

Political Attitudes, Partisanship and Social Structures in Northern Ireland

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Abstract: This paper applies multivariate analysis to 1978 survey data to examine the attitude structure of the Northern Ireland electorate and its effect on partisanship. Four political attitudes are extracted: two communal attitudes, strongly related to religious affiliation, and two non-communal attitudes, unrelated to religious affiliation. All four attitudes are found to be weakly embedded in the social structure. When used to predict partisan loyalties, the four political attitudes have a consistent, if limited, significance. In addition, analysis shows that individuals who support the Alliance Party are more likely to reject the dominant attitudes and loyalties of their co-religionists.

I INTRODUCTION

Successive studies of American voting behaviour have emphasised two concepts in explaining the decision on how to vote: party identification and issue salience. Party identification is taken to be an abiding attachment to one political party, which is maintained throughout life and is empirically and conceptually distinct from vote. The concept of party identification was originally formulated in the 1950s, achieving its apotheosis in the *American*

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Voter study where it was defined as "the individual's affective orientation to an important group object in his environment."¹ Issue salience, by contrast, occurs when electors lack any strong party identity, and their decision on how to vote therefore rests on the positions of the parties on issues of concern to them. The rise of such issue voting since the 1960s is held to have become a major element in American voting behaviour.²

These two concepts are taken to mark the opposite extremes of a continuum by which electors finally arrive at a decision on how to vote.³ The assumptions on which this rests are two-fold. First, the effectiveness of childhood political socialisation determines the strength of party identification. If affective loyalties to one party are created throughout the period of political socialisation, then a strong and stable party identification will be formed, leaving little room for issue voting. On the other hand, if the creation of affective loyalties is attenuated, then party identification will be weak or non-existent, thereby opening the way for issues to become salient and to influence voting. The second assumption concerns the relationship between the society's cleavage structure and party system. If the cleavage structure is firmly in alignment with the party system, there will be less opportunity for issue voting, since party platforms and policies will be closely related to the salient cleavage. However, if the cleavage structure is less firm or is undergoing change, then third parties or groups may select issues around which to mobilise support away from the dominant cleavage.

In this simple model, Northern Ireland should stand firmly at the party identification end of the continuum. Political socialisation, operating through the Province's pervasive religious segregation and the rigidity of the constitutional cleavage, should ensure that party and religious loyalties are coterminous and fixed from adolescence: as McCracken (1967, p. 150) concludes, "there is no floating vote on the constitutional question". In this context, the potential role of political issues will be negligible. Since religion determines partisanship, the individual's own political attitudes — in so far as they are coherently formed — should add little or nothing to our ability to predict party choice. Religion, and only religion, decides partisanship. The Northern Ireland parties themselves have made little effort to adopt positions on anything other than the perennial constitutional issue. The Nationalist Party, for example, did not feel the need to formulate any clear statement of policy until November 1964 (McAllister, 1977, p. 17). Similarly,

1. Campbell *et al.*, (1969, p. 121). For recent perspectives on the party identification model, see Budge *et al.*, (1976).

2. See, for example, Nie, Verba and Petrocik (1976) and Pomper (1972).

3. For a general discussion of this model, see Sartori (1976, pp. 328-330).

Rose (1971, pp. 224, 228) found that only a handful of respondents in his 1968 survey thought the Unionist and Nationalist parties stood for anything other than religion and constitutional positions.

This paper examines the role of political attitudes in Northern Ireland, and uses multivariate analysis to define the dominant attitudinal dimensions within the electorate and to relate them to party support. Specifically, a number of questions are raised. Are the major attitudinal dimensions all related to religion? What are the social bases of these attitudes? What utility do they have in determining party support? Within the party identification/issue salience model defined above, attitudes should be strongly tied to religion and have little additional influence in determining partisanship. However, since 1969 the party system has seen severe fragmentation within the Protestant majority, the emergence of the small but consistently supported bi-confessional Alliance Party, and a new political party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), to articulate the political demands of the Catholic minority. Given the depth and scope of these changes, it is possible that political attitudes may play a larger role than has hitherto been accorded them. Section II of this paper outlines the data and methodology employed in the analysis, while Section III extracts four political attitudes and examines their social structural basis within the electorate. Section IV analyses their importance in predicting party support and Section V discusses some implications of the study.

