



Election 2024

KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU VOTE



Introduction

A General Election has been called for Friday 29 November 2024. Christian citizens should think carefully and prayerfully about how they vote.

The Christian Institute will not tell you how to vote. What we will do in this briefing is address:

- why you should vote
- biblical priorities
- issues on the horizon
- two key factors in voting
- speaking to candidates

We also suggest Questions for Candidates (see pages 6-10), to help you find out some key views of the people standing for election in your constituency. The issues we highlight are those where we believe the Bible is clear. They are issues where biblical standards, particularly the Ten Commandments, directly apply.

WHY SHOULD YOU VOTE?

The State is a means of God's 'common grace'. The Bible is very clear that the governing authorities act on God's behalf to restrain evil and promote what is good (Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2). This benefits all people, not just Christians.

As a general rule, Christians must follow the Lord Jesus Christ's command to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's (Matthew 22:21).¹ Christians are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) and also of the earthly nation in which God

has placed us. The Christian's duty is to obey the governing authorities, unless they forbid what God requires, or require what God forbids (Acts 5:29). It is our earnest prayer that Christians will have freedom to share the Gospel and live out the Christian life. In praying "deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13) we are praying against the persecution of the Church as well as against personal temptation.

Common grace and the privilege of voting

Romans 13 makes clear that God has ordained the governing authorities in every country whether they are Christian or not. Thanks to God's common grace, there are many non-Christians who take the right view on a range of issues. Nobody's thinking is wrong at every point. Politicians who disagreed with Christians about redefining marriage can still be strongly against assisted suicide or liberalising cannabis laws. Some atheists will strongly defend the free speech of Christians. Like the prophet Daniel, God's people must encourage leadership which promotes truth and righteousness. Daniel not only urged King Nebuchadnezzar to renounce his sins and his wickedness; he pleaded with the king to practice what is right and to show kindness to those who are oppressed (Daniel 4:27).

Unlike Daniel, Christians in Ireland today get to play a part in electing their leaders. In a democracy everybody has the legal right to vote. Billions of people around the world do not enjoy the freedoms Irish citizens have. By electing members of Dáil Éireann

and ultimately the Government they help choose 'Caesar'. So voting is a privilege and a serious responsibility.²

The General Election provides an opportunity for Christians to speak out and play their part by voting. Governments can make it easier or harder to live freely as a Christian or to share the Gospel. Believers have to make a judgement about how their vote can be used to best effect.

BIBLICAL PRIORITIES

When it comes to matters of public policy, Christians have to assess biblical priorities.

The Lord Jesus Christ criticised the Pharisees and told them that they had neglected the more important matters of the law (Matthew 23:23) namely justice, mercy and faithfulness. This included setting aside the commands of God by neglecting to support their parents in order to observe a man-made tradition (Mark 7:9-12). For the Lord Jesus Christ, and for us, it is God's commands that tell us what constitutes justice, mercy and faithfulness.

We can also distinguish those political issues on which the Bible is absolutely clear from those on which it is not.

For instance, the Bible is not clear on how to improve access to university or the most appropriate level of investment in roads and housing. To decide on these issues involves a detailed assessment of the facts and the exercise of judgement based on experience and preference. Many situations in ordinary life are at this level, and so are many political issues.

Very often, making a Christian judgement depends on the wise assessment of several biblical principles. This can result in Christians arriving at different conclusions. For example, we

know for certain that the State has a right to levy taxes (Romans 13:7). But Christians who hold to biblical truth can legitimately disagree on the level of particular taxes.

Yet at the other end of the spectrum, the Bible is "clear, direct, and decisive"³ about a whole host of political issues. For example, a vote for abortion or euthanasia is a vote to break the Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20:13). These are the kinds of issues that our Questions for Candidates focus on – straightforward matters of right or wrong.

The new Dáil elected on 29 November could vote on laws affecting religious liberty, freedom of speech, abortion, assisted suicide, drugs legalisation and sex education.

These are all issues of concern to Christians. Some are 'conscience votes', where TDs are free to vote without a party whip, underlining the importance of finding out what individual election candidates think.

