Government plays a key role in a country's unity, and, in Ireland, the political parties are polarized over historical differences. The Fine Gael is one of the major political parties of Ireland, and current Irish politics cannot be explained without first understanding the reason for the polarity. Gallagher and Marsh (2004) write, "The foundation event for the modern Irish party system is the split in 1921-2 that took place within the Irish nationalist movement over the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty" (p. 409). The split of parties keeps Ireland from uniting, progressing, and succeeding in today's world**.** The Fine Gael demonstrates the purely subjective dispute that has divided Irish political parties and kept the entire country from unity.

The story of the Fine Gael begins with the Irish War of Independence, which took place from 1919 to 1921 ("Irish War of Independence," n.d., para. 1). The War began as an uprising to fight British control of Ireland, and an Irish Declaration of Independence was written in of January of 1919 ("Irish War of Independence", n.d., para. 1). The War ended in ceasefire in July of 1921 which resulted in the Anglo-Irish Treaty the following December ("Irish War of Independence", n.d., para. 1). The Treaty ended British rule in most of Ireland except for six Northern countries that came to be known as Northern Ireland ("Irish War of Independence," n.d., para. 1). Northern Ireland was given the choice to become a Free State, but they chose to remain part of the United Kingdom, whereas the rest of Ireland was only a country within the British Commonwealth ("Anglo Irish Treaty", n.d., para. 1). The Treaty made Ireland into a form of a British colony, but it would be called a Free State rather than Republic ("Irish Civil War," n.d., para. 5).

The Treaty became controversial over the distinction between a Free State versus a Republic; anti-treatists believed that becoming a free Republic was the best opportunity for full Irish independence from Great Britain whereas a Free State would continue British control however little it would be ("Irish Civil War," n.d., para. 4). The Anglo Irish Treaty passed sixty-four to fifty-seven; this led to a split within Irish politics and a Civil War between those for and against the Treaty ("Irish Civil War," n.d., para. 8).

The Cumann na nGaedheal, a pro-treaty party, formed out of this division (Chubb, 1979, p. 121). After the Civil War ended in ceasefire in 1923, Cumann won the first election with forty percent of the votes ("Irish Civil War," n.d., para. 51). The Cumann did not become the Fine Gael until ten years later; Gallagher and Marsh (2004) write, "Fine Gael came into being in 1933 as a merger between three groups, by far the largest of which was Cumann na nGaedheal, which had governed Ireland from 1923 to 1932" (p. 407). The parties that merged were the Cumann na nGaedheal, the National Centre Party, and the National Guard; this coalition was led by Michael Collins ("Fine Gael," n.d., para. 2). From 1948 to 1957, Fine Gael's main opposition, Fianna Fáil, was in power because Fine Gael and the Labour Party pursued similar policies and split their support (Chubb, 1979, p. 123-124). Fine Gael defined itself early on as being advocates of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and a United Ireland ("History of Fine Gael," n.d., para. 1).

The Fine Gael is known for being moderate nationalists (Marsh, Sinnott, Garry, and Kennedy, 2008, p. 31); according to the Fine Gael's official website, they are a progressive center party that strives for equality of opportunity, enterprise

and reward, security, integrity, and hope for all of Europe ("Fine Gael Values," n.d., para. 1). The Fine Gael pushes protection of the state, democratic values, law and order, and citizen rights (Honohan, 2008, p. 115). Their main identifying ideological choice is the "unity of Ireland with complete independence and nationhood on the international stage" (Honohan, 2008, p. 116). Fine Gael members encourage strong relationships with other nations, particularly Britain (Honohan, 2008, p. 122). Their 2011 Program was released with their goals for their 5 years in power and how they plan to improve Ireland.

Their economic policies are liberal, and, recently, the economy has been a large issue within Ireland; the Fine Gael supports joining the euro and having an open free market economy ("A new government," n.d., para. 4). They plan to reduce the number of public sector workers in Ireland during their time in power (O'Connell, 2011, para. 4). In their 2011 Program, the Fine Gael has promised to improve fiscal planning and the banking sector as well as reduce the financial deficit to three percent (O'Connell, 2011, para. 3). While most Fine Gael supporters agree with their economic policies, some criticize that the Fine Gael puts the interest of businesses above that of the workers in Ireland ("Fine Gael," n.d., para. 6).

Fine Gael's social policies have gradually become more liberal. Since 2003, the Fine Gael has supported civil unions for same-sex couples and is now considering same-sex marriage ("Fine Gael," n.d., para. 13); however, Fine Gael does not support abortion ("A new government," n.d., para. 4). The Fine Gael also advocates for universal health care in Ireland by 2016 (O'Connell, 2011, para. 5).

The party is advocating for major reforms to the Irish curriculum in schools and to reduce the voting age and presidential term (O'Connell, 2011, para. 7 & 10).

While these make up their main beliefs, some Irish believe that the distinction between the Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is only based on the Anglo-Irish Treaty and that their policies are not clear enough. Marsh, Sinnott, Garry, and Kennedy (2008) write, "Lack of knowledge in the electorate of what Fine Gael stands for may reflect the uncertainties arising from the party" (p. 47). Their next five years in office could prove to be a turning point for the Fine Gael because their Program was approved unanimously by Fine Gael members and by ninety-five percent of the Labour Party (O'Connell, 2011, para. 2). Despite some policy confusion, the Fine Gael still has a large base of support within Ireland.

The general supporters of Fine Gael are those whose relatives fought on the Pro-Treaty side in the Irish Civil War ("A new government," n.d., para. 5). Gallagher and Marsh (2004) write, "Three-quarters of today's members report that they come from families with a tradition of support for the pro-Treaty tradition…and sixty-two percent report that at least one of their parents was also a member" (p. 409). Because of this historic bond, the loyalty of the members is very impressive; "they have stuck with the party through thick and thin for 20 or 30 years or even more" (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 409).

The general age of Fine Gael supporters is older with those sixty-five and older making up thirty-two percent of Fine Gael's voters (Marsh, Sinnott, Garry, Kennedy, 2008, p. 37-38); the average age of a Fine Gael supporter is fifty-two years old (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 412). Among students, the Fine Gael has fared

better than Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party; Gavan Reilly (2011) found that the "Fine Gael was set to win the first preference votes of thirty-four percent of student voters" compared to only ten percent supporting Fianna Fáil in the 2011 General Election ("Fine Gael set," para. 2). Women make up less than a third of Fine Gael members, but they represent about half of the party voters that demonstrate women's high participation in the party (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 411).

In 1933, the Fine Gael drew mostly middle class business people (Chubb, 1979, p. 128); however, in the 1970s, the Fine Gael began to have less class division and attracted more working class and farmers (Marsh, Sinnott, Garry, and Kennedy, 2008, p. 34). Gallagher and Marsh (2004) write that the Fine Gael today "fares best among farmers and middle-class voter and worst among working-class voters…Farmers have long been the backbone of Fine Gael support" (p. 412). Fine Gael struggles in urban areas and large cities; thirty-one percent of their voters live in open country whereas only twelve percent live in Dublin City (Marsh, Sinnott, Garry, and Kennedy, 2008, p. 38). Fine Gael members are also known for being active within their society (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 412). Gallagher and Marsh (2004) write, "Nearly a third of members belong to two or more other organizations besides Fine Gael" (p. 412). A little less than thirty percent are members in a farmer's association, and ninety-four percent are practicing Catholics (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 412). Most of Fine Gael members are "fairly active" and eighty-two percent report having attended at least one meeting in the past year (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 413).

