

6

The Earthquake that Never Happened: Analysis of the Results

Michael Gallagher

Those looking back on the 2007 election several decades hence may wonder why it was regarded at the time as such an exciting contest. Looking at the results, it seems that the electorate largely reiterated the verdict it delivered in 2002. The government to emerge was much the same as the outgoing one, and most parties came back with seat totals that showed little change from 2002. Fine Gael made substantial seat gains while Independents slipped back, but this could be seen more as a reversion to normality after the aberrant 2002 outcome than as an upheaval in its own right. Yet, as we saw in chapter 3 and will see in chapter 9, this was not what anyone expected during the campaign (see also the Chronology at the front of book). The theme of the 2007 results, then, is not just one of little change; it is one of little change in the context of widespread expectations of major changes. The story of the 2007 election outcome is primarily one of the dramatic changes that, in the event, simply did not happen. In chapter 7 Michael Marsh probes more deeply into just why the electorate drew back from the brink of setting the party system onto a different trajectory. In this chapter, we look at the performances of each party, at what transfer patterns tell us, and at intra-party competition and vote management.

The Irish constitution states that the ratio of TDs to population in each constituency 'shall, so far as it is practicable, be the same throughout the country' (Article 16.2.3). The constituencies on which the 2007 election were fought had been drawn up in 2004 on the basis of the 2002 census findings. A further census was conducted in 2006; the preliminary results were released in September 2006, but the final results, which were virtually identical, did not become available until 29 March 2007, a month before the election was called and thus too late to allow a fresh redrawing of the constituency configuration to take place. Two Independent TDs, Finian McGrath and Catherine Murphy,

challenged the set of constituencies in place, arguing that it did not meet the constitutional requirement: far from there being the same ratio of population to TDs across the country, this ratio ranged from more than 30,000 to 1 in Dublin West and Dublin North to fewer than 23,000 to 1 in Dun Laoghaire and Cork NC. The judge's verdict was that the state had acted in accordance with the law and the constitution, in that it had had insufficient time before the election to rectify the undisputed anomaly, but he suggested that 'urgent consideration' should be given to amending the legislation so that in future the task of redrawing the constituencies (known as 'redistricting' in the US) could begin upon release of the preliminary census figures rather than having to wait for the final ones.¹

Votes and candidates

The regulations on nomination of candidates had been changed before the 2002 election, allowing party candidates simply to demonstrate that they were endorsed by a registered political party while other candidates required the signatures of 30 'assentors' from the constituency, who had to present themselves at a designated local authority office within the constituency with proof of identity. This followed a decision by the High Court in 2001 that the existing rules requiring candidates to make a financial deposit, which was returned to those whose support exceeded a certain level, was unconstitutional. In November 2006 the Supreme Court ruled that while the requirement of 30 signatures was not itself unreasonable, the stipulation that they each had to travel to a particular office within the constituency was unduly burdensome, and so it declared the regulation unconstitutional. Accordingly, the rules were changed again, so that candidates not endorsed by a registered party could either be nominated by 30 assentors, who would have to complete statutory declarations, or lodge a deposit of €500. Despite these changing rules, the number of candidates has remained fairly stable: 484 in 1997, 463 in 2002, and 470 in 2007.

The statement that 'all politics is local' may have reached cliché status in Ireland, but this is partly because of the strong element of truth it contains. On average, each TD represents around 12,400 voters, but a much smaller number of votes pretty much guarantees election. Only three of the 82 candidates who received as many as 8,000 first preferences, and nine of the 120 to reach 7,000 first preferences, were not elected. With such a low number of votes to garner, we should not be surprised at the 'friends and neighbours' style of politics adopted by most successful politicians. Every candidate, bar one, who received fewer than 1,500 first preferences failed to qualify for reimbursement of election expenses (see note to Table 6.1). The shining exception was Cyprian Brady in Dublin Central, who received only 939 first preferences (0.14 quotas), the lowest of any Fianna Fáil candidate in the election, yet was elected due primarily to his receipt of the lion's share of

Bertie Ahern's transferred surplus, thus becoming the first candidate for 80 years to win election with fewer than 1,000 first preferences.² His election recalled to some observers' minds Conor Cruise O'Brien's suggestions in the early 1970s that Eugene Timmons, who was regularly elected in another Dublin northside constituency with the aid of large transfers from Charles Haughey's surplus, was Haughey's 'surplus in human form'; as Haughey's popularity waned, claimed O'Brien, Timmons was 'already beginning to flicker at the edges'. Receiving between 0.5 and 0.6 quotas gave a candidate about a 50–50 chance of being elected; only 2 per cent of those with fewer than this were elected, while 89 per cent of those with more succeeded.

Of the candidates outside the six main parties, 74 received fewer than 1,000 votes, and the great majority did not qualify for reimbursement of their (usually negligible) campaign expenses. Party candidates fared better, though the PDs, the Greens and Sinn Féin also ran many candidates who made little impact. As explained in appendix 5, parties have an incentive to

Table 6.1 Fate of candidates at the 2007 election

	Number	Average vote	Average Droop quotas	% elected	% not elected but qualifying for reimbursement of expenses	% not qualifying for reimbursement of expenses
All candidates	470	4,395	0.44	35	29	36
Fianna Fáil	106	8,100	0.81	73	27	0
Fine Gael	91	6,203	0.60	56	40	4
Labour	50	4,184	0.44	40	36	24
Green Party	44	2,204	0.23	14	27	59
Sinn Féin	41	3,498	0.35	10	49	41
Prog. Democrats	30	1,880	0.20	7	20	73
Others	108	1,268	0.13	5	16	80
Cabinet minister	15	11,299	1.20	93	7	0
Junior minister	15	8,824	0.88	87	13	0
Non-ministerial TD	116	7,197	0.72	77	22	1
Senator	27	5,698	0.55	52	30	19
MEP not in Oireachtas	2	4,190	0.47	0	100	0
County councillor	122	4,070	0.41	20	57	23
None of the above	173	1,563	0.16	6	17	77
Male	388	4,506	0.45	37	27	36
Female	82	3,872	0.40	27	40	33

Note: As explained in appendix 5, candidates qualify for some reimbursement of campaign expenses provided their vote total at some stage of the count reaches a quarter of the Droop quota (for explanation of the Droop quota, see appendix 4). Voting figures refer to first preference votes. 'County councillor' refers to those candidates who at the time of the election were members of a County or County Borough Council.

do this, since their total permitted campaign spending increases the more candidates they nominate.

Elective status, too, is strongly related to candidates' fates (see Table 6.1). Ministers had the strongest record of re-election: only three ministers lost their seats, all from the PDs (Michael McDowell from the cabinet plus junior ministers Tim O'Malley and Tom Parlon). TDs rarely fail to meet the threshold for reimbursement of expenses, and the exception this time was again a PD, Mae Sexton in Longford–Westmeath, who had been a surprise victor in 2002. Five senators – four from the PDs and one Independent – met the same fate. Candidates with at least some elective status fare significantly better than those with none. Among the latter, the great majority polled poorly (more than three-quarters received fewer than 0.2 Droop quotas), and only ten were elected, including a few with an electoral track record: three former Fine Gael TDs returning after defeat or retirement in 2002, and a Fianna Fáil candidate defeated in a 2005 by-election. Knowing a candidate's party label and elective status, then, goes a long way toward predicting their likely fate.

The proportion of female candidates was slightly lower than in 2002 (down from 18 to 17 per cent) and, as always, female candidates received fewer votes than men, though this is more realistically attributed to their party label and their elective status than to their gender. Although all parties pay lip service to the desirability of increasing the number of women TDs, women did not make up more than a quarter of any party's candidates, and the proportion among the two main parties' lists were especially low (13 per cent within Fianna Fáil and 16 per cent in Fine Gael).

Plus ça change

Before we look at the fate of the parties, we should mention that more attention than usual was focused on the level of turnout. According to official figures this had been declining steadily since the late 1960s, though some wondered whether this indicated a genuine decline or, rather, an increasingly inaccurate electoral register.³ Although in most countries inaccuracy tends to refer to the non-inclusion of individuals who are entitled to vote, in the Irish context the criticism has been that the register contained a large number of names that should not have been there, so 'real' turnout was several percentage points higher than reported turnout, though it was still declining.⁴ Between 2002 and 2007 there were highly publicised attempts to 'clean up' the register, so there was reason to expect an increase in turnout, especially given the perceived closeness of the contest this time.

