

Title	Ireland: Understanding gender quotas as a stepping-stone to gender transformation and empowerment
Authors	Brennan, Mary;Buckley, Fiona;Galligan, Yvonne
Publication date	2022-12-02
Original Citation	Brennan, M., Buckley, F. and Galligan, Y. (2023) 'Ireland: Understanding gender quotas as a stepping-stone to gender transformation and empowerment', in Lang, S., Meier, P. and Sauer, B. (eds) Party Politics and the Implementation of Gender Quotas. Gender and Politics. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, pp 231–248. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-08931-2_12
Type of publication	Book chapter
Link to publisher's version	10.1007/978-3-031-08931-2_12
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Download date	2025-07-28 14:37:01
Item downloaded from	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/10468/14430">https://hdl.handle.net/10468/14430</a>



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**University College Cork, Ireland**  
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

## **Chapter 12: Ireland: Understanding Gender Quotas as a Stepping-Stone to Gender Transformation and Empowerment**

Mary Brennan, Fiona Buckley and Yvonne Galligan

Historically, Ireland's record on women's political participation is far from stellar, and party resistance to change has been subject to repeated analysis (Buckley 2013; Galligan 1993). Across the six general elections from 1989 to 2011, women's candidacy averaged just 17.2 percent while women's election averaged 12.3 percent (Table 12.1.). Social conservatism, masculinized party cultures, and informal gendered norms of candidate recruitment and nomination biased men's selection and election (Galligan and Buckley 2018). To redress the gender imbalance of Irish politics, the electoral law was amended in 2012 to link state funding of political parties to the proportion of women selected at general elections. In doing so, Ireland joined the global spread of gender quotas in politics, a phenomenon which has been described as "one of the critical political reforms of the last two decades" (Krook and Zetterberg 2014: 3). In this chapter we assess whether legislative gender quotas have changed political recruitment in Ireland to enable more gender-equal access to representative politics. We assess how political parties as "the players" have adapted to the new "rules of the game" and pay particular attention to the "rules in use", such as cultural, political and institutional factors, that have both enhanced and encumbered the law's effectiveness (Lowndes 2014: 685-690). Finally, the dynamic between gender quotas, gender transformation, and gender empowerment is evaluated. We argue that the quota initiative should be understood as the

start rather than the culmination of efforts to achieve gender equality within political parties, but beyond party and electoral politics, the introduction of quotas in Ireland flagged a significant shift in political culture, which then rapidly moved to the fore issues previously set in aspic (abortion, divorce) and new issues of sexual identity (marriage equality, gender recognition) for public and political decision.

**Table 12.1. Number (N) and Proportion (%) of Women who contested Election and were elected in General Elections from 1989 to 2020 in Ireland**

<i>Election</i>	<i>Candidates</i> (party and independent)			<i>Elected</i> (party and independent)		
	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Women (N)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>Women (N)</b>	<b>%</b>
1989	371	52	14	166	13	7.8
1992	482	89	18.5	166	20	12
1997	484	96	19.8	166	20	12
2002	463	84	18.1	166	22	13.3
2007	471	82	17.4	166	22	13.3
2011	566	86	15.2	166	25	15.1
2016	551	163	29.6	158	35	22.1
2020	528	162	30.7	160	36	22.5

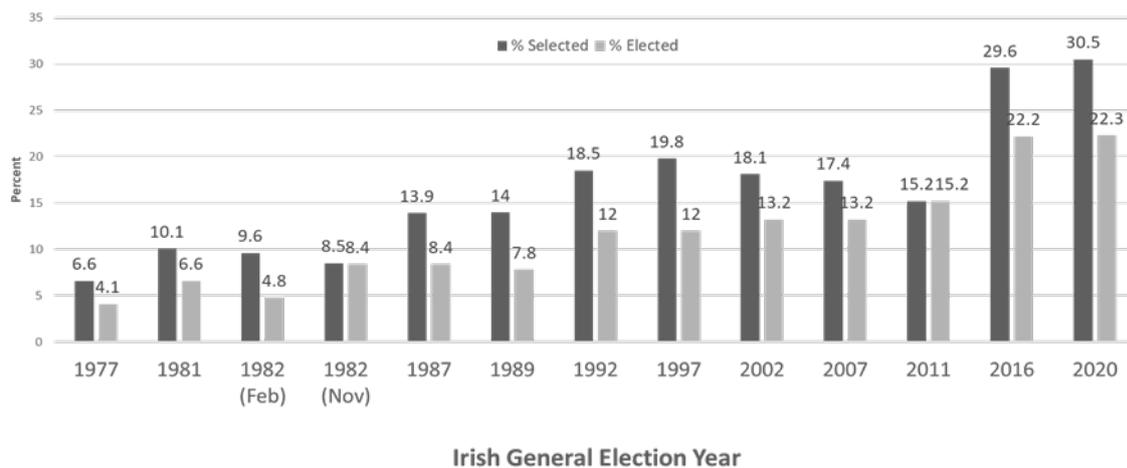
**Source:** Authors compiled data from publications of the Franchise section of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

