

The role of the Irish Times opinion pages in  
the formulation of public opinion and shaping  
the political agenda in Ireland: A case study of  
the 2018 8th Amendment Referendum in  
Ireland.

By

Abigail Malone

Masters in Journalism and Public Relations

Faculty of Journalism & Media Communications

Griffith College Dublin

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## Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Public Relations and Journalism; Abigail Malone is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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## Abstract

The research question proposed is an analysis on ‘The role of the Irish Times opinion pages in the formulation of public opinion and shaping the political agenda in Ireland: A case study of the 2018 8th Amendment Referendum in Ireland.’ The opinion pages of print media have the ability to change minds and influence the political agenda. In an era where fake news and biased reporting is prevalent, the need for diverse viewpoints to be represented in a balanced manner in the opinion columns of national newspapers across the world is more urgent than ever. Representation within the powerful opinion columns is needed to encourage healthy discourse and democratic conversations and prevent individuals and politicians from being immersed in an echo chamber of their own opinion. It is widely recognised that newspapers, editors and journalists have a professional obligation to maintain a balance and impartiality in their publication.

This thesis demonstrates the ability that the opinion pages have to change the mind of the reader and be a powerful actor in setting the political agenda by influencing the elite members in society. The nature of opinion pages in the Irish Times, in relation to the 2018 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment referendum in Ireland, is analysed. The 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment recognised the equal right to life of the unborn child and mother and, with exception to limited circumstances, prevented abortion services being available in Ireland. The referendum in May 2018 sought to remove this amendment and legislate for abortion in Ireland. A mixed method research approach was utilised in this study which included qualitative and quantitative analyses on the persuasion of the selected opinion pages. The findings showed that the Irish Times opinion pages published in relation to abortion and the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in Ireland during the month of May 2018, before the referendum took place, were dominated by the pro-repeal, ‘Yes’, side of the abortion debate.

Out of the forty-nine Irish Times opinion pages studied, twenty-eight of the opinion pages proposed a repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in Ireland while twelve opinion pages argued in favour of keeping the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. In addition to this, six opinion pieces were neutral on the topic while three opinion pieces were excluded from the content analysis data set as they were irrelevant to the debate.

This research illustrates the need for a more varied discourse within national media outlets in Ireland regarding topical social and political issues. The research exemplified the need to challenge the biases prevalent in the opinion pages of national and widely read newspapers in Ireland and demand more representation of differing viewpoints within the national media.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is a study on the role of the Irish Times opinion pages in the formulation of public opinion and the shaping of the political agenda in Ireland: A case study of the 2018 8th Amendment Referendum in Ireland. This thesis has several aims which are summed up in the chosen research question. The purpose of this thesis is to firstly illustrate the power of the opinion pages in mainstream media. Basing the argument on published research and academic work, the author seeks to analyse the power of the opinion pages in influencing public opinion and influencing the political agenda in society. The dissertation centres on the Irish Times Newspaper and their published opinion pages regarding the Irish Referendum on the removal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment from the Irish Constitution. The author chose this topic as it is a relevant issue in Irish society today and it also allows for a clear qualitative and quantitative analysis on the number of published opinion pages in the lead up to the referendum. The thesis hypothesises that the opinion pages do have power to change the mind of the reader and influence the political agenda and that there is a responsibility on the media, specifically the Irish Times, to seek quantitative balance in the representation of both sides of a critical debate in their opinion pages. The need for balance and representation of varied opinions is particularly vital in the current cultural context in the Western World for several reasons which will be explored further below.

### Balance and Objectivity

Balance and objectivity have become fundamental building blocks of the profession of journalism (De Bruycker and Beyers, 2015). Objectivity can be defined as the 'lack of favouritism toward one side or another', or a 'freedom from bias', (Webster, 2019). When utilising this term in the context of journalism, journalistic objectivity ensures that journalists and newspapers do not openly choose one side of an argument or overtly advocate for one position over another (Ward, 2006). This is to allow for the presentation of facts and both sides of a debate over personal opinions or attitudes.

The history of objectivity and balanced reporting within journalism is attributed to Walter Lippmann during the late 1800's (Bybee, 1999). Lippmann argued that in order for newspapers and news reporting to survive, the audience needed to receive accurate accounts of events and not a romanticised unrealistic version of what was occurring (Bybee, 1999). In 1920, Lippmann and Charles Merz conducted research on the accuracy of news

reporting and biasness in a study entitled 'A Test of the News,' (Lippmann and Merz, 1920). Over a three-year period, Lippmann and Merz analysed the New York Times reporting on the Russian Bolshevik revolution starting in 1917. The New York Times was chosen for the study as it was widely recognised as the most accurate and fair paper at the time (Lippmann and Merz, 1920). Their research found that the extensive coverage was not accurate or balanced with Lippmann and Merz stating that the news stories were influenced by the aspirations and ideologies of the newsroom rather than the actual events that were occurring in Russia (Bybee, 1999).

Over time objectivity and balance have become fundamental characteristics of journalistic integrity and ethics. According to the journalist code of conduct of the National Union of Journalists in the UK and Ireland, journalists must 'strive[s] to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair,' (2011). Fairness and impartiality are also recognised as critical values in professional journalism worldwide. The Ethical Journalism Network recognises that on occasions where objectivity cannot be expected, such as cases of inhumane brutality, the provision of context is needed to ensure that the profession is a trustworthy and reputable agent for the readers (2019). Balanced representation in the opinion pages is in line with the foundations of the journalism profession.

### **Era of Fake News**

The need for balanced, accurate and fair newspaper coverage has become more urgent with the emergence of the 'fake news' phenomenon in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Mason et al, 2018). 'Fake News' is defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary as 'false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke,' (2019). Media academic Brian McNair also recognises the intentionality behind fake news and differentiates it from journalistic error or editorial misjudgement by defining it as the 'intentional disinformation (invention or falsification of known facts) for political and/or commercial purposes, presented as real news' (p. 38, McNair, 2018). Fake news has become prevalent in the past decade evidenced in major elections and campaigns in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and the European Union (Mason et al, 2018). The agents in fake news, as illustrated in the above definitions, are seeking to

misinform the public about critical political and social issues to activate a designated attitude or behaviour to bring about a desired outcome.

Misinformation in the media has always existed but the 2016 presidential campaign in the United States of America and subsequent presidency of Mr. Donald Trump has pushed the idea of 'fake news' into public discourse (Mason et al, 2018). Donald Trump regularly uses social media accounts, particularly Twitter, to bypass mainstream news outlets with political information and his own commentary on changes in America and abroad. Of note, Mr Trump has regularly used this platform to challenge instances of 'fake news' within certain media outlets (Mason et al, 2018).

Mason, Krutka and Stoddard point to the rise in technology and social media as a key factor in the concept of fake news being pushed to the foreground of Western society (2018). Due to the popularity and accessibility of social media platforms anyone can now become a reporter, writer, commentator and publisher. While the advantages of this new technology are well recognised a challenge is also posed to media outlets who seek to have their messages cut through the noise of social media chatter and bring reliable, balanced and accountable stories and opinions to their audiences (McNair, 2018).

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

The authors chosen media topic is the Irish print newspaper outlet 'The Irish Times'. The Irish time has been a prominent newspaper in Irish society since (O'Brien, 2008). The Irish Times recognises itself as a paper of record in Irish society. It is therefore a significant source to analyse in relation to the balance provided by the editorial team to diverse perspectives in the published opinion pages. This literature review will document the author's journey in discovering the relevant research that is published in relation to the Irish Times and its role in Irish society. The author will also identify the gap in the research in relation to this the drive for balance in the Irish Times opinion pages matter and base the research upon these findings.

### Literature Review

#### Historical Analysis on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum Ireland

The 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Irish Constitution dealt with the issue of the right to life of an unborn child and prevented abortion services being legalised in Ireland with the exception of specific cases where the mother's life was in danger. The 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment read '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,' (Irishstatutebook.ie, 2019).

On the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1983, the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment was added into the Constitution by a referendum result of 67%, recognizing the equal right to life of the mother and the unborn child (Thejournal.ie, 2014). Since its inclusion into the Constitution, clauses were added to the Amendment allowing for the freedom to travel abroad for abortion services and the right to information about abortion services in other states.

Since the enactment of the amendment campaigns began to seek the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and allow abortion services to be provided in Ireland. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2018 the Irish public voted by referendum to remove the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment from the Irish Constitution winning the referendum with 66.4% of the vote (Henley, 2018).

### Historical Analysis on Irish Times Paper

In his work 'The Irish Times; A History', Mark O'Brien documents the establishment of the paper and profiles the Irish Times' rise to prominence and recognition as Ireland's leading national newspaper (2008). The Irish Times, then named the 'Irish Times and Daily Advertiser' was founded in 1859 by Major Lawrence Knox with the first edition published on Tuesday March 29th, 1859. The paper was published on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays and had two daily editions; at 2pm and an evening edition at 5pm. Historians recognised that the Irish Times entered circulation at a time where the market for daily newspapers in Dublin was already overcrowded. However, the longevity and reputation that the Irish Times Paper would build was second to none (O'Brien, 2008). Knox who came from a wealthy Protestant family in southern Ireland established the paper to be an advocate for unionism with the United Kingdom. O'Brien noted that through his research he discovered that Knox had a very keen interest in the paper's editorial content and this influenced the coverage and reporting at the time (2008).

Knox passed away suddenly in 1873 and the paper was sold to Sir John Arnott under whose leadership the paper flourished and became known by the simpler name of the Irish Times (O'Brien, 2008). The unionist and nationalist debates were covered in great detail by the paper with a noticeable shift in the narrative, evident in the Irish Times publications in 1873, which gave glowing reviews to members and politicians of the Home Rule Association (O'Brien, 2008). It is evident from the paper's origins that the political context of the time played a critical role in influencing the papers reporting. It is also evident that the paper was a key vehicle for communication by political actors at the time.

The Irish Times began to change dramatically from 1963 with a new editor in Douglas Gageby (O'Brien, 2008). O'Brien notes that 'Gageby presided over the transformation of the Irish Times from being the newspaper of the Protestant minority, albeit one with a liberal Catholic readership, to being a truly national newspaper', (pg.165, 2008). Even at this time the Irish Times was having a great influence on Irish society. Gageby took the reins and navigated the paper to success through changing times in Ireland specifically in relation to the social issues of the time. O'Brien writes that 'Gageby assembled a team of journalists

that sometimes reflected but also sometimes led the process of social change throughout the 1960's', (pg.166, O'Brien, 2008).

The appointment of the first female editor of the Irish Times was a significant historic milestone for the paper. In October 2002, Geraldine Kennedy became the first female editor of the Irish Times, illustrating the change and increased diversity in the gender roles within the Irish Times. In a move that is marked as one of the first worldwide, The Irish Times became one of the first 30 newspapers in the world to operate a website for the paper in 1944. This website and the online element of the paper have progressed since that time (The Irish Times, 2018). In its latest figure of readership, the Irish Times boasts a daily readership of upwards of 650,000 people (The Irish Times, 2018).

### Thematic Analysis on the Irish Times Paper

#### *Theme 1: The Paper of Record*

From the establishment of The Irish Times in 1859, by Major Lawrence Knox, the Irish Times has identified itself in two diverse ways. Each self-chosen identity has been reflected in the behaviours, commentaries, opinion pieces and the published work of the paper (O'Brien, 2008). In his work 'A History of the Irish Times', Mark O'Brien identifies how The Irish Times viewed itself as a paper of record for many decades on from its conception in 1859 (2008). Robert Park describes a newspaper of record as one which recognises itself as professional and authoritative in its conduct (1923). Supported by wide circulation and often publishing legal notices, The Irish Times served Irish people as a paper of record.

In addition to this O'Brien recognises how key changes in the behaviours in the Irish Times established the paper as a paper of record within society (2008). During his time as editor Douglas Gageby understood the value of specialised reporting to establish the paper as an accurate, educated and specialist paper. Gageby appointed journalists to specific fields such as education, economics, diplomacy, religion and business. These appointments encouraged expertise and sources within each field and enhanced the papers standing with the public (2008).

However, in more recent times the Irish Times has gone through an identity revolution and no longer defines itself as 'a paper of record' but rather 'a paper of relevance,' (The Irish Times, 2018). According to the Irish Times Editor Paul O'Neil, the paper offers 'a platform for

critical, constructive and divergent comment in the different spheres including business, politics and public affairs, culture, the environment, health and education. We have moved in recent years from being a newspaper of record to a newspaper of reference,' (The Irish Times, 2018). This significant change has been reflected in The Irish Times commentary, journalism and publications. No longer does the paper views itself as a medium which gives an account of history contemporaneously but rather it views itself as an active player in the society that is ever changing. As noted above, the establishment of the paper as an active player in society was evident through the selection of journalists and publication of various pieces of work. O'Brien notes that 'Gageby assembled a team of journalists that sometimes reflected but also sometimes led the process of social change throughout the 1960's', (pg.166, O'Brien, 2008).

