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Fianna Fáil and Irish Party Competition

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Whatever issues animate the campaigns of politicians and their parties, or mobilise and engage voters, once an election outcome is known analysts inevitably want to ask whether the election in question was one marked by continuity or by change. Of course, sometimes there is evidence of both and that has certainly been the case of judgements of recent Irish general elections. Writing of the 1997 election, Michael Laver argued it 'was remarkable more for what didn't happen than for what did', but he then went on to conclude that it ushered in a 'more or less permanent era of coalition government . . . which meant a much enhanced role for the Labour party'.¹ After the 2002 contest John Coakley suggested that 'the Irish party system arrived in the twenty-first century with few signs of age', although he also conceded that there was now 'substantial support for new political forces'.²

Much of this measured ambivalence seems to flow from differing interpretations of the continuing place and capacities of Fianna Fáil, whose size and position have long structured Irish electoral competition. In 1992 Peter Mair concluded that after 1989 it had 'become just another party'.³ The next election led Laver to conclude that Fianna Fáil's vote would have to drop considerably (something he saw no evidence for) before 'the core logic of the Irish party system' changed.⁴ But then, after the 2002 election, Coakley argued that it was clear that the party's 'overall direction has been one of [long-term] decline'.⁵ Putting the 2007 election in context, and assessing what it tells us about the shifting nature of the country's political life, requires that we understand Fianna Fáil and the changes that are reshaping it. The party has obviously maintained its pre-eminent place in the system – after all, it has formed the government after the last six elections. But this success increasingly rests on shifting sand.

The place of Fianna Fáil in Irish party competition

Ireland's electoral politics have always revolved around Fianna Fáil. During the first decade after independence the issue was whether this self-styled slightly constitutional republican party would play by democratic rules. Then, in the decades that followed, the central political question quickly became: were Fianna Fáil electoral victories and governments inevitable? With the accession of a new post-revolutionary generation to power in the late 1960s, internal cracks in the partisan monolith began to appear which had the effect of destabilising the entire political system. In the 1970s and 1980s the party's legendary loyalty and discipline cracked: it quarrelled incessantly over its leadership and some prominent dissidents ultimately left to form the Progressive Democrats. These internal party conflicts were at the root of much of the electoral turmoil in a decade during which Irish voters were sent to the polls in five increasingly indecisive general elections. In the years since, Fianna Fáil continued to be the pivot around which Irish politics centred but, with its easy electoral dominance ended, it has had to rethink, and then relearn, how to govern.

As one of the twentieth century's most successful democratic political parties Fianna Fáil has long been accustomed to the prerogatives of office and to thinking of itself as the country's natural governing party. For decades it argued that coalitions were weak and divisive and that the only possible good government was one-party government. While this may have been an obvious electoral claim for the only party that could hope to command enough seats in the Dáil to form a government on its own, it soon became an essential feature of Fianna Fáil's belief system and political catechism. Abandoning beliefs is never easy and it eventually fell to Charles Haughey to lead the party towards a new style of coalition politics after the 1989 election. Albert Reynolds, instinctively opposed to coalitions, saw his subsequent short leadership flounder over the issue and it was left to Bertie Ahern to make it clear that the party was committed to building and maintaining stable coalition relationships. Though Fianna Fáil won 81 seats in 2002, the same number it had secured in February 1982 when it resolutely chose minority over coalition government, Ahern opted to form a potentially unnecessary and politically costly (in terms of cabinet seats, junior ministries and Seanad appointments) government partnership with the apostates who led the Progressive Democrats. In doing so he made it clear he recognised that the old days of Fianna Fáil *versus* the rest had gone and the future of government formation was now Fianna Fáil *and any of* the rest.⁶

Fianna Fáil is a leader-centred party so that struggles over the succession, and the style of resulting leaderships, have shaped the evolving character of the party. Because the six men who have led the party have also all been Taoiseach in their turn, the conduct of Fianna Fáil's leadership politics has shaped the wider party system. The years of intra-party conflict over

Haughey's leadership contributed to the considerable fragmentation of the party system. In the decade after 1977, during which he moved to seize and then aggressively defend the party's leadership, the number of candidates running in general elections grew by 24 per cent and the vote for the three traditional big parties shrank from 93 to 78 per cent. The replacement of Haughey with Reynolds in 1992 did little to reposition Fianna Fáil and the latter quickly became the shortest serving leader (and Taoiseach) in the party's history. Ahern's political genius has been to take the party to a position where it now prefers, and so is able to dominate, coalition-making in a newly balanced party system.⁷ Though, as Gallagher notes in chapter 6, he has been far from the party's most successful vote-getter, he is an extraordinarily skilful politician. By the time the 2007 election was called the 55-year-old Ahern was already the second longest serving Fianna Fáil leader and Taoiseach in the party's history. If he serves another full term, as he has publicly declared he intends to do, Ahern will come close to matching de Valera's post-1937 constitution time in office.

