

Johan Martin Gerrard

# Unionist Murals from the Troubles to Brexit:

## Continuity or Change?

Graduate thesis in History with Teacher Education, years 8-13

Supervisor: Michael J. Geary

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Faculty of Humanities

Department of Historical and Classical Studies



**NTNU**

Kunnskap for en bedre verden



## **Abstract**

Since 1984, the many walls of Northern Ireland have been covered by nationalist and unionist murals, which are important expressions of political views and identity. This thesis centres around the unionist mural tradition, and the remarkable signs of continuity within it. Previous research show that the unionist mural tradition has used the same symbolic imagery to convey fixed views on political issues in Northern Ireland, since its origins in the Troubles. At the same time, Northern Ireland has seen consistent progress and change for the better since Good Friday. This thesis exploits secondary literature regarding the unionist mural tradition and compares it with a discourse analysis of three recently erected unionist murals to answer whether they signal continuity or change. It will be shown that, despite the unprecedented unionist anger with the Northern Ireland Protocol, the three murals exhibit no change. Ultimately, the findings from the discourse analysis are telling of a political movement and mural tradition that remain stagnant in the face of continuous political change and will likely continue to be so in the coming future.

## **Sammendrag**

Siden 1984 har Nord-Irlands mange vegger vært prydet med nasjonalistiske og unionistiske veggmalier, som er viktige uttrykk for politiske ståsted og identitet. Denne oppgaven sentrerer seg rundt den unionistiske veggmaliertradisjonen, og de bemerkelsesverdige tegnene på kontinuitet i dets form og innhold. Tidligere forskning viser at den unionistiske veggmaliertradisjonen har brukt de samme symbolske bildene for å formidle de samme faste synene på politiske debatter i Nord-Irland siden den ble etablert under The Troubles. Samtidig så har Nord-Irland sett jevn og stødig fremgang siden Good Friday. Denne oppgaven benytter seg av sekundærlitteratur i kombinasjon med en diskursanalyse av tre nylig reiste unionistiske veggmalier for å svare på om veggmalierne signaliserer kontinuitet eller endring i tradisjonen. Det vil komme frem at de tre veggmalierne viser ingen tegn på endring. Funnene fra analysen forteller om en politisk bevegelse og en tilhørende veggmaliertradisjon som forblir stillestående i møte med kontinuerlig politisk utvikling, og som kommer til å forbli slik i umiddelbar fremtid.



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## Introduction

### Research Question

Northern Ireland is impossible to understand without knowledge of the Troubles, what caused it, and the ensuing peace process. The Troubles refer to the years between 1968 and 1998 when unionists and nationalists were engaged in conflict.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of the conflict lay the mutually exclusive constitutional preferences of unionists and nationalists. Unionists wished to maintain the union with Britain, whilst nationalists sought to reunite Ireland. Peter Shirlow has described the conflict as unsolvable, as ‘Republicans will not be British, and unionists will not shift their constitutional alliance.’<sup>2</sup> However, the conflict did end in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement remains a watershed moment in the history of Northern Ireland, as it removed political violence and established the framework for a region in which unionists and nationalists could peacefully co-exist. However, the violence did not end because the constitutional preferences were set aside, but because neither side could sense victory in the foreseeable future. This would have important implications for the peace process and political issues that was to come.

Compared to the period of conflict it replaced the peace process cannot be seen as anything other than a success. Throughout the period, political violence has become near-extinct. However, that is not to say the period has been without its challenges. In addition to conditions for peace, the Good Friday Agreement established a new devolved government, in which Unionists and Nationalists were forced to cooperate. However, considering the end-goals of Unionist and Nationalists are diametrically opposed, the devolved government has often been disabled by their inability to cooperate. As a result of this, the devolved government has collapsed several times, and many have described the peace process as stagnating.<sup>3</sup> Despite the government collapses, the sense of peace and progress has never really been doubted. Continuity and change are terms that can define the period, as the removal of political violence changed the entire region for the better, but the political aspirations and divisions between unionists and nationalists have continued.

The entirety of the Troubles and the peace process has, since the mid 1980s been visualized on the many walls of Northern Ireland, in the shape of murals. At the height of the Troubles, both unionists and nationalists began to use murals as means of expressing their

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<sup>1</sup> Fitzduff & O’Hagan, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Shirlow, 2017, p. 394

<sup>3</sup> Crowley, 2015, p. 71



views and ideological messages. Considering how the history of Northern Ireland is tightly intertwined with the social, political, and ideological divides of the region, the murals' reflections of history are also reflections of the political atmosphere. During the Troubles, the murals captured the violent political atmosphere through depictions of armed gunmen accompanied by promises of violence. Although the violence ended in 1998, the constitutional preferences of unionists and nationalists did not. The murals were a non-violent way of expressing those preferences, which explains why murals continued to appear throughout the peace process, despite originating in a time of conflict and violence. They continued to reflect the political atmosphere during the peace process, as some murals promoting and commemorating the peace began to appear. At the same time, murals containing offensive and sectarian content continued to be erected. This shows how the political divides of the Troubles remained present within Northern Ireland's society throughout the peace process.

The sense of peace and progress continued despite the sectarian murals suggesting otherwise, up until 2016. In 2016 the Brexit referendum was held, and Britain would vote to leave the EU. Brexit has since proved itself to be the largest challenge to the peace settlement established in 1998.<sup>4</sup> Although the majority of Northern Ireland voted remain, the rest of Britain disagreed, and Northern Ireland had to leave the EU alongside Britain.<sup>5</sup> The vote carried unseen implications for Northern Ireland, especially regarding their border to the Republic of Ireland. As Northern Ireland left the EU, the European Single Market's integrity would have to be protected by a border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, which the absence of is an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement. The establishment of a hard border could be detrimental to the Agreement. The British government and the EU soon realized the dangers of this and were quick to state their intentions of safeguarding the Good Friday Agreement. The solution came in 2021 through the Northern Ireland Protocol. The Protocol ensured the integrity of the Good Friday Agreement and the European Single Market by establishing an artificial sea border in the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain.<sup>6</sup>

The Protocol and especially the unionist reactions towards it represent fundamental change to the peace settlement, evident by the violent protests of April 2021 where unionist

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<sup>4</sup> Guelke, 2019, p. 394

