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**Potential Outcomes for the  
2007 and 2011 Irish elections  
under a different  
electoral system.**

**A Submission to the Convention on the  
Constitution.**

**Dr Adrian Kavanagh & Noel Whelan**

## Forward

[Publicpolicy.ie](http://Publicpolicy.ie) is an independent body that seeks to make it as easy as possible for interested citizens to understand the choices involved in addressing public policy issues and their implications. Our purpose is to carry out independent research to inform public policy choices, to communicate the results of that research effectively and to stimulate constructive discussion among policy makers, civil society and the general public.

In that context we asked Dr Adrian Kavanagh and Noel Whelan to undertake this study of the possible outcomes of the 2007 and 2011 Irish Dail elections if those elections had been run under a different electoral system.

We are conscious that this study is being published at a time of much media and academic comment about the need for political reform in Ireland and in particular for reform of the electoral system. While this debate is not new, it has developed a greater intensity in the recent years of political and economic volatility and in a context where many assess the weaknesses in our political system and our electoral system in particular as having contributed to our current crisis.

Our wish is that this study will bring an important additional dimension to discussion of our electoral system and of potential alternatives. We hope it will enable members of the Convention on the Constitution and those participating in the wider debate to have a clearer picture of the potential impact which various systems might have on the shape of the Irish party system, the proportionality of representation, the stability of governments and the scale of swings between elections.

[Publicpolicy.ie](http://Publicpolicy.ie) has no view on the merits or otherwise of our current electoral system. Our objective in publishing this study is to illustrate the possible implications of the choices that surround the issue. Our purpose in undertaking this work, however, was to set out an objective assessment based on comprehensive voting data and detached psephological judgements.

Donal de Buitléir  
Director  
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## About the Authors

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## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine what might have been the outcomes of Ireland's 2007 and 2011 Dáil elections if, instead of being conducted under the current constitutionally mandated PRSTV electoral system, these had instead been conducted under any of three alternative electoral systems.

The three alternatives that we explore for each of these two elections are:

1. The First Past the Post electoral system (Single Member Plurality)
2. The Alternative Vote electoral system (Single Transferable Vote in Single Seat Constituencies)
3. The Mixed Member Proportional electoral system (variant of a List electoral system as used in Germany)

We draw on our differing expertise in the study of Irish elections and in particular on our detailed constituency level knowledge of the results of the 2007 and 2011 election to develop what we hope will be seen as an informed and reasonable suggestion of what the outcome would have been if each of these two elections had been conducted under any of these three alternative electoral systems.

In order to develop these outcomes we have sourced and collated detailed tally information for all constituencies in the two elections. In some instances this tally information had been published in the local newspapers in the aftermath of the count but for some constituencies we obtained it from those political parties that conducted tallies on the day. We are grateful to them for their assistance.

Once a complete set of the tally information for the entire country had been gathered, the next step was to develop a credible scenario for how the boundaries of the 43 multi-seat Dáil constituencies in place for the 2007 and 2011 elections might have been redrawn to form either 166 single seat constituencies for the First Past the Post and Alternative Vote scenarios or 83 single seat constituencies for use in a Mixed Member Proportional system. This involved making reasoned judgements about how the current constituencies might have been divided on the basis of contiguous geographical areas. We set out the basis for drawing up these notional constituencies in Chapter 1. When the task of delineating them was completed, we calculated the level of support that each political party and the category of independents/others had received in the relevant geographic area in 2007 and 2011 based on an analysis of the tally figures.

On the basis of their level of support in these notional constituencies it was possible to work out which party (or independent) was likely to have won the seat in each election scenario. Obviously, this was more straightforward for First Past the Post than for the Alternative Vote scenario. The basis on which these determinations were made is laid out in Chapters 3 to 5 and the full detail of those constituency by constituency decisions is set out in the spreadsheet in the appendix to this report. For the purpose of the Mixed Member Proportional scenario, we also had to explore how the 'top up seats' on a notional national list would have been distributed.

We start by giving a summary of our overall results and key findings.

*Adrian Kavanagh and Noel Whelan, May 2013*

## Key Findings

### Overall National Results - A Summary of the Scenarios

#### 2007 Dáil Election

Party/Grouping	Actual Result	Scenario 1.a	Scenario 2.a	Scenario 3.a
	PR-STV	First Past The Post	Alternative Vote	Mixed Member Proportional
Fianna Fáil	78	142	114	80
Fine Gael	51	18	34	53
Labour Party	20	3	12	19
Sinn Féin	4	1	1	13
Green Party	6	0	2	0
Progressive Democrats	2	1	1	0
SP/PBP/WUAG	0	0	0	0
Others/Independents	5	1	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table X.1: Actual seats won in the 2007 General Election and party seat estimates for this election under alternative electoral system scenarios.**

#### 2011 Dáil Election

Party/Grouping	Actual Result	Scenario 1.b	Scenario 2.b	Scenario 3.b
	PR-STV	First Past The Post	Alternative Vote	Mixed Member Proportional
Fianna Fáil	20	3	2	35
Fine Gael	76	114	114	71
Labour Party	37	32	35	38
Sinn Féin	14	6	5	20
Green Party	0	0	0	0
United Left Alliance	4	1	1	0
Others/Independents	15	10	9	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table X.2: Actual seats won in the 2011 General Election and party seat estimates for this election under alternative electoral system scenarios.**

The outcomes of both the 2007 and 2011 elections would have been dramatically different they had been conducted under any of the three other electoral systems that we discuss here. A number of striking outcomes emerged, including the following.

(1) The make up of government would have been altered dramatically. Under either the First Past the Post or Alternative Vote electoral systems, Table X.1 shows that Fianna Fáil would have governed on its own from 2007 to 2011 as a single party government with an extraordinarily large majority. Had either of these electoral systems been in place at the 2011 election (Table X.2), Fine Gael would now be governing on its own with a substantial overall majority in Dáil Éireann. Neither the Progressive Democrats nor the Green Party would have been in government after the 2007 election and Labour would not be currently in government. Under the Mixed Member Proportional system, however, Fianna Fáil would have had to form a coalition with either the

Labour Party or Sinn Féin in 2007 to have a working majority in Dáil Éireann. The only one of our scenarios which would have resulted in the same government outcome as that which actually occurred would have been that in which the 2011 election was run under the Mixed Member Proportional system.

(2) Governments would have been more stable, but less accountable and would have been more likely to run complete a full five-year term. Under the First Past the Post system there would have been only 24 opposition TDs after the 2007 election. Using the Alternative Vote system the size of the opposition after the 2007 election would have been larger, but that opposition would still have been dwarfed by the size of the government majority. After the 2011 election either of these systems would have led to Fine Gael in government similarly dominating Dáil Éireann, with 114 seats.

(3) The volatility in Irish politics, as would have been reflected even more strongly than it actually was in 2011, if the 2007 and 2011 elections had been conducted under either the First Past the Post or the Alternative Vote electoral systems. Under First Past the Post Fianna Fáil would have won 142 of the 166 seats at the 2007 election, but in the 2011 election the party would have lost all but three of these seats. Under the Alternative Vote system, Fianna Fáil would have had 114 seats after the 2007 election but would have been left with only two seats after the 2011 contest. On the other hand, Fine Gael's seat numbers would have increased almost seven-fold under First Past the Post between 2007 and 2011. Even under the Alternative Vote system Fine Gael would have more than tripled its seat numbers from 34 to 114 between these two contests.

The degree of volatility, in terms of party representation levels, would have been marginally less pronounced if the 2007 and 2011 elections had been conducted under the Mixed Member Proportional system. Fianna Fáil seat number would have declined from 80 seats to 35 seats, a loss of 45 seats, as compared with the 58 seats actually lost by the party between these elections under PR-STV electoral rules. In a similar vein, the level of Fine Gael gains would have been marginally less pronounced; they would have gained 18 additional seats under a Mixed Member Proportional system whereas in the actual election they gained 23 seats.

(4) The Labour Party would have had representation in Dáil Éireann irrespective of which electoral system was used in the two elections. However, the size of that representation would have differed dramatically after the 2007 election depending on which electoral system had been used. In the actual 2007 election Labour won 20 seats and they would have won 19 seats under a Mixed Member Proportional system, but the party would have won only 12 seats under Alternative Vote and just 3 seats if a First Past the Post system had been used. By comparison Labour seat numbers in 2011 would have been only marginally different depending on which system was used. In the actual 2011 election they won 37 seats, they would have won 38 under the Mixed Member Proportional system, 35 using the Alternative Vote and 32 using First Past the Post . The similar outcomes for the Labour Party in the 2011 studies would appear to be related to factors specific to that election and in particular to the scale of the Fianna Fáil collapse.

(5) Sinn Féin would also have had representation in Dáil Éireann after both of these elections, irrespective of which electoral system was used. Under both the First Past the Post and Alternative Vote systems, however, they would have had only one seat after the 2007 election. In 2011 they would also have suffered to a significant degree from the lack of proportionality associated with both these systems. (However, the geographical concentration of Sinn Féin support in certain areas would have left the party with more seats than Fianna Fáil, despite winning a smaller number of votes nationally.) Sinn Féin won 14 seats in the actual 2011 election under PR-STV but in our 2011

scenario they would have won only six seats under First Past the Post and five seats using the Alternative Vote. By comparison the party would have been a significant beneficiary of the additional proportionality that flows from the Mixed Member Proportional system both in 2007 and 2011. If these elections had been conducted using that system, Sinn Féin would finished with nine extra seats in 2007 and six more in 2011.

(6) The study shows that independent candidates would have fared differently in our alternative scenarios, especially with respect to the First Past the Post and Alternative Vote electoral systems. In 2007, independents would have struggled to win seats under either of these: in fact they would have won only one seat under a First Past the Post system and two seats under the Alternative Vote at that election. Tipperary would have been the only place where the support for an independent was both strong enough and geographically concentrated enough to win a seat in a single seat constituency with both systems (although there would have been another independent seat in north Kildare using the Alternative Vote scenario).

However, in the volatile 2011 election a surprisingly large number of independents would have been gained Dáil seats under most of these electoral systems. Under PR-STV electoral rules, 15 independents were actually elected. Our study suggests that 10 independents would have been elected if the 2011 election had been run under First Past the Post rules, while 9 independents would have won seats using the Alternative Vote. The geographic concentration of high support in relatively small areas within constituencies for certain independent candidates, while not sufficient to win many seats in 2007 in the face of strong local Fianna Fáil opposition, would have been great enough in 2011 to enable well-positioned independents to take advantage of the Fianna Fáil collapse. Independents would not have done well under a Mixed Member Proportional system in either of these electoral contests; they would have been locked out of the distribution of 'top up' seats as the highly diverse nature of the Independents and Others grouping would have meant that it could not be treated as a separate political party.



## Chapter 1: The Basis for Creating the Single Seat Constituencies for our scenarios

For the purpose of replicating the 2007 and General Election contests under First Past the Post/Alternative Vote electoral systems, it was necessary for us to divide the state into 166 constituencies, each of which would elect just one Dáil deputy. We then merged neighbouring pairs of these First Past the Post/Alternative Vote) constituencies to create the 83 larger single member constituencies for that element of the Mixed Member Proportional scenarios.

The 166 notional constituencies were created by sub-dividing the actual 2007 and 2011 constituency units in line with the number of seats allocated to each of them for those elections. Accordingly three notional constituencies were created out of each three seat constituency, four were created out of each four seat constituency and five constituencies were created out of each of the five seat constituencies. The general approach taken in carrying out this division of the constituencies was, as far as was practicable, to apply the various principles which the *Constituency Commissions* have adopted over the years.

One of the key principles that shapes constituency boundaries is the constitutional stipulation that the ratio between the number of Dáil deputies to be elected at any time for each constituency and the constituency population as ascertained at the preceding census shall, so far as it is practicable, be the same throughout the country. Population change is usually the main basis under which Constituency Commissions have to make changes to existing electoral boundaries and these are required to give “particular attention to constituencies with variances exceeding 5% from national average representation”. This five per cent variance limit has been breached in a number of previous boundary revisions (but not in the 2012 Constituency Commissions revisions), though not to an excessive degree. In practice, the maximum degree of variance allowed has been based on the precedent set for the Mayo East constituency (a variance of -7.89 per cent) in the 1983 boundary revisions.

