

Ireland votes to liberalise divorce laws in referendum landslide

i [inews.co.uk/news/ireland-votes-liberalise-divorce-laws-referendum-landslide](https://www.inews.co.uk/news/ireland-votes-liberalise-divorce-laws-referendum-landslide)

Sunday May 26th 2019

by **Nick Duffy**

Voters in Ireland have overwhelmingly backed changes to the country's divorce laws in a referendum landslide.

In a referendum on Friday, 1,384,192 voters (82.1 per cent) backed a measure to repeal a constitutional clause that requires spouses to have lived apart for four of the past five years before seeking a divorce.

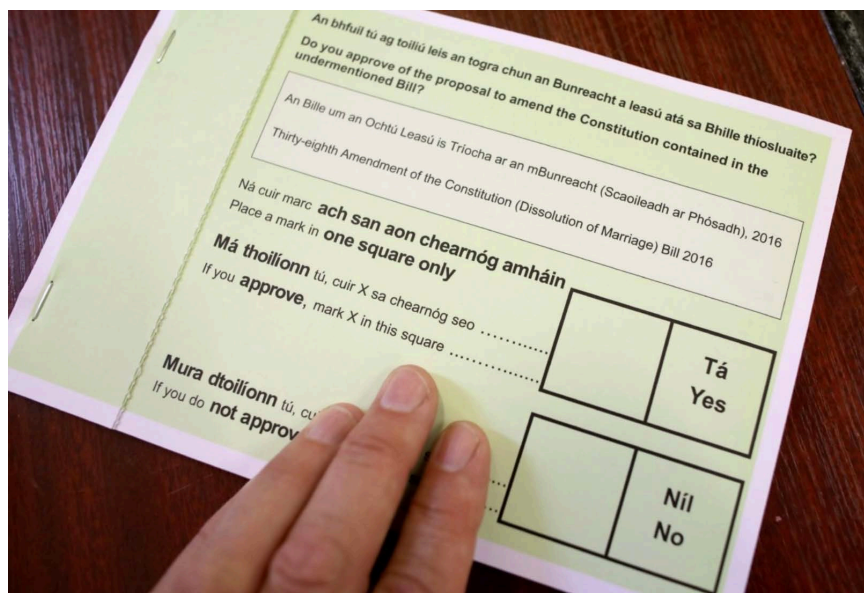
Just 302,319 people (17.9 per cent) opposed the change.

Easier divorces

The country's parliament will decide a new separation period, with the Fine Gael-led government proposing to halve the period from four years to two.

The poignant vote comes 24 years after Ireland first legalised divorce, in a 1995 referendum that was won by a margin of just 0.3 per cent, or 5,372 votes.

Referendums are common in Ireland, as the country requires public approval for any changes to its constitution.



Ireland overwhelmingly voted to liberalise divorce laws to end a four-year separation period (Photo: PAUL FAITH/AFP/Getty Images)

In 2015, same-sex marriage was approved by referendum with 60.5 per cent of the vote.

Referendums in 2018 also saw the country abolish its blasphemy laws and decriminalise abortion, with 64.9 per cent and 66.4 per cent of the vote respectively.

Help for couples trapped in legal limbo

Irish culture minister Josepha Madigan, who has long pressed for the liberalisation of divorce laws, said the result of Friday's vote is the latest sign of progress in Ireland.

The Fine Gael politician said: "I think it's an emphatic unequivocal result, and even though we have a very low marital breakdown in Ireland, it just demonstrates the amount of people who stand in solidarity with them.

"It's a real groundswell of support and compassion for all those people suffering from marital breakdown and I really want to thank the Irish people for coming out and supporting them."



Irish culture minister Josepha Madigan, who advocated for the liberalisation of the nation's divorce laws (Photo: Rebecca Black/PA Wire)

Ms Madigan told the *Irish Examiner*: "I think there is a deep well of kindness in the Irish people, this ultimately wasn't about rocking the system it was about humanising it.

"I think people felt it was a reasonable proposal, it was a moderate proposal, it will mean significant reform for those thousand of people out there who are locked and trapped in a legal limbo-land. So it's a great day for those people."