



THE BELMAYNE SOCIAL INCLUSION VOTING CAMPAIGN

*Findings from a study exploring how a local initiative
can enhance voter engagement*

Prepared by TASC for Belmayne Community Group

Author: Tiarnán McDonough

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List of Abbreviations

AHB	Approved Housing Body
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DALC	Dublin Adult Learning Centre
DCC	Dublin City Council
ECOICOP	European Classification of Individual Consumption according to Purpose
ED	Electoral Division
EU	European Union
HP	Haase-Pratschke
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
LA	Local Authority
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MESL	Minimum Essential Standard of Living
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PR-STV	Proportional Representation with Single Transferable Vote
Q&A	Questions and Answers
SAPS	Small Area Population Statistics
TASC	Think-tank for Action on Social Change
TD	Teachta Dála
VPSJ	Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice

Executive Summary

The Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign is a grassroots initiative, led by and delivered by local activists, to improve engagement with local democracy among residents living in the Belmayne area. The campaign sought to strengthen engagement from elected representatives with local residents and advance local agendas, in particular, the delivery of local development plans.

Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) conducted research to understand how the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign was delivered and gauge its effectiveness. We spoke to stakeholders involved in delivering and implementing different aspects of the campaign, and participants who took part in some of its activities. We also conducted spatial analysis of electoral data to understand some of the impacts of the campaign and the broader context.

The Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign involved a range of activities undertaken to advance its aims. These included:

- Information campaigns, including delivering flyers to residents and promoting activities on local social media groups
- Voter registration drives
- Canvassing events and encouraging local candidates to set up constituency clinics in the area
- Voter education programme delivered in collaboration with Dublin Adult Learning Centre.

With voter turnout declining in Ireland, our research highlights the importance of local engagement with voters in low-turnout areas.

Notwithstanding key caveats, we discovered encouraging evidence that the project had a positive impact, with voter turnout well above average by national standards in one of the blocks where the campaign was conducted. Our findings suggest a need for more comprehensive research into the qualitative dimensions of barriers to democratic participation in Ireland.

Prevalence of home-ownership is the biggest predictor of voter turnout in Ireland. Growing numbers of people in Ireland are living in social and private apartment blocks. Since politicians tend to focus canvassing activities in high-turnout neighbourhoods, canvassing tends to be focused in areas that are often less diverse, home to older residents, and characterised by more established community networks. Residents in these areas are far more likely than those in low-turnout areas to live in houses and own their own homes.

By national standards, Belmayne has exceptionally high levels of people living in social housing. The Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign identified that the inaccessibility of housing blocks to canvassers exacerbates low levels of engagement between politicians and those living in them. This contributes to persistently low levels of political trust among people living in social housing, who can feel forgotten and as though their vote doesn't matter.

Information campaigns encouraged local people to register to vote, and additional support was provided to help people with the process. The campaign also helped raise awareness among non-Irish people around the right to vote in local elections (and EU elections for those from other member states).

Collaborating with the Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC) enabled the campaign to deliver a voter education programme, advertised as 'Make Your Voice Heard'. Participants we spoke to described how taking part had made them more conscious that having the right to vote is a privilege that should not be wasted, and also that it had improved their knowledge and understanding of how electoral processes work. For those who took part, the education programme provided an opportunity to meet with and challenge local representatives. While stressing the importance of this kind of education, stakeholders cautioned that it was not a 'silver bullet' with the power to instantly engender trust, but that trust takes a long time to regain once it has been lost or damaged.

Our research indicates the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign showed promising signs of improving engagement between politicians and local residents in the medium term. Stakeholders noted a varied level of commitment among politicians in the canvassing event. While some could only dedicate a few hours to canvassing, others spent whole days and returned for multiple events. Crucially, some local politicians have maintained this commitment by continuing to engage residents through local constituency clinics. The resident response has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants reporting they now feel better equipped to raise relevant topics with their local politicians.

However, participants also stressed that a greater onus should be placed on politicians to proactively reach out and engage voters in more disadvantaged areas, arguing the impetus for engagement should come from elected officials, not just local activists.

Some participants felt that the success of the campaign demonstrated the importance of trusted, local leaders when trying to build trust and engagement with democracy in local areas affected by similar issues as Belmayne. Local activists are more likely to know what kinds of intervention will work well in a given local area, and their record of advocacy on behalf of local causes will demonstrate to others their central commitment to improving the local area and advancing local agendas.

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign, a programme that aimed to improve voter participation in the Belmayne area in the run-up to the local and general elections in 2024. The programme is a grassroots initiative led, implemented, and delivered by local activists. This report documents the activities involved in implementing and delivering the programme from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders and, in doing so, identifies challenges and barriers to delivering the programme; maps various outcomes and impacts; and explores learning and recommendations for delivering similar programmes intended to promote democratic participation in low voter-turnout areas.

To ground its findings, the report explores the specific context of Belmayne, a new suburb on the periphery of Dublin city's northside. This case study is used to illuminate broader challenges for democratic participation in Ireland and the potential of community-centred responses.

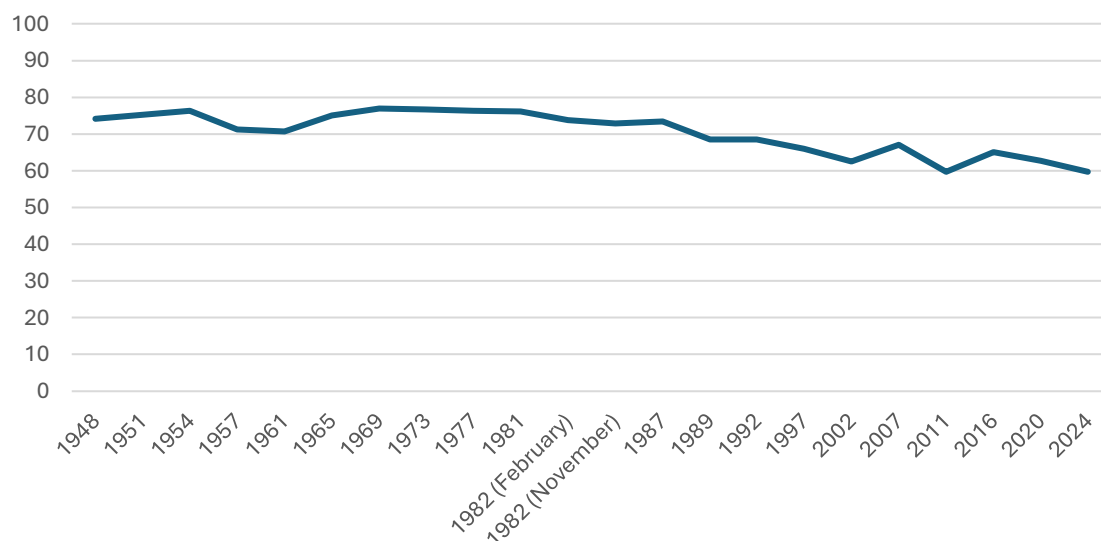
This report is based on mixed-methods research conducted by [Think-Tank for Action on Social Change](#) (TASC), an independent think-tank whose mission is to address inequality and sustain democracy by translating analysis into action. Our Democracy strand works collaboratively with civil society to explore ways of building a more deliberative and participatory society anchored in social trust and accountable institutions.

Electoral participation in Ireland

In Ireland, we know that voter turnout is declining. In line with broader European trends, fewer people are turning up to vote in local and general elections. Figures from the most recent general election suggest that, despite a major voter campaign by the newly established Electoral Commission, national turnout fell by 3.19% on the previous election in 2019 to just below 60% overall.¹ As illustrated in Figure 1 below, this is the lowest recorded voter turnout in the period since 1948 and the first time that voter turnout has fallen below 60% in that time.

