Irish Question is a phrase used mainly by members of the British ruling classes from the early 19th century until the 1920s to describe Irish nationalism and the calls for Irish independence. It is a complex problem that dates back to the 12th century and is still unresolved.
SECTION SUMMARY

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1. From the ORIGINS to the 10th CENTURY
0. Ireland in ancient times...

- **6000 BC**: The first settlement of Ireland took place by hunters and fishermen along the island’s eastern coast.

- **4000 BC**: The first farmers reached the island and started growing crops.

- **3200 BC**: An exceptionally grand passage tomb, Newgrange, was built which is older than Stonehenge and the Pyramids.

- **300 BC**: Iron Age warriors known as the Celts came to Ireland from mainland Europe and subdued the previous inhabitants.
...& in the old days!

The Celts forged the culture and the language of Ireland: the country’s name, Éire, derives from a Celtic goddess, Ériu.

- **50 BC - 50 AD**: the island was organised into five kingdoms, the traditional “*Five Fifths of Ireland*”.

- **400 AD**: seven independent kingdoms had evolved. Their kings often allied their armies to raid neighbouring Roman Britain and the Continent.
The 5th century: St. Patrick.

- On one of these raids a lad of 16 was captured in Wales, taken to Ireland and sold into slavery.
- During his enslavement the boy turned to religion and some six years later, at the age of 22, he escaped.
- The young man studied theology in the Roman church and in 432 A.D. he returned to Ireland where he began a lifelong quest of converting the Irish to Christianity.
- This was none other than Ireland’s patron, Saint Patrick (ca. 387-460).
From the 6th to the 9th century.

- Christianity took over the indigenous pagan religion by the year 600 AD.
- Irish Christian scholars excelled in the study of Latin, Greek and Christian theology in monasteries throughout Ireland.
- The arts of **manuscript illumination**, **metalworking** and **sculpture** flourished and produced such treasures as the **Book of Kells**, ornate jewellery, and the many carved stone crosses that can still be seen across the country.
The 9th and 10th centuries.

- In the 9th and 10th centuries, Ireland came under fierce attacks from the Vikings and monasteries suffered great atrocities at the hands of these aggressors.

- The Vikings founded, Dublin, Ireland’s capital city in 988 but their influence faded after their defeat by Brian Boru, the High King of Ireland, at Clontarf in 1014.

- In 1152 the four ecclesiastical provinces (Ulster, Leinster, Munster, Connaught) were created with both Celtic and Viking elements which also formed a united Church.
2. From the MIDDLE AGES to the 17th CENTURY
1. From the 11th & 12th c. ...

- After conquering England the Normans set their sights on Ireland: they arrived in 1169 during the reign of Henry II (1154–1189) when Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster, solicited Henry’s help to recover his kingdom from the King of Connaught.

- Henry landed at Waterford and declared himself Lord of Ireland with pope Adrian IV’s support.

- At first England was too busy with her own wars to mind Irish affairs, though: the Normans built walled towns, castles and churches, increased agriculture and commerce in Ireland and adopted Irish ways.
The English did NOT rule over the whole country: in fact they fought against the Irish constantly and after the Black Death of the late 1300s, English territory was reduced to the Greater Dublin area (The Pale).

In Tudor times Henry VIII (1509–1547) tried to impose his religious reformation as well as English control over the whole island. Henry’s interference in religious matters thus proved a mistake and resulted in problems for both countries.
...to the 16th century.

- The violent extremes of Edward VI (1547-1553) and of his half-sister Mary I (1553-1558), known as Bloody Mary, made the situation even worse.

- As for Elizabeth I (1587-1603), she soon realized that the friendship between Ireland and Catholic Spain might enable the latter to use the island as a base to attack England. To prevent this danger, she then colonized all the south with Englishmen, who were given land for settlement (plantation policy).

- Under James I (1603-1625) thousands of Protestant Scots settled in Ulster to escape the king’s rule.
2. From the early 17th c. ...

- In the 17th century, during the conflict between King and Parliament, Catholic Ireland supported Charles I (1625-1649) against Oliver Cromwell, but it was defeated and severely punished.

- Besides the tragic massacres carried out by Cromwell’s Ironsides (1649-50), most of the country was handed over to Protestant settlers: thus Ireland became a colony, the first English colony. The hatred between colonized and colonizers was increased by the difference in their religions. From that time on, religion and politics became the two inseparable aspects of the Anglo-Irish conflict.
... to the late 17th century.

- There seemed to be some hope for Irish Catholics in 1689, when the deposed James II (1685-1689), a convert to Catholicism, landed in Ireland to claim his throne, but in 1690 he was defeated in the battle of the Boyne by his Protestant successor William III (1688-1702).

