

# Electing Not to Fight: Elections as a Mechanism of Deradicalisation after the Irish Civil War 1922–1938

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# Electing Not to Fight: Elections as a Mechanism of Deradicalisation after the Irish Civil War 1922–1938

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Much research into the relationship between democratisation and conflict argues that holding elections soon after civil war, when nationalist issues still resonate, is likely to see voters elect to fight. This paper explores a case where elections had the opposite effect. Examination of the relationship between election results and political developments, as well as geographical voting patterns, demonstrates that elections were the primary mechanism for the deradicalisation of Irish politics after the civil war of 1922–23. Elections served as a mechanism for arbitration, selection, and coordination between more and less radical elites and their bases of support. Once the new state had shown its strength it had to accommodate gradual change, while electoral losers had to show they could reconcile change with stability. Elections helped establish credibility in both respects without altering the state-society relationship, suggesting that deradicalisation was dependent on state performance, and thus on some shared conception of the state. This combination of credibility, electoral legitimacy, and state performance, enabled a revolutionary elite, schooled in both constitutional and revolutionary politics, to deradicalise Irish nationalism after independence.

The idea that the early stages of democratic transition can be hijacked by nationalist elites and result in people “electing to fight” is a useful corrective to the view that democratisation always brings peace. Transitional elections may enable elites to entrench their positions, and nationalism is the ideology which enables them to do so (Snyder 2000; Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2005). Although institutions such as a free press may constrain elites, early elections are likely to see people elect to fight by choosing leaders who advocate radical policies. Post-conflict elections particularly can re-ignite civil war passions, give a platform to extremists, and allow one side to confirm its victory, obstructing general reconciliation (Reilly 2008). Early elections can be especially damaging if power becomes distributed along lines over which the war was fought, rather than leading to the integration necessary for state-building (Sisk 2009, 198). Accordingly, Paris suggests that elections be postponed until moderates prevail, and elec-

toral systems designed to marginalise radicals (Paris 2004, 188–91).

In Ireland, however, elections brought the War of Independence (1919–1921) to a close, and enabled a state to deradicalise after its birth in civil war in 1922. Although these elections did confirm victories, expressed civil war tensions, and kept nationalist elites in power, politics substantially deradicalised nonetheless. Many democratic theorists understand democratic institutions principally in terms of functions and outputs, not ideals. Irish elections proved to be a “mechanism” of deradicalisation in two ways: while at first seen as a way of achieving civil war ends, repeated exposure to this mechanism led to consensus on its value as a means of resolving conflict. It worked not because the two sides agreed to resolve their differences peacefully, but because it accelerated a process of deradicalisation that led to the marginalisation of violent actors and consensus on democratic politics.

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### 1. Electing Not to Fight

If electing to fight is important, so should its converse be. If elections result in radicalisation when elites exploit us-versus-them sentiments, represent their opponents as traitors, and harness electoral support in defence of privileges (Snyder 2000, 45–88), a nationalist movement which possessed these combustible elements, but still deradicalised, suggests other possibilities. The Irish Free State was created by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, after partition in 1920, and only became a republic in 1949. If the hardest struggles are those against the “birth defects” of a political community (Mansfield and Snyder 2005, 3), the deradicalisation of a state whose very existence constituted a violation of the founders’ principles shows that voting can also lead to non-violence.

Sinn Féin rose to prominence in 1918 when radicalisation seemed the best way of achieving independence. The movement abstained from the United Kingdom’s Westminster parliament, founded its own underground parliament, Dáil Éireann, in January 1919, and committed itself to the Irish Republic proclaimed during the 1916 Rising. The War of Independence lasted until July 1921, and the Rising remained a symbol of what could be achieved by physical force. The Irish Republican Army (IRA hereafter) spearheaded the independence movement. However, once the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty had been accepted by the second Dáil, on January 7, 1922, elections became the crucial mechanism making the nationalist elite accountable to a public which had become war-weary. The Rising had seen “specialists in violence” increasingly take the initiative away from the politicians. The treaty, however, split the IRA, and began a long process in which elected governments re-asserted their authority. Just as Sinn Féin invoked the principle of majority rule in 1918 to back its call for independence, electoral victories were followed by the forceful assertion of this principle in 1923, 1927, 1933, and 1939. While 1918 radicalised politics, elections had the opposite effect after the treaty.

Deradicalisation involved a “painful confusing metamorphosis” for many revolutionaries (Garvin 1997). Since 1916 nationalists had combined conventional with transgressive politics. By ending the civil war in prison camps in 1923, the anti-treaty elite had shown their loyalty to Republicanism, but they themselves marginalised transgress-

ive politics after they formed the Fianna Fáil party in 1926. Elections were their primary mechanism for doing so, but the state’s foundation myth remained 1916. While the Rising had been a classic example of radical actors taking the initiative away from the politicians it remained, ironically, the foundation myth for a state whose stability rested on the marginalisation of the style of politics it established. The deradicalisation of behaviour did not extend to values. After “four glorious years” of revolution, deradicalisation was an unlikely source of national pride (Hogan 1954).

Deradicalisation had four dimensions. The commitment to the Republic was de-intensified, and the state stabilised in the 1930s, without achieving either the Republic or an end to partition. The treaty required these goals to be pursued incrementally, and the “all or nothing” Republican approach to “the national question” was sidelined. Secondly, conflicts were increasingly resolved in the formal representative arena. Differences over the Treaty split the second Dáil, and two rival parliaments continued to exist in parallel. The decision of Fianna Fáil to enter the new state’s “third Dáil” in 1927 made it the only chamber which mattered. The all-Ireland second Dáil stopped meeting in 1938. Thirdly, the blurred boundary between constitutional and violent politics was reasserted, and elections became the only basis of legitimate authority in nationalist politics by 1933. Paramilitarism then declined. Finally, politics were deradicalised in the sense that a revolutionary elite became dependent on the support of an electorate less radical in its outlook. This meant that purely ideological parties did not flourish, and economic issues increasingly dominated electoral campaigns.