Terence Brown's book 'The Irish Times' (2015) recognises the position that the paper has in Irish society; he notes that the paper is essentially a barometer to where the Irish people are at in a political, social and cultural context. His narrative work charts the history of the Irish Times as a paper of record that, as a paper with Protestant roots, was not entwined with the Roman Catholic Church's power in Ireland and he therefore positions it as a reliable source to analyse the changing Ireland (Brown, 2015).

### *Theme 2: Female Voices*

The Irish Times has been in existence since the mid 1800's yet women journalists or contributors were not seen on the pages of the paper until the 1970's, over a century later. While women were late contributors to The Irish Times news room their impact and work has been one of the most notable elements of the Irish Times in the latter years (Gillespie, 2003).

In her work 'Changing the Times', Elgy Gillespie, who herself was a female contributor to the Irish Times, documents the massive impact that women journalists and contributors have had on the paper (2015). She particularly notes the impact of Mary Maher, the first ever woman's page editor of the Irish Times in the 1970's. The Irish Times was the first paper to have a women's only page, edited by a female writer. This change influenced other national papers to establish their own dedicated page to women (O'Brien, 2008). Gillespie comments that this change occurred simultaneously with many other significant and historical changes for Irish women in Irish society (2003). Gillespie quotes Mary Maher who stated that 'Irish

women were invented', when the first woman's page, entitled 'Women First' was published (p,30, Gillespie, 2003). Maher edited the 'Women First' page before Maeve Binchy took over the role until she was succeeded by Christina Murphy (O'Brien, 2008).

The 'Women First' page was retired in October 1974, two years after it was first included in the paper. However, this was not due to the failure of the column but rather the inclusion of women's stories and news in the mainstream news and paper. In a farewell column Murphy stated that women's affairs was now 'mainstream news in its own right' and that women's issues had moved from being a 'frowned upon, suspect fringe to an important multi-pronged lobby' which had moved the women's affairs from the confines of one page to the 'front pages of the newspapers where it belongs', (Murphy, pg. 170, cited in O'Brien, 2008).

The appointment of Geraldine Kennedy to Editor of the Irish Times in 2002 was a significant achievement for women in the media. While Geraldine was not the first female editor in Ireland she was recognised as the first female editor of the Irish Times with her appointment coinciding with the continually changing role of women in the media (Gillespie, 2003).

Gillespie's book compiles the work of some of the most notable female journalists in the Irish Times including Maeve Binchy, Christina Murphy, Geraldine Kennedy and Nell McCafferty. In addition, the current female journalists working in the Irish times have also acted as a reflection to the current social changes in Ireland and are 'reinventing' what it means to be a woman in Irish society (Gillespie, 2003). As this memoir focuses on the years 1961 – 1981, the continuing impact of female journalists such as Miriam Lord, Breda O'Brien and Una Mullaly is of particular interest in current society and not documented in Gillespie's work.

### *Theme 3: The Irish Times Opinion Pages*

In describing the role of The Irish Times in Irish society, Editor Paul O'Neil stated that 'The Irish Times occupies a special position as a pacemaker for change in the society which it serves,' (The Irish Times, 2018). The author would argue that while there has been much analysis, as outlined above, on the general history of The Irish Times and the contribution of female journalists in the years 1961 – 1981, there has been little research done on the 'special position' of the paper as a 'pacemaker for change' in Irish society. The opinion pages

that the Irish Times publishes are arguably a major voice in the discourse in society with a daily circulation of 79,406 copies in 2018 (Slattery, 2019). However there appears to be little analysis on their influence and power to change public opinion and impact on the political agenda in Ireland. The author identifies the lack of research on the impact of the Irish times opinion pages on Irish society as a significant and interesting area for further study particularly in relation to recent social changes in Ireland. Additionally, the author identifies the lack of analysis on the quantitative balance of the opinion pages in the publication. With regards to specific social changes in Ireland, including the referendum to remove the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment from the Irish Constitution, the need for a quantitative analysis of the voices that are published in the opinion pages is prevalent. A study on the proportion of published opinion pages for one side of a referendum, compared to another within the Irish Times is a research gap relevant for society today.

### Theory Analysis on Opinion Pages and Power

#### *Purpose of an opinion page*

Within print media opinion pages have become a key component of the newspaper industry. It is important to recognise the origin and the purpose of these pages.

In 1841, led by Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune, newspapers began including the view of the paper on specific topics in society. This led to the establishment of an 'Editorial' (Goodbody and Stoddard, 1947). An editorial is defined as a 'newspaper or magazine article that gives the opinions of the editors or publishers,' (Merriam-webster.com, 2019). An editorial can also be described as an article where an editor articulates the papers position on critical issues in society (Mason et al, 2018). Editorials are usually dedicated an individual page with the name of the author omitted to draw attention to the opinion and content of the article.

The rise in debates on radio and television channels in the 1930's created a need for newspapers and print media to offer opinions on topical issues in society (Goodbody and Stoddard, 1947). Noting the desire for analysis and professional opinion newspapers began to give space to opinion-based journalism giving rise to the prominence of the editorial page.

In the late 1900's it became apparent that while the editorial page contained the prominent opinion of the newspaper there was a need for a contrasting voice to be heard and reach out to a varied readership. The opinion pages were created as a forum to discuss various topics from a critical perspective that would contrast the editorial (Socolow, 2010). An opinion page is defined as 'a page of special features usually opposite the editorial page of a newspaper, (Merriam-webster.com, 2019). The opinion pages of major newspapers are also regularly named an 'op-ed', meaning an opposite to the editorial, with the purpose of providing a contrasting point of view to the paper's editorials and a commentary on current issues (Socolow, 2010).

The New York Times states that the opinion pages purpose is to be both 'the voice of The Times, and to challenge it,' (Tumin, 2017). Tumin elaborates further on the purpose of the opinion pages stating 'The objective is rather to afford greater opportunity for exploration of issues and presentation of new insights and new ideas by writers and thinkers who have no institutional connection with The Times and whose views will very frequently be completely divergent from our own,' (2017). James Bennet, editor of the editorial page of the New York Times in 2017 reiterated this view on the purpose of the opinion pages stating that the purpose of the opinion pages is 'to supply readers with a steady stream of big ideas and provocative arguments, and to entertain them. It should be an exciting experience and often a challenging one,' (cited in Tumin, 2017).

Newspapers across the globe recognise the purpose of the opinion pages as being an arena where dissenting voices are heard and unconventional points of view are argued (FinancialTimes.com, 2019). The Financial Times in the United Kingdom state that they want their opinion pieces to be 'readable articles that make strong arguments... which demolish conventional wisdom or dissent from opinions we have already published,' (Financial Times, 2019). The prevalent theme amongst world recognised newspapers is the desire for opinion pages to reflect diverse viewpoints and to challenge the status quo.

If the opinion pages are the main area within a publication for a diverse view to be heard it is arguably more critically important than ever to ensure that the message in the opinion piece is in contrast to the stance of the paper (Tumin, 2017). Not only does this approach successfully fulfil the purpose of the opinion pages but it provides an intellectual space for

discussion, debate and critical self-evaluation of the reader on their own points of view and perspectives. If the opinion pages are not challenging the reader's preconceived ideas then the newspaper industry runs the risk of catering to readers who are living in an echo chamber of their own beliefs and attitudes (Day and Golan, 2005).

#### *Opinion Pages Power to Change Public Opinion*

Terun A. van Dijk, a recognised author on the prevalence of opinions and ideologies in the media, acknowledged the power of the opinion piece in today's society stating that opinion columns function to 'critique and advise specific (often elite) groups or institutions, and hence involve (power) relationships between the media, politicians and businessmen and readers, (p.10, 1995).

The power and influence of opinion pieces in print and online media mentioned above is widely recognised. Research points to the levels and forms of power that an opinion piece wields. Opinion pieces have the power to change the opinion of the reader as the consumer of news and also have significant power to influence policy makers and the political agenda (Coppock, Ekins and Kirby, 2018).

In 2018, researchers found that an opinion piece is an extremely effective means of changing a person's mind and informing their long-term opinion about critical matters in society (Coppockm Etkins & Kirby, 2018). Researchers Alexander Coppock, Emily Etkins and David Kirby of Yale University and the Cato Institute recognised the prevalence of opinion articles in newspapers and recognised the time and energy that was invested in the authoring of these articles (2018). They sought to assess if the opinion pieces had any lasting impact on readers and were readers persuaded by the arguments made.

The study involved 3,567 participants, who were randomly allocated into a 'control' group or one of five 'treatment' groups. While the control group were not given an op-ed to read, each treatment group were given one op-ed to read. The available op-eds proposed libertarian policy positions on subjects including climate change, federal spending and taxation. The control group, those without an opinion piece', was surveyed to gather the views of the members on the libertarian policies contained in the other other opinion pages. After reading the articles the opinion of the treatment groups on the chosen issues was recorded. A second survey was completed by the readers ten days and thirty days later.

These results were then compared to responses given by the control group at each stage of the evaluation (Coppock, Ekins and Kirby, 2018).

The results indicated that individuals in the treatment groups who were exposed to the opinion pieces changed their views in support of the advocated position in the article. The experiment reported that while 50% of the people in the control group supported the articles position, 65%-70% stated their agreement with the author of the opinion piece immediately after reading the article. The researchers also noted that the views of the participants changed only slightly between the ten day survey and the thirty day survey indicating that the impact on the readers opinion was long lasting (Coppock, Ekins and Kirby, 2018).

Significantly the research also illustrated the power of an opinion piece on a reader who may be predisposed to the opposite opinion, i.e. a non-believer of a certain point of view. This study found that both Democrats and Republicans shifted their views in favour of the opinion piece in roughly equal amounts (Coppock, Ekins and Kirby, 2018). This research illustrates the significant impact that opinion pieces can have on members of the public and the ability for opinion pieces to change the minds of the readers. Of important note, the study also highlights the power of an opinion piece to change a mind, reflected in the replicated responses between the participants of a Republican and Democrat background.

However, despite the significant findings of this research there are those who argue that the power of the media is held in too high esteem and it is the readers, the consumer who in fact drive and influence the media cycle and content reported on.

Within media and communications theory, the uses and gratification theory exemplifies the above point of the critics. The uses and gratification theory is a theoretical approach to understanding how readers seek out and engage with news and reporting that meets a certain need that they have (Pietilä, 2005). The theory proposes that the consumer decides what they want to hear or read for a social, political, emotional or intellectual need. Commentators argue that it is the gratification of this need that drives the discourse and content in media as news outlets seek to meet the demand that is apparent in readers or consumers (Pietilä, 2005).

By characterising the news reader as a latent and inactive recipient of news, and in particular, of the opinion pages underestimates the role that the reader themselves plays in being influenced by the opinion page (Shaw, 1979). It could be argued that while the opinion pages are powerful, the readers know what they are looking for and the opinion page reaffirms this in them, playing no role in changing their mind but rather reaffirming an already established point of view. This argument is of particular significance in today's society where individuals are increasingly becoming more active in their engagement with opinion pages and news through varied forms of media including online and social platforms (Shaw, 1979).

However, while the uses and gratification theory is of critical importance when analysing the behaviours of readers and media consumers the objective power, evident through scientific research, that the opinion pages have on readers cannot be discounted and remains a critical finding. In contrast those who propose the uses and gratification theory as a means to discount the power of media, the finding that the opinion pages even convinced 'non believers'; those against the proposed view in the article, to change their minds is evidence of the power of an opinion page (Coppock, Ekins and Kirby, 2018).

#### *Power of Opinion Pages to Influence Policy Makers*

Opinion pieces have the power to set the political agenda and influence policy makers. By setting the agenda for discourse, comment and debate in society the opinion pages play an integral role in advocating for policy changes, referendum outcomes and the topics on the political agenda (A. van Dijk, 1995). This power is evident over a prolonged period of time, through consistent messaging and discourse framing. McNair pointed out that the opinion pages give the press the 'power to set the dominant political agenda elaborated over weeks, months and years, in editorials, columns and other forms of proactive opinionated journalism' (p.30, 2018).

The ability of the opinion pages in relation to political opinion and power was evident in Coppock, Ekins and Kirby's research (2018). The experiment illustrated the ability of the opinion pieces to change the minds of those considered the 'elite' within in society (Coppock, Ekins and Kirby, 2018). The same experiment and surveys were carried out with 2,169 elites which included journalists, law professors, social policy academics,

congressional staff and more. The research indicated that upon reading of the opinion piece the 'elite' reader's opinion shifted in favour of the article (Coppock, Ekins and Kirby, 2018).

