

## **Irish and Scottish Separatism in the Wake of Brexit**

## The History of Northern Ireland

## **British Rule on the Emerald Isle**

Ireland and England have had a tense relationship throughout history. Just from before the 1500's, England invaded and occupied portions of Ireland known as the Pale. By the early 16th century AD, England had conquered Ireland. Starting in the late 16th century, British King James I encouraged immigration to Ulster, as well as establishing the Ulster Plantations. These plantations, run by Scottish and English noblemen, were utilized to protestantize Ulster. Through rebellion in the late 1800's, an Irish identity began to form. Autonomy was stripped away from Ireland in the 1800 Act of Union, designating that Ireland be directly governed by the British Parliament. Ulster began the process of





## A Map of Ulster<sup>1</sup>

industrialization, but the legacy of the plantations in the region hindered food production. This famously was one of the factors that led to the Irish Potato Famine in 1845, in which over a quarter of A Map of Ulster<sup>1</sup>  
Pink = Northern Ireland  
Green = the remainder of Ulster

<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster>

the Irish Population died or immigrated to the Americas.<sup>2</sup>

## Home Rule and the Easter Rising

From 1866 to 1914, three Home Rule Acts were passed in the British Parliament, but only the final one was approved on the onset of World War One. In 1916, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) staged a revolt known as the Easter Rising, leading to hundreds of civilian deaths. While the uprising was not popular with the Irish people, the execution of its leaders further galvanized support for Home Rule.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of World War One, Ireland became a fierce standoff between the nationalists



Aftermath of the Easter Rising<sup>4</sup>

and the Unionists. The Unionists wanted to remain a part of Britain, while the Nationalists wanted an Irish Free State. The solution was the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 and the Anglo-Irish treaty, which saw the Protestant-majority counties of Ulster remain with Britain, while the catholic countries join a new Irish state.<sup>5</sup>

## The Troubles

Northern Irish society under British control was deeply intolerant. Discrimination against catholics by Protestant organizations in the area led to a Civil Rights movement starting in the 1960's. Rioting broke out as a result of these protests, and the British military was called in to stop the violence. The Provisional Irish Republican Army, a continuation of the original IRB,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00750778.2011.664806>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Easter-Rising>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.flickr.com/people/47290943@N03>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ireland/Independent-Ireland-to-1959#ref316077>

began a campaign of guerilla warfare in an effort to pressure the United Kingdom into returning Northern Ireland to the rest of Ireland. Through this turmoil, communities became separated through barbed wire and ‘peace walls’, and events such as Bloody Sunday<sup>6</sup> resulted in retaliatory action by the IRA. Mainly, car bombings and other insurgent tactics were heavily utilized.<sup>7</sup> In 1998, The Good Friday Agreement was signed, formally ending the conflict. In the treaty, The United Kingdom agreed to

“...recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union with Great Britain or a sovereign united Ireland.”<sup>9</sup> By the conflict’s end, 3,500 people had died and thousands more were injured.



A ‘Peace Wall’ in Belfast<sup>8</sup>

## The History of Scotland

### Rivalry and Union with England

Since the medieval era, the Scots and the English had always been fierce rivals. Invasions from both sides of the border, as well as a clash of dynasties, produced conflict that marred the land where Hadrian’s wall once stood. Eventually however, as Elizabeth I of England died heirless, James VI became James I of England. The two countries were ruled by one king, but were still separate. When Scotland fell on hard times in 1707, the Act of Union formally

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bloody-Sunday-Northern-Ireland-1972>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Irish-Republican-Army>

<sup>8</sup> <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/northern-ireland/articles/the-story-behind-northern-irelands-peace-walls/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf)

combined the two countries into one, Great Britain. Scotland's integration with England opened up the flow of economic capital and ideas, paving the way for Scottish enlightenment thinkers such as Adam Smith, as well as industrialization.

