

Local Elections 2014 – What made the difference? An analysis of successful local election campaigns

“Virtually all countries have systems of local government. To a greater or lesser extent these are designed to give expression to local identity, to identify local concerns and to set local priorities.”¹

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for giving me their time and completing the survey which formed the basis of this research. I would also like to thank everyone for their feedback and very helpful advice. Finally I'd like to thank the Councillors who agreed to be interviewed and answered questions in a frank and a straight forward manner. Without all your support this paper would not have been possible.

Abstract:

This paper examines the attitudes of current City and County Councillors and their personal experience of contesting the 2014 local election in Ireland. Using quantitative data taken from a comprehensive survey of all City and County Councillors as well as a number of qualitative interviews, the paper looks at the campaigns and strategies employed by those successful candidates. One of the main aims of the research was to establish what the most important aspects of each individual campaign were. The survey examined campaign timelines, campaign expenditure, campaign teams and what the main issues were that concerned voters. It also looked at factors such as the impact of posters and leaflets. As social media has started to play a bigger role in Irish elections it was also analysed. Local elections by their nature are focused on local issues and the community so the importance of being an established or a well-known member of the community in getting elected was also assessed. The paper also briefly looks at possible reform of the process and how issues such as posterage could be dealt with. As well as the overall findings, analysis is also done by political affiliation,

¹ Mark Callanan, Justin F. Keogan (2003) “Local Government in Ireland: Inside Out” Institute of Public Administration.

geographical location and gender. Some of the questions are also analysed by age profile. It is hoped that this paper is the first in a series of papers on local authority members with the next paper examining the experiences of being a Councillor. It will focus on workload and the influence Councillors have on local Government. A further paper will be written detailing the experiences of unsuccessful 2014 local election candidates and it is my aim to compare responses to a set of similar questions posed in this work.

Introduction:

On 23rd May 2014 the 16th local elections since the foundation of the state were held. A total of 2,039 candidates² stood in the election with 949 elected to serve a five-year term following the counting of votes which concluded in the early hours of 27th May. The turnout for this election was 52% which was 6% lower when compared with the 2009 local elections. The turnout in Dublin was lower than the national average at coming in at 43%. The table below outlines national turnout in local elections since 1967³:

Year	1967	1974	1979	1985	1991	1999	2004	2009	2014
Turnout	67%	62%	64%	60%	56%	50%	59%	58%	52%

It is important to note that this election was preceded by the 2013 Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report⁴ which had led to major changes to electoral areas. The changes were in line with the Government report *“Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government”* which was launched in October 2012.⁵ The report controversially proposed the abolition of all Town and Borough councils, and merged Limerick City and County councils, Waterford City and County councils, and Tipperary North Riding and South Riding County councils. Most electoral areas underwent significant changes both in geographical size and in the number of seats per area.⁶

² <http://adriankavanaghelections.org/2013/12/19/local-election-candidates-update/>

³ <http://adriankavanaghelections.org/2014/06/03/turnout-or-turned-off-a-geographical-review-of-voter-turnout-patterns-at-the-2014-local-elections/>

⁴ <http://www.boundarycommittee.ie/>

⁵ <http://www.environ.ie/en/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,31309,en.pdf>

⁶ <https://electionsireland.org/results/local/2014local.cfm>

The outcome of this election saw an increase in the number of Councillors that were elected as Independents, as well as an increase for Sinn Fein and non-traditional parties. Political commentary in the aftermath of the election focused on the disappointing results for the Government parties and articulated the view that this was a clear win for opposition parties and the Independents.⁷ However it could be argued that this was following a familiar trend for second order elections particularly when it comes to non-party candidates. Michael Gallagher and John Coakley in their research on the comparison between national and local elections have observed that non-party candidates have tended to do better at local elections than in national elections. At a local level they are perceived to make a bigger impact than at national level (Gallagher 1989: P. 28) (Coakley 2001: P. 86). International academic research has produced similar findings, where second order national elections are viewed as having less at stake (Reif and Schmitt: 1980). The table below outlines the percentage and seats won in the 2014 local elections⁸:

Party	FF	FG	Ind	SF	Lab	PBP	AAA	GP	Others	Total
Vote	25.3%	24%	23.2%	15.2%	7.2%	1.7%	1.2%	1.6%	0.6%	100%
Seats	267	235	193	159	51	14	14	12	4	949

Methodology and Paper Structure:

The research conducted for this paper focused mainly on a comprehensive survey of all the Councillors who were elected in the 2014 Local Elections. On the first anniversary of the 2014 local elections an electronic survey was circulated to all those City and County Councillors that have an email address. 932 surveys were sent in total with 345 responses received giving a response rate of 37%.⁹ Some of the qualitative responses are also included in the paper but they are not attributed to any Councillor.

In August qualitative interviews were conducted with a cross section of Councillors, this included members of political parties (government and opposition) and Independents. The

⁷ <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/elections/local-elections/independents-sinn-f%C3%A9in-to-benefit-from-austerity-fatigue-1.1808121>

⁸ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/10QTIsH9i09RDOG04iDRBVISGtK9AAL3KyQyVtwuKjos/edit#gid=975751026>

⁹ Responses to the various questions did fluctuate, the response rate to each question is included in each table/chart.

interviews were conducted with a mix of new/existing Councillors, full-time/part-time and urban/rural so as to gather as wide a range of views as possible. Where an interviewee is quoted in the paper a footnote has been added to identify their background.

The paper analyses responses to each of the survey questions as well as the post-survey interviews conducted with a cross section of Councillors. The statistics are used descriptively so as to describe and show the data in a meaningful way and to assess whether patterns emerge.

The Respondents – Councillor Profiles:

Appendix I details the profile of the Councillors who responded to the survey. A good cross-section of party and independent Councillors took time to give their opinions and complete the survey, with just under 75% of the respondents being male. The gender breakdown per grouping broadly reflected the 75%/25% split although female responses were higher for Sinn Fein and Labour at 34% and 38% respectively. The responses included a complete range of the age profiles included in the survey. Just under 38% of the Councillors declared themselves as full-time public representatives while those who declared that they had other employment the majority were self-employed followed by 26.6% who were public sector employees, 26.2% private sector employees and just under 10% described themselves as having retired.

The table below breaks down Councillors employment profiles by political affiliation:

	Fianna Fail	Fine Gael	Independents	Sinn Fein	Labour	Green
Private Sector	30%	24%	20%	35%	20%	22%
Public Sector	18%	15%	30%	35%	45%	67%
Retired	7%	5%	15%	11%	20%	-
Self Employed	45%	56%	35%	19%	15%	11%

There was also an even spread of Councillors from rural areas, small/medium sized towns, large towns/cities and Dublin. Over 52% of the respondents were sitting Councillors at the time of the 2014 Local Election. Finally in terms of political ideology and on the left/right scale, the average rating turned out to be 4.61 where 0 meant left and 10 meant right. Councillors clustered at somewhere between three and six.

On employment status, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael had similar proportions of full-time and part-time Councillors, with 31% and 34% declaring themselves as full-time respectively. 38% of Independents and 39% of Labour Councillors were full-time Councillors. Sinn Fein represented somewhat of an outlier with 49% declaring themselves as full-time Councillors. When it came to ideology Fine Gael Councillors clustered between 5 and 8 with the majority at 5 and 6, for Fianna Fail it was between 4 and 6. Independents did cluster somewhat between 4 and 6 however the range of ideological identification was far more spread than the other political parties. Sinn Fein clustered heavily between 1 and 4 outlining a distinct left-wing political stance. Labour clustered between 3 and 4 but a number indicated their ideology as being 1, 2 and 5. The Anti-Austerity Alliance and People Before Profit Alliance identified as 1 as would be expected. Renua identified at 6 and 7. The table below outlines responses to the question on the issue of the left/right political spectrum.

Ideology - In politics we sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right? N/A for single issue Councillors who can skip this question

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
Responses	18	27	43	63	81	49	19	18	7	1	4.61

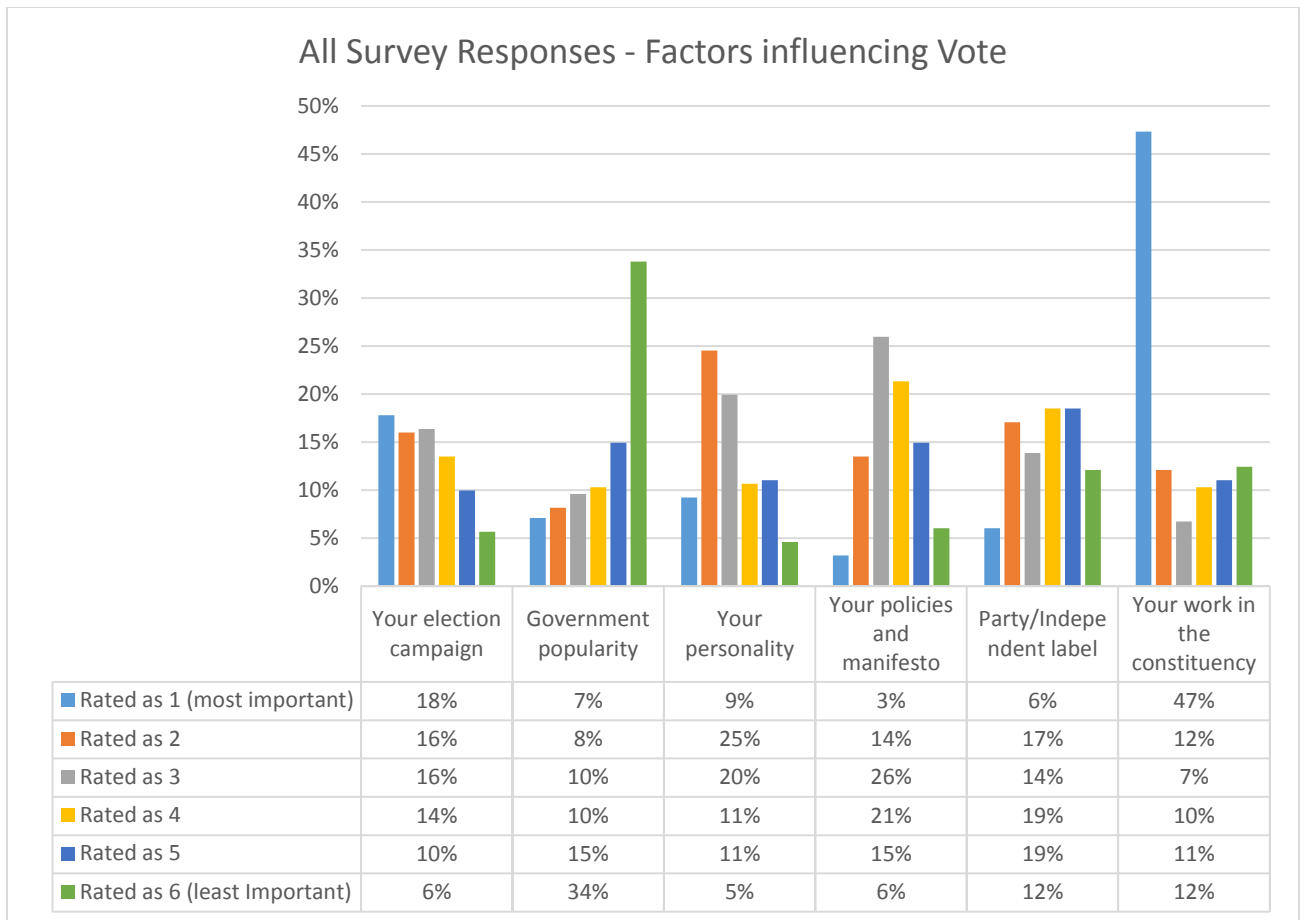
Responses 326

What factors were important in explaining the vote received?

“It was a combination of factors that explained the vote that I got. Being seen as someone who got things done even before becoming a Councillor was really important. For me as a new candidate hoping to get elected being able to show I could deliver for my community did lead to support for me. The proof of this was seeing the boxes from my areas on the morning of the count and the No. 1 votes beside my name. Nothing beats the hard work on the ground.”¹⁰

This was in many respects the central question in the research, trying to establish what Councillors felt were the main factors were when it came to explaining their vote.

¹⁰ Interview with a Dublin based new Independent Councillor.



