New Irish Politics
Political Parties and Immigrants in 2009

Bryan Fanning, Neil O’Boyle and Jo Shaw

Research on behalf of the
Migration and Citizenship Initiative, University College Dublin
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Bryan Fanning, School of Applied Social Science UCD
Neil O'Boyle, School of Applied Social Science UCD
Jo Shaw, School of Law, University of Edinburgh
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction                  1
2. Main Findings and Issues     2
3. Recommendations             4
4. Immigrants and Politics      5
5. Immigrant Party Members      7
6. Integration Role of Political Parties  9
7. Reaching Immigrant Voters   12
8. Change We Must Believe In    14
9. Appendices                   16
1 Introduction

This report follows two earlier assessments of responsiveness by Irish political parties to immigrant communities, Positive Politics published prior to the 2004 local government elections and Irish Political Parties: Immigration and Integration in 2007. In 2004 a number of immigrant candidates stood for local government elections as independents. Efforts at the time by political parties to engage with immigrant communities were variously perfunctory and ineffectual. Irish political parties had yet to catch up with the changing face of Irish society. Officials working for some of these were bemused when asked what their parties were doing to reach out to immigrants who were entitled to vote in the local government elections. The idea of responding to immigrants who had a right to vote in local elections was still foreign to them.

In 2009 commitments ‘in principle’ to integration are being translated into tangible political efforts to engage the diverse face of twenty-first century Irish society. This positive politics has emerged at a time of considerable social and economic pessimism where it might be all too easy to promote hostility towards immigrants. The political integration of immigrants is described in this report as ‘change we must believe in.’ For the sake of future social cohesion the integration of immigrants is arguably no less important to the future of Irish society than resolving economic problems. The focus of this report is on ‘top-down’ and grassroots efforts to promote a New Irish Politics that reflects the diversity of twenty-first century Irish society.

Firstly, the research sought to ascertain how and to what extent Irish political parties as institutions are now responsive to immigrants. Each of the five parties was asked what policies or good practices they had adopted to encourage members of immigrant communities and ethnic-minority groups to become party members. Secondly, the parties were each asked to outline their specific ‘vision’ for the integration of immigrants into Irish society. Thirdly, interviews were conducted with immigrant members of political parties, including some candidates standing in for election, and with other immigrants active in politics and in voter registration campaigns. The aim throughout has been to present a non-partisan account of how the political parties represented the nature and extent of their responses to immigrants.

The study was undertaken as part of a three-year project funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences integration and social change in the Republic of Ireland. It is part of the wider research programme of the Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative (MCRI) at UCD. As with equivalent UK research, the emphasis is on identifying institutional barriers and good practices. The research also built on earlier research on Irish political parties in 2003, 2004 and 2007 with the aim of identifying improvements in responses of parties to immigrants and ethnic minorities. The MCRI is committed to the development of evidence-based policy-making and practice in the area of Irish immigration policy and positive engagement with stakeholders in the development of good practice.

3 MCRI, Bridging the Research-Policy Divide: Evidence-Based Research in Irish Integration Policy, www.ucd.ie/mcri
Main Findings and Issues

The findings of this survey suggest that Irish political parties still find it difficult to assess to what extent efforts they have made to reach out to immigrants and members of ethnic minority communities have been successful. The responses of all the parties suggest an urgent need for monitoring of progress. Parties need to know how well they are doing at reaching different immigrant communities. Whilst none of the parties had an established practice of monitoring membership, officials in a number of these found themselves going through membership rolls to estimate (on the basis of surnames) how many members from different communities they had attracted.

Not only is such an approach amateurish and ineffective, it might provoke legitimate concern amongst party members who may consider that they are being profiled without their permission. It is clear that political parties need to consult with their members on such issues and come up with systems that allow members to self-identify on a voluntary basis. One way of doing so might be to allow new members to self-identify when applying for party membership. Another might be to have web-based systems that allow existing members to register in on-line party forums. For example African members might be interested in receiving regular updates on issues of particular interest to them.

None of the parties had access to clear data on membership that would enable them to engage more successfully with immigrant communities. The lack of sound information in some cases meant there was a gap between how parties presented themselves in their official responses to the survey and what was happening on the ground. To some extent the parties undersold the work they were doing at a grassroots level. Again, when the official responses of the political parties were compared with what immigrants said in interviews there was sometimes a gap between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ perceptions.

Interviews with immigrant candidates and party members brought home the need for parties to listen to and learn from their immigrant and ethnic minority community members. If ‘top-down’ party responses on political integration often seemed abstract this was perhaps because immigrants still form only a miniscule proportion of political party membership. Those immigrants who have joined have yet to achieve the status that is given to elected representatives and some longstanding members. Political parties, especially the larger ones, need to put in place schemes for mentoring immigrant members. A number of interviewees discussed how their choice of party was shaped by the extent they believed they would be listened to and taken seriously.

This report frequently uses the term ‘immigrant candidate’ for want of an alternative descriptive term. Its use might be criticised on a number of grounds. Firstly ‘immigrants’ have long played a role in Irish politics. James Connolly came from Glasgow, Jim Larkin from Liverpool and Eamon de Valera was born in New York to Cuban and Irish parents. More recently Dr Bhamgee was elected as a TD for Clare. As used here the term ‘immigrant candidate’ refers to the now-large percentage of the Irish population made up of recent migrants from EU and non-EU states. One interviewee who is standing as a candidate felt that the term was exclusionary:

If I get elected I am not going to represent Nigerians, I am not going to represent Africans, I am not going to represent immigrants. I am going to represent everybody. Everyone who lives in my constituency will have free access to me and that is why I was saying to the women yesterday don’t allow anybody to refer to you as an immigrant candidate; you are a contestant in the elections who just happens to be an immigrant.

