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# Is Local Office a Springboard for Women to Dáil Éireann?

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**Reference** **Fiona Buckley, Mack Mariani, Claire McGing & Timothy White (2015) Is Local Office a Springboard for Women to Dáil Éireann?, Journal of Women, Politics & Policy, 36:3, 311-335**

**SUMMARY.** Previous research has found the single transferable vote electoral system is relatively friendly to women candidates. Despite this, female representation in the Irish Parliament remains substantially lower than in most other democracies. Drawing on pipeline theory and localism, we assess the impact of local office-holding on the success of male and female major party candidates in the 2007 and 2011 Irish general elections. We find previous experience in local office is a key springboard to higher office for men and women, and when women serve in local government the likelihood of election increases significantly.

**KEYWORDS**. Ireland; women and politics; PR-STV; pipeline theory; localism

In the history of the Irish state, women's political representation in Dáil Éireann, the lower house of the Irish Parliament, has never risen above 16.5%. Previous research finds that cultural and institutional factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in the Dáil. Cultural studies focus on how gender roles, family responsibilities, gendered career opportunities, and discrimination discourage women from seeking political office and make it more difficult for female candidates to win elections. Institutional studies focus on the extent to which incumbency and the nomination process create obstacles to female candidates. Although these studies help explain Ireland's historically low levels of women's representation, they do not adequately explain why women's representation in Ireland has remained stagnant during a period of expanding opportunities for women.

We turn to pipeline theory and localism to explain why the percentage of women in the Dáil has remained essentially flat over the last two decades. Pipeline theory suggests that candidates who have gained experience and resources through previous service at the sub-national level are best positioned for seats in the national legislature. Localism suggests that a candidate with a strong constituency base, prominent name recognition, and local office experience is more likely to win election to national office. Based on these theories, we argue that women must first gain experience and resources in lower-level offices before moving up through the pipeline to higher level legislative bodies.

In this study, we consider how the pipeline shapes political opportunities for men and women in Ireland and whether gender differences in local office-holding experience are responsible for male and female candidates' differing levels of electoral success in the 2007 and 2011 elections. Our analysis finds that previous experience in local office is a key springboard to higher office for both men and women. When women serve in local government, their

opportunities for election to national office increases significantly. At the same time, opportunities to increase the level of women's descriptive representation in the Dáil are limited by the fact that in Ireland, very few women serve in local office.

## WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN DÁIL ÉIREANN

Between 1977 and 1992, the percentage of women TDs (*Teachta Dála* – Irish for members of the lower house of the Irish Parliament) tripled from 4% to 12%. Following this period of growth, however, women's representation in the Dáil stagnated. As of 2014, Ireland ranked in the bottom half of democracies in women's descriptive representation, behind 90 other states (Inter Parliamentary Union 2014).

Comparative research by Hughes and Paxton (2008) indicates that Ireland does not conform to the historical patterns of female representation seen in the majority of Western European states. Over the past several decades, women's representation increased steadily in Germany, Portugal, and the Scandinavian nations and jumped dramatically during critical periods in England and Spain. In contrast, Ireland and France followed a "lower increasing trajectory" of continuous, but slow growth in women's representation (Hughes and Paxton 2008, 249).

Historically, Ireland's low levels of female representation have largely been attributed to cultural forces and electoral institutions (Randall and Smyth 1987). In recent years, however, scholars have called attention to the pipeline of political opportunities and the importance of lower-level political offices as springboards for the election of women to national legislatures.

<Insert Table 1 Here>

**Cultural Factors**

Numerous scholars have pointed to cultural or ideological factors as the principal obstacles to the election of women (Inglehart and Norris 2003, 127-146; Paxton and Kunovic 2003). The scholarship in this area often focuses on the effects of discrimination and bias against female candidates and officeholders, as well as the socialization of women to adopt gender roles that limit them to the private sphere. Empirical studies link women's work outside of the home to higher levels of women's representation and participation (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 1997; Chhibber 2003; Jensen 2008; McDonagh 2002, 541; Siaroff 2000).

Feminist scholars argue that historically, Ireland's patriarchal social arrangements have minimized and marginalized women, limiting them to the private sphere and excluding them from politics (Kilfeather 2005; O'Connor 2008). Although the evidence is mixed, some studies suggest that female candidates have faced discrimination from the Irish electorate. In his study of gender and elections in Ireland from 1948 to 1997, O'Kelly (2000) found evidence of voter bias against female candidates among supporters of Fianna Fáil while Schwindt-Bayer, Malecki, and Crisp (2010) concluded that being a woman was detrimental to a candidate's electoral prospects. In addition, the fact that many women officeholders were related to a recent or current member of the Dáil led some scholars to argue that female candidates were more likely than male candidates to rely on family connections to win election (Galligan 1998).

Although cultural factors contribute to the historically low numbers of women in the Dáil, they fail to explain why earlier gains in female representation have not been extended. Irish women gained the franchise comparatively early, a factor normally associated with higher levels of women's representation (Stockemer 2008, 67). In addition, the number of women in the Irish workforce and the number of married women working outside the home increased substantially

in recent years (O'Sullivan 2007, 136). In the 'Celtic Tiger' period, Ireland experienced phenomenal rates of economic growth between the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Although given little recognition in academic and popular accounts, the feminization of the workforce contributed significantly to this growth, leading O'Connell (1999, 217) to argue that the term Celtic Tiger "misconstrued the gender of the animal." Demand for cheap labor brought more Irish women into the workforce, often in part-time jobs which allowed them to maintain a balance between the spheres of work and care. By 2007, 60% of Irish women worked outside the home, surpassing the European average (Galligan 2010, 274).

