Consociationalism on Europe's Periphery: A Comparative Analysis on Institutional Stability in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland and North Macedonia

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<u>Abstract:</u>

This thesis examines in a comparative fashion the experiences of two post-conflict European polities, the Republic of North Macedonia (hereafter "North Macedonia", for ease of reference, regardless of the state's official name at the historical moment in question) and Northern Ireland. It seeks to answer the puzzle of why the Northern Irish experience has been characterised by institutional instability and periodic collapse, in contrast with the far more stable institutional performance in post-conflict North Macedonia, in spite of their manifold similarities as cases. Through analysis of the electoral performance of extreme parties in both jurisdictions, and process-tracing of certain instances of particular instability and crisis, it tests hypotheses surrounding the distinctive roles of the European Union in both polities and the effect of electoral systems on consociational governing structures. The findings suggest that, contrary to what the literature would lead one to suspect, Northern Ireland's instability cannot be attributed to any significant degree to its electoral system, and that a more salient point of difference lies in the European Union's scope for direct action in North Macedonia, whilst calling for further research on the distinction between intra- and inter-communal crises.

Introduction

North Macedonia and Northern Ireland are two post-conflict societies on the European periphery that have, since 1998 and 2001 respectively, had their governing institutions overhauled by the imposition of consociational provisions geared towards facilitating stable democratic governance despite the ethnic divides that had brought these places to violence. Both have seen the imposition of a constitutional settlement rooted in consociationalism through peace agreements: the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in the Northern Irish case, and the Ohrid Accords in North Macedonia, with the Good Friday Agreement reinforced by the later St Andrew's Agreement. In both cases, the conflicts brought to an end by said peace agreements were fought along strikingly similar lines – an ethnically distinct minority felt disenfranchised by majoritarian rule, seeking either more robust protections and expansion of their political rights or, in the case of more extreme factions, to secede and unite with their ethnic kin in a neighbouring state, Ireland and Albania respectively. The similarities do not end there; Northern Ireland and North Macedonia each have a population estimated at around 2 million inhabitants – although the North Macedonian case is more ambiguous in this way, with no reliable census data since 2002.

The agreements also bear significant similarities, with the guiding principle that the state borders would not be changed – or at least, that any aspirations for change must be confined to peaceful political processes – and that the offices of government must be shared between the two principal ethnic groups. The system of double majorities in the Ohrid Accords are, furthermore, notably similar to the Petition of Concern system provided for in Northern Ireland, creating *de facto* ethnic vetoes on matters of particular relevance. (Bieber, 2005, p. 113). The agreements even share similar "weaknesses", notably that both systems exclusively guarantee political and executive representation to the two largest ethnic groups, with no specific provisions at the main legislative level for smaller minorities (Bieber, 2005, p. 115). Crucially,

however, the post-conflict institutions set up to govern these polities have proven far more stable in North Macedonia compared to those in Northern Ireland, which are prone to collapse periodically, leading to the imposition of direct political control from London and the suspension of local autonomy.

Whilst both societies have enjoyed relative peace (that is to say, the general absence of large-scale political violence, though occasional acts resulting in injury or fatalities do still take place) in the intervening years, neither can claim unqualified success. North Macedonia saw ethnic tensions spill over into rioting in 2012, and a police operation was necessary in 2015 in Kumanovo against a terrorist cell that had infiltrated from Kosovo. (Bogdanovski, 2015). Infamously, there was an attempt to storm the national parliament in 2017 when legislators sought to install an Albanian president of the parliament for the first time, bringing the institutions under severe stress. Meanwhile, the country has been unable (much to the frustration of prospective scholars) to hold a census since 2002 in large part due to a provision in the Ohrid Accords which has incentivised nationalists in both of the major ethnic groups to engage in bad faith distortion of their demographic statistics. (Gözübenli, 2016). This provision allows for ethnic groups that form more than 20% of the population to enjoy certain rights such as the right to education in their native language, leading to campaigns being launched to provide falsified information on the census in order to skew the official demographic balance in one direction or the other.

Nevertheless, North Macedonia has preserved a representative power-sharing form of government throughout the post-Ohrid Accords period, any residual paramilitary activity is negligible, and the country is currently governed by a coalition of pro-European social democrats from across the ethnic divide. Whilst ethnic-based political violence has not ceased to be a concern, it is infrequent and has never brought down the state's governing institutions. The situation in Northern Ireland appears significantly less encouraging. Of the 57 attacks

carried out by ethno-nationalist or separatist terrorist groups in the European Union in 2019, 55 were carried out by dissident republicans in Northern Ireland. (Europol, 2020). The British domestic intelligence service, MI5, have described Northern Ireland as "the most concentrated area of terrorist activity probably anywhere in Europe", and that "paramilitary groups remain a feature of life in NI". (PSNI; MI5, 2015) (Corera, 2017). Whilst these attacks have, again, never posed a serious threat to the institutions in and of themselves, they play a significant role in framing the broader socio-political circumstances that have seen them repeatedly collapse. Entities like the Loyalist Communities Council, featuring direct representatives of paramilitary organisations, operate as political interlocutors with state government bodies (Simpson, 2021). On the electoral politics level, affairs have not stabilised – voters have largely rejected the relatively moderate parties that controlled Northern Ireland's devolved Executive in the years immediately after the Good Friday Agreement in favour of more extreme parties on both sides of the ethnic divide, with these currently dominant within their respective camps. The institutions centred around a power-sharing executive have collapsed for protracted periods twice since 1998 (2002-2007 and 2017-2020), further underscoring the continued volatility of Northern Irish politics and fragility of the post-Good Friday Agreement structures designed to underpin peace.

It is surprising, therefore, to note the gap in the literature in terms of any scholarly work comparing the two cases despite their apparent similarities. The gap is worth closing for a number of reasons – the policymaking community stands to gain valuable lessons from the relatively stable experience of North Macedonia, and to consider whether Northern Ireland might benefit from their incorporation. Furthermore, given the two polities' historically distinct relationships with the European Union, a unique opportunity is presented to interrogate the potentially decisive role of the European institutions and the constructive operationalisation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (though this currently does not apply to the United

Kingdom) in promoting stable governance in the states bordering the Union. This end is especially significant given the evolving situation in Northern Ireland following Brexit and North Macedonia's progress towards accession to the Union – constructive steps to promote stability are as crucial as they have ever been. This study seeks to address this oversight by examining these two outwardly similar cases, with the goal of establishing why power-sharing government and the absence of violence has been so unstable in Northern Ireland, but considerably more stable in North Macedonia, interrogating two key possible causal factors and calling for future studies of broader and deeper scope – for such an issue, a thesis of 10,000 words can only serve as the opening of what will hopefully prove a much longer academic discussion.

