



How is Ireland governed?

Ireland is a parliamentary democracy. The National Parliament (Oireachtas) consists of the President and two Houses: Dáil Éireann (House of Representatives) and Seanad Éireann (the Senate) whose functions and powers come from the Constitution of Ireland. The Houses of the Oireachtas are situated at Leinster House, Dublin.

The President (Uachtarán na hÉireann) exercises his/her powers on the advice of the government. The President also has absolute discretion in certain matters, for example, referring a Bill to the Supreme Court for a judgment on its constitutionality. The President is elected directly by the people every 7 years. The current president is Mary McAlesse. For more details about the presidency go to www.president.ie

The method of election to each House is different. The Seanad is largely an advisory body. It consists of sixty members: 11 nominated by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), six elected by 3 national universities and 43 elected from vocational panels. The Seanad has the power to delay legislative proposals and is allowed 90 days to consider and amend bills sent to it by the Dáil.

The Members of Dáil Éireann (called Teachta Dála or TDs) are directly elected by the people at least once every five years. It currently has 166 members. Since 1922, it has met in Leinster House, on Kildare Street in Dublin. While, in principle, Dáil Éireann is only one of three components of the Oireachtas, in practice, the powers the constitution grants to the Dáil make it by far the dominant branch, meaning that most proposals passed by Dáil Éireann will ultimately become law.

Since the 1990s there have been coalition governments. Currently, there are five different political parties represented in Dáil Éireann.

Fianna Fáil – www.fiannafail.ie

Fine Gael – www.finegael.com

The Labour Party – www.labour.ie

The Green Party – www.greenparty.ie

Sinn Féin – www.sinnfein.ie

There is also a significant number of TDs that are not members of any of the main political parties and are called Independents. A list of all the current sitting TDs is available on the 'Members' link at www.oireachtas.ie

The Government is headed by a prime minister called the Taoiseach, and a deputy prime minister called the Tánaiste.

Below is a list of the prime ministers (Taoisigh):

- W.T. Cosgrave: August 1922 – March 1932
- Eamon de Valera: March 1932 – February 1948
- John A. Costello: February 1948 – June 1951
- Eamon de Valera: June 1951 – June 1954
- John A. Costello: June 1954 – March 1957
- Eamon de Valera: March 1957 – June 1959
- Seán F. Lemass: June 1959 – Nov 1966
- Jack Lynch: November 1966 – March 1973
- Liam Cosgrave: March 1973 – June 1977
- Jack Lynch: July 1977 – December 1979
- Charles J. Haughey: December 1979 – June 1981
- Garret FitzGerald: June 1981 – January 1982
- Charles J. Haughey: March 1982 – December 1982
- Garret FitzGerald: December 1982 – March 1987
- Charles J. Haughey: March 1987 – February 1992
- Albert Reynolds: February 1992 – December 1994

- John Bruton: December 1994 – June 1997
- Bertie Ahern: June 1997 – May 2008
- Brian Cowen: May 2008 – to date

There are 15 Government Departments:

- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food:
www.agriculture.gov.ie
- Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism:
www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie
- Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources: www.dcenr.gov.ie
- Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs:
www.pobail.ie
- Department of Defence: www.defence.ie
- Department of Education and Science: www.education.ie
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment:
www.entemp.ie
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government: www.environ.ie
- Department of Finance: www.finance.gov.ie
- Department of Foreign Affairs: www.dfa.ie

- Department of Health and Children: www.dohc.ie
- Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform: www.justice.ie
- Department of Social and Family Affairs: www.dsfa.ie
- Department of Transport: www.transport.ie
- Department of the Taoiseach: www.taoiseach.gov.ie

Who is eligible to run for election for Dáil Éireann?

If you are at least 21 years of age and you are an Irish citizen you can run for election in Dáil Éireann.

Local Government

Along with the central institutions of the Oireachtas, the political system in Ireland also extends to local level government of the local authorities. Local authorities consist of:

- 29 County Councils, for example, Fingal County Council, Cork County Council
- 5 City Councils, for example, Dublin City Council, Galway City Council
- 5 Borough Councils, for example, Drogheda Borough Council, Wexford Borough Council and

- 75 Town Councils, for example, Portlaoise Town Council, Tralee Town Council

At regional level there are also eight Regional Authorities and two Regional assemblies.

Local elections are held in Ireland every 5 years in the month of May or June. At these elections, members of the local community elect Councillors to represent the community in local authorities.

The elected council is the policy-making arm of the local authority. The day-to-day management of the local authority is coordinated by the county or city manager.

What services do Local Authorities provide?

Local Authorities are involved in the provision of a wide variety of services such as: Housing, Waste Management and Recycling, Libraries, Roads and Public Parks.

Can I be involved in local elections?

You are eligible to be elected to a local authority if you are ordinarily resident in Ireland and you are at least 18 years old. You do not have to be an Irish citizen. All residents of Ireland, regardless of nationality, can vote in local elections (see below).

Membership of the European Union

What role does the EU play in the Irish political system?

Ireland is a member of the European Union. Member states participate in common institutions so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made at European level. For more information about the EU see:

www.europa.eu

How am I represented at the EU?

The European Parliament is elected every five years by the people of Europe to represent their interests. Ireland has 12 MEPs (Members of European Parliament). Details of Irish MEPs can be found at www.europarl.europa.eu

Who is eligible to run for European elections in Ireland?

If you are at least 21 years of age and you are an Irish citizen or a resident EU citizen you can run for election to the European Parliament.

Voting

Am I entitled to vote in Ireland?

This depends on your citizenship. You must also ensure that you are included on the Electoral Register. The right to vote in

Ireland is as follows:

	Local Elections	European Elections	Dáil Elections	Referendum/ Presidential Elections
Resident Irish Citizen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Resident British Citizen	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Resident EU Citizen	Yes	Yes	No	No
Resident Non-EU Citizen	Yes	No	No	No

How do I include my details on the Electoral Register?

In order to be included on the Electoral Register you will need to satisfy two conditions. You must:

- Be at least 18 years of age on the day the Register comes into force (15th February) and

- Have been ordinarily resident in the State on the 1st September in the year before the Register comes into force

You can get application forms from your local authority, post offices and public libraries. Applications for inclusion on the Electoral Register must be completed by the 25th November.

To check if you are on the electoral register you can also go to www.checktheregister.ie

What if I am not on the Register?

If you are not on the Register you should complete **Form RFA2**. This form is available from www.checktheregister.ie and your local authority. You must sign this form at your local Garda station and return it to your local authority.

How do I vote?

Where you vote depends on your address. Each street has a designated polling station. Before Election Day you will be sent a polling card which tells you which polling station you will vote at. On Election Day you should bring your polling card and photo ID to your polling station. You will be given a ballot paper which lists all the candidates. You fill in your ballot paper in the privacy of a voting booth. You should

write 1 beside your first choice and continue down the list of candidates. When you are finished fold your ballot paper and place it in the ballot box.

Links

www.ivote.ie is an initiative of Integrating Ireland – its aim is to provide basic non-party political information on voting to support member groups working on active citizenship and civic participation projects.

www.micandidate.eu gives profiles of candidates for all elections in Ireland.

www.vote.ie is a website hosted by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice which works for social and economic change through tackling poverty and exclusion.