Councillors were asked to rank in order of importance from a choice of six options. The question forced Councillors to rank in order what they felt were the most important factors in explaining the vote that they got in the 2014 Local Elections. It should be noted the respondents did not have to fill-in and rank all options and some respondents did leave blanks. However forcing the individual Councillors to rank what they thought was important as allowing this to be an open question may have led to respondents ranking more than one option being of equal importance. There is no doubt each of the factors played some part in explaining a Councillors vote however what this paper wanted to establish was in the view of Councillors what for them stood out as the main factor and set of factors in order of importance. The multi-layered nature of factors was summed up by one Dublin based Councillor: *“The fact that I was a new candidate and the fact that I was a relatively young candidate and the fact that I was seen to have done a good bit of work in a particular part of the ward and being active in the local community.”*¹¹

¹¹ Interview with a Dublin based new Government Party Councillor.

Perhaps not surprisingly the candidate's work in the constituency was viewed as being by far the most important factor with the election campaign itself coming a distant second. This point was re-iterated by an incumbent Councillor: *"The record of hard work, the constant feedback to people and the regular newsletters over my 5-year term and not being someone who simply turned up in the three weeks before the election all were major factors."*¹²

Developing the point about work in the constituency over the lifetime of the previous Council an opposition party Councillor stated: *"If you're a sitting councillor going for re-election people have to recognise your name so you're not calling at the door for the first time or haven't seen you in five years. So one of the most important aspects was keeping people up to date, whether it be leaflets or in the local press. It gives you a boost when you canvassing and people at the doors tell you that they remembered your leaflets. The job is half done before you get to the door. So when you get to a door hopefully you are only confirming your vote."*¹³

The low ranking of a Councillor's policies and manifesto is very interesting and worthy of further analysis. Interestingly Government popularity as an issue was ranked as being one of the least important factors. That being said in the qualitative research it did feature as an issue, for example a Government party Councillor felt that: *"Being a member of a party that was in Government was certainly harder given the unpopularity of the Government. I think I lost votes and support based upon national issues and the votes I gained were really because of my local work and local issues."*¹⁴ The influence of being an opposition party candidate was also remarked upon by a Councillor elected outside of Dublin: *"I think because I was Fianna Fail there was still a residual anger towards us. I'm not sure Fianna fail would have got it as easy as say Sinn Fein or the Independents. But it does make it easier if you're on the door steps and someone is angry about property tax or water charges because that was viewed as the current government policy. However there was the feeling that this was government policy but a case of 'you guys started it'."*¹⁵ The reality of being in Government and its effect on a candidates vote was also remarked upon by an incumbent opposition Councillor who had

¹² Interview with an incumbent Independent Councillor from a non-Dublin Constituency.

¹³ Interview with an incumbent Opposition Party Councillor from a Dublin Constituency.

¹⁴ Interview with a Dublin based new Government Party Councillor.

¹⁵ Interview with a new Opposition Party Councillor from a non-Dublin Constituency.

fought the previous Local Election as a member of a party in Government: *“I said it to our lads, don’t get fooled by your votes. If you’re in Government you do lose a sizeable chunk of your votes whether you are good or bad.”*¹⁶ Similarly the strength of the Independent brand was underlined by a sitting Independent Councillor: *“There was a very favourable disposition among the electorate towards independents. Independents were pushing at an open door really on the canvass. In some ways it was a case of a ‘plague on all your houses’ I am going to vote Independent”*¹⁷

When comparing male to female responses there were very few differences and the ranking of factors were almost identical (details in Appendix II). Similarly when we compare responses by region we find that there is a uniformity in terms of the factors that Councillors felt had influenced their vote. So for example Dublin and rural Councillors rated work in their constituency as the number one factor (49% and 50% respectively) as being the most important factor in influencing their vote. Dublin Councillors rated the influence of their election campaign much higher than all other regions.

Appendix III outlines responses to this question by political party. All political parties and the Independents felt that work in the constituency was the most important factor in explaining their vote. This is interesting as it includes both sitting Councillors at the time of the local election as well as new candidates who were not Councillors. We can infer from this that all successful candidates in the 2014 Local Elections were working as either Councillors anyway or working as Councillors in their constituencies. In other words all candidates had to act on and work on local issues. Independents rated this aspect as the most important with 60% indicating as such, whereas 31% of Sinn Fein Councillors rated it as the main factor in their vote. The fact that Independents saw this as being very important perhaps underlined the fact that Independents felt they had to prove their worth without a party label. Interestingly Sinn Fein Councillors by a narrow margin felt that their Party label was the main factor in explain their vote. The two Government parties did not see their party label as being a factor in explain their vote, both Fine Gael and Labour rated it as least important. Fianna Fail rated their label as slightly more important while Independents rated their label as the second most

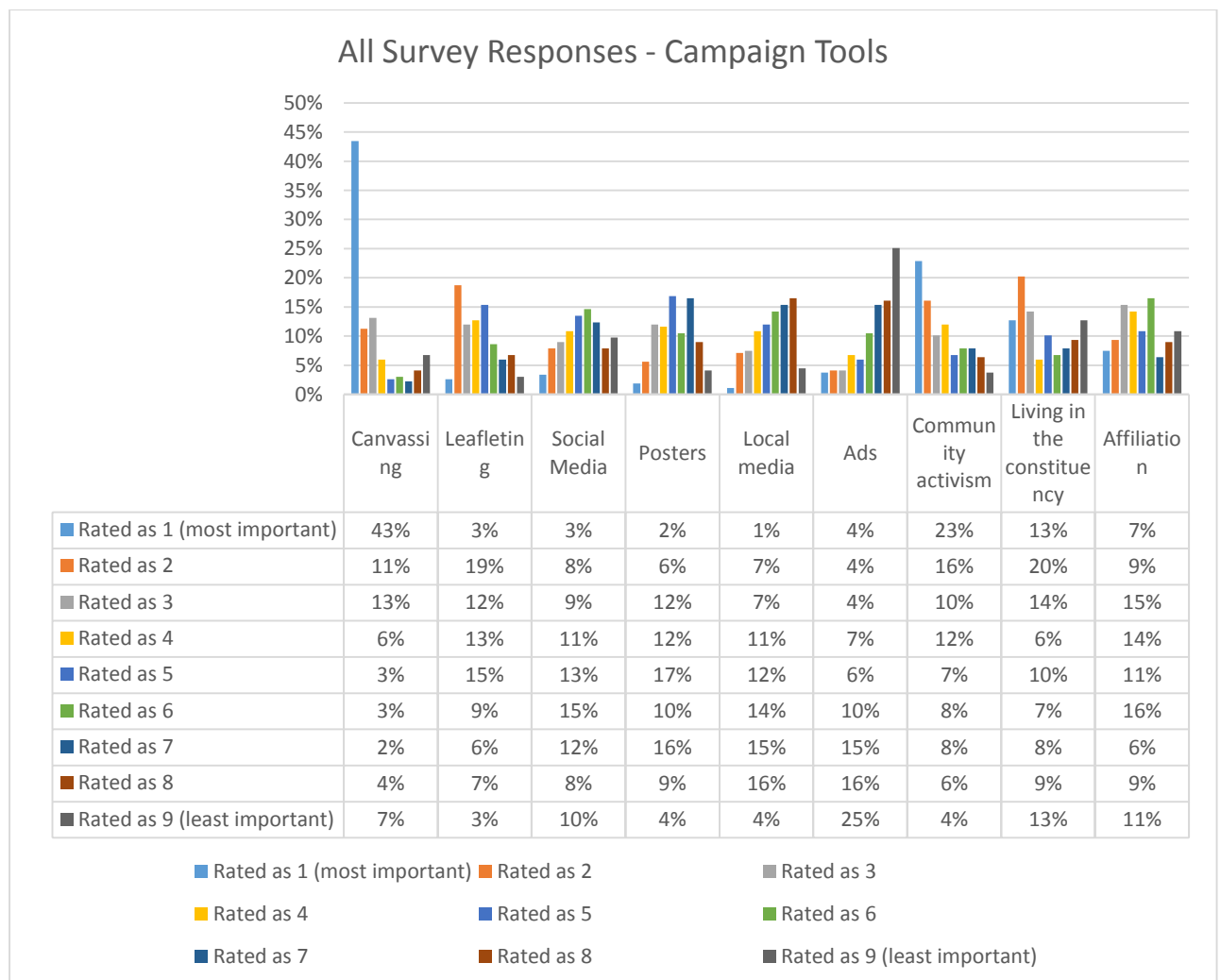
¹⁶ Interview with an incumbent Opposition Party Councillor from a Dublin Constituency.

¹⁷ Interview with an incumbent Independent Councillor from a non-Dublin Constituency.

broadband were highlighted by Councillors outside of Dublin. Economic issues such as unemployment while an issue across Ireland it was referred to more by non-Dublin Councillors. According to one Councillor national and local issues tended to cross-over: *“In an election like this people on the doors will raise every single issue. While something like housing and planning are very much local the fact is they are also very national as well. Water was an obvious contentious issue, I mean I can remember canvassing an estate one evening and Irish Water were installing water metres. Obviously it became the issue of that canvass then.”*¹⁸

What were the most important campaign tools?

“I under-utilised social media something I am rectifying. Leafleting is to my mind a waste of time as the material is dumped. Canvassing is much better.”



¹⁸ Interview with a Dublin based new Independent Councillor.

Canvassing was viewed as being by far the most effective campaign tool. Living in the constituency and community activism were also viewed as being significant campaign tools. While leafleting and postering were not considered as being the most important tools they did rate quite highly and underlined the importance of building up the identity and familiarity of the candidate. For example an incumbent Councillor referred to the importance of quality electoral literature: *“I do think my main flyer was very important for me as the local authorities were undergoing changes and I was able to explain and make the case for my area. People did say to me that my literature compared with some of the other candidates was streets ahead.”*¹⁹ The challenge faced by all candidates of the increasing number of households that try and dissuade leafleting by having notices on letter boxes was also referred to: *“It can be hard raising your profile especially with the number of ‘no-junk mail’ signs on doors.”*²⁰

Local media was viewed as being slightly more important than social media which is worthy of further study. Campaign ads were considered the least important tool although they continue to be a feature of Irish election campaigns. A first-time Councillor explained: *“Ads are never going to win you any votes however what they do achieve is candidate recognition and your name becomes familiar. Taking ads out were in my view absolutely essential for me as a new candidate. It also opened the door to local journalists and getting issues into the local papers.”*²¹

In terms of gender breakdown there was very little difference in terms of attitudes to campaign tools with 44% of male and 41% of females ranking it as the most important tool. The ranking of all categories were remarkably similar between genders. When looking at campaign tools by geographical responses we again find that canvassing is the most important campaign tool but there are some differences: ‘living in the constituency’ is ranked higher in areas outside of Dublin as is ‘community activism’. It would seem that successful Councillors in areas outside of Dublin tended to be very active and lived in their constituency. Dublin Councillors rated the influence of leafleting as being more important than those outside of Dublin. Rural and small town Councillors also placed more stock on local media than large town, city and Dublin Councillors. Appendix V outlines the detailed responses.

¹⁹ Interview with an incumbent Independent Councillor from a non-Dublin Constituency.

²⁰ Interview with an incumbent Opposition Party Councillor from a Dublin Constituency.

²¹ Interview with a Dublin based new Independent Councillor.

Appendix VI details responses by political party and Independents. All the political parties rated canvassing as the most important campaign tool with 53% of Fianna Fail Councillors naming it number one followed by 44% of Sinn Fein Councillors, and 39% of Fine Gael and Labour Councillors. The Independents rated their community activism as slightly more important as canvassing perhaps again underlining the importance to Independents of showing the voters that they work hard for the constituency. All bar Sinn Fein rated ‘living in the constituency’ as a significant campaign tool. Fianna Fail, Labour and the Independents scored leafleting as significant with it being viewed as the second and third most important tool. Local media was also ranked ahead of advertisements by all the political parties and independents.

While virtually all Councillors delivered leaflets in their constituency there was a wide range in terms of the numbers produced – From zero to 200,000. Over 50% of the respondents indicated that they had delivered in excess of 10,000 leaflets in their constituencies. In terms of the campaign timelines, while many sitting Councillors stated that their campaigns were effectively ongoing from the end of the last election, over 65% of the respondents indicated that they had started their campaigns in 2014 with the majority stating the campaigning and canvassing began in January. Very few Councillors had campaigns that were shorter than 12 weeks.

