Continuity and Change in Irish Electoral Politics, 1923–1969

TOM GARVIN

THE purpose of this study is to examine certain long-term trends in Irish parliamentary representation since the founding of the State, to indicate certain interrelationships between the trends, suggest some explanations for them, and offer speculation as to the direction of future change. The study focuses in particular on indications of generational change, developments in the party system and examines the relationships between voter participation, the party system and generational succession.

Sources

The data used consisted of aggregate biographical and electoral information derived from official sources, biographical directories[1] and secondary compilations.[2] Data on voter turnout, spoiled votes, numbers of seats contested and won by parties, numbers of candidates competing in elections and basic biographical material are readily available for all elections since 1923. Some discrepancies between sources were observed, and efforts made to reconcile them in so far as this was feasible.

More tentative figures are supplied in a Dáil committee report, published in 1967, on turnover of deputies since 1922.[3] These figures were found to be of questionable utility as they stood, as they combined in a single figure new deputies replacing retiring members, and veterans returning following electoral defeat in a previous campaign. The figures constituted a combined index of fluctuations in voter support and patterns of retirement.

Despite these and other shortcomings, these aggregate figures suggest partial answers to some questions, among them being the relationships between voter turnout, fragmentation of the party system, inter-party competition and electoral strength of individual parties. An unexpected apparent close relationship between fragmentation of the party system, localism in Dáil composition and generational change raised further questions, for which tentative answers are offered.

1. Thom's *Directory;* Flynn's *Parliamentary Companion* and IPA *Diary,* 1970. Whyte, J.: *Dáil Deputies,* Dublin, Tuairim, 1966.
   2. Data in McCracken, J. L.: *Representative Government in Ireland,* London, Oxford U.P. 1958, p. 90. Chubb, B., *The Government and Politics of Ireland,* Stanford U.P., 1970, *passim* and pp. 331–336. Official reports of the results of Dáil elections are available for all elections since 1948.
   3. *Report* of the Committee on the Constitution, Dublin, Stationery Office, 1967, p. 102.

More definite explanations, for some of the interrelationships may emerge from more elaborate studies of social ecology and analyses of political trends over time or from direct research in the field on voting behaviour. This study represents a preliminary step toward such further inquiry.

Dáil Composition since 1922

Studies of biographical information on Dáil deputies[4] have established clear-cut trends toward professionalisation of the House in recent decades; the Dáil has become a less accurate reflector of the occupational structure of Irish society. Disproportionate representation tends to be given to professions involving *social brokerage*, or the handling of relationships between individuals or groups within society.[5] The classic example of such a profession is, of course, that of lawyer. Certain forms of shopkeeping and medicine, auctioneering and even teaching are other examples. As in other countries, occupations which possess *role dispensability*—i.e., which permit the individual to keep irregular hours without unduly injuring his employment or professional prospects—are also overrepresented. Farming, legal work, business and shopkeeping tend to involve a considerable amount of role dispensability. Farrell documents a recent shift from barristers to solicitors in the Dáil and suggests that solicitors have better access to secretarial facilities.[6]

It has, however, been suggested that the most important change in the social profile of the Irish political leadership has been generational rather than occupational. The passage of time, because of the slow pace of urbanisation and modernisation, has been the main source of such change in leadership as there has been over the half-century since 1922.[7] The political leaders who founded the new political system, together with those who took it over from them in the subsequent decade owed their positions to their roles in the transfer of power from the British coupled with their willingness and ability to run a parliamentary system of government. Many of these men attained national prominence during the 1916–1923 upheaval and acquired a revolutionary charisma which helped them retain the support of the voters. This charisma was assiduously reinforced during the following four decades by repeated appeals to the electorate to remember the stirring days of the fight for national independence, and the bravery and prominence of the parties' veterans during the struggle.

The electoral popularity of these men was immense, and the voters permitted them certain freedoms not often permitted to lesser men whose routes into

4. McCracken, J. L., *op. cit.*; Whyte, J., *op. cit.*; Farrell, B., "Dáil Deputies: the 1969 Generation", *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. II, No. 3, pp. 308–328.

5. Bax, Mart, "Patronage Irish Style: Irish Politicians as Brokers", *Soziologische Gids*, Vol. 17, No. 3.

6. Cf. Mathews, Donald, *The Social Background of Decision Makers*, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday 1954, p. 32 and *passim* for similar observations in a U.S. context. See also Farrell, B., "Dáil Deputies: the 1969 Generation", *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. II, No. 3, pp. 317–318.

