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Title	Women and politics in Ireland: The road to sex quotas
Authors	Buckley, Fiona
Publication date	2013-09-10
Original Citation	Buckley, F. (2013) 'Women and politics in Ireland: The road to sex quotas', Irish Political Studies, 28(3), pp. 341-359, doi: 10.1080/07907184.2013.818537
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.1080/07907184.2013.818537
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Download date	2026-09-16 09:53:22
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Women and Politics in the Republic of Ireland: The Road to Sex Quotas

FIONA BUCKLEY
Department of Government, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

Reference: Fiona Buckley (2013) Women and Politics in Ireland: The Road to Sex Quotas, Irish Political Studies, 28:3, 341-359

ABSTRACT *This article tells the story of how and why legislative candidate sex quotas, more commonly known as gender quotas, were adopted by the Irish Parliament in July 2012. In so doing, it reviews both internal party equality strategies and external party influences. Tracing party data over a two decade period, the article shows that parties have adopted a range of strategies, in line with their ideological orientation, to address women's political under-representation. For the most part however, these strategies have been rhetorical and promotional in nature, and have not resulted in significant gains for women in electoral politics. To understand how support for gender quotas was secured, Krook's (2007) analytical framework for the adoption of gender quotas is employed, and the conditions favouring the introduction of quotas in the Republic of Ireland are identified. The article finds that the coming together of a constellation of pressures, notably a political reform discourse, the mobilisation of civic society groups, and elite support, facilitated the adoption of legislative candidate sex quotas in 2012, a legislative outcome that could not have been predicted some years earlier.*

Keywords: Ireland[1], gender quotas, political reform, equality, parties

Introduction

In July 2012, legislation on political party funding and candidate sex quotas was enacted by the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament). The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 provides for a 30 per cent sex quota for party candidates at the next general election, rising to 40 per cent seven years thereafter. Non-compliant parties will lose half of the public funding available to them for the full duration of the parliamentary term following an election. A comparative review of international gender quota laws (the term more widely used to describe candidate sex quotas) indicates that the Republic of Ireland will operate one of the most punitive sanction for non-compliance to be found in quota laws. The gender quota legislation represents an important attempt to improve the historical under-representation of women in Irish politics. Gender inequality in political representation has been

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

a constant feature of Irish politics since the foundation of the State in 1922. Only 92 women have been elected to Dáil Éireann (lower house of parliament) in the nine decades since independence from Britain. In 2013, women make up 26 (15.7 per cent) of TDs (Teachtaí Dála, members of the Dáil), placing Ireland 22nd of the 27 European Union member states in terms of women's political representation in national parliaments.[2] In recent years all of the main political parties have acknowledged the severe under-representation of women in Irish politics and have engaged in a variety of strategies to promote the role of women within their parties. However, most stopped short of advocating gender quotas for electoral politics until now. In light of this reluctance to move on solving the problem of women's under-representation, the current cross party support for the adoption of legislative candidate sex quotas begs the question: what conditions are in place now, that were hitherto absent, that have facilitated the introduction of candidate selection legislation?

In answering this question, the article provides a descriptive overview of party activities to promote women in Irish politics since the 1990s. It expands upon the work of Galligan and Wilford (1999) who concluded there were distinct differences between 'the facilitatory perspectives embraced by social democratic parties such as Labour, DL[3] and the Green Party' and the more gender neutral and rhetorical strategies pursued by those on the centre right - Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the PDs[4]. The literature on women's political representation, especially that dealing with candidate recruitment, emphasises the importance of parties in providing opportunities for women to engage in electoral politics.

A party's organisation, rules and ideology directly affects its selection processes and candidate eligibility criteria (Campbell, Childs and Lovenduski, 2006: 22). Researchers, including those writing in an Irish context, have observed that the gate-keeping function of political parties has institutionalised bias against the selection of women candidates (Randall and Smyth, 1987; Fawcett, 1992; Galligan, 1993). In this article, party manifestos, taskforce reports and policy statements of the four main political parties – Fine Gael, Labour, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin – are reviewed to identify gender

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

equality strategies adopted to advance women within party ranks and electoral politics. These are then assessed using Lovenduski's (2005) threefold stratagem for increasing the number of women in electoral politics, namely equality rhetoric, equality promotion and equality guarantees. Equality rhetoric entails political elites publicly acknowledging in speeches and party manifestos the need for more women in public life but doing little else to redress the problem of women's political under-representation. Equality promotion involves parties encouraging women's political ambitions through the introduction of 'soft' measures such as target-setting, mentoring, training and financial supports to increase the number of 'qualified' women available to run as potential candidates. Equality guarantees are more interventionist. This is where a party either voluntarily or is legally bound to give a guarantee that candidate gender representation will not drop below an agreed level, usually ranging between 30 and 40 per cent. Living up to a gender guarantee quota requires active engagement by party leaders with the candidate selection process, and often runs in tandem with an equality promotion strategy.

