

Citizen Participation and Democracy:  
Assessing Local Political Engagement Strategies in Northern Ireland

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## Introduction

This paper investigates how political organizations in conflict-prone societies affect citizen participation in, and attitudes to, democratic politics. It focuses on three central questions: first, what methods do political organizations, specifically political parties, use to increase engagement and involvement in politics at the grassroots level? Second, how do these methods shape the practice of democracy in deeply divided societies? And third, which methods are most effective or most desirable at delivering strong, engaged, democratic publics? In asking these questions, this paper engages and builds on existing knowledge about democratization and consolidation, social capital, and deeply divided societies while focusing explicitly on “everyday” politics and the ways in which political parties affect ordinary citizens’ experiences of democratic governance.

Taking Northern Ireland as my primary case, I investigate the strategies that the two main Nationalist political parties—the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and Sinn Féin—employed after 1982 to build and mobilize grassroots support.<sup>1</sup> I examine how these strategies affected public attitudes towards democratic institutions among nationalist voters and evaluate which strategies seem most effective at both strengthening democratic practice and overcoming Northern Ireland’s deep political divisions. I argue that overall, Sinn Féin has been markedly more successful than the SDLP at increasing political engagement on the ground. As a result, Sinn Féin has managed to increase participation among groups who have felt alienated from politics in the past. However, this success carries with it some worries for democratic consolidation. Specifically, the strategies and tactics that the party utilizes for recruiting and mobilizing supporters raise concerns about transparency, accountability, and legality while the norms and internal culture of the party are anti-democratic in many ways. In addition, its success in fostering active, engaged citizens among Nationalist voters strengthens, rather than transcends, the deep divisions in Northern

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to 1982, Sinn Féin did not participate in electoral politics in Northern Ireland.

Ireland. In other words, while Sinn Féin may be more successful at increasing citizen participation in politics, its overall effect on the democratic political culture of the province may undermine its advances.

To advance this argument, I proceed as follows: first, I discuss the importance of democratic consolidation as a tool for managing tensions in post-conflict or deeply divided societies. While scholars disagree on the role of democracy as a conflict resolution mechanism, I argue that in cases like Northern Ireland, where part of the conflict is rooted in systematic disenfranchisement and marginalization of part of the population, strengthening democratic institutions and practices can mitigate some sources of hostility. Even though the United Kingdom is a liberal democracy with generally strong institutions and participatory norms, Northern Ireland is something of an anomaly, with deep divisions, a history of illiberal practices, and a long experience with internal conflict, all of which makes the question of democratic consolidation a salient one. I next turn to an assessment of the tactics that both Sinn Fein and the SDLP employ to reach out to and motivate the Nationalist public, focusing particularly on issues of recruitment, mobilization, organization, and party life. I conclude by considering the implications of my argument for other post-conflict cases or for deeply divided societies in general.

### Democracy, Conflict, and Peace

Deeply divided states, particularly ones recovering from experiences of internal conflict, are often directed by policymakers to strengthen their democratic institutions and practices as a way of preventing future recurrences of strife.<sup>2</sup> A number of scholars support this prescription, arguing that “sustainable recovery from violent conflict depends on rebuilding all sectors of the polity and society, but none so much as re-constituting a viable, trusted state authority through the creation of

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<sup>2</sup> Burnell, Peter, ed. (2000). Democracy Assistance: International Cooperation for Democratization. London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass; Santiso, Carlos (2002). "Promoting Democratic Governance and Preventing

democratic institutions.”<sup>3</sup> The causal mechanisms that such scholars argue exist among democracy, conflict abatement, and post-conflict reconstruction are three-fold: first, democracy is considered the most legitimate form of governance available, thus making it harder for extremists and provocateurs in society to challenge popularly elected leaders and destabilize the state.<sup>4</sup> Second, democratic practices such as elections routinize and regularize the disagreements that exist in society, and channel grievances that might trigger conflict into more peaceful, institutional politics.<sup>5</sup> Third, many argue that democracy increases the chances for economic growth and prosperity, which can mitigate the grievances and deprivation that trigger much intra-state conflict in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

Democracy as a prescription for conflict-prone societies has a number of detractors as well. While democracy may be the most legitimate form of governance available, legitimacy is not much of a defense against determined extremists who intend to challenge the state or from general destabilization that might occur during what is typically an unstable and conflict-prone transition process.<sup>7</sup> Though elections and other democratic practices regularize disputes, the competition among political elites for votes can also lend themselves to ethnic outbidding and radicalization,

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the Recurrence of Conflict: The Role of the United Nations Development Programme in Post Conflict Peace-Building." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34(3): 555-586.

<sup>3</sup> Katorobo, James (2003). "Democratic Institution Building in Post-Conflict Societies." UNDESA Conference on New or Restored Democracies, Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia..

<sup>4</sup> Manin, Bernard (1987). "On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation." *Political Theory* 15: 338-68; Young, Iris Marion (2000). *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press; Dryzek, John S. (2001). "Legitimacy and Economy in Deliberative Democracy." *Political Theory* 29: 651-669.

<sup>5</sup> Reilly, Ben (2001). *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press; Valadez, Jorge (2001). *Deliberative Democracy, Political Legitimacy, and Self-Determination in Multicultural Societies*. Boulder, CO: Westview; Reilly, Ben (2002). "Electoral Systems for Divided Societies." *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 156-170; Lijphart, Arend (2004). "Constitutional Design for Divided Societies." *Journal of Democracy* 15(2): 96-109.

<sup>6</sup> Barro, Robert J. (1996). "Democracy and Growth." *Journal of Economic Growth* 1(1): 1-27; Tavares, Jose and Romain Wacziarg (2001). "How Democracy Affects Growth." *European Economic Review* 45(8): 1341-1378.

<sup>7</sup> de Nevers, R. (1993). "Democratization and Ethnic Conflict." *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Michael E. Brown, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Mansfield, Edward D. and Jack Snyder (1995). "Democratization and the Danger of War." *International Security* 20(1): 5-38.

which in turn harden social divisions and make dispute resolution increasingly difficult, not easy.<sup>8</sup>

And while democracy might produce prosperity, it is also quite possible that prosperity is a necessary condition for successful democracy, so that poor states—where a disproportionate number of conflicts occur—may not have much of a chance to achieve stable democracy in the first place.<sup>9</sup>

These differences of opinion over the causal relationship between democracy and conflict resolution mean that it is unclear whether, in general, democracy is a good, bad, or even necessary element in creating and sustaining peaceful societies in the wake of ethnic conflicts. But in certain cases, like that of Northern Ireland, the relationship between democracy and post-conflict resolution is easier to claim. Although the conflict between Protestants and Catholics gives the Northern Ireland situation a nominally religious character, it is not a dispute over religion. And although the central issue at stake is the future constitutional position of the province, disagreement over the border separating Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland is not why the dispute turned bloody. In fact, one of the main causes for the escalation of what had been a largely non-violent struggle for Nationalist rights into a prolonged violent conflict was the failure of formal democratic institutions to represent minority views fairly and protect the minority population from the tyranny of the majority.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rabushka, A. and Kenneth A. Shepsle (1972). Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability. Columbus, OH: Merrill. Sisk, Timothy (1995). Democratisation in South Africa: The Elusive Social Contract. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Wallensteen, P. and M. Sollenberg (2000). "Armed Conflict, 1989-99." Journal of Peace Research 37(5): 635-49.

