

The Brexit Challenge

What is the issue?

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- While the Brexit Referendum (2016) narrowly went in favour of pro-leave camp, calls for a re-poll on the issue have only grown stronger with time.

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- Nonetheless, the Conservative government under PM Teresa May has categorically stated that it would fulfil the mandate in favour of leave.

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How does the current internal churn in the British society look?

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- Despite 2 years since the Brexit vote, Britain remains as divided as ever, over the issue of leaving the EU.

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- Demonstrations demanding a reconsideration of the issue and a new referendum have been aplenty on the streets of U.K.

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- Contrarily, there have also been mobilisations by pro-leave lobby albeit in smaller numbers as things are already moving in their favour.

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- Those asking for re-poll state that many issues were not properly understood and recognized by the electorate during the 2016 referendum.

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- Additionally, the “leave campaigners of 2016” have also not been successful in pushing significant aspects of their promised agenda as part of the deal.

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- Significantly, promises on bettering National Health Service (NHS) and peacefully resolving the “Northern Ireland” question haven’t been addressed.

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- Also, Indian Brits are said to have majorly voted pro-leave in the belief

that UK outside EU would be more conducive for migrants from India.

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- But as immigration laws are only tightening and show no signs of easing in the near future, they are most likely to reconsider their choice in case of a re-poll.

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How is the political situation evolving?

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- Initially, those concerned about the direction of Brexit policy were pushing for greater parliamentary accountability on the issue.

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- Currently, both main UK parties have committed to exiting EU, albeit under very different post-Brexit agendas.

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- Labour Party seeks to remain within EU Customs Union (like Turkey - a non EU member), while the Conservative Party is envisioning a cleaner break.

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- Notably, despite the civil chaos and the multiple court battles, the Conservative government has asserted grit in setting Brexit in motion.

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- Recently, legislation in this regard has also been passed in the British parliament by a slim majority.

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How the Irish question playing out?

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- **What** - Ireland is an island to the west of Britain and has two major regions (north and south) with distinct demographic features.

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- “Protestant majority Northern Ireland” (a U.K. territory) and “Catholic majority Irish Republic” (an independent country in the south), have had serious ethnic tensions within and between them.

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- Numerous agreements and EU's integrated markets system has thus far been a significant influence in resolving these tense and violent trends.

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- As U.K. plans to exit EU, the Irish question has come to haunt all concerned governments as there is palpable fear that a new era of violence might start.

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- **Challenges** - Hard borders would detach the minorities on both parts of Ireland and add to their insecurity, and hence is not desired.

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- But as Irish Republic is an EU member, a porous border with it would mean a porous border with EU, which is not wanted by the pro-leave group in U.K.

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- Some have suggested a porous border between the Ireland and another semi-border between Northern Ireland and UK to ensure a compromise.

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- But DUP (the major party in Northern Ireland and a Conservative ally), has strongly opposed any borders between UK and Northern Ireland.

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What are the other significant aspects of Brexit?

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- **Economic** - Many business groups have expressed concerns due to the prevalent uncertainty, and new investments have almost reached nil presently.

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- Even some are speculating exiting UK if no economic deal is reached with the EU in the post-Brexit scenario.

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- **Political** - Serious allegations of campaign violations by pro-leave groups (in the run-up to 2016 referendum) have also cropped up lately.

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- All these have strengthened calls for a re-poll, but there have also been voices that have vouched that another polarising campaign would bring

little good.

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- **Accountability** - The British government has been doing reasonably well for accommodating diverse voices within its fold to push Brexit forward.

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- There are but considerable dissent, and criticism on austerity cuts and on the compromises being made with the EU.

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Source: The Hindu

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