



Article

Putting Abortion in the Frame: The Success of the Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment in Ireland

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Abstract: This paper examines the role that framing and visual communications played in the mobilising of contentious politics, with particular reference to the Repeal the 8th referendum in Ireland in 2018. We analyse how framing an unpopular argument through both text and visual imagery galvanized the abortion debate on the Yes side (in particular) and created alliances and solidarity through public displays of sentiment towards the issue. Using frame analysis, we examine the visual imagery and messaging employed by both sides of the ‘Repeal the 8th’ debate and conclude that the careful framing of unpopular arguments or positions can open up the space for dialogue and personal stories that were previously shrouded in shame and mystery. This new willingness to discuss the topic of abortion ultimately led to an outpouring of compassion and empathy that had previously not existed due to the religious and misogynistic influence on women’s reproductive health in Ireland up to that point. The ultimate ‘Yes’ vote resulted in one of the biggest social and health reforms for Irish women in the 21st century, one that, five years later however, we still wait to see the full implementation of.

Keywords: Repeal the 8th; abortion; frame analysis; social movement; reproductive politics



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1. Introduction

On the 25 May 2018, the people of the Republic of Ireland went to the polls to vote in a referendum to repeal what was known as the ‘8th amendment’ (legislation preventing abortion), producing one of the most contentious and emotive political debates that Ireland has thus far witnessed. A long history of anti-abortion sentiment and legislation in Ireland had created divisions that ran deep within Irish society. The issue of abortion was (and indeed, remains) a complicated and deeply personal matter for many Irish people, but the referendum came at a time subsequent to the Irish economic crisis (Heffernan et al. 2017), austerity, the water protests (Power 2018), and the marriage equality referendum (Tiernan 2020), after which a much stronger protest culture had emerged (Drażkiewicz et al. 2020). This was coupled with a profound shift in terms of attitudes towards the Catholic church (Hogan 2019) and more broadly, questions of social justice and rights (Mullally 2018). While Ireland had held contentious referenda previously (other abortion referenda, Marriage Equality in 2015), the 2018 referendum differed starkly in terms of the broad range of visual imagery that was displayed by both sides of the debate. Ireland was awash with posters, leaflets, and brochures, as well as merchandise such as sweatshirts, bags, badges, murals, and even manicures and doughnuts, confronting all members of Irish society with the issue. Indeed, even the Irish landscape itself was used as a message medium with the well known Ben Bulbin mountain becoming a site of engagement with the campaign. The ubiquity of merchandise and messaging forced debate and discussion on social media, broadcast media, and in peoples’ homes, opening up a space for dialogue about the issue of women’s reproductive rights. In this article, we deploy frame analysis to examine a sample of the imagery and

messaging that was used by both sides of the abortion debate and compare the framing techniques that were used. The term ‘framing’ evinces how message makers develop particular forms of communication and subsequently, how individuals interpret a broad range of information and apply meanings to their everyday life, in short how they engender “scripts of reality to influence each other and to negotiate the meanings of their experience” (Melucci 1995, p. 109). ‘Framing’ essentially helps with ‘sensemaking’ by ‘selecting, naming, categorising and storytelling’ (Van Hulst and Yannow 2016, p. 92) and has been used in a wide variety of disciplines from social movement research (Oliver and Johnston 2000), public policy creation (Van Hulst and Yannow 2016), and political issues such as gender representation in politics (Fountaine and McGregor 2002; Fox 2010). Abortion campaigns have also previously been examined under the ‘framing lens’, such as by Luker (1984), who examined how pro-life and pro-choice groups in the US framed their arguments. The referendum to repeal the 8th amendment in Ireland, as a particularly contentious movement, offers up much in this regard for fostering social change in terms of how framing creates an idealised version of a movement that unifies, disrupts, and occasionally divides.

The ‘Yes’ side of the referendum was overwhelmingly successful, and the 8th Amendment was repealed with unprecedented levels of support (67% of the population voted for Repeal). With this result in mind, we scrutinise a sample of the available imagery and messaging and consider how the framing used by both sides may have, in part, contributed to this result. Firstly, this article discusses the context of the referendum in terms of how Irish society’s opposition to abortion has evolved and changed, particularly since the 1970s. Next, we look at the particular period of March–May 2018, which was the immediate pre-referendum timeframe, in order to examine how both sides approached the general populace with their messaging. We also discuss our methodological approach in examining framing techniques employed by both sides through three framing tasks proposed by Benford and Snow (2000)—diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational tasks. ‘Diagnostic framing’ involves identifying the problem and attributing responsibility or blame for this problem. ‘Prognostic framing’ is concerned with articulating a solution to the problem (in this case either voting to keep the 8th amendment or to abolish it), and lastly, ‘motivational framing’, which provides the motivation for people to engage in the suggested collective action from the prognostic framing task.

Our analysis centres on the partial role that these different framing techniques played in shaping some of the central debates around the ‘politics of reproduction’ (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995) and, ultimately, the positioning of attitudes towards the idea of abortion and the referendum. We follow our frame analysis with interviews with activists from both sides of the debate about their choice of visual communications and framing arguments. Critically, however, we caution that, in our analysis, we do not attempt to over-determine the power of framing (Ryan and Gamson 2015). Rather, instead we see it as a part of the broader armoury in the battle for reproductive rights and justice. Ireland as a context has long been subject to reproductive governance (Morgan and Roberts 2012, p. 241) so we situate our discussion in the recognition and admiration of the extensive history of grassroots activism (Connolly and O’Toole 2005; De Londras 2020; Fitzsimons 2021), advocacy, and critical education for reproductive justice (Fitzsimons 2022) in Ireland and in global contexts (Mullally 2018). We write cognisant that the politics of abortion is often a conduit for larger social concerns and political debates (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995) and framing sits partially in these mobilisations as a meaning maker, cipher, and anchor. Our analysis also remains attentive to the fact that the inner logics of abortion narratives and discourses are temporally, culturally, and politically situated and that, in Ireland as elsewhere, ‘stratified reproduction’ (Colen 1995) and access issues remain. Framing as an act of curating, parsing and communicating the diversity of such narratives is, in many ways, an interesting epistemic partner to the politics of abortion. The ubiquity of the visual communications in Ireland at that time in 2018 worked to generate wider debate around questions of gender, personhood, and motherhood—many of these discussions remain unresolved and continue in critical ways. The Repeal the 8th referendum functioned simultaneously as an opening

and an ending—fuelling a reckoning with the very long history of gendered oppression in Irish society. We write in the understanding that reproductive justice has been and continues to be fragile and contingent (Andaya 2019), so we have an ethical responsibility to witness, document, and analyse the emergence, evolutions, and outcomes of the Repeal the 8th referendum in Ireland (Andaya and Mishtal 2017).

2. Background to the Referendum Campaign

The position of women and their bodies in Ireland is fraught with a long history of subjugation and oppression by the Catholic Church with the collusion of the Irish state (McDonnell and Murphy 2019). While the role of women in Irish society has changed dramatically in the 21st century, more so than in any other period in Irish history, we still have a long way to go. The construct of the Irish family has held a particularly important role in the Irish constitution and the fabric of Irish society (Holborrow 2021). Therein, the role of the mother was co-opted in the reinforcement of the Catholic religious ethos. While reproductive rights had advanced somewhat in Ireland since the 1970s (Mullally 2018), the issue of abortion remained highly contentious. Abortion had been illegal in Ireland since the 1828 Offences Against the Person Act. This was further compounded across the decades, culminating in 1983 when the titular ‘8th amendment’ was added to the Irish constitution, conferring equal right to life to a mother and a fetus, or the right to life of the unborn (Mullally 2018). Abortion was only permitted when the life of the mother was in danger; however, in reality, the wording of the amendment was deemed to be vague and confusing. Subsequent court cases served to illustrate how ambiguous the language indeed was, and the amendment proved to be open to interpretation. Officially, women risked fourteen years in prison for ‘unlawfully procuring a miscarriage’ (Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013).