## **1. IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATIVE GENDER QUOTAS IN IRELAND**

Part six of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 obliges political parties in Ireland to select at least 30 percent women and 30 percent men when selecting candidates for general elections. Non-compliant parties forfeit half of the state funding they receive annually to run their operations, a potential loss of millions of euros for some parties. The

gender quota threshold is set to rise to 40 percent from 2023 onwards and applies only to general elections. Ostensibly, the quota provision has had a transformative effect on women’s political candidacy and election in Ireland – since the law’s implementation, women’s candidacy has increased by 90 percent while women’s election has increased by 44 percent. An overview of the descriptive representation of men and women in Dáil Éireann, the lower house of Parliament, between 1977 and 2020 clearly illustrates the positive effect of quota implementation (Figure 12.1).

**Figure 12.1. Selection and Election of Women to Dáil Éireann, 1977 to 2020**



**Source:** Authors compiled data from publications of the Franchise section of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

### 1.1. CANDIDATE SELECTION IN IRELAND

Candidate selection in Ireland is dictated by its electoral system – proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote (PR-STV). Briefly, party candidates are gradually eliminated over multiple rounds of vote counting until the number of candidates remaining

corresponds with the number of seats available. At the 2020 general election the state had 39 multi-member constituencies of three, four or five seats, electing 160 members to Parliament. The district magnitude determines the party magnitude, and political party strategists must tread a fine line when deciding candidacy numbers to ensure maximization of the party vote, while simultaneously avoiding dispersion of that vote. Parties usually err on the side of caution, meaning spaces on the ballot are limited. Incumbents are usually assured of selection at the party selection convention, with any remaining places on the party ticket for that constituency filled by a prominent local councilor. However, given that over 75 percent of seats at national and local government are held by men, women struggle to feature among selected incumbents and councilors.

Party membership is low in Ireland with research estimating it to be as little as two percent of the electorate (Weeks 2018: 125). Within this, women's level of participation hovers between 25 and 40 percent of party membership (Galligan and Buckley 2018: 226).

Candidate selection in Ireland is best described as a hybrid process involving constituency level party members and party headquarters (HQ). Parties use a one-member-one-vote (OMOV) system whereby party members vote in constituency-level selection conventions to decide who will represent their party in general elections. However, HQ manage these conventions and holds the right to issue directives outlining the number of candidates to be selected, where in the constituency they should hail from, and, more recently, the gender profile of the candidacy ticket. Party HQ also reserves the right to add candidates to the slate selected by local party members. The decision to place additional candidates on a ticket is usually based on national opinion-polling, which indicates the national swing in favor or against the party, and constituency polling, which indicates the geographical strength of the vote within a district. The added candidate is expected to maximize the party's standing in a particular area of the constituency. In some cases, additions are made quite late in the election

campaign, meaning the add-on candidate is not considered a serious election contender. Rather, their task is to shore up the party vote in anticipation of its transfer to the party's lead candidate when they are eliminated from the count. This practice is particularly prevalent in larger parties.

