Political Cleavages and Party Alignments in Ireland, North and South

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Introduction

THE ORIGINS AND THE NATURE OF POLITICAL CLEAVAGES are central issues in any systematic comparison of the two parts of Ireland. One might even say that they are *the* central issues since, without these cleavages, we would not be comparing 'two parts of Ireland'; nor would there be a 'Northern Ireland problem'. This chapter addresses a limited aspect of this question, namely, the relationship between the cleavage system and the party system at the mass level. Parties are variously seen as articulators, or aggregators, or embodiments of conflicting interests. Whether parties articulate specific interests or aggregate a wide range of interests in a catch-all fashion and whether they embody or institutionalise basic cleavages or simply represent ad hoc coalitions of particular interests at individual elections, are questions of fundamental interest in terms of understanding party systems and electoral behaviour; in the context of the problems in Northern Ireland they are also of some practical interest in that they affect the role parties play in the generation, maintenance and resolution of political conflict.

The background to our analysis derives from Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) well-known 'freezing' hypothesis in which they argued that the cleavages underlying European party systems at the beginning of the twentieth century or earlier continue to form the basis of divisions in contemporary politics. In their account, certain historical junctures—Reformation and Counter-Reformation, centre-periphery relations during periods of nation and state-building, the timing of industrialisation—are held to have had a profound influence on the nature and on the extent of politicisation of divisions in any given country. These historical developments have tended to generate four major cleavages: centre-periphery,

Proceedings of the British Academy, **98**, 419–456.

church versus state, town versus country, employer versus worker; which of these, or which combination, comes to dominate depends on the historical path taken and upon the degree of social and cultural distinctiveness of the social groups involved (Bartolini and Mair 1990: 224). Thus the strength of a particular social cleavage will be conditioned by its institutionalisation in the party system at the onset of democratic competition. In the case of the two Irish political systems, the critical juncture can be dated to the process of mass electoral mobilisation and the institutionalisation of political competition in 1918 and the turbulent years that followed. A key aim of this chapter will therefore be to assess the influence of the political cleavages that existed at that time on the structure of present-day politics in the two systems. For this purpose we examine not only the political issues that might divide parties and their supporters, but also the social characteristics that have been thought to provide the basis of partisanship and mobilisation. In combination, these two sources of structure have been said to provide the key to understanding the stability of European party systems (Ibid.: 219). In particular, we consider what the current evidence suggests about the potential for change in the patterning of the two party systems: what is the current state of electoral mobilisation? What is the relationship between parties and voters? Are there emerging lines of cleavage that could form the basis of a political realignment? To what extent has Ireland, North or South, already embarked on a period of realignment and what would be the implications of such a development?

A systematic North-South comparison can be expected to be particularly useful in this context. Given the common origins of the two party systems, an important question is to what extent the differences between them can be understood, on the one hand, as regional variations in the island of Ireland that were institutionalised by partition or, on the other hand, as effects of the differences in their situations that have emerged since partition, particularly the presence or otherwise of unresolved conflict and the eruption of violence and terrorism. Part of this inquiry is to trace the ways in which the divergent paths of development following partition may have altered the salience of the constitutional issue, both in absolute terms and relative to the 'left-right' cleavage regarding inequality and the role of the state.

The first part of this chapter traces the common roots of the political parties on the island of Ireland from the mid-nineteenth century onward, noting the growing polarisation that occurred and focusing especially on the effects of partition on the emerging cleavage systems. It then attempts to tease out the implications of the particular form of the institutionalisation of cleavage, North and South, for involvement in the political process and for the contemporary bases of party choice. The empirical analysis

then tests the implications of this account of the development of the party systems at the mass level by focusing on three aspects of political representation: voter turnout, levels of identification with parties and the structure of political divisions in the two societies.

The Origins of the Party Systems and the Effects of Secession

While the main foundations of the party systems in Ireland North and South are located in the period 1918–23, it is useful, particularly in the context of a North-South comparison, to trace the origins of the political parties in earlier periods of partial electoral mobilisation and party competition. In the early nineteenth century Irish political parties were simply extensions of the Tory and Whig parliamentary alliances that dominated British politics. This began to change in the period from 1832 to 1880, a period characterised by 'the metamorphosis of the Whigs into the Liberal party, which increasingly became the party of Catholic Ireland, and of the Tories into the Conservative party, which quickly became the party of Protestants' (Coakley, 1993: 6). The other development that occurred toward the end of this period was a strengthening of the link between the religious cleavage and an emerging territorial cleavage resulting, eventually, in the displacement of the liberals by the nationalists as the representatives of Catholic Ireland. The year 1885 saw a significant widening of the franchise and a step in the direction of mass electoral mobilisation. This intensified the religious/territorial cleavage and strengthened the position of nationalism. Its impact on the institutionalisation of cleavage was limited, however, both by the modest extension of the franchise involved and by the restraint on party competition imposed by the extensive territorial segregation of the competing groups (Garvin, 1981: 89–90).

The context of the 1918 election (1916 and all that) included the emergence of radical nationalism as an electoral force in the form of a remodelled Sinn Féin Party. Sinn Féin overwhelmed the moderate nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party in the South and mounted a very substantial challenge to the nationalist party in the North. Whereas in 1884 the electorate had increased from 8 to 31 per cent of the population aged 20 and over, in 1918 it went from 26 to 75 per cent. While there were still uncontested areas, a much fuller mobilisation occurred and this was followed, especially in the South, by a decade of intensive political activity and party building and the establishment of the real basis of the party system. The implications of these developments can be clarified by applying the Lipset-Rokkan framework to the analysis of the processes of electoral mobilisation and the development of the party systems and

electoral alignments North and South, beginning, for reasons of ease of exposition, with the South.

Secession, Cleavages and Parties in the South

The insight which opened the way for the application to Ireland of the standard model of the development of European political cleavages and party systems is due to John Whyte. His focus at the time was on the development of cleavages and parties in the South. The positive implications of what he had to say for the comparability of the Irish case were perhaps obscured by his statement that 'It is, then, perhaps a comfort to comparative political analysts that Irish party politics should be *sui generis*: the context from which they spring is *sui generis* also' (Whyte, 1974: 648). Accompanying this apparently negative assessment of the comparability of the Irish party system, however, was a lucid comparative account both of the prevailing cleavages in the United Kingdom in 1918 (as seen from an Irish perspective) and of the effect of secession on the development of political cleavages in the South.

Reminding the reader of the four cleavage categories 'worked out by Lipset and Rokkan in their magisterial work on party systems and voter alignments' he argued that 'Ireland has handled all these conflicts to varying extents in exceptional ways' (Ibid.: 647). In particular, 'the centre/periphery crisis was . . . resolved in Ireland in an unusually absolute way: Ireland is a former part of the United Kingdom periphery that simply broke off'. The land-industry conflict 'again . . . was solved in an unusually absolute way. The agrarian sector broke off to found its own state' (Ibid.: 648). The same observation applies to the church-state conflict: the periphery and therefore the secessionist state was overwhelmingly and loyally Catholic. The owner-worker conflict was the only potential cleavage that was internal to the new state, but both its material and cultural bases were weak.

This view forms the basis of a fruitful application of the Lipset-Rokkan approach to the party system in the South. In the absence of major conflict along agrarian-industrial, church-state and owner-worker fault-lines, the dominant cleavage in what was to become the Republic of Ireland was based on a centre-periphery conflict in which Southern Ireland was the periphery and London the centre. Through the treaty split and the civil war, this centre-periphery cleavage became the bedrock of the Irish party system. The two parties (Anti-treaty Sinn Féin/Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael) became identified with opposing positions on the issue, though it must be emphasised that these

positions were not nationalist versus anti-nationalist but radical nationalist versus moderate nationalist. Though these differences can be subtle and nuanced, residues of them are clearly discernible in the contemporary party politics of the Republic (Sinnott, 1986a; 1986b; Laver and Hunt, 1992). Two other consequences of the development and institutionalisation of cleavages in the South should be noted. The first is the persistent minority status of the Labour Party. The second is that the dominant role of the centre-periphery conflict in the building of the Irish party system left the two largest parties as free agents on other potential cleavage dimensions; as such, they have at various times pursued identical policies or even exchanged positions on a wide range of issues: on church-state relations, on public spending, on the role of the state in the economy, on the interests of industry and agriculture, and on free trade versus protectionism.

Given this background, the major feature of the Irish party system in recent years has been its vulnerability. This vulnerability arises, in the first place, because part of the original centre-periphery conflict (the Anglo-Irish relations part) was solved by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1938 and the declaration of a Republic in 1948 and the part that was not solved (the Northern Ireland problem) developed into so intractable and so bloody a conflict that it ceased to be a basis which could sustain overt inter-party competition. Secondly, from about 1960 onwards, Irish society underwent rapid economic, social and cultural change. Thirdly, partly as a result of these changes, potential alternative bases of cleavage emerged or at least threatened to emerge in the form of either embryonic left-right or secular-confessional conflict. Political scientists pored long and hard over the entrails of what seemed to be an emerging class conflict in the party system in the 1980s, while the possibility of a secular-confessional conflict in the same period also appeared to be substantial. The victory of Mary Robinson in the presidential election of 1990 was seen by some as indicative of the emergence of a combination of both and, certainly, as a 'cataclysmic event' (Finlay, 1991). It should also be noted that the vulnerability of the party system in the South is exacerbated by the electoral system variable (PR-STV), which facilitates party fragmentation and particularistic voting. We would expect therefore that, in the South, contemporary party choice will not be strongly determined by positions on the original cleavage issue (nationalism). Whether it is determined by positions on other issue dimensions—i.e., left-right or secular-confessional—will provide an indication of the extent of any realignment. The lack of *any* pronounced basis to partisanship would suggest dealignment.

Secession, Cleavages and Parties in the North

While creating a highly homogeneous society and institutionalising an external conflict between Britain and Ireland in the party system in the South, the secession of Southern Ireland strengthened the potential for conflict *within* Northern Ireland on three of the four Lipset-Rokkan cleavage dimensions. First and foremost, there was the centre-periphery (unionist-nationalist) conflict, which, with religion as an ethnic marker, split the new political entity into a two-thirds majority versus a one-third minority. This conflict would have existed whether or not state institutions had been established in Northern Ireland. The establishment of a government and parliament of Northern Ireland did, however, exacerbate the conflict by giving a local focus both to unionist possession and nationalist dispossession. But, over and above this potent mixture of religion, nationalism and considerable political autonomy, the establishment of the state added a further, sharper edge to church-state conflict: the state was a Protestant state and the Catholic Church went into opposition, nurturing and guarding institutions of cultural separation at every turn. Because religion is also the clearest ethnic marker in Northern Ireland, it is important to emphasise that church-state relations constituted a distinct dimension of conflict in addition to the nationalist/centre-periphery cleavage. Even if nationalism had been weak in Northern Ireland, there would have been a conflict between church and state; as it was, both conflicts were strong and, by and large, each reinforced the other.