It is puzzling that the expansion of economic and social opportunities available to Irish women did not lead to higher levels of female political participation and engagement. While the second wave feminist movement that emerged in Ireland four decades ago succeeded in securing rights for women, it was less successful at increasing women's access to positions of political power (Connolly 2006). Furthermore, it is clear that cultural factors were a far more significant obstacle to women's representation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, yet the proportion of women in the Dáil increased more quickly during that period than the preceding two decades. Indeed, several recent studies argue that discrimination by voters is no longer a major obstacle for female candidates once they are on the ballot (McElroy and Marsh 2010, 2011). Given the dramatic social changes that have taken place in Ireland, the slow growth in women's representation over the last two decades cannot be explained by cultural factors alone.

**Institutional Factors**

Political ambitions and the likelihood that individuals will act on those ambitions are shaped by the political opportunity structure in a given electoral system (Schlesinger 1966). Institutional factors play a key role in women's representation by defining the structure of

political opportunities for male and female candidates. Numerous studies find that women candidates are at a disadvantage in political systems that advantage incumbent candidates over challengers. Because most incumbents are men, female candidates cannot take advantage of the increased name recognition, political support, and resources available to their incumbent male opponents (Galligan 2008, 155-156; Schwindt-Bayer 2005; Schwindt-Bayer et al 2010, 707). Furthermore, there is evidence that incumbency remains an advantage in the Irish political context (Benoit and Marsh 2008). We would expect that once women in Ireland as elsewhere become incumbents, they will no longer be at an electoral disadvantage (Shair-Rosenfield and Hinojosa 2014).

Research suggests that the political status of women in society is linked to institutional factors such as the electoral system and whether women played a critical role in achieving democracy (Krook 2010; Waylen 2012). In addition, Fitzgerald (2003, 66-67) contends that proportional representation single transferrable vote systems (STV) encourage TDs to focus on local issues and constituent service, which favors the election of candidates from male-dominated professions.[1] Historically, Irish candidates came from occupational backgrounds such as the legal profession, as well as localized jobs such as undertakers, shopkeepers, and publicans (Gallagher 1985). These predominantly male-dominated 'brokerage' occupations provided candidates with economic independence and flexibility of time, while enabling them to develop a strong local profile.

Despite concerns that the STV system can advantage candidates from male-dominated occupations, the system is generally viewed as more friendly to the election of women than a first-past-the-post system (McGing 2014; White 2006). Unlike the single-member district system, the Irish STV system allows voters to select more than one candidate on the ballot. A

transfer process allows voters to express their preferences through a rank-order of the candidates, even across partisan lines if they so wish. In addition, the Irish system's use of multimember districts enables underrepresented groups and non-incumbents to win seats without having to finish first. Previous research suggests that the larger the district magnitude, the more likely minority candidates (e.g., women, independents, members of small parties) will win election (Engstrom 1987; Norris 2004, 187).[2] McGing's study (2013, 337) on the gendered effects of STV in Ireland concludes that the system's multimember nature and lower thresholds for electoral success can act to advantage women candidates.

PR-STV is distinct from the Proportional Representation (PR) List electoral system used in many countries. In PR-List systems, the electorate votes for a political party, and the party lists its candidates from top to bottom. The percentage of popular vote received determines the percentage of seats a party receives in parliament. PR-List systems are often praised for their proportionality, guaranteeing representation to national parties in proportion to their overall popular support. A PR-List system can also be used to guarantee that a minimum percentage of women candidates are elected, depending on how party lists are devised.

The Irish experience resembles that of the Australian Senate, where a similar STV electoral system has consistently elected more women than the instant run-off alternative vote system used in Australia's lower house (Kaminsky and White 2007). At the same time, relatively few states operate under PR-STV and electoral rules vary considerably from one state to another. The lack of comparative examples makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the effects of PR-STV systems on women's representation (Farrell, Mackerras, and McAllister 1996).

In Irish national elections, the principal means by which candidates seek national elected office is by being nominated from a political party and traditionally, the chances of victory

increase dramatically when a candidate is nominated by one of Ireland's major parties.[3] However, research suggests that women are often marginalized in the candidate selection process, resulting in few women being nominated by the major political parties (Galligan 2010, 272).

As in other democracies, campaign finance is an important factor in Irish elections. The cost of a campaign is lower in Ireland than in the United States, but fundraising remains a significant obstacle to women's representation. The responsibility for campaign fundraising in Irish elections rests with the individual candidate. In Ireland, as elsewhere, incumbents raise and spend more than challengers (Benoit and Marsh 2008). Since far more incumbents are men, female candidates are at a disadvantage when it comes to financing their campaigns. There is also evidence from other electoral systems that, in comparison to men, women candidates are more concerned about their fundraising ability (Jenkins 2007) and find it more difficult to raise funds (Burrell 2005, 39; Hogan 2007; Jenkins 2007). Gender differences in occupation likely contribute to women's fundraising disadvantages relative to men. On average, women in Ireland earn 70% of what men do. In addition, more than 20% of women occupy lower paid clerical positions compared to 6% of men (Central Statistics Office, CSO, 2012).

Though women remain less able than men to take advantage of the personal resources and incumbency advantages that help fund successful campaigns in Ireland, these institutional obstacles are not as formidable as they were in the past. The presence of seasoned female incumbent candidates on the ballot and the shift of greater numbers of women into professions that facilitate fundraising suggest that other factors play a role in the continued underrepresentation of women.

**The Importance of Local Experience: Localism and the Pipeline**

To understand the stagnation of women in the Dáil, some consideration must be given to the means by which women establish themselves as credible candidates for national office. Research on the pipeline of electoral opportunities and Ireland's tradition of localism suggests that the lack of women in lower-level offices is a critically important factor in the continued underrepresentation of women in Ireland.

Pipeline theory builds upon research on political ambition and the decision to run for office that finds that building name recognition and political success at local or regional levels of government is critically important to winning election to high-level political offices (Black 1972; Fowler and McClure 1989; Schlesinger 1966). According to pipeline theory, increasing women's representation at the national level requires women candidates to first win election to lower level offices, where they can gain the resources, experience, name recognition, and credibility needed to compete for highly competitive national offices (Fox and Lawless 2004, 265; Palmer and Simon 2003, 128).