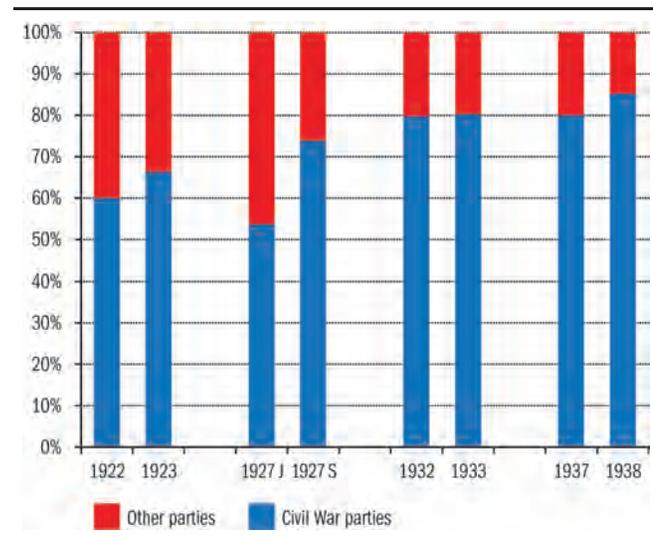
Democratisation had resulted in a combination of independence war, civil war, and sectarian war after 1918 (Kissane 2004). Yet the British imposition of the Treaty, and the fact that attacks on Northern Ireland would result in further violence against Catholics there, meant that the War of Independence could only be extended to Northern Ireland at a price. In this combustible environment “southern Irish” voters elected not to fight. The June 1922 election saw radical nationalists lose majority support, which meant that the costs of further conflict could not be easily imposed on the voters. The link between elections and deradicalisation, thus established, would endure.

Mansfield and Snyder also suggest that radical elites can be held in check by strong institutions of accountability (2003, 23). Irish voters' decision not to fight in 1922 has been explained in three ways: (1) The sequence was one of institutionalisation before liberalisation. The British left the "building blocks" of normal politics: a central administration, legal system, and free press. The breakdown of constitutionalism in 1916 was an aberration, 1922–23 a reassertion of the Irish norm. (2) Institutions such as the Catholic Church, the labour movement, and the press were sufficiently developed for the movement's radicals to be reined in by the organised expression of public opinion (Garvin 1996; Laffan 1999); an accountability argument. (3) A combination of British military pressure, the Catholic Church, and the stance of the banks distorted the marketplace of ideas in 1922. (The first anti-treaty newspaper, *The Irish Press*, was not founded until 1931). Only the holding of successive elections, without threats of reoccupation, sanctions, and red scares, allowed the real views of the people to be ascertained. Sovereignty was a pre-requisite for the electorate expressing itself freely (a state-building argument). All three perspectives suggest that transitions do not necessarily create conditions especially favourable for radical nationalist causes (Snyder 2000, 54).

## 2. "Civil War Politics"

"Civil war politics" – the term for the heated electoral campaigns after 1922 – retained all the combustible elements of "electing to fight". Yet elections continued to deradicalise. The civil war was fought within Sinn Féin and the IRA. The pro-treaty government prevailed and formed Cumann na nGaedheal in December 1922. The losers continued to be represented by Sinn Féin, from which Fianna Fáil split in 1926. Cumann na nGaedheal ruled until 1932, after which Fianna Fáil remained in power for sixteen years. Civil war politics continued in two ways. No coalition was formed before 1948, which meant that the non-civil war parties played no role in government. Secondly, civil war issues were revisited at each election. Up to 1932 the government wanted elections to confirm its victory, while the opposition used elections to stake its claim as guardian of the incomplete national revolution. Both sides thus struggled for legitimacy in the name of the nation.

Figure 1: Vote share of civil war and other parties 1922–38



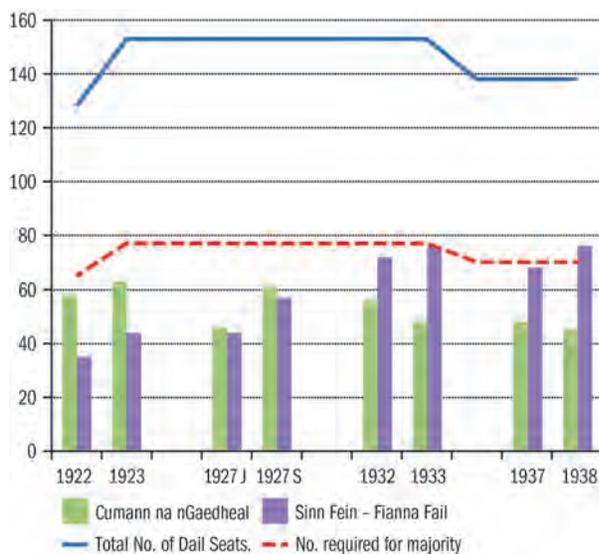
Note: General elections were held in June and September 1927.  
Source: Gallagher 1993.

