

#MoreWomen  
**WOMEN**  
FOR ELECTION



# **Women's political representation: what do we know about the issue in Ireland?**

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# FOREWORD

**In order to understand the reasons for the low levels of women’s representation in politics, this report examines the literature behind why men are still far more represented in politics, firstly in exploring analysis of the broader global context, and then focusing on the Irish context.**



Currently, out of the 160 TDs sitting in the Dáil, only 37 are women. Since the foundation of the state, only 131 women have been elected to serve in the Dáil. There are 11 constituencies and 23 local electoral areas with no women representatives and there are only four women representing the whole of Munster. In a democratic state, 50/50 representation should be something that is a given and this report looks into the literature to understand why Ireland has such high levels of overrepresentation of men in politics.

**More than ever it is vital that we get #MoreWomen involved in politics because #WomenBelong in politics.**

It is vital that the people in our Government represent the population of the country, and in creating a more diverse and equal political field in Ireland, decisions can be made on behalf of everyone throughout society. 50/50 representation is the key to Ireland becoming the best democratic state it can be.

With continuing leadership from our board, staff, the women who put themselves forward to run and all of our supporters, we thank you for your support in helping to achieve gender parity in Irish politics. The women who put themselves forward to run continue to inspire us and we are looking forward to the Local Elections in 2024, where we hope to have 1,000 women on the ticket.

A special thanks to Dr Lisa Keenan and Dr Fiona Buckley for their expertise in the field and for their in-depth and excellent research and analysis throughout the report. Our sincerest thanks to our donors and funders who make this research possible. You are changing the face of Irish Politics. We will continue to inspire and equip women to run for election and advocate for the barriers that are still in place to be broken down.

To the women who have come before us, the ones who engaged in political life and the ones who never got the chance, women are getting the chance now. More than ever it is vital that we get #MoreWomen involved in politics because #WomenBelong in politics. In the words of former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg; “women belong in all places where decisions are being made... it shouldn’t be that women are the exception”.

Caitríona Gleeson  
CEO, Women for Election

# INTRODUCTION

**Despite women making up half of the world’s population, globally, approximately one-in-four parliamentarians (26.5 percent)<sup>1</sup> and one-fifth (22 percent)<sup>2</sup> of cabinet members are women.**

It is true that these headline figures conceal a lot of variation, with some countries, such as Sweden (46.4 percent)<sup>3</sup>, substantially outperforming the worldwide average rates for women’s political representation. However, it is the case that in political life, men are overrepresented while women are underrepresented.

This period of commemoration represents an important opportunity to take stock of the position of women in Irish politics. While we can point to exceptional women who have made their mark on the Irish political stage, collectively, when it comes to the story of women’s political representation in Ireland, the most notable feature is the extent to which women have been underrepresented in electoral politics. This is no more evident than when examining data from Dáil Éireann. Of the 1,342 people elected to the Dáil in the 103 years between 1918 and 2021, just 131 (9.8 percent) have been women.



In Ireland, the Decade of Centenaries is drawing to a close. Starting in 2012, a series of events were organised to commemorate a turbulent period in Irish history, one that saw great social and political upheaval. Between 1912 and 1923, women in Ireland won the right to vote for the first time, the first female TD, Constance Markievicz, was elected and then appointed to cabinet, and women played an important role in the struggle for Independence and the subsequent civil war.



<sup>1</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2023). *Women in parliament: rankings as of 1st February 2023*. Available online: <https://www.ipu.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank (2023). *Gender indicators report: Proportion of women in ministerial level positions* [Data file]. Available online at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> IPU (2023).



After being one of the first governments in the world to appoint a woman to cabinet (in April 1919), it would take another sixty years before a woman was selected to serve in cabinet again, when Máire Geoghegan-Quinn became Minister for the Gaeltacht<sup>4</sup> in December 1979. In total, 22 women in comparison with 189 men, have been appointed cabinet minister between 1919 and 2022.

In 2023, women make up 23 percent of TDs<sup>5</sup>, 25 percent of local councillors<sup>6</sup>, and 27 percent of cabinet ministers<sup>7</sup>. Considering women's representation in all these fora only begun to reach double-digits in the early 1990s, significant progress has been made over the past thirty years. However, it is clear that more work is needed before gender parity is achieved. In order to take effective action, it is crucial to understand the recurring conditions and barriers that shape women's entry into political life.

This report begins by setting out the general causes of women's political underrepresentation observed from international studies, before it focuses on Ireland. The reasons why women are underrepresented in political life are varied and can be context specific. It is crucial to know what these reasons are so that the problem can be effectively addressed.

<sup>4</sup> The Irish language ministerial portfolio.

<sup>5</sup> 36 female TDs were returned in the 2020 general election (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2020) and the by-election the following year in the constituency of Dublin Bay South increased that number to 37 of 160 TDs (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> McGing, C. (2021). Doing politics differently: development of local or regional caucus for women councillors – identifying interest and examining possible supports. *National Women's Council of Ireland*. Available online at: [https://www.nwci.ie/learn/publication/women\\_doing\\_politics\\_differently](https://www.nwci.ie/learn/publication/women_doing_politics_differently).

<sup>7</sup> 4 of the 15 current cabinet ministers are women: Ms. Norma Foley (Minister for Education), Ms Heather Humphreys (Minister for Social Protection and Minister for Rural and Community Development), Ms Catherine Martin (Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media) and Ms Helen McEntee (Minister without portfolio).

# WHY ARE WOMEN UNDERREPRESENTED IN POLITICAL LIFE AROUND THE WORLD?

When we consider the causes of women's underrepresentation in political life, we tend to divide these causes into two broad categories. Firstly, structural and institutional factors shape the context in which people run for office. Secondly, individual-level factors determine whether someone will decide to run. We sketch these different categories below.

## STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPLANATIONS OF WOMEN'S UNDERREPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

### COUNTRY-LEVEL DIFFERENCES

Overwhelmingly, the existing evidence tells us that countries with higher levels of economic development, progressive cultural attitudes that don't relegate women to the domestic sphere, and high levels of female labour force participation will have a greater number of women in politics<sup>8</sup>.

We know that the rules used to elect political representatives also matter: certain kinds of electoral rules are more favourable towards women's selection and election than others.

In majoritarian systems with single-seat constituencies, a winner-takes-all contest takes hold, and one candidate is elected.

Traditionally, where parties were restricted to fielding just one candidate per constituency, there was a perceived risk among party selectors in placing a woman on the ballot, for fear of alienating traditional voters<sup>9</sup>. Where

this was the case, parties more often chose a male candidate to run. In majoritarian systems, the advent of affirmative action, in the shape of party gender quotas, has somewhat combated this. However, leftist parties are more likely than parties of the right to voluntarily adopt party gender quotas, meaning the privileging of male candidacy remains a feature in countries with majoritarian electoral systems.

