Democracy and the Fallacy of the Post-Conflict Era in Northern Ireland

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Democracy and the Fallacy of the Post-Conflict Era in Northern Ireland

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A Thesis in the Field of International Relations
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

While Northern Ireland has experienced a period of relative peace since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, entrenched, age-old tensions persist between those of opposing political persuasions, and between those of different religions. Those tensions continue to manifest themselves in ways which disprove the notion that Northern Ireland is in a post-conflict era. Further, demographic shifts, social changes, and external pressures make the status quo in Northern Ireland untenable. Profound uncertainty over Brexit now threatens the structure and foundation of government, and, perhaps of more immediate concern, the devolved local Executive and Assembly of Northern Ireland have collapsed, with little evidence that local government may be restored in the near term.

The examination of these issues is pursued through a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating historical perspective, analysis of laws and treaties, political demography, a comparison between major party platforms, and quantitative analysis of voting trends and shifting norms identified through sentiment polling. The conclusions drawn from this research demonstrate that, while Northern Ireland continues to exist in a state of unrest in ways not dissimilar from those of the past, change is now inevitable. New pressures and new challenges will soon force change as Northern Ireland attempts, again, to achieve a truly post-conflict state.
Acknowledgments

Foremost, I wish to thank US Ambassador (Ret.) and Harvard Kennedy School professor Nicholas Burns for his willingness to direct this thesis. I must also thank Dr. Doug Bond for his support, patience, and indispensable guidance throughout this process. I wish also to thank Dr. Peter Der Manuelian, professor of Egyptology and director of the Harvard Semitic Museum, for inspiring me to pursue this endeavor despite considerable obstacles.

I could not have completed this project without the support of my Harvard cohort, US Air Force veteran Catherine Williams, who supported me in academic partnership during all phases of this project.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge the people of Ireland, from all walks of life, who have worked to pursue a just and peaceful way forward.
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Chapter I.
An Introduction: The Good Friday Agreement and Beyond

Ireland is a unique case. Countries around the world have changed borders, changed hands, changed demographics, changed governments, and changed history. All of these things have happened in Ireland in just the past century. To be sure, many other regions have experienced prolonged periods of unrest, and even open division and bigotry, similar to what has transpired in the past few hundred years of Irish history. There are, however, two things which differentiate the Irish case from the rest of the world: Ireland, most notably Northern Ireland, is essentially the last bastion of the age-old Protestant v. Catholic divide in Western Europe, and, despite numerous, well-meaning attempts to the contrary, is losing its hold on any kind of meaningful power-sharing form of devolved government. This thesis asserts that the status quo in Northern Ireland is not sustainable and the growing instability caused by current events makes significant change in Northern Ireland inevitable. What’s more, the oft-repeated refrain that Northern Ireland now exists in a post-conflict era is false. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which ostensibly guaranteed the peace, is now under strain, with some calling for an entirely new agreement despite years of negotiations and a tremendous effort expended to achieve an accord in the first place.

When considering the history of Ireland as a whole, it would be a great disservice to attempt to sum up hundreds of years of that history here. However, in order to
understand how Northern Ireland arrived at its current state, one must first understand how the structure of government in Northern Ireland came to be. Through this lens of history, this thesis examines the ways in which instability has been made manifest in modern Northern Ireland through an examination of the implications of the Brexit referendum, the collapse of the power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland, and an analysis of societal trends and shifting demographics that signal both society’s need for change, and the inevitability of change itself.

To be sure, no one system of governance, or attempt at devolved government, has succeeded in offering a lasting peace, primarily because each attempt failed to address the underlying social issues that exist in Ireland. Indeed, for a span of time, the climate in Ireland was marked by sectarian violence and paramilitary activity which was sufficiently troubling as to have been dubbed “The Troubles” by the watching world. In the most simplistic terms, there are two sides to this story, existing in opposition: one side which is traditionally Protestant and in favor of Northern Ireland continuing to be governed by the United Kingdom (individuals of this persuasion are often called “Unionists” or by the similar but not quite synonymous term, “Loyalists”), and one which is traditionally Catholic and largely in favor of the six counties of Northern Ireland reunifying with the rest of the Republic of Ireland to form an independent, all-island state (such individuals are generally referred to as “Republicans” or also by the term “Nationalists,” although Republicans and Nationalists diverge on some issues). It could be argued that each side views the history of Ireland through a slightly different lens. Exceptions do exist, of course, and no one individual in such a struggle may be easily pigeon-holed into one
category or another, but understanding these fundamental divisions is key to understanding how Northern Ireland has arrived at this moment in history.

For clarity, and in order to place current events in their proper context, it is important to understand that the island of Ireland is divided into two separate countries: six counties in the north serving as part of the United Kingdom, and the remaining twenty-six counties to the south functioning as the independent nation of the Republic of Ireland. For the purposes of this paper, the twenty-six counties to the south which constitute the modern republic will be referred to as the Republic of Ireland, and the six counties to the north, that are part of the United Kingdom, will be referred to as Northern Ireland. When referring to both entities collectively, they shall be referred to as Ireland. This distinction is necessary to prevent confusion.

Religion

As noted, much, but not all, of the discord between the two sides has been based on religion, and this discord dates back several centuries. Briefly stepping back in history to the late eighteenth century, during a time of continued Protestant ascendancy in Northern Ireland, there began calls to relieve Irish Catholics of some of the religious, social, and economic barriers which had been imposed upon them. History demonstrates, however, that only the most liberal of Protestants would take up the call.1 These barriers included a lack of representation in positions of authority, lack of recourse or representation in the legal or justice system, subjection to various duties and tithes

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collected by the government, the suppression of the expression of Catholicism to include symbols of the same or the presence or authority of priests within the community, and restrictions against the right to exercise various aspects of their Gaelic heritage.

The religious and cultural differences between Protestants and Catholics were so profound that Protestants expressed a general suspicion and distrust of Catholics. Theobald Wolfe Tone, the famous Protestant barrister who became a champion of Catholic emancipation at the turn of the nineteenth century, described this state of mistrust thusly:

> But here a good old Protestant lady will tell me, that all compacts between us are in vain, for no faith, nor even oaths, are to be kept with heretics; and I know that she will have many to coincide in opinion with her. … What has become of the wisdom of the Legislature, that has been able to devise no better means for the exclusion of Catholics from the professions and parliament…?^2

In this same text, Wolfe Tone made a robust argument as to how that mistrust and bigotry was the singular impediment to Catholics being granted the same rights as Protestants. He further highlighted the practice of land seizures by Protestants against Catholics, and expounded on one of the main points of contention between both sides: the suppression of Catholic rights to education. He stated, in part:

> We plunge them by law, and continue them by statute, in gross ignorance, and then we make the incapacity we have created, the argument for their exclusion, from the common rights of man! We plead our crime in justification of itself: If ignorance be their condemnation, what has made them ignorant? Not the hand of Nature: For I presume they are born with capacities, pretty much like other men: It is the iniquitous and cruel injustice of Protestant bigotry … they cannot obtain degrees … and therefore we find that they do not enter our University.^3

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^3 Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*. 

4
It is these systemic issues which form the foundation of the events which were to follow.

Partition

As Ireland entered the twentieth century, the island was divided between the twenty-six counties to the south and the six counties to the north, referred to as Partition. Following a prolonged period of struggle between the British and the native Irish, who viewed the British as occupiers, an armed uprising of the native Irish began in 1916, and ultimately culminated in the development of the Irish Free State in 1921. The uprising of 1916, called “the Easter Rising” for the day upon which it occurred, helped to precipitate the Anglo-Irish War which lasted from 1919 - 1921. The Anglo-Irish war was a brutal and violent one; multiple armed factions existed on either side and the war was characterized by assassinations, guerilla tactics, raids on police barracks, and retaliatory attacks resulting in the burning of whole villages. In response, the Government of Ireland Act was established in December 1920 and served as a primary instrument by which two parliaments would be established, one in the south (called in this document “Southern Ireland”) and one in the north, in an attempt to provide representation to minority communities and secure the peace. A number of Nationalists in the south expressed a lack of enthusiasm for the agreement, but Unionists in the north (albeit reluctantly as it was not their preferred outcome) elected to adopt the treaty as a means of

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thwarting potential rule from Dublin. Thus, the first parliament in the north was opened six months later by King George V. ⁵

To be sure, the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 was an ambitious undertaking. Despite establishing two parliaments, ostensibly of equal authority, it did so “with a view to the eventual establishment of a Parliament for the whole of Ireland, and to bringing about harmonious action … and to the promotion of mutual intercourse and uniformity in relation to matters affecting the whole of Ireland…”⁶ According to the Act, this could only be accomplished if both the Parliaments of Southern Ireland and Northern Ireland created acts identical in nature and agreed to by an absolute majority of members in each Parliament’s House of Commons. The result of such an agreement would be the formation of a new government consisting of the British monarch and upper and lower houses of Parliament. In the climate of the day, such an agreement was, of course, unlikely. In addition, the Act afforded the Irish some representation in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom,⁷ however, the Act failed to meaningfully address many of the issues which had prompted the Easter Rising in the first place.

Events continued to evolve, and one year later the Anglo-Irish Treaty was agreed on December 6, 1921. This accord effectively ended the war and established what was called the Irish Free State. As written, the Treaty applied to the whole of Ireland, but granted the counties of the north the opportunity to opt out of the Treaty in order to retain

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⁷ “Government of Ireland Act, 1920.”
the status previously afforded to them in the Government of Ireland Act of 1920.\(^8\) The Treaty specified that the counties of the north had to petition the British monarch within one month if they wished to opt out of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and be excluded from the Irish Free State, and they did so almost immediately.\(^9\) Thus, a formal boundary was created between the north and the south and the Irish Boundary Commission was established.\(^10\) This effectively divided the Irish Free State (roughly the same area as the current Republic of Ireland) from the counties to the north, which are collectively referred to as Ulster (although the term Ulster is also historically used to describe all of the counties in the north, not merely those in the northeast that voted to opt out of the treaty and remain part of the United Kingdom). Two distinct areas were born, and, as the six counties to the north opted out, minority Catholics and Republicans living there became marginalized.

The language of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 bolstered the previous Government of Ireland Act’s notion of an Irish Parliament, and moved a bit further away from the notion of direct rule by Great Britain. It opened with the decree that “Ireland shall have the same constitutional status in the Community of Nations known as the British Empire as the Dominion of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Dominion of New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa.”\(^11\) And while the Treaty may

\(^8\) “Government of Ireland Act, 1920.”


\(^11\) “Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland,” Department of the Taoiseach, National Archives of Ireland, December 6, 1921.
have represented a measure of progress to Irish Nationalists, it did not afford Ireland the status of an independent republic, and there were certain aspects of citizenship included in the Treaty which they found less than pleasing. For instance, members of Parliament were required to pledge the following oath:

I……do solemnly swear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the Irish Free State as by law established and that I will be faithful to H.M. King George V., his heirs and successors by law, in virtue of the common citizenship of Ireland with Great Britain and her adherence to and membership of the group of nations forming the British Commonwealth of Nations.  

The Treaty also prohibited the Irish Free State from establishing a military which could rival that of Great Britain by including the following restriction: “If the government of the Irish Free State establishes and maintains a military defense force, the establishment thereof shall not exceed in size such proportions of the military establishment maintained in Great Britain.”

These restrictions were viewed as barriers to Irish sovereignty. With regard to religion, the Anglo-Irish Treaty included a passage specifying that neither the Parliament of the Irish Free State nor the Parliament of Northern Ireland could establish any law so as [to] either directly or indirectly endow any religion or prohibit or restrict the free exercise thereof or give any preference or impose any disability on account of religious belief or religious status or affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a public school receiving public money without attending the religious instructions at the school…

However, the language of the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 did not go as far as the previous year’s Government of Ireland Act of 1920 in terms of articulating broad religious

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12 “Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland,” 1921.
13 “Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland,” 1921.
14 “Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland,” 1921.
protections. It could be argued that the earlier Government of Ireland Act of 1920 went further in articulating these protections than did the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 by specifying that neither Parliament could

… make a law so as [to] either directly or indirectly establish or endow any religion, or prohibit or restrict the free exercise thereof, or give a preference, privilege, or advantage, or impose any disability or disadvantage, on account of religious belief or religious ceremony a condition of the validity of any marriage, or affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending the religious instruction at that school, or alter the constitution of any religious body … or divert from any religious denomination the fabric of cathedral churches … or take any property without compensation.  

Meaningful differences emerge when comparing these two documents, and when placed side by side, one can see that some of the specific protections mentioned in the earlier Act were not retained in the subsequent Treaty.

Many of these religious-based themes stretch back for centuries and continue to be present in the current dialogue of the day. This further substantiates that those acts and treaties mentioned here were ineffective in securing a lasting peace, and, despite the fact that the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 marked the formal end to the war, conflict remained ongoing, including armed struggle. Indeed, sectarian violence and civil rights violations formed the backdrop to all of the major events which took place in Northern Ireland in the twentieth century. Before proceeding into an examination of the modern era, one must be ever aware that these historical conflicts have colored every action and reaction that came thereafter.

15 “Government of Ireland Act, 1920.”
The Modern Era

The transition of the Irish Free State, as part of the British Commonwealth of Nations, to the sovereign and independent Republic of Ireland was brought about through changes which occurred incrementally over the course of several years. These included the election of the Irish Free State to the League of Nations in 1930, formation of a new government within the Irish Free State in 1932, which was comprised of a coalition of parties who rejected many of the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and the introduction of a new constitution in 1937. The introduction of the new constitution, which declared those counties to the south to be sovereign and independent, was precipitated by a governmental crisis taking place in Britain at the time of the abdication of King Edward VIII.16 In the intervening years, established ties between the Irish Free State and the crown were dismantled one by one. The sovereign state, now established as the Republic of Ireland, was so named in 1949 by the Irish government in the Republic of Ireland Bill.17

Of course, the establishment of the Republic did not address the concerns of all Nationalists as the counties of the north remained under British rule, and discord continued. During the height of violence that took place in the last half of the twentieth century, it was evident to all parties that Northern Ireland was in crisis and that new reforms were needed. During this period, parties on both sides formed the New Ireland Forum in order to solicit ideas on how to improve relations, and to then debate those


ideas and disclose them in a public report. Shortly after its founding, the parties began drafting the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which was signed on November 15 of that year. At this time there was a sense of renewed enthusiasm in working toward a meaningful accord.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 differed from previous treaties in that it directly addressed cross-border issues, with a section dedicated to “Cross-Border Cooperation on Security, Economic, Social, and Cultural Matters.” Of note, the Agreement opens with an affirmation that the two sides wish to build stability and a lasting peace, while also making three declarations in Article 1, stating that both governments

… affirm that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland; recognise that the present wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland is for no change in the status of Northern Ireland; [and] declare that, if in the future a majority of the people of Northern Ireland clearly wish for and formally consent to the establishment of a united Ireland, they will introduce and support in the respective Parliaments legislation to give effect to that wish.