7. Cohan, Alvin S., *The Irish Political Elite in Transition, 1919–1969*, Ph.D. thesis in the Library of the University of Georgia at Athens, Georgia, and *passim*, 1970.

political life were less self-evidently noble. Men as varied in character, beliefs and experience as W. T. Cosgrave, Dan Breen, de Valera, James Dillon, Gerald Boland and James Ryan had at least one thing in common: their electorates exempted them from the classic duty of a parliamentary representative in a rural society with a widely-dispersed population—that is, to be a local man, well-entrenched in the local social system, resident in or near the constituency and concerned more with being an ambassador for his community to the central government than with the task of making national policy or law.[8]

Revolutionary charisma can be inherited: Whyte's study (1965) documented the ease with which Dáil seats can be inherited by relatives of an ex-TD, and second and third generation bearers of names prominent in the 1916–1923 period are quite common in the Dáil. However, with the passing of the revolutionary generation, the natural tendency of the system toward extreme localism asserted itself even more thoroughly than hitherto: localism in representation, as indicated by the proportion of TDs with addresses in their constituencies [for Cork City Constituencies, local area defined as Cork City and County; for Dublin, local area defined as Dublin City and County plus Dún Laoire] increased from roughly 80 per cent at the beginning of the 1950s to an extraordinary 94 per cent in 1969 (see Figure 1). It must be admitted that this is an inflated figure; due to the treatment of urban TDs and also to the possibly common practice of TDs giving *pied à terre* rather than genuine residential addresses.
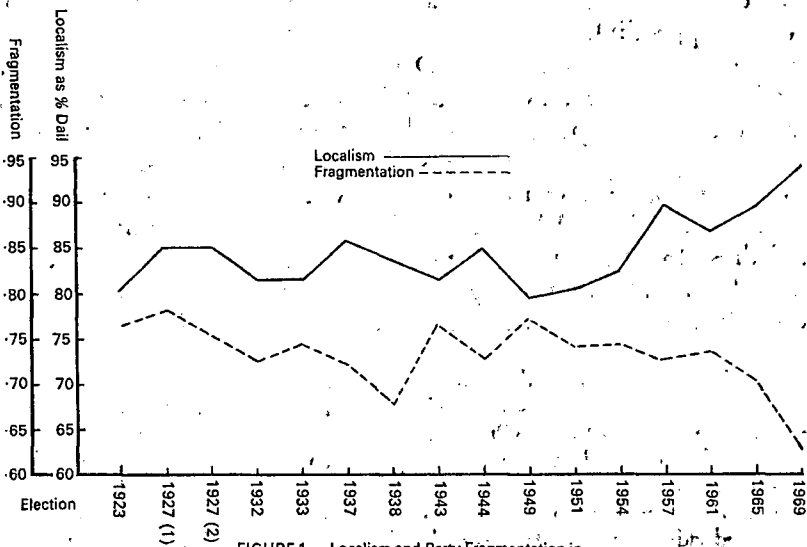

FIGURE 1.—Localism and Party Fragmentation in Dail, 1923–1969. Localism figures for 1927 (1) are approximate. See also note (9).

8. Chubb, B., "Going About Persecuting Civil Servants: the Role of the Irish Parliamentary Representative", *Political Studies*, Vol. II, No. 3, pp. 272–286.

Because of the localist character of the system, military or political prominence was rarely sufficient on its own to generate enough voter support unaided by other factors. Local residence, family connections or business contacts, prominence in GAA affairs or local government were, (and are) important also. Rather, revolutionary prominence permitted a certain latitude to men, who very often were local people.

An example is instructive. In the Dáil elected in 1938, approximately 83 per cent of TDs were localist by our admittedly generous definition. Of these, 43 per cent reported in their biographical sketches a Sinn Féin/I.R.A. background; the figure for the non-localist group was 50 per cent. If we add to this people who were prominent, outside or in opposition to the revolutionary movement (members of the 1918 Irish Convention, Redmondite supporters or British Army World War veterans) the figures rise to 50 per cent and 59 per cent—a roughly similar differential.

Among the remaining non-localist TDs, two were inheritors of Redmondite charisma—James Dillon and Mrs. Redmond, and one was a widow of a Fianna Fáil T.D. Two were prominent in the Labour movement—William Norton and William Davin.

