

1 **The political salience of animal protection in the Republic of Ireland (2011-2020): What do Irish political**
2 **parties pledge on animal welfare and wildlife conservation?**

3

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18 **The political salience of animal protection in the Republic of Ireland (2011-2020): What do Irish political**
19 **parties pledge on animal welfare and wildlife conservation?**

20

21 **Abstract**

22

23 Ireland is the largest beef trader and a major dairy exporter within the European Union. Horse racing holds
24 significant cultural value, while greyhound racing is economically important at the regional level. As public
25 concern about farm animal welfare rises and biodiversity loss intensifies, this research examines the political
26 salience of animal protection in Ireland across the 2011, 2016, and 2020 general elections. Political salience
27 measures the degree of public concern about political issues, with party manifestos serving as indicators of this
28 concern. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study analysed 364 statements on animal
29 protection from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Green Party, Labour Party, and Sinn Féin. The results show a
30 significant increase in the frequency and positivity of animal protection statements over the course of the
31 election period, with a shift in the attitudes of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The Green Party has consistently
32 promoted progressive animal protection policies. Key issues such as farmed animal welfare, wildlife and
33 biodiversity, and horse and greyhound racing have gained prominence in party manifestos, also reflecting
34 economic influences. Despite this growing focus, critical issues such as the puppy trade and certain aspects of
35 farmed animal welfare remain under-represented. This research provides the first comprehensive academic
36 analysis of animal protection policy in political party manifestos in the Republic of Ireland.

37

38

39 **Keywords**

40 Animal protection – animal welfare – conservation – issue salience – party politicisation – Republic of Ireland

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41 1. Introduction

42

43 This research examines the political salience of animal protection in the Republic of Ireland by analysing
44 election manifestos from the 2011, 2016 and 2020 general elections. Ireland, with a population of approximately
45 5.15 million (CSO, 2023a), occupies four-fifths of the island of Ireland and has been a member of the EU since
46 1973. It has a GDP of €480 billion (World Bank Group, 2023).

47 With around 100,000 production farms and a herd of 6.6 million cattle, beef farming plays an important role in
48 Irish agriculture, accounting for over 25% of total agricultural output. There are 889,000 suckler cows, making
49 Ireland's herd the third largest in the EU. With 1.5 million dairy cows, the country is also a major dairy exporter
50 (Dairy Industry Ireland, 2022; Teagasc, 2023). Ireland maintains 2 million pigs, including 145,000 breeding
51 sows, 2 million laying hens and produces 70 million broiler chickens per year (Teagasc, 2017; PWC, 2022).
52 Recent welfare concerns have focused on dairy cows, calves, beef cattle, broiler chickens and sows (Boyle et al.,
53 2022). The *EU Animal Welfare Barometer 2023* shows that 71% of the Irish population prioritise decent living
54 conditions for farm animals and 78% strongly support sufficient space for movement (European Commission,
55 2023).

56 Ireland has a diverse range of habitats supporting significant populations of birds, fish, mammals, invertebrates,
57 plants and fungi. However, 85% of EU protected habitats are in unfavourable condition, with 46% in decline,
58 particularly in marine, peatland, grassland and woodland areas (National Parks & Wildlife Service, n.d.).
59 Livestock production has exacerbated problems of overexploitation, pollution and biodiversity loss (Department
60 of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2019). While 90% of the population support the improvement of
61 biodiversity, 56% are unsure of how they can contribute (Office of Public Works, 2022).

62 Ireland's horse and greyhound racing industry is recognised as a valuable economic contributor. According to
63 Horse Racing Ireland (2023), the horse racing industry employs approximately 30,000 people and contributes
64 €2.46 billion to the economy. An estimated 10,000 people benefit economically from the greyhound sector
65 (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2023). Both industries receive financial support from the Irish Government through
66 the *Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund* under Section 12 of the *Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001*, which
67 is considered vital to the survival and development of both horse and greyhound racing. Yet, both industries have
68 come under increasing criticism, as highlighted by the documentaries *The Dark Side of Horse Racing* and *RTÉ*
69 *Investigates: Greyhounds Running for Their Lives*, which exposed inhumane treatment and welfare issues
70 (Moore, 2021; Power, 2021). Concerns have also been raised about Ireland's large puppy breeding industry
71 (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021a).

72 This research examines the political salience of animal protection^a in Ireland, a country with a multi-party system
73 where proportional representation determines the composition of government. Political salience refers to the
74 importance of a political issue to voters and its influence on their voting behaviour (Wlezien, 2005). Election

^a In this paper, the term 'animal protection' is used as an umbrella term to cover animal welfare, wildlife conservation, and animal rights.

Commented [SM2]: For the Intro, need to think about what purpose is. Also about readership. Currently, it dives into political context.

Note, I'm not sure if you are influenced by reviewers of P1 re structure. Please remember that reviewers say all sorts of crazy things. Next reviewers may say something entirely different.

We are submitting to JAGE. I.e., agri ethics. Agri, then welfare, then ethics. Welfare for us is part of the ethics. Politics isn't in there. So we don't want to dive in Intro with lots of politics. What we have, certainly from Table 1, but probably the para before too, belongs in a politics section in the lit review.

In the Intro, we need the material to be much more basic. And we need it to be focused on agric and then welfare, and then political salience at end.

Commented [AH3]: 8,390 words (max = 8,000)

75 manifestos, which are designed to maximise electoral success, serve as a measure of the issues prioritised by
76 voters and reflect the positions of political parties at particular moments in time (Däubler, 2012; Chaney, 2014).

77

78 This paper explores the following research questions:

- 79 1. How has the prominence of animal protection issues in Ireland evolved according to manifesto
80 analysis of the 2011, 2016 and 2020 general elections?
- 81 2. Which animal protection issues have been most politically significant in Ireland from 2011 to 2020?
- 82 3. What is the relationship between the political orientation of Irish parties and their animal protection
83 policies as outlined in their manifestos?

84

85 The following sections provide a review of academic literature on salience in animal protection and the political
86 context in Ireland. The paper then moves on to provide an overview of animal protection in Ireland, focusing on
87 farmed animal welfare, horse and greyhound racing in Ireland, puppy farming, and wildlife and biodiversity.
88

Commented [SM4]: I have amended the RQs slightly -
check.

Also moved down as didn't fit well.

89 **2. Salience in animal protection**

90
91 Several academic studies have examined the attention given to animal protection by political parties across
92 different countries and time periods. Chaney (2014) analysed the UK political landscape from 1979 to 2010,
93 noting a gradual increase in attention to animal protection issues, with left-wing parties adopting more
94 progressive policy positions than right-wing counterparts. Chaney et al. (2020) conducted a detailed examination
95 of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland^b from 1998 to 2017, noting a rising prominence of animal welfare
96 issues within electoral agendas across various levels of government.

