

REFERENDUM BRIEFING PAPER NO 17 THE SECOND REFERENDUM ON THE TREATY OF LISBON IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND, 2ND OCTOBER 2009

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Key points:

- The Republic of Ireland held a re-run of the Lisbon Treaty referendum on 2nd October 2009.
- The government secured legal guarantees on: a Commissioner for each member state, taxation, neutrality, social issues, and workers' rights.
- The referendum took place during period of serious economic crisis, while the government introduced a controversial plan to rescue the banking system during the campaign and was the focus of public outcry over expenses paid to senior ministers. This led to a further huge slump in its public approval rating.
- The country voted by 67.1% to 32.9% to pass the treaty, on the back of a 58% turnout.
- There was a swing of 20% from the No to Yes side from the first Lisbon referendum.
- There were strong levels of public knowledge about and engagement in the Treaty, aided by substantive media engagement and an active referendum commission.

Background/Context

Ireland held a second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty on the 2nd October 2009. This took place due to the initial rejection of the Treaty on the 12th June 2008². In 2008 the

¹ I would like to thank Dr Michael Holmes of Liverpool Hope University for his generous assistance in drafting this briefing paper.

² See: Michael Holmes, 'The Referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon in the Republic of Ireland, 12 June 2008,' *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Referendum Briefing Paper No 16* at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern_no_16_ireland_08.pdf; and John FitzGibbon, 'Ireland's

result was a 53.4% No vote on the back of a 53.1% turnout. Immediately after the outcome, the Irish government stated that it would engage in an “extended period of consultation” with the Irish people as to the reasons for the No vote. Ostensibly, in public the government claimed it had no “blueprint” on what should be done. At the EU Council level, however, the government was under significant pressure to pass Lisbon by whatever means necessary so as to enable the ratification process of the Treaty across the EU before the end of 2009. This period came to an end at the EU summit meeting in June 2009 when the government announced a series of “legally binding guarantees” that it had secured after lengthy negotiation with other member states. These guarantees were separated into three: one guaranteeing a commissioner; another in relation to Irish competency over tax rates, abortion, and neutrality; and finally an agreement on workers rights. While these were not voted on in the referendum, they were used by the government as justification for the re-running of the referendum on Lisbon. The government put forward the argument that it had listened to the Irish people and had convinced the EU member states to address their concerns over Lisbon with these legally binding guarantees.

While there was significant disquiet amongst the public about having to vote again on the same Treaty, the anti-Lisbon side did not gain much traction when they sought to raise this issue amongst the public. The government and other pro-Lisbon campaigners emphasised that the legal guarantees meant that Lisbon was being voted on in a different context to the previous vote. Additionally, there was the precedent of multiple votes on similar issues, such as: the two votes to ratify the Treaty of Nice, three referendums on the status of abortion, and two on legalising divorce. When a case was taken as to the constitutionality of a ‘re-run’ of the same issue before a referendum, the Irish Supreme Court found the government’s action to be perfectly compatible with a constitutional provision that allows the government to hold referendums at its discretion. However, while the public may have been uneasy with voting for a second occasion on the same Treaty, there was widespread acknowledgement on both pro- and anti- sides that the changes in the Irish economic situation from June 2008 to October 2009 meant that both votes would take place in a fundamentally changed national situation. This difference appears to have negated the reservations of Irish voters towards voting on Lisbon again, with issues relating to the economy dominating the debate and acting as motivating factors for voters on both sides.

Holmes argues that the first Lisbon campaign was characterised by a “dearth of co-ordination” on the Yes side.³ Many other commentators, amongst them then EU Commissioner Peter Mandelson, were openly and strongly critical of the Yes campaign for its failure to develop any momentum and to counter the perceived false claims of the No side. Amongst Irish pro-Lisbon activists in journalism, academia, business and trade unionism, a common belief emerged that with two out of the previous three European referendums rejected, Ireland was in danger of negatively affecting its relationship with the EU. They saw this as being at odds with the pro-EU

No to Lisbon: Learning the Lessons from the failure of the Yes and success of the No Side,’ *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Working Paper No 21*, September 2009, Brighton: Sussex European Institute, at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/sei_working_paper_110.pdf.