Biblical Christians believe that the Gospel is paramount. Salvation is only found in Christ, not in any political programme. Yet followers of Christ are to care about their world, being salt and light in our society. In order for that to happen, and for evangelism, there has to be freedom for the Gospel: religious liberty is a crucial issue.

Christians in Ireland enjoy remarkable freedom that many Christians elsewhere in the world do not. We must pray for them. Political leaders must do more to combat the persecution of Christians abroad.

Many Christians are gravely concerned about legislative proposals that intrude into ordinary family life, evangelism and the running of the local church. Christians believe that governing authorities are established by God, but at the same time the Government is not

responsible for everything. Indeed, if there is to be freedom, it must not be.

It is important to say that society is more than the State. Society is made up of families, as well as many institutions and organisations between the State and the citizen. Government by itself cannot solve all our problems, or even come remotely close.

CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

In the 'Single Transferable Vote' system for Dáil elections, you vote for particular candidates in order of preference. So there are two key factors to consider when deciding who to vote for: your local candidates and the parties they represent, if any.

It is very important to know what is going on in your constituency and to find out who your candidates are. So make sure you know which constituency you live in. Most constituency boundaries have changed for this election.

A lot may hinge for you on the individual views of your candidates. In some constituencies, there will be the option to vote for a candidate who takes the right stance on moral issues. In voting, Christians are not necessarily endorsing every policy of a party or candidate they vote for. You may decide to back a particular political party that most approximates to where you stand. Or you may consider it better to vote for an exceptional candidate who shares your Christian views across a range of moral issues, even if they are standing for a party you would not naturally support. It is relevant to consider how the parties fared in your constituency in the last election.⁴

These are decisions which ultimately only you can make. Christians should prayerfully exercise their conscience in

these matters. Just because your parents or your colleagues vote in a certain way does not mean that you need to do the same.

But you cannot make an informed decision without knowing what the parties and the candidates stand for. Christians should make it their business to find out the policies of each candidate and party. You should seek to find out their positions on crucial ethical matters.

SPEAKING TO CANDIDATES

Candidates or their canvassers may come to your door, call by telephone or stop you in the street to ask how you intend to vote. This presents an ideal opportunity to find out where the candidate stands on key moral issues. His or her opinions on these issues can be quite different from the position of their party.

More than at any other time, candidates will be open to listening to your views. Should they be elected, they will be representing *you* in the Dáil.

The Christian Institute has suggested Questions for Candidates (see pages 6-10). Think through some of the issues and have the questions ready in case canvassers call or stop you on the street. Limit yourself to the two or three with which you are most concerned. Be prepared to give a reason for your view.

If you speak to the candidate, ask if he or she is willing to raise your concerns in the Dáil if elected. If they say they will, you can hold them to this promise should they be elected.

If you speak to someone canvassing on behalf of the candidate, ask for your concerns to be passed on. The very act of asking these questions is a Christian witness.

CONTACTING YOUR CANDIDATES

You can contact your candidates by letter or email, or on social media, in order to raise your concerns. This way you can be sure that all the candidates have been made aware of the issues important to you.

If you contact a candidate, keep things short, but do raise specific points. Make sure you tell them that you are a constituent. You could swap notes with other Christian friends who have had contact with a candidate.

There are many ways of being a Christian citizen, but a General Election provides an excellent opportunity for Christians to be salt and light in society. We must pray for wisdom and speak out for the truth. Christians must weigh up the evidence and exercise their conscience, remembering that God has promised to give wisdom generously to those who ask him (James 1:5).

ELECTION BACKGROUND

Prior to dissolution for the election, Dáil Éireann consisted of 160 Teachtaí Dála (TDs), from 39 constituencies. Following electoral reforms, there will be 174 TDs in the next Dáil, with the number of constituencies rising to 43.

TDs are elected by Single Transferable Vote. Voters can choose to vote for as many or as few candidates as they like, in order of their preference. The voter's first preference vote is most important and is always counted. A voter's second and further preferences may be counted if their preferred candidate is eliminated at the end of a round of counting, or is elected with a surplus.

