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Peace After Brexit: The Case of Northern Ireland

MA Thesis

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Abstract

Since its occurrence in January 2020, Brexit has garnered much academic interest and its consequences in domestic and international politics have become subject to analysis. The constituent parts of the United Kingdom are reacting to Brexit in distinct ways and tensions are particularly pronounced in Northern Ireland as it is a nation within the United Kingdom, but shares an island with the Republic of Ireland. The objective of this thesis is to analyse Brexit as a critical juncture in the context of Northern Ireland's peace process and its maintenance. The main research question is: how has Brexit impacted the fragile peace in Northern Ireland? The main hypothesis of this thesis is that the British exit from the EU destabilises peace in Northern Ireland, as the Good Friday Agreement has been shelved in favour of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol. Using critical juncture theory and process tracing methodology, provides a systematic framework from antecedent conditions to cleavages to the critical juncture to its legacy. The antecedent conditions focus on The Troubles (1968-1998) and the legacy of the critical juncture (Brexit) ends with May 2022 Stormont elections. The Good Friday Agreement and the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, from the Withdrawal Agreement, provide primary source evidence for peacekeeping in Northern Ireland and secondary sources expose the actual steps taken to subdue tensions. Both the Good Friday Agreement and the Protocol emphasise cooperation between Belfast, London, and Dublin. However, much of the cooperation used to be mediated by the European Union. A dissonance is apparent between the primary sources and the reality, thus, challenges from 1998 remain in 2022.

Keywords: Northern Ireland, Brexit, Critical Juncture, Good Friday Agreement, Protocol

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List of Abbreviations

DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ECHR	European Convention of Human Rights
EU	European Union
GFA	Good Friday Agreement
IRA	(Provisional) Irish Republican Army
PM	Prime Minister
TD	Teachta Dála (Member of Irish parliament)
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

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1. Introduction

The island of Ireland has been an epicentre of tumultuous tensions for the best part of the last century. Tensions have been high due to the multiplicity of identities in the region and the sectarian divides that continue to prevail since the partition of the island of Ireland in the 1920s. The Republic of Ireland declared its independence from the United Kingdom (UK) in 1919, however, the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 secured United Kingdom a notable portion of the island through partition. The divide can be generally reduced to religious and political affiliations. Protestants, with a strong affinity for union with Great Britain, are politically active under the unionist banner. Catholics, with a strong affinity with the Republic of Ireland, are politically active under the republican banner. Despite the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland, there was and still is a significant Catholic minority in the region.

Tensions between the two groups continued to increase in the period after the partition, most notably in the 1970s when direct sectarian terror attacks became commonplace in Northern Ireland. The period from 1968 to 1998 is commonly referred to as the Troubles, which coincided with the global rise of civil rights activism. This was not a coincidence as the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland increasingly called for equal treatment with their Protestant peers, especially with regards to political office, housing, and employment. Furthermore, due to Protestant, unionist monopoly over rule of law and policing in the region, Catholics did not feel secure and separate paramilitary groups began to form in order to provide security. The most prominent of the Catholic paramilitary groups was the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), which opposed the wholly Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary. In response to Catholic, republican uprisings, Protestant paramilitary groups like the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) formed. The different groupings staged targeted attacks against members of the other groups and through retaliations maintained a constant cycle of attacks and counter-attacks in Northern Ireland for over three decades. These attacks were not exclusively limited to Northern Ireland but occurred also in the different constituent parts of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

A truce between the paramilitaries and greater equality in Northern Irish political leadership was brought about by the Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement of 1998. The document, signed by representatives of Northern Ireland, the UK, and the Republic of Ireland, managed to establish common ground between the two opposing groups in Northern Ireland,

who, up until then, had not been able to agree on anything nor had had the opportunity to converse on equal footing. The agreement not only introduced consociational government to secure power-sharing, but also enabled easy movement of goods, people, and businesses across the islands of the UK and Ireland thanks to their common membership in the EU. Thus, EU membership and its policies guaranteed the peace in Northern Ireland to a certain degree.

In a referendum held in June 2016, the UK public voted on whether to leave or stay in the European Union. Whilst the majority of English and Welsh voters voted in favour of leaving the EU, the same cannot be said for Scotland and Northern Ireland, where the majority chose to stay in the EU. Therefore, the overall decision to leave the UK was made based on votes from only two of the four constituent parts of the UK. Not only did this result further catapult the Scottish independence movement, but the question of Northern Ireland with all its historical complexities has now become under scrutiny once again. The security provided by the membership of both Ireland and the UK in the EU has been rejected and Northern Ireland is faced with the need to address the societal divisions within its borders head-on.

The objective of this thesis is to analyse Brexit as a critical juncture in the context of Northern Ireland's peace process and its maintenance. The main research question is: how has Brexit impacted the fragile peace in Northern Ireland? The main hypothesis of this thesis is that the British exit from the EU destabilises peace in Northern Ireland, as the Good Friday Agreement has been shelved in favour of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol. This thesis aims to investigate the implications of Brexit on Northern Ireland as it remains a part of the UK, but shares an external border with the Republic of Ireland. The existing peace mechanisms, most prominently the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), will be analysed and revisited within the context Brexit – the critical juncture in Northern Ireland. The thesis will make use of critical juncture theory and will make sense of the process from pre- to post-Brexit through process tracing. The thesis will focus, not only on the critical juncture itself, that is Brexit, but also on the conditions and the underlying cleavages, which precipitated the current dilemma in the regional context of Northern Ireland. Research has shown that the period since the adoption of the Good Friday Agreement until the early 2000s, despite ushering in a consociational system in Northern Ireland, was characterised by the persistence of a strong cleavage in Northern Irish society (Tilley, Evans, and Mitchell 2008, 701). Thus, a necessary step in the critical juncture framework, which is an apparent societal cleavage, is present in the case of Northern Ireland.

The topic is relevant as Brexit has taken effect relatively recently and the conclusions of this thesis have the potential to contribute to maintaining peaceful relations in Northern Ireland. Whilst the Brexit referendum took place in 2016, the actual withdrawal of the UK from the EU occurred in January 2020. Hence, the results of Brexit have now become more tangible in the UK and the difficulties related to the status of Northern Ireland have become more apparent. Northern Ireland Assembly (Stormont) elections of 2022 point to historical changes in Northern Irish society as the republican Sinn Féin acquired the majority of votes for the first time in history, following an increase of republican support already visible during the previous 2017 election. The idea of unionist majority in Northern Ireland is countered by the success of, not only Sinn Féin, but also the cross-community Alliance Party. Understanding the problem areas in the context of Northern Ireland can help sustain peace in the region and usher in reconciliation.

The case is important as Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU during the Brexit referendum and is currently the epicentre of talks between EU and UK. Thus, understanding the impact of Brexit is vital to the current developments in Northern Ireland especially as it pertains to the historical agreements between the different parties involved, whether domestic (unionists and republicans) or transnational (Republic of Ireland (and EU by proxy) and the United Kingdom). The future of Northern Ireland is existential to both unionists, who aim to retain and strengthen Northern Ireland's union with the UK, and republicans, who aspire towards a united Ireland. Additionally, fears of a return to civil unrest not unlike the Troubles fuels partisanship and mutual distrust. Brexit revealed that ideas like sovereignty and territorial integrity are more complex than originally thought as devolved government in the UK is still misunderstood and a land border between Ireland and Northern Ireland has not been established, despite it being an external EU border. Issues concerning borders have risen to the forefront in the midst of the UK and the EU negotiations concerning withdrawal, which include a section on Ireland and Northern Ireland relations after Brexit. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland establishes a de facto border in the Irish Sea and assigns certain EU regulations on Northern Ireland, but not on the rest of the UK. The controversies on different sides for upkeeping, abandoning, and questioning the Good Friday Agreement and the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland enhance the existing cleavages and are the by-product of Brexit. Analysing the specific problems arising in the era immediately following Brexit pinpoints areas to be tackled to foster reconciliation as opposed to conflict..

In this thesis, the analysis of the impact of Brexit on the Northern Ireland peace process is chronological and has a three-fold focus on the following: a) the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) as the basis of peace in Northern Ireland today b) the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, intended to keep the land border between UK and EU open post-Brexit, along with the difficulties with its implementation, and c) the implications Brexit has on peace in Northern Ireland. The British exit from the EU destabilises peace in Northern Ireland as the Good Friday agreement, which has historically secured regional stability and relied on the EU membership of both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, is becoming increasingly irrelevant and objectionable by both sides of the spectrum. Its failings in fostering reconciliation and establishing institutions are now more salient than ever. Here, the fragile peace is called to question due to post-Brexit disagreements between the parties to peace and conflict in Northern Ireland

The thesis will use critical juncture theory and its framework to comprehend, how Brexit ruptured the existing path of Northern Ireland and what will be its legacy in the region as Brexit has taken effect and its consequences unfold. The first chapter introduces historical institutionalism as a broader theory, before focusing on critical junctures as central to historical institutionalists accounts of change. The second chapter introduces the methodology for the analysis section of the thesis by justifying the choice for a single case study process tracing method and describes the data that will be used. The third chapter will provide a brief historical context for Northern Ireland with a focus on the period since The Troubles, consolidation through GFA, and Brexit to illustrate, respectively, the antecedent conditions, the societal cleavage, and the juncture necessary for critical juncture analysis. The fourth chapter will analyse how peace in Northern Ireland is secured, mainly through the GFA and soon likely by the Protocol. The chapter will discuss the legacy formation stage of the critical juncture theory and distinguish the mechanisms of production and reproduction in Northern Ireland after Brexit. The fourth chapter will be followed by the conclusion which will summarise the results and discuss the implications of this research in light of the objectives set out in the introduction.

2. Historical Institutionalism and Critical Juncture Theory

The general development of societies is incremental and consistent, yet, every once in a while a sudden event, whether environmental, political, or other, comes along to significantly change the course of development. Recent history has been marked by notable revolutions, which are seen as altering the path from a long-lasting state of affairs to a substantially different one. The American Revolution altered the relations between an imperial power and a colony to relations between two independent states. The French Revolution is heralded for abolishing a monarchical system in favour of a democracy. The Haitian Revolution signified freedom from slavery and revolt against oppressive colonial power. All of these revolutions resulted from deeply ingrained and normalised conditions, such as centuries of oppression under colonial rule, slavery, or monarchy, which eventually led to a breaking point. Thus, societal changes and their underlying causes have been a long-standing topic of discussion in academic debates (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Collier and Collier 1991; Hogan 2019).

The nineteenth and twentieth century brought about focus on institutions as agents of change in society. Institutions can be understood as rules, whether formal, like constitutional codes, or informal, like perpetuated norms. Early institutionalism focused on formal organisations and used institutions to compare systems between states (Kaufmann, Hooghiemstra, and Feeney 2018). A notable institutionalist author was the economist and sociologist Max Weber (1978, 956) known for his bureaucratic theory, which emphasised the rigid structure of organisations and their impersonal nature. In the mid-twentieth century, the theory was, however, interrupted by a rise in behaviouralism in political and social sciences (Immergut 1998, 17). Thus, interest arose in the intricacies of institutions and specifically their relations to people. Institutions were no longer viewed as entities of their own, but as made up and led by individuals who could be behaviourally understood in ways that abstract organisations could not. Yet, behaviour was not the be-all and end-all of the new institutionalism as human behaviour can only be understood within the context of institutions (Immergut 1998, 6).

New institutionalism has traditionally been divided into three different branches ranging from most culturally-oriented to the most calculus-oriented. The shared core of institutionalist analysis is the question: how do institutions affect the behaviour of individuals (Hall and Taylor 1996, 939). Sociological institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and

rational choice institutionalism have three other shared characteristics according to Immergut. Firstly, institutionalist theory allows for analysing the discrepancy between professed interests by individuals and whether these are reflected in their political behaviour or not (Immergut 1998, 7). Secondly, new institutionalism does not claim that the total of individual preferences justifies their generalisation to the collective level of preferences, since preferences are not clear-cut, but complex. Thirdly, new institutionalists believe that political behaviour and collective decision-making is bound by the procedural process of institutions, thus, there is a bias in institutions towards a certain normative goal, which a scholar has to distinguish the implications and determine whether the outcome is just relative to the process (Immergut 1998, 8).

While rational choice theory provides a rigid and quantitative institutionalist approach, then, on the other end of the spectrum, sociological institutionalism provides a behaviourally-guided and inductive approach. Both theories were popularised in the late 1970s and 1980s (Hall and Taylor 1996, 943-946). Rational choice institutionalism views decision-makers as rational actors constricted by fixed preferences due to interdependence and institutions as platforms for furthering utilitarian goals (Immergut 1998, 12). The theory makes use of economic tools of analysis like game theory, collective action dilemmas, and the principal-agent model to comprehend decision making (Riker 1980). In contrast, sociological institutionalists recognise that decision-makers are limited by their cultural surroundings, but culture itself is being continually constructed. They view institutions as arbiters of behavioural and cultural norms rather than purely utilitarian purposes, which have formative power in identity creation (Hall and Taylor 1996, 946). Sociological institutionalists seek to understand why institutions opt for certain norms and symbols, but not others, and how these differ often depending on different types of institutions and regions (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Thus, rational choice institutionalism represents an economic perspective to institutionalism and sociological institutionalism represents a sociological, behavioural perspective.

2.1. Historical Institutionalism

Whilst sociological institutionalism and rational choice theories are deeply embedded in their respective disciplines, historical institutionalism is a fusion of a number of disciplines. It emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in response to theories of politics and functionalism in political science at the time (Hall and Taylor 1996, 937). Historical institutionalists believe in

the perseverance of certain institutions and how they prevail over time as they become increasingly integrated in society, thus, certain outcomes and decisions are more likely than others, but not purely from a utilitarian standpoint. It also provides a useful framework for understanding policy continuity.

Historical institutionalism suggests that institutions have the tendency to foster stability and continuity. A common explanation for continuity is the idea of policy lock-in, which takes into account all that has been invested in a policy and departing from it would incur major costs (Hogan 2019, 171). Additionally, the stickiness of institutions, the tendency of institutions to reinforce themselves as time goes on, secures a specific type of continuity based on contextual factors like the region in which they are based or their area of specialisation. Thus, historical institutionalism hinges upon previous steps taken by certain institutions as they progress as they form a specific path from which it is difficult and expensive to stray from.

Historical institutionalism emphasises the power of institutions, once established, to prevail over long periods of time due to the stability they represent and bring about. Path dependency is used to explain the long-lasting nature of institutions to secure and reproduce the stability. Yet, there are periods of institutional flux, sometimes referred to as critical junctures, that can provide opportunities for a changed trajectory and a change in the path dependent institutions (Capoccia and Keleman 2007, 341). Historical institutionalism derives its understanding from classical institutionalism with regards to organisational theory. However, where organisational theory understands decision-makers as being bound by rules and procedures, then historical institutionalism understands decisions as being based on power and interests of individuals (Immergut 1998, 16). Thus, path breaking decisions cannot always be explained by rational choice or sociological behaviour, but by understanding preferences.

In times of change prompted by shocks, mechanisms that reinforce path dependency are loosened and institutions can be reshaped (Stark 2018, 24). However, exclusive focus on exogenous shocks can diminish the visibility of endogenous actorhood. In this way, articulating the role of endogenous factors in fostering change in otherwise path dependent timelines creates a more complex and nuanced understanding of critical junctures (Hogan 2019, 185). Endogenous shocks can be regarded as more common perhaps, for instance in the form of political opposition and dichotomies of partisanship, but can also result in path-breaking critical junctures. Whereas there is space in historical institutionalism for changes and newly formed

paradigms, new institutionalism as a grand theory typically emphasises constant incremental change (Stark 2018, 24). Thus, historical institutionalism allows to discuss and examine events, which differ from the baseline of what has been done and how it has been done.

Historical institutionalism's focus on temporal and historical order impacted the conceptualisation of critical junctures. March and Olsen's (1984, 743) work ushered in a wave of operationalising tools to aid in political science and noted both historical and temporal factors as essential for a streamlined and repeatable research. Capoccia and Keleman (2007, 362) have made explicit the timeframe, which can be considered as critical as to justify the label of a critical juncture. Namely that the time of the critical juncture should be shorter when compared to the time of path dependency. For them, critical junctures are not only temporally shorter than the periods of path dependency, which preceded them, but also enable key actors to have considerable agency in the outcome of said juncture. In doing so, the authors attribute two characteristics to measuring criticalness. The first is the "probability jump", which is based on the likelihood of a substantial increase in key actor agency during the critical juncture in comparison to the period preceding and succeeding it. The second factor is "temporal leverage" is the comparison of the duration of the critical juncture relative to the path dependency. The hypothesis they suggest is that "the briefer a critical juncture is relative to the duration of the path-dependent causal process that it instigates, the more critical it is" (Capoccia and Keleman 2007, 360-361).

The dimension of time is central to historical institutionalism and the discussion on path dependencies and critical junctures. Time was not taken to account enough in the early critical juncture literature, where multiple decades could be marked as critical junctures. This was not necessarily a bad thing and allowed for debate around constant and historical causes, which distinguished between changes based on a progressive model of change and those based on past changes that are reimagined in future changes respectively (Stinchcombe 1968, 103). At the same time, the contributions of Collier and Collier (1991, 745) in comparing the economies of a number of Latin American countries illustrate well the variation of reactions and developments in individual countries in response to the same external shock to alter relations between labourers and the state. However, the different regions produced extremely different results as the consequences of the juncture became apparent within a year in some places and over multiple decades in others. The laxness of the timeframe, which is considered for critical junctures has been the core of critique (Hogan 2019; Peinert 2018). This is understandable as

time-sensitive or critical events, which last for multiple decades do seem paradoxical. Hence, critical juncture research has undergone self-reflexivity and refinement, especially with regard to establishing the temporal bounds by which an event is considered a critical juncture.