That did indeed happen. Turnout (valid votes as a percentage of electorate) rose by over four percentage points from 2002 to 66 per cent, the highest figure (according to official data) since 1989. Compared with 2002, the total electorate rose by 109,000, while the number of valid votes rose by 208,000. Turnout rose in virtually every constituency, and the rise was greatest in

Dublin, where it was up by six percentage points, though turnout in Dublin is still lower than in the rest of the country (for full details see appendix 1). Dublin SE, one of only four constituencies where turnout declined, has the lowest turnout (53 per cent). Whether turnout as a proportion of the total number of eligible voters increased, and if so by how much, or whether the apparent rise is wholly or partly an artefact of the pruning from the electoral register of surplus names, requires further analysis.

Turning to the fates of the parties and candidates, the results of the election showed that only Fine Gael and Independents saw significant changes in their vote shares, and only these and the PDs registered significant seat changes (Table 6.2). The other parties' performances were remarkably close to those of 2002, although the changes were sufficient to bring about a change of government (see chapter 12). Table 6.2 also shows that the largest three parties gained from the electoral system, winning a combined total of 148 seats against their 'fair share' of just 136. We now turn to analysis of each party's performance.

Table 6.2 Result of the 2007 election, with changes since 2002

	% vote	Change since 2002	Seats	Change since 2002	% seats	'Fair' number of seats in proportion to first preference votes
Fianna Fáil	41.6	+0.1	77	-4	46.7	72
Fine Gael	27.3	+4.8	51	+20	30.9	47
Labour	10.1	-0.6	20	0	12.1	17
Green Party	4.7	+0.8	6	0	3.6	8
Sinn Féin	6.9	+0.4	4	-1	2.4	12
Progressive Democrats	2.7	-1.2	2	-6	1.2	5
Socialist Party	0.6	-0.2	0	-1	0.0	1
People before Profit/SWP	0.5	+0.3	0	0	0.0	1
Workers' Party	0.1	-0.1	0	0	0.0	0
Christian Solidarity Party	0.1	-0.2	0	0	0.0	0
Fathers' Rights	0.1	+0.1	0	0	0.0	0
Immigration Control	0.1	-0.0	0	0	0.0	0
Independents	5.2	-4.2	5	-8	3.0	2
Total	100.0	0	165	0	100.0	165

Note: For detailed results, see appendix 1. Table refers to contested seats; Fianna Fáil also won the one uncontested seat (automatic re-election of Ceann Comhairle), giving it 78 seats out of 166 in the 30th Dáil. Fathers' Rights and Immigration Control are not registered parties so their candidates were not officially listed as such. Last column represents allocation of seats by Sainte-Laguë method of proportional representation (generally seen as the 'fairest' since it does not systematically favour either larger or smaller parties) based on parties' national first preference vote totals; each Independent candidate is treated as a separate unit.

Fianna Fáil

The election, it was agreed after the votes were counted and the government formed, was a triumph for Bertie Ahern, who by becoming the first Taoiseach to win three consecutive terms since Eamon de Valera in 1944 had confirmed his unique bond with the Irish people. Fianna Fáil's dark days of the 1980s, when it was led by Charles Haughey, a man who failed to win an overall majority for Fianna Fáil in five attempts, were well and truly laid to rest. There was much discussion of the sources of Ahern's ability to broaden Fianna Fáil's appeal to sections of the Irish electorate that had shunned the party under Haughey.

Only those with a set of reference books by their side and, no doubt, an absence of generosity of spirit dared suggest that this version flew in the face of the facts. Ahern has now led the party into three elections, and the 41.6 per cent of the votes Fianna Fáil won in 2007 represents its high point under his leadership. In contrast, the *lowest* point that Fianna Fáil hit under Haughey was 44.1 per cent. Ahern has an excellent record of leading his party into government and is more politically adept at many things than Haughey was, but attracting first preference votes to Fianna Fáil is not one of them. In fact, Ahern's electoral record as Fianna Fáil leader is the second lowest of Fianna Fáil's six leaders; only Albert Reynolds, who was given just one chance to lead the party into an election, fared worse (see Table 6.3). While any previous leader who notched up an average support level of 41 per cent would have had Fianna Fáil TDs searching for a copy of the Corú (the mythical and virtually unobtainable party constitution) for the section on how to bring about internal party regime change, Ahern finds himself feted as a leader like no other.

Table 6.3 Fianna Fáil performance under six leaders, 1927–2007

	<i>Elections</i>	<i>% votes</i>	<i>% seats</i>
Eamon de Valera (1926–59)	12	43.6	47.0
Seán Lemass (1959–66)	2	45.8	49.7
Jack Lynch (1966–79)	3	47.5	52.1
Charles J. Haughey (1979–92)	5	45.2	47.4
Albert Reynolds (1992–94)	1	39.1	41.2
Bertie Ahern (1994–)	3	40.8	47.4
Total	26	43.4	47.0

This is partly because of the low expectations surrounding Fianna Fáil for much of the 2007 campaign (see Chronology). When early polls during the 1992 campaign had shown Fianna Fáil faring poorly, Albert Reynolds had famously declared that his strategy was to 'start low and finish high', but unfortunately he achieved only the first of these. In 2007, though, Ahern managed this perfectly, finishing higher than virtually anyone had expected.

Consequently the outcome was widely perceived as snatching victory from the jaws of defeat, whereas if Fianna Fáil had been expected during the campaign to achieve an overall majority the outcome would have prompted far more critical post mortems.

The other reason why the result was seen as a success for Ahern was, of course, that it meant the party would be returning to government. Since changing its stance on coalition in 1989,⁵ Fianna Fáil has, exaggerating just a little, exchanged all of the power most of the time for most of the power all of the time, and Ahern's ability to build relations of trust with other parties has certainly played an important part in this. This is apparent in the process of building and maintaining governments (see chapters 1 and 12), but it also affects the way voters of other parties use their lower preference votes. In the pre-Ahern era supporters of virtually all other parties, from whatever part of the political spectrum, displayed an attitude of 'anyone but Fianna Fáil' when ranking candidates on the ballot paper, but under Ahern, Fianna Fáil, while not exactly acting as a magnet for transfers, does not repel transfers as it used to. There is now a greater range of parties than at most times in the past, and not all of their voters feel as antagonistic to Fianna Fáil as voters of Fine Gael and Labour did when the party system was, essentially, a competition between Fianna Fáil and the rest. The consequence is that although Ahern's record in terms of votes trails well behind that of the party's first four leaders, he has done better than any previous leader in converting votes into seats. In seat terms he is doing as well as Haughey and better than de Valera (Table 6.3).

Fianna Fáil's national vote share hardly altered compared with 2002, though this conceals some change in almost every constituency, with particularly large gains of over eight percentage points in Limerick E and Donegal SW and equally large losses in Mayo and Tipperary N. There were suggestions that it owed its success to the backing of voters in the commuter belt counties around Dublin (summed up in the cryptic neologism 'breakfast roll man'), who faced problems such as poor public transport and inadequate and expensive childcare provisions. Such voters had inflicted by-election defeats on Fianna Fáil in Kildare N and Meath in 2005, yet had backed the party in 2007, because, whatever the difficulty of travelling to their job, they saw Fianna Fáil as the party responsible for the fact that they had a job to travel to. The evidence is mixed: the party made above average gains, compared to 2002, in some of the constituencies doughnutting Dublin, such as Wicklow, Kildare S, and Meath, it is true, but it lost support in Kildare N and Louth. Overall the picture of gains and losses is shapeless, with no strong geographical patterns. Fianna Fáil lost five seats to Fine Gael, and most of its other gains and losses were due to redistricting: a reduction in the number of seats cost it one seat in both Cork NC and Dublin NC, while it picked up the newly created extra seats in Kildare N and Meath (see Table 6.4). The party remains over-represented by the electoral system due mainly to the small average number of TDs per constituency (only four, which is very low by the standards of

proportional representation systems internationally), winning 47 per cent of the 165 contested seats with 42 per cent of the votes, but it was not so over-represented as in 2002. With a little luck it could have taken additional seats, as three of its candidates (Denis O'Donovan in Cork SW, Martin Brady in Dublin NE and Tom Fleming in Kerry S) missed out only narrowly, while only two of its TDs were equally narrow winners (Niall Blaney in Donegal NE and Martin Mansergh in Tipperary S).

