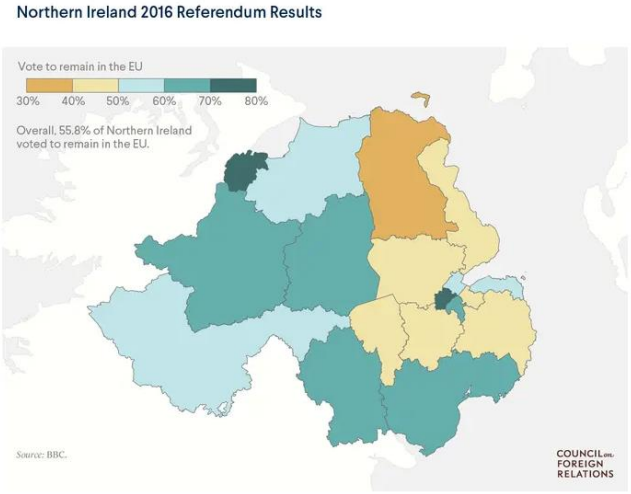
(seungyeon kim/Getty Images/iStockphoto) - The Irish News

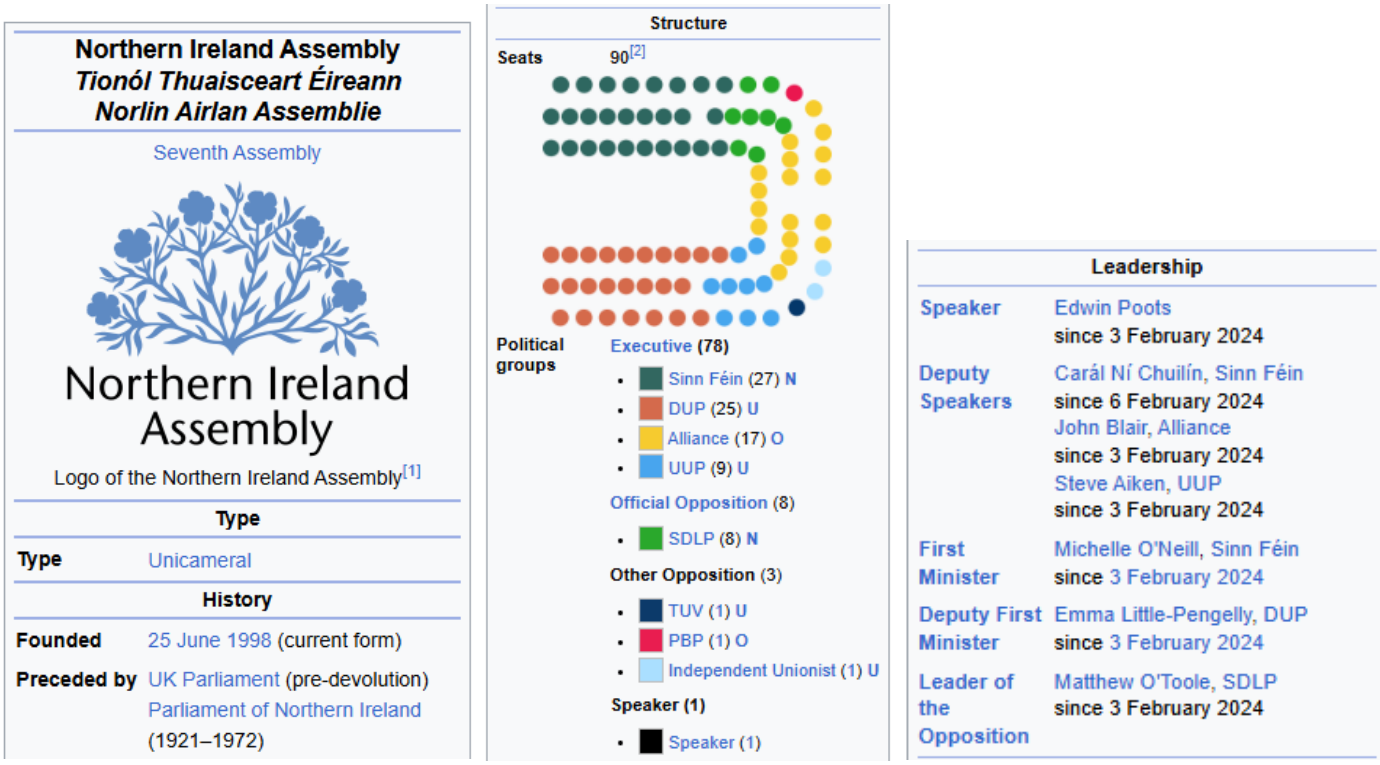


NORTHERN IRELAND AT A GLANCE

Area 13, 562 sq km
Population 1.9 million (2022) (Ireland 5.15 m)
Primary Language English
Primary religions Catholicism 42%, Protestantism 34%, no religion 17% (2021)
Form of government
A legislature and an executive with powers devolved from the United Kingdom, which is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy

Republic of IRELAND AT A GLANCE

Area 70,276 sq km
Population 5.38 m (2024)
Primary languages Irish and English
Primary religions Roman Catholicism 69%, Protestantism 4.2%, other religions 4.5%, no religion 14.8%
Form of government
A constitutional republic, Parliamentary system (bicameral national parliament (House of Representatives and Senate)



Glossary & References

- Ulster – Eire
- Union – Home Rule – Free State – Partition of Ireland
- Republicanism - Nationalism – Unionism
- The Troubles – The Good Friday Agreement
- Sectarianism
- Devolved Powers – Legislative Assembly - Stormont
- MLAs – First Minister – Deputy First Minister
- Power-sharing – Northern Ireland Protocol – Windsor Framework
- Oireachtas (Eireann) / ˈɛrəktəs ˈɛərən / - Taoiseach / ˈtiːʃək /
- Michael D. Higgins – Micheál Martin
- Michelle O-Neill – Emma Little-Pengelly
- Sinn Fein / ʃɪn ˈfeɪn /– DUP – Alliance – UUP – SDLP
- Fine Gael / ˌfiːnə ˈgeɪl /
- United Ireland – Border poll

History – Celebrating the Good Friday Agreement

● 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

● BBC's Story of Ireland in five episodes
Episode 1 – Age of Invasions https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCecND_jBV0&ab_channel=IrishMedievalHistory
Episode 2 – Age of Conquest https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXJphT5iEV4&ab_channel=VolimIrsku
Episode 3 – Age of Revolution https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSlOSXZ9TCI&ab_channel=VolimIrsku
Episode 4 – Age of Union https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubnG0XIjEbM&ab_channel=BritishHistoryDocumentaries
Episode 5 – Age of Nations

●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!
● The Guardian - The Real Derry Girls and the peace walls that divide their city
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXALrrEFtJk&ab_channel=TheGuardian

● A very good backgrounder from the Council of Foreign Relations
Moving Past the Troubles: The Future of Northern Ireland Peace
The Good Friday Agreement has dampened sectarian conflict and brought stability to Northern Ireland, but the peace deal has been challenged by Brexit-related border tensions that have thrown the region's hard-won gains into doubt.
https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/moving-past-troubles-future-northern-ireland-peace
Here is their "conclusion":
What is the future of the peace process?

