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Teen and two men arrested in suspected gangland killing

Families evacuated over pipe bomb concerns

20-year-old victim was travelling in a car

Liz Dunphy

Gunmen with suspected AK47 assault rifles shot a young man dead in a residential Dublin neighbourhood early yesterday morning.

Terrified families were then evacuated from their homes, after a suspected pipe bomb was found close to where the young man was shot dead.

The victim has been named locally as 20-year-old Josh Itzeli.

A teenager and two men in their early 20s have been arrested in connection with the killing, and a number of vehicles have been seized.

The killing is suspected to have been gangland-related.

The fatal shooting took place at around 12.15am on the Knocknarea Rd, Drimmagh, Dublin 12.

Multiple gunshots were heard by local residents at the time of the killing.

The victim was travelling in a car when he was attacked, it is understood.

His vehicle was in a collision and he was shot at in what appears to have been a targeted hit, it is understood.

An AR-15 semi-automatic rifle has been seized by gardai which is believed to be linked to the attack.

An improvised explosive device was also found.

Defence Forces explosive ordnance disposal experts were called to the scene and removed the device from the area.

Justice Minister Helen McEntee condemned the attack.

The attack in Drimmagh last night is not something we will tolerate on our streets," she wrote on X.

"I commend the gardai for responding quickly, resulting in the speedy arrest of suspects."

Superintendent Paul



Gardaí at the scene of a fatal shooting in the Knocknarea Rd, Drimmagh, Dublin 12, yesterday. The victim has been named locally as 20-year-old Josh Itzeli, inset.

Picture: Sasko Lazarov/RollingNews.ie

Maher said that, at approximately 12.15am yesterday, gardai received multiple calls about shots being fired in Knocknarea Rd, Drimmagh, Dublin 12.

"Gardaí responding to the scene discovered two vehicles, a black Mercedes Benz and a black Volkswagen Golf which appeared to have been in a collision."

"A male in his early 20s was discovered with gunshot wounds," Supt Maher said.

"Responding gardai offered first aid and, despite attempts by gardai and Dublin Fire Brigade paramedics, the male was pronounced deceased at the scene."

"Our thoughts are with the deceased's family at this time."

Shortly after the shooting, the regional garda Armed Support Unit encountered three men on Slievebloom Rd — two in their early 20s and one teenager, Supt Maher said.

They were arrested and detained under Section 30 of the Offences Against the State Act.

Families were evacuated from their homes after the suspected pipe bomb was found near the shooting, the chairperson of the Joint Policing Committee, Sinn Féin councillor Daithí Doolan, said. The violence was an attack on the whole community, he added.

"What happened last night will live on in people's memories for a long time."

"Children, babies in buggies, were taken out of their houses in the middle of the night."

"It's absolutely unacceptable that criminals are doing this to good, decent, hard-working communities."

"I have to emphasise that anyone with any information — no matter how small or insignificant they

think it is — to please communicate it to the gardai."

"Those involved in this awful crime need to be brought to justice. We cannot allow criminals involved in gun crime to be hiding in communities like Drimmagh."

Anyone with information is asked to contact Sundrive Rd Garda Station on 01 666 9600, the Garda Confidential Line on 1800 666 111, or any garda station.

TDs: Call the election before clocks go back

Elaine Loughlin, Paul Hosford, and Michelle McGlynn

Government politicians are preparing for an autumn election, with the majority of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil members eager to go early, according to an *Irish Examiner* survey.

Almost two-thirds of Fianna Fáil TDs, ministers, and senators surveyed want a general election in the autumn, while exactly half of Fine Gael members also favour going to the polls before the end of the year.

However, Green Party members differ from the two main Coalition parties and believe that the three-stool Government should stay in place until next March.

It is understood Finance Minister Michael McGrath is ready to pass a budget quickly, which would allow for an election before the end of the year.

Ministers are also now working at speed to deliver the remaining big-ticket items before the Dáil summer recess, in a bid to have significant achievements to point back to during an election campaign. One minister suggested the Government must call an election after October's summer recess as "anything longer is madness."

The *Irish Examiner* spoke to 88 of the 106 Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil TDs and senators, with the survey revealing that going to the polls before a budget is passed in the autumn is now the most favoured time.

A number of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael politicians stated that holding an election "before the clocks go back" would be the best option, while a smaller minority want to go straight to the polls after the summer without holding a budget.

