

<b>Institution:</b> University of Liverpool		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 19 Politics and International Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Shaping political change in Northern Ireland; influencing key decisions of the governing devolved Executive, the British and Irish governments, Political Parties and Parliament; and informing the Public.		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Jon Tonge Peter Shirlow	Professor Professor	2005- current 2015 – current
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Impacts are on decisions taken by Northern Ireland's governing Executive, the Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and Northern Ireland's political parties; and upon the knowledge bases of the Labour Party and the public. These impacts have been achieved via provision of expertise on the reintegration and employment of former paramilitaries, use of our four ESRC Northern Ireland General Election studies and our work with political parties on membership surveys. Impacts include a) changes by the Northern Ireland Executive on employer recruitment of individuals with conflict-related convictions; b) anti-sectarian dialogue with Unionists by Sinn Féin; c) rejection by the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) of merger with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP); d) restructuring by Unionist parties to improve gender balance e) adoption of proposals to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly by the British and Irish governments f) training on the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) for Labour Party members and g) media acknowledgement of our assistance in informing the public on key political issues.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The underpinning research is as follows:</p> <p><b>On reintegrating former prisoners</b>, via various research projects (including a Leverhulme Trust study on Abandoning the Past (Principal Investigator (PI) Shirlow; Co Investigator (CI) Tonge)) involving interviews with 150+ republican and loyalist former prisoners, yielding a book and journal articles (example article at 3.1). Our research showed that the Northern Ireland Executive had not met commitments to prisoner reintegration in terms of removing legal barriers to employment, as required in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), rendering ex-prisoners subject to high levels of unemployment. Those holding convict-related convictions could be legally vetted and restricted from access to financial services, travel, adoption rights and employment.</p> <p>Measurement of public opinion via a) Tonge's PI and Shirlow's CI roles on the 2010, 2015, 2017 &amp; 2019 ESRC <b>Northern Ireland General Election surveys</b> (3.2) involved the design and conduct of large surveys of the Northern Ireland electorate's party choices and political attitudes. Data from each are lodged at the UK Data Service and findings published in articles (e.g. <i>Party Politics</i> (3.5) showing how generational effects outweigh party ones on attitudes to same-sex marriage and abortion). Our findings, presented to the Northern Ireland Office and Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, demonstrated how extensively the public desired devolution's restoration, even though its institutions have been unstable. We showed: a) support for the devolved Executive and Assembly created by the GFA remained extensive (above 75% among unionists and nationalists) even when those institutions were suspended between 2017-19; b) widespread (88%) opposition to direct rule from Westminster; c) extensive cross-community support (70%+) for key power-sharing principles, notably that the Executive must contain unionists and nationalists and that legislation should require support from elected representatives from both main traditions; d) Cultural issues are the biggest sources of division, e.g. 92% of unionists opposed an Irish Language Act whereas 93% of nationalists wanted one; e) Majority nationalist and unionist backing for social liberalization re same-sex marriage and abortion laws; e) Continuing inter-communal division over Brexit, with 65% of unionists favouring EU departure and 85% of nationalists opposed, although Brexit had not thus far greatly reshaped constitutional preferences.</p>		

Research on **political parties** was undertaken via e.g. Tonge's PI role on a Leverhulme Trust membership study of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) (2012-14) and a similar study of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) (2016-18). Both studies were published as Oxford University Press books. (3.3 and 3.4). This research undertook the first-ever quantitative surveys of the DUP and UUP memberships, accompanied by almost 200 interviews with grassroots members, elected representatives and the leaderships of each party, along with focus groups. Findings included: a) Strong opposition to merger with the DUP among UUP members, despite 3 sets of unity talks between the parties 2010-17; b) In addition to the near absence of Catholics (less than 1% of the membership of either party) women are under-represented, with both parties more than 70% male; c) Our membership studies showed most unionist party *members* opposed legalizing same-sex marriage or abortion (3.3, 3.4). Our election studies demonstrated, however, that more unionist *voters* favoured legalization than opposed (3.2, 3.5) with age a more important variable than ideology.

### 3. References to the research

3.1 Shirlow, P. 'Truth Friction in Northern Ireland: Caught between Apologia and Humiliation', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2018, 71.2, 417-37. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsx029> [Available from the university on request].

3.2 Set of 4 ESRC Northern Ireland General Election surveys: 2010, 2015, 2017, 2019, PI: Tonge, CI: Shirlow, for each, with datasets deposited at the UK Data Service:

<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8619> (2019) ES/T015527/1.

<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/doi/?id=8234> (2017) ES/R005060/1.

<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/doi/?id=7523#!#1> (2015), ES/L007320/1.

<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/doi/?id=6553#!#1> (2010) ES/HO370012/1.