Across Western society the media and news are regarded as an important component in the political and social sphere by communicating key policies, issues and changes to wider society. However, the role of the media is no longer solely viewed as a vehicle through which message is communicated from the policy makers and elite to the public (Mason et al, 2018). In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the media is established as a political agent in itself with a powerful role in changing society. Within the UK in particular the status of an opinion page contributor can wield much power in influencing the political agenda and subsequent policy changes within Britain. So powerful is the opinion page writer that they are recognised as a powerful political force bringing visibility to certain topics and arguments to influence the public sphere (Kettle, 2000). Martin Kettle recognises the group of opinion contributors as the 'columnist's party', who write regular opinion pieces about domestic politics (2002).

However, it is important to note that the ability of the opinion pages to influence public opinion is not necessarily a negative role but is also a critical part in maintaining accountability and transparency of politicians and powerful personalities in society. The rise in 'journalistic interventionism' has played a critical role in informing the public about crises within government while also calling on politicians and legislators to deliver on promises that they made to the electorate (p.1, Hanitzsch, Hanusch and Lauerer, 2014). In this role the power of the media to influence the political agenda is widely recognised. Coppack, Ekins and Kirby's research reaffirmed how the opinion pages utilise in influencing public opinion by influencing the 'elite' members in society, those who are key players in setting the political agenda (2018).

The research outlined above demonstrates the power of the opinion pages to change the mind of readers, both those whose views are originally in line with the author and those who views were opposite to that of the authors. The role of the opinion page contributors in influencing the public opinion and also that of elite members in society is of significance. The opinion pages have the ability to set the public agenda by demanding accountability and transparency and commenting for topical issues in society (Hanitzsch, Hanusch and Lauerer, 2014).

### Communication Theory Analysis

As mentioned above, changes have occurred within The Irish Times and within Irish culture simultaneously throughout history. The author seeks to analyse select Irish Times opinion pages in relation to the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum in Ireland. The author seeks to analyse the power of the opinion pages in influencing public opinion and setting the political agenda and also to analyse if equal opportunity was given to both sides of the argument in the quantitative allocation of the opinion page publishing's. As the Irish Times in a newspaper outlet and the opinion pages contain strong messages for public consumption, communication and audience theories need to be recognised in analysing the opinion pages and the way readers engage with media content.

### *Mass Media: Hypodermic Needle Theory*

The hypodermic needle theory states that mass media, including print media, has a direct, immediate and powerful effect on those who consume it (Shaw, 1979). The theory proposes that the media is like a needle burrowing into the thoughts of the reader and filling them with the specific message, opinion or information contained in the media (Shaw, 1979). The message would then encourage the audience to engage in a desired response, suggested through the media. The hypodermic need theory originated in the mid 1900's during a period of time where people recognised that the media was having a significant and notable impact on the behaviours of individuals in society. The key characteristic of this theory is that it constructs the individual and the audience as a passive actor; incapable of objectively analysing the news content it receives (Fearing, 1945). By recognising the audience as passive, this theory portrays the media as the powerful influencer in the reader and media relationship.

While the hypodermic needle theory was prevalent in the 1900's critics argue that the theory is not as relevant in understanding the behaviours of the 21<sup>st</sup> century audience. The hypodermic needle theory underestimates the ability of the audience to think critically and engage in with the messaging the media produces. The theory also fails to recognise the ability of the reader to analyse the messages and conclude an opinion in line with, or despite, the papers messaging (McQuail, 1987).

In analysing the opinion pieces produced by the Irish Times, the author notes the importance of the hypodermic needle theory while recognising the limitations to the theory

in today's society. As the hypodermic needle theory acknowledges the important role the media plays in informing and framing public opinion it is a valuable communication theory when assessing the power of the opinion pages on public opinion. Additionally, this theory highlights the need for equal coverage to be given to both sides of a debate within the opinion pages, particularly when the behaviour that is desired from the messaging is a political vote on an important social issue such as the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in Ireland.

#### *Mass Media: Uses and Gratification Theory*

In contrast to the hypodermic needle theory, which identifies the impact media has on people, the uses and gratification theory approaches media from a different perspective and analyses the way people and audiences engage with media (Blumler, 1979). The uses and gratification theory identifies the media consumer as someone who can analyse, interpret, integrate and ignore media messages that they are presented with. As a result, the audience is the powerful agent in their relationship with the media (Ruggiero, 2000). This theory explains the casual and formal interaction of the audience with their selected media product.

Another key element to this theory is that the audience are an active agent, seeking out the media they want for their own individual use or desire (Ruggiero, 2000). This is a significant characterisation of the audience as it is the consumer's preference which drives their choice of media and message consumption (Blumler, 1979).

Researchers argue that while the Uses and Gratification theory educates on why people use specific media outlets, it fails to give an account of what meaning the consumers received from the messages (Blumler, 1979). This is a significant criticism as the intellectual or behavioural response in the reader, upon reading a message, is extremely important when understating media engagement and yet is not accounted for with this theory (McQuail, 1987).

In analysing the opinion pieces produced in the Irish Times, the Uses and Gratification theory is significant as it recognises the patterns in the audience behaviours. Additionally, it is important to note that if a reader is choosing their media for their own use, the need for diversity of viewpoint and messaging is more necessary than ever to prevent readers being in an echo chamber of their own ideologies. It raises the question that if readers are

choosing the Irish Times to reaffirm their pre-established views, that in order for the paper to fulfil its role challenging the status quo and the mainstream public opinion, that the paper give equal opportunity to viewpoints on both sides of a debate or social issue.

Additionally, as the Uses and Gratification Theory identifies the media as the mirror to society (Blumler, 1979), reflecting the choices, opinions, behaviours and motivations of the people, there is an argument for the paper to fully reflect the complete population and not just those who believe with the writer's opinions.

## **Conclusion**

The author has identified The Irish Times as a significant and powerful player in Irish society and discourse. Research on The Irish Times has focused on its history with a limited account given on the female writers who contributed to the paper. The author has identified a gap in the research on The Irish Times. There appears to be little research or analysis on the themes, perspectives and balance in opinion pages in The Irish Times. The author seeks to analyse if Irish Times is balanced in the publishing of opinion pieces from different points of view.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### Search Methodology

The author recognised the need to utilise a balanced and transparent method in selecting the opinion pages to be analysed in this study. In order for research and results to be objective and reliable the search methods must be impartial and accurate so that the result is not skewed (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). The research included a critical analysis of each opinion piece regarding the '8<sup>th</sup> Amendment' and 'abortion' over a specific time frame. Each opinion piece underwent critical qualitative analysis to ascertain the viewpoint of the opinion piece. Quantitative analysis was utilised to establish the number of opinion pieces published on both side of the 8th Amendment debate over the specified time frame. A more detailed account of the data collection and analysis is given below.

The following steps were followed in the selecting of the opinion pages that would be utilised in this study. Firstly, the author gained a subscription account to the Irish Times newspaper online to allow access to all newspapers and Sunday newspapers that the Irish Times had published which were available online. By subscribing to the Irish Times newspaper there would be full access to all articles published by the Irish Times. This is important in order for the results to be accurate. If the author did not have access to all published work then the results would not be accurate and reliable.

The second step was the selection criteria. The Irish Times website allowed for a search to be conducted through various categories. The search was narrowed down by selecting the 'Opinion' category which provided the published opinion pages. This removed other news articles, letters and editorials from the data. This is significant as it removes other publishing's which are not covered in the category of opinion pages.

Of critical importance to the selection of the opinion pages for this research was the search criteria used to identify relevant opinion pages in relation to the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment referendum. The author decided to limit the search term phrases to 'abortion' and '8<sup>th</sup> Amendment' for several reasons. The opinion pages that were available under the search terms '8th Amendment' and 'abortion' resulted in the same opinion pieces which had a direct and obvious message about the referendum on abortion in Ireland. Any of the opinion pieces that were present in the search that included the word 'abortion' but were

not related to the referendum were analysed and a justification for their exclusion from the data was given. The author recognised that selecting only the opinion pages with the search terms '8<sup>th</sup> Amendment' and 'abortion' narrowed down the data to focus on the specific chosen topic and eliminated specific opinion pages that did not focus on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum in Ireland.

The time frame for analysis was important to establish. When the chosen search terms of '8<sup>th</sup> Amendment' and 'abortion' was inputted for search into the Opinion category on the Irish Times website the search results that were generated dated from January 2015 to present day. The author decided to analyse all results generated from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018 to 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018. The author decided on this time frame for several reasons. Firstly, by including all opinion pages from May 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 to voting day the author could analyse the most recent and varied opinion pages regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. By analysing all opinion pages present there could be no bias or partiality in the research. Secondly the author decided to only include opinion pages up to the day of the vote as the focus of the research is on the ability of the opinion pages to influence public opinion and the public behaviour would then be evident in the vote. Additionally, regardless of which way the vote went on the referendum it would be expected that there would be more coverage on a winning side post vote which could influence the data selected.

## **Data and Analysis**

This research seeks to analyse the opinion pages published by the Irish Times regarding the specific topic of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum in Ireland between the period of 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018 and 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018. In order to assess the level of balance given to both sides of the debate this research will utilise both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods.

Critical analysis will be utilised to ascertain the views of each opinion piece. The content, messaging and author will be analysed in line with each opinion piece published to ascertain the view of the opinion piece and if it either for, against or neutral in relation to the removal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment from the Irish Constitution. Critical analysis is the careful analysis and examination of a text to identify the viewpoints and arguments contained in the selected text. Critical analysis is necessary in this research to gain reliable and accurate data (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). Qualitative critical analysis will allow each opinion piece to be

categorised as either for, against or neutral to the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment from the Irish Constitution.

The critical analysis method will be based upon the template of analysing opinion pieces by Scott Snair (2008). Snair states that opinion pieces, which are often argumentative in nature, make a huge impact on the reader and therefore need to be analysed critically through a reliable and consistent framework (2008). Snair's framework allows the researcher to delve into opinion pieces and the context in which the opinion page was published including elements like the writers' background, the tone of the article and the controlling idea in the piece (2008). This method will be utilised to qualitatively evaluate each piece of work ascertain the stance of the opinion page in relation to the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment referendum.

Snair's method of analysing opinion pieces includes seven steps when critically analysing an opinion piece. The seven categories are; acknowledge the writers background, analyse main points, consider the tone, consider the topic, identify the controlling idea, synthesise the opinion piece and scrutinise the messages (2008).

Qualitative analysis has been chosen for this research project as it is a recognised and reputable research method. Qualitative analysis deals with the intangible inferred and experienced meaning that can be derived from research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). It is not concerned with numbers and figures but takes meaning from the language and experience that is presented. Denzin and Lincoln describe qualitative research as "an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them,' (p.3, 2005).

Researchers point out the multiple benefits of qualitative research. This form of research allows for explanations of complex occurrences, and with regard to the analysis of opinion pages, it allows each opinion piece to be accurately analysed in a detailed, objective yet specific manner (Bansal, Smith and Vaara, 2018). Additionally, qualitative research allows for detailed meaning and data to be drawn from non-quantifiable data like opinion pages for example. By qualitatively analysing a nonquantifiable piece of work the data can be

reliably used to give explanations for attitudes and human behaviour and also utilised to compare to other similar or differing data findings (Bansal, Smith and Vaara, 2018).

Once the qualitative analysis has been conducted the author will use quantitative analysis to identify the number of opinion pages for, against or neutral regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum in Ireland in the Irish Times newspaper from May 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 to May 25<sup>th</sup> 2018.

Quantitative analysis involves the collection of data that is measurable and can be mathematically calculated to generate information and inferred meaning (Venkatesh, Brown and Bala, 2013). Cambridge dictionary defines quantitative analysis as 'relating to an amount that can be measured,' (Dictionary.cambridge.org, 2019). Quantitative analysis in sociological terms allows for statistics to be utilised when analysing sociological data. In contrast to qualitative measures, quantitative research gives a bottom-line analysis (Venkatesh, Brown and Bala, 2013). In relation to the research on opinion pages, quantitative analysis allows for the balance between both sides of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment debate, that is displayed in the opinion pages to be analysed.

Quantitative analysis is beneficial in research for several reasons. Quantitative research provides academics and researchers with effective and accurate methods of studying a large sample size of data and getting objective results (Vogt, 2011). When utilising a quantitative method research is gathered objectively and systematically which allows for accurate meaning and analysis to be drawn from the data without being subjected to biases or influencing factors, in a sense the numbers speak for themselves (Vogt, 2011).

The mix methods research of qualitative and quantitative analysis is critical in obtaining accurate and reliable data in this research question (Venkatesh, Brown and Bala, 2013). The qualitative analysis of the content of each opinion will identify the message and stance contained in the article. The quantitative analysis will then allow these opinion pieces to be numerically compared to analyse how much opportunity and balance there was in the allocation of opinion pages to both sides of the debate regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the Irish Times newspaper.