<sup>5</sup> McCann & Hainsworth, 2017, p. 335

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland

protesters exerted violence not seen since the Troubles.<sup>7</sup> For the first time, the peace and progress made after the Good Friday Agreement may be upended. This thesis seeks to explore if this has led to change within unionist murals erected after the Protocol was negotiated and implemented. Thus, the thesis seeks to answer the following research question: *Do recently erected unionist murals reflect continuity or change within the mural tradition?* The aims and objectives of the thesis are to present and discuss the unionist mural tradition between the years of 1968 and 2015, then analyze three unionist murals erected after the Protocol was negotiated and implemented. The purpose of the analysis is to discover whether unionist murals exhibit change or continuity compared to the mural tradition's history by focusing on the symbolic use of imagery in the murals and their ability to reflect the political issues that concern unionists. As will be shown, the murals of Northern Ireland have reflected the political atmosphere since 1984 and stands to believe that the significant change in the current political atmosphere is reflected in recently erected murals. Furthermore, the political landscape of Northern Ireland may yet be fundamentally altered in the 2022 Northern Ireland Election, as Nationalists may become dominant in Northern Ireland for the first time in over a century. The analysis of the murals could provide important insight as to how unionists may react to such a change to the political landscape.

#### Author's note

Before we can move on to the next chapter, a few central terms and concepts need to be defined. The first is Unionists vs. unionists. Unionists with the upper-case refers to Unionist parties and its members. An example would be the Democratic Ulster Party and the party member Sir Jeffrey Donaldson. Unionist with a lower-case refers to the parts of the population that support Northern Ireland's position within the UK. Another relevant distinction to be made is the difference between unionists and loyalists. Although their political orientation is similar, loyalists differentiate themselves from unionists through their hardened attitude and willingness to resort to violence to achieve or maintain their political goals. This thesis focuses on unionists rather than loyalists because of the recent period of peace where deadly politically motivated violence has reached near non-existent levels. Another term that needs clarification is the political atmosphere of Northern Ireland. When this thesis refers to the political atmosphere of Northern Ireland, it refers to the political and social sentiments expressed by various members and communities of Northern Ireland at a

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<sup>7</sup> Hirst, 2021

given time. Considering the focus on unionist murals, this thesis understands their reflections of the political atmosphere as reflections of unionist political and social sentiments. In the current political landscape, those are defining features of the political atmosphere.

Additionally, the choice of three unionist murals rather than nationalist murals, or just murals in Northern Ireland, has several explanations. Firstly, the sense that peace and progress may be upended by the Protocol is mainly rooted in the unionist disapproval and anger with it and is more likely to be reflected within unionist murals. Goalwin has defined three categories of unionist imagery: depictions of historical events, flags, crests and slogans, and masked gunmen.<sup>8</sup> The choice of three unionist murals is rooted within this statement. Should the research question be answered to an adequate degree, then all categories must be represented in the analysis. Lastly, the thesis is limited by word count, which limits the number of murals that can be analyzed.

## Literature review

This thesis concerns itself with whether recently erected unionist murals represent change or continuity in the unionist mural tradition established in the 1980s. Consequently, literature regarding the form, content, and rhetoric of unionist murals between 1984 and 2016 is highly relevant, as it contributes to creating a picture of how unionist murals have used symbolic imagery to reflect their views and ideological messages up until Brexit. In that regard, Bill Rolston's *Politics and painting: murals and conflict in Northern Ireland* is relevant, as he analyses and explains how the mural tradition has evolved from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, up until the 1990s. In the first chapter Rolston details how the unionist mural tradition came to be and evolved during the Troubles, up until 1990. 'The Art of War: Instability, Insecurity, and Ideological Imagery in Northern Ireland's Political Murals' by Gregory Goalwin compliments Rolston's work, as he focuses on murals beyond where Rolston's work ended, in addition to providing three main categories of unionist imagery within the murals, which has informed this thesis' understanding of the murals' ability to reflect the political atmosphere.

When looking at the murals throughout the peace process, Bill Rolston returns to relevance with his article "'Trying to reach the future through the past": Murals and memory in Northern Ireland', accompanied by Toney Crowley's work 'Hegemonic shifts: The latest from the walls of Northern Ireland'. Both journal articles examines what the murals might tell

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<sup>8</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p. 199

you about Northern Ireland's societies during the peace process but differ in certain areas. Whereas Crowley provides a detailed description of how the murals have evolved and changed and how they may reflect societal and political realities obscured by other forms of discourse, Rolston focus on what the murals erected after the Belfast Agreement may mean to the various communities throughout Northern Ireland. Both are relevant to understand how the murals reflect the views of unionists and the political issues that concern them. However, neither move any closer to present-day than 2015. Since this thesis concerns itself with the current state of Northern Ireland, all the literature mentioned above serves to inform and contextualize the analysis of this thesis. Their journal articles carry signs of continuity regarding the functions of the various imagery as ascribed in Goalwin's article and are therefore telling as to whether the mural tradition exhibited signs of continuity or change during the peace process.

The murals of Northern Ireland are closely knit with the political atmosphere of the region, which is interwoven with the history of the region. Regarding the Troubles itself, the work of Fitzduff and O'Hagan on the 'INCORE Background Paper' within the *Cain Archive* has proven most valuable regarding concrete information about the conflict. Unfortunately, their work largely descriptive and does not delve deep enough into the peace process. Colin Coulter does so, in his introductory chapter of *Northern Ireland after the troubles* which highlights how the peace process has been shaped by the Belfast Agreement, and the various ways the process can be dubbed both a success and failure. It is especially the emphasis on the unionist working-class that makes Coulter's work valuable, as the thesis centres around what we might learn from unionist murals and those who commission them.

Although Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol only recently happened, they have already been the subject of multiple research papers. Considering the sheer amount of research available on Brexit, this thesis largely concerns itself with the research addressing Brexit and Northern Ireland. Chris McCrudden's *The Good Friday Agreement, Brexit and Rights* (2017) describes the ways in which the Belfast Agreement could be affected by Brexit, which is important to understand why the Northern Ireland Protocol came to be, and why it has upended the sense of peace and stability. Adrian Guelke's 'Northern Ireland, Brexit, and the Interpretation of Self-Determination' analyses how Brexit could move Northern Ireland further towards a unified Ireland, which is a major source of unionist anxiety. The literature above informs the thesis' understanding of the political atmosphere of Northern Ireland and how it has evolved between 1998 and 2022. The reflections between the murals and the political atmosphere of Northern Ireland is a defining trait of the mural tradition. As such,

attaining an understanding of the political atmosphere is critical to answer whether the unionist murals represent change or continuity in the mural tradition. If they murals do not reflect the political atmosphere established by the literature above, then the murals present a change in the mural tradition.

