

Britain: The Union Is Now All but Dead. The U.K. is Inevitably Breaking Up?

By [True Publica](#)

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Boris Johnson declares himself a champion of the UK union, a prime minister who wants to strengthen “the ties that bind our United Kingdom”. This is just part of the propaganda game being played. But as the FT headline goes – “[Brexit has become the enemy of the UK union](#)” (paywall) and it stresses that the union is done. The international press are now reporting that Britain is inevitably breaking up. The Washington Post asserts that BJ is gambling the house on a one card game and likely to lose his shirt in their article ‘[Playing Chicken](#).’ The [New York Times](#) pretty much says the same.

[Business Insider](#) says quite matter of factly, that the Tories are simply conditioning the electorate to accept the breakup of the union as an acceptable consequence of Brexit. The reason is political selfishness driven by psychotic lust for power at all costs. “If the UK were to break up, it would likely leave the Conservative party with a permanent majority in an English House of Commons.”

I’ve heard this from contacts in Westminster quite a lot recently and it is this that alarms many parliamentarians behind closed doors the most.

Traditional institutions set up to uphold the values of Britain are just as worried. The [British Academy](#) was established in 1902, as the United Kingdom’s national academy for the humanities and the social sciences. It says that Brexit is a spasm of English nationalism and it is clearly worried the union is facing its biggest test ever. It argues that whatever way you look at Brexit – Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales will all present real dangers to the survival of the union in their own way. Part of the problem is that with Brexit, the UK is not a federal state with a written constitution allocating powers unambiguously.

The BA rightly points out that the Irish border question is the most pressing and that the scale of the Brexit task for government is unprecedented. And as the BA likes to quote when it comes to Brexit – “*it’s like taking the egg out of an omelette*. And they are not wrong.

Irish Unity

A large majority in the Republic of Ireland would now vote to unify with Northern Ireland if a vote were held, according to an election exit poll by Irish broadcasters RTÉ and TG4. This was back in May this year. Interestingly, the [poll](#) questioned 3,000 people at polling stations after they had cast their ballots in local and European elections, so they were in the right place and frame of mind – and were actual voters, not randomly selected in a city high street.

Overall, the results showed 65 per cent “yes” versus 19 per cent “no.” Excluding undecided

voters and those who refused to answer – 15 per cent – nearly four in five respondents who had made up their minds said they would vote in favour.

In Northern Ireland, voters originally and unambiguously voted to Remain by [56% to 44%](#).

Sinn Fein, the left-wing Irish republican political party active in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, has called for a vote on Irish unification after Brexit.

Back in Westminster – “A no-deal Brexit is the way that’s most likely to lead to a border poll and to people questioning the benefits of being in the United Kingdom,” one cabinet minister [told the BBC](#), supported by a number of notable Tory backbenchers.

The other side of the NI equation are the loyalists. “[There will never be a united Ireland](#)” screams one headline from the Irish Times, where so-called ‘street loyalists’ warn against ‘dangerous’ talk on hard border and Irish unification. And we all know what the consequences will be. Loyalists see the repeated warnings from Taoiseach [Leo Varadkar](#) and Tánaiste [Simon Coveney](#) about the threat of a return to violence.

As it turns out in [latest polls](#), if Brexit happens, over half of the people in the North would also back Irish unity and it confirmed once again that a large majority of people were in favour of Ireland remaining in the EU. In a joint referendum, Ireland would likely unify and the union would fracture.

If Boris Johnson achieves what he has promised – to leave the EU on 31st October, it is all but inevitable that a referendum question of some sort will be asked – and violence will erupt to stop it will follow. But once Pandora’s box is opened – a prolific source of divisive trouble will emerge – as we have already witnessed, not just with the ‘troubles’ but with Brexit itself.

Scottish Independence

The headline from a major new [Ashcroft poll](#) of Scottish public opinion is that Independence now has 52-48 majority support. The polling method involves much larger samples than regular newspaper polls and has a generally good record. The point that is the most interesting in this new Scottish poll is that it finds that fully 40% of Scottish Labour voters in 2017 now support Independence.

