

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

Corinne Deloy



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 26<sup>th</sup> 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 27<sup>th</sup> 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 Fein (SF) candidate Liadh Ni Riada won 6.38%, and Joan Freeman (independent), 5.96%. Gavin Duffy (independent) won 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
<b>Michael D. Higgins (independent)</b>	822 566	55.81
<b>Peter Casey (independent)</b>	342 727	23.25
<b>Sean Gallagher (independent)</b>	94 514	6.41
<b>Liadh Ni Riada (Sinn Fein, SF)</b>	93 987	6.38
<b>Joan Freeman (independent)</b>	87 908	5.96
<b>Gavin Duffy (independent)</b>	32 198	2.18

Source: <https://www.presidentialelection.ie/2018-results-latest/>

"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 Fein. 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 Fein 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

*"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 according to him. In 1995 Catholic John Corway said he was upset by drawings which had been published in the press and which he deemed blasphematory.

The complaint that he lodged at the High Court was however rejected.

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