The Republic of Ireland - A beginner's guide to society, culture and politics.

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The Republic of Ireland -
The island of Ireland is located west of the island of Britain. There are 4 provinces and 32 counties. The Ulster province is divided. Six of the counties in Ulster are part of the United Kingdom and three are part of the Republic of Ireland.

Dublin is the biggest city with 1.2 million of the 4.5 million total population. Ireland has a very young population compared to many other European countries and the population is increasing each year. Race is primarily Caucasian. There is greater diversity in the population due to European Union rules which allow free movement of labour. The dominant religion is Catholicism (85%) followed by Protestantism. However diversity is increasing with (for example) the Muslim population growing tenfold in 20 years.

Weather- rain can be expected at any time of year, though there also is much bright weather. In the summer daylight lasts until after 10pm.
History in brief

1. There was a predominantly Celtic/Gaelic early Christian culture until the Vikings invaded, with Waterford the first town settled by the Vikings about 1200 years ago.

2. The Gaelic provincial kings fought and defeated the Vikings. However the Normans followed about 900 years ago and conquered the east of the country. They later assimilated with the existing population and culture.

3. In 1450 most of Ireland was run by native Irish Gaelic kings, except for the Dublin area and large parts of Munster. From the 1500s British colonial control expanded Protestant ascendancy.

4. British plantations developed first in the modern Cork, Kerry, Clare regions in the late 1550s and expanding first to the midlands and eventually to Northern areas in the early 1600s. Figures such as Daniel O’Connell fought for Catholic emancipation and improved voting rights.

5. After the 1798 rebellion, the Act of Union dissolved the Irish parliament in 1800 and Irish MPs were amalgamated into the British House of Lords. The 1840s famine killed over a million people and another million emigrated. Irish MP, Charles Stewart Parnell, tried to introduce Home Rule in the 1880s.

6. A growing demand for Irish independence could no longer be ignored after the 1916 Easter Rising. It developed into a war for independence from 1919-1920. In 1920 the island was partitioned with the 6 counties of 'Northern Ireland' remaining fully integrated into the UK.

7. Michael Collins led the negotiations for a Treaty between Ireland and the UK which was signed in December 1921 and passed by a narrow majority in the new Irish parliament. However, some Irish MPs did not agree to parts of this Treaty and a Civil War resulted from 1922-1923. Collins was assassinated.

8. The Treaty came into force in December 1922 and Ireland became independent but did not have control over the six counties in Northern Ireland. Today, the two main political parties that have dominated Irish politics, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, are direct descendants of the opposing sides of the Civil War.

9. Ireland did not participate in World War II under the leadership of Taoiseach Eamon de Valera. Ireland formally became a Republic in 1949. The Northern Troubles began in the late 1960s. The Good Friday Peace agreement was signed in 1998. Ireland received an IMF/ECB loan in 2010.
Dáil Éireann (the House of Representatives). Has 166 members called TDs.

Seanad Éireann (the Senate). Has 60 members called Senators.

The Committees of the Oireachtas of which there are 14.

Local Government is comprised of county councils and city and town councils. Elections to these are held (separately to national elections) every 5 years. They organise local services (like waste collection and water distribution) and provide a means of representation in the community.
Voting in Ireland - PR-STV

**What is PR-STV?**
This is Ireland’s electoral system. People vote for not just the political party that they want but also for the candidate that they want.

**How does it work?**
You vote on a ballot paper like this one. You fill in each box with a number and order or rank them from your most preferred candidate (1), your second most preferred candidate (2), your third (3), fourth (4), fifth (5) and so on.

**The results?**
In theory the most popular people win not just the most popular political party. However knowing exactly who you vote for means that you are more personally attached to the candidates and this has led to problems where some believe that there is too much of a local focus for national politics.

**Where is it used?**
The only places in the world that use this as their national electoral system are Ireland and Malta!

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| KEARNS - NON-PARTY   |
| (ROBERT KEARNS of 4 Castle Park, Wicklow, Co. Wicklow; Carpenter) |

| KEDDY - NON-PARTY   |
| (CHARLIE KEDDY of Sea Road, Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow; Plumber) |

| KELLY - THE LABOUR PARTY |
| (NICKY KELLY of “Aille”, Highfield Avenue, Arklow, Co. Wicklow; Full Time Public Representative) |

| KENNEDY - SOCIALIST WORKERS’ PARTY (S.W.P.) |
| (CATHERINE KENNEDY of 31 Old Court Drive, Bray, Co. Wicklow) |

| KENNY - NON-PARTY   |
| (BRIAN KENNY of 17 Heatherwood, Boghall Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow; Sales Manager) |

| McMANUS - THE LABOUR PARTY |
| (LIZ McMANUS of 1 Martello Terrace, Bray, Co. Wicklow; Full Time Public Representative) |

| O’ROURKE - FINE GAEL |
| (RAYMOND JOHN O’ROURKE of 5 Cuala Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow) |

| O’SHAUGHNESSY - THE LABOUR PARTY |
| (JIMMY O’SHAUGHNESSY of Woodside, Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow; Public Representative) |

| ROCHE - FIANNA FÁIL |
| (DICK ROCHE of 2 Herbert Terrace, Herbert Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow; University Lecturer and Public Representative) |

| TIMMINS - FINE GAEL |
| (BILLY GODEREY TIMMINS of Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow; Public Representative) |
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Political Parties in Ireland

