

Towards Open & Transparent Government

Reforming Politics | Tackling Corruption

Social
Democrats

TOWARDS OPEN & TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT: REFORMING POLITICS, TACKLING CORRUPTION

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INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We believe that by bringing about a number of much-needed strategic reforms in the areas of parliamentary operations, governmental decision-making, electoral organisation, political funding and anti-corruption we can revitalise rebalance and re-invent our political system. By undertaking wholesale, meaningful reform of the system in a way that truly respects the democratically expressed will of the citizens and the public good, we can create a system that citizens engage with, understand and, most importantly, are proud of. We must develop a culture that centres on openness and transparency that is focused on serving the people of Ireland. Towards Open and Transparent Government: Reforming Politics, Tackling Corruption sets out a number of proposed measures under the following headings:

1. STRENGTHEN TRANSPARENCY IN DECISION-MAKING

Public monies and resources have too often been used as political slush funds where the needs of insiders or the electoral interests of governing parties are favoured over genuine public need. The Social Democrats aim to bring about an end to “Golden Circle” politics by eliminating the culture of “jobs for the boys”. To achieve this we will:

- Introduce an Oireachtas Committee vetting procedure for all senior appointments;
- Establish an independent judicial appointments body to remove all political involvement from the process;
- Poverty-proof all legislative, policy and budgetary decisions and introduce an evidence-based system of resource allocation;
- Replace the Official Secrets Act 1963 with legislation that strikes a better balance between maintaining state security and protecting whistle-blowers in reporting wrongdoing;
- Introduce an e-governance platform, abolish the Economic Management Council and publish extensive data in open source to bring about a more open and transparent form of governance.

2. ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCY

Ireland does not have an effective means of preventing, detecting, and prosecuting corruption and white collar crime. Various Tribunals and Commissions of Inquiry have come and gone with little consequence for corrupt and reckless behaviour. Anti-corruption law is spread across a multitude of legislation, and responsibility for preventing and prosecuting corruption is spread across a multitude of agencies.

We therefore propose to establish a new Independent Anti-Corruption Agency (IACA) to:

- Tackle white collar crime and corruption in the public and corporate spheres;
- Operate as a standing Commission of Investigation ending the need for expensive ad hoc Tribunals;
- Assume the anti-corruption remit of the Standards in Public Office Commission, Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, Registrar of Lobbyists and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission;
- Act as an advisory body to several other public bodies;
- Monitor and investigate public procurement activities;
- Conduct sectoral reviews and initiate investigations as and when necessary;
- Work with a newly established Dáil oversight committee, (the Public Interest Committee) to oversee IACA and ministerial resource allocation decisions;
- Propose updates to anti-corruption legislation, including setting minimum standards for eligibility to hold public office.

3. ESTABLISH AN IRISH ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Though the centrepiece of our system of governance, no government has ever treated the management of the democratic process as a priority. The Social Democrats aim to change this by establishing an overarching independent statutory body with full operational and regulatory powers over the electoral process. Led by the Chief Electoral Officer of Ireland, this body would be known as the Irish Electoral Commission and would:

- Assume the electoral and referendum-based functions of the Referendum Commissions, the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) and much of the electoral functions of Ireland's local authorities;
- Conduct research and explore options to enhance and improve all aspects of the electoral process;
- Trial new options to increase mobilisation and make voting more accessible;
- Take responsibility for all aspects of voter registration, boundary division and redraw, election campaign oversight, political finance regulation, and voter education.

4. INSTITUTE MEANINGFUL OIREACTHAS REFORM

The Irish Oireachtas is one of the weakest parliaments in liberal democracy. Lack of authority and autonomy substantially undermines the ability of members and the institution itself in carrying out the fundamental functions of parliament.

