

A Record Number of Candidates in the Presidential Election in Ireland

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ANALYSIS1 month before
the poll

3.1 million Irish are being convened to vote for the second time this year. After having renewed the Chamber of Representatives (Dail Eireann), the Lower Chamber in Parliament, on 25th February they will elect the successor to Mary Patricia McAleese to the presidency of the Republic on 27th October next. Elected for the first time on 30th October 1997 with 45.2% of the vote (as Fianna Fail's candidate, she won ahead of the then Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Albert Reynolds in the race to be appointed as the party's candidate)); she was then re-elected in October 2004. The only candidate standing (on her own nomination, as stipulated in article 12.4.4 of the 1937 Constitution – Bunreacht na hEireann – for heads of State in office) for the supreme office when nominations were finalised, she was appointed without having to stand before the population. Born in Belfast, Mary Patricia McAleese was the first president of the Republic of Ireland to come from Northern Ireland, and is the third to have undertaken two consecutive terms in office, the last one dating back to, Eamon de Valera the father of the Irish nation, who was in office as Head of State from 1959 to 1973.

The President of the Republic has done a great deal of work to bring the communities living in the country together and has given a great amount of encouragement to the reconciliation and peace process between Catholics and Protestants living in Northern Ireland. In 1998 she caused a mini diplomatic incident by accepting to receive communion in an Anglican church. From 17th to 20th May last she hosted the British Queen Elizabeth II who was visiting Ireland, an all time first since the foundation of the Republic of Ireland.

At the beginning of 2011 Fine Gael (FG), in office at present, suggested the organisation of a referendum on the extension of voting rights to the election of the Irish presidency to the British population living in Northern Ireland. Prime Minister Enda Kenny's party states that if a native of Ulster can become President of the Republic of Ireland then it was normal for the Irish in Northern Ireland to be able to elect the head of the Irish State. The far left nationalist party, Sinn Fein (SF), said it supported the vote of the Irish from Northern Ireland in the presidential election.

The Presidential Function

The President of the Republic of Ireland is elected in

the so-called alternative vote for a 7 year mandate that can be renewed once. Any Irish citizen aged at least 35 can stand for the post. All candidates have to have the signatures of 20 members of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) or that of at least four County Councils or of four town councils. The former heads of State (or the outgoing president of the Republic) are the only ones to be exempted from this.

In 1997 two of the five candidates, Derek Nally and Dana Rosemary Scallon, succeeded in putting forward their bids with the support of the counties, a first in the country's history.

Although the president of the Republic only has representative power, he can however refuse to dissolve the Dail Eireann. Indeed, according to the Constitution the Taoiseach has to resign if he loses the support of his parliamentary majority. He can however ask the Head of State to dissolve the Chamber of Representatives. The latter is then allowed to refuse this request, in which case the Prime Minister has to resign.

The Candidates

7 people are running for the presidency of the Republic

of Ireland, which is a record for this election.

Gay Mitchell, MEP, will represent the party in office, Fine Gael. On 9th July last he won during a vote within his party, taking 54% of the votes ahead of MP Mairead McGuinness, who won 46% of the votes. Previously Gay Mitchell was preferred to the former President of the European Parliament (2002-2004), Pat Cox who suffered for having been a Fianna Fail, then Progressive Democratic Party member – which disbanded on 20th November 2009 – before finally joining Fine Gael. The second candidate supported by a political party is Michael Higgins, poet, former Arts and Culture Minister (1994-1997) and chair of the Labour Party, a member of the government coalition in office. With 37 votes he pushed ahead of former Labour Party advisor Fergus Finlay (18 votes) and former Senator Kathleen O'Meara (7 votes) during the nomination vote of the candidate for the supreme office within her party in June last.

On 18th September Martin McGuinness, Deputy Prime Minister of Northern Ireland was appointed as the Sinn Fein candidate in the presidential election. Martin McGuinness was a militant in the Irish Republican Army (IRA) for thirty years, from the beginning of the 1970's until 1998 and one of the actors in the peace agreement, the so-called Good Friday Agreement – signed on 10th April 1998 between the nationalist Catholic parties and the Protestant Unionists of Northern Ireland (and ratified by referendum on 23rd May in the same year by 71% of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland and 85% of the Irish from the Republic). This text put an end to three decades of violence between the two communities, Protestant and Catholic, in a war that cost 3,400 people their lives between 1969 and 1997. The Good Friday Agreement also led to the formation of a government rallying the Protestant Unionists, loyal to the British crown, and the Catholic Nationalists, supporters of a united Ireland.