This document also made clear that a devolved government in Northern Ireland would be responsible for some matters, and that others would be taken up by the recently formed Intergovernmental Conference, and that yet still others would remain under the

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21 “Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985.”
jurisdiction of the British government.\textsuperscript{22} As had been seen in previous attempts at sustaining the peace, however, the factions on either side continued to wage violence against one another and discrimination based on sectarian beliefs remained ever-present.

Examples of violence during this period are too numerous to list, but include assassination attempts, imprisonment without cause, pre-planned attacks on selective targets which included bombings, and an alarming number of casualties on both sides. Tensions were inflamed, in part, due to the history of conflict between the sides, and the presence of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in Northern Ireland,\textsuperscript{23} a police force which was manned by a majority of Unionists. In juxtaposition, however, the final decades of the twentieth century saw a period of renewed hope for civility once again in the dawn of a new economic boom, partly due to the Republic of Ireland’s membership in the European Union (EU). Membership in the EU helped to stabilize the region as the EU held some influence over policy, and measures were undertaken to bolster the economy.\textsuperscript{24} Still, tremendous discord remained, and a degree of distrust continued to exist between the two sides.

At this moment in the West, and particularly in the United States, there is much to be said for the widespread belief that caustic language and \textit{ad hominem} attacks have now reached unprecedented levels in politics. These types of attacks are, of course, nothing new in other parts of the world, including Ireland. The divisions that exist in Northern Ireland are not only structural, as will continue to be evidenced throughout this thesis, but

\textsuperscript{22} “Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985.”


decidedly personal as well. Life in Northern Ireland, as everywhere, is characterized by the quality of the community, the religions exercised, equality in opportunities, and the ability to uphold the traditions of one’s heritage. One can see that if discrimination were to continue to take place on these grounds, seeming ceaselessly, it would be viewed as personal and galvanize communities to action.

By way of example, in late 1985, Ian Paisley, the leader of the largely Protestant, Democratic Unionist Party, shouted “Never, never, never, never!” to a crowd of Protestants gathered by the tens of thousands in Belfast to protest the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.25 Similarly, Martin McGuiness, leader of the largely Catholic, Republican party, Sinn Féin, stated in a 1986 address to the party conference, “Our position is clear, and it will never, never, never change: the war against British rule must continue until freedom is achieved.”26 A few years later, little progress had been made in the way of civility. When Pope John Paul II addressed the European Parliament in October 1988, he was shouted down by Paisley. Paisley, who was then also a member of the European Parliament representing Northern Ireland, shouted to the Pope, “I denounce you, Anti-Christ! I refuse you as Christ’s enemy and Anti-Christ with all your false doctrine” before being removed from the hall.27

With so much vitriol, and so many promises to “never” come to the table, it is a wonder that an accord was reached at all. And yet, in 1998, the Good Friday Agreement

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27 “Ian Paisley: ‘Never, Never, Never’ and Other Notable Quotes,” *The Irish Times*. 
(also known as the Belfast Agreement) was signed. It was subsequently ratified by voters in both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and its provisions became legally binding. Years of negotiation and mediation from outside parties, including the United States, resulted in an agreement to which both sides, ostensibly, could agree and which promised an end to this seemingly endless period of unrest. The Agreement itself sought to, once more, define the future of a power-sharing government and other formal institutions, enumerate certain human rights and the manner by which they would be safeguarded, and articulate the shared commitment that all paramilitary groups would disarm and commit to peaceful negotiation.\textsuperscript{28} This included armed factions on both sides of the conflict, including the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Loyalist factions such as the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association.

The Good Friday Agreement

The Agreement was arrived at after a period of considerable turmoil during the negotiation phase. In fact, negotiations pursuing a ceasefire and a peace agreement had been ongoing in one form or another for well over two decades before the agreement was reached. At times, the two sides worked in collaboration to move toward a peace deal, and at other times existed in a state of obvious acrimony. The eventual ceasefire and early efforts at decommissioning (disarmament of paramilitary groups) preceded the most meaningful talks, but only after years of especially brutal violence. Surely, there were offenses committed by both Loyalists and Nationalists. Paramilitary groups were formed

in both communities, eventually splintering into sub-groups or factions until there were several paramilitary groups operating on each side, just as had occurred during the build-up to the Easter Rising (and as continues to the present day).

With a nod to the violence that immediately preceded the Agreement, the accord opens with a joint “Declaration of Support”:

We, the participants in the multi-party negotiations, believe that the agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning. The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died and been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all. … We reaffirm our total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues, and our opposition of any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose, whether in regard to this agreement or otherwise.29

Thus, within this fragile peace, the Good Friday Agreement was signed on April 10, 1998, and ratified in both parts of Ireland on May 22, 1998.30 It was established as an act of Parliament of the United Kingdom and incorporated into law as the Northern Ireland Act. As stated, the Agreement is comprised of a number of strands which serve to establish certain governmental institutions that are meant to further cooperation between, and ensure representation of, all parties. Principally, three institutions were created: the Northern Ireland Assembly, an internal legislative body with the power to appoint ministers to the Executive; the North-South Ministerial Council which promotes cooperation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland on matters of mutual


interest; and the British-Irish Council which serves to promote mutually beneficial initiatives not only between the UK and Irish governments, but also with Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands.\textsuperscript{31} Heavy emphasis was placed on the importance of the consent of the people to the terms of the agreement and any subsequent changes. This principle of consent has continuously been challenged, as will be discussed in later chapters.

While regarded as a constitution, it is relatively unique among agreements with regard to the Executive. The Agreement prevents either the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister from appointing other ministers to the Executive Committee in Northern Ireland. Those posts are allocated to ministers based on each of their respective parties’ strength in the Assembly.\textsuperscript{32} For example, if six different major parties each win a sizeable number of the 90 seats available in the Assembly, then all six of those parties should reasonably expect to have ministerial positions available to them commensurate with each party’s strength in numbers. This guarantees that there is true cross-community representation and that no one party may monopolize the Executive. This portion of the Agreement is the very cornerstone of equal representation. In fact, such an effort was made to pre-emptively codify protections against any discord that may arise in the future that even a “Code of Conduct” for all ministers was included.\textsuperscript{33} Despite this, cross-community cooperation eventually broke down and the Executive, at least

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{31} Mary Murphy, \textit{Europe and Northern Ireland’s Future: Negotiating Brexit’s Unique Case} (Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2018), 5.


\textsuperscript{33} “The Belfast Agreement,” Government of the United Kingdom.
\end{flushleft}
temporarily, has ceased to operate. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

Beyond the three main strands, a significant portion of the Agreement is devoted to human rights protections, security, and the decommissioning of paramilitary units, to include the withdrawal of British troops in certain locations, including at the border. In the years to follow, border checkpoints were removed and border crossings became less formally monitored. With regard to decommissioning, the Agreement required that, “[a]ll participants reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations.”34 The document stipulates that every effort should be made to achieve decommissioning within two years (by 2000). Despite this, a number of incidents have occurred in Northern Ireland since 2000 which have been ascribed to paramilitary groups. This will be examined in greater detail in chapter four.

This agreement is the most recent contract between the sides and is the document that governs current relations. For this reason, it is exceedingly important that it be examined and scrutinized as to its durability in the current climate. The volatility in Europe, and particularly in Britain – partially due to the results of the Brexit referendum, but also due to other, more systemic issues emerging in the British Isles – has placed considerable strain on the Agreement. If events proceed as they have, it is implausible that the Agreement will survive in its current form as it is incompatible with the arc of current events. Thus, change, again, is necessary.

In reflecting on the 20th anniversary of the Agreement, leaders who participated in the original negotiations met in Belfast in April 2018 to discuss the impact the accord has

had on Northern Ireland since its inception. Even now, each party seems to reflect on the Agreement in a decidedly different tone. Former US President Bill Clinton, who helped to broker the peace asserted, “The most interesting thing was by creating a space for the identity and interests and the values of all the people involved – in a framework which protected democracy and let future demographic, economic and political changes take Northern Ireland wherever it would go – it was a work of surpassing genius.”35 These very demographic, economic, and political changes will be examined later in this thesis, for indeed they have changed the face of Northern Ireland. Similarly, former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, who helped to mediate the negotiations, also struck an optimistic tone, calling modern-day Northern Ireland both “unrecognizable” and a “better place” than the Northern Ireland he encountered 20 years prior.36

Two men whose viewpoints have historically been in opposition to one another, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams, also took a moment to reflect on what was most positive about the Agreement. Tony Blair, in recalling the period of intense violence that preceded the Good Friday Agreement, reckoned that the Agreement was “worth doing and worth keeping.”37 Gerry Adams, in describing the day in which the Agreement came to pass, said:

Of course I didn’t know how people were going to respond … Sinn Féin was going back to an *ard fheis*38 to get authority to conclude the deal, but I was met there by two very, very fine women … whose sons were IRA volunteers who had

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36 “Good Friday Agreement was ‘Work of Genius,’” *BBC News*.

37 “Good Friday Agreement was ‘Work of Genius,’” *BBC News*.

38 *Ard fheis* is an Irish language term used by political parties of a generally Nationalist orientation to refer to their party conference.
been killed. And they both embraced me. And I knew then that the instinct of this, the emotion of this – that if those two women who had suffered so much were prepared to embrace this – then, we were on the right road.\textsuperscript{39}

At this same event commemorating the 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Agreement, Peter Robinson, a Unionist and the former First Minister of Northern Ireland, responded in an entirely different tone: “The specifics of the Belfast Agreement itself, clearly I oppose. I think I was right in opposing it. I think the Unionist community validated that by their subsequent votes within the electoral process.” Further reflection was offered by Seamus Mallon, former (and first ever) Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland: “Am I sad? Yes, of course. Am I angry? Yes. Very Angry. … I watch the hypocrisies, which are unbelievable. And the untruths, which are believable. Politics has been debased and diminished by these two political silos which have almost Balkanized the Northern Ireland that I live in.”\textsuperscript{40}

One must be mindful of the fact that these statements were made in April 2018, demonstrating that substantial discord remains, even amongst the principal players. The Agreement was reached and adopted only after years of pride, lives, and monies had been expended, and external pressure brought to bear. And, despite the Good Friday Agreement appearing to be, at the time, the agreement to end all agreements, ostensibly putting to rest the risk of future armed conflict, one can see now that the agreement itself is no longer tenable. When put to the test, it does not address the challenges present in the modern era, such as the turbulence and uncertainty caused by the Brexit referendum,

\textsuperscript{39} “Good Friday Agreement was ‘Work of Genius,’” \textit{BBC News}.

\textsuperscript{40} “Good Friday Agreement was ‘Work of Genius,’” \textit{BBC News}.

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the collapse of any meaningful power-sharing Executive at Stormont, and rapidly changing demographics in Northern Ireland.
Chapter II.

Brexit

Perhaps there is no more immediate sign that significant change in Northern Ireland is inevitable than the results of the so-called Brexit referendum. As a whole, the United Kingdom elected to leave the European Union. Northern Ireland, however, voted to remain, a preference which will seemingly not be honored. At the time of this writing, it is as yet unclear how Northern Ireland will be affected, particularly in terms of having access to the European common market, possible re-implementation of a hard border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and access to certain protections upon which a percentage of the population have relied, such as the European Court of Justice and the European Convention on Human Rights. No matter the outcome, the underlying issues remain and the result of the Brexit referendum has served as another symbol of the democratic under-representation that Northern Ireland has endured within the United Kingdom historically. The manner in which dialogue and negotiations have since unfolded is more evidence that significant conflict continues to exist between the parties. Questions regarding the constitutionality of the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union have been raised by citizens, rights groups, and the European Council.

On June 23, 2016, the Brexit referendum was put to the people with only a single question being posed: “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European
Union or leave the European Union?" While the final tally was relatively close overall, the results were nevertheless surprising. By a margin of 52 percent to 48 percent, the people of the United Kingdom collectively opted to withdraw from the European Union. This triggered Article 50, the provision within the Treaty on European Union which sets forth the procedural guidelines that must be followed in the event that a member state wishes to withdraw. The first and second clauses of Article 50 state that “Any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements” and that

A Member State which decides to withdraw shall notify the European Council of its intention. In the light of the guidelines provided by the European Council, the Union shall negotiate and conclude an agreement with that State, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union.

On March 29, 2017, and in accordance with the second clause of Article 50, British Prime Minister Theresa May submitted the formal notification letter to European Council President Donald Tusk. This action set into motion the first steps of the formal withdrawal from the European Union and also opened the two-year period of negotiations which was to follow. Just two days later, on March 31, 2017, the European Parliament composed a “Motion for Resolution” in response. In it, the European Parliament

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declared that it “[r]espects the democratic will of the British people who voted to leave the European Union and take back control of their country.”\textsuperscript{45} This was not the will of the people of Northern Ireland, however, who voted to remain in the European Union by a margin of 56 percent to 44 percent.\textsuperscript{46} The motion’s reference to sovereignty and national identity represented a central theme of the campaign to leave the European Union and it is little wonder that issues of sovereignty and national identity would be viewed in an entirely different light by those living in Northern Ireland than by the rest of the United Kingdom.

Table 1. Final Brexit referendum results.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{axis}[
    title={Brexit Referendum Vote},
    ytick={1,2},
    yticklabels={All Voting Areas, Northern Ireland},
    xtick={0,10,20,30,40,50,60},
    xticklabels={0\%,10\%,20\%,30\%,40\%,50\%,60\%},
    xbar legend,
    legend columns=-1,
    y=1cm,
]
\addplot[draw=blue,fill=blue!20] coordinates {(48.1,1) (55.8,2)};
\addplot[draw=red,fill=red!20] coordinates {(51.9,1) (44.2,2)};
\legend{Remain, Leave}
\end{axis}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textit{Comparison of referendum results from Northern Ireland against the entire voting constituency. These figures were extrapolated from published data on voting results.}\textsuperscript{47}


\textsuperscript{46} “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” \textit{BBC News}.

