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# Gender and consociational power-sharing in Northern Ireland

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## Abstract

Designing political arrangements is the most viable approach to resolving inter-communal divisions in post-conflict societies. Yet women are frequently ill-served by such peace settlements, since gender equality is often sacrificed in an effort to resolve conflicts over national identity. Northern Ireland is no exception to this trend. Although the 1998 Northern Ireland Agreement made specific provision for gender equality, it was primarily framed in terms of national identity. This article examines to what extent this focus on inter-communal ethnic division undermined support for the Agreement among women. Using data from the 2010 Northern Ireland Election Survey, we examine gender differences in attitudes towards the consociational institutions of government. The results show a significant gender gap in support for the institutional arrangements that were established by the Agreement. We propose and test three explanations to account for this gender gap.

## Keywords

consociationalism, gender, national identity, Northern Ireland, post-conflict, power-sharing

It is now generally accepted that institutional design is the most viable approach to resolving inter-communal divisions in post-conflict societies. More specifically, internal power-sharing arrangements among political elites, otherwise known as consociationalism, has now moved to centre stage as the dominant institutional approach (see Lijphart, 2004; McGarry and O'Leary, 1993, 1995, 2004). In principle, this approach enables communities with conflicting ethnic or religious identities to overcome long-standing antagonisms and create a political discourse based on mutual accommodation. Advocates of the consociational model argue that only by recognizing such ethnic and/or religious divisions and building them into new political structures can deep-seated antagonisms be successfully regulated (Lijphart, 1977).

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Not all political analysts, however, remain convinced as to the suitability of this approach. Many scholars point to the negative aspects of the consociational model, notably its tendency to freeze communal division along ethno-national lines. As Shapiro (1996: 102) puts it, rather than resolving the problem, consociationalism further exacerbates ‘the malady it is designed to treat’. Furthermore, this reification of communal division is undertaken at the expense of addressing other forms of social inequality, such as those based on class or gender. Some critics even suggest that because consociational models are based on accommodation among political elites, they have little impact on mass attitudes and, therefore, only a limited chance of success. Alternative integrationalist approaches advocate the dispersion of power across communal lines of division and the allocation of resources to cross-community interactions (Horowitz, 1990, 2000; Taylor, 2009a). It is both these factors – its disjuncture from the realities of the lives of ordinary citizens as well as its negation of other forms of social division in favour of communal identity – that many scholars see as the two main disadvantages of consociational forms of government (see Taylor, 2009a; cf McGarry and O’Leary, 2009: 377–378).<sup>1</sup>

Feminist scholars have also pointed to the role of peace settlements in perpetuating gender inequality within post-conflict societies (see Cockburn, 2001; Enloe, 1989, 1993; Meintjes et al., 2001; Montgomery, 2003). They argue that power-sharing political arrangements sacrifice women’s claims for equality in the interests of communal unity. In addition, they provide particular ethno-national groups with the opportunity to further perpetuate their own sexist ideologies (Rebouche and Fearon, 2005). Much of the literature on the relationship between gender and national liberation movements warns against the dangers of subordinating the social struggle to the national one. Women and feminists are silenced both by the ‘masculinization’ of the peace process and by the desire by men to re-establish their pre-war prerogatives of domination.<sup>2</sup> As Enloe (1993) notes, not only are many peace agreements negotiated exclusively by men, but they also reinforce male privilege at the expense of gender equality.<sup>3</sup> Even women who were active participants in the national struggle are ill-served by such negotiations. In the words of Enloe (1989: 62): ‘Not now, later’, or when the nationalist goal is achieved, has become the most commonly evoked response to nationalist women who seek to bring about gender equality.<sup>4</sup>

This article evaluates these competing interpretations by examining gender differences in public attitudes towards the new political arrangements in Northern Ireland. The article proceeds in three stages. First, we outline the nature of the consociational settlement, with particular reference to the treatment of women. Second, using nationally representative survey data collected in 2010,<sup>5</sup> we examine gender differences in attitudes towards the new power-sharing arrangements. Finally, we test three explanations – support for underlying principles, perceived effectiveness of the institutions, and levels of political engagement, and trust in its political leaders – to account for gender differences in attitudes towards devolved government.

Northern Ireland is a particularly appropriate case study for three reasons. First, the 1998 Northern Ireland Agreement is explicitly based on consociationalism, a form of conflict management that is becoming increasingly common in post-conflict settlements (Rothchild and Roeder, 2005). Thus, the degree to which women, as well as men, support such arrangements must be considered a crucial linchpin in determining the success of this approach in other post-conflict settings. Second, despite many criticisms, notably that it endorses and perpetuates segregation and division (Oberschall and Kendall Palmer, 2005; Taylor, 2009a; Wilson, 2010), the Northern Ireland peace process has been heralded as a success story by the international community. As Taylor (2009b: 7) notes, it now ‘shines as the brightest star in the new consociational universe’. Finally, unlike previous studies of the relationship between gender and post-conflict settlements that have

focused on transitions to democracy, Northern Ireland offers a unique opportunity to study the views of women towards peace agreements in a society marked by protracted ethno-national conflict (see Racioppi and O'Sullivan See, 2006).