• Fine Gael - means tribe or family of the Irish. It is a centre right party. In the last election in 2011, it became the largest political party in Ireland for the first time.

• Labour - is a centre left party. It is the second largest party in Ireland. Fine Gael and Labour currently govern Ireland in a coalition.

• Fianna Fáil - means warriors of destiny. It a centrist party. Up until the last election in early 2011, it was the largest party and suffered the worst losses of any party since the foundation of the state.

• Sinn Fein - is a small party that advocates republican nationalism. The party are in government in Northern Ireland.

• The Green Party - Irelands only environment focused party. It has largely centre left policies. It was in government with Fianna Fail and lost all their seats in the last election.

• Independents - feature very strongly in Irish politics. There are more Independent elected now that ever before.
Voting behaviour in Election 2011

Percentage of first preference votes:

- Fianna Fáil: 12.6%
- Fine Gael: 17.4%
- Labour: 19.4%
- Green Party: 9.9%
- Sinn Féin: 36.1%
- Independent: 12.6%
- Other: 0%

Percentage of change in first preference votes since election 2007:

Summary: As can be seen in the pie chart above, Fine Gael received the most first preference votes at the February 2011 election. The bar chart indicates the percentage change in votes. Fianna Fail suffered the worst electoral losses ever experienced by one party in one election since the foundation of the Irish state.
1. Bunreacht na hÉireann was introduced in 1937, it replaced the 1922 constitution which was secular in tone and which had an oath of allegiance to the King.

2. Bunreacht na hÉireann consolidated Irish independence by affirming our autonomy.

3. It is formal in that it can’t be changed except by a referendum.

4. There have been 29 referendums but only 24 amendments to the constitution.

5. It has been the fundamental set of laws for the Irish State since 1937.

6. It ensures that Ireland operates under a representative democratic system.

7. It protects certain rights and places significant responsibility on the role of the state in social policy.

8. It is known to value and protect the family and emphasises property rights.

The Irish and emigration

1. The long history of Irish emigration can be traced back as far as the 1600s when 50,000 to 100,000 Irishmen, over 75 percent of them Catholic, journeyed or were transported to America.

2. 100,000 more Irish Catholics arrived in America in the 1700s. There was also large scale emigration to continental Europe at this time. Promising service upon arrival was an especially common way of affording migration.

3. As many as 4.5 million Irish arrived in America between 1820 and 1930 when demands for labourers increased. The disastrous Great Famine of the 1840s is connected with this huge increase. There was also very large scale Irish emigration to Britain, Australia, Canada, Argentina and other countries.

4. Today 11.9% of the total population of the USA reported Irish ancestry in 2008. The impact of this has been immeasurable.

5. During the boom years (from 1995-2010) in Ireland trends reversed. Many Irish people returned and immigrants from all over the world arrived in Ireland greatly boosting Irish diversity.

6. With increasing unemployment in Ireland at the moment many are forecasting a return to the tradition of emigration in Ireland. This year for the first time more people left Ireland than arrived!
The Troubles: The conflict in Northern Ireland stems from religious, cultural and economic differences between the two unique groups in Ireland but most specifically Ulster. The plantations in Ulster in the 1600s were unique and laid a strong foundation for the modern day difficulties. When the six counties of Ulster were separated from the rest of the island of Ireland, some agreed with the change and others fought it.

Protestant unionists and loyalists sought to remain a part of the UK, they felt British. Catholic nationalists sought to reunite the 32 counties of Ireland. Unionist domination was opposed by a Nationalist civil rights movement that arose in the 1960s. Both sides were fearful of the other and discrimination hampered all aspects of life. The communities – including even the education system - remain divided.

The paramilitary groups on the nationalist side included the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its many splinter groups. On the unionist and loyalist side, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). The state forces such as the police - Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) - and the British Army were involved in the conflicts too. Tribunals are still investigating the atrocities on both sides that killed an estimated 3,524 people over a thirty year period.

The peace process evolved with ceasefires and talks behind the scenes, leading to the signing by all parties, including the British and Irish Governments, of the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998. Many cross community initiatives have developed in Northern Ireland to foster social cohesion.
Irish culture

Irish music and dance- is very unique and features specific instruments and is known for its lively upbeat tempo. Riverdance introduced Irish dance to the rest of the world.

