



Dear Citizens' Assembly member,

Women are more than ½ the population, but we are less than ¼ of our elected public representatives. That needs to change. Women for Election want to see an Ireland with the full participation of all women in Irish politics. We inspire, equip and support women to succeed in politics. We work for systematic and sustainable change across all levels of our political system. We are a non-partisan, independent organisation – we work with women across political parties, and independents, with a view to seeing more women elected.

Our approach works - we've worked with or trained more than half of the women who were elected to their local council last year, and we've worked with or trained 31 of the 36 TDs elected in 2020. But we need to do more. The current rate of change is slow, too slow. We need to put measures in place to ensure more women run for election. And we need to support women once they are elected. Our submission provides some context – outlining some of the recent progress and explaining Women for Election's work. In summary, our recommendations are that the Citizens Assembly should propose the government

1. Legislate for a **quota system to be extended to local and Seanad elections.**

Parties should be required to ensure at least **40% of their election candidates are of each gender.**

2. Introduce additional targets to improve **diversity within our political system.**

And to help ensure that once elected women can stay within elected politics