Table 6.4 Party gains and losses, 2007

	FF	FG	Lab	SF	Grn	From PD	Soc	Ind	Redistricting	Total
Gains by										
FF	–							3	2	5
FG	5	–	2	1		6	1	5		20
Lab			–		1				1	2
SF				–						0
Grn			1		–					1
PD						–				0
Soc							–			0
Ind	1							–		1
Redistricting	2							1	–	3
Total	8	0	3	1	1	6	1	9	3	32

Fine Gael

Fine Gael's performance can be interpreted in two very different ways. Those who see a glass half full would hail it as one of the outstanding achievements in Irish political history. The party, which after the 2002 debacle some thought was bound for oblivion,⁶ not only remained alive but gained 20 seats – a greater inter-election advance than any Irish party had ever made before. In the wake of the 2002 election some had predicted that by 2007 the new vigorous forces on the political scene would be dismembering what was left of Fine Gael's cadaver, but the party spectacularly defied these challenges and reasserted its status as the second largest party in the state, with more seats than all the smaller parties put together.

Others, though, see a glass half empty. The gain of 20 seats was based on a modest increase in votes; in 2002 its seat share dropped much more than its vote share, and this was simply reversed in 2007. If seats were allocated nationally according to first preference vote totals, Fine Gael's seat gain would have been far less dramatic, from 38 seats in 2002 to 47 in 2007. The 20 seats it gained, though impressive, is still a smaller number than the 23 it lost in 2002. Far from achieving any kind of breakthrough, Fine Gael has simply returned to the uninspiring level of support that has passed for normalcy since 1987. Indeed, its performance is virtually identical in both votes and seats to

that of 1987, and its 1987 result was described in the relevant volume in this series in terms such as 'lowest vote share since 1957', 'unambiguously gloomy' and 'transported back to its feeble position of the late 1950s'.⁷ Moreover, Fine Gael seems to be still almost irrelevant to government formation, with 51 seats bringing it no more power than 31 had in 2002.

Fine Gael made vote gains in all but eight constituencies, making 20 seat gains and sustaining no losses. The most spectacular gain was in Mayo, where the party's support rose by over 16 points as voters hoped they were playing their part in ensuring that the next Taoiseach would be a Mayo TD. Other notable gains were in Kerry South, where it won its first seat for 20 years; in Wicklow, where it won two seats for the first time since 1982; and in Clare, where it took two seats for the first time since 1989. Only Kildare S and three Dublin constituencies are now unrepresented by a Fine Gael TD, whereas there had been 13 such constituencies in 2002. Only two Fine Gael TDs lost their seats, in both cases to running mates. One defeated TD was Dr Liam Twomey, who was elected in Wexford in 2002 as an Independent⁸ and joined Fine Gael in September 2004; while the other, Gerard Murphy, had unseated frontbencher Michael Creed in 2002 and now lost his seat to Creed. Most of its seat gains came from the government parties, with only two being made at the expense of its putative coalition allies, Labour and the Greens (Table 6.4). The party narrowly missed out on two further gains, as a swing of less than 1 per cent would have seen it take seats in Carlow–Kilkenny and Cork E. As against this, had its vote gains in Clare, Cork SW and Dublin NE been very slightly smaller it would not have gained seats in each of these constituencies.

Overall, given the despondency in the party after the 2002 result, Fine Gael is justified in emphasising the positives of its performance. Realistically, it could not have been expected to do any better than it did, and it might well have done worse. Entering office remains at least one more push away, but its 2007 result gives it a platform from which it can make credible claims to be a party of government after the next election.

Labour

Labour's result was much the same as at most previous elections of the past 30 years: up a bit here, down a bit there, much the same overall. Over the ten elections of the period 1977–2007, Labour's vote fell outside the band 9–12 per cent, and its seats outside the band 15–21, only twice: in 1987 when it plunged to 6 per cent after the uncomfortable experience of the 1982–87 coalition government, and in 1992 when the Spring tide raised it to 19 per cent of the votes. This remarkable stability, 1987 and 1992 apart, suggests a party that has found its level within the party system – or, some would say, is stuck in a rut. The incorporation of the bulk of the Workers' Party (which won 5 per cent of the vote in 1989) via Democratic Left and New Agenda has made no perceptible difference. While Labour, unlike some other parties

that have flourished for a while, is not going to disappear, there is no sign that it is on course to achieve anything like the level of strength that the left in most of the rest of Europe has come to expect. Moreover, for as long as Fianna Fáil is able to command the kind of support it has received at the last three elections, Labour seems to have become almost as marginal in the government formation process as Fine Gael has.

The context in which we now evaluate Labour's performance (10 per cent of the votes, 20 seats) was expected to be very different. If the pre-election punditry had been correct, Labour would now be in a minority on the broad left, with Sinn Féin, the Socialists, the Greens and left-wing Independents having around 25 seats between them. Had that happened, analysts would have been quick to speculate on the displacement of Labour, the representative of the 'old left', by forces apparently more in tune with the twenty-first-century zeitgeist, and to suggest that Labour needs to move away from the centre if it is to broaden its appeal. Labour asserted its dominance of the left-hand side of the political equation by winning twice as many seats as Sinn Féin, the Greens and the Socialist Party combined – yet it did this despite winning 44,000 fewer votes than those parties did. Sinn Féin alone won more than two-thirds as many votes as Labour, an achievement obscured by its return of only four seats to Labour's 20; Labour would have been five seats behind the rest of the broad left, rather than ten seats ahead of it, had seats been awarded in proportion to national vote totals (Table 6.2). Labour's seats-to-votes ratio, calculated by dividing its share of the seats by its share of the votes, was, at 1.2, the highest ever. Clearly, there are many voters who are not attracted by the two main parties and whose inclinations are in some sense left of centre but who find other options more appealing than Labour.

Examining the entrails of Labour's 2007 result, we find that it slipped marginally in votes and fell back by one seat. It gained two seats, one at the expense of the Greens in Cork SC and the other by taking the new seat created in the Dublin Mid-West constituency. It lost three: the seats of retiring TDs in Carlow–Kilkenny and Dublin North were not held, and in Kerry South the incumbent Breeda Moynihan-Cronin, who was prevailed upon to stand again having earlier announced that she would be retiring, was defeated. Labour had been represented in Carlow–Kilkenny by father and son James and Séamus Pattison almost continuously since 1933, and another dynasty was ended when, for the first time since 1943, there was no Spring on the ticket in Kerry North, where Labour's vote dropped by over 11 per cent. At least, unlike in 2002, some new blood arrived in the Dáil group, with Joanna Tuffy in Dublin MW, Ciarán Lynch in Cork SC, and Seán Sherlock, who succeeded his father in Cork E, reducing the age profile somewhat (the 17 re-elected Labour TDs had an average age of 58 at the time of the election).

Although some in the party claimed after the election that a few hundred votes in a handful of constituencies could have made a significant difference,

the evidence contradicts this. In only one constituency did Labour narrowly miss out on a seat (in Dublin SC Eric Byrne finished just 69 votes short of a seat), while in two (Cork E and Dublin W) it was Labour that clung on by its fingertips. Although the party leadership changed in the late summer, as it had within months of both the 1997 and 2002 elections, the new leader Éamon Gilmore, upon taking over, emphasised continuity of philosophy, improved organisation and better presentation of Labour's existing values and policies rather than a more fundamental reassessment. As at most elections over the last 30 years, Labour's performance was neither bad enough to prompt a root-and-branch self-examination nor good enough to lift it into the top division.

Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin confirmed its dominance over the SDLP in the Northern Ireland Assembly election of 7 March and confidently expected to continue its onward march in the Dáil election. It was to discover that the southern electorate needs wooing in a rather different way from northern nationalists. The party had been widely expected to win around 10–12 seats, and there were signs, such as Martin McGuinness's prediction that the other parties would be lining up to try to persuade it to join a coalition after the election, that it was coming to believe its own hype. The idea that it could actually slip in support compared with 2002 was never mooted, making its loss of one seat all the more of a shock and, quite apart from the details of its performance, the result punctured the myth of the party's unstoppable rise North and South.

Sinn Féin's national vote went up but it slipped back by two percentage points in Dublin, where it had been most confident of gains. It entered the election with two seats in Dublin and was regarded as virtually certain to add three more. In the event, one of its TDs lost his seat (Seán Crowe in Dublin SW), the other (Aengus Ó Snodaigh in Dublin SC) hung on by 69 votes, and none of the other three candidates seen as certainties to enter the 30th Dáil (Mary-Lou McDonald in Dublin Central, Larry O'Toole in Dublin NE and Dessie Ellis in Dublin NW) came close to taking a seat. Outside the capital its vote rose in all but a handful of constituencies, but only in Donegal, where it presumably picked up republican votes from the disbanded Blaneyite organisation (see 'Others' section below), did it really give the established parties a scare. For the most part it fell short on first preferences and compounded this by its continued inability to attract lower preferences at the same rate as most other parties.

On the basis of its national support it would have earned 12 seats on a proportional basis (Table 6.2), but it missed out on seats primarily because it did not have concentrated support in enough specific constituencies. The party won between 5 and 10 per cent of the votes in 11 constituencies, which added impressively to its national vote total but was nowhere near enough to win a seat in any one constituency. Only eight of its candidates won more

than 0.6 Droop quotas, which as we saw earlier is the level above which a majority of candidates win election, and even four of these missed out on election due partly to their inability to attract transfers. In Donegal SW Pearse Doherty won the highest vote (0.85 quotas) of any unsuccessful candidate in the country. Only one other candidate had between 0.5 and 0.6 quotas; the other 32 started with less than half a quota, which spells almost certain defeat for any candidate, especially one with no running mate and no allied parties. Although it has slightly higher support than in 2002, its prospects look less bright than they did five years ago. After the 2002 election it was quite plausible to expect that one more heave in six to ten constituencies would bring a rich tranche of seats clattering into Sinn Féin's hands. After the 2007 election, in contrast, most of what seemed to be low-hanging fruit have retreated out of easy reach, and it remains to be seen whether 2007 is just a temporary setback to the party's inexorable progress or whether 2002 will come to be seen as Sinn Féin's high water mark.

Green Party

For the first time in its existence the Green Party entered government after the 2007 election, and that inevitably invests the party's electoral performance with the retrospective aura of success. When the votes were counted on 25 May, though, there did not seem to be very much to celebrate. The outstanding feature of the Greens' 2007 result, in fact, is how similar it was to its 2002 result. Usually, there is significant variation in a party's performance across the country, but the Green Party's 2007 vote level was within 2.5 per cent, either above or below, of its 2002 level in all but three constituencies: Cork SW, Cork NW, and Louth. Moreover, in the first two of those its growth was larger than the norm simply because it had not run a candidate in 2002, while in Louth its advance (3.4 per cent) scarcely represented a seismic shift in its appeal.

Its seat level remained unchanged, as it lost one seat and gained another. Its defeat came in Cork SC, where Dan Boyle, who had been seen as a likely minister if the party entered government, lost to Labour in one of the biggest surprises of the election. Because Boyle was seen as a virtual certainty to be re-elected, his campaign could not credibly send out the message that every vote was crucial. Irish politicians seeking election react to being described as 'safe' in the same way as Count Dracula reacts to garlic, and while their horror at the word sometimes seems to border on superstition, Boyle's defeat is a reminder that it is by no means irrational. Two other TDs came close to defeat. In Dublin SE John Gormley narrowly pipped Michael McDowell for the last seat, just as in 1997, and if McDowell had received a slightly more supportive transfer from Fianna Fáil on the last count then Gormley would have lost (see section on transfers below). In Dun Laoghaire, Ciarán Cuffe came within 110 votes of being eliminated after the eighth count. Indeed, of the six constituencies where the Greens won a seat in 2002, their

vote dropped in four and remained unchanged in one; only Éamon Ryan in Dublin South showed any real increase in support. The party's three biggest vote losses came in constituencies where it had a TD, perhaps a sign that its voters had expected something from their Green TDs, either at national level or in terms of local activity, that they did not get. If it was the second half of the 'think globally, act locally' slogan that voters wanted more of, then the entry to ministerial positions of three of the party's six TDs may be electorally damaging rather than rewarding.

Its only seat gain saw the election of its deputy leader, Mary White, in Carlow-Kilkenny. This marked a number of firsts: White became the first female Green TD, the first woman ever elected from either Carlow or Kilkenny, and the first Green TD to represent a predominantly rural constituency. Even her vote fell back compared with 2002; her election in 2007 was due partly to there being an additional seat available in the constituency (one having been reserved for the Ceann Comhairle in 2002) and partly to poor vote management by Fine Gael (see later section). Other seat gains that had been predicted at the start of the campaign – Deirdre de Búrca in Wicklow, Niall Ó Brocháin in Galway West (see chapter 5), and perhaps Mark Dearey in Louth or Tony McDermott in Dublin SC – did not come close to materialising, and no Green anywhere in the country was the runner-up in their constituency. While we do not yet know the constituency configuration on which the next election will be fought, at present there are more seats that the party is close to losing than it is close to winning, and the next election could be a challenging occasion for the Greens.

Progressive Democrats

Ever since the PDs were founded in the mid-1980s, and certainly from the 1989 election, the party has felt beset by unsympathetic critics predicting its imminent demise. On each occasion, sometimes only just, it was able to prove its detractors wrong – but in 2007 the prophecies of doom finally came true. The PDs' result represented something close to wipe-out. The party lost about a third of its votes and three-quarters of its eight seats, placing its continued existence in doubt. Those defeated included its leader, Michael McDowell, one of the first crop of PD TDs in 1987; its deputy leader Liz O'Donnell, a TD since 1992; its president Tom Parlon; Fiona O'Malley, a daughter of its first leader Des O'Malley; and Tim O'Malley, a cousin of Des O'Malley and the third in a line of O'Malleys who had held a seat in Limerick East continuously since 1954.

On a proportional basis its national vote total would have earned it five seats instead of the two it won (Table 6.2), but it has had lucky breaks in vote-seat conversion in the past and this time the pendulum swung the other way. Of its six defeated TDs, only Michael McDowell in Dublin SE and Tim O'Malley in Limerick E came close to holding their seats. In the other four cases the party's vote plunged to around half of its 2002 level, and, as

mentioned above, one of its defeated TDs, Mae Sexton from Longford, was the only incumbent in the country who did not even qualify for reimbursement of expenses (Table 6.1).

Back in 1987 Fine Gael had been the main victim of the emergence of the PDs, and 20 years on it was Fine Gael that may have delivered the *coup de grâce* to the party, as five of its seat losses were definitely to Fine Gael and the sixth, that of Mae Sexton, while complicated by a rearrangement of constituencies in the north-west and midlands, is probably best seen that way as well. It was not just Fine Gael that bore responsibility for the PDs' virtual obliteration, though, for their coalition partner Fianna Fáil could have come to their aid through transfers. Instead, a weak terminal transfer from Fianna Fáil cost the PDs two seats (see later section), including that of their leader. It is as yet too early to be certain whether the PDs will remain in existence long enough to contest the next election. If they do decide to disband, we can confidently conclude that never before has a party that averaged just 5.6 per cent of the votes in the six elections that it contested made such an impact on government policy.