Given the demonstrated ineffectiveness world-wide of rhetorical statements in increasing women's representation and the patchy success of encouragement measures, it is not surprising that gender quotas have become an increasingly popular mechanism to advance women in electoral politics. In recent years more than a hundred countries have adopted reserved seats, legislated for candidate sex quotas, and introduced voluntary party quotas to address the under-representation of women in politics (Krook, 2007). To assess quota adoption on a comparative basis, Krook (2007: 370 - 374) has identified four narratives that explain how and why quotas are adopted.

- Mobilisation

The first narrative – mobilisation - highlights that women mobilise for the adoption of quotas. This may take the form of grassroots women's movements, internal women's sections of political parties, cross party networks and prominent party women. These groups mobilise at the local, national, international and transnational levels with the aim of lobbying parties and parliamentarians to support

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

gender quotas as a mechanism for increasing women candidates and accomplishing a broader goal of women-friendly policy change. However, even when there is strong mobilisation of women in support of gender quotas, such proposals rarely gain traction until elites support their adoption. Oftentimes elite support is secured when the strategic advantages for supporting gender quotas are recognised.

- Elite support and strategic consideration

Elite support and strategic considerations is the second narrative to explain the adoption of gender quotas (Krook 2007: 371). There is a contagion effect at work here: political parties typically adopt voluntary quotas after one of their rivals establishes them. These tendencies are especially strong in cases where parties seek to overcome a long period in opposition. The adoption of voluntary party-based quotas can also be responding to a perceived crisis in representation (Krook, 2007: 371).

- Democratic renewal or change

A third narrative – democratic renewal or change – illustrates that quotas are employed during times of democratic innovation, transition or renewal as a means of establishing the legitimacy of new or changing political systems (Krook, 2007: 372).

- International norms and pressures

Fourth and finally, quota adoption may be driven by international norms and pressures. The United Nations, European Union and Council of Europe regularly call upon member states to implement measures to address the gender imbalance in their political structures (Krook, 2007: 373).

Using Krook's (2007) analytical framework for the adoption of candidate sex quotas, this article seeks to understand how support for gender quotas was cultivated and translated into political action in the Republic of Ireland. The activities of civil society and elites, as well as the influence of the political reform debate arising from the recent economic crisis, are discussed.

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

Women's Political Representation in the Republic of Ireland

The 2009 Oireachtas (parliamentary) report on women's participation in politics highlighted that Ireland's ranking on global scales of women's political representation dropped significantly during the previous two decades (Bacik, 2009: 7). In effect, women's representation plateaued at 12 to 15 per cent, as Table 1 shows, despite the dramatic socioeconomic and cultural changes during this time, evidenced by women's increasing economic and educational empowerment (Buckley and McGing, 2011: 222).

Insert Table 1 About Here

The mismatch between women's greater contribution to society across a range of areas and the persistence of a male super-majority in politics has been the subject of extensive analysis, as well as civil society discussion. Recent studies conclude that discrimination by voters is no longer a major obstacle for female candidates in Irish elections once they are placed on the ballot (McElroy and Marsh 2010, 2011). However, the gate-keeping function of political parties has traditionally institutionalised bias against the selection of women candidates (Randall and Smyth, 1987; Fawcett, 1992; Galligan, 1993). A review of candidates who contested the 2011 general election on behalf of the four main political parties reveals that women's candidacy hovered between 14 and 27 per cent (see Table 2). National party elites in Ireland have much less control over candidate selection than in other proportional representation systems, as the local-level party organisation plays a crucial role in this aspect of party decision-making. Political experience, name recognition, and reputation in the local area are seen as equating to electability, and these are among the key attributes which local party members look for when selecting candidates (Weeks, 2007; Reidy, 2011). Given the personalist nature of Irish politics, local government service is particularly critical to one's chances of selection as it allows an individual to develop the political base and experience necessary to be viewed as a credible candidate for Dáil elections (McGraw 2008: 637). It is an especially essential attribute for women, for

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

research shows that 'when women enter the political pipeline through involvement in local government service, they are statistically more likely than men to win a Dáil seat' (Buckley et al forthcoming 2015). However, relatively few women are in a position to use local government as a springboard to national politics in Ireland. In 1991, only 12 per cent of city and county council seats were held by women. Although women's local seat-holdings reached 19 per cent in 2004, it fell back to 16 per cent following the 2009 local elections.

Insert Table 2 About Here

To successfully nurture a political base, one needs funds and time. Given the persistent gendered division of care in Irish society, women are less likely than men to possess these types of capital. Women's income in 2011 was around 73 per cent of men's income (CSO, 2012: 28). With less cash at their disposal to mount an election campaign, women hesitate to seek a nomination to run in the first place. Lack of time proves to be an additional barrier to women, given that they spend three times as long as men in an average week engaged in care and domestic work (NWCI 2009). In addition, more than half a million women were looking after the home/family in 2011 compared with only 9,600 men (CSO, 2012: 11). Women party members, therefore, have less time and funds to devote to local bailiwick-building activities.

