Introduction

The Northern Ireland Assembly was established under the terms of the Belfast Agreement (also known as the Good Friday Agreement) and was first elected on 25 June 1998. Legislative powers and executive authority for the Northern Ireland Government Departments were devolved to the Assembly from 2 December 1999.

The second election to the Assembly was held on 26 November 2003, although the Assembly had been
The STV system works as follows:

i. Voters in each constituency vote for as many candidates as they wish in order of preference, putting a ‘1’ beside their first choice, a ‘2’ beside their second choice and so on.

ii. Each voting paper is checked to see if it has been correctly filled in and any spoilt papers are removed from the count to give a total valid count. This is the minimum number of votes a candidate must have to be elected.

iii. A quota is calculated for each constituency using the formula:

\[
\text{Quota} = \left\lfloor \frac{\text{total number of valid votes cast in constituency (V)}}{\text{number of seats (S)}} \right\rfloor + 1
\]

iv. Voting papers are sorted according to first preferences. Any candidate attaining or exceeding the quota is elected.

v. Surplus votes from candidates who exceed the quota are transferred to other candidates. To ensure fairness, all the candidate’s ballots are transferred at a fractional value to second preference candidates.

vi. Candidates with the least number of votes are eliminated and their votes are also transferred to second preference candidates.

vii. This process continues until all available seats have been filled.

The STV system was used to elect six Members in each of the 18 constituencies in the 1998, 2003 and 2007 elections.

The Constituencies

The 18 Westminster parliamentary constituencies are used for the Assembly elections (see map below). Six seats are allocated to each constituency, giving a total of 108 seats. The geographical boundaries for the 18 constituencies have remained unchanged since the first Assembly election in 1998.

The Candidates

A total of 257 candidates stood for the 2007 election, compared with 256 in 2003.

There were 47 female candidates in this election (49 in 2003 and in 1998). The party with the greatest number of female candidates in the 2007 election was the SDLP, with fourteen.

In 2007, of the 108 outgoing MLAs, 91 stood for re-election.