



# General Election Opinion Poll

March 2006

Prepared for

**THE SUNDAY BUSINESS POST**

RESEARCH EVALUATION DIRECTION **CLARITY**

## **Must be Included**



**RED C interviewed a random sample of 1002 adults aged 18+ by telephone between the 20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2006. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results weighted to the profile of all adults.**



## **SUNDAY BUSINESS POST – 25<sup>th</sup> March Opinion Poll**

### **Concerns on crime damages Fianna Fail support**

It looks as if the budget honeymoon is well and truly over for Fianna Fail as we move further into 2006. With the election just over a year away at most, the latest Sunday Business Post/RED C tracking poll sees Fianna Fail support slump back to a level recorded before the budget of 33% and appears to be on a downward trend month on month so far in 2006.

The same poll sees Fine Gael stabilise its share of the first preference vote at 25% for the second month running, which will please party strategists who may have been somewhat worried by the fall in support seen in January. The party appears to have made a significant step over the past year in managing to hold on to a more regular mid twenty's poll rating, while the gap between Fine Gael and Fianna Fail first preference support is even closer among those who will definitely go and vote.

The results of this most recent in our series of monthly tracking polls, reflect the electorates change in attitudes following a month where the news has been dominated by both the riots in Dublin at the stalled "Love Ulster" march and also a significant focus on crime in general. There has been a succession of shootings reported in the last month, and the government, and in particular Michael McDowell, has been attacked for their record on fighting crime, while the governments solution of a Garda Reserve has been vocally opposed by Garda Síochána representatives.

Perhaps the riots and the apparent annoyance among the public that the march was allowed to go ahead, is one reason why support for Sinn Fein sees its share of the vote at 11% in this poll, the highest recorded since the Sunday Business Post/RED C polls started.



At the same time it would appear that being bizarrely attacked as the perpetrator of the riots has done a world of good for John Gormley and the Green party, who see their support rise again in this poll to 7% of first share preference. Historically Green Party support reacts very quickly when the party does get good media coverage. This was seen in January before the Dail returned and again this month. During March the party has had significant coverage in the media on the Bush stopover protests in Shannon, the Dail attack by Michael McDowell on John Gormley suggesting the rioters were of “his type of people”, and also the coverage they have received ahead of the parties annual convention this weekend.

Disappointingly for the Greens, when we analyse the poll by those most likely to vote the parties share of first preference vote does fall back to 6%, and this analysis also impacts on Sinn Fein who see their share fall back to 10%. This suggest that their increase in support is somewhat based in those more apathetic voters who perhaps cannot be relied on to come out and vote on Election Day. The challenge for both parties is to do maximise turnout among these possible supporters between now and the election, by persuading them that their vote is worthwhile.

The Labour Party will be very disappointed with their results from this poll, with their support falling to just 11%, the same as Sinn Fein, and the lowest level of support seen in the Sunday Business Post/RED C tracking surveys. While this appears to be a new low point for the party, it is interesting to see that this downward trend is not apparent when we strip out the more apathetic voters and only look at those very likely to vote, among whom their support appears to be more secure and steady at 12% for the last four months.

Perhaps surprisingly the PD's do not appear to have been impacted by the headlines generated by Michael McDowell in recent weeks, with their support maintained at 4% in March after a rise last month. It would appear that there are many who are happy to see Mr McDowell continue with his approach in the Dail.



## **Party support by Region**

Because we are now conducting polls every month this also gives us the opportunity to look at some subgroups in the poll data more closely by rolling the results of polls together. By rolling the data from the polls conducted in January, February and March together we have a significant base to look at voting intentions by region, and this makes interesting reading.

Fianna Fail support is significantly weaker in Dublin where they manage to achieve just 31% share of vote, and this is certainly where the party needs its big hitters for the election, but Fine Gael do not capitalise on this as they also receive a much lower share of the vote at 17%.

The parties that gain in Dublin are the Labour party with 15% first preference share 3% above their national share. Sinn Fein, who reach 12% of support in Dublin which is 2% above their national share, and the Green Party who take a very high 12% share of the first preference vote, 5% above the national share in the first three months of the year.