- Though they had been promised fair treatment after the defeat, the Irish were actually oppressed by humiliating restrictions: the Penal Laws, passed by a Protestant Parliament in Dublin in 1695, turned them into virtual slaves.
  - They were excluded from political life.
  - They were prohibited from having their own schools.
  - They could not own more than a limited amount of land.

- Ireland’s economy began to decline and people had to emigrate.
3. The 18th & the 19th CENTURIES
3. The 18th century: the croppies...

- In 1798 a serious rebellion, known as the United Irishmen Rebellion, broke out: the uprising lasted several months and was directed against British rule in Ireland.

- Influenced by the ideas of the American and French revolutions, the rebels were known as “croppies”, from their closely cropped hair, a fashion which was associated with the anti-wig (and, therefore, anti-aristocrat) French revolutionaries of the period.

- Suspected United Irish sympathizers were often subjected to torture by flogging, picketing and half-hanging: pitch capping, in particular, was a form of torture invented to intimidate them.

- It was possibly the most concentrated outbreak of violence in Irish history, and resulted in thousands of deaths over the course of three months.
In fact, despite attempts at help from the French the rebellion failed and in 1801 the Act of Union was passed uniting Ireland politically with Britain.

In 1829 one of Ireland’s greatest leaders Daniel O’Connell (1775 – 1847), known as ‘the Great Liberator’ was central in getting the Relief Act passed in parliament in London by which the total ban on voting by Catholics was lifted and they could now also become Members of the Parliament in London.

After this success O’Connell aimed to cancel the Act of Union and re-establish an Irish parliament. However, this was a much bigger task and his approach of non-violence was not supported by all.

Such political issues were overshadowed however by the worst disaster and tragedy in Irish history: the great famine.
The Great Famine was a period of mass starvation, disease and emigration which took place between 1845 and 1852. Also known as the Irish Potato Famine, it was caused by a potato disease commonly known as potato blight, a frequent problem throughout Europe during the 1840s. The impact and human cost in Ireland – where one-third of the population was entirely dependent on the potato for food – was monstrous: approximately 1 million people died and 1 million more emigrated from Ireland, causing the island’s population to fall by between 20% and 25%.
4. The 19th c.: Charles Parnell.

- **Charles Stewart Parnell** (1846 – 1891), an Irish landowner, founded the Irish Parliamentary Party and was its leader **between 1875 and 1890**, when the party split following revelations of Parnell’s private life which intruded on his political career.

- An enigmatic but charismatic personality, he created single-handedly the first modern disciplined political party machine, held together all strands of Irish nationalism and harnessed Irish-America into the Irish cause. He even converted the British P. M. W. Gladstone (1809 – 1898) to Irish Home Rule.

- Parnell is commemorated on the first Sunday after the anniversary of his death on **October 6**, known as “**Ivy Day**”.

[Image of Charles Parnell]
4. The EARLY 20th CENTURY
5. The early 20th c.: 1914

- **On 18th September 1914** the Government of Ireland Act was passed by Parliament to provide *home rule* for Ireland within the UK.

- However, **with the outbreak of the First World War**, it was formally **postponed for a minimum of 12 months**: Britain couldn’t afford to go into war without the Irish to the point that, in March 1915, conscription became a serious threat.

- The Armistice ended the Great War on 11th November 1918 so that the military draft bill was never implemented.

- Nevertheless subsequent developments in Ireland led to further postponements of the Act till it was finally repealed in 1920.
6. From 1916...

- In 1916 the **Easter Rising** took place: it was mounted by Irish republicans with the aims of ending British rule in Ireland as well as establishing the Irish Republic.

- The Rising lasted from Easter Monday, 24\(^{th}\) April, to 30\(^{th}\) April 1916. Members of the *Irish Volunteers*, led by schoolteacher and barrister **Patrick Pearse**, were joined by the smaller *Irish Citizen Army* of **James Connolly** and 200 members of *Cumann na mBan*, i.e. The League of Women. Together they seized key locations in Dublin and proclaimed the Irish Republic independent of Britain.

- The Rising was suppressed after seven days of fighting, and its leaders were **court-martialled and executed**, but it succeeded in bringing physical force republicanism back to the forefront of Irish politics.
... to 1919.

- In the **1918** General Election to the British Parliament, republicans (then represented by the **Sinn Féin** party, Irish for *we ourselves*, founded in 1905) won 73 seats out of 105: theirs was a policy of abstentionism and Irish independence.

- In January **1919**, the elected members of who were not still in prison at the time, including survivors of the Rising, convened the **First Dáil**, i.e. a unicameral, revolutionary parliament which refused to recognise the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and established the Irish Republic.