Others

Independent candidates took 13 seats in 2002, the highest number since 1951, and their ranks increased in 2005 when Catherine Murphy won the Kildare N by-election, but most of them came back down to earth with a bump in 2007. Only ten of these Independents contested the election under that label, along with an eleventh, Beverley Flynn (see next page). Two retired (Marian Harkin and Mildred Fox), and a further two joined parties. In Donegal NE Niall Blaney joined Fianna Fáil in July 2006, finally putting an end to the split that began in 1970 with the Arms Crisis, when his uncle Neil T. Blaney had been dismissed from government by Taoiseach Jack Lynch. Blaney had been a TD since 1948, and his father before him had represented Donegal from 1927. Neil T. Blaney was expelled from Fianna Fáil in 1972 and had styled himself and his organisation 'Independent Fianna Fáil', under which label he had been continuously re-elected until his death in 1995. He had been succeeded by his brother Harry, Niall's father. The durability of the Blaney dynasty in Donegal politics, and its strong roots in Fianna Fáil, gave Niall Blaney's incorporation into the party in 2006 something of the aura of the return of the prodigal son. The other Independent TD to join a party was Liam Twomey, who not only joined Fine Gael but became that party's spokesperson on health, but he then became one of only two Fine Gael TDs to lose a seat in 2007.

Of the 11 TDs who contested the election as Independents, five were re-elected, in most cases quite comfortably. Three had strong roots in parties – or, in Noel Whelan's now widely used phrase, came from a particular 'gene pool'. Michael Lowry, who headed the poll in Tipperary N, had been a Fine Gael TD and minister before parting company with the party in 1997 over his

financial affairs. In Kerry S Jackie Healy-Rae, a one-time Fianna Fáil stalwart in the constituency, had won a seat as an Independent in 1997 and retained it ever since, being one of the 'gang of four' Independents who had supported the FF-PD minority government between 1997 and 2002. In Mayo Beverley Flynn, elected for Fianna Fáil in 1997 and 2002, was expelled from the party in May 2004 following the failure of a libel action she took against the national broadcaster RTÉ. Her father had been a Fianna Fáil TD and minister as well as a European Commissioner, and her 2007 campaign made clear her expectations of a return to the party fold: her advertisements used the phrase 'For Flynn', with the letters 'FF' highlighted. The other two, Tony Gregory and Finian McGrath, were left-wing Independents representing adjacent constituencies in Dublin. McGrath was a former member of the constituency organisation of Gregory, who, having been elected at all nine elections from February 1982 to 2007, has become the second most successful Independent TD in Irish political history, bettered only by Alfie Byrne, who was elected to 13 Dála and spent 31 years as a TD between 1922 and 1956.

The other six lost their seats. The only one elected prior to 2002, Séamus Healy, was a surprise and narrow loser to Fianna Fáil in Tipperary S. Catherine Murphy, like Healy a left-wing Independent, lost to Fianna Fáil in Kildare N. James Breen, a Fianna Fáil 'gene pool' Independent in Clare, lost narrowly to Fine Gael. The other three – Paudge Connolly in Cavan–Monaghan, Jerry Cowley in Mayo and Paddy McHugh in Galway E – lost around half of their 2002 support and came nowhere near retaining their seats.

Independents have followed an almost market-driven cyclical pattern at recent elections. After the 1997 election their scarcity, and the minority government's reliance on them, enabled them to make demands on behalf of their constituencies. As a result an Independent TD seemed to become a valuable commodity for a constituency, and in 2002 many more were elected – but now there was an over-supply, not to mention a majority government, and so they had much less value. This led to a drastic reduction in their numbers at the 2007 election, but those few found themselves in a position to secure benefits for their constituency in the government formation process (see chapter 12). On this basis, the next election might see a resurgence in Independents' fortunes.

Elsewhere in the 'others' category, the Socialist Party had been expected to return to the Dáil with two seats, but instead it lost the only one it had, when its leader Joe Higgins lost his Dublin West seat by around 400 votes. Higgins had possessed the rare capacity to unsettle the Taoiseach in parliamentary questioning, and (once he was safely defeated) even his political opponents agreed that, like the PD leader Michael McDowell at the opposite end of the political spectrum, he would be a major loss to parliamentary politics. The Socialists' other hope of a seat had lain in Clare Daly in Dublin North, where she had been the runner-up in 2002, but her vote slipped by nearly four percentage points. The Socialists were unfortunate in that their strongest two constituencies were also the two that suffered most from the failure of the

Dáil to redraw the constituencies in the light of the 2006 census (see above) – both Dublin North and Dublin West should have had an additional seat. However, the Socialist Party as a whole won only around 300 votes more than the Independent Michael Lowry. Further on the left, the People before Profit movement, largely a label for the Socialist Workers' Party, came close to winning a seat in the far from proletarian constituency of Dun Laoghaire, where its candidate Richard Boyd Barrett's 5,223 first preferences perhaps owed more to his local activism in defence of the area's amenities and heritage than to his views on international capitalism. Finally, the Christian Solidarity Party continued to fight the good fight against onrushing secularism in the face of an indifferent public; it ran eight candidates, but none of them managed to win even 1 per cent of the votes in their constituency.

Vote transfers

Under the PR-STV electoral system voters can rank candidates in order of their preference, and the transfer of votes from eliminated or elected candidates to continuing candidates as each constituency count progresses enables us to glean information about patterns in the preference orderings given by voters (see appendix 4 for a full explanation of PR-STV). Voters are free to rank candidates on any basis they wish, but for most voters the main criterion is party, with geography usually the second most important. Of course, we are unable to analyse all votes; the only ones available for analysis are those that were the subject of a distribution. Our ability to draw inferences about the preferences of supporters of different parties is reduced by the practice of multiple eliminations (the simultaneous elimination of candidates not all from the same party), making it impossible to tell how each candidate's votes transferred. Multiple eliminations save some time, but they reduce the transparency of the counting process.

If all voters were entirely party-oriented, we would expect all those awarding a first preference to a candidate of one party to give their second preference to another candidate of the same party. Analysis of intra-party transfers, shown in Table 6.5, shows that internal party solidarity is rather less than perfect.⁹ In the case of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, around two-thirds of votes transfer to another candidate of the same party when one is available, while in Labour fewer than half of votes remained within the party fold. The figures are much the same as in 2002, and are well below those for the period from the 1920s to the 1980s, when Fianna Fáil's internal solidarity averaged over 80 per cent, Fine Gael's over 70 per cent and Labour's over 60 per cent. As in 2002, the main message in most candidates' election literature was 'Vote for Me', though in fairness 'And please give your next preference(s) to my running mate(s)' was usually to be found in small letters at the bottom of the page. As noted in both chapters 4 and 13, Fianna Fáil in particular has responded to this decline in straight party-ticket voting by running fewer candidates, thus

ensuring that fewer votes 'leak away' on eliminations. In 1977 32 Fianna Fáil candidates across the country were eliminated at some stage of the count, but in 2007 there were only 14 Fianna Fáil eliminations. There was considerable variation across the country, with Fianna Fáil's solidarity ranging from only 45 per cent in Dublin MW to over 85 per cent in Cork NW and Donegal NE, and Fine Gael's from 48 per cent in Kerry S to over 80 per cent in Wexford.

Table 6.5 Transfer patterns at 2007 election (%)

<i>From</i>	<i>Available</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>FF</i>	<i>FG</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>PD</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>Grn</i>
<i>Internal solidarity:</i>								
FF	FF	34	66.9					
FG	FG	29		64.4				
Lab	Lab	5			42.5			
<i>Inter-party transfers:</i>								
FF	PD	4				37.1		
PD	FF	9	49.0					
PD	FF, FG	9	49.0	27.9				
FG	FF, Lab	4	20.1		58.6			
FG	FF, SF	4	17.4				15.9	
Lab	FF, FG	10	19.9	45.9				
Lab	FG, Grn	3		33.9				36.8
Lab	FF, SF	2	15.1				10.7	
Grn	FF	17	11.0					
Grn	Lab	19			41.8			
Grn	FF, FG	17	11.0	28.7				
Grn	FF, Lab	16	10.0		39.9			
Grn	FG, Lab	19		26.4	41.8			
Grn	FF, FG, Lab	16	10.0	27.0	39.9			
SF	FF, FG	23	26.0	21.5				
SF	FF, Lab	20	23.6		26.8			

Note: The 'Available' column shows those parties that had candidates available in each case to receive transfers. 'Inter-party' transfers refer only to terminal transfers, in other words to cases where the party whose votes were being distributed had no candidates of its own left in the count.