³ See: ‘The European Parliament Election in Ireland, 5 June 2009’. *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network European Parliament Election Briefing No 35* http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/no_35_epernep2009ireland.pdf.

disposition of Ireland in repeated Eurobarometer surveys. In the immediate aftermath of the rejection of Lisbon, pro-European activists came together to plan out how the succeeding Lisbon referendum would be won. For them the period between the two referendums was spent fundraising and supervising the formation of various groups to contest the second referendum.

On the anti-Lisbon side, the No outcome bolstered the aspirations of groups, political parties and individuals who successfully campaigned for a No vote to run for in the European Parliamentary (EP) elections of June 2009.⁴ One of the most important No groups, Declan Ganley's Libertas, changed from a civil society anti-Lisbon group into a pan-European political party by contesting the European elections in many member states. The party fared badly returning only one candidate, Phillippe de Villiers in France, while Ganley himself came several thousand votes short from winning a seat. Ganley considered the EP vote a referendum on himself and Libertas's role in Ireland's EU debate, and said that if he failed to get a seat he would excuse himself from "leading any further campaigns" against any future EU referendums. The Eurosceptic Socialist Party, on the other hand, succeeded in getting its high profile EP candidate Joe Higgins elected. Higgins had campaigned strongly against the first Lisbon referendum from a traditionalist socialist position, as part of a wider strategy to take an EP seat, after he lost his seat in the Dáil (the Irish parliament) in 2007. Higgins's victory in taking the third seat in the (reduced from four to three member) Dublin European constituency from the governing Fianna Fáil party and the left-wing nationalist Sinn Féin party, together with Ganley's failure to win a seat, saw him become the most high profile elected anti-Lisbon activist. Overall anti-Lisbon campaigners fared badly in the EP elections. Prominent Lisbon I No campaigners Sinn Féin's Mary Lou McDonald and Independent MEP Kathy Sinnott lost their EP seats, leaving Higgins as the only anti-Lisbon Irish MEP.

Whilst Lisbon had thrown Irish-EU relations into disarray it was overshadowed by the collapse of the Irish economy (at the time of writing, a 6.7% fall in GDP for the year 2009) and resultant jump in unemployment from 6.2% to 12.9%. Compounding the economic situation there was the government's controversial National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) bank rescue plan, which opposition parties and a majority of public opinion were deeply sceptical of. From June onwards a controversy over expense payments to senior government ministers broke and dominated media headlines up to the day of polling. All these factors contributed towards giving the ruling Fianna Fáil-Green coalition government an approval rating of only 20% in early June: the lowest since opinion polling began in the 1970s. In the local and European elections of May 2009, both Fianna Fáil and the Greens had suffered significant electoral setbacks. With Fianna Fáil suffering their worst national electoral result since the foundation of the party in the 1926 (the EP elections saw 5.4% fall in its vote share to 24.1% of the national average, the local elections saw 6.4% decline in vote share to 25.4% of the national average). Following on from these electoral setbacks and growing public resentment against the government, the worry amongst the pro-Lisbon opposition parties was that the Treaty would be used as an opportunity for voters to vent their frustration against the government and the failing economy. For anti-Lisbon campaigners, the government's handling of the economy was symbolic of its failure to negotiate a good deal for Ireland in the Lisbon Treaty. Both

⁴ Ibid.

sides came quickly to the consensus opinion that the outcome of the referendum would be decided as to whether or not the Irish electorate believe that economic recovery would come from the changes to the EU brought about by the Lisbon Treaty, or from a rejection of Lisbon and the negotiation of a new Treaty better equipped to deal with the changed economic environment.

The Campaign

Essentially the campaign for the second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty began when prominent pro-Lisbon activists started planning for the re-run which, it was widely believed, would have to be held the following year. Following the result of Lisbon I the government argued that no decision had been made on how to proceed with the Irish ratification of Lisbon, and the EU Commission and Council issued statements about letting “the Irish decide on how they should proceed in their own time”, with the precedence of the two Nice referendums. However, another referendum was the only realistic option.

