

Irish Partition and Brexit in Historical Context

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“The unity of the UK itself is on the ballot”



John Major and Tony Blair speaking in Derry
ahead of Brexit vote, 2016. Reuters.

The External Border of the EU



Irish border after Brexit



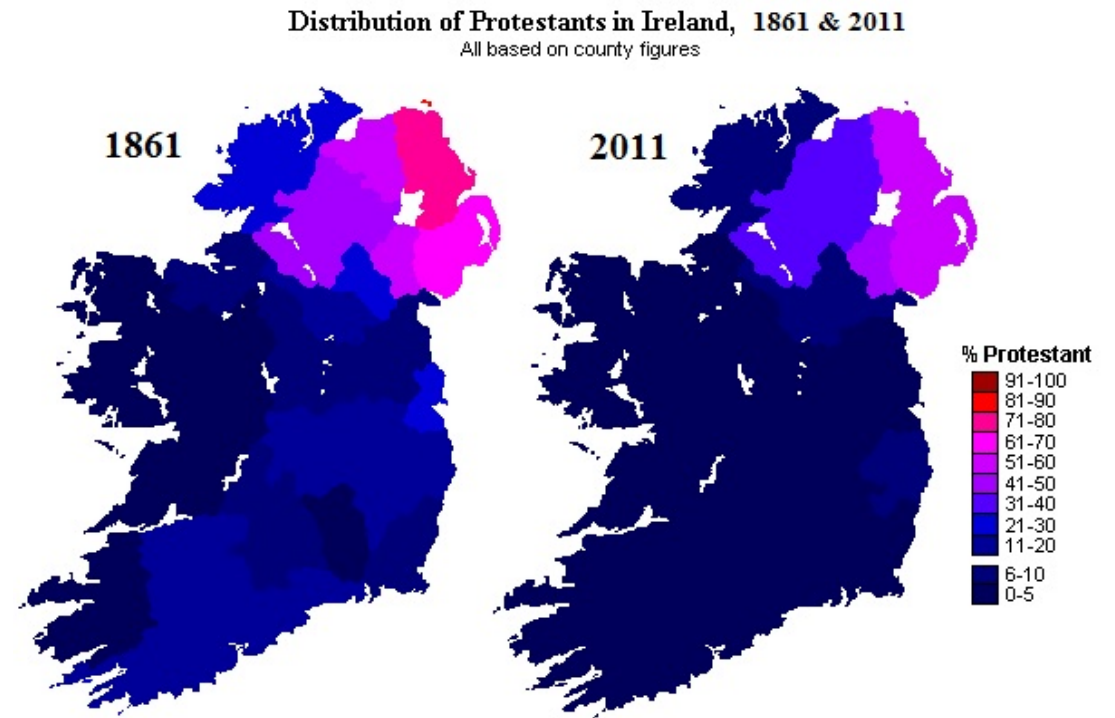
CBC NEWS

Irish Partition

- 1922 creation of Irish Free State: **a new rupture**
- Border created along county lines
 - 26 out of 32 Irish counties became the Irish state
 - Border between Ireland and Northern Ireland (Great Britain) remains where it was created 100 years ago
- Political conflict since centered on questions of:
 - Union: Northern Ireland's incorporation into Great Britain
 - Nationalism: creating a single, unified Irish state
 - Repartition: independent Northern Ireland state

Ireland and the British Empire

- Plantation colonialism: British king gives Irish territory to English and Scottish Protestant elites
- Focus on Ulster (Northern Ireland) → Protestants concentrated in NI today
- 17th and 18th century Irish rebellions: anti-colonial conflict



