

## Next Dáil to have up to 20 additional TDs

13 Feb, 2023. Daniel McConnell, Political Editor – Irish Examiner. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/politics/arid-41070074.html>

The next Dáil will have either 18 or 20 additional TDs under plans to be rushed through the Oireachtas before the summer recess, the Irish Examiner can reveal. While the new **statutory** Electoral Commission has indicated a range of between 171 and 181 TDs, senior Government sources have said the next Dáil will have 178 or 180 TDs.

While the new statutory **Electoral Commission** has indicated a range of between 171 and 181 TDs, senior Government sources have said the next Dáil will have 178 or 180 TDs — up from the current number of 160. This is because the Commission will go for the “upper limit” of what is permitted to ensure the population is properly represented in line with the Constitution.

The reason for going to the higher limit is to allow the Commission to “**future proof**” the design of the new boundaries which will have to last for “at least two electoral cycles” or 10 years if the Government runs full term. “The constant chopping and changing of boundaries has proven to be very disruptive and controversial. The plan by going high in terms of Dáil numbers is to provide some clarity and consistency,” one minister said.

**Details from commission.** In a note to TDs and Senators sent on Friday, the Commission also made clear that each constituency shall return 3, 4 or 5 members, thereby ending suggestions of new mega six-seat **constituencies**.

Another reason for going to the maximum level is to correct for the impact of reducing the number of TDs from 166 to 158 by the then Fine Gael led Government under Enda Kenny on the grounds of making **austerity** savings. “While that was done at a particular time, it was a mistake and this will seek to make up for lost time,” the minister said.

Under Article 16.2.2 of the Constitution, the total number of members of the Dáil Éireann cannot be fixed at less than one member per 30,000 of the population or at more than one member per 20,000 of the population. The provisional data from Census 2022 show that the population of the State has crept over 5 million people for the first time. At 5,123,536, this represents an increase of 361,671 from 2016. Preliminary Census 2022 figures showed that the number of people for each TD has risen to 32,022.

A number of constituencies, especially in the east of the country, are already significantly higher over the 30,000 limit. For example, in Dublin Rathdown, the number of people per TD is at almost 34,000, it is just above 34,100 in Fingal, and in Kildare North it is 33,589. While it is clear the Dáil will significantly increase in size this time, suggestions that there could be up to 250 TDs by 2050 due to population growth have been ruled out, suggesting a referendum change in the near future to increase the threshold limits. “That won’t happen. We will not see a Dáil of 250 TDs,” said one senior Government figure familiar with this process.

Of the new seats, it is clear that the greater Dublin area could see as many as nine added in counties where population growth has been strong since 2016. Professor Gary Murphy of the School of Law and Government at Dublin City University said there is precedent for such a large increase.

After the 1977 election the then newly formed constituency commission recommended a Dáil of 166 seats for the next general election up from 148 in 1977. This led to a situation where from 1981 to 2011 there was a Dáil of 166 TDs, he said. “It was decided to **implement** a big leap to a size that wouldn't require constant **amendment** in subsequent years. This might explain the current Electoral Commission's tendency to the maximum in that going to the bare minimum of 171 might soon require a further increase,” he told the Irish Examiner.

Explain the following key words from the document:

**Statutory**

**Electoral Commission**

**future proof**

**constituencies**

**austerity**

**implement**

**amendment**

1. Comprehension Question: Why, according to the document, are the government rushing through legislation to change the number of seats in the Dáil? (What quantitative data can you use to substantiate this answer?)
2. Interpretation Question: Critically assess the previous changes to the number of TDs in the Dáil. In your opinion, were these policies consistent and appropriate? Explain your answer.
3. Sourcing question: Is it *good* or *bad* to have anonymous sources quoted (i.e. “one senior Government figure”) in newspaper articles? Compare this with the practise of consulting a university professor (i.e. Prof Murphy).
4. Engagement Question: If, as the article suggests, a referendum was to be passed changing the proportion of representatives to constituents, how would you vote in that referendum? Explain your justification in detail.
5. Extension Question: What other steps would you take to make the Oireachtas more fair and representative?