Of those questioned, 23

(64%) Fianna Fáil members want to go to the country before Christmas, eight (22%) want to wait until next year, and five (14%) stated that they didn't mind.

Exactly half of the 32 Fine Gael members questioned want a pre-Christmas election, 14 (40%) would prefer to wait until the new year, and three (10%) said they don't have a preference.

However, there is a feeling both among Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil that Simon Harris may wait until 2025 before going to the country — even if this is not what members want.

Some 44% of Fianna Fáil politicians believe that the Taoiseach will call an election before Christmas.

Among Fine Gael members, this figure drops to 37.4%.

Separately, all five Green Party members questioned want the Coalition to complete its full term out to Spring 2025.

Publicly, the three Government leaders have stressed the importance of fulfilling the programme for government.

Opinion is split at Cabinet level, with two senior ministers stating they want to cut early before Christmas, a further three stating the Government should wait the full term, and two others claiming they do not mind when an election is called.

Many of those in favour of an autumn election have stated the weather as being a significant factor — as well as a low public mood early in the new year, with one TD stating he is still "scarred" from two winter elections.

One long-serving Fianna Fáil TD warned that the upcoming EU elections may prompt by-elections, which Government parties have never historically done well in.

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Gardaí fear right-wing threats to politicians' safety

Cormac O'Keefe
Security Correspondent

Irish security services have concerns for the physical safety of politicians TDs and senators, figures on the far right, and believe the country is entering a "very tricky" period with the upcoming local and European Parliament elections.

It is understood that a number of investigation files have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions on threats from far-right individuals to politicians, including Government leaders and ministers.

The Special Detective Unit, the operational arm of the Garda Security & Intelligence Service, has other "active investigations" into threats to public figures from right-wing political extremists.

While almost all files sent

to the DPP relate to offences under the Harassment, Stalking, and Related Offences Act 2020, other investigations could seek charges under terrorism laws — but only if the behaviour "reaches the threshold" necessary.

The developments come as new Garda figures on hate crime, due to be published in the coming days, are expected to show a significant increase in reported incidents.

The *Irish Examiner* understands that the formal threat assessment of an attack on politicians has not increased despite the widespread threats on social media accounts, including Telegram, X, and YouTube. These include multiple threats from well-known far-right figures to "kill" or "shatter the faces of" politicians, both named and in

general, or to "execute them on the street" and to "take the war to them and their families".

Separately, political extremists, including candidates for far-right parties in the upcoming elections, openly talk of being "at war" with the State, including warnings that a "bloodbath" is coming.

After gardai were attacked at Newtownmountkennedy last Thursday week, Tánaiste Micheál Martin warned of the "growing militancy" of the far right, and said they posed a threat to the security of the State.

The violence followed intimidation outside the home of Children's Minister Roderic O'Gorman — a long-time target of the far right — and before a brief protest by the same far-right group outside the home of Taoiseach Simon Harris.

Justice Minister Helen McEntee and her family have been affected by a number of recent hoax bomb threats, and People Before Profit TD Pádraig Murphy — another hate figure of the far right — discovered graffiti on a wall near his house saying "Paul Murphy RIP".

The security services still rate the threat to politicians as "moderate" — the second lowest of five threat levels.

However, security officials stress the assessment is conducted partly "in the dark" as some components for a comprehensive assessment are missing.

This is because, unlike a threat assessment on an organised, structured organisation, the far right in Ireland is fragmented, with a range of small political parties as well as various high-profile agitators and a larger

number of active supporters.

Nevertheless, security officials do have "some concerns" for the safety of politicians and believe the country is entering a "very tricky" environment and a "critical" period for Irish democracy.

Within the next 18 months there are local, European, national, and presidential elections.

Security sources said a concern is the online radicalisation of individuals who are "in the circle" of high-profile agitators or follows their accounts, who could decide to commit violence.

Some sources stress that, given the often spontaneous and unplanned nature of far-right activities, such violence could suddenly flare up during 2024.

Special report: 4&5

Israel attacks Rafah despite peace proposal

Israeli leaders have approved a military operation in the southern Gaza town of Rafah and began striking targets in the area, despite Hamas announcing its acceptance of an Egyptian-Qatari ceasefire proposal.

Hamas's abrupt acceptance of the deal came hours after Israel ordered an evacuation of Palestinians from eastern Gaza, signalling an invasion was imminent.

Israeli prime minister

Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the proposed Hamas ceasefire was "far from Israel's essential demands", but it would send negotiators to continue talks.

