25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement

Leaders | The Good Friday agreement at 25

TEXT 1 - Unblock Northern Ireland's power-sharing assembly

The Economist, Apr 9th 2023

The 25th anniversary of the Good Friday (or Belfast) agreement is being celebrated this week with high-profile visits to Northern Ireland by the American president and the British and Irish prime ministers. On almost any measure, the agreement has been a huge success. By bringing peace to Northern Ireland after the three decades of Semtex and kneecapping known as the Troubles, it has saved many lives and brought stability to a turbulent region. Other places afflicted by long-standing sectarian divides now avidly study the peace process that helped bring this about.

Yet in one respect the agreement has worked less well: in the power-sharing executive at Stormont. Because of boycotts by one or other of the two biggest parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (dup) and the nationalist Sinn Féin, the executive has been suspended for more than a third of the time since 1998—and for nearly 60% of the past five years.

Today's boycott by the DUP began in February 2022, in protest at Boris Johnson's decision, as part of his Brexit deal, to accept a customs border in the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. The party is continuing its boycott as it refuses to endorse the Windsor framework recently secured by Rishi Sunak, the current prime minister, which minimises the checks and paperwork needed at the Irish Sea border.

The DUP is right to argue that it was let down by Mr Johnson, who had repeatedly promised not to place a border in the Irish Sea. Yet it is still wrong to continue boycotting Stormont. Doing so is not going to secure any meaningful changes to the Windsor framework, which has now been ratified by both the UK and the European Union. And the missing power-sharing executive is causing real damage to the province's government, as civil servants must perforce put off politically contentious decisions. From health care to education to the economy, none of this is good for the people of Northern Ireland.

The repeated failure to make power-sharing work is also not good for the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Although the DUP does not admit this, one motive for its boycott is a visceral dislike of the fact that a reconstituted Stormont would for the first time be headed by a leader from Sinn Féin, which now has the most seats in the assembly. Yet if only for demographic reasons Sinn Féin is often likely to be the largest party in future elections. Unionists who want to see devolved government function better in Northern Ireland should learn to accept this fact rather than take it out on the people they represent.

The DUP's boycott is also exposing structural faults in the way power-sharing is set up. It currently requires a first minister and deputy first minister to represent the biggest unionist and the biggest nationalist party. But that curtails the increasing role of centrists, especially the non-sectarian Alliance party, which now holds almost 20% of the assembly seats. The growth of parties like the Alliance is encouraging, as it suggests that Northern Irish voters are gradually escaping the religious divides that have fuelled bitter and pointless conflict in the past. But to accommodate them means that the power-sharing rules at some point need to be updated.

For all these reasons, the DUP leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, should now look for a way for his party to back down from its Stormont boycott—and not only for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland, but also for the self-interested reason that a permanent DUP boycott may end up bringing a revision of the power-sharing rules closer. Sir Jeffrey may prefer to wait until after next month's local elections, to avoid losing votes to parties further to the right than his own. And it is always difficult for unionist parties to make political concessions during Northern Ireland's summer season of marches (some of which commemorate centuries-old Protestant victories). But once these are over, Sir Jeffrey must move. If he does not, he may find that the many Northern Irish voters who want devolution to actually work will start to desert him.

OPINION - GUEST ESSAY **TEXT 2** **Northern Ireland Is Far Too Quiet**

By Clare Dwyer Hogg *The New York Times*, April 9, 2023

Ms. Dwyer Hogg is a playwright, poet and journalist who lives in Northern Ireland.

I/ HOLYWOOD, Northern Ireland — In 1998, two jagged, conflicting philosophies agreed to end the violence known as the Troubles and create a power-sharing government in Stormont, the seat of Northern Ireland's devolved assembly.

The Good Friday Agreement was a tortuous thing to wangle*. A host of individuals — some on the world stage, others forever anonymous — took meetings in living rooms and shadowy fields. People prayed in churches of all denominations. It failed and failed and failed until it didn't.

To say there were compromises is one of those instances of the English language having scant resemblance to reality. People in prison for murder were freed. More than 1,000 murders were left unsolved. People on all sides kicked some hopes down the road and gave up on others completely. People sewed up their wounds, believing in an eventual healed scar.

On Tuesday, President Biden will arrive in Northern Ireland to mark the anniversary of the agreement. He will spend about a day here — the rest of the week he'll be in the Republic of Ireland — and excitement is high. (…) The following week, the Clintons are coming.

The mood should be celebratory, and it is. But perhaps the arrival of these public figures is as much about reassurance as it is about toasting a job well done.

I am part of a generation that as children thought bomb scares and military patrols were normal. For 25 years there has largely been an absence of war, and we've never taken it for granted. But I think we have the mistaken impression here that that absence is peace. If only it were peace, we'd all be fine. But it's not.

Stormont has been inactive for almost a year because one of the main parties has refused to take its seats; the terrorism threat level was recently raised to "severe" after an off-duty police officer was shot. The shooting was claimed by a dissident republican group called the New I.R.A. and paramilitaries are estimated to still have thousands of members operating like organized crime gangs and doling out* what are colloquially known as "punishment beatings," like bullets through kneecaps.

Peace in Northern Ireland is a matchstick tower*, and recently there has been a shifting of the ground below.

II/ One of the central tenets* of the agreement was that the border between Northern Ireland — or the North of Ireland, depending on your political persuasion — and the Republic of Ireland would no longer be a hard border. What we mean by a "hard border" here can be characterized by its opposite — today, I really notice I've crossed it only because the road signs change from miles to kilometers and my phone beeps to tell me that I've changed countries. But throughout my childhood I crossed a hard border at least eight times a year to visit family in the South, in Cork. Back then, there were watchtowers and helicopters, the northern side was patrolled by the British Army, and soldiers with machine guns checked our passports. (…)

When the border was dismantled as part of the peace process, there was a sense that a bulwark* against collectivism had been demolished. And since both North and South were part of the European Union, it even made good geopolitical sense.

Being part of the E.U. did something metaphysical, too: Citizens of Northern Ireland could then and can still choose to hold British or Irish passports or both. But we were also all European, and our passports bore the little circle of stars that represented the E.U. We could all formalize our national identity as we saw fit and remain part of something international.

III/ But then England, Scotland and Wales left the E.U., and all the people in Northern Ireland who held British passports exited with them, while those who held Irish passports remained European. Nobody moved a muscle.

Northern Ireland did not collapse into chaos overnight, but something deeper was afoot*. Insecurities about identity that had been slumbering started to wake.

To avoid a hard border with the Republic, a post-Brexit trade agreement called the Northern Ireland Protocol allowed the North to, in effect, stay in the European single market for goods. This endowed* certain

advantages on businesses here that trade with Europe, but it also meant that some goods coming into Northern Ireland from Britain would be subject to customs checks.

Unionists, especially members of the Democratic Unionist Party, were spooked*; they feared that every form stamped would erode British identity, each one a de facto declaration that Northern Ireland is separate.

In an election last May, about a year after the protocol came into effect, Sinn Fein, the main nationalist party, became the largest party in Stormont for the first time in the 100-year history of Northern Ireland. Members of the D.U.P., the second largest, refused to take their seats until the British government renegotiated the protocol. (They were able to do this because, per the Good Friday Agreement, government cannot sit in Stormont without both parties present.) Rishi Sunak, the British prime minister, negotiated a new arrangement with the E.U. in February that simplifies the customs arrangements but leaves some E.U. law in place in Northern Ireland. The D.U.P. said it still wasn't good enough. The British government's position, more or less, is that it's the best they're getting. (…)

The unfolding of Brexit has elucidated several facts long suspected, one of which is that the British government is not overly concerned about us. But it's remarkable to me that citizens who took part in a democratic election have almost silently allowed the absence of government to take place. There have been articles, tweets and grumbling but notably few demonstrations.

As long as there is peace, this absence of dissent seems to say, "Anything is better than the Troubles." (…)

This month we remember that a version of peace was gifted to us by a brittle matchstick tower constructed a quarter of a century ago. We can celebrate that, but we need to tend to it, too.

TEXT 3 - Good Friday Agreement is a rare success story of 1990s U.S. diplomacy

The Washington Post, TODAY'S WORLDVIEW

Analysis by Ishaan Tharoor,Columnist, April 11, 2023

On June 29, 1974, a girl is seen in a street of the Belfast Catholic area, looking at barbed wire near a roadblock. (-/AFP/Getty Images)

On Tuesday, President Biden will mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement on a trip to Belfast. Alongside British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, Biden will hail the pact that brought about an end to three decades of sectarian strife in the restive British province, and paved the way for a more productive, positive relationship between Northern Ireland and Ireland, as well as the governments in Dublin and Westminster. The United States played a key role in nudging through the peace agreement, which represents a sadly unique success story from an era in which other grand U.S.-brokered initiatives have faltered.

As my colleague Ruby Mellen explained, the deal, signed April 10, 1998, established power-sharing structures within Northern Ireland that brought together its feuding Irish Catholic and Protestant Unionist communities, scarred by years of de facto civil war that led to the deaths of about 3,600 people. The ending of this period known simply as the "Troubles" also saw

Ireland and Britain set aside their disagreement over Northern Ireland's status. Ireland dropped its claim to the northern counties, conditioned on the reality at the time that a majority of Northern Ireland's population wanted to remain in the United Kingdom.

On the latter front, the aftermath of Brexit — which upset the delicate political balance in a land divided by two national borders but all within the European Union — has accelerated the conversation about Irish reunification, with recent opinion polls showing that a growing number in Northern Ireland (though far from a majority) would favor unity with Ireland. Still, that prospect remains distant and the passions around it tempered by the province's steady, if fitful, project of political compromise.

"The most notable political trend is the large number of Northern Irish voters who say they are open-minded about the future but in no hurry to leave the United Kingdom," noted Irish essayist Fintan O'Toole. "Over the long term, the prosperity of Ireland, the dynamic effects of Northern Ireland's alignment with the EU, and its changing demography will make Irish unity increasingly likely — but not in the next decade."

Dissident republicans participate in an anti-Good Friday Agreement rally on the 25th anniversary of the peace deal, in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, on Monday. (Clodagh Kilcoyne/Reuters)

Northern Ireland is hardly a happy utopia. Its confessional divisions endure, communities remain segregated and tensions still periodically flare into violence. Yet the potential for a return to the bad old days seems impossible. "There are many problems in Northern Ireland that the Good Friday Agreement has not solved — political crises, sporadic violence, criminality and above all sectarianism," wrote Jonathan Powell, the former lead British negotiator in Northern Ireland. "But what it has done is end the war and provide the space to resolve other problems. We are never going back to the Troubles."

Former U.S. president Bill Clinton, whose administration helped broker the deal, concurred. "Though power-sharing has at times yielded frustration and even gridlock, it has given each side the opportunity to make its concerns heard and work toward consensus," Clinton wrote in a Washington Post op-ed this weekend. "Even the most imperfect democracy is better than a return to violence."

In his piece, Clinton outlined a number of reasons the Good Friday Agreement worked at the time and in the long run. Those included the courage of political leaders in reaching across the aisle, the popular will among a divided polity to achieve peace, and an agreement that appears to have adequately been fair to both sides and accommodated "the complex views of both communities."