## **Modern Scotland**

The Industrial Revolution provided Scotland with massive population and economic growth. The Industrial Revolution tripled Scotland's population from 1.5 million in 1700, to 4.5 million by 1900. Scotland's industry exploded, becoming an industrial center and a key economic asset for Great Britain. Scotland was one of the worst regions of the United Kingdom affected by the collapse of the Great Depression, which led to radicalism gaining traction, including the social-democratic Scottish National Party.<sup>10</sup> In the years after World War Two, Scottish nationalism ebbed and flowed, with the discovery of oil in the North Sea prompting the electoral success of the SNP in the 1970's. In 1999, Scotland was granted a parliament, which signified a devolution of certain powers from the British Parliament to the Scottish people.

## **The 2014 Referendum**

In 2007, the SNP won control of the Scottish Parliament, and successfully pressured British Prime Minister David Cameron to sign an agreement to hold a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014. Both sides campaigned vigorously, with one of the main issues being if Scotland would remain in the European Union if it became independent. Many senior members



Pro and Anti-independence rallies meet, 2014

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Scottish-National-Party>

of the British government, as well as of the European Union, confirmed that Scotland would have to reapply to join the EU if the referendum succeeded.<sup>11</sup> Scotland wished to remain as a part of Europe, as its economic policies benefited Scottish industry and oil production. In the referendum, about 3.6 million Scots, constituting 85 percent of registered voters, voted to keep Scotland in the United Kingdom by a margin of 55 percent to 45 percent.

## Brexit

### **The United Kingdom and the European Union**

The European Economic Community (also called the common market), the precursor to the European Union, was originally only made up of six continental European member states.<sup>12</sup> The United Kingdom became a member of the European Economic Community in 1973 after repeated attempts over the prior decade to join were rejected by France.<sup>13</sup> The Labour Party was skeptical of British membership, but ultimately voted to join. A referendum was held in 1975 on Britain's status in the EEC, which showed resounding support for European integration. Over time, Eurosceptic rhetoric within the Conservative Party led to a new party being founded, known as the United Kingdom Independence Party. UKIP drained votes from the Conservative Party, and so to appeal to Eurosceptic voters, Prime Minister David Cameron promised a referendum on EU membership to be held in 2016.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Referendum and the Brexit Process**

The referendum was set to be held in June of 2016, and Cameron made it clear that if the UK voted to leave the EU, Article 50 (The process by which a country leaves the European

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/sep/12/barroso-doubt-scotland-eu-membership>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/European-Union/Creation-of-the-European-Economic-Community>

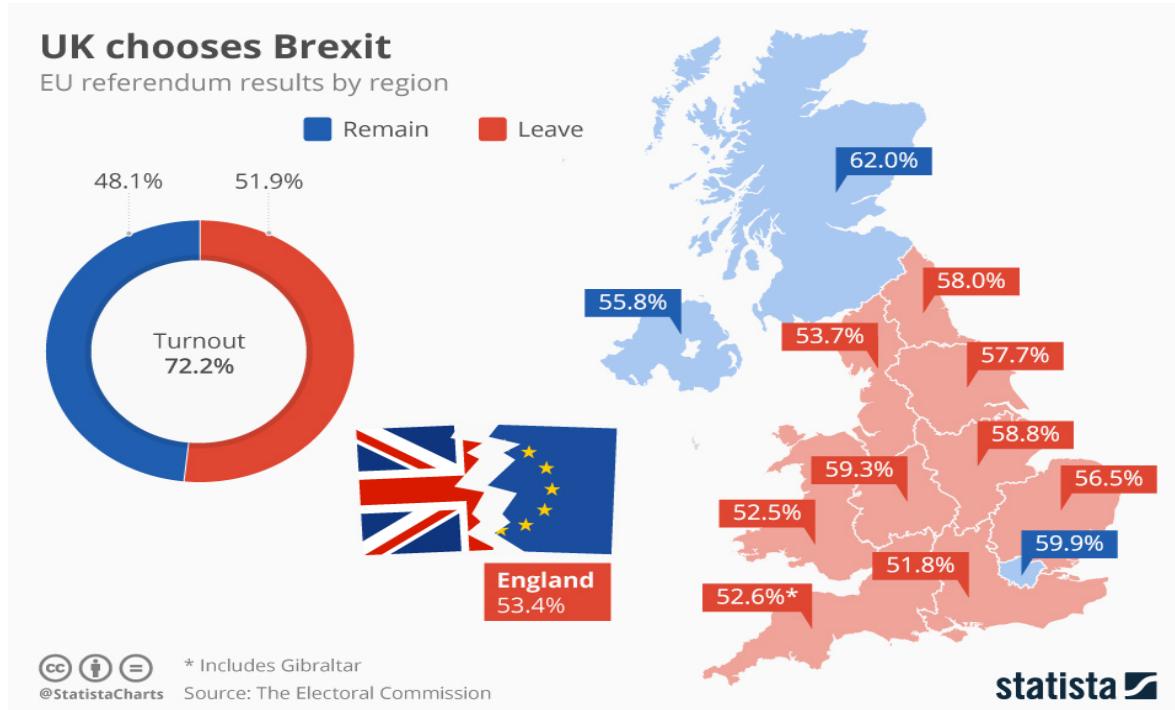
<sup>13</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/27/newsid\\_4187000/4187714.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/27/newsid_4187000/4187714.stm)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21148282>

