



14 November

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I. Campaign overview

There are just 15 days until the 2024 general election and the campaign is in full swing. The former coalition partners are now actively attacking each other's policies with all parties fighting to secure headlines, undermine their rivals and win votes.

To date, only Fianna Fáil and the Green Party have launched their general election manifestos, with other parties choosing to do smaller policy launches. We've included an overview of the manifestos and a summary of the key policy launches from the week below.

Fine Gael started the week on the back foot following a joke made by Ryanair's CEO Michael O'Leary about teachers at the launch of outgoing Minister for Enterprise Peter Burke's election campaign. Fine Gael was quick to distance itself from O'Leary's comments, but the party's opponents seized the opportunity to attack Fine Gael for representing billionaire elites and not the workers who form the backbone of Irish society. Sinn Féin's party leader Mary Lou McDonald appears to be back to old form delivering strong soundbites against the former coalition parties during the week. Fianna Fáil is also off to a reasonably good start with the launch of its robust 186-page manifesto on Monday.

The political parties are bombarding the public with general election promises including commitments to establish new government departments to drive policy priorities. Fianna Fáil announced that it will establish a new Department of Domestic Affairs, focused on national security, migration and other key issues. The move would involve devolving powers from the Department of Justice. Fine Gael, as reported pre-election, has committed to establishing a new Department of Infrastructure to drive forward significant public projects. The Social Democrats stated this week that the creation of a senior minister for disability is a red-line issue for the party in potential coalition talks.

Housing once again is reported to be the biggest issue for the electorate in this general election, with the parties facing off on an almost daily basis around issues such as rent freezes and the help-to-buy scheme. During Monday night's housing debate on RTÉ's Upfront with Katie Hannon, Sinn Féin and other opposition parties accused the former coalition partners of repeatedly failing to deliver enough homes

and to alleviate the homeless crisis. Tensions were particularly high between Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil. Ahead of the debate, the Minister for Housing Darragh O'Brien wrote to Sinn Féin's housing spokesman Eoin Ó Broin accusing him of "putting out factually incorrect statements" in relation to its affordable housing scheme which Ó Broin strongly rebuffed.

Promises around tax have also been driving headlines since the weekend. Fine Gael said the party would reduce VAT to 11% for the food based hospitality sector, to ease business costs. The party was accused of bringing forward a "half-baked" proposal that was inconsistent with its recent treatment of the hospitality sector and would have knock-on consequences for other sectors. The Social Democrats were quick to undercut the proposal, calling for a 9% VAT rate to be applied to restaurants and a higher VAT rate for the accommodation hospitality sector. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were at odds as to whether the proposal would raise energy costs for businesses and households. By contrast, Fianna Fáil has committed to keeping gas and electricity at the 9% VAT rate for the next five years.

Date for the diary: The first and largest-ever leaders' debate will take place on Monday 18th November on RTÉ. All 10 political party leaders have been invited to the studio to answer questions on Upfront with Katie Hannon.

II. Prospective government formation

Seven days into the general election campaign, discussions surrounding potential government formations are intensifying, with party leaders outlining their positions on possible coalitions. Until Tuesday, Taoiseach Simon Harris steadfastly declined to reveal which parties he favoured for potential coalition partners, despite outgoing TD Charlie Flanagan urging Fine Gael to resist "left-wing" influence. However, while canvassing in Offaly, Harris highlighted Fine Gael's policies for farmers, noting key issues like succession planning and inheritance tax. He urged farmers not to vote for independents if they wanted to strengthen Fine Gael's position in government, advocating for a stable two-party coalition government, which could potentially exclude the Green Party.

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, Sinn Féin has maintained a more flexible approach, with the party leader expressing a willingness to engage with any party to form a government. Mary Lou McDonald emphasised that the "best outcome" would be a government excluding Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, but stopped short of ruling out talks with either. In contrast, Fianna Fáil has firmly rejected any coalition with Sinn Féin, with Tánaiste Micheál Martin citing concerns over the party's economic model, stating that it fails to support the ratification of the Canadian-European Union trade deal, which he stated indicates a disconnect from traditional economic values. However, Martin also acknowledged the fluidity of Ireland's proportional representation system, noting that the dynamics of the campaign could shift and urging voters not to make predictions.

At the launch of the Green Party manifesto in Dublin on Wednesday, party leader Roderic O'Gorman addressed questions about the Greens' role in a potential new government, following their position as a junior partner in the outgoing administration. O'Gorman suggested that while Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil

might attempt to secure a majority without relying on smaller parties, negotiations with additional parties would most likely be needed.

The Social Democrats reiterated their intention to enter government, but only under specific conditions. Their red lines, outlined in a recent press conference, include strong commitments on social justice, climate action, and health reform, along with the full implementation of Sláintecare and the appointment of a dedicated Disabilities Minister.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are reportedly viewing Labour as their preferred coalition partner. This came after former Labour leader Alan Kelly's stated desire to secure a cabinet position, as noted in the *Nenagh Guardian*, drew the attention of Fine Gael. The Sunday Independent subsequently reported that the party favours Labour due to their similar values, which would enhance their joint leverage over Fianna Fáil. Labour is also expected to secure more seats than the Greens, who are seen as vulnerable outside of Dublin, although some losses in specific constituencies remain possible.

There is also growing discussion about the potential merger of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael if the parties govern together again. This possibility stems from the challenge of presenting themselves as distinct parties after successive coalitions. A Fine Gael source acknowledged the difficulty of differentiating their policies and holding each other accountable following shared governance.

