

What do the Northern Ireland parties say? Key humanist issues at the 2019 UK general elections

All party policies come from the respective party manifestos unless a specific reference is given. Sinn Féin do not take their seats or vote in the Westminster Parliament. A number of the issues that we work on are devolved to Northern Ireland. This means that in Westminster, the parties only legislate for England, or for England and Wales. As such, on some issues, we have presented the views of the parties in a Northern Irish context, and explained where it isn't clear that the party would take the same approach in Westminster.

NI Humanists question	DUP	Sinn Féin	Alliance Party	SDLP	UUP	Green Party of Northern Ireland	People Before Profit
Manifesto link:	https://humanists.uk/GE2019dup	Manifesto not published yet.	https://humanists.uk/GE2019alliance	https://humanists.uk/GE2019sdlp	Manifesto not published yet.	Manifesto not published yet.	https://humanists.uk/GE2019pbp
Will your party support repealing Northern Ireland's blasphemy laws? ¹	No. DUP's leader Arlene Foster previously told us 'the DUP respectfully disagrees', and defended maintaining the existing law.	Yes. Sinn Féin MLAs have previously told us that party policy is in support, and said 'These laws are outdated and not representative of the Ireland we live in today.'	Yes. Leader Naomi Long has told us 'I support the repeal of Northern Ireland's blasphemy laws.' Other MLAs have also told us they support it too.	Yes. SDLP MLAs have previously told us it supports repeal. 'When power-sharing is restored, the SDLP will continue to support efforts to amend the law in this area.'	No stated policy.	Yes. The Green Party has previously told us, 'The Green Party Northern Ireland is fully supportive of abolishing existing blasphemy laws.'	Yes. PBP MLA Gerry Carroll has previously told us 'I can confirm that People Before Profit do indeed support the call for ending of the blasphemy laws. They are a relic of the past and need to be rescinded.'
Will your party support full access to safe, legal abortion services in Northern Ireland?	No. 'The DUP wants: The Assembly to act to fill the dangerous vacuum of law and guidance that the Creasy legislation creates. Our aim will be to maximise support for mothers and protection of the unborn child.'	Yes. 'The situation as exists denies women their human rights, has caused loss of life and cannot be allowed to continue, and stigmatises and traumatises women and girls. Therefore, this means that the 1861 Act must be repealed in the north and legislation must be implemented, north and south, which allows women access to abortion.' ²	No policy on abortion, regards this issue as a matter of individual conscience for party members. Leader Naomi Long has stated that 'I support decriminalisation, with access to free, safe, legal termination within strict gestational limits.' ³	Unclear. The SDLP describes itself as a "pro-life party" but its politicians are free to vote with their conscience on abortion laws. ⁴	When contacted by us in 2017, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. Leader Steve Aiken will not support attempts to repeal the new abortion legislation. ⁵	Yes. 'Decriminalise abortion. The UK is not meeting its minimum human rights requirements for people across the UK in this regard, and especially in Northern Ireland.' ⁶	Yes. PBP party policy states it supports 'legislation for free, safe, and legal abortion on both sides of the border.' ⁷
Will your party support legally recognised same sex marriages in Northern Ireland?	No. Opposed to same-sex marriage. ⁸	Yes. 'Civil Marriage Equality is an easy task for republicans. In Stormont, Sinn Féin have consistently advocated	Yes. 'We welcome the extension of Same Sex Marriage to Northern Ireland from January 2020.'	Yes. Leader Colum Eastwood has stated that the SDLP 'support equal marriage. We support an inclusive, equal future,	Allows members a conscience vote on same-sex marriage. ¹¹ Leader Steve Aiken has supported same-sex	Yes. Leader Steven Agnew stated, 'We are determined to legislate for equal marriage in a functioning Assembly... In	Yes. PBP party policy states 'full support for marriage equality in the North.' ¹⁴

¹ All responses to this question come from Humanists UK 'DUP opposes repealing Northern Ireland's blasphemy laws while all other parties come out in favour' 12 July 2019:

<https://humanism.org.uk/2019/07/12/dup-opposes-repealing-northern-irelands-blasphemy-laws-while-all-other-parties-come-out-in-favour/>

