

Corinne Deloy

RESULTS

The outgoing coalition is set to be re-elected in Ireland

Fianna Fail (FF) (Soldiers of Destiny), led by Micheal Martin, came first in Ireland's general election on 29 November, with 21.9% of the vote (first preference). It beat Fine Gael (FG) (Clan of Gaels), the party of the Taoiseach (name of the Prime Minister in Ireland) Simon Harris, which won 20.8% of the vote. Sinn Fein (SF) (Ourselves), the radical left-wing nationalist party led by Mary Lou McDonald, came third with 19%.

The results of this election differ slightly from the forecasts made in the polls. *'People often change their minds in election campaigns across Europe'* said Theresa Reidy, Senior Lecturer in Politics at University College Cork, adding *"The old links between voters and political parties simply don't exist anymore and the election campaign matters a lot"*.

Simon Harris, known as the TikTok Taoiseach because of his social media presence, slipped up a week before the vote when he walked away from a carer who was telling him about the inadequacy of services for disabled people. His conduct - turning his back on the woman without responding - dented his image somewhat, although the Prime Minister has apologised several times for his reaction.

Independents obtained 13.2% of the vote. This result reflects the electorate's disaffection with traditional parties. *'Independents have become the 4th largest force in the country. The existence of these candidates affiliated to no party is a typically Irish phenomenon, linked to the weakness of our local institutions and the electoral system, which is super-proportional'*, said Gary Murphy, Professor of Political Science at Dublin City University (DCU).

The Green Party (GP), led by outgoing Transport Minister Eamon Ryan, suffered a significant defeat, losing 3% of the vote. *'This is undoubtedly a disappointing result for our party'*, said the leader, adding *'It's difficult for a small party to get into government, that's the tradition, the history of Ireland. We were hoping at the time of the election to break away from that situation, but we weren't able to do that. People who wanted to keep the current government voted for Fianna Fail or Fine Gael but not for us'*, said former leader (2011-2019) and outgoing Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth Roderic O'Gorman.

The Social Democrats, led by Holly Cairns, secured 4.8% of the vote; the Labour Party, led by Ivana Bacik, 4.7%. Peadar Toibin's party, Aontu, won 3.9%; Independent Ireland, a right-wing party led by Michael Collins, 3.6%; and Solidarity - Our Lives Before Their Profits (S-PBP), a radical left-wing party, 2.8%.

Turnout was the lowest recorded since 1923. It stood at 59.7%, down 3.01 points on the previous general election held on 8 February 2020.

General elections in Ireland

29th November 2024

02

Results of the general election in Ireland on 29 November 2024

Turnout: 59.7 %

Political Parties	Number of votes (1st choice)	% of votes cast (1st choice)	Number of seats
Fianna Fail (FF)	481 427	21.90	48
Fine Gael (FG)	458 134	20.80	38
Sinn Fein (SF)	418 637	19	39
Independents	290 746	13.20	16
Social Democrat (SD)	106 038	4.80	11
Labour Party (Lab)	102 467	4.70	11
Aontu	86 134	3.90	2
Independent Ireland	78 276	3.60	4
Green Party (CG)	66 911	3	1
Solidarity-Our lives (S-PBP)	124 962	2.80	3
Others	11 238	2.30	1

Source : <https://www.rte.ie/news/election-24/results/#/national>

Following the results, the most probable scenario seems to be the maintenance of a coalition comprising Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and one or even two other parties. The support of a 4th party could prove essential to guarantee the stability of the future government.

Fianna Fail and Fine Gael have been in power since Irish independence in 1921. Both positioned on the centre-right, they are politically very close but, having come from opposite sides of the civil war (1922-1923), they remain adversaries.

The two main parties could form an alliance with the Labour Party or the Independents to form the next government. However, Labour leader Ivana Bacik has stated that her priority is to *'build a platform on the left'*.

The outgoing coalition government was able to boast of Ireland's good economic situation, with an expected growth rate of 4% in 2025 and a public surplus of €25 billion, representing 4.40% of its GDP. Ireland's economic results are partly explained by the income tax paid by a number of American multinationals (including Apple and Google) that have set up in the country because of its low corporate tax rate (12.5%). These revenues have allowed the government to be

generous, granting a large number of subsidies to the population (for buying a first home or paying energy bills). *'These benefits have cushioned the crisis in purchasing power, which is why Ireland has escaped some of the frustrations associated with inflation,'* points out Tom McDonnell, Director of the Nevin Economic Research Institute. However, this situation has been undermined by the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, who plans to increase customs duties and reduce corporation tax in the United States.

Ireland's oldest party, Sinn Fein, isolated on the political scene, seems condemned to remain in opposition. Since 2020, when it came first in the general election, it has established itself as a key political player. The party has normalised its position by promising to resolve the country's housing crisis. Sinn Fein comes from the former political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a paramilitary organisation that fought for decades for the independence and unification of Ireland. The Good Friday Peace Agreement, signed on 10 April 1998 in favour of a political solution to the conflict between Irish nationalists and pro-UK unionists, put an end to thirty years of 'troubles' that left 3,480 people dead. Mary Lou McDonald has worked

to distance the party from its militant past, focusing on social issues and, in particular, on the housing crisis that the country has been experiencing for many years. According to Eurostat, housing costs account for half of Irish household income and rents rose by 68% between 2010 and 2021.

Sinn Fein was recently criticised during the anti-migrant riots that took place in Ireland at the end of November 2023. At the time, Mary Lou McDonald called for the resignation of the Minister of Justice and the Chief Constable. *'She pointed the finger at those responsible for law and order instead of denouncing the rioters, and that went down very badly with the public. We are committed to private property and order in a country that has experienced decades of violence in Northern Ireland,'* said John Lee, editor of the Irish Daily Mail.

Aware of the concerns of a section of its traditional working-class electorate about the number of immigrants allowed into the country, Sinn Fein then changed its rhetoric on immigration to reassure them. At the risk of displeasing its centrist and progressive electorate, its younger supporters or those belonging to the middle class. *'Sinn Fein has always been a left-wing party, but its base has been very diverse. This could only be a problem because it is impossible for Sinn Fein to adopt a position that would satisfy all of its voters,'* said Rory Costello, Professor of Political Science at the University of Limerick, adding: *'People who used to support Sinn Fein and were concerned about immigration are not really supporting it now (...)*

I think the party is going to find it difficult to win them back.'

'Sinn Fein has been given a strong, powerful mandate and will be discussing with potential coalition partners the possibilities of government (...). The two-party system no longer exists. This has been consigned to the dustbin of history. That in itself is very important. The question now is what we are going to do with it. Clearly, we want to change people's lives. I think another five years of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael is bad news for society,' said Mary Lou McDonald after the results were announced.

Micheal Martin, 64, from Cork, could become the next Taoiseach. A graduate in arts, political history and education, he began his career as a history teacher in his hometown. He joined Fianna Fail and was first elected as an MP in 1989. A few years later, in 1997, he became Minister (for Education and Science) for the first time and was then given various portfolios including Health (2000-2004) and Foreign Affairs (2008-2011) until becoming Prime Minister following the last general election on 8 February 2020. As leader of Fianna Fail since 2011, Micheal Martin is expected to return to Steward's Lodge in Farmleigh, home of the Taoiseach.

The 174 *teachtai dala* (MPs) of the Dail Eireann (House of Representatives) elected on 29 November will meet for the first time on 18 December.

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