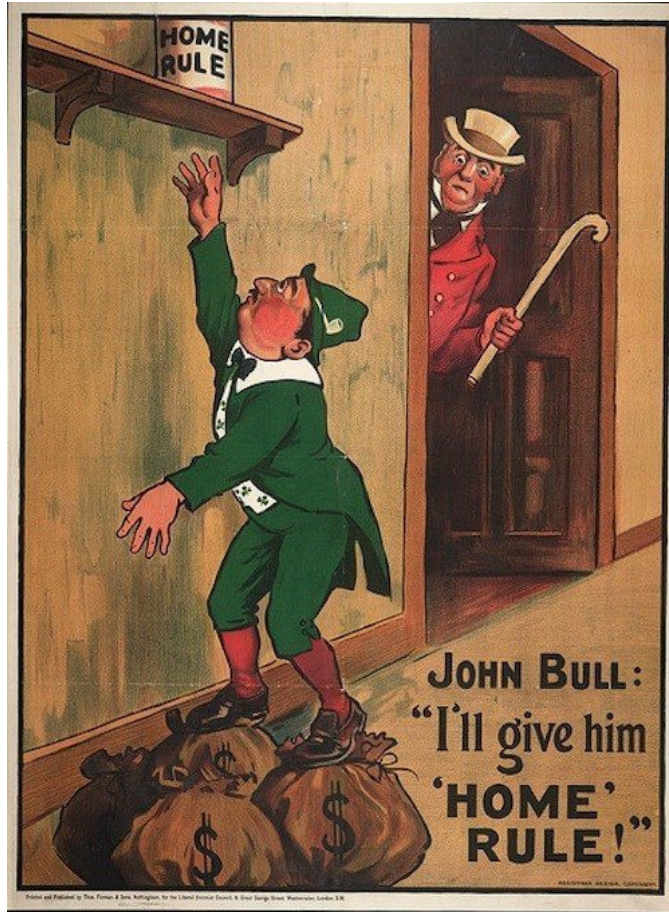
Union with Great Britain

- 1800 Act of Union creates United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland
 - Irish parliament dissolved, reps sent to Westminster
 - Anglican (Protestant) church established over Ireland
- Economic exploitation of Ireland exacerbates Great Famine (1846–1851)



James Mahoney. 1847. *The Illustrated London News*.

Home Rule Debate



Nationalists:

- Range from full independence to limited self-government within UK
- Primarily Catholic

Unionists:

- Saw Home Rule as slippery slope towards independence
- Primarily Protestant: "Home Rule means Rome Rule"
- Ulster Covenant: militias to defend union w/Britain

1914–1923: Birth of the Border

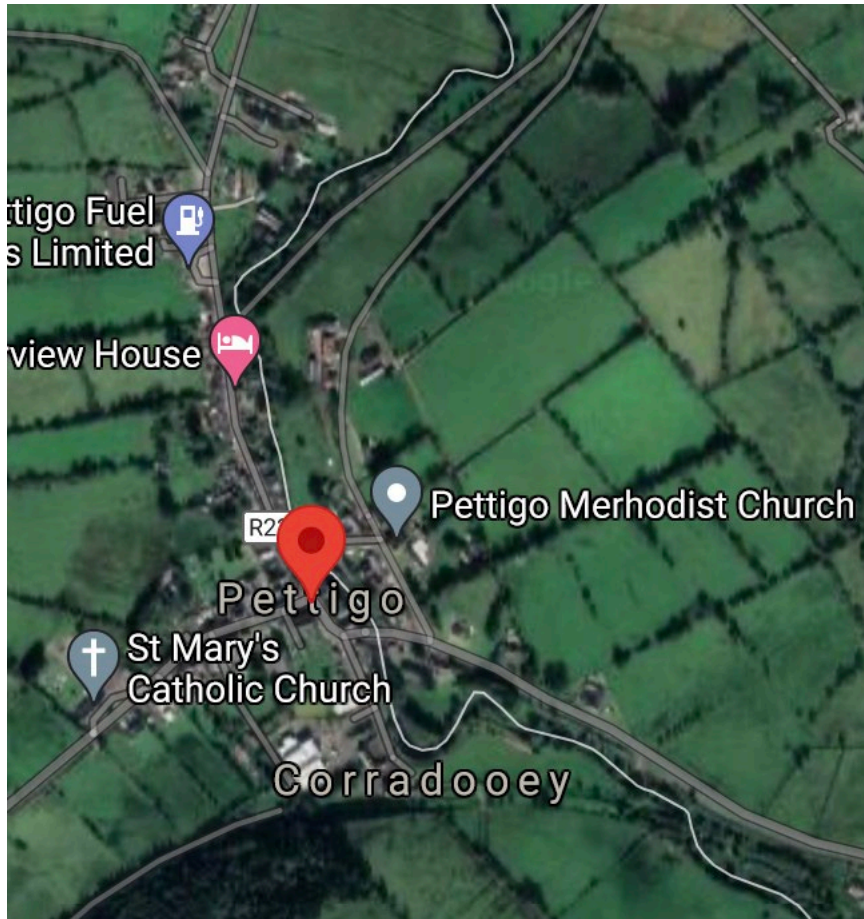
- 1914: Home Rule Act and start of World War I
- 1916: Easter Rising
- 1919: First Dáil
- 1919–1922: Irish War of Independence
- 1922–1923: Irish Civil War