Some observers have long feared that the UK's departure from the EU threatens the Good Friday Agreement; they include Tony Blair, the UK prime minister who presided over the accord. The previous Irish prime minister, Leo Varadkar, echoed this point in March 2018, arguing that Brexit "threatens to drive a wedge between Britain and Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and potentially between the two communities in Northern Ireland." Sinn Fein leaders have called Brexit "the most serious threat in the history of the peace process."

That is because the Good Friday Agreement established intricate arrangements among the various parties. The Three Strands of the pact created a web of institutions to govern Northern Ireland (Strand One), bring together leaders in Northern Ireland with those in Ireland (Strand Two, or North-South cooperation), and bring together leaders from throughout the UK and Ireland (Strand Three, or East-West cooperation). There are currently more than 140 areas of Northern Ireland–Republic of Ireland cross-border cooperation, including on health-care services, energy infrastructure, and policing. Many experts and political leaders fear that any disruption to this cooperation could undermine trust in the agreement and thus the basis of peace in Northern Ireland.

Though British and Irish leaders have pledged to protect the Good Friday Agreement, some Brexit supporters have seized the opportunity to criticize the deal's power-sharing institutions, arguing that the pact is outdated. Some in the DUP, which opposed the agreement in 1998, have increasingly questioned the arrangements it established. Experts worry that the rancor over the Brexit deal's trade provisions has fed a growing sense among Northern Ireland's Protestants that the Good Friday Agreement itself is failing to represent their interests.

Yet another pressing question is whether Brexit could lead Northern Ireland's people to vote to leave the UK and join a united Ireland, a possibility the Good Friday Agreement allows for. Since the 2016 Brexit vote, Northern Ireland's nationalist and republican leaders have pushed for such a referendum. It would require London's approval, as well as a separate vote in the Republic of Ireland. Analysts say that Sinn Fein's growing electoral influence in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has made that more likely, and First Minister O'Neill has called this the "decade of opportunity" for unification. However, many experts also say that Sinn Fein's recent success in Northern Ireland politics has largely been a result of the disarray among unionist parties rather than a rise in nationalism, and that public support for unification remains well below the necessary simple majority.

- 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.

OPINION - GUEST ESSAY

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. (…)

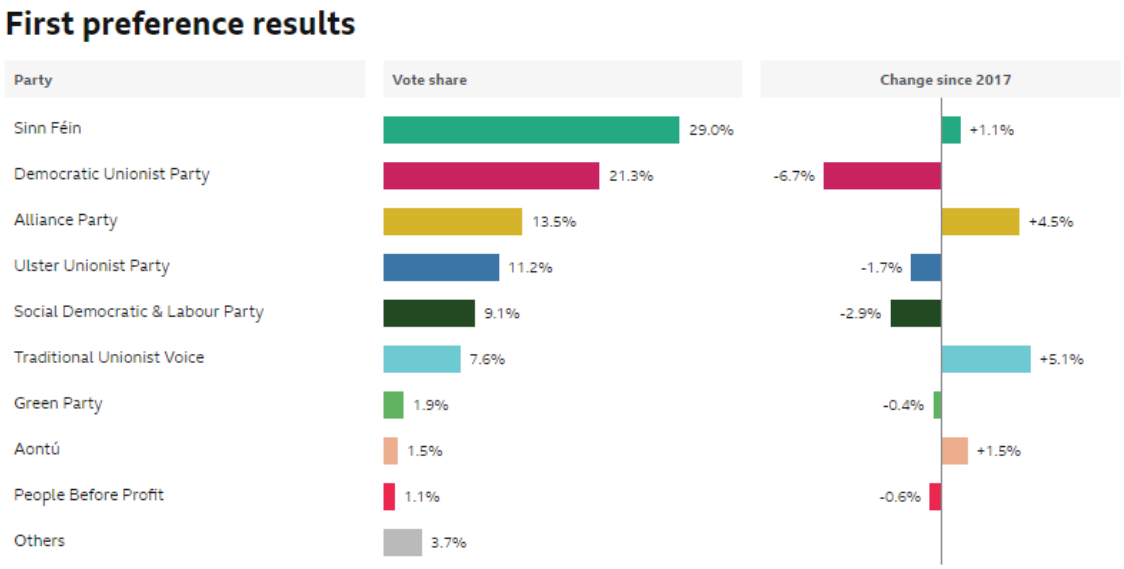
The unfolding of Brexit has elucidated several facts long suspected, one of which is that the British government is not overly concerned about us. But it's remarkable to me that citizens who took part in a democratic election have almost silently allowed the absence of government to take place. There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

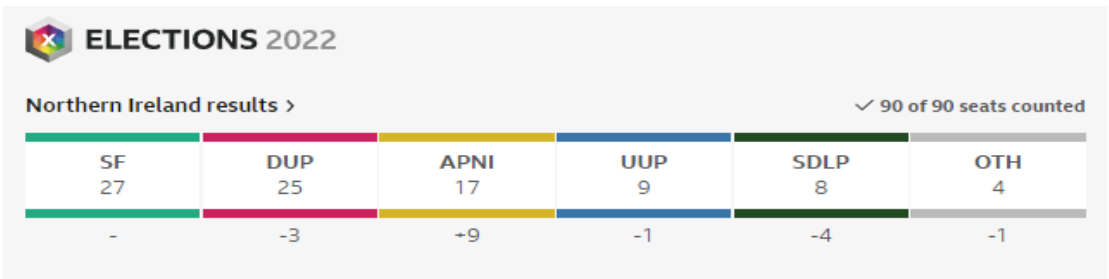
As long as there is peace, this absence of dissent seems to say, "Anything is better than the Troubles." (…)