The shift toward more complete localism does seem to be connected with generational succession. The national hero was replaced by a local man who had no revolutionary past—or if he had, it was inherited. The increase in localism was closely accompanied by changes in the party system: as the veterans retired, the combined dominance of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour became total (see Figure 1 and Appendix).

The variations in localism and in Dáil party fragmentation are very closely and negatively correlated, as Figure 1 indicates.[9] This correlation was even stronger in the pre-1951 period than it has been since. The correlations between localism and fragmentation are −·85 for the admittedly short series of six elections 1951–1969, −·80 for 1933–1969 (twelve elections) and −·71 for the whole series of sixteen elections. All these correlations are significant at the 95 per cent level, and those for the 1923–1969 and 1933–1969 periods are significant at the 99 per cent level, indicating a fragmentation effect directly connected with the non-localist figures' participation in electoral competition.

9. "Localism" was operationalised for this study as giving a permanent address in the constituency or, in the case of Dublin constituencies, in the areas of Dublin City, Dublin County or Dún Laoire, and, in the case of Cork City, in Cork City or Cork County. It should be noted that the figures derived from this definition are not directly comparable with those of earlier studies, and tend to inflate localism.

"Fragmentation" (F) measures number and strength of parties (Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour. Other Parties individually were relevant, and Independents as a unit), e.g. in a 3-party system

$$F = 1 - \frac{[f_1(F_1 - 1) + F_2(f_2 - 1) + F_3(f_3 - 1)]}{N(N - 1)}$$

where N = No. of individuals, and f_1, f_2 and f_3 = Numbers of individuals in the three parties. See Rae, D. W., and Taylor, M., *The Analysis of Political Cleavages*, New Haven, Yale U.P., 1970, pp. 25–26 and 30–33.

The explanation for this connection seems to lie in the ability of charismatic figures to create an essentially personal retinue which in some cases went to reinforce (or, perhaps, in Fianna Fáil's case, create) a major party, but in other cases went to forming a personalistic group which tended to fragment the party system.

Personalismo, often associated more with Latin American politics than with Irish politics, was an important feature of Irish politics throughout the first decades of the State's existence, and both major and minor parties seem to have been shaped extensively by a few dominant, creative and nationally visible individuals. The small scale of Irish politics must also have lent itself to personalist influence on patterns of political behaviour.

The neo–Redmondite National League, the Dillon–MacDermot Centre Party and Clann na Poblachta all had their share of personalistic leadership. In the case of parties of this sort, the high public visibility and appeal of a few prominent personalities seems to have acted as a surrogate for solid local organisation and real and extensive penetration of local society. Fianna Fáil itself was, of course, highly personalistic in appeal—most of the Sinn Féin/I.R.A. veterans in the Dáil in the 1930s were Fianna Fáil TDs—but it succeeded in inheriting large elements of the old Sinn Féin party apparatus and expanded and improved it in the years after 1926.

The disappearance of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary era as a source of charismatic figures, together with the comparatively tranquil and pragmatic character of Irish politics since the mid-1950s has permitted the long-term organisational superiority of the major parties to make itself felt. The resurrection in the Republic of sub-revolutionary and pseudo-revolutionary politics which has accompanied the crisis in Northern Ireland may make personal charisma again a potentially significant factor, partially overruling the "service" criterion so prominent in Irish electoral politics up to now. Few established Southern politicians have been closely involved in the Northern situation, and those who have are still very much on the fringe at the time of writing.
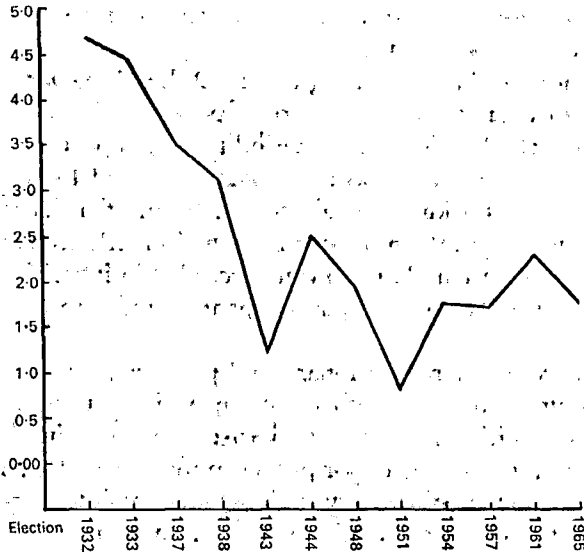
The Nationalisation of Electoral· Forces