This overly simple sketch of Fianna Fáil moving from its politically suspect outsider status in the 1920s, to its mid-century dominance as the natural governing party, to its current place as the pivot in a restructured coalitional system, captures the essence of much of the change in the history and character of Irish political competition. Yet there is more to the nuances of the story that needs to be appreciated if we are to fully understand what has happened to Fianna Fáil in recent years and what it portends for the future of Irish party politics.

The changing destiny of Fianna Fáil

As Fianna Fáil faced the 2007 election it must have done so with at least some trepidation. Though it had governed for almost 23 years of the previous three decades, its long-term electoral trajectory was hardly encouraging. Table 13.1 illustrates the gross change in the party's electoral position after eight elections following its historic victory in 1977 when Jack Lynch led it to a rout of the Fine Gael–Labour coalition, capturing the largest parliamentary majority in the history of the state. It seems clear that Fianna Fáil had suffered a serious decline over this period. From an electorate that had grown by over 875,000 the party found itself attracting almost 41,000 fewer votes than it had 25 years earlier. Simply put, the electorate grew by over 41 per cent but the Fianna Fáil vote fell by five. Any party's immediate electoral concern is for its vote share which shapes parliamentary outcomes and by 2002 it had fallen by nine percentage points from its 1977 peak.⁸

In the 2007 general election Fianna Fáil finally saw the raw number of voters supporting it climb back above the 800,000 mark for the first time in three decades, but they did so in an electorate that was now 45 per cent larger and with no increase in its vote share over 2002. These numbers hint

at the magnitude of the change that has reshaped the Irish party system and Fianna Fáil's place as the major player in it. They do not, however, tell the whole story for it is not simply one of a general, secular Fianna Fáil decline, although that, as we shall see, there certainly has been. There are a number of other important dimensions to the changes that have altered the basic patterns of the country's electoral competition.

Table 13.1 Fianna Fáil's quarter-century from 1977

	<i>Electorate</i>	<i>FF vote</i>	<i>FF vote share (%)</i>
1977	2,123,229	811,621	50.6
2002	3,002,173	770,748	41.5

The first of these is a significant decline in the proportion of the growing electorate which is actually voting, a change which must account for some of the reduction in the sheer numbers voting for Fianna Fáil. Electoral participation, which had long hovered just over 75 per cent, dipped a few points in the two elections of 1982. Then, in 1989 the numbers voting plunged sharply by five percentage points and continued to decline, falling sharply again in 2002 to below 62 per cent – the total drop over the three decades from 1969 was a full 15 percentage points. The modest recovery in the turnout rate during 2007 will have contributed to the increased total numbers supporting Fianna Fáil, although not by enough to increase the party's vote share.

It is tempting to speculate that the decision of so many Irish voters to become non-voters reflected their response to the internal chaos in Fianna Fáil as well as to the political confusion generated by the proliferation of candidates and minor parties that erupted into the party system during the 1980s. However, the reality is surely more complex, for virtually the same sharp decline in voter turnout occurred across the large majority of established Western democracies in those same years.⁹ A large variety of competing explanations have emerged pointing to institutional and organisational dimensions of modern political processes, to changing socio-economic conditions, to new social-capital cultural realities, to new generational experiences, or to the impact of globalisation. Whatever the reason, and any comprehensive explanation would likely take many of these factors into account, the global character of this pattern suggests that the Irish turnout decline reflected more than just the immediate features of its contemporary competitive alignments. The parties, starting with Fianna Fáil, obviously felt the immediate brunt of voter abstentions, but it was not clear that they had any easy, specifically Irish, response to this significant shift in the behaviour of electorates across the established Western democracies.

