

IRISH ELECTIONS 1922-44: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Edited by
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Sources for the Study of Irish Politics 1

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Introduction

There are no official records of the results of pre-1948 general elections in Ireland, published or even (it seems) unpublished, a lacuna that has been a handicap both to those conducting research into the political history of twentieth-century Ireland and to those whose interests lie in the working of Ireland's almost unique electoral system. In the 1920s and the 1930s, a pioneering effort to provide the sort of information that is nowadays taken for granted where recent elections are concerned was made by William J. Flynn in successive editions of his *Oireachtas Companion and Saorstát Guide* (later called *Irish Parliamentary Handbook*). These volumes, which are of course long out of print and virtually unobtainable, provide facts and figures on the deputies elected, officers of the Dáil, members of the government and so on, as well as some data on election results themselves. Except in a small number of cases, these are accurate as far as they go, but only first preferences are given; no details of transfers are provided. More recently, Brian Walker's *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1992) contains results of all parliamentary elections in Ireland, north and south, for the period covered, together with a comprehensive index of candidates. While invaluable to all students of twentieth century Irish electoral politics, it, too, does not contain details of vote transfers. (For a list of relevant publications, see the bibliography at the end of this volume.)

Consequently, the only sources from which the full results can be obtained are newspapers. The Dublin-based dailies of the day rarely gave the full results for any constituency outside Dublin, which can be gleaned only from the provincial press. These papers vary in the quality of their coverage of the results; some carried complete details (occasionally reprinting in its entirety the official version supplied by the returning officer), while others provided, say, only the vote totals for each candidate after each count, from which the transfers each received, and the number of non-transferables, can be calculated. Results given in one newspaper have been cross-checked against others where possible. Most of the provincial newspapers were consulted in the National Library of Ireland, Kildare St, Dublin, to which thanks are due for the extensive use of its facilities. In addition, some newspapers were consulted in the British Newspaper Library in Colindale, London. However, it has proved impossible to track down 23 of the 314 constituency counts in full. Of the missing results, 1 is from 1922 (Tipperary North, South and Mid), 4 are from 1923 (Cork North, Galway, Limerick and Longford-Westmeath), 1 is from June 1927 (Dublin County), 2 are from 1932 (Limerick and Roscommon), 1 is from 1938 (Mayo North), 9 are from 1943 (Clare, Cork Borough, Dublin North-East, Dublin North-West, Dublin South, Dublin Townships, Dublin County, Mayo North and Wicklow) and 5 are from 1944 (Dublin North-West, Dublin South, Dublin Townships, Dublin County and Wicklow). In these cases, as much detail as is available on the result has been provided.

The names of constituencies are straightforward enough, except that the constituency generally known throughout the 1922-44 period as Leix-Offaly is here called Laois-Offaly, in line with current usage. The names of candidates sometimes present more of a problem. In some cases it is difficult to establish the correct name of an individual. For example, the first name of the winner of the 1936 Galway by-election is variously given in the available sources as Martin/Mattie, while his surname alternates between Neilan and Niland, while the name of a long-serving Fianna Fail TD from Mayo varied in Dáil reports between Clery, Cleary and Ó Cléirigh. In such instances an effort has been made to decide which version is the

most reliable. In other cases, candidates simply used different versions of their names over time. Some added or dropped middle names—for example, the Monaghan TD generally known as Conn Ward often appeared on the ballot paper as Francis Constantine Ward. Others appear to have switched between the Irish- and English-language versions of their names, such as Tadgh/Timothy Crowley in Limerick, James/Séamus Bourke in Tipperary or Finian / Fionán Lynch in Kerry.

A perennial problem is that of candidates who adopt or discard an O', presumably in the hope of gaining some advantage from achieving a higher position on the ballot paper (on which names appear in alphabetical order). This was a trick onto which politicians latched early. In the words of a reporter writing about the Donegal campaign of 1923: "There was some comment on the fact that Mr Joseph O'Doherty's nominators had eliminated the prefix 'O' from his name, and it was suggested that this was done so that the candidate's name would be near the top of the ballot paper" (*Derry People*, 25 August 1923). Some political Byrnes or Connors were O'Byrne or O'Connor outside the Dáil, while some Reillys became O'Reillys. The Fianna Fáil TD for Cork West is described in Dáil reports variously as Timothy (Ted) Sullivan and Ted O'Sullivan, while the Labour TD Johnny O'Leary appears there as Johnny Leary. In 1922, Kevin O'Higgins, contesting the Laois-Offaly constituency, is described in all official statements by the returning officer as Kevin Higgins. In the present publication there has been a degree of standardisation of names, although when candidates presented different versions of their forenames over time, this is reflected in what is contained here. The list of all TDs of the 1922-44 period included after the 1944 results should reduce the confusion.