<sup>9</sup> Lipset, Seymour Martin (1959). "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy." American Political Science Review 53(1): 69-105..Przeworski, Adam and Fernando Limongi (1993). "Political Regimes and Economic Growth." The Journal of Economic Perspectives 7(3): 51-69.

<sup>10</sup> NICRA, Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (1978). We Shall Overcome...The History of the Struggle for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland, 1968-1978. Belfast: NICRA; Purdie, Bob (1990). Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland. Belfast, UK: Blackstaff; Bew, Paul and Gordon Gillespie (1993). Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles, 1968-1993. London: Serif; McGarry, John and Brendan O'Leary (1995). Explaining Northern Ireland. Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell; Aughey, Arthur and Duncan Morrow (1996). Northern Ireland Politics. Essex, UK: Longman; Dixon, Paul (2001). Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace. Basingstoke, UK and New York: Palgrave.

Northern Ireland has now experienced a long-term abatement of political violence following on the paramilitary cease fires in the early 1990s. And following the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, it has new institutions and electoral rules in place intended to give fair voice to both the Protestant and Catholic communities in the province. While these formal rules redress some of the injustices and imbalances of earlier decades, the real question at this time should be: what are the everyday experiences of democratic politics for ordinary citizens? Are they engaged with and have confidence in the institutions and practices that were set up, or are they, like earlier generations of Nationalists, unhappy with the formal practices of democracy and likely to either withdraw or, more worryingly, turn to other, less conventional means for representing their interests and grievances? An analysis of democracy is thus salient to the question of sustainable peace in Northern Ireland because it was the historic failure of democracy that acted as one of the most important proximate triggers for conflict in the late 1960s.

#### Democratic Practice in Great Britain and Northern Ireland

As noted earlier, the discussion of democratic failure and democratic consolidation in the United Kingdom might strike a false note, given that the UK was one of the world's earliest democracies, and it has certainly been one of the strongest and most consistent. Freedom House rates it as a free society for every year between 1972 and 2004, with the highest marks for political freedom and civil liberties.<sup>11</sup> It scores well on measures of perceived corruption, indicating that citizens feel the government is generally not dishonest.<sup>12</sup> And the World Audit organization, drawing on data from both Freedom House and Transparency International, along with Amnesty

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<sup>11</sup> It receives a ranking of 1 (out of 5) for both political freedom and civil liberties for every year except 1990-1997, where it received a 2 for civil liberties. See <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/allscores2005.xls>

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.transparency.org/surveys/index.html#dpi>

International, Human Rights Watch, the UN, and the International Commission of Journalists, rated the UK in the top ten of all countries for democratic institutions and practices.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the UK's overall performance conceals considerable variance at the regional level. Northern Ireland in particular has a history of democratic failure despite maintaining the technical features of democracy, including open and competitive elections. Nationalists charged the Unionist-dominated Stormont Parliament with rigging elections in their favor through the use of gerrymandered districts and restrictions in the franchise so that even in areas where there was a strong Nationalist majority, Unionists would still dominate the government. Such practices were particularly evident in how local council districts were drawn in Derry, which had a significant Catholic population. By 1961, Catholics comprised about 60% of the total adult population in the city, yet Unionists won control due to the particularities of the boundaries that had been drawn in 1923. When it appeared that Nationalists might capture one of the wards held by a Unionist, the boundaries were redrawn to keep the seat in Unionist hands.<sup>14</sup> This re-districting was justified by the Unionists who argued that those who paid the most rates (property taxes) should get a greater say in local government, and because Unionists were in general more well-off than Nationalists, this gerrymandering effectively resulted in a weighting of votes by income.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from the clear case of Derry, it is important to note that many of the charges of gerrymandering, restricting the franchise,<sup>16</sup> and changing electoral rules<sup>17</sup> did not greatly affect the

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.worldaudit.org/democracy.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Hewitt, Christopher (1981). "Catholic Grievances, Catholic Nationalism and Violence in Northern Ireland During the Civil Rights Period: A Reconsideration." *British Journal of Sociology* 32(3): 366; Buckland, Patrick (1979). *The Factory of Grievances: Devolved Government in Northern Ireland, 1921-1939*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, pp. 243-246.

<sup>15</sup> Walmsley, A. J. (1959). *Northern Ireland: its Policies and Record*. Belfast: Ulster Unionist Council, pp. 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> By law, only property owners and spouses of property owners were eligible to vote. Tenants, adult children living at home, and other non-propertied individuals were thus disenfranchised—more than 25% of the electorate in 1961. These rules were originated in Britain, but whereas Britain abolished the property rule in 1945, in Northern Ireland, the rule was retained. Though it is undisputed that more Nationalists were affected by this rule, Hewitt (1981: 365) argues that the extent to which Nationalists were overrepresented has

number of seats controlled by Nationalist politicians. As John Whyte argues, many of these charges overstate the extent to which control changed hands from Nationalist to Unionist officials.<sup>18</sup> But even though there may not have been as strong an actual effect, these rules and practices created a strong sense of injustice among Nationalists and came to symbolize how the democratic institutions of the province were not, in fact, representative at all. As a senior member of one of the Nationalist parties noted in an interview, “it seems incredible now to think about how small the changes were that we were initially demanding—one person, one vote. What’s more reasonable than that? We lived in a democracy, after all. It should have been automatic. But it wasn’t.”<sup>19</sup> Another Nationalist politician commented, “they didn’t think of us as equals, they didn’t treat us as equals under the law.”<sup>20</sup>

### Northern Ireland and Post-Conflict Democratic Experiences

These historic resentments of Northern Ireland’s flawed democracy led to a prolonged period of conflict between Nationalist and Unionists. Attempts to represent Nationalist grievances using parliament and other legislative means failed utterly prior to 1968 as Unionists dismissed all claims and maintained their relative power in political institutions.<sup>21</sup> After thirty years of violence, however, the British and Irish governments, along with Unionist and Nationalist politicians came together to sign the Belfast Agreement in 1998, which created new power-sharing institutions and

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been exaggerated. For more, see Elliott, Sydney (1971). The Electoral System in Northern Ireland since 1920. PhD Dissertation, School of Politics, Queen's University, Belfast.

