observe that the clashes around the Holy Cross Girls' Primary School did not spread across Northern Ireland or even led to wider rioting in Belfast itself, as similar events did over the past years. What this indicates is a decreasing acceptance of violence as a useful means to achieve political aims, and as such points to a change in the overall political climate in Northern Ireland over the past several years that must not be underestimated in its significance for conflict resolution.

4.3. In terms of party politics, one of the smaller Unionist parties, the Ulster Democratic Party, which functioned as the political arm of the Ulster Defence Association was dissolved in late 2001, because its strategy of support for the Good Friday Agreement was at odds with the withdrawal of support for the peace process by the UDA. The significance of this development lies in the implication that opponents of the peace process become increasingly marginalised even within their own communities, but that they at the same time become more radicalised, too.

4.4. Finally, the decreasing confidence of Unionists that the Good Friday Agreement provides a workable framework within which the Northern Ireland conflict cannot only be managed but eventually also be resolved can be assumed to have driven UUP leader David Trimble to ask the British government to call a referendum on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland (i.e. on Irish reunification) to coincide with the next Northern Ireland Assembly elections due in May 2003. If the referendum is called, it is relatively unlikely that a majority of people will vote for Irish reunification. The real issue, therefore, is how much the referendum campaign and result will polarise and radicalise the two communities. From this perspective, the toughest test for the success or failure of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland is yet to come.

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**Appendix**

Figure 1: Conflict-related Deaths in Northern Ireland 1969-1998
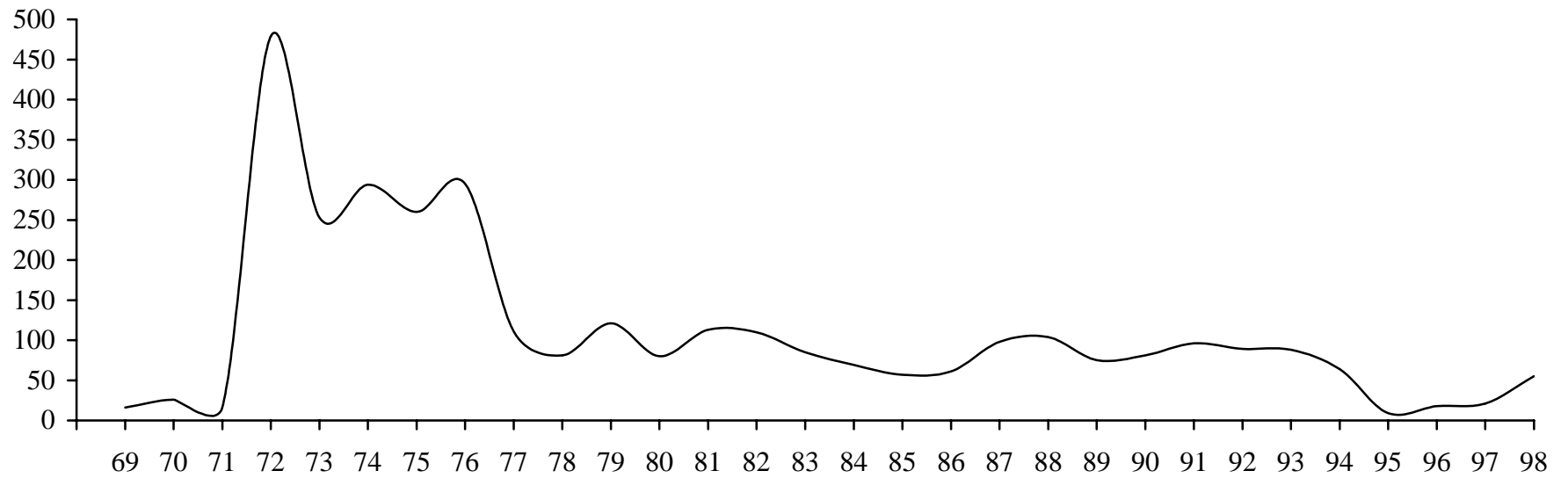[Source: Sutton Index of Deaths]