### **Ethical Challenges**

The author recognises that a challenge may arise when trying to analyse the specific message that is proposed in each opinion piece. As the chosen data are opinion pieces, the

author recognises that there will be nuances, latent meanings and debate even within each opinion piece. However, due to the nature of the data set, that is that each opinion piece must have that; an opinion, the author proposes that accountable qualitative analysis will overcome this challenge. The chosen critical qualitative analysis method will be utilised to systematically analyse the content and conclude reliable generalisations from it (Haggarty, 2009).

The author recognises that it will not be possible to make an explicit link between the opinion pieces published in the Irish Times and the outcome of the referendum on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in Ireland. The author recognises that there are numerous known and unknown factors at play in the public voting behaviours including education, life experience, socio-economic background and religious affiliation (Shamir, 1994). However, the author has overcome this challenge by independent researching and analysing the power of an opinion piece and secondly analysing the number of opinion pages for each side of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment debate that were published in the Irish Times. If the opinion pages have the power to change minds, to influence opinion and to impact on public policy, and if the opinion pages were not balanced in coverage than a conclusion may be drawn that the opinion pages advocated for one side of the debate over the other and that this had an impact on Irish society.

A challenge may be found in the potential for the data to be selected to favour one side of the debate or to illustrate a position of the Irish Times newspaper. The author recognises that the possibility for a skewed and partial result may most likely occur through the selection of the opinion pages for analyses. To overcome this challenge the author has specified in detail the selection process for each opinion piece and chosen to count every opinion piece that comes under the search term '8<sup>th</sup> Amendment', between the chosen dates in the data set.

## Chapter Four: Analysis

The chosen method to analyse each opinion piece is Scott Snair's seven steps to analyse an opinion piece (2008). Each opinion piece published by the Irish Times found under the search term the 'abortion' will be critically analysed through this qualitative method to ascertain the viewpoint of the opinion piece. An explanation of the template analysis is given below with the analysis for each opinion piece is completed below. In ascertaining the stance of each article on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum the author selected three categories; support for the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment, against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and neutral regarding the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Any article that brought negative coverage to either side of the debate was considered to be in support or against the referendum respectively.

### Qualitative Analysis

#### Opinion Piece Template Analysis

**Title:** What is the title of the Opinion Piece?

**Date Published:** On what date was the opinion page published?

**Writer and Background:** What is the name and description of the author?

**Analyse:** What are some key phrases in the opinion piece?

**Tone:** What tone does the author use?

**Topic:** What is the topic of the opinion piece?

**Controlling Idea:** What is the key idea the author puts forward?

**Synthesise:** What is the inferred meaning in the piece?

**Scrutinize:** What is the foundation of the authors argument?

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Is the opinion piece for or against the removal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment?

### Opinion Piece 1

**Title:** Referendum on Eighth about trusting politicians – not women or doctors.

**Date Published:** Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Nick Parks is the executive director of Evangelical Alliance Ireland and a pastor of an evangelical church. He has several books included those titled 'Birth Equality' and 'The Gospel and Human Rights' (Nickpark.ie, 2019).

**Analyse:** According to the World Health Organisation 'Ireland currently has a healthcare system that is one of the safest in the world for pregnant women.' The article also states that Irish people 'have all seen the breath-taking speed at which politicians' principles can "evolve" – whether it be with respect to water charges, abortion or whether the US President merits an invitation to our country or not.'

**Tone:** Persuasive and questioning.

**Topic:** The possible removal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment from the Irish Constitution and trust in politicians.

**Controlling Idea:** Irish people are not being asked to trust women or doctors in relation to the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and legislation for abortion but to trust politicians. The public are being asked to give the politicians a blank cheque to legislate for abortion services in Ireland as they deem appropriate. The author advises that this is not a good idea as politician's principles and decisions can change at any time.

**Synthesise:** The latent and inferred stance is to reject a repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment on the basis that politicians are not be trusted with a blank cheque book to legislate for abortion services.

**Scrutinize:** The opinion piece speaks about the legislative process, politicians previous changing behaviour, and the wording of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment referendum and proposed bill to back up the opinion piece.

**Stance regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 2

**Title:** Fintan O'Toole: 8th Amendment demands punishment for women

**Date Published:** 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Fintan O'Toole is a columnist for the Irish Times and has written books on Irish history, politics, society and culture and was awarded the European Press Prize 2017 and the Orwell Prize for Journalism 2017 (Royal Irish Academy, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author states that the constitution ban on abortion means 'Ireland too extreme even for mainstream social conservatives', and that the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment is 'the lunatic fringe of anti-abortion activism.' The author states that states that the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment punishes women and conclude stating that 'If you do not defend punishment, you have to get rid of the Eighth.'

**Tone:** Factual and confident.

**Topic:** The illegal nature of obtaining an abortion Ireland due to the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**Controlling Idea:** Mr O'Toole makes reference to the prosecution of women who obtain abortions and states that this is the 'constitutional imperative in Ireland'.

**Synthesise:** Mr O'Toole infers that any supporter of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment is a supporter of punishment of women for having an abortion stating 'If you defend the Eighth, you defend punishment,'

**Scrutinize:** The author draws upon the legality of the Constitution and the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment to make his argument.

**Stance Regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 3

**Title:** Removal of Eighth would create law more inhumane than Britain's

**Date Published:** 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** David Alton is a previous member of the House of Lords and a long-time anti-abortion campaigner. David Alton sought to bring a private members bill to the House of Commons in the UK in 1987 (David Alton, 2019).

**Analyse:** A comparison between Britain's Abortion Act of 1987 and the proposed legislation for the bill once the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment is repealed is made. The author states that the abortion service in Ireland will be less restrictive than the UK and the author concludes stating 'I hope

voters will opt instead to Vote No to maintain Ireland's Constitution as a civilised standard of human dignity and rights.'

**Tone:** The authors tone is persuasive and urgent citing tragic cases where abortion has been utilised 'to cover up [her] sexual abuse,'.

**Topic:** The author is comparing the UK abortion landscape to what is being proposed in Ireland in place of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that should Ireland repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and replace it with the proposed legislation it would lead to 'a de facto situation of abortion on demand, for any reason, up to birth.' The author states that this is because there would be no gestational limit to abortion for health reasons which he notes includes mental health.

**Synthesise:** The author also infers that there could be selective reproduction as 'due to improvements in prenatal testing technology, foetal gender can now be detected after seven weeks' gestation.' The author is inferring that the abortion legislation could be discriminatory to gender.

**Scrutinize:** The experience of the author in relation to this topic due to his history of advocacy and policy campaigning in the UK.

**Stance Regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

#### **Opinion Piece 4**

**Title:** Graham Linehan: Men must play their part in repealing the Eighth

**Date Published:** 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Graham Linehan as a writer and supporter of Amnesty International Ireland's 'It's Time' campaign.

**Analyse:** The author speaks of a changing Ireland where women do not have to be only responsible for voting in the referendum. The author encourages men to have a role stating 'If you don't vote, and this referendum doesn't pass, you will have contributed to its defeat.'

**Tone:** The tone of the piece is challenging stating to male readers 'Don't drop the ball on this one.'

**Topic:** The involvement of men in the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment referendum debate.

**Controlling Idea:** The author encourages men to ‘Stand with women and vote Yes,’ which is the controlling idea of the piece.

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the Magdalene Laundries where women in Ireland were exiled from community. An inferred meaning could be that the author is asking for something like this not to happen again.

**Scrutinize:** The author speaks of his own personal experience in relation to a termination of pregnancy that he and his wife decided upon.

**Stance regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Support of the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 5

**Title:** Noel Whelan: Bid to fix abortion law in Constitution did not work

**Date Published:** 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Noel Whelan as a political campaigner, a barrister, a newspaper columnist.

**Analyse:** The author analyses the various legal cases, amendments and judicial interpretations that the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment has been an integral part of. The author states that trying to change abortion provision in Ireland is not possible by continually adding amendments to the Constitution but that it should be removed and replaced with something better.

**Tone:** The author utilises a critical and sceptical tone stating that ‘The effect of both the “travel” and “information” amendments was to enshrine hypocrisy into our basic law.’

**Topic:** The failure of the previous amendments to the constitution to make accessing abortion services in Ireland easier and safer for women.

**Controlling Idea:** The opinion piece’s main argument is evident in the following statement by the author that ‘we need to delete the Eighth Amendment. It is the only way to create the constitutional space for the Oireachtas to make better abortion law.’

**Synthesise:** An inferred meaning to be taken from the opinion piece is that the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment has never been what people, even those who enacted it, intended it to be for.

**Scrutinize:** The author speaks about the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in a legal context from his background as a solicitor.

**Stance Regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 6

**Title:** Ireland's cervical cancer shame shows women are still second-class citizens

**Date Published:** 4<sup>th</sup> May 2019

**Writer and Background:** Una Mullaly is a columnist for the Irish Times Newspaper and author and editor of 'Repeal the 8th' book which is a collection of stories and poems supporting a repeal of the 8th Amendment (Una Mullally, 2019).

**Justification for exclusion from data:** The content of this opinion piece centres on the cervical smear check scandal with the HSE and smear check testing labs in 2018. While the inferred meaning from the opinion page could be that this cervical scandal is 'evidence that women's healthcare is treated in a cavalier manner.' However, as the content of this opinion piece does not link directly back to the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment debate it has been excluded from the analysis.

## Opinion Piece 7

**Title:** Compassion's role in voting on Eighth Amendment

**Date Published:** 5<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Breda O'Brien is a columnist for the Irish Times newspaper and a patron of the Iona Institute and provides commentary on religious and social affairs (The Iona Institute, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author analyses the use of the word 'compassion' in the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment debate noting that 'compassion is a slogan used on many pro-choice posters'. The author however argues that 'voting yes in the upcoming referendum is not a vote for compassion.'

**Tone:** Persuasive and educational in defining words and giving history and context to their meaning.

**Topic:** The utilisation of the term compassion in the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment debate and the reality of this for women.

**Controlling Idea:** The author proposes that genuine compassion is supporting women so that abortion is not the only option available to them. The author did so by highlight the statistic from the International Campaign for Women’s Right to Safe Abortion and quoted the research which illustrated ‘that 40 per cent of abortions are motivated by economic reasons such as poverty, with 31 per cent due to reasons related to a partner.’

**Synthesise:** An underlying message prevalent in the piece when the author challenges the idea that prolife messages are untruthful. The author does this by quoting a prominent repeal campaigner who stated she was tired of the ‘killing, killing, killing’ and that abortion one become the cure for everything.’

**Scrutinize:** The author gives examples of real compassion to women which gives a foundation to her argument.

**Stance on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Debate:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 8

**Title:** The poisonous online campaign to defeat the abortion referendum

**Date Published:** 7<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Una Mullaly is a columnist for the Irish Times Newspaper and author and editor of ‘Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup>’ book which is a collection of stories and poems supporting a repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment (Una Mullally, 2019).

**Analyse:** A criticism of the online advertisement campaign of activist seeking to keep the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The author insinuates that the advertisements by the online campaign are false citing a Facebook spokesperson stating ‘we are aware that the spread of false news is a concern for many people, particularly in the context of the forthcoming referendum’. When identifying the information on these websites the author also states that they are ‘purported to be an unbiased website for “facts”’.

**Tone:** The tone of the piece is critical of the lack of legislation put in place by the Irish government for online advertising regarding referendums and also encourages the reader to question the adverts that the view.

**Topic:** The online campaign of the 'no' side of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment debate.

**Controlling Idea:** The author argues that the No side of the campaign have a 'poisonous' campaign online which targets the undecided social media user. The author states that the online campaign would not have been accepted by Facebook if the No side had admitted that they were behind it.

**Synthesise:** The author insinuates that the ads are strategic to undecided voters and that they should not be considered reliable by being sceptical of the 'unbiased' nature of the online websites identifying the website as one 'purported to be an unbiased website for "facts"'.

**Scrutinize:** The author makes a persuasive case utilising quotes from other sources to back up the opinion presented.

**Stance regarding 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Support repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 9

**Title:** Churches' stance against abortion is 'virtue signalling'

**Date Published:** 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Dr. Fergus O'Ferrall as lay leader of the Methodist Church in Ireland and a member of The Irish Times Trust.

**Analyse:** The author states that churches advocating a 'No' vote are 'simply "virtue signalling" to their more traditional constituencies.' The author also states that 'it is not defensible for Christian leaders to advocate the retention' of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment adding that 'I and other church leaders and members will be voting "yes"'.

**Tone:** The authors tone is very critical of churches in Ireland who support the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**Topic:** The author's argument centres on the need for religious institutions and people of faith to support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**Controlling Idea:** The author proposes that if the church was concerned about women it would not be fighting a repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment but supporting women to access health services that they deem necessary.

**Synthesise:** The author also implies that as some churches are organised in a democratic fashion it is not fair to state that politicians cannot be trusted to make critical decisions when they are elected in a democracy.

