# Audio file

Jonathan Arlow Researcher in Focus Podcast.mp3

# Transcript

Nick Jones (NJ)

Welcome everybody to the latest edition of the Researcher in Focus podcast from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences here at the University of Liverpool. My name is Nick Jones, part of the Research and Impact team here at the faculty, and today I'm joined by Dr Jonathan Arlow, the Marie Curie Research Fellow based in the Department of Politics. Today Jonathan will be taking us through his work in comparative politics, and in particular his current project, a comparative evaluation of Sinn Fein as an all-island party since the Great Recession. First of all, Jonathan, hello and thank you very much for joining us.

Dr Jonathan Arlow (JA)

Thank you, Nick. Thanks for having me.

NJ

That's my pleasure. I suppose my first question is why this subject? What got you interested in politics and wanting to study it?

JA

Oh so. I've always been really interested in politics like I was quite active in my trade union and you know, various sort of left wing advocacy groups and things like that. And like a lot of Irish people during the recession, I spent some time on welfare and I was kind of rethinking career options. And I was thinking to myself. Well, is there any way they could turn this interest in political scholarship into a career so I kinda retrained as a care assistant because I knew you'd have flexible working hours that could do around the Masters. Did the Masters and scholarship for PhD in Dublin City University. And yeah, so far it's been going quite well. I worked as a teaching assistant there. And and just this September I've started in Liverpool on this Marie Curie project.

NJ

Fantastic. Yes. And that's kind of my next question. What was your academic journey been like and were there any particular struggles or difficulties you had in making that move into academia?

JA

Yeah, I think you. Know maybe this is a personality thing, but I I suppose everyone who went into starting their PhD in their early 30s might say this, but I wish I did it earlier and I think that PhD, although the PhD process is maybe harder when you're older and have more experience in the workplace. But I think a lot of people say that, but otherwise. Yeah. Sorry, no beyond starting it earlier. I can't think.

NJ

Do you think it's been useful having that experience outside of academia and and having other jobs before coming into it, seeing a bit more of the, I don't want to use the word real world, but you know the world outside of research.

JA

I think so. I think it makes, and to be honest, I think it makes teaching to students easier. I think, to teach you to interact with them, I think. And building networks like and potential like future collaborators to research with. I think it is quite good to have kind of an, just an experience of interacting with people in the workplace for, you know, significant amount of time outside of academia. Suppose it's just people skills, really.

NJ

OK. And your current research is looking at the policies and practises of Sinn Fein as an all-island party comparing their operations in the North to the South and contrasting its unusual all Ireland position one party two jurisdictions to other anti-systemic European parties of the Left. So in order to talk about that a little bit. Best could you explain what you mean by anti-systemic and then secondly tell us a little bit about the findings that you've come up with.

JA

What I mean by anti-systemic is like a lot of international scholars, a lot of scholars are from the radical left place. Sinn Fein in that radical left typology and I wouldn't necessarily argue against that. But I also think when we're comparing Sinn Fein, we shouldn't only compare them to parties of the radical left in Europe. Who they are in the same group within the European Parliament. So I'm thinking of saree's Podemos Delinko in Germany, so completely reasonable to compare them to these other parties that want to see radical change. In their respective countries. Well, Sinn Fein is first and foremost a party for. But they're called an independent struggle. You know, the national question, United Ireland is primary focus. So it's also important to compare them to parties who are not radical but do fight an independent struggle like the SNP, like clad Kumari and. Like the various sort. Of centre to centre right parties in Catalonia. Which you wouldn't you? Would not call them radical, but they are anti systemic because they want to see you know. So for instance, the SNP, they're not a radical party. They would be the left of Labour, but solid Social Democratic space and they don't want radical change in Scotland, but they do want systemic change. They want essentially Scottish sovereignty and something similar with Sinn Fein in in the late 70s, 80s. There would have been very much official policy, would have been a Socialist 32, County United Ireland, where it is now. North and towards a solid Social Democratic space and public policy. But they combine that with more radical left rhetoric. And I suppose what makes Shin Fein still radical is. More the threat they placed at the status quo in Northern Ireland and the Republic in the UK, rather than their policy which? You know, I think it's fair to say Sinn Fein now would like a 32 County united Ireland that looks more like Denmark than Cuba. Do you know they have? Moved into that. Space. So that's why I use anti systemic rather than just radical so I can bring in left nationalist parties from around Europe that. Don't necessarily have a radical agenda, but are also systemic threat. To the status quo.

