

Discuss the reasons why successive governments in Northern Ireland failed to establish political stability in the period between 1920-1967?

To answer the question, a background on the independence of Ireland must be discussed as well as the governments, laws, and problems in each decade from the 1920s to the 1960s. Then there will be a discussion on whether the attitudes and solutions were correct and how it affected the succeeding governments, thereby coming to a conclusion on why successive governments in Northern Ireland failed to establish political stability.

Leading up to the independence of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, before the 1920s and onwards, Ireland went through many factors resulting in liberation. The after effect of the 1798 Irish Rebellion, The Act of Union, was created whereby Ireland became part of the British state. This was soon changed in 1801, when Ireland and Britain were officially made into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The union included Catholic emancipation which attracted the Irish Catholics and other Dissenters as it was a promise to abolish the Penal Law. However, this was quickly blocked by King George III and the abolishment of the Test Act was granted. After a huge economic boom in the Napoleonic War, Ireland then went through a great famine during which the country had economic unrest, and its lowest economic struggle between 1849 to 1851.¹ The economic lows were due to the small size of landholdings and a large increase.² Although Ireland was producing food, it was exported to England and abroad, with no food to feed their own people³ Finally, the Easter Rising occurred in Easter of 1916, in which one thousand five hundred Republican rebels started rioting in Dublin. This resulted in the government handling this poorly and executing the rebels, leading to widespread public sympathy for them.

The 1920s was met with violence, it all beginning with the Government of Ireland Act established in 1920 where the principles of two different parliaments were created and recognized in both Dublin and Belfast.⁴ There were riots breaking out due to the years leading up to the twenties, resulting in the Black and Tans being sent to Ireland as reinforcements for the police.⁵ This ensued into thirty being killed in Belfast and Derry, with Cork being set on fire.⁶ On November 21st 1920, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) killed fourteen alleged British agents, and the Black and Tans opened fire onto a crowd of football fans.⁷ From 1921 onwards, Sinn Fein dominated the Northern Irish parliament and in 1922, violence continued against Catholics with civil war breaking out in June after the Free State

¹ David, Ross. *Ireland: History of a Nation*, 2002.

² Morgan, V.; Macafee, W. "Irish Population in the Pre-Famine Period: Evidence from County Antrim", *The Economic History Review*, 1984.

³ Kinealy, Christine. *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland*. Pluto Press, London and Chicago, 1997.

⁴ Belfast Gazetteer. The National Archives, 1921.

⁵ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

⁶ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

⁷ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

government tried to silence the resistance to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921.⁸ Many died due to political violence between 1920 and 1923.⁹ The conclusion was that almost 5000 people were killed and 77 of them were those put to death for opposing the treaty.¹⁰ In 1924 the Boundary Commission met to discuss the border between Northern Ireland and the Free State, which in 1925 came to a deal to resolve to cede small parts of the North to the Free State in exchange for a section of County Donegal.¹¹ This was ultimately overruled by parliament in London in order to preserve the existing border.¹² The twenties ended with the forming of Fianna Fail, a political party that formed the biggest opposition in the Dublin parliament¹³ and the Great Wall Street Crash of 1929, where economies all across the world crashed and sunk into a depression.¹⁴ This decade had started and ended in violence with political and religious instability, giving an unsteady climate and foundation for the 1930s to build upon with economic depression as a main feature. The twenties finished with constant political opposition in parliament making it difficult for the next decade to change Northern Ireland for the better and bring balance to the people of both Ulster and the Free State.

The following decade saw an increase in unemployment and a rise of Fascism and Communism worldwide, with economic depression everywhere.¹⁵ In Northern Ireland there was an attempt at creating and promoting a policy of protectionism and self-sufficiency.¹⁶ This would start an industrial programme under the leadership of Fianna Fail, who remained in power from 1932 until 1948.¹⁷ The Free State started to develop a Republic in the thirties, which widened the gap between the Belfast and Dublin parliaments.¹⁸ In 1932, the Army Comrades Association (ACA) was established, only to be banned a year later by Eion O'Duffy.¹⁹ O'Duffy replaced the ACA with the United Irish Party, also known as Fine Gale, however Eion O'Duffy resigned in 1934.²⁰ 1935 saw rioting in Belfast which began as Protestants marching and processing through the streets on the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne.²¹ This resulted in four being killed, thirty injured and massive damage to the city.²² The IRA was finally banned by the Free State in 1936, and they became an illegal organisation in 1939 following a repeal against the 1922 constitution.²³ The new constitution, voted for in 1937, not only made claims on the land of Northern Ireland²⁴ and the Free State acknowledged British presence in Ireland, but would not have any obligation

⁸ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

⁹ Belfast Gazetteer. The National Archives, 1921.

¹⁰ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

¹¹ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

¹² Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

¹³ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

¹⁴ Poole R, Llewellyn J. *Northern Ireland Before 1968*. Alpha History, 2018.

¹⁵ *An Overview of the Years 1931-1940*, Ask About Ireland.

¹⁶ *An Overview of the Years 1931-1940*, Ask About Ireland.

¹⁷ *An Overview of the Years 1931-1940*, Ask About Ireland.

¹⁸ Poole R, Llewellyn J. *Northern Ireland Before 1968*. Alpha History, 2018.

¹⁹ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

²⁰ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

²¹ Poole R, Llewellyn J. *Northern Ireland Before 1968*. Alpha History, 2018.

²² Poole R, Llewellyn J. *Northern Ireland Before 1968*. Alpha History, 2018.

²³ Poole R, Llewellyn J. *Northern Ireland Before 1968*. Alpha History, 2018.

²⁴ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

to them, as well as changing the position of Governor-General to President, making them a Republic.²⁵ Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, and Éamon de Valera signed the Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement, which consisted of allowing the British to have outposts in Éire, which was the new name for the Free State.²⁶ The end of the decade saw the outbreak of World War Two with Éire staying neutral and the North siding with the rest of the United Kingdom and their allies.²⁷ However, the IRA carried out thirty different bombings across England from early 1939 to the mid-1940.²⁸ Overall, the thirties, like the twenties, saw great violence with rioting. This decade also witnessed economic depression, loss of employment and the beginning of a world at war. Politically, there were constant failed attempts at helping the population of Northern Ireland but nothing truly effective. This decade had a terrible foundation to begin with and set up the next decade with economic hardship and participation in a war.

In the 1940s Belfast experienced the worst bombings in Northern Ireland on the 15th of April 1940 with over 200 German bombers ruthlessly attacking, destroying factories, infrastructures, and housing.²⁹ Around 900 residents of Belfast were killed, and it ultimately made a quarter of the population homeless.³⁰ Dublin also experienced bombing in 1941 as well as other places in Éire.³¹ This led to de Valera attacking American troops and their posts in Northern Ireland.³² Once the War had ended in 1945, Winston Churchill praised Northern Ireland's efforts for participating in the War.³³ However, Churchill criticised Éire for staying neutral, although Dublin's government had cooperated with MI5 in order to gather intelligence against Germany.³⁴ The lives of the Northern Irish people improved when the British government implemented a National Welfare State because the Belfast government could not, and had constantly failed to implement safety nets for their population for the past three decades.³⁵ Housing, health care and education, which once was the responsibility of the Northern Irish government was now controlled, administered and funded by Westminster. Due to the influence of Westminster, Northern Ireland received 100,000 new dwellings, National Insurance, and family allowances.³⁶ Nationally funded programmes created new jobs and boosted infrastructure spending with industrial development.³⁷ The Catholics of Ulster were also happy with all the changes the British government brought about, as they felt like they no longer had to fear discrimination, marginalisation and being forced into poverty.³⁸ In 1948 de Valera lost the general election and was replaced by John

²⁵ Poole R, Llewellyn J. Northern Ireland Before 1968. Alpha History, 2018.

²⁶ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

²⁷ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

²⁸ Poole R, Llewellyn J. Northern Ireland Before 1968. Alpha History, 2018.

²⁹ Poole R, Llewellyn J. Northern Ireland Before 1968. Alpha History, 2018.

³⁰ Poole R, Llewellyn J. Northern Ireland Before 1968. Alpha History, 2018.

³¹ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

³² Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

³³ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

³⁴ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

³⁵ Poole R, Llewellyn J. Northern Ireland Before 1968. Alpha History, 2018.

³⁶ Poole R, Llewellyn J. Northern Ireland Before 1968. Alpha History, 2018.

³⁷ Poole R, Llewellyn J. Northern Ireland Before 1968. Alpha History, 2018.

³⁸ Poole R, Llewellyn J. Northern Ireland Before 1968. Alpha History, 2018.

Costello of the Fine Gael party.³⁹ Costello announced the change of the name Éire to the Republic of Ireland and detached their country from the Commonwealth.⁴⁰ The Republic of Ireland was officially announced on April 18th of 1949 and the Ireland Act made sure the Republic was no longer under the British domain, whereas Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom.⁴¹ The Forties began with violence like the past two decades before it, however, it ended with great improvements and change for Northern Ireland. The Belfast government had been constantly unpredictable and incapable of making changes, forcing the British government to intervene.

The 1950s was full of economic crisis, unemployment, and emigration. Politically, Fianna Fail remained in power from 1951 to 1954.⁴² The economy was in recession and Fianna Fail cut public expenditure and increased taxes which made them very unpopular among the people.⁴³ This was their solution to the economic crisis, as it was in decline and a huge depression.⁴⁴ Both the Republic and Northern Ireland were an agricultural economy and due to the depression, farming declined, accompanied with great unemployment and there was no money to invest in modernisation.⁴⁵ The industrial industry had periods of inactivity, and many companies used a tariff system resulting in them being inefficient and uncompetitive.⁴⁶ In the 1954 election there was a coalition made up of Fine Gael, Labour and Clann na Talmhan.⁴⁷ Unemployment became widespread with protests all over Northern Ireland.⁴⁸ This pushed people to emigrate abroad, in particular to America, in order to find employment and a better life.⁴⁹ It was such a problem in Northern Ireland that around 500,000 people left, which is close to 16% of the overall population.⁵⁰ Statistically, three out of five children that grew up in Ulster in the Fifties would leave to another country.⁵¹ In the final election of the decade, Fianna Fail regained their position of power.⁵² By 1957, around 78,000 were unemployed and the Welfare State only paid six months to

³⁹ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

⁴⁰ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

⁴¹ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

⁴² Conal, Kelly. *The 1950 Westminster Elections in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland Economic and Social Research Council.

⁴³ Conal, Kelly. *The 1950 Westminster Elections in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland Economic and Social Research Council.

⁴⁴ Rowthorn, Bob. *Cambridge Journal of Economics Vol. 5, No. 1, Northern Ireland: An Economy in Crisis*. Oxford University Press, 1981, page 1-31.

⁴⁵ Rowthorn, Bob. *Cambridge Journal of Economics Vol. 5, No. 1, Northern Ireland: An Economy in Crisis*. Oxford University Press, 1981, page 1-31.

⁴⁶ Rowthorn, Bob. *Cambridge Journal of Economics Vol. 5, No. 1, Northern Ireland: An Economy in Crisis*. Oxford University Press, 1981, page 1-31.

⁴⁷ Conal, Kelly. *The 1950 Westminster Elections in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland Economic and Social Research Council.

⁴⁸ Rowthorn, Bob. *Cambridge Journal of Economics Vol. 5, No. 1, Northern Ireland: An Economy in Crisis*. Oxford University Press, 1981, page 1-31.

⁴⁹ Delaney, Enda. *Irish Emigration Since 1921*. University of Edinburgh Press, 2002.

⁵⁰ Delaney, Enda. *Irish Emigration Since 1921*. University of Edinburgh Press, 2002.

⁵¹ Delaney, Enda. *Irish Emigration Since 1921*. University of Edinburgh Press, 2002.

⁵² Conal, Kelly. *The 1950 Westminster Elections in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland Economic and Social Research Council.

families struggling, causing a mass long-term unemployment.⁵³ All these factors internally piled pressure on the already broken and struggling Irish economy. Overall, the Fifties was a decade of downfall for the economy with no real help from the government. This was a terrible set up and foundation for the Sixties, with no jobs or young workers. Politically, the government had failed themselves, their people, and Northern Ireland's future.

The 1960s seemed to begin with dwindling support for the IRA, ending their active campaigning in Northern Ireland that had begun in the Fifties.⁵⁴ In 1965, the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement was established, which allowed free trade between countries.⁵⁵ The year 1966 brought about the conviction of Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) for murdering a Catholic in Belfast.⁵⁶ This all resulted in the UVF declaring war on the IRA and growing tension between the Nationalists and Unionists groups in Northern Ireland.⁵⁷ In the same year protests begin against the discrimination against Catholics living in Northern Ireland.⁵⁸ There was a lack of connection, communication and common ground between the Protestants and Catholics, making it a huge problem.⁵⁹ Due to decades of segregation and policies the Catholics and Protestants had completely different and separate societies, with different schools, workplaces and even pubs.⁶⁰ In 1967, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) is formed and the Northern Irish Prime Minister Terence O'Neill met the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, Jack Lynch, causing public outrage from Loyalist groups.⁶¹ The Sixties was full of violence with many religious aspects. The past few decades isolated Catholics and the Sixties did not improve this, with no attempt to help the situation. This decade was the turning point where everything came to head, resulting in the beginning of the Troubles.

In conclusion, successive government in Northern Ireland failed to establish political stability between 1920 to 1967 because each decade had a terrible foundation from the decade before. Each government did try and support the population of Northern Ireland however, every attempt failed, and focus shifted to isolation and segregating Catholics and policies that would both harm both of their communities. Nevertheless, with time improvements were made by signing agreements and policies with attempts to fix the economy, which was only received with the assistance from the Westminster. Overall, Northern Ireland was full of violence that finally came to ahead at the end of the Sixties and began The Troubles which lasted almost thirty years.

⁵³ Rowthorn, Bob. *Cambridge Journal of Economics Vol. 5, No. 1, Northern Ireland: An Economy in Crisis*. Oxford University Press, 1981, page 1-31.

⁵⁴ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

⁵⁵ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

⁵⁶ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

⁵⁷ Poole R., Llewellyn J. *Northern Ireland Timeline: 1960s*. Alpha History, 2017.

⁵⁸ Poole R., Llewellyn J. *Northern Ireland Timeline: 1960s*. Alpha History, 2017.

⁵⁹ Poole R., Llewellyn J. *Summary of the Troubles in Northern Ireland*. Alpha History, 2020.

⁶⁰ Poole R., Llewellyn J. *Summary of the Troubles in Northern Ireland*. Alpha History, 2020.

⁶¹ Hume, John. *A Brief History of Northern Ireland 1919-1999*. The Guardian, 1999.

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