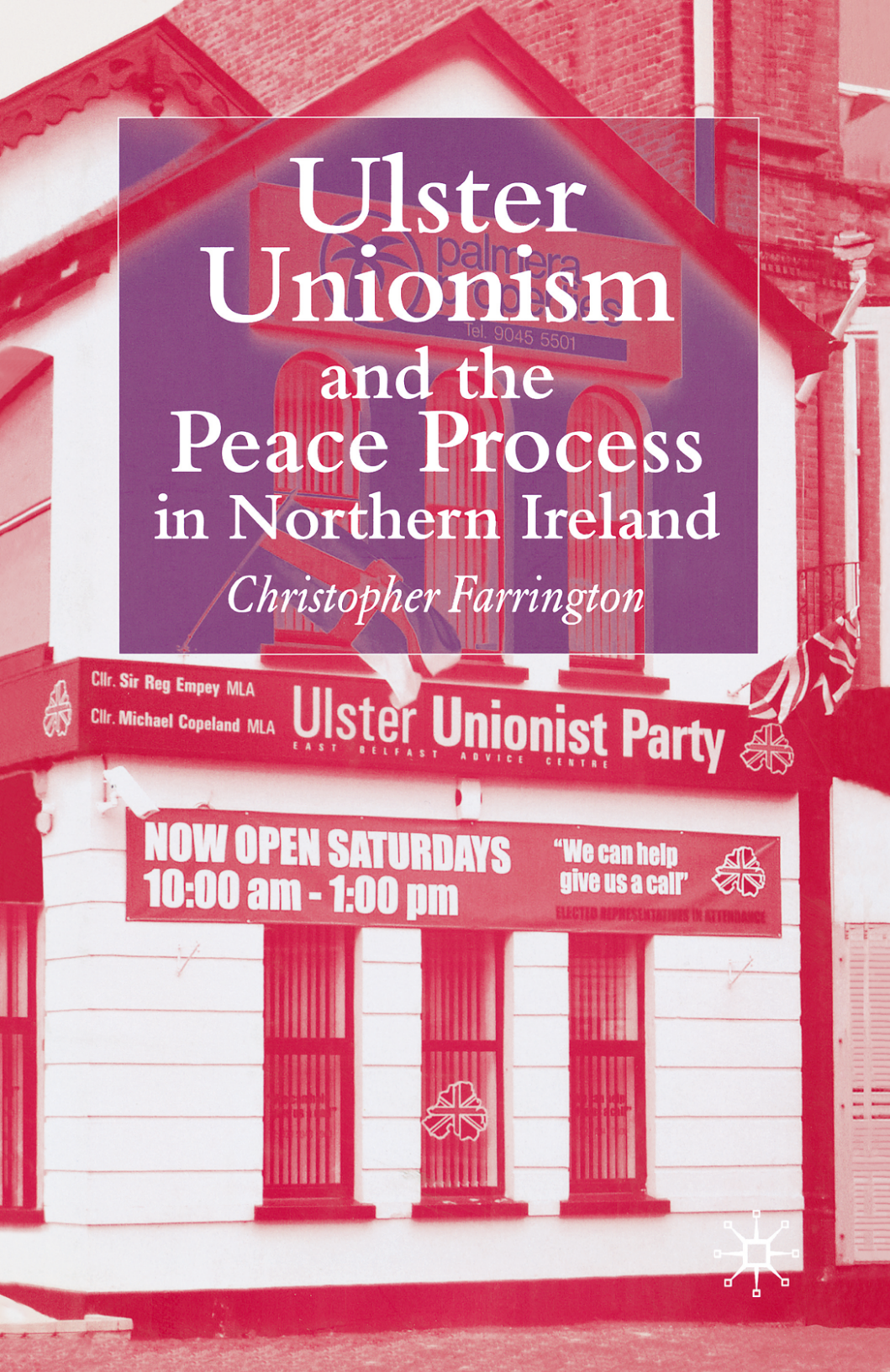

Ulster Unionism and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland

Christopher Farrington

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2006 978-1-4039-9285-7

First published 2006 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010
Companies and representatives throughout the world