The third line of cleavage that was intensified by the secession of Southern Ireland was that between owners and workers—the class cleavage most closely associated with industrialisation. In the South of Ireland, over 50 per cent of the work-force were engaged in agriculture and a mere 12 per cent in industry in the period immediately following secession. In the North, by contrast, only 26 per cent were engaged in agriculture and 39 per cent in industry (Harkness, 1983: 46). Clearly the potential for the political mobilisation of labour against capital was much greater in the North. In the event, a left-right cleavage played a very subordinate role in each jurisdiction. In the South, the minimal potential for left-right alignment that might have existed was definitively side-lined by the abstention of the Labour Party in the 1918 election. In the North, the conflict between capital and labour was not so much sidelined as subsumed into the overriding conflict between unionism and nationalism.

The outcome in Northern Ireland was not, therefore, the emergence of a fully developed multidimensional cleavage system (which might have led to some amelioration of conflict through cross-cutting cleavages). Instead, a centre-periphery cleavage, in which the marker of ethnicity was religion,

emerged and dominated all other cleavages in the society. To this picture of reinforcing lines of cleavage must be added the fact that the very creation of the Northern Ireland state was the creation of a cockpit of conflict in which the lines of struggle were drawn with particular clarity and invested with a special intensity born of proximity, smallness of scale and historical longevity. This was exacerbated by the institutional combination of a local parliament operating on strict majoritarian and adversarial lines and, from 1929 until the abolition of Stormont in 1972, using a plurality or first-past-the-post voting system. This institutionalisation of a Protestant majority (which saw itself as a besieged minority) ensured that, for most of the period since partition, there was little prospect of Catholics having an effective political voice.

Against this background, one would expect a continuing intense partisan alignment in Northern Ireland. A number of considerations might, however, qualify this expectation. First, one-party dominance and the consequent reduction of party competition in a first-past-the-post electoral system may have injured the capacity of parties to represent the interests of voters. Secondly, the contemporary party system will inevitably have been affected by the intractability of the conflict, by the failure of repeated efforts at conflict resolution and by the partial displacement of parties by terrorist organisations as carriers of the putative interests of each side to the conflict. Given the manifest failure of the party system to manage the conflict, the level of attachment to political parties may well have declined over the last two decades. Thirdly, in the wake of the abolition of a representative assembly and the imposition of an alternative form of governance, it seems likely that a partial realignment did in fact occur, with the addition of a further layer to Northern Ireland's cleavage structure through the growth of parties (the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin) drawing their force from the interests of groups that were not adequately represented by the established unionist and nationalist parties (see Evans and Duffy, 1997: 52–5). Despite these qualifications, however, the most plausible prediction for the North is the maintenance of the original alignment, in which party choice is determined mainly by position on the ethnic/centre-periphery cleavage, possibly complemented by position on a left-right axis of more recent vintage.

Analysis

In testing the expectations set out above, three sets of data will be examined. The first is data on electoral turnout, for all types of elections in both jurisdictions. Secondly, we use Eurobarometer data to analyse the

evolution of party attachment over time. The advantages of the Eurobarometer in this context are obvious: it provides twice-yearly data for Northern Ireland and the Republic since the late 1970s. The disadvantage is that, in the case of Northern Ireland, the sample in each survey is only 300. In the analysis that follows, this is partly overcome by combining the two samples in each year; even so, sample size is less than would be desirable, particularly when we proceed to compare attitudes in the two communities. The third data set, which we use to examine the bases of party choice, consists of coordinated studies of national identity and of attitudes to the Northern Ireland problem carried out in 1995 and 1996. Sample sizes in this case are approximately 1,000 in each area.

Turnout North and South, 1920–96

High turnout is both a condition of the maintenance of an electoral alignment and an indicator of its strength and stability. Figure 1 shows turnout in general elections, local elections, presidential elections and European Parliament elections in the South. Across the different kinds of elections, average turnout has ranged from 45 per cent in non-concurrent European elections to 70 per cent in general elections. Over time, turnout in general elections has ranged from 60 per cent in 1923, through 80 per cent in 1933, to 66.7 per cent in 1997. The first point to note about this line in the graph, however, is that the sharp rise in general election turnout between 1923 and 1932 needs to be substantially discounted because of problems of redundancy in the electoral register in the 1920s.[1] Turnout in 1997 was therefore, in all probability, the lowest since the foundation of the state, surpassing the previous low of the snap war-time election of 1944. The 1997 figure confirms a modest but indisputable downward trend in turnout in general elections since 1981 when turnout was 76.2 per cent. That this is part of a general trend is suggested by the decline in turnout in local elections since 1967, a slight decline in turnout over the two European Parliament elections that have not been linked to another more substantial electoral contest[2] and by the turnout of 42 per cent in the presidential election of 1997. The increase in turnout in the presidential election of 1990 might have been regarded as confounding any suggestion of a declining trend, but the 1997 presidential turnout put paid to that notion. The relatively high turnout in 1990 may have been due

[1] This redundancy occurred mainly in western and north-western areas (see Sinnott, 1995: 84–87).

[2] European Parliament elections coincided with local elections in 1979 and with a general election in 1989.

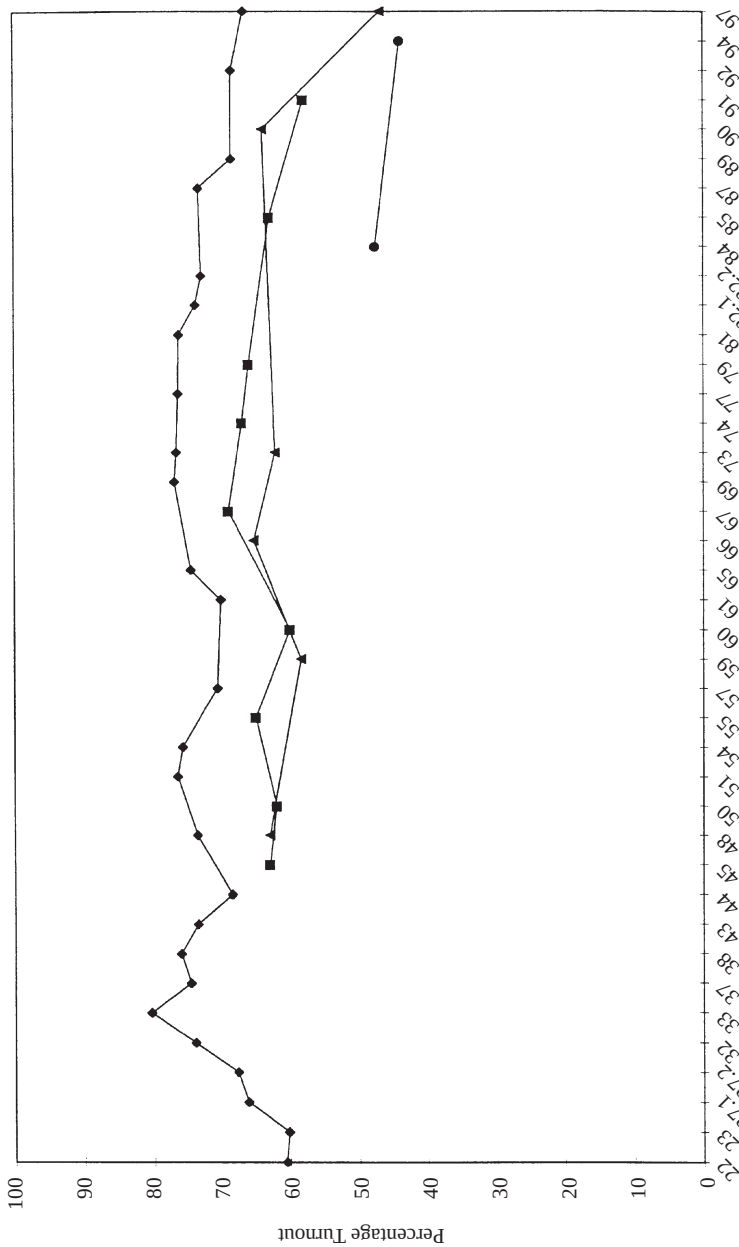

Figure 1. Turnout in general, local, presidential, and non-concurrent European Parliament elections, Irish Free State/Republic of Ireland, 1922–97. (◆) General, (■) Local, (▲) Presidential, (●) European Parliament. *Sources*: Gallagher 1985, Walker 1992, and the Stationery Office, Dublin, various dates.

to the novelty of the event (the previous one had been in 1973); if it was due, on the other hand, to a more fundamental process of mobilisation, this would give no comfort to the existing party system. Whether or not the 1990 presidential election was cataclysmic may be debatable; what is not debatable is that it was a contest that challenged rather than reinforced existing electoral alignments and the established party system.

