Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service
Briefing Note

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2016 Assembly Election:

Transferred Votes

This briefing note provides information on how votes were transferred between parties at the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly Election. It supplements the recently published Research and Information Service briefing paper on the 2016 Election results (*NIA 141-16 – "Election Report: Northern Ireland Assembly Election, 5 May 2016"*)[1].

Key Points

- Only 17 MLAs had a sufficient number of first preference votes to meet the quota and to be elected at the first count. The remaining 91 were elected at a later stage and required transferred votes.

- A total of 179,287 votes were transferred during the 2016 Election count.

- Of the parties elected, the UUP received most transferred votes (25%), followed by the DUP (22%), Sinn Féin (14%), SDLP (13%), Alliance (11%), Green Party (4%), TUV (3%) and People Before Profit Alliance (1%).

- Most of the UUP's transfers came from other UUP candidates (24%), the DUP (19%) and TUV (15%).

- Most of the DUP's transfers came from other DUP candidates (42%), the TUV (17%) and the UUP (12%).

- Most of Sinn Féin's transfers came from other Sinn Féin candidates (61%), the SDLP (8%) and People Before Profit Alliance (7%).

- Most of the SDLP's transfers came from other SDLP candidates (21%), the Alliance Party (16%), Sinn Féin (13%) and the UUP (11%).

- Most of the Alliance Party's transfers came from other Alliance Party candidates (29%), the SDLP (20%) and the Green Party (10%).

- Most of the Green Party's transfers came from the SDLP (23%), Sinn Féin (13%), the Alliance party (11%), independents (6%), Cross-Community Labour Alternative (6%) and the People Before Profit Alliance (6%).

- Most of the TUV's transfers came from other TUV candidates (38%), the UK Independence Party (29%) and DUP (8%).

- Most of the People Before Profit Alliance's transfers came from the SDLP (35%), the Green Party (14%) and independents (11%).

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[2] are removed from the count to give a **total valid count**.

iii. A **quota** is calculated for each constituency using the formula[3]:

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

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[4].

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.

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[2] 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).

[3] The formula 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 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 six-member constituency, the candidates require just over 1/7 of the votes each and the PR is 6/7 (or 86%) of the voters (see http://www.voting.ukscientists.com/stvcount.html).

[4] 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 second 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 - the result is calculated to two decimal places and the remainder ignored).

In the 2016 Assembly Election, only 17 MLAs had a sufficient number of first preference votes to meet the quota and to be elected at the first count. The remaining 91 were elected at a later stage and required transferred votes.

Party to Party Transfers

A total of 179,287 votes were transferred during the 2016 Election count.

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.

For some excellent infographics and a breakdown of party to party transfers by constituency, see the 'Elections NI' project produced by the Open Data Institute at NICVA and the Open Government Network NI.[5]

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[5] http://electionsni.org.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/index.html

Table 1. 2016 Assembly Election Transferred Votes by Party

To / From	Alliance	AWP	CCLA	CISTA	Con	DF	DUP	Green	Ind	NIF	NILRC	PBPA	PUP	SBU	SDLP	SF	TUV	UKIP	UUP	WP	Combination	Totals	% of all
Alliance	5,928		255	139	243		152	2,139	1,165		80	527	315	21	4,143	768	264	361	990	102	2,940	**20,531**	11.5
Animal Welfare Party					1																	**1**	0.0
CCLA	2				8		1	4			62		17	3						38	29	**164**	0.1
CISTA	30				2		11	181	80				21								174	**498**	0.3
Conservatives	1						16					3			2	1	17		6		5	**52**	0.0
Democracy First																							
DUP	610		47	31	174		16,680	174	846		5	69	2,710	99	379	111	6,837	1,699	4,795	89	4,819	**40,174**	22.4
Green Party	752		388	95	150		65		401		157	379	265	8	1,566	878	81	192	51	168	1,078	**6,674**	3.7
Independent	607		31	170	73		367	310	780		21		422	21	386	83	388	228	579	1	725	**5,191**	2.9
Northern Ireland First																							
Northern Ireland Labour Representation Committee					2		10									0			10		1	**24**	0.0
People Before Profit Alliance							85	253	197				34		615	67	1	37		110	366	**1,765**	1.0
PUP	10		28		2		75	23	403		3			6		10	364	281	52	10	63	**1,332**	0.7
SBU					6						1									1		**8**	0.0
SDLP	3,736		59	492	21		792	633	1,733		35	1,229	33	8	5,092	3,049	118	115	2,676	161	3,808	**23,790**	13.3
Sinn Féin	1,064		64	737	4		49	401	1,868		18	1,903	14	2	2,083	15,687	29	65	212	71	1,494	**25,766**	14.4
TUV	88		14	11	18		367	64	105		2		180	57	17	11	1,759	1,356	162	45	366	**4,623**	2.6
UKIP	101		50	71	119		174	87	117		1		371	28	34	31	763		531	9	125	**2,612**	1.5
UUP	2,543		89	273	443		8,378	353	1,987		25	70	1,891	88	759	224	6,509	1,644	10,835	172	8,059	**44,341**	24.7
Workers Party	364							217				235			126	750		9			42	**1,742**	1.0
Total	15,836		1,025	2,018	1,265		27,221	4,834	9,686		414	4,412	6,273	341	15,202	21,672	17,131	5,987	20,889	987	24,094	**179,287**	100

