

Submission to the European Constituency Boundary Review

The Secretary, European Parliament Constituencies Committee,
Room 1.65, Custom House, Dublin 1

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In considering the possible outcomes of a review of constituency boundaries, the biggest challenge facing a Boundary Commission is that of reconciling terms of reference which at times may be in conflict with each other.

In looking at the flexibility of terms of reference, some take precedence over others. For example, the provision regarding breaching of county boundaries has always been seen as one that is less “negotiable” than others. Likewise, the provision that each constituency is made up of contiguous areas is both “non-negotiable” as well as sensible. By law, each constituency shall return 3, 4, or 5 members again a provision which is fixed, and which limits the options, and the total number of seats to be filled is 13.

This leaves a small number of mathematical possibilities for the number of constituency configurations that are possible to be reconciled with the optimum balance between those Terms of Reference which do allow some flexibility. So, what are the options? We could have three constituencies made up of 5:5:3 seats or 5:4:4 seats or four constituencies made up of 3:3:3:4 seats.

The final provision in the terms of reference directs that the Committee shall endeavour to maintain continuity in relation to the arrangement of constituencies. The clear inference here is that an arrangement of three constituencies should be retained, unless a convincing argument can be made that having four would yield a result that is demonstrably better in terms of the other provisions.

The move to a four-constituency scenario, therefore, can only be justified if it can be proven to provide a more equal distribution of seats to population and to give any additional representation to the areas of lowest population density.

Four-Constituency Scenarios

There are a number of arrangements or variations where four constituencies are possible. Only a relatively small number, however, would be administratively sensible as many of them would breach some of the other terms of reference.

The particular challenge to a four-constituency scenario is Dublin. In every possible four constituency scenario, Dublin would form a constituency of its own. If Dublin were to receive only three seats, that would represent a variance of almost 23% from the national average in terms of equality of representation. That is significantly higher than any variance accepted in the past.

If Dublin were to get four seats, it would then be over-represented by a factor of 8%. While this figure is within the range of what might be considered acceptable figure, it is quite a large variation and would exceed all recent practice of the committee. It also runs contrary to the provision that consideration should be given to population density. By conferring additional or “bonus” representation on the area of highest population density it opposes the intent and the logic of that provision.

Previous reviews have also considered the range between the highest and lowest variances recommended. Given the skewing fact of a Dublin 4-seater having a variance of -8.04%, the likely best possible scenario for the range between the lowest and highest variations in any 4-constituency scenario is likely to be in the order of 13-14%.

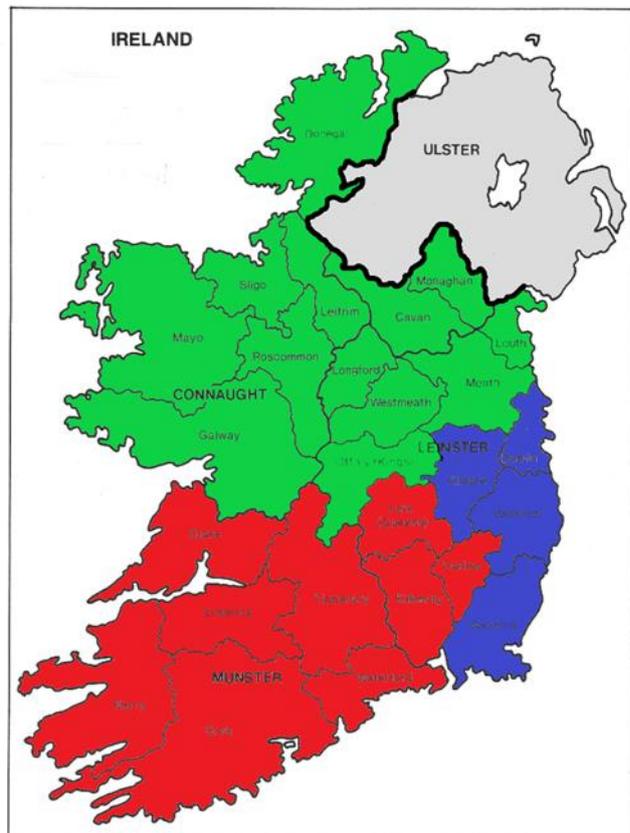
Leaving Dublin aside, the ensuing combinations of counties required to make up the remaining three constituencies would also require significant re-organisation and the most likely permutations would involve considerably less equality of representation than some of the possible three seat scenarios.

So, clearly there is no four-constituency scenario that delivers a more equal distribution of seats to population while at the same time offering additional representation to the areas of lower population density. It is clear, therefore, that there is not a justifiable case for breaking with the existing arrangement, made up of three constituencies.