## Women and the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly

The May 1998 Northern Ireland Agreement was ratified by 71% of citizens, formally ending almost 30 years of violence. For the first time, representatives from both religious communities came together to endorse an elite-driven political accommodation designed to recognize their differing traditions. Based on the principle of 'parity in esteem' – the principle of providing full expression to differing identities<sup>6</sup> – a key assumption of the Agreement was that entrenched communal divisions could be accommodated and eventually ameliorated through institutionalized power-sharing arrangements. These power-sharing arrangements included: the formation of a Northern Ireland Assembly with devolved legislative powers; the creation of a 'power-sharing' Northern Ireland Executive, headed by a premiership diarchy possessing equal powers and using the d'Hondt method to allocate ministries proportionally to the main parties;<sup>7</sup> and the introduction of a cross-community support principle for any major decisions taken by the Assembly.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Northern Ireland Agreement was also the first political initiative to explicitly call for the greater political representation of women, and committed the various parties to ensuring the 'right of women to full and equal participation in political life' (NIO, 1998).<sup>9</sup>

As the first democratically elected government in Northern Ireland in more than 25 years, the establishment of the new Assembly with its power-sharing Executive held out tremendous hope. The Assembly also coincided with an influx of women into elected office: out of 108 members elected in June 1998, 14 were women, two of whom were members of a women-only political party, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.<sup>10</sup> The electoral success of women translated into significant ministerial power (see Galligan, 2006). In contrast to their overall paucity within the Assembly, three of the 10 ministerial positions were held by women prior to dissolution in October 2002;<sup>11</sup> all were from nationalist parties, one Sinn Fein and two Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP).<sup>12</sup> While this influx of women may appear modest, it represented a significant advance for female political representation in Northern Ireland.<sup>13</sup> As Donaghy (2004) notes, not only did these women Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) provide 'the first legislative role models for Northern Ireland women in over 30 years', but they also represented the 'founding mothers' of Northern Ireland's new politics of peace-building and power-sharing democracy (Cowell-Meyers, 2003).

The unique role of these female MLAs as bearers of a new politics of consensus was reflected in the attitudes of the newly elected MLAs themselves. As Cowell-Meyers (2001) points out, both male and female MLAs stressed the unique political style and interests of women, such as their greater emphasis on 'bread and butter' issues. They placed much of the responsibility for the transition to peace on the women themselves. By focusing on issues such as health and education, it was believed that women would negate the tribalism of the past and bring an approach based on consensus and mutual accommodation. The gender-based assignment of responsibilities and committee membership within the Assembly strongly reflected this belief (see Galligan, 2006). For example, women were disproportionately allocated to just one committee – Health, Social Services and Public Safety – while the important Finance and Personnel Committee was a male-only grouping. While some of the female MLAs welcomed this gendered allocation of responsibilities, others viewed it as a form of discrimination that reflected society-wide attitudes about women.

Despite its promise of an inclusive form of government, much of the history of the Assembly has been one of a highly acrimonious and dysfunctional institution.<sup>14</sup> Disagreements over the constitutional question dominated debates. So great was the level of mistrust between the political parties that some commentators have characterized the early period of devolution as little more than a 'war by other means' (see Wilford and Wilson, 2000, 2001). With the re-establishment of the Assembly in May 2007, relations between the parties were transformed. Assisted by the electoral dominance of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein in the 2007 elections,<sup>15</sup> as well as the personal chemistry between Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness, First and Deputy First Minister, respectively, the Assembly became a more effective body. The boycotts and vitriolic exchanges that had characterized the previous period of devolution gave way to more cooperative relations between ministers as well as more joined-up government (Adshead and Tonge, 2009). The dissolution of the third Assembly in 2011 marked the first time in Northern Ireland's history that a devolved government had completed its full term of office.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the belief that the inclusion of women would transform politics in Northern Ireland, the new Assembly remained highly patriarchal in nature, with its female members subject to widespread heckling and verbal abuse (Murtagh, 2008; Ward, 2000). In particular, Barbara de Brun was singled out for much abuse by unionist politicians,<sup>17</sup> although almost all non-unionist women were exposed to inappropriate sexist remarks at some stage. The persistent verbal disparaging of women, even when female speakers discussed non-controversial issues, led some female MLAs to wish for 'male unionists to be sent on a course of good manners, respect and basic decency' (see Ward, 2000). These verbal attacks were not just directed by men, but also found favour among some high-profile unionist women, such as Iris Robinson, then deputy leader of the DUP. As one Sinn Fein member noted: 'when we were getting heckled, Iris Robinson was in there giving it all she had' (Ward, 2004: 15). While efforts were made to unite the female MLAs through a cross-party women's caucus, the primacy of party position and communal identity undermined such initiatives.

In summary, despite its promise of a new beginning, the Northern Ireland Assembly turned out to be an inhospitable place for women. Old sectarian divisions about the constitutional position and not 'bread and butter' issues dominated the political agenda. Even the final session of the last Assembly ended on a deeply sexist note when Ian Paisley, in his farewell speech to the house, remarked that while 'he had faced many prime ministers, thank God, only one of them was female'.