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ISBN 978-1-349-54382-3 ISBN 978-0-230-80072-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9780230800724

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Farrington, Christopher.
Ulster unionism and the peace process in Northern Ireland / Christopher Farrington.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Northern Ireland—Politics and government. 2. Peace movements—Northern Ireland. 3. Unionism (Irish politics). I. Title.
DA990.U46F36 2006
941.60824—dc22 2005045604

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06

Transferred to Digital Printing 2011

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Acknowledgements

It is impossible to complete such a project without accumulating enormous debts that cannot be repaid within any normal space of time. I am grateful to the funding provided by Queen's University of Belfast, and the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences that enabled me to embark on and complete this research. Primarily I owe a great intellectual and personal debt to Richard English and Graham Walker, who have been both supportive and encouraging at every possible turn. Colleagues and friends in Belfast and Dublin also provided help, support and stimulation at crucial moments and I would like to thank Miranda Alison, John Barry, Stephen Bloomer, John Coakley, Aaron Edwards, John Foster, Gladys Ganiel, Karin Gilland Lutz, Adrian Guelke, Ciara Hogan, Albert Hughes, Colin Irwin, Tara Keenan-Thomson, Kieran Laird, Jane McConkey, Owen McEldowney, Marie Moran, Caroline Newell, Margaret O'Callaghan, Catherine O'Donnell, Michael Potter, Bert Preiss, Kieran Rankin, Brian Thomson and Jennifer Todd. I would also like to thank my family, my mother, father and brothers Graeme and Laurence. The usual qualification applies.

Many people assisted with the primary research. I would like to thank the staff at various libraries and district councils, who have been generous with their time and expertise and without them this thesis would have been significantly poorer. In particular, Darren Topping at the Newspaper Library in Belfast's Central Library and Yvonne Murphy, Ciaran Crossey and Kris Brown at the Northern Ireland Political Collection have provided invaluable assistance. I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation for the assistance of Margaret Kane at Enniskillen Library, Liz Connor at Fermanagh District Council, Barbara Johnston at Ballymena Borough Council and Helen Crozier at Craigavon Borough Council who all generously gave time out of their busy working days to allow me access and guidance to the local government minutes of their respective areas.

As should be obvious from the text, many politicians gave generously of their time and thoughts. I would like to thank Jack Allen, Paul Berry, Esmond Birnie, David Burnside, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Fred Crowe, Joe Dodds, Jeffrey Donaldson, Raymond Ferguson, Sam Foster, Roy Garland, Oliver Gibson, William Hay, Bert Johnston, Bertie Kerr, Gordon Lucy, Robert McCartney, William McCrea, Chris McGimpsey,

David McNarry, Joe Miller, Jim Nicholson, Robert Saulters, George Savage, Duncan Shipley-Dalton, Martin Smyth and Jim Wells. I may not have given the assessment that Jim Wells was keen that I would: 'So basically I want you to write the DUP's all singing, all wise perfection and going forward from strength to strength... so anyone who reads this will join in the morning!!' But I do hope that I have been fair and representative of all the views that were expressed to me.

Abbreviations

AIA	Anglo-Irish Agreement
APNI	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
BBC	Ballymena Borough Council
BCC	Belfast City Council
BICO	The British and Irish Communist Organisation
CBC	Craigavon Borough Council
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CDP	Campaign for a Devolved Parliament
CEC	Campaign for Equal Citizenship
CLR	Campaign for Labour Representation
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
DCC	Derry City Council
DSD	Downing Street Declaration
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ELO	Electric Light Orchestra
EU	European Union
FDC	Fermanagh District Council
FEA	Fair Employment Agency
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NIUP	Northern Ireland Unionist Party
NIWC	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
QUB	Queen's University of Belfast
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PR	Proportional Representation
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SF	Sinn Féin
UDA	Ulster Defence Association

UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UDP	Ulster Democratic Party
UIO	Unionist Information Office
UK	United Kingdom
UKUP	United Kingdom Unionist Party
UUC	Ulster Unionist Council
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UUUC	United Ulster Unionist Coalition
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force
UYUC	Ulster Young Unionist Council
VUPP	Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party