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We therefore aim to return power to the Oireachtas, to do this we will:

- Make the Oireachtas, and not government, the primary initiator, drafter and driver of legislation;
- Formally establish Dáil and Seanad Business Committees to wrestle agenda control back from government and place it in the hands of parliament;
- Allocate committee chairpersonships and appointments to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission on a proportional basis using the D'Hondt system;
- Redistribute power to a reformed local government system to remove localism from national politics;
- Reform the whip system to rebalance the power dynamic between parties and members;
- Conduct a comprehensive review, revision and reform of the Standing Orders of both Houses;
- Strengthen Oireachtas Committees and place them at the centre of the legislative process;
- Require that public representatives declare significant liabilities as well as assets;
- Eliminate salary top-up payments made to committee chairpersons, whips, and members of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

5. REBALANCE POLITICAL FUNDING

Politics is currently funded in such a way as to protect the established parties and this makes it extremely difficult for new alternatives to emerge. Our political funding model therefore acts as a barrier to the on-going development and evolution of our party system, making the system less responsive to the needs and wishes of the voters of Ireland. It is vital that this problem be addressed. We propose to reform the two streams of political funding - parliamentary and electorally-based - as follows:

- Change the distribution mechanism for parliamentary funding and resourcing to give members better access to and control over how such resources are used. This would safeguard the equal capacity of members to do their jobs and would rebalance the power dynamic between parties and members;
- Change the distribution mechanism for funding provided under the Electoral Acts to prevent qualifying parties from receiving a proportion of the shared fund that is larger than the proportion of 1st preference votes received in the preceding general election. This proposed reform would divert political funding to the Irish Electoral Commission to fund political education and outreach work aimed at providing support and voter engagement for small parties, new parties and under-represented groups.

TRANSPARENCY IN DECISION-MAKING

Public monies and resources have too often been used as political slush funds where the needs of insiders or the electoral interests of governing parties are favoured over genuine public need. The Social Democrats aim to bring about an end to “Golden Circle” politics by eliminating the culture of “jobs for the boys”. To achieve this we will institute the reforms set out in this section.

APPOINTMENTS TO PUBLIC BODIES

We must bring about transparency in how senior appointments are made. To do this we will introduce a requirement that all proposed senior appointments are vetted by the newly reformed Oireachtas Committees (see Oireachtas Reform below). This would have the effect of introducing objectivity and oversight into the process and would ensure that appointments are made on the basis of merit, suitability and qualification rather than political connection. By limiting ministerial discretion in this way, consistency and openness could be achieved and efforts made to bring about inclusivity and diversity in respect of the profiles of appointees.

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

We propose to eliminate all political involvement from the judicial appointments process in order to strengthen the independence of the judiciary in line with internationally recognised standards. Little justification can be given for the continued involvement of government in this process and we therefore endorse and echo calls by the Irish Council of Civil Liberties to:

- Abolish the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board;
- Remove the Attorney General from the appointments process completely;
- Establish an independent expert body tasked with all aspects of judicial appointments and promotions.

Objectivity and independence must be the key driving principles of this new judicial appointments process. As such it is essential that an interview process be employed to determine appointments, and clearly defined merit-based selection criteria be used to determine appointment and promotion decisions in respect of all courts and judicial positions – this includes appointment to the roles of Chief Justice and President of the Courts.

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POVERTY PROOFED DECISION-MAKING

We propose to poverty proof all legislative, policy and budgetary decisions by working together with interested parties who will be affected by the outcomes of each decision. This would be conducted in line with the new Anti-Poverty Strategy we propose to introduce within 6 months of election, and would involve working within clearly defined targets, timeframes and lines of responsibility that prioritise the welfare of the people of Ireland in all government decisions. By adopting this approach a clearly defined mechanism of decision-making would be set out thereby increasing transparency across all government departments.

PROTECT WHISTLE-BLOWERS

We intend to repeal the Official Secrets Act and replace it with legislation that strikes a balance between the vital aim of maintaining the security of the state and removing barriers for public servants who feel compelled to report wrongdoing. This act was written in very broad terms however it has been misused as a means of blocking public-interest led disclosures. Such broad reaching restrictions are no longer necessary and, while the Protected Disclosure in the Public Interest Bill 2012 did introduce improvements, legislative reform in this area remains a matter of vital public interest.

OTHER PROPOSED MEASURES

As part of our overall proposals to strengthen transparency in governmental decision-making, we will:

- Systematically introduce an e-governance platform based on the Nordic initiative that provides for integrated service delivery and ensures accessibility to citizens;
- Abolish the Economic Management Council in order to open up finance-focused decision-making;
- Introduce a clear and transparent system of resource allocation, where allocations are based on objective, pre-constructed and evidence-based criteria;
- Publish extensive data in open source as part of the introduction of a general presumption of openness in relation to State-held data.