At first sight, the turnout data for Northern Ireland present a strange picture: as measured in the normal way, i.e., voters as a proportion of the total electorate, turnout in Northern Ireland Parliament (Stormont) elections appears to have plummeted in the first decade or so of the existence of the state, to have recovered somewhat between 1938 and 1949, but then to have fallen sharply again in the early 1950s, and not to have recovered until 1969 or even 1973 (see Figure 2). The picture of turnout in Westminster elections is stranger still: starting from an extremely low level in 1922 and 1923, it seems to gyrate on a two-election cycle until 1955 when it settled down to a more normal level and a more normal pattern. The explanation of these enormous fluctuations in the rate of recorded participation in elections in the early decades of the existence of Northern Ireland is a simple but, in terms of our inquiry, quite significant one: relatively large swathes of the Northern Ireland electorate did not have a regular opportunity to vote in Northern Ireland Parliament elections from 1925 to 1969 and in Westminster elections from 1922 to 1951. This is illustrated in Figure 3, which presents bargraphs of the proportions of the electorate in contested constituencies and a line graph of voters as a percentage not of the total electorate but of the electorate in the contested constituencies. The absence of contests was a function of a combination of safe seats and the abstentionist policies pursued by nationalist parties. The temporary disenfranchisement of the voters was particularly widespread in 1922 and 1923 (both Westminster elections), in 1931 (Westminster) and 1933 (Stormont) and was at quite a high level (40 per cent or more) in all Stormont elections between 1929, when plurality voting was introduced, and 1965. This absence of competition clarifies the anomalies that are apparent in the turnout data for the early decades in Figure 2 and confirms that the turnout estimates from 1955 on for Westminster elections and from 1973 on for Northern Ireland Assembly elections can be relied on but that the earlier figures require radical adjustment to allow for non-contested constituencies. On the basis of the adjusted turnout figures for the early years we can make at least some tentative observations (see Figure 3). Turnout in Westminster and especially in Stormont elections went through two periods of decline: it fell between 1921–22 and 1945 and then, following a notable increase in turnout in 1949–50, declined again between then and the mid-1960s. It

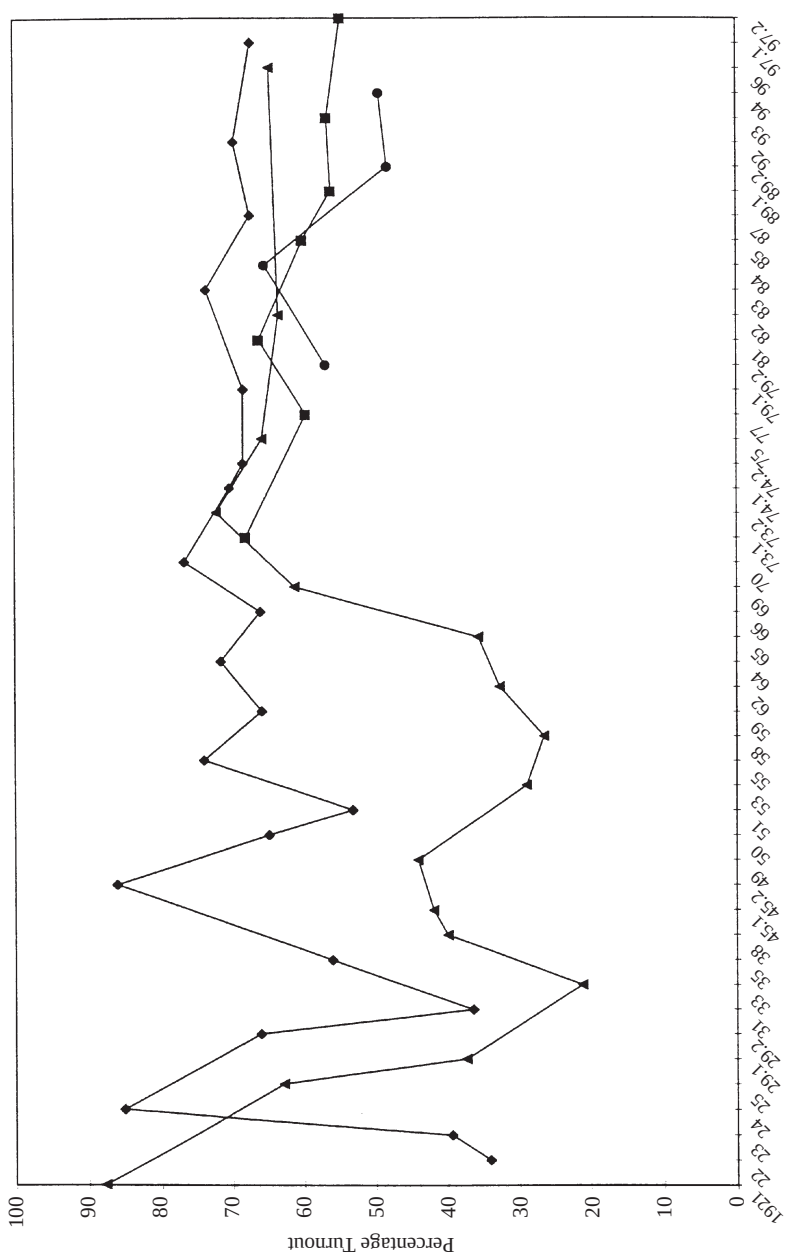

Figure 2. Turnout as proportion of total electorate in Northern Ireland Parliament/Assembly, Westminster, district council and European Parliament elections, 1921–97. (▲) NI Parliament/Assembly, (◆) Westminster, (■) District Council, (●) European Parliament. *Sources:* Flackes and Elliot 1994, Walker 1992, *Irish Political Studies,* 1995, 1997, 1998.

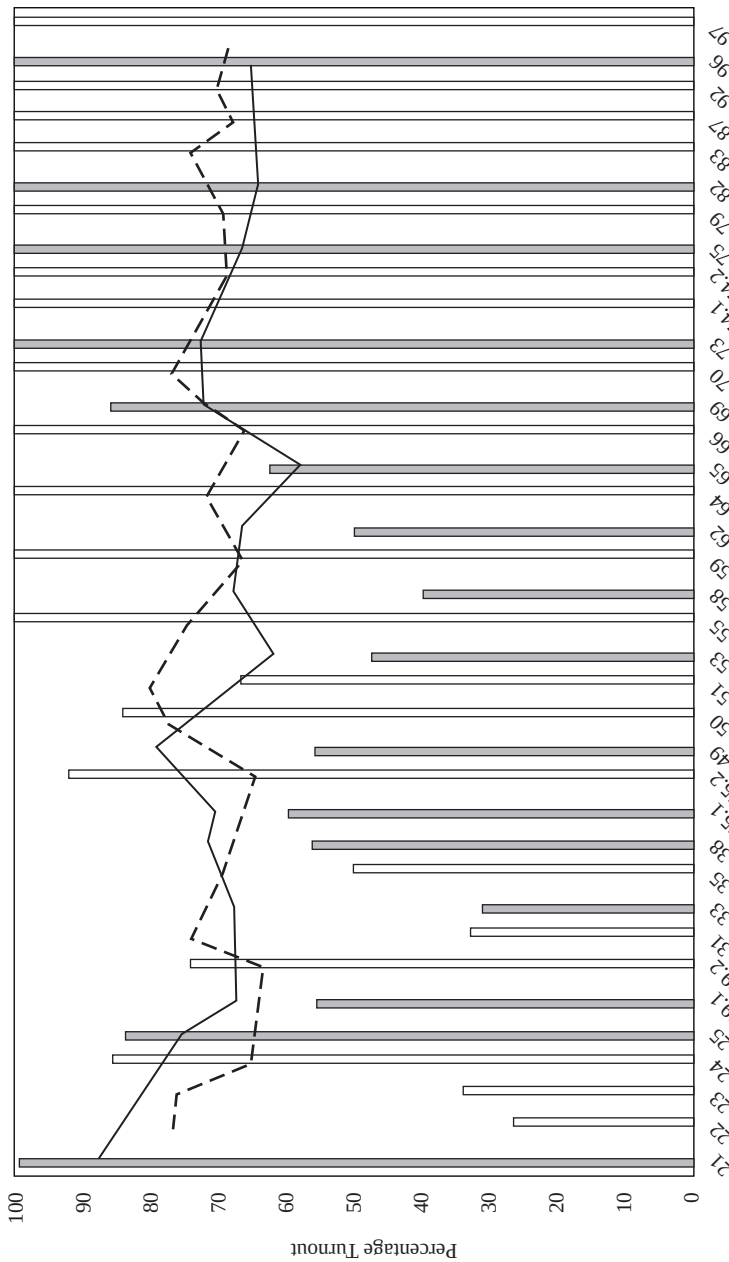

Figure 3. Proportion of total electorate and turnout in contested constituencies, Northern Ireland/Assembly and Westminster elections, 1921–97. ▓ Electorate in contested constituencies – NI Parliament/Assembly, □ Electorate in contested constituencies – Westminster, —— Turnout – NI Parliament/Assembly, - - - - Turnout – Westminster. *Source*: As Figure 2.

recovered in Stormont elections in 1969 and in Westminster elections in 1970.

Given the oddities of the turnout data for Northern Ireland in the early years, the best approach to North-South comparisons is to concentrate on the period since 1970 when we have both reliable data and data from a variety of types of elections. As with the South, we have data from four types of elections for this period: Westminster, Northern Ireland Assembly, District Council and European Parliament. Taken as a whole, these data indicate a significant decline in turnout since the early 1970s: from 77 per cent in 1970 to 68 per cent in 1997 in the case of Westminster; from 72 per cent in 1973 to 64.7 per cent in 1996 in the case of the Assembly; from 68.1 per cent in 1973 to 54.7 per cent in 1997 in the case of the District Councils and from 56.9 per cent in 1979 to 49.4 per cent in 1994 in the case of the European Parliament. Taken together, all of this suggests a degree of demobilisation in Northern Ireland more or less on a par with the South; this demobilisation is in conflict with the general expectation that electoral alignments would have been more strongly maintained in Northern Ireland.

Party Attachment in Ireland, North and South, 1973–95

If parties are the carriers or sources of the maintenance of political cleavage as suggested by Lipset and Rokkan, one would expect that levels of attachment to parties would be high and stable over time. Although controversies may rage about how it should be measured, about its applicability across systems and about its consequences for voting choice, party attachment has been an enduring concept in the study of voters and parties. Indeed, the classic 'Michigan model' of voting behaviour (Campbell *et al.*, 1960) sees party identification as the primary mechanism by which the structure of political cleavages is reproduced over time.

The basic concept is a simple one: voters do not make a fresh choice of party at each election; rather, they possess what has been variously described as a degree of affective support for, a standing decision in favour of, a sense of loyalty or a feeling of closeness to, or an identification with a certain party. In any given election voters may vote otherwise than in accordance with this prior sense of commitment; nevertheless, so the argument goes, the commitment remains an important attribute of the voters, affecting not only their propensity to vote for a given party but also their perceptions of politics and even the positions they adopt on issues. While party identification is the most popular label for the concept, it is probably preferable to use party attachment as the generic term;

identification, closeness, loyalty etc., can then be treated as particular operationalisations of the overall concept. The notion of party attachment fits in well with a Lipset-Rokkan style account of cleavages and party systems: party attachment is the carrier at the level of the individual of the systemic-level electoral alignment that is central to the theory. Application of the concept to the Irish party systems leads to two pertinent questions: has the alignment which originated in Southern Ireland between 1918 and 1923 survived in the form of enduring attachments to parties in the very different Ireland of the period since the late 1960s? Has attachment to party in the North, which one would expect to have endured in tandem with the persistence of the basic cleavage, survived the political failures and the party fragmentation brought on by the Troubles?

