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# Bordered Youth

Analysing Citizenship and Identities in Post-Brexit Northern Ireland







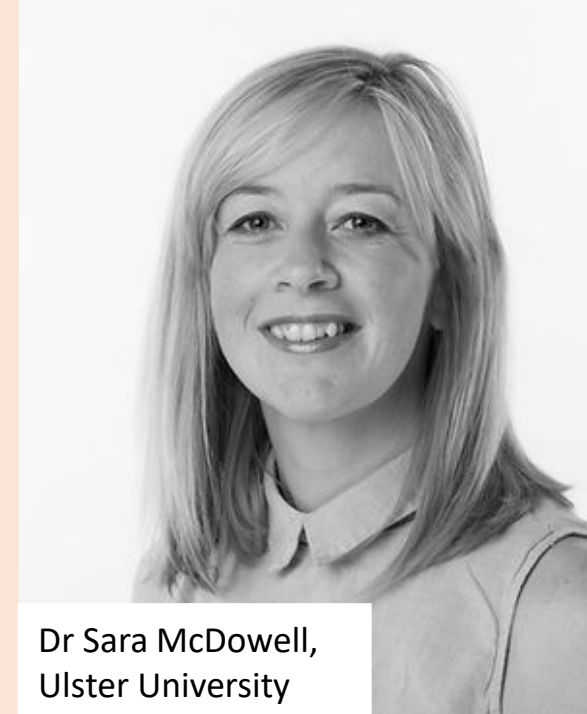
Dr Suzanne Beech,  
Ulster University (PI)



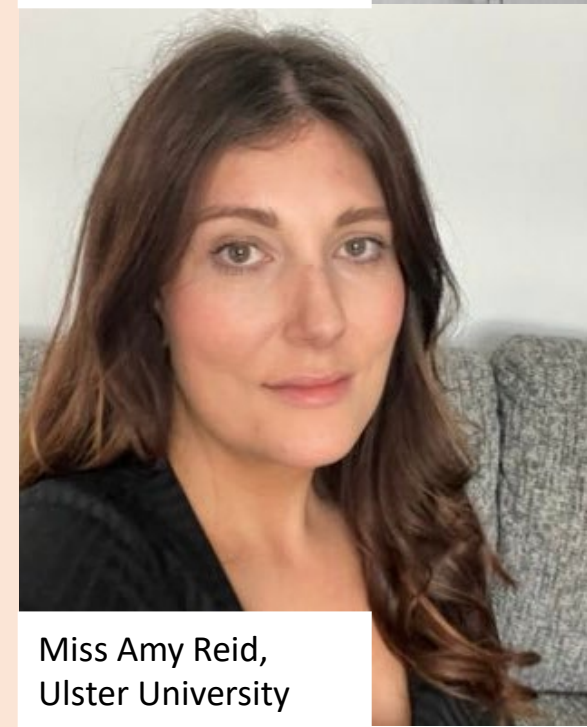
Dr Mark Holton,  
University of Plymouth

# Bordered Youth

Young people living in the North of Ireland are put into boxes which perhaps do not adequately represent their views and opinions – the Bordered Youth Project seeks to change that.



Dr Sara McDowell,  
Ulster University



Miss Amy Reid,  
Ulster University

# Research context

- Borders and the relationships, tensions and exchanges that they bring are a critical area of academic study.
- Work has considered:
  - Position of borders in a globalised world and the threats that this may bring to their very existence (Laine, 2016).
  - Their evolution over time (Agnew, 2008).
  - The challenges they present for international mobilities (Knowles and Matthiessen, 2009).
- Citizenship can be circumvented and negotiated in order to facilitate rights to mobility in contested borderlands (Waters and Leung, 2020).
- Citizenship is contested:
  - The transaction of rights and duties to the nation state (e.g., voting) (Van Liempt, 2011).
  - The social processes and expectations from the state of its citizens and vice versa (Jackson, 2016).
  - The cultural (Anderson et al., 2008) and emotional realms (Jackson, 2016) of citizenship.

# Research context

- Advance thinking by considering how young people's citizenship and mobilities shape, and are shaped by, geopolitical change.
- Focus on 18-24 enables us to capture their voices during this critical period of transition from being those in training to, supposedly, fully-fledged citizens and participants in society.
- Changing the narrative of apprentice citizenry.
- In the context of the Island of Ireland, evidence shows this has major ramifications for how young people feel about their prospects and upon their political engagement (Sturgeon & Lucas 2018).
- Young people's additional worries and concerns relating to the transgenerational impact of the Troubles.
- Significant bearing upon how young people communicate identity and citizenship, and yet has been neglected in the existing literature.