A system in which regional particularism is well developed will possess regionally distinct electorates which will vary from area to area with comparatively little regard for one another. A system in which, on the other hand, political regionalism is declining and in which politics is progressively becoming centralised will display a tendency for regional variations in voter support for various parties to become progressively uniform over time.[10] In a unified system like Britain, for example, "swings" from one party to another tend ·not to vary randomly from one constituency to another, nor even from one region to another,

. 10. Cf. Stokes, D.: "Parties and the Nationalisation of Electoral Forces" in Chambers, W. N., and Burnham, W. D., *The American·Party Systems,*·New York, Oxford U.P., 1967, pp. 182–202 on this trend in the British and U.S. systems.

FIGURE 2.—Regional Variation from National Support Level for Fianna Fail, 1932–1965. Derived from Chubb, B., *The Government and Politics of Ireland*, pp. 80 and 334.

Y-axis: Average % Difference between Regional and National Support Levels. Values: 5·0, 4·5, 4·0, 3·5, 3·0, 2·5, 2·0, 1·5, 1·0, 0·5, 0·00.

X-axis: Election 1932, 1933, 1937, 1938, 1943, 1944, 1948, 1951, 1954, 1957, 1961, 1965.

but rather to vary uniformly over the whole country. In Britain and the U.S., this tendency toward uniform "swing" has been very strong over the last century.

A tendency of this sort is also visible in the Irish system, but it is coupled with the decline of separate agrarian parties and an increased geographical sectionalism on the part of Labour. Rumpf and Pyne have documented a regional element in the political and socio-economic cleavages which occurred after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.[11] Fianna Fáil's early support came disproportionately from the smallholding regions of the country, and this support tended also to be relatively invariant during the first decades of the new régime: it was much less subject to the natural tendency toward short-term oscillation in support for a major party visible in the Irish system as in other political systems. As Figure 2 indicates, this regional, invariant loyalty became subject to oscillation after about 1938.

11. Rumpf, E., *Nationalismus und Sozialismus in Irland*, Meisenheim am Glan, Anton Hain, 1959, *passim* and Pyne, P., "The Third Sinn Fein Party, 1923–1926", *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. I, Nos. 1 and 2, *passim*.

The Competitiveness of the Party' System

Competition between parties in a system of popular elections is surprisingly difficult to define, despite the intuitive appeal of the notion. It is also difficult to develop completely satisfactory indices of party competition.[12] These difficulties are compounded in a multi-party system like Ireland's which has always had at least three parties, sometimes as many as six, and very often a large group of independents.

Basically, there are two ways in which competitiveness can be defined. The definition can involve the relative electoral strength of each party, or the efforts of parties to compete with each other. These indices of competitiveness can be
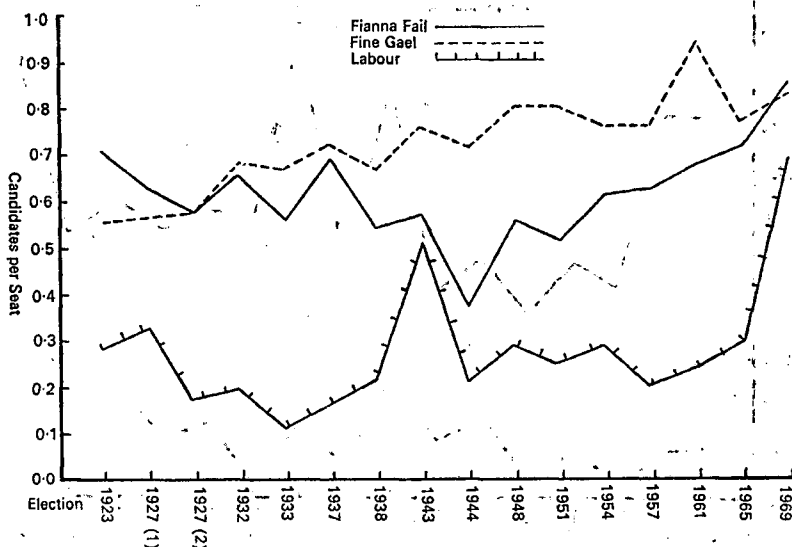

FIGURE 3.—Major Party Candidates Standing for Dail Seats, 1923–1969. Labour includes National Labour.

conveniently operationalised as (*a*) the size of the largest vote for a single party and (*b*) the numbers of candidates campaigning. Both indicators are used in this study.