² Sinn Féin, 'A Vision for Women's Health, 2018': https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2018/SF_Vision_for_Womens_Health.pdf

³ The Irish Times report, 'Abortion in Northern Ireland where do the parties stand', 7 June 2018: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/abortion-in-northern-ireland-where-do-the-parties-stand-1.3522879>

⁴ BBC News, 'SDLP members support conscience vote on abortion matters', May 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-44174053>

⁵ Belfast Telegraph, 'I won't back Foster bid to overturn new abortion law: Steve Aiken'

17 November 2019: <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/i-wont-back-foster-bid-to-overturn-new-abortion-law-steve-aiken-38706203.html>

⁶ Green Party of NI, 'General Election Manifesto 2017': https://issuu.com/anthonyflynn_gpni/docs/gpni-manifesto-2017

⁷ PBP, 'Reproductive Rights Policy': <https://www.pbp.ie/policies/reproductive-rights-policy/>

⁸ Belfast Telegraph, 'DUP wants religious protections over same sex marriage written into law' 23 October 2019:

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/dup-wants-religious-protections-over-same-sex-marriage-written-into-law-38621812.html>

		and campaigned for its introduction. ⁹		free from discrimination and intolerance. ¹⁰	marriage. ¹²	the absence of a functioning Assembly, the UK Government has a responsibility to provide equality to all citizens. ¹³	
Will you support replacing faith-based religious education in state schools, and instead treat all major religious and non-religious worldviews equally?	No clear views on changing education about religious and non-religious worldviews.	No stated policy.	When contacted by us in 2017, said 'We support undertaking a full and comprehensive review of the curriculum to ensure that a wide-range of academic and vocational options is available.'	No. Education policy states that 'We recognise the value of faith based education and the initiative of various churches in this regard.' ¹⁵	When contacted by us in 2017, said 'Religious Education should remain taught in state schools, school children should also be made aware that there are many different religions around the globe, as well as non-religious viewpoints.'	When contacted by us, said 'we would oppose any attempt to enshrine one religion above others (or above agnosticism or atheism).'	When contacted by us, said 'PBP is for: Education about religious and non-religious beliefs'.
Will your party support school assemblies being equally inclusive of all pupils, regardless of religion or belief, rather than being acts of collective worship?	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	No stated policy, but has stated that within 'the SDLP model for integration ... it is still possible to have a diversity of religious elements built into the students' weekly schedule.' ¹⁶	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	Yes. 'Abolish all requirements for compulsory religious instruction.' ¹⁷
Will your party support fully inclusive school admissions with no discrimination on the basis of religion?	In the context of Northern Ireland, the DUP believes that 'sharing can produce educational, societal and economic benefits', and has previously supported the Shared Education Bill. It has also 'secured a £500m Treasury commitment to invest in shared education'. ¹⁸	In Northern Ireland, will 'Continue to encourage & facilitate the growth of... Integrated and Shared Education.' ¹⁹ But also supports 'parental preference – whether it be in the integrated, Catholic maintained, the controlled or Irish medium sectors.' ²⁰ In the Republic of Ireland, Sinn Féin 'will end the laws that allow for religious	In the context of Northern Ireland, the Alliance Party has committed to 'strengthening the statutory duty on the Department for Education and the Education Authority to promote the development of integrated education and increasing the number of integrated school places.'	In the context of Northern Ireland, 'the SDLP will actively build and promote the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland so that it becomes the educational format of choice ... there is scope to develop integrated education which builds upon the faith element of schools.' ²²	In the context of Northern Ireland, calls for 'a single education system, where children mix from age four... but which also protects a family's right to education within a religious context.' ²³	In the context of Northern Ireland, when contacted by us, said 'We would call for the creation in Northern Ireland of a single, publicly funded, non-selective, integrated secular education system.'	Yes. 2019 Manifesto states it has a vision of Ireland 'that stops all forms of discrimination and removes church control of schools.' In the context of Northern Ireland, 'People Before Profit wants to see: An integrated, all-ability education system... We oppose the sham "shared education" programme which simply reinforces