As will be made apparent, the unionist mural tradition from the 1980s and onwards is defined by continuity in its symbolic imagery and the use of it through the largest watershed moment in the modern history of Northern Ireland: The Good Friday Agreement. This thesis seeks to analyze unionist murals erected after the Northern Ireland Protocol was announced in an attempt at judging whether the murals signal continuity or change compared to the history of the tradition, given the significant political developments witnessed in the region after Brexit. This can have important implications regarding the current political atmosphere beyond what is said by scholars and politicians, as the murals provide insight to social and political realities not available in other forms of discourse.<sup>9</sup>

## Methodology

This thesis exploits both primary and secondary sources to answer the research question. It is driven by a qualitative discourse analysis of three unionist murals erected after the Protocol was announced on 31 Jan. 2021, as it is arguably the protocol that has had the most effect on Northern Ireland's current political atmosphere. Specifically, it is the Critical Discourse Analysis framework created by Anabela Carvalho this thesis builds upon. Carvalho emphasizes the need for critical thinking when reading data – which translates well to the murals.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the research question implies a comparative aspect of the thesis. Melve describes working comparatively as looking at a research object in light of something else.<sup>11</sup> Answering whether the murals represent continuity or change implicates comparing the findings from the discourse analysis against the thesis' informed understanding of the unionist mural tradition as established by secondary sources. As such, the first two chapters are necessary to establish an understanding of what defines the unionist mural tradition and how it has evolved. That understanding will form the backdrop for the qualitative discourse analysis of the three unionist murals in chapter 3. Choosing discourse analysis ahead of an aesthetic analysis is rooted in the highly political nature of the murals. The unionist mural tradition is not only defined by its symbolic imagery, but by the rhetorical use of that content

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<sup>9</sup> Crowley, 2015, p. 75

<sup>10</sup> Carvalho, 2008, p. 166

<sup>11</sup> Melve, 2018, p. 71

as well. An esthetic analysis would therefore be insufficient, as a central characteristic, the rhetoric behind the murals, would be ignored.

The three murals selected for the analysis within this thesis are chosen based on several different criteria. Each mural needs to represent at least one of the three main categories established earlier in the introduction. Secondly, they must all be erected after the Protocol was negotiated and implemented. The murals have traditionally reflected the political atmosphere of Northern Ireland, and the current political atmosphere is largely influenced by the Protocol. Thus, unionist murals erected before the Protocol are less relevant, seeing as they cannot reflect unionist opinion on the issue. Thirdly, the murals need to be erected in different areas of Northern Ireland. The mural tradition exists mainly at the grassroots level which means that every mural is only representative of the local area they are erected within. By choosing murals from separate unionist communities in Northern Ireland the analysis will be more representative of the entire unionist mural tradition and makes similar findings in each of the three murals more credible reflections of the entire unionist community and mural tradition. The murals are all found on Extramural Activity, which is a forum dedicated to registering murals and street art erected in Northern Ireland.

This thesis is divided into four separate, but complimenting chapters. The first chapter explores the unionist mural tradition, dating back to the Troubles. Such information is essential to create the foundation for the comparison that need to be done later in the thesis. The second chapter moves away from the murals of Northern Ireland, and towards the current political atmosphere of the region. An understanding of the current political atmosphere, with emphasis on unionist sentiments within it is essential context for the coming discourse analysis. The third chapter contains the specific analysis of the unionist murals. The conclusion presents the findings from the discourse analysis and examines how they compare to the tradition as established in chapter one.

## Chapter 1 - Unionist murals in Northern Ireland



Figure 1: Peter Maloney, Jan. 1 2008



Figure 2: Extramural Activity, Jul. 2 2016

This chapter presents and analyses the unionist mural tradition that was established in 1984 and how it has evolved since. However, there is one aspect of unionist imagery within the tradition that dates back further, which is why the chapter starts with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There will be an emphasis on the content and rhetoric of the murals, and how both aspects have evolved throughout history, up until Brexit. The research question seeks to understand whether recently erected unionist murals may signal continuity or change in the mural tradition. That question is not possible to answer without knowledge of how unionist murals began and have evolved since then, which is what this chapter will provide. Specifically, the chapter will identify a set of key features within unionist murals and analyze whether those features continue or change between the years 1968 and 2015.

### 1.1 - Unionist Murals Before Good Friday

The first unionist murals in Northern Ireland began appearing in the early 1900s. They were mainly erected as part of unionist celebration and parades, such as the celebration of Protestant victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. During this time, the most common theme was a depiction of King William III, most often crossing the Boyne on a white horse. During this time, there was little explicit political rhetoric was absent in the murals. However, King William III and the year 1690 is perhaps the most emotive symbols in all of unionism<sup>12</sup>, and was likely used to emphasize Unionism's dominance within the region.<sup>13</sup> Although this tradition was less political in nature compared to the one established during the Troubles, it still carried strong implications regarding unionist identity through its frequent use of traditional unionist symbols. Considering nationalists were banned from holding their own

<sup>12</sup> Rolston, 1991, p. 15

<sup>13</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p. 200

parades, celebrations, and erecting their own murals, this tradition reflects the political atmosphere which was defined by unionist political dominance.<sup>14</sup>

In the latter half of the 1960s, a major opposition against the Unionist rule was forming. The civil rights movement of nationalists was met by Unionists with promises of reform, but realities of repression.<sup>15</sup> Soon, Northern Ireland would be engulfed in a violent conflict between nationalist and unionist paramilitaries. Unionist murals continued to be erected in connection to unionist celebrations and parades, but considering the political developments of the Troubles, they did not reflect the current political atmosphere which was defined by hostile and violent confrontations between unionists and nationalists. That would change in 1984, when unionist movement would find their voice and unity in response to the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1984, which led to the establishment of the unionist mural tradition as described by Goalwin.<sup>16</sup> In different ways, this signaled both a change and continuity in the unionist mural tradition that had begun in the early 1900s.