The constituency boundaries for the 2007 General Election would have been based on population levels for the 2002 Census (with a total population level of 3,917,203) and the same seat levels (166) decided on by the 2004 Constituency Commission. On the basis on these figures, the average population level for a single seat Dáil constituency at the 2007 election would have been 23,597.6. The stipulation that the average population per Dáil deputy levels within the state should be similar for each constituency, as far as is practicable, has resulted in a general approach over the past few decades in which different boundary commissions have tried to ensure that average representation levels per constituency fall within five per cent of the state average. If this approach had been applied in the case of single member constituencies/districts, as based on these 2002 Census population by area figures, this would have meant that these single seat constituency population sizes should have fallen in the range between 22,418 and 24,777. However, allowing for past precedent in which a variance level of 7.89 per cent was allowed for the Mayo East constituency in the case of the 1983 revisions, would allow this minimum/maximum population levels for these single seat constituencies to have ranged from between 21,736 and 25,459. The constituency boundaries for the 2007 General Election would have been based on population levels for the 2006 Census (with a total population level of 4,239.848) and the same seat levels (166) decided on by the 2004 Constituency Commission. On the basis on these figures, the average population level for a single seat Dáil constituency at the 2007 election would have been 25,541.3, meaning that the populations of single seat constituencies (based on the 2007 Census) should range between 24,264 and 26,818 in this instance in keeping with the five per cent variance level principle. However, allowing for past precedent, in which a variance level of 7.89 per cent was allowed for the Mayo

East constituency in the case of the 1983 revisions, would allow this minimum/maximum population levels for these single seat constituencies to range from 23,526 to 27,556.

Another key principle was that the breaching of county boundaries be avoided as far as practicable (although this principle was not applied to Dublin local authority boundaries prior to the *2012 Constituency Commission* boundary revisions and hence is not applied in Dublin our scenarios). There is also a requirement that a Constituency Commission should endeavour to maintain continuity in relation to the arrangement of constituencies, as far as is practicable and we also took this into account in drawing up the notional constituencies for our 2011 election scenario. The Constituency Commission is also required to ensure that the constituency units should *make geographical sense*. *Electoral Acts* have stipulated that constituencies must be composed of “*contiguous areas*”, while also requiring that the drawing up of constituency boundaries should give regard to other geographic considerations including significant physical features and the extent/density of population in each constituency. Again we sought to follow these principles in drawing the notional constituencies

We also sought, as far as was practicable, to take the boundaries of pre-existing (local) electoral areas (local election constituencies) into account and to avoid drawing the boundary lines within or through towns. There were exceptions to this, however, where major urban centres (such as Dundalk, Drogheda and Swords) had populations that exceeded the maximum population limits established for the notional constituency units.

In order to reflect the continuity principle that shapes electoral boundary revisions, and also to allow for a direct comparison between 2007 and 2011 notional constituency units, we attempted to ensure that the constituency units would be similar for the 2007 and 2011 simulations. This was not always possible; especially where major changes had been made to Dáil constituency boundaries (especially outside the Dublin region) in the *2007 Constituency Commission* report. In some instances, the decision to maintain the same constituency boundaries as for the 2007 analysis might have invoked some minor breaches of the proportionality principle. In these instances, the continuity principle was seen to over-ride these concerns and the decision was made to keep the constituency areas similar to those used in the 2007 analysis. Changes, however, were made between the 2007 and 2011 constituency units in cases in which serious differences between the constituency populations and the national average representation level would have emerged had no changes been made to the 2007 constituency boundaries.

Taking all these principles into account allowed us to draw up the notional constituency boundaries on as objective a basis as was possible and to most accurately reflect the shape that such constituency units would have taken, had a First Past the Post or Alternative Vote electoral system involving single-member constituencies been employed for the 2007 and 2011 contests. It should be noted, however, that there are always a range of alternatives that can be applied in the case of creating, or redrawing, constituency units. Given the highly localised nature of voting patterns at the sub-constituency level in Irish elections, with especially high support levels for candidates being recorded around their home bases as envisaged in the “friends and neighbours effect” (as discussed in the next chapter), there can be significant geographical differences in party support levels, even within a single Dáil constituency. The high level of marginality associated with Irish electoral contests also means that that some of the outcomes we suggest in some constituencies might be different if the notional constituency boundaries had been drawn differently, even to a relatively minor degree. Of course this might also be offset in such a scenario because results would go in the opposite direction in other notional constituencies.

One further item of note is that these simulations do not make provision for the automatic re-election of the Ceann Comhairle. This does not make a difference to the overall figures for the 2007 study, since our analysis of the figures suggest that the constituency (in Cavan-Monaghan), in which the outgoing Ceann Comhairle, Fianna Fáil's Rory O'Hanlon, was automatically returned in, would still have been won by Fianna Fáil anyway. The automatic election of the Ceann Comhairle in 2007 would not therefore have made any difference to the overall seat allocations in the First Past the Post or Alternative Vote election scenarios for that election. In the 2011 scenario, however, our analysis of the figures shows that Fine Gael would have won the constituency (in Louth), which would otherwise have been automatically assigned to the then outgoing Ceann Comhairle, Fianna Fáil's Seamus Kirk. In this instance, the automatic election of the Ceann Comhairle would have made a difference to the overall seat allocations in the First Past the Post election and Alternative Vote models, as Fianna Fáil would have been assigned an extra seat at the expense of Fine Gael in this instance.

## Chapter 2: The Geographic spread of support for candidates with existing Dail constituencies: The Friends and Neighbours Effect

The geographic spread of support for different political parties and groupings within individual Dáil constituencies plays a major role in dictating the results of the various scenarios we examine in this study. Much of this impact is due to the “friends and neighbours” effect. This argues that there will be a distance-decay effect in that an election candidate will generally win their largest share of the vote in the area in and around their home base within the constituency while their share of the vote will decline the further they move away from this bailiwick. This has had a significant influence on sub-constituency voting patterns in Irish elections. Studies of sub-constituency voting trends in more recent general elections have shown that this still occurs, even in the context of changing social and technological mores. Political parties take this into account when selecting their nominees, especially in constituencies where they are running more than one candidate.

The friends and neighbours effect can be illustrated by a closer look, for example at the geographic patterns of support for the Fine Gael candidates in the Galway East constituency at the 2011 Dáil Election. These maps shows the very distinct geographical differences in the percentage vote share which each of the four Fine Gael candidates received across the Galway East constituency.

*Maps to be included here*

**Figure 2.1(a) Support trends, by electoral division, for Fine Gael’s Ciaran Cannon and Jimmy McClearn in the Galway East constituency at the 2011 General Election.**

*Maps to be included here*

**Figure 2.1(b) Support trends, by electoral division, for Fine Gael’s Tom McHugh and Paul Connaughton in the Galway East constituency at the 2011 General Election.**

The two candidates based in the south of the constituency, Ciaran Cannon and Jimmy McClearn, did significantly better in that part of the constituency with Cannon’s vote spiking in the area focused on his bailiwick in the south-east of the constituency. Meanwhile McClearn’s share of the vote is distinctly higher in his bailiwick in the south-western part of the constituency. Similarly the two Fine Gael candidates based in the northern part of Galway East, Paul Connaughton and Tom McHugh, are seen to do much better in terms of vote share in that part of the constituency than in the south. Again, each of these candidates win their largest share of the vote close to their constituency bases; McHugh in the north-west and Connaughton in the north-east also see their share of the vote declining in line with a distance-decay effect.

These trends were not limited to these candidates. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show striking variations in the geographies of support for the Fianna Fáil and Labour Party candidates (both of these parties had two-candidates each). The trend towards greater local support is perhaps less evident in the case of Fianna Fáil’s Michael Kitt (Figure 2.2), who polls relatively well in some areas far away from his own constituency base. This is most notable in the cluster of higher support levels in the south of the constituency focused on Gort, but his strongest area is still around his local base in the north-east of the constituency. In both cases party votes are also shown to be weaker in those areas of the constituency where neither party candidate had a local base, namely the north-western part (Tuam area) of the constituency in the case of Fianna Fáil and the eastern part of the constituency in the case of the Labour Party.

*Maps to be included here*

**Figure 2.2 Support trends, by electoral division, for Fianna Fáil’s Michael Kitt and Michael F. Dolan in the Galway East constituency at the 2011 General Election.**

*Maps to be included here*

**Figure 2.3 Support trends, by electoral division, for the Labour Party’s Lorraine Higgins and Colm Keaveney in the Galway East constituency at the 2011 General Election.**

These friends and neighbours are even more evident in the case of the main independent candidates in Galway East at that election, Sean Canney and Tim Broderick (Figure 2.4). Both candidates polled exceptionally well in and around their home bases – the Ballinasloe area in the case of Broderick and the Tuam area in the case of Canney. But their ability to win first preference votes declines significantly as one moves away from their bailiwicks, once again showing a distance decay effect, and their share of the vote tends to be low in the parts of the Galway East constituency that are distant from their home areas. The pattern is perhaps most striking in the case of these independent candidates as they cannot rely on picking up party loyalist votes in areas distant from their home bases, while candidates from Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Labour might be expected to pick up votes in such areas from party supporters.

*Maps to be included here*

**Figure 2.4 Support trends, by electoral division, for independent candidates, Tim Broderick and Sean Canney, in the Galway East constituency at the 2011 General Election.**

These friends and neighbours voting patterns are not unique to Galway East, of course, and other researches on the friends and neighbours effect have found evidence of this in both past and recent electoral contests, both in rural and (to a lesser degree) urban constituencies.

This chapter is designed to illustrate aspects of the spatial structuring of vote patterns in Irish general election contests, in particular highlighting the importance and impact of local candidates in shaping party support patterns in different parts of a constituency. Within the context of this specific research, it illustrates how, as discussed in Chapter 1, decisions made about the location of electoral boundaries will have an impact on election results and in cases where selection approaches mean that political parties will be decidedly stronger in certain areas within a constituency and weaker in other areas this may play a definitive role in determining which candidate (and which political party) wins seats. It must be emphasised that the outcome in terms of who wins seats is always likely to be impacted by the way in which single seat constituencies are drawn out of the existing constituencies. This is why the use of clear, consistent and objective criteria to draw up such constituencies has been an essential element of this research.

### Chapter 3: The First Past the Post electoral system

Electoral systems are essentially the constitutional arrangements that exist in different countries under which the sum of every individual's vote in an election is used to determine which parties or individuals are elected to positions of power, either in terms of levels of representation in parliament or in terms of positions of power within the national government. Electoral systems can be divided into two major groups – majoritarian or plurality type systems and proportional type systems.

Majoritarian/plurality electoral systems are more generally described as First Past the Post electoral systems and are usually based around voting practices in which the party/candidate that wins the most votes (the plurality) in a single-seat constituency will win the seat in that constituency (or all the electoral college votes in a state in the context of US presidential elections), irrespective of whether that party/candidate has won a majority (over 50 per cent) of the votes. First past the post electoral systems generally tend to produce more decisive results in terms of government formation but they also give rise to a large degree of disproportionality.

The larger parties often tend to get significant seat bonuses in these electoral systems, meaning that their percentage share of seats in parliament will often be significantly higher than the percentage share of the (national) first preference vote they received. In the 2005 parliamentary election in the United Kingdom the Labour party won a majority (55 per cent) of seats in House of Commons with just 36 per cent of the votes. Politics in countries using First Past the Post electoral systems will often be dominated by a small number (often two) of large parties, as with the Republicans and Democrats in the United States of America or the Conservative and Labour Parties in the United Kingdom.

Smaller parties tend to suffer in these electoral systems, especially if the party support is spatially dispersed across the country. This can be seen, for example, in the difficulty faced by the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom in translating their support levels nationally into seats in the House of Commons (and also in the difficulties faced by “third party candidates” in United States presidential elections). The only small parties that can hope to have any significant impact (and win seats) in First Past the Post electoral systems are regional parties. These are often separatist political parties, as is the case, for example, with the Sinn Féin, Democratic Unionist Party, Scottish Nationalist Party and Plaid Cymru parties in United Kingdom elections.

In many instances, mainly due to local socio-economic and demographic profiles, certain constituencies are viewed as being foregone conclusions in terms of which party is expected to win, even before a vote is cast in an election. For examples, many states in the United States Presidential Election are seen as “red states” or “blue states” because one of the main parties (Republicans or Democrats) have traditionally won comfortably there. In the United Kingdom there are similarly “safe Labour” and “safe Conservative” constituencies. Supporters of different political parties in these ‘safe’ constituencies are often disinclined to vote on election day as they believe their party is virtually certain to win or lose that seat and voter turnout levels in such constituencies suffer as a result.

