

# POLL: Act now on abortion say voters

Health, education, social services should be priority before tax cuts | No wage increases yet, but private sector comes before public | Free allowance of water just won't be enough | Don't put abortion decision off until after next election | Repeal the 8th Amendment | Huge support for abortion after rape, when woman is suicidal or health/life of mother threatened

**JODY CORCORAN EXCLUSIVE**

Published 21/09/2014 | 02:30



Health Minister Leo Varadkar.

The Irish public has changed its attitudes on abortion after recent controversies related to the health and well-being of pregnant women, according to the latest Sunday Independent/Millward Brown opinion poll.

The most seismic shift is that a clear majority (56pc) now favour a new referendum to repeal the current position, which gives equal right to life to the mother and foetus.

Social change is also reflected in other key poll findings which show people to be generally more satisfied, still cautious but of the view that economic benefit should be used for the common good.

The poll finds voters prioritise spending on social services (32pc) over a cut to the Universal Social Charge (29pc) or taking more workers out of the higher tax rate (27pc).

More voters also think the time is not yet right for wage increases for workers, rising to a majority (51pc) who believe the economy has not improved enough to merit a pay hike for the public sector.

The recent controversy surrounding 'Miss Y', a young "suicidal" asylum seeker who sought an abortion but was ultimately delivered of a baby by caesarean section, added to the tragic death of [Savita Halappanavar](#) last year, has triggered a major shift in attitudes.

The poll shows that around two-thirds believe abortion is acceptable in specific circumstances:

- Where there is the threat of the mother's suicide (60pc), up seven points since May last year;
- Where a woman is pregnant as a result of rape (69pc), up one point;
- Where there is a medical risk to the mother's life other than suicide (72pc), up three points, and;
- Where there is a threat to the long-term health of the mother (68pc), up four points.

There is a less support (34pc), up four points, where a mother decides to have an abortion for other reasons.

The abortion findings coincide with the publication of [Department of Health](#) abortion guidelines which Health Minister Leo Varadkar has admitted could still change, as they do not provide absolute clarity.

Asked if they were personally in favour of, or against, holding a referendum to repeal the 8th amendment to the Constitution, which gives equal right to life to the mother and foetus, more than half (56pc) were in favour, 19pc against and 25pc did not know.

Support for a referendum is higher among supporters of Labour (80pc) and [Sinn Fein](#) (66pc), Dublin residents (62pc), those aged between 35-44 (60pc) and the better off, or AB voters (66pc).

And more than four-in-ten (40pc) disagree with the Government's decision to postpone tackling the abortion issue until after the next election, while 31pc agree and 29pc do not know.

In other findings, satisfaction with the Government has risen to its highest level since these tracking polls began: one-in-four (27pc) are now satisfied, up four points since July, while 62pc are still dissatisfied, down seven points, and 11pc do not know, up three points.

Satisfaction with each of the party leaders is also up, a finding which reflects increased optimism among voters: Enda Kenny (31pc) up four points; Joan Burton (30pc) up three points, now twice the satisfaction rating of predecessor Eamon Gilmore; Micheal Martin (30pc) up three points and Gerry Adams (28pc) up three points.

However, just one-in-seven are confident the Water Charge 'free allowance' will meet their needs: 61pc believe the allowance will not cover requirements; 14pc believe it will and 24pc do not know.

Including Don't Knows, the state of the parties is: [Fine Gael](#) (25pc) no change; [Fianna Fail](#) (21pc) up one point; Sinn Fein (22pc) down two points; Labour (9pc) up two points; Greens (1pc) no change and Independents/Others (23pc) no change.

Based on 970 interviews conducted nationwide between September 9 and 18, the poll shows public opinion to be more considered after the economic crash and austerity, findings which will give the Government food for thought.

Asked what the Government should do "first" in the Budget, a third (32pc) said to maintain or increase spending of services such as health, education and social services.

This key finding shows voters' priorities to be ahead of a cut to the universal Social Charge (29pc) and taxation changes to take more workers out of the higher rate of tax (27pc).

Asked what the Government should do "second", voters then opt for taking more out of the higher tax rate (37pc), cut the USC (35pc) and maintain/increase social services spending (30pc).

While the poll clearly indicates that voters would like more money in their pockets, it also shows there is strong demand for social services maintained or improved.

In another key finding, more voters than not believe there have been insufficient improvements in the economy to merit wage increases.

Asked if there had been enough improvement for wage increases in the private sector 44pc said no, 38pc said yes and 18 did not know.

However, attitudes harden significantly when it comes to pay hikes for the public sector: 51pc said no, 31pc said yes and 18pc did not know.

Opinion is equally divided on whether there is currently a property bubble: 39pc believe there is, 39pc believe there is not and 22pc do not know.

Those polled believed Lucinda Creighton (19pc) would be the most effective leader.

Sunday Independent

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