Another barrier to women's candidacy is incumbency. Evidence suggests that incumbency is advantageous to candidates in Irish elections (Benoit and Marsh 2008). As most incumbents are men, female candidates find it difficult to overcome the increased name recognition, political support and resources of their incumbent male opponents (Galligan 2008: 155 - 156; Schwindt-Bayer, 2005; Schwindt-Bayer, Malecki and Crisp, 2010: 707; McGing, 2013).

Within party structures, too, the spaces are limited for women to develop political experience, networks and electoral capital. Across all party structures, women account for a much higher percentage of those in supportive roles (i.e. secretaries and treasurers) than in leadership positions

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

(i.e. chairs and vice-chairs) (see Table 3). This concurs with Galligan's (2009: 272) earlier finding that there is a 'persistent bias in favour of traditional gender roles' in internal party structures, thus reflecting a 'local reluctance to encourage the ambitions of aspiring women candidates, perpetuating the cycle of women's exclusion from electoral politics'.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Political Parties and Gender Equality Strategies in the Republic of Ireland

In this section we discuss party activities to increase women's representation prior to the introduction of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act, and assess those activities using Lovenduski's (2005) threefold stratagem for increasing the number of women in politics, namely equality rhetoric, equality promotion and equality guarantees. The discussion concentrates on the four main parties – Fine Gael, Labour, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin – and examines their gender equality strategies since the 1990s. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have been described as the 'twin pillars' of Irish political life, winning an average combined vote of 74 per cent since the 1920s (Weeks, 2009: 138). They have traditionally occupied the centre-right space on the ideological spectrum. The Labour party occupies a centre-left position and has been pivotal in coalition government formation with the larger parties, most notably Fine Gael, in the course of its history. In the years following the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, Sinn Féin has re-established itself as a political challenger in Ireland. It occupies a left position on the political ideological spectrum. While all parties have made attempts to redress the gender imbalance in Irish politics during the past twenty years, the impact of these activities has been minimal. For the large part, such activities can be categorised as rhetorical and promotional, or 'soft' in nature. A distinction can be made between the 'soft' measures adopted to advance women in electoral politics and the more 'hard' equality guarantee measures employed to improve gender balance in internal party positions. All parties, with the exception of Fine Gael, have implemented positive discrimination for elections to their governing bodies.

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

Fine Gael

Fine Gael's approach to improving gender representation has been framed within a liberal partisan ideology, shaped by an equal-opportunity philosophy (Galligan and Wilford, 1999: 166), which has made it difficult for feminist party activists to advocate for interventionist policies on gender equality. In the early 1990s, an internal party report recommended avoiding quotas 'because of the danger of compromising democratic principles' (Fine Gael, 1993: 44). Instead, this report recommended the engagement of 'soft' activities such as the establishment of a women's group, the appointment of a full-time women's officer and the provision of training and mentoring to women members. The impact of these measures was minimal. During the period 1989 to 2002, women's membership on the Fine Gael national executive hovered between 20 and 30 per cent, male officer holders dominated party leadership positions (chair and vice-chair), and only four new women TDs were elected.[5] Following a poor election in 2002, an internal party review showed that the party's low level of women representatives was a strategic weakness. Fine Gael begun to slowly acknowledge the structural and gendered barriers faced by women members. A survey of card-carrying members revealed a lack of equal opportunities for women in the party, and recognition that women prioritised families over a career in politics (Gallagher and Marsh, 2002). The same survey found that 41 per cent of respondents found the idea of gender quotas acceptable (p.134). In 2003, the party established an equality taskforce to examine how it could promote women candidates and increase its number of female representatives. The taskforce set a target of securing the election of between eight and ten women to the Dáil in the 2007 general election, and placed an obligation on each Fine Gael team of candidates at the 2004 and 2009 town council elections to include at least one woman. Other actions included the rejuvenation of the party's women's group, the publication of an internal newsletter *Genderlines*, the provision of training and mentoring, and the compilation of a 'toolkit' for women members which provided advice on campaigning, messaging and fundraising. The results were mixed. In the absence of sanctions for non-compliance, just five women TDs were elected for the party in the 2007 general election, falling well short of the target. In contrast, the town council elections resulted in a modest

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

increase of Fine Gael women elected from 26 per cent in 1999 to 31 per cent in 2009 (Dinan, 2009: 14 – 15).

Fine Gael's positive experience of using targets in local elections prompted a shift in attitudes amongst party strategists towards the use of candidate selection quotas for general elections. Gender quotas were first muted in a political reform statement, *New Politics*, launched by the party in March 2010 (p.7). However, the proposal was met with strong opposition from members of the parliamentary party, local branches and youth sections of the party. Objectors claimed the introduction of gender quotas would contravene the principles of equal opportunity, fairness and democracy. Accordingly, the party's 2011 election manifesto *Let's Get Ireland Working* contained a diluted and more rhetorical commitment to increasing women's political presence as part of a political reform agenda (Fine Gael 2011: 63). The roll-back on gender quotas reflected a resistance to positive action within the party. Only 16 women out of a total of 104 Fine Gael candidates contested the 2011 general election despite a female party membership rate of 42 per cent.