By contrast, in proportional electoral systems, there are multiple seats per constituency. The share of seats a party wins in parliament is in proportion to the share of their overall vote achieved in the election<sup>10</sup>. Where these types of electoral rules are in place, it facilitates a diverse slate of candidates being selected and creates an incentive for parties to run female candidates in order to differentiate themselves from one another<sup>11</sup>. Empirical research strongly shows that proportional electoral systems are better for female candidates than are

<sup>8</sup> Matland, R. E. (1998). Women's representation in national legislatures: Developed and developing countries. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 23(1), 109-125; Kenworthy, L., & Malami, M. (1999). Gender inequality in political representation: A worldwide comparative analysis. *Social Forces*, 78(1), 235-268; Paxton, P. M., & Kunovich, S. (2003). Women's political representation: The importance of ideology. *Social Forces*, 82(1), 87-113; Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2001). Cultural obstacles to equal representation. *Journal of Democracy*, 12(3), 126-140.

<sup>9</sup> Engstrom, R. L. (1987). District magnitudes and the election of women to the Irish Dáil. *Electoral Studies*, 6(2), 123-132; Norris & Inglehart (2001); Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2005). Women as political leaders worldwide: cultural barriers and opportunities. In S. Thomas & C. Wilcox (Eds.) *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future* (pp. 244-263). New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>10</sup> There are different kinds of proportional electoral systems: closed-list (used in countries like Spain, Israel, and Argentina), open-list (Austria, Sweden) and single-transferrable vote (Ireland, Malta).

<sup>11</sup> Zimmerman, J. F. (1994). Equity in representation for women and minorities. In W. Rule & J. F. Zimmerman (Eds.). *Electoral systems in comparative perspective: Their impact on women and minorities*, (pp.3-13). London: Greenwood Press; Matland, R. E., & Studlar, D. T. (1996). The contagion of women candidates in single-member district and proportional representation electoral systems: Canada and Norway. *The Journal of Politics*, 58(3), 707-733.

majoritarian ones; more women will run in proportional systems, and more women will be elected<sup>12</sup>.

Part of the reason for the effect of electoral rules is due to the way that they affect incumbency. Serving parliamentarians are likely to be reselected to run in future contests. This is because they enjoy strong electoral advantages in the shape of name recognition and visibility, which increases their likelihood of being returned to office<sup>13</sup>. This means that where male incumbency rates are high, fewer women are selected, which in turn depresses the number of women elected.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Although parties will compete with one another under the same electoral rules and in the same country-level context, not all parties are the same. In fact, there are important differences between parties that can help to explain whether women will be selected to run.

We know that ideology matters: political parties that are on the left of the political spectrum tend to run more female candidates and to see more women elected<sup>14</sup>. In addition, parties that are newer and smaller also tend to be better for women since they don't have the same institutionalised incumbents' interests as their larger, more established competitors<sup>15</sup>.

We also know that the organisational structure and the rules that are employed to select candidates matter. If the process of candidate selection is gendered, we should see fewer women running for office. So, if party selectors base their view of what constitutes an 'ideal' candidate off a male template, then they are less likely to choose women candidates<sup>16</sup>.

In addition, the extent to which the candidate selection process is centralised also matters. When the process is centralised, parties have the ability to select more women if they choose to do so. However, where the process is decentralised (as it would be with an open primary, where party members get to vote for their preferred candidate to represent their party in the election), it is hard for party leadership to intervene<sup>17</sup>.

## VOTERS' DECISIONS AT THE BALLOT BOX

We should also consider the issue of the attitudes of voters towards female candidates. Researchers studying election results in advanced industrial democracies overwhelmingly conclude that voters do not discriminate against female candidates: they are just as likely to vote for a woman as for a man<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Duverger, M. (1955). *The political role of women*. Paris: UNESCO; Reynolds, A. (1999). Women in the legislatures and executives of the world: Knocking at the highest glass ceiling. *World Politics*, 51(4), 547-572; McAllister, I., & Studlar, D. T. (2002). Electoral systems and women's representation: a long-term perspective. *Representation*, 39(1), 3-14; Salmond, R. (2006). Proportional representation and female parliamentarians. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 31(2), 175-204.

<sup>13</sup> Darcy, R., & Schramm, S. S. (1977). When women run against men. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 41(1), 1-12; Andersen, K., & Thorson, S. J. (1984). Congressional turnover and the election of women. *Western Political Quarterly*, 37(1), 143-156; Studlar, D. T., & Welch, S. (1991). Does district magnitude matter? Women candidates in London local elections. *Western Political Quarterly*, 44(2), 457-466; Matland, R. E., & Studlar, D. T. (2004). Determinants of legislative turnover: a cross-national analysis. *British Journal of Political Science*, 34(1), 87-108.

<sup>14</sup> Norris, P. (1993). Conclusions: comparing legislative recruitment. In Lovenduski, J., & Norris, P. (Eds.). *Gender and party politics*, (pp.309-330). London: SAGE Publications Limited; Caul (1999); Galligan, Y. (1993). Party politics and gender in the Republic of Ireland. In J. Lovenduski & P. Norris (Eds.). *Gender and party politics* (pp. 147-167). London: SAGE Publications Limited; McGing, C. (2013). The single transferable vote and women's representation in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies*, 28(3), 322-340.

<sup>15</sup> Caul (1999).

<sup>16</sup> Norris, P. & Lovenduski, J. (1993). 'If Only More Candidates Came Forward': Supply-Side Explanations of Candidate Selection in Britain. *British Journal of Political Science*, 23(3), 373-408.

<sup>17</sup> Caul (1999).

<sup>18</sup> Darcy, R., & Schramm, S. S. (1977); Welch, S., Ambrosius, M. M., Clark, J., & Darcy, R. (1985). The effect of candidate gender on electoral outcomes in state legislative races. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 38(3), 464-475; Smith, E. R., & Fox, R. L. (2001). The electoral fortunes of women candidates for Congress. *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(1), 205-221; McElroy, G., & Marsh, M. (2010). Candidate gender and voter choice: analysis from a multimember preferential voting system. *Political Research Quarterly*, 63(4), 822-833; McElroy, G., & Marsh, M. (2011). Electing women to the Dáil: gender cues and the Irish voter. *Irish Political Studies*, 26(4), 521-534.



However, the challenge that these studies have to deal with is being able to account for candidate quality. If women who run for office are of higher quality than their male counterparts, then equal outcomes at elections would not indicate a lack of voter bias. It would instead suggest that female candidates have to be better than male ones in order to experience the same level of success.

To tackle this issue, a second branch of literature on this topic uses experiments to investigate whether voters are subject to traditional gender stereotyping when it comes to evaluating female candidates<sup>19</sup>. When we consider the results from this body of research, we can see that the picture is more complex.