If crises call into question the path that a nation has pursued, then critical junctures are specific events or choices that can have revolutionary effects on existing path dependency. The following section will set out the evolution of critical juncture theory and how it has become refined especially with regards to establishing temporal bounds for a juncture. This is due to the fact that often critical juncture as a concept is used too liberally and assigns the title to events that are incremental rather than spontaneous, quick junctures. The basis for analysing watershed moments in history was set out by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan's (1967, 47) notable study on party systems and voter alignments, wherein the concept of "critical junctures" was first mentioned. In their view, a critical juncture was not necessarily bound by its duration, thus, allowing critical junctures to encapsulate both brief as well as long-term developments. The early and more recent critical juncture theory literature is different in that way as early works broader in their interpretation of a critical juncture, whilst newer works emphasise the criticalness above all.

2.2. Importance of Temporality and Key Figures

Agency and the increased role of key actors in times of critical juncture is a common pattern in historical institutionalist literature. Collier and Collier (1991, 28) even found some roots of key actor agency in Max Weber's work when analysing continuity and disjuncture. In some cases, charismatic leaders have a greater ability to alter and transform social relations purely due to their persona and the access available to an individual in such a position. This is not always the case as leaders are also able to gain special privileges during times of crisis, which also facilitate unexpected decision-making. It is precisely their ability to take charge in key decision-making, which is only amplified in times of crisis. As mentioned briefly before, crisis triggering the need for a response provides the arena for key actors to take charge in key decisions which can have the ability to change the existing status quo. Of course, it is not necessary that a key decision alters the path as it can also, just as likely if not more, upkeep it as path dependency can be robust.

The increase in visibility of political personalities plays a big role in the agency of actors as well. Samuel Bennett (2019, 456) has attributed this rise to the growing trend of Americanisation that is mainly spread through communication technology, media, and the Internet. Following the celebrity-like status of American leaders, especially presidents, the trend of charismatic leaders, who can be marketed with the help of public relations personnel and spin doctors, are appearing also in Europe. Additionally, cult of personality around leadership is not anything new as it developed around dictators like Joseph Stalin in the USSR and around Mao Zedong in China during the twentieth century. The increase in visibility of leaders can of course be attributed in the growth of technology too. When the previous century incorporated media, like newspapers and gradually radio and television, then the current era has further saturated the market with the Internet and social media, specifically.

The interests of an actor have significant impact on the decisions that are made during critical periods, where barriers for monumental change have been lowered. In the advent of a critical juncture, which truly diverts path dependency, the decision-maker's interests and connections can explain the outcome. Hogan links discourse with structure and agency to explain how the words of key actors and the narrative they present can re-structure what already exists and have the power to do so (Hogan 2019, 176). To add to the second part, appeals to democracy and free speech, for example, can legitimise the actor and give way to agency, which perhaps was not present to them before. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, this is relevant in the case of Brexit as key figures were highly advertised in media. Bennett has likened this highly sophisticated political visibility to marketing-derived tactics used increasingly by political actors to drive up support (Bennett 2019, 456).

Alternative decisions that could have been undertaken by decision-makers have to be considered in order to understand the multiplicity of choice. The consideration of different outcomes and options for decision making lend to the core principle of modern critical juncture literature, which is to reflect on the possibility of no critical juncture at all (Capoccia and Keleman 2007, 369). In the case of Brexit, for example, the alternative explanation would have been to have the United Kingdom stay in the EU. However, a simple binary alternative might not present in all cases and even multiple alternative explanations could be imagined. Path dependency depends on prior choices and decisions combined with the metaphorical doors those choices and decisions opened or closed, thus, each choice in itself can possess an

alternative. Determining the temporal framework, the key actors, and understanding cleavage formation in society are crucial components to critical juncture theory.

2.3. Critical Juncture Framework

Critical junctures initiate new path-dependent processes as once a change has happened it is difficult to reverse. The difficulty lies in the self-reinforcing aspect of critical junctures as they become increasingly established through formal and informal institutions (Zappettini and Krzyżanowski 2019, 382). Nevertheless, junctures do not erase context, like the territory on which they occur or the historical conditions of the region. These factors slightly constrain the revolutionary power of the juncture. Thus, a critical juncture is by no means a one-size fits all categorization. It must, however, include three components. Firstly, there must be a genuine claim for significant, tangible change in each case (Collier and Collier 1991, 28). A change that visibly alters the path thus far. Secondly, although change may look different in different contexts and regions, its essential nature of altering what was before remains the same (Collier and Collier 1991, 28). For instance, the critical juncture such as a pandemic might be common in many contexts, yet, the effects and the legacy of it may differ depending on the region, a country's GDP, its public welfare sector, and many other societal markers. Thirdly, if the consequences of, what is deemed a critical juncture, are significantly divergent from the existing path, then the label is appropriate to use (Collier and Collier 1991, 28). This means that out of possible choices and decisions that could have been made at a point of time, such a decision was made, which parted from existing ways to establish a new paradigm itself. As path dependency hinges on the idea that prior choices define the path a society is on and limit diverting from it. Yet, crucial moments in time do alter this in the form of critical junctures. If the consequences are not significantly divergent from the existing path, then the label of a critical juncture is not justified (Collier and Collier 1991, 29). The extent to which a juncture differs from the path is difficult to determine, but will be discussed later on.

Critical junctures typically arise in the midst of or as a conclusion to societal cleavages. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) discuss societal cleavages extensively in their book, "Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives". They distinguish two primary dimensions of cleavages, which are territorial or cultural and functional. Territorial or cultural cleavages involve explicitly local oppositions, like those between the political elite and peripheral regions (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 10). The functional dimension of a cleavage arises from some initial consolidation of territory and culture, which can present themselves in terms

of a specific ideology or interests (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 13). The authors clarify that cleavages rarely fit neatly under one or the other grouping, but are a combination of both. Their study of voter alignments compares tendencies depending on regional specificity, which highlight why certain people-groups, even within nation-states, vote in a certain way. The historical aspect of the formation of cleavages is therefore vital as it especially takes time to establish functional dimensions of cleavages and is case sensitive and specific.

Categorising events as critical junctures must meet certain criteria in order to not lose their critical nature. John Hogan (2019) has made the distinction explicit between seemingly significant events and critical junctures. According to Hogan (2019, 173), a critical juncture is a situation “prior to which a range of possibilities exist, but after which these possibilities will have mostly vanished”. A critical juncture clearly limits the future options due to the shift in the paradigm, or departure from path dependency. This departure is rooted in the historical antecedent conditions, which have shaped the existing conditions and created a dependency on the status quo to prevail against alternative routes. A critical juncture is critical in the sense that it has the power to divert robust path dependency, whilst simultaneously limiting options for the future, if the juncture were to prevail. Typically, strong and established institutions adapt well to long-term change, however, critical changes are harder to respond to (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 119).

The critical juncture framework put forward by David Collier and Ruth B. Collier (1991), following Lipset and Rokkan, provides a systematic and chronological step-by-step guide to study critical junctures. The framework, shown below in Figure 1, begins with antecedent conditions, which is the baseline from which a critical juncture and its legacy stem (Collier and Collier 1991, 29). These are the specific conditions of the region or regions under study, that reflect the region’s history and the implications of its history in its development. The antecedent conditions outline the norms and the status quo, which has prevailed in the region and would define its next steps of development. In critical juncture theory, antecedent conditions are presented as a baseline against which to determine the presence of a critical juncture and consequences of it (Collier and Collier 1991, 30). Change cannot be explained without the examination of historical path dependence, or antecedent conditions, which led up to that. Not only are critical junctures reactions to existing path dependencies, but they can bring about substantial change by initiating a new path dependency. The arrow pointing from

antecedent conditions directly to legacy suggest the possibility of a rival hypothesis signifying continuity over significant change.

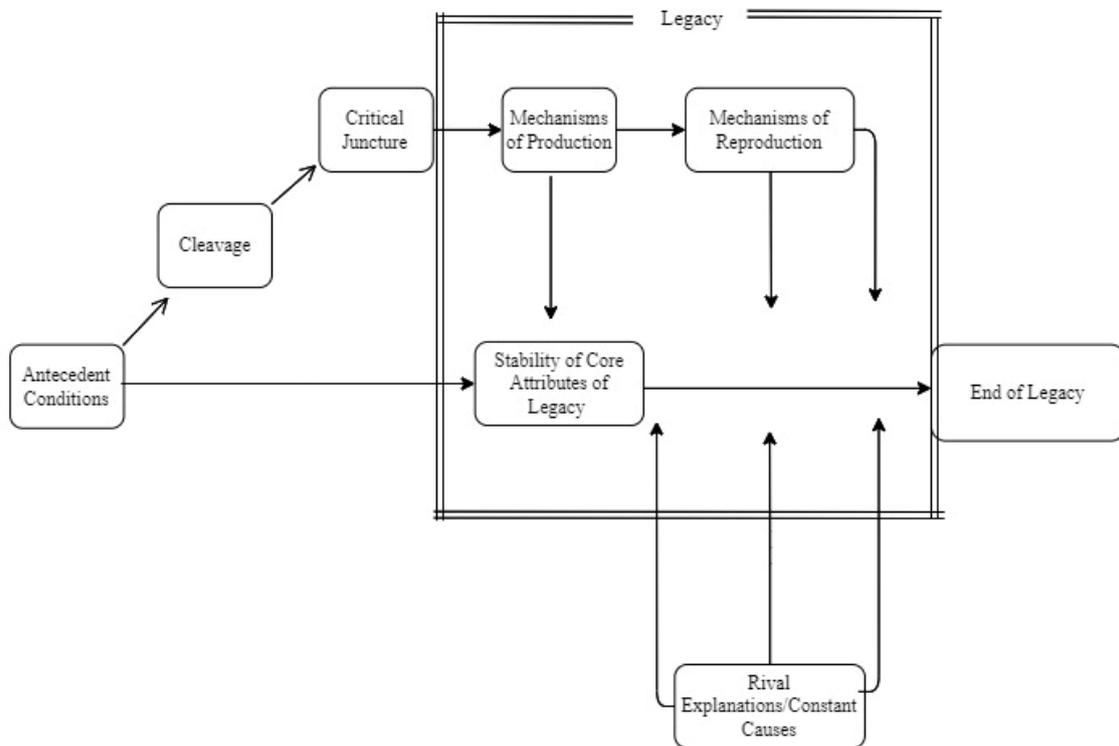


Figure 1. Critical Juncture Theory Diagram

Source: Collier and Collier (1991, 30)

Critical juncture theory explains change by recognising that antecedent conditions may lead to cleavages. A cleavage can, in fact, be either a cleavage or a crisis. Collier and Collier (1991, 30) distinguish between the two terms to take into account their longevity. A crisis occurs within strict bounds of time, where there is an evident starting and end point. A cleavage is more continual as it may fluctuate in significance over time. On the one hand, a cleavage can be, at times, almost invisibly present in the background of society. On the other hand, it can become exasperated at a particular point in time and require immediate addressing. The culmination of a cleavage can also be a crisis or even a critical juncture (Collier and Collier 1991, 30). Due to the chaos of a crisis or an exasperated cleavage, certain restrictions have been lessened to provide for more erratic and spontaneous, path-altering decisions to be made. It is

the following stage of legacy, which truly determines the stickiness, or strength, of a critical juncture.

The legacy period is the aftermath of a critical juncture, if it has indeed occurred, and would shape the beginning stages of a new path upon which to become dependent on. The legacy, which follows a critical juncture consists of mechanisms of production, mechanisms of reproduction, and the stability of central elements of the legacy. Mechanisms of production suggest that legacy is not evident immediately after the occurrence of a critical juncture, but is apparent in the combination of intervening steps, that fortify it. Mechanisms of reproduction emphasise, that stability may not be the automatic result of a critical juncture. Only when the critical juncture is adopted as the norm by existing structures, like institutions, can it become stable (Collier and Collier 1991, 31). However, stability can be achieved quickly through just mechanisms of production when the critical juncture reverts back to a direct path from antecedent conditions. Thus, a critical juncture may actually occur, but its legacy might not hold.

Notably, Collier and Collier include a parallel pathway to the critical juncture framework. This path eliminates all necessity of a critical juncture and sees consequences to be derived from the existing antecedent conditions. In other words, *Figure 1* provides for rival explanations to that of a critical juncture. The legacy period is what really determines whether a case truly contained a critical, path-altering juncture or not. By comparing the similarities and differences between the antecedent conditions and the legacy gives proof, or lack thereof, of a critical juncture.

Social scientific research has the opportunity to allow room for rival or alternative explanations when analysing critical junctures. To consider the dual definition of critical as something both significant and evaluative, which would entail approaching sources with criticism and an open mind. Thus, research investigating critical junctures must take into consideration a parallel path, which would suggest persistent continuity of the status quo. Likewise, rival explanations can expose other critical junctures or historical events, which may have precipitated a diversion from path dependency (Capoccia and Keleman 2007, 360). For this reason, an alternative hypothesis can also be useful.

Critical juncture theory, stemming from historical institutionalism provides a systematic and thorough overview of all aspects related to a juncture. This means that the antecedent

conditions are considered as vital for understanding societal or other cleavages, which in turn precipitate a critical juncture. The theory helps explain the lead up to a juncture, especially if that juncture ends up significantly altering a previously consistent path. The consideration of the temporal bounds as well as the agency of key actors is also highlighted by historical institutionalism and is particularly interesting in the critical juncture phase of the framework as well as in the consequences of said juncture on the society in which it takes place.

Regarding Brexit as a path-breaking event in British society, the critical juncture framework outlines, what prompted the juncture and how it affects Northern Ireland specifically. Despite Brexit affecting the entirety of the UK, undoubtedly also Ireland and the EU, the impact on Northern Ireland is notable due to the societal conditions already present before Brexit. Compared to other parts of the UK, Northern Ireland is in a unique position as it lies on the island of Ireland, yet, is a nation in the UK. It is precisely this duality, which is evident in Northern Irish society and faces further exasperation as the UK has left the union in which both the UK and Ireland were members. The hypothesis of this thesis suggests that the British exit from the EU destabilises peace in Northern Ireland, as the Good Friday Agreement has been shelved in favour of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol. The critical juncture framework allows for antecedent conditions to Brexit to be considered in the context of Northern Ireland, comprehend the cleavages present Northern Ireland, how Brexit impacted the state of affairs in Northern Ireland, and how peace can be maintained as the legacy period of Brexit has begun.

3. Case, Methodology, and Data

The development and aftermath of a critical juncture can be analysed using a wide variety of qualitative methods, yet, process tracing fits exceptionally well with the critical juncture framework. The method takes into account a range of preconditions and brings attention to crucial moments in the process, which have the ability to cause a juncture (Collier and Collier 1991, 30). Qualitative methods have the benefit of explaining and analysing the reactions and consequences, which are not readily quantifiable. Process tracing specifically aims to test theories, like determining whether a critical juncture was or was not pivotal. For this reason, process tracing also enables the focus on a single case study to thoroughly comprehend all the stages that preceded and succeeded a possible critical juncture in a particular regional context and within temporal bounds.

Northern Ireland has been the subject of a large amount of scholarly literature ranging from topics concerning its societal issues to education to its position in the world economy. Taking into account the long history of complications in the region, this paper will concentrate on the effects of Brexit on the peace and stability ushered in by the GFA in 1998. Process tracing and critical juncture theory will provide the structure for analysing the antecedent conditions for the cleavages in Northern Irish society, which contributed to the constituency voting stay in the EU during the 2016 Brexit referendum. The subsequent exit of the UK from the EU in 2020 will provide insight into the consequences of Brexit in Northern Ireland. Due to the centrality of the GFA in establishing a ceasefire in Northern Ireland and the role of the Withdrawal Agreement concerning the UK's exit from the EU, these documents provide invaluable insight into the expressed motivations and outcomes. Yet, the centrality of key figures in critical juncture theory demands, that legal and formal motivations may in fact differ from reality and actions may differ from words, thus, contributions by key figures and media sources provide another invaluable angle to comprehend, especially, the aftermath of Brexit and the way forward.

3.1. The Case: the Impact of Brexit on Peace in Northern Ireland

This paper will consider the specific, single case of Northern Ireland as the region has undergone and continues to undergo changes triggered by Brexit, which heightens the historical tensions. The complexity of Northern Ireland is no easy feat to simplify as the region is on the

island of Ireland, but is governed by the British government since the partition of the island of Ireland in 1921. It is the smallest province in the UK with a population of around 1.8 million people. In comparison to the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland exhibits a deep sectarian divide between unionists or Protestants, who support Northern Ireland's union with the UK, and republicans or Catholics, who support a unified Ireland. It is particularly this binary divide of two distinctly opposing groups, which enhances tensions following Brexit. Furthermore, Northern Ireland has been a model case for conflict resolution through a peace agreement, in this case, the Good Friday Agreement to calm the Troubles. The case is broadly viewed as successful, which is why Brexit's disregard for Northern Ireland and all its intricacies can undermine the carefully constructed peace.

