

The Next 5 Years

2021-2026

Review of the 2020 General Election
and the 2019 European and Local Elections.



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Chairperson's introduction

I am pleased to present the review of the Party's 2020 General Election campaign performance. While this report is a review of the last election it is more about rejuvenating and strengthening the Party for the many elections we face over the coming years.

Taoiseach and Uachtarán Fhianna Fáil, Micheál Martin TD, asked me to lead the review into the 2020 General Election and the 2019 European and Local Elections and I was more than pleased to do so.

Since the establishment of the Committee, we sought to hear the views of as many Party members as possible. Over 2,700 of our members contributed to our work and I would like to acknowledge and thank them for their contribution on behalf of the Party.

A review into election campaigns is essential for Fianna Fáil. However, the real value of such a review is to learn from previous campaigns, to build on this and to strengthen the Party for the future. This is a forward-looking report which has been written with the future of Fianna Fáil in mind.

I would like to thank and praise all Committee colleagues who devoted so much of their time to the review and renewal of the Party. The membership of the Committee consisted of: Róisín Bradley, Maria Buckley, Minister Mary Butler TD, Margaret Conlon, Cormac Devlin TD, Seán Dorgan, Minister Seán Fleming TD (Chairperson), Darragh McShea and Michael Thompson. I also wish to thank Aidan O'Connor for his excellent work in assisting the Committee.

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le baill Fhianna Fáil agus na daoine ar fad a thug tacaíocht do Fhianna Fáil thar na blianta. Táimid uilig ag súil go mór le bheith ag obair le chéile ag leibhéal áitiúil agus ag leibhéal náisiúnta chun an páirtí a fhorbairt agus a laidriú ionas go mbeimid ábalta aghaidh a thabhairt ar an todhchaí le muinín.

Ar aghaidh le Fianna Fáil,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Seán Fleming". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath it.

Minister Sean Fleming TD

Fianna Fáil – Looking to the future

Over the next five years Fianna Fáil will be competing in a General Election, European Elections, Local Elections, Presidential Election and Bye-Election(s).

2021 is the 95th anniversary of the founding of Fianna Fáil. In five short years we will be celebrating the 100th anniversary. The coming five years between now and 2026 will be a defining period for the future of the Party.

This review and the recommendations flow from the largest ever engagement and consultation process by the Party with its members. We need to respect their views. We must respond by showing positive leadership for the Party and the country, so we can face the many electoral challenges in the future with confidence and determination.

This Committee believes the Party has a positive and successful future. We have made 59 recommendations that are practical and will improve the Party's ability to win elections.

Central to our Party's future is our delivery in Government. We in Fianna Fáil are duty bound to build a fairer, more equal and compassionate republic for the people of Ireland. We need to show leadership, competence and compassion in how we represent all our people at both local and national level.

As a grassroots organisation, we need to listen more to all our members, especially young people, and learn from them as all our futures are in their hands.

If we manage to combine these two elements in how we conduct our work, we will go into the coming elections in a strong position.

How we went about our work

The Committee first met in October of 2020, where we set out an ambitious work programme. We held 22 virtual Committee meetings. The objective of the Committee was to undertake the largest review of a General Election in the history of the Party. All of the following quantitative and qualitative methods helped the Committee to deliver our findings and recommendations for the future.

The Committee's work programme included the following:

1. Membership Survey

A key objective of the Committee was to seek the widest set of views to deliver a comprehensive report. The Committee contracted Coyne Research to survey our membership. The Committee agreed four key groups to be surveyed:

- a. The membership
- b. Local Election candidates
- c. General Election candidates
- d. Directors of Elections

The Committee wrote distinct multiple-choice questions for each group covering the following topics:

- Management of election campaign at national level
- Party Identity
- Candidates
- Performance of Party Leadership and Frontbench
- Party policies and manifesto
- National and local media performance
- Social media performance
- Campaign at constituency level
- Role of Headquarters
- Profile of membership and activity levels

There were 46 different multiple-choice questions in the survey, giving 219 potential answers. There was also a section in every survey for people to make additional comments.

The survey was very successful, resulting in over 2,500 responses. Over 1,200 members wrote additional comments, all of which were individually examined and considered by the Committee. According to Coyne Research, it was the largest response they had ever received from a membership-based organisation.

2. Interviews/Virtual meetings

There were 10 interviews conducted with the full membership of the Committee present. The purpose of these meetings was to broaden our understanding of decision making in the Party in the run up to and during the General Election.

These interviews involved current and former Oireachtas Members, key Party staff and others.

The Committee also split up into groups of two to interview key voices who would add value to our report. The Committee identified 20 people/groups to interview based on the following criteria:

- Gender balance
- Geographical split
- Elected candidates
- Unsuccessful candidates
- TDs who lost their seats
- Newly elected TDs
- Established TDs

Ógra

The Chairman of the Committee held two virtual meetings with Ógra Fianna Fáil. The first meeting was for those under 20 years of age. The second meeting was for members of Ógra over 20 years of age. 100 members attended these two meetings. These meetings provided valuable insights into how the Party can be made more relevant and attractive to younger people.

3. Independent External Analysis

This Committee sought insights from people involved in the Party. We also spoke to political commentators and communications experts. The value of this expertise was to benchmark our analysis against independent views. Throughout our research we identified key areas we needed to examine, namely the analysis of information and use of social media. We believed an independent analysis was beneficial in delivering a comprehensive report.

The Committee arranged three commentators to deliver their independent analysis:

- a. A lecturer in Politics and Chair of a University's Journalism course.
- b. An Associate Professor in Political Science in a National University.
- c. A digital campaigner, who also lectures in Public Relations and Strategic Communications.

4. Information from Party Headquarters

We requested and received substantial information from Party Headquarters, which assisted the Committee with our work.

5. Other

- 15 TDs were formally interviewed by members of the Committee.
- 7 other TDs gave their views directly to the Chairperson.
- 9 TDs completed the survey.

The Committee also received a number of submissions directly from Party members which contributed to our work.

In total, over 2,700 people directly contributed to the work of the Committee.

General Election 2020

A. Management of election campaign at national level

The National Director of Elections was appointed on the eve of the General Election being called.

The de facto national election team during the election campaign comprised of senior officials of the Party. Monthly meetings were held during 2019. Meetings were also held with the Party Leader.

There was no committee in place to provide oversight and a strategic view to assist and direct those who were intensely involved on an hourly and daily basis in the operation of the campaign.

There was no overall collective approval by any group of members of the Frontbench of the final manifesto prior to its publication.

In the run-up to the campaign from the 1st of January 2020, and during the campaign, senior staff meetings were held each morning and each evening. Each of these meetings involved discussion of the following items:

- Review of feedback from candidates and constituencies
- Specific proposals for extra themes and new activities
- Daily press events including review of message and content as discussed with spokespeople/candidates appearing at events
- Provision of briefing materials for local and national interviews and debates
- Review of national tour and Leader's activities
- Logistics (postering, leaflets, election material, Party political broadcasts and specific candidate support)
- Advertising
- Daily message notes for candidates and members

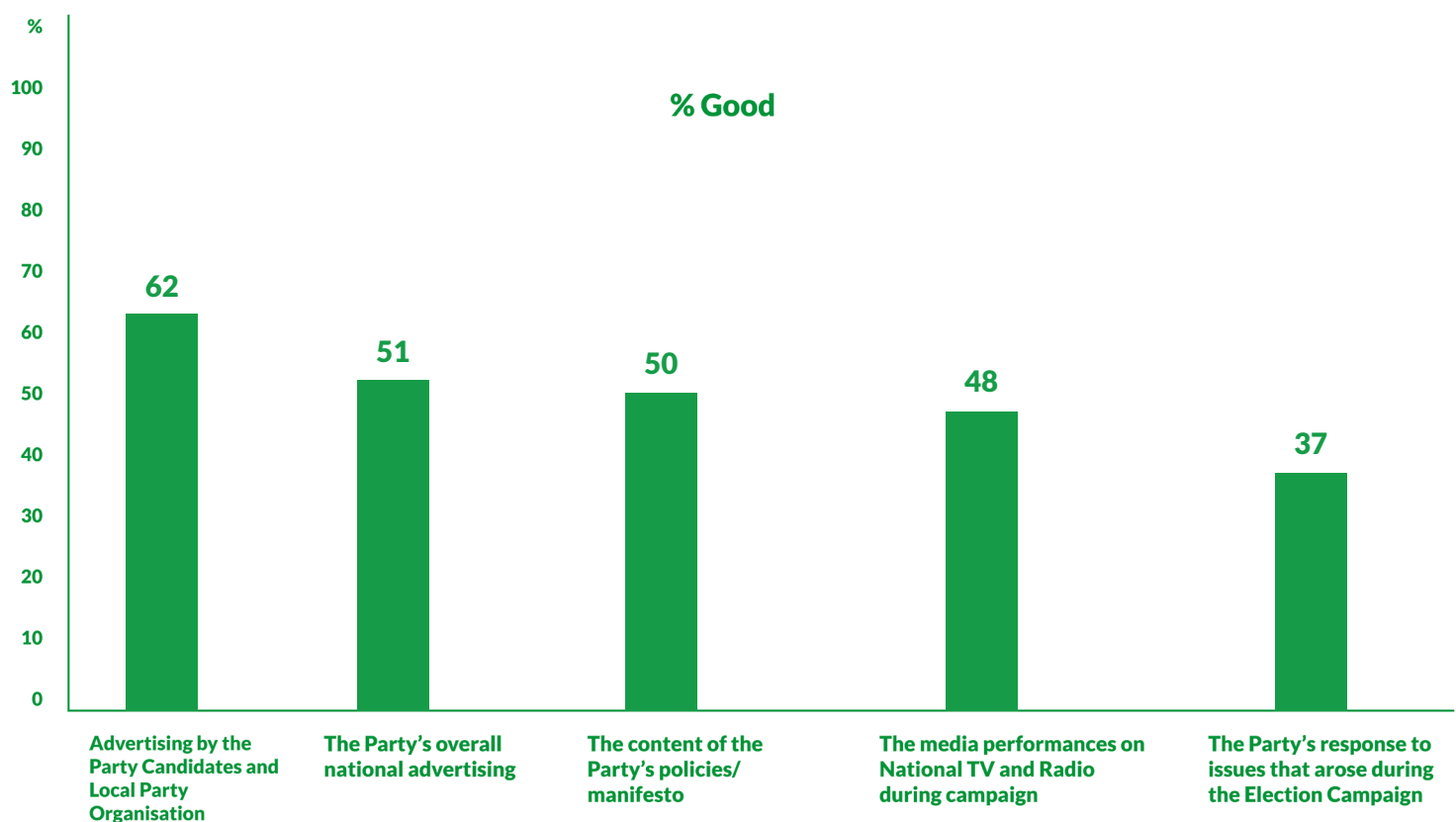
A master grid for the management of the election campaign as it existed on the week of the 12th January 2020 was provided to the Committee by Headquarters.

