

Themes and Theories for the Northern Ireland Conflict

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Abstract

This article takes the political, economic, border and other issues caused by Brexit and Northern Ireland as the background, combines different theories and conflict themes, and analyzes the conflicting factors that have arisen and will arise in Northern Ireland. How it applies to the troubles of Northern Ireland is explained in different theoretical explanations. It then rationally analyzes social identity, changes in economic and political structures, countries, and regions, and deeply explores the relationships among various classes, industries, and political groups.

Keywords

Northern Ireland Conflict, Social Learning Theory and Intergroup Conflict, Aggression and Violence Theory, Landscape Model of Intractable Conflict DST & the Attractor.

1. Social Learning Theory and Intergroup Conflict

In Bandura's interactionist approach to personality, an individual is a thinking person who can impose some direction on the forces from within and the pressures from the external environment[1]. What we can understand from behavior is that it is a function of an individual in her environment, people learn by observing others and the differential sequences attending these behaviors. Thus, aggressive behavior can be learned from others or depending on how others treat them, which can trigger aggression, hate, and mostly conflict. Social learning theory can be applied to the Northern Ireland conflict by looking at the citizen's behavior toward their need for change and independence. I will be introducing the theory and how that applies to the Northern Ireland conflict and Brexit.

Due to the significant identity differences in Northern Ireland and the resulting in violence, it is crucial to examine the history of the conflict. As it is supported by research, is essential to consider identity and conflict to resolve present or future conflicts between parties and tackling conflicts of identity is necessary to reduce conflict between groups[2]. Moreover, the future time perception of one societal group is related to its identity and the protection of the group's ethics and to help improve the self-esteem of the minority group whom in this case, will be applied to Northern Ireland Catholics. Conflict is a combination of many things, amongst which are, social identity, religious differences, and political aspirations. Thus, intergroup conflict theory is an excellent fit to be applied to the Northern Ireland case to understand the conflict better and work toward a resolution that will help.

1.1. Social identity theory

Social identity theory is a social psychological tool regarding the role of self-conception in-group processes, group membership, and intergroup relations [2]. The group, as defined by three or more people that take part in the membership and share similar beliefs and attitudes, allows for the individual to construct a self-conception psychologically.

There has been a significant inter-group conflict on the issue of Brexit in the United Kingdom. Whereas some faction of people is of the thought that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union as per the Brexit vote. While another faction advocates for the status quo in such a way that the U.K. remains in the E.U[3]. In this case, the group of people advocating for

the U.K. to leave the E.U. led by Prime Minister Boris Johnson can be construed to mean socialism. The reason for such action is because they believe that by leaving the European Union, U.K. will be able to realize its full economic potential that is not currently being realized under the E.U. arrangement[4]. However, there is also another conservative group led by policy experts who have been keen to point out the demerits of the United Kingdom, leaving the European Union. The conservatism reason for the maintenance of the status quo is that leaving the E.U. will hurt the U.K. more economically. This phenomenon can further be related to constructive theory. In this case, by leaving the E.U., the U.K. may lose its culture due to the disintegrations that will result. There are instances where families may be disintegrated into different cultural factions if Brexit is actualized. On a different note, the decision by the U.K. to remain in the E.U. and will help maintain a strong culture.

The conflict between socialism and conservatism on the issue of conflict is related to the theory of conflict. The individuals in power are keen on a Brexit deal as opposed to conformity and consensus. Therefore, this conflict can be analyzed using the conflict theory in such a way that socialism advocating for Brexit is mainly comprised of the government led by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. In this case, for a Brexit deal to be realized, they will have to dominate over the conservatism.

The Northern Ireland conflict has a bicameral political belief system that focuses on either unionists or nationalists. These two groups vary significantly contingent upon their political beliefs but also religious, psychological, economic, and social beliefs. For instance, the majority of Unionists want to be united with the United Kingdom. However, the Nationalists want a united Ireland that is independent of the United Kingdom. They possess a dichotomy of different social and national group identities. The theory of intragroup conflict allows researchers to observe this thematically. In observing intragroup conflict, there are numerous integrative negotiation and constructive controversy models that one can apply to the Northern Ireland Conflict.

2. Aggression and Violence Theory and Competitive v. Cooperative Conflict

Intragroup conflict can be influenced and understood in numerous ways. The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice, discusses the implications of aggression and violence and how it relates to or stems from intragroup conflict. It begins by discussing that some aspects of conflict can be healthy by encouraging as some scholars describe conflict through the lens that conflict is necessary for change. However, as researchers delve into studying the conflict, some parts complexify the conflict further such as security, peace, and nationalism. Complex needs and desires can form hostile attitudes from those who perceive the conflict as a competition of limited resources. It "can be destructive when it does not occur in a cooperative text and is not regulated by fair rules"[5]. Thus, it is crucial to emphasize conflict that is cooperative and fulfilling the superordinate goals of both parties without destroying the parties' relations and desires.