The research puzzle of this study, therefore, is why, despite the apparent similarities (as well as Northern Ireland's status as an economically much richer society – nominal GDP is roughly five times as high, whilst GDP in terms of purchasing power parity is close to twice as high compared to North Macedonia), consociationalism has proven relatively successful in providing the basis for a mostly peaceful but crucially far more stable system of government in North Macedonia compared to Northern Ireland. (Republic of North Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2020) (Northern Ireland Department for the Economy, 2019). In the latter case, consociational institutions have been shown to collapse when pressurised, and when in session have grown increasingly dominated by politically extreme parties, whilst the broader society is still plagued by active paramilitary organisations, whereas for all of the state's wider issues, the institutions themselves in North Macedonia have never been driven to protracted collapse, although the 2015-16 political crisis, which shall be analysed below, seemed to threaten this. Mill's Method of Difference is applicable to the study.

<u>Literature Review</u>

The literature on consociationalism as well as the nature of ethnic violence is rich and varied, but as alluded to above, there is a significant gap when it comes to viewing Northern Ireland and North Macedonia through a common framework which this study hopes to help address. A notable exception is Fontana's work *Education Policy and Power-Sharing in Post-Conflict Societies*, which focuses on Northern Ireland and North Macedonia as well as Lebanon. (Fontana, 2017). Given the space constraints of this thesis, it is wiser to cite this as an area for further study, in order to more fully interrogate the two areas alluded to in the introduction. There is a further gap in the literature in terms of the relationship between regional organisations and the success of consociational systems within the appropriate region of interest, which this study hopes to make a theory-forming attempt at bridging.

Lijphart noted that "if one wants to change the nature of a particular democracy, the electoral system is likely to be the most suitable and effective instrument for doing so", whilst Reilly and Reynolds demonstrate that there is clear evidence that electoral system choice is important to the viability of a post-conflict, divided democracy (Lijphart, 1977). There is near-unanimity in the literature that PR systems, as opposed to majoritarian ones, are virtually essential for the viability of nascent democratic governments in post-conflict societies, but there is considerable debate over the form of PR that is most appropriate. A solitary exception to this trend towards PR in consociational systems was Lebanon, which had a non-proportional electoral system under a consociational framework until a 2017 constitutional amendment saw it switch to a system of proportional representation. Majoritarianism in Lebanon took the form of a series of multi-member constituencies operating under a system of multiple non-transferable votes in which seats were distributed among the various religious groups, but elected members required a majority of all votes in their constituency in order to be elected, in an attempt to encourage candidates to seek support from outside their religious base. (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016).

This system left itself open to accusations of gerrymandering to maximise the returns of particular ethnic groups in particular areas, and Lebanon's eventual abandonment of the system in favour of proportionality seems to reinforce the notion that majoritarianism is ill-suited for consociational democracies. This study seeks to contribute to this debate by establishing the roles played by the electoral systems in the levels of institutional stability in these two similar European examples. Lijphart expresses a clear preference for list-based PR systems (such as what is practiced in North Macedonia) in post-conflict or divided societies for three main reasons. They facilitate larger electoral districts, increasing proportionality; they are less susceptible to gerrymandering (significant in both polities, wherein pre-Agreement majoritarian systems gave rise to significant gerrymandering and underrepresentation of Catholics and Albanians respectively); and their relative simplicity means they are less likely to arouse suspicion as to fairness among voters.

Reilly and Reynolds are warmer towards proportional representation conducted via the Single Transferrable Vote (PR-STV) on the grounds that it supposedly holds potential to encourage parties to seek to draw support from outside their particular ethnic support base, however, their work dates from very shortly after the Good Friday Agreement was signed. The literature needs updating in light of the subsequent two decades of political development in this area. The usage of PR-STV is extremely uncommon internationally, with Northern Ireland the sole post-conflict society currently using it in popular elections. In the only other case in a divided society, Estonia in 1990, there was little evidence of any parties or candidates seeking support from across the ethnic divide – and indeed, in Northern Ireland, as few as ~2,000 first preference votes regularly see candidates elected to the Assembly. (Reilly & Reynolds, 2000). Lijphart argues that PR-STV is more suited to homogenous societies than divided ones, and Horowitz reinforces this by observing that the support threshold to win seats under PR-STV is too low, removing much of the incentive for ethnic parties to seek to broaden their appeal

(Lijphart, 1990) (Horowitz, 1991). The literature thus points one, on balance, to suspect that the Northern Irish electoral system is, at best, suboptimal for a post-conflict society, but no study has systematically sought to establish whether or not there is a causal link between it and the polity's institutional instability, a gap this study seeks to help close with obvious implications not just for Northern Ireland but for the broader area of study on the importance of the choice of electoral system in post-conflict societies. Paul Mitchell, on the other hand, points to factors outside the electoral system to explain the increasing fortunes of extreme parties, such as the transformation of Sinn Féin into something close to the "acceptable" face of nationalism given their "de facto acceptance of the consent principle" and participation in the post-conflict institutions, with the rise of the DUP facilitated by the weakness of UUP leader David Trimble in the face of the glacial pace of IRA decommissioning. (Mitchell, 2007). In North Macedonia, Bieber notes "intra-communal outflanking" by increasingly radical forces to be especially prevalent among Albanian parties, which presents a significant challenge to Lijphart's theoretical defence of list-based systems in consociational democracies. (Bieber, 2005, p. 117).