ESTABLISH AN IRISH ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCY

Ireland does not have an effective means of preventing, detecting, and prosecuting corruption and white collar crime. Various Tribunals and Commissions of Inquiry have come and gone with little consequence for corrupt and reckless behaviour. Anti-corruption law is spread across a multitude of legislation, and responsibility for preventing and prosecuting corruption is spread across a multitude of agencies. We propose to establish a new Independent Anti-Corruption Agency tasked with addressing this.

COORDINATE ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES

In February 2014 the European Commission published the EU Anti-Corruption Report. The efforts of the current government were commended as an ambitious attempt to reform the anti-corruption regime in Ireland. At an international level Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and the Council of Europe Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Nevertheless, responsibility for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of corruption and white-collar crime is shared between a variety of bodies, including Tribunals of Inquiry, Commissions of Inquiry, High Court inspectors, the Financial Regulator, SIPO, the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation and the Criminal Assets Bureau. The most powerful body is the Director of Public Prosecutions which deals with the most serious instances of corruption.

We propose that the wide range of investigative bodies and varying powers they hold to exercise their jurisdiction serves to undermine public confidence in Ireland's capacity to tackle corruption. It is also likely that such a wide range of bodies with over-lapping responsibilities will result in genuine cases of corruption escaping investigation.

TRIBUNALS OF INQUIRY

Tribunals of Inquiry have of themselves negatively affected public confidence in Ireland's ability to tackle corruption. Tribunals have come to be seen as systems that benefit lawyers more than they benefit society. Short investigations, such as that conducted by Judge Niall Fennelly and Sean Guerin SC, have garnered public support but the harm done by the longest running and most expensive investigations will not be undone by subsequent efforts. And, more recently, the powers afforded to the Cregan Investigation into activities in IBRC have proven to be wholly inadequate.

The ad hoc nature of these investigations also risks raising the impression that the national response to instances of alleged corruption is responsive and reactionary rather than

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systemic. The approach taken in the past and to a lesser extent the reforms brought about by the outgoing government have perpetuated the issues. A root and branch reform of the anti-corruption regime is needed. A consolidation of the agencies charged with tackling corruption and the strengthening of the legislative framework within which they operate is required. Along with a higher level of transparency and accountability in their activities, this will help to build confidence in the institutions of the State. It will also renew public and international confidence in Ireland as a place to do business.

WHAT ACTION DO WE PROPOSE TO TAKE?

The Social Democrats have a plan to tackle white collar crime and corruption to improve accountability, end cronyism, and restore confidence in public life. To achieve this we propose to establish a new law enforcement body - an Independent Anti-Corruption Agency (IACA) - to tackle white collar crime and corruption in the corporate world and political spheres. The IACA would:

Operate as a standing Commission of Investigation thereby ending the need for expensive and ineffective Tribunals of Inquiry;

- Assume the anti-corruption remit of a number of existing bodies including the Standards in Public Office Commission, the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, the Registrar of Lobbyists and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission;
- Act as an advisory body to several other public bodies;
- Monitor and investigate public procurement activities, conduct sectoral reviews and initiate investigations as it saw fit;
- Suggest updates to anti-corruption legislation, including proposing minimum standards for eligibility to hold public office.

A new Dáil oversight committee – the Public Interest Committee – would be established to oversee the IACA as well as all ministerial resource allocation decisions.

Our full proposals for an Independent Anti-Corruption Agency are set out in a detailed policy document, Independent Anti-Corruption Agency, available at www.socialdemocrats.ie (<https://goo.gl/P6VnT2>) or upon request.

ESTABLISH AN IRISH ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Though the centrepiece of our system of governance, no government has ever treated the management of the democratic process as a priority. The Social Democrats aim to change this by establishing a new Irish Electoral Commission to be headed up by a Chief Electoral Officer of Ireland.