II DATA, MEASUREMENT AND METHOD

The data used in the analysis are based on the Northern Ireland Political Attitudes Survey, carried out in the summer of 1978 under the supervision of Dr E.P. Moxon-Browne of Queen's University, Belfast; I am indebted to Dr Moxon-Browne for giving me access to his data. A random sample of the Northern Ireland electorate was used, yielding 1,277 successful responses and representing an effective interview rate of 63.7 per cent. Of the total sample, 825 (or 65 per cent) identified themselves as Protestants of various denominations, while 402 (or 31 per cent) identified themselves as Roman Catholic. Only 50 respondents (or 4 per cent) labelled themselves as outside the two religious communities, by either claiming no religion or refusing to answer the question.

The variables figuring in the analysis, together with their scoring and means, are shown in Table 1. The construction of the four political attitude scales is described in the next section. Partisanship is measured by three dummy variables reflecting support for the three most electorally popular parties in 1978, when the survey was carried out: Official Unionist, Alliance,

and SDLP.⁴ Socioeconomic status is measured by the occupational status of the head of the household and by years of full-time education. Religion is measured by the actual affiliation of the respondent, and by frequency of church attendance. Regional influences are reflected in the degree of urbanisation, and by two dummy variables measuring residence in Belfast and west of the River Bann; the excluded category is residence east of the River Bann. These regions were chosen because they have been shown to have significance in electoral competition in Northern Ireland over an extended period (McAllister, 1983). Finally, age is scored in single years and sex is scored 1 for male, 0 for female.

The analysis relies on factor analysis and multiple regression. Factor analysis is used to isolate the main attitudinal dimensions within the electorate. Given the correlations among a large set of variables, factor analysis obtains mathematically optimal estimates of a simple measurement model in which the observed variables are taken as imperfect indicators of one (or more) of the underlying hypothetical traits. If the model is true, factor analysis provides mathematically optimal estimates of the underlying traits; if the model is only approximately true, in practice, factor analysis has been consistently shown to provide robust and appropriate estimates. Ordinary least squares regression is used to estimate the effect of social structure and political attitudes on party support. They assume that relations between the variables are, to a reasonable approximation, linear and additive. Missing data are treated by the "pair-wise" present procedure which is statistically preferable to the various alternatives (Hertel, 1976).

III POLITICAL ATTITUDES, ATTITUDE CONSTRAINT, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Within any political system there will be literally thousands of issues demanding an opinion and allowing for an infinite variety of patterns within each individual's own system of beliefs. There should, however, be some consistency, rather than pure randomness, in how issues cohere from person to person. The structuring of attitudes should be particularly marked in a highly polarised society such as Northern Ireland, and we might expect little overlap in political attitudes between the two religious communities. Thus, if a person's attitude to Irish unity is known, it ought to be possible to predict their attitude to the British monarchy or the Irish Republic with some degree of accuracy. The ability to predict one attitude if another is known is called

4. The exact question was: "Could you tell us which of these political parties in Northern Ireland you feel closest to?" Persons who supported the Vanguard Unionist Party were included with the Official Unionists, since Vanguard dissolved in 1977 and the bulk of its members rejoined the Official Unionist Party.

Table 1: *Variables, scoring, and means*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Scoring</i>	<i>Mean</i>
<i>Political attitudes</i>		
Pro-Ulster unionism	From 0 (lowest endorsement) to 1 (highest endorsement)	.76
Pro-Irish nationalism	From 0 (lowest endorsement) to 1 (highest endorsement)	.46
Unionist objections to Irish unity	From 0 (lowest endorsement) to 1 (highest endorsement)	.70
Pro-EEC	From 0 (lowest endorsement) to 1 (highest endorsement)	.36
<i>Partisanship</i>		
Official Unionist	1 = Official Unionist partisan; 0 = otherwise	.31
Alliance	1 = Alliance partisan; 0 = otherwise	.16
SDLP	1 = SDLP partisan; 0 = otherwise	.13
<i>Socioeconomic status</i>		
Occupational status	From a low of 0 to a high of 1	.45
Education	From a low of 0 (completed education at age 15 or less) to a high of 1 (completed education at age 21 or over)	.14
<i>Religion</i>		
Religious affiliation	1 = Protestant; 0 = Catholic	.65
Church attendance	From a low of 0 (never attends) to a high of 1 (attends once a week or more)	.50
<i>Region</i>		
Urbanisation	1 = urban; .5 = semi-urban; 0 = rural	.51
Belfast	1 = Belfast resident; 0 = otherwise	.21
West of River Bann	1 = West of River Bann; 0 = otherwise	.37
<i>Demography</i>		
Age	Years	43.26
Sex	1 = male; 0 = female	.45

Source: 1978 Northern Ireland Political Attitudes Survey (N = 1,277).

constraint so that, at one extreme, all attitudes would stand alone with none constraining another, while at the other extreme, a highly constrained system would be one where each attitude exactly predicts another.⁵

5. The standard work on political attitudes is that of Converse (1964), who found that congressional candidates had opinions on domestic and foreign affairs which were more highly constrained than the general public on the same issues.

