

Submission to Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee 2018, Committee No.2.

There are several points to be made in relation to the revision of the boundaries under your remit: the councils in Galway, Cork & Dublin.

The first is that in 2014 there was a massive change the abolition of all town and councils and urban boroughs indeed many city councils were also abolished in what seemed a naked political ploy by Fine Gael to destroy one of the few growth platforms for alternative parties, not just be killing town councils where district magnitude was normally 9 (or in some rare cases 12) so much easier to get elected to, but also in that urban populations seem to seek more diverse representation. Clearly the carrot for their government partner, Labour, was the increasing in size of district magnitude within county councils and the newly merged city & county councils. This has only been allowed one election and it is clearly of bad faith to change it after only one exercise. But it is much worse than that.

District Magnitude or the number of seats does not just have an impact on effective electoral thresholds and thus the likelihood of being elected, (impacting the scale of whether STV operates more as a majoritarian or a proportional system) but it also effects government formation (or in council terms office holding) and the number of parties and independents. Even in council terms this has a major impact in government formation terms, as most successful candidates for the Dail (and indeed the Seanad) will have been successfully elected as councillors first.

The fact that Fine Gael has now ordered a reduction in the district magnitude is yet another naked attempt of a power grab by them, and is a kick in the teeth to their former allies Labour and the current partners the independents. Going along with this form of gerrymandering shows either a lack of consideration for the electoral system or else an ignorance of how it works. One assumes that FG & FF have decided that they have had enough of minority govt and of backbench and opposition parties having input into legislation and want to get back to the old days of a 2.5 party system and squash all other smaller parties and independents.

How else to explain the boundary committee to be limited in scope to reviewing downwards only with a view to 5-7 seats but allowing them to consider 3 or 4 seaters in special circumstances (but not 8 or 9). Most academic experts agree that for minimum proportionality PR-STV needs to operate at a district magnitude of at least 6 seats.

Yet when we consider Malta with 5-7 seats also operating PR-STV it has been a two party state since 1964, and Australia with a form of PR-STV in its federal senate of 12 seat districts but on rotations of 6 seats elected at different times we find that while there is some diversity the vast bulk of the seats have been held by the two main parties. NI assembly has seen several small parties die over the years and while the reduction from 6 to 5 seats did not overly harm the small parties on this first cycle, the effect on the medium sized UUP was

drastic and we can fairly assume that in the next cycles it is likely that the smaller parties will start to feel the pinch.

The remit of this body is Cork Galway and Dublin councils. The 3 main cities of Ireland

If the districts are reduced we will see an increase in electoral areas to be contested.

In reality this means it will be harder to for smaller parties to also find the candidates to contest and of course it means more election expense as more different runs of leaflets and posters need to be printed as well. So harder to get elected, harder to run someone, and more expensive. The fact is that for the bigger parties without a vote cast this will mean default far more seats for them in any given election, as simply put smaller parties will not be able to event contest let alone compete with them and as for independents they will lack the cohesion of transfers that might have been witnessed in the last 2 elections due to a plague on both your houses from the electorate, which will be to some extent reduced in the coming elections, besides for the last 20 years at least half the independents if not more were members of either FF or FG and many continue to vote with them in Council or Dail chambers.

Given the experiences of Kilkenny and Waterford Councils in not only being merged but also seeing their urban seats being diluted with massive rural hinterlands, I would urge caution in how new boundaries in Cork and Galway are to be applied, it is important that urban representation is not diluted further with the serious planning and housing issues we have today.

Given I know more about Cork's possible boundary I shall just make a few points

1. It is simply unacceptable that north west and north east city wards are still 4 seaters, the only ones in the country, cork city should have new boundaries to be revised to ensure all districts are of a roughly similar seat size.
2. With the inclusion of douglas, glanmire, ballincollig and blarney it is suggested that cork be given roughly 8 more seats. This is an incredibly low amount considering the population size being added, there really should be more councillors added to the city.
3. Cork county has in many electoral areas some of the highest council quotas in the country, even though several high population density areas are being moved into the cities there is a strong argument for not lowering the number of seats in the county, and that there is some kind of smoothing of the quotas for councillors in the county.
4. With the savings made from abolishing nearly 100 councils in 2014, I think the govt can afford to stump up the cash to allow the retention of moving cllrs from county to city and a more generous increase in cllrs to the city.
5. With the new city boundary, All city districts should be redrawn in light of the new additional areas

I can only implore the committee, If they do not wish to be a veneer of respectability placed on what is a gerrymander 2.0 by FG (and possibly FF), that they will ensure the highest possible number of 7 seaters and where necessary 6 seaters, and only in extreme and rare cases 5 seaters, they should not countenance in any shape or form 4 or 3 seaters.

Diversity and proportionality are things that can be nurtured but only if we have the appropriate environment for them, the 3 main cities are a good place to try, but they need a decent district magnitude to thrive. It is in your hands now if Ireland will go forwards or backwards into the past of a 2.5 party system.