

Post-referendum survey in Ireland

Preliminary results

Fieldwork: 13-15 June 2008

Report: June 18 2008

Introduction

A nationwide referendum on the Lisbon Treaty was held in Ireland on 12 June 2008. After the result was known, a Flash Eurobarometer survey was conducted by Gallup, from 13 to 15 June, at the request of the EU Representation in Ireland. Altogether, a randomly selected 2,000 respondents, aged 18 and older, were interviewed by telephone.

The main objectives of the survey were to understand the reasons for non-participation in the referendum, the respondents' views about the campaign, the reasons for the "yes" or "no" votes and the overall reactions to the result. Respondents were also asked how they judged the likely consequences of the referendum.

The sample size and the composition allowed us to draw statistically reliable information; for example, the proportion of respondents who said they had voted "yes" to the referendum question was well within the sampling error of the official results, and no weighting correction has been applied.

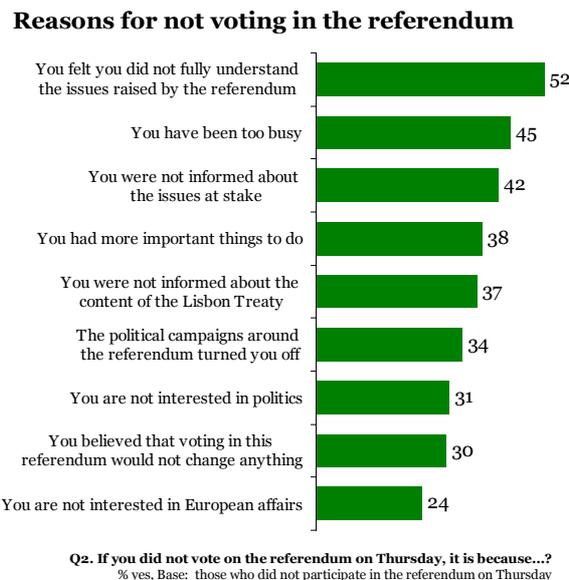
Similar to other post-election phone surveys, the proportion that participated in the referendum was over-represented. The 53% official turnout figure was applied for weighting the results in order to properly report on the true proportion of voters and non-voters. The results are robust and show the detailed demographic characteristics of voters and non-voters as well as "yes" and "no" voters. This preliminary report gives an overview of the results; a more detailed analysis will be performed and released later.

Main findings

- Over half of the people who did not vote in the referendum said this was due to a lack of understanding of the issues; younger people were much less likely to participate than their older counterparts (a ratio of 2:1)
- For the "yes" voters, the prime motivation was the feeling that "Lisbon" was in Ireland's best interest; the reasons mentioned were mostly one-dimensional, centred around how Ireland has benefitted from the EU
- The "no" voters presented a much wider diverse spectrum of reasons to explain their preference. They displayed a multidimensional character of the explanations: a lack of information (a quarter of "no" voters) led the way
- The young people who participated, women and those not working were significant supporters of the "no" vote; the majority of professionals, managers and retirees were backing the "yes" campaign
- In the "no" camp, voters thought that the result would put Ireland in a strong position to renegotiate the treaty, to allow Ireland to maintain its neutrality and to keep its tax system (all backed by three-quarters of voters or more)
- The "yes" voters felt less strongly about the issues, but they did emphasise the fact that the result would weaken Ireland's position in the EU (two-thirds of "yes" voters)
- A large majority of Irish voters (68%) said the "no" campaign was the most convincing; even a majority of "yes" voters felt that way (57%)
- Despite that judgment, within the "yes" camp we found more people who changed their minds during the campaign (25% of the "yes" and 17% of "no" voters started out from a different position)

1. Reasons for not voting in the referendum

Presented with a number of **possible reasons for not voting** in the referendum (see chart below), many respondents said this was either due to *a lack of knowledge* (52% had not fully understood the referendum's issues, 42% had not been informed about the issues at stake and 37% felt they were not informed about the Lisbon Treaty's content) or because *the referendum was not important enough* for them (just under half – 45% – said they were too busy to vote and 38% had something more important to do than vote in the referendum).