The understanding of inclusive politics described above is both idealistic and pragmatic. No ‘immigrant candidate’ is likely to be elected unless she achieves support from across the electorate. Immigrant candidates exemplify a New Irish Politics that cannot be reduced to the presence of ‘new Irish’ in politics. In the 2009 local government elections political parties are both asking immigrants for their vote and anticipating that the ‘Irish’ electorate is potentially willing to vote for candidates from outside the dominant ethnic group.
International research indicates that political parties use different approaches to engage with immigrants and ethnic minorities. At one end of the spectrum is the ‘elite’ model that views parties as rational actors who promote top-down change where it is perceived as necessary to attract votes. Examples in the Irish case include decisions to target particular immigrant communities on websites and the work programmes of integration officers. The second ‘societal change’ model emphasises how parties and other political institutions react to new challenges in a bottom-up process. Here, it is immigrants who choose parties and seek to be included without necessarily receiving support from the organisation.\textsuperscript{5} As illustrated by the Irish experience both approaches are not mutually exclusive. It is important that immigrants seek to join political parties and campaign for change from within. It is crucial that parties encourage them to join and to seek the political support of immigrant communities.

‘Top-down’ approaches in the Irish case include the appointment of integration officers by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and high-profile campaigns by both to attract Polish members. Similar extensive efforts have not been aimed at Africans even though Africans were the most politically engaged immigrants in the 2004 elections and Africans are collectively, after Poles, the second largest immigrant ‘community’ in the Republic of Ireland. Yet, Fianna Fáil estimates that it has attracted a greater number of African than it has Polish members. It is suggested that the kind of high profile ‘top down’ efforts made to recruit Polish members should be adapted to also reach out to other communities. It is important that parties seek to actively engage with immigrants from various different countries of origin. All of the parties have tried various ways of engaging with immigrant communities at grassroots level and each reported some success in recruiting immigrant members. By April 2009, with the exception of Sinn Fein, all the parties had selected a number of immigrant candidates to represent them in the local elections.

3 Recommendations

Political leadership in promoting the integration of immigrants is crucial in the current economic crisis. The efforts of political parties to include immigrants as candidates and as members in 2009 are a crucial first step investment in the political integration of immigrants. This engagement has occurred at a time when, as one political party put it, many immigrants are afraid that they will be the first to “pay” for the recession. It also exemplifies the positive role of politics at a time of considerable cynicism about politics in Ireland. Social cohesion in a diverse society requires an inclusive politics.

Commitment to political integration on its own is not enough. Immigrant candidates and party members in discussing their ‘bottom up’ efforts to engage with political parties emphasised the importance of organisational openness to newcomers, the importance of being listened to and of being taken seriously. The findings of this study suggest that efforts of parties to integrate immigrants and ethnic minority communities will not be successful unless they work to develop systems for consulting and listening to immigrant members. Political parties need information systems that show whether initiatives aimed at promoting inclusion are working.

Voter registration is a crucial component of political integration. A number of efforts have been made to encourage immigrants entitled to vote in local elections onto the electoral register. However, immigrant candidates, members of political parties and individuals active in voter register campaigns all expressed concern that the message is not getting across to many immigrants that they are entitled to vote in the local government elections.

The practice of requiring Gardaí to stamp registration forms in order to get onto the supplemental register should be discontinued. Some migrants, owing to experiences in their home country, may be distrusting or fearful of police. They may not feel comfortable having to enter a Garda station for the purpose of registering to vote. The Gardaí should have no jurisdiction in this area and it should be the responsibility of the local authority’s franchise office.

Active promotion of naturalisation is vital for successful integration. As put by Fianna Fáil in its response to this survey: The key challenge facing both Government and Irish society in the period ahead is the need to integrate people of a different culture, ethnicity, language and religion so that they become part of our nation, part of the Irish family in the 21st century. Such a sense of belonging can hardly be achieved without achieving the naturalisation of a large proportion of immigrants. In its absence the danger is that divisive distinctions between ‘nationals’ and ‘non-nationals’ may undermine efforts to promote future social cohesion.

Immigrants can participate in local politics because they have a right to vote. However, most cannot participate in parliamentary politics because the franchise is restricted to citizens. Much of Ireland’s immigrant population is so recent that most do not yet qualify for naturalisation. If the Republic of Ireland is serious about integration it needs to actively encourage migrants who have settled in Ireland to naturalise. Unless many more immigrants get to vote in general elections they are likely to be ignored as they were in the 2007 general election.

There is also a need to foster political inclusion beyond citizenship. A renewed debate is needed on how the franchise might be reciprocally extended to citizens of other EU countries living in Ireland who are less likely to naturalise as they can achieve a settled residence status under EU law, without regards to national law. There is a precedent. Reciprocal voting rights are established in the case of citizens of the United Kingdom. The European Union operates a common travel area within which millions of citizens of Member States living in other EU countries enjoy many reciprocal entitlements. In Ireland, as in many other EU countries, there are substantial politically-marginalised immigrant communities from other Member States.

It is crucial that the post of Minister of State with Responsibility for Integration Policy is not abolished as part of the current cutbacks. Integration is too important to future social cohesion to be demoted in emphasis within Irish government.
4 Immigrants and Politics

Each of the five political parties was asked what policies or good practices they had adopted to encourage members of immigrant communities and ethnic-minority groups to become party members? Each had been previously asked the same question in 2004. At that time none of these could identify any specific measures aimed at encouraging members of immigrant communities and ethnic minority groups to become members. In 2004 six candidates stood as independents. Two were elected, one in Ennis, the other in Portlaoise. None of the six political parties successfully stood such a candidate in 2004.

