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# BY-ELECTIONS TO DÁIL ÉIREANN 1923–96: THE ANOMALY THAT CONFORMS

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**Abstract:** Ireland is the only country in Europe to combine a proportional representation electoral system with by-elections as a means of filling casual vacancies. However, this is the only anomalous feature of Irish by-elections; the pattern of results conforms closely to that observed in other countries. Turnout falls compared with the general election level, support for the government falls, support for minor parties rises, and the number of candidates is increasing over time. Despite the possibility that by-elections in a PR electoral system will give an undue advantage to larger parties, in practice by-elections have not distorted political representation in Ireland. The merits of by-elections as a method of filling casual vacancies are discussed.

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If the author of a book on British by-elections can deplore the lack of research on the subject when the existing literature already consists of several books and articles (Norris, 1990), any study of Irish by-elections hardly needs to be justified. Apart from the pioneering preliminary studies by Beamish and Coakley (1983) and Punnett (1987), and a brief survey by Sinnott (1995, pp. 251–4), by-elections to Dáil Éireann have gone entirely unexamined, despite the widespread media and public interest that they attract when they take place. This article will analyse voting patterns and seat changes at by-elections since the founding of the independent Irish state in the light of some comparative evidence about the fortunes of governments and major parties at by-elections.

Ireland's combination of by-elections and a proportional representation (PR) electoral system is almost unique (for details of the electoral system, see Sinnott, 1993). Most countries that employ by-elections, such as the United Kingdom, France, Australia and (in the past) New Zealand have single-member constituency systems, in which the by-election can be justified as simply a rerun of the original contest. Where PR list systems are used, casual vacancies are filled by the candidate next on the list (or next in terms of preferences received)

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of the party concerned. Apart from Ireland, Japan, whose electoral system until 1994 was based on the single non-transferable vote in multi-member constituencies, appears to be the only country to have employed by-elections in conjunction with multi-member constituencies. Malta, which employs the same electoral system as Ireland, has a different method of filling casual vacancies, whose merits we shall consider at the end of this paper.

## FREQUENCY AND CAUSES

From the establishment of the first Dáil in 1919 until 1923, no by-elections were held. The first Dáil by-election took place on 25 October 1923, and from then until the end of April 1996, a total of 113 by-elections have occurred.<sup>1</sup> Two of these (the contests in Dublin North and Leitrim–Sligo in March 1925) were exceptional in that in each constituency two deputies resigned their seats, so in all 115 seats have been filled at by-elections. Not all vacancies have been filled, since when a deputy dies or resigns not long before a general election is expected to be held, it has become common to leave the seat empty until the general election. In addition, both the civil war and the second world war were unpropitious periods for the holding of by-elections. At the time of the 1923 election 14 seats were vacant, while by the time the 1943 general election was held there were 9 vacancies, some of them caused by deaths over three years earlier.<sup>2</sup>

As Table 1 shows, the frequency of by-elections has varied over the history of the state, with peaks in the 1920s and the 1950s and a marked falling off since the beginning of the 1980s. Most by-elections have been caused by the death of an incumbent, with a little over a quarter resulting from other factors. Ten have been caused by the resignation of TDs who wished to express discontent with the policy of the party on whose label they had been elected: nine of these occurred in the mid-1920s, when a group of TDs of Cumann na nGaedheal (the precursor of Fine Gael) centred around Joseph McGrath resigned in protest at the government's handling of the 'army mutiny' in March 1924 and at its refusal to pursue a more strongly nationalist line on Northern Ireland, and the tenth was the resignation of former Fianna Fáil minister Kevin Boland in 1970. Another 22 resulted from the disqualification of TDs who have

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<sup>1</sup> The source for by-election results prior to 1944 is Gallagher (1993). For by-elections from 1944 onwards, results are officially published in the relevant issue of *Election Results and Transfer of Votes in the General Election* (Dublin: Stationery Office).

<sup>2</sup> A vacancy arising in 1944 was, though, filled by a by-election later that year. There were few complaints at the virtual suspension of by-elections during the 1939–45 'Emergency', even though by-elections continued to take place in combatant countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom.

received jail sentences (1924 and 1926) or who have been deemed not validly elected (1928), from the relinquishing of a seat by politicians elected simultaneously to two seats (1923 and 1927), from resignation of TDs due to ill-health, or from TDs resigning to pursue other careers, some of which have entailed entering offices (such as President, judge, member of the Seanad or Commissioner of the EU) that are incompatible with membership of Dáil Éireann.

**Table 1: Frequency and causes of by-elections, 1923–96**

Decade	<i>Reason for by-election</i>			Total
	Death	Politically motivated resignation	Other resignation or ineligibility	
1920–29	7	9	11	27
1930–39	9			9
1940–49	10		4	14
1950–59	20		2	22
1960–69	15			15
1970–79	13	1	1	15
1980–89	5		1	6
1990–96	4		3	7
Total	83	10	22	115
%	72.2	8.7	19.1	100.0

There have been slightly fewer Dáil by-elections pro rata than there have been by-elections in the United Kingdom over the same period. Between 1945 and 1987, there were 393 by-elections to fill vacancies in the House of Commons, whose membership varied between 625 and 650 MPs over this period (Norris, 1990, p. 13); over the same period, there were 70 by-elections to fill vacancies in the Dáil, whose size varied between 144 and 166 seats. The much smaller absolute number of by-elections in Ireland creates obvious problems for analysis, since introducing controls for more than one independent variable will often produce a disconcertingly low number of cases in some categories. It also has the consequence that by-elections, when they arise, tend to be fairly salient political events: 'by-election campaigns frequently resemble miniature general election campaigns, involving the front bench of each party' (Beamish and

Coakley, 1983, pp. 6–7). Indeed, in November 1994 the Dáil was even adjourned for a week to allow TDs to go and campaign in two by-elections in Cork!

The high number of by-elections in the 1920s, as Table 1 shows, was primarily due to factors other than death (indeed, 20 of the 32 by-elections not caused by a TD's death occurred during this decade). The new political class took some time to define itself, as some of those who had entered the fray in the early years of the new state soon found that political life simply held little appeal for them, and the uniquely high number of 21 vacancies filled at by-elections held during the span of the fourth Dáil (1923–27) was followed by the retirement of 29 outgoing deputies at the June 1927 general election (Gallagher, 1993, p. 55). Since the 1920s, the great majority of by-elections (76 out of 88, or 86 per cent) have resulted directly from the death of an incumbent, and the decline in the number of by-elections from 1980 onwards is due to a decrease in the number of deaths. This might be attributed to a pronounced (though unquantifiable) shift in deputies' priorities away from social activities and towards constituency or legislative work (part of the professionalisation of the political elite over the last two decades), and/or to an increased tendency for older TDs to stand down when they reach the veteran stage rather than try to remain in the Dáil until they die (the proportion of TDs aged 60 or more fell from 20.3 per cent in the 1948 Dáil to 8.4 per cent in the 1992 Dáil).

By-elections are not triggered automatically by the creation of a Dáil vacancy. They are held only after the Dáil has directed the Ceann Comhairle (the Speaker) to instruct the Clerk of the Dáil to issue a writ to the returning officer for the relevant constituency directing him or her to 'cause an election to be held'.<sup>3</sup> Following a convention inherited from British practice, the party of the deceased or retiring TD moves the writ (Beamish and Coakley, 1983, pp. 6–7). When a TD dies, it is conventional to observe a 'month's mind' before the writ is moved, although sometimes this convention is breached; the shortest interval between the death of a TD and the moving of the writ to fill the vacancy was a mere eight days after the death of the Wexford TD Osmond Esmonde in July 1936. Neither the law nor the constitution prescribes a limit to the time a seat may be left vacant, which gives the opportunity for a government that has majority support in the Dáil to block the holding of a by-election indefinitely. The longest intervals between the creation of a vacancy and the holding of the resultant by-election are the 521 and 470 days respectively that followed the resignations of Fianna Fáil TDs Pádraig Flynn and John O'Connell early in 1993. The by-elections were not held until June 1994, and the government's

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<sup>3</sup> *Electoral Act 1992, Section 39(2) and Fourth Schedule.*

evident intention from an early stage to postpone the by-elections for as long as possible led to an attempt by opposition deputies after a few months to speed up the moving of the writ. However, the government used its majority to defeat the idea, its chief whip explaining to a sceptical opposition that two major forthcoming bills 'must receive our full and undivided attention' and that neither the Dáil nor the people needed the 'distraction' of by-elections at such a time (*Dáil Debates* 429: 1632, 28 April 1993).

