



What is the Oireachtas?

Ireland is a parliamentary democracy, which is a system of representative Government. The Oireachtas is the National Parliament of Ireland. It consists of:

- ▶ The President
- ▶ Dáil Éireann (the House of Representatives)
- ▶ Seanad Éireann (the Senate)

Executive power is exercised by the Government, which is led by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), whose deputy is the Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister).

The Cabinet is nominated by the Taoiseach and approved by the Dáil, then appointed by the President.

Who decides the powers and functions of the Oireachtas?

The Irish Constitution (which is called Bunreacht na hÉireann) outlines the powers and functions of the Oireachtas. The Constitution states that only the Oireachtas can make laws and that the Government must answer to Dáil Éireann. The Constitution allows both Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann to make their own rules (these are known as Standing Orders).

What is the difference between Parliament and Government?

Government holds the executive power and is led by the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and Cabinet. There are, at present, 18 Government Departments. The Government's main functions are to propose legislation, manage the public finances and administer the respective Government departments.

Parliament performs the legislative function providing parliamentary scrutiny and oversight of executive action. It oversees the Government particularly through Dáil Committees and Parliamentary Questions. It represents the people and legitimises the Government.

The Government is formed from the Dáil and is responsible to it. If the Government loses the support of the Dáil, the result will be either:

- ▶ the ending of the current Dáil term by the President (this is called a dissolution) and a general election is called; or
- ▶ the formation of a replacement Government.

How are people elected to Dáil Éireann?

The people of Ireland directly elect the members of Dáil Éireann (who are called Deputies or TDs). Every person aged 18 years and over, who is an Irish or British citizen and is included in the register of Dáil electors in force on polling day, is entitled to vote at a general election. By law, a general election to Dáil Éireann must be held at least every five years. The country is divided into areas known as constituencies. The size of these constituencies varies, and they may elect either three, four or five TDs.

According to the Constitution, there must be at least one TD for every 20,000 to 30,000 people. A TD may be a member of a political party or be an independent. In the current 34th Dáil there are 174 elected TDs.

What happens in Dáil Éireann after a general election?

- ▶ Each TD signs the roll of Members before taking their seat.
- ▶ The Clerk reads the proclamation convening Dáil Éireann and announces the name and constituency of each Member.
- ▶ The Chair of the Dáil is called the Ceann Comhairle. His/her deputy is the Leas-Cheann Comhairle. The Members elect the Ceann Comhairle by way of secret ballot.

Parliamentary Parties and Independents

The result of any general election and the subsequent negotiations to form a Government defines where members of the various political parties will sit within the Dáil Chamber.

The process of forming a Government begins.

- ▶ If one party has a majority or has the support of other parties and/or independents, it will be clear who will lead the country into the new Dáil session.
- ▶ If there is no clear majority, there may be a period of negotiation, where groups of parties and/or independent TDs try to build a majority.
- ▶ Each political party or coalition of political parties may nominate a Member to be Taoiseach. The TDs vote on each nomination. Usually, the TD with the support of the majority of members wins and becomes Taoiseach.
- ▶ The Taoiseach nominates the other members of the Government (the Ministers) and assigns Government Departments to them.
- ▶ The Dáil votes to approve the Government.
- ▶ The President formally appoints the Taoiseach and Ministers and gives them their seals of office.

Seating allocation within Dáil Éireann

Once the Government has been formed they, and members of the majority party or the coalition of elected members who will lead the Dáil, will be seated to the left side from the perspective of the Ceann Comhairle. The main opposition party will be seated to the right side, and smaller parties and independent members will occupy the remainder of the seating within the chamber.

Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann

The Standing Orders of the Dáil are the rules which govern the work of the Dáil. The Dáil's Standing Orders were first adopted by Resolution of the Provisional Parliament of 11 September 1922. Since then, Standing Orders have been amended and modified by the Dáil. A new edition is published at the start of each Dáil term.

Speaking Time

The allocation of speaking time is in accordance with the Standing Orders.

How Dáil Éireann works

The business of the Dáil is agreed every Thursday by the Business Committee, which the Ceann Comhairle chairs, and published on the Dáil Business website. The website is the digital version of what would previously have been called the Order Paper.

What are Questions and Leaders' Questions?

On Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, the Ceann Comhairle allows each Opposition party leader, or their representative, an opportunity to ask the Taoiseach a brief question about a matter of public importance. If the Taoiseach isn't available on the day he can ask another member of the Government to answer on their behalf.

