

David McCann Talk

KEY:

D: Dr David McCann

D: Thanks to the education team for inviting me back and thank you for coming and listening to me talk about Northern Ireland political parties. There's no election this year so it's a bit of a scrape around as to what would I talk about because normally elections are my forte and we're 538 days until the next time we go to the polls. So I just thought I'd look at some of the performance of the Northern Ireland parties but also talk about kind of where the lay of the land is and it ties in very nicely to the great presentation Clare just gave you there.

So we're going to be looking through the Northern Ireland parties and I decided on basically looking at what we term now is probably the six main parties and we are going to have to go, we started off with four then the alliance started to rise, we had to go to five and we're really probably going to have to start going to six with the TUV now consistently being very high in the polls and a number of polls the TUV are now north of 10% so we're now going to have to start considering that. We're going to have to talk about the six-party system rather than the five party system as well. My apologies to any Greens or people for profit supporters in there just for time I don't have time to go through them as well so my apologies to any supporters of those parties.

Okay so let's start off with the basics so when is the next election?

A lot of people don't actually realise at the moment the local government elections and the assembly elections are cancelled to be on the same day so all 462 local government seats will be up alongside the 90 assembly seats as well which will be a bit of a challenge for the electoral commission but still they assure me they're up to it. So the two will go together and that will have all sorts of implications on how the parties campaign, it will have all sorts of implications on how the tenor of the election is conducted, it will also probably skew the local government result somewhat as well.

So the date we are legally going to go on is the 6th of May 2027. Now the Secretary of State I should note should hasten the ad does have the power to change the election date for either or. You may remember at the last local government election in 2023 it was delayed by three weeks for the King's coronation we were meant to go I think on the 5th of May but was put back to the 23rd of May that was all due to the King's coronation so they were afraid of us voting on a Thursday and we would have to wait to the following week because they wouldn't count it for the weekend when the King was being coronated. So the Secretary of State does have those powers and to do that remains to be seen whether he will but at the moment we're on track for both elections to be held on the 6th of May 2027.

So what does that mean for a campaign? It means campaigns, the two campaigns will be held alongside each other so the campaign will be held in April through to the first week of May so that means the assembly will likely be dissolved in the last week of March for the campaign then to start into April and then into the first week of May. So campaigns in Northern Ireland typically last about five weeks okay they typically don't go beyond that as well.

So the votes on the same day now I always get this question is well how will the votes be counted is there any precedence for this? Yes there is so 2011 we voted in our local government election and our assembly elections they were held both on the same day and I am told if we do that it will be a rerun essentially of how we held that so the votes for this so we'll vote on the Thursday the votes will be counted on the Friday and the Saturday for the assembly election and then we'll take a break on the Sunday and then we'll go for the Monday and the Tuesday for the local government elections.

Interestingly Scotland is now following our model they're not going to count in 2026 after the polls close they're going to wait till the next day so they're actually following the things we are. Normally Northern Ireland gets a bit of stick for the fact that we don't count when polls close but actually they're good Scotland is now mirroring and following what we do they they've decided it's just not worth doing it after the polls close so they're going to start counting on the Friday. The Senate election in Wales they're going to count immediately so they are sticking to the tradition of counting throughout the night so the votes will be held on the same day. It's the same electoral system as well so what typically happens and again remains to be seen whether this will happen or not is people will walk in they'll get two ballot papers one will be one colour one will have another colour you fill them out as you would for your local government and for your assembly you put them into the same ballot box and they get sorted. This will likely prolong the count by the way, I know you'll think assembly election counts are pretty long but they will be longer next year in 2027 if we follow if we follow that approach so those things will happen as well.