<sup>17</sup> After Northern Ireland was partitioned from Ireland, all elections were held using PR rules. In 1929, the Northern Ireland government abolished PR, replacing it instead with 48 single member districts. Nationalists objected that the change from PR to FPP rules disadvantaged the minority.

<sup>18</sup> Whyte, John (1983). "How Much Discrimination Was There under the Unionist Regime, 1921-1968?" Contemporary Irish Studies, Tom Galagher and James O'Connell, eds. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Personal interview, SDLP official, Downpatrick, Co. Down, February 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview, SDLP official, Belfast, February 2004

<sup>21</sup> McAllister, Ian (1975). "Political Opposition in Northern Ireland: The National Democratic Party." Economic and Social Review 6; Lynn, Brendan (1997). Holding the Ground: The Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland, 1945-1972. Aldershot, UK and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate; Murray, Gerard (1998). John

which reinstated a list-PR electoral system for provincial-level and local elections.<sup>22</sup> Under the terms of the Agreement, the four main parties, two from each community, form a coalition that serves as the Executive, and distributes cabinet portfolios based on the D'Hondt method of apportioning seats.<sup>23</sup> The practical result of these rules is that members from the majority and the minority are guaranteed representation in the Executive, and minority politicians have some ability to shape policy at the regional level. With this system, Martin McGuinness, the second-in-command of Sinn Féin and an admitted ex-member of the Irish Republican Army, became the Minister of Education in 1999—a result that would have been inconceivable in the old Stormont.

Despite these advances, however, there are some worrying signs that, as before, there may be a disconnection between democratic processes and institutions and the everyday attitudes and experiences of individuals at the grassroots level. The 2000 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey (NILT), for example, found that 62% of all Catholics either agreed or strongly agreed that “politics and government are too complicated to follow” (versus 17% who disagreed or strongly disagreed). 62% also agreed or strongly agreed that “elected officials quickly lose touch” with their voters (against 13% who disagreed or strongly disagreed). And 63% agreed or strongly agreed that “people like me have no say in what government does” (versus 19% who disagreed or strongly disagreed).<sup>24</sup> These survey data indicate that democratic consolidation and confidence in democratic institutions may not be particularly well rooted in the population.<sup>25</sup> The next step, then, is to understand how

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Hume and the Sdip: Impact and Survival in Northern Ireland. Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press.

<sup>22</sup> Horowitz, Donald L. (2002). "Explaining the Northern Ireland Agreement: The Sources of an Unlikely Constitutional Consensus." British Journal of Political Science 32: 193-220.

<sup>23</sup> O'Doherty, Paul (1998). "The D'hondt and Hare/Niemeyer Methods and the Northern Ireland Election of 30 May 1996." Political Studies 46(2): 328-335.

<sup>24</sup> Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2000.

<sup>25</sup> The frequent suspension of Stormont institutions after 1998 due to an inability of the main political parties to work with each other, may account for, and intensify, the general discontent that voters feel towards their elected officials.

political actors in Northern Ireland are attempting to address this weakness by increasing citizen participation in (and hopefully trust in) democratic processes.

### Political Parties and Citizen Participation

For most ordinary citizens, their first and most common point of contact with democratic institutions is through elected officials who vie for their votes, and through parties that encourage and organize their political participation. Because this paper is concerned with “everyday” politics, I focus on these interactions between citizens and the political parties that attempt to increase their involvement. Political parties are also worth studying in this regard because of their centrality to democracy. As John Aldrich writes, “the political party as a collective enterprise, organizing competition for the full range of offices, provides the only means for holding elected officials responsible for what they do collectively.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, this civic engagement with the political process is thought by theorists of social capital to be particularly important for overcoming deep divisions within society.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, if we focus only on issues of constitutional design and electoral rules, we miss an entire class of political activity that, in the context of deepening and strengthening democracy, might be more important.

In Northern Ireland, two Nationalist parties are of particular interest given their size and influence: the moderate Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and the more militant Sinn Féin.<sup>28</sup> The two parties are quite distinct in their identities, histories, and support, although both

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<sup>26</sup> Aldrich, John Herbert (1995). Why Parties? : The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Fiorina, Morris P. (1981). Retrospective Voting in American National Elections. New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Putnam, Robert D. (1993). Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Deth, Jan W. van (1999). Social Capital and European Democracy. London and New York: Routledge; for an opposing view, see Encarnaci on, Omar Guillermo (2003). The Myth of Civil Society : Social Capital and Democratic Consolidation in Spain and Brazil. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>28</sup> In this paper, I focus only on the Nationalist political parties because of the historic difficulties that the Nationalist community has had with participatory democracy, though a similar analysis could be conducted for the main Unionist parties as well.

represent Nationalist (mostly Catholic) voters, draw minimal support from Unionists, and want to see a united Irish state. The SDLP, formed in 1970, was the successor to the old constitutional Nationalist Party. The Nationalist Party had existed in some form or another since the 1870s, and when Northern Ireland was partitioned from the rest of the country, it formed the core of the official opposition in the Stormont Parliament. Throughout its opposition, the Nationalist Party worked solely through peaceful, constitutional channels, but accomplished very little by way of policy improvements for the Catholic minority.<sup>29</sup> In the 1960s, the Nationalist Party disbanded, finding itself increasingly irrelevant to nationalists who were looking for more active and dynamic representatives of its political interests. The SDLP, formed by a younger generation of politicians who had been activists in the civil rights movement, took over the role of providing nationalist voters with a legal, constitutional political choice.<sup>30</sup>

The SDLP's main rival for votes, Sinn Féin, represents a militant strain of nationalism and has advocated more radical means for achieving the goal of a united Ireland. Tracing its roots back to 1905, Sinn Féin long abstained from participation in any British political institutions, claiming that to do so would legitimate Britain's illegal occupation of Ireland. Instead, Sinn Féin and its paramilitary arm, the Irish Republican Army, used the armed struggle as its primary method of resistance. It gradually moved to a more mixed strategy, combining armed struggle with political action. In 1982, it elected a candidate, hunger striker Bobby Sands, to Westminster, and has stood candidates in local, regional, and national elections ever since, though its Westminster MPs still do not take their seats in Parliament.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> McAllister, Ian (1975). "Political Opposition in Northern Ireland: The National Democratic Party." *Economic and Social Review* 6; Lynn, Brendan (1997). *Holding the Ground: The Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland, 1945-1972*. Aldershot, UK and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate.

<sup>30</sup> Murray, Gerard (1998). *John Hume and the SDLP: Impact and Survival in Northern Ireland*. Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press.