The diplomatic moves left a glimmer of hope for an accord that could bring at least a pause in the seven-month war that has devastated the Gaza Strip. Hanging over the wrangling is the threat of an all-out Israeli assault on Gaza, a move the US strongly opposes and that aid

groups warn will be disastrous for 1.4m Palestinians taking refuge there.

The Israeli military said it was conducting "targeted strikes" against Hamas in eastern Rafah.

US president Joe Biden spoke with Mr Netanyahu and reiterated US concerns about an invasion of Rafah, telling him a ceasefire was the best way to protect the lives of Israeli hostages, according to a US National Security Council spokesperson.

Last week, US secretary of state Antony Blinken pressed Hamas to take the deal, and Egyptian officials said it called for a ceasefire in stages, starting with a limited hostage release and



Benjamin Netanyahu: Rejected Egyptian-Qatari peace proposal.

partial Israeli troop pull-out, and Egyptians within Gaza.

Hamas had been seeking clearer guarantees for its key demand of an end to the war

and complete Israeli withdrawal in return for the release of all hostages, according to Egyptian officials. Mr Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders repeatedly rejected that trade-off, vowing to keep up their campaign until Hamas is destroyed after its October 7 attack on Israel.

Aid agencies have warned that an offensive will bring a surge of civilian deaths in an Israeli campaign that has already killed 34,000 people and devastated the territory.

It could also wreck the humanitarian aid operation based in Rafah that is keeping Palestinians across the Gaza Strip alive, they say.

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serious is the threat to the State?



One recent contributor on an Irish far-right group hailed Norwegian far-right terrorist Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people on July 22, 2021, including 69 young people at a youth camp

largely agreed with this assessment.

"As we come closer to the local and European elections, it is likely that we will see continued disruption from the far-right," assistant professor in criminology John Morrison, of Maynooth University, said.

"As with all threats of this nature, there is the potential for this to escalate in terms of severity."

However, he added: "It is important to emphasise that this is a small group of individuals and disparate groups who have, to date, not shown the intention and/or capability for this to escalate in terms of severity."

A number of Garda sources believe it is a very difficult area to definitely say what could or could not happen.

"There's definitely a menace out there, and one danger I would see is politicians going out canvassing for the elections and either knocking at the wrong door or being harassed by a group of these people with phones, up and abusing them," one experienced Garda source said.

"So, while there might not be evidence there to show these groups are planning to attack someone, they are not organised like that, it could be an unplanned situation where someone in the group is in their areas."

Speaking to the *Irish Examiner* after the protest at Mr O'Gorman's house, senior analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue Aoife Gallagher said the tactics of the far-right were becoming "increasingly more violent".

She said the "direction of travel is only becoming more clear", and said it was the "scary" to think where it could end.

Also at the time, professor of European politics at Maynooth University, said he feared the violence would get worse during the elections.

"Are we really going to wait for a member of the Oireachtas to die before we do anything? I hope not."

Arson and assaults

The hostility to immigrants has particularly manifested itself in the surge of arson attacks on accommodation linked to asylum seekers.

In Limerick after he left work and was walking home with his brother.

He said a man approached him, asked them where they were from, and when they replied, the man attacked them with some kind of baseball bat.

Last March, Croatian man Josip Strok was fatally assaulted and his friend David Druzinec was seriously attacked by a group of young men, after they apparently heard them speaking Croatian and told them they should be speaking English.

The *Irish Examiner* understands that Garda figures on hate crime, due to be published this week, will show a significant increase in incidents — though this is thought to be a combination of more incidents and more reporting.

It is expected to show a higher proportion of incidents where the victim's nationality or ethnicity was a factor.

There are other potential targets, like the construction worker in Aughrim, Co Wicklow, who was recently subjected to a tirade of abuse and intimidation and told, in no uncertain terms, to pack up his tools and leave after a group of people — completely wrongly as it turned out — thought he was working on asylum accommodation.

Videos of that abuse were circulated by the usual far-right actors as examples of local people "having enough" and "standing up".

Election barometer

More broadly, concerns in relation to immigration and asylum have become a dominant issue in Ireland.

As reported recently in the *Irish Examiner*, a Eurobarometer survey showed that migration and asylum were the second most important issues for Irish people in the forthcoming European Parliament elections — compared to seventh for the average EU citizen.

The survey, conducted last February, showed that 42% of Irish people said it was the most pressing issue (after health at 46%), compared to just 24% for the average EU citizen.