Looking at the **socio-demographic profiles of those who did not vote** in the referendum revealed that the younger people were much less likely to participate than their older counterparts (64% of the 18-24 year-olds abstained compared to less than a third of the 55+ age group, 31%).

Furthermore, while six out of 10 manual workers and half of the employees (51%) did not vote in the referendum, the self-employed and those not working were much more likely to have voted – only 39% of the self-employed and 44% of non-working individuals abstained.

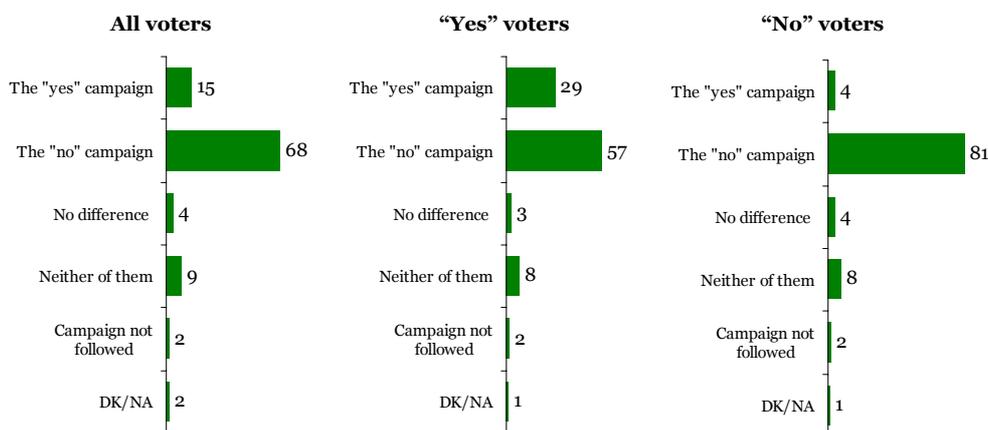
Eighty-six percent of respondents who did not vote in the referendum said they supported Ireland's membership of the EU (compared to 89% of voters) – voters and non-voters hold similar views about Ireland's membership of the EU.

A relatively high proportion of people who had not voted in the last general election (20%) participated in the referendum. This showed that the referendum had reached a segment of the population that did not normally get involved in internal politics. At the same time, as the referendum turnout was substantially lower than that of the last general election (53% and 67%, respectively), it is not surprising that about one-third of those who claimed that they had voted in the last election did not turn out in the referendum.

2. The campaign – voices of those who voted in the referendum

A large majority of Irish voters (68%) said the “no” campaign was the more convincing one, while only 15% said the same about the “yes” campaign. Even those who voted “yes” were more likely to say that the “no” campaign was more persuasive (57% – compared to 29% who thought the “yes” campaign was the more convincing one).

Which campaign was the most convincing?

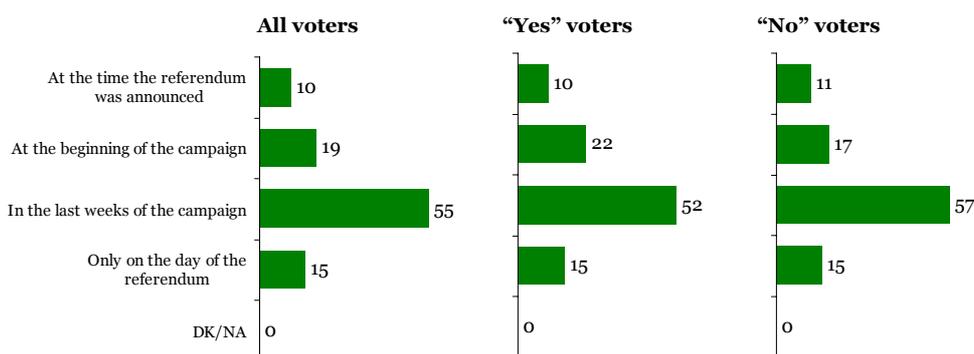


Q5. In your opinion which campaign was the more convincing, the “yes” or the “no” campaign?
%, Base: those who participated in the referendum on Thursday

Three out of 10 Irish voters made up their mind on how to vote in the referendum at a fairly early stage: 10% knew how they would vote at the time the referendum was announced and 19% had made up their mind by the beginning of the campaign. However, more than half of the electorate (55%) made their decision in the final weeks of the campaign, and 15% of voters only made up their mind on the day of the referendum itself.