The civil war divide became more, not less, important. The "directional model" of voting behaviour (Dunleavy 1995, 150–52) suggests that once a basic line of division is established in a political system, voters tend to vote in terms of what side of the divide they are on, not in terms of how closely their opinions match those of the parties themselves. In this respect voting is not rational but directional, and the parties that situate themselves most clearly on either side of the middle ground tend to attract most votes. Despite strong support for "neutral" candidates in June 1922, once the two large parties representing the civil war sides emerged, voting became directional. As a result, the non-civil war parties' share of the vote dropped from over 40 percent in June 1922 to less than 15 percent in 1938. This decline is shown in red in Table 1. The September 1927 election was the obvious turning-point.

Radicalisation may thrive when nationalist elites rule in the name of the people, but are insufficiently accountable to them (Snyder 2000, 45). Yet the civil war parties *did* impose their conception of politics on voters. They usually fell short of a majority during elections, but to avoid coalitions with "sectional interests" they took advantage of an ambiguity in the 1922 constitution which did not outline the

conditions under which a Dáil could be dissolved, except to say that “Dáil Éireann may not at any time be dissolved except on the advice of the Executive Council”. The first dissolution occurred in 1927, when the attorney general advised the minority government, which had done badly in the June election, that the Constitution did not prevent the Executive Council from dissolving the Dáil without its consent (O’Leary 1979, 24). The Dáil was dissolved and the September 1927 “snap election” returned Cumann na nGaedheal to power. In 1933 and 1938 Fianna Fáil governments also called “snap elections” in order to convert their initial plurality of seats in the Dáil into a majority. They then formed a single-party government and avoided a coalition. Figure 2 shows the effects of these “snap elections” on parliamentary strengths.

Figure 2: Party strengths and snap elections 1922–38



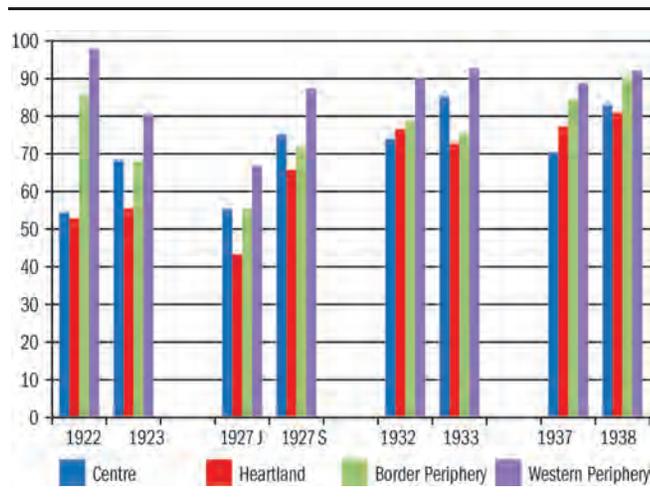
Source: Gallagher 1993.

Much has been written about what kinds of institutional design encourage deradicalisation. Power-sharing is often recommended. Irish politics deradicalised under a Westminster “winner take all” system where power was exclusively in the hands of one or other of the civil war parties. Local government was placed under strong central control after 1923. The term “Civil war politics” itself sug-

gests the instrumental use to which civil war memories were put. The scars were real: seventy-seven IRA men were officially executed by the state during the civil war, most as reprisals. Yet “joint institutional manipulation”, whereby both sides used the rules of the game to structure competition around themselves, took place (Dunleavy 1991). By 1936 forty-eight of the eighty-three articles of the 1922 constitution had been amended, further concentrating power in the hands of the civil war parties (Farrell 1988).

Deradicalisation thus occurred more because the civil war blocs changed internally, rather than because moderate actors became more pivotal. Institutions, such as a free press or a multi-party system, were not strong enough to persuade voters that vertical divisions (between elites and masses) were more important than those between nations (Mansfield and Snyder 2005, 2). The combined electoral strength of the civil war parties was initially greatest in western areas where civil war violence was worst. Figure 3 shows their combined first preference vote by region between 1922 and 1938. Before September 1927, their share of the vote in the “heartland” of Ireland and in the capital Dublin was actually less than 60 percent. Remarkably, in the heartland, where most constituencies were located, their share of the vote had dropped to only 43 percent by June 1927. This area had seen less fighting in 1922–23. After Fianna Fáil’s entry into the Dáil in 1927 a national pattern of representation emerged, with the civil war parties’ combined vote share reaching 80 percent or more in all regions in 1938. Their territorial expansion was an aspect of “the invasion of the centre by the periphery” between 1922 and 1938 (Garvin 1974). The third parties lost out in this invasion.

Figure 3: Civil war parties' share of first preference vote by region 1922–38



Note 1: To account for boundary revisions in 1923 and 1935, the following classifications were used. In 1922 *Centre* includes Dublin Mid, Dublin North West, Dublin South, Dublin County; *Heartland* includes Carlow-Kilkenny, Cork Borough, Cork East and North East, Cork Mid, North, South, South East, and West, Kildare-Wicklow, Laois-Offaly, Louth-Meath, Tipperary North, South, and Mid, Waterford-Tipperary East, Wexford; *Border Periphery* includes Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim-Roscommon North, Longford-Westmeath, Monaghan, Sligo-Mayo East; *Western Periphery* includes Clare, Galway, Kerry-Limerick West, Limerick City and East, Mayo South-Roscommon South, Mayo North and West. In 1923–33 *Centre* includes Dublin North, Dublin South, Dublin Co.; *Heartland* includes Carlow-Kilkenny, Cork Borough, Cork East, Cork North, Cork West, Kildare, Laois-Offaly, Meath, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford, Wicklow; *Border Periphery* includes Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim-Sligo, Longford-Westmeath, Louth, Monaghan, and Roscommon; *Western Periphery* includes Clare, Galway, Kerry, Limerick, Mayo North, and Mayo South. For 1937–38 *Centre* includes Dublin North East, Dublin North West, Dublin South, Dublin Townships, Dublin County; *Heartland* includes Carlow-Kildare, Cork Borough, Cork North, Cork South East, Cork West, Kilkenny Laois Offaly, Meath-Westmeath, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford, and Wicklow; *Border Periphery* includes Athlone-Longford, Cavan, Donegal East, Donegal West, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, Roscommon, Sligo; *Western Periphery* includes Clare, Galway East, Galway West, Kerry North, Kerry South, Limerick, Mayo North, and Mayo South.