The two main operationalisations of party attachment are party identification and party closeness. In the following analysis we use the latter measure as implemented in Eurobarometer surveys since 1978. This enables us to compare Ireland North and South on this dimension over almost two decades and to compare trends in both parts of Ireland to trends in Europe as a whole.[3] Figure 4 presents the data on party attachment in the Republic, in Northern Ireland and in the European Community for the period 1978–94. The evidence clearly supports the dealignment hypothesis in the South: since 1978, party attachment has declined by some 20 percentage points from about 60 per cent in the late 1970s to less than 40 per cent in the early 1990s. The decline occurred in three stages: between 1980 and 1981, between 1983 and 1986 and between 1988 and 1991. The level of party attachment in Northern Ireland appears to have been significantly lower than that in the Republic at the outset of the period under consideration. Given that party attachment in the North did not show any consistent trend between then and the mid-1980s and given the already noted decline in party attachment in the Republic, levels of party attachment in the two systems became remarkably similar. The similarity indeed extends into the second half of the period considered as party attachment in both jurisdictions declined at more or less similar rates between 1987–88 and 1991.

[3] Irish-European comparisons of party attachment must be approached with caution. There are significant differences in the wording of the party attachment question in the Eurobarometer surveys, mainly between a relative question ('do you feel closer to one party than to the others?') and an absolute question ('do you feel close to any particular party?'). It can be shown that the relative question produces higher proportions with party attachment than does the absolute question. The relative question has been asked in most continental European Community member states of the European Community/Union and the absolute question has been asked in Britain, Northern Ireland and Ireland. This means that only the measures for North and South are directly comparable; the European average is included in Figure 5 to provide a yardstick only for comparing general *trends* in levels of attachment.

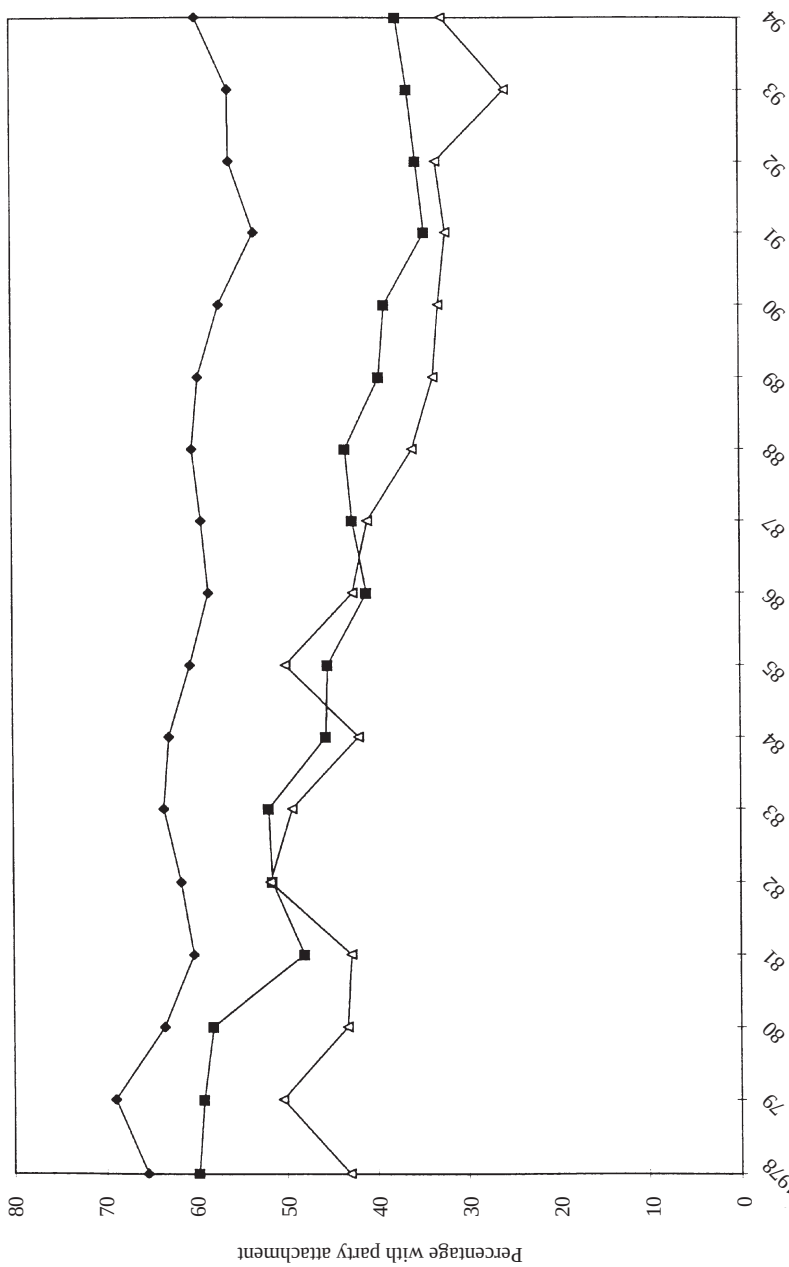

Figure 4. Party attachment, European Community, Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, 1978–94. (◆) EC, (■) Republic of Ireland, (Δ) Northern Ireland. *Source:* Eurobarometers 9–41.1.

If there are signs of similarity between North and South, there are substantial differences in party attachment within Northern Ireland, between Protestants and Catholics. Figure 5 shows that except for two years (1978 and 1988), levels of attachment to party have been quite different in the two communities, being substantially higher among Protestants than among Catholics. Similar downward trends are, however, observable in both communities, the decline being precipitous among Catholics between 1978 and 1980 and more evenly spread over time among Protestants. In short, and viewing the period 1978–94 as a whole, the level of party attachment has been about the same in the Republic and in the Protestant community in Northern Ireland and has been notably lower in the Catholic community; the trends among all three groups have, however, been downward.

It might be argued that these downward trends are simply part of a general trend in Western Europe and that the evidence of party attachment examined so far therefore sheds little or no light on specifically Irish developments; there has after all been a lot of speculation in recent years about just such a decline and about the more general phenomenon of dealignment. Before writing off the significance of the Irish trends in this way, however, we should note Schmitt and Holmberg's scepticism about a general decline in party attachment: following a detailed analysis of all of the available evidence, they concluded that '. . . specific developments, by country and by party, are so varied that any ''overall'' view disguises more than it discloses' (Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995: 121). This sceptical view regarding any overall trends, up or down, is confirmed when we compare the average trend in party attachment in the European Community as a whole with the Irish trends: while there may be some slight evidence of a decline across the Community as a whole, it is small compared to what occurred in Ireland, North and, particularly, in the South (see Figure 4). Indeed, one of the most striking features of Figure 4 is the absolute discrepancy in party attachment in Ireland, North and South, and in the European Union. We have already issued a severe health warning in regard to drawing inferences from the absolute differences between Europe and Ireland on the basis of the data in Figure 4. We have also noted, however, that Eurobarometer data that make an adjustment for the differences in question wording are available from the post-election Eurobarometer survey of June-July 1994 (EB 41.1).[4] These data, which enable us to

[4] The adjustment was made by inserting a supplementary question, which asked all those respondents who gave a negative answer to the initial question whether they 'feel a little closer to one of the parties than to the others'. As hypothesised when this methodological test was undertaken, the supplementary question produced larger additional proportions of attached voters in countries in which the absolute question had been asked as compared with countries

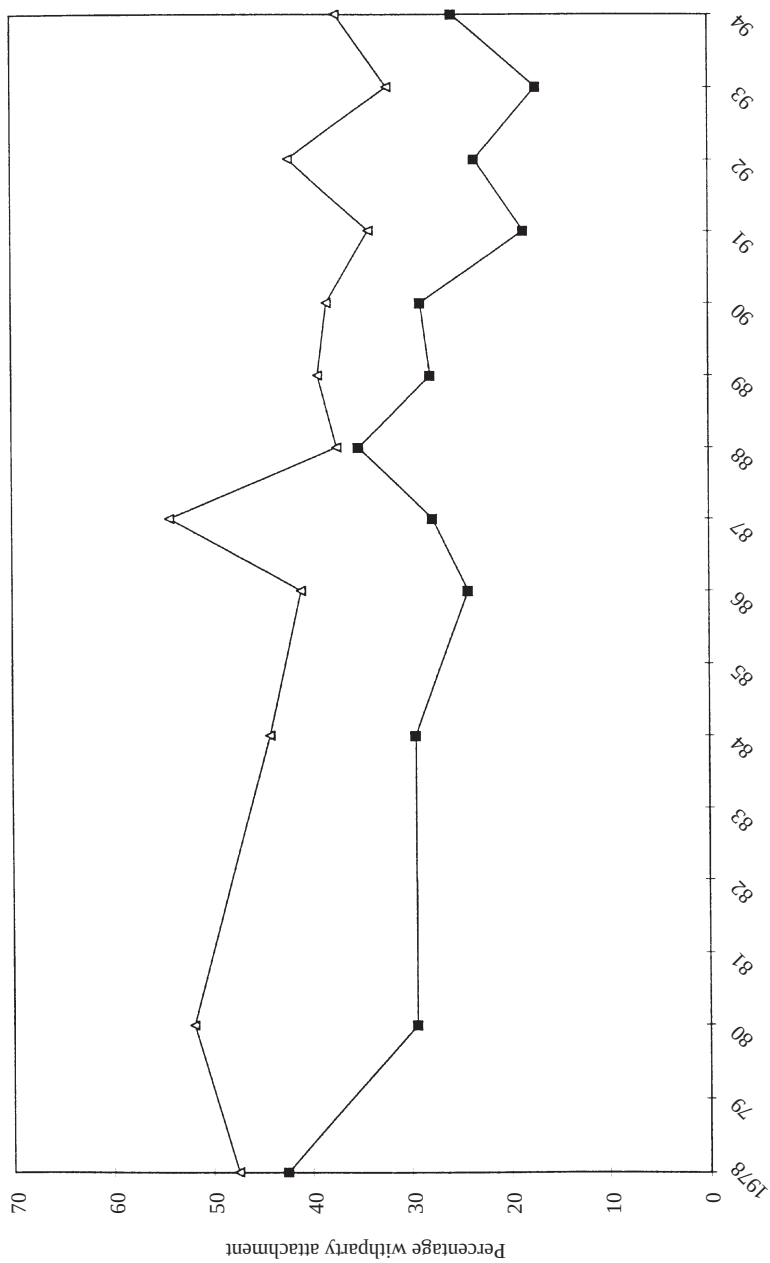

Figure 5. Party attachment, Northern Ireland Catholics, Northern Ireland Protestants, 1978–94. (■) NI Catholic, (Δ) NI Protesant. *Source:* Eurobarometers 9–41.1.

make a direct comparison of levels of party attachment across all member states, are presented in Figure 6. This shows that the Republic of Ireland and, following close on its heels, Northern Ireland had the lowest levels of attachment to party across 14[5] European political systems in June-July 1994. However we may explain the decline in party attachment in the two systems, the process involved has left the two parts of Ireland looking very similar to each other and very different from the majority of member states of the Union with respect to this important party-system characteristic. It is perhaps significant that the only case that comes close to Irish levels of detachment from party is Belgium, a state that has also been characterised by a fundamental cleavage on the nationalist issue. Our original expectations were that party attachment would have declined in the South but would have been maintained in the North. The evidence confirms the first expectation but not the second. It is understandable that party attachment would be withering away in the Republic; it appears that, rather than maintaining or even intensifying attachment to party, the prolonged conflict in Northern Ireland is also associated with a reduced attachment to parties. The context of politics in each jurisdiction and the experiences and records of the parties North and South may have been very different; the results were, however, the same: similarly low levels and a continuing erosion of party attachment.

