

IRELAND

Date of Elections: 11 June 1981

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of the House of Representatives, which was prematurely dissolved on 21 May 1981. Normal expiry of the House's term was not due until May 1982.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Ireland, the *Oireachtas*, is composed of the House of Representatives (*DM Eireann*) and the Senate (*Seanad Eireann*).

The House of Representatives has 166 members* elected for a maximum of 5 years.

The Senate is composed of 60 members, of whom:

- (a) 11 are nominated by the *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister);
- (b) 3 are elected by the National University of Ireland*;
- (c) 3 are elected by the University of Dublin*;
- (d) 43 are elected from five panels of candidates, consisting of persons having knowledge of and practical experience in, respectively, culture and education, agriculture, labour, industry and commerce, public administration and social services.

Not more than 11 and not less than 5 members of the Senate are elected from any one panel.

Electoral System

Every citizen who is not disqualified by law and who has reached the age of 18 has the right to vote in elections to the *DM* in the constituency in which he ordinarily resides.

Registers of electors are revised annually at the county or county borough level. Voting is not compulsory. Members of the armed and police forces are authorized to vote by post.

As regards elections for the Senate, the following persons may vote:

- (a) For the 3 representatives of the National University of Ireland, every citizen over 18 years of age who has received a degree from the University;
- (b) For the 3 representatives of the University of Dublin, every citizen over 18 years of age who has received either a degree or a foundation scholarship from the University or, if a woman, has obtained a non-foundation scholarship;
- (c) For the 43 other Senators, members of the new *Dail*, the outgoing Senate and every council of a county or county borough.

Electoral rolls for Senate elections are revised before each election.

* See *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments XIV (1979-1980)*, p. 17.

Citizens who fulfil the conditions required of electors to the *Dail* are entitled to stand for election to this House, with the exception of the insane, undischarged bankrupts, persons undergoing imprisonment with hard labour for at least six months or penal servitude for any term imposed by a court of competent jurisdiction, and persons convicted of corrupt electoral practices. Members of the armed and police forces, civil servants (unless excepted), the President of the Republic, the Comptroller and Auditor General and all judges are excluded from membership while holding these posts.

For election to the *DM*, a person may nominate himself or may, with his consent, be nominated by another person (who is registered as a *Dail* elector in the same constituency), as proposer. Nominations must be made within nine days after the issue of the writ for election and be accompanied by a deposit of £100, which is reimbursed if the candidate is elected or gains at least one-third of the electoral quota.

Candidates for the Senate must be eligible to become members of the *Dail* and, in addition:

- (a) Be nominated by 10 registered electors of the University concerned, if they are standing for a University seat;
- (b) Be nominated by either 4 members of Parliament or a registered nominating body, if they are standing as panel members.

Members of the *Dail* are elected in a ratio of 3, 4 or 5 to each of the 41 electoral constituencies, by proportional representation under the single transferable vote system.

According to this system, each voter receives a ballot-paper containing the names of all the candidates in his constituency. He votes for one of these by writing the figure 1 opposite the name of his choice; he is then at liberty to indicate an order of preference for the other candidates by adding the figures 2, 3, 4, etc., against their names.

At the opening of the count, the ballot papers are sorted according to the first preferences recorded. The total number of valid papers is then computed, and from that figure the electoral quota is calculated through division by the number of seats to be filled, plus one. Candidates who obtain a number of first preferences equal to, or greater than, this quota on the first count are immediately declared elected. If, however, no candidate has reached the quota, the candidate who received the lowest number of votes is eliminated and his votes are transferred to the candidate for whom a second preference is recorded. If a candidate receives more than the quota required for election, his remaining votes are transferred to the remaining candidates in accordance with the subsequent preferences expressed by the electors. When the number of remaining candidates neither elected nor eliminated equals the number of vacancies to be filled, those candidates are declared elected, although they may not have reached the quota.

Voting for the Senate, which is by secret postal ballot, is also conducted according to the single transferable vote system.

The Speaker is automatically deemed to have been re-elected to the *Dail* without having to go through the electoral process*.

Vacancies which occur between general elections are filled through by-elections, except that the Prime Minister nominates a person to fill a vacant seat formerly held by a nominated Senator.

* See section *Parliamentary Developments*, p. 15.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On 21 May 1981, Prime Minister Charles Haughey asked for dissolution of the *Ddil* by the President of the Republic. In announcing the forthcoming election, the Prime Minister said that the Government needed a clear mandate to pursue its efforts to achieve a political solution to the problem of Northern Ireland and to pursue effectively its social and economic policies with the full support of the electorate.

The three-week election campaign was dominated by debate over the social and economic problems (inflation, unemployment) as well as by the events in Northern Ireland. A total of 402 candidates (including nine candidates who were imprisoned in the Maze prison of Northern Ireland, four of whom were hunger strikers) were in the running for the newly-enlarged *Dairs* 166 seats, principal contenders being, once again, the country's two large centre-right parties—the ruling *Fianna Fail* and *Fine Gael*—and the Labour Party. These three groups were led, respectively, by Prime Minister Haughey (in power since December 1979), Mr. Garret FitzGerald and Mr. Frank Clusky.

Polling day was marked by a high turnout. *Fine Gael* gained 22 additional *Ddil* seats but still trailed *Fianna Fail* which, though remaining the largest single party, lost its absolute parliamentary majority; this situation heightened the importance of the 15 Labour and independent members' political orientation with regard to the formation of a coalition.

On 30 June, the *Ddil* convened and elected Mr. FitzGerald Prime Minister, Mr. Haughey being narrowly defeated. Mr. FitzGerald formed a minority coalition Government, having obtained the support of the Labour Party and one independent parliamentarian.

Statistics

*1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the Dail Eireann*

Number of registered electors.	2,275,450
Voters.	1,734,379 (76.22%)
Blank or void ballot papers.	16,168
Valid votes.	1,718,211

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained		Number of Seats
<i>Fianna Fail.</i>	138	777,616	45.26	78 (-6)
<i>Fine Gael.</i>	126	626,376	36.46	65 (+ 22)
Labour P a r t y	60	169,990	9.89	15 (-2)
<i>Sinn Fein.</i>	15	29,561	1.72	1 (+D)
Socialist Labour Party	7	7,107	0.41	1 (+ D)
Independents	52	106,632	6.21	6 (+ 2)
				166*

* 18 seats added since last elections.

2. Distribution of Members of the Dail according to Sex

Men.	156
Women	10
	166