

Irish Reunification / Border Poll — Public Opinion & Debate Tracker

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Context

The debate on Irish reunification (a united Ireland / Éire Aontaithe) has intensified following Sinn Féin becoming the largest party in Northern Ireland for the first time (2022 Assembly election) and Michelle O'Neill becoming First Minister (February 2024). Demographic shifts, Brexit, and the Windsor Framework have all reshaped the constitutional question.

The Good Friday Agreement provides a mechanism for a border poll if the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland believes a majority would vote for a united Ireland. No border poll has been held since 1973.

Border Poll Polling Summary (as of June 2026)

Pollster	Date	NI Yes	NI No	ROI Yes	ROI No	Notes
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Uni of Liverpool/IIS	Jun 2026	35.8%	49.7%	—	—	10-year low for Yes. N=1,534. Support for UK at 61.4% (up from 59.4% in 2025).
LucidTalk/BT	Spring 2026	~35%	~47%	—	—	Standard wording. N=1,050.
LucidTalk/BT	Winter 2026	~33%	~48%	—	—	Consistent with earlier waves.
LucidTalk/BT	Feb 2025	41%	48%	—	—	Upward trend peak before 2026 reversal.
Amarach/EM Ireland	Mar 2026	63%	29%	59%	22%	⚠ Outlier. EU-framed wording ("united Ireland in the EU"). Excl. D/K: NI 68%, ROI 73%. FactCheckNI warns not to treat as baseline.

Republic of Ireland

Poll	Date	For unity	Against	Notes
Amarach Research / EM Ireland	Mar 2026	59%	22%	Wording: "united Ireland in the EU". Excluding D/Ks: 73% Yes.
Ipsos MRBI / ARINS	2023-2024	~64-66%	~16%	Standard wording. Support softens to ~50-55% when costs mentioned.

Key takeaway (June 2026): Standard-wording polls put NI Yes at **33-35%**, No at **47-50%**. The June 2026 Liverpool/Institute of Irish Studies poll shows support for unity at a **10-year low (35.8%)**, with support for remaining in UK rising to **61.4%** (up from 59.4% in 2025). The Amárach 63% figure remains a significant outlier driven by EU-centric question wording. Constitutional issues rank **9th in voter priorities (2%)** vs healthcare (35.4%) and economy (28.8%).

Demographic shift: 2021 census showed Catholics (45.7%) outnumbered Protestants (43.5%) in NI by religion/background for Younger demographics are more likely to favour unity, but recent polling shows this hasn't translated into increased Yes vote — possibly due to post-Brexit uncertainty, cost-of-living concerns, and SF's electoral decline reducing urgency.

Party Positions — Republic of Ireland

Party	Position	Detail
Sinn Féin (Mary Lou McDonald)	☐ Border poll now	"Within the next five years." Supports all-island citizens' assembly. Introduced Planning for Irish Unity Bill in Dáil (16 Jun 2026). Second-stage debate scheduled 7 Jul 2026.
Fianna Fáil (Micheál Martin)	☐ Unity by consent	"Not the right time" for a poll. Prioritises Shared Island initiative cross-border funding. Martin's authority weakened after presidential campaign disaster; Jim O'Callaghan (52%) clear favourite to succeed as next leader.
Fine Gael (Simon Harris)	☐ Unity by consent	Announced "blueprint for a unified island" (14 Jun 2026). Due November 2026. Most detailed FG unity planning ever.
Labour	☐ Unity by consent	Similar incremental approach to FG/FF.
Social Democrats (Holly Cairns)	☐ Border poll in principle	Supports as "part of a wider conversation." Cautious on timeline.
PBP-Solidarity	☐ Border poll	Supports a socialist united Ireland.
Aontú (Peadar Tóibín)	☐ For unity	Nationalist party; socially conservative.
Green Party	☐ Long-term goal	Currently focused on climate and coalition governance.
Independent Ireland	Not a priority	Right-wing populist; focused on rural/agricultural issues.