The Bases of Party Support, North and South

This brings us to the final and most complex part of this comparative exploration of electoral alignment in Ireland North and South: the basis of party choice. Our analysis of the structure of political cleavages in the two systems involves an assessment of, first, the extent to which voters' partisan preferences are structured by ideological cleavages or social characteristics and, secondly, the dimensionality or cross-cutting character of the relationships between partisanship and such underlying structures of cleavage as may exist.[6] Our consideration of events since partition led to opposing prognoses for North and South: in the North, party choice should be

in which the relative question had been asked (Sinnott, 1998). The data from the supplementary question can be used to construct a functionally equivalent measure of the overall levels of party attachment across all member states as of 1994.

[5] The comparison can be made across 14 cases by treating Northern Ireland (sample 300) and former East Germany (sample 1,000) as separate political systems.

[6] The relevance of cross-cutting issues and social cleavages to the situation in Northern Ireland has received detailed treatment by a variety of survey analysts (Budge and O'Leary, 1973; Aunger, 1981; Duffy and Evans, 1996). In the South, the question of the dimensionality of inter-party differences has been dealt with, for the most part, at elite level.

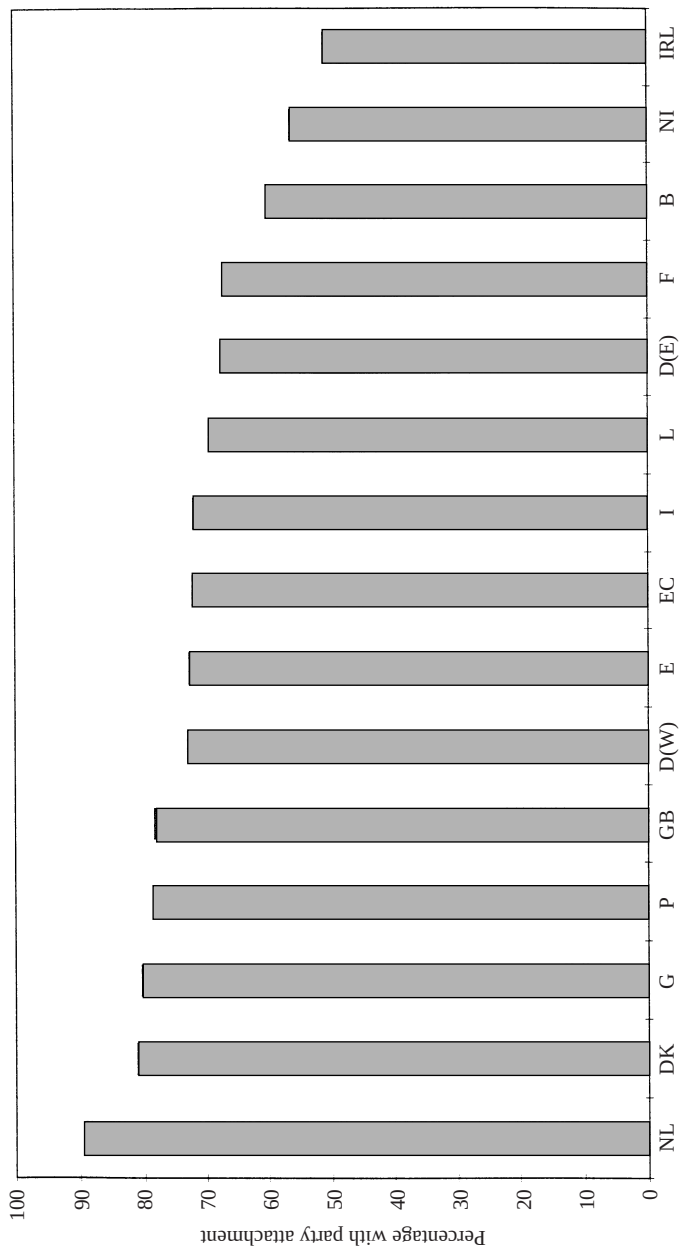

Figure 6. Total party attachment in the member states of the EU, June–July 1994 (with sub-samples for former East and West Germany and Northern Ireland). NL = Netherlands, DK = Denmark, G = Greece, P = Portugal, GB = Great Britain, D(W) = West Germany, E = Spain, EC = European Community, I = Italy, L = Luxembourg, D(E) = East Germany, F = France, B = Belgium, IRL = Ireland. *Source*: Eurobarometer 41.1.

significantly determined by position on the original cleavage, whereas in the South, the original cleavage should have withered to insignificance. At the same time, although these were our original expectations, the evidence examined so far on levels of turnout and on party attachment suggests that the long-term cleavage structures in both systems may have been undermined.

After 25 years of conflict involving numerous practical and theoretical efforts to devise constitutional solutions to the problem, the range of possible constitutional alternatives for the future governance of Northern Ireland is considerable and complex. The attempts of survey researchers to grapple with this complexity have meant that it is quite difficult to obtain comparable evidence on constitutional preferences across different surveys.[7] This paper draws on a coordinated survey effort conducted in the context of the comparative ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) study of national identity and the BSA (British Social Attitudes) and NISA (Northern Ireland Social Attitudes) surveys.[8] The constitutional preferences question was asked in an identical manner in Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.[9] The question gave four basic options for the future governance of Northern Ireland: remain part of the UK, become part of the Irish Republic, be governed jointly by the UK and the Irish Republic or become an independent state. Each of the first three options was presented in two alternative forms, i.e., with or without a separate Parliament in Belfast.[10]

Table 1 presents the data derived from this question for Britain, for Northern Ireland Protestants and Catholics and for the Republic of Ireland. The contrast in attitudes between Protestants in Northern Ireland and the three other publics is striking: the constitutional preference of 84 per cent of Northern Irish Protestants is supported by 20 per cent of Northern Irish Catholics, 16 per cent of people in Britain and 9 per cent of people in the Republic of Ireland. Substantial majorities of both Northern Irish Catholics and of people in the Republic of Ireland express a preference for either a United Ireland or joint governance of Northern

[7] With sufficient effort, however, the evidence can be compared and is effectively marshalled in Hayes and McAllister (1996).

[8] The authors are grateful to the ISSRC and the Greeley Trust for support for the ISSP study in the Republic of Ireland.

[9] Unfortunately comparability is somewhat reduced by the non-coincidence of fieldwork dates; fieldwork was carried out in Britain and Northern Ireland in the spring of 1995 and in the Republic in the spring and summer of 1996.

[10] This question was designed by Geoffrey Evans and Brendan O'Leary to obtain a more informative measure of views on the constitution than can be gained from the standard two-option question used in the BSA and NISA surveys.

Table 1. Attitudes to future government of Northern Ireland among NI Protestants, NI Catholics, and in the Republic of Ireland and Britain (%).

	NI Protestants	NI Catholics	Republic of Ireland	Britain
Remain part of the UK without a separate parliament in Belfast	29	12	4	11
	84	20	9	16
Remain part of the UK but with a separate parliament in Belfast	55	8	5	5
Become part of the Irish Republic without a separate parliament in Belfast	0	18	23	14
	2	31	38	27
Become part of the Irish Repblic with a separate parliament in Belfast	2	13	16	13
Be governed jointly by the UK and the Irish Republic without its own parliament in Belfast	1	10	9	3
	5	28	22	16
Be governed jointly by the UK and the Irish Republic with its own parliament in Belfast	4	18	14	13
Become an independent state with its own parliament, separate from both the UK and the Irish Republic	4	7	17	11
Can't choose	6	14	13	20
N	674	431	997	1,058

Note: Question wording: Here are a number of different ways in which Northern Ireland might be governed in the future. Please tick one box to show which you would most prefer.

Ireland; it should, however, be noted that, in line with the conclusions drawn by Hayes and McAllister (1996) from their analysis of a wide range of surveys, the preference for a united Ireland in the Republic is substantially down on what it has been in the past. The question which most concerns us, however, is: how do the supporters of the various political parties in Ireland line up on this issue?

Table 2 shows that there is very little difference on this issue between party supporters in the South. In particular, the supporters of the two parties (Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael) that embodied the original nationalist cleavage differ only on the nuances and then only minutely. In fact, the

Table 2. Attitudes to future government of Northern Ireland by party support (Republic of Ireland) (%).

	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour Party	Others	Don't know
Remain part of the UK without a separate parliament in Belfast	3	4	5	5	4
	8	11	11	10	8
Remain part of the UK but with a separate parliament in Belfast	5	7	6	5	4
Become part of the Irish Republic without a separate parliament in Belfast	27	21	33	16	14
	40	39	52	35	31
Become part of the Irish Republic with a separate parliament in Belfast	13	18	19	19	17
Be governed jointly by the UK and the Irish Republic without its own parliament in Belfast	9	9	6	8	13
	22	25	17	21	23
Be governed jointly by the UK and the Irish Republic with its own parliament in Belfast	13	16	11	13	10
Become an independent state with its own parliament, separate from both the UK and the Irish Republic	16	17	12	21	17
Can't choose	14	8	9	13	20
N	383	210	89	166	113

Note: Question wording: Here are a number of different ways in which Northern Ireland might be governed in the future. Please tick one box to show which you would most prefer.

party with the most distinctive supporters is the Labour Party, whose supporters are actually a shade greener in this respect than the supporters of the other parties. In stark contrast to the virtual inter-party unanimity on this issue in the South, this same question polarises the supporters of the parties in Northern Ireland: 91 per cent of UUP supporters and 89 per cent of DUP supporters opt for remaining part of the United Kingdom, while only 15 per cent of SDLP supporters do so. Conversely, a mere 2 to 3 per cent of the supporters of either of the Unionist parties support any one of the set of options that link Northern Ireland more or less closely with the Republic and that are chosen by 68 per cent of SDLP supporters.

Table 3. Attitudes to future government of Northern Ireland by party support (Northern Ireland) (%).