The comparable sizes of Northern Ireland and North Macedonia present a key way in which the two cases are similar, and a discussion is warranted here in light of Lijphart's assertion of the "small countries' prerogative", in which consociationalism is framed as being more suitable to smaller polities. Lijphart argues that this is so because "in small countries political leaders are more likely to know each other personally than in larger countries, the decision-making process is less complex, and such countries generally do not conduct a very active foreign policy." (Lijphart, 1985, p. 123). Andeweg summarises some key arguments to the contrary. First, mere geography does not dictate the personal connection between leaders more than, for instance, their psychological or ideological proximity; the social stratification of various interest groups that makes consociationalism necessary in the first place negates the point about

simplified decision making; and Lijphart cannot on the one hand say that an inactive foreign policy is desirable whilst on the other hand suggesting elsewhere that a common external threat is a desirable condition, and it is precisely North Macedonia's active foreign policy, specifically in engagement with the EU, that appears to be a strong reinforcer of its stability. (Andeweg, 2000, p. 523).

Despite its small size, Lijphart and O'Leary were both pessimistic as to consociationalism's prospects in Northern Ireland, given that it lacked many of the supposed preconditions. There was a lack of shared loyalty; lack of a common external threat (indeed, both communities perceived diametrically opposing external threats; the Irish government "abetted by the Vatican, Moscow, the American State Department and the British Foreign Office" on the one hand, and the British presence in Northern Ireland on the other); no stable multiple balance of power (compounded by the historical hostility of the major unionist parties to compromise of any sort); what few commonalities existed across the divide did not lessen their differences – for instance, the shared Christianity of Protestants and Catholics was itself divisive; and the socioeconomic inequalities between the two communities bred further distrust. These were seen as so fundamentally inhibiting of consociationalism developing voluntarily or organically, that it was suggested by Lijphart and echoed by O'Leary that it might prove necessary to forge a common external threat by "threatening a second partition of Ulster" and thereby incentivise consociation by creating this risk for Protestants in the western and southern parts of Northern Ireland (where they were in the minority) and Catholics in places such as West Belfast, who would find themselves even more isolated than before. (O'Leary, 1989, pp. 573-574).

Anderweg notes that the Good Friday Agreement essentially amounts to coercive consociationalism, given its imposition via an international treaty between the UK and Ireland, rather than emerging from within Northern Ireland's domestic political context – notably, the Ohrid Accords were also essentially imposed coercively, given the intervention of NATO

forces to halt the conflict in North Macedonia – their status as examples of coercive consociationalism reinforce the appropriateness of studying the two comparatively. (Andeweg, 2000, p. 516). The issues present in Northern Irish society in terms of its apparent fitness for consociationalism, whilst mirrored in some respects, are certainly far less pronounced in the context of North Macedonia. Accordingly, it must be borne in mind that one cannot discount the simple explanation that Northern Irish society is simply less suitable for consociational democracy, and thus its efforts at maintaining a consociational system are inevitably going to remain unstable and inconsistent. Whilst acknowledging this possibility, it is nonetheless a worthwhile contribution to the discussion to examine the extent to which Northern Ireland's apparent disadvantages are exacerbated (or, perhaps, mitigated) by its choice of electoral system – which the literature squarely points to as a meaningful factor – or by the role played by international organisations such as the EU or NATO.

Theoretical Framework

The literature has established consociationalism as a form of power-sharing government in societies divided on issues of language, culture or ethnicity, wherein elite cooperation across the divide serves as a foundation for the conduct of representative politics in a stable and peaceful manner. In North Macedonia and Northern Ireland this is facilitated at the legislative level via mutual vetoes on issues of particular importance and a requirement for both major communities to be represented in the executive. The fact that Northern Ireland has been unable to sustain this peace and stability to the same extent as North Macedonia despite both operating under consociationalism in similar circumstances is the issue at hand.

The first hypothesis centres around the key variable of the electoral system used in Northern Ireland which the literature suggests is ill-suited to post-conflict societies by disincentivising candidates from seeking support outside their own ethnic faction and can furthermore serve to incentivise voters in post-conflict polities to tactically support more extreme parties and candidates, even when their own views are more moderate. So-called "Tribune Parties" can arise on either side of the divide, feeling a responsibility primarily to protect the interests of their own group from which the vast bulk of their support is drawn, rather than work for the whole population, with an obvious destabilising effect as voters demand ever more strident "tribunes" to counter the perceived threat of the opposite community's. (Garry, 2016, p. 107). Garry's work on Northern Irish voting patterns, which notes an imbalance between Catholics and Protestants in their willingness to transfer to "moderate" parties on the other side of the divide provides a ready-made start point for further study on this topic, but given the constraints of this thesis, only first-preference votes will be considered. A party is considered "extreme" if they have links to paramilitaries, oppose the terms of the respective peace settlement, or pursue an agenda that can be fairly classed as ethnically supremacist, ultranationalist, pursue an extremist ideology such as Leninism, fascism or are otherwise fundamentally exclusionary.

A full breakdown with justifications is provided below, although it should be noted such distinctions are inevitably subjective in nature.

<u>H1</u>: Northern Ireland's greater instability can be attributed to its usage of the PR-STV electoral system, whereas the list-based system used in North Macedonia is more conducive to the success of moderate parties which are more likely to work constructively for the institutions' preservation.

A second hypothesis concerns the role of the EU, which can act with greater levels of decisiveness in a small country on its periphery, compared to within the UK – not only is the UK a materially more powerful state in terms of its economic and military heft than North Macedonia, but it was until 2020 a significant member of the Union, severely limiting their ability to intervene directly for political reasons. External actors in Northern Irish politics have historically been the Irish and British governments, each of which are inevitably viewed as biased towards one faction by the other. North Macedonia's relatively small size and desire to join both institutions, on the other hand, greatly strengthened their hand, especially on occasions when accession seemed a more viable prospect, whilst it is far less obvious for parties to conclude that the EU should have a particular bias towards either ethnic group. The achievement of full NATO accession for North Macedonia in 2020 has inevitably altered this picture, much like the UK's withdrawal from the EU in the same year has altered the situation for Northern Ireland, and the role of the institutions in key moments in each polity's post-conflict history will be examined below.

<u>H2:</u> North Macedonia's greater institutional stability has been facilitated by the more direct action taken by the EU in its internal politics, made possible by political conditions that have not existed in Northern Ireland.