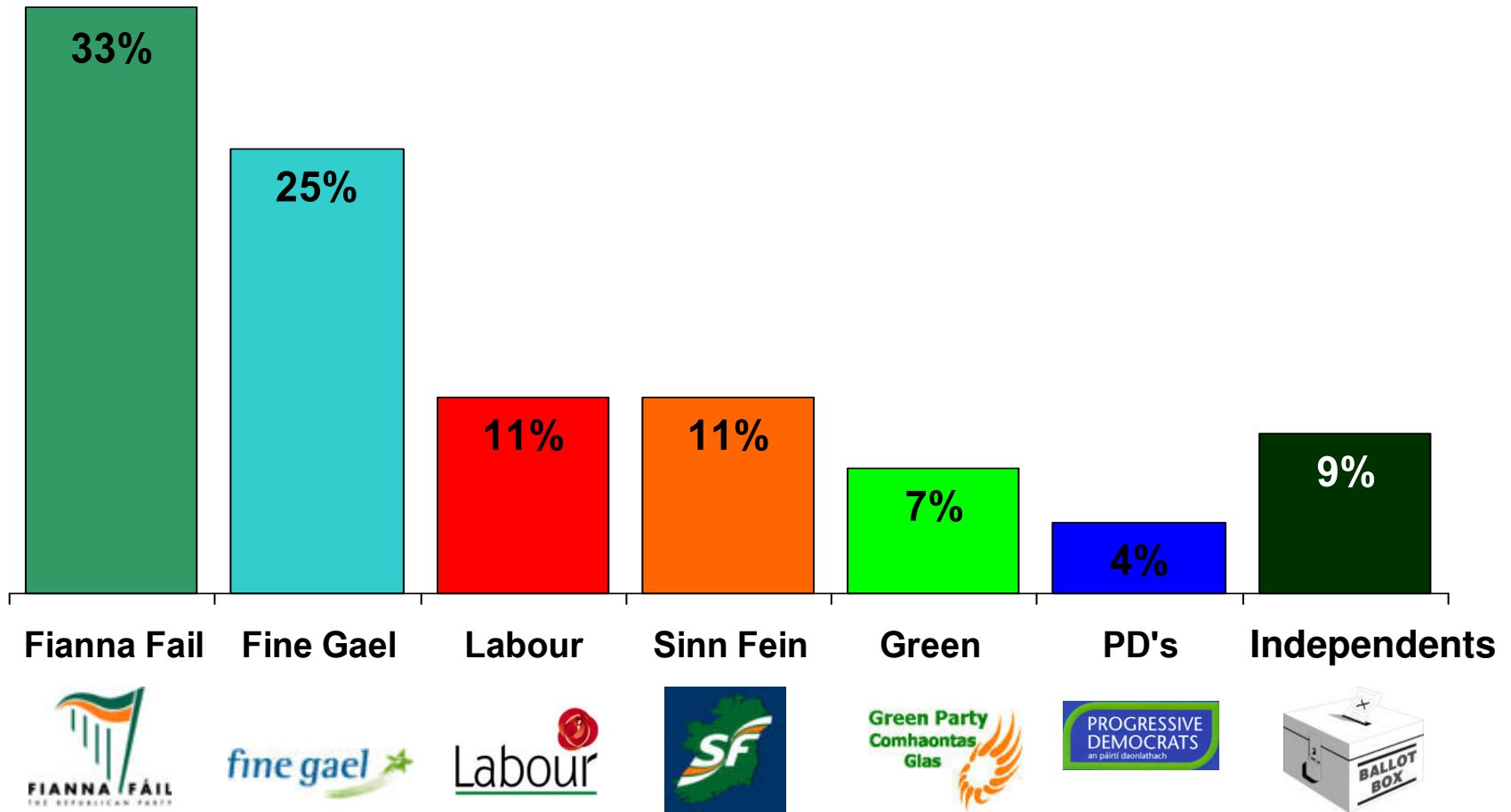
The other parts of Leinster outside Dublin are where the Fianna Fail share of vote is at its highest, with 40% of the first preference vote significantly above its national share, while Sinn Fein, the Green Party and Independent candidates take a lesser share of the vote here than they do nationally.

Munster, Connaught and Ulster are where Fine Gael garners their highest level of support at 29%, but Fianna fail is also relatively strong in these regions. Sinn Fein records its strongest share of the first preference vote in Connaught/Ulster counties at 15% which is 5% above their national support, and this is also where the Green party support is at its weakest.

Over the coming months The Sunday Business Post/RED C polls will be able to track support in each of the regions and so determine the trends that could win or lose the election.