# Aims and objectives

## **Project aim:**

- This project aims to analyse how young people negotiate the complex and overlapping identities and citizenships produced by living in border regions.

## **Objectives:**

1. How do intersecting national and local identities, and transgenerational trauma, affect young people's material and symbolic engagements with the Border?
2. How do these material and symbolic engagements with the Border shape im/mobilities alongside and/or across it?
3. How is the relationship between mobility and citizenship contextualised and what impact do varying scales of mobility have upon young people's ever-evolving identities as active citizens across and alongside the border?
4. What is the likely impact of Brexit upon these three factors, and how is this voiced by young people living in borderland regions?

# Methodology

- Work package I: Digital Ethnography
  - Photo-elicitation using Instagram to capture perceptions of, and engagements with, the border.
- Work package II: Participatory filmmaking
  - Series of films made by groups of young people, in conjunction with The Nerve Centre, Belfast, on what borders mean to them.
- Work package III: Digital and Archival Research
  - Statistical analysis of ARK Survey and Young People's Life and Times Survey (2003-2023)
  - Media discourse analysis of reportage on Brexit, young people and citizenship.

# Digital ethnographies

- Young people are invited to upload photographs, videos and diary entries over two weeks relating to their experiences and perceptions of living alongside the border, and how this impacts upon their citizenships.
- Participant sampling:
  1. Those commuting or travelling through the Border on a regular basis.
  2. Those living alongside the Border but with limited movement through it.
  3. Those living in Belfast negotiating Brexit and the NI Protocol.
- SHOWeD analysis method (Wang and Burris, 1997):
  1. What do you see here?
  2. What is really happening here?
  3. How does this relate to our lives?
  4. Why does this situation/concern/strength exist?
  5. What can we do about it?



# Digital ethnographies

1. Young people's **broad knowledge and perceptions of borders** generally and the Irish border specifically.
2. How the **border influences young people's identities** (e.g., in terms of social interactions, family life etc.).
3. How the **border features in young people's everyday lives** (e.g., through signs, symbols, barriers etc.).
4. How the **border affects young people's movements and mobilities** (e.g., getting around, commuting to college, work or university etc.).

the\_bordered\_youth\_project



### How does Brexit and the Irish Border impact your life?

Participate in the Bordered Youth Project to have a say in the big issues affecting young people in Northern Ireland!

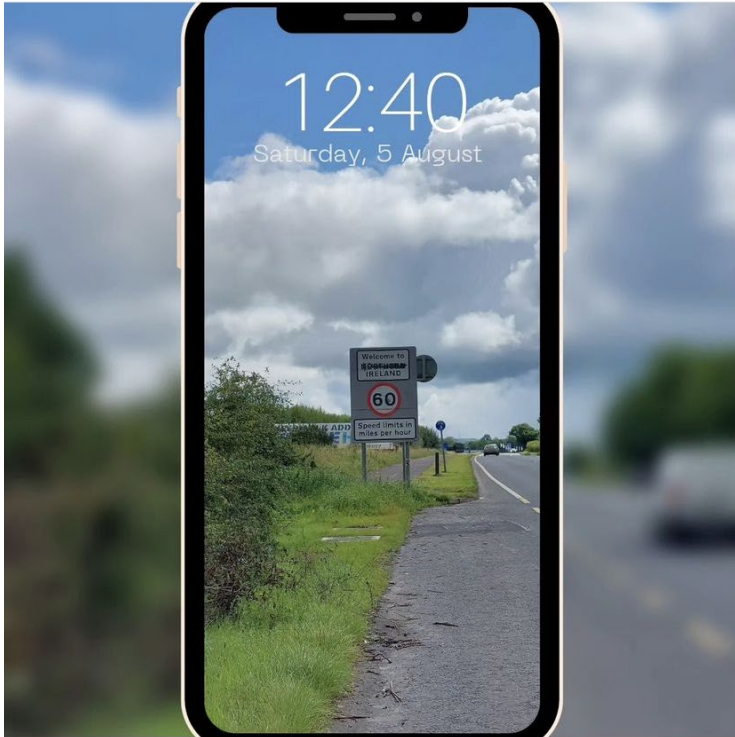


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the\_bordered\_youth\_project 🇮🇪 Young people living in the North of Ireland are put into boxes which perhaps do not adequately represent their views and opinions... more

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Liked by

the\_bordered\_youth\_project I crossed the Donegal-Derry border yesterday after a fantastic time away with some of my family. How does crossing the border make you feel? Do you cross it often or never at all? Whatever your experiences we want to hear from you!

the\_bordered\_youth\_project



Liked by

the\_bordered\_youth\_project This huge bonfire is being built near my home ahead of the 11th July. How do you feel about bonfires? Do you think they are community events or are they exclusionary? Do they have a place in 21st Century Northern Ireland? Does the building of bonfires represent a 'border' in our wider communities? We want to know what you think! Sign up for our photo blogging activity.





