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I. Election results

The results of the 2024 general election are in and they generally followed the polls, although Fianna Fáil emerged as the clear winner overall. Fianna Fáil is the most popular party with 48 seats and almost 22% of first-preference votes. Sinn Féin followed on 39 seats and 19% of first-preference votes, while Fine Gael took just 38 seats despite capturing almost 21% of first-preference votes. The Social Democrats and Labour secured considerable gains with 11 seats apiece, People Before Profit/Solidarity took 3 seats, while Independents and other small parties secured just 23 seats. Notably, former coalition partner the Green Party, which won 12 seats in the last general election, was almost wiped out, with their leader Roderic O’Gorman the only Green Party candidate to win a seat.

The results leave a second iteration of a coalition between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael alongside a third party or Independents the most likely outcome. The two coalition parties amassed 86 seats, two shy of the 88 needed to form a government.

While this election was not particularly volatile in its overall results, with the two or the three biggest parties broadly remaining at the same level of support, more than 20 TDs from the previous government lost their seats. 11 of these can be attributed to the Green Party annihilation but there were some notable losses nationwide. Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly failed to retain his seat in Wicklow, Sinn Féin TD Chris Andrews was pipped at the post by the Social Democrats’ Eoin Hayes in Dublin Bay South and Fine Gael veteran Bernard Durkan failed to win re-election in Kildare North after more than 40 years of public representation.

On the other hand, there are 58 newly elected TDs. Fine Gael dominates this list with 23 first time TDs. This is not surprising as over half of their TDs from the previous Dáil did not stand for re-election. Fianna Fáil is set to welcome 13 newly elected TDs, Sinn Féin will have 9 first-time deputies, Labour will have 7 and the Social Democrats will have 6.

II. Key battlegrounds and issues

Dublin Central: All eyes were on the four-seat constituency which is home to prominent political figures like Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald and Minister for Public Expenditure Paschal Donohoe. McDonald was first past the post, followed by Donohoe and Social Democrats’ Gary Gannon. Leaving Labour’s Marie Sherlock and controversial independent candidate Gerry "The Monk" Hutch to battle it out for the final seat. As the ballot boxes were emptied in RDS Simmonscourt the early tallies seemed

strong for Hutch, but as the day progressed support waned and Sherlock emerged the victor. Several other high-profile candidates, including former MEP Clare Daly and sitting Green TD Neassa Hourigan were eliminated during the process.

Cork South Central: Fianna Fáil Leader Micheál Martin topped the poll in Cork South Central bringing his running mate, Séamus McGrath, brother of Commissioner Michael McGrath, with him. Sinn Féin's Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire retained his seat, as had been expected. The stand out story was from Social Democrat's Pádraig Rice, a Cork City Councillor who received strong first preference votes and transfers from Labour's Laura Harmon winning a seat. Meanwhile Fine Gael's parachute candidate Jerry Buttimer edged out his internal rivals to retain Simon Coveney's seat for the party.

Wicklow: The constituency was reduced from five to four seats in the recent boundary commission, introducing uncertainty for incumbent TDs. Despite a decline in personal and party support in the final days of the campaign, Simon Harris retained his seat comfortably. Green Party TD Steven Mathews was eliminated on the eighth count, paving the way for sitting TD Social Democrats' Jennifer Whitmore to be reelected. Sinn Féin's John Brady followed. The final count resulted in the loss of Fianna Fail Minister Stephen Donnelly's seat to Fine Gael Councillor Edward Timmins, who benefited from his party leader's surplus.

III. Campaign highlights

This general election has been widely regarded as one of the least engaging elections in recent Irish political history, and largely failed to capture the interest of the public. However, several key moments shaped its trajectory:

- **Simon Harris's Kanturk incident:** A defining moment was Taoiseach Simon Harris's controversial interaction with carer Charlotte Fallon in Kanturk, Co. Cork. The video of Harris appearing dismissive went viral, undermining Fine Gael's campaign and the party leader's popularity. The fallout deepened when concerns emerged about attempts to suppress the clip, compounding the party's struggles.
- **Sinn Féin's early setbacks:** Sinn Féin entered the campaign burdened by internal controversies, including resignations of key members and a scandal involving references provided for a convicted sex offender and former party press officer. These challenges cast a shadow over Mary Lou McDonald's leadership and the party's early momentum.
- **Manifesto criticism and Micheál Martin's ceasefire:** Manifesto clashes saw Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil attacking each other's economic proposals, while both criticised Sinn Féin's fiscal policies. Amid this, Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin called for an end to intra-coalition hostilities, urging focus on key voter issues like health, housing, and the cost of living.
- **Michael O'Leary on teachers:** Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary's comments at a Fine Gael campaign launch at the outset of the campaign sparked outrage by disparaging teachers, further souring public perception of the party during a critical phase of the election.
- **Immigration debate:** While anti-immigration sentiment was present with about 60 candidates who could be regarded as anti-immigration standing for election, it failed to translate into any electoral gains for far-right candidates.
- **Leaders' debate:** The final leaders' debate provided a last chance to sway undecided voters, with party leaders clashing over health, housing, and economic challenges. However, the debate failed to deliver a clear turning point, leaving many of the electorate still undecided.

