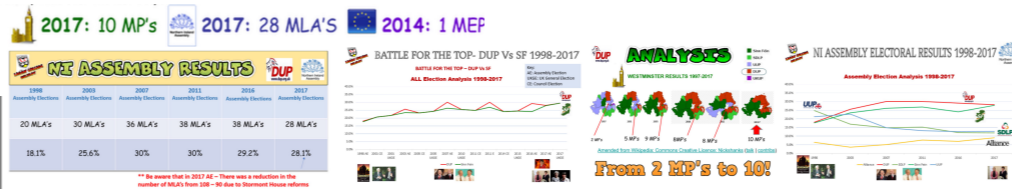




LEADER: Arlene Foster
Preceeded by Peter Robinson, Ian Paisley



The DUP is currently the largest political party in Northern Ireland and the largest Unionist party. Together with Sinn Fein it has dominated Northern Ireland politics for over 15 years. It has also successfully transformed itself from a sideshow party of protest to a dominant political party who currently influence the levers of power on a UK basis through their confidence and supply agreement.

This success is due to a number of factors but the party is not without limitations and challenges. Sinn Fein have come very close to overtaking the DUP as the largest party in 2017. The party has also been wracked by the RHI scandal which has saw its previous image as a party of competency seriously questioned. It also highlighted deep internal rifts within the party that illustrated rare chinks in its armour. The party has been challenged by its conservative stance on abortion and equal marriage in a Northern Ireland which is changing rapidly. It has also been heavily blamed for the current political impasse at Stormont which has seen the NI Assembly suspended for over two years. It is a party that has proved remarkably adaptable, despite its image of intransigence. This adaptability brings with it opportunities as well as dangers.

PARTY BACKGROUND
The DUP was founded at the start of the Troubles in 1971. It was founded by the Rev Ian Paisley and was set up to oppose what was seen as liberal unionism, exemplified by the official unionist party. The DUP was against any compromise on unionist and loyalist values and deeply opposed Irish republicans and the government of the Irish Republic. It saw any agreement or compromise as tantamount to surrender. As such it opposed the Sunningdale agreement, which it helped suspend. It also opposed the Anglo Irish agreement and the Good Friday Agreement.

It's strongly unionist values were matched by its conservative base. This was based on the fundamentalist Christian values which were highly traditional. It was always the minority party in unionism and always polled well below the dominant UUP. This was until the Good Friday Agreement when things rapidly changed.

GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT
The Good Friday Agreement ironically transformed the fortunes of the DUP. It was opposed to the agreement. It saw it as giving in to IRA violence and offering power to the Republic of Ireland through north South links. It would not countenance working with Sinn Fein and detested that the UUP would go into government without decommissioning of IRA weapons. It despised the prisoner releases and the Patton police reforms. It saw the agreement as a step towards a united Ireland. It also had numbers to work on as only 54% of protestants had supported the GFA with a large minority of critics from which the DUP could garner support. It aimed to stop it through a policy of Constructive opposition. Essentially, they refused to meet and work with Sinn Fein Ministers. They also refused to attend NSMC meetings - both essential parts of the agreement. They also piled on immense pressure on the UUP who were saddled with the job of negotiating and governing.

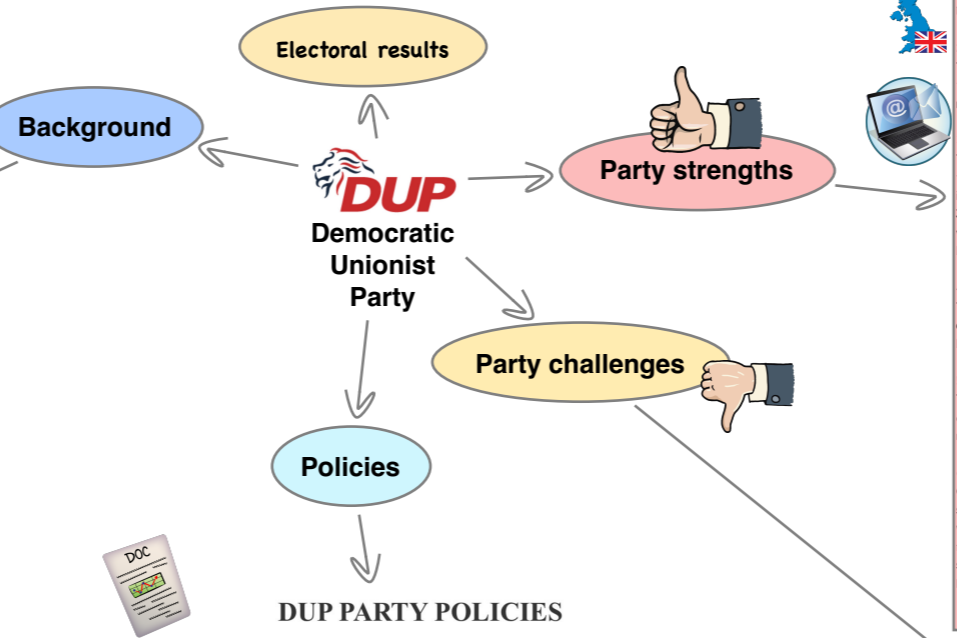
GFA dilemma
The irony of the DUP position became very clear when the Assembly collapsed in 2002. Despite their opposition to the institutions, the GFA had ironically helped make the DUP into the largest party in unionism. They had more influence than ever before and more MLAs. Their electorate also seemed to now favour devolution over direct rule with over 60% wanting a restoration of devolution by 2005. YET, the suspension of the Assembly risked all this and made them politically impotent unless they got a deal. However, that deal would have to be with Sinn Fein as they were now the largest nationalist party.. an impossible deal would have to be done!