Clinton also observed that it helped that "the United States was deeply involved in a way that both sides came to see as positive." The Clinton administration leaned on the solidity of the United States' "special relationship" with Britain, while taking confidence-building steps like granting Gerry Adams, the leader of a political party linked to the militant Irish Republican Army, a two-day visa to speak to Irish American groups. A successful brokering of peace, after all, required warring parties to have faith in an honest broker "that enabled the deeply distrustful sides to communicate."

Now, apply these criteria to the two other big diplomatic deals of the Clinton era: The 1993 Oslo accords forged between Israel and the Palestinians and the 1995 Dayton Accords that sought to settle the vicious ethnic conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The peace deals at the time seemed landmark achievements. Oslo set in motion the theoretical creation of an independent Palestinian state, to exist side by side with Israel. Dayton, steered by the late U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke, brought to an end a hideous period of conflict in the Balkans, which had torn apart Bosnia, in particular, and seen campaigns of genocide carried out by Serb militias.

But both deals hang threadbare more than a quarter of a century later. Analysts have for years pronounced the Oslo framework dead: The peace process is in deep freeze, with successive Israeli governments spending the past two decades steadily expanding settlements in land designated for a Palestinian state. The prevailing conditions have moved both Israeli and international human rights groups to determine that a form of apartheid exists in the country.

The "two-state solution" promised by the Oslo accords is no longer supported by a considerable portion of the

Israeli body politic, nor even much of a concern for Palestinians who chafe under military occupation, shorn of equal rights with Israelis, let alone a pathway to a viable state of their own. In 1995, an Israeli ultranationalist assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who signed the deal and famously appeared at the White House alongside Clinton and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat; the extremists who cheered his murder now find themselves represented in Israel's halls of power. The Palestinian Authority, a political institution that emerged after Oslo and was only meant to be a transitional entity, is deeply unpopular, increasingly autocratic and lurching toward obsolescence.

Moreover, the experience of the past generation, capped by the Trump administration's embrace of Israel's right-wing settler movement, has convinced Palestinians of the complicity of the United States in the conditions that oppress them and undermine their political aspirations. In their view, Washington is not an honest broker, but a guarantor of Israeli impunity.

Bosnia struggles with the legacy of the Dayton Accords. The convoluted power-sharing structures it created, dividing Bosnia into a convoluted tripartite polity composed of its constituent Bosniak, Croat and Serb populations, has proven to be a "veritable engine of chaos," wrote Jasmin Mujanovic, a political scientist specializing on the Balkans.

The prevailing system has played into the hands of separatist Serbs, backed in some instances quite directly by the Kremlin. Amid entrenched political paralysis — and in the absence of a "New Dayton" or a renewed effort to build a more rational, liberal, constitutional government — analysts talk about the possibility of further instability and state fracture. "Rather than fostering a climate of peaceable power-sharing, Dayton's byzantine sectarian provisions have promoted conflict and brinkmanship," Mujanovic wrote in Foreign Policy last year.

Ethnic tensions endure, while, decades later, no clear national consensus exists on the horrors of the war and the war crimes carried out by ethnic Serb militias. "Between Serbs glorifying and trying to rewrite the past and the international community turning a blind eye to their actions, the future is once again looking bleak for us in Bosnia," wrote Ehlimana Memisevic, a law professor at the University of Sarajevo, last week. "Peace and unity in this country depend on all segments of our society accepting the past, learning from it and with the help of our international partners, taking the necessary steps to prevent its repeat."

She concluded: "Sadly, we seem to be moving in the opposite direction."

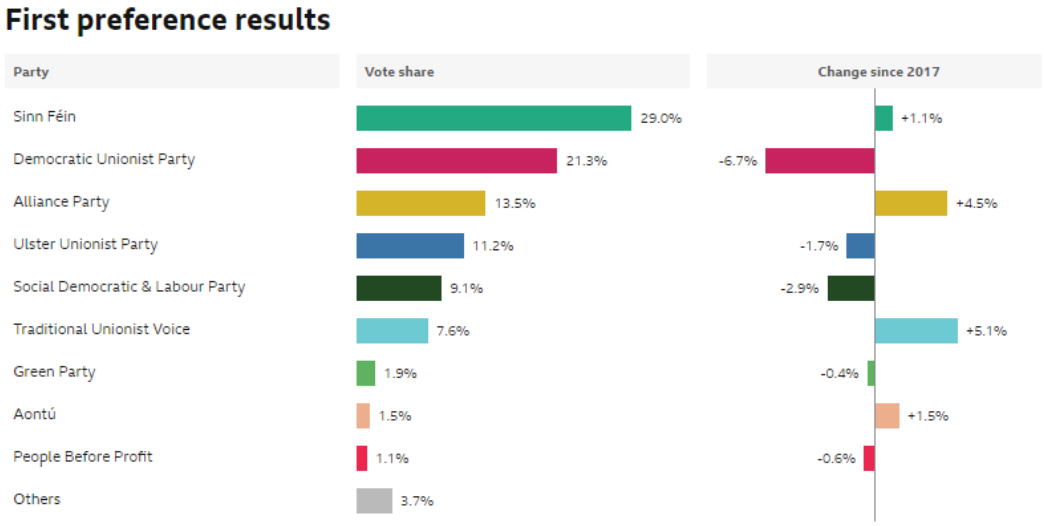
Today's deadlock in Northern Ireland

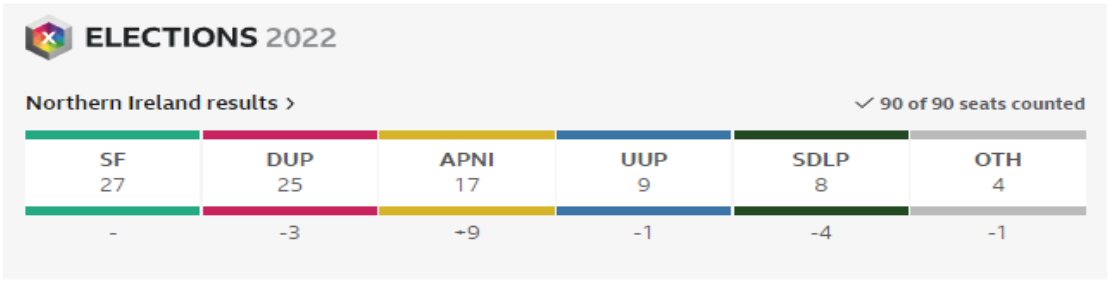
TEXT 4 -An Essential Guide - How does Northern Ireland's power-sharing government work?

BBC News 12 May 2022

Sinn Féin has emerged as the biggest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly, after last week's elections.

https://www.bbc.com/news/election/2022/northern-ireland/results





However, the party's vice-president, Michelle O'Neill, cannot become first minister unless the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) - which had been the largest party since 2007 but has now been pushed into second place - nominates for the position of deputy first minister.

This is because of Northern Ireland's power-sharing system of government, which was introduced in the 1990s as a way of ending decades of violence.

What is power sharing?

The principle of power sharing is what sets Northern Ireland apart from the UK's other nations.

It means that in any government there must be representatives from both the nationalist community - who favour unity with the Republic of Ireland - and unionists, who want Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK.

The idea is that, whatever their historic differences, both communities have a vested interest in the system.

How does power sharing work in practice?

A chamber of 90 members (MLAs) is elected to the assembly at least once every five years.

Five MLAs are elected in each of the 18 constituencies using a system called single transferable vote (STV), which ranks candidates by preference.

Northern Ireland has a first minister and a deputy first minister - one unionist, the other nationalist.

Since 2006 the first minister has been chosen by the largest party in the assembly. If this is a unionist party, then the deputy minister is drawn from the largest nationalist party, and vice versa.

Both ministers have equal powers, and one cannot be in office without the other. If either the first minister or the deputy first minister resigns, the other is also forced to resign, whether they want to or not.

The executive, or cabinet is multi-party, and ministers are drawn from both unionist, nationalist and non-aligned parties, based on how many seats they have won in an election. This also means that politicians from smaller parties can be appointed as ministers.
The assembly exercises powers over matters including the economy, education, health, and more recently, Covid.
Certain areas - including international relations and defence - remain reserved for the UK government in London.

How did the present system come about?

Northern Ireland was created in 1921 and remained part of the UK, when the rest of Ireland became an independent state.
This created a split in the population between the unionists - who were mainly Protestant - and nationalists, who were predominantly Catholic.
From the late 1960s, armed groups from both sides, such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Ulster Defence Association (UDA), carried out out bombings and shootings.
This period was known as the Troubles - it lasted almost 30 years, and cost the lives of more than 3,500 people.
Peace talks started in the early 1990s, culminating in the signing of the **Good Friday Agreement** in 1998, which ended the worst of the violence.
It was endorsed in a referendum with 71% voting in favour. Under its terms, Northern Ireland found itself run by a new power-sharing assembly.

How well has it worked?

The assembly has endured but it has also been suspended a number of times. The longest suspension was between 2002 and 2007, during which time Northern Ireland was run once more from London.
Relations between the two main parties broke down again in 2017, and the assembly and ruling executive were not restored until January 2020.
In February this year the DUP's Paul Givan **resigned as first minister**, in protest against the Northern Ireland Protocol.
This is the section of the UK's Brexit deal with the EU which keeps Northern Ireland aligned with the European single market, and protects the movement of goods across the border with the Irish Republic.
However, it also involves creating border controls between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.
While most of the politicians elected to the assembly are in favour of the protocol remaining in place, unionists are not happy at what they perceive as a weakening of Northern Ireland's bond with Great Britain. The issue has caused street protests and unrest in some areas.

What happens now?

Now that Sinn Féin has become the largest party in the Assembly, its deputy leader, Michelle O'Neill, stands to become first minister.
While DUP leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, said that his party would respect the election result, his party says it won't nominate any ministers to an executive until its concerns about the protocol are addressed by the UK government.
Sinn Féin has accused DUP leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson of holding society to ransom by threatening to paralyse the Assembly.
Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs; Irish: Comhaltaí den Tionól Reachtach; Ulster Scots: Laa-Makkan Forgaitherars) are representatives elected by the voters to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

● **Summary of the situation in a short video**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvruXb8MXjw&ab_channel=GuardianNews

●**More on the Stormont Brake**
https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-64795902
●**Michelle O'Neill calling for shared power to be respected in May 2022**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SBgkMQcLzk&ab_channel=GuardianNews
●**Leader of the Alliance Party, Naomi Long, doing the same**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8udIXLtmw4&ab_channel=SkyNews

TEXT 5 - Qu'est-ce que le protocole sur l'Irlande du Nord, dont l'UE et la Grande-Bretagne viennent de signer une révision ?

Ce texte qui maintient de fait l'Irlande du Nord dans le marché unique européen, tout en prévoyant des contrôles pour les marchandises britanniques, avait été signé en même temps que le Brexit et provoquait, depuis, des tensions politiques et économiques.