In addition to providing candidates with key skills and experiences that prepare them for electoral success at a higher level, local office-holding is a factor in party recruitment efforts and voter evaluations of candidates. Research by Pederson, Kjaer, and Eliasson (2007) indicates that a large number of parliamentarians across Western Europe have some geographical connection to their elected constituencies. Rush (2001, 204) defines localism as "direct constituency connections" such as "being born, educated, living or working in the constituency; having property interests or serving or having served as a member of a local government body in the constituency." In Ireland, the expectation that a candidate will be a 'local' is particularly strong. Writing over 30 years ago, Gallagher (1980, 491) noted:

> Studies of the membership of Dáil Eireann (the lower house of the Irish parliament) have demonstrated that practically all TDs (members of the Dáil) live in the constituency they represent, and a majority were born there. This tendency has become more pronounced with time. At least two-thirds of Dáil members in recent years have simultaneously been members of their local county council.

Localism is also an important factor for party leaders. McElroy and Marsh (2011) argue that the challenge for women lies in the process of women seeking and being successfully nominated onto the ballot. Though party leaders have taken steps to recruit women candidates (especially in the 1970s and 1980s), national party elites in Ireland have less control over candidate selection than party leaders in PR-List systems. Historically, local connections have been the determining factor for candidate success and party leaders have been constrained in their ability to promote female candidates by the need to recruit experienced candidates who are better known and more attractive to voters (Fox and Lawless 2004, 2010; Sanbonmatsu 2006; Weeks 2007). Political experience, name recognition, and reputation in the local area equate to electability and these are the key attributes local party leaders look for when selecting candidates. In the 2007 Dáil election, Weeks (2007) found that party strategists focused on electability and dismissed gender and age when determining who would be successful candidates.

The Irish electorate demands nurturing of local constituencies and a feeling of local connectedness. Irish voters expect representatives to serve as brokers between citizens and a state which "partly for historical reasons, is often seen as remote and hostile and is viewed with suspicion" (Gallagher 1980, 491). Several studies (Reidy 2011; Weeks 2007) confirm that local

government experience and localism remain key attributes for selection in Dáil elections. McGraw (2008), for example, concludes that winning a seat as a local councilor is critically important because it allows an individual to develop the political base and experience necessary to be viewed as a credible candidate in Dáil elections.

Surveys of the Irish electorate have consistently found 'localness' and the ability to look after the needs of the constituency to be key considerations for voters when deciding who to vote for in an election. The 2011 Irish National Election Study (INES) revealed that looking after the local area is considered more important than party affiliation when it comes to voting for a candidate, and that voters regard the provision of local services to the constituency as one of the strengths of the Irish political system (Marsh 2011). The consequence of these findings is that few candidates can expect to be elected unless they have an extensive network of local contacts, a strong local base and experience of local service.

While local office-holding experience is a key factor in candidate recruitment and electoral success, relatively few women are in a position to use local offices as a springboard. Though the percentage of women elected to city and county council seats increased in recent years (from 12% in 1991 to 20% in 2014), women remain a relatively small percentage of local officeholders. As a result, it is men, not women, who are gaining the skills, credibility, and political resources that can be used in the pursuit of higher office.[4] Not surprisingly, previous studies indicate that women consistently make up a higher percentage of candidates than elected TDs (Galligan 2005, 275).

Though scholars have looked carefully at the impact of cultural and institutional factors that contribute to the continued underrepresentation of women in Ireland, little is known about the impact of local office-holding experience on women's electoral success.[5] Accordingly, the

analysis that follows considers the effect of various factors on the electoral success of men and women candidates, including: incumbency, family service, the support of the major political parties that win the vast majority of legislative seats, campaign expenditures, and, most importantly, local office experience.[6]

## THE PIPELINE AND THE 2007 AND 2011 ELECTIONS

To assess the impact of local office-holding and other factors on electoral success, we compiled data on all candidates on the ballot in the May 2007 and February 2011 Dáil elections. Data were drawn from candidate and party web sites, the *Nealon's Guide* series (Collins 2007 and 2011), the website http://electionsireland.org, and profiles of candidates in Irish newspapers such as the *Irish Times*. Candidate spending data was obtained from the Standards in Public Office Commission. When possible, conflicting data was resolved through e-mail communications with the candidate or party officials.

The main dependent variable in this study is whether the candidate won election to the Dáil (*elected*). Both *sex (female)* and *party (independent)* serve as conditional variables. *Sex (female)* is measured with a nominal, dummy variable, with 1 for women and 0 for men.

It is important to understand whether different factors affect the likelihood of electoral success differently for male and female candidates. *Party (independent)* is a nominal dummy variable where 1 designates independent and small party candidates and 0 designates candidates from the five largest parties (Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour, Sinn Féin, and Green). Independents make up a disproportionate share of total candidates, but they are far less likely to win election than those from major and secondary parties. In the 2007 and 2011 elections, independents made up 36% of all candidates. While candidates from the five largest parties won 46% percent of their races, independent candidates won just 7% of the time. Given the vastly

different rates of electoral success, it seems appropriate to focus on the factors that shape the electoral fortunes of the 63% of candidates who win 93% of Dáil seats. The variable *major party* identifies candidates nominated by Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, historically the two largest parties in Ireland. The variable *Labour* identifies candidates nominated by Labour, the third largest party, which has recruited and promoted female candidates more aggressively than other parties.

Our main independent variable identifies candidates who served previously as local councilors (*local*). We also include variables that account for service in other national-level legislative positions prior to the election, such as service in the Senate (*Seanad*) and the European Parliament (*euro parl*).