The lack of consideration of Northern Ireland during the grand scheme of the Brexit debate has been well documented. The Northern Irish population itself was very aware of the acute tensions that penetrated the society. The lead-up to the Brexit referendum in late June of 2016 was during a time when a new Northern Ireland executive was formed in May 2016, hence, the region had no strong, distinct devolved government at the time. In fact, since the formation of Northern Ireland's devolved government in 1999, the executive has been absent for over a third of the period due to frequent resignations and lack of agreement amongst the five parties, that it consists of (Flanagan 2022). These five parties are the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Sinn Féin, Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and the Alliance Party. The DUP and UUP are unionist and strive for a stronger union between the UK and Northern Ireland, whilst Sinn Féin and SDLP are striving for a closer relationship with the Republic of Ireland, and the Alliance has unionist roots, but is currently regarded as non-sectarian.

Northern Ireland, like their peers in Scotland, did not vote to leave the European Union, yet, Brexit happened. At the time, in early 2016, Northern Ireland was experiencing yet another dysfunctional executive, which resulted in the absence of leadership until May 2016. This means merely a month before the Brexit referendum, Northern Ireland changed executive leadership. Therefore, the run-up to the referendum on Brexit coincided with local elections and the focus was on the latter as Brexit seemed like an impossibility. Nevertheless, the vote to remain in the EU was much closer in Northern Ireland (c. 56% voted to remain) than it was in Scotland (62% voted to Remain) (Stevenson 2017, 119). Some regions of Northern Ireland had a leave majority, whilst there were none in Scotland. Thus, the specific process of Northern

Ireland's departure from the EU whilst also maintaining relations with the country it shares an island with provides a unique case for understanding the incremental peace process in Northern Ireland since the GFA, which was interrupted by Brexit. In this regard, issues like relations with the EU, the question of a land or sea border and, overall, the future of the island of Ireland, connect to uphold the 1998 peace agreement as new decisions and agreements continue to be made.

This paper focus on the repercussions of Brexit in Northern Ireland immediately following the formal British exit from the EU in 2020 and the stability or lack thereof stemming from decisions made about Northern Ireland by the UK and the EU. In the case of Northern Ireland, the historical dimension of relations on the island cannot be ignored, thus, critical juncture theory's inclusion of antecedent conditions as well as cleavages is essential for a multifaceted and complex understanding of the North-East region of the island of Ireland. Critical juncture theory helps to track the process and the following sections on methods clarify their compatibility with critical juncture theory to trace the direction in which Northern Ireland is headed after leaving the EU.

3.2. Single Case Study Process Tracing

By definition, process tracing enables systematic analysis of evidence “to understand the processes linking the different factors to the outcome” (Ulriksen and Dadalauri 2014, 224). A case-study undertaken using process tracing allows for rigorous theory testing, which in this case centres around the impact of a critical juncture on a particular regional and cultural context (Ulriksen and Dadalauri 2014, 223). Using process tracing methodology, the development of the case can be reconstructed and the most significant decisions become evident (Capoccia and Keleman 2007, 354). These significant decisions are evidence for paths taken over those that were not. In line with critical juncture theory, the focus on decision-making also centres on the key actors, who make the decisions. By further linking decisions to actors, which can be individuals or organisations, will help to understand the motivations behind these decisions, whether that may be with regard to the critical juncture itself or the legacy period that follows.

Process tracing allows for thorough within-case analysis, which can be used in later comparative works as single case study thorough analysis then already exists. Stringent analysis of single cases allows for assumptions about the causal processes, which are context dependent, but can be generalised if included in a wider research (Beach 2016, 470). The full

comparison of Brexit's effects on all nations of the UK is beyond the scope of this paper and, thus, Northern Ireland is being considered as it voted to remain in the EU, yet, is still part of the UK, which is no longer an EU member state. The benefit of a regional focus is the ability to test out hypothesis about causal processes during specific, in this case critical, time periods and verify whether the hypothesis is credible or not.

Researchers have refined the process tracing methodology so as to clearly distinguish the mechanisms involved. Derek Beach has simplified the methodological framework into three main characteristics, which should be present (Beach 2016). First, tracing mechanisms are whole systems that bridge the gap between causes and results. Second, tracing mechanisms are made up of multiple reinforcing parts, which sustain the causal forces and lead from one to another as new mechanisms are triggered. Third, mechanisms should be operationalised with expectations for different stages (Beach 2016, 471). In other words, hypothesis, for instance, can be used to set expectations. Thus, the approach is more pragmatic to gain understanding on causal dynamics that lead to the outcome, which is visible, in a particular historical timeline. Alternatively, combining process tracing with comparative methods would aid to form generalisations based on a single case study to be relatable to causally similar cases.

There are three types of process tracing: theory-testing, theory-building, and explaining-outcome. Theory-testing considers that two things, A and B, have occurred, and that there is a causal relationship between the two (Punton and Welle 2015, 2). Furthermore, the researcher, based on a hypothesis, believes that there is a justifiable and traceable explanation of why A caused B. Theory-building also understands that event A and B have occurred and that there is a causal relationship, yet, the researcher aims to find out why A caused B without an assumption to begin with. Alternately, explaining-outcome only views the result, B, as given. In other words, the goal is to fully explain B without knowing what caused it in the first place (Punton and Welle 2015, 2). This paper adopts theory-testing to determine why and how Brexit has impacted the peace in Northern Ireland.

In the case at hand, critical juncture theory will be tested through theory-testing process tracing. As the first step, theory-testing requires the distinction of a mechanism, the critical juncture itself, and elaborating on all the steps involved (Punton and Welle 2015, 4). Critical juncture theory has a clear framework ranging from antecedent conditions to legacy, which aid in distinguishing the evolution of the whole process around the critical juncture. Figure 2, below, features a simplified critical juncture framework adapted to the case of Brexit's effects

on the Northern Irish peace process, taking into account the preceding steps and adjusting the abstract procession to the case of Northern Ireland before and after Brexit specifically. The box around Critical Juncture and Legacy accentuates the focus of this paper on the critical juncture and the legacy that stems from it, with lesser focus, but still necessary, on the antecedent conditions and the cleavage.

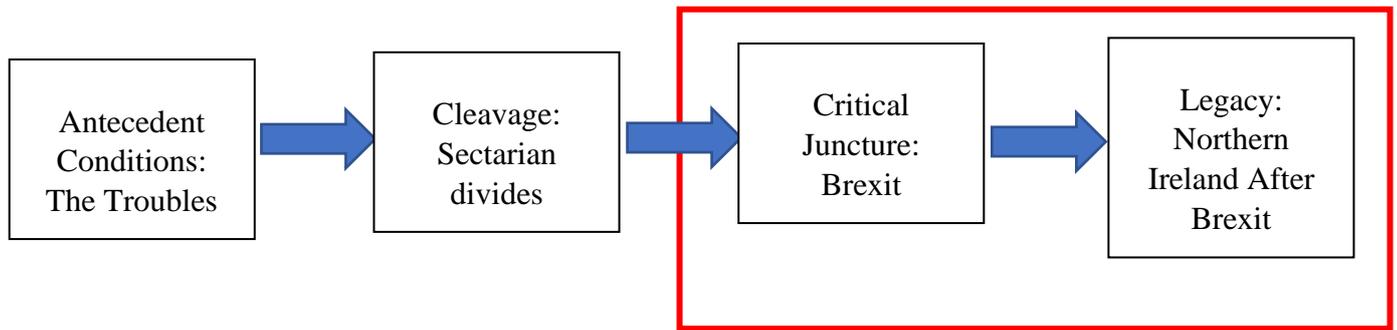


Figure 2. Critical Juncture Framework adjusted to the case of Northern Ireland.

Following the distinction of the mechanism, it has to be operationalised as the second step in theory-testing. Operationalising the mechanism should identify the causal links between different parts of the mechanism, what make up the critical juncture (Punton and Welle 2015, 6). In finding causal linkages between different parts of the mechanism, a particular process is observable, which leads to the outcome in ways, that other choices would not have done so. Here, characteristics of antecedent conditions as well as that of cleavages can be distinguished in the critical juncture phase itself. Thus, interactions continually occur between reinforcing parts of the mechanism and are not a vacuum in and of themselves. Evidence of linkages can be found in account evidence, which contains empirical material found in interviews, press media, and the like. Also, trace evidence, like interviews concerned with a specific topic and questions specifically addressing relevant issues, further bolster linkages as interviews on the specific topics under scrutiny occurred as reflected in their publication (Punton and Welle 2015, 5).

The third step of theory-testing is the gathering of evidence. This involves convening evidence for every observable characteristic of the mechanism and step in the process. Sources can be both primary or secondary, but the reliability, biases, and limitations of the sources should be considered too as is common in any social scientific research (Punton and Welle 2015, 6). Additionally, their validity should be justified and relevancy to the theory-testing

clarified. Evidence should be apparent in every step of the process, in this case, ranging from the antecedent conditions to the legacy. For the historical portion, focus will mostly be on secondary sources and interview information. In the legacy portion of the critical juncture theory, analysis will rely mostly on primary sources, like the interview material along with the Withdrawal Agreement and the GFA.

Fourthly, evidence is assessed within the context of the rest of the evidence. The process tracing method has been likened to a criminal trial, where evidence from multiple sources is compared to formulate a clear idea of what has occurred and what possibilities exist to justify the results (Punton and Welle 2015, 6). Process tracing research has come up with four different tests, which can be used to test strength of evidence based on Bayesian probability logic. David Collier has adapted the classic process tracing tests for causal inference, by combining methodologies of Van Evera and Bennett (Collier 2011, 825). The four types of process tracing tests for causal inference are put forward in Table 1. These tests not only determine the strength of hypothesis, but do not disregard rival hypothesis, like the possible lack of impact of Brexit on the peace process in Northern Ireland. The straw-in-the-wind test is considered as the least credible and the double decisive, the most credible. However, the latter is regarded as unfeasible in real world social scientific research (Beach 2013, 104-105).

Table 1. Causal inference tests

		<i>Sufficient for affirming causal inference</i>	
		No	Yes
<i>Necessary for affirming causal inference</i>	<i>No</i>	Straw in the wind	Smoking-Gun
		Pass: affirms relevance of hypothesis, but does not confirm it	Pass: confirms hypothesis
		Fail: Hypothesis is not eliminated, but slightly weakened	Fail: hypothesis is not eliminated, but is somewhat weakened
	<i>Yes</i>	Hoop	Doubly Decisive
		Pass: affirms relevance of hypothesis	Pass: confirms the hypothesis and eliminates others
		Fail: eliminates hypothesis	Fail: Eliminates hypothesis
	Implication for rival hypothesis: Pass: somewhat weakens them Fail: somewhat strengthens them	Implication for rival hypothesis: Pass: eliminates them Fail: substantially strengthens them	

Source: Collier 2011, 825

Beach and Pedersen, who have refined the process tracing method over a number of years, regard it to be helpful to specify, which tests are to be used before data collection (Beach and Pedersen 2013). Depending on the purpose of the research, one could opt for seeking uniqueness, thereby a smoking gun test would be preferential, or opt for a test of certainty, like a hoop test (Punton and Welle 2015, 7). The type of test would then determine the trajectory of data collection. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that this process may occur in reverse too, as data is sought out first and only then an appropriate test is assigned. Testing a theory is regarded as highly analytical and context-specific, but also limited somewhat by subjectivity, which is why transparency in the process is essential.

The final step in theory-testing is concluding, whether the theory has been sufficiently backed up by evidence. This requires concentrating on the different steps in the process and their reinforcing parts, which, when combined, create a more holistic overview of the process and explain its evolution. In the words of Punton and Welle “evidence for the mechanism as a whole is only as strong as the evidence for its weakest links,” which accentuates the necessity of being clear about the weakest links (Punton and Welle 2015, 7). Determining the validity of each part of the process ultimately determines, whether the mechanism, the critical juncture, is acceptable or not.

Advantageously, process tracing methods provide consideration for rival hypothesis. This can be viewed in parallel to critical juncture theory’s critiques to involve greater regard for alternative hypothesis. The causal inference tests explicitly point out the implications for rival explanations in cases where the original hypothesis either fails or succeeds. Identifying evidence to support or disprove a hypothesis is dependent on prior knowledge (Collier 2011, 824). Thus, providing a timeline can help to recreate the conditions and to consider them with the benefit of hindsight. The critical juncture theory does provide a chronological timeline template and reconstructing it provides the necessary prior knowledge.

3.3. Sources

The empirical portion of this paper will be based upon core primary sources as well as secondary sources for background purposes. The two core primary sources, of this paper are the full Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and the latest version of The Northern Ireland/Ireland Protocol from 31 January 2020. The Good Friday Agreement (1998) is a 35-page document containing a multi-party Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland as well as a bilateral agreement between the governments of the UK and Ireland. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is a 43-page portion in the middle of the 177-page Withdrawal Agreement (European Commission 2019) between the UK and the EU, which directly addresses Northern Ireland and it is only this section that will be discussed thoroughly. These documents provide evidence for expressed goals for the region of Northern Ireland and are of existential value as Northern Ireland does not have a Bill of Rights of its own.

To supplement the primary sources, interviews with key figures tied to Northern Ireland will serve as valuable secondary sources. The 12 interviews, roughly an hour long each, were conducted by Cambridge University's Centre for Geopolitics within a seminar series on the topic of the future of the island in Ireland throughout 2021. The seminars feature interventions and interviews with politicians and community leaders directly related to Northern Ireland. Thus, the seminars hosted by the Centre for Geopolitics and Sidney Sussex College, University of Cambridge with influential participants, ranging from former Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland to Prime Minister Theresa May's right hand man, and a history of prestige, provide integral insight into the reality of Northern Ireland. The centrality of key actors is an integral part of critical juncture theory and key actors are prominent in the historical context of the Northern Ireland peace process. Their lived experience over the period of time from the Troubles, or the Good Friday Agreement, until the time immediately following Brexit provides a retrospective understanding of the process, which, when combined with other sources, gives way for a comprehensive understanding of the roots of current, post-Brexit issues. The seminars are publicly available online as Zoom recordings, making them accessible after the date they were conducted. Due to the lack of connections in the specific field relating to Northern Ireland of the author of this paper, the interviews were not be conducted directly by the author. As the seminars were conducted in 2021, a year after the implementation of the

Withdrawal Agreement, they are temporally relevant for discussing the aftermath of the Protocol and what different interested parties find most troubling.

The seminars provide an abundance of perspectives, which lessens the propensity for bias in favour of some over another. The interviewees range from Northern Irish unionists to Irish politicians to grassroots activists to religious leaders, which give insight into the multiplicity of identities beyond a simplistic binary, which is often the tendency where Northern Ireland is concerned. During the processing of the interviews, specific quotes pertaining to the effects of Brexit on Northern Ireland, the analysed documents (the GFA and Protocol), as well as background supplementary knowledge often linked to the Troubles were noted and later categorised topically for an overview of the most frequent sub-topics, which came up. These were linked to topics addressed in the GFA and the Protocol, respectively, to have comprehend the contents of the legal documents in comparison to the reality in Northern Ireland. Table 2, below, provides an overview of the 12 interviewees, which includes their name, their position, the date of the interview, and the duration. The seminars were moderated by Dr. Barry Colfer, Professor Eugenio Biagini, and Dr. Niamh Gallagher. Colfer holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge and fellowships at Harvard, Oxford, and Turin, and is researching the implications of Brexit on Ireland. Biagini is a Cambridge alumnus and professor of modern and contemporary history, at the same university, and his areas of interest include the history of democracy and Ireland. Gallagher acquired her PhD in history from Cambridge University, where she currently teaches Modern British and Irish History and her research areas centre around modern history of the island of Ireland. Thus, the three moderators are accomplished scholars in their own right and can be considered authoritative on the topic of Northern Ireland.

Table 2. Expert Interviews available from the Cambridge Centre for Geopolitics.

Interview Number	Name	Position	Interview Date	Duration of Interview
1	Bertie Ahern	Former Taoiseach of Ireland (1997-2008)	18 October 2021	00:57:14
2	Ivana Bacik	Irish Labour Party politician	29 November 2021	01:03:29
3	Doug Beattie	Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) Leader	6 December 2021	1:00:00
4	John Bruton	Former Irish Fine Gael politician; Irish Taoiseach (1994-7)	8 November 2021	01:04:54
5	Matt Carthy	Irish Sinn Féin politician	22 November 2021	1:05:20
6	Lucinda Creighton	Irish businesswoman; former politician	12 May 2021	01:00:05
7	Robin Eames	Former Primate of All Ireland; Anglican Bishop	15 November 2021	58:45
8	David Lidington	British Conservative politician; PM Theresa May's cabinet member	20 September 2021	01:01:54

9	Hugo MacNeill	former rugby union player; Chairman British-Irish Association	11 October 2021	01:01:54
10	Ian Marshall	farmer and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) politician	13 July 2021	01:01:34
11	Neale Richmond	Irish Fine Gael politician	19 April 2021	01:06:51
12	Eileen Weir	Community relations worker at Shankill Women's Centre in Northern Ireland	25 October 2021	01:08:07

Source: "The Cambridge seminar on the future of the island of Ireland". University of Cambridge. 2021. <https://www.cfg.polis.cam.ac.uk/island-ireland>.