Introduction

The conflict in Northern Ireland has consisted of multiple relationships between and within groups (sometimes violent, sometimes merely antagonistic). By extension a peace process necessitates addressing these relationships and transforming them into a mode which is less destructive. The extent to which the peace process in Northern Ireland has accomplished or has intended to accomplish this is debateable but the process has fundamentally altered all of these relationships. Indeed, as the process has developed, it has created yet another dynamic, as the various groups developed a relationship with the process itself. It is that relationship which this book examines and in doing so it seeks to link the study of Ulster Unionism and the study of the Northern Ireland peace process. Too frequently the peace process is considered without a thorough understanding of this relationship and, similarly, Unionism is discussed as if it exists outside the political changes which have occurred since the early 1990s. It seeks to give Unionism a central place in this analysis, to understand the relationship between changes that are initiated and driven by other political actors and the attitudes of the group which is not central to those changes. The focus is on 'formal' politics throughout. In other words, the focus is on political parties, public intellectuals and politicians. However, in studying these institutions and people, the effort has been made to move the focus away from the elite leadership, on which some of the most recent studies have concentrated (Godson, 2004; Miller, 2005). In addition, the focus is on the longer-term processes and how these have interacted and influenced the development of the political parties, rather than on the micro-issues of the process such as when and how a particular deal or trade-off was made.

Two main debates have dominated the study of Unionist politics. The first is a matter of definition. There is no difficulty defining *who* Ulster

Unionists are; they are primarily Protestants who live in the six north-eastern counties of Ireland. The greater difficulty is in defining *what* Unionists are and what they want. The second debate concerns the divisions within Unionism and, more particularly, how these are translated into a political dynamic. In both of these debates there is a certain level of disjuncture between popular understandings of their importance and dynamics and the research-driven academic analysis, although the most interesting developments in Unionist politics have occurred when this interface has been thoroughly explored, such as the discussion on Unionist ideas in Chapter 1. These two questions of definition and division are central to the Unionist experience of the peace process and yet a thorough engagement with these debates has not been central to the analysis of the peace process in general. As we shall see in Chapter 1, Unionists were developing their own ideas about the various salient relationships involved in a resolution to the conflict but at this stage it is worth sketching some of the basic observations that can be made of Unionists, concerning their relationship with British national identity and key aspects of their traditional political arguments.

Unionism is, at core, a political idea which is wrapped in identity politics. Ulster Unionists are British but the manner in which they have expressed their political identity has made them seem curious and odd. National identity has been described as more of an emotional than a rational concept. Benedict Anderson has argued: 'it would... make things easier if one treated it [nationalism] as if it belonged with "kinship" and "religion," rather than with "liberalism" or "fascism"' (Anderson, 1991, 5). Therefore it seems more appropriate to examine it with reference to its internal structure and terms of reference rather than subject it to rigorous academic analysis to find intellectual coherence, as we would with a work of political theory. However, Ulster Unionists have conceived their political environment somewhat differently to an interpretation based wholly on nationalist assumptions. This is partly structural, relating to their relationship with British national identity, and partly the product of their distinctive political thought, which tends to see the political conflict in Northern Ireland in a quasi-legalistic manner. This is neatly illustrated by the title of a pamphlet written in 1981 which was presented by a group of prominent professional and business people who were, at that time, non-party political Unionists, *The Case for the Unionists* (McCartney, 1981). Dermot Nesbitt (UUP) further illustrates this: 'Unionists today need not be despondent: there is an argument to be made, a case to be won – and it *can* be won' (Nesbitt, 1995, 3, emphasis in original). Conceptualising

Unionism as an argument rather than an identity creates difficulties when the nature of that identity is investigated. Thus, Unionism appears either confused or fractured when asked to define itself (Cochrane, 1997) and the range of responses indicates uneasiness with definitions based on a national identity.