A slightly higher proportion of “no” voters had formed their opinions in the course of the campaign, mostly in the last weeks. Last minute decisions, however, were in similar proportions in both camps.

How to vote: when did voters make up their minds?

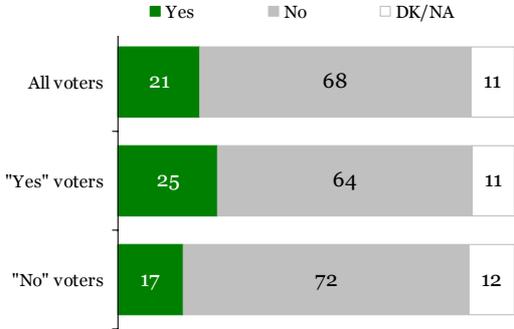


Q3. When did you make up your mind on how would you vote in the referendum?
%, Base: those who participated in the referendum on Thursday

Although a relatively high proportion of people made up their mind during the campaign – having not started out with a pre-determined mindset – once their mind was made up, they were unlikely to change their decision: a large majority of voters (68%) said they did not change their mind on how to vote during the course of the campaign, compared to just 21% who did.

Furthermore, those who voted “yes” were more likely to have changed their mind in the course of the campaign (25% vs. 17% of the “no” voters). If we look at the “switchers” within the “yes” and “no” voters, we can say that for whatever complex reasons, the “yes” campaign convinced more people to *change* their minds.

How to vote: did people change their mind during the campaign?



Q3_B. Did you change your mind about how to vote in the course of the campaign?
%, Base: those who participated in the referendum on Thursday

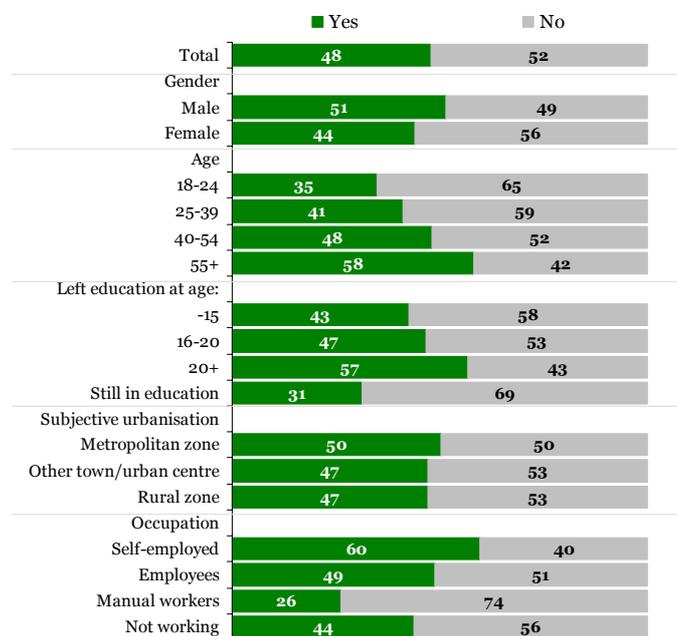
3. Profiles of “yes” and “no” voters

Although just over half of the voters said “no” in the referendum, certain socio-demographic groups did not follow this pattern. The largest difference lay, again, in the 18-24 year-olds, where 65% voted against the Lisbon Treaty, compared to 42% of the over 55s. Again, this only refers to the minority of young people who took part in the referendum.

Women were also in the “no” camp (56%), as were those not working (56%): these consisted primarily of housewives / those looking after the home (63%), students (72%) and the unemployed (58%), whereas only 45% of retired people voted against “Lisbon”.

