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THE 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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ABSTRACT

Polling for elections to the 29 county and five city councils was held between 7:00 and 21:00 on Friday, 11 June 2004. The general expectation was that the two largest parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, would lose seats in these elections – especially given their relatively strong performances in the 1999 local elections – and that Sinn Féin would make significant gains, particularly in Dublin and other large urban centres. The elections were also expected to mark yet another stage in the trend of continuing turnout decline that has marked Irish elections over the past 25 years, with the national turnout expected to be lower than the 1999 level of 50.3 per cent, the lowest ever turnout for local elections in the history of the state. As it transpired, turnout increased significantly in these elections, particularly in Dublin and the rest of the East region. Voting patterns also changed dramatically, with Sinn Féin, Labour and other smaller left-wing parties increasing their support and representation levels, particularly in Dublin, while losses for Fianna Fáil proved to be even greater than had been anticipated. Fine Gael confounded the pundits by actually increasing their number of council seats, even though their share of the vote declined marginally.

Introduction

This article will analyse the levels, and changing patterns, of voter turnout and party support in the 2004 local elections in the Republic of Ireland.

Turnout and Spoiled Votes

Factors Influencing Local Election Turnout

Rallings (2000) finds a high degree of commonality between the factors that influence general election turnout and those that influence local

election turnout, but he places particular emphasis on the importance of local issues, party mobilisation and socio-structural factors, such as age, council tenancy and unemployment. Relatively high local election turnouts are also associated with areas that have strong local identities, as well as an influential local media: Rallings (2000: 105) finds that 'the continued existence of a well-read, community based local paper which gives coverage to local issues and to elections' will increase interest and participation levels. By contrast, high levels of population mobility and low levels of identification with one's local area are found to depress turnout levels in local elections. These findings mirror those of a study into low turnout rates in the 1999 local elections in the south west inner city of Dublin, in which the lowest turnouts in the area were found to be in the new, private 'gated' apartments (Kavanagh, 2002b).

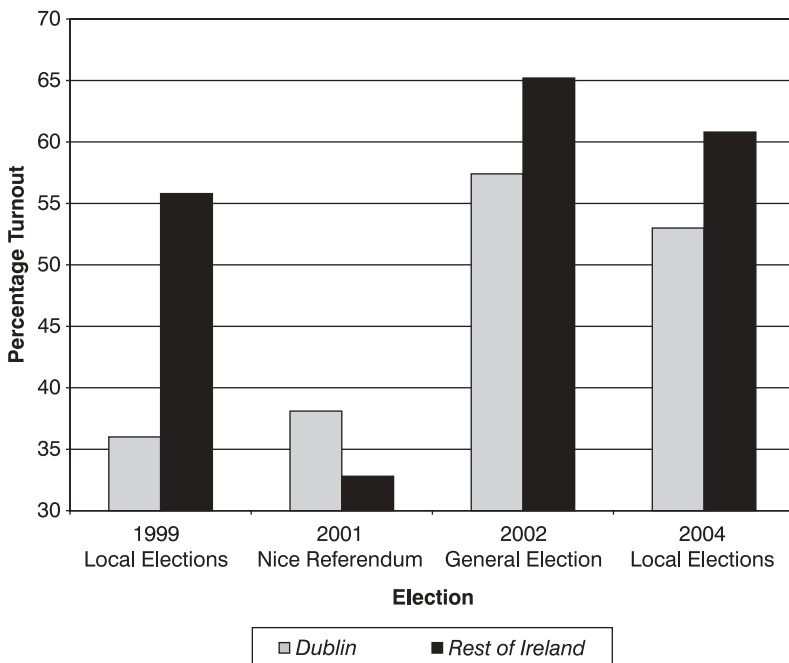
Generally turnouts in first-order elections (e.g. general elections) will tend to be higher than those for second-order elections (e.g. referendums, local, regional and European elections). Electors perceive that there is less at stake in second-order elections and may opt to abstain in these, while voting in first-order elections. (Government supporters who do vote may often opt to vote against their party in these elections and then return to their 'normal' voting patterns in subsequent first-order elections.) There may be exceptions to this, as envisaged by the 'turnout twist' concept of Horiuchi (2004). This observes higher turnouts for sub-national elections than for general elections in parts of France, Japan and Canada, linking such findings to socio-cultural factors as well as to perceptions as to the extent to which individual votes matters in different electoral contests. The pattern of higher turnouts in first-order elections generally also applies to Ireland. Local election turnouts tend to be lower than for those in general elections. Turnout differences between general and local elections are not as marked in Ireland as in other countries, however, mainly due to the high levels of party competitiveness associated with these elections (Gallagher, 1989; Sinnott, 1995). Local elections are particularly important to Irish political parties as they form a means to recruit new candidates for future Dáil elections, and also because city and county councillors form a large part of the electoral college for Seanad elections. There are some exceptions to the trend of higher general election turnouts, however, as local election turnouts may often be higher than general election turnouts in some electoral areas in the more rural parts of Ireland. For instance, turnout in the 2002 general election was 65.6 per cent in Boyle, Co. Roscommon and 72.0 per cent in Ballymahon, Co. Longford. However, local election turnouts were higher in these electoral areas, both in 1999 and 2004, with turnouts of 70.3 per cent in Boyle and 73.6 per cent in Ballymahon in 1999, and turnouts of 70.9 per cent in Boyle and

74.4 per cent in Ballymahon in 2004. Higher local election turnouts in such constituencies may be due to the higher number of candidates involved in local elections in these areas and a resultant higher level of political mobilisation.