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Methodology

In terms of case selection, there are a number of reasons as to why these two polities are similar
enough to make the comparison worthwhile, outlined above in this piece's introduction. It is
important, however, to defend the choice more thoroughly. It is clear that they are
fundamentally different sorts of polity in that North Macedonia is a sovereign state whereas
Northern Ireland is a constituent part of the United Kingdom, remaining largely dependent on
a block grant from the central government in order to continue the operations of its devolved
government. The United Kingdom also can and has stepped in when required to govern the
province directly from London, arguably lowering the cost of failure in a way not replicable in
North Macedonia. However, their similar population size, common history of conflict along
ethnic and separatist lines, and the broad powers over internal matters (particularly pertaining
to post-conflict cultural issues) devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive mean
that the comparison remains worthwhile. Whilst North Macedonia lacks the apparent safety net
of having a higher level of government that can step in to provide governance if the institutions
collapse, this is no guarantee of stability in itself – Belgium, a far richer country but also home
to a stark ethnic divide, was at one point without an elected (i.e. non-caretaker) government for
652 days, demonstrating that the mere fact that North Macedonia is a state whilst Northern
Ireland is not does not mean that it is necessarily less susceptible to institutional stasis or
breakdown. (Rankin, 2020).

Given the broad range of powers wielded by the Northern Irish institutions in key areas such
as health and agriculture, the paralysis induced by the lack of a functioning executive is in
many ways comparable to caretaker state governments – this was especially keenly felt during
the recent negotiations on the UK's departure from the EU, when Northern Ireland had no
ministers with a mandate to make their own case, allowing for the province's future to be
decided elsewhere – the outcome of these negotiations, after Northern Ireland voted 56% to

remain in the EU, was a Protocol that only enjoys the support of 47% of the population (with 42% against), amid an uptick in rioting over its implementation. (Breen, 2021). Moreover, there are real political risks for parties when the institutions collapse. The DUP's longstanding effective vetoes against same-sex marriage and abortion in Northern Ireland were rendered impotent when the British government was able to legislate to introduce both during the 2017-20 Stormont collapse, whilst the unwillingness of Irish nationalists to see all local power ceded to London needs little explanation. (Torrance, 2020). There has existed a broad cross-party consensus that the pre-1998 system of direct rule from London was at best "unsatisfactory". (Ó Dochartaigh, 1998, p. 57). At the same time, however, fundamentalists on both sides of the divide have clung to a more cynical logic whereby stasis or collapse serves their interest – the republican cause is, in a perverse way, served by a perception of Northern Ireland as a "failed political entity", whilst parties such as the TUV have always held that the Good Friday Agreement constitutes an assault on the UK's constitutional order – the electoral success of moderate parties at the expense of such voices, then, must be viewed as an important ingredient for the polity's future stability. The argument that Northern Ireland's lack of the status of a sovereign state drastically lowers the possible cost of institutional failure thus simply does not stand up to any serious scrutiny – Northern Ireland's political history demonstrates the very real costs of failure in this regard, which are at least comparable to those of a sovereign state such as North Macedonia.

A further potential issue arises from the observation that the UK has a far more robust international reputation for democratic governance – it has a score of 8.54 out of 10 in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, compared to just 5.89 for North Macedonia, leaving it categorised as a "Hybrid Regime." (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021). Such numbers give only an incomplete picture, however – most obviously, such indices only consider the state as a whole, and in a state of more than 60 million people, the political culture

and situation in Northern Ireland can only have a minimal effect. Furthermore, North Macedonia was classed as a "Flawed Democracy" as recently as 2015, and its overall score in 2020 was brought down by a particularly low mark in political culture – in areas such as electoral process and pluralism, it scored much more respectably. Bosnia-Herzegovina might at first appear a more natural point of comparison with North Macedonia – they share a geographical region in the Western Balkans, both emerged from the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and, crucially, both are sovereign states. In practice, however, the author finds comparisons here far more problematic. Bosnia-Herzegovina seeks to balance three ethnic groups instead of two, and is rooted in division of power among separate entities within the state, instead of a simple power-sharing executive in the context of a unitary polity. Whilst the author accepts that North Macedonia and Northern Ireland have some significant structural differences, they retain sufficient commonalities to study together – indeed, of the examples of consociational democracy in the modern world, no other two seem to fit so neatly together, whilst, naturally, remaining far from identical.

In terms of demographic breakdown, it is in one sense easier to ascertain the ratio in North Macedonia due to the relatively simple dichotomy between those identifying as Macedonian or Albanian in the census. Whilst North Macedonian census issues have been referred to above, and thus precise figures are impossible to acquire, the most recent official figures state that the state's population is 64.2% Macedonian and 25.2% Albanian, with the remainder a mix of mostly Turks, Romani and Serbs, none of which form over 4%. (Republic of North Macedonia State Statistical Office, 2020). Northern Ireland is more complex given identities are less clear cut. In the most recent census, 48.11% cited their primary identity as British, 28.3% as Irish, and a further 29.44% as the more neutral "Northern Irish". Despite this, and the provision in the Good Friday Agreement for all Northern Irish-born people to acquire either a British or Irish passport, or both, at their discretion, a mere 20.75% reported holding exclusively an Irish

one, against 57.18% holding exclusively a British one, and just 1.67% holding both. (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2012). It should be noted, however, that the most recent census was held in 2011, before Brexit made passports a more pressing issue – as of 2020, Irish passports have held the advantage of affording the bearer free movement across the EU, and record numbers of applications for Irish passports have been recorded, alongside a notable slump in applications for British passports, rendering this data far less salient. (Hutton, 2020). In terms of religious identity, 48.4% of people reported identifying as Protestant against 45.1% identifying as Catholic. (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2012). Regardless of the particular figures – and up-to-date figures are not available for either polity – it is fair to observe that Macedonians enjoy a far more secure majority in North Macedonia than unionists do in Northern Ireland. The geographic concentration of North Macedonia's Albanian minority primarily in the west of the country, in contrast with the far more dispersed nature of the ethnic divide in Northern Ireland, also presents a fundamental shift in aspirations for the parties to the dispute; whilst the more radical Albanian nationalists have sought the right for that part of the country to secede from North Macedonia to join Albania, there is no suggestion that the rump North Macedonian state would not continue to exist in such a scenario.

