

<b>Institution:</b> Queen's University Belfast		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 19 Politics and International Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Helping to shape the Irish democratic process: Advising the Irish Citizens' Assembly on the issue of abortion, 2016-18		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2001-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
John Garry	Professor	2003-ongoing
Brendan O'Leary	Professor	2012-ongoing
James Pow	Lecturer	2019-ongoing
John Coakley	Professor	2012-ongoing
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> September 2013–2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Professor Garry's research has helped shape the democratic decision-making process in the Republic of Ireland on the highly sensitive issue of abortion provision. Garry served as the only political scientist adviser on the Expert Advisory Group of the Irish Citizens' Assembly (2016-18), established by the Irish government to consider and make recommendations on the abortion issue (as well as issues relating to ageing, climate change and political reform). Based on his research experience, Garry advised on the organisation of citizen deliberation and the measurement of citizens' policy recommendations. The Irish Citizens' Assembly recommended a liberalisation of Irish abortion law, and this was subsequently supported in a binding referendum vote in May 2018. The Scottish Government has since established its own Citizens' Assembly of Scotland which was inspired by the Irish model.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Two core features of a well-functioning citizens' assembly are high quality consideration (deliberation) of the policy issue by participants, and a fair and balanced measurement of the participants' policy recommendations. Garry's research on political deliberation and attitude measurement enabled him to provide the Irish Citizens' Assembly with appropriate high-quality evidence-based advice.</p> <p><b>Research on deliberation</b></p> <p>Garry has systematically examined the process of citizen deliberation on a range of political topics in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Specifically, Garry has studied how participants can be effectively provided with: relevant information on a topic; balanced sets of arguments in favour or against particular proposals; and the opportunity to engage in a considered way with a wide range of other participants who hold diverse views and perspectives.</p>		

For example, Garry analysed one of the very first attempts at organised public deliberation in Ireland. The National Forum on Europe was established by the Irish government in the wake of the public's rejection of the Nice Treaty in the 2001 referendum. Garry collaborated, in 2006-2008, with the Director of the National Forum on Europe, Ann Barrington, in a co-authored academic study of the work of the Forum. The study highlighted how balanced debate in the Forum, including political actors and wider society, increased the quality of public discourse and provided a deliberative model that may be used by other EU states to address the EU democratic deficit (**reference 1**).

Subsequently, Garry examined citizen deliberation on divisive issues in Northern Ireland. As Principal Investigator of an ESRC-funded academic project (August 2014 to April 2016) on citizens' assemblies in divided places, Garry examined how a randomly selected set of citizens can deliberate effectively on the contested issue of flag display. Garry found that providing citizens with balanced information and arguments and enabling them to consider the viewpoints of other citizens with opposing views resulted in a tendency to find a compromise on this highly contentious issue (**reference 2**).

This programme of work on citizen deliberation on divisive issues resulted in two further citizens' assemblies in Northern Ireland, designed and conducted by Garry (in collaboration with O'Leary, Pow and Coakley) and also funded by the ESRC (April 2017 to March 2019): on the issue of 'Brexit' (**reference 3**) and on the issue of a possible referendum on a united Ireland (**reference 4**). Both studies demonstrated that even on highly divisive issues, citizens with strongly held opposing views can – via effective presentation of objective information and arguments and careful structuring of citizen discussion – engage in informed policy dialogue.

From his research on citizen deliberation, Garry developed expertise on how to structure and organise citizen deliberation on a range of divisive issues: how to provide appropriate neutral information on the issue; how to provide balanced arguments; and how to facilitate citizens in articulating their own views and understanding the perspectives of those with different views (**reference 1, 2, 3 and 4**).

### Research on attitude measurement

Garry has also conducted many studies which have systematically examined citizens' social and political attitudes, and policy preferences, on sensitive topics (including abortion) in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The studies have been based on the careful and objective measurement of citizens' views using specially designed questionnaires and surveys. For example, Garry was one of the lead designers (along with Payne and Hardiman of University College Dublin) of a large-scale survey in 2001-2002 on a wide range of Irish people's social and political attitudes (**reference 5**), and was the sole designer of series of bespoke surveys on sensitive political issues and behaviour in Northern Ireland (**reference 6**).