For much of the last twenty years, Fine Gael's preference for equality of opportunities over guarantee of outcomes has resulted in the party relying on what Lovenduski describes as rhetorical and promotional strategies to advance women in politics, illustrating the role that party ideology plays in the framing of internal gender debates (Krook, 2007). On forming a government in 2011, and to the surprise of many, the party began to articulate an equality guarantee discourse by mooting the adoption of candidate sex quotas. As Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Fine Gael strategist and TD Mr. Phil Hogan announced his intention to introduce legislation whereby the State funding of political parties would be tied to the percentage of women candidates selected to contest elections. While opposition to this proposal continued within the party (see Dáil Debates, 19 June 2012), the Fine Gael party leadership was committed to the use of interventionist measures to secure women's candidate selection. 'Quotas are the only show in town' stated Tom Curran, general secretary of Fine Gael,[6] in January 2012 (Minihan, 2012).

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

Labour

In their study of political parties and gender, Galligan and Wilford (1999: 163) concluded that Labour was 'a gender facilitator' in terms of the party strategies introduced to promote women within the party. It is easy to see how they came to such a conclusion - the Labour party has supported the use of interventionist measures since the mid 1980s when a 25 per cent gender target was introduced for candidates in the 1985 local elections. While the measure did not increase the number of Labour women elected at that election, the initiative did generate an internal party debate on the role of women in politics. A sub-committee of the party's national executive was established to examine the introduction of gender quotas for internal positions within the party. Nearly thirty years later, the effects of such policies are reflected in the percentage of women who occupy positions on the party's national executive (see Table 4). A gender quota exists for the six delegate positions on the Executive Board, where three of these positions must be filled by women, and the Executive Board must consist of a minimum of four women. In 2013, six women serve on the 14-person board, including the party's deputy leader Joan Burton TD, making the national executive of the Labour party the most gendered balanced of all of the four main political parties. In addition, a 30 per cent gender quota exists for membership of executive and central council committees. At constituency level, women remain under-represented at chairperson and vice-chairperson ranks though Labour has significantly more women serving in these positions than Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil (see Table 3).

Women comprise over one-third (37 per cent) of the Labour party membership and automatically become members of Labour Women, a group that works both inside and outside the party, connecting particularly with women's groups and organisations, to influence party policy and strategy. Since the early 2000s, the group has focused its efforts on achieving 'parity democracy' (Ní Chúlacháin, 2011: 2) in electoral politics and internal party structures. In 2005 the group convened an internal commission, headed up by Senator Ivana Bacik, to examine women's participation. This commission set out a 10 year plan of targets to be achieved, notably, for women to comprise one-third of all local election

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

candidates in 2009 rising to one-half in 2014. In addition, the commission recommended that women constitute 30 per cent of party candidates at the 2011 general election. While the party agreed to adopt the commission's recommendations, a review of the actual percentage of women candidates who have contested recent elections reveals that it has fallen short of these self-imposed targets. Just 23 per cent of its 2009 local election candidates and 26 per cent of its 2011 election candidates were women. Notwithstanding this, the party has embraced all three strategies identified by Lovenduski. The rhetoric of 'parity democracy', the existence of a strong women's section, and the adoption of equality targets, have facilitated the advancement of women within the Labour party. There is evidential support for gender quotas too. In March 2009, Ciarán Lynch TD published the Electoral (Gender Parity) Bill 2009 as a private members' motion.[7] While the bill lapsed, the party's 2011 general election manifesto, *One Ireland*, reiterated Labour's commitment to introducing legislative candidate selection quotas. Following the election, the party entered into a coalition government with Fine Gael. During talks on the formation of the government, the Labour party negotiators were successful in having a commitment to increasing women's participation in politics inserted into the programme for government, *Statement of Common Purpose* (2011: 20). However, resistance to affirmative action does exist within the party. One of the most vocal opponents of gender quotas in the Irish Parliament is a female Labour TD. In the course of a debate on gender quotas, Joanna Tuffy stated 'I wish to put on record my opposition to the gender quota proposals... My first reason for opposing the provisions is that they are very likely to be unconstitutional... Second, I believe they are undemocratic and, third, I believe they are discriminatory' (Dáil debates, 22 March 2012).

Insert Table 4 About Here

Fianna Fáil

Writing in 1999, Galligan and Wilford (p.156) evaluated Fianna Fáil as a 'traditional party slowly awakening to the *woman question*'. All of the indicators seemed to suggest that this was the case. Women's membership of the party increased from 25 to 35 per cent in the twenty year period from