The situation in Northern Ireland is far more existential for unionists, however, because nationalists propose the abolition of Northern Ireland in its entirety via annexation to Ireland. Finally, the conflict in Northern Ireland was far longer and more deadly, whereas the conflict in North Macedonia was, mercifully for its citizens, "the least horrific of the wars in the former Yugoslavia in terms of the number of victims and overall destruction in the country", regardless of the very real societal scars it still left behind. (Bieber, 2005, p. 107). Whilst the Northern Irish Troubles lasted some three decades and claimed the lives of 3,532 people, the insurgency in North Macedonia lasted less than a year and cost less than 300 lives, although it displaced some 140,000 people. (Sutton, 2020) (Phillips, 2004, p. 161). The author acknowledges that

such intangible factors will inevitably impact greatly upon the character and public psychology of the respective societies as they seek to move on from their troubled pasts – a far larger proportion of the Northern Ireland Assembly's members are former participants in, or relatives of victims of the conflict, for instance, due to sheer mathematics – but it is this intangibility that puts it outside the remit of this study. Political science seems a poor tool with which to analyse such matters, even though they surely bear political consequences. Further research in the fields of, for instance, psychology of conflict and sociology would be welcomed here, as a means of providing a more holistic understanding of why these societies have developed as they have.

Empirical analysis will be conducted separately to test the two hypotheses mentioned above. The first hypothesis will be tested on a quantitative basis, charting the electoral performance of extreme and moderate parties respectively in elections to North Macedonia's unicameral Sobranie and Northern Ireland's unicameral Assembly. Elections to these bodies are used because they are the most directly comparable; Northern Ireland does not have an elected president, North Macedonia does not elect members to a national parliament above the Sobranie, and both the Assembly and the Sobranie have broad and meaningful powers over domestic policy (though clearly not to identical degrees given Northern Ireland is not a sovereign state). Importantly, both executives under consociational constraints are drawn from these legislatures. The vote share of extreme parties examined relative to their eventual seat totals will provide scope for analysis as to whether the Northern Irish system can credibly be asserted to reward extremists at a higher level. This is an appropriate method because it allows one to quite readily test the hypothesis that PR-STV rewards extreme parties in a way in which North Macedonia's list-based system does not, without prejudicing towards any particular outcome – particularly as one examines the relationship between first-preference vote share and final seat share of extreme parties. Figure 1 sets out which parties are considered extremist

for the purposes of the analysis. North Macedonian electoral coalitions led by an extreme party will be collectively regarded as such.

Figure 1: A Table Detailing Political Groups Classified as Extreme for the Purposes of this Study, with Brief Justifications

Northern Ireland	
Party	**Reasoning**
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	Historical hostility to the Good Friday Agreement, though somewhat moderated since entering government since the St Andrews' Agreement. Multiple senior members with links to paramilitary activity. (Cobain, 2017)
Sinn Féin	Historically the political wing of the Provisional Irish Republican Army, a paramilitary organisation, maintaining close ties to the IRA Army Council. (Bradfield, 2021)
Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV)	Hostility to the Good Friday Agreement. Hostile to aspects of Irish culture. One member sought the release of a terrorist from prison having been re-convicted for assault, and faced no disciplinary action. (BBC Northern Ireland, 2009)
Republican Sinn Féin	Hostility to the Good Friday Agreement

United Unionist Council (and preceding Independents)	Hostility to the Good Friday Agreement
The Workers' Party	Adherence to Marxism-Leninism, historical relationship with the Official Irish Republican Army, a paramilitary organisation.
Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)	Links to the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Red Hand Commando (RHC), paramilitary organisations.
UK Unionist Party	Hostility to the Good Friday Agreement
Ulster Democratic Party (UDP)	Relationship with the Ulster Defence Association, a paramilitary organisation.
British National Party (BNP)	Ultranationalism, racism.
North Macedonia	
Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE)	Chauvinistic nationalism, hostility to Albanian minority rights.
VMRO – People's Party (until 2016 election)	Chauvinistic nationalism, though significantly moderated before joining the "We Can" coalition ahead of the 2020 election.
Democratic Union for Integration – BDI	Leadership carried over from the National Liberation Army – a paramilitary

|	organisation. Senior members involved in the 2011 Skopje Fortress Incident.
United For Macedonia	Chauvinistic nationalism, leader charged with war crimes and later acquitted, but currently on the US black – list for "engaging in, or assisting, sponsoring, or supporting extremist violence in the Republic of Macedonia and elsewhere in the Western Balkans region". (Marusic, 2009)
Radical Party of the Serbs in Macedonia	Ultranationalism.
Tatkovinska Makedonska Organizacija za Radikalna Obnova - VARDAR EGEJ PIRIN (TMORO-VEP)	Ultranationalism, belief in forging "Greater Macedonia".
Union of Tito's Left Forces	Marxism-Leninism.
Never North, Only Macedonia	Chauvinistic nationalism.

The second hypothesis will be tested qualitatively through process tracing crisis moments through their eventual resolution. This method is appropriate for testing the hypothesis that the greater freedom for the EU to play an active, independent role in North Macedonia renders its institutions less prone to collapse than the Northern Irish ones as the role of the EU and other actors can be plainly ascertained. This hypothesis arises from the fact that consociationalism in both polities is rooted in an essentially coercive origin, whereby external actors imposed an end to the conflict and facilitated the setting up of the post-conflict institutions. The external actors are fundamentally different in character, however; whilst the EU can credibly pose as honest external brokers in North Macedonia, this is much less easy for an Irish Taoiseach or

British Prime Minister, even acting in unison, given the hostility they will each foster from either side of the divide, as O'Leary alludes to. (O'Leary, 1999). NATO and the EU have also historically held the "carrot" of possible accession as a means to incentivise constructive behaviour from North Macedonian politicians, which is obviously not applicable in the Northern Irish context. The constraints of this thesis mean it is not feasible to adequately process trace more than one case in each jurisdiction. These will essentially serve as "smoking gun tests", as any clearly identifiable factors in either triggering or resolving crises that are not present in the other jurisdiction would strongly suggest this factor as having explanatory power for the phenomenon of North Macedonia's greater institutional stability. The purpose of this analysis is thus as much theory-formation as it is theory-proving; it is hoped that it will precipitate further, more comprehensive qualitative analyses of these polities' post-conflict political history. This is an appropriate method because it facilitates conclusions on causality that are rooted in practical experience rather than theoretical conjecture, and also allows one to test the effect of a possible lower cost of failure, alluded to above. The selected cases are the North Macedonian political crisis of 2015-16 and the collapse of the Northern Irish institutions between 2002-2007 – these are appropriate cases in light of their status as the most protracted and serious threats faced by either consociational settlement since the conflicts ceased.