Party Positions — Northern Ireland

Party	Position	Detail
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Sinn Féin (Michelle O'Neill)	☐ Border poll now	First Minister has called for a border poll "this term."
SDLP (Claire Hanna)	☐ Unity by consent, ⚠ caution on timing	Hanna: doesn't want UI "slipping past by a tiny majority during a period of chaos." Proposed "New Ireland Commission." Distances from SF's urgency.
Alliance (Naomi Long)	⚡ Neutral	Calls for Secretary of State to define border poll criteria. Warns every election becoming "proxy" for poll is "toxic."
PBP NI	☐ Border poll	Socialist republican position.
Green Party NI	☐ Pro-unity leaning	Supports a border poll.
DUP (Gavin Robinson)	☐ Opposes	Firmly unionist. Rebuilding after Donaldson scandal.
UUP (Jon Burrows)	☐ Opposes now	Turmoil after Beattie resignation. Moderate unionist voice diminished.
TUV (Jim Allister)	☐ Opposes	Hardline unionist.

The Good Friday Agreement Mechanism

The **Belfast Agreement (1998), Section 1** provides:

- The **Secretary of State for Northern Ireland** (currently Hilary Benn, Labour) *shall* call a border poll if it "appears likely" that a majority would vote for a united Ireland
- **No set threshold or criteria defined in law** — the GFA does not specify how the Secretary of State should judge whether there is majority support
- Polls cannot be held more than once every **seven years**
- The Secretary of State **can decide to hold a border poll at any time** (provided 7-year gap)
- If a poll passes, UK and Irish governments negotiate to give effect
- Previous (only) border poll: **1973** (overwhelmingly pro-UK — 98.9% for UK on 59% turnout, nationalist boycott)

Current UK Government position: Hilary Benn has stated there is "no new data" to suggest a majority would vote for unity.

The Republic's Government Position

The current coalition (formed Nov 2024) is a **Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael** government led by Taoiseach **Micheál Martin** (FF) with Tánaiste **Simon Harris** (FG).

The Programme for Government did **not** commit to a border poll this term. It commits to:

- **Shared Island Unit** — cross-border infrastructure funding (now exceeds €1bn as of 22 Jun 2026)
 - **New Ireland Commission** — planning and research for potential constitutional change
 - No formal border poll commitment
 - Ireland to hold EU Presidency from 1 Jul 2026 (sixth rotating presidency; trio with Lithuania and Greece)
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Key Arguments

For a United Ireland

- **Demographic shift** — Catholics now outnumber Protestants in NI for first time; younger population more nationalist/less unionist
- **EU membership** — reunification brings NI back into EU, resolving post-Brexit trade friction
- **Economic coordination** — all-island economy could attract investment
- **Reconciliation** — some argue unity would reconcile historic conflicts
- **Shared Island momentum** — €1bn+ invested in cross-border cooperation demonstrates practical integration already underway

Against / Cautious

- **Economic cost** — NI receives £10-12bn annual UK subvention; estimated cost of unification €10-40bn over a decade
 - **Identity** — Unionists fear being "overwhelmed" in a united Ireland
 - **Healthcare burden** — Republic would need to fund NI's NHS-style system
 - **Pensions/welfare** — NI benefits higher than Republic's; would need harmonisation
 - **"The unknowns"** — major unanswered questions about governance, public finances, service standards
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Recent Developments (July 2026)

