

# Sorting out the vote

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No	Travel						
Yes	Travel						
No	Info						
Yes	Info						
No	Info						
Yes	Info						
26 Counties (not Dublin)	42	58	45	55	65	35	
26 Counties	38	62	49	60	65	35	
Dublin	27	73	30	70	67	33	

It is hard to analyse the most important result from the Referendum, namely the ‘substantive issue’ or the Abortion Referendum. It would only be possible to give an accurate reading of this Referendum if a further poll was taken. People need to be asked why they voted ‘No’ on the day.

The Irish Times has made the most serious attempt so far to analyse the result, but they used data taken before the Referendum. This is of limited use since the MRBI poll taken nine days before the election on November 17 and 18 showed that a quarter of the electorate still had not decided which way to vote.

The poll also predicted a ‘No’ vote of 56%, nearly 10 points lower than the actual ‘No’ vote of 65%. Clearly many people had yet to make up their minds, and we cannot say for sure what side they were on in the end of the day. I am not going to try to add to this debate.

## A Liberal vote

The other two referenda, on Travel and Information yield more information. A ‘Yes’ vote in these Referenda indicate at the least a liberal stand on abortion. Voters were spread over the spectrum from ‘free abortion on demand’ to not liking it but not wanting to put too many impediments in a woman’s way.

Taken with the vote for Mary Robinson and the recent Labour Party advances, the referendum results shows a growing of the liberal vote.

## Rejection of far right in referenda

The Referenda on Travel and Information prove that the ‘No, No, No’ lobby failed by a decisive amount. From a look at the Travel vote which had the lowest percentage of ‘No’ votes it can be seen that ‘No, No, No’ campaigners won at most 38% of the vote. It is likely that the actual number is lower because of the voters who were confused or voting for other reasons.

The ‘No, No, No’ lobby contained extreme anti-abortion groups such as Youth Defence and the Christian Centrist Party. That these people were rejected is no surprise. More significantly

the extremely conservative lobby was supported by several Bishops including the Arch-Bishop of Dublin, Dr Desmond O'Connell.

This is worth mentioning because the Dublin 'No, No, No' vote was at most 27%. The Arch-Bishop's intervention included letters being read out at the pulpits at Sunday mass. His massive failure at the polls was a welcome rejection of his views by most Dubliners and showed a shift away from Church views.

## **Failure of far right in General Election**

People not only rejected church leaders. In the General election the far right were slaughtered.

Niamh Nic Mathuna, the Youth Defense leader and candidate in Dublin Central only received 514 first preferences. This was despite the fact that 13,617 people in this constituency voted 'No' to Travel. Most people who voted 'No' to Travel probably voted 'No' to Information and Abortion as well because these respective 'No' votes were higher.

Niamh was the only 'No, No, No' candidate in that constituency, the most conservative constituency in Dublin. She obviously did not benefit from her views on abortion. All the other 'No, No, No' campaigners failed to pick up votes from the potential support that they had.

## **'The Dublin Effect'**

The divide between the urban vote and the rural vote is well known. Rural people traditionally vote more right wing than the urbanites.

This is most clearly seen by the clear divide in the vote between Dublin and the rest of the country. Dublin is one county out of 26 but it still amounts to over a quarter of the electorate (29%). In both Travel and Information, the Dublin 'Yes' vote was higher than the 'rest of the republic' by 15 points. This shows the strategic voting importance that Dublin has.

The Dublin vote pulled up the result in both Travel and Information by 4–5 points. It is possible that in the future a close referendum result will see Dublin casting the deciding vote for the 26 counties. For example in a hypothetical Divorce referendum next year, the 'rest of the republic' could vote 'No' to Divorce by 52%. A Dublin 'Yes' vote of anything over 63% would see the referendum carried and Divorce introduced in the 26 counties.

To see the 'Dublin effect' again we can look at the Referendum on Travel. 73% of Dubliners voted 'Yes' to Travel. Even if the 'rest of the Republic' had voted 'No' to Travel by a decisive 61%, the result at the end of the day would still have been a 51% 'Yes' vote.

## **Effect of campaigning**

Finally if we want to get some estimate of the success of the canvassing and leafletting done by the Workers Solidarity Movement, the Dublin Abortion Information Campaign and the Alliance for Choice we can look again at the results.

The number of spoilt votes was less than half in Dublin than anywhere else in the country. In the Abortion referendum 2.4% of the votes were spoilt in Dublin compared to 5% in the rest of Leinster, 5.5% in Munster and 7% in Connaught/Ulster.

This indicates that people in Dublin were better informed than anywhere else in the country. Pro-choice leaflets must have played some part in that. On the other hand the Dublin turnout at 66% was slightly less than the national average at 68%. When it comes to referenda people must be urged to get out and vote as well as being convinced of the arguments.

From all that can be gleaned at the moment the pro-choice side did far better out of the referendum than the far right. November 26 can go down as being a significant victory for womens rights in Ireland. It is, we hope, the start of a long term trend.

Election results taken and adopted from Irish Times Saturday November 28 1992. MRBI poll mentioned was in IT Saturday November 21 1992.

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