- The British Government in turn refused to accept the legitimacy of the newly declared nation, precipitating the **Anglo – Irish War** (also known as the Irish War of Independence).
7. 1919-1921: the Anglo-Irish War....

- The **Irish War of Independence** was a guerrilla war mounted by the **Irish Republican Army (IRA)** against the **British government** and its forces in January **1919**, following the Irish Republic's declaration of independence. Both sides agreed to a truce in July **1921**, but violence continued in the northeast (mostly between republicans and loyalists).

- The post-ceasefire talks led to the **Anglo-Irish Treaty** on 6th December **1921**, which ended British rule in most of Ireland and established the **Irish Free State**, a self-governing dominion of 21 counties, which replaced the Irish Republic.

- Six **northern counties** of Ulster, one of the four provinces of Ireland, **would**, however, remain within the United Kingdom as Northern Ireland.
... & 1922-1923: the Irish Civil War.

- A division of opinion immediately led to the **Irish Civil War** (1922 to 1923) between pro and anti treaty forces, with
  - **Michael Collins**, one of the key leaders in the War of Independence, pro-treaty;
  - **Éamon de Valera**, who had led the Sinn Fein party in the successful elections of 1918, anti-treaty.

- The war was won by the former and its consequences can be seen to this day since the two largest political parties in Ireland have their roots in the opposing sides of the time:
  - **Fine Gael** (pro-treaty)
  - **Fianna Fáil** (anti-treaty).

- A period of political stability followed the Civil War.

- **1937**: the Irish Free State came to an end when the citizens voted by referendum to replace the 1922 constitution. It was succeeded by the modern state of Ireland, an entirely sovereign state with a new constitution.

- **1940-45**: in World War II, the Irish Free State remained neutral while Northern Ireland took part in the fighting.

- **1949**: the last formal link with the United Kingdom was severed when the Oireachtas (national parliament) passed the Republic of Ireland Act.

Nevertheless the Irish question has remained alive throughout the second half of the 20th century...
5. From the MID to the LATE 20th CENTURY

Catholics supported by the IRA (Irish Republican Army) attempted to reunite the island: a terrorist campaign began.

- **1962**: the terrorist attacks were stalled by the lack of weapons.

- **1963-68**: discrimination against Catholics spread in housing, jobs and political representation because they were seen as a threat to the State. The Catholics started to fight for their Civil Rights.

- **1969**: *The Troubles* began, and British troops were sent to Ireland permanently. This was followed by the introduction of *internment without trial* in 1971, to stem IRA attacks.
On 30th January 1972 in the Bogside area of Derry, 26 unarmed civil rights protesters and bystanders (including 7 teenagers and 3 pregnant women) were shot by members of the British Army, soldiers of the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment.

The incident occurred during a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association march organized to protest against the continuation of internment without trial. It became known as Bloody Sunday.

The event caused shock and revulsion at an international level: within Ireland the killings resulted in a dramatic increase in support for Republicanism in general and the IRA in particular.
10. “unjustified and unjustifiable”.

- Two investigations were held by the British Government:
  1. The Widgery Tribunal, held immediately after the event, largely cleared the soldiers and British authorities of blame;
  2. The Saville Inquiry, chaired by Lord Saville of Newdigate, established in 1998 to reinvestigate the events, lasted twelve years. Saville’s report was made public on 15th June 2010, and re-opened the controversy: the report found that all of those shot were unarmed.

- On the publication of the Saville report, the British PM, David Cameron, made a formal apology on behalf of the UK stating that the killings were both “unjustified and unjustifiable.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5e3VXzWjQ7g

- **1973**: Ireland joined the E.U. (at the time the European Economic Community).
- **1974**: the proposal for an executive formed by Protestants and Catholics together failed.
- **1979**: Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Queen’s cousin, was killed by a bomb blast on his boat in Ireland.
- **1981 (5th May)**: Bobby Sands, an Irish volunteer of the Provisional Irish Republican Army and member of the British Parliament, died on hunger strike while he was imprisoned in HM Prison Maze. Following his example republican prisoners joined the strike at staggered intervals in order to maximise publicity.
The hunger strike centred around five demands:

- the right not to wear a prison uniform;
- the right not to do prison work;
- the right of free association with other prisoners and to organize educational and recreational pursuits;
- the right to one visit, one letter and one parcel per week;
- full restoration of remission lost through the protest.

The prisoners’ aim was to be recognised as *political prisoners* (or prisoners of war) and not to be classed as criminals.
12. The Enniskillen bombing.