Le Monde ,27 février 2023

Deux ans après le départ du Royaume-Uni de l'Union européenne (UE), Londres et Bruxelles se sont entendus pour mettre fin à leurs différends sur les contrôles de marchandises post-Brexit en Irlande du Nord. Après plus d'une année de négociations marquées par des soubresauts et des tensions, le premier ministre britannique, Rishi Sunak, et la présidente de la Commission européenne, Ursula von der Leyen, sont arrivés, lundi 27 février, à « l'accord de Windsor » sur ce dossier qui suscitait de vives tensions.

Une première version intégrée au Brexit

Communément appelé *« protocole sur l'Irlande du Nord »,* le protocole sur l'Irlande et l'Irlande du Nord a été signé en même temps que l'accord sur le Brexit, le 24 janvier 2020. Pour l'Union européenne, ces deux traités ont été signés par le président du Conseil européen, Charles Michel, et la présidente de la Commission européenne, Ursula von der Leyen. Pour le Royaume-Uni, il a été signé par Boris Johnson, alors premier ministre. Le protocole est entré en vigueur le 1er janvier 2021.

Le protocole est censé prendre en compte la situation particulière de l'île d'Irlande : il a été convenu entre le Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord (Royaume-Uni) et l'Union européenne une solution stable et durable destinée à protéger l'économie de l'ensemble de l'île ainsi que l'accord du Vendredi saint (ou accord de Belfast) dans toutes ses composantes, et à préserver l'intégrité du marché unique de l'UE.

L'Irlande du Nord, qui continue de faire partie du territoire douanier du Royaume-Uni, est soumise à un ensemble de règles de l'UE relatives au marché unique des marchandises et à l'union douanière. Le protocole pose pourtant un problème pratique : il introduit un système de vérifications et de contrôles aux points d'entrée sur les marchandises arrivant en Irlande du Nord depuis le reste du Royaume-Uni ou tout autre pays tiers. Ces marchandises sont soumises aux droits de douane de l'UE, à moins qu'il n'existe aucun risque qu'elles entrent dans l'UE.

Ce système garantit néanmoins l'absence de vérifications et de contrôles entre l'Irlande du Nord et la République d'Irlande, évitant ainsi la mise en place d'une frontière physique et assurant la libre circulation des marchandises en vertu des règles de l'union douanière de l'UE.

Difficultés d'application et tensions politiques

Le protocole n'a toutefois jamais été mis complètement en œuvre car des « périodes de grâce » sur les contrôles ont été instaurées et prolongées pour des produits, comme la viande non surgelée et les médicaments. Certaines entreprises ont dénoncé des formalités trop lourdes, notamment dans le domaine des produits pharmaceutiques, comme le notait la Chambre des lords.

A peine entré en vigueur, le protocole, tenu depuis pour responsable de difficultés d'approvisionnement en Irlande du Nord, a par ailleurs donné lieu à des tensions entre l'Union européenne et Londres. Après le lancement d'une révision unilatérale du statut post-Brexit de l'Irlande du Nord, l'exécutif européen avait lancé une série de procédures contre Londres.

Le protocole est surtout devenu un problème interne pour l'autorité de Rishi Sunak confronté à l'opposition des durs du Brexit et à celle des unionistes du Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), farouchement opposés à toute remise en cause de l'appartenance de l'Irlande du Nord au Royaume-Uni.

L'Irlande du Nord n'a pas de gouvernement depuis février 2022. Malgré des ultimatums successifs et des apparents progrès dans les négociations entre Londres et Bruxelles à ce sujet, Londres n'a pas réussi à convaincre le DUP de participer à un exécutif. Après l'annonce de l'accord entre Londres et Bruxelles, le chef du DUP a annoncé qu'il *« prendra le temps pour étudier les détails et évaluer l'accord »*. Prudent, le gouvernement britannique avait annoncé, début février, avoir reporté à janvier 2024 la date limite pour la tenue d'élections en Irlande du Nord.

Le nouveau « cadre de Windsor »

En réponse à ces tensions politiques, l'accord de Windsor du 27 février vise à réduire considérablement les contrôles douaniers nécessaires sur les marchandises en provenance de Grande-Bretagne et arrivant en Irlande du Nord. Il doit aussi, s'il est approuvé par les parlementaires britanniques, réduire l'application de réglementations de l'UE dans la province britannique.

Concrètement, les produits arrivant de Grande-Bretagne en Irlande du Nord pour y rester ne seront plus soumis aux mêmes contrôles que ceux voués à être ensuite exportés vers la République d'Irlande, c'est-à-dire vers l'Union européenne. Cela vaudra pour les échanges commerciaux, comme pour l'envoi de colis par des particuliers. Les autorités britanniques, et non plus l'Agence européenne du médicament, délivreront les autorisations de mise sur le marché des médicaments.

Le maintien de certaines lois européennes et de la compétence de la Cour de justice européenne en Irlande du Nord était l'un des points de blocage principaux du protocole pour les unionistes. Le *« cadre de Windsor »* prévoit la création d'un *« frein »* à disposition du Parlement nord-irlandais. Si trente députés de plusieurs partis s'opposent à l'application dans la province d'une nouvelle loi européenne sur les biens et marchandises, ils pourront convoquer un vote pour la bloquer, sur le modèle d'une disposition existant déjà dans l'accord de paix de 1998.

Ce *« mécanisme d'urgence »* n'enlèvera toutefois par à la Cour de justice européenne *« le dernier mot »* en ce qui concerne les règles régissant le marché unique toujours en vigueur dans la province, a insisté la présidente de la Commission européenne, Ursula von der Leyen. Finalement *« moins de 3 % »* des lois

européennes continueront de s'appliquer en Irlande du Nord, fait valoir Londres.

De son côté, Londres renonce à un projet de loi grâce auquel le gouvernement britannique voulait s'arroger unilatéralement la faculté de passer outre certaines dispositions du protocole nord-irlandais. Une concession qui pourrait raviver la fronde des partisans d'un Brexit dur au sein du Parti conservateur

TEXT 5 – Bis What is the Northern Ireland protocol, a revision of which the EU and Britain have just signed?

This agreement, which keeps Northern Ireland in the European single market, was signed at the same time as Brexit and has caused political and economic tensions.

Published on February 28, 2023

Two years after the United Kingdom left the European Union (EU), London and Brussels have agreed to end their differences over post-Brexit goods controls in Northern Ireland. After more than a year of negotiations marked by hiccups and tensions, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen agreed to the Windsor Framework on Monday, February 27, for this issue that has been causing much friction.

Read more Article réservé à nos abonnés UK and EU hope for more peaceful relationship following Northern Ireland deal

Taking into account a unique situation

Commonly referred to as the Northern Ireland protocol, the agreement was signed at the same time as the Brexit agreement on January 24, 2020. For the European Union, both treaties were signed by European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. For the UK, it was signed by Boris Johnson, then prime minister. The protocol entered into force on January 1, 2021.

It is supposed to take into account the unique situation of the island of Ireland. A stable and lasting solution has been agreed upon between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) and the European Union, designed to protect the economy of the whole island and the Good Friday Agreement (or Belfast Agreement) in its entirety, as well as to preserve the integrity of the EU's single market.

Northern Ireland, which remains part of the UK customs territory, is subject to a set of EU rules relating to the single market for goods and the customs union. However, the protocol poses a practical problem: It introduces a system of checks and controls at points of entry for goods arriving in Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK or any other third country. These goods are subject to EU customs duties unless there is no risk of them entering the EU.

However, this system ensures that there are no checks and controls between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, thus avoiding the establishment of a physical border and ensuring the free movement of goods under the rules of the EU customs union.

Implementation difficulties and political tensions

The protocol was never fully implemented, however, as grace periods on controls were introduced and extended for products such as non-frozen meat and medicines. Some companies have complained that the procedures are too burdensome, particularly in the area of pharmaceutical products, as noted by the House of Lords.

Having barely entered into force, the protocol has been held responsible for supply difficulties in Northern Ireland and has also given rise to tensions between the European Union and London. After the launch of a unilateral review of Northern Ireland's post-Brexit status, the European Commission initiated a series of proceedings against London.

The protocol has mostly become an internal problem for the government of Rishi Sunak, who faces opposition from Brexit hardliners and the unionists of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), who are fiercely opposed to any questioning of Northern Ireland's membership in the UK.

Northern Ireland has been without a government since February 2022. Despite successive ultimatums and apparent progress in negotiations between London and Brussels on this issue, London has not been able to convince the DUP to participate in a government. After the announcement of the agreement between London and Brussels, DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson said the party would take time to "study the detail of what has been published today." Cautious, the British government announced in early February that it had extended the deadline for elections in Northern Ireland to January 2024.

The new Windsor Framework

In response to these political tensions, the February 27 Windsor Framework aims to significantly reduce the

customs controls required on goods coming into Northern Ireland from Great Britain. If approved by British MPs, it will also reduce the application of EU regulations in the British province.

In concrete terms, products arriving in Northern Ireland from Great Britain and remaining there will no longer be subject to the same controls as those destined for export to the Republic of Ireland, i.e. the European Union. This will apply to commercial trade as well as to individuals sending packages. The UK authorities, rather than the European Medicines Agency, will issue market authorizations for medicines.

The retention of certain European laws and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in Northern Ireland was one of the main sticking points of the protocol for the unionists. The Windsor Framework provides for the creation of a "brake" available to the Northern Ireland Assembly. If 30 MPs from different parties object to the implementation of a new European law on goods in the province, they will be able to call a vote to block it, modeled on a provision that already exists in the 1998 peace agreement.

However, this emergency mechanism will not take away the European Court of Justice's final say on the rules governing the single market still in force in the province, insisted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. In the end, "less than 3%" of European laws will continue to apply in Northern Ireland, London argued.

For its part, London has abandoned a bill that would have allowed the British government to unilaterally override certain provisions of the Northern Ireland protocol. This concession could rekindle the rebellion of supporters of a hardline Brexit within the Conservative Party.

TEXT 6 - Trade barrier talks with DUP in final stages, says Northern Ireland secretary

The Guardian, Sat 30 Sep 2023

https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/sep/30/trade-barrier-talks-with-dup-in-final-stages-says-northern-ireland-secretary

Talks between the UK government and Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist party over its concerns regarding the Windsor framework have entered their final stages, the Northern Ireland secretary has said.Further changes as part of the framework will come into effect on Sunday, including the green/red lane system for the movement of goods.

The DUP has been blocking power sharing in Belfast for more than a year in protest against the internal UK trade barriers created by Brexit's Northern Ireland protocol. The party claims the framework deal struck by the EU and the UK to reform the protocol does not sufficiently address its concerns and says it will not return to Stormont until the government commits to legislation over Northern Ireland's place in the UK internal market.

Writing in the News Letter on Saturday, Chris Heaton-Harris said the government had engaged with the DUP extensively and that work was taking place to address the party's concerns in order to restore Northern Ireland's executive. "We are also in the final stages of a period of constructive engagement with the DUP," he wrote. "We are pulling together a comprehensive package of proposals that we hope will address their concerns.

"I have no doubt that it is their genuine desire to focus on concrete improvements and to create a situation that will enable the executive to be restored. I firmly believe that restoration of the institutions is right for Northern Ireland and right for the future of the union."