Note 2: In 1922 Limerick City and East, Donegal, Leitrim-Roscommon North, Clare, Kerry-Limerick-West, and Mayo North and West were uncontested.

Note 3: Figures for University constituencies are not included.

Hence deradicalisation cannot be explained in terms of the weakening of the original cleavage: rather the cleavage was reinforced as the polity deradicalised. Deradicalisation was not the result of the familiar steps: the abandonment of nationalist goals, the replacement of radical actors with moderate ones, or changes in the external environment which made nationalist issues less relevant. The Irish marketplace of ideas was actually severely distorted by the alliance between priest and patriot: exactly the conditions under which elections allegedly lead to radicalisation (Snyder 2000, 56–59). Elites were accountable electorally, but not in other ways. Nonetheless, elections proved a suf-

ficient mechanism for deradicalisation. They did so because they performed three essential functions.

### 3. Functions of Elections: Arbitration, Coordination, Selection

#### 3.1 Elections as an Arbitration Mechanism

Elections can strengthen public support for democracy in new democracies if a process of “habituation” can lead to the internalisation of democratic rules. They can also strengthen the power of “norm entrepreneurs” who advocate democratic methods within political movements divided between radicals and moderates. Irish involvement in mass elections long predated 1921 and its long democratic “apprenticeship” is usually cited as a reason for its stability (Chubb 1992). When the single transferable vote proportional representation system was introduced in 1921, there was little difficulty adapting to it. On the other hand, others stress that belief in elections was reinforced by a dramatic alternation in power (Munger 1979). The 1932 changeover demonstrated that democratic rules applied to both sides.

Neither approach explains the relationship between elections and deradicalisation. In the absence of a negotiated peace and power-sharing, why should either side accept election results? The winners held an election to rubber-stamp their victory in 1923, but why accept defeat in 1932? The role of “norm entrepreneurs” in persuading the losers to accept election results and the strengthening of state legitimacy in 1932 were important factors. But why were the norm entrepreneurs persuasive among the anti-treatyites, and why did a “winner take all” changeover not disrupt the process? Post-civil war democracies must combine respect for political pluralism with the provision of public order. If elections perpetuated the winner-take-all logic of civil war, how did they allow for the restoration of order?

One explanation is that both sides eventually accepted that the treaty issues should be arbitrated by the voting public. The question was not whether such issues should be dominant, but whether they would be arbitrated democratically. Post-civil war democracy can be “an arbitration mechanism” in which the public are given the right to choose between warring factions in elections (Wanthchekon 2004). The treaty had required that a general election take place

within six months. The Provisional Government, under pressure from the British, saw this election as a means of finding out if the people would give them a mandate for the course they were taking. The anti-treatyites feared it would signify the disestablishment of the Republic and an acceptance of partition (Kissane 2002). An election was held only on June 16 after both sides agreed to put forward a joint panel of candidates and form a Sinn Féin coalition government afterwards. This agreement became known as “the Collins-de Valera electoral pact”. In the June election pro-treaty panel candidates won 58 seats out of 128, while anti-treatyites from this panel got 36, a loss of 22 seats.

The assumption of the electoral pact, that a straight vote on the treaty be avoided, was now rejected in favour of the arbitration device. The Provisional Government thought the results gave them a clear mandate to implement the treaty. Republicans thought the mandate was for a coalition. To the case for the Treaty settlement, only narrowly accepted by the Dáil in January 1922, was added the principle that the majority must rule. A switch to peacetime legitimacy was underway, and the alleged threat to individual liberty and private property posed by the “irregular” IRA was now stressed in government propaganda (Kissane 2005, 155–58). The Provisional Government, under British pressure, attacked the IRA positions in central Dublin on June 28. Civil war then spread to the countryside. The fighting was ultimately one-sided, the public proved weary, and the anti-treatyites laid down their arms and returned home without a surrender in May 1923 (Hopkinson 1988). Military victory was secured.

The logic of an arbitration device was that the electoral victors would determine the direction of the polity, and government policy reflect public opinion. The government claimed that the August 1923 election retrospectively vindicated its civil war policy. Yet Michael Collins, the pro-treaty leader, also said that the treaty would stand, unless “in the whirl of politics” those opposed to it got a majority in the country (Kissane 2002, 207). The arbitration mechanism thus pointed to two means of conflict resolution. The victors tried to use their strength to compel the losers to accept the settlement. In contrast, Fianna Fáil wanted to reconcile the losers to the new state by replacing the agreement.

Implicit in the arbitration device is the principle of majority rule. When the anti-treatyites offered to negotiate peace in April 1923, the government replied that in future, “all political issues ... shall be decided by the majority vote of the elected representatives of the people” (Valiulis 1992, 189). At the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis (general convention) in 1926, when a large minority left to form Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin’s president de Valera declared that “the majority of the people were going to shape the future” (Fanning 1989, 10). The pro-treaty government stood down after the 1932 elections, from which Fianna Fáil emerged as the largest party. After gaining a majority of seats in 1933, de Valera gradually revised the treaty on the basis of his parliamentary majority. His enactment of a Republican constitution in 1937 “completed the reconciliation of majority rule with popular sovereignty” (Farrell 1988, 117–19).