## **1.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF QUOTAS**

Following the legislative adoption of a gender quota provision in 2012, all parties began preparing for its implementation. The longstanding and center-right *Fianna Fáil* (Soldiers of Destiny, FF) established a party commission under an independent academic chair to develop its candidate selection strategy. This strategy proposed the selection of women to contest half of the constituencies where the party had no incumbent parliamentarian (Teachta Dála, TD) and half of the constituencies where the party held one seat and wished to run a second candidate. The party's national constituency committee maintained the right to order constituencies to select women at candidate selection conventions. The other center-right and long-established party, *Fine Gael* (Tribe of Gaels, FG), convened a national strategy committee which identified a number of constituencies where gender directives would be issued to ensure gender balance on the candidate list and other constituencies where women would be added to the ticket. An existing provision in the Labour party constitution obliged it to run a gender balanced ticket wherever more than one candidate contested a constituency. Similarly, *Sinn Féin* (Ourselves Alone, SF) and the Green Party undertook to run gender balanced tickets.

All parties engaged in activities to gender diversify their candidate recruitment processes. This primarily consisted of approaching women party members and asking them to run. Parties also approached women who were not party members but were well-networked into

their local communities through professional and/or voluntary work, thus ensuring a ready-made local profile. Political parties offered capacity-building workshops, informal mentoring and in some instances, scholarships to women members to train with Women for Election, a non-partisan organization offering election strategy and campaigning advice. Across parties, there was an increase in funding directed towards women candidates (Buckley and Gregory 2019; Buckley and Mariani 2022). Electorally, most parties used the 2014 and 2019 local elections to recruit and run new women candidates, some of whom went on to contest the 2016 and 2020 general elections. However, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were notable exceptions and continued to run heavily male-dominated candidate tickets in local government elections.

The candidate quota provision was implemented for the first time at the 2016 general election. In total, 163 women contested this election, a 90 percent increase in women's candidacy from the previous election in 2011. In the 2020 election, the 30 percent gender quota was normalised and integrated into party candidate selection procedures (Buckley and Galligan 2020). Yet, there was widespread disappointment when the final candidacy numbers were confirmed – just 162 women stood in the 2020 general election, one less than in 2016. The National Women's Council of Ireland and Women for Election were particularly critical of this turnout from the selection process and called upon political parties to treat the gender quota threshold as a minimum requirement rather than a target (deBuis 2020).

Inspecting candidate selection data shows that 130 party women participated in the 2016 general election (33.7 percent of party candidates) while 33<sup>1</sup> women ran as independents. The number (n=138) and proportion (34.2 percent) of party women increased marginally in 2020, while the number of women independents decreased to 24, reflecting an overall decrease in the number of independent candidates to contest the 2020 general election.

An examination of candidate selection processes in 2016 and 2020 show that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were exponents of the add-on route to meet obligations under the gender quota law. In 2016, two-fifths of Fianna Fáil's women candidates came via the add-on route. This increased to 58 percent in 2020. A third of Fine Gael's women candidates accessed the ballot paper through the add-on mechanism in 2016, increasing to 44 percent in 2020. The respective figures for men ranged between ten and 21 percent across the two general elections. As described by one party strategist,<sup>2</sup> the add-on route was an exercise "to balance the books".

The 2012 Act does not prescribe how political parties should implement the gender quota, leaving such decisions to the parties themselves. Gender directives – instructions to gender-balance candidate slates – are one mechanism employed by parties to meet their quota obligations. In total, 20 gender directives were issued by party headquarters in 2016 accounting for just over five percent of all party candidates selected. The number was even smaller in 2020 when just three gender directives were issued, accounting for less than one percent of all party candidates. The low number of gender directives issued across the 2016 and 2020 general elections is a reflection of the longstanding resistance to affirmative action within local selectorates, a situation that did not dissipate with the passage of the 2012 Act. Indeed, local reaction against gender directives in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael was intensely negative. Fine Gael party members in one constituency engaged in tactical voting to undermine the effectiveness of the gender directive while in another, gender quotas were described as undemocratic and akin to North Korean style party rule (Buckley et al. 2016: 188). Ironically, at that time, Ireland and North Korea were jointly ranked in 86<sup>th</sup> position for women's parliamentary representation in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) world rankings. In Fianna Fáil, the issuing of a gender directive in one constituency resulted in a constitutional challenge to gender quotas, which, at the time of writing, is still working its

way through the legal system. In another constituency, the selection of a woman by a gender directive resulted in claims of undemocratic practices, a motion of no-confidence in the woman selected, and a threat (that eventually abated), to select an unofficial party candidate to contest the election and challenge the officially selected woman.