There is an inherent bias in this electoral system towards candidates from the larger parties, especially as the larger parties do not need to win a majority of the votes cast in a constituency to win the seat there. This is particularly the case in those constituencies where the margin of victory is relatively narrow or in constituencies where more than two parties' candidates prove to be serious contenders to win the seat. As the winning candidate does not need to obtain at least half the votes

cast in order to win the seat in this electoral system, it may well prove to be the case that more than 50 per cent of the votes cast within in a state in the United States or within a constituency in the United Kingdom in a general election are effectively wasted votes.

In First Past the Post systems voters may also tend towards *tactical* or *compromise* voting in constituencies where their favourite party is not expected to be in contention to win a seat. Rather than voting for their own party and “*wasting*” their vote in the process, these voters may instead decide to choose between the two or three other parties that are in serious contention to win that constituency and vote for their preferred option from amongst these as “the lesser of two (or three) evils”. So for example a Labour supporter, based in an English constituency in which Labour support is weak may opt not to vote for Labour in that instance, but instead to vote for the Liberal Democrats in preference to the Conservatives. These voters may, of course, still vote for their own party irrespective of the fact that they know that their party will not win that constituency; electors in these categories do not vote tactically en masse. In other cases, similar voters may simply choose not to vote at all, resulting in a lower overall voter turnout level for those contests.

### Simulating the 2007 Election using First Past The Post

For the purpose of this study the 2007 Irish General (Dáil) Election contest was re-run under First Past the Post rules in the different notional constituencies created for this purpose, as detailed in Chapter 1. The results in these nominal constituencies were calculated using tally figures for the 2007 election, with the votes for each political party or grouping being calculated based on the sum of votes cast for them across all the polling stations/districts located within the area ascribed to each notional constituency. The political party, or grouping that was found to have obtained the largest number of votes in each notional constituency was deemed to have won that contest and hence was assigned the Dáil seat for that notional constituency.

<b>Party</b>	<b>Dublin</b>	<b>Leinster</b>	<b>Munster</b>	<b>Connacht-Ulster</b>	<b>Total</b>
Fianna Fáil	38.8	45.2	42.7	38.5	<b>41.6</b>
Fine Gael	18.7	27.1	29.6	34.8	<b>27.3</b>
Labour Party	14.5	11.4	9.9	3.3	<b>10.9</b>
Sinn Féin	7.0	5.9	5.3	10.7	<b>6.3</b>
Green Party	8.3	4.3	3.5	2.5	<b>4.7</b>
Prog Democrats	4.1	2.6	1.5	3.0	<b>2.7</b>
SP/PBP/WUAG	4.5	0.1	1.2	-	<b>1.5</b>
Others/Independents	4.1	3.4	6.2	7.2	<b>5.2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2.1: Support levels (%) by party (or political grouping) by region and nationally for the 2007 General Election**

To allow for direct comparability between the 2007 and 2011 contests, results are combined in this analysis for the different groupings and candidates that came together to form the United Left Alliance before the 2011 General Election. These include the Socialist Party (SP), People Before Profit Alliance (PBP) and the Workers and Unemployed Action Group (WUAG), as well as some individual (then independent) candidates such as Dublin South Central’s Joan Collins, although these groupings, did not fight the 2007 contest on a common platform. All other candidates that were not affiliated with the six major parties in this contest, or the aforementioned leftist grouping,



were assigned to the Independents and Others grouping. Support levels for the different parties and groupings in the 2007 contest, both at the national and regional levels, are shown in Table 3.1.

As a health warning, these characteristics of First Past the Post systems need to be kept in mind when reviewing what the results of the 2007 and 2011 elections would have been, had they been run under First Past the Post rules.

## SCENARIO 1.a

### 2007 Election Outcome using First Past the Post

Party	Dublin	Leinster	Munster	Connacht-Ulster	Total
Fianna Fáil	47	36	40	19	<b>142</b>
Fine Gael	-	3	5	10	<b>18</b>
Labour Party	-	2	1	-	<b>3</b>
Sinn Féin	-	-	-	1	<b>1</b>
Green Party	-	-	-	-	<b>0</b>
Progressive Democrats	-	-	-	1	<b>1</b>
SP/PBP/WUAG	-	-	-	-	<b>0</b>
Others/Independents	-	-	1	-	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table 3.2: Seat allocations by region and nationally if 2007 General Election re-run under First Past the Post rules**

Rerunning the 2007 General Election under First Past the Post electoral rules produces some very surprising results (Table 3.2). These include the following:

(1) **Fianna Fáil would have won a landslide victory taking 142 of the 166 seats. They would have taken 85.5 per cent of the Dáil seats on 41.6 per cent of the vote, more than double the number of seats they would have been entitled to in a strictly proportional allocation (69 seats).** Fianna Fáil's dominance in this scenario is further underpinned by the runners-up statistics (Table 3.3), which show that they would have been runners-up in 21 out of the 24 constituencies that the party would not have won. This means that there would have been only three of the 166 notional constituencies in which the party was not at least in contention to win the seat.

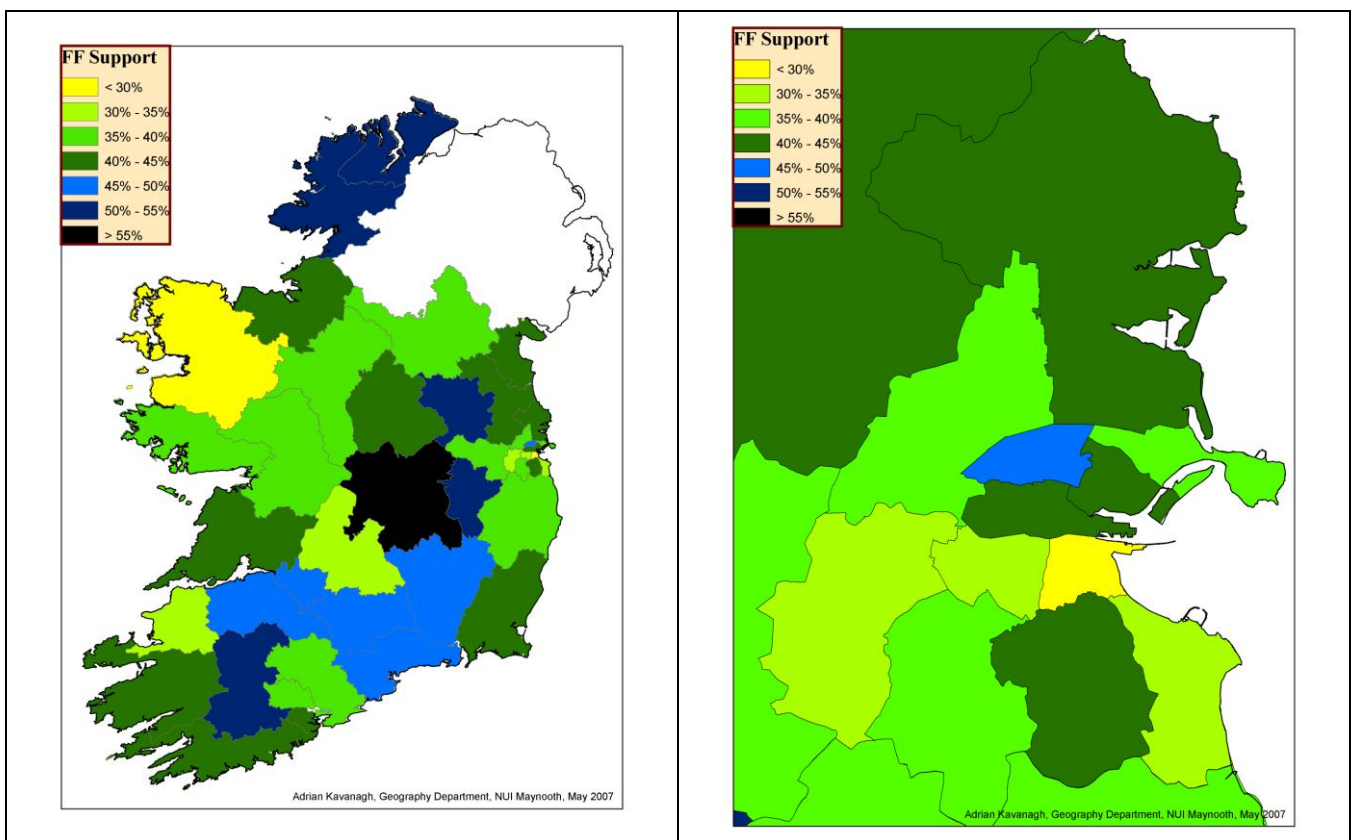
(2) **Fine Gael, although getting 27.3 per cent of the national vote, would only have succeeded in winning 18 seats.** Half of these Fine Gael seats would have been won in the Connacht-Ulster region, in which the party would have won each of the five seats in Mayo. The party would have been the runners up in close to two third of the constituencies (see Table 3.3).

(3) **Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael combined would have taken 160 of the 166 in the First Past the Post scenario. Ireland would effectively have had a two-party election.** The Labour Party would have won just three seats (one each in Cork County, Wexford and Westmeath) and Sinn Féin would have won only one seat (in Monaghan). The Progressive Democrats would have won a single seat, and that would have been for Noel Grealish in Galway, and only one Independent, Michael Lowry in Tipperary, would have been elected.



(4) **The region in which Fianna Fáil proved to be especially dominant in this analysis was the Dublin region and the party would have won all of the 47 seats in Dublin** (Table 3.2). Fianna Fáil’s remarkable level of success here would not have been down to the party being especially strong in terms of support levels in this region relative to others – after all, they have traditionally weaker in Dublin than in other, more rural, regions. While the capital was the only region in which Fianna Fáil support levels improved in at the 2007 contest, relative to the 2002 General Election, the party share of the vote in Dublin was still lower than in Leinster and Munster and was only marginally higher than Fianna Fáil’s weakest region in the 2007 election, Connacht-Ulster.

(5) Throughout the country, and in particular within the Dublin region, it is the “catch-all” nature of Fianna Fáil’s support and in particular the party’s tendency to poll consistently well across all regions of the state and within different social groups which would have enabled that party to gain such a massive advantage from the First Past the Post system .



**Figure 3.1: Support levels (%) for Fianna Fáil by Dáil constituency, nationally and within the Dublin region, at the 2007 General Election**

As Figure 3.1 shows, Fianna Fáil’s support was consistently strong across all of the state. The party failed to breach the thirty per cent support level in only two constituencies, Dublin South East and Mayo. In our First Past the Post scenario Fianna Fáil would have lost in each one of the five notional constituencies in Mayo but curiously, notwithstanding the fact that Dublin South East was its weakest constituency in 2007 in terms of vote share, the party would still have won the seat in each of the four notional Dublin South East constituencies there. This is because of the very different nature of the composition of Fianna Fáil’s adversaries in these different constituencies. In Mayo and most of the Connacht and Munster constituencies it had one large opponent in the form of Fine Gael .

Party	Dublin	Leinster	Munster	Connacht-Ulster	Total
Fianna Fáil	-	5	6	10	21
Fine Gael	22	29	38	16	105
Labour Party	10	6	1	1	18
Sinn Féin	4	-	-	3	7
Green Party	3	-	-	-	3
Progressive Democrats	-	-	-	-	0
SP/PBP/WUAG	4	-	1	-	5
Others/Independents	4	1	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table 3.3: Runners up in the notional constituencies, by region and nationally, if 2007 General Election re-run under First Past the Post rules**

We can see this in the comparison between Tables 3.2 and 3.3, which demonstrates that Fine Gael tended to be the main opposition to Fianna Fáil in constituencies in these regions, winning some and tending to be runners-up in those constituencies that were won by Fianna Fáil. However, in the Dublin constituencies, such as Dublin South-East, the opposition to Fianna Fáil was more fragmented. As a result, the share of the vote Fianna Fáil needed to win the seat in the Dublin constituencies tended to be much lower than the share of the vote they would have required to win seats in the more rural constituencies.