The 1978 survey contained 56 items covering attitudes on constitutional solutions to the Northern Ireland problem, paramilitary organisations, the policies of the British and Irish governments, the police and judicial system, and a wide range of socioeconomic issues. Factor analysis was used to discover the underlying patterns of relationships within this array of variables. Because of its data-reduction capabilities, factor analysis has become a standard approach in attitude research (see, for example, Marcus *et al.*, 1974; Stimson, 1975). After a preliminary series of factor analyses, the 56 variables were reduced to 18 variables covering 4 broad areas, and the factor loadings for this final solution are presented in Table 2.

The result is a clear pattern of four main attitudes. The first two of these main attitudes reflect, as we might expect, the particular interpretations the two religious communities possess of the Northern Ireland problem and together they account for a substantial 43 per cent of the variance.⁶ The Ulster Unionist interpretation criticises the policies of the Irish government with regard to the IRA, reunification and extradition, criticises British government policy on the IRA and rejects the belief that Catholics have been subject to religious discrimination. The Irish Nationalist interpretation, by contrast, endorses peaceful reunification and the involvement of the Irish government in a solution, and denies the Protestant community's British identity. The juxtaposition of the factor loadings for these attitudes in Table 2 indicates the extent to which they polarise the belief structure of the society: persons who endorse Ulster Unionist beliefs do not, by and large, favour Irish Nationalist beliefs and vice versa, as is shown by the series of negative loadings alongside each factor.

The other two attitudes that emerge from the factor analysis are more unexpected. The first covers favourable attitudes to the European Economic Community (EEC) and the extent to which the organisation can alleviate the Province's social and economic problems. In the 1975 EEC referendum, Northern Ireland voted narrowly in favour of the United Kingdom's continued membership, with a turnout of 47.4 per cent, one of the lowest in the United Kingdom. Unionist objections to Irish unity, which cover economic, religious and political objections, form the final cohesive system of beliefs within the electorate. These four attitudes are therefore taken to represent the major dimensions of political attitudes to be found within the Northern Ireland electorate. Luttbeg (1968) has suggested that the number of factors produced in such an analysis indicates the degree of attitude constraint within a particular population, so that a single factor solution would point

6. The emergence of one particular factor as the predominant one does not mean it is necessarily the most important, only that there were many variables reflecting it included in the analysis. For parallel analyses of Protestant and Catholic political attitudes and their role in the Ulster conflict, see Kelley and McAllister (1982) and McAllister and Rose (1983).

Table 2: *Factor Loadings for political attitudes*

<i>Variables^b</i>	<i>Factor Loadings^a</i>			
	<i>Factor I</i>	<i>Factor II</i>	<i>Factor III</i>	<i>Factor IV</i>
<i>Ulster Unionism</i>				
1. The Irish government should stop talking about re-unification	.56	-.45	-.01	.18
2. The Irish government should curb IRA activity on the Border	.76	-.23	-.06	.13
3. The Irish government should not claim N. Ireland	.65	-.49	.01	.18
4. The Irish government should be tough with the IRA	.87	-.10	-.07	-.01
5. The Irish government should agree to extradition	.82	-.16	-.04	.02
6. The British government should be tough with the IRA	.82	-.12	-.07	-.02
7. Not as much discrimination against Catholics as claimed	.65	-.33	-.02	.05
<i>Irish Nationalism</i>				
8. A united Ireland is worthwhile if achieved peacefully	-.36	.65	.16	-.07
9. Never be peace in Ireland until partition ended	-.17	.69	.01	.07
10. The Irish government must be involved in a solution	-.31	.64	.10	-.07
11. Protestants say they are British, but they know they are not	-.12	.62	.14	.03
<i>Favours EEC</i>				
12. The EEC has done more harm than good to N. Ireland	.15	-.02	-.79	.06
13. N. Ireland's economic problems are easier to solve within the EEC	.00	.08	.87	.03
14. N. Ireland's political problems are easier to solve within the EEC	-.01	.17	.70	.05
<i>Unionist Objections to Irish Unity</i>				
15. Unionists object to Irish unity because they would be a minority	.05	.30	-.05	.57
16. Unionists object to Irish unity because they fear their standard of living would go down	.06	-.09	-.01	.71
17. Unionists object to Irish unity because they would lose their British identity	.06	-.19	-.05	.73
18. Unionists object to Irish unity because they fear the Roman Catholic Church	.12	.02	.12	.66