By February 2007 this overall position had changed only to a limited extent. Most political parties had taken little or no specific action to become more open to immigrants and ethnic minority groups. Some suggested that there would be a greater focus on reaching out to immigrant communities after the 2007 general election. Fine Gael, the Labour Party, Sinn Fein and the Green Party each stated that they would focus more on immigrant recruitment after the 2007 election. Sinn Fein stated that it hoped to run candidates from immigrant and ethnic minority communities in the 2009 local government elections and would consider putting a target quota in place. In off-the-record conversations officials from some political parties observed that attracting immigrants would be more important for them in the 2009 local government elections. 2009, as one put it, might be something of a ‘tipping point’.

With respect to immigrant participation in Irish political parties the state of play in 2009 has improved dramatically since 2004 when no immigrant candidates stood successfully in the local government elections as party representatives. A number of immigrants stood for election, most as independents. Two were elected, Councillor Rotimi Adebari who in 2007 became Mayor of Portlaoise and Councillor Taiwo Matthews who was elected in Ennis in County Clare. The lack of success of political parties in engaging with immigrant communities seemed to have worsened by 2007. As put in the MCRI report published prior to the 2007 general election:

The bad news is that the integration efforts of Irish political parties are, as of yet, minimal. This is a crucial issue. Politicians are key actors in debates about immigration and integration. They are expected to provide leadership. Yet their own specific institutions, the political parties, remain amongst the least diverse, the least responsive, the least capable of leading by example when it comes to representing the diversity of twenty-first century Irish society. This is unsustainable and potentially dangerous to social cohesion in the long run.6

This was perhaps unsurprising; most immigrants were not entitled to vote in the general election. As put in the 2007 report: ‘In some cases Irish parties in 2007 are making less of an effort on the ground to reach out to immigrants than they did in the run up to the 2004 local government elections. This is understandable insofar as the franchise for local elections is not restricted to citizens whilst non-citizens did not have a say in the 2007 general election. In the 2007 survey most of the political parties reported that developmental work aimed at recruiting immigrant and ethnic minority members had been deferred until after the 2007 general election.7 This points to the crucial role of citizenship in integration.

6 Fanning, Shaw, O’Connell, and Williams, Irish Political Parties, Immigration and Integration in 2007
7 Ibid.
The election of Councillor Adebari as Ireland’s first black mayor in 2007 received media attention around the world. A week after being elected as Mayor of Portlaoise the Ceann Comhairle (Speaker of the House) John O’Donoghue hosted a reception at Leinster House welcoming Councillor Adebari to ‘the heart of Irish Democracy.’ The Ceann Comhairle hailed ‘a significant moment in Ireland’s development’ and voiced his hope that the 2009 local government elections would bring a greater cultural diversity at council level. Commitments by political parties to the integration of immigrants became explicit in the run up to the 2007 general election. Various political parties included in their manifestos a commitment to establish a cabinet post with responsibility for integration. In 2008 the Minister of State for Integration Policy emphasised the role of political parties in integration:

Given the number of migrants who live in Ireland it is essential that every effort is made to ensure that as many as possible engage with the political system and participate to the maximum extent possible… It is clear that all parties have embraced migrants as members. The challenge is to further encourage more migrants to become active in political life both at local and national level.

It was envisaged prior to the current economic crisis that funding would be made available to political parties to implement integration plans. The absence of such funding has not prevented a number of initiatives. However, what is of concern is that the smaller political parties in particular lack resources to develop their outreach to immigrant communities. Irish NGOs have repeatedly advocated that the political parties establish mentoring programmes for immigrant members. UK initiatives have included a high profile state funded cross party leadership programme aimed at ensuring the ongoing emergence of electoral candidates from different ethnic groups and reforms of practices within political parties aimed at tackling ethnic under-representation. As the next section suggests, much more could be done to integrate immigrants into Irish political parties.

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8 Irish Times ‘Ireland looks beyond race – Adebari’ 6 July 2007
9 Office of the Minister of Integration, Migration Nation: Statement on Integration Strategy and Diversity Management (Dublin: Stationary Office, 2008), p.44
10 Rushanara and O’Connede, Our House? Race and Representation in British Politics
Our interviews with immigrant candidates suggest that they get involved in Irish politics for many of the same complex reasons as other persons in order to campaign on issues that affect their localities, to fulfil personal ambitions and because they are attracted to the values and ideals of specific parties. But some recounted additional reasons for joining political parties. One interviewee described how being a member of an Irish political party offered immigrants a means to overcome feelings of alienation within Irish society and also a way to “show the Irish people that we can do something together.” Membership of a political party was seen to provide a sense of belonging: “I think for me it is important to be in a party because that way I feel a part of Irish society.”

Another candidate described feeling that political participation became possible only when insecurities about residency status had been resolved. Only then was it possible to engage politically in day-to-day social issues:

Often immigrants start out with immigrant-specific concerns (residency status, immigration issues, English language) but gradually move on to more mainstream concerns (childcare, housing, public transport etc). One of our Nigerian members described it as ‘if you are thirsty you only care about getting water – that’s how it is with what is your immediate concern. If I need residency, I only care about that, not about public transport. But once I am settled and maybe get a job, I want to sort out how to get to work by public transport and I no longer care about residency but public transport.’

Some interviewees described how they had been approached by more than one political party to stand or how they put thought into which political party to join. One candidate described making a pragmatic study of the ‘political terrain in Ireland’ whilst being less concerned with party ideology than with records of effectiveness. Others described being attracted by the core values of a particular political party. It became clear that there was no sense amongst interviewees that any particular party was especially attractive to immigrants on the basis of their ethnicity or country of origin in the sense that the Irish in the United States had been historically attracted to the Democratic Party.