(6) The *margin* of victory for the winning candidate in the notional constituencies varied quite dramatically. There were a number of constituencies where the winning party/candidate was more than five thousand votes ahead of their closest rivals (and their share of the vote exceeded that of their closest rivals by more than forty per cent). At the other extreme, there were some cases where there was less than one per cent of the vote (or less than two hundred votes) separating the winning party/candidate from their closest rivals. On average the winning margin in the Dublin constituencies was 1,687 votes, as opposed to 2,251 in Leinster constituencies, 2,086 in Connacht-Ulster and 1,755 in the Munster constituencies, with a national average winning margin of 1,920 across the 166 notional constituencies. There is a higher proportion of safe constituencies in more rural regions and this may have had a knock-on effect on voting behaviour in these areas, most notably with respect to voter turnout.

(7) The level of *wasted* votes in the First Past the Post scenario would have been very high. The winning candidate had a majority (over half of the votes cast) in only 27 of the 166 notional constituency contests. In all, 56.4 per cent of the votes cast could be viewed as being wasted in that they were cast in constituencies where the voter's preferred candidate/party did not win a seat. The level of wasted votes in the more rural parts of the state averaged around 55 per cent but was as high as 61.3 per cent in the Dublin region, reflecting the more fragmented political landscape in this region. If surplus votes were also factored in as wasted votes, in line with the earlier discussion, the level of wasted votes nationally would have been in the region of 72 per cent of all the votes cast.

### Simulating the 2011 General Election under First Past The Post

The political landscape of the Republic of Ireland at the 2011 General Election was very different to that of 2007. The Progressive Democrats had ceased to exist, while the political fall-out from the collapse of the Irish economy had brought about an unprecedented collapse in support for the two remaining government parties, Fianna Fáil and the Green Party. The Progressive Democrats were

part of the outgoing government up to the point at which it ceased to exist. If the Progressive Democrat 2007 vote is factored in then the combined losses by the government parties nationally in 2011 would have amounted to just under thirty per cent of the national vote. The level of government party losses was especially high in Dublin (35.1 per cent) and Leinster (31 per cent) and less dramatic in Munster (27.7 per cent) and Connacht-Ulster (24.2 per cent).

<b>Party</b>	<b>Dublin</b>	<b>Leinster</b>	<b>Munster</b>	<b>Connacht-Ulster</b>	<b>Total</b>
Fianna Fáil	12.5	19.5	18.8	18.9	<b>17.4</b>
Fine Gael	29.9	36.6	38.1	40.1	<b>36.1</b>
Labour Party	29.3	19.2	18.6	8.7	<b>19.4</b>
Sinn Féin	8.2	10.4	7.7	14.8	<b>9.9</b>
Green Party	3.6	1.6	1.3	0.8	<b>1.8</b>
United Left Alliance	7.1	0.4	2.5	0.5	<b>2.7</b>
Others/Independents	9.4	12.2	13.1	16.2	<b>12.5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 3.4: Support levels (%) by party or political grouping by region and nationally for the 2011 General Election**

The Fianna Fáil share of the vote nationally fell by 24.1 per cent between the 2007 and 2011 elections, a collapse which was reflected in an even more dramatic loss in Dáil seat numbers. Fianna Fáil had 47.0 per cent of the seat after the 2007 election (78 seats), but that fell to 12.0 per cent after the 2011 contest (20 seats). Not only did the seat bonus that the party gained in 2007 dissipate, but its percentage share of Dáil seats was also significantly lower than its share of the first preference vote in this contest. While Fianna Fáil's national support sat at, or above, the 40 per cent level (which has traditionally been the norm), the party was in a position to challenge for two seats in most three-seat and four-seat constituencies (and even three seats in some four-seat constituencies) and was in the running for three seats in most five-seat constituencies. When their support level fell below the twenty per cent level in 2007, however, the "catch-all" nature of the Fianna Fáil support base proved to be a curse, leaving the party without the necessary number of votes to win a seat in most three-seat and four-seat constituencies and even short of enough votes to win a single seat in some five-seat constituencies in the Dublin region.

### **SCENARIO 1.b**

#### **2011 Election Outcome under First Past the Post**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Dublin</b>	<b>Leinster</b>	<b>Munster</b>	<b>Connacht-Ulster</b>	<b>Total</b>
Fianna Fáil	-	2	-	1	<b>3</b>
Fine Gael	23	31	35	25	<b>114</b>
Labour Party	22	5	5	-	<b>32</b>
Sinn Féin	1	2	1	2	<b>6</b>
Green Party	-	-	-	-	<b>0</b>
United Left Alliance	-	-	1	-	<b>1</b>
Others/Independents	1	2	4	3	<b>10</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table 3.5: Seat allocations by region and nationally if 2011 General Election re-run under First Past the Post rules**

Again the scenario of running Ireland’s 2001 Dail election under First Past the Post rules throws up some very dramatic outcomes.

(1) **Fianna Fáil’s collapse would have been near total in terms of seat loss.** They would have lost all but three of their Dáil seats. The accentuation of seat losses for Fianna Fáil which occurred in Ireland in the 2011 election under PR-STV would have been even more dramatic if Ireland had been using First Past the Post (as Table 3.5 shows). Fianna Fáil’s most dramatic losses would have been in the Dublin and Munster regions. In our 2007 First Past the Post scenario Fianna Fáil would have won all of the seats on offer in the Dublin region (Table 3.2), but in our 2011 First Past the Post scenario Fianna Fáil would have failed to win any seats in Dublin. The party’s seat losses in the Munster region would have been equally dramatic. They would have won 40 seats under First Past the Post in 2007, but would have lost all of these seats under First Past the Post in 2011. Although Fianna Fáil would have won no seat in either Dublin or Munster, the party would have been more competitive in Munster as the runners-up statistics in Table 3.6 illustrates. They would have finished in second place in almost half the constituencies in this region (and would also have come relatively close to winning seats in some of the Cork constituencies).

Party	Dublin	Leinster	Munster	Connacht-Ulster	Total
Fianna Fáil	1	15	20	14	50
Fine Gael	15	9	8	3	35
Labour Party	19	9	9	-	37
Sinn Féin	4	2	2	6	14
Green Party	-	-	-	-	0
United Left Alliance	2	-	1	-	3
Others/Independents	6	7	6	8	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table 3.6: Runners up in the pseudo constituencies by region and nationally if 2007 General Election re-run under First Past the Post rules**

(2) **Fianna Fáil’s dominance in 2007 would have been almost replaced by Fine Gael dominance, especially outside the Greater Dublin region.** The level of Fine Gael dominance does not, however, mirror that of Fianna Fáil in 2007, mainly because the Fine Gael support base would not have been as “catch all” as that of Fianna Fáil had been. In this scenario, Fine Gael still struggles to win seats in working class urban areas, through performing strongly in rural areas and middle class urban areas. In the more urban parts of the state, Fine Gael would have been especially challenged by the Labour Party; this is reflected in the almost equal allocation of seats to these parties in the Dublin region. Outside Dublin, however, the challenge from Labour weakens and in a significant number of these cases, as the runners-up statistics in Table 3.6 show, Fianna Fáil would have offered the most serious opposition to Fine Gael’s dominance. Although Labour would have won ten seats across the more urban parts of the Leinster and Munster regions, the main challenge to Fine Gael dominance outside Dublin, apart from Fianna Fáil, tended to come from non-party candidates. The Labour Party is predicted to win 32 seats in this analysis, which would be six fewer seats than they did win in the actual 2011 contest.

(3) **The smaller parties are predicted to win more seat than in the 2007 simulation, although their number of seats still falls well below the seat levels won by these parties in the actual election.** Sinn Féin would have won six seats in the First Past the Post scenario instead of the fourteen seats won in the actual contest (under PR-STV electoral rules). In a similar vein, the United Left Alliance would have won three seats, as against the five seats won by this grouping at

the actual election. Very small parties tend to struggle to win seats in First Past the Post though the more fragmented political landscape of the 2011 contest means that these trends are not as dramatic as they were in the 2007 study. The geographic concentration of support for Sinn Féin and for the United Left Alliance in certain parts of the state would give them some chance of winning seats in a First Past the Post scenario. While their percentage share of national support would not be sufficient to leave them in contention for seats if it were replicated across all the constituencies, it is worth noting that the United Left Alliance share of vote is predetermined by the fact that this grouping only contested nineteen constituencies in the 2011 election. (Sinn Féin also failed to contest five of the Dáil constituencies in 2011.) Furthermore, much of the United Left Alliance vote was concentrated in a small number of mainly urban working class areas, namely the political bases of their strongest candidates, meaning that in a First Past the Post scenario these candidates would have been vying to win seats in the notional constituencies that would focused on these areas. Similarly the dramatic regional nature of the Sinn Féin patterns translates into very low support levels for the party in a number of areas (or constituencies), but also into very high support levels for that party in its Border and urban working class heartlands. Even though the party would have won less votes nationally than Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin's geography of support means the party would have been better placed to translate its support levels into representation levels at the 2011 election, had First Past the Post rules been in place.

**(4) Candidates from the Independents/Others grouping would have won 10 seats, with nine of these being won outside the Dublin region.** As Table 3.6 shows, candidates from Independents/Others would have also been the runners-up in twenty-seven other constituencies. In all, the number of seats predicted to fall to candidates from the Independents/Others grouping under First Past the Post rules would not have been significantly lower than the number of seats won by this grouping in the actual February 2011 election. Given the general association of First Past the Post systems with poorer results in terms of seat gains for smaller parties, this result may be somewhat surprising at first glance. But, again, this can be mainly accounted for by the atypical geography of support for a strong independent candidate. While party support will tend to be more geographically dispersed across a constituency, allowing for spikes around candidates' bases, there will be some degree of support from party loyalists in other parts of the constituency but the atypical independent geography of support tends to be very much localised. In the 2011 election the bulk of an independent candidate's first preference votes tended to be won in, and around, their home base, although there are occasional exceptions, such as the pattern of support for Shane Ross in Dublin South and, to a lesser extent, for Mick Wallace in Wexford. If the electoral boundary lines are favourable to them, an independent candidate may well find they would win almost as many votes in a smaller First Past the Post constituency as in a larger three, four, or five seat single transferable vote constituency. Hence, independent candidates could well have as good a chance of winning seats in this type of electoral system, as they would have in a proportional single transferable vote system.

**(5) The margin of victory for those who would win the seat in the 2011 First Past the Post scenario would again vary quite dramatically across the different constituencies.** At one extreme, there were a number of constituencies where the winning candidate was more than five thousand votes ahead of their closest rivals (and where their share of the vote exceeded that of those closest rivals by more than forty per cent). In two of the Mayo constituencies the Fine Gael candidates' winning vote shares exceeded their closest rivals by more than fifty per cent and these candidates would have been more than eight thousand votes ahead of their closest rivals in these contests. At the other extreme, there were some cases where there was less than one per cent of the vote (or less than two hundred votes) separating the winning candidate from their closest rivals.

Only 18 votes would have separated Fine Gael and Labour in one of the Cork constituencies, with the third placed Fianna Fáil candidate in that constituency coming less than two hundred votes behind that. The winning margin, on average, in the Dublin constituencies was 1,318 votes, as opposed to wider margins (on average) of 1,819 in the Leinster constituencies, 2,587 in the Connacht-Ulster constituencies and 2,427 in the Munster constituencies, with a national average of 1,989. This national average is only slightly higher than that recorded for the 2007 analysis (and can be explained with reference to the higher number of votes cast in the 2011 election). But regionally there are striking patterns. The average margin of victory increased in Connacht-Ulster and Munster (reflecting the weakening of the competition between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil) but declined significantly in the Dublin and Leinster regions (reflecting the fractured political landscapes in these regions in the wake of the collapse in Fianna Fáil support).

**(7) The level of *wasted votes* in the 2011 First Past the Post scenario would again have been quite high.** The winning candidate won a majority (over half of the votes cast) in only 17 cases out of the 166 constituency contests. In all, 60.3 per cent of the votes cast could be viewed as being wasted votes (an increase on the 2011 level of 56.4 per cent). In more rural areas the level of wasted votes averaged around 58 per cent, but it was as high as 63.5 per cent in the Dublin region. If surplus votes were also included as wasted votes, as we suggested earlier, the national level would have been in the region of 75 per cent of all votes cast.

**(8) The turnover level of Dáil deputies would have been very high, with the model predicting that almost eighty five per cent of the candidates predicted to win seats in 2007, would have failed to hold those seats in 2011.** Only 25 of the successful 2007 candidates would have been elected again in 2011 if First Past the Post rules been in use at these elections.