September 2012 saw the beginning of what eventually became the ‘Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment’ with the first ‘March for Choice’ organised by Abortion Rights campaigners held in Dublin and other cities all over the world. The tragic death of Savita Halappanavar the following month in October 2012, due to a septic miscarriage, propelled the campaign into a national movement (McDonnell and Murphy 2019). This was as a result of the refusal of University Hospital Galway to perform a termination that could have potentially saved Savita’s life and highlighted again the misunderstanding around what the 8th Amendment actually meant for medical staff and pregnant women. This defining event occurred at a time when the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland, once all powerful and unassailable, had become much more tenuous. With abuse scandals and revelations about industrial schools and the Magdalene laundries (Hogan 2019), the once staunchly reverent Irish population began to question the motives of the Church. In 2017, the finding of the remains of hundreds of babies in a ‘Mother and Babies Home’ in Tuam, County Galway, as well the ongoing revelations and investigations (see the Ryan report, 2009, and the Mother and Babies home commission for a fuller history) into the cruelty and injustices perpetrated by the Catholic church, meant that Irish people became more outspoken in their criticism (Hogan 2019). The laundries were constructed as Church-run institutions for ‘fallen women’ but, in actuality, the laundries housed many different kinds of women and girls—those who had babies ‘out of wedlock’ or were orphans (Smith 2007). Some women remained incarcerated in laundries until the early 1990s (Hogan 2019). These many Catholic church scandals served as a watershed moment in opening up public discourse about the position of women in Irish society (Fischer 2019). All of these stories had women’s bodies at their heart—did women in Ireland have autonomy over their own bodies? What rights did women in Ireland have when it came to making decisions around their reproductive health? This time of contention and changing attitudes provided the backdrop to the timing of the referendum on the 8th amendment in May 2018 (Fegan 2018).

The Referendum Campaign Is Launched

The referendum campaign officially got underway on 28 March 2018, which meant that both sides were legally permitted to put posters up around the country and get their message out. Whilst, prior to this, artistic and creative imagery was in broad circulation, for the purposes of this paper, our analysis begins within this official time frame. The ‘No’ side were on the streets first, getting their posters up well before the ‘Yes’ side. Lampposts and telephone poles were soon covered with imagery, sometimes with both sides of the debate competing for the same lamppost.

Social media was also alive with debate, disseminating information and visual imagery from both sides even before the official ‘postering’ got underway (see Figure 1). In fact, the role of social media in the branding of both the Yes and No campaigns became a kind of ‘test case for democracy in the social media age’ in its occupation as a site of debate and messaging. Within days of the launch of the official campaign, Ireland was covered with posters, merchandise, and murals, as well as bearing witness to constant discussion in both traditional and social media. Debate raged on television and radio. The topic of abortion that had been once so shrouded in secrecy and shame in Ireland was now being openly discussed and debated. In particular, the stories and experiences of women who had undergone a termination were shared (see especially—the platform *In her Shoes*, which served to enlighten and inform the public through expanding the narrative around abortion (Darcy 2020; Rivetti 2019).



Figure 1. Lampposts with Yes and No posters simultaneously—“‘Abortion Never’ Galway City” by NationalPartyIE is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

An unprecedented level of merchandise was sold and worn as the campaign progressed. At the start of the campaign, people were cautious in their public displays of how they felt about the issue (as discussed by many of our interviewees). However, as the weeks passed, heightened by inchoate anxieties and tension, both sides questioned their chances of victory. Members of the general public mobilized, becoming increasingly bolder and less apologetic about how they felt. Through the wearing of merchandise, some individuals turned themselves into walking visual signifiers of the debate, a kind of ‘cultural convergence’ (Jenkins 2006), where the grassroots infused the terms of the referendum debate. In addition to the apparel, there was poetry, songs, art exhibitions, photographic displays, a procession of art, graffiti and murals, manicures, memes, phone cases, and even doughnuts (to mention just some examples), all communicating either Yes or No (interestingly, mainly Yes in terms of the more creative displays of imagery).

The sheer diversity and ubiquity of the imagery that covered Ireland during the period March–May 2018 ensured that avoiding this topic of conversation became almost impossible. A critical difference in this 2018 narrative that had been absent in the 1983

campaign (when the 8th amendment was voted *in* to the Irish constitution) was the impact that this imagery was having on children. The question ‘What will I say to my children?’ was asked frequently on national radio talk shows where discussions and concerns were raised with particular reference to some of the more brutal images used by some ‘No’ groups. Many posters appeared on lampposts outside schools and the sheer number of posters everywhere prompted children to ask about abortions and the poster’s contents leading to many parents’ frustration. This visual element of the campaign had not been a factor in previous referenda due, in part of course, to the technological developments that we have witnessed since 1983. Concerns about ‘images popping up on children’s i-pads’ also contributed to the decision by Google and Facebook to ban referendum adverts in early May 2018, a few weeks before the referendum date of 25 May.

3. Framing Theory

The concept of ‘frames’ and ‘frame analysis’ is largely attributed to sociologist Irving Goffman (1974) who described the concept as ‘the organization of experience’ Goffman (1974, p. 11) and more simply as a possible framework to help answer the question ‘What is it that’s going on here?’ Goffman (1974, p. 8). In essence, frame analysis examines the selection and salience of certain aspects of an issue by exploring images, text, the language used, the metaphors employed, etc., in a bid to get the message across (Matthes 2009). Frames and framing processes are powerful concepts (Oliver and Johnston 2000) as they contain a central organising idea or persuasive storyline that provides meaning to unfolding events and invites people to think about an issue in a particular way. Historically, social movements have employed the use of frames to present their arguments or positions in such a way as to make them relatable and to resonate with the public (Charles 2020). Framing techniques have also frequently been used for policy making (Krishen et al. 2014; Van Hulst and Yarrow 2016), health messages (Bullock and Shulman 2021), and political issues, such as gender representation in politics (Fountaine and McGregor 2002; Fox 2010), in a bid to change behaviour or generate support for an issue/position. Framing can also help organisations and entire industries to transform traditionally harmful or undesirable products and behaviours, such as marijuana use and gambling, into socially acceptable phenomena, core in many social marketing strategies (Fong et al. 2018 quoted in Wong et al. 2019). Indeed, the recent rise of global Far Right movements has been attributed to these groups successfully re-framing their extremist racist rhetoric into more socially acceptable messaging of protecting cultural identities and preventing people from becoming victims of homelessness and violent crime (Charles 2020; Ahmed and Pisoiu 2020; Duffy 2022).

Social movement theory uses many different kinds of explanatory frameworks to understand popular mobilisation and activism (Goodwin and Jasper 2015). ‘Collective action frames’ (Daellenbach and Parkinson 2017) are often drawn on to partially understand the success of some social movements. These frames are constructed by the movement ‘organisers’, but they draw on wider held values and existing cultural narratives (Charles 2020). This provides legitimacy to the arguments and activities of the movement (Daellenbach and Parkinson 2017). Only a limited number of collective action frames have sufficiently broad appeal and cultural resonance to become ‘master frames’. Injustice frames, choice frames, and human rights frames can fall into this ‘master frame’ category as they tend to strike a chord and draw support from large numbers of a population (Benford and Snow 2000). (Della Porta et al. 2006) argue that master frames are a symbolic anchor point that often prove unifying in contexts where there are diverse strands in a given movement, which is redolent of the Yes campaign, as we discuss later. For a frame to resonate with a given populace, it must have credibility, both in terms of how believable the frame argument is and how closely it seems to tally with other cultural events and contemporary environmental factors. Framing can have a profound effect on consumer perceptions and behaviours, particularly through the media (Wong et al. 2019).

The credibility of the people behind the social movement or the ‘frame articulators’ (Benford and Snow 2000) is also important for creating resonance. The concept of ‘experiential commensurability’ is often key to the success of a given movement. This essentially asks if the framings are resonant with the ‘personal, everyday experiences’ of the target audience? (Benford and Snow 2000). If a movement’s frame does not resonate with the target audience, the movement could be at risk (Morrison and Isaac 2012). The challenge for social movements may be that the ‘targets of mobilisation’ or the support required to make the movement a success (in this case the voting public in Ireland) are not necessarily directly impacted by the situation as it stands (in this case, all men and also women past child-bearing age), yet their vote was vital. The language style that is used by social movements can be a carrier of meaning (Machin and Van Leeuwen 2005): the vocabulary used helps to present the world in a particular way. Using images as well as, or indeed instead of, text leaves the messaging open to interpretation or can help a hardline message to be softened. Visuals are widely used by activists as they can evoke strong emotions (Christiansen 2018) and the effects of visual framing may be more salient (Giese and Baden 2014) and cause stronger physiological reactions than text (Safaian and Teune 2022). The context in which texts and images are used has a strong influence on how these messages are interpreted (Machin and Van Leeuwen 2005) as do the meanings of other texts that are in the community at that time (Flowerdew 2004). This means that texts from one group may refer to those of other groups, implying cohesion and solidarity, or, indeed, implicitly criticising the messaging used by another group. Frames help to make events meaningful and guide action (Benford and Snow 2000) in a way that resonates both emotionally and, indeed, logically with the broader populace. The ‘frames’ that are selected deliberately highlight certain aspects of the argument and also decide which parts to leave out (Fountain and McGregor 2002).