At present we depend on a combination of bodies to operate our electoral process – this includes the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, individual local authorities and Referendum Commissions established to administer individual referendums. We believe that Irish electoral politics must instead be administered by an overarching independent statutory body, an Irish Electoral Commission.

WHY DO WE NEED AN ELECTORAL COMMISSION?

The Irish electoral process enjoys a consistently high level of trust on the part of the Irish electorate; but we can do better. In particular, the mechanisms of our electoral process are disjointed and are under-performing, the inaccuracy of the electoral register is a prime example of how lack of coordination can lead to duplication and inaccuracy. An overarching body that takes full responsibility for overseeing and regulating all facets of the electoral process would strengthen existing levels of trust in the electoral process, streamline its administration, and provide a transparent one stop-shop for citizens to interact with on all matters electoral.

WHAT WOULD THE IRISH ELECTORAL COMMISSION DO?

The remit of the Irish Electoral Commission ('the Commission') would extend to all areas of the electoral process, including:

- Voter registration;
- Boundary divisions;
- Campaign oversight;
- Political financing;
- Voter education.

The Commission would also assume the electoral and referendum related functions of the Referendum Commissions formed to take responsibility for individual referendums, the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) and local authorities around the country.

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In addition to its responsibility for direct electoral engagement, the Commission would also conduct research and explore options to enhance and improve all aspects of the electoral process. The electoral commissions of other jurisdictions regularly trial and implement new options to increase mobilisation and make voting more accessible, the Irish Electoral Commission would operate in a similar way to identify and implement best practice initiatives aimed at continually strengthening the electoral process in Ireland.

HOW WOULD THE COMMISSION OPERATE?

The Commission would be a permanent statutory body with financial accountability to the Comptroller & Auditor General. This is to be distinguished from the temporary, albeit highly successful and respected, Referendum Commissions founded to take responsibility for specific referendum campaigns. Recruitment of all staff, including the Chief Electoral Officer, would take place through an open, transparent, non-political recruitment process conducted by the Public Appointments Service with due regard to the achieving a gender balance within the Commission. Full powers of regulation, sanction and enforcement regarding matters of electoral politics would rest with the Commission and this includes taking responsibility for administering a single unified electoral register for the Irish state. This would replace the 31 separate electoral registers maintained at present.

WHAT REFORMS COULD THE COMMISSION BRING ABOUT?

It is intended that the Commission would promote increased awareness, understanding and engagement with the electoral process. This would be brought about through:

- Centralised management of the electoral register to ensure more accurate measures of voter turnout and better strategies to increase voter participation;
- Overseeing the selection of voting locations to ensure the needs of the electorate rather than the needs of government institutions are central to such decisions;
- Providing wider access to postal voting;
- Improving voting rights for recent emigrants;
- Rollout of on-going and thorough voter education initiatives aimed at mobilising citizens, increasing participation in the democratic process, and educating voters as to how the system works and how they can maximise their electoral choices.

INSTITUTE MEANINGFUL OIREACTHAS REFORMS

The Irish Oireachtas is one of the weakest parliaments in liberal democracy and its lack of authority and autonomy has substantially undermined its ability to carry out the fundamental functions of scrutinizing and holding government to account. The Social Democrats believe we must return power to parliament so that the power to legislate, scrutinize government and hold the executive to account exists in reality and not just in theory.

EMPOWER THE OIREACTHAS

As it currently stands the Oireachtas operates subject to the will of government. Legislation is produced and enacted subject to the instruction of government ministers and the Government Chief Whip schedules all business. As such Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann lack the basic freedom to produce legislation and determine what items are debated, when and for how long, and this has led to overuse of measures such as legislative guillotining. To address the fact that the Irish Oireachtas has become one of the weakest parliaments in western democracy, the following reforms are proposed as a means of empowering the Oireachtas to perform its essential functions of holding government to account and engaging meaningfully in the legislative process.

DÁIL BUSINESS

We propose to formally establish a Dáil Business Committee and a Seanad Business Committee, with committee proceedings to be minuted or take place in full public view. The of which is to bring about the central involvement of parliament in scheduling the business of each House. This change is intended to address the current power deficit where Government determines the parliamentary agenda.