Irish voters were not only turning out in reduced numbers. They were also abandoning the strong partisan identifications and allegiances that had, for decades after independence, shaped and stabilised a system that was relatively weakly rooted in distinctive socio-economic cleavages. Michael Marsh reports that studying the 2002 election reveals that only about one-quarter of the electorate felt 'close' to a particular party, although about the same numbers admitted feeling 'closer to one party than the others'. This put Ireland at the very bottom of a league table of 13 established Western democracies in the extent to which its electorate identified itself with a political party.¹⁰

Analysis of survey data suggests that fully one-half of the electorate now has no party identification – this in a system where socio-economic cues provide comparatively little partisan guidance. Much of the collapse in the standing partisan identifications once held by most of the electorate appears to have occurred in the past two decades. In 1981, at the start of the most tumultuous decade of political change, less than 40 per cent reported having no party attachment; by 2002, fully three-quarters of the electorate said they had none.¹¹ The impact of this shows up in a number of significant ways. First, the strength of intra-party transferring – the solidarity of the party vote – has been declining, with consequences for nomination strategies (it risks making over-nomination more costly) and for any vote-seat bonus that might be extracted at the constituency or national level (for more on transferring and nomination strategies, see chapters 6 and 4). Second, the capacity of parties to direct inter-party transferring is reduced where voters are less inclined to take partisan direction.¹² With parties less able to direct their voters, this makes pre-election bargaining, which in turn offers the possibility of providing electors with an effective choice of alternate governments, less viable. But, perhaps more important, the significant de-alignment of the electorate leaves the country with what Marsh has called a 'floating party system'. With no anchors stabilising party competition short-term factors, including the electoral campaigns themselves, become more important and consequently are increasingly likely to have a 'big impact' on electoral outcomes.¹³

The rhythm and dynamic of party competition, and ultimately Fianna Fáil's place in the politics of government-making, was fundamentally altered by the electoral fragmentation and volatility of the support patterns of those continuing to vote, and the slow adjustment to its consequences. Figure 13.1, which records the effective number of parties at the level of the electorate as well as the Dáil, provides a clear portrait of the changing fragmentation of the party system. It illustrates just how much the election of 1987 – in which the Progressive Democrats emerged out of Fianna Fáil, a Workers' Party challenged on the left, and Sinn Féin returned to electoral politics – was a major turning point. That contest saw the total number of individuals running for a seat in the Dáil jump by almost 30 per cent. The result of this proliferation of choices was a level of electoral fractionalisation not seen since the 1940s. The vote share of the three large established parties plunged by 16 percentage points

(from 94 to 78 per cent of the vote) leading to a drop of ten points in their share of seats in the Dáil which fell below 90 per cent for the first time in two decades.

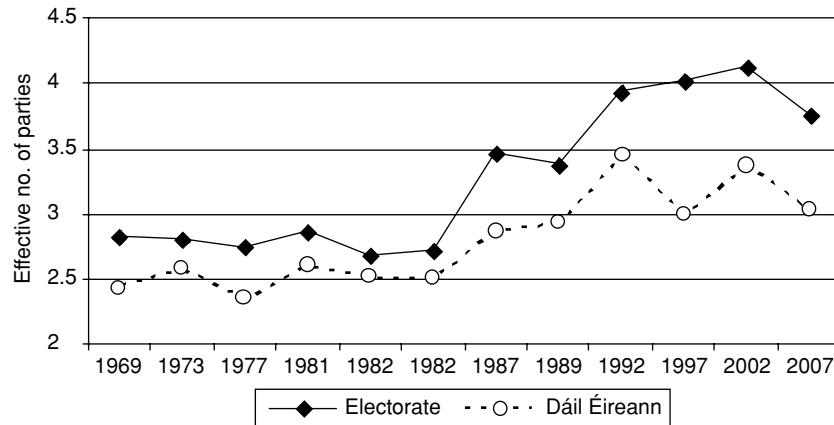


Figure 13.1 Party system fragmentation, 1969–2007

At first it appeared that Fianna Fáil had survived the electoral dislocations of 1987 more successfully than its opponents. The party's vote share declined only one percentage point from the previous election, while Fine Gael's share collapsed from 39 per cent to just over 27. That marked decline in Fine Gael support has proved difficult to reverse and the party has not won as much as 30 per cent of the vote in a general election since.¹⁴ For its part, Labour saw its vote eroded by almost a third in 1987, but it was soon to recover and resume its traditional place in the party system with something over 10 per cent of the vote. These changes strengthened Fianna Fáil's hand as compared to its traditional opponents and allowed the party to return to office that year as a minority government. However, they also testified to the end of several decades of predictable party competition and presaged the end of Fianna Fáil's easy electoral predominance.