For more information, see electoralcommission.ie/irelands-voting-system/

Following the last election in February 2020, Fianna Fáil had the most seats, with 38 – including one TD returned automatically as Ceann Comhairle. Sinn Féin won 37 seats and Fine Gael 35. The Green Party won twelve seats, Labour six, Social Democrats six, People Before Profit-Solidarity five, and Independents and others 21. As no party won enough seats to form an overall majority, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party formed a coalition Government from June 2020, with ministers coming from all three parties.

Fianna Fáil's Micheál Martin became Taoiseach, but by prior agreement handed over to Fine Gael's Leo Varadkar in December 2022. Varadkar announced his resignation in March 2024 and was succeeded as Taoiseach by Simon Harris in April.

Within 90 days of the dissolution of the Dáil, elections to Seanad Éireann will also take place. TDs in the new Dáil will be part of the electorate for 43 of the 60 seats in the new Seanad, along with outgoing Senators and members of county or city councils. Six more Senators will be elected by graduates of certain universities, and eleven will be nominated by the new Taoiseach.



Issues on the horizon



1. HATE SPEECH

The Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill was brought forward by Government minister Helen McEntee (Fine Gael) in November 2022. It contained an offence of inciting hatred against others based on certain 'protected characteristics', such as religion, sexual orientation and gender. Gender was defined as including "transgender and a gender other than those of male and female". No hatred had to be stirred up for the offence to be committed – it simply had to be considered likely by a reasonable person. The Bill did not define hatred.

Hate speech laws endanger free speech and religious liberty. Activists try to use them to silence those they disagree with, and they have been used against Christians in various parts of the world. Faithful preachers could have been accused of hate crime for expounding biblical teaching on sexual morality. Views on sexual ethics expressed on social media could have fallen foul of the wide-ranging law.

The Bill was passed by TDs in April 2023 and moved to consideration in the Seanad. It began to attract more controversy, and after widespread adverse public reaction it was

announced that plans to create the new incitement to hatred offences would be put on hold.

The now narrower Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024 was signed into law in October 2024. Using the concept of 'aggravation by hatred' against people with 'protected characteristics', it introduces several new offences and tougher sentences. These provisions are less dangerous than freestanding hate speech laws, because of the requirement for an offence such as assault or criminal damage to be committed before tougher sentencing can apply. The definition of gender including "transgender and a gender other than those of male and female" remained in the final Act.

By one estimate, the broad definition of gender could include more than 800 different genders.⁵

ASK YOUR CANDIDATES:



Should it be a hate crime to disagree with same-sex marriage or say that gender is binary and men cannot become women?

2. ASSISTED SUICIDE

In March 2024, the Joint Committee on Assisted Dying published a report recommending that adults in Ireland who are suffering intolerably from a terminal condition should be allowed help to kill themselves.⁶ In October 2024, the Dáil voted by 76 votes to 53 to “take note” of the report.

The inquiry followed a Justice Committee report in July 2021 on the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020, a Private Member’s Bill proposed by Gino Kenny TD (People Before Profit-Solidarity). The Justice Committee recommended that the Bill should not be taken forward, saying it did not have proper safeguards to protect vulnerable people from undue pressure. In June 2024, Deputy Kenny introduced another Bill to allow assisted suicide and euthanasia, but it made no progress before the election.⁷

Assisted suicide denies the value of human life as created in the image of God. Allowing doctors and others to help vulnerable people kill themselves is the ultimate in hopelessness. It pressures them into ending their lives prematurely for fear of being a burden on others. The choice to die can quickly become the duty to die. True compassion for such people means valuing their lives and supporting palliative care for all who need it.