<sup>31</sup> Coogan, Tim Pat (1994). *The IRA: A History*. Niwot, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart; O'Hegarty, P.S. (1998). *The Victory of Sinn Fein: How It Won and How It Used It*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press;

The SDLP and Sinn Féin, though direct competitors for nationalist votes, have historically occupied different locations in the political environment and have accordingly drawn support from distinct groups of individuals within the nationalist community. The SDLP has traditionally received the majority of its support from individuals in the Catholic middle class, particularly among teachers, lawyers, doctors, and other professionals. SDLP voters also tended to be well-educated and middle-aged. Sinn Féin, on the other hand, received its support from individuals who with less education, manual labor jobs, came from the lower socio-economic backgrounds, and were younger.<sup>32</sup>

#### RECRUITMENT AND MOBILIZATION

Sinn Féin and the SDLP both rely on similar basic strategies for recruitment of party activists. In interviews with Sinn Féin and SDLP officials,<sup>33</sup> both sets of respondents described recruitment activities such as running province-wide and local recruitment drives, linking to student groups and establishing youth branches in universities. Both parties use their relationships with student groups to establish ties to potential activists and bring them into the political life of the party from an early age. Mark Durkan, the leader of the SDLP, got involved in the party through a university branch, and of the twelve senior SDLP leaders interviewed, nine remembered participating actively in university politics as a main reason for their subsequent involvement with the party.

Sinn Féin seems less active in terms of recruitment on university campuses, though given its demographic profile, this difference is not so surprising. Sinn Féin draws a great deal of its supporters in through its association with a number of different organizations that further the welfare of Catholics, especially in less economically developed neighborhoods. It pulls in some

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English, Richard (2003). *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press; McAllister, Ian (2004). "'The Armalite and the Ballot Box': Sinn Féin's Electoral Strategy in Northern Ireland." *Electoral Studies* 23(1): 123-142.

<sup>32</sup> As an example of the differences in socio-economic profiles of the two parties, Mark Durkan, the leader of the SDLP, has a degree in public policy. In contrast, Sinn Féin's leader Gerry Adams, was a bartender.

members through its long association with the Irish Republican Army. A number of former IRA members, upon retirement or after release from prison, became involved in Sinn Féin politics as an alternative route to promoting republican ideals.<sup>34</sup>

Sinn Féin also draws in new members through its reputation as a party that is actively involved in local, often underserved communities. One Sinn Féin representative noted that people want to join the party partly because it comes off as the most capable, the most involved in the community, and the most responsive to people's concerns. He gave the example that when there is a bomb scare in a Catholic neighborhood, the first people to respond to the scene will not be the police, nor the bomb squad, but the local Sinn Féin representatives who talks to the neighbors, gets shelter for the displaced, and generally offers comfort and help. His bottom line was that people want to get involved with the party because of its competence and its capacity to actually "get things done" while the SDLP, not having that same kind of reputation in Catholic neighborhoods, did not draw in recruits in the same numbers.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, Sinn Féin's ability to look after the well being of its members and its constituents is legendary within Northern Ireland. Even two different hard-line Unionists acknowledged (grudgingly) that Sinn Féin excelled at taking care of its own,<sup>36</sup> and a number of other respondents, including academics and journalists, observed that in terms of community representation and constituency service, Sinn Féin in general outperformed the SDLP. SDLP members often agreed with this assessment, noting that Sinn Féin's constituency service could be more comprehensive than their own because of its superior manpower and, to put it baldly, its willingness to circumvent officials channels or use unconventional means to take care of constituents' problems. One SDLP

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<sup>33</sup> Conducted in Northern Ireland between November 2003-June 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Personal interview, ex-IRA member, Belfast, February 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Personal interview, Sinn Féin representative, May 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Personal interview, Ulster Unionist Party member, March 2004; Personal interview, Democratic Unionist Party member, March 2004.

member gave the example that in some Sinn Féin strongholds, individuals who are involved in drug dealing, or who threaten their neighbors may simply receive a beating in the middle of the night from party enforcers.<sup>37</sup> This extra-legal method of dealing with neighborhood menaces may be more effective than calling in the police and following legal niceties, but certainly is at the very least a questionable practice in a democratic society.

Another possible motive for individuals to join Sinn Féin is its access to and control of resources. Since the cease fires of 1994, Northern Ireland has benefited from an influx of money from a number of sources, including the US and the EU, earmarked for community re-building and cross-community activities. Much of this money, an official from the Northern Ireland Office commented, is directed to organizations that have some (informal) connection to Sinn Féin.<sup>38</sup> Members and supporters of Sinn Féin, in turn, have a greater chance of receiving the benefits of this money than those who support the SDLP. Membership, in other words, might be driven in part because Sinn Féin controls more resources than its rival and can reward its followers more handsomely.<sup>39</sup> Though a Sinn Féin official noted that in its membership application, the party screens out individuals who join for venal reasons, this motive for party membership support cannot be discounted entirely.

Apart from its general recruitment strategies, Sinn Féin also has a more deliberate strategy than the SDLP to draw in younger members and women. While the SDLP is more effective at drawing recruits from universities and colleges, the party's image remains decidedly middle aged and decidedly male. This image may not be particularly well-deserved, as its current chairperson is

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<sup>37</sup> Personal interview, SDLP representative, November 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Personal interview, NIO representative, November 2003; Trutz Haase (1999). "Analysis of Community Uptake of Funds." SSPPR Analysis, Linen Hall Library Political Collection.

<sup>39</sup> Apart from such regeneration money, Sinn Féin is thought to have significant financial resources, including revenue from illegal activities such as cigarette and petrol smuggling. See also the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (2002). "The Financing of Terrorism in Northern Ireland, Vol. 1-2. London: House of Commons,

female, and it counts seven women among its party officers (out of fourteen). Sinn Féin, on the other hand, has both the reputation for youth and gender equality, and the numbers to back it up: ten women in its senior leadership (out of nineteen), 30% female representatives (the all-Ireland average is about 12%), 30% of ballot slots set aside for women, and the youngest local council team in Belfast. Sinn Féin also makes a point of showcasing its younger, up-and-coming members prominently in political ads, posters, and events. One journalist commented that in every photo opportunity or at any political event when the cameras and attention are all focused on Gerry Adams, the party is careful to place a few young faces around him so that these next-generation members start to appear familiar to the public.<sup>40</sup> As a side benefit, the prominent display of younger party members also draws in younger members who see the party as youthful and dynamic.

These differences between the SDLP and Sinn Féin become particularly acute at election time, when Sinn Féin's superior manpower and community links create an electoral machine that is unrivaled in Northern Ireland. A former Sinn Féin supporter described what happens in his neighborhood on polling day:

You'll hear a knock on the door and when you open it, it's three or four Sinn Féin men. One of them has a clipboard in his hand and says, Mr. Deegan,<sup>41</sup> we noticed that you haven't voted yet. Would you like us to give you a lift to the voting station? And if you tell them you'll get to it later, they'll leave. But if you don't get to it, they'll come back to remind you. I had them show up three times in one day.<sup>42</sup>

This sort of coverage and ground-level canvassing would not be possible for the SDLP, simply for manpower reasons alone. An aide to an SDLP councilor recalled that when canvassing the same neighborhood prior to an election, the SDLP might turn out two or three people to knock on doors,

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The Stationary Office; Cusack, Jim (2004). "Sinn Fein and the IRA: The Money Machine." [Belfast Telegraph](#). Belfast.