Turnout in 1999 and 2004 Local Elections

Figure 1 shows that turnout in the 2002 general election was higher than for other types of elections held in the years prior to this. Turnouts were significantly lower in Dublin than in the rest of the country for general, local and European elections, whereas referendum turnouts were higher in Dublin. These striking contrasts are evidenced in the fact that Connacht-Ulster had a 25.6 per cent higher turnout than Dublin for the 1999 local and European elections, but had a 10.4 per cent lower turnout for the 2002 abortion referendum. Rural–urban turnout differences were particularly pronounced in the 1999 local elections, when turnouts in most of the larger urban areas were generally below the 40 per cent level, while turnouts of over 70 per cent were recorded in parts of the North West and North Midlands. Constituencies with the highest turnouts were,

FIGURE 1
TURNOUTS IN IRELAND BY REGION BETWEEN 1999 AND 2004



2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC

TABLE 1
LOCAL ELECTORAL AREAS WITH TEN HIGHEST AND LOWEST TURNOUTS IN
THE 1999 LOCAL ELECTIONS¹

Highest turnout constituencies			Lowest turnout constituencies		
Constituency	County	%	Constituency	County	%
1. Tobercurry	Sligo	81.2	1. Clondalkin	South Dublin	28.3
2. Dromahaire	Leitrim	76.5	2. Ballyfermot	Dublin City	28.6
3. Ballinamore	Leitrim	74.5	3. Mulhuddart	Fingal	29.7
4. Ballymahon	Longford	74.4	4. North Inner City	Dublin City	30.7
5. Dromore	Sligo	74.1	5. South West Inner City	Dublin City	31.1
6. Manorhamilton	Leitrim	73.8	6. Tallaght Central	South Dublin	31.1
7. Strokestown	Roscommon	73.0	7. South East Inner City	Dublin City	31.7
8. Boyle	Roscommon	70.9	8. Lucan	South Dublin	32.3
9. Granard	Longford	70.6	9. Tallaght South	South Dublin	32.3
10. Belturbet	Cavan	70.2	10. Artane	Dublin City	32.6

Note: The turnout rate in Kilbeggan was 29.9 per cent for the 1999 European elections and 29.8 per cent for the 1999 local government referendum, but no local government election was held here as only four candidates were nominated for election in this four-seat constituency (data provided by Westmeath County Registrar).

as Table 1 illustrates, predominantly associated with the counties of Leitrim, Sligo, Longford, Roscommon and Cavan. The low turnout constituencies were mainly associated with working class areas in inner city, or western suburban, parts of Dublin.

The greater drop in turnouts between general and local elections in Dublin, compared with the rest of Ireland, may be related to the higher ratio of councillors to electors in the rural constituencies. In the 2004 contest, for instance, the population to councillor ratio was 11,566:1 for Lucan and 10,716:1 for the three inner-city electoral areas in Dublin City, whereas it was just 1,090:1 in the Ballinamore ward in Leitrim. The importance of this factor was reflected in a negative and significant correlation of -0.58 between turnout in the 2004 local elections and the population-to-councillor ratio, thus associating lower local election turnouts with the areas with the larger population to councillor ratios.

Turnouts had been expected to fall even further for the 2004 local elections, given the continual decline in turnouts in the period since the late 1970s. However, the turnout rate for the 2004 elections proved to be higher than those in the local elections of 1991 and 1999. Turnout nationally increased to a level of 59.9 per cent, while turnout in the Dublin region increased from 36.0 per cent in 1999 to 53.0 per cent in 2004. Table 2 shows that turnouts were again generally higher in the more rural

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TABLE 2
LOCAL ELECTORAL AREAS WITH TEN HIGHEST AND LOWEST TURNOUTS IN
THE 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Highest turnout constituencies			Lowest turnout constituencies		
Constituency	County	%	Constituency	County	%
1. Ballinamore	Leitrim	76.3	1. North Inner City	Dublin City	42.3
2. Dromahaire	Leitrim	75.8	2. South West Inner City	Dublin City	43.6
3. Mountmellick	Laois	75.6	3. South East Inner City	Dublin City	44.8
4. Tobercurry	Sligo	75.1	4. Rathmines	Dublin City	45.8
5. Ballinarobe	Mayo	73.2	5. Tallaght South	South Dublin	45.9
6. Carrickmacross	Monaghan	73.2	6. Trim	Meath	47.1
7. Drumlish	Longford	72.0	7. Celbridge	Kildare	47.7
8. Ballymote	Sligo	71.6	8. Clondalkin	South Dublin	47.7
9. Ballymahon	Longford	71.6	9. Ballyfermot	Dublin City	49.2
10. Killarney	Kerry	71.5	10. Carlow Town No. 1	Carlow	49.5

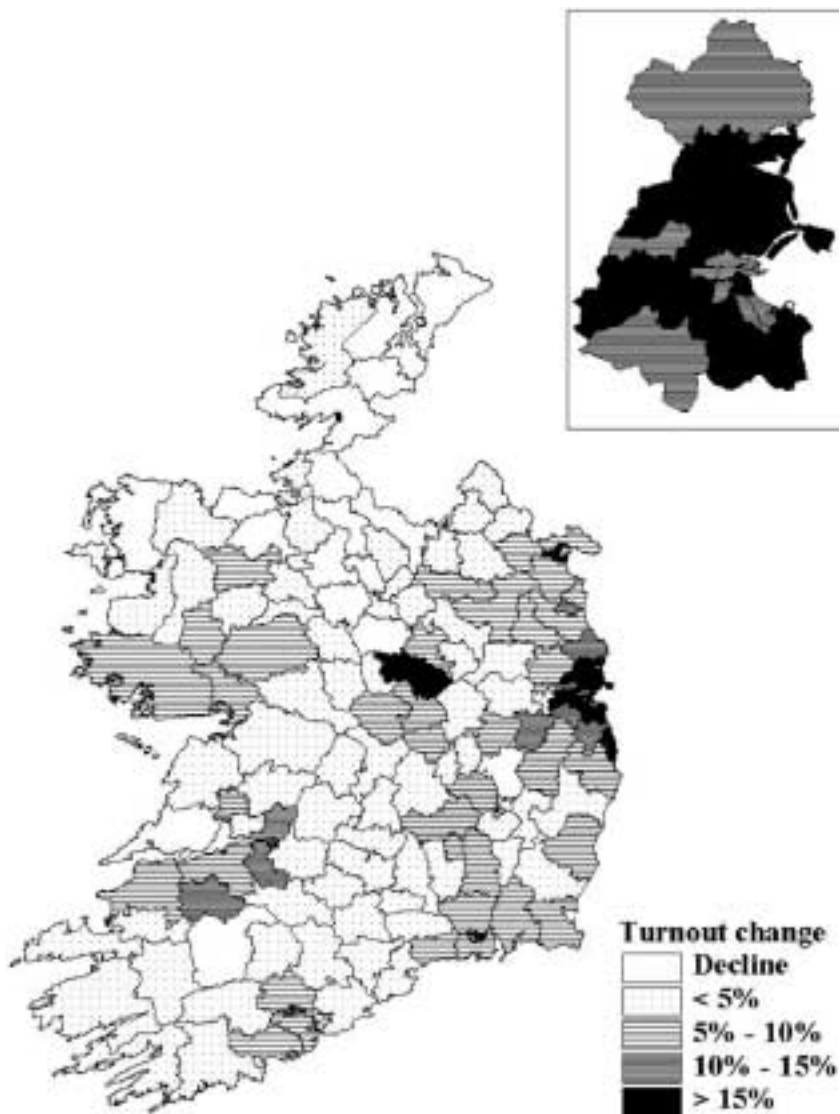
constituencies in the North West, South West and Midlands, with turnouts again lowest in Dublin and the East. Low turnout is shown to be increasingly becoming an inner-city phenomenon. This continues a trend that has marked recent elections in which the lowest turnouts nationally are generally recorded in the Dublin Inner City. The strong concentration of disadvantaged communities in this area is one reason for this, but the main cause is the exceptionally low local election turnouts associated with the new private ‘gated’ apartments that have mushroomed in this area over the past decade (Kavanagh, 2002b). Low turnouts in this area, thus, are probably due in part to high levels of population mobility, with the population of the Dublin Inner City increasing by 23.4 per cent over the 1996–2002 period (Census, 2002). The new, mainly middle-class, residents in the inner city have little interest in participating in local elections, as they engage little with their new communities, have little interest in local political issues, and have no knowledge of local political figures.