The interviews combined with the Good Friday Agreement and the Protocol show many overlapping themes. The combination distinguishes certain core concerns and topics that appear both in the documents as well as in the analysis of the individual experts. The most common themes are pinpointed in the analysis section as core ideas are substantiated with existing secondary source material. As Northern Ireland has been an area of interest for researchers for the best part of the last half-century, then, there is no shortage of secondary source material with regards to the antecedent conditions and the societal cleavages present in Northern Ireland. Additionally, increasing research has been conducted on the topic of Brexit, which directly relates to the purpose of this paper in understanding the aftermath of Brexit in a particularly volatile region. The recent nature of the Protocol and its commonalities with the GFA provide a unique comparison for the situation in Northern Ireland after Brexit. In addition, insights from the Cambridge seminar series provide access to valuable information, which would have otherwise been unavailable to the author directly.

3. Antecedent Conditions and Societal Cleavages

In order to accurately and thoroughly understand the effects of Brexit in Northern Ireland, the history of the region must be elaborated upon. The simplified binary divide in Northern Ireland, which is often associated either with religious affiliation or political affiliation does not capture the nuance of identities in the region. However, the simple division that is traditionally made in Northern Irish society does have specific ethno-nationalist roots, which have been narrowed down to religious and political affiliation. This section considering the antecedent conditions and the cleavages before Brexit in Northern Ireland set the context for current and future interactions between Northern Ireland, the UK, the Republic of Ireland, and the EU. Antecedent conditions focus on the period of Northern Irish history referred to as the Troubles, from the late 1960s to the 1990s. However, the Troubles did not occur in a vacuum and, in fact, reflected centuries of pent up divisions on the island of Ireland. Thus, a very brief summary of the roots of the tensions are mentioned and how these finally came to the forefront in the mid-20th century as the civil rights movement reached the island of Ireland. Following the GFA, a period of relative peace in Northern Ireland.

Once the antecedent conditions have been established, the cleavages, which resulted from the historical tensions, were exasperated during the 2016 Brexit referendum. To bridge the gap between the 1998 GFA and the Brexit referendum, multiple distinct cleavages can be distinguished in Northern Irish society and, more broadly, in British society. The second half of this section will pinpoint the reoccurring themes and narratives presented in the period leading up to Brexit. Special attention will be paid to the rise of (English) nationalism in the UK, disagreements between the EU and UK, and the role of education. The latter is especially topical in the case of Northern Ireland as education is, arguably, the most segregated area of everyday Northern Irish life. Thus, the two first stages of critical juncture theory will be elaborated upon here, which present characteristics that precipitated Brexit as a juncture.

4.1. Ethnic Infighting and The Troubles

The Troubles (1968-1998), and the tensions of today, in Northern Ireland stemmed from centuries of resentment and division, where the English and the Irish were at odds with one another. The Troubles were only the culmination point, where the minority in Northern Ireland sought equal rights to the majority. Despite the labelling of the minority as Catholic or republican or nationalist or green, the common identity of the group stems from affinity to be Irish. Likewise, the Protestant or unionist or Ulster or orange labels merely convey affinity to British, or more so English, identity. Claims to English affinity can be traced back to the Norman Invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century, whereby the English king claimed Dublin and its surrounding area as his dominion (Muldoon 2004, 456). The following 400 years, Ireland was controlled by the English from a hub in Dublin. Beyond Dublin, the Irish were adamant in distancing themselves from English rule and staged attacks to retain Irish culture and identity as it was threatened by the English (Muldoon 2004, 457). This era of Irish history explains the tensions between the English and the Irish perpetuated only further with time.

Further tensions in Northern Ireland can be traced back to the Ulster plantations created in early 17th century, which expanded English rule beyond the Dublin region to a whole province of Ireland. Six of the original counties of the province make up Northern Ireland today. When Ulster was defeated, British colonists could repurpose the land and claim it as their own (Muldoon 2004, 457). The colonists kept the native Irish out of the region by forcing them to move to surrounding areas and brought in an entirely different, Protestant, English-speaking way of life in comparison to the native Gaelic-speaking, Catholic Irish. Tensions, similar to those of today, arose in the form of Protestants fearing for the security of the land and Catholics believing their land had unjustly been taken from them. Thus, segregation of society began already then with clear-cut regional divides between the Protestants and Catholics.

The 1922 partition of Ireland between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain ushered in the status quo, that remained in place in Northern Ireland at least until the Troubles. Irish republicans rebelled against British rule, yet, the predominantly Protestant Northern part of Ireland sought to maintain its union with Great Britain. The south of the Ireland became the Republic with a small Protestant minority, whilst the north of the island upheld its relation with Great Britain and included a substantial percentage of Catholics (Muldoon 2004, 458). Not only was the political and law enforcement sector in Northern Ireland made up entirely of

Protestants, but the divide based on religious affiliation was nowhere more evident than in the educational system, that was completely segregated.

The formation of Northern Ireland was based upon the creation of borders to amplify the presence of the Protestant unionists during the partition in 1921. The specific regional bounds relied on an artificial majority to maintain the power of Westminster over a portion of the island of Ireland. The years following the partition exhibited inequality in Northern Ireland as the Catholic, republican minority had far fewer security guarantees and limited agency (Muldoon 2004, 458). The disregard for the Catholic minority culminated in a three decade long period of in-fighting, commonly referred to as The Troubles spanning from roughly 1968 to 1998. Paramilitary groups from both sides of the spectrum created a state of terror in Northern Ireland with attacks beyond their borders as well. The violence was mainly led by the (Provisional) Irish Republican Army (IRA) on the minority side and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) on the majority side, with notable intervention also from British Army.

The rise of civil rights activism in Northern Ireland and the increase of sectarian violence as of the 1960s initiated the era known as the Troubles. In line with parallel civil rights movements across the world demanding for equal treatment, the side-lined Irish-minded minority took to the streets of Northern Ireland to confront the dominant British-supported leadership. The main focus of early civil rights activism was to expose the discrimination, which republicans faced in employment and housing, and political gerrymandering to uphold the status quo (Muldoon 2004, 458). Additionally, the security in Northern Ireland was guaranteed by an exclusively Protestant police force (Walsh 2017, 30). Calls for equal treatment were perceived as a front for republican militarism by the Protestant majority. The protests often culminated in street fights, which eventually led to British troops coming in to maintain peace and direct control of Northern Ireland from Westminster and not devolved government as had been since partition (Muldoon 2004, 459). Against this backdrop, radical paramilitary groups emerged on the Northern Ireland scene in the form of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) to defend the cause of Catholics and Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Ulster Defence Association (UDA) to maintain the power of Britain over Northern Ireland.

The violence in Northern Ireland emphasised the sectarian divide and impacted the majority of the population. The violence ranged from assassinations to bombings to riots and differed between highly personalised attacks to broad attacks on the other community. Orla Muldoon

has labelled the Troubles as “low intensity urban guerrilla warfare,” which captures the unpredictable nature of the majority of the attacks (Muldoon 2004, 459). Not only did attacks occur in Northern Ireland, although, undoubtedly those attacks were most frequent and fuelled existing tensions further, but attacks also took place in the Republic of Ireland and in the United Kingdom. The UVF took responsibility for the 17th May 1974 bombings of Dublin and Monaghan, which took the lives of 33 civilians with over 300 injured causing it to be the deadliest attack during the Troubles and in Irish history (Urwin and Meehan 2018, 46). In November of the same year, the IRA coordinated two bombings in Birmingham, where 21 people were killed and 182 injured (O’Brien 2017, 379). These are but two examples of the extent to which representatives of both the Catholic, republican and the Protestant, Ulster unionist groups were willing to go to, in order to convey their supremacy over the other.

The Troubles are viewed as coming to an end with the Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement signed in 1998 to initiate a long-lasting ceasefire and allow for bipartisan representation in the Northern Ireland Executive. Its particularities and impact on legacy formation will be discussed in the following section, yet, its importance in creating a governing body, which included both republicans and unionists can not go unmentioned here. This agreement was not the first to try to solve the distinct cleavage in Northern Ireland’s society as 1974 saw the formation of the Sunningdale Agreement, which lacked Ulster support, and the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, which gave the Republic of Ireland a consultative role in Northern Ireland’s affairs (Walsh 2017, 12). The Good Friday Agreement was regarded radical upon its signature, despite it being rather similar to the Sunningdale Agreement, yet, it seems that the abundance of attacks after Sunningdale prompted the Ulster unionists to reconsider the concessions they initially were not willing to make (Murphy and Evershed 2021, 3). Thus, the Good Friday Agreement was a product of its time and came about following an intense period of infighting, which was conducive to a settlement, that would have otherwise been even more conscientious to agree upon.

International participation in Northern Ireland’s peace process created greater accountability and security in the region. The involvement of a mediator, the United States, also created further security guarantees that had not existed previously (Walsh 2017, 13). Furthermore, the membership in the EU of both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom provided the infrastructure to facilitate relations between the two countries and especially with regard to the contentious position of Northern Ireland. Notably, the EU enabled

easy border crossings on the island of Ireland, which had previously been a source of conflict as well. Moreover, the border issue, as can be seen in the following section, has not been mitigated and has in fact come to the forefront in Northern Ireland after Brexit in relation to the Protocol negotiated by the UK with the EU.

It is important to understand the Northern Ireland Executive following the GFA and before Brexit as existing tensions were only enhanced. The GFA ushered in a domestic consociational system of governing in Northern Ireland, where power-sharing was the backbone (Tilley, Evans, and Mitchell 2008, 701). Power-sharing is seen as a possible solution to deeply entrenched social divisions. However, despite the representation of opposing parties on the political level, there is the suspicion that votes are rather based on keeping the opposing side out and not on specific cross-community policies. Nevertheless, unionist majority represented by the DUP was critical already of the GFA as what they perceived as concessions were made to accommodate the Catholic, republican minority (Tilley, Evans, and Mitchell 2008, 705). The inherent divisions in the Northern Ireland were still evident following the signing of the GFA and merely moved the divisions from a militarily violent sphere to the political one.

On the Catholic, republican side, Sinn Féin emerged as the main party with its primary vision of a united Ireland and securing equality for the minority in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin operates on an all-island basis as it is a prominent party on both sides of the Irish border. The Northern Irish Sinn Féin has historically been affiliated with the IRA, but the political leadership has been adamant in distancing itself from the paramilitary group. The cross-over of leadership between Sinn Féin and IRA has been extensively researched over the past two decades, where the former has gained support as fighting for the republican cause through diplomatic means and the latter has become marginal, lacking political clout (Richards 2001; Silke 1999; Taylor 2014). Whiting has distinguished the less militant approach to be a result of a turn towards moderation and centrism in republican circles, where aim of a united Ireland remains the same, yet, the tactics to achieve are political (Whiting 2018, 306). The SDLP, the other republican party in Northern Ireland, has a smaller voter group and even their voters regard Sinn Féin as being the predominant advancer of the republican agenda (Tilley, Evans, and Mitchell 2008, 703). Nonetheless, Sinn Féin has not been in government in Northern Ireland since the devolved government was set up in the late 1990s.

The protestant, unionist majority of Northern Ireland has more active party competition between unionist parties and split the votes of unionist voters (Tilley, Evans, and Mitchell 2008, 701). DUP is a right-wing conservative party with a strong affinity to Northern Ireland's union with the UK. It has historically been the dominant unionist party in Northern Ireland's Executive, but the mid-2000s brought about the rise of UUP as well. UUP has historically not been very different in its policies, but their leaderships clash amongst each other. In this way, key actors in their respective parties play a big role in attracting voters to vote for them. With the rise of Sinn Féin, DUP has taken a more aggressive approach as opposed to a more moderate UUP response (Tilley, Evans, and Mitchell 2008, 711). The divisions in unionist parties, despite a strong base of shared values and aims, creates an additional feeble cleavage on top of that of the historically sectarian divide. These divides were further distinguished and clear in the lead up to Brexit, where UUP pledged to secure Northern Ireland (and the UK) in the EU and DUP campaigned for Brexit.

The antecedent conditions in Northern Ireland portray a deeply divided society, where segregation is rampant and goes unaddressed. These divides are explicit in both the political as well as the private sphere. Mainly the opposition lies between the part of the Northern Irish population, who has close ties with their Irish heritage, and the other part of the population, who views their heritage as deriving from English or Ulster roots. As the communities have been historically segregated from each other, the cycle has continued and been perpetuated. Robert Eames, an Anglican bishop, has likened the segregation based on ethnic, religious belonging in Northern Ireland to that of racial segregation in South Africa as witnessed by his colleague Desmond Tutu (Interview 7). Hence, community-based division were present in Northern Ireland before Brexit, which only increased the saturation of sensitive topics.

4.2. Cleavages Preceding Brexit

The Brexit referendum enhanced and perpetuated existing cleavages in British society. By definition, cleavage theory purports that national party systems reflect societal conflicts and bolster in-groups and out-groups (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 111). Hooghe and Marks place significant responsibility for forming, but also upholding, social divisions on political parties (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 113). From their perspective, political parties are not subjects of cleavages, but actors enhancing them. In the case of Brexit, the actorness surpassed the traditional political party level to an issue level, where actorness was more personalised and

based on key figures rather than a political grouping. Nevertheless, the agency of key actors to perpetuate existing divisions and bring attention to new ones is unavoidable in the context of Brexit.

New political parties and ideas have arisen in the midst of crises of their times. Thus, foundational values of parties based on, for example, religious conflict cannot solve a crisis of class conflict, which in turn cannot solve a transnational conflict (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 126). The latter of which is particularly salient in the context of Brexit. Parties have become flexible as new parties rise when new issues come to the forefront, whilst simultaneously old parties decline as they lack relevance. Parties challenging the established party system do not need to have deep ties to “pre-existing, socially closed, groups” (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 112). This is evidenced in the context of Brexit by the short-lived heyday of UK’s Independence Party (UKIP), which aimed to reach the fringes of society and metaphorically give a voice to the voiceless. In this case, the party was issue-oriented and its relevancy did not extend beyond the goal of making Brexit a reality.

Organisations, such as churches, no longer play an integral role in binding voters to parties. Despite losing relevancy, crisis that formed parties historically have not been eliminated, but now add to the layers of a party. Faith, class, and territory based cleavages can co-exist within parties and reflect the historical formation of a country and, by proxy, the political parties that exist within (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 126-127). Thus, understanding the historical background of political parties and the individuals that head them provides the necessary nuance for understanding reactions to crisis. In the context of Brexit, and with particular focus on Northern Ireland, the existing parties in the country are deeply entangled in historical divisions rooted in religious, but also territorial divisions stemming from allegiance to Northern Ireland in the Republic of Ireland or the United Kingdom respectively. Due to the diversity of countries within the United Kingdom, the regional reactions to crises depend on the existing path, as in the case of England with an imperial legacy in comparison to Northern Ireland, which was a truly dichotomised society during the era of The Troubles.

It is clear that multiple cleavages do not exclude one another, but can co-exist together and bring about even more cleavages. A commonality discovered in the narrative around Brexit as a crisis was the recontextualization of prior crises (Bennett 2019, 458). Moreover, these preceding crises were reframed at an angle, whereby Europe was seen as the cause for them.

Hooghe and Marks found that the crises at the centre of the Brexit debate was triggered by a transnational cleavage, which sought to reject further European integration and immigration (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 109). Clearly in the case of the latter, the migration crises was framed as an issue stemming from EU membership even though the UK's control over their borders was considerably more robust, in comparison to the majority of other member states, due to their lack of membership in Schengen.

The euro-crisis contributed to the formation of the transnational cleavage as well, with focus on the economic impact (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 116). Again, the UK was not so directly affected due to their currency being the pound sterling, yet, during Brexit, the issue was reframed to bolster claims of economic losses due to UK's membership in the EU. The themes of money and immigration were focused upon by the Leave campaigners as exemplified before by the double-decker bus advertising an obscene amount of money, which the UK was apparently losing by being a member of the EU (Haynes 2019). Likewise, UKIP's focus on immigration cannot go unmentioned. Thus, in the simplest terms, the migration and euro crises brought about a transnational cleavage, which managed sway enough Brexit voters to opt to leave the Union.

The abandoning of traditional party lines in the Brexit debate, in favour of issue-based coalitions, can be explained by the abundance of internal dissent within otherwise moderate parties. As opposed to radical parties with a polarising point of view, parties that are usually in the centre of the spectrum have less consensus within the party. In the case of Brexit, internal dissent was substantial amongst the parties with a middling position, especially the Conservative party (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 121). Stemming from Marks and Wilson's research using cleavage theory to understand party response, the Conservative party's inclusion of both neoliberal idea of transnationalism and nationalist idea of sovereignty created the most distinct areas of disagreement (Marks and Wilson 2000, 455). Whereas parties neatly locatable on the left-wing and right-wing political spectrum have a more united vision, typically bigger and more moderate parties include individuals with different leniencies, which can put them at odds with one another. Again, this emphasises the importance of key figures especially with regard to those in major, moderate parties, as distinct features come to the forefront when crises emerge and when certain individuals are given a platform compared to others.

Due to the high barrier of entry into the British electoral system, only already established parties have the jurisdiction to respond to crises, but disunity within them discombobulates the response. The differing perspectives in the existing parties take centre stage in crises. Despite the threshold of entry, groups outside of the electoral system can rise up in times of crises. Hooghe and Marks find that during Brexit, the transnational cleavage polarised the Conservative party from within as neoliberal and nationalist divides became more evident. Furthermore, the quick rise of UKIP outside the formal party system also brings attention to the importance of the transnational cleavage (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 125). As UKIP established itself clearly in right-wing politics, the moderate Labour party was the only representation of a somewhat left-wing party and, thus, a proper dichotomy was not present. Hence, the reality of the Brexit debate being issue-based and not party-bound solved the otherwise ever present internal dissent. Individuals could side with Remain or Leave without undermining loyalty to their respective political affiliations, party-wise.