<sup>40</sup> Personal interview, BBC correspondent, March 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Name changed to protect privacy.

<sup>42</sup> Personal interview, ex-Sinn Fein member, February 2004.

but that Sinn Féin might send out twenty, simply because it could.<sup>43</sup> As a result of its superior numbers, which in turn stem from its recruitment and membership initiatives, Sinn Féin has managed to be a tough rival to the SDLP and to generate a positive, self-reinforcing dynamic that is likely to pull in more people in coming years. In fact, Sinn Féin is thought to be the fastest growing political party in all of Ireland, both North and South. It certainly grew sufficiently to go from being the second largest Nationalist political party in Northern Ireland a mere decade ago to being the largest in the north, and the third largest overall on the entire island.

#### OPERATIONS AND PARTY LIFE

The differences between Sinn Féin and the SDLP continue in their internal operations and experiences of party life. The SDLP describes itself as a much more democratically organized party than its rival and dismisses Sinn Féin as being so centralized it is practically Stalinist in nature. Such a characterization might be dismissed simply as a product of electoral rivalry if it weren't for such consistent characterization from a number of different political actors in the UK. In interviews with representatives of the Irish and British governments, members of the Northern Ireland Office, Unionists, Nationalists, non-Sinn Féin republicans, ex-Sinn Féin members, academics, and journalists, almost all commented consistently on this highly centralized structure of decision making in the party. The more charitable individuals described it as "democratic centralism," while members of the hard-line Democratic Unionist Party and the SDLP were more consistent in calling it "Stalinist" or even "fascist."

Former members of the party acknowledge that the internal culture of the organization did place a great deal of importance on unity of thought, and some clearly disaffected members noted that there was very little space for or encouragement of disagreement with official policy. One ex-

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<sup>43</sup> Personal interview, SDLP representative, December 2003.

member said that “disagreements were answered with a gun barrel to your head.”<sup>44</sup> Understandably, Sinn Féin officials were quick to defend the democratic practice within their organization and noted that disagreements were often aired in the party and that there were processes by which such disagreements were discussed and debated before official policy was set.<sup>45</sup>

Despite these differences of opinion over the extent to which dissent is tolerated within the party, it seems fairly certain that the party does exert a significant amount of control over its members — certainly far more than the SDLP does. The party has a much stronger party hierarchy than the SDLP, and its central offices coordinate a number of functions that in the more decentralized SDLP get delegated to local officials. One SDLP councilor noted, for example, that he takes care of most of his own PR and press, and that the central office provides only minimal administrative support.<sup>46</sup> Sinn Féin, in contrast, has an extensive press office both in Belfast and at their central Dublin headquarters. All contact with Sinn Féin officials is filtered through the press office, which decides whom among the Sinn Féin officials should field particular requests for information and interviews. The SDLP councilor went on to note that in terms of monetary support, the individual councilors are generally on their own to raise the kinds of funds they might need to do their job, to publicize their accomplishments, and to operate in general.<sup>47</sup> Sinn Féin councilors, on the other hand, give their government salaries over to the party, which then allots them a stipend (a portion of what they actually are paid by the government for their duties) and uses the difference to fund party activities.<sup>48</sup>

Sinn Féin also sets out guidelines and expectations about the amount of party work that its members must perform. While these expectations are not explicitly quantified, there is the belief

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<sup>44</sup> Personal interview, ex-Sinn Féin member, February 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Personal interview, Sinn Féin representative, May 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Personal interview, SDLP representative, December 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Personal interview, Sinn Féin representative, May 2004.

that in joining the party, you become not just a member, but an activist. With this activist status comes the responsibility to perform constituency work alongside elected officials and to get actively involved in the local communities. Sinn Féin members thus perform tasks like staffing citizen advice offices and interacting with local community organizations. The SDLP is run much more along the lines of a traditional political party with a membership that is involved primarily around elections but less so at other times. As such, Sinn Féin representatives and members are significantly more active and involved in party tasks on a regular, ongoing basis than the bulk of SDLP members.

### Assessment of Strategies

To evaluate the impact of the two parties' approaches to and interaction with their supporters and members, I look first at the impact on patterns of political participation, then at the norms and values generated by the parties, and finally, at the effects on overcoming deep divisions in Northern Ireland.

#### PARTICIPATION

From 1982 when it first began to contest elections to the last assembly election in 2005, Sinn Féin has demonstrated a steady increase in votes in both local government elections (Figure 1) and national elections (Figure 2), resulting in their usurpation of the SDLP as the dominant Nationalist party. More interesting, much of the increase came not at the cost of the SDLP's core support, but by drawing in new voters, particularly among the young and those alienated with the "politics as usual" sentiments from the other political parties. As Figure 1 indicates, the increase in support for Sinn Féin from 1981 to 1985 (when it first contested local offices) had almost no measurable impact on the percentage of votes that the SDLP received. These votes also were highly unlikely to come from other political parties in Northern Ireland—Unionist voters would never cross the communal divide to vote for a party that was more extreme than the SDLP, and the parties of the center, like the Alliance Party, would be unlikely to lose votes to Sinn Féin for the same reason. Its vote share

also cannot be explained by loss of votes from parties to its left, simply because that space is largely occupied by marginal parties that have such a small vote share that wholesale defection from them to Sinn Féin cannot account for this vote share either. Simply put, the main source of votes for Sinn Féin in this period is new voters. Likewise, as shown in Figure 2, Sinn Féin managed to overtake the SDLP in the last Westminster elections, but note that both parties increased their vote share—Sinn Féin only gathered more, particularly from new sources.<sup>49</sup>

Sinn Féin's ability to tap into new voters is likely linked to its image as a dynamic, young party (appealing to first-time voters), its image as a party concerned with equality (appealing to women), and its ability to turn out an impressive, well-oiled electoral machine that can get people to the polls in large numbers (helpful for countering voter apathy). The SDLP, in contrast, has managed to hold on to much of its core support, but with its current practices, it has fallen behind Sinn Féin in the race to appeal to new constituencies. There is little doubt that the SDLP has lost some votes to Sinn Féin, especially among voters who are sympathetic to the more strident Sinn Féin view point but who felt unable to vote for them so long as they sanctioned violence. In the wake of the 1994 cease fire, such voters would find it easier to vote for Sinn Féin and many, in fact, have done so.<sup>50</sup> This defection from the SDLP to Sinn Féin, however, cannot explain the latter's increase entirely.

