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## Geographical Factors in Constituency Voting Patterns

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This chapter focuses on geographical influences on voting behaviour at the 2020 general election. Geography intervenes at various stages and at various levels in electoral processes, perhaps especially in Ireland, given the high degree of localism that has been traditionally part and parcel of Irish politics. Geography shapes the candidate selection processes of political parties, as discussed in Chap. 3, and, in many cases, shapes the canvassing and vote management strategies employed by these parties, as well as independent candidates. Electoral boundaries again highlight the impact/importance of geography, as these, in part, determine the efficiency by which different political parties translate their vote levels into seats, and changes in constituency boundaries can impact on the electoral prospects of political parties and—particularly—individual candidates. Studies of voting patterns for different parties and different candidates—both at the Dáil constituency level and at the sub-constituency level—show that high

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20 support levels may be clustered in certain areas for a variety of reasons,  
21 including demographic and socio-economic factors, as well as other, more  
22 locally focused, reasons. Finally, after the votes have been counted and a  
23 new government set in place, geographical factors may be taken into con-  
24 sideration when ministerial and especially junior ministerial positions are  
25 being allocated, while policy and spending decisions may also be framed  
26 by geographical variables.

## 27 HOW PARTIES AND CANDIDATES MAKE USE OF GEOGRAPHY

28 Any account of geographical influences on voting patterns needs to take  
29 account of candidate selection (see Chap. 3 for this process in general).  
30 Reflecting what has been termed the ‘local orientation of almost all politi-  
31 cal activity’ in Ireland<sup>1</sup> and as discussed in past research by other academ-  
32 ics,<sup>2</sup> Ireland is often viewed as having a highly localised style of voting  
33 when compared with other western democracies. Election candidates usu-  
34 ally rely on a strong support base in their own local area within a given  
35 constituency. This ‘friends and neighbours’ voting pattern means that a  
36 candidate’s support level is strongest where they reside and radiates from  
37 this point, declining with distance.<sup>3</sup> As well as having the advantage of  
38 being well known in their local area, or at least better known than candi-  
39 dates hailing from other parts of the constituency, a local candidate will be  
40 better able to take advantage of local information flows and use these to  
41 gain political advantage and secure higher support levels there. The impor-  
42 tance of constituency work within the Irish political system also lends itself  
43 to such ‘friends and neighbours voting’. People in a local area will tend to  
44 vote for the candidate whom they perceive to be most likely to ‘work for’  
45 that area and gain political benefits for it, and in most cases, this candidate  
46 will be one that hails from that area. The importance of establishing a  
47 strong local base in a constituency, as well as gaining political experience  
48 at a local level, is further highlighted by the high number of former county  
49 or city councillors within the Dáil deputy ranks. In the 2020 general elec-  
50 tion, for instance, 33 of the 56 seats (59 per cent) won by non-incumbents  
51 were won by city or county councillors while 5 more were won by Sinn  
52 Féin candidates who were former councillors, having lost their local  
53 authority seats only a few months earlier at the May 2019 elections.

54 The strong degree of localism evident in Irish politics has a bearing on  
55 party candidate selection strategies. This, as tantamount to a ‘which came  
56 first, the chicken or the egg’ conundrum, in turn may act to further fuel

the strength of strong localistic trends in support patterns for parties and individual candidates. In constituencies where political parties are selecting more than one candidate, candidate selection approaches generally take these ‘friends and neighbours’ voting trends into account and thus will strive to select candidates from different areas within the constituency. These geographically balanced tickets ensure that the potential party vote may be fully mobilised in different areas within the constituency, and the party does not risk losing local votes in these areas to local candidates from other political parties or groupings, which might be the case if the party opted not to select a candidate from that area. As well as pushing up the size of the party vote in that local area, the selection of a local candidate may also depress the level of local votes that might otherwise be won by other local candidates from other political parties or groupings. A geographically balanced ticket also helps in terms of party vote management strategies. This can help to ensure a relative balance between the numbers of first preference votes won by each of these candidates and help towards maximising the number of seats that party wins in that constituency, especially if an effective vote management strategy has been employed.

Parties often use geographical prompts, such as maps, as a means of implementing vote management strategies. Adverts in local newspapers, campaign leaflets and, to an increasing extent, social media may be used to ask party supporters to vote in line with these strategies. The most effective examples of maps being used in this vein at recent general elections came from the two Healy-Raes in Kerry. In 2016, days after Danny Healy-Rae had announced (minutes before the close of nominations) that he would be contesting the general election, the Healy-Raes placed adverts in local newspapers featuring a map, in which voters were asked to vote No. 1 Danny Healy-Rae and No.2 Michael Healy-Rae in the Greater Killarney area, reflecting the fact that Danny was the only real high-profile candidate from that area contesting the election and was thus well placed to win large numbers of local votes there. In the rest of Kerry, voters were asked to vote Michael No. 1, given that he was the more high-profile candidate, and Danny No. 2 (see Fig. 9.1). The use of green and gold, the Kerry County colours, to highlight the two bailiwicks was a clever appeal to Kerry voters. The success of the strategy saw it being used again at the 2020 election, but with one change. The area around Killorglin—the Healy-Raes’ home base—had been in Michael’s area in 2016 but was established as open territory for the 2020 contest. This reflects how these vote management strategies can be tailored based on evidence from a



Fig. 9.1 Campaign advertisement used by Michael Healy-Rae and Danny Healy-Rae at the 2020 general election

96 previous election. Given that Michael had won over ten thousand more  
 97 first preference votes than Danny in 2016, the evidence suggested he  
 98 could afford to cede some more territory to this brother. The purple  
 99 colour assigned to this open territory may have been a nod to Kerry's  
 100 being known as The Kingdom.

