



(C) UK remains in EU Single Market and Custom's Union

- (A) Unionists view as a violation of NI's constitutional status.
- (B) Vetoed by the European Union, Republic of Ireland, and Northern Irish Nationalists who wish to avoid sectarian conflict.
- (C) Vetoed by members within the conservative party on withdrawal agreement vote.

Context: "The Brexit Trilemma"

2016: A majority of UK citizens vote to leave the EU. Northern Ireland and Scotland vote to remain.

2019: A Brexit deal which would leave the UK within the EUSMCU unless and until a solution can be found for Northern Ireland is defeated in the British Parliament.

2020: UK government agrees to a withdrawal agreement including the NI Protocol, effectively leaving Northern Ireland in both EU and UK trade institutions.

2023: Continued negotiations result in the Windsor Framework. Checks on goods moving between GB and NI reduced with a trusted trader scheme. DUP continues to boycott power sharing institutions.

Source: Kelemen, Daniel R. "Brexit, Ireland, and the Future of Europe." Conference and Launch of DCU Brexit Institute. 25 Jan. 2018, Dublin City University.

Divisions and Decisions:

The Democratic Unionist Party in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum

Glynn Boltman, COL 2026
 Dr. Brendan O'Leary, COL
 Department of Political Science
 Grants for Faculty Mentoring Undergraduate Research

Research Question and Hypotheses

Why does the DUP refuse to enter power sharing?

- DUP representatives in the Northern Irish and UK government are divided over trade protocol issues and a "hard" or "soft" Brexit stance.
- The party is taking a deliberately populist stance in response to votes lost to other hardline unionist parties and rising nationalist performance in NI.
- The DUP view the Northern Ireland Protocol as evidence of their diminished status in the UK which will eventually lead to a referendum on Irish reunification.

Methods

- Interviews with Brexit negotiators from UK and EU, members of UK parliament, and representatives of Northern Ireland's Legislative Assembly.
- Systematic review of public statements of DUP executive body, MPs, and MLAs.
- Code of all parliamentary debates relating to Brexit trade issues in NI according to pro/anti Brexit and Protocol issues.
- Review of positioning of both nationalist and unionist opposition to the DUP according to trade and power sharing.

Results

"The Members of Parliament want to just keep on digging and the Members of the Legislative Assembly want to go back in" Member of Parliament for Northern Irish Nationalist Party (SDLP) discussing DUP division over power sharing.

"[The DUP], if not, if not invented the reason, they've used it as a very convenient pretext not to play second fiddle to Sinn Fein." British Government Minister discussing DUP refusal to enter power sharing.

"There may be a small number of people who would have not wanted to see Brexit, but they accepted the decision of the party that we were a Brexit party." Senior DUP Official.

Implications

- British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has promised unionists "legal assurances" of their place within the UK which nationalist parties have warned would be viewed as a violation of NI's constitutional status.
- Questions on the effectiveness of NI's power sharing institutions amid rise of "other" (non-unionist or nationalist) population.
- Questions on the interpretation of the principle of "consent" as it's represented in the 1998 Belfast agreement which determines NI's constitutional status.