97
98 Vogeler (2017a) performed a systematic review of farm animal welfare policies in Austria, Germany, and
99 Switzerland, revealing distinct approaches across these countries. Vogeler (2017b) also explored the German
100 political landscape, noting the prominent advocacy role of the green party in supporting animal welfare.
101 Additionally, Vogeler (2019) highlighted how societal concerns influenced political parties in Germany and the
102 UK, leading to stricter regulations compared to EU standards.

103 Hus and McCulloch (2023) examined the political salience of animal protection by analysing party manifestos in
104 the Netherlands and Belgium from 2010 to 2021. They found that animal protection gained in importance over
105 successive electoral cycles. Left-wing parties adopted more progressive positions, prioritising animal protection
106 over economic concerns, while right-wing parties focused more on economic interests. The study also
107 highlighted that different levels of electoral politics offer opportunities to advance animal protection agendas.

108 Issue salience, a key concept in political science research, describes the relative importance and relevance of
109 different policy issues (Wlezien et al., 2003). As a metric for measuring the level of contention between political
110 factions, issue salience highlights the extent to which individual parties attach importance to particular policy
111 areas; and party manifestos provide repositories of this information at particular points in time. Despite potential
112 shortcomings associated with their use as data repositories, party manifestos can be invaluable resources for
113 longitudinal research, particularly because they have tended to become more comprehensive documents in recent
114 decades (Chaney, 2014).

^b Animal health and welfare is a devolved responsibility in the UK.

115 **3. The political context in Ireland**
116

117 The Republic of Ireland is a parliamentary republic with proportional representation and a bicameral parliament:
118 Dáil Éireann (lower house) and Seanad Éireann (upper house) (European Commission, 2022). Simon Harris has
119 been Taoiseach (Prime Minister) since April 2024. The three largest parties are Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and Fine
120 Gael. Table 1 lists the Irish political parties that published manifestos for the 2011, 2016 and 2020 general
121 elections analysed in this research.

122

Political party ^c	Political orientation	Seats in 2020 general election
Fianna Fáil	Centre	38
Sinn Féin	Left	37
Fine Gael	Centre-right	35
Green Party	Left	12
Labour Party	Left	6

123 Table 1: Irish political parties that published manifestos for each general election in 2011, 2016 and 2020, their political orientation, and
124 seats won at the 2020 general election.

125 In 2020, Fianna Fáil won 38 seats and formed a government with Fine Gael (35 seats) and the Green Party (12
126 seats). This Parliament marked the first power-sharing between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and the first
127 government entry for the Green Party (Coulter & Reynolds, 2020).

128 Fianna Fáil, established in 1926, dominated Irish politics after the Second World War but experienced a decline
129 in seats in 2011 (Carty, 2022). Alongside Fine Gael, established in 1933, Fianna Fáil's manifestos supported high
130 animal welfare standards but also endorsed horse and greyhound racing, live livestock exports, and wildlife
131 protection (Fianna Fáil, 2020; Fine Gael, 2020). The Green Party, established in 1981, increased its seats from 3
132 to 12 in 2020 (Coulter & Reynolds, 2020) and advocated for more animal welfare regulations and the
133 recognition of animals as sentient beings (Green Party, 2022).

134 Sinn Féin, a left-wing republican party founded in 1905, emphasised animal protection in the context of
135 economic interests related to farming and fishing (Sinn Féin, 2020). It won 37 seats in 2020, but Fianna Fáil and
136 Fine Gael refused to form a coalition, citing tax policy and links to the IRA (Kelpie, 2020). The Irish Labour
137 Party, founded in 1912, remains linked to the trade union movement and defends workers' interests. In 2020 it
138 pledged to tighten dog breeding laws and protect fish stocks after Brexit (Kelpie, 2020; Labour Party, 2020).

^c Fine Gael (Family of the Irish), Fianna Fáil (Soldiers of Destiny), Green Party (Comhaontas Glas), Labour Party (Páirtí an Lucht Oibre), Sinn Féin (We Ourselves).

Commented [SM5]: New section with material copied and pasted directly from Introduction. I think for JAGE this section needs shortening a little. Probably by around 25%. Also take out/amend bits that are now in Intro. E.g., the first para may need adapting a bit. Essentially, we just want to provide basic contextual information about what these parties are. Remember we are writing for the JAGE reader too. So we need some for context and because this paper is about political salience, but we don't want to put them off at start of lit review (having this at start of Intro would have put most off; I think this section comes most naturally here, though it could also potentially be put at end of lit review too). Regardless, it should be brief.

Commented [SM6]: Use this term in research question, cf 'leaning'.

Commented [SM7]: Check the correct term.

139 **4. Animal protection in Ireland**

140

141 Farming and husbandry, companion animals and sporting activities with animals are all an important part of
142 contemporary Irish life. In 2021, the Irish Government published its *Animal Welfare Strategy 2021-2025* to
143 provide a coherent and ambitious approach to animal welfare, based on five principles: facilitating respectful
144 dialogue, enhancing cooperation, increasing capacity, improving coordination and improving animal welfare in
145 multiple situations (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2021).

146

147 **4.1 Farm animal welfare**

148 **4.1.1 Beef farming**

149 Ireland's livestock industry is significant, with 6.6 million cattle across 100,000 farms. It ranks among the top ten
150 beef exporters globally, exporting 90% of its 524,543 tonnes of beef production in 2020 primarily to the UK and
151 EU markets (Teagasc, 2023). Effective management and proper housing are vital for beef cattle welfare,
152 especially in winter or when pasture is limited (RSPCA, 2023a). In the Irish beef sector, farmer engagement is
153 crucial; increased farmer interest is associated with reduced lameness, cleaner equipment and animals, fewer
154 diseases, and improved conditions in areas such as environment, lighting, animal movement, weaning, and social
155 interactions (Lawrence et al., 2022).

156

157 **4.1.2 Dairy farming**

158 Ireland has 1.5 million dairy cows on 17,000 farms (Teagasc, 2023), with dairy products worth €6.3 billion in
159 exports in 2023 (Bord Bia, n.d.). The *Food Harvest 2020* programme and the removal of milk quotas spurred
160 expansion in the dairy sector (Chen & Holden, 2018), raising the public profile of the industry (O'Donoghue &
161 Hennessy, 2015). In 2023, the industry faced criticism after RTÉ footage showed the mistreatment of calves,
162 including being thrown, kicked and subjected to harsh handling (O'Sullivan & Kent, 2023).

163

164 **4.1.3 Pig farming**

165 In 2022, Ireland had 1,634,800 pigs, including 1,497,600 non-breeding and 137,200 breeding pigs (CSO, 2023b).
166 Most indoor sows are kept in stalls for one month of gestation and then moved to farrowing crates for five
167 weeks, starting one week before farrowing (Compassion in World Farming, 2020). The EU's partial ban on sow
168 stalls, effective from 2013, allows their use only during the first four weeks of pregnancy and the week before
169 farrowing. Sow stalls that restrict movement and behaviour are discouraged by the European Food Safety
170 Authority (EFSA, 2022). McCulloch (2022a, 2022b) has reported that farrowing crates do not meet the welfare
171 needs of sows, are not essential for piglet survival and should be banned.