The change in tradition relates more to the content of the murals. Before depictions of historical events dominated the imagery of unionist murals, but now masked loyalist gunmen began appearing in large numbers, which illustrated and reflected unionists' willingness to fight for Northern Ireland's position in Britain. Often accompanying the loyalist gunmen, was the crests and slogans of loyalist paramilitary organizations, as well as the Union Jack. The expanded portfolio of unionist imagery within the murals represents perhaps the greatest change to the unionist mural tradition and can be seen as the start of the unionist mural tradition as we know it today. At the same time, the expanded portfolio reflects a continuity within the mural tradition. As the Troubles began, the mural tradition of old became less and less reflective of the political atmosphere of Northern Ireland. That ability was restored alongside the expanded portfolio of unionist imagery in 1984. Additionally, the newly increased portfolio allowed unionists to express their views regarding political issues. As such, the change or expansion in content signal a continuation in the murals ability to reflect the political atmosphere and an expanded ability to reflect unionist views and ideological messages.

Considering this, we can identify a set of key features of the unionist mural tradition during the Troubles. Firstly, the imagery within the murals can be divided into three main categories: 1) depictions of historical events, 2) representations of loyalist masked gunmen,

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<sup>14</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p.198

<sup>15</sup> Rolston, 1991, p. 29

<sup>16</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p. 199



3) flags, crests, and slogans.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, that symbolic imagery allowed the murals to reflect different aspects of the views of unionists and political issues that concerned them. It was especially the loyalist masked gunmen that reflected the hostile political development and atmosphere that defined Northern Ireland between 1968 and 1998. As we can see, the unionist mural tradition was not necessarily altered, but rather expanded in the face of the significant historical event that is the Troubles. Next, we will look at how the next major historical event, the Good Friday Agreement, led to continuity or change within the key features of unionist murals mentioned above.

## 1.2 - Unionist Murals After Good Friday

After the Troubles ended, the murals continued to be erected, which may appear surprising considering how integrated the unionist mural tradition had become with the conflict itself. There are multiple explanations. Firstly, the Troubles did not end because the sectarian and political divides of the region was set aside, but rather because unionists and nationalists became exhausted of the violence and could see no apparent victory soon. As mentioned in the introduction, the constitutional preferences that perpetuated the conflict lasted past it. During the Troubles, the murals had been given the role as mediums in which unionist could express their views and ideological messages. Considering the constitutional preferences remained past the Troubles, there was no apparent reason for the murals to stop being erected either. Secondly, the murals had evolved into identity markers that served to unite unionists and nationalists respectively.<sup>18</sup> The need to express and maintain identity did not disappear alongside the violence, and thus the murals also did not. Thirdly, the devolved mandatory power-sharing government established by the Good Friday Agreement meant that unionists and nationalists would have influence of the rule of Northern Ireland. As reflections of political issues, the murals allowed unionists to promote and further their political goals in a non-violent way.

How did peace affect the unionist mural tradition then? Nationalists decided to remove all masked gunmen from their murals as a gesture of good-will and faith in the peace process. Due to their vast portfolio of different themes within the murals, this decision was easier compared to that of the unionists, which had a rather limited portfolio in comparison.

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<sup>17</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p. 199

<sup>18</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p. 212

The unionists were not inclined to remove the masked gunmen from their murals, as masked gunmen composed most of the imagery they had painted during the Troubles. As mentioned, the unionist movement had rallied behind the depictions of their armed struggle, and the masked gunmen had continued to dominate the unionist murals throughout the Troubles. If they were to remove all masked gunmen from their murals, it would damage and reduce the sense of identity crafted during the Troubles. So, they didn't. Their murals were soon officially judged anachronistic, which led to increased pressure for unionist to change their murals.<sup>19</sup> This pressure from the British government and other external forces materialized in the government-led project *Re-Imagining Communities*. Seeking to promote reconciliation, the project replaced some of the most offensive murals with murals that promoted unity and peace.<sup>20</sup>

Although the project was directed at both nationalist and unionist murals, the latter saw the most change, considering the republicans had already reimagined themselves to a larger degree than the unionists. However, the project was limited in scope. Only a total of 123 murals were repainted through the project which, given the thousands of murals in Northern Ireland, cannot be described as very impactful.<sup>21</sup> One might wonder if the government-led intervention did more harm than good. Within many of the murals created through the project, politics were completely removed. Bill Rolston claims this created the sense that the state sought to enforce the people of Northern Ireland to forget the past<sup>22</sup> – which frankly appears impossible in Northern Ireland. Consequently, the reactions to the project were mixed. There were some murals embraced by the communities, such as murals advocating human rights and children's rights. Others outright denied the struggles of working-class communities by refusing to acknowledge the conflict and was unsurprisingly not approved of. This is evident within the Arts Council's evaluation of the program, where they experienced that 'local activists waited until the Re-imagining Communities project was completed, and then installed their own imagery'.<sup>23</sup> Clearly the locals viewed the murals as a way of expressing their identity and ideology and would alter the murals if they felt that was not the case.

In the years after the project ended there are signs that the peace process has consolidated itself within the murals. Crowley argues that there has been a general 'clean-up'

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<sup>19</sup> Rolston, 2010, p. 297

<sup>20</sup> Rolston, 2010, p. 298

<sup>21</sup> Crowley, 2011, p. 27

<sup>22</sup> Rolston, 2010, p. 304

<sup>23</sup> Arts Council, 2009, p. 105

of unionist and republican murals in some of their respective districts.<sup>24</sup> Communities have commissioned artists to repaint conflict-related murals in specific areas, often those travelled by tourists, within Northern Ireland. King Billy, who featured prominently in the murals before the Troubles, has reemerged as central figure within repainted unionist murals. The greatest example of this is the repainting of the infamous *You Are Now Entering Loyalist Sandy Row* mural, which was replaced by a mural commemorating King William III, as seen on page 10. As for the republican murals, commemorations of IRA soldiers have been modified to celebrate the same individuals as “working-class” heroes. Yet, these developments paints only a partial picture of the mural tradition during the peace process.