HOUSES OF THE OIREACTHAS COMMISSION

The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission is the body corporate charged with overall responsibility for running the Houses of the Oireachtas. Among other things this authority determines the distribution of parliamentary resources and presides over a range of other administrative functions of parliament. Yet government appoints the majority of the Commission with only minimal opposition involvement being permitted.

We believe this is a major impediment to the independence of the Oireachtas and we propose that the membership of the Commission be appointed subject to proportional representation

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determined under the d'Hondt system. We also propose that the salary top-up payment made to each member of the Commission be eliminated. This is to remove barriers to the creation of additional Commission positions when required for increased inclusiveness and representativeness. It is also in acknowledgement of the fact that Oireachtas members are already paid to participate actively in parliamentary life and this form of double payment is not required.

NATIONAL ISSUES IN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT

Irish national politics currently features an excessive amount of localism and short-termism. We must redistribute power to a reformed local government system so as to address this and ensure that the national parliament is facilitated in focusing on national matters.
Declarations of Interest

We will introduce new requirements for public representatives to declare significant liabilities as well as assets.

RESPECT THE VOTING RIGHTS OF MEMBERS

Party and group whips play an essential role in organising the business of each House, and in advising TDs and Senators on the endorsed party lines relating to issues that come before each House. The Government Chief Whip plays a particularly important role in ensuring the stability of the government by guaranteeing that government support is maintained on important votes on matters such as confidence and supply. It is therefore vital that we maintain a version of our present whipping system in the interest of maintaining order and stability within parliament. Nevertheless the Irish whip system is one of the most stringent in western democracy, as such it stifles Oireachtas members by demanding that they vote in line with party policy on all matters without exception (save for very rare occasions where express permission is given for an 'open vote'). This problem must be addressed.

As a rule, parliamentarians voting against the instructions of their party whip face drastic consequences irrespective of the level of importance placed on the item being voted on. These consequences include being expelled from their parliamentary party, which results in the loss of much needed parliamentary funding and basic supports such as administrative and research assistance. Crucially, 'losing the whip' also involves being removed from involvement in the Oireachtas Committee system and often restricts or removes access to speaking time during debates.

We see this as fundamentally undemocratic and propose a shift away from this extreme application of parliamentary whipping to a more flexible approach that places the responsibility for voting back in the hands of individual parliamentarians. To achieve this we propose to:

- Empower parliamentarians by refocusing the parliamentary funding and resourcing model in order that it safeguards access to essential supports irrespective of status as the member of a parliamentary party (see Rebalancing Political Funding below).
- Investigate the introduction of a lined whipping system similar to the one employed in the British Houses of Parliament. This system helps parties and government to distinguish between policy positions that members are absolutely bound to support, issues they are strongly advised to support and issues the party would prefer they support. In adopting such a tiered approach it may be possible to maintain the stability of parliament on urgent matters of confidence and supply, while also respecting the voting rights of individual members.

These potential reforms could have the effect of increasing the accountability of individual parliamentarians for their voting choices and is aimed at strengthening the role of the Dáil and Seanad as deliberative forums. However this will only improve the workings of the Oireachtas as a whole if these measures are adopted on a cross party basis. The Social Democrats will lead the way in investigating the value of instituting these changes within our own ranks, and will seek cross-party take-up to see that institution-wide reform is achieved.

REFORM STANDING ORDERS

The Standing Orders, or rules of the House, are the backbone of parliament. Yet a comprehensive review, revision and reform of these rules governing how Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann operate has never been undertaken since the foundation of the state. The Social Democrats believe it is time to change that and we propose to undertake a comprehensive consultation and review process aimed at revising and clarifying the current Standing Orders in the interest of strengthening parliament as a whole. This process would be undertaken by an all party committee of each House of the Oireachtas, the membership of which would be made up of all parties and recognised groups of both houses with the number of representatives being determined according to the D'Hondt system of proportional allocation. The chairperson of this committee would be elected directly by the committee itself.

STRENGTHEN OIREACTHAS COMMITTEES

The Oireachtas Committee system is not being used to its fullest potential. We propose to address this by strengthening powers of scrutiny, refocusing the system so that it operates independently of party patronage, and placing committees at the centre of the legislative process.