Union) would be triggered automatically. The two sides of the referendum were “Remain” and “Leave,” constituting those who wanted to remain in or leave the European Union. Both sides campaigned vigorously, with UKIP’s Nigel Farage famously campaigning in a “battle bus,” plastered with the promise that the UK’s membership dues to the EU would be redirected to the National Health Service.<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup> The following diagram shows the results of the referendum:<sup>17</sup>



Nigel Farage, former head of UKIP<sup>18</sup>



<sup>15</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2016/05/20/nigel-farage-launches-ukip-s-brexit-battle-bus>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eu-referendum-result-nigel-farage-nhs-pledge-disowns-350-million-pounds-a7099906.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.statista.com/chart/5100/uk-chooses-brexit/>

<sup>18</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigel\\_Farage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigel_Farage)

As can be seen, the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU by a margin of around 52% to 48%, with remain votes spread between London, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, and leave votes concentrated in the rest of England and Wales.

Directly after the results of the referendum were revealed, instead of triggering Article 50, Prime Minister David Cameron resigned. Shortly after, Theresa May became Prime Minister. May made it her mission to solve Brexit, while at the same time preventing a “No Deal Brexit.” A “No Deal Brexit” would mean that the UK leaves the European Union without any negotiations in regard to trade, immigration, and further cooperation.

May called a snap election in 2017 in order to strengthen her government’s support in negotiating with the EU, which backfired, forcing her to form a coalition with the Democratic Unionist Party to maintain her majority. After many months of fierce negotiations, May presented her deal to Parliament. The deal, including what is known as the “Irish Backstop,” and billions of pounds in a financial settlement to be paid by the UK, was rejected by Parliament (See **“Northern Ireland and the European Union”** section for an explanation of the backstop).<sup>19</sup> The agreement was presented twice more, and defeated both times, before the UK requested for an extension from the EU. A second extension was granted in April of that year. Prime Minister May resigned, and after a contentious leadership election, Boris Johnson became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.



Theresa May walking on stage at a Conservative Conference to talk about the future of Brexit<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jan/28/brexiter-mps-back-away-from-anti-backstop-brexit-amendment>

<sup>20</sup> TIME Youtube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKWoa69arBM>

Another extension was granted in October of 2019, and in December, Boris Johnson won a convincing majority in a snap election called in order to “Get Brexit Done.”<sup>21</sup> Johnson’s Brexit plan was to leave the European Union, while providing a one year transitional period where EU institutions will remain in place, but may be removed over the course of negotiations. On 31 January 2020 the United Kingdom left the European Union.