\textsuperscript{47} “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” \textit{BBC News}.
Representation

When examining voter representation more fully, it is noted that there was a 72 percent overall turnout rate across all voting areas in the referendum.\(^{48}\) Coming in considerably lower, however, a mere 62.7 percent of the population of Northern Ireland turned out to vote, constituting one of the lowest participation rates within the British Isles.\(^{49}\) This is due in part to the fact that Northern Ireland was largely seen as an afterthought, with little campaigning taking place there by either the Leave or Remain camps, and, as later became obvious, little regard given to the manner in which a Leave vote would impact Northern Ireland’s status and population. This, combined with the inability of competing political parties within Northern Ireland’s multi-party system to form a cohesive platform on the Brexit issue left the populace essentially without anyone to represent them or their interests.\(^{50}\)

This lack of representation, combined with a general uncertainty as to what a withdrawal from the European Union would mean to the average citizen of Northern Ireland led to lower turnout rates for the Brexit referendum, and mixed results in post-referendum surveys conducted in late 2017. As part of a joint effort between Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University, the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey has been measuring political attitudes in Northern Ireland since 1998 (the year of the Good Friday Agreement). In the survey conducted in late 2017, a question was posed to respondents regarding the potential economic ramifications of a withdrawal from the

\(^{48}\) “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” *BBC News*.


\(^{50}\) Murphy, *Europe and Northern Ireland’s Future*, 6.
European Union. When asked to rate whether or not they agreed or disagreed with the statement “Northern Ireland will be financially better off when the UK leaves the EU,” a full 40 percent of respondents stated that they either did not know or had no opinion.\textsuperscript{51} Notably, this survey was conducted well over a year after the referendum took place, during the time in which major negotiations should have already been taking place.

When compared against other parts of the UK, it is important to note that Northern Ireland was not the only region to have voted in favor of remaining within the European Union. In fact, Scotland and London itself both voted in greater proportion to remain than did Northern Ireland, as can be seen in Table 2 below.\textsuperscript{52} When juxtaposed against the collective Leave votes from the rest of England and from Wales, it is easy to see why the overall result was so close. It is also notable that the vote in Scotland skewed so heavily against leaving the European Union given that Scotland, just two years prior, in 2014, had itself held a referendum to leave the United Kingdom. Ultimately, the Scottish people voted to remain in the United Kingdom by a margin of 55 percent to 45 percent,\textsuperscript{53} but the campaigns leading up to the referendum (and since) have echoed many of the same sentiments expressed by political parties in Northern Ireland which seek to leave the United Kingdom, and which are also largely pro-EU.

\textsuperscript{51} ARK, Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University, Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: Political Attitudes, 2017, updated May 31, 2018, http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2017/Political_Attitudes/NIFINBRX.html.

\textsuperscript{52} “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” \textit{BBC News}.

Table 2. Brexit referendum results by region.

![Referendum Results by Geographic Area, All UK](image)

*Comparison of outcomes between all areas included in the referendum. These figures were extrapolated from published data on voting results.*

*Numbers will not add to 100 due to rounding.*

The Communities and Our Abiding Assumptions

Attempts to predict the referendum outcome, and examinations of the referendum result, have tended to rely heavily on traditional assumptions regarding the political attitudes associated with each demographic. When examining constituencies within Northern Ireland, one may note that there are patterns which have emerged that demonstrate a correlation between certain demographic attributes and voting preferences, but these are not necessarily deterministic. To assume that voting patterns can be predicted based on religious affiliation, gender, age, socio-economic status, or even

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54 “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” *BBC News.*
political affiliation alone is to fail to adequately understand the varied and nuanced problems that exist in Northern Ireland.

To break down these assumptions, the constituency areas in Table 3 below were selected for comparison based on the history of discord which has existed in each of these communities, as well as the prevalence of certain population centers. For example, Belfast has traditionally been divided into separate communities along largely sectarian lines. Further, the areas of Foyle and Derry have each experienced sectarian violence significant enough to have had a lasting impact on those communities. Referendum results within these communities vary significantly, demonstrating that while there may be trends, there is no one factor which could be used to predict the vote’s outcome.

Table 3. Brexit referendum results from selected assembly areas in Northern Ireland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referendum Results by Geographic Area, Northern Ireland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Belfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain: 48.6% Leave: 51.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Belfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain: 50.4% Leave: 49.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Derry/Londonderry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain: 52.0% Leave: 48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Belfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain: 69.5% Leave: 30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Belfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain: 74.1% Leave: 25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain: 78.3% Leave: 21.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voting results from key communities within Northern Ireland are compared. These figures were extrapolated from published data on voting results.  

55 “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” BBC News.
The area of Foyle had one of the top Remain percentages in all of the United Kingdom, at 78.3 percent for Remain.\textsuperscript{56} The strength of this vote is significant because Foyle is a border community, although it is one of the smaller assembly areas in Northern Ireland. When compared against the average Remain vote for all Northern Ireland assembly areas, Foyle stands a full 22.5 percent higher,\textsuperscript{57} revealing the intense interest in the referendum amongst those who did vote. Foyle borders county Donegal in the Republic of Ireland, and the area has benefitted significantly from investment by the EU.\textsuperscript{58} The community of Foyle has historically itself been deeply divided, with a predominately Unionist community on one side of the River Foyle and a larger Nationalist community on the other. By contrast, the area of Armagh to the south contains a significantly longer border with the Republic of Ireland than does Foyle, and yet only 62.9 percent of the constituency voted to Remain, 15.4 percent fewer than those who voted in Foyle to Remain. Differences in turnout rate were also evident. Despite the much stronger Remain vote in Foyle, only 57 percent of eligible voters there cast a vote, whereas 64 percent of eligible voters in Armagh voted.\textsuperscript{59} These factors indicate that voting preferences were not merely driven by cross-border concerns alone, although those concerns were considerable.

\textsuperscript{56} “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” \textit{BBC News}.

\textsuperscript{57} “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” \textit{BBC News}.


Further investigation reveals that voting preferences in Northern Ireland are driven by a combination of political and demographic factors. The Northern Ireland census of 2011 is the most recent source from which we may derive official demographic data on the population of Northern Ireland (the census is conducted once every ten years). In the most recent census, individuals were asked to answer the following questions with regard to religion: “What religious denomination or body were you brought up in?” and “What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?” For both questions, respondents were given the same set of choices from which they could select one response: “Roman Catholic,” any one of several Protestant denominations, “Other,” or “None.”\(^{60}\) For the purposes of this survey, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency aggregated the results into two broad categories consisting of those who belong to or were brought up in the Catholic religion and those who belong to or were brought up in a Protestant religion.\(^{61}\) It is worth noting that, when considering Northern Ireland as a whole, 93.5 percent of all respondents chose to identify as either Catholic or Protestant in that survey, leaving only a small segment of the population who selected “Other” or “None” with regard to religious affiliation, despite the question itself being optional.\(^{62}\)


Table 4. Religious identification and the Remain vote in select constituencies.

Brexit referendum results compared against data on religious identification as was derived from 2011 Northern Ireland census responses.63

While one can conclude from Table 4 that those who tended to vote Remain came from geographic areas largely populated by Catholics, a strong and predictable correlation between the two does not necessarily exist. For example, when comparing North Belfast and South Belfast, both of which have relative parity between Protestant and Catholic populations within their respective communities, divergent responses were seen when the referendum votes were tallied. North Belfast, with a self-identified population ratio of 47 percent Catholic to 46 percent Protestant, saw only 50 percent

support for the Remain position in the Brexit referendum.\textsuperscript{64} By contrast, South Belfast, with a quite similar population ratio of 44 percent Catholic to 44 percent Protestant produced much greater support for the Remain position, at nearly 70 percent, a full 20 points higher.\textsuperscript{65} Much like assuming that proximity to the border serves as a primary indicator of a community’s position on inclusion within the European Union, so too must religion be viewed as only one of many factors. Indeed, it may be argued that both Protestant and Catholic communities are equally affected by the tenuous peace in the region and that all of Northern Ireland shares the same collective concerns with regard to what institutional protections may be jeopardized by a withdrawal from the European Union.

Some do posit a strong correlation between religious affiliation and the outcome of the Brexit vote by region. In their assessment of both pre-referendum survey data and post-referendum polling data, Professors Coakley and Garry of Queen’s University Belfast assert that religion is a “fundamental line of division” between the voting preferences of those in Northern Ireland and those in the UK.\textsuperscript{66} However, going back as far as the late 1980s, the people of Northern Ireland tended to view the European Union in the most pragmatic way possible, and therefore it is necessary to take a nuanced look at each community itself, and not to merely rely on religious affiliation as the most predominant predictor.

\textsuperscript{64} “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” \textit{BBC News}.

\textsuperscript{65} “EU Referendum: The Results in Maps and Charts,” \textit{BBC News}.

\textsuperscript{66} Coakley and Garry, “Northern Ireland: The Challenge of Public Opinion.”
When looking to the pragmatic approach that Northern Ireland has taken with regard to EU membership, it is the benefits, such as increased access to economic markets, support for peacekeeping efforts, guaranteed labor protections, and human rights protections, which have remained a primary focus. It should not be lost on the observer that the first years of membership within the EU coincided with the most intense period of sectarian violence seen in the last half of the twentieth century. In that period, both Loyalists and Republicans objected to the manner in which EU membership might negatively impact each side’s pursuit of British or Irish national sovereignty respectively. But in the run-up to the 2016 referendum, people of all political persuasions (as evidenced by the overall Northern Ireland preference to Remain) turned toward the economic protections afforded by the EU, and the oversight of internal affairs it provided (coincidentally, such oversight was a leading reason why the Leave vote was so popular in the UK).

In its 2017 white paper, “The Impact and Consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland,” the European Parliament acknowledged that “Northern Ireland has no autonomy over Brexit [and] as such, Northern Ireland’s 2016 referendum vote to remain with the EU is, in constitutional terms, of no significance.” Despite this, individual citizens and groups, not all of whom are from Northern Ireland, have challenged the referendum outcome in court. The European Parliament followed those early cases closely and has

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67 Murphy, *Europe and Northern Ireland’s Future*, 13.

68 Murphy, *Europe and Northern Ireland’s Future*, 10.

noted that the UK Supreme Court has found against those plaintiffs who were from Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{70}

\textbf{Brexit in the Context of the Good Friday Agreement}

Hearkening back to the rights codified within the Good Friday Agreement, the principle of consent is paramount. Again, in its 2017 white paper, the European Parliament states unequivocally that “Brexit will require the deletion of references to the EU within the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland’s peace deal.”\textsuperscript{71} Also in 2017, then-Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams presented a similar perspective, but perhaps with a more hard-lined tone:

The British Government’s intention to take the North out of the EU, despite the wish of the people there to remain, is a hostile action … The British Prime Minister repeated her intention to bring an end to the jurisdiction of the European Court. Along with her commitment to remove Britain from the European Convention on Human Rights this stand threatens to undermine the fundamental human rights elements of the Good Friday Agreement.\textsuperscript{72}

At issue here is the provision within the Good Friday Agreement that citizens must be afforded the right to challenge changes to their citizenship status, particularly if such changes should occur without the consent or will of the people. Article 1 of the Good Friday Agreement states that both governments “recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British

\textsuperscript{70} Tonga, \textit{The Impact and Consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland}.

\textsuperscript{71} Tonga, \textit{The Impact and Consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland}.

and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by a future change in the status of Northern Ireland.” Withdrawal from the European Union will, of course, change the status of Northern Ireland. While individuals may elect to declare themselves either citizens of the United Kingdom (after Brexit, not part of the EU), or citizens of the Republic of Ireland (part of the EU), or both, their daily lives will be governed by the laws which apply to the place in which they live. As such, several legal challenges to the Brexit referendum have been lodged since 2016.

Legal Challenges

In 2016, Raymond McCord, a victims’ rights advocate from Northern Ireland, joined with pro-EU groups to lodge a legal challenge against the outcome of the Brexit referendum as it relates to Northern Ireland. Prior to the proceedings, McCord’s attorney asserted that “essentially the question posed is whether or not there can be any Brexit for Northern Ireland, based on the fact we have our own constitution consisting of the Northern Ireland Act and the Good Friday Agreement. We say the people of Northern Ireland are sovereign on constitutional change.” The court was then presented with the challenge as to whether consent was required from the majority of the population of the people of Northern Ireland. Affirming that the majority of people of Northern Ireland had voted to remain in the EU, McCord himself reiterated that “the people of Northern Ireland should be deciding whether we stay in the EU or leave [and] 56 percent of the

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people here voted Remain.” The judges did not agree and argued that the Good Friday Agreement governs the constitutional rights of those subjects of the UK, but does not extend to an individual’s place within the EU. Because of the intense political sensitivities surrounding the issue, it was believed – and rightly so – that the case would be referred to the UK Supreme Court in London.

In his written appeal, McCord, through his legal representation, asserted that when the Good Friday Agreement was adopted into UK law as the Northern Ireland Act, it essentially conferred constitutional status upon the Good Friday Agreement, and that other, pre-Brexit rulings had set precedent for this argument. Further, he argued that the Good Friday Agreement (referred to as the “GFA” in the appeal), once ratified, stood as an international treaty as it was negotiated within the context of the EU. The appeal states:

… [Q]uite simply, the GFA is a written constitutional document which any act of Government or Parliament … must be consistent with, similar to the status of the constitution of any country with a written constitution. … [T]he GFA is an international treaty binding in international law which has been incorporated into domestic law. … [T]he GFA is an expression of the de facto constitutional position of a devolved country with the recognised right to self-determination within a federal system …

75 McDonald, “Northern Ireland Campaigner to Challenge Brexit in UK Supreme Court.”


78 Reference by the Court of Appeal (Northern Ireland).
In the matter of *R (on the application of Miller and another) (Respondents) v Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Appellant)*, the UK Supreme Court was charged with making a determination in the McCord case as well as similar cases lodged by other plaintiffs named Miller and Agnew, and others. Principally, the court sought to clarify whether or not the UK government could make such a decision without first requiring an act of Parliament or consulting with devolved governments and their citizens directly, in this case the Northern Ireland Assembly and/or the people of Northern Ireland. In its January 2017 judgment, the Supreme Court asserted that “[t]he issues in these proceedings have nothing to do with political issues such as the merits of the decision to withdraw, the timetable and terms of so doing, or the details of any future relationships between the UK and the EU.”  

Ultimately, the court concluded that the provisions within the Northern Ireland Act regarding devolved government were not applicable in this case. This conclusion bolstered the UK government’s argument that it was free to invoke Article 50 despite the majority of citizens in Northern Ireland, including those from both Unionist and Republican communities, having voted against withdrawal from the EU.

Notably, McCord is a Unionist, a fact which is asserted from the outset in his appeal to the high court where he is described as a “male British and European citizen resident in Northern Ireland who identifies as a working-class Unionist.”

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80 The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, “Press Summary R (on the application of Miller and another) (Respondents) v Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Appellant).”