### **Some Health Warnings: Adjustment in campaigning and voting patterns in a First Past the Post electoral system scenario**

The party seat level figures generated in this study are predicated on the basis of voting patterns at the 2007 and 2011 contests, which were of course held under PR-STV electoral rules. Had these contests been run under First Past the Post rules, there is every possibility that different voting, and indeed party campaigning trends, would have emerged. Voters are likely to have engaged in more *tactical voting* practices. Supporters of parties in constituencies where their party would not have been in serious contention to win the seat would have been tempted to vote *tactically* in order to avoid *wasting* their vote by switching to their most preferred option among the candidates actually in contention to win. In some of the safer constituencies (as highlighted by the larger winning margins), voters might have been tempted not to turn out to vote in the belief that their votes would have no impact on the overall result. This, in turn, would have depressed voter turnout levels in the safest (or least marginal) constituencies (and, in turn, impacted on overall vote patterns).

It is also possible that parties would have changed the geographical scope of their campaigns by directing financial and personnel resource towards those constituencies where they believed they had the best chance of winning marginal seats. They would also have been likely to switch resources away from their safe seat constituencies where there was little or no prospect that they would lose. In a manner which would have mirrored the focus in US presidential campaigns on swing states or purple states, political parties might have invested most of their campaigning efforts in swing constituencies where they had a narrow lead or were trailing by a small margin. As research has shown, these patterns of voter mobilisation might also have had an impact on voter turnout levels in the “safe” and “swing” constituencies; they might for instance have helped to inflate turnout propensity in the more competitive constituencies.

Tactical voting (and also “tactical campaigning”) might, thus, have eroded the extent of the seat bonuses assigned to the largest parties in these 2007 and 2011 elections to some extent, especially in the case of Fianna Fáil in 2007, but probably not by a sufficient degree to prevent these parties from winning comfortable overall majorities in Dáil Éireann.

The analysis in Appendix 1 suggests that this electoral system would have been just as unfriendly towards female electoral candidates as the PR-STV system (with its low district magnitude) proved to be. A study of the 2007 results shows that just 22 female candidates (13.3 per cent of the total number elected) won seats in that election, as opposed to a slightly higher level in the 2011 contest (25 seats, or 15.1 per cent of the total). The study in Appendix 1, which outlined the likely recipients of the seats won in the nominal First Past the Post constituencies, predicts that 21 female candidates would have been elected had such an electoral system been used for the 2007 contest, with 26 female candidates predicted to be elected based on the 2011 analysis. Given the close similarities between these figures, there is little evidence to suggest that the use of a First Past the Post system would have been more conducive to promoting higher level of female representation than the current PR-STV system (even with its low district magnitude) would. By contrast, the use of a Mixed Member Proportional electoral system (which will be studied in Chapter 5) might have helped to improve female representation levels since it would allow party headquarters, should they so wish, to increase their number of female representatives by means of strategic placings on the party lists.



## **Chapter 4: The Alternative Vote electoral system**

The Alternative Vote electoral system is a relatively familiar one to Irish people, since it involves the application of single transferable vote electoral rules to single member constituencies. It is the process already used in Irish presidential elections and in Dáil by-elections. This electoral system is also used for parliamentary elections in Australia. As with the Irish electoral system, voters in this system have the option of voting for all the candidates on the ballot paper in order of preference and when the votes are counted their vote may be transferred to their next preference if the voter's preferred candidate does not have enough votes to be in contention for a seat and is eliminated during that count. However, unlike the current Irish electoral system, the Alternative Vote electoral system is not a proportional system, because it is based on single-member constituencies. This means that, even though they do not need to win the most first preference votes, parties will at least need to have a significant level of support within a constituency in order to challenge for a seat there.

We have of course some evidence of how the Alternative Vote system might operate in Ireland from recent Dáil by-election and presidential election contests. A review of the twenty five by-election contests that have taken place in Ireland between 1980 and 2013 shows that vote transfers influenced the result of these on five occasions – the 2005 Kildare North, 1999 Dublin South-Central, 1994 Cork South-Central, 1994 Mayo West and 1982 Dublin West by-elections – as well as the result of the 1990 Presidential Election. (That is to say, these are instances in which the elections were not won by the candidate with the most first preference votes because a lower placed candidate overtook them during the count, thanks to higher levels of vote transfers.) Allowing for this, the general expectation would be that the use of an Alternative Vote electoral system would benefit the larger political parties in Ireland's political system, and would especially benefit those larger parties that are also transfer-friendly. This electoral system usually offers larger parties a significant seat-bonus relative to their national vote share. Smaller political parties, especially those with no significant clustering of votes in specific parts of the state, would be expected to fare badly if it were used.

### **Simulating the 2007 and 2011 elections under the Alternative Vote system**

Developing the scenario for this study for outcomes in the 2007 and 2011 elections if the Alternative Vote system had been used was initially more straight-forward. The same 166 notional constituencies we had drawn up for the First Past the Post scenario could be used and the vote share which each party, or grouping, achieved in these notional constituencies in the two elections had already been determined.

However, finding out which party or grouping would have won the seat proved more difficult under Alternative Vote since we had to examine not only the vote share which each party won, but also vote transfer patterns. In constituencies where the share of the first preference was not sufficient to establish a clear winner, the analysis needed to take account of the likely transfer patterns between the various parties and of any constituency-specific, or party-specific, factors which might have enabled a candidate, who was behind the leading candidate on the first count, to leapfrog that first placed candidate and win the seat in that constituency with the help of vote transfers.

The detailed breakdown of which party or candidate would have won in each constituency in these situations is set out in the excel sheet at appendix 1. In a quarter of the notional constituencies the leading party or grouping achieved more than 50 per cent of the first preference vote (or were only just below this level) so the outcome was straightforward. In all but six of these constituencies the leading party was Fianna Fáil. The six constituencies where Fine Gael got above, or fell just short



of, the 50 per cent level included each of the five notional constituencies in Mayo and one of the Sligo Leitrim notional constituencies. In another 75 constituencies the task of selecting which party or grouping would win the seat was also easy because the party, or grouping, whose candidate was ahead on first preferences had such a lead over its nearest rival that there was no prospect of them being overtaken, even allowing for strong transfer patters between their opponents.

In a number of constituencies, however, the gap was sufficiently narrow to require us to consider whether the leading candidate, in terms of first preference votes, could be overtaken. It was necessary to consider each of these in turn carefully. One factor we had to pay particular regard to was the traditionally strong pattern of vote transfers from Fine Gael to Labour, and the somewhat weaker, but still significant, transfer pattern from Labour to Fine Gael. There were nine cases where our assessment is that transfers from Fine Gael (and transfers from other parties, such as the Green Party) would have enabled the Labour Party candidate to win the seat although Fianna Fáil had more votes on the first count. There were fifteen constituencies where Labour Party transfers (and transfers from other parties, such as the Green Party) would have enabled Fine Gael to leapfrog Fianna Fáil.

In addition there were a small number of constituencies where an independent candidate or a candidate from one of the smaller parties, although being behind both the Fianna Fáil and/or the Fine Gael candidate on the first count, would have won the seat because of their stronger ability to attract transfer votes. This for example was the case in relation to the Green Party candidates in a Dublin North and a Dublin Mid-West constituency.

There were some constituencies where the leading candidates were so closely balanced that it was difficult to decide which would have won. These included one in Meath East, two in Sligo Leitrim, two in Clare and three in Dublin South Central. Here we determined the outcome on the basis of what transfer patters between non-Fianna Fáil candidates in the actual 2007 election.

## **SCENARIO 2.a**

### **2007 Election Outcome using Alternative Vote electoral system**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Dublin</b>	<b>Leinster</b>	<b>Munster</b>	<b>Connacht-Ulster</b>	<b>Total</b>
Fianna Fáil	29	28	38	19	<b>114</b>
Fine Gael	8	9	7	10	<b>34</b>
Labour Party	8	3	1	0	<b>12</b>
Sinn Féin	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Green Party	2	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Progressive Democrats	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
SP/PBP/WUAG	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Others/Independents	0	1	1	0	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table 4.1: Seat allocations by region and nationally if the 2007 Election re-run under Alternative Vote system.**

The most striking features of the outcomes of the 2007 election in this Alternative Vote scenario (Table 4.1) include the following

(1) **Fianna Fáil would again have had large seat bonus and a large Dáil majority.** While it would not have been as dramatic as that in the First Past the Post scenario it would still have been substantial. In the actual 2011 contest (fought under PR-STV electoral rules) Fianna Fáil secured 41.6 per cent of the vote and 47.0 per cent of the seats (78 of 166), but in this Alternative Vote scenario the same 41.6 per of the vote would have given Fianna Fáil almost 70 per cent of the seats (68.7 per cent).

(2) **Fine Gael would have done considerably better in terms of seats in Dáil Éireann in this Alternative Vote scenario than it did in the First Past the Post scenario,** winning almost twice as many seat (18 compared to 34) as it did in out First Past the Post 2007 scenario. It would, however, have had many fewer seats than it did under the existing system. In the actual election it won 51 seats. Almost all of the Fine Gael seat gains using the Alternative Vote scenario were dependent on strong transfer patterns from the Labour party of at least 50 per cent. If an Alternative Vote system operated in Ireland a strong formal transfer pact between Fine Gael and Labour is very likely or indeed a strong pattern of each of these parties voters supporting the other in constituencies where their own candidate had no realistic prospect of success would emerge in practise.

(3) **The dominance which Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael would have had in 2007 in the First Past the Post scenario would be lessened under the Alternative Vote system, but not to any great extent.** In this Alternative Vote scenario the two large parties would still have won 148 of the 166 seats (89.2 per cent) between them. Of the other parties the Labour Party would have fared best, with the concentration of its vote in the Dublin and East regions assisting it to seat gains there. Eight of the twelve seats which Labour would have won in this scenario would have been in Dublin, with two other wins in Kildare and one win each in Cork East and Wexford. The geographic concentration of the support of a smaller party means that one interesting circumstances which would arise in this Alternative Vote scenario is the fact that four of the Labour Party seats would have been won in the Dublin South Central constituency area.

(4) **Even very small parties or independents can win an occasional seat in using the Alternative Vote system if their vote is geographically concentrated (and if these parties are transfer-friendly).** In our scenario for the 2007 election, the Green Party would also have won two seats (as opposed to the First Past the Post scenario in which this party was predicted to win no seats) with these seats being won within the Dublin North and Dublin Mid-West constituency areas. It takes a very strong concentration of vote in a geographic area for an independent to win in a single seat constituency in the Alternative Vote system (as it does in the First Past the Post scenario), but that is what Michael Lowry would have managed to do in both cases, with the Independents/Others grouping winning over 57 per cent of the vote in the notional Tipperary North constituency covering his bailiwick. (This Independents/Others figure would have included a significant number of votes for another independent candidate, Jim Ryan, but the Lowry vote would have still exceeded the first preference vote won by any of the other political groupings even if the Ryan vote had not been included.) So he would have comfortably taken a seat even under the Alternative Vote system. Similarly, due to the clustering of support around her Leixlip/Maynooth political base in Kildare North, Catherine Murphy would have had a sufficiently high level of support to win a seat in the nominal constituency based around her bailiwick. Vote transfers from other parties (most notably Labour) were sufficient to edge her ahead of the Fianna Fáil candidate (who would have been assigned this constituency in the First Past the Post simulation), even though Fianna Fáil would have won slightly more first preference votes. By comparison, the fact that Tony Gregory's vote was spread relatively evenly across the four notional constituencies drawn out of the Dublin Central constituency means that, while the Independent/Others vote was the second

strongest to Fianna Fáil in all four of these notional constituencies, the assessment would be that there would not have been an independent seat in any of these even allowing for the impact of vote transfers to this grouping.