# Identities

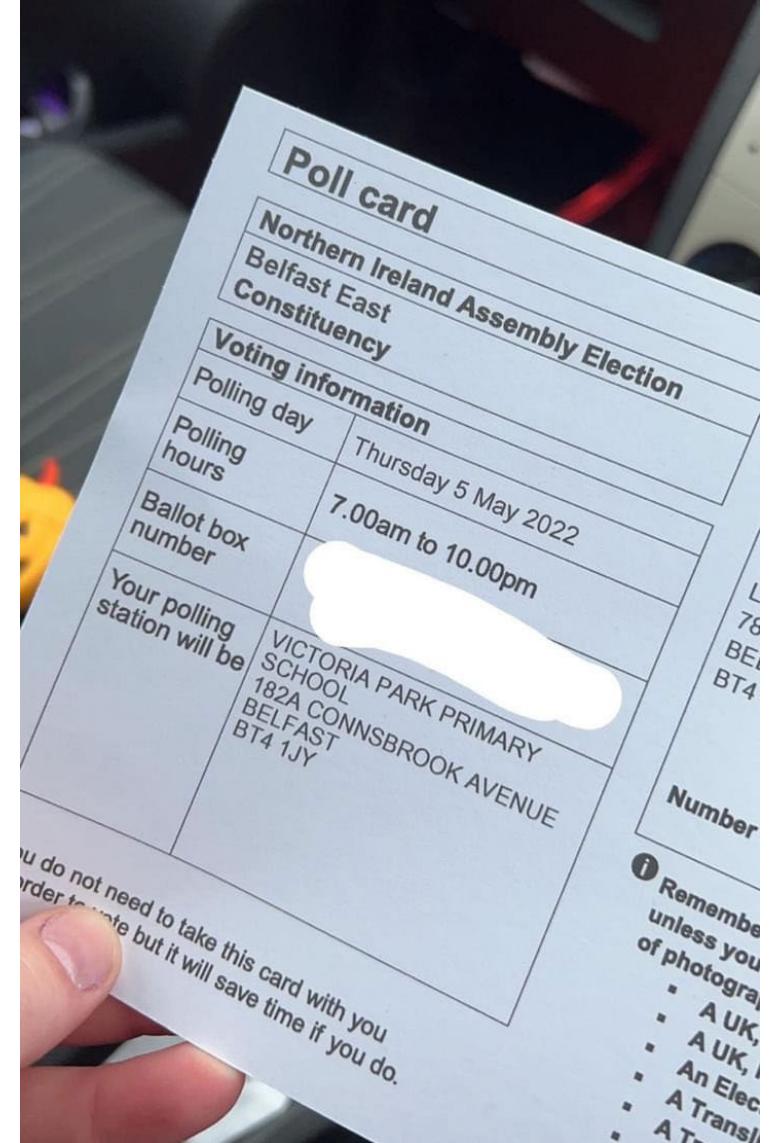




# Everyday life







# Mobilities



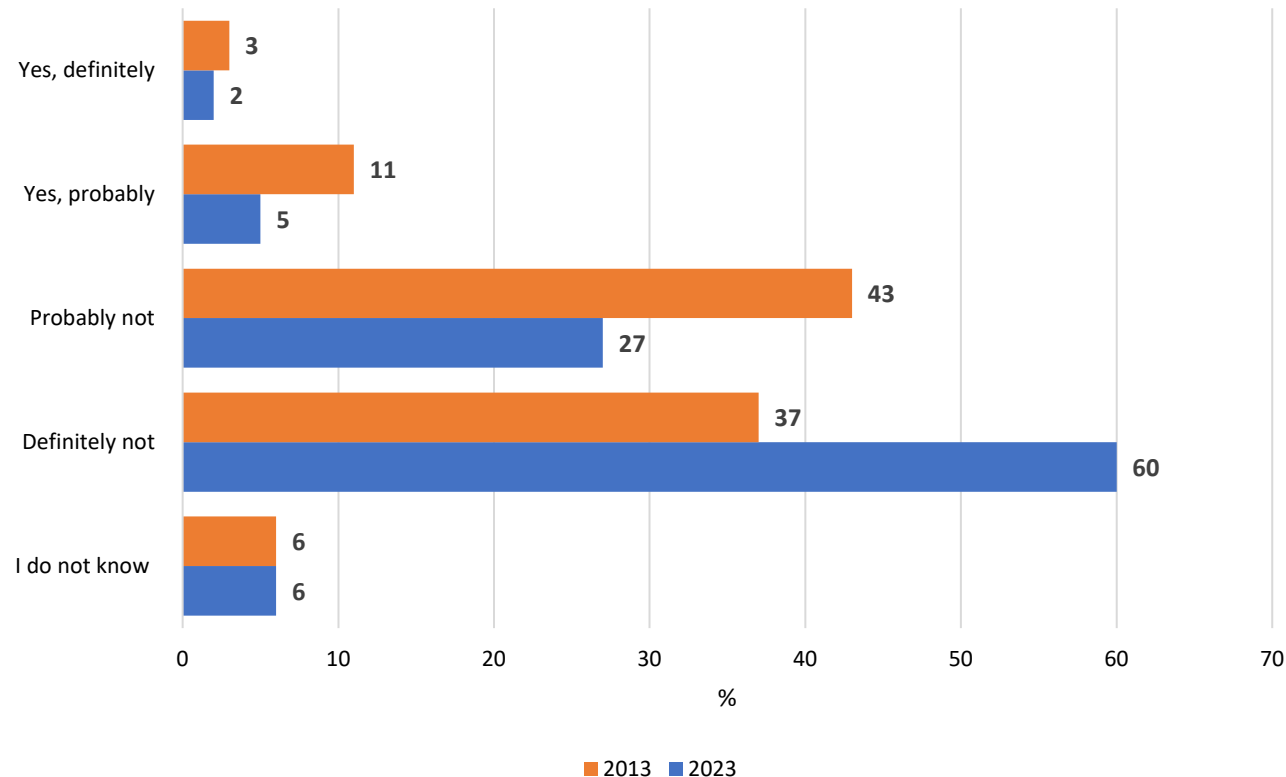
# Politics of Not Belonging

A sense that many of the young people feel disenfranchised with life in NI and this is often accentuated by the border (both the Irish border and the Irish Sea as a border).

1. Apathy – ‘why bother’ / not being listened to.
2. Limited participation in citizenship activities.
3. Active disengagement.

# Young Life and Times Survey

Influence in NI decision making (2013-2023)



“While politics is still stuck in the mire, Northern Ireland’s peace babies have their focus trained on climate crisis, human rights, education and mental health. Unburdened by the historically entrenched concepts of identity that came to define prior generations, most 18 to 24-year-olds state they do not identify as unionist or nationalist, according to the 2022 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey.”

(Guardian, 2023)

Do you feel that you have any influence when it comes to any of the decisions made about what happens in Northern Ireland?

# Contested borders

“Well, from the photo you can see there, well, like it's more about the Irish Sea border. Like this is from where my boyfriend lives. He lives in Ballyclare. It's kind of in the more northern part of Northern Ireland, and they're quite Unionist. So they're really kind of against the Irish Sea border. And you can kind of see, where I live, I actually was born in East Belfast, so it's kind of the same idea. They don't accept the border, they don't want the union, they want the union between Britain and Northern Ireland, that sort of thing. Yeah, it's quite, it's quite enforced and in Ballyclare and people are very against it. And they believe the Good Friday Agreement has been broken because of the whole thing. And it's not in effect anymore” (LK).



# Temporal borders

“To me, the border, it's kind of a division between a Catholic side, and a Protestant side, that sort of thing. Which I don't think they should be there anymore. It's kind of a marker of the past shall we say, that kind of shouldn't exist” (LK).

“But yeah, I feel like Northern Ireland just has been hung up in the 1970s, and they have not moved since then. So [in terms of borders] it's quite difficult for a person in this day and age, a young person who believes in being a bit more of a liberal society” (EM).

“Day to day, I'm not too much affected by the border. [...] I wanted to learn some sort of Irish cultural thing, but I never got taught. I went to [Grammar School], and they didn't teach me shit at all about Irish history. I'm mad about it. Like it's annoying. It's our country. It's where we are from, but we didn't learn anything” (CU).