Dáil Éireann sets aside a specific time on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays when TDs may ask Ministers about issues connected with their Departments or for which they are officially responsible. Ministers reply to questions on a rota basis. This is one way that TDs use to make the Government accountable to the Dáil.

What do TDs do?

The main parliamentary function of TDs is to pass laws.

They also take part in debates and make representations on behalf of members of the public, interest groups and their constituents. In addition, TDs may ask parliamentary questions. TDs also sit on Oireachtas Committees.

Transparent Parliament – Parliamentary debates live

Dáil Éireann has a press gallery for press and media and also a public gallery where visiting school and other groups can attend and watch proceedings live.

All Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann debates and all public committee meetings are broadcast live on the Oireachtas website. In addition, the Oireachtas TV channel is delivering unprecedented public access to the work of the Dáil, Seanad and Committees. It is available throughout Ireland through various providers.

www.oireachtas.ie



Last updated on 15-01-2026



**Tithe an
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Houses of the
Oireachtas

34th Dáil



34th Dáil

1 The Ceann Comhairle and Leas Ceann Comhairle

After a general election, the newly elected Dáil meets and selects the Ceann Comhairle, who acts as chairperson of the Dáil. The Dáil also selects a deputy chairperson, known as the Leas-Cheann Comhairle. The Ceann Comhairle commences the process of forming a government by asking a member of the largest party or group in the House to nominate their party leader for the position of Taoiseach. If there is more than one nominee, a vote takes place.



Ceann Comhairle
Verona Murphy (IND)
Wexford



Leas-Cheann Comhairle
John McGuinness (FF)
Carlow-Kilkenny

2 Secretary-General of the Houses of the Oireachtas and Clerk of the Dáil

The Clerk of Dáil Éireann provides advice on parliamentary procedures and practices to the Ceann Comhairle and to all members of Dáil Éireann.

The Clerk of the Dáil is the Secretary General of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and chief executive of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

3 The Clerk of the Dáil is assisted in this regard by the Deputy Secretary General and several Assistant Secretaries.

4 Systems clerks

Systems clerks use the Chamber Business System (CBS) to track chamber business and show live progress on screens (9).

Systems clerks also manage digital speakers' lists and times in the Dáil chamber (speakers can see a count-down of their speaking time on separate screens located at each side of the chamber (10)).

5 Parliamentary reporters

Parliamentary reporters are part of the Debates Office team that produces the Official Report, which is the authoritative record of everything said during proceedings in the Houses and at committees.

The parliamentary reporters sit at the reporters' desk on the floor of the Chamber, located in front of the Clerk of the Dáil, during debates. These proceedings are also digitally recorded. Using their logs together with the sound files, reporters produce the Official Report.