## Attitudes towards devolution

A cornerstone of the 1998 Northern Ireland Agreement was the reintroduction of devolved government with a power-sharing Executive. The creation of a formally institutionalized power-sharing Executive was considered a linchpin in ensuring public acceptance of the new political arrangements. However, as noted earlier, much of the history of the Assembly in the post-Agreement period has been one of a dysfunctional and misogynous institution. To what extent did the highly sexist and combative approach to communal relations within the Assembly translate into gender differences in levels of popular support for the new institutions? Table 1 addresses this question using the 2010 Northern Ireland Election Survey.

The results show that on all three measures of devolution, men are consistently more supportive than women in their views.<sup>18</sup> For example, among men, 61% of Protestants and 66% of Catholics support the Assembly. By contrast, the equivalent figures for Protestant and Catholic women are considerably lower at 51% and 54%, respectively. A similar pattern emerges when attitudes towards the Executive or the transfer of justice powers are considered. Once again, it is men who are the

**Table 1.** Gender differences in support for devolution, 2010 (%)

	Protestant (n = 500)		Catholic (n = 417)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Northern Ireland Assembly	61	51	66	54
Power-sharing Executive	44	39	66	50
Transfer police/justice powers	45	35	54	45

Notes: The questions were: 'Could you tell me how you feel about the following issues? The Northern Ireland Assembly; The requirement that the executive is power-sharing; The transfer of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly.' Ns may vary due to missing cases.

Source: 2010 Northern Ireland Election Survey.

**Table 2.** The gender gap in support for devolution, 1998–2010

	1998	2003	2010
<i>Protestants</i>			
Northern Ireland Assembly	+1	+8	+9
Power-sharing Executive	+5	+11	+5
<i>Catholics</i>			
Northern Ireland Assembly	+1	+10	+12
Power-sharing Executive	0	+4	+16

Note: The gender gap is the percentage of men minus the percentage of women who express 'strongly support' or 'support'.

Sources: 1998, 2003 and 2010 Northern Ireland Election Surveys.

most positive in their views, although the levels of support, particularly among Protestants, are notably lower. There are also some significant gender differences in levels of indecision, with Protestant women being the most undecided in their views. For example, around one in 10 Protestant women were undecided on all three issues, compared with half this proportion among Protestant men.

This lower level in female support for both the Assembly and Executive has increased consistently over the last decade. As Table 2 demonstrates, while both men and women within both communities were equally supportive of the Assembly in 1998, since then, support has declined at a much faster pace among women than among men. In 1998, 81% of Protestant men compared with 80% of Protestant women supported the Assembly; by 2003, support among Protestant women had fallen to 72% as compared with 80% among Protestant men, producing a gender gap of eight percentage points. A similar pattern emerges in respect of Catholic attitudes towards the Assembly, with the gender gap increasing from 1% in 1998 to 10% in 2003 and 12% in 2010. These findings are also replicated in attitudes towards the Executive.

In summary, these findings demonstrate that irrespective of which attitudes towards devolution are considered, men are more supportive in their views than women. Furthermore, this relationship holds for both of the religious communities. Why are men more willing than women to endorse these new political arrangements? And are there any differences between Protestants and Catholics in relation to this issue? It is to an investigation of these two questions that we now turn.

## Explaining gender differences in support for devolution

There are several possible explanations as to why men are more likely to support the Assembly and its power-sharing Executive, the most obvious being that they are simply more likely to endorse its underlying consociational principles. The results in the first part of Table 3 lend support to this explanation. In both communities, men are consistently more supportive of the four propositions that reflect consociational governance.<sup>19</sup> For example, 35% of Protestant men as compared with just 27% of Protestant women endorse the position that ministries should be shared between the parties; the equivalent proportions among Catholics are 59% and 46%, respectively. Gender differences in support for the other three requirements of governance – the designation of MLAs, legislation via majority consent and an independent Justice Minister – are similarly pronounced. For example, 27% of Protestant men compared with 19% of women support the view that the Justice Minister should be independent of the two traditions; the equivalent proportions within the Catholic community are 53% and 38%, respectively.

Although these are notable gender differences in support for consociationalism, they are considerably less than the differences between the two communities. For example, just under a quarter of Protestants as compared with 45% of Catholics support the view that the Justice Minister should be independent of the two main traditions. Even the shared ministries requirement, a crucial underlying principle of a consociational form of governance, commands support among less than one-third of Protestants as compared with 52% of Catholics. Even more than a

**Table 3.** Gender differences in support for political institutions, 2010 (%)

	Protestant (n = 500)		Catholic (n = 417)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>Support for:</i>				
Shared ministry	35	27	59	46
Designation of MLAs	32	23	54	42
Majority consent for legislation	32	23	54	41
Independent Justice Minister	27	19	53	38
<i>Effectiveness of:</i>				
First, Deputy Ministers' posts	36	39	61	48
Executive and Assembly	32	32	59	46
<i>Trust in leaders</i>				
Peter Robinson	60	54	13	14
Martin McGuinness	17	12	52	36
<i>Political engagement</i>				
Partisan (yes)	73	61	66	54
Political interest (some)	65	45	59	33

Notes: The questions were: 'Can you please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Ministries should be shared between unionist and nationalist parties. Members of the Assembly (MLAs) should designate as Unionist, Nationalist or 'Other' when elected. Legislation should require the consent of a majority of Unionist AND Nationalist Assembly members (MLAs) before it can be passed. The Minister for Justice should not be from the Unionist and Nationalist traditions.' 'On a scale of 0–10, where 0 means complete *distrust* in a leader and 10 means complete *trust* please rate these leaders.' 'Do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one of these parties or organisations?' 'How much interest do you have in what is going on in politics?' Trust in leaders is scored over 6 on the 0–10 scale. N's may vary due to missing cases.