As curator of the Northern Ireland Murals archive in the Clairmont Colleges Digital Library, Tony Crowley states that the period between 2005 and 2015 has seen some signs of consolidating peace and progress, such as the repainting above, but that there has been erected many more murals that display a less optimistic picture of post-conflict Northern Ireland. He claims that ‘there are increasing numbers of murals that reflect a hardening of attitudes, a reinforcement of sectarian division, and bitterness and disillusion with the “post-conflict situation”’.<sup>25</sup> This was especially evident through the resurgence of unionist murals carrying masked gunmen. After a brief decline in their presence in unionist murals, they began reappearing in the early 2010s. This is a development within the murals that aligns itself with the unionist view on the peace process, which has consistently decreased the unionist dominance within Northern Ireland and consequently increased their anxiety.

The unionist murals erected after the Good Friday Agreement exhibit more continuity than change from during the Troubles, despite initiatives to promote peace and reconciliation. Removal of offensive content suggest that the mural tradition may have had some change in content, but the initiatives to make such a change are not substantial enough, as they are overshadowed by far more murals expressing continuity in the sectarian and offensive content of the Troubles. Unionist murals erected during the peace process also exhibits a continuation of their ability to reflect the political atmosphere. The peace process can be characterized by some progress in areas such as policing, but stagnation on other political issues.<sup>26</sup> In a similar way, some areas of Northern Ireland has seen a clean-up of offensive content in some areas, but a continuation of hardened attitudes between unionists and nationalists in many more. This quote from Crowley’s conclusion summarizes the continuity

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<sup>24</sup> Crowley, 2015, p. 68

<sup>25</sup> Crowley, 2015, p. 71-72

<sup>26</sup> Crowley, 2015, p.71

within the unionist mural tradition throughout the peace process: ‘the walls are telling us what they’ve always told us’.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Crowley, 2015, p. 75

## Chapter 2 - The Current Political Atmosphere



Figure 3: Peter Maloney, Aug. 30 2007

‘Deserted! Well – I can stand alone’. Unionist anxiety is nothing new in Northern Ireland. The left-side picture on the mural above is a 2007 copy of an anti – home rule postcard created in 1914.<sup>28</sup> Although it was created long before the Troubles, it has consistently been reused within unionist murals as a symbol of abandonment from the British government and unionist willingness to defend Ulster, or Northern Ireland, from nationalists. The Northern Ireland Protocol has made unionist anxiety the defining feature of the current political atmosphere of Northern Ireland by spurring violent protests against the Protocol. The previous chapter proved that the unionist mural tradition has been defined by continuity regarding both content and the ability to reflect the political atmosphere. Although the imagery of the unionist murals can be analyzed on its own, their ability to reflect the political atmosphere cannot be discerned without knowledge of the political issues that define it. This chapter seeks to provide a thorough understanding of the current political atmosphere in Northern Ireland, by exploiting relevant literature on the subject matter.

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<sup>28</sup> Moloney, 2007

## 2.1 - Unionists and Brexit

Throughout the peace process, Unionists have seen Nationalists make consistent and considerable ground at successive elections. Their anxiety is closely tied to the end-goal of Nationalists: A reunification with the Republic of Ireland. The identity of unionists is near-dependent on their understanding of themselves as British and not Irish. This explains why their anxiety has consistently increased in the years after the Belfast Agreement was signed, given the ground Nationalists have made at every election. Peter Shirlow states that the Unionists continue to use the political language of the Troubles and consistently halter the legislative ability of the devolved government – which serves to maintain the social and political divides of that period.<sup>29</sup> It appears Unionists have viewed the progress towards peace as progress towards a unified Ireland – which opposes all they stand for. However, Brexit presented Unionists with an opportunity to firmly place Northern Ireland within Britain by leaving the EU and furthering the distance between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Consequently, Unionists heavily supported the leave-campaign in the time before the Brexit. Creating more distance from the EU and the Republic of Ireland could perhaps ease some of the anxiety which had affected Unionists in Northern Ireland for so long. 23 June 2016 the referendum was held, and it became clear that the leave-campaign had lost in Northern Ireland but won in Britain.<sup>30</sup> Sinn Féin, SDLP and other Nationalist parties expressed their dismay with the result and was not prepared to see Brexit as a done deal, considering the majority of Northern Ireland had in fact voted remain. Unionists responded with “Brexit meant Brexit”. But as McCann and Hainsworth puts it: ‘This mixed bag of results served to open up a Pandora’s Box of post-referendum conundrums for Northern Ireland’.<sup>31</sup> The discrepancy between the voting pattern of Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK did create some minor political turmoil, but it did not amount to anything substantial, and Northern Ireland had to conform to leaving the EU. But Brexit would soon go on to create substantial political issues for both Northern Ireland and Britain in its entirety. Those issues were rooted in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

## 2.2 - The Good Friday Agreement and Brexit

The Belfast Agreement, which had ended the Troubles and established the devolved government of Northern Ireland, was in many ways, minor and major, underpinned by and

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<sup>29</sup> Shirlow, 2017, p. 394

<sup>30</sup> McCann & Hainsworth, 2017, p. 335

<sup>31</sup> McCann & Hainsworth, 2017, p. 338

contingent on Northern Ireland being a part of the EU. In his 2017 article *The Good Friday Agreement, Brexit, and Rights*, Chris McCrudden highlights the many ways in which the Belfast Agreement depends on a membership within the EU.<sup>32</sup> The Agreement consists of three separate strands regarding Northern Ireland's relationship with Ireland, the UK, and the rule within the region itself. All three strands are, to varying degree, dependent on various rights guaranteed by EU membership. What could leaving the EU and not accommodating to the Agreement mean for the peace process in Northern Ireland? One could wonder if Unionists saw this as a possibility of renegotiating the Agreement for the betterment of their own political position. However, this would undoubtedly upset the increasingly influential Nationalists and perhaps endanger the peace process. The EU and the British government clearly wished to avoid this. Therefore, soon after Brexit became fact, they issued joint statements where they announced their intentions of accommodating the Belfast Agreement and ensure that the hard-won peace would remain.<sup>33</sup> The result of this intention was the Northern Ireland Protocol.