¹ (O'Halloran, 2024)

Figure 1 - Voter Turnout in Ireland Since 1948²



The accuracy of these figures has subsequently come into question. In December 2024, Electoral Commission chief executive Art O’Leary confirmed that the number of names on the electoral register may be half a million over the correct count, with the numbers bloated by duplicate names belonging to people who have moved or died but have not been removed from the register.³ Unfortunately, the poor maintenance of and consequent inaccuracy of the electoral register have been known about for a long time. As noted by William Durkan, the TD Seán Fleming once went so far as to label the register a ‘disgrace to the state’.⁴

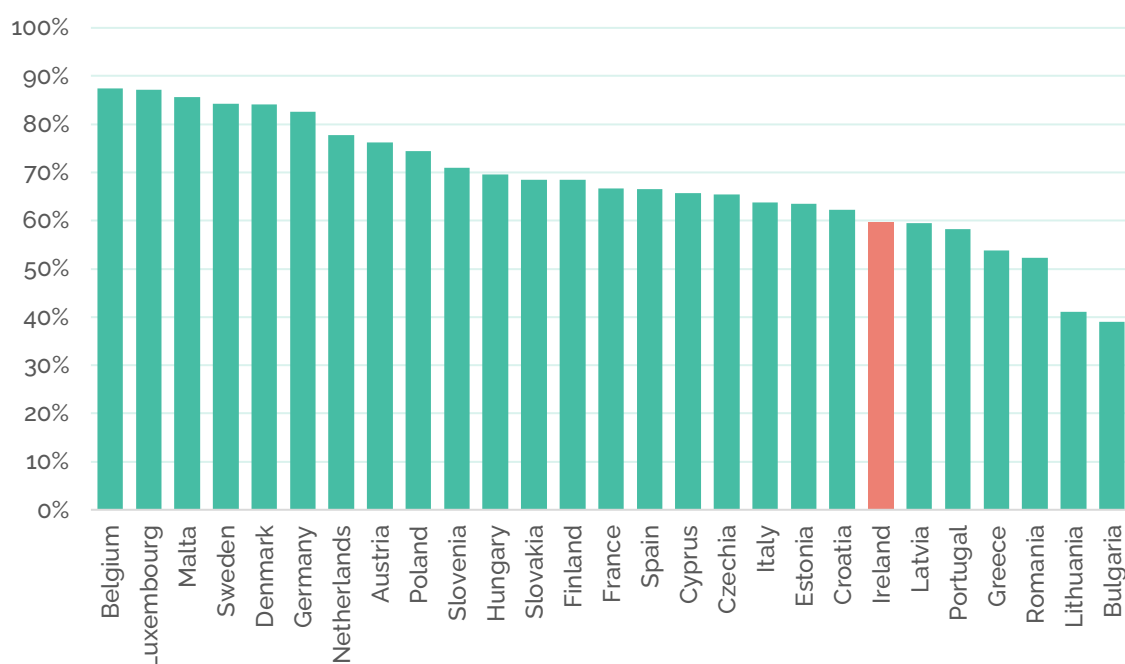
However, while our estimates of voter turnout may be underestimated, this is surely not enough to make up for the disparity between voter turnout registered in Ireland compared with some of our neighbours. At the most recent election, voter turnout was more than 80% in six EU countries.

² (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2024, 2020, 2016, 2011, 2007, 2002; López Pintor and Gratschew, 2002)

³ (O’Halloran, n.d.)

⁴ (Durkan, 2021)

Figure 2 - Last General Election Turnout in EU Countries



5

The above comparison is based on the most recent parliamentary elections for each country. In Ireland, general elections tend to draw the highest numbers of voters to the polls, with voter turnout generally lower for referendums and local elections.

The relationship between housing tenure and voter turnout

We know that voter turnout is affected by socio-economic and demographic factors, including age, marital status, and level of education attained. A 2015 multi-country study conducted using data from wealthy OECD countries (including Ireland) found a strong relationship between economic inequality and voter turnout. The authors found that greater income inequality had an overall negative effect on voter turnout, with turnout most depressed in poorer neighbourhoods.⁶

These broader trends are reflected in studies conducted in Ireland. Studies mapping turnout levels in previous general elections have identified a pattern of higher voter turnout in more affluent areas and lower turnout in more disadvantaged areas.

However, this research shows that factors affecting voter turnout are complex and reflect area-based determinants (such as rural/urban areas) and individual-level determinants, with older people more likely to vote than younger people. Table 1 summarises factors identified by Kavanagh and Durkan associated with higher and

⁵ (IDEA, n.d.)

⁶ (Schäfer and Schwander, 2019)

lower voter turnout, based on their analysis of data captured from marked electoral registers.

Table 1 - Factors Associated with High/Low turnout⁷

Factors Usually Associated with Higher Turnout	Factors Usually Associated with Lower Turnout
Older populations	Younger populations
Married people	Single or separated people
Residential stability	Population mobility
Rurally based / Agricultural employment	Urban-based employment
Affluence / High levels of social well-being	Social deprivation
High levels of education	Low education standards
Owner-occupied housing	Local authority or private rented housing
High levels of political mobilisation	Low levels of political mobilisation
Proximity to the polling station	Distance from the polling station
High levels of political choice	Low levels of political choice
Weekend voting	Voting on weekdays
Numbers on electoral register are underestimated*	Numbers on electoral register are overestimated*

Several overlaps exist between factors identified by Kavanagh and Durkan. For instance, younger, mobile people and those living in socially deprived areas are more likely to live in rented housing (local authority or private) than owners occupying their own housing, who will likely be older, more affluent and with more stable tenure. As is well documented, Ireland is undergoing a housing crisis, in which growth in the supply of housing lags increasingly further behind demand. Sale and rental prices for homes in Ireland are inflated to levels that are out of reach for a growing proportion of the population. Given both the urgency of the housing crisis and the long-term failure of the state to address it, the extent to which housing tenure predicts voter turnout is of great importance.

While analyses such as Kavanagh and Durkan’s provide us with a robust understanding of the factors that shape electoral participation, qualitative research is needed to explore the mechanisms through which these factors play out in practice. As the newly established Electoral Commission has determined, there is a dearth of research and knowledge enabling us to understand barriers experienced by “under-served, under-reached and under-represented groups.”⁸

⁷ (Kavanagh and Durkan, 2020)

⁸ (The Electoral Commission, 2024)

A key finding from Kavanagh and Durkan's research was that inaccuracies in the voter registration are likely to suppress differences in voter turnout between different areas, as voter registers are more likely to over-represent the number of eligible voters in high-turnout areas and under-represent the number of eligible voters in low-turnout areas. If this is correct, it suggests that current disparities are even greater than is suggested by official figures, a finding with major policy implications for creating a more equitable democracy that overcomes individual-level and area-based barriers to voter participation. Consequently, mixed-methods research combining qualitative and quantitative research is vital to explore how housing tenure and associated factors play out in practice to bring about observed disparities in voter participation.

Methodology

The present study explores these questions concerning inequality and voter participation in the context of the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign. The study uses mixed-methods approaches, including qualitative research to explore stakeholders' experiences of delivering and taking part in activities organised as part of the campaign, alongside quantitative analysis of electoral data.

Qualitative research with stakeholders

Qualitative analysis was used to gain a multi-stakeholder perspective on how the Social Inclusion Voting Campaign pilot was implemented and delivered. Interviews and focus groups were held with a small number of participants (n=6), including individuals involved in implementing and delivering key aspects of the campaign; beneficiaries who were impacted by the campaign; and local political representatives.

By exploring participants' views and experiences, qualitative research sought to understand how the campaign impacted participants' civic knowledge and awareness, increased transparency and trust in the electoral process and reduced barriers to voting. In doing so, interviews provide an account of how the campaign was conducted and delivered, informed by differing perspectives of the campaign's success, including barriers and facilitators to implementation and delivery.

Findings are also supported by research undertaken by local community leader Michelle McGoldrick as part of her Undergraduate Dissertation, and these are referenced within the findings of this report.

Interview conduct

Belmayne Community Group facilitated recruitment of participants, who were provided with an information sheet detailing what participation would involve, including what topics would be discussed and how the study would make use of their data. This information, and information about the voluntary nature of participation, were delivered again verbally at the beginning of the research encounter. Participants were invited to ask any questions they had about the process. It was made clear to participants what steps TASC takes to maintain participant anonymity, including caveats regarding the small sample size, which contributes to the possibility that some with knowledge of participants' views may be able to guess at the identities of individuals taking part.

Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcript data were managed and analysed using the Framework method.⁹ In line with this

⁹ Spencer, Liz, Jane Ritchie, and William O'Connor. "Analysis: practices, principles and processes." *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* 199 (2003): 218.

approach, key themes were identified through familiarisation with transcripts, and from this a thematic framework was developed, with each row representing an individual case (in this instance, each case corresponding to an individual research encounter) and with columns representing sub-themes or topics. Transcripts were summarised into the appropriate cells in this thematic matrix, which enabled the analysis to identify differences and commonalities between experiences and perspectives. Verbatim transcripts are included alongside the analysis presented in this report to illustrate key points in participants' own words and highlight the texture of individual responses.

Secondary data analysis

Alongside this qualitative research, TASC conducted secondary analysis of electoral data to inform the broader context of the campaign's delivery and to gauge the measurable impact of the project.

Data was sourced from a wide range of sources, including Dublin City Returning Officer turnout reports, Dublin City Franchise Department, and the marked electoral register for the Dublin Bay North Constituency. Data from these sources was analysed and mapped using Excel, RStudio and QGIS.