Date	Event
15 Jul	Dáil in summer recess — first full day — Dáil adjourned until 14 September. No legislative progress on unity planning until autumn. Aughinish Alumina report legal advice sought by minister. Deportation flight cost >€1m. Quiet news day politically. (RTÉ, Irish Times)
	13 Jul
12 Jul	Mick Fealty (Sluggor): Why SF's citizens' assembly proposal fails — Detailed analysis: (1) Bill presumes reunification destination before citizens are selected, undermining the open question requirement; (2) Opposition PMB lacks government authority needed for legitimacy — compares unfavourably to Macron's French Climate Convention (£10m budget vs UK's weak select committee model); (3) Unionists have every reason to boycott a body whose founding statute presumes departure from UK. "An assembly missing an entire tradition cannot generate the legitimacy that's the whole point of the exercise." Key observation for the unity debate: any credible citizens' assembly on unity needs genuine cross-community buy-in from the start, not a predetermined outcome. (Sluggor O'Toole)
	8 Jul
	8 Jul
7 Jul	Dáil debates SF Irish Unity Bill at second stage — McDonald's Private Members' Bill to compel government planning for constitutional change goes to full second-stage debate. Bill would compel Taoiseach to publish Green Paper on vision for reunification and establish all-island Citizens' Assembly with emphasis on unionist inclusion. McDonald publishes op-ed in Irish News calling it "unprecedented opportunity." Vote expected Wednesday 8 July. FF/FG expected to oppose or heavily amend. (Irish News, Oireachtas)
7 Jul	Nigel Farage to resign as MP, will run for re-election in Clacton — By-election triggered. (Sluggor O'Toole, BBC)
	6 Jul
	5 Jul
	3 Jul
	1 Jul

Date	Event
	29 Jun
	26 Jun
	25 Jun
	25 Jun
	24 Jun
	23 Jun
	22 Jun
	22 Jun
	18 Jun
	18 Jun
	17 Jun
	16 Jun
	15 Jun
	15 Jun
	14 Jun
	13 Jun
	12 Jun
	9-13 Jun
	9 Jun
	5 Jun

Key Observations (updated July 2026)

25. Slugger's citizens' assembly critique — a structural obstacle for credible unity planning

Mick Fealty's 11 July analysis on Slugger O'Toole provides a rigorous critique of SF's citizens' assembly proposal that applies beyond the party: (1) **Loading the question:** A citizens' assembly needs a genuinely open question; SF's bill presumes reunification as the destination before any citizen is selected. (2) **Authority deficit:** The bill is an opposition PMB, not a government-backed initiative — this undermines the assembly's ability to command national attention and act on findings, repeating the weakness of Climate Assembly UK vs France's Macron-backed Convention

Citoyenne pour le Climat (£10m budget, 58% implementation rate). (3) **Unionist boycott risk:** Unionists have every rational reason to decline participation in a body whose founding statute presumes their community's departure from the UK. An assembly missing an entire tradition cannot generate cross-community legitimacy.

Implication: Any credible future citizens' assembly on unity would need to be government-initiated, genuinely open-ended on outcomes (not just "how to achieve unity" but "whether unity is desirable"), properly resourced, and structured to attract cross-community participation. The Shared Island Dialogue series (3,000+ participants, no constitutional destination built in) may be a better model than the SF bill's approach.

1. Border poll polling at 10-year low

The June 2026 Liverpool/Institute of Irish Studies poll shows NI support for unity at **35.8%** — a 10-year low, down from 40.6% in 2025. Support for remaining in UK rose to **61.4%**. This reverses the prior upward trend and is the most significant finding of 2026 so far. Standard polls (LucidTalk) consistently show **33-35% Yes, 47-48% No, 15-19% DK**.

2. The EU framing effect is real and confirmed (FactCheckNI, 15 Jun 2026)

The Amárach/EMI Ireland poll (63% NI Yes, 59% ROI Yes) demonstrates that **adding "in the EU" to the question** dramatically inflates support. FactCheckNI's detailed analysis (15 Jun 2026) confirmed:

- The EMI poll asked: *"If a referendum were held tomorrow on a United Ireland in the EU, how would you vote?"*
- This is a **redundant framing** — a United Ireland would automatically be an EU member under current arrangements
- The wording creates confusion: some respondents may have answered thinking about EU membership rather than constitutional change
- EMI itself acknowledged: *"results should be interpreted as indicative of general attitudes rather than as a precise measure of voting behaviour"*
- The EU framing moved the needle by **15-20 percentage points** vs standard wording
- **David Geary (EMI CEO)** stated the variance is due to "framing" — the wording of the question
- FactCheckNI: individual poll results should not be treated as baseline border poll figure

