

The Election in Context

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In his assessment of the 2011 election, the late Peter Mair observed that while undoubtedly it had marked ‘enormous change’, nevertheless it had done little ‘to disturb the fundamentals’.¹ The 2011 election outcome may at first blush have appeared dramatic, but, if anything, it represented a ‘conservative revolution’.² The result was cataclysmic for Fianna Fáil and the Greens and it saw further electoral gains by Sinn Féin and micro-parties and independents on the left of the spectrum, but the major electoral beneficiaries were Fine Gael and Labour. Just like in all previous elections, the baton of government was passed between the traditional parties. Relative party positions may have been seriously disrupted, but the hold of the traditional parties of government (Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour) remained intact; for the most part the political system remained unscathed. As of 2011 Mair’s view was that Ireland was ‘becoming a democracy ... in

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