There is some evidence that bias against women exists for those political offices where they have not yet achieved representation (e.g. the US Presidency)<sup>20</sup>, that women politicians are perceived to be generally less competent<sup>21</sup>, that women who are perceived to be seeking power experience an electoral backlash<sup>22</sup>, and that voters don't view men and women as equally possessing leadership qualities<sup>23</sup>.

These findings suggest that at least some voters do evaluate men and women differently. However, the issue with relying on experiments to draw conclusions about voter bias is that, in this artificial setting, respondents do not have access to a lot of the information that voters use when making decisions on polling day<sup>24</sup>. It is also likely that voters' preferences change over time<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, the context in which these decisions are being made also matters<sup>26</sup>.

Finally, it is important to note that voters' views about women who run are shaped by the media. If media coverage is biased against female candidates, either because outlets ignore them or because they cover them in a different way, then this has the potential to affect their ability to win elections. While it does not happen in every contest, there is evidence from some elections that female candidates sometimes receive less coverage<sup>27</sup> and that the coverage they receive has a tendency to reinforce male stereotypes<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Using an experiment allows researchers to hold constant the factors that we know are going to matter for candidate success in a given election in the real world (e.g. party identification, incumbency, campaign expenditure, media coverage) in order to isolate the effect of candidate gender.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, J. L., Paul, D., & Paul, R. (2007). No place for a woman: Evidence for gender bias in evaluations of presidential candidates. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 29(3), 225–233.

<sup>21</sup> Huddy, L., & Terkildsen, N. (1993a). Gender stereotypes and the perception of male and female candidates. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(1), 119–147; Aalberg, T., & Jenssen, A. T. (2007). Gender Stereotyping of Political Candidates. *Nordicom Review*, 28(1), 17–32.

<sup>22</sup> Okimoto, T. G., & Brescoll, V. L. (2010). The price of power: Power seeking and backlash against female politicians. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(7), 923–936.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander, D., & Andersen, K. (1993). Gender as a factor in the attribution of leadership traits. *Political Research Quarterly*, 46(3), 527–545.

<sup>24</sup> Matland & King (2002). Women as candidates in Congressional elections. In c. S. Rosenthal (Ed.). *Women Transforming Congress* (pp.119–142). Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.

<sup>25</sup> Sanbonmatsu, K. (2002). Gender stereotypes and vote choice. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(1), 20–34.

<sup>26</sup> Lawless, J. L. (2004). Women, war, and winning elections: Gender stereotyping in the post-September 11th era. *Political Research Quarterly*, 57(3), 479–490.

<sup>27</sup> Kahn, K. F. (1991). Senate elections in the news: Examining campaign coverage. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 16(3), 349–374; Kahn, K. F. (1994). The distorted mirror: Press coverage of women candidates for statewide office. *The Journal of Politics*, 56(1), 154–173; Ross, K., Evans, E., Harrison, L., Shears, M., & Wadia, K. (2013). The Gender of News and News of Gender A Study of Sex, Politics, and Press Coverage of the 2010 British General Election. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(1), 3–20.

<sup>28</sup> Witt, L., Paget, K. M. & Matthews, G. (1994). *Running as a Woman: gender and power in American Politics*. New York: The Free Press.

## INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL EXPLANATIONS FOR WOMEN'S UNDERREPRESENTATION

The second branch of literature that investigates the reasons why so few women are present in political life focusses on the circumstances under which an individual will decide to put themselves forward as a candidate. The idea is that even if there are no structural or institutional barriers to women being elected to political office, we may still have a problem of underrepresentation if women are just less likely to run than are men. The problem then could relate to a gender gap in political ambition which might arise due to an uneven distribution of the resources that are required in order to achieve electoral success.

We know that time, income, and social networks are three important resources that people need to draw on in order to mount an electoral campaign. People with lower levels of financial resources are less likely to run regardless of gender, since campaigns are costly and candidates have to be able to meet personal expenses<sup>29</sup>. It is also true that women on average have lower income levels than men<sup>30</sup>, so these differences in income can help to explain why fewer women run for office.

Campaigning is also time-consuming<sup>31</sup>, so time availability should help to explain an individual's openness to running for office<sup>32</sup>. The idea that women work a 'second shift'<sup>33</sup> has been used to explain how women who entered the workforce in large numbers failed to experience a reduction in their

domestic duties. Women who still experience a traditional division of household labour are likely to be time poor, and this shapes decision-making in relation to them running for office

We know also that women are less likely to be in the types of jobs (e.g. law, business) that represent a 'pipeline' into politics<sup>34</sup> because these kinds of jobs are ones that they have historically been discouraged from taking up<sup>35</sup>. These occupations can provide access to the types of resources (income, social networks) that increase a candidate's likelihood of success. Sub-national political offices (e.g. local politics) also serve as stepping-stones to national political office<sup>36</sup>, but women are also underrepresented in these offices<sup>37</sup> which helps to explain why there are so few women in national-level political and senior political roles.

We should note that political ambition is not just determined by access to resources. Women may also have lower levels of political ambition than men due to traditional sex-role socialisation<sup>38</sup>, whereby they internalise expectations from an early age around being passive, caring and focussed on domestic affairs, rather than assertive, achievement-oriented and competitive<sup>39</sup>. If women experience this process of gendered socialisation from birth then it can lead to a psychological barrier to standing; whereby women underestimate their qualifications for political office and their likelihood of success<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Norris & Lovenduski (1993).

<sup>30</sup> Weichselbaumer, D., & Winter-Ebmer, R. (2005). A meta-analysis of the international gender wage gap. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 19(3), 479–511.

<sup>31</sup> Norris & Lovenduski (1993).

<sup>32</sup> Ballington, J. & Matland, R. E. (2004). *Political Parties and Special Measures: Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes. Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-conflict Countries*. Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) & Department of Political Affairs Expert Group Meeting.

<sup>33</sup> Hochschild, A. R., & Machung, A. (1989). *The second shift: Working parents and the revolution at home*. New York: Viking.

<sup>34</sup> Mariani, M. D. (2008). A gendered pipeline? The advancement of state legislators to Congress in five states. *Politics & Gender*, 4(2), 285–308.

<sup>35</sup> Darcy, R., Welch, S., & Clark, J. (1994). *Women, elections and representation*. London: University of Nebraska Press; Fox, R. L., Lawless, J. L. & Feeley, C. (2001). Gender and the Decision to Run for Office. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 26(3), 411–435; Palmer, B., & Simon, D. (2001). The political glass ceiling: Gender, strategy, and incumbency in US House elections, 1978–1998. *Women & Politics*, 23(1–2), 59–78.

<sup>36</sup> Schlesinger, J. A. (1966). *Ambition and politics: Political careers in the United States*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

<sup>37</sup> Oxley, Z. M., & Fox, R. L. (2004). Women in executive office: Variation across American states. *Political Research Quarterly*, 57(1), 113–120.

<sup>38</sup> Clark, J. (1991). Getting There: Women in Political Office. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. American Feminism: New Issues for a Mature Movement*, 5(15), 63–76.