### 3.3 - The Northern Ireland Protocol

The protocol had three main goals: avoiding a hard border between North and South, safeguarding the Belfast Agreement in all its dimensions, and ensuring the integrity of the European Single Market.<sup>34</sup> Northern Ireland needed to remain within the Single European Market to avoid a hard border, but at the same time there needed to be checks on all goods that was at risk of entering the EU from Britain. The Protocol defined goods at risk of entering the EU as all goods travelling from a third country – which includes any other part of the UK.<sup>35</sup> As a result, what has been dubbed by Unionists as the “Irish Sea Border” has been established between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, which placed checks on goods travelling to Northern Ireland from any other place in Britain. Upon its final negotiations, the British government and the EU acknowledged the protocol as a long term and viable withdrawal agreement. However, as evident by foreign secretary Liz Truss’ article in the Belfast Telegraph, the British Government has backtracked on this outlook, and returned to renegotiate the protocol.<sup>36</sup> Why?

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<sup>32</sup> McCrudden, 2017, p. 1

<sup>33</sup> European Commission, Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland

<sup>34</sup> European Commission, Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland

<sup>36</sup> Truss, Jan. 20, 2022

This thesis argues the backtracking can be attributed to unionist anxiety and anger exhibited in response to the Protocol. Unionist anxiety is nothing new, as we have already established. Unionists had viewed Brexit as a viable way of ensuring Northern Ireland's position within the UK. However, due to the Belfast Agreement, which unionists had been reluctant to even sign in the first place, Brexit now had the opposite effect.<sup>37</sup> To safeguard the Belfast Agreement and ensure the integrity of the European Single Market, Northern Ireland had to be effectively moved away from Britain's internal market and further to the European Single market and thus Ireland. This has outraged Unionists and unionists alike, perhaps more so considering Brexit was meant to move Northern Ireland further away from Ireland, instead of the opposite. However, the fact that the British government has listened to the Unionists and backtracked on the protocol proves the government has a different outlook on unionist anxiety this time, compared to previously. Several times throughout the post-Troubles years, the British government has taken control of the devolved government of Northern Ireland and made legislations against Unionist policy, such as gay marriage. But now, the British government has listened and adhered to unionist anxiety, which suggest Britain sees the anxiety as far more substantial and volatile than previously.

There is some evidence that Unionist anxiety is at a higher level and is more volatile now than before Brexit and the NI Protocol. The most obvious is the April 2021 protests. The civil unrest shook Northern Ireland to its core, as the violence created unpleasant visual reminders of the Troubles. Burning vehicles and violent clashes between police and dissidents was found throughout Northern Ireland. April 2021 made it clear that unionists were capable of violence once more, and begat fears that the future could contain more, if the protocol was not negotiated. Although the violence was not directly connected with the paramilitary organizations of the past, such as the UFF or UVF, there was some evidence that senior figures within these organizations, whom undoubtedly have major influence on unionist communities, allowed the violence to carry on.<sup>38</sup>

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss published an article in the Belfast Telegraph regarding the damage the protocol has on the peace process, in which she stated that the Protocol 'is putting that hard-won progress at risk by upsetting the delicate balance which is fundamental to the Agreement'.<sup>39</sup> In the article, she claims the Protocol has lost the consent of the unionist community because they feel their identity and the integrity of the country is threatened. This

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<sup>37</sup> Coulter, 2015, p. 8

<sup>38</sup> Hirst, Apr. 14, 2021

<sup>39</sup> Truss, Jan. 20, 2022



statement seemingly validates the fears of the DUP and supports the warnings of scholars addressing Northern Ireland and Brexit. The current political atmosphere can therefore be defined by a sense that Brexit and the Protocol may upend the peace and progress that has been sustained since the Troubles ended. Perhaps the most telling evidence of this is the British government backtracking on the Protocol they initially viewed as a long-term and viable solution to the withdrawal from the EU, and the violent April 2021 protests. By listening and adhering to the demands of Unionists, the British government has proven the genuine threat the Protocol may be against the peace process.

## Chapter 3 - Mural Analysis

As to answering the research question, the thesis has so far provided two of the three components needed to say whether the unionist murals reflect change or continuity compared to the unionist mural tradition. The first chapter provided the foundation for comparison. The second chapter provided essential political context needed to extract information from unionist murals regarding the current political atmosphere and developments. This chapter provides the final component needed before we can answer the research question: an analysis of recently erected unionist murals.

### 3.1 - 'Defending Freedom from Hate'. Aug. 30, 2021



Figure 4: Extramural activity.

The mural above was registered on Extramural Activity Aug. 30, 2021. The creator(s) of the mural is unknown, as with most murals, but we can assume that it was

commissioned by the local community of the area in which it presides. At the very least we know it is supported by it, considering it is yet to be removed or repainted, as unionist communities have displayed a propensity to do should they disagree with the mural. The mural contains two of the main categories of imagery established by Gregory Goalwin: masked loyalist gunmen and the crest of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA).<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the names of three unionist areas of Belfast is written out at the very top of the mural. 'Defending Freedom from Hate' is written out below the UDA crest.

Murals depicting loyalist gunmen and crests of paramilitary organizations have been prevalent within the unionist mural tradition since 1984 and has been used to reflect the unionist willingness to defend or protect Northern Ireland's membership in the United Kingdom<sup>41</sup>, which unionists feel is threatened by the Protocol. In that way, this mural exhibit a clear continuation of the unionist mural tradition in term of imagery and symbolism, as the same masked gunmen symbolize the same political rhetoric. Of course, one might assume



Figure 5: *Extramural Activity*, Aug. 13, 2007

that is a given, considering the mural is a reiteration of the one who previously stood in its place. The mural pictured to the left is the old one and was recorded in 2007. As we can see, the reiteration is a near-perfect copy of the older one, albeit with some exceptions. One criterion for the selection of the murals in the analysis was that the murals had to have been erected after the Protocol was announced. Although the mural was repainted after it was announced, its imagery was decided all the way back in 2007. At first glance, this could discredit the mural definition as 'recently erected', as the imagery was created 14 years prior. However, this thesis still acknowledges

the mural as valid for the analysis. The main reason for this is the inclination of unionist communities to repaint and alter murals should they feel unrepresented by them, as evident within the Arts Council evaluation of the Re-Imagining Communities programme.<sup>42</sup> With this in mind, by choosing to reiterate the older mural instead of painting a new one, the unionist community has exhibited continuity in the unionist mural tradition, as well as continuity of the unionist anxiety that spurred the representations of loyalist gunmen in the murals in the first place.