3.3 J. Tonge, M. Braniff, T. Hennessey, J. McAuley and S. Whiting: *The Democratic Unionist Party: From Protest to Power*, Oxford University Press, 2014, Political Studies Association of Ireland Brian Farrell Book of the Year award, 978-0198705772, via Leverhulme Trust grant: 'A Membership Survey of the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland', RPG-2012-433, 2012-14: [REF 2]

3.4 T. Hennessey, M. Braniff, J. McAuley, J. Tonge and S. Whiting: *The Ulster Unionist Party: Country Before Party?* Oxford University Press. 2019, 978-0198794387. [REF 2]

3.5 J. Evans and J. Tonge, 'Partisan and religious drivers of moral conservatism: same-sex marriage and abortion in Northern Ireland', *Party Politics*, 2018, 24.4, 335-46. [REF 2]

3.6 Tonge, J. (2017) ;The Impact and Consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland', Report commissioned by the European Parliament Constitutional Affairs Committee, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL\\_BRI\(2017\)583116](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_BRI(2017)583116)

### 4. Details of the impact

Impacts have been achieved via 1) changing the rules of the Northern Ireland Executive on the **employment of ex-paramilitary prisoners** 2) data provision to the British and Irish governments, select committees and parties on **restoring devolved power-sharing**; 3) influencing **decisions taken by political parties** via data from our party membership and election surveys and 4) impact via parliamentary bodies, the Labour Party and media on **knowledge, scrutiny and debate**.

#### **1: On the employment of individuals holding conflict-related convictions**

Research on former paramilitary prisoners led to Shirlow's appointment by the Northern Ireland Executive as Chair of the Review Panel ([www.reviewpanel.org](http://www.reviewpanel.org)) evaluating structural and legal barriers to employment for persons with conflict-related convictions.

Shirlow's recommendations to amend the 1998 Fair Employment Treatment Order (FETO) Section 2 (4) ensured any conviction for a pre-Good Friday Agreement conflict-related offence would no longer be considered unless directly relevant to the employment sought. His proposals were endorsed in *The Fresh Start Panel report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland*, (5.1a; see paras. 4.25, 26, 27 and section B2 of the report) chaired by Lord Alderdice and then supported by the Northern Ireland Executive, which agreed to "urgently adopt recommendations by the Review Panel" that a) the FETO be amended b) that this guidance be implemented for public sector recruitment and vetting and c) there should be greater transparency over all these issues (5.1b; section B1 of the report).

The impact of Shirlow's research was that the Executive directed the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to amend the FETO, which had until this point permitted the vetting of individuals and their families who had approved or accepted the use of violence for political ends. This means such persons will have the same employment protection as other citizens. The Executive reiterated its commitment to FETO legislative change in 2021, having implemented the Guidance Principles in 2018 following Shirlow's proposals and amended NICS recruitment policy.

As the Deputy First Minister stated, *'Professor Shirlow produced a report that had a significant impact upon conflict transformation initiatives and policy-making within the Executive. Notably it was adopted within the Fresh Start Panel report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups... These recommendations were adopted in the Executive Action Plan in July 2016 and provide the basis for legislative change'* (5.2a). The Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), Sir Malcolm McKibbin, (5.2b) confirmed: *"Professor Shirlow has...effected change in terms of revisions to the Northern Ireland Civil Service recruitment policy and proposed legislative change to the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998...These developments are highly significant as they will reduce barriers to employment and enhance reintegration of people with conflict-related convictions...important impacts that continue to develop societal relations..."*

The Finance Minister (5.2c) directed the NICS to adopt the Guidance Principles, acknowledging the *"helpful input that Professor Shirlow has had both to the implementation of the guidance into Civil Service Policy and Procedures and to assisting the process of conflict transformation by enabling those with conflict related convictions to gain access to employment opportunities"*.

## **2: On the restoration of devolved power-sharing**

The election data findings informed recommendations to the British and Irish governments and the Northern Ireland Select Committee that a) restoration of the devolved Assembly and Executive continued to command public support b) direct rule from Westminster had negligible support c) devolution was restorable with modest institutional rule changes d) parties opposing same-sex marriage and abortion did not represent most of their voters, so Westminster could legalize pre-devolution's return but e) Irish Language provision needed compromise given unionist opposition.

Shirlow was invited by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and the Northern Ireland Office to present research to help solve tensions over identity and social rights, advancing a framework based upon cultural value that was accepted as part of future government policy in Northern Ireland. The British-Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat (5.3) declared the research *"fed into the preparation of new proposals...to restore the NI Executive and Assembly" ...The impact...was to re-frame the promotion of cultural value into present reconciliatory policies as a means of reducing antagonistic cultural expressions. A further impact of this work was the capacity it provided for a better understanding that parity of esteem and mutual respect does not simply require a rights or horizontal fix but requires building better governance."* The paper *"aided our understanding that many of the social issues that are read as dividing the two main communities are in fact better understood as issues divided along inter-generational lines"* (5.3).