The reaction to Government assertions that around 80% of rising asylum claims are from applicants crossing over from Britain to the North, and travelling across the border, has further pushed the immigration issue towards the top of the agenda.

Security sources said the far-right have been able to establish a foothold in the political space regarding concerns over immigration levels, the asylum process, and border controls.

"The Government ceded territory in this space and the left have labelled all those concerned about immigration as racists or

far-right, so it's become polarised with little space in the middle," one source said. "The Government is trying to take back some of that territory now."

Sources predict the far-right vote is splintered, with so many candidates standing in both the local and European elections.

"Maybe the increased number of independents might help moderate things and soak up the anti-immigrant sentiment," one source said.

However, sources point out that 400 to 500 votes could get far-right candidates elected to local councils. "I think the local elections will be a very interesting barometer of where Irish people are in terms of their political views," one source said.

Response

The capacity of the security services in Ireland, traditionally cloaked in secrecy, is not irrelevant in this space.

Some sources point out that security services here are thin in numbers, surveillance technology, and the legal powers to use them — a matter that has been raised by oversight judges.

Despite calls for major investment "as a matter of urgency" in the Garda Security and Intelligence Service by the Commission on the Future of Policing in its September 2018 report, no "ring-fenced budget" has been provided, no significant staffing increase has happened (albeit no different than much of the organisation), and there is no direct recruitment of specialist expertise.

One security source said: "The State has to be equipped to respond to national security threats and if we are not at the average of what EU countries have — which we aren't — then we are at a disadvantage."

"With the election, there is more talk from politicians about not being soft and a tougher approach. Well, that's fine, but what's the capacity and capability to act?"

Sources stress this is not just a matter for law enforcement. "They point to the need for an 'overarching Government strategy' on protecting democracy, how to deal with political extremism during election debates, and how to debate immigration."

"I think the State has been slow to respond," one senior security source said. "The threat from the far-right is still relatively small, but they are more emboldened now, so we need to step back and examine where this is coming from."

With the next 18 months packed with elections — local, European, national, and US presidential — the source said: "This is a critical time for the Irish democratic State."

Integrity of electoral system is 'fundamental' to democracy

Authorities are conscious of the potential harassment of public workers in the run-up to a period in which Ireland will hold all possible electoral events, writes **Cormac O'Keefe**

GARDAÍ, the Electoral Commission, and the country's 28 returning officers know that the political landscape has changed dramatically since the last elections, four years ago.

In addition to arson attacks on asylum centres, intimidation outside the homes of politicians, violence directed at gardai at protests, the widespread disorder at the Dublin riots last November, election authorities are conscious of harassment of public workers in libraries from far-right individuals.

The issue for the integrity of the local and European Parliament elections on June 7 is whether or not that will spill over onto the electoral system itself, including the staff that run it and the voters that make it work.

"It is definitely on our radar — the possibility of a physical threat and intimidation to the elections, both at polling stations and count centres," one security source said. "Protecting the electoral system is fundamental to the security of the State."

A second security source commented: "These groups and individuals don't play by any rule. So, it would be foolish not to expect they will continue during the elections."

Gardai and returning officers are responsible for physical security at polling stations and count centres.

"The protection of the electoral process is central to democracy and a priority for An Garda Síochána," Garda HQ said in a statement to the *Irish Examiner*.

"As a security service, An Garda Síochána is prioritising resources, in this critical area, as we face into an 18-month period when Ireland will hold all possible electoral events (local, European, General, Presidential, and a referendum)."

It said assessments will be shared with relevant State agencies in identifying and countering activities that pose a threat to electoral events. It said these agencies include An Comisiún Toghchán (Electoral Commission), the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and the National Media Centre (Media Commission).

The statement said An Garda Síochána worked with international partners as part of its intelligence gathering operations.

"An Garda Síochána, as the Security Service of the Irish State, engages in proactively gathering (domestically and internationally) relevant information to inform collaborative actions to mitigate emergent risk in this regard."

It said it was standard that policing plans, based upon assessed threat, are put in place for all electoral events.

The statement pointed out that electoral legislation provided for offences in proximity to polling stations and count centres.

It said incitement to



Members of An Garda Síochána at scene of the Dublin riots last November following the violent attack of five people, including three young children. Violent scenes unfolded in the city centre following the attack.

hatred was a criminal offence and will be investigated.

"Additionally, any threat of physical harm is a criminal matter and will be investigated where identified or reported," it said.