Herein, our perspective on framing is shaped by Benford and Snow’s (2000) approach to what they call the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational tasks of framing. Collective action frames attribute blame for perceived (social) problems by identifying the individuals or social groups responsible for the problem [diagnostic framing], they offer reasons and justifications as to why activists and voters should support the cause or issue [motivational framing], and they suggest a general line of action [prognostic framing] (Elgenius and Rydgren 2019). This approach focuses on the process of framing as a construction of reality in order to attract supporters and to motivate them to action (Charles 2020). Within this analysis, we pay particular attention to the visual framing that was employed, as the manner in which an issue is ‘pictorially framed’ may ‘profoundly influence’ how the audience perceives the issue (Abdel-Raheem 2017, p. 328).

4. Methodological Approach

The images and messaging used in this campaign on abortion in Ireland are the central focal point for our analysis of how the framing techniques by both sides of the Repeal the 8th arguments partly informed the larger discourses shaping this referendum. In the post referendum timeframe of September to November 2018, Google images and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) made the task of tracing this imagery very straightforward for the authors. However, a key challenge was how prolific the Yes imagery was and so, herein, we are only able to deal with a sample of this imagery. Yet another challenge was that ownership of some particular imagery was not always clear as many groups used multiple images and some changed their imagery mid-campaign in response to polls and feedback from on-street canvassers. Further, some imagery had no identifiable ‘frame articulator’ at all. The overarching Together for Yes campaign livery was adopted by many diverse Yes groups in addition to their own particular message. Imagery was often co-opted by different factions and the same images appeared on different media (see Figure 2), such as the iconic Maser mural (see Figure 3) being used on manicures and leggings and the iconic repeal jumper (see Figure 4), as the examples below illustrate.



Figure 2. Trust Women—Images reproduced with permission from the Trade Union Campaign to repeal the 8th amendment.



Figure 3. Leggings with the Maser mural artwork; <https://lovin.ie/news/feature/five-ways-to-wear-your-support-for-the-repeal-the-8th-campaign> (accessed on 14 August 2023).



Figure 4. Repeal jumper: “REPEAL YES01” by Katenolan1979 is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Contemporary frame analysis uses qualitative content analysis, semiotics, and narrative analysis (David and Sutton 2011). Semiotics starts from the premise that anything that contains meaning or that can be attributed meaning by an interpreter (images, words, music, fashion, architecture) can be called a ‘text’. Texts can be ‘read’ and meaning can be taken from these texts (ibid). The question of how many ‘texts’ should be analysed to try to

answer the chosen research questions is challenging as the answer is often ‘a representative number’ with no absolute guidelines in place (David and Sutton 2011) and much is left to the researcher to use their judgement. As a result, the authors decided to firstly search the Internet for images from both sides of the debate with the intention of using what we found as a ‘jumping off point’ for deciding on a particular number of images to include. We used a range of search words including ‘repeal the 8th yes’, ‘repeal the 8th no’, ‘Vote yes repeal’, and ‘Vote no repeal’. We also picked specific groups that we knew to be involved and looked for ‘Together for Yes 8th referendum’ and ‘Justin Barret Interview Abortion’ and ‘Iona Institute No campaign’. We also used more ‘random’ search terms such as ‘ICBR gory repeal the 8th posters’ and ‘Repeal manicures’. We continued in this vein until we reached a saturation point and the images that were returned were ones that we already had.

Google returned twenty images representing the ‘No’ side, mainly from the official ‘No’ campaign groups, such as the Iona Institute and Love Both. There was little by way of more ‘grassroots’ or creative imagery, such as that found on manicures, doughnuts, and tattoos representing the Yes side; the No side was represented very much by the ‘official’ campaign branding and symbolism. By contrast, we ran into difficulty with the ‘Yes’ side due to the sheer volume and diversity of imagery and messaging that we found, creating a very large imbalance between the two sides. Compared with the huge number of images (too many to enumerate) used by the Yes side, twenty images on the No side seems paltry in comparison. To use just twenty images from the Yes side in the interests of a balanced examination could be seen as doing the Yes side a disservice in terms of representing it as a campaign. As a result, we selected the imagery used by the main Yes groups including the official campaign group ‘Together For Yes’ and the political parties, as well as the larger ‘organised’ Yes groups, such as ROSA and The Artists Campaign to Repeal the 8th. In addition, we examined the more grassroots activist imagery and messaging as a whole to gain an appreciation for the frames that were used. The limitations of word count have resulted in just a sample of these groups being presented here.

The authors separately examined the selected images in a bid to identify the framing techniques that had been employed. We then compared our findings and discovered very high levels of inter-rater reliability in terms of themes and frames. Any differences that emerged were discussed and agreed upon.

We subsequently contacted the campaigners behind these images and successfully interviewed nine different ‘Yes’ groups and one prolific ‘No’ group about their campaign strategies and choice of images. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in person and recorded on a Samsung tablet. We interviewed the key official ‘Together for Yes’ group and also engaged with more fringe campaigners including photographers, artists, and social activists. These depth interviews lasted on average 50–60 min each and probed the respondents on the thinking behind the imagery that they put out to the public during this crucial time. Unfortunately, procuring interviews with representatives from the ‘No’ side proved almost impossible. ‘No’ groups were reluctant to grant interviews and even though we reached out repeatedly to the main ‘No’ groups, such as the Iona Institute, the Life Institute, and Love Both, we received no response. Only one group was willing to speak to us—the ICBR or Irish Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform. We consider this to be unfortunate as we had hoped to present an impartial and balanced examination of the messaging from both sides. Table 1 below outlines the interview participants.

We followed Bryman’s (2008) recommendations by firstly becoming acutely familiar with the data through transcribing the interviews and repeatedly re-reading the transcriptions as well as re-listening to the recordings. The authors worked separately to each identify themes and sub-themes within the data by looking for repetitions, i.e., topics that recurred across the nine interviews and also examining the imagery alongside the transcripts. The authors then compared findings and further discussed the identified frames to ensure internal reliability and validity (Bryman 2008).

Table 1. Interviewees from Yes and No sides.

'Yes' Groups Interviewed	'No' Groups Interviewed
Together For Yes (Ailbhe Smyth and Orla O'Connor, Directors)	Irish Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform (ICBR)
Persuasion Republic	
Artists Campaign to Repeal the 8th	
Andrea Horan (Tropical Popical and The Hunreal Issues)	
Merch Addicts	
GUTS Magazine	
Will St. Leger (Activist and photographer)	
Dogs For Choice	
Karen Fagan (Activist)	

5. Framing the Argument: The 'Yes' Side

Social movements are broadly understood to be large, sometimes informal groups of individuals and/or organisations which carry out, resist, or un-do social change (Opp 2009). Social movements try to change or modify a problematic situation and are recognised as the producers of meanings and ideas—we suggest that the campaign to mobilise the Irish public to vote Yes can therefore be described as a social movement which has its origins in a long history of feminist activism on the island of Ireland. As the 8th amendment was law in Ireland at that time, the official 'Repeal the 8th' campaign group, known as 'Together for Yes' (see Figure 5), were fighting against the status quo and trying to create change.



Figure 5. The 'Together for Yes' speech bubble logo—Image courtesy of the Together for Yes free downloads <https://www.togetherforyes.ie/downloads/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).

'Together for Yes' was an umbrella group for the Abortion Rights Campaign, the National Women's Council of Ireland, and the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, which ultimately had over 100 diverse groups operating under its banner. 'Together for Yes' (hereafter referred to as TFY) was an appellation that came about after much debate and discussion among its members (Interview with TFY Directors, September 2018) and is arguably the master frame under which many Yes sub-frames operated. It indicates a solidarity among people in Ireland, articulated as citizens with the common purpose of joining together to make this change for women's health. Indeed, this is borne out by the large number of 'offshoot' TFY groups, such as the many geographic and professional groups that took 'TFY' and made it their own, such as 'Galway Together for Yes', 'Tipperary Together for Yes', 'Nurses Together for Yes', and 'Farming Families for Yes'. These groups used the TFY colours and speech bubble logo to identify with the main TFY campaign but drew attention to the fact that their own particular county or profession supported a 'Yes' vote. The TFY livery became a 'shorthand' for Yes (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Limerick Together for Yes'—Picture by Naomi McArdle, Image courtesy of togetherforyes.ie.