<sup>39</sup> Okimoto & Brescoll (2010).

<sup>40</sup> Fox, R. L. & Lawless, J. L. (2005). To Run or Not to Run for Office: Explaining Nascent Political Ambition. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), 642–659.

# EXPLAINING WOMEN'S UNDERREPRESENTATION

**From this brief review of the existing research on the topic of women's political underrepresentation, we can see that there is a wide variety of possible explanations accounting for women's absence from political office.**

While it is useful to think about the two branches of the literature separately, dividing them up according to whether they are concerned with institutional/structural or individual-level factors, in reality, they are interlinked. Individuals make the decision to stand for office within a broader social and political context<sup>41</sup>.

In addition, it is important to think about the way in which the supply of candidates interacts with the demands of gatekeepers to the political process (voters, party selectors etc.). We should expect that people's level of willingness to put themselves forward as a candidate will be influenced by the extent to which they perceive that there is an opportunity for them to be successful. It may be the case then that one way to increase the supply of women will be to increase the demand for female candidates. This is the logic underlying the use of candidate gender quotas, a policy intervention that has been used in the Irish context and which we discuss below.



<sup>41</sup> Fowler, L. L. (1993). *Candidates, Congress, and the American Democracy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

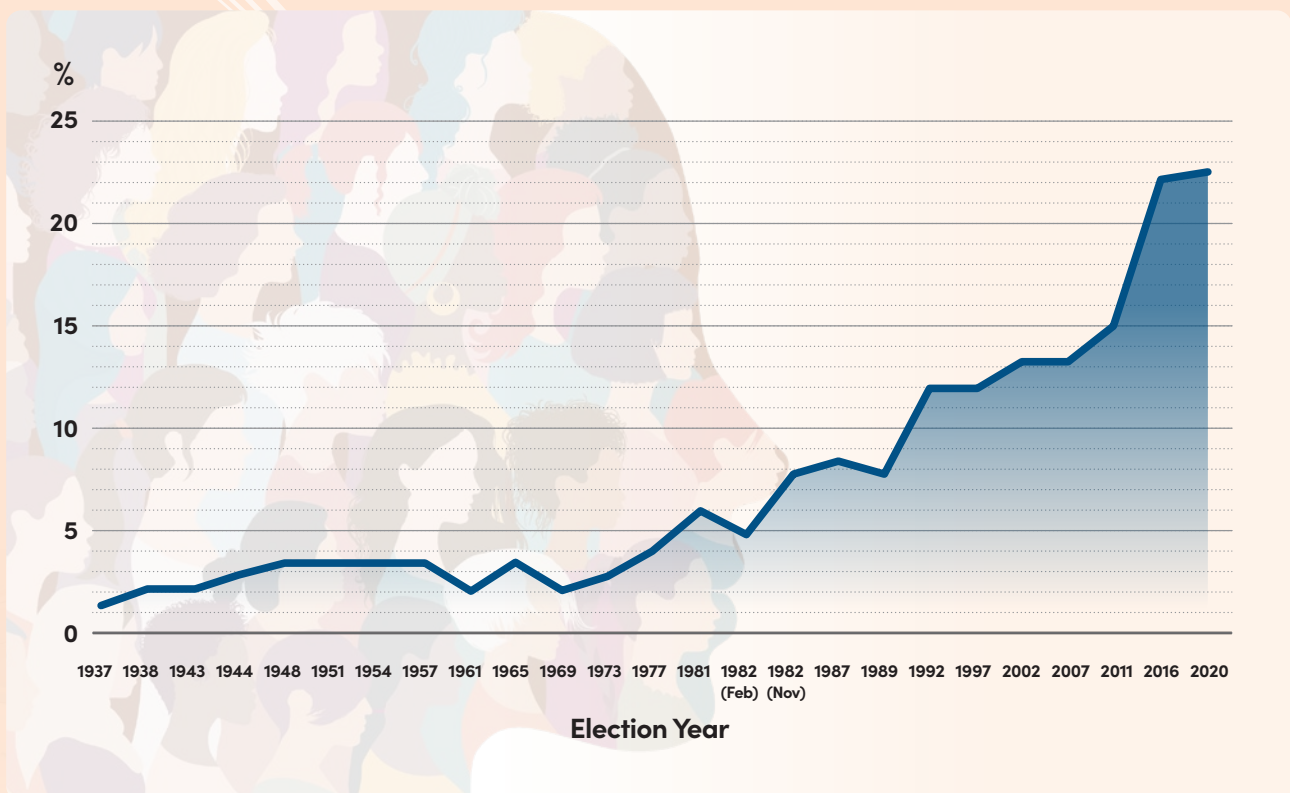
# THINKING ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN IRELAND

When thinking about women's political representation, Ireland is an interesting case. Levels of female representation in Dáil Éireann are low up until the 1970s (see Figure 1).

Though some gains are observed after this period, we see that this trend does not continue, and instead female membership of the Dáil plateaus after 1992, hovering between 12 and 15 percent for around two decades. It is only after the 2016 general election that

we see the share of women in Dáil Éireann increase to more than a fifth. This is due to an important legislative intervention – the *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012* – which introduced a legislative gender quota for party candidates at Dáil elections.

Figure 1: Women elected to Dáil Éireann (1937-2020) (%)



## THE PARADOX OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL UNDERREPRESENTATION IN IRELAND

When considering the Republic of Ireland, it is clear from the review above that there are many features that should lead to high levels of women's participation in politics. Ireland enjoys high levels of economic development, which we know is associated with higher women's political representation. Women's labour force participation is also comparatively high, having risen sharply since the 1960s as part of Ireland's process of economic and social modernisation. In 2021, 46.5 percent of the Irish labour force was made up of women<sup>42</sup>. Furthermore, while Ireland had a strong Catholic tradition that affected and shaped societal attitudes, including socially conservative views about women's participation in public life, the percentage of people who identify as Catholic in Ireland has been declining over time<sup>43</sup>.

If we consider the other structural and institutional explanations that were reviewed above, we can identify more features that should increase the number of women in politics. In both local and general elections, seats are filled using a proportional electoral system, the single transferrable vote (STV). In the general election, constituencies return between three and five TDs, and there has been a tendency for increased district magnitudes over time<sup>44</sup>. The existing international evidence tells us that PR electoral systems are more facilitating of women's selection and election, than other, majoritarian, alternatives<sup>45</sup>.



In terms of the supply of candidates, in contrast to other countries, Ireland does not see heavily male-dominated professions acting as pipelines into the Dáil. In fact, the largest occupational grouping has been members of the teaching profession, a profession where women are overwhelmingly in the majority<sup>46</sup>. Consequently, in Ireland, rather than thinking about what jobs public representatives previously held, it makes sense to focus more on 'the local' as a pipeline into national politics. The majority of TDs have previously held local office prior to election to Dáil Éireann<sup>47</sup>. As noted above, women are underrepresented in local politics, meaning one of the key recruitment routes into national-level politics is male-dominated.