3. SF's electoral decline reduces border poll pressure

SF at **19% in ROI** (Ireland Thinks, 3 Jul 2026) — now third behind FG (20%) and only 2 points above FF (17%). In NI, SF continues to lead but support has plateaued. The main party pushing for a border poll has significantly less political capital than in 2020-2024. SF failed to win either by-election in May 2026, and Mary Lou McDonald's approval rating has fallen to **30%** — her lowest as leader. The FG overtaking SF as most popular party is a major psychological blow to the unity campaign's main political vehicle. McDonald faces questions about direction; the Unity Bill (7 Jul) is an attempt to regain initiative.

4. SocDems surge to 12% reshapes the left

Social Democrats (12%, up from ~4.8% in 2024 election) are siphoning support from both FF and FG, particularly among younger urban voters. Holly Cairns' 40% approval rating (highest of any leader) gives her influence beyond her numbers. SD supports unity in principle but isn't pushing for immediate poll.

5. Fine Gael's "blueprint for a unified island" is a watershed

Simon Harris's announcement (14 Jun 2026) that FG will produce a **detailed blueprint by November** — covering fiscal implications, public services, all-island infrastructure, labour mobility, EU market access — is arguably the most significant policy centre-right development on unity since the GFA. FG has traditionally been most cautious. This marks a fundamental shift in the centre-right's approach to constitutional change.

6. SDLP opts for caution against rushed timeline

Claire Hanna's explicit warning (5 Jun 2026) — *"I don't want a united Ireland slipping past by a tiny majority during a period of chaos"* — is significant. The party that historically drove the unity agenda (via John Hume) is now the most cautious nationalist voice. This narrows the "poll now" coalition.

7. UUP implosion weakens moderate unionism

Doug Beattie's departure (1 Jun 2026) leaves the UUP in turmoil. Moderate unionist voices on constitutional matters are diminished, leaving the field to DUP (firm No) and TUV (hardline No). This polarises but also fragments the No side.

8. Donaldson verdict reshapes unionist politics

Jeffrey Donaldson's conviction on all 28 charges (22 Jun 2026) is the most damaging scandal in DUP history. For the border poll debate:

- Pro-unity: Unionism is fractured, DUP in crisis management mode
- Anti/reality: Immediate focus is on criminal justice, not constitutional change
- Long-term: Could accelerate unionist fragmentation but doesn't change voting preference structure

9. Belfast far-right violence (9-13 Jun 2026) reshaping political landscape

The knife attack and ensuing anti-immigration riots (four nights, water cannon deployed, 27 made homeless, 19 arrested, 200 GB officers deployed):

- Far-right mobilisation now driving agenda — planned online with AI-generated misinformation
- Active Clubs neo-Nazi network confirmed as orchestrating violence
- Polarising communities along ethnic rather than constitutional lines
- Crisis management likely to dominate political agenda for weeks
- Ofcom now investigating online platforms under Online Safety Act
- Introduction of online misinformation into NI politics has implications for future border poll campaign regulation

10. CTA debate reopens border question through immigration

The Starmer-Martin call (12 Jun 2026) agreeing to strengthen CTA via enhanced data sharing is significant. Irish gov data shows more people cross from NI→ROI to claim asylum than the reverse, undercutting DUP claims that the CTA is a "backdoor" into UK. The immigration-security framing of the border question is now a live political issue.

11. EU Migration Pact asymmetry

ROI is now fully opted into the EU Migration & Asylum Pact (effective 12 Jun 2026). NI remains outside it. This creates a concrete policy asymmetry between jurisdictions that would need harmonisation in any unity scenario. Currently underexplored in unity planning.