The government kept its Lisbon cards close to its chest and refused to acknowledge the inevitability of another referendum only when entering into negotiations on the legal guarantees with the other member states in early 2009. At first a date in May or June was believed to be the plan for the second referendum. Delays in securing clarification on the guarantees stretched on into late April, and not until well after the guarantees had been finalised after the June EU summit meeting did the Taoiseach (prime minister) announce on July 8th that the date for the Lisbon referendum rerun would be October 2nd. Despite no official announcement that a referendum was taking place both pro- and anti- Lisbon groups were operating on the assumption that it was the only route Irish ratification of the Lisbon Treaty could take.

The Yes Side

The main feature of the Yes campaign was its focus on individual identity. Previous Yes campaigns were organised by mainstream pro-European political parties with support from sectoral groups such as trade unions, farming organisations and business groups. With the rejections of Nice I and Lisbon I, leading pro-Europeans in Irish civil society believed that a different approach to ‘selling’ the EU to the Irish electorate was required. Adopting this approach they supervised the foundation of various pro-Lisbon groups such as Women for Europe, Generation Yes, the Charter Group, We Belong, Lawyers for Europe, Ireland for Europe, and Business for Europe amongst others. These groups were, respectively, targeting: women, young people aged 18-30, workers, un-politicised members of the public, legal professionals (who would also provide ‘expert’ analysis of EU legal texts and Irish treaties), latent pro-Europeans, and small and medium businesses.

With previous EU referendums, a Yes vote was canvassed for on the back of party allegiance. With Lisbon I party cues were weak, with a majority of Fine Gael and Labour supporters voting No despite their parties’ pro-Lisbon position. Thus, a Yes to Lisbon campaign based on party allegiance became unviable. For Lisbon II the pro-Lisbon parties and civil society groups came to the conclusion that a campaign that went beyond party politics and focused specifically on the benefits of European

integration and its furtherance under the Lisbon Treaty for specific groups in Irish society, was the only means by which a Yes vote could be secured. Three specific groups in Irish society were identified as being crucial to swinging the vote in favour of Lisbon. Women and young people, both of whom had voted No in decisive numbers (58% and 59% respectively) last time, and pro-Europeans who had abstained in the first referendum. The extensive links of these civil society groups to existing elites within Irish politics and society must be acknowledged, however, with many media commentators referring to them as “astro-turf groups”. The assertion being that they were not drawn from larger civil society (“grass-roots”) but created by the elite so that their arguments could be put forward with the public legitimacy of a civil society group.

Generation Yes employed new media such as the Facebook social networking site, a Youtube channel and Twitter to get their pro-Lisbon arguments to young people. The group largely ignored the mainstream media in their campaign, focusing instead on generating support for Lisbon amongst 18-30 year olds through viral new media campaigning, and in the direct organisation of canvassers in Dublin and other urban centres around the country. The group had over 5,000 Facebook members and claimed to have spent 3,630 hours canvassing. Women for Europe did not engage in grassroots activism by canvassing and leafleting. Their focus, on the other hand, was on organising information meetings across the country addressed by high profile women from the EU sphere such as EU Commissioner Margot Wallstrom and Irish Secretary General of the EU Commission Catherine Day. The group was led by high profile and well respected feminist activists. Their message was that EU membership had brought significant benefits to Irish women and that Lisbon was an extension of these advances. Using well-respected public figures in an open forum setting in locations not normally used to such a format was a key tactic of the group. This allowed them to reach women in rural areas and explain the EU and Lisbon in an accessible manner, whilst also attracting maximum local media coverage.

Ireland for Europe and We Belong, while being separate groups had a very similar approach. An increased turnout from the traditionally pro-EU segment of the electorate was a key element of the Yes side’s strategy. Both groups used high profile figures to appeal to the wider public that is generally positively inclined towards the EU and convince them to turn out and vote for Lisbon. Ireland for Europe brought individuals such as Nobel Prize winning poet Seamus Heaney, Chairman of BP Peter Sutherland and former rugby player Denis Hickey (who got members of the extremely popular national rugby team to come to Yes rallies) to appeal to pro-Europeans amongst the upper and middle classes to come out and vote Yes. These groups, while not ostensibly against Lisbon, had increasingly abstained from EU referendums. We Belong used local Gaelic sport stars, soap opera actors and the national football team manager to sell its argument - that a Yes to Lisbon meant Ireland ‘belonging’ at the heart of Europe - to a middle and lower middle class segment of the population that had not turned up to vote, and had been drifting toward the No side in successive referendums. For both of these groups the key tactic was the use of popular public figures without ties to political parties. Their focus was to make Lisbon firmly about Ireland’s relationship with the EU, which 79% of the Irish public is positive towards, and not making it a referendum on the political elite.