2.1. Direct and Structural Aggression

The Northern Ireland conflict can be viewed in the light of the theory of direct and structural aggression and violence. The direct and structural problems that permeate throughout the conflict are the political and economic structures. For instance, the participant's ability to create and gain value, perceived extremity of polarization, regional and national level government barriers to discourse, and lack of fulfillment in the participant's needs. However, the system of discourse or system of functioning does not provide fulfillment to the participants. For instance, the aspect of hard border implies that people symbolize the wall as something that has a variety

of meanings. The participants' needs might imply a sense of feeling economically and physically secure or financially flexible and immigrant dynamic.

Furthermore, it might imply the need to feel nationalistic and economically secure in their homes by placing a border to protect their goods and services and by confirming the individuals that enter Northern Ireland. However, it can also symbolize a system of national identity and openness to economic and nationalistic autonomy. Such identity was recognized by the Good Friday Agreement, by Northern Ireland remaining a part of the U.K. with the option of border control. However, it had an open border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, which aided in the implementation of the Good Friday agreement. The symbol and issue of a hard border aim to show how the participant's economic and psychological needs are either being met or not.

2.2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Another theory that resonates with the conflict is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. "Maslow argued that biological needs for food, water, oxygen, and the rest must be met (i.e., social attachment, self-esteem, creativity, understanding, self-actualization, and spiritual transcendence) before higher needs can be satisfied"[5]. Maslow's theory of needs can be used to assess how the Northern Ireland Conflict border control, political and economic autonomy, and trade stability was affected by the participant's basic needs and desires. Furthermore, Maslow's hierarchy of needs describes at its base air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, and reproduction. The basic level of these needs' changes drastically as the Northern Ireland Conflict progresses. For example, changes in trade, customs, immigration checks, local economies, services, recognition of qualifications, medical cooperation, and much more can impact basic human fulfillment. For example, during the periods of conflict and war, participants are unable to accomplish negotiation and bargaining tactics. For example, during the troubles, paramilitary groups such as the Irish Republican Army and the Ulster Volunteer Force endured conflict by the ignition of bombings, shootings, and massacres.

Furthermore, Brexit manages to bring up times of conflict that reiterate feelings of self-doubt and insecurity or violence. The perception of future fear and conflict scares people into believing their basic human needs will not be met. However, this cycle or spiral of silence will enable participants to place barriers to communication.

3. Landscape Model of Intractable Conflict DST & the Attractor

In order to address the issue of developing a strategy for the Police Service and related security forces in Northern Ireland to ensure violence does not erupt post-Brexit, a change to the system's dynamics is required.

To change the dynamics of a system requires the four elements of the Dynamics System Theory (DST). The system consists of *Preparation* work for a thorough *Comprehension* of the system, which develops from an understanding of underlying dynamics and identifying opportunities of *Engagement*, which leads to the testing of the system behavior leading to *Adaptation*[6].

The reason DST was chosen to address the issue of dynamics between the police and other security forces in Northern Ireland post-Brexit is that violence is not a stranger to the area in the past. The DST contains the four different stages that are required when change is needed in a system. By the police and other security elements preparing for the potential of violence due to Brexit, they can develop a level of comprehension on each element operation and work in tandem to protect citizens and property.

There is no single policy that will reduce violence at the border if it erupts post-Brexit due to the multidimensionality of the issues. If a policy were to be created to address the issues at the border regardless of the context, it would affect both communities in different ways and would have to address the responses of both sides[7].

3.1. The stronghold against "hard border" power in play

This theory aims to discuss how game theory as a theoretical framework is used for analyzing the stronghold against the "hard border" in Northern Ireland. A game in this sense is simply a situation in which there are two or more parties, which can affect what happens, all of whom are pursuing their separate aims. Since no actors have complete control over events, each needs to take account of other's possible actions [8].

The world has witnessed how Brexit agreements between the United Kingdom and the European Union cannot pass the U.K. Parliament, and without passing Parliament, the way to sustainable peace in the border area cannot be achieved. Now it appears as if the United Kingdom is trying to change the deal, fearing the backstop might stretch for a long time. However, the E.U. has refused their demands. Because of this game of chicken as it is called in-game theory between the U.K. and E.U., it is a prime example of where game theory can be applied to analyze the sensitive nature of the conflict. The withdrawal deal states that Northern Ireland would remain in the E.U. market if an agreement were not reached, and the U.K. will remain in the customs union. However, the U.K. is trying to change the deal with 32 days remaining to decide on an agreement.

3.2. Game Theory

The U.K. Parliament voted against the Northern Ireland backstop, a plan that sets out what will happen during the end of the withdrawal period because there is no agreement on how trade would be conducted between Northern Ireland (which is part of the United Kingdom) and the Republic of Ireland (which is part of European Union). In the game theory framework, both the U.K. and E.U. are engaged in a threat strategy. However, the problem with the Brexit threat is that it is not highly credible[9].

For instance, suppose actor A's most advantageous course of action depends on what actor B decides to do, and vice versa. If both realize that this is so, A will try both to anticipate and to influence B's choices, knowing that B is trying to do the same in reverse. Thus, even if A and B never meet, their decisions interact, and they will find themselves dependent on both their choices. Such situations typically bring forth possibilities for mutual threats, deceit, bluff, and counterbluff[8].

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