	Alliance	DUP	UUP	SF	SDLP	Others	None
Remain part of the UK without a separate parliament in Belfast	26	32	30	9	9	23	23
	65	89	91	12	15	50	51
Remain part of the UK but with a separate parliament in Belfast	39	57	61	3	6	27	28
Become part of the Irish Republic without a separate parliament in Belfast	1	1	0	27	20	8	4
	8	1	1	57	33	16	10
Be governed jointly by the UK and the Irish Republic with a separate parliament in Belfast	7	0	1	30	13	8	6
Be governed jointly by the UK and the Irish Republic without its own parliament in Belfast	4	1	0	0	12	5	4
	18	1	2	3	35	20	14
Be governed jointly by the UK and the Irish Republic with its own parliament in Belfast	14	0	2	3	23	15	10
Become an independent state with its own parliament, separate from both the UK and the Irish Republic	7	8	3	15	5	5	6
Can't choose	4	2	3	12	13	10	18
N	133	127	334	33	236	101	272

Note: Question wording: Here are a number of different ways in which Northern Ireland might be governed in the future. Please tick one box to show which you would most prefer.

The conclusion that there are virtually no differences between party supporters in the Republic on this issue and immense differences between the supporters of the parties in Northern Ireland is confirmed when we look at the other measure, i.e., attitudes to the role of the Irish government in the running of Northern Ireland. The maximum difference between the three main parties in the South is 8 percentage points and this and any other trace of difference that exists is confined to the limited question of whether the Irish government should have 'a great deal of say' or 'some say'

in how Northern Ireland is run. When these two categories are combined, very similar and overwhelming majorities in all three parties come down on the positive side of the scale (Fianna Fáil, 74 per cent; Fine Gael, 76 per cent; Labour, 72 per cent). In Northern Ireland, on the other hand, the scale again polarises the supporters of the parties: 83 per cent of DUP and 72 per cent of UUP supporters express outright rejection of any role for the Irish government; on the other side of the political spectrum, 62 per cent of SDLP supporters and 82 per cent of Sinn Féin supporters want at least some say for the Irish government (see Table 3). Within the nationalist side, however, the scale makes a further distinction between SDLP and Sinn Féin supporters (respectively 22 per cent and 53 per cent 'a great deal of say' for the Irish government in the way Northern Ireland is run).

While the above crosstabulations go some way towards answering the questions raised regarding the differing fate of the original centre-periphery conflict in the two parts of Ireland, the answers provided are quite incomplete without consideration of where these supporters also stand on other key issues or of how positions on the full range of issues might relate to one another. To display these we present a number of plots of the mean positions of party supporters North and South on several scales: a nationalist, left-right and pluralist-confessionalist scale in the Republic (Figures 7 and 8) and a nationalist and left-right scale in Northern Ireland (Figure 9). At first sight, the nationalist scale seems to distinguish quite effectively between the supporters of the various parties in the South. This is seen to be quite illusory, however, when it is realised that the supporters of the three main parties are almost completely indistinguishable on this scale. This is as predicted; less predictable is the even greater degree of similarity between the supporters of the parties on the left-right scale which measures attitude to the role of government in reducing differ-

Table 4. Attitudes to Irish government involvement in running Northern Ireland by party support (Republic of Ireland) (%).

	All	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour Party	Others	Don't Know
A great deal of say	30	34	28	29	26	26
Some say	42	40	48	43	38	48
A little say	15	14	14	17	16	12
No say at all	9	8	9	8	15	5
Can't choose	5	5	1	3	5	9
N	989	383	210	89	166	113

Notes: Question wording: How much say do you think an Irish Government of any party should have in the way Northern Ireland is run? Do you think it should have . . .

Table 5. Attitudes to Irish government involvement in running Northern Ireland by party support (Northern Ireland) (%).

	All	DUP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	SF	Others	None
A great deal of say	9	0	1	0	22	53	12	8
Some say	20	4	6	24	40	29	27	23
A little say	20	6	6	24	40	29	27	23
No say at all	42	83	72	36	5	0	29	31
Can't choose	9	6	4	7	14	6	11	14
N	1,237	126	334	133	238	34	100	272

Notes: Question wording: How much say do you think an Irish Government of any party should have in the way Northern Ireland is run? Do you think it should have . . .

ences between rich and poor. The supporters of the three main parties are also virtually *ad idem* on a measure of pluralism versus confessionalism: the supporters of all parties are located on the pluralist side of the scale and the only substantial differences are between the supporters of the tiny Democratic Left and the supporters of the three main parties. Fine Gael and Progressive Democrat supporters are a shade more pluralist on this scale than the supporters of Fianna Fáil or Labour, who have almost identical scores.

In contrast to the pervasive political homogeneity in the South, in the North the role of the Irish government scale shows up a huge gulf between the DUP and UUP on the one side and Sinn Féin and the SDLP on the other. It also distinguishes clearly between Sinn Féin and SDLP supporters on the nationalist side and it shows that Alliance Party supporters are to the unionist side of the centre but remain quite a distance from UUP and DUP supporters. Attitudes towards the role of government in redistribution show some difference between party supporters on each side of the constitutional divide: DUP supporters are more left-wing than UUP or Alliance supporters; the same goes for Sinn Féin in comparison to SDLP supporters.[11]

In order to complete this account of the bases of partisan cleavage in Ireland North and South, it is also necessary to examine the possible impact of socio-economic and demographic factors: these may provide a foundation for party choice that may or may not be mediated through explicit policy preferences. Thus, in the South we should explore possible social class and religiosity correlates of voting in addition to ideological

[11] Similar findings obtain using a more comprehensive 'left-right scale' comprising five items concerned with inequality and redistribution, see Evans and Duffy (1997), who also provide a detailed discussion of divisions within nationalist and unionist camps.

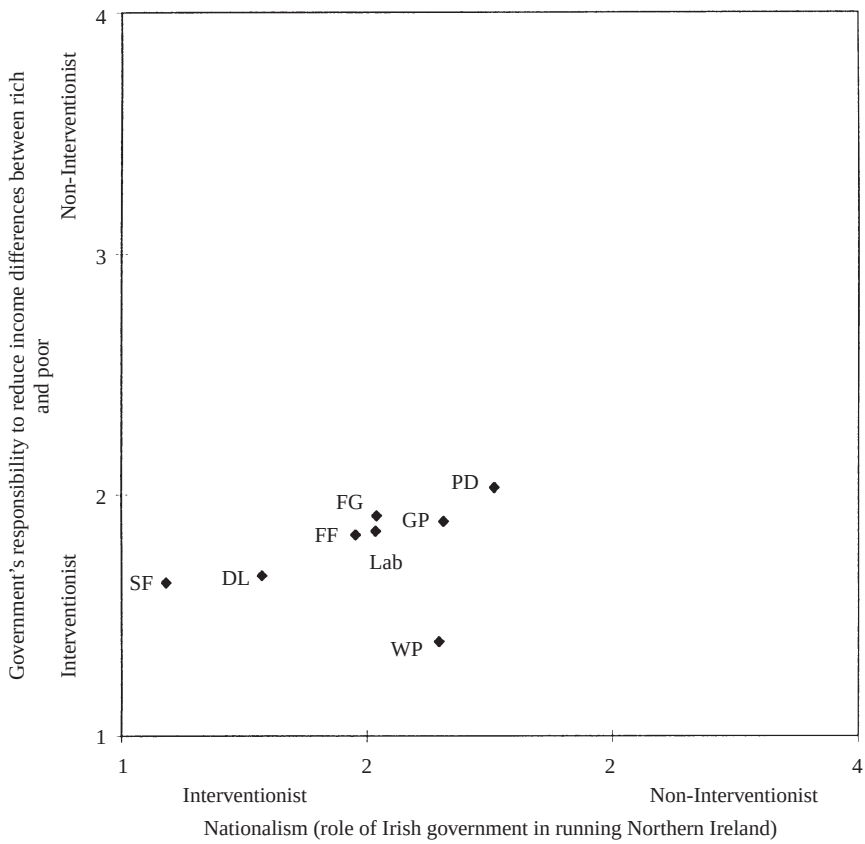

Figure 7. Mean scores of party supporters on a nationalist and a left-right scale, Republic of Ireland. SF = Sinn Féin, DL = Democratic Left, FF = Fianna Fáil, FG = Fine Gael, Lab = Labour, PD = Progressive Democrats, WP = Worker's Party, GP = Green Party.

and policy preferences; in the North we would obviously expect religious denomination to play an overwhelming role but class and urban-rural differences are also worth exploring. In all of this, we are particularly interested in teasing out the relative weight of different determinants of party preference. In order to do this we must take account of the simultaneous effect of all of these variables in a multivariate analysis.

Logistic regression is one of a group of multivariate techniques that calculate the odds of being in one response category rather than another (see Aldrich and Nelson, 1984). The response categories in this case are a series of dichotomies arrived at by comparing the choice between various pairs of parties or groups of parties. The first and most obvious pairing in

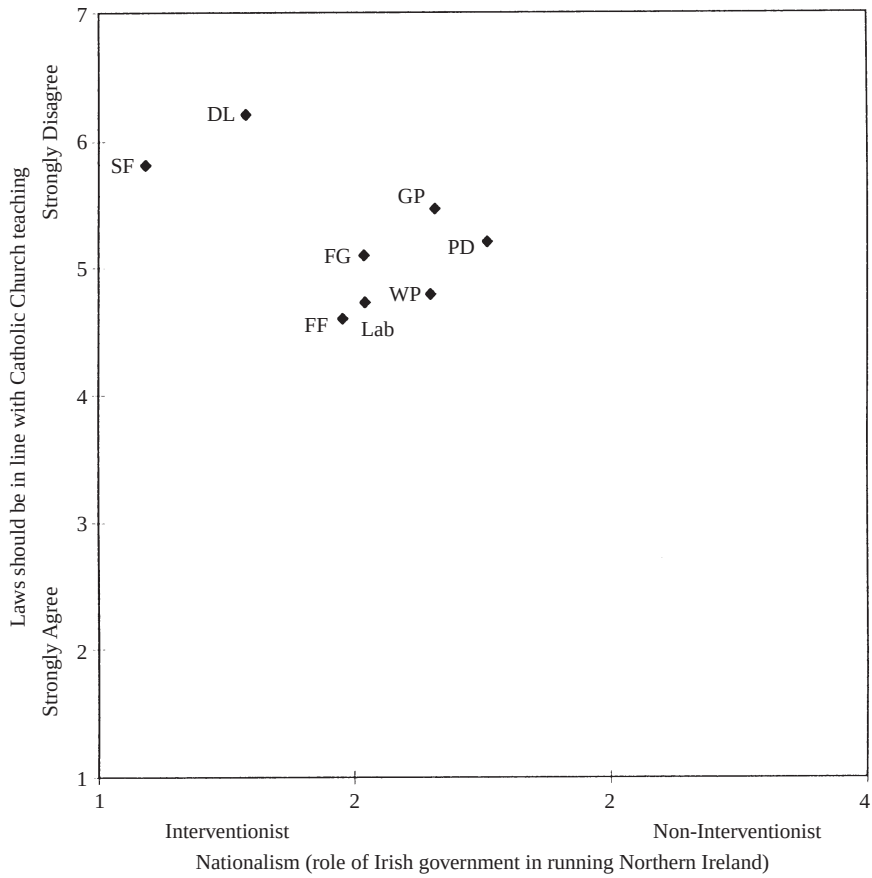

Figure 8. Mean scores of party supporters on a nationalist and a confessionalist scale. Republic of Ireland. SF = Sinn Féin, DL = Democratic Left, FF = Fianna Fáil, FG = Fine Gael, Lab = Labour, PD = Progressive Democrats, WP = Worker's Party, GP = Green Party.

