

Devolved Government in Northern Ireland



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Outline



- Timeline: how we got to devolved government
- The institutions
- Challenges, 2012-2015
- What we have achieved: positives and negatives
- The future, including Brexit

End of the old regime, search for a new start



- 1921 to 1972: Government of Ireland Act, majority rule at Stormont
- Late 1960s: Civil Rights movement... then violence
- 1972: **Direct Rule**
- 1973 Sunningdale agreement, **power-sharing** government and an “**Irish Dimension**”
- 1974: Workers Council strike, and then direct rule
- 1981: Hunger strikes, and Sinn Fein in politics
- 1985: Anglo Irish Agreement, and an **Irish role in non-devolved affairs**

New realities: ceasefires and talks



- 1991-2: Brooke-Mayhew talks... And backchannel to SF
- 1993: Joint Declaration
- 1994: Ceasefires
- 1996: Mitchell Report... route into talks based on **'democratic and exclusively peaceful means** of resolving political issues... total **disarmament** of all paramilitary organisations' (and **US involvement**)
- 1996: Talks begin (and IRA ceasefire ends)
- 1997: IRA ceasefire resumes, Sinn Fein into talks, and the DUP leave
- 1998 (April): the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement... referendums (71.1% pro in Northern Ireland, 94.4% in South) and elections

Good Friday Agreement and ... stable devolution



- 1999 (December): devolution of economic and social matters, with David Trimble (UUP) and Seamus Mallon (SDLP) as FM/DFM
- 2001: first act of decommissioning
- 2002: collapse of devolution and resumed direct rule
- 2003: new elections: DUP and Sinn Fein on top
- 2005: IRA statement – “end to the armed campaign... dump arms... exclusively peaceful means... an alternative way to end British rule in our country”
- 2006-7: St Andrews Agreement... devolution resumed
- 2010: Hillsborough Castle Agreement: devolution of policing and justice

Good Friday/Belfast Agreement 1998



- Not just devolved government (Strand One)...
- Constitutional status... Northern Ireland in UK or Ireland, by consent. Legal changes
- North-South institutions (Strand Two) – and East-West (Strand Three)
- Parity of esteem; rights and equality
- Transition from conflict: prisoner releases, decommissioning, reconciliation and victims
- Later: policing - the Patten reforms and Policing Board

Devolution*: the Assembly



- 108 members (reducing to 90), elected by STV (38 DUP, 28 SF, 16 UUP, 12 SDLP, 8 Alliance ...)
- responsible for economic and social issues, law and order (not defence, foreign relations, macroeconomy, terrorism). Subject to European Convention
- members – MLAs – designate as Unionist, Nationalist, or other
- Key votes need cross community support (50, 50, 50; or 60, 40, 40); 30 members signing a Petition of Concern > cross community vote

Devolution: the Executive



- FM and DFM, one Nationalist, one Unionist, all powers joint and equal
- Ministers: selection by the d'Hondt formula: any party sufficiently large entitled to nominate ministers, and only parties can dismiss them
- Exception: Justice Minister: election by cross community vote
- All parties used to take up d'Hondt places; but now Opposition
- Programme for Government

Devolution: money



- Power to raise local property taxes (rates); and soon Corporation Tax
- But nearly all money from the Treasury: mainly the Barnett formula (existing budgets, +/- increase or decrease in comparable Whitehall budgets)
- NI fiscal deficit of £9.6 billion on total spending of 23.8 billion (2011-12)
- Northern Ireland public expenditure per head 27% higher than England
- Coming challenges of austerity?

2012 on... the structures shaken



- 2010 to 2012: partnership... reconciliation... the Queen... and Sinn Fein
- 2012: tensions over parades... The flags dispute
- 2013: efforts at refocusing... the Economic Pact; Together-Building a United Community
- 2013: the Haass talks: flags, parades, the past
- 2014: Euro-elections... welfare and parades...
- December 2014: the Stormont House Agreement (finance, welfare+, the past, parades, institutions)
- February 2015: Sinn Féin 'misled... DUP bad faith'
- Summer 2015: paramilitary concerns, UUP withdrawal

[The welfare dispute]



- Welfare devolved, but by historic accident
- Treasury funds (since 1948) on the basis of parity
- Change in Great Britain, opposed by Northern Ireland parties
- DUP position: live with realities – GB rules plus top-up. Nationalist position: resist: no one should lose out
- Treasury deducts difference in cost from Exec budget

Fresh Start*, November 2015



- Paramilitarism: new quangos
- Welfare: UK deal plus Executive-financed top up
- Some extra money
- Flags, parades: some progress
- Past: no progress
- Institutional changes
 - Departmental restructuring, Assembly to shrink 20121, Opposition, petition of concern, Civic Panel

Assembly elections 2016* CU Monitor



- DUP and Sinn Féin mended fences
- Arlene Foster DUP leader and First Minister
- Election outcome
 - DUP, especially Foster, reaffirmed
 - Nationalism shaken: seat losses, People Before Profit, nationalist vote down
- Executive formation: DUP+SF+JM –
UUP and SDLP opt for Opposition, Alliance out too

Positives of the present position* ...



- Constitutional pathway firmly established
- Sectarian division in politics accommodated
- Institutions of government largely accepted, including police
- Old adversaries working together
- Steps towards reconciliation
- Most street violence ended
- Basic public services delivered
- Three year election holiday

... and negatives



- No common purpose, no ‘vision’
- Focus on past not future
- Fragmenting consensus? – parties at times worry about other things more than working together: Unionists their hardliners, Sinn Fein the South
- Easily hamstrung: decisions not made
- Politics not policy: bad at ‘government’
- Little civil society voice, or public policy innovation or challenge

Alternatives*



- **Direct rule**
 - What might we lose?
 - Where does it lead in the long term?
- **New arrangements/institutional change?**
 - But what is practicable?
- **Change from within Northern Ireland society**
 - New voices, changing the climate
 - Vision
 - Public policy challenge and development – think tanks etc

Challenges



- Economy
- Shared future
- Service provision
- Brexit*
 - The negotiation issues: hard border, justice, EU funding...
 - ✦ Reaching a common position will create DUP/SF strains, stasis
 - Economic impacts: investment, trade, UK austerity...
 - Attitudes in population to the border
 - ✦ Disenchantment of the 'Rory McIlroy generation'?
 - ✦ Impact of Scottish developments
 - ✦ A border poll?