The patterns of competitive campaigning by the major parties as indicated by the numbers of candidates offered by the parties to the electorate have two main characteristics (Figure 3)—short-term oscillation and a long-term trend upwards. In the earlier decades up to about 1950, the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael patterns zig-zag from election to election as does the Labour pattern albeit with some

12. See Stokes, D., *op. cit.*, and, in the same volume, Dawson, R. E., "Social Development, Party Competition, and Policy", pp. 203–237.

irregularity. The zig-zag pattern reflects attempts to strike the optimum ratio of candidates to seats gained. The long-term upward trend is steadiest in the case of Fianna Fáil, dates from about 1950 in the case of Fine Gael, while Labour's 1969 upsurge may represent the beginning of new patterns of campaigning for that party. Fine Gael's increasingly "aggressive" stance since the late 1950s is noteworthy.

The numbers of non-major party candidates remain reasonably constant, as Figure 4 indicates. There are exceptional peaks in the 1920s, 1943 and 1948, the last reflecting Clann na Poblachta's campaign of that year. The rapid decline in other party candidatures in the 1920s reflects the learning process by which the
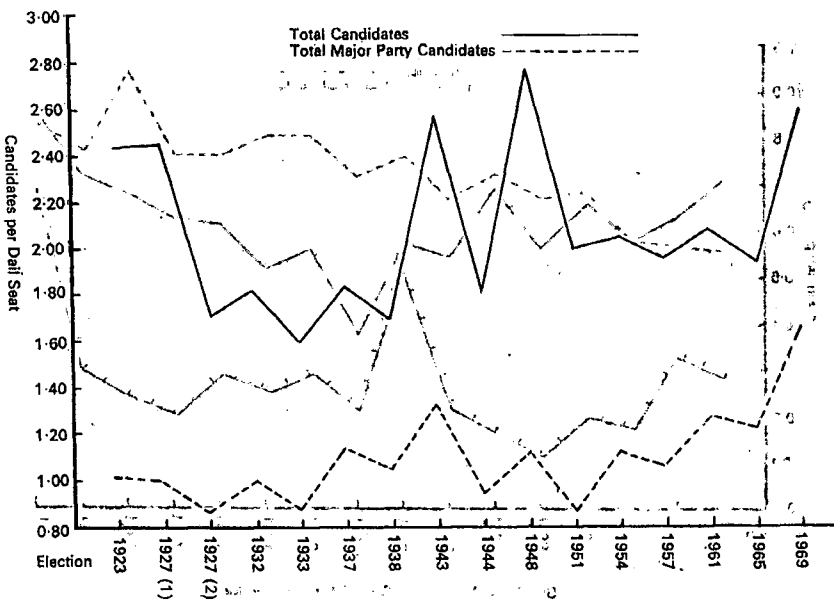

FIGURE 4.—Total Candidates and total Major Party Candidates standing for Dail Seats, 1923– 1969.

politically ambitious learned the hard way the preferences of the new Irish electorate.

The zig-zag oscillation visible in Figures 3 and 4 is a very common one to find in electoral data. It resembles a "hunting" pattern, or the pattern exhibited by a self-steering system. Karl Deutsch remarks about such systems:

[their] effectors send back new information about the results of their actions. This new information is added to the information already in the system, and it is used to correct the output in the next cycle. Results from this corrected output are again

fed back, cycle after cycle. Each such cycle of output, feedback, and corrected output is called a *feedback cycle*. All goal seeking, all steered or controlled behaviour, depends on feedback cycles.[13]

The patterns of candidature suggest goal-seeking behaviour in a context in which the goals change. The evidence of increasing control is also clear. The dampening of the oscillation in both of the larger parties resembles negative feedback and is substantially complete by the 1950s: each party has a broad awareness of the possibilities of winning offered by the system. Labour's pattern shows less control and takes longer to settle down, the National Labour split providing further distortion. Fianna Fáil has established a closer candidates: seats ratio than either of the other two parties.