5.1. Frame 1: Women's Health/Safety

The motivation/argument used by the official 'Yes' campaign, which was run by TFY, centred around a positive message of women's health and safety. There had been much discussion in the media around the idea of women procuring abortion pills on the Internet and then taking them alone in their bathrooms. There was no medical recourse for these women if something went wrong due to the possible fourteen-year prison term associated with 'procuring a miscarriage' so the health frame was not just a 'slogan' but borne of a genuine concern for women's lives. It was also a known fact that Irish women went to England to have abortions and there was no medical support for these women if there were complications afterwards. This emphasis on 'health' also put the issue in a socially acceptable frame and took the focus off the procedure itself and the notion of selfish young women who refused to be tied down with a baby, which was the implication and tone of much of the 'No' rhetoric. A message about 'health' has a broad, intersectional appeal, traversing age, gender, and geography. The health frame was also adopted by the Labour Party who used 'For Women's Health Yes' on their posters. The Irish Trade Union movement (Mandate) also used the women's health frame in their support to Repeal the 8th, while also, at times, using the TFY speech bubbles (see Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7. Women's health "33174633_10155340497957601_2519029350242713600_n" by Labour Youth ~ Oige an Lucht Oibre is licensed under CC BY 2.0.



Figure 8. Image courtesy of the Together for Yes free downloads <https://www.togetherforyes.ie/downloads/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).

Despite vocally supporting the ‘Health’ frame, the visual imagery used by TFY predominantly focused on the simple call to action to ‘Vote Yes’ or simply ‘Yes’, sometimes accompanied by ‘For Women’s Lives’ or ‘Yes for Care’. The TFY visuals deliberately featured women very little or not at all as TFY did not want to cloud the argument by putting a ‘face’ on the issue and giving people ‘ammunition’ to judge the woman in the picture (Interview with TFY, October 2018). The clever use of speech bubbles by TFY symbolised conversation and dialogue—‘let’s talk about this’—and the muted colour palette used was also carefully selected.

5.2. Frame 2: Compassion and Support

TFY also employed a parallel frame of compassion and support, which was embraced by some other Yes groups. The phrase ‘A Woman you Love Might Need your Yes’ was adopted to this end. ‘A Woman you Love Might Need your Yes’ spoke to the ‘targets of mobilisation’ (Benford and Snow 2000). These were the people of Ireland whose vote was needed but who might not be directly affected by the 8th amendment, such as men or women who were no longer of child-bearing age. This frame was popular with some of the mainstream political parties. In addition to the health frame, as noted above, the Labour Party also used ‘Compassion in a Crisis’. The Sinn Fein political party had a picture of their leader Mary Lou McDonald with ‘Care, Compassion, Trust’ or ‘Show Compassion’ against a plain blue/green background. The compassion frame implored the Irish voting public to understand that abortion is not a ‘black and white’ issue but one with many ‘grey areas’ and that there is a myriad of situations that could create the need for an abortion, such as fatal fetal abnormality, rape, or illness, and that compassion should be shown in these circumstances. By highlighting stories of women who had undergone a termination due to fatal fetal abnormality, for example, often married women who already had a family and who became visibly upset on television debates when recounting their experience, the picture of ‘the sort of woman’ who has an abortion was challenged. This woman clashed with the picture being painted by the No side whose hardline stance and harsh rhetoric suggested that women were selfish and would rush out to have abortions if their pregnancy was inconvenient or unplanned. The compassion and support frame created ‘experiential commensurability’ (Benford and Snow 2000) in that the stories resonated with the Irish public and people sympathised with women in these difficult situations. As such, both these frames (Health and Compassion) fostered an understanding of the moral complexities within the seeking of reproductive rights in a social landscape where such complexities had been silenced for so long (see Figures 9 and 10).



Figure 9. Show Compassion <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).



Figure 10. Trust in Women “32863323_10155334754497601_3740770928309567488_n” by Labour Youth ~ Óige an Lucht Oibre is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

5.3. Frame 3: Trust (in Women)

Framing the Yes argument in terms of trusting women was the narrative adopted by groups such as the Trade Union movement and also the Green Party. The Green Party employed the trust frame with—‘Your Sister, Your Friend, Your Daughter, Trust Her, Vote Yes’—which again has a universal appeal across gender and age and ties neatly in with the trope of compassion (see Figure 11). Sinn Féin also used the word ‘Trust’ in their communication. The message here was to trust women to make the right choices for both them and their unborn babies and is a subtle criticism of the ‘No’ side who were, at times, implying that women could not be trusted if access to abortion was provided. This was very starkly stated by Justin Barret (right wing National Party) who stated in an interview that if a woman was pregnant and was going on holiday that she would get an abortion because the pregnancy ‘would upset her holiday plans’—a misogynistic pronouncement that clearly demonstrates a complete lack of trust in women.



Figure 11. Posters employing the ‘Trust’ Frame courtesy of the Green Party <https://greenparty.ie/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).

5.4. Frame 4: More Militant and Controversial Messaging

As noted, the authors’ intention to provide a balanced analysis of the imagery used by both the Yes and No sides of the debate using an equal number of images from each side was rendered impossible by the huge number of Yes images and texts in circulation, many of which we deem as falling under what we call the ‘militant’ or ‘controversial’ frame. Arguably, however, this is not a frame per se as the imagery and messaging do not adhere to a single, ‘central organising principle’ other than supporting the Yes side. There were dozens and dozens of diverse images supporting the Yes side that were unique, artistic, sometimes offensive, humorous, and provocative. Some adopted the TFY logo (master frame) demonstrating solidarity and others were stand-alone, singular protests. These various activist groups were passionate and committed in their beliefs that the 8th Amendment should be repealed and were determined to draw attention to the cause in a ‘visually striking’ way (Artist Rachel Fallon, Artists Campaign to Remove the 8th Amendment, interview September 2018). There were activist groups, such as ‘ROSA’ (for Reproductive Rights, against Oppression, Sexism and Austerity), who fought injustice on many fronts to the more informal and ‘spontaneous’ groups, such as Dogs for Choice and Cats for Choice. Rebellious frames used by ROSA, such as an anti-Catholic Church stance like ‘Get Your Rosaries off my Ovaries’, obviously risked alienating certain groups, such as the older demographic, for example, who have a long history of indoctrination by the Catholic Church and could have found such slogans offensive. As noted by Carol Hunter, founder of ‘Grandparents for Repeal’, when discussing the 65+ age group “*For them, this is life, they have always done what they were told to. They have lived within the parameters of church teaching. It takes a lot to abandon something that has literally cocooned you from birth.*” (The Guardian, 22 May 2018).

Rhetoric that drew attention to how long the battle for reproductive health choices for women had been going on took the form of slogans like ‘I Can’t Believe I still Have to Protest about this Shit’. While this slogan can be traced to an image of a woman protesting abortion in Poland in 2016, one that subsequently went viral and was deployed in many women’s rights marches, it also illustrates how context plays an important part in framing techniques (Andaya 2019; Tewksbury and Scheufele 2009).

Unapologetic imagery, as depicted below (see Figure 12), was produced by The Hunreal Issues (an online platform for young women) and appeared on badges and on social media and obviously had the potential to alienate some Yes supporters who felt it was too hard hitting or offensive.



Figure 12. The ‘Hunreal Issues’ Repeal the 8th imagery (Image courtesy of Andrea Horan).