81 Reference by the Court of Appeal (Northern Ireland) – in the Matter of an Application by Raymond McCord for Judicial Review (Northern Ireland).
underscores the point that attitudes toward Brexit cannot be predicted based on demographics alone. And, although McCord stands as a central figure in this case, he is joined by rights groups resident to Northern Ireland, as well as other individuals who have lodged similar arguments in the high court. From a democratic standpoint, their views are worthy of consideration, and the fact the senior judges found the case worthy of elevation to the high court substantiates this argument. As McCord stated, “The three judges believe I have a right to an opinion, unlike political people who have criticized me.”

In its final judgment on the McCord case, the UK Supreme Court found that, although devolved governments, such as the one in Northern Ireland, were founded based “on the assumption that the UK would be a member of the EU,” that it is not a requirement that they remain part of the EU, and that the UK’s relationship with the EU is a matter “reserved to UK Government and parliament, not to the devolved institutions.” With regard to citizenship status specifically, the court notes that the Good Friday Agreement does afford the citizens of Northern Ireland the right to determine, for themselves, whether or not they remain part of the UK or form a united Ireland, but that this right to self-determination does not extend to the British government’s decision to withdraw from the EU. In light of the ruling, the question of

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82 McDonald, “Northern Ireland Campaigner to Challenge Brexit in the Supreme Court.”

83 The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, “Press Summary R (on the application of Miller and another) (Respondents) v Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Appellant).”

84 The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, “Press Summary R (on the application of Miller and another) (Respondents) v Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Appellant).”
citizenship status has elevated the discussion on a potential referendum on a united Ireland once again, adding yet more complexity to an already tenuous situation.

Beyond this case, the entire post-referendum period has been fraught with uncertainty, with little consideration given by any government as to how best to manage Northern Ireland’s status following the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. In Theresa May’s original Article 50 letter, dated March 2017, she states, “The government wants to approach our discussion with ambition, giving citizens and businesses in the United Kingdom and the European Union … as much certainty as possible, as early as possible.”85 May further outlines certain legislative actions which the United Kingdom seeks to undertake in order to reinstate “national self-determination.”86 The letter goes on to explicitly state:

In particular, we must pay attention to the UK’s unique relationship with the Republic of Ireland and the importance of the peace process in Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland is the only EU member state with a land border with the United Kingdom. We want to avoid a return to a hard border between our two countries, to maintain the Common Travel Area between us, and to make sure that the UK’s withdrawal from the EU does not harm the Republic of Ireland. We also have an important responsibility to make sure that nothing is done to jeopardise the peace process in Northern Ireland, and to continue to uphold the Belfast Agreement.87

In its response to the Article 50 letter, the European Parliament reiterated that “there is genuine concern among the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland regarding the possibility of a hard border being erected” while taking care to also note that while it is the right of any member state to withdraw from the union, that the

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85 “Article 50 Letter: Read it in Full,” The Telegraph.

86 “Article 50 Letter: Read it in Full,” The Telegraph.

87 “Article 50 Letter: Read it in Full,” The Telegraph.
terms of withdrawal are subject to negotiation.\textsuperscript{88} Indeed, the third clause of Article 50 states that the member state shall cease being subject to the treaty on the date in which a withdrawal agreement is finalized, or, two years after the date of notification should an agreement fail to be reached during such time.\textsuperscript{89} The two-year period of negotiation shall thereby expire on March 29, 2019 unless an agreement is reached prior to this date, or both sides agree to extend the negotiation period. One must consider also that any agreement made between the British Prime Minister and the EU must then also be approved by the UK Parliament. This lengthy period of negotiation has led to uncertainty as to the future of security in Northern Ireland, raising the concerns of those who have already suffered through decades of sectarian violence. Likewise, businesses in Northern Ireland which operate on both sides of the border must continue to operate without any sense of certainty regarding the future movement of goods and tariffs.

Such protracted uncertainty leaves voters in Northern Ireland, again, left out in the democratic cold. However Brexit impacts Northern Ireland in the future, it is nevertheless evident that the referendum itself has eroded the sense of security and stability that was meant to be guaranteed by the Good Friday Agreement. In this post-referendum period, the United Kingdom has effectively failed to avoid what Theresa May termed as the “cliff-edge”\textsuperscript{90} while seeking to negotiate sensible terms of withdrawal from the European Union. Both the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which backs Theresa May’s government, and Sinn Féin, the Republican party at odds with both the DUP and

\textsuperscript{88} European Parliament, “Motion for a Resolution,” B8-0243/2017.

\textsuperscript{89} “Treaty on European Union,” European Council.

\textsuperscript{90} “Article 50 Letter: Read it in Full,” The Telegraph.
Theresa May’s government, have begun to engage strongly on the issue. Indeed, uncertainty about the future, and the ever-opposing positions of the major political parties has led to profound conflict once more.
Chapter III.

Stormont

The Northern Ireland Assembly was born out of the Good Friday Agreement. Colloquially known as “Stormont” for the location of its Parliament buildings in Belfast, the Assembly is currently comprised of a total of 90 members. As stated, positions within the Executive are determined by the strength of each party’s representation in total number of seats in the Assembly. Northern Ireland is a multi-party region, with as many as nine different political parties holding seats in the Assembly in recent years. Since the 2007 Assembly election, two parties have held power in the Executive in Northern Ireland: the DUP and Sinn Féin. Whereas the DUP has enjoyed the majority of the seats in the Assembly, a member of their party has held the position of First Minister since 2007, while a member of Sinn Féin, the party with the second greatest number of seats, has held the position of Deputy First Minister since that same year.

The DUP is a Unionist party, while Sinn Féin is a Republican party which has advocated for the reunification of Ireland. The parties have historically worked in opposition, not only in a political sense, but also because each party generally represents those demographics who have been at odds with one another: Protestants and Catholics. The DUP was founded as the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party by prominent Protestant minister, Ian Paisley, as he and other members split from the Protestant Unionist Party in
1971, during the height of the Troubles.\textsuperscript{91} Sinn Féin, on the other hand, has been in existence since 1905, and was founded during a time in which Nationalist groups began to organize prior to the Easter Rising. Generally translated as “We Ourselves” or “Ourselves Alone,” the term Sinn Féin embodies the goal of sovereignty and self-determination, and, despite being born out of a philosophy of passive resistance, came to be associated with several militant Nationalist groups, including the Irish Republican Army.\textsuperscript{92} Sinn Féin is active in both the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. The history of relations between the DUP and Sinn Féin is a convoluted one, and the current period of discord has led to another breakdown in the devolved government.

Sinn Féin and the DUP

Whereas the DUP and Sinn Féin are the current principal players, it is worth examining the history of their relations as their ability to work together – or not – has had a significant impact on the state of Northern Ireland today. Further, it cannot be ignored that both parties have been led by larger-than-life personalities who, in their own right, have each encountered their own share of public controversy. Although the parties have often been at odds, they have also worked together on occasion, and similarities between their respective party platforms do exist.

Having been established by the Good Friday Agreement, the Assembly and the Executive are relatively young institutions, at just 20 years old. Despite this, the


devolved government has been dissolved five times to date. In the first three instances, the government was dissolved for brief periods while negotiations regarding the disarmament of the IRA took place after the IRA failed to decommission by the deadline set forth in the Good Friday Agreement (by 2000), or by the extended deadline (by 2001). The dissolution of government which occurred in 2002 was different, and not merely because it lasted for well over four years. In 2002, both the DUP and Sinn Féin held seats in the Assembly, but were not, at that time, the two most powerful parties. At the time, the positions of First Minister and Deputy First Minister were held by members of other parties; however, during those early years, the position of First Minister was held by a Unionist and the Deputy position was held by a Nationalist, and thus the same type of power-sharing dynamic existed then as could be seen in later years. Although the Good Friday Agreement, and its formula for promoting collaboration between the parties was, at the time, only a few years old, the parties were ultimately unable to work together in the long term, regardless of who held power.

As a symptom of the type of pervasive discord and distrust that existed between the parties, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) raided Sinn Féin’s offices at Stormont on October 4, 2002. Citing reports that suggested that the IRA was working through Sinn Féin in order to gather intelligence on British officials and possibly on active court cases in which IRA members were on trial, several private homes in Belfast were also raided that same day. The raids culminated in four arrests, including the head

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of Sinn Féin’s administration team, Denis Donaldson, who was charged with possessing information likely to be of use to terrorists. Keeping in mind that the cessation of paramilitary activity was an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement, Unionists saw the potential collusion between Sinn Féin and the IRA as grounds for expelling Sinn Féin from the government despite the fact that, at the time, Sinn Féin held 18 duly-elected seats in the Assembly.

The raid itself was controversial as it was perceived by some as being heavy-handed and overtly politically motivated. In addition, accusations were made that the PSNI had tipped off the media in advance which had then enabled journalists and photographers to be on site at Stormont prior to the raid taking place. Sinn Féin claimed that the homes of community activists who were working in support of human rights and police reform were also specifically targeted, with one assemblyman stating, “This is part of their wider anti-Sinn Féin and anti-Irish Republican agenda.”

Following the raids, six total complaints were made to the Police Ombudsman regarding the conduct of the PSNI officers, including two assault complaints, as well as a complaint that the raids were disproportionate in scale to the alleged crimes being investigated. The

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100 “Police Raid Sinn Féin’s Stormont Offices,” The Guardian.
Police Ombudsman concluded in its report that there was no evidence to support the claim that the raids were politically motivated, nor was there evidence that the PSNI had alerted the media in advance.\textsuperscript{101}

The raids were a seismic event in Northern Ireland as they came at a time when tensions between the parties were already heightened due to the issue of decommissioning. Subsequent to the raid, and in response to the controversy, the Northern Ireland Secretary stated, “I regret the way it was done. You can take that as a general apology.”\textsuperscript{102} The Chief Constable apologized for the heavy-handed nature of the raid, and the Police Ombudsman, too, admitted in its report that

… the search could have been adequately conducted with a much smaller and less obtrusive police presence. There was no necessity for the presence at Stormont of the large number of officers who attended. There should have been prior consideration by police of the fact that the premises to be searched were contained within the Legislative Assembly for Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{103}

Still, the damage was done and the British government concluded that the devolved government was not sufficiently functional to continue in its current state. Just weeks after the raids took place, Prime Minister Tony Blair dissolved the power-sharing government and reinstituted direct rule over Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{104}

While work was being done to restore the devolved government during the intervening years, it was not until 2007 that the government was restored and a new

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\textsuperscript{102} “Police Apology for Sinn Féin Raid,” CNN.

\textsuperscript{103} Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, “Stormont Search: Police Ombudsman Statement.”

\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
election took place. Groundbreaking talks at Stormont between Ian Paisley, then the leader of the DUP, and Gerry Adams, then the leader of Sinn Féin, precipitated a new agreement establishing a multi-party Executive Committee. The Assembly elections which took place shortly thereafter elevated the two parties to the positions of First Minister and Deputy First Minister respectively, positions which those parties have maintained to date. This was a period of rare cooperation, achieved, in part, due to the forcefulness and political savvy displayed by the major players.

The Personalities

The events above unfolded in such dramatic fashion partly due to the extremely disparate positions taken by the principal players, as well as the fact that those positions were informed by the extraordinary experiences that each man had endured in his lifetime. On the Unionist side, the Reverend Ian Paisley was a fixture in Northern Irish politics for decades prior to the Good Friday Agreement. As a Protestant minister, he railed against Catholicism for the majority of his life, straight through to the aforementioned outburst as Pope John Paul II addressed the European Parliament in 1988. As far back as the 1960s, however, Paisley began to gain prominence for denouncing the papacy, beginning with his leadership of a protest against the prevalence of sympathy messages and flags lowered to half-staff over the death of Pope John XXIII in 1961. So adamantly did he oppose working in collaboration with Catholics that he

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resigned his seat in protest after the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 was signed (he was later re-elected), and vehemently opposed the Good Friday Agreement.\textsuperscript{107} While the devolved government was dissolved from 2002 to 2007, the DUP continued to gain momentum as a party, with Paisley at the head. By the time the power-sharing Executive was restored in 2007, he was elected First Minister, along with Martin McGuinness, of Sinn Féin, as Deputy First Minister.\textsuperscript{108}

For his part, McGuinness had not chosen the cleric’s life. As a senior IRA commander during the 1970s, he led paramilitary activities beginning in his early twenties, stating that he joined the Republican movement after witnessing years of government repression and escalating violence in his community.\textsuperscript{109} In 1973, while on trial in the Republic of Ireland for being a member of the IRA, he admitted, “We have fought against the killing of our people. I am a member of \textit{Óglaigh na hÉireann}\textsuperscript{110} and very, very proud of it.”\textsuperscript{111} Despite this, he later became a chief negotiator of the Good Friday Agreement, citing his past as a reason for wanting to leave the violence and sectarianism of the Troubles behind. He worked closely with Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams to drive the Republican agenda and was often at odds with Paisley in those early years.

\textsuperscript{107} Carbery, “Ian Paisley: Timeline of his Life and Career.”

\textsuperscript{108} Carbery, “Ian Paisley: Timeline of his Life and Career.”


\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Óglaigh na hÉireann} is an Irish term generally translated to “Irish volunteers.” It is sometimes seen as being synonymous with the IRA.

\textsuperscript{111} BBC News, “The Search for Peace: Martin McGuinness.”
During this time it was widely believed that McGuinness had maintained a significant position of power within the IRA long after he claimed to have left to join Sinn Féin (which the IRA and Sinn Féin maintain are separate entities). In 2001, McGuinness admitted the extent of his leadership, not merely his membership, in the IRA throughout the 1970s and 1980s (although he continued to deny that he held a position of power after joining Sinn Féin). McGuinness made the admission in an attempt to demonstrate his earnest commitment to advancing the peace process with integrity, but Paisley seized on this and called for the removal of McGuinness from office, citing that the admission was evidence that Sinn Féin and the IRA were one and the same.  

Many years of conflict passed between Paisley and McGuinness before they eventually came to work together. In a turn of events that was truly remarkable, given each man’s past, both Paisley and McGuinness joined together to work for the betterment of Northern Ireland after the devolved government was restored in 2007. Although the DUP was the one major party which had refused to participate in the negotiations leading up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, Paisley, once elected as First Minister, began working with McGuinness as soon as the first post-election meeting between the two took place.  

As the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and efforts to secure a lasting peace continued, Paisley and McGuinness managed to soften their language toward one another. During a visit to the United States to meet President George W.

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113 Graham, “The Strange Friendship of Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley.”
Bush in 2007, Paisley characterized their past conflicts as “squabbles” and went on to say that “[t]here will be a fight for peace. You have to fight for peace and we are dedicated to that.”