# Liminal youth voices

“I can say yes and no. Yes, sometimes our voices are being heard. Yes, there is change coming about regarding policies, that sort of thing. But then again, it's like there's no government right now. We unfortunately really aren't being heard. So because there's a Sinn Fein majority, the DUP refused to sit. So definitely our voices aren't being heard [in that case]. So young people are now in disarray. There's nothing. Nothing's changing. It's kind of like we're going backwards once again, because obviously, the Government in Northern Ireland came back after hiatus, for three years, and now were kind of back to square one, again, with no Government sitting, nothing's happening, and laws are potentially gonna have to go through Westminster, which is a lot longer process, [which means] our voices won't be heard” (LK).

“[...] the majority of the time, you're having to force your voice a lot more than if you were an adult. [Adults are] like, ‘yeah, we grew up in the troubles’ or ‘we went through this and that’, so that makes sense. Whereas whenever I say it, like, I was born in 2001, they're just like, ‘well, what do you care? Like, you didn't grow up in it’. And that's even though I'm still seeing the effects and, you know, it gets passed on all the information gets passed on” (NM).



# Active disengagement

“A lot of people that I know on my Instagram, they're all in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, travelling Southeast Asia and things like that. [...] so many people, they've got plans to go. A lot of people I'm working with right now they are going to go. I do feel like there's not very many young people left here. It's not a young people's country at all. And there's no jobs and there's no houses, it's expensive as hell to rent anything. I've been looking to rent something in [town] for five months now, and I still haven't found anything. I have to live with my parents still, which is so annoying, and people don't want that. I just think the quality of life is quite bad here. I love Ireland. When I'm away from Ireland. I never shut up about Ireland. But when I'm in Ireland, I want to leave” (CU).

“I think [emigration is] a big, massive, massive issue within Northern Ireland at the moment. And like, I would say, everyone between the age of 22, and maybe 30, I would say, half of all my friends within that age group are either in Australia, or Canada. And maybe more than half, you know [...]. And so, I think that it would be useful to understand why. I think that maybe that's why the hopelessness comes in. Because they just think, well, what's the point here? And that's why they emigrate, you know” (EM).

“And then there's obviously emigration. A lot of young people, you know, don't care as much, like, people are like, well, ‘I don't care about the border poll, because I'm leaving, you know, I'm moving to Australia’, which is interesting” (OF).

# Immobilities and 'stuckness'

"[...] actually my friend, he couldn't afford to go anywhere. He lives in a council house. He couldn't afford to do anything. He doesn't really want to. He's content with his life but he's depressed and stuff. And I'm like, You're depressed because you never go out you never see the sun. There's no sun here. You know, Northern Ireland is expensive and he's stuck in a crappy job, working minimum wage. Same for my friend actually, who is Canadian and moved here as a kid, and she hates it. She's struggled to make friends, she's working a job that's beneath her for not very much money. She's got two kids, and she's a single mum, she's not able to go anywhere. She's not able to do anything, and she wants to [leave]. She really wants to, but she's stuck" (CU).

"I would like to move away for a few years just to experience living somewhere else. Because I've never lived outside of this country for an extended period of time. [...] So it would be nice, however politically there's other issues, you know, there's economic considerations, there's, you know, things like, for example, like moving to London, you know, there's the money, there's all those things [like] cost of living, and a massive cost living housing crisis" (OF).

