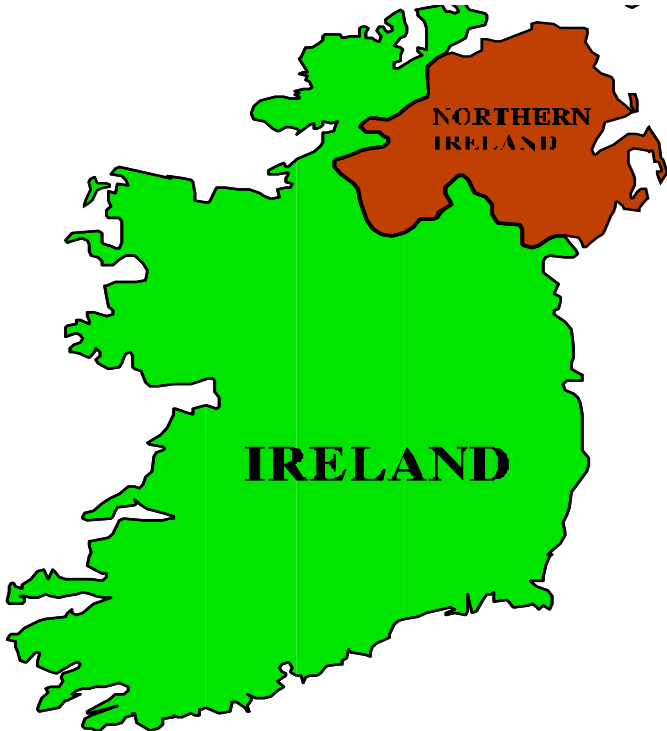


IRELAND'S DEMOCRACY



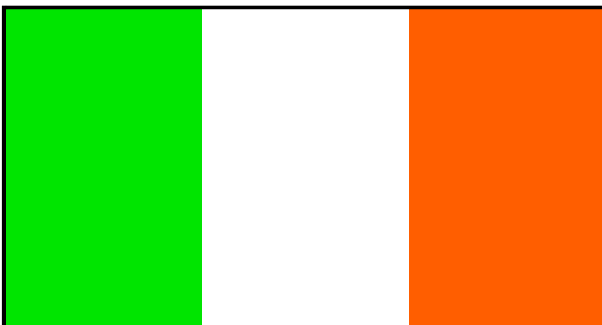
DEMOCRACY

In Ireland we live in a democracy. Democracy means “rule by the people” – the people decide who is to run the country. Abraham Lincoln, a famous American president defined democracy as “government of the people, by the people and for the people”.



THE CONSTITUTION

When a new state is brought about, one of its first duties is to draw up a constitution. A constitution is like a set of laws that determine how the country is to be ruled. The government must abide by these laws. The people can change or amend the constitution by a vote known as a referendum. The Irish constitution was drawn up in 1937 by Eamon De Valera. It was approved by the Dáil, proposed to the Irish people and accepted by them.



Web Link: [The Constitution](#)

THE PRESIDENT

Article 12 of the Constitution provides for a president for the country. Uachtarán na hÉireann is elected by a direct vote of the people. Every citizen over 35 years of age is eligible for the office. The president's term of office is seven years, although he/she may be re-elected once. The official residence of the president is Áras an Uachtaráin in the Phoenix Park, Dublin. An tUachtarán is our head of state and represents us when acting in an official capacity. As citizens of this country, we owe our president every respect.

Web Link: [Uachtarán na hÉireann](#)

AN tOIREACHTAS

Our parliament is known as “An tOireachtas”. It consists of the President and two houses - Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann. The president and the Dáil are elected by direct vote of the people, whereas the Seanad is not. The Dáil and the Seanad meet at Leinster House, Dublin. The first Dáil met in the Mansion House, Dublin on January 21st, 1919. The Mansion House is now the official residence of the Lord Mayor of Dublin.

Web Link:

[Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

AN DÁIL

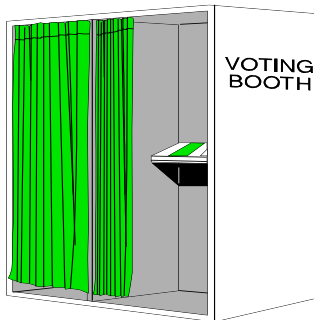
Dáil Éireann is the more powerful and democratic of the two houses. It has 160 members called “Teachtaí Dála” (TDs) elected in 39 different constituencies. Every citizen of Ireland over 21 years of age who is not disqualified by the Constitution or by law is eligible to be elected to the Dáil. Every citizen over 18 years of age is eligible to vote for TDs in a General Election. TDs are paid and they attend meetings of Dáil Éireann that are held on about 90 days of the year. They discuss the problems of the country and pass laws to try to solve these problems.