**Scrutinize:** The author utilises sections of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment wording to support the argument proposed.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 10

**Title:** Washington press corps afraid to look in the mirror over Trump

**Date Published:** 9<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Eleanor Tiernan as a writer and comedian.

**Justification for exclusion from data:** The opinion piece was included in the search category as reference was made to 'an abortion joke' which a comedian told at the USA's White House Correspondents' Association dinner. The focus of the article was a comedian's monologue regarding President Donald Trump and has been excluded from the data set.

## Opinion Piece 11

**Title:** Who made Facebook and Google referendum debate gatekeepers?

**Date Published:** 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Colum Kenny as a Barrister-at-Law and lectures at the DCU School of Communications.

**Analyse:** The author is critical of the decision by Facebook and Google to ban certain advertisements regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum.

**Tone:** The author utilises a questioning and challenging when inquiring of the authority of social media platforms to interfere with political campaigns.

**Topic:** The involvement of Facebook and Google in the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum.

**Controlling Idea:** The author argues that Facebook and Google have interfered with the campaign asking ‘who made them the ultimate gatekeepers of political debate?’ The author illustrates how this is dangerous as ‘no State body such as the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland had input into or oversight of this decision,’ of Facebook and Google to cancel ads.

**Synthesise:** The author states that it raises questions that the decision was made in light of the ‘No’ campaigns funding despite the international funding if the Yes campaign being brought to light previously with no such decision about banned advertisements. The author argues ‘that democracies need a way to ensure that fairness prevails on the internet as well as on the airwaves and in print.’

**Scrutinize:** The author gives an in-depth account of the decision by Facebook and Google and uses international examples to support the article.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Neutral stance regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 12

**Title:** Una Mullally: What was No side up to online that was so crucial?

**Date Published:** 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Una Mullaly is a columnist for the Irish Times Newspaper and author and editor of ‘Repeal the 8th’ book which is a collection of stories and poems supporting a repeal of the 8th Amendment (Una Mullally, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author raises questions about the ‘No’ campaigns online campaigning labelling it ‘dubious’. The author accuses the ‘No’ campaign of lacking transparency stating ‘If the No campaign and its ancillary actors weren’t doing things online that lacked transparency we probably wouldn’t be in this situation,’

**Tone:** The tone is critical of the 'No' campaign stating that the 'No' campaign focuses on 'heightened emotions, scaremongering, distraction tactics, and spreading fear and conspiracy'.

**Topic:** The banning of specific adverts in relation to the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum by Facebook and Google and its impact on the 'No' side of the debate.

**Controlling Idea:** The opinion piece focuses on the 'disproportionate' response of the No campaign to the banning of specific ads by Facebook and Google with the author highlighting the 'sensationalist' press conference that the No campaign held.

**Synthesise:** The opinion piece also proposes that the Irish government must take responsibility to legislate for advertising on social media platforms so that sites like 'Undecided 8<sup>th</sup>' cannot be active without transparency.

**Scrutinize:** The author expresses their opinion on the behaviour of the No campaign utilising terms such as 'sensationalist' and 'car crash' to describe the 'No' campaign's response. The author also questions the motive behind the 'No' campaign in establishing an apparently impartial website.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 13

**Title:** Breda O'Brien: Abortion for Down syndrome looms as real threat

**Date Published:** 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Breda O'Brien is a columnist for the Irish Times newspaper and a patron of the Iona Institute and provides commentary on religious and social affairs (The Iona Institute, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author gives an account of the differing medical opinions on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment citing doctors on both sides of the debate with differing points of view. The author examines the discrepancies between doctors advocating for a yes vote stating 'Boylan and Mahony do not agree on the diagnosis of Down syndrome and its implications.'

**Tone:** The author utilises a grave tone discussing the possible abortion of babies diagnosed with a disability.

**Topic:** The availability of genetic testing to indicate if a baby in the womb has Down syndrome and how, under the proposed abortion legislation in Ireland, a baby could be diagnosed with Down syndrome before the 12-week mark which would allow for an abortion to be carried out in Ireland.

**Controlling Idea:** The author points out that a medical campaigner for the Yes campaign stated that 'testing (NIPT) for Down syndrome is 99 per cent accurate and is available from nine to 10 weeks' gestation' and points out that abortion will be allowed up to 12 weeks without a limit. The author argues that this will discriminate against babies with a Down syndrome diagnosis.

**Synthesise:** The author also alludes to the challenge it would be for the government, should the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment be repealed, to legislate against abortion on the grounds of disability before 12 weeks stating 'How can any society deny abortion for disability, but allow aborting a healthy baby?'

**Scrutinize:** The author cites statements from the Yes campaigners as a foundation to the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 14

**Title:** World View: Debate on future of Europe is only beginning

**Date Published:** 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Dr Paul Gillespie as a former foreign policy editor with The Irish Times. He currently contributes a regular column for the newspaper entitled 'World View'.

**Justification for exclusion from data:** The opinion piece focuses on key political changes and innovations across Europe including Brexit and methods to encourage more engagement at a European level. The reference to the abortion debate is present when the author

discusses the innovative idea of the Citizens Assembly. The opinion piece is not directly linked to the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment debate and has been excluded from the data analysis.

### Opinion Piece 15

**Title:** Diarmaid Ferriter: Life goes on in the Valley of the Squinting Windows

**Date Published:** 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Diarmaid Ferriter as a contributor to The Irish Times and is one of Ireland's best-known historians and Professor of Modern Irish History at UCD.

**Analyse:** The author discusses Brinsley McNamara's novel The Valley of the Squinting Windows. The author states that 'It is surely time to confront the double values that the absolutism and squinting windows culture have allowed to thrive for so long at great cost to Irish women.'

**Tone:** A historical and nostalgic tone when looking at the history of Ireland.

**Topic:** That historically in Ireland 'there were always women to blame in the Irish land of absolutes.

**Controlling Idea:** The author discusses the positions of several grandparents who have stated their support of repealing the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The author questions the 'selectiveness of the "solidarity" expressed with the unborn and vulnerable pregnant women.'

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the "double-value system here; a double-value society" for women in Ireland that the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment creates.

**Scrutinize:** The author draws on historical analysis to exemplify the point.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 16

**Title:** Fintan O'Toole: On abortion we are subjects of Brexit Britain

**Date Published:** 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Fintan O'Toole is a columnist for the Irish Times and has written books on Irish history, politics, society and culture and was awarded the European Press Prize 2017 and the Orwell Prize for Journalism 2017 (Royal Irish Academy, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author states that the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in Ireland has become 'a legal chastity belt, locking Ireland into a permanent state of anti-continental continence.'

**Tone:** Critical of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment which means women must travel to Britain for abortions.

**Topic:** A parallel between Britain leaving the European Union and Ireland 'Irexit' not being in line with other abortion legislation in Europe and the dependency of Irish women seeking an abortion on the Common Travel Area.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that 'abortion is arguably the last great remnant of post-colonial dependency,' on Britain. The author states that 'women depend on England to uphold their right to choose.' The author proposes that 'If the Eighth is removed from the Constitution, it will be an important moment in the shift away from Irish psychological dependency on England.'

**Synthesise:** The author infers that all anti-abortion individuals are religious Catholics stating, 'Anti-abortionists depend on England to uphold their vision of a holy Catholic Ireland where such abominations are not permitted.'

**Scrutinize:** The author utilises the travel of Irish women abroad for an abortion to support his argument.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 17

**Title:** Muslim view: Repeal Eighth Amendment to relieve burden on women

**Date Published:** 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Shaykh Dr Umar al-Qadri as the head imam of the Al-Mustafa Islamic Centre of Ireland and the Chair of the Irish Muslim Peace & Integration Council.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘Muslim scholars agree that ‘the termination of developing new life in ordinary circumstances to be a grave sin and affront to human dignity, and states that ‘The vast majority of Muslim clerics therefore permit, or even require, abortion in extraordinary circumstances.’

**Tone:** Reflective when speaking of the death of a mother Savita Halappanavar when she did not have an abortion in Ireland while having a miscarriage.

**Topic:** The Muslim view on abortion

**Controlling Idea:** ‘The Eighth Amendment should be repealed so as to relieve the unnecessary burden on women and medical professionals at what already constitutes a highly traumatic time.’

**Synthesise:** The author also argues that ‘abortion to be freely available until the end of the first trimester should be rejected.’

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on Muslim teachings to support their opinion.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 18

**Title:** Fintan O’Toole: Why are the State's great secrets often about women's bodies?

**Date Published:** 15<sup>th</sup> May

**Writer and Background:** Fintan O’Toole is a columnist for the Irish Times and has written books on Irish history, politics, society and culture and was awarded the European Press Prize 2017 and the Orwell Prize for Journalism 2017 (Royal Irish Academy, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘in Ireland the things the State tends to keep secret are things to do with women’s bodies.’

**Tone:** Critical of the State’s position and behaviour with Irish women across history.

**Topic:** The role of the Irish State in controlling women’s bodies.

**Controlling Idea:** The author argues that women have to give up everything, ‘privacy, intimacy, ultimately life itself – to try to make the State break its long habits of secrecy and silence.’

**Synthesise:** The author alludes that due to the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and other women’s health issues ‘Our Republic still exists in the long shadow of shame.’

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on historical crises in the Irish State to support the argument made.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 19

**Title:** Abortion debate: When does the human person come into being?

**Date Published:** 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times identifies the author Patsy McGarry as the Religious Affairs Correspondent of The Irish Times since 1997.

**Analyse:** The author argues that the unborn person has been lost and excluded from the abortion debate stating ‘Where is the unborn person in current debate on the Eighth Amendment referendum?’.

**Tone:** Critical of both sides of the debate.

**Topic:** Examining when during pregnancy ‘the human person comes into being’.

**Controlling Idea:** The author concludes that ‘What is at issue is when, during pregnancy, the human person comes into being. It is what we ought to be discussing in this debate.’

**Synthesise:** The author gives the diverse views of the Catholic church regarding an unborn child becoming human and at what stage of the pregnancy does this occur in.

**Scrutinize:** The author utilises historical statements to back up the argument.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Neutral stance on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 20

**Title:** Ronan Keane: Repeal of Eighth does not mean unborn have no right to life

**Date Published:** 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Ronan Keane as Chief Justice between 2000 and 2004 in Ireland.

**Analyse:** The author analyses whether the right to life of the unborn child is solely contained in the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment within the Irish Constitution or if it occurs in other sections of the Constitution. The author states that 'I accept that the control of abortion should be entrusted to the Oireachtas, subject to the jurisdiction of the courts to rule on its constitutional validity.'

**Tone:** The authors tone is educational and analytical of the legal history regarding abortion in Ireland.

**Topic:** The 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment being the only Constitutional protection for the unborn in Ireland.

**Controlling Idea:** The author proposes that, in accordance with referenced case law, the right to life of the unborn can be maintained in Ireland subject to the legislation that the Oireachtas propose post repeal of the Amendment. The author states that 'following the removal of article 40.3.3 in its present form, the right to life of the unborn continues to exist, but subject to the power of the Oireachtas to provide for its termination.'

**Synthesise:** The author states that 'the article does not purport to confer a right to life on the unborn: it recognises that such a right exists and guarantees that it will be defended and protected', arguing that the Constitution did not 'create' the right to life, but recognised it and defended it.

**Scrutinize:** The author uses case history and court rulings to support the argument.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## **Opinion Piece 21**

**Title:** Kathy Sheridan: Tone of No side no more humble than in 1983

**Date Published:** 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Kathy Sheridan as a contributor to The Irish Times and writes a weekly opinion column.

**Analyse:** The author is critical of the No sides 'tone' during a televised debate on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The author states that 'We hold within living memory the savagely misogynistic culture presided over by clerics, politicians, medics and pillars of society.'

**Tone:** Critical of the tone of the No side during the campaign and the Catholic churches involvement in the abortion debate

**Topic:** The demeanour of the No campaign in 2017 compared to the No campaign in the 1983 abortion debate in Ireland.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that historically 'decisions regarding the life and health of the mother belonged to the church.' The author concludes that 'The role of the church and its acolytes in the shaping of public policy has cast a long, long shadow over Irish public life, families and in particular, women's healthcare.'

**Synthesise:** The author infers that pro-life supporters are all Catholics stating 'many of the promoters of the No side are devout Catholics anyway'.

**Scrutinize:** The author draws upon Irish history to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment

## Opinion Piece 22

**Title:** Brianna Parkins: 'Yes, Roses have abortions too'

**Date Published:** 17<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Brianna Parkins as the Sydney Rose of Tralee in 2016 and is a journalist in Australia who has taken a leave of absence to campaign for a Yes vote in the referendum.

**Analyse:** The author discusses the 'Roses who have had terminations' and where they come from across the world.

**Tone:** The author's tone is encouraging people to support women.

**Topic:** Abortions amongst Rose of Tralee entrants and the need for abortion to be provided in Ireland.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that regarding abortion; 'The problem is offshored. Someone else's issue. We shrug and turn away.' The author states 'that I have come back to the places I was warned to stay away from,' to campaign for a referendum on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the idea that women, the 'one of us [who] owns a uterus,' carry the fault of crisis pregnancies.