Empirical Analysis

Beginning with the electoral data, all post-conflict elections were taken into account. The 1996 election to the Northern Ireland Forum, conducted under a list-based system, is included as all the major warring factions were on ceasefire at the time, even though it preceded the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Subsequent elections are to the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly, conducted under PR-STV. Figures 2 and 3 set out the percentage totals over time in terms of seats and (first-preference) votes across both jurisdictions. See the Appendices for an election – by – election numerical breakdown.

Figure 2: Chart Depicting the Combined Results of "Extreme" Parties in Northern Ireland Forum and Legislative Assembly Elections, 1996-2017 (Melaugh & McKenna, 2019)
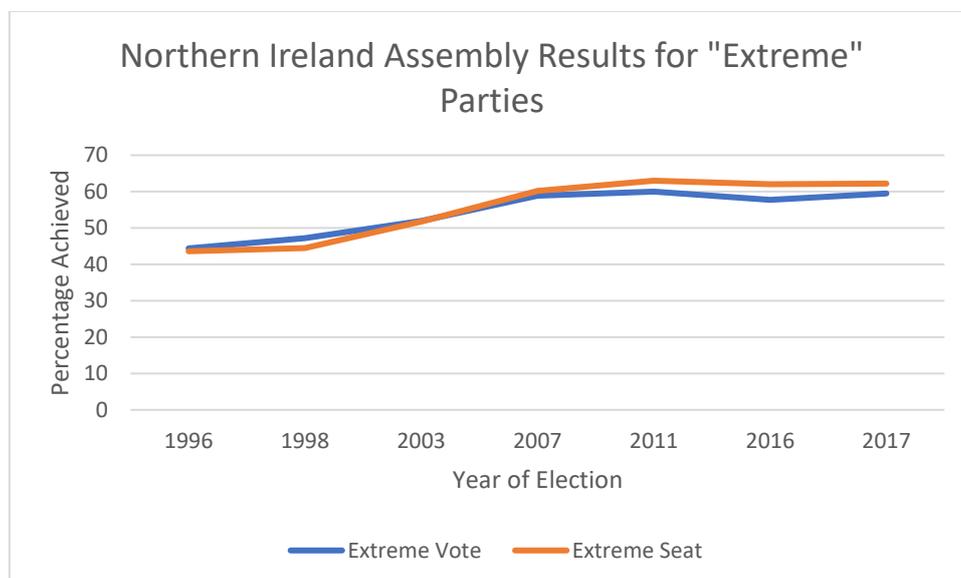
Figure 3: Chart Depicting the Combined Results of "Extreme" Parties in North Macedonian Sobranie Elections, 2002-2020 (State Election Commission of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2020)
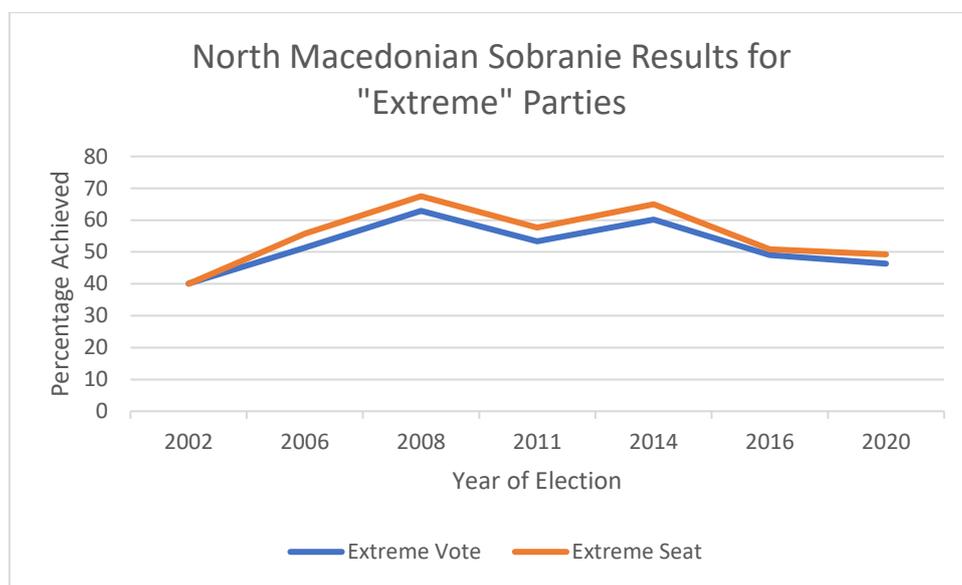
The electoral data strongly suggests that Hypothesis 1 is not borne out. In Northern Ireland, there was initially what can be described as a modest "extremism penalty" as extreme parties won seats at a relatively modestly lower rate than they attracted first preference votes – the extremist parties underachieved relative to their vote totals by 0.8% in 1996, before expanding to a margin of 2.7% in 1998. Whilst extreme parties did better in 1998 than they did in 1996, the marginal increase is less than the increase between the subsequent two elections (all conducted under PR-STV), suggesting there is little reason to attribute this in any significant way to the change in electoral system. The 1998 election raised a further interesting point on

PR-STV, moreover, in that of the two dominant moderate parties, the SDLP and UUP, the SDLP attracted more votes but won fewer seats, owing to the UUP's greater transfer-friendliness and superior strategic vote management. The "extremism penalty" sharply retracts in 2003, the breakthrough election for the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin, and in all subsequent elections is reversed, replaced by what can be described as an "extremism bonus" – the extreme parties outperform their vote total in terms of seats gained, with the most stark example coming in 2016, when the discrepancy stood at 4.3%. Most saliently, the extreme parties have enjoyed a majority in terms of both seats and votes in every election since 2003.