US multi-national corporations, most notably Microsoft and Intel, who have large operations in Ireland, joined these civil society groups on the Yes side. The chief executives of their Irish operations gave media interviews and advertised in the national media on the importance of a Yes to Lisbon vote to secure future foreign direct investment in Ireland. In a typical blaze of publicity Ryanair CEO Michael O’Leary announced that his company would spend €500,000 on a Yes campaign. His rationale for doing so was: that EU competition law had forced the Irish government to change laws that allowed Ryanair to grow, that membership of the Eurozone and ECB support was the only thing keeping Ireland financially solvent, and that the securing of a Commissioner and national competency over taxation meant that the interest of Irish business was in a Yes vote.

Such a diverse coalition of interests on the Yes side was backed up from the beginning by the organisational support of volunteers, canvassers, professional media advisers, and an over-arching national executive. Key individuals from each of the pro-Lisbon parties acted as coordinators between the individual Yes groups to ensure that contradictions or arguments did not get in the way of a single unified Yes message. That message was of the necessity of Ireland passing Lisbon to ensure that the country stayed at the centre of the EU to help in the solving of the economic crisis. Such elements were missing for the majority of the pro-Lisbon campaign in 2008.

The Yes campaign’s arguments were not wholly based on the text of the Lisbon itself. While several MEPs and national parliamentarians raised the issue of the increased powers for the EP and new role for national parliaments provided for by Lisbon, their arguments were on the margins of the Yes side. This was part of a larger pro-Lisbon effort to make the discourse of the campaign about Irish membership of EU and how rejecting Lisbon again would send Ireland to the periphery of Europe from whence the country came from in the dark days of the 1950s and 60s. The strategic goal of the Yes side was to make the referendum not on Lisbon but on Irish membership of the EU. To move away from trying to sell a largely bureaucratic Treaty and shift the emphasis to what the electorate could plainly understand: Irish membership of the EU, which the Irish public is enthusiastic about and fully aware of the benefits.

The No Side

The No side faced a different challenge from Lisbon I. On that occasion, the Yes side was divided along party political lines, and distracted from the campaign by the resignation of the Taoiseach (prime minister). To deal with the changed Yes campaign outlined above, the No side engaged in a different campaign strategy. For Lisbon I a highly effective poster campaign set the agenda for the campaign. For Lisbon II the No side employed spokespeople to participate in the media debates that quickly became the main focus of the campaign. With Ganley and his Libertas group missing, there was no media appointed leader of the No campaign as per Lisbon I. Instead coverage was spread between several figures: Joe Higgins MEP of the Socialist Party, former MEP Mary Lou McDonald of Sinn Féin, and former Green MEP Patricia McKenna of the left wing civil society group, the People’s Movement. These individuals not only were well know public figures with extensive media experience, but also had wide experience of the EU institutions. They were well able to articulate a strong argument against Lisbon from their knowledge of the EU.

During the Lisbon I campaign, by far the most effective tactic employed by the No campaign was a series of emotive posters placed by the fundamentalist Catholic group C oir (“The New EU Won’t See You, Hear You, Speak for You” being their most widespread poster slogan) which was widely acknowledged as setting the tone for the debate. For Lisbon II C oir moved away from more abstract criticisms of the impact of Lisbon on Ireland’s relationship with the EU, towards more specific references of the potential impact of Lisbon on Ireland. C oir launched a poster campaign on August 29th, which stated: “ 1.84 Minimum Wage After Lisbon?” across the country. Wedded to the more high profile involvement of left-wing politicians on the No side, the issue of workers’ rights moved firmly to the top of the No to Lisbon agenda, and the campaign as a whole. The Socialist Party and Sinn F ein, as members of the far left NGL/GUE group in the EP, were able to access resources to fund a campaign based on a left-wing critique of Lisbon. Their main arguments were: that Lisbon was negotiated with an inherent neo-liberal bias based on an ideology that was the cause of the current economic collapse; that the ratification of Lisbon would force the privatisation of Irish public education and healthcare services; and that provisions in the Lisbon Treaty would force Ireland to increase military spending and become more involved in a common EU defence policy.