Limitations

Secondary data analysis conducted as part of this report relies on electoral data. As has been discussed in the introductory section of this report, poor maintenance of the Irish electoral register is a longstanding issue plaguing electoral research in Ireland. For this reason, estimates of voter turnout are subject to a wide margin of error.

In addition to this, the Belmayne area and its surroundings have been subject to rapid development since the original development of the area during the Celtic Tiger. Such is the pace of expansion that it has been difficult for researchers working in this area to keep track of population changes between census years. The dynamic population changes experienced in the area will inevitably also undermine the accuracy of more granular population estimates necessary to gauge the impact of the highly localised activities undertaken as part of this campaign.

While this report shares insights based on electoral data to investigate the impact of the campaign on voter behaviours, including registration and voting, it is important to recognise that it is not feasible to draw a causal inference between observed behaviours and the activities undertaken as part of the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign, not least for the reasons outlined above. The secondary quantitative analysis should, for this reason, be considered an exploratory analysis and read in the context of the qualitative findings which accompany it.

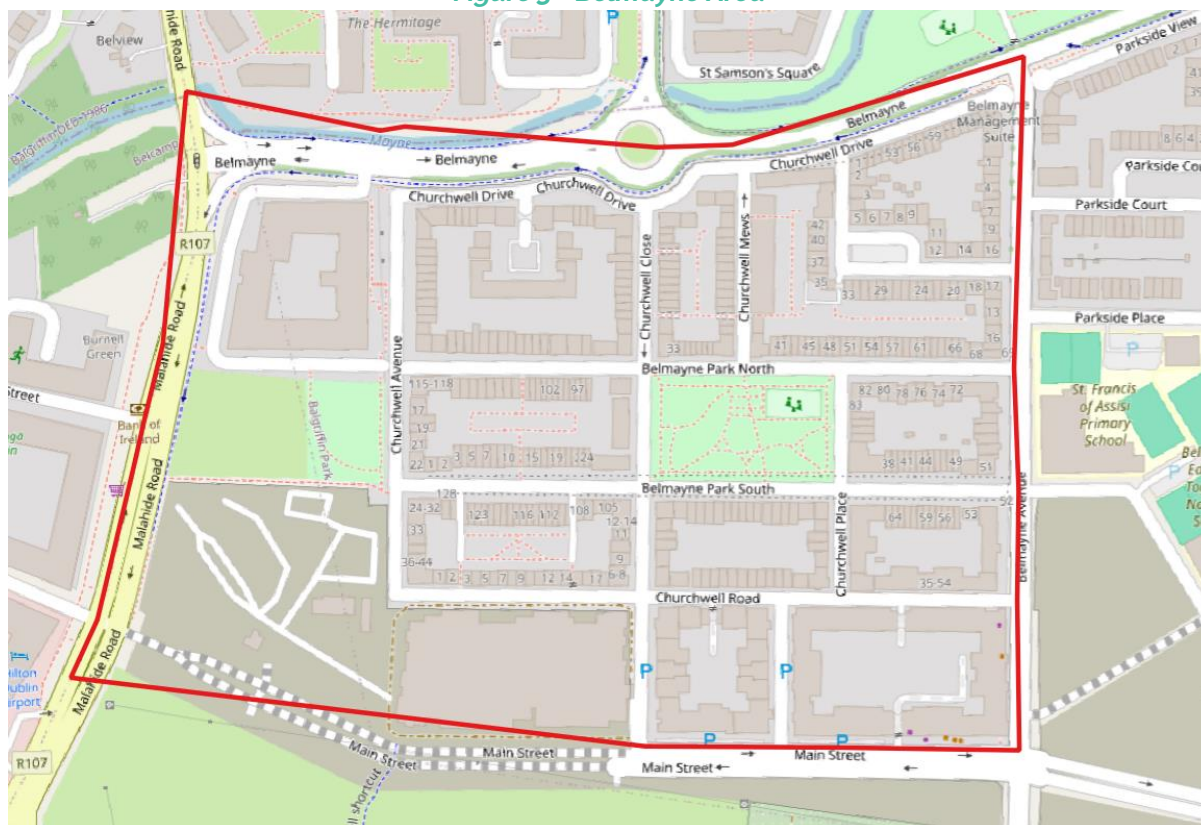
The Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign

The Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign emerged in 2023 in response to dissatisfaction with local development. It was a grassroots initiative, spearheaded by local activists, supported by Clúid Housing Agency and drawing in part on resources delivered by Dublin Adult Learning Centre.

Context: Belmayne area

The Belmayne area is located in the north-west corner of the Grange A electoral division of the Dublin Bay North constituency, and is located at the periphery of Dublin city suburbs, near the border with Fingal County Council area. The map below traces the outline of the Belmayne area, which is bordered by the similar Belcamp and Clongriffin areas to the west and east, respectively, as well as the Clare Hall retail developments to the south.

Figure 3 - Belmayne Area

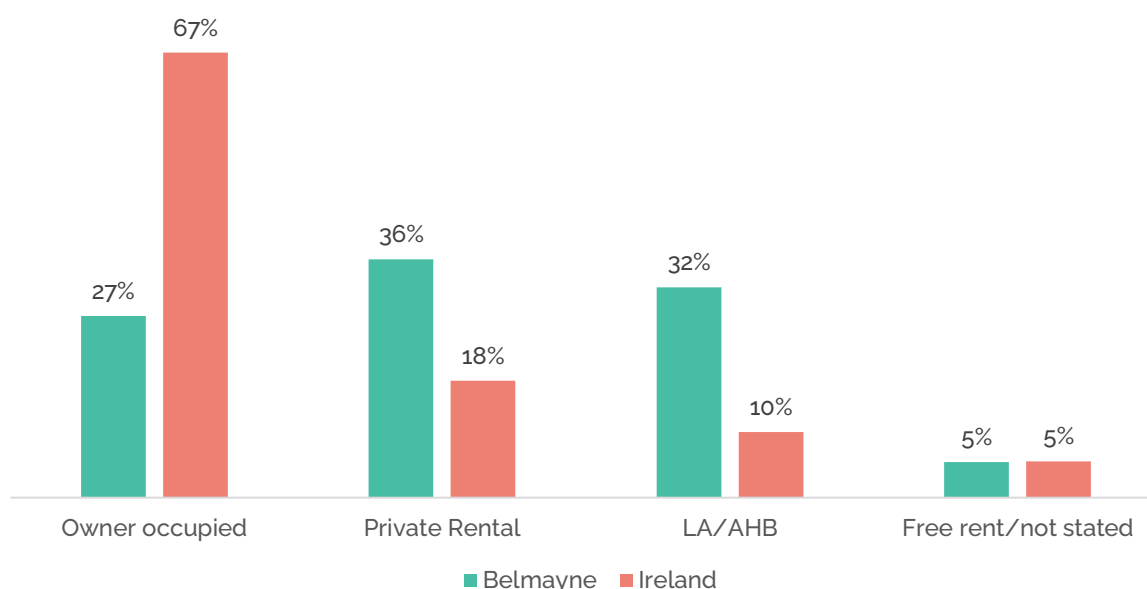


The Belmayne local area has undergone rapid development since the 2000s. The rapid development of the area began with the launch of the Belmayne scheme in 2005, marketed as a luxury development by developers Kitara Ltd., a subsidiary of Stanley Holdings. Following the financial crash, the subsequent development of the area

entailed a far higher proportion of social housing than what was originally planned and a long-term failure to deliver vital local amenities promised originally by the developer, and subsequently in a 2012 Local Area Plan by Dublin City Council.¹⁰

Comparing 2022 Census data for the Belmayne area with national figures shows a much higher proportion of Belmayne residents are renters compared with national levels, with twice as high a proportion of Belmayne residents in private rentals and over three times the proportion of Belmayne residents living in Local Authority or Approved Housing Body (AHB) rentals compared with national levels. Conversely, only 27% of Belmayne residents are owner-occupying residents compared with 67% of people across the country. A recent report by Dublin City Council indicates that following the construction of 2,000 planned units, the wider Belmayne/Clongriffin area will be 55% LA/AHB tenants.¹¹