Our data showed how the public had NOT lost faith in devolution despite regular Executive and Assembly crises. Tonge's oral and written evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) was cited extensively (20 times) in its 2018 *Devolution and Democracy in Northern Ireland: Dealing with the Deficit* report (5.4). The Committee noted our data showing continuing cross-community support for devolved power-sharing and its rules as reason for continuing to press for restoration, concurring with our evidence that the problems were more short-term issues than those of institutional design (see 5.4: e.g. pp.53-54 of NIAC report). Tonge advised the NIAC that the Assembly should remain for scrutiny roles (5.4, pp.32-38, NIAC report) until fully reinstated (the Assembly was restored in Jan 2020).

The NIAC endorsed these recommendations for a holding scrutiny role whilst the Assembly was suspended, its report stating: *"We recommend that the Secretary of State take legal and procedural advice ... on how the committee system in Stormont could be reinstated to provide, at a minimum, a scrutiny function for locally elected MLAs"* (5.4, p.37). The NIAC also cited Tonge's

opposition to transferring Assembly powers to councils, highlighting his view that *“there may be 11 mini-Stormonts with the same rows just transferred to local level”* (5.4, p.42, NIAC report).

### **3: On decisions taken by political parties**

The impact of membership surveys on political parties upon party strategies and composition is acknowledged in testimonials from the leaders of Northern Ireland’s main unionist parties, the DUP and UUP (5.5a&b). The surveys detailed each party’s (lack of) representativeness. The UUP leader acknowledged *“the ‘uncomfortable reading’ could actually provide very clear challenges... the research has proven exceptionally useful in terms of identifying the occupational, gender and denominational make-up of the party. It was also revealing to learn of the membership attitudes to cultural issues; social issues, political institutions and other political parties”* (5.5b).

One impact was abandonment of UUP merger talks with the DUP. Three sets of merger talks between the DUP and UUP were held between 2010-17 but our survey data showed only 15% of UUP members supported merger. The UUP leader stated (5.5b) *“A benefit of the research is the confirmation, from the party membership, that there is no appetite for a merger with the DUP”*.

The DUP leader’s testimonial states *“as a party, we have benefited greatly from the research. The party leadership was fully briefed on the entire data findings, which have been used to help shape party strategy in a wide range of areas. These include the composition and roles of the membership, the roles of women, key party messages; the attraction of votes from within and beyond the unionist community; relationships with other political parties and inter-community relations”* (5.5a). One such benefit was the establishment of a 1928 Women’s Committee to attract more women to the DUP and increase their candidacy. The membership survey showed women formed only 27% of the party and female election candidacy was lower, at 9% (it rose over the next 5 years to 25% at the elections contested by the party in 2019). The DUP Policy Director has used our election surveys to shape agendas, declaring that they *“impacted significantly upon our party in understanding who votes DUP and why ... highlighted the most important issues we need to address; and helped us tailor policy development and key election messages”* (5.5d).

Our election survey data has influenced Sinn Féin’s approach to unionist identities, the need for reconciliation and anti-sectarian strategies. Sinn Féin’s President, Mary Lou McDonald, commented: *“The role of Prof. Shirlow has been invaluable in this process. He...presented his research and understanding of the Unionist community at our Ard Fheis...Prof. Shirlow has facilitated a number of informative exchanges between our party and members of the Unionist community. Prof. Shirlow led a series of inter-community talks between unionists and Sinn Féin members...critical to sharing inter-community perspectives and understanding of diversity within the unionist community...The impact of Prof. Shirlow’s work has been to shape an environment within which attitudes and opinions can be shared and openly debated”* (5.6a). Sinn Féin’s leader in Seanad Éireann, Rose Conway-Walsh (now elected TD) stated: *“the research clearly demonstrates that many of the assumptions held by me and my colleagues regarding the Unionist population in the North are inaccurate...This was particularly evident in relation to attitudes to social issues. The importance of this evidence is that it demonstrates the cultural complexity of the North/NI and enables us...to frame strategies and provide transformational leadership”* (5.6b).

### **4: Impacts on knowledge/understanding, scrutiny and public debate**

Our dissemination of research to parliamentary bodies has helped improve understanding and scrutiny of Brexit’s political implications for Northern Ireland. Tonge was commissioned by the European Parliament (EP) Constitutional Affairs Committee to provide the first written and oral briefings on *The Impact and Consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland*, praised as *“excellent”* and *“significant”* by the Committee Chair and a *“resounding success”* by the EP Directorate for Citizens Rights (5.7). Tonge’s oral and written evidence to the House of Lords EU Committee was cited in its 2017 report (5.8): *“Professor Tonge told us: 89% of nationalists voted to remain, against only 35% of unionists. So, the binary divide is being reinforced in Northern Ireland by Brexit.”* (para.39, p.13). The Committee urged that government *“take account of the interests of the nationalist community to maintain its confidence”* (para: 6, p.75) whilst concurring with Tonge that *“special status is a politically contentious term in Northern Ireland”*, to be avoided (para 9, p.73).