Table 2. 2016 Assembly Election - % transferred votes by party

To / From	Alliance	AWP	CCLA	CISTA	Con	DF	DUP	Green	Ind	NIF	NILRC	PBPA	PUP	SBU	SDLP	SF	TUV	UKIP	UUP	WP	Combination	Totals
Alliance	28.9		1.2	0.7	1.2		0.7	10.4	5.7		0.4	2.6	1.5	0.1	20.2	3.7	1.3	1.8	4.8	0.5	14.3	**100**
Animal Welfare Party					100.0																	**100**
CCLA	1.4				4.9		0.4		2.4		37.8		10.4	1.8					23.2		17.7	**100**
CISTA	6.0				0.4		2.1	36.3	16.1				4.3								34.9	**100**
Conservatives	2.2						31.3				5.8				3.9	1.9	33.0		12.2		9.7	**100**
Democracy First																						**100**
DUP	1.5		0.1	0.1	0.4		41.5	0.4	2.1		0.0	0.2	6.7	0.2	0.9	0.3	17.0	4.2	11.9	0.2	12.0	**100**
Green Party	11.3		5.8	1.4	2.3		1.0		6.0		2.4	5.7	4.0	0.1	23.5	13.2	1.2	2.9	0.8	2.5	16.2	**100**
Independent	11.7		0.6	3.3	1.4		7.1	6.0	15.0		0.4		8.1	0.4	7.4	1.6	7.5	4.4	11.2	0.0	14.0	**100**
Northern Ireland First																						
Northern Ireland Labour Representation Committee					8.4		43.7									1.7			42.0		4.2	**100**
People Before Profit Alliance							4.8	14.4	11.2				1.9		34.8	3.8	0.1	2.1		6.2	20.7	**100**
PUP	0.7		2.1		0.2		5.6	1.7	30.3		0.2			0.5		0.8	27.4	21.1	3.9	0.8	4.7	**100**
SBU				75.0							12.5								12.5			**100**
SDLP	15.7		0.2	2.1	0.1		3.3	2.7	7.3		0.1	5.2	0.1	0.0	21.4	12.8	0.5	0.5	11.2	0.7	16.0	**100**
Sinn Féin	4.1		0.2	2.9	0.0		0.2	1.6	7.2		0.1	7.4	0.1	0.0	8.1	60.9	0.1	0.3	0.8	0.3	5.8	**100**
TUV	1.9		0.3	0.2	0.4		7.9	1.4	2.3		0.0		3.9	1.2	0.4	0.2	38.1	29.3	3.5	1.0	7.9	**100**
UKIP	3.9		1.9	2.7	4.6		6.6	3.3	4.5		0.0		14.2	1.1	1.3	1.2	29.2		20.3	0.3	4.8	**100**
UUP	5.7		0.2	0.6	1.0		18.9	0.8	4.5		0.1	0.2	4.3	0.2	1.7	0.5	14.7	3.7	24.4	0.4	18.2	**100**
Workers Party	20.9							12.5				13.5			7.2	43.0		0.5			2.4	**100**
All Transfers	8.8		0.6	1.1	0.7		15.2	2.7	5.4		0.2	2.5	3.5	0.2	8.5	12.1	9.6	3.3	11.7	0.6	13.4	**100**

List of Abbreviations

AWP	Animal Welfare Party
CCLA	Cross-Community Labour Alternative
CISTA	Cannabis is Safer than Alcohol
Con	Conservative
DF	Democracy First
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
Ind	Independents
NIF	Northern Ireland First
NILRC	Northern Ireland Labour Representation Committee
PBPA	People Before Profit Alliance
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
SBU	South Belfast Unionists
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour party
SF	Sinn Fein
TUV	Traditional Unionist Voice
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
WP	Workers' Party