For some candidates the core issue came down to what they perceived as the culture of the party, the “modus operandi”, whether they thought they would be fully accepted and, crucially, whether they felt they would have a voice. For some, how a party worked, the extent to which its structures appeared open to them, mattered more than ideology or policies. As put by one candidate:

I was not considering being an independent because you need the party machinery with you. And being a migrant, and we have to be realistic about that, it’s very difficult – you need the networks with you. But also being a migrant you cannot just join any party, you need a party that has policies that resonate with you and that you can really stand over and that has a modus operandi that will allow you to be at the centre of things, that will not just leave you at the periphery or absorb you and not allow you to speak out about issues that are important to you.

Another interviewee who had been active as a voter registration campaigner made the case against joining any political party. A key reason was scepticism that anything more than token participation in party politics could be achieved. This interviewee argued that more could be achieved by civic participation – for example getting involved as a parent representative in schools – or through being an active member of a trade union.

One candidate described deciding to stand as an independent (after having been approached to stand by a political party) because his fellow immigrant supporters who encouraged him to stand in the first place were against the idea of him joining a party:
The people who were supporting me weren’t into a party thing – they were looking for somebody who was independent and locally orientated who could work on issues. And if you look at party politics … it’s something that I’m against actually. Like I would be forced to become a party person. I wouldn’t be able to do or talk on the issues I want to talk about.

Against this another interviewee argued that being with a political party is still fundamentally a better option for immigrant candidates: “I think it would be quite hard to go independent and I think we should go mainstream politically … I’d rather opt for a party … the whole background and understanding of the political system makes it much easier to go with a party.” Party politics was viewed as a balancing act that demanded certain concessions and compromises:

[You] have to try to find out the balance. That’s politics, you know. You are obliged to keep up with party policy but from the other side you’ve got real physical mandate from people. So you have to be somewhere in the middle you know … Independents can have an impact but it depends on your character and your support.

Yet another candidate described being loyal to the message the party was sending out yet feeling that he has been given considerable latitude to organise activities and campaign as a he sees fit.

Not unlike many longstanding councillors, some interviewees weighed up the political advantages of keeping a degree of distance from the party identity. Some Irish public representatives place more emphasis on what they can do as individuals for their localities than upon the party brand, especially when their party is doing poorly in public opinion polls. Some such candidates affiliated to particular political parties are to a greater or lesser extent capable of becoming detached from their party for pragmatic reasons. Some immigrant candidates similarly set limits on the extent to which they wished to be identified with political parties they joined.

Politics is a hard-headed and competitive enterprise, especially within political parties. Some interviewees described being approached by more than one party to stand. At the same time, immigrant candidates may find it difficult to be nominated to stand in areas where there are no vacancies on the party ticket. As expressed frankly by Labour in terms that would arguably hold for any political party:

Good candidates always have a chance to be picked, we actively encourage non-Irish where possible. Unfortunately Labour has fewer vacancies in places where most of our potential non-Irish candidates are (Dublin); in one area for example we could have picked an African candidate but there are three sitting councillors in that area already.

Labour stated that the party rules for the selection of candidates in any area where there were more than two candidates required that one of these must be female, but no such rules apply to members of minority ethnic groups. Formal quotas may not be the most practical means of attracting candidates from immigrant and ethnic minority communities. However, it is important that in future elections that all political parties give thought to mechanisms that would work to improve the chances of such candidates being selected. Labour described how its Limerick County Council candidate from Moldova was selected: she joined the party, became the branch secretary, impressed people, and was selected as a candidate in the same manner as any other party candidate.
Integration Role of Political Parties

Efforts by the five political parties to recruit immigrant members shared much in common. Party literature was translated into various languages. Some parties had adapted their websites by including translation software and information in different languages. However, any amount of translation does not get around the fact that the political process in Ireland is accessed through English language fluency. As put by the Green Party: ‘Simply translating some material, while it has some use, does not really get over the barrier for those who do not have good English.’

One way political parties have tried to get around language barriers has been to identify community leaders and community organisations with which they might engage. For example Labour described conducting workshops with African women’s community groups as part of the work programme of its Women and Equality Officer. Labour also established an ‘Advisory Group on Immigrant Outreach’ made up of party members who have an immigrant background. Labour emphasised the role of the ‘Labour Equality (LE)’ party section as a forum for party members with an interest in equality issues, including immigration and integration. The LE has over 400 members. The party also has Constituency Equality Officers who are encouraged to reach out locally and network with the local immigrant communities so that members of minority ethnic groups can get familiar with Labour’s policies and values.

Both Labour and Sinn Fein placed considerable emphasis on equality principles. In other words, rather than direct campaigns towards particular communities the emphasis was on principles of equality and inclusion that were understood to appeal to immigrants and ethnic minorities in general and upon issues (such as asylum or immigrant legislation) where the emphasis was on solidarity with immigrants experiencing racism, discrimination and marginalisation.

The Green Party pointed to the organisational openness and flexibility of their party organisation as an asset in engaging with immigrants, claiming that it had never needed ‘any special measures to attract them’. To some extent this was a reflection of the relatively small size of the party where inclusion was seen to arise from the general culture of the organisation rather than requiring specific policies and targets to be sustainable: As put by the Green Party:

> The fact that we currently have five election candidates who are not originally Irish … is indicative of a certain success in attracting immigrants to the party. We believe that the best way to attract more immigrant members is through the good experience of the immigrant members that we already have. We have held meetings of our immigrant candidates to try to develop ways of improving our accessibility to their communities and pass on their knowledge to our other candidates.

Sinn Fein reported that it had recruited a number of individuals from immigrant and ethnic minority communities. To date there has not been a nationwide targeted strategy for the recruitment of these groups, but that is currently under development along with other aspects of recruitment and membership by the recently convened National Recruitment Committee. There have been a number of initiatives taken by members at a local level. An example given was targeting individuals within the local Polish community who subsequently used their networks to recruit further. Sinn Fein reported that it now had a cumainn (branch) whose membership were predominantly Polish but did not specify the location. The party has also carried out a number of targeted voter registration drives for people from immigrant communities.

Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael recruited integration officers in, respectively, late 2007 and the beginning of 2008. These coordinated campaigns that, in particular, targeted the Polish community; the Fine Gael post-holder is described on the party website as ‘Polish Liaison Officer’. Fine Gael stated that the Liaison Officer is presently working with the Polish community and that the role of the Liaison Officer has been to encourage Polish migrants to get involved in politics, register to vote and potentially to run in local elections. It also stated that all Fine Gael ‘New Irish candidates’ are doing
similar work in their own areas, including attending church services and community meetings. The role of Integration Officer was filled in the Labour Party by the Women and Equality Officer. Neither the Green Party nor Sinn Fein were in a position to establish such a post in the run up to the 2009 election.

The responsibilities of the Fianna Fáil Integration Officer include the development of a Fianna Fáil integration strategy, as well as expanding the Party’s links with individuals and groups within the New Irish communities. It reported that the Integration Officer has developed strong contacts throughout the various New Irish communities, liaising with the immigrant and ethnic groups living throughout the country and building awareness within the New Irish communities of their voting rights. The Integration Officer has developed a special ‘Polski’ section on the Fianna Fáil website which includes messages and information in Polish. It was envisaged that the website would be redesigned to focus on other ‘New Irish communities.’

Fine Gael stated that it has actively encouraged members of immigrant communities and ethnic-minority groups to run for Fine Gael in the forthcoming local elections. The aim is both to broaden the Party’s representation among immigrant communities and to give immigrants a voice in local politics. The Party also has a dedicated Front Bench Spokesman on Immigration and Integration, Denis Naughten TD. Deputy Naughten has been encouraging immigrants to get involved in local politics by registering to vote, as well as highlighting issues that work against successful integration.

Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have explicitly targeted the Polish community in their efforts to recruit immigrant members. The integration officers in both parties are Polish. Both parties included Polish language (Polski) links on their websites but did not do the same for other immigrant groups. When questioned about the impression that outreach was mostly focused on Polish migrants the reply was the website was currently being redesigned to emphasise the integration of all migrant groups. The impression given is that Poles enjoy most-favoured status and that comparatively little effort has been given towards reaching out to many other immigrant communities. By way of example Appendix 3 sets out the (abridged) Fianna Fáil response to the question ‘What policies or good practices have been adopted by the party to promote the integration of immigrants within Irish society?’ The vast majority of those good practices identified related to the Polish community. All are commendable but it is suggested that similar levels of effort are needed to engage with other communities.

When it comes to actual success in attracting immigrant members the impression given by both websites appears to differ from what is actually happening on the ground. Both parties had attracted members from across a range of immigrant communities although both found it difficult to quantify how many members had been recruited. Whilst most Fianna Fáil political integration initiatives were focused on the Polish community the party estimates that the number of Africans who have joined the party probably exceeds the number of Poles.

Different political parties defined their membership in quite different terms and this had a bearing on efforts to recruit immigrant members. In the case of some parties membership was defined in terms of paying an annual subscription. In the case of Sinn Fein membership was defined at a higher threshold in terms of being active in a specific branch organisation. Sinn Fein reported that a National Recruitment Committee had been recently convened to review membership criteria and to consider how best to reach out to immigrant communities. Fianna Fáil emphasised that party membership was open to all residents of Ireland, regardless of citizenship, ethnic background or religion.

The 2007 report suggested that the efforts of parties to integrate immigrants and ethnic minority communities would not be successful unless monitoring systems to track progress were put in place. Strategic goals were needed but so was the information that shows whether initiatives aimed at promoting inclusion are working. None of the political parties had introduced systems to monitor the success of their efforts to recruit immigrant members. Labour responded that its database did not include a ‘nationality’ box or ‘ethnicity’ box that one can tick. As such it was impossible to say what percentage of party membership was from immigrant communities. It acknowledged that such data would be useful.
Fianna Fáil reported that its party membership form does not ask about the nationality or country of origin of the individual and the membership database does not identify nationality. Fianna Fáil does not have a monitoring system which provides detailed information about the number of members of a particular nationality. The party considered that many immigrant members would be uncomfortable about being asked to state their background on application forms (‘People might be offended if asked their nationality’). But nevertheless the Integration Officer emphasised that it was important to know about the ethnic composition of the party in order to measure the success of efforts to promote integration of migrants into Fianna Fáil. In the absence of any formal system of monitoring membership (an issue for all the political parties) she had resorted to going through membership lists in order to be able to estimate numbers of migrants from different communities who had joined the party. As a result she estimated that Fianna Fáil had more African than Polish members. Precise information rather than such rough estimates is clearly useful in planning how to respond to immigrant communities.

The experience of Labour was of a need to reach out to immigrants at two levels. Firstly, the leadership of the party has to invite and encourage people from immigrant communities to join and be active in the party. Secondly, the parties have to work at grassroots level through workshops and networking. The role of information and research from non-governmental organisations was also emphasised. Labour stated that 70 percent of party members were also members of Amnesty International.
Reaching Immigrant Voters

In the run up to the 2009 elections considerable emphasis was placed on the need to encourage immigrant voter registration. The Office of the Minister for Integration (OMI) has proposed that publicity campaigns about the elections should specifically target non-Irish nationals to ensure that they are aware that they can vote. OMI has funded initiatives on voter awareness among immigrants by Dublin City, Fingal, Dun Laighoire and Rathdown and Cork County Councils. A number of other voter registration initiatives have also emerged through the voluntary sector. It is also the case that political parties have worked to encourage immigrants to register to vote as part of door-to-door canvassing, through their websites and, for example as described by Sinn Fein, through targeted voter registration campaigns.