The main supporters of the “yes” vote were found in the higher socio-economic groups: the “self-employed” (60%), professionals (58%), senior managers (66%) and those with the highest levels of education (i.e. those who left the educational system after the age of 20, 57%).

Referendum outcome: “yes” and “no” votes



Q7. How did you vote in the referendum? Did you vote yes or no to the treaty?
Base: those who participated in the referendum on Thursday
% by socio-demographics

4. Reasons for voting “yes” or “no”

The “yes” voters: it was in Ireland’s best interest

When asked in an open question about the reasons as to why they voted “yes” (see chart Q8 below), a third of those respondents said they felt this was **in Ireland’s best interest** (32% of all answers). The other reasons were some way behind, but most of them were variations on a theme – the advantages the EU provides and provided to Ireland. One in five voted “yes” because Ireland had got a lot of benefit from the EU (19% of all answers). Other grounds for voting “yes” (each representing 9% of all answers), were that the Lisbon Treaty would keep Ireland fully engaged in Europe and that it would help the Irish economy.

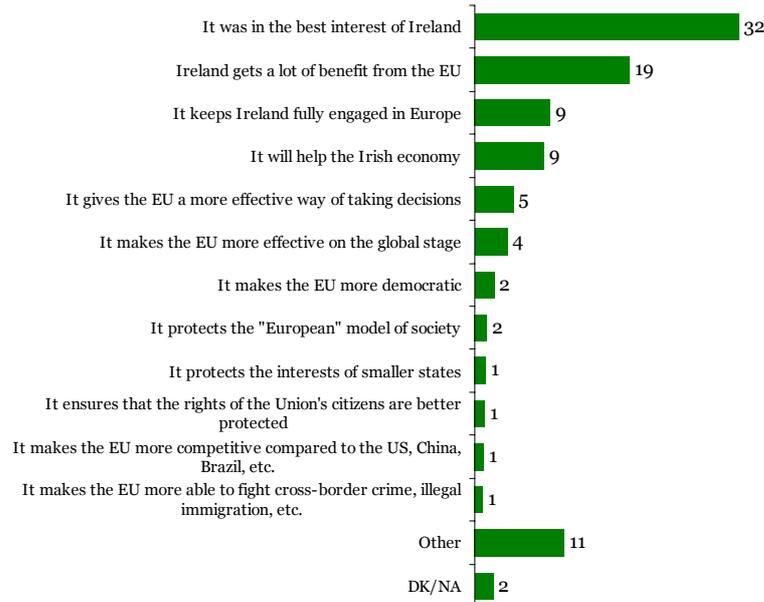
Although some respondents mentioned other reasons for their voting preference, those numbers were far less significant: the treaty would make the EU more effective in its decision-making (5% of all answers); it would make the EU more effective on the global stage (4%), etc.

The “no” voters: a diverse spectrum of reasons

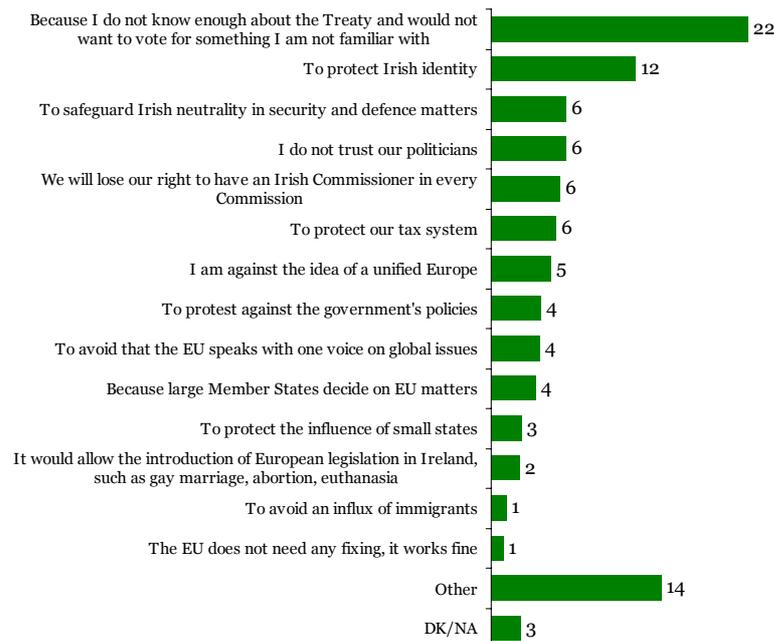
The “no” voters were also presented with a list of the potential reasons for their decision, the responses were diverse and numerous – going from a lack of information about the treaty to, for example, a way of protesting against the government’s policies. **A lack of information** about “Lisbon” was the main reason for voting against the treaty (22% of all answers), followed by the desire **to protect Irish identity** (12% of all answers).