Terminology of crises has been used to create a sense of urgency for action. The proximity of the crises allowed for the relaxing of otherwise binding party lines to address the single issue of EU membership (Bennett 2019, 449). The framing of EU membership as a crises was used by both the Leave and the Remain campaigns. The latter constructed the crises as an event in the future, which would befall the UK were it to leave the union. Meanwhile, the former suggested that the crises was already at hand and voting to leave the union would solve the crises (Bennett 2019, 460). In other words, the transnational cleavage, which was framed as being a result of EU membership, was the crises of the Leave campaign. Due to the immediacy of the Leave crises, voters could be mobilised to alter the situation, whereas the Remain campaign relied on a crises that was still hypothetical and had not yet materialised. Therefore, the proximity of the crises can be regarded as a key factor for voter choice and, to a degree, explains the win of the Leave campaign.

4.2.1. Enhancing Nationalism During Brexit

If following the world wars, nationalism was denounced uniformly across Europe, then, recent trends in European politics suggest a new rise in nationalism. Due to the proximity and trauma of fascism in the interwar period, nationally-motivated ideologies lost all popularity or, if they managed to survive, were marginalised. Ethnic nationalism was viewed as an ugly reminder and as hindering the process of nation-building (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 113). The

rise of parties with a strong nationalistic messages has returned and its significance is particularly noticeable in the case of Alternative für Deutschland, where collective memory of Nazism had, up until recently, prevented openly right-wing party to attain a platform nationally. Hence, it is not entirely surprising that right-wing parties have appeared in most European countries.

The transnational cleavage is rooted in skewed notions of nationalism. Hooghe and Marks have identified nationalism as emphasising national citizenship and binding one's worth to their national group (Hooghe and Marks 2019, 114). Those, who resent the movement towards transnationalism or even the idea of it, are comforted by identifying with a clearly defined group like that provided by citizenship. Radical right parties tend to cater towards those who value nationalism, are against immigration, and wish to upkeep traditionalism (Hooghe et al. 2002, 979). Institutions, like a number of those within the EU, conversely aim for supranationalism, where transnationalism thrives. Thus, the EU's supranational aspirations would certainly alarm those, who oppose transnationalism and have a nationalist view of sovereignty. This alarm is and can be exploited by right-wing parties.

Existing research and analysis has labelled Brexit as a nationalist initiative. Brexit's nationalist and populist influences have been the subject of books, articles, and whole journals (Evans and Menon 2017; Koller et al. 2019; Zappettini and Krzyżanowski 2019). The age-old debate on elitism as well as the divide between the core and periphery was rehashed in the context of transnationalism during Brexit with great tensions especially prominent in England (Tolson 2019; Krzyżanowski 2019). Brexit also provides insight into narrative formation especially from the perspective of national interests and present prejudices. As mentioned before, the media portrayal and framing of Brexit certainly played a role in creating unrealistic, clear-cut dichotomies and originated from a place of, not only self-interest, but also self-centeredness. The focus and the main stage for Brexit debates has been England, and even more so London, which is warranted due to its political significance. Yet, the impact of Brexit on the countries of the UK, which did not vote to leave the EU has been often clouded by the former and has done a disservice to their justifiable plights.

The prominence of English nationalism in the Brexit debate emphasised the idea of sovereignty and taking back control. The Leave campaign pinpointed insecurities in predominantly English circles about the costs associated with membership in the EU as well

as the sovereignty, that the UK was apparently forfeiting to a supranational EU executive. Again, the idea of borders was included in the sovereignty claims to demand Britain's right to control, who entered their country and not be at the mercy of an abstract EU machine. It also showed the lack of understanding of devolved governance in all regions of the UK except for England, where sovereignty was already legally divided (Murphy and Evershed 2021, 2). Connecting the campaign to issues beyond EU membership allowed the Leave campaign to exploit insecurities and the ignorance of British public about the EU. Eurobarometer data from 2015 analysed by Simon Hix reveals the lack of member state knowledge of the EU and the UK is at the bottom of the list of countries familiar with the EU's doings (Hix 2015).

English nationalism is not limited to the territory of England, but became a core talking point for unionists in Northern Ireland. The DUP openly campaigned for leaving the EU and Northern Ireland's secretary of state, Theresa Villiers, supported the initiative too (Lidlington 2021). It is precisely the propagation of English nationalism, that is seen as a threat to unionist goals being met as it further exasperates lack of consensus between the republicans and unionists (Interview 9). Centring English identity in an already volatile Northern Ireland, where identity markers have been historically prominent, undoes any existing reconciliation work on a cross-community level. The society of Northern Ireland has long been subjected to a societal binary, which has only sought to form clear distinctions between two communities by separating people into Catholics or Protestants, republicans or unionists, green or orange. Bringing in the element of English identity, and tying it to unionist ideology, attempts to equate unionism with Englishness and, thus, anything else as Irish. Therefore, nuance is robbed by the application of a simple binary.

Whilst Brexit reignited the flame of English nationalism, the Irish counterpart continued in moderating the outward expression of its own nationalism. Since the laying down of arms by the IRA, republicans in Northern Ireland maintained a moderate and political agenda towards a united Ireland (Whiting 2018, 307). Due to their accommodation within the system established by, amongst others the GFA, Irish republicans invested in the long-term initiative of reuniting the island of Ireland. This project is certainly aided by the parallel Sinn Féin on both sides of the border to enable coordination of policy on an all-island basis (Interview 5). The groundwork for Irish reunification has been in the works since partition and has only changed in its strategy, from militant to political (Whiting 2018, 288). The lack of consideration for those, who identified as Irish, became clear in the run-up to Brexit and especially in the

outcome of Brexit, where Northern Ireland's democratic voting against the UK leaving EU was ignored.

The success of the Leave campaign can also be narrowed down to the spread of fear rooted in negative perspectives on transnationalism. As inciting fear is a common tactic in agitating people during referenda, the characteristic was not missing during Brexit. Increasingly, the fear came from the fear of the unknown. Scholarship has distinguished the role of education in making people more or less susceptible to this fear of the unknown. Formal education, depending on the level that is completed by an individual, shapes, but can also limit, the accessibility or willingness of individuals to accept, what they do not know yet (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 127). The segregated education system in Northern Ireland further amplifies the issue as no common curricula exists and parallel histories are taught in schools, especially regarding the involvement of the UK in Irish history (Interview 10). It is particularly this disconnect, which enables anti-EU politicians and parties to exploit the lack of knowledge to sow doubt and fear about the EU.

A knowledge deficit allows actors to manipulate the perception of certain issues to fit a self-serving narrative. In the mildest of forms, facts can be used selectively to create a false narrative. However, in more extreme cases, misinformation is spread for the sole purpose of fear-mongering (Bennett 2019, 453). The Leave campaign used marketing tactics to alter manipulate the British public with clickbait headlines covering bogus information (Haynes 2019). The campaign focused on targeting posts and advertisements towards the portion of the population who was eligible to vote, but had not in the past. A clear target group and the pinpointing of fears based on people's online tendencies allowed for a sophisticated marketing campaign, that did acknowledge the difference between traditional sales marketing and political marketing.

The evidence of a cleavage in British society before Brexit is multifaceted as there was no one sole cleavage, but a combination of many. The transnational cleavage appears to be the most prominent cleavage as it incorporated, and was linked to, a multitude of preceding cleavages. Most prominently, the transnational cleavage transformed the understanding of the euro-crisis and the immigration crisis of the mid-2010s as the fault of the EU. The fear and insecurity, which stemmed from perceptions of these crises, prevailed in the lead up to Brexit in differentiating between a British identity independent from the EU. Disregard for the

possibility of multiple identities undermined the entire premise of Northern Ireland, which was a piece of the sovereign UK, whilst being territorially located in the Republic of Ireland. Thus, the formation of societal cleavages, not unfamiliar to people in Northern Ireland, created an “us” versus “them” dichotomy between the UK and the EU, which essentially removed nuance from the equation.

5. Brexit as a Critical Juncture in Northern Ireland's Peace Process

On 23rd June 2016, the British public voted to leave the European Union with a close vote of around 17.5 million in support of leaving the union and around 16.0 million in favour of remaining. This historic vote ushered in a period of negotiations between the UK and the EU as to how best accommodate the departure of the UK. An integral part of this process was certainly the Withdrawal Agreement, which was a feat in itself due to the clashing of opinions and even the change in government in the UK from PM Theresa May to PM Boris Johnson, of Leave campaign fame. It was in fact the 31st January 2020, that the UK formally left the EU with a still highly contested Withdrawal Agreement, of which the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol was one of the most controversial portions.

The critical juncture of Brexit is evidenced by the lead-up to the referendum as cleavages are present and time arises for path-breaking opportunity to alter the status quo. At this stage, this thesis has provided an overview of the antecedent conditions, the cleavages inherent in British society, which brought about the Brexit referendum. The following section analyses the compatibility of Brexit in Northern Ireland with regards to instruments, which guarantee Northern Irish peace. The legacy focuses specifically on the implications Brexit has on the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 as well as the Northern Ireland/Ireland Protocol from the Withdrawal Agreement between EU and the UK. The content of these documents is viewed with the benefit of hindsight and from the perspective of all parties invested in Northern Ireland. This group consists of the EU, the UK, the Republic of Ireland, and the representatives from Northern Ireland itself. The perspectives of experts and those intimately involved in resolving the Northern Irish conflict are invaluable in this section.

5.1. The Effects of Brexit on the Good Friday Agreement

The Good Friday Agreement hinged upon the common membership of the UK and the Ireland in the EU to ease tensions in Northern Ireland. With Brexit, this safeguard is no longer guaranteed and many central issues, such as the border, are called into question once again. When discussing constitutional issues in the Good Friday Agreement, it must be noted that some claims tying Northern Ireland's identification with either the UK or the Republic Ireland, could be also tied to their EU membership. The document claims, that "it would be wrong to make any change in the status of Northern Ireland save with the consent of a majority of its

people” (GFA 1998, 3). Northern Ireland’s peace and territorial security was dependent upon the freedoms provided by the EU, which both the Republic of Ireland and the UK signed up for. In this way, leaving the EU for the Northern Ireland did change its status as it is now solely a country in the UK and not in the EU. Furthermore, there was a clear lack of consent from the majority of people in Northern to leave the EU (House of Commons Library 2020, 101). That is to say, the majority of people, despite the rather close voting results, did still show that Northern Ireland wanted to remain in the EU.

The principle of consent is central to the Good Friday Agreement. It guarantees the possibility of Northern Ireland to reunify with the Republic of Ireland were it to be the wish of the majority of the island (GFA 1998, 3). However, it must be initiated by the secretary of state, who is appointed to their position by the British government, and thus does not appear as an unbiased party. Nevertheless, there seems to be a consensus amongst the variety of parties and interests in Northern Ireland, that this possibility is not disregarded. Even unionist, Protestant voices in Northern Ireland cannot deny the legitimacy of the Agreement to the degree, that it would void the Agreement altogether (Interview 3; Eames 2021). Different parties and leaders may perceive a different outcome were there to be a referendum on the reunification of Ireland and how soon in the future one could consider it to be fruitful to have.

Despite some unionist rejection of the GFA, the document does largely benefit those with a unionist and Protestant background and only extends certain rights to the republicans, Catholics. Sinn Féin’s Matt Carthy further reiterates the idea of an “artificial majority,” which originates from partition, whereby only protestant-majority regions of Ireland were incorporated under the newly formed Northern Ireland under British rule (Interview 5; Guelke 1985, 45). Likewise the agency of the secretary of state, of British peerage, in initiating a possible border poll mitigates the reality of that happening (Interview 9). Thus, these existing tensions concerning the concessions made to establish the Good Friday Agreement provide the backdrop for possible changes in Northern Ireland after Brexit.

Although the EU was not one of the parties to sign the Good Friday Agreement, its implicit complicity cannot be ignored. The EU provided the framework for certain guarantees, which had previously not existed in Northern Ireland. Perhaps most notably, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU bound Northern Ireland to a higher level of equality than had previously existed on that corner of the island (House of Commons Library 2020, 22). The

Charter solidified “universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity” to all citizens and residents of the EU, which secure minority rights and prohibit discrimination based on minority status, amongst other identity markers (European Parliament 2000, 13). These rights hinged on the membership of the participating countries in the EU, something that is complicated by Britain’s exit from the union.

The Good Friday Agreement was signed by representatives of the UK, Republic of Ireland, and parties in Northern Ireland guaranteed by the presence of US overlookers. The GFA consists of two agreements. A multilateral, multi-party agreement was signed by the UK, Ireland, and political parties in Northern Ireland. Simultaneously, a bilateral international agreement between the UK and Ireland was signed. At the time, eight different political and community organisations in Northern Ireland were parties to the multilateral agreement. Of these, three were unionist – Ulster Unionist Party, Progressive Unionist Party (closely related to the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force), and Ulster Democratic Party (affiliated with Ulster Defence Association) (Brennan 2021, 754). Two nationalist parties, Sinn Féin (related to the Provisional Irish Republican Army paramilitary) and the Social Democratic and Labour Party. Additionally three non-partisan groups also signed on. These were the Alliance Party, Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition, and the Labour Coalition. Hence, a wide variety of interests, within Northern Ireland and beyond it, met together and agreed on the GFA.

The participation of the US as a facilitator for cross-border and cross-community talks served to legitimate the integrity of Northern Ireland separate from both Irish and British direct influence. After years of American isolationism under President Nixon, two-term elected President Bill Clinton refocused attention to partnerships in Europe (Walsh 2017, 13-14). His peace envoy, George Mitchell, went on to chair many meetings leading up to the signing of the GFA and oversaw the process of disarmament of the paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. The decommissioning of the weapons of these groups was key to GFA differing from prior peace agreements in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the involvement of an international figure outside the bounds of the islands of Ireland and Great Britain added to the newly emerging trend of conflict resolution with external guarantees to provide a less biased agreement.

The GFA makes explicit note of the right of the population of the island of Ireland to choose their future without outside influence. This makes the clear distinction that the future of the

island of Ireland's future is the hands of the people on the island, North and South, and not in the hands of the UK as a whole. Page 3 of the GFA establishes this right explicitly:

It is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland (GFA, 3).

In this way, the agency is placed solely on the inhabitants of the island of Ireland as both sides must consent to becoming a single country for the reunification to take place. Thus, a reunified Ireland would not only require Northern Ireland to surmount the hurdle of historical unionist, Protestant majority, but also acceptance of the people of the Republic of Ireland to reunify.

While the GFA makes a distinction between a binary of Irish, Catholic, republicans and British, Protestant, unionists, then, there appears to be a growing and distinct middle way. The middle way does not identify neatly with either side of the binary. This group is characterised as value bound rather than party-bound by the historical binary, which eliminated nuance on what one can identify as. The new generations, which did not live through partition and the Troubles is seen to have a distinct Northern Irish identity above that of British or Irish (Interview 3). Ian Marshall makes a specific remark concerning the younger generations, in general, but particularly apt in the context of Northern Ireland, where they are not so much interested in the political or religious affiliations of their peers, but rather their values (Interview 10). Hence, the growing middle between the two extremes is a vastly unknown people group, who is not directly considered in the GFA.

The significant divide still persists in Northern Ireland's political elite as there is only one cross-community party and the DUP, the biggest unionist party, is not willing to hold cross-community talks. The Alliance Party, despite its unionist origins, is the only party that includes individuals, who can perhaps be seen as representing the emerging middle-ground. However, there is a dire need for greater traditional unionist and nationalist discussion. Hugo MacNeill distinguishes the reluctance of unionists to engage even in the simplest of discussions with their republican counterparts, which only maintains the divide (Interview 9). The claims by the new

UUP leader suggest a change in tone in conversations between at least his party and republican parties, however, UUP is not as influential as their DUP peers (Interview 3). As the GFA concentrates also on topics of reconciliation and tolerance in Northern Ireland, such conversations between unionists and republicans would be but a beginning.

The EU facilitated vital components of the GFA ranging from erasing borders to guaranteeing human rights. The European Convention on Human Rights is noted as a safeguard seven times in the GFA. It guaranteed the standard of human rights, which Northern Ireland had to abide by due to its membership in the EU within the UK (GFA 1998, 7). The different standards, or rather generations, of human rights still appear on the island of Ireland collectively as the Republic and Northern Ireland have differing policies and beliefs in areas such as same sex marriage and abortion. Abortion law has been prominent in differing policies on the island of Ireland as the Republic has long been regarded as highly conservative within the wider context of the EU too due to its Catholic history. However, currently the abortion laws in the Republic as well as in the UK are less strict than in Northern Ireland (Interview 2). This is due to these areas falling under the realm of devolved institutions, whereby Northern Ireland can differ from other component parts of the UK.

In the year of GFA another important document was signed by the UK, namely the 1998 Human Rights Act. The act bound the UK government's law-making to the European Convention on Human Rights, thus, these rights are guaranteed in the country law without the necessary EU membership. Thus, guarantees are still provided even when the UK is no longer bound by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Worries of eroding human rights in the UK after Brexit can be subsided due to the guarantees in the Human Rights Act, which remains. Moreover, during the time of UK's membership in the EU, a lot of law-making derived from interdependence between EU institutions and harmonisation in member-states. In the words of Mary Murphy "supremacy of British parliament" was reined in by the EU's supranational nature especially considering the principle of supremacy of EU law and the beacon of EU supranationalism being the European Court of Justice (Murphy 2021, 411). Currently the nature of devolved government in the UK offers agency to the different regions of the UK, thus, still limiting the power of purely English, Westminster-centred governance.