The variable *family TD* is a nominal variable that identifies members who have immediate family members (a parent, sibling, grandparent, or aunt/uncle) who preceded them in the Dáil. We also include a variable for *district magnitude* to take into account the fact that the number of TDs elected within a district varies from as few as three to as many as five seats. In addition, we also include a variable for *campaign spending* that is adjusted to account for the varied campaign spending limits that are imposed on candidates in different-sized districts. The campaign spending variable is a measure of a candidate's total expenses incurred as a proportion of their district spending limit.[7]

In elections for multi-member districts or constituencies as in Ireland, the concept of incumbency is not as limited as it is in a single-member district election since multiple incumbents can compete (and win) in the same district. Given that the advantages of incumbency are more widely dispersed within a district election, we combine current incumbents with other candidates who have previously served in the Dáil into a single variable, *Dáil service*. The logic behind this variable is that both former and current members of the Dáil are able to draw on their

experience and political contacts in ways that are unavailable to candidates who never served in the Dáil.

Keeping in mind that our main focus is on the impact of various factors on the electoral success of major and secondary party candidates, our hypotheses fall into two general areas:

**First, in comparison with male candidates, female candidates are at a disadvantage with regard to experience and resources and this translates into lower levels of electoral success for women.**

$H_1$: Female candidates will be less likely than male candidates to have prior experience in the Dáil, Seanad, and European Parliament.

$H_2$: Female candidates will have lower campaign funding, as a proportion of their district's expenditure cap, than male candidates.

$H_3$: Female candidates will be less likely than men to receive endorsements from one of the two major parties.

$H_4$: Female candidates will receive lower percentage of the quota on the first-ballot than male candidates.

$H_5$: Female candidates will be less likely than male candidates to win election.

**Second, local elected experience helps level the playing field for women candidates:**

$H_{6:}$ Female candidates will be as likely as male candidates to have prior local experience.

$H_7$: Female candidates with local experience will have higher campaign expenditures than those without local experience.

$H_8$: Female candidates with local experience will receive a higher proportion of the quota and will be more likely to win election than women without local experience.

$H_9$ Female disadvantage disappears when accounting for experience and party, including local experience.

$H_{10}$: Local experience will be a more important factor in winning election for female candidates than male candidates.

## DESCRIPTION OF DATA

Our sample includes a total of 1,037 candidates, including 471 in the 2007 elections and 566 in the 2011 elections.[8] Given that the number of female candidates is relatively small (82 in 2007 and 86 in 2011) and female candidates had similar rates of success in both election years examined here, we believe that a pooled analysis is the most reasonable approach for our analysis. Unless otherwise specified, the description and analysis that follows refers to pooled 2007 and 2011 data.

The dataset includes a total of 661 major/secondary party candidates and 376 independent/small party candidates. The comparison of these groups in Table 2 illustrates why it is necessary to analyze major/secondary party candidates separately from independent candidates. Among major and secondary party candidates, male candidates are more likely than female candidates to have previous Dáil, Seanad, and local service. In comparison to female major party candidates, male candidates spend more on their campaigns, win a higher proportion of the quota on the first ballot, and are more likely to win election (49.2% versus 33.6%). In

contrast, the reverse is seen among independent candidates, with women scoring higher than men in each measure.

<Insert Table 2 Here>

Among major and secondary party candidates, a higher percentage of women candidates seek office in larger-magnitude districts, while the reverse is true for male candidates. In addition, the Labour party puts forward a disproportionate percentage of female candidates relative to its proportion of candidates overall. Among independents, higher percentages of male and female candidates seek office in the larger-magnitude districts; this suggests that regardless of sex, independent candidates perceive that their chances of election are better in larger districts.

## ANALYSIS

The analysis presented in Table 3 focuses on major/secondary party candidates (hereafter referred to as "major party"). For major party candidates, we find that in comparison to men, women are less likely to have national-level political experience and have lower levels of campaign expenditures. Not surprisingly, women also have lower levels of electoral success than men, as measured by their initial quota percentage and their likelihood of winning election. At the same time, we find that local government service helps level the playing field for female candidates. Women candidates are more likely to have local experience than national experience. In addition, Table 4 shows that among candidates with local experience, women candidates receive a higher proportion of quota votes and are more likely to win election than women candidates without local experience. The binary logistic regression analysis shown in Table 5 indicates that, when controlling for other factors relevant to electoral success, local experience is significantly associated with the election of women candidates to the Dáil.

In addition to local experience, we also find that district magnitude, previous service in the Dáil, membership in major parties, and membership in the Labour party are each significantly associated with the election of female candidates. Although campaign spending, previous service in the Seanad, and membership in a secondary party are significant factors associated with the election of male candidates to the Dáil, these variables do not have a significant impact on the election of female candidates.

**Service in the Dáil, Seanad, and European Parliament**

Historically, incumbency has been seen as a major barrier to female representation (Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 2007). Schwindt-Bayer, Malecki, and Crisp (2010) noted that "where large numbers of incumbents run and most of those incumbents are men, it may be very difficult for women to break the incumbency cycle" (696-697). One of the challenges to considering incumbency advantage in Ireland's multi-party, multi-member district system is that it is relatively common for members of the Dáil to serve non-consecutive terms. Given that non-incumbent members with past service in the Dáil are likely to share many of the advantages of incumbency in terms of name recognition, fundraising ability, and experience, it is more appropriate to focus on whether male and female candidates have prior experience serving in the Dáil than whether they are currently-serving incumbents. Likewise, it is also important to consider whether candidates have experience in national-level legislative positions in the Seanad (the upper-house of the Irish legislature) and the European Parliament that would provide candidates with political resources, experience and support relevant to a Dáil campaign.

A review of the pooled 2007 and 2011 election data indicates that female candidates are less likely than male candidates to have experience in the Dáil. We do not, however, find

significant differences between men and women in terms of prior service in the Senate and European Parliament (this represents partial confirmation of $H_1$).

