

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Ireland Referendum on the 36th Amendment to the
Constitution (Abortion) 25th May 2018



Ireland Referendum – May 25th 2018

Preliminary Statement on Election Observation of Voting

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the Republic of Ireland.
2. To advise the local returning officers and national electoral bodies on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice within Ireland.
3. Support local returning officers, councils and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider them as part of their own reviews and potential plans for improving the voting process.

Methodology

Democracy Volunteers and SDAI-AIDD deployed teams across the twenty-two constituencies out of the forty constituencies in the Dail. This constitutes all the constituencies available to be observed in the referendum. These constituencies were:

Roscommon-Galway, Mayo, Galway West, Galway East, Laois, Kildare North, Kildare South, Tipperary, Kerry, Cork North Central, Cork South Central, Dublin Fingal, Dublin West, Dublin Mid-West, Dublin South-West, Dublin Rathdown, Dun Laoghaire, Dublin North-West, Dublin Bay North, Dublin Central, Dublin South Central, Dublin Bay South.

Twenty-five observers were deployed in total with the team being made up as follows: United Kingdom (12), Republic of Ireland (5), United States of America (3) Canada (3), France (1) and Greece (1). All observers were accredited by the national returning officer for the referendum.

The number of polling stations visited differed between the constituencies. 275 polling stations were visited in total.

Observers attended polling stations in teams of two. This started with the opening of polls at 7am and ended at 10pm. Observations lasted no less than 30 minutes and no more than 45 minutes per polling station. On exiting the polling station, the two observers completed an online form with their immediate report of their observations at that polling station.

STATEMENT

A team of 25 international election observers have attended over 275 polling stations across Ireland in today's referendum. The team was made up of observers from the UK, Canada, the United States, France and Greece. They worked in teams of two being accredited by the national returning officer, Barry Ryan.

Polling was observed to be brisk throughout the day and observers have seen the process of voting in Ireland in polling stations.

The team especially looked for aspects of the process which challenge the ease of access for voters including the simplicity of the process to be issued with a ballot paper to the security of the secret vote and the right of voters to cast their vote independently.

Initially the surveys that observers have completed, following their observations, suggest the following issues should be areas of interest to Ireland's election authorities. Our observers reported that:

- 21% of the time it was observed that polling stations were not clearly signposted¹
- It was not clear where voters should report to in 32.5% of polling stations²
- In 11% of cases it was observed that ballot boxes were not sealed in the way required
- So-called 'family voting' was observed in 22% of polling stations³
- The ID of voters was checked 29.6% of the time by polling staff which is in line with the advice from returning officers that this should be done for 1 in 4 voters

Staff were very welcoming across the country and our observers reported that polling was friendly and welcoming. However, in some cases, primarily because observers are not anticipated there were some issues of the acceptance of accreditation at polling stations in some constituencies.⁴

The Head of the Mission was the Director of Democracy Volunteers, Dr John Ault and the Deputy Head of Mission was Karen Reinhardt, Executive Director of SDAI-AIDD.

¹ This can especially affect first time voters or those new to an area who might not be familiar with local polling arrangements.

² This was often because polling stations have multiple ballot boxes (in one case 12) which led to some confusion about the process of receiving a ballot paper.

³ This figure is the percentage of the polling stations this was seen 22% of polling stations. This was seen infrequently as turnout was relatively high but this did mean that 3.1% of voters observed were either involved, in or affected by, family voting. This can limit voters' right to a secret ballot as it generally involves two voters, usually partners, sharing a polling booth.

⁴ We will make suggestions on how to ameliorate this in the final report when it is published.