The devolution settlement included in GFA transformed Irish-British relations. The involvement of both countries in Northern Ireland's pursuit for peace allowed for Irish

participation in an area, that was previously regarded as an internal matter only relevant for the UK (Murphy 2021, 411). GFA established an Assembly in Northern Ireland, a North/South Ministerial Council, implementation bodies, a British-Irish Council, and a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (GFA 1998, 3). Their functioning is interdependent and clearly requires cooperation between, what Ian Marshall calls, the Dublin-Belfast-London triangle (Interview 10). The inclusion of Ireland in Northern Irish affairs and the devolution of powers to Northern Ireland executive in certain areas recalibrated British sovereignty as constituent parts of the UK got a greater say in self-government. GFA's inclusion of Irish involvement in Northern Ireland, which is not bound to membership in the EU, is inherent in the nature of relations between the two sections of the island.

In addition to the ECHR, the formation of a Northern Irish Bill of Rights was inscribed in the GFA. However, a Bill of Rights has yet to come to fruition. Following the signing of the GFA and the establishment of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, it was anticipated that these two would serve as the Bill of Rights and domesticate the ECHR, which they act in union with. A report commissioned by Queen's University Belfast has emphasised the need for a Bill of Rights especially considering UK's departure from the EU (Hayward, Phinnemore, and Komarova 2020, 31). Although general ECHR policies have been incorporated in UK legislation, the need for harmonisation by constituent parts is seen as vital. The report recommends for the UK to form a legally binding document to further reiterate their commitment to the ECHR and their will to close the governance gap, that has appeared post-Brexit in relation to security of rights (Hayward, Phinnemore, and Komarova 2020, 31). It is not only necessary that there is a bill of rights because the GFA demands so, but because it has been generally wanted.

There is active public desire to have a Northern Irish Bill of Rights. Eileen Weir, who has led a cross-community women's movement in Northern Ireland since the Troubles, calls for the realisation of the bill (Interview 12). She explains the specific urgency for such a bill in Northern Ireland after Brexit as the EU had previously provided employment guarantees and the like. She also highlights the importance of such a bill especially for women in Northern Ireland as her experience alludes to a comparatively patriarchal society, where "a working woman has less rights than a dead man" (Interview 12). Hence, creating an all inclusive and comprehensive bill to secure the rights of all, including women, should be on top of the agenda. This is a topic, which was brought up by Doug Beattie as something he wishes to accomplish

during his time as leader of the UUP. He aims to differ from previous UUP leadership by creating a Bill of Rights and increasing the involvement of women in the party as it lacks far behind on that front compared to all other parties in Northern Ireland (Interview 3). The topic of women's engagement Northern Ireland is an interesting subject to consider in itself, but is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper. Overall, the Bill of Rights would help legitimise the rights offered to all people in Northern Ireland, especially the most vulnerable in society.

Unionist disapproval for the Good Friday Agreement has been present from the beginning. Primarily, unionists viewed closer relations with Dublin and the Republic of Ireland as a threat to their own identity, which was deeply intertwined with the British. The Good Friday Agreement was perceived as a Trojan horse to the established Northern Irish status quo, which was built upon a hierarchical society in favour of unionists (Interview 10). The specific brand of political unionism presented in Northern Ireland was not generally approved neither by Dublin nor by London ever since the partition in 1921. As unionists tend to present a highly conservative worldview and desire to keep existing systems, which historically have been skewed in their favour, the crux of the matter is related to the unwillingness to modernise. The new UUP leadership has identified the lack of modernisation as the party's Achilles heel and Beattie has made it clear that new plans for UUP are in action (Interview 3). His plans involve greater involvement of young people in the party ranks as well as women. Thus, some unionists intend to engage with groups, like the youth, who will determine the future of Northern Ireland one day and may offer perspectives, that have not been featured in unionist rhetoric before. This further links to the idea that the new generations of Northern Ireland have a different point of departure from the previous generations as their direct connections with violence have been limited, or non-existent. Again, these people make up a portion of the growing middle, who might not vote according to party lines, but based on personal convictions transcending sectarian divides.

The divides in Northern Ireland's society did not derive from the Troubles, but were a continuation of decades, if not centuries, of segregation. The segregation ranged from separate schools, pubs, and housing, thus, encompassing very different sectors of society and affecting all generations. Ian Marshall, a unionist politician, views the Good Friday Agreement as delivering peace in a tumultuous time, which it succeeded in (Interview 10). Meanwhile, Carthy, coming from a republican and pro-Irish unity perspective, views the Good Friday Agreement as providing a way to end segregation through the incorporation of Northern Ireland

under the Republic (Interview 5). A united island would have a harmonised healthcare, education, and transport system, which has previously been exceedingly differential between the two parts of the island. Additionally, the EU has declared that a united Ireland, if it were to come about, would be wholly included in the EU as was the case of the unified Germany (O’Leary 2020).

The deeply segregated education system in Northern Ireland exasperates divides from a young age. There seems to be overall consensus, that segregating children from a young age and limiting their worldview, especially with regards to the history of the island on which they live, only reproduces long-standing societal divisions (Interview 10; Interview 7; Interview 9). Since the Good Friday Agreement’s signing, there is still a large majority of the child population of Northern Ireland, who attend schools segregated based on religion. In fact the trend is even growing as over 90% of schools in Northern Ireland are segregated (Wallace 2021). This means that less than 10% are integrated allowing cross-community interaction. David Lidington even muses that integrated workplaces were easier to accomplish than an integrated education system (Interview 8). If education is of any indication, then segregation is nowhere close to being removed from Northern Irish society and actually upkeeps it. Since the most formative years for children are shaped by a restricted horizons, dependent on historical prejudices, the society’s striving for reconciliation is not really evident.

Reconciliation is a major theme in the Good Friday Agreement and it is often overlooked as an abstract ideal rather than something to actively strive towards. In actuality, the Agreement calls for reconciliation to be the centre of all practical undertakings in Northern Ireland. The Agreement’s declaration of support by UK, Ireland, and Northern Ireland claim to “strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements” (GFA 1998, 3). Following from the previous point of education, it would be a logical field to exercise reconciliation especially if it is the aim for the future generations. The lack of integrated schools seems to indicate the opposite and acts to maintain the existing status quo. Furthermore, integrating Northern Irish society would lead not only to reconciliation, but also “tolerance and mutual trust and the protection and vindication of human rights of all”, which the Agreement’s signatories signed on to (GFA 1998, 2). Hence, the guiding principles of the Agreement seem to have been put off in favour of disarmament of the paramilitaries.

The conversation around reconciliation has been mostly limited to the abstract and furthered by idealistic words and slogans. There is little practicality in speaking of reconciliation save for some desire for further integrating the school systems of Northern Ireland, which has not happened as of yet. Idioms like building bridges and breaking down barriers are used in political discourse to foster an inclusive society and a culture of mutual respect (Interview 10). Likewise, MacNeill was partial to the promoting the idea of “generosity of spirit,” which indicates the need for open dialogue and willingness to participate in said dialogue (Interview 9). There seems to be a divide between words and actions in the case of reconciling the communities in Northern Ireland.

The strained relations following the Good Friday Agreement are not only applicable within Northern Ireland, but also in relations between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. It is particularly the area of legacy, which has not been comprehensively addressed by either side (Interview 10). Given the role of both countries in the peace process as well as the preceding violence in Northern Ireland, a common understanding between the two countries may help in reconciling the tense relations. It is particularly important to address the victims on both sides, which the Good Friday Agreement, again, accounted for by addressing a section to victims of violence (GFA 1998, 22). Although there is mention of Northern Ireland Victims Commission, an NGO working to carry justice to the affected, the role of the UK and Ireland has been left unmentioned. This is particularly relevant now that the UK considers granting full amnesty to those, who committed crimes during the Troubles without allowing the families of victims to seek proper justice (Interview 7). Specifically, the event of the Bloody Sunday on 30th January 1972, where British troops shot 26 unarmed civilians during a protest in Derry, has not been adequately addressed by British authorities, considering their significant role (Walsh 2017, 143). Granting amnesty for crimes committed during the Troubles would not aid reconciliation, but foster resentment.

Despite the ambitious institutions brought up in the Good Friday Agreement, the reality of cross-border cooperation between the UK, Ireland, and Northern Ireland has slacked behind. There seems to be disagreement as to which relationship is currently less effective. On the one hand, Neale Richmond believes that the Republic has distanced itself from the north of the island since 1998 (Interview 11). Likewise Brexit severed relations between the UK and Ireland, which had not been very frequent even before, but lessened even further. On the other hand, John Bruton believes that there has been too great a focus on Strand 1 (internal) and

Strand 2 (North-South) institutional relations (Interview 4; GFA 1998, 1; Murphy and Evershed 2021, 4). He emphasises the need for greater investment in Strand 3 (East-West) institutions especially following a period, where, before Brexit, UK and Ireland's counterparts met more regularly in the context of the EU rather than one-on-one (Interview 4). These differing perspectives suggest the multiplicity of opinions even within party lines as both Bruton and Richmond are or were members of the Irish Fine Gael party. Also, the cited portion of the Agreement, which distinguishes between the different strands of institutions, only really refers to political or top-down institutions rather than bottom-up, community-founded ones. Hence, grassroots organisations are less focused upon in comparison to official and politically driven ones.

Brexit called two core characteristics of the Good Friday Agreement into question. The first was the question of territorial sovereignty (Interview 4). The existence of devolved institutions in constituent parts of the UK, except for England, has been the norm since the late 1990s. Sole sovereignty of Westminster was not true in the case of UK for decades before Brexit, thus, calls for regaining sovereignty for the UK is an ambiguous term. It is not a matter clarified by the Leave campaign, whether regaining sovereignty was meant only in the context of the UK as a unit in the EU or the regaining of English sovereignty over Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland too. The second question to be raised is related to territorial sovereignty, namely it concerns the exclusive control over the border of the UK (Interview 4). The border issue, as discussed in above sections, was solved by the membership of the UK and Ireland in the EU. As England does not have a land border with an EU member state itself, the issue of an external border was not advertised during the Brexit debate. However, Northern Ireland's clear land border with the Republic was jeopardised due to the exit and is still nowhere close to be solved as both the EU and the UK are not open to making concessions, which may worsen their respective positions. The EU seeks to secure its external border, whilst the UK seeks to establish its control over its borders to a degree it has actually never before (Interview 8). Thus, the idea of "taking back" exclusive border fails to understand the complexity of creating physical borders between the UK, Northern Ireland, and Ireland.

Centring territorial claims concerning Northern Ireland is not unique to the UK as parties within the Republic of Ireland continue to further the idea of a united Ireland based on the Good Friday Agreement's allowance for a border poll. Sinn Féin, which operates in both Northern Ireland as well as the Republic, has continually sought to harmonise as many policy

areas across the entire island (Interview 5). They have made reference to the Northern Ireland Act of 1998, where the UK gave Northern Ireland devolved powers, and allowed for a border referendum to be held by the secretary of state, if it “appears likely” that a majority of Northern Irish voters would support reunification (GFA 1998, 5; House of Commons Library 2020, 113). Of course, this claim is highly subjective especially considering the lack of information about a clear majority in Northern Ireland and the reliance on the secretary of state to uphold such a commitment to the democratic process above personal preference. Nevertheless, there are strong democratic and legal grounds for a border poll in Ireland.

Power-sharing in Northern Ireland’s executive is not regarded as utterly equal. Specifically the role of first minister, assigned in the Good Friday Agreement, is elected based on democratic elections. Generally, due to the majority, unionists, there has only ever been unionist first ministers in Northern Ireland. The deputy first minister’s position has, therefore, been occupied by republicans from Sinn Féin. Of significance is the position of deputy first minister, who is clearly not of equal status to the first minister. Thus, calling such a compromise power-sharing is not completely appropriate (Interview 4). This element of the GFA has become contested as power-sharing insinuates equality in the division of powers, but the specific wording does not suggest that and upkeeps a double-standard between unionist and republican sides.

The Good Friday Agreement is seen to have succeeded not least because of the personalities involved in the process, who could motivate and mobilise the population to agree on an agreement, if on nothing else at all. The importance of key figures cannot be overstated as the aforementioned US President, Bill Clinton, exhibits well. Nevertheless, the presence of figures in Northern Ireland, the UK, and the Republic of Ireland, who were willing to put aside differences to achieve a truce is likewise important. Tony Blair served as the Prime Minister of the UK at the time and Bertie Ahern as Taoiseach in Ireland (Interview 1). For a good continuation of Good Friday Agreement based principles in Northern Ireland, there is a need for more great leaders and Fine Gael’s Neale Richmond believes that such individuals, of comparable calibre to Blair and Ahern, are present today (Interview 11). To this point, Marshall relates key figures to people with unbridled vision for the future and Lord Eames further confirms this by encouraging leaders to be so forward-thinking, that although the vision may be inconceivable to most, striving for it with confidence may be worth the effort (Interview 10; Interview 7). Furthermore, Richmond and Weir highlight the need to look beyond traditional

politicians for good leadership like in the form of civil servants, who were also crucial during a time of unknowns as the Troubles raged in the 1990s (Interview 11; Interview 12). The agreement between Richmond and Weir is formidable as the first is an Irish politician supporting Irish unity, whilst the other is a civil servant, an expert in cross-community grassroots work of unionist heritage. Yet, there seems to be overwhelming consensus, that there is leadership in Northern Ireland, who can accomplish reconciliation of the sectarian communities given the opportunity. In a way, Brexit can indeed provide that opportunity.

5.2. Repercussions of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland on Peace

On the surface, the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland commits itself to the Good Friday Agreement in all its constituent parts. The preamble of the Withdrawal Agreement, wherein the Protocol lies, recognises the need to maintain the commitments made in 1998 as they appeared in the Agreement and affirms goals like reconciliation and good cross-border relations (European Commission 2019, 92). In doing so, the relationship between Northern Ireland and Ireland is crucial for keeping to the GFA principles. However, as mentioned in the section above, the institutions created through the Agreement were not fully functional nor very regular for achieving aims like reconciliation and bolstering triangular relations between Dublin, Belfast, and London even before Brexit. Thus, in order to keep a semblance of the relations set out in the GFA, the Protocol ought to secure these same guarantees for reconciling the different identities in Northern Ireland, but also raise awareness of those identities in Ireland as well as the UK. The Protocol does intend to safeguard the Northern Ireland Executive, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the North-South Ministerial Council, which focus on the Irish and Northern Irish relations more than those between the UK as well (European Commission 2019, 92).

By trying to appease Northern Irish unionists during the Protocol formation stage, the May government lost the confidence of the broader British public. Theresa May's government sought to get a good deal in Brexit and maintain domestic popularity by meeting with devolved governments and community leaders in constituent regions. The beginning stages of the Brexit process were managed by Prime Minister Theresa May, who attempted to appease the pro-Brexit Conservatives in the UK, which included a significant portion of unionists in Northern Ireland. Her goals for Brexit recognised unionists concerns about a sea border between Northern Ireland and the island of Great Britain, which would transform the relation and, from

a unionist perspective, would threaten their very identity (House of Commons 2020, 108). Notably, the centrality of the Northern Ireland border was lobbied by Irish politicians, according to Theresa May's deputy, to be included in EU's first stage negotiations with the UK and to be included in the Withdrawal Agreement (Interview 8). The British government did not intend to include decisions on the border question at that early of a stage. Lidington also places some blame on the European Commission, who released a draft of the Agreement to the public before its acceptance (Interview 8). The draft enraged unionists due to concessions made to the EU, which would create checks between the two islands. Combining unionist disapproval with broader public discontent with the time-consuming Brexit process, elections in the UK brought Boris Johnson, an avid Brexiteer, to power.

Prime Minister Johnson personified the disconnect between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK as he severed ties with unionists. According to political insiders, Johnson understood the Irish border crisis as a problem invented by the EU and Ireland, whereby trade could continue as usual even after the UK left the EU (Interview 8). It was a simplistic understanding, which mainly resulted from the lack of communication and information exchange between Northern Ireland and England. Whilst May had been constrained by expressed partnerships with Northern Irish unionists, the Johnson administration did not have that constraint and was not familiar with the existential nature of the border issue to unionists and republicans alike (Interview 8). Moreover, it is particularly the relationship, or lack thereof, between PM Johnson and unionists, that caused the Withdrawal Agreement and the Protocol to be so badly received by the unionists. Johnson signed to not having a physical border on the island of Ireland, which as a consequence resulted in a de facto border in the Irish Sea (Murphy 2021, 413). The special status of Northern Ireland was perceived by unionists as a win for republicans and a greater undermining of Northern Ireland's claims to union with the UK.

Unionist perspectives were largely ignored or misunderstood by key decision makers during the making of the Withdrawal Agreement, which was unlike the lead-up to the Good Friday Agreement. The GFA was created with inclusion of opposing sides, who could voice their opinions and concerns. Articles 46 and 47 of the Withdrawal Agreement assigned Northern Ireland to remain in the UK's customs territory, but required the region to abide by EU customs rules and regulations set out in the single market provisions (European Commission 2019, 24-25). Clearly, binding Northern Ireland to EU's customs regulations, while no other constituency of the UK had to do that after Brexit, created an unwanted

distinction in the eyes of unionists (Murphy 2021, 413). This discontent ranged from UUP's opposition to the Protocol to unilateral calls by DUP leadership to disobey mandatory checks on good crossing the Irish Sea (BBC 2022). Hence, Northern Ireland, specifically unionists in power, felt betrayed by their greatest ally.