The DUP MP Sammy Wilson said on Friday that the changes would "confirm" a border in the Irish Sea, and that his party would not return to power sharing as it would be legally required to implement the framework.

The Sinn Féin vice-president, Michelle O'Neill, said patience had run out with the DUP blockade of the assembly and called on the UK and Irish governments to work together on a plan to restore the institutions.

Heaton-Harris wrote: "To address concerns about divergence between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, we have to not only show that goods trade is working, we also have to show we are tackling worrying disparities on healthcare waiting lists, on childcare, on environmental pollution, on pay for our teachers, nurses and hardworking public servants, and on hundreds of smaller decisions being taken every day. "To do that we need a devolved government here. Over the coming weeks we have a chance to move forward, to move on from Brexit and get Northern Ireland moving again."

TEXT 7 - DUP will not be pressured into power sharing - Sir Jeffrey Donaldson

BBC News 13 September 2023

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) will not be pressured into shifting its stance on the Windsor Framework or power sharing, its leader has said.

Sir Jeffrey Donaldson was responding after NI minister Steve Baker said the UK government's talks with the DUP are in the final stages. Mr Baker said the DUP was under pressure from hard-line unionists to continue blocking Stormont. He said his party "doesn't give way to pressure whether it's from the minister or anyone else". "I live in the real world. I recognise the problems that we have, the challenges that we face, and I'm looking for solutions," he added.

The devolved government at Stormont collapsed last year after the DUP withdrew in opposition to checks on goods crossing the Irish Sea under the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The Windsor Framework was struck by the UK Government and European Union earlier this year in an effort to address concerns, but the DUP has said it does not go far enough. It has been in talks with the government seeking further legislative assurances of Northern Ireland's place within the UK internal market.

"We outlined our concerns weeks and weeks ago. The government have responded several weeks later to those concerns, and we are now responding to their response," he said.

'Megaphone diplomacy'

Sir Jeffrey also said Taoiseach (Irish PM) Leo Varadkar's "megaphone diplomacy" is harming the potential of resolving the impasse.

Leo Varadkar on Monday had reiterated calls for a "plan B" if the Stormont institutions were not restored. It followed comments last week in which he said he believed he would see a united Ireland in his lifetime.

Sir Jeffrey also said Mr Varadkar's "interventions recently have not been helpful". "He is planning for failure, I am not. He talks about plan B, I'm focused on plan A, which is getting this right for the people of Northern Ireland," the DUP leader said. "This megaphone diplomacy by Leo Varadkar is not helpful and I really think he should reflect on the harm he is doing to the prospects of making that progress."

However, Sinn Féin vice president Michelle O'Neill said the onus is on the DUP to stop the blockade and restore the executive in order to grasp the opportunity and take advantage of the unique and special access of both markets.

Alliance leader Naomi Long told the summit Sir Jeffrey will have to "face down his critics" in order to lead his party back to Stormont. Ms Long said some unionists "undoubtedly" believed the DUP was being pressured by hard-line unionists to stay out of government. She also criticised the British and Irish governments, saying that having them squabble in public was "profoundly unhelpful" But she said after a year and a half without Stormont "the situation is not sustainable for much longer".

Here is an interesting document found on the official UK government website

TEXT 9 - Ten reasons why Northern Ireland is safer, stronger and better off in the EU

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ben Wallace MP, today sets out why he thinks Northern Ireland is safer, stronger and better off in the EU

From:**Northern Ireland Office** and **The Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP** Published **26 May 2016**

1. We get easy access to the Single Market

Over the last decade around 60% of all goods exported from Northern Ireland went to the EU. 87% of food and drink exports (£1.2bn) go to the EU.

2. You get a stronger economy

A recent Oxford Economics report predicted that NI's economic output would be on average 2.8% lower than otherwise by 2030 - well below the 1.8% projection for the UK as a whole – if the UK left the EU. Manufacturing and construction would be hardest hit.

3. It's better for business

Surveys of businesses consistently demonstrate strong support for remaining in the EU, including the 80% of CBI members who believe remaining in the EU would be best for their business. This view is shared by major NI employers like Bombardier and Moy Park.

4. It attracts inward investment

Being part of the EU and offering access to a Single Market of 500m people is a major selling point in attracting investment to Northern Ireland.

5. We don't have to worry about cross border restrictions…

Having the UK and Ireland in the EU guarantees the free movement of people and goods across the border, boosting cross-border cooperation and trade.

6. …like customs controls…

Alternative models for a UK outside the EU suggest that the UK would be outside the 'EU Customs Union' – this would mean that trade with Ireland would once again be subject to customs controls.

7…or immigration controls

It is unclear if the Common Travel Area arrangements between the UK and Ireland could continue in the same way they did before both countries joined the EU.

8. We're safer together

Membership of the EU allows NI law enforcement agencies to benefit from use of the EU watch-list and membership of Europol, which helps EU countries to fight serious crime and terrorism.

9. We benefit from the European Arrest Warrant

Since 2009, NI law enforcement agencies brought back 34 people to face justice and extradited 190 people accused or convicted of crime to other EU countries.

10. The EU supports Northern Ireland's future

The EU has been supportive of the Northern Ireland political process with €469m of PEACE and related structural funding committed over 2014- 2020.

Robert Ben Lobban Wallace (born 15 May 1970) is a British politician and former British Army Officer who served as Secretary of State for Defence from 2019 to 2023. A member of the Conservative Party, he has been the Member of Parliament (MP) for Wyre and Preston North, formerly Lancaster and Wyre, since 2005.

Following the 2015 general election and the formation of the majority Cameron government, he became Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Northern Ireland Office. In 2016, he was appointed Minister of State for Security and Economic Crime by Theresa May, holding the position until she left office in July 2019. A supporter of Boris Johnson, Wallace was promoted to the senior cabinet role of Secretary of State for Defence, after Johnson became Prime Minister. He continued the role under Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, making him the longest serving member of the Cabinet to serve continuously in the same position until he left office.

In July 2023, he announced that he intended to resign as Secretary of State for Defence at the next Cabinet reshuffle, and that he would not be seeking re-election as an MP at the next general election. In August 2023, Wallace formally resigned as Secretary of State for Defence.

Future Prospects for Ireland

How Ireland has benefited from joining the E.U.

Explore this webpage and take notes!

https://ireland.representation.ec.europa.eu/about-us/benefits-eu-membership-ireland_en

TEXT 10 - Irish unification is becoming likelier

The Economist, Feb 13th 2020

For most of the century since Ireland gained independence from Britain, control of the country has alternated between two parties. On February 8th that duopoly was smashed apart, when Sinn Fein got the largest share of first-preference votes in the republic's general election. The party, with links to the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which bombed and shot its way through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, won with a left-wing platform that included promises to spend more on health and housing. Yet it did not hide its desire for something a lot more ambitious. "Our core political objective", its manifesto read, "is to achieve Irish Unity and the referendum on Unity which is the means to secure this."

Scottish independence has grabbed headlines since Brexit, but it is time to recognise the chances of a different secession from the United Kingdom. Sinn Fein's success at the election is just the latest reason to think that a united Ireland within a decade or so is a real—and growing—possibility.

That prospect means something far beyond the island of Ireland. The Irish diaspora includes more than 20m Americans. Parties to ethnic conflicts across the world have long found common cause with Northern Ireland's Roman Catholics, who contend that the separation from the south is an illegitimate vestige of 500 years of incompetent and often callous domination from London. **Ireland, source of pubs, poets, playwrights and too many Eurovision songs for anyone's good, has soft power to rival a country many times its size.**

Until today, however, unification has never been more than a Republican fantasy. Even as the IRA waged a bloody campaign in the 20th century, the north's constitutional status was cemented by a solid Protestant majority and the financial and military backing of the British state. **The Good Friday agreement of 1998** took the heat out of the struggle, bringing an end to the Troubles, which had claimed over 3,500 lives. Many Catholics were content to have representation in Northern Ireland's government thanks to that agreement, and to see their culture, flag and sports

celebrated and subsidised. The Protestants have their terrorists, too, and a campaign for unification was thought to risk opening old wounds, with bloody consequences.

Brexit is one reason all this has changed. The north voted against, but the biggest **unionist party** and England voted for. **Nationalists** were not the only ones to be angered by the current home secretary, who suggested using the threat of food shortages to soften up the south in the negotiations, heedless of the famine in the 1840s when all of Ireland was under British rule. Brexit also creates an economic border in the Irish Sea, between Northern Ireland and Britain, even as it keeps a united Ireland for goods. Although services will become harder to trade with the south, trading goods will be easier than with Britain. In that the north's six counties are affected more by what happens in Dublin, the value of having a say in who governs there will grow.

The pressure for unification is about more than Brexit. Northern Ireland's census in 2021 is likely to confirm that Catholics outnumber Protestants for the first time. The republic has also become more welcoming. The influence of the Catholic church has faded dramatically and society has become more liberal. Over the past three decades restrictions on contraception have been lifted and gay marriage has been legalised. All this explains why support for unification in Northern Ireland appears to have risen in recent years. In some polls respondents show roughly equal support for it and the status quo.

That leads to the last reason for thinking that unification is more likely. Even though the Good Friday agreement reconciled some Catholics to remaining in the United Kingdom, it also set out how the north could peacefully rejoin the republic. A British secretary of state who thinks it likely that a majority favours unification is bound to call a vote on the north's constitutional status. To change the republic's constitution, another referendum would be required in the south.

The EU has already said that Northern Ireland could rejoin the bloc under Ireland's membership after such a vote, meaning that for Northern Irish voters a referendum on Irish unity is also a second referendum on Brexit. Unlike an independent Scotland, which would have to go it alone (at least until the EU agreed to admit it), Northern Ireland would immediately rejoin a larger, richer club, from which it could win big subsidies—if not, perhaps, as big as the subsidy it gets from Westminster today.

There are obstacles and uncertainties. Sinn Fein's recent success may turn some in the north against unification. Brexit may turn out to have less effect than expected. A British secretary of state may use the wriggle room in the Good Friday agreement to hold off calling a referendum. Many British politicians worry that such a vote would be an administrative headache or, worse, provoke violence. So do their Irish counterparts (barring Sinn Fein), though they must always be seen to be fully behind unification.

Yet sooner than most people expect, the momentum for a united Ireland could come to seem unstoppable. (…)

The island of Ireland needs a plan. The priority should be to work out how to make unionists feel that they have a place in a new Ireland. Work is needed on the nuts and bolts of unification—including how to, and indeed whether to, merge two health systems (one of which is free), the armed forces and police services, and what to do about the north's devolved assembly. It helps that the republic has a fine record for the sort of citizen-led constitutional consultations that might help sort things out. Politicians from Britain and Ireland need to start talking, too. The price of ending violence two decades ago was for Northern Ireland, the republic and Britain to jointly set out a political route to a united Ireland. If the people of the north and the republic choose that path, the politicians must follow it.