There was no adequate policy briefing for all candidates or the Frontbench during the campaign.

The Committee was informed of seven different ways by which information flowed between the constituencies and the national campaign during the election. There was no effective two-way communications system between Headquarters and the constituencies.

In our membership survey, advertising was considered the strongest aspect of the 2020 General Election campaign.

Rating of Party Performance During 2020 General Election Campaign



FINDINGS

1. The practice of appointing the National Director of Elections on the eve of the campaign is not appropriate. It undermines the effective role of the National Director of Elections.
2. The de facto national election team comprised of senior officials of the Party.
3. There was no committee in place to provide oversight and a strategic view to assist and direct those who were intensely involved on an hourly and daily basis in the operation of the campaign.
4. There was no overall collective approval by any group of members of the Frontbench of the final manifesto prior to its publication.
5. The response to some issues that arose during the campaign was too slow.
6. The governance structures in place for making preparations and managing a General Election campaign are neither appropriate nor effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Party must ensure appropriate and effective governance structures are in place for making preparations and for managing general elections.
2. The Party should establish an ongoing National Election Committee to plan, make preparations and manage election campaigns. Membership should include key persons in the Party and others with relevant skills who could contribute to the process. Their task should include ensuring:
 - a. Policies for future elections are prepared and in place covering all areas and are subject to regular review.
 - b. A proper system is in place for candidate identification, selection and mentoring.
 - c. Communications through traditional and social media both internally and externally are operating effectively.
 - d. There are key people at constituency level to ensure that each area is ready for an election.
3. The National Election Committee should establish an appropriate work programme to meet the challenges ahead and to ensure the Party is always election ready.
4. The National Election Committee should have an implementation plan dealing with the following areas:
 - a. Policies.
 - b. Candidates.
 - c. Communications/Media.
 - d. Constituencies.
5. The Chairperson of the National Election Committee may well be the Director of Elections.
6. The Director of Elections will have political knowledge and experience in modern day campaigning techniques and not be a member of either the Parliamentary Party or Party staff. This person should be appointed at the earliest practical date.
7. The National Election Committee will provide strategic oversight to the campaign.
8. This National Election Committee should obtain, as a minimum, approval by a group of members of the Frontbench of the final manifesto prior to its publication.
9. This National Election Committee should present its progress report to the Party leadership on a frequent basis.
10. Our election review Committee will meet in 12 months time to review and report on the implementation of all recommendations in this report.

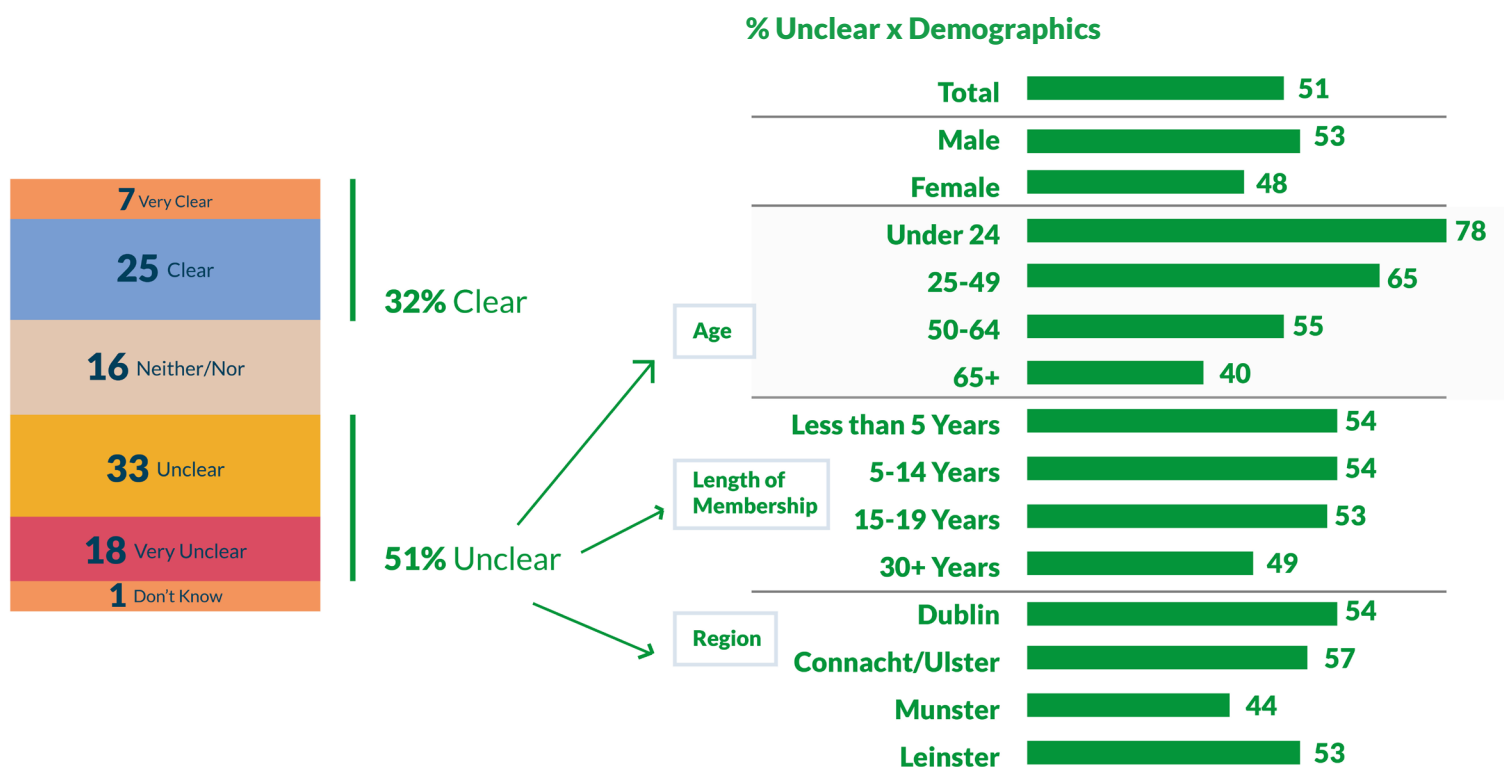
B. Party Identity

The majority of respondents over-65 years of age who have been members for over 30 years have a clear vision of the Party's distinct identity. Overall, 32% of respondents believe the Party has a clear and distinct identity.

78% of under 24-year-olds, 65% of 25 – 49-year-olds and 55% of 50 – 64-year-olds say the Party does not have a clear and distinct identity.

This tallies with the strength of the Fianna Fáil vote by demographic in the 2020 General Election:

Clarity of Distinct Identity During 2020 General Election Campaign



% of voters by age who voted Fianna Fáil

Total vote	18-34	35-50	50-64	65+
22%	15%	22%	23%	30%
Total Male voters		Total Female voters		
23%		21%		

The lack of clarity regarding our identity may have been influenced by a number of factors including:

1. The Confidence and Supply Arrangement pushed the Party too close to the Government at a time when they were right wing and deeply unpopular. To many, we became indistinguishable from the party in Government. Our Party's previous successes on housing delivery were overshadowed by our association with the Government. The arrangement hampered our ability to provide opposition to the Government's policies. It may have been a strategic error not to develop our own policies and communicate them during that time. Supporting the arrangement was seen by many as the right thing to do during this period. While supporting the Government, we could have developed and clearly communicated our policies making clear that these would be in our manifesto at the General Election.
2. The financial crisis of a decade ago marked a major shift in the public's voting patterns. The Party dropped 24.2% to 17.4% of the first preference vote in the 2011 General Election.
3. Prior to the Good Friday Agreement, Ireland's political landscape could be partly explained by individual party's outlook on Northern Ireland and a United Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement has brought a greater consensus on Northern Ireland. The Party's position on Northern Ireland does not now differ significantly from some of the other political parties.
4. The 2018 referendum to repeal the 8th Amendment of the Constitution captured the imagination of many voters. The Party's policy was that this was a conscience vote for individual members. Many members of the public felt the Party was not in tune with modern social issues in Ireland.
5. Younger people have no recollection of Fianna Fáil's excellent record on many issues in the past such as house building, free travel and the introduction of free education.
6. Voters are now less loyal to individual political parties and more willing to switch votes at election time. This is prevalent more so amongst younger, urban voters where the Party is not strong.

The Party has always been successful in attracting votes from all sections of Ireland's political spectrum; better than other parties. We were known as the Republican Party that represented all sections of society and we were good at managing the economy.

The advent of social media has diversified and polarised political opinions. Economic growth has led to greater urbanisation.

The evolution of the country from a small agrarian insular state to one of the world's most advanced outward looking societies and economies was always attributed by many people to the political leadership and vision of Fianna Fáil. This included the public recognition that the Party would deliver for the people, mainly through employment, housing and education.

An external analyst the Committee consulted with, made this point:

“Other parties did well in part because a proportion of the electorate open to supporting left wing parties has generally increased over time. While left has decreased in other European countries it has increased in Ireland. There is no certainty that the left will continue to increase.”