Artwork- is displayed in the many museums throughout Ireland. Artists such as Francis Bacon, William Orpin and Jack B Yeats (right) are famous worldwide.

The literature and artwork from the Book of Kells drafted in the 7th century is world renowned. Ireland is also celebrated for its contribution of poetry, plays and novels.
Irish literature → a rich tradition.
Irish sport and recreation

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) is based in Croke Park, Dublin. It entails national leagues of two sports; hurling (called camogie for women), played with hurls and a sliothar, and Gaelic football. Both are very popular amateur traditional Irish sports. But of course rugby,

In GAA sports scoring entails a goal (into the net) worth 3 points, or a point (above the net between the bars) worth one point. The leagues are divided into the 4 provinces and subdivided into the 32 counties. The best counties in each province play one another in the GAA quarter finals which lead to the All Ireland Final. There are over 2300 GAA clubs on the island.
Ireland & the European Union (EU)

Impact on Ireland's economy- Given that Ireland is a small open economy, it is highly susceptible to fluctuations across the continent. EU membership has reduced our dependency on the UK and diversified our economy hugely. Yet it has also contributed to the slow response to the worst economic crisis ever experienced due to our inability to change fiscal policies.

Impact of Euro on Ireland- The euro became Ireland’s official currency on January 1, 2002. Before that, the Irish punt (pound) was the official currency. The euro has positively impacted Irish industry, although it is now connected to problems with fiscal policy and the economic crisis.

Impact on Education in Ireland- Uniform teaching standards especially at third level. EU funding specifically targeted improving standards.

Impact on Ireland's environment- Regulations for water pollution, waste disposal, air quality, energy emissions and preservation of natural habitats.

Impact on Irish life- The standard of living has increased significantly since 1973. EU legislation has ensured that women have equal rights in the workplace. It is now easier to travel, live and work within other EU countries.

Impact on Traditional Industries- CAP Common Agricultural Policy and the CFP Common Fisheries Policy have changed and supported agriculture and aquaculture in Ireland thanks to redistribution subsidies.
1. A property bubble developed in Ireland between 2000 and 2008. Banks became over leveraged because of this and there was failed regulation.

2. Property prices dropped by 35% and the number of mortgages has fallen by close to 75% between 2008 and 2010.

3. In 2009, the government devised “NAMA” to take over the worst assets of the Irish banking system into one entity that would seek to slowly draw out their value through sales and the pursuit of debt.

4. The loans were worth €77 billion when first drawn up. They are now estimated to be worth €47 billion.

5. The total losses are hard to measure as they depend on future realisable values.

6. In 2010 the IMF and ECB offered the Irish government an €85 billion loan package – called a ‘bailout’ – at an interest rate of 5.8% that the government has been trying to reduce ever since.

7. So the Irish government has begun implementing a wide variety of austerity measures to ensure that we have the capacity to continue repaying the loans.
Some common expressions

‘What’s the craic?’ - what is going on with you/any news?

‘Well’ - hello.

‘I am just after doing something’ - I have done something.

‘Yoke’ - any object, thing or person

‘He’s some tool’ - he is a foolish person.

‘It’s grand’ - it’s alright/all good.

‘Quare’ - unusual

‘It’s Banjaxed’ - it’s broken
Darina Allen's Irish soda bread recipe

Serves – makes 1 loaf

Ingredients
450g (1lb) plain white flour, preferably unbleached
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
400ml (14fl oz) buttermilk

Directions:
1. Preheat the oven to 230° Centigrade/400° Fahrenheit/Gas Mark 9.
2. Sift all the dry ingredients into a large, wide bowl, and make a well in the centre. Pour in the milk. Using the fingers of one hand, stiff and outstretched like a claw, stir from the centre to the edge of the bowl in concentric circles. The dough should be softish, but not too wet and sticky. When it all comes together, turn out on to a well-floured work surface.
3. Wash and dry your hands. Pat the dough into a tidy shape and flip over gently, then pat it into a round about 4cm (1 and 1/2 inches) thick. Gently transfer to a floured baking tray. Cut a deep cross into the loaf and prick the centre of each quarter to 'let the fairies out'.
4. Bake for 15 minutes, then reduce the heat to 200°C/370°F/Gas Mark 6 and bake for a further 30 minutes or until cooked. If you are in doubt tap the bottom of the bread: it should sound hollow. Cool on a wire rack.

Soda bread is best eaten on the day it is made.
For further information:

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The project, **Promoting Civic Participation of Third Country Nationals through Local Authority Platforms**, is led by Dublin Employment Pact and New Communities Partnership through Dublin City Council, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Fingal County Council and South Dublin County Council. AkiDwA is also a project partner.

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