Source: 2010 Northern Ireland Election Survey.



decade after the 1998 Agreement was ratified, there are still major differences between the two communities on the system of governance that the Agreement established.

A second explanation for greater levels of support among men is perceptions of the effectiveness of these political arrangements. Previous research suggests that it was this issue – the highly dysfunctional nature of the Assembly and its power-sharing Executive – which was a key factor in fuelling early Protestant disillusionment with the institutions of governance (see Hayes and McAllister, 2004; Hayes et al., 2005). The second part of Table 3 addresses this question by focusing on gender differences in perceptions of the effectiveness of the Assembly and the Executive as well as the posts of First and Deputy First Minister. The results in Table 3 only partially support this explanation. Irrespective of which governance institution is assessed, no notable gender differences emerge among Protestants on either question. By contrast, marked gender differences are evident among Catholics. For example, while 59% of Catholic men view the Executive and the Assembly as effective, the equivalent proportion of women is 46%.<sup>20</sup>

A third explanation for the higher level of support among men for the power-sharing Assembly is their potentially greater levels of trust in the political leaders delivering devolved government, as well as higher levels of political engagement. A key element of the Agreement, absent from previous settlements, was the ability of the political elites to deliver the consent of their respective communities (Hayes and McAllister, 2001). The results in the final two parts of Table 3 support this explanation and it is again men who are consistently the most trusting and politically engaged in their views.<sup>21</sup> As expected given the polarizing nature of the two leaders, there are major religious differences, with each leader being held in a much more positive light by members of their own community than the opposing one. When levels of trust in the two political leaders within the Catholic community are considered, there were no differences in views concerning Peter Robinson. However, men were much more trusting of Martin McGuinness than women, so that whereas just over half of the Catholic men claimed to have some trust in Martin McGuinness, only 36% of women endorsed this view.<sup>22</sup>

There is a similar pattern with respect to party attachment and political interest. In both communities, men are significantly more likely than women to have a party identification and to report an interest in politics. Thus, 73% of Protestant men as compared with just 61% of women said that they supported a political party; the equivalent male and female Catholic proportions were 66% and 54%, respectively. In both communities, party support among men outstripped that of women by 12 percentage points. A more pronounced pattern emerges with respect to political interest, with interest among men outstripping that of women by at least 20 percentage points in both communities. There is also evidence to suggest that among Catholics at least, the gender gap in partisanship is a relatively recent phenomenon that dates from 2003 onwards, and coincides with the collapse of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition as an electoral force.<sup>23</sup> As the data in Table 4 demonstrate, Catholic men and women were about equally divided in terms of their levels of party identification in 1998 and 2003, but, since then, party support has eroded at a much faster rate among women than among men.

**Table 4.** The gender gap in partisanship, 1998–2010

	1998	2003	2010
Protestants	+7	+3	+12
Catholics	-1	+2	+12

Note: The gender gap is the percentage of men minus the percentage of women who think of themselves as a party supporter.

Sources: 1998, 2003 and 2010 Northern Ireland Election Surveys.



## Decomposing the gender effects on devolution

There are, then, three major explanations that could account for gender differences in support for devolved government in Northern Ireland and each demonstrates a degree of empirical support. These explanations relate to Northern Ireland's system of governance, to the effectiveness of its institutions and to the degree of trust in leaders and levels of political engagement. In each of the three cases, men are more supportive than women, so there is empirical evidence to suggest that all three have some validity, at least at the bivariate level. To what extent do each of these three explanations explain gender differences in support for the new devolved institutions established in 1998 once a wide range of other factors are taken into account? And are there any differences between Protestants and Catholics in relation to this issue?

In order to make these estimates, Table 5 conducts a decomposition of effects using OLS regression equations calculated separately for Protestants and Catholics (see Alwin and Hauser, 1975). In each equation, gender is included and then socio-economic background, and each of the three explanations are entered separately and sequentially.<sup>24</sup> The gender estimates represent the amount by which the differences between men and women would be reduced (or increased) if men had the same average value in terms of these characteristics as women. Five estimates are shown in Table 5 for each community: line 1 shows the effect of gender on support for devolution; line 2 is the estimate for gender once socio-economic background is included; and lines 3 to 5 show the gender effect when the additional effects of the three explanations – support for systems of governance,<sup>25</sup> the effectiveness of its institutions<sup>26</sup> and trust in its political leaders and political engagement – are taken into account.<sup>27</sup> Support for devolution is operationalized in terms of our earlier three-item measure, namely: attitudes towards the Northern Ireland Assembly; the requirement that the Executive is power-sharing; and the transfer of police and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly.<sup>28</sup>