### 3. References to the research

1. Barrington, A. and J. Garry. 2010. 'Deliberative Fora and European Integration: What can Europe Learn from the Irish Experience?' In: C. McCall and T. Wilson (eds) *Europeanisation and Hibernicisation: Ireland and Europe*. Amsterdam: Rodopi Press. 28: 197-225. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042030541\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042030541_010)

2. Garry, J. 'Deliberative Democracy in Northern Ireland'. Published by the Northern Ireland Assembly: Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series / March 2016: [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge\\_exchange/briefing\\_papers/series5/garry-briefing.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series5/garry-briefing.pdf)

Garry's presentation at the Northern Ireland Assembly: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8MJ7y3K5Pk>

3. Garry, J., McNicholl, K., O'Leary, B. and J. Pow. 2020. 'The future of Northern Ireland: Border anxieties and attitudes to the reunification of Ireland under varieties of UKexit'. *Regional Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2020.1759796>
4. Garry, J., O'Leary, B., Coakley, J., Pow, J. and L. Whitten. 2020. 'Public attitudes to different possible models of a united Ireland: Evidence from a citizens' assembly in Northern Ireland', *Irish Political Studies*, 35:3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2020.1816379>
5. Garry, J. 2006. 'Political Alienation'. In: Garry, J., Payne, D. and N. Hardiman (editors). *Irish Social and Political Attitudes*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. ISBN: 978-0-853-23909-3 <https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/books/id/39448/>
6. Garry, J. 2016. *Consociation and Voting in Northern Ireland*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. ISBN: 9780812248371 <https://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/15567.html>

#### 4. Details of the impact

Between October 2016 and April 2018 Garry served as the political science advisor on all four of the Expert Advisory Groups (EAGs) of the Irish Citizens' Assembly which considered the issues of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution (abortion), climate change, the ageing population, and fixed term parliaments / the manner in which referenda are held (**source 1**).

The EAGs were established to advise the Chair (Supreme Court Judge, Justice Laffoy) and the Citizens' Assembly Secretariat (led by senior civil servant Sharon Finegan) on how to plan and run the Assembly. Membership of the EAGs included legal and constitutional experts, a range of medical experts, a philosophy/ethics expert, and a political scientist (Garry). The specific roles played by Garry in the EAG were as follows.

Drawing on his expertise on political deliberation, Garry provided advice to ensure that the Citizens' Assembly was informative, fair and balanced in regard to:

- Choice of experts and their presentations of arguments and evidence
- Structure of the citizens' round-table discussions and deliberation

Drawing on his expertise on attitude measurement, Garry provided advice on the construction of the questions on the ballot paper used when citizens voted on what recommendations the Assembly should make.

Garry had significant influence on all aspects of the Citizens' Assembly, as publicly stated by the Chair, Justice Laffoy:

*"A special mention should go to John Garry who has been on all four EAGs and has provided invaluable advice and support through all 5 topics considered by the Assembly."* (**source 2**)

Also, in a written endorsement by the Secretariat:

*"...In addition, and perhaps in particular, Professor Garry provided the Assembly with continuous guidance and advice on ensuring we satisfied the criteria that distinguishes a deliberative democracy exercise ... Professor Garry made an*

*unprecedented contribution to the work of the Assembly ... and his personal input has undoubtedly been one of the reasons for the Assembly's success.” (source 3)*

One of the citizens participating in the deliberation, Louise Caldwell, described the process in an article published in *The Guardian*:

*“As a group of 100 citizens, it felt there was a good mix of men and women with a broad range of age and backgrounds. The atmosphere was friendly but serious – we were proud to have been given an important task. We wanted to take in all the information, help shape the debate and make solid recommendations that were representative of our views at the end of a period of deep learning about the topics.” (source 4)*

The participating citizens, via the balloting at the end of the deliberation process, opted to recommend a liberalisation of Ireland’s law on abortion availability. Their recommendations were considered by the Dáil (Irish parliament) and the government initiated a referendum on the issue in May 2018, which resulted in public support for liberalization of abortion law **(source 5)**.

The impact was threefold.