Figure 2, which maps changes in local election turnouts between 1999 and 2004, shows that the difference in turnouts between urban and rural areas has declined significantly. Local election turnout remained generally static, or declined, in high-turnout, rural areas such as the North West, but increased significantly elsewhere and particularly in the low-turnout areas of the East region and the other major urban centres. Turnout increased by 20.4 per cent in Waterford City, 18.4 per cent in South Dublin County and 17.1 per cent in Dublin City. Turnouts fell marginally in parts of the North West: falling by 1.1 per cent in Donegal,

0.4 per cent in Leitrim and 0.2 per cent in Longford. For local electoral areas, the largest turnout increases were in Tallaght Central (23.7 per cent), Donaghmede (22.8 per cent), Artane (22.2 per cent), Dundalk South (21.2 per cent), Lucan (21.1 per cent), Ballyfermot (20.6 per cent) and Mulhuddart (20.3 per cent). By contrast, turnouts fell in 18 constituencies, with most of these being located in the North West. Turnout fell by 6.6 per cent in Tobercurry, the constituency with the highest turnout in 1999, and by 3.6 per cent in Letterkenny, 3.3 per cent in Dromore, and 3.2 per cent in Manorhamilton.

A number of reasons have been suggested for the increase in local election turnouts. First, the decision to hold the citizenship referendum on the same day as the local elections did help to increase turnouts, as it drew many people to the polls who would be interested in referendum issues but not in local electoral issues and personalities. This would have particularly been the case in mainly middle-class areas in Dublin, which generally tend to have higher turnouts for referendum contests than for local elections. However, such contests do not draw large turnouts in most rural and working-class urban areas, and hence other factors undoubtedly fed into the increased turnouts in such areas. One such factor, particularly for working-class urban areas, was the role that parties such as Sinn Féin and the Socialist Party played in mobilising large numbers of people, who had previously been non-voters, to turn out for these elections. Such mobilisation was particularly effective, especially given that working-class voters have relatively high levels of interest in local election issues (Kavanagh, 2002a,b). Increased working-class turnouts, in turn, impacted on the local election results, with higher turnouts in constituencies often leading to higher voters for left-wing parties and candidates. For instance, the higher turnout in Clondalkin, the constituency with the lowest turnout in 1999, resulted to some degree in an extra 1,916 votes for Labour, 1,799 votes for Sinn Féin and 1,014 votes for the Socialist Workers Party. Left-wing parties and candidates gained an extra 22.3 per cent of the vote in Clondalkin, which had a 19.4 per cent increase in the turnout rate between 1999 and 2004. It could also be argued that conflicts over the bin charges also had the effect of politicising a previously disinterested section of the electorate in working-class areas in Fingal and Dublin City, such as Finglas and Mulhuddart, in the same manner as anti-war protests may have politicised younger voters. Non-partisan voter education campaigns, run by voluntary organisations such as the Vincentian Partnership for Justice, and particularly targeted at disadvantaged communities and younger voters, may also have increased turnouts on a more localised scale. Finally, both the local and European election contests proved to be unusually high profile contests in terms of media coverage and party

FIGURE 2
 INCREASE IN TURNOUT RATE, BY ELECTORAL AREA, BETWEEN 1999 AND 2004
 LOCAL ELECTIONS.



competition, with exceptionally high levels of expenditure invested in election campaigns by the different candidates and parties. This was particularly evident in the high amounts of spending on election posters,

most notably in the case of Royston Brady's high profile European Election campaign in Dublin. This meant that the electorate was very much aware of the local elections and the other electoral contests, as opposed to the generally low profile contests of 1999.

Spoiled Votes

The number of spoiled votes increased significantly between the 1999 and 2004 local elections from 20,916 (or 1.4 per cent of the total poll) to 36,733 (2.0 per cent). 10,926 votes were spoiled in the Dublin region, which had the highest rate of spoiled votes (2.5 per cent), with particularly high levels in Dublin City (4,882, or 2.7 per cent of the total poll) and South Dublin (2,420 or 2.6 per cent). The constituencies with the highest levels of spoiled votes tended to be largely disadvantaged Dublin constituencies, such as North Inner City (3.7 per cent), Tallaght South (3.4 per cent), South West Inner City (3.2 per cent), and Tallaght Central (3.1 per cent). High levels of educational disadvantage in these constituencies could suggest that the high levels of spoiled votes were partially due to mistakes being made in the voting process, or else amounted to a protest vote on the part of a politically alienated electorate. High levels of spoiled votes were also associated with Callan, Co. Kilkenny (3.4 per cent) and Borris, Co. Carlow (3.4 per cent), as well as the No.1 ward in Waterford City (3.2 per cent) and the North Central ward in Cork City (3.1 per cent). Higher levels of spoiled votes were generally linked with the low turnout constituencies, with a significant and negative correlation of -0.65 between the turnout rate and the percentage of spoiled votes. The lowest levels of spoiled votes were generally associated with the more rural and western constituencies. Less than 1 per cent of the votes cast were spoiled in Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim (0.7 per cent), Mid Roscommon (0.8 per cent), Ballinamore, (0.9 per cent) and Dingle, Co. Kerry (0.9 per cent).