The only seat that was lost to a party because of a weak internal transfer was in Carlow–Kilkenny, where upon the elimination of a Fine Gael candidate only about half of his votes went to the two remaining Fine Gael candidates while enough leaked to the Green candidate to ensure that she pipped the second Fine Gael candidate for the last seat. Geography played a large part here, as the eliminated Fine Gael candidate and the Green candidate were both from Carlow, while the other two Fine Gael candidates were from Kilkenny. The impact of geography was noticeable in many transfers around the country, perhaps most dramatically in the large constituency of Mayo, where on the last count 54 per cent of the votes of an eliminated Fine Gael

candidate, Michelle Mulherin, passed to the other Fine Gael candidate, while the two remaining Fianna Fáil candidates received 26 per cent; the Fianna Fáil candidate from Mulherin's home town of Ballina received 1,924 of her transfers, while the Fianna Fáil candidate whose base was 40 kilometres away got just 89.

Turning to inter-party relationships, transfers between some pairs of parties were slightly stronger than at the 2002 election, which had been characterised by exceptionally low levels of inter-party solidarity. On the government side, transfers from the PDs to Fianna Fáil were up on 2002, though still ran at less than 50 per cent in situations where a Fianna Fáil candidate was available to receive terminal transfers from a PD candidate. On the opposition side, Labour voters preferred Fine Gael to Fianna Fáil, though despite the alliance between Fine Gael and Labour the pattern was not much stronger than in 2002, while Fine Gael voters were more strongly inclined to give preference to Labour over Fianna Fáil candidates (see photo section for examples from Cork SW and Dublin SE of advice to Fine Gael and Labour voters to give their next preference to the other party). These figures are a far cry from those of 1973, the high point of solidarity between Fine Gael and Labour, when more than 70 per cent of terminal transfers flowed from one of these parties to the other, a decline that reflects the wider range of acceptable alternatives now available and the less structured nature of political competition.

When, in the days after the election, the Greens were deciding whether to join Bertie Ahern's third coalition government, opponents claimed that Green voters had certainly not shown any sign that this was a government they had hoped for. Table 6.5 shows that Green terminal transfers were more than twice as likely to go to Fine Gael as to Fianna Fáil, and four times as likely to go to Labour rather than to Fianna Fáil, when this choice arose. When all three parties had candidates available to receive terminal Green transfers, the two opposition parties together received 67 per cent to Fianna Fáil's 10 per cent. This does not prove that the Green Party acted contrary to its mandate when it signed up to the Programme for Government, but it helps explain the cries of pain heard in some quarters. Sinn Féin terminal transfers did not display the mildly pro-Fianna Fáil leanings seen in 2002; this time, the party's votes were about equally likely to pass on to Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or Labour. Sinn Féin itself continued to be unattractive to supporters of other parties. There are few cases available for analysis, but we can see from Table 6.5 that when supporters of Fine Gael or Labour had a straight choice between Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin candidates to transfer to, they were even less likely to transfer to Sinn Féin than to Fianna Fáil.

In 2002 the two main opposition parties did not have a transfer pact, and as it turned out this cost them only one seat, in Tipperary North. The existence of such an agreement in 2007 brought them the modest dividend of two seats, Fine Gael benefiting in Cork SW and Tipperary N (see Table 6.6). Fianna Fáil did not gain a single seat due to inter-party transfers, while transfers among

candidates of other parties cost the party five seats; had the party not suffered from this modest degree of solidarity among its opponents it would have won 83 seats and could have dispensed with some of its eventual coalition partners when forming a new government. The most striking of these transfers was in Dublin NC where the left-wing Independent Finian McGrath, over 1,800 behind Fianna Fáil's highly publicity-conscious incumbent Ivor Callely on first preferences, eventually finished more than 1,400 votes ahead of him, due primarily to receiving 70 per cent of the votes from the Green and Labour candidates upon their joint elimination, a level of transfer solidarity higher than we often see within parties these days, let alone between them. Table 6.6 also highlights the Green Party's appeal for voters across the board; transfers from the left took John Gormley into a seat ahead of the PD leader in Dublin SE, while transfers from the right enabled Ciarán Cuffe to overtake the People before Profit candidate in Dun Laoghaire. It also demonstrates the party's dependence on transfers; four of its six TDs were reliant on a favourable transfer from elsewhere to overtake a candidate of another party. Sinn Féin, in contrast, remained unattractive to supporters of other parties. This did not quite cost it any seats, though in Dublin SC it nearly did so as Eric Byrne of Labour, nearly 800 votes behind Sinn Féin's Aengus Ó Snodaigh on first preferences, narrowed the gap to 69 votes by the last count thanks mainly to transfers from the Green Party candidate.

Table 6.6 Constituencies where transfers affected the outcome

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Seat won by</i>	<i>At the expense of</i>	<i>Due to transfers from</i>
Carlow–Kilkenny	Mary White Grn	John Paul Phelan FG	Lab, SF, FF
Cork SW	Jim O'Keeffe FG	Denis O'Donovan FF	Lab
Dublin MW	Joanna Tuffy Lab	Frances Fitzgerald FG	Ind, SF, FF
	Paul Gogarty Grn	Frances Fitzgerald FG	Ind, SF, FF
Dublin NC	Finian McGrath Ind	Ivor Callely FF	Lab, Grn, SF
Dublin NE	Tommy Broughan Lab	Martin Brady FF	SF
Dublin SE	John Gormley Grn	Michael McDowell PD	SF
Dun Laoghaire	Ciarán Cuffe Grn	Richard Boyd-Barrett PbP	PD, FG
Kerry S	Jackie Healy-Rae Ind	Tom Fleming FF	Lab, FG
Tipperary N	Noel Coonan FG	Michael Smith FF	Lab

As well as the seats that were swung by transfers, there were others that could have been but were not. In particular, weak terminal transfers from Fianna Fáil led to three seats going to candidates from the (then) opposition rather than to allies. Two of the defeated PD deputies, Michael McDowell in Dublin SE and Tim O'Malley in Limerick E, received an unimpressive share of the final Fianna Fáil transfer (43 per cent and 27 per cent respectively); each would have been elected had he received 50–60 per cent of these transfers. This rate of transferring was well below the levels seen in both 1997 and 2002

and perhaps indicates a cooling of enthusiasm among Fianna Fáil supporters towards the PDs under their new and more combative leader. The seats went instead to John Gormley (Green) and Kieran O'Donnell (FG). In Clare, 40 per cent of the final Fianna Fáil transfer went to the 'Fianna Fáil gene pool' Independent James Breen, which was not quite enough to give him, rather than Fine Gael's Joe Carey, the last seat. Had the PDs won four seats in total rather than two, and had one more well-disposed Independent been elected, then Fianna Fáil and the PDs would have had the numbers to form a minority government which, with one seat more than their 1997–2002 administration, would have been quite comfortable thanks to the support of friendly Independents.

Intra-party competition and vote management

Under PR-STV, candidates, especially in the two major parties, are in competition with their running mates as well as with candidates from other parties, and some of the most intense battles take place within the party fold. From the party's point of view, this competition can be beneficial; it gives each candidate an incentive to bring in as many votes as he/she can, both by active campaigning and by his/her work between elections, and thus contributes to maximising the party's overall vote total. At the same time, the party must try to ensure that intra-party competition does not get out of hand and disrupt its cohesion, leading to splits or the creation of bitterly opposed factions. In addition, candidates sense that concentrating their fire on a running mate rather than on the opposition does not impress the voters and, moreover, is likely to be looked askance upon by the party leadership and central organisation and may thus be costly when promotional opportunities (minister, frontbench spokesperson, parliamentary committee chair) arise. Consequently, parties try to maintain a public facade of unity, knowing that the media will prick up their ears if the fur starts flying in fights between its candidates.