How well known was each Councillor before the election campaign?

Thinking of your constituency, before your election campaign how well known would you have considered yourself within the constituency?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very well-known	22.9%	67
Well known	50.5%	148
Not very well known	23.9%	70
Not known at all	2.7%	8
Other (please specify)		33
<i>answered question</i>		293

The importance of a candidate being known to the general public in a local election was viewed as a factor in winning the election. The table above shows that 73% of the successful candidates were either very-well known or well known in their constituency. A candidate who voters know is a key advantage not just in terms of voter recognition but also in respect to

building a candidate’s profile. In practical terms this could mean having to spend less time on introductory leaflets and advertisements in the local media. For those candidates who were not well known or not known at all before the start of the campaign it may have meant having to start their campaigns earlier.

Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour and Independent responses were very similar to this question with 82% of Labour respondents stating that they were either well-known or very-well known. For Fine Gael it was 80%, Fianna Fail 75% and Independents 77%. The figure for Sinn Fein was lower at 63%. The smaller parties generally had far lower candidate recognition in their constituencies before the election. The Anti-Austerity Alliance and People before Profit respondents felt they were not known while 63% of Green respondents felt that they were either not known at all or not very well known.

When the responses to this question are broken down by gender we find that male candidates felt they were generally better known than female candidates: 78% of males felt that they were either very well known or well-known. 60% of female candidates indicated that they were either very well known or well-known. 40% of the female candidates felt that they were either not known at all or not very well known while for males this figure was almost half at 22%. When it came to comparing responses by geographical area 82% of respondents from rural or villages felt that they were either very well-known or well-known while the responses from Dublin were 60%, large towns 68% and small/medium sized towns 69%.

How important was social media to your campaign?

“Social media certainly helped with engagement with the under 35s but people of all ages are on Facebook and stuff I post up is followed and you do get feedback from supporters and people in the constituency. It’s becoming more important.”²²

How would you rate the importance of social media, Facebook, Twitter, etc on your campaign?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very important	20.5%	61
Somewhat important	46.3%	138
Neither important or not important	14.4%	43
Not important	12.1%	36
Not important at all	6.7%	20

²² Interview with a new Opposition Party Councillor from a non-Dublin Constituency.

The use of social media and its impact on all election campaigns has been analysed extensively. Academic research on its affects include Loader and Mercea (2012), Dimitrova. Shehata, Strömbäck and Nord (2011). Councillors did recognise that in the 2014 Local Elections that it did play an important role, over 20% felt that it was very important it. However it could be viewed as simply another tool in the armoury of a long election campaign. Many of the respondents to the survey pointed out that although it was an important campaign tool it required significant effort on the candidate's part for it to be effective and for it to be translated into votes. To illustrate the point one Councillor responded to the question as follows: *"Social media is hugely important - direct access to voters but you need to invest time in it and not simply appear online at election time."* Recognition of the importance of social media was tempered by the view that canvassing remained the key tool: *"It's very important as part of an overall campaign. It should account for 20% of overall campaign. Some candidates overly relied on it to the exclusion of old school canvassing. There is no substitute for boots on the ground."* Others still remain to be convinced of its effectiveness: *"I have to date chosen not to engage in this medium, as I consider it very superficial. In my position I was fortunate enough to have built a reputation in a time when social media was not important. I may have to concede at some stage and engage in social media."* It is interesting that some of those Councillors who are established in their constituencies did not feel the need to engage with social media. Indeed some Councillors remain suspicious of its impact: *"It's very difficult to know - it could be argued that those of us who use social media live in a social media bubble and are not cognisant of how those outside it communicate and express preferences."*

In terms of responses by political parties and the independents there was a general consensus that social media was somewhat important with 46% – 51% of Fine Gael, Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein, Labour and Greens feeling that it was somewhat important. The Independents were the slight outliers with 35% stating that it was somewhat important. Sinn Fein respondents were the most enthusiastic about social media as 42% of respondents felt it was very important. Fianna Fail at 22% were the second most enthusiastic. Just 8% of Labour respondents, 11% of

Fine Gael respondents, 18% of Independents and 13% of Green Party respondents felt it was very important.

When comparing responses by area there was consistency in responses from Councillors across the country. Councillors in Dublin, towns of all sizes and rural areas ranked social media’s influence on the campaign very similarly. 38% of Dublin respondents, 45% of large town respondents, 53% of small town respondents and 47% of rural respondents ranked social media as being somewhat important. 8% of Dublin and 16% of rural respondents felt it was not important at all. So the conclusion from this sample of Councillors would suggest there is little difference in attitudes to social media between Dublin Councillors and those Councillors representing rural Ireland.

The table below outlines attitudes to social media broken down by age category which does outline some differences in attitudes to social media by age group:

	18 – 24 ²³	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55 – 64	65+
Very important	50%	24%	38%	14%	8%	-
Somewhat important	50%	63%	45%	48%	36%	32%
Neither important or not important	-	13%	6%	16%	23%	21%
Not important	-	-	9%	15%	18%	26%
Not important at all	-	-	2%	7%	15%	21%

What percentage of the households in your constituency did you or a member of your team canvass?

“The wards are very big. Much bigger than in the past. After 6-7 months of canvassing I only covered about 60% of the ward.”

What percentage of the households in your constituency did you or a member of your team canvass?

²³ Sample size very small – Two respondents

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Did not canvass	1.3%	4
up to 24%	8.6%	26
25 - 49%	20.3%	61
50 - 74%	30.2%	91
75% - 100%	39.5%	119
Additional Comment (Optional)		47
<i>answered question</i>		301

As referred to at the beginning of this paper one of the significant changes that followed the reform of local government was an increase in size of many of the constituencies. While this meant campaigning was more difficult the majority of successful Councillors were able to canvass over half of their constituency. One Councillor felt that: *"With larger Areas in 2014 the one to one option was far more difficult to achieve. I did not go into 2/3 of the overall land area. For instance I had one New Electoral Division with 702 Voters come in which was over 15 miles from my base but being the most proximate candidate I felt it necessary to undertake a full canvass there. In terms of time this took in excess of 60 hrs given its rural composition."* For many urban based candidates the issue was somewhat alleviated by having larger constituencies: *"Going from a five seater to a nine seater made a big difference. It certainly made the campaign more manageable."*²⁴

There was also a recognition that canvassing itself is difficult: *"Hard to get people to canvass compared to leafletting. There is a tendency for canvassing to be seen as a very challenging activity where a high threshold of knowledge about the candidate and his/her politics is needed."* The rise in the number of apartment and gated communities was certainly an issue when it came to canvassing urban areas: *"Huge number of apartments in my area now difficult to contact."*

In terms of the party breakdown Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein Councillors covered the most territory with 73% and 72% respectively stating that they canvassed more than 75% of their constituency compared with 69% of Labour, 68% of Fine Gael, 63% of Independents and 63% of Green Party Councillors. It is also worth noting that for many party candidates there would have been vote management to maximise seat numbers so reducing the area to be canvassed: *"As a party candidate I was given a particular area to canvass and work in as we had a multi-*

²⁴ Interview with an incumbent Opposition Party Councillor from a Dublin Constituency.

candidate strategy. My core area was manageable for the purposes of an election campaign.”²⁵

In terms of geographical area 82% of Councillors in towns over 10,000 and cities excluding Dublin were able to canvass over 50% of their constituency. This compared with 53% in small and medium sized towns and 66% of Dublin Councillors who stated that they had canvassed over 50% of their constituency. 71% of Councillors in rural areas were able to canvass over 50% despite the significant geographical sizes involved. When we compare male and female Councillors we find virtually no difference in terms of the area canvassed with 71% of males and 70% of females stating that they had canvassed over 50% of their constituency.

How many people in total assisted with your campaign e.g. canvassing, leafleting, postering, etc?

“I have always found one to one canvassing best. Group canvassing tends to lead to impression one is hiding from something. People also have the option to discuss matters with feeling inhibited by bystanders.”

How many people in total assisted with your campaign e.g. canvassing, leafleting, postering, etc?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
None	1.0%	3
1 - 10	32.6%	99
11 - 20	27.6%	84
More than 20	38.8%	118
answered question		304

Almost 40% of successful Councillors had campaign teams of over 20. Just 1% did not have a campaign team. Again we see the importance of canvassing to a successful campaign. Fianna Fail had the largest campaign teams with 52% of Councillors indicating that they had teams of over 20 volunteers. 39% of Sinn Fein, 38% of Greens, 37% of Fine Gael and 36% of Independents stated that they had teams of over 20 and Labour being the outlier at 13%. In terms of geographical location rural based Councillors had the largest campaign teams with almost 50% of Councillors stating that they had a campaign team of 20 or more. Both party

²⁵ Interview with a Dublin based new Independent Councillor.

and Independent candidates referenced the importance of family and friends to their campaigns: *“My team was made up of family and friends as well as party supporters. I didn’t have a massive team but I had enough to get the area covered as best anyone could have. Being a party candidate obviously means a pool a supporters however family and friends were vital.”*²⁶

What were the total campaign spends?

Approximately how much did you spend on your election campaign?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Up to €1,000	8.6%	26
€1,001 - €5,000	62.1%	187
€5,001 - €10,000	24.6%	74
€10,000+	4.7%	14
<i>answered question</i>		301

Considering the size of many of the constituencies the average campaign spend could be considered modest. 62% of the Councillors spent between €1,000 and €5,000. Just under 5% spent over €10,000 on their campaign. When comparing male and female responses we find that there is very little difference in terms of campaign spend.

	Fianna Fail	Fine Gael	Independents	Sinn Fein	Labour	Green	Overall Total
Up to €1,000	1%	13%	7%	24%	-	25%	8%
€1,001 - €5,000	55%	59%	61%	70%	75%	75%	62%
€5,001 - €10,000	36%	25%	25%	6%	25%	-	25%
€10,000 +	8%	3%	7%	-	-	-	5%

²⁶ Interview with a new Opposition Party Councillor from a non-Dublin Constituency.

	Dublin	Large Town / City (Over 10,000)	Small or Middle Sized Town	Rural Area or Village	Overall Total
Up to €1,000	4%	10%	12%	12%	9%
€1,001 - €5,000	52%	76%	59%	59%	62%
€5,001 - €10,000	32%	11%	27%	27%	25%
€10,000 +	12%	3%	2%	2%	4%

What were attitudes to election posters?

“Before my campaign I decided I would not have any posters. An experienced friend convinced me that it was essential to have posters to get my name out into the community. How right he was. Every door I knocked on there was a mention of seeing my poster, thus people felt they knew me.”

In relation to campaign posters, which of the following would you support:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
No change to the current rules around postering	25.5%	76
A strict limit placed on the number of posters a candidate can have	33.9%	101
Posters being erected in specific areas only	23.8%	71
A complete ban on posters	16.8%	50
<i>answered question</i>		298

The issue of campaign posters often comes to the fore in the run up to all Irish elections with the debate on whether posters should be banned or changes introduced to the rules around postering. Those who oppose a ban on postering often and legitimately point to a ban favouring sitting Councillors and while posters do not necessarily lead directly to additional votes their power is in building recognition. As one Councillor succinctly put it: *“Posters are an extremely efficient way of building name and facial recognition. Although they are an expensive nuisance and many favour prohibiting them, they are most beneficial to new or non-*

incumbent candidates. Abolishing posters would put challenger candidates at a very unfair disadvantage.” Another pointed to the fact that posters essentially raise the profile of the elections and the candidates themselves: “Given that many people are unaware of their political representatives, who they are and what they do posters are essential to get people talking and perhaps indeed voting.” Again this point was re-iterated by a first-time County Council candidate representing a political party: “I could not have done without posters as a first time candidate but one of my colleagues who is thirty years on the Council didn’t need posters so it really depends what stage of your career you are at.”²⁷

While Councillors were overwhelmingly against a complete ban on posters well over half did favour changes to the current system. For example one Councillor stated: *“I personally had one of the largest amount of posters in my area, yet I do believe that designated areas where all candidates erect their posters should be something we work towards as it makes the running field more even. It also gives voters an opportunity to see every candidate in the one area.”* While another felt that: *“A limit on posters would favour urban over rural. A ban favours incumbents over new candidates. Posters work because they allow people to feel that they know you and if done right demonstrates confidence in your campaign. I would restrict the time allowed for posters to the last week. This would naturally limit the amount of posters you can get up and the money one would be willing to spend on posters for such a short period, while it would still allow new candidates get their faces up.”*

The table below outlines responses by the parties and independents. Again all were against a complete ban on posters with a Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Independents and Sinn Fein favouring a limit on posters, while Labour and the Greens favouring posters being erected in specific areas only. All Anti-Austerity Alliance respondents favoured a strict limit on posters while all Renua respondents felt that there was no need to change the current rules.

