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From: Fiona Buckley [REDACTED] >
Sent: Friday 12 January 2024 17:05
To: ELC Research
Subject: Submission on the Commission's draft research programme

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To whom it concerns,

please see below my submission on Commission's draft research programme.

Kind regards,
Fiona.

Question 1

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

See page 12 of the draft research programme.

STRAND A: LONGITUDINAL SURVEY RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

STRAND B: ELECTORAL LAW, ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND ELECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE

STRAND C: INTEGRITY OF ELECTORAL EVENTS

STRAND D: EDUCATION, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

STRAND E: BLUE SKY/CURIOSITY-DRIVEN RESEARCH

The five strands are wide-ranging and cover the main areas that is expected in the research programme of an electoral management board. It is good to read that the research programme will place a "particular focus on encouraging and promoting electoral participation, enhancing the information available to the public, improving the electoral experience for all voters and increasing accessibility to our democratic processes for all" (page 12). To achieve this ambition, an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lens is important to integrate into research strands and projects. This would enable an enhanced understanding of political culture and patterns of electoral engagement and behaviour. An examination of electoral institutions and practices through an EDI lens would also contribute to increasing knowledge of the workings of institutions, for example, examining how formal and informal electoral institutions integrate with one another to shape candidacies (ie how does the PR-STV electoral system and district size [a formal electoral institution] integrate with informal practices such as party candidate selection procedures, to (dis)advantage candidacies?). Altogether, including an EDI lens into the research programme increases knowledge and understanding, and will also contribute to the development of measures that to realise the Commission's ambition of "encouraging and promoting electoral participation" (page 12).

Question 2

Which of the research questions under section 4 would you consider most important and why? See page 14 of the draft research programme.

STRAND A: A National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS): This is long overdue and very much welcomed. As noted on page 14 of the draft research programme, Ireland lags behind many other countries in not having a national election study.

STRAND B: Research of representation and constituency/district magnitude. Again, this is welcomed. International research finds that larger constituency sizes are more conducive to the election of under-represented groups in society, for example women, and leads to a broader representation of parties. Smaller constituency sizes tend to benefit larger parties.

Some of the other suggested topics - election postering; political financing; postal voting; residency and voting; by-elections; and the electoral register - have been the subject of discussion at previous fora (for example Oireachtas Committees and Constitutional Convention). This will provide valuable knowledge to the Commission and could act as a launch-pad for its research of these topics.

STRAND C: Improving the conducting of elections and referenda, particularly with regard to accessibility and enhancing participation; safeguarding the electoral process; and combatting online electoral interference are all timely and important topics to focus on.

STRAND D: Research on the voting age and enhancing democratic and electoral participation is welcomed.

Question 3

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

Across the world, "socially conservative anti-gender movements have mobilised; growing cultural polarisation has exacerbated threats/acts of violence against women in the public sphere; and gains for authoritarian-populist parties and leaders are threatening to rollback gains for women's rights" (Pippa Norris, Sept 2020 in an address to UN Women). Advancing gender equality, diversity and inclusion in politics is a relevant and pertinent issue in today's world. The conditions that shape women's access into politics are gendered, but research finds this is intensified by demographics including socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, ableness, migrant status, sexuality and age. An intersectional lens should be applied to project's examining women's political participation to recognise women's diversity.

Suggestions for addition research projects include:

- * Research by Mona Lena Krook (2016) on gender quotas has highlighted the multiple ways in which political parties and political actors act to resist and undermine the transformative effects of gender quotas. How are Irish political parties integrating gender quotas into their candidate selection processes? Is there evidence of attempts to undermine their effectiveness?

- *Examine the feasibility of using what are variably referred to a tandem or nested or paired quotas to enhance the representation of minoritised women as well as young women in Irish politics. The work of Melanie Hughes (2011), Karen Bird (2014) and Belschner and Garcia de Paredes (2021) would be useful to the work of the Commission in this regard. Worldwide, Bird (2014) identifies three families of ethnic quota schemes: reserved seats; systems that incorporate designated ethnic groups within larger pan-ethnic parties; and creation of special electoral districts for ethnic interests. Hughes (2011: 618) advises that tandem or paired quotas 'nest' gender and minority quotas, requiring selection procedures to look at gender and minority status at the same time and include women "among minorities, or that minorities be included among women". Research by Belschner and Garcia de Paredes (2021: 15), examining the use of paired youth and gender quotas, show that "paired quotas are indeed most useful to support doubly under-represented groups if they are nested" but caution that "parties tend to enact quotas in a manner that will protect majoritarian groups in parliament". Research and recommendations for increasing diversity and inclusion among women in politics, conducted by Dr Pauline Cullen and Shane Gough in 2022, will be instructive for the Commission's work on enhancing public participation (please see the report 'Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland'.

