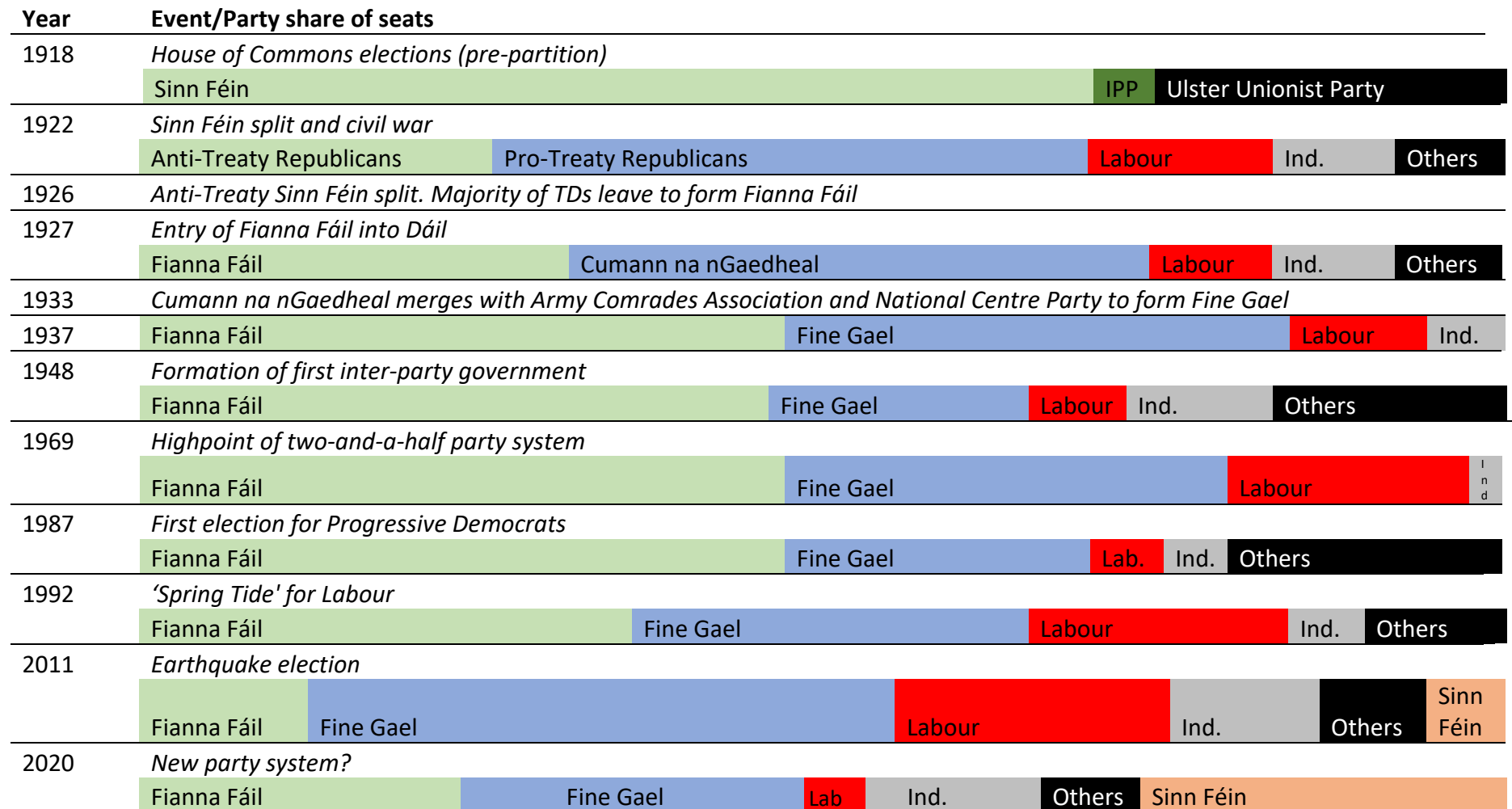


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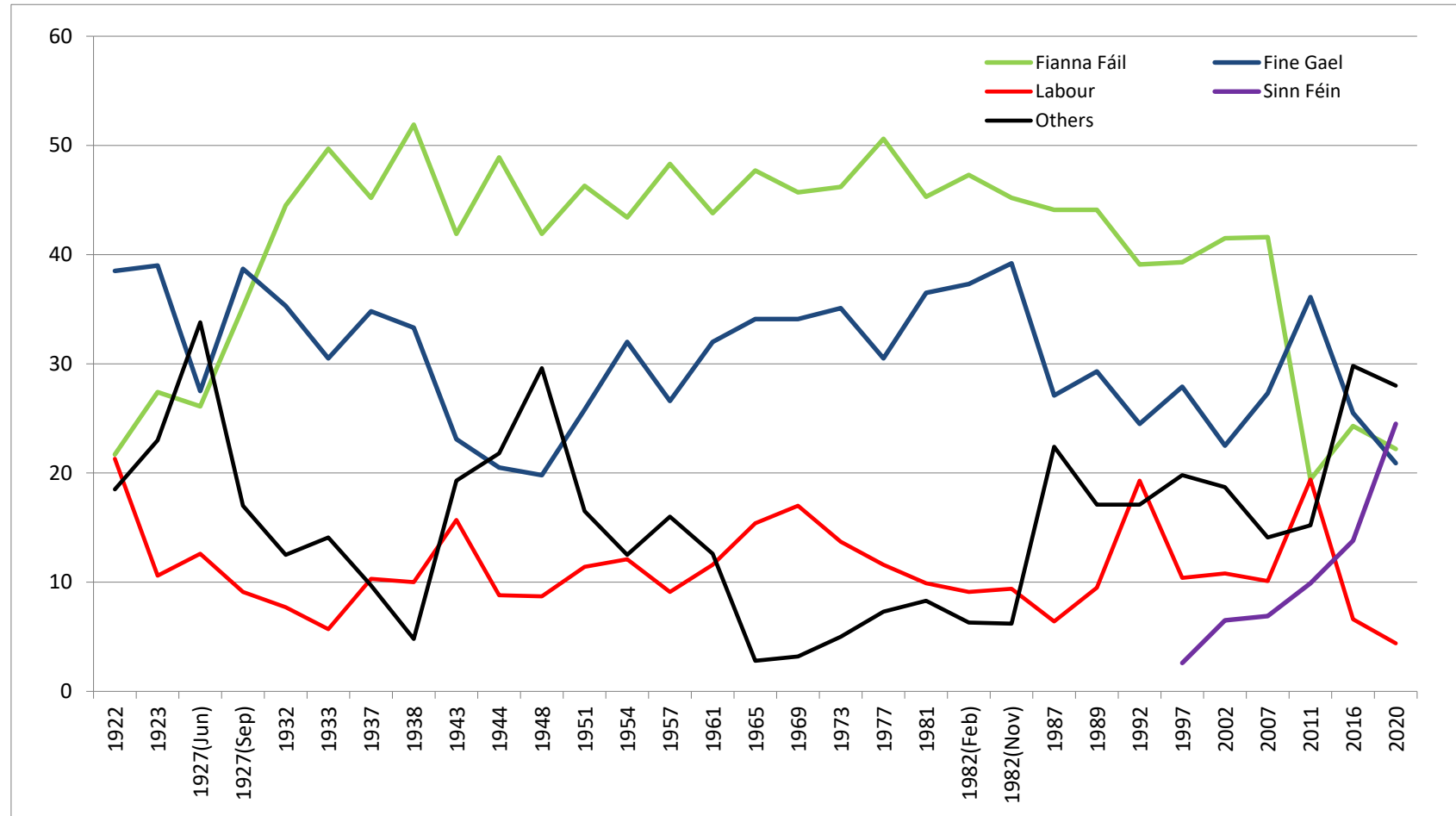
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Figure 5.1 Evolution of Irish party system