Party Support in the 2004 Local Elections

Fianna Fáil lost 79 seats in the elections and its share of the national vote was to fall by 7.0 per cent to 31.8 per cent. Fine Gael, however, increased its number of seats from 277 to 291, although its share of the vote fell marginally by 0.5 per cent to 27.6 per cent. The elections proved particularly successful for Labour, Sinn Féin and the smaller socialist parties. Labour won an extra 20 seats in the elections, even though its national share of the vote increased only marginally by 0.6 per cent to 11.4 per cent. Sinn Féin more than doubled its local representation in these elections, increasing from 21 to 54 seats, and its share of the vote increased

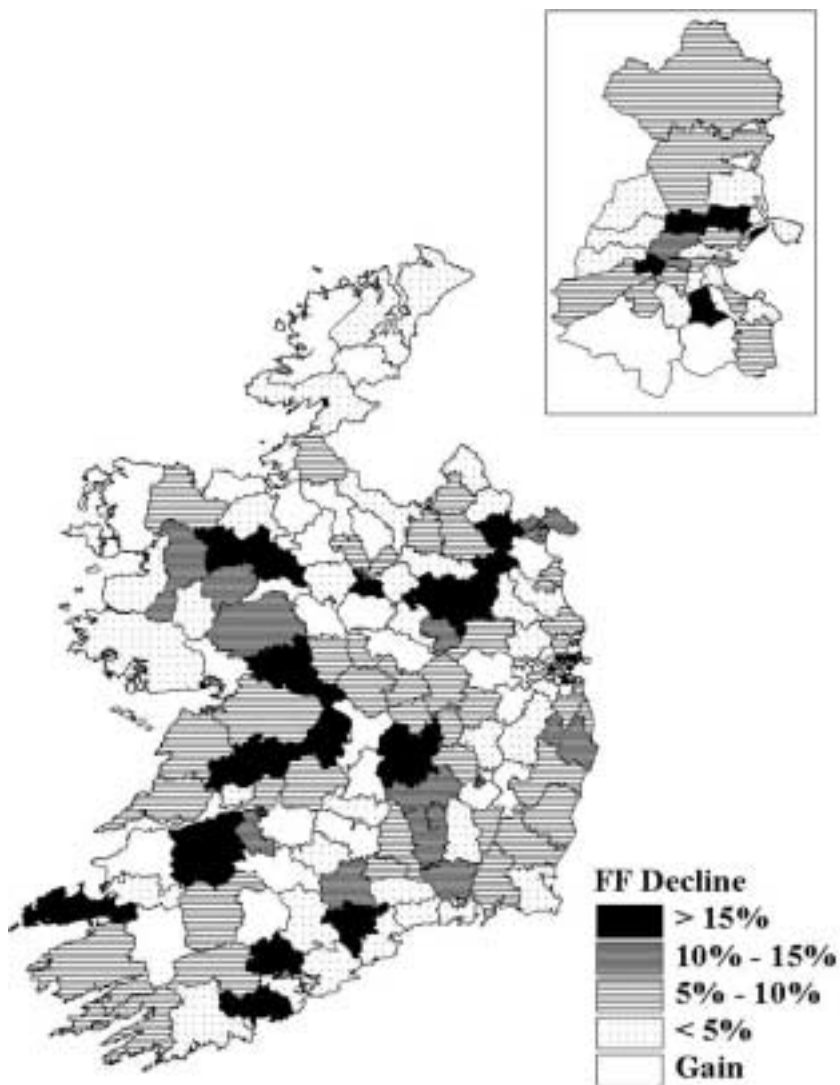
from 3.5 per cent in 1999 to 8.0 per cent in 2004, to leave it the fourth largest party in the Republic of Ireland in terms of local authority representation. Smaller socialist parties, such as the Socialist Party and the Workers Party, also won seats in Dublin and Waterford City, while the share of the vote won by other parties, such as the Socialist Workers Party, increased significantly in a number of other constituencies, such as Ballyfermot, Clondalkin and South West Inner City. The elections proved to be less successful for the Progressive Democrats, who lost six seats although their share of the national vote increased by 0.8 per cent to 3.7 per cent. The Green Party more than doubled their level of representation, increasing from eight seats to 17, and their share of the national vote increased from 2.5 per cent to 3.9 per cent.

These changing support patterns undoubtedly partially resulted from a protest vote against the government, and Fianna Fáil in particular. Another key factor was the ending of the dual mandate. This meant that political parties were not able to run TDs and Senators in the elections, as they had in 1999, and party votes generally declined in the affected constituencies as a result. As Fianna Fáil had by far the largest number of TDs and Senators, their local election support levels were the most likely to be influenced by the ending of the dual mandate. Local political issues may also shape party support levels in particular spatial contexts, and in the 2004 local elections many of these issues were to do with waste management, such as the conflicts over bin charges in Fingal and Dublin City and over incineration in Ringsend and Cork City. Such disputes created a context in which protest candidates were able to gain ground electorally.

Fianna Fáil

Fianna Fáil were the big losers in the local elections, losing over one-fifth of their city council and county council seats. As Figure 3 shows, there were significant spatial variations to the Fianna Fáil decline. The Fianna Fáil vote fell by over 15 per cent in areas such as the western parts of counties Laois, Meath and Limerick, as well as the north city area of Dublin, which had long been the party's stronghold in the capital city. The party vote fell by 27.3 per cent in Swinford, Co. Mayo, and by over 20 per cent in some other constituencies, such as Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan (27.1 per cent), Donaghmede, Dublin City (24.3 per cent), Ballinasloe, Co. Galway (22.9 per cent) and Portlaoise, Co. Laois (21.5 per cent). On the other hand, the Fianna Fáil vote actually increased in other constituencies, most notably those of Boyle, Co. Roscommon (15.0 per cent), Celbridge, Co. Kildare (9.2 per cent), Birr, Co. Offaly (7.2 per cent) and Carlow No.1 (7.0 per cent). The party's strongest performances were in the more western and rural constituencies, as Table 3 shows, particularly in the counties

FIGURE 3
DECLINE IN THE FIANNA FAIL VOTE, BY ELECTORAL AREA, BETWEEN 1999
AND 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS



of Clare (where it won 41.5 per cent of the votes cast), Cavan (41.2 per cent), Leitrim (40.1 per cent), and Donegal (40.0 per cent).