Beyond a softening of language, Paisley and McGuinness even managed to develop a friendship of sorts. Often seen laughing and joking together in public, they were dubbed the “Chuckle Brothers” after a popular British comedy duo. However, in yet another sign that the peace could not last, their partnership was short-lived. Paisley retired after just 13 months, partially due to the DUP’s criticism of his relationship with McGuinness. While Paisley and McGuinness remained friends until Paisley’s death in 2014, McGuinness did not enjoy a similarly warm relationship with the DUP’s Peter Robinson, Paisley’s successor as First Minister.

In contrast to McGuinness, Gerry Adams steadfastly asserts that he has never been a member of the IRA. Arguably more vocal, and perhaps more controversial and well-known than McGuinness, Adams has been a leading figure in the Republican movement, and in Northern Ireland in general, for many decades. McGuinness and Adams worked closely together as they were bonded by the shared experiences which drove them toward the Republican movement. McGuinness was part of the IRA leadership in Derry during the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1972, in which British soldiers opened fire on civilians gathered to protest the practice of imprisonment without trial.

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114 Graham, “The Strange Friendship of Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley.”
115 Graham, “The Strange Friendship of Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley.”
116 Graham, “The Strange Friendship of Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley.”
117 Graham, “The Strange Friendship of Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley.”
Adams himself was interned without trial by the British in 1972 and has written extensively about the abuses he suffered while imprisoned.\textsuperscript{118}

Adams was released from prison that same year in order to facilitate talks between the British government and Republicans, which he continued to do for several years thereafter. Elected as a member of the UK Parliament in 1983, Adams worked to facilitate talks between both sides up until the IRA agreed to cease all military actions in 1994.\textsuperscript{119} By 1997, Adams was heavily engaged, along with McGuinness, in the cross-party talks which preceded the Good Friday Agreement, and by 2005 he was working directly with the IRA in an effort to convince them to fully demilitarize so that the devolved government could be restored.\textsuperscript{120} As Sinn Féin party leader, it cannot be overstated how much of an impact Adams’ efforts, along with those of McGuinness and Paisley, had on the peace effort during that time.

Still, for many, Gerry Adams will always be inextricably linked with the IRA. As Sinn Féin seeks to modernize and expand its base by moving away from the stigma of the past, there is a strong need to transform the image of the party leadership in order to expand the party’s base. Noted journalist and scholar on the topic, Tim Pat Coogan, framed it this way: “The relationship between Sinn Féin and the IRA is intricate in the extreme. While taken together they form the principal components of the Republican


\textsuperscript{120} Sinn Féin, “Gerry Adams TD.”
movement, there are obvious overlaps … Nevertheless, the two wings remain two separate organisations with separate leaderships.”

The Collapse of Stormont Brings Yet More Change

Although Martin McGuinness was more openly associated with the IRA than was Adams, he continued to maintain his position as Deputy First Minister until Stormont collapsed again in 2017. McGuinness’s resignation as Deputy First Minister precipitated the collapse after a row with DUP First Minister Arlene Foster could not be resolved. In his resignation letter, dated January 9, 2017, McGuinness cited the ongoing controversy over the “Renewable Heat Incentive” scheme as the final straw. DUP First Minister Arlene Foster was in charge of the green energy initiative which, in addition to running £490M over budget, was rife with speculation regarding corruption and wrongdoing. Part of the controversy involved accusations lodged against Foster by another member of the DUP, claiming that Foster had directed civil servants to alter documents in order to minimize the appearance of her role in the scheme, an accusation Foster has denied. McGuinness and others called for Foster’s resignation and, when she refused to


capitulate, McGuinness himself resigned. Thus, without a functioning Executive, and with no effort being made to hold a new election, Stormont was once again disbanded.

Of course, the heating scandal was not the only reason McGuinness cited for his resignation. Many themes from the region’s painful past were also revisited in his letter, and indeed the Renewable Heat Initiative is not even mentioned until mid-way through the letter. First, McGuinness made a point of highlighting his own goals as Deputy First Minister over the years, and how he viewed the DUP and the British government as having failed the people of Northern Ireland:

Over ten difficult and testing years … I have sought with all my energy and determination to serve all the people of the north and the island of Ireland by making a power-sharing government work. Throughout that time, I have worked with successive DUP First Ministers and, while our parties are diametrically opposed ideologically and politically, I have always sought to exercise my responsibilities in good faith and to seek resolutions rather than recrimination. … At times I have stretched and challenged republicans and nationalists in my determination to reach out to our unionist neighbours. It is a source of deep personal frustration that those efforts have not always been reciprocated by unionist leaders. … The equality, mutual respect and all-Ireland approaches enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement have never been fully embraced by the DUP.

McGuinness did address Foster’s role in the Renewable Heat Initiative but then returns again in his letter to the overarching issues:

The First Minister has refused to stand aside, without prejudice, pending a preliminary report from an investigation.

That position is not credible or tenable.

The Irish and British governments have internationally binding obligations to uphold issues of equality and parity of esteem. They need to fulfill these obligations.

\[125\] Fenton, “Power-Sharing Collapses in Northern Ireland.”

\[126\] McGuinness, letter of resignation.
Therefore, it is with deep regret and reluctance, that I am tendering my resignation as deputy First Minister with effect from 5pm.\textsuperscript{127}

Since that date, Sinn Féin has submitted a number of social policy demands which they require be met, or at least discussed, prior to returning to the table. These include marriage equality for the LGBT community and efforts to secure access to Irish language education which was ostensibly guaranteed by the Good Friday Agreement.\textsuperscript{128} To date, Stormont remains shuttered, which is only one of many significant events that have occurred in Northern Irish politics in recent years. Many mourned the passing of Ian Paisley, which occurred in 2014. The Brexit referendum was, of course, held in 2016. And in 2017, Martin McGuinness also passed away, less than three months after his resignation and just as efforts to explore how Stormont could be restored began anew.

In February 2018, Gerry Adams stepped down as Sinn Féin party president after 35 years in the position. During its \textit{ard fheis}, leadership of the party was handed to Adams’ successor, Mary Lou McDonald.\textsuperscript{129} Whether calculated or not, this change in leadership moved the party away from the long-held perception that Sinn Féin was associated with the IRA, not merely because McDonald was Dublin-born and not from the north, but also because Adams had been such a polarizing figure. The passing of Martin McGuinness, and Gerry Adams’ decision to step down as Sinn Féin president, marked a significant sea change for the party. It is noteworthy that so much change has

\textsuperscript{127} McGuinness, letter of resignation.


occurred both within the DUP and Sinn Féin during a time in which the government is not even operational.

As the parties greet the challenges of the current era, the new personalities are now creating their own legacies. When Mary Lou McDonald assumed the Sinn Féin presidency, she acknowledged, “I won’t fill Gerry’s shoes. But the news is that I brought my own.” This type of sentiment could be indicative of the current era in which women’s presence in positions of power continues to increase. McDonald ran unopposed, and her vice president, Michelle O’Neill, is also seen as a capable politician in her own right. This marks the first time in which the top two leaders of the party have both been women. In 2018, the position of Lord Mayor of Belfast was won by Sinn Féin’s Dierdre Hargey, marking the first female in the party to win that position. Hargey’s election as Belfast mayor is all the more meaningful given the absence of Stormont as a governing force in the region, and demonstrates the broad reach Sinn Féin has achieved. As for the DUP, Arlene Foster is similarly the first female to have ever led the party. Given such significant changes in leadership, can the parties now find a way to work together once more?


131 Frayer, “A New Leader for Ireland’s Sinn Féin, But Will it Be a New Era?”


Examining the Assembly Election Results

The ascent of both the DUP and Sinn Féin between the 2002 and 2007 election cycles is notable. Much has been said about the strong efforts made by Paisley, Adams, and McGuinness to restore the devolved government in 2007 after Stormont had been shuttered for several years. Those efforts garnered votes, which translated into the Assembly seats needed to elevate both parties to leadership positions within the Executive. Throughout the 2007, 2011, and 2016 election cycles, both Sinn Féin and the DUP enjoyed a sustained level of support from their respective voting bases; however, the events of 2016 proved to take a significant toll on the DUP thereafter.

The Assembly election of 2016 took place on May 5, just six weeks prior to the Brexit referendum. In the run-up to the election, the DUP declared that it would campaign for the Leave vote in the Brexit referendum, with Arlene Foster asserting that “[t]he Democratic Unionist Party has always been Eurosceptic in its outlook.” As an indication that the party may not have been completely unified on the issue, however, Foster also added, “[W]e fully expect that DUP members and voters will hold a range of differing personal views as to what is in the best interests of the United Kingdom.”

Overall, the DUP’s messaging on the Brexit issue was mixed. As noted, no party made a strong argument for or against Brexit in Northern Ireland and the region was largely seen as an afterthought. This is borne out by DUP advertising, which, in the example of Facebook, was not undertaken until three days before the referendum.

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135 “DUP Confirms it Will Campaign for Brexit in Leave/Remain Referendum,” The Belfast Telegraph.
During that brief time, the DUP spent nearly £33,000 on pro-Leave Facebook ads, with only 16 of them being targeted to audiences in Northern Ireland, and 24 of them being targeted to English audiences.137 Further, there is no mention of Brexit at all in the DUP party manifesto generated for the 2016 Assembly election cycle, despite the fact that the manifesto covers the entire range of issues upon which the party was campaigning.138

Figure 1. DUP-sponsored pro-Brexit ad on Facebook.139

As controversy over the circumstances under which the UK would leave the EU grew, British Prime Minister Theresa May’s platform became increasingly precarious. In an effort to bolster support for her position, she held a snap election on June 8, 2017, three years prior to the regularly-scheduled election. May’s hope was that the election would result in an increased number of members from her Conservative party being voted into the UK Parliament, thereby solidifying her position of power just weeks prior


137 “Vote Leave’s Targeted Brexit Ads Released by Facebook,” BBC News.


139 “Vote Leave’s Targeted Brexit Ads Released by Facebook,” BBC News.
to the formal negotiations on the UK’s exit from the EU were to start. The attempt backfired, however. Rather than gaining seats, the Conservative party lost seats in the election and, although they remained in the majority, their position was further weakened. The outcome was a shock to many, just as the Brexit referendum results had been a year prior, and the British pound fell sharply on the news,\(^{140}\) which was ironic given that one of the stated goals of the Leave campaign was to strengthen the economy.\(^{141}\)

In response, May entered into talks with the DUP just one day after the snap election. Whereas Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, Northern Irish candidates have the right to sit for elections in either the UK Parliament or in the Northern Ireland Assembly, or both (although it was eventually frowned upon to sit in both houses simultaneously). For example, the DUP’s Jeffrey Donaldson, a staunch Unionist from Northern Ireland, has been both a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly as well as a member of the UK Parliament and is now the Parliamentary Chief Whip in Westminster.\(^{142}\) In multi-party states, it is not uncommon for two or more parties to form a formal coalition to ensure that the votes necessary to achieve their shared initiatives are secured. In this way, May and her Conservative government stood


to benefit greatly from the support, and votes, which could be garnered by the establishment of a coalition with the DUP.

This arrangement was not a true coalition, however. On June 26, 2017, the DUP signed a “Confidence and Supply” agreement which states, in part:

The DUP agrees to support the Government on all motions of confidence … the Budget; finance bills; money bills; supply and appropriation legislation and Estimates.

In line with the parties’ shared priorities for negotiating a successful exit from the European Union … the DUP also agrees to support the Government on legislation pertaining to the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union; and legislation pertaining to national security.

The DUP made clear that support on other matters would be agreed on a case-by-case basis.\textsuperscript{143}

In short, the DUP agreed to support the Conservative government by promising votes in support of a wide range of issues which might be raised in the UK Parliament, including in relation to Brexit, but not on everything that could ever conceivably be proposed. The DUP endured major losses between the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly election and the 2017 Assembly election. The DUP suffered for its support of Brexit, losing 10 total seats over the previous year,\textsuperscript{144} which was not a surprise given that public sentiment was not, overall, in favor of leaving the European Union. As with most pacts between parties in a multi-party state, the agreement between the DUP and May’s


Conservative government is necessarily conditional and temporary, as was evidenced by subsequent debates and parliamentary votes on the terms of the Brexit divorce.

Table 5. Northern Ireland Assembly election results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Democratic Unionist Party</th>
<th>Sinn Féin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011*</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016*</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017*</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Seats won by the DUP and Sinn Féin respectively during each Assembly election._

*Years in which the First Minister and Deputy First Minister positions were held continuously by the DUP and Sinn Féin respectively.

The loss of seats that the DUP suffered during the 2017 Assembly election cycle was significant; however, those seats ended up being diffused amongst several other parties, rather than going exclusively to Sinn Féin. Regardless, the two parties remained in power until the present government collapse, and indeed, Sinn Féin’s influence relative to the DUP was strengthened as it reached near parity with the DUP in the number of

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Assembly seats won. In short, Sinn Féin was seen to be gaining on the DUP for the first time.

With respect to new party leadership, and the seriousness of the issues facing Northern Ireland today, it is prudent to examine what principles and goals are advertised in each party’s platform. A comparison of the principles and goals articulated in each party’s 2016 Assembly election manifesto is featured below. The manifestos that each party produced in 2017 served largely to reiterate the points articulated in the 2016 versions, with little substantive change.

Table 6. Comparison of party manifestos from the 2016 Assembly election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democratic Unionist Party</th>
<th>Sinn Féin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. More jobs, rising incomes – 50,000 new jobs</td>
<td>1. Economy – 50,000 new jobs, enhanced fiscal powers, small business tax relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. World class health service – at least £1B in additional spending</td>
<td>2. Housing – 10,000 affordable homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Education for every child</td>
<td>3. Health - £1B in additional health spending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Rewarding hard work – low taxes, support for caregivers and pensioners</td>
<td>5. Education – Childcare and early development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of each 10-point plan as presented by the DUP and by Sinn Féin during the 2016 Assembly election campaign.146

This comparison between the parties is somewhat deceiving. Without a true grasp of history, an outside observer might not readily appreciate how much each party is at odds when reading these documents. Despite appearing to be closely aligned in their platform positions (including with regard to government reform), the ways in which the manifestos diverge is significant. Both manifestos feature a 10-point list of priorities (listed above in the order in which they were presented), some of which are nearly identical. When comparing each party’s manifestos from 2016 against the versions they produced in 2017, it is clear that the general principles, goals, and commitments remained the same year over year. It is evident, however, that the Brexit referendum results and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy efficiency, address homelessness</th>
<th>8. Tackling crime – reconciliation, inclusiveness, transparency in policing</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. A friend of the farmer and our natural heritage – price stabilization, rural development, environmental protection, availability of broadband internet</td>
<td>9. Equality – support for the Irish language, support for the elderly, gender equality, marriage equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Taking pride in Northern Ireland – increased international events, 2021 centenary celebration, honoring national heritage</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

renewed discord between the parties was beginning to influence the rhetoric on each side in the latter year.