12. Ireland's EU Presidency (from 1 Jul 2026) — Now operational

Ireland now holds rotating EU Council presidency for six months (July-Dec 2026) while NI remains outside EU frameworks. Early signs positive: "Relief for Govt as EU Presidency off to a good start" (RTÉ analysis, 3 Jul). Von der Leyen visited Dublin 3 Jul for launch, praised Ireland's EU membership

story as "compelling argument for expanding union". This creates institutional asymmetry:

- NI excluded from migration Pact, EU single market alignment discussions
- Ireland has agenda-setting power at time when NI is excluded
- Diplomatic cost for unionist rejection of engagement is now higher
- Provides practical argument for reunification

13. Uni of Liverpool/Institute of Irish Studies June 2026 Poll — Full Detail

- **N=1,534** (largest NI sample of any 2026 poll)
- Unity support: **35.8%** (▼ down from 40.6% in 2025, 41.8% in 2024, 38% in 2023)
- Remain in UK: **61.4%** (▲ up from 59.4% in 2025)
- Don't know/refused: **14.5%**
- **Constitutional issues ranked 9th in voter priorities (2%)** — unchanged from previous waves
- **55.2% would not support any party that collapsed Stormont** (only 14% would)
- Non-constitutional bloc: **18.3%** of electorate; religiously mixed (41% Catholic, 45% Protestant, 15% non-religious)
- Support for keeping Stormont above constitutional preference is now overwhelming
- **Source:** UnHerd/Archie Earle analysis, Liverpool (9 Jun 2026)

14. Amárach/EM Ireland EU Poll 2026 — Full Detail (15 Jun 2026 analysis)

- **N=1,200 per jurisdiction** (ROI and NI)
- Wording: *"If a referendum were held tomorrow on a United Ireland in the EU, how would you vote?"*
- NI: **63% Yes, 29% No** D/Ks: 68% Yes)
- ROI: **59% Yes, 22% No** (excluding D/Ks: 73% Yes)
- Also found: 73% in NI would vote to rejoin EU; NI trust in EU at 28% (highest of any institution); NI Executive trust at 5% (lowest ever)
- **Methodologically sound** (online poll, weighted, $\pm 2.2\%$ margin of error) but **heavily caveated** due to EU framing
- EMI stated poll tracks attitudes toward **EU issues, not constitutional change**
- FactCheckNI confirmed: results should not be treated as baseline border poll figure

15. Government unlikely to pursue drug decriminalisation (29 Jun)

Pat Leahy (Irish Times) reports coalition will not follow through on decriminalisation proposals. Minor constitutional significance but indicates government caution on progressive social policy.

16. Fuel protests dominate late June 2026

Third day of National Fuel Protest causing major disruption (M50 motorway blocked 29 Jun). Government considering extending/tapering excise cuts. Cost-of-living remains dominant political issue and overshadows constitutional debate.

17. Ireland to represent EU in relations with Iran (29 Jun)

Major foreign policy role secured ahead of EU Presidency. Helen McEntee to lead diplomatic engagement. Deepens Ireland's foreign policy profile. Now operational under the presidency.

18. SF Irish Unity Bill: Dáil debate on 7 July 2026 — a pivotal moment

Sinn Féin's Private Members' Bill mandating government planning for constitutional change goes to full second-stage debate on 7 July. Key dynamics:

- **The Bill:** Would compel the Taoiseach to publish a Green Paper outlining government's vision for a unified state (health, education, economy, governance, EU membership), and establish an all-island Citizens' Assembly including unionist/protestant voices
- **Expected opposition:** FF and FG are expected to oppose or heavily amend — they argue it's "not the right time" and prefer their own Shared Island/blueprint processes
- **Test for coalition unity:** The vote forces FF and FG to clarify their positions; Martin (FF) has said "not now," while Harris (FG) has announced a competing "blueprint for a unified island" due November
- **SF's strategic calculus:** With SF now at 19% (third place) and McDonald's approval at 30%, the Bill is partly an attempt to change the narrative and re-establish SF as the leading voice on unity
- **What to watch:** Whether any FF/FG backbenchers break ranks; whether SD and Labour support it; the tone of the debate on unionist concerns and costings

19. FG overtakes SF — implications for the unity debate

The Sunday Independent/Ireland Thinks poll (3 Jul) showing FG (20%) ahead of SF (19%) for the first time in years has several implications for the reunification debate:

- The main political vehicle for unity (SF) is in decline; its ability to frame and drive the constitutional conversation is diminished
- Simon Harris's centre-right "blueprint for a unified island" is now backed by the most popular party, giving it more political weight
- The unity debate increasingly has two competing poles: SF's urgency (rushed, demand-driven) vs FG/FF's incrementalism (planning-heavy, consent-focused)
- Holly Cairns (SD) becoming the most popular leader while supporting unity in principle but not immediately gives moderate voters a "unity-adjacent" option that doesn't carry the baggage of a border poll
- The SD surge (12%) suggests a realignment of the left that could reshape how the unity question is approached — away from SF's traditional republican framing toward a more social-democratic, practical integration narrative

20. UK breakup fears drive unity contingency planning — Guardian analysis (4 Jul)

The Guardian's major feature (Rory Carroll & Lisa O'Carroll, 4 Jul) reports political leaders across the UK and Ireland are now actively gaming the breakup of the UK in the event of a Nigel Farage/Reform UK election victory. Key points for the reunification debate:

- **Jim O'Callaghan (Justice Minister):** "The future may not go down the predictable pathway of discussions and harmony. Dublin should begin preparing for unification rather than wait for English nationalism to set the timetable." — The most senior Irish government minister to explicitly link Farage's rise to the need for unity planning.
- **Mark Drakeford (former Welsh FM):** "There may not be time" for a considered debate about the UK's future if Farage reaches Downing Street. Warns English nationalism could push out Scotland and NI.
- **Claire Hanna (SDLP):** The NI subvention (£6-20bn/year) could become a "political football" for Farage, echoing the Brexit "£350m/week" claim. "We can no longer say the Nigel Farage phenomenon is a flash in the pan. It is prudent for us to think about our own constitutional future and not be passengers in wherever politics wishes to take us."
- **Irish leaders** think the UK subvention for NI could become a rallying cry for Farage, similar to the Brexit campaign's anti-EU funding messaging.
- The conference was the SDLP's "Future of These Islands: Preparing for Change" at The MAC, Belfast (25 Jun), featuring Leo Varadkar, Claire Hanna, Jim O'Callaghan, and Liz Saville-Roberts. |- **Significance:** This represents the first time multiple senior politicians across Ireland, NI, Scotland, and Wales have publicly coordinated messaging on UK breakup contingency planning. The framing has shifted from "if" constitutional change happens to "when and how."

21. SF Irish Unity Bill second-stage debate — 7 July 2026

The Dáil debate on Sinn Féin's Irish Unity Bill (Private Members' Business) commenced on 7 July 2026. Key dynamics:

- **The Bill:** Would compel the Taoiseach to publish a government Green Paper setting out a vision for reunification covering health, education, economy, governance, and EU membership; and establish an all-island Citizens' Assembly with emphasis on unionist/Protestant/ British-identity inclusion.
- **McDonald's framing:** Op-ed in the Irish News (7 Jul) calls it an "unprecedented opportunity" and the "first ever piece of legislation passed by the Dáil directing an Irish government to start proactively planning and preparing for reunification."
- **FF/FG position:** Opposed — arguing it's "not the right time" and preferring their own Shared Island / FG blueprint processes.
- **SD/SDLP/Green position:** Supported in principle.
- **Vote (8 Jul):** DEFEATED. FF/FG majority voted against; SD, Labour, Greens supported.
- **Significance:** Even though the Bill failed, the debate moved the unity question from abstract to legislative. Combined with FG's competing "blueprint" (due November), the SDLP's "Future of These Islands" conference, and the Guardian's UK breakup reporting, July 2026 represents the most concentrated period of constitutional planning activity since the GFA.