### **Scotland and the European Union**

As seen by the results of the Brexit referendum, Scotland was opposed to leaving the European Union. The Scottish National Party argues that Scots are leaving the EU against their will, and that an independent Scotland would rejoin the bloc. This has once again reignited separatist tendencies in Scotland, with polling suggesting 51% of Scots supporting a second Scottish Independence Referendum.<sup>23</sup> This has been echoed by Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the SNP, as she has demanded a referendum on Scottish independence in 2020.<sup>24</sup> It is up to the delegates of this committee to decide whether Scotland should be allowed a second referendum, and if so, what an independent Scotland’s relationship would be with the United Kingdom.



Scottish pro-independence rally, 2020<sup>22</sup>

### **Northern Ireland and the European Union**

As the results of the Brexit Referendum tell, a majority of people in Northern Ireland support remaining in the European Union. The United Kingdom’s membership in the EU is an

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-2019-50765773>

<sup>22</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/24/a-new-scottish-independence-vote-seems-all-but-inevitable/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.drg.global/wp-content/uploads/Scottish-Poll-tables-for-publication-190820.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-right-choose-putting-scotlands-future-scotlands-hands/>

issue for Northern Ireland because of its land border with the Republic of Ireland. The Good



Boris Johnson (left) with German Chancellor Angela Merkel (right) also keeping Northern Ireland in some parts of the EU in terms of rules and regulations.<sup>25</sup> That was rejected by Parliament, and ultimately resulted in May's resignation.

The solution proposed by Boris Johnson's government creates a customs check moving goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland and vice-versa, effectively keeping Northern Ireland in the EU customs union while creating a border within the UK's single market.<sup>26</sup> The Northern Irish Parliament will be allowed to opt out of this if they so choose. This was included in the Final Brexit deal, which took effect on January 1st, 2021. Some worry that a lack of transparency at the border could lead to a reignition of The Troubles, and could lead to hundreds of deaths. Recent polling has indicated that the Northern

Friday Agreement mandates “**a normalisation of security arrangements and practices**” on the border of Ireland and the United Kingdom, something which a No Deal Brexit could jeopardize. The plan proposed by May included a backstop at the Irish Border, which would make sure the status quo is kept (no barriers or security measures), while



Johnson's Northern Ireland Plan<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup><https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/brexit-referendum/what-irish-backstop-why-has-it-complicated-brexit-n961161>

<sup>26</sup><https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-51098457>

<sup>27</sup><https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/brexit-northern-ireland-border-european-union-1.5445825>

Irish population is split on whether to join Ireland, with 45% supporting it and 47% against unification (8% were undecided).<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that if a referendum is authorized, and if Northern Ireland chooses to rejoin Ireland, those results must be respected by the United Kingdom, as per the Good Friday Agreement. It is up to the delegates of this committee to decide what to do about the customs situation in Northern Ireland, as well as if a referendum should be held about reunification with Ireland.

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### Questions to consider:

1. How does your Member of Parliament want to deal with the fallout of Brexit? How does their party?
2. How does your Member of Parliament feel about an independent Scotland?
3. How does your Member of Parliament feel about a unified Ireland?
4. How will your constituency be affected by an independent Scotland/Unified Ireland?
5. Does your Member of Parliament want a second Scottish referendum?
6. Does your member of Parliament support an Irish reunification referendum?

### Helpful Links:

Britannica Article on Scotland: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Scotland>

Britannica Article on Northern Ireland: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Northern-Ireland>

The Good Friday Agreement PDF:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf)

The Good Friday Agreement in the Age of Brexit:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/good-friday-agreement-20th-anniversary/557393/>

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<sup>28</sup><https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/a-majority-favour-a-border-poll-on-the-island-of-ireland-in-the-next-10-years>

Britannica section on Brexit and May's Prime Ministership:

<https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/The-Brexit-referendum>

BBC Guide to Brexit: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-46318565>