Not only were unionist voices absent from withdrawal discussions, but Northern Irish figures, irrespective of worldview, were not present at the discussions between the UK and the EU leading up to the Protocol (Interview 3). Generally speaking, the lack of involvement of Northern Ireland in UK's domestic politics as exhibited in the Brexit campaign was transferred to an international level when agreeing on the appropriate measures for the British exit from the EU. Doug Beattie, from UUP, brought attention to the fact that Brexit proceedings were rather accelerated considering that two of the four constituencies making up the UK had not voted to Leave (Interview 3). Thus, he relates this exclusion as a sign of democratic deficit in the UK. His position is significant as he represents a party, whose primary mission is to keep Northern Ireland in the UK and further integrate the two. However, this critique along with the information above shows that the relationship is not reciprocated equally from the side of Westminster. To add fuel to the fire, all five parties in Northern Ireland withheld consent from the Withdrawal Agreement, and the Protocol within, presented to them by the UK. Nonetheless, Westminster overrode the decision and proceeded with the agreement and the Protocol (Murphy 2021, 413). Therefore, overwhelming evidence suggests, that there is little grasp of the situation in Northern Ireland amongst the UK's elite and decisions tend to be made for the benefit of Westminster rather than democratic will of the people, especially if they are from Northern Ireland.

A multiplicity of power dynamics are exhibited in the case of Northern Ireland as the UK, the Republic of Ireland, and the EU all have stakes in the region. Both the EU and the UK made proportional concessions to secure a suitable trade deal. On the one hand, the UK's compromise concerned agriculture and sanitary standards, which had to meet EU standards (European Commission 2019, 123). On the other hand, the EU made a compromise on medical supplies going from the EU to Northern Ireland, which eased their transport for consumers and producers (European Commission 2019, 112; Interview 8). Overall, it looks as if Northern Ireland got the best of both worlds as it benefits from the EU single market, in certain areas, and from the UK's internal market too. However, these benefits are only reflective of the economic perspective and not of the political, which views the sea border as a hindrance to

Northern Ireland's union with the UK (Interview 6). To add more legitimacy to the unionist argument, Lidington believes that under World Trade Organisation rules all external borders should be administered in the same way, so this break from the mould in the case of Northern Ireland is perhaps not legally justifiable (Interview 8). However, a land border would be incredibly hard to enforce, would certainly stir up even more tensions, and would not help the unionist cause, but probably further the cause for a united Ireland. Hence, the interests of the bigger powers can somewhat be justified as they opted for the lesser of two evils, if the only options were a land or sea border.

The Protocol makes little mention of bilateral relations between Ireland and the UK, despite their centrality in the case of Northern Ireland. Article 11 is the only article within the Protocol, which directly addresses North-South relations on Ireland, but only broadens the responsibility to both Ireland and the UK in saying: "in full respect of Union law, the United Kingdom and Ireland may continue to make new arrangements that build on the provisions of the 1998 Agreement in other areas of North-South cooperation on the island of Ireland (European Commission 2019, 98)". Thus, the Protocol assumes that further relations between the UK and Ireland to be conducted bilaterally and not through the EU. The majority of British-Irish relations were previously conducted through the EU and now that one is no longer a part of the EU, the relationship is also altered.

Despite the value of community engagement and bottom-up initiatives, which were not included in the process of forming the Protocol. Community engagement includes the involvement of civil servants and grassroots movements in decision-making. Again, this involvement was focal in forming the Good Friday Agreement, yet, less than noticeable when deals after Brexit had to be negotiated. Eileen Weir, who has decades long experience working at the grassroots and cross-community level with women in Northern Ireland, pinpoints this flaw especially in the context of Northern Ireland itself (Interview 12). Since her work began during the Troubles, the Northern Irish executive and politicians are still hesitant towards ideas, which encourage cross-community outreach. Notably, she distinguished a paradox, whereby Protestant communities were, also during the Troubles, more conservative and stuck to traditional gender roles. Meanwhile, Catholic women were encouraged to be active in their community and on equal footing to Catholic men (Interview 12). This paradox challenges the commonly held view that Catholic tradition is more conservative in relation to gender equality than Protestant.

Active engagement of grassroots and especially cross-community organisations in a still highly segregated Northern Ireland develops a culture of mutual recognition. Hence, the visit of the vice president of the European Commission to Northern Ireland, which focused on engaging with grassroots groups to understand the work of reconciliation done through them was rather different from Weir's local experience (Interview 12). It is therefore surprising to learn that long-standing, successful grassroots organisations are not consulted regularly by the Northern Irish political elite nor are they mentioned at all in the Protocol. Of course this may be due to the comfort of segregation that prevails in the sectarian party system, however, even those leaders call for reconciliation and mutual trust. Moreover, the Protocol does mention cross-community initiatives as being important, yet, does not specify further (European Commission 2019, 92). A basic search in the Protocol document shows that "community" as a term mostly appears in relation to the European community rather than Northern Irish cross-community work, which only appears a total of three times in the entire withdrawal agreement of 177 pages (European Commission 2019, 92 and 102).

EU's interests in Northern Ireland are based on maintaining regional stability especially as the other half of the Ireland is a member state of the EU. The EU centres cross-community work, which has historically aimed to supersede segregation. This overall goal makes Northern Ireland's special status, guaranteed by the Protocol through an open border on the island of Ireland (European Commission 2019, 92) and access to the UK's internal market in Article 6 (European Commission 2019, 96), justifiable. According to Lidington, the trade crossing the Irish border was only a small part of trade between the UK and the EU, so the EU could afford to dwell longer on the border question and how best to solve it (Interview 8). The previous Brexit negotiator for the UK, Lord Frost, created a special Northern Ireland Business Brexit Working Group to secure trade in the region with insights from business leaders in Northern Ireland (Interview 6). Thus, engaging with businesses is not as scarce as with grassroots organisations. Clearly there are organisations, like Weir's, which have a long history of cross-community work in Northern Ireland, yet, have not received the official support, which would further legitimise cross-community relations and ultimately reconciliation.

The legacy of the principle of consent guaranteed by the GFA prevails in the Protocol. Democratic consent appears in the protocol a number of times, but Article 18 is dedicated to it fully and relies on the GFA as the basis for consent (European Commission 2019, 102; Interview 1). The article explicitly calls upon the UK government to acquire consent from the

Executive and the Assembly in Northern Ireland in decisions pertaining to Northern Ireland. According to former Anglican primate of all-Ireland Lord Eames, the Church played a crucial role in the inclusion of the principle of consent into the Good Friday Agreement, in the first place (Interview 7). Thus, it shows the formative role of non-state actors in the inclusion of now integral, and historically profound, principles. Therefore, the GFA's broad inclusion of a wide variety of actors solidified the central principle of consent, which could not be left out, due to its importance, from the Protocol.

The Protocol has not lessened fear of sectarian violence reigniting to pre-Good Friday Agreement levels in Northern Ireland. Although republican paramilitary violence has often been centred in research into Northern Irish sectarian divisions (Whiting 2016; Richards 2001), unionist, loyalist paramilitaries cannot be distanced from the debate, especially considering the existential threat they perceive from the Protocol (Interview 6). As the sea border is viewed as a physical border between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, it is precisely unionist extremists, who feel most attacked. Similarly, Brexit itself presents an existential threat to republicans due to the inherent distancing from not only the EU, but the Republic of Ireland as well. Thus, both sides perceive threats against their culture and their identity through Brexit or its repercussions. Some believe that the question of Irish unity and that of Brexit should be considered as separate topics, despite not being mutually exclusive (Interview 10). However, the inherent identity issues rooted in unionism and in republicanism do hinge on national affiliation with either the UK or Ireland respectively.

Northern Ireland has become a bargaining chip in the Brexit debate and the Protocol is at the forefront of it. The Protocol focuses on the economic and financial repercussions of Brexit and how to alleviate those to the best of their ability, but the social and community issues are not addressed. Due to the historical cross-over of sectarianism with practically every aspect of life in Northern Ireland, the lack of mention of societal issues and how to overcome those in the Protocol only continues to disregard the inherent issues. To paraphrase Lord Eames, the history of Northern Ireland cannot be rewritten, thus, appropriate steps need to be taken to actively understand and reconcile the multiple identities and communities (Interview 7). In this respect, the proposed Westminster legislation for offering amnesty to aggressors during the Troubles, which would "end all prosecutions for incidents up to April 1998 and would apply to military veterans as well as ex-paramilitaries" fails to account for justice (Leebody 2022). The legislation has been criticised by multiple political parties in Northern Ireland as well as

grassroots organisations, who do not think amnesty would solve the problems of reconciling Northern Irish society and would only heighten tensions further (Interview 7; Interview 12). Amnesty would not bring about justice to those affected and past mistakes cannot be erased in this fashion, especially in such a segregated society. Thus, the disconnect between Westminster and Northern Ireland is once again exasperated.

The Protocol allows for direct control over Northern Ireland in specific circumstances, which annuls the existing devolved and consociational executive of the region. Article 16 of the Protocol, which sets out safeguards of the agreement, reads:

If the application of this Protocol leads to serious economic, societal or environmental difficulties that are liable to persist, or to diversion of trade, the Union or the United Kingdom may unilaterally take appropriate safeguard measures. Such safeguard measures shall be restricted with regard to their scope and duration to what is strictly necessary in order to remedy the situation. Priority shall be given to such measures as will least disturb the functioning of this Protocol (European Commission 2019, 101).

The exceptional circumstances under which Westminster can assume direct control over Northern Ireland are rather vague in determining, what qualifies as a serious enough economic, societal, or environmental difficulty (European Commission 2019, 101). Hence, the interpretation of the paragraph above is highly dependent on its interpreter, which is not local leadership in Northern Ireland but in the UK. Previous sections have already shown the dissonance between London and Belfast, thus, leaving sole agency in cases of serious difficulty to the UK government can reflect this dissonance further.

Article 16 of the Protocol does insinuate the temporary nature of Westminster control when the exceptional circumstances are met (European Commission 2019, 101). Moreover, the section centres the Protocol as being the source of the aforementioned difficulties. That is to say, certain issues in Northern Ireland are foreseeable and may only be exasperated by the Protocol, like the question of whether a border should separate Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland or the border should be in the Irish Sea. Hence, the ambiguity of Article 16 problematises the border issue along with other existing societal issues. Whilst the Protocol does address economic matters as well as environmental ones, it does not address societal issues, which are not then defined and remain vague and abstract. Furthermore, as a former EU

member state, the UK understands why the EU wants to maintain borders around its single market as to guarantee a certain standard and quality within its borders (Interview 4). There is no simple solution to the border problem, but failing to recognise the ethno-national signifier it presents in the case of Northern Ireland does not help the process of reconciliation.

The lack of stability in the Northern Irish Executive does not bode well for avoiding “serious societal difficulties” (European Commission 2019, 101). Not only has Stormont been inactive for over a third of the period since its inception by the GFA, but the period between the Brexit referendum and the exit of the UK from the EU is marked by a three year paralysis in Stormont (Flanagan 2022). This plateau was only overcome on 11 January 2020 with a new agreement, however, even then the executive has fallen twice since. The power-sharing nature of the executive guarantees the removal of the deputy first minister simultaneously with a first minister’s resignation and vice versa, thus, resignation has been used tactically by both major parties. Due to the unionist majority in Northern Ireland, the first minister has always been unionist (from DUP), whilst the deputy has been republican (Sinn Féin) except the very first pair with a UUP first minister and a Social Democratic and Labour party deputy. In sum, the Northern Ireland Executive can be artificially altered based on personal whim and protest.

Dissatisfaction with the Protocol amongst Northern Irish politicians, especially unionist representatives, served to further politicise the issue in anticipation of the Stormont elections of May 2022. Associating and framing the Protocol as an existential issue for unionists only fuels the divisions in society and does not benefit either side (Interview 8). However, the significance of the Protocol cannot be ignored in Northern Ireland as its territorial claims are legitimate, but so are claims of Brexit going against the will of the people in the region. The existential issue created by Brexit, which distanced the Republic of Ireland from Northern Ireland, and the Protocol, specifically with regards to the sea border separates Northern Ireland from the UK, require mutual recognition. The Irish Sea border is implied by Northern Ireland having to abide by EU regulations concerning sanitary and food regulations as goods from the UK to Northern Ireland can be exported to the EU via the non-physical land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (European Commission 2019, 115).

For the first time in history, a republican party has a real chance of leading the Executive of Northern Ireland. The previous Stormont elections were held in 2017, before the official exit of Britain from the EU, and the results were the closest to date with the DUP getting just one

more seat than Sinn Féin (BBC 2017). Sinn Féin also saw the greatest percentage of gains amongst the five parties, whilst DUP saw losses. Considering Sinn Féin's presence on both sides of the Irish border, they are able to coordinate common policies and its representatives were able to participate in Article 50 taskforce, which formulated the Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and the UK (Interview 5). Matt Carthy considered his party's role as contributing to the special status of Northern Ireland, which guaranteed the region access to both the British and the Irish market with as few border checks as possible (Interview 5). The rejection of a hard border on the island of Ireland was announced in the preamble of the Protocol as well as in Article 1 (European Commission 2019, 92-93). The involvement of republican viewpoints in the Brexit debates only furthers the tensions between republicans and unionists in Northern Ireland as the latter were not actively represented. Hence, the elections of May 2022 are particularly vital to observe, whether Sinn Féin will be able to nominate a first minister for the first time in history.

There is a broad consensus amongst parties in the Republic of Ireland that a border poll will have to take place, however, the timing of it is still up for debate. Representatives of Fine Gael, the Labour Party, and Sinn Féin support the right of the people on both borders of the island of Ireland to determine their future (Interview 4; Interview 2; Interview 5). The greatest urgency for it comes from Sinn Féin, as can be predicted, due the party functioning on an all-island basis and having united Ireland as their expressed goal. So far Sinn Féin's collaboration has been limited to Northern Irish and Irish relations, yet, presence in the Northern Irish executive and even possible leadership there, can extend those relations also to the UK. Thus, the party has not eliminated collaboration with the British government along with greater visibility to form public opinion in the UK and presenting republican views in Westminster, for instance (Interview 5).

The UK rejected Northern Ireland's right to democratic and especially consensual voting, as emphasised in both the GFA (GFA 1998, 4) and the Protocol (European Commission 2019, 102). This was done by overriding the will of the people of Northern Ireland and Scotland to remain in the EU as well as proceeding with the Withdrawal Agreement without Northern Irish consent. Northern Ireland remains a constituency in the UK and territorially it is bound to the island of Ireland. Furthermore, the identity ties related to affiliation with the UK and Ireland respectively, which are roots of the sectarian divides in Northern Ireland, can only be addressed through triangular communication between the three parties and having all the different

perspectives within them represented. Something that the GFA expected to be done upon its inception, but was not. Furthermore, communication was mediated by the regular meetings on the EU-level of British and Irish colleagues, which Brexit brought an end to and the Protocol allocates to be in the jurisdiction of both parties to pursue bilateral relations instead (European Commission 2019, 92).

5.3. Discussion on the Ramifications of Brexit on Peace

The political landscape in Northern Ireland has a lot to learn from civic engagement and grassroots cross-community projects. The active inclusion of Northern Irish political, as well as civic, forces during the making of the GFA was not present during the Protocol. Neither procedure actively included cross-community civil actors, which does not align with the aim of reconciliation reiterated in both the GFA as well as the Protocol. Whilst the political landscape in Northern Ireland is marked by intense sectarianism, the same cannot be said for grassroots organisations, which cater to both communities indiscriminately. Eileen Weir represents two groups - who have long been marginalised in Northern Irish policy-making – women and grassroots activists (Interview 12). Her organisation has survived for multiple decades, the same cannot be said for the Northern Irish Assembly, and cross-community success is, thus, very possible when it is invested in. Hence, cross-community reconciliation is a product of the will of the people, but would benefit significantly from leadership, who really intend to reconcile.

The security and mutual understanding, which accompanied the GFA was based on inclusion of all parties and a time-consuming process of negotiations. Neither inclusion nor longevity were present during Brexit negotiations to the extent to which they should have been considering the critical nature of this historical turnaround. Murphy, in discussing stability and sovereignty in post-Brexit UK, distinguishes three misconceptions Brexit exposed (Murphy 2021, 413). Firstly, Brexit revealed the lack of understanding in the UK about Northern Ireland and particularly the nature of the Good Friday Agreement as ushering in a type of post-sovereignty in the UK. Secondly, the UK's approach to Brexit undermines key characteristics of devolved government. Namely, two of the four units making up UK did not agree to leave the EU, yet, their votes or opinions were mostly ignored or merely overridden by government in England. A problem, which Lidington believes could somewhat be solved, if England also acquired devolved status like Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales (Interview 8). Thirdly, Brexit disrupted the bilateral relationship between the Republic of Ireland and the UK. This

relationship is a significant portion of the Good Friday Agreement, yet, it is hardly of note in the Withdrawal Agreement and the Protocol (Murphy 2021, 413).