The visceral membership reaction against gender directives in 2016 forced Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to re-think their approach and in 2020, the add-on route became the preferred mechanism to increase their numbers of women candidates. Unlike in 2016, there were no challenges and controversies at selection conventions, but far from being an indicator of growing acceptance of quotas, it is more likely that the add-on route was used to avoid aggravating party members at selection conventions. The sudden and unexpected announcement of the 2020 general election also took some constituency organizations by surprise, leaving little time to convene outstanding selection conventions. The add-on route was heavily relied upon to complete final selections. Thus while 2020 has been described as a consolidation election for candidate gender quotas (Buckley and Galligan 2020), it also is one where standard selection practices were reasserted as parties avoided the affirmative action of gender directives.

The electoral success rate of women candidates declined between the 2011 general election (29.1 percent) and the 2016 general election (21.5 percent). There is evidence that some parties, notably Fine Gael, ran women candidates in constituencies where the party had no hope of winning (Mariani et al. 2021), which may account for this decline. New women candidates selected by Fine Gael in 2016 were significantly less experienced than their counterparts in previous years, less experienced than their counterparts in other parties, and more likely to run in non-competitive races (Mariani et al. 2021). While the average success rate of women candidates across the 2016 and 2020 general elections (21.9 percent) was

lower than the average success rate of women candidates across general elections from 1989 to 2011 (25 percent), the actual number gaining a seat in Parliament increased (Table 12.2.).

**Table. 12.2. Success Rates of Women as a Proportion of Women selected, 1989 to 2020 in Ireland**

	Total number of candidates	Total number of women candidates	Number of winning women	Success Rate %
1989	371	52	13	25
1992	482	89	20	22.5
1997	484	96	20	20.8
2002	463	84	22	26.2
2007	471	82	22	26.8
2011	566	86	25	29.1
2016	551	163	35	21.5
2020	528	162	36	22.2

**Note:** 1989-2011 average success rate: 25%; 2016 to 2020 average success rate: 21.9%

**Source:** Authors compiled data from publications of the Franchise section of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

## **2. EXPLANATORY FACTORS: CULTURAL, POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL**

Enacting and implementing legislated quotas in Ireland cannot be understood as an isolated phenomenon. Cultural, political and institutional factors shaped the adoption of the quota provision and influence its effectiveness. We look at each of these factors in turn.

## 2.1. CULTURAL

Ireland has experienced considerable social change since the 1990s, and while parties went on a journey of reluctantly accepting and then absorbing the quota into a “business as usual” model of candidate selection, the attitudinal climate on gender equality in political life was more progressive. Analysis of the Irish National Election Study (INES) 2002-2007 shows that there was considerable support among the public – especially women – for seeing more women in politics (Galligan and Knight 2011). A strong level of public support for greater gender balance in Irish politics was demonstrated again in the 2011 election study (McElroy and Keenan 2017). An additional nuanced question was included in 2011 that sought to assess public support for making it compulsory for political parties to nominate more women.<sup>3</sup> The results revealed that almost one-half (48 percent) agreed with the proposition, while about one-fifth disagreed (22 percent), reflecting a disposition among the public for more robust action to deliver gender equality in politics (McElroy and Keenan 2017). It was within this progressive attitudinal climate that the candidate gender quota provision was enacted.

The implementation of the quota was a theoretical matter until 2016, but an exit poll<sup>4</sup> on the day of the general election surveyed public attitudes towards this new feature and found that support for gender quotas held up. Overall, 42 percent agreed with the measure. Another survey found that over half (55 percent) thought that parties should abide by the quota measure,<sup>5</sup> with women, young people and a majority of party supporters more likely to agree with the statement (RedC 2016). It remained a talking point into 2021, with The Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality (2019 to 2021) considering the role of gender quotas in promoting women’s political participation.<sup>6</sup> Views on this matter ranged widely, from linking party efforts to accountability and sanctions for non-compliance, to implementing quotas as voluntary measures. Interestingly, though, the discussions revealed that the participants held