172

173 **4.1.4 Broiler chickens**

174 Irish farmers rear 110 million broiler chickens per year (Irish Farmers Journal, n.d.). Although poultry meat
175 exports fell from 143,100 tonnes in 2019 to 95,500 tonnes in 2021 due to COVID-19 and Brexit, they recovered
176 in 2022, exceeding 100,000 tonnes and increasing in value by 31% to €314 million (Department of Agriculture,
177 Food and the Marine, 2023). Intensive farming practices for broilers include physical mutilations, feed

Commented [SM8]: See this - FAWAC.
We need to mention this early, and then cite a few times, eg codes of recommendations etc.

Have a good look at this website - including rep groups, chairmans statement, publications, etc.

Maybe take a quote off the chairmans statement?

<http://www.fawac.ie/>

Commented [SM9]: Nb when we submit, no need to start all these sections on different pages, so join them up.

Commented [SM10]: This section doesn't include anything on farmed animal welfare.

Use the material here to write a shorter and more introductory paragraph in the Intro - paragraph 2. Then, what we need here is a flavour of the key farmed animal welfare issues in Ireland.

The Irish SPCA guy should have helped with this. They are similar to the UK but not the same: Dairy - mastitis, lameness, infertility (leading to slaughter). Live exports?

Beef - feedlots/indoor

Sheep - lameness, parasites

Pigs - sow stalls/farrowing crates, tail docking, CO2 stunning (EU advised against)

Broilers - rapid growing = lameness in 25% and heart attacks, indoors, hock burns etc

Layers - around half or more in cages, beak trimming.

Try and give this an Irish flavour though. Provide the contextual material in Intro, then here lead in with contextual material. Have a look at Irish SPCA or other websites (similar to UK all dogs and cats, but if you look deeper you'll see main concerns). Andrew mentioned pigs I remember and gestation crates are awful.

Also, should be able to reverse engineer to extent from results. What are the manifestos saying? What is the Green Party focusing more on?

Also in here, we need to introduce reader to some main NGO groups.

So can introduce a sentence like: The Irish SPCA have voiced concern about Etc

That tells the reader the key players etc.

Commented [SM11]: This and the pig section earlier part read much better as focused on Ireland context.

Commented [SM12]: I've drafted this section to have a bit more of the authority that I think we should have in other sections.

But it is too long - we only want a paragraph or two for each subsection.

Also, missing here perhaps is a more contextual reference, eg ISPCA.

For instance, for this and/or other sections, try and find a nice quote so we can write something like:

The ISPCA has stated that pig farming in Ireland has "major welfare issues"..... And is particularly concerned about.....

So issues will include those more related to Ireland - eg live exports sheep, maybe beef on slats.

178 restrictions, confinement in cages (EFSA, 2023a), high stocking densities, inadequate housing and accelerated
179 growth (Bracke et al., 2020). Fast-growing broilers, which make up 95% of the population, suffer from welfare
180 problems such as disease, exhaustion and starvation, and common problems such as lameness, lesions and heart
181 failure (Eurogroup for Animals, 2023). The Better Chicken Commitment aims to improve welfare standards in
182 the poultry industry (Better Chicken Commitment, n.d.).

183

184 4.1.5 Egg-laying hens

185 Ireland has 1.8 million caged laying hens, representing 54% of the national flock (ISPCA, 2021). Although the
186 EU banned barren battery cages in 2012, it still allows larger modified cages with some enrichment features,
187 although they restrict essential behaviours such as nesting, dust bathing and foraging (EFSA, 2023b). The Irish
188 Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPCA)^d and other NGOs advocate phasing out all cages by 2025
189 (Compassion in World Farming, 2020).

190

191 4.1.6 Sheep farming

192 Ireland has a sheep population of 4 million, with nearly 3 million slaughtered in 2022. It is the fourth largest
193 global exporter and second in the EU, with exports valued at €476 million (Irish Farmers' Association, 2023).
194 Key welfare concerns include lameness, castration, tail docking, handling stress, and parasites (RSPCA, 2023b).
195 In 2022, Ireland exported 15,000 live sheep worth €2 million, mainly to Europe and the Middle East (O'Brien,
196 2023). Live transport poses welfare risks, including stress and disease transmission, especially outside the EU's
197 safeguards (Eurogroup for Animals, n.d.).

198

199 4.1.7 Aquaculture and seafood industry

200 Ireland's fishing industry, valued at €1.3 billion, includes 1 993 fishing vessels and 296 aquaculture sites.
201 Aquaculture, mainly salmon (€119 million) and cod (€44 million), is worth €196 million. Its growth has led to
202 environmental and public health concerns, such as biodiversity loss, pollution and overuse of antibiotics (Becca
203 et al., 2021). Animal welfare concerns include overcrowding, poor water quality, malnutrition, disease and poor
204 handling (Naylor et al., 2021; Barreto et al., 2022). The seafood industry exports €703 million, with the main
205 markets being the EU (€407 million), the UK (€80 million) and Asia (€79 million) (BIM, 2022). Garratt and
206 McCulloch (2022) highlight welfare issues in UK marine fisheries, including stress from overcrowding, pressure
207 and temperature shocks, hypoxia and suffocation at slaughter.

Commented [SM13]: I think this follows naturally from Beef and dairy industries.

However, just bear in mind that by far the biggest issue will be broilers and lameness etc, and we currently have that buried under laying hens.

Fish too.

So we are writing in a (kind of) logical order, at least conventional one - following the beef and economics I guess. But obv as people with a concern re welfare, we also want to make clear through our writing that the big issues are broilers etc, related to numbers.

The subheadings may help a bit with this. But also foreground the numbers involved and use language to emphasise etc (we currently don't).

^d The Irish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is Ireland's leading animal welfare organisation. It focuses on preventing cruelty, promoting animal welfare and alleviating animal suffering.

208 **4.2. Horse and greyhound racing**

209 **4.2.1. Horse racing**

210 Established in 1994 to boost horse racing investment, the Irish Horse Authority was succeeded by Horse Racing
211 Ireland (HRI) in 2001 as a quasi-governmental body to reinforce Ireland's racing tradition (Irish Thoroughbred
212 Marketing, 2022). In 2022, the Irish horseracing industry contributed over €550 million in foreign direct
213 investment and aims to expand its global market, enhance domestic impact, and lead in equine welfare and
214 sustainability (Horse Racing Ireland, 2023). Despite the Irish Thoroughbred Welfare Council's advocacy since
215 2000, the sector has faced criticism. A 2021 BBC investigation reported the slaughter of many young, retired,
216 and predominantly Irish-bred racehorses (MacIntyre, 2021), with similar concerns raised by *the Irish Times*
217 about the treatment of exported racehorses (Power, 2021). The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
218 confirmed that many thoroughbreds are slaughtered (Power, 2021).