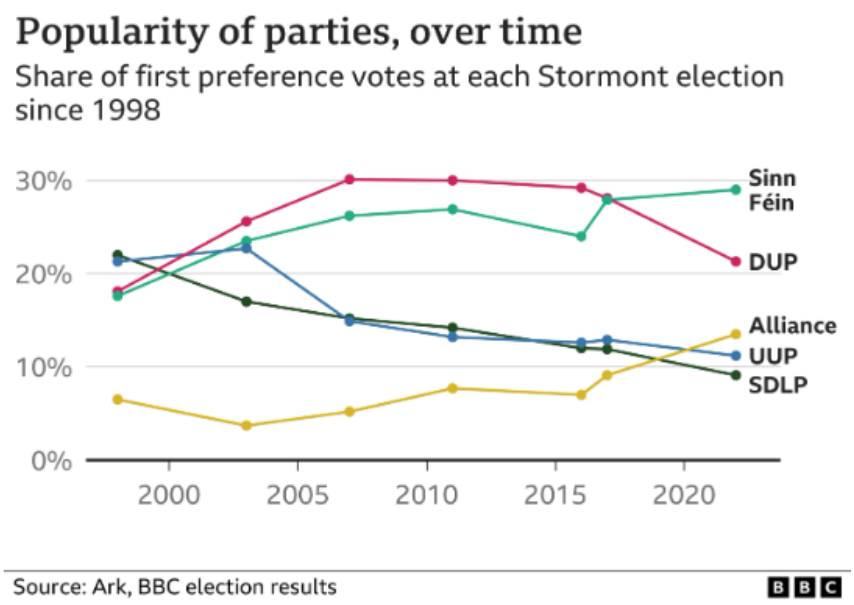
This month we remember that a version of peace was gifted to us by a brittle matchstick tower constructed a quarter of a century ago. We can celebrate that, but we need to tend to it, too.

Northern Ireland today

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







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.

Northern Ireland's power-sharing system of government 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 2022 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.

EXPLAINER - What does return to power sharing mean for Northern Ireland?

After a two-year DUP boycott, the Northern Ireland assembly is to reconvene with a Sinn Féin first minister
The Guardian, Sat 3 Feb 2024

Power sharing will return to Northern Ireland on Saturday after two years, with Sinn Féin's Michelle O'Neill making history as she becomes the first nationalist first minister. Here are answers to some of the key questions surrounding the historic event.

What is happening at Stormont on Saturday?

Members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) will return to Parliament Buildings in Belfast after a political impasse that has lasted for two years. Several previous attempts to restart the devolved government have failed since the 2022 assembly elections.

This time the Democratic Unionist party (DUP) has stated it will support the restoration of the power-sharing executive, which needs the support of the largest parties in unionism and nationalism to operate.

This will end the deadlock, allowing a new speaker to be elected and clearing the path for parliamentary business to resume.

Michelle O'Neill, of Sinn Féin, will be nominated as **first minister,** while a DUP MLA will fill the role of **deputy first minister**. The party has not yet confirmed who it will nominate, although speculation has suggested **Emma Little-Pengelly** could take the position. (*Note she IS now the deputy First Minister)*

Then a series of ministers will be appointed using the D'Hondt mechanism, which measures party strengths. Ministers will be appointed to the departments of health, education, finance, economy, communities, infrastructure and agriculture, environment and rural affairs.

A justice minister will also be appointed on Saturday, although the rules are different for this department as the minister needs to have cross-community support.

Sinn Féin will be entitled to three ministries, the DUP and the Alliance parties two and the Ulster Unionists one. The Social Democratic and Labour party did not win enough Stormont seats to gain a ministry and will go into opposition.

What is different this time?

At the 2022 assembly election, Sinn Féin emerged as the largest party in Northern Ireland for the first time. This means their Stormont leader, O'Neill, will make history as the first nationalist first minister in the region's history.

The republican party has emphasised that this is a moment of significance, with the party leader, Mary Lou McDonald, stating that their ultimate goal of Irish unity is now within "touching distance".

However, under the rules of power sharing, the offices of first and deputy first minister, filled by the largest parties from the nationalist and unionist communities, have equal authority. All decisions are taken on a joint basis.

What happens after Saturday?

The business of governing Northern Ireland will begin. A first meeting of the executive will take place early next week followed by the first plenary session of the new assembly. Party leaders from executive parties have already met to discuss the immediate priorities to be addressed.

Ministers will have bulging in-trays. Long periods without devolved government, combined with a series of budget crises in Stormont departments, have had a damaging impact on public services.

As part of the negotiations that led to Stormont's return, the UK government offered a £3.3bn package to stabilise Northern Ireland's finances, including £600m to settle public sector pay claims.

Ministers will be expected to begin making decisions quickly to alleviate some of the pressures facing public services.

Why has there not been a devolved government for two years?

During the Brexit divorce talks, the then prime minister, Boris Johnson, negotiated the Northern Ireland protocol with the EU to ensure the continued free movement of goods on the island of Ireland.

However, this led to the requirement for checks on goods travelling between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and was deeply unpopular with unionists, who described it as an Irish Sea border.

After feeling that Westminster was not responding adequately to his concerns, the DUP leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, collapsed the Stormont power-sharing institutions when he withdrew Paul Givan as first minister two years ago.

In response, the new prime minister, Rishi Sunak, negotiated the Windsor framework with the EU, introducing new rules on the movement of goods and a veto for the implementation of EU law in Northern Ireland.

However, Donaldson insisted this did not go far enough, leading to months of protracted negotiations that have culminated in the command paper Safeguarding the Union, published by the government this week.

Why has the DUP agreed to the deal?

Donaldson has insisted the new arrangements have removed the Irish Sea trading border and restored Northern Ireland's place within the UK internal market.

The deal will end routine post-Brexit checks on goods shipped from Great Britain to final destinations in Northern Ireland, as well as introduce measures aimed at providing assurances around Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the UK.

The DUP leader says this is the best deal that could be achieved for the people of Northern Ireland and it persuaded him to end the DUP boycott. He has long argued in favour of restoring devolved government, providing his concerns over post-Brexit trade and sovereignty were addressed.

Does this represent a major change to the trading arrangements agreed with Brussels?

It depends who you listen to.

Donaldson says his party has delivered "fundamental change" to the Windsor framework by ending routine checks on goods moving from Great Britain to, and staying in, Northern Ireland.

Downing Street, however, has insisted the measures unveiled on Wednesday and approved by MPs on Thursday do not require specific EU sign-off, characterising them instead as "operational" changes to the framework, without altering the "fundamentals" of the bilateral deal.

Does anyone oppose the DUP leader's move?