<sup>42</sup> World Bank (2023). *Gender data portal: Labor force, female (% of total labor force)*. [Data file].

Available online at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/>.

<sup>43</sup> According to the census data published by the CSO, the share of people who self-identified as Catholic peaked that 94.9% in 1961. In the 2016 census, this figure had declined to 78.3% (CSO, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> McGing (2013).

<sup>45</sup> White, T. J. (2006). Why so few women in Dáil Éireann? The effects of the single transferable vote election system. *New Hibernia Review*, 10(4), 71–83.

<sup>46</sup> CSO (2019). *Women and Men in Ireland 2019*.

Available online at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wamii/womenandmeninireland2019/education/>

<sup>47</sup> Weeks, L., & Quinlivan, A. (2009). *All Politics is Local: A guide to local elections in Ireland*. Dublin: Collins Press; Reidy, T. (2011). Candidate selection. In M. Gallagher & M. Marsh (Eds.), *How Ireland voted 2011: the full story of Ireland's Earthquake election* (pp.47–57). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Buckley, F., Mariani, M., McGing, C., & White, T. (2015). Is local office a springboard for women to Dáil Éireann? *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 36(3), 311–335.

More positively, research shows that the Irish electorate is not systematically biased against female candidates. In fact, when women run, they can expect their chances of winning to be just as high as that of their male counterparts<sup>48</sup>. So, if the electorate is not biased against women's candidacy, then the focus should turn to political parties.

Looking at the political parties that operate in the Irish system, we can see that the system features numerous political parties, many of which are small and some of which are on the left of the political spectrum. As discussed above, smaller parties and left-wing parties tend to select female candidates at higher rates, so where they are present in a political system, we expect to see a positive effect on women's representation. The experiences of the now defunct Progressive Democrats (right-of-centre)<sup>49</sup> and the comparatively new Social Democrats (left-of-centre) show the positive effect small parties can have on the electoral fortunes of women<sup>50</sup>. However, research shows that the two largest political parties historically, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, have been comparatively slow to recruit women<sup>51</sup>.



Political parties are the gatekeepers to political candidacy, and if party selectorates overlook women as nominees for electoral candidacy, then those who come through candidate selection conventions will be predominantly men. In Ireland, candidate selection is a hybrid process, involving both the party's constituency-level organisation and its headquarters. This can lead to tensions between the two levels as party headquarters reserve the right to intervene, if necessary, in candidate selection processes<sup>52</sup>. As a result, political parties have been described as centralised<sup>53</sup> with the candidate selection falling somewhere between "democratic centralism" and "managed democracy"<sup>54</sup>. Yet many informal requirements including incumbency, localism and a candidate's geographical location within the constituency, play a part in candidate selection decisions<sup>55</sup>. Taken together, "decentralised involvement in party selection processes and informal selection procedures are not always conducive to diversifying candidate lists"<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> McElroy & Marsh (2010); McElroy & Marsh (2011).

<sup>49</sup> Galligan (1993).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> McGing (2013).

<sup>52</sup> Farrell, D. (1999). Ireland: A party system transformed. In D. Broughton & M. Donovan (Eds.), *Changing Party Systems in Western Europe* (pp.30-47). London: Pinter; Lundell, K. (2004). Determinants of candidate selection: The degree of centralization in comparative perspective. *Party Politics*, 10(1), 25-47.

<sup>53</sup> Gallagher, M. (1988). Ireland: the increasing role of the centre. In M. Gallagher & M. Marsh (Eds.), *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective: The Secret Garden of Politics* (pp. 119-144). London: Sage.

<sup>54</sup> Weeks, L. (2008). Candidate selection: democratic centralism or managed democracy?. In M. Gallagher & M. Marsh (Eds.), *How Ireland Voted 2007*. (pp. 48-64). London: Palgrave.

<sup>55</sup> Buckley, F. & Brennan, M. (2021). Gender Quotas in Ireland: A First for Proportional Representation by means of the Single Transferable Vote. In D.M. Farrell & N. Hardiman (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Irish Politics*. (pp. 577-594). Oxford University Press.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

## EXPLAINING THE ABSENCE OF WOMEN FROM IRISH POLITICS

It is in the context of persistent low levels of women's representation, that in October 2009, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality Defence and Women's Rights published a report examining *Women's Participation in Politics*.

As set out in the foreword by committee chairman Brendan Kenneally (TD), the core aim of the report had been to "examine the challenges facing women who wish to pursue a career in politics"<sup>57</sup> at any level. Female politicians gave evidence on their experiences, and Prof Yvonne Galligan submitted evidence based on her extensive academic work in the field. Ivana Bacik (TD), then a Senator, acted as Rapporteur.

The most significant contribution of the Committee's report lies in its identification of the five key challenges facing women with respect to their entry into political life. These so-called 5 C's are the following: childcare, cash, confidence, culture, and candidate selection processes. Access to childcare is a gendered issue, since women are more likely to have these caring responsibilities. And where they do have these responsibilities, this can limit their ability to enter into political life and, once there, to progress to higher office.

A lack of access to cash is also identified as a barrier that affects women more often than men. Although existing legislation restricts campaign spending by candidates and parties, it is still the case that candidates running for office in Ireland need access to financial resources to meet the associated costs. Where women earn less than men, it can deter them from running for office. A lack of confidence was similarly highlighted as an issue in the Irish context. Women, the report found, were less likely to put themselves forward as candidates. Culture, both within parties and in the broader society, was similarly addressed as a barrier to women's entry into politics. Finally, the report highlighted the issue of candidate selection whereby the way that political parties went about choosing their candidates limited the number of women who ran. The processes were described as heavily male-dominated and did not take seriously the need to improve the gender balance in the slate of candidates being presented to the electorate.

Beyond simply identifying these significant challenges in the Irish case, the report also makes a series of recommendations to address them. As the *5 C's Scorecard*<sup>58</sup> makes clear, the implementation of these recommendations has been uneven across the five barriers, with minimal progress in those areas associated with cash and culture. However, recommendations to introduce a candidate gender quota has been fully implemented for general elections and was implemented in a version that is stronger than had originally been envisaged<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Joint Committee on Justice, Equality Defence and Women's Rights (2009). *Women's Participation in Politics*. (Second Report). (pp. v.). Available online at: [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_justice\\_and\\_equality/reports/2009/2009-11-05\\_women-s-participation-in-politics\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_justice_and_equality/reports/2009/2009-11-05_women-s-participation-in-politics_en.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> Keenan, L. & Buckley, F. (2023a). *5 C's Scorecard: assessing progress in the wake of the 2009 Women's Participation in Politics report. Women for Election*.

<sup>59</sup> In contrast with the quota proposed by the Committee, the existing legislation does not feature a sunset clause (whereby the quota would be removed once the stated objective was achieved).