nuanced views on the topic, with no reporting of outright opposition to candidate quotas. This suggests that since 2009 (Bacik Report on Women’s Participation in Politics) when the issue first became part of public discourse, the intent behind the measure has been increasingly understood – and broadly agreed with – by citizens. Indeed, survey evidence shows that the Irish public were even then on a gradual journey of accepting gender equality in politics. In a 2005 Eurobarometer survey, 69 percent of Irish people (above the 66 percent average response across the European Union) disagreed with the suggestion that men make better political leaders than women (European Commission 2005: 30). When asked this question as part of the Citizens’ Assembly in 2020, 78 percent of respondents (n=66) registered disagreement with the statement. These findings indicate the extent to which attitudes towards gender equality have liberalized during the millennial years (Galligan 2021). Given the support for gender quotas as a mechanism for gender equality, one would expect the electorate to follow this trend and cast their votes in favor of women candidates. As outlined earlier, STV can play into the gender preferences of electors, and potentially, negatively impact on women’s electoral chances. However, studies of this question prior to quota enactment showed minimal voter bias against women candidates in Ireland (Galligan et al. 1999; Galligan 2008; McElroy and Marsh 2010; McGing and White 2012). This finding is corroborated in more recent studies (McElroy 2018; Bennan and Keenan 2021), but with the additional nuance that Fianna Fáil voters are somewhat less disposed to vote for women than are voters of other parties (McElroy 2018).

## **2.2. POLITICAL**

A review of selection and general election results in Ireland shows that left parties consistently, before and after the implementation of quotas, select and elect greater numbers of women than other parties (Table 12.3.).

**Table 12.3. Comparison of the Proportion and Number of Women selected and elected by the Main Irish Parties across four General Elections (2007 to 2020)<sup>7</sup>**

Party	2007		2011		2016		2020	
	Selected	Elected	Selected	Elected	Selected	Elected	Selected	Elected
<i>Center-Right Parties</i>								
<b>Fianna Fáil</b>	13.1%	9.1%	14.7%	0	31.0%	13.6%	31.0%	13.2%
	(14)	(7)	(11)	(0)	(22)	(6)	(26)	(5)
<b>Fine Gael</b>	16.5%	9.8%	15.4%	14.5%	30.7%	22%	30.5%	17.1%
	(15)	(5)	(16)	(11)	(27)	(11)	(25)	(6)
<i>Center-Left/Left Parties</i>								
<b>Labour</b>	22%	35%	26.5%	21.6%	36.1%	28.6%	32.3%	0%
	(11)	(7)	(18)	(8)	(13)	(2)	(10)	(0)
<b>Green Party</b>	25%	16.7%	18.6%	0	35%	50%	41.0%	16.7%
	(11)	(1)	(8)	(0)	(14)	(1)	(16)	(2)
<b>Sinn Féin</b>	24.4%	0%	19.5%	14.3%	36%	26%	33.3%	35.1%
	(10)	(0)	(8)	(2)	(18)	(6)	(14)	(13)

**Note:** Absolute values in parentheses

**Source:** Authors compiled data from publications of the Franchise section of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

Yet, the analysis finds no evidence of a contagion effect as the two long-established and center-right parties – Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael – show no signs of following the selection behavior of the three center-left/left parties – Labour, Green Party and Sinn Féin. However, party fragmentation in Ireland maybe opening up opportunities for women in politics. While such fragmentation is associated with a rise of right-wing populism elsewhere and an ancillary backsliding on gender equality, party fragmentation in Ireland has seen a shift in voter support towards left-leaning political parties (Cunningham and Marsh, 2021). New and leftist parties distinguish themselves from the longstanding parties by selecting more women candidates and advocating on social justice and equality issues. While more research is

required to test this claim, early signals indicate that party fragmentation in Ireland is heralding a new era of opportunities for women's candidate selection and election.

### **2.3. INSTITUTIONAL**

The intersection of political culture with the PR-STV electoral system promotes candidate-centered competition in Irish elections with localism creating a particular gendered barrier to women's political recruitment. Localism refers to the tendency of the electorate to vote for candidates who are local, recognizable and are perceived to understand and support local issues most relevant to the voter. In STV a "friends and neighbors" effect – whereby candidates receive the majority of their support from voters living close to the candidates' home base – impacts all parties, whether at national or sub-national elections (Górecki and Marsh 2012). Localism is found to negatively impact the selection of women in two ways: firstly, in privileging local and highly networked men as the so-called "ideal candidate" and secondly in shaping the perception of the importance of the local party selectorate as a key component of the selection process, thereby diluting the power of the central election strategy party committee (Culhane 2017). These factors underlay the resistance to quota implementation observed in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in 2016 and prompted the parties' central organizations change of tactic towards adding women candidates in 2020.