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

1977 to 1997, while during this time, eleven[8] women were elected to the Dáil on behalf of Fianna Fáil. Even its 1997 election manifesto, *People Before Politics,* advocated support for the use of affirmative action, declaring the 'establishment of quotas and targets for women as a medium term strategy' (p.47). However, in the years following that election, this statement remained firmly in the rhetorical realm, with no movement on implementing the declared strategy. There was a renewed focus on gender in the mid-2000s, when the then party leader, Bertie Ahern, commissioned an internal gender audit and action plan. The research demonstrated a highly masculinised culture within the party, finding that women members were less likely than men to contact a local representative, to attend party meetings, and to donate money to the party (Fianna Fáil, 2005). The report committed to implementing a ten year gender action plan including a number of specific targets notably, women to comprise one-third of all delegates to selection conventions by 2006; women to comprise 25 per cent of the party's local election candidates in 2009 and 33 per cent at the following local election; women to comprise 20 per cent of the party's general election candidates in 2007 and 30 per cent in 2011. To achieve these ambitious targets it was recommended that the party implement training and support programmes for women considering running for political office. These recommendations were sanctioned at the party's 2005 Árd Fheis (national party conference). This conference also saw the establishment of a new *Committee of 20*[9] elected from separate male and female panels by delegates to the national conference. However, the party's *National Women's Forum* was disbanded as it was felt the forum served to marginalise women within the party.

A review of the party's record on women's representation reveals mixed results. Within the party, women comprise 34 per cent of the party membership and 26 per cent of all officers on the National Executive (see Tables 3 and 4). While the proportion of women constituency officers has increased to 30 per cent, the percentage of female secretaries outdo the percentage of women chairpersons indicating support for Galligan's (2009) assertion that there is a persistent bias in favour of traditional gender roles in internal party structures. Encouragingly, women's participation in elections to fill

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

positions on the *Committee of 20* is very vigorous - in 2013, had the 50:50 rule not applied, women would have won 12 of the 20 places. However, a review of Fianna Fáil's female candidacy rates at recent elections reveals little or no progress in gender equality. Just 19 per cent of the party's local election candidates in 2009 were women. For this election, an interview based selection process was initiated by Fianna Fáil party headquarters (HQ) to ensure the selection of new, young and female candidates. The move was strongly opposed by local party selectorates, and candidates selected by HQ were frequently met with resistance and resentment from local party officials. In the 2011 general election, only 14.7 per cent of Fianna Fáil's general election candidates were women. Indeed, since 1997, just six new women TDs[10] have been elected for Fianna Fáil. With so few women incumbents, the voter backlash against the Fianna Fáil party during the 2011 general election resulted in all of its women TDs losing their seats.

During the past twenty years, Fianna Fáil has engaged in what Lovenduski describes as equality promotion and guarantee activities to advance the number of women within internal party structures. However, it has resisted implementing candidate sex quotas for electoral contests and its activities in this regard have tended to be more rhetorical in nature. While the party's 2011 election manifesto committed support for the introduction of measures to gender balance candidate lists (p.29), it did not elaborate on targets to be achieved. In contrast to the wording of the 1997 election manifesto, the 2011 pledge seemed weak and non-committal. The party's relationship with candidate selection quotas is difficult. A motion to introduce electoral gender quotas was defeated at the party's Árd Fheis (annual conference) in March 2012 with delegates preferring the notion of 'merit' as grounds for selection. The 2012 Árd Fheis motion against gender quotas indicates that the rank and file party membership hold a more conservative attitude towards the promotion of women in politics than the party leadership. The parliamentary party has welcomed the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 leaving it at odds with the party membership on the issue. Despite internal opposition to gender quotas, the party published a *Gender Equality Action Plan* in April 2013 in which

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

it recommends the imposition of a voluntary 30 per cent gender quota at the 2014 local elections and the establishment of a candidate selection monitoring committee to ensure this quota is achieved.

Sinn Féin

In the three general elections since the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast agreement, Sinn Féin's share of the first preference vote has increased from 6.5 per cent in 2002 to just under 10 per cent in 2011. In 2913, it held 14 seats in Dáil Éireann, two of which were filled by women.[11] Concomitant to its social justice values, the party advocates 'the use of all possible mechanisms for advancing gender equality including: equality and other legislation; funding for women's groups; affirmative action; gender-proofing; gender mainstreaming' and also recognises 'the vital need for the equal participation of women in politics and in the decision making process' (Sinn Féin, 2004: 1). These principles have led the party to adopt interventionist strategies to promote women within party ranks. The party's 2003 Árd Fheis changed its rules to provide that equal numbers of women and men be elected to the Árd Comhairle (national executive), and that women's representation on the Executive be at least 30 per cent, through co-option if needed. A further rule change at the 2012 Árd Fheis stipulated that in any election or appointment of more than one member or delegate to a committee or officer board, the election shall be conducted to ensure that not less than 30 per cent of those elected shall be women. In electoral politics, the party has used targets in local elections in an effort to increase women's candidacies. In 2009, the party did not reach a 30 per cent target: just under 23 per cent of the candidates were women. In general elections the party has not engaged in target setting despite pledges in its election manifestos to embrace affirmative action as a mechanism for increasing the number of women in political decision-making, and women comprised between 24 per cent and 19 per cent of party candidates in 2007 and 2011 respectively. Both its 2007 and 2011 general election manifestos advocated a 40 per cent gender share for cabinet appointments as well as a review of the sitting hours in Leinster House to create a more family friendly working environment. It welcomed the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act during its legislative course.