¹¹ BBC News, 'General election 2019: A simple guide to the Ulster Unionist Party' November 14 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50315905>

¹² The Belfast Telegraph, 'I hope Johnson doesn't return as PM, blasts Aiken as he warns of risk to the Union' December 2019:

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/i-hope-johnson-doesnt-return-as-pm-blasts-aiken-as-he-warns-of-risk-to-the-union-38743393.html>

¹⁴ PBP, LGBTQ Policy: <https://www.pbp.ie/policies/lgbtq-policy/>

⁹ Sinn Féin, 'On your Side: A policy for LGBTQI equality': https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2018/On_Your_Side_-_A_Policy_for_LGBTQI_Equality.pdf

¹⁰ SDLP, 'Eastwood: Welcomes progress on equal marriage', March 28 2018: <http://www.sdlp.ie/news/2018/eastwood-welcomes-progress-on-equal-marriage/>

¹³ Green Party NI, 'Green Party leader says momentum towards marriage equality now irresistible' February 14 2018 <http://www.greenparty.org/green-party-leader-says-momentum-towards-marriage-equality-now-irresistible/>

¹⁵ SDLP, 'Education': <https://www.sdlp.ie/issues/integrating-education/>

¹⁶ SDLP, 'Assembly Manifesto 2016': https://www.sdlp.ie/site/assets/files/43032/sdlp_manifesto_web-1.pdf

¹⁷ PBP, 'Education Policy' <https://www.pbp.ie/policies/education-policy/>

¹⁸ DUP Policy, 'Every child with the opportunity to succeed': <https://www.mydup.com/policies/every-child-with-the-opportunity-to-succeed>

¹⁹ Sinn Féin, 'Assembly Manifesto 2016': <https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2016/MANIFESTO2016Assemblytogether.pdf>

²⁰ News Letter, 'Integrated Education: Where do the NI Parties Stand' March 2016, <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/integrated-education-where-do-ni-parties-stand-1-7291875#ixzz4727vPOps>

		discrimination against children in school admissions'. ²¹					segregation. ²⁴
Will your party support legalising assisted dying for people who are of sound mind but are terminally ill or incurably suffering?	No stated policy. The former Shadow DUP Spokesperson for Health has spoken against assisted dying during a debate in the House of Commons. ²⁵	No stated policy.	When contacted by us in 2017, said that this is a matter of individual conscience.	No. Has voted against proposals to legalise assisted dying in Westminster. ²⁶	When contacted by us, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. Has voted against proposals in Westminster. ²⁷	In the context of Northern Ireland, has previously stated that it will support assisted dying. Unclear if this refers to incurably suffering, as well as terminally ill, individuals.	No stated policy.
Will your party remove the automatic right of the 26 bishops to sit in the House of Lords?	No. Under DUP proposed reforms of the House of Lords 'Lords Spiritual would be retained.' ²⁸	The party does not recognise the jurisdiction of the Westminster parliament over Northern Ireland so wouldn't form a specific policy on this.	Yes. Supports 'a directly elected House of Lords. Elected representatives could be elected by proportional representation from the 12 regions of the UK, including Northern Ireland and would serve one or at most two longer terms to avoid party politicisation of the roll.'	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	Yes. 'Move to a system of proportional representation for Westminster elections, and will make the House of Lords a fully elected body.' ²⁹	No stated policy.
Will your party the introduction of an Ambassador- level post for global freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief?	Committed to 'retaining and strengthening [the] role of the Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief with necessary financial and administrative support' and to 'retaining the Foreign Secretary's Human Rights Advisory Group, and ensur(ing) that there are at least three representatives from civil society which specialise on Freedom of Religion and Belief.'	No stated policy, but 'committed to guaranteeing religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities for all citizens'. ³⁰	The Alliance Party will 'continue to promote our unwavering commitment to freedom of, and from, religion across the world and opposing discrimination on the basis of religion or belief.'	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	No stated policy, but 'committed to defending and campaigning for equality and human rights across all sectors, regardless of... religious belief'. ³¹	No stated policy.
Will your party commit to retaining the Human	No stated policy. However, in 2015 DUP	Yes. Has spoken out against the scrapping of	Yes. 'Alliance strongly supports the European	Yes. 'The SDLP will stridently oppose any	Yes. When contacted by us, said 'We believe that	Yes. 'Defend the UK Human Rights Act.' ³⁵	Yes. When contacted by us, said 'We are for