Nevertheless a number of interviewees felt strongly that too little had been done too late to promote voter registration. Several were extremely critical of what they perceived as a lack of government leadership efforts to encourage voter registration. They felt that immigrant voter registration had been largely left to the voluntary sector. The efforts of some local authorities to raise awareness and increase migrant participation in voting fell far short of what is required. Some did not engage in any public awareness initiatives aimed at encouraging immigrants to register to vote.

As an example of good practice, Dublin City Council’s ‘Migrant Voters Project’ has produced promotional materials on voter registration in more than twenty languages. This project is designed to raise awareness of the right to vote (and the need to register to do so) and to offer information on the practicalities of voting on Election Day.

In the case of Dublin concerns about low rates of voter registration seem to be borne out by the most recent (March 2009) electoral register figures for the Dublin City Council area. Here the total number of persons entitled to vote in the local government elections totals 337,925 persons. Of these some 14,010 are persons entitled to vote in the local government elections from EU countries (other than the United Kingdom) and non-EU countries. The number of such persons registered to vote in the local government elections has more than doubled from 6,000 in 2004. This could well be a percentage decline in real terms given the rapid increase in the size of the immigrant population from 2004 onwards. The 2006 census found that the non-Irish/UK born population of Dublin (as distinct from the smaller Dublin City Council area) rose more than four-fold between 1996 and 2006, growing from 29,500 to 158,000 (that is, from 2.8 percent of the city population to 13.3 percent). Within the Dublin City Council area non-Irish/UK born account for just over four percent of the electorate.

Some interviewees commented on differences between political campaigning in Ireland and in their countries of origin. The Irish practice of door-to-door canvassing was considered to be unusual. Several African interviewees observed that hands-on campaigning in Ireland contrasts greatly with the political process in Africa, where matters are settled largely behind closed doors. One commented that; “You hardly see politicians on the campaign trail. But here from the person standing as a candidate in the local council right up to Leinster House they go out campaigning and knocking on doors.” Another interviewee stated that door-to-door canvassing and canvassing outside Churches was not something he had experienced in Poland. Another described how an immigrant community organisation had sought to distribute information on voter registration outside a Polish Church in Dublin.

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11 As obtained from the Franchise Department of Dublin City Council 19 March 2009
One interviewee actively involved in recruiting immigrant party members expressed concern about low levels of voter registration by Poles. The potential reasons for this were seen to include: (1) a lack of trust amongst Polish people of government and of canvassers who tried to get them to fill in forms for the register of electors and (2) an unwillingness amongst many Poles to go to Garda stations. One suggestion made was that the practice of requiring Gardaí to stamp registration forms in order to get onto the supplemental register should be discontinued. Some migrants, owing to experiences in their home country, may be distrusting or fearful of police. They may not feel comfortable having to enter a Garda station for the purpose of registering to vote. As put by one voluntary sector activist engaged in voter registration work: “In my opinion, the Gardaí should have no jurisdiction in this area and it should be the responsibility of the local authority’s franchise office.”

With respect to door-to-door canvassers one suggestion made was that canvassers distribute stamp-addressed letters so that confidentiality could be assured. The workings of the voter registration system in Ireland are different from what many people might have experienced in their countries of origins. For example, there is no specific register of electors in Poland. Citizens are required to carry ID cards which means that they are automatically registered to vote. Useful canvassing suggestions prepared by Labour are set out in Appendix 4.
Each party was asked to outline its vision for the integration of immigrants within Irish society. It is crucial in the context of the current economic crisis not to lose sight of the broader challenge of securing future social cohesion. As put by Fianna Fáil the current economic situation makes the process of integration especially difficult: ‘Many immigrants are afraid that they will be the first to “pay” for the recession.’ One interviewee felt that many Poles who might otherwise be politically engaged kept a low profile because of concern about how the Irish might react to them taking an active role in Irish society. Whilst it did not emerge as a major theme in interviews a number of interviewees expressed anxiety that immigrants might be treated as scapegoats in the current economic context.

Immigrant candidates face pressures not encountered by other candidates. In January 2009 a website that featured stories on immigration with headings such as ‘Non-nationals steal Irish jobs’ and deportation as ‘money well spent’ came under investigation by the Gardaí for incitement to hatred. The Migration Watch website published the phone numbers and addresses of a number of immigrant candidates. Several candidates made complaints to the Gardaí, the Office of the Minister of Integration or their party leaderships. Following various complaints the site was shut down by its organisers. One Green Party candidate felt that it was extremely important to her that her party leadership immediately followed up her complaint about the website.

Political integration has a crucial role in preventing the alienation of immigrant communities as well as countering xenophobia. Fine Gael defined integration as ‘an approach that encourages a process of mutual adjustment in a pluralist society’. As stated by Fianna Fáil ‘There is a need to eradicate misconceptions, to dispel beliefs that just because somebody is different they are somehow a threat. We need to show that diversity has positive elements, and can add to the rich cultural tapestry of our country.’ The symbolic inclusion of immigrants is of course politically important. However, as put by Fianna Fáil ‘integration will only be successful if it takes hold at the grassroots level; successful integration relies on a vibrant civil society’. The success or failure of integration can best be judged by what occurs in specific localities.