In its 2016 manifesto, Sinn Féin’s document opens with statements from both Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams. Both statements reiterate the general tenets of the Republican Party. McGuinness’s statement is representative of his experience as a high-level negotiator and he and Adams both take care to avoid any statement that could be construed as overly inflammatory. The next year, Sinn Féin’s 2017 manifesto opens with a statement by Michelle O’Neill, and the language is more direct. In the 2016 document, McGuinness makes no mention of the DUP directly, referring only to the “negativity and blatant opportunism by some political parties.”¹⁴⁷ He chose instead to call out the British Conservative government by name, citing the “political instability” their policies have caused.¹⁴⁸ In 2017, O’Neill goes further to assert that the “arrogance and disrespect of the DUP to sections of the community [has] damaged the institutions. … Martin McGuinness called time on all of this. There is no going back to the failure of the past.”¹⁴⁹

Neither the 2016 nor the 2017 manifestos produced by the DUP includes the term “Brexit,” choosing instead to include a section titled “Leaving the European Union” in the 2017 version.¹⁵⁰ By contrast, McGuinness addresses the issue directly in Sinn Féin’s

¹⁴⁷ Sinn Féin, “Better with Sinn Féin: Sinn Féin Manifesto, Assembly Election 2016.”
¹⁴⁸ Sinn Féin, “Better with Sinn Féin: Sinn Féin Manifesto, Assembly Election 2016.”
2016 manifesto, asserting that the party is “committed to campaigning against Brexit as it would be bad for Ireland politically, economically and socially.”

In 2017, O’Neill took care to highlight the fact that the DUP stood with the Conservative government, which was “imposing Brexit against the will of the people.”

Additionally, there is then an entire section of the 2017 Sinn Féin manifesto devoted to Brexit (and which is titled as such) in which the party unequivocally states: “The people of the North voted to remain in the European Union. … Sinn Féin will defend that democratic mandate and the rights of citizens. … Brexit undermines the integrity and status of the Good Friday Agreement and the political institutions.”

Beyond Brexit, it is not until one reviews the tenth and final commitment in each party’s manifesto that the essential, historic, difference between the parties is revealed. The DUP lists its tenth goal as “Taking pride in Northern Ireland” and places an emphasis on the ways in which Northern Ireland has begun to reap the economic rewards of a reformed image through increased tourism and the hosting of notable international events:

Northern Ireland is a great country, full of potential and bouncing back after the dark days of the Troubles. Despite the negativity generated by some, there has been a growing pride in Northern Ireland and the achievements of its people, coinciding with the restoration of devolution. There is a clear opportunity to build pride amongst everyone in Northern Ireland and in particular, our future generations.

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151 Sinn Féin, “Better with Sinn Féin: Sinn Féin Manifesto, Assembly Election 2016.”

152 Sinn Féin, “Sinn Féin Assembly Manifesto 2017.”

153 Sinn Féin, “Sinn Féin Assembly Manifesto 2017.”

With regard to drawing the positive attention of the international community specifically, the manifesto reinforced the DUP’s desire to celebrate the centenary of the events of 1921:

With Northern Ireland fast approaching its centenary year in 2021, we want to see more people, regardless of their community background, taking pride in Northern Ireland. 2021 presents us all with the opportunity to build positively on the events of recent years and to develop a series of events and initiatives that will celebrate this historic milestone and build community pride.\textsuperscript{155}

The events of 1921 refer clearly to the Partition of Ireland and the establishment of Northern Ireland. For Republicans, it is obviously more meaningful to celebrate the centenary of 1916 and the Easter Rising. In opposition to the DUP’s version of national pride, McGuinness suggested an alternative celebration in the Sinn Féin manifesto:

2016 is an important year for the people of Ireland, marking the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising. The Proclamation of the Irish Republic commits to pursuing the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally. That historic document is a clear statement of intent for an all-Ireland Republic built on the foundations of civil and religious liberty, social justice and equality for all citizens. It remains the mission statement of modern Irish republicanism and its principles guide us in government today. Almost 100 years after the imposition of partition it is clear that it has failed all of our people politically, socially and economically.\textsuperscript{156}

The tenth commitment articulated in the Sinn Féin manifesto referred not to a DUP-like goal of celebrating Northern Ireland as it is, but to what it could be by “Building momentum toward Irish unity.” In furtherance of McGuinness’s statement above, Sinn Féin vowed to drive the national conversation on Irish unity and build support for the same by demonstrating that a united Ireland benefits all through improved

\textsuperscript{155} Democratic Unionist Party, “Our Plan for Northern Ireland: The DUP Manifesto for the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly Election.”

\textsuperscript{156} Sinn Féin, “Better with Sinn Féin: Sinn Féin Manifesto, Assembly Election 2016.”
public services and economic growth. Direct references to a referendum on Irish unity are included in the document. Thus, even as recently as 2017, the goals and principles stated by both the DUP and Sinn Féin – meaning, by both Unionists and Republicans – include references to the age-old divide between the parties. Compare these modern manifestos against Unionist and Republican rhetoric of 100 years ago and the perception that little progress has been made is confirmed. Despite the evolution of Northern Ireland’s politics and people over the past 100 years, no functional government nor meaningful accord has been achieved.

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Chapter IV.

Changing Demographics, Changing Tides

Beyond general underrepresentation, and beyond the most recent collapse of Stormont, there are also more systemic and perhaps more impactful changes taking place in Northern Ireland. In recent years, Northern Ireland has witnessed both a shift in demographics (manifesting itself in myriad ways), as well as a widespread shift in cultural attitudes which are not directly attributed to those demographic changes. Some of these emerging cultural attitudes fail to comport with the assumptions made about the various groups in Northern Ireland, particularly with regard to social issues. While it must be recognized that certain demographic and cultural changes have taken place in recent years, some age-old problems continue to persist, such as the prevalence of sectarianism.

Demographic Shifts and Evolving Social Issues

According to the most recent census, 48 percent of usual residents in Northern Ireland declared themselves as belonging to or having been brought up in the Protestant religion, while 45 percent declared that they belonged to or had been brought up in the Catholic religion.\(^{158}\) Notably, Protestants have outnumbered Catholics in Northern Ireland for many years, but recent demographic surveys demonstrate that this gap is

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beginning to close. The percentage change between the 2001 census and the 2011 census revealed a 10.8 percent gain in the Catholic population, and a 2.2 percent decline in the Protestant population.\textsuperscript{159} The Northern Ireland Assembly and Research Service has concluded that there are several factors which account for these changes, with one primary factor being that the median age of the Protestant population is significantly greater than that of the Catholic population, with roughly twice the number of residents aged 75 or older than their Catholic counterparts in the years trending between the 2001 and the 2011 census.\textsuperscript{160} This age disparity may correlate to certain platform positions taken by each party as well.

The popular assumption is that Republicans and Nationalist groups tend to be comprised largely of Catholics, and that Unionist parties are generally comprised of Protestants. These generalizations, however, do not correspond directly to the broader social policies that parties such as Sinn Féin and the DUP have adopted in recent years. When examining one social issue in particular, access to abortions, one is reminded that social change in Ireland has generally been slow to arrive (for example, it was not until 1995 that divorce was legal in the Republic of Ireland, requiring a constitutional amendment).\textsuperscript{161} It was not until May 2018 that abortion (with certain restrictions) became legal in the Republic of Ireland following a referendum in which 66.4 percent of those in the Republic voted to legalize abortion, including 72.1 percent of women, and

\textsuperscript{159} Raymond Russell, “Census 2011: Key Statistics at Assembly Area Level.”

\textsuperscript{160} Raymond Russell, “Census 2011: Key Statistics at Assembly Area Level.”

81.7 percent of all 18 – 49 year olds.\textsuperscript{162} This reveals that, for this issue in particular, attitudes are youth-driven, which is to the advantage of Sinn Féin. Again, Sinn Féin is a political party active on both sides of the border, but in Northern Ireland they have a marked share of the vote of the younger generations. The 2017 \textit{Life and Times Survey} reveals that Sinn Féin enjoys the favor of the majority of respondents between ages 18 – 44, while the DUP enjoys the support of the majority of respondents aged 45 and over.\textsuperscript{163}

The pace of change may now be accelerating. In the Republic, there was surprisingly little backlash or protest once clinics started offering abortion services, even amongst those who voted against it, despite the fact that the procedure would have been unheard-of just a few years ago.\textsuperscript{164} Changes in public attitudes have also transcended the border and this emergent issue has been up for debate in Northern Ireland as well. Despite abortion being legal in the UK since 1967, it has never been legalized in Northern Ireland as health administration was one of the devolved powers granted to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive in the Good Friday Agreement.\textsuperscript{165} As such, Northern Ireland remains the only place in the United Kingdom in which abortion is illegal, and, although there is great momentum for change, the issue cannot be


\textsuperscript{163} ARK, Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University, Northern Ireland \textit{Life and Times Survey}: Political Party Support, 2017, updated June 11, 2018, https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2017/Political_Attitudes/POLPART2.html.


addressed while Stormont is disbanded. The penalty for abortion in Northern Ireland is the same as that of murder, including in cases of incest, rape, or fatal fetal abnormality. This restriction has pushed women seeking access to abortion to travel outside of Northern Ireland for the procedure.\textsuperscript{166}

The Republicans of Sinn Féin have been vocal in their support for abortion rights of late, and for greater attention to women’s health issues in general. This was not always the case, however, and historically the party has been more mindful of its Catholic base in supporting access to abortion only in the most extreme cases. The vote to legalize abortion in the Republic, and a changing of the guard in Sinn Féin leadership have led to a more modern approach. On both sides of the border, abortion and women’s issues have been central to the Sinn Féin party platform in recent years. Echoing the popular refrain “the north is next,” Sinn Féin has recently voiced its strong support for efforts to legalize abortion in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{167}

In contrast, the DUP has campaigned against abortion rights. Citing that the DUP is a pro-life party, Arlene Foster has asserted that the referendum results in the Republic will have “no impact” on Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{168} The issue of access to abortion in the case of fatal fetal abnormality specifically has received considerable attention throughout Ireland following the 2012 death of a Galway dentist who was denied an abortion after

\textsuperscript{166} Ben Kelly, “Abortion in Northern Ireland.”


she began to miscarry. In that case, tests determined that the fetus would not survive, but the woman was reportedly told that the pregnancy could not be terminated and that the fetus could only be removed after it was deceased. During the three days it took for the miscarriage to conclude, both she and her husband repeatedly requested termination of the pregnancy but were refused on the grounds that Ireland was “a Catholic country,” as one doctor reportedly stated, despite the fact that the couple asserted that they themselves were not Catholic. The woman died shortly thereafter. This case is often cited by grassroots groups, and now more mainstream groups, as grounds for advocating for abortion rights across Ireland.

Despite Northern Ireland having some of the most restrictive abortion laws in all of Europe, the DUP does seek to address the matter of women’s health in its stated goal to promote “a world class health service.” Its 13-point plan advocates for increased government investment in order to modernize health services. With regard to the debate on fatal fetal abnormalities, the DUP set forth a goal of establishing hospice care, stated as follows:

Public debate has focused on the needs of women who are pregnant with a child diagnosed with a severe life limiting condition. The DUP believes that women who find themselves in these most difficult of situations need the best medical

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and emotional support. The DUP is committed to establishing a perinatal hospice care service or facility in Northern Ireland.172

Indicative of the trend toward more liberal thinking on the issue, a poll conducted in Northern Ireland by Amnesty International in late 2018 revealed that 65 percent of adults in Northern Ireland believe that abortion should be decriminalized.173 On this issue, Sinn Féin is more aligned with the position of most adults in Northern Ireland than is the DUP as the DUP continues to advocate for hospice care over access to abortion in certain circumstances. And yet, the party positions on this matter are counter-intuitive: Sinn Féin, as the traditional party of Catholics has softened its stance on abortion, while the DUP has remained staunchly opposed. The divergent positions on this issue further demonstrate that general assumptions based on demography are not sufficient to serve as a predictor of public sentiment on certain social issues. The people of Northern Ireland continue to agitate for change, and religious affiliation, party affiliation, and one’s position on various social issues serve as only some of the many factors comprising identity in modern Northern Ireland.

Identity

Returning again to the most recent census conducted in 2011, participants were, for the first time, asked a question about national identity. The census offered respondents the opportunity to identify as British, Irish, Northern Irish, English, Scottish, or Welsh, and respondents could make more than one selection.174 Nearly 40 percent of

172 Democratic Unionist Party, “A World Class Health Service.”


respondents identified as British Only, 25 percent identified as Irish Only, 21 percent identified as Northern Irish Only, and just over 6 percent identified as both British and Northern Irish.\footnote{Raymond Russell, “Census 2011: Key Statistics at Assembly Area Level.”} The census did not stipulate what characteristics would be associated with each selection of national identity; that portion merely reads: “How would you describe your national identity? Tick all that apply.”\footnote{Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, “2011 Census, Individual Questionnaire.”} This left respondents with the opportunity to self-identify their own nationality without influence.

When taking the results of the identity question, and applying those to existing census data regarding religious identification, there is little surprise at the result. Comparing again the six key Northern Ireland assembly areas outlined in chapter two, one can readily see a predictable correlation between religious background and national identity. Those communities which are predominately Catholic tend to identify as Irish Only, while those communities which are predominately Protestant tend to identity as British Only. That correlation is self-evident in Table 7 below.
Table 7. National identity by religious affiliation: British and Irish.

Of interest, one can see from Table 8 below that relatively few people consider themselves to be Northern Irish only, but that those who do tend to come from both backgrounds equally as they appear in relatively equal numbers throughout these select communities. Even fewer individuals in these communities regard themselves as a combination of British and Northern Irish exclusively.

Self-selected national identity compared against religious affiliation/background.177

Of interest, one can see from Table 8 below that relatively few people consider themselves to be Northern Irish only, but that those who do tend to come from both backgrounds equally as they appear in relatively equal numbers throughout these select communities. Even fewer individuals in these communities regard themselves as a combination of British and Northern Irish exclusively.

Table 8. National identity by religious affiliation: British and Northern Irish.

Self-selected national identity compared against religious affiliation/background.\textsuperscript{178}

These results confirm that national identity is, of course, only one aspect of the multifaceted identity of those living in Northern Ireland. While predictable correlations between religion and national identity do exist, predictable correlations between religion and positions on certain social issues do not exist. And, despite the fact that more and more people are electing to identify as “no religion” than ever before,\textsuperscript{179} religion continues to serve as a key ingredient to conflict.