An external analyst spoke about the impact this phenomenon is having on the Party’s brand:

“The age of the Fianna Fáil vote is then reflected in the attitudes and behaviours, so Fianna Fáil voters, being older, are also more conservative. That does not mean that they are attracted to Fianna Fáil for perceived conservatism but could be that voting for Fianna Fáil is a long-held habit, and those voters also happen to have more conservative values. More positively Fianna Fáil retains its cross-class support, whereas other parties are more class specific.”

The strength of this cross-class support is the Party’s greatest asset. This will allow us to take ownership of certain issues affecting these communities and making them part of our identity.

An external analyst made a similar point:

“So, if I think that the health service is the most important issue I may vote for a Party that ‘owns’ that issue, whereas if I am concerned about unemployment, then the Party I think performs best on the economy gets my vote, even without me changing my opinion on the parties. Ideology is then a dead end – it probably rarely changes, and most people are centrist. I can switch Party on the basis of what I think is important.”

FINDINGS

7. The majority of our members are unclear about our distinct identity.
8. The Party is predominantly rural and highly reliant on its decreasing core base in defining itself.
9. We were unable to distinguish ourselves sufficiently in the minds of many people from the Government during the Confidence and Supply Arrangement.
10. Fianna Fáil has a low support base in urban areas and also with younger people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. The Party needs to prioritise defining Fianna Fáil’s clear identity, that is distinct and differentiates us from others.
12. Young people must be central in defining our Party’s identity.
13. The Decade of Centenaries is an opportunity for the Party to highlight its strong Republican roots.

C. Candidates

Fianna Fáil received 484,315 votes (22.18%) in the 2020 General Election. In the 2016 General Election the Party received 519,353 votes (24.35%).

There has been a marked improvement for the Party in Dublin, where it has increased its Dáil seats from 1 in 2011, to 6 in 2016 to now where we have 7 seats. However, losses in Connacht/Ulster and in commuter counties around Dublin resulted in a significant decrease in the Party's support in 2020.

One of the main areas raised was how the National Constituencies Committee selected candidates. Much of the commentary focused on how decisions were made and communicated. These comments are common to most if not all political parties.

Fianna Fáil General Election Candidates

	Number of Candidates	Number Elected	% Elected
Selected by Convention	57	33	58%
Added by the National Constituencies Committee	27	4	15%
Total	84	37	44%

45 of the 57 candidates selected at convention were sitting TDs.

37 TDs were elected plus the Ceann Comhairle giving Fianna Fáil 38 TDs in the 33rd Dáil. There has been an improvement in the number of women who represent the Party in the Dáil, having gone from no female TDs in 2011 to 5 in 2020.

Overall, 26 (30.95%) of our candidates were female. Of all the candidates selected at convention 11 (19%) were women, well under the gender quota of 30%. Of the 27 candidates added by the National Constituencies Committee, 15 were female (56%) and 12 were male (44%).

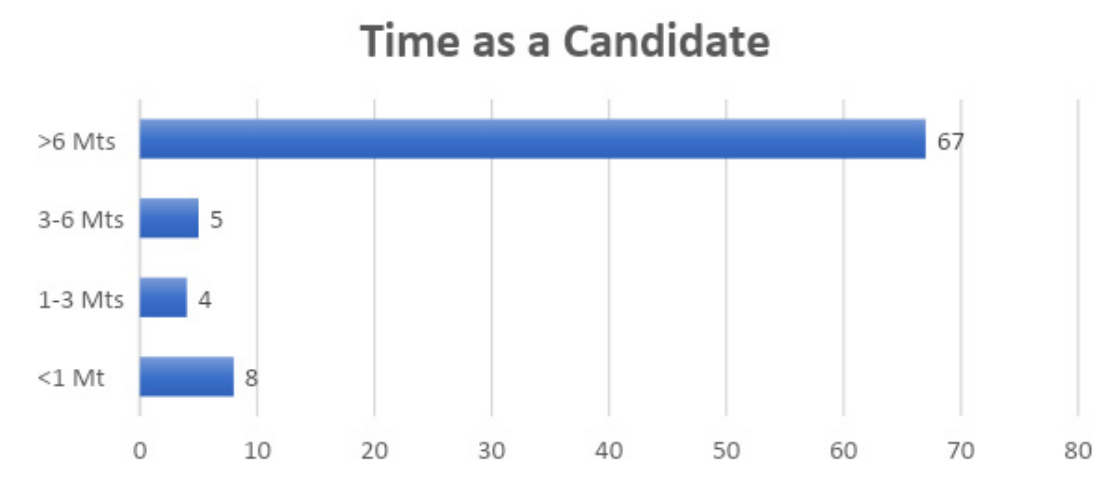
The table below shows the age category of candidates selected at convention:

Age category	Number of candidates	Number elected
Under 30	1	1
30 - 44	14	9
45 - 60	33	17
> 60	9	6

The table below shows the age category of candidates added by the National Constituencies Committee:

Age category	Number of candidates	Number elected
Under 30	1	1
30 - 44	8	2
45 - 60	17	1
> 60	1	0

67 of the 84 (80%) candidates were in place 6 months out from the General Election. Below is a chart showing the length of time all candidates were in place prior to the start of the General Election campaign:



The Party had 45 outgoing TDs seeking re-election. 29 of these were re-elected. 16 outgoing TDs were not re-elected, 5 of whom were replaced by Parliamentary Party colleagues. Three TDs were elected in areas where we did not have a sitting TD.

Overall, there was a net loss of 6 seats to the Party since 2016. A very concerning aspect was that of the 16 TDs, who did not hold their seats, 11 of these TDs were first elected to the 32nd Dáil.

48 of our candidates were in a winning position in their constituency on the first count. 12 of these were not elected due to other candidates benefitting more from transfers. Two of our candidates who were not in a winning position on the first count were elected. The net outcome was that we had 38 seats after the General Election. We have two seats in 5 constituencies, one seat in 28 constituencies and no seat in 7 constituencies.

Our first preference percentage vote in constituencies ranged from 39.4% to 10.3%.

The internal transfer rate of votes between Fianna Fáil candidates ranged from 72% to 29% and the overall national average was 54%. Internal transfers arise where votes/surpluses are distributed following a Fianna Fáil elimination/election and there is a continuing Party candidate(s) in the field.

A summary of the internal transfers are shown below:

Region	Internal Transfers
Munster	48%
Leinster	55%
Connacht/Ulster	56%
Dublin	58%
National	54%

FINDINGS

11. Fianna Fáil achieved 22.18% first preferences in the General Election.
12. The Party increased its number of Dáil seats in Dublin.
13. The Party lost seats in Connacht/Ulster and in the commuter counties around Dublin.
14. No progress was made in improving the gender balance of candidates in 2020 compared with 2016, despite very strong efforts by many people including the National Constituencies Committee.
15. Women find it more difficult than men to get selected at conventions.
16. We achieved our legal gender quota of 30%.
17. The gender quota will increase to 40% in 2023.
18. If, for example, we run the same number of candidates (84) in the next general election as in 2020 we will be required to run a minimum of 34 female candidates. On the basis that all current TDs run again (32 male and 5 female) there will have to be a minimum of 29 additional female candidates. This will represent 62% of the 47 additional candidates.
19. 2 of our 84 candidates were under 30 years of age and both were elected.
20. 11 of the 16 TDs who lost their seats were elected for the first time to the 32nd Dáil.
21. 58% of candidates selected at convention were elected, 45 out of 57 were incumbents.
22. Of our 84 candidates, 45 were outgoing TDs, 4 were Senators, 30 were Councillors, and 5 were not public representatives.
23. 15% of candidates added by the National Constituencies Committee were elected.
24. 13 of our TDs were elected having reached the quota and 24 were elected without reaching the quota.
25. Our first preference percentage vote in constituencies ranged from 39.4% to 10.3%.
26. The internal transfer rate of votes between Fianna Fáil candidates was 54%.
27. We achieved a 2-seat bonus when compared with our first preference percentage vote.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. The Party must prioritise younger candidates for the forthcoming elections, especially those under 30 years of age.
15. The Ard Chomhairle must develop and implement an action plan to progress gender equality at every level in the Party as a matter of urgency.
16. A new mentoring system should be established for all newly elected TDs to assist them in getting established at constituency level. This mentoring group should include people from the constituency and also include people with an outside national view.
17. Briefings by Party spokespersons on policies and issues should be arranged for all candidates.
18. The Party's candidate pledge should be regularly reviewed and updated.

D. Performance of Party Leadership, Frontbench and Parliamentary Party

In general, there were mixed views of the Party's Leadership and Frontbench. Our survey showed that Party members in Munster rated the leadership and Frontbench performance on national media and the overall profile/image highest. Those in Connacht/Ulster were least positive.

We received very positive feedback on the Leader's work on the ground. Naturally, there were some comments that he didn't canvass with certain candidates in the election campaign, but they all acknowledged he did canvass the constituency before the start of the campaign. Others said the Leader put in a lot of work knocking on as many doors as possible before and during the election.

Prior to the election, the Leader spent a lot of time canvassing with candidates in their constituencies, there were a number of visits every week. This is very important for new candidates.

There was a view among some interviewees that some members of the Frontbench had poor public recognition in contrast to the Government and other opposition parties. Some also had a view that the Party had become complacent after the successful 2019 Local, European and Bye-Elections.

Some members of the Frontbench had not established internal policy committees to develop Party policy. There was not sufficient priority given collectively to addressing strategic national issues that affect the public and the Party.

There was criticism of the leadership for overly focusing on another party during the campaign. Justification for this approach was provided, but some members felt the strategy was negative and backfired.

Two events were highlighted by interviewees and survey respondents that they believe damaged the perception of the Party.

The first was abstaining on the vote of confidence in the former Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government. Many interviewees believed this pushed us closer to the Government's poor housing record and damaged the Party's message that we represented change in the 2020 General Election.

The second was 'Votegate', which received substantial and high-profile coverage.

There has been a long trend of leaks from the Parliamentary Party. These leaks are amplified in the media and are damaging to the Party. This creates an impression of a fragmented party and stifles meaningful debate at parliamentary party meetings.