- On 8th November 1987 the Remembrance Day bombing (also known as the Enniskillen bombing or Poppy Day massacre) took place in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland.

- 11 people were killed when a Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) bomb exploded at the town’s war memorial (cenotaph) during a Remembrance Sunday ceremony, held to commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women in the two World Wars and later conflicts.

- The bombing was described by the BBC as a turning point in The Troubles and an attack that shook the IRA “to its core”.

- **1994**: the IRA proclaimed a ceasefire and the Irish Peace Process was set in motion with “talks” between the British Prime Minister John Major and the Irish Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams.

- **1996 (February)**: the IRA called off its ceasefire and one hour later set off a bomb at South Quay which injured 100 people and caused millions of pounds’ worth of damage...

- On 10th April 1998 the Belfast Agreement (or the Good Friday Agreement) was signed in Belfast by the Irish and the British governments through their P.M.s Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair: it was a major political development in the Northern Ireland peace process.

- It established the Northern Ireland Assembly with devolved legislative powers and marked a de-escalation of violence in The Troubles, the period of ethno-political conflict conventionally dated from the late 1960s. It also committed its participants:
  - to partnership, equality and mutual respect between these islands;
  - to use exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues;
  - to oppose any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose.
15. The Omagh bombing.

- On 15th August 1998 the **Omagh bombing** took place: the paramilitary car bomb attack was carried out by the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA), a splinter group of former Provisional Irish Republican Army members opposed to the Belfast Agreement. **29 people died** as a result of the attack and about **220 people were injured**.

- Described as **Northern Ireland’s worst single terrorist atrocity**, an **appealing act of savagery**, it made victims among both Protestants and Catholics, teenagers and children, natives and tourists.

- The nature of the bombing created a strong international and local outcry against the RIRA, which later apologised.
6. The EARLY 21st CENTURY
16. From 2000 ...

• Violence continued, though on a sporadic basis:

1. 3rd August 2001: the Ealing bombing – a Real IRA car bomb injured 7 civilians in Ealing, west London;

2. 12th July 2005: police were attacked with blast and petrol bombs during rioting in an area of Belfast, following an Orange Order parade. 80 police officers were injured and several people were arrested;

3. 25th February 2006: the Dublin riots. A unionist demonstration was to take place down O’Connell Street but counter-demonstrators blocked the route of the proposed march. 14 people, including journalists and photographers, were hospitalised and 41 people were arrested;
4. 7th March 2009: two British Army soldiers were shot dead and two more seriously injured during a Real IRA gun attack. Two days later a police officer was shot dead by the Continuity IRA;

5. February – October 2010: car bomb attacks were organised by the RIRA throughout the year;


7. 1st November 2012: a prison officer was shot and killed. A new paramilitary group calling itself the “New IRA” claimed responsibility for the murder;
8. 8th October 2013: the same group claimed the callous and cold-blooded murder of a 46-year-old man in north Belfast;

9. June – October 2014: a significant number of bomb attacks targeting police officers were foiled by police in various counties of NI;

10. April – June 2015: numerous threats were made to the lives of police officers from dissident republicans;

11. 4th March 2016: another prison officer was murdered. The new IRA claimed responsibility for the killing. The victim was the 32nd prison staff member to be murdered in NI because of his job.

• These are only some of the many tragic events which occurred.
7. From the EASTER RISING CENTENARY (2016)…
In 2016 the centenary of the Easter Rising was celebrated: many events were organised by the Irish government to mark the occasion, and included the circulation of Ireland’s first ever commemorative €2 coin.

The ceremony which took place on Easter Sunday, 27th March, was the culmination of the commemorations: hundreds of thousands of people lined the streets of Dublin to take part in the largest military parade ever staged in the Republic of Ireland.

Irish President Michael D. Higgins led the main ceremony on O’Connell Street as the Irish tricolour was lowered at the General Post Office (GPO), the building that was once the rebels’ headquarters.
IN DUBLIN...

- The **1916 Proclamation** was read out by an officer from the Irish defence forces, in a re-enactment of the declaration of independence the rebels made outside the GPO on 24th April 1916:

  “...In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, **we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State**, and **we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades in arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations**…”

- Though the parade was inspired by “an unshakable resolve to live together in harmony and peace”...
... & IN BELFAST.

- ... a separate service was held in Northern Ireland on that Sunday to commemorate the death of 116 British soldiers who were among the over 450 people killed that Easter.

- After a parade in Greyabbey, a wreath was laid on the grave of Sandy McClelland, of the Royal Irish Rifles, a teenager when he was killed. He thought he was on his way to the Western Front while in fact he found himself fighting against his fellow people from the same island.