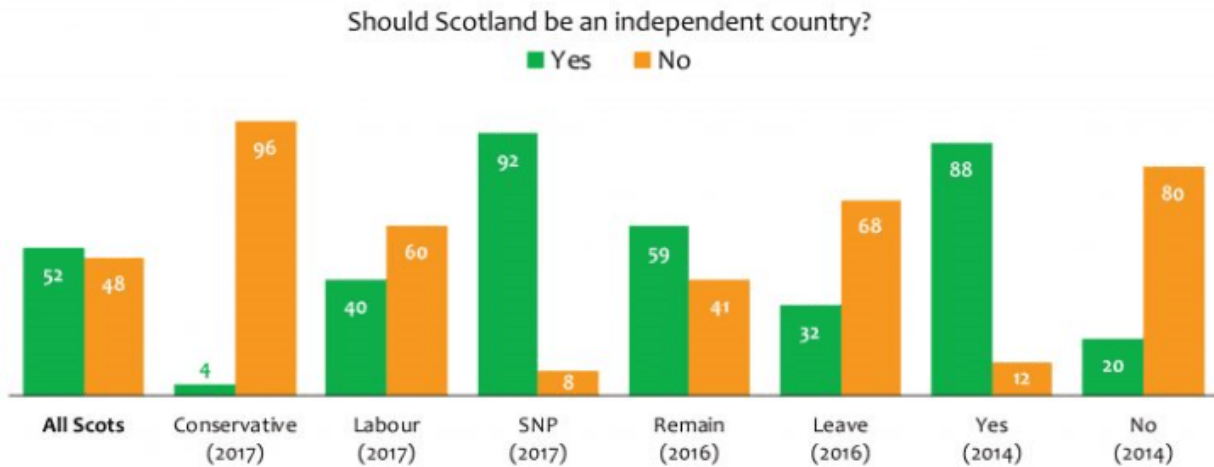
Craig Murray – former British ambassador, Scot and Independence activist –

“This has important repercussions. The Labour leadership will no longer be able to portray Independence as beyond the pale for decent thinking people, or to portray Scottish nationalism as akin to Viktor Orban, without alienating a huge swathe of its own support. It certainly ought, at the very least, to encourage the Labour Party in supporting the Scottish people’s right to a new referendum, against Tory attempts to block it.

But it also has ramifications for how the SNP and wider Yes movement conduct ourselves, particularly online. Nationalists must stop automatically writing off Labour supporters as unionists. There remains a Blairite rump still powerful in Scottish Labour who are rightfully despised, but we need more readily to acknowledge how much we have in common with a great many ordinary members of the Labour Party, both in terms of supporting Independence and in terms of the more socially inclusive Scottish state we wish to build.”

If there were a referendum tomorrow on Scotland's future and this was the question,
how would you vote?

Excludes don't know/won't vote



The dates in brackets indicate that the affiliation refers to how people voted in the election or referendum of that date.

“It is not surprising that many more Labour voters are looking to Scottish Independence as a reaction to a historically extreme right-wing government in London. But as I blogged at the time, already in 2017 25% of Scottish Labour voters supported Independence and a significant number who had voted SNP in the 2015 General Election had reverted to Labour in the 2017 General Election. The reason for this was simple – the SNP showed little sign of pushing on with Independence anyway and our dreadful, lacklustre 2017 GE campaign was conducted entirely on the basis of “don’t mention Independence and deny we are pushing for it whenever the Tories bring it up.” No wonder some Indy supporters drifted away.

The SNP must put Independence right at the forefront of a general election campaign, and I entirely endorse the Angus MacNeil option of declaring the general election a de facto independence referendum if the Tories persist in their refusal to countenance a formal one. If the SNP fails to strike all out for Independence now, and gets further distracted by the effort to stop Brexit for the whole UK, I shall not be alone in wondering how many of the 8% of SNP voters in the Ashcroft poll who do not support Independence, are at or near the top of the party.”

I’ve asked several very well connected Scots on what they feel – and unanimously it now echoes Murray’s sentiment.

Welsh Independence

Former First Minister Carwyn Jones garnered significant press coverage a few weeks back with his statement that the chaos in UK politics was driving curiosity about Welsh independence. It was a pretty remarkable intervention from a former Labour First Minister.

In a recent in-depth [poll on Welsh Independence](#), the results showed some interesting answers. They compared attitudes towards independence in 2017 and today. The average

(mean) scores from both years – in 2017 the polling showed a mean score of 3.8 – by 2019 this had grown to 4.4. This continues to demonstrate that somewhat more of the Welsh population has a negative view of Welsh independence than a positive one – but the direction of travel is clear – many more electors are willing to consider the possibility.

Further categorizing of the data into three groups – Against (0-3), In Favour (7-10) and the middle – Indycurious – ground (4-6). Here we find 42% against (down from 48%) in 2017 with almost 30% in favour and almost 30% in the Indycurious bracket.

So, if a vote were held on Welsh Independence it would likely vote to remain part of the union. But the question has not been asked in an environment where Brexit has actually happened, only what their preferences were as at June (before Boris Johnson came to power). I suspect that the ‘Indycurious’ might well be ‘ProIndy’ and the campaign trail will follow. Wales will stay but in ten years or twenty?

What’s next?

Whatever happens – the union of Britain is almost certainly coming to an end, if not in the immediate future, then within a decade or so. The price of Brexit will be as I said last year, the [demise of global Britain](#). I said –

“Britain is not just facing the challenge of negotiating Brexit – it is demonstrating in front of the world stage its incompetence and more than anything that it lacks the confidence to do so in a manner befitting a world power.”

As if to reinforce that quote the FT recently said that Brexit “*guarantees chaos on all sides*” and a “*series of co-ordinated unilateral actions would be required to avoid a national crisis.*” The current government has just about given up even trying to save the national crisis from happening and is now actively engaging the idea of the union coming to an end for the purposes of retaining their power in Westminster at all costs.

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