219 **4.2.2. Greyhound racing**

220 Greyhound racing, which evolved from hare coursing in the 1920s, receives public funding of €20 million
221 (O'Connor, 2024). Despite pandemic-related challenges, the industry showed resilience in 2021, recording an
222 operating surplus of €3.8 million from 1,384 meetings with 91,778 greyhounds (Rásaíocht Con Éireann, 2022).
223 Yet, the documentary *RTÉ Investigates: Greyhounds Running for Their Lives* exposed welfare issues, including
224 the annual euthanasia of 6,000 greyhounds due to poor performance (Moore, 2021). This *wastage* and associated
225 concerns about breeding and welfare conditions have been extensively documented (Hansen, 2017; Knight,
226 2018). Legislative efforts such as the Greyhound Racing Act 2019 and the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund
227 Regulations 2023 have sought to improve welfare, but animal welfare groups such as the Dogs Trust and ISPCA
228 want to see the sport phased out within the next few years (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine,
229 2020a, Houses of the Oireachtas, 2023).

230

231 **4.3. Puppy farming.**

232 In Ireland, the number of registered dog breeding establishments surged from 73 in 2016 to 258 in 2018, leading
233 to an annual production capacity of about 30,000 puppies (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021a). This growth,
234 particularly in large-scale operations with up to 500 breeding animals, raised animal welfare concerns (Houses of
235 the Oireachtas, 2021a). In response, the *Animal Health and Welfare (Sale or Supply of Pet) Regulations 2019*
236 imposed stricter registration requirements for breeders of six or more dogs annually (Department of Agriculture,
237 Food and the Marine, 2020b). Despite these measures, Ireland faces a severe dog welfare crisis, with a 77%
238 increase in dogs entering pounds in 2022, doubled euthanasia rates, and a notable rise in rehoming requests and
239 rescues in 2023 (Fieldfisher, 2024).

240

241 **4.4. Wildlife and biodiversity**

242 Ireland's *National Parks and Wildlife Service* (NPWS), part of the Department of Housing, Local Government
243 and Heritage, oversees the protection and conservation of the country's natural heritage. This includes

Commented [AK14]: I've not got much to say about horse racing other than it is not without its welfare issues and of course the large numbers being bred of which only a small % will be successful in racing. Many thousands are sent for slaughter when no longer of any value and certain slaughterhouses in Ireland are licensed to slaughter horses on particular days. Also, it might be worth stating that the Horse and Greyhound Fund comes from a levy on gambling industry which the industry claims as a kind of 'self-funding' but it remains the only tax raised income ring fenced for a particular purpose. HRI also provides support for fox hunts which is still fully legal in Ireland.

Commented [SM15]: https://www.ispca.ie/news/detail/the_ispca_has_welcomed_animal_welfare_commitments_included_in_the_new_progr

On greyhounds, although we would rather see an end to greyhound racing, we welcome the commitment that future funding of the greyhound sector is contingent on a guarantee of welfare standards being upheld on an annual basis. However, we are concerned that the welfare commitments published in 2019 by the Irish Greyhound Board will not address the real problem which is the over production of greyhounds. Welfare standards should be independently determined and independently monitored. More needs to be done to stop Irish greyhounds being exported to countries with poor animal welfare records.

Commented [SM16]: ISPCA https://www.ispca.ie/news/detail/the_ispca_has_welcomed_animal_welfare_commitments_included_in_the_new_progr

On pet animals, the ISPCA is pleased to see a commitment to promote responsible pet ownership. This could be done by introducing a responsible pet ownership module to the national school curriculum. We are also pleased to see a commitment to ensure the robust enforcement of the Animal Health and Welfare Act and a review of the sentencing regime underpinning the legislation. Ireland has some of the toughest penalties for animal welfare offences in the EU, but penalties handed down by courts have been inconsistent and do not act as a deterrent. ISPCA Inspectors are authorised officers under the Animal Health and Welfare Act and deal with horrific cruelty to animals on a daily basis. We hope to see proper funding of the ISPCA Inspectorate to allow the ISPCA to recruit a sufficient number of Inspectors to be able to cover the whole country as recommended by the Joint Agriculture Committee in 2016. We are also pleased to see a commitment to robustly and consistently enforcing the Dog Breeding Establishments Act. While we

Commented [SM17]: This is good on the broader context and policy. But we need a story or two here (a couple of sentence each.) I.e., a small case study. Are there a couple of issues that we can write about - a bird or other wild animal? Shorten the contextual policy material and add a case study or two very briefly to retain the same overall length.

Commented [SM18]: SHOULDN'T THIS SECTION BE AFTER SPORTS? THAT'S BECAUSE SPORTS ARE ANIMAL WELFARE ISSUES, AND THESE ARE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES.

244 designating *Special Areas of Conservation* (SAC), *Special Protection Areas* (SPA), and *Natural Heritage Areas*
245 (NHA), and managing a licensing system to regulate activities impacting habitats and species (gov.ie, 2022).

246 The 4th *National Biodiversity Action Plan* (NBAP) for 2023-2030 must transform biodiversity conservation and
247 foster a collective effort to address biodiversity loss. The *Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023* introduced a
248 biodiversity duty for public bodies to adhere to NBAP objectives (NPWS, n.d.). In 2024, Ireland supported the
249 *Nature Restoration Law*, a key component of the *European Green Deal* integrating biodiversity with climate
250 action (Hus, 2024).

251 Despite these efforts, Ireland faces conservation challenges. Of 37 bird species, many, such as the hen harrier
252 and curlew, are highly endangered, and nature conservation remains underfunded (National Biodiversity Data
253 Centre, 2022). The seafood industry exacerbates biodiversity issues through aquaculture and overfishing,
254 affecting species like Atlantic salmon, angel shark, and European eel, and threatening freshwater pearl mussels
255 and white-clawed crayfish due to invasive diseases (Becca et al., 2021; National Biodiversity Data Centre,
256 2022).

257 **5. Methodology**

258

259 **5.1. Research design**

260 This research analyses election manifestos from the Irish national elections of 2011, 2016, and 2020, following
261 the methodology of Hus & McCulloch (2023). Only manifestos from parties that participated in all three
262 elections were considered (see Table 1). These manifestos, available in English and partially in Irish, were
263 sourced from the Manifesto Project website^e and <http://michaelpidgeon.com/manifestos/>.

264 A quantitative analysis was conducted using keywords such as animal(s), agriculture, fish(eries), biodiversity,
265 slaughter, transport, and wildlife. Manifesto texts were segmented into quasi-sentences—statements expressing
266 political ideas—and coded based on animal protection issues, similar to the method used by Chaney et al.
267 (2020). Statements were categorised as pro-, anti-animal protection, or neutral, following Reingold’s (2000)
268 directional approach to analysing political debates. This method, combined with qualitative analysis, helps reveal
269 party positions and political dynamics (Chaney, 2014). Categories for analysis are detailed in Table 2.

