

Political Reform

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1 Summary & Key Points

This political reform policy aims to respond to the need for new approaches to democratic governance that responds to the scale of change required to meet and address the climate, environmental and social crisis. The proposed reforms in this policy aim to strengthen trust in our democratic institutions, reduce the negative impact of social polarisation, and ensure that citizens are at the heart of responsive and inclusive decision-making processes on issues that matter to them.

This policy sets out an ambitious vision for political reform to ensure these goals are met in a way that puts the lived experience and perspectives of citizens at the heart of decision-making on the key challenges facing our country as we transition to a just and sustainable future. The Green Party believes that democratic values, institutions and procedures are fundamental to our strength as a nation, to our peace and prosperity, and to our collective ability to respond to severe and rapid challenges and crises.

For this reason, central to the political reform proposals of the Green Party, are the following principles to which the proposed reforms relate:

We will aim to:

- Support citizens in all ways necessary to participate effectively in Ireland's democracy
- Ensure subsidiarity in decision-making, where the national government is responsible only for tasks that cannot be performed effectively at lower levels.
- Promote governance that actively focuses on the needs and rights of future generations
- Reform governance procedures to increase accountability and transparency of the Government to the Oireachtas
- Expand the eligibility criteria for people to participate in electoral processes as citizens of Ireland and EU citizens with permanent residence, in a way that is accessible to the widest range of electorate needs.
- Improve and strengthen the integrity of elections and sustainability of their processes
- Enforce high standards of ethics, transparency and accountability at all levels of governance
- Increase accountability and efficiency of implementation of laws
- Deepen engagement of Irish citizens with European level politics
- Update Ireland's constitution to provide the protective and enabling framework required to support these reforms.

2 Introduction

The following section outlines these high-level principles and associated reforms. Reform to local government is addressed in a separate policy.

3 Principles and Reforms

3.1 PRINCIPLE 1: Support citizens in all ways necessary to participate effectively in Ireland's democracy

In order to: ensure policies and legislation meets peoples' needs inclusively; ensure all voices are represented inclusively; build and maintain high levels of trust in our democratic institutions; increase political power of citizens; and ensure power in decision-making is transparent and fairly distributed; the Green Party will pursue the following reforms:

- Enable citizens to put an item on the legislative agenda via an Irish Citizen's Initiative, including legislation to hold a referendum, similar to the European Citizen Initiative.¹
- Examine the type of second house of the Oireachtas, if any, that would be best for Ireland. To do so, we propose a Citizens' Assembly. The agenda items supported by the Green Party would include: the electorate, the electoral system with the possibility of a regional or national top-up to broaden representation, Taoiseach's nominees, university seats, vocational panels, designated seats for overseas citizens, and unicameralism.
- Update the Constitution to place limits on the number of members of the Oireachtas as Ireland's population grows and to support more power being decentralised to local government.
- Change Dáil constituencies from three, four or five seats to return four, five or six seats as appropriate to the constituency size in order to support more proportional representation.
- Revise the portion of public funding that political parties receive for TDs and senators, under the Party Leaders funding allocation stream, yearly so that it reflects on the actual number of TDs and senators each party

¹ The **European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)** is a European Union (EU) mechanism that enables EU citizens to initiate a legislative proposal. The initiative to call directly on the European Commission to propose a legal act (notably a Directive or Regulation) in an area where the member states have conferred powers onto the EU level must be signed by one million citizens of the European Union, who are nationals of at least seven member states.

had in that year, in order to treat emerging parties more fairly. This would take effect a year after the TD/Senator's departure.

- Enhance Civic Education to foster the concept and practice of active and participatory citizenship. Civic Education should be compatible with the freedom that citizens are to enjoy and provide pupils with the critical skills necessary as an autonomous citizen. It should be cross-curricular and enable young people's engagement in civic society through school and community programmes. These should proactively engage with young people on issues that affect their lives and give life to their citizenship and participation.
- Ensure the widest range of public views and lived experiences that are impacted by a policy, plan or decision-making process, are included through appropriately designed public consultations, engagements and citizen forums/assemblies.
- To achieve stronger and deeper public engagement, require and resource government and local authorities to take a proactive, inclusive and collaborative approach to public engagement and increase publicity and awareness.
- Outcomes from public engagements must be considered and reasons provided back to citizens by decision-making bodies in determining the final decision, or the outcomes should be binding where appropriate.
- Require the Electoral Commission to summarise both or all referendum options, in order to ensure citizens are fully informed.
- Pursue formal ways to expand debates and identify most preferred options among different viewpoints on public issues, such as through consensus voting, in order to help mitigate polarisation in public debate and support inclusion.
- Improve access to and accessibility of information to make it easier for citizens to obtain and engage with information on the political and legislative process, and progress on legislation, issues and policy decisions.
- Develop innovations to evolve and strengthen our democracy with citizens. Ideas will include but are not limited to:
 - Local citizen assemblies (e.g. plan-making process, climate action, etc.)
 - Forums for children and young peoples' voices
 - Local and national participative budgeting
 - Digital innovation for citizen participation opportunities.