The Unionist community has always been more diversified concerning national identity than political options for Northern Ireland. Opinion poll evidence has consistently shown that, while independence has been a significant minority option, the majority of Unionists have chosen political options which keep Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom (UK) intact. In contrast, Nationalists have generally been more divided by options which maintain or eliminate the border (Breen, 1996). In a 1978 poll, 39 per cent of Catholics opted for devolution with power sharing while 24.9 per cent chose a united Ireland. Of the Protestants surveyed, 72.1 per cent opted for some version of devolution and 15.6 per cent for direct rule. No other option received more than 5 per cent support (Moxon-Browne, 1983, 24). In a similar poll in 1996, 63 per cent of Protestants opted for direct rule or the British state; 7 per cent chose a continuance of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) and a further 10 per cent for North–South institutions. Catholics surveyed, on the other hand, were split between an Irish State (32 per cent), joint authority (24 per cent), AIA (14 per cent) and North–South institutions (11 per cent) (Irwin, 2002, 131).

Fifty years of devolved government in Stormont has inculcated an insularity within Unionism. Over this period the Unionist case became implicit, in that it was no longer seen as important to articulate Unionist arguments. Moreover, the end goals of Unionism altered. During the Third Home Rule crisis, partition was a means to defeat Home Rule but, from the establishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland, maintaining partition has become the end goal itself. Nevertheless, Unionists have traditionally utilised a number of arguments in defence of the Union, based on religion, British nationality and economics (Whyte, 1990).

However, according to Whyte, the major weakness in Unionists' traditional interpretation is that it fails to take account of the division within Northern Ireland, and this, for Unionists, makes the conflict incomprehensible (Whyte, 1990, 162–3). Indeed, a recurring critique of Unionism is the absence of a consideration of Irish Nationalism and Unionists' perceived inability to adequately incorporate the minority within their discourse. McGarry and O'Leary identify this as the foremost defect in conventional Unionist discourse: 'The absence in

conventional unionist literature of any significant treatment of the Nationalist minority, one which takes seriously its experiences and preferences, suggests profound political prejudice' (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, 105). Moreover, both Whyte and McGarry and O'Leary argue that the experience of Nationalists, and Unionists' denial of it, during devolution between 1922 and 1972, severely damages the Unionist case (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995, 106–11; Whyte, 1990, 164–9). Jennifer Todd has analysed how this occlusion has had a negative effect on Unionism. Todd has argued that the body of Unionist political thought contained tensions and contradictions but these were not necessarily logically incompatible. Their problem lay in the challenge that they consistently faced in 'the Irish context'.

> The real problem for unionism was always partly occluded within its own self-understanding – the existence of Catholics and Nationalists within the unionist state. Once Catholics asserted themselves, the contradictions between the exclusivist foundations of Northern Ireland and its liberal ideals became clear. (Todd, 1993, 207)

As a slight corrective, infrequently acknowledged in the literature, this 'political prejudice' is not restricted to Unionism (see O'Halloran, 1987) and, indeed, some prominent Republicans are now acknowledging that their political ideas and strategy were based on an ignorance of Unionists and their political options (English, 2003, 312–13). For example, Tom Hartley, a leading Sinn Féin (SF) strategist, has stated: 'In a way we made them a non-people... we didn't even see them as part of the problem, never mind as being part of the solution' (English, 2003, 312).

Many of the Unionist arguments are concerned with legitimising Unionism and its place within the UK. However, full appreciation of Unionist ideology has to begin with a consideration of the peculiar circumstances of Unionism. Unionists are at the centre of two very different and complicated relationships. Unionism has been concerned with Ireland's relationship with Britain and this has been further complicated for Unionists because they have had a parallel, and as problematic, relationship with Irish nationalism. In both relationships Unionism has been the junior and often neglected partner and it is the nature of these relationships that determines Unionism's defence of the Union. Unionism may have no place for Nationalists within its political philosophy but this does not mean that it is, or has been, unaware of their presence; Unionists were all too aware of the divisions within Northern Ireland. However, by the early 1990s it was clear to Unionists

that they were losing the battle on several fronts and throughout the decade there was restructuring of a number of substantial areas. Primarily these were concerned with proselytising the Unionist message but there was also a new vehemence about how they tackled Nationalist arguments. This will be addressed in Chapters 1 and 2.