The Border



- 500 km border, crossed by over 200 public roads
 - Cuts through homes and farms
- NI excludes 3 Ulster counties with large Unionist populations: Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan
 - NI includes counties with Nationalist majorities: Fermanagh and Tyrone

In or Out? Towns on the border



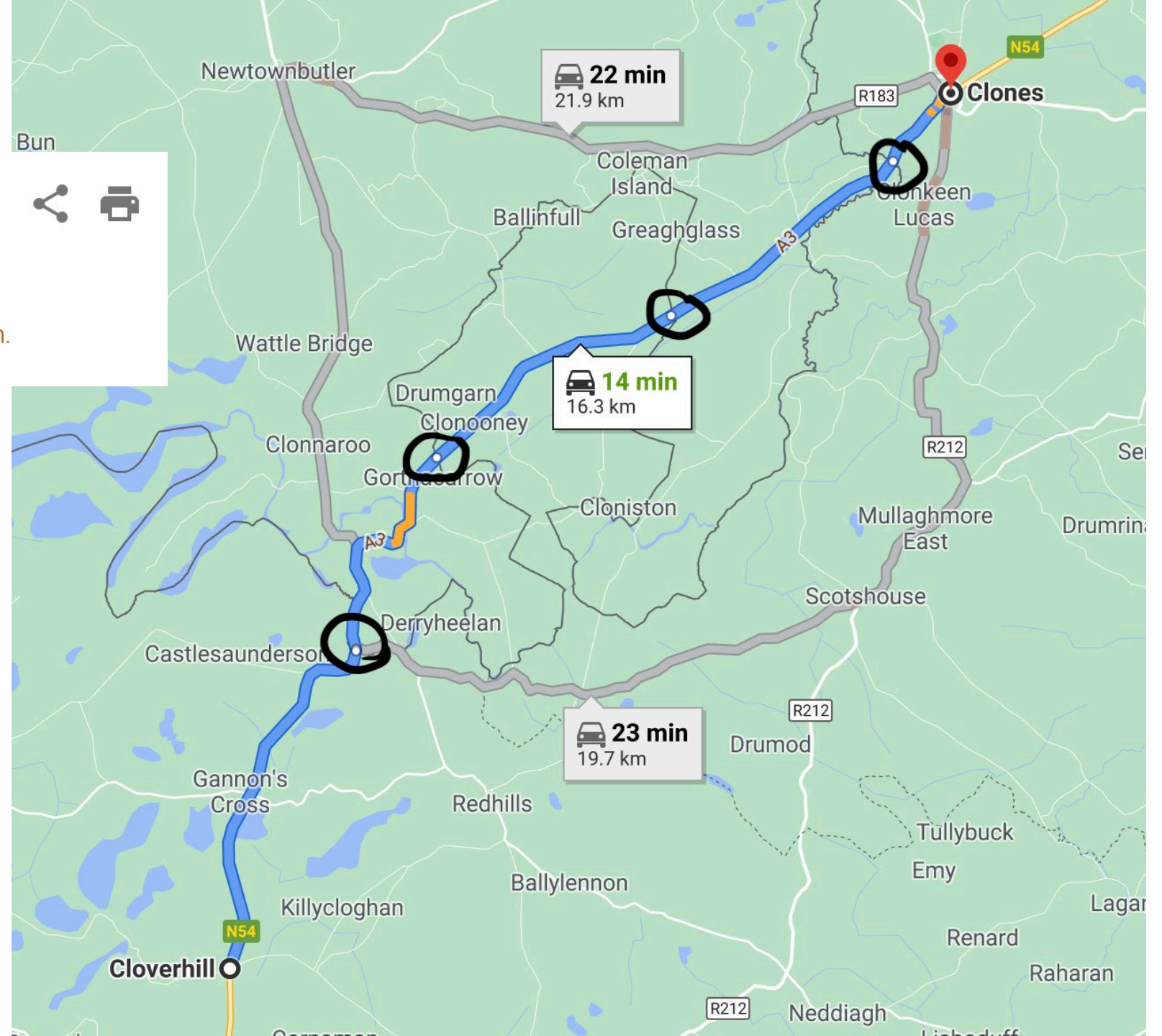
Irish Sun reporter Kieran Dineen drinks a pint ("still perfectly cold") poured on the opposite side of the border in Pettigo. 2019. Pacemaker Press.