the case of the Republic of Ireland is Fianna Fáil versus the rest.[12] This was for a long time assumed to be the basic fault line in the party system and is the dichotomy that should reveal any nationalist cleavage in the party system, if such exists. The main alternative cleavage is of course a division between left and right. This is explored in our second contrast: Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Progressive Democrats, on the one hand, versus Labour, the Workers' Party and Democratic Left on the other. A third contrast that is in fact only a minor variation on this can also be explored:

[12] For the purpose of this analysis the small proportion of Sinn Féin supporters in the sample is omitted.

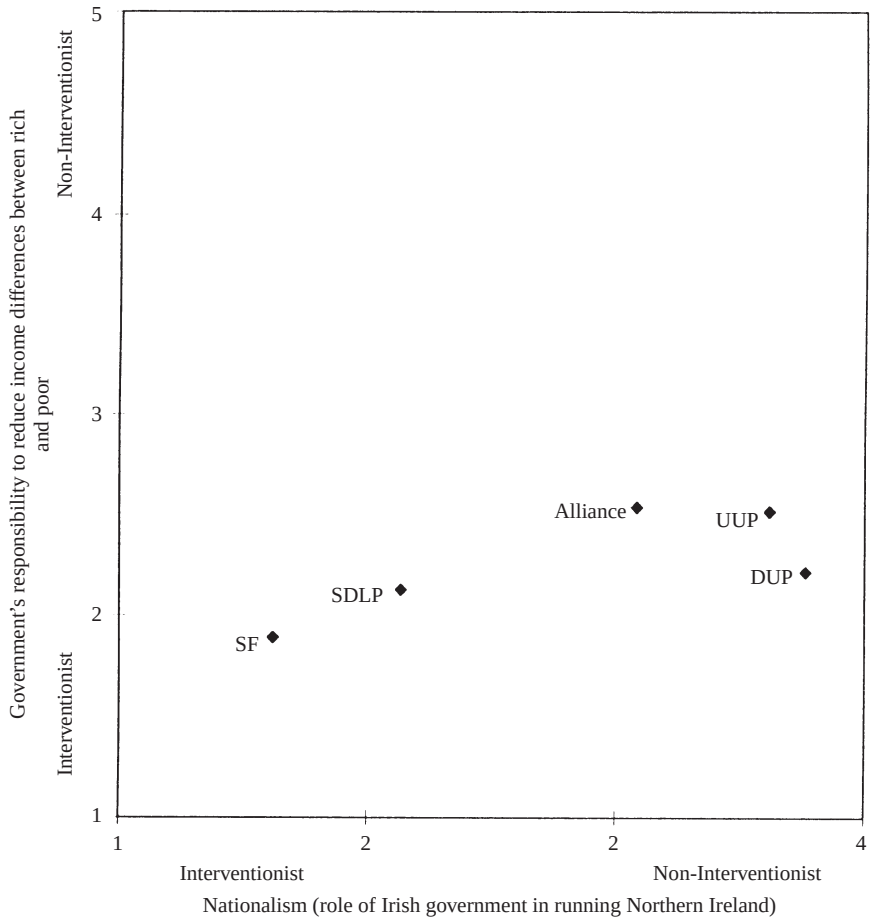

Figure 9. Mean scores of party supporters on a nationalist and a left-right scale, Northern Ireland. SF = Sinn Féin, SDLP = Social Democratic & Labour Party, Alliance = Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, UUP = Ulster Unionist Party, DUP = Democratic Unionist Party.

the so-called 'civil-war parties' (Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael) against the rest.[13]

The independent variables used in analysing these three contrasts are: preference regarding the amount of say an Irish government should have in running Northern Ireland; the importance of Irish identity; a measure of confessionalism-pluralism (whether laws should be independent of or in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church); frequency of religious

[13] These contrasts were chosen after a preliminary investigation of the structure of divisions among all of the main parties using discriminant analysis.

practice; attitude to income redistribution; age; self-identification as middle class and level of educational attainment. These variables provide a basis for testing for the existence of the three cleavages that we have focused on in our discussion of the Irish party system: nationalism, left-right ideological orientation and secularism-confessionalism.

The results of the test confirm the view that the original (nationalist) cleavage in the system has all but petered out; they also indicate that the gap has not been filled by either of the two alternative lines of conflict (left-right and secular-confessional) but that some limited divisions on both these lines have emerged. Thus, just three variables—frequent religious practice, a lower level of education,[14] and an emphasis on the importance of Irish identity—contribute to the prediction of the odds of being a Fianna Fáil supporter rather than a supporter of any of the other parties but the model does little to improve goodness of fit. The parameters which do attain significance are of modest size and, most importantly, attitude to the amount of say the Irish government should have in running Northern Ireland does not have any significant effect at all.[15]

Perhaps the original battle lines in the South over centre-periphery relations and nationalist issues have been replaced by conflict between left and right. The improvement in fit is a little better in the second model in Table 6, but the variables that predict support for the left have little to do with left versus right as traditionally conceived. The results indicate that the odds of supporting a left-wing party are affected by being young (specifically being between 25 and 34 years of age) while the odds are significantly reduced by a higher level of education and by frequency of religious practice. Most importantly, both subjective middle class identification and support for a government role in the redistribution of income are statistically insignificant.[16] There is some evidence here that the left-right divide between the parties may reflect a secular-confessional ideological divide. However, the reflection is, at best, subliminal since the direct measure of confessional ideological outlook (laws should be in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church) also has no significant effect.

[14] To ensure that socio-demographic effects were not being masked by attitudinal variables, all three socio-demographic variables were used in a first-stage, separate analysis. In the account that follows, attention will be drawn to any socio-demographic effects that appeared at this first stage but do not figure once attitudes are included in the model.

[15] If we rerun this analysis focusing on the contrast between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, which was after all the original embodiment of the conflict, none of the variables have a significant effect. This reinforces the point that, at the mass level, the original conflict in the party system has run its course.

[16] The class variable is significant in a model that consists only of socio-demographic variables. Thus there are class differences in support for parties of the left and right but the contrasts are more effectively captured by the variables in the final model reported in Table 6.

Table 6. Social characteristics, political attitudes and party preference in the Republic of Ireland, 1995.

	FF (1) vs the rest (0)	Left (1) vs the rest (0)	Civil War parties (1) vs the rest (0)
Irish goverment should have a say in the running of NI	0.08 (0.05)	0.01 (0.08)	0.13** (0.07)
Laws should be in line with teachings of Catholic Church	0.01 (0.04)	−0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.05)
Importance of being Irish	0.18* (0.10)	−0.16 (0.12)	0.33*** (0.10)
Attendance at religious services	0.08** (0.03)	−0.15*** (0.04)	0.19*** (0.04)
Govt should reduce income differences	−0.02 (0.06)	−0.16 (0.10)	0.15* (0.08)
Middle class (subjective)	0.07 (0.15)	−0.30 (0.22)	0.10 (0.19)
Education (no. of years)	−0.07** (0.03)	−0.10** (0.05)	0.01 (0.04)
Age under 25	0.01 (0.22)	0.47* (0.27)	−0.33 (0.25)
Age 25–34	−0.10 (0.15)	0.43** (0.20)	−0.42** (0.18)
Age 35–44	0.00 (0.14)	−0.24 (0.22)	−0.09 (0.18)
Age 45–54	−0.01 (0.15)	0.00 (0.22)	0.10 (0.20)
Age 55–64	0.00 (0.16)	−0.27 (0.26)	0.16 (0.22)
Age over 65 (reference category)	—	—	—
Constant	−1.72 (0.56)	0.92 (0.69)	−2.71 (0.64)
% classified accurately	60.7	86.6	76.0
Initial log likelihood	1,260.8	747.0	909.6
Improvement in fit	33.6, 12 df	48.0, 12 df	88.8, 12 df

Notes: The parameter estimates are logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. * significant at p <0.10 ** significant at p <0.05 *** significant at p <0.01.

Our final attempt to identify cleavage lines in the Irish party system pits the two 'civil war' parties against the rest. In the final model in Table 6, the improvement in fit (chi^2 88.75, for 12 df; represents a 9.8 per cent reduction in the log likelihood) is a little more impressive and several variables have significant parameters. Supporters of the 'civil war' parties are distinguished from the supporters of other parties in terms of age, religious practice, attitude to Irish identity and to policy on Northern Ireland, and, at the margin of statistical significance (0.07), by attitude to the role of government in redistributing income. Again it must be emphasised that the differences are modest: being older and more religious, placing more emphasis on Irish identity and being more supportive of a substantial role

for the Republic in the running of Northern Ireland are characteristics that are linked to support for the 'civil war parties' but the relationships are far from being strong enough to warrant the conclusion that there are substantial cleavages underlying mass support for the political parties in the South.

The main conclusions of this analysis of the sources of party support in the South can be summarised briefly: the contemporary party system in the South is largely unstructured, whether we look for that structure in terms of ideological preferences or socio-demographic characteristics. To the extent that traces of such structure exist, they can be found mainly in degrees of religious practice; this makes some contribution to distinguishing between Fianna Fáil and the rest (including the left), between the left and the rest (including Fianna Fáil) and between the civil war and non civil war parties. The indicator of nationalism does not predict support for Fianna Fáil versus the rest (nor for Fianna Fáil versus Fine Gael) but it does play a modest role in distinguishing the civil war parties from the others. The measure of left-right ideological orientation does not pass the conventional minimum for statistical significance in any of the analyses we have conducted.