Tag	Issue categories
Entertainment	Circuses, (petting) zoos, dolphinariums, animal fairs.
EU	EU Common Fisheries Policy, EU Pigs Directive, and other EU related issues.
Experimentation/testing	Animal testing, genetic engineering
Farmed animal welfare	Livestock, fish, fur farming, use of medication, promotion of meat replacers and plant-based diets.
Hunting and culling	Issues and regulations relating to hare hunting, badger culling, hunting with hounds.
Pets	Dogs, horses, exotic pets, related regulation.
Regulation/criminal justice	General animal protection rules, proposed changes to legislation, governance structure, criminal law, food labelling, VAT rates for animal products, animal protection services (e.g. vet, rehoming), sanctions, punishments for animal abuse and neglect, support for animal protection organizations, animal helplines, police, other services.
Slaughter	Regulations regarding slaughterhouses, non-stun slaughter.
Sport	Horse and greyhound racing: breeding, training, competition, animal welfare.
Trade	Import/export of animals and animal products, WTO, related regulation.
Transport	Live animal transport

^e <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>

Commented [SM19]: This section reads well. The main omission is reference to our P1. We follow the same methodology, so we do need to make that explicit I think. Atm we refer to how we are different to Chaney. That's fine, but it comes across as a bit unusual when we don't state that we also follow Huss and McCulloch (2023). (I would do both, and state that we follow P1 first. The Chaney also then adds an authority on manifesto analysis by a leading political scientist.)

Commented [SM20]: Do we use this term in the first paper? If not I suggest broadly use the same terminology etc as got published last time.

Commented [SM21]: ? check

Commented [SM22]: Write these sections consistently. Is there a reason why semi colons here and commas elsewhere? Similarly just list issue categories (see my change first row) for all, rather than some prose and some listing.

Commented [SM23]: Do we use this term alone in P1 and not non-stun slaughter?

Wildlife/biodiversity	Fishing industry, wild animals in nature, water and cities, insects, regulations for biodiversity and animal protection.
-----------------------	--

270 Table 2: Animal protection tags and corresponding issue categories.

271 Only statements directly related to animals were tagged, with multiple references to the same statement counted
 272 once. Statements covering multiple issues were tagged under the most relevant issue. The first author conducted
 273 the analysis of the manifestos twice.

274 **5.2. Limitations**

275 The methodology follows Hus and McCulloch (2023) by using a single-coding approach, assigning each
 276 statement only once. This method enhances the reliability of comparing statement counts across election years to
 277 measure 'salience' quantitatively. However, it presents challenges in tagging statements that address multiple
 278 issues. Despite clear definitions for issue categories (see Table 2), assigning the appropriate tag can be difficult.
 279 Additionally, due to varying manifesto sizes, absolute statement counts may be misleading. To address this, the
 280 number of pages in each manifesto was also assessed to improve the reliability of the quantitative analysis.

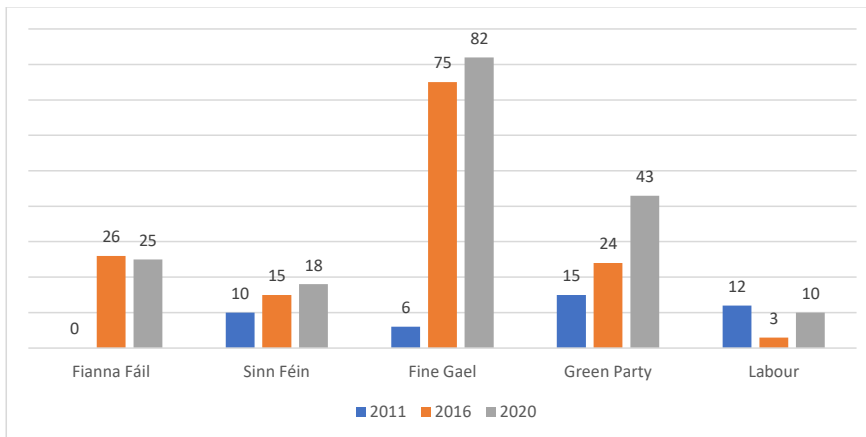
281 **6. Findings**
282

283 This section presents an analysis of manifestos from the 2011, 2016 and 2020 Irish elections, revealing a
284 growing emphasis on animal protection, particularly *farmed animal welfare* and *wildlife/biodiversity*. Left-wing
285 parties generally prioritise animal protection, while right-wing parties focus on its economic implications.
286 Notably, right-wing parties' attitudes towards animals have evolved positively over the decade. The findings are
287 detailed in three subsections: trends in animal protection salience, analysis of specific issues and party-political
288 analysis.

289 **6.1. Trends in animal protection salience**

290 Between 2011 and 2020, animal protection became increasingly prominent in Irish political manifestos, with
291 statements rising from 43 in 2011 to 143 in 2016 and 178 in 2020. Positive statements grew from 29 in 2011 to
292 74 in 2016 and 113 in 2020. Although the length of party manifestos has varied over the years, the number of
293 statements addressing animal protection has consistently grown. Fianna Fáil was the only party in 2011 without
294 animal protection statements, but all parties included them in 2016 and 2020 (see Figure 1). Anti-animal
295 protection statements varied, comprising 2.3% in 2011, 26.6% in 2016, and 13.5% in 2020. These were primarily
296 linked to Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil's support for horse and greyhound racing.

297



298

299 Figure 1: Total number of animal protection statements per political party for Irish national elections in 2011, 2016 and 2020. Parties are
300 ranked by number of seats after the 2020 election.

301

302 For the Irish general elections in 2011, 2016, and 2020, *farmed animal welfare* (34.3%) and *wildlife/biodiversity*
303 (19.2%) were the most salient issue categories. Furthermore, *farmed animal welfare* was the most salient issue in
304 each general election, followed by *wildlife/biodiversity*. Figure 2 illustrates the total number of animal protection
305 statements per issue category for the Irish national elections of 2011, 2016 and 2020 combined

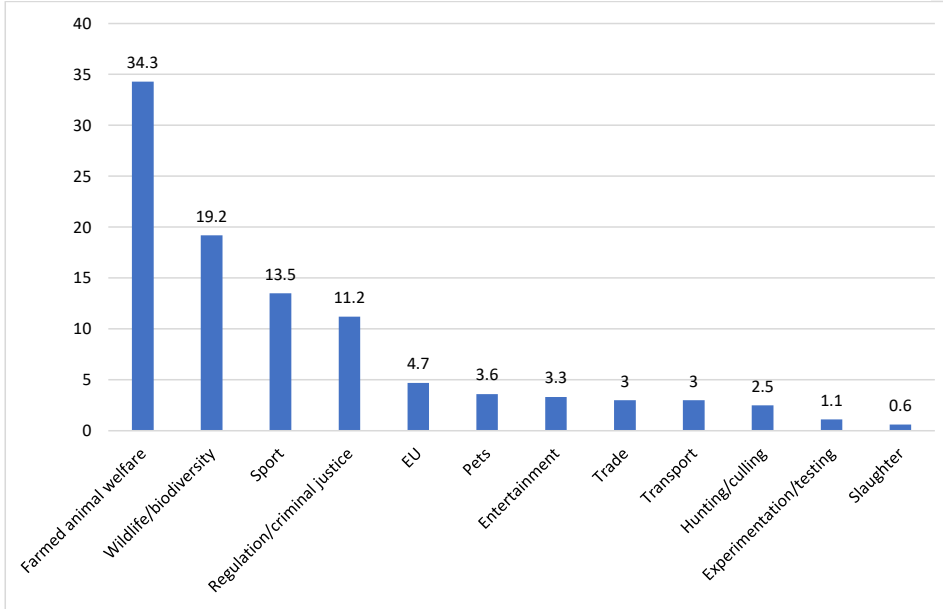
306

Commented [SM24]: This sentence arguably belongs in the above section. It is an important point related to consistency across elections.

