

Outgoing President of the Republic, Michael D Higgins, favourite for a second mandate as head of Ireland on 26th October next

On 28th August last, Eoghan Murphy, (Fine Gael, FG) Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government announced to the Irish that they would be convened to ballot on 26th October next to elect the President of the Republic.

A month and a half prior to this, on 10th July, outgoing head of State, Michael D Higgins announced that he intended to run for office again, even though in 2011 he said he would only stay for one mandate.

For the first time since 1966, an outgoing President of the Republic has rivals to face and will therefore not be re-elected automatically, without an electoral battle, as has been the case for several of his predecessors. Michael D Higgins is supported by the Labour Party to which he belongs, Leo Varadkar, and the Taoiseach's (Prime Minister in Gaelic) Fine Gael, and Fianna Fail (FF). Many political parties in the Celtic Republic do not want to engage an expensive electoral campaign and have chosen not to put any candidates forward in the presidential election on 26th October.

Extremely popular, the outgoing head of State has succeeded in supporting his fellow countrymen over the last seven years as they have witnessed great changes in Ireland (acceptance via referendum of same-sex marriage on 22nd May 2015 and of the liberalisation of abortion on 25th May 2018). In 2014 he was the first President of the Republic to undertake a State visit to the UK.

The candidates running

Michael D Higgins will be running against five others:

- Gavin Duffy, 58, independent, originally from Meath, a businessman. He took part in Dragons' Den, a telereality show on RTE;
- Peter Casey, 60, independent, originally from Derry, founder and General Manager of the global recruitment company, Claddagh Resources and also known for his role in Dragons' Den;
- Joan Freeman, independent, originally from Dublin, a

psychologist. A Senator, she founded the Maison Pieta, an organisation that aims to prevent suicide; in 2006 she took over its management until 2014;

- Sean Gallagher, independent, originally from Monaghan, a businessman and unfortunate candidate in the last presidential election on 27th October 2011. He came second, winning 28.5% of the first preference votes (39.6% for Michael Higgins). He also took part in Dragons' Den;

- Liadh Ni Riada, 51, MP and Sinn Fein (SF) candidate, a radical, nationalist left wing party. Former TV producer, she was appointed on 16th September last by the Ard Comhairle (the party's High Council).

Sinn Fein maintains that taking part in the election is good for the country and democracy. It will use the electoral campaign to highlight the need for Irish reunification and the role of women in the national debate. «People in Ireland want political and social change,» declared Mary Lou McDonald, the party's leader.

The Presidential Function

The President of the Republic of Ireland is elected by the so-called alternative vote for a 7 year mandate that is renewable once. The post is accessible to any Irish citizen who is aged at least 35. All candidates to the supreme office have to have won the signature of a minimum of 20 members of the Oireachtas (Parliament) or the support of at least 4 County Councils or 4 Town Councils. The former Heads of State (or the outgoing President of the Republic) are the only ones exempt from this obligation. They can therefore stand-alone before the electorate, as outgoing head of State, Michael D Higgins is doing.

Presidential election in Ireland
26th October 2018

Although the President of the Republic only plays a representative role in Ireland, he can however refer a draft bill to the Supreme Court, if he deems it unconstitutional and refuse to dissolve the Dail Eireann (House of Representatives), the lower house of parliament. Indeed according to the Constitution, the Taoiseach must resign if he loses the support of his parliamentary majority. He can however ask the Head of State to dissolve the House of Representatives. The latter is then allowed to refuse this request, in which case the Prime Minister is obliged to resign.

The most recent poll by RED C, published in The Sunday Business Post on 16th last forecasts an easy victory for outgoing President Higgins in the election with 67% of the vote. Sean Gallagher is due to come 2nd with

15% of the vote, ahead of Sinn Fein candidate, Liadh Ni Riada, who is due to take 7% of the vote and Gavin Duffy with 6%.

The President of the Republic elected on 26th October will officially take office on 11th November next as he enters the Aras an Uachtarain (name of the residence of the Irish heads of State).

On the same day as the presidential election, the Irish will be called to vote by referendum on the removal of the offence of the publication or declaration of blasphemy from the Constitution. In order to be completely adopted this amendment to the Fundamental Law must be put to the Dail Eireann, adopted by the two houses of Parliament and approved by referendum. Blasphemy is punishable by a fine of 25,000€ in Ireland.

Reminder of the presidential election results of 27th October 2011 in Ireland

Turnout: 56.11%

Candidates	First preference votes (%)	Number of first preference votes	Number of second preference votes	Number of third preference votes	Number of fourth preference votes
Michael D. Higgins (Labour Party)	39.57	701 101	730 480	793 128	1 007 104
Sean Gallagher (Independent)	28.50	504 964	529 401	548 373	628 114
Martin McGuinness (Sinn Fein, SF)	13.72	243 030	252 611	265 196	
Gay Mitchell (Fine Gael, FG)	6.40	113 321	127 357	136 309	
David Norris (Independent)	6.18	109 469	116 526		
Dana Rosemary Scallon (Independent)	2.89	51 220			
Mary Davis (Independent)	2.75	48 657			

Source : <https://electionsireland.org/result.cfm?election=2011P&cons=194>

Outgoing President of the Republic, Michael D. Higgins is re-elected to be the Irish head of State

Results

The outgoing President of the Republic, Michael D. Higgins, who was standing as an independent candidate, was re-elected as the Irish head of State with 55.81% of the vote on 26th October. He easily pulled ahead of all of his rivals, but to a lesser degree than forecast in the polls. The victory that had been predicted for the outgoing head of State undoubtedly dissuaded many of his fellow countrymen from turning out to ballot. Fewer than one Irishman in two fulfilled his civic duty: turnout totalled 43.87% (-12.24 points less than in the previous election on 27th October 2011), i.e. the lowest turnout ever recorded for a presidential election.

Independent candidate Peter Casey came second in the election with 23.25% of the vote. Sean Gallagher (independent) won 6.41% of the vote; the Sinn Féin (SF) candidate Liadh Ni Riada won 6.38%, and Joan Freeman (independent), 5.96%. Gavin Duffy (independent) closed the list with 2.18% of the vote.

Results of the Presidential election 26th October 2018 in Ireland

Turnout: 43.87%

Candidates	Number of first preference votes won	% of first preference votes won
Michael D. Higgins (independent)	822 566	55.81
Peter Casey (independent)	342 727	23.25
Sean Gallagher (independent)	94 514	6.41
Liadh Ni Riada (Sinn Féin, SF)	93 987	6.38
Joan Freeman (independent)	87 908	5.96
Gavin Duffy (independent)	32 198	2.18

"The presidency of the Republic belongs to no one in particular, but to the Irish people as a whole. I shall be the president of all, of those who voted for me, and of those who didn't," declared Higgins on the announcement of the results.

None of the "major" political parties in the country put candidates forward in this presidential election

except for Sinn Féin. Michael D Higgins was indeed supported by the Labour Party, to which he belongs, Fine Gael of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar and Fianna Fail (FF). Sinn Féin did not however draw any advantage from the absence of its main rivals. Liadh Ni Riada's result (6.38% of the vote) will only weaken the position of the party's leader Mary Lou McDonald, who maintained that there

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"was an appetite for political and social change in the country," during the electoral campaign.

The surprise in this presidential election came from Peter Casey. The latter undertook a campaign in the last two weeks preceding the election which was very critical of the traveller community (who, in his opinion, do not pay their taxes and use the property of private parties to set up camp) expressing his regret that Ireland had become a country of *"socially assisted"* citizens. The founder and general director of the world recruitment company Claddagh Resources, stood as the candidate of the average Irishman, for those who were finding it hard to pay their bills and find housing, who, in his opinion, are those the State should be helping. These declarations, which were condemned by Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, pushed him to second place in the presidential election. *"The real reason why I achieved this result is because I spoke for the majority of the Irish, for people who are suffering, who have no advantage and who pay all of their bills,"* indicated Peter Casey.

And so, Michael D. Higgins will stay in the Aras an Uachtaráin (name of the residency of the Irish heads of State). He will be sworn in on 11th November next at St Patrick's Hall at the Castle of Dublin where he will deliver the following declaration in Gaelic: *"In the presence of Almighty God I 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 hÉireann, the Constitution of Ireland of 1937).

Aged 77, Michael D. Higgins is originally from Limerick. A graduate in sociology, he taught this subject, as well as political science at the University of Galway and in Southern Illinois University (USA). Firstly a member of Fianna Fail, he left this party to join the Labour Party. Elected in 1981 he lost

his seat the following year, before returning to the Dail Éireann, the lower house of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament), in 1987. He chose not to stand in 2011, the year he was elected President of the Republic.

Former Mayor of Galway (1982-1983 and 1991-1992), Michael D. Higgins was the Minister for Art, Culture and Gaelic from 1993 to 1997 in the government led by John Bruton (FG). In 2003, he succeeded Proinsias De Rossa as the leader of the Labour Party, which he left after his election as President of the Republic on 27th October 2011. Finally, the head of the Irish State is also a renowned poet.

On the same day the Irish were called to vote by referendum on the abolition of the crime of blasphemy from the Constitution. Two thirds of the electorate (64,85%) voted in support of its abolition. As in the presidential election less than half of the Irish voted: turnout totalled 43.79%.

After the "yes" to the legalisation of abortion on 25th May last and to same sex marriage on 22nd May 2015, the referendum result on 26th October marks another development for Ireland, which for a long time was deemed to be caught up in its Catholic traditions. *"We have already allowed marriage equality and have given women the right to choose regarding stopping their pregnancies. This referendum regarding blasphemy is the following stage,"* declared Prime Minister Leo Varadkar ahead of the election.

"Ireland is rightly proud of its reputation as a modern, liberal society," declared the Minister for Justice and Equality Charlie Flanagan (FG) on the announcement of the result. Blasphemy, defined as any word or action that is *"rude and injurious towards sacred elements of religion"* that can cause *"the indignation of worshippers"* was to date banned by article 40.6.1 of the Irish Constitution and offenders were liable to a fine of 25,000€. The last prosecution for blasphemy dated however back to 1855, when a priest Vladimir Pecherin was

finally acquitted after burning a Bible – accidentally in the press and which he deemed blasphematory. according to him. In 1995 Catholic John Corway said The complaint that he lodged at the High Court was he was upset by drawings which had been published however rejected.

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