Research and Information Service
Briefing Note

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2022 Assembly Election:
Transferred Votes

This briefing note provides information on how votes were transferred between parties at the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly Election. It supplements the recently published Research and Information Service briefing paper on the 2022 Election results (*NIAR 47-22 – "Election Report: Northern Ireland Assembly Election, 5 May 2022"*)[1].

Key Points

- Only 21 MLAs had a sufficient number of first preference votes to meet the quota and to be elected at the first count. The remaining 69 were elected at a later stage and required transferred votes.

- A total of 199,199 votes were transferred during the 2022 Election count. Some of these transfers (11%) were treated collectively during the counting process and cannot be attributed to individual parties. The percentages quoted below are not therefore definitive and merely provide an indication of transfers between parties based on what we can identify from the Electoral Office data.

- Of the parties elected, the DUP received most transferred votes (26%), followed by the SDLP (20%), Alliance (17%), UUP (13%), Sinn Féin (9%), TUV (6%) and People Before Profit Alliance (3%).

- Most of the UUP's transfers came from other UUP candidates (53%), TUV (15%), and DUP (13%).

- Most of the DUP's transfers came from TUV (45%), UUP (20%) and other DUP candidates (19%).

- Most of Sinn Féin's transfers came from other Sinn Féin candidates (31%), SDLP (27%), Alliance (11%) and Independent candidates (11%).

- Most of the SDLP's transfers came from Alliance (28%), Sinn Féin (28%) and other SDLP candidates (12%).

- Most of the Alliance Party's transfers came from the UUP (23%), Sinn Féin (21%) and SDLP (16%).

- Most of the TUV's transfers came from the UUP (66%), DUP (6%), PUP (6%) and Alliance (6%).

- Most of the People Before Profit Alliance's transfers came from the SDLP (36%), Alliance (14%) and Aontú (12%).

Introduction

Transferred votes are an extremely important part of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system.

The STV system works as follows:

i. Voters in each constituency vote for as many candidates as they wish in **order of preference.**

ii. Each voting paper is checked to see if it has been correctly filled in and any spoilt papers are removed from the count to give a **total valid count**.

iii. A **quota** is calculated for each constituency using the formula:

$$\text{Quota} = \left[\frac{\text{total number of valid votes cast in constituency (V)}}{\text{Number of seats (S) + 1}} \right] + 1$$

iv. Voting papers are sorted according to first preferences. Any candidate attaining or exceeding the quota is deemed to be elected.

v. **Surplus votes** from candidates who exceed the quota are transferred at a fractional value to the remaining candidates according to next available preference.

vi. Candidates with the least number of votes are excluded and their votes are also transferred according to next available preference.

vii. This process continues until all available seats have been filled.

Spoilt ballots include those where the first preference candidate cannot clearly be determined e.g. where a voter has placed a number of "X's" against the list of candidates instead of using the numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. If an "X" has been placed against only one candidate, this will be taken as the first preference and the vote will be counted. Also, if a voter has left out a number (e.g. voting 1,2,3,5,6) their votes up to the missing number will be accepted and the remaining numbers will be ignored (votes 1,2 and 3 only are valid in this example).

The formula for calculating the quota is a rationalisation of the simple majority count, whereby one candidate needs just over half the votes to be elected in a single member constituency i.e. 100%/(1+1) +1 = just over 50%. The Droop quota (as it is sometimes referred to) generalises this to say that in a two-member constituency, two candidates need just over one-third of the votes each to be elected. This gives a proportional representation (PR) of two times one-third or two-thirds of the total vote. Three members are returned with one-quarter of the votes each, proportionally representing three-quarters of the voters, and so on. Therefore, in a five-member constituency, the candidates require just over 1/6 of the votes each and the PR is 5/6 (or 83%) of the voters (see http://www.voting.ukscientists.com/stvcount.html).

All the most preferred candidate's voters have an equal right to decide how that candidate's surplus vote is transferred or re-distributed to next preferences, so all the elected candidate's transferable votes are transferred with a fractional transfer value (obtained by taking the surplus and dividing it by the total number of papers that were transferable).

Party to Party Transfers

In the 2022 Assemble Election, only 21 MLAs had a sufficient number of first preference votes to meet the quota and to be elected at the first count. The remaining 69 were elected at a later stage and required transferred votes.

A total of 199,199 votes were transferred during the 2022 Election count.

The importance of transfers in the 2022 Election was highlighted in the following constituencies:

- **Belfast West** – where People Before Profit Alliance took a seat, despite having the sixth highest number of first preference votes (a DUP candidate had the fifth highest number of first preference votes, but was displaced to sixth after transfers);
- **East Londonderry** – where the SDLP took a seat, despite having the sixth highest number of first preference votes (a Sinn Féin candidate had the fourth highest number of first preference votes, but was displaced to sixth after transfers);
- **Foyle** – where the SDLP took a seat, despite having the seventh highest number of first preference votes (a UUP candidate had the fifth highest number of first preference votes, but was displaced to sixth after transfers);
- **North Antrim** – where Alliance took a seat, despite having the sixth highest number of first preference votes (a DUP candidate had the fourth highest number of first preference votes, but was displaced to sixth after transfers);
- **Strangford** – where Alliance took a seat, despite having the seventh highest number of first preference votes (a TUV candidate had the third highest number of first preference votes, but was displaced to sixth after transfers);
- **Upper Bann** – where the UUP took a seat, despite having the sixth highest number of first preference votes (a Sinn Féin candidate had the third highest number of first preference votes, but was displaced to sixth after transfers).