The tendency for candidatures to increase in the last two decades indicates a change in the parties' and candidates' expectations of the electorate. The older pattern suggests reasonably stable expectations, while the newer pattern suggests growing unpredictability in the electorate, almost as though there were no longer the same ease in predicting voting patterns. This would be consistent with the observable decline of the relative position of rural communities in the electorate, and the replacement of the stable, fairly predictable voting patterns characteristic of such communities by the less predictable and more impersonally determined shiftings characteristic of urban electorates. The parties may have been forced, because of this unpredictability, to cast their nets wider to catch the same amounts of electoral fish. In the past, the rural or small-town activist's detailed knowledge of his community resembled an opinion poll: the use of survey techniques by political parties to supply similar information in urban areas is normal in other Western countries, but is still in its infancy in Ireland.

Another factor which must be considered is average constituency size: a steady dilution of the effective proportionality of the PR electoral system has taken place. The main effects of the shrinkage in average constituency size seem to be to lower the chances of independents gaining office and to exaggerate swings in voter support as reflected in Dáil seats.

The constitutional requirement that constituencies be broadly equal in population per deputy entails a gradual swing of the political gravity of the State eastwards to follow population trends.

The competitive relationships between the parties, as reflected in the variations in their Dáil strength are also of interest. As Table 1 suggests, the most definite patterns of rivalry are Labour versus Cumann na nGaedheal in earlier years, Fianna Fáil versus Fine Gael since 1933, and Labour versus Others in all periods, the last relationship becoming more intense in the later periods. The sequence seems to be as follows: the initial Cumann na nGaedheal—Labour electoral competition is overshadowed by the Fianna Fáil challenge. Labour draws aside, and benefits less from direct competition with the larger parties than from

13. Deutsch, Karl, *Politics and Government*, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1970, p. 145. See also his *Nerves of Government*, Glencoe, Free Press, 1963, *passim*.

replacing the other groups and Independents as the main beneficiary of the system's "slack". The amount of "slack" is probably considerable: the Fianna Fáil—Fine Gael conflict has become considerably muted since the forties.

TABLE 1: *Correlations between parties' Dáil strengths.*

Party	Period								
	1923–1969			1933–1969			1951–1969		
	FG	FF	LP	FG	FF	LP	FG	FF	LP
FG									
FF	—·01			—·60			—·29		
LP	—·58*	·18		—·24	—·10		—·50	—·59	
Other	—·20	·27	—·51**	—·14	·41	—·77**	·58	·44	—·93**

*Significant at 95 per cent probability level.
**Significant at 99 per cent probability level.

The Impact of Voter Participation

.The proportions of votes spoiled and the proportion of the eligible electorate actually voting are the two basic indicators available to us of voter participation in the Irish system.

The proportion of votes spoiled declines rapidly until the mid-1930s, reflecting a familiarisation process and, presumably, an increased acceptance of the system as a meaningful political exercise. The importance of rates of turnout and vote spoilage is that they constitute pointers to the legitimacy of the system, popular comprehension of its possibilities and of public interest in its workings. It should be remembered also that the new political system inherited a very recently enfranchised electorate, most of whom had been given the vote for the first time in 1918.[14] Instability and extremism are often characteristic of such electorates; voting is not a habit, and tends to be viewed less as a civic duty and more as a means of symbolic protest. Furthermore, this new electorate had lived through a period of unparalleled political upheaval.

. Turnout, expressed as the proportion of the electorate actually voting, increased steadily during the first decade, reaching its all-time high of 81 per cent in 1933 with Fianna Fáil's winning of an absolute majority of Dáil seats for the first time. After that climax, turnout subsided somewhat and has usually remained around 74 per cent. It tended to rise in the 1960s despite the tranquil atmosphere of Irish politics in that decade. This may reflect the effect of television. Television's

14. Farrell B.: *The Founding of Dáil Eireann: parliament and nation-building*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1971, Chap. 4 and *passim.*

dramatisation of politics, portraying it as a clash of national personalities and treating elections as gladiatorial contests may have quickened public interest. It is also possible that there is a growing sense of voting as a civic duty, or a changing perception of the vote as a political weapon. In the complete absence of survey data we simply do not know. Voting tends to be correlated positively with wealth and education, so turnout patterns presumably echo to some extent the economic upturn since 1958.

It proved difficult to identify any considerable proportion of the cases of turnout variation. Presumably the media, the time of year, the weather, day of the week and recentness of the register as well as political factors have considerable effect. The all-time high of 1933 and the all-time low of 1944 seem to be related to fairly easily identifiable political factors—the "Dev versus the Rest" polarisation of 1933, and the abnormally low competitiveness of 1944. Over the whole period, however, indicators of competitiveness and turnout do not correlate at significant levels.