Moreover, a party cannot simply leave its candidates to their own devices, because very often it feels that the number of seats it wins in a constituency could depend on how its votes are divided among the candidates. For example, suppose it expects to win about 32 per cent of the votes in a four-seat constituency, where the quota equals 20 per cent. If it runs two candidates, and these two split the party vote evenly between them, it has a much better chance of taking two seats than if one candidate has a quota or more on first preferences and the other is left behind on 12 per cent or less. In other words, parties often attempt to 'manage' their votes within each constituency with the aim of maximising their seat return. In most cases it is obvious retrospectively that the number of votes alone determined the outcome and that vote management could not have made any difference to the destination of the seats, but during the campaign itself this may not

be apparent, and the head offices of both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, acting with and through constituency organisations, devise and try to implement vote management strategies in many constituencies. Parties are undoubtedly more aware of the benefits of vote management than they used to be, and with advances in communications the central election committees are able to monitor and if necessary intervene in any constituency on a daily basis. The constituency director of elections has responsibility for enforcing such schemes. In Mayo, for instance, local media reported 'a frank exchange of views' at a meeting where the four Fine Gael candidates, together with their agents, sat down with the director of elections to thrash out a new division of the constituency.¹⁰ With the two incumbents secure, both non-incumbents sought to build a personal support base. One of the two non-incumbents, Michelle Mulherin, secured the backing of the party's elected representatives on Mayo County Council, while the other, John O'Mahony, the manager of the Mayo football team, was said to be mobilising the extensive GAA network in his support.¹¹

Characteristically, vote management entails dividing the constituency geographically and, like handing out slices of a pie, awarding sections of it to individual candidates. In urban areas, an alternative approach that keeps candidates apart without formally dividing the territory involves allowing each candidate to canvass the whole constituency but making sure that only one candidate is in a particular area at a time (see Terence Flanagan's account in chapter 5). Candidates may be told which areas they are and are not permitted to canvass, and voters may be asked to vote in a particular way depending on which part of the constituency they live in. For example, in the Wexford constituency Fianna Fáil awarded each of its three candidates sole canvassing rights in their home area, while the Gorey area was divided among them down to the level of individual polling boxes. Within Fine Gael, the New Ross electoral area was open territory, and, moreover, each candidate was allowed to canvass one day a week in the other candidates' areas provided this was arranged in advance (see also the party's newspaper advertisement in the *Echo* newspapers, reproduced in the photo section).¹² Candidates will, of course, expect to be given the area around their home base, and so the borders of their respective bailiwicks, like a disputed frontier between states, are where trouble is most likely to flare. Matters can become particularly tense if one candidate is perceived as a front-runner, in which case vote management requires trying to siphon some of his or her support to the weaker member of the team. As well as provoking resistance from the front-runner, this tactic, if pushed too far, might have the unintended effect of leading to the election of the weaker candidate at the expense of the front-runner, thus costing the party one of its leading lights, as happened in Cork NW in 2002 when a Fine Gael vote management plan backfired and the front-bencher Michael Creed lost his seat as a result.¹³

When party support seems to be slipping candidates become edgy and the normal courtesies of intra-party conduct may be cast to the winds. In Cork E the two Fianna Fáil incumbents took their gloves off in the run-up to polling day. Michael Ahern, based in the south of the constituency, appealed for support from the northern area, the bailiwick of Ned O’Keeffe. Traditional boundaries, he said, meant nothing in this election: ‘At the last election there was a boundary in place which he [O’Keeffe] broke lock, stock and barrel right up to my doorstep. This time there is no boundary so it is open territory.’¹⁴ O’Keeffe, who had had to resign a junior ministerial position in 2001 and had then suffered the further pain of seeing Ahern appointed to the equivalent position in June 2002, said that if Ahern had performed competently in his ministerial post Fianna Fáil would have been pressing for three seats in the constituency instead of having to worry about holding on to two. Ahern rounded off the exchange by opining that some of O’Keeffe’s comments amounted to slander, though he did not intend to take legal action. In the event, as at every election since November 1982, both Ahern and O’Keeffe were comfortably re-elected.

In Dublin Central vote management takes on a different meaning altogether. Fianna Fáil usually wins around 40 per cent of the votes here, making it competitive for two seats. Whereas the logic outlined above would suggest something like an even division of the votes between two candidates, the local constituency organisation, dominated by party leader Bertie Ahern, operates instead the tactic of trying to maximise Ahern’s first preference support in the hope that enough votes will transfer from his surplus on to his running mate(s) to secure a second seat. Neutral observers believe that when Fianna Fáil has taken two seats in Dublin Central it has been despite rather than because of this singular approach, but, undaunted, the organisation repeated the tactic in 2007. Ahern received 12,734 first preferences, 83 per cent of the party total. On this occasion he had two running mates – reportedly this was simply because he had been unable to decide which one to drop from the ticket, and so let them both stand – and they were in effect competing for Ahern’s second preferences, with the winner likely to take a seat. Although Mary Fitzpatrick received more first preferences than Cyprian Brady (1,725 compared with 939), Brady, a long-time member of Ahern’s constituency organisation, received over 1,000 more of Ahern’s second preferences than she did and went on to take the seat. It turned out that the party organisation had distributed 30,000 leaflets early in the morning of election day asking voters to vote 1–2–3 in that order for Ahern, Brady and Fitzpatrick (see photo section). While, Fitzpatrick said, ‘I never thought they were the Legion of Mary’, she had not expected the party to ‘shaft’ and ‘undermine’ her as it had.¹⁵ However, one of Ahern’s associates in the constituency, Chris Wall, explained that Fitzpatrick had brought her fate upon herself by firing the first shot: she had distributed campaign literature in some areas asking voters to give her their first preference. Wall said: ‘She was asked not to do this sort

of thing. Having then done it, she therefore effectively set in train a motion she wasn't going to be able to stop.'

In the event, Fianna Fáil's vote management schemes probably made little difference, because where they were applied it usually turned out that the party's level of support alone pretty much determined its level of support. There were three constituencies where a more even spread of support between its candidates could have brought an extra seat, most spectacularly in Limerick East, where its leading light Willie O'Dea won over 19,000 first preferences, 79 per cent of the party total, and it finished with only two seats in this five-seater despite winning 49 per cent of the votes. In Dublin Mid-West and Kerry South, too, a more even balance of support between its two candidates would have brought an extra seat. Fine Gael took seats in Laois–Offaly, Roscommon–Leitrim South and Wicklow that might have been forfeit had one of its candidates run too far ahead of the other, but let slip one to Mary White of the Greens in Carlow-Kilkenny by insufficient management. Labour rarely has enough votes to need to manage them, but in the one constituency where it had a real chance of taking two seats, Dublin SC, its front-runner was too far ahead of its second candidate, Eric Byrne (the victim of a five-vote defeat in 1992), who missed out on a seat by fewer than 100 votes in consequence.

The members of the 30th Dáil

Turnover, age and experience

The turnover in the composition of the Dáil was unusually high, though not quite as extensive as in 2002 when over a third of the membership had changed. In 2007, 19 TDs retired and 30 were defeated. Those retiring included three former cabinet ministers (Noel Davern, Síle de Valera and Joe Walsh), plus 'father of the house' and former Ceann Comhairle Séamus Pattison who stood down after almost 46 years' continuous membership, the sixth longest on record. The 49 departing TDs were replaced by 38 first-time TDs along with 11 former TDs who had departed from the Dáil in 2002 (ten were defeated and one retired) and were now reclaiming their place. These 11 returnees included the former deputy leader of Fianna Fáil, Mary O'Rourke, and the veteran Fine Gael campaigner from Cork SW, P. J. Sheehan, who has been contesting elections since the 1960s and at 74 may well be the oldest deputy ever to reclaim a seat.

The average age of the TDs in May 2007 was 51, and on average they had been aged 40 when first elected. These figures are a little higher than at some past elections, partly because several new TDs are not exactly youngsters: ten were in their fifties and two, Michael Fitzpatrick and Martin Mansergh, in their sixties. Among the party groups, Labour's average age is the highest at 55 while the Greens' is youngest (47). The median TD entered the Dáil in 1997, and 97 have known Dáil life only under a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach. Just

seven TDs, including the leaders of the two major parties, entered the Dáil before 1981. Most TDs (97 out of 166) were elected the first time they stood, and only 11 succeeded after two or more defeats.