By 1938, (besides partition) most civil war issues had been substantially resolved by the arbitration device. This encouraged deradicalisation in two ways. Responsibility for deciding the direction of the polity was devolved, which meant that the moves away from the treaty were in step with a public opinion less radical than the elite. Secondly, those parties that accepted the arbitration device found themselves at odds with radical actors. The anti-treatyites were seen to have rejected democracy in 1922, and Fianna Fáil had to resolve its “commitment problem” by signalling its moderate intentions after 1926. The assassination of the Minister of Home Affairs, Kevin O’Higgins on 10 July, 1927, saw them end their abstentionist policy and enter the Dáil. Before the 1932 election, rather than declaring that once in power they would dissolve all existing relationships with the United Kingdom, Fianna Fáil limited their ambitions to the removal of the oath (required of parliamentarians by the 1922 constitution), combined with the non-payment of land annuities to the British government. (Land annuities were paid by Irish farmers as compensation for land they gained from various land reform acts before independence.) These commitments ensured Fianna Fáil Labour’s support in power. Nonetheless, the IRA informally worked for Fianna Fáil in elections in 1932 and 1933., Only Fianna Fáil’s electoral victory in 1933 saw them finally resolve their commitment problem by employing military tribunals against the IRA. These tribunals

had been established by Cumann na nGaedheal in 1931. After this extra-legal opposition to the Fianna Fáil government subsided.

### 3.2. Elections as a Coordinating Mechanism

If civil war ends in stalemate and an agreement to share power, both sides may deradicalise concurrently. Yet in Ireland there was a direct connection between the imbalance of power created by the civil war and the loser's decision to deradicalise. An effective coordination device establishes clear expectations about actors' compliance with its provisions, forcing them to re-assess their attitudes to it or become marginalised (Hardin 1999, 140). In Ireland the prospect of political oblivion quickly led to deradicalisation. The civil war victors insisted on elections as the only route to power. The anti-treatyites could reorganise knowing that their opponents would respect the integrity of this procedure. Expectations converged around parliament as the only place for opposition.

The government had won the war "hands down". The losers abstained from the Dáil, and hoped for an election victory which would enable Sinn Féin's parliament and government to become the institutions of the state. Yet local government appointments were centrally controlled, the losers were excluded from public employment, and many emigrated. Financial problems and electoral failures forced Sinn Féin to reconsider tactics (Pyne 1969–70). The danger of a genuine multi-party system was very obvious to de Valera, who remarked in 1923 that if the "third parties" (such as Labour) succeeded in organising themselves to any considerable extent it would be nearly impossible to unite them again "for a purely national purpose". It was vital, therefore, that the reorganisation of Sinn Féin as the national organisation should be pushed forward with all speed (Laffan 1999, 429).

In January 1926 de Valera announced his willingness to enter the Dáil if the oath of allegiance were removed. The issue was debated by Sinn Féin on 9 March, 1926. Having lost the debate, de Valera's minority became Fianna Fáil: the Republican Party, further splintering Sinn Féin with another split. The public rewarded their step towards deradicalisation. In June 1927 Fianna Fáil gained forty-four

as opposed to Cumann na nGaedheal's forty-seven seats, but its elected members were prevented from taking their seats so as long as they refused to take the oath. The assassination of Kevin O'Higgins then led the government to introduce a bill requiring electoral candidates to promise in advance to comply with the oath. The basis of the abstentionist policy was destroyed. Fianna Fáil took the oath – albeit as "an empty political formula" – and became the largest opposition party. When the "Republican Dáil" met on December 11, 1927, only half of those who had attended the previous year were invited, as the other half had joined the de facto parliament (Kissane 2002, 173–80).

Post-conflict democracies can be sustained by uncertainty: actors can accept electoral defeat for now, confident of future chances (Prezowski 1988). In Ireland, certainty about their future irrelevance if they continued their policy of abstentionism encouraged the losers' participation in official institutions. An imbalance of power had similar consequences in 1933, when the newly-formed Fine Gael (a continuation of Cumann na nGaedheal) chose an unelected fascist with a civil war past as its president, and a campaign of political disruption by his "Blueshirts" began. "Red-scare" tactics against Fianna Fáil marked the 1933 election and paramilitary violence returned to the countryside. The Blueshirts were led by fascists, but the Fine Gael parliamentary elite abandoned them when the situation polarised. The government repressed them with the cooperation of the Garda Síochána (police). The poor showing of Blueshirt candidates in the 1934 local elections suggested their movement, and the crisis it provoked, would be "the nemesis of civil war". If Fianna Fáil had not won an electoral majority in 1933, Fine Gael (and the British government, with whom Fianna Fáil fought a trade war), may have tried harder to undermine its government. De Valera had called the snap election believing that the British government would not negotiate with a parliament they expected to fall (Fanning 1983). The pro-treaty elite confined themselves to conventional opposition from then on. An imbalance of power again saw expectations converging on parliament as the arena of political opposition.

Stable democracy has, as a core element, political consensus on the desirability of existing institutions and the

rules of the game. Historically, such elite consensus has come about either through elite settlements, or through processes of electoral competition in which the main parties eventually converge on an equilibrium point (Higley and Burton 1998). Although the civil war destroyed the basis for consensus for some time, the parties converged on some issues in the late 1930s, culminating in an agreed policy of neutrality in World War Two. Elections encouraged this convergence at two critical turning-points. Fianna Fáil became a responsible opposition in 1927 as the world depression was deepening. Fine Gael accepted the legitimacy of Fianna Fáil rule in 1934, when the European polarisation between democrats and fascists was extending to Ireland. Both crises saw expectations coordinate on parliamentary forms of opposition.

