

GUIDE TO IRISH POLITICS

WHY IS THE CONSTITUTION SO IMPORTANT?

Ireland's Constitution is the supreme form of law in Ireland, the Courts and the Government have to act and make decisions that are consistent with the Constitution. Each time the Government wishes to change or amend the Constitution, it must do it by holding a referendum. A referendum gives the people of Ireland the opportunity to express their opinion and vote for or against the proposed change or amendment.

Since our politicians are only allowed to make laws which do not contradict the Constitution, it is legally impossible for the Government to bring in free, safe and legal abortion under the current Constitution. This is because of Section 40.3.3, which was added by referendum in 1983 and is also known as the 8th Amendment. It states: *"The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."* If this section is removed by referendum the Government will be legally able to bring in more progressive legislation on abortion.

HOW DO YOU CALL A REFERENDUM?

In order to call a constitutional referendum, the Government (a majority of both the Dail and the Seanad) must vote in favour of a Bill calling a referendum.

WHAT IS THE WHIP SYSTEM?

The Whip System is the term used when all of the elected representatives in a particular political party vote the same way based on how they are instructed to vote by the party leadership, for example if they were told to vote against a proposal to have a referendum on the 8th Amendment. This means that even if a politician does not agree with the position of their party they will still vote according to the party position. The opposite of the Whip System is a Free Vote. Several political parties have said that they will allow their TDs to have a Free Vote on repealing the 8th Amendment if a referendum is proposed.

HOW AM I REPRESENTED IN THIS DEBATE?

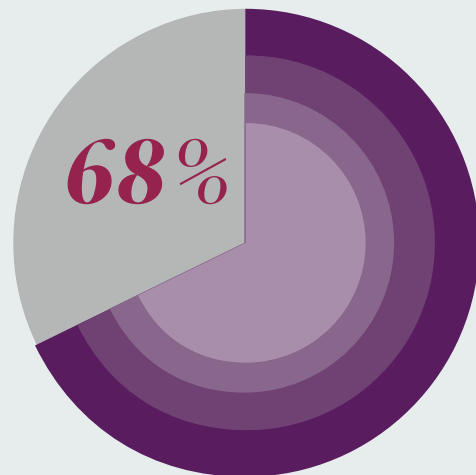
To have the opportunity to vote on repealing the 8th Amendment, we must first convince our elected representatives to hold a referendum. We have different types of elected representatives:

- 1** TD's, who are your national representatives in the Dáil. TDs are extremely important as they get to vote on whether or not to hold a referendum. Ensuring your TDs know your position on abortion is an important step in making a referendum on the 8th Amendment a reality.
- 2** Senators who sit in the Seanad, and who are appointed by the Taoiseach or elected by vocational panels and university graduates.
- 3** MEPs who are members of the European Parliament. MEPS don't get to vote on holding a referendum but they are still important and influential politicians worth engaging with on this issue.

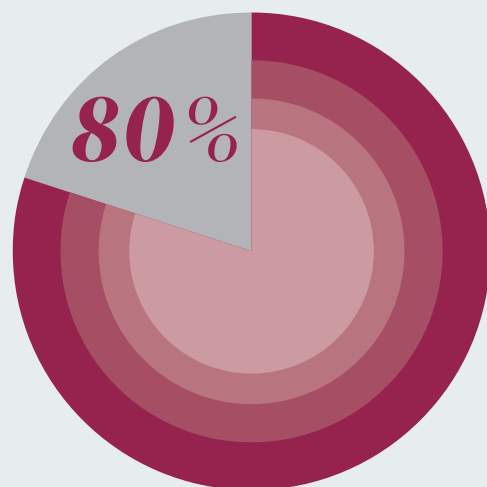
HOW DO I LET MY REPRESENTATIVES KNOW THAT I WANT THEM TO REPEAL THE EIGHTH AMENDMENT?

- 1** Find out who your TDs are by visiting whoismytd.com or calling in to your local Citizens Information Centre.
- 2** Email and write to your TDs explaining that this issue is important to you and you will only vote for a candidate who is pro-choice and makes a definite commitment to repealing the 8th Amendment.
- 3** The most powerful way that you can tell your TD you want change is to meet them face to face. Some politicians have public clinics where they meet their representatives to discuss issues of concern to them. If your TD does not have a regular clinic you can contact them to ask them to meet you.

IRISH WOMEN HAVE ABORTIONS AT A LATER STAGE IN THEIR PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF OUR LACK OF ABORTION ACCESS



68% OF WOMEN FROM THE REPUBLIC, 13,601 HAD TERMINATIONS (68%) THAT TOOK PLACE AT 3-9 WEEKS GESTATION



80% OF WOMEN FROM THE UK HAD HAD TERMINATIONS BEFORE THE 10TH WEEK IN 2014

Source: by the UK Department of Health (DH) and annual DH Abortion Statistics for England and Wales