Two years later saw the Greens emerge as an organised partisan force in the election that witnessed the largest single drop in voter turnout. Fianna Fáil's vote share did not drop in 1989, but two other features of that election's outcome heralded the party's new reality. First, and most immediately relevant, it won fewer seats than in 1987 and this led to Haughey's surprising decision to form a coalition with the Progressive Democrats. It was surprising because many in the party blamed the Progressive Democrat leaders and TDs for Fianna Fáil's electoral problems, and surprising because one of the party's long-standing core principles had been the rejection of coalition politics. By following its leader into a coalition the party seemed to be signalling that

it recognised that there had been a qualitative change in the Irish political world and its place in it. A second, perhaps less noticed but equally significant, development was the fall of Fianna Fáil's share of the electorate to below 30 per cent for the first time since the turbulent elections of the 1920s. At those levels, it would inevitably be difficult to form a single-party government whose legitimacy wouldn't be questioned.

The fragmentation of the system increased sharply again in 1992 (Figure 13.1) with the addition of a Democratic Left party and greater support for Independents as well as Labour. That election saw another jump in the number of candidates running – by 30 per cent over 1989 – but this time Fianna Fáil paid a large electoral price. Its vote share dipped below 40 per cent for the first time since 1927 and, with just 41 per cent of the seats in the Dáil, it was again reluctantly driven to accept a coalition partner. This time it looked left – to Labour – rather than right to its former partners in the Progressive Democrats, to create a government. Though the Reynolds government collapsed in two years, the experience confirmed that while Fianna Fáil's days as a dominant single-party might be over, its size and location in the Irish political spectrum gave it a pre-eminent role in a new coalition-style politics.

However, Fianna Fáil's ability to survive the vicissitudes of the changing party system and continue to hold office for most of the last two decades, an image reinforced by its ability to form yet another, different coalition in the wake of the 2007 election, masks the reality of the party's continuing long-term secular decline. Table 13.2 reveals just how far the party has fallen. During the decade of Jack Lynch's leadership the party won, on average, over 47 per cent of the vote in three successive general elections and a clear majority of the seats in the Dáil in two of them. In the subsequent Haughey years the party's average vote declined by just over two percentage points, but that, with the fragmentation of the rest of the party system, pushed its share of the Dáil down by five points. This was enough to deprive the party of a parliamentary majority in the five contests of that decade and push it into accepting the need to practise coalition politics. Then, in four elections under Reynolds and Ahern, Fianna Fáil has again seen its vote share drop, this time more sharply to just over 40 per cent. The corresponding decline in its Dáil strength was not as great, but it has led Ahern to embrace the principle of genuine partnership as the basis for coalition governments designed to

Table 13.2 Fianna Fáil's electoral and parliamentary decline, 1969–2007

		<i>Avg. vote share (%)</i>	<i>Avg. share of electorate (%)</i>	<i>Avg. share of Dáil seats (%)</i>
1969–77	Lynch	47.5	36.6	52.1
1981–89	Haughey	45.2	32.7	47.2
1992–2007	Reynolds–Ahern	40.4	26.4	45.8

last full parliamentary terms. Now attracting the active support of just over one-quarter of the electorate, Fianna Fáil can hardly credibly claim, as it long sought to do in its heyday under de Valera and Lemass, that it is the sole legitimate political voice of the republic.

Fianna Fáil's continuing ability to maintain its pre-eminence in the face of its vote losses has been made easier by a similar decline in Fine Gael's vote and seat shares over the same period. During the Lynch decade Fine Gael regularly won about a third of the votes and seats; in recent elections it has managed only about a quarter of the vote and a similar, but rather variable, seat share.¹⁵ Although it remains the largest of the other parties in the system, its substantially reduced size means that forming politically viable alternate coalitions to Fianna Fáil is inherently more difficult. However, there are a number of other factors that have played an important part in maintaining Fianna Fáil's central place in Irish electoral competition. These have worked at the level of individual voters' political commitments, the party's own election strategy, and the impact of the electoral system's translation of votes into seats. Each deserves some attention.