That Sinn Féin has managed to increase participation among young and disenfranchised voters is positive news in general, though there are some countervailing patterns that are somewhat worrying. In the same period of time that Sinn Féin increased its appeal to young voters and to previously abstaining voters, the rate of voter registration in Northern Ireland decreased slightly

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<sup>49</sup> Belfast Telegraph, 5 February 2004

<sup>50</sup> Fay, Marie-Therese (1996). The Battle for Control of the Nationalist Agenda: SDLP and Sinn Fein Competition, 1982-1996. Masters Dissertation. Department of Department of Politics, The Queen's University, Belfast, Belfast; O'Hegarty, P.S. (1998). The Victory of Sinn Fein: How It Won and How It Used

from 84.8% to 83.1% (between 2003 and 2004). Certain groups of individuals had far lower rates of voter registration, particularly those aged 18-24, among whom only 71% are registered.<sup>51</sup> So even as Sinn Féin's strategies have increased participation among certain groups, in general, there are indications that the level of political engagement as measured by voter registration is slightly depressed. Sinn Féin's practices may be more successful than the SDLP's approach at engaging individuals, but it seems, it still is not enough to improve participation in elections overall.

#### NORMS AND CULTURE

The differences in operational style and culture of the SDLP and Sinn Féin, particularly the reliance on heavily centralized and perhaps even undemocratic internal practices, raises the question of whether the two parties are creating members that have very different approaches and attitudes towards democratic institutions and practices. More specifically, if Sinn Féin is as undemocratic and as Stalinist as its detractors claim, might that not suggest that its supporters and members are being immersed in a culture that is fundamentally anti-democratic in its orientation? Certainly members of the SDLP believe this to be the case. One senior member of the SDLP recalls a committee meeting in which there was a disagreement between his party and Sinn Féin over a local spending matter. In the middle of the discussion, one of the Sinn Féin members (whom he describes as being a not-so-secret member of the local hit squad) came over and sat next to him "so close that it was pretty clear his purpose was to intimidate me, to keep me from speaking out about the issue we were talking about."<sup>52</sup> He also described Sinn Féin's canvassing practices of "sending out groups of people to knock on doors. One man holds a clipboard and checks off your name, one man sells you on why

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It. Dublin: University College Dublin Press; McAllister, Ian (2004). "'the Armalite and the Ballot Box': Sinn Féin's Electoral Strategy in Northern Ireland." *Electoral Studies* 23(1): 123-142.

<sup>51</sup> Northern Ireland Office (2005). "Electoral Registration in Northern Ireland." Consultation paper prepared by the Northern Ireland Office, available online at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/nio/nio050805a.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Personal interview, SDLP member, May 2004.

you should vote for Sinn Féin, and then there's the "hard man," he's the thug who just stands and stares you down."<sup>53</sup>

Apart from personal anecdotes about the less savory practices of Sinn Féin members, there are indications from the Northern Ireland Life and Times surveys that Sinn Féin members do not have particularly strong attachments to democracy, or at least, as Tables 1 and 2 show, no stronger than individuals who identified themselves as supporters of the SDLP. In fact, the percent of Sinn Féin members either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, "people like me have no say in government" increased from 64.3% in 2000 to 70.7% in 2004. The SDLP supporters responding in the same way also increased from 59.8% to 62.2%, which is still considerably lower than for Sinn Féin while also constituting a smaller increase as well.

While the results of the NILT do not provide conclusive evidence that Sinn Féin members are being inculcated with anti-democratic norms, what is perhaps worrying is the fact that many individuals who join Sinn Féin or turn to Sinn Féin to resolve their local or personal problems do so with the full knowledge and perhaps even the expectation that such problem solving may take place outside of the normal, legal institutional channels customary for such matters. By relying on Sinn Féin to take care of community problems with drugs, crime, public nuisances, even domestic disputes (all have been the subject of Sinn Féin informal "dispute resolution" practices), nationalist communities risk turning Sinn Féin into an extra-legal force that acts outside the bounds of the law and that cannot be held accountable for its actions in the same way that the regular police or courts can. Such practices, effective as they might be, challenge the legitimacy and the effectiveness of regular democratic institutions and create a shadow government of sorts that acts independently of regular government agencies. For a society plagued with thirty years of illegal violence and policing

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

that lacked accountability, such practices are not conducive to the kind of democratic consolidation that is needed.

#### OVERCOMING DEEP DIVISIONS

The final area worth investigating is the impact that the two parties have on their supporters' attitudes to the deep social divisions in Northern Ireland. Ideally, the involvement and engagement in democratic politics should make it possible for the two sides in Northern Ireland to bridge their differences and transcend Unionist/Nationalist cleavages. However, as the NILT surveys indicate, Sinn Féin members are significantly less likely than their counterparts in the SDLP to want meaningful contact with members of the Unionist community (Tables 3-5). In general, it is striking that while Sinn Féin members showed greater willingness by 2004 to live in, work in, and send their children to school in mixed-religion environments, the proportion of Sinn Féin supporters interested in own-community surroundings is still quite high, and significantly higher than those individuals who support the SDLP.

While it may not be surprising that SDLP supporters, being generally more moderate in their political views and more educated, are more likely to be tolerant of mixed environments, and while it is certainly the case that individuals who do not tolerate unionists very well are likely to self-identify as Sinn Féin, rather than as SDLP members, these data are still quite striking. In all three categories, Sinn Féin members improved in their tolerance for mixed settings from 2000 to 2002, but became less tolerant from 2002 to 2004. Even if hard-line nationalists were self-selecting into Sinn Féin, if democratic engagement were to help deeply divided societies overcome their social cleavages, we would hope to see some more continuous improvement from 2002 to 2004, particularly since Sinn Féin in this same period of time was performing particularly well at the polls and generally consolidating its position as the most dynamic and engaged party on the Nationalist side.

Instead, what seems to be occurring is that the values of political engagement, community work, and activism that Sinn Féin instills in its members are all limited to engagement, work, and activism within the nationalist community, not within a broader Northern Ireland political community. From the point of view of Sinn Féin, this narrow focus on those individuals who are likely to support it makes total sense. From the point of view of transcending deep divisions, however, this focus and activism within the nationalist community strengthens and reinforces the bonds within the community and, by extension, weakens possible ties and linkages (in the workplace, through community groups and clubs, etc.) that bridge both nationalist and unionist communities. In other words, the kind of social capital that Sinn Féin creates in its community work and activism is not a type of “bridging” social capital, but a kind of “bonding”, or excluding, type of social capital.<sup>54</sup>

In general, bonding forms of capital, to the extent that they reinforce group boundaries rather than linking them together, are undesirable for deeply divided societies since they exacerbate the problem of social cleavages. For Northern Ireland, these practices have a compound effect. As Sinn Féin and its supporters forge stronger ties with each other and with others in the nationalist community, it not only emphasizes the distance between nationalist and unionist, it approximates a kind of security dilemma in which unionists feel increasingly threatened by a strong, resurgent nationalist community.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, a number of unionists noted in interviews that they felt “under siege” by the nationalists, especially since the nationalists had formed what seemed to them to be a tight, unified community capable of acting in concert.<sup>56</sup> The social capital that Sinn Féin is building, with its emphasis on community activism and involvement, in sum, has the potential to perpetuate

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<sup>54</sup> Putnam, Robert D. (1993). Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>55</sup> Kaufman, Stuart J. (1996). "Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses, and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War." Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict, Michael E. Brown, Jr. Owen R. Cote, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller, eds. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

and possibly even harden the deep divisions in Northern Ireland rather than overcoming those divisions through general participation in a shared democratic culture.