The second the last thing just to point out here again another big debate will the 16 year olds be able to vote in 2027? Very unlikely in that basically the plan is for all regions of the UK to be able all 16 17 year olds will be able to vote at the same time across the general election so that will mean it'll be 2029 at the next general election that the franchise in Northern Ireland will be lowered to 16. So it's very unlikely that we will be able to do it. Northern Ireland unlike Scotland and Wales does not have the power to set its own franchise so it's the Secretary of State who has to do that and the Secretary of State has pretty much indicated um that it will be 2029 in Northern Ireland along with England that 16 year olds will be given the franchise to be able to vote.

One of the reasons why this is interesting about local governments about local government elections and the assembly being on the same day is who does it benefit? It largely benefits the two main parties for the very simple reason of there are a lot of SDLP and Ulster Unionist high-profile councillors that will probably be targeting some key seats. They'll probably face an incumbent MLA from the big party so that does face a challenge for them running in both elections. They can do it if they want to but it does place a bit of a challenge. It allows some of the bigger parties to say to maybe some of the some of the people who are running for both to say oh are they serious about the assembly if they're running for local government and so on so forth.

So again that'll be an interesting dynamic to be able to watch there as well so it will change the dynamic of the campaign. The other thing that it will likely do is it'll raise turnout for the local government elections so local government elections.

Just to give you a few facts and figures on that the last assembly election we had a 63 percent voter turnout, at the last local government election turnout was about 53. So if we mirror the same assembly election result turnout for the local government will be significantly higher than

we've been used to because they'll be held on the same day so that's the that's the lay of the land for the next set of elections 538 days away, we're looking forward to it.

Okay so what do the polls say? So Claire went through some of the polls on kind of executive performance which are pretty dire and expectations of government. So what are the polls actually said now. You can see here it's Lucid Talk. Lucid Talk because that's our main pollster here in Northern Ireland, polls conducted for the Belfast Telegraph. And you can see here it's broadly consistent. Okay it's broadly consistent, there have been a couple of dips. The margin of error on Lucid Talk polls is around 2.3 percent okay so basically it means that you need the plus or minus about two percent in order to get an idea of the range.

So what are the interesting things that we can see about the polling averages? Well for Sinn Féin what we're starting to see and I just hastened to add we're only starting to see it, we'd need to see a couple of more polls before we can confirm this, is their lock on polling which has been pretty much there since 2021 is starting to dip somewhat. Okay it's starting to dip somewhat so you can see they were up around 29 28. Within the margin of error that is them holding their assembly election result. They got 29 at the last assembly election so anything from 27 to 30 percent is them holding average from the last assembly election. But you can see now they dip down to about 25 percent that is a bit outside their average. That's low for Sinn Féin in recent Polls. So again, on 25 percent that would be slightly worrying for the very simple reason of Sinn Féin would likely lose maybe a seat or two off the back of that. They would still remain the largest party because again despite the fact that that is a little bit of a disappointment.

They, Michelle O'Neill has nowhere near the polling problems that Gavin Robinson has. He is in very serious trouble with the polling averages the way they are for the DUP so you can see here Gavin Robinson had the worst inheritance of any party leader in Irish political history for sure. But he is now 18 months into the job and his polling average as you can see there is consistently below 20. The DUP scored 21.3 at the last assembly election and polls have them pretty consistently down below 20 percent. You can see there are about 17 percent 18 percent.

it is worth noting that polls typically do underestimate the DUP. Polls during the last assembly election if you remember, had the DUP around 17 percent. The panic poll that forced the DUP to blast Arlene Foster out of office where they fell to 13 percent, that's what triggered the move against Arlene Foster in April of 2021 and the DUP typically do much better when they get there. The DUP in most recent elections have averaged around 21-22 percent of the vote so again the polls do typically under sample them. But if, say, theoretically that poll is right in the DUP coming on 18 percent that would be the DUP back to 2003, 2000, sorry 1998 levels of support, so that was back when they were the second lead unionist party. So they currently have they elected 25 MLAs, they've got 26 now because Peter Martin took Alex Easton's seat but that would be the DUP falling back to pretty low levels. In terms of seats the DUP did a really good job of kind of holding their seats because they had such big margins but a lot of those margins have been eaten up, so the DUP would lose a few seats.