NJ

Before we go on to your findings, that's an interesting point that you talked about there. Do you think outside of Ireland, Northern and the Republic that there are any radical parties in the UK politics or are they the only one? Do you think?

JA

There are no radical party that is in the UK to have sort of electoral significance, I suppose. Previously UKIP and Reform would be the most sort of radical ones as we're talking more on the right occasionally, George Galloway will come in, you know, on the left, but in general, a radical left alternative outside of saying Great Britain outside of Labour is just not really there in Northern Ireland. People before profit, which is Trotskyist, party revolutionary, they are they, they do have an assembly member, they have county councillors. But you know, under a first past. The post system, like in the UK, they just wouldn't feature. So yeah, for comparing Sinn Fein to other parties, you're very much I think looking. SNMP card really. Interestingly, Corbyn's Labour was very close to Sinn Fein, he, the constituents he represents, is historically quite Irish and he would have been very sympathetic to Irish republicanism. So, and I think this were to say, Sinn Fein. Went like very much. Where it felt very close to. Corbyn's labour agenda? That's that's kind. Of where they would see themselves.

NJ

OK. And so back to the research that you are currently talking about and your study of the Sinn Fein's strategies and tactics, if you like, what have you found so far?

JA

Suppose the 1st paper I've done. I haven't actually started interviews with the party. Yeah, I've been focusing on essentially, desk based research and joining up pre-existing data sets. So my first paper that's currently under review, I compare Sinn Fein's policies between North and South and compare them to other parties in Northern Ireland and the Republic and there would be in among political commentators and scholarship there would be a sense that Sinn Fein would say one thing in Northern Ireland and a different thing in the South. That they would be very sort of targeted, I think my own expectation and my own understanding of Sinn Fein led me to believe actually that's an inaccurate statement that they adapt towards the interests of voters. But in general it's a very similar Social Democratic messaging. Combined with radical left rhetoric, both in the North and the South, and we won't see major differences and actually the data shows which and the data comes from manifestos released at election time. It's two projects that it gives them a mention. The Irish policy agendas project and the public policy agendas on the Shared Island project, which looks at manifestos in Northern Ireland and it codes them based on the Comparative Agenda project, which is an international, an international manifesto project that codes these manifestos based on a a shared scheme. So we can do cross country compare. And actually what I find is that Sinn Fein really does adapt its messaging. Now it's not necessarily that wouldn't the radical left criticisms of Sinn Fein would be that they implement austerity in the north and oppose it in the. Republic this was during. The recession, yes, I think that's slightly harsh. They are under constraints in Northern Ireland. In terms of power sharing, in terms of dealing with, you know, the UP ministers of finance, the limited revenue raising ability of the Northern Ireland Assembly. So I think that's slightly hashed. What you do find is that in Northern Ireland the party tends to prioritise what comes in. The top three and issue focus in in most manifestos is governance and politics. So what they're really focusing on is issues around the Northern Ireland Assembly, the working of the peace process and tensions with both the British Government and the DUP. So you can see in the North, what they're doing is representing nationalist concern. Accounts are periods in which nationalism views their interests as being under threat, whereas in the South, in every single election, and even more so since they've become electorally competitive, they focus on Social Democratic bread and brochure issues. It's health, it's housing. Uh, you know, it's, uh, social welfare. And players in the north now. Interestingly though, in the most recent election. In 2022, for the Northern Ireland Assembly, Sinn Fein's policy agenda shifts to a focus that is very similar to the self. It's no longer about governance. It's no longer about politics and the difference between 2022 and say, 2016 and 2017 elections is that at this. Point the interests of Irish nationalism in the north is secure. They're not saying there's no tensions. Not saying there's no crises, but they're relatively secure because, uhm, essentially nationalism, although not happy with it, can live with the Northern Ireland protocol and the Windsor framework thing to do with Brexit. They don't feel threatened by it. There's no border on the north-south. And the blame, that's not quite the right word, but I I can't think of any any other one, but the blame for the continuing suspension of the power sharing executive, the UM, the blame for the sort of the problems within the functioning of the Northern Ireland state is predominantly on the DU. Be and. They're sort of intransigence about agreeing to the NI Online protocol, and eventually that did work out there was, you know, various deals and they and they became they went. Back into power. But I suppose what I'm trying to say is that when nationalist interests are relatively secure here in the north then, Sinn Fein shifts to this central policy agenda of social democracy and essentially that is how they built. That's how they overtook the moderate SDLP in the north. It wasn't by being the most radical on the national question. It was by the sort of laser like focus. Are underground issues, you know, community activism, not necessarily revolutionary national activism, if that makes sense.

NJ

Do you think that's something that all of the parties are going to be able to make a shift to, away from doing politics about politics, to bringing more about social issues as things are, like you say, if not completely settled, but certainly maybe a little more stable than they were five, six years ago?

JA

Yeah. Excellent question because what we see is the more moderate SDLP and the non-aligned Alliance party basically focus on these Social Democratic issues across nearly all elections and that's their, that's where they sort of put most of their effort now. Sinn Fein and GDP are similar in that at times of crisis for their community, they both focus on governance and politics and this this is this idea that other scholars have and developed that Sinn Fein and GUP is the largest nationalist bloc party is the largest Unionist bloc party that they act as. Tribune defenders for their communities that times of insecurity, they will come in and focus on protecting the nationalist interest or focus on protecting the Unionist interest. So essentially they act more as tribune part. But what my finding does show is that when. When nationalist interests are secure, Sinn Fein then reverts to this sort of a Social Democratic agenda that is pretty much indistinguishable from its agenda in the self.

NJ

OK so. In a nutshell, I suppose it's you are finding there's a consistency in in Sinn Fein's policies in the north and in the Republic at the moment, although it can be in flux maybe.

JA

Yeah, yeah, it's not essentially because they are a tribune party and more at times of crisis, they will focus on governance and politics, which just isn't really an issue in the. Both that briefly came up during the aftermath of the Great Recession, where people felt the Irish state wasn't working as well as it. Should but it. Was a brief. Blip, and in general, they don't really, it doesn't enter. The top five, if she focuses at all. Of any party left, right or centre. So there is you. I would argue that there is an overall. Ideological consistency about essentially providing leadership or their unique selling point being, you know, a drive for reunification and outside. Of that they. Are fairly consistent North and South about? In terms of policy, it is. Social democracy mixed with more radical and. Rhetoric more unsaid, whereas. I suppose what? I found surprising. I genuinely didn't think governance and and probably I was naive or whatever, but I didn't think governance and politics would feature so strongly at times of crisis. I didn't think it would be #1 and #2, but it very much is and it shows that. And this actually conforms with agenda setting theory and issue competition theory, which suggests that political parties must adapt their messages based on institutional context and varying public attitudes. So if Sinn Fein wants to be a mainstream political party. Northern Ireland and the mainstream political party in the South and at the moment it is the largest in terms of vote chair in national elections, both sides. Then they have to. Basically tailored their message to the context of the Northern Ireland Assembly and power sharing and to the context of their core nationalist votes needs. So actually, if I was growing by issue competitions here, your agenda setting theory, I should have expected the the convergence between North and South.

NJ

And so you mentioned that you are looking forward to actually interviewing politicians. So what's next in this stage of research for you? Is it going over there and boots on the ground talking to people.

JA

Yeah. Yeah, that's it. I, I've essentially, have to start arranging interviews with not just Sinn Fein activists at all levels, but I also want to interview political parties that compete against Sinn Fein in terms of how they view the party, how they compete, where they think they succeed, where they think they fail, also want to Sinn Fein has become very involved in the Irish trade union. Movement to stomach to a large extent, it has replaced the Irish Labour Party as as the party of organised labour, and so I'd like to explore that a bit more. There's a gap in the literature there and and. I would also date Sinn Fein 10s or Sinn Fein activists are also quite involved in various sort of social movements, whether it's on abortion access and or gay rights, etcetera. And so I'd like to talk to some of these movements within Ireland and their experience. Of working in. Collaboration with Sinn Fein and on issues of shared concern and. And I suppose what's unique about my project is that it's an all island basis. Because Sinn Fein is an All Island party but mostly just produced on Sinn Fein, either focuses very much on Northern Ireland and then actually there's much less research on the South because Sinn Fein has only really emerged as an electorally competitive party since 2011, really in the South. Although interestingly, that was their long term strategy since the late 70s and so this has been. A long time blurring. They've always felt that achieving power in the South will be necessary for facilitating. The United Army. So it's a, it's a long term strategy which I find fascinating. Really party can think that strategically for that long is very unusual, facilitate it by the fact that. They don't have much leadership change. And you know Gerry Adams was one of the longest serving leaders in Europe. And now Michelle or sorry, Mary Lou McDonald is uh, very secure as a leader and and I think what is subdomains like tangents. But I think another unique aspect of Sinn Fein is. They give leaders. To room to make mistakes and fail and still grow and learn. So I suppose you know for compared to. Like football teams, I know now are always criticised for not giving their managers time to make mistakes and and and lose and grow from that loss where Sinn Fein very much will they'll stick by it later.

NJ

OK. Yeah. Fascinating stuff. As you say, it's a more to come. So Jonathan, you're the Marie Curie postdoctoral fellow over in politics department. That's a position funded by Horizon Europe. Currently it's open for new applicants, so if you're interested in that, please go to our website. But Jonathan, could you tell us a little bit more about the fellowship and your experience of applying and winning one?

JA

Yeah, it was. I suppose at the time I was looking around for postdocs where I could, you know, where it would be my funding and I could be. The principal investigator. And umm, I came for the reasons I explored earlier. I was very much focusing on Sinn Fein All Island Party comparing North and South, other European parties. And so I decided to build. A. A sort of. Base postdoctoral application that I can adapt to various different, you know, scholarships summary jury was one of several that applied for and was by far it was by far the most prestigious and and and the best. It was one I was. I'd get and I approached John Tong because I knew I I knew his research very well, his Professor John Tong and Department of Politics. I knew his research very well on Northern Ireland and I knew that, you know, when I was pointing to reviewers, I could say that I have had proven track record producing research on Irish politics. They had nothing on Northern Ireland so so John's mentorship helps me there and also Liverpool was this excellent. For me, like #1 with the maker, you cannot apply in the place. You did your PhD so. Ireland was was not an option and. To be honest for my own. Career. I did think it. Was time to. Work and live abroad academically and Liverpool. Was just this real? In terms of the research it was a perfect fit, not only and you know that the Irish Department, the Department of Politics uh, there's a history of producing, you know, top scholarship on radical left Parties, European Studies, Irish politics in general. So it was a very good fit. It was something that it could fail to the Marie Curie reviewers. And it made sense and also. Just the culture in Liverpool is so Irish. There's a GAA club at the end of my Rd. It's. Yeah. It's like living in Dublin to be honest. So the help and reviewers are kind of aware of these cultural links between the University of Liverpool and. Account and am experience very time consuming which is kind of high risk. I've worked on it four months full time and the actual application it's 10 pages but the way you space it out it turns into a 10,000 word post doc application like research proposal so you know if you think about it, it's essentially the same time that you might. Spend writing up and revising a a a journal article is is kind of like what this proposal would be like and UM. Yes, so four months full. Time and then you have to what they seem to be very keen on and I'm not sure how. This might be a social science thing, but in my application, what they really liked was that I was so heavily focused on research outputs so that all my research questions and research objectives were linked to specific journal article outputs. And then you know, collectively they were all going to be teams or chapters within the final sort of academic monograph and and they really they liked that focus and they just put my hands up. They criticised the lack of. Just might be useful for others. They want to know what things the. Reviewers are focusing on, but they criticised my lack of theoretical innovation and I knew that one was putting the proposal together, that I wasn't saying anything. All that innovative in terms of theory, I wasn't developing any new theories about why Sinn Fein is successful or or where where it is weak or anything. Like that well. I suppose I was arguing that this is research. That hasn't been done before. There is a huge gap in the literature about Sinn Fein and it is important in terms of the impact it could have on Ireland, Northern Ireland, the UK, European borders, etcetera. So there was impact for policymakers.

NJ

OK, excellent insights. Like you say, the Faculty is putting together a whole suite of support for people who might want to apply for their own Marie Curie, though excellent to have someone on hand who knows so much about it. So in the blog that you sent through to us, you say you've also researched and published on antifas role in combating electoral ambitions of the extreme right. Could you tell us a bit more about what they did, how they worked?

JA

Yeah. So in that case, I was reading. A bit about anti-fascist activism sort of popularly known as the Antifa and largely the theory about the reasons for anti fascist activism is emerging. What's that? It was a response to the threat of the extreme right, so that radical left activists would see a fascist presence on their streets and mobilisation on the streets and react against that, whereas I was looking at Ireland, which at that time had no extreme right presence or very, very limited. Very, very weak. But there was quite an active Antifa presence in urban areas and that we're still dealing with relatively small numbers, but in terms of left wing. Activism. The Antifa anti Fascist Action Ireland were there and heavily present and so saying well, this was sort of using Ireland as an outlier and saying, well, if we were to if other scholars internationally are saying it's a reaction. There is no reaction in Ireland. There's nothing to react to. So what else? What other explanations can Ireland tell us about the reasons for Antifa activism? And I did interviews with U M7 activists under they were anonymous interviews because obviously most of their activism. Just completely, you know it. It's just campaigning leafletting education, that kind of thing. But that 5% where they use violence against the extreme right, that's obviously illegal. So they're at risk of GBH charges. So it was all anonymous interviews. And what I found was that. Number one, they were looking. Outward. Uh, well, actually, these aren't in order, but I developed 3 new reasons, but the first reason I thought about. Is that they were looking at. They were looking outward at the extreme right presence, you know, in the UK from Football Lads Association and the BNP, they were looking at France and Germany and they're saying we don't want that here. And so it's like a defence of action, even though these extreme right groups are tiny and embryonic, we will still. We will still campaign against them to ensure that they never get a foothold and then also in terms of I argue that if if worked as an area of left convergence in that radical left. Peace activists from various different parties in Ireland is a very old radical leftist. Fragmented. Ireland is even perhaps more fragmented than most because there's the Irish republican strain on the left as well as just, you know, trots, Maoists, anarchists, etcetera. So it's especially fragmented and this is and and some of them have long. Lasting intergenerational dislike of each other, it it is quite amazing, but Antifa activism is somewhere they leave their party politics or they leave their ideological beliefs behind and they come together on one clear issue. So left convergence and then. An aspect of tradition or militant heritage and there's an element of romanticism and storytelling behind this, but you could argue that is the basis of an awful lot of political activists. But these people, and they would they talked about it very regularly. These activists, they would say that we're from the tradition that fought the fascists in Spain. We're from the tradition that fought the British Empire that fought the Nazis, and we're fighting the same people today. Now, obviously hugely. You know, they're storytelling involved there. There's romanticization involved there, but that's it. Can still be a real motivation, and it seemed to really motivate those activists. And. Now the interesting thing. So I would say we are, that's a reasonable sort of basis for theory generation on, on new explanations for anti activism. What has changed significantly is that now Ireland, it avoided an extreme light stream presence for so long, but has emerged in the last. UM Cocal 2 years essentially, and you know, sort of culminated in the November Dublin riots which were, you know, featured very heavily internationally and were a bit of a shock I think to a lot of experts in the field, it definitely shocked me, although I knew the extreme right had become a street presence, I didn't think that kind. Of level of. Far right, leading the breakdown on law and order. I just didn't. Yeah. Yeah. I never saw it. I was genuinely incredibly. Shocked, I never. Saw it coming. And now immigration, for the first time. In the history. Of the Irish State, immigration is an issue. It's in the top five issues for voters and it never was before. So the this is new. Aspect. I still think the extreme right will be elected. No signs that they will become electoral. Significant. But they are. A significant and rather unpleasant St presence at the moment they protest outside ministers, houses and things like that, which is is not. Nice politics for.

NJ

Do you think that is? A reflection of the kind of global increase of the acceptance and the moving towards far right ideas and ideal ideologies.

JA

Oh yeah, they definitely situate like on social media. They definitely situate themselves within the international far right. They'd be very close to extreme right elements in the UK. And they would. I think COVID was a breeding ground for conspiracy theories and half-baked ideas and and then afterwards the housing crisis. And then maybe this is my own romanticism about Ireland, but I don't think immigration would be a. Top fraud issue if? It wasn't for this housing crisis in Ireland, which has been going on for 10 years, and it's just getting worse and. Worse every year. Here and that the Irish state seems incapable of addressing it or unwilling to address it. And yeah, it's like Ireland at the moment. It's like if an entire country had a rental and housing market like London. It's it's very it is bad and it's and I think it is radicalising. Young people, especially as the Irish state is. And. The failed state. It's pockets of excellence so addressed COVID and the crisis around that quite well. It addressed the Ukrainian crisis. Quite well we we took. In nearly 100,000 Ukrainian refugees provided housing for them or accommodation at least for them, and which is? Among the highest rates in Western Europe per capita, it is the highest rate in Western Europe, but I suppose it's very easy, then for the far right to tell the narrative that ohh look. The state and the crisis can. And address these issues. But the 13,000 Irish homeless it won't address. I know 13,000 doesn't sound a lot, but ten years ago there was three and Ireland is a small country. No. So you can see how far right narratives can build under these conditions.

NJ

OK. Thank you very much. So. Looking at your research and career so far, what's been the most interesting or jaw-dropping thing that you've come across in your research? Things that stopped you in your tracks?

Speaker

Well, I'm still in early days, so still very much desk based research looking at pre-existing data sets but in the paper I was just speaking about comparing our North and South what I did. So there was. One variable from those data sets. Looking at the political parties. In a binary variable that looked at attention to Northern Ireland as a constitutional issue, so parties this would be sentences that question the position of Northern Ireland's constitutional status quo, basically pushing for United Act. And actually what I have found is or what the date is. No, it is in Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein only focuses on those sort of, you know, United Ireland issues. And between 5 to 7% of coded lines in each manifesto. It's it's quite small. I was expecting much larger and then in the Republic of Ireland, it's smaller again, it's only between UH-2 and 2 1/2% of their manifestos. But now in each in Northern Ireland and the Republic, Sinn Fein. Devote more space to United Ireland issues than any other party. It is their unique selling point or you can see is this is. A party who, although. All their policies are framed true. The prism of the United Islands, you know. So for instance, in their manifesto in Ireland in 2020, the first policy position was reunification. But they only mention it briefly because you do not win elections by banging on about the national question all the time you need. To and even though like. United Airlines in the Republic of Ireland is. Very popular 76% of voters support it, but they don't. It doesn't. It's not a day-to-day concern. It's not like health. It's not like housing. So I found that quite how how little they focus on it. Quite surprising. Uh. And. Yeah, so far that is the only thing that really shook me. I think I was briefly saying I was expecting Sinn Fein to focus less on government and policy in Northern Ireland. So that was a little surprising. But in hindsight, to do the self criticism I I I probably should have expected it actually.

NJ

Well, you know, from my point of view, the unification question was one was like I, you know, I I need to ask Jonathan about this, you know, in terms of your research and you've just answered there that it's it's not the thing which takes up a lot of their talking / publications, if you like.

JA

But I would say, and I I deal with this in the paper, it is something that frames everything. So like Dublin, they say in their 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly manifesto, the first page is a photo of, you know, Dublin based, Mary Lou MacDonald and her little address there is framing. Their policies, through the struggle for independence through the electoral success in the South. So it is it's it's a very small proportion of the manifesto. It is not a focus, but it it frames everything that follows. If if that makes sense. Yeah.

NJ

It's the overarching thing behind everything. Yeah, well, looking forward then a little bit, as I'm in the research and impact team, I've got to ask you this question. What would you like to see as the single most significant change in out there in the world as a result of your rest?

JA

Yeah, that's it's interesting how? Because it's own party political focus. My research, I think I would like there is Sinn Fein is I feel and I suppose I would say this I I kind of dedicate the next next two years in my life to it but I feel it is badly understood and badly researched I think quite regularly. You know. Experts in the media and academia would dismiss Sinn Fein's policies, as you know, empty left wing populism. But when you actually look at them and break them down, it's but that that's social democracy now to the left, put it into context, then the. Slightly to the right of Corbin, but very much to the left of Blair or hair. Starmer you know. So it's it's it's within the European norms of social democracy. And I suppose the radicalness does, as I've said before, come from or from the from, the from the. The threat the the status quo, they present an obviously most important the militant past, the the, the, the past of violence, and I think it's important that I know I'm going slightly off your thing, but I think it's important to note that all this electoral group, all this recent success for the party has been predicated. Peace and the peace process that before the IRA went to the ceasefire and and eventually decommissioned in 2005. But before 1998 they were not an electorally it wouldn't be fair to call them in mainstream party in. Northern Ireland and Republic. Whereas they are now very much a mainstream party in. Both both sections but changes.

I suppose briefly, then I would like policymakers to be better informed about Sinn Fein, I think the reunification issue, there's no guarantees. But. But since Brexit and you know today 2024, those in support of the United Ireland and Northern Ireland has increased by 10%, which is a significant jump, it's still there is no. In terms of opinion polling, there is no clear route to a successful border poll to a United Ireland vote yet. But demographics are on the side of Sinn Fein. The younger, newer voters coming in tend to be more nationalist than older voters and I think where the future lies. Sinn Fein is their ability. City and I think what that party or the parties aim now is is to become a party of government in the South as well as the north and then use the levers of the Irish state to facilitate reunification. So there's a reason Sinn Fein hasn't has never really produced very in-depth details about how they propose. A United Ireland might work well, would look like after successful waterfall. I think they're waiting out. They're waiting to have state resources and a full department of reunification before they do that. They want the the. Power and resources of the state. And so I think they hope that. The message to. The undecided and persuadable voters in Northern Ireland, who tend to vote for, say the Alliance party or the Greens, that the message to them as they approach a border poll, possibly in mid twenty 30s, would be a reasonable maybe early twenty 30s would be an A reasonable guess. The message would be that Westminster. Like obviously this is Sinn Fein's analysis, you know, and Sinn Fein's messaging, but that Westminster doesn't want to understand you, but Sinn Fein LED Dublin does and look at all this money they're spending on North S initiatives and look at how we're trying to facilitate reconciliation etcetera, etcetera and they their belief, I believe their strategic hope. Is that that could be decisive in a border poll. So I think I would like that better understood. I would like policymakers, UK, Ireland, Europe to sort of perhaps understand this unusual party which is. A bit of. A black box it it's it's not well. Understood what goes on inside Sinn Fein, obviously, historically had to be very secretive. Even now it works under party activists. They're very disciplined activists, you know. The Ard Chomhairle. Which is the main decision making body that governs the party outside the heart. It's very powerful. Very influential. It's a mix of. Of elected reps and and party activists, and essentially that controls their shots. It's it's not the MLAs and the assembly. It's not the TDs and dual air and it's the hardcourt. And there's not suspicious radical parties. That's how radical parties work. Do you know what I mean? It is it is an activist LED party. It is. There's nothing unusual. They're very open about that. But I think a better understanding of Sinn Fein could only increase our knowledge and perhaps ease future transitions. Maybe.

NJ

Fabulous. Thank you so much. Well, best of luck on shining a light on the open box for Sinn Fein in the future, then that sounds fantastic. Thank you very much. Jonathan, darling. Thank you so much for joining me today. That's been really, really fascinating. Thank you for coming along and sharing that with us.

JA

Thanks nick. Thank you.

NJ

Well, thanks again and thank you everybody for listening. And next time, we're hoping to be joined by Doctor Anna Mackay from the Department of History. So hopefully I'll see you all then and thank you very much. Goodbye.