Tonge was requested by the Labour Party to write a Good Friday Agreement training programme for its members, explaining the significance of the deal and showing how our survey data indicates continuing support for its institutions and principles. The Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland commented that *“his in-depth knowledge and expertise have been pivotal...His insightful input has enabled us to develop a robust and easy-to-understand political education programme for all Labour Party members, ranging from MPs to party staff to local CLPs and activists”* (5.9).

Our research also rectified knowledge deficits by informing the public how Northern Ireland votes and why, who joins its parties, whether the region’s divisions are thawing and how. The data has been used by a vast range of media outlets, including *BBC Newsnight*, *BBC News*, *Radio 4’s PM, Today* and *Westminster Hour*, *Sky News*, *ABC*, *Observer*, *Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Irish Times*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and *Foreign Policy*. 5.9 lists some of the hundreds of items. As an example of how our research informed the public, Newsnight (5.10, with link) used our election and DUP survey data to a) show most voters backed legalising same-sex marriage b) quantify to a national audience the degree to which religious faith informs DUP members c) demonstrate how DUP voters are different from party members in religiosity and social attitudes. These findings showed for the first time majority support for same-sex marriage even among DUP voters. The *Guardian’s* use of our findings (5.10, with link) showed how the social conservatism of political parties alienated young people in Northern Ireland, only 1 in 3 18-24 year olds voting. The research informed Tonge’s consultant role for a 7-part BBC explainer series on N. Ireland.

An editorial (5.10) in Northern Ireland’s largest-circulation newspaper, the *Belfast Telegraph*, declared: Professor Tonge *“has made a valuable contribution to the debate on the social, cultural and political situation in Northern Ireland”*. The editor asserted (5.10): *“Professor Tonge has become a key part of the political offering in the Belfast Telegraph...Drawing upon his extensive research, which includes definitive membership studies on the DUP and UUP, he delivers unrivalled critical insight into the often opaque and complex world of Northern Ireland politics. His writing adds further intellectual heft to our reportage and frequently sets the agenda for debate here. Our readers undoubtedly seek out his expert views”*.

##### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- 5.1 Reports citing Shirlow’s evidence on ending employer recruitment discrimination.
- 5.2 Testimonials on impact in changing of employer recruitment practices in Northern Ireland from a) Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, 16/01/17 b) Head of the N Ireland Civil Service, Sir Malcolm McKibbin 31/05/17 c) Finance Minister, Mártín O’Mulleoir, 20/02/17.
- 5.3 Testimonial from Kevin Conmy, Irish Joint Secretary, British-Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat, 19/11/19 on Shirlow’s proposals to restore the NI Assembly and mitigate divides.
- 5.4 Report of the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee (2018) Devolution and Democracy in Northern Ireland: dealing with the deficit, HC613, 22 May, containing 20 citations of Tonge’s evidence and recommendations regarding the Assembly.
- 5.5 DUP and UUP leadership testimonials: DUP leader (2008-16), 07/14 UUP leader, (2017-2019), 02/07/19 UUP leader, Belfast Telegraph, 18/01/19, DUP Policy Director 26/03/20 on the value of Tonge’s party membership surveys to those parties in terms of structures and policies.
- 5.6 Sinn Féin testimonials: a) Party leader, Mary Lou McDonald, 07/19; b) Senator Rose Conway-Walsh, Leader of Sinn Féin in Seanad Éireann, (2016-20) 14/11/19 on the value of Shirlow’s work with the party in better informing them on unionism and sectarianism.
- 5.7 Emails from the European Parliament Directorate General, 10/07/17 and 20/9/17 on the extensive take-up of Tonge’s report on the impacts of Brexit upon Northern Ireland.
- 5.8 House of Lords European Union Committee (2017) Brexit: Devolution, 4th Report, 2017-19, citing Tonge’s evidence on the reinforcement of the unionist-nationalist binary via Brexit.
- 5.9 Testimonial from the Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Louise Haigh, 4/11/20, on the value of Tonge’s work in writing a Good Friday Agreement module for the Labour Party.
- 5.10 Main Broadcast and Print Media pieces 2015-2020, with links to pieces cited above. Testimonial from the Editor, Belfast Telegraph, 02/07/19 & b) editorial 02/04/19 on Tonge’s work.