<Insert Table 3 Here>

**Campaign Expenditures**

Previous research suggests that challengers need even more funds to win seats in the Dáil than incumbents and that increased spending on campaigns pays off in increasing one's likelihood of election (Benoit and Marsh 2008 and 2010). Because women are disproportionately running as challengers, they need these funds to overcome the incumbency advantages many male candidates possess. Women, however, typically spend less on their campaigns than men, and this may help explain their electoral difficulties. Although there is a relatively low spending cap for candidates in Ireland, the differences in expenditures are meaningful in the sense that they reflect the level of organization and support for a candidate as well as the resources available to that candidate during the election. Differences in expenditures are also meaningful in that they clearly contribute to candidates' success in gaining votes and ultimately being elected.

As hypothesized, we find that female candidates have lower campaign expenditures as a proportion of their district's expenditure cap than male candidates (supporting $H_2$). Female candidates' campaign spending was 41.9% of their expenditure cap; compared with 48% for men (this was significant at the .002 level).

**Major Party Affiliation**

One of the most important factors in achieving election to the Irish parliament is to be nominated by a major party. Given the historical significance of relatively strong party identification and support in Ireland, being nominated by one of Ireland's two largest parties is likely to significantly enhance a candidate's likelihood of victory. Our analysis supports the

hypothesis that female candidates are significantly less likely than men to receive endorsements from Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, traditionally, the two largest political parties in terms of membership of the Dáil. In the last two elections, 59.6% of men and 45.9% of women candidates represented one of the two largest parties (this difference was significant at the .006 level). In contrast, female candidates were more likely than male candidates to receive the endorsement of Labour, the third largest party; 16.5% of male candidates and 23.8% of female candidates ran under the Labour banner (these findings support the hypothesis set out in $H_3$).

**Quota and Electoral Success**

In assessing the electoral candidates in the Irish context, scholars have generally relied on two distinct measures. The first is the quota, the number of votes that candidates receive as a proportion of the total number of votes needed to secure election. The second measure (which is a more important measure for our purposes) is a nominal/dummy variable that indicates whether a candidate was elected to the Dáil. Consistent with our hypothesis, we find that women received fewer votes as a percentage of the quota than male candidates and were less likely than men to win election (supporting our hypotheses in $H_4$ and $H_5$). On average, the first ballot votes won by female candidates were equal to 46.4% of the quota, which is significantly less (at the 0.000 level) than the 57.3% received by male candidates. In addition, while nearly one-half of male candidates won election, just one-third of female candidates were elected to the Dáil, a difference that was significant at the 0.002 level.

**Gender, Local Service, and Electoral Success**

One of the main assumptions of pipeline theory is that lower-level offices provide women with opportunities to gain experience and political resources that can help springboard them to higher level offices. This assumption is consistent with previous research that finds that

becoming a local representative (county, city, town councilor) has always been the most common first step on the road to Dáil Éireann (Weeks and Quinlivan 2009). A review of the comparative success of local candidates in the 2007 and 2011 elections lends additional support to the argument that local service is a springboard to the Dáil. Consistent with our expectations, major party female candidates were as likely as major party male candidates to have prior local experience (confirming our hypothesis in $H_6$). In addition, we find that, for both male and female candidates, local experience was associated with higher levels of campaign expenditures measured as a proportion of the respective candidates' district limit (confirming our hypothesis in $H_7$). Further (and most importantly), we find that female candidates with local experience earned a higher proportion of the quota and were more likely to win than women without experience (confirming our hypothesis in $H_8$).

<Insert Table 4 Here>

As a final test, we conducted a binary logistic regression analysis of all candidates to assess the impact of local experience on winning election when controlling for district magnitude, campaign expenditures, party, national-level electoral experience, and whether the candidate was preceded by a family member in the Dáil. For party, we included variables for major party (Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael), Labour, and secondary parties (Green, Sinn Féin); independent candidates are used as the reference category. Finally, a dummy variable for the 2011 election was added to the model to control for election year effects.

<Insert Table 5 Here>

The test reveals that for male candidates, district magnitude, campaign spending, Dáil service, Seanad service, local service, major party membership, Labour party membership, and secondary party membership are all significantly associated with winning election. European

Union (EU) service and being preceded by a family member in the Dáil were not significantly associated with winning election. The model fit is fairly strong, with a Cox-Snell R Square of 0.372 and Nagelkerke R Square of 0.521.

For female candidates, district magnitude, Dáil service, local service, major party membership and Labour party membership were significantly associated with winning election. In contrast to male candidates, campaign expenditures, service in the Seanad, and membership in a secondary party were not significantly associated with the election of female candidates. Similar to men, neither EU service nor being preceded in the Dáil by a family member was associated with female candidates winning election. The model fit for female candidates was also fairly strong, with a Cox-Snell R-Square of 0.282 and a Nagelkerke R-Square of 0.406.

Although service in local office was associated with winning election for both male and female candidates, the impact was quite substantial for female candidates. When holding the other variables constant, the odds of winning election were 173% greater for women with local experience than women without local experience. In comparison, men with local experience were 54% more likely than men without local experience to win election.

## DISCUSSION

This article finds gender-related differences in terms of Dáil experience, campaign expenditure, major party affiliation, proportion of quota achieved, and election. Women candidates are less likely than their male counterparts to win seats in general elections due to their relative inexperience in politics, lack of major party nominations and comparatively less campaign spending than male candidates. Further, women candidates are less likely than men to benefit from incumbency, especially within the major parties and the Labour party is more open to selecting women candidates than both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. In 2007 and 2011, at least,

family dynastic connections were not statistically significant for Dáil election. Finally, and most importantly for this study, becoming a local representative and serving in local office is a springboard for female representation in the Dáil, with major party female candidates earning a higher proportion of the quota and thus more likely to win election than women without such experience.

These findings demonstrate the importance of localism in Dáil elections. The strong political base and prominent name recognition that comes with holding local office are key attributes for one's candidacy in local party selection conventions, and subsequently, election at the national level. The findings concur with pipeline theory, which suggests that achieving higher levels of women's representation at the national level requires women candidates to first win election to lower level offices where they can gain the resources and experience needed to win election to highly competitive national offices.