It pointed out that the running of election centres and count centres are a matter for returning officers, with whom they engaged with.

Art O'Leary, chief executive of the Electoral Commission, said they have an "oversight role" in relation to physical threats to elections.

"We need to be assured that the integrity of the electoral process is maintained," he said. "So, this is one of the things that we will be holding returning officers to account for."

"But the actual responsibility remains with each returning officer in each local authority area."

On whether or not there is an increased threat from the far-right in these elections, he said: "It's a risk that has to be managed. There is no evidence yet of any interference in the electoral process, but it's a possibility that shouldn't be discounted."

"We are conscious it could become a difficulty," he added. "If there are difficulties on the day it becomes something for the returning officer and the gardai, rather than ourselves. We will in our post-election review look at it if there are any particular difficulties."

Every candidate in the

Presiding officers can ring as soon as they fear there is any intimidation or interference

are very close to the staff counting," one security source said. "They provide a key function, but what if people acting as tallmen for a far-right candidate starts interfering with staff, telling them they put that vote in the wrong place or it was spoiled or not spoiled and generally harassing people? That is a possibility."

A second security source added: "The tally people are literally hanging over the barrier looking at the staff allocating the votes, so someone could start intimidating them. It could get hot and heavy."

OUTSIDE polling stations and count centres, sources said it was possible there could be individuals or protest groups aggressively calling on prospective voters to vote for certain candidates — although canvassing inside 50 metres of a polling station is illegal.

Mr O'Leary said the Electoral Commission was plugged into a large number of EU election networks, as well as Hybrid CoE, an expert centre that works with the EU and Nato on countering hybrid threats.

Last March, Hybrid CoE published a research paper, *Countering Hybrid Threats to Elections*, focusing on physical attacks, disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks that threatened the integrity of the democratic process.

It said that since the 2020 US presidential election there have been "numerous reports of poll workers being threatened, harassed and assaulted".

It urged authorities take steps to mitigate the effects of "threats and harassment of election workers".

The 28 returning officers work for their local authority and operate independently, though they do meet as a group with the Electoral Commission and the Department of Housing.

Of six returning officers contacted by the *Irish Examiner*, two responded. Dublin County returning officer Fergus Gallagher said it "would be inappropriate" to comment on specific matters relating to the security and integrity of the electoral system.

"In more general terms," he added, "you may take it that all necessary steps are taken to ensure the preservation of the integrity of the ballot and the safety of all polling and count staff. This is done in consultation with the gardai, with whom there is liaison prior to every election event."

Constituency returning officer south local returning officer Cork City Martin Convey said it would not be appropriate to comment as the information was "security sensitive".

The Department of Housing said physical security was a matter for returning officers as they were independent.

It did point out that there are a range of offences in relation to elections and that there were further offences in relation to European Parliament elections including "interference with, obstruction of or impediment" of a voter going to, coming from or in the vicinity of a polling station.

It said the department issued guidance to returning officers and presiding officers in advance of elections, outlining the legislation in relation to offences and powers available to them.

The four regional gardai assistant commissioners and their divisional officers liaise with the various returning officers to ensure "effective management, co-ordination and oversight" of policing functions and security requirements.

In Dublin, the detective chief superintendent of the Special Detective Unit (SDU) is also involved.

Gardai accompany presiding officers to collect votes from external venues. On polling day gardai conduct patrols and some visits to polling stations.

This is to maintain a presence and "deter any behaviour" that could interrupt the constitutional rights of voters and enforce electoral legislation, Garda sources said.

Gardai point out that a "significant security operation" is put in place once polling is concluded to ensure the "security and integrity" of ballot boxes and their subsequent transport, including armed escort, to respective count centres.

Mr O'Leary points out there are 6,500 polling stations in the country and that it was not possible to have gardai stationed at the vast bulk of them.

Garda sources said a risk assessment, drafted by the Security and Intelligence Section forms the basis for the National Policing Plan, which the Deputy Commissioner Policing and Security sends down to the assistant commissioners, who devise regional and divisional plans.

Local gardai have contact numbers of returning officers in Dublin, the SDU also carries out patrols.

"If there is intelligence indicating a threat to a particular polling station you could have physical presence, but generally is by patrol," one security source said.

"Obviously we can't be everywhere, but presiding officers can ring as soon as they fear there is any intimidation or interference."



Jacob Chansey, right with fur hat, and other Trump supporters confronted by US Capitol police officers during the Capitol riot in 2021.