

Ireland: the next President of the Republic will be a woman

On 24 October, the people of Ireland will go to the polls to elect the successor to the outgoing President, Michael D. Higgins, who has already served for 14 years and is not eligible to stand for a third term. The presidential election must take place within 60 days of the end of his term, i.e. 11 November.

Two women are running in the 24 October presidential election, the smallest number of candidates since 1990. The latest opinion poll published on 7 October, conducted by RED C for Business Post and which only takes into account first preference votes (see below), puts independent candidate Catherine Connolly in the lead with 36% of the vote, ahead of Heather Humphreys (Fine Gael, FG) with 25%. Another poll by the same institute, including second preference transfers, published in Business Post, gives the victory to the left-wing candidate (49.3%) ahead of the Fine Gael candidate (34.2%).

THE CANDIDATES IN THE RUNNING

Heather Humphreys (Fine Gael, FG), former Minister for Rural Development and Minister for Social Protection (2020-2025), was nominated as a candidate by 55 MPs from her party led by Simon Harris.

Catherine Connolly (independent), former President of the Dáil Éireann (House of Representatives), the lower house of parliament (2010-2024), is supported by 32 MPs, including 12 from Ivana Bacik's Labour Party (Lab), 12 from Holly Cairns' Social Democrats (SD), two from People Before Profit (PBP), one from Solidarity (S) and finally one elected representative from Tomas Sean Devine's 100% Redress, as well as four independents.

Jim Gavin (Fianna Fail, FF) withdrew his candidacy on 5 October following the revelation by The Irish Independent that, in the late 2000s, he had, on the one hand, failed to register a property he was renting with the Residential Tenancies Board and, secondly, that he had not refunded €3,300 in overpayment he had received from one of his tenants. 'I made a mistake that is not in keeping with my character and values,' said Jim Gavin, who therefore chose

to withdraw from the presidential race. Prime Minister Micheal Martin's party is now without a representative in the election.

Jim Gavin's withdrawal has strengthened left-wing candidate Catherine Connolly's position in the opinion polls.

A DUEL BETWEEN WOMEN

Heather Humphreys is relying on her biography and personality to convince her compatriots to elect her as President of the Republic. She can draw on her experience and rely on a stable Fine Gael campaign team that has remained unchanged since the start of the campaign, even though the candidate initially chosen, Mairead McGuinness, a former European Commissioner, withdrew from the race for the highest office in September for health reasons.

Heather Humphreys is a Presbyterian. Some people criticise her for her family's links to the Orange Order, a Protestant society in Northern Ireland that works to promote Protestantism. Some Irish people also regret that the Fine Gael candidate is not fluent in Gaelic, even though she served as Minister for Arts, Heritage and Sport in 2016.

Heather Humphreys has announced that she will give up her pension as a Member of Parliament and Minister if she wins on 24 October. The outgoing President of the Republic, Michael D. Higgins, did so during his two terms of office. He also gave up part of his salary until 2022, when he received his full remuneration.

Catherine Connolly is supported by a broad coalition of left-wing parties. A former member of the Labour Party, she resigned in 2006 and has remained highly critical

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of the party. She is now considered closer to People Before Profit (PBP) than to Labour.

The main left-wing party, Sinn Féin (SF), decided not to field a candidate for this election and is therefore supporting Catherine Connolly. *'She is not a representative of Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, and I think that matters to voters,'* said Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald, who indicated that the former president of the *Dáil Éireann* had her full confidence.

Catherine Connolly is campaigning on Gaza, Irish neutrality, anti-imperialism, housing, fairness, community spirit, inclusion, Irish unity and the Gaelic language.

Heather Humphreys criticises Catherine Connolly for not condemning Russia after Vladimir Putin's armed forces invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The left-wing candidate is also criticised for several of her statements, such as saying that Germany's rearmament *'has certain similarities with the 1930s'* and that Hamas is *'an integral part of the social fabric of the Palestinian people'*.

The two candidates faced off in a [radio debate](#) on 12 October, focusing in particular on the issues of defence and Europe.

It is worth noting that Jim Gavin's name will appear on the ballot papers, as his withdrawal from the presidential race came after the official registration of candidates (his election campaign has been suspended, but his candidacy cannot be). It will therefore be possible to vote for the Fianna Fail candidate on 24 October, a choice that will be... valid. The votes he would receive will be split between Heather Humphreys and Catherine

Connolly and could, in a not unreasonable scenario, ultimately decide the outcome of the presidential election.

One thing is certain: the next President of the Republic of Ireland will be a woman. Mary Robinson was the first woman (and the first person not from Fianna Fail) to hold this position in Ireland on 7 November 1990. She helped to modernise the role.

THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE

The President of the Republic has only representative powers, but he or she may refer a bill to the Supreme Court if he or she considers it unconstitutional and may refuse to dissolve the Dail Eireann (House of Representatives). According to the Constitution, the Taoiseach must resign if he loses the support of his parliamentary majority. However, he may ask the Head of State to dissolve the House of Representatives. The latter is then entitled to refuse this request, in which case the Prime Minister is forced to resign.

The President of the Republic is elected by [alternative vote](#) (a single transferable vote where the voter can express a first preference and then a second preference) for a seven-year term, renewable once. The position is open to any Irish citizen aged 35 or over. All candidates for the highest office must obtain the signatures of at least 20 members of the Oireachtas (parliament) or the support of at least 4 of the 34 county councils in the Celtic Republic. Former heads of state (or the outgoing President of the Republic) are the only persons exempt from this requirement.

Reminder of the results of the presidential election in Ireland on 26 October 2018

Turnout: 43.87%

Candidates	First choice votes	% of votes cast
Michael D. Higgins (independent)	822 566	55.81
Peter Casey independent)	342 727	23.25
Sean Gallagher (independent)	94 514	6.41
Liadh Ni Riada (Sinn Fein, SF)	93 987	6.38
Joan Freeman (independent)	87 908	5.96
Gavin Duffy (independent)	32 198	2.18

Source : <https://www.presidentialelection.ie/2018-presidential-election/>

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