Martin McGuinness worked hard to achieve Sinn Fein's acceptance of the peace agreement. He also played a major role in the IRA's decision to sign a permanent cease-fire and to destroy its stock of arms. "I joined the IRA, I have never denied it, the conditions and circumstances that led me into it are no different from those that made Michael Collins, Tom Barry, Eamon de Valera and Nelson Mandela to take up arms against

injustice that existed in their time," declared Martin McGuinness adding, "I greatly regret the fact that so many people died – British soldiers, IRA volunteers, men of the UDR (Ulster Defence Regiment) and the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary), innocent civilians – in the 25 years of fighting."

Martin McGuinness says he is a progressive candidate of a wide progressive movement that extends the party to which he belongs.

"He has all the qualities necessary to be a political leader: a deep love of Ireland, its people, and more importantly, a vision for the future of this nation," declared Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams as he spoke of Martin McGuinness. "I want to use my power to build bridges and unite people on this island based on the peace process," declared the candidate. Martin McGuinness's presence in the Irish Presidential election offers Sinn Fein a chance to undertake an electoral campaign across all of Ireland. This might however weaken the Deputy Prime Minister of Northern Ireland's position in places where his opponents may highlight the fact that he privileges his desire for the reunification of Ireland in relation to the Ulster peace process. The presence of the former IRA officer turned craftsman of the peace process between the Protestants and Catholics in Ulster amongst the pretenders to the Aras an Uachtarain (the name of the residence of the Irish Head of State) has been the source of dispute in Ireland. The Chief of Justice, Alan Shatter, expressed his doubts about the candidature of the Deputy Prime Minister of Northern Ireland to the presidency of the Republic. "I think that many will look at his chequered past as inappropriate for someone who is to be the commander in chief of our armies, but it is up to the electorate to choose;" he declared adding, "I do not believe that someone who boycotted Queen Elizabeth's visit to Ireland can stand as a reconciler." Martin McGuinness is asking the Irish to judge him on the role he played in the peace process rather than on his past.

The other four candidates are standing as independents.

Sean Gallagher is a company head known as one of the heroes of the TV programme broadcast by RTEI, Ireland's Dragons' Den. He decided not to use electoral posters during his campaign, qualifying the posters as a "waste of taxpayers' money."

Mary Davis, the organiser of the Summer Olympic Games in 2003 was appointed to the Council of State in 2004. "The Irish are ready for another Mary," she declared; referring to the outgoing head of State Mary Patricia McAleese and former President Mary Robinson (1990-1997).

Dana Rosemary Scallan is running for the second time in the presidential election. The unfortunate candidate in the election on 30th October 1997 in which she won 13.8% of the vote and finishing 3rd, she was finally elected to the European Parliament in 1999. Dana Rosemary Scallan is famous for having enabled Ireland to win the Eurovision Song Contest in 1970 with the song All Kinds of Everything.

Finally, David Norris, a Dublin Senator, a James Joyce specialist and known for being the first homosexual to have been elected to public office in Ireland, is also running. David Norris first made a bid to run before being forced to withdraw from the race at the beginning of August after it was revealed that in 1997 he had written a letter requesting clemency addressed to an Israeli court in support of his former partner, Ezra Nawi, who had been found guilty of raping a boy fifteen previously. Some weeks later he decided to re-enter the race in response according in his own opinion to "the demand of his electorate". "If I can make a comeback like this then the country can also make its own and I hope that I will be the one to lead it at that moment," declared David Norris.

The senator owes his return in part to the chair of the

Labour Party, Michael Higgins who encouraged the councillors of Dublin to grant their support to independent David Norris and help him stand in the presidential election "in the interest of democracy", he said.

The main opposition party, Fianna Fail (FF) decided not to put anyone forward in the presidential election. In office in Ireland from 1997 to 2011 and in coalition with the Progressive Democratic Party (PD), it achieved its worst result in its history in the early general elections that took place on 25th February last (17.4% of the vote), losing 24.2 points and 57 of its 77 seats compared to the previous election on 24th May 2007. Its leader Micheal Martin supported his party's participation in the presidential election. "If we are a serious party, we will stand in the elections," he declared. Criticised for having delayed in taking decisions and for having allowed division to reign over the party, he finally gave up and chose to focus on the reconstruction of Fianna Fail.

Former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern (1997-2008) had said for a time that he might stand for the supreme office before withdrawing. He said he would support the Fine Gael candidate Gay Mitchell in the election on 27th October next.

Just one month before the presidential election, David Norris is in the lead in all polls in which he is due to win around 21% of the vote. He is followed by Labour Party candidate, Michael Higgins with 18% and Martin McGuinness with 16%. Dana Rosemary Scallan is running last.