This was the first Dáil election to take place since the introduction of the prohibition of the 'dual mandate', meaning that TDs and senators can no longer simultaneously be members of a local authority. Some incumbents had expressed fears that as a result of being unable to participate in the work of their County or City Council, they would be more vulnerable than before to being unseated by running mates who could assiduously cultivate the grass roots that they were now prevented from attending to, but in the event there was nothing unusual about the pattern of turnover and certainly no sign that hungry young councillors were ousting deputies who were spending too much time for their constituents' liking on national parliamentary work. Of the 12 defeated Fianna Fáil TDs, only four were displaced by a running mate (three of these running mates were former TDs and the fourth was not a councillor), and while both defeated Fine Gael TDs were replaced by running mates, one of these was a former TD and the other the son of a former TD.

Routes to the Dáil

While there was no sign of councillors rising en masse to take the seats of incumbents, it remains the case that there is no better base for launching a Dáil career than being a councillor. Nearly 77 per cent of TDs were councillors before becoming Dáil deputies, and only 22 of the 166 TDs have never been councillors. The percentage of former councillors among the first-time TDs was, at 76 per cent, essentially the same as among TDs as a whole. Being a senator also helps: 14 members of the 30th Dáil moved across from the upper house. Fine Gael had picked its Seanad candidates in 2002 with the next Dáil election in mind,¹⁶ and of its 15 Seanad members ten stood in the Dáil election and six of these won seats.

Rather than build a base from scratch, it is easier to take over one already built by a close relative. The Dáil continues to stand out in a comparative context for the very high number of its members (44 out of 166, or 27 per cent) who have been preceded by one or more relatives. On a subjective judgement, this was significant in the TD's initial election in all but six cases. The largest category consists of the 25 sons who followed their fathers into the house, and there are also five nephews, four daughters and three brothers.

Background of deputies

The Dáil has always been highly unrepresentative of the gender balance in Irish society, with the number of female TDs growing at a glacial pace. In 2007 even this slow advance ground to a halt, as only 22 women were elected to the 30th Dáil: the same number as in the 29th Dáil and one fewer than the number of outgoing female TDs.¹⁷ Ireland, with women making up only 13 per cent of the Dáil, is now near the bottom of the parliamentary gender

balance league. Women do not make up even 10 per cent of TDs of either Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, so if change is to come it must entail a rethink by these parties of their candidate selection policies. In contrast, 35 per cent of Labour deputies are female, while the collapse of the PDs, whose Dáil group from 2002–07 was 50 per cent female, did not help matters.

Most TDs (54 per cent, the highest proportion ever) can be classified as having pursued a professional occupation before entering the Dáil, while very few have a background as manual workers. A significant proportion of TDs (22 per cent), as in earlier Dála, can be classified as having a 'commercial' background, characteristically being small business people such as auctioneers, shopkeepers or publicans. Only 9 per cent of TDs, the lowest percentage ever, are farmers – though as the proportion of full-time farmers shrinks while part-time farming grows, it is harder to draw a clear line between those who are farmers and those who are not. The rise in the proportion of professionals is mirrored by a rise in the level of educational qualifications – for the first time ever, a majority of TDs have a university degree.

Conclusion

The 2007 election produced a government that was little changed from its predecessor and much the same could be said about its impact on the composition of the Dáil. Fine Gael defied its obituary writers by recording a large seat gain, but, creditable as this was, it was the product of a modest gain in votes, merely restored it to its pre-2002 level of strength rather than representing any transformation of its position in the party system, and left it still stranded in opposition. Fianna Fáil, Labour, Sinn Féin and the Greens registered the same levels of support as in 2002 – Labour's result was expected but the predictions of significant gains and losses for the other three parties showed that in the right circumstances even a result of 'little real change' can make a dramatic story.

The next election will undoubtedly be fought on a different set of constituency boundaries, so the 2007 marginals may not be the key marginals during the next campaign. Whatever the boundaries, some constituencies are bound to prove very marginal: in 2007 there were two constituencies where a swing of fewer than 100 votes would have created a seat change and a further nine where fewer than 500 votes were needed. In general terms, several scenarios are plausible. Fine Gael, having made up so much ground in 2007, might be able to achieve the further advance that it needs in order to form the core of an alternative government, a task that would be facilitated were the PDs to disappear before the next election. However, Fine Gael's fortunes have waxed and waned consistently at recent elections – ever since February 1982, it has gained at one election and lost ground at the next one – and unless it can break this pattern Fianna Fáil will be very difficult to dislodge from office. The three main parties, having been reduced in 2002 to their

lowest collective vote share since 1948, reasserted their dominance in 2007, invalidating predictions of the demise of the party system that has existed since 1932. The high proportion of marginal constituencies, together with the absence of uniform swing, makes it impossible to predict how many seats parties will win from a given level of national support. Despite this, and as we examine further in chapter 9, some people are willing to bet on the outcome, and at the time of writing, a Fine Gael–Labour government is favourite to emerge after the next election.

Notes

1. *Irish Times*, 8 June 2007.
2. Leaving aside the university constituencies, which returned TDs until 1933. The record was set by Brian O’Higgins in Clare in 1923, who was elected with only 114 first preferences in the face of a Droop quota (see appendix 4 for explanation of the Droop quota) of 6,575. Michael Gallagher (ed.), *Irish Elections 1922–44: Results and Analysis* (Dublin: PSAI Press, 1993), p. 26.
3. Pat Lyons and Richard Sinnott, ‘Voter turnout in 2002 and beyond’, pp. 143–58 in Michael Gallagher, Michael Marsh and Paul Mitchell (eds), *How Ireland Voted 2002* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). The *Sunday Tribune* ran a campaign to get inaccuracies in the electoral register sorted out: see, for example, Odran Flynn, ‘The flaws in the electoral register that threaten our democracy’, *Sunday Tribune*, 19 June 2005; Shane Coleman, ‘The 800,000 opportunities for voter fraud need to be sorted now’, *Sunday Tribune*, 5 March 2006; Shane Coleman and Odran Flynn, ‘Huge inconsistencies remain in electoral register’, *Sunday Tribune*, 12 November 2006.
4. Eoin O’Malley, ‘Apathy or error? Questioning the Irish register of electors’, *Irish Political Studies* 16 (2001), pp. 215–24.
5. Peter Mair and Liam Weeks, ‘The party system’, pp. 135–59 in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher (eds), *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 4th edn (Abingdon: Routledge and PSAI Press, 2005), at pp. 149, 154.
6. 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, offered a downbeat assessment of the party’s prospects.
7. Michael Laver, Peter Mair and Richard Sinnott (eds), *How Ireland Voted: The Irish General Election 1987* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1987), p. 63.
8. See his account of this in Gallagher et al., *How Ireland Voted 2002*, pp. 83–7.
9. The analysis excludes transfers resulting from multiple eliminations, and the distribution of surpluses where the package of votes taking the elected candidate over the quota came from a candidate of a different party.
10. ‘Fine Gael enter “vote equalisation” talks’, *Connaught Telegraph*, 2 May 2007.
11. The GAA is the Gaelic Athletic Association. Even though O’Mahony’s charges were beaten in the Connacht football championship by their closest rivals Galway just four days before the election, O’Mahony outpolled Mulherin and took the third Fine Gael seat.
12. ‘Big two divide up electoral areas between candidates’, *Wexford People*, 9 May 2007.
13. Michael Gallagher, ‘Stability and turmoil: analysis of the results’, pp. 88–118 in Gallagher et al., *How Ireland Voted 2002*, p. 110.

14. 'FF feud descends into open warfare', *Irish Examiner*, 23 May 2007.
15. Ronan McGreevy, 'Taoiseach's running mate accuses FF of "shafting" her', *Irish Times*, 31 May 2007.
16. Michael Gallagher and Liam Weeks, 'The subterranean election of the Seanad', pp. 197–213 in Gallagher et al., *How Ireland Voted 2002*, pp. 202, 208.
17. The number rose from 22 to 23 over the lifetime of the 29th Dáil following the success of Catherine Murphy in a by-election in 2005.