AN SEANAD

Seanad Éireann has 60 members. It is less democratic than the Dáil because its members are not elected by the votes of all the people. 11 are nominated by An Taoiseach; 6 elected by the graduates of the universities and 43 elected by the TDs, outgoing senators and members of the Local Authorities. The Seanad acts as an advisory body to the Dáil.

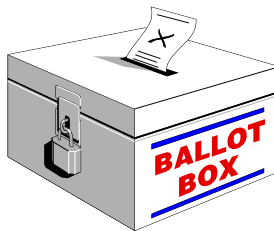
ELECTIONS

As part of our democracy, a general election must be held at least every five years. For the purposes of a general election, the country is divided into areas, called **constituencies**. At present there are 39 constituencies in the country, 11 of those are in Dublin. The level of population in an area determines the size of constituencies. Constituencies may elect three, four or five people in an election.



VOTING

Every Irish citizen who is over 18 years of age has the right to vote in an election. On Polling Day, a person goes to a polling booth or polling station to cast their vote. If their name is on the Electoral Register they are given a ballot paper. Voting takes place by secret ballot. The person marks their ballot paper 1, 2, 3 etc. in order of their choice. In Ireland, a system called proportional representation determines which candidate is elected. This means that the candidate who receives the most votes does not necessarily win a seat in the election. A candidate must reach a quota to be elected.



THE GOVERNMENT

Article 28 of the constitution says that the **government** shall consist of not less than seven and not more than fifteen members.

The government is the group of people who rule the country and make new laws.

An **Taoiseach** is the leader of the government and An **Tánaiste** is the deputy leader of the government. An Taoiseach nominates a team of **ministers** who have responsibility for different areas of the running of the country.

Web Link: [The Irish State](#)