TABLE 2: *Turnout and party competition 1923–1969*

Indicators of competition	Correlations
(a) Total Candidatures	—·23
(b) Total Major Party Candidatures	·21
(c) Party Competitiveness as indicated by strength of largest party in Dáil	·35

Indicator (c) is the standard measure of party competitiveness, and a correlation of about ·35 between turnout and this indicator is common in other countries.[15]

Whatever the determinants of voter turnout may be, turnout itself does have an impact on the composition of the Dáil. High turnout has a mild tendency to favour the largest established parties and minor groups as against the smaller major parties. Turnout correlates negatively with party fragmentation (—·38 for 1923–1969 period), but the correlations are very weak. It correlates strongly with Cumann na nGaedheal strength in the 1920s, and negatively with Labour strength in the same period. In more recent years, Fianna Fáil appears to benefit somewhat from high turnout. The vast majority of the correlations between turnout and indices of change in the party system are extremely weak.

15. Cf. Lowi, T., "Party, Policy and Constitution in America", in Chambers and Burnham, *op. cit.*, pp. 238–276, esp. pp. 250–252.

TABLE 3: *Turnout and the Party Systems*

Period	FG	FF	LP	Others
1923–1969	·59*	·01	·53*	·10
1933–1969	·29	·07	·28	·40
1951–1969	·37	·68	·23	·25

*Significant at 95 per cent probability level.

There exists a very slight tendency, for the established dominant party to benefit from increased turnout.

Straws in the Wind: Possible Future Changes

The prominence of generational factors in patterns of change indicates the extraordinary stability, if not stagnation, of Irish political life over the past half-century. Recent social change presumably challenges the form of this stability, if not the stability itself.

The population of the Republic is extremely homogeneous. Whatever about objective measures of class distinction, subjective class consciousness does not express itself to any large extent in party preference. A survey of political attitudes carried out in 1969[16] indicated that support for Fianna Fáil cuts across all class boundaries. Fine Gael and Labour support tends to be affected by socio-economic class level to a greater extent.

The same survey gives some pointers as to future voting trends. Figure 5 represents the survey's evidence as to differences in party preference by age group. In the 55–64 age group, there is a marked preference for Fianna Fáil and an equally marked rejection of Fine Gael. There is a noticeable preference for Fianna Fáil in the 35–44 age group. The 45–54 age group tend to reject Fianna Fáil and show a tendency to favour Labour. The two youngest age groups display a falling off in Fianna Fáil support and a growing preference for Labour.

Preference for a particular political party tends to be inherited from one's family. Deviations from this generalisation tend to occur during adolescence, and young adulthood,[17] and political experiences during this period, including the first vote, tend to have a strong impact on the choice of party. Party choice, once made, tends to be permanent for the individual.

16. *Nusight*, Dublin, October, 1969. See also Whyte, J., "Ireland", in Rose, Richard, *Comparative Electoral Behavior*, New York, Free Press, forthcoming 1972.

17. Butler, D., and Stokes, D., *Political Change in Britain*, Pelican, 1971, pp. 65–89; Katz, D., and 'Valen, H., *Political Parties in Norway*, Oslo U.P., 1964, pp. 211–212. See also, Dawson, R., and Prewitt. K., *Political Socialization*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1969, pp. 111–121 and pp. 54–55.
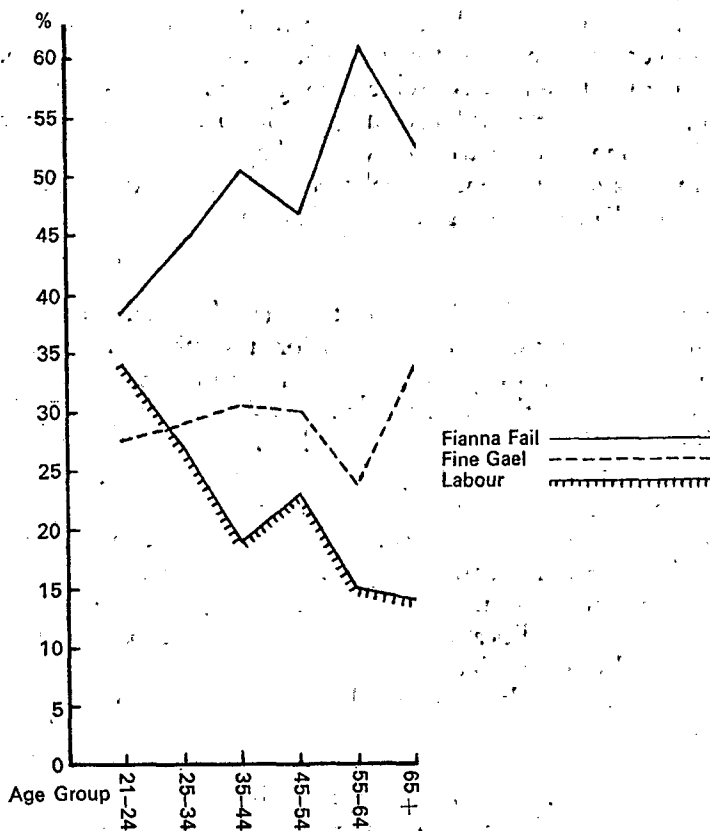
FIGURE 5.—Age and Party Preference in Ireland, 1969.