Despite the stakes, the election campaign highlighted public disengagement as indicated by low turnout figures and a lack of compelling leadership, leaving no party with a decisive upper hand.

IV. Government formation

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are in the driving seat to form the next government as they jointly hold 86 seats in the 34th Dáil – just shy of a majority in the expanded 174-seat chamber – but up to eight more TDs might be needed to ensure that a working majority can withstand any potential shocks. Today, the two parties are expected to hold separate post-election parliamentary party meetings where newly-elected TDs will have their say on government formation options.

When both parties feel they have clarity of intention, negotiators will be selected to hammer-out the outline of a Programme for Government. They did this previously in 2020, and also worked together via a confidence-and-supply deal between 2016 and 2020. It's therefore not expected that negotiations will prove difficult.

Apart from policy, both parties will also have to agree on the structure of the government. Fine Gael has made it clear that it wants the position of Taoiseach to be rotated between Simon Harris and Micheál Martin - just like last time. If that is agreed, which is expected, Fianna Fáil will no doubt demand that its 10-seat advantage over Fine Gael is recognised at Cabinet. However, it has been suggested that Fine Gael will insist on “parity of esteem” with Fianna Fáil as a basic condition in any coalition agreement. The suggested view within Fine Gael is that a continuation of the rotating taoiseach arrangement and near parity in cabinet – perhaps an 8-7 split between the two parties – will be red lines for the party.

Once Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have an outline agreement they will seek to engage with other parties. There is a growing sense in both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael that their chances of persuading Labour to join a coalition are not high though senior party members Alan Kelly and Ged Nash have given strong signals that Labour should consider government. Labour is expected to hold a parliamentary party meeting on Thursday. There are divisions in Labour about the prospect of entering government and an anxiety that the Social Democrats could sit out a potential stint in government and grow at their expense, if difficult decisions need to be made in the coming years.

The Social Democrats said they intend to speak to all parties before making a decision. Deputy leader Cian O’Callaghan has written to the leaders of Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour to set up meetings around government formation. The party has proposed meeting Sinn Féin on Thursday and Labour on Friday.

There is no shortage of Independent TDs open to talks on backing a new government should Labour and the Social Democrats not be willing to strike a deal with likely coalition partners Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The last Dáil had the eight-strong Regional Independent Group with some of its members often voting with the government in crunch votes, bolstering its majority. The re-elected members of the group are Tipperary North’s Michael Lowry, Galway East’s Seán Canney, Noel Grealish of Galway West and Wexford’s Verona Murphy. All have expressed an openness to talks about possible support for a new government. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael could look to engage this experienced cohort of TDs in formation talks.

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald has been in contact with the leaders of the Social Democrats and the Labour Party about possible talks. However, there is a resignation within the party that the outcome

of the election is now clear and that the numbers are there for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to form a government together.

Once a preferred coalition partner for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael has been selected, the Programme for Government has to be finalised. This can be the most challenging part of the formation process, even if an outline agreement is on the table, as this is the command paper for the next five years. If a policy isn't written down in the Programme for Government, then there's no obligation for it to be prioritised or delivered. It's a crucial phase in the negotiations - the point at which all parties have to compromise.

Separate party talks are expected to continue this week and into next as the frontrunners align internally on how to proceed. Micheal Martin has said that he doesn't expect a government to be formed this side of Christmas and experience shows it could take many weeks before the return to an operational Dáil.

V. Election dynamics and trends

The 2024 Irish general election underscored a tension between stability and change in the nation's political landscape. Fianna Fáil campaigned to “move forward,” Fine Gael promoted “a new energy,” and Sinn Féin positioned itself as the party of “change.” Yet, Sinn Féin's momentum faltered, as its share of first-preference votes dropped by 5.5 points to 19%. This decline was driven by internal scandals, leadership missteps, and diluted messaging on housing — a key issue where other parties offered comparable solutions. Nevertheless, Sinn Féin retained significant support among younger voters, capturing 29% of the 18-24 demographic.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael collectively secured 42.7% of the vote, sustaining their dominance and narrowly defying the anti-incumbency trends seen in other democracies. Their economic stewardship, highlighted by a €23 billion budget surplus and relative stability during global crises, helped mitigate dissatisfaction over unresolved housing shortages and cost-of-living pressures. Strategic cross-party transfers also bolstered their position.

The Green Party's near-collapse, losing 11 of 12 seats, created openings for Labour and the Social Democrats, which made gains by appealing to middle-class voters seeking progressive alternatives. These parties now face critical choices about whether to join Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in government or to establish themselves as a dynamic opposition force. The election further highlighted the value of local engagement, with candidates rooted in their communities performing better than high-profile newcomers like Gráinne Seoige.

Generational divides played a pivotal role in shaping the outcome. Older voters largely supported Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, valuing continuity, while younger generations gravitated toward Sinn Féin and smaller progressive parties. Turnout, however, dipped below 60%, reflecting voter disillusionment with a campaign perceived as lacklustre and lacking sharp policy contrasts.

Far-right candidates, despite significant online attention, failed to secure Dáil seats, though they chipped away at Sinn Féin's traditional working-class base. Overall, the election illustrated Ireland's complex political dynamics — marked by competing visions of progress, generational shifts, and evolving voter priorities — while reaffirming the resilience of its long-standing political duopoly.