Cochrane has argued that there was an 'identity crisis' among Unionists caused by their insecurities and confusion. However, many of the problems which have rendered Ulster Unionist identity perplexing and awkward have arisen from the tendency to look at Unionism through the prism of an Irish Nationalist framework, which shares some of the assumptions of primordialist approaches to nationality and emphasises certain characteristics of nationhood, such as language, origin myths, culture and self-determination (Connor, 1994), thereby failing to recognise the existence of nations within nations, such as Scotland within the UK or Catalonia within Spain, which do not always seek the same goals or exist within the same statist frameworks (Keating, 2001). Unionists certainly display some of these 'primordialist' characteristics but it is significant that no one has seriously advanced such an analysis of Ulster Unionism and most studies take an implicitly constructivist approach.

Thus, the relationship between state and nation is crucial and has not been thoroughly analysed in the study of nationalism in general (Guibernau, 1999; Keating, 2001) and especially in Northern Ireland. British national identity does not perform the same functions for Ulster Unionism as Irish national identity does for Ulster's Nationalists. British national identity has been described as 'banal nationalism', lying implicit in public discourse (Billig, 1995) and therefore is not articulated in the same manner that Irish Nationalism is and has been. The distinction between an explicit and an implicit articulation of national identity has meant that Unionists have had fewer resources to call upon in the intellectual conflict and therefore the expressions of Britishness seem more crude than those of Irishness. Indeed, this has led Feargal Cochrane to argue that the relationship between Britishness and Ulster Unionism is poorly and incoherently understood by Unionists and is not reciprocated by many in Great Britain who do not understand Unionists and have no particular wish for them to remain part of the UK (Cochrane, 1994, 1997, 372). Overall, Cochrane sees the connection with Britain as a regressive dynamic within Unionist politics, tending towards stagnation (Cochrane, 1997, 373).

However, recent writing on Unionism has dovetailed with a new interest and understanding of the nature and development of Britishness (Kearney, 1989; Colley, 1992) within academia, and much of this work

indicates that Ulster Unionists are far from aberrant in their views on national identity (Longley, 1997, 112–13). There has been an increased awareness that 'British history' is not coterminous with 'English history' (Pocock, 1975; Harvie, 2004). The influential historical perspective provided by Linda Colley shows how Britishness was a construct built upon other identities, although never replacing them (Colley, 1992). This has opened new avenues in reflecting how to reconcile the 'four nations' with the 'one nation'. Hugh Kearney argues that if we accept that the UK is a multi-national state then many more phenomena are intelligible than is otherwise the case but is uncomfortable with the word 'nation'. He prefers to see the history of the UK as '"multi-cultural" rather than "multi-national"'. To use the term 'multi-national' is inaccurate because it 'ignores the unifying factor of "Britishness"' (Kearney, 1991). England and the English are now the fundamental problem because they, more than the other constituent nations of the UK, have to deal with changing identities (Nairn, 2000, 2001). As Keith Robbins argues, the Irish, Scottish and Welsh, or the 'peripheral peoples of the state', 'have long experience of schizophrenetic identity, with all its joys and difficulties' (Robbins, 1990, 14–15).

Academic literature on Scotland since the 1990s has pointed to the contradiction between the definition of the UK State as a 'unitary' one and its multi-cultural/multi-national nature (McCrone, 1997). Authors such as David McCrone and Lindsay Patterson have argued that Scotland maintained a distinctive 'civil society' from 1707 through separate legal, educational and clerical systems which kept alive a sense of Scottish identity (McCrone, 1992; Patterson, 1994). Moreover, the research which has been conducted on national identity has explicitly tested the extent to which the Scots, Welsh and English have multiple identities by asking questions such as, 'Do you feel more Scottish than British?' It is significant that we have no such data on Ulster Unionists, despite the articulation of identity in similar ways. The Scottish literature is also significant in the light that it sheds on the development of the relationship between Scottish identity and British identity. This research has argued that the Scots had a pragmatic and contractual conception of the Empire and Britain (Walker, 1995; Harvie, 2004). David Miller's influential 1978 book, *Queen's Rebels*, also described Ulster Protestants' relationship with Britain in this way and this is widely recognised within Scotland. For example, Neal Ascherson observed:

> It [Protestant Ulster] has insisted... on its 'Britishness'. This is an old-fashioned use of the term... The last Britons are to be found in

> County Antrim or County Down. But the words they use to proclaim their Britishness are often Scots. (Ascherson, 2002, 256)

Ascherson does not give full credit to the range of opinion within Ulster Protestants but his observations are nonetheless significant. Unionism's 'identity problem', and from this discussion it is not at all clear that there is one, cannot be analysed in an insular fashion, without reference to 'the unresolved nature of Britishness itself' (McBride, 1996, 1). These ideas have begun to filter into discussions of contemporary Unionism (Aughey, 1989; Walker, 1995) but have been more prominent in discussions of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Unionism (Hennessey, 1993; McBride, 1996).

Indeed, while Ireland is usually explicitly excluded from discussions on the development of Britain because of the existence of a large number of people who did not identify with the project (O'Leary and Arthur, 1990), this has been to the detriment of a proper understanding of the position of the Ulster Protestant. As Keith Robbins argues: 'The yearning for an Ireland (and particularly a Northern Ireland) with "Brits out" does as much injustice to the complexities of individual identity as simple unqualified assertion that "Ulster is British"' (Robbins, 1990, 15). Those Unionists who have been nudging the ideology in the direction of a more nuanced understanding of their own identity, which will be considered in Chapter 1, have been trying to remove such an assertion from the Unionist lexicon. Therefore, on one hand, this intellectual and political context has opened space where Unionism has been able to reflect on its own identity and how it relates to the state in which that identity is invested. On the other hand, its ability to fully explore these implications has been curtailed because it has not had the security so that identity can be fully appreciated.

Since the 1980s most analyses of the Northern Ireland conflict have treated ethnic and national identity as the main division in Northern Ireland, and proposed solutions of the conflict have involved various mechanisms of reconciling or balancing these identities. The Belfast Agreement of Good Friday 1998 reflected these intellectual trends and stated clearly that it was necessary to recognise political identities as part of a resolution to the conflict. The difficulty in defining Unionism and Unionist identity complicates the idea of an easy symmetry between Unionism and Nationalism and therefore has made the search for peace more difficult. Therefore, understanding Unionist identity, how it has changed and how it responds to change is an important part of understanding the origins and nature of the peace process. Moreover,

the Agreement and key documents relating to it such as the Downing Street Declaration (DSD) all tackle these questions of definition as they all propose some answer to the 'constitutional question'. We shall see throughout this book that a recurring theme of Unionist dissatisfaction with various political initiatives lies in the definitions of Unionists, the Irish Nation and the various recognitions of national identity. These identity and ideational issues also form the background to other aspects of the peace process, such as changing relationships with Irish Nationalism and the political and legislative changes resulting from the Agreement.

If definitions form the backdrop to the discussion, the question of Unionist division has more immediate importance for how we examine the politics of Unionism and it should therefore be a crucial question for the analysis of the peace process. How has the peace process affected the dynamics of Unionist division? And, conversely, how has Unionist division affected the dynamics of the peace process? The central argument of this book is that the peace process has affected Unionist divisions to a greater extent than vice versa. In particular, the peace process, through the Agreement, has defined how Unionists relate to one another (see Chapter 4) and has fundamentally altered the dynamics of party competition (Chapter 5). These two factors have allowed significant party political realignments to occur. This picture is substantially different to the research that had been conducted prior to 1998, which emphasised social and cultural factors to Unionist party competition.

Unionists are aware of their divisions and this is evident in the desire for Unionist unity. This desire is a recognition of the deep divisions within the Unionist community; divisions of a 'political, cultural, class, regional and denominational nature' (English and Walker, 1996, ix). The fact that these divisions exist is unsurprising because Northern Ireland is undoubtedly a divided society and, in political science literature, resembles an unranked ethnic group system (Horowitz, 1985, 21–4), where each of the two communities in Northern Ireland is, essentially, a distinct societal structure, although there is a level of integration between the two communities (Ruane and Todd, 1992). Unionism obviously conforms to this model in that its divisions are largely the product of an internally differentiated community but the difficulties that organised Unionism has found in negotiating and accommodating these divisions are derived, in large part, from the fact that its political circumstances have forced it to try and suppress the natural diversity inherent within the Unionist community.