I can see why we might have it here to emphasise the importance of farmed animal welfare, but think we also need above. I have copied above for now, and if we keep a version here, we will need to amend wording.

Commented [SM25]: I have moved the other text below first because a lot of journals insist on putting the figure directly after first mention. Secondly, the next bit of text (now below figure) isn't illustrated in the pie chart, so throws the reader off a bit.

307 **6.2. Analysis of salience of animal protection issues by issue**



308 Figure 2: Total number of animal protection statements per issue category for the Irish national elections of 2011, 2016 and 2020 combined.

309 Between 2011 and 2020, the number of *farmed animal welfare* statements by Irish political parties increased,
 310 rising from 11 in 2011 to 64 in 2020. Statements on *wildlife and biodiversity* also saw a rise, from 8 in 2011 to
 311 32 in 2020.

312 **6.3. Party political analysis of 2020 manifestos**

313 This section analyses the 2020 general election manifestos, summarising key policy issues in Table 3. It then
 314 explores animal protection concerns across sectors, including agriculture, aquaculture, farmed animal welfare,
 315 wildlife, biodiversity, horse and greyhound racing, and pets.

316

Issue category	Political party				
	Fianna Fáil	Sinn Fein	Fine Gael	Green Party	Labour Party
Entertainment			x	x	
EU	x	x	x	x	
Experimenting/testing				x	

317

Commented [SM26]: Writing this comment after looking at the next section. Important to signpost here that this just refers to the totals summed across elections. That's because we then do a lot more of this (issue by issue) in the next section - 'party political analysis'. Note there may be a slight difference here to P1 as we will have more space as only one country. But atm this section is far shorter than the next, and we have a lot of 'issue by issue' in the next section. May be inevitable, but just flagging.

Commented [SM27]: Is there a way to order the key from highest to lowest? If there is, would work better if farmed animal welfare in yellow is top, then wildlife/biodiversity second etc. Nb I think we may include a lot in our farmed animal welfare like economic things, making it a lot bigger? That's fine and just an observation. Surprising pets is only 3.6% (I'm writing this after my suggestion for the final section). Why do we have transport as 11.3% - if this is live animal transport, that is over one in ten pledges, and we should refer to that in text somewhere. I'm just thinking about a final section in the findings mopping up what we have left here. Eg EU is quite bit - Ireland part of EU. Maybe goes with transport (live exported across water to mainland Europe). And regulation/criminal justice as a general category. Could also refer to in this section if we don't already, but explain a bit more with examples (as we have dedicated sections on FAW and wildlife etc later).

Commented [SM28]: Note that I still think this pie chart would be better as 2020 election tbh. 2010 or whenever is now 14 years ago. I don't think its that important, but ideally I think now first section on trends across elections, then in this second part immediately focus on most recent election. Just a point to make and fine to keep with this I think.

Farmed animal welfare	x	x	x	x	
Intensive farming		x		x	
Aquaculture	x		x		
Farmer wellbeing	x	x	x		
Economy related to farming	x	x	x	x	
Hunting/culling				x	
Pets			x	x	x
Regulation/criminal justice	x		x	x	x
Slaughter				x	
Sports	x		x	x	x
Horse racing	x		x		x
Greyhound racing			x	x	x
Trade	x	x	x	x	
Transport	x		x	x	
Live export	x		x	x	
Wildlife/biodiversity	x	x	x	x	x
Fishing industry		x	x		x
Protection of wildlife	x	x	x	x	x

321 Table 3: Animal protection policies covered by the Irish political parties in the 2020 general election. Parties are ranked by number of seats
322 after the 2020 election.

323

324 **6.3.1: Agriculture, aquaculture and farm animal welfare**

325 In 2020, all political parties committed to fair prices and greater transparency in the food supply chain. Fianna
326 Fáil supported adding value to the dairy sector in line with national food strategies (2020, p.94), while Fine Gael
327 committed to developing the aquaculture sector and expanding markets for the pig industry (2020, pp.59, 80). A
328 political divide emerged over intensive farming: Sinn Féin opposed it as contrary to Ireland's interests (2020,
329 p.32) and the Green Party advocated extensive farming with an emphasis on animal welfare, recognising animals

Commented [SM29]: Mention here re both positive and negative/pro and anti ?

Commented [SM30]: Now amended this to include the industry focus.

330 as sentient beings (2020, p.40-41). Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael did not address intensive farming. Labour did not
 331 address *farmed animal welfare* and aquaculture in its manifesto.

Political party	Farmed animal welfare issue			
	Intensive farming	Aquaculture	Farmer wellbeing	Economy related to farming
Fianna Fáil	No policy	'Review the current implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the Independent Aquaculture Licensing Review Group.'	'Ensure a fair price for farmers with a €200 per head suckler cow payment scheme.'	'Support the dairy sector to continue adding value to high quality product in line with national food strategies.'
Sinn Fein	'Intensive farming models are not in Ireland's interests.'	No policy	'The current level of payment to the suckler farmer needs to be enhanced to encourage good husbandry and the proper weaning of calves.'	'We will also provide for an additional suckler cow scheme to increase the payment to €200 per cow for the first 15 cows in the herd.'
Fine Gael	No policy	'We are committed to the future development of the aquaculture sector.'	'We will publish a new animal welfare strategy for Ireland, building on this work, and providing strategic direction for the sector in terms of welfare.'	'We will work with stakeholders in the pig sector on the successor strategy of Foodwise 2025, open new markets and focus on animal health in the sector.'
Green Party	'An extensification of the animal agricultural model, one which places emphasis on animal welfare.'	No policy	'Irish agricultural policy should support farmers to diversify away from an over reliance on dairy and beef production for commodity export markets'	'Adopt higher welfare standards for all farmed animals and press for measures under the CAP which will support those implementing higher welfare standards.'
Labour Party	No policy	No policy	No policy	No policy

Commented [SM31]: Tables are great, esp now they are in a better order!

332 Table 4: Irish political parties manifesto statements related to farmed animal welfare for the 2020 general election.