Notes: ^aVarimax rotated factor loadings from a principal components factor analysis with unities in the main diagonal. The eigenvalues of the first four factors (with variance explained in parentheses) are: 5.74 (31.9%); 2.00 (11.1%); 1.74 (9.7%); 1.19 (6.6%), respectively. No other factor had an eigenvalue greater than one.

^bSome questions have been abbreviated.

Sources: Northern Ireland Political Attitude Survey, conducted by Dr E.P. Moxon-Browne, 1979, N = 1,277.

to high constraint and a multifactor solution to low constraint. The results presented in Table 2 indicate medium constraint, and while some of the attitudinal questions do cohere together in single attitudes, overall they produce four separate attitudes. Indeed, if more issues had been incorporated in the survey, we might expect more attitudes to have emerged from the analysis.⁷

What conclusions can we arrive at from these results as to the attitude constraint within the Northern Ireland electorate? Table 3 presents the inter-item correlations between the four attitudes separately for Protestants and Catholics, together with their respective means and standard deviations. The results show, once again, the divergence between the two competing interpretations, Unionist and Nationalist: Protestants who endorse the Unionist version are unlikely to endorse the Nationalist version, and vice versa for Catholics. However, the means for these variables indicate that at least *some* respondents are prepared to support a political attitude contrary to the disposition of their own religious community. For example, the mean Protestant scores .34 on the 0 to 1 Irish Nationalism scale, compared to .68 for the mean Catholic; conversely, the mean Catholic scores .51 on the 0 to 1 Ulster Unionism scale, while the mean Protestant scores .88. Evidently, then, the two competing interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and a few respondents can find some aspects of the opposing community's interpretation palatable.

Among both religions, persons who find the EEC favourable are more

Table 3: *Attitude constraint, Protestants and Catholics separately^a*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Mean	Std dev.
1. Ulster Unionism		-.36	-.01	-.04	.51	.23
2. Irish Nationalism	-.39		.21	.14	.68	.19
3. Favours EEC	-.19	.25		.04	.40	.26
4. Unionist objections to Irish unity	.23	-.03	.04		.66	.21
Mean	.88	.34	.35	.72		
Std dev.	.13	.22	.24	.20		

Notes: ^aPearson's product-moment correlations.

Protestants in bottom triangle, Catholics in top triangle.

Source: as for Table 1.

7. It is self-evident that the attitudes which emerge from the factor analysis depend on the scope and number of issue-type questions that are included in the analysis. We are necessarily limited here by the fact that this is a secondary analysis of the data.

likely to support Irish nationalism (a correlation of .25 for Protestants, .21 for Catholics), while Protestants endorsing Ulster Unionist values are more likely to oppose it. The means for both communities, on the EEC, are comparable. Similarly, Unionist objections to Irish unity find inter-communal support, the mean Protestant scoring .72 on a 0 to 1 scale, compared to .66 for the mean Catholic. Unlike attitudes to the EEC, however, Unionist objections are positively associated with *both* communities' political interpretations, producing correlations of .23 and .14 with Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, respectively. So what emerges are two *communal* attitudes – Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism – which reflect the dominant political interpretation placed on the Ulster problem by each religious community, and two *inter-communal* attitudes – the EEC and Unionist objections to Irish unity – which gain bi-confessional endorsement.

The four attitudes were operationalised into 0 to 1 scales using the factor score coefficients from the factor analysis, and a multiple regression analysis performed to determine their social structural bases (Table 4). If the attitudes are embedded within the social structure, then we would expect them to be relatively stable and a change would be precipitated only by some alteration in the social structure of the electorate. Conversely, if the attitudes are less fixed they should be less stable and more susceptible to change from a wide variety of sources.