Besides these two main rationales, “no” voters gave a number of other explanations – that together led to a multitude of reasons – these included a lack of trust in politicians in general; a wish to safeguard Irish neutrality in security and defence matters; the desire to keep an Irish Commissioner in every Commission; the need to protect the Irish tax system (in each case, 6% of all answers) as well as interpreting their vote as a vote against a “unified Europe” (5% of all answers).

At the bottom of the list, just 1% of all survey responses adjudged the “no” votes that they cast to be either a way of avoiding an influx of immigrants or as a method of saying that the treaty did not need fixing, as it was “fine”.

Reasons for voting “yes” on the Lisbon Treaty

Q8. Please tell me what are the reasons why you voted “yes” to the treaty?
% of all answers, Base: those who participated and voted Yes in the Referendum on Thursday

Reasons for voting “no” to the Lisbon Treaty

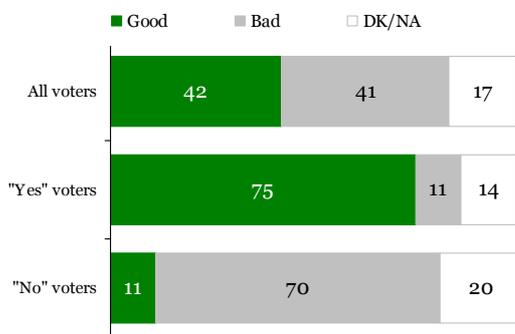
Q9. Please tell me what are the reasons why you voted “no” to the treaty?
% of all answers, Base: those who participated and voted NO in the Referendum on Thursday

5. Informed decisions?

Certain questions in the survey gave an indication as to how informed the electorate was as the people went to cast their votes in the referendum:

- One-fifth of the “no” voters and one-sixth of the “yes” voters did not know if the Lisbon Treaty would be good or bad for Ireland
- Forty two percent of “no” voters were of the opinion that the referendum was not important for Ireland’s future position in the EU, compared to only 5% of the “yes” voters
- Eighty percent of the “no” voters said they supported Ireland’s membership of the EU, as did 98% of “yes” voters – reinforcing the argument that except for a small minority in the “no” camp, there is no doubt about the future of Ireland within the EU

Is the Lisbon Treaty good or bad for Ireland?



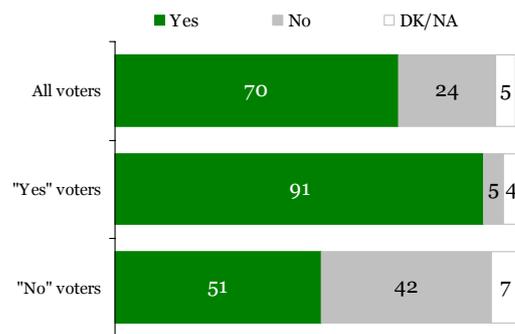
Q4. In your opinion is this treaty good or bad for Ireland?
%, Base: those who participated in the referendum on Thursday

Support for Irish membership of the EU



Q6_B. Do you generally support or oppose Ireland's membership of the European Union?
%, Base: those who participated in the referendum on Thursday

Was the referendum important for Ireland's future position in the EU?



Q6. Regardless of whether you participated or not in the referendum, do you agree with the statement that the referendum was important for the future position of Ireland in the EU?
%, Base: those who participated in the referendum on Thursday

6. The impact of the referendum/likely consequences

All respondents were asked for their opinion about the consequences of the “no” vote in the referendum. The views related to how people saw the possible impact of the referendum results and are best analysed by examining three areas: EU-related issues, Irish domestic policies and matters **related to the retention of Ireland’s identity**.