The results support our hypothesis that it is differences in the three political explanations that account for the gender gap with respect to devolution. Although gender has an independent and statistically significant effect on attitudes towards devolution (see line 1), an effect that remains even when a range of control variables are included in the regression equation (see line 2), these statistically significant differences disappear once our three explanations are included in the analysis (see lines 3 to 5). Of these various explanations, however, while the perceived effectiveness of

**Table 5.** Decomposing the gender differences in support for devolution, 2010 (regression estimates)

	(Partial coefficients)	
	Protestant	Catholic
(1) Gender effect, no controls	.033**	.048**
<i>Gender effect controlling for:</i>		
(2) Socio-economic status	.032*	.041*
(3) Systems of governance	.026*	.030*
(4) Effectiveness of institutions	.030*	.025ns
(5) Trust in leaders, political engagement	.015ns	.012ns

Notes: Estimates are partial regression coefficients from OLS regression equations predicting support for devolution, which is scored 0 (least support) to 1 (most support). Figures show the partial regression coefficients for gender as variables are progressively added to the equation. See Appendix Tables A1 and A2 for full models and results.

\*\*Significant at  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; ns not significant at  $p > .05$ .

Source: 2010 Northern Ireland Election Survey.

its institutions emerges as the primary explanatory factor among Catholics (see line 4), it is levels of political engagement, reflected in party attachments and expressions of political interest, that explain the gender gap among Protestants (see line 5).

Focusing on Protestants, the results in line 1 in Table 5 again demonstrate that gender is an important differential predictor of attitudes towards devolved government in Northern Ireland. Men are significantly more supportive of devolution than women. Furthermore, this relationship remains even after a range of background variables are included in the analysis (line 2). The only factor that negates the gender effect among Protestants is differences in trust in political leaders, party support and political interest. Once these factors are controlled for in the analysis, gender is no longer a significant net predictor of attitudes towards devolution. Of these various factors, it is levels of political engagement that emerge as the key factor in explaining gender differences in attitudes among Protestants (see Appendix Table A1).

A different result emerges among Catholics. Although gender is again an important differential predictor of attitudes towards devolution (see line 1), an effect that remains even when socio-economic background and attitudes towards power-sharing are included in the analysis (see lines 2 and 3), these statistically significant gender differences disappear once perceptions of the effectiveness of institutions are included in the analysis (line 4). Thus, for Catholics, it is the effectiveness of the devolved institutions that accounts for the more positive views among men than women. In addition, identical to our previous analysis, trust in leaders and political engagement further reduce the gender effect (see Appendix Table A2).

## Conclusion

Peace settlements based on consociational models of government are often effective in mitigating conflict based on ethno-national identity. Consociationalism establishes political institutions that permit cross-community representation, and embeds the right to participate in government in legally binding arrangements. While these arrangements are often complex and difficult to negotiate, once established they have been shown to reduce divisions within post-conflict societies. The main drawback is that they privilege the source of conflict within a society, usually national identity, over other sources of division, such as class and gender. In this article, we have examined one such secondary source of division, gender, and evaluated the gender gap that exists in support for consociational political arrangements in Northern Ireland.

Our results confirm the existence of a significant gender gap in support for the institutional arrangements that were established by the 1998 Northern Ireland Agreement. Women are consistently less likely to support such measures compared with men. While gender equality and anti-discrimination measures were embedded in the Agreement, the need to establish the new system of government, make it function effectively and – perhaps the most difficult challenge of all – encourage widespread public support from Protestants took first priority. The net effect has been that gender issues have been accorded a secondary status at best, despite the significant number of women elected to the Assembly, particularly in the two nationalist political parties. A case in point is the overwhelming and continuing male opposition from across the political divide for any extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, or even its referral for discussion to the relevant committee.<sup>29</sup> Even Sinn Féin, the main advocates of the ‘equality agenda’,<sup>30</sup> are united in their opposition to this issue.

The findings also suggest that the gender gap operates differently between the two communities. Among Catholics, it is the effectiveness of the consociational institutions that shapes the gender gap in political attitudes; among Protestants, the gap is largely attributable to levels of political

engagement. What explains these differences? One explanation is the differing responses of the political parties to the conflict and to the political role of women. For unionists, the maintenance of the union was paramount, with women's political activity relegated to a support role. While some women were politically involved,<sup>31</sup> the traditional role for unionist women was that of wives and mothers acting in support of the formal political activities of their Protestant men (Racioppi and O'Sullivan See, 2001).<sup>32</sup>

However, the post-1972 history of Protestant activity has been dominated by bitter competition between the political parties, particularly after the ratification of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. In fact, no sooner had the Agreement been signed than significant divisions began to emerge even within mainstream unionist groups, namely over matters such as the reform of the police, the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons as well as the early release of prisoners (see Aughey, 2000). So great was the level of disagreement and bitter division within the unionist community that, by 2003, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the main architect of the Agreement within the unionist community, had been defeated in the polls by the traditionally anti-Agreement party, the DUP,<sup>33</sup> and, in 2005, after losing his Westminster seat, David Trimble was forced to resign as leader (Mitchell and Evans, 2009). It was increasing unionist disillusionment over the Agreement, particularly among women, who had voted in greater numbers than men for the Agreement<sup>34</sup> and had endorsed David Trimble to deliver on its commitments,<sup>35</sup> which we suggest explains the gender gap in support for devolution among the Protestant community.