The engagement of immigrants in politics will be of crucial importance as Irish society works to redefine what it means to be Irish. The term ‘new Irish’ is sometimes used to refer in an inclusive manner to immigrants. However, it is currently the case that most of these (over ten percent of the Irish population) are not yet Irish citizens. It is likely that most non-EU migrants who settle in Ireland will become naturalised. The dualism promoted by the 2004 Referendum was one between ‘nationals’ and ‘non-nationals’ suggesting an empirical definition of the ‘new Irish’ restricted to those who become naturalised. The ‘new Irish’ so defined are likely to remain a small fraction of the immigrant population even in the longer term. Immigrants from non-EU countries will have the greatest impetus to naturalise. What is certain is that any national project of immigrant integration will have to come to terms with the inadequacies of citizenship as a badge of social membership and as a vehicle for social cohesion. This bigger picture was acknowledged by Fianna Fáil in the following terms:

The key challenge facing both Government and Irish society in the period ahead is the need to integrate people of a different culture, ethnicity, language and religion so that they become part of our nation, part of the Irish family in the 21st century.

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12 ‘Nigerian local election candidate dismissed web track’ Leinster Leader, 7 January 2009
13 ‘Migration Watch website shuts down after Leinster Leader story’ Leinster Leader, 15 January 2009
The right to participate in local elections offers a crucial mechanism for integrating non-citizen immigrants into Irish society. The concern is that inclusive politics will stop at a local level unless large numbers of immigrants naturalise. For example, the research undertaken in the run up to the 2007 general election noted a pragmatic indifference towards immigrants by Irish political parties; immigrants were of little or no electoral significance. If Ireland is serious about integration, proactive policies aimed at encouraging naturalisation need to be developed. Otherwise the cognitive distinctions between ‘nationals’ and ‘non-nationals’ that prevailed in 2004 are likely to persist within ‘national’ politics. Unless a significant proportion of immigrants naturalise Ireland will be left with a parliamentary politics that excludes ‘non-nationals.’ Whereas Fianna Fáil emphasised the inclusion of immigrants within the ‘nation’ or ‘Irish family’ Sinn Fein stated that ‘a new Ireland needs an inclusive nationalism.’ Fine Gael stated that streamlining the process of achieving long term residency and citizenship was vital. One way or another new ways of thinking about what it means to be Irish need to translate into new institutional rules of belonging. It is not enough to describe immigrants as the ‘New Irish’ whilst treating them as ‘non-nationals’.
Appendix 1:
Research Methodology

Each of the five political parties was asked to respond in writing to a number of questions. The questions were similar to those put to the parties prior to the 2004 local government and 2007 general elections. The questions were followed up by some interviews with (1) officials involved in working with immigrants on behalf of the political parties (2) some immigrant candidates and immigrant members of the political parties (3) immigrants active in voter registration and standing as independent candidates in the 2009 elections. These interviews form part of an ongoing IRCHSS-funded Integration and Social Change Research Project that will run until 2010. All materiel is presented here in such a way as to preserve the anonymity of all interviewees. The following questions were put to each of the political parties in January 2009:

1. What policies or good practices has the party adopted to encourage members of immigrant communities and ethnic-minority groups to become party members?

2. To what extent have these been successful?

3. Where do future challenges lie?

4. What is the (name of party) vision for the integration of immigrants within Irish society?

5. Can you provide details of candidates from immigrant and ethnic minority communities standing in the 2009 local elections?

6. What policies or good practices have been adopted by the party to promote the integration of immigrants within Irish society?
Appendix 2: Immigrant Candidates Representing Political Parties

The following is a list of candidates selected by Irish political parties to stand in the 2009 local elections as at time of publication.

**Fianna Fáil**

Anna Banko from Poland *(Limerick City South)*  
Katarzyna Gaborec from Poland *(Mullingar)*  
Anna Michalska from Poland *(Kilkenny City)*  
Wojciech Wisniewski from Poland *(Shannon)*  
Idowu Sulyman Olafimihan from Nigeria *(Mulhuddart)*  
Stella Oladapo from Nigeria *(Letterkenny)*  
Shaheen Ahmed from Pakistan *(Lucan)*  
Ala Olsevska from Lithuania *(Portlaoise)*  
Anna Rooney from Russia *(Clones)*

**Green Party**

Tendai Madondo from Zimbabwe *(Tallaght South)*  
Paul Osikoya from Nigeria *(Tuam)*  
George Enyoazu from Nigeria *(Dundalk West)*  
Yinka Dixon from Nigeria *(Drogheda South)*  
Alex Peter Ivanov from Russia *(Cavan County Council and Coothill Town Council)*

**Fine Gael**

Adeola Ogunsina from Nigeria *(Fingal County Council)*  
Joanne Crowley from Poland *(Clonakilty Town Council)*  
Michael Abiola-Phillips from Nigeria *(Letterkenny Town Council)*  
Vilma Moceviciene from Latvia *(Balbriggan Town Council)*  
Okey William-Kalu from Nigeria *(Castlebar Town Council)*  
Bartlomiej Bruzewicz from Poland *(Dublin City Council)*  
Benedicta Attoh from Nigeria *(Dundalk)*

**Labour**

Elena Secas from Moldova *(Limerick County Council)*  
Jan Rotte from the Netherlands *(Waterford City Council)*  
Anna Keilkewski from Poland *(Shannon Town Council)*  
Jose Ospina from Colombia *(Skibbereen)*

**Sinn Fein**

None at time of publication
Appendix 3:

What policies or good practices have been adopted by the party to promote the integration of immigrants within Irish society?

Note: the below extract refers to the good practices identified by Fianna Fáil

To help achieve these goals Fianna Fáil appointed its first Integration Officer in 2007. Their responsibilities include the development of a Fianna Fáil integration strategy, as well as expanding the Party's links with individuals and groups within the New Irish communities. The Integration Officer has developed strong contacts throughout the various New Irish communities, liaising with the immigrant and ethnic groups living throughout the country and building awareness within the New Irish communities of their voting rights.

The Integration Officer has developed a special ‘Polski’ section on the Fianna Fáil website which includes messages and information in Polish. Currently this section is under construction and will shortly be further expanded to reach out to other sections in the various languages of the New Irish communities.