Three Constituency Scenario 4:4:5

If the boundaries of the three existing constituencies were to be maintained, then the allocation of the two additional seats would lead to significant disparities in representation. On the other hand, large scale re-organisation of constituencies such as a Dublin Constituency, an East Constituency and a West Constituency would not be in keeping with the term of reference providing for maintenance of continuity.

So, the optimal scenario would be a three-constituency arrangement with as few changes as possible to existing boundaries.



This scenario could be met by a 5-seat East constituency (comprising Dublin and a small number of contiguous counties), with the rest of the country divided between a 4 seat Midlands & North-West and a 4 seat South constituency.

- This configuration allows for very low variance in representation.
- In retaining the two 4 seat constituencies of South and Midlands-Northwest, is in harmony with the provision of maintenance of continuity.

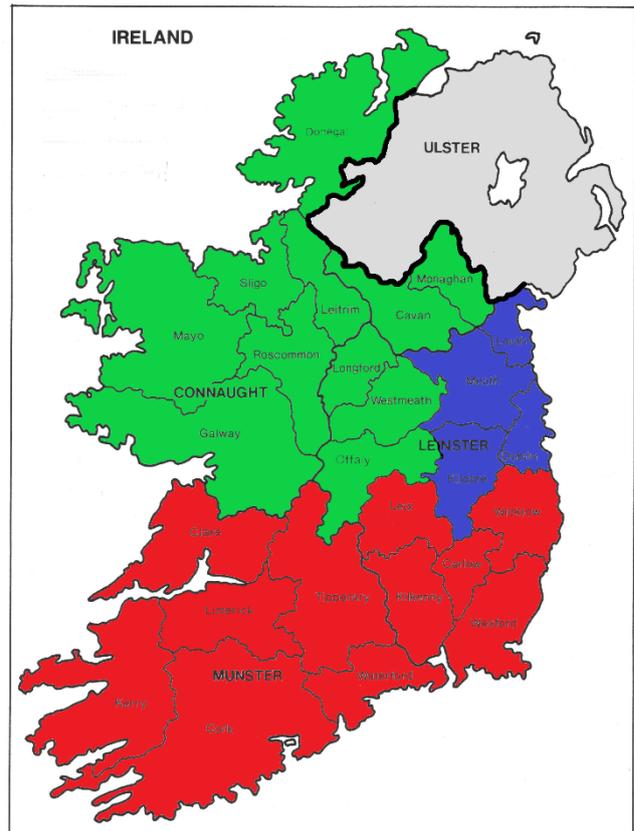
	Population	Area (Km ²)	Density Pop / Km ²	Seats	Pop / Seat	Variance
East	1,862,010	7,011	266	5	372,402	+1.7%
Midlands & Northwest	1,463,671	35,619	41	4	365,917	-0.1%
South	1,436,184	27,645	52	4	359,046	-2.0%
Total	4,761,865	70,273	68	13	366,297	

Three Constituency Scenario 3:5:5

As in the previous example, this configuration retains three constituencies but also proposes limited changes to boundaries. It has the effect of reducing the size of the Midlands-Northeast constituency, which currently represents over half of the land area of the State, and is the largest constituency by area in any of the countries who sub-divide their countries into smaller constituencies.

As before, the optimal scenario would be a three-constituency arrangement with as few changes as possible to existing boundaries.

This scenario shown here involves a 5-seat East constituency (comprising Dublin and a small number of contiguous counties), with the rest of the country divided between a 3-seat North and a 5-seat South constituency.



- **This configuration is the one that represents the best balance between the various terms of reference.**
- It requires minimal change, with just four counties (Louth, Meath, Kildare and Laois) being moved.
- The problem of the size of the previous Midlands and North-West constituency has been addressed, with the area of the two “rural” constituencies being brought towards parity.
- There is good equality of representation, with a maximum variance of 4% and a range between lowest and highest variances of only 7.4%. (+3.4% to -4.0%)
- The small variance that does exist is weighted in favour of the least densely populated area (North) and is taken from the most densely populated area. This is in accordance with the provision recommending that density of population be taken into consideration.

	Population	Area (Km ²)	Density Pop / Km ²	Seats	Pop / Seat	Variance
East	1,893,791	5,785	327	5	378,758	+3.4%
North	1,055,046	30,731	34	3	351,682	-4.0%
South	1,813,028	33,759	54	5	359,046	-1.1%
Total	4,761,865	70,273	68	13	366,297	

In summary:

- there is no compelling case to move to four constituencies
- disruption should be kept to a minimum
- the second scenario outlined herein (3:5:5) is the one that best strikes the balance between the various terms of reference.

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