In contrast to Protestants, the goal of most Catholic activity has been to gain equal representation in the political institutions of Northern Ireland. This aim was enshrined in the SDLP's platform when it was formed in 1970, and one that Sinn Fein adopted after it abandoned military activity in the early 1990s. Moreover, as McWilliams (1995) notes, this was also the position increasingly adopted by many nationalist women in voluntary and community groups, particularly since the mid-1980s, when the practical problems of domestic violence and poverty provided a unifying force. Although some republican women activists within the movement continued to advocate for gender equality in terms of an all-Ireland context, for most Catholic women, it was the achievement of equality, social inclusion and justice within the existing political structures that was a primary aim.

However, the history of the Northern Ireland state was based not only on Catholic but also on female exclusion. Since its establishment in 1921, not only have women in Northern Ireland been largely excluded from formal politics, but the history of the political parties has also been one of deep-seated ethno-national division based on male domination and patriarchal privilege (see Wilford, 1999; Wilford and Galligan, 1999). One glaring consequence of this division was the dismal record of women in elected office. It is the doubts that the new political arrangements would really lead to their full and equal representation that we suggest explain the gender gap in support for devolution within the Catholic community. As Fearon (2000: 162) puts it in summarizing the concerns of women who had endorsed the Agreement because of its pro-equality agenda: 'She is worried that the move away from a conflict-ridden society to an extremely conservative one will further stymie the equal rights promised by the Agreement, and provided for in part by the institutions it establishes.'

These results have several implications for post-conflict societies. First, consociational scholars must address the relationship between conflict resolution and gender. As feminist research demonstrates, the concept of nationalism is highly gendered and regressive in nature, with women still wondering, in the words of Cynthia Enloe (1989), when 'later' will arrive. Second, greater recognition must be given to negotiating gender and national identity in post-conflict societies. As the experience of Northern Ireland demonstrates, despite the increasing marginalization of women

from politics as well as efforts to introduce a more inclusive, or transversal,<sup>36</sup> form of politics, women remain divided along ethnic lines. Electoral results since the Agreement point to a loss in cross-community support and to an escalation in ethnic outbidding (see Mitchell et al., 2009).<sup>37</sup> Finally, placing women in peace negotiations is not enough. Attention must also be paid to the role of women in the transformation of post-conflict societies. As Kilmurray and McWilliams (2011) put it: ‘As people everywhere know, ensuring that visible, missionary women maintain a central role in rebuilding their societies remains an unfinished project.’

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### Notes

1. See Taylor (2009c) for a vigorous discussion of this debate, particularly in terms of its relationship to the 1998 Belfast Agreement.
2. The potential marginalization of the interests of women from the emerging decision-making process led to the foundation in 1996 of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition, a cross-communal and women-only political party (see Fearon, 1999; Fearon and Rebouche, 2006).
3. Although women had been actively involved in the multiparty talks that formed the basis for the Agreement, the final negotiations were exclusively male, involving talks between the UK and Irish Prime Ministers, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, and the leaders of the four main political parties. In an effort to appease unionist politicians, even the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, was eventually excluded from these final negotiations.
4. This is also the case in Northern Ireland where throughout the history of the ‘Troubles’, the centrality of the constitutional issue has not only deprived women within both communities of a political voice, but also marginalized their aspirations (see Aretxaga, 1997; Sales, 1997; Ward, 2006).
5. The 2010 Northern Ireland General Election Survey was a nationally representative post-election survey of all adults aged 18 years or older conducted immediately after the May 2010 general election. Using face-to-face interviews and with a response rate of 63%, the survey was carried out by Market Research Northern Ireland and based on a clustered stratified random sample of 1002 adults. The survey was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.
6. In practice, this means that there is recognition for the political rights of both communities, and the freedom to express those rights in political institutions (for the terms and conditions of the Agreement, see O’Leary, 2001).
7. Under the terms of the 1998 Agreement, the co-premiers who head the Executive had to secure the support of a majority of both nationalists and unionists, as well as a majority in the Assembly as a whole. Since the St Andrew’s Agreement of 2006, they are now appointed as the leaders of the largest party and the second-largest party in the opposite designation. The remaining ministers are chosen by the nominating officers of each party.
8. To permit the latter, the Agreement requires that members elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly designate themselves as ‘nationalists, unionists and others’, and no member may change her or his designation more than once during an Assembly session.
9. This stipulation has been ignored by the parties and its inclusion in the human rights section of the Agreement was the result of an intervention by Mo Mowlam, the Secretary of State, following a

clandestine meeting with Pearl Sagar, a founding member of the Women's Coalition, in the female toilets during the final week of negotiations at Stormont in April 1998 (see Fearon, 1999: 106).