⟋ If we make the rather large assumption that political maturation and the final decision (or "non-decision") concerning party preference take place, on average, at age 21, it is possible to relate variations by age in the present electorate as indicated by the sample to actual historical variations in voting support, for various parties.

Accordingly, the first peak—and—valley (anti-Fine Gael, pro-Fianna Fáil) may be interpreted as echoing the early political experiences and actions of an age-group who reached political adulthood during the decade centring on the year 1930—the period of Fianna Fáil's climb to power. Similarly the second peak-and-valley pattern (anti-Fianna Fáil, pro-Labour) echoes the experiences of a group whose maturation occurred during the decade centring on 1940. This corresponds to Labour gains in the 1938 and 1943 elections, although to no marked decline in Fianna Fáil support. A further pro-Fianna Fáil and anti-Labour shift

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is visible in connection with the young adults in 1950, corresponding to no
parallel historical shifts. It might be speculated that the experience of the first
Inter-party government benefited Fianna Fáil among that age-group. A slight
slippage in Fine Gael support is visible among younger age-groups.

This admittedly meagre evidence suggests that Irish voters, like voters else-
where, tend to support the party for which they first voted.[18] If this is so, the
data point to a long-term generational trend, favouring the Labour Party and
penalising Fianna Fáil and dating from the late 1950s.

Conclusion

The data examined in this study point to certain long-term trends in the Irish
party system. First, in the absence of major pressures for political change,
generational succession was a major source of change in the system. The generation
of politicians which was thrown up by the revolution was personalistic in style
and contributed to the formation of both the major and minor parties. As the
revolutionary era receded in time, *personalismo* also declined, Dáil composition
became even more parochial in character and minor parties disappeared.

Electoral patterns became symmetrical nationally, as regional variations from the
national "swing" pattern became weaker. Sectional agrarian groups declined,
while the Labour party is in the process of becoming sectional in character.[19]

The existence of a political learning process on the part of both political
activists and the electorate is indicated by the data.

High voter turnout tends to favour the established "dominant party system"
pattern. The electorate may be becoming less easy to predict by the parties.
Furthermore, there seems to be a long-term-generational trend favouring Labour
at Fianna Fáil's expense. The party system has become more competitive, with
Fine Gael and, later, Labour, developing majority-bent patterns of behaviour.
Despite the two-party pattern common among English-speaking countries, the
Irish Republic may be in the process of generating a more thorough-going
three-party system. There are no signs of either Fine Gael or Labour being
squeezed out after the fashion of the British Liberals. Of course, a new polarisa-
tion of Irish politics over the Northern issue or over the possibly painful process
of adaptation to EEC conditions could fragment the existing party system by
generating new cleavage lines cutting across party lines. Some fragmentation is
to be expected, but the three-party pattern of Irish politics is well-entrenched and
looks capable of weathering most storms.

University College, Dublin.

18. See for example Campbell, et al. *The American Voter,* N.Y., Wiley, 1960, pp. 493–498, and
Dawson and Prewitt, *op. cit.,* pp. 53–55.
19. Cf. Busteed, M.A., and Mason, H., "Irish Labour in the 1969 Election", *Political Studies,*
Vol. 18, No. 3, (September, 1970), pp. 373–379.