

# **Green Party Political Reform Policy**



# Political Reform Policy

December, 2016

## Table of Contents

<b>1.POLITICAL REFORM POLICY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1.THE CONSTITUTION .....	3
1.2.OIREACHTAS REFORM.....	3
1.3.ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION .....	5

## 1. Political Reform Policy

---

Ireland has not just faced an economic crisis in recent years; we have faced a profound crisis in public confidence in politics. Any democracy worthy of the name depends on trust between elected representatives and the people they are accountable to.

The lack of accountability in our political system has actually worsened over the last few years even though this was a key factor behind the financial crisis. The principle behind the reforms outlined below is to put people at the centre of decision-making.

### 1.1. The Constitution

The Green Party believes the Constitutional Convention generated proposals that deserve a more substantive response from government. In addition to their call to reconvene the Constitutional Convention, the Green Party supports their proposals for referendums on the following issues:

- Allow citizens to directly initiate referendums to amend the Constitution, overturn legislation or even propose new legislation<sup>1</sup>
- Allow citizens to nominate Presidential candidates
- A constitution that uses gender-neutral language and upholds equality between all genders
- Remove the prohibition on blasphemy
- Lower the voting age to 16
- Adding constitutional provision for economic, social and cultural rights, particularly to pursue the universal provision of housing and healthcare.

The Green Party also seeks referendums to:

- Prevent the privatisation or commercialisation of water services

---

<sup>1</sup> □ For an illustrative document outlining possible checks and balances see:  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/14fPnFX\\_IJ86aA2TG4bbCodb3QdF\\_JnBtd9ntXvQhq8/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/14fPnFX_IJ86aA2TG4bbCodb3QdF_JnBtd9ntXvQhq8/edit?usp=sharing)

- Insert a clause on environmental protection that would oblige stewardship of our island's ecosystem and all the life therein.

## **1.2. Parliamentary Reform**

The Green Party believes that the Oireachtas must be empowered to fulfill its constitutional role of holding the government to account.

The Green Party acknowledges the work of the Working Group on Seanad Reform. However, we believe that further reform to democratise the Seanad is needed for the institution to be meaningful. To this end we propose that the Seanad be elected by universal suffrage among all voters eligible to vote in Dáil elections and would introduce a referendum to this effect:

- The Seanad should be elected using an open list system with d'Hondt distribution elected on the same day as the Dáil:
- 56 members should be elected from four regions in the state proportionate to population (Dublin, Leinster, Munster and Connacht/Ulster)
- 4 members should be elected by Irish citizens throughout the world
- The Green Party favours reform of the 1997 Electoral Act to introduce a single European Parliament constituency for Ireland. This would allow for a greater discussion of national issues affecting Ireland in a European context
- In order to maintain the independence of the Dáil and the Seanad (and prevent current abuses):
  - A candidate for election to the Seanad cannot be a candidate for election to the Dáil on the same day
  - Members of one Seanad may not stand for election to the next Dáil
  - Given the importance of European legislation, the Seanad should be given an enhanced role of scrutiny over EU legislation and affairs and the hearing of MEPs.

The Dáil is also in need of urgent reform and we propose the following reforms:

- Fewer but bigger constituencies; set the minimum number of TDs per constituency to 5 (up to a maximum of 8) in order to improve the diversity of representation in the Dáil whilst curbing “parish-pump” tendencies in national politicians
- Introduce a more flexible whip system such as the three whip system
- Appoint committee chairs and their memberships proportionally so that people’s representatives are empowered to hold government accountable
- Elect the Ceann Comhairle by a secret ballot so that TDs would be free to pick between candidates who could facilitate fair debate
- Revise the portion of public funding that political parties receive for TDs and senators yearly so that it reflects on the actual number of TDs and senators each party had in that year (e.g. if a TD or senator is ejected from a party then the party should stop receiving funding for that TD or senator)
- Allocate public funding of parties based on current party representation once a year during the budget, not on the results of the last general election

We also see the government itself as in need of reforms, including:

- Ending the practice of the Economic Management Council within Cabinet
- Empowering the Oireachtas to oversee Ireland’s policy towards the EU and Ministers’ policy in Europe, along the lines of the model used in the Danish parliament
- Allow half of board appointments to be made by Oireachtas committees, as the Green Party did in legislation appointing board members to RTÉ and other bodies
- End ministers' powers to allocate National Lottery moneys at will by having the money allocated by State boards

- Hold a referendum for a fixed-term Dáil, similar to the recent reforms in the United Kingdom, so that the date of general elections is not decided by the Taoiseach.

### **1.3. Encourage Participation**

The Green Party believes that voting is a fundamental right to be provided for. Registering to vote and the act of voting should be as accessible as possible. We foresee an Electoral Commission having a strong independent role in driving forward reform on these matters.

The Green Party supports the following reforms:

- Citizens should be placed on the electoral register automatically.
- Elections should be held at weekends with provision for an absentee ballot facility for any eligible voters currently living overseas.
- Homeless people and travellers should also be accommodated by being allowed to register at an address that is convenient for them.
- Along with reducing the voting age to 16, we support educational reforms that will engage young people in politics through school and community programmes.
- Plastering our roads with election posters clutters our public space and wastefully bombards voters. Candidates, parties and referendum campaigns should be restricted to one poster each in designated areas such as outside shopping centres, libraries etc.
- Extend the Dáil franchise to EU citizens who are entitled to permanent residence under Chapter 4 of Directive 2004/38/EC

The Green Party / Comhaontas Glas support the recommendations of the SIPO 2016 Annual Report relating to Third Parties set out below and propose the Electoral Acts be amended to include those recommendations:

1. The definition of what constitutes a “third party” should not be determined on the basis of whether an individual/group has received a donation but should focus on spending by individuals/groups and to regard them as third parties if they intend to incur expenditure over a certain threshold, say €5,000, in relation to a campaign which is for political purposes as defined in the legislation (Review of the Electoral Acts 2003; and 2009 Report on third parties at the Referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon)
2. The registration process for “third parties” and for “other persons” (who intend to incur election expenses) should be amalgamated. (There should be no need for an individual/group to register as a “third party” and to also register as an “other person”.) (Review of the Electoral Acts 2003).
3. Registration of third parties should be allowed for the duration of a particular campaign only, or on an on-going basis (2009 Report on third parties at the Referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon 2008).

**ENDS**

# Document Control

## Version:

Version	Project Phase	Date Released	Contributor(s)	Description
1.0	A	12.10.15	Oliver Moran Jonathan Victory Justin Fleming John Goodwillie Dr Roy Johnston Brian MacDomhnaill Francis Duffy Malcolm Noonan Dan Boyle Catherine Martin Roderic O’Gorman Eamon Ryan	Amended Policy for submission to PSC for minor revision of text.
2.0	A	24.10.15	Elaine Butler	Amended Policy approved by PSC and ready for publication
3.0	A	14.12.16	Elaine Butler	Amended Policy approved by PC and ready for publication

## Approval:

Approved by	Position in Party	Date Approved

## Distribution List:

Distributed to	Email Address	Date