Off the back of that if that was repeated at an election another party that has been trending down consistently has been the Alliance party. So the alliance party surge is something we're starting to talk about in past tense. So Alliance have 17 seats. One of my favourite fun facts is that the Alliance party the only assembly party that has never, well apart from the TUV, has never lost an assembly seat since 1998. They've always held their seats or grown but 17 seats. A lot of them are quite marginal. Some very high-profile MLAs and very marginal seats.

So Eoghan Tennyson, the deputy leader, is in a very marginal seat in upper Upper Bann. You have of course Andy McMurray who inherited Patrick Brown's seat and you also then have Sian Mulholland up in North Antrim who won her seat, sorry she didn't win her seat, Patricia O'Lynn won that seat but she holds that seat by a grand total of just 400 votes. That was one of the big surprises of the last assembly election.

So on these polling numbers those three seats would be in a lot of difficulty, and it would be very difficult to see how Alliance come back with their 17 seats. They would likely drop down to about 13 although I am old enough to remember when Alliance used to get all excited about eight seats so like you know 14 seats isn't bad when you when you put it in that type of context. And so yeah polls trending down and also significant. Actually, I'll save the leadership thing till later and the other party there then.

The Ulster Unionist party they're actually holding pretty steady even despite the fact they're kind of got one leader. He kind of said he isn't really interested in the job anymore and he's got one foot out the door and he's more focused on being our health minister. They're actually holding steady the UUP held about 12 of the first preference vote at the last assembly election and when you consider the October poll was done well after Mike Nesbitt threw that grenade into his party that's actually not bad and when you consider the fact they've got a portfolio that they haven't exactly shone in. Mike Nesbitt has not kept on the Robin Swann mantle by any stretch that's actually not that's actually not bad for them.

Another party that's trending on the way up is the SDLP marginally. It should be said not by any big numbers but since Claire Hanna has taken over the party the party has definitely surged up. So in the last year of Colin Eastwood's leadership they fell down to as low as seven percent in the polls. They scored nine percent at the last assembly election. They got 11 at the last general election but that should be noted that is massively inflated by Colin Eastwood and Claire Hanna showings in South Belfast and Foyle respectively but 11. On those numbers the SDLP should qualify for an executive seat again which they probably won't take but again they could maybe gain a seat or two off the back of that. Some of those would probably likely come at the expense of the Alliance party or the DUP

But the real poll surge within the parties is from the traditional unionist voice and you see here. This is consistent. This has been consistent not just in 2024 it's been consistent from 2023 and one of the things that I think we really didn't do justice to the TUV, and I have to give myself a bit of a slap for this, is the TUV didn't elect seats but they got a hell of a lot of votes. They only came just over a percentage point behind the SDLP at the last at the 2022 assembly election so they got 7.6 percent of the of the first preference vote which was incredibly high. They only elected one MLA because they're so transfer unfriendly so if this was if the TUV were what I would deem a normal political party like who get preferences and transfers the TUV should be looking at easily electing north of 10 MLAs, easily north of 10 MLAs. 13 percent of what is what Alliance got at the last assembly election and they elected 17 so the TUV should be on for that but because they're so transfer unfriendly they're not. So Jim, sorry Timothy as it is now, so Timothy Gaston will no doubt be bringing some friends with him to the next assembly. The question is just how much? Is it two? Is it three? Is it four? But if they get 13 percent of the first preference vote they will without question elect more MLAs. These will likely come at the expense of the DUP so you're looking at places like East Antrim. Gordon Lyons the Communities Minister has a bit of a sweat there. As well you're looking at maybe the second in North Belfast, the second DUP seat in North Belfast. You're looking at places like Strangford, the second in North Antrim and that could put Alliance under pressure. It could also put the potential future leader of the Ulster Unionist Party Jon Burrows, who's been here

for about two months, under a bit of pressure there. As well he will struggle to hold Robin Swann's pandemic vote but the TUV are definitely on for some gains. The question is can they sustain this throughout the election? Can they dip back? That'll be the interesting thing as well.