10. In 2003, an additional four women were elected to the Assembly bringing the total to 18, a pattern that was replicated in the 2007 Northern Ireland Assembly elections. In the 2011 elections, 20 women were elected, giving them a 19% share of the total seats.
11. Since full powers were devolved to the Assembly in December 1999, the Assembly has been suspended on four occasions: 11 February–30 May 2000; 10 August 2001 (24-hour suspension); 22 September 2001 (24-hour suspension); and 14 October 2002–7 May 2007). The most recent and longest suspension was over allegations of an Irish Republican Army (IRA) spy ring at Stormont.
12. With the restoration of the Assembly in May 2007, four of the 12 ministerial appointments were held by women, two from Sinn Fein, one from the SDLP and, for the first time, one from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The DUP representative was Arlene Foster, who had defected from the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) after the 2003 elections. When Peter Robinson temporarily stood down following a scandal involving his wife, Iris Robinson, Arlene Foster became acting First Minister from 11 January 2010 to 3 February 2010. Following the 2011 election, three women held ministerial office, two from Sinn Fein and one from the DUP.
13. In all, only nine women, or just 2% of the total, were elected to the 1921–1971 Stormont Parliament and, prior to 2001, only three women had ever been elected to the Westminster Parliament. In 2001, however, three women were elected to Westminster and all were returned after the 2005 elections. After the 2010 UK elections, four women were elected, although one – Iris Robinson – was forced to resign in January 2010 after allegations of financial impropriety linked to an extra-marital affair.
14. This was not unexpected given that the 1999–2002 era was marred by the boycotting of meetings by ministers, the abstention (and eventual) rotation of DUP ministers in the Executive, judicial reviews of the power of the Executive, and multiple attempts to exclude Sinn Fein (see Wilford and Wilson, 2000, 2001).
15. Following the 2007 Assembly election, the DUP and Sinn Fein combined held seven of the 10 departmental ministerial posts and all the ministerial posts at the heart of the Executive (Wilford and Wilson, 2008).
16. Contrary to the 1999–2002 period, which saw very little in the way of legislative activity, during the 2007–2011 session, nearly 300 plenary sessions were held and around 70 bills were passed.
17. As Wilford and Wilson (2000: 91) note, part of the reason for the antipathy expressed towards her by unionist politicians may be due more to her insistence on speaking at length in Irish.
18. In all but one case – attitudes towards the power-sharing Executive among Protestants – these male–female differences are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or above.
19. In all cases, these male–female differences are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or above.
20. In both cases, these male–female differences within the Catholic population are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or above.
21. In all but three cases – trust in Peter Robinson among both Protestant and Catholics and trust in Martin McGuinness among Protestants – these male–female differences are statistically significant at the 0.05 level or above.
22. So great were levels of distrust that while just over one-third of all respondents expressed a position of 'complete distrust' in Peter Robinson, the equivalent proportion who held this view about Martin McGuinness was even higher at just over 40%.
23. In addition to the loss of both its Assembly seats in 2003, where it managed only 0.8% of the vote – a 50% drop from 1998 – the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition presence in the formal political sphere was negated in 2005 when its one remaining Councillor, Patricia Wallace, lost her seat. With no remaining elected representatives, the party formally disbanded in May 2006.
24. See Appendix Tables A1 and A2 for a complete listing of the regression results.
25. For the purpose of this analysis, support for its underlying systems of governance, or power-sharing arrangements, is operationalized in terms of our earlier four propositions, namely: shared ministry; designation of MLAs; majority consent for legislation; and an independent Justice Minister. Factor analysis

- demonstrates that for both Protestants and Catholics, these four items are unidimensional in nature. They also demonstrate high reliabilities, producing a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78. and 0.82 for Protestants and Catholics, respectively.
26. Previous analysis suggests that it is a combination of these two factors that predicts attitudes towards devolution.
  27. The ordering of these variables reflects their closeness to the foundations of devolution as expressed in the 1998 Northern Ireland Agreement, namely: first, its underlying principles; second, its institutional structures; and, finally, expressions of political interest and attitudes towards its current political representatives.
  28. Factor analysis demonstrates that for both Protestants and Catholics, these three items are unidimensional in nature. They also demonstrate high reliabilities, producing a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. and 0.84 for Protestants and Catholics, respectively.
  29. For example, in June 2000, a majority of MLAs backed a DUP motion opposing the extension of the Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. However, an amendment proposed by the Women's Coalition calling for the issue to be referred to the Assembly's Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee was defeated by 43 votes to 15, with seven women voting for the amendment and no woman voting against it (see Cowell-Meyers, 2003: 88). Since then, all further attempts to extend the abortion legislation to Northern Ireland, for example, Diane Abbott's proposed amendment to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill in July 2008, have been blocked by the Northern Ireland Assembly.
  30. As Gerry Adams (2003), in the Sinn Fein Assembly Election Manifesto of 2003, put it: 'At the core of our Agenda for Government is one simple word – equality. ... As republicans we are totally committed to ending inequality and bringing about a society where all are treated equally.'
  31. For a comprehensive account of this issue, see Ward (2006).
  32. A sentiment, it should be noted, that has also been endorsed by the current leader of the largest unionist party (DUP) and First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly – Peter Robinson – when he told the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition that 'women should leave politics and leadership alone' (see Kilmurray and McWilliams, 2011).
  33. In fact, so great had the level of dissent within the UUP ranks become that, in January 2004, three of its members – Jeffrey Donaldson, Norah Beare and Arlene Foster – all defected to the DUP.
  34. Opinion poll data suggests that not only did more women than men vote in favour of the Agreement – 75% as compared with 68% – but a crucial factor in gaining its eventual endorsement within the unionist community was its greater support among women, many of whom remained undecided throughout much of the campaign (see Elliott, 1999; O'Neill, 1999).
  35. Among those Protestant women who voted in favour of the Agreement, when asked which of the politicians they would trust to act in the best interests of all the people in Northern Ireland, David Trimble came top of the list at 91%, 21 percentage points higher than his nearest rival, John Alderdice (for a discussion of this issue, see Elliott, 1999).
  36. According to Yuval-Davis (1997: 126), who first coined the term, transversal politics refers to the formation of alliances between women of diverse identities and distinct national communities whose boundaries are established 'not in terms of "who" we are but in terms of what we want to achieve'.
  37. As Galligan and Dowds (2004: 4) put it in accounting for the defeat of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition in the 2003 Assembly elections despite an overall gain in female electoral representation: 'The defeat of the Women's Coalition may be construed more as a reassertion of sectarian voting patterns rather than as a vote against women.'