101 Political parties also employed maps as part of their vote management  
 102 strategies at the 2020 election. In Donegal, Sinn Féin used a map that  
 103 asked party voters to give first preference votes to Pearse Doherty in the  
 104 area that was formerly part of the old Donegal South-West constituency  
 105 and to Pádraig Mac Lochlainn in the area that was formerly part of  
 106 Donegal North-East, and to give second preference votes to the running  
 107 mate. Louth was a constituency where the use of maps for vote manage-  
 108 ment purposes was particularly evident (Fig. 9.2). The three main parties  
 109 in the constituency—Sinn Féin, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil—all ran two  
 110 candidates in this constituency, with one candidate hailing from the  
 111 Dundalk area and the other hailing from the Drogheda area. Furthermore,



Fig. 9.2 Use of maps to promote party vote management strategies in the Louth constituency, as used by Fine Gael (top) and Fianna Fáil (bottom)

112 an experienced, sitting TD was joined by a first-time general election candi-  
113 dicate on all these tickets.

114 At the start of the campaign, these three parties all entertained pros-  
115 pects of winning two seats in Louth, although Fine Gael's and Fianna  
116 Fáil's ambitions became more tempered as the campaign progressed, and  
117 in the final days, the focus was on ensuring they won at least one seat. Fine  
118 Gael used a strategy that allocated the Dundalk area (including his home  
119 base) to John McGahon, but he was also allocated significant territory in  
120 the mid-Louth area, including the town of Ardee. As one local party  
121 organiser argued, 'without Ardee, it would have been difficult for John  
122 McGahon to have enough votes to stay in the race—as a new candidate he  
123 had a lower profile—so the decision was made to allocate Ardee to  
124 McGahon'. The sitting Fine Gael deputy, Fergus O'Dowd, was allocated  
125 the southern half of the constituency and encouraged to increase his  
126 efforts to win votes in the part of east Meath included in this constituency.  
127 The use of the map in local newspaper adverts was important not only in  
128 terms of applying this constituency divide but also in terms of stressing to  
129 McGahon supporters the importance of giving O'Dowd their second  
AU1 130 preference votes. As the local Fine Gael party official noted, 'First of all, it  
131 was a good graphic, so when it went into the papers people were struck by  
132 it. I think maps were actually very important during the election. They  
133 communicate a lot more than words, visually with the proper text they  
134 communicate a lot more than text on its own, I think it was extremely  
135 useful in establishing in the minds of the Fine Gael people that there was  
136 a game on here and there's rules to the game and we have to follow those  
AU2 137 rules if we are to get a result.<sup>74</sup> Given that the two Fine Gael candidates  
138 won less than a quota between them (15 per cent of the first preference  
139 votes), a solid vote transfer (56 per cent of McGahon's vote on his elimi-  
140 nation) between the candidates on the penultimate count ultimately  
141 helped secure the Fine Gael seat in Louth.

142 The Fianna Fáil vote management strategy was similar, with Ardee  
143 being assigned to the North Louth candidate, Declan Breathnach, while  
144 James Byrne was assigned the southern end of the constituency and  
145 Dunleer. The smaller Fianna Fáil share of the vote (14 per cent) meant,  
146 however, that there were just not enough votes to make the vote manage-  
147 ment strategy a success, and Fianna Fáil failed to win a seat here. Sinn Féin  
148 also applied a vote management strategy in Louth, with voters in towns in  
149 the north of Louth asked to support first-time general election candidate,  
150 Ruairí Ó Murchú (who replaced Gerry Adams on the party ticket), while

Sinn Féin voters in the south were encouraged to give their first preference votes to incumbent deputy Imelda Munster. Such was the extent of the swing to Sinn Féin in Louth that the strategy ultimately was not required to secure two seats for the party, but it did ensure that both candidates were elected on the first count.

## GEOGRAPHIES OF SUPPORT

Each candidate and each political party in Ireland has a unique geography of support and the 2020 election was no different in this regard. The impact of geography was moderated somewhat by the Sinn Féin surge in this election, with its candidates often defying the laws of geographical gravity by faring well in areas that were distant from those candidates' home bases. These geographically defined voting patterns may be attributed to the PR-STV electoral system, which facilitates the expression of localism, as well as the geography of the various socio-economic factors traditionally associated with higher support levels for different political parties. Support patterns may also illustrate an area that has been canvassed thoroughly by a given campaign, stem from a party's effective vote management strategy (as discussed earlier) or simply be shaped by the fact that people often see a local representative as an opportunity to improve services in their locality.

Various socio-economic and demographic factors have been identified by academics as influencing political voting patterns, both internationally and in the Irish context. Age, marital status, housing tenure, employment status, income level, education level and social class are factors that can shape political choices on election day. In the Republic of Ireland, a combination of these factors gives rise to specific geographies of support for the different political parties. Sinn Féin, for instance, has traditionally tended to fare strongly in working-class urban areas and less well in the more middle-class areas, as well as also faring strongly in border areas. While it is interesting to study constituency level support trends, one can only fully understand the political choices that people make through better understanding the nature of the places that they live in and the various factors that shape their lives in these places.

