

## Women and the 2016 Assembly Election in Northern Ireland

2016 saw the re-election of Northern Ireland's first female First Minister. The leader of the DUP Arlene Foster has been First Minister since September 2015 and she takes the position again after her party won 38 seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly Election 2016. A total of 276 candidates stood for the Assembly Election of which 76 were women, 27 per cent of overall candidates. This is an increase on 2011 when 38 candidates were women, 17 per cent of all candidates. At present there are no gender quotas for candidates in Northern Ireland although the election manifestos of Sinn Féin and the Green Party each included a commitment to support the introduction of gender quotas for the Assembly.

As shown in Table 1, in terms of the larger parties the percentage of female candidates was highest for Sinn Féin at 38%, then for the Alliance Party at 35%, followed by SDLP (33%), UUP (21%) and the DUP (18%). The Green Party stood 18 candidates on a clear 50/50 gender split and the NILRC stood 8 candidates on a 50/50 gender split.

Table 1: 2016 Election Candidates by Party and Gender

Party	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	36	8	44	18.2
Sinn Féin (SF)	24	15	39	38.5
Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	26	7	33	21.2
Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)	16	8	24	33.3
Alliance Party (APNI)	15	8	23	34.8
Green Party	9	9	18	50
Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV)	13	2	15	13.3
UK Independence Party (UKIP)	12	1	13	7.7
Conservative	12	0	12	
NI Labour Representation Committee	4	4	8	50
Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)	5	1	6	16.7
Cannabis is Safer than Alcohol	4	0	4	
The Workers Party	2	2	4	50
Cross Community Labour Alliance	2	1	3	33.3
People before Profit Alliance (PBPA)	2	1	3	33.3
Animal Welfare Party	0	1	1	100

Democracy First	1	0	1	
Northern Ireland First	1	0	1	
South Belfast Unionists	1	0	1	
Independents	15	8	23	34.8
Totals	200	76	276	27.5

[NIAR 141-16: Election Report: Northern Ireland Assembly Election, 5 May 2016](#). Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly, 2016 p.8

A total of 30 women were elected in the 2016 Assembly Election, 18 incumbents and 12 new female MLAs. This represents a 50 percent increase on the number of women elected in 2011 (20) in Northern Ireland. Overall 28% of MLAs are women, this compares to 22% of TDs in Dáil Éireann, 29% of MPs in the House of Commons, 35% of MSPs in the Scottish Parliament and 42% of AMs in the National Assembly for Wales.

Table 2: Northern Ireland Assembly: Seats by Party and by Gender

Party	Male	Female	Total	% Female
DUP	30	8	38	21.1
SF	18	10	28	35.7
UUP	12	4	16	25.0
SDLP	9	3	12	25.0
APNI	5	3	8	37.5
TUV	1	0	1	
GREEN	1	1	2	50.0
PBPA	2	0	2	
IND/OTHERS	0	1	1	100.0
Totals	78	30	108	27.8

[NIAR 141-16: Election Report: Northern Ireland Assembly Election, 5 May 2016](#). Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly, 2016 p. 26

Although the DUP won the same number as seats as 2011 (38), the percentage of women MLAs rose from 13 per cent to 21 per cent in 2016. In Fermanagh and South Tyrone the DUP leader Arlene Foster was elected with 8,801 first preference votes. In Belfast East Joanne Bunting topped the poll and was elected to the Assembly for the first time. Pam Cameron was re-elected in South Antrim

and became the only female MLA in the constituency. Emma Little Pengally, Carla Lockhart, Michelle McIlveen, Paula Bradley and Brenda Hale were also elected for the DUP.

Within Sinn Féin the number of women MLAs rose from 8 in 2011 to 10 although their overall share of seats went from 29 in 2011 to 28 in 2016. The percentage of women MLAs in Sinn Féin is currently 35.7%. In Mid-Ulster Sinn Féin's outgoing Agriculture Minister Michelle O'Neill was re-elected and her colleague, former Mid-Ulster district councillor, Linda Dillon was also elected. Party colleagues Carál Ní Chuilín, Catherine Seeley, Jennifer McCann, Caitriona Ruane, Megan Fearon, Michelle Gildernew, Caoimhe Archibald and Michaela Boyle were also elected.

The percentage of women MLAs in the UUP rose from 12.5% in 2011 to 25% in 2016. In Lagan Valley former DUP party member, Jenny Palmer took one of the seats for the UUP, reducing the DUP share from four to three seats. Sandra Overend and Jo-Anne Dobson were re-elected and Rosemary Barton was also elected.