Not everyone in the DUP supports accepting the arrangements. (…)

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

The Prospect of a United Ireland and a border poll

Statistics on a border poll – Northern Ireland

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) / Northern Ireland Life and Times / Political Attitudes.
www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/nilt/results

REUNIFY: Would you vote to unify with the Republic of Ireland? In %	2002	2019	2020	2021	2022
Yes, should unify with the Republic	27	25	30	34	35
No, should not unify with the Republic	54	51	53	48	47
I would not vote	6	6	4	4	4
Other	2	4	3	3	4
Don't know	10	14	9	11	10

REUNIFY: Would you vote to unify with the Republic of Ireland? In 2019, in %	Catholic	Protestant	No religion
Yes, should unify with the Republic	56	4	17
No, should not unify with the Republic	23	79	47
I would not vote	7	4	10
Other	3	0	8
Don't know	12	13	19

5 years after Brexit, has push for a united Ireland lost its momentum?

RTÉ.ie, Friday, 31 Jan 2025 - OPINION **By** Catriona Shelly **and** Orla Muldoon, University of Limerick

Brexit forced the border question back onto the agenda, but the sense of crisis that once drove these conversations has started to dissipate

Brexit was a British project, but Ireland felt the shockwaves. After nearly two decades of relative peace in Northern Ireland, Brexit forced the difficult 'border question' back onto the agenda. As the UK left the EU five years ago, new trade and customs arrangements were needed. At one stage, it seemed a hard border might divide Ireland, North and South. Later, it seemed unification of the island might be on the agenda. Now 5 years on, this solution also has seemed to lose its appeal.

The Good Friday Agreement being a multi-party deal involved both the British and Irish governments. Brexit was a stark reminder of the fragility of Northern Ireland's fragile peace and old power imbalances. The UK appeared to act unilaterally on Brexit, with little regard for this fragile peace.

This discontent with Brexit handed Sinn Féin a strategic opportunity to push their agenda. The day after the Brexit result in 2016, Martin McGuinness, then Sinn Féin deputy first minister of Northern Ireland, called for a border poll. Since then, its leaders have skilfully painted Brexit as yet another chapter in a long history of British indifference, presenting a united Ireland, free from Brexit and British rule, as the solution.

The prospect of reunification resonated not just with Nationalists, but also with some Unionists. Disillusioned by Westminster's disregard for the hard-won peace and the social and economic dividend it brought, political attitudes began to shift. More people in Northern Ireland became open to the idea of a united Ireland in the wake of Brexit.

In the Republic of Ireland, the conversation moved from the fringes to the mainstream, with major political parties beginning to address the possibility of a united Ireland. Sinn Féin's popularity on both sides of the border rose as they made historic electoral gains in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. A united Ireland became a hot political topic on both sides of the border.

But Brexit has not unfolded in the manner many had feared. The Northern Ireland Protocol pushed the border into the Irish Sea and Northern Ireland began to operate under different rules from the rest of the UK. In practical terms, the Protocol avoided major disruption. Businesses adapted and Northern Ireland's economy even benefited from unique access to both the UK and EU markets. The Northern Ireland government was restored, bringing a level of stability. The Common Travel Area that has allowed free movement between Britain and Ireland since 1922 has assuaged many of the concerns those in the Republic had.

In Ireland, the border is both a geographical divide and a symbolic fault line. Any change to its location or significance fuels tensions between the two parts of the island. This is because the border makes Northerners and Southerners out of people. This fault line defines groups of people. Many will define their nationality based on the border: it's a line that can make you British, Irish or Northern Irish. In Northern Ireland, your political position with regard to the border can make you a leaver or remainer or even a Nationalist or Unionist.

Because people self define with regard to the border, any substantive change in the border can feel threatening to people on both sides. In the early days post-Brexit, Unionists felt threatened, believing the promised backstop would weaken ties with Britian. Indeed, the 2022 collapse of the Stormont assembly can be linked to this feeling of betrayal and threat amongst unionists.

For Republicans and even Nationalists, Brexit was further proof that Northern Ireland's future was best decided by Dublin rather than London. The prospects of being disconnected from the rest of Ireland and Europe by a hard border made the desire for Irish unity even stronger. We know from research that when people feel threatened it can cause a 'rally around the flag effect'. In this case, Brexit created real fears bringing stronger Unionist and Nationalist sentiments.

But five years later, tensions have eased and daily life has continued. The sense of crisis that once drove conversations has started to dissipate. As those fears have subsided, so too has the momentum for change.

Indeed it would appear that attempts to convince people that Brexit remains a pressing threat- can actually reduce support for Irish unity. We are back to viewing those with strong and entrenched identities with caution. It would seem that the worst of Brexit is now behind us, and so much of the energy behind unification has faded.

Sinn Féin's goal of securing a referendum by 2030 now seems out of reach. Tánaiste Simon Harris this week stated that Irish unity is "not his priority" and UK prime minister Keir Starmer has also said that an Irish unity poll is "not even on the horizon." Without Brexit related instability, the conversation and the border question is no longer even being asked.

Dr Catriona Shelly is a postdoctoral researcher in social psychology at the University of Limerick. She is a former Research Ireland awardee. Prof Orla Muldoon is Professor of Psychology at University of Limerick and Queen's University Belfast. She is a former Research Ireland awardee

A podcast - **A united Ireland: Inevitable or a fantasy?**

The BelTel, Wed 10 Apr 2024

Nationalists continue to campaign for planning a united Ireland, but unionists seem assured it's a pipe dream – where does the truth lie?

https://open.spotify.com/episode/2VnILLwvnnpFPjp8AaE6om?si=Ulw-WUeqTZKt3HaUN4kjhA

The 'United Ireland vs the Union' debate has existed as long as Northern Ireland has.

In recent years, buoyed by demographic shifts, Brexit and the strength of the Irish economy, nationalists have been calling for planning to begin towards a united Ireland.

But for many unionists, a united Ireland has never been further away or more unrealistic.

What is the truth of the matter – or is it impossible to say? Is a united Ireland a realistic prospect or pure fantasy, inevitable or impossible?

Politics writer, lecturer, and commentator David McCann and commentator Owen Polley join Ciarán Dunbar.

pro-united Ireland banner on Divis flats in west Belfast.

A The famous "No More" mural in Belfast

● **For a virtual tour of Belfast murals go here https://www.virtualbelfastmuraltour.com/**

Au Royaume-Uni, l'indépendance de l'Ecosse et la réunification de l'Irlande n'ont plus le vent en poupe

Cécile Ducourtieux, Le Monde, 9 janvier 2025

Il y a cinq ans, le 31 janvier 2020, avait lieu le Brexit. A en croire tous les sondages, une majorité de Britanniques regrettent aujourd'hui ce choix historique. Pourtant, les plus dramatiques des prédictions formulées par les experts et les opposants à la sortie de l'Union européenne (UE) ne se sont pas réalisées.