Despite high involvement in the party, attachment to the Fine Gael has dwindled. Marsh, Sinnott, Garry, and Kennedy (2008) write that the strength of party attachment in Fine Gael is a little less than twenty-three percent being very strong and twenty-three percent somewhat strong (p. 68). This statistic is backed by the tendency for membership to increase only around the time of elections rather than remaining consistently high (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 408). Many Fine Gael voters are only members to keep family tradition as well as keeping the other party out of power due to the historic rivalry (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 410).

Fine Gael is Ireland's second largest party behind its rival, the Fianna Fáil (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 407). Fine Gael has gained support over the years simply because it is not Fianna Fáil (Marsh, Sinnott, Garry, and Kennedy, 2008, p. 70). The distinction between these parties is not ideological—they define their differences based on their views of the Anglo-Irish Treaty (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004, p. 420). In Ireland, voters may select a second party to vote for behind their first choice; Global Comment reports that it's far more likely for a Fine Gael member to vote for a smaller party rather than Fianna Fáil ("A new government," n.d., para. 5). While the two parties try to appear different, they agree on many issues that split their would-be supporters if people voted based solely on policies and not tradition. Gallagher and Marsh (2004) write, "The gap between the two parties has ranged from 6 percent (in November 1982) to 28 percent (in 1944)" (p. 408). The parties switch majority regularly, but no party can establish dominance because of their ideological split. This has been apparent in the past elections where the Fine Gael has gained support.

Fine Gael party attachment is declining with a low turnout at past elections—potentially because of their lack of definitive policy differences from Fianna Fáil (Marsh, Sinnott, Garry, and Kennedy, 2008). In the 2002 election, Fine Gael lost five and a half percent of the vote from the previous election (Marsh, Sinnott, Garry, and Kennedy, 2008, p. 15). The 2011 general election was a turning point for the Fine Gael when they gained twenty-five more seats for a total of seventy-six ("Fine Gael," n.d., para. 21). The 2011 election marked a low point for the Fianna Fáil; they came in third place with only fifteen percent percent of the vote (Ghosh, 2011, para. 4). The reason for their decline was due to an unpopular austerity programs after the European Union granted Ireland an eighty-five billion euro bailout package (Ghosh, 2011, para. 1).

The 2007 election had just over two million voters; Fianna Fáil received 850,000 of these votes while Fine Gael received 560,000. In 2011, total voter turnout was just over two million voters with 800,000 first preference votes going to the Fine Gael and less than 400,000 to Fianna Fáil ("2011 Irish General Election," 2011, para. 2) In the 2011 election, turnout increased by over 150,000 people (Kavanagh, 2011, para. 1).

The historic rivalry between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil led the discouraged Fianna Fáil voters to vote, not for the Fine Gael, but instead for parties lined on the left like the Labour Party. The Labour Party's support grew by nine percent in 2011, and other left independent parties increased by up to five percent (Kavanagh, 2011, para. 2). The 2011 election was a turning point for the Fine Gael in regaining power in the Irish government. In October of 2012, Barry Moran reported that support for

the Fine Gael has gradually improved—increasing two points to thirty-four percent while Fianna Fáil is far behind at nineteen percent ("Mixed results," n.d., para. 1).

However, their biggest test will be in the next election in 2015 to see if the Fine Gael can continue their dominance over Fianna Fáil or if power will once again switch. Barry Moran writes, "The Red C poll also revealed that fifty percent of the population reckon [Fine Gael] is taking us down the wrong road" ("Mixed results," n.d., para. 5). Without unity, the Irish government will never be able to solve their country's issues without first turning on each other.

Irish politics is a complicated and historic issue; unless new leaders work to unite the parties, Ireland will forever be split over an issue that was almost a century ago. Global Comment says, "Civil war politics is dogging [Ireland's] steps and holding [Ireland] back from achieving some maturity and sense in politics" ("A new government," n.d., para. 13). Ireland cannot progress forward if their politics and party system does not change and work to improve the whole country by uniting and putting issues of the past behind them.

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