22. SF Irish Unity Bill defeated (8 July 2026) — analysis

The defeat of Sinn Féin's Planning for Constitutional Change Bill was expected but still significant:

- **What happened:** FF and FG TDs voted against, arguing the bill imposed "arbitrary timelines" and that a Citizens' Assembly was not the right mechanism. Martin said the idea of completing "rigorous and independent data in 18 months... is obviously not serious." Harris said he wants a united Ireland but "does not believe that constitutional change should be tied to arbitrary timelines."
- **Who supported:** Social Democrats, Labour, Green Party. Fianna Fáil TD Pat "the Cope" Gallagher had indicated he'd support if given a free vote, but the party whip was applied.
- **McDonald's response:** Called the rejection "astonishing" and said "the government may have voted down our Irish Unity Bill tonight, but they cannot vote down the future. This conversation isn't going away."
- **What it means for the unity debate:** The defeat clarifies the battle lines — SF's urgency vs FF/FG's incrementalism. The FG "blueprint for a unified island" (due November) now becomes the primary vehicle for centre-right planning on unity. SF's defeat also highlights its diminished political capital — at 19% and third place, it couldn't even peel off FF/FG backbenchers. The debate however keeps the issue alive and creates a record of legislative consideration.
- **Farage subplot:** Nigel Farage's announcement (7 Jul) that he will resign as MP and seek re-election in Clacton adds a parallel UK dimension. The Guardian's "Celtic nations planning for UK breakup" feature (4-6 Jul) now has even more salience — if Farage wins

back Clacton with an increased majority, Reform's threat to the UK union becomes more credible.

23. BIC Guernsey summit and John Hume Peace Prize — soft diplomacy on unity

The 45th British-Irish Council summit (10-11 Jul 2026) in Guernsey was themed on early years family support, not constitutional politics. However, the attendance of all eight member governments — including Taoiseach Martin, Tánaiste Harris, First Minister O'Neill, and deputy First Minister Little-Pengelly — provides a regular forum for face-to-face communication between Irish and NI leaders.

The John Hume Peace Prize announcement (10 Jul) by Martin in Strasbourg is symbolically significant:

- Links the European project directly to Northern Ireland peacebuilding
- Reframes Irish unity within a European integration narrative
- Positioned as a legacy-burnishing move ahead of Martin's rotation to Harris (Nov 2027)
- Welcomed by SDLP (Hume's party) — underscores the cross-party nature of the peace legacy
- Colum Eastwood's return as a key voice on Humean traditions contrasts with SF's more confrontational approach

Together, these events show the "soft track" on unity planning continuing alongside the legislative clash over SF's bill.

24. More in Common poll (Jul 2026): Border immigration checks reshape constitutional landscape

The More in Common survey (published 8 Jul 2026, n=1,000, post-June riots) has significant implications for the border poll debate:

- **62% support immigration checks at the border with ROI, even if it creates a harder border** — This is the first major poll testing this question and shows a clear majority favour border controls
- **Nationalist voters split almost evenly:** 45% support checks, 44% prefer open border — indicating the unity/immigration nexus is not straightforward even among those who may vote Yes
- **71% want UK/ROI/NI governments to work together on migration** — Cross-border cooperation seen as the solution

- **Immigration now ranks among top 3 NI issues for 44%** — Constitutional issues rank 9th (2%) in the Liverpool/IIS poll; immigration is now a far more salient concern
- **Racism (76%) now viewed as serious as sectarianism (73%)** — The traditional constitutional/nationalist-unionist axis is being supplemented (or partially supplanted) by ethnic/immigration-based divides

Implications for border poll:

- Any campaign for a united Ireland would need to address immigration and border control as a first-order concern — not just constitutional identity
- The finding that a majority of NI voters (including nearly half of nationalists) want border checks undermines the assumption that a united Ireland would automatically mean a frictionless border
- A post-unity border regime (ROI in Schengen via EU vs NI outside it) would need to reconcile these preferences
- The CTA debate (Observation 20) and immigration checks polling now need to be considered together: voters want both open travel (CTA) AND immigration controls — a tension that any unity blueprint must resolve
- FactCheckNI's earlier analysis (15 Jun 2026) of EU-framed polling interacts with this: if EU membership is associated with open borders, the 62% support for immigration checks at the ROI border suggests EU-framed unity support (63%) may be fragile

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