However, there were other ‘softer’ approaches taken by activists and non-official groups, such as The Artists Campaign to Repeal the 8th, the haunting ‘Out of the Shadows’ series of photographs by Will St Ledger, and the Maser mural, which also made its way onto manicures, badges, leggings, and jackets. Maser’s (street artist and activist) mural became one of the most iconic images of the Repeal the 8th campaign. The colours alone became synonymous with the Repeal movement, thanks in part to the publicity surrounding the mural’s infamous reception and the backlash against it. As far back as July 2016, the ‘Repeal the 8th mural’, was unveiled on the exterior wall of the Project Arts Centre in Temple Bar, Dublin. Just two weeks later, the mural was taken down following an order from Dublin City Council that the mural ‘violated planning law’ after it had received a number of complaints. Fast forward two years to the referendum timeframe and Maser was invited by social activist Andrea Horan to repaint the mural on the original wall of the Project Arts Centre. However, less than two weeks later, the Project Arts was again ordered to remove the mural. The ‘painting over’ of the mural was turned into a protest event with hundreds of activists and the media gathering at the site. The mural controversy was dubbed a ‘freedom of speech’ issue, which garnered large publicity around the event. A speech declaring ‘you can paint over a mural but you can’t paint over an issue’ drew huge support and the mural was painted over for a second time (see Figure 13). However, by now, this was almost incidental as the mural was shared everywhere on social media with the protest event available to view on Youtube ([GCN Mag 2018](#)).



Figure 13. The iconic Maser ‘Repeal the 8th’ Mural. “Repeal the 8th 002” by Sinn Féin is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Activist Will St. Leger's 'Out of the Shadows' series of photographs depicted shadows of women standing at bus stops and train stations with small overnight bags ostensibly making 'the trip to England' (one of the well-known Irish euphemisms for having an abortion) (see Figure 14). Depicting the lineage of women, particularly since 1983, Will employed large silhouettes of women and gave them different types of bags (suitcases, rucksacks, wheelie bags) to depict travel across the decades and used different clothing to show that women of different nationalities who nonetheless live in Ireland are also forced to travel for a termination (Interview with Will St. Leger, October 2018). These photographs were a collaboration with ARC (the Abortion Rights Campaign) and Amnesty International and were widely disseminated across twitter and other social media platforms.



Figure 14. From Will St. Leger's 'Out of the Shadows' series—reproduced with permission from the artist.

There was a huge outpouring of creative work for the Yes side from a large number of artists, writers, painters, musicians, and others involved in the Arts who came together to form the 'Artists Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment' (Chan 2019). These creative outputs were publicly displayed during the Eva International festival (a large-scale contemporary art exhibition) in the city of Limerick from April to July 2018. The exhibition opened with a procession of 'performative art', which started from the former Magdalen Laundry (now Limerick School of Art)—a symbolic choice of location by the artists. This depiction of women 'taking back' the city used the historic mistreatment of women to powerful effect and showcased artwork, banners, posters, and even aprons symbolising the struggles of women through the ages.

This incredibly diverse and far-reaching use of art, art history, folklore, and myth, along with the symbols of female power combined in the many artistic representations, displays the commitment, passion, and belief of the various groups on the "Yes" side. All of these diverse outpourings of creativity provided the 'Yes' side with a myriad of voices and visual identities, helping to spread the 'Repeal' message in diverse forms. There

were countless other images and calls to action, used by all manner of activist groups and individuals for the Yes side. A number of Irish celebrities, such as rugby player Brian O’Driscoll, actors Amy Huberman, Cillian Murphy, and Liam Neeson, and singer Hozier, endorsed the #togetherforyes campaign and encouraged their many followers to vote Yes. Irish band The Saw Doctor’s wrote a moving and powerful song ‘Everyday’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byOlsP7EkkU> (accessed on 14 August 2023) highlighting the issue of travelling to the UK for abortion. As such, the dominant unifying aspect of all of this imagery and text (to make it something of a ‘frame’) was an attempt to draw attention to the plight of women in Ireland who needed an abortion (for whatever reason), to generate dialogue about it, and, ultimately, to persuade people to vote Yes. While perhaps not a ‘frame’ in the strictest sense of the term, we feel it is critical to acknowledge this side of the debate and those behind it, not only due to its sheer ubiquity but also due to its creativity, sensitivity, and arresting imagery, which was hugely mobilising and instrumental in securing a Yes vote (see Figure 15).



Figure 15. Repeal manicures provided by Tropical Popical, using Maser’s mural art and also mimicking the iconic Repeal sweatshirt (Images reproduced courtesy of Andrea Horan and Tropical Popical).

6. Framing the Argument: The ‘No’ Side

As discussed earlier in this work, there were far fewer images used by the No side than that of the Yes side and they did not have the same level of diversity and creativity (see Figures 16 and 17). This is likely linked to the fact that there were far fewer groups supporting the No side, even though it has been well documented that the No side (initially at least) was far better funded than the Yes side (Interview with TFY, September 2018). Indeed, it could be further argued that the No side did not ‘build their movement’ in terms of creating a consolidated and unified No side anchored in co-operation and consensus. Indeed, too narrow a focus on the message without paying attention to movement-building can reduce a framing strategy to mere slogans and taglines (Ryan and Gamson 2015).

6.1. Frame 1: Fear

The No side used tropes of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety to try to encourage the Irish public to vote No to repealing the 8th amendment. If the 8th Amendment was repealed, the Irish government would be free to legislate on the issue of abortion, so the No campaign played heavily upon the emotional, social, economic, and political aspects of this uncertainty in a morally freighted manner. No one knew exactly what the government would ultimately legislate for (unlimited abortion? unlimited abortion up to a certain gestation stage? limited abortion?, etc.) and the No side capitalised on this uncertainty in their messaging. There were suggestions from the No side that both the Minister for Health and the Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) were too liberal and that the new laws would be extremely loose and permissive. There were people who agreed with legalising abortion in limited circumstances, such as in the case of fatal fetal abnormality, for example, but were absolutely opposed to a more liberal law approach. Suggestions that if the 8th amendment was repealed, the ‘floodgates of abortion’ would be opened, alarmed some potential voters. ‘It’s Too Extreme’ was a warning from the LoveBoth campaign, again playing on uncertainty as the Irish public had no idea as of yet what ‘It’ was going to be.



Figure 16. Image on Ben Bulbin mountain, Co. Sligo.



Figure 17. “The Fifth Annual All-Ireland Rally For Life” by infomatique is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

The visual imagery accompanying this messaging often featured a born baby (see Figure 18), rather than a fetus in the womb, playing on the protective emotions that pictures of cute babies tend to arouse. The message here is that abortion is the murder of a child—this cute baby in the picture—which is, for many, an unsettling notion. A picture of a fetus does not engender the same emotive reaction to that of a fully developed, born baby (see Figures 19 and 20).



Figure 18. Campaign photo reproduced from save8.ie.



Figure 19. Campaign poster reproduced from <https://loveboth.ie/tag/posters/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).



Figure 20. “‘Abortion Never’ Poster, Co. Kildare” by NationalPartyIE is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

6.2. Frame 2: Morality

Another popular frame in the No campaign was the ‘morality’ frame, which included an ‘equality’ angle. The message here was that abortion is murder and that people had no right to ‘kill a baby’ in the womb (see Figure 21). This is a common trope in anti-abortion campaigns globally that emphasises fetal personhood and kinship even in opposition to the pregnant mother. The imagery and accompanying text in this frame could be described as more hardline and ‘negative’ than the fear frame. Use of the word ‘kill’ is blunt and unambiguous. In the poster, note also the reference to abortions at six months gestation or ‘on demand’, tying in with the ‘Fear’ trope.



Figure 21. Photo reproduced from <https://www.save8.ie/posters/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).

Much of the imagery that was used was intrauterine, showing a developing fetus, for example, and demonstrating that even at a very early gestation period (critical to the argument around when does life begin?) that a person was being formed (see Figure 22). This imagery was criticised by some for focusing on a woman's uterus and not showing the actual woman, which commentators suggested was a demonstration of how women continued to be undervalued as human beings and were perceived merely as incubators for new life (Molony 2018).



Figure 22. Photo reproduced from <https://www.save8.ie/posters/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).

This frame is designed to engender moral outrage and may have been aimed more at people who were already voting 'No'. A picture of a fetus is not necessarily perceived as an aesthetically pleasing image, unlike the picture of a baby, for example, and is more of a 'hardline' and clinical approach.