This focus on left-wing issues was at odds with Lisbon I where the Libertas group put forward right-wing economic arguments to oppose Lisbon. C oir’s highlighting of a reduced minimum wage for Irish workers’ was based on their calculation of the average minimum wage from the accession states, and the rulings of the ECJ in the Laval, Luxembourg and Vaxholm cases. These rulings were repeatedly used by the No side as evidence of an “anti-worker bias” inherent in the functioning of EU institutions. The Socialist Party, Sinn F ein and C oir put up posters around the country putting forward these left-wing criticisms, before a final set of posters that highlighted the different voting weights that Lisbon would bring in that would put Ireland at a disadvantage relative to the larger member states. All groups put forward individuals for broadcast debates and to write opinion articles in national and local newspapers. At the same time, C oir and the left-wing People’s Movement also organised public meetings: C oir in rural and middle class urban areas, the People’s Movement in working class areas.

Right wing opposition to Lisbon returned when Ganley re-entered the campaign on the 12th of September. He stated that he had been “provoked” back into campaigning, after he said he would not return, by the “shrill and vociferous” campaign tactics of the Yes side; in particular he cited the Commission visiting Irish schools to provide information about the EU. The assertion among commentators and the Yes side was that the No side was losing ground and Ganley came back to bolster a flagging campaign. He was placed right back in the centre of the campaign by the media, and in the final few debates he was chosen as a representative of the No side. The logic for doing this was to create some balance between left and right-wing opponents of Lisbon. In reality, it probably had more to do with Ganley’s attraction as a political celebrity.

The impact of the return of Ganley showed a significant shortcoming of the No campaign. They had high profile, knowledgeable, media-savvy figures to argue the case for a No vote on the increasingly important media debates, but these figures were almost exclusively associated on the hard left of the Irish political spectrum. Working

class areas have continually voted strongly against successive European referendums in Ireland, that portion of the electorate was always going to vote against Lisbon again. The absence of Ganley for the majority of the campaign denied the No side a means of attracting centre-right, middle class voters who ignored the cues of mainstream parties to vote No to Lisbon I.

The No side lacked the targeted campaign strategy of the Yes side. A diverse coalition of republicans, socialists, trade unionists, and fundamentalist Catholics could never organise a national structure to direct their campaign. While the No side avoided clashes between campaigners there was no over-arching No to Lisbon organisation capable of creating the capacity to reach beyond the traditional No constituency and attract the floating referendum voter necessary to defeat the Treaty. For Lisbon I, the wider middle class appeal of Ganley and Libertas was able to achieve this. Without Libertas the No campaign was confined to the extremities on the left, and to a lesser degree on the right.

The last few weeks of campaigning saw both sides use ever more emotive and controversial arguments. C oir put out posters insinuating that abortion and euthanasia would be forced on Ireland if Lisbon passed. Libertas increased their presence with thousands of posters lamenting the ending of Irish and European democracy should there be a Yes to Lisbon: "Irish Democracy 1921-2009?" The entrance of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) into the debate did not aid the No side and quite possibly had a more positive effect on the Yes side. UKIP sent a leaflet to every house in the country, which argued amongst other things that Lisbon gives "free movement for 75 million" Turkish workers. The Yes side jumped on this development and claimed that the only people who would be happy with a No to Lisbon were British nationalists.

Facing such an organised campaign with substantial resources was difficult for the No side. Their cause was not helped when the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland stated that the rules regarding an explicitly equal 50% share of airtime to both Yes and No arguments could be relaxed, so as to allow for the discretion of those providing coverage to ensure that it is "fair to all interests and undertaken in a transparent manner". No campaigners such as McKenna (who had originally secured the judicial ruling that created equal airtime) complained strongly about this revision of the rules, as they felt it was too open to abuse by broadcasters who brought in "experts" to discuss the Treaty but whom the No side felt were openly calling for a Yes vote.

