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Abortion in Ireland: Public Opinion

For more than a decade, there has been a significant shift in public attitudes towards abortion in Ireland. Opinion polls and research consistently show increased support for access to abortion within Ireland:

- In **May 2017**, an [Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll](#) ^[1] found that **73%** of respondents agreed with abortion up to 12 weeks gestation.
- Also in **May 2017**, the results of a [Behaviour and Attitudes Poll](#) ^[2] on abortion, conducted by the Sunday Times, were released. The results indicated that public opinion is in favour of reforming Ireland's abortion laws. The poll found that:
 - 75%** of respondents believed that abortion should be permitted in cases fatal foetal anomaly.
 - 73%** supported access to abortion where the pregnancy is the result of rape.
 - 77%** believed abortion should be allowed where there is a risk to the health of the woman.

The poll also tracked political party support for reform of Ireland's abortion laws, with a similar trend emerging. The political parties surveyed believed that Ireland should provide access to abortion services in the cases of fatal foetal anomalies (**75%**), rape (**73%**), and risk to the health of the woman (**77%**).

- In **April 2017**, in a [Claire Byrne Live audience survey](#) ^[3], **50%** of respondents agreed with the Citizen's Assembly that abortion with no restrictions should be made available in Ireland.
- In **March 2017**, an [Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll](#) ^[4] indicated that **38%** of respondents were in favour of replacing the Eight with **28%** of respondents were in favour of a repealing the Eight.
- In **October 2016**, an [Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll](#) ^[5] found that almost **75%** of respondents support repeal of the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[6].
- In **July 2016**, an [Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll](#) ^[7] found that **67%** or two thirds of respondents support repeal of the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[6] to allow for abortion in cases of rape or fatal foetal anomaly.
- In **March 2016**, a [Red C poll](#) ^[8] commissioned by Amnesty International Ireland found that **87%** of respondents want abortion access expanded and **72%** believe abortion should be decriminalised. The poll also found that:
 - **87%** supported wider access to abortion in Ireland and **72%** supported the decriminalisation of abortion.
 - **69%** wanted the expansion of Ireland's abortion laws to be a priority for the new government (when 'don't knows' and those who were neutral are excluded).
 - **73%** believed that the new government should hold a referendum on repeal of the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[6].
 - **66%** consider it "hypocritical" that the Constitution bans abortion in Ireland but allows women to travel abroad for abortion.
 - **72%** believed that the fact that women must travel for abortion services unfairly discriminates against those women who cannot afford or are unable to travel.
 - **68%** described Ireland's abortion laws as "cruel and inhumane" (when 'don't knows' and those who were neutral are excluded).
 - **80%** supported abortion at least in cases where a woman's life or health is at risk or where the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest. **38%** favoured abortion access as women choose. **7%** supported abortion access only in cases of fatal foetal anomaly.
 - Only **5%** were opposed to abortion in all circumstances. Of that group, **72%** were not aware that the penalty for an unlawful abortion is up to 14 years imprisonment.
 - **55%** did not know that having an abortion in Ireland is a crime when a woman's life is not at risk.
 - **80%** agreed that under international human rights law, women have a right to access abortion in Ireland in cases of rape or incest, where their health is at risk or in cases of fatal foetal anomaly.
- In **February 2016**, an [Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll](#) ^[9] found that **64%** of people surveyed were in favour of repealing the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[6]. Support for repeal was highest amongst younger and middle-aged voters, with about **70%** of those under the age of 49 supporting repeal.