# TACKLING CANDIDATE SELECTION: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATE GENDER QUOTA IN 2016

In Ireland, the candidate gender quota stands out as a very substantial policy success. The *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012* introduced a candidate gender quota at the 2016 general election for the first time.



This piece of legislation effectively required that at least 30 percent of the candidates selected by political parties be women<sup>60</sup>, with any party failing to meet the quota losing half of their state funding for the term of the parliament. The quota will rise to 40 percent at the next election.

There are a few aspects of the quota that are worth discussing in more detail.

Firstly, as a candidate quota that applies to political parties, there is an implicit assumption that political parties are the key barrier to women entering into politics. The measure forces parties to make space for women among their slate of candidates, since they have not managed to do this in large numbers so far. Prior to the implementation of the legislative gender quota, political parties in Ireland had been largely resistant to positive action initiatives that would directly tackle the problem of women's political underrepresentation. In fact, it was only due to a constellation of pressures – including due to an increased appetite for political reform in the wake of the 2008–2013 financial crisis – that the larger

parties became “reluctant reformers”<sup>61</sup>. Indeed, among political elites and voters, support for the quota measure was generally low at the time of its implementation<sup>62</sup>.

Secondly, while the quota serves to increase the pool of female candidates available for voters to choose from, it does not guarantee their election in the way that reserving seats in parliament for women would. The underlying assumption here, then, is that voters are not biased against female candidates. The expectation is that if more women run, more women will win.

Thirdly, the measure to incentivise political parties to comply with the gender quota is meaningful. The loss of half of a party's state funding would significantly reduce a party's financial resources. Irish political parties have become particularly reliant on this source of funding, since the introduction of legislative reforms in relation to political donations and party financing between the late 1990s and 2012<sup>63</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> The legislation is written in gender-neutral terms, so if a political party failed to run at least 30 percent men, it would also be subject to their state funding being halved. The quota benefits women rather than men only because its level of representation has been so low among candidates.

<sup>61</sup> Buckley, F. (2013). Women and politics in Ireland: the road to sex quotas. *Irish Political Studies*, 28(3), 341-359.

<sup>62</sup> Keenan, L., & McElroy, G. (2017). Who supports gender quotas in Ireland? *Irish Political Studies*, 32(3), 382-403.

<sup>63</sup> Farrell, D. M., & Webb, P. (2000). Political parties as campaign organizations. In R. Dalton & M. Wattenberg (Eds.). *Parties without Partisans: Political change in advanced industrial democracies* (pp.102-128). Oxford: Oxford University Press.



## ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE GENDER QUOTA

The impact of the gender quota was substantial and far-reaching. Though the measure applies only to general elections, we can see that it has had an impact at the local level also. Political parties used the 2014 local elections as an opportunity to recruit and field more female candidates, enabling these women to gain experience in advance of a potential future contest for the Dáil. In 2014, one-fifth of all candidates who ran in the local election were women, a substantial increase on the 16.5 percent at the previous election<sup>64</sup>. Not all of the main parties managed to field enough candidates in 2014 to meet the quota, but the Green Party and Sinn Féin did, with the Labour Party only slightly below the 30 percent threshold. This trend continued at the 2019 local election; most parties fielded a slate of candidates made up of at least 30 percent of women. However, Fine Gael were one percentage point below this threshold (29 percent) while Fianna Fáil, were nine points below it (21 percent)<sup>65</sup>. This indicates that at local elections, the rates of women candidacy across political parties is uneven. There is no guarantee that parties will substantially increase their share of female candidates, and in the absence of a legislative gender quota, some parties revert to practices where men's candidacy is privileged.

Examining the results from the general elections where the legislative gender quota first applied, the number of female candidates rose sharply (163 women were on the ballot in comparison to 86 at the previous election<sup>66</sup>). All of the main political parties met the quota and therefore complied with their legal obligations. Crucially the number of women elected in 2016 increased by ten to 35 women, a 40 percent increase on the number of women elected at the previous Dáil election in 2011 (25)<sup>67</sup>. This increase is depicted in Figure 1, which illustrates how sharp of an increase this was on the stagnation of the previous two-and-a-half decades.

Analysis of the results from that first quota election of 2016 are encouraging. In contrast to the low levels of support for the quota measure among political elites and among voters in 2011<sup>68</sup>, an RTÉ exit poll showed that the general public appears to be more positive than negative. Asked about the quota in 2016, 42 percent of respondents in the exit poll report strongly support, 17 percent strongly opposed it and some 38 percent were neither strongly in support of it nor against it (three percent did not know)<sup>69</sup>. Furthermore, voters did not discriminate against women, instead choosing candidates on the basis of their quality, their political experience and their party label<sup>70</sup>. However, it is worth noting that Fianna Fáil voters did reveal a preference for male candidates<sup>71</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Buckley, F. and Hofman, C. (2015) 'Women in local government: Moving in from the margins', *Administration*, 63(2), 79–99.

<sup>65</sup> McGing, C., & Cullen, P. (2019). Women beyond the Dáil: more women in local government. *National Women's Council of Ireland*. Available online at: [https://www.nwci.ie/learn/publication/women\\_beyond\\_the\\_dail\\_more\\_women\\_in\\_local\\_government](https://www.nwci.ie/learn/publication/women_beyond_the_dail_more_women_in_local_government).

<sup>66</sup> McElroy, G. (2018). The impact of gender quotas on voting behaviour in 2016. In *The post-crisis Irish voter* (pp. 165–189). Manchester University Press.

<sup>67</sup> Buckley, F., Galligan, Y., & McGing, C. (2016). Women and the election: Assessing the impact of gender quotas. *How Ireland Voted 2016: The Election That Nobody Won*, (pp. 185–205). Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>68</sup> Keenan & McElroy (2017).

<sup>69</sup> RTÉ/Behaviour & Attitudes (2016). *2016 General Election Exit Poll Report*. Available online at: <https://www.rte.ie/documents/news/rte-exit-poll-report.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> McElroy (2018).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Some opponents of the quota raised concerns that it would lead to large numbers of low-quality, ‘token’ female candidates being selected, purely to make up the numbers. But this failed to materialise. In fact, when comparing men and women candidates, as well as those who were elected, most women have very similar credentials to their male counterparts<sup>72</sup>.

Proponents of quotas are often concerned about the discretion that party selectors have when it comes to where they field their candidates. While it is possible for parties to meet a candidate quota, it is also possible for selectors to do this by running women in seats where they are unlikely to win<sup>73</sup>. Where this is the case, women remain underrepresented in legislatures. In 2016, there is some evidence that women non-incumbents running for Fine Gael and, to a lesser extent, the Labour Party, were more likely to run in less competitive races<sup>74</sup>. However, in the Irish case, political parties can largely be said to have embraced the spirit of the quota<sup>75</sup>. In addition, analysis of campaign spending by political parties indicates that the quota led to increased expenditures on female candidates; a strategy which appears to be designed to compensate for a lack of fundraising experience among women newcomers<sup>76</sup>.