As we have already seen, the Irish party system appears to be in a period of marked de-alignment with significantly fewer electors identifying with political parties. There are, however, definable differences across the system with most of the remaining identifiers associating with the three long-established major parties.¹⁶ Among them Fianna Fáil does best. It has the largest number of self-identifying partisans of any of the parties and its partisans admit to having stronger and more stable attachments to their party than do those of the others. It remains true that such partisans generally constitute the most stable voters and, in particular, Fianna Fáil's partisans are more likely to vote for their party than are those who identify with the other parties. At the same time, the weaker identifications of its opponents' partisans may help account for the fact that Fianna Fáil 'does not repel transfers as it used to'.¹⁷ Thus, while Fianna Fáil has had the most to lose with the erosion of the traditional base of the system in a set of family socialised party identifications, the course of these changes may have left it comparatively better off – at least as the process has evolved to date.

As the party's vote came under increasing pressure Fianna Fáil's national campaign managers responded by increasing central control over the candidate selection process at the heart of their electoral strategy.¹⁸ This was perhaps most obvious in their often controversial attempts to direct the numbers and identities of local constituency teams of candidates, but no less important was the cumulative impact on the party's national electoral strategy. Figure 13.3 traces the changes in the numbers of candidates nominated by Fianna Fáil over the last four decades and it is clear that there has been a regular and deliberate pattern to it. Recognising that there are organisational and electoral costs to nominating too many candidates – in disruptive internal party competition, in vote fragmentation, and in transfer losses – the party has

been systematically decreasing the number it nominates in order to maximise its seat return.¹⁹ In the last three elections the number of the party's nominees has stabilised at about two-thirds of the size of the Dáil, a ratio that has not been so low since the 1930s. The largest number the party ever nominated was in 1977 (89 per cent), when the national executive added an unusually large number of candidates to those chosen locally but, as its vote subsequently declined, Fianna Fáil responded strategically by reducing the numbers it nominated, even while the total number of all candidates contesting general elections was growing by some 12 per cent. This strategy has paid off in terms of maximising the number of seats it has won given its altered vote share.

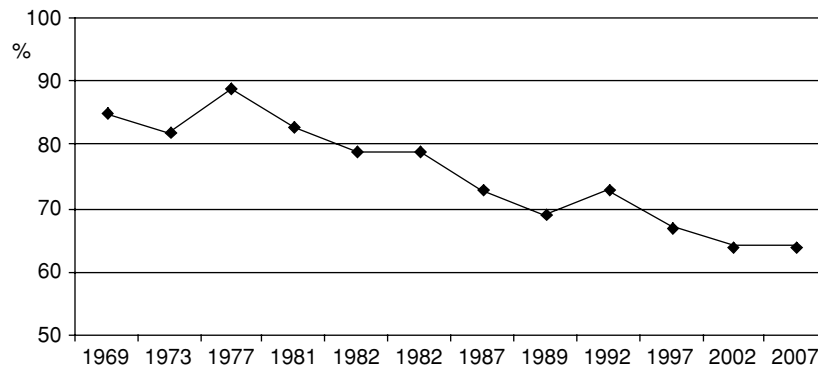


Figure 13.2 Dáil seats contested by Fianna Fáil

Virtually all electoral systems provide some advantage to the largest parties and the Irish version of the single transferable vote is no exception. It has always given some bonus to Fianna Fáil. This bonus is reflected in the 'index of proportionality', simply calculated as seats won as a percentage of votes won. With full proportionality being 100, any score over 100 represents a bonus in the sense that it indicates that a party has won more seats than proportionality would dictate it was entitled to. Figure 13.3 charts the index for Fianna Fáil over the last four decades. It indicates that the extent of the party's bonus has varied considerably from election to election but, given this was an era of often evenly balanced contests, it inevitably made a difference to the party's governing prospects. It is particularly striking that the bonuses delivered to Ahern in 1997 and 2002 were the largest ever in Fianna Fáil history; and the one he secured in 2007 was exceeded only once before – by de Valera in 1943. This jump in the bonus was skilfully engineered by the party's decision to enter into transfer pacts with potential coalition partners, which increased the inter-party transfers flowing its way.²⁰ Given the significant decline in the party's own vote share during this period, these especially large bonuses

have been critically important for Ahern and have provided one of the pillars on which he has depended to keep Fianna Fáil in office.