### 3.3. Elections as a Selection Mechanism.

In the absence of strong mechanisms of accountability elections can be hijacked by an elite threatened by the return to normal politics. Yet Irish elections did not provide “a safe landing” for nationalist elites (Mansfield and Snyder 2005 8): after all mechanisms of accountability had been sufficiently strong to make radical arguments unpersuasive in 1922 (Garvin 1996). Elections also *remained* competitive, giving the edge to those who could adapt their skill sets and rationalise their commitment to them after the civil war. Elections institute a double process of “Darwinian selectivity” in favour of such actors: one among parties in general elections, and one among politicians vying for leadership within these parties (Rustow 1970, 359). The danger was that hardliners would regroup and use civil war networks to continue the conflict by other means. Yet in Ireland early elections had the opposite effect, forcing splits within Sinn Féin in 1922 and 1926. The losses of anti-treaty Sinn Féin in the “pact election” of 1922, and the public’s rejection of key anti-treaty leaders, led to the pro-treaty leader, William Cosgrave, refusing negotiations during the civil war with people whose “period of usefulness” had been eclipsed (Kissane 2005). Into the 1930s elections continued to give actors more suited to peaceful politics the upper hand within the anti-treaty opposition.

The impact of this double selectivity on the party system has been noted. It resulted in the marginalisation of Sinn

Féin after 1926 and of the Blueshirts after 1933. Anti-treaty losses in 1922, strong support for third parties up to 1927, and the fear that they would realign the system around non-nationalist issues, all encouraged deradicalisation. Republicanism had to become electorally competitive to achieve its goals. Moreover, the victors’ “red-scare” propaganda continually stressed the responsibility of the anti-treatyites for the economic cost of the civil war. This had two consequences: first, Fianna Fáil had to focus on economic issues in elections; then, in order to show coalition potential, the party deradicalised its behaviour in the Dáil. The prospect of it coming to power after its five years as a constructive opposition was less threatening. Labour, which supported the government during the civil war, supported the minority Fianna Fáil government between 1932 and 1933.

This selectivity was also at work in the struggle for hegemony within Sinn Féin. While the struggle between revolutionary and conservative nationalists among the victors continued within the army, on the losing side those who were successful in elections became “norm entrepreneurs” for democratic methods. This struggle went through three phases: the initial response to defeat, the 1926 split, and Fianna Fáil’s period in power. In 1923 de Valera reflected that the absence of popular support was his side’s chief weakness during the civil war. He saw in the government’s formation of *Cumann na nGaedheal* an opportunity to relaunch Sinn Féin as a broad-based national movement. Attempts to have the party rename itself the Irish Republican Political Organisation were resisted by de Valera, who insisted that “we wish to organise not merely Republican opinion strictly so-called, but what might be called ‘Nationalist’ or ‘Independence’ opinion in general”. De Valera, who had explicitly rejected the arbitration device in 1922, became “a norm entrepreneur” for democratic methods (Kissane 2002, 168–73).

Yet stalemate first prevailed. In 1925 the IRA decided it would withdraw its allegiance to the Republican government founded by de Valera in 1922. This contributed to the formation of Fianna Fáil, and after its entry into the Dáil the balance of power shifted. Sinn Féin was only able to put forward fifteen candidates for the June 1927 election, as

opposed to Fianna Fáil's eighty-seven, and only five were elected. Sinn Féin was unable to put forward any candidates at all for the election in September 1927. In contrast, Fianna Fáil increased its seats from forty-four to fifty-seven. The number of affiliated Sinn Féin branches (Cumann) was 87 in 1927 compared to a figure of 232 for 1926 (Kissane 2002, 175). Many Sinn Féin members and supporters who initially remained loyal, later joined Fianna Fáil, "attracted by its dynamism and the political acumen of its leaders" (Pyne 1969, 47).

A third phase began in 1933. Even though many IRA members worked for Fianna Fáil in the 1932 and 1933 elections, Fianna Fáil's government did not suspend Article 2A, which allowed for military tribunals, although their operations were halted. The hated Criminal Intelligence Department, responsible for counter-insurgency, remained in existence. Moreover, a former Cumann na nGaedhealer was chosen as Minister of Justice. Open confrontation with the IRA followed a radical change in IRA policy in March 1933, when the IRA rescinded its resolution, carried in 1932, to adopt a supportive attitude towards the government. It would now "pursue its policy irrespective of its reactions on the policy of the Free State Government and other political parties" (Kissane 2002, 184).

Fianna Fáil wanted not to marginalise Republicanism, but to show those bitter in defeat that politics could achieve their objectives. The Constitution (Removal of Oath) Actin 1933 went some way towards fulfilling the government's ambition of establishing a government based on democratic principles, "and the complete absence of political barriers or tests of conscience of any kind" (Kissane 2002, 187). Government pensions were introduced for members of the anti-treaty IRA, and IRA men were recruited into the Gardaí. The 1937 constitution made it difficult to claim that the state was not legitimate. The changed attitude of one IRA leader, Sean MacBride, is illustrative. In the early thirties he predicted that if Fianna Fáil succeeded in removing the oath and the office of Governor General, the IRA would be in a difficult position (*ibid.*, 192). By 1937 he had become convinced that the IRA had no real role to play in Southern politics, and ceased to be active in the organisation soon thereafter.