The design of the Irish gender quota was informed by research and input from gender politics experts (Bacik 2009). A key factor accounting for compliance, and thus its success, was the sanction applied. Parties would have forfeited between 122,975 Euro (Green Party) and 763,394 Euro (Fianna Fáil) in 2016 if they had not met their obligations under the gender quota law. The sanction was successful in incentivizing political parties to select women candidates. Ireland stands in contrast to France in this regard. French political parties, in particular the larger and wealthier ones, initially ignored the Parité Law and wilfully incurred

the financial penalty rather than alter the gender profile of their candidacy slates (see chapter on France).

PR-STV is said to promote personal as opposed to party vote-chasing, as the individual preference votes cast by the electorate have real impacts on election outcomes (Farrell and McAllister 2006). This candidate-level as opposed to party-level focus intensifies in larger districts when a party runs more than one candidate, and therein, intra-party rivalry can often be the main arena of competition in the election. This highly personalized effect of PR-STV ensures candidates with a strong local profile and past political experience, notably those who have served in local government or are incumbents, have a strong electoral advantage.

However, these candidate criteria are particularly gendered: less than 25 percent of local government councilors and Dáil incumbents are women. Table 12.4. presents an overview of the political experience of candidates selected to contest general elections from 2007 to 2020 and highlights the extent of parties' preference for these highly gendered candidate selection criteria. Even post-quota, under ten percent of all candidates selected by parties (with the exception of the Green Party) are newcomers.

**Table 12.4. Political experience of candidates across the 2007, 2011, 2016 and 2020 Irish General Elections**

Party	2007				2011				2016				2020			
	TD	OH	Exp*	New	TD	OH	Exp	New	TD	OH	Exp	New	TD	OH	Exp	New
<b>Fianna Fáil</b> 2%	63%	25%	6%	6%	68%	24%	1%	7%	25%	53%	12%	10%	54%	40%	5%	
	(68)	(19)	(14)	(6)	(51)	(13)	(6)	(5)	(18)	(42)	(4)	(7)	(45)	(33)	(4)	(2)
<b>Fine Gael</b>	33%	49%	10%	8%	41%	55%	1%	3%	69%	20%	5%	6%	48%	42%	5%	5%
	(30)	(45)	(9)	(7)	(43)	(57)	(1)	(3)	(61)	(18)	(4)	(5)	(40)	(34)	(4)	(4)
<b>Labour</b>	36%	44%	10%	10%	24%	65%	9%	3%	72%	25%	3%	0%	16%	55%	23%	6%
	(18)	(22)	(5)	(5)	(16)	(44)	(6)	(2)	(26)	(9)	(1)	(0)	(5)	(17)	(7)	(2)
<b>Green Party</b>	14%	27%	27%	32%	14%	14%	35%	37%	0%	17%	50%	33%	8%	52%	21%	21%

	(6) (12) (12) (14)	(6) (6) (15) (16) (0) (7) (20) (13)	(3) (20) (8) (8)
<b>Sinn Féin</b>	12% 34% 34% 20%	10% 56% 22% 12%	24% 62% 4% 10%
	(5) (14) (14) (8)	(4) (23) (9) (5)	(12) (31) (2) (5)
			43% 26% 31% 0%
			(18) (11) (13) (0)

**Note:** Absolute values in parentheses;

<sup>i</sup>OH = an officeholder (local councilor, senator or MEP) other than a TD at time of the general election;

\*Exp = Previous electoral experience of candidates who were not public representatives when selected but had previously contested election at either local, Seanad (Senate), Dáil or European level.

**Source:** Authors' calculation adapted from the *How Ireland Voted* Series (Gallagher and Marsh 2007, 2011, 2016; Gallagher, Marsh and Reidy 2021).