6 Press Gallery

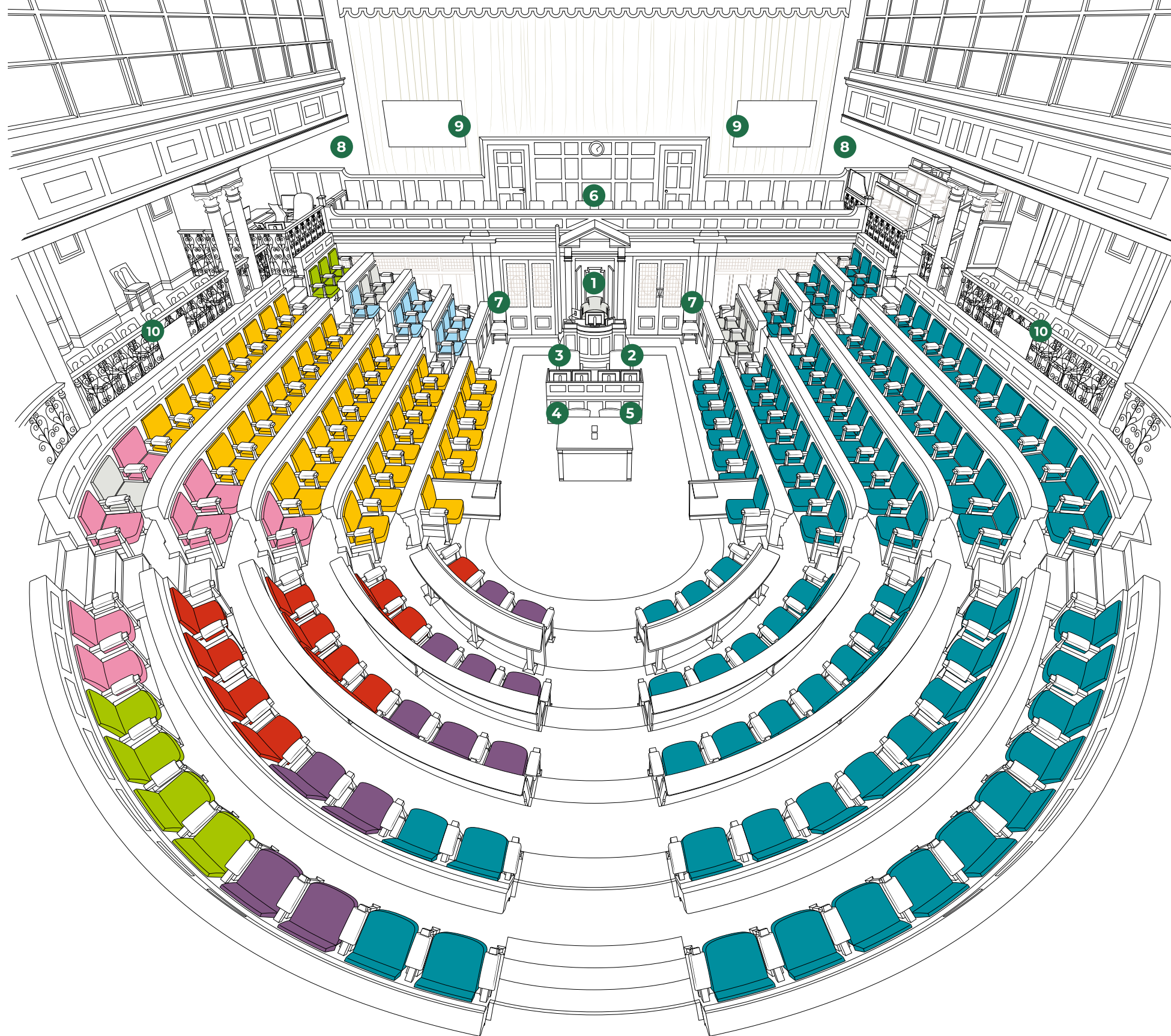
The Press Gallery organises access to Leinster House, and to sittings of Dáil Éireann, on behalf of journalists from Ireland and around the world. It is made up of accredited journalists and is entirely independent of the Oireachtas itself.

7 Ushers

An usher escorts the Ceann Comhairle or Leas-Cheann Comhairle to the Chamber at the start of a sitting day and assists with their robing. While in the Chamber, ushers circulate hard copies of ministerial speeches and replies to oral and written questions, deal with requests from Deputies and oversee access, especially during votes.

8 Cameras in the Dáil Chamber

The Broadcasting Unit is responsible for all parliamentary broadcasting, including the Oireachtas TV channel. Ireland is one of several countries that broadcast unfiltered, live proceedings from their legislatures, from cameras located at various points around the chamber.



- 91 Government
- 39 Sinn Féin
- 11 Labour
- 11 Social Democrats
- 7 Independent & Parties Technical Group
- 7 Independent Technical Group
- 6 Non party / group
- Inactive



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List of Cabinet Ministers that form the Government of the 34th Dáil

Taoiseach
Micheál Martin, Fianna Fáil

**Tánaiste and
Minister for Finance**
Simon Harris, Fine Gael

**Minister for Public Expenditure,
Infrastructure, Public Service
Reform and Digitalisation**
Jack Chambers, Fianna Fáil

**Minister for Foreign Affairs
and Trade; and Minister
for Defence**
Helen McEntee, Fine Gael

**Minister for Climate, Energy
and the Environment; and
Minister for Transport**
Darragh O'Brien, Fianna Fáil

**Minister for Education
and Youth**
Hildegard Naughton,
Fine Gael

**Minister for Children,
Disability and Equality**
Norma Foley, Fianna Fáil

**Minister for Enterprise,
Tourism and Employment**
Peter Burke, Fine Gael

**Minister for Social Protection;
and Minister for Rural and
Community Development
and the Gaeltacht**
Dara Calleary, Fianna Fáil

**Minister for Culture,
Communications and Sport**
Patrick O'Donovan, Fine Gael

Minister for Health
Jennifer Carroll MacNeill,
Fine Gael

**Minister for Housing, Local
Government and Heritage**
James Browne, Fianna Fáil

**Minister for Justice, Home
Affairs and Migration**
Jim O'Callaghan, Fianna Fáil

**Minister for Agriculture, Food,
Fisheries and the Marine**
Martin Heydon, Fine Gael

**Minister for Further and
Higher Education, Research,
Innovation and Science**
James Lawless, Fianna Fáil

Government Chief Whip
Mary Butler, Fianna Fáil