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on personal experience to support the opinion.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 23

**Title:** It will not take long before the sad French reality of abortion comes to these shores

**Date Published:** 18<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Dr Bénédicte Sage-Fuller as a lecturer at the School of Law in University College Cork.

**Analyse:** The author compares the abortion service and current context in France to what may happen in Ireland. The author states that 'It will not take long before the sad French reality will come to these shores,' where 'One in three women will have an abortion in their lifetime.'

**Tone:** The tone is reflective and persuasive

**Topic:** A comparison between the French levels of abortion and the proposed legislation in Ireland.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that 'Legalising abortion will inevitably and inexorably create a general malaise in Irish society, at every level, in every family, between neighbours, in medical facilities, everywhere.'

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the argument that this is about maternal healthcare, the author disagrees stating that this is an ideological question about unrestricted abortion in Ireland up to 12 weeks.

**Scrutinize:** The author uses examples from France to illustrate the argument.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 24

**Title:** Noel Whelan: Why I am voting Yes in the referendum

**Date Published:** 18<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Noel Whelan as a political campaigner, a barrister, a newspaper columnist.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘many voters have yet to make up their mind,’ about their position on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**Tone:** The tone is engaging and encourages the reader to make an informed decision.

**Topic:** The reasons to vote Yes in the upcoming referendum.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that ‘I came to the view that removing the Eighth Amendment was the right thing to do,’ and proposes that those how have made their decision and ‘come down on the Yes side can do now is to share our reasons.’

**Synthesise:** The author additionally states that ‘I see the Eighth Amendment as bad law.’

**Scrutinize:** The author’s opinion is based on a personal evaluation of the facts presented in the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 25

**Title:** Anne Harris: Pro-choice activists are on a 35-year march of attrition

**Date Published:** 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Anne Harris as a journalist and commentator.

**Analyse:** The author discusses what the cultural context was like in 1983 ‘when Ireland was a more extremely Catholic state than it is today,’ and where ‘The airways were dominated by men – lay and clerical – with passionate prejudices about control of the female fulcrum.’

**Tone:** Critical of the role of the church in the 1983 referendum campaign and of the lack of abortion services for women in Ireland.

**Topic:** The 35-year campaign of the Yes side to see the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment since 1983.

**Controlling Idea:** The author speaks of a changed Ireland but with regards to the No side questions ‘whether hypocrisy has replaced hysteria.’ The author also states that there is ‘a disproportionate number of NO posters in Dublin,’ when compared to how much Ireland has changed.

**Synthesise:** The author states that ‘few in pro-choice now deny that abortion doesn’t have consequences...but they want to take responsibility,’ for abortion here in Ireland.

**Scrutinize:** The author uses examples from Irish history to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 26

**Title:** Pat Leahy: One way or the other, the referendum will change Irish politics

**Date Published:** 19<sup>th</sup> May 2019

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Pat Leahy as the political editor of The Irish Times and presenter of the Inside Politics podcast.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘Whatever the result’ of the referendum, ‘it will change Irish politics.’

**Tone:** The tone is analytical.

**Topic:** The impact that both a Yes and No vote would have on the Irish political system.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that 'A No vote has the potential to upend the political landscape; but a Yes vote will change it as well.'

**Synthesise:** The author alludes that it is less likely that the No campaign will win stating it is the 'less likely possibility.'

**Scrutinize:** The author analyses the positions of the political parties on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Neutral

### Opinion Piece 27

**Title:** Reasons to vote No in the abortion referendum

**Date Published:** 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Breda O'Brien – Breda O'Brien is a columnist for the Irish Times newspaper and a patron of the Iona Institute and provides commentary on religious and social affairs (The Iona Institute, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author questions why the Government is proposing abortion instead of trying to 'eliminate the root causes of why women feel forced to choose abortion.'

**Tone:** Critical of the government's position on services to women other than abortion.

**Topic:** The reasons to vote No in the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment referendum

**Controlling Idea:** The author gives several reasons for the reader to vote including 'If abortion for no reason up to 12 weeks worries you, vote No. If abortion on unspecified mental health grounds scares you, vote No.'

**Synthesise:** The author draw attention to the lack of care the Government is really showing to women stating 'If politicians can persuade us that the only two choices are repeal or the status quo, they don't have to look after our citizens.'

**Scrutinize:** The author uses current examples of the health service and the proposed legislation changes to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 28

**Title:** Fintan O'Toole: Abortion issue creates and sustains tribal politics

**Date Published:** 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Fintan O'Toole is a columnist for the Irish Times and has written books on Irish history, politics, society and culture and was awarded the European Press Prize 2017 and the Orwell Prize for Journalism 2017 (Royal Irish Academy, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author states that the issues of abortion 'creates and sustains tribal politics,' as it has 'been very deliberately chosen as a dividing line.'

**Tone:** Informal and persuasive in encouraging the reader to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**Topic:** How abortion is a dividing line in politics.

**Controlling Idea:** The author speaks of a well renowned columnist John Healy and states 'Healy would be far more blunt and intolerant in his support for repeal than I would feel comfortable with.' The author cites Healy and identifies the 1983 Anti-Abortion Amendment Campaign as 'lunatic fringe on the way-out Catholic right'.

**Synthesise:** The author additionally questions whether 'the Constitution is the right place to deal with a question as complex and divisive as abortion.'

**Scrutinize:** The author uses historical accounts to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 29

**Title:** 'I have been a midwife for 30 years and am voting Yes'

**Date Published:** 21<sup>st</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Mary Brosnan as director of midwifery and nursing at the National Maternity Hospital and adjunct associate professor at the school of nursing and midwifery and health sciences at UCD.

**Analyse:** The author states that; ‘After reflecting long and hard about the impact of the Eighth Amendment on women’s health, I have decided to vote and advocate for the removal of the amendment.’

**Tone:** Honest as the author speaks about coming to her decision on the referendum.

**Topic:** Reasons to vote yes in the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment referendum.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment ‘exports the problems’ of abortion to the UK and that Irish abortions do happen under the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment ‘in unregulated and unsafe circumstances, with the abortion pill.’

**Synthesise:** The author alludes that the Constitution is not the right place to deal with abortion and ‘should have no role in this matter.’

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on professional experience to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 30

**Title:** Society has a duty to protect the most vulnerable among us

**Date Published:** 21<sup>st</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Dr. Dónal O’Mathúna as Associate Professor of Ethics at Dublin City University.

**Analyse:** The author discusses the difference between ‘the principle of autonomy’ and ‘relational autonomy.’ The author states that ‘we should consider the impact of those decisions on those around us,’ giving the example of a pregnant woman and baby.

**Tone:** The author is analytical in comparing autonomy and relative autonomy.

**Topic:** The ethical questions faced in the abortion discussion including autonomy and responsibility.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that ‘the so-called harm principle: that people have the freedom to do what they want, so long as they do not harm others,’ is where the prochoice

argument breaks down. The author state that 'The unborn are one group of humans least able to express autonomy,' and need protection.

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the responsibilities that people have stating that. With the exception of rape, 'the unborn come to be because of a relationship. Those relationships bring responsibilities.'

**Scrutinize:** The author acknowledges the difficult scenarios to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 31

**Title:** The Eighth Amendment puts the health of pregnant women in jeopardy

**Date Published:** 21<sup>st</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Dr Joan McCarthy, as Lecturer in Healthcare Ethics at UCC who addressed the Citizens' Assembly last year.

**Analyse:** The author states that 'two moral principles, autonomy and justice,' are needed to answer the questions of abortion in Ireland.

**Tone:** The authors tone is persuasive and questioning of the current legal context for abortion in Ireland.

**Topic:** The rights of women to bodily integrity and how the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment places women in jeopardy.

**Controlling Idea:** The questions if 'the State or anyone else has any basis for limiting a woman's reproductive right to make these decisions,' on abortion. The author also states that 'fertilised eggs, embryos and fetuses (at least up to 18 weeks) are not sentient or self-aware, and as such they lack any interests of their own.'

**Synthesise:** The author infers that women and girls carry the weight of the decision regarding an abortion stating 'pregnancy results in profound and irreversible physiological, psychological and emotional changes to a woman's body, her sense of self and, indeed, the rest of her life.'

**Scrutinize:** The author bases the opinion piece on professional experience.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 32

**Title:** Claire Malone: Now the No campaign is using my coping against me

**Date Published:** 21<sup>st</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Claire Malone as a mother of three from Wexford.

**Analyse:** The author speaks of her own crisis pregnancy stating 'I didn't want an abortion, what woman does? But I needed one... and so I made the difficult decision to end the pregnancy.'

**Tone:** The authors tone is emotive when speaking of personal experience.

**Topic:** The author speaks of her own personal experience under the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and speaks out against the Save the 8<sup>th</sup> campaign.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that 'The Eighth Amendment denied me the choice I had made, not to continue with a pregnancy that was an undoubted risk to my health.' The author criticises the No campaign stating 'The No campaign used my coping against me. They suggested that much of what I said wasn't true.'

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the danger of the suggested 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment stating 'The Eighth Amendment means that I, and countless other women are forced to just endure whatever harm we might suffer if we become pregnant.'

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on her own personal experience of a difficult pregnancy and health risks to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 33

**Title:** Josepha Madigan: The case for Yes to repealing Eighth

**Date Published:** 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Josepha Madigan as Minister for Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht, and leader of Fine Gael's campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment

**Analyse:** The author states that 'the women in our country have been subjected to unspeakable horrors,' including the mother and baby homes.' The author argues that 'private female reproductive organs being discussed ad nauseam online and in the mainstream media is humiliating and degrading.'

**Tone:** The authors tone is persuasive and caring toward Irish women.

**Topic:** The need to protect Irish women and repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that 'We are colluding in the judging of our friends and family by retaining the Eighth Amendment and that Ireland 'can do better... we will vote Yes on May 25th.'

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the argument that the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment does not belong in the Constitution stating 'An issue so sensitive and delicate as this does not belong in the Constitution.'

**Scrutinize:** The author uses an example of tragic death of Savita Halappanavar to support the opinion pieces.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 34

**Title:** Eighth Amendment is a declaration of tenderness at heart of the Constitution

**Date Published:** 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Eamon Martin as Archbishop of Armagh and Catholic Primate of All Ireland.

**Analyse:** The author asks for real support and compassion to be given to women other than abortion services stating 'to choose life for a mother and her unborn child involves more than simply marking an X on a ballot paper.'

**Tone:** The author utilises a reflective and compassionate tone.

**Topic:** The author discusses the need for compassion toward everyone, including the unborn child.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that ‘the Eighth Amendment is a declaration of tenderness at the heart of the Constitution of Ireland. It declares the equal right to life of a mother and her unborn child, and holds these equal rights in a tender, fragile balance.’

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the idea that some people think all prolife individuals are Catholic stating ‘to be against abortion is not simply “a Catholic thing”. People of all faiths and none value the protection of innocent human life.’

**Scrutinize:** The author relies upon his own faith and history to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 35

**Title:** You don’t have to agree with abortion to vote “Yes” to repeal the 8th

**Date Published:** 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Nick Breen as a GP and Senior Clinical Lecturer in General Practice at UCD. He is a member Doctors for Choice.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘you need to trust us, as doctors who are prepared to help, to give that professional advice,’ regarding abortion.

**Tone:** Persuasive and analytical

**Topic:** The author states that there are many reasons to vote Yes and it does not mean you agree with abortion.

**Controlling Idea:** The author proposes that ‘You don’t have to agree with abortion to vote “Yes” to repeal the 8th.’

**Synthesise:** The author also alludes to the danger of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment stating ‘The 8th led to maternal death.’

**Scrutinize:** The author uses his own professional experience as a GP to support his opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 36

**Title:** Fintan O'Toole: Real choice is not Yes or No. It is What If? or As If

**Date Published:** 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Fintan O'Toole is a columnist for the Irish Times and has written books on Irish history, politics, society and culture and was awarded the European Press Prize 2017 and the Orwell Prize for Journalism 2017 (Royal Irish Academy, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author illustrates the difference in the statements 'What If?' and 'As If.' The author elaborates that 'What if?' is unpredictable and allows for uncertainty versus 'As If' which 'is the world as we think it should be.'

**Tone:** A questioning tone is utilised.

**Topic:** The topic is the 'What if?' questions that people ask in relation to the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment debate.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that 'When the Eighth Amendment was placed in the Constitution, in 1983; it was not just one clause among the others. It was a big As If.' The author concludes that 'We can but acknowledge that in a world of doubts we should not presume to impose on others what we do not really know ourselves,' proposing that those who are 'pro-life' cannot act like they do not have questions regarding the debate and about life itself.

