What do the Northern Ireland parties say? Key humanist issues at the 2024 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 Ireland context, and explained where it isn't clear that the party would take the same approach in Westminster.

NI Humanists question	**Sinn Féin**	**DUP**	**Alliance Party**	**SDLP**	**UUP**	**Green Party of Northern Ireland**	**People Before Profit**
Manifesto link:	https://humanists.uk/GE2024SinnFein	https://humanists.uk/GE2024DUP	https://humanists.uk/GE2024Alliance	https://humanists.uk/GE2024SDLP	https://humanists.uk/GE2024UUP	https://humanists.uk/GE2024GreenNI	https://humanists.uk/GE2024PBP
Do you support getting rid of Northern Ireland's blasphemy laws? *This issue is devolved to and only affects Northern Ireland.*	Yes. In replies to constituents, Sinn Féin confirmed it 'supported removing blasphemy from the constitution and we actively campaigned for its removal throughout the 2018 referendum in the south. As a 32 county organisation the position we took on the referendum in the south is reflective of our party's position in the north. The laws are outdated and not representative of the Ireland we live in today.'	No. In 2019, the DUP's former leader Arlene Foster told us 'the DUP respectfully disagrees'[1], and defended maintaining the existing law. This was later reconfirmed to a constituent.	Yes. In response to questions from us, said '...our current libel laws are incompatible with the freedom of and from religion... We support the calls from both the United Nations and Human Rights Commission to repeal Blasphemy laws...'.[2]	Yes. In replies to constituents, the SDLP confirmed it 'agrees... that maintaining these laws here... provides tacit support to other nations which use similar laws to violently oppress minorities... The SDLP has previously supported attempts to amend our libel laws to remove offences related to blasphemy.'	No stated policy, but most UUP MLAs have expressed individual support for repeal.	Yes. In response to questions from us, said '...Green Party Northern Ireland is in favour of repealing Northern Ireland's blasphemy laws'	Yes. 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.'
Do you support moving to an inclusive education system? *This issue is devolved to Northern Ireland. Similar issues exist in England, which Westminster legislates for.*	Yes. The 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly Election Manifesto stated 'Respond to the demand for both Irish Medium and Integrated Education'.[3] The Party also supported the Integrated Education Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022, aimed at providing dedicated funding for the integrated school sector.[4]	Unclear. The party has stated their support for a single education system but it is not clear what they mean by this. Further, they tried to block the Integrated Education Act by using the Assembly veto mechanism.[5]	Yes. 'Creating a successor fund to the Fresh Start capital fund for shared and integrated education.' Alliance MLA Kellie Armstrong brought forward the Integrated Education Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022, aimed at providing dedicated funding for the integrated school sector.[6]	Yes. 'The SDLP has a long history of supporting integrated education... and will continue to promote integrated education.'	Yes. 'We will establish a single education system that... Values every child equally'. Voted against the Integrated Education Act, but this was because they would rather make other types of school inclusive than replace them with integrated schools.	Yes. The 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly Election Manifesto stated 'Ensure that all children have access to integrated education... Support the provision of Irish-medium education within the integrated sector'.[7] Clare Bailey MLA also supported the Integrated Education Act, saying 'I supported the principles of the Bill.'[8]	Yes. Gerry Carroll MLA supported the Integrated Education Act, saying 'If we are to move away from being a society that is entrenched in division... one of the key pillars... is to do away with the outdated practice that teaches people in separate and divided schools based on religion.. The Bill... has my party's broad support.'[9]

[1] Humanists UK 'DUP opposes repealing Northern Ireland's blasphemy laws while all other parties come out in favour', 12 July 2019
[2] Furthermore, the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly Election Manifesto stated 'Repeal blasphemy laws - to strengthen freedom of, and from religion and so that these antiquated laws can never be used to curtail freedom of expression.' Alliance Party 'Together We Can - Assembly Manifesto 2022'
[3] Sinn Féin 'Time for real change', Assembly Election 2022
[4] Brendan Hughes 'Integrated education bill would create a "three-tier system"', Belfast Live, 17 January 2022.
[5] 'How MLAs voted on Stormont integrated education bill' ITV News, 9 March 2022. MLA Diane Dodds commented on the Act: 'This will mean that the Department of Education will have to prioritise one sector over all others. This is unfair and unreasonable. My local controlled school should not be deprived of a new building just because it is not in the integrated sector.' Brendan Hughes 'Integrated education bill would create a "three-tier system"', Belfast Live, 17 January 2022.
[6] Brendan Hughes 'Integrated education bill would create a "three-tier system"', Belfast Live, 17 January 2022.
[7] Green Party 'It's Time. Green Party Manifesto 2022 Assembly Election'
[8] Clare Bailey MLA, Integrated Education Bill: Consideration Stage Debate, 17 January 2022.
[9] Gerry Carroll MLA, Integrated Education Bill: Consideration Stage, 17 January 2022.