The rest of this chapter will focus on sub-constituency level support patterns for parties and candidates. As well as illustrating how demographic and socio-economic factors impact on political choices at the local level, such studies can also highlight the impacts that local factors,

188 campaigns and candidates may have on political choices. The impact of  
 189 localism in Ireland is well noted among academics in the field, with differ-  
 190 ent studies highlighting the resultant impact, such as Sacks’s study of  
 191 Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael bailiwicks in Donegal North-East at the 1969  
 192 election and Parker’s study of Galway West at the 1977 election.<sup>5</sup> This  
 193 localised impact of a candidate in a given community may be further  
 194 enhanced by what has been referred to as the ‘neighbourhood effect’, a  
 195 process that outlines how political opinion and choice can be shaped by  
 196 interactions among voters in a given context—effectively a process of con-  
 197 version through conversation.<sup>6</sup> The constituencies examined in this sec-  
 198 tion reflect the availability of required data (such as tally figures<sup>7</sup> and  
 199 detailed polling scheme information) to allow for maps and graphs to be  
 200 drawn up. They also highlight interesting aspects, such as the impacts of  
 201 ‘friends and neighbours’ voting, urban–rural variations, socio-demo-  
 202 graphic influences and county identities, as well as features unique to the  
 203 2020 contest, such as the Sinn Féin surge.

204 Strong evidence of ‘friends and neighbours’ voting emerges from a  
 205 study of voting patterns in the largest towns in Louth constituency.  
 206 Drogheda-based candidates tended to poll well in Drogheda, while  
 207 Dundalk-based candidates fared well in that town (Fig. 9.3). What is

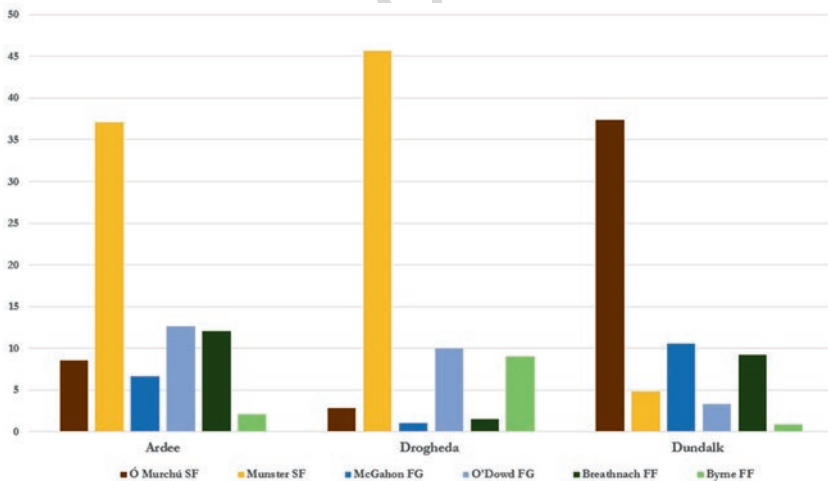


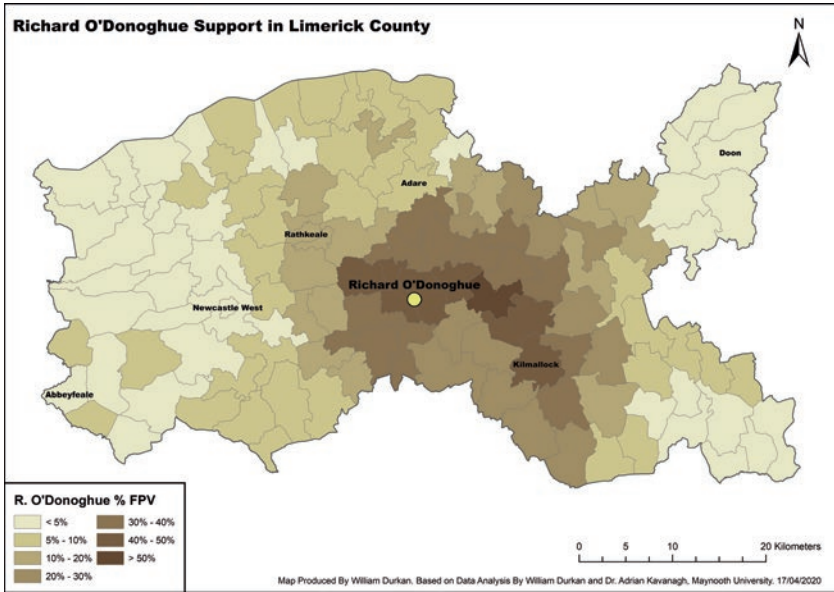
Fig. 9.3 Support levels (percentage) for Sinn Féin, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil candidates in the three largest towns in Louth at the 2020 general election



particularly striking here is the strength of the local Sinn Féin candidates, especially Imelda Munster, in Drogheda and Dundalk, with Sinn Féin winning almost half of the valid votes (49 per cent) cast in Drogheda, for instance. The local Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil candidates did not fare as well, in large part due to the strength of Sinn Féin in both these towns but also due to strong competition from other local candidates, such as Ged Nash in Drogheda and Peter Fitzpatrick and Mark Dearey in Dundalk. The voting trends in Ardee are of interest, given that Ardee effectively lies on the border between the bailiwicks of those candidates located in Dundalk and north Louth and those located in Drogheda and south Louth. Sinn Féin's dominance is again evident here, but what is also evident here is the strength of the more experienced candidates in Ardee, given that, as incumbents, they would have had a longer political relationship with voters in this town than their running mates (all first-time general election candidates). Ardee had been allocated to Munster by Sinn Féin and Breathnach by Fianna Fáil for canvassing purposes, but the town fell within the area assigned to McGahon by Fine Gael. Admittedly, the margin between O'Dowd's and McGahon's vote numbers in Ardee was notably smaller than was the case with the other party candidates, and it could be argued that McGahon's Ardee vote was crucial in ensuring he remained in the race for as long as possible in order to secure one Fine Gael seat in a very competitive Louth constituency.