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

Assessing Sinn Féin's gender equality strategies using Lovenduski's threefold stratagem we can conclude that the party has been more committed than others to supporting the use of equality guarantees and supportive actions to increase women's presence in internal leadership positions. Yet, its record in electoral politics has been more rhetorical, stating support for affirmative action, but showing very little evidence of implementing such strategies.

The main political parties, then, have a chequered record when it comes to expressing support for seeing more women in political life, and implementing actions to that end. Two decades of varied commitment to this issue did not impact much on the male parliamentary super-majority, and by 2011 the political reform discourse put women's political representation back on the agenda. The next section discusses how this came about, and the outcome.

Legislating for Candidate Sex Quotas

As noted earlier, the four main drivers for the adoption of candidate sex quotas worldwide are women's mobilisation; elite support and strategic considerations; democratic renewal or change; and international norms and pressures (Krook, 2007: 370 - 374). The Irish story of quota adoption is not too dissimilar to that of its international counterparts. Demands for political reform (*democratic change*), coupled with calls from civil society for an increased presence of women in politics (*women's mobilisation*) as well as the support of elites (*elite support and strategic considerations*) were critical factors for the adoption of gender quotas in the Republic of Ireland.

Political Reform and Women's Mobilisation

The advent of an economic crisis and a prolonged focus on the personalism inherent in Irish politics, as well as the lack of diversity in decision-making, brought the issue of women's political under-representation to the forefront of politics from 2008. The role of women in political decision-making was debated, and strategies to increase the number of women in politics discussed. Simultaneously, civil society groups, notably the 5050 Group[12], mobilised for change in this area.

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

In response to calls for political reform following the economic downturn of 2008, the Parliament initiated two committees with a remit to examine the role of women in politics. One took effect in April 2009, when a sub-committee of the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights was established to examine women's participation in politics. The report, prepared by Senator Ivana Bacik, advocated the introduction of a legislative candidate selection quota, modelled on the Belgian Smet-Tobback Law, obliging political parties 'to impose a maximum limit on the proportion of candidates of any one gender selected to run in elections' (Bacik, 2009: 32). In September 2009, the Joint Committee on the Constitution conducted a review of the electoral system to assess its performance against a range of criteria including the representation of women. The final report recommended political parties to 'pursue positive measures to promote gender equality in its membership, including in the selection of candidates for election' and suggested that the public funding of parties could be 'regulated so that a proportion of the funding allocated to a party would be determined by the number of women candidates it nominates for election' (Joint Committee on the Constitution, 2010: 18). The findings of these committees were to be pivotal in the debate that followed.

Public Engagement with the Quota Debate

The quota debate sprang to public consciousness in August 2010 when an article in the Irish Times newspaper reported the findings of a survey which found that a majority of women TDs were against gender quotas as a means of increasing women's political representation (Minihan, 2010). The report sparked a lively public debate. In September 2010, the debate continued at a conference in University College Cork[13] which engaged the interest of academics, citizens and political representatives, from which the 5050 Group emerged. This group set about campaigning for the introduction of legislative gender quotas in Irish elections, based on the recommendations of the aforementioned parliamentary committees. The group held a number of public meetings to discuss the under-representation of women in Irish politics, developed a social media information campaign on affirmative action and

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

lobbied politicians in all political parties to legislate for gender quotas. This was the beginning of a political mobilisation of civil society women's organisations on women's political representation. The Longford Women's Link and Women's Manifesto[14], Women into Public Life[15] and Women for Election[16] ran campaigns to increase women's participation in public life. Together with the National Women's Council of Ireland and Labour Women, the capacity generated by these groups, combined with the political reform movement and parliamentary reports, gave the issue of women's political under-representation a profile and momentum it had never before achieved.

Elite Support and Strategic Considerations

Amid growing political instability following the IMF/EU/ECB bailout[17], a general election was announced in January 2011. Economic management and political reform became central tenets of all parties' election manifestos and featured prominently in the election campaign. Women's under-representation and its implications for democracy was a prominent strand in this democratic critique. The new coalition government of Fine Gael and Labour was determined to keep its election promises, but with economic decisions being dictated by the terms of the bailout agreement, independence in economic matters was limited. In contrast, the government enthusiastically embarked upon a programme of political reform. In May 2011, after just two months in office, the new government announced its intention to introduce legislation whereby the state funding of political parties would be tied to the percentage of women candidates selected to contest elections. Mr. Phil Hogan, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, introduced a draft bill to that effect in December 2011. Hogan was widely acclaimed as a key strategist behind Fine Gael's electoral success at the 2011 general election garnering much respect amongst his party and legislative colleagues. This is important to note as Schmidt (2003) observes that calls for the introduction of gender quotas rarely gain traction until at least one well-placed male elite supports their adoption and pressures his party, or parliamentary colleagues, to approve them.