## SCENARIO 2.b

### 2011 Election Outcome using the Alternative Vote electoral system

Party	Dublin	Leinster	Munster	Connacht-Ulster	Total
Fianna Fáil	0	1	0	1	2
Fine Gael	22	34	36	22	114
Labour Party	23	5	5	2	35
Sinn Féin	0	0	0	5	5
Green Party	0	0	0	0	0
United Left Alliance	0	0	0	1	1
Others/Independents	2	2	4	1	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table 4.2: Seat allocations by region and nationally if 2007 Election re-run under Alternative Vote electoral system.**

This scenario throws up some of the most startling outcomes of our study. The more interesting findings included;

(1) **The outcome of the Alternative Vote scenario for the 2011 election would have been almost the same as that of the First Past the Post scenario for that election.** Fianna Fáil would have won one seat less, Labour three more and Fine Gael the same number of seats. Sinn Féin would have got one seat less and the number of independents elected would have been the same. The similarity in the results calculated under the two simulations is striking and suggests that the effect of the implosion of one of two hitherto dominant parties, Fianna Fáil, would have been the same if either the First Past the Post or Alternative Vote electoral systems had been employed for the 2011 contest. In both simulations Fianna Fáil would lose almost all of their seats and the main beneficiary, by a large margin, is Fine Gael, which manages effectively to supplant Fianna Fáil as the largest party. In the Alternative Vote scenario, we can see that Fine Gael would have ended up with exactly the same seat share as that which Fianna Fáil would have had before its collapse.

(2) **As in the First Past the Post scenario for this election Fianna Fáil would have effectively been wiped out in terms of the party's Dáil presence.** Eamonn O'Cúiv in Galway West and Barry Cowen in Laois-Offaly would have been their only surviving TDs if the 2011 election had been run under the Alternative Vote system. The swing against Fianna Fáil in terms of seats losses would have been much more dramatic than the collapse in vote share. In the 2011 election their vote more than halved, falling from 41.6 per cent to 17.4 per cent and they lost more than two thirds of their seats, falling from the 78 seats won at the 2007 contest to 20 seats at the 2011 election. If the two elections had been run under the Alternative Vote system, however, Fianna Fáil's seat numbers would have fallen from the dizzy heights of 114 seats in 2007 to just two in 2011. The extent to which the Alternative Vote system delivers disproportionate results in terms of seats for vote share is illustrated by the fact that in 2011 using our scenario Fianna Fáil's 17.4 per cent of the vote would have given them only 1.2 per cent of the seats in Dáil Éireann.

(3) **Fine Gael would have almost tripled the number of seats they would have been predicted to win under Alternative Vote rules in 2007.** They would be in government on their own with a very comfortable majority of 62 seats, while Labour as the largest opposition party would have less than one third of the seats held by the government party.

(4) **Labour would be the only other party to achieve a significant level of representation in Dáil Éireann using the Alternative Vote.** Of the 34 seats that the party is predicted to win in this scenario, 23 of these would have come from the Dublin region, the only area where the party would have posed a significant challenge to Fine Gael in term of Dáil seat numbers.

(5) **The geographic concentration of Sinn Féin support would have meant that it would have been able to benefit to some extent from the dramatic collapse of Fianna Fáil,** but not to the same degree as in the First Past the Post system as the party's problem in winning vote transfers would have seen it lose out to Labour in the Dublin North-West constituency assigned to it in the First Past the Post simulation (and also to Fine Gael in Cork North-Central). As a result, all of the five seats assigned to Sinn Fein in this scenario would have come from the Connacht-Ulster region and in particular from the counties of Donegal (accounting for four of these seats) and Monaghan. It is interesting to note that the list of constituencies won by Sinn Féin in this analysis is somewhat different to the constituencies won by the party in the First Past the Post study, even though there would have been a similar outcome in terms of total number of seats .

### **Some Health Warnings: Adjustment in campaigning and voting patterns in an Alternative Vote electoral system scenario**

The points noted in the conclusion of the previous chapter (Chapter 4) in relation to different voting styles in First Past the Post and PR-STV electoral systems do not have the same degree of resonance here, given that the ability to transfer one's vote in this electoral system would negate the need for tactical voting (although plumpers – voters who cast preferences for just one candidate – might still, in certain contexts, be more likely to vote tactically than they would in a PR-STV contest). By contrast, it is likely that political parties would still have been highly tactical in terms of focusing their campaigning efforts and finances on constituencies that they believed to be winnable. The only difference between this context and the First Past the Post scenario is that the ability to pick up vote transfers under Alternative Vote might have increased the number of constituencies that political parties deemed to be winnable, especially if these parties were transfer-friendly (as was the case with Fine Gael and Labour at the 2011 election, as well as the Green Party in previous electoral contests).

## Chapter 5: The Mixed Member Proportional electoral system

In this section the analysis turns to simulating the 2007 and 2011 Irish Dail elections under list-type electoral rules and in particular under the Mixed Member Proportional variant (as used in Germany). In this system, electors each have two votes. They have one vote for a constituency candidate in a single-member constituency and they have a second vote, which they cast for a political party. The single seat in a constituency is won by the candidate who wins the most votes, as in a First Past the Post contest. The proportional element of this system emerges from the second or 'party' vote.

This electoral system guarantees parliamentary representation to political parties that achieve a certain threshold of support. In Germany this is set at five per cent of the national vote (based on the second 'party' ballot) or on winning three of the constituency contests. The same threshold has been applied in this study. All parties that failed to achieve this threshold were excluded from the second stage of the exercise although such parties would still have been represented in parliament if they had won one or two of the single-member plurality constituency contests (see Table 5.1). This system excludes very small parties, but the threshold of entry is low enough to allow well-organised new or smaller parties to have a realistic prospect of reaching it. However, the exclusion of very small parties from parliament injects a degree of disproportionality into the system, since the parties that do achieve the threshold for entry will win a higher percentage of seats than their percentage share of the national vote.

The number of seats that parties are entitled to is calculated from the second 'party' vote share. Seats are then distributed between the parties to achieve proportionality, taking into account seats already won in the single member districts. The candidates who fill those 'top up' seats are decided by the ordering of each party's list. If a party is entitled to ten more seats these will go to the first ten candidates on that party's list. (In Germany there are party lists at the regional, or *Land*, level. Once the number of candidates to be elected for each party is calculated, based on that party's share of the national vote, the number of candidates to be elected from each of the regions or *Lands* is then calculated, based on the number of votes won by that party in the second 'party' ballot in different regions. Once the winners of single member constituency seats in that region is taken into account, seats are allocated to that party in that region based on the position of different candidates on the *Land* party list. Since the purpose of this study is to illustrate the actual number of seats to be won by a party nationally the regional element will not be a feature of this analysis.)

### SCENARIO 3.a

#### 2007 election outcome under the Multi Member Proportional system

Since 83 of the 166 seats in this electoral system are to be allocated on the basis of single-member First Past the Post constituencies our first step in developing this scenario was to create the 83 notional constituencies by combining contiguous First Past the Post constituencies. These are twice the size of the single member plurality constituencies created for First Past the Post study. We added together the party/political grouping votes for those constituencies to calculate the party votes for the Mixed Member Proportional system single-seat constituencies. Once these votes had been calculated, the party or political grouping that was seen to have won the most votes in these Mixed Member Proportional constituencies was deemed to have won the constituency seat, based on First Past the Post rules, and then the total number of constituency seats won by the different parties was

calculated. The total number of constituency seats won by each party under this scenario would have been as follows:

<b>Party</b>	<b>Party vote (%)</b>	<b>Seats to which party is entitled</b>	<b>FPTP/SMD seats won</b>	<b>MMP seats awarded</b>	<b>Total seats</b>
Fianna Fáil	41.6	80	73	7	<b>80</b>
Fine Gael	27.3	53	8	45	<b>53</b>
Labour Party	10.1	19	0	19	<b>19</b>
Sinn Féin	6.9	13	1	12	<b>13</b>
Green Party	4.7	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Progressive Democrats	2.7	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Socialist Party	0.6	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
People Before Profit	0.5	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Workers Party	0.1	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Christian Solidarity	0.1	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<i>Others/Independents</i>	<i>5.4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table 5.1: Seat allocations by party (constituency seats and list seats) if the 2007 Election re-run under Mixed Member Proportional system.**

The outcome of the 2007 election in the single seat constituencies, allocated by First Past the Post, shows the proportion won by Fianna Fáil increased somewhat at the expense of both Fine Gael and more especially Labour (Table 5.1). Labour would not have won any of the constituency seats. All but two of the constituency seats would have been won by Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael with those two falling to Sinn Féin (Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin in Monaghan) and to an independent candidate (Michael Lowry in Tipperary).

The next step was to determine what proportion of Dáil seats each party would have been entitled to win under the application of Mixed Member Proportional rules, based on each party's share of the national vote.

The first step in this second part of the exercise was to decide which parties should be included when the five per cent/three constituency seats threshold is applied. In this regard, the only parties that would be included would be Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael (on the basis of achieving the three constituency seats requirement, in addition to the five per cent of the national vote requirement), as well as the Labour Party and Sinn Féin (on the basis of achieving the five per cent of the national vote requirement). The Green Party would have fallen agonisingly short of this five per cent requirement while national support levels for the other small parties (including the Progressive Democrats, Socialist Party, People Before Profit Alliance, and Christian Solidarity Party) would all have been well below the threshold level.

Under the national party list criterion Fianna Fáil would have been entitled to 80 seats overall so that party would have been allocated an additional seven seats in addition to the 73 constituency based seats the party won.

Fine Gael would then be allocated 45 of the List seats, in addition to the eight seats that the party would have won in the constituency vote element, to bring that party to 53 seats overall. Labour would be allocated 19 seats and Sinn Féin would be allocated 12 seats. It is interesting to note that

in this scenario all of the Labour Party's 19 TDs would be List TDs, while only one of Sinn Fein's overall number of 13 TDs would be a constituency based.

The independents grouping would have (just about) exceeded the five per cent threshold requirement, but it was decided that this grouping could not be treated in the same manner as a political party on the basis of the wide diversity of candidates and political ideologies covered within this grouping. Had the independents grouping been treated as a separate political party, this grouping would have been entitled to 9 seats overall (8 List seats in addition to the one seat won in the single-member plurality constituencies), with the number of seats being won by Fianna Fáil then being reduced to 76, Fine Gael's allocation falling to 50 and the Labour Party's falling to 17.

## **SCENARIO 3.b**

### **2011 election outcomes using the Multi-Member Proportional system**

The same approach was adopted in terms of developing the 2011 scenario. In order to achieve greater comparability between our studies, an attempt was made to ensure that the drawing up of the single-member plurality constituencies would reflect the approach taken for the 2007 study as far as was practicable. By and large, the same combination of notional First Past the Post constituencies was involved for this scenario although the loss of a Dáil seat in Limerick East (City) at the expense of Louth in the *2007 Constituency Commission* report had a knock on effect in terms of requiring a change to be made to the combination of constituencies in these areas, and this has a further impact on the combination of constituencies in some of the neighbouring counties.

In this 2011 scenario the constituency seat numbers are again seen to largely reflect the seat allocations under the First Past the Post system, especially in the cases of Labour and Sinn Féin. Indeed these parties would have won exactly half the number of seats that they were allocated in the First Past the Post study. The proportion of constituency seats won by Fine Gael in this analysis was, however, somewhat higher than that which they won in the First Past the Post scenario (taking 74.7 per cent of the constituency seats in the Mixed Member Proportional system scenario, as opposed to 68.7 per cent of the seats assigned to this party in the First Past the Post simulation). The increase in Fine Gael's share of the constituency seats would have been accounted for by a reduction in the proportion assigned to Fianna Fáil (winning no constituency seats in this simulation), as well as the Independents and Others grouping. The dominance of the largest party in the allocation of constituency seats in the Mixed Member Proportional system would not have been as evident as in the 2007 scenario, mainly because Fine Gael's vote lacks the same catch-all characteristics (due to that party's weakness in urban working class areas) that the Fianna Fáil vote had prior to the economic collapse.

In this Mixed Member Proportional scenario only two seats would have been won by the Independents/Others grouping, these being in Tipperary and in Kerry.