Results in the remaining 12 constituencies went in favour of the five candidates with the highest number of first preference votes (i.e. transfers did not ultimately change the outcome in those constituencies).

Vote transfers from party to party are summarised in Tables 1 and 2 below. Some transfers from excluded candidates were treated collectively during the counting process. These are included in the column labelled 'Combination' in the tables as it was not possible to attribute them to individual parties.

Table 1. 2022 Assembly Election Transferred Votes by Party

To / From	APNI	Aontú	Con	CCLA	DUP	Green	Heritage	Ind	IRSP	PBPA	PUP	Resume NI	SDLP	SF	Socialist	TUV	UUP	Workers Party	Combination	Totals	% of all Transfers
APNI	898	273			439	1,061		1,405	18	425	38		5,265	7,042		1,263	7,540	44	7,368	33,081	16.6
Aontú	124					6		795	126		1		5	648		9	6	16	68	1,803	0.9
Conservative								26												26	0.0
Cross-Community Labour Alternative																				0	0.0
DUP	832	408			9,489	82		1,531	1	91	1,187		484	114		22,801	10,427	8	3,575	51,029	25.6
Green Party	243	40			386			420		778	34		640	1,186		177	759	51	704	5,417	2.7
Heritage Party																				0	0.0
Independent	1,147	208			719	5		1,038	70	12	102		1	191		785	906	12	671	5,867	2.9
IRSP	7					10		22					2	29					7	76	0.0
People Before Profit Alliance	680	598			2	173		218	148		10		1,827	471		14	21	151	716	5,028	2.5
Progressive Unionist Party	3	1						58		15			2	1				1	4	86	0.0
Resume NI														2						2	0.0
SDLP	11,270	1,301			65	669		1,956	130	1,492	20		4,803	11,237		936	1,624	65	4,660	40,228	20.2
Sinn Féin	2,149	593			4	58		2,153	116	60	3		5,086	5,869		25	75	34	2,673	18,899	9.5
Socialist Party														20						20	0.0
TUV	674	69			710	28		674		26	707		81	105			7,505	6	766	11,351	5.7
Ulster Unionist Party	855	56			3,510	78		1,052	2	276	573		697	107		3,940	13,810	12	1,253	26,220	13.2
Workers Party	4							7						54						64	0.0
Totals	18,886	3,548	0	0	15,323	2,169	0	11,354	610	3,176	2,675	0	18,893	27,075	0	29,950	42,674	407	22,457	199,199	100

Table 2. 2022 Assembly Election - % Transferred Votes by Party

To / From	APNI	Aontú	Con	CCLA	DUP	Green	Heritage	Ind	IRSP	PBPA	PUP	Resume NI	SDLP	SF	Socialist	TUV	UUP	Workers Party	Combination	Totals
APNI	2.7	0.8			1.3	3.2		4.2	0.1	1.3	0.1		15.9	21.3		3.8	22.8	0.1	22.3	100
Aontú	6.9					0.3		44.1	7.0		0.1		0.2	36.0		0.5	0.3	0.9	3.8	100
Conservative								100.0												100
Cross-Community Labour Alternative																				0
DUP	1.6	0.8			18.6	0.2		3.0		0.2	2.3		0.9	0.2		44.7	20.4		7.0	100
Green Party	4.5	0.7			7.1			7.7		14.4	0.6		11.8	21.9		3.3	14.0	0.9	13.0	100
Heritage Party																				0
Independent	19.5	3.5			12.3	0.1		17.7	1.2	0.2	1.7			3.2		13.4	15.4	0.2	11.4	100
IRSP	9.2					13.1		28.9					2.1	37.6			9.2			100
People Before Profit Alliance	13.5	11.9				3.4		4.3	2.9		0.2		36.3	9.4		0.3	0.4	3.0	14.2	100
Progressive Unionist Party	3.9	1.2						67.5		17.7			2.5	1.4				1.2	4.7	100
Resume NI														100.0						100
SDLP	28.0	3.2				1.7		4.9	0.3	3.7			11.9	27.9		2.3	4.0	0.2	11.6	100
Sinn Féin	11.4	3.1				0.3		11.4	0.6	0.3			26.9	31.1		0.1	0.4	0.2	14.1	100
Socialist Party													100.0							100
TUV	5.9	0.6			6.3	0.2		5.9		0.2	6.2		0.7	0.9			66.1	0.1	6.7	100
Ulster Unionist Party	3.3	0.2			13.4	0.3		4.0		1.1	2.2		2.7	0.4		15.0	52.7		4.8	100
Workers Party	5.6							10.5						83.8						100
Totals	9.5	1.8	0.0	0.0	7.7	1.1	0.0	5.7	0.3	1.6	1.3	0.0	9.5	13.6	0.0	15.0	21.4	0.2	11.3	100

List of Abbreviations

CCLA   Cross-Community Labour Alternative

Con   Conservative and Unionist Party

DUP   Democratic Unionist Party

Ind   Independents

IRSP   Irish Republican Socialist Party

PBPA   People Before Profit Alliance

PUP   Progressive Unionist Party

SDLP   Social Democratic and Labour party

SF   Sinn Fein

TUV   Traditional Unionist Voice

UUP   Ulster Unionist Party