Deriving from the ostracization of Northern Irish leaders from discussions directly concerning the future of the island has brought about a pre-revolutionary mindset. A distinct phrase that came up in two interviews was “no taxation without representation,” which was the slogan for the United States gaining independence from imperial Great Britain (Interview 3; Interview 4). The idea hinged on the right of citizenry of a specific region to decide their path for themselves and be a part of the processes, which directly affect them. Although the understanding that Northern Irish voices were not present in the formation of the Protocol was broad, the likening of this exclusion to unequal treatment mirroring that of British United States appeared too. UUP’s Doug Beattie made this connection with reference to the lack of Northern Irish politicians in the room during the Protocol talks as opposed to their presence during the GFA talks (Interview 3). Likewise, John Bruton also drew the parallel between revolutionary America and the exclusion of Northern Irish participation in areas directly related to them (Interview 4). This comparison is not unwarranted due to the clear similarities, but instead of not seeing the fruit of taxes as in the United States, Northern Irish leaders are not included in basic discussions.

Another contributor to the Good Friday Agreement negotiations for calming societal divides was the Church, broadly including both Protestants and Catholics. Due to the religious sectarianism, that in name define the two major oppositional forces in Northern Ireland, religious outreach may seem improbable. There are some, who do not regard religious intervention necessary for accomplishing cross-community reconciliation. Weir, for instance, believes that religion has been talked about too much, but little action has been taken to further civic society in reality (Interview 12). Nevertheless, there are people like Robert Eames, who has served as the Anglican primate for all of Ireland, that have personal experience in multi-denominational work through which to reconcile people (Interview 7). He attempts to unravel the paradox of the Church uniting in a highly sectarian environment by separating the Church, whether Protestant or Catholic or other, from political, identity labels. In other words, the terms have become politicised in Northern Ireland and do not reflect the will of church leaders. A principle which is surely a central one and would traditionally be viewed as something that the majority – unionists, or protestants – would find unfavourable to them. Therefore, distancing the Church from political labels would be a good first step in removing at least one divide.

Religion as a bridge may not only be beneficial in Northern Ireland, but also in remedying relations between the Republic of Ireland and the UK. Once the political association with religious labels is no longer perceived as a threat and harmful politicisation takes the back seat, cross-community work led by Northern Irish religious leaders with their colleagues in the Republic and the UK can further awareness and reconciliation. Lidington suggests that churches can mediate between governments, like in the UK and in the Republic, however, this may be counter-productive as it would only further the negative politicisation of denominations (Interview 8). Thus, focusing on mediating between ordinary people, the civil society, which centres personal experience and personal connections may serve as a more beneficial use of Church resources. Research has found that it is particularly personal relationships and friendships with individuals outside of one's own community to be the best gateway to reconciliation and mutual understanding (Hewstone et al., 2006, 116). The same research also pointed to Catholic subjects having more out-group friends and acquaintances than their Protestant counterparts, which is perhaps reminiscent of traditional unionist tendency to avoid cross-community talks even with political peers. The study traces this tendency to upbringing and school, which, as mentioned in a previous section concerning education, is still highly segregated in Northern Ireland (Hewstone et al., 2006, 114-5). When considering the benefits of cross-community interaction and the benefits it could bring in Northern Ireland, religious organisations cannot be excluded as religious titles are central in most Northern Irish debates.

The Republic of Ireland has launched a Shared Island Initiative aimed at incorporating institutions and goals set out in the GFA to their full potential. Specifically, the initiative aims to further the triangular relationship between Dublin, Belfast, and London by appealing to the idea of a shared island with multiple identities (Government of Ireland 2022). Aligned with the GFA, the initiative also aims to increase North/South relations on the island and focus especially on the border region. Finally, the initiative aims to produce inclusive dialogue between the different communities on the island of Ireland to pinpoint a shared vision (Government of Ireland 2022). Due to the direct involvement of the Republic of Ireland and the professed unwillingness of dominant unionists in Northern Ireland to communicate with their republican peers, by proxy extending to their peers in the Republic, the involvement of the government of the UK is essential for fostering unionist support. Beattie, as the new leader of UUP, does have a more progressive stance towards relations with Dublin, thus, the willingness of a key actor has the potential to transform current relations for the better and help with real dialogue (Interview 3).

The Shared Island Initiative circumvents the issue of an immediate border poll as it seeks to reconcile communities before engaging in a simple binary vote. Moderate parties in the Republic seek to prioritise the visible respect for the principle of consent, which is explicit in the GFA (Interview 11). They create a space for dialogue between the two sides of the island, which must ultimately take place with or without the involvement of the UK as the island is shared by Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland specifically. Such dialogue would show, not only respect, but a will to participate in reconciliation and tolerance with a “generosity of spirit” (Interview 9). A society, which is not able to hold civil dialogue and listen to those with other ideas, cannot make binding constitutional decisions as the society is quite evenly divided (Interview 9; Interview 7). There is ample research that shows the benefits of cross-community dialogue, not only in isolated cases, but as a broader societal goal, where leadership intervention is crucial (Hewstone et al., 2006). By signing the GFA, the Northern Irish executive agreed to push towards reconciliation and it is in the interests of both the UK and the Republic of Ireland to hold the executive accountable to the goal of reconciliation.

Despite the popularity of the border poll amongst politicians on both sides of the Irish border, there does not seem to be sufficient will of the people. Northern Ireland still remains majority unionist, Protestant constituency as it is believed that a significant portion of the growing middle and non-voters in Northern Ireland can still be labelled as unionist (Interview 3). A centenary poll, conducted in 2021 to commemorate Ireland’s partition one hundred years prior, shows that 67% of the population of the Republic of Ireland are in favour of a unified Ireland (Sheahan 2021). Meanwhile, only 35% of the Northern Irish population are in favour of united Ireland. The poll shows the age distribution of those polled, which indicates, that on both sides of the island, it is the younger generations (from ages 18 to 34), who are more in favour of unification than the older generations (Sheahan 2021). However, there is currently no common consensus on both sides of the border, that a vote for reunification of the island of Ireland would result in favour of a reunified Ireland. Such a realisation is present also amongst the Irish politicians, who do advocate for a border poll, but further in the future, like Fine Gael and Labour (Interview 11; Interview 2).

The costs associated with Irish reunification deter support on both sides of the border. Whilst Northern Ireland was more advanced than the Republic of Ireland, especially for the majority of the twentieth century, then, the south of the island is increasingly prosperous now. A lot of the benefits to Ireland have come from EU subsidies, eased movement of Irish goods,

greater respect for women's rights, and Ireland's low corporate tax (Interview 6; Interview 11). Still, the general perception also exhibited in the centenary poll, suggests that 55% of the Northern Irish believe they would be worse off financially, if the island was to be unified. Likewise 39% of the Irish believe the same with a whopping 43% of the population not sure about the outcome (Sheahan 2021).

In the case of Northern Ireland, a particular source of worry is the prevalence of segregated schools, which introduces a societal binary to the population when they are most impressionable and malleable (Wallace 2021; Interview 7; Interview 1). The segregation, though outwardly based on religious affiliation, is centred on ethno-national association. In other words, Protestant schools teach from a British vantage point, whilst Catholic schools teach from an Irish vantage point (Interview 9). The vantage point either enhances the positive effect of Britain on the island of Ireland or focuses on the negative effect, respectively. The lack of common curricula results in parallel histories being taught, especially concerning the last century of Northern Irish history (Interview 11). A substantial overhaul of the Northern Irish education system is an immense undertaking and is not utterly feasible especially when maintaining segregated tensions is easier than addressing root causes through reconciliation.

Rugby in Ireland is a good example of cross-community communication as it operates on an all-island basis. Despite the lack of extensive, formal cross-community interactions, the national rugby team for Ireland incorporates both the south and the north of the island. This partnership shows that it is possible for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to convene and share something. Hugo MacNeill, a former rugby player and chairman of the civic British-Irish Association, aims to incorporate the solidarity experienced in rugby to a more formal and official standing (Interview 9). Again, it is clear that there are certain areas, where opposing sides can meet and form relationship through dialogue. Without politicising all areas of life in Northern Ireland, it is possible for unionists and republicans to get along, but the leadership of the devolved government ought to lead by example.

The growing middle-ground in Northern Ireland has emerged even in the midst of segregation. This trend has moved away from the denominational binary in Northern Irish politics to a more centrist and delineated worldview. Coakley's research finds that it is especially common amongst the younger generations, who distance themselves from republican and unionist labels (Coakley 2021, 47). Thus, their identity lies not within binary

limitations, but oftentimes can be labelled as a distinctly Northern Irish identity through which to express themselves. Reimagining identity can be somewhat related to the impact of the EU as the abstract, novel conception of European identity becomes increasingly more prevalent particularly amongst younger generations (Brennan 2021, 758). This new configuration of identity, like the European identity combined with citizenship of a member state, gives way for transformation of the binary-bound society in Northern Ireland. Additionally, labels relating to religious affiliation do not take into account the rise in secularism in Northern Ireland as well as the Republic of Ireland and the UK.

Whereas the GFA included and focused on Northern Irish voices guaranteed by external powers, the Protocol was rushed and few Northern Irish concerns were addressed. The Shared Island Initiative, if it keeps up momentum and is acceptable to Dublin, Belfast, and London, provides a pathway to incorporate GFA principles in a post-Protocol Northern Ireland. The centrality of the Protocol in Northern Ireland's evolution after Brexit exposes the shortcomings also of the GFA, which had not been implemented to its fullest extent since its signing in 1998. A number of problems contribute or, at least, explain the instability of the Northern Irish Executive and perhaps the reluctance of Northern Ireland's peace guarantors, the UK and Ireland, to actively engage with one another.

Northern Ireland leaving the EU has heightened border and constitutional talks as the aftermath of Brexit brings the existential issues of Northern Ireland to the forefront. The border topic, whether in the Irish Sea or on the land separating the island of Ireland, to ethno-national identification through unionist and republican affiliation exhibits the prevailing dichotomy, which has never been properly addressed. The dissatisfaction of unionists with a sea border, which separates them from their Ulster ancestry, is only heightened as elections loom over Northern Ireland. Likewise, guaranteeing an open land border on the island of Ireland is not only contrary to EU's traditional external border policy, but keeps an open relationship with the Republic of Ireland, and is contrary to unionist interests. Due to the privileged position of unionists in the last two decades of the Northern Irish Executive, the issue is unlikely to subsume especially considering that the trend of "voting to keep the other side out" has not disappeared (Interview 3). Brexit has only increased the existing tensions in Northern Ireland, which, without it, may have just simmered a while longer.

The legacy period in Northern Ireland after Brexit is not over and the recent historical electoral win of Sinn Féin signifies, that further ramifications, triggered by Brexit, are not excluded. The May 2022 elections in Northern Ireland, which occurred during the termination of this thesis and are not thoroughly discussed here, suggest changing tides in the region. For the first time in the history of devolved government in Northern Ireland, Sinn, representing republican worldview, has won the election. This places Michelle O'Neill in the position to become the first republican first minister of Northern Ireland. It signals a democratic shift in Northern Ireland, which is willing to have a republican leadership, whether such willingness is present in Stormont itself is not as certain. However, considering the aims of reconciliation and mutual understanding echoed by the GFA and the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol, it would be ripe time to have actions reflect words and promises. Likewise, the Alliance Party was third in terms of support during these elections, which suggests the growing tendency to opt for cross-community representation centring shared values. The window of opportunity precipitated already before Brexit and even more so following Brexit, allows further adjustments to be made to the already altered path.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to analyse Brexit as a critical juncture in the context of Northern Ireland's peace process and its maintenance after Brexit. The main research question was, how had Brexit impacted the fragile peace in Northern Ireland? The theoretical approach employed for understanding and analysing the effects of Brexit on Northern Ireland was critical juncture theory, which stemmed from broader historical institutionalism. The main hypothesis of this thesis was that the British exit from the European Union destabilised the peace in Northern Ireland, as the Good Friday Agreement had been shelved in favour of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol.

The second chapter introduced critical juncture theory as appropriate for studying major societal changes. Critical juncture theory grew out of historical institutionalism, which is one of the three major branches of new institutionalism along with rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. Historical institutionalism underlined the tendency of institutions, whether informal or formal, to withstand time as the more established they became, the tougher they were to alter or replace. Yet, it was precisely revolutionary change, which diverged from the status quo, that critical juncture theory helps to explain. The core idea is that crisis or shocks, either internal or external, create the conditions in which institutions can be shaped as usual restrictions are loosened. Furthermore, attention was drawn to the critical nature of time in labelling a juncture as well as the preferences of key figures in determining the course of a new path. Critical juncture theory employed a multi-step framework, which accounted for the role of antecedent conditions and cleavages in the lead up to a critical juncture and in the legacy phase, which followed the juncture.

The third chapter dealt with introducing the methodology, elaborating upon the case to be discussed, and the sources for the empirical analysis. The compatibility of process tracing with critical juncture theory as well as with single case study research strengthened the use of the methodology above other qualitative methods. The specific case study of Northern Ireland after Brexit is presented and as is the arrow-diagram fitting the critical juncture framework to the specific case of maintaining peace in Northern Ireland following Brexit. The focus on peace-keeping mechanisms, like the GFA and the Protocol, was justified with regards to their relevance in Northern Ireland particularly after the British exit from the EU in January 2020. Interview material enabled the pinpointing of especially crucial points in both documents.

The fourth chapter launched the empirical part of the thesis as it handled the first two steps of the critical juncture framework, namely the antecedent conditions and the cleavages. The antecedent conditions concentrated on the period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland spanning three decades of the late twentieth century with reference to earlier conditions, which culminated in the formation of the GFA. The antecedent conditions provided the necessary background information, which helped to understand the roots of the divisions and conflicts, that had plagued Northern Ireland for the majority of its existence. The cleavages were, thus, discussed as a follow-up to the antecedent conditions. The cleavages preceding Brexit were pinpointed as precipitating the critical juncture. These cleavages ranged from being purely domestic to Northern Ireland or more broad in the context of the UK as a whole. Specifically, the transnational cleavage was regarded as the catalyst for Brexit.

The fifth chapter solidified Brexit as a critical juncture and zeroed in on the implications of Brexit on peace in Northern Ireland in light of both the GFA as well as the post-Brexit Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. This section directly tested the hypothesis of whether Brexit destabilised the peace in Northern Ireland and whether the GFA had been shelved in favour of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol. The Protocol made certain to emphasise the precedent set by the GFA for interactions between Northern Ireland and Ireland and the UK. Yet, the continuation of peace was called into question as the Protocol has become a point of contention in Northern Ireland and exasperated existing tensions. The discussion section of chapter five outlines further grounds for securing peace in Northern Ireland, which broadly tie to the GFA and the Protocol, like cross-border cooperation and community-oriented reconciliation. Thus, the content of the GFA and the Protocol, which had become increasingly debatable following Brexit, were analysed with respect to the words written and the actions actually taken. The paper concludes that the GFA and the Protocol, despite being the centre of a number of controversies after Brexit, have been able to maintain peace to the extent that no violence comparable to the Troubles has arisen in Northern Ireland. The consideration of key documents, the GFA and the Protocol, in light of Brexit has pinpointed the gaps between legislation versus action. The sustained status quo, which prevailed in Northern Ireland for the past century, has faced opposition with regards to the historical elections of May 2022, where republicans in Northern Ireland acquired the majority of votes for the first time in history.

This thesis has a couple of limitations. First, the thesis concentrated on sections of the GFA and the Protocol, which were directly relevant to peace in Northern Ireland, and topics, which

were of heightened significance since Brexit, like the border. As the documents are substantial in length and, in the case of the Protocol, rely on a number of legal precedents derived from the EU, a closer look at more aspects of the documents would increase the validity of the work. However, considering the constraints of the thesis, like the word-count, the full consideration of both documents would have been excessive and perhaps not as relevant to understanding the implications of these documents in a post-Brexit era. A second limitation is the interviews featured in the seminar as they were not conducted by the author and, thus, the author had no control over the interviewees. Nonetheless, the interviewees represent a variety of different people groups of different origins, who provide a multitude of perspectives, which would have perhaps otherwise not have been considered. Lastly, the legacy of Brexit has not come to an end, thus, the conclusions cannot be regarded as binding and may, in fact, change significantly in the years ahead. Yet, for the time being, the landscape in Northern Ireland has maintained considerable peace, despite prevailing differences in opinion.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of the effects of Brexit in Northern Ireland as critical juncture theory provides a thorough process from the antecedent conditions in Northern Ireland to the aftermath of Brexit in the region. Concentration on the topic of peace in Northern Ireland immediately following Brexit provides insight into the early stages of legacy formation as a result of Brexit. The time period is also highly relevant as it assesses the situation in Northern Ireland before the historical win of republicans in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Thus, the future of peace in Northern Ireland may continue to develop in a different direction than that portrayed by this thesis. In this way, future research into the period following the newly elected Assembly of May 2022 with regards to peace in Northern Ireland would certainly be fruitful. Furthermore, utilising the critical juncture framework for comprehending this electoral win can be another promising avenue of research.

Maintaining peaceful relations in Northern Ireland continues to be a challenge. Many issues, which still plague the region, continue to be side-lined in favour of short-term successes. Perhaps the truest test of the fragile peace in Northern Ireland is, indeed, the very real and current possibility of republican leadership in the nation for the first time in history. As much as Brexit distanced the UK and specifically Northern Ireland from the EU, the long-standing relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland remain. Brexit perhaps served to exasperate existential questions in Northern Ireland, but did not drive the nation to chaos and unrest.

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