- a. Garry played a leading role in the EAG in organising how the citizens participating in the Irish Citizens’ Assembly deliberated and how their recommendation options were structured, hence facilitating them in making clear deliberation-based recommendations **(sources 1, 2 and 3)**.
- b. The Assembly’s recommendations led to a referendum on the issue of abortion availability which resulted in the amendment of the constitution to liberalise abortion provision and a highly significant public policy change **(source 5)**.
- c. The Irish Citizens’ Assembly is lauded internationally as a model of citizen participation in politics. For example, Scotland has established one, inspired by the Irish model. As First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, stated to the Scottish Parliament in April 2019:

*“I have been struck recently by the Irish example of a Citizens’ Assembly to help find consensus on issues where people have sharply divided opinions. Of course, the circumstances here are different, as are the issues under consideration. But the principle is a sound one and I believe we should make use of it. So, I can confirm that the Scottish Government will establish a Citizens’ Assembly.” (source 6)*

In addition, in 2019, the former UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, advocated that the UK should follow the Irish example and conduct a citizens’ assembly as a possible way forward during the highly divisive Brexit debates:

*“A year’s extension [to the Brexit deadline] would allow us to pursue a British version of Ireland’s successful experience in participatory democracy when they held citizens’ assemblies, to find common ground on deeply divisive issues in advance of a referendum.” (source 7)*

Garry’s work for the Irish Citizens’ Assembly 2016-18 is part of a range of contributions by Garry to Irish deliberative democracy. In September 2013, Garry’s research informed a previous citizens’ assembly the Irish government established: The Convention on the Constitution, 2012-14. Based on analysis of his own specially designed survey in Northern

Ireland, Garry gave a presentation to the Convention on the issue of voting rights for citizens residing outside the state.

Garry reported on the significant support a Sinn Féin Irish presidential candidate would attract if people in Northern Ireland from a Catholic community background, who typically identify as Irish, were allowed to vote. The Convention's Chairman highlighted Garry, along with Professor Colin Harvey (QUB), as making “very engaging presentations on the implications of the proposal as it might apply to those living in Northern Ireland” (**source 8**). The Convention recommended extending voting rights. The Irish coalition government established in June 2020, in its agreed Programme for Government (PfG) (**source 9, p.113**), explicitly committed to holding a referendum on the issue.

Also, subsequent to the Irish Citizens' Assembly 2016-18, Garry was asked by the Irish government in 2020 to serve on the Expert Advisory Group of a new Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, 2020-2021. Garry is the only previous Expert Advisory Group member serving as advisor (**source 10**). The Irish government commits, in its PfG to “respond to each recommendation of the Citizens' Assembly on gender equality” and “informed by the work of the Citizens' Assembly, consider whether there should be a referendum on Article 41.2 of the constitution” [on the issue of mothers' “duties in the home”] (**source 9, p.77**).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

(1) Description of the Expert Advisory Group of the Citizens Assembly: [Expert Advisory Group - The Citizens' Assembly](#) and [overall description of the Citizens' Assembly](#).

(2) Public acknowledgement by Justice Laffoy, Chair of the Irish Citizen's Assembly of the contribution of Garry to the Irish Citizens' Assembly, [as expressed in the final report](#) published by the Assembly in June 2018, p.5.

(3) Testimonial from the Secretariat of the Irish Citizens' Assembly describing the comprehensive contribution of Garry to the Irish Citizens' Assembly. Please contact the Secretary if any further corroboration is needed.

(4) Caldwell, Louise “[I took part in a citizens' assembly – it could help break the Brexit deadlock](#)”, *The Guardian*, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

(5) Full details relating to the Irish Citizens' Assembly's consideration of the issue of abortion are available [here](#), including its recommendations, consideration by parliamentary committee and the result of the consequent public referendum.

(6) First Minister's statement on “[Brexit and Scotland's future](#)” on 24 April 2019.

(7) Brown, Gordon “[The UK needs a year-long extension on Brexit – to really take back control](#)”, *The Guardian*, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

(8) [The Convention on the Constitution](#), November 2013, The Chairman's comment is in Section 1 and Garry's presentation (based on data reported in reference 6, chapter 3) is in Section 6.2.

(9) Department of the Taoiseach [Programme for Government : Our Shared Future](#), 29th October 2020.

(10) Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality website: [Expert Advisory Group](#).