

# [***Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar says he's quitting for personal and political reasons***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BKP-7871-JC5B-G06J-00000-00&context=1516831)

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LONDON — Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who made history as his country's first gay and first biracial leader, announced Wednesday that he is stepping down for reasons that he said were both personal and political.

Varadkar announced Wednesday he is quitting immediately as head of the center-right Fine Gael party, part of Ireland’s coalition government. He’ll be replaced as prime minister in April after a party leadership contest.

“My reasons for stepping down now are personal and political, but mainly political,” Varadkar said, without elaborating. He said he plans to remain in parliament as a backbench lawmaker and has “definite" future plans.

Varadkar, 45, has had two spells as taoiseach, or prime minister — between 2017 and 2020, and [*again since December 2022*](https://apnews.com/article/politics-ireland-e57e4edf251f6ad7b58c91e9347ae081) as part of a job-share with Micheál Martin, head of coalition partner Fianna Fáil.

He was the country’s youngest-ever leader when first elected, as well as Ireland’s first openly gay prime minister. Varadkar, whose mother is Irish and father is Indian, was also Ireland’s first biracial taoiseach.

He played a leading role in campaigns to [*legalize same-sex marriage*](https://apnews.com/international-news-general-news-7c8da42acb84434c8b7e171b47e48f24), approved in a 2015 referendum, and to [*repeal a ban on abortion*](https://apnews.com/article/ca6013b5d95d422db6379861cf33cb76), which passed in a vote in 2018.

“I’m proud that we have made the country a more equal and more modern place,” Varadkar said in a resignation statement in Dublin.

Varadkar was first elected to parliament in 2007, and once said he'd quit ***politics*** by the age of 50.

He led Ireland during the years after Britain’s 2016 decision to leave the European Union. Brexit had huge implications for Ireland, an EU member that shares a border with the U.K.’s Northern Ireland. U.K.-Ireland relations were strained while hardcore Brexit-backer Boris Johnson was U.K. leader, but have steadied since the arrival of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Varadkar recently returned from Washington, where he [*met President Joe Biden*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-ireland-irish-patricks-varadkar-e120354333924e4e1a7bea36161c5a64) and other political leaders as part of the Irish prime minister’s traditional St. Patrick’s Day visit to the United States.

Varadkar also has expressed frustration at how polarized ***politics*** has become in Ireland, as in other countries.

There have been reports of discontent within Fine Gael, and 10 of the party’s lawmakers, almost a third of the total, have announced they will not run for reelection.

Earlier this month, voters [*rejected the government’s position*](https://apnews.com/article/ireland-women-constitution-referendum-8eead7fd4ee13e76d77e8322bf348d0d) in referendums on two constitutional amendments. Changes backed by Varadkar that would have broadened the definition of family and removed language about a woman’s role in the home were resoundingly defeated. The result sparked criticism that the pro-change campaign had been lackluster and confusing.

Even so, his resignation was not widely expected. Martin, the current deputy prime minister, said he'd been “surprised, obviously, when I heard what he was going to do.”

“But I want to take the opportunity to thank him sincerely,” Martin said. “We got on very well.”

Transport Minister Eamon Ryan said he didn't think the referendum results were “the key factor” in Varadkar's decision.

“I think there is a gap before the local and European elections (in June) and that timing probably influenced him more than the referendum," Ryan said.

Martin said Varadkar's resignation should not trigger an early election, and the three-party coalition government that also includes the Green Party would continue.

Varadkar said he knew his departure would “come as a surprise to many people and a disappointment to some.”

“I know that others will, how shall I put it, cope with the news just fine – that is the great thing about living in a democracy," he said. “There’s never a right time to resign high office. However, this is as good a time as any."

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