Apart from these two cases, only once have more than 300 days elapsed between the creation of a vacancy and the holding of a by-election. This was the Galway West by-election of May 1940, which arose from the death of a TD in July 1939, and the perceived complications of holding a wartime by-election meant that subsequent vacancies arising during the lifetime of the tenth Dáil were left unfilled. Such long vacancies are exceptional: 83 per cent have been filled within five months of the vacancy arising, and on average seats have lain empty for 111 days before a by-election takes place. At the other end of the scale, seven by-elections have taken place within 30 days of the creation of the vacancy. There is some tendency for governments to be less keen than opposition parties to initiate the process of holding a by-election: when the deceased or retiring deputy is a government TD, seats have lain empty for 121 days on average, compared with only 99 days when the TD whose departure created the vacancy was not a government TD. Comparable data from the few other countries to hold by-elections are not available, although in the United Kingdom a Speaker's Conference recommended that the writ for a by-election should normally be moved within three months of the vacancy arising, and a six-month delay in holding a by-election in 1962 was regarded as exceptional (Butler, 1973, pp. 4-5; Norris, 1990, p. 12). In Ireland, as in Britain, it is common to hold several by-elections on the same day when a number of vacancies occur within a short space of time.

## RESULTS OF BY-ELECTIONS 1923-96

By-elections have a straightforward rationale in countries whose electoral systems are based on single-member constituencies, as a by-election is in effect a rerun of the general election contest, held on the same terms. It thus makes sense to examine parties' gains and losses at by-elections, since these tell us something about changes in voter behaviour between a general election and a by-election. When by-elections are held in countries that use a PR electoral system, in contrast, gains and losses of seats at by-elections tell us nothing about changes in party support. If the vacancy is caused by the death or retirement of a TD representing a minor party, for example, the party is likely to be unable to

hold the seat in the by-election even if it retains its level of support. By-elections held under PR systems are open to the criticism that they are likely to discriminate against smaller parties.

Anomalous results have certainly occurred. In all, there have been 25 cases - over a fifth of the total number of by-elections - where the party the death or resignation of whose TD brought about the by-election (which we shall refer to as the vacating party) has gained votes at the by-election yet failed to hold the seat (on a further three occasions, in 1926, 1928 and 1996, the same fate befell independents). The most recent of these cases occurred in Cork City in 1979, when a Labour TD died, and although the Labour vote rose from 10 per cent at the 1977 general election to 23 per cent at the by-election, Fine Gael took the seat. Labour has been the party to suffer in 5 of these cases and the beneficiary only once; Fine Gael has been the victim on 12 occasions and the beneficiary 8 times; Fianna Fáil has made a net gain of 8 seats, being the sufferer 8 times and the beneficiary 16 times. Whether this degree of injustice, of which Labour has been the main victim, is sufficient to warrant abolishing by-elections altogether is a question to which we return in the final section of this article.

Even so, no party has significantly gained or lost from by-elections over the period 1923-96 (see Table 2), since to some extent the anomalies have evened themselves out over time. Fianna Fáil, as the largest party for all but the first nine years of that period, has recorded a net gain at by-elections of only six seats, while Fine Gael, the second largest party ever since 1932, has gained three seats. Labour has been the main loser, while minor parties and independents have lost only two seats overall. Altogether, 62 of the 115 contests (54 per cent) have produced a victory for the party or group whose TD was responsible for the vacancy, a much lower percentage than that in countries using single-member constituency electoral systems, where a change in voting patterns is needed to bring about a seat change (Norris and Feigert, 1989, p. 123). As Table 2 shows, all parties have been more likely to win by-elections when the vacancy was created by one of their own TDs than when the vacancy was caused by a TD of another party. Fianna Fáil, for example, has won 59 per cent (27 out of 46) of by-elections arising from the death or resignation of a Fianna Fáil TD, but only 36 per cent (25 out of 69) of all other by-elections. Similarly, government parties, which have won 62 of the 115 by-election seats in total, have fared better in by-elections caused by the departure of a government TD: they have won 38 of 59 such by-elections (64 per cent) compared with only 24 of the 56 by-elections where the vacancy was created by a non-government TD (43 per cent).

Table 2: By-election victories, by party of vacating TD, 1923-96

	<i>Party winning by-election</i>				Total
	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour	Others	
<i>Party of vacating TD</i>					
Fianna Fáil	27	13	1	5	46
Fine Gael	17	26	0	0	43
Labour	5	3	3	1	12
Others	3	4	1	6	14
Total	52	46	5	12	115
Net gain/loss	+6	+3	-7	-2	

Lower preferences have not usually had the effect of altering the outcome; that is, the candidate receiving the most first preferences has usually been elected, either on the first count or later. In most cases, indeed, no transfers of votes have taken place, as one candidate has achieved an overall majority on the first count. Leaving aside the two by-elections of March 1925 in which two seats were filled, and the Dublin University by-election of 1933 in which there was only one candidate, we find that in the remaining 110 cases, the first count has been decisive on 56 occasions, while the first-count leader has failed to win the seat on only 14 occasions (updated from figures in Punnett, 1987, p. 29). All but one of these 14 occasions (the exception was Donegal North-East in 1976) involved cases where the Fianna Fáil candidate led on first preferences but was subsequently overtaken by another candidate (usually of Fine Gael) due to transfers from other parties and independents (Punnett, 1987, p. 33).

Part of the reason for the fairly low impact of transfers is that by-elections have not consistently attracted a profusion of candidates. The large parties do not, as they might, run more than one candidate and invite voters to choose between them, and until recently smaller parties and independent candidates made little use of the opportunity provided by by-elections to publicise their cause. Altogether, the 115 by-election seats have been contested by 439 candidates (an average of 3.8 per seat), with most by-elections attracting either two or three candidates. Only twelve by-elections have been contested by more than five candidates, the highest being 13 in Dublin West in 1996, followed by 12 in Cork North-Central in 1994 and Wicklow in 1995. There has been a very clear



trend here, with the number of candidates per by-election rising from an average of 2.7 candidates at the 45 by-elections of the 1923–47 period to 3.5 at the 40 by-elections of 1948–69 and 6.1 candidates at the 28 by-elections held from 1970 to 1996. Apart from the 2-seat contest in Dublin North in 1925, not until 1947 was a by-election contested by as many as 5 candidates, but competition patterns have changed so much that no by-election since 1961 has had as few as 2 candidates and none since 1975 has had as few as 3. Whereas in the early years of the state small parties tended to keep out of contests that they knew they could not win, the lure of by-elections and their attendant publicity, not least the opportunity to make a free party political broadcast on television, is now such that few parties are able to resist the temptation of involvement. In Britain, likewise, the number of minor party and ‘fringe’ candidates has risen steadily from 0.5 per contest during the 1945–50 parliament to 7.6 per contest in the 1983–87 parliament (Norris, 1990, p. 179).