<b>Party</b>	<b>Party vote (%)</b>	<b>Seats to which party is entitled</b>	<b>FPTP/SMD seats won</b>	<b>List seats awarded</b>	<b>Total seats</b>
Fianna Fáil	17.4	35	0	35	<b>35</b>
Fine Gael	36.1	71	62	9	<b>71</b>
Labour Party	19.4	38	16	22	<b>38</b>
Sinn Féin	9.9	20	3	17	<b>20</b>
United Left Alliance	2.7	0	0	0	<b>0</b>



Green Party	1.8	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
New Vision	1.1	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Workers Party	0.1	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Christian Solidarity	0.1	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<i>Others/Independents</i>	<i>11.4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>
Total	100.0	164	83	83	166

**Table 5.2: Seat allocations by party (constituency seats and List seats) if 2011 Election re-run under Mixed Member Proportional system.**

The next step was to determine the number of Dáil seats that each party would have been entitled to win based on their share of the national vote/first preference votes. A number of parties were excluded on the basis of the application of the threshold requirements (five per cent of the national vote/three constituency seats). Therefore the only parties entitled to be included were Fine Gael, Labour and Sinn Féin (on the basis of achieving the three constituency seats/ five per cent of the national vote requirements), as well as Fianna Fáil (on the basis of achieving the five per cent of the national vote requirement). None of the other political parties or groupings would have come close to achieving these requirements, with the United Left Alliance grouping and the Green Party falling some percentage points short of the five per cent threshold requirement and failing to win any of the constituency seats.

The study calculates that Fianna Fáil would have been entitled to 35 seats overall, with all of these seats to come from the party list element (Table 5.2). In contrast, most of the seats won by Fine Gael would have come from the constituency vote, with that party entitled to a further 9 seats from the party list element. The largest proportion of seats allocated to Labour and Sinn Féin in this analysis, however, would come from the party lists, with Labour assigned 22 List seats (in addition to the 16 seats won in the constituency vote element) and Sinn Féin assigned 17 List seats (in addition to the 3 seats won in the constituency vote element). With 85 per cent of Sinn Féin seats and all of the Fianna Fáil seats coming from the List element, there can be no doubt that these would have been the parties that would have benefited the most had Mixed Member Proportional electoral rules been used at the 2011 election.

The Independents and Others grouping would have comfortably exceeded the five per cent threshold requirement, but, as with the 2007 analysis, it was decided that this grouping could not be treated in the same manner as a political party and was excluded from the List seat allocations. But had the Independents and Others been treated as a separate political party, they would have been entitled to 22 seats overall (20 List seats in addition to the two seats won in the single-member plurality constituency element). In this scenario, the number of overall seats that would have been won by Fine Gael would have fallen to 62 (meaning the party would have not been entitled to any extra seats from the party lists), with Labour's overall allocation of Dáil seats falling to 33, Fianna Fáil's falling to 30 and Sinn Féin's to 17.

### **Some Health Warnings: Adjustment in campaigning and voting patterns in a Multi-Member Proportional (List) system scenario**

The party seat-level figures calculated here are predicated on the basis of voting patterns at the 2007 and 2011 contests, which were of course held under PR-STV electoral rules, and also under the assumption that the first vote/constituency vote and second vote/party vote levels would have been exactly the same. In reality, there can be significant differences between first/constituency vote and second/party vote patterns, given that fact that some voters may tend to vote tactically in these contests. In this instance, supporters of the smaller parties will cast their votes for these parties in



the second/party vote element. But they may well switch their first/constituency vote to a candidate from another, stronger, party if they believe that their party has no chance of winning the constituency contest and that their vote would be wasted if they voted for the candidate from their own party. In this instance, given the context of the Mullingar Accord, it could be argued that some Labour voters might have been inclined to cast their constituency votes in 2007 for a Fine Gael candidate if they were based in constituencies in which the Labour Party candidate was not in serious contention to win that seat. These Labour Party supporters would, of course, then have voted for their own party in the second vote/party vote element.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions – Comparing party seats by electoral system

So what conclusions can be drawn about the impacts that the use of different electoral systems would have had on Irish political party representation levels? The following section will try to tease these out by comparing the predicted seat levels for the different political parties, across the simulations for the three different types of electoral systems studied here, with the actual results of the 2007 and 2011 contests under Proportional Representation by Single Transferable Vote electoral rules.

### 2007 General Election

The most striking differences here are between the projected results under single-member plurality (First Past the Post) and Alternative Vote electoral rules and those associated with the more proportional electoral systems. The number of seats assigned to Fianna Fáil in these models far exceeds the number won by that party at the actual election (under PR-STV rules) or the number of seats that the party is predicted to have won had a Mixed Member Proportional system been in place. The predicted seat levels for the other parties would have been significantly lower, underlining the highly disproportional nature of these electoral systems, with the small parties struggling to attain any representation levels in Dáil Éireann, as shown in Table 6.1.

Party	Party vote (%)	PR-STV	FPTP/SMP	AV	List/MMP
Fianna Fáil	41.6	78	142	114	80
Fine Gael	27.3	51	18	34	53
Labour Party	10.1	20	3	12	19
Sinn Féin	6.9	4	1	1	13
Green Party	4.7	6	0	2	0
Progressive Democrats	2.7	2	1	1	0
Socialist Party	0.6	0	0	0	0
People Before Profit	0.5	0	0	0	0
Workers Party	0.1	0	0	0	0
Christian Solidarity	0.1	0	0	0	0
Others/Independents	5.4	5	1	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table 6.1: Actual seats won in the 2007 General Election (and party vote share) as compared with party seat estimates for this election under alternative electoral system scenarios.**

It is interesting to note, however, that the predicted seat numbers for the Mixed Member Proportional system analysis generally mirror those won by the three largest parties, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour, in the actual contest (under PR-STV rules), although the two larger parties do get a slightly higher seat bonus in the Mixed Member Proportional system analysis. The most striking differences between the Mixed Member Proportional system estimates and the results of the actual election are the number of seats won by the smaller parties, with Sinn Féin's tally of seats in a Mixed Member Proportional system scenario significantly larger than the number won by that party in the May 2007 contest (under PR-STV rules). By contrast, all the other smaller parties, including the Green Party (which won 6 seats in the 2007 PR-STV contest), would have been left without parliamentary representation under Mixed Member Proportional system rules. Apart from the Sinn Féin example, the functioning of the Mixed Member Proportional system in this case appears to be decidedly less proportional in scope than the running of the election under PR-STV rules proved to be, given the increase in the size of the *seat bonus* awarded to the two largest

parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, in addition to the fact that only four political parties are seen to gain political representation in Dáil Éireann in this scenario. A key issue here is how to treat the Independents and Others grouping. If it is decided that this is not a coherent enough grouping to be treated as a separate political party (and to be in line to earn top-up seats from the party lists as a result), this does make for a greater degree of disproportionality in this system as this means that the List seats would be shared out amongst a smaller number of political parties as a result, leaving these in line to win more significant seat bonuses. In the analysis in which this grouping was treated as a single political entity (and hence able to win top-up seats from the party lists) the extent of these seat bonuses declines and the total number of seats won per political party comes to better resemble these parties' share of the national vote than the PR-STV result does as a result.

### 2011 General Election

Again, as with the analysis of the 2007 results, the stark contrast between the projected results under single-member plurality (First Past the Post) and Alternative Vote electoral rules and those for the more proportional electoral systems is highly evident. In this case, however, the significant seat bonuses are seen to benefit Fine Gael, as opposed to Fianna Fáil in the 2007 study (Table 6.2). The number of seats assigned to Fine Gael significantly exceeds (by between thirty-five and forty-five seats) the number won by that party at the actual election (under PR-STV rules) or the number of seats assigned to that party in the Mixed Member Proportional analysis. The extent of the *bias* towards Fine Gael in the First Past the Post/Alternative Vote models, however, is not as dramatic as was the case for Fianna Fáil in the 2007 study, given that Fine Gael's support pattern did not exhibit the same catch-all attributes associated with Fianna Fáil in 2007, due to the party's weak support in urban working class areas. This weakness, in particular, would have allowed Labour and some of the other (more left-leaning) parties the opportunity (particularly given the collapse in Fianna Fáil support) to be able to win some of the single-member plurality constituencies. The projected number of Labour seats under First Past the Post and Alternative Vote electoral rules is not seen to be significantly lower than the level won by the party in the actual 2011 election or in the Mixed Member Proportional system analysis. The same pattern also applies in the case of the Independents and Others grouping, with just four fewer seats being assigned to this grouping in the single-member plurality and Alternative Vote simulations relative to the number won by this grouping in the 2011 election.

Party	Party vote (%)	PR-STV	FPTP/SMD	AV	List/MMP
Fianna Fáil	17.4	20	3	2	35
Fine Gael	36.1	76	114	114	71
Labour Party	19.4	37	32	35	38
Sinn Féin	9.9	14	6	5	20
United Left Alliance	2.7	5	1	1	0
Green Party	1.8	0	0	0	0
New Vision	1.1	1	1	0	0
Workers Party	0.1	0	0	0	0
Christian Solidarity	0.1	0	0	0	0
Others/Independents	11.4	13	9	9	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>166</b>

**Table 6.2: Actual seats won in the 2011 General Election (and party vote share) as compared with party seat estimates for this election under alternative electoral system scenarios.**

While both Sinn Féin and the United Left Alliance would achieve representation under First Past the Post/Alternative Vote electoral rules, the predicted numbers of seats for these parties, fall well

short of the levels won under PR-STV rules at the February 2011 contest. The most striking figure is the predicted number of seats for Fianna Fáil. Just as that party would be expected to gain from a very large seat bonus under these rules when national support levels are high (above the forty per cent level), the catch-all nature of the party means that it would struggle to achieve representation in the First Past the Post/Alternative Vote simulations if its support levels fell substantially. This translates into a very dramatic drop in the number of seats being assigned to Fianna Fáil in the Alternative Vote and especially the First Past the Post simulations, as is evident if we compare Tables 6.1 and 6.2. By contrast, the loss of Fianna Fáil seats would have not have been as remarkable had Mixed Member Proportional system rules been employed for those two contests.

The link between the numbers of seats assigned to the different parties and groupings in the Mixed Member Proportional analysis and the numbers actually won by these under PR-STV rules in the February 2011 election is not as clear cut as it was for the 2007 study. While the proportion of seats assigned to Fine Gael falls closer in line with party's share of the national vote, all of the other larger parties (Labour, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin) are predicted to have won higher seat levels had Mixed Member Proportional rules been in place. These trends might not have been as defined had the Independent and Others grouping been treated as a separate party, as is shown in the predicted seat levels when this grouping was treated as a separate political entity and hence in a position to win top-up seats from a party list (as discussed in Chapter 5).

### **Other Comments**

The studies here have shown that the use of different types of electoral systems would have resulted in significant changes to the Irish political landscape in terms of levels of party representation levels in Dáil Éireann. But there would have been other implications in terms of shaping voter behaviour and campaigning tactics. Issues that are not features of the current Irish electoral system, such as high numbers of wasted votes, varying constituency marginality levels and party tactics in the face of relatively smaller numbers of competitive seats, would have impacted on voter behaviour had a different electoral system been employed, particularly in a First Past the Post system. In this instance, lower voter turnout levels might have resulted, especially in constituencies where voters believed that a vote for their favourite party would be a wasted one due to that party not being in serious contention to win that seat. If these voters did not opt to vote tactically for another party or decided to remain loyal to their party irrespective of the likely outcome, they might choose instead to not turn out to vote in that election. Turnout concerns would have been especially pronounced in the case of safe constituencies where the final result was believed to be a foregone conclusion – in this instance, a number of voters might have opted not to turn out on polling day in the belief that their individual votes would have had no effect on the outcome in that constituency.

## Appendix 1: List of candidates like to be elected in the First Past the Post electoral contest scenarios (see Chapter 3)

In this section, suggestions are made as to the identification of which candidates would have been elected in the First Past the Post system simulations, as covered in Chapter 3. In most instances/constituencies, this is a fairly straightforward prospect in that the numbers of seats won by a party may match up exactly with the number of party candidates contesting those elections.

This is not the case in Dáil constituency areas where the number of notional First Past the Post constituencies predicted to have been won by a party exceeded the number of candidates running for that party in the actual election. For instance, Fianna Fáil were predicted to win all five of the notional First Past the Post constituencies created from the Carlow-Kilkenny Dáil constituency in the 2007 analysis, but the party just ran three candidates in that constituency in that contest. In this instance, once nominal constituencies had been assigned to the party candidates who contested the election, the remaining constituencies were assigned to other party members, mainly coming from the councillor/local election candidate ranks. The basis for doing so was determined by which party members won the most first preference votes in the areas covered by these nominal constituency areas in the preceding local elections (the 2004 local elections in the case of the 2007 General Election analysis and the 2009 local elections for the 2011 General Election analysis). Exceptions were made in the cases where these seats would have been won by family members of people who were party candidates in the actual elections, as in the case of Maurice Ahern and Michael Ahern in Cork East the 2007 study. Not surprisingly, this was a far from rare occurrence.