<sup>40</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p. 199

<sup>41</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p. 202

<sup>42</sup> Arts Council, 2009, p. 105

This leads us to the political atmosphere described by the mural. Unionist murals can only reflect the unionist contribution to the political atmosphere, and the previous chapter established increased anxiety as the defining trait of unionism today. Anxiety is undoubtedly present in the mural through the representation of masked loyalist gunmen, but they do not necessarily reflect increased anxiety. Of course, it is difficult to portray a sense of increased anxiety within the murals, outside of explicitly mentioning the Irish Sea Border or the Protocol. Still, without those explicit messages, this mural still reflects unionist anxiety, which is a defining aspect of the current political atmosphere and how unionists view political issues in Northern Ireland. Thus, the mural suggest continuity regarding the tradition’s ability to reflect the current political atmosphere.

### 3.2 - ‘This We Will Always Maintain’. Sep. 14, 2021



Figure 6: Extramural Activity

‘This We Will Always Maintain’ was registered Sept. 14, 2021, at Extramural Activity. Once again, the creator(s) is unknown, but we can assume it is either commissioned and/or supported by the local unionist community that presides in the neighborhood the mural was erected in. The imagery of the mural can be placed within the third category established by Goalwin: symbolic expressions of identity such as flags, crests, and coat of arms.<sup>43</sup> 2021 marked the centenary of Northern Ireland’s creation in 1921, and this mural clearly celebrates this. The Union Jack is draped along the left-hand side of the mural and creates the backdrop for the Northern Ireland government’s coat of arms surrounded by every member of the United Kingdom in every cardinal direction. Above the coat of arms, the United Kingdom is written out. Below the mural ‘This We Will Always Maintain’ is written in gold.

The Union Jack and Irish tricolor became symbolic representations of the unionist and nationalist cause during the Troubles, respectively.<sup>44</sup> They have since continued to exist as symbolic reflections of identity, and clearly do so today. The entire mural reads as a celebration and reaffirmation of Northern Ireland’s position within the United Kingdom. Firstly, by having ‘The United Kingdom’ above the celebration of the centenary creates a sense that this is not a mural of Northern Ireland, but of the entire UK. Secondly, the way the coat of arms is faced with members of the UK in every cardinal direction clearly emphasizes Northern Ireland’s position within it. Lastly, the words ‘This We Will Always Maintain’ is an outright reaffirmation of the unionist belief that Northern Ireland will always belong in the UK. All in all, the content exhibits a clear continuity regarding the symbolic use of the Union Jack and Northern Ireland government’s coat of arms.

What then of the ability to reflect the political atmosphere? Foreign Secretary Truss summarized why unionist disapprove of the Protocol in her article published in the Belfast Telegraph: “Northern Ireland’s prosperity is overwhelmingly tied to the place it has in the UK internal market”.<sup>45</sup> Regarding checks and balances, the Protocol has made Northern Ireland a part of the European Single Market and not the UK internal market. The placement of Northern Ireland government’s coat of arms at the center of the United Kingdom can be interpreted as a visual representation of Northern Ireland’s correct position within the UK internal market instead of the European Single Market. However, this is a bit of a stretch considering the mural far more likely just celebrates Northern Ireland’s centenary as member

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<sup>43</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p. 199

<sup>44</sup> Goalwin, 2012, p. 203

<sup>45</sup> Truss, Jan. 20, 2022

of the UK. Still, the turmoil generated by the Protocol largely relates to the region's position as member of Britain. As such, the mural reflects a political atmosphere where unionists need to express and display their connection to Britain, which alludes to their anxiety of that connection no longer being the case.

### 3.3 - 'The Liberties of England'. Jan. 29, 2021



Figure 7: Extramural Activity

This mural was recorded Jan. 29, 2021, which is just one week after the Protocol was negotiated and announced. It is unlikely that the mural was commissioned and painted within that one week and is therefore not likely made with the Protocol in mind. However, the issue of the border between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland was still very much a central theme within the political atmosphere before the Protocol was announced. Considering this, the thesis views the mural as erected after the Protocol was announced and reflective of the political atmosphere caused by it, despite there being such a short timespan between the Protocol's announcement and the murals recording. The mural is a depiction of the landing of King William III at Carrickfergus in 1690, where he took over the army that he would defeat

the Catholics with at the Battle of the Boyne.<sup>46</sup> The mural is likely based off a near-contemporary painting of the landing at Carrickfergus, by painter C. Pocock, made some time between 1702-1710.<sup>47</sup> The color palette of the mural consists largely of various shades of brown, with the notable exception of the royal standard at the center of the mural, which is draped in red, blue, and yellow.

“Remember 1690” is perhaps the most emotive slogan of Unionism’.<sup>48</sup> This is the very first sentence of Bill Rolston’s *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland*, and it establishes the near mythical importance the year and King William III had and continues to have for Unionism in Northern Ireland. Depictions of King William III and the year 1690 have remained central to the unionist mural tradition, dating back to its origins in the early 1900s, as it symbolized Northern Ireland’s historical status as Protestant and British. This mural is clearly a continuation of that unionist mural tradition, as described by both Bill Rolston and Gregory Goalwin.

There are two features within the mural that can be understood as deliberate inclusions in relation to the political atmosphere it was erected within. The first is the words accompanying the portrait of King William III. “The Protestant Religion & Liberties of England I Will Maintain” is taken from the *Declaration of the Prince of Orange*, October 10, 1688. King William III’s victory in 1690 is said to have guaranteed Protestant liberty rather than Catholic authoritarianism.<sup>49</sup> Brexit and the Protocol have increased unionist anxiety because unionists perceive ‘Catholic authoritarianism’ as a possible outcome if the Protocol is not renegotiated. Within this context, the words of King Williams III can be seen as a promise that Northern Ireland is part of Britain and will maintain to be so. The visualization of the Protestant victory over the Catholics can be seen as a reassurance or reaffirmation of the Protestants’ (now unionist) presence in Northern Ireland, and its historical status as British.