The pace of change in relation to women’s political representation was significant in 2016. However, similar rates of change were not experienced in 2020, when the number of women elected to the Dáil increased by just one. That election was notable for the



number of prominent women TDs who lost their seats. An examination of the headline figures shows that incumbent women were less likely to be re-elected than incumbent men<sup>77</sup>. Success rates for women candidates also varied across political parties. Women running for Sinn Féin and the Social Democrats had higher success rates than their male party counterparts. However, the success rates for female Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil candidates were less than half that of their male party colleagues<sup>78</sup>. The international experience of gender quotas indicates it takes three to four electoral cycles for gender quotas to bed in to an electoral system and a party’s candidate selection process<sup>79</sup>. Nevertheless, we can say that female candidates received more first preference votes than ever before, with 584,101 voters entrusting their number one vote to a female candidate<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> Buckley, Galligan & McGing (2016).

<sup>73</sup> Matland, R. E. (2006). Electoral quotas: Frequency and effectiveness. In D. Dahlerup (Ed.), *Women, quotas and politics*. (pp. 275–92). New York: Routledge; Dahlerup, D. (2007). Electoral gender quotas: Between equality of opportunity and equality of result. *Representation*, 43(2), 73–92.

<sup>74</sup> Mariani, M., Buckley, F., McGing, C., & Wright, A. (2021). (Gender) balancing the books: how did Irish political parties respond to the first ‘gender quota’ election in 2016?. *Irish Political Studies*, 36(2), 235–262.

<sup>75</sup> Brennan, M., & Buckley, F. (2017). The Irish legislative gender quota: The first election. *Administration*, 65(2), 15–35.

<sup>76</sup> Buckley, F., & Mariani, M. (2023). Money Matters: The impact of gender quotas on campaign spending for women candidates. *International Political Science Review*, 44(1), 59–76.

<sup>77</sup> Buckley, F., & Galligan, Y. (2020). The 2020 general election: a gender analysis. *Irish Political Studies*, 35(4), 602–614.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

# THINKING ABOUT WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN IRISH POLITICS: SOME PROGRESS BUT MORE TO DO

**We can point to improvements with respect to women's political representation since the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality Defence and Women's Rights published their 5 C's report in 2009.**

More women are now running at local and national level, and there are more women elected to local councils and to Dáil Éireann than ever before. It is the implementation of the candidate gender quota (the recommendation from the Oireachtas report to address the barrier of candidate selection) that is largely responsible for this change. By obliging parties to make space for women among their slate of candidates, and by introducing a substantial financial incentive for parties to comply, opportunities for politically interested women have increased. More to the point, these opportunities have been taken up.

However, in the wake of the second 'gender quota election', it is important to take stock of what the measure has been able to achieve, and what it may not be able to do. The 2020 general election demonstrated that the quota might not necessarily lead to a steady increase in the share of women in Dáil Éireann, as female incumbents retain their seats and newcomers are added to the existing pool of deputies. By contrast, what we saw was a substantial cohort of politically experienced women replaced by women with less experience. The reasons why this happened are not yet clear and further research is required.



While parties ran enough candidates to meet the quota at both the 2016 and 2020 general elections, there do still appear to be some pockets of resistance to the measure within political parties<sup>81</sup>. There is evidence of "sacrificial lamb" behaviour in some parties whereby female candidates are selected to run in non-competitive races, but this is not a systematic behaviour across the party system<sup>82</sup>. We also know that many within political parties have previously expressed low support for the quota measure<sup>83</sup> and, at least at the 2016 election, some voters were more likely to vote for male candidates<sup>84</sup>. Previous research carried out in a US context tells us that even where voter bias is not evident at elections, it has the potential to emerge in the event of

<sup>81</sup> Mariani, Buckley, McGing & Wright (2021).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Keenan & McElroy (2017).

<sup>84</sup> McElroy (2018).

a change of circumstances. For example, if voters view men as more competent at dealing with certain issues, when those issues become more important to voters, they may become less likely to vote for women<sup>85</sup>. As discussed above, there is no evidence that in Ireland voters are systematically biased against female candidates, and certainly, female candidates did not experience a backlash with the introduction of the quota – more women ran, and more women were elected. Still, the losses of prominent women at the 2020 election indicate that this is something that cannot be assumed and warrants further investigation. The threshold for the gender quota is due to rise to 40 percent at the next general election. This will be a test both for parties and for voters.

Relatedly, we can consider the way that the gender quota has resulted in an increase in women's representation at local level too. As was discussed above, political parties responded to the pending implementation of the legislative gender quota at national level by running more women in the 2014 local election. This trend continued into the 2019 local election. However, there are substantial differences across parties, both with respect to the share of women they are fielding (varying between 21 and 55 percent) and also with respect to the composition of their elected representatives (varying between 18 and 64 percent)<sup>86</sup>. The implementation of a gender quota at the national level does not then guarantee that parties will meet that threshold in local elections. This has important



implications since increasing the number of women in local government is a goal in and of itself, but it is also important because it represents a pipeline to the Dáil<sup>87</sup>. To give women the best chance of being elected to the Dáil, it is crucial that they have the opportunity to gain experience at the local level. It is for this reason that introducing a candidate gender quota at local elections is increasingly seen by academics<sup>88</sup>, and organisations like Women for Election<sup>89</sup> as crucial for raising the level of representation. It was one of the 45 recommendations made by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality which reported in 2021<sup>90</sup>. In its action plan for the implementation of the Citizens' Assembly's recommendations, the Oireachtas' Joint Committee on Gender Equality sets a timeline for achieving this as Q1 of 2024<sup>91</sup>, which would mean that it would be implemented prior to the next local election, due to be held in May of 2024.

<sup>85</sup> Lawless (2004).

<sup>86</sup> McGing & Cullen (2019).

<sup>87</sup> Mariani (2008).

<sup>88</sup> E.g. Buckley & Hoffman (2015).

<sup>89</sup> Buckley, F., & Keenan, L. (2021). 'More Women – changing the face of Politics: women's experience of running for election in Ireland'. Women for Election. Available online at: <https://www.womenforelection.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics-small.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> Citizens' Assembly (2021). *Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality*, Dublin: The Citizens' Assembly. Available online at: <https://citizensassembly.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-gender-equality.pdf>

<sup>91</sup> Joint Committee on Gender Equality (2022). *Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality*. (Final Report). Available online at: [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_justice\\_and\\_equality/reports/2009/2009-11-05\\_women-s-participation-in-politics\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_justice_and_equality/reports/2009/2009-11-05_women-s-participation-in-politics_en.pdf)

Returning to the other four barriers identified by the 2009 5 C's report, the recommendations around cash, childcare, culture and confidence have not yet been fully implemented<sup>92</sup>. Recent research commissioned by Women for Election, highlights the extent to which these issues still serve to deter women from running<sup>93</sup>. In fact, some of these recommendations have been made once more by the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality<sup>94</sup>, though that report goes much further with its recommendations, since its goal is to see the establishment of a more gender equal society. Such changes would serve to tackle issues around a lack of cash, a disproportionate burden of care (broadly defined), a masculinised political culture, and a lack of confidence. However, it remains to be seen whether these recommendations will be adopted.