	Fianna Fail	Fine Gael	Independents	Sinn Fein	Labour	Green
A complete ban on posters	20%	20%	17%	13%	17%	-

²⁷ Interview with a new Opposition Party Councillor from a non-Dublin Constituency.

A strict limit placed on the number of posters a candidate can have	35%	35%	35%	35%	21%	25%
No change to the current rules around postering	28%	19%	27%	28%	24%	13%
Posters being erected in specific areas only	17%	26%	21%	24%	38%	62%

Attitudes to posters in geographical areas showed some differences with those in Dublin being the least in favour of a complete ban on posters. Dublin and rural Councillors were more inclined to favour the current rules around postering although overall a majority of Councillors in all areas did favour some changes in postering rules.

	Dublin	Large Town / City (Over 10,000)	Small or Middle Sized Town	Rural Area or Village
A complete ban on posters	8%	20%	17%	20%
A strict limit placed on the number of posters a candidate can have	36%	34%	36%	32%
No change to the current rules around postering	28%	24%	20%	28%
Posters being erected in specific areas only	28%	22%	27%	20%

Conclusion:

*"It was challenging and tough but one of the best experiences I have ever had."*²⁸

This paper set out to capture and to try and understand the main factors were in explaining why the current members of local authorities were ultimately successful in May 2014. The paper has used the results of a comprehensive survey of Councillors across Ireland to try and explain how the various elements of the 2014 Local Election campaigns came together. It is clear that the work of each candidate in the constituency in the lead up to the election played a significant part in explaining their vote and was viewed as being more important than the election campaign itself. The low ranking of policy and manifesto is very interesting and worthy of further analysis. Equally interesting was the view that Government popularity was viewed as one of the least important factors when asked in the survey but the qualitative research showed that it did play a significant role for both party and Independent candidates.

As one might expect canvassing was viewed as being the most important electoral tool. We also find that on average successful candidates tended to be well known in their communities, had started their campaigns in January 2014, spent between €1,000 and €5,000, were able to canvass more than half their constituency and had campaign teams of more than 11 people. In terms of the issues we find somewhat of a paradox in that national issues tended to dominate the agenda however the popularity of the government ranked quite low in terms of factors explaining a candidate's vote.

The following quote taken from an interview with one of the new opposition party Councillors on their overall impression of their campaign is particularly striking. When asked to sum up their overall impression they described their campaign as: *"Gruelling, exhausting but positive overall. You were doing everything from designing your literature, putting your message together, getting your photograph done, ordering your posters and getting teams together all that stuff so you were really hands on in everything. It was a huge learning curve. It certainly sets you up for the next election, once you do it once you can improve and it sets you up for the next campaign"*²⁹ It really highlights the commitment required to be a successful

²⁸ Interview with a Dublin based new Government Party Councillor.

²⁹ Interview with a new Opposition Party Councillor from a non-Dublin Constituency.

candidate and despite being a party candidate it required a significant amount of self-management and self-motivation to deliver a seat.

The view from an incumbent Independent Councillor that the 2014 campaign differed from the previous local election campaign is also particularly interesting. According to this Councillor: *“It was more difficult in 2014 to get a committed endorsement from people, people just seemed to be brassed off with politicians. They may well have been going to vote for you but they were damned if they were going to tell you. People were certainly cagier. I found in 2009 people were more upfront they would endorse you with enthusiasm.”*³⁰

Local elections in Ireland are hard fought and the 2014 election was no different in the level of work and commitment required. It is clear that to be a successful candidate it requires great personal dedication and a range of tools and campaigning techniques to stand out. When drilling into why a candidate was successful the degree of commonality between all candidates regardless of party affiliation or whether they stood as an independent was very evident. So while an election campaign is about highlighting differences and standing out when it comes down by and large Councillors can point to similar reasons for their election no matter where they stood or who they stood for.

³⁰ Interview with an incumbent Independent Councillor from a non-Dublin Constituency.

Appendix I

What is your Political Affiliation?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Fianna Fail	26.0%	89
Fine Gael	21.9%	75
Sinn Fein	18.1%	62
Labour	7.6%	26
Green	2.6%	9
People Before Profit Alliance	0.3%	1
Anti-Austerity Alliance	0.6%	2
Renua	0.6%	2
Independent	21.6%	74
Other	0.6%	2
Other (please specify)		5
<i>answered question</i>		342

What is your gender?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Male	74.9%	257
Female	25.1%	86
<i>answered question</i>		343

Age		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
18 - 24	1.2%	4
25 - 34	18.1%	62
35 - 44	26.6%	91
45 - 54	27.8%	95
55 - 64	19.3%	66
65+	7.0%	24
<i>answered question</i>		342

Are you a.....		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Full Time Councillor	37.1%	126
Part-Time Councillor	62.9%	214
<i>answered question</i>		340

If you are in employment in addition to being a Councillor are you employed in the....

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Public Sector	26.6%	67
Private Sector	26.2%	66
Self Employed	37.3%	94
Retired	9.9%	25
<i>answered question</i>		252

Where do you live?

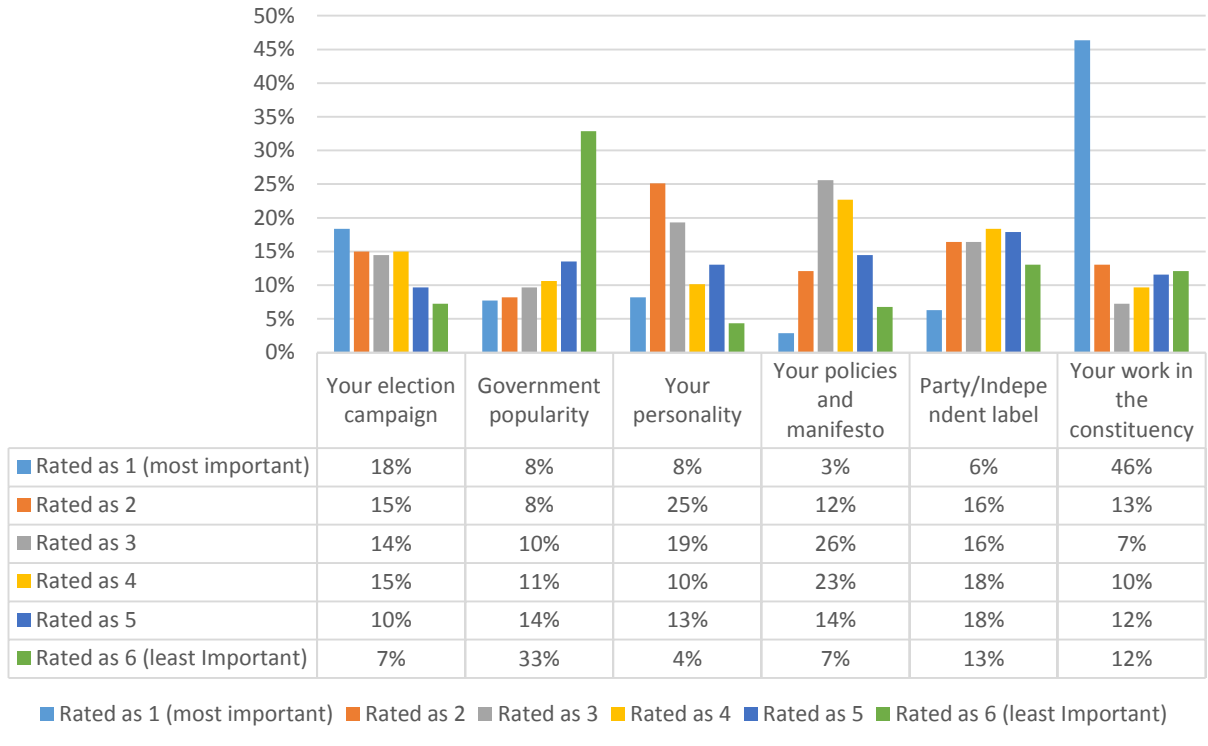
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Rural area or village	32.5%	111
Small or middle size town	21.9%	75
Large town (over 10,000) or City (excluding Dublin)	23.7%	81
Dublin	21.9%	75
<i>answered question</i>		342

In the 2014 Local Elections were you a.....

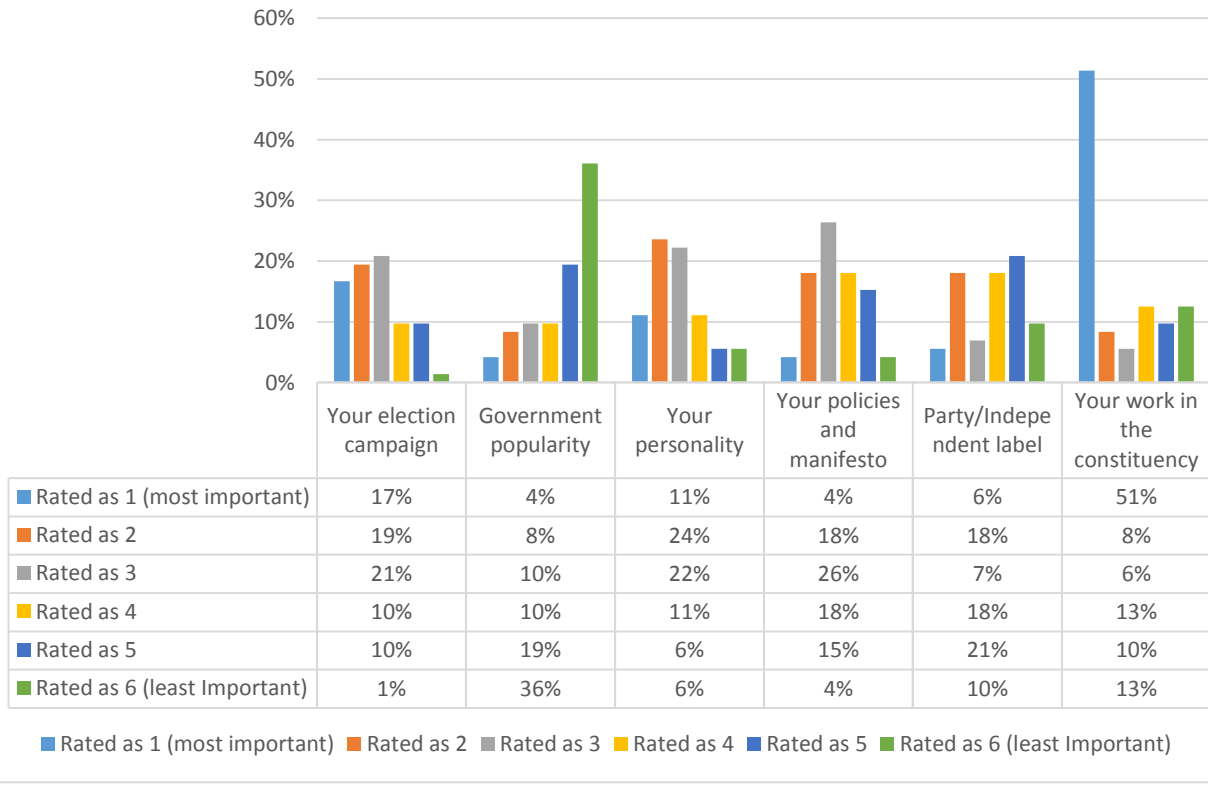
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
A first time local election candidate	36.2%	123
An unsuccessful candidate in a previous election local or other	11.8%	40
A sitting Councillor	52.1%	177
<i>answered question</i>		340