Turning to the Limerick County constituency, a strong geographical element can be observed in the case of Richard O'Donoghue. A large number of votes from his local area helped him to become the first independent TD to represent the Limerick County constituency (formerly Limerick West). A strong local support base can be viewed radiating from his home village of Granagh, with support levels clearly declining with distance from his home area (Fig. 9.4). O'Donoghue's local strength also made it difficult for competitors to win large numbers of votes from these areas. While the two Fianna Fáil candidates (Niall Collins and Michael Collins) also performed strongly in their local areas, they both struggled to gain a strong share of the votes in the central part of the constituency in which O'Donoghue was extremely successful (Fig. 9.5). In this case the presence of a strong independent candidate, who was formerly a Fianna Fáil councillor, appears to have significantly reduced Fianna Fáil support in central Limerick County.

It was not only Fianna Fáil that failed to appeal to supporters in central parts of Limerick County, with Sinn Féin's Séighin Ó Ceallaigh also



**Fig. 9.4** Support levels for Richard O'Donoghue, by electoral division, in the Limerick County constituency

247 winning his lowest levels of support in this area (Fig. 9.6). The most notable  
 248 pattern for Ó Ceallaigh is the lack of a strong 'friends and neighbours'  
 249 effect, with high levels of support observed in both urban and rural areas  
 250 in the east and west of the constituency. This may be due to Ó Ceallaigh's  
 251 established political base lying outside the constituency boundaries—he  
 252 had previously served as a councillor in Limerick City—but may also suggest  
 253 that factors other than local influences shaped the overall level of Sinn  
 254 Féin support in Limerick County. Its low support levels in central areas of  
 255 Limerick County may have been shaped by the presence of a strong candidate,  
 256 O'Donoghue, who made a similar appeal to the electorate in terms  
 257 of providing an 'anti-establishment' option to local voters. Ó Ceallaigh's  
 258 ability to win healthy levels of support in different parts of the Limerick  
 259 County constituency reflects a tendency that can be associated with a  
 260 'surge election', an ability to win strong levels of support far from your  
 261 local base—a tendency exemplified by cases such as the Labour Party in

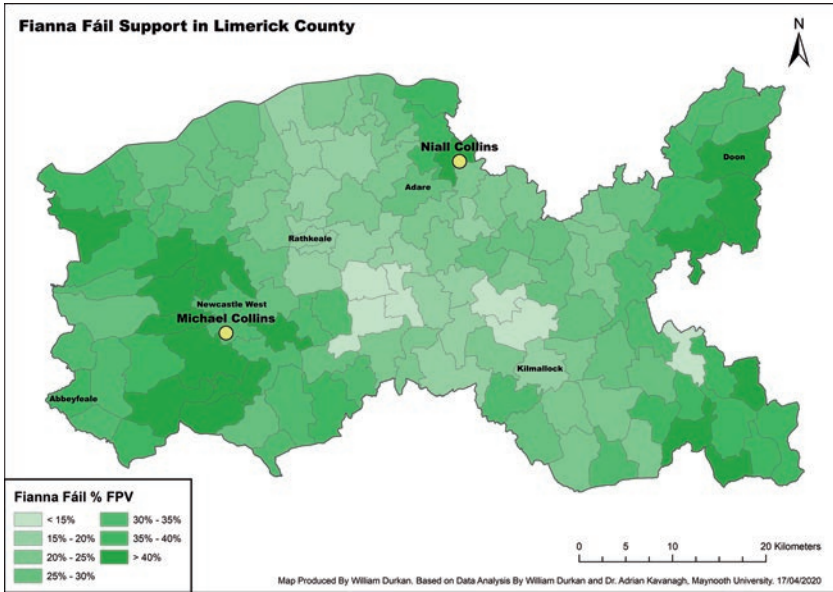
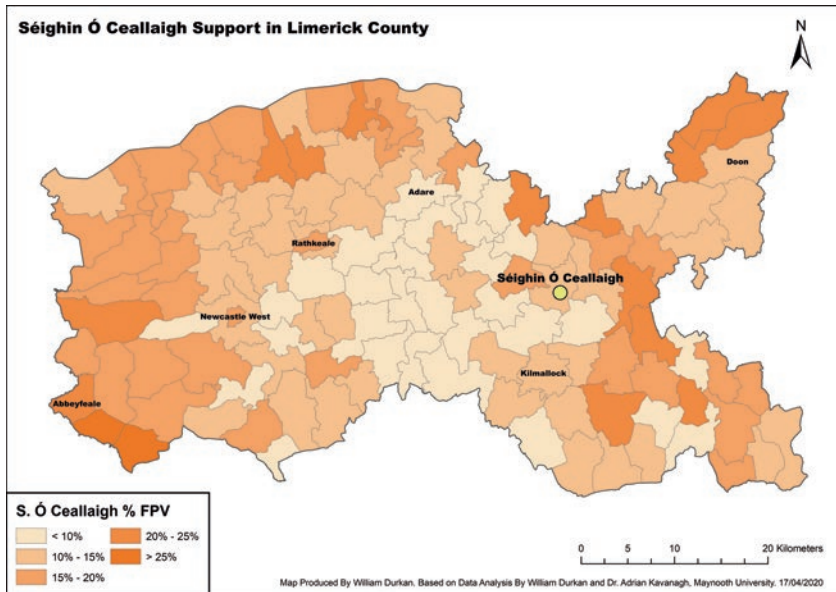


Fig. 9.5 Combined support levels for the Fianna Fáil candidates, by electoral division, in the Limerick County constituency

1992 and Sinn Féin in 2020, or by individual candidates, such as Mick Wallace in Wexford in 2011 and Michael Healy-Rae in Kerry in 2016.