Figure 4 - Proportion of Local Residents by Housing Tenure¹²



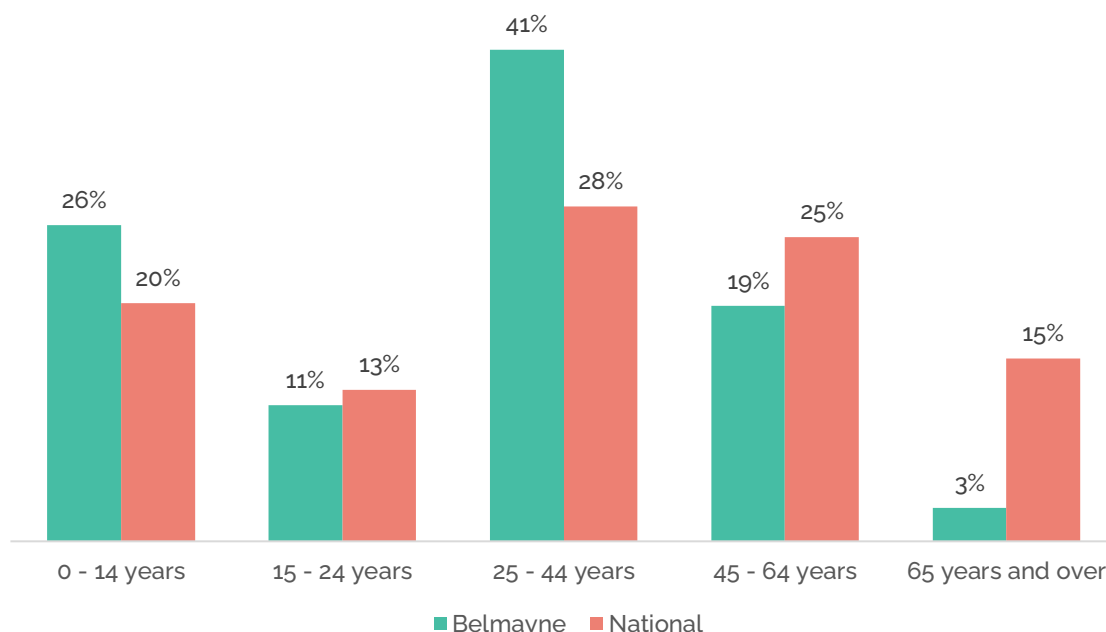
Belmayne residents also tend to be younger than the average population of Ireland, with a higher proportion of individuals in the 0-14 and 24-44 age range. There are very few residents older than retirement age, with only 3% of Belmayne residents in this category compared with 15% nationally.

¹⁰ (Dublin City Council, 2012)

¹¹ (Dublin City Council, 2025)

¹² (CSO, 2022)

Figure 5 - Age of Belmayne Residents¹³



In interviews and focus groups, residents gave voice to frustrations regarding a lack of services and ongoing challenges related to the area’s development history. These findings echo key findings of the Forgotten Communities report commissioned by Northside Partnership and the City of Dublin Youth Service in 2023.¹⁴ Stakeholders and participants highlighted:

- a lack of local services and facilities for the area’s growing population;
- disappointment and frustration with the slow pace of improvement in the area;
- lack of social cohesion between private homeowners and a growing population of social housing tenants; and
- poor perception of local politicians.

Lack of facilities

Participants voiced frustration over poor facilities and services in the area. They described how the original developer had not delivered on community spaces promised for the area. While local active community members had taken the initiative to offset this through volunteer-led activities for children, they were hindered by a lack of infrastructure to support their efforts and consequently were unsustainable.

“There were so many kids in the area hanging around, you know, nothing to do or whatever. Obviously, we’d run our summer projects, but they were only for a couple of weeks and summer”

¹³ (CSO, 2022)

¹⁴ (Quinlan, 2023)

As discussed in the Forgotten Communities report, only two small community spaces exist across the wider Belmayne and Clongriffin area, lacking storage and thus unable to accommodate large groups and equipment. While organisers were sometimes lent access to premises by supportive groups, these were outside of the local area and hindered access to young people of greatest need.

It was felt that these resources were particularly needed with a growing number of Local Authority (LA) and Approved Housing Body (AHB) tenants, who were more likely to have a more varied and higher degree of need than the population projected in the original developer plan.

Slow pace of local improvement

Participants explained that the lack of community space within the area was a long-term issue. A library was part of the original developer plans for the area, but the space earmarked for it had remained a shell since the construction of the estate. Local efforts to develop the space as a community centre offering community childcare, youth services and family support services through a social enterprise model had not come to fruition.

However, participants were cautiously optimistic about a new development plan and funding for the local area announced during the course of this research.¹⁵ They also felt that the new senior management in DCC was more engaged with residents, highlighting greater consultation from senior staff.

Poor social cohesion

Participants reported that social division existed between homeowners and the growing number of LA/AHB tenants in the area. This was felt to be partially rooted in homeowners' disappointment when the development failed to deliver on the promises they had been sold.

"This is what we bought into when we bought these houses, eighteen years ago. This is the seductive advertising campaign. They got celebrity couples over to advertise during the Celtic Tiger"

"It would be great if the apartments actually looked like that inside!"

(Exchange between focus group participants)

Participants sympathised with homeowners who had been sold the dream of 'seductive living' but were instead faced with the protracted issues described at the beginning of this section.

¹⁵ ("A new development plan and funding are good news for Clongriffin and Belmayne, councillors and community activists say," 2025)

“Private homeowners still have to pay management fees for the upkeep and the maintenance of the roads and the lighting and everything else [...] You can understand that [private homeowners] were frustrated and annoyed, having paid so much for their houses and having to pay for the upkeep and the maintenance [...] there is that underlying divide in the area.”

This was felt to be exacerbated by anti-social behaviour and addiction-related challenges in the area. Participants felt there was a perception among some homeowners that these challenges were a consequence of the ‘disproportionate’ number of LA/AHB units in the area and highlighted what they felt was an important contribution social housing tenants were making to improve conditions through local activism and community leadership.

Lack of trust in politicians

It was felt that, as a result of the above, many residents had little faith in local politicians.

“We’re talking about these issues in the area for years and years and years, and we haven’t made much progress. That’s contributing to the voter apathy, or the distrust in politicians.”

Participants felt that any trust between politicians and residents had been eroded through previous experiences of politicians failing to deliver on promises to bring about improvements in the area. There was a perception that politicians are more interested in the more affluent areas within the local constituency.

“That’s what kind of happened over the years, [...] [Local people] just kind of, you know, getting worn out or fed up. I’m sure the politicians were getting worn out and fed up as well [from] getting nowhere.”

Overview of the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign

The Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign emerged out of broader campaign efforts by local activists to advocate for greater investment in the Belmayne area. Participants from this group felt that the local area lacked a strong relationship between local representatives (TDs and Councillors) when compared with more affluent areas within the constituency, such as Howth or Raheny.

“The main objective of this social inclusion voting campaign is to ensure the voices of everyone in our communities are heard and ensure our communities get what they need to thrive! We want to highlight the importance of voting and engaging with our elected representatives to get vital resources and hope to increase voter turnout, particularly in working-class areas. “

To address this, the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign was conceived. The campaign consisted of several activities, which are listed below:

- Leaflets

- Voter registration coffee morning.
- Canvassing events for people living in social housing blocks
- Voter education (delivered in collaboration with DALC)

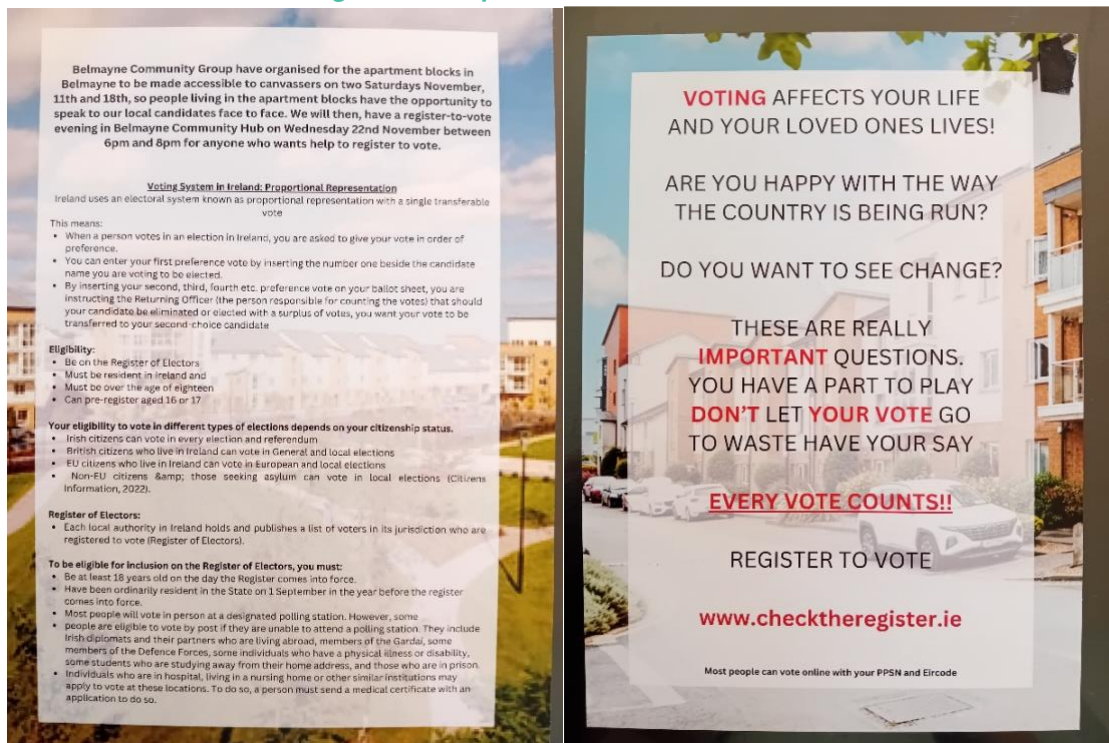
The campaign was delivered throughout 2024 and coincided with the run-up to the local elections in June and the general election in November 2024.

Flyers

The first activity taken by the Belmayne Community Group as part of the campaign was to create flyers for the local area. These flyers use images of surrounding streets to highlight the relevance for local residents. One side of the flyer directly addresses readers, asking them to consider whether they feel their voices are currently being listened to and encouraging them to register to vote, directing them to the [checktheregister.ie](https://www.checktheregister.ie) website.

The other side of the flyer alerts readers to the upcoming canvassing and voter registration events being organised in the local area by the campaign. It also includes information on voting in Ireland, including a summary explanation of how the Proportional Representation with Single Transferable Voting (PR-STV) system works and differing eligibility criteria for voting in different elections (such as local, European, and general elections and referendums).

Figure 6 - Leaflet Distributed to Local Residents



These flyers were put up across the housing estate and were not limited to social housing blocks. The campaign was also advertised on local Facebook groups.

Register to vote evening

A register-to-vote evening was held to support individuals in registering to vote. The registration evening was held with the aim of offering assistance to those who would find signing up to vote more challenging. While the flyer directed local residents to the checktheregister.ie website, where they could sign up, it was recognised that there were individuals in the local area who lacked the requisite digital skills.

Participants' experience was that the digital divide in the local area was not simply a divide between older and younger people, but that they had encountered a lack of digital literacy and/or access, among e.g. some young parents in the area. Previous experience had shown that this was potentially a barrier to signing children up to local events where the only sign-up options are online.

Participants reported that uptake for this part of the campaign was quite low, with only five or six people turning up. Nevertheless, it was felt to be vital to offer this to support the inclusive aims of the campaign while at the same time recognising that this section of the population may be difficult to reach and unwilling to ask for that kind of support.

Canvassing event

A canvassing event was held for people who live in the social housing blocks in Belmayne. A key observation made by the Belmayne Community Group was that the front doors of people living in social housing blocks are not accessible to politicians hoping to canvass in the area, unlike in more affluent areas nearby, where people are more likely to live in houses. This was felt to be an exacerbating factor in alienating working-class areas from politicians and thus from political representation.

Participants described their view that this feeds into a vicious circle whereby local people are less likely to vote, and consequently politicians have less interest in campaigning in those areas.

To remedy this, the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign organised a day where local candidates could access the social housing blocks and canvass residents living there. The campaign organised access to key fobs for local politicians on two consecutive weekends during the run-up to the 2024 local and general elections. This was facilitated by local housing associations Clúid Housing and Oaklee Housing. Organisers reported that local social housing management organisations were happy to facilitate this event when it was proposed and provided fobs to the organisers of the campaign and also alerted tenants, sending text messages ahead of time to inform/remind them about the canvassers' visits. Access to the blocks was organised on the weekends beginning on the 13th and 20th April.

It was observed by participants that the initial response among local politicians differed, with some enthusiastic and others who had not visited a social housing block previously expressing reservations and confiding to the organisers that they were nervous about what to expect. Some feared that they would face hostility from residents, and, perhaps as a consequence, some politicians engaged more enthusiastically and visited both canvassing events, whereas others set aside a smaller amount of time.

“Different politicians have different commitments and all that type of stuff [...] but there were definitely some politicians that put an awful lot more effort [than others] into it”

Organisers reported that while only half of the residents whose doors were knocked on answered, those who did were welcoming and inviting to politicians. Many had questions ready and expressed appreciation for the effort canvassers had made to knock on their door.

Voter education programme

To build skills and knowledge in democratic participation, the campaign also organised local delivery of the Active Citizenship Voter Education programme in collaboration with Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC), a programme originally developed by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ), which ran it from 1996 until 2023 when DALC took it over. DALC considered that the programme was grounded in a participatory approach to education that aligned the Vincentian Partnership’s approach with their own ethos.

“...where you take people where they're at. It's not that you go in and teach people things, and you have all the knowledge and that they're completely disempowered. You encourage people to find their voice and develop their confidence through dialogue”

Framed in this way, DALC considered voter participation to be linked to adult education and its core aim of empowering and enabling people to engage, whether as parents or as active citizens. In making this link, they also considered low voter turnout among people experiencing literacy challenges.

As designed, the programme comprises four units and takes 15 hours to deliver. DALC deliver the programme as a ‘train the trainer’ module in order to maximise reach, with the intention that participants will deliver the training within their networks. It was reported that a wide range of community and voluntary sector organisations have taken part in these training sessions. The course is targeted at participants who have never voted before and is intended to reach participants in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Across the four units, topics covered include:

- Histories of democracy and the right to vote.
- The party-political landscape and left-right spectrum.

- Different functions of government, including local government and the EU.
- Electoral process, including practical aspects of voting and how the Proportional Representation Single Transferable Voting system (PR-STV) works.

The format of the programme is inspired by the work of the educationalist Paulo Freire, and emphasises an ‘experiential’ rather than a ‘content-based’ approaches, which ask participants to examine their own experiences and, through this, to build their critical thinking around political questions that affect them. This involves role-play and other reflective workshop activities.

Supplementary information related to the course is available on the website vote.ie, including resources explaining the functions of local government and the EU, as well as advice for participants to engage with politicians. Examples included a flyer with tips on engaging with your local TD by engaging with their Facebook page/information and formulating questions to ask them.

"People always say, 'You never see politicians, only around election time.' [...] [I suggest groups] try and get local councillors in, just for kind of a chat and what's their role like, tell us about the reality - that would be very powerful to do"

Figure 7 - Flyer Advertising 'Make Your Voice Heard' Voter Education Programme



In Belmayne, the programme was advertised as “Make Your Voice Heard”, as this was felt by the campaign organisers to be more appealing to local residents, and delivered over three days in somewhat abbreviated format, as the full 15-hour course was felt by local organisers to be a ‘hard sell.’ As part of the delivery, the Belmayne group included

a Q&A session with local politicians, something DALC encourages those delivering the course in their local area to do. They also arranged a visit and a tour of the Dáil for participants.

Other activities

Beginning in February 2024, local candidates were invited to start delivering constituency clinics in the local area. Five local candidates took the opportunity to begin delivering local clinics. These were scheduled to be held weekly or bi-weekly on various days during the week. This was first advertised in local social media posts around February.

A coffee morning was held on the 1st March to discuss the then-upcoming referendums (on the 39th and 40th amendments to the Constitution) that were held alongside the local elections, featuring a community drama by Women's Collective Ireland, Ronanstown, exploring the impact of Article 41.2 of the Constitution on the lives of Irish women.

Figure 8 - Social Media Posts Advertising Local Constituency Clinics



SHANE FOLAN Labour
Advice Clinic
Every Monday
From 6:30pm

Paddy MONAHAN Social Democrats
Advice Clinic
Every second Saturday
by appointment
9am to 10am
Belmayne Community Hub

Supriya SINGH FINE GÁEL
Clinics by appointment in the Belmayne Community Hub
Time: 6:30-7:30pm

✓ Peace commissioner, advice, advocacy and support services
✓ Voter registration support
Belmayne Community Hub, D13EH58
Every Wednesday morning, 9.15-10.30am
Sinn Féin
Clodagh Ó Moore

Cllr. Daryl Barron Working for our Community
Advice Clinic:

Belmayne Community Group
6 Feb 2024 · 🌐

!! Reminder, clinics running from Belmayne Community Hub !!
Please drop in and discuss any local issues you may be experiencing, the more noise we make as a community, the more resources we will be allocated.
This whole area has been overlooked for far too long! Let's work with our local representatives and make it better for everyone!

Clinic times and days are as follows;

Shane Folan every Monday at 6:30pm
Supriya Singh every second Tuesday at 6:30pm
Clodagh Ó Moore every Wednesday at 9:15am
Paddy Monaghan every second Saturday at 9am
Daryl Barron every Saturday at 10am
Tom Brabazon is also doing mobile clinics, contact him on 0868082944 to arrange

Figure 9 - Flyer for the Coffee Morning to Discuss the 2024 Referendum



Challenges and Barriers

Participants described challenges encountered throughout the campaign. Overall, poor perceptions of politicians and the efficacy of political engagement were reported as factors challenging engagement from residents. Broader societal factors contributed to differing levels of engagement with the programme among local politicians.

Resident engagement

Participants felt that distrust of local politicians contributed to a lack of enthusiasm for politics and taking part in democracy. Participants underscored the relationship between deprivation and democratic participation, with individuals facing hardship less likely to engage:

"You have, might have addiction problems, and you're not getting the help that you need, [...] everything is getting so expensive these days, for everybody. Everyone has to pay for their food, and everyone has to pay for their electricity. You have energy companies

making stupid amounts of profit, and people can't [afford to] put their electricity on. 'Am I putting the lights on? Or am I feeding my kids?' [...] every week I go, my shopping is more and more expensive. Yeah, you know, people don't see that change. Don't see the people in power changing that"

More broadly, focus group participants alluded to a pervasive sentiment felt among residents that politicians were typically less interested in engaging with areas like Belmayne than they were with wealthier neighbouring areas. Participants suggested that before the campaign, politicians were not prominently visible and that a lack of support from local politicians had held back progress on local initiatives, such as the local neighbourhood watch. Participants reported that the long-term effect of this was disengagement and that many people felt that their vote would not make a difference or bring about local change. They felt that, even when well-intentioned, local politicians lacked power.

"How many times can you say the same complaint over and over again? And what exactly can your local councillor do, you know?"

Participants also cited distrust over the amount that TDs were paid, generous time off from Dáil, as well as broader distrust in the expertise of Ministers. It was reported that when politicians did canvass the local area, they asked residents what they wanted rather than presenting a plan or vision for the area.

"It's all about 'What do you want? What can we do to try [and help you]?' [...] [Politicians] should be encouraging us, telling us, like, 'Well, this is my plan. If I was to get into the Dáil. I have a list of... I want to do this. In my first year, I want to bring this up.' Don't ask us, we're not in power. They should do the statistics, see what areas are lacking facilities, say, 'I've been around this area, and I think we could do with a bigger community service.' You'd have a bit more faith and feel more positive, whereas – It's just to get in, it's all just small talk really!"

Those involved with delivering the campaign recognised the challenges of encouraging disengaged voters to take part in voter education, recognising that life experiences can give rise to persistent apathy and cynicism about the electoral process and that this sentiment was difficult to change. This was identified as a challenge to recruiting those who would most benefit from voter education to take part in the initiative.

Participants felt this was a long-term challenge, with voter disengagement likely to be passed intergenerationally. This was partly felt to arise from a lack of political education, with fewer residents likely to know the difference between a TD, a councillor or an MEP. This was seen to be further hindered by civic education in schools that teaches students about abstract or historical dimensions of democracy and not how it relates to their day-to-day lives.

Local politicians

Participants cited barriers to engagement in the local area among local politicians. It was felt that local politicians were reticent to engage with the area due to challenges with anti-social behaviour in the area.

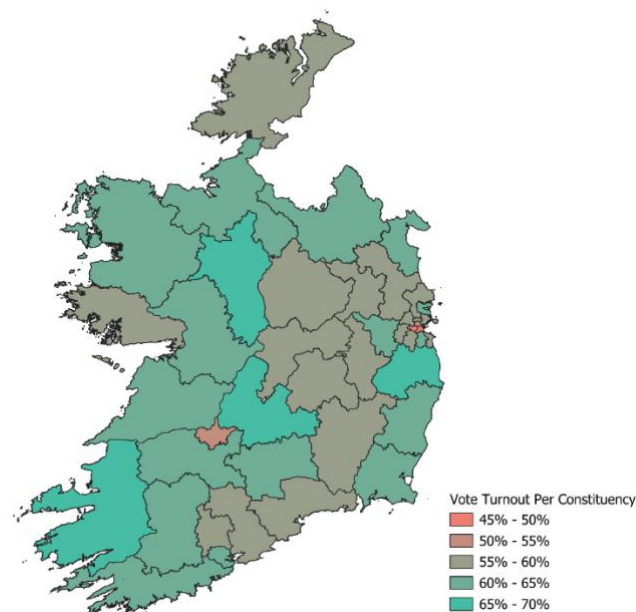
“In fairness, we do have a big majority of addicts or very vulnerable people in the area”

Safety was felt to be a concern, particularly for female politicians, a problem that participants observed made it more difficult for canvassers. This was seen as a broader problem, not just affecting areas like Belmayne.

Impacts of the campaign

Capturing the impacts of a campaign like the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign on voter registration and turnout is challenging. Before doing so directly, it is worth relating the context for voter turnout in the Belmayne area to regional and national figures. Figure 10 below is based on official turnout figures for the 2024 general election, where overall turnout was 59.7%. Turnout varied widely between constituencies, ranging from 67.8% in Wicklow to 47.8% in Dublin Bay South. The three lowest turnout constituencies were all within central Dublin (Dublin Bay South, Dublin South-Central, and Dublin Central). Constituencies in large urban centres (Dublin, Cork, and Limerick) were predominantly the areas that recorded the lowest turnout. Turnout in the Dublin Bay North constituency, where Belmayne is located, was relatively high compared with other Dublin constituencies, with an overall figure (59.8%) very close to the national average.

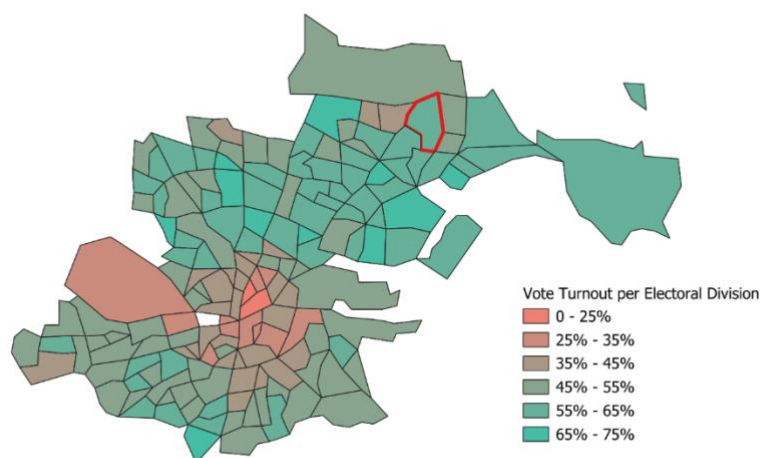
Figure 10 - National Turnout at the 2024 General Election¹⁶



Looking at data recorded by the Dublin City Returning Officer (Figure 11), we can see that inner-city areas recorded the lowest turnout, with some Electoral Divisions (North City and Rotunda B) where turnout was less than 25%. The Grange A electoral division, where the Belmayne area is located, is highlighted in the upper right-hand corner of the map, and recorded an average turnout of 56%, slightly below the national average.

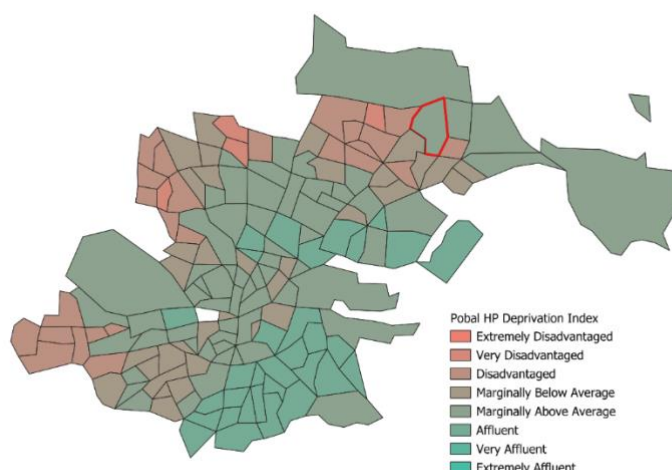
¹⁶ (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2024)

Figure 11 - Dublin City Turnout - 2024 General Election¹⁷



A surprising anomaly appears when one compares areas of low turnout in Dublin compared to areas of relative affluence and disadvantage (Figure 12). Based on what we know about low turnout, we might broadly expect that more disadvantaged areas would register low turnout and vice versa. However, if we map Pobal deprivation rates against this, we can see that turnout was relatively high in north Dublin suburbs where higher levels of disadvantage are typically found. The Grange A area, where Belmayne is, is on average classed as 'Marginally Above Average.'

Figure 12 – HP Deprivation Index Scores for Dublin City¹⁸

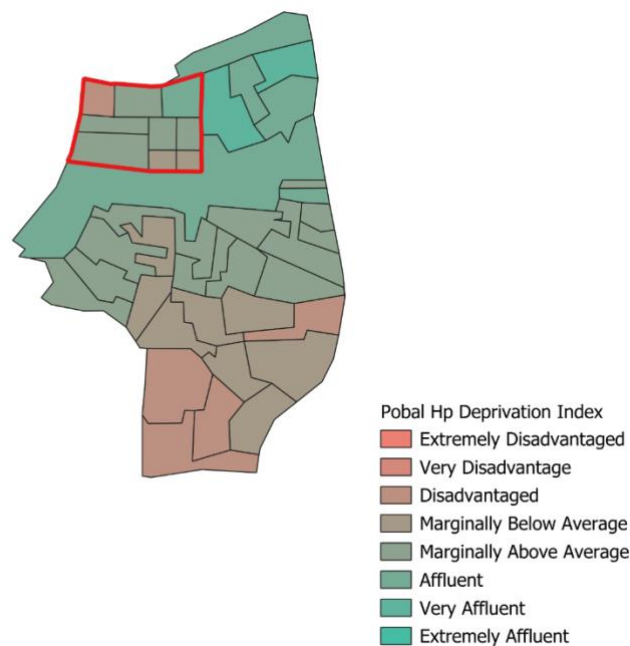


¹⁷ (Dublin City Returning officer, 2024)

¹⁸ (Haase and Pratschke, n.d.)

Belmayne is located in the north-west corner of the Grange A electoral division. Figure 13 shows that rates of affluence and disadvantage vary within the electoral division, from small areas classed as 'Very Affluent' in the Parkside area to the east of Belmayne, to disadvantaged areas in the south of the electoral division near Donaghmede and one area in the corner of Belmayne. The LA/AHB blocks where the Belmayne Social Inclusion Voting Campaign was conducted (highlighted in the upper left-hand corner of Figure 13) coincide with the three Small Areas in the Belmayne area with the lowest relative levels of affluence, with one area classed as 'Disadvantaged' and two (in the bottom right corner of the area) classed as 'Marginally Below Average.'

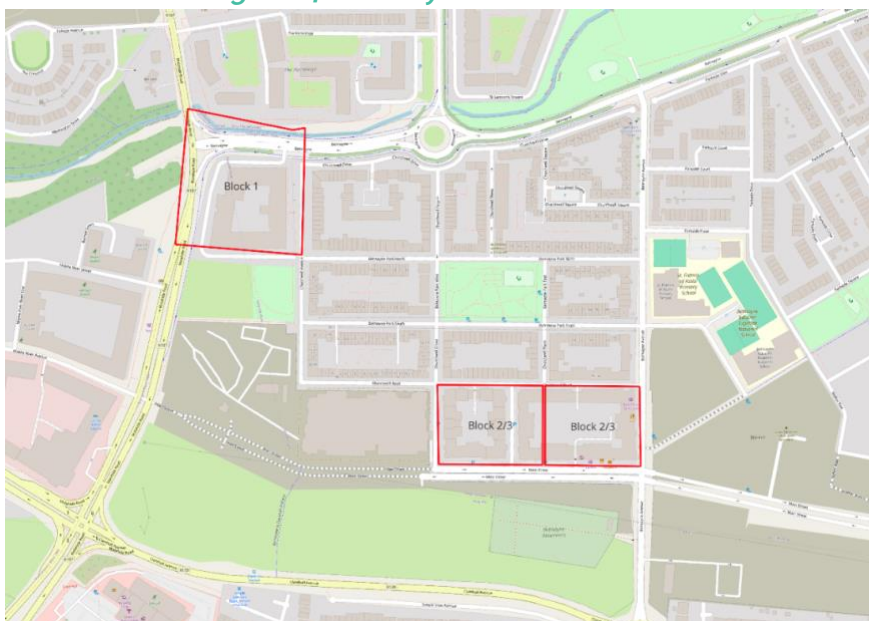
Figure 13 - Deprivation Scores for Grange A Electoral Division¹⁹



The locations of the LA/AHB blocks are highlighted on the map of the local Belmayne area in Figure 14 below:

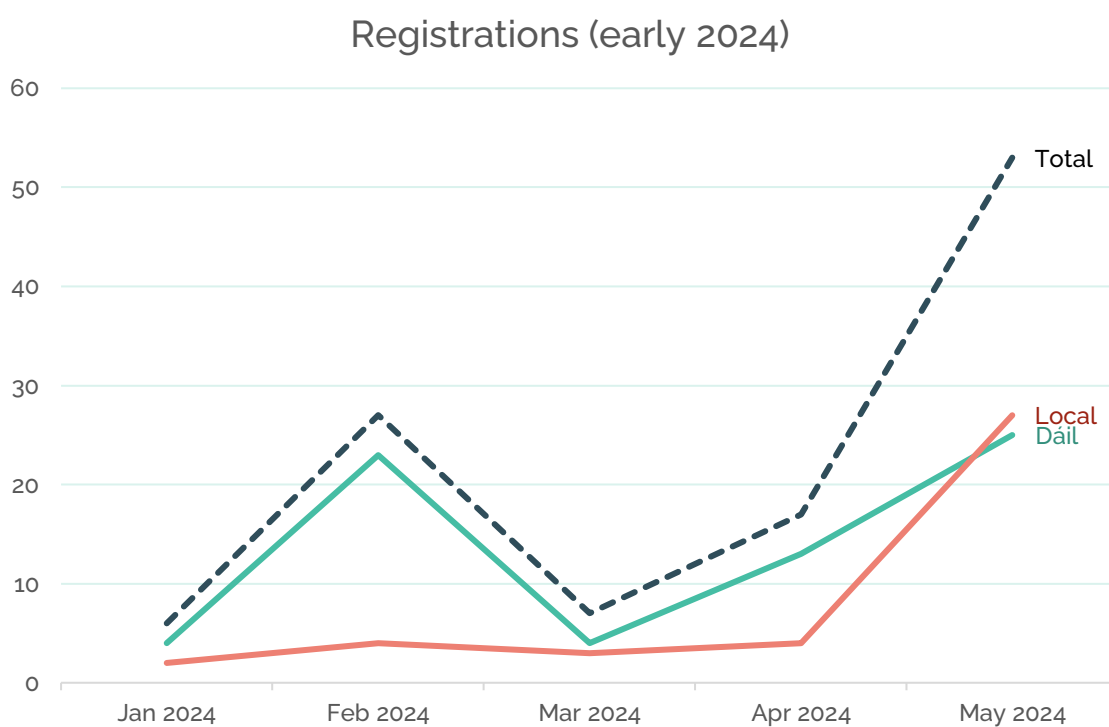
¹⁹ (Haase and Pratschke, n.d.)

Figure 14 - Belmayne LA/AHB Blocks



Figures obtained from the Dublin City Council Franchise Department show that the number of registered voters in streets in the Belmayne area (those with street names beginning with Belmayne or Churchwell) increased by 191 between January and May 2024.

Figure 15 - Registrations in the Belmayne Area (Figures Supplied by the DCC Franchise Department)



Bumps in registration numbers were observed in February and May. This second, larger bump happened in advance of the June 2024 local elections and showed a large

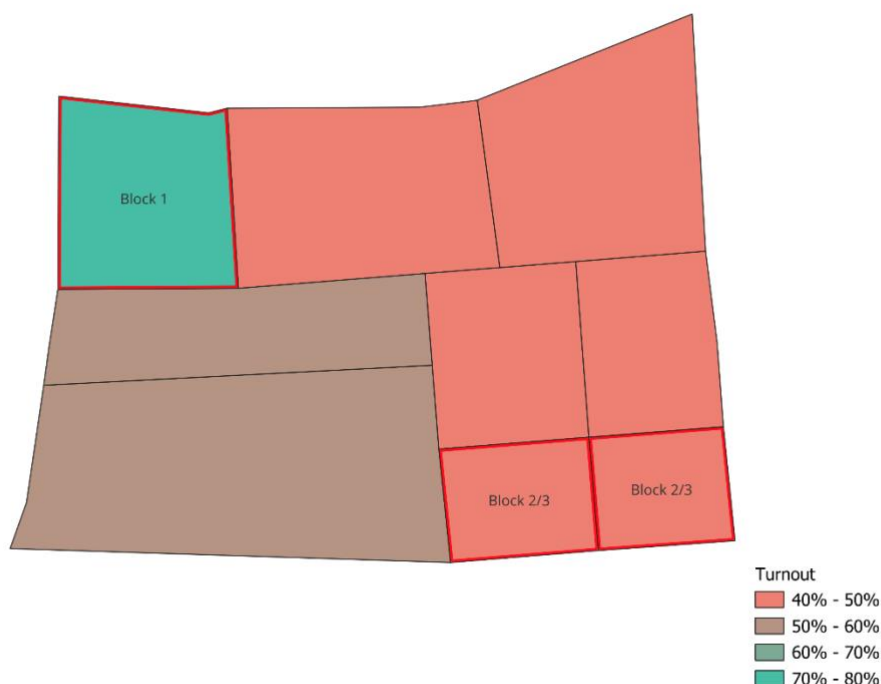
increase in voters eligible to vote in local elections only. These bumps coincide with activities reported by campaign organisers, including social media posts to promote the launch of canvassing events (first posted online 6th February 2024); social media posts in February advertising the coffee morning to discuss the upcoming referendum (see 'Other Activities', p. 24). Canvassing events were held in mid and late April 2024.

The Grange A polling location, which includes polling stations covering the Belmayne area, had a higher number of late registrations ahead of the local elections, with 310 voters included on the balancing list. This was the highest balancing list reported by the Dublin City Returning Officer for that election, and well above average. Only one other polling place in the Dublin City (North Dock B) area had a similarly large balancing list. Almost all balancing lists tallied between 1 and 150.

Voter turnout in the area was mapped using data parsed from the marked electoral register, and this is shown in Figure 16. This is a somewhat painstaking exercise, as voter data is grouped by street address, though street addresses cut across different census small areas. In this case, the street names of those living in LA/AHB blocks in the southeast corner of the Belmayne area overlap with the street names in the addresses of others living in private rental and/or owner-occupied housing within the area. Consequently, this approach can only be done with detailed knowledge of local addresses, and is not feasible to map large numbers of small area voter turnout in order to get a wider comparative picture.

The findings of this analysis surprisingly showed that the highest voter turnout was recorded in Churchwell Gardens, a newly built estate in the northwest corner of the Belmayne area, classed as 'Disadvantaged' by the Pobal HP index and where turnout was 80%, well above the national average. Turnout was 48.9% and 42.5% in the two other LA/AHB blocks in the local area.

Figure 16 - Voter Turnout in Belmayne Area (from Marked Electoral Register)



It is difficult to ascribe a causal relationship between the campaign and the positive outcome observed in the Churchwell Gardens block, not least because of the somewhat contradictory outcome observed in the other LA/AHB blocks.

This promising, albeit preliminary, finding suggests an opportunity for exploring in greater depth the potential of local campaigns intended to improve voter turnout and engagement. Given the identified issues with electoral data arising from inaccuracies in the electoral register, we must also explore qualitative factors that may explain how the activities outlined in this report can address existing barriers to voter engagement at a local level. These include:

- Greater awareness of voting rights among local residents
- More engagement from local residents with politics
- Mixed experiences of engagement by local politicians with the campaign

Greater awareness

Participants reported that an outcome of the campaign had been to increase awareness among participants about their right to vote. Those who had taken part in the voter education programme reported that it had made them more conscious of the right to vote as a privilege. This is in line with the experience of those delivering the voter education training:

“People said it really challenged their thoughts on voting, politics and society. [...] Really made them think. And they said it was remarkably empowering.”

This included improved understanding of how votes are counted as part of the PR-STV voting system used in Ireland.²⁰

One member of the campaign observed that the flyer campaign had improved awareness of voting rights for local elections among non-Irish citizens in the area. Participants felt that a lack of knowledge about voting rights led to a lack of confidence in taking part in their local area.

“[They] believe it's better for the Irish to decide, even though they live here, contribute.”

However, it was reported that those who had been affected directly by the campaign had become local advocates encouraging other non-Irish citizens in the area to make use of their vote.

Similarly, other participants described how their greater awareness following the campaign had encouraged greater engagement among family members.

However, those involved in developing and delivering voter education programmes cautioned that this type of intervention was unlikely to result in immediate and measurable outcomes. Rather, the impact was likely to be felt gradually over time:

“People don't leave our course and say ‘politics is great and I think the system is wonderful’. It gets them to question more, to think more, and even if they don't vote this time, they're going home to talk to their families; there's a ripple effect.”

More engaged local residents

Participants reported that the activities undertaken as part of the campaign had "broken the ice" between local residents and politicians. Activities like the voter education programme Q&A session and the Canvassing Event had improved participants' confidence in building a relationship with local politicians.

“I found from it not to fear reaching out to [politicians] or building a relationship with them. How to approach them and for what to approach them. Not just to give out to them [but also to go to them for support.] I wouldn't have known that if I didn't know how to approach them or create that relationship with them”

Those involved in the campaign relayed reports from politicians that they had noticed an increase in engagement from local participants as a result of the campaign's activities.

Engagement from politicians

²⁰ (McGoldrick, 2025)

Politicians who engaged with the campaign reported that the canvassing event had circumvented physical and social barriers to engaging with LA/AHB tenants.²¹

It was reported that engagement in the programme activities had varied by party. Though the campaign had felt that a non-partisan approach that included all parties was important, they felt there had been noticeably more uptake from left-wing parties. It was reported that during the canvassing event, some politicians had availed of the full opportunity to canvass for the whole day on both of the days that had been arranged, while others had only dedicated an hour or two. It was perceived that politicians lacked commitment to canvassing in the area, as they would assume that local people were less likely to vote.

It had been observed by some participants that politicians had already begun canvassing wealthier areas within the constituency, well ahead of the next round of elections, but not the local Belmayne area.

“They do canvass a lot more coming up to elections, but they're back out canvassing again. But where are they canvassing? They're not back out canvassing the blocks.”

However, it was also reported that local clinics for residents that had begun in February 2024 had been well-attended, and two of the five local politicians who began delivering these clinics continue to hold clinics every second week in the Belmayne Community hub. Politicians observed that there was greater engagement with local committees.

“[T]he [Clongriffin, Belmayne Safety Forum], has way more people than before.... that's really interesting, because normally you'd associate that with an election coming up....the Forum, which is every two months, is more packed than ever.”²²

One campaign organiser felt that the programme had been beneficial in driving through local improvements in the area, reporting that an increase in engagement from local politicians had contributed to recent successes advancing local investment.²³

Local champions

Participants felt that the success of the campaign in the Belmayne area was attributable to some degree to the local profile of activists leading the campaign. It was felt that the trust held by these individuals among the local community, as well as the rapport they had built with local politicians, had helped to bridge the gap between local residents and politicians. The rapport between such figures and local residents was also cited as a factor enabling the successful delivery of voter education, enabling the training to engage local residents in a way it might not if delivered by someone from outside.

²¹ (McGoldrick, 2025)

²² McGoldrick, “Place Exploration (Undergraduate Dissertation).”

²³ Citing the recent commitment to €13m investment to improve local amenities:

Recommendations

As part of this research, a number of recommendations were identified to improve voter engagement. These include suggestions for improving or expanding the activities of the campaign, as well as others to improve democratic participation more broadly.

- **Holding regular canvassing events** to maintain lasting engagement between residents and politicians.
- **Ensure activities are engaging**, e.g. voter training is pitched in an appealing way to local residents
- **Reduce barriers** and ensure campaign activities are local and accessible. Address barriers to voting, such as having emergency polling stations in hospitals.
- **Involve local activists** such as individuals involved in local tenant engagement teams and active community groups.
- **Start with younger people**, breaking intergenerational non-voting patterns through improved civic education in schools or through local youth groups that involve local politicians, register younger voters and consider lowering the voting age to encourage younger people to engage with politics.
- **More proactive approach to voter registration**, either automatically signing up all eligible voters or conducting door-to-door registration drives to sign people up on their doorsteps
- **Improved voter education** that makes people more aware of the rights and privileges of voting. There is a particular need to target non-Irish citizens and ensure awareness of rights to vote, e.g. in local elections.

Finally, participants felt that improving voter participation also meant improving how politicians engage with people in less-affluent areas.

“There needs to be some kind of onus on our elected representatives as well. Some of them are quite happy to just go to their normal voters, and that's it. But you know, they're not just elected to represent a certain view. They're elected to represent everybody that's living in the area, and they need to take that on as a real responsibility.”

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www.tasc.ie | contact@tasc.ie | +353 16169050