The party's worst electoral performances generally came in the more urban areas, including a number of electoral areas in the cities of

TABLE 3
 LOCAL ELECTORAL AREAS WITH TEN HIGHEST AND LOWEST FIANNA FÁIL
 VOTE SHARES IN THE 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Highest share of vote			Lowest share of vote		
Constituency	County	%	Constituency	County	%
1. Ennistimon	Clare	56.8	1. Ballyfermot	Dublin City	8.6
2. Mid Roscommon	Roscommon	53.9	2. Limerick No. 3	Limerick City	10.6
3. Cahir	Tipperary SR	52.1	3. Waterford No.2	Waterford City	12.2
4. Belturbet	Cavan	51.2	4. Waterford No.1	Waterford City	13.0
5. New Ross	Wexford	50.5	5. Limerick No. 4	Limerick City	13.1
6. Athlone	Westmeath	50.2	6. Milford	Donegal	14.2
7. Carlow No.1	Carlow	49.7	7. Baltinglass	Wicklow	14.3
8. Stranorlar	Donegal	49.5	8. South West Inner City	South Dublin	15.8
9. Donegal	Donegal	49.3	9. Galway North East	Galway City	16.2
10. Templemore	Tipperary NR	49.1	10. Waterford No.3	Waterford City	16.7

Waterford, Dublin, Galway and Limerick, as shown by Table 3. Fianna Fáil's share of the vote in Dublin fell from 31.8 per cent in 1999 to 23.7 per cent in 2004, and the party lost 15 of the 44 seats that it held on the four local authorities in the Dublin region before the elections. The most significant loss in this region came in Dublin City, where the party's vote fell by 11.5 per cent and it lost eight of its 20 seats, being left without any representation in the Ballyfermot, Pembroke and South West Inner City wards. In Waterford City, Fianna Fáil won 13.9 per cent of the total vote and was left with just one seat on the city council.

These results are particularly worrying for Fianna Fáil, as a large swathe of Fianna Fáil seats would be under threat, particularly in the Dublin constituencies, should this trend be replicated in the next general election. What is particularly worrying for Fianna Fáil is the fact that it appears to be the party that is losing support to Sinn Féin, and not the Labour Party. Based on the local election results, Fianna Fáil faces a strong possibility of losing seats to Sinn Féin in the next general election in constituencies such as Dublin North West, Dublin Central, Dublin North East and Waterford. It could, on the other hand, be argued that the abolition of the dual mandate and other personnel changes had a large part to play in the party's poor results, and that personal votes for individual Fianna Fáil TDs will see a resurgence in the party's fortunes come the next general election, particularly as the atypical anti-government vote associated with second-order elections is expected to decline somewhat.

Fine Gael

The local elections proved to be particularly successful for Fine Gael, especially in marking a recovery from the party's electoral collapse in the 2002 general election. While their share of the national vote declined marginally, Fine Gael succeeded in winning an extra 13 seats in the local elections. As in most recent elections, Fine Gael's best electoral performances tended to be in the more rural and western parts of the country, particularly in Cavan (44.0 per cent), Mayo (43.2 per cent) and Limerick County (38.9 per cent). The biggest increases in the Fine Gael vote were in Cavan (6.8 per cent) and Westmeath (6.2 per cent), while the party's biggest gains at an electoral area level were in Castleknock (29.8 per cent), Monaghan (18.5 per cent), Limerick No.3 Ward (15.1 per cent) and Callan, Co. Kilkenny (15.0 per cent).

The party's weakest electoral performances were generally in the Dublin region, where Fine Gael won just 18.6 per cent of the vote, taking 16.9 per cent of the vote in Dublin City and 13.7 per cent in South Dublin. The outlier to this was Leo Varadker's sensational performance in Castleknock where he polled almost two quotas. However, although the party's share of the vote in Dublin fell by 1.3 per cent between 1999 and 2004, the party did succeed in increasing its number of seats in the region from 25 to 27. The biggest drop in the party vote at a county level was in Louth, where the party's share of the vote fell by 5.4 per cent, but it just lost one seat. At a constituency level, the party's biggest losses were in the Limerick No.4 (27.5 per cent), Cashel

TABLE 4
LOCAL ELECTORAL AREAS IN WHICH FINE GAEL WON THEIR TEN HIGHEST
AND LOWEST VOTE SHARES IN THE 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Highest share of vote			Lowest share of vote		
Constituency	County	%	Constituency	County	%
1. Rathkeale	Limerick	57.5	1. North Inner City	Dublin City	4.8
2. Ballymahon	Longford	55.0	2. Waterford No. 3	Waterford City	6.6
3. Callan	Kilkenny	54.8	3. Thurles	Tipperary NR	8.2
4. Kanturk	Cork	52.4	4. Tallaght South	South Dublin	8.8
5. Claremorris	Mayo	47.5	5. South East Inner City	Dublin City	9.4
6. Ballina	Mayo	47.4	6. Lucan	South Dublin	10.3
7. Boyle	Roscommon	47.4	7. Ballyfermot	Dublin City	10.4
8. Ballinarobe	Mayo	47.2	8. Cork South Central	Cork City	10.6
9. Dromore	Sligo	46.7	9. Galway West Ward	Galway City	11.0
10. Bailieborough	Cavan	46.4	19. Clondalkin	South Dublin	11.7

(25.7 per cent), and Glencullen (25.3 per cent) wards. As with Fianna Fáil losses, a number of the larger Fine Gael losses resulted from the abolition of the dual mandate.

Labour

In many ways, the local elections were particularly satisfying for the Labour Party, particularly in the Dublin region, where their vote held up in the face of the Sinn Féin surge. That said, the party's performance in rural constituencies, with the exception of the Leinster counties of Westmeath, Wicklow, Carlow, Kilkenny and Kildare, was again disappointing and Labour lost its only seats in Offaly and Donegal, although it did gain, or regain, representation on the county councils of Laois, Limerick, Galway and Clare. This election appears to mark the continuance of the trend in which support patterns for the party have become increasingly urbanised since the amalgamation with Democratic Left in 2000.