Some candidates are consistently strong at appealing to voters from various areas across a constituency in this respect, as illustrated in the maps of support levels within the Limerick City constituency for long-time Fianna Fáil representative Willie O’Dea and his running mate James Collins (Fig. 9.7). There were few areas where O’Dea failed to win at least 10 per cent of the first preference votes, and he won over 25 per cent of the vote in a number of areas, even though the Sinn Féin surge reduced the overall number of first preference votes he would normally expect to win in this constituency. Being on the same ticket as a strong candidate such as O’Dea often poses challenges for party running mates, as was the case for Collins. Collins received less of a widespread distribution in his vote share, and his vote demonstrates a greater degree of localisation than his running mate. His strongest share of the vote was in the Dooradoyle region in the west of the constituency, where he is based, but his support

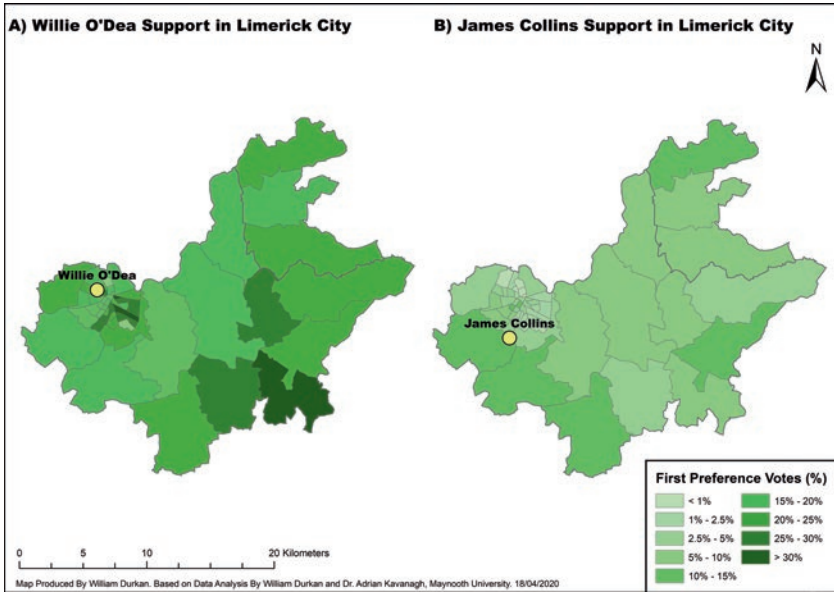
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**Fig. 9.6** Support levels for Séighin Ó Ceallaigh (Sinn Féin), by electoral division, in the Limerick County constituency

278 fell to very low levels in other areas. One area where both candidates  
 279 polled relatively well was the newly added area in the east of the constitu-  
 280 ency, which lies in County Tipperary. This highlights the importance of  
 281 electoral boundaries, as well as county identities, but these factors will be  
 282 even more evident in the next two constituencies to be studied here.

283 Taylor and Gudgin argue that the translation of votes into seats in any  
 284 given system depends on the geography of party support within a given  
 285 state and the nature in which the ‘grid’ of electoral boundaries is placed  
 286 upon the geography of support.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the process of revising electoral  
 287 boundaries can have a profound impact on election results. While the use  
 288 of an independent commission removes the aspect of party influence and  
 289 intended bias, any boundary changes can still have unintended impacts.  
 290 Revisions may impact on candidate support levels within a given constitu-  
 291 ency, as well as on party and candidate campaigning approaches. This is  
 292 particularly evident in Ireland when electoral boundaries are seen to  
 293 breach county boundaries. County identity is a very influential factor in



**Fig. 9.7** Support levels for Willie O'Dea and James Collins (Fianna Fáil) by electoral division, in the Limerick City constituency

shaping an individual's and a community's sense of place, and its importance is obvious when it comes to topics such as sporting allegiances, but it also has an influence on political identity. The political impact of county identity within a multi-county constituency often leads to a scenario in which candidates receive most of their support from their home county, reinforcing the observed level of 'friends and neighbours' voting. The need to maintain county boundaries 'as far as practicable' is established in the terms of reference set for the Constituency Commission. However, breaches of county boundaries are allowed in order to reduce the degree of variance from the national average representation level. John Coakley argues that 'it is confusing for voters, at best, and deeply alienating' if they 'find themselves transferred, as they see it, out of their own county and into a neighbouring one', something he views as 'a process that is potentially delegitimising'.<sup>9</sup> The extent of county boundary breaches was increased notably by the 2017 Constituency Commission report, even though some observers argued that these could have been limited without

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310 unduly impacting on the proportionality principle. There were a number  
 311 of cases where small portions of counties were joined on to other constitu-  
 312 encies, as was the case with the aforementioned Limerick City example.