Appendix II

Male Responses - Factors influencing Vote

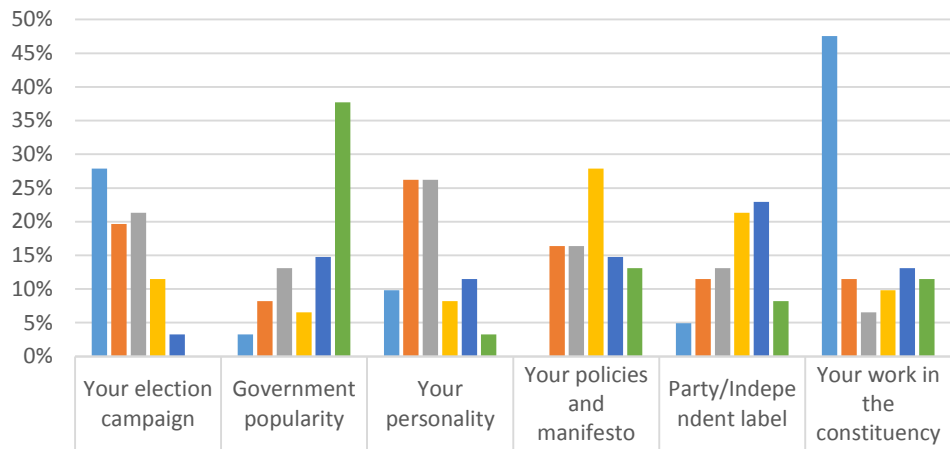


Female Responses - Factors influencing Vote



Appendix III

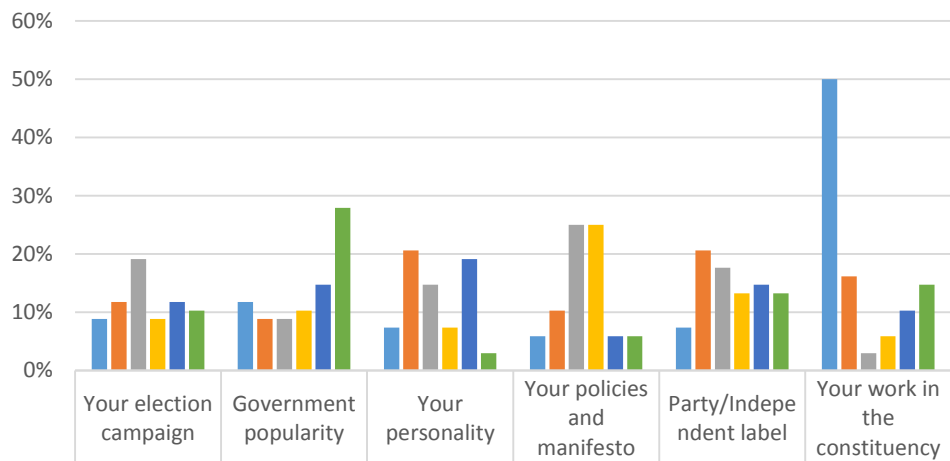
Dublin Responses - Factors influencing Vote



	Your election campaign	Government popularity	Your personality	Your policies and manifesto	Party/Independent label	Your work in the constituency
Rated as 1 (most important)	28%	3%	10%	0%	5%	48%
Rated as 2	20%	8%	26%	16%	11%	11%
Rated as 3	21%	13%	26%	16%	13%	7%
Rated as 4	11%	7%	8%	28%	21%	10%
Rated as 5	3%	15%	11%	15%	23%	13%
Rated as 6 (least Important)	0%	38%	3%	13%	8%	11%

■ Rated as 1 (most important)
 ■ Rated as 2
 ■ Rated as 3
 ■ Rated as 4
 ■ Rated as 5
 ■ Rated as 6 (least Important)

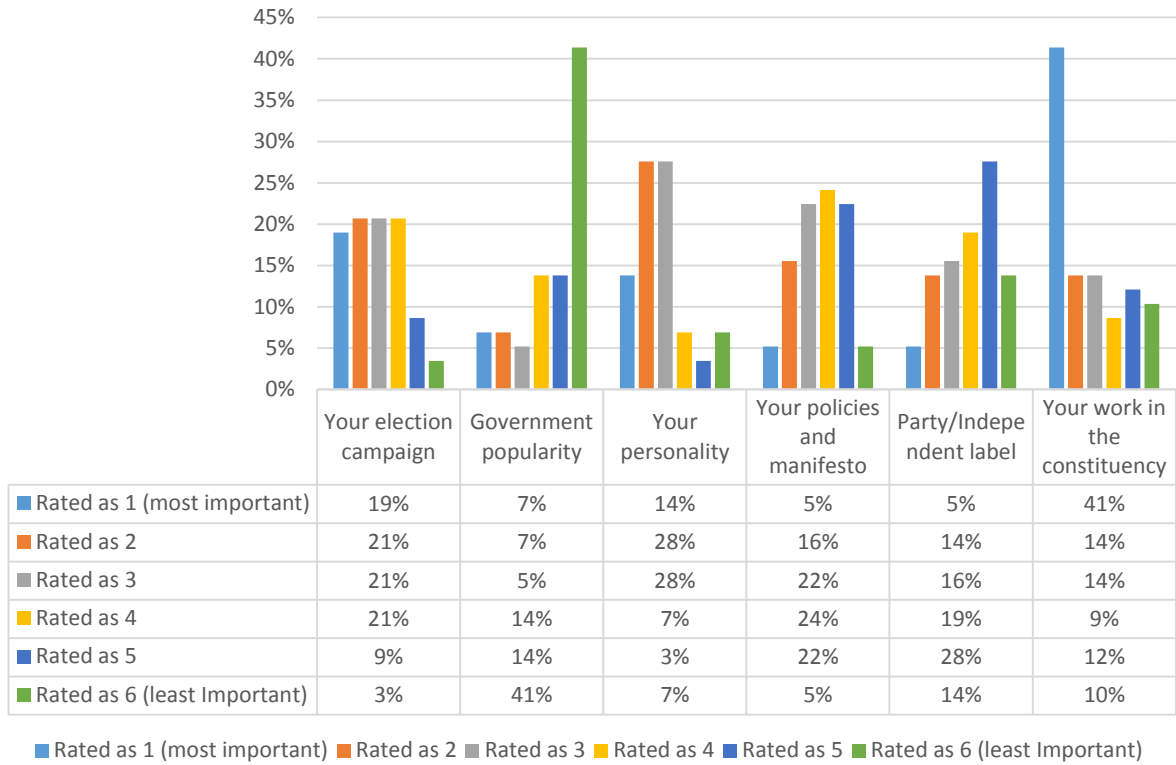
Large Town or City Responses - Factors influencing Vote



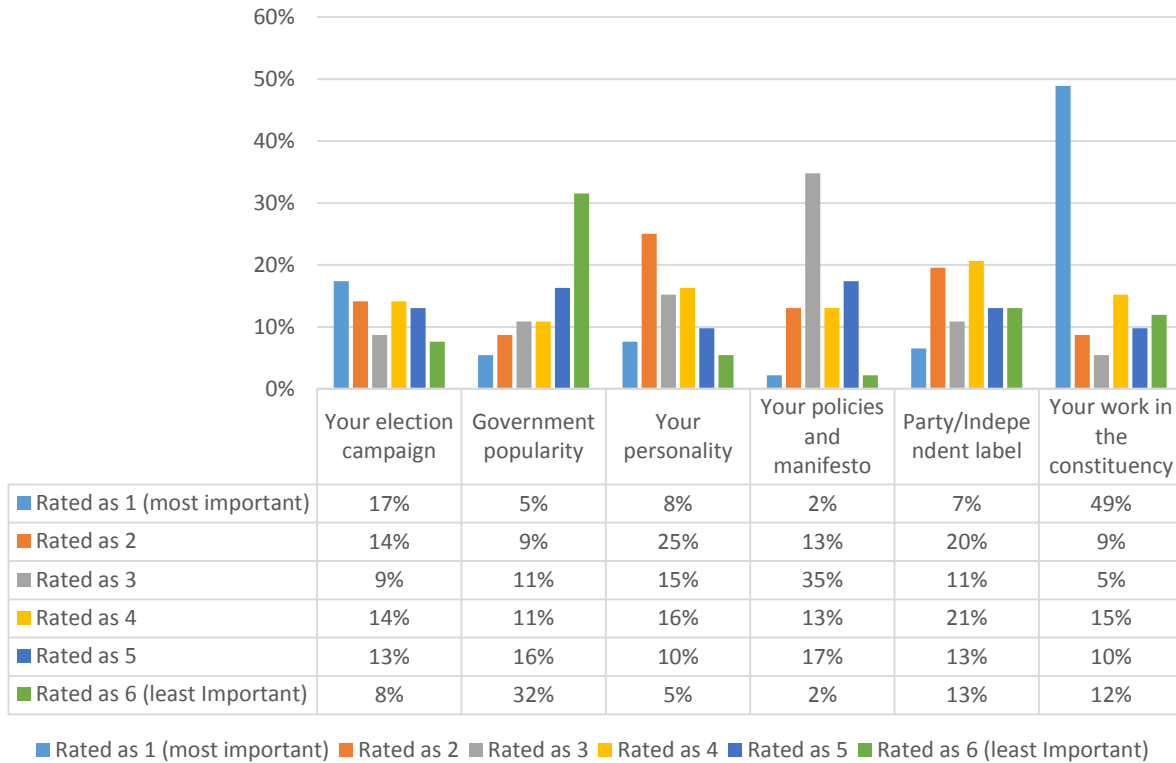
	Your election campaign	Government popularity	Your personality	Your policies and manifesto	Party/Independent label	Your work in the constituency
Rated as 1 (most important)	9%	12%	7%	6%	7%	50%
Rated as 2	12%	9%	21%	10%	21%	16%
Rated as 3	19%	9%	15%	25%	18%	3%
Rated as 4	9%	10%	7%	25%	13%	6%
Rated as 5	12%	15%	19%	6%	15%	10%
Rated as 6 (least Important)	10%	28%	3%	6%	13%	15%

■ Rated as 1 (most important)
 ■ Rated as 2
 ■ Rated as 3
 ■ Rated as 4
 ■ Rated as 5
 ■ Rated as 6 (least Important)