Labour's strongest electoral performance was in Westmeath, where the party won over a quarter of the vote (25.3 per cent) and 6 of the 23 Council seats. The party also won over 15 per cent of the vote in Wicklow (21.8 per cent), Kildare (18.9 per cent), Carlow (17.2 per cent), Waterford County (17.2 per cent), Galway City (16.5 per cent), and Waterford City (15.2 per cent), as well as in the four Dublin local authorities: Dublin City (20.4 per cent), Dun Laoghaire–Rathdown (20.3 per cent), Fingal (18.7 per cent), and South Dublin (18.5 per cent). The party won nearly one-fifth of all the votes cast in the Dublin region (19.7 per cent) and emerged as the largest party in the region, increasing its number of seats to 34. But while the party did well in the east and in the larger urban centres, it generally did poorly in areas located to the west of a line between Drogheda and Limerick, with the exception of Galway City, Sligo and, to a lesser extent, Castlebar. This mirrors the traditional concentration of Labour support to the south and east of a line drawn between Dundalk and Limerick, reflecting the geographical concentration of farm labourers in this area in the earlier part of the twentieth century. However, the party's poor performance in Louth necessitates that this line be shifted further southwards to exclude that county.

Labour failed to contest any constituency in Monaghan and won less than 2.5 per cent of the vote in Cavan (0.8 per cent), Donegal (1.1 per cent), Longford (1.8 per cent), Roscommon (1.9 per cent), Leitrim (2.2 per cent), Louth (2.3 per cent) and Mayo (2.3 per cent). By and large, the party's weakest constituencies, as detailed in Table 5, were located in the Border-Midlands-West region, in the same manner as its strongest constituencies were located in the east. The party's biggest gains came in Galway City (4.6 per cent), Limerick County (3.5 per cent) and Kilkenny

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TABLE 5
LOCAL ELECTORAL AREAS WITH TEN HIGHEST AND LOWEST LABOUR VOTE
SHARES IN THE 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Highest share of vote			Lowest share of vote		
Constituency	County	%	Constituency	County	%
1. Mullingar East	Westmeath	49.4	1. Carlingford	Louth	1.0
2. Arklow	Wicklow	36.5	2. Letterkenny	Donegal	1.1
3. Mullingar West	Westmeath	36.1	3. Kilmallock	Limerick	2.0
4. Malahide	Fingal	33.6	4. Dundalk South	Louth	2.1
5. Borris	Carlow	33.6	5. Scarriff	Clare	2.4
6. Celbridge	Kildare	33.5	6. Newcastle	Limerick	2.6
7. Rathmines	Dublin City	29.3	7. Longford	Longford	2.7
8. Blackrock	Dun Laoghaire	28.4	8. Ballyjamesduff	Cavan	3.0
9. Wicklow	Wicklow	26.3	9. Borrisokane	Tipperary NR	3.2
10. Tallaght Central	South Dublin	26.3	10. Bantry	Cork	3.2

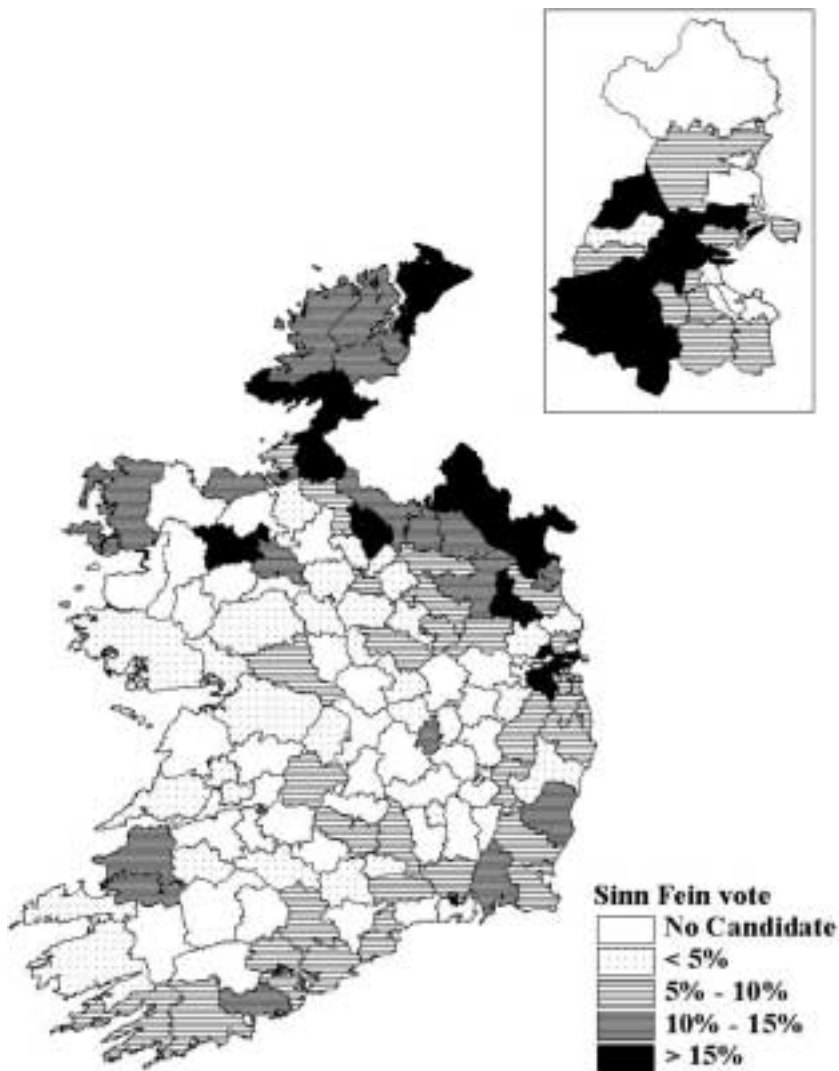
(3.5 per cent), and, at a constituency level, in Arklow (26.1 per cent), Glencullen (15.3 per cent), North Inner City (13.3 per cent) and Rathmines (13.1 per cent). The party's biggest losses were in Offaly (5.6 per cent), Wexford (4.2 per cent), Limerick City (4.1 per cent) and Donegal (4.0 per cent) at a county level, and in Leixlip (25.5 per cent), Baltinglass (18.8 per cent), Tullamore (13.6 per cent) and Mullingar West (13.1 per cent) at a local electoral area level. Such losses largely resulted from the dual mandate, or the retirement, or defection, of sitting Labour councillors, such as Pat Gallagher in Tullamore and Catherine Murphy in Leixlip.