333

334 **6.3.2 Wildlife/biodiversity**

335 In Ireland's 2020 general election, Fianna Fáil proposed a *Threat Response Plan* for hen harrier conservation and
 336 restoring the *National Parks and Wildlife Service* (2020, p.95). Fine Gael pledged to appoint Education Liaison
 337 Officers and implement a ban on large trawlers within Ireland's six-mile limit to sustain inshore fisheries (2020,
 338 pp.80, 93). Sinn Féin highlighted the impact of super trawlers, advocating for mandatory CCTV on vessels to
 339 monitor illegal practices and protect habitats (2020, p.21). The Green Party focused on supporting the *National*
 340 *Pollinator Plan* and addressing harmful pesticides (2020, p.9). Labour pledged to establish maritime
 341 conservation zones to protect fish stocks post-Brexit (2020, p.14).

Commented [SM32]: [The conservation focus in the paper is currently a bit weak. That is very noticeable here. If this is the second most salient policy issue, we want a good two paragraphs here. Follow the principles I have set out above for agri/farm animal welfare. I.e., lead with the largest parties. More general statements first, and add colour with some more specific ones. The former will give an idea of the more progressive parties for the reader. The latter gives a bit of detail to what are otherwise fairly abstract claims.]

Political party	Wildlife/biodiversity
-----------------	-----------------------

	Fishing Industry	Wildlife protection
Fianna Fáil	No policy	'Ensure the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) completes a Threat Response Plan for the conservation of Hen Harriers on designated land.'
Sinn Fein	'We advocate the compulsory installation of CCTV onboard super trawlers to monitor their fishing and processing facilities to stop illegal or unethical practices such as under-reported fishing.'	'As well as acting as a boundary and serving to enclose livestock in fields, hedgerows act as an important factor in the habitat of various animals and plants.'
Fine Gael	'We are committed to the sustainable development of the fisheries sector, ensuring that stocks are protected so the next generation have the opportunity to continue the family tradition of deriving an income from the sea.'	'We will appoint Education Liaison Officers in each of our National Parks to work with schools across the country, in order to promote the importance of biodiversity and the natural world.'
Green Party	No policy	'Tighten restrictions on the harmful use of pesticides and insecticides.'
Labour Party	'Labour will set up maritime conservation zones to allow Irish fish stocks to recover and also to protect Irish waters from overfishing post-Brexit.'	

Commented [SM33]: Missing word here - 'for' ?

Commented [SM34]: Check this.

Commented [SM35]: Does the Green Party have no policy on fishing ??

Table 4: Irish political parties manifesto statements related to wildlife and biodiversity for the 2020 general election.

6.3.3 Horse and greyhound racing

In the 2020 election, Fianna Fáil pledged to secure long-term funding for the horse racing sector (2020, p.96), while Fine Gael committed to developing the industry with *Horse Racing Ireland* (2020, p.60). Sinn Féin did not address horse racing, while the greens and Labour focused on greyhound racing. The Green Party aimed to phase out public funding for greyhound racing (2020, p.41), and Labour proposed using the *Betting Levy* to fund welfare inspectors and address unwanted dogs (2020, p.38). Fine Gael also committed to fully implementing the *Greyhound Racing Act* for industry integrity (2020, p.60).

Political party	Sports	
	Horse racing	Greyhound racing
Fianna Fáil	'Secure the long-term funding of the horse racing sector to ensure its prestige and credibility as the global leader is fully maintained.'	No policy
Sinn Fein	No policy	No policy
Fine Gael	'We are fully committed to the future of horseracing and will work with Horse Racing Ireland in developing the industry over the coming years.'	'We will fully implement the Greyhound Racing Act 2019, strengthening integrity in the industry and providing for a new system of traceability.'
Green Party	No policy	'Phasing out of public funding to the greyhound racing industry.'
Labour Party	Labour will ring-fence part of the Betting Levy to fund animal welfare inspectors to ensure only the highest practice is permitted in any sports or pursuits involving animals (such as greyhound racing and horseracing) and to reform the situation of unwanted dogs.'	

Commented [SM36]: Order changed.

Commented [SM37]: Just wondering if for these tables it might be better to state in caption that these are direct quotations from the manifestos, and then we don't need quote marks. But prob better to keep as we have. Nb I think we need a footnote for these with the citations for the manifestos? Same for all these tables. Footnote on caption.

Table 5: Irish political parties manifesto statements related to sports for the 2020 general election.

353 **6.3.5 Pets and puppy farming**

354 In their 2020 manifestos, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin did not address pet or puppy breeding issues. Fine Gael
355 highlighted past initiatives, including national dog microchipping and new welfare regulations for pet sales
356 (2020, p.62). Labour proposed stricter enforcement of dog breeding laws, including inspections and penalties
357 (2020, p.13). The Green Party also called for stricter dog breeding regulations and specified rules on breeding,
358 keeping, and selling animals (2020, p.41).

359

360

Commented [SM38]: For UK manifestos, there is generally a fair bit on pets. Ireland also has an issue with puppy farming as far as I know. If we can fit it would be good to have a short section - one paragraph on pets and one on puppy farming perhaps (assuming covered in manifestos?). But no need for the table I think as we have too many. Or just a single combined one for pets, including puppy farming. There does seem to be an omission here I would say as we don't have anything at all on companion animals!

361 **7. Discussion**

362

363 **7.1. Trends of animal protection salience**

364 Between 2011 and 2020, animal protection issues gained prominence in the Irish general election, with increased
365 attention paid to *farmed animal welfare* and *wildlife/biodiversity*. Fine Gael made the most statements, while the
366 Green Party put forward the most ambitious proposals, including a shift towards extensive livestock farming
367 with a greater emphasis on animal welfare, the recognition of animals as sentient beings and tighter restrictions
368 on the harmful use of pesticides and insecticides.

369 Despite the increased focus on animal protection, key issues received limited attention. The puppy trade was
370 absent from party manifestos. Only the Green Party comprehensively addressed animal slaughter, which affected
371 1,792,500 cattle, 2,975,500 sheep and 3,690,000 pigs in 2021 (O'Donnell, 2022), and highlighted specific
372 concerns such as badger culling, hunting with hounds and live hare coursing (Green Party, 2020). Important
373 issues such as chicken lameness, poor fish farming conditions and the use of sow stalls and farrowing crates are
374 largely overlooked by most parties.

375 **7.2. Politically salient topics of animal protection**

376

377 **7.2.1. Farmed animal welfare**

378 The political significance of *farmed animal welfare* in Ireland has steadily increased from 2011 to 2020,
379 influenced by initiatives like the *Food Harvest 2020* programme aimed at expanding the agri-food sector
380 (O'Donoghue & Hennessy, 2015). This programme heightened public discourse on animal welfare alongside
381 consumer and environmental concerns (Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, 2010). The *Animal*
382 *Health and Welfare Act 2013* imposed legal duties on animal owners to ensure welfare standards, and the *Animal*
383 *Welfare Strategy 2021-2025*, based on One Health and One Welfare principles, further emphasised this
384 interconnectedness (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2021).