Do you support getting safe, legal abortion services fully up and running in Northern Ireland? *This issue is devolved to Northern Ireland. Similar issues exist in England and Wales, which Westminster legislates for.*	Yes. 'We want women to be able to access the safe and legal health services they are entitled to.' Sinn Féin previously supported repealing the 1861 Act that made abortion a criminal offence.[10]	No. 'The DUP is unashamedly pro-life and continues to oppose the radical abortion laws foisted on communities in Northern Ireland.'	Yes. In response to questions from us, said 'our party fully supported the Abortion regulations for NI introduced by the UK Government in 2019… We urged the Secretary of State in 2022, when the Assembly and Executive was down, to ensure full commissioning of abortion services in Northern Ireland…'	Unclear. In 2018, the SDLP described itself as a 'pro-life party' but its politicians are free to vote with their conscience on abortion laws.[11]	No party policy. The UUP considers this a conscience issue.	Yes. Clare Bailey MLA welcomed a direction from the Secretary of State that the commissioning of abortion services must be brought forward by the Department of Health.[12]	Yes. 'Defend the hard fought for rights of women including the right to choose.' Gerry Carroll MLA endorsed the NI Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup's call for the commissioning of abortion services.[13]
Do you support a compassionate assisted dying law for adults who are of sound mind but are terminally ill or incurably suffering? *This issue is devolved to Northern Ireland. Similar issues exist in England and Wales, which Westminster legislates for.*	Yes, but it is unclear whether this commitment covers the terminally ill or the incurably suffering or both. A Sinn Féin spokesperson said 'In principle we support legislating for assisted dying in certain circumstances and with robust safeguards, but the legislation should only be progressed once the appropriate services and supports are available.'[14]	No. 'We will… firmly oppose efforts to legalise assisted suicide.'	No party policy. The Alliance Party considers this a conscience issue.	Yes, but it is unclear whether this commitment covers the terminally ill or the incurably suffering or both. The SDLP says it 'is open to a change in the law and we think it's appropriate for Westminster to consider the issue.'[15]	No party policy. The UUP considers this a conscience issue and 'elected members would have a free vote if it were ever to be brought forward.[16]	Yes for the terminally ill, but unclear for the incurably suffering. In response to questions from us, said 'The Green Party in Northern Ireland supports dignity in dying and calls on the Northern Ireland Executive to bring forward legislation to permit assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent adults.'	Yes. People Before Profit TD Gino Kenny has brought forward the Assisted Dying Bill in the Republic of Ireland. Gerry Carroll MLA has also told assisted dying campaigners he is supportive.
Do you support removing the automatic right of the 26 bishops to sit in the House of Lords? *This issue is not devolved.*	The party does not recognise the jurisdiction of the Westminster Parliament over Northern Ireland so wouldn't form a specific policy on this or vote on it.	Unclear. 'The DUP remains committed to reform of the House of Lords. We believe it should be a smaller chamber, with a majority of its membership elected.'	Yes. 'Alliance MPs will demand… a directly-elected House of Lords.'	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	Yes. 'We advocate for the abolition of the House of Lords in its current form and reform of the second chamber.' The 2017 General Election Manifesto included a commitment to 'make the House of Lords a fully elected body'.[17]	No stated policy.

[10] Sinn Féin 'A Vision for Women's Health', 2018
[11] Enda McClafferty 'SDLP members support conscience vote on abortion matters', BBC News, May 2018
[12] Green Party Northern Ireland 'Direction on Commissioning of Abortion Services Welcomed', 22 July 2021
[13] People Before Profit 'Carroll welcomes Abortion and Contraception Taskforce Report', 31 March 2021
[14] Mark Simpson 'Assisted dying: Sinn Féin and SDLP would consider change to law', BBC News, March 2024
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] Green Party of NI, 'General Election Manifesto 2017'

Do you support there being an envoy or ambassador for global freedom of religion or belief? *This issue is not devolved.*	No stated policy.	Yes. 'DUP MPs… endorsed the appointment of a special envoy for freedom of religion and belief… We will build on this record to ensure that the rights of those of all faiths and none are protected across the United Kingdom.'	No stated policy. But says it 'will… Continue to promote our unwavering commitment to freedom of and from religion across the world and oppose discrimination on the basis of religion or belief.'	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	No stated policy.

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. 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. Founded in 1896, we are trusted to promote humanism by 120,000 members and supporters and over 115 members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group, 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.

Northern Ireland Humanists and Humanists UK are independent of all political parties and do not support, fund, or advocate any particular political party. Parties are ordered based on their polling average at the time the table was compiled.

All party policies come from the respective party manifestos unless a specific reference is given. Where policies are not stated we contacted the parties to seek further clarity and the table incorporates any replies we received. If you spot something where you think we've got it wrong, or have missed a piece of information, then please do contact us. 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. Sinn Féin do not take their seats or vote in the Westminster Parliament.

You can find out more about our election work, including how to write to your prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) about these issues, at https://humanists.uk/ge2024/.

For more information please contact:

Boyd Sleator
Northern Ireland Humanists Coordinator
07918 975795
boyd@humanists.uk / www.nihumanists.uk