6.3. Frame 3: Discriminatory

The 'discriminatory' frame, as we have called it, argued that abortion would be used against certain sections of the population with particular emphasis on the Down Syndrome group (see Figure 23). Various No groups featured a picture of a child with Down Syndrome, either alone or with a smiling parent, and captioned the image with the byline 'In Britain 90% of babies diagnosed with Down Syndrome are aborted'. The savethe8th.org poster also had 'Don't Let That Happen Here' under the Down Syndrome text. There was also a suggestion that babies could be aborted because they were a twin. The UK was held up as a bastion of immorality and discrimination with respect to aborting babies who were going to be too expensive and difficult to manage (twins) or not exactly what was envisaged for a particular family (Down Syndrome) (see Figure 24). The imagery used for this frame was a happy family with a Down Syndrome child or a close-up of a young Down Syndrome child looking into the camera. The imagery was emotive and designed to show the Irish public who and what would be missing from Irish society in the future if the 8th amendment was repealed. It was also nationalistic in its tone, drawing boundaries in

an ‘us and them’ fashion, therefore playing to generational positionalities and erstwhile antagonisms between Ireland and England.



Figure 23. Campaign poster reproduced from <https://loveboth.ie/tag/posters/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).

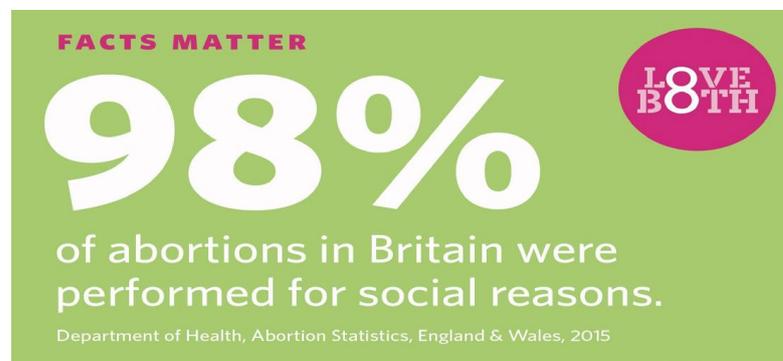


Figure 24. Campaign poster reproduced from <https://loveboth.ie/tag/posters/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).

6.4. Frame 4: Violence/Shock

The frame of violence was not a widely used frame in the repeal referendum but nonetheless deserves mention for the controversy that it caused. Violent frames used by some No campaigners received much public criticism including, critically, from other factions of the No side. The use of what are known as ‘grotesque images’ has a long history in abortion campaigns; however, they can often be counterproductive for activists. Indeed, the use of graphic late-term abortion imagery in the Repeal the 8th campaign attracted widespread condemnation and may in fact have harmed the ‘No’ argument by causing the No side to ‘splinter,’ creating intragroup conflict. John McGuirk, the Save the 8th spokesperson, was quoted as saying:

“These people are not Irish. They are not connected to our campaign, or to any other mainstream No campaign. We have asked them to stop doing it. We are asking them go home. We hope they do so”.

The one group responsible for using this frame is known as the ICBR or Irish Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform. This organisation is an international group (so not, in fact, Irish, despite the name) who concern themselves with what they perceive as social injustice around the world, with Irish abortion laws being just one of the many causes that they represent. They regularly stationed supporters outside of maternity hospitals and government buildings with very large posters of images of post-abortion fetuses. Such ‘grotesque images’ (Halfmann and Young 2010) tend to simplify issues and do not need to articulate an explicit argument—the visuals say enough. This tactic was heavily criticised by the maternity hospitals, the government, the media, parents of children who saw the pictures, and as noted, even other No groups. They ultimately generated positive publicity for the

Yes side as various Yes groups, including ‘Angels’ with large wings and Radical Queers Resist with rainbow flags, tried to cover up the uncompromising imagery.

7. Examination of Framing Techniques

We have examined the imagery and messaging used by both the Yes and No sides of the Repeal the 8th debate. The Yes side, as discussed, had many more creative images and slogans in use across both social media and the Irish public who wore their support for the Yes side on their nails, leggings, sweatshirts, t-shirts, and bags, to name but a few of the personal media used. While the No side had much less diverse imagery in circulation, we have, however, demonstrated that each side employed four different frames to try to persuade the Irish public to vote a certain way, bringing some balance to the analysis. See Table 2 below for detail.

Table 2. Frames Used by the Yes and No sides.

Vote ‘Yes’ Frames	Vote ‘No’ Frames
Women’s Health	Fear
Compassion	Morality
Trust	Discrimination
Grassroots/controversial/maverick images	Violence/Shock

Collective action frames offer three elements to the public (Benford and Snow 2000; Elgenius and Rydgren 2019)—they attribute blame or responsibility for an issue, they provide reasons why supporting the cause is necessary, and finally they suggest what action should be taken to provide this support. We now examine the collective action frames used by both sides of the debate to try to ascertain why, ultimately, the Yes side won a landslide victory at the polls with 67% of people voting to Repeal the 8th amendment in what had been a staunchly Catholic and anti-abortion country for many years prior to this campaign.

7.1. Diagnostic Framing—What Is the Issue/Problem and Who Is Responsible?

‘Diagnostic framing’ involves identifying the problem and attributing blame or responsibility (Benford and Snow 2000) for it. The ‘problem’, as the ‘Yes’ side saw it, was a lack of access to abortions in Ireland and the fact that women in Ireland had to travel to the UK if they needed one, essentially exporting Irish abortions, which was deemed deeply hypocritical. The ‘No’ side were happy with the status quo and did not want the 8th Amendment to be repealed.

As for who was responsible, this framing task was potentially problematic for the Yes side as the citizens they were appealing to for change were in fact, in many cases, the same people who were responsible for the 8th amendment in the first place. The 8th amendment was voted *in* to the constitution in 1983 by many of the same people who were now being asked to vote for its repeal. Obviously, however, there was a large number of voters who had come of age since 1983 and were less conservative in their outlook and some of the more fringe or ‘maverick’ Yes groups pointed fingers of blame squarely at the Catholic church (see Figure 25). It was argued that the diminished status of women in Ireland, as a result of decades of subjugation by the Catholic Church (Curran 2022), was the reason for the existence of the 8th Amendment and this was evident in some of the Yes imagery.



Figure 25. Image Courtesy of artist Shirani Bolle.

7.2. Prognostic Framing—What Can We Do?

Prognostic framing is concerned with articulating a solution to the problem (Benford and Snow 2000). The initial prognostic framing task of TFY was to ‘make them think’ (TFY, interview with the authors, referring to the Irish people), to encourage people to contemplate the realities of this complex issue and to really consider the ramifications of what either a Yes or a No vote would mean for Irish women. The tone employed was very deliberately one of reaching out to the Irish public, asking them to demonstrate understanding and compassion rather than appearing ‘preachy’ and dictatorial which TFY believed Irish people had had enough of after decades of political and religious dogma. This message was also shared with canvassers and campaigners who called to peoples’ doors encouraging a Yes vote; ‘don’t tell people what to think, ask them what they think’ (TFY Interview, October 2018). The ‘spiral of silence’ in Ireland (Noelle-Neumann 1974) that surrounded this issue had proven to be very effective at keeping it at bay from both a cultural and legislative perspective, hiding the complexities of the issue and preventing people from being compassionate or feeling empathy.

TFY believed that engaging the general populace in dialogue and asking them to discuss their feelings and concerns on the issue would be a more respectful and effective approach as they were confident that people would ‘do the right thing’ (as they saw it) once they had contemplated the issue in all its complexities. Encouraging dialogue around a particular topic is a defining feature of contentious politics in that even citizens who are not usually interested in political issues often form and share opinions on the issue (Bode et al. 2018). However, in Ireland, the topic of abortion was considered to be such a shameful and controversial topic that dialogue was largely non-existent and often even family members did not know that someone in their family had undergone the procedure.

As the campaign progressed, the prognostic frame employed by the Yes side changed. Feedback from both campaigners and polls suggested that the Yes side had a great deal of support and now the objective became getting people to the polls. It was imperative that this purported support ultimately translated into votes because if people did not vote ‘Yes’ then the status quo or ‘no abortion’ situation would remain. Getting people down to their polling station to vote Yes became the urgent focus of the messaging in the latter part of the campaign.

From the point of view of the No side, the prognostic frame that was adopted was very straightforward—encouraging people to vote No was the objective of their campaign. The 8th Amendment was law at that time and the No side wanted the situation to remain unchanged. There was no call for debate and discussion from the No side because even opening a space for debate allowed for a ‘chink in the armour’. There could be no ‘grey areas’ from the No side, no exceptions or circumstances where perhaps abortion was an understandable decision, and, as noted, the No side played on tropes of fear that if the 8th

amendment was repealed, the 'liberal' government (as the No side saw it) could introduce all kinds of unlimited abortion access.