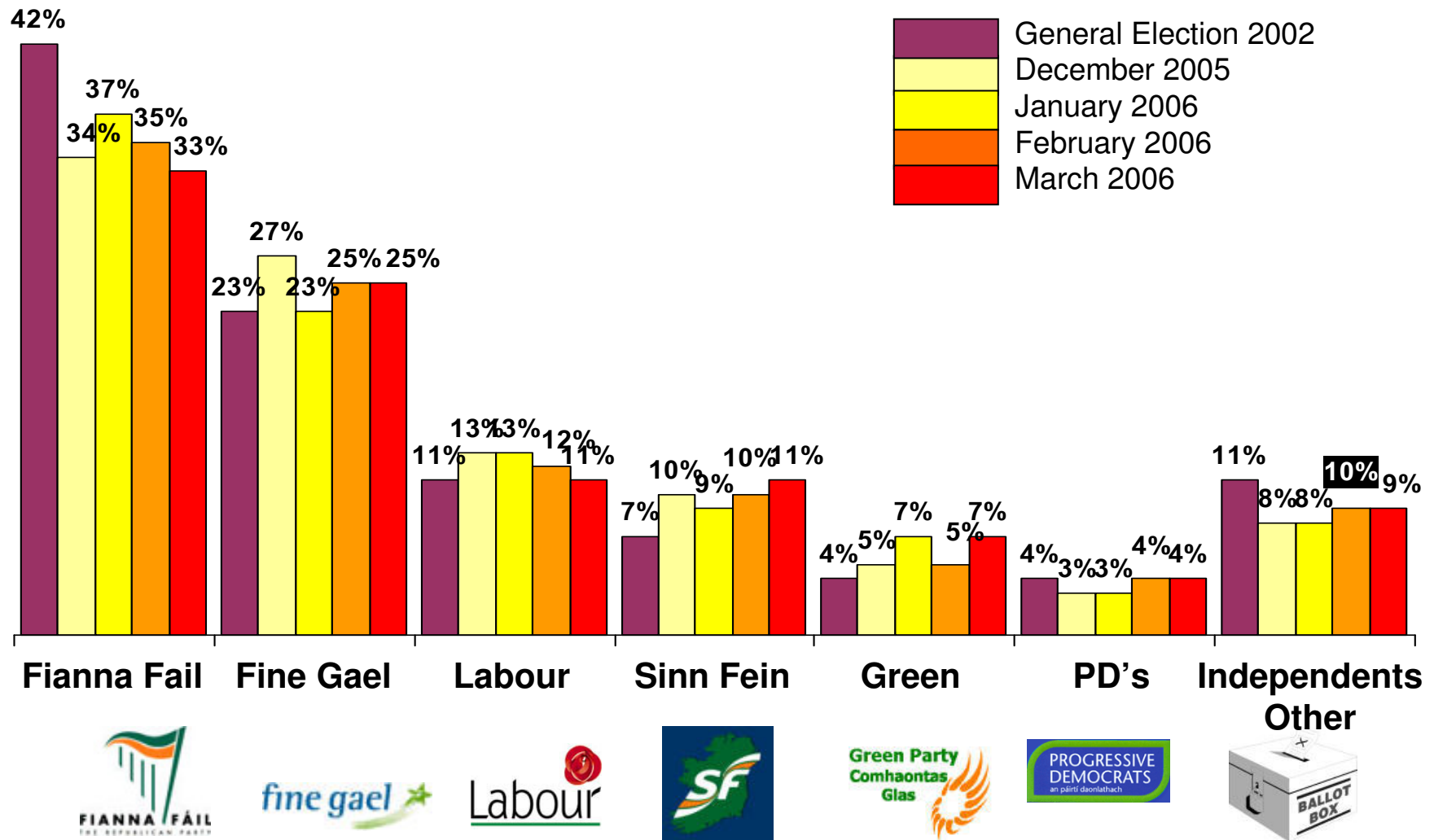
If there were a *General Election* tomorrow which party or independent candidate do you think you would give your first preference vote?

(Base: All adults 18+)