Since the decision of the more pragmatic Sinn Féiners to accept the treaty involved a commitment to deradicalise, the selection mechanism mattered most for those with the longest journey to travel. It worked so effectively that Fianna Fáil developed the most efficient electoral machine in the state, remaining dominant until 2011. Its electoral journey began in defeat, and its organisational culture was already apparent from de Valera's attempted reorganisation of Sinn Féin in 1923; ideological pragmatism combined with Republican rhetoric; a concentration on socio-economic issues; and electoral efficiency – an internal memo stated that there should be no "duds" in this regard, but appointment by ability (Kissane 2002, 193). Before 1932 such norm entrepreneurs required electoral successes to be persuasive. In power they vindicated their civil war cause with constitutional changes, and at the same time pushed aside the IRA. "Constitutional Republicanism" may be an oxymoron, and only success at the polls allowed Republicanism, south of the border, to become constitutional.

#### 4. Elections and State-Building

A tension can exist between elections and state-building, and for this reason Paris recommends "institutionalisation before liberalisation" (2004, 179–211). Early elections can freeze allegiances in ways that are incompatible with state-building, which requires integration among the population (Sisk 2009, 198–203). Yet the Irish sequence was simultaneous institutionalisation and liberalisation. By 1922 the country was in chaos, with no official security force. Only civil war resolved the problems of dual authority structures, private armies, rival sovereignty claims, and disputed boundaries. Central institutions were then rapidly reconstructed between 1923 and 1927, years in which four general elections took place.

Early elections rubber-stamped this process of reconstruction. The Provisional Government's claim that it received a mandate in 1922 would have been hard to sustain had they not won the conventional phase of the civil war by September. The August 1923 election was held before the civil war had officially ended, and enabled the government to claim public endorsement for its military campaign. Later elections (in 1927, 1933, and 1938), were also followed by emergency legislation. The public rewarded the

elite with a mandate for the course (deradicalisation) they were taking. Indeed all but one of the eight elections held between 1922 and 1938 were won by incumbents. If the public was receptive to deradicalisation in the interests of democracy, it consistently showed a preference for strong central authority. There was no trade-off between liberalisation and institutionalisation.

Elections also confirmed that the state had not been captured by the winners. An electoral reform that did not disadvantage the losers was carried out in 1923. The retention of proportional representation (STV) allowed them to rapidly regain electoral ground. Garvin suggests that the pro-treaty elite saw politics “essentially as administration”, and reacted to the disturbance of revolution by committing themselves to a state autonomous from a “corrupting” native culture (Garvin 1981). After 1932 Fianna Fáil sought no revenge, and made the state more autonomous. While previous reconstruction schemes offered employment to National Army veterans, Fianna Fáil offered it to all.

The state itself was a source of deradicalisation. Early elections signalled that this process was underway, and state strength kept these signals strong. Had elections been postponed, the state would have lacked legitimacy, and the losers would have been deprived of a reason to regroup. Eight general elections took place between 1922 and 1938: one every few years. Since power was usually returned to incumbents, public support for deradicalisation was obviously connected to state performance. Elections furthered institutionalisation because they reinforced traditional conceptions of state performance. By 1922 an idea of the state existed: the government’s civil war propaganda stressed the state’s role in the protection of individual liberty and private property (Kissane 2005, 151). Fianna Fáil incorporated aspects of Cumann na nGaedheal’s appeal into its own strategy, as demonstrated in its manifesto for the 1933 general election.

#### **Fianna Fáil 1933 General Election Manifesto**

*Today!*

*Choose your own Government*

*Choose a Strong Government*

*Choose an Irish Government!*

*We pledge ourselves to promote unity, to rule justly and impartially, to hold all citizens equal before the law, and to protect each in his person and in his property with all the resources at our command. We promise that the confidence placed in us by the people will not be abused. We promise to serve Ireland with all our abilities and to advance in every way the true interests of her people.*

*(Signed President de Valera).*

*Vote Fianna Fáil*

Security was the bedrock of the state-society relationship (Sisk 2009), and the issue most likely to lead voters to support the government after civil war, regardless of social cleavages (Wantchekon 2005). The emphasis of the British state had also been on security. Mulhall notes that expenditure on the secret service was vastly higher after independence than it had been under the British in 1921–22. Expenditure on the police, for example, rose from £425,000 in 1922–23 to £1,031,000 in 1923 (Mulhall 1993). The government’s “red-scare” tactics, effective in the civil war, continued into the 1930s. This forced Fianna Fáil to address the public’s need for security too. As de Valera recalled:

The people supported Fianna Fáil because its policy was a practical one. It kept the ultimate objective of a free, united Irish nation clearly in view, but it concentrated successively on the nearer local objectives along the way, striving at each point to put upon the people only the strains which the people could bear. (quoted in Kissane 2002, 191)

Civil war issues were revisited at election time, and in the atmosphere of insecurity this created, those who could provide strong government benefited. The result was that competition, while intense at the elite level, was deradicalising at the societal level. The dominance of such a conservative elite was reassuring to those among the public who were also socially conservative. The stress on security implied acceptance of the social order at a time when European politics were becoming polarised. Its bases, land reform, Catholic morality, and the common law system, had also been promoted by the British state, and reconstruction ef-

forts worked through institutions, like the Land Commission, which predated independence. The state-society relations were reassuring in the sense of being traditional.