14 min (16.3 km)

via N54

Fastest route

⚠ This route crosses through the United Kingdom.



Life Under Partition

- Simmering conflict in post-war era
- Tariffs and smuggling: customs duties made price of goods different across border
- Ethnic-religious tension and anti-Catholic discrimination



The Troubles

- Civil rights protests of 60s and 70s → sectarian violence
- British security forces deployed 1969, occupied NI throughout the Troubles
 - Border crossings major site of violence
- 3500 people killed by 1990s
 - Most were civilians, most perpetrators paramilitary groups on both sides and the British security forces



British soldiers on the streets of Derry, 1975. Alain Le Garsmeur/Getty Images

The Good Friday Agreement

- 1993 European Single Market: border begins to soften
- 1998 Good Friday Agreement:
 - Power-sharing NI government
 - Principle of consent: Irish unification can only occur with majority approval of whole island's population



Peacetime Status Quo

Last Updated: Wednesday, 7 November 2007, 18:52 GMT

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McGuinness confirms chuckle image

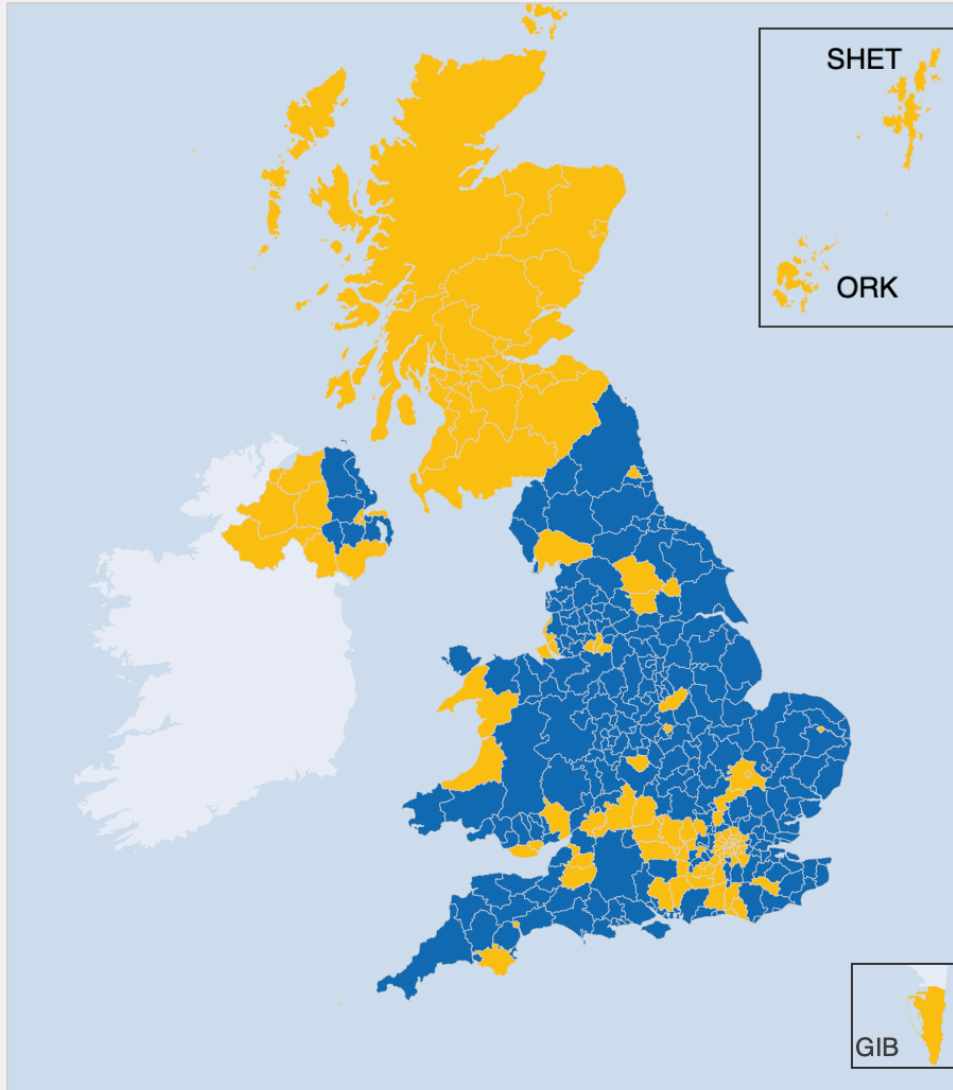
Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley have not exchanged an angry word in the eight months they have led the Stormont executive, it has been claimed.

Deputy First Minister McGuinness said his "cordial and civilised" working relationship with the Democratic Unionist leader had confounded critics.



The leaders have been nicknamed the Chuckle Brothers

Enter a postcode, council name or NI constituency



Key:

■ Majority leave ■ Majority remain

■ Tie □ Undeclared

England

Leave **53.4%**
15,188,406 VOTES

Remain **46.6%**
13,266,996 VOTES



Counting complete

Turnout: 73.0%

Northern Ireland

Leave **44.2%**
349,442 VOTES

Remain **55.8%**
440,707 VOTES



Counting complete

Turnout: 62.7%

Scotland

Leave **38.0%**
1,018,322 VOTES

Remain **62.0%**
1,661,191 VOTES



Counting complete

Turnout: 67.2%

Wales

Leave **52.5%**
854,572 VOTES

Remain **47.5%**
772,347 VOTES



Counting complete

Turnout: 71.7%

Northern Ireland Protocol

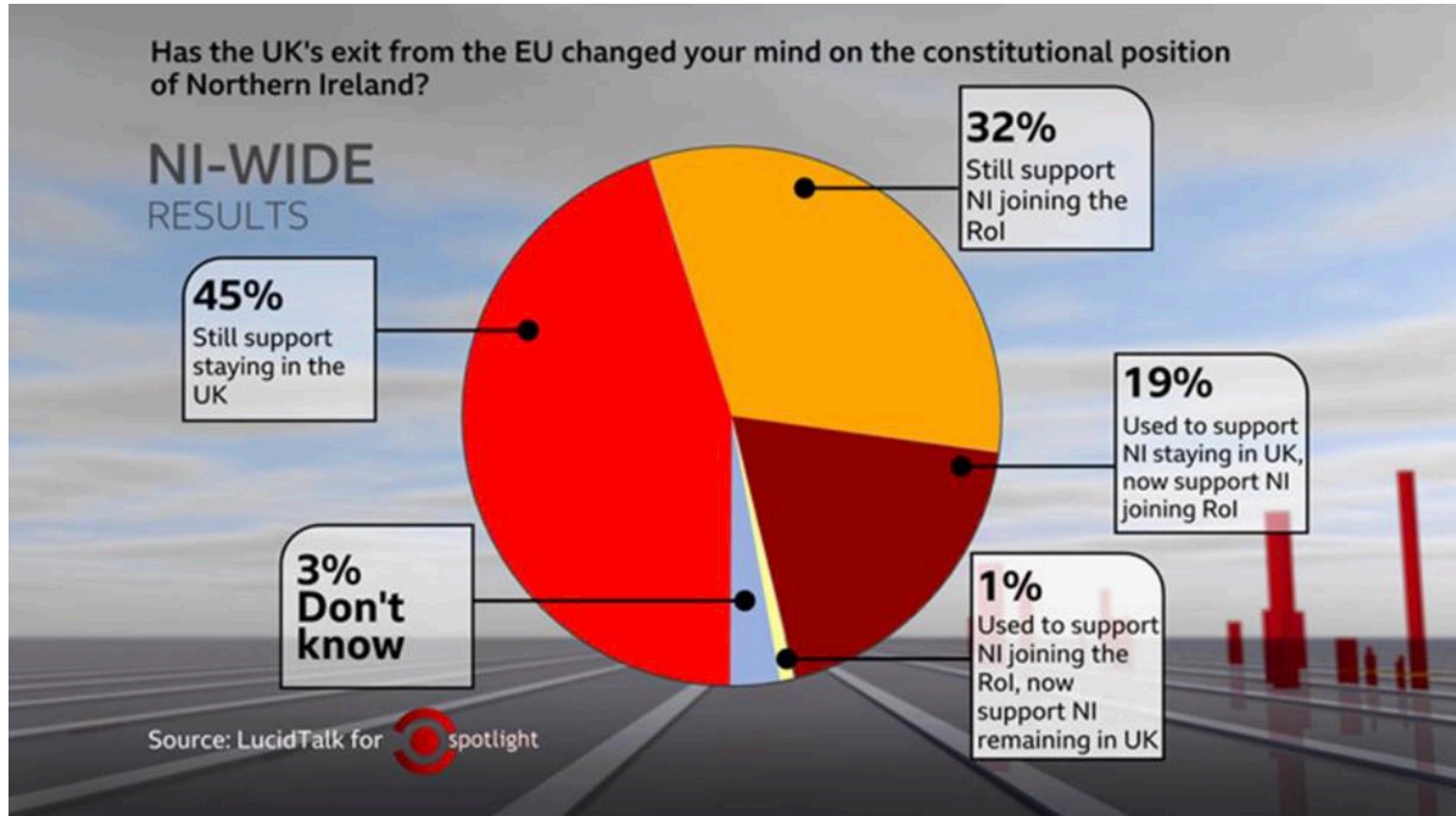
- NI complying w/EU regulations, so **Irish land border mostly functioning as normal**
- Exports from UK mainland to NI not compliant w/EU regulations

How checks between Britain and Northern Ireland work

Certain goods, such as meat and eggs, need to be checked when they enter Northern Ireland from Great Britain



Consent for unification?



BBC Spotlight. April 2021.

Conclusions

- Since Good Friday Agreement, Irish Partition has been a **political compromise**: peace but not satisfaction
 - Peace process still ongoing, e.g. Historical Investigations Unit
- Civil unrest in NI this spring: primarily associated with loyalist groups opposed to Irish Protocol
- Little support for hard border in NI...potential for unification with Ireland?