Sinn Féin

The party that experienced the most dramatic increase in both votes and seats was Sinn Féin. As Figure 4 and Table 6 show, their support pattern was particularly distinctive in geographical terms, with the Sinn Féin vote being particularly concentrated in working class parts of the major cities, and in the Border constituencies.

At the county level, the party's strongest support came from Monaghan (31.1 per cent), Dublin City (18.5 per cent) and Louth (16.9 per cent), while its biggest increases in support came in Waterford City (13.5 per cent), Dublin City (10.6 per cent) and Donegal (9.2 per cent), and in the Ballymun-Whitehall (24.2 per cent), Swinford (22.2 per cent) and Ballyfermot (20.6 per cent) local electoral areas. With the exception of North Kerry, Cork City, parts of Wexford, and individual constituencies such as Swinford and Portlaoise, Sinn Féin did relatively poorly

FIGURE 4
SINN FEIN SUPPORT, BY ELECTORAL AREA, IN 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS



outside the Dublin and Border regions. Its weakest electoral performances came in the more rural constituencies in the Midlands, West and South, as illustrated by Table 6, and it did poorly in Offaly (0.7 per cent), Kildare (0.7 per cent), Limerick County (1.2 per cent), Carlow (1.5 per cent) and Clare (1.8 per cent). Unlike Labour, the Green Party

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TABLE 6
LOCAL ELECTORAL AREAS WITH TEN HIGHEST AND LOWEST SINN FÉIN VOTE SHARES IN THE 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Highest share of vote			Lowest share of vote		
Constituency	County	%	Constituency	County	%
1. Monaghan	Monaghan	44.3	1. Granard	Longford	1.9
2. Finglas	Dublin City	32.9	2. Tuam	Galway	1.9
3. Artane	Dublin City	32.1	3. Tullamore	Offaly	2.1
4. Carrickmacross	Monaghan	30.5	4. Kilrush	Clare	2.3
5. Clones	Monaghan	26.2	5. Killorglin	Kerry	2.4
6. Carlingford	Louth	24.9	6. Mountmellick	Laois	2.5
7. Ballymun-W'hall	Dublin City	24.2	7. Kilmallock	Limerick	2.9
8. SE Inner City	Dublin City	24.1	8. Dunshaughlin	Meath	3.0
9. Swinford	Mayo	22.1	9. Borrisokane	Tipperary NR	3.3
10. Cabra-Glasnevin	Dublin City	22.1	10. Loughrea	Galway	3.3

and Progressive Democrats, Sinn Féin ran candidates in every county in Ireland. In contesting a considerable number of apparent 'lost causes' in their weaker areas the party may be setting the basis for gains in future elections in these areas. The general trend in the Sinn Féin vote was for the party to make gains, but it did lose support in Offaly (1.0 per cent) and Kildare (0.4 per cent), and in local electoral areas such as Athy (7.7 per cent), Ballina (5.5 per cent), Shannon (3.1 per cent) and Tullamore (2.5 per cent).

Correlation analysis shows that the gains in Sinn Féin support were generally associated with losses in Fianna Fáil support, with a negative, statistically significant association of -0.30 between the changes in Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin support between 1999 and 2004. Sinn Féin gains were also strongly associated with areas that experienced large increases in turnout, as were Labour gains also. Significant and positive correlations existed between changes in the turnout rate and in the support levels for Sinn Féin and Labour of 0.29 and 0.18 respectively. This may suggest that the increase in the turnout rates resulted in increasing levels of support for these parties, or that these parties were more successful than the other parties in mobilising people, who had been non-voters prior to the local elections, to vote.

Progressive Democrats

With the exception of a good performance in Galway and a significant increase in support in the so-called 'Parlon Country', the local elections

were particularly disappointing for the Progressive Democrats, especially as the party did not contest the European elections and hence could concentrate their resources on their local campaigns. Generally, with the exception of Galway West and, to a lesser extent, Laois-Offaly, the party failed to build on the successes of the 2002 general election and the local election results appear to offer little potential of further gains in the next general election. Their strongest areas, as shown by Table 7, corresponded with the constituencies of Noel Grealish (Galway West), Tom Parlon (Laois-Offaly) and Michael McDowell (Dublin South East). Outside of their TD's bailiwicks, the party made little impression and won less than 3 per cent of the vote in 15 constituencies, including those listed in Table 7.

At a county level, the party's best results came in Galway City (22.6 per cent), Laois (10.1 per cent), Limerick City (8.4 per cent) and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown (8.4 per cent), and the biggest increases in support came in Laois (10.1 per cent), Offaly (7.2 per cent) and Limerick County (4.0 per cent). The party did not contest any election in the Ulster counties, Sligo, Leitrim and Westmeath, and outside these their worst performances were in Kerry (0.6 per cent), Tipperary (0.9 per cent) and Meath (1.1 per cent), with the biggest declines in support coming in Cork City (4.1 per cent), Cork County (1.2 per cent) and Carlow (1.1 per cent). The biggest increase in Progressive Democrat support at a constituency level came in Emo, Co. Laois (22.4 per cent), Edenderry, Co. Offaly (17.1 per cent) and Mountmellick, Co. Laois (11.8 per cent), all of which were located in the so-called 'Parlon Country'. The largest falls in Progressive Democrat support at a constituency level were associated with the North East ward of Cork City (21.8 per cent), Carlow No.1 (14.9 per cent), Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon (14.6 per cent) and Longford (12.6 per cent).

TABLE 7
LOCAL ELECTORAL AREAS WITH TEN HIGHEST AND LOWEST PROGRESSIVE
DEMOCRAT VOTE SHARES IN THE 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Highest share of vote			Lowest share of vote		
Constituency	County	%	Constituency	County	%
1. Galway South	Galway City	29.0	1. Longford	Longford	0.3
2. Galway West	Galway City	24.0	2. Dundalk South	Louth	1.5
3. Emo	Laois	22.4	3. Carlingford	Louth	1.9
4. Edenderry	Offaly	17.1	4. Arklow	Wicklow	2.0
5. Pembroke	Dublin City	16.6	5. Tipperary	Tipperary NR	2.1