Reminder of the Presidential Election Results 30th October 1997 in Ireland

Turnout: 47.6%

Candidates	No. of first choice votes	% of first choice votes won
Mary McAleese (Fianna Fail, FF)	574 424	45,2
Mary Banotti (Fine Gael, FG)	372, 02	29,3
Dana Rosemary Scallan (Independent)	175 458	13,8
Adi Roche (Independent)	88 423	6,9
Derek Nally (Independent)	59 529	4,7

Source :Elections Internet Site in Ireland (<http://www.electionsireland.org/result.cfm?election=1997P&cons=194>)

Labour candidate Michael Higgins in the lead in voting intentions for the Presidential election in Ireland

D-7
7 days before
the poll

3.1 million Irish are being invited to appoint the successor to Mary Patricia McAleese to the Presidency of the Republic of Ireland on 27th October. The Irish will vote on the same day in two referenda – one on the remuneration of judges and the other on the possibility of the Oireachtas (Parliament) to undertake inquiries.

7 people are running for the Presidency, a record number in this election:

- Gay Mitchell, MEP (PEE, IE) is the Fine Gael candidate, the party in office;
- Michael Higgins, poet, former Arts and Culture Minister (1994-1997), is the chair of the Labour Party, a member of the ruling government coalition;
- Martin McGuinness, Deputy Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, is running for Sinn Fein (SF);
- Sean Gallagher, company head, known as one of the heroes in a TV programme broadcast by RT1, Ireland's Dragons' Den, is running as an independent;
- Mary Davis, organiser of the World Summer Olympics in 2003, appointed the following year to the State Council, is also running as an independent;
- Dana Rosemary Scallan, the unfortunate candidate in the previous presidential election on 30th October 1997 and known for having enabled Ireland to win the Eurovision song contest in 1970 with the song, All Kinds of Everything, is also running as an independent;
- David Norris, Senator of Dublin, a James Joyce specialist and known for being the first homosexual to have been elected to a public post in Ireland, is running as an independent.

Fianna Fail (FF), the main opposition party chose not to put a candidate forward.

Labour chair Michael Higgins attracted many supporters amongst the Fianna Fail electorate at the beginning of the campaign. The latter now seem to be turning their attention towards Sean Gallagher. The two men are also convincing an increasing number of the Fine Gael electorate, who are turning away from the appointed candidate, Gay Mitchell.

Former Fianna Fail member, Sean Gallagher is trying to distance himself from his old party and notably from his work in government over the last four years. "I think we should give value back to traditional, to production and services and not just to high tech industries that

are unable to take on half a million people," declared the candidate.

Sinn Fein candidate, Martin McGuinness, lies third in the polls. This explains why, over the last few days that he has chosen to throw the light on the two men who are leading in the polls – Michael Higgins and Sean Gallagher – whom he accuses of being the establishment candidates. He has promised to unite the people against avariciousness and the egotism of the wealthiest and has promised to fight mass unemployment. Since Fianna Fail does not have a candidate and with one candidate on the left – Michael Higgins – whose party is in power – Sinn Fein undeniably has a role to play. Martin McGuinness should have the support of a great number of Irish who are fighting for the reunification of the island and his party's opposition to the cost of the rescue plan imposed on Dublin by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union. With regard to this, in its latest annual study published on Ireland published on 14th October, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) lauded "the significant work that has been done towards achieving budgetary balance," undertaken by the Irish authorities and noted the "satisfactory progress in reducing of the public deficit."

Farmers, people with the highest incomes, the elderly, women and Fine Gael supporters are the firmest opponents to the far-left nationalist group's candidate.

On 12th October last the seven candidates took part in a TV debate on RTE. 654,000 people on average watched the programme. Many viewers complained about how Martin McGuinness was treated. Journalist Miriam O'Callaghan indeed asked the Sinn Fein leader if he knew the murderers of Patrick Kelly, killed by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Ballinamore in December 1983 (his son David recently asked Martin McGuinness to reveal the truth). She also asked him about the way he reconciled his faith in God and the fact of having

been involved in the murder of many people. "I have been accused of murder, it is false," declared Martin McGuinness who deplored the fact that the journalist asked each of the candidates if they thought he was a worthy candidate in the presidential election, without asking him what he thought of his rivals.

David Norris is losing ground in the polls, after having led the race for several weeks.

According to the most recent poll by Ipsos MMRBI, published in the daily *The Irish Times*, Labour Party chair, Michael Higgins is in the lead in terms of voting intentions with 23% of the vote. He is followed by Sean Gallagher who is due to win 20% of the vote, Martin McGuinness 19%. Mary Davis is credited with 12%, David Norris, 11%, Gay Mitchell, 9% and Dana Rosemary Scallan, 6%.

Michael D. Higgins takes over from Mary Patricia McAleese as President of the Republic of Ireland

Michael Higgins (Labour Party) won the presidential election that took place on 27th October in Ireland winning 39.6% of the vote (first choice votes). He came out ahead of independent Sean Gallagher who won 28.5% of the vote. Michael Higgins won in 18 of the country's 26 counties and Sean Gallagher won in 7 of them: Cork North West, Cork South West, Tipperary North, Laois/Offaly, Roscommon/South Leitrim, Carvan/Monaghan and Donegal South West.