Le Brexit n'a pas donné lieu à un brutal décrochage économique, même s'il a introduit des freins aux échanges avec l'UE, principal partenaire commercial du pays, limitant sa capacité de croissance. Le Brexit n'a pas non plus déclenché la désagrégation du Royaume-Uni : l'indépendance de l'Ecosse reste une perspective lointaine et il n'existe ni majorité ni sentiment d'urgence en

République d'Irlande, comme en Irlande du Nord, pour une réunification de l'île d'Irlande.

Le référendum sur le Brexit de 2016 avait pourtant donné aux indépendantistes écossais un argument de poids : ils réclamaient la tenue d'un second référendum sur leur indépendance après celui de 2014 (55 % des votants avaient alors choisi de rester au sein du Royaume-Uni), au motif que la donne avait fondamen¬talement changé.

En grande majorité pro-européens – ils ont voté à 62 % pour rester dans l'UE –, les Ecossais voyaient leur destinée contrariée par le vote des brexiters anglais. Les dirigeants britanniques, Boris Johnson en tête, ont aussi alimenté leur rejet d'un pouvoir concentré à Londres, entre Westminster et Downing Street, faisant peu de cas des sensibilités et identités régionales. A partir de 2020, les sondages en faveur de l'indépendance se sont mis à osciller autour de 50 %.

Divisions et scandales au SNP

Le soufflé indépendantiste est en partie retombé : après dix-sept années au contrôle de l'exécutif régional à Edimbourg, le parti indépendantiste Scottish National Party (SNP, le Parti national écossais) a de plus en plus de mal à justifier un bilan mitigé. Il a beaucoup travaillé à réduire la pauvreté (notamment infantile), mais les temps d'attente au National Health Service (NHS) Scotland (le système de santé écossais) sont encore plus longs qu'au NHS England, son pendant anglais, et l'Ecosse détient toujours le triste record du plus grand nombre de morts par overdose en Europe.

Un peu comme les conservateurs britanniques, le SNP s'est enfoncé dans les divisions et les scandales : il en est à son troisième chef de file en deux ans, après la démission de la très charismatique Nicola Sturgeon, en février 2023, puis celle de Humza Yousaf un an plus tard. Et la police enquête sur des irrégularités dans les finances du parti.

La stratégie d'indépendance du SNP a volé en éclats quand la Cour suprême du Royaume-Uni a statué, fin 2022, que le Parlement d'Edimbourg ne pouvait organiser de référendum sur l'indépendance sans l'aval du Parlement britannique. En outre, le Brexit agit désormais comme un repoussoir. Bien des Ecossais n'ont pas envie de revivre, avec un futur processus d'indépendance, les profondes divisions que le Brexit a engendrées, jusqu'au sein des familles.

Ils redoutent aussi de se déchirer sur la question d'une future frontière entre l'Angleterre et l'Ecosse, alors que les deux nations partagent le même destin depuis la signature de l'Act of Union de 1707. Enfin, l'indépendance aurait un coût (des dizaines de milliards de livres, au bas mot) que les Ecossais ne sont pas prêts à assumer, car leurs priorités vont au pouvoir d'achat et à la crise de leur système de santé.

Refus d'un retour à la violence

En Irlande, le contexte est très différent, mais les réticences des Irlandais et des Nord-Irlandais vis-à-vis d'un grand chambardement territorial sont assez similaires. Les Nord-Irlandais ont voté en majorité (56 %) contre le Brexit en 2016. Ce dernier a abouti à la création d'une frontière douanière en mer d'Irlande, qui a fortement contrarié la communauté protestante et unioniste, attachée au maintien dans le Royaume-Uni.

Le Sinn Fein, le principal parti pro-réunification de l'île, s'est silencieusement félicité de cette nouvelle donne, engrangeant en parallèle des soutiens au Nord et au Sud grâce à des propositions de réformes très sociales et des efforts pour polir son image – il fut jusque dans les années 1990 la branche politique de l'Armée républicaine irlandaise, groupe paramilitaire considéré comme terroriste par Londres.

Mais sa raison d'être reste la réunification de l'île, alors qu'une majorité de Nord-Irlandais sont davantage préoccupés par la pénurie de logements abordables ou la difficulté à décrocher des emplois rémunérateurs. Ils refusent aussi le retour de la violence, alors que la perspective d'une fin de la partition braque la communauté unioniste, dans une société encore meurtrie par la guerre civile qui a opposé pendant trente ans les catholiques aux protestants (jusqu'au traité de paix du Vendredi saint, en 1998).

En République d'Irlande, les inquiétudes du quotidien incitent également au statu quo davantage qu'à un futur aventureux. Une coalition des partis de centre droit, Fianna Fail et Fine Gael, est sur le point de se reconstituer après les élections générales du 29 novembre. Les électeurs n'ont pas apporté le soutien suffisant au Sinn Fein, troisième parti au Sud, pour décrocher une majorité absolue et accéder pour la première fois de son histoire au pouvoir à Dublin.

Les sentiments nationalistes n'ont pas pour autant disparu dans ces îles et nations britanniques, les rêves d'indépendance ou de réunification restent vivaces. En Irlande du Nord, un sondage réalisé par l'Economic and Social Research Council indiquait, en octobre, que le soutien au maintien dans le Royaume-Uni était passé pour la première fois sous la barre symbolique des 50 % des sondés (à 48,6 %). En Ecosse, entre 45 % et 50 % des personnes interrogées continuent à souhaiter l'indépendance, qu'elles considèrent davantage comme un futur enviable que comme une affaire pressante. Le Brexit ne semblait simplement pas une raison suffisante pour précipiter le cours de l'histoire.

John Manley: Is there a realistic prospect of a border poll by the end of the decade?

At the halfway point in what has been termed the 'decade of opportunities' Political Correspondent John Manley assesses the chances of securing a border poll by 2030

By John Manley, Politics Correspondent, ***Irish News***, December 23, 2024

Brexit ushered in the period of greatest constitutional upheaval for 50 years, prompting corresponding momentum in the effort to secure Irish unity.

The so-called decade of opportunities was said to offer the potential for a border poll by 2030 and an accompanying surge in support for ending more than 100 years of partition.

The new year marks the halfway point in the decade, and as 2025 dawns it's arguable the prospect of a unity referendum is no closer than it was five years ago, with the Labour administration in London so far ensuring greater constitutional stability than its Brexiteer predecessor.

