



## **NYCI Briefing Paper**

### **Voter Participation Section of the National Survey on Young People.**

#### **Introduction:**

The National Youth Council of Ireland commissioned SPSS Ireland in June 2008 to conduct a national survey of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 to ascertain their attitudes, aspirations, and concerns about a range of issues in 2008.

The primary aim of the research was to consult with young people on issues which concern and impact upon them. We hope that the findings of the survey will generate information which would help to ensure that Government, policy makers, legislators, and organisations working with young people are better able to respond to the needs of young people.

#### **Methodology:**

SPSS interviewed 1,020 young people from around the country aged between 18-25 years of age in August 2008. Of these 526 (51.6%) were male and 494 (48.4%) were female. 688 (67.5%) were from an urban area and 332 (32.5%) were from a rural area. 474 (46.5%) were classified as being from the ABC1 social demographic group and 546 (53.5%) were classed as belonging to the C2DE social demographic group. Approximately 93.4% of the participants in the survey identified themselves as Irish.

#### **Results:**

NYCI will be publishing the results of the national survey on the following themes over the coming months:

- Voter Participation
- Lisbon Treaty
- Education
- Personal Finance/Saving
- Health
- Housing
- Final Report

## Context:

NYCI has campaigned for many years on issues related to the participation of young people in the political and electoral system. We have consistently called for the voter registration and electoral system to be reformed to make them for accessible, effective and relevant to young people in Ireland.

## Key Issues:

- Numbers of young people on the electoral register.
- Voter turnout among young people.
- Views/opinions of young people on encouraging voter participation.

## Main findings of the survey relating to voter participation:

- Only 71.2% of young people aged 18-25 were registered to vote.
- Only 64% of young people between 18-21years of age were registered to vote.
- Online voting and automatic registration were seen by young people as the most effective methods of encouraging voter participation.
- Only 20% of young people have ever had personal communication with their local T.D./Councillor.

## Electoral Register:

Are you on the Electoral Register?		
	Count	%
Yes	721	71.2
No	263	26.0
Don't Know	29	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1013</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Electoral Register vs Age			
Are you on the Electoral Register?	Age of Respondent		
	18 - 21 years	22 - 25 years	Total
Yes	282	438	720
No	169	94	263
Don't Know	19	10	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>542</b>	<b>1012</b>

## Electoral Register vs Social Demographic Group

Are you on the Electoral Register?	Social Demographic Group		
	ABC1	C2DE	Total
Yes	357	364	721
No	103	160	263
Don't Know	11	18	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>542</b>	<b>1013</b>

### **Analysis:**

Our survey found that 26% of young people aged 18-25 are not on the electoral register. In addition we found that the problem was most acute among the 18-21 age group with up to 36% not being registered, however even among the 22-25 year olds, 17% were not registered to vote. While there was little difference between young women and young men, young people from the C2DE social demographic group were less like to be registered to vote than those from middle class backgrounds.

NYCI believes that the findings of our survey demonstrate that the current registration system is failing and must be overhauled. This survey confirms anecdotal evidence that many young people who want to vote are prevented from doing so because they are not registered in time to do so.

A previous survey by NYCI found that “not being registered to vote” was the primary reason why young people did not vote.<sup>1</sup> This was further confirmed by the findings in a CSO report that not being registered was cited by 46% of 18-19 year olds, 43% of students and 30% of 20-24 year olds as the reason why they did not vote in the 2002 General Election.<sup>2</sup> Government and the local authorities should be supporting and promoting young people to be registered, however the current out of date and bureaucratic system inhibits young people from exercising their democratic rights.

---

<sup>1</sup> Voting at the Crossroads, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Politics, Democracy and Young People, NYCI 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Quarterly Household Survey Report, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2003, Module on Voter Participation and Abstention, CSO.

## Measures to increase turnout:

### Rating of measures to encourage voting participation

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Not Important	Not at all Important	Overall	
	%	%	%	%	%	Number of Respondents	Average Rating
Saturday/Sunday Voting	36.2	21.2	20.6	8.9	13.1	1017	2.4
Online Voting	53.1	22.0	12.7	5.0	7.2	1018	1.9
Public Awareness Campaign aimed at Young People	41.6	26.5	18.1	8.1	5.8	1017	2.1
Automatic Registration	45.7	23.9	18.0	4.9	7.5	1013	2.0
Penalties for not using your Vote	17.3	16.5	22.2	14.2	29.9	1015	3.2
Other	44.4	14.8	22.2	7.4	11.1	27	2.3

## Analysis:

Young people have identified a number of measures to increase voter participation. Over 73% of young people stated that online voting was either a very important or important measure in encouraging voter participation. This is not surprising given that as digital natives they use and trust technology. Electronic voting does not have a good history in Ireland, given the general negative reaction to the introduction of electronic voting machines in 2001-2002. However, the method favoured by young people is remote electronic voting, i.e. via the internet. NYCI believes it should be possible for us to introduce a safe and secure yet accessible and convenient online voting system. In 2005 Estonia introduced remote electronic voting where all citizens can vote via the internet for a period prior to an election. Given the major problems with the voter registration system it is not surprising that automatic registration of young people when they reach 18 onto the electoral register was also identified as an important measure by which to increase turnout. A move in this direction should be possible given that all residents in Ireland have a PPS number. Once the person reaches 18 years they should be automatically added to the relevant electoral register. This may only be possible if the voter registration system is controlled and managed by a central agency, as proposed by NYCI and also now recommended by the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.

Young people also identified public awareness campaigns as a means to increase turnout. In the past NYCI has advocated for elections/referenda to be held on Saturdays/Sundays to

facilitate young people to vote. This was viewed by 57.4% as very important or important in encouraging turnout, but not as critical as we would have expected.

### **Contact/Communication with Local TDs/Councillors**

<b>Have you ever had any personal communication with your local T.D./Councillor?</b>		
	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	203	20.0
No	814	80.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1017</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<b>Have you ever had any personal communication with your local T.D./Councillor?</b>	<b>Age of Respondent</b>		
	<b>18 - 21 years</b>	<b>22 - 25 years</b>	<b>Total</b>
Yes	67	136	203
No	404	409	813
<b>Total</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>1016</b>

#### **Analysis:**

Only 20% of young people have ever had personal contact or communication with a local TD or councillor. Unsurprisingly contact increases with age, with 25% of 22-25 year olds compared to just 14% of 18-21 years olds ever having personal communication with their local T.D./Councillor.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **In light of these results NYCI recommend that:**

- Government to implement the recommendation of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship to establish an Independent Electoral Commission to oversee voter registration, voter education and the electoral process.
- Government to move towards automatic registration of young people when they reach the age at which they are entitled to vote (currently 18).
- Government to reduce the voting age to 16. Unlike 18 year olds who are very transitory (moving away from home to study or work), the vast majority of young people aged 16 are still in school, they could be easily added to the electoral register.

- Government to examine online voting system introduced in Estonia in 2005 with a view to introducing it here
- Politicians and Political Parties to develop strategies to increase their direct contact with young people.