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the idea that the abortion discussion is full of 'What If's' and no one can be certain of many of the questions the abortion discussion raises.

**Scrutinize:** The author utilises history and reasoning to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 37

**Title:** Whatever this referendum is about, it is not about human rights

**Date Published:** 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author as Dr Vittorio Bufacchi who teaches philosophy at University College Cork.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘Anyone who insists on bringing human rights into the abortion ring first has to specify two important points. First, are we talking about legal rights or moral rights?’, when clarifying the various rights discussed in the debate.

**Tone:** The author uses a challenging tone in analysing both sides of the debate.

**Topic:** The author discusses the inclusion of ‘human rights’ as an argument proposed by both sides of the debate.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment ‘is not about human rights; and it is not a dispute captured by the terminology of “pro-life” versus “pro-choice”.’

**Synthesise:** The author proposes that ‘The pro-life-versus-pro-choice terminology, which is taken for granted whenever abortion is debated, is highly misleading and therefore should be abandoned.’

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on his expertise in philosophy to underpin the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Neutral position regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### **Opinion Piece 38**

**Title:** Human beings are equal in their basic interests and their basic human rights

**Date Published:** 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Dr Helen Watt as senior research fellow and former Director of the Anscombe Bioethics Centre, Oxford, United Kingdom.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘the growing, maturing foetus is clearly not a potential but an actual life - a living member of our own kind.’

**Tone:** The authors tone is persuasive and questioning.

**Topic:** The human rights that everyone has including unborn babies.

**Controlling Idea:** The author proposes that no one has the right to end the life of an unborn child stating 'No one may choose to end your life for their sake,'.

**Synthesise:** The author also alludes to the argument for termination of pregnancy when a baby is unwell stating that the human rights of a person does not change if that 'human being, born or unborn, has just been diagnosed with a terminal condition.'

**Scrutinize:** The author uses their professional medical background to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 39

**Title:** Several factors complicate passing legislation in event of repeal

**Date Published:** 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Dr David Kenny as Assistant Professor of Law at Trinity College, Dublin. He addressed the Citizens' Assembly and the Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment

**Analyse:** The author discusses how 'the power in the law-making process in Ireland usually rests with the executive branch, known as the Government.'

**Tone:** The tone is analytical when discussing the legislative process in Ireland.

**Topic:** What will happen to the legal and legislative situation in Ireland if the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment is repealed.

**Controlling Idea:** The author identifies 'several factors [that] complicate passing legislation in the event of the repeal of the Eighth Amendment' including the majority Dáil position and the moral decision-making process of individual parliamentarians.

**Synthesise:** The author is also encouraging representative democracy stating 'that voters would have a chance, by engaging with their elected representatives, to have a role in shaping this legislation.'

**Scrutinize:** The author utilises their legal professional background and legal facts to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Neutral stance regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 40

**Title:** Repeal's constitutional change would carry deep legal implications

**Date Published:** 23rd May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Benedict Ó Flóinn as a practising barrister, author of Practice and Procedure in the Superior Courts and was a member of the expert group on the Courts Act. He is a supporter of the LoveBoth campaign.

**Analyse:** The author states that 'we are being asked to remove the Eighth Amendment, and with it "the only constitutional right of the unborn"', and that 'we are asked to give the Oireachtas power to provide for the regulation of abortion.'

**Tone:** The opinion piece has a persuasive and educational tone.

**Topic:** The wide-ranging implications that a repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment will bring to Ireland.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that 'Our Constitution will no longer acknowledge the right to life of the unborn and instead will simply refer to the Oireachtas's power to regulate, as the draft legislation puts it, procedures which "are intended to end the life" of the unborn.'

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to what may happen in the future if the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment is repealed stating 'it is in the nature of legislation that it can be changed without consulting the people, so such limitations on access to abortion as might be set in legislation can be removed at any time by future governments or challenged.'

**Scrutinize:** The author relies of their professional legal background to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 41

**Title:** This referendum is about life and that is why, for most of us, it creates a dilemma

**Date Published:** 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author, Very Rev. Dr. Trevor Morrow, as minister emeritus of Lucan Presbyterian Church and a former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

**Analyse:** The author states that 'this referendum is about life and that is why, for most of us, it creates a dilemma.'

**Tone:** The tone is compassionate and persuasive

**Topic:** The dilemma faced when proposing a removal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states 'I can see the reasons for wanting to repeal the 8th,' yet 'many advocating a 'Yes' vote do not seem to want to talk about the unborn child whose life is taken when abortion is performed.' The author states 'I feel that I am forced, however reticently, to vote 'No'.

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the need for more compassionate and quality services for women over abortion stating 'I am a passionate supporter of readily accessible and appropriate care... for every woman, child and family.'

**Scrutinize:** The author uses his own experiences and faith to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 42

**Title:** Legislating for abortion on grounds of rape alone is impossible

**Date Published:** 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Dr Maeve Eogan as a Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at the Rotunda Hospital. She is medical director of the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) at the Rotunda Hospital and national SATU Services

**Analyse:** The author states 'that pregnancy as a consequence of rape/sexual assault is a scenario where women should have the choice to terminate pregnancy.' The author recognises however that legislating for these grounds alone is impossible.

**Tone:** The authors tone is persuasive.

**Topic:** The difficulty in legislating for abortion in rape circumstances only and how the proposed legislation deals with this.

**Controlling Idea:** The author is in support of the proposed abortion legislation allowing for abortion up to 12 weeks, stating 'the only equitable, workable and compassionate way to offer choice to women pregnant after rape is to provide termination of pregnancy with no restriction as to reason within a defined gestational limit.'

**Synthesise:** The author states that if the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment isn't repealed women who become pregnant due to rape will not receive the support they need in Ireland.

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on their professional expertise to give foundation to the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 43

**Title:** Regina Doherty: Ireland will not be introducing UK-style abortion laws

**Date Published:** 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Regina Doherty as Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

**Analyse:** The author refutes claims that the abortion service provided in Ireland will be similar to the UK stating 'Ireland will not be introducing widespread abortion up to six months as has been alleged.'

**Tone:** The authors tone is factual and persuasive.

**Topic:** How Ireland will not introduce UK style abortion services.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that Ireland has ‘learned how to put together a restrictive, yet compassionate, and caring system,’ in the provision of abortion services where the ‘proposed law does not allow for abortion on the basis of disability.’

**Synthesise:** The author alludes to the other services that will be made to women including ‘introducing a broad range of measures to reduce crisis pregnancies.’

**Scrutinize:** The author relies upon the proposed legislation to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 44

**Title:** Oliver Callan: To vote No is a special kind of unfairness

**Date Published:** 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Oliver Callan as a writer and commentator.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘to vote no is a special kind of unfairness that affects someone else’s life in a way that doesn’t affect you back.’

**Tone:** The tone of the piece is compassionate and reflective.

**Topic:** How voting yes will give people a compassionate choice and voting no is unfair

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that ‘This is not a vote to bring abortion to Ireland, but to accept that it’s already here and to make it safe.’ The author states that ‘The No campaign is based on fear-stoking [and] mistruths.’

**Synthesise:** The author also involves men in the discussion stating ‘For us men, voting yes is a chance to right a history of treating women unjustly.’

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on personal experiences to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 45

**Title:** Kathy Sheridan: Friday is about so much more than abortion

**Date Published:** 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author, Kathy Sheridan as a contributor to The Irish Times and writes a weekly opinion column.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘the No side [is to] characterise the majority [of abortions] as “social abortions”. The author gives examples of circumstances where women need abortions.

**Tone:** The author uses a persuasive and passionate tone.

**Topic:** The author focuses on how the shame will be lifted off women when the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment is repealed.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that the ‘Referendum vote is set against a culture of women being shamed and silence,’ and that this Friday ‘we can do better’.

**Synthesise:** The author speaks of women who travelled for an abortion ‘due to a fatal foetal abnormality in a longed-for baby.’

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on personal stories that have been shared by women to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 46

**Title:** What can Ireland learn from the UK on abortion?

**Date Published:** 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author, Dr Patricia Lohr as medical director of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS). This is an edited version of her submission to the Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘the majority of the women we see were trying to avoid pregnancy when they conceived,’ with ‘the majority of early abortions provided for Irish women are performed surgically [at] 71 per cent.’

**Tone:** The author uses a factual tone.

**Topic:** What can Ireland learn from the UK on abortion rates and statistics.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that 'If Ireland overhauls its abortion laws... it would do well to avoid some of the pitfalls and problems that the UK framework presents.'

**Synthesise:** The author states that 'abortion is an extremely safe procedure, but the earlier in pregnancy it is performed the better for women's physical and mental wellbeing.'

**Scrutinize:** The author uses professional expertise to underpin the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Neutral stance regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Opinion Piece 47

**Title:** Breda O'Brien: If you vote for choice you are facilitating abortions

**Date Published:** 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** Breda O'Brien is a columnist for the Irish Times newspaper and a patron of the Iona Institute and provides commentary on religious and social affairs (The Iona Institute, 2019).

**Analyse:** The author states that 'the triumph of pro-choice ideology' is that it 'allows us to conceal from ourselves that when we vote for something, we enable it and facilitate it,' which the author disputes.

**Tone:** A persuasive and factual tone is used.

**Topic:** A yes vote is a vote that actively facilitates abortions in Ireland.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that in repealing the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment 'we will have enshrined the right of politicians to choose for us into our Constitution and taken away the right to live or ever choose anything from the youngest humans.'

**Synthesise:** The author also alludes to rising abortion rates. If abortion is legalised stating 'When you normalise something by voting for it, you get more of it.'

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on instances in the UK and Ireland to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Against the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 48

**Title:** We can and should trust our Oireachtas on abortion

**Date Published:** 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author David Farrell as Head of Politics and International Relations at UCD is the co-editor of The Post-Crisis Irish Voter.

**Analyse:** The author states that it is not possible to amend the Constitution to allow for instances of abortion in cases of rape or incest as 'it would be incumbent on the authorities to have proof,' of said crime which is not always possible and necessary within a limited time frame.

**Tone:** The authors tone is persuasive.

**Topic:** The author states that the Irish 'political system is innately conservative' and that we should trust the Oireachtas with abortion.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that 'on May the 25th we vote to change the Constitution; this will give the Oireachtas the power to legislate on terminations of pregnancy. We should let them get on with it.'

**Synthesise:** The author states that we can trust politicians as 'in a modern-day democracy such as ours it is the role of parliament to legislate, to design public policy,' and the public can 'kick the rascals out'.

**Scrutinize:** The author relies on their professional background to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## Opinion Piece 49

**Title:** The moment a baby's brain starts to function, and other scientific answers on abortion

**Date Published:** 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**Writer and Background:** The Irish Times opinion piece identifies the author Dr Tomás Ryan as assistant professor of neuroscience at Trinity College Dublin and spokesman of Science for Yes.

**Analyse:** The author states that ‘Nobody can say when an individual life begins, but the facts can help show when a life does not begin.’

**Tone:** The authors tone is factual and persuasive.

**Topic:** Scientific answers to the major questions about abortion.

**Controlling Idea:** The author states that All 1,500 members of the science community who signed an open letter for Scientists for Yes ‘have one thing in common; that Ireland must repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution.’

**Synthesise:** The author addresses the concerns regarding mental health as a ground for abortion and states that ‘in all cases, mental disorders are due to effects on the brain itself and must be treated and managed according to the same framework as any medical disorder.’

**Scrutinize:** The author utilises his professional expertise to support the opinion piece.

**Stance Regarding 8th Amendment:** Support the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

### Quantitative Analysis

A count was conducted on the above opinion pieces to ascertain the views of each opinion piece on the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment referendum in Ireland. The chart below displays the findings from this mixed method content analysis.

Position on 8 <sup>th</sup> Amendment Referendum	Support Repeal of 8 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Against Repeal of 8 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Neutral	Excluded from data set
Number of Opinion Pieces	28 Opinion Pieces	12 Opinion Pieces	6 Opinion Pieces	3 Opinion Pieces

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

The research question posed in this dissertation was an analysis on ‘The role of the Irish Times opinion pages in the formulation of public opinion and shaping the political agenda in Ireland: A case study of the 2018 8th Amendment Referendum in Ireland.’

Through academic research and journals the author established the ability of the opinion pages to change the mind of the reader and to influence the political agenda in society. An analysis was undertaken on the opinion pages published by the Irish Times from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018 to 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018 regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment abortion referendum in Ireland. A mixed method research plan, involving qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, was utilised to ascertain the stance of each opinion piece and to evaluate the number of published opinions on both sides of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment debate.

The research found that the opinion pages published in relation to abortion and the 8th Amendment in Ireland during the month of May 2018, before the referendum took place, were dominated by the pro-repeal, ‘Yes’, side of the abortion debate.