TEXT 11 - How Ireland gets its way

An unlikely diplomatic superpower

The Economist, Jul 18th 2020

Every St Patrick's day, Ireland's ministers partake in a long-held Irish custom: they leave the country. Ministers are packed off to far-flung destinations to preach the virtues of the homeland. The prime minister always heads to America, but other bigwigs find themselves farther afield. In 2018 the housing minister was sent to South Korea, while the minister for higher education ended up in Oman. This year, as covid-19 raged through Europe and Irish politics stood still during coalition negotiations, things were scaled back. Only the trip to Washington went ahead. Ireland, a country of 5m people, had to settle for an audience with the president, a breakfast with the vice-president and a lunch with practically every senior member of Congress.

On a per-head basis, Ireland has a good claim to be the world's most diplomatically powerful country. Its finance minister, Paschal Donohoe, last week won the race to become president of the Eurogroup, the influential club of euro-zone finance ministers, despite the French and German governments backing another candidate. In June Ireland won a seat on the UN Security Council, fending off Canada, another country often flattered by comparison with a bigger, sometimes boorish, neighbour. Barely a decade after a financial crisis saw Ireland bailed out, Philip Lane, the former head of Ireland's central bank, is the main thinker at the European Central Bank. And the EU's position on Brexit was shaped by Irish diplomats.

Ireland has some natural advantages. A history of emigration blessed it with a huge diaspora in America, which unlike say the German diaspora, is vocal about its heritage. That ensures an audience in the White House and sway on Capitol Hill. It is a small, English-speaking country with diplomats able to focus on a few clear aims. A policy of neutrality helps it avoid unpopular military entanglement. Unlike most rich European countries, it carries no imperial baggage. Indeed, Ireland's history as a victim of colonialism still provides a useful icebreaker with countries once coloured pink on Victorian maps. Nor is Ireland shy about using its cultural clout. Alongside more subtle overtures, the push for the Security Council seat involved free tickets to Riverdance and a U2 gig. The best that Canada could muster was Celine Dion.

It is in the EU where Ireland shows true diplomatic dexterity. It avoids easy classification. Ireland shares a lust for balanced budgets with frugal northern states, yet it endured a banking crash and the ignominy of a bail-out programme like Spain and Portugal. Though it is now among the richest countries in the bloc, it started life as the poorest, relying on EU funding to spur growth—a similar path to the one countries in Europe's east hope to take. It is a member of the New Hanseatic League, a club of northern, liberal countries, yet it was among the first to back a demand from southern Europe for common debt to be issued by the EU and granted to struggling governments. **Ireland can fairly be labelled as a northern, southern, eastern or western European country.**

Ireland's membership of a more informal, yet powerful, grouping is also key. Of the EU's 27 members, only five have populations of more than 20m. The small countries have different agendas, but they share a similar goal: not being trampled by bigger neighbours. These relationships are cherished by Ireland, which has an embassy in every EU country—a rarity for a country of its size. **For big countries used to having their own way through history, the EU is a way of maintaining power even as they shrink as individual actors on the world stage**. **For smaller countries, however, the EU magnifies their power beyond their wildest dreams.** During last year's Brexit negotiations, Irish diplomats were well aware of this fact, which took longer to be appreciated in London. The EU was never likely to side against a current member in favour of a departing one. However, it was thanks to Dublin's patient, energetic lobbying that the border on the island of Ireland became the defining issue during talks.

Letting other people have your way

Ireland was not always so influential. At the start of the decade, the country's reputation was shot. A banking crisis led to an embarrassing €85bn bail-out. **Rebuilding that reputation has been a decade-long task. Among the bail-out countries, Ireland became a star pupil, enacting reforms with almost masochistic relish, while other countries in a similar position complained. For a country whose prosperity is based on economic openness, foreign policy starts with economic policy.**

There are still plenty of reasons for Ireland to be disliked. It hosts the European operations of many of the world's largest tech companies, and **its data-protection regime is lenient**. For a while, the likes of Google and Facebook were watched over by a regulator whose office was above a convenience store in a small town 50 miles (80km) from Dublin. Although now a more professional operation, it is still seen as weak. When it comes to tax, kind words about the Irish disappear. At 12.5%, **its corporation tax is the second-lowest in the EU.** Often companies do not pay even that. In 2016 the European Commission demanded that the Irish government collect €13bn in back-taxes from Apple. On July 15th the European Court of Justice annulled the decision. Ireland's tax policy was legally vindicated (although its coffers were less full).

A crackdown on Ireland and her fellow low-tax states is still brewing. But here Ireland has real power: each EU country wields a veto on the topic. There is less need for crafty diplomacy if Dublin has as much power to block as Paris. Now plans are afoot to clamp down on unpopular tax policies using methods that would bypass this veto. The only way of stopping such proposals would be via an alliance of countries able to amass a blocking minority. It is lucky Ireland has skilled diplomats. It will need them.

You can also read, watch, listen to…

● **A video from *The Economist*: Beyond Good Friday: the future of peace in Northern Ireland**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NHsbJXhbBk&ab_channel=TheEconomist

● **A very detailed series from the Imperial War Museum on the Troubles in Northern Ireland as part of their 2023 Exhibition "Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles"**
Episode 1 – Origins: Why the Troubles in Northern Ireland
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHLYeBtGvOg&ab_channel=ImperialWarMuseums
Episode 2 – Escalation: How the Troubles became a bloody war
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGo17SIvMRM&t=0s&ab_channel=ImperialWarMuseums
Episode 3 – Division: Living through the Troubles in Northern Ireland
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNmcRoNMC5E&t=0s&ab_channel=ImperialWarMuseums
Episode 4 – Peace : How do you end a 30-year war?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5RlWxirYYM&t=0s&ab_channel=ImperialWarMuseums

● **(A short version) What were The Troubles? | Northern Ireland spotlight**
The Imperial War Museum
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N70TGMyK0QQ&ab_channel=ImperialWarMuseums
● **An NPR news item about the new NI protocol being signed in February 2023**
https://www.npr.org/2023/02/27/1159782161/northern-ireland-brexit-trade-deal-eu-uk
●**Northern Ireland 'peace babies' reflect on Good Friday agreement's 25th anniversary - BBC Newsnight**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYKBiAcTID0&ab_channel=BBCNews
They mention the series Derry Girls in this report. Which you can watch of course!

All the videos mentioned or shown in class will be uploaded on the Cahier de Prépa Website

Regional Inequalities

TEXT 12 - Why Britain is more geographically unequal than any other rich country

Other countries have poor bits. Britain has a poor half

The Economist, Jul 30th 2020

"Someone's been busy", says John Trueman, a builder. Apart from an old sign at the entrance, there is little hint that the enormous patch of ground in South Yorkshire was a working mine until 2013. The baths where the men washed before Maltby Colliery closed are a pile of rubble. An old car park is being used to store construction vehicles for auction. A site that once employed more than 1,000 people is quiet, except for one security guard.

Maltby grew quickly in the early 20th century after coal started coming out of the mine. It has declined almost as quickly. The village seems past its best, bereft of wealth, and lagging. The miners welfare club is boarded up; the high street is full of bargain shops. One street still has flags up from Remembrance Day, eight months ago.

The village is also at the centre of a political revolution. Maltby lies in the constituency of Rother Valley, which was created in 1918 and held by the Labour Party without interruption for a century. Last December, however, Rother Valley went Conservative. That was surprising; what is more, the new MP, Alexander Stafford, was educated at Oxford and was previously a local councillor in west London. Three constituencies touching Rother Valley swung from Labour to the Tories at the same time.

That upheaval, which was caused largely by the defection of white working-class voters to the Conservative Party, creates a political problem. Conservatives (like Labourites) have talked for years about the need to revive the poorest parts of Britain. Now, as Mr Stafford puts it, the party has skin in the

game. If the Tories cannot work out how to improve the lives of their new supporters in left-behind places, they might not survive the next election.

Many wealthy countries contain poor regions. America has the rural South and the Mexican border area; Germany has the former East Germany; Italy has the lower part of the boot. But Britain is unique. On a regional level, it is exceptionally unbalanced, and becoming more so. Look closer, to the towns and cities within those regions, and Britain seems even odder.

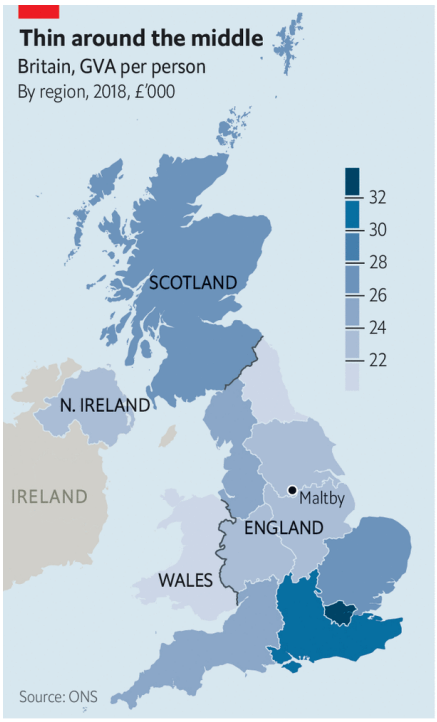
In 2017 *The Economist* pointed out that the gap between GDP per person in the richest and poorest parts of Britain is larger than in other rich countries. That remains true; indeed, it has grown. The richest bit (Camden and the City of London) is now 30 times richer than the poorest (Ards and North Down in Northern Ireland). Not everybody likes that comparison; some argue that GDP per person is distorted by commuters, and that the data are skewed by the way regional boundaries are drawn.

No measure is perfect. So Philip McCann, an economist at the University of Sheffield, has compared Britain with other rich countries on 28 of them. He looks at large regions and smaller ones, and uses various yardsticks—GDP, gross value-added and regional disposable income. Britain can be compared with between 10 and 26 other countries. On all 28 of Mr McCann's measures, Britain is above average for geographical inequality. On six, it comes top. "We're a world beater", he says.

It is not as though nobody has tried to do anything about it. "Regional policy is not a new thing—it goes back to 1937," says David Higham, who used to oversee the government's efforts in north-west England. Between the 1940s and the 1960s businesses and people were pushed out of London and other big cities; the population of the capital eventually fell by 2m. Since the 1970s governments have launched local and regional regeneration schemes at the rate of about one per year.

The net effect of all those city grants, local strategic partnerships, local enterprise growth initiatives, city region pilots, local enterprise partnerships, regional growth funds and the rest has been: not much. Since the 1960s London and the regions next to it have powered ahead relentlessly. In 1998 productivity per head in London was 65% above the British average. At the last count, in 2018, it was 77% higher. Half of all foreign direct investment projects go to London and south-east England. (…)

North of a line from the Severn estuary to the Wash, and south of Hadrian's wall, lies an area that (measured by purchasing-power parity) is as poor as the American state of Alabama or the former East Germany. The regions therein—the East and West Midlands, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, North East, Wales and Northern Ireland—contain 47% of Britain's population. By contrast, 20% of Germans live in the former Democratic Republic, and only 15% if you exclude Berlin.