313 Another example was the newly enlarged Kildare South constituency,  
 314 which consisted of areas in three counties, with 9450 individuals located  
 315 in County Laois and a further 2404 in County Offaly. Voting patterns dif-  
 316 fered notably between these areas and the parts of the constituency located  
 317 within County Kildare. For instance, support patterns for the Labour candi-  
 318 date, Mark Wall, not only provide a clear example of a ‘friends and  
 319 neighbours’ voting effect (see Fig. 9.8) but also illustrate how county  
 320 boundaries may have an influence on support patterns. Wall has a high  
 321 level of support in his home area of Athy, while his vote share declines the  
 322 further north one travels in Kildare South. As the only Labour candidate  
 323 in Kildare South, localised voting patterns appear to be the primary driver  
 324 of support for him, as opposed to party policies or ideological consider-  
 325 ations. The one area that demonstrates a notable variation from the overall

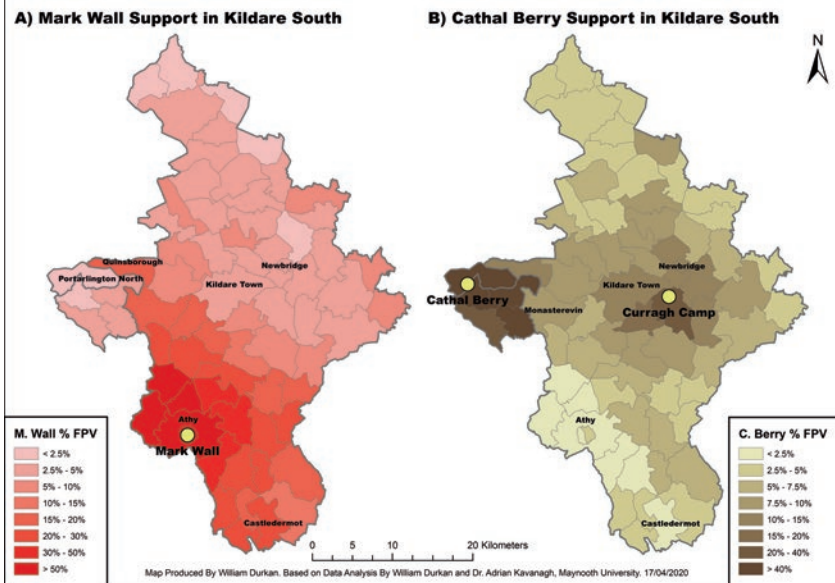


Fig. 9.8 Support levels for Mark Wall (Labour) and Cathal Berry (Independent), by electoral division, in the Kildare South constituency

Wall support patterns is the part of the constituency located within Laois and Offaly. For instance, Wall won over 17 per cent of the vote in the Quinsborough electoral division (located in Kildare), but received less than 1 per cent of the total vote in the neighbouring Portarlington North electoral division (located in Offaly), thus demonstrating the common pattern whereby a candidate's support tends to decrease when moving outside their home county.

First-time independent candidate, Cathal Berry, by contrast, won a strong level of support in the areas located in Laois and Offaly, winning over 40 per cent of the first preference votes cast in these areas. He experienced a notable drop in support immediately after crossing the Kildare County boundary, taking less than 10 per cent of the vote in the Monasterevin area. However, Berry also won over 40 per cent of the first preference votes in the Ballysax East electoral division in central Kildare, despite this being geographically removed from his home area. During his campaign, Berry, himself a former Irish Army officer, frequently appealed to members of the defence forces and outlined the need to better address concerns relevant to them, which was reflected in high level of support observed for him in the areas around the Curragh army camp. This was further highlighted when examining the postal votes in Kildare South. Berry received 583 postal votes, over two-thirds of those available.<sup>10</sup> Overall, Berry's strong localised support base outside of County Kildare and his appeal to members of a select demographic group within the constituency ensured a successful election campaign for him.

The 2017 Constituency Commission report resulted in some areas being joined with Dáil constituencies with which they previously had no political connection, as with the parts of Laois and Offaly that were added to the Kildare South constituency. By contrast, the (re)creation of a five-seat Laois–Offaly constituency saw the re-establishment of a two-county constituency that had been in existence from the foundation of the state up to the 2016 general election. The 2012 Constituency Commission report had recommended the creation of two new three-seat constituencies: Laois (including a portion of south-west Kildare) and Offaly (including a much larger portion of north Tipperary). The existence of these three-seaters was very short-lived, even though the recreation of a five-seat Laois–Offaly effectively resulted in the loss of a seat by a region that had one of the highest levels of population increase in the state in the 2000s. As a longer established two-county constituency, county loyalties have not traditionally been as absolute in determining political preferences in

365 Laois–Offaly as would be the case with other two-county constituencies  
 366 with shorter histories of political association. In past elections, some candi-  
 367 dates traditionally were able to secure relatively high levels of support in  
 368 areas that were located outside their home county, as was the case with  
 369 Fianna Fáil’s Ger Connolly, an Offaly candidate who was strong in north-  
 370 east Laois—an area that was admittedly close to his Bracknagh home  
 371 base—across the elections he contested between 1969 and 1992.  
 372 Moreover, the Fine Gael candidates could often rely on strong support  
 373 bases outside their own counties. These trends were highlighted in a study  
 374 of the 1992 election in Laois–Offaly.<sup>11</sup>

375 In 2020, however, county loyalties were very much to the fore in shap-  
 376 ing support levels for the four Fianna Fáil candidates (Fig. 9.9). The two  
 377 Offaly-based candidates, Brian Cowen and Peter Ormond, fared signifi-  
 378 cantly better in Offaly than in Laois, with the reverse trend observed for  
 379 the Laois-based candidates (although one of Pauline Flanagan’s strong-  
 380 est areas was in Offaly). Both Fine Gael candidates, Charlie Flanagan