- Senior unionist politicians were invited to the Irish government’s official commemorations in Dublin on Sunday but, sadly, they declined to attend. Nevertheless, the UUP (Ulster Unionist Party) leader Mike Nesbitt said “From what I’ve seen of what has happened in Dublin today, I think they have made a huge effort to be inclusive.”
18. From 2016 ...

- Violence never stopped but the episodes became less frequent:

  12. 22\textsuperscript{nd} February 2017: a bomb exploded outside the home of a serving police officer in Londonderry as Army experts tried to defuse it.

  13. 2\textsuperscript{nd} April 2018: petrol bombs and stones were thrown at police vehicles during an illegal dissident republican parade in Londonderry.

  14. 13\textsuperscript{th} February 2018: dissident republicans may have been behind the murder of a man in west Belfast, shot dead in front of his partner and an 11-year-old girl.

  15. November 2018: a stash of bullets and guns exploded after being left on top of a hot boiler at a house in west Belfast. Police blamed the New IRA.
... to 2019.

16. **January 2019**: a bomb placed inside a van exploded in the centre of Londonderry on a Saturday night. The attack seems to have been carried out by the New IRA.

17. **March 2019**: five small explosive packages were found at locations across Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. The New IRA said it was behind the letter bombs.

18. **18th April 2019**: a journalist was shot dead while observing rioting in the Creggan area of Londonderry. Police blamed the 29-year-old’s killing on dissident republicans.

19. **19th August 2019**: a bomb exploded near Wattlebridge in County Fermanagh. Police said it was an attempt to lure officers to their deaths and blamed Continuity IRA for the attack.

- Once again, these are only some of the events which occurred.
8. ... to BREXIT in IRELAND today.
When the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union with the referendum of 23rd June 2016, out of all the problems which had to be faced the most complicated one was probably that of the Irish border, which held up Brexit for over three years.

The Republic of Ireland had no intention of leaving the EU, but it shares a border with Northern Ireland, which is part of Brexit and this created a big issue: how could the transition of goods crossing in and out of the EU be controlled? And what was going to happen on the Irish border?
Fences and checkpoints on the border were the last thing people wanted after the years of The Troubles in which more than 3,600 people... so what was agreed?

- **Northern Ireland** would be outside the EU while the **Republic of Ireland** would remain inside.
- The UK and EU agreed this should not lead to **new checks or controls on goods crossing the border** between the two parts of Ireland.
- To achieve this, **NI would continue to follow EU rules on agricultural and manufactured goods**, while the rest of the UK would not.
- Additionally, the whole of the UK would leave the EU’s customs union but **NI would continue to enforce the EU’s customs code**.

- The UK went through an 11-month period, known as the *transition*, which kept the UK bound to the EU’s rules: the idea behind it was to give some breathing space while new UK-EU negotiations were taking place to determine what the future relationship would eventually look like.

- The operation of the whole withdrawal deal was overseen by a joint committee of the EU and UK but there was also a *specialised committee focusing solely on the Northern Ireland part of the deal* which was able to receive proposals from the north-south bodies set up under the Good Friday Agreement.
The situation today is as follows:

- **people born in Northern Ireland** have the right to **Irish as well as British citizenship**. Those who exercise that right will retain their EU citizenship, something not available to people elsewhere in the UK who may have only British citizenship;

- **people travelling on Irish passports** will be able to use **EU/EEA lanes and e-gates at airports**. Those with British passports will not. More fundamentally people with Irish passports **keep their right to freedom of movement within the EU**, which means they can **live, work and study in an EU country without a visa and with no time limit**. These rights extend to their spouses and dependent children;
as regards students and studying abroad the UK will no longer be participating in Erasmus, the EU student exchange scheme. However, students at Northern Ireland’s universities will still be able to take part in Erasmus due to funding and administrative assistance from the Irish government;

new rules regarding trade were set out in the an agreement between the EU and the UK called the Northern Ireland Protocol, which came into force on 1 January 2021. Thus certain goods, such as meat, milk, fish and eggs, need to be checked when they enter Northern Ireland from Great Britain but they can move across the border into the Republic of Ireland.
2022: an update

- After the full first year of U.K.-Irish trade following Brexit there has been an acceptance from both sides that there are issues with the Protocol:
  - the EU thinks they can be tweaked to work;
  - the UK is asking for the whole Protocol to be removed.

- Newly published figures confirm that cross-border commerce is surging on the island of Ireland, while imports from Britain have slumped.
  - For many traders and manufacturers almost overnight it became easier for Dublin to order goods from Belfast than London, and likewise easier for Belfast to order goods from Dublin than London...