Sinn Fein (SF) candidate, Martin McGuinness, Deputy Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, came third with 13.7% of the vote. He won in the county of Donegal North East. In fourth position came MEP Gay Mitchell, the ruling party, Fine Gael's candidate (FG) with 6.4% of the vote, followed by Dublin's Senator David Norris, (independent), who won 6.2% of the vote; then came the other independent candidates Dana Rosemary Scallan and Mary Davis, who each won 2.9% and 2.7% of the vote respectively.

Turnout rose to 56.10%.

"I want to be the President for all of the people in the Republic, and for all of those who did not vote, for those who I shall encourage to have confidence in the institutions again," declared Michael Higgins who announced that he would resign from his post as Chair of the Labour Party- Fine Gael's present partner in the government coalition led by Prime Minister Enda Kenny.

"The electorate has privileged experimentation," stresses Elaine Byrne, Political Science Professor at Trinity College, Dublin. "Michael D. (Michael Higgins's nickname) is well loved and respected well beyond the Labour Party," she added. "Michael Higgins will have my entire support in his work as President of the Republic. His campaign motto confirmed that he would be everyone's president, of whom we could be proud, and I think he will do this," declared Sean Gallagher when the results were announced.

The major favourite, just days before the presidential

election, the latter was accused by Sinn Fein candidate Martin McGuinness, during a TV debate on 24th October last, of having accepted 5,000€ from a businessman who has been convicted of smuggling, in order to fund Fianna Fail, of which Sean Gallagher once said he had "temporarily been a member". The independent candidate categorically denied these accusations but the polemic undeniably led to a loss of votes. "I shall not be distracted by manoeuvres such as political assassination on the part of Martin McGuinness or any other Sinn Fein member," he said. According to a poll undertaken by the channel RTE, 55% of the electorate declared they had changed their voting intentions in the wake of this controversy.

"Michael Higgins will be a good President," stressed Martin McGuinness who said he was "delighted with his own result." "Tens of thousands of ordinary Irishmen and women identified with my patriotic message and my commitment," he said. "We have reduced the gulf

RESULTS

Presidential Election in Ireland 27th October 2011

between the north and south,” said Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams. “This presidential campaign has enabled the far left nationalist party to smooth over its image of being a terrorist organisation to position itself as a true opposition party.”

Fine Gael’s candidate Gay Mitchell undoubtedly made the mistake of focussing his attacks on Martin McGuinness.

Aged 70 Michael Higgins is originally from Limerick. A sociology graduate, he taught this subject as well as political science at the University of Galway and at the University of Southern Illinois. Formerly a member of Fianna Fail, he then joined the Labour Party. Elected MP in 1981 he lost his seat the following year before returning to the Dail Eireann, the lower chamber of the Oireachtas (parliament), in 1987. He chose not to stand again in 2011. Michael Higgins was mayor of Galway in 1982-1983 and in 1991-1992 and Arts, Culture and Gaelic Minister (a language which the new President of the Republic speaks) between 1993 and 1997 in the

government led by John Bruton (FG). In 2003, he succeeded Proinsias De Rossa as chair of the Labour Party. Finally, the successor to Mary Patricia McAleese is also a famous poet.

On 11th November next Michael Higgins will become the ninth resident at the Aras an Uachtarain (the name of the residency of the heads of the Irish state). He has promised to respect the neutral nature of the post. He will be sworn in as President of the Republic in St Patrick’s Hall at the castle of Dublin. He will make the following declaration in Gaelic: “In the presence of Almighty God I, Michael Higgins, do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will maintain the Constitution of Ireland and uphold its laws, that I will fulfil my duties faithfully and conscientiously in accordance with the Constitution and the law, and that I will dedicate my abilities to the service and welfare of the people of Ireland. May God direct and sustain me.» (Article 12.8 of the Bunreacht na hEireann, i.e. 1937 Constitution).

Results of the Presidential Election 27th October 2011 in Ireland

Turnout: 56.10%

Candidates	No. of votes won (first choice votes)	% of votes won (first choice votes)
Michael Higgins (Labour Party, (Lab))	701 101	39.6
Sean Gallagher (independent)	504 964	28.5
Martin McGuinness (Sinn Fein (SF))	243 030	13.7
Gay Mitchell (Fine Gael, FG)	113 321	6.4
David Norris (independent)	109 469	6.2
Dana Rosemary Scallon (independent)	51 220	2.9
Mary Davis (independent)	48 657	2.7

Source : Internet Site of the TV channel RTE (<http://www.rte.ie/news/presidentialelection/results.html>)

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