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

While there were some dissenting voices on the issue, the parliamentary debate on gender quotas was remarkable for its near unanimous support of the measure (Clancy et al, 2012). The bill was enacted in July 2012 with the support of all political parties. The incentive to deliver on political reform promises, and thus the adoption of legislative candidate sex quotas, can be assessed as a strategic one. The government will have to stand on its record in office at the next general election. With the country still in the grip of recession, positive economic indicators are few and far between. However, deliverance on political reform can be used by the governing parties to show that (at least) some election promises were kept.

A Constellation of Pressures

There is some evidence to support the Galligan and Wilford (1999: 165) conclusion that a distinction can be made between the 'facilitatory perspective' of left-of-centre parties and others when it comes to the promotion of women. Of the four parties discussed, the Labour party has shown the most enduring ideological commitment to interventionist strategies, such as gender quotas, to promote women in politics. However, its use of targets rather than party quotas in elections indicates a reluctance to fully commit to equality guarantees when political power is at stake. Sinn Féin has followed a similar path, at a later point in time. Both parties have engaged in a dual policy of party-oriented equality guarantees and election-oriented equality promotion and rhetorical strategies. The two larger parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, have been more reluctant reformers and until recently were heavily dependent on promotion and rhetorical strategies for delivering their modest gender equality plans. All baulked at using equality guarantees to advance women in electoral politics, preferring to employ gender targets, an equality promotion strategy, for elections. None successfully achieved their stated markers, although the Labour party came close. Nevertheless, over the past twenty years, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin have moved most on this issue internally, following Labour's example of using quotas for internal party elections, notably to national executives and policy forums. While men still dominate leadership positions within all parties, the increasing use of affirmative

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

action indicates a growing acceptance of such measures across the political party spectrum. Thus the left-right differentiation observed by Galligan and Wilford in 1999 is no longer so clear-cut.

The demands for institutional change and democratic innovation bestowed by the political reform discourse after 2008 were key motivations for the introduction of legislative candidate sex quotas. While resistance to the notion of electoral gender quotas still exists within political parties, the language of political reform has smoothed the way for their introduction, and has contributed to gaining support for the measure from elites who may not have supported the initiative otherwise. The mobilisation of groups campaigning for increased women's political representation has also brought a salience to the issue rarely seen before. It is the combination of these factors that have been critical to the adoption of candidate sex quotas in the Republic of Ireland.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 obliges political parties to select at least 30 per cent women candidates at the next general election or else lose one-half of public funding for the duration of the parliamentary term. Given that tight restrictions on corporate donations were also introduced by the Act, the gender quota provisions are a significant financial 'incentive mechanism to encourage political parties to apply a more equal gender balance in the selection of candidates' (Minister Phil Hogan, 2012).

A review of candidates who contested the 2011 general election on behalf of the four main political parties reveals that much progress will need to take place if parties are to meet their obligations under the quota law (Table 2). In anticipation, Fianna Fáil has developed a *Gender Equality Action Plan* which, as noted earlier, sets out a voluntary party quota of 30 per cent for the 2014 local elections as well as the provision of a number of supports – financial, mentoring, training – for women candidates contesting future elections. Fine Gael has employed equality strategy consultants to advise on

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

gendered candidate recruitment and has begun a series of regional meetings to engage women members. Sinn Féin too has embarked on a series of regional meetings to attract women political hopefuls, and Labour Women continue to encourage, advise and mentor women looking to a political career. All parties are working with the civil society organisation Women for Election who provide tailored training and support programmes to women seeking to enter public life.

International experience indicates that the effectiveness of quota implementation is dependent on an interplay of significant quota obligations and penalties, strong political will, and fit with institutional structures (Franceschet et al, 2012). The Irish gender quota law will operate one of the most robust sanctions for non-compliance, thus, with one of the three criteria for the effective implementation of gender quotas achieved, attention must focus on ensuring that political will and institutional mechanisms are in place to facilitate the effectiveness of gender quotas. This is where the challenge lies for political parties. Legislated candidate sex quotas are more frequently used in PR List electoral systems where it is easier to combine quotas with lists of party candidates due to higher district magnitudes and more candidates per party in each constituency. Ireland will be the first country worldwide to introduce gender quotas in a PR-Single Transferable Vote electoral system, and one with low district and party magnitudes. Other challenges to the effective implementation of gender quotas are the strong decentralised selection systems operated by parties, an anticipated decrease in the number of parliamentarians from 166 to 158, and the proposed abolition of the indirectly elected upper house, the Seanad. These factors will lead to increased competition at candidate selection conventions at the next general election creating a more challenging environment for the implementation of gender quotas. Considering that resistance to gender quotas remains in all parties, particularly at local levels, strong political leadership will be required if parties are to meet their obligations under the new Act. It will take at least one, if not two, elections before the full impact of the gender quota provisions are fully understood.