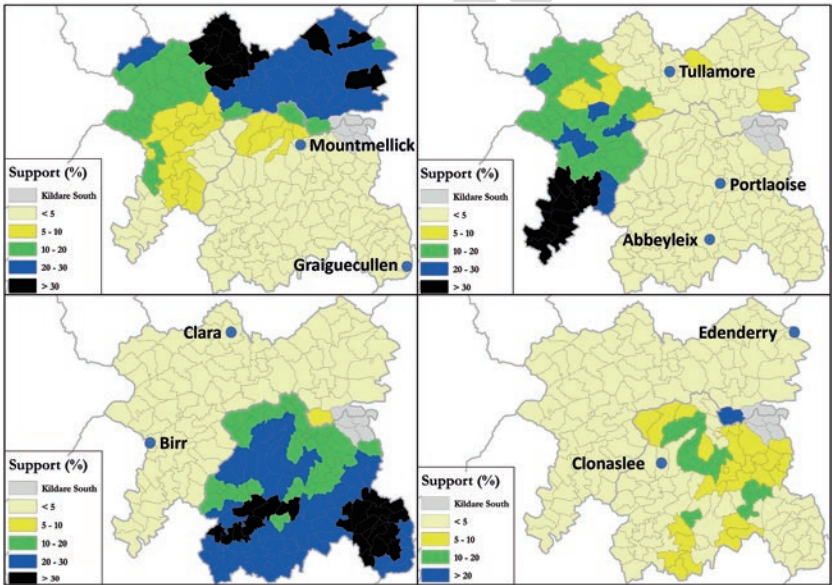


Fig. 9.9 Support levels for the Fianna Fáil candidates, by electoral division, in the Laois–Offaly constituency



and Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, also failed to poll well outside their home county. 381  
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Two candidates who polled well in areas outside their home counties 383  
were incumbent TDs Brian Stanley and Carol Nolan. Stanley was the only 384  
Sinn Féin candidate in this constituency and fared very well in this elec- 385  
tion, particularly in Laois, given that his political base is in Portlaoise. Such 386  
was the extent of the Sinn Féin surge in this election that he also polled 387  
well in some parts of Offaly (Fig. 9.10). He did not fare well in areas 388  
where strong local candidates vied to win large shares of the local vote, 389  
namely south-west and north-west Offaly. Four strong local candidates in 390  
south-west Offaly were effectively competing for the last seat in Laois- 391  
Offaly—Ormond, Corcoran–Kenny, Nolan and former Renua leader John 392  
Leahy—while Cowen polled strongly in Clara (the Cowen family base) 393  
and Tullamore (his home). Stanley won more votes than any other candi- 394  
date in the Edenderry electoral area in north-east Offaly, however. The 395  
only strong local candidate in this area was Pippa Hackett of the Green 396

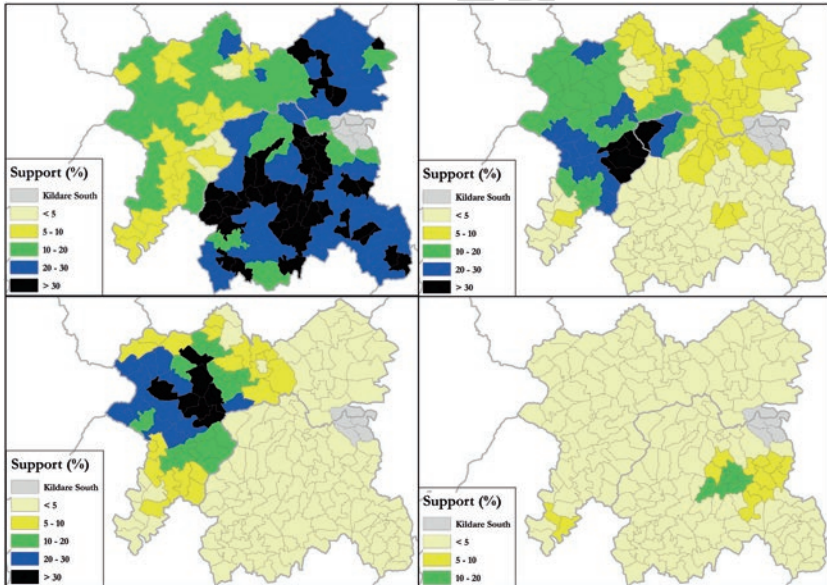


Fig. 9.10 Support levels for candidates in the Laois–Offaly constituency, by elec-  
toral division

397 Party, and her support levels were not particularly locally focused. Carol  
398 Nolan, who had been elected as a Sinn Féin TD in 2016 but left the party  
399 in 2018, not only fared well in her home base in west Offaly but also suc-  
400 ceeded in winning high numbers in areas across the county boundary,  
401 such as the town of Clonaslee. She also tended to fare especially well in the  
402 areas where Stanley's support was lowest—a pattern that one would nor-  
403 mally associate with party running mates, even though Nolan was no lon-  
404 ger a member of Sinn Féin. Leahy fared strongly in west Offaly also, but  
405 his vote levels collapsed once the county boundary was crossed and his  
406 weakness in Laois ultimately prevented him from being in contention for  
407 the final seat here. Support patterns for Labour's Noel Tuohy saw a similar  
408 focus on his home area and home county, although he did have a pocket  
409 of support in Dunkerrin in Offaly.