There are plans to develop the website by updating the information regarding the local and European elections in 2009. There will be a section dedicated to interviews with Fianna Fáil politicians, as well as essential information about the Irish government. The section will also provide information that is useful for all immigrants who are interested in politics. Hopefully these sites will be a useful link between Fianna Fáil and the New Irish communities.

In advance of the local elections a multi-language range of Party literature is being produced also (in Polish, Chinese, Lithuanian, etc.). As the Party is lucky to have members from these communities, we have been greatly assisted in preparing documentation.

The Integration Officer will be working closely with Fianna Fáil’s New Irish candidates in the forthcoming local elections campaign.

In relation to the local elections, Fianna Fáil strongly encourages each of its candidates to participate in anti-racism training, and makes them aware of the challenges in the field of integration by providing them with a wider knowledge of the issues concerning immigrant and ethnic communities living in Ireland.

Examples of the recent activities of Fianna Fáil in the field of integration include:

- The existing Polish section of the Party website and a forthcoming section on integration.
- The site includes information about Fianna Fáil activities linked to the Polish community in addition to articles concerning the government’s work in the field of integration.
- Attracting individuals from the New Irish communities to stand in the local elections in 2009.
- Fianna Fáil has arranged meetings for local party representatives with members of the Polish community. The objective was to create a line of communication between the Irish and Polish community in Ireland and to show the Polish community that they can contact their local representatives and work together to improve a greater understanding of issues. During one meeting in Cork in February 2008 Billy Kelleher TD, Minister for Labour Affairs, met a Polish activist who was subsequently appointed as a member of an Advisory Board for the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA). She is presently the only representative of the New Irish communities on the Board.
- The Party has started an advertising campaign in the Polish media to build awareness of the voting rights within the New Irish community (the Polish Express published several ads encouraging and explaining the voter registration procedure, etc).

- Attracting New Irish communities to get involved with Fianna Fáil (i.e. multi-language membership leaflets).

- The Party facilitates contacts between the Minister for Integration and the Polish media (the Minister is encouraged to meet with media representatives to discuss the integration issues, the Party arranges meetings for journalists who wish to interview the Minister, and has communicated to the Polish community the Minister's condolences after the tragic incident in Drimnagh where two Polish men lost their lives).

- The Party has produced multi-language leaflets explaining voter rights and voter registration procedure as well as Irish voting system.

- Some Party politicians have also prepared their leaflets in Polish - explaining the voter registration system and encouraging Poles to contact their local politician.

- Party cumann are in contact with the local Polish community. They often include an introductory message in Polish in their newsletter (an example is the cumann in Macroom, Co Cork.)

- An Taoiseach’s Christmas message in 2008 to the Polish community has been widely published within the Polish press and websites in Ireland and Poland. The first such message was published in 2007.

- The topic of integration is discussed during Party activities and events, i.e. the workshop on integration ‘Integration and New Irish’ which took place during the Ógra Fhianna Fáil National Youth Conference in Tullamore in February 2008. The seminar was hosted by Conor Lenihan, TD, Minister for Integration, and Margaret Conlon, TD for Cavan-Monaghan, and was attended by representatives of the Polish, Lithuanian, African and Pakistani communities.

- A thank-you reception for former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, TD was organised by members of the Polish community. A special album with thank you letters from Polish organisations and Polish newspapers in Ireland was submitted to Mr Ahern.

- Fianna Fáil participates in political events organised by the different communities as well as in events linked to integration (such as the Polish Community Roundtable Discussion with the Polish Community and Irish Service Providers which took place in April 2008. A roundtable discussion on the Nigerian Community in Ireland, hosted by the Nigerian Association of Ireland Network and NCCRI, was held in November 2008).

- A Polish charity event, The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, takes place every January. Local Fianna Fáil TDs have been supporting the Charity through donating gifts for the auction.
The **Fianna Fáil** Integration Officer also encourages the Party politicians to contact New Irish communities living in their constituency by:

- Assisting **Fianna Fáil** TDs in providing information regarding the New Irish communities
- Advising them on contacting the local immigrant communities
- Helping them with multi-language leaflets
- Providing information and encouraging **Fianna Fáil** public representatives to participate in immigrant and ethnic events throughout the country (especially during national holidays, cultural events, etc).
Appendix 4: 
Canvassing Advice Prepared by the Labour Party

- Treat everyone you meet with respect

- Don’t assume anything. You may meet an Arabic-speaking woman with broken English who is, in fact, an Irish citizen. She may vote, yet her Irish neighbour might not. You may meet a Polish man who may end up settling down in Ireland and becoming a party activist. Think of every person as a potential voter, activist or supporter.

- There should be no need to remind canvassers that any racially abusive language is totally unacceptable.

- Those new in Ireland may not be familiar with terminology. Words such as ‘TD’ or ‘Fianna Fail’ are probably new to them. You can use words such as ‘Member of the Parliament’ or ‘Fianna Fail which is one of the political parties’. But remember the Chinese person who opens the door might have lived here for 30 years and knows the system well, so don’t assume anything.

- Canvassing door-to-door does not happen in most countries. Those new in Ireland may not understand why you are calling. If they appear abrupt with you, it may be because they are wondering what you are doing at their door.

- Foreign nationals resident in Ireland have various concerns. Some may have immigrant-specific concerns such as residency or English language support. When one is affected by those issues they become extremely important and the person needs to focus on solving them. Others may have more mainstream concerns such as public transport or childcare. Listen to what the concerns are before making assumptions.

- Register of electors: the following letters indicate what type of voting rights the person has: (D) May vote at Dail, European and Local Elections, (E) May vote at European and Local Elections (L) May vote at Local Elections (P) Postal or Special Voter.

- Members of minority ethnic groups can be affected by racism. Make sure the Labour Party takes a stand against racism.
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