A disappointing general election for Sinn Féin in the Republic, which will see it excluded from the next Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael-led government, may also be regarded as a setback for the unity project.

But Sinn Féin's Declan Kearney isn't downbeat, pointing to the "new vista of opportunities" emerging across the island.

"For the first time all of the main political parties contesting the southern general election had a section of their manifestos relating to constitutional change," he says.

The Sinn Féin national chairperson points to "landmark remarks" by former taioseach Leo Varadkar in September in which he said Irish unity should be an objective, not just an aspiration.

"The opportunity now is for us to collectively encourage those parties which form the next government to ensure that Irish unity does indeed become a policy and political objective in the next programme for government," Mr Kearney says.

He believes the former Fine Gael leader's comments and the manifesto pledges, coupled with July's report from the cross-party Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, are evidence of a "political consensus that has emerged, particularly over the last 12 months".

The South Antrim MLA says there is now an opportunity for "new conversations" which are "elevated above adversity between parties".

He argues that a referendum within the next five years is still possible and that there is now a responsibility on the two governments to establish a roadmap for a border poll, the first stage of which is the British government setting out the criteria that would trigger it – something it appears reluctant to do.

Colum Eastwood, who since stepping down as SDLP leader in October has committed more time and energy to the party's New Ireland Commission, has always been loath to put a timeframe on a border poll because "we end up in the wrong arguments".

The Foyle MP nonetheless believes there is a "new political context which gives us an opportunity to do things" but says there won't be a referendum within the mandate of the current British government.

"We shouldn't get fixated on a date – we should ultimately be focused on doing the work to make sure that we can win over that 20-25% in the middle who are undecided," he says.

Many of the issues around Brexit may be resolved but Mr Eastwood believes it continues to influence politics.

"Not long ago we were part of EU and all that goes with that in terms of trade but we're now attached to what is becoming a diminished state, the UK, and a more inward-looking society, when the rest of the island is moving on, with a more liberal society and economy, which is thriving as a result." (…)

For economist John FitzGerald, Irish unity is at least a generation away. Describing himself as "neutral" on the constitutional question, the son of former taoiseach Garret FitzGerald believes there is "zero" prospect of a border poll in the next decade and if there were, it's likely the Republic's electorate would vote 'No'.

He argues that before people in the south would agree to unification it's necessary "to make Northern Ireland work". It would be a "disaster", he says, for the north to vote for unity but for the Republic to reject it.

John Manley has spent the vast bulk of his 25 year-plus journalistic career with The Irish News. He has been the paper's Political Correspondent since 2012, having previously worked as a Business Reporter. He is a past winner of the CIPR's Business Journalist of the Year and Environmental Journalist of the Year awards.

The Irish News (https://www.irishnews.com/) is a compact daily newspaper based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. It is Northern Ireland's largest-selling morning newspaper and is available throughout Ireland.[3] It is broadly Irish nationalist in its viewpoint, though it also features unionist columnists.
Centre / centre-left - Irish nationalism (with Liberal Unionist columnists)

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

The Literary Corner

Brexit: A cry from the Irish border – A short film by the Royal Court Theatre

February 2019

Belfast-born actor Stephen Rea (Cyprus Avenue) explores the impact of Brexit and the uncertainty of the future of the Irish border in a short film written by Clare Dwyer Hogg. Produced and directed by Juliet Riddell; edited by Tom Hannen; written by Clare Dwyer Hogg and performed by Stephen Rea.

"The Royal Court Theatre is the writers' theatre. It is the leading force in world theatre for energetically cultivating writers – undiscovered, emerging and established. The Royal Court is located in London, UK."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIBwEFny5Ik&ab_channel=RoyalCourtTheatre

Here is the text

Jacob Rees-Mogg, you're right. You don't need to visit the north of Ireland to understand the border. You need to have lived here. When the border was no man's land, neither your land or my land, a ragged stretch of spike.

And because you do not like to think it's a problem does not mean it vanishes. A trick of the eye, a trompe-l'oeil. Just because you have said the problem is imaginary does not disappear the thread of reality. I used to assume that magical thinking meant wide eyes, a vision that doesn't stop at the sky. Creative view on old to make it new.

But now, Sure, someone from the EU accused Westminster of magical thinking. No assumptions anymore about what magic is. There's a lot of chat about imagination when people talk of the border- The Irish one, you know: Between the northern part And the southern part, And what keeps them apart,

Stone or moss, Hard or soft. You hear these things through airwaves And screen And wonder what they mean. Boris Johnson took a notion that our border was just like his. Donegal, Derry, Camden, and Islington. What's the difference?

I won't break down the distance There Between reality And creativity. 'Magical thinking'. 'An imaginary problem'. 'A pragmatic extension Of a reality That already exists'. 'The magic formula of words Has yet to materialise'. Now there's a collection of words Fished from a misty view Of what connects me and you.

They're not pagan hopes. Just quotes. Politicians Struggling to grasp The ungrabbable. We're knee deep in Philosophy here, Trapped in other people's boundaries. Yet to me it feels quite real: Roads that start here And end there, somehow allowing a wound to heal.

It's counterintuitive That nothing to see Now Is more real Than what there was Then. Nothing to see Means reality. It sounds magical, doesn't it? This is what magic in the day to day looks like: The spirit of peace in the normality. Nothing outward as such, no extra levity. Just- a gentleness in the mundanity.

Daily travel. Across political lines. Work, school, grocery shops. Back again. Magic is the absence, Sometimes. There was magic, too, in 1998. A very good Friday. And all the years in between To make the border disappear: There but not there, A line of imagination that needed Imagination to make it Exist while unseen.

And war, That vulture Who makes human lives carrion, Tears the beauty Of identity To pieces, Feasts on death, Cares not about any cause- It shrieked and screamed As it's roosting places Were turned into wider spaces. Nobody ever thought that dismantling the barricades Like a jigsaw bit by bit Was a temporary measure.

We thought the concrete was broken down, Old wood burnt, Weapons beat into ploughs. We hoped, by digging out old roots, the grass would grow Over lines drawn in war rooms. And even though we would all know When we drove from one political sphere to the next, We would know but The earth would not.

And so Maybe The stale, tight air around the site Of fear and death and human plight Would burst, Instead allowing a flowing, a growing with time. None of us expected this would be swift, that overnight tensions would lift. No, we're not the types to put faith in magicians.

But we want to believe in magic. And this was a start, beginning something, a road with no blocks, clear paths. We didn't think it was illusion. The pieces of the jigsaw falling away before our eyes didn't stop existing, after all. Instead packed away in boxes labelled and ordered for use at a future time, ready for reconstruction down the line.