FINDINGS

28. The Party leadership overly criticised one other party.
29. The Leader put in a lot of work on the ground in the years in the run up to the election.
30. There was not sufficient priority given collectively by the Frontbench to addressing strategic national issues affecting the public and the Party.
31. Abstaining in the vote of confidence on the former Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government damaged the message that we represented change in the 2020 General Election.
32. 'Votegate' received substantial and high-profile coverage and damaged the Party.
33. The leaks from Parliamentary Party meetings are of deep concern. It stifles meaningful debate and creates an impression of a fragmented party.

RECOMMENDATIONS

19. The Party should ensure all spokespersons are assisted in achieving an improved performance level in the media.
20. The Party leadership and all spokespersons should devote time on a regular basis to deal with strategic issues affecting the public and the Party at a national and local level.
21. The Party should deal with and take appropriate action in respect of leaks from Parliamentary Party meetings.

E. Party policies and manifesto

Some members of the Party felt that the Party's policies lacked fresh imagination, was overly cautious and did not capture the imagination of the public.

Documentation presented to the Committee by the Party said the main unique selling points were:

- "A significant move towards investment in public services versus the Government's focus on tax cuts for the wealthiest.
- Action on delivering housing, especially affordable and social housing.
- Immediate focus on concrete improvements in health, especially waiting lists and mental health.
- Reducing costs for families especially childcare and insurance.
- Unlike other opposition voices, all promises to be fully costed and deliverable – they will promise more, but we will deliver more."

The approach agreed by the Frontbench was to restore public trust by showing the Party was fiscally responsible. This was in response to the reputational damage to the Party arising from the financial crash, and the attempts by the Government to label the Party as irresponsible.

Further documentation presented to the Committee by the Party stated:

"it was agreed at the Frontbench that our spending commitments had to be detailed in full and had to operate within a specific set of spending and economic limits. It was agreed that we had to be in a position to stand over costings of every policy. Each policy was therefore costed with reference to Department of Finance and Public Expenditure data."

An external analyst stated:

"Rival parties clearly targeted housing and health. Those were the two issues that became the issues in 2020. They, at least in housing, proposed alternative and distinct policies. The strategy to concentrate on housing made sense given the increase in the population renting, and the massive increases in rents. It was less clear what Fianna Fáil's issues were and how they differed from the Government on key issues. I suspect this lies at the heart of the problem in 2020."

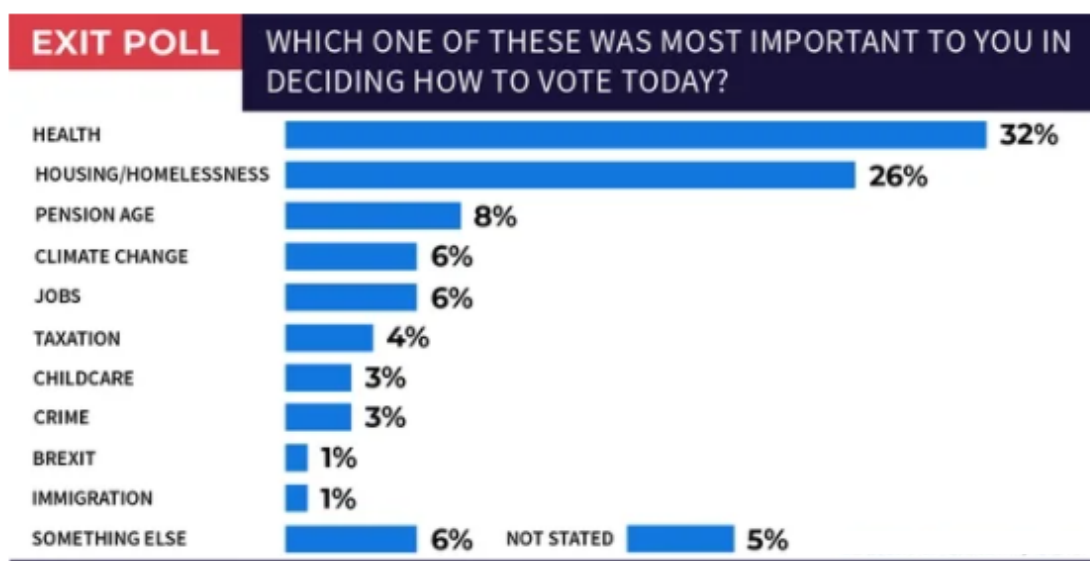
In terms of issues, the General Election exit poll confirmed health and housing/homelessness as the two biggest issues. The pension issue was next and all other issues were down the line. The pension issue was raised in the interviews. The delay in giving a concise position was stated by many interviewees to have cost us votes.

Fianna Fáil performed well amongst those most concerned with health and less so amongst those concerned with housing. The exit poll also confirmed a decisive move by the Irish public towards support for greater public investment in services. This had been correctly identified by the Party during the 32nd Dáil.

Another external analyst looked at the change in public opinion before and during the campaign and what mattered to Fianna Fáil's voters:

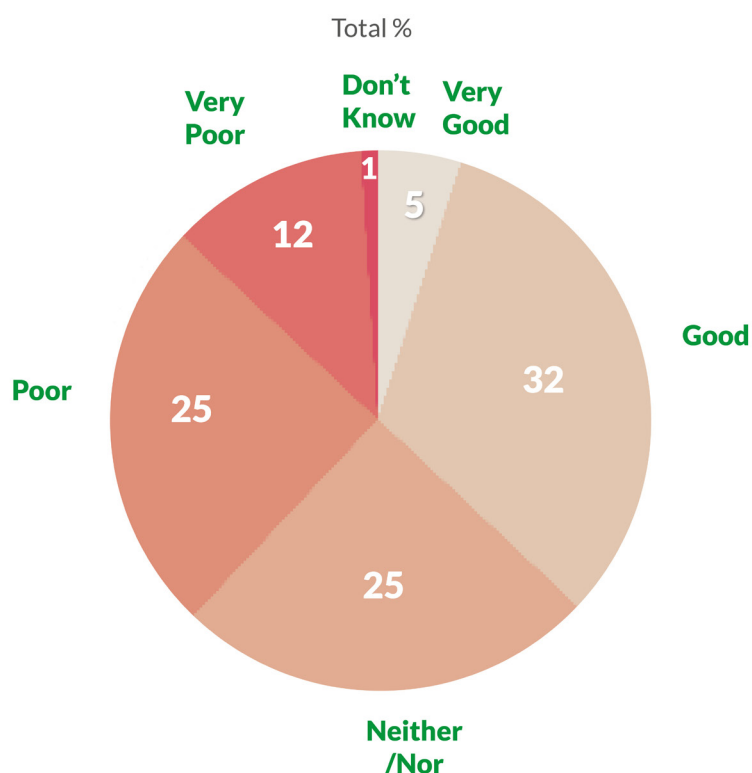
"One difference between the period before Christmas and the period after is the emergence of healthcare as a political issue. Housing and homelessness emerged as the dominant issue from late 2017 and stayed there as the most important issue. It is worth noting that these are open-ended responses to the question and therefore are entirely unprompted. The emergence of healthcare as an issue to challenge housing is perhaps unsurprising given that the election was triggered by the prospective motion of no confidence in the health minister. The issue soaked up the attention of those that were not concerned with housing and homelessness, particularly in the vacuum in which Brexit had declined as a political issue."

The following chart is from RTE's exit poll, which shows the most important issues to all voters:



Respondents to our survey were equally divided as to how well or how poorly the Party responded to issues that arose during the election campaign.

The Party's response to issues that arose during the Election Campaign During 2020 General Election



FINDINGS

34. We failed to set out clear unique policies that were easy for voters to identify with and understand. They were particularly weak for under 40s.
35. Members of the Frontbench were not sufficiently involved in the finalisation of the manifesto.
36. The Party's manifesto was conservative and cautious.
37. The Party's manifesto was fully costed with reference to data from the Department of Finance and Public Expenditure.
38. The Supply and Confidence Arrangement pushed the Party too close to the outgoing Government.
39. The pension issue was unexpected and not handled well.

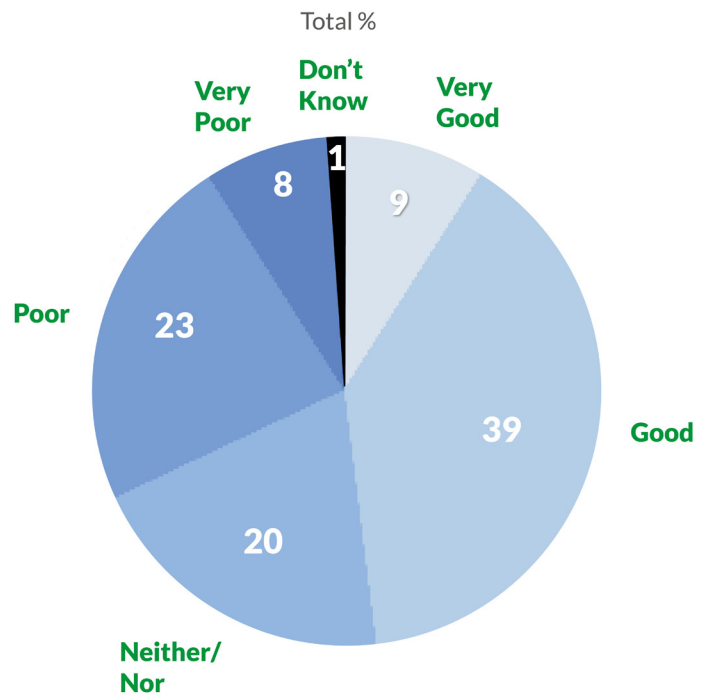
RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The Party leadership and all spokespersons should ensure a draft manifesto is always in place. This living document should be reviewed and updated every six months.
23. There needs to be a more streamlined process and opportunities for members to contribute to policy formation.
24. When significant issues arise during a campaign, they require a swift response.