And just to show I just haven't totally forgot about them, the Greens that's actually one of their best showings in a Lucid Talk poll actually, so four percent of the vote could they potentially snag away a seat in places like South Belfast or North Down. It's going to be very difficult for them to do so but again we're 17 months and a bit out from the next election. Also we have People Before Profit making up the difference there. Jerry Carroll is going to have a bit of difficulty with a boundary change. That's one of the seats that boundary changes will matter because a lot of the basically the unionist Shankill Road now is all in West Belfast so that's not a sad ad. So whilst Philip Brett lost about 3,000 unionists votes from North Belfast at the DUP are gaining them in West and the DUP have a camp that can have come tantalizingly close before. 90 votes in 2016 to getting a seat in West Belfast so the unionist parties will be putting their shoulder to the wheel there. Although the TV would also be looking that's Ron McDowell's patch is now all in West Belfast so unionism could potentially gain a seat in West Belfast but then the SDLP will be looking for that as well so that's kind of the lay of the land of the polls.

Okay so the polls tell us, I didn't get those slides, and I just told you I just told you all this so Sinn Féin DUP executive returns massive surprise, and so that will be the most likely outcome but however their combined vote share will fall quite significantly on these polls. So they took just over 50% of the vote in 2022 which was a bit low for the two of them combined but they would take just 43% of the vote and combined as well. I think that would be the lowest level combined DUP Sinn Féin vote that we've seen since 2003.

Alliance still get into the executive as of right so you have to put all these results into context. So the Alliance would still more than qualify for the executive but again if they lose two or three assembly seats there will be a big debate within the party about whether being in the executive is worth it so they could end up becoming the lead opposition party.

The Ulster Unionists are only in the executive by just one seat they have nine and if they fall back in one and they lose a seat that could be problematic for them as well.

The SDLP is in the same position so yes the SDLP could maybe gain a seat in West Belfast but with Patsy McGlone likely to depart in mid Ulster Sinn Féin with Michelle O'Neill as the incumbent first minister will likely make a big push to try and gain a seat there as well so again. They could it would be a very typically quintessentially SDLP result they would gain somewhere else but then lose somewhere else so that would be SDLP result.

But again TUV as well a normal political party they would be they would be on for some serious amount of gains but they still do have a transfer problem. I mean if you think back to the 2003 assembly election where Alliance took just three percent of the vote and elected six MLAs the TUV took 7.6 percent of the vote and elected just one it's just the scale the transfers. Of the things we over focus on, first preferences in Northern Ireland, we don't focus enough on transfers that come and actually elect the majority of the MLA now.

The other key question is will the executive collapse? It's a question quite often I get asked and I know Clare talked a wee bit about this. Now no executive has run a full term since 2011 to 2016. In fact only two have done so since 1999. The 2007-11 mandate and the 2011 to 2016 mandate. So just over 17 months to go. Will it happen? Yeah it could do. One thing about executive collapses if you look at the past two, they've happened relatively quickly. So in the

January of 2022 there was a bit of a murmuring whether Jeffrey Donaldson would pull the DUP out but it still wasn't certain. And then when it happened it was the Nolan show broke it that the DUP were about to announce they were leaving and it did catch people off guard. The same thing in 2017 Martin McGuinness walking in one day and saying, look well we're out. That escalated incredibly quickly so I would just caution people who say, well it can't collapse, the last two collapses have been very very fast and very unforeseen.