Since 1979, the Republic of Ireland has held 5-yearly elections to the European Parliament, for which the country is divided into four constituencies: Connacht-Ulster, Dublin, the rest of Leinster, and Munster. It has become standard to present voting figures for these four provinces/regions, and the practice is followed in the aggregated tables in this book. Connacht and the three Ulster counties in the Republic comprise the western and north-western part of the country, and during the 1922-44 period were characterised mainly by small-scale subsistence farming, carried out primarily by owner-occupiers. Dublin, as the capital city, was the most industrialised part of the country. The counties in the rest of Leinster and Munster varied markedly, but these provinces could be broadly characterised during the period covered as areas of large farming. The map at the back of the book shows the location of the counties and the composition of the provinces.

This volume is the first in the Political Studies Association of Ireland's series *Sources for the Study of Irish Politics*, whose aim is to make more widely available material that is at present difficult to obtain. Its publication has been generously supported by a grant from the Arts and Social Sciences Benefactions Fund (Trinity College Dublin), and thanks are due to the Deans of the three faculties concerned (Arts (Humanities), Arts (Letters) and Business, Economic and Social Studies) for this award.

All the figures in this publication have been extensively checked by computer, but given that coverage of the entire period generates approximately a quarter of a million digits it would be optimistic to imagine that there are no errors. The editor would be grateful to be notified (at the Department of Political Science, Trinity College, Dublin 2) of any mistakes detected by readers. These will be corrected in any future printing.

Michael Gallagher
September 1993

A guide to the STV electoral system in Ireland

Voters are given a ballot paper containing the names of all candidates, in alphabetical order. Candidates' party affiliations, if any, did not appear on the ballot paper at elections before 1963. Voters put a "1" beside the name of their favourite candidate, and can rank as many of the other candidates as they wish (by placing "2", "3" and so on beside their names).

The counting of the votes revolves around the Droop quota, calculated as the lowest integer greater than $\frac{vv}{s+1}$, where vv is the number of valid votes and s the number of seats. Thus in Carlow-Kilkenny in 1922, where there were 31,227 valid votes and 4 seats to be filled, the number that the quota had to exceed was $\frac{31227}{4+1}$, or 6,245.4, and so the quota was set at 6,246. All candidates whose first preference vote total equals or exceeds the quota are declared elected.

Assuming that some seats are left unfilled, the count proceeds by distributing the "surplus" votes of elected candidates, in other words the votes they possess over and above the quota. These votes are distributed among the continuing candidates (i.e. those still in the count, having been neither elected nor eliminated), in proportion to the next "live" preferences marked (a live preference is defined as one for a continuing candidate). The precise number of votes transferred from an elected candidate A to another candidate B is given by the formula:

$$\frac{(\text{number of A's surplus votes}) * (\text{number of A's votes that contain a next live preference for B})}{\text{total number of A's votes that contain a live preference}}$$

Thus, in Carlow-Kilkenny in 1922, we can calculate that among the votes cast for Gaffney that contained at least one live next preference, the proportion carrying a next preference for O'Sullivan was $\frac{2430}{4629}$, or 52.5 per cent.

The returning officer is not obliged (though is entitled) to distribute a surplus if this (together with any other undistributed surpluses) could not alter the position of the bottom two candidates, which is why in Carlow-Kilkenny in 1922 neither Cosgrave's nor Gorey's surplus was distributed on the third count. If a candidate is elected on the first count, all his or her votes are examined for their second preferences, but if the candidate is elected on a later count, only those in the last package received are examined. Thus, if the returning officer in Carlow-Kilkenny had distributed Gorey's surplus at some stage, he would have based the distribution on the next live preferences marked on the 469 votes that Gorey received from Gaffney rather than on all 6,591 votes in Gorey's possession.

If no candidate has a surplus, then the count proceeds by the elimination of the candidate with fewest votes. This candidate's papers are transferred according to the next live preference marked. Any paper without a preference for any of the continuing candidates becomes "non-transferable". The counting process continues until all the seats are filled by candidates attaining the quota (as happened in Carlow-Kilkenny), or until a candidate is declared elected because he or she can no longer be caught by any other candidate, as happened in Cork Borough in 1922, where MacSwiney was declared elected after the fifth count, despite not having reached the quota, as she could not possibly be overtaken by Beamish.