²² SDLP, 'Assembly Manifesto 2016': https://www.sdlp.ie/site/assets/files/43032/sdlp_manifesto_web-1.pdf

²³ UUP, 'Assembly Election Manifesto 2017': <https://uup.org/assets/policies/2017%20assembly%20manifesto.pdf>

²⁴ PBP, 'Assembly Manifesto 2017': <http://www.peoplebeforeprofit.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PBP-Manifesto-Assembly-Elections-2017.pdf>

²¹ Sinn Féin, 'General Election Manifesto 2016 (Ireland)': <https://issuu.com/sinnfeinireland/docs/ge2016manifesto>

²⁵ Jim Shannon MP, Shadow DUP Spokesperson (Health) in the House of Commons, July 4 2019: <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2019-07-04b.1411.2>

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ House of Commons, 'Assisted Dying Bill vote results', September 2015 <https://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-09-11&number=69>

²⁸ DUP, 'House of Lords: Reforming the Second Chamber' https://www.mydup.com/images/uploads/publications/House_of_Lords_DUP_Public_Policy_Consultation.pdf

²⁹ Green Party of NI, 'General Election Manifesto 2017', https://issuu.com/anthonyflynn_gpni/docs/gpni-manifesto-2017

³⁰ Sinn Féin, 'Assembly Manifesto 2017': https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2017/MANIFESTO_ENGLISH.pdf

³¹ SDLP, 'Assembly Manifesto 2016': https://www.sdlp.ie/site/assets/files/43032/sdlp_manifesto_web-1.pdf

Rights Act and remaining part of the European Court of Human Rights?	Parliamentary Chief Whip Jeffrey Donaldson stated 'The DUP has long been critical of the Human Rights Act and the way in which it has been interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights... We support, as a minimum, the reform of the Human Rights Act, to remove the "right to family life" defence against deportation upon conviction for a serious criminal offence.' ³²	the Human Rights Act and remaining part of the Convention. ³³	Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). We will oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act or withdrawal from the ECHR.'	attempt to caricature and devalue human rights at home and abroad. The Human Rights Act underpins the Good Friday Agreement; it must be complemented by rather than supplanted by a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights.. We will also vehemently oppose any attempts to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights.' ³⁴	the rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights are essential to a free society. We are open to the idea of a British Bill of Rights replacing the Human Rights Act, but only if the same rights and protections are given. We oppose any attempt to weaken Human Rights legislation in Northern Ireland.'		retaining [the Human Rights Act].'
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About Northern Ireland Humanists

Northern Ireland Humanists is part of Humanists UK, working with the Humanist Association of Ireland. At Humanists UK and Northern Ireland Humanists, we want a tolerant world where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We work to support lasting change for a better society, championing ideas for the one life we have. We do this because we're humanists, people who shape our own lives in the here and now, because we believe it's the only life we get. Our work helps people be happier and more fulfilled, and by bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. We're committed to putting humanism into practice. Through our ceremonies, pastoral support, education services, and campaigning work, we advance free thinking and freedom of choice so everyone can live in a fair and equal society.

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You can find out more about our election work, including how to write to your prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) about these issues, at humanists.uk/ge2019ni.

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³⁵ Green Party of NI, 'General Election Manifesto 2017': https://issuu.com/anthonyflynn_gpni/docs/gpni-manifesto-2017

³² Statement of DUP Parliamentary Chief Whip Jeffrey Donaldson, May 2015: <http://www.mydup.com/news/article/donaldson-human-rights-act-has-failed-victims>

³³ Sinn Féin, 'President Gerry Adams' statement on the Human Rights Act, European Convention, and Good Friday Agreement' July 2016: <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/40835>

³⁴ UNA-UK, 'General Election 2017: Putting a foreign policy lens on party manifestos' <https://www.una.org.uk/file/11873/download?token=seyXWusR>