To be certain, the conflict that has existed in Northern Ireland has largely been driven by religious differences, both caused by and a byproduct of religious segregation within communities. At certain times in Ireland’s history, sectarian violence has caused communities to be forcibly, physically separated, most notably through the construction of “peace walls.” Peace walls first appeared in Belfast in 1969 during a particularly intense year of sectarian violence during the Troubles. What were originally fashioned as temporary barriers erected by residents soon turned to permanent barriers which were fortified, increased in length and height, and topped with barbed wire by the British Army when it was deployed to Northern Ireland that same year.\textsuperscript{180} As of late 2017, there were still 108 peace walls or similar types of security barriers throughout Northern Ireland as both sides must agree before removal can be considered, and it was not until 2016 that the first wall came down through cross-community agreement.\textsuperscript{181}

During the height of the Troubles and shortly thereafter, some peace walls were monitored by watchtowers manned by the British military. While the watchtowers are no more, and the government has pledged to remove the walls by 2023, there are actually more sections of wall today than before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The agreement to remove the walls by 2023 was established by Martin McGuinness and Peter Robinson in a Stormont which no longer exists.\textsuperscript{182} Further, not all communities are

\textsuperscript{180} “A Glossary of Terms Related to the Conflict,” CAIN, Ulster University, last modified June 21, 2018, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/glossary.htm#peaceline.


prepared to give up the relative safety of the walls, particularly in areas of dense population, and there is still a portion of wall in Belfast that is closed and locked during evenings and weekends in order to separate communities.  

In Belfast and Derry in particular, there is a long tradition of covering the walls with murals, and one can find many examples of elaborate murals depicting the sentiments of each community. Walls facing Nationalist communities tend to include murals featuring tributes to civil rights leaders fighting for freedom in Ireland and other countries, messages of solidarity with people of other regions they view as being similarly occupied, such as the Palestinians or those from the Basque region of Spain, but most often the murals feature memorials to those who were killed during the Troubles or who were imprisoned by the British. Similarly, walls facing Unionist communities feature pro-British and pro-monarchy themes, as well as celebrations of British victories over the Irish.

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There is certainly evidence that some of the communities have become more integrated over the years but not nearly as much as would be in evidence if Northern Ireland were to exist in a truly post-conflict area. Referring back to the 2017 *Life and Times Survey*, a specific question about political attitudes was posed: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Unionist, a Nationalist or neither?” While a significant number of respondents selected “neither,” those who did select a response did so along wholly religious lines. Of those who claimed to be Unionists, 67 percent were Protestant while just 2 percent were Catholic. Of those who claimed to be Nationalists,
50 percent claimed to be Catholic and only 1 percent claimed to be Protestant.\textsuperscript{187} And, just as the younger generations tend to favor Sinn Féin over the DUP, so too do the younger generations tend to lean Nationalist over Unionist when given the choice. Again, of those who made a selection (rather than choosing “neither”), the majority of those aged 18 – 44 identified as Nationalist, while those aged 45 and older more often identified as Unionist. To drive the age disparity home, a full 50 percent of respondents over age 65 claimed to be Unionist, while just 19 percent of those over 65 claimed to be Nationalist.\textsuperscript{188}

Beyond there being little movement in the entrenched communities, there is also little in the way of ethnic diversity in Northern Ireland relative to other countries in the EU. One is reminded that the Leave campaign touted immigration as one if its chief concerns in the lead-up to the Brexit referendum. The campaign’s materials advertised that leaving the EU would provide the UK with the opportunity to resume control over its own borders and to autonomously decide who might be admitted, a necessity, they stated, “in a world with so many new threats.”\textsuperscript{189} And yet, the 2011 census reveals that the vast majority of residents of Northern Ireland are native to the area, with only 2 percent of all residents having been born in other EU member states and an additional 1.8 percent having been born to an ethnic minority group outside of Europe (to include Asian and African descent).\textsuperscript{190} This reinforces the understanding that the conflicts which persist are

\textsuperscript{187} Northern Ireland \textit{Life and Times Survey}: Political Attitudes, 2017.

\textsuperscript{188} Northern Ireland \textit{Life and Times Survey}: Political Attitudes, 2017.


\textsuperscript{190} Raymond Russell, “Census 2011: Key Statistics at Assembly Area Level.”
based on the age-old religious and political divides which have always existed, rather than new or external threats.

**Political Activism, Military, and Paramilitary Activity**

In 1991, the 75th anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916 was scarcely acknowledged due to the extraordinary tensions of the day.191 Flash forward 25 years to the centenary celebration in 2016 and the occasion was marked by hundreds of local, state-sponsored events taking place in the Republic. Given that the events of the Easter Rising were the foundation of the independence of the Republic of Ireland, it makes sense that this event would be celebrated there more heartily than in the north, but there were celebrations in the north, too, and abroad. As part of an ambitious program, the government of the Republic of Ireland advertised a “Decade of Centenaries,” as the “Government’s programme to mark the centenary of the rebellion of Easter 1916, the event that is generally regarded as having led to Ireland’s independence some six years later,” with a goal to “remember the events of 1916 in the full context of our history and [to] honour the people whose courage and idealism inspired a nation.”192

Thus, on Easter Sunday 2016, a state ceremony and military parade took place in the heart of Dublin and served as an early focal point for the centenary celebrations. What is remarkable about this event is that the Republic of Ireland has had a long-standing commitment to military neutrality, incorporated into most of its international treaties, pledging never to participate in military alliances and to engage in international

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activities only insofar as they promote peacekeeping efforts.\textsuperscript{193} It is therefore noteworthy that such a display of military capability would be deemed an appropriate focal point for the centenary celebration, particularly at this time in history. All branches of the Irish military participated in the parade, with armed troops in formation, tanks and other armored vehicles interspersed throughout the parade, and an official military fly-over.

![Military formation to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising.](image)

Figure 3. Military formation to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising.

*Soldiers march to mark the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising in Dublin.*\textsuperscript{194}


\textsuperscript{194} © Nicole A. Worsham, Dublin, 2016. Faces have been obscured through pixelization for privacy purposes.
No major incidents of unrest occurred during the centenary events of Easter weekend, but it was evident that various factions of Nationalist groups were keen to be present. Dating back to the talks leading up to the Good Friday Agreement, those who were not pleased with the manner in which Adams and McGuinness worked to negotiate with Britain toward an agreement, and who were therefore unwilling to accept the terms of the Good Friday Agreement at all, splintered off from traditional Republican and Nationalist groups to form more militant groups. Those groups espoused the same ideals once promoted by Adams and McGuinness – that there would be no peace until the
British left Northern Ireland – but once Adams, McGuinness, and the rest of Sinn Féin began to take a more conciliatory tone with the British, while pressuring the IRA to decommission, the splintered factions began to multiply. Over the years, some groups have become further divided, taken on different names, disbanded altogether, or gone underground. A number of Nationalist groups do exist today, some of which are paramilitary in nature, but not all of which share the same ideals. Some of these groups participated in the Easter Rising Centenary parade in Dublin, including the 32 County Sovereignty Movement, Continuity Sinn Féin, and the Irish Republican National Congress.\textsuperscript{196}

The 32 County Sovereignty Movement is relatively well-known, having been formed on the eve of the Good Friday Agreement, as they state:

The 32 County Sovereignty Movement was founded at a meeting of like-minded Republican activists in Fingal County Dublin on Sunday 7th December 1997.

Most of those present were members of Sinn Féin who were finding themselves increasingly marginalised due to their open concerns at the direction in which the party was being led following revelations of Britain's latest proposals for “peace” in Ireland.\textsuperscript{197}

These themes are common amongst splinter Nationalist groups. The 32 County Sovereignty Movement does not, at least in their public statements, advocate for violence in order to achieve their stated goal of all-island sovereignty, free from Britain, seeking


instead to “develop an influential capability” through advancement of Republican
dialogue, campaigns, and media messaging.¹⁹⁸

For its part, the Irish Republican National Congress is more recently established,
in 2014, and aspires to similar goals:

The Irish Republican National Congress shall strive in it's (sic) efforts to reclaim
the Unity and Independence for all the people on the Island of Ireland as
proclaimed in Easter Week 1916. The Irish Republican National Congress is
steadfast in it's [sic] belief that the partition of Ireland by foreign governments is
illegal. We shall strive to see the democratic will of the people of this Island in an
all-Ireland referendum on the question of Irish Unification. The Irish Republican
National Congress are also totally opposed to Irelands [sic] membership of the
European Union as it was forced upon the Irish people in the most undemocratic
manner conceivable.¹⁹⁹

Here, one sees the stress placed on absolute sovereignty, to include resistance to
membership in the EU as well. From their perspective, the representative government of
Northern Ireland was not and is not legitimate, and therefore had no legitimate right to
bring the country into the EU in the first place.

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¹⁹⁸ 32 County Sovereignty Movement, “Dismantling Partition,” undated, accessed March 13,

¹⁹⁹ Irish Republican National Congress, “Our Background,” undated, accessed January 20, 2019,
Figure 5. Nationalist groups appear in the Easter Rising centenary parade.

*Members of Continuity Sinn Féin march in a parade to mark the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising in Dublin.*  

With regard to Continuity Sinn Féin, the “Continuity” portion of the name refers to the continued struggle against occupation which was unduly arrested when the Republican Party capitulated to Britain at the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The group no longer has an active public-facing webpage, although they do have an official Facebook page that is actively updated. The group boasts less than 1200 followers on their Facebook page, but their appearance in the parade was one of a group that is organized and at least somewhat well-established. As evidenced in the photograph above, members carried professional flags and wore matching military-style uniforms.

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© Nicole A. Worsham, Dublin, 2016. Faces have been obscured through pixelization for privacy purposes.
with combat boots and berets. Interestingly, their uniforms are nearly identical to those worn by the youth of Na Fianna Éireann, the “Irish Republican Scouts,” who continue in the tradition of the original group established in the early twentieth century. Na Fianna, too, is anti-Sinn Féin and its current stated purpose is to recruit youth to the Republican cause. While their youth scouting exercises have the feel of basic military exercises, the group states simply, “Above all Na Fianna is an educational organization, an organization that teaches and trains Irish boys to work for Irish Independence.”

No references are made to Na Fianna on Continuity Sinn Féin’s Facebook page, but their New Year’s post does align with Na Fianna’s stated goals. Their enmity is not reserved for the British alone, however. It is directed at the government of the Republic of Ireland as well, for their perceived complicity in the current state of affairs (this group is not alone in that sentiment):

… [A] sustained campaign of harassment and arrest of Republicans who oppose the British presence continue[s] and in recent weeks the activity of the 26 county political police has been stepped up against republican activists who refuse to accept British rule throughout Ireland. … The unity of Ireland is a legitimate aspiration for the Irish people and this political aim should not be tarnished by police describing it as some sort of criminal enterprise.


202 Continuity Sinn Féin, 2019, “New Year statement from The Republican movement,” Facebook, January 1, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/Continuitiesinnfein.org/posts/2385576264805367?__xts__=%5B0%5D=68.ARA905nEg60EuAH2xUxT9R1GaTqxp5mahmDUs6HPA65BQ1mFSo8GF8k-e78YZE_mypq6tSmRok02bzJyj0NHFec2NKjkjtO-D24e_GvShb1CJMGQ6yjv0Kt2muxxLkTAOE54mi72OSlnjCtdTtdrMclRaRT1cXpEhgPHg-GUPZMALpxqFQ-w-t-1K9L5F21xwVAYviKf1evQUuYlsSfrkjjxCQb0356InZeuGuDz5q90FNXX3oivr7b4KD6JBat1UzlspXko4249k1EvbhQ5-AthYNuJAGbO6T1BaqGp-xS5mQsPagSjHM1Z49AQNQx_7aUu1yce1w1OdEaOzz5OnXfl&__tn__=K-R.
Curiously, the Continuity Sinn Féin post from January 2019 does not so much refer to itself as it does the Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA):

A process of recruitment, education and training is on-going and the results will become clear in the coming months. The CIRA wish to restate that the armed struggle against British occupation continues despite the sell-out and surrender by some former Republicans who now administer British rule in Ireland. There will be no CIRA ceasefire and military operations against the forces of the British presence will be intensified. The CIRA give warning that there is no safe haven for those who administer and support the British presence in the occupied six Counties. The core cause of conflict still exists as Ireland is divided and the age old aspiration to unity must be acknowledged by British declaring their intention to withdraw from Ireland. Only then shall the foundations of a real and lasting peace in our country be established.\textsuperscript{203}

Many Nationalist groups have taken up names which are similar, and the state of the Republican movement remains dynamic. Some groups are legitimately involved in purely political activities, while others are more evidently associated with paramilitary groups. In the United States, the Department of State is the entity responsible for determining which groups shall be designated as “Foreign Terrorist Organizations” in relation to certain diplomatic actions such as sanctions, visa bans, and the monitoring of foreign and domestic support for these organizations. These designations are based on the Department’s determination that a group has been involved in a terrorist act in the past, and that the group retains the capability to conduct further attacks, even if they have not done so in recent years. As of 2019, Irish-based groups do remain on the list, including the Real Irish Republican Army (designated in 2001), and the Continuity Irish Republican Army (designated in 2004).\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{203} Continuity Sinn Féin, 2019, “New Year statement from The Republican movement.”

IRA as a terrorist group, the State Department also identified certain aliases of the Real IRA, one of which was the 32 County Sovereignty Movement.\textsuperscript{205}

One is reminded that decommissioning was a principle component of the Good Friday Agreement. Although violence directly attributed to paramilitary groups has decreased significantly since 1998, the notion that the Good Friday Agreement has cured all of the ills which foment paramilitary activity is simply false. In a 2015 investigation into paramilitary activity commissioned by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the PSNI and the British intelligence service MI5, concluded that

all the main paramilitary groups operating during the period of the Troubles remain in existence: this includes the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Red Hand Commando (RHC), Ulster Defence Association (UDA), Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). Seventeen years after the 1998 Belfast Agreement, paramilitary groups remain a feature of life in NI; the UDA, UVF and INLA have continued to recruit and all the paramilitary groups maintain a relatively public profile in spite of being illegal organisations.\textsuperscript{206}

To be clear, Loyalist and Unionist paramilitary groups, such as the UDA and UDF, do continue to operate with the same level of sophistication as Nationalist and Republican groups, and the UDA and the UVF have both been active for decades. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that some prominent members of Loyalist paramilitary groups have openly endorsed DUP candidates. Arlene Foster herself has taken criticism for meeting with UDA leadership and failing to disavow them.\textsuperscript{207} In this way, a parallel


may be drawn between the relationship between the DUP and the UDA and the relationship between Sinn Féin and the IRA. The ongoing violence continues to jeopardize human rights within communities, as well as broader efforts to move toward a lasting peace.
Chapter V.