385 Despite legislative progress, significant challenges remain. In 2023, RTÉ exposed welfare abuses involving male
386 calves, a by-product of the dairy industry, while reports in 2024 revealed poor conditions for pigs (RTÉ, 2023;
387 O'Reilly, 2024). Although political parties have proposed various policies, critical issues such as piglet mortality,
388 calf welfare and the welfare of broiler hens are still inadequately addressed. As Wedderburn (2023) noted,
389 addressing these welfare concerns can also improve economic efficiency by reducing health-related losses.

390 The Green Party succeeded in banning fur farming through the *Animal Health and Welfare and Forestry*
391 *(Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022*, a pledge made in its 2020 manifesto (Green Party, 2020; Houses of the
392 Oireachtas, 2022). While Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael prioritised the economic aspects of agriculture, they largely
393 overlooked welfare concerns. In contrast, the Green Party has consistently championed progressive animal
394 welfare policies, in line with broader European trends in green party advocacy (Vogeler, 2017b; Chaney et al.,
395 2020; Hus & McCulloch, 2023).

396

Commented [SM39]: I think in the discussion we should have a section on what policies were actually implemented. We have the manifesto analyses for all parties. Then we know FF, FG, and Greens have been in power since 2020. So what policies have they actually implemented, four years later? This is the former ISPCA guy's point - and a good one. We don't need to be too critical, as his point was. But surely it wraps up and also points to a limitation of such manifesto studies too, if the governments don't actually implement them. Related to this, as we point out many times the Greens have more progressive policies. So have they been able to impact policy significantly since 2020? They would have had deals during the 2020 post election negotiations related to coalition. Which of their policies did they prioritise and why? Which have therefore been implemented. This is the kind of thing we should be spending 25-33% of the space of discussion on IMO.

Commented [SM40]: This section should be improved. Try and lead with key policies in larger parties - FF and FG. Contrast with GP. That contrast leads to status quo supported by subsidies, versus major reform away from intensification. Then bring in what has happened, if anything, since. Have the greens got anything out of power? Ie they won't get extensive farming, but they might get eg a ban on a particular type if they have enough power. Or if not that some consultations etc. With this, try and give understanding of the big issues, at least implicitly, in terms of numbers (chickens, fish), or severity (eg sow stalls - legal in Ireland for one month, and crates). Paint the picture and at same time give indication of major welfare problems. Yes Ireland has big beef industry, but at the same time, are there more pigs and chickens (yes). So we need to do these two things at the same time in the paper - i) what are the big issues, and ii) what are the more distinctive Irish issues (beef, live exports). And what are the parties saying about them, particularly the larger ones? (As they have more power, and ultimately more people are voting for them.) And the latter point raises another question - what are FF and FG offering, that the Greens are not? Why do they have 5-6x the number of seats. See my comment in e-mail - Irish elections are seen as fight between FF and FG. Greens are a secondary type party. Why? That's what we need here really I'd say.

397 **7.2.2. Wildlife/biodiversity**

398 Although *wildlife and biodiversity* issues received limited attention in 2011, Irish political parties increased their
399 focus in 2016 and 2020. In 2020, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and the Green Party extended their emphasis from
400 fisheries to include National Parks. Fianna Fáil advocated for enhancing biodiversity through a thorough
401 restoration of the *National Parks and Wildlife Service* (2020), while the Green Party called for better resourcing
402 of national parks, related services, and environmental NGOs to fulfil their functions and explore new initiatives
403 (2020). This heightened focus may be attributed to the *2019 UN Convention on Biological Diversity* report,
404 which highlighted accelerating habitat loss and species decline (O’Sullivan, 2019). Connaughton (2019) noted
405 that Ireland’s biodiversity conservation efforts have been challenged by ongoing disputes between the *National*
406 *Parks and Wildlife Service* and private property owners concerning the *Birds and Habitats Directives*. In terms
407 of protecting endangered species, Irish political parties have prioritised the hen harrier, leading to additional
408 protections under the *Forestry Programme 2023–2027*, which introduced new measures to safeguard this species
409 beyond designated areas (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2024).

410

411 **7.2.3. Horse and greyhound racing**

412 A notable shift occurred in the salience of animals in sport, which was absent in 2011. By 2016, horse and
413 greyhound racing were highlighted by centre and centre-right wing parties, with Fianna Fáil pledging to maintain
414 Ireland’s global leadership in horse racing (2016, p. 30) and Fine Gael emphasising its importance to rural
415 Ireland (2016, p. 16).

416 In the 2020 general election, the Green Party critiqued greyhound racing, advocating for an end to public
417 funding. This scrutiny followed a 2014 report by Indecon International Consultants, which exposed financial
418 issues and reputational damage at the *Irish Greyhound Racing Board*, mainly due to doping scandals (Indecon
419 International Consultants, 2014). This led to increased political scrutiny, updates to the *Welfare of Greyhounds*
420 *Regulations* in 2016, and the enactment of the *Greyhound Racing Act 2019* to enhance regulatory oversight.

421 In 2021, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Charlie McConalogue (Fianna Fáil), endorsed the
422 draft *Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations*, emphasising the importance of the fund in supporting the
423 economic and social development of both industries (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021b). In 2024, the government
424 had allocated €95 million to the fund, of which €76 million was earmarked for horseracing, an increase of €3.2
425 million from 2023 (O’Connor, 2024). Despite this allocation, the government announced an external review to
426 assess the effectiveness of the fund in maintaining high animal welfare standards. The allocation has faced
427 sustained criticism from animal welfare organisations and other stakeholders, who argue that these industries
428 receive a disproportionate amount of taxpayer funding (Brennan, 2024). Documentaries such as *The Dark Side of*
429 *Horse Racing* and *RTÉ Investigates: Greyhounds Running for Their Lives* (Moore, 2021; Power, 2021) have also
430 highlighted the deep-rooted animal cruelty associated with these the sports, making the eradication of such
431 practices a challenging task.

432

433

434 **8. Conclusion**

435 The analysis of Irish political party manifestos from the 2011, 2016, and 2020 general elections indicates a
436 growing focus on animal protection. Fianna Fáil, a centrist party, and Fine Gael, a centre-right party, have
437 primarily addressed these issues through an economic lens. In contrast, left-wing parties such as Sinn Féin and
438 Labour have offered moderate attention to animal protection. The Green Party, however, has consistently
439 championed more progressive reforms in this area.

440 The *Food Harvest 2020* programme raised awareness of *farmed animal welfare* by linking it to both economic
441 and ethical concerns. In addition, increased reporting on biodiversity loss spurred parties to address
442 environmental issues more thoroughly. By 2020, party statements had broadened from a narrow focus on the
443 profitability of the fishing industry to include national parks, *wildlife and biodiversity*.

444 Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael maintained support for horse and greyhound racing, valuing its cultural and economic
445 importance in rural areas, and continued to support live cattle exports despite controversy. Although there was an
446 increase in animal protection statements, critical issues such as the mistreatment of farm animals, the puppy
447 trade, slaughter practices and hunting were still insufficiently addressed, indicating a continuing evolution in the
448 political discourse on animal protection in Ireland.

449 **9. Conflict of interest statement**

450 The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

451

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