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

Tables

Table 1: Women candidates and TDs at elections, 1977 – 2011

Election	Total	Women Candidates	Women Candidates (%)	Women TDs	Women TDs (%)
1977	376	25*	6.6	6	4.1
1981	404	41	10.1	11	6.6
Feb. 1982	366	35	9.6	8	4.8
Nov. 1982	365	31	8.5	14	8.4
1987	466	65	13.9	14	8.4
1989	371	52	14.0	13	7.8
1992	482	89	18.5	20	12.0
1997	484	96	19.8	20	12.0
2002	463	84	18.1	22[#]	13.3
2007	471	82	17.4	22	13.3
2011	566	86	15.2	25	15.1

Source: Figures for 1977 to 2002 adapted from Galligan, 2005: 275; figures for 2007 and 2011 are author's calculations.
*There were 148 total deputies in 1977. From 1981 through to the 2011 elections, the total number of deputies was 166.
[#] Figure does not include Catherine Murphy (Ind) elected in a 2005 by-election in Kildare North.

Table 2: Women candidates in the 2011 election

Party	Total number of candidates	Women candidates (N)	Women candidates (%)
Fianna Fáil	75	11	14.7
Fine Gael	104	16	15.4
Labour	68	18	26.5
Sinn Féin	41	8	19.5

Table 3: Women Constituency Officeholders in Fine Gael, Labour and Fianna Fáil in 2013

	Fine Gael (%)	Labour (%)	Fianna Fáil (%)

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

Chair	9.3	13.3	7.0
Vice-Chair	18.6	32.0	6.0
Secretary	18.6	35.0	46.0
Treasurer	32.5	23.0	25.0

Source: Data sourced from political parties. Sinn Fein data was unavailable.

Table 4: Women's representation on National Executives of Fine Gael, Labour and Fianna Fáil, 1993 – 2012

Election	Fine Gael (%)	Labour (%)	Fianna Fáil (%)
1993	23.7	21.0	12.6
1995	28.0	22.0	16.8
1997	23.5	26.0	17.9
1998	21.4	26.3	30.0
2003	28.6	32.4	26.6
2008	32.1	26.0	30.5
2012	33.3	46.0	26.0

Source: Figures for 1993 to 1997 adapted from Galligan and Wilford, 1999: 156; figures from 1998 to 2008 adapted from Galligan 2009: 271; figures for 2012 sourced from political parties. Sinn Fein data was unavailable

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[1] In this article 'Ireland' refers to the sovereign state, not to the geographical name of the island.

[2] Database on women in decision-making, European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/politics/national-parliaments/index_en.htm' (accessed 22 April 2013).

[3] Democratic Left (DL) emerged from a split in the Worker's Party in 1992 when, as the party's modernising wing, it failed to shift the Worker's Party towards a social democracy platform. DL merged with the Labour Party in 1999.

[4] The Progressive Democrats (PDs) were formed in 1985 when a number of disaffected Fianna Fáil representatives and supporters left the party. The party advocated liberalist and individualist policies and a pro-free market liberal agenda. The PDs entered into a coalition governments with Fianna Fáil in 1989 1997 and 2002. Following a poor election showing in 2007, the party dissolved in November 2009.

[5] Theresa Ahearn (Tipperary-South), Frances Fitzgerald (Dublin Mid-West), Deirdre Clune (Cork South-Central) and Olivia Mitchell (Dublin-South)

[6] The *How to Elect More Women* conference, hosted by Kathleen Lynch, Minister of State in Dublin Castle on 20th January 2012 to examine strategies to secure the increased representation of women in politics.

[7] See http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/bills/2009/1009/b1009d.pdf for a copy of the Electoral (Gender Parity) Bill 2009 (accessed 12 July 2012)

[8] Máire Geoghegan-Quinn (Galway-West), Catherine (Kit) Ahern (Kerry North), Eileen Lemass (Dublin Ballyfermot/ Dublin West), Carrie Acheson (Tipperary South), Mary Mooney (Dublin South-Central), Síle deValera (Clare), Cecilia Keaveney (Donegal North-East), Mary Coughlan (Donegal South-West), Mary Wallace (Meath-East), Mary O'Rourke (Longford-Westmeath), Mary Harney (Dublin South-West) served as a Fianna Fáil TD until 1985

[9] The Committee of 20 serves on the national executive of Fianna Fáil. It is elected by delegates to the Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis.

[10] Beverley Flynn (Mayo), Mary Hanafin (Dun Laoghaire), Marian McGennis (Dublin Central), Máire Hoctor (Tipperary North), Margaret Conlon (Cavan-Monaghan), Áine Brady (Kildare North).

[11] Mary Lou McDonald (Dublin-Central) and Sandra McLellan (Cork-East)

[12] 5050 Group, see http://5050-group.com/blog/

[13] The conference entitled 'Moving in from the Margins: Women's Political Representation in Ireland' was co-hosted by the Women's Studies programme and Department of Government of University College Cork in conjunction with the Gender Politics Specialist group of the Political Studies Association of Ireland.

[14] Longford Women's Link and Women's Manifesto, see http://www.longfordwomenslink.org/

[15] Women into Public Life, see http://www.engender.org.uk/projects/47/Women_into_Public_Life.html

[16] Women for Election, see http://www.womenforelection.ie/

[17] In November 2010 the Irish government applied for financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and the European Union.

Correspondence Address: Fiona Buckley, Department of Government, O'Rahilly Building, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie