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"No Longer Fit for Purpose"? Reconsidering Consociation in Northern Ireland

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Introduction

Northern Ireland has become something of a success story in the sphere of ethnic conflict. The Good Friday Agreement heralded a new era of peace between the (shrinking) majority Protestant Unionist community of Northern Ireland, and the (growing) minority of Catholic Nationalists. The agreement created a set of institutions built on the consociational principles of power-sharing between the communities, with proportional representation and mandatory coalition in the Assembly and on the Northern Ireland Executive at the heart of these new arrangements.

These institutions have undoubtedly brought a period of sustained peace to Northern Ireland, with all the large political parties now committed to the democratic process and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Consociation has helped achieve that. But, while we have seen eight years of uninterrupted devolution in Northern Ireland, they have not been uneventful. There have been significant difficulties caused by power-sharing in a mandatory fashion, including arguments over the devolution of policing and justice and welfare. How much progress there has been since 2007 in terms of policy is perhaps better explained through a glance at what has not been achieved; no legislation for a programme to deal with the past conflict in Northern Ireland, no consensus on how to deal with flags, emblems and parades and a section of the education system has been forced to go rogue to maintain its academic selection criteria, because no agreement can be reached between the political parties on how to transfer pupils to post-primary schools.

This paper sets out to explore the First Minister, Peter Robinson's recent assertion that the Northern Ireland institutions "are no longer fit for purpose" (BBC, 2014a). It shall examine whether the tools of consociation are causing important structural problems for Northern Ireland that threaten the institutions' ability to deliver good governance for the province. It will first review the journey Northern Ireland has come on to reach the point in 1997, where consociational government was seen as essential by nationalists and the British and Irish governments, before considering the arguments for and against consociation. It shall then move to explore four key areas that Arend Lijphart, the founder of consociational theory, considers essential for a consociational system to operate, and consider how they have

performed in the context of Northern Ireland. These include the electoral system, how power is shared in practice, the minority veto and autonomy of ethno-national groups.

Methodology

This paper shall approach this question through a case study of Northern Ireland's experience with consociation. While power sharing was attempted (and failed) in the 1970s (Jackson, 2010, pp.400), and the institutions in question were devised and initially housed the first Assembly between 1998 and 2002, this paper shall focus on devolution since 2007 (which has been uninterrupted). This is because we now see all political parties committed to the process (which the DUP were not in 1998), and we now see all parties operating entirely within the law and in support of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), which Sinn Fein were not during the first Assembly. Northern Ireland now has a form of government and a set of institutions that all parties accept, resulting in sustained, devolved government in Northern Ireland for the first time in decades. First Minister Peter Robinson said in 2012 (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2012, pp.4) that this backdrop of peaceful progress meant that the electorate would judge the Assembly at the 2016 election on its ability to deliver in practical terms. This marker, set down by the de facto co-leader of Northern Ireland, coupled with his position that the institutions of power-sharing are no longer fit for purpose, form the basis for this study.

The field of consociation involves a vast number of scholars with competing ideas of what the most effective tools are and whether it is in fact the best form of government for divided societies, as will be explored later. We shall focus on the assertion of Lijphart (2004, pp.99), however, as one of the founding scholars of consociational theory, who argues that consociation is the only form of government that has any chance of being adopted in in a society with such a deep ethno-national cleavage as Northern Ireland. Lijphart goes on to set out a series of recommended constitutional choices for such divided societies. A case study is a valid mode of study for this question, as it will allow us to consider in depth how these constitutional choices have played out in Northern Ireland. It is not the aim of this paper to explore alternative forms of government and constitutional choices (although it will briefly consider the proposals laid out in the Stormont House Agreement relating to each area). But the case study method will help us to answer our central question: are there

structural problems within the consociational institutions that are restraining progress in Northern Ireland?

The Road to Power-Sharing in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland, according to McGarry and O'Leary (1990, pp.4) was the result of a failure in British state and nation-building. British government control had not been effectively consolidated throughout Ireland, and a British national identity had not been shared by Catholic and Protestants, leading the British government to separate the southern, predominantly Catholic counties of Ireland, and creating a state out of the six northern counties which were predominantly Protestant and anti-Catholic. McGarry and O'Leary (1990, pp.5) note that this, "was nobody's first preference", and was viewed by the British government as a stepping stone towards full Irish unity, within the British Empire.

This artificial border left a deep religious cleavage in Northern Ireland. Fully two thirds of the population of Northern Ireland were Protestant, leaving Catholics in the minority as the remaining third (Fitzduff and O'Hagan, 2009). Coakley (2009, pp.256) notes that in response to this, and in an effort to avoid the abuse of minorities in Northern Ireland, the British government prescribed Proportional Representation (PR), in the form of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) as the mode of election to the newly constituted Northern Ireland House of Commons. Forty eight members would be drawn from nine constituencies (Coakley, 2009, pp.256). The first election, held in 1921, saw 67% of the vote being registered in support of Unionism, with 32% in support of Nationalism. In the House of Commons, Unionists took 36 seats, to the Nationalists' twelve (Knight and Baxter-Moore, 1972, pp.28). A further four seats, assigned to Queens University, Belfast, were won by Unionists. This demonstrates that politics in the earliest days of the Northern Irish state had been decided along the lines of religion, with the Catholic minority supporting Irish unity, and the Protestant majority supporting the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The PR-STV system had also been in place for local council elections, but this was quickly dispatched with by the Unionist administration at Stormont, the seat of the Northern Irish Parliament, in favour of a plurality system. This move from PR to majoritarian voting was mirrored in the 1929 Northern Ireland Parliament election, with the original nine, multi-member constituencies being divided into forty eight

single member districts elected by first past the post (Coakley, 2009, pp.256). Pringle (1980, pp.199-201) demonstrates that this move did not seem to be in order to reduce nationalist influence within the Parliament (although the decision to change the local council electoral system was). Rather it was to divide society along the lines of religion, and created Protestant and Catholic constituencies, many of which were uncontested in successive elections because of the demography of the seats (Knight and Baxter-Moore, 1972, pp.28). The decision to carve the seats up according to religion meant that the unionist bloc vote, which had been becoming increasingly fractured along class lines due to rising unemployment and economic turbulence, (Pringle, 1980, pp.201-204), was spared the strain that a proportional system had already proven to place it under in Belfast (note the reduction in Unionist seats between 1921 and 1925 in table below), as the vote was concentrated in the Official Unionist Party (Knight and Baxter-Moore, 1972, pp.28). This reinforced religion as the dominant cleavage within the province, and to date Northern Ireland has been insulated from many of the cleavages that have divided other countries, such as a left/right economic divide. This is remarkable, considering the global political upheaval of the 20th Century.

	1921	1925	1929
Unionist/Labour Unionist	40	32	37
Independent Unionists	-	4	3
Labour	-	3	1
Independents	-	1	-
Nationalists	6	10	11
Republicans	6	2	-
Total	52	52	52

From this dominant electoral position, both within the NI House of Commons and on local councils, Catholics were marginalised. O'Leary notes that the governance arrangements carried little legitimacy in the opinion of Catholics, as public spending, political representation and the civil service were significantly skewed in favour of the Protestant majority (1985, pp.40). The consequences of this are well documented, and as Catholics felt increasingly marginalised by the political

arrangements in Northern Ireland, civil unrest led to what has been described as a low grade civil war (Jackson, 2010, pp.5). Various political solutions were sought, and failed to bring about peace and stability to the province, until the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998, brokered by the US Government between almost all the local political parties and UK and Irish governments, presented an opportunity to end the conflict and restore devolution in the form of a cross-community, power-sharing Assembly.

Considering Consociation

The Good Friday Agreement saw Northern Ireland adopt a consociational model of democracy. There has been much scholarly debate surrounding the principle of consociation, and some of that will be discussed here. It is worth noting that while a number of scholars do directly refer to Northern Ireland in the literature, it is regularly the case that aspects of scholars' studies do not wholly apply to Northern Ireland. A number of scholars (Lijphart, 2004; Selway and Templeman, 2012) make reference to debate over whether a parliamentary or presidential system of government is preferable in Northern Ireland. There is no serious political debate around Northern Ireland becoming an independent country with its own head of state, and as a contingent part of the United Kingdom, which has as its head of state a constitutional monarch, this is not relevant to the current question of Northern Irish governance.

Arend Lijphart, one of the founders of consociational theory, uses the term consociation to describe the political system most appropriate to societies with, "subcultural cleavages and with tendencies toward immobilism and instability" (1968, pp.20). He earlier discusses such instability as resembling the "negotiations between two rival states" (1968, pp.20), such is the division between the ethno-national groups. Consociational systems are characterised by the presence of grand coalitions, with parties working together in a government, representing the views of a much wider proportion of the electorate than might have been achieved under a minimum winning arrangement. Lijphart (2004, pp.97) argues that two elements are essential to fostering democratic government within divided societies, and those are power-sharing and group autonomy. Power-sharing requires all major groups and communities to have a stake in the decision making process of the polity. Group autonomy, according to

Lijphart, requires the aforementioned groups to have the ability to manage the affairs of their own community, "especially in the areas of education and culture" (2004, pp.97). He asserts that, "power sharing has proven to be the only democratic model that appears to have much chance of being adopted in divided societies" (2004, pp.99).

Others have disagreed with Lijphart's opinion that consociation is the only viable option for divided societies. Indeed, Lijphart notes the criticisms of Brian Barry who, writing in 1975, in fact argued that consociation, specifically in the case of Northern Ireland, could lead to a worsening of the situation there (pp.393). He argued that Northern Irish society had been divided along one cleavage, and that was religion (1975, pp.402). He draws on Richard Rose's findings (1971, pp.235) in 1971 that 95% of Unionist supporters are Protestants, and 99% of Nationalist supporters are Catholics. In this context, then, Barry saw no way of manipulating the electoral system to change this culture of division, as the, then, current system of first past the post might have exaggerated the division, but any move towards proportionality would simply have mirrored it (Barry, 1975, pp.402).

Barry does not offer a particularly inspiring set of alternative arrangements, writing, as he did, during one of the bleakest periods of the Northern Ireland troubles. One proposal was to simply absorb Northern Ireland wholly into the United Kingdom (1975, pp.404). Northern Ireland was of course the only region of the UK to have a devolved administration at this time, so his solution was simply permanent rule from Whitehall. It seems extremely unlikely such a proposal would ever have satisfied the Nationalist community. Further discussion of solutions is based around territory exchange, but again Barry (p1975, pp.404-405) notes that this would cause huge problems for civil peace. His primary recommendation, which assumes a lack of political consensus around a set of consociational institutions, is based simply upon trust being shown by political leaders of the Protestant and Catholic 'sides'. He proposes that a system of "cooperation" could have arisen with some good will between the dominant Unionist and Nationalist parties, without the need for the imposition of a power-sharing arrangement by the British government. Again, considering the scepticism with which Catholics viewed the arrangements, justified by the record of Unionist governments, and the polarisation of society based on the grounds of religion, it is difficult to see how such a culture of trust could have developed.

Coakley (2011) draws on the arguments put forward by Lijphart in his paper, pointing out the relatively few examples of effective consociational government arrangements to draw on throughout the world. Further, he points out that in the few examples of other countries, like the Netherlands and Belgium, the parties themselves, those that represent various subcultures, have come to the agreement on how to effectively govern, without external interference. This was not the case for Northern Ireland. Both the British and Irish governments were very keen to see a consociational settlement in Northern Ireland, and Coakley characterises the negotiations as being premised on parties being able, "to agree to anything, provided it included power sharing" (2011, pp.488). Such a situation, where the solution has been presented without all parties arriving at it as the natural option, does not seem to be the optimal backdrop to effective governance once the institutions are up and running. Certainly McGarry and O'Leary (2006, pp.53) agree with this assessment. They note that while external actors can play a role in bringing about a settlement in divided societies, if a settlement is brought about with too much pressure from such actors, without the wholehearted support of "endogenous" factors, it is likely to have very weak foundations.

Another key criticism of consociation theory is laid out by Dixon (2012, pp.105). He argues that the institutions of consociation have the effect of perpetuating the division that already existed in the society, a divide which the consociational government structure is presumably there to bridge. He believes that a key weakness of consociational theory is that it ignores the fact that as peace is restored, and sense of identity becomes less threatened, societies that might wish to integrate further are unable to, because the political structures are based upon a cleavage that is no longer of such supreme importance. Horowitz (2014, pp.12) supports this, noting that transition away from consociation once peace has been achieved is often not considered when the institutions are crafted, and this can lead to immobilism within the system.

While there is broad criticism of consociational theory, Lijphart (2004, pp.99) argues that the reality is that there are no other alternatives to the theory that have been adopted in divided societies. Considering the past history of Northern Ireland, it is no surprise then that a consociational system was chosen as the manner of government for Northern Ireland. Lijphart (2004, pp.100-107) goes on to make a

series of recommendations of constitutional choices for divided societies seeking to democratise, including choosing proportional representation as the electoral system, enshrining a system of how executive power is to be divided in law and facilitating a form of minority veto within the institutions to protect sections of the community from abuse. These are similarly recognised by one of consociation's primary critics, Paul Dixon (2012, pp.108) as being the four key prescriptions of consociation. He believes that they are not intrinsically bad instruments, but argues that their deployment can cause an entrenchment of communal identities that can have a negative effect upon society. Considering these contrasting opinions, the constitutional instruments are therefore worthy of further discussion.

1) Proportional Representation as the electoral system

Lijphart (2004, pp.100) notes that it is critical within a divided society that the electoral system allows the legislature to reflect the population of the polity, and so he recommends PR as the optimal method of achieving this. Diamond (1999, pp.103-104) supports this view, arguing that proportional representation can foster a feeling of inclusion within the political process. He argues that only through this inclusion can there be any possibility of cross cutting cleavages emerging, perhaps on issues that might be considered 'bread and butter' such as economic policy.

Once PR has been decided upon, Lijphart (2004, pp.100) goes on to recommend that such divided societies must adopt a system of PR that is simple to understand. He recommends that districts should be multimember, but not have so many members as to alienate electors from their representatives. Lijphart further recommends that Party List PR be deployed, allowing electors to see each party's list of candidates, in preference to the "rarely used" (2004, pp.101) PR-STV system. Diamond (1999, pp.105-106) supports this view, arguing that PR with open lists will encourage political parties to create lists of candidates that can attract votes from across the cleavage. He also warns that one must be careful to balance proportionality with accountability, ensuring that districts are not too large, with too many members.

Selway and Templeman argue that proportional electoral systems can facilitate the presence of "extremist parties" (2012, pp.1547), those parties that are anti-agreement. They suggest that the presence of such parties can be to the detriment of the power-sharing institutions, and indeed Sartori (1976, pp.140-141) supports the

view that these parties represent a threat to the institutions of power-sharing, and where the institutions can survive with the anti-agreement parties within them, it can take a prolonged period of time for such parties to fall into line and accept the existence of the arrangements for government. In Northern Ireland, this was very clearly the case with the anti-agreement DUP who, vehemently opposed to the Good Friday Agreement (Tonge, 2014, pp.19-24), set about rotating their Ministers to cause disruption within the Executive, and continued to oppose the presence of Sinn Fein in government without decommissioning by the IRA. Even following the 2011 Assembly election, the Traditional Unionist Voice leader Jim Allister was elected and voices fierce opposition to the Good Friday Agreement, St Andrews Agreement and the presence of Sinn Fein in government. His rhetoric, however, as only one MLA, is worse than any wound he can inflict upon the institutions.

Selway and Templeman (2012, pp.1547) argue further that the use of PR, as noted by Barry, allows cleavages within society simply to be mirrored by group size within the legislature. This incentivises parties to pursue, "centrifugal campaign strategies" and appeal to extreme voters at election time in order to shore up the subculture grouping, rather than seeking to appeal across the cleavage of religion, in Northern Ireland's case. They argue that PR, with mandated coalition, can paralyse government, rendering it ineffective at the time in a polity's existence when it is often most critical that government can deliver effectively and efficiently (Selway and Templeman, 2012, pp.1547).

McGarry and O'Leary (2006, pp.59-60) are similarly unconvinced by the arguments for Party List PR. They argue that such a system would encourage hardliners within each ethno-national group to form new parties. They could do so knowing that they were siphoning votes off the major party within their bloc, but safe in the knowledge that there could be no fewer votes for their subcultural group overall. This fragmentation could foster instability. While they do not put forward a strong case for PR-STV to replace Party List as the consociationalists' electoral system of choice, they do assert that the reliance upon the latter should be reconsidered.

It was the case, then, that PR-STV was chosen as the electoral system for the new Assembly. Clear benefits of the system are that it creates a clear link between MLAs and the constituency, which other forms of PR can lack. Wilford (2010, pp.137)

notes that the system allows the Assembly to represent as closely as possible the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. Further, Lijphart recommended a system of voting that the electorate were familiar with and which was easy to use. PR-STV was familiar to the Northern Irish electorate (Lynn, ca.2004). Reilly (2002, pp.157-158) argues that in theory, the system should encourage vote pooling in order to secure election if the quota set is not reached in the first round, which requires candidates to moderate their views to appeal to a wider section of the electorate. While in other studies scholars have focused on cases with multiple, cross cutting cleavages (Chandra, 2005), the reality in Northern Ireland is that there is only one prominent cleavage, and that is the constitutional position, Unionist/Nationalist cleavage.

2011 Assembly Election Results		
Party	Share of Vote *%*	Seats *(% of Total Seats)*
DUP	30	38 (35.2)
Sinn Fein	26.9	29 (26.9)
UUP	13.2	16 (14.8)
SDLP	14.2	14 (13)
Alliance	7.7	8 (7.4)

Source: BBC (2011)

But while the system may produce an Assembly as close to the popular vote as possible, as demonstrated above, this does not tell us the full story. Research by the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILTS) in 2010 discovered a rising sense of identity that did not conform to the traditional cleavage we associate with Northern Ireland. The 2010 survey found 45% of respondents did not identify themselves as either Unionist or Nationalist. These findings are outlined below.

Do you think of yourself as a Unionist, Nationalist, or Neither? *(%)*				
	1998	2010	2012	2013
Unionist	40	34	28	29
Nationalist	25	20	23	25
Neither	33	45	47	43

Source: NILTS (arc.ac.uk)

This is an interesting study into the changing nature of identity in Northern Ireland. Dixon (2011, pp.311) argues that the tools of consociation, as advocated by Lijphart, encourage the perpetuation of entrenched identities. Dixon notes that other scholars, while not disagreeing with him, view ethno-national identification as a primordial aspect of one's identity (Lijphart, 1977, pp.227). From the above data, it seems that this is not the case. The electoral system was fit for purpose in 1998, when the plurality of the population identified themselves along the constitutional cleavage. Then, the biggest barrier to progress in Northern Irish politics was that the political relationship between Unionism and Nationalism was non-existent. This demanded an electoral system that would provide a result that would facilitate a power-sharing arrangement in Northern Ireland. By 2011, however, it seems that this system produces a result along the traditional Unionist/Nationalist cleavage that is evidently is weakening within Northern Ireland. Why is this?

Northern Ireland's electoral system is defined by Mitchell et al (2009, pp.400) to have developed into an ethnic system, by virtue of the singular dividing cleavage of ethno-national identity. Political competition takes place in two separate blocs (See Appendix A), with ethno-national parties from the same community competing against one another, making dominant parties vulnerable to the emergence of hard liners within their bloc, who profess to be a greater champion of that ethno-national bloc. Following the collapse of the first Assembly, during which the UUP and SDLP were the two dominant parties, this pattern was very clearly visible, leading to the situation where, in 2007, the DUP and Sinn Fein emerged as the largest two parties in each bloc. The UUP and SDLP were vulnerable because they had chosen to work together, allowing both fringe parties to claim they better represented the Unionist and Nationalist/Republican electorate (Mitchell et al, 2009, pp.399).

Kedar (2005, pp.187) argues that in a multiparty system where power must be shared, like Northern Ireland, voters with moderate opinions will often choose to vote for more extreme parties. This is because if all policy positions are watered down to be accommodating during party bargaining, the more moderate views will be reduced to very little, whereas there is a greater chance of a moderate compromise being reached if extreme parties are left to try and come to a consensus over a policy position. This is known as compensational voting. In this way, Kedar argues voters can more closely achieve their policy aspirations. Mitchell et al (2009, pp.403) believe

this follows the pattern of electoral movement in Northern Ireland, and there is evidence to suggest that this is true (See Appendix A), with 11% of "Neither" respondents in the NILT survey saying that they would vote for either the DUP or Sinn Fein, despite not identifying as either Unionist or Nationalist (a further 58% said they didn't know who they would vote for, or didn't want to vote for any of the five largest parties). Mitchell et al (2009, pp.416) note that it is not an anti-system vote that leads voters to support extremist parties – although at least the DUP were anti-system in the first Assembly – rather it is the desire to ensure that peace can continue, but that the voice of the bloc one belongs to can be heard loudly and clearly within the political system.

Tilley et al (2001, pp.701) argue that the consociational agreements have therefore led to political parties seeking to appeal only to their core vote, rather than trying to reach across the ethno-national cleavage, in order to achieve re-election. Indeed, O'Flynn (2003, pp.142) notes that with Northern Ireland divided into eighteen constituencies, each with a district magnitude of six members, the quota necessary to achieve election is relatively low. In the 2011 Assembly election, the quote in the North Down constituency was just 4,015 (Melaugh, 2011). This means that, contrary to the theory that PR-STV should encourage candidates to try and pool votes across the cleavage, the quota needed for re-election is only 14%, and it is easy for candidates to appeal to their core in order to achieve this, negating the need to appeal to the other ethno-national group. Management of this core vote within constituencies, which parties have got much better at doing, can often lead to the return of a majority of MLAs from the extremist parties, as is the case in West Belfast (five Sinn Fein MLAs returned) and Lagan Valley (four DUP MLAs returned) (Melaugh, 2011).

We have therefore established that PR-STV encourages fringe parties to stand and encourages the electorate to vote for extreme 'ethnic tribune' parties, all while the district magnitude is low enough to allow candidates to get elected with a relatively low vote. As a consequence of this, rather than moderating positions of candidates and MLAs in order to attract votes in a centripetal fashion, makes the option of appealing to the fringe – centrifugally attracting votes – a much easier prospect.

Gallagher (2005, pp.575) notes that the system of proportional representation presents a further difficulty to the electorate, insofar as it makes it extremely difficult

to eject the government of the day, in favour of a new administration. Under a single member system, this can be done easily, but in Northern Ireland, despite seeing their popularity slashed since 1998, the UUP and SDLP remain members of the governing Executive. It makes it much more difficult to attribute blame for particular policy failures. Three different parties have held the office of Health Minister since devolution was restored, and the electorate consider it to be one of the top policy priorities in Northern Ireland (See Appendix B). Health has also regularly been in the news through a series of problems, including MRSA and C-Difficile outbreaks, along with pressure on Accident and Emergency Departments. Despite this, it is extremely difficult for voters to attribute blame for policy failures and almost impossible to remove a government for its handling of an issue like health policy, because the proportional system, coupled with mandatory power-sharing, mean the party will continue to be a part of the government in some form. This system therefore shields politicians and ministers from the full judgement of the electorate.

The Stormont House Agreement made just one suggestion to reform the current electoral system, which was to reduce the district magnitude to five. This would have a number of consequences. Firstly, Gallagher and Mitchell (2005, pp.517) note in the case of Ireland, which also used PR-STV, that a district magnitude of five is the bare minimum a system can support while still returning a proportional result. Taagepera and Shugart (1989, pp.114) argue that, considering there are two large parties within the Assembly and three smaller contenders, a district magnitude of five, within the same electoral boundaries might still produce a disproportional result. The quota will increase, naturally, which might suggest that candidates would have to moderate their views to appeal to the other side of the ethno-national divide, but with the electorate as entrenched as it has become (See Appendix A), there is little real prospect of the proposed change making headway in producing an electoral system that can accommodate cross-cutting cleavages, rather than simply catering to the ethno-national divide.

The positive case for PR-STV in Northern Ireland was set out earlier. List systems or mixed member systems could break the link the Northern Irish electorate is used to having with its elected officials as representatives of the constituency, and lead to tensions amongst politicians, as Lundberg (2014) discovered in the case of Scotland with its regional and constituency Members of the Scottish Parliament.

Further, Coakley (2009, pp.271) notes that challenges to the process would have been presented by a range of different electoral systems, so the issues with PR-STV and its operation in Northern Ireland are not unique. But as a proportional system, and thus a tool of consociation, we have demonstrated that it has failed to bring communities together in politics in any meaningful way. This is in line with Dixon's concerns about this prescription of consociation. Further, there is a sizeable chunk of the electorate that is not engaged in politics, and does not associate itself with any of the five largest political parties, seemingly creating a new minority within our electoral system, of those who despair with ethno-national politics, but who do not see an alternative in the current system. This consociational tool has failed to encourage politicians to appeal across the divide or fight elections on anything other than constitutional and identity issues, allowing the Assembly to perpetuate the singular cleavage of ethno-national identity, which raises further issues, as set out in the next section.

2) Minority veto rights

Lijphart (2004, pp.106) argues that referenda should be avoided as a means of settling questions over policy or constitutional change. He argues this is a majoritarian tool that will mean the will of the majority will prevail over what may be in the best interests of protecting a minority. In an earlier paper by Lijphart (1985, pp.4), however, he argues that a secondary characteristic of consociational systems should be the provision of a minority veto power. (McGarry and O'Leary, 2004, pp.44) agree that a critical aspect of consociational governance should be the inclusion of a minority veto, which, as the name suggests, allows for protection from majority rule for minority subcultures.

The Good Friday Agreement (1998, pp.8) included such a provision. It was decided that a petition of concern, signed by thirty MLAs, could trigger a cross-community vote on any legislation or motion, which would then require parallel consent. This meant a majority of both Unionist and Nationalist members, or a 60% majority of the whole Assembly, including 40% of both Unionists and Nationalists, was required to vote in favour in order for a motion to pass or for legislation to progress.

There are two key concerns here. Firstly, the rules around the use of the petition of concern are extremely vague. In fact, apart from requiring thirty MLAs to sign the petition, there are no guidelines around when it may be deployed and no adjudication process as to whether the bill or motion is discriminatory against a section of the community. During the lifespan of the first Assembly, the mechanism was deployed only seven times (McCaffrey, 2013, pp.2) between 2007 and 2013 petitions of concern were tabled 49 times. The DUP alone tabled eighteen petitions of concern between May 2011 and March 2013 (McCaffrey, 2013, pp.5-7). They are the only party in the Assembly which currently have an adequate number of MLAs to table a petition of concern independently of other parties. While some petitions may have been valid, including petitions put down on contentious issues like the murder of Pat Finucane during the Troubles, or Irish language provision, others issues that had petitions of concern tabled on them were seemingly innocuous, like the A5 roads project (4NI.co.uk, 2011), with very little basis for the accusation they discriminated against one or other community. Even more recently, the DUP tabled a petition of concern on a motion supporting gay marriage in Northern Ireland (BBC, 2014b), and perhaps even more concerning, used a petition of concern to protect one of their MLAs, Jim Wells, from a disciplinary report issued to the Assembly. By definition the petition of concern is a mechanism for protecting the interests of one community in Northern Ireland from abuse by the other (Schwartz, 2010, pp.351). It is clear that the system is being abused by the political parties, and this comes, at times, at the expense of good and transparent governance. It also comes at the cost of democracy, by effectively creating two tiers of MLAs. This leads us to our second area of discussion.

For the petition of concern system to function, all MLAs are required to designate themselves as Unionist, Nationalist or Other (Northern Ireland Act 1998, s4[5]). This is because, as already discussed, any motion or legislation upon which a petition of concern is moved will require either parallel consent of the Unionist and Nationalist members, or a supermajority of 60% of members voting in favour, including 40% of both Unionist and Nationalist MLAs. Clearly then, this system discriminates against members who choose not to designate as either Unionist or Nationalist. In the current mandate of the Assembly, nine members have chosen to designate as "Other". During cross-community votes, however, their vote in the

Assembly is worth less to the process than the vote of a member who designates as either Unionist or Nationalist (Wilford, 2010, pp.139). Schwartz (2010, pp.351) attempts to temper the voices that claim this is anti-democratic, by arguing that the votes of MLAs designated as "Other" always count, and contribute toward the overall majority, however he does concede that they are at a disadvantage, as the votes of community-designated MLAs in practice count twice – once toward the majority, and a second time towards ensuring cross-community support.

Lijphart himself, drawing on the experience of Belgium where members of the federal cabinet are required to designate as either French or Dutch speaking (2004, pp.103), believed such designation to be a bad idea. He did not think that specifying which groups were entitled to power was conducive to a consociational democracy, and did not tackle discriminatory choices in the electoral system. How can Northern Ireland be expected to shake off the shackles of its divided past, if the political elite, a critical element of any consociational system, who are supposed to rise above and represent subcultural groups at a political level, are required to continue labelling themselves as a Unionist or a Nationalist in order to enjoy an equal standing in the Assembly with other designated MLAs?

O'Flynn (2003, pp.144) argues that the system does more to promote bloc identities, rather than protecting rights of subcultural groups, a view supported by Dixon (2011, pp.311) who argues that a range of consociational tools, including the petition of concern, can have the effect of entrenching tribal identity. O'Flynn (2003, pp.145) approaches the problems with the current structure of the petition of concern from a liberal perspective. He argues that the system fails to protect the rights of other individual and minority groups at a time when, as discussed earlier, 43% of the population choose not to identify as either Unionist or Nationalist. Issues such as abortion rights and gay marriage do not divide people tidily along the cleavage of Unionism and Nationalism or religion (See Appendix C), and therefore the current format of the petition of concern has been abused, and found to be deficient in 'post-constitutional' debates Northern Ireland has begun to have, because it cannot protect minority groups other than Unionists or Nationalists effectively.

The recent Stormont House Agreement, which represents the most recent collective thinking of the major Northern Ireland political parties, only mentioned the

petition of concern to say that the parties should decide a protocol for its operation (Gov.uk, 2014, pp.11). It does not appear likely, then, that any consensus will be reached around the issue any time soon, as all parties, including those designated "Other", continue to use the system to party political advantage, particularly while no adjudication process around its use exists (Schwartz, 2014, pp.4). It has been demonstrated that the petition of concern is an out-dated concept that no longer reflects the full identity of Northern Ireland. It marginalises and reduces the importance of those who choose not to identify themselves in one of two ways, both in the community and in the Assembly.

3) Legislating for how power must be shared in the executive

Lijphart (2004, pp.101) comes to the conclusion that within a divided society, a parliamentary system is preferable to a presidential or semi-presidential one. He notes that while in normal circumstances a parliamentary system would naturally facilitate a collegial, power-sharing cabinet, this would not necessarily be enshrined as its normal composition, either within statute or a constitution. Lijphart draws on the example of Belgium, where the Cabinet must be composed of an equal number of French and Dutch speakers. He argues against this model, which dictates which groups must share power, as he believes that it would require parties and members to be labelled as one or the other, perpetuating the division that has led to seeking a consociational model in the first place. He notes, however, that where there is no disagreement about which subcultural groups should be represented, this model allows for power-sharing without a grand coalition and does not remove a partisan opposition from the legislature.

When considering the examples of consociation set by other governments in Western Europe, Barry (1975, pp.409-410) notes that these are not governments where a grand coalition is required, but simply where an oversized coalition has been seen as the best way to provide stability to a political system. In the context of consociation in Northern Ireland, an oversized coalition is required by law under the Northern Ireland Act, and Barry argues that this has the potential to further destabilise institutions, because parties can work from within the coalition to make governance impossible. These were prophetic words, as this was indeed the strategy the DUP

adopted in the first Assembly, following the Good Friday Agreement (Tonge et al, 2014, pp.170).

McGarry and O'Leary make a further contribution to the debate over how to share power within the executive. While they note (2006, pp.61) that traditional consociational thinking has found executive building to be an inherent weakness, because it is based upon political will which might not exist, they argue that the Northern Ireland model of allocating ministerial portfolios through the d'Hondt process has skipped a step of negotiation by setting out who is eligible to be a part of the executive, speeding up the process of forming a government. The authors claim that this system produces strong incentives for parties to remain within the executive, as the alternative is another party simply taking their portfolio, boosting their rivals' profile and demonstrating their competence to govern.

Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Section 18), the Northern Ireland Executive was to be derived from the Assembly through the use of the d'Hondt formula, which allowed Ministerial portfolios to be shared amongst parties in proportion to their size within the Assembly. The below table sets out how many departments each party was allocated under the system following the 2007 and 2011 election.

Party	2007	2011
DUP	5	5
Sinn Fein	4	4
UUP	2	1
SDLP	1	1
Alliance	1*	2*
*Includes Justice Minister, appointed separately from d'Hondt process		

Source: cain.ulster.ac.uk

It was quite clear that for effective governance to prevail, consensus across all political parties, as well as both sides of the community, would be required. McEvoy (2006, pp.453) notes that when this sequential portfolio allocation method of distributing ministerial positions was developed as part of the Good Friday Agreement, it was in line with the British and Irish governments' desire to see all parties be included in the power-sharing Executive, including the extremist party elements (DUP and Sinn Fein) from each subculture, rather than simply rewarding the

moderate parties (UUP and SDLP) who had carved the road to peace in the approach to the Good Friday Agreement. Following the 2011 Assembly election, each of these parties continued to be represented in the Executive, alongside the Alliance Party.

McEvoy (2006, pp.455-456) relays the reasons politicians in the first Assembly agreed to the system, including the inclusive nature of the system and the proportionality of it, and the fact that it removed any need for negotiation around who would be in government, saving the Assembly from the possibility of stalemate before the Executive had even got to work. Mark Durkan, formerly deputy First Minister, is cited as having some members within his party who were concerned by the system, because it would allow anti-agreement parties to enter the Executive. This was the case, for example, with the DUP following the restoration of devolution in 1998. Clearly the d'Hondt process and mandatory coalition have an impact both for the day to day operation of the Executive, as well as its relations with the Assembly. It is therefore pertinent to explore this area in two separate sections, firstly how the Executive parties operate within the Executive committee, and secondly how the Executive operates within the Assembly.

i) Intra-Executive Relations

It is certainly true that the d'Hondt system has its drawbacks. By mandating which parties are allowed in to the Executive, the arrangement puts together a range of parties who clearly represent the two sides of the ethno-national cleavage within Northern Ireland. Often these parties are also fundamentally in disagreement over a range of issues relating to 'bread and butter' politics, including economic and social issues. While there are some issues where agreement is reached, there is a long list of others where the parties still disagree. The consequences of this are best illustrated using the example of policing and justice. During the first Assembly term, the parties could not agree the timetable for devolving policing and justice powers to Northern Ireland, away from Westminster. Sinn Fein wanted to move quickly on the power transfer, however the DUP had reservations, with many of their core vote vehemently opposed to the possibility a Sinn Fein MLA could become Justice Minister, if the office was included in the normal portfolio allocation mechanism. Sinn Fein had, however, fully endorsed the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), a key tenet of unionist demands prior to the Assembly's restoration (Wilford, 2010, pp.135). The

expectation of the UK and Irish governments was that policing and justice powers could be devolved by May 2008 (St. Andrews Agreement, 2007, pp.2). The majority of the public supported the move, ranking it above any settlement of the constitutional question in importance for the Assembly (NI Life and Times Survey, 2007).

But the issue brought the Assembly to a stall. The Executive did not meet for six months in 2008 as they were unable to reach agreement about the timetable to devolution of policing and justice, and the issue came to a head in 2010 when, in talks brokered by the Prime Minister and Taoiseach which lasted ten days, the Hillsborough Agreement was forged, setting out the arrangements for devolving policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Executive. The agreement set out specific arrangements for nominating a Minister for Policing and Justice, which demanded a cross community vote. The position was filled by David Ford, the leader of the cross-community Alliance Party, in April 2010 (Fitzpatrick, 2010). It is notable that, on such a critical matter, progress on which attracted cross-community support (See Appendix D), the local political parties were simply unable to reach an agreement until the Prime Minister and Taoiseach stepped in carrying both a carrot and a stick. An ultimatum was issued that if the parties could not come to an agreement, the two national governments would impose an arrangement upon them (Burns, 2010): the stick. But further, the Prime Minister was willing to offer a significant financial package to cover a range of issues relating to policing and justice, beyond adequately funding the department: the carrot. These arrangements were set out in the final document of the Hillsborough Agreement.

This example of the Assembly only delivering on a matter of clear, local public interest when forced to by the UK and Irish governments echoes the argument Coakley put forward earlier. The parties to the St Andrew's Agreement had not come to the table without pressure from the Premiers in 2006, who claimed that without agreement, they would impose their own set of arrangements for governance in Northern Ireland (AgendaNI, 2010; Cheney, 2010). Therefore, it cannot be surprising that this same coercion had to be used in order to come to an agreement on policing and justice powers. This is a very clear example of how consociation failed to accommodate such a difference of opinion between two parties sharing power. Perhaps Northern Ireland could be said to be fortunate, insofar as it had two willing partners committed to ensuring the peace in the province held, as well as a financial

incentive provided by the British government. But it is evident that bringing the whole system to a halt over one area of dispute is far from an efficient manner in which to operate a government. This is, however, a consequence of mandatory power-sharing.

ii) Executive/Assembly Relations

At the last two elections (2007 and 2011), the parties have run the process of d'Hondt to allocate ministerial positions, without first agreeing a Programme for Government. In 2011, for example, the Executive was formed shortly after the election, in May, but the official Programme for Government did not emerge until March 2012 (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2012). Indeed, when it was eventually voted on by the Assembly as a whole, one of the Executive parties, the SDLP, voted against it, and yet remained within the Executive. More recently, the Executive's proposal for the 2015-2016 Northern Ireland budget was passed in the Assembly, but was rejected by three of the five Executive parties, the UUP, the SDLP and Alliance, being passed by the DUP and Sinn Fein alone (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2015b, pp.69). In most other political systems, such a vote would be considered a confidence measure in the government, creating an expectation that all members of the government will support it. The political reality is quite different in Northern Ireland.

This naturally leads us to consider opposition. By adopting a mandatory power-sharing coalition as the structure of government in Northern Ireland, which mandated who was entitled to be in the Executive, the Good Friday Agreement did not make any provision for an opposition within the legislature, something that is a feature of the vast majority of democratic systems. Currently, only six of the 108 MLAs are not members of the Executive parties (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2014), making effective scrutiny of legislation extremely difficult. It was anticipated that this scrutiny role would be taken on by the statutory committees which shadow each department, although Wilford (2001, pp.234) notes that this role was on top of an already sizeable workload that the committees had to contend with, including supporting the department in policy formation and overseeing departmental expenditure. Committees have also had the power to introduce their own legislation to the Assembly since devolution, however to date this still, perhaps unsurprisingly considering their workload, this has not happened.

Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs are allocated by the d'Hondt method (Wilford, 2010, pp.137), but must not be of the same party as the departmental Minister. The membership of committees is necessarily drawn from Executive parties, as they are proportionally the largest parties within the Assembly, and there are not enough opposition MLAs to balance the committees or fulfil these roles. Indeed, an assessment of the membership of these statutory committees shows that as of February 2015, six of them, including Agriculture, Education, Environment, Health, Justice and the committee overseeing the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, do not have any representation beyond the five Executive parties.

Between 2007 and 2015, 99 bills have been passed by the Assembly into law, of which only seven originated from outside the Executive. This is a huge workload for the statutory committees to undertake, alongside their function of scrutinising the department. Further, this illustrates a clear clash of interests, where we see the Executive dominating the legislative agenda of the Assembly, while the Executive parties, due to their membership of statutory committees, also dominate the scrutiny process.

It is clear then that the d'Hondt process poses a series of challenges to the Northern Ireland institutions, as well as to the principle of democracy. It brings together parties that come from opposing sides of the ethno-national cleavage, but this ignores their positions on the range of other matters the Executive is responsible for. Without being able to agree on those matters, in order to deliver effective policy for Northern Ireland, all decisions will boil down to the Unionist/Nationalist cleavage that the institutions are supposed to be striving to bridge. Further, while provision has been made for the Assembly to try and scrutinise the Executive, the dominance of the Executive within the Assembly, as well as the huge expectations placed upon the statutory committees, has made this a challenging task. There have been repeated calls for the Assembly to put in place a framework for an official opposition, but this has yet to materialise. In the Stormont House Agreement (UK Government, 2014, pp.11), a commitment was made to establish financial and research support for an opposition. This would be available to any party that was entitled to a position within the Executive (through the d'Hondt process) but declined it. Such a process does have the potential to improve the scrutiny process within the Assembly. With positions on committees allocated proportionally, it is possible to envisage a position where a

significant minority of the committee membership could be made up of opposition MLAs. This requires a political calculation to be made by the party, however, as to whether their interests are served better by taking up their position in the Executive or moving into opposition. There is no guarantee that the interests of the political party will be in the interests of the good governance of Northern Ireland. The Stormont House Agreement, therefore, does not remove the problem that parties are not free to form a government with likeminded parties following the election. Rather, the Executive must still accommodate as many parties as are entitled to ministries, should they choose to take them up.

4) Autonomy of subcultures

As his fourth prescription for consociation in a divided society, Lijphart (2004, pp.105) argues that if subcultural groups are not divided territorially within a polity, "non-territorial autonomy" can still provide an effective way for subcultures to maintain control over expression of traditions and the education of their young people. In 1969 (pp.219-220) Lijphart stated that in such deeply divided societies as those that would require a consociational solution, a 'good fences make good neighbours' strategy might be the best solution. He noted that subcultures may not necessarily have to be in conflict, and could, in theory, live side by side, as long as their exposure to one another was limited. Their interests could instead by represented to one another by political elites within each subculture. O'Leary et al (1993, pp.17) concur that this is a key tenet of consociational theory, although they note that it depends upon all communities respecting the rights of others group's autonomy.

McGarry and O'Leary (2006, pp.58-59) argue that consociationalist theory often lends too much weight to the importance of designing and agreeing upon mutually acceptable power-sharing institutions. They believe that this is at the expense of a much wider conversation around topics such as education reform, language rights and how other groups are able to interact in a system that may be dominated by two monolithic subcultures, as is the case in Northern Ireland. The institutions may be as well as designed as possible, but without agreement on these critical issues, McGarry and O'Leary believe that the success of consociationalism can be jeopardised.

This raises a number of interesting points in the context of Northern Ireland. Firstly, the Department for Education is controlled by just one Minister, and in both 2007 and 2011 Sinn Fein chose this position first in the d'Hondt portfolio allocation process. There have been a number of contentious education policies since devolution was restored, including the abolition of the 11+, but when we consider the autonomy of ethno-national groups, the most contentious has been the increase in size of the Irish medium Education sector. Between 2002 and 2012, the number of pupils educated in Irish rose from 2,695 to 4,392 (DENI, 2012). The recent announcement that a new Irish medium school would be opened was met with opposition from Unionist MLAs, due to the small number of students it would cater to, particularly at a time of deep public spending cuts in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2015a, pp.42). Further, Unionists have objected to the statutory requirement for the Department of Education to promote and facilitate Irish medium education (DENI, 2009, pp.16; Northern Ireland Assembly, 2015a, pp. 44-46). This comes down, then, to an issue of how resources are directed and managed. While education provides an interesting example, it is by no means the only one. The Assembly has yet to endorse an Irish language strategy, a key policy of Sinn Fein and the SDLP, but which is deeply contentious and which Unionist MLAs oppose. Recent proposals from the Sinn Fein Minister for Culture would see Irish used in parallel with English in the Assembly and Northern Ireland's Courts (Belfast Telegraph, 2015). Given the continued use of the petition of concern, and the very vocal disapproval of these plans from Unionism, it is clear that there is no possibility of such a plan coming to fruition in the Assembly term.

This paper has not set out to scrutinise these policies, and will refrain from doing so. But they are two examples, amongst many, that illustrate how respect for one another's culture has not yet permeated Northern Ireland's politics. They serve to demonstrate that the consociational settlement has focused too much on the institutions themselves, without trying to ascertain how agreement might be reached on cultural and educational disputes, particularly where a Minister represents one ethno-national group, but a decision might affect another.

A further problem with focusing on the ethno-national cleavage has been that other groups have come to be seen to be treated unfairly in society. In 2013, surveys

found that rather than respondents thinking Protestants or Catholics were treated unfairly, in fact 42% felt that Travellers were treated unfairly and 37% thought other ethnic minorities were treated unfairly (NILTS, 2013). This has been reflected in a recent surge in racially motivated crimes in Northern Ireland, with PSNI statistics finding such crimes have risen 47% from 2012/13 to 2013/14 (PSNI, 2014). Community relations have concentrated on healing the divisions between Protestant and Catholic communities, which has come at the cost of wider community tolerance and cohesion.

These findings suggest that the idea of group autonomy cannot be effectively provided for in the current governance framework of Northern Ireland. Politicians from both sides of the ethno-national cleavage can currently contribute to and veto decisions that do not solely impact the bloc they represent. That is not to say this is a bad thing; the vast majority (88%) of Northern Irish citizens want greater mixing between Protestants and Catholics (See Appendix E), as they believe this will bring about better community relations. Dividing politics in a way that keeps these groups as far apart as possible would run contrary to the aspirations of most Northern Irish residents. The current structure of government in Northern Ireland would therefore appear confused. We have consociational institutions, an electoral system that forces candidates to the fringe and a legislature that compounds ethno-national division, but there is no space for ethno-national autonomy in the manner proposed by Lijphart. There is also, however, no incentive for MLAs to moderate their stances in order to deliver on the electorate's aspiration of better community relations, because the system favours extremist positions on both sides of the divide. Further, by focusing on the singular ethno-national divide, the institutions are unable to accommodate the changing ethnic composition of Northern Ireland, resulting in rising levels of violence against ethnic minorities. This is a paradoxical situation, and further evidence that community progress in Northern Ireland is certainly not being helped by the current structure of government institutions.

Conclusions

This paper has therefore demonstrated the considerable strain that Northern Irish politics has been placed under, within the framework of consociational governance. The electoral system, PR STV, was not recommended by Lijphart, who

advised against the Single Transferable Vote system, but is nevertheless a consociational institution in Northern Ireland. PR-STV has not been proven to foster more moderate positions, as might have been hoped, but instead has insulated extremist candidates from the risk of splitting votes and allowing the alternative bloc to win the seat. This has led parties to be rewarded for taking harder stances on issues, making compromise more difficult to attain. This is compounded by such parties being chosen by voters either because they feel the party is the best guardian of their ethno-national bloc's interests, or because voters recognise that the current system does not allow moderate positions to fully flourish, encouraging them to vote for extremes in the hope that, when a compromised position is finally reached, it will reflect more closely the elector's own position. Further, this system alienates a sizeable slice of the electorate, who no longer identify as Unionist or Nationalist, but in order to effectively participate in the democratic process, have to vote along those lines.

These flaws in the electoral system are carried forward into the Assembly. The d'Hondt system forces together parties that are ideologically polarised, simply because of their position on the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. This has created huge difficulties in the process, and single matters of contention have held up the whole legislative agenda, as we saw in 2010 and with welfare reform in 2014. Further, the requirement for MLAs to designate themselves into a community perpetuates the ethno-national division. This tool, designed to protect the minority from abuse, punishes moderate parties who might try and attract voters and candidates from across the divide, because their votes do not carry as much weight as those who do choose to designate as Unionist or Nationalist. It also fails to protect other groups in Northern Irish society, and assumes all matters of concern will boil down to one's constitutional position which, on matters like abortion gay marriage, and tackling hate crime, is patently untrue. These findings vindicate the opinion of Dixon (2012, pp.108) that consociation can be segregationist, and that the tools we have explored will force the continuation of an ethno-national divide that has dogged Northern Ireland for almost a century.

The findings of this paper demonstrate that while scholars may draw upon experiences of other countries in arguments about consociation (Lijphart and Belgium for example), the reality of Northern Ireland, as a contingent part of the United

Kingdom, and with the Irish Republic a significant external influence, is that Coakley's theory of coercive consociation plays a critical role in understanding how the institutions have reached a point where they are no longer fit for purpose. It was the two governments that were desperate to push for this particular solution in 1998. Even now, their influence is essential to mediate disputes between the local political parties. The need for their involvement demonstrates a continued lack of political consensus between the parties; but when the system, as it stands, rewards those parties for taking extreme positions, why should they moderate their stance?

Consociation has delivered peace to Northern Ireland. It has brought political actors to the table who were sworn enemies just twenty years ago, and that represents huge political progress. What this paper has proven is that, at a time when Northern Ireland needs to see policy delivery on a range of issues, including education, dealing with the past, public sector spending cuts and more, and as politics moves on to post-material issues like gay marriage, the institutions as they stand are no longer fit for purpose. They perpetuate a division that no longer defines every political matter facing Northern Ireland. Consociational theory does not, as noted earlier, offer a managed integration of two communities, it only serves to continue to polarise them. It also does not offer a method for its own decline, as societies move to a post-conflict era. This paper does not offer an alternative – that was not its aim, and it would be for the Northern Irish electorate to decide whether they were ready for power to be reorganised within society. It does, however, find that consociation, while able to deliver and sustain peace, has a limit to its utility, and that limit has been reached in Northern Ireland.

Appendix A

		Do you think of yourself as a unionist, a nationalist or neither?					
		Unionist	Nationalist	Neither	Other	Don't know	Total
If there were a general election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?	DUP	45.3%	0.0%	7.5%	10.0%	4.3%	17.1%
	Sinn Féin	0.0%	47.8%	4.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.0%
	Ulster Unionist Party	29.9%	0.4%	3.4%	0.0%	8.7%	10.7%
	Social Democratic and Labour Party	0.3%	32.0%	12.4%	0.0%	4.3%	12.7%
	Alliance Party	5.5%	3.2%	12.4%	10.0%	0.0%	8.1%
	None of these	8.1%	10.1%	41.6%	10.0%	34.8%	24.5%
	Other answer	3.2%	0.4%	6.6%	40.0%	8.7%	4.6%
	Don't know	6.4%	4.0%	9.2%	10.0%	39.1%	7.9%

Source: *NILTS 2012, Political Attitudes: Party Support (arc.ac.uk)*

Appendix B
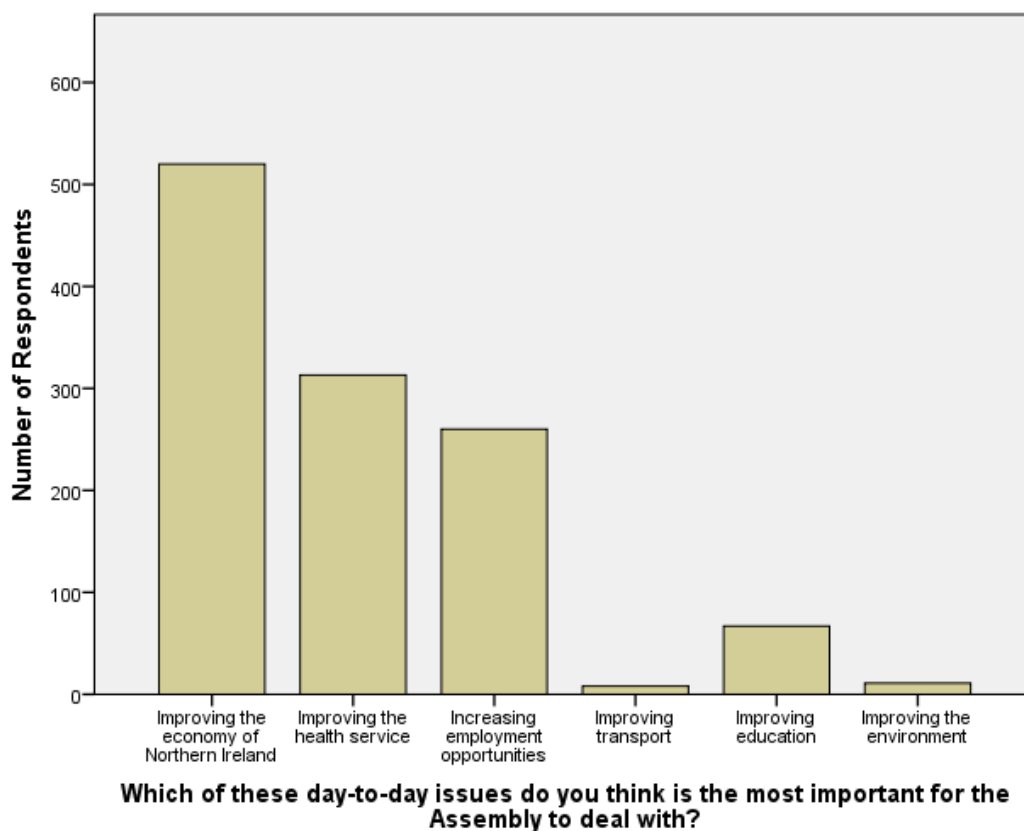
Source: *NILTS 2013: Political Attitudes: Most Important Day to Day Policy for Assembly (ark.ac.uk)*

Appendix C

| | | Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should be recognised by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages? | | |
		Should be valid	Should not be valid	Don't know
Do you think of yourself as a unionist, a nationalist or neither?	Unionist	41.4%	44.5%	14.1%
	Nationalist	63.9%	25.9%	10.2%
	Neither	64.3%	23.2%	12.5%
	Other - specify	63.2%	31.6%	5.3%
	Don't know	43.8%	18.8%	37.5%
Total		57.0%	30.4%	12.7%

Source: *NILTS 2013: LGBT Issues: Same Sex Marriage (arc.ac.uk)*

Appendix D

		Constitutional issues that the Assembly will have to deal with. Which of these do you think it the most important?				
		Devolution of policing and justice	Securing Northern Ireland's union with the United Kingdom	Bringing about a United Ireland	None of these	Don't know
Do you think of yourself as a unionist or a nationalist?	Unionist	41.7%	51.5%	0.0%	4.2%	2.6%
	Nationalist	59.7%	1.6%	29.5%	4.3%	5.0%

Source: *NILTS 2007: Political Attitudes: Most Important Constitutional Issue (arc.ac.uk)*

Appendix E
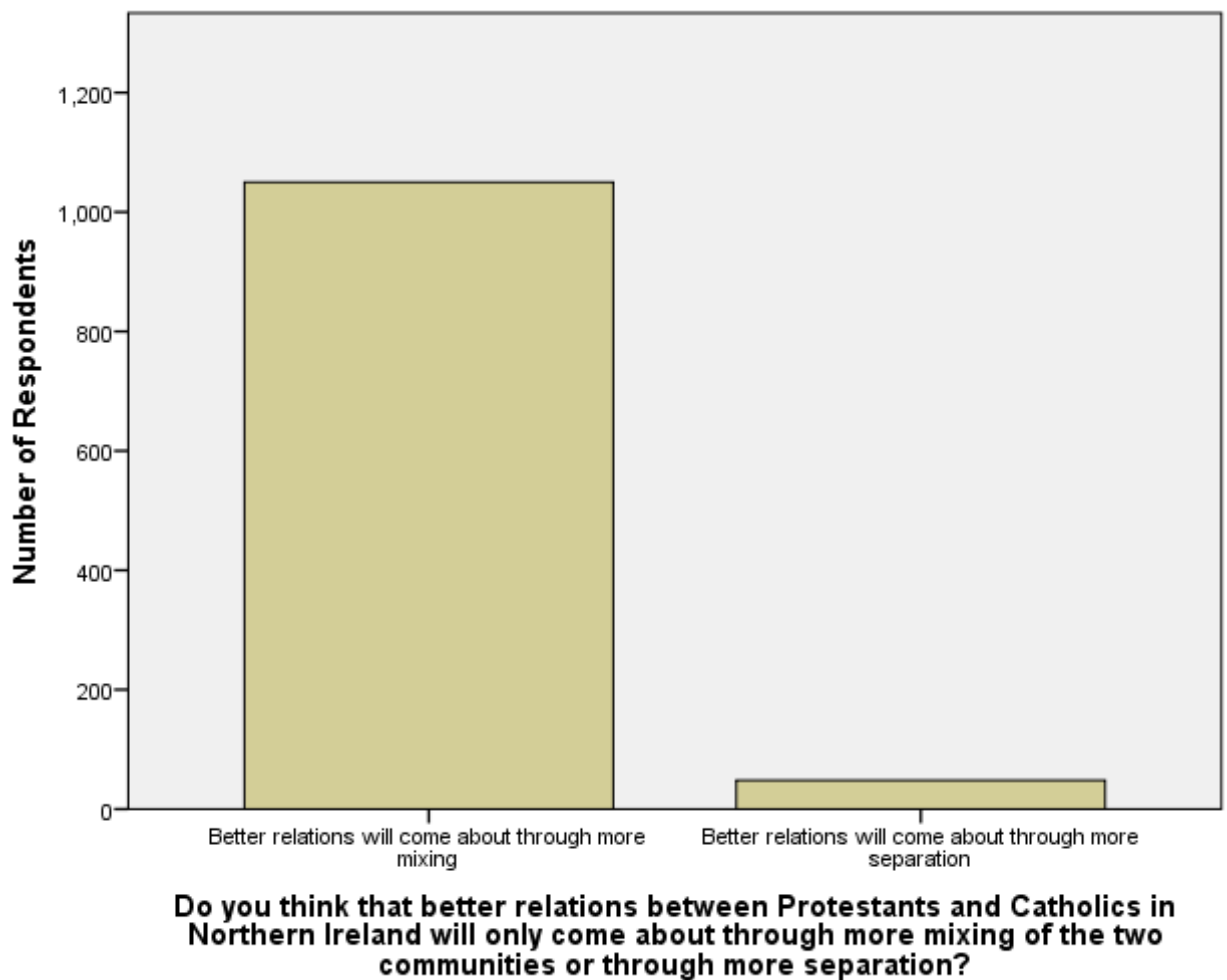
Source: *NILTS 2013: Community Relations: Mixing Communities (arc.ac.uk)*

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