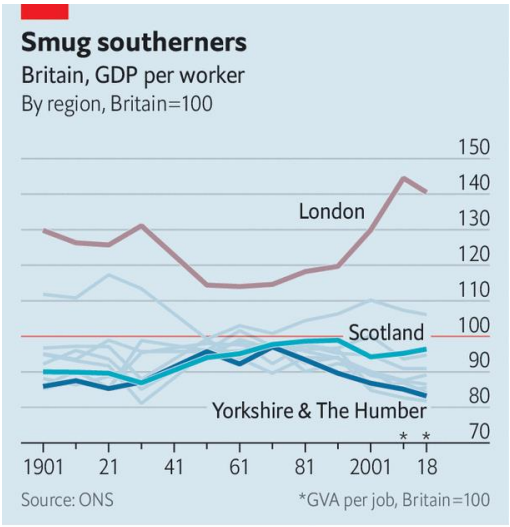
The Economist

The former East Germany is emptying as young people drift west. In Britain every region is growing. Yorkshire and the Humber, which includes Maltby, is swelling three-quarters as quickly as the United Kingdom as a whole. Maltby is shedding people, but slowly for a place that has lost its main industry.

Eight miles west of Maltby, in Rotherham's city centre. There truth is bleaker. The metropolis of which Rotherham is part—which also includes Sheffield and contains 1.2m people—is ailing.

In other countries, cities are often islands of prosperity in poor regions. In the former East Germany, for example, Dresden and Leipzig are doing increasingly well. They are wealthier than the state in which they are located, and are climbing towards the national average. Britain is different. In 2017 gdp per person in the Sheffield metropolitan area was just 70% of the British average, according to the oecd—its lowest share since the turn of the century. Only nine of Britain's 40 metropolitan regions that can be analysed

are wealthier than the country. Just one of the nine, Preston, is in northern England.



The Economist

The real economic divide in Britain is not between urban and rural areas, or between big cities and small towns, says Mr McCann. Wealthy regions tend to contain wealthy cities and towns; poor ones have mostly poor cities and towns. The real gap is between regions—or, to look at it another way, between urban areas in poor regions and urban areas in richer ones. The puzzle is why, with the great exceptions of Edinburgh and London, Britain's large cities do not lift their hinterlands.

A hub with no spokes

The answer is not simply that southern cities suck talent out of northern ones. By tracking tax records, the Office for National Statistics found that 94% of young people in Rotherham stayed put between 2011 and 2015, or moved only within the Sheffield area. Fewer than 1% went to London. People who move to affluent areas tend to be from affluent areas. The government's Social Mobility Commission has divided places into "hot spots" with lots of opportunities (mostly in London and the south-east), "cool spots" that lack them, and "medium spots" in between. It finds that migration between hot spots is seven times greater than moves from cool spots to hot spots.

Poor places tend to grow too little talent in the first place. In Rotherham, 21% of disadvantaged 18-year-olds from state schools and colleges go on to higher education—not far below the English average of 25%. Still, London is miles ahead: 41% of disadvantaged 18-year-olds there go on to higher education.

Another reason for many cities' weak performance is that they are not larger. England has 14 urban green belts, covering 12% of the land area. Along with height restrictions and nimbyism, these push up property prices in prosperous cities both southern and northern, making it hard for people in places like Maltby to move to them. "If we didn't constrain their growth so much, Oxford and Leeds would be a hell of a lot bigger," says Henry Overman of the London School of Economics.

Some metropolises are so hard to get around that they do not benefit much from their concentrations of businesses and people. As northern cities complain, London absorbs a large share of infrastructure money. In 2017-18, 28% of public expenditure on transport—and 46% of capital expenditure on railways—went there. The capital's advocates argue that it gets a lot of public money because a lot of people take public transport. But two economists, Diane Coyle and Marianne Sensier, have shown that projects with low benefit-cost ratios are more likely to go ahead there.

London is exceptionally good at making the case for public and private investment in itself. It has the highest-profile mayor (…). It has the biggest businesses and the best transport agency. The capital's only real English rival is Manchester, which has been cleverly led since the 1990s. What crumbs fall from London's table, such as the Commonwealth Games, the HS2 railway and much of the bbc's production, tend to go there.

The other success is Scotland. "If you look back, there was no real difference between Scotland and the rest of the UK until the 1950s and 1960s," says Graeme Roy of the Fraser of Allander Institute, a think-tank. But Scotland was represented by the powerful Scottish Office, which lobbied for its interests in Westminster. As local governments in England lost powers, Scotland gained them. A generous public-spending formula, and the opening of the North Sea oilfields, helped it become the richest part of Britain outside south-east England. (…)

These are all knotty problems, which cannot be unpicked quickly. They compound each other. Just as people are seldom poor for one reason, regions do not fall behind only because they have poor transport, poor schools or poor leadership, but for all those reasons and more. Ideally, Britain would develop a bold plan for regional development that could be followed by successive governments, as Germany did for its eastern part. Tera Allas of McKinsey, a consultancy, argues that improving education is crucial, even if the returns are not immediately obvious. It is easier to improve schools than to persuade businesses to move to a part of the country.

But that is not much good for a government that feels compelled to do something before the next election, probably in 2024. So Tory thinkers are increasingly

arguing for a different approach. Never mind the big cities, they say. Concentrate instead on giving the residents of small cities and towns things that make them proud of where they live. That could mean a better bus service or a spruced-up high street. “It’s about money, but not necessarily about growth,” says Will Tanner of Onward, an influential conservative think-tank.

Mr Stafford, Maltby’s new MP, agrees. The Tory vote is not growing in big cities like London and Manchester, he points out. The party’s future lies in places like Rother Valley. He is a critic of the High Speed 2 railway line, which will connect big cities, but a fan of restoring local railway services. He insists locals want small, incremental improvements that they can see. “They want their little part of England to be a little bit better than it was before,” he says.

TEXT 7 - What is levelling up and who is it helping?

BBC News, By Reality Check team, 15 February, 2023

of schemes across the UK have been awarded funding as part of the government's "levelling up" project. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak says its aim is "to create jobs, drive growth, and make sure that people feel enormous pride in the places that they call home".

But critics say it doesn't make up for the big cuts in local council funding under the Conservatives.

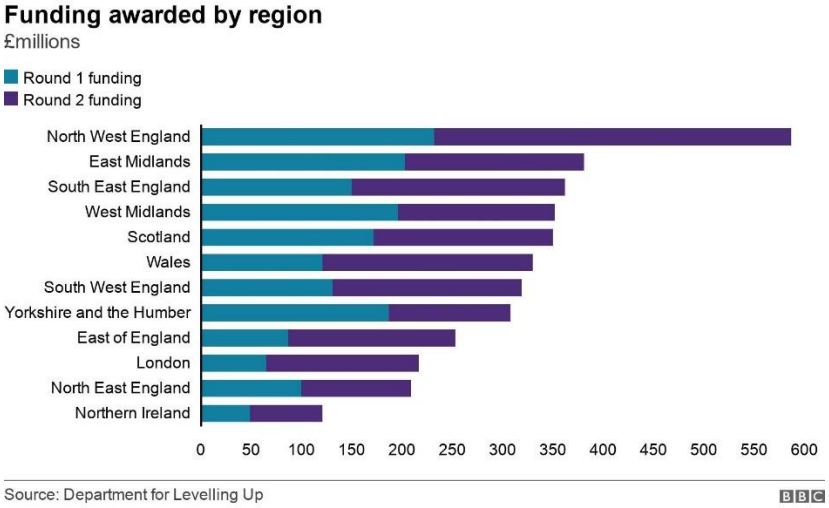
Who has received funding?

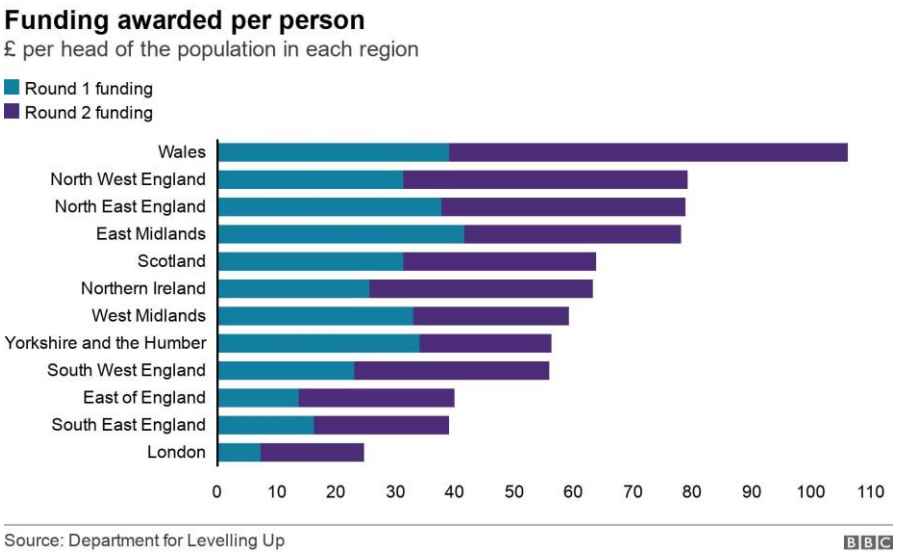
The Levelling Up Fund awarded £1.7bn to projects in October 2021 and another £2.1bn in January 2023.

The North West of England got the most money in both rounds of funding.

In the latest round, the South East came second, prompting questions about why it was benefitting.

The government has highlighted funding per head of the population. If you look at the funding awards this way, the North of England clearly does better than the South of England.





On this measure, Wales comes out on top followed by the North West and North East of England.
London and the South of England come bottom, with Yorkshire and the Humber also faring badly in the second round.

How fair is the process?

Areas were invited to bid for investment in transport, cultural, town centre and regeneration projects.

Local MPs were allowed to give their formal support to two bids before the proposals were judged by officials from the Treasury, Levelling Up Department and Department for Transport.

Assessing how fair this is, is not straightforward. Some projects - such as transport for example - may spread across several constituencies, represented by MPs from different parties.

For the projects that can be allocated to a single party, we can say that more money was allocated to Conservative constituencies than to Labour ones. But there are significantly more Conservative ones.

BBC analysis of the latest round of funding found:

52% of successful bids that can be allocated to a party were in Conservative constituencies (the Conservatives won 56% of seats in the Commons in 2019)

24% of them were in Labour areas (Labour won 31% of the seats in 2019)

Projects in Tory constituencies were awarded a total of £1.21bn, compared with £471m in Labour ones.

There was one successful bid in a Lib Dem constituency, seven for the SNP, five for the DUP, three for Sinn Fein, and one each for the Alliance Party and Plaid Cymru.

Areas have also been competing for money under the government's Towns Fund. In that contest, of the 56 constituencies that won, 47 had Conservative MPs.

What about deprived areas?

On the second round of funding, Rishi Sunak said: "two thirds of all the levelling up funding is going to the most deprived parts of our country".

BBC analysis shows that using the government's index of multiple deprivation, which is the usual measure, in the second round about 57% of England's funding went to the areas with the highest deprivation, down from 69% in the first round. That analysis excludes a small number of awards that were given to areas covering multiple local authorities.

What have critics said?

Labour said the money awarded was dwarfed by the cuts to local authority funding since 2010, with Alex Norris telling MPs: "the government have nicked a tenner from our wallets and expect us to be grateful for getting less than two quid back."

The Institute for Fiscal Studies found that between 2009-10 and 2019-20, English councils' non-education funding per resident had fallen by almost a quarter, after adjusting for rising prices.