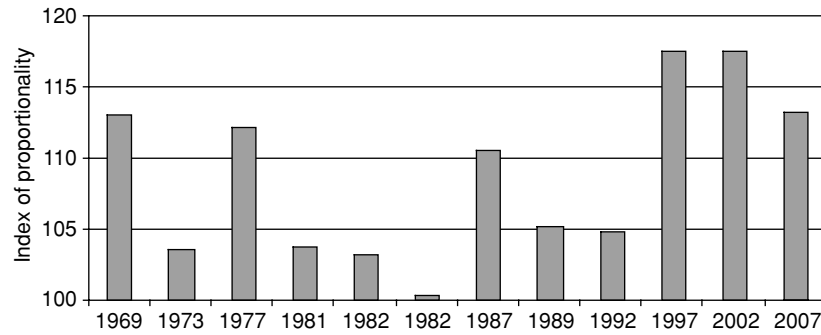


Figure 13.3 Fianna Fáil's electoral system bonus

These separate, but entwined, stories are brought together in Figure 13.4 which illustrates the general trend lines for Fianna Fáil's candidates, votes and seats over the past four decades. It reveals that they have all been continually falling as the party's dominance of the system is systematically eroded. The number of candidates has declined more sharply than its vote share, suggesting that the party's nomination strategies have been relatively

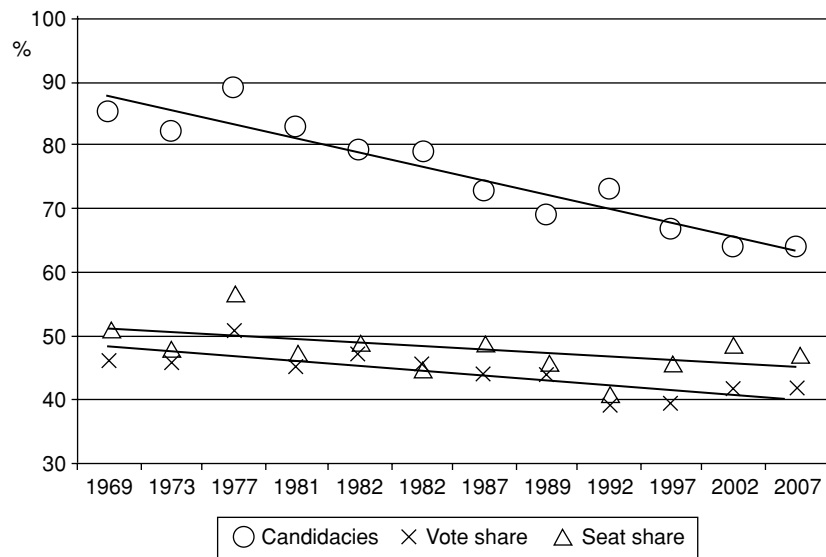


Figure 13.4 Fianna Fáil candidates, votes and seats, 1969–2007

successful at minimising the political costs of its electoral decline. That aspect of the system's competitive dynamics – bolstered, at least temporarily, in no small part by the electoral system – is reflected in the slower decline in its seat share. If it expects to maintain its status as the party of government, Fianna Fáil may need to resist dropping its nomination ratio much further, lest it stimulate a vicious cycle in which fewer candidates continually lead through fewer votes to fewer seats. Despite its success in 2007 in maintaining its dominant position in Irish politics, the party's long-term trajectory is not a positive one. And the contemporary experience of other governing parties offers little encouragement.

Fianna Fáil in comparative perspective

Fianna Fáil is one of a group of extraordinarily successful political parties that have managed to establish themselves as the dominant players in the national politics of their respective countries. This era may be drawing to a close for they all appear to be experiencing a similar long-term decline. Figure 13.5 traces the trends in voter support over the last four decades for the four most electorally successful Western European parties – Fianna Fáil, Austria's Socialists, Sweden's Social Democrats and Germany's Christian Democrats (with its partner Christian Social Union) – and two other long-dominant governing parties, Japan's Liberal Democrats and Canada's Liberals.²¹ While