Small or Middle Size Town Responses - Factors influencing Vote

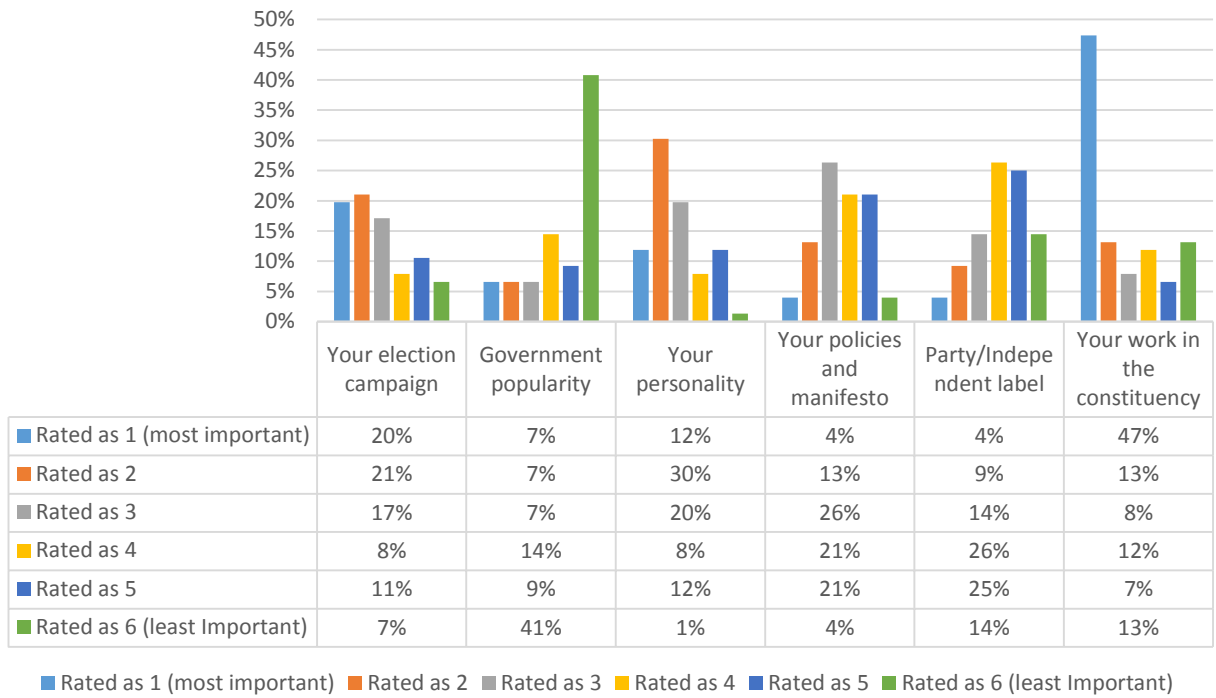


Rural Area or Village Responses - Factors influencing Vote

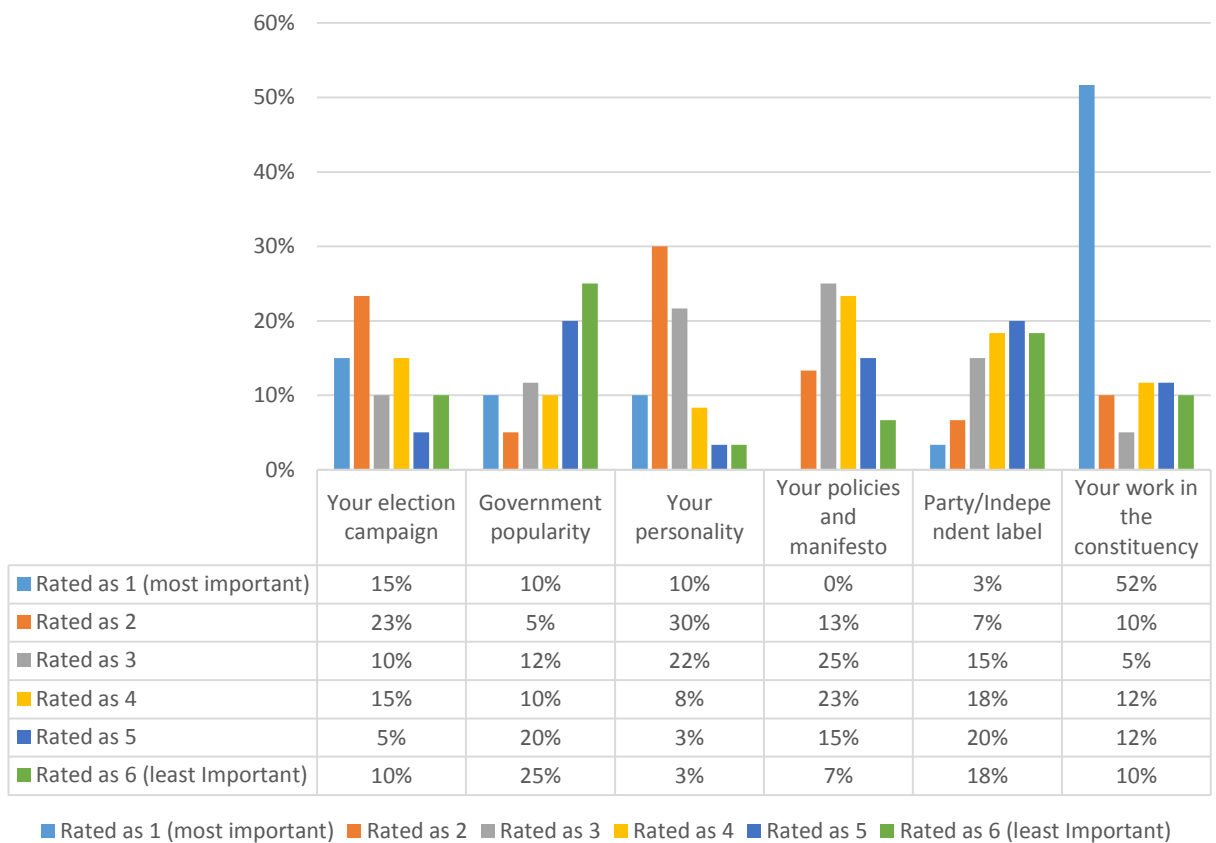


Appendix IV

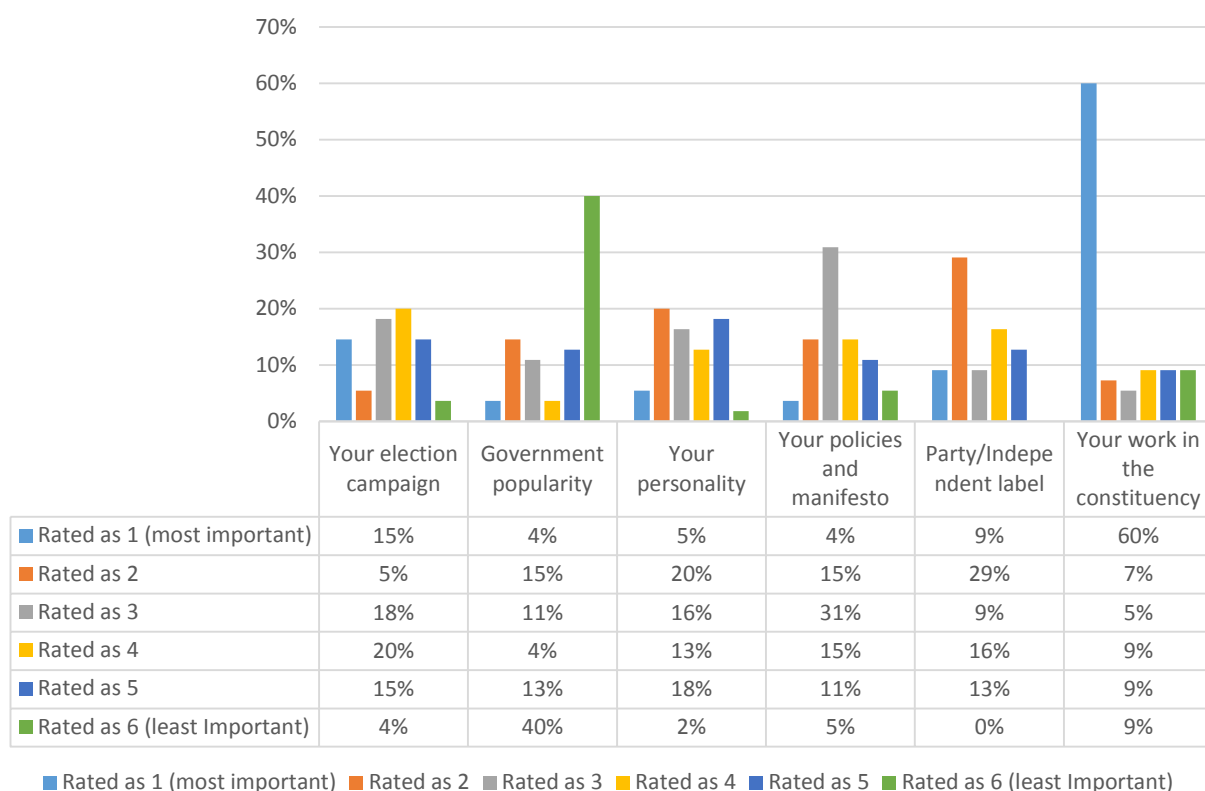
Fianna Fail Responses - Factors influencing Vote



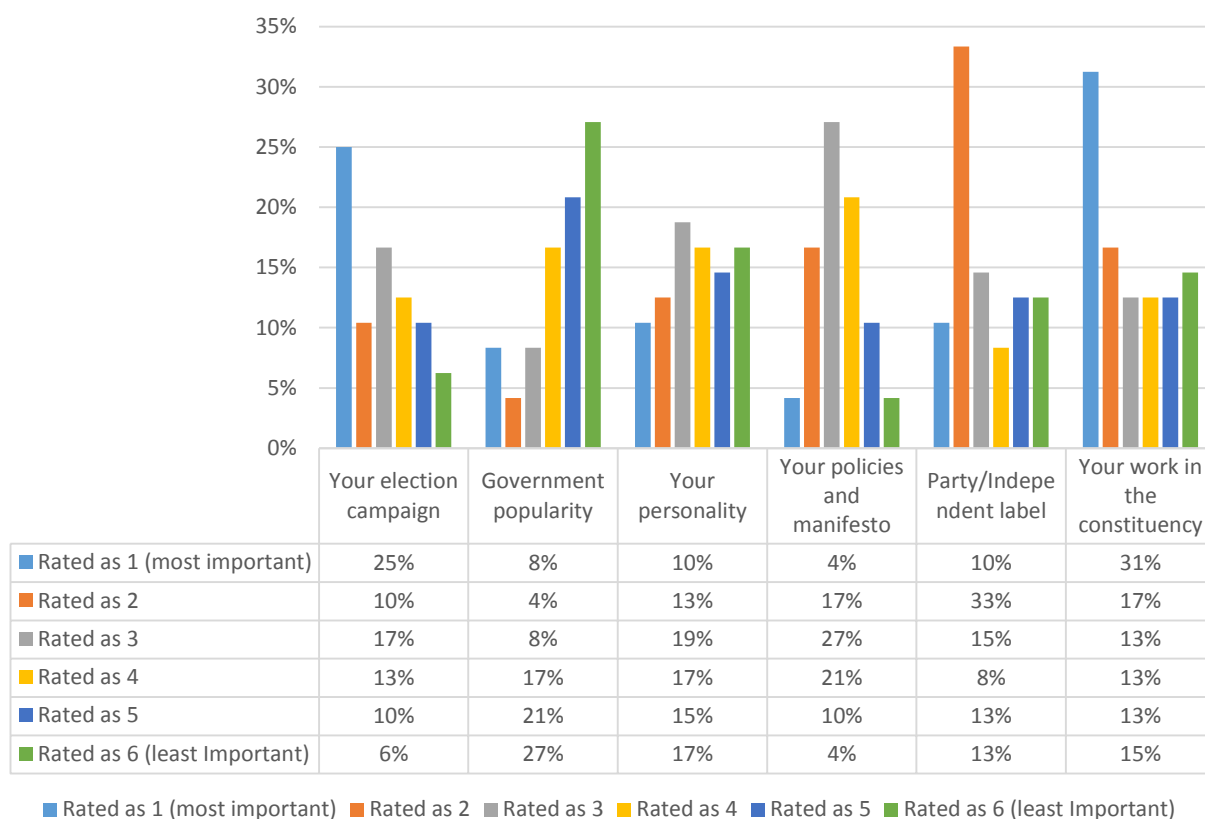
Fine Gael Responses - Factors influencing Vote



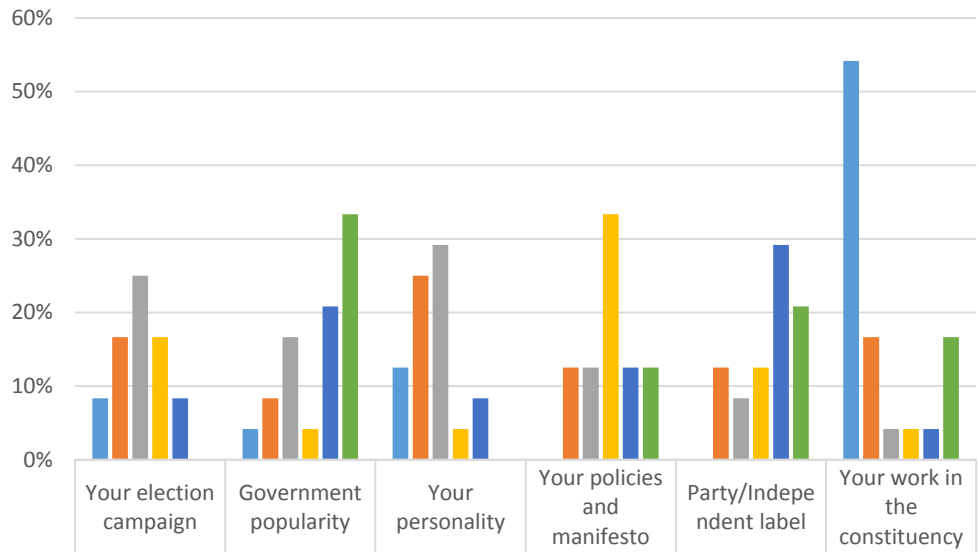
Independents Responses - Factors influencing Vote



