

Ireland

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Introduction

The Irish Free State was constitutionally established on the 6th of December 1922. In 1921 the United Kingdom and the revolutionary Irish Republic had agreed on the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Irish Free State was not completely independent, as the British Monarch was still the head of state and the United Kingdom kept control over ports, but in nearly all other political areas the Irish Free State was independent of the United Kingdom. In the summer of 1922 the Irish Civil War began. Factions that opposed the remaining connection to the British Empire fought their former allies to achieve complete independence. This was especially visible in the party of **Sinn Fein** which had played a major role in the fight against the British Monarchy but now was split into opposing sites in the civil war. The government troops of the provisional government led by Michael Collins were winning the war. After Collins' death the first general elections were held. On the 22nd of June 1922, Ireland enters the ABEL Database. William Cosgrave was elected President and brought the war to an end in 1923 with a victory of the government troops. The impact of the war shaped Irish politics for the whole time span as the major parties were the successors of the pro-treaty and anti-treaty groups during war. But while the history and the relations to Great Britain created some tension in parliament, Ireland became a stable democracy. In 1937 a plebiscite ended the Irish Free State and created Ireland with a new constitution. Besides formal independence, the reintroduction of the second parliament chamber and the creation of a ceremonial head of state were part of the constitutional reforms.

Elections

Between June 1922 and June 1938 Irish people voted 8 times for the lower chamber of their parliament, the Dáil. Ireland used a proportional representation single transferable vote (PR-STV) system in constituencies with 3-9 seats each. In 1922, 128 members were elected in 28 constituencies, whereas between 1923 and 1933 153 members were elected in 30 constituencies. In the 1937 and 1938 elections 138 members were elected

in 34 constituencies. A single constituency PR-STV system was used for that. As the election had a very low turnout the Senead members were voted by a parliamentary joint committee after that (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 989-992).

22 June 1922

The ABEL database database lists five parties winning at least one seat for the general election in 1922. Sinn Fein had been the leading party in the fight for Irish independence against the British Monarchy. While there already was a clear distinction between the proponents and opponents of the Anglo-British treaty within **Sinn Fein**, they agreed to not nominate candidates in districts were they would oppose a sitting member of the other faction. With this strategy **Sinn Fein** easily gained the majority of votes. Whereas pro-treaty candidates received 38.5 % of first preference votes, anti-treaty candidates only reached 21.8 %, leading to a 58-36 seat split between the two **Sinn Fein** factions. The **Labor party** received nearly as many votes as anti-treaty **Sinn Fein**, but only gained 17 seats. The remaining seats were won by the **Farmer's Party** (7 Seats), the **Businessman's Party** (1 Seat) and by nine independents. The election's turnout was 62.5 % (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1009, 1016). The elections showed that the vast majority of the Irish electorate voted for parties agreeing with the Anglo-Irish treaty (everyone but anti-treaty **Sinn Fein**). 12 Days after the election the Irish Civil war began. The election results led to the formation of an all pro-treaty **Sinn-Fein** government, which was the provisional government of Ireland defined in the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The government was led by William T. Cosgrave after pro-treaty **Sinn Fein's** leading candidate Michael Collins had died on the 22nd of August 1922. On the 6th of December, the government became the first official government of the new Irish Free State. The Dáil was dissolved on the 9th August 1923, a few weeks after the end of the civil war, leading to new elections which formed the next Cosgrave government.

27 August 1923

This was the first election after the establishment of the Irish Free State. Women between 21 and 30 were allowed to vote for the first time. The turnout was 61.3 %. It was also the first election held after the end of the civil war in May 2023 which the government and pro-treaty groups had won against the republican opponents of the treaty. The election led to a clear victory of **Cumann na nGaedhead** (formerly known as pro-treaty Sinn Fein) under the lead of the chief executive William T. Cosgrave. The party won 41.2 % of the seats and was able to form a government alone with a majority as the elected members of the former anti-treaty **Sinn Fein** (now known as Republicans, later as **Fianna Fáil**) followed an abstention policy and did not take part in parliament. The party had received 44 Seats. Other seats were distributed as followed: Farmers' Party - 15 Seats, Labour 14 Seats, Businessmen's Party (2 Seats), Cork Progressive Association (2 Seats) and Independents (13 Seats) (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1009,, 1016). The new government was once again led by Wiliam Cosgrave and stayed in office until 1927.

09 June 1927

The elections of the Dáil saw again **Cumann na nGaedheal** as the most successful party. Even though they lost 16 seats they still formed the biggest fraction of parliament with 47 of 153 members. Most of the former anti-treaty Sinn Fein members joined Éamon de Valera in forming the **Fianna Fáil**, which now took part in their first election. The new party instantaneously won 44 seats, while the remnants of **Sinn Fein** only gained 5 seats. Those five remaining parliamentarians opted to leave their seats vacant in protest against the Anglo-Irish Treaty. **Labour** won 22 seats, the Farmers' Partty 11 and the National League 8 seats. 16 seats were won by independents (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1010, 1016). As **Fianna Fáil** abstained from taking their seats in the early weeks of parliament, a **Cumann na nGaedheal** government under the lead of Cosgrave could be elected with the support of some independents and the Farmers' Party. And even after **Fianna Fáil** representatives took their seats in August a vote of confidence brought in by the **Labour Party** failed in removing Cosgrave from his office. After winning two

by-elections Cosgrave called new elections in September 1927.