That deal was the ST ANDREWS AGREEMENT.
This was remarkable political pragmatism by the DUP. It had to radically change its policies in order to restore devolution but without appearing to compromise to Sinn Fein.. which of course it had to do.

In the end it agreed to work with SF once the IRA had decommissioned, which they did in 2006. It agreed to accept a ne ministerial code. That committed it to attend NSMC meetings and to work with Sinn Fein. This helped produce a workable executive for the first time containing DUP and SF. This was exemplified by Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness A6 First and Deputy first minister.. a relationship which became known as the chuckle brothers because of their warm constructiveness.

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF GOVERNMENT
There is no way of saying that the decade of government following the Good Friday Agreement was plain sailing. The two parties did make some good progress:
- They collaborated on key projects like institutional child abuse inquiry; sporting events like Giro d Italia, economic conferences, legislation such as plastic bags, sun beds, taxi bills. They acted in unison in times of trouble. Martin mcguinness calling dissidents traitors to Ireland.
- They have did some PR exercises such as attending GAA matches and Irish language lessons
- They were good. At brinkmanship.. finding deals at the last minute such as hillsborough, stormont house and fresh start.

HOWEVER, the relationship was always fraught with difficulty. The DUP, while being adaptable, have maintained many of their core policies. This brings them into obvious conflict with Sinn Fein who are not only opposites on the border issue but also on ideology. The DUP are a centre right party while SF are centre left. (Some May argue about the 'centre' label for both!)
The DUP remain wedded to a very conservative ideology with obvious issues when it comes to abortion and equal marriage. They have also been deeply opposed to Irish language reforms and have had deep divisions when it comes to issues of marching, flags and identity. The definition of victims is also a huge issue. The past continues to haunt the present and future. The failure of the multi. Million pound Maze prison development is a good case of a policy crashing down over old division.
They also now disagree on Brexit too!



- DUP Key Party Policies**
- 1) PRO BREXIT**
Wholeheartedly in favour of leaving the EU ; Campaigned for this outcome from the start; Does not want a hard border but struggles with other alternatives.
 - 2) PRO UNION**
The DUP have always been devoted to the maintenance of the Union and have been opposed to any dilution of it.. This can mean any type of agreement or reform in the past.. It has only recently found itself more adept at deal making rather than breaking
 - 3) CULTURE**
The DUP have defended Protestant/ unionist culture including the right to march and the importance of the union flag. They have had enormous difficulty over respect for the Irish language and culture. Gregory Campbells 'Curry My Yoghurt' remarks caused much consternation. The DUP have bitterly opposed the notion of a stand along Irish language act which they see as unnecessary and a political tool of republicans. This issue is one of many that continue to divide. Arlene Foster has visited Irish lessons in local schools but has did little more than offer lip service to any progress. The DUP believes that Irish culture is the Trojan horse to undermined British / Unionist culture
 - 4) EQUAL MARRIAGE**
The DUP was founded on maintaining the Union at all costs and opposing republican violence. However, it is based on much evangelical Christian support - a great deal centred on Paisleys own Free Presbyterian church but encompassing others too. As part of this the party has always remained implacably opposed to same sex marriage and abortion
 - 5) LEGACY ISSUES**
The DUP is in support of victims of the Troubles receiving support for their suffering. However, they disagree on what a 'victim' is. They feel that this extends to victims of terrorism. They do not agree that those who may have been active in groups such as paramilitaries can be classed as victims.

- 1) ADAPTABILITY, POLITICAL PRAGMATISM**
One clear element of success was the ability of the party to adapt to circumstance. The DUP was famous for stubborn intransigence YET it has adapted successfully like a chameleon to suit circumstances. St. Andrews is a key example, where the party went against principles it had held for decades in order to make an acceptable political deal which would suit the party.. this was a gamble which laid off. It lost some members like Jim Allistair but actually won over moderate unionist support, who may have voted for the UUP previously. The sight of Paisley and mcguinness as leaders was a remarkable political turnaround. Even now the party springs surprises with the election of its first openly gay councillor... perhaps a slow transition to change?
- 2) ETHNIC OUTBIDDING**
The party is considered to be the strongest champion of unionist community. When the UUP were doing the tough negotiating, the DUP gave the appearances of being the part that would protect unionism the most.. this remains with strong stances on marches, bonfires, flags, Irish language etc
- 3) MODERNISATION**
The party underwent a radical transformation. It centralised the organisation of the party and has always maintained almost flawless discipline. Those who fall foul of the party are quickly ostracised as a warning to others.. eg Jonathan Bell. There was increased professionalism with media consultants employed to help get the message right. It also got policy advisors like Timothy Johnston from the UUP. They used powerful communications tools and social media to capture a new and dynamic group of voters and attract the young especially. Messages were always clear and consistent. This contrasted with the UUP who seemed to be giving out mixed messages.
- 4) STATE ENGAGEMENT**
The party also embarked on a much more media and politically impressive campaign to win over influential friends. It had developed close links with British and Irish politicians and this has led to peerages, state funding and much more importantly has brought it into its present position as holding the political balance of power and propping up the conservative government.
- 5) IDEOLOGICAL MODERATION**
The political pragmatism has moderated the parties older harsher image. It's politicians were regarded as safe pairs of hands in executive departments, in most cases. It's policies adapted like wise. Decisions to go into government with SF actually attracted new and more moderate voters, further undermining the UUP.
- 6) POLARISATION**
Clearly the parties success has a lot to do with political polarisation. The rise of Sinn Fein has encouraged unionist voters to switch to the DUP as a counter measure. It has little to do with policies and more to do with fear. The DUP can afford more wriggle room than other parties as they know that the alternative to them is the UUP or Alliance. They know that their vote remains within the unionist block. They have made a judgement that these are not threats to their ultimate power. However, they should recognise that voter disillusionment combined with switches to smaller parties could easily cost them their crown as the largest party in N Ireland.

- The DUP also faces several challenges which limit its success and even threaten its growth as a party.
- 1) RHI.** The failure of the renewable Heating Initiative scheme severely impacted the DUP. It led to the loss of government and the loss of the relationship with SF. Moreover, it led to the loss of reputation for competency for the party as a whole and for Arlene Foster in particular. The scandal forced deep animosities into the open with Jonathan Bell in particular opening up on what were clearly huge divisions within the party.
 - 2) CULTURE WARS**
The DUP has also found itself heavily criticised for its stance on gay marriage and other issues like immigration and abortion. It's stance on equal marriage has been heavily criticised in the UK and the Republic of Ireland and threatens to impact on younger voters. Northern Ireland is increasingly becoming a secular society and this juxtaposition threatens division in the party over issues which can be fundamental to two different opinions. The part has clearly championed Christian values and the right for free speech in the Ashes case but it is also tentatively going for change with the election of Allison Bennington as its first openly gay councillor.
 - 3) CROSS COMMUNITY ISSUES BREAKDOWN**
policies can be very different between unionist and nationalist leading to bitterness and division. The Irish language act has become a political football.. The DUP see it as a Trojan horse while SF regard this as remarkably disrespectful.
 - 4) LACK OF GOVERNMENT**
The failure of the latest assembly has led to deep anger from many DUP supporters who blame both for the failure,
 - 5) BREXIT.**
The party stance on Brexit has been controversial in that it supported Brexit. This is at odds with many of its members
 - 6) SF CHALLENGE**
Clearly the DUP have won elections over the fear factor. The fact is that SF are getting closer and closer to the prize.

BREXIT- the issue of Brexit has given the party untold recognition at local, national and international basis. What has been the effect?
- **POWER-** without doubt it has given the DUP power that it could never have dreamed of! Theresa may's disastrous decision to have an election left her dependent on the votes of the DUP at a time when Parliament was more fractured than ever before! The DUP are now much more recognised and have been able to steer national policy on Brexit in a way that they could never have done before.
- There are **CONSEQUENCES-** many in Britain were not even aware of the DUP. This increasing national awareness created pressure on them to moderate. A secular English audience would be far less accepting of some of their policies on abortion and equal marriage. The DUP policies and presentation have noticeably moderated as a result.
- Brexit creates **PROBLEMS!** They are pro Brexit but the implications could affect Northern Ireland in a negative way fir the DUP. The issue of the hard border placed the possibility of a border on the Irish Sea reducing Northern Ireland's ties to the UK. On top of this the NI business and agricultural sectors are deeply worried about Brexit and are against the DUP position. There are rumblings from within the DUP over the feasibility of Brexit for the union.