F. National and local media performance

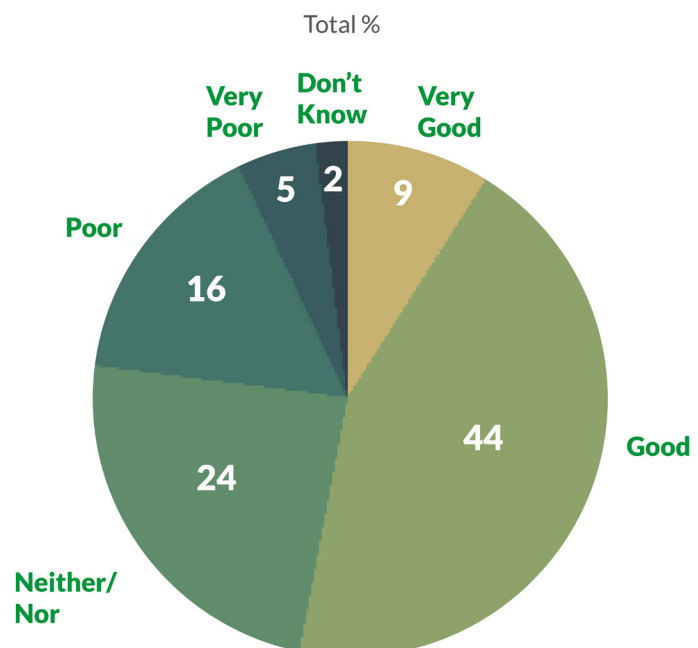
During 2019, there seemed to be general satisfaction with the performance of the Party in the media. Those in Dublin and Munster recorded the highest ratings regarding the profile/image of the Party in 2019. Over half in Connacht/Ulster rated the profile/image as poor.

The media performances on National TV and Radio during campaign During 2020 General Election

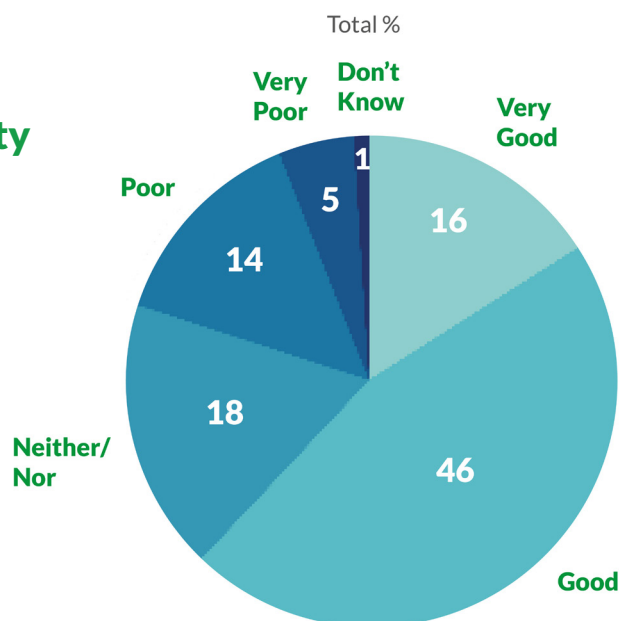


In the 2020 campaign, our survey showed satisfaction with the media performances by the Party. Those living in Munster were most positive towards the media performances of the Party's Leadership and Frontbench on national TV and radio during the campaign. The lowest rating was recorded in Connacht/Ulster.

The Party's overall national advertising During 2020 General Election



Advertising by the Party Candidates and Local Party Organisation During 2020 General Election



The survey showed a majority of respondents were satisfied with the overall advertising during the campaign. It also showed a higher level of satisfaction with advertising by candidates and the Party at constituency level.

Documentation supplied to the Committee by the Party explained the rationale for choosing the election slogan:

"In 2016, the Party adopted 'An Ireland for all' to help in framing a core message that the government was benefitting certain groups and communities. It had a high level of acceptance with the Party's members and supporters. It was used at all major Party events during the last Dáil. No stronger alternatives emerged in the research. Its use in 2020 was intended to contrast with the then Government, who we had argued were obsessed with short-term marketing over real substance. As explained during one of the early press conferences 'this is Fianna Fáil's core belief and it will define how we will govern'."

The Committee believed this was not a good strategy approach and appeared complacent. The Party's strategy was focused on Fianna Fáil representing change and replacing the outgoing Government. The Party did not fully anticipate that many members of the public did not agree with our assumption that we represented change.

We were informed that the Party had not sought external advice to optimise the Party's media strategy, because it was believed that it would not add value. Like most large organisations, seeking external communications advice is a normal and positive practice.

In 2016, the Party's performance and ratings improved during the campaign. The Party erroneously believed this would happen again in 2020, but this belief failed to take into account the changes in other parties.

An external analyst informed us:

“The question asked here was: ‘What election campaign news story have you noticed if any?’ the most popular option did not notice any particular news story in the first week of the campaign. The next most popular related to homelessness, housing policy and a specific story about a man, reported on January 15th, who was in serious condition after his tent was removed by a vehicle. Supporters of Fianna Fáil were more likely to recognise this story. The next most prominent was the change in the pension age. Fianna Fáil supporters were more likely to notice this. Third was the TV debate - a significant subset of which was exclusion from the two-way debate.”

The Party utilised a relatively small number of TDs in the media. There should have been more media training for members of the Parliamentary Party.

FINDINGS

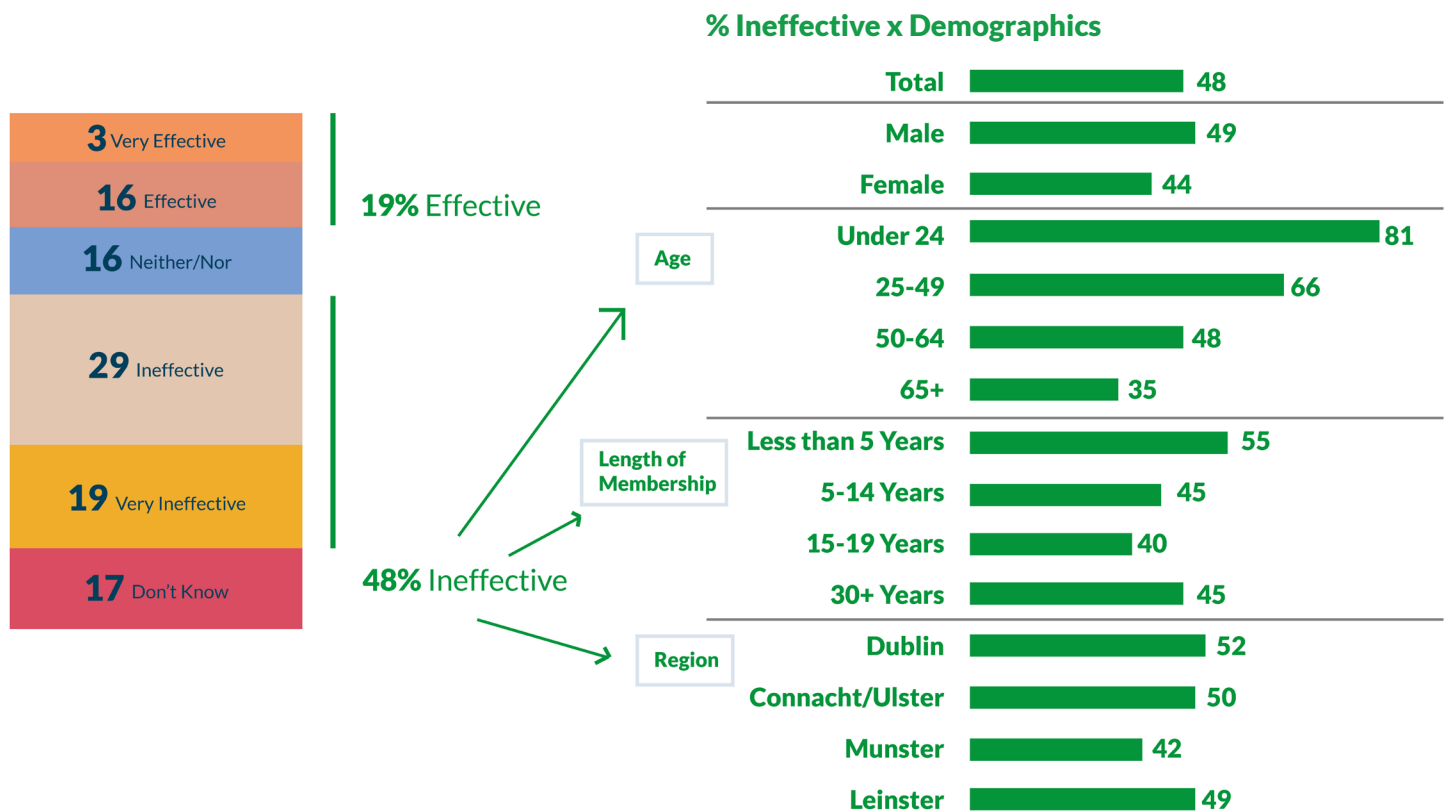
40. The campaign media strategy was naturally focused on the Leader and on the daily press briefings.
41. The numerous set pieces from the national press centre, while functional, looked staid and lacked imagination.
42. Using the 2016 slogan gave a tired appearance to the campaign and manifesto.
43. There should have been more media training for members of the Parliamentary Party.
44. No external advice was sought on the Party’s communications and media strategy.
45. Performance reviews were not provided to politicians after their appearance in the media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

25. All members of the Parliamentary Party should be provided with and be required to participate in ongoing media training.
26. A system should be put in place to ensure that media performance reviews are undertaken, and feedback provided to Party representatives following their appearance in the media. This is to provide objective analysis for the benefit of the Party and the persons concerned.
27. The daily media events during the campaign must show imagination and variation of style and location and must be more engaging for the public.
28. Election campaigns must be modern and of our time.

G. Social media performance

Effectiveness of Party on Social Media During 2020 General Election



Social media performance was the weakest rated aspect of the Party's campaign. Only 1 in 5 respondents believe the Party's social media was effective during the 2020 General Election. Almost half claimed to feel the Party was ineffective on social media – those in the younger age groups and more active members were more likely to believe it was ineffective. 81% of under 24s, and 66% of these between 25- and 49-year-olds believed the Party was ineffective on social media.