Role of the media and Referendum Commission

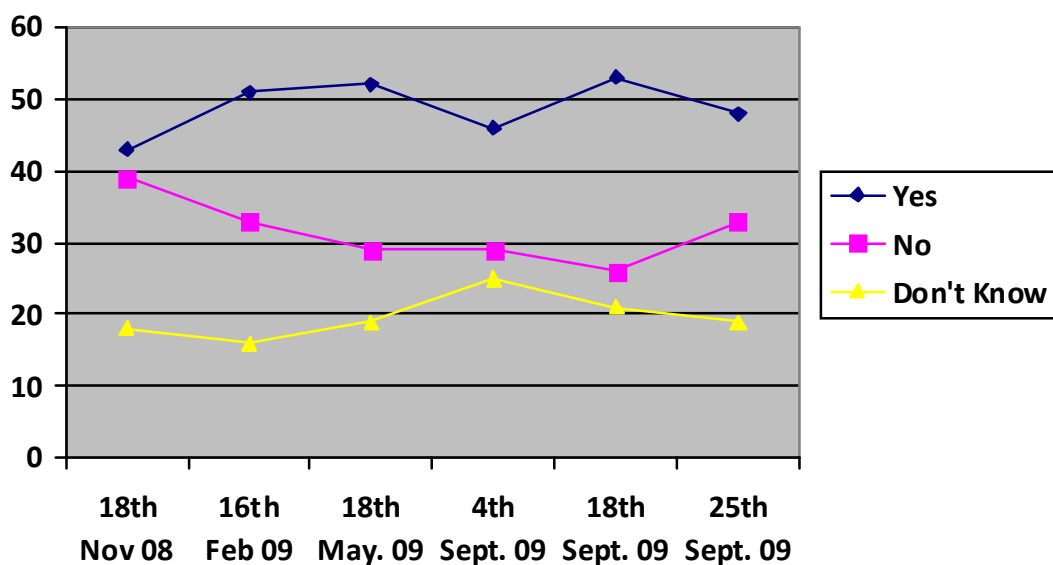
Once the campaign upped a gear at the end of August and debate on NAMA subsided the media began to take full advantage of the clash between a motivated Yes side and experienced No campaigners. Major news programmes, particularly on radio, hosted debates between representatives of both sides. This kept Lisbon firmly at the top of the national political agenda, and ensured that the electorate had exposure to the main arguments of both sides. Indeed the media actively sold the "confrontations" between the high profile members of each campaign, with the "clash" of Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary and Libertas founder Declan Ganley on both radio and television being heavily promoted and covered by both broadcast and print media. At times it appeared

that the media was more interested in the personalities behind each campaign rather than the Yes and No arguments that they were making.

The role of the independent Referendum Commission was important. During the last Lisbon referendum the then chair of the Commission could not answer a series of questions on the text of the Treaty put to him by journalists. Additionally the briefing booklet sent out by the Commission to every household in Ireland on Lisbon I was criticised as being too long, complicated and vague on the issues. That the Commission was not high profile enough in getting a clear explanation of the Treaty to the public and in clarifying what issues were and were not contained in it. This time a senior member of the judiciary, Justice Frank Clarke, led a high profile Referendum Commission that had an extensive media campaign highlighting several of the issues on the Yes and No side of Lisbon in a clear and concise manner. His appearance on radio phone-in shows answering questions on the Treaty from the public, allowed voters to access a respected impartial source of information that was notably absent from the previous referendum. In addition, he interjected in the campaign several times to clarify that certain issues raised by both Yes and No campaigners were not relevant to the text of the Treaty and should not be considered by voters in their decision on the referendum. This affected the Yes campaign as much as the No side, with Justice Clarke pointing out that Lisbon was not a referendum on membership, which the Yes side were trying to make it out to be. While his interjections most certainly had an effect on the impact of the points he highlighted as irrelevant, they did not stop both sides from using them.

The explicit role of the media and independent Referendum Commission in highlighting the arguments in favour of and against the Treaty, while emphasising its importance, resulted in high levels of public knowledge about the Treaty itself. But, perhaps more importantly, a greater majority of the public felt “more engaged” with the debate on Lisbon II than Lisbon I.