If the lack of a local government pipeline inhibits the election of women to the Dáil, what prevents the selection and election of women to local government? Although future research is required to fully answer this question, some contend that women may be averse to run for election (Kanthak and Woon forthcoming) or lack the necessary ambition (Fox and Lawless 2014). In the Irish context, it appears that women are less likely than men to have access to the necessary political and social capital needed to run for office.

The key resources required to nurture a local political base are networks, funds, and time. Given the continuing bias in favor of traditional gender roles in Ireland (Galligan 2010), the simple fact is that Irish men are more likely to possess these types of capital than women. Research undertaken by the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) in 2009 revealed that over the course of a week, women spend one-fifth of their day on average engaged in care and

domestic work, three times as much as men. In addition, the CSO (2012) revealed that more than half a million women were looking after the home/family in 2011 compared with only 9,600 men. The same report showed that employment rates amongst men and women were more or less the same before having children. However 80.2% of men whose youngest child is aged 3 or below are in employment, compared to a figure of 56% for women. Female party members[9] may, therefore, have less time and funds to devote to local bailiwick-building activities and may be less likely to seek a nomination when a local electoral vacancy presents itself.

In Ireland, office-seekers tend to acquire a track record of party work in the constituency before they are initially selected (Gallagher 1985). After devoting a considerable period of service to a party, the 'next step' for a member might be a coveted place on the ballot for election to local government. In decentralized candidate selection systems like Ireland, long-time party members can also develop a strong network of fellow party activists who will support them at the selection meeting and mobilize others to do the same.

Traditional gender roles may influence the 'type' of activities that female members undertake within their political parties, and such work may be less advantageous in the recruitment process (Boneparth 1977). Studies on political parties in Ireland illustrate the gendered dimension of party work. Research by Galligan (2010) and Buckley (2013) show that women across Irish parties account for a higher percentage of those in supportive roles (secretaries and treasurers) than in leadership positions (chairs and vice-chairs). Gendered patterns of party activism might influence both the supply and demand of female candidates. Constituency chairs and vice-chairs in Irish parties play an important role in targeting and recruiting new candidates (McGing 2014). The lack of women in 'gatekeeper' roles in constituency politics may prove an obstacle to gender equality. As illustrated by Canadian

research (Cheng and Tavits 2011; Tremblay and Pelletier 2001), women in such positions might be more inclined to find and encourage other women to run. Women members may also be less likely to put themselves forward because they feel they lack networks, resources and, perhaps, confidence. Membership surveys of political parties in Ireland reveals a difference in the type of party activities undertaken by women and men. A survey of the membership of Fianna Fáil notes that women are less likely than men to contact a local representative, to attend party meetings, and to donate money to the party (Fianna Fáil 2004). Likewise, a Labour Party report states that female members prefer to focus on 'individual-orientated activities' rather than attend party meetings and have less of a profile as a result (Labour Party 2005). Gendered patterns of party activism may result in women being less networked and thus less visible as viable candidates to the local party selectorate.

The findings presented here are pertinent to the gender quota recently enacted in Ireland. The *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act* passed by the Irish Parliament in July 2012 creates a gender quota for Irish national legislative elections. The quota obliges political parties to run at least 30% women candidates in the next general election, with the threshold rising to 40% seven years thereafter.[10] Political parties that fail to meet the gender quota lose half of the State funding they receive annually under the *Electoral Act 1997*. The legislative gender quota should help women candidates overcome the highly localized and gendered barriers they have traditionally faced in candidate selection processes (Buckley, Mariani and White 2014) and bring Ireland closer to achieving gender parity in national politics.[11] However, it is important to keep in mind that the quota does *not* apply to local elections. Given the importance of local government experience to electoral success in Dáil elections, whether the women candidates who

are nominated win their races may depend, in the long run, on whether political parties are committed to recruiting and developing women politicians at the local level.

## ENDNOTES

[1] Recent research suggests that the electoral system is one of several factors that account for the localism and constituency focus in Irish politics (Martin 2011).

[2] Galligan (2008) who found constituency size had no effect on female TDs elected from the three largest parties in Ireland from 1948-2002, contests this (154-155).

[3] Historically, Fianna Fáil was the largest political party, gaining the most votes and seats in every national election from 1932 through 2007, while Fine Gael and the Labour Party were the second and third largest parties. An economic crisis led to the 'earthquake election' of 2011 (Gallagher and Marsh 2011) in which Fine Gael won the most seats, Labour came in second, and Fianna Fáil fell to third.

[4] Previous research suggests that women who hold local offices are not as well-positioned to run for office as their male counterparts (Mariani 2008). There is evidence, for example, that women are more likely than men to delay or forgo a political career to raise children or tend to other family responsibilities (Fox, Lawless, and Feeley 2001; Maestas et al. 2006). As a result, women who run for office are typically older than men, serve fewer years in office, and are more likely to pass up opportunities to run for higher-level positions (Mariani 2008).

[5] Welch (1977) places key factors that contribute to lower levels of female representation into three categories: sociological, situational, and structural. For further discussion, see Constantini (1990).

[6] Note that our database also includes variables that measure candidates' personal and situational characteristics, including age, marital status, number of children, occupational status (professional or non-professional) and education (first, second or third-level). Unfortunately, there is no uniform source for these measures, and data were difficult to obtain for independent candidates. Independent candidates for the Dáil won only 13 seats in 2002, 5 seats in 2007 and 15 seats in 2011. Although we do not include these variables in our analysis, we believe that the impact of personal and situational factors on the electoral success of female candidates deserves further examination.

[7] In 2007 and 2011, district spending were €30,150 for a three seat constituency, €37,650 for a four seat constituency, and €45,200 for a five seat constituency (Standards in Public Office Commission 2011).

[8] In the Irish election system, candidates can seek election to multiple constituencies at the same time. The number of candidates who actually do this is very small, and for the purposes of simplicity, we treat races in different constituencies as separate candidacies.

[9] In 2011, women comprised 34% of Fianna Fáil, 42% of Fine Gael, 36.5% of Labour, and 23.6% of Sinn Féin (Buckley and McGing 2011, 228).

