

From: The Electoral Commission <noreply@electoralcommission.eu>
Sent: Friday 10 November 2023 15:59
To: ELC Research
Subject: New submission from Research Form

CAUTION: This eMail originated from outside your organisation and the BTS Managed Desktop service. Do not click on any links or open any attachments unless you recognise the sender or are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you are in any doubt, please contact the OGCIO IT Service Desk.

1. What is your view on the five proposed research strands? Are there amendments or additions you would suggest?

Strand A: Surely there is plenty of information available in the numerous editions of Ted Nealon's Guide and the newspapers that publish the results of each count without having to reconstruct it all again. Of course, the first duty of a bureaucracy is to ensure its future and so the word 'vital' etc will appear regularly in your documents. It has long been acknowledged that Ireland's elections have appeared to be free and fair, so the emphasis should be on ensuring that they remain so. It would also appear that the threats to the integrity of elections are unlikely to arise from the actual voting or counting system - unless electronic voting returns, an option that is to be firmly rejected. And so the monitoring of social media and the like is necessary and is to be called out when found to be problematical - by whatever sensible criteria are established. But I suspect that this is not part of your mandate. Equally, education should be concentrated in the schools on developing a proper civic awareness and the responsibilities therein before they actually vote and this again can hardly form part of your mandate except by expensive publicity campaigns on the various media, paid for by the public. There are others areas where Maria Leptin's remarks would be more usefully employed and paid for than into studying past elections, where there is plenty of opportunity for the politics departments and postgrads to do it. I suggest that the various bodies involved in researching and publishing our illfunded heritage should get these funds. "The cutting edge of democratic innovation". Forsooth! One person, one vote has worked well in the past. The problems for democracy arise when the girls and boys get into power and that again is outside your mandate.

2. Which of the research questions under section 4 would you consider most important and why?

Without question, Section B. Electoral Law and the like.
Of course, the number of TD's should be reduced or, perhaps, not increased. This involves constitutional change and the Commission should consider promoting that as 'vital'.
Posters should be retained but limited in quantity. I think that while they are up, they are a constant reminder of the forthcoming election and of the candidates and thus, I believe, contribute to the turnout. I was in London around the time of a recent general election there and unless one was reading newspapers or watching TV, there was not a hint that such a momentous event was about to occur. The cost of them should always be borne by the candidate or the party and never by the public.
Funding of political parties etc. This is a clear area for the Commission to do useful research leading to further discussion on the merits of public funding of political parties. If this latter is to continue (and the shock would be if it did not - when did turkeys vote for Christmas?) then legally enforceable studies of the sources of all parties' funds should commence and be published. Ireland is at about the middle of the percentage of parliamentarians per head of population and should remain so as most of those with more than Ireland have smaller populations.
Postal voting should continue to be available only to a restricted number of people. The probability of it being used by Irish residents abroad is a worry.
The current system of by-elections is fine. Replacing it by the 'appointment' of 'also rans' from a list is not acceptable. Eventually only the government will be able to approve the list system and they will have one final, successful election.
No representation without taxation. Irish residents abroad on the day of election should not be entitled to vote. Perhaps if one was an ordinarily resident voter - and can prove it - and knows that they will be abroad on the day then they could apply for a postal vote. But a properly functioning system governing such exceptions should be established first.
Voting age should remain as it is. Scottish voting is only local and not for conducting international business in the EU, the UN or other such bodies. That Austria is one of the very few countries to have lowered its age does not counter the fact that over 80% of countries retain 18 as the age. I do not think that the youth of Ireland, given their addiction to social media and other impediments, are mature enough to exercise restraint - remember the disgrace of Dustin the Turkey - when it comes to the election of a functioning government.

3. Are there additional research projects that you consider important to promote and enhance Ireland's democracy and electoral events? If yes, please specify?

I am sure that you will keep us all informed as to the possibilities of further expenditure.

4. Are there any other comments or observations that you wish to make regarding An Coimisiún's research programme?

That the research programme lasts but a few years and is then retired for, possibly, a generation (really only five electoral cycles), when it could be taken up again in the 2050s. Constant fiddling with the system is unnecessary, an irritant, a waste

of public money and a probable cause of cynicism and falling turnout (look, for example, at the constant fiddling with the British educational system). Excitements regarding elections are the prerogative of the politicians, the process should not enter into the equation. Thus after an extensive period of work, can we look forward to the voluntary abolition of the Commission - "our work here is done"? I suspect not.

Name

Robert Towers

Email

[REDACTED]

Are you replying as an Individual or representing an Organisation?

I am responding as an Individual