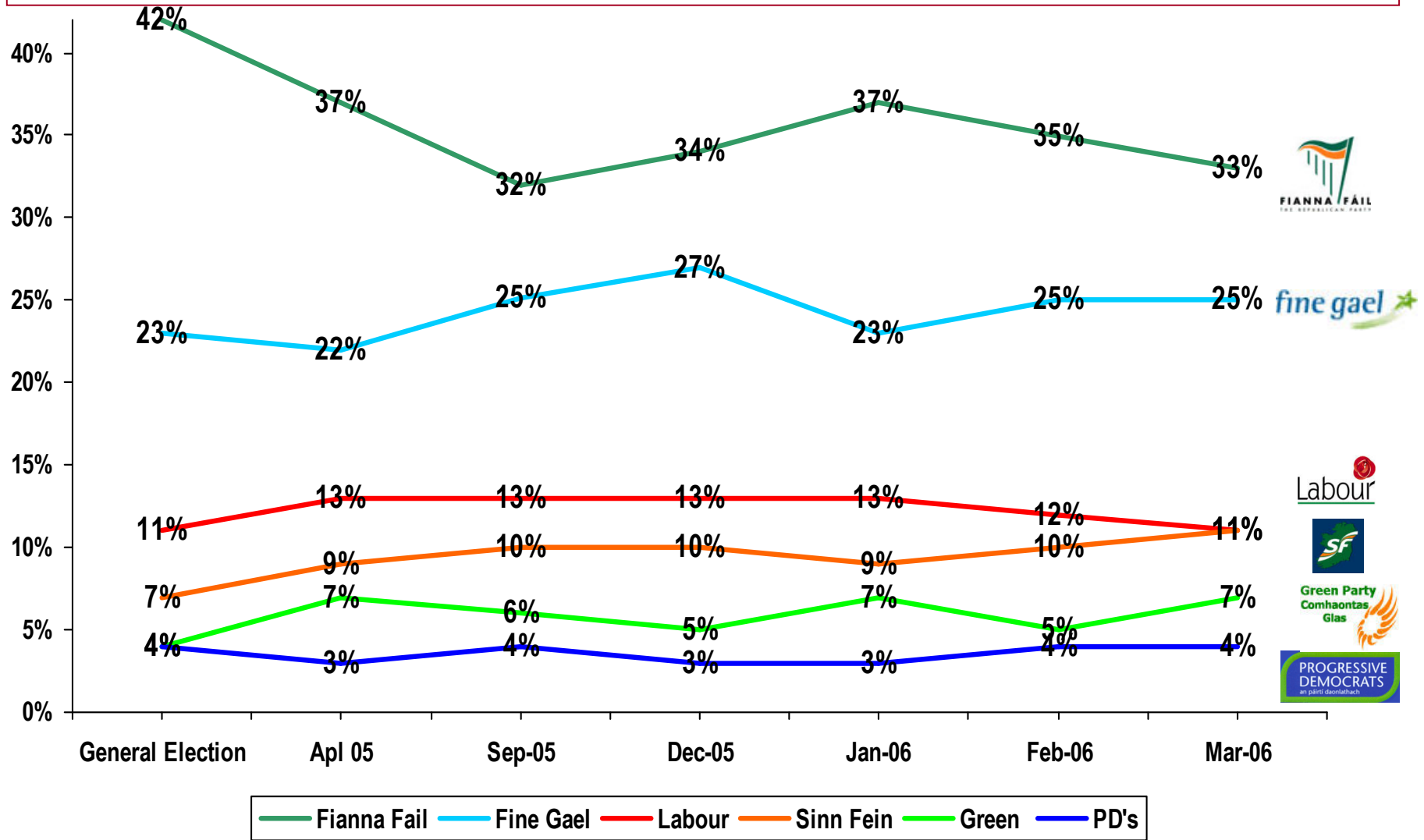
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<b>CURRENT FIRST PREFERENCE SUPPORT</b>				
	<b>Core figures</b>	<b>Excluding undecided</b>	<b>Adjusted</b>	<b>2002 Election Results</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Fianna Fail</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Fine Gael</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Labour</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Sinn Fein</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>P.D.s</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Green Party</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Independents /Others</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Undecided</b>	<b>18</b>			

**CURRENT FIRST PREFERENCE SUPPORT BY THOSE MOST LIKELY TO VOTE**  
 (those who give a score of 7 or more out of 10, on a scale where 1 = Definitely will not vote and 10 = Definitely will vote)

	Mar 2006	Feb 2006	Jan 2006	Dec 2005	Sept 2005	2002 Election Results
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Fianna Fail</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Fine Gael</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Labour</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Sinn Fein</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>P.D.s</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Green Party</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Independents /Others</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>

### CURRENT FIRST PREFERENCE SUPPORT BY REGION

(All respondents expressing an intention to vote across polls taken in January, February and March)

	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>DUBLIN</b>	<b>REST OF LEINSTER</b>	<b>MUNSTER</b>	<b>CONN/ ULSTER</b>
Sample Size	<b>2120</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>515</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>390</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Fianna Fail</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Fine Gael</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Labour</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sinn Fein</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>P.D.s</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Green Party</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Independents/ Others</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>