### Conclusion: Three Lessons

Extrapolating from the case of Northern Ireland, we can make three tentative conclusions about the relationship between democratic practice and citizen engagement that might have broader applicability to other societies hoping to consolidate democracy after experiencing internal conflict. First, to understand the experiences of post-conflict and deeply divided states in their experiments with democratic consolidation, it is important to look beyond constitutional design and electoral engineering to the level of ordinary politics and the interactions between citizens and the political actors closest to them. While it may be the case that democratic consolidation is proceeding as desired at the level of institutions and rules, it is the everyday experience and practice of democracy that ultimately will determine whether consolidation succeeds or fails. In the case of Northern Ireland, high-level democratization put in place new institutions and rules intended to overcome deep divisions in society, yet the everyday experience of politics indicates that deep divisions still exist. While the institutions may succeed in transcending those cleavages over the long term, they are unlikely to do so without reinforcement at the local level.

Second, democratic consolidation requires an active, involved, engaged citizenry, but not all strategies for producing such a population are equally effective. The corollary to this lesson is that not all effective methods are equally desirable. In the case of Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin was able to attract new members of the Nationalist electorate and mobilize them into participating in elections. Especially among young voters, new voters, and those who had withdrawn from the political process, Sinn Féin's ostentatious display of its youth and vitality, combined with strong, central organization and a massive electoral machine increased its vote share and increased its

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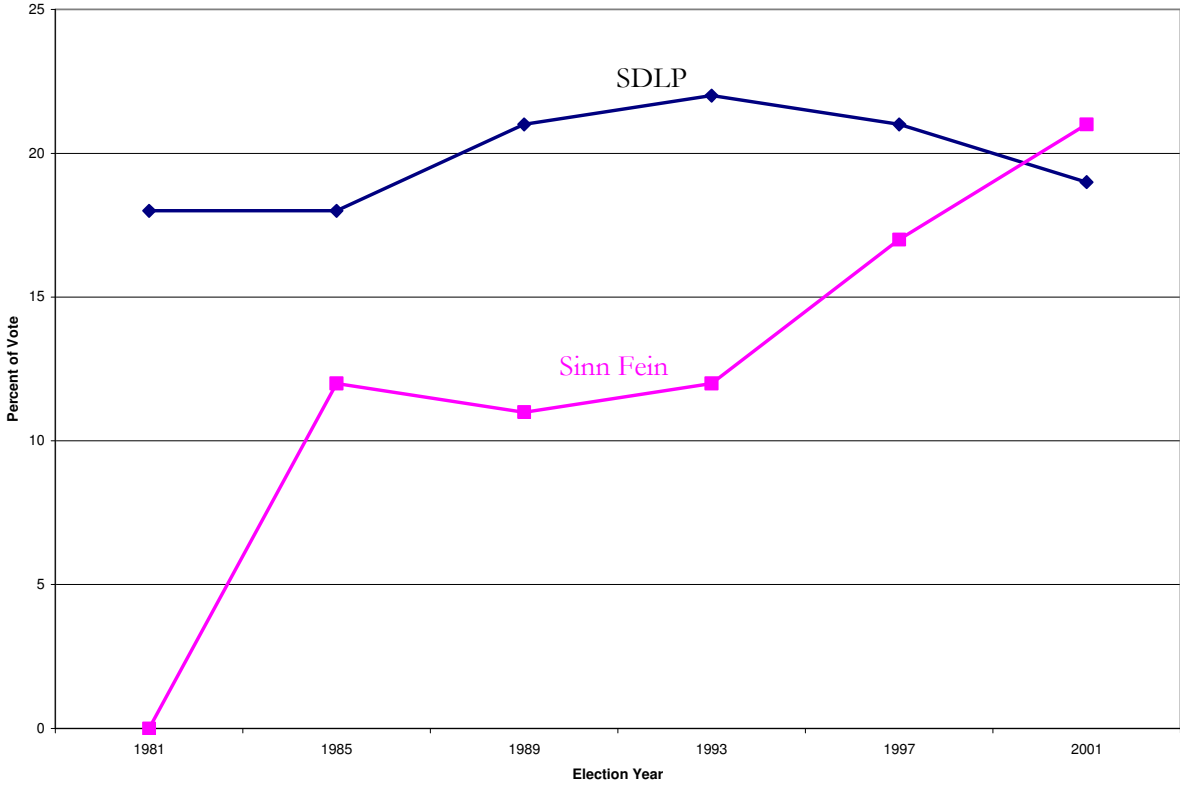
<sup>56</sup> Personal interviews, UUP and DUP members, March-April 2004.

membership base. Especially considering declines in voter registration, Sinn Féin's feat is impressive, given that it built its base in a little over twenty years.

At the same time, Sinn Féin's ability to increase participation has ambiguous effects on democratic consolidation. While it may bring more people into the process, it does so through methods that strike many as heavy handed and even dictatorial. It exercises tight control over its members and by many accounts, stifles internal debate and dissent—worrying claims for a democratic party. Its members seem less willing than those of the SDLP to engage with others who are outside of the nationalist community, which raises concerns about whether this democratic engagement actually helps or hinders a unified democracy in Northern Ireland. For other states looking to consolidate democracy and increase civic participation, how these tasks are accomplished may be particularly important in the long term so that the efforts to consolidate democracy do not simultaneously weaken it.