- The number of Oireachtas Committees was reduced during the term of the 31st Dáil, which resulted in committees being overburdened and ill-equipped to tackle the volume of business that came before them. We propose a slight expansion of the number of committees in order that each can conduct its work in a more focused and specialised fashion.
- The cost of increasing the number of committees will be offset by full removal of salary top-up payments made to committee chairpersons. Oireachtas members are already paid to participate actively in parliamentary life, this form of double payment is not necessary.
- We propose to alter the mechanism for appointment of committee chairpersons. The d'Hondt system is to be applied in the apportionment of the number of committee chairpersonships each party and group receives. Additionally committee chairpersons are to be elected by the committees themselves as opposed to being appointed externally by party whips and leaders.

REFORM THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

We propose to substantially reform the legislative process to strengthen the role parliament plays in initiating, scrutinizing and adopting legislation. This involves placing committees at the heart of the legislative process.

- We would change how government legislation is initiated in the Dáil and Seanad to incorporate increased committee engagement in the drafting stages. This would strengthen the role of the Oireachtas in producing and scrutinising legislation prior to enactment.
- The legislative process should not end with enactment. legislation must be subject to post-enactment scrutiny to ensure it operates as originally intended. This is to be achieved by attaching a brief outcome report to all new legislation setting out the precise intention of the legislation and identifying an appropriate Oireachtas Committee to conduct the assessment. Reviews would take place approximately one year after enactment and, where amendments are identified as necessary, committees would appropriate action.

REBALANCE POLITICAL FUNDING

Politics is currently funded in a very insular way that protects the established parties and makes it extremely difficult for new alternatives to emerge. This acts as a barrier to the on-going development and evolution of the party system in line with the needs and wishes of the voters of Ireland. It is therefore vital that this be addressed.

Two streams of political funding presently exist, they are parliamentary funding and electorally-based funding. The former consists of funding and supports provided in respect of TDs and Senators to facilitate their work as parliamentarians, the latter is paid to qualifying political parties on the basis of the proportion of 1st preference votes received in the preceding General Election.

PARLIAMENTARY FUNDING AND RESOURCES

The democratic mandate of each individual parliamentarian is neither fully recognised nor respected under the present system of parliamentary funding. When a TD or Senator leaves their parliamentary party or is expelled from its ranks the party continues to receive funding and resources from the Oireachtas on their behalf. These supports and finances are then withheld from the parliamentarian whose needs they were originally intended to serve. This undermines the mandate of such parliamentarians as, where a TD or Senator lacks adequate resources to do their job, their ability to hold government to account, scrutinise legislation and represent the interests of their constituents is severely curtailed.

We would change this system to ensure distribution of resources in such a way that parliamentarians have more control over the funding allocated to them. This would:

- Safeguard all parliamentarians in doing their jobs on an equal footing;
- Strengthen the Oireachtas as a whole by rebalancing the power dynamic between parties and parliamentarians;
- Empower parliamentarians to engage more meaningfully in debates, voting and decision-making;
- Loosen the rigidity of the party whip system as the practical implications of losing the whip would be reduced for TDs and Senators.

FUNDING UNDER THE ELECTORAL ACTS

A second stream of political funding is paid to registered political parties who receive a minimum 2% of first preference votes cast in the preceding general election. These 'qualifying parties' are allocated an annual fixed sum payment of €126,974 and receive a proportionate share of the annual €4.98 million fund based on the percentage of the vote they received. Interestingly though, the distribution of this fund does not take account of votes cast for non-qualifying parties and independents, which means that qualifying parties receive a share of this fund larger than the vote received as qualifying parties share the fund in its entirety. In the case of the qualifying parties of the 31st Dáil (i.e. Fine Gael, Labour, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin), while these four parties received 83% of first preferences cast in General Election 2011, they shared 100% of the €4.98 million annual fund between them since 2011.

The Social Democrats propose that this distribution mechanism be changed so that parties receive sums calculated against the exact percentage of first preference votes received in the preceding general election. This would allow the remainder of the fund to be allocated to the Irish Electoral Commission in order to fund political education and outreach work aimed to providing support and voter engagement for small parties, new parties and under-represented groups.