

**Subject:** FW: New submission from Research Form

**From:** The Electoral Commission <noreply@electoralcommission.eu>

**Sent:** Friday 12 January 2024 14:50

**To:** ELC Research <research@electoralcommission.ie>

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

This is an excellent draft research programme. Each of the proposed research strands are important to enhancing the quality of Irish democracy. Within the first strand, it is essential that the Electoral Commission collects anonymised disaggregated data on voter turnout in the areas of sex; age; socioeconomic status; level of education; race; disability; ethnic minority status; location and other categories that are considered relevant. In seeking to promote the integrity of electoral events, I would suggest that the Electoral Commission closely monitors and researches the emerging use of artificial intelligence (AI) in election campaigns. The misuse of AI has the potential to spread disinformation, mislead voters and target violence against candidates. This research could be used to inform the development of a rule-based framework regulating the use of AI in election campaigns and support the Electoral Commission's response to coordinated attempts to spread disinformation in the electoral process. I am particularly interested in the fourth strand which seeks to promote education, public engagement and inclusion in electoral activities. As recommended by the EC-UNDP Joint Taskforce on Electoral Assistance, electoral management bodies should implement gender-mainstreaming in its activities and seek to promote the full and equal participation of women and minorities in the electoral process. Finally, I fully support the inclusion of the blue sky/curiosity-driven research strand. This will enable researchers to pursue a diversity of projects related to democratic participation in Ireland.

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

I consider the research questions related to increasing the participation of women, minorities and people with disabilities in the electoral process to be the most important. Gender-balanced political institutions are important in addressing the historical injustices of women's exclusion from politics, increasing the democratic legitimacy of the legislature and improving the effectiveness of policymaking processes. Currently, less than one in four TDs are women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) ranks Ireland as 101st in the world for the representation of women in its national parliament. Similarly, only 25.9% of councillors are women and there is a distinct urban-rural divide in women's election to local authorities with women representing less than 10% of local councillors in Offaly County Council, Mayo County Council and Longford County Council. There is very low representation of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities at all levels of government and further research is

required to measure this representational gap and identify barriers to the election of these groups. Furthermore, the collection of disaggregated data on voter turnout is needed to commence research on the participation of women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities as voters. The representation of women in civil society organisations, the media and political parties should also be researched.

### **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 would propose the following research projects to be included under Strand B of the research programme:

Under Strand B: Electoral Law, Electoral Systems and Electoral Infrastructure, the draft research programme recommends that research be conducted on the benefits of extending constituency magnitude above the current maximum of five seats. I would like to propose that this research focuses on the relationship between district magnitude and the election of women to parliament. International research indicates that larger constituency sizes are preferable for increasing women's political representation. However, as recently noted by Electoral Commission CEO Art O'Leary, a significant proportion of female TDs have been elected in three-seat constituencies. It would be interesting to analyse the impact of district magnitude on women's election prospects in Ireland.

I would also propose that the Electoral Commission examines the merits of changing from an electoral system of Proportional Representation by Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) to an open PR Party list system. Research indicates that PR party list systems may be more favourable to the election of women than PR-STV systems. Furthermore, the use of placement mandates on ballot papers in PR list systems, which alternate the ranking order of male and female candidates, facilitates positive action in promoting the election of female candidates. Transitioning to a PR list system may encourage changes in Irish political culture – which is currently characterised by localism and personalism under PR-STV – that enables TDs to focus more on their policymaking functions. I would recommend research that compares PR-STV and PR list systems in terms of their impact on women's political representation.

Additionally, I would propose that the Commission examines the possibility of introducing term limits for TDs. While the use of term limits for parliamentarians is rare in Europe, term limits are implemented in South American countries including Bolivia (two consecutive terms), Costa Rica (no consecutive term) and Ecuador (two consecutive terms). Incumbency is an advantage for parliamentarians in election campaigns, as serving representatives benefit from name recognition and resources from their offices. As incumbent parliamentarians are more likely to be male, non-elected female candidates are disadvantaged in election campaigns compared to long-serving incumbents. Increasing the turnover of TDs through term limits (after 2-3 consecutive terms) may favour the election of non-incumbent female candidates, improve the effectiveness of the policymaking process and increase the accessibility of electoral office to a diversity of minority groups. However, it is also important to acknowledge potential risks in the introduction of term limits, such as its impact on voter choice in elections, representative accountability and political experience in parliament. I recommend that case studies are carried out on parliaments where term limits have been implemented.

Finally, I would recommend that the Commission conducts research into the structure of the ballot paper. Changes to the ranking of the candidates on the ballot paper should be considered. Currently, the ranking of candidates is in alphabetical order, but this privileges candidates with surnames beginning in A,B,C, etc. There is a risk of 'donkey voting' in such a system, in which electors vote based on the order in which candidates appear on the ballot paper. The use of a random ranking order of candidates, which could be adjusted to include the use of a placement mandate, could produce more fair and equitable outcomes.

Additionally, I would recommend that the Commission considers the requirement for candidates' addresses to be listed on the ballot paper. Faced with an increasingly volatile

political culture and threats of violence against candidates, removing this requirement may be necessary to ensure the personal safety of candidates and their families. I would suggest cross-national research on this issue to determine best practice in other countries that could be replicated in Ireland.

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

I would recommend that An Comisiún's research programme uses feminist and intersectional research methodologies.

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**Are you replying as an Individual or representing an Organisation?**

I am responding as an Individual