So what could they walk out over? Sinn Féin could walk out over Casement Park not being built. Gordon Lyons doesn't seem like he's got any intention of moving forward on this at this stage. Language issues. Liz Kimmons with the language, I know Clare was talking about this, over the Grand Central station signs. If she loses that court judgment, if Casement isn't built, and there's these backlog of issues, not niggling issues, for Sinn Féin, it may be in their interest to leave the executive at some point over that. Again they may not but again they could and the DUP could walk over language issues. Also again, there's talk about the new commissioners that have been appointed and again could it be in the DUP's interest to maybe give a bit of a strong stance ahead of an assembly election. Again those are things that could come up and could potentially topple the executive. I think at the minute if I was asked out of 10 how likely is the executive to collapse I would probably say it's maybe got about a 30% chance of collapse. I still think because the last collapses were too far were too fairly recent Sinn Féin in 2017 and the DUP in 2022. I still think it's more likely than not it makes it to 2027 but again we'll see.

Okay so what about the parties themselves? So Sinn Féin they will continue as the largest party in Northern Ireland so Michelle O'Neill can run quite confidently in that now you've got a nationalist first minister. You need to keep it. So she can run quite confidently in at the next assembly election and they're likely going to continue as the largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly which again will be a big boon for them as well because again it's one thing to get the win in 2022 to be re-elected is another thing as well in 2027. So they maintain strong support with the nationalist community, Sinn Féin still take well over 66% of the nationalist vote. In some elections, the recent elections, they were taking around 70% of the nationalist vote which is just unheard of. It's incredible you think about the times were when you consider when we were comparing back in 2007 and 2011 the DUP's dominance within unionism and how Sinn Féin just weren't totally matching them on that.

Well that dam wall largely broke in 2022 so the politics of who is the first minister has arrived within nationalist politics that's been the difference in 2022. What Peter Robinson twigged on to in 2007 is what Sinn Féin have now twigged on to in 2022 so that that issue that coalesced nationalism sorry unionism behind the DUP for many elections has now visited nationalism as well so they've got still got strong support in nationalist communities. Also key focus on Irish unity and progressive social policy those things are still going to be key focuses for Sinn Féin although it isn't all of them.

As I told you before there is a growing backlog of issues. You know Michelle O'Neill saying Casement will be delivered on my watch, but in a powersharing government Michelle O'Neill can't deliver Casement on her watch. It's up to Gordon Lyons to deliver Casement and it's up to him to work with John O'Dowd to deliver Casement to get the money and again where does the money come from? There's still a big shortfall there even with the recent pledges of money from the Irish and British governments there's still issues there as well, so still struggling to implement parts of its agenda.

There's talk about the language commissioners but again there's the wrangling over that. Emma Little-Pengelly said yeah but they can't do anything unless we sign it off so there's a lot

of hope being pinned on the Irish language commissioner in particular. But again if that gets blocked by the DUP and they can't do anything that's going to become a problem for them as well and that was a problem for them too there is that narrative repeating itself again that the DUP are running rings around Sinn Féin in the executive on policy.

Now again whether the rights are wrong of that we won't get into today but again that was a narrative that was really creeping in in 2014, 2015, 2016 and it was, it did gnaw a bit at Sinn Féin's support so again just something for them to be cognizant of and mindful of as well.

The DUP. Now again the DUP, like Sinn Féin, are a bit of a mixed picture. So they remain the major force within unionist politics so the DUP we're talking about them under pressure but under pressure for the DUP is still taking about 52 percent of the unionist vote. It's just in previous elections they were taking 62-63 percent of the unionist vote, now they're taking 51-52 and that, again context is everything, in that so they are still taking a majority of the unionist vote. It will be interesting to see in 2027 do they lose that majority vote status so do they drop down to 48 percent, 49 percent. That'll be something that I'll be looking out for in 2027.

We don't need to go into leadership, they speak for themselves. They faced internal divisions and leadership challenges. Gavin Robinson seems pretty safe as DUP leader. I was at the DUP conference in September, they actually do seem to like him which isn't always a given for the DUP membership and their party leaders and so they do seem to like him. He has steadied the ship for the party but again the DUP have just they have learned the lessons of disunity and that is problematic for them as well. Gavin again is nice guy, very popular in East Belfast but he's almost got the same problem that Clare Hanna has - popular in their own constituencies but can they translate that to 17 other constituencies across Northern Ireland? So again that remains to be seen whether he can whether he can do that focused on protecting Northern Ireland's place in the UK.