The analysis was carried out combining all the respondents, in order to determine the importance of religious affiliation, and for the two communities separately. In each case, the results are reported differently. First, where all the respondents are combined, sheaf standardised regression coefficients (betas) are shown. These are standardised coefficients which are a summary measure of the importance of the variables within a particular category; because they are standardised, they show the relative importance of variables *within* each group and cannot be used to make comparisons *between* groups.⁸ Secondly, the results for each religious group show unstandardised regression coefficients (bs); since these are unstandardised, they may be used to assess differences between the various religious groups. The interpretation of these figures may be illustrated by examining the effect of region on Ulster Unionist attitudes (Table 4, Columns 1, 2 and 3). The combined analysis (Column 1) shows that region is about twice as important

8. The sheaf coefficient is calculated by multiplying each variable to be included by its unstandardised regression coefficient and summing all the variables. Thus, the sheaf coefficient for socioeconomic status predicting Ulster Unionism in Table 4 is:

$$\text{Socioeconomic status} = (\text{occup. status } b * \text{occup. status}) + (\text{education } b * \text{education})$$

where * denotes multiplication. Since unstandardised sheaf coefficients have no natural metric, only standardised coefficients (betas) are presented here. See Heise (1972).

Table 4: Political attitudes and social structure^a

<i>Social Structure</i> (all coded 0 to 1 unless otherwise stated)	<i>Ulster Unionism</i>			<i>Irish Nationalism</i>			<i>Unionist objections to Irish Unity</i>			<i>Favours EEC</i>		
	<i>All sheaf beta</i> (1)	<i>Prot. b</i> (2)	<i>Cath. b</i> (3)	<i>All sheaf beta</i> (4)	<i>Prot. b</i> (5)	<i>Cath. b</i> (6)	<i>All sheaf beta</i> (7)	<i>Prot. b</i> (8)	<i>Cath. b</i> (9)	<i>All sheaf beta</i> (10)	<i>Prot. b</i> (11)	<i>Cath. b</i> (12)
<i>Socioeconomic status</i>	(.07)			(.06)			(.03)			(.18)		
Occupational status		-1	17**		6*	-8		4	-4		14**	14*
Education		-6**	1		6*	5		1	3		4	15*
<i>Religion</i>	(.57)			(.51)			(.10)			(.09)		
Religious affiliation		-na-	-na-		-na-	-na-		-na-	-na-		-na-	-na-
Church attendance		2	-15*		-7*	7		-4*	-10*		-7*	5
<i>Region</i>	(.14)			(.02)			(.10)			(.06)		
Urban		-3*	8*		3	-11**		1	3		0	-12*
Belfast		2	-14**		0	11*		4	-1		1	4
West of R. Bann		-1	-13**		-1	-1		-2	0		0	-2
<i>Demography</i>	(.10)			(.02)			(.09)			(.11)		
Age (years)		0.1**	0		0	0.1*		0.1**	-0.1*		-0.2**	0.1*
Sex		1	-5*		-3*	4*		1	1		4*	6*
Per cent variance explained (R^2)		6	13		4	5		4	2		6	10
Constant		85	60		36	62		64	75		36	24

Notes: ^aClassical multiple regression analysis showing sheaf standardised regression coefficients (betas) and unstandardised regression coefficients (bs) predicting endorsement of political attitudes. The dependent variables are scored on a metric from 0 to 1. For details of variables see Table 1.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .10$.

Source: as for Table 1.

as the respondent's socioeconomic status or demography in predicting Ulster Unionist attitudes (.14 as against .07 and .10), and considerably less important than religion (.57). Comparing the importance of regional factors for the two religious groups (Columns 2 and 3), we find, for example, that Catholics vary substantially in how region affects their views of Ulster Unionism, whereas Protestants are relatively unaffected. For example, a Belfast Catholic is 14 per cent less likely to endorse Ulster Unionism than his co-religionists living to the east of the River Bann, other things being equal. However, a Belfast Protestant is only some 2 per cent more likely to endorse Ulster Unionism, again net of other things.

Overall, the results in Table 4 for the combined sample (Columns 1 and 4) emphasise, not surprisingly, the importance of religion in predicting the two communal attitudes. Religion produces a sheaf beta of .57 against Ulster Unionism and .51 against Irish Nationalism, easily the largest coefficients in the analysis. By contrast, religion is relatively unimportant in determining inter-communal political attitudes (Columns 7 and 10) and is of equal weight with region in determining Unionist objections to Irish unity, producing betas of .10 and .09, respectively. The same analysis performed separately for Protestants and Catholics (Columns 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11 and 12 in Table 4) reveals the social processes at work within the two communities. The first point to note in this separate analysis in Table 4 is the relatively small percentage of variance explained – ranging from 2 per cent in predicting Unionist objections to Irish unity among Catholics, to 13 per cent in predicting Ulster Unionist attitudes among Protestants. However, the relatively low predictions of attitudes from the demographic characteristics of a population is common in similar research in Britain and the United States (Schaefer, 1974; Studlar, 1979; Studlar and Welch, 1981). The detailed results show that Protestants who favour Ulster Unionism are less likely to live in urban areas, net of other things (3 per cent less likely) as are Catholics who support Irish Nationalism (11 per cent less likely), which suggests that stronger endorsement of the traditional communal attitudes is to be found in the countryside, and not in the cities, as Daniel (1976, p. 455) argues. An important pattern emerges when we compare persons of one community who voice support for the communal attitude of the other (Columns 3 and 5). These "political deviants" share the common attributes of higher social status, and lower frequency of church attendance, and are likely to be female and resident in urban areas.