Figure 1: Opinion Poll results on voting intentions on the Lisbon Referendum



Source: TNS-MRBI Irish Times 18/11/08, 16/2/09, 18/5/09, 4/09/09, 18/09/09, 25/09/09.

Opinion Polls

The Yes side held a lead in the opinion polls from when polling on a second Lisbon referendum began in November 2008, up until the last poll conducted a week before the vote, in late September. In the final few weeks the number of those voters intending to vote Yes increased but the number of No voters increased by a greater number as Don't Knows moved towards the No camp. As Figure 1 shows that the Yes side were in a dominant position as regards public opinion support from 2009 onwards. It also shows that un-decided voters were a strong presence right up until the end and that appealing to them held the key to victory for either side.

Results

Table 1: Irish EU Referendum Votes and Results

Referendum	Turnout	%	Yes	%	No	%	Result
Accession (1972)	1,264,278	70.9	1,041,890	83.1	211,891	16.9	Yes
Single European Act (1985)	1,085,304	44.1	755,423	69.9	324,977	30.1	Yes
Maastricht (1992)	1,457,219	57.3	1,001,076	69.1	448,655	30.9	Yes
Amsterdam (1998)	1,543,930	56.2	932,632	61.7	578,070	38.3	Yes
Nice I (2001)	997,826	34.8	453,461	46.1	529,478	53.9	No
Nice II (2003)	1,446,588	49.5	906,317	62.9	534,887	37.1	Yes
Lisbon (2008)	1,621,037	53.1	752,451	46.6	862,415	53.4	No
Lisbon II (2009)	1,816,098	58	1,214,268	67.1	594,606	32.9	Yes

Source: 'The European Parliament Election in Ireland, 5 June 2009'. European Parties Elections and Referendums Network European Parliament Election Briefing No 35 http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/no_35_epernep2009ireland.pdf; and <http://www.rte.ie/news/features/lisbontreaty/index.html> - National Broadcaster

As Table 1 shows, three points stand out from a comparison of the Lisbon II result to those of previous Irish votes on Europe. Firstly, Lisbon II had the highest turnout since the referendum on accession in 1972. Secondly, it also saw the highest Yes vote

since Maastricht in 1992. Thirdly, the Yes vote was the largest ever in a European referendum. The overall figures affecting these outcomes can be seen from the changes from Lisbon I to Lisbon II: an increase of 461,817 in the number of Yes votes, a decrease of 267,809 in the number of No votes, and an increased turnout of 195,061. Two overall conclusions can be drawn from these figures. Firstly that pro-Lisbon campaigners succeeded in moving around 250,000 No voters over to the Yes side. Secondly, that the increased turnout benefited the Yes side almost exclusively.

Looking at the opinion poll data from Figure 1 the number of voters intending to vote No averaged at about 31%, well within the margin of error in relation to the actual No vote of 33%. The Yes side averaged 48% in the opinion polls but finished with 67.1% of the vote. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that those voters who were undecided, averaging around 20% in the polls throughout the campaign, went almost wholesale to the Yes side. The post Lisbon II EU Commission survey conducted immediately after the outcome found that some 29% of voters said that they changed their vote from No to Yes due to “increased information and communication”. Indeed some 67% of voters found the Yes side more convincing. This was a total reversal of the situation in 2008 where 67% found the No campaign more convincing.⁵

Table 2: Top 5 Reasons for Voting Yes and No: Post Lisbon II Analysis

TOP 5 REASONS FOR VOTING YES
EU has been/is good for Ireland 51%
The treaty is good for Ireland/ it was in the best interest of Ireland 44%
It will help the economy 33%
Maintain Irish influence in Europe 11%
The treaty is good for the EU 17%
TOP 5 REASONS FOR VOTING NO
To protect Irish identity 30%
I do not trust our politicians 20%
To protest against the Government’s policies 12%
To safeguard Irish neutrality 11%
Increasing unemployment 10%

Source: Lisbon Treaty Post – Post Referendum Survey Ireland 2009 Analytical Report, *Flash Eurobarometer*, October, 2009

More generally, as Table 2 shows, the report also found that the most common reason cited by Yes voters for their decision was that the “EU has been good for Ireland and Ireland has got a lot of benefit from the EU”, mentioned by 51% of voters. Additionally, 44% of Yes voters said the Treaty was good for Ireland while 33% believed that Yes vote would help the Irish economy. Interestingly, just 9% of Yes voters highlighted the Irish economy as a reason for backing the Lisbon Treaty,