The overall number of seats for the SDLP reduced from 14 in 2011 to 12 in 2016, 3 of which were won by women MLAs. In South Down Sinéad Bradley topped the poll and was elected to the Assembly for the first time. Claire Hanna and Nichola Mallon were also elected.

The number of women MLAs in the Alliance Party rose from 2 in 2011 to 3 in 2016 and the party's overall number of seats remained at 8. Paula Bradshaw, formerly of the UUP, stood for Alliance in Belfast South and was elected following Anna Lo's decision not to stand for the 2016 elections. In Belfast East, former MP and the Deputy Leader of the Alliance Party, Naomi Long made a return to the Assembly with 5482 first preference votes, just 56 votes behind poll topper Joanne Bunting. Kellie Armstrong was also elected for the Alliance party in Strangford.

The Green Party went from 1 seat in 2011 to 2 seats in 2016 with the election of Clare Bailey in Belfast South. Commentator Alex Kane duly provided one of the more light-hearted moments of the election. He had remarked early on that he would he would sing on the steps of Stormont in a dress should Clare win a seat for the Greens. A man of his word he sang 'I am what I am' in a purple dress on the steps of Stormont on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The Green Party candidate Ellen Murray also made history by being the first transgender candidate to stand for election in Northern Ireland.

In East Londonderry the independent candidate Claire Sugden kept her seat, going on to become the current Justice Minister in Stormont.

Belfast South returned the largest number of female MLAs with four women out of the six representatives elected. The four female representatives for South Belfast also come from different parties – Alliance, DUP, Green Party and the SDLP. The four Belfast constituencies combined returned 10 female MLAs, 42% of MLAs in Belfast. The other 14 constituencies combined returned 20 female MLAs or 24% of MLAs in those areas. Belfast North, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mid Ulster and Upper Bann all returned 3 men and 3 women MLAs. Belfast East, East Londonderry, Lagan Valley, South Down, and Strangford each returned 4 men and 2 women MLAs. Four constituencies – Belfast West, South Antrim, West Tyrone, and Newry and Armagh - returned one woman MLA each. North Antrim, East Antrim, North Down and Foyle did not elect any female MLAs.

Although the percentage of female MLAs in the Assembly (28) compares favourably to the percentage of female TDs in Dáil Éireann (22), it is still far from gender parity. The percentage of female candidates put forward for election by the DUP (18.2) and UUP (21.2) is still significantly lower than the minimum 30% female candidates and 30% male candidates necessary for a substantive move toward more equal representation. The other two main parties fare better in terms of female candidates for election, with Sinn Féin at 38.5% and SDLP at 33.3%. Although there is movement in the right direction properly addressing the over-representation of men and under-representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland requires significant quota obligations.

Women elected to the Assembly, 2016

<b>Name</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Elected/Re-elected</b>
Joanne Bunting	DUP	Belfast East	Elected
Naomi Long	Alliance	Belfast East	Re-elected
Nichola Mallon	SDLP	Belfast North	Elected
Caral Ní Chuilín	SF	Belfast North	Re-elected
Paula Bradley	DUP	Belfast North	Re-elected
Clare Bailey	Green	Belfast South	Elected
Paula Bradshaw	Alliance	Belfast South	Elected
Claire Hanna	SDLP	Belfast South	Re-elected
Emma Little Pengally	DUP	Belfast South	Re-elected
Jennifer McCann	SF	Belfast West	Re-elected
Dr Caoimhe Archibald	SF	East Derry	Elected
Claire Sugden	Independent	East Derry	Re-elected
Rosemary Barton	UUP	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	Elected
Arlene Foster	DUP	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	Re-elected
Michelle Gildernew	SF	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	Re-elected
Jenny Palmer	UUP	Lagan Valley	Elected
Brenda Hale	DUP	Lagan Valley	Re-elected
Linda Dillon	SF	Mid Ulster	Elected
Michelle O'Neill	SF	Mid Ulster	Re-elected
Sandra Overrend	UUP	Mid Ulster	Re-elected
Megan Fearon	SF	Newry and Armagh	Re-elected
Pam Cameron	DUP	South Antrim	Re-elected
Sinéad Bradley	SDLP	South Down	Elected
Cartriona Ruane	SF	South Down	Re-elected
Kellie Armstrong	Alliance	Strangford	Elected
Michelle McIlveen	DUP	Strangford	Re-elected
Carla Lockhart	DUP	Upper Bann	Elected
Catherine Seeley	SF	Upper Bann	Elected
Jo-Anne Dobson	UUP	Upper Bann	Re-elected
Michaela Boyle	SF	West Tyrone	Re-elected