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**Appendix**

**Table A1.** Explaining the gender gap in attitudes towards devolution among protestants (n = 491)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta
<i>Socio-economic background</i>										
Marital status (single)	–	–	–.02	(–.07)	–.01	(–.04)	–.01	(–.02)	.01	(.03)
Age (years)	–	–	.01**	(.28)	.01**	(.27)	.01**	(.27)	.01**	(.18)
Education:	–	–								
Tertiary	–	–	–.05*	(–.12)	–.05*	(–.13)	–.04*	(–.11)	–.04	(–.11)
Secondary	–	–	–.03	(–.09)	–.03	(–.08)	–.02	(–.07)	–.03	(–.08)
No qualification <sup>a</sup>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Employment (labour active)	–	–	.02	(.07)	.02	(.06)	.02	(.06)	.01	(.03)
<i>Systems of governance</i>										
Power-sharing (support)	–	–	–	–	.27**	(.28)	.13**	(.14)	.14**	(.14)
<i>Effectiveness of institutions:</i>										
First Minister/Deputy First Minister – Assembly/Executive	–	–	–	–	–	–	.24**	(.26)	.18**	(.20)
<i>Trust in political leaders and levels of political engagement</i>										
Peter Robinson	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–.04	(–.08)
Martin McGuinness	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.06	(.08)
Partisanship (yes)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.07**	(.21)
Political interest (some)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.09**	(.16)
<i>Gender effect</i>										
Male	.03**	(.11)	.03*	(.10)	.03*	(.08)	.03*	(.10)	.02	(.05)
Constant	.628**		.530**		.388**		.316**		.322**	
R-squared	.011		.131		.206		.252		.327	

Notes: The dependent variable is coded from 0 (least support) to 1 (most support); <sup>a</sup> omitted category of comparison; \* statistically significant at p < .05; \*\* p < .01.  
 Source: 2010 Northern Ireland Election Survey.

**Table A2.** Explaining the gender gap in attitudes towards devolution among Catholics (n = 407)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta
<i>Socio-economic background</i>										
Marital status (single)	–	–	–.02	(–.07)	–.01	(–.04)	–.01	(–.03)	.01	(.01)
Age (years)	–	–	.01**	(.25)	.01**	(.21)	.01**	(.17)	.01*	(.13)
Education:	–	–								
Tertiary	–	–	–.01	(–.02)	–.01	(–.02)	–.01	(–.02)	–.05	(–.09)
Secondary	–	–	–.04	(–.11)	–.03	(–.08)	–.02	(–.07)	–.03	(–.10)
No qualification <sup>a</sup>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Employment (labour active)	–	–	.03	(.10)	.01	(.04)	.01	(.02)	–.01	(–.01)
<i>Systems of governance</i>										
Power-sharing (support)	–	–	–	–	.38**	(.37)	.25**	(.24)	.21**	(.21)
<i>Effectiveness of institutions</i>										
First Minister/Deputy First Minister – Assembly/Executive	–	–	–	–	–	–	.26**	(.26)	.24**	(.24)
<i>Trust in political leaders and levels of political engagement</i>										
Peter Robinson	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.02	(.03)
Martin McGuinness	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–.05*	(–.11)
Partisanship (yes)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.04*	(.11)
Political interest (some)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.15**	(.23)
<i>Gender effect</i>										
Male	.05**	(.15)	.04**	(.13)	.03*	(.09)	.03	(.08)	.01	(.04)
Constant	.643**		.558**		.347**		.282**		.293**	
R-squared	.022		.138		.263		.308		.371	

Notes: The dependent variable is coded from 0 (least support) to 1 (most support); <sup>a</sup> omitted category of comparison; \* statistically significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source: 2010 Northern Ireland Election Survey.