In cases where the number of nominal constituencies won by a party was less than the number of candidates running for that party in the actual general election contest, the party seats were assigned on the basis of which party candidates were strongest in the nominal constituencies being assigned to the party and not on the basis of which party candidates won seats in the actual election. This is evidently the case in terms of the allocation of the two nominal constituencies won by Fine Gael between its party candidates in the 2007 analysis, as well as the allocation of the one nominal constituency won by Fianna Fáil in Roscommon-South Leitrim.

### 2007 General Election

**Carlow-Kilkenny:** John McGuinness FF, Bobby Aylward FF, MJ Nolan FF, Rody Kelly FF, Tom Brennan FF

**Cavan-Monaghan:** Brendan Smith FF, *Margaret Conlon FF*, Clifford Kelly FF, T.P. Smith FF, Caoimhghin O Caolain SF

**Clare:** Timmy Dooley FF, Tony Killeen FF, Pat Breen FG, Joe Carey FG

**Cork East:** Michael Ahern FF, Ned O'Keeffe FF, David Savage FF, Sean Sherlock LAB

**Cork North-Central:** Billy Kelleher FF, Noel O'Flynn FF, Dan Fleming FF, Bernard Allen FG

**Cork North-West:** Michael Moynihan FF, Batt O'Keeffe FF, Michael Moynihan FF

**Cork South-Central:** Michéal Martin FF, Michael McGrath FF, John Dennehy FF, *Deirdre Forde FF*, Donal Coughlan FF

**Cork South-West:** Christy O'Sullivan FF, Denis O'Donovan FF, Alan Coleman FF

**Donegal North-East:** Jim McDaid FF, Niall Blaney FF, *Cecilia Keaveney FF*

**Donegal South-West:** *Mary Coughlan FF*, Pat Gallagher FF, *Alice Bonner FF*

**Dublin Central:** Bertie Ahern FF, Cyprian Brady FF, *Mary Fitzpatrick FF*, Tom Stafford FF

**Dublin Mid-West:** John Curran FF, Luke Moriarty FF, Trevor Gilligan FF, Des Kelly FF

**Dublin North:** Michael O'Kennedy FF, Daragh O'Brien FF, John O'Leary FF, *Barbara Foley FF*

**Dublin North-Central:** Sean Haughey FF, Ivor Callellly FF, *Deirdre Heney FF*

**Dublin North-East:** Michael Woods FF, Martin Brady FF, Tom Brabazon FF

**Dublin North-West:** Noel Ahern FF, Pat Carey FF, Liam Kelly FF  
**Dublin South:** Seamus Brennan FF, Tom Kitt FF, *Maria Corrigan FF*, Gerry Horkan FF, John Lahart FF  
**Dublin South-Central:** Sean Ardagh FF, Michael Mulcahy FF, David Gaynor FF, *Marian McGennis FF, Mary Mooney FF*  
**Dublin South-East:** Chris Andrews FF, Jim O’Callaghan FF, Garry Keegan FF, Michael Donnelly FF  
**Dublin South-West:** Conor Lenihan FF, Charlie O’Connor FF, Joe Neville FF, John Hannon FF  
**Dublin West:** Brian Lenihan FF, Gerry Lynam FF, *Brenda Clifford FF*  
**Dún Laoghaire:** *Mary Hanafin FF*, Barry Andrews FF, Larry Butler FF, Barry Conway FF, Cormac Devlin FF  
**Galway East:** Noel Treacy FF, Michael Kitt FF, John Barton FG, Tom McHugh FG  
**Galway West:** Eamon O’Cuiv FF, Frank Fahey FF, Michael Crowe FF, Sean O Tuairisg FF, Noel Grealish PD  
**Kerry North:** Tom McEllistrim FF, Jimmy Deenihan FG, Pat McCarthy FG  
**Kerry South:** John O’Donoghue FF, Tom Fleming FF, Michael D. O’Shea FF  
**Kildare North:** *Aine Brady FF*, Michael Fitzpatrick FF, Paul Kelly FF, Willie Callaghan FF  
**Kildare South:** Sean O’Fearghail FF, Sean Power FF, Martin Miley FF  
**Laois-Offaly:** Brian Cowen FF, Sean Fleming FF, John Moloney FF, John Foley FF, Peter Ormond FF  
**Limerick East:** Willie O’Dea FF, Peter Power FF, *Noreen Ryan FF*, John Cronin FF, Kieran O’Hanlon FF  
**Limerick West:** Niall Collins FF, John Cregan FF, Dan Neville FG  
**Longford-Westmeath:** *Mary O’Rourke FF*, Peter Kelly FF, Donie Cassidy FF, Willie Penrose LAB  
**Louth:** Seamus Kirk FF, Dermot Ahern FF, Peter Savage FF, Fergus O’Dowd FG  
**Mayo:** Enda Kenny FG, Michael Ring FG, John O’Mahony FG, *Michelle Mulherin FG*, Gerry Coyle FG  
**Meath East:** *Mary Wallace FF*, Thomas Byrne FF, Noel Leonard FF  
**Meath West:** Noel Dempsey FF, Johnny Brady FF, Tommy Reilly FF  
**Roscommon-South Leitrim:** John Ellis FF, Frank Feighan FG, Denis Naughten FG  
**Sligo-North Leitrim:** Eamon Scanlon FF, Jimmy Devins FF, Michael Comiskey FG  
**Tipperary North:** *Maire Hooctor FF*, Michael Smith FF, Michael Lowry IND  
**Tipperary North:** Mattie McGrath FF, Martin Mansergh FF, *Siobhan Ambrose FF*  
**Waterford:** Martin Cullen FF, Brendan Kenneally FF, Ollie Wilkinson FF, Tom Cronin FF  
**Wexford:** John Browne FF, Sean Connick FF, *Lisa McDonald FF*, Michael D’Arcy FG, Brendan Howlin LAB  
**Wicklow:** Dick Roche FF, Joe Behan FF, Pat Fitzgerald FF, Fachtna Whittle FF, Billy Timmins FG

*The model predicts that only 21 female candidates (highlighted by italics) would have been elected, had this election been run under First Past the Post rules – a slightly lower number than the 22 females that were actually elected at the 2007 contest (under PR-STV, from constituencies with low levels of district magnitude).*

**2011 General Election** (\* denotes a candidate also predicted to win a seat in the 2007 analysis)

**Carlow-Kilkenny:** Phil Hogan FG, John Paul Phelan FG, Pat Deering FG, Fergal Browne FG, Pat O’Neill FG  
**Cavan-Monaghan:** Joe O’Reilly FG, Sean Conlan FG, *Heather Humphries FG*, Peter McVitty FG, Paddy Smith FG

**Clare:** Pat Breen FG\*, Joe Carey FG\*, Tony Mulcahy FG, Martin Conway FG  
**Cork East:** Tom Barry FG, David Stanton FG, Pa O'Driscoll FG, Sean Sherlock LAB\*  
**Cork North-Central:** Pat Burton FG, *Kathleen Lynch LAB*, John Gilroy LAB, Jonathan O'Brien SF  
**Cork North-West:** Michael Creed FG, *Aine Collins FG*, Derry Canty FG  
**Cork South-Central:** Simon Coveney FG, Jerry Buttimer FG, *Deirdre Clune FG*, *Deirdre Forde FG\**, Emmet O'Halloran FG  
**Cork South-West:** Jim Daly FG, Noel Harrington FG, Kevin Murphy FG  
**Donegal North-East:** Joe McHugh FG, John Ryan FG, Noel McBride FG  
**Donegal South-West:** Pearse Doherty SF, *Cora Harvey SF*, Thomas Pringle IND  
**Dublin Central:** Joe Costello LAB, *Aine Clancy LAB*, *Claire O'Regan LAB*, *Maureen O'Sullivan LAB*  
**Dublin Mid-West:** Derek Keating FG, *Frances Fitzgerald FG*, *Joanna Tuffy LAB*, Robert Dowds LAB  
**Dublin North:** James Reilly FG, Alan Farrell FG, Brendan Ryan LAB, Tom Kelleher LAB  
**Dublin North-Central:** Richard Bruton FG, Naoise O'Muire FG, Pat Crimmins FG  
**Dublin North-East:** Terence Flanagan FG, Tommy Broughan LAB, Sean Kenny LAB  
**Dublin North-West:** *Roisin Shortall LAB*, John Lyons LAB, Dessie Ellis SF  
**Dublin South:** *Olivia Mitchell FG*, Alan Shatter FG, Peter Mathews FG, Barry Saul FG, Jim O'Leary FG  
**Dublin South-Central:** Colm Brophy FG, Eric Byrne LAB, Michael Conaghan LAB, Henry Upton LAB, John Gallagher LAB  
**Dublin South-East:** *Lucinda Creighton FG*, Eoghan Murphy FG, *Edie Wynn FG*, Kevin Humphries LAB  
**Dublin South-West:** Brian Hayes FG, Pat Rabitte LAB, Eamonn Maloney LAB, Mick Duff LAB  
**Dublin West:** Leo Varadkar FG, Kieran Denison FG, *Joan Burton LAB*, Patrick Nulty LAB  
**Dún Laoghaire:** Sean Barrett FG, *Mary Mitchell-O'Connor FG*, *Marie Baker FG*, John Bailey FG, Eamonn Gilmore LAB  
**Galway East:** Paul Connaughton Jnr FG, Ciaran Cannon FG, Tom McHugh FG\*, Jimmy McClearn FG  
**Galway West:** Eamonn O'Cuiv FF\*, Sean Kyne FG, Brian Walsh FG, *Hildegard Naughton FG*, Noel Grealish IND\*  
**Kerry North:** Jimmy Deenihan FG\*, John Sheahan FG, Arthur Spring LAB  
**Kerry South:** Brendan Griffin FG, Tom Fleming IND\*, Michael Healy-Rae IND  
**Kildare North:** Bernard Durkan FG, Anthony Lawlor FG, Emmett Stagg LAB, John McGinley LAB  
**Kildare South:** Martin Heydon FG, Michael Nolan FG, Jack Wall LAB  
**Laois-Offaly:** Barry Cowen FF, Charlie Flanagan FG, *Marcella Corcoran-Kennedy FG*, John Moran FG, John Foley IND\*  
**Limerick City:** Michael Noonan FG, Kieran O'Donnell FG, Michael Hourigan FG, *Maria Byrne FG*  
**Limerick:** Dan Neville FG\*, Patrick O'Donovan FG, William O'Donnell FG  
**Longford-Westmeath:** *Nicky McFadden FG*, James Bannon FG, Peter Burke FG, Willie Penrose LAB\*  
**Louth:** Fergus O'Dowd FG\*, Peter Fitzpatrick FG, Anthony Donohue FG, Gerry Adams SF, Tomas Sharkey SF  
**Mayo:** Enda Kenny FG\*, Michael Ring FG\*, John O'Mahony FG\*, *Michelle Mulherin FG\**, Gerry Coyle FG\*  
**Meath East:** *Regina Doherty FG*, Shane McEntee FG, *Maria Murphy FG*  
**Meath West:** Damien English FG, Ray Butler FG, *Catherine Yore FG*

**Roscommon-South Leitrim:** John Ellis FF\*, Frank Feighan FG\*, Luke Flanagan IND  
**Sligo-North Leitrim:** John Perry FG, Tony McLaughlin FG, Sean McDermott FG  
**Tipperary North:** Noel Coonan FG, Alan Kelly LAB, Michael Lowry IND\*  
**Tipperary North:** Tom Hayes FG, Michael Murphy FG, Seamus Healy WUAG/ULA  
**Waterford:** John Deasy FG, Paudie Coffey FG, John Carey FG, John Halligan IND  
**Wexford:** Sean Connick FF\*, Paul Kehoe FG, Liam Twomey FG, Michael D'Arcy FG\*, Brendan Howlin LAB\*  
**Wicklow:** Billy Timmins FG\*, Simon Harris FG, Andrew Doyle FG, Vincent Blake FG, Stephen Donnelly IND

*The model predicts that only 21 female candidates (highlighted by italics) would have been elected, had this election been run under First Past the Post rules – a slightly lower number than the 22 females that were actually elected at the 2007 contest (under PR-STV, from constituencies with low levels of district magnitude).*

*Only 25 of the candidates that would have been elected in 2007, based on the model predictions, would have been elected again in 2011 had First Past the Post rules been in use.*