Snyder suggests a zero-sum relationship between the interests of nationalist elites and democratic accountability (2000, 52). However, as with the emphasis on security, the majority rule principle was mutually reassuring to elite and public. In 1936 de Valera published a pamphlet *National Discipline and Majority Rule*, which distanced his party from the civil war and suggested that the IRA had only been legitimate when supported by the majority of the people. He was now claiming the mandate he had enjoyed in 1918. Majority rule meant that the civil war elite remained dominant, in return for which the elite provided the public with the sense of security that had been disrupted since 1914. Elections were crucial to this balancing act. When governments with weak parliamentary bases held snap elections at two critical junctures (September 1927 and 1933), crises of authority were resolved with the public's support. Such elections forced the public to choose between one or other of the civil war sides who favoured an arbitration device that privileged their own conception of politics. Deradicalisation was thus a joint exercise, not one where either elite or public prevailed. Irish elites were able to shape governing alternatives, while becoming more responsive to public preferences.

The horizontal aspect to the state-society relations was important too. As issues became resolved by the arbitration device, the two civil war parties converged on common ground. The Offences Against the State Act, passed against the IRA in 1939, gained their joint support, as did the state's policy of neutrality in World War Two. Consensus on economic protectionism and on the defence of Catholic morality had also been established. Both civil war sides had originated in Sinn Féin, and unlike unionists, shared a belief in full independence and Irish unity. Some personal friendships were revived as work in the Dáil acted as "an emotional solvent" for the bitterness of civil war. The elite had come to prominence in a national revolution, which disadvantaged those with no "national records", such as Labour. The outcome was mutually reassuring to those whose nationalist politics prevailed, and to the public which saw the social conflicts of the civil war left behind.

Unfortunately, the price was the muffling of the pluralism Snyder associates with deradicalised politics. The Irish revolution had had a social dimension: over one hundred Soviets were formed between 1917 and 1923 (Kostick 2009). Labour did exceptionally well in 1922, but after the civil war its vote fell sharply. Its weakness in rural regions far from Dublin gave the advantage to Fianna Fáil, which took many of its manifesto commitments from Labour in 1927. Fianna Fáil continued the nineteenth-century pattern of standing up to Britain, but rapidly spread its support base beyond those peripheral areas where anti-state feeling had been strongest in 1923 (Garvin 1981). "Civil war politics", involving competing visions of the nation's future and the muffling of pluralism, could have delayed reconciliation. Yet Fianna Fáil's expansion was compatible with state-building, as such parties came to represent an encompassing, not exclusive, national interest. Neither Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael were established during the civil war.

The paradox of deradicalisation taking place alongside the institutionalisation of a deep cleavage has been explored regarding Northern Ireland, an ethnically-divided society (Evans, Mitchell, and O'Leary 2009). Party competition can, however, further national integration: (a) by establishing a national network of cross-local communication channels in a way that strengthens national identity; and (b) by helping to set the national system of government above any particular set of office holders, encouraging voters to target their discontent at the governing party and not the political system as a whole (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 4). The 1932 changeover allowed voters' discontent to be targeted at Cumann na nGaedheal, not the state. Moreover, both civil war parties continued the nineteenth-century tradition of establishing mass centralised organisations which cut across class and territorial cleavages (Garvin 1981, 216). Neither were a party of periphery or centre: both emphasised social cohesion. Nation-building through party competition was one consequence of civil war politics. As with older nationalist movements, these parties also provided institutions within which the rivalry between constitutional and violent nationalism could be bridged (ibid., 180).

## 5. Conclusion

The Irish nationalist elite was only relatively autonomous: they remained electorally dominant, but the steps they took on the treaty were in line with public opinion. The Mansfield/Snyder perspective reflects the pre-1914 liberal view of the public as “a molten mass” that elites can easily put their stamp on (Müller 2011, 7). Yet Irish elections combined two things Snyder does not allow for. They deradicalised politics and kept a nationalist elite, schooled in constitutional *and* revolutionary politics, in power. Since the formation of a cohesive elite is required for societies to move out of transition, elections mattered not in making this elite accountable, but giving it the ability to rule. Civil war politics perpetuated the struggle for legitimacy, but keeping that struggle sharp favoured not moderates, but those who combined constitutional politics with a revolutionary pedigree.

Irish elections only became part of an effective system of checks and balances after the passing of the 1937 constitution. They mattered most as conduits of public opinion in a society with a long tradition of local political organisation. Most Irish politicians had “dual mandates” (i.e., held local government and parliamentary seats) and local elections were held in 1925, 1928, and 1934. Anti-treatyites never abstained from these bodies, many of which passed peace resolutions during the civil war, but were not generally responsible for national issues. That local support was required for national power provided a key mechanism of deradicalisation, and points to the need to investigate voters’ preferences at the local level before assuming that elections held in transitional circumstances

will radicalise politics. Such an investigation would direct attention to that combination of war weariness, government repression, economic interests, mass emigration, religious authority, and cultural traditions that made these constituencies elect not to fight. Their articulation through the STV proportional representation system was also constant before and after the civil war.

For Mansfield and Snyder elections could have deradicalised because they were held after central institutions had developed (the sequence argument), were complimented by strong checks and balances (the accountability argument), or because the time that elapsed before 1937 was sufficient for behaviour to change incrementally (the state-building argument). None of these perspectives explains the outcome in Ireland, where institutionalisation and liberalisation were mutually reinforcing, despite the frequency of elections in this period. The complementary relationship between elections and state-building was crucial to the resolution of the civil war divide. Once the Free State had shown its strength, the question was how it could accommodate change by making credible the “stepping-stone” approach to the Treaty. The losers had to show they could reconcile changes to the Treaty with stability. Elections helped establish credibility in both respects. That they did so without altering the state-society relationship suggests that deradicalisation was dependent on state performance, and thus on some shared conception of the state. In explaining why the currency of revolutionary politics could be converted into a state-building project through elections – the gold standard of deradicalisation in Ireland – the idea of the state was as important as its institutional design.

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