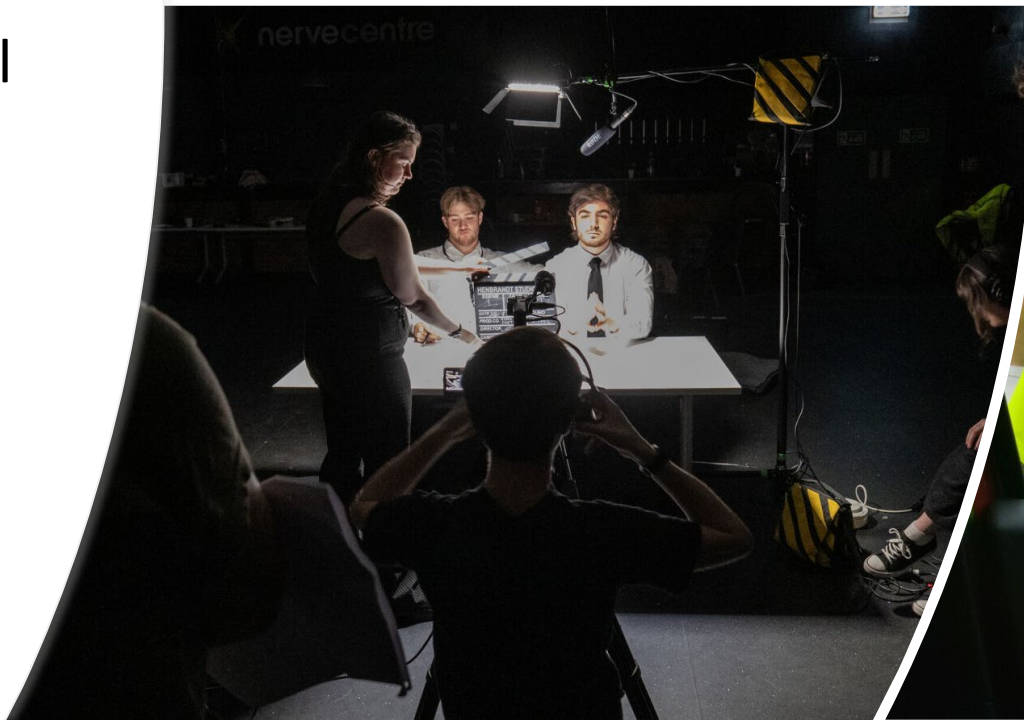
# Youth advocacy / youth engagement

Some examples of success, such as youth advocacy and youth engagement projects. Communication and education was often key here but need to be critical given that some of these participants take an active role in youth politics.

- “In my opinion, yes, my voice is being heard, because I do a lot of campaigning for LGBTQ rights, that sort of thing. Yes, some of them [youth voices] are being heard, but they [NI Government] need to, they need to listen more” (LK).
- “I think, since Brexit and things, since, like the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, there's a lot more of a push from young people to go ‘actually, I want a say in peacebuilding’, and in the future, because they're realising that, you know, they're living in this post-conflict society, and it does actually affect them. And adults aren't listening to that. So I think it's changed the landscape a bit. It's not like people were always interested in it, but I just think there's a bit more now, especially since Brexit and stuff, because there was a massive youth-led campaign there too, for getting another referendum and stuff. So I think it's just all off the back of that, sort of ‘let's change the landscape a bit’” (NM).

# Closing thoughts...

- Still more to go!
  - Filmmaking – Nerve Centre, Belfast & Derry
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> phase digital ethnographies and key informant interviews
  - Analysis of Life and Times Survey data





# Imagine! Belfast

Reflections on the Irish  
Border: Young People,  
Citizenship and Identity

18-24<sup>th</sup> March, 2024



# Changing borders: Identity, citizenship, and belonging in twenty-first century Ireland

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Venue: Ulster University, Belfast Campus

Keynote: Professor Katy Hayward

Organisers: The Bordered Youth Project Team (Dr Suzanne Beech, Dr Sara McDowell, Dr Mark Holton, Amy Reid)

From sea borders to conversations about a New Ireland this symposium brings together diverse perspectives on the future of the Irish Border. The symposium is open to academics, policymakers, practitioners, and students interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding bordered landscapes.



We welcome abstracts on themes which could include (but are not limited to):

- The changing Irish Border;
- Borders within communities such as peace lines;
- Brexit;
- Young people's perspectives;
- Identity, citizenship and belonging across the Island of Ireland;
- Mobilities along and through the Irish Border;
- Representations of heritage and commemoration;
- Minority groups and changing demographics within Ireland;
- Migrant populations in Ireland.

**Please submit your abstract (max 250 words) by 23 February 2024 to: [borderedyouth@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:borderedyouth@ulster.ac.uk)**

**ARTICLE**

# Citizens apart? Representing post-Brexit youth politics in the UK media

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**Abstract**

In 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union (EU). This outcome was not only unexpected but also had clear geographical and age-bound divisions. While people over the age of 65 tended to vote to leave, younger voters were more likely to vote to remain a part of the EU. Reflecting on 7 years of journalism, this paper explores the ways in which young people have been represented by the news media with regards to the issue of Brexit. It analyses a database of 700 news media articles published from 2016 to 2022 across the UK, equating to 100 articles per calendar year and ranging from regional sources to those with an international reach. The paper showcases how young people occupy liminal spaces within the news media through an analysis of the language used to describe their political participation, and a focus on their role within political activism. As it is this media that dominates hegemonic narratives within traditional political spheres, the retelling and representation of young people's engagement serves, we argue, to reinforce their liminality as citizens apart.

**KEYWORDS**

Brexit, liminality, political participation, UK, young people

# Thank you!



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