A Way Forward

In the span of history, the period known as the Troubles was quite recent, beginning mere decades ago. Regrettably, many of the issues which formed the root cause of the Troubles persist to this day. Intermittent periods of direct rule by the UK, the presence of British intelligence forces in Northern Ireland, lack of true autonomy in legislative decision-making (such as membership in the European Union), and changing demographics and social preferences that have not been reflected in the devolved government have all led to a period of sustained discord. History has not been addressed, the concerns of the communities have not been resolved, and ever-mounting challenges in the region signify that change must come. These issues touch the day-to-day lives of individuals, as well as their perspective on the future.

Protection of Human Rights

Profound uncertainty regarding the outcome of Brexit belies greater concerns about human rights protections. Lack of respect for religion, cultural traditions, and national identity are at the heart of the conflict between the British and the Irish dating back millennia. However, a measure of human rights protections was afforded to the people of Northern Ireland by virtue of its membership in the European Union, and other European institutions. Many have questioned how Northern Ireland could function if forced to revert to a time in which the British government was the sole authority over the region, as the collapse of Stormont and withdrawal from European institutions makes this distinctly possible.
An example of these concerns is related to the breadth of surveillance of citizens in Northern Ireland by the PSNI and MI5. Throughout Northern Ireland, and particularly in the more urban areas, closed-captioned television cameras are ubiquitous and considered an everyday part of life, but some recent cases have demonstrated that surveillance efforts have gone much further. In October 2015, three Republican men were brought to trial on charges that they had conspired to murder police officers, which the men denied. Some of the evidence presented included audio recordings and GPS data which was gleaned from tracking devices placed in the men’s vehicles. Helicopter and drone video footage was then laid over the audio and tracking data to reveal that virtually all of the men’s movements, conversations, and activities had been recorded for as long as three years. The case was eventually thrown out and the men were not charged, primarily because authorities were unwilling to fully disclose to the defense the manner in which all of the information was captured.

Indeed, some British watchdog groups have suggested that relatively lax standards are employed when law enforcement seeks a warrant to conduct surveillance. One such case of covert, invasive surveillance was recently brought before the European Court of Human Rights. Granted anonymity by the court, a Northern Irish man known as RE, claimed a breach of his human rights after being arrested three times over the course of two years for the murder of a police officer for which Republicans were blamed.

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During the first two arrests, RE and his attorney were granted the opportunity to confer confidentially. On the third occasion, the PSNI would not permit this to occur and monitored those conversations between RE and his attorney. He was subsequently released without charge. RE then filed suit in the European Court asserting that the PSNI had violated Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights which protects an individual’s private life, home and correspondence. The Court found unanimously in favor of RE’s claim, and in their judgment, cited concerns regarding the provisions set forth in UK domestic law regarding surveillance.210

Further, as discussed, many do feel that the communities should continue to be separated and protected by the ongoing presence of peace walls. The continued need for peace walls signifies, obviously, that the region is far from achieving the stability and lasting peace required to ensure human rights protections. And yet, in a recent study, as many as 78 percent of those surveyed believed that segregation existed within communities even where no walls were present.211 This is due to the prevalence of sectarian violence which personally impacts individuals within their own small communities. While crime in Northern Ireland is at its lowest rate since 1998, the prevalence of paramilitary violence has been on the rise. In the survey year ending 2017, the number of paramilitary style shootings doubled in number from the previous year.212


By way of example, a highly contentious period occurs each year in July, during a period called the “marching season.” During the season, Unionist communities rally to put on parades and other displays in support of their position, and are met by a smaller-scale Nationalist response. Indeed, the parades grew out of the Unionist desire to commemorate the defeat of Catholics under King James II by the Protestant King William of Orange on July 12, 1690. Those Unionists and Loyalists, termed “Orangemen,” have held an annual commemorative parade which wends its way through Republican and Loyalist neighborhoods. At the same time, Orangemen have upheld a long-standing tradition of lighting enormous bonfires in the city, largely made of wooden pallets. The bonfires are often accompanied by crude, sectarian chanting, and the burning of Republican or Catholic images, such as photographs of the Pope or Republican political figures.

For obvious reasons, Nationalist and Republican communities have felt threatened by these displays, which, over time, have prompted local governments to implement rules regarding pre-approved parade routes and bonfire locations. In 2018, thousands of Orangemen marched in Belfast and Derry, hijacking and setting cars and buses on fire, and blocking routes to hospitals and police stations. Police were aware that the Loyalist paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force was planning a disruption, and Republican dissidents responded in what proceeded to be five sustained nights of violence. In January 2019, discord erupted in the Belfast City Council over proposals to devote

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214 “Orange Order Parades Take Place Amid Violence in Northern Ireland,” The Guardian.
£500,000 from the budget toward efforts to divert and diffuse tensions during the marching season, recognizing that current efforts were insufficient.\footnote{Allan Preston, “Belfast Council Storm as DUP and SF Vote Through £500k ‘Diversion Fund,’” \textit{The Belfast Telegraph}, January 8, 2019, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/belfast-council-storm-as-dup-and-sf-vote-through-500k-bonfire-diversion-fund-37689518.html.}

These issues serve as yet more indication that true community reconciliation is unlikely in the near term. It is for this reason that externally-guaranteed protections are so important. During the recent election campaign in the UK, the Prime Minister promised to end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the UK as part of her Brexit package.\footnote{Raphael Hogarth, “Brexit and the European Court of Justice,” Institute for Government, June 2017, https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/brexit-and-european-court-justice.} Moreover, rights protections that currently exist in the European Charter on Fundamental Rights will no longer carry over into UK law once the UK withdraws from the EU.\footnote{Human Rights Consortium, \textit{Rights at Risk: Brexit, Human Rights and Northern Ireland}, January 10, 2018, http://www.humanrightsconsortium.org/rights-risk-brexit-process/.} The provisions within include protections related to dignity, freedom, equality, and justice, and the Charter provides for enforcement via the European Court of Justice and redress if rights are violated. Despite assurances from Theresa May’s government, many in Northern Ireland fear what may happen to the communities in the event that there are no codified rights protections beyond those that exist in UK law.\footnote{Human Rights Consortium, \textit{Rights at Risk: Brexit, Human Rights and Northern Ireland}.}

The Future of the Good Friday Agreement

The breadth and depth of these issues jeopardizes the durability of the Good Friday Agreement. While no major party has expressed a desire to put an end to, or even
to renegotiate the Good Friday Agreement, there are a number of parties who continue to
assert that the Agreement will no longer be valid once the UK exits the European Union.

The Good Friday Agreement states: “The British Government will complete
incorporation into Northern Ireland law the European Convention on Human Rights …
with direct access to the courts, and remedies for breach of the Convention.”\textsuperscript{219} The
Good Friday Agreement was negotiated in the context of the European Union and,
clearly, European-backed human rights safeguards are explicitly incorporated in the
Agreement. To undermine these protections is to endanger the Agreement in its totality.

Further, two significant issues remain at play: the lack of complete
decommissioning on both sides, and the provision within the Good Friday Agreement
that affords the people of Northern Ireland the opportunity to vote once more on their
inclusion in the UK, if the people elect to do so. The failure of decommissioning and the
mounting calls for a referendum, or border poll, for a united Ireland further place the
future of the Good Friday Agreement in jeopardy as little progress has been made on
these issues and the government has taken no steps to address them.

Back in 1993, when a ceasefire and the first notions of a formal agreement
between the British and those living in Northern Ireland was just beginning to germinate,
Sinn Féin made a bold party statement, which read, in part: “The emerging political and
economic imperatives both within Ireland and within the broader context of greater
European political union support the logic of Irish unity.”\textsuperscript{220} Republicans assert the very

\textsuperscript{219} “Belfast Agreement,” Government of the United Kingdom.

\textsuperscript{220} Tim Pat Coogan, The Troubles: Ireland’s Ordeal 1966 – 1996 and the Search for Peace,
same notion today. This party line carries greater weight, of course, now that the outcome of the Brexit referendum is seen as being in opposition to the will of the people of Northern Ireland.

Sinn Féin’s position is that Northern Ireland’s overall Remain vote, combined with a growing trend toward Republicanism, equate to a rise in support for a united Ireland. In the 2017 *Life and Times Survey*, respondents were asked, “Does the UK leaving the European Union make you yourself feel more in favour of a United Ireland, less in favour, or has it made no difference?” Although the majority of respondents indicated that it made no difference, more respondents indicated that it made them more in favor (17 percent) rather than less in favor (9 percent), and, perhaps more importantly, those in favor tended to be younger. Even more recent polling from 2018 substantiates this shift in thinking toward a united Ireland. An aggregate of five recent polls shows public support for the north staying in the UK averaging around the 50 percent mark, a decrease from recent years, and due mainly to the uncertainty regarding the return to a hard border in Ireland post-Brexit.

Turning from mainstream thought back to the position of the paramilitaries, the 32 County Sovereignty Movement (32CSM) poses these questions to Sinn Féin:

How is our right to national self determination defended and promoted by signing a treaty which states that no such right exists?

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221 Murphy, *Europe and Northern Ireland’s Future*, 7.

222 ARK, Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University, Northern Ireland *Life and Times Survey*, Political Attitudes: 2017, updated May 31, 2018, https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2017/Political_Attitudes/UNIRFAV.html.

By what authority does Sinn Féin sign a treaty which states that British occupation in Ireland can be legitimately permanent?

Is the use of armed force defending and seeking to restore Irish sovereignty a criminal act?

What part of the GFA challenges Britain’s claim to sovereignty over part of Ireland?

The 32CSM calls upon Sinn Féin to repudiate any stance on the national question which subverts Irish sovereignty.224

Further, Na Fianna Éireann state: “Our aim is to completely cut the links with the British Crown and the EU and to re-establish the true All-Ireland Dáil.225 We will continue the fight until that day comes.”226 These are the sentiments of the paramilitaries, those who are generally opposed to Sinn Féin’s position, and yet these sentiments are not dissimilar from the ends which Sinn Féin seeks through its promotion of Irish unity via referendum, an increasingly popular position in all quarters. Even as Theresa May decries the likelihood of a border poll resulting in a united Ireland, Sinn Féin’s Mary Lou McDonald has no such misgivings. On January 26, 2019, McDonald addressed both the Republic of Ireland, as well as the British government, with regard to the part each must play in enforcing the democratic right to a referendum on Irish unity. She stated, “The biggest mistake – and most reckless course of action – is for leaders to set their face against the inevitable and to try to deny the people their democratic right to define their


225 Dáil is the Irish term for “assembly” or “parliament.”

future … I want to, again, challenge the government in Dublin to convene a forum to begin the planning for Irish unity.”

To be sure, the principle of consent is one of the most critically important aspects of the Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement guarantees that all signatories recognise that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

And yet, despite the calls from Republicans, and certain other parties in Europe and elsewhere, for consideration of a border poll, the UK-appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has refused to consider this, stating that the “conditions for a referendum have not been met.” Republicans continue to stipulate that the conditions for a border poll, in keeping with the guarantees articulated in the Good Friday Agreement, have already been met. Sinn Féin spokesman Sean Crowe reiterated, “It’s going to come in our lifetime anyway so bring it on and let’s have the discussion.”

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Conclusion

Northern Ireland does not exist in a post-conflict era. Although there continues to be a cessation of large-scale paramilitary activity (a positive byproduct of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent cross-party cooperation), sectarian violence does continue to pervade the landscape. Sectarianism and paramilitary activity are driven by issues of national identity, and, regardless of community background, these issues of identity have not been fully addressed. The need for change, and indeed the inevitability of change remains a consistent part of the political landscape within Northern Ireland because the underlying issues that divide communities continue to persist without remedy. These include religious, cultural, and political differences which exist today largely in the same way in which they existed one hundred years ago and more.

The devolved government which was established under the Good Friday Agreement just 20 years ago has functioned, in total, for less than 14 of those years. It would be difficult to view this as a success by any measure. The current Stormont stalemate demonstrates that the two sides have made little political progress in the intervening years since 1998 and thus Northern Ireland returns again to a state in which there is no functioning government. Yet even when Stormont has been open and operational, there have been an inadequate number of consecutive years in session for lasting progress to have been achieved. Legislative fixes to human rights issues, emerging social issues, and efforts at crime reduction and government transparency have largely been unsuccessful, despite the effort and intentions of the negotiating parties.

If what occurred in 1916 during the Easter Rising sounds similar to what occurred in the 1970s and 1980s during the Troubles, and sounds similar to what occurred in 1985,
and similar again to what occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s (just as the Good Friday Agreement was being implemented and paramilitary groups were being forced to disarm), then that is because those events are, in fact, similar. In this case, all of the significant underlying problems are known, and yet have never been adequately addressed, and thus history repeats. No amount of external pressure, external aid, shifting of party ideology or changes in leadership has affected real change.

Moreover, it is virtually impossible to think – were this to occur in any other part of the world – that this type of ongoing conflict would escape notice. It is not that the wider world is not aware of these issues, for indeed Brexit has pushed this conflict back into the spotlight, but the Western world’s response to the ongoing conflict is relatively unconventional in its level of disengagement. Were a devolved government to be in a prolonged period of collapse whereby issues of national sovereignty, national borders, organized commerce and travel, issues of human rights and the rule of law to be under threat in some other part of the world, those issues would garner much greater attention than does the conflict in Northern Ireland, particularly since the region has already endured many years of bloodshed. Imagine that this situation were to occur in Latin America, for example. Would some form of international intervention not be likely to have already occurred?

Imagine, too, the impact that these events must have on the community of Northern Ireland, relative to its size. At just under 1.9 million, the entire population of Northern Ireland is only slightly greater than that of Phoenix, Arizona. The effects of

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instability are amplified in a country with a relatively small population size and few internal political structures capable of absorbing or buffering against the damages of constant change. The international community’s lack of ongoing and meaningful engagement on this issue further differentiates the Northern Irish case from other areas which have weathered similar conflicts. It is evident that Northern Ireland is already suffering from the instability caused by ever-diminishing European oversight.

The current devolved government, even when functional, is not capable of securing a lasting peace, despite its structure being representational by design. The Good Friday Agreement, while a groundbreaking and vitally-important first step, has not sufficiently quelled ongoing paramilitary activity. Every condition in Northern Ireland is ripe for change. The population is edging more Catholic for the first time since Partition, and yet communities remain largely segregated. Nationalists are emerging amongst those who choose to take a side, and Sinn Féin is, for the first time, within one seat of gaining a majority in the Assembly. The population is skewing younger and with more modern thinking. At the same time, long-held, deeply entrenched ideas and biases remain the same, which also makes the current situation untenable. Northern Ireland remains in a period of prolonged conflict that can only be remedied through systemic, and democratically achieved, change.
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