Now they are delivering a narrative to get things done and this is a brave thing for me to say in a room full of teachers but Paul Givan is seen as an effective minister. Don't leap out at me he is seen, whether you agree with him or not, he is generally regarded. And even people in parties here behind the scenes will say that Paul Givan, whether you agree with his agenda or whether you don't, he is seen as someone getting things done. One of the reasons why Paul Givan is seen as someone getting things done he is very cleverly just focusing on things within education he's staying away from what are called cross-cutting issues because all cross-cutting issues have to go to the executive so that's the problem that some other ministers are having. They're going into things that they need to get other departments to sign off on and then that has to go to the executive so Paul Givan has done a good job of focusing on things within his department.

Gordon Lyons has had a much more difficult road ahead in the department for communities. House building is nowhere near where it needs to be so he is not having the same way. Emma Pengelly, again a surprise really, Emma Pengelly is one of the most popular ministers in the executive. Again someone who was derided for, you know, being co-opted she has actually had pretty strong polling ratings.

That's the same for Michelle O'Neill as well. Michelle O'Neill still leads within nationalism as the most popular politician for nationalist voters as well but issues around cultures are still a problem. They did get some blowback over the approval of the language commissioners and there are issues particularly in Belfast City Council even though it's not an executive issue but it

is bleeding in here about language and there are still some cultural issues there as well some insecurities within the union space.

And then on to the Alliance party. So again they have increased support amongst moderate and younger voters. They position themselves again it's the centrist party they've advocated again in the last mandate they were seen to have scored a win on integrated education with the act. However, that act now by three years later is not seen as the piece of legislation that it was maybe heralded as but it was passed. As well they face a might like other parties, they face a mounting number of issues - Lough Neagh and how you solve it. That's a cross-cutting issue and Andrew Muir is having a difficult time getting his proposals through the executive. There's hesitancy around how we tackle vested interests such as agriculture. The DUP certainly are not on board with the nutrient action program and Sinn Féin have some concerns about it although they have bought more into it.

As well, integrated education. You know when Paul Givan is literally waving the act that you passed in your face and saying this is what I'm using to block your integrated skills that is a problem for our Alliance. That is a major problem for them and so they do have a problem of effectiveness because like I always say this if you're going to run on demand better in an assembly election you need to deliver better. And the problem is with the Alliance and the executive is that they don't necessarily have a record and the two departments they have are problematic for that of delivering better government and again the debate internally is maybe would they be better going in the opposition. And the other issue they have is that Naomi Long has gone from being one of those popular leaders in Northern Ireland she's now the least popular of all the party leaders in Northern Ireland and so again that is problematic for them as well going forward.

Okay now the UUP they're a party that has leadership issues that they've brought on themselves. Mike Nesbitt in January is going to tell us whether he's going to continue on as the leader of the Ulster Unionist party. Doug Beattie as you know left in not great circumstances. You had Steve Aitken if you remember him as UUP leader. Then you had Robin Swann then Mike Nesbitt and you've got all these issues as well so they've got leadership issues and there's no clear alternative, there's no clear successor. So there's talk of Robbie Butler, whether he's going to run for the deputy leader. There's Jon Burrows being talked about, he's only been in MLA for about eight weeks, him potentially being a leader as well and this really brings in the kind of narrative of what role do the Ulster Unionists have in the executive what role do they have in Northern Ireland politics? So they've got narrative problems are they a liberal unionist party? Are they a conservative unionist party? They face issues within unionism on that you know because they try to present themselves as quite cuddly and nice but then the problem is the DUP have got kind of a cuddly nice face for some of their people. Like you know you can't really say that we're the liberal party when your opposition is people like Philip Brett and Gavin Robinson. They just don't scream conservatives. You know that's a problem that they have as well.