The US state of Oregon has had an assisted suicide law for over 25 years. Around half of the people who have died under the law there cited being a burden on family, friends, or caregivers as a reason they chose assisted suicide.⁸

There are no effective safeguards once these laws are introduced. The

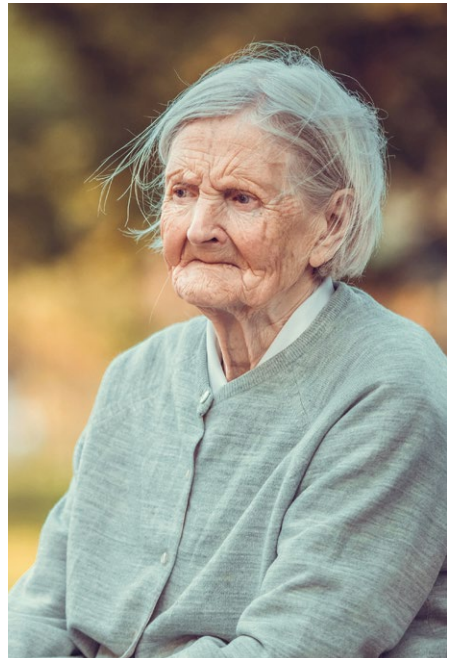
evidence from other countries shows that the eligibility criteria inevitably expand and those dying because of euthanasia and assisted suicide increases year on year.

Canada only legalised ‘Medical Assistance in Dying’ (MAID) in 2016 but has already scrapped the requirement for a person to be terminally ill and plans to extend the law to those with mental illness from 2027.⁹ There were 13,241 MAID deaths reported in 2022, an increase of almost a third compared to 2021.¹⁰

ASK YOUR CANDIDATES:



Will you oppose attempts to legalise assisted suicide or euthanasia?



3. EDUCATION

Parents are the primary educators of their children. This biblical truth is acknowledged by both the Irish Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights. It remains the case even if parents decide to delegate some educational provision to schools.

The teaching of controversial topics such as gender ideology in schools risks undermining parental authority. Changes to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) across the school curriculum in Junior Cycle have seen the introduction of wellbeing indicators that have caused concern to many parents. These include the statement that students should be able to “appreciate the breadth of what constitutes human sexuality, and how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways”.¹¹

“Gender identity” is taught as a core part of what it means to be human, including that it “may” or “may not” correspond with “sex assigned at birth”. This is the terminology of transgender activism, questioning the reality and importance of biological sex. While parents may be able to withdraw their children from lessons they object to, children should not be exposed to such ideological topics in school.

The proposed Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum recently attracted strong criticism from parents over its promotion



of gender ideology and the absence of any reference to marriage or sexual abstinence.¹² The new draft primary school wellbeing curriculum specification also fails to mention marriage.¹³

There is a danger throughout SPHE guidelines that the Christian values of faithfulness in marriage and abstinence before marriage, and the reality of biological sex, could be side-lined in favour of a secular anti-Christian worldview.

ASK YOUR CANDIDATES:



Do you think schools should teach children that there are more than two genders?

4. CONVERSION THERAPY

Activists are trying to bring in new laws against so-called conversion therapy. They say that we need new criminal offences to prohibit actions that seek to change, suppress or inhibit someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity. They are calling for prayer, preaching, pastoral conversations and even parental decision-making that is not LGBT-affirming to be included in a new law.

LGBT people are already protected from physical and verbal abuse under existing law. No evidence of a gap that needs to be filled has been produced.

In January 2023, Government Equalities Minister Roderic O’Gorman (Green) stated his intention to pass a conversion therapy Bill by the end of the year.¹⁴

The following month, Trinity College Dublin published a report on conversion practices in Ireland, commissioned by Mr O’Gorman. It considered 23 academic papers worldwide, only one of which contained data from Ireland, and spoke to only five self-professed survivors of

conversion therapy in Ireland. The report also seemed to unquestioningly accept the definition of conversion therapy as including prayer, confessions, repentance and general non-affirming attitudes.¹⁵

Any law using such a definition would put the ordinary work of churches at risk of prosecution. In Victoria, Australia, official guidance on applying its conversion therapy law says that “not affirming someone’s gender identity” may be unlawful conversion therapy. It also says that Christians can only pray in a way that affirms that everyone is “perfect as they are”. Prayers that “talk about a person’s brokenness or need to repent” are deemed harmful and likely to be illegal.