Were the decisions on that day sacred for both sides of the divide? Just things that made the process move ahead- for then? Apparently, there hasn't been a hard border here since 1923. You'd have known that wasn't true, Toby Young, if you'd been here to see.

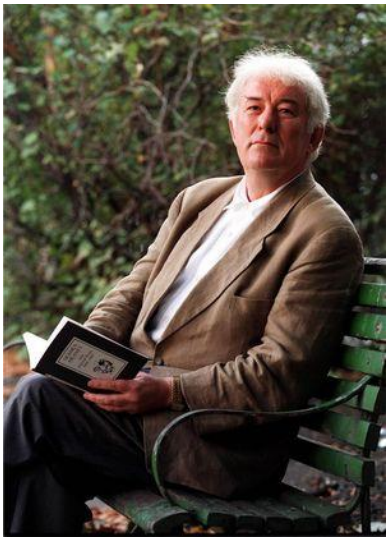
And no, I wasn't alive either when Lloyd George called Ireland 'The Irish Question'. That was 1916. It's strange that now it seems the people in power and the people who write about us are calling it that again. We've got questions, but now we're the Irish Question.

Isn't identity something to do with magic, The mystery of birth and What we cleave to in life. Another imagination, Given credence by ritual, Grows from the soil, Planted in the earth, Rooted in how we see. Where are the stereotypes Here when some of us have Irish passports, Some British, Some have both - ?

'Overreaching' Arlene Foster said, About the words in documents that will Determine what and when- but Does anything happen then unless you reach Beyond? Two kingdoms bound by imaginations: That's why the language woven through negotiations has a mystical thread Those at the head Cannot help themselves but use.

The power of identity Infusing and confusing practicality. We live here. And we're holding our breath Again Because we know That chance and hope Come in forms like steam and smoke.

About Seamus Heaney



Seamus Heaney (born April 13, 1939, near Castledàwson, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland—died August 30, 2013, Dublin, Ireland) was an Irish poet whose work is notable for its evocation of Irish rural life and events in Irish history as well as for its allusions to Irish myth. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. (Britannica)

Here is his obituary by ***the Irish Times*** Extracts:

The Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney, who has died aged 74, was described by Robert Lowell as "the most important Irish poet since Yeats". Widely acclaimed for his many notable achievements, he was undoubtedly the most popular poet writing in English, and the only one assured of a place in the bestseller lists. His books sold, and continue to sell, in the tens of thousands, while hordes of "Heaneyboppers" flocked to his readings. His earliest influences, Robert Frost and Ted Hughes, are reflected throughout his work, but most especially in his first two collections, where he recollected images of his childhood on the family farm in Co Derry. Other poets, especially Gerard Manley Hopkins, William Wordsworth and Thomas Hardy, as well as Dante, also influenced his work.

On Heaney's 70th birthday, the poet Paul Muldoon wrote: "If ever the concept 'generous to a fault' has had a corporeal manifestation it's surely in him".

The critic Helen Vendler wrote: "Seamus broadened my view of Ireland, north and south – its geography, its history, its labour, its sounds, its euphemisms, its crises of conscience, its bog bodies, its bombs, its weather, its sectarian stand-offs, its twilights." Poet and critic Robert Pinsky praised Heaney's "gift for laughter and for friendship, a generosity entirely

congruent with the qualities of his great gift and accomplishment in art". (…)

Heaney did not confine himself to poetry. A respected critic, he was also a distinguished academic and his translations from Greek, Latin, Italian, Irish, Anglo-Saxon and Middle Scots reflect the extent of his learning. As a translator he sought to remain true to the original text, and disliked the modern practice whereby a poem is "smashed and grabbed rather than rendered up". (…)

About his first Collections including North which is on this year's syllabus

Door into the Dark (1969) was also well received and became a Poetry Book Society choice. It demonstrated a willingness to go beyond the familiar into the unknown, investing portraits of local people – blacksmiths, thatchers, fishermen and farmers – with mythic qualities. From this auspicious start his career prospered, his reputation grew and he soon came to be regarded as the leading Irish poet of his generation. A third book of poetry, Wintering Out, published in 1972, confirmed his reputation. It deals with exposure and endurance in poems that are grimly circumspect about the civil and sectarian conflict in the North.

"These were very dangerous times," he said in 2009. "When the Provisional IRA began their campaign, people like myself, with a strong sense that things needed to be redressed, were excited."

Bloody Sunday in Derry prompted him to write a polemical poem that spoke of "My heart besieged by anger, my mind a gap of danger", and of justice waiting to sprout "in Derry where the 13 men lay dead". He insisted this was a protest poem, commissioned for a rally but never actually performed.

Recalling the mid-1970s, when the violence was at its worst, he said: "There was a sense of an utterly wasteful, cancerous stalemate, and that the violence was unproductive. It was villainous, but you were living with it. Only after it stopped did you realise what you had lived with. Day by day, week by week, we lived through this, and didn't fully take in what was going on."

He always felt it was impossible for him to take sides, and had no regrets about not speaking out. His nationality, however, was never in doubt. When, in 1981, his work was included in an anthology of contemporary British poetry, he resented being "cornered" and protested in rhyme: "My passport's green,/No glass of ours was ever raised/To toast the Queen."

His reading of PV Glob's book The Bog People (1969), with its account of Iron Age sacrificial victims such as the Tollund Man discovered in a Danish bog, suggested ways of understanding the horror of the Troubles as part of a timeless continuum.

This understanding found expression in his "Bog Poems" sequence contained in North (1975). This volume confirmed the emergence of a talent on a par with Yeats. Widely regarded as his finest and most original collection, it was, however, the subject of adverse criticism in Northern Ireland, even from some of those he had befriended and championed.

The pressures and intransigencies of the northern conflict surface in Field Work (1979), in which elegies to victims of sectarian violence emphasise the personal over the tribal. Both North and Field Work enhanced his reputation further and spread it far beyond Ireland

- **Here are three poems which are going to be mentioned on March 28**

Singing School (see the long version of the file)

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48394/singing-school

Punishment

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first
she was a barked sapling
that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin:

her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
her blindfold a soiled bandage,
her noose a ring

to store
the memories of love.
Little adultress,
before they punished you
you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

Whatever You Say Say Nothing

I
I'm writing this just after an encounter
With an English journalist in search of 'views
On the Irish thing'. I'm back in winter
Quarters where bad news is no longer news,

Where media men and stringers sniff and point,
Where zoom lenses, recorders and coiled leads
Litter the hotels. The times are out of joint
But I incline as much to rosary beads

As to the jottings and analyses
of politicians and newspapermen
Who've scribbled down the long campaign from gas
And protest to gelignite and sten,

Who proved upon their pulses 'escalate',
'Backlash' and 'crackdown', 'the provisional wing',
'Polarization' and 'long-standing hate'.
Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing,

Expertly civil tongued with civil neighbors
On the high wires of first wireless reports,
Sucking the fake taste, the stony flavours
Of those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts:

'Oh, it's disgraceful, surely, I agree.'
'Where's it going to end? It's getting worse.'
'They're murderers.' 'Internment, understandably...'
The voice of sanity is getting hoarse.