7.3. Motivational Framing—Why Should We Do What You Suggest?

The final framing task, as suggested by [Benford and Snow \(2000\)](#), is 'motivational framing' or providing people with the motivation to engage in the suggested collective action. This is where compelling arguments are made to try to convince people to behave in the desired way, in this case go out to vote. Motivational framing can include reasoned arguments or emotional pleas or a combination of both.

Ultimately, we see that the Yes side was much more successful in the motivational frames that they chose. An understanding of the target audience with carefully crafted messages delivered in an appropriate tone meant that the Yes side appealed to voters' sense of humanity and compassion. The use of terms such as health, compassion, trust, and support presented the Yes argument in a positive tone and the words themselves are difficult to argue with—who does not want to be compassionate? This positive terminology took the emphasis off the procedure itself and drew voter's attention to the 'bigger picture' and the complexities that surround the issue. The existing narrative of selfish, irresponsible women having abortions because it was inconvenient to be pregnant seemed less and less representative of reality. By not using pictures of women in the visual imagery, the Yes side kept the public's focus firmly on the issue rather than getting sidetracked by judging the women in the picture and reinforcing the (largely inaccurate) stereotypes of the 'type of woman' who had an abortion. The fatal fetal abnormality circumstance in particular presented a new 'angle' to abortion that many people had not contemplated. Television talk shows interviewed visibly upset couples who shared the heartache that a fatal fetal abnormality diagnosis caused and the difficult decision that had to be made. These couples were often already parents. This was not in line with the No-side rhetoric and ultimately the No side were perceived as being unrealistic and unsympathetic to the plight of these women (and indeed men).

The motivational framing tactic used by the No side was to suggest that if the 8th amendment was repealed, there would be widespread take-up of abortions in Irish society and that the 'liberal' Irish government could potentially allow late-term abortions, which many people find abhorrent. While there was no evidence to suggest that either of these things might occur, [Charles \(2020\)](#) points out that the degree to which a frame resonates with a group is more important than whether or not it is necessarily true. The use of fear and uncertainty was one of the initially more successful motivational frames used by the No side. As noted, the morality frame was also employed but this became somewhat problematic particularly towards the end of the campaign in the face of the compassion and trust frames used by the Yes side, as people began to soften their previous hardline stance in favour of a more understanding and nuanced approach. The imagery employed by the No side pictured either babies alone or with a mother or fetuses in utero. [Curran \(2022\)](#) discusses that the 'No' side of the debate employed stock photography (images bought from an image bank such as Getty Images or Alamy stock photographs) rather than creating their own—which may explain some of the lack of resonance with the Irish public. These images have been used in other anti-abortion campaigns around the world ([Curran 2022](#)).

8. Discussion

In addition to examining the framing techniques (text and image) used in the communications by the Yes and No sides of the debate, the authors also interviewed a number of different groups responsible for the campaigns. The objective was to gain an understanding as to why certain frames and images were employed by each side and to learn about the strategies behind their selection. As previously discussed, however, despite reaching out to the No side on numerous occasions through social media and, where possible directly via email, only one of the No groups (the ICBR) were willing to be interviewed for this research. On the other hand, we were fortunate enough to interview nine different represen-

tatives from the Yes side, including the main group responsible for the Yes side campaign, TFY, and also Andrea Horan, who was very active throughout the campaign, including commissioning the Maser mural and offering many Repeal manicures through her salon, Tropical Popical, which were heavily shared on social media, thereby creating awareness and conversation.

The credibility of the ‘frame articulator’ (Benford and Snow 2000) is critically important for frame resonance. The directors of the TFY campaign were conscious of this and were keen to be perceived as ‘truthful’ and ‘reliable’; they did not want to look like ‘revolutionaries’ but tried to appeal to the perceived 60% majority who had not fully decided which way to vote. Market research carried out in the run up to the referendum indicated that the Irish population broke down into roughly 20% hardline ‘yes’ and 20% hardline ‘no’ with about 60% in the middle who could potentially be influenced in either direction. This resulted in an ‘evidence based campaign’ (interview with TFY), which created a carefully curated message and visual identity. Establishing the right ‘tone’ of the campaign was key for TFY. During the lead up to the referendum to Repeal the 8th, many of the activists involved held diverse beliefs about the campaign and how it should unfold; nonetheless, many were mobilised into collective action under the umbrella organisation Together for Yes, which reflected, as it were, a kind of master frame for the overall movement. While participants, particularly from more radical organisations, did not always agree with this master frame, sometimes considering it to be too ‘soft’ and not ‘hard-hitting’ enough, the overall action in the campaign was defined to some degree through the creation of this umbrella organisation. While some of the more radical or grassroots groups used more controversial or potentially offensive sub-frames, they often still used the TFY logo, indicating solidarity despite their reservations about what some considered to be a potentially too cautious approach.

This was a multi-vocal campaign with a wide range of perspectives and narratives (both visual and textual), which, despite presenting quite different visual imagery, appeared cohesive and united. The different modalities worked together “to create a complex interplay of mono-modal elements” (Giese and Baden 2014, p. 4). The use of over-arching frames, such as women’s health and compassion, allowed for an all-encompassing framework that could then be interpreted and presented in many diverse yet connected ways, thereby reaching different demographic groups. Importantly, the contribution of the more radical and unconventional approaches was welcomed by the official TFY campaign. Because, by definition, an ‘official’ campaign needs to adopt a certain tone of voice and visual identity that the majority can relate to, this can result in the more ‘fringe’ elements of society or people who are not in the ‘mainstream’ (either by choice or by circumstances) potentially being left out of these communiqués. However, the more radical groups were instrumental in creating a more ‘rounded’ campaign and also in attracting the public’s attention (TFY interview with the authors). TFY commented that when people saw the more visceral imagery, with specific reference to the Handmaids’ Tale protest (see Figure 26), that they could see how committed and passionate people were to this cause, which might encourage people to really ponder the issue (to view the video of the handmaid’s tale protest, please see the ROSA Facebook page here) <https://www.facebook.com/ROSAsofemIE/videos/709483072568749/> (accessed on 14 August 2023).



Figure 26. Photo courtesy of ROSA <https://www.rosainternational.org/post/rosa-socialist-feminist-movement-ireland-abortion-rights-victory-5-year-anniversary> (accessed on 14 August 2023).

One of our key research participants, Andrea Horan, co-founder of the Tropical Popical nail salon (responsible for Repeal manicures) and well-known social activist, also articulated the power of the diversity of messaging:

With campaigning it's very important to have different voices. If you're all going to have one tone of voice then that tone of voice is just going to reach the same people that engage with the main campaign. If we don't do anything different, we won't reach a different audience. (Andrea Horan, interview with the authors, October 2018).

Even though the Yes side was made up of over 100 different groups (Griffin et al. 2019), it demonstrates that it is possible for many disparate factions to nonetheless work as a united front with the same aim. Many of these groups had been campaigning for years (decades in some cases) to change abortion legislation in Ireland, including Alliance for Choice (later Choice Ireland), ARC (Abortion Rights Campaign), and NWCI (National Women's Council of Ireland). These organisations had built up a loyal following who were galvanised by the 2012 death of Savita Halappanavar to create what became the social movement to Repeal the Eighth. In stark contrast, the (far fewer) No groups did not have any history of co-operation and struggled to come together cohesively with reported in-fighting and public criticisms of each other. In social movements, it is possible to achieve cohesion and solidarity regardless of the number of groups involved if the right framing techniques are used. In contrast, even small numbers can be disparate and separate even though they are on the same side if their motivational frames fail to resonate with the general populace and do not appear to complement each other. TFY took the time to gauge the mood of the people and proceeded to create a campaign that spoke to this audience in a language that they could relate to, employing a tone that was measured and open. This contrasted with rhetoric from the No side that seemed to poorly understand where the Irish people were at that point in 2018 in relation to their attitude towards being dictated to by the ideology of the Catholic Church. The No side underestimated the compassion and sympathy that Irish citizens would feel towards the women (and men) that came forward with their personal stories and how much they would open their minds after hearing them.