[10] The quota legislation also requires 30% male representation, though the lowest percentage of men elected to Dáil was 84.9% in 2011.

[11] Indeed, Rainbow Murray (2014) argues that gender parity is the purpose of such quotas.

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**Table 1. Women Candidates and TDs at elections, 1973 – 2011**

| Election | Total Candidates | Female Candidates | Female Candidates (%) | Female TDs | Female TDs (%) | Success Rate Women (%) | Success Rate Men (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1973 | 334 | 16* | 4.8 | 4 | 2.7 | 25 | 44.0 |
| 1977 | 376 | 25* | 6.6 | 6 | 4.1 | 24 | 40.5 |
| 1981 | 404 | 41 | 10.1 | 11 | 6.6 | 26.8 | 42.7 |
| Feb. 1982 | 366 | 35 | 9.6 | 8 | 4.8 | 22.9 | 47.7 |
| Nov. 1982 | 365 | 31 | 8.5 | 14 | 8.4 | 45.2 | 45.5 |
| 1987 | 466 | 65 | 13.9 | 14 | 8.4 | 21.5 | 37.9 |
| 1989 | 371 | 52 | 14.0 | 13 | 7.8 | 25 | 48.0 |
| 1992 | 482 | 89 | 18.5 | 20 | 12.0 | 22.5 | 37.2 |
| 1997 | 484 | 96 | 19.8 | 20 | 12.0 | 20.8 | 37.6 |
| 2002 | 463 | 84 | 18.1 | 22[#] | 13.3 | 26.2 | 38.0 |
| 2007 | 471 | 82 | 17.4 | 22 | 13.3 | 26.8 | 37.0 |
| 2011 | 566 | 86 | 15.2 | 25 | 15.1 | 29.1 | 29.4 |

Source: Figures for 1977 to 2002 adapted from Galligan 2005, 275; the 1973 figures were sourced from Gallagher 2009, 283–320; figures for 2007 and 2011 are authors' calculations.

* There were 144 total deputies in 1973 and 148 total deputies in 1977. From 1981 through 2011 elections, total number of deputies was 166.

[#] Figure does not include Catherine Murphy (Ind) elected in a 2005 by-election in Kildare North.

**Table 2. Description of Candidates and Electoral Results**

| | Major and Secondary Party Candidates | | | Independent and Small Party Candidates | | | All Candidates | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | All | Male | Female | All | Male | Female | All |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| N | 539 (81.5%) | 122 (19.5%) | 661 (100%) | 330 (87.8%) | 46 (12.2%) | 376 (100%) | 869 (83.4%) | 168 (16.6%) | 1037 (100%) |
| Won Election | 49.2% | 33.6% | 46.3% | 6.1% | 13.0% | 6.9% | 32.8% | 28.0% | 32.0% |
| Mean Quota | 57.3% | 46.4% | 55.3% | 13.4% | 21.3% | 14.4% | 40.6% | 39.5% | 40.5% |
| Mean Expenditure Prop. | 17,729 | 15,755 | 17,364 | 7,332 | 11,425 | 9,855 | 13,791 | 14,569 | 13,918 |
| District Magnitude | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 Seat District | 36.0% | 27.9% | 34.5% | 27.6% | 26.1% | 27.4% | 32.8% | 27.4% | 31.9% |
| 4 Seat District | 32.8% | 34.4% | 33.1% | 37.0% | 34.8% | 36.7% | 34.4% | 34.5% | 34.4% |
| 5 Seat District | 31.2% | 37.7% | 32.4% | 35.5% | 39.1% | 35.9% | 32.8% | 38.1% | 33.7% |
| Served in Dáil | 44.3% | 29.5% | 41.6% | 7.3% | 17.4% | 8.5% | 30.3% | 26.2% | 29.6% |
| Served in Seanad | 17.3% | 13.1% | 16.5% | 1.8% | 4.3% | 2.1% | 11.4% | 10.7% | 11.3% |
| Served in EU | 1.1% | 3.3% | 1.5% | 0.3% | 0.0% | 0.3% | 0.8% | 2.4% | 1.1% |
| Served in Local | 72.2% | 65.6% | 71.0% | 27.6% | 43.5% | 29.5% | 55.2% | 59.5% | 55.9% |
| TD Family | 14.5% | 18.0% | 15.1% | 1.5% | 6.5% | 2.1% | 9.6% | 14.9% | 10.4% |
| Party | | | | | | | | | |
| Fianna Fáil | 29.1% | 20.5% | 27.5% | ----- | ----- | ----- | 18.1% | 14.9% | 17.6% |
| Fine Gael | 30.4% | 25.4% | 29.5% | ----- | ----- | ----- | 18.9% | 18.5% | 18.8% |
| Labour | 16.5% | 23.8% | 17.9% | ----- | ----- | ----- | 10.2% | 17.3% | 11.4% |
| Sinn Féin | 11.7% | 14.8% | 12.3% | ----- | ----- | ----- | 7.2% | 10.7% | 7.8% |
| Green | 12.2% | 15.6% | 12.9% | ----- | ----- | ----- | 7.7% | 11.3% | 8.3% |
| Independent | ----- | ----- | ----- | 100% | 100% | 100% | 37.9% | 27.4% | 36.2% |

Source: Pooled Data, 2007 and 2011 Elections
Percentages reflect percent of valid cases.