Among the two non-communal attitudes, Unionist objections to Irish unity has little social structural attachment, save for the fact that older Protestants are more likely to endorse it. This relationship between age and strength of support for Protestant beliefs is also apparent among Protestants who support Ulster Unionism, and probably stems from their socialisation

during periods of relatively high political and religious tension. Persons of both religions who favour the EEC are more likely to be of higher occupational status (14 per cent each for Protestants and Catholics) and more probably male. These findings can be interpreted in the context of the European Community's limited economic impact on the Province, and for that reason knowledge and support of its operations are likely to be confined to those who come into contact with its activity, such as business people, civil servants, and, because political interest is partly a function of gender, men. Finally, rural Catholics are more likely to support the EEC, probably because of its greater efforts at job creation in rural areas where there is long term structural unemployment among Catholics (Murie, 1974; Osborne, 1978).

With the exception of the influence of religious affiliation on communal attitudes the four political attitudes display a weak relationship with social structure. It is possible to infer from this that the two non-communal attitudes will have less permanency within the belief systems of the population: political change could easily precipitate their demise and replacement by new, more electorally salient, political issues. One final point is worthy of note in this section. It is frequently argued that the cycle of violence in Ulster has become almost self-perpetuating because of the political socialisation of the young to political extremism. Such an interpretation is not confirmed by the findings presented here. Indeed, so far as age is important in shaping political attitudes, the young are significantly *less* likely to endorse political attitudes bound up with the conflict, and significantly *more* likely to support non-sectarian attitudes, for example, on the European Community.

IV PARTY SUPPORT AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

For a political attitude to make an alteration to levels of party support, over and above the basic demographic characteristics of the electorate, three conditions must be met. First, the electorate must take a position either for or against the particular issue involved. Secondly, there should be a skewed distribution of opinion either for or against the issue, otherwise the parties would see little potential benefit in mobilising support around it. Finally, the voters should perceive the parties as having differing policy positions on the issue (Butler and Stokes, 1977, pp. 290-292; Stokes, 1966). Not all political issues meet this exacting criterion; some reach salience within the electorate but fail, for tactical or other reasons, to be taken up by the parties; others fail to exhibit a skewed distribution of opinion and divide supporters and opponents into numerically equal groups. According to the party identification/issue salience model originally posed, political attitudes should have little additional significance in predicting party support in Northern

Ireland, since the socialising processes of the political system ensure the continuance of partisan loyalties from generation to generation.

Of the four political attitudes analysed here, the major Northern Ireland parties have clear and unambiguous positions on the two communal attitudes. Party attitudes to the two non-communal attitudes are less clear. On the EEC, the Official Unionist Party is divided but leans towards opposition, largely because one of its MPs, Enoch Powell, is an outspoken opponent, and the party's major rival for the Protestant vote, the Democratic Unionist Party, emphatically opposes it. The Alliance Party, by contrast, is a vigorous advocate of the EEC: for example, in a 1976 survey of its activists, 88 per cent were in favour of continued membership of the organisation, while only 6 per cent were against (McAllister and Wilson, 1978, p. 216). The SDLP has also been in favour, and has gone as far as to suggest that the EEC could provide the overall framework for the implementation of eventual Irish unity (McAllister, 1977, p. 58). The fourth attitude, Unionist objections to Irish unity, has not been an issue on which the parties have formally taken positions, and within the electorate as a whole, there has been only modest discussion of what are conceived of as the basic Protestant objections. Only the SDLP has taken tentative steps along this path, and its leadership have periodically advocated various constitutional devices, such as condominium, to preserve the Protestant community's British identity within any proposed solution.

The regression results predicting party support from social structure and political attitudes are given in Table 5; due to the small numbers, the results reporting Catholic and Protestant support for the Official Unionists and SDLP, respectively, have been excluded. As in Table 4, sheaf standardised regression coefficients (betas) are reported for the combined sample (Columns 1, 3 and 6) and unstandardised regression coefficients for the separate religious groups (Columns 2, 4, 5 and 7). Examining the two confessionally based parties first, it is evident that political attitudes do play a role in predicting partisanship, over and above demographic factors. Supporters of the Official Unionists are some 24 per cent more likely to endorse Ulster Unionism, other things being equal, and 23 per cent less likely to support Irish Nationalism (Column 2). There is an inverse relationship among SDLP supporters, which fails to reach statistical significance, but they are some 22 per cent more likely to endorse Unionist objections to Irish unity (Column 7). Attitudes towards the EEC are of no significant concern to either side. This suggests, then, that Unionist partisans have a more clearly defined belief about where they stand on the two competing communal attitudes than SDLP supporters, net of that which is explained by the basic Protestant-Catholic cleavage. On the other hand, SDLP partisans have obviously benefited from their leadership's attempts to articulate Protestant objections to

Table 5: *Party support, social structure, and political attitudes*^a

<i>Variables (all coded 0 to 1 unless otherwise stated)</i>	<i>Official Unionist</i>		<i>Alliance</i>			<i>SDLP</i>	
	<i>All sheaf</i>	<i>Prot. b</i>	<i>All sheaf</i>	<i>Prot. b</i>	<i>Cath. b</i>	<i>All sheaf</i>	<i>Cath. b</i>
	<i>beta</i>		<i>beta</i>			<i>beta</i>	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<i>Socioeconomic status</i>	(.07)		(.22)			(.05)	
Class		2		19**	14		12
Education		-22**		21**	10		-13
<i>Religion</i>	(.35)		(.14)			(.27)	
Protestant		-na-		-na-	-na-		-na-
Church attendance		17**		-11**	-6		-21
<i>Region</i>	(.08)		(.17)			(.13)	
Urban		-4		6*	33**		-14
Belfast		0		4	-7		4
West of R. Bann		13*		-2	2		13*
<i>Demography</i>	(.12)		(.03)			(.02)	
Age (years)		0.4**		0	0.3*		0
Sex		9*		-4*	-1		0
<i>Political Attitudes</i>	(.23)		(.17)			(.28)	
Ulster Unionism		24*		-28**	41**		-17
Irish Nationalism		-23*		18**	9		9
Unionist objections to							
Irish unity		8		3	5		22*
Favours EEC		4		10*	18*		2
Per cent variance explained (R^2)		10		18	17		8
Constant		9		13	-43		3

Notes: ^aMultiple regression analysis showing sheaf standardised regression coefficients (betas) and unstandardised regression coefficients (bs) predicting party support. The dependent variables are scored 1 for party support, 0 otherwise. For details of independent variables see Table 1. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$.

Source: as for Table 1.

constitutional change and they, therefore, possess a greater awareness of the problem.

The Alliance Party poses an interesting example and as the only party with a bi-confessional base, it is possible directly to compare the attitudes of its Protestant and Catholic adherents. The results show an important pattern. Protestant partisans of Alliance are 28 per cent more likely to *reject* the dominant attitude of their co-religionists, and some 18 per cent more likely to support the opposing attitude (Column 4), other things being equal.

Its Catholic partisans show a similar pattern by favouring Ulster Unionism, other things being equal, but have no significant position on Irish Nationalism. This illustrates the extent to which Alliance supporters have modified the dominant political attitude structures of their respective religious communities in order to promote the non-sectarian aims of their party. That Protestant partisans should not only reject their own communal beliefs, but actively embrace those of the opposing community, demonstrates the extent of their political commitment to conciliation. Alliance attitudes towards the EEC also indicate a different pattern from the two confessional parties and both Protestants and Catholics are significantly more likely to support it.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed the attitudinal structure of the Northern Ireland electorate and extracted four political attitudes by factor analysis. Two communal attitudes emerged, Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, which were, not surprisingly, associated with religious affiliation, as well as two non-communal attitudes, Unionist objections to Irish Unity and the EEC, which were unrelated to the predominant religious cleavage. In addition, the EEC is essentially economic in nature and entirely separate from the prevailing constitutional cleavage. These attitudes were found to be weakly embedded in the social structure, but they did play a role, albeit not a consistent one, in structuring partisanship. This confirms Miller's (1977, p. 35) finding that "the weak link in the causal chain from social groups to party vote via attitudes [is] the relatively low dependence of attitudes on social groups". From the perspective of the party identification/issue salience model, it is possible to conclude from these results that Northern Ireland lies closer to the party identification end of the continuum, but that this explanation is not a complete one: political attitudes apparently *do* have an independent effect in moulding the decisions that electors make.