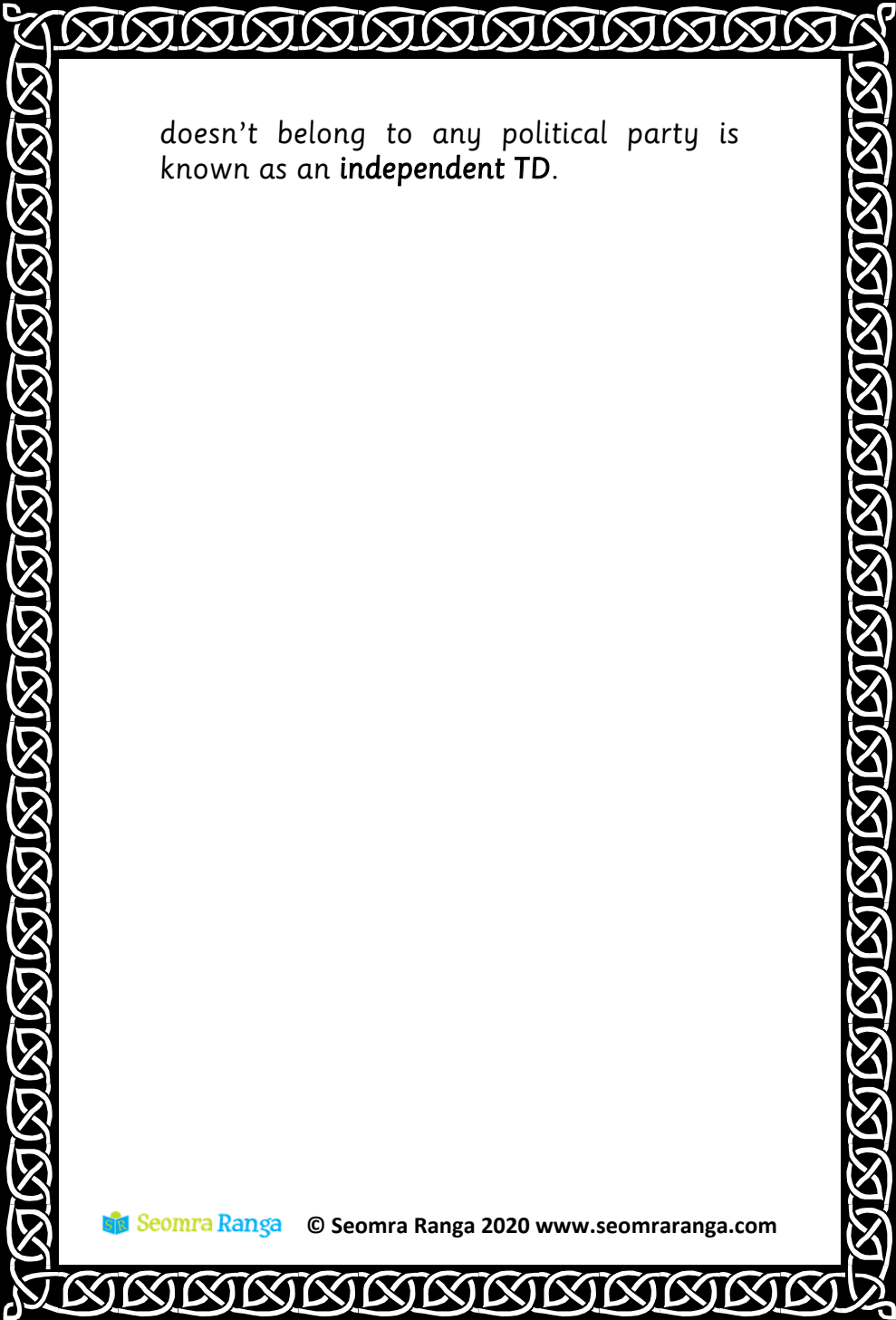
POLITICAL PARTIES

At present there are five main political parties in Ireland. They are:

POLITICAL PARTY	LEADER
Fianna Fáil	Micheál Martin
Fine Gael	Leo Varadkar
Labour	Brendan Howlin
Green Party	Eamon Ryan
Sinn Féin	Mary-Lou McDonald

A party is made up of people who share the same ideas on how the country should be governed. The plans they agree upon are called their **policies**. Whichever party has the most TDs after an election decides to form a government.

If a political party has not got enough TDs to form a government on their own, they may join up with another party or parties to form a **coalition** government. The rest of the TDs become the **opposition**. A TD who



doesn't belong to any political party is known as an independent TD.

VOCABULARY

election	ministers
constitution	Teachtaí Dála
government	parliament
Dáil	An tOireachtas
Seanad	political party
Coalition	opposition
Leinster House	democracy
Electoral Register	referendum
ballot paper	Uachtarán
secret ballot	citizen
ballot box	cast a vote
constituencies	candidate
proportional representation	polling booth / station
Taoiseach	quota
Tánaiste	policies

Foclóir

toghchán	seanadóir
olltoghchán	Aire
vótaí	Taoiseach
cárta vótála	Tánaiste
Teachtaí Dála	iarrthóir
póstaeir	rialtas
comhrialtas	Oireachtas
daonlathas	polaiteoir

Web Links

Fianna Fáil	www.fiannafail.ie
Fine Gael	www.finegael.ie
Labour Party	www.labour.ie
Green Party	www.greenparty.ie
Sinn Féin	www.sinnfein.ie

IRELAND'S DEMOCRACY 1

1. What does the word “democracy” mean?
2. How did Abraham Lincoln define democracy?
3. Who established Ireland’s constitution?
4. Who is eligible to become a President of Ireland?
5. Who was the first President of Ireland?
6. Who is the present President of Ireland?
7. Where is the official residence of the President of Ireland?
8. What does “An tOireachtas” consist of?
9. Where was the first Dáil held?
10. What is that building used for at present?

IRELAND'S DEMOCRACY 2

1. What do the letters “T.D.” stand for?
2. How many T.D.’s are elected to the Dáil?
3. What is the name of the upper house of the Oireachtas?
4. What is the role of the Seanad?
5. How often is a general election held in Ireland?
6. What does the word “constituency” mean?
7. How many constituencies are there in the country?
8. Who has the right to vote in a General Election in Ireland?
9. What is meant by the term “secret ballot”?
10. What is the name given to the system of the counting of votes in this country?

IRELAND'S DEMOCRACY 3

1. How many members may there be in a government?
2. What is the leader of the government called?
3. What is the deputy leader of the government called?
4. What is meant by the term “political party”?
5. What is the name given when two or more parties form a government?
6. Who is the present Taoiseach?
7. Who is the present Tánaiste?
8. Who is the leader of the Fine Gael party?
9. Who was the first woman to become the leader of a political party in Ireland?
10. Name the main political parties in this country.