Health again is a big issue for them. The health department is slowly moving forward and again that's not solely the Ulster Unionist party's fault and health is always going to take a long time to turn around. But again are people seeing that in their GP waiting room? Are they seeing it in their hospitals by 2027? They're not. Robin Swann got a big boost from the pandemic but I think it is worth noting that only Robin Swann benefited from that. He was the only Ulster Unionist that had a massive increase in his vote. It didn't translate to the other constituencies. The party vote fell backwards, they actually lost an assembly seat. So in 2022 with the

pandemic at their back and Robin Swann being the most popular politician in Northern Ireland it didn't actually translate into votes for the Ulster Unionist party at the ballot box.

Now what about the official opposition? Now they've maintained a steady presence even though they've had limited growth, so yes Matthew O'Toole has gotten praise for how he's handled the opposition. I am still doubtful about how much of the public actually saved that. Yes, political nerds like me pay attention to what goes on in the assembly. Yes, I'm intrigued by his arguments for reform, but are people on Royal Avenue talking about institutional reform? Probably not unless they're talking to me, but they're not but so I think that is the opposition cutting through? That is still doubtful as well. They still are struggling with Sinn Féin's dominance within nationalism. There is no evidence that they're appealing back any of the support from Sinn Féin.

They are trying to make a flyer at Alliance and again I think that is a strong play for them. Clare Hanna is, as the new leader, has been proven in South Belfast that she can hold back the Alliance surge against the SDLP when she is on the ballot and she cruised the victory in 2024, she absolutely demolished Kate Nicholl in the in the election, and that followed on from how she how she demolished Alliance with Paula Bradshaw in 2019, so she is proven in South Belfast. She can basically win over those kind of small end nationalist alliance voters but again can she translate that out to the other constituencies in Northern Ireland? All the SDLP losses last time were to the Alliance party in in 2022 so again it is worth it is it'll be interesting to see can they peel any of the Alliance voters back. Sinn Féin is a much more longer term game because even though polls show Clare is popular she is very popular with the Alliance voters, actually funny enough, she's actually more popular with the Alliance voters. Funny enough actually and the recent Lucid Talk poll showed that.

But within nationalism Michelle O'Neill still rules the roost. Most nationalist voters prefer Michelle O'Neill over Clare Hanna so Sinn Féin will be a more longer term burn and you can see that with who at the SDLP conference, who the SDLP directed their fire at. They directed it at the Alliance party. They weren't really focusing on Sinn Féin so I think that that shows where they get their votes from.

And last but not least Jim Allister and Timothy Gaston, steady growth in the polls. Jim in the House of Commons has got a very high profile but then also to be fair to him so has Timothy Gaston. He has actually done, and again you don't have to agree or disagree with it, but he has done a good job in the assembly of making his presence felt. But again questions remain can this be more than a North Antrim project? Can this be more than just the North Antrim party because that's where their dominance seems to lie at the minute. They are playing into the critique of storm of performance which again polls.

I know Clare went through some of the polling data on you with that, so it does they are playing into a pre-existing narrative of a do-nothing executive that the institutions can't work. Again on current polls they are set to make some gains but the question is to what extent? At the moment they're set to be in handfuls rather than shovelfuls, but again where can those gains be? They will likely be in unionist areas. As I was telling you earlier the second seat in East Antrim. A second seat for another addition for them in North Antrim? Could they take the DUP second seat in North Belfast? Could they make a run in Strangford? These are the types of places. So the unionist leaning constituencies, and if they do take some seats that could cause further issues around the trajectory for unionism because you know if Gavin loses two, three maybe four seats to them that will spook a lot of DUP MLAs. So again could we get a change in direction from the DUP from that as well so the TUV will be will be one to watch there as well.

So look I've gone on long enough I'm just coming up on 1 p.m so I could be on time for everything so thank you very much for that.