The comparison with North Macedonia is striking. Contrary to the expectation from the literature that a list-based system would return more proportional results and encourage voters to favour more moderate candidates, each election from 2006 onwards reflects a significant "extremism bonus". Whilst this narrows to 1.8% in 2016, widening to 2.9% in 2020, the previous four elections saw a notably consistent "extremism bonus" ranging from 4.3% to 4.8%. The highest ever result for the extremists was 60.2% in North Macedonia compared to 60% in Northern Ireland, meaning that the hypothesis that a list – based system inhibits extremists from obtaining more seats than their due, or indeed that the presence of extremists in the legislature is itself a recipe for instability, appears to not be borne out by the data. North Macedonia's electoral system has not been significantly better at limiting extremist representation than Northern Ireland, nor can its relative stability be attributed to playing host to fewer extremist legislators. That being said, the trend in terms of extreme parties' performances is more straightforwardly upwards in the Northern Irish case (even if some plateauing appears to be taking place), with North Macedonia's two most recent elections witnessing reversals for the extremists, particularly dramatically in 2016. It must be borne in mind that these two polities remain quite young in terms of their post-conflict political history,

and as more electoral data is created over time, this picture may begin to look significantly different.

A close examination of the electoral data, combined with executive formation, however, give rise to a further hypothesis – as mentioned above, this study is theory-forming as much as it is theory-proving. The Northern Irish consociational system mandates executives which contain, at minimum, the largest party from each major group. The failure to revive the institutions in 2003 (having been suspended the previous year following a police raid on Sinn Féin offices) was predicated largely on the Democratic Unionist Party's new status as the largest unionist party – since they were opposed to the Good Friday Agreement, and in particular to forming an Executive with Sinn Féin, there was seen as being no feasible way forward to forming an executive. (Left, 2002) The power – sharing model under the Ohrid Accords, on the other hand, affords parties much greater freedom in selecting their coalition partners, provided that the government still contains a selection of parties from across the ethnic divide – the Democratic Union for Integration (BDI), for instance, has participated in the great bulk of governments, including with ethnic Macedonian ultranationalists, despite its own strong Albanian nationalist background. This level of political flexibility simply does not exist in Northern Ireland, where either of the major parties can collapse the institutions virtually at will. A further study focusing on executive formation, rather than legislative electoral process, in consociational systems, would therefore prove a much welcome addition to this discussion, as it goes beyond the scope of this particular piece. In terms of secondary hypotheses, there is little apparent link between outbreaks of political violence and the performance of extreme parties. The Belfast City Hall flag protests – which resulted in injury to some 157 police officers – arose at an inconvenient time for any electoral salience, in late 2012, and had largely fizzled out by late 2013. In the North Macedonian case, there appears to be some correlation between the performance of extreme parties – which would eventually preside over the 2015 crisis – and stasis in the

country's Euro-Atlantic accession programme, which stagnated from the mid-late 2000s over the naming dispute with Greece. Further research on determining any causality here – both in terms of inter-party dynamics and constitutional imperatives – would be most welcome.

The first incident to process trace in interrogating Hypothesis 2 is the 2015-16 North Macedonian political crisis. This was almost inarguably the most serious moment of crisis in North Macedonia's post-conflict political history, and stretched the post-Ohrid settlement close to breaking. Nikola Gruevski, who had served as Prime Minister since his initial victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections and oversaw a worsening relationship with Greece due to his so-called "antiquities" campaign, stunting the state's Euro-Atlantic prospects, became embroiled in a wiretapping scandal which soon broadened to include accusations of covering up a murder in the aftermath of his victory in the 2011 elections.

The process tracing begins with the April 2014 election, the results of which were contested by the defeated Zoran Zaev of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, who alleged "threats and blackmail and massive buying of voters" as part of a broader "massive abuse of the entire system". (Casule, 2014). Whilst the assessments of international observers were less singularly condemnatory, concerns were raised as to the lack of distinction between state funds and those of the ruling party, as well as the partiality of state media outlets. (Dimeski, 2014, p. 133). Hypothesis 1 is also further challenged here, as one of Lijphart's principal arguments as to the superiority of list-based voting in consociational systems was their supposedly low susceptibility to accusations of cheating. (Lijphart, 1990, p. 4). A cycle of escalation between the two major ethnic Macedonian parties followed. Zaev's accusations were dismissed by the government which accused him of fomenting a coup, only for him to respond with increasingly serious accusations: most notably, that the government had wiretapped some 20,000 citizens, and that Gruevski had engaged in a coverup of a murder that took place in the aftermath of the 2011 election. (MacDowall, 2015). Zaev's accusations sparked a widespread protest movement

in support of the opposition – peaking at perhaps more than 100,000 demonstrators in the streets of Skopje by May of 2015, a huge number relative to the country's small population – and even a deadly clash between authorities and Albanian militias in the city of Kumanovo, resulting in 22 fatalities, at which point the first offers for mediation arrived from the European Union. (De Launey, 2015). The EU's response to the crisis reflects the wealth of options it possesses in such a situation in North Macedonia and appears to rest on two crucial factors. The first is the EU's image as a "fair" interlocutor, and secondly, its ability to both offer rewards and threaten sanctions in terms of the country's accession prospects. The ambassadors of three EU states – the UK, Germany and France – along with the EU's own delegation head and the US ambassador published a letter warning of the ramifications for North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic accession prospects if the accusations of wrongdoing were not addressed. (U.S. Embassy in North Macedonia, 2015). This was a public instance of the EU (or more specifically, its member states) deploying institutional power to influence the political calculus back towards stability, in a way that would neither be constructive nor politically coherent in Northern Ireland, given that the ambassadors of various EU states to the UK are in no position to threaten their governments' vetoing Northern Ireland's non-existent ambitions to join the Union. The European Parliament facilitated an inconclusive round of talks between Gruevski and Zaev in Strasbourg on May 19th, whilst the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations – a further hint as to the ramifications the situation would have on North Macedonia's EU accession prospects – chaired a further round of talks in Skopje. Only on foot of these negotiations was an agreement reached on early elections, with the EU-brokered Pržino Agreement paving the way to a post-Gruevski North Macedonia. Whilst further negotiations on future government formation were obviously required domestically, key steps out of the crisis and back towards political normalisation in North Macedonia were orchestrated or at least facilitated by proactive EU engagement with the crisis – a "smoking

gun" in favour of the hypothesis that North Macedonia's greater institutional stability is facilitated to a significant degree by the EU's ability to behave in a manner that would not be appropriate in the territory of what was historically a significant member state, and would be unable to deploy the incentive of accession for obvious reasons. The counterfactual scenario where the EU and its member states did not take swift, decisive action in terms of both applying incentives and facilitating negotiations seems certain to have led to protracted unrest and jeopardised the domestic state institutions. Of further note is the fact that the crisis emerged primarily out of a dispute between intra-ethnic elites rather than cross-community tensions, encouraging further research on the internal political dynamics that goes beyond this piece's remit.