3.2 PRINCIPLE 2: Ensure subsidiarity in decision-making, where the national government is responsible only for tasks that cannot be performed effectively at lower levels.

The Green Party will work to ensure policy and budgeting decision-making occurs at the lowest effective level. To this end we will aim to:

- Devolve more power to local authorities for the design and delivery of local services and infrastructure.
- Ensure local authorities are enabled with sufficient funding to act effectively on these devolved competencies and powers including through a more effective and equitable local taxation and spending policy in which communities have a direct say.
- Ensure a materially larger share of public expenditure and revenue-raising takes place at the local level.
- Institutionalise public deliberations at community level on local budgeting and policies.

3.3 PRINCIPLE 3: Promote governance that actively focuses on the needs and rights of future generations

- Establish a Future Generations Commission
- Examine the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to ensure that its provisions or interpretation of provisions do not prevent the generation of knowledge required for the formation of policies which are necessary to meet our climate targets and social change. E.g. energy data and research.

3.4 PRINCIPLE 4: Reform governance procedures to increase accountability and transparency of the Government to the Oireachtas

The Green Party believes that the Oireachtas must be empowered to fulfil its constitutional role of holding the government to account and will implement the following reforms:

- Ensure a greater use of Oireachtas committees for policy-making and in board appointments. The Green Party will also strengthen committees as well as the engagement of stakeholders and the public on legislation before the committee stage. As well as pre-legislative scrutiny, committees should be given an explicit responsibility for post-legislative review.

- Provide alternatives to decision-making and political discourse focused on simple majoritarianism towards more inclusive approaches, for example through the use of deliberative methods as well as inclusive decision-making voting procedures.
- To reduce Government dominance of the Dáil and foster more collaborative, inclusive and long-term decision-making, the Green Party proposes to make it easier for minority governments to be formed and survive. To this end, we propose that the Taoiseach, Ministers and Government would no longer need the support of a majority in Dáil Éireann to be nominated, appointed or survive votes of no confidence. Instead, the Dáil's support would be implied unless an absolute majority voted against them.
- Support the findings of the Constitutional Convention on the need for more than two options being presented in referendums where relevant. Multi-optional / preferential referendums should use voting methods that enable the identification of the consensus option (e.g Modified Borda Count).²
- Ensure the Money Message is not used inappropriately to block the progression of bills, by reforming the Dáil Standing Orders, in order to increase representation of all parties and reduce executive dominance of the Dáil.
- The Green Party proposes a review of the procedures around parliamentary questions in order to make it more difficult for ministers to avoid giving full answers.
- End Ministers' powers to allocate National Lottery monies at will, by having the money allocated by State boards, in order to support transparency and independence in the allocation of public money
- Ensure that there is clear and timely progression of Private Members' Bills that are agreed by the Dáil/Seanad, or where they are not progressed after a period, that they are returned to the Dáil for decision.
- Develop innovations to evolve and strengthen our democracy. Ideas will include but are not limited to:
 - Coalition formation processes
 - The idea of all-party power-sharing, possibly with a cabinet elected by the Dáil using a preferential voting system (e.g. matrix vote³)

² The **Modified Borda Count (MBC)** is a preference voting procedure by which is identified that option which gains the highest average preference score. It may also be regarded as a points system, in which the winner is the outcome with the most points. The procedure involves three stages: the debate, the vote and the analysis of that vote. (See Emerson. 2013)

³ See Emerson (2022)

3.5 PRINCIPLE 5: Expand the eligibility criteria for people to participate in electoral processes as citizens of Ireland and EU citizens with permanent residence, in a way that is accessible to the widest range of electorate needs.

Given that voting is a fundamental right for Irish citizens, registration and the act of voting should be as accessible as possible. The rationale for the extension of voting franchise to citizens living overseas for a limited period is based on the recognition that some citizens need to live abroad because of circumstances outside their control, for example, difficulty in securing housing. They may wish to have a say on those policies through the electoral process in order to shape an opportunity to return home. The democratic principles of equality, voice and individual autonomy assumes that one can choose to exercise that right. For some people, that right cannot be realised due to the impact of policies over time.

For EU citizens with permanent residence, we support an individual's right to equal say in laws to which one is subject, which is the basic principle of democracy.