At local level a number of candidates did not have the following:

- Ability to run advertisements and an understanding of how online advertisements could assist their campaign
- Ability to produce campaign videos fit for social media

At national level the necessary structure was not in place:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of social media posts or advertisements
- To better inform campaign decision making of the issues coming up on social media
- To produce high quality content and to ensure wide distribution in a short period of time

During the campaign on Facebook, Fianna Fáil had less than 10% of the engagement in relation to the election through our comments/shares/likes. Also, the emoji icons reaction to Fianna Fáil's posts, while orchestrated, was very negative.

Twitter did not allow advertising and we had a reasonable number of posts on twitter compared to others, including some original posts, retweets and replies to other posts.

We had less than 5% of the interaction/voices on Instagram during the campaign.

We had little to no presence on TikTok.

An analysis of Facebook's advertising library for the period of Jan 13th - Feb 9th found the following:

Party	Approx. No. of Advertisements	Approx. Engagement
Fianna Fáil	120	8.7m - 9.8m

An analysis conducted at the time on Facebook advertisement spending between Jan 13th - Feb 5th found the Party spent €65,500. Across the course of the campaign, Fianna Fáil were outspending all other political parties on advertising.

A difference between Fianna Fáil and other parties is in advertising tactics and audience targeting. We placed our advertisements for broad circulation while others targeted their advertisements at specific audiences.

Content Creation

For Fianna Fáil there was a clear investment in pre-arranged campaign videos. Some videos were too long, and the Party should have examined the retention rates in Facebook's analytics to see how long on average users watched for. This insight should then be used to inform future campaigns.

Many candidates at constituency level did not have the ability to prepare high quality content at short notice.

Organisation and Mobilisation

While social media presents political campaigners with powerful communications channels, it can also be an effective tool for organising and mobilising candidates, members and supporters across the country.

The Party was able to promote content through social media advertising. The organic distribution/share/retweeting from members and supporters was not sufficiently effective.

FINDINGS

46. The performance of the Party on social media was the weakest aspect of our campaign both at national and local level.
47. The Party is active on social media, but our reach and engagement across the various platforms are weak.
48. There was no structure in place to measure engagement on social media and therefore to better inform campaign decision making on issues.
49. The organic sharing, liking and retweeting from members, supporters and public representatives was very weak at all levels in the Party.
50. The Party significantly invested in social media advertising but had less reach because of poor organic mobilisation.
51. Many candidates at local level said social media was the weakest element of their own campaign and they would prioritise this issue in future campaigns.
52. There was a time lag in getting key media performance clips out on social media.
53. Some candidates were more prepared than others for an online campaign, in that they had recorded their own campaign videos, were able to design their own graphics and were running online advertisements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

29. Structures should be put in place to maximise the benefit of social media.
30. Social media training should be made available to all members, candidates, officer boards and public representatives in the Party.
31. There should be better engagement with members and supporters to encourage them to interact more with the Party on social media.
32. The Party should invest in and develop a more sophisticated approach to social media to improve our online performance and activation. Members of Ogra should be asked to play a key part in this. The Party should consider appointing a key figure in the Party to lead this initiative.
33. The Party must develop new social media policies and guidelines for members. This will cover ethics, behavioural codes and general online standards.

H. Campaign at constituency level

Overall, there was very positive feedback on the election campaign at local level. There seemed to be widespread engagement by the organisation with candidates' campaigns. The local management and member engagement was broadly seen as a very positive part of the campaign.

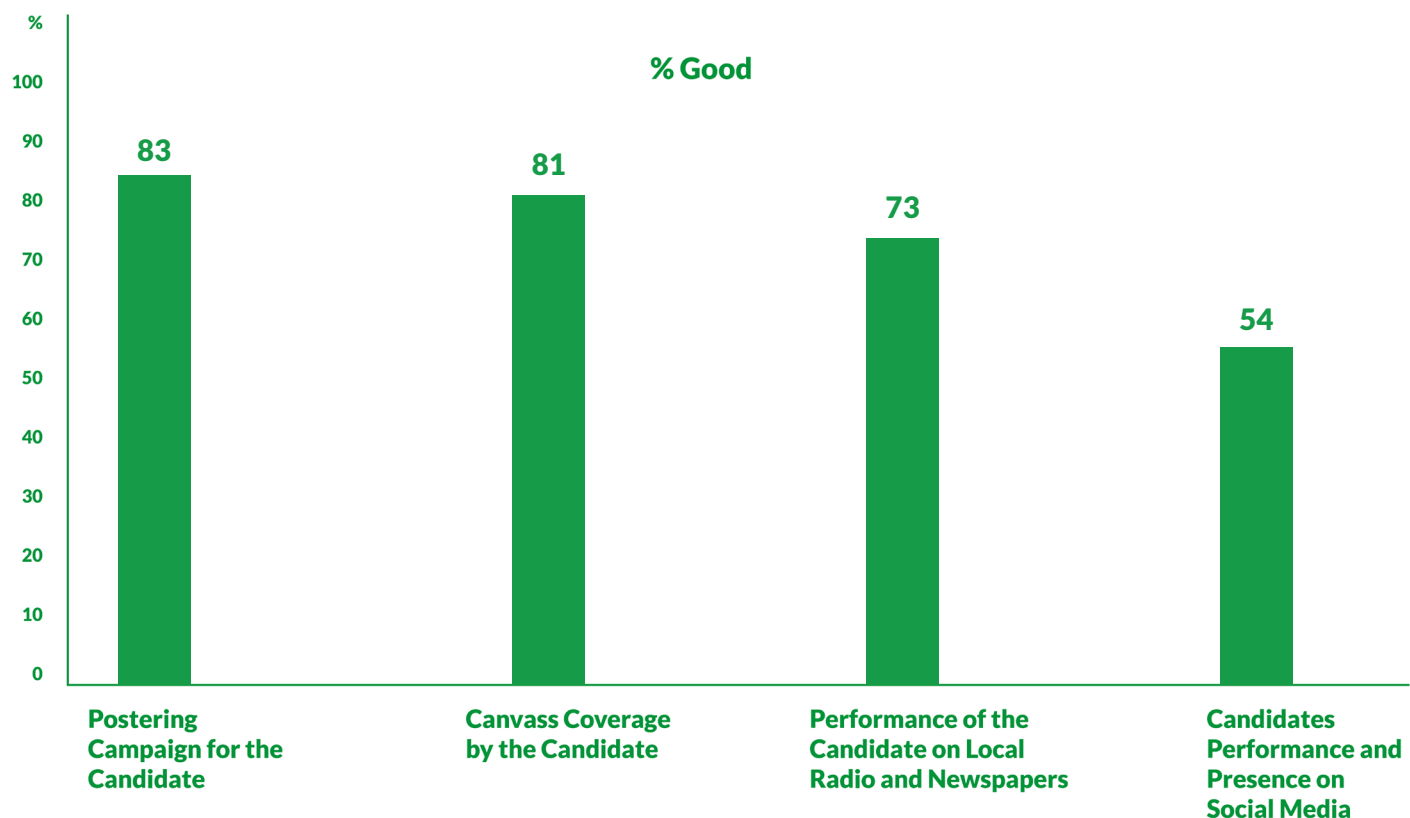
There were high ratings about the performance and activity of candidates.

An external analyst stated that 70% of Fianna Fáil voters suggested that they were voting for the candidate rather than the Party in the 2020 General Election and this was higher than for any other party.

There were positive ratings of candidates by our members - particularly the work rate at local level and the local profile of our candidates.

Canvassing, postering and the performance of candidates on local radio and newspapers all received high ratings, with most members agreeing the candidates performed well on these aspects of the campaign.

Rating of Candidate Performance During 2020 General Election Campaign



FINDINGS

54. Fianna Fáil is highly reliant on candidate-based voting rather than Party-based voting.
55. The election campaign at local level was strong. Though it varied by constituency, candidates and members put in a very high level of work on the ground.
56. There were generally high ratings in our survey about the performance and activity of our candidates.
57. There was a high level of satisfaction amongst respondents regarding candidate postering, canvass coverage and performance on local media.
58. There was no clearly defined effective two-way communications system between the national campaign and the constituencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

34. Fianna Fáil must address why many of our voters voted for the candidate rather than the Party.
35. The Party must ensure there is a new and clearly defined effective two-way communications system between the national campaign and candidates/constituencies.
36. The Party must put in place a training programme for constituency/local Directors of Elections, with special emphasis for those who are new to the position.

I. Role of Headquarters

Overall, the evidence given by interviewees and the survey respondents indicated both positive and negative interaction with Headquarters before the campaign. The functional area for candidate support e.g. posters, leaflets and other campaign material was unprecedented and highly praised. Approximately 10 million items of campaigning material, including canvass cards, leaflets and their deliveries were provided to candidates since 2017. Headquarters operated a centralised order and design service for campaign material including posters. However, there were a few areas highlighted that need to be reformed.

There should be a more structured relationship management system put in place for candidates. New candidates need support on practical issues, for example in respect of content of leaflets. Candidates need to know what is expected of them and Headquarters needs to know these are being met.

Support from Headquarters was complimented by a number of interviewees. Support levels varied from candidate to candidate, but those who received significant resources and support did very well. All complimented the delivery of posters and leaflets. Some said shared posters were not useful. There were some comments directed at the quality of the design work, saying it was dated.

The main focus of polling was on candidates and their constituency profiles. There should be more focus group research carried out by the Party on policies and issues that affect the general public.

One focus group project was conducted throughout 2019/2020. This concentrated on weak or potential Fianna Fáil voters in constituencies where seat gains were possible or in marginal constituencies.

Campaign expenditure

The Party's expenditure on the three campaigns were as follows: Local Elections €304,752; European Elections €609,458 and General Election (during the election period) €1,055,391.

All expenditure by the Party is returned to The Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO). A detailed breakdown of expenditure is always provided to SIPO and can be viewed on their website. Accordingly, we decided not to repeat the process in this review.