Figure 2: Conflict-related Deaths in Northern Ireland 1969-1998 by Paramilitaries
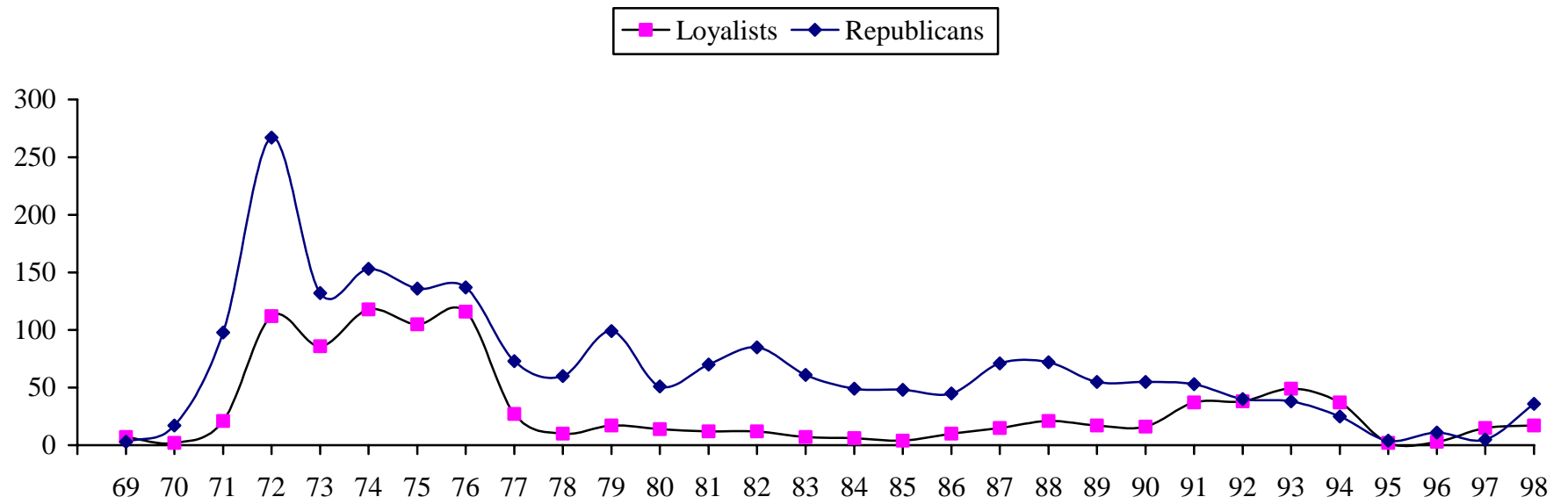[Source: Sutton Index of Deaths]