The Institute for Government found that councils in the most deprived areas had been worst hit because they were the most reliant on central government funding.

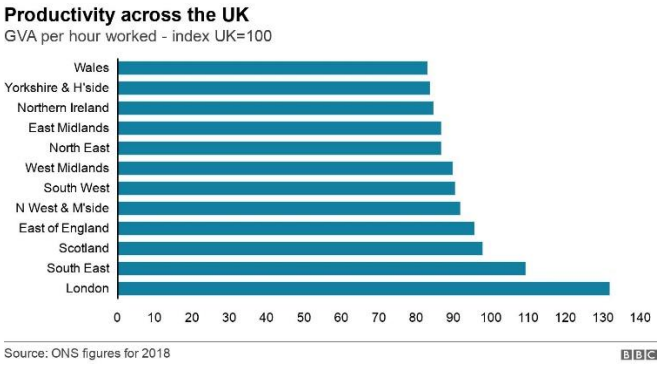
Andy Street, the Conservative mayor of the West Midlands criticised the Levelling Up funding process as being part of Whitehall's "broken begging bowl culture". He suggested the money would have been allocated better by local decision-makers than civil servants in London.

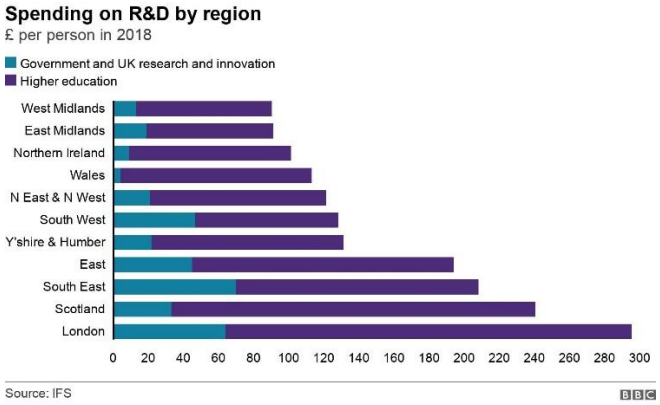
Have some places been left behind?

When he was chancellor, Rishi Sunak made changes to the way government funding for projects is allocated to resolve an anti-northern spending bias. It was because the traditional model of comparing the benefits of a project to its cost made it easier to allocate funding to places with high population density and high property prices, such as South East England.

Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that: "On a wide variety of measures, regional disparities in the UK are greater than in most comparable countries."

Many organisations have put forward suggestions of things that need to be addressed such as employment rates, pay, health and formal education, but there seems to be fairly broad agreement that one of the central issues is the differences in productivity between regions - that's the amount of value created (GVA) per hour worked.





One of the factors cited as having caused this productivity gap is that government and universities spend more on research and development in the south-east of England.

The government proposes to increase public investment in research and development outside the South East of England by 40%, by 2030.

In its 2019 manifesto, the Conservative Party said it would be "levelling up every part of the UK". In its White Paper in February 2022, the government laid out its 12 "levelling up missions" although there was limited funding to achieve them.

What is the government looking at apart from funding?

Having 22,000 civil servants based outside London by the end of the decade, with a target for 25% of roles to be outside London by 2025The government wants to level up skills with an extra £126m announced in March 2021 to fund work placements and training for 16 to 24-year-olds in England

Eight freeports have been set up in England, with two planned in Scotland and one more in Wales.

TEXT 8 - As Britain's town hall services crumble, the case for reform is overwhelming

The Guardian, Sun 1 Oct 2023 Richard Partington Economics correspondent

Birmingham city council's offices. The authority declared itself to be in financial distress this month. Photograph: Neil Hall/EP

In most of Britain's towns there are buildings hinting at a more prosperous past. Vast stone public libraries, swimming baths and theatres; all encircling the grand town halls that once controlled them. Many are long shut, converted or owned by someone else. But the symbolism remains – local government used to do stuff.

5 Today, England's councils are in the worst crisis since the foundation stones of these municipal palaces were laid.

Birmingham, the largest local authority in Europe, is the tip of the iceberg in its effective bankruptcy. Croydon, Northamptonshire, Slough, Thurrock and Woking have all gone bust. Dozens more are perilously close – from "red wall" Stoke-on-Trent to the blue-blooded Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

As the Conservatives hold their annual conference in Manchester this week, the collapse of the English system of local government ought to worry Tory MPs far more than HS2, taxes or the rights of motorists to drive faster than 20mph.

In the backyards of current and former cabinet ministers, in important target seats, and across the country at large, a wave of local austerity is coming. (…)

England's councils are facing a collective multibillion-pound black hole in their finances, up to £3.5bn on one estimate, as the impact from an almost 60% cut in central government funding since 2010 collides with stubbornly high inflation and pressure on services from an ageing population.

The result will be yet deeper cuts to public services, council tax rises and ever higher fees for parking and other council charges. Already since 2010 there have been £15bn worth of public assets flogged to help plug holes in council budgets.

But, where there is anything left to cut, close, privatise or pass into charity hands, get ready for that too. Just ask people in Woking and Kirklees, where plans announced in recent weeks include the closure of swimming pools, care homes, sports facilities, public toilets and community schemes.

For Birmingham the tragedy is most pronounced, as the cradle of modern local government – where Joseph Chamberlain put into action the "Civic Gospel" of improvement that helped define the Victorian age. As the city's Liberal mayor, he pioneered the building of municipal swimming pools and schools, and used corporation funds to buy the town's gas and waterworks.

After Birmingham's financial implosion, Rishi Sunak sought to pin blame on the council's Labour leadership. The local party isn't without fault, to say the least. But context also matters: for every Labour-run authority in dire straits, there is at least another Tory or Liberal Democrat one in a similar predicament.

Michael Gove, who as levelling up secretary is in charge of local government, should know better than most. Surrey Heath borough council, in his constituency, is close to effective bankruptcy. (…)

The mess in this leafy London commuter belt should have more Tories worried. The party dominates here in parliamentary elections, but several councils have fallen from its control after racking up vast debts – including Spelthorne, in former chancellor's Kwasi Kwarteng's seat, and Windsor and Maidenhead, in Theresa May's.

The wider economic context matters, too. To offset austerity-era cuts, many councils took on their debts while borrowing was cheap in the period of low interest rates after the 2008 financial crisis. The money often went into schemes to regenerate town centres. (…)

However, they were often on to a losing bet. Town centres have been drained of life in recent years by the rise of online shopping, as well as benefit cuts and sluggish wage growth sapping consumer spending power. The Covid pandemic then turbocharged these trends, leaving any council that had been acting as a buyer of last resort in a deeper mess.

Even for authorities that steered clear of the property market, the cost of providing services has ballooned as Britain grapples with the highest inflation in the G7, while the cost of living crisis leads more households to need their help.

Urgent solutions are clearly required. Aiming to plot a way forward, a forthcoming report from the Fabian Society thinktank recommends greater devolution of tax and spending powers to local communities. It's a tough sell when so many councils are going bust. But it is not without merit.

England is one of the most centralised nations of its size in the developed world, with central government involved in almost every aspect of how councils operate. As much as 95p in every £1 of tax raised goes to the Treasury, which then decides on how best to reallocate money to local areas – often grudgingly.

Greater devolution could help sidestep the postcode lotteries and council bidding wars witnessed with Boris Johnson's centralised pots of levelling up money, which were often spent on pork barrel schemes in Tory target seats anyway.

However, any increase in local power will require serious efforts to bolster local governance structures to prevent future town hall financial scandals.

The case for reform is overwhelming. Voters will not thank any party, locally or in national government, for the steady demise of the most visible aspects of the public realm: town centres, public buildings, parks, streets and services. It's about time local government did stuff once again.

For more data on Regional inequalities in the UK see also

https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/dvc1370/index.html

https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/geographical-inequalities-in-the-uk/

Future Prospects for Scotland

DOCUMENT 9 – VIDEO - Scottish independence: could Britain break up?

***The Economist*, April 21 2021**

A history of the Scottish English relationship and a look at future prospects

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBHZiXUDV6A&ab_channel=TheEconomist

TEXT 10 -Scotland's Independence Movement Is Down, but Not Out, Analysts Say

A protest in support of Scottish Independence in Glasgow last month.Credit...Robert Perry/EPA, via Shutterstock

By Stephen Castle Reporting from London

The New York Times, June 12, 2023

For almost a decade Nicola Sturgeon, as the leader of the Scottish government, was the uncontested figurehead of the push to break Scotland's centuries-old union with England.

Her resignation earlier this year — and now her arrest on Sunday over an investigation into her Scottish National Party's finances — leaves the fate of the movement in flux.

Support for independence has dipped, but backing for Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom, a bond forged in 1707, is fragile, too. Opinion polls show the Scottish public still roughly split on the issue. For now, the political path to an independent Scotland is blocked.

"It's a stalemate, there is no settled will for independence, but equally we have to acknowledge that there is no settled will for union either," said Nicola McEwen, professor of territorial politics at the University of Edinburgh.

"Reports of the demise of the independence movement and indeed of the S.N.P. are somewhat exaggerated," said Professor McEwen, who added that "given everything that's going on, maybe it's surprising that support hasn't declined more than it has."

Operation Branchform, the code name for inquiry into the Scottish National Party's finances, began in 2021 and was reported to have followed complaints about the handling of about 600,000 pounds, or about $750,000, in donations raised to campaign for a second vote on Scottish independence. In 2014, Scots voted by 55 to 45

percent against breaking away from the United Kingdom in a divisive referendum.

Ms. Sturgeon, who was released on Sunday after seven hours of questioning and who swiftly proclaimed her innocence, has not been charged. On Monday, her successor, Humza Yousaf, rejected calls for Ms. Sturgeon to be suspended from the party.

She is the third senior figure in the party to be arrested but not charged. Another is Ms. Sturgeon's husband, Peter Murrell, the party's former chief executive who held the post from 1999 until March, when he resigned after accepting blame for misleading statements from the party about the size of its dues-paying membership.

The police investigation deepened in the weeks after Ms. Sturgeon's surprise resignation and the fractious competition to succeed her that was won, narrowly, by Mr. Yousaf.

His leadership is still relatively new but, so far, he has struggled to match the high profile of his predecessor, or to advance toward the prize that ultimately eluded her: Scottish independence.

Supporters have pressed for a second vote on Scottish independence after the first one failed in 2014. Their argument was bolstered by Brexit, which took Britain out of the European Union because the majority of Scots who voted in the Brexit referendum of 2016 wanted to remain in the European bloc. They were outnumbered by voters in England and Wales who wanted to leave.

But, to have legal force, the government in London must agree to another vote on independence, and successive prime ministers have refused, insisting that the decision of 2014 stands for a generation.

Ms. Sturgeon hit another roadblock last year when she tested in court her right to schedule a referendum without approval from London. In November, Britain's Supreme Court ruled against her.

Some hard-line voices favor unilateral action, perhaps holding a vote in defiance of London. Catalan separatists in Spain took that route in 2017, but it led to the imprisonment or exile of some independence movement leaders. And going outside the law would block an independent Scotland's path toward membership of the European Union, the S.N.P.'s objective.