⁵ See: Lisbon Treaty Post – Post Referendum Survey Ireland 2009 Analytical Report, *Flash Eurobarometer*, October, 2009

despite the argument of No campaigners that the economic crisis benefited the Yes side. It would appear that the strategy of the Yes campaign outlined earlier, that of targeting specific groups in Irish society who had voted No to Lisbon I, was successful. Breaking down the Yes vote further it can be seen that 64% of women voted Yes, compared to 42% in 2008. While young people constituted the largest segment of No voters amongst the Irish electorate, 62% of them voted Yes, as compared to 41% in 2008. From these figures it can be seen that the swing of 20% from the No to Yes side was copied across all sections of the electorate. It was not one particular group in Irish society who tipped the balance in favour of the Yes side, but a move across almost every segment of society by 20% to the Yes side.⁶ The broad organised coalition of Yes parties and groups undoubtedly were the key to this shift. The one group in Irish society who remained steadfast in their opposition to Lisbon were working class voters. The dominance of the No side by left-wing groups and arguments ensured that the working class voters of Ireland would remain strongly anti-Lisbon.

Conclusions

The second Irish referendum vote emerges as something of a 'playbook' for a Yes side in a referendum on the EU. Although there is the obvious situational context of the decline in the economy, that is perhaps slightly compensated for by the significant un-popularity of the government at the time. Much of the debate in relation to European referendums, in particular those of the Danish Euro referendum, the French vote on the European constitutional treaty, and the first Irish Lisbon referendum, has focused on the outcome as a vote of no confidence on an un-popular government. Vital to the victory for the Yes side was the realisation that a campaign based solely on political party allegiance led by politicians was doomed to failure. The electoral competition between government and opposition parties, combined with public cynicism towards the party system would inevitably lead to a dis-unified campaign which the electorate would view as 'second order'. The consequence of which would be the public using it as a means of venting anger on the government and party system for domestic reasons.

A priority for the Yes side was in getting the electorate to view the referendum as between themselves and the EU, and not between them and the government. They achieved this goal by presenting their pro-Lisbon arguments in the form of an 'identity' appeal, not one based on party political allegiance. Women, young people, and latent pro-Europeans were marked for specific campaigning by individual civil society groups who tailored their tactics to suit the needs of each identity. In the background was an over-arching organisational structure that co-ordinated these civil society groups and the political parties, so as to maintain a unified message and conflict free campaign. During the course of the campaign the Yes side succeeded where it had failed in the Lisbon I campaign. Firstly it countered the claims of the No side before they gained traction amongst voters (67% of voters found the Yes campaign more believable). Secondly they managed to set the agenda for the campaign. For Lisbon I the main reasons cited for a No vote were those of anti-Lisbon campaigners. As can be seen in Table 2 the vague message of the Yes side of the

⁶ Ibid.

importance of EU membership to Ireland encouraged people to vote Yes; whereas the left-wing criticisms and sovereignty arguments of the No side appear to have made only a limited impact even on No voters who did not list them as reasons for voting No in the post referendum survey.

If the dis-organisation of the Yes side in the first Lisbon referendum was a situational opportunity for the No side, the economic situation proved a situational threat to them. Essentially their argument was for Ireland to retain more power over key decisions and not give sovereignty over to the EU, when Ireland was suffering an economic collapse at the hands of its own government far worse than the majority of member states. Amidst such economic upheaval the nuanced arguments of the No side in relation to specific provisions in Lisbon were lost to the simpler and emotive Yes slogans: “Ireland need Europe”.

This is the latest in a series of election and referendum briefings produced by the European Parties Elections and Referendums Network (EPERN). Based in the Sussex European Institute, EPERN is an international network of scholars that was originally established as the Opposing Europe Research Network (OERN) in June 2000 to chart the divisions over Europe that exist within party systems. In August 2003 it was re-launched as EPERN to reflect a widening of its objectives to consider the broader impact of the European issue on the domestic politics of EU member and candidate states. The Network retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. For more information and copies of all our publications visit our website at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2.html>.