15 September 1927

The second election within four months led to an increased number of seats for both **Cumann na nGaedheal** and **Fianna Fáil**. **Cumann na nGaedheal** with 62 of 153 seats was able to form a minority government again under the lead of William T. Cosgrave with the support of the **Farmers' Party** (6 seats) and some of the 12 independent members. The opposition was made of the 57 **Fianna Fáil** deputies, 13 **Labour** members and 2 members of the **Irish Worker League**. The old **Sinn Fein** lost all their five remaining seats(Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1010, 1016).

16 February 1932

The 1932 elections led to the first alternation in government in the Irish Free State. **Fianna Fáil** won the elections with 72 out of 153 seats. With the support of the **Labour Party** (7 seats), **Fianna Fáil** was able to form a minority government under the lead of **Èamon de Valera**. **Cumann na Gaedheal** was the biggest opposition party with 57 seats. Other members in parliament came from the **Farmers' Party** with 3 seats or were independent (14 seats). The transfer of power was peaceful and successful even though it was the first alternation between the former antagonists in the Civil War that had occurred a decade earlier(Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1010, 1017).

24 January 1933

In the 1933 election the **Fianna Fáil** minority government was reelected with the support of the **Labour Party**. **Fianna Fáil** gained more seats and a total of in the elections reaching nearly a majority without support. **Cumann na nGaedheal** won 48 seats, the **National Centre Party** 11 and **Labour** 8. 9 seats were held by independents(Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1010). The government severed all formal ties to the British monarchy by abolishing Senate and the Governor General. It also drafted a new constitution, which was to be voted on by the entire electorate in the next elections. Finally, the **Cumann**

na nGaedheal and **National Centre Party** merged to form the **Fine Gael** in 1933, also including the far-right Army Comrades Association.

01 July 1937

Fianna Fáil also won the next election by winning 69 of the now only 138 seats. They again formed a minority government with the help of the **Labour Party** which won 13 seats. The newly merged **Fine Gael** party won 48 seats in their first election. 8 seats were won by independents. Eamon de Valera was reelected as President of the executive council. Irish voters also voted on the constitutional plebiscite, and the new constitution passed with 56.5% of the vote(Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1005,1011, 1017). Later that year the government known as executive council became the 1st Government of Ireland after the new state was established on the 29th of December 1937.

17 June 1938

Only one year after the last election, a snap election was hold which was clearly won by **Fianna Fáil** winning 77 of 138 seats. Eamon de Valera could therefore stay Taoiseach (chief executive) without the support of any other party. **Fine Gael** got 45 seats, the **Labour Party** won 9 seats and seven seats were won by independents(Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1017).

Parties

The main cleavage in the Irish party system in this period was the Anglo-Irish-Treaty and the acceptance of the new state. After most parties accepted the new state and the continuing relation to the United Kingdom, a fraction of the **Sinn Fein** Party which later developed to **Fianna Fáil** did not accept the treaty and the new state. Other cleavages played a minor role, so that neither social- nor christian-democratic parties developed.

Fianna Fáil

Fianna Fáil was founded in 1926 and took over most of the former **Sinn Fein** members which had remained in the party after the split from **Cumann na nGaedheal**. The main political aim was the creation of an unified Ireland without any links to the British Monarchy. Different to **Sinn Fein**, the party declared the oath in parliament on the British King as a formality and therefore took their seats in the Dáil. The party tended to be in the center on economic on social questions while being clearly nationalist. Still the party had a significant base among the working population. The party ruled Ireland from 1932 and was the leading party behind the new constitution. (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 541-543)

Original Name	Fianna Fáil
Other Names	Republicans
Abbreviation	FF
Factions	

Fine Gael (Family of the Irish)

Fine Gael was founded in 1933 when **Cumann na nGaedheal**, **National Guard** and the **Centre Party** merged. The party symbolised a clear opposition to the openness of **Fianna Fáil** towards the nationalist-radical left group of the Irish Republican Army. The **National Guard** which was also known as Army Comrades Association, League of the Youth or as Blueshirts had fascist tendencies. The League of the Youth was excluded from the party in 1936. **Fine Gael** was then a right-wing conservative party, with less

focus on the liberation from the British Monarchy than **Fianna Fáil** (Wende, 1981: 272-273) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 543-544).

Original Name	Fine Gael
Other Names	United Ireland Party
Abbreviation	FG
Factions	Cumann na nGaedheal, National Guard, Centre Party

Cumann na nGaedheal

Cumann na nGhaedheal was founded in 1923 and was the party of the fraction of the **Sinn Fein** movement that agreed with the Anglo-Irish Treaty from 1921. The agreement to the treaty was the uniting position of the party members. Additionally, the party followed a strict course towards the Irish Republican Army and other leftist-nationalist or communist groups. While the party was internally often not united in many other political topics, their general positions can be described as more right-wing and conservative. The party merged with the **National Guard** and the **Centre Party** to form **Fine Gael** in 1933 (Wende, 1981: 277-278).

Original	Cumann na nGhaedheal
Other Names	Sinn Fein (Pro-Treaty) (before official founding)
Abbreviation	
Factions	

Labour Party

The **Labour Party** was a socialist/social-democratic party. The party in the first years after World War I demanded the nationalisation of banks and key industries, later the party fought for social policies that improved the living conditions for workers. The party supported the Anglo-Irish-Treaty but had Irish unity and the end of the Oath on the British Monarchy as additional aims. While the Labour Party never had great electoral success, the seats gained were often important as a support for minority governments of one of the two big parties like the 1932 **Fianna Fail** cabinet (Wende, 1981: 261-262) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 537-538).

Original	Labour Party
Other Names	Páirtí an Lucht Oibre
Abbreviation	
Factions	

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