The Cabinet approved plans to bring forward a Bill in July 2023, but nothing was published before the election, with Mr O’Gorman admitting that aspects of it had proven to be “extremely complex”.¹⁶

ASK YOUR CANDIDATES:



Will you oppose attempts to bring in a new ‘conversion therapy’ law that criminalises parents, preaching and prayer?

5. ABORTION

Until 2018, Ireland had some of the strongest protections for the unborn in the world. However, under the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, abortion is now permitted in Ireland during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. It is also allowed later if there is “a risk to the life, or of serious harm to the health” of the mother, or the child is deemed to have a ‘fatal foetal abnormality’.¹⁷

Between 2018 and 2023, over 38,000 abortions took place, with only a

tiny proportion being due to a risk to the mother’s life.¹⁸

A review of the law published in 2023 recommended making permanent the dangerous home abortion arrangements that were introduced as an emergency measure during the pandemic. It also called for the removal of the sensible requirement for a three-day wait between the first consultation with a doctor and having the abortion.

Recent ‘safe access zones’ legislation has banned all pro-life presence within 100 metres of hospitals and GP surgeries where abortions are performed.¹⁹ Under this law, silent prayer, offering help to vulnerable women or holding a placard could be criminal, punishable by imprisonment or fines if they are perceived to be having the effect of influencing someone accessing abortion. There have been prosecutions in both Northern Ireland and England for holding a placard and for silent prayer within such censorship zones.

The Bible teaches us that every human being from conception is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 139:13-16) whether that person is able-bodied or disabled. Christians are called to love our neighbour before, as well as after, they are born.

ASK YOUR CANDIDATES:



What is your position on the current abortion laws in Ireland?





6. DRUGS

Ireland has the highest drug death rate in the EU.²⁰ Increasing numbers of people are seeking help for drug and alcohol addiction – 13,000 in 2023, up by over 1,000 from 2022. Cocaine accounted for around a third of cases.²¹

Campaigners in Ireland have been pushing the Government to weaken the law on illegal drugs, including decriminalising possession for personal use. A Bill put forward by Gino Kenny TD (People Before Profit-Solidarity) to decriminalise cannabis for personal use was debated in the Dáil in January 2024.²²

Ireland's first supervised drug injection centre is also being opened in Dublin.²³ People will be able to inject their own drugs under medical observation. This exemplifies the philosophy of 'harm reduction'. The argument is made that people are going to take drugs anyway, so it is better to facilitate them doing so in a 'safe' way.

Yet illegal drugs are inherently harmful. Cannabis is often seen as a

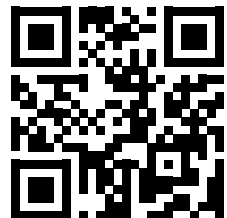
'soft' drug but is in fact a powerful, mind-altering substance that increases users' risk of mental and physical health problems, including psychosis and lung cancer.²⁴ As well as endangering health, drug use leads to problems in relationships, family life and work. Decriminalisation would send the message that taking them is acceptable and would leave people unaware just how dangerous they can be to individuals and society. The State has a duty to protect its citizens.

All people are created in the image of God, with the ability to reason, and the capacity for self-control. The use of any substance which leads to a loss of reasoning capacity, a loss of self-control or addiction is condemned in Scripture (Ephesians 5:18) and the Bible also teaches that Christians should be self-controlled (1 Peter 4:7).

ASK YOUR CANDIDATES:



Do you believe recreational drug use should be legal?



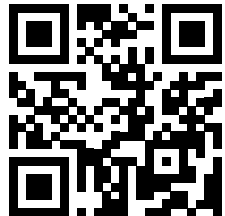
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Questions for Candidates

1. Should it be a hate crime to disagree with same-sex marriage or say that gender is binary and men cannot become women?
2. Will you oppose attempts to legalise assisted suicide or euthanasia?
3. Do you think schools should teach children that there are more than two genders?
4. Will you oppose attempts to bring in a new 'conversion therapy' law that criminalises parents, preaching and prayer?
5. What is your position on the current abortion laws in Ireland?
6. Do you believe recreational drug use should be legal?

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