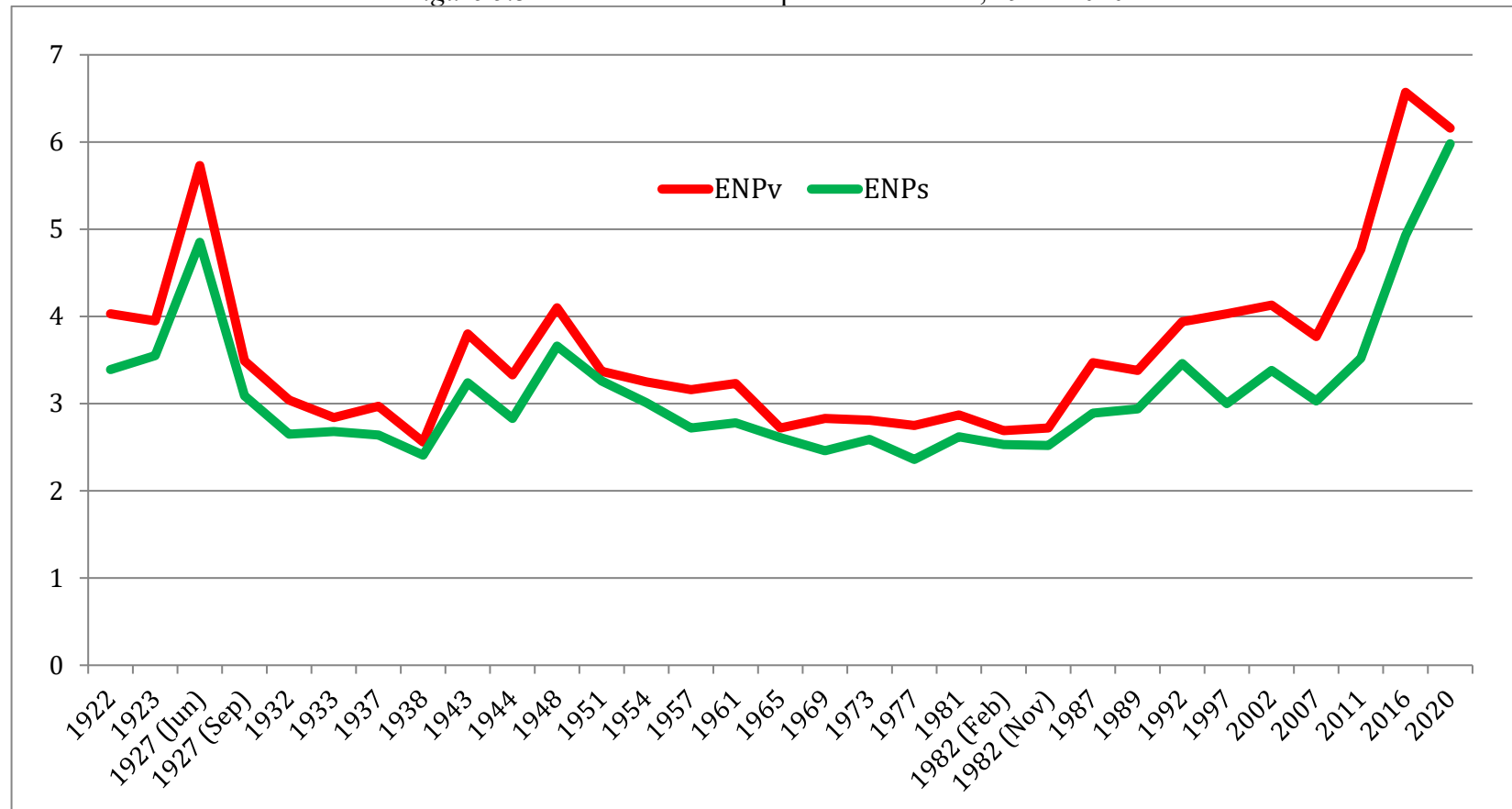
Note: Size of party boxes is in proportion to party strength in parliament

Figure 5.2 Electoral support (% vote) for Irish parties, 1922–2020



Source: Calculated from Appendix 2b.

Figure 5.3 Effective number of parties in Ireland, 1922–2020



Source: Gallagher, Michael, 2017. Election indices dataset at

https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/people/michael_gallagher/ElSystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf, accessed 11 November 2022.

Note: ENPv denotes the effective number of parties at the electoral level, ENPs at the parliamentary level.

Box 5.1 The role of independents

Since 1990, as the party system has been fragmenting, support for non-party actors (independents) has been steadily increasing. They now have a significant presence in the Dáil, culminating in the appointment of four independents as cabinet ministers (including one ‘super-junior’) and two as ministers of state following the 2016 election. The proliferation of independents has provoked some debate about their normative value, particularly in a parliamentary democracy, where it is believed that disciplined parties are essential to its functioning and effectiveness (Weeks, 2017: 218–23).

Those against independents argue that:

- They are populist free-riders, who oppose everything and avoid the responsibility of government.
- They cause instability because of their failure to follow a whip. This is especially to the fore when a minority government is dependent on independents’ support for survival.
- The presence of independents makes the formation of government more difficult as it results in a more fragmented political landscape.
- They demand patronage, or ‘pork-barrel’ constituency projects in return for their support. This skews the allocation of national resources, without regard to priorities and needs.
- This patronage tends to come in the form of secret deals, which are neither accountable nor transparent.