- *Conduct gender, diversity and inclusion audits of party membership and election candidates.
- *Research on electoral fund raising, party expenditure and donations through a gendered lens. Who is donating? To whom are they donating? How do political parties allocate resources (financial or otherwise) to their candidates during election? Are there gendered differences?
- * Conduct research examining disabled peoples' experiences of running for election and public life.
- * Conduct research of age-appropriate citizenship and political education that encourages, promotes and normalises gender equality in politics from an early age. Evidence from a British Household Panel Survey shows that "at age 15, there is already a substantial gender gap of 20 percentage points in the probability of respondents reporting being politically interested, pointing to gendered socialisation processes as the key explanation for such differences" (Fraile and Sánchez-Vitores 2020: 89). Conduct research on political knowledge and the gender gap in an Irish context.
- *Conduct research on men and masculinities in politics. While gender and politics research has done much to explain women's political under-representation and highlight the gendered barriers and disadvantages that women in politics encounter, the "corresponding overrepresentation of men has seldom been explicitly recognised" and conceptualised (Bjarnegård and Murray, 2018: 265). Concurrently, studies have done little to explore men's experiences of politics or theorise how gender shapes men's pathway to, presence in, and performance of, political office. As Murray (2015), Bjarnegård and Murray (2018) and Piscopo (2019) highlight, a failure to conceptualise men in politics "obscures how bias works" (Piscopo, 2019: 825); presumes a position that men are "natural born leaders", innately equipped with the skills to lead (ibid); conflates the qualities, skills and experiences of men in politics as the universal norms for accessing, achieving and navigating political office (Murray, 2015); and presumes men acquire office 'on merit' rather than recognise that "it is based on (male) gender, privilege, and an uneven playing field" (ibid). Men in politics have been hiding in plain sight. Examining men in politics enables researchers to theorise explicitly how gender shapes and sustains men's predominant access to and navigation of political office. It also queries how men represent and use their representativeness, and through an intersectional lens, examines who are the men that get elected. Such research also shines a light on masculinities in politics and whether a hegemonic masculinity operates within political life.
- *Much of what we know about party candidate selection processes in Irish politics is gleaned from the experiences of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Yet, as Gallagher and Marsh (1988) point out, candidate selection is the "secret garden" of politics and it is an area of political party activity that researchers never tire of wanting to learn more about. In an age of party fragmentation, with more parties contesting election, what does this mean for party candidate selection procedures? Are there opportunities for new and more candidacies to emerge and if so, how does this impact upon the mobilisation of traditionally under-represented to participate in the electoral process? Or, do newer parties adopt and adapt candidate selection procedures that have been used by longstanding parties? Furthermore, in light of party fragmentation, how do longstanding parties adapt to this new reality in terms of their candidate selection processes?
- *Processes of party fragmentation and realignment, coupled with a decline in participation in party politics, has seen a "proliferation of "nonconventional" forms of political participation and engagement" (Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017: 7). An outcome of these dynamics is that at election time, parties are less able to exert a monopoly over the supply of candidates for election (Copus et al, 2009; Clark, 2010) as individuals, civil society and quasi-parties embrace non-party or independent routes into political candidacy. The independent route has always been a feature of Irish politics. However, research finds that "the independent route is no less gendered or more advantageous a pathway for women's candidacy" (Buckley, 2020: 349). Further research could examine why this is the case.

*Political violence (harassment, abuse, intimidation, threats) against politicians is prevalent in Ireland. A recent survey finds that 75 percent of respondents (election candidates/elected public representatives) have experienced at least one form of political violence (Buckley et al, 2023). Furthermore, this political violence is gendered, in its form, scope and consequences" (ibid). Data collection on political violence is important to "document, recognise and highlight" its occurrence (Raney and Collier cited in Ballington and Borovsky 2023: 194). Ballington and Borovsky (2023: 197) advise that electoral management bodies (EMBs) "have a role in researching, monitoring, mitigating, reporting and where powers allow, sanctioning political violence". In particular, research should focus on strategies to respond to and address political violence, as well as review and monitor the effectiveness of such strategies.

Question 4

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

N/A

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