The structuring of party preference in the North is a very different story. As outlined above, we expect that party choice in Northern Ireland will be determined mainly by position on the ethnic/centre-periphery cleavage, possibly complemented by position on a left-right axis of more recent vintage. Given the nature of the conflict and the role of religion as an ethnic marker, it is very difficult to separate the effects of religion and nationalist preferences in the determination of party support. From a simple cross-tabulation of the survey data, we know, for example that more than 60 per cent of Protestants express support for one of the main Unionist parties (UUP and DUP) and that virtually no Protestants support either of the main nationalist parties (SDLP and Sinn Féin[17]); the remainder of the Protestant community either supports the Alliance (10 per cent) or gives a don't know/other minor party/no party response. Party support among Catholics is the mirror image of this. In this sense, religious affiliation is a good predictor of party support. But, how good? And, do nationalist preferences or other political attitudes also play a role?

[17] The number of respondents openly supporting Sinn Féin is clearly an underestimate—a common problem with surveys in Northern Ireland. Importantly for our purposes, however, comparison with analyses conducted on more extensive data indicates that this does not appear to have affected the relationships between Sinn Féin support and either social characteristics or the issue positions reported above (see Evans and Duffy, 1997).

What happens when we control for the effects of class[18] and other socio-demographic variables? Most importantly, what distinguishes party supporters within each camp (UUP versus DUP and SDLP versus Sinn Féin) and supporters of the more moderate party in each camp from Alliance supporters in the middle? This set of questions yields the five models presented in Table 7.[19]

The first model in Table 7 captures the pattern of division between unionist and nationalist camps. The blocs are formed by combining supporters of the UUP with those of the DUP to form the unionist bloc, and supporters of the SDLP and Sinn Féin to form the nationalist bloc. Unsurprisingly, the divisions are very firmly drawn: the initial log likelihood is reduced by no less than 87 per cent and 96.8 per cent of cases are accurately classified—and determined very much, but not completely, by respondents' denominational affiliations. The only additional significant predictor is the measure of attitudes towards the Irish government's involvement in the affairs of the North, which we use as a reasonably effective indicator of where respondents stand on the constitutional question.

It should be apparent, however, that even when analysing bases of partisanship that are distinct from the main nationalist versus unionist cleavage, all of the models in Table 7 display far greater levels of division than those observed in the case of the South (as indicated, for example, by considerably larger proportional reductions in the initial log likelihood). There are also major differences in the social and ideological content of the divisions. Thus although we expect the effects of denomination to be powerful, the most important patterns to observe in the subsidiary contrasts are that class and education effectively divide supporters of the more hard-line versus less hard-line parties: levels of support among middle class and more highly educated groups decrease as the distance from the political centre increases. The strong relationship between class position and

[18] Social class is measured using Goldthorpe's class schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992), in which class position is operationalised by a combination of distinctions in employment status (i.e., between employers, self-employed and employees) and on the basis of conditions of employment, degree of occupational security and career prospects among employees (see Evans, 1992). Allocation to a class position is derived from respondent's occupation and employment status, except when this is not available, when partner's occupational and employment status is used. Church attendance is measured using a scale from 'never' (1) to 'more than once a week' (6). Educational qualifications are measured with a 6-point scale ranging from 'none' to degree level.

[19] This structure has also been examined using discriminant analysis, which shows a very strong main function dividing the nationalist and unionist blocs, with a secondary division between social classes and educational groups in their preference for more or less hard-line constitutional parties, and with Alliance support remaining very much the preserve of the urban, educated middle-class voter on both sides of the communal divide.

Table 7. Social characteristics, political attitudes and party preference in Northern Ireland, 1995.

	Nationalist (0) vs Unionist (1)	UUP (0) vs DUP (1)	Alliance (0) vs UUP (1)	Alliance (0) vs SDLP (1)	SDLP (0) vs Sinn Féin (1)
Church of Ireland	7.49** (0.75)	—	—		Na
Other Protestant		0.60* (0.27)	−0.07 (0.30)	−3.30** (0.45)	Na
None	4.63** (0.88)	0.64 (0.44)	−2.24** (0.37)		−0.10 (1.21)
Catholic	—	Na		—	—
Urban residence	0.59 (0.53)	−0.18 (0.24)	−0.53* (0.27)	−0.94** (0.36)	0.64 (0.43)
Church attendance	−0.13 (0.20)	−0.07 (0.08)	−0.03 (0.08)	−0.09 (0.13)	−0.08 (0.21)
Middle class	−0.02 (0.73)	−0.73* (0.37)	−0.31 (0.31)	−0.88* (0.45)	−0.74 (1.09)
Educational Qualifications	0.48 (0.32)	−0.30* (0.15)	−0.36* (0.14)	−0.04 (0.20)	−1.31** (0.39)
Age 18–29 (ref. Cat.)	–	–	–	–	–
Age 30–44	−0.06 (0.76)	−0.85* (0.33)	−0.57 (0.45)	0.08 (0.56)	−1.38* (0.62)
Age 45–59	0.68 (0.91)	−2.05** (0.41)	−0.46 (0.92)	−0.37 (0.59)	−2.58** (0.77)
Age 60+	−0.40 (0.94)	−1.67** (0.38)	−1.12* (0.48)	−0.27 (0.60)	−1.84** (0.70)
Support for redistribution	−0.11 (0.27)	0.28** (0.12)	0.00 (0.12)	0.33* (0.16)	0.11 (0.22)
Irish govt. role in North	−1.61** (0.32)	−0.50** (0.20)	−0.74** (0.16)	0.98**(0.22)	0.95** (0.31)
Constant	−9.67 (0.32)	−2.64 (1.08)	2.12 (1.04)	3.88 (1.16)	−2.65 (1.60)
% classified accurately	96.8	74.8	80.3	87.4	87.7
Initial log likelihood	954.3	535.6	550.0	476.5	203.9
Improvement in fit	830.5, 11 df	66.5, 11 df	123.7, 11 df	243.1, 10 df	47.4, 10 df

Notes: The parameter estimates are logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Catholic is the reference category for the effect of denomination in the nationalist vs unionist model. Church of Ireland is the reference category for the effect of denomination in the analyses of UUP vs DUP and Alliance vs UUP. Catholic is the reference category in the analyses of Alliance vs SDLP and SDLP vs Sinn Féin. * significant at $p < 0.05$; ** significant at $p < 0.01$.

educational qualifications leads to class effects (which are significant for all models when education is not controlled for) becoming non-significant except for the DUP versus UUP comparison when education is included in the models. This suggests that at least part of the preference for less hard-line nationalist and unionist parties among the middle classes may derive from their possessing more tolerant expressed attitudes as a result of greater experience of higher education,[20] which are probably complemented by differences in the rhetorical style of the competing unionist and nationalist parties.

Urban-rural divisions appear most marked among nationalists, with the SDLP picking up a noticeably higher proportion of its support from rural areas than either the Alliance Party or Sinn Féin. The marked effects of age on partisanship can probably be best understood in terms of political socialisation—both Sinn Féin and the DUP only started to compete electorally after many older voters had already developed attachments to the more established representatives of unionist and nationalist political visions. The recruitment of the young and unaligned was therefore an easier prospect (Evans and Duffy, 1997: 75–6). Church attendance, arguably a proxy for religiosity, has no effect, thus testifying to the political rather than theological nature of divisions in the North.

Finally, the coefficients for the two attitudinal variables show clear evidence of an asymmetry in the patterns of intra-community partisan differences among nationalists and unionists: among the former, the attitudinal bases of party choice concern only attitudes towards the constitutional issue; whereas among unionists the main partisan division derives its force not just from the position of parties on the constitutional issue but from interests relating to economic, left-right considerations (for more on this, see Evans and Duffy, 1997).

Conclusions

We have examined the development of political cleavages and party and electoral alignments in Ireland, with particular emphasis on how these have been affected in each jurisdiction by partition. Our findings confirm the main expectations formed in the course of this exercise but they also significantly modify other expectations or, perhaps more accurately, they strengthen some hunches at the expense of others. One of the striking

[20] This interpretation of the relationship between educational experience and intergroup tolerance has been advanced by many researchers (see, for example, Hyman and Wright, 1979; Lipset, 1981) although not without disputes about the conditions under which it occurs (see Weil, 1985).

features of the evidence we have presented is the similarity of certain aspects of party and electoral alignment in the two jurisdictions. Party alignments at the mass level are similar in two respects: relatively low and declining voter turnout and low and declining party attachment, the latter being markedly lower than that found in other West European societies. The contrasts arise when we turn to the cleavage structure underlying party choice. In the North, there are highly structured underlying cleavages: in addition to the main nationalist/unionist cleavage there are further intra-bloc cleavages in terms of both social bases and issue dimensions. In contrast, in the South there is very little evidence of a cleavage structure or structures underlying party choice. The nationalist cleavage has all but evaporated and, contrary to expectations in some quarters during the mid- to late 1980s, it has not been replaced by either a left-right or a secular-confessional conflict, though fragmentary evidence of both can be found.

Cleavages in the North remain entrenched despite the weakness of party attachment and voter mobilisation; differences of identity and of interest rather than of party provide the basis for the maintenance of conflict. Here we encounter another similarity between the two systems: parties are not in fact the embodiments of conflict in either jurisdiction; parties are marginal. The differences between these societies arise because there is an underlying homogeneity in the South and an underlying conflict in the North; both of these conditions are products of partition. In the North, partition institutionalised conflict. That conflict is, however, independent of and, in a sense, greater than the parties. This means that parties in the North can play only a limited role in brokering a solution, a conclusion reinforced by research which shows that, in Northern Ireland, parties that stray from the preferences of their constituencies are likely to lose them (Evans and O'Leary, 1997). Perhaps if parties had been more central to the conflict in Northern Ireland, rather than providing just another expression of entrenched divisions, it might have been easier to find a solution to the problem. In the South, secession institutionalised homogeneity; in the long term this has led to a weakening of the parties and resulted eventually in substantial dealignment. However, there is another aspect to the effect of partition in the South: it may have institutionalised homogeneity within the South but it also institutionalised a conflict between North and South and between Ireland and Britain. Looking at the South from this perspective, one can see that conflict was institutionalised not so much between political parties as between states. The politics of the parties in the South may at times appear to be post-nationalist; the politics of the state are certainly not. Paradoxically, while the weakness of parties that are prisoners of an entrenched conflict in the North may make the search for a solution more difficult, the weakness of post-alignment parties in the South may

facilitate a solution by enabling political leaders, of whatever party or combination of parties, to redefine the objectives and orientations that were embedded in the structure of the state by partition.

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