III
'Religion's never mentioned here,' of course.
'You know them by their eyes,' and hold your tongue.
'One side's as bad as the other,' never worse.
Christ, it's near time that some small leak was sprung

In the great dykes the Dutchman made
To dam the dangerous tide that followed Seamus.
Yet for all this art and sedentary trade
I am incapable. The famous

Northern reticence, the tight gag of place
And times: yes, yes. Of the 'wee six' I sing
Where to be saved you only must save face
And whatever you say, you say nothing.

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
Subtle discrimination by addresses
With hardly an exception to the rule

That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod
And Seamus (Call me Sean) was sure-fired Pape.
O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
Of open minds as open as a trap,

Where tongues lie coiled, as under flames lie wicks,
Where half of us, as in a wooden horse
Were cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks,
Besieged within the siege, whispering morse.

IV
This morning from the dewy motorway
I saw the new camp for the internees:
A bomb had left a crater of fresh clay
In the roadside, and over in the trees

Machine-gun posts defined a real stockade.
There was that white mist you get on a low ground
And it was deja-vu, some film made
of Stalag 17, a bad dream with no sound.

Is there a life before death? That's chalked up
In Ballymurphy. Competence with pain,
Coherent mistress, a bite and sup,
We hug our little destiny again.

The tale of the Northern Irish rap group, the Tories – and the sinister censoring of 'anti-British' art

The UK government has blocked funding to Republican band Kneecap. Who knew patriotism was a requirement in the arts?

-Anna Cafolla, ***The Guardian,*** Mon 12 Feb 2024

"Guess who's back on the news, it's your favourite Republican hoods," spits Móglaí Bap on Kneecap's 2019 track, Get Your Brits Out – a roiling, riotous tune, rapped in both English and Irish, in which the trio imagine a drug-fuelled night out with DUP politicians.

"Favourite Republican hoods" is a cheeky yet apt descriptor for how the provocative, satirical Irish-language rap group have been received this year. Kneecap became the surprise stars of Sundance film festival, where their biopic – a semi-fictional origin story in which they play themselves opposite Michael Fassbender – received rave reviews and the festival's audience award last month. The film has been praised for its anarchic, irreverent tone, grappling with issues of identity and the tumultuous social and political landscape of Northern Ireland, post-Good Friday agreement.

But the group isn't likely to feature on Kemi Badenoch's Spotify Wrapped. The British government soured Kneecap's recent success by blocking the group from receiving a £15,000 grant. Their application to the Music Export Growth Scheme – an independent, government-backed arts initiative that offers grants to promote artists overseas – had been approved, before the government stepped in to rescind the funding. A spokesperson for the UK business secretary said they did not want to give taxpayers' money "to people that oppose the United Kingdom itself". Which raises the question: does art have to be pro-union to be recognised and properly funded?

The intervention sets a troubling precedent for creative, political expression. In the era of arcane streaming models, where artists can be paid as little as 13% of the income made from streams, musicians are all the more reliant on independent grants and funding. It seems a flagrant attempt to defang subversive art: Kneecap's themes directly confront the Tory government's failings and the stifling post-Troubles landscape it has manufactured.

I saw the group – made up of Móglaí Bap, Mo Chara and DJ Próvaí – at their Belfast homecoming show in December, at the hallowed Ulster Hall. This was a venue once considered the bastion of Ulster unionism and a pulpit for Ian Paisley. The irony of taking over a stage that was once used to preach hate and division was not lost on them.

"We're working-class first, and there's a bigger enemy out there," Móglaí Bap shouted on stage. "God bless the Good Friday agreement. They want us divided."

Kneecap's brand of Republican politics is honest and alive – and rage-inducing for rightwingers. The group have courted plenty of controversy as a result. They regularly discuss Britain's need to confront its colonial past in interviews, led a "Brits out" chant at a pub Prince William and Kate had previously visited and unveiled a mural of a burning police Land Rover in Belfast. However unfair, Badenoch's decision to starve the group of funding is in some ways unsurprising. For Kneecap, the move is just another expression of the British government's colonial mindset.

When I met them at a later date in Belfast, our conversation was expansive, funny and optimistic. We discussed their hopes for a non-exclusionary, multicultural united Ireland, and their focus on class solidarity as a means to overcome sectarianism in Northern Ireland. We talked about how more people have taken their own lives in the north since the Good Friday agreement than were killed in political violence throughout the Troubles, and how the band see the Irish language not as a weapon – but as a creative mode, a way of survival, a way to converse with friends and live their lives authentically.

Kneecap are part of the "ceasefire generation", born at the tail end of the Troubles and with the Good Friday agreement and its promise of peace ringing in their ears. This is a youth contending with a living, amorphous conversation about its identity and political future. The British government's attempt to stem that is draconian and dangerous. It also seems to directly contravene the Good Friday agreement, which enshrined protections for diverging political aspirations – the tongue-in-cheek Get Your Brits Out and otherwise. The result of this insidious form of censorship? Potentially, the proliferation of state-sanctioned art, which would not only blunt the intentions of the Good Friday agreement, but suppress a generation expressing their full political identity.

It is a charged time in Northern Ireland, with change afoot. Figures for national and faith identities have shifted massively. The last census figures showed that, for the first time, there are more people from a Catholic background in the country than Protestant, while 29% identified as Irish-only. The Irish language was only officially recognised by the British government in 2022, and later this year, the first Irish language primary school will open in east Belfast – a generally loyalist area. Michelle O'Neill has become the first ever Republican first minister.

It is natural that with these changes will come artists who will, in their own way, give voice to these currents – however controversial their art may appear to fusty rightwingers. Kneecap have rallied a legal team together to challenge the decision. Here is hoping they win. Fine art – well-funded art – is worthy whether on a museum podium or spat through a balaclava.

Anna Cafolla is a Belfast-born, London-based writer and editor with a focus on youth culture