The second incident to be process traced is the collapse of the institutions in Northern Ireland from 2002-2007. The process tracing here begins with the raiding of Sinn Féin's offices in Stormont by police due to allegations of party staff conducting espionage on behalf of the party's affiliated paramilitary organisation, the Provisional IRA. Widespread disgust at this possibility resulted in unionist parties withdrawing from the Executive in protest, effectively collapsing the power-sharing institutions which depend upon participation by parties representing both communities. The British and Irish governments sought to mediate a return to the institutions, with the former making the decision to postpone Assembly elections originally scheduled for later in 2002. (Torrance, 2020, p. 22). As alluded to above, the Irish and British governments – each seen as a guarantor of the interests of one of the two communities – are the primary external interlocutors when circumstances have need in Northern Ireland. As this modus operandi has basis in the Good Friday Agreement and neither government objects to playing this role, it would be obviously politically improper for the EU to seek to go over the heads of (historically) two of its member states and seek to mediate in an internal matter – this is a fundamental point of difference between Northern Ireland and North

Macedonia. Whilst it has been addressed above that Northern Ireland's "safety net" of being able to fall back on direct rule can be construed as a significant point of difference between the two cases, its lack of the status of a sovereign state appears far more consequential in this regard. In the North Macedonian case, there are no intermediate levels of government for the EU to offend by inserting itself into domestic matters, whereas the existence of the British and Irish governments would make any direct action by the EU far more politically problematic. It is striking to note that no serious consideration by the EU's institutional leaders of even offering to do so seems to have entered the public domain. When fresh Assembly elections were held in 2003, the more extreme DUP and Sinn Féin were dominant in each of their respective communities for the first time. Given that there was no prospect of the DUP going into government with Sinn Féin, the Assembly never sat during that term of office. The longstanding efforts of the Irish and British governments to broker a compromise to see the institutions restored were frustrated until the St Andrews' Agreement of 2006, which saw the DUP agree to enter government with Sinn Féin on the basis that the latter formally recognise the legitimacy of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Contrasting the painfully slow process that was the Irish and British governments' four-year quest to broker some form of compromise with the swift and decisive actions the EU was able to take in North Macedonia in 2015, one is tempted to suggest that Northern Ireland might have benefited from a similar structure, but this is facile. The criminality that sparked the Northern Irish crisis was of an entirely different order than what Gruevski was accused of and, crucially, the fault-line split the elites of the two communities, rather than being a dispute within a single community. What is more, the EU would have little to offer in the way of incentives even if it did intervene, and since the Brexit issue has broken along largely ethnic lines in Northern, could no longer pose as a credibly neutral outsider if such a crisis were to re-emerge. Whilst this incident can be described as effectively a straw-in-the-wind test vis-à-vis Hypothesis 2, therefore, it potentially gives

credence to a third hypothesis rooted in how institutional crises in constitutional systems can prove more soluble when the dispute is primarily intra-communal.

Conclusion

This study empirically tested two principal hypotheses in an effort to explain why, despite their outward commonalities, consociational institutions have proven far more stable in North Macedonia than in Northern Ireland. The first, that Northern Ireland's electoral system put it at a distinct disadvantage compared to the list-based system used in North Macedonia, was not borne out by the data. Instead, the data demonstrated that extremist parties in both jurisdictions had a tendency to gain a disproportionate amount of seats relative to votes, at a broadly comparable level, although extremist parties in Northern Ireland have seen their overall support rise at a more consistent rate. Further research remains desirable, however, on account of the fact that lower preferences were not taken into account in this study, and an analysis of how Northern Irish voters transfer their preferences would be most useful in determining whether Lijphart's assertion that PR-STV is significantly less suitable than other proportional systems for consociational legislatures is worth finally dismissing.

The second hypothesis, interrogated through process tracing, was that the EU's greater freedom of action in North Macedonia – which exists due to myriad political factors – means that this polity is more prone to avert crises before becoming institutionally fatal, as the EU can apply various incentives and deterrents, as well as credibly posing as a neutral arbiter above domestic politics. The 2015-16 crisis in North Macedonia demonstrated the capacity of the EU to halt a spiral towards chaos in that country, and is without doubt an indispensable partner there, it nonetheless remains difficult to conclusively argue that Northern Ireland's relative instability can be similarly attributed to the EU's inability to act as decisively there. Accordingly, whilst there is significant cause to attribute North Macedonia's relative stability to its relationship with the EU, further research is certainly required here to ascertain the role of regional organisations in promoting and maintaining stability in such polities. A third hypothesis,

concerning the diverging nature of crises rooted in intra- versus inter-ethnic disputes in consociational polities, merits close interrogation in future studies.

The peoples of North Macedonia and Northern Ireland both deserve to enjoy the peace and prosperity that stable institutions can facilitate. It is hoped that this study will prove a significant step towards policymakers and scholars alike gaining an understanding of how institutional setup in matters such as electoral systems and the role of regional organisations can work to safeguard stability in post-conflict societies in Europe and beyond.

Appendices

Figure 4: Electoral Results for "Extreme" Parties in Northern Ireland Forum and Legislative Assembly Elections, 1996-2017

	Extreme Vote	Extreme Seat
1996	44.4	43.6
1998	47.2	44.5
2003	51.9	51.8
2007	58.9	60.2
2011	60	63
2016	57.7	62
2017	59.5	62.2

Figure 5: Electoral Results for "Extreme" Parties in North Macedonian Sobranie Elections, 2002-2020

	Extreme Vote	Extreme Seat
2002	40.1	40
2006	51.3	55.8
2008	62.9	67.5
2011	53.3	57.7
2014	60.2	65
2016	49	50.8
2020	46.3	49.2

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