Green Party

In more than doubling their local authority seats, the local elections proved to be somewhat successful for the Green Party, particularly in the context of the loss of their two European Parliament seats at the same time. Much of their success was, however, concentrated in the old County area of Dublin and the party generally made little impact outside of the Greater Dublin area. The Green Party won 18 council seats, but ten seats were won in Dublin alone and one each in Cork City and Galway City. The only electoral areas, outside the main cities, where the Green Party won seats were Bray, Naas, Slane, Kilkenny, Borris and Ennis. At a county level, the party's best performances were in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown (10.3 per cent), Fingal (8.2 per cent), Carlow (7.8 per cent) and South Dublin (7.7 per cent), and the party's strongest constituencies were also located in these areas, as Table 8 illustrates. The party ran candidates in all of the different council areas, with the exception of Sligo, Monaghan and Cavan, but failed to win more than 1 per cent of the vote in ten county council areas. To the west of a line drawn between Dundalk and Waterford, the party only succeeded in winning over 5 per cent of the vote in some wards in the cities of Galway and Cork and the counties of Clare and Cork. Outside of Galway City, the party failed to win more than 5 per cent of the vote in any constituency in the Midlands, West and North West regions, with its poorest election results generally coming in these areas (Table 8). This pattern is in keeping with the general trend in Green support levels, both in Ireland and the rest of Europe, in which the party's vote is seen to be particularly concentrated in urban, mainly middle-class, areas, which have high concentrations of young, professional and highly educated people.

TABLE 8
LOCAL ELECTORAL AREAS WITH TEN HIGHEST AND LOWEST GREEN PARTY
VOTE SHARES IN THE 2004 LOCAL ELECTIONS

Highest share of vote			Lowest share of vote		
Constituency	County	%	Constituency	County	%
1. Borris	Carlow	20.4	1. Ballaghaderreen	Roscommon	0.5
2. Malahide	Fingal	14.8	2. Mid Roscommon	Roscommon	0.7
3. Lucan	South Dublin	14.4	3. Tuam	Galway County	0.9
4. Howth	Fingal	12.3	4. Glenties	Donegal	0.9
5. Dundrum	Dun Laoghaire	12.1	5. Ferbane	Offaly	0.9

The Green Party's biggest increases in support came, at a county level, in Galway City (4.3 per cent), Carlow (3.1 per cent), Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown (3.0 per cent) and Cork County (2.8 per cent), and, at a constituency level, in Kilkenny (9.8 per cent), Celbridge (8.5 per cent), Carlow No. 1 (7.8 per cent) and Galway South (6.8 per cent). Its share of the vote declined in Dublin City (1.3 per cent), Mayo (0.1 per cent) and Fingal (0.1 per cent). The party's loss of support in Dublin City resulted in the Greens losing their two city council seats in the Dublin South East Dail constituency, and its support levels fell by 6.2 per cent in Rathmines and by 6.1 per cent in South East Inner City. The party did gain a seat in the Clontarf ward, however, with the election of Bronwen Maher.

Others

Independents generally win larger shares of the vote in local elections, mainly due to the larger numbers of independent candidates in such contests, the heightened importance given to local political issues that are given prominence in the Independents' campaigns, and voters' increased willingness to vote for local candidates rather than their preferred political parties in second order elections. Independent candidates come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from former Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael members in rural areas, who were unable to win the party nomination at the selection convention, to left-wing oriented Independents contesting urban constituencies. Many Independents were 'single issues' candidates, with the most popular issues in 2004 relating to waste management and health care.

Smaller parties, such as the Socialist Party, Workers Unemployed Action Group, and Workers Party, are often classified along with Independents in analyses. These parties' support patterns tend to be highly regional in nature, with support levels being particularly concentrated in certain areas. For instance, the Socialist Party did well in Fingal County and Tallaght in the local elections, Waterford City proved to be the main area of support for the Workers Party, and the Workers Unemployed Action Group were mainly focused on urban centres in South Tipperary, such as Clonmel. The Socialist Workers Party increased their share of the vote dramatically in a number of Dublin constituencies, with Brid Smith winning 1,094 votes in Ballyfermot and Gino Kenny winning 1,044 votes in Clondalkin. Although the party failed to win a seat, they did succeed in outpolling Fianna Fáil in Ballyfermot, taking 11.8 per cent of the votes in that electoral area to Fianna Fáil's 8.6 per cent vote share.

Independents were again highly successful in the 2004 elections. Independents only failed to win any level of representation in Carlow, Cavan, Limerick County, Waterford County and Westmeath. Independents and smaller parties won five seats, or more, in Galway County, Limerick City,

Meath, Offaly, Tipperary South, Waterford City and Roscommon. Independents won seven seats on Roscommon County Council, their best performance in the election, and they won 5,616 votes, or 20.1 per cent of the total vote in the county. The local elections in Roscommon were notable for the unexpected success of the well-known campaigner for the legalisation of cannabis, Luke Ming Flanagan, who topped the poll in the Castlerea electoral area with 1,050 votes, or 28.3 per cent of the first preference votes.

The 2004 local elections were also notable for the first electoral successes of black candidates in Irish elections, with the seats won in the town commission elections in Portlaoise and Ennis. Dr Taiwo Matthew was elected to Ennis Town Council with 564 votes (7.5 per cent of the votes cast). Rotimi Adebare won election to Portlaoise Town Council with 321 votes (7.7 per cent of the votes cast), and also performed creditably in the county council elections for the Portlaoise electoral area, where he won 411 votes (5.8 per cent of votes cast) and remained in contention until the penultimate count.

Implications

The impact that the 2004 local elections will ultimately have on the Irish political landscape remains to be seen. The elections marked the lowest ever share of the vote that Fianna Fáil have won in a national election since 1927, and also saw the continuation of Sinn Féin's rising electoral tide, which was first evidenced in the 1999 local elections. The elections also raised the potential of an alternate government emerging to challenge the Fianna Fáil–Progressive Democrat coalition, given the relative success of Fine Gael, Labour and the Green Party. The 2004 contest also saw a reversal of the general trend of declining election turnouts, which had marked the previous quarter century and the turnout rate was higher than the 1991 and 1999 local elections. The extent to which these elections will prove to mark a historical signpost, pointing to intensified electoral competition and participation, remains to be seen however. These developments may ultimately prove to be a temporary aberration, representing a brief reversal of a general trend of continued turnout decline. The local elections may also prove to represent a fleeting decline in Fianna Fáil support, which is then reversed in the upcoming general election, as is envisaged by the second-order election model. Political and electoral developments over the next few years will determine whether these elections ultimately prove to be particularly ground-breaking and a historical signpost or else prove to be a temporary aberration to the trends of continued Fianna Fáil hegemony and turnout decline.

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