- In **January 2016**, a [Newstalk/Red C poll](#) ^[10] found that **78%** of respondents supported abortion in cases of rape or incest and **76%** in cases of fatal foetal anomaly. **41%** agreed that abortion should be an option in all circumstances felt necessary by a woman, while **48%** supported removal of the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[6].
- In **August 2015**, the majority of Fine Gael TDs who responded to a [Sunday Times survey](#) ^[11] (63%) were in favour of a referendum to widen access to abortion in the lifetime of the next Dáil.
- In **July 2015**, a [Red C poll commissioned by Amnesty International Ireland](#) ^[12] found that two thirds (**67%**) of people surveyed believed the Government should decriminalise abortion. The poll also found that:
 - **64%** did not know that having an abortion in Ireland is a crime when a woman's life is not at risk. **50%** believed that it is legal for doctors to make referrals for women to abortion services abroad.
 - **9%** knew that the penalty for an unlawful abortion is up to 14 years imprisonment - when informed **87%** disagreed that it is a reasonable penalty.
 - **81%** were in favour of widening the grounds for abortion **45%** were in favour of access to abortion as women choose, while **36%** were in favour of abortion only where a woman's life or health is at risk, or in cases of rape, incest and fatal foetal anomaly.
 - **7%** were opposed to abortion in all circumstances, while **9%** were in favour of abortion only where a woman's life is at risk.
 - **70%** agreed that under international human rights law, women have a right to access abortion where their life or health is at risk, and in cases of rape, incest and fatal foetal anomaly.
 - **65%** agreed that Ireland's ban on abortion makes women have unsafe abortions.
 - **71%** agreed that the criminalisation of abortion adds to the distress of women who need abortion.
 - **64%** agreed that the criminalisation of abortion contributes to stigma experienced by women who have had abortions.
 - **70%** disagreed that travelling abroad for an abortion is not especially traumatic for women.
- In **June 2015**, a [Sunday Times Behaviour and Attitudes Poll](#) ^[13] found that 76% of people surveyed were in favour of abortion in cases of fatal foetal anomaly, while 70% supported abortion in cases of rape or incest.
- In **April 2015**, a [Sunday Independent/Millward Brown poll](#) ^[14] found that 70% of people surveyed supported abortion where there is a medical risk to a woman's life other than suicide. 63% of people supported abortion in cases fatal foetal anomaly, while 60% were in favour of abortion in cases where a woman is suicidal.
- In **October 2014**, an Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll found that 68% of people surveyed were in favour of a referendum to be held on whether or not to allow for abortion in cases of rape and fatal foetal anomaly.
- In **September 2014**, a Sunday Independent/Millward Brown poll found that of those who expressed an opinion, over 75% of people surveyed were in favour of holding a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. 69% of respondents believed abortion should be allowed in cases of rape, while 68% were in favour of abortion where there is a threat to the long-term health of a woman.
- In **June 2013**, an Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll found that 75% of people surveyed were in favour of the Government decision to introduce legislation to give effect to the X case judgment, which provides for abortion in circumstances where a woman's life is at risk, including the threat of suicide.
- Also in **June 2013**, a Sunday Independent/Millward Brown opinion poll found that 58% of people surveyed said they would support legislation for the X case, which provides for abortion where there is a risk to the life of the woman, including the risk of suicide.
- In **May 2013**, a Sunday Independent/Millward Brown opinion poll found that 53% of people surveyed supported legislation that would allow for abortion in cases where a risk to life occurs because of a threat of suicide. 78% of people surveyed said they would support legislation that would permit abortion in cases where the mother's life is at risk.
- In **February 2013**, an Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll found that 71% of people surveyed supported legislation for the X case. 85% of people surveyed said abortion should be allowed in certain circumstances where a woman's life is at risk.
- In **January 2013**, a Sunday Times Behaviour and Attitude Poll found that 60% of people surveyed supported legislation for the X case, which provides for abortion in circumstances where there is a risk to the life of the woman, including the risk of suicide.
- Also in **January 2013**, a Paddy Power/Red C Poll found that 64% of people surveyed were in favour of more liberal abortion laws.
- In **December 2012**, a Sunday Business Post/Red C Poll found that 85% of people surveyed supported legislation for the X case, allowing abortion where a woman's life is threatened, including by suicide.
- In **September 2012**, a Sunday Times Behaviour and Attitude Poll found that 80% of people said they would support a change in the law to permit abortion in cases where the mother's life is at risk.
- In **2011**, a [study](#) ^[15] of 500 established GPs and almost 250 GPs in training revealed that 75% of Irish GPs feel that there are situations in which abortion should be available in Ireland with 52% believing that abortion should be available to any woman

who chooses it.

- In **2010**, an Irish Examiner/Red C Poll found that 60% of people supported legal abortion and three in five people aged 18-35 believed abortion should be legalised.
- Also in **2010**, a Marie Stopes/YouGov opinion poll indicated that 79% of those questioned were in favour of liberalisation of Irish abortion laws in certain circumstances.
- In **2007**, an Irish Times Behaviour and Attitudes Poll found that 54% of women believe the Government should act to permit abortion.
- A **2004** Crisis Pregnancy Agency study found that 90% of 18-45 year olds support abortion in certain circumstances, with 51% stating that women should always have to right to choose an abortion.

Referenda in **1992** and in **2002** rejected proposals to further restrict access to abortion. No referendum has ever been held to offer Irish people the opportunity to make access to abortion less restrictive; opinion polls, however, consistently indicate public support for less restrictive abortion regulation.

Despite much media and political attention on the abortion issue during the Lisbon Treaty debate independent research from the EU ^[16] indicated that only 2% of respondents cited the Treaty allowing the introduction of EU legislation in Ireland, such as gay marriage, abortion and euthanasia, as a reason for voting no.

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Links:

- [1] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/opinion-poll-shows-voters-cautious-on-abortion-1.3098059>
- [2] <https://www.ifpa.ie/sites/default/files/documents/sunday-times-may-2017-report.pdf>
- [3] <https://twitter.com/ClaireByrneLive/status/856637849365610496>
- [4] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/poll-shows-public-support-for-abortion-is-cautious-and-conditional-1.2995696>
- [5] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/irish-times-poll-majority-want-repeal-of-eighth-amendment-1.2819814>
- [6] <https://www.ifpa.ie/Hot-Topics/Abortion/Abortion-and-the-Irish-Constitution>
- [7] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/majority-support-repeal-of-eighth-amendment-poll-shows-1.2714191>
- [8] <https://www.amnesty.ie/amnesty-internationalred-c-poll-reveals-irish-public-want-expanded-access-abortion-political-priority-incoming-government/>
- [9] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/majority-for-repeal-of-eighth-amendment-poll-shows-1.2544564>
- [10] <https://www.newstalk.com/reader/47.1252/63650/-/>
- [11] http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/ireland/News/Irish_News/article1591535.ece?CMP=OTH-gnws-standard-2015_08_08
- [12] <https://www.amnesty.ie/support-decriminalisation-abortion-ireland-topline-results/>
- [13] <http://banda.ie/sunday-times-behaviour-attitudes-opinion-poll-june/>
- [14] <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/most-voters-back-abortion-if-threat-to-mothers-life-31135407.html>
- [15] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/over-half-of-doctors-support-abortion-1.15955>
- [16] http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_284_en.pdf