Frustrated on all sides, Ms. Sturgeon finally proposed using the next British general election, which is expected in the second half 2024, as a de facto independence referendum, making Scotland's constitutional future the central question. Internal critics doubted the practicality of that idea, given that other political parties would not agree.

Image

Nicola Sturgeon at a news conference in 2022 about Scottish independence.Credit...Andrew Milligan/Press Association, via Associated Press

In an interview broadcast on Sunday, before Ms. Sturgeon's arrest, Mr. Yousaf said he was confident that, even with recent setbacks, an independent Scotland was coming.

"Despite having some of the most difficult weeks our party has probably faced, certainly in the modern era, that support for independence is still rock solid. It's a good base for us to build on," he told the BBC. "I've got no doubt at all, that I will be the leader that will ensure that Scotland becomes an independent nation."

The party might have missed its moment, however. It is hard to see a more favorable backdrop for the independence campaign than the messy aftermath of Brexit, the chaotic leadership of the former prime minister, Boris Johnson — who was unpopular in Scotland — and the political dramas of 2022 when Britain changed prime ministers twice.

Paradoxically, while Brexit may have strengthened the political case for Scottish independence, it has complicated the practical one. Britain has left the European Union's giant single market and customs union, and that implies that there would be a trade border between an independent Scotland and England, its biggest economic partner.

The years of gridlock and chaos that followed the Brexit referendum may also have scared some Scottish voters away from further constitutional changes.

In addition, the S.N.P. has been criticized over its record in government, and the opposition Labour Party senses an opportunity to recover in Scotland, where it dominated politically before the S.N.P. decimated it.

"Coming after dishonest claims of party membership, a very poor record in government and making no progress

on independence this simply adds to the S.N.P.'s woes," said James Mitchell, a professor of public policy at Edinburgh University, referring to recent events.

"It would be damaging enough to the S.N.P.'s electoral prospects but with Labour looking ever more confident and competent in Scotland as well across Britain, it looks as if the S.N.P.'s opportunity to advance its cause has passed."

Image

Humza Yousaf, Scotland's new first minister, has said he was confident that, despite recent setbacks, an independent Scotland was coming.Credit...Russell Cheyne/Reuters

The next British general election might present Mr. Yousaf with a new opening if, as some pollsters predict, Labour emerges as the biggest party but without an overall majority. In that scenario, the S.N.P. could try to trade its support for a minority Labour government in exchange for a promise to hold a second referendum.

The problem is that Keir Starmer, the Labour leader, has so far rejected any such deal. And, if some Scottish independence supporters vote for Labour to try and defeat the Conservative government, led by Rishi Sunak, the S.N.P. could lose seats at Britain's Parliament, weakening its hand.

Some analysts believe that the independence movement should concentrate on building wider popular support, including through other organizations and political parties, reaching out beyond the confines of the S.N.P. and its supporters.

After all, Scotland's union with England was entered into voluntarily, and were opinion polls to show around 60 percent of voters consistently favoring an independent Scotland, that would be difficult for a British government to ignore.

Even Mr. Yousaf acknowledges that is some way off, however. At present, he told the BBC, "it's pretty obvious that independence is not the consistent settled will of the Scottish people."

The question confronting him, his colleagues and the wider independence movement is how they intend to change that. "I don't really see any signs of a strategy," said Professor McEwen, "that doesn't mean there isn't one, I just don't see any evidence of it."

TEXT 11 - Explainer-Scottish independence: After Supreme Court defeat, can Sturgeon hold a new referendum?

Reuters Published on 23/11/2022

LONDON – The UK Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected an argument that the Scottish government can pass legislation allowing it to hold a second independence referendum next year, leaving nationalists searching for another route to a new vote.
In a referendum in 2014, Scots voted 55%-45% to remain in the United Kingdom, but the independence movement argues that the vote for the UK to leave the European Union two years later changed everything.
Here is the history of the push for Scottish independence and how another vote could happen:

ACT OF UNION

The nations of Britain have shared the same monarch since 1603, when King James VI of Scotland became James I of England. In 1707, a formal union created the Kingdom of Great Britain.
Now, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland binds England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and has an overall population of about 68 million, of which Scots make up some 5.5 million.
In 1998, the then Labour government passed the Scotland Act which created the Scottish parliament and devolved some powers from Westminster.

ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION VOTE

Both sides agreed at the time of the 2014 plebiscite that it should be a once-in-a-generation poll. However, Scottish nationalists say Brexit means they should be allowed a second vote. While the United Kingdom as a whole voted in favour of leaving the European Union in 2016, a clear majority in Scotland voted to stay in the bloc.
Independence supporters say one of the main arguments put forward in 2014 by opponents of a break-up was that an independent Scotland could not join the EU.
The left-wing, nationalist Scottish National Party (SNP), which has run Scotland's devolved assembly since 2007, also argues that the UK government has pursued policies with which the vast majority of Scots disagree.
In the last national election for the UK parliament in 2019, the SNP won 45% of votes cast and 48 of the 59 Scottish seats, while Britain's governing right-wing Conservative Party captured just six.

POLITICAL PRESSURE

The Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said on Wednesday she would now turn the next general election due in two years into a de facto referendum to ramp up the pressure on the British government to grant another vote.
Sturgeon said she would ask her party's national executive committee to discuss and agree the detail of how they would use the next election as a de facto referendum.
She said her party will now "launch and mobilise a major campaign in defence of Scottish democracy".
James Mitchell, a professor of politics at Edinburgh University, said a decision to call for the next election to be a de facto referendum would be a "major gamble".
Even if the SNP won more than 50% of the vote in Scotland it was still unlikely the British government would agree to negotiate a new referendum deal and Sturgeon would have very little international support, Mitchell said.
In their best ever election result in 2015, the SNP fell just short of 50% of the votes.
If the SNP fails to win more than half of Scots' votes they may have to accept that voters have made their decision and the issue would be settled for a generation, he said.
"It is difficult to see her continuing in office" if that happened, he said. "Internal dissent has been building for some time and it seems most likely that the gamble of a 'de facto' referendum – very much out of character for a very cautious politician – is her last throw of the dice."

KINGMAKER ROLE

At the next UK general election, if the main opposition Labour Party is the largest party in the London parliament, but falls short of a majority, the SNP could support a minority government in return for being given permission to allow Scotland to hold another independence referendum.
Labour has ruled out any deal with the SNP after the next election that must be held by January 2025, saying this scenario is talked up by political opponents to damage the party.
Michael Keating, a professor of politics at the University of Aberdeen, said such a deal is unlikely because Labour "would be accused of putting the unity of the United Kingdom at risk for short term gain".
"Then they would look pretty vulnerable," he said. "They would be more likely to say we are forming a minority government" and challenge the SNP to vote to bring the government down, he said.

UNAUTHORISED REFERENDUM

Sturgeon has previously said she would only seek to secede from the United Kingdom through a legally agreed referendum.
Sturgeon is under pressure from some activists frustrated with her gradualist strategy to call a referendum without the British parliament's permission. But unionists could boycott this vote and claim the result lacks legitimacy.
If the independence movement was to hold a referendum without the consent of the British government, it could also struggle to gain international recognition if it won.
That would mirror the situation in Spain over Catalonia four years ago, when the regional government held an independence referendum that the central government said was illegal.

Text 12 - What does the Supreme Court decision mean for indyref2?

BBC News 23 November 2022

By Philip Sim

Judges at the Supreme Court have ruled that the Scottish government cannot hold an independence referendum without the UK government's consent.
How could their decision affect the future of the constitutional debate in Scotland?

How did we get here?

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon hopes to hold a referendum on 19 October 2023, with the SNP and Scottish Greens forming a pro-independence majority in the Scottish Parliament.
She wants the UK government to do a deal similar to the one ahead of the 2014 referendum, to ensure the result would be legitimate and recognised internationally.
But successive prime ministers have refused to do so, and the Scottish government instead asked the Supreme Court to rule on whether Holyrood could set up a referendum on its own.
Judges heard two days of arguments in October. Court President Lord Reed - a Scottish judge - announced their decision on Wednesday morning.

What were the arguments?

The core question of the case is whether the draft independence referendum bill drawn up by the Scottish government would "relate to" a matter reserved to Westminster, which only MPs can pass laws about.
The Scottish government argued that **a referendum would be "advisory"**, and would simply seek the views of the people of Scotland on the topic.
It said the vote would have "no legal consequences", and that there would still need to be negotiations and legislation at Westminster if a majority of those taking part in the referendum backed independence.
The UK government said **it was "perfectly obvious" that the fate of the union was reserved** to Westminster, and that Holyrood does not have the power to hold a referendum on its continued existence.
Its lawyer said a referendum bill would be "self-evidently, squarely and directly about the Union", and that it was clear the Scottish government's intention was "not just to have an opinion poll".
The UK government also previously argued that the judges should throw the case out without making a ruling, saying it would be premature to take a position on a draft bill.

What happened in court?

The judges **ruled unanimously** that Scottish government does not have the power to hold an independence referendum without the UK government's consent.
They did at least make a judgement - there had been a lot of debate about whether they would come down on either side.
Media caption,

Supreme Court president Lord Reed read the verdict of the justices
The judgement underlined the difficulty of the position Lord Advocate Doroth Bain KC was in.
She had to convince the court that this was a weighty issue of constitutional importance, to get them to make a ruling.
But then she had to persuade the judges that a referendum would be of little legal importance.
The judges were quick to point out the "contrast" between these two lines of argument, and said they were far more convinced by the first point than the second.

They agreed this was a significant constitutional matter - but that meant Ms Bain's second argument was bound to fail.
The UK government argument meanwhile was a simple one - essentially to slap the Scotland Act on the table and say "it's in black and white".
They spent so little time on it in the hearings that it felt like a bit of a gamble. But it's produced an equally simple ruling in their favour.

What happens next?

Reuters
UK ministers had seemed confident of this result, but it is not the end of the matter as far as the Scottish government is concerned.
The independence debate has been deadlocked for years, and they hoped this case would move the matter forward regardless of the result.
Ms Sturgeon had already been clear that she would view a negative result as another roadblock in the path of Scottish democracy.
She hopes the perceived unfairness of being denied a say will prompt a wave of public support - again putting pressure on UK ministers to change their stance.
She says there are significant questions for UK ministers too about how exactly the issue of independence is ever going to be resolved, given it continues to dominate Scottish politics.
But she knows she will face questions too about how she looks to move forward now - and has doubled down on her plan of turning the next election into **a single-issue vote on independence**.
There are significant practical issues when it comes to how that would actually work, given the other major parties involved in the vote are unlikely to agree that it constitutes a "de facto referendum".
So Ms Sturgeon has sought to push some of those questions down the road a bit, by annoucing a special SNP conference focused on answering them in the new year.
That means detailed responses to how the question of independence will be settled are still some way off - as are answers to tricky issues like how an independent Scotland would get back into the EU, which are to feature in a government paper to be published at some unspecified future date.
It all means that after the legal fireworks, the debate is now squarely back in the political realm - and will continue to be as fiercely contested as ever, with no clear ending in sight.