Sinn Fein Responses - Factors influencing Vote



Labour Responses - Factors influencing Vote

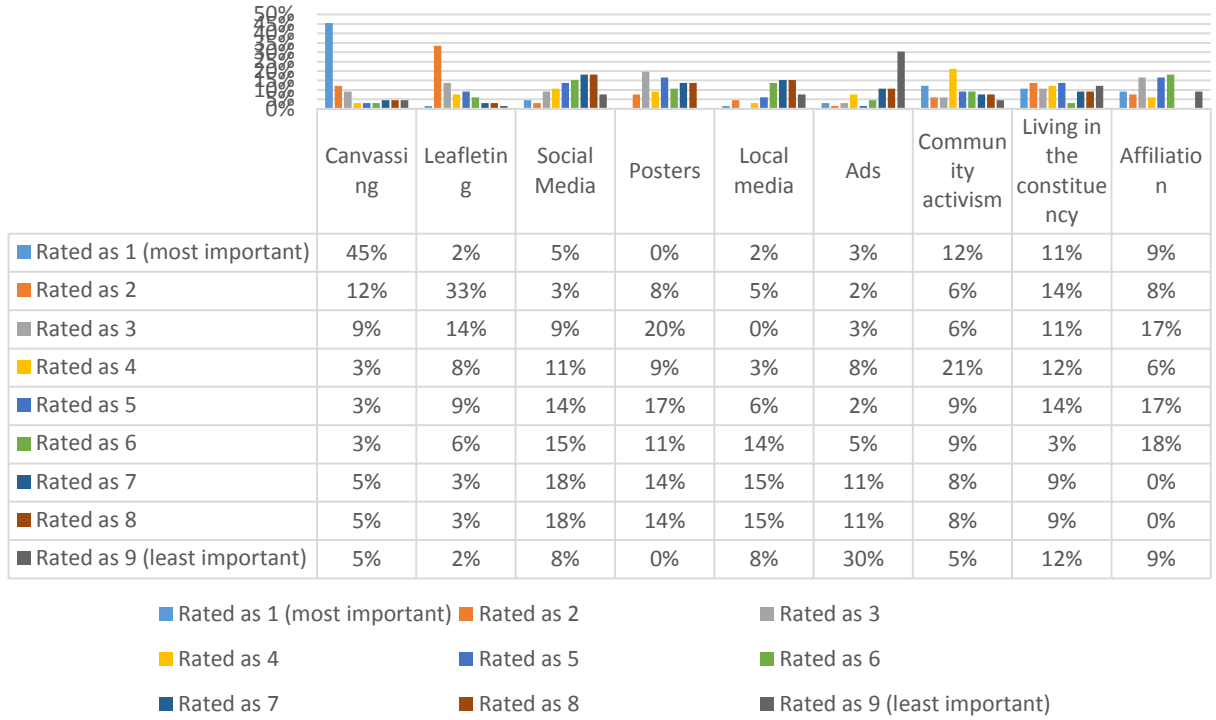


Rated as 1 (most important)	8%	4%	13%	0%	0%	54%
Rated as 2	17%	8%	25%	13%	13%	17%
Rated as 3	25%	17%	29%	13%	8%	4%
Rated as 4	17%	4%	4%	33%	13%	4%
Rated as 5	8%	21%	8%	13%	29%	4%
Rated as 6 (least Important)	0%	33%	0%	13%	21%	17%

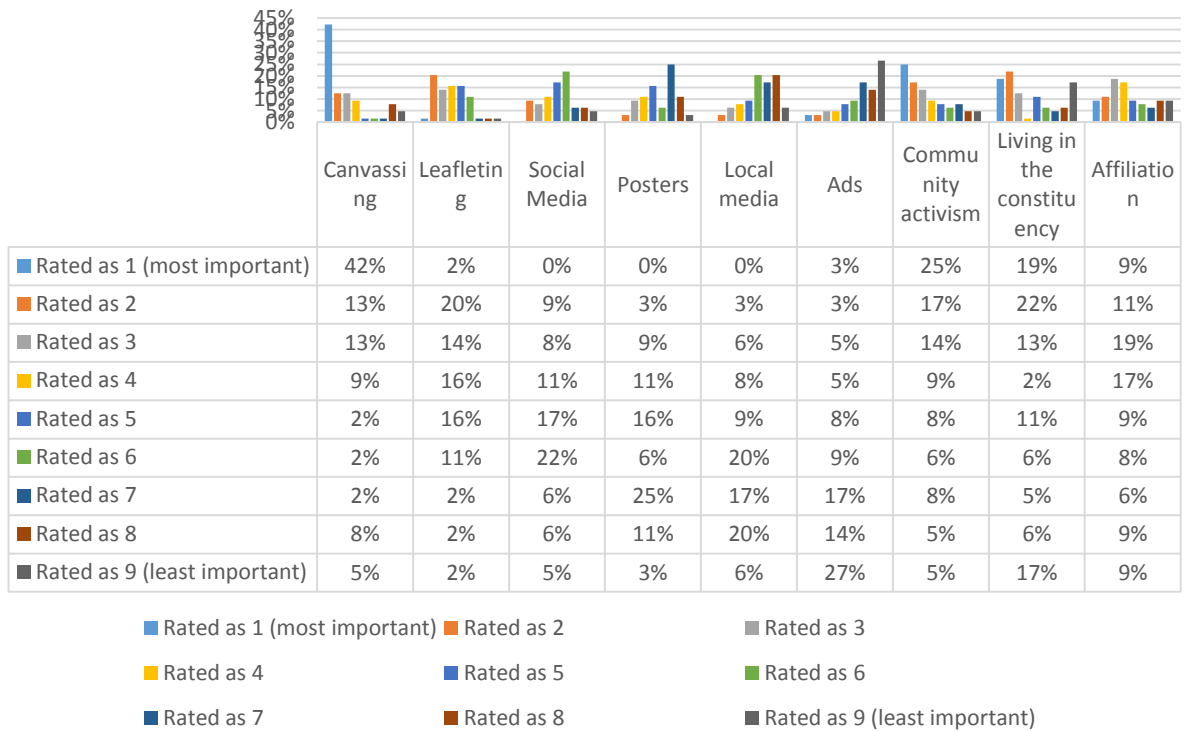
■ Rated as 1 (most important)
 ■ Rated as 2
 ■ Rated as 3
 ■ Rated as 4
 ■ Rated as 5
 ■ Rated as 6 (least Important)

Appendix V

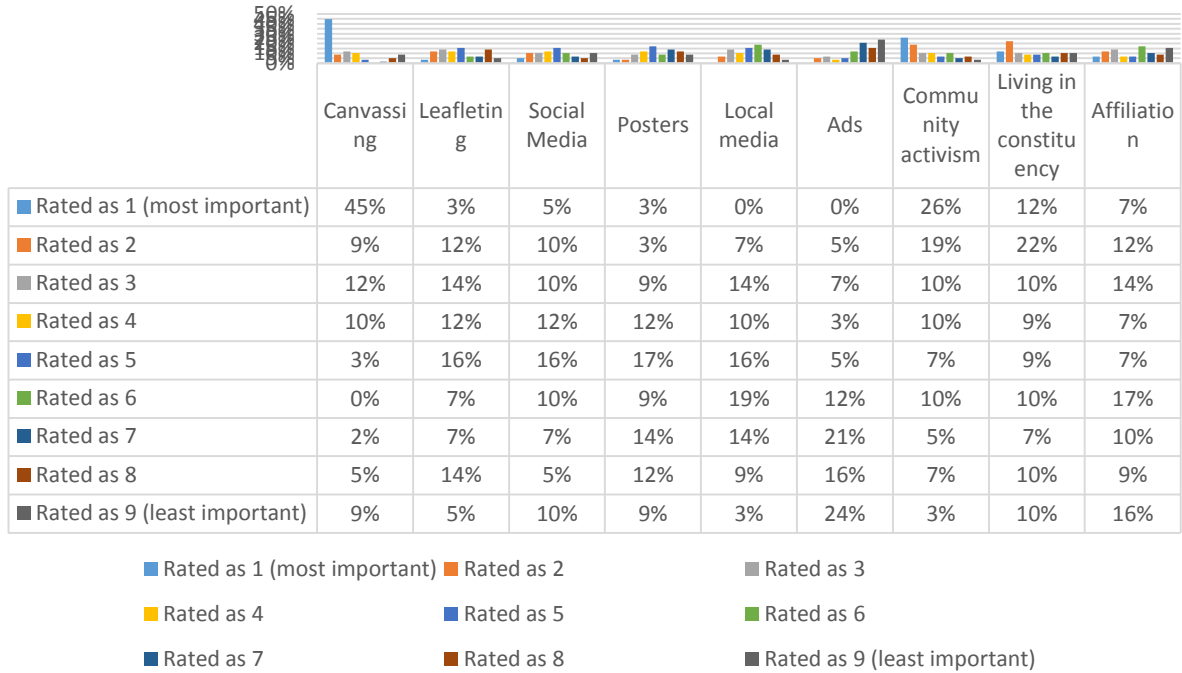
Dublin Responses - Campaign Tools



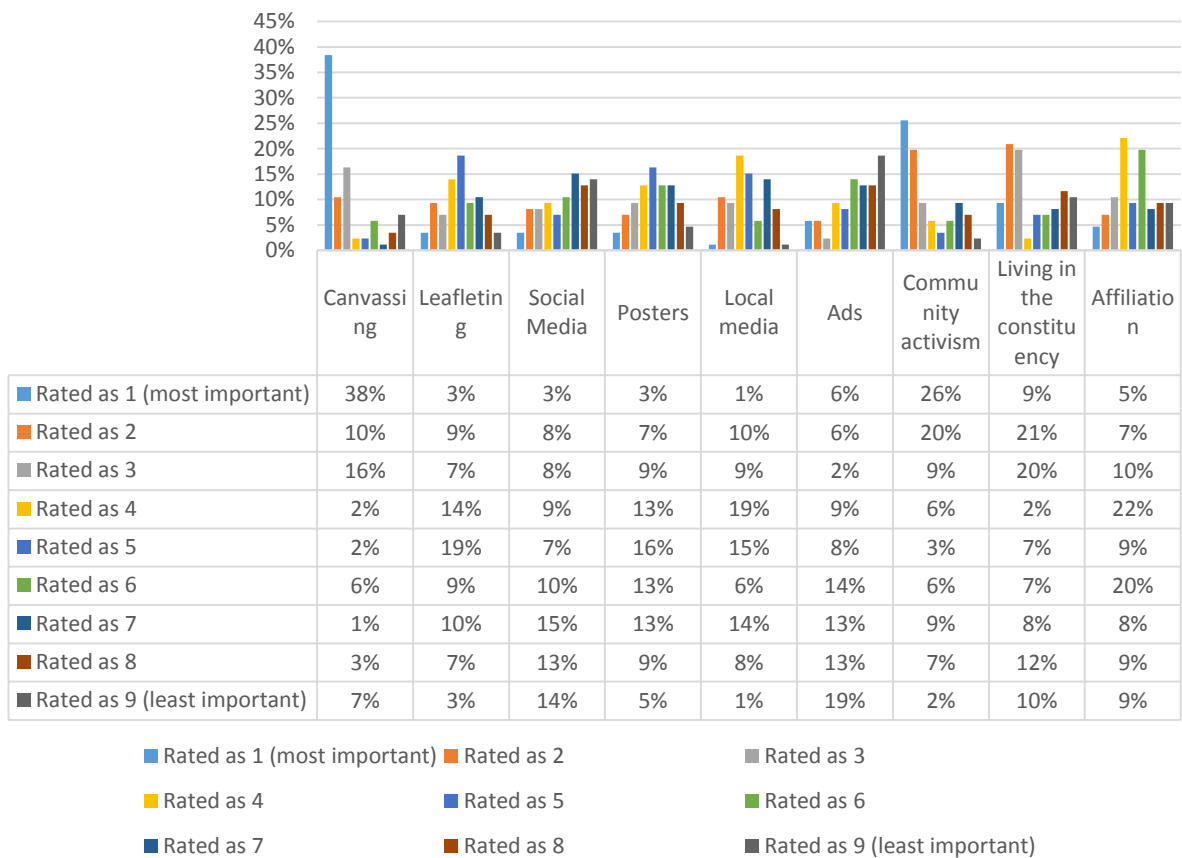
Large Town or City Responses - Campaign Tools