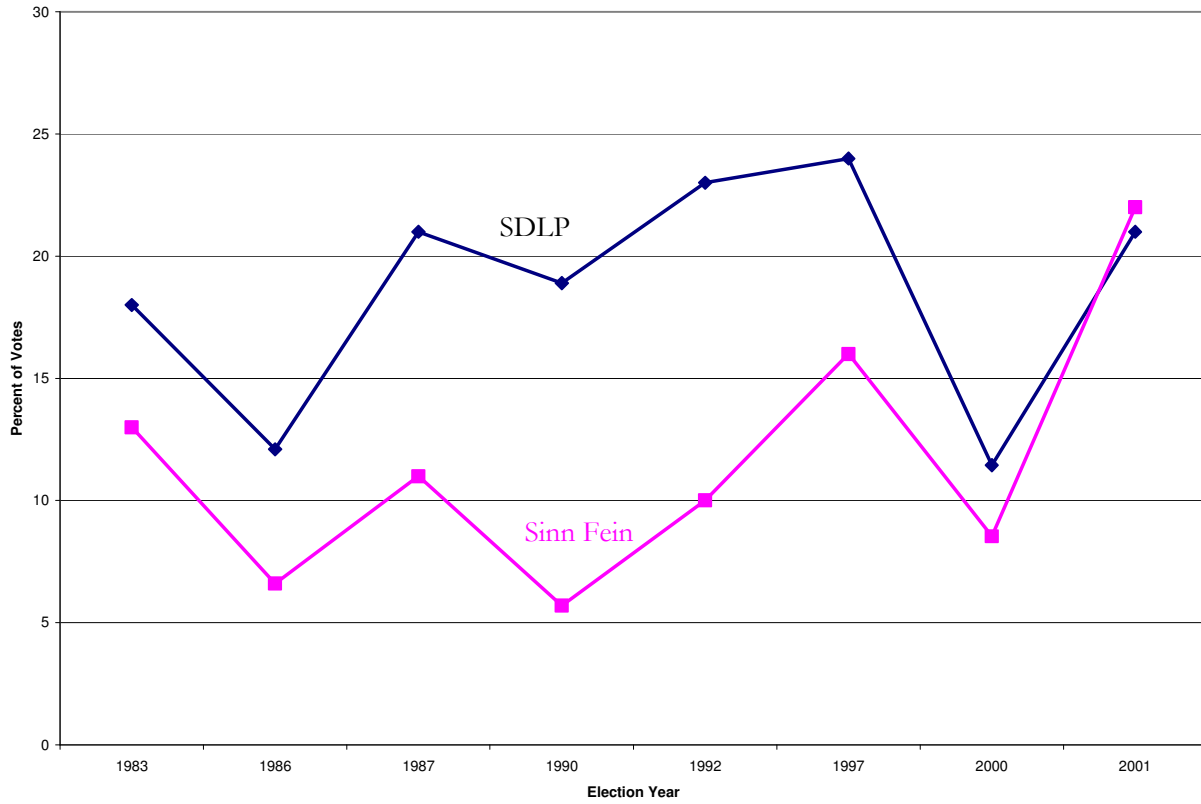
Third, the potential for democratic participation and engagement via political parties has an impact on the social capital of a society. Social capital is often thought of as consisting of non-political kinds of ties, such as the links formed through sports clubs or associations. As the experience of Northern Ireland suggests, the political activities of parties can have an impact on the social capital of a community as well. Proponents of building social capital, especially those concerned with enhancing the type of bridging capital, should pay attention to the practices of parties, since the types of ties that they are likely to foster, given the electoral incentives to focus narrowly on their own communities, are unlikely to bring communities together, and may in fact, drive them further apart.

Figure 1: SDLP and Sinn Féin Votes in Local Government Elections



Source: UK Electoral Commission

Figure 2: SDLP and Sinn Féin Votes in National Government Elections



Source: UK Electoral Commission

Table 1: Personal Involvement in Democracy

<i>People like me have no say in what government does (% responding)</i>						
	2000		2002		2004	
Self-identified political party members						
	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>
Agree strongly	13.79	14.29	15.24	15.74	12.36	24.53
Agree	46.12	50	46.67	55.56	49.81	46.23
Neither agree nor disagree	15.09	18.57	11.43	12.04	13.90	8.49
Disagree	18.53	12.86	22.86	14.81	20.85	17.92
Disagree strongly	3.017	1.43	0.63	0.93	1.54	0.94
Can't choose	1.29	1.43	0.95	0	1.54	0
Missing	2.16	1.43	2.22	0.93	0	1.89
<b>Total</b>	232	70	315	108	259	106

Source: NILT survey

Table 2: Accessibility of Government

<i>Politics and Government are too complicated (% responding)</i>						
	2000		2002		2004	
Self-identified political party members						
	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>
Agree strongly	14.66	20	14.29	17.59	13.90	25.47
Agree	47.84	44.29	52.38	54.63	44.40	36.79
Neither agree nor disagree	16.81	17.14	11.11	8.33	12.74	9.43
Disagree	14.22	12.86	14.92	14.81	22.01	17.92
Disagree strongly	3.88	2.86	4.44	2.78	4.25	7.55
Can't choose	1.29	1.43	0.63	0.93	1.16	0.94
Missing	1.29	1.43	2.22	0.93	1.54	1.89
<b>Total</b>	232	70	315	108	259	106

Source: NILT survey

Table 3: Social Attitudes towards Mixed Neighborhoods

<i>If you had a choice, would you prefer to live in a neighbourhood with people of only your own religion, or in a mixed-religion neighbourhood?</i>						
	2000		2002		2004	
	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>
Own religion only	18.52	51.22	10.14	27.08	7.31	40
Mixed-religion neighbourhood	75.42	39.02	85.48	67.36	92.03	57.24
Other (specify)	3.03	1.22	0.55	0	0.33	1.38
Doesn't matter	-	-	0.82	1.39	-	-
(Don't know)	3.03	8.54	3.01	4.17	0.33	1.38
<b>Total</b>	297	82	365	144	301	145

Source: NILT survey

Table 4: Social Attitudes towards Mixed Workplaces

<i>And if you were working and had to change your job, would you prefer a workplace with people of only your own religion, or a mixed religion workplace?</i>						
	2000		2002		2004	
	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>
Own religion only	11.11	25.61	4.93	15.28	1.66	16.55
Mixed-religion workplace	85.86	64.63	92.05	80.56	97.67	80
Other (specify)	0.67	3.66	0	0	0.33	1.38
Doesn't matter	-	-	0.27	2.78	-	-
(Don't know)	2.36	6.10	2.74	1.39	0.33	2.07
<b>Total</b>	297	82	365	144	301	145

Source: NILT survey

Table 5: Social Attitudes towards Mixed Schools

<i>And if you were deciding where to send your children to school, would you prefer a school with children of only your own religion, or a mixed-religion school?</i>						
	2000		2002		2004	
	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>	<b>SDLP</b>	<b>SF</b>
Own religion only	37.71	58.54	26.30	42.36	32.56	57.93
Mixed-religion school	51.18	35.37	66.03	53.47	60.13	36.55
Other (specify)	1.68	1.22	1.10	0.69	2.33	2.07
(Don't know)	9.43	4.88	6.58	3.47	4.98	3.45
<b>Total</b>	297	82	365	144	301	145

Source: NILT survey