The second feature is the royal standard at the centre of the mural. Considering how it stands out from the rest of the mural due to its colours and is placed at the very centre of the mural, it is likely meant to draw the attention of whomever sees it. What makes this relevant to the current political atmosphere of Northern Ireland is the fact that the royal standard is anachronistic. The royal standard depicted is the Royal Standard of Queen Anne I,

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<sup>46</sup> Rolston, 1991, p. 15

<sup>47</sup> Pocock, c. 1702-1710

<sup>48</sup> Rolston, 1991, p. 15

<sup>49</sup> Rolston, 1991, p. 15

which includes the red lion of the Scottish royal banner. The Royal Standard was not used before 1707, after the Acts of Union. The Royal Standard is therefore the first Royal Standard of Great Britain. This is likely done to reaffirm Northern Ireland's position within Britain, as it connects the mythical importance of King William III and 1690 to present-day Great Britain. These reaffirmations of Northern Ireland's position within Britain aligns itself with unionist anxiety of losing that position. As such, this mural reflects a political atmosphere where unionists feel the need to reaffirm Northern Ireland's identity as British, which imply the presence of unionist anxiety.



## Conclusion

### Analysis Findings

Crowley concluded in 2015, that the murals “tell us what they’ve always told us”.<sup>50</sup> The findings from the analysis confirms this statement, as the murals show clear continuity of the unionist mural tradition regarding their content and unionist views expressed through it. The three murals were analysed within the framework of the current political atmosphere yet shared the imagery and rhetoric of the murals established during the Troubles. Mural 3.1 contained masked loyalist gunmen and promises of defence, and clearly symbolized the same message now as they did during the Troubles: unionists will defend Northern Ireland’s position within Britain. Murals 3.2 and 3.3 are not overtly violent as 3.1, but they do combine to emphasize and maintain Northern Ireland’s connection to Britain. Whereas 3.2 celebrates the centenary of Northern Ireland (which is one and the same time also a celebration of Northern Ireland’s position in Britain), 4.3 depicts King William III’s landing in Carrickfergus, 1690. Both celebrates and visualizes Northern Ireland’s historical position as part of Britain and aligns themselves with the unionist mural tradition established in 1984. Thus, all three murals show continuity regarding their imagery and symbolism.

The recent political developments in Northern Ireland can be seen as the latest in a long line that has reduced Unionist influence and power, whilst at the same time increasing Nationalist influence and power. Given this trend of increased nationalist influence and power, unionist anxiety has continually increased as well. Now, the British government clearly assumes the unionists are close to their boiling-point, seeing as they backtracked on the Northern Ireland Protocol and adhered to unionist dismay for the first time during the peace process. In fact, it can be said the current political atmosphere is defined by the fear that unionist anger with the Protocol will upend the peace and progress sustained the last 24 years. The three murals analysed in this thesis convey a clear sense of unionist anxiety, which is at heart of the unionist anger, and thus show continuity in their ability to reflect the political atmosphere. However, there are some limitations to the analysis that need to be addressed.

### Limitations and suggestions for further research

Firstly, there are thousands of murals in Northern Ireland, and more are being erected every day. Concluding that the current unionist mural tradition exhibits continuity based on

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<sup>50</sup> Crowley, 2015, p. 75

the findings from just three murals make for an incredibly narrow understanding of mural tradition, as there may be hundreds of murals that may suggest differently. Considering that this thesis seeks to answer whether the current unionist mural tradition signal change or continuity, it is difficult to draw such a conclusion from just three murals. Ideally, all unionist murals need to be analysed to properly answer the research question of the thesis, but that is only possible in a wider longer study, given the sheer number of murals that exist. Still, although three murals are not enough to definitively conclude continuity, they can speak to it.

The limitations to the analysis are largely derived from the thesis' nature as a bachelor thesis, as it naturally limits the amount of research that can be done. However, the limitations provide promising suggestions for further research as well. Naturally, analysing more murals is a natural suggestion, which can provide more insight and nuance to our understanding of the mural tradition. Additionally, the unionist mural tradition is not the only mural tradition in Northern Ireland, as nationalist murals exist in equal numbers. Analysing the nationalist mural tradition for continuity or change could provide important and interesting insight to the political issues that concern nationalists. The murals in Northern Ireland clearly provide insight to the social and political realities of the region, as Crowley states<sup>51</sup>, and as the region continues to change and evolve, they will remain important objects to study in relation to coming political developments.

### Concluding remarks

If you assume a birds-eye view to the societal and political developments in Northern Ireland, and the unionist reception of them, it appears the region is nearing a crossroad. For the last 100 years, unionists have been in control, but to a lesser and lesser degree. Unionists are clearly anxious about this. At the same time, nationalism has been on the rise and gain more influence every election, which also undoubtedly makes unionists anxious. Now, for the first time in the contemporary history of Northern Ireland, nationalists may take the majority of the Northern Ireland Assembly, as Sinn Féin is on track to secure the greatest number of seats in the election and therefore the position as First Minister for the first time ever. The party has Irish Unity as their core political objective, which means a border poll is likely not far off should Sinn Féin reach majority in the election. DUP leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson has declined to answer whether his party would join a Northern Ireland executive with a Sinn Féin member as first minister, which has been branded by undemocratic by other parties. At the

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<sup>51</sup> Crowley, 2015, p. 75

same time, the Alliance party is expected to do well, which reflects an increasing number of the Northern Ireland population that do not identify as either nationalist or unionist. Clearly, the “Northern Ireland election could fundamentally alter the political landscape”, as the Irish Times puts it.<sup>52</sup>

The findings from this thesis portrays a Unionist movement and mural tradition that has remained near constant since 1984. Given the sectarian identity politics that Unionists campaign and the frequent government collapses in Northern Ireland, it may appear as though the peace process has stagnated and may even be upended the Protocol. But that is not the case. Northern Ireland has seen continuous progress and change for the better since the Good Friday Agreement. Violence has subsided, the terrorist threat-level was lowered in 2022 for the first time since 2010 despite the British Government claiming the peace may be upended by the Protocol<sup>53</sup>, and increasing parts of the population do not care to identify themselves as unionist or nationalist.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, Northern Ireland can, and is moving on from the Troubles. Clearly, Unionism cannot. As long as Irish Unity remains a possibility, no matter how distant, unionist anxiety will persist and thus the unionist mural tradition will not change, evident by the findings of this thesis. This contributes to explain why the unionist mural tradition exhibits continuity, and why it will likely continue to do so, no matter what the election results will be.

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<sup>52</sup> McClements, May 4, 2022

<sup>53</sup> Lewis, Mar. 22, 2022

<sup>54</sup> NI Election Survey 2019, p. 4

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