

The Seanad Election: Second Chamber, Second Chance

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The backdrop to the 2016 elections to Seanad Éireann was unlike that of any previous election. The prolonged and protracted process of forming a government following elections to Dáil Éireann in March meant that the election to the 25th Seanad took place in something of a political vacuum. With no government in place and ambiguity in relation to the possibility of a government being formed, the likelihood of a newly elected Seanad lasting no more than a few days seemed at various points to be a real prospect. It was also unclear if membership of the 25th Seanad would be complete given that it is the responsibility of the incoming Taoiseach, and not the caretaker Taoiseach, to nominate 11 Seanad members (Article 18.3 of the constitution). Eventual agreement on the formation of a minority government 10 weeks after the Dáil elections led to the nomination of the remaining 11 members by the Taoiseach a further three weeks later on 27 May.

The absence of a government was not the only factor that impacted on the 25th Seanad. During the lifetime of the 24th Seanad (2011–16), plans to abolish the institution were actively pursued. In 2009, Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny had proposed abolition of the Seanad, a position that was later included in the 2011 Fine Gael general election manifesto. There

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