The most interesting results concerned individuals who were acting in political discontinuity with their respective communities — that is, persons who supported a political attitude or party at odds with the dominant beliefs and attachments of their co-religionists. These "political deviants" were found to be from similar social groups, but to espouse the dominant political attitude of the other religious community. This deviant behaviour can at least partly be explained by the fact that they come from social groups which would be expected to have more contacts with persons of the opposite religion. There is substantial evidence that the highest levels of residential and social segregation between the two communities occurs within the working class, and that levels of segregation drop dramatically with higher

socioeconomic status (Boal, 1971; Jones, 1960). In addition, the opportunities for social interaction are improved in urban areas, compared to the countryside where there is often rigid segregation (Harris, 1971; Boal, 1976). This explanation is consonant with the results presented above (Table 4, Columns 3 and 5).

Overall, we might conclude that while religion is the major characteristic structuring partisanship, it is entirely possible for voters to shift allegiances between the parties representing their respective community. For example, a Protestant voter, faced with two parties (the Official Unionists and the Democratic Unionists), both equally assiduous in their defence of the British link, could deliver his support to the party that best matched his opinion on the EEC. In addition, it was shown that regional influences exerted a pervasive influence not only on the distribution of political attitudes, but on party support as well. This suggests that account should be taken not only of a person's religion, but also of the urbanisation of the area and the particular region they live in. So while it is undoubtedly true that there is no floating vote on the constitutional question, once that has been decided, there may well be a floating vote *within* each religious community.

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APPENDIX

Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations^a

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Social class		.25	.09	-.12	-.01	-.08	-.04	.14	.16	-.03	-.04	.23	.03	.13	.08	.40	.23
2. Education	.32		.04	-.03	-.06	.06	-.02	-.01	.09	-.05	.04	.10	-.02	.08	-.02	.12	.36
3. Religiosity	-.07	.02		.07	.11	-.10	-.06	.20	.14	-.03	.06	.03	.10	.12	-.11	.41	.14
4. Urban	-.06	.03	.08		.69	-.45	-.03	-.08	.10	-.06	.06	-.14	.12	.24	-.17	.38	.37
5. Belfast	-.05	.00	.01	.63		-.50	-.01	-.04	.03	.07	.03	.04	.07	.14	-.12	.14	.35
6. West of R. Bann	.01	.04	-.04	-.56	-.35		-.00	.08	-.25	-.02	-.01	.00	-.09	-.14	.18	.61	.49
7. Age	-.04	-.07	-.17	.07	.12	-.05		.02	.05	.07	-.06	.07	.06	.11	.05	39.76	16.54
8. Sex	.05	-.01	.17	-.03	-.09	.02	.01		-.10	.10	.02	.15	.01	-.02	.03	.46	.50
9. Ulster Unionism	-.06	-.07	-.09	-.03	.04	.00	.17	.02		-.36	-.03	-.00	.14	.26	-.14	.51	.23
10. Irish Nationalism	.07	.07	.14	.10	.04	-.07	-.07	-.04	-.40		.14	.21	-.19	-.03	.09	.68	.19
11. Unionist objections to Irish unity	.02	.02	.01	.10	.11	-.09	.13	.02	.22	-.03		.04	.02	.04	.08	.66	.21
12. Pro EEC	.16	.11	.14	.00	.00	-.01	-.14	.11	-.20	.24	.02		-.06	.12	.04	.40	.26
13. Official Unionist Party	-.04	-.14	-.11	-.10	-.03	.13	.20	.07	.16	-.17	.05	-.06		-.04	-.06	.01	.07
14. Alliance Party	.22	.21	.10	.15	.11	-.11	-.04	-.03	-.21	.23	.01	.18	-.36		-.43	.21	.41
15. SDLP	-.02	-.09	.07	-.03	-.03	-.04	-.05	.03	-.21	.12	-.07	-.01	-.06	-.02		.41	.49
Mean	.47	.15	.53	.56	.24	.28	45.29	.45	.88	.34	.72	.35	.47	.12	.00		
Std. dev.	.25	.32	.22	.39	.42	.45	17.39	.50	.13	.22	.20	.24	.50	.33	.06		

Notes: ^aTop triangle Catholics only; bottom triangle, Protestants only.

Source: as for Table 1.