**Table 3. Comparison of Candidates, by Sex, Major and Second Party Candidates Only (including Expenditures, Quota and District Magnitude)**

| | Male | Female | Chi. Square | Sig. (2-sided) | Lambda | Cramer's V |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dáil Service | 44.3% | 29.5% | 9.009 | 0.003** | 0.000 | 0.117 |
| Seanad Service | 17.3% | 13.1% | 1.238 | 0.266 | 0.000 | 0.043 |
| EU Service | 1.1% | 3.3% | 3.131 | 0.077 | 0.000 | 0.069 |
| Local Service | 72.2% | 65.6% | 2.101 | 0.147 | 0.000 | 0.056 |
| Major Party (FF & FG) | 59.6% | 45.9% | 7.567 | 0.006** | 0.025 | 0.107 |
| Labour | 16.5% | 23.8% | 3.574 | 0.059 | 0.000 | 0.074 |
| Family TD | 14.5% | 18.0% | 1.194 | 0.550 | 0.000 | 0.043 |
| Won Election | 49.2% | 33.6% | 9.686 | 0.002** | 0.000 | 0.121 |

| | Male | Female | Diff. | Sig. (1-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expenditure Proportion | 0.4804 | 0.4189 | -0.0614 | 0.002## |
| Quota | 0.5732 | 0.4642 | -0.1090 | 0.000### |
| District Magnitude | 3.95 | 4.10 | 0.15 | 0.037## |

Source: Pooled Data, 2007 and 2011 Elections; Major and secondary parties only (includes FF, FG, LAB, GRN, and FF; excludes independents and minor parties).
Chi Square (2-tailed): * = p <.05; ** = p <.01; *** = p <.001
T-Test (single-tailed): # = p <.05; ## = p <.01; ### = p <.001

**Table 4. The Impact of Local Service on Major Party and Secondary Candidates**

| | All | | Men | | Women | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Local Experience | No Local Experience | Local Experience | No Local Experience | Local Experience | No Local Experience |
| Quota | 59.8%*** | 44.3% | 61.0%*** | 47.8% | 54.1%*** | 31.9% |
| Expenditure | 37.8%*** | 50.6% | 51.3%*** | 39.7% | 47.7%*** | 30.8% |
| Won Election | 51.2%$^{+++}$ | 34.4% | 52.7%$^{++}$ | 40.0% | 43.8%$^{++}$ | 14.3% |

Source: Pooled data for 2007 and 2011 elections. Major Party and Secondary Candidates Only.
Quota and expenditure proportion: Independent Samples T-Test (single-tailed): * = p <.05; ** = p <.01; *** = p <.001
Won Election: Pearson Chi Square (2-tailed): $^{+}$ = p <.05; $^{++}$ = p <.01; $^{+++}$ = p <.001

**TABLE 5. BINARY LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS: ALL CANDIDATES**

| | ALL CANDIDATES | | | | MALE CANDIDATES | | | | FEMALE CANDIDATES | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model Estimates | B | Sig. (single tail) | Exp (B) [Odds Ratio] | % Change in Odds | B | Sig. (single-tail) | Exp (B) [Odds Ratio] | % Change in Odds | B | Sig. (single-tail) | Exp (B) [OddsRatio] | % Change in Odds |
| Sex (Female)- | -0.340 | 0.075 | 0.712 | -28.8 | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| District Magnitude | 0.274 | 0.008** | 1.315 | 31.5 | 0.224 | 0.035* | 1.251 | 25.1 | 0.565 | 0.029* | 1.759 | 75.9 |
| Spending | 2.605 | 0.000*** | 13.527 | 1252.7 | 2.887 | 0.000*** | 17.946 | 1694.6 | 1.347 | 0.147 | 3.844 | 284.4 |
| Dáil Service | 1.715 | 0.000*** | 5.556 | 455.6 | 1.711 | 0.000*** | 5.537 | 453.7 | 1.740 | 0.000*** | 5.697 | 469.7 |
| Seanad Service | 0.382 | 0.059 | 1.466 | 46.6 | 0.483 | 0.038* | 1.621 | 62.1 | -0.070 | 0.454 | 0.933 | -6.7 |
| EU Service | 1.151 | 0.057 | 3.161 | 216.1 | 1.285 | 0.089 | 3.615 | 261.5 | 1.595 | 0.125 | 4.928 | 392.8 |
| Local Service | 0.503 | 0.008** | 1.654 | 65.4 | .429 | 0.032* | 1.536 | 53.6 | 1.004 | 0.046* | 2.730 | 173.0 |
| Major Party | 1.816 | 0.000*** | 6.146 | 514.6 | 1.946 | 0.000*** | 7.000 | 600.0 | 1.143 | 0.028* | 3.136 | 213.6 |
| Labour | 1.761 | 0.000*** | 5.821 | 482.1 | 1.788 | 0.000*** | 5.976 | 497.6 | 1.718 | 0.006** | 5.571 | 457.1 |
| Secondary Pty | 0.733 | 0.017* | 2.082 | 108.2 | 0.861 | 0.013* | 2.366 | 136.6 | 0.018 | 0.492 | 1.018 | 1.8 |
| TD in Family | -0.006 | 0.486 | 0.994 | -0.6 | 0.097 | 0.298 | 1.102 | 10.2 | -0.759 | 0.095 | 0.469 | -53.2 |
| 2011 Election | 0.301 | 0.947 | 1.351 | 35.1 | 0.273 | 0.907 | 1.313 | 31.3 | 0.348 | 0.774 | 1.416 | 41.6 |
| Constant | -5.403 | 0.000*** | 0.005 | -99.5 | -5.407 | 0.000*** | 0.004 | -99.6 | -6.130 | 0.000 | 0.002 | -99.8 |

Model Summary

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chi Square (Change in -2 Log Likelihood) | 481.515 | 435.917 | 55.686 |
| Sig. | 0.000 | 0.000*** | 0.000*** |
| Cox-Snell R-Square | 0.372 | 0.396 | 0.282 |
| Nagelkerke R-Square | 0.521 | 0.551 | 0.406 |
| Hosmer & Lemeshow | 17.519* | 19.196* | 11.532 |
| N | 1,034 | 866 | 168 |
| Missing | 3 | 3 | 0 |

Binary Logistic Regression, Dependent Variable: Won Election; Pooled Data, 2007 and 2011 Irish Elections; Independent candidates are used as a reference category; Single-Tailed Test, Sig. = * p <.05; ** p<.01; ***p<.001