Unionism has, at least in organisational terms, been a reluctant participant in creating a society that is divided into two competing

nationalisms. In the formative stages of the Home Rule crises in the late nineteenth century, Unionist political organisations had to be forged out of pre-existing political structures rather than around a nationalist project. Political Unionism was an umbrella organisation, the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC), and was created by another umbrella organisation, the Orange Order, explicitly to represent the various groupings in Unionist society. The priorities of Unionists in the late twentieth century have been to ameliorate differences which are essentially political in character. The fracturing of the organisational monolith of the Unionist Party occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the Unionist government was unable to adequately meet the demands of the civil rights protests and the Unionist hardliners (Mulholland, 2000). The Unionist Party was able to maintain control of a growing number of ginger groups within the party when it was in power. Once Stormont was prorogued the party fractured and by the time of the Ulster Workers' Council strike there were five political parties appealing to a Unionist constituency (the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland (UPNI), the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Vanguard Unionist Party (VUP)). It was from this time that the remaining UUP members became known as Official Unionists. It was not until after the Constitutional Convention in 1975 that Unionist party politics settled into two main parties – the UUP and the DUP, and the Alliance Party. The UUP, VUP and DUP had formed a coalition to contest those elections but when William Craig advocated a coalition with the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) Vanguard lost the support of the other parties and the electorate. Since the paramilitary ceasefires in the 1990s we have seen another proliferation of Unionist parties. However, while two of these parties, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the now defunct Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), were self-consciously catering for a working-class Protestant constituency, and McCartney and his United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP) claim to be the repository for a liberal Unionism, Unionism has not split into its ideological parts.

The academic debate has tended to focus on what these constituent parts of Unionism might be. Feargal Cochrane argues:

> Unionist ideology contains diverse interest groups with little in common other than a commitment to the link with Britain. While this position remains relatively cohesive during periods of constitutional crisis when they can articulate what they do not want... the

> coherence of the ideology begins to disintegrate when unionists are forced to establish a consensus for political progress. (Cochrane, 1997, 35)

We should not be surprised that different social groupings and interest groups want different things and undoubtedly the divisions are an important dynamic of how Unionist politics functions. Cochrane argues that the differences in political culture between the two Unionist parties are reflected in their style of politics and their analysis of their political situations. However, outlining and delineating these divisions is insufficient because Unionists are acutely aware of their variation and there have been attempts to either eliminate or nullify internal division. For instance, the major division within the Stormont cabinet was the importance of prioritising measures to maintain Unionist cohesion (Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, 1996), and anthropological research on the Orange Order has argued that this was the main function of the Order and was achieved through layers of representation (Bryan, 1998, 2000a, b).

Nevertheless, the majority of research on Unionism has been concerned with delineating the complex ideological web of Unionism. The seminal work in this regard is Jennifer Todd's 'Two Traditions in Unionist Political Culture', which, while published in 1987, is still the dominant model for political researchers. Todd identified two ideological traditions in Unionism based on different primary imagined communities and different conceptions of political life. Ulster Loyalism's imagined community is Ulster, its connection with Britain is conditional, and religion and politics are inextricably linked; the Ulster British tradition's imagined community is Great Britain and it professes liberal political values (Todd, 1987). This duality not only seems more comprehensive than other accounts aimed at distilling an 'essence' of Unionism (Coulter, 1994) but also seems to simplify a more fluid Unionist political discourse and reduces essentially political disputes to cultural structures (Doyle, 1994). Unionist political ideology is more integrated, or perhaps has become more integrated, than Todd's model allows and a political dynamic is discounted altogether under this dualist approach. Arthur Aughey, for example, has argued that Unionist political thought has centred around two ideas: the fact of the Union and its durability (Aughey, 1997; 2001a), and as Bew and Patterson note:

> Although the history of Protestant politics and ideology is replete with divisions on democratic and class issues, on the national

> question... there is no significant intra-Unionist division – the liberals and the neanderthals make common cause. (Bew and Patterson, 1987a, 45)

This 'thick' interpretation of Unionism is ultimately more sophisticated than those interpretations which build on the ethnic conflict literature and which try to interpret party competition within Northern Ireland. Paul Mitchell has described the party system in Northern Ireland as 'an ethnic dual party system'; essentially two systems operating in tandem – one for Unionism and one for Nationalism (Mitchell, 1995) – and therefore it accords closely with Horowitz's unranked ethnic group system. Competition between the two Unionist parties is, for Mitchell, identifiably ethnic, perhaps more so than within Nationalism, as he argues there are real and ascertainable differences between the two Nationalist parties, such as electorates, politics and tactics (Mitchell, 1995, 782). Thus, the changing fortunes of the DUP from the early 1980s, when its fortunes declined after it captured 50 per cent of the Unionist vote, are explained in political and not social or economic terms:

> The DUP has ultimately suffered from the ineffectiveness of its rejectionist stance. While the belligerency and theatricality of Paisley's opposition to Irish Nationalism has sustained his personal popularity, his party has fallen further behind the UUP. The DUP's tactics in trying to 'defend the Union' have been seen to be inept, unsuccessful and even counter-productive. (Mitchell, 1995, 785)

Indeed, the limited literature on voting behaviour in Northern Ireland would tend to endorse a rational choice model. Knox, McIlheney and Osborne found: 'The social and economic profile of the UUP and DUP voter, although not merging was at the very least converging.' Thus, it was suggested, 'the unionist electorate's expectations of these parties is *not* the extent to which they are staunch defenders of the Union, since it is assumed that both are, but their success in building a constitutional framework for Northern Ireland' (Knox, McIlheney and Osborne, 1995, 93–4, emphasis in original). This is supported by research by Ian McAllister who found that 'party has a consistently important influence in predicting Protestant political beliefs and preferences' (McAllister, 1983a, 281).

There are therefore two debates in the academic literature on Unionist divisions but little engagement between them. One addresses

the social and cultural divisions within Unionism in general and the other focuses on the nature of party competition. The problem with both these debates is that the first neglects the importance of electoral competition while the second neglects the importance of cultural divisions. There are further problems with the literature on Unionist political parties in that, generally speaking, it is outdated.[1] This book goes some way to rectifying this problem by treating the political parties and their organisation seriously and examines in depth how the political parties function, how they perceive themselves and how they have developed. This is a key part of the overall book, which examines the politics of Ulster Unionism with reference to a political dynamic; in other words, how political debates, political behaviour and party competition are affected or determined by political circumstances rather than by ideological and cultural structures. This is not to deny the importance of, for example, differences in perceptions of national identity. Rather it argues that these are insufficient to explain the dynamics of Unionist politics because of the nature of the political circumstances of Northern Ireland since the AIA.

The structure of the book

Most of these debates and discussions have been overtaken by events since 1998, as political change has raised a series of other questions. However, they remain pertinent in explaining the shape and substance of Unionist politics post-Good Friday Agreement. The most important discussion is the relationship between Unionists and the process of change which occurred since the mid-1980s. There have been many studies since 1998 that have outlined Unionist dissatisfaction with political developments but the framework for the period prior to 1998 remains undeveloped. The 1998 Agreement significantly changed Northern Irish politics but in many ways the main questions remained the same: Would Ireland be united? Could Nationalists and Republicans find an agreed space with Unionism in Northern Ireland? Each chapter of this book addresses key questions about the relationship between Unionism and this process of political change. Chapter 1 discusses developments in Unionist ideas from the AIA. These developments have been seen as crucial in changing the Unionist interpretation of the direction of politics in Northern Ireland and therefore providing a rationale for participation in the negotiations of 1996–8 and the conclusion of the 1998 Agreement. Chapter 2 examines the Unionist interpretation of the AIA, which was an important staging post for