FINDINGS

59. Headquarters performed well in the functional areas of planning, organising, supporting candidates and Directors of Elections during the campaign.
60. Headquarters' strategy for the 2020 General Election was based on previous campaigns with no real innovation or improvement.
61. There should be greater regular use of focus groups to better understand the sentiment of the public and towards the Party.
62. Some members feel an inordinate proportion of communications from Headquarters was related to fundraising and membership fees.
63. Communications was poor between headquarters and members of the Parliamentary Party regarding constituency strategy.
64. Forward planning was not sufficient especially when election dates were known well in advance, such as the Local and European elections. This also applied to the General Election, as the timing of it was not that unexpected.
65. There was insufficient investment in communications technology regarding electioneering.

RECOMMENDATIONS

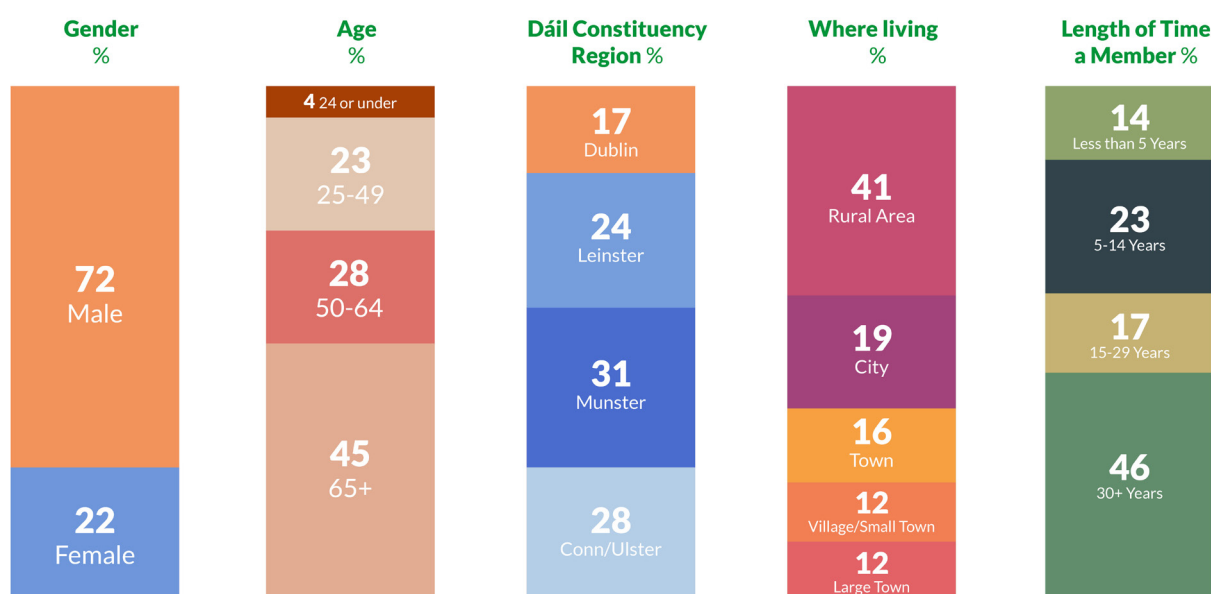
37. The Party must always be election ready, especially when election dates are clearly known in advance and when it is anticipated elections may occur at any stage in the near future.
38. The Party must ensure all campaigns take on board modern campaigning techniques and are innovative to capture the public.
39. The Party should on a regular basis carry out more focused research on policies and issues that affect the public.
40. The Party should ensure that all staff employed at national level work to maximise co-ordination when dealing with candidates, the Party organisation, policy and both internal and external communications.
41. The Party must put a proper communications structure in place between Headquarters and members of the Parliamentary Party regarding constituency strategy in the future.
42. The Party must seek out best international experience regarding advances and new methods of campaigning to assist the Party in future campaigns.
43. The Party must ensure there is sufficient investment in communications technology to ensure campaigns are modern and efficient.

J. Profile of membership and activity levels

Fianna Fáil has one of the largest memberships of any political organisation in Ireland. The Party has 14,375 members, of which 2,500 responded directly to this survey and a further 200 members contributed to the work of this Committee.

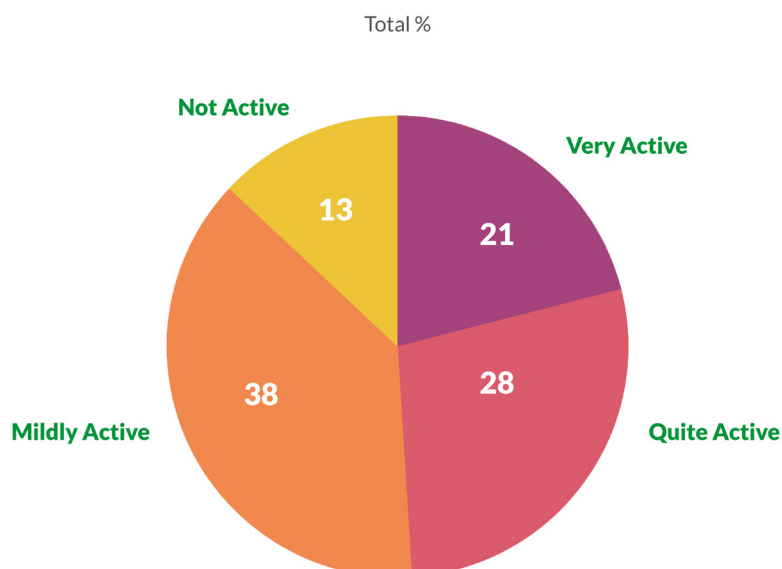
72% of respondents to the survey were male. 46% of respondents were members for over 30 years. 45% of respondents were aged over 65. 41% of respondents live in a rural area. 31% of respondents were from Munster.

Profile of Membership Sample



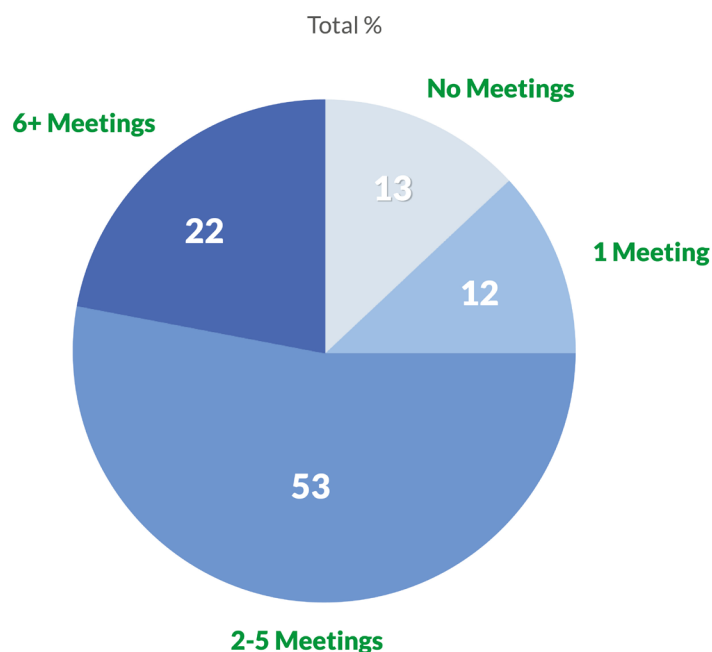
About half of all respondents were quite or very active. The longer they have been members, the more active they are likely to be.

Level of Activity in Party (Members)



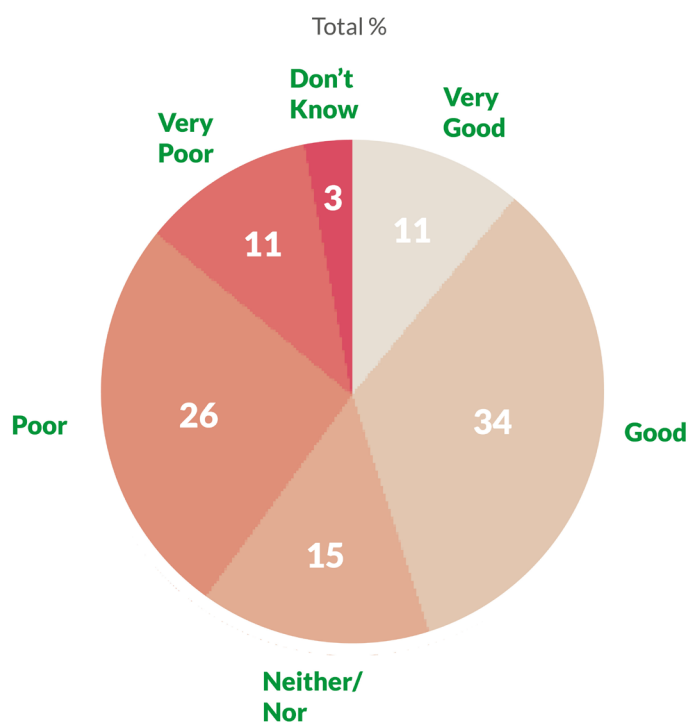
Over half of respondents were invited to between 2 and 5 meetings in 2019 with 13% not invited to any meetings. 3 in 10 Dublin members were invited 6 meetings or more.

Number of Party Meetings Invited to in 2019



Approximately half of our respondents state the organisation is strong in their constituency. Members in the Connacht/Ulster region have a more negative view of the strength of the organisation in their area.

Assessment of Strength of Constituency



The main reasons cited by respondents who did not participate in the election campaign were; not being asked to participate, work/family commitments and being unwell/not physically able. Those who have been a member of the Party for less than 5 years were significantly more likely to say they were not asked to participate.

It was raised in some interviews that the cumann structure is weak in many areas. It was highlighted by some that the one member one vote, to give members a greater say in the Party, may have weakened the role of the cumann.

The most common activity by our Party membership during the campaign was canvassing and this was high across all age groups in the Party. Other election activities like delivering leaflets and posterage were also participated in by a large number of members. Engaging on social media was more common amongst our newer and younger members.