1. EU-related issues:

- An impressive 76% of “no” voters supported the view that the “no” vote would allow the Irish government **to renegotiate “exceptions” within the treaty**, whereas only 38% of “yes” voters held this opinion.
- There was relatively little difference in the opinions as to whether **the EU institutions would be blocked**: 42% of “yes” voters vs. 33% of “no” voters agreed on that point
- There was even less difference concerning the views about the “no” vote **blocking moves to a more federal Europe**: 52% of “no” voters vs. 48% in the “yes” camp
- When it came to whether **Ireland’s position in the EU would be weakened**, 64% of the “yes” voters supported this view while only a quarter (24%) of “no” voters felt that way
- The vast majority in either camp (88.5% of the “no” voters and 89% of the “yes” voters) rejected that the vote could mean that **Ireland was on its way out of the EU**.
- As expected, more “no” voters than “yes” voters felt that the result would **strengthen Ireland’s position in the EU**: 39% vs. 19%.

2. Irish domestic issues:

- Half of the “yes” voters agreed that the vote would **harm the economy** while only one in six of “no” voters (17%) agreed on this
- Just a quarter of “no” voters and 9% of “yes” voters agreed that the vote should **oblige the government to stand down**

3. The retention of Ireland’s identity:

- Even more “no” voters (83%) were in agreement that the result meant that **Ireland could keep its neutrality**, an opinion supported by only half (51%) of “yes” voters
- There were similar results (79% of “no” voters and 50% of “yes” voters) on the question as to whether the “no” vote would **allow Ireland to keep its tax system**
- The numbers in agreement were smaller on the issue of the “no” vote allowing Ireland to keep its current legislation on **abortion, gay marriages and euthanasia**: 60% of “no” voters and a third (36%) of the “yes” camp agreed on this matter.

4. Other issues

- On the issue of **agriculture loosing out in trade negotiations** due to the “no” vote, there was little difference of opinion: 41% of “no” voters and 36% of “yes” voters agreed with that line of reasoning
- Just over a third (36%) of “no” voters thought that the referendum result would make it **easier for the EU to negotiate on climate change**, compared to a quarter of “yes” voters (23%)
- A closer look at the differences in the perceived impact of the victory for the “no” campaign in the table below shows that voters and non-voters hold similar views about the technical/internal EU-related consequences. Moreover, some EU issues have not been a differentiating argument between “yes” and “no” voters. Overall, issues related to the EU decision-making process or arguments related to the EU external negotiating positions are considerations that have not differentiated between the various groups

Perceived consequences of the victory of the NO vote on the Referendum (% tend to agree)			
	<i>Not participated</i>	<i>Participated and voted “no”</i>	<i>Participated and voted “yes”</i>
The NO vote will ensure that the present Treaty is maintained	55%	59%	39%
The NO vote will block EU institutions	38%	33%	42%
The NO vote will block a more federal Europe	50%	52%	48%
The NO vote will weaken Ireland’s position in the EU	42%	24%	64%
The NO vote means Ireland is on its way out of the EU	15%	13%	10%
The NO vote strengthens Ireland’s position in the EU	32%	39%	18%
The NO vote will harm Ireland’s economy	30%	17%	49%
The NO vote should oblige the government to step down	23%	26%	9%
The NO vote will allow the Irish government to renegotiate exceptions for Ireland	62%	76%	38%
The NO vote allows Ireland to keep its neutrality	69%	83%	51%
The NO vote will allow Ireland to keep its tax system	62%	79%	50%
The NO vote guarantees that we do not have to change our legislation related to abortion, gay marriages and euthanasia	47%	60%	36%
The NO vote is a warning against agriculture loosing out in trade negotiations	37%	41%	36%
The NO vote will make it easier for the EU to negotiate on climate change	36%	36%	23%
Q10. Please tell me if you tend to agree or disagree with each of the following statements %, Base: all respondents			