410 Class factors were also evident in the support levels in Laois–Offaly,  
411 with Stanley winning his highest vote levels in the polling stations in  
412 Portlaoise that were associated with areas with high levels of local author-  
413 ity housing. Class impacts on turnout can be easier to detect, however, in  
414 the more urban areas, given that higher levels of social mix in more rural  
415 areas can limit the impact of class effects on support patterns. Higher lev-  
416 els of social stratification in the larger cities, especially in the Dublin con-  
417 stituencies, allow for class effects on voting patterns to be easier to detect.  
418 In Dublin West, for instance, there were notable variations in candidate  
419 support levels among polling stations located in different parts of that  
420 constituency, with very different voting patterns evident in the more  
421 working-class areas in Mulhuddart and Tyrrelstown areas as compared  
422 with the more middle-class Castleknock area. Sinn Féin's Paul Donnelly  
423 topped the poll in Dublin West, and he fared especially well in polling sta-  
424 tions located in the more working-class parts of the constituency, as was  
425 also the case for Solidarity's Deputy Ruth Coppinger (Fig. 9.11). In the  
426 more working-class parts of the constituency, Donnelly and Coppinger,  
427 between them, won 73 per cent of the vote in the Ladyswell National  
428 School polling station and 68 per cent of the vote in the St. Patrick's  
429 Senior National School polling station, but they won only 8 per cent of  
430 the vote in St. Brigid's National School, which was located in the more  
431 middle-class Castleknock area. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, by contrast,  
432 tended to fare notably better in the more middle-class areas in Dublin  
433 West, so his vote share was inversely correlated with that of Donnelly, with  
434 similar support patterns also evidenced for the Green Party's Roderic  
435 O'Gorman. It would be mistaken to infer that support patterns in urban

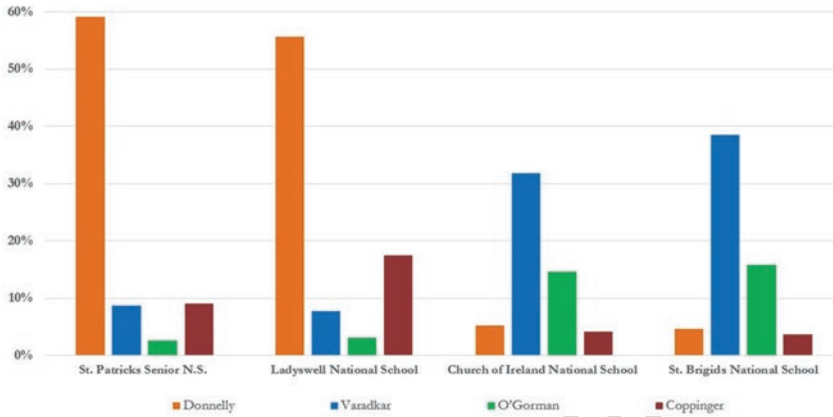


Fig. 9.11 Support levels for candidates at different polling stations in the Dublin West constituency at the 2020 general election

constituencies, such as Dublin West, are solely down to class effects, as 436  
 ‘friends and neighbours’ voting is also evidenced in these. In most cases, 437  
 class effects act in tandem with local candidate effects in these constitu- 438  
 encies. In the case of Dublin West, the strength of Varadkar and O’Gorman 439  
 in Castleknock may be attributed, in part, to class effects, but also reflects 440  
 the fact that their political bases lie within the Castleknock area. Geography 441  
 matters in Dublin too; as Fine Gael minister Richard Bruton has said, 442  
 Dublin is still a ‘City of Villages’.<sup>12</sup> 443

## CONCLUSION 444

This chapter offers a brief overview of how geographical factors influenced 445  
 voting at the 2020 general election. Perhaps not surprisingly, given that 446  
 Irish elections are fought on the basis of geographically defined constitu- 447  
 encies, geography has been shown to be key to various aspects of the 2020 448  
 election. Even though the Sinn Féin surge tempered this somewhat in 449  
 2020, localism again was to the fore and most candidates still tended to 450  
 win their highest levels of support in and around their local areas, even 451  
 though technological and societal developments might lead one to expect 452  
 that the effects of localism would no longer be pronounced. The geogra- 453  
 phies of different socio-economic and demographic factors also helped to 454

455 influence the geographies of support for different candidates and parties,  
 456 with such influences being especially evident in the more urban constitu-  
 457 encies. Further complicating the picture, the impacts of electoral bound-  
 458 ary changes, especially when these involved breaches of county boundaries,  
 459 also shaped the extent to which these factors impacted on support patterns  
 460 and success levels, as evidenced in this chapter. Ultimately, people live,  
 461 socialise and work in places, and these places will help frame the political  
 462 decisions made by people, as was very much the case at the 2020 election.

## NOTES

463

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- 470 3. Adrian Kavanagh, 'All changed, changed utterly? Irish general election  
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 472 *Irish Political Studies* 29:2 (2014), pp. 215–35, at p. 224.
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- 479 6. Ron Johnston et al., 'The neighbourhood effect and voting in England  
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- 482 7. General election results in the Republic of Ireland are published officially  
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 484 specific areas within a constituency) are opened at the start of the election  
 485 count, party officials keep a tally of how many votes have been won by each  
 486 candidate in those boxes and these tally figures give a detailed geographical  
 487 breakdown of the votes won by each candidate/party at the sub-  
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10. It is worth noting that members of the Irish Army posted overseas are among the few electors entitled to vote by postal ballot. 494  
495
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*ciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin: Geography 498  
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12. Research interview with Deputy Richard Bruton, 3 October 2019. 500

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