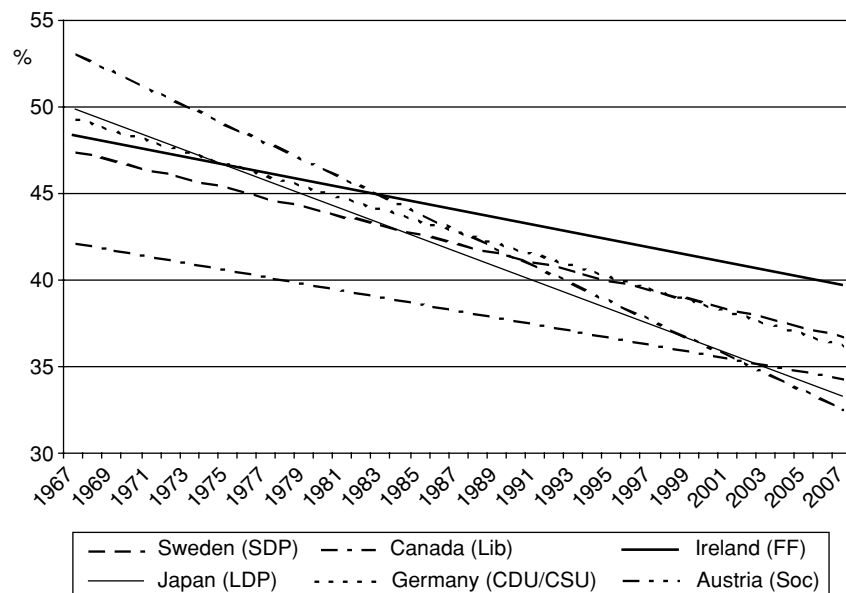


Figure 13.5 Trends in major party vote shares, 1967–2007

there is some variation in the rate of decline among the individual parties the long-term general trend across these institutionally and socially very diverse political systems is unmistakable.

Despite what we have seen about the changing cast of the Irish party system and Fianna Fáil's declining position in it, the evidence of Figure 13.5 suggests that, by comparative standards, the party has been the most successful of all in this group in meeting its challenges. Forty years ago it might have ranked fourth among these six parties, today it ranks first and appears to be in a relatively much stronger position than any of them. This seems particularly striking given Marsh's observation that levels of party attachment, assumed to stabilise support, are much lower in Ireland.²² The looming question of Irish politics must be what might happen if Fianna Fáil becomes more like the other established, once commanding, dominant parties and shrinks to a size where it can no longer dominate party politics as easily as it has for so long.

Fianna Fáil and the party system

In forming his third government Bertie Ahern revealed just how politically promiscuous Fianna Fáil has become. In 1992 the party had coalesced with Labour, in 1997 and 2002 with the Progressive Democrats, and in 2007 they partnered with the Greens. It really has become a system of Fianna Fáil and any of the rest with simple numbers dictating just who the other party will be at any given moment.²³ Fianna Fáil's ability to dictate the shape and composition of governments now rests on its sheer size (magnified by the electoral system) as well as the lack of a really viable alternate pivot around which governments might easily form. However, if the party's slow long-term decline persists, even promiscuity and electoral system bonuses may not eventually save it.

Of course, a shrinking vote share for Fianna Fáil implies a growing share for others and historically, that would have meant Fine Gael and Labour. Yet in the years of Fianna Fáil's greatest vote decline neither of them was able to take advantage of it to reposition themselves as a more significant force in the system. Fine Gael's collapse in the late 1980s has left it much weaker than it had been in the previous decades when both Cosgrave and FitzGerald managed to form governments, and Labour has never managed to repeat its atypical 1992 election success. Indeed, the futures of both those parties are no more secure for their own partisans are, if anything, less loyal than Fianna Fáil's.²⁴ This suggests that if Fianna Fáil's vote does continue to decline, the major beneficiaries are likely to be, as they have been for two decades now, the minor parties and Independent candidates. None of the minor parties which now regularly manage to win seats in the Dáil has yet demonstrated any prospect of either displacing the others or emerging as a major party in its own right. But if this is the case the result is likely to be an increasingly

fragmented party system. In that situation stable coalitions might become harder to build; almost certainly they would become harder to predict. Few voters in 1992 expected a Fianna Fáil–Labour government, not many more expected a Fianna Fáil–Green–PD one in 2007 (as we saw in chapter 9). This could make Irish elections far less of a choice of government than they have been in the past, a development that hardly seems likely to encourage public participation and restore voter turnout rates.

A quite different scenario might see some political issue or dynamic leader engendering a fundamental realignment of electoral divisions and the emergence of a very different party system. Alternatively, electoral reform could alter the terms of competition in a fashion that would reshape the existing parties and their competitive relationships. But both prospects seem unlikely. While the electorate's post-independence experience is one of comparatively weakly structured partisanship and it is now more de-aligned than ever, the compromises of coalition governance seem to mitigate against the emergence of highly divisive conflicts capable of realigning the system. Although electoral reform is on the agenda in many of the established and emerging democracies its prospects in Ireland are not bright. There is no obvious parliamentary coalition for it and Fianna Fáil has twice failed to convince the electorate of it.