In the results presented in this volume, an asterisk (*) before a candidate's name denotes that the candidate was an outgoing TD.

The 1922 general election

The 1922 general election was the first election to take place in the independent Irish state, the first to be contested by the parties that, in modified form, have dominated Irish politics ever since, and the first general election held under the STV variant of proportional representation. In addition, the circumstances in which it was held produced a peculiar and highly restrained form of competition.

Elections to the second Dáil had taken place in May 1921, also under STV and using the same constituencies as were employed in 1922, but there were no contests in the area known from 1922 as the Irish Free State. The 26 territorial constituencies plus the National University returned 124 Sinn Féin candidates unopposed, and four Unionists were returned unopposed from Dublin University.

Sinn Féin split when the Anglo-Irish Treaty was debated (and passed by 64 votes to 57) by the Dáil in December 1921 and January 1922, and yet it still preserved a fragile existence as a party. Consequently, some members of both the pro- and anti-Treaty wings of the party made efforts to prevent the development of open competition between the two sides at the 1922 election, which was to be held on 16 June. These efforts culminated in the "Collins-de Valera Pact" of 20 May, under which each of the two wings would nominate in each constituency only as many candidates as it then had TDs (members of the Dáil), and a coalition government of the two wings would be formed after the election.

Only the inclusion of a clause acknowledging the right of other interests to stand prevented the election being a rerun of the 1921 non-contest, and gave the voters a chance to pass judgement on the Treaty. Even so, eight of the 28 constituencies were not contested, and the ratio of candidates to seats (just 1.4 candidates per seat) was lower than it has ever been since. The clear hope of most Sinn Féin TDs was that contests would be kept to a minimum. Although there was an element of self-interest in this, there was also a genuine feeling that the open expression of political division at such a critical juncture should be avoided at all costs.

In this sense, the election marked a contest between two groups with very different views on the place of politics. One saw Irish society in essentially monist terms, as innately conflict-free. It wanted any differences of opinion to be resolved within the framework of the all-encompassing "national movement", and was suspicious of the very idea of political parties because the concept implied a fragmentation of the Irish people into different sections with different interests. The other took a more pluralist view, and saw the political process as existing in order to allow the peaceful resolution of conflicts that inevitably existed within Irish society. The fact that enough

non-Sinn Féin candidates came forward to make the election a genuine test of the people's will ensured that the second view prevailed, and established the new Irish state as a twentieth-century liberal democracy.

The electoral register was widely acknowledged to be not very accurate, something that partly accounts for the low turnout figure recorded. Men were entitled to vote if they had reached 21, but the franchise was extended to women only if they were aged 30 or more. University graduates could vote in both a university and a territorial constituency.

The results showed a clear victory for the pro-Treatyites over the anti-Treatyites. In the contested constituencies, the former won 41 seats and the latter only 19. Each anti-Treaty candidate won on average only 3,372 votes, compared with the pro-Treatyites' average of 5,174 votes, and not a single anti-Treaty candidate headed the poll in any constituency. The non-Sinn Féin candidates, who received criticism and occasionally intimidation during the campaign for having dared to stand at all, generally fared well. Labour, indeed, has never subsequently equalled the 21.3 per cent of the votes it won in 1922. All but one of its candidates were elected (the other finished just eight votes short of a quota), and caution cost it certain seats in both Laois-Offaly and Louth-Meath, where its sole candidate won over two quotas. The Farmers Party won a seat in all but one of the constituencies it contested.

Analysis of the transfers (see p. 16) shows that supporters of each wing of Sinn Féin tended to give their lower preferences to candidates of the other wing. Transfers from non-Sinn Féin candidates tended to go in greater numbers to pro-Treatyites than to anti-Treatyites.

The results show that the electorate had relatively little difficulty in adjusting to the use of STV, with only about 3 per cent of votes being spoiled (see p. 17). Moreover, voters clearly grasped the power STV gave them to differentiate between candidates of a particular party. The most striking example of this comes from the Galway constituency, where the last seat lay between two anti-Treatyites, Frank Fahy and Liam Mellows. Fahy had recently made speeches "in favour of the restoration of order and goodwill", in the words of a contemporary newspaper (*Connacht Tribune*, 24 June 1922), while Mellows was regarded as one of the most uncompromising of the republicans. Transfers from pro-Treaty and Labour candidates enabled Fahy to overhaul Mellows despite trailing him by more than 500 votes on first preferences.

The 1922 general election is significant in its own right from many perspectives. But perhaps its most important long-term consequence for Irish political history was that it asserted the primacy of the ballot box, at a time when this seemed very much in the balance.