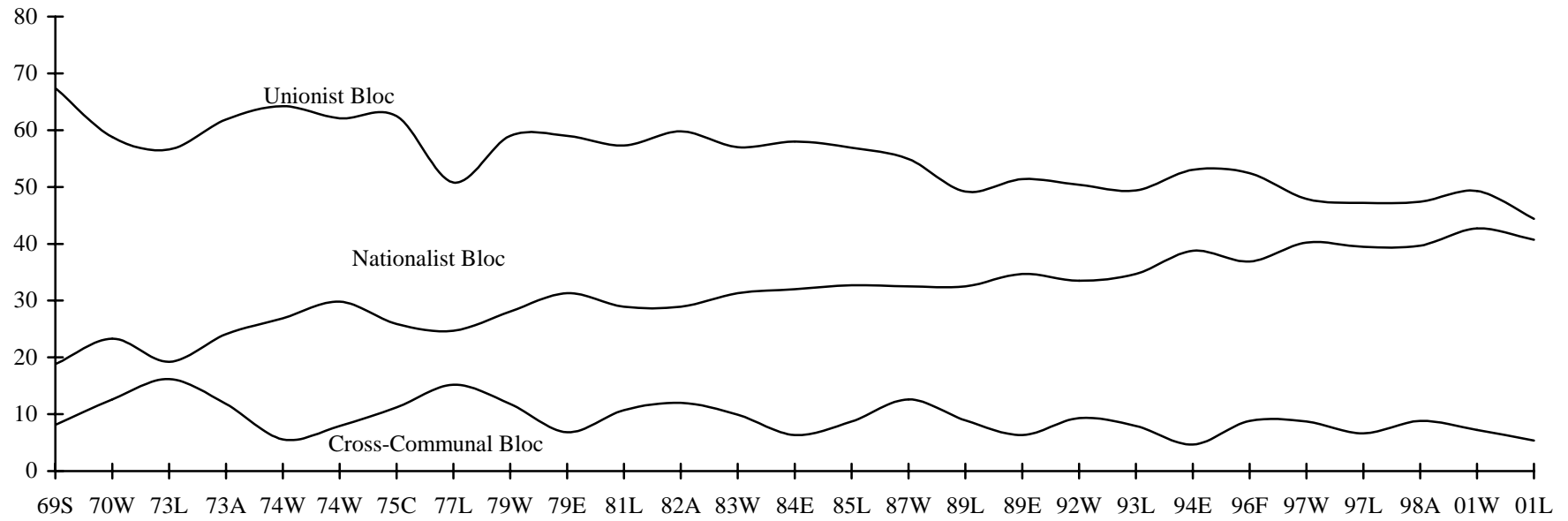**Figure 3: Performance of the Three Major Party Blocs in Northern Ireland 1973-2001**
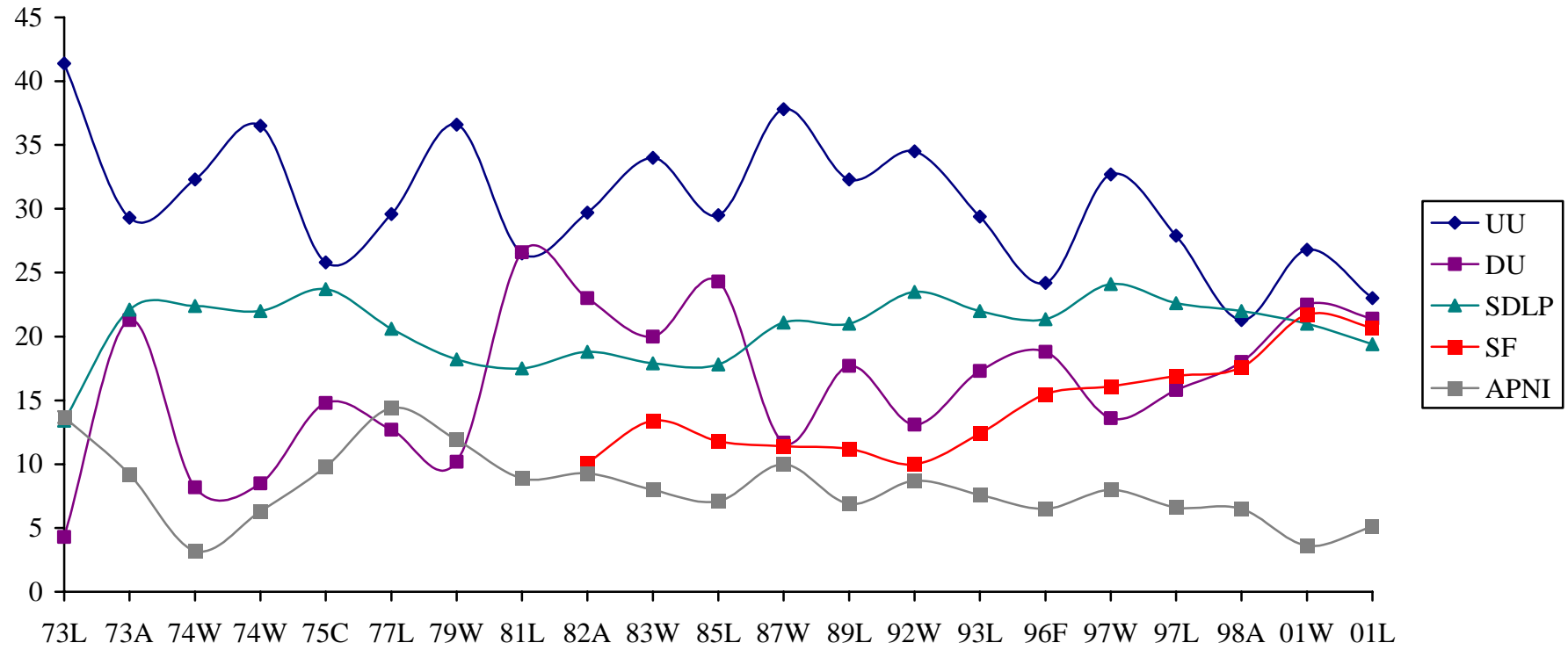
Figure 4: Performance of Major Political Parties in Northern Ireland 1973-2001

Key for Figures 3 and 4:
S – Stormont
W – Westminster
L – Local
A – Northern Ireland Assembly

C – Constitutional Convention
E – European
F – Peace Forum