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12<sup>th</sup> January 2024

An Coimisiún Toghcháin,  
Dublin Castle,  
Dublin 2,

Dear Sir/Madam

As a Lecturer and Researcher at the School of Political Science & Sociology, the University of Galway, I am strongly supportive of the need for new and significant research on electoral policy and procedures to help bolster and support democracy in Ireland and add to our overall body understanding in these domains. While the Irish public is evidently optimistic about our democracy and the democratic process, this should not be taken for granted, and, as evident from across Europe and elsewhere, conditions can change swiftly and markedly to imperil our democratic system and undermine our institutions. We must seek to collect as much data and information as possible on the electoral trends in attitudes in Ireland, which will provide deeper insight into how social and political processes have changed over the recent past and whether these have been positive or negative in terms of our democracy. Such research and analysis will help policymakers and civil society better understand what conditions lead to positive political and societal changes and perceptions of fairness, political efficacy, and trust in such political and societal systems.

I am strongly supportive of the guiding principles for such research: independence and impartiality; inclusivity and fairness; the advancement of scholarship and debate; and peer review and scrutiny. Of particular interest is the advancement of scholarship and debate as Ireland lags behind other nations in our understanding of the distinctive attitudes, motivations, and practices underpinning electoral policy and procedures in the country. There is a need for much more research, public debate, and scrutiny on what makes our democracy thrive and the potential challenges and pressures that undermine our democratic processes. The five proposed thematic research strands will require substantive data and research to be realised and such research will need to be appropriately funded and resourced. Longitudinal studies will allow for a more accurate analysis of attitudes, motivations, and electoral practices over time, and these are to be welcomed as empirical evidence will be needed to underpin any electoral reform that may be deemed necessary over the coming years.

While strongly supportive of the Commission and the need for such research, I do wish to add the following supportive recommendations and remarks:

1. All commissioned research should have a clear and transparent application process in which all organisations, groups, and individuals across society have a reasonable chance of applying for and successfully competing for
2. All commissioned research must be properly and sufficiently funded and resourced, and the Commission must fully support the dissemination of results through its communication channels and mechanisms

3. Of particular concern at this moment in time is the rise in online dis/misinformation amplifying bad actors and allowing manipulative individuals and groups, both internal and external, to have oversized influence and sway over our democracy. Therefore, the Commission should strive to understand how such dis/misinformation emerges, the actors involved in creating and disseminating such dis/misinformation, and its impact on democracy in Ireland through a series of robust research calls
4. All collected data from all research projects funded by the Commission should be freely available to academics, organisations, groups, and interested individuals to allow for the production of new analyses and understandings through secondary data analysis
5. The Commission should provide a central online repository to house the updated Electoral Register, past electoral and referendum results from all constituencies, and all conducted research, results, and associated data
6. The Commission should facilitate communicative processes on the state of democracy in Ireland through a series of public events, conferences, and community engagements throughout the country
7. The Commission should strive to promote its work and associated research through bespoke and audience-specific communicative processes to all sections of society in Ireland: school children, teenagers, young adults, mid-life adults, and elderly citizens.

Yours Sincerely

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Dr Mike Hynes