Small or Middle Size Town Responses - Campaign Tools

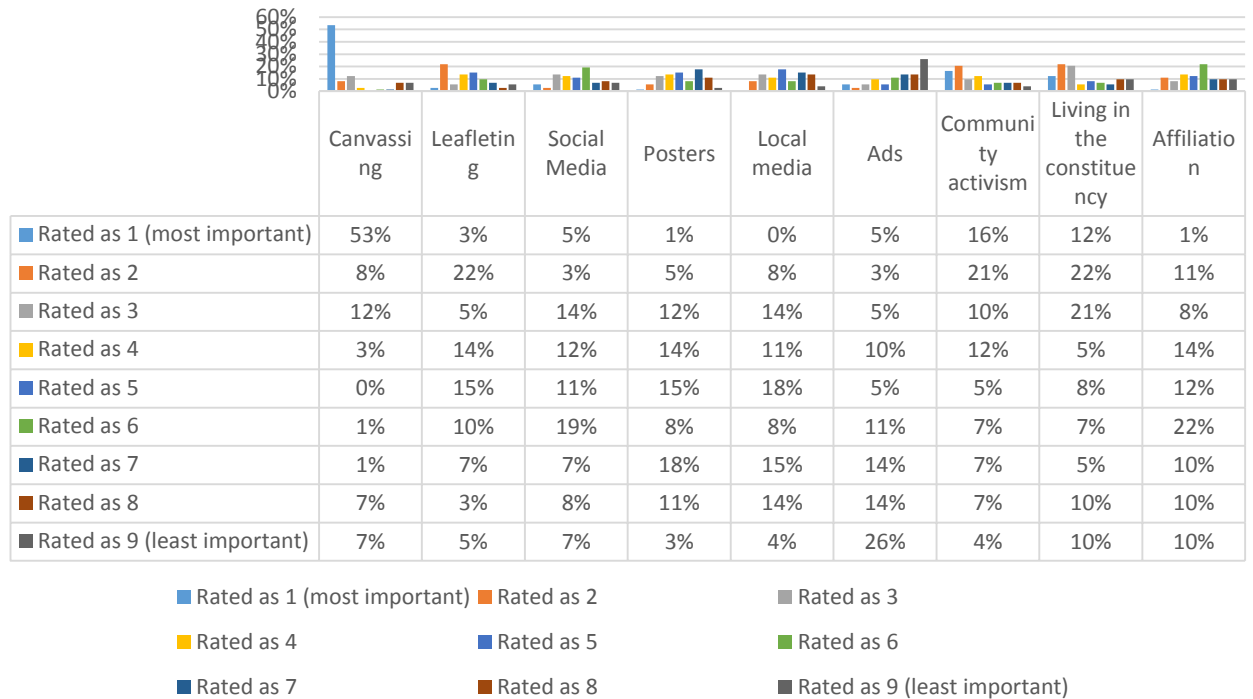


Rural Area or Village Responses - Campaign Tools

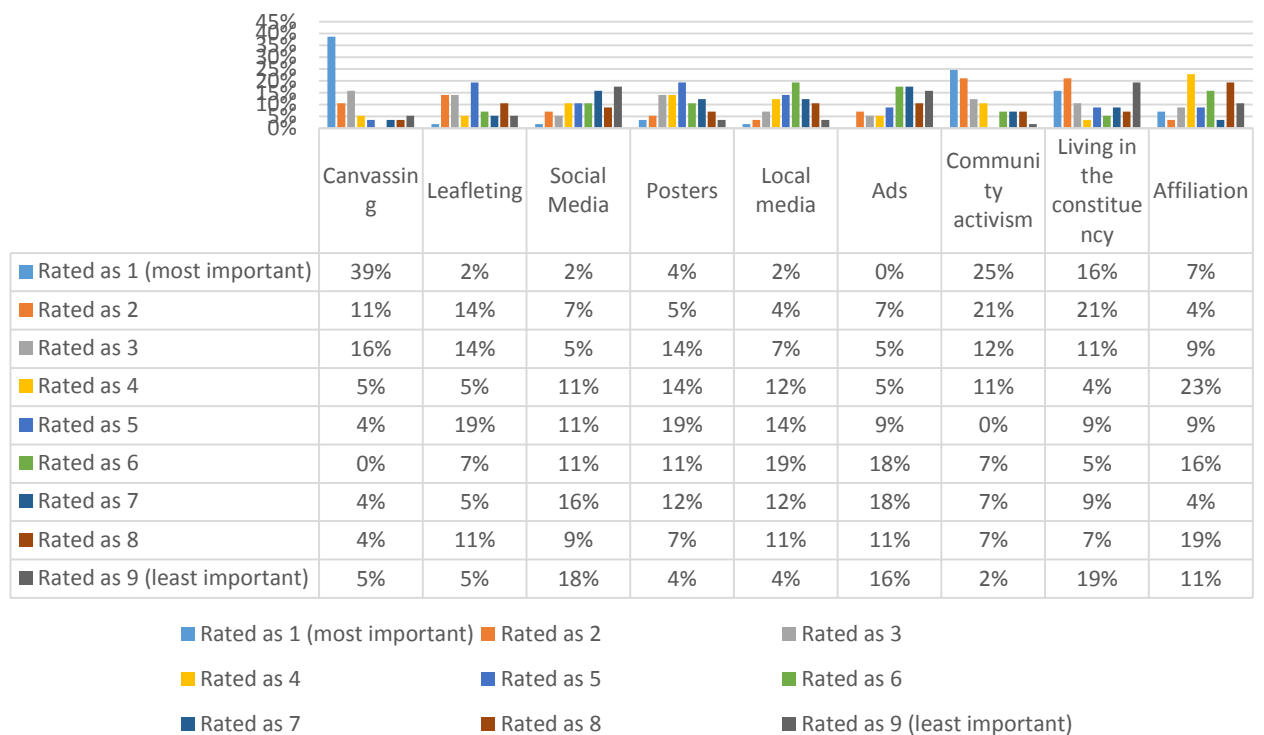


Appendix VI

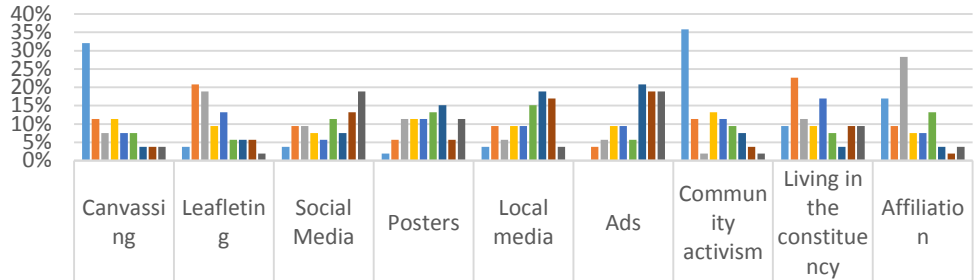
Fianna Fail Responses - Campaign Tools



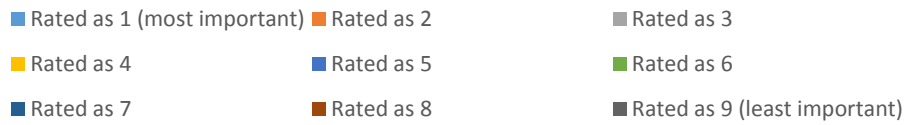
Fine Gael Responses - Campaign Tools



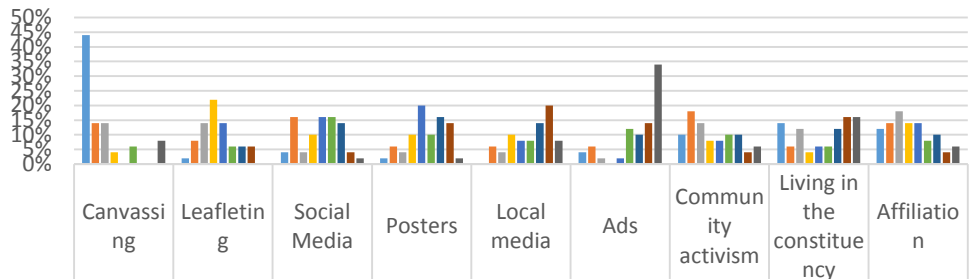
Independents Responses - Campaign Tools



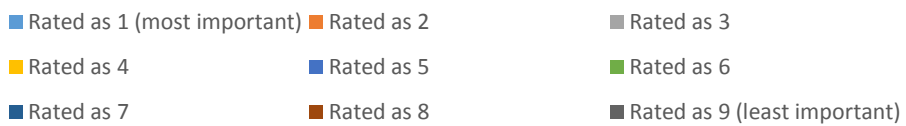
	Canvassing	Leafletting	Social Media	Posters	Local media	Ads	Community activism	Living in the constituency	Affiliation
Rated as 1 (most important)	32%	4%	4%	2%	4%	0%	36%	9%	17%
Rated as 2	11%	21%	9%	6%	9%	4%	11%	23%	9%
Rated as 3	8%	19%	9%	11%	6%	6%	2%	11%	28%
Rated as 4	11%	9%	8%	11%	9%	9%	13%	9%	8%
Rated as 5	8%	13%	6%	11%	9%	9%	11%	17%	8%
Rated as 6	8%	6%	11%	13%	15%	6%	9%	8%	13%
Rated as 7	4%	6%	8%	15%	19%	21%	8%	4%	4%
Rated as 8	4%	6%	13%	6%	17%	19%	4%	9%	2%
Rated as 9 (least important)	4%	2%	19%	11%	4%	19%	2%	9%	4%



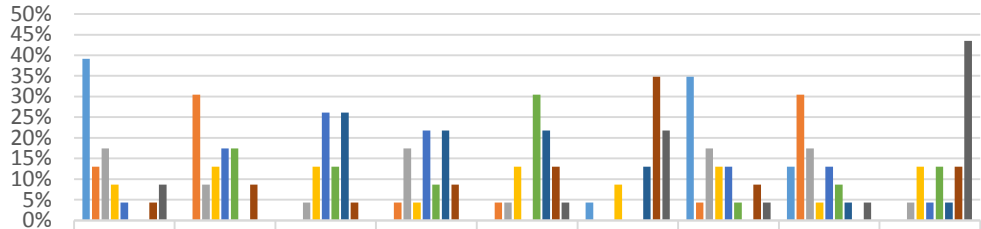
Sinn Fein Responses - Campaign Tools



	Canvassing	Leafletting	Social Media	Posters	Local media	Ads	Community activism	Living in the constituency	Affiliation
Rated as 1 (most important)	44%	2%	4%	2%	0%	4%	10%	14%	12%
Rated as 2	14%	8%	16%	6%	6%	6%	18%	6%	14%
Rated as 3	14%	14%	4%	4%	4%	2%	14%	12%	18%
Rated as 4	4%	22%	10%	10%	10%	0%	8%	4%	14%
Rated as 5	0%	14%	16%	20%	8%	2%	8%	6%	14%
Rated as 6	6%	6%	16%	10%	8%	12%	10%	6%	8%
Rated as 7	0%	6%	14%	16%	14%	10%	10%	12%	10%
Rated as 8	0%	6%	4%	14%	20%	14%	4%	16%	4%
Rated as 9 (least important)	8%	0%	2%	2%	8%	34%	6%	16%	6%



Labour Responses - Campaign Tools



	Canvassing	Leafletting	Social Media	Posters	Local media	Ads	Community activism	Living in the constituency	Affiliation
Rated as 1 (most important)	39%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	35%	13%	0%
Rated as 2	13%	30%	0%	4%	4%	0%	4%	30%	0%
Rated as 3	17%	9%	4%	17%	4%	0%	17%	17%	4%
Rated as 4	9%	13%	13%	4%	13%	9%	13%	4%	13%
Rated as 5	4%	17%	26%	22%	0%	0%	13%	13%	4%
Rated as 6	0%	17%	13%	9%	30%	0%	4%	9%	13%
Rated as 7	0%	0%	26%	22%	22%	13%	0%	4%	4%
Rated as 8	4%	9%	4%	9%	13%	35%	9%	0%	13%
Rated as 9 (least important)	9%	0%	0%	0%	4%	22%	4%	4%	43%

- Rated as 1 (most important) Rated as 2 Rated as 3
- Rated as 4 Rated as 5 Rated as 6
- Rated as 7 Rated as 8 Rated as 9 (least important)

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