We foresee the Electoral Commission having a strong independent role in driving forward reform on these matters. The Green Party supports the following reforms:

- Work to ensure that there is greater diversity and gender balance at all levels of Irish politics.
- Lower the voting age to 16
- Allow citizens to nominate Presidential candidates
- Place citizens on the electoral register automatically.
- Extend the Dáil franchise to EU citizens who are entitled to permanent residence under Chapter 4 of Directive 2004/38/EC.
- Work at the EU level to achieve reciprocal voting rights at national level for EU citizens, including Irish citizens, abroad, who are entitled to permanent residence.
- Extend full voting rights for Irish citizens abroad for up to 7 years for those who have been on the electoral register in Ireland for national elections in order to enable fair, permanent and unrestricted representation of overseas citizens' interests and needs at the national level.
- Facilitate voting in elections with practical measures for all citizens within the bounds of security of the ballot

- Hold elections at weekends with provision for an absentee ballot facility for any eligible voters currently living abroad.
- Facilitate voting by proxy, in order to facilitate voters who may be away for a short period (for example during an election, or are in hospital). No person will be allowed to exercise more than one proxy vote.
- Establish a fund designed to remove or reduce the limitations facing individuals with disabilities seeking election to local authority, the European Parliament, the Oireachtas or the Presidency that non-disabled individuals do not face.
- Support the introduction of maternity, paternity and adoptive leave for local councillors, in line with current public sector regulations. This would involve the establishment of a co-opt system for the duration of absence including for sick leave.
- Seek to remove the requirement for prospective election candidates to include their home address on the ballot paper. The area of residence of candidates should be noted instead.

3.6 PRINCIPLE 6: Improve and strengthen the integrity of elections and sustainability of their processes

- Regulate the use of online political advertising to avoid manipulation of political outcomes
- Ensure accuracy in political information and transparency on source and funding for political advertising.
- Restrict candidates, parties and referendum campaigns to one poster each in designated areas to reduce plastic waste and visual clutter and to level the playing field.
- Define what constitutes a “third party” in order to mitigate the muzzling effect of current electoral legislation on NGOs by implementing the recommendations of the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) Annual Report (2016).

3.7 PRINCIPLE 7: Enforce high standards of ethics, transparency and accountability at all levels of governance

- Strengthen and reform SIPO in accordance with the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) recommendations (2003) and the Public Sector Standards Bill (2015).

- Publish periodically a register of all non-commenced legislation to deal with the amount of legislation that is waiting to be commenced.
- Implement a legislative footprint, i.e. a comprehensive public record of lobbyists' influence on a piece of legislation.
- Support and enable the participation of Ireland in the Open Government Partnership, in order to advance the ambition and pace of improvements in open, transparent and participatory governance.⁴
- Change the current process of appointing state board appointments by the Minister to provide for half of the appointments to be made by Oireachtas committees in a gender balanced way.

3.8 PRINCIPLE 8: Increase accountability and efficiency of the implementation of laws

- Identify and strengthen regulations where needed, for example, in building regulations; water quality; environmental legislation; planning enforcement legislation; and financial regulation.
- Sufficiently resource inspection & enforcement services in order to ensure laws are effective in implementation.

3.9 PRINCIPLE 9: Deepen engagement of Irish citizens with European level politics

- Legislate for a single national constituency to elect Members of the European Parliament to promote a strong focus and awareness of EU institutions, processes and policy areas.
- Enhance the ability of Committees/the Seanad to scrutinise EU legislation and affairs, and encourage Irish MEPs to address parliamentary committees/the Seanad a number of times a year on a thematic basis.

3.10 PRINCIPLE 10: Update Ireland's constitution to provide the protective and enabling framework required to support these reforms

To achieve appropriate changes to our constitution, and support the enactment of some of the above proposed reforms, the Green Party believes in the need to establish an open and deliberative process for reviewing

⁴ The **Open Government Partnership (OGP)** is a multilateral initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and use new technologies to strengthen governance. Ireland is a member of the OGP.

aspects of the constitution.

Through the process of reviewing the constitution, the Green Party will advocate:

- a new constitutional provision for economic, social and cultural rights, particularly to pursue the universal provision of housing and healthcare.
- a provision to prevent the privatisation of public water services.
- a clause that recognises the rights of nature, that would oblige stewardship of our island's ecosystem and all the life therein, and the responsibilities of all citizens to conserve finite resources and limit levels of pollution.

The Green Party will also advocate reform of political institutions as outlined in this policy. A revised constitution should use gender-neutral language and uphold equality between all genders.

The process should be led by citizens through an open and deliberative process at all levels, including national and local level Citizen Assemblies.

END

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5. One Pager for Party Website

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Sustainable Development Goals: 3, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16