Beyond thinking about the barriers and the associated recommendations of the 5 C's report, it is important to point to areas that require further investigation. Something that could not have been foreseen by the Committee in 2009 was the rise in importance of social media. As politicians and candidates increasingly use these platforms to connect with voters, they are being laid open to harassment and abuse. Certainly, this is not just an issue for Irish politicians, or indeed only for female politicians. However, analysis of Twitter finds that such online abuse is gendered: female local councillors and senators – but not TDs – received more abusive tweets than their male counterparts<sup>95</sup>. There has also been a substantial increase in the media coverage about the online abuse received by female

politicians in Ireland, partially as a result of recent high-profile women speaking-up about their experiences<sup>96</sup>. In 2022, the National Women's Council produced a toolkit for political parties to assist women public representatives who have experienced online abuse<sup>97</sup>.

However, concerns about abuse of women in politics are not just limited to those experienced in the online space. In fact, there are increasing concerns about the level of in-person harassment, intimidation and abuse that women are encountering<sup>98</sup>. After calls from some politicians, and organisations like Women for Election, a cross-party Oireachtas taskforce is being established to address the issue of abuse of women in public life<sup>99</sup>. Research by Women for Election indicates that fear of encountering this kind of behaviour personally, or subjecting their families to this threat, may act as a deterrent to women entering politics<sup>100</sup>.

In general, more research is needed in the Irish context to understand the circumstances under which women will put themselves forward as election candidates. It is crucial to understand more broadly which factors enable women to run or prevent them from running. In addition to the barrier of caring responsibilities and the important enabling factor of access to financial resources, we might want to think about support and encouragement in a broader sense. Women for Election research indicates that receiving support and encouragement from their family, their community and their party, would be important in enabling politically interested

<sup>92</sup> Keenan & Buckley (2023a).

<sup>93</sup> Keenan & Buckley (2023b).

<sup>94</sup> Citizens' Assembly (2021).

<sup>95</sup> Richardson, I. (2022). 'The Dynamics of Political Incivility on Twitter towards Irish Representatives'. Available online at: [https://rpubs.com/Ian\\_W\\_Richardson/Twitter\\_Irish\\_Politics](https://rpubs.com/Ian_W_Richardson/Twitter_Irish_Politics)

<sup>96</sup> Female politicians face 'dark hum' of abuse – TDs. (2023, Jan 21). RTÉ. Available online at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/2023/0121/1349988-political-abuse/>

<sup>97</sup> National Women's Council of Ireland (2022). Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties. Available online at: [https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC\\_Toolkit\\_SocialMediaAbuse\\_2022FINAL.pdf](https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC_Toolkit_SocialMediaAbuse_2022FINAL.pdf)

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Bray, J. (2023, Jan 25). Female TDs to meet Ceann Comhairle to tackle abuse and threats: New cross-party taskforce will also be set up to address the growing issue of intimidation. *Irish Times*. Available online at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/oireachtas/2023/01/26/female-tds-to-meet-with-ceann-comhairle-to-tackle-abuse-and-threats/>

<sup>100</sup> Keenan & Buckley (2023b).

women to run for office<sup>101</sup>. Recent research suggests that women who run for office may need to receive more encouragement to do so than their male counterparts, and might not run in the absence of encouragement from particular sources (their spouse, their family and elected politicians)<sup>102</sup>. What this suggests is that the calculation to run for office is gendered, and more work needs to be done to investigate the way in which women decide to rule themselves out or put themselves forward. In the absence of research on political ambition among the general population, our understanding of the supply of female candidates is still limited.

Another important area for future research is to investigate the representation of minority ethnic women in Irish politics. Organisations such as the National Traveller Women's Forum, Akina Dada wa Africa (AkiDwA), the Immigrant Council of Ireland and Women for Election are campaigning to diversify public life and enable more minority ethnic women to run for political office. In 2019, only nine of 949 elected councillors were from a migrant background, despite 12 percent of the Irish population consisting of non-Irish nationals<sup>103</sup>. The majority of migrant candidates were men, although six of the nine who were elected were women<sup>104</sup>. In general, however, "minoritised women, particularly Traveller women" express "anticipation that the majority population may not vote for them"<sup>105</sup>.

For women of minority ethnic backgrounds, the gendered barriers to political office are compounded by the interaction between their

gender and minority status. Women from migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds have access to support networks that are smaller and less deep, limiting their ability to draw on this support for the provision of childcare, financing, and other resources that would support them in their campaigns<sup>106</sup>. Those minority ethnic women who do run for political office, report having to confront both sexism and racism when on the campaign trail<sup>107</sup>. To address the issue of minority women's underrepresentation in Irish politics, policies must be implemented that are targeted specifically at the unique barriers faced by minority women<sup>108</sup>.

With respect to women's representation in Irish politics, it is clear that progress has been made since the 2009 publication of the *Women's Participation in Politics* report by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights. Not only is women's comparative absence now accepted as a problem, a range of measures have been adopted to address it, with the candidate gender quota being the most ambitious and successful mechanism. However, it is clear from this review that a broader suite of measures, in conjunction with the legislative gender quota, is required both to make space for women (i.e. to increase demand), but also to encourage women to put themselves forward (i.e. to increase supply). It is crucial too, that a diverse group of women are enabled to run for politics. Women from migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds are doubly disadvantaged and will require targeted interventions to ensure their inclusion, selection and election.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Keenan, L., & McElroy, G. (2022). Who wants women to run? An investigation of gender differences in patterns of support among Irish local election candidates. *Irish Political Studies*, 37(4), 477-498.

<sup>103</sup> Lima, V. (2019). The Experience of Migrant Candidates in the 2019 Local Elections: migrant electoral empowerment report. *Immigrant Council of Ireland*. Available online at: [https://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/sites/default/files/2021-09/Migrant%20candidates%20experience\\_LA2019.pdf](https://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/sites/default/files/2021-09/Migrant%20candidates%20experience_LA2019.pdf)

<sup>104</sup> McGing & Cullen (2019).

<sup>105</sup> Cullen, P. & Gough, S. (2022). *Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland*. The National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF)/AkiDwA. Available online at: [https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/filefield\\_paths/Different\\_Paths\\_Shared\\_Experiences\\_Report.pdf](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/filefield_paths/Different_Paths_Shared_Experiences_Report.pdf)

<sup>106</sup> McGing & Cullen (2019).

<sup>107</sup> Lima (2019).

<sup>108</sup> Cullen & Gough (2022).

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