To form a governing coalition, parties—sometimes with the support of independent TDs—will negotiate agreements on the priorities and policies they will pursue. These agreements are typically formalised in a document known as the Programme for Government, which all parties involved must sign. The challenge for any new government will be balancing diverse priorities while maintaining stability in an increasingly fragmented political environment.

III. Fianna Fáil manifesto

On Monday, Fianna Fáil published its [general election Manifesto](#) entitled 'Moving Forward Together' outlining the proposals the party intends to implement during the next Dáil term.

The document identifies six priority policy areas:

- **Cost of living:** Fianna Fáil proposes addressing the cost of living through investment in sustainable energy, increasing the state pension, reducing childcare fees to €200 per month, and tackling insurance costs.
- **Health:** The party intends to deliver a significant expansion in the number of hospital beds, consultants and GPs, as well as reforms intended to improve access and quality of the health system.
- **Housing:** Noting the progress made by Fianna Fáil Minister for Housing Darragh O'Brien, the party proposes expanding the rate of homebuilding to 60,000 homes per year by 2030, reforming the planning system, and the prioritisation of demand-side supports for first-time buyers and renters.

- **Communities:** Fianna Fáil intends to support community safety by expanding Garda numbers, establishing a separate Department of Domestic Affairs to lead on national security issues, and introducing initiatives to develop and rejuvenate disadvantaged communities.
- **Economy:** The party aims to grow Ireland's economy by implementing a pro-enterprise taxation policy, investing in services and research initiatives, and building significant contingency funding.
- **Education:** Fianna Fáil pledges to reduce school class sizes, reform school curriculum, participate in all-Island and EU research partnerships, and improve funding for higher education and student accommodation.

Responding to the publication of the manifesto, Sinn Féin criticised Fianna Fáil's spending commitments as insufficient, arguing that the party's proposed €2.5 billion capital spend on health would leave vital projects unfinished and that their €5.5 billion additional housing allocation falls far short of the €20 billion required to tackle the housing crisis. Conversely, Fine Gael's Paschal Donohoe said the manifesto "has figures inflated by as much as €5.2 billion, with no credible explanation given." Fianna Fáil responded that all its income and spending proposals were costed by the Department of Finance and relevant government departments, and that they "look forward to seeing their [Fine Gael's] manifesto rather than the policy soundbites they and Sinn Féin have been focused on."

IV. Green Party manifesto

On Tuesday, the Green Party published its [general election manifesto](#) entitled 'Towards 2030, a Decade of Change.' The Manifesto covers a myriad topics with the theme of climate change and decarbonisation present throughout. Key elements include:

- **Transport:** A major element of the Green Party's contribution to the previous government was in public transport. Their manifesto continues this focus, pledging to allocate half of the Apple tax case funds to public transport.
- **Health:** The party's health strategy aims to develop a "cutting-edge health service" with a focus on the digitisation of healthcare. It also aims to expand capacity in acute healthcare settings, expand the GP visit card to all children under the age of 11 and provide access to reproductive health for all.
- **Housing:** The Green Party has highlighted that €20 billion annually in public and private investment is needed to solve the housing crisis while pledging to build an average of 50-53,000 homes per year over the next five years. This will include 15,000 cost rental homes, 12,000 social homes and at least 4,000 renovated vacant and derelict homes.
- **Energy:** The document pledges to "turn Ireland into a renewable energy superpower" by delivering a zero-carbon electricity system by 2035. The party also vowed to develop 20 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind, 10 GW of onshore wind and 15 GW of solar by 2040. Notably, the party says it "will always stand firmly against the development of a commercial LNG facility."
- **Economy:** The document notes the Irish economy's success through a small number of sectors and pledges to support small businesses to grow and thrive, make the economy more resilient to external threats and make Ireland a global leader in clean energy (20 GW of offshore wind).

- **Taxation & Public Expenditure:** The Green Party is promising to expand the state's share of the economy. Their strategy for this promise is to utilise the proceeds from new tax measures to support the enhanced delivery of public services.

In comparison with the reaction to the Fianna Fáil manifesto, the reaction to the Green Party's release was muted with comments from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Sinn Féin scarce. One of the main focuses of criticism has been around the party's proposal to change the Help to Buy scheme by introducing price caps on its use. Fianna Fáil and other parties have been disparaging of the Green Party's plan, accusing the party of a halfway approach to abolishing the scheme.

V. Other policy launches

Fine Gael

- **Business:** *Fine Gael Backs Business by Cutting Costs* ([Link](#))
- **Housing:** *Fine Gael commits to €40 billion housing budget* ([Link](#))
- **Childcare:** *Fine Gael sets out vision to give children the best start in life* ([Link](#))

Sinn Féin

- **USC:** *A Sinn Féin led government will scrap USC on the first €45,000 of income for every worker* ([Link](#))
- **Housing:** *Sinn Féin's plan will make housing affordable and restore hope for a generation* ([Link](#))
- **Renters:** *A Sinn Féin led government will cut rents and ban rent increases for three years* ([Link](#))

Green Party

- **Vacant homes:** *Green Party proposes plan to fill vacant homes* ([Link](#))

Labour

- **Housing:** *Labour launches ambitious plan for housing* ([Link](#))
- **Economy:** *Labour sets out its economic and fiscal plan for Ireland* ([Link](#))

Social Democrats

- **Dublin:** *A Plan for Dublin* ([Link](#))
- **Accountability:** *Honest Politics, Better Government – Restoring Trust and Accountability in Politics and Public Life* ([Link](#))
- **Renters:** *Soc Dems publish plan to strengthen renters' rights* ([Link](#))
- **Domestic, Sexual and gender-based violence:** *Soc Dems launch policy on ending Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* ([Link](#))