The data analysis revealed the following findings; Out of the forty-nine Irish Times opinion pages studied, twenty-eight of the opinion pages proposed a repeal of the 8th Amendment in Ireland while twelve opinion pages argued in favour of keeping the 8th Amendment. In addition to this, six opinion pieces were neutral on the topic while three opinion pieces were excluded from the content analysis data set as they were irrelevant to the debate.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2018 the Irish public voted by referendum to remove the 8th Amendment from the Irish Constitution winning the referendum with 66.4% of the vote (Henley, 2018). As the opinion pages have the power to change minds and influence the public agenda, and as the opinion pages were not balanced in coverage of both sides of the debate than a conclusion may be drawn that the Irish Times opinion pages were impartial and advocated for a repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and that this had an influence on society.

This research illustrates the need for a more varied discourse within national media outlets in Ireland regarding topical social and political issues. The research exemplified the need to challenge the biases prevalent in the opinion pages of national and widely read newspapers

in Ireland and demand more representation of differing viewpoints within the national media.

As the worldwide culture of news reporting and opinion-based commentary shifts, increased accountability and fairness is needed and further research into practical methods to establish and encourage this balance. The author discovered recent research in relation to the era of 'fake news' and notes that this will be an area of continued contemporaneous study. Future research relating to this thesis may analyse the reason behind the imbalance in the publication of different viewpoints by the Irish Times. In researching this topic, the author acknowledged the lack of academic research, publication and commentary on the media in Ireland and the influence and role it has in Irish society. This is an area for future study and analysis.

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## Appendices

### Links to Opinion Pages included in Data Analysis

Link to Opinion Pages	Date	Author
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-moment-a-baby-s-brain-starts-to-function-and-other-scientific-answers-on-abortion-1.3506968">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-moment-a-baby-s-brain-starts-to-function-and-other-scientific-answers-on-abortion-1.3506968</a>	24/05/2018	Tomas Ryan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/we-can-and-should-trust-our-oireachtas-on-abortion-1.3505859">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/we-can-and-should-trust-our-oireachtas-on-abortion-1.3505859</a>	24/05/2018	David Farrell
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/breda-o-brien-if-you-vote-for-choice-you-are-facilitating-abortions-1.3505850">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/breda-o-brien-if-you-vote-for-choice-you-are-facilitating-abortions-1.3505850</a>	24/05/2018	Breda O'Brien
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/what-can-ireland-learn-from-the-uk-on-abortion-1.3504229">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/what-can-ireland-learn-from-the-uk-on-abortion-1.3504229</a>	23/05/2018	Patricia Lohr
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/kathy-sheridan-friday-is-about-so-much-more-than-abortion-1.3504515">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/kathy-sheridan-friday-is-about-so-much-more-than-abortion-1.3504515</a>	23/05/2018	Kathy Sheridan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/oliver-callan-to-vote-no-is-a-special-kind-of-unfairness-1.3504484">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/oliver-callan-to-vote-no-is-a-special-kind-of-unfairness-1.3504484</a>	23/05/2018	Oliver Callan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/regina-doherty-ireland-will-not-be-introducing-uk-style-abortion-laws-1.3504500">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/regina-doherty-ireland-will-not-be-introducing-uk-style-abortion-laws-1.3504500</a>	23/05/2018	Regina Doherty
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/legislating-for-abortion-on-grounds-of-rape-alone-is-impossible-1.3504219">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/legislating-for-abortion-on-grounds-of-rape-alone-is-impossible-1.3504219</a>	23/05/2018	Dr Maeve Eogan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/this-referendum-is-about-life-and-that-is-why-for-most-of-us-it-creates-a-dilemma-1.3504474">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/this-referendum-is-about-life-and-that-is-why-for-most-of-us-it-creates-a-dilemma-1.3504474</a>	23/05/2018	Trevor Morrow
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/repeal-s-constitutional-change-would-carry-deep-legal-implications-1.3504345">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/repeal-s-constitutional-change-would-carry-deep-legal-implications-1.3504345</a>	23/05/2018	Ben O'Floinn
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/several-factors-complicate-passing-legislation-in-event-of-repeal-1.3504177">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/several-factors-complicate-passing-legislation-in-event-of-repeal-1.3504177</a>	22/05/2018	Dr. David Kenny
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/human-beings-are-equal-in-their-basic-interests-and-their-basic-human-rights-1.3504163">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/human-beings-are-equal-in-their-basic-interests-and-their-basic-human-rights-1.3504163</a>	22/05/2018	Dr. Helen Watt
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/whatever-this-referendum-is-about-it-is-not-about-human-rights-1.3503253">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/whatever-this-referendum-is-about-it-is-not-about-human-rights-1.3503253</a>	22/05/2018	Dr Vittorio Bufacchi
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-real-choice-is-not-yes-or-no-it-is-what-if-or-as-if-1.3503001">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-real-choice-is-not-yes-or-no-it-is-what-if-or-as-if-1.3503001</a>	22/05/2018	Fintan O'Toole
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/you-don-t-have">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/you-don-t-have</a>	22/05/2018	Nick Breen

<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/eighth-amendment-is-a-declaration-of-tenderness-at-heart-of-the-constitution-1.3503219">to-agree-with-abortion-to-vote-yes-to-repeal-the-8th-1.3503219</a>		
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/eighth-amendment-is-a-declaration-of-tenderness-at-heart-of-the-constitution-1.3503105">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/eighth-amendment-is-a-declaration-of-tenderness-at-heart-of-the-constitution-1.3503105</a>	22/05/2018	Archibishop Eamon Martin
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/josepha-madigan-the-case-for-yes-to-repealing-eighth-1.3503156">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/josepha-madigan-the-case-for-yes-to-repealing-eighth-1.3503156</a>	22/05/2018	Josepha Madigan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/claire-malone-now-the-no-campaign-is-using-my-coping-against-me-1.3503100">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/claire-malone-now-the-no-campaign-is-using-my-coping-against-me-1.3503100</a>	21/05/2018	Claire Malone
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-eighth-amendment-puts-the-health-of-pregnant-women-in-jeopardy-1.3502936">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-eighth-amendment-puts-the-health-of-pregnant-women-in-jeopardy-1.3502936</a>	21/05/2018	Dr. Joan McCarthy
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/society-has-a-duty-to-protect-the-most-vulnerable-among-us-1.3502919">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/society-has-a-duty-to-protect-the-most-vulnerable-among-us-1.3502919</a>	21/05/2018	Dr. Dónal O'Mathúna
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/i-have-been-a-midwife-for-30-years-and-am-voting-yes-1.3502002">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/i-have-been-a-midwife-for-30-years-and-am-voting-yes-1.3502002</a>	21/05/2018	Mary Brosnan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-abortion-issue-creates-and-sustains-tribal-politics-1.3498898">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-abortion-issue-creates-and-sustains-tribal-politics-1.3498898</a>	19/05/2018	Fintan O'Toole
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/reasons-to-vote-no-in-the-abortion-referendum-1.3500375">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/reasons-to-vote-no-in-the-abortion-referendum-1.3500375</a>	19/05/2018	Breda O'Brien
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/pat-leahy-one-way-or-the-other-the-referendum-will-change-irish-politics-1.3500411">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/pat-leahy-one-way-or-the-other-the-referendum-will-change-irish-politics-1.3500411</a>	19/05/2018	Pat Leahy
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/anne-harris-pro-choice-activists-are-on-a-35-year-march-of-attribution-1.3500512">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/anne-harris-pro-choice-activists-are-on-a-35-year-march-of-attribution-1.3500512</a>	19/05/2018	Anne Harris
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/noel-whelan-why-i-am-voting-yes-in-the-referendum-1.3499186">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/noel-whelan-why-i-am-voting-yes-in-the-referendum-1.3499186</a>	18/05/2018	Noel Whelan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/it-will-not-take-long-before-the-sad-french-reality-of-abortion-comes-to-these-shores-1.3499179">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/it-will-not-take-long-before-the-sad-french-reality-of-abortion-comes-to-these-shores-1.3499179</a>	18/05/2018	Bénédicte Sage-Fuller
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/brianna-parkins-yes-roses-have-abortions-too-1.3497801">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/brianna-parkins-yes-roses-have-abortions-too-1.3497801</a>	17/05/2018	Brianna Parkins
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/kathy-sheridan-tone-of-no-side-no-more-humble-than-in-1983-1.3496344">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/kathy-sheridan-tone-of-no-side-no-more-humble-than-in-1983-1.3496344</a>	16/05/2018	Kathy Sheridan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/ronan-keane-repeal-of-eighth-does-not-mean-unborn-have-no-right-to-life-1.3496422">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/ronan-keane-repeal-of-eighth-does-not-mean-unborn-have-no-right-to-life-1.3496422</a>	16/05/2018	Ronan Keane
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/abortion-debate-when-does-the-human-person-come-into-being-1.3495998">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/abortion-debate-when-does-the-human-person-come-into-being-1.3495998</a>	15/05/2018	Patsy McGarry
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-</a>	15/05/2018	Fintan O'Toole

<a href="#">why-are-the-state-s-great-secrets-often-about-women-s-bodies-1.3494918</a>		
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/muslim-view-repeal-eighth-amendment-to-relieve-burden-on-women-1.3494798">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/muslim-view-repeal-eighth-amendment-to-relieve-burden-on-women-1.3494798</a>	15/05/2018	Shayk Dr Umar Al-Qadri
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-on-abortion-we-are-subjects-of-brexite-britain-1.3490655">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-on-abortion-we-are-subjects-of-brexite-britain-1.3490655</a>	12/05/2018	Fintan O'Toole
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/diarmaid-ferriter-life-goes-on-in-the-valley-of-the-squinting-windows-1.3492097">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/diarmaid-ferriter-life-goes-on-in-the-valley-of-the-squinting-windows-1.3492097</a>	12/05/2018	Diarmaid Ferriter
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/world-view-debate-on-future-of-europe-is-only-beginning-1.3491929">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/world-view-debate-on-future-of-europe-is-only-beginning-1.3491929</a>	12/05/2018	Paul Gillespie
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/breda-o-brien-abortion-for-down-syndrome-looms-as-real-threat-1.3491954">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/breda-o-brien-abortion-for-down-syndrome-looms-as-real-threat-1.3491954</a>	12/05/2018	Breda O'Brien
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/una-mullaly-what-was-no-side-up-to-online-that-was-so-crucial-1.3491739">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/una-mullaly-what-was-no-side-up-to-online-that-was-so-crucial-1.3491739</a>	11/05/2018	Una Mullaly
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/who-made-facebook-and-google-referendum-debate-gatekeepers-1.3490925">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/who-made-facebook-and-google-referendum-debate-gatekeepers-1.3490925</a>	11/05/2018	Colum Kenny
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/washington-press-corps-afraid-to-look-in-the-mirror-over-trump-1.3488033">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/washington-press-corps-afraid-to-look-in-the-mirror-over-trump-1.3488033</a>	09/05/2018	Eleanor Tiernan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/churches-stance-against-abortion-is-virtue-signalling-1.3486855">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/churches-stance-against-abortion-is-virtue-signalling-1.3486855</a>	08/05/2018	Fergas O'Ferrall
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-poisonous-online-campaign-to-defeat-the-abortion-referendum-1.3486236">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-poisonous-online-campaign-to-defeat-the-abortion-referendum-1.3486236</a>	07/05/2018	Una Mullaly
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/compassion-s-role-in-voting-on-eighth-amendment-1.3484429">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/compassion-s-role-in-voting-on-eighth-amendment-1.3484429</a>	05/05/2018	Breda O'Brien
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/ireland-s-cervical-cancer-shame-shows-women-are-still-second-class-citizens-1.3484162">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/ireland-s-cervical-cancer-shame-shows-women-are-still-second-class-citizens-1.3484162</a>	04/05/2018	Una Mullaly
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/noel-whelan-bid-to-fix-abortion-law-in-constitution-did-not-work-1.3482939">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/noel-whelan-bid-to-fix-abortion-law-in-constitution-did-not-work-1.3482939</a>	04/05/2018	Noel Whelan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/graham-linehan-men-must-play-their-part-in-repealing-the-eighth-1.3481645">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/graham-linehan-men-must-play-their-part-in-repealing-the-eighth-1.3481645</a>	03/05/2018	Graham Linehan
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/removal-of-eighth-would-create-law-more-inhumane-than-britain-s-1.3480588">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/removal-of-eighth-would-create-law-more-inhumane-than-britain-s-1.3480588</a>	02/05/2018	David Alton
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-8th-amendment-demands-punishment-for-women-">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fintan-o-toole-8th-amendment-demands-punishment-for-women-</a>	01/05/2018	Fintan O'Toole

<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/referendum-on-eighth-about-trusting-politicians-not-women-or-doctors-1.3479421">1.3479390</a>		
<a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/referendum-on-eighth-about-trusting-politicians-not-women-or-doctors-1.3479421">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/referendum-on-eighth-about-trusting-politicians-not-women-or-doctors-1.3479421</a>	01/05/2018	Nick Park