Those in favour of independents say that:

- Parties have been more likely to bring down governments than independents. In most cases where independents' votes are needed by minority administrations, they provide consistent support in parliament. The mean length of such governments is almost three years, slightly less than majority administrations, but not short by comparative standards.
- It can often be easier for parties to form a government with independents than with minor parties, who can be more ideologically resistant to the compromise necessary for coalition.
- Free of the shackles of a whip, independents are free to speak their own mind, and are not simply voting fodder. Voters demand greater transparency and accountability from their politicians, qualities that are lessened by the presence of a whip.
- While independents do demand largesse for their constituencies, they are being responsive to the demands of their constituents, and are replicating the behaviour of almost all other members of parliament. The amount of largesse independents receive is also most likely exaggerated, and can often pale into significance to that which government ministers attract for their local constituency.
- Independents are not the only individuals in politics to negotiate secret deals, as it is never known what rebellious backbench TDs or ministers demand in return for their support to a party leader. The secretive nature of these deals ensures that governments can limit what they grant independents. In contrast, when such deals have been read into the parliamentary record, as was the case for the 'Gregory Deal', negotiated by independent Tony Gregory in 1982, their detail can be substantial. At the time, this was estimated to cost more than £200 million, most of which was not delivered, as the government lasted just nine months.

Table 5.1 Party membership in Ireland, 1985–2020

Year	Fianna Fáil	Fine Gael	Labour	Progressive Democrats	Greens	Workers' Party	Sinn Féin	Democratic Left	Total
1985	80,000	40,000	6,200			3,000			129,200
1990	75,000	20,000	7,500	6,000	1,200	2,800	3,000		115,500
1995	70,000	20,000	7,000	8,000	1,000	800	3,000	1,400	111,200
2000	50,000	23,500	5,719	2,800					82,019
2004	55,000	34,219							89,219
2008	65,000	35,000	7,500	4,000	2,000		5,000		118,500
2014	20,000	35,000	5,606		800		8,054		69,460
2020	20,000	15,000	3,400		2,336*		15,000		55,736

Source: Data yearbooks of *Irish Political Studies* and previous editions of *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*.

*Does not include 598 members in Northern Ireland

Note: Figures are provided at five yearly intervals where possible.

Table 5.2 Income of political parties in Ireland, 2020/21 (€)

Party	Exchequer funding	Leader's allowance	Parliamentary staff	Fundraising	Membership fees	Donations	Other income	Total
Fine Gael	1,350,251	1,629,776	1,310,047	1,032,643	415,942	10,112	36015	5,784,786
Fianna Fáil	1,427,140	1,798,390	1,374,359	507,436	237,175	12,623	12,522	5,369,644
Labour	383,436	609,016	346,131		116,175	49,145	35,921	1,539,824
Sinn Féin	1,565,044	2,027,231	1,552,211	101,473	128,488	90,809	34,250	5,499,506
PBP/Solidarity	281,248	322,645	172,583		9,984	2,393	8,050	796,904
Green Party	545,150	667,799	116,809	8,260	55,404	82,688	49,654	1,525,764
Social Democrats	297,122	387,175	153,108	12,255	35,592	4,485		889,737
Aontú		64,529	24,893		15,649	19,779	73,646	198,496
Total	5,849,391	7,506,561	5,050,141	1,662,067	1,014,409	272,034	250,058	21,604,661

Source: Standards in Public Office Commission (2021, 2022a, 2022b).

Note: Parliamentary staff refers to value of staff allocated to parties in parliament. Totals may not exactly match due to rounding. Independent TDs received a total of €705,461 and Independent Senators €189,878 under the Parliamentary Activities Allowance.

Websites

www.electionsireland.org

Contains details of election results dating back to 1922.

www.sipo.gov.ie/en/

Site of the Standards in Public Office Commission, with details about the funding of political parties.

<https://irishelectionliterature.com/>

Contains scanned Irish election literature

<https://www.politicalpartydb.org/>

Multi-national database about political party organisations

www.partyfacts.org

Database of over 4,000 political parties

<https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>

Manifesto Project with content analysis of party manifestos back to 1945

<https://www.v-dem.net/data/v-party-dataset/>

Varieties of Party Identity and Organisation dataset with policy positions and organisational structures of parties.