This 'hidden shame' and secrecy around the topic of abortion was something that troubled many groups on the Yes side. One of the objectives of the Yes supporters was to 'normalise the conversation' (Interview with activist Andrea Horan, September 2018) and make it comfortable for women (young women in particular) to discuss the issue. Roisin Agnew of Guts Magazine is another activist who felt the compulsion to 'normalise' the reality of abortion—wanting to speak to women in a voice that resonated with them. Through the production of 'Guts Magazine' and the particular 'Fight Back' issue, Roisin wanted to give Irish women a voice, a voice she felt had been suppressed by the Irish state for too long. The goal was to "shift the way we framed the conversation (about abortion) and womens' personal stories" (Interview with the authors and Roisin Agnew, Guts Magazine, September 2018).

A critical contribution to opening up a space in Irish society for conversation about abortion was made by the general population themselves, boldly sporting apparel (sweat-

shirts, t-shirts, leggings) and merchandise (badges, stickers, bags, manicures, etc.) declaring which side they were on. In multi-modal campaigns such as this one, visual and linguistic information both hold 'mode-specific' communicative potential (Giese and Baden 2014) with all the different elements playing their part in transmitting the message. It is difficult to explain just how controversial it was for people to wear the word 'Repeal' (for example) across their chests at the start of the campaign (Interview with Susan McGrady, MerchAd-dicts, September 2018). Interviewees discussed how nerve wracking it was to wear this merchandise for the first time, expecting hostility and 'dirty looks' (which did occur at times), but actually encountering smiles, nods, and 'high fives' from complete strangers. This feeling of solidarity was expressed in the uniquely Irish phrase of 'Tágetherness' coined by Karen Fagan, a Dublin North West Yes Campaigner. 'Tá' is a synonym for 'Yes' in the Irish language so this phrase neatly captures both the sentiment of Repeal and the sense of community that was created when people saw like-minded individuals declaring how they felt about the issue, creating a 'collective gesture of defiance' (Pisters 2015). Solidarity was created by this 'social-signalling' and Yes supporters became more encouraged and optimistic. The sheer ubiquity of Repeal sweatshirts and other Yes merchandise proved to be a further motivational tool as a Yes vote began to look like a real possibility, thereby galvanising the Yes side into putting their message focus on getting people out to the polling stations.

In contrast to the success of the Yes side, who went to great lengths to understand their potential voters and find out how they felt through market research and listening to voters (Interview with TFY, October 2018), the motivational frames used by the No side came across as somewhat dogmatic and uncompromising. As a result they failed to resonate with much of the general population. The No side seems to have over-relied on traditional Catholic sentiment and morality tropes that had worked extremely well in the past but were now somewhat out of step with an Ireland that was becoming increasingly secular and anti-church. This hardline autocratic rhetoric failed to resonate with voters, 60% of whom had declared themselves unsure how they would vote and, therefore, were presumably open to persuasion from either side with the right messaging. There was initially an assumption on the No side that voters agreed with them, and this led to a 'tone deaf' campaign that failed to notice until it was too late that this was not the case. The Yes side articulated a much more empathetic and relatable argument that ultimately resonated strongly with these undecideds.

In terms of providing a motivational frame, the No side had quite a diverse range of arguments that were employed in a bid to keep the status quo and encourage people to vote No. By using the visual imagery of cute babies, the No side played on voters' emotions and suggested that abortion was tantamount to murdering one of these children. The Yes side worked hard at being compassionate and approachable, but the No side did not appear to be empathetic or tolerant. The lack of trust in women to make compassionate and considered decisions around having an abortion, as demonstrated by the National Party and other No groups, was viewed as misogynistic and simply being 'out of step' with reality, especially when considering 'fatal fetal abnormality'. Television and radio talk shows featured women (and their husbands) who detailed the pain and heartbreak of learning that their baby had a fatal fetal abnormality and was unlikely to survive to birth. These families had wanted their babies and were heartbroken at the termination decision that had to be made. These and many stories like these exposed the public to situations where women had abortions that they had not previously considered. The anti-abortion narrative of a young, selfish, sexually promiscuous woman who used abortions like contraception was the only narrative many (particularly older generations) knew, but here were new complex scenarios. Many potential voters could not help but be moved by these stories and found it difficult to continue to maintain their hardline 'No' stance. The compassion that was created was at odds with the language and imagery used by No side in their motivational frames, which was, at times, quite negative, with use of the word 'kill' and stark images of fetuses in utero, presenting a much narrower view of the issue and

keeping it firmly on the unborn fetus. The pregnant women and their particular contexts (rape, poverty, illness, fatal fetal abnormality, age, etc.) were not referred to, possibly for fear of creating compassion, which has been shown was detrimental to the No cause.

Importantly, there was a lack of a master frame on the No side, no unifying banner under which all No groups campaigned. This could potentially be traced to the lack of movement-building that the No side carried out before the campaign (Ryan and Gamson 2015). The No side predominantly appeared as diverse groups using differing motivational frames (some reliant on more global, right-wing, anti-abortion frames), which may have weakened the overall No argument. There was little evidence of solidarity, indeed there were public divisions and arguments within the No side, such as when the Save the 8th group publicly criticised the blunt ICBR imagery featuring late-term abortions and asked them to desist. In our interview with Dr. Jean Engela of the ICBR, he explained that the ICBR is a 'social justice and human rights organisation' and were not a referendum campaign group *per se*, so their approach of using such graphical imagery is bedded in historical social reform movements (Interview with Dr. Jean Engela, ICBR, October 2018). Dr. Engela defended the use of such imagery stating that, throughout history, the use of images, even going back as far as the West Indian slave trade, needed to be shocking and powerful to teach people about the social injustices that were being perpetrated throughout the world; he articulated it thus "No social movement has ended without using images" (Dr. Jean Engela interview 2018). However, non-activists tend to react with hostility to 'gruesome images' and they can give the impression that the campaigners are irrational and manipulative (Halfmann and Young 2010).

Further divisions within the No side became more evident as the campaign approached the referendum date. There was speculation in the media about conflict within the No groups as some appeared to waver on their previous stance, with a suggestion that perhaps abortion under very limited circumstances would be more in keeping with the public mood. As discussed, the couples who appeared on TV talk shows with their emotive stories proved to be very powerful and the No side became aware that they may have misjudged how committed people were to the 8th Amendment. This uncertainty and *volte face* on the issue damaged the No side as the public questioned what exactly they stood for—contrasting sharply with the steadfast messaging of the Yes side.

9. Conclusions

Social movements have the unenviable challenge of trying to address societal challenges and ills through radical change. Such efforts mostly require public support, so a given social movement's task is to draw attention to whatever the perceived injustice is, convince the public that change is needed, and get them sufficiently engaged for the change to take place. It takes a confluence of factors to achieve a successful social movement (Ryan and Gamson 2015). Framing, as we have shown in this work, is one partial but critical aspect of any campaign's success. Framing any given argument needs to be a deliberate, careful process, which works to appeal to people through reason, logic, emotion, or indeed, all three. However, to succeed, these framing strategies must be integrated with broader movement-building efforts, otherwise the arguments risk becoming mere slogans (Ryan and Gamson 2015). While the communication vehicles that are used by social movements are carefully selected and managed as the particular campaign progresses, it is the groups and activists *behind* these frames that play a critical role in determining the outcomes. TFY and its 100+ groups and organisations translated its absolute conviction of the need for change into messaging that resonated with the Irish public and, ultimately, persuaded them of the need to repeal the 8th amendment.

The framing techniques and engagements used by TFY were balanced, well researched, and connected across all media (social, mainstream, posters). They created a space for dialogue on the issue, bringing the topic out of 'exile', so to speak, and facilitating the many moving and emotional stories that were shared about experiences of abortion. At the inception of the campaign, there was little confidence that the 8th amendment would be

repealed—anti-abortion sentiment seemed to be just too deeply entrenched within Irish society. Yet, ultimately, the 8th amendment was repealed with 25 out of the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland voting to repeal, as well as all age groups under 65 years of age. With the topic in the public domain, misconceptions were broken down and discourse was encouraged. The success of the Repeal the 8th campaign demonstrates the potency of well-orchestrated social movements. The Repeal the 8th referendum ultimately led to one of the biggest changes for women in the Republic of Ireland in the 21st century. While this was a victory widely celebrated, there is still much work to be done on the island of Ireland, given the ongoing concerns around the growth of ‘regressive reproductive politics’ (Andaya 2019) in many other contexts. Repealing the 8th was a watershed moment illustrative of decades-long grassroots activism on reproductive rights—it is an opening point, a north star, to further guide continually improved reproductive justice for all on the island of Ireland.

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