But perhaps Fianna Fáil's organisation will find a way to stabilise its support and Dáil strength so that the lines in Figure 13.4 cease their relentlessly downward direction. In that case we can expect future elections to have all the order and predictability of 2007, and future governments to continue to be constructed by Fianna Fáil and one (or two) of the rest. Which of the rest will reflect the vagaries of specific electoral outcomes, depend on the political skill of its leadership, and measure the party's well-demonstrated determination to stay in office at whatever the cost.

Notes

1. Michael Laver, 'The Irish party system approaching the millennium', pp. 264–76 in Michael Marsh and Paul Mitchell (eds), *How Ireland Voted 1997* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 264, 275.
2. John Coakley, 'The election and the party system', pp. 230–46 in Michael Gallagher, Michael Marsh and Paul Mitchell (eds), *How Ireland Voted 2002* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 231.
3. Peter Mair, 'Fianna Fáil, Labour and the Irish party system', pp. 162–73 in Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh (eds), *How Ireland Voted 1992* (Dublin: PSAI Press, 1993), p. 171.
4. Laver, 'The Irish party system', p. 275.
5. Coakley, 'The election and the party system', p. 231.
6. Paul Mitchell, 'Government formation in 2002: 'you can have any kind of government as long as it's Fianna Fáil'', pp. 214–29 in Gallagher et al., *How Ireland Voted 2002*.
7. Mitchell, 'Government formation', p. 216.

8. The party's vote share had fallen even lower in the intervening period, reaching an all-time low (for a general election) of 39.1 per cent in 1992.
9. Martin P. Wattenberg, 'The decline of party mobilisation', pp. 64–76 in Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg (eds), *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 71–5, discusses the turnout collapse in the OECD states, including Ireland. For current data see the IDEA website, www.idea.int/vt/index.cfm.
10. Michael Marsh, 'Party identification in Ireland: an insecure anchor for a floating party system' *Electoral Studies* 25:3 (2006), pp. 489–508.
11. *Ibid.*, Table 2, p. 495.
12. For evidence of declining rates of 'party solidarity' and successful inter-party transfer direction see Michael Gallagher, 'Stability and turmoil: analysis of the results', pp. 88–118 in Gallagher et al., *How Ireland Voted 2002*.
13. Marsh, 'Party identification', pp. 506–7.
14. For a recent assessment of Fine Gael's place in the party system, see Eoin O'Malley and Matthew Kerby, 'Chronicle of a death foretold? Understanding the decline of Fine Gael', *Irish Political Studies* 19:1 (2004), pp. 39–58.
15. As its vote share has declined the number of seats it has won has become more unpredictable. Over the last four elections (1992–2007) it has averaged 27.3 per cent but ranged from a low of 18.7 per cent to a high of 32.5 per cent.
16. This paragraph draws heavily on the evidence and analysis in Marsh, 'Party identification'.
17. See chapter 6, this volume.
18. For a discussion of the pressures changing the candidate nomination processes in Irish parties, see Yvonne Galligan, 'Candidate selection: more democratic or more centrally controlled?', pp. 37–56 in Gallagher et al., *How Ireland Voted 2002*, and also chapter 4, this volume.
19. There is a small but lively literature on the subject of the best number of candidates to nominate. See Michael Gallagher, 'Candidate selection in Ireland: the impact of localism and the electoral system', *British Journal of Political Science* 10:4 (1980), pp. 489–503. Richard S. Katz pulls one debate together in his 'But how many candidates should we have in Donegal? Numbers of nominees and electoral efficiency in Ireland', *British Journal of Political Science* 11:1 (1981), pp. 117–22.
20. Michael Gallagher, 'The results analysed', pp. 121–50 in Marsh and Mitchell, *How Ireland Voted 1997*, pp. 128–9; Peter Mair and Liam Weeks, 'The party system', pp. 135–59 in J. Coakley and Michael Gallagher (eds), *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 4th edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 152.
21. Coakley, 'The election and the party system', p. 240, identifies these as the most successful parties in Europe in the post-Second World War period. He notes that by 2002 Fianna Fáil had become Europe's 'most consistently successful vote-getter'.
22. Marsh, 'Party identification', Figure 1, p. 494, provides comparative data for Sweden, Germany and Canada.
23. The party has always been happy to deal with Independents who could generally be bought off with particularistic benefits designed to benefit their constituencies.
24. See Marsh, 'Party identification', Table 7, p. 499, for a comparison of partisans' propensity to vote for their own party.