Another particularity of the Irish system is the unusually high number of non-party candidates or independents (Buckley 2020; Weeks 2017) that contest election. Since the gender quota is a party level gender equality policy, the scheme has no influence on this cohort of candidates. However, the adoption of the candidate quota did see a diffusion effect whereby the number of women running as independent in 2016 increased by 65 percent. While the number of independent women candidates declined in 2020, it was still higher than in pre-gender quota elections. This positive indirect effect of the quota provision is attributed to a so-called feminizing of Irish politics. It would seem the rhetoric about gender quotas “encourages efficacy and activity among women” (Kittilson 2006: 15) and in Ireland, when the party system, and by extension the political system “is viewed as more welcoming of women candidates”, this has a contagion effect “beyond party boundaries, mobilizing non-party women to put themselves forward for election” (Buckley 2020: 365).

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO GENDER EQUALITY

Since the adoption of the legislated candidate quota, Ireland has seen a 44 percent increase in the number of women elected to Dáil Éireann, rising from 25 in 2011 to 36 in 2020. Although women account for just 22.5 percent of all TDs, the gender quota has accelerated the pace of increase – what the gender quota has achieved in one electoral cycle across five years, previously took four electoral cycles across 22 years to achieve.

For the most part, the quota has not altered candidate selection processes or candidate recruitment principles. Being well-known and well-networked in the local community (i.e. personalism and localism) are still key criteria that party strategists look for when recruiting candidates. These are informal norms of practice that have not been displaced by the formal gender quota requirement. Rather, the quota has been layered into these existing recruitment and selection criteria and is very much bounded within these norms of practice.<sup>8</sup>

The introduction of candidate gender quotas in Ireland flagged a significant shift in political culture, which carried through into later political reforms on the unresolved issue of abortion and the newer issue of marriage equality. These matters were prohibited by the Irish Constitution and required a referendum for constitutional and legislative change. Abortion – a long-simmering issue dating from 1983 when a referendum introduced a constitutional ban on the service – encapsulated the contestation over women’s autonomous decision-making. Marriage equality epitomized the extent to which Irish society was prepared to challenge Catholic doctrine and the Catholic hierarchy by adopting a more inclusive interpretation of marriage. These two political issues became totemic symbols of a new Ireland. This chapter argues that they were manifestations of a changing Irish society that sought to accord women full and equal civic, legal and political rights. The gender quota was the first political expression of that change, and it opened the way to tackling more contentious social issues. In doing so, the political sphere caught up with attitudinal change that had been under way for some decades.

In conclusion, the Irish experience of gender quotas is imperfect, but the scheme has engendered change and a positive impact on the number of women selected and elected. Furthermore, it is questionable that without the quota provision, substantive mobilizations for issues such as abortion and marriage equality would have lacked institutional support. However, recent attitudinal data suggests a reassertion of gender stereotypes meaning the period 2008 to 2020 may have been a golden moment for gender politics in Ireland. This, coupled with evidence of resistance to gender quotas within political parties, suggests the quota measures require continual effort to ensure effectiveness.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this examination, independents are those who contested election as an Independent or as part of the group of Independents known as the Independent Alliance. It does not include those who were affiliated to quasi-political parties or smaller registered parties, whom often act independently of a party structure and as such, maybe considered independent. When this latter group are included, the number of Independents increases to 40

<sup>2</sup> From an interview with party organizers in 2016.

<sup>3</sup> “Parties should be forced to nominate more women candidates”.

<sup>4</sup> 2016 RTÉ exit poll

<sup>5</sup> The statement posed in the Red C survey was: “It is important that political parties abide by a gender quota for candidates”.

<sup>6</sup> “The Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality was established by Oireachtas [Irish Parliament] resolution in July 2019 to consider gender equality and make recommendations to the Oireachtas to advance gender equality” - <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/about-the-citizens-assembly/>. The final report of the Citizens’ Assembly was published in June 2021 and maybe accesses at: <http://citizensassembly.ie/en/about-the-citizens-assembly/report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality.pdf> (accessed 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Data on selection and election in this chapter begin from the 2004 local elections, as prior to this period the electoral system included a dual mandate scheme, where national politicians could also hold seats at local level, a widely held practice due to the localized nature of the STV electoral system.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the intersection of formal and institutional norms, including layering and bounded innovation, please see Mackay (2014).

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