As well as considering party fortunes, we can also examine the impact of by-elections on the backgrounds of Dáil deputies. By-elections have been partly responsible for the strikingly high proportion of Dáil deputies who are related to other TDs (23 per cent in the parliament elected in 1992), as parties have often found it expedient to nominate a relative of a deceased or retiring TD for the ensuing by-election. Especially when the vacancy is brought about by the death of a TD, this step may help to avoid friction within the local constituency organisation and is often, perhaps mistakenly, believed likely to attract a certain sympathy vote from the electorate. In addition, if the family member was involved in the late deputy’s constituency work, he or she may already have access to that deputy’s networks and thus be well qualified to take over the former incumbent’s role. The practice of nominating a relative did not begin until the mid-1930s, when Fine Gael nominated relatives of deceased TDs in three consecutive by-elections (two in Galway and one in Wexford), though without winning any of them. The first time a party successfully nominated a relative of the departed TD at a by-election was in 1945, when Fianna Fáil’s Honor Mary Crowley retained her late husband’s seat in Kerry South. Since then, both the practice and the success of the tactic have increased. Altogether, the party of the deceased or resigning TD has nominated a relative on 35 occasions (30 per cent of the total), and this candidate has won the seat on 23 occasions.<sup>4</sup> Most commonly, the pattern has been of widows, sons or daughters being nominated to contest the by-election caused by the departure of a male TD. Increasingly, parties have become less inclined to nominate widows—the most recent nominated was Eileen Lemass in Dublin South-West in 1976, and

<sup>4</sup> In addition, in the Galway East by-election of 1964, the contest was won by the son of the deceased TD, but he stood for Fine Gael whereas his late father had represented Clann na Talmhan.

none has been successful since Eileen Desmond in Cork Mid in 1965—and more inclined to nominate daughters.

For this reason, by-elections have, in a modest way, helped to increase the number of women in the Dáil. Of the 115 seats to be filled at by-elections, the vacancies in 112 cases have been caused by the departure of a male TD, and 10 of these vacancies have been filled by women, while men have won all three by-elections caused by the deaths of women TDs, giving women a 'net gain' of seven seats. Women's capture of 10 of the 115 by-election seats (9 per cent) represents around twice the proportion of all Dáil seats they have taken during the 1922–96 period. Seven of the successful women by-election candidates have been relatives of a male TD whose death created the vacancy (four were widows and three daughters), an eighth, Myra Barry (1979), was the daughter of a sitting TD in the constituency where the vacancy arose, who had already decided to retire at the next election, and a ninth, Cecilia Keaveney (1996), was the daughter of a former TD for the constituency.

There is no reason to suppose that by-elections have led to any reduction in the quality of Dáil deputies. Quality is clearly a difficult concept to measure in this context, but if we assess it by ability to rise to the top of the political ladder, we find that TDs winning by-elections have fared at least as well as those they replace. Altogether, 24 of the vacancies have been created by the death or resignation of present or former cabinet ministers, while 21 of the by-election victors have gone on to become cabinet ministers (and in the case of 10 of the other 94 by-election winners, the verdict at this stage can only be that they have 'not yet' become cabinet ministers). Of by-election winners who were related to the TD whose departure caused the vacancy, six (Brendan Corish, Neil Blaney, Eileen Desmond, Gerry Collins, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn and Brian Cowen) became cabinet ministers while their deceased relative did not, while only one former cabinet minister (T.J. Murphy) has been replaced by a relative who did not go on to enter government. It seems that there is no justification for the occasionally voiced criticism that the nomination of relatives at by-elections is a nepotistic practice that stresses kinship at the expense of merit. The premium placed on the possession of local roots in Ireland means that by-elections are not used, as they sometimes are in Britain, to bring back into parliament heavyweight candidates who lost their seats at the previous general election (Butler, 1973, p. 5). Most by-election winners (90 out of 115, or 78 per cent), indeed, did not even stand at the previous general election.

## VOTING BEHAVIOUR AT BY-ELECTIONS

**Turnout**

The most consistent feature of voting at by-elections is that there is simply less of it than there is at general elections. Turnout (operationalised here as valid votes as a proportion of the electorate) has been on average seven percentage points lower at by-elections than in the same constituency at the preceding general election (see Table 3). Of the 112 cases, turnout rose in 33 and dropped in 79 compared with the previous general election. In two Dublin by-elections (North-West in 1945 and South-West in 1956) turnout dropped by more than 30 per cent compared with the previous general election. Indeed, while the fall in turnout varies little over time, there is a large regional variation: in Dublin by-elections the average drop has been far larger than in other parts of the country (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Turnout at by-elections, 1923–96**

	Previous general election	By-election	Change	N
All by-elections	69.8	62.9	-7.0	112
Dublin	64.7	48.3	-16.4	30
Rest of Ireland	71.7	68.2	-3.5	82

*Note:* Turnout is defined as valid votes divided by electorate. One uncontested by-election (Dublin University, 1933) is excluded, and the two 2-seat contests are counted only once.

A fall in turnout at by-elections is also characteristic of Britain, where only 23 of 359 by-elections from 1945 to 1987 witnessed an increase in turnout, and of Australia and Canada. In Britain, as in Ireland, turnout tends to fall more heavily in urban constituencies than in rural ones (Norris, 1990, pp. 203, 221; Butler, 1973, p. 7). The absence of survey data makes any explanation speculative, but it would be plausible to suppose that the absence of the question of government formation is mainly responsible for the low turnout at by-elections, given the consistent pattern that turnout is lower at other 'second-order' elections where government formation is not at stake (such as local elections and European Parliament elections) than at general elections. In addition,

abstention provides an easy option for regular supporters who wish to withhold support for their party at a non-crucial contest without actively backing another party.

### Government support

In many countries, by-elections operate to weaken the position of governments within parliaments, since governments lose many more seats than they gain. The Irish pattern is not quite the same, because, as Table 4 shows, Irish governments have actually gained a total of 3 seats on balance at by-elections. While opposition parties have taken 21 seats from government parties at by-elections, government parties have picked up 24 seats in cases where the deceased or retiring deputy belonged to an opposition party. This net gain, of course, does not of itself prove that governments in Ireland win extra support at by-elections; to a large extent it is merely an artefact of the combination of by-elections with a proportional representation electoral system, and as such reflects the fact that the government party or parties, which by definition form the largest bloc in many constituencies, have a good chance of making gains from smaller parties in single-seat contests. Governments fared much better in the first 25 years of the independent Irish state than they have done subsequently. In the period from 1922 to 1947 governments made a net gain of 6 seats, retaining 79 per cent of government vacancies and picking up 63 per cent of opposition vacancies. From 1948 to 1996, though, governments sustained a net loss of 3 seats, retaining only 52 per cent of their own vacancies and winning just 32 per cent of opposition vacancies.

Table 4: Government seat gains and losses at by-elections, 1923–96

	<i>Party winning by-election</i>		Total
	Government party	Non-government party	
Party of vacating TD			
Government party	38	21	59
Non-government party	24	32	56
Total	62	53	115
Net gain/loss	+3	-3	

When we analyse government fortunes in terms of votes rather than seats, a similar picture emerges. Over the whole period, the government party (or parties) has suffered on average a modest loss of support at by-elections (Table 5); the drop in its vote is much smaller than comparable figures for other countries. In Australia, the government vote fell by an average of 5.9 per cent at by-elections from the 1940s to the 1980s, and the corresponding figures for Canada and Britain were 5.4 per cent and 8.9 per cent (Norris, 1990, p. 219). Table 5 makes it clear that Ireland is not such a deviant case as it might at first appear, though, for once again there is a marked difference between the two time periods, and in recent times Irish governments have sustained setbacks at by-elections just like governments elsewhere.

**Table 5: Change in government support at by-elections, 1923–96**

	Previous general election	By- election	Net change	(N)
All by-elections	47.5	46.2	-1.2	(112)
1923–47	47.3	52.6	+5.3	(44)
1948–96	47.6	42.1	-5.5	(68)

*Note:* One uncontested by-election (Dublin University, 1933) is excluded, and the two 2-seat contests are counted only once.

The good performance of governments in the early years of the state has not a little to do with the small number of candidates at pre-1950s by-elections that we discussed earlier. The upshot was that by-elections were often contested by only two parties in constituencies where many more had run at the general election, and so the vote for both the government party and the main opposition party rose dramatically from the general election. A good example is the Cork East by-election of November 1924, where the governing Cumann na nGaedheal and the main opposition group, the Republicans, having won only 55 per cent of the votes at the 1923 general election, had the field to themselves at the by-election. The surge in Cumann na nGaedheal support from 32 per cent at the general election to 59 per cent at the by-election may thus give a rather misleading impression of government performance. In fact, of the four cases where a government has won over 20 per cent more of the votes in a by-election than in the preceding general election, all occurred in the 1920s, all were

contested by either two or three candidates, and two took place in August 1927 in the emotional period following the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins, Vice-President of the Executive Council.

Increasingly, the pattern in Ireland is one of a large number of candidates at by-elections, as we have seen, and a swing against the government. Since 1975, in fact, only one by-election (Donegal in 1980) has not produced a drop in government support compared with the previous general election. The largest ever drop in support for a government was recorded at the Dublin South-Central by-election of June 1994, when the government parties fell back by over 27 per cent compared with the general election nineteen months earlier. At the thirteen by-elections to have taken place in the 1980–96 period, government support dropped by 10.6 per cent on average. As might be expected, governments tend to fare worst in Dublin, the most volatile part of the country (an average loss of 11.2 per cent over the 14 by-elections held since 1948), and best in Connacht–Ulster, where voting behaviour is usually least volatile (an average gain of 1.1 per cent in the 19 post-1947 by-elections).

Surveying the 1923–96 period as a whole, it might seem that the fate of governments at by-elections depends largely upon which parties are in office at the time, for governments fare better when they do not include Fianna Fáil. Altogether, governments have on average sustained a net loss of 4.6 per cent at by-elections when Fianna Fáil is in government (61 cases) and made a net gain of 2.8 per cent when that party is in opposition (51 cases). However, this, too, is partly a result of the way the shortage of candidates at by-elections in the 1920s—the decade witnessing the highest number of by-elections—led to an apparent but rather artificial increase in support for the Cumann na nGaedheal government, which was in office from 1922 to 1932. Confining the analysis to the period from 1948 onwards, governments of all shades have tended to fall back at by-elections, though it is true that governments involving Fianna Fáil have tended to do a little worse (-6.0 per cent on average) than governments not involving that party (-4.5 per cent on average).

There are reasons for expecting the timing of a by-election to have an impact on the fortunes of the government. Given the government's control over the holding of by-elections, for example, one might anticipate that delay in holding a by-election will lead to some local resentment against the government and to a greater than usual anti-government swing, a factor often cited in explanation of the large swing against the government at the two by-elections of June 1994, where the seats were left vacant for over a year. This expectation is borne out in a modest negative Pearson correlation ( $r = -0.23$ , significant at the .05 level) between the swing to the government at by-elections and the length of time the seat has lain vacant.

Likewise, one might expect that governments become steadily less popular as time passes and that, therefore, their vote losses will be inversely related to proximity to the previous general election. Certainly, it is generally true that the swing away from the government is positively correlated with days elapsed since the last general election, but the relationship is not especially strong ( $r = 0.25$ , significant at the .01 level). The relationship between a government's performance and the length of time that has elapsed since the previous general election might not be as straightforward as this, though. While it is true that most governments tend to enjoy a 'honeymoon period' for a while after an election, and then start to lose popularity, some governments then manage to stage something of a comeback in the run-up to a general election, implying that the relationship between government popularity and time since the previous general election may not be linear. To see whether a U-curve fits the data better, we have divided by-elections into three categories: those held within a year of the previous general election (the honeymoon period), those held one to three years after the general election (the trough of popularity for many governments), and those held more than three years after the previous general election (when the imminence of a general election might concentrate minds more than in a mid-term by-election and by which time the government's measures may be paying electoral dividends). Of course, the 3-year cut-off point is arbitrary, especially as some governments have not lasted that long while others have gone on for a further two years. However, since the date of the following general election is known only in hindsight, the selection of any specific point must be arbitrary. After three years, the prospect of a new general election is heightened and, besides, the number of cases shrinks alarmingly if a later cut-off point is chosen.

The results of this analysis are shown in Table 6. As we have already seen, governments tended to do well at by-elections in the early years of the state, and while the data for the 1923-47 period correspond to a model that sees governments losing popularity steadily throughout their term of office, a model that is no doubt accurate for some governments, it would be unwise to draw too firm conclusions from these figures for reasons that we have already discussed. For the later period, the figures match the U-curve model of government popularity reasonably well, with governments sustaining smaller losses towards the beginning and the end of their time in office and larger losses in the middle. Although the relatively small number of cases outside the '1-3 years' category advises caution in interpreting these results, they correspond to a pattern observed in Britain, Canada and the USA, and support the idea that by-election

outcomes are strongly influenced by national factors rather than being decided purely by local ones (Feigert and Norris, 1990, p. 191).<sup>5</sup>

**Table 6: Government vote gain at by-elections, by time elapsed since general election, 1923-96**

	All by-elections	By-elections 1923-47	By-elections 1948-96
<i>Time since general election</i>			
Less than 1 year	+3.3 (21)	+8.6 (11)	-2.5 (10)
1-3 years	-1.9 (73)	+6.3 (26)	-6.5 (47)
3 years +	-3.8 (18)	-3.9 (7)	-3.8 (11)
All	-1.2 (112)	+5.3 (44)	-5.5 (68)

*Note:* One uncontested by-election (Dublin University, 1933) is excluded, and the two 2-seat contests are counted only once.

### Party support

Turning to the fortunes of specific parties, we shall confine our analysis to the largest two parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, since no other party has stood consistently enough, at either by-elections or in the relevant constituencies at general elections, to be worth including in the analysis. Tables 7 and 8 show that Fine Gael has, on the whole, been more successful than Fianna Fáil at by-elections. It has improved its vote by nearly five percentage points on average (from 34 per cent in the preceding general election to 39 per cent in the by-election) while Fianna Fáil's gain has been only a third of this. Moreover, while Fianna Fáil has lost votes on average at post-1947 by-elections, when competition at by-elections has been more fierce, Fine Gael has continued to make gains, albeit not on the same scale as before 1948. It should be borne in mind that Fianna Fáil has fought all but two of the by-elections held while Fine Gael has refrained from contesting on ten occasions.<sup>6</sup> Fine Gael's absence from

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the absence of regular survey data in Ireland rules out detailed time-series analysis of by-election results in conjunction with poll data on government popularity.

<sup>6</sup> The two by-elections uncontested by Fianna Fáil were Dublin County in 1926 and Dublin University in 1933; the ten uncontested by Fine Gael were Dublin University in 1933, Dublin North-West in 1945, Kerry South in 1945, Mayo South in 1945, Wexford in 1945, Cork West in 1949,



five contests in the 1949–56 period was due to a conscious decision during the era of the ‘Inter-Party’ coalition governments to stand aside in favour of the nominee of the party whose TD had died, but its absence from the fray at four of the five by-elections held in December 1945, despite some attempt at rationalisation along the lines that the people were tired of elections, was simply a result of the fact that it was unable to find candidates willing to run (Beamish and Coakley, 1983, p. 5; Whyte, 1980, p. 379). This exercise of a degree of selectivity in contesting by-elections may constitute part, though only a part, of the reason for Fine Gael’s positive record at by-elections.

While all governments suffer at by-elections, Tables 7 and 8 show that Fianna Fáil tends to feel more pain than Fine Gael. For Fianna Fáil, the relationship between being in government and by-election performance is very striking. The party does far better when contesting by-elections from opposition; in the 1948–96 period, which for reasons already discussed perhaps offers a more reliable basis for analysis than 1922–47, its performance was on average nearly eight percentage points better when it was in opposition than when it was in government.

**Table 7: Fianna Fáil performance at by-elections 1923–96**

	All by-elections	By-elections 1923–47	By-elections 1948–96
All by-elections	+1.4 (111)	+7.6 (43)	-2.5 (68)
Fianna Fáil in government	-3.9 (61)	-0.8 (16)	-5.1 (45)
Fianna Fáil in opposition	+8.0 (50)	+12.5 (27)	+2.6 (23)
Fianna Fáil vacancy	-0.8 (46)	+3.6 (10)	-2.0 (36)
Non-Fianna Fáil vacancy	+3.0 (65)	+8.8 (33)	-3.0 (32)

*Note:* The figures show the average of Fianna Fáil’s percentage gain at the by-elections compared with its performance in the preceding general election. Two by-elections not contested by Fianna Fáil are excluded.

Dublin North-West in 1952, Kerry North in 1956, Dublin North-East in 1956, and Laois-Offaly in 1956.

Table 8: Fine Gael performance at by-elections 1923–96

	All by-elections	By-elections 1923–47	By-elections 1948–96
All by-elections	+4.8 (103)	+8.4 (40)	+2.6 (63)
Fine Gael in government	+5.8 (47)	+9.4 (28)	+0.4 (19)
Fine Gael in opposition	+4.0 (56)	+6.0 (12)	+3.5 (44)
Fine Gael vacancy	+8.1 (41)	+8.8 (27)	+6.9 (14)
Non-Fine Gael vacancy	+2.6 (62)	+7.6 (13)	+1.3 (49)

*Note:* The figures show the average of Fine Gael's percentage gain at the by-elections compared with its performance in the preceding general election. Ten by-elections not contested by Fine Gael are excluded.

Fine Gael, in contrast, actually did better as a government party than as an opposition party in the earlier period, but like Fianna Fáil it now tends to do better when it is in opposition. Its average gain from opposition in the 1948–96 period is about the same as Fianna Fáil's, but it fares much better than Fianna Fáil when fighting by-elections while in government, managing to notch up a small gain on average. This may be because Fine Gael has always been in government with other parties, and may be able to deflect some of the unpopularity of government onto its coalition partners. In contrast, only four by-elections (in 1994) have taken place while Fianna Fáil has been in a coalition government; in its other spells in government, the party has had to take the full force of any anti-government sentiments.

As well as considering the record of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in competition with each other, we can also look at their joint performance. It turns out that in Ireland, as in Britain and Canada (Norris, 1990, pp. 219–20), the largest two parties are increasingly losing ground to minor parties. The joint support for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael combined rose on average by 17 per cent at the by-elections of the 1923–47 period but fell on average by 0.4 per cent at the 1948–96 by-elections. Breaking this down into shorter time periods is problematic because of the small number of by-elections in some decades, but Table 9 does clearly indicate that the main beneficiaries of government losses at by-elections

are, to a growing extent, minor parties rather than the main opposition party. This tendency was especially evident at the Dublin West by-election of April 1996, when 49.4 per cent of the first preferences went to independents or to parties not represented in the Dáil.

Table 9: Vote gain, by percentage, at by-elections of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael combined, 1923–96

Period	Average gain for FF and FG combined	N of by-elections
1920–29	+23.2	24
1930–39	+13.1	8
1940–49	+4.9	9
1950–59	-2.1	18
1960–69	+2.8	15
1970–79	-0.0	15
1980–96	-5.7	13
All by-elections	+6.2	102

N: All by-elections contested by both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

Tables 7 and 8 show that over the period 1948–96, both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have tended to fare better when the by-election arose from the death or resignation of a TD of their own party than when the vacancy was brought about by another party's TD. Over the whole period, the vacating party has done 4.2 per cent better at the by-election than it did at the previous general election (the figure refers to Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour only and is based on 99 cases). Once again, there is a big difference between the two time periods, with the vacating party's gain being much larger (8.2 per cent) in the 1923–47 period than in the 1948–96 period (1.6 per cent). One possible reason for this generally good performance by the vacating party could be some kind of sympathy vote in the aftermath of a deputy's death, with some party supporters voting for the party as a last mark of respect to a well regarded TD. This sympathy vote might be all the more pronounced when the vacating party nominates a family member of the deceased TD.

We can test this by examining the performance of the vacating party in contests brought about by the death as opposed to the resignation (or disqualification) of a deputy, and, where death is the cause, trying to assess the effect of the nomination of a close relative. Table 10 shows that over the whole period the vacating party has done no better when the vacancy is brought about by the death of a TD rather than by resignation; it does fare better in these circumstances in the 1948–96 period, but there have been only six by-elections caused by anything other than death during this period. On the other hand, when a death is the cause of a by-election, the vacating party has done slightly better when it has nominated a relative of the deceased deputy in both time periods.

**Table 10: Performance of the vacating party, by cause of vacancy, 1923–96**

	All by-elections	By-elections 1923–47	By-elections 1948–96
All by-elections	+4.2 (99)	+8.2 (39)	+1.6 (60)
Caused by death	+4.1 (74)	+8.6 (20)	+2.5 (54)
Vacating party nominates relative	+4.0 (29)	+10.4 (5)	+2.7 (24)
Vacating party doesn't nominate relative	+4.2 (45)	+8.0 (15)	+2.3 (30)
Not caused by death	+4.3 (25)	+7.6 (19)	-6.4 (6)

N: all cases where the vacating party was Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or Labour.

However, the small number of cases advises caution before concluding that political folk wisdom is vindicated in this instance. In fact, both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have on average done slightly *worse* when they have nominated a relative following the death of one of their TDs, and the apparent pattern in Table 10 of parties doing better when they nominate relatives, in both the 1923–47 period and the 1947–96 period, is due to the eight cases where the Labour Party has done this. In two of these cases (Cork West in 1949 and Laois–Offaly in 1956) the Labour candidate was opposed only by a candidate from Fianna Fáil, and in another case (Wexford in 1945) Fine Gael did not stand, so not surprisingly the Labour vote rose greatly in each instance (from 20 per cent to 63 per cent in Cork West, for example). This had more to do with competition patterns than the identity of the Labour candidate (except in as far as the party's

nomination of a son of the deceased deputy in each case was a factor in inducing the other non-Fianna Fáil parties to leave the field clear for Labour).

Another piece of political folk wisdom holds that sitting TDs of a party are often not keen to see the party's by-election candidate do well. The rationale is that since the PR-STV electoral system places candidates of a party in competition with each other as well as with candidates of other parties, it is in the interests of incumbents to ensure that their running mates pose as little electoral threat to them as possible. If the party wins a by-election, the victorious candidate then has time to establish himself or herself before the next general election and perhaps to oust one of the party's other TDs. By-election winners, indeed, do have quite a respectable electoral record. Of 108 by-election winners between 1923 and 1984, 74 were returned at the following general election as well and only 18 were defeated (the other 16 did not contest the general election). In 71 of the 92 cases where the by-election victor contested the next general election, he or she was accompanied on the ballot paper by one or more other TDs of his or her party who had been returned at the previous general election. The record shows that incumbents are right to fear the threat of by-election winners, as in 19 of these 71 cases the by-election winner has been elected at the expense of another TD of the party, compared with 17 cases where the by-election winner has been defeated while another of the party's TDs has been re-elected (and another 35 cases where the by-election winner has been re-elected without ousting an incumbent). In all, the by-election winner has won most first preferences among his or her party's TDs on 34 occasions out of these 71 and fewest on 28 occasions.

Faced with such evidence of the potential threat posed by a running mate who has won a by-election, do incumbent TDs indeed deliberately fail to mobilise their organisation at by-elections and thus help to bring about their party's defeat? Looking at the aggregate figures might suggest so, since the vacating party (Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour only) tends to fare better at by-elections when it does not already have an incumbent TD (an average gain of 6.0 per cent) than when it does (an average gain of 3.5 per cent). Analysis is complicated, though, by the very small number of cases in which there is no Fianna Fáil incumbent in a constituency and by the even smaller number in which any vacating party other than Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael does have an incumbent. If we confine the analysis to Fine Gael and, for reasons already elaborated, to the post-1947 period, we find 44 comparable cases of by-elections that occurred while the party was in opposition. In these cases, Fine Gael did slightly worse (an average gain of 2.9 per cent in 35 by-elections) in cases where it did have an incumbent TD than where there was no Fine Gael incumbent (an average gain of 5.7 per cent in 9 by-elections). The pattern is

suggestive, but no more, since, after all, it is not just incumbent TDs who might have a vested interest in seeing a by-election candidate do badly. Other aspirants for a party nomination at the next general election might also be ambivalent about the party's by-election campaign, and the range of conflicting interests within the parties is such that the possibility of less than full commitment by elements of the local party organisation is not really susceptible to measurement with the data at our disposal.

Finally, what of the consequences of by-elections?<sup>7</sup> While by-election results tend to be chewed over carefully at the time in terms of their wider significance, no Dáil by-election could be said to have changed the course of history in the way that, for example, the Newport by-election of 1922 is said to have brought down Lloyd George (Ramsden, 1973).<sup>8</sup> Even so, some by-elections have had a national impact. In October 1947, Clann na Poblachta won two by-elections due to transfers from the other opposition parties, giving the cue to those parties to use lower preferences to their mutual benefit in the general election three months later and to form the first Inter-Party government as a result. In November 1956, Fine Gael's loss of a seat to Fianna Fáil, which was then in opposition, was among the factors terminally weakening the Dáil position of the second Inter-Party government and precipitating a general election in March 1957. Labour's gain of a seat from Fianna Fáil in Dublin South-West in June 1976, an era before opinion polls were taken seriously, undoubtedly contributed to the Fine Gael-Labour government's complacency and to its lack of preparation for the Fianna Fáil challenge that was to sweep it from office in June 1977. Fianna Fáil's heavy defeats in two by-elections in Cork in November 1979, coming on top of setbacks in local and European Parliament elections earlier in the year, precipitated the early retirement as Taoiseach of Jack Lynch, himself from Cork, as his inability to secure votes for the party even in his own bailiwick undermined the confidence of many backbenchers in his electoral appeal. In 1994, Fine Gael's capture of 2 seats, together with a gain by Democratic Left, meant that the prospect of a coalition between Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left became much more viable (it had 85 of the 166 Dáil seats compared with 82 at the start of the year) when the Fianna Fáil-

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<sup>7</sup> No attempt will be made here to examine the impact of by-elections upon voting patterns in the subsequent general election (see Upton (1991) for such an analysis in England). The frequency of constituency revisions in Ireland (major revisions were carried out before the elections of 1937, 1948, 1961, 1969, 1977 and 1981) reduces the material available for analysis, and the decidedly non-uniform swing across the country at general elections, coupled with the small number of by-elections in each inter-election period, would make hazardous the task of attempting to identify a distinctive by-election effect on the vote in any constituency at a general election.

<sup>8</sup> Many nineteenth-century by-elections were significant political events; for example, three by-elections following the Parnell split in the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1891 were trials of strength between Parnell and his former party (Garvin, 1981, pp. 84-6). Moreover, Sinn Féin established the force of its challenge to the IPP at a number of by-elections in 1917 (Farrell, 1971, ch. 4).

Labour coalition collapsed at the end of the year. Although most by-elections are soon forgotten, then, some at least have had repercussions at the national level.

### ALTERNATIVES TO THE BY-ELECTION

By-elections might seem to be an anomaly in a PR electoral system. However, despite the possibility of systematic injustice at by-elections under STV, in particular the likelihood that large parties might gain systematically at the expense of smaller ones, in practice by-elections have not significantly distorted political representation in Ireland, although they have given a certain advantage to large parties, as we have seen. Whatever their potential for unfairness, there does not appear to be any better method of filling casual vacancies.

There are two main alternatives. One is to allow the party of the vacating representative to nominate a successor, and this is done at some levels of politics in Ireland.<sup>9</sup> When vacancies arise on local authorities, the council concerned has the power to co-opt a replacement; on many councils, an informal arrangement exists whereby the nominee of the party of the councillor concerned is unopposed. By-elections were ruled out as a means of filling casual vacancies in the European Parliament because of the expense of holding such contests in the large EP constituencies. From 1979 to 1984, parties were able to replace retiring or deceased MEPs with fresh nominees, but this practice attracted the unfavourable attention of the EP's credentials committee when no fewer than 11 different individuals held the 4 Labour seats at some stage during the five-year period. The position since then has been that the parties must nominate 'substitutes' at election time, and the names of these people are made available to voters. Any subsequent vacancies must be filled from the list of substitutes, the voters' election of an MEP being deemed to indicate, in some vague way, approval of the substitutes, much as voting for a list in a list PR system is held to constitute approval of all the candidates on the list. The disadvantage of this method is that it permits parties to nominate a popular candidate at the general election only for this person to stand down soon afterwards in favour of someone whom the voters might not have chosen.

The second is the 'countback' method employed in Malta, the only other country to use PR-STV to elect its national parliament.<sup>10</sup> The ballot papers are

<sup>9</sup> In a Dáil debate in 1924, William T. Cosgrave, President of the Executive Council (prime minister), seemed to suggest that he would favour the unopposed return of a candidate of the party that had previously held the seat (*Dáil Debates* 6: 1180, 20 February 1924; quoted in Beamish and Coakley, 1983, p. 7).

<sup>10</sup> Essentially the same procedure is used to fill casual vacancies in Tasmania, where the state parliament is elected by PR-STV. See Newman (1992, pp. 132-8); O'Connell (1983, p. 45).

stored after each election, and when a vacancy occurs a 'casual election' takes place based on the papers of the vacating MP.<sup>11</sup> There is a nomination process, but only those candidates who contested the general election in that constituency and who are still eligible to be candidates (a provision that excludes elected members) may be nominated. The seat is awarded to the candidate elected from the final package of votes of the vacating candidate, the count being conducted according to the regular STV rules, with the additional proviso that the 'votes' of the elected candidate must equal or exceed 'half the number of papers in the parcel of the vacating Member'.<sup>12</sup> If there are no validly nominated candidates, if none of the nominated candidates reaches the threshold stated in the previous sentence, or if a seat filled at a casual election itself subsequently becomes vacant, the seat is filled by parliament, which is obliged to nominate a replacement of the same party as the vacating MP (paragraph 22).

This method too has its drawbacks. It reinforces the reluctance of Maltese voters to award lower preferences to candidates not of their favoured party, since to do so would carry the risk that, if one of their own party's MPs were to vacate his or her seat, such transfers could help award the seat to a candidate of another party should their own party be unable to nominate a candidate for the casual election (see footnote 12). In addition, it encourages candidates to stand in several constituencies simultaneously, either (in the case of high-profile candidates) to boost the party's vote or, in the case of less well-known names, to increase their chances of picking up the crumbs when a vacancy arises. In Malta's 1992 election, seven of the 65 seats were taken by doubly-elected candidates (the figure had been nine after the 1987 election), duly triggering seven casual elections, and altogether the 143 candidates of the two main parties were responsible for 213 candidatures between them (Troisi, 1992, pp. 6-7). As with the co-option method, then, voters do not know the true range of options before them at general elections, and run the risk of finding that the candidate they voted for vacates the seat and is replaced by a candidate rejected at the general election.

Newland (1982, pp. 73-4) expresses disapproval both of this method and of by-elections and suggests various alternatives, such as co-opting the runner-up, allowing the party of the deceased or retiring representative to nominate a replacement, or even leaving the seat empty on the ground that in a multi-member constituency there remain other representatives for the constituency.

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<sup>11</sup> Details are given in Part 3 of the Thirteenth Schedule of the *General Elections Act*, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 21(4). This applies even if only one candidate is nominated. Since hardly any votes at Maltese elections are transferred between the two main parties, the Nationalist Party and Labour, this provision in effect ensures that a seat vacated by an MP of one party cannot be gained by a candidate of the other party if by chance the vacating party is unable to nominate a candidate for the casual election.



By-elections might also be opposed on the ground that they can deprive a government of a majority in parliament should by-election results go against it, as they usually do. However, despite the theoretical disadvantages of by-elections under STV, no alternative seems to represent an improvement. Under a candidate-centred and proportional method of election such as PR-STV, by-elections may be as satisfactory a method as any of filling casual vacancies.

## CONCLUSION

Although each by-election is a unique event, heavily influenced by purely local considerations and personalities, we have seen that certain clear patterns exist in the history of Irish by-elections. Turnout and support for the government of the day are lower than at general elections, support for minor parties is higher, and the number of candidates is increasing over time. In all these respects, Irish by-elections match the pattern of by-elections elsewhere and, indeed, of other 'second-order' elections (such as European Parliament elections). Although the employment of single-seat contests to fill vacancies arising in multi-member constituencies could be expected to discriminate against small parties, the record shows that the net gains made by the largest two parties at by-elections have amounted to only nine seats in 115 contests. Part of the explanation is that the large parties have suffered from the anti-government swing that characterises most by-elections—either Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael has always been in government throughout the history of the state. Fianna Fáil appears to suffer more in government than Fine Gael does; indeed, Fine Gael's vote holds up well in by-elections, even when it is in government. There is little or no evidence to support suggestions that a party can count on a significant 'sympathy vote' if it nominates a relative of a deceased TD at the resulting by-election. No alternative method of filling casual vacancies has clear advantages over the by-election.

Although the existence of by-elections in a PR electoral system is anomalous, the pattern of by-election outcomes conforms closely to that observed in other countries where such contests take place. In particular, in all countries, governments tend to fare badly at by-elections. In the light of other evidence that we are witnessing 'a continuing process of dealignment' in Irish voting behaviour (Marsh and Sinnott, 1993, p. 113), the anti-government sentiments displayed at most by-elections of the postwar period mean that we can expect by-election outcomes in future to offer little comfort to governments.

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## Appendix: By-elections to Dáil Éireann 1923-96

		<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Seat vacated by</i>	<i>Seat won by</i>	<i>Cause</i>
1	25.10.23	Dublin S	Michael Hayes (CG)	Hugh Kennedy (CG)	Doubly elected
2	3.11.23	Nat Univ	Eoin MacNeill (CG)	Patrick McGilligan (CG)	Doubly elected
3	12. 3.24	Dublin S	Philip Cosgrave (CG)	James O'Meara (CG)	Death
4	19. 3.24	Dublin Co	James Derham (CG)	Batt O'Connor (CG)	Death
5	28. 5.24	Limerick	Richard Hayes (CG)	Richard O'Connell (CG)	Resignation
6	18.11.24	Cork E	Thomas O'Mahony (CG)	Michael Noonan (CG)	Death
7	18.11.24	Dublin S	Hugh Kennedy (CG)	Seán Lemass (Rep)	Resignation
8	18.11.24	Mayo N	Henry Coyle (CG)	John Madden (Rep)	Disqualified
9	19.11.24	Cork Boro	Alfred O'Rahilly (CG)	Michael Egan (CG)	Resignation
10	20.11.24	Donegal	Peter Ward (CG)	Denis McCullough (CG)	Resignation
11	11. 3.25	Carl-Kilkny	Seán Gibbons (CG-N)	Thomas Bolger (CG)	Resignation
12	11. 3.25	Cavan	Seán Milroy (CG-N)	John O'Reilly (CG)	Resignation
13	11. 3.25	Dublin N	Francis Cahill (CG-N)	Patrick Leonard (CG)	Resignation
14	11. 3.25	"	Seán McGarry (CG-N)	Oscar Traynor (Rep)	Resignation
15	11. 3.25	Dublin S	Daniel McCarthy (CG-N)	Thomas Hennessy (CG)	Resignation
16	11. 3.25	Leit-Sligo	Thomas Carter (CG-N)	Samuel Holt (Rep)	Resignation
17	11. 3.25	"	Alex McCabe (CG-N)	Martin Roddy (CG)	Resignation
18	11. 3.25	Mayo N	Joseph McGrath (CG-N)	Michael Tierney (CG)	Resignation
19	11. 3.25	Roscommon	Henry Finlay (CG-N)	Martin Conlon (CG)	Resignation
20	18. 2.26	Dublin Co	Darrell Figgis (Ind)	William Norton (Lab)	Death
21	18. 2.26	Laois-Off	John McGuinness (Rep)	James Dwyer (CG)	Disqualified
22	24. 8.27	Dublin S	Const Markievicz (FF)	Thomas Hennessy (CG)	Death
23	24. 8.27	Dublin Co	Kevin O'Higgins (CG)	Gearóid O'Sullivan (CG)	Death
24	3.11.27	Carl-Kilkny	Wm T. Cosgrave (CG)	Denis Gorey (CG)	Doubly elected
25	3. 4.28	Dublin N	James Larkin (IWL)	Vincent Rice (CG)	Disqualified
26	14. 3.29	Dublin N	Alfie Byrne (Ind)	Thomas O'Higgins (CG)	Resignation
27	7. 6.29	Leit-Sligo	Samuel Holt (FF)	Seán MacEoin (CG)	Death
28	13. 6.30	Long-WM	James Killane (FF)	James Geoghegan (FF)	Death
29	9.12.30	Dublin Co	Bryan Cooper (CG)	Thomas Finlay (CG)	Death
30	29. 6.31	Kildare	Hugh Colohan (Lab)	Thomas Harris (FF)	Death
31	13.10.33	Dub Univ	Sir James Craig (Ind)	Robert Rowlette (Ind)	Death
32	17. 6.35	Dublin Co	Batt O'Connor (FG)	Cecil Lavery (FG)	Death
33	19. 6.35	Galway	Martin McDonogh (FG)	Eamon Corbett (FF)	Death
34	13. 8.36	Galway	Patrick Hogan (FG)	Martin Neilan (FF)	Death
35	17. 8.36	Wexford	Osmond Esmonde (FG)	Denis Allen (FF)	Death
36	6. 6.39	Dublin S	James Beckett (FG)	John McCann (FF)	Death
37	30. 5.40	Galway W	Seán Tubridy (FF)	John J. Keane (FF)	Death
38	10.11.44	Kerry S	Fionán Lynch (FG)	Donal O'Donoghue (FF)	Resignation
39	4.12.45	Clare	Patrick Burke (FG)	Patrick Shanahan (FF)	Death
40	4.12.45	Dub NW	Seán T. O'Kelly (FF)	Vivion de Valera (FF)	Resignation
41	4.12.45	Kerry S	Fred Hugh Crowley (FF)	Honor Mary Crowley (FF)	Death
42	4.12.45	Mayo S	Michael Cleary (FF)	Bernard Commons (CT)	Resignation
43	4.12.45	Wexford	Richard Corish (Lab)	Brendan Corish (Lab)	Death
44	14. 6.46	Cork Boro	William Dwyer (Ind)	Pa McGrath (FF)	Resignation
45	29.10.47	Dublin Co	Patrick Fogarty (FF)	Seán MacBride (CP)	Death
46	29.10.47	Tipperary	William O'Donnell (CT)	Patrick Kinane (CP)	Death
47	29.10.47	Waterford	Michael Morrissey (FF)	John Ormonde (FF)	Death
48	7.12.48	Donegal E	Neal Blaney (FF)	Neil Blaney (FF)	Death
49	15. 6.49	Cork W	T. J. Murphy (Lab)	William Murphy (Lab)	Death
50	16.11.49	Donegal W	Brian Brady (FF)	Patrick O'Donnell (FG)	Death
51	26. 6.52	Limerick E	Dan Bourke (FF)	John Carew (FG)	Death
52	26. 6.52	Mayo N	Patrick Rutledge (FF)	Phelim Calleary (FF)	Death
53	26. 6.52	Waterford	Bridget Redmond (FG)	William Kenneally (FF)	Death

		<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Seat vacated by</i>	<i>Seat won by</i>	<i>Cause</i>
54	12.11.52	Dub NW	Alfie Byrne jnr (Ind)	Thomas Byrne (Ind)	Death
55	18. 6.53	Cork E	Seán Keane (Lab)	Richard Barry (FG)	Death
56	18. 6.53	Wicklow	Tom Brennan (FF)	Mark Deering (FG)	Death
57	21. 8.53	Galway S	Frank Fahy (FF)	Robert Lahiffe (FF)	Death
58	3. 3.54	Cork City	Thomas O'Higgins (FG)	Stephen D. Barrett (FG)	Death
59	3. 3.54	Louth	James Coburn (FG)	George Coburn (FG)	Death
60	13.12.55	Limerick W	David Madden (FG)	Michael Colbert (FF)	Death
61	29. 2.56	Kerry N	Johnny Connor (CP)	Kathleen Connor (CP)	Death
62	30. 4.56	Dublin NE	Alfie Byrne snr (Ind)	Patrick Byrne (Ind)	Death
63	30. 4.56	Laois-Off	William Davin (Lab)	Kieran Egan (FF)	Death
64	2. 8.56	Cork City	Pa McGrath (FF)	John Galvin (FF)	Death
65	14.11.56	Carl-Kilkny	Thomas Walsh (FF)	Martin Medlar (FF)	Death
66	14.11.56	Dublin SW	Peadar S. Doyle (FG)	Noel Lemass (FF)	Death
67	14.11.57	Dublin NC	Colm Gallagher (FF)	Frank Sherwin (Ind)	Death
68	30. 5.58	Galway S	Patrick Beegan (FF)	Anthony Millar (FF)	Death
69	25. 6.58	Dublin SC	John Murphy (Ind)	Patrick Cummins (FF)	Resignation
70	22. 7.59	Clare	Eamon de Valera (FF)	Seán O Ceallaigh (FF)	Resignation
71	22. 7.59	Dublin SW	Bernard Butler (FF)	Rchie Ryan (FG)	Death
72	22. 7.59	Meath	James Griffin (FF)	Henry Johnston (FF)	Death
73	23. 6.60	Carl-Kilkny	Joseph Hughes (FG)	Patrick Teehan (FF)	Death
74	1. 3.61	Sligo-Leit	Stephen Flynn (FF)	Joseph McLoughlin (FG)	Death
75	30. 5.63	Dublin NE	Jack Belton (FG)	Paddy Belton (FG)	Death
76	19. 2.64	Cork City	John Galvin (FF)	Sheila Galvin (FF)	Death
77	19. 2.64	Kildare	William Norton (Lab)	Terence Boylan (FF)	Death
78	8. 7.64	Roscommon	James Burke (FG)	Joan Burke (FG)	Death
79	3.12.64	Galway E	Michael Donnellan (CT)	John Donnellan (FG)	Death
80	10. 3.65	Cork Mid	Dan Desmond (Lab)	Eileen Desmond (Lab)	Death
81	7.12.66	Kerry S	Honor Crowley (FF)	John O'Leary (FF)	Death
82	7.12.66	Waterford	Thaddeus Lynch (FG)	Patrick Browne (FF)	Death
83	9.11.67	Cork City	Seán Casey (Lab)	Seán French (FF)	Death
84	9.11.67	Limerick W	James Collins (FF)	Gerry Collins (FF)	Death
85	14. 3.68	Clare	William Murphy (FG)	Sylvester Barrett (FF)	Death
86	14. 3.68	Wicklow	James Everett (Lab)	Godfrey Timmins (FG)	Death
87	22. 5.68	Limerick E	Donogh O'Malley (FF)	Des O'Malley (FF)	Death
88	4. 3.70	Dublin SW	Seán Dunne (Lab)	Seán Sherwin (FF)	Death
89	14. 4.70	Kildare	Gerard Sweetman (FG)	Patrick Malone (FG)	Death
90	14. 4.70	Long-WM	Patrick Lenihan (FF)	Patrick Cooney (FG)	Death
91	2.12.70	Dongl-Leit	Patrick O'Donnell (FG)	Patrick Delap (FF)	Death
92	2.12.70	Dub Co S	Kevin Boland (FF-Ind)	Larry MacMahon (FG)	Resignation
93	2. 8.72	Cork Mid	Paddy Forde (FF)	Gene Fitzgerald (FF)	Death
94	28.11.73	Monaghan	Erskine Childers (FF)	Brendan Toal (FG)	Resignation
95	14.11.74	Cork NE	Liam Ahern (FF)	Seán Brosnan (FF)	Death
96	5. 3.75	Galway NE	Michael Kitt (FF)	Michael Kitt (FF)	Death
97	5. 3.75	Galway W	John Geoghegan (FF)	Máire Geoghn-Quinn (FF)	Death
98	13.11.75	Mayo W	Henry Kenny (FG)	Enda Kenny (FG)	Death
99	10. 6.76	Dongl NE	Liam Cunningham (FF)	Patrick Keaveney (Ind)	Death
100	10. 6.76	Dublin SW	Noel Lemass (FF)	Brendan Halligan (Lab)	Death
101	7.11.79	Cork City	Pat Kerrigan (Lab)	Liam Burke (FG)	Death
102	7.11.79	Cork NE	Seán Brosnan (FF)	Myra Barry (FG)	Death
103	6.11.80	Donegal	Joe Brennan (FF)	Clement Coughlan (FF)	Death
104	25. 5.82	Dublin W	Dick Burke (FG)	Liam Skelly (FG)	Resignation
105	20. 7.82	Galway E	Johnny Callanan (FF)	Noel Treacy (FF)	Death
106	13. 5.83	Dongl SW	Clement Coughlan (FF)	Cathal Coughlan (FF)	Death
107	23.11.83	Dub Central	George Colley (FF)	Tom Leonard (FF)	Death
108	14. 6.84	Laois-Off	Ber Cowen (FF)	Brian Cowen (FF)	Death

		<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Seat vacated by</i>	<i>Seat won by</i>	<i>Cause</i>
109	9. 6.94	Dublin SC	John O'Connell (FF)	Eric Byrne (DL)	Resignation
110	9. 6.94	Mayo W	Pádraig Flynn (FF)	Michael Ring (FG)	Resignation
111	10.11.94	Cork NC	Gerry O'Sullivan (Lab)	Kathleen Lynch (DL)	Death
112	10.11.94	Cork SC	Pat Cox (PD-Ind)	Hugh Coveney (FG)	Resignation
113	29. 6.95	Wicklow	Johnny Fox (Ind)	Mildred Fox (Ind)	Death
114	2. 4.96	Dongl NE	Neil Blaney (Ind)	Cecilia Keaveney (FF)	Death
115	2. 4.96	Dublin W	Brian Lenihan (FF)	Brian Lenihan (FF)	Death

**Abbreviations of party names:**

FF	Fianna Fáil
FG	Fine Gael
Lab	Labour
CG	Cumann na nGaedheal
Rep	Republicans
IWC	Irish Workers League
CT	Clann na Talmhan
CP	Clann na Poblachta
DL	Democratic Left
PD	Progressive Democrats
Ind	Independents