FINDINGS

- 66. The Party organisation is large and has a strong presence in rural Ireland.
- 67. There has been an increasing trend that the local team is built around the candidate; rather than the candidate being supported by the Party membership.
- 68. Some constituencies do not hold enough regular meetings.
- 69. The Party has to do more to encourage women and young people into the organisation.
- 70. One-member-one-vote was raised by a number of people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

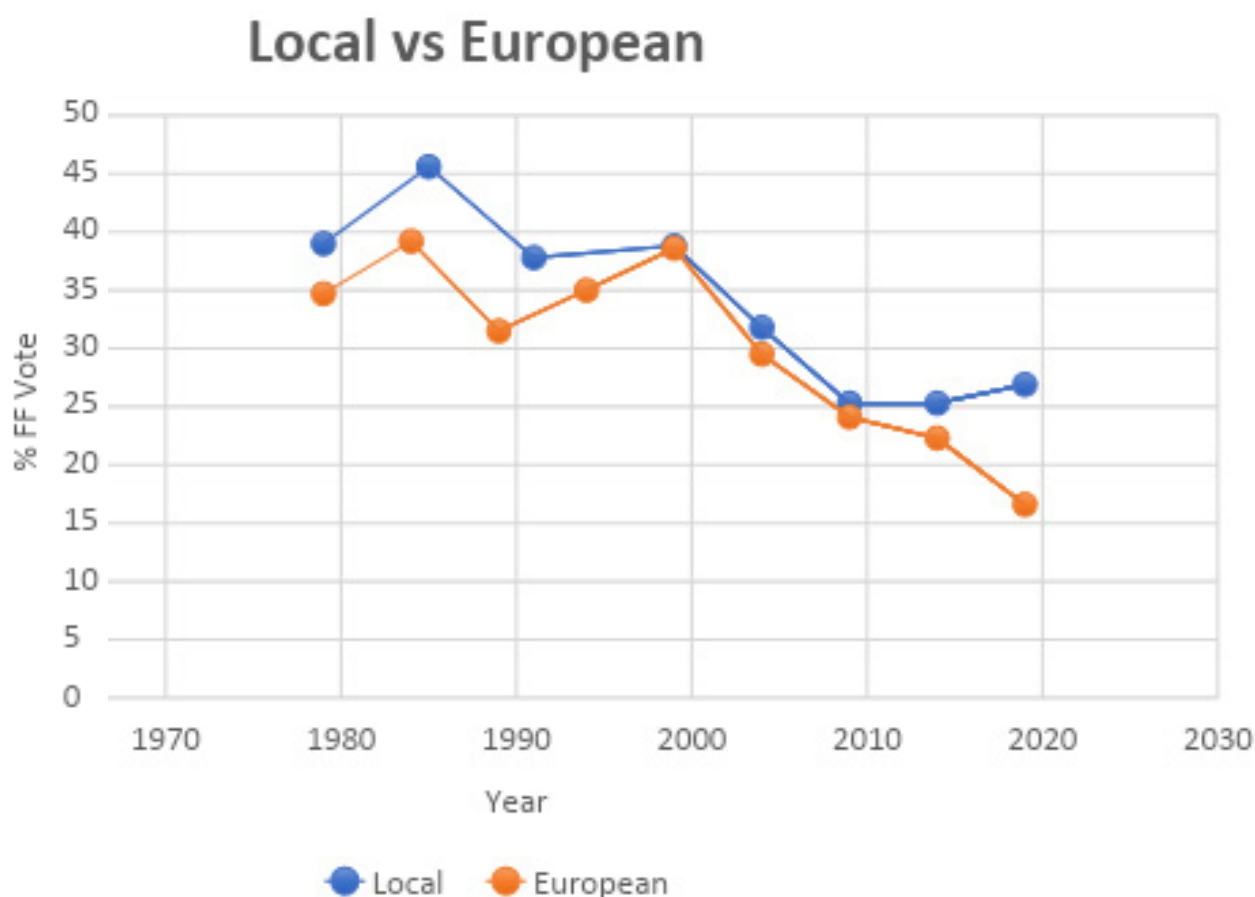
- 44. The Party should strive to achieve full gender balance and more young people on the officer boards of all Comhairlí Dáilcheantair.
- 45. There should be regional and national meetings of councillors twice a year that should be attended by senior members of the Party.
- 46. Two meetings of each Comhairle Dáilcheantair every year should be attended by a member of the Parliamentary Party from outside the constituency.
- 47. The Party should carry out a review of the one-member-one-vote system to see what improvements could be made and to ensure it is meeting its original objectives. This could be carried out in tandem with a programme of increased activity by members and units of the organisation.
- 48. The Party must ensure all members of officer boards, public representatives and candidates are fully paid-up members and they agree to receive Party communications both in the traditional and electronic format.
- 49. The effectiveness and role of the cumann should be reviewed, in particular where there are not sufficient members in a cumann. The idea of joint meetings and amalgamation between neighbouring cumainn should be actively examined to ensure there is a level of synergy in the organisation at local level.

European Elections 2019

In the 2019 European Election, Fianna Fáil won two seats, and this is an improvement on 2014 when we won one seat.

The Party held no seat in Dublin in 2009 and 2014, securing a seat in 2019. We won no seat in the Midlands–North–West constituency in 2014 or 2019.

In 2019, 190,000 people who voted for Fianna Fáil in the Local Elections did not vote for the Party's European candidates on the same day.



European Constituency	Local Election vote	European Election vote	Difference
Dublin	18%	14%	4%
Ireland South	29%	21%	8%
Midlands–North–West	30%	12%	18%

It is clear that a new strategy must be devised to select candidates and run European Election campaigns. In particular recognition of the unique nature of European Election campaigns, there needs to be a more strategic approach taken to selecting candidates and winning seats.

The most common critique we received in our interviews was how and when candidates were selected. Both the candidates and the Party leadership admitted the system for selecting candidates needs to be reformed. Due to the size of these electoral areas, the selection process must take account of the existing profile of a potential candidate.

Candidates need a significant amount of time on the ticket to run an effective campaign. Headquarters should support candidates with ongoing market research around which to build their campaign.

It was raised by candidates that they would like more input into the European Election manifesto.

The date of the European Elections was known years in advance, but we commenced our candidate selection approximately 2 months before polling day. The Local Election campaign by candidates was already well advanced at that stage with Party literature already printed with no reference to the European Election candidates.

FINDINGS

- 71. The current candidate selection system for the European Elections is not fit for purpose.
- 72. Candidates were selected at an exceptionally late date.
- 73. 190,000 people voted for Fianna Fáil in the Local Elections but did not vote for the Party in the European Election on the same day.
- 74. There was inadequate co-ordination between the Local and European Election campaigns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 50. The Party should immediately review the selection process and implement an appropriate methodology as a matter of urgency.
- 51. Prior to selection, candidates should be able to demonstrate an ability to mount a campaign and build a team and perform effectively on national and local media.
- 52. European Election candidates should be selected at a much earlier date.
- 53. The Party should put in place a centrally co-ordinated intensive marketing campaign for candidates.
- 54. There should be much greater co-ordination between the European and Local Election campaigns, with all party literature referring to both campaigns.

Local Elections 2019

The Local Elections were a significant success for the Party. We are the largest Party in local government. 279 candidates were elected. We received 467,407 votes, representing 27% of the total vote. This was an increase of 14 seats. We also made good progress in Dublin.

Council	2019	Before Election	Seat Change
Carlow County Council	6	5	1
Cavan County Council	8	6	2
Clare County Council	13	12	1
Cork City Council	8	10	-2
Cork County Council	18	16	2
Donegal County Council	12	11	1
Dublin City Council	11	9	2
Fingal County Council	8	6	2
South Dublin County Council	8	7	1
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council	7	8	-1
Galway City Council	5	3	2
Galway County Council	15	12	3
Kerry County Council	10	10	0
Kildare County Council	12	13	-1
Kilkenny County Council	11	9	2
Laois County Council	6	7	-1
Leitrim County Council	6	6	0
Limerick City and County Council	12	12	0
Longford County Council	6	7	-1
Louth County Council	7	5	2
Mayo County Council	11	10	1
Meath County Council	12	10	2
Monaghan County Council	4	4	0
Offaly County Council	8	8	0
Roscommon County Council	6	6	0
Sligo County Council	5	7	-2
Tipperary County Council	9	11	-2
Waterford City and County Council	7	9	-2
Westmeath County Council	9	8	1
Wexford County Council	12	11	1
Wicklow County Council	7	7	0
Total	279	265	14

Fianna Fáil Local Election candidates

	Number of candidates	Number elected	% Elected
Selected at convention	337	249	74%
Added by National Constituencies Committee	78	30	38%
Total	415	279	67%

Of the 337 candidates selected at convention:

- 64 were female (19%);
- 273 were male (81%).

Of the 78 candidates added by the National Constituencies Committee:

- 24 were female (31%);
- 54 were male (69%).

Overall, 88 of all the Party's Local Election candidates were female (21%). Of the Councillors elected, 51 were female (18%).

More than 87% of candidates were in the field for longer than 3 months despite the fact that the boundary alterations were only published in June 2018.

222 of our candidates were outgoing councillors, of which 201 (91%) were re-elected. Of the other 193 candidates 78 (40%) were elected.

FINDINGS

- 75. The 2019 Local Election was a success.
- 76. Fianna Fáil is the largest Party in local government.
- 77. 74% of candidates selected at convention were elected.
- 78. 21% of candidates were female.
- 79. 87% of candidates were in the field for longer than 3 months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 55. The Party must prioritise the identification of as many candidates as possible under 30 years of age, both female and male, while balancing youth and experience, for the next Local Elections.
- 56. There should be meetings between councillors and Party spokespersons on a regular basis.
- 57. Local Election selection conventions should be held at a minimum of six months before the election date.
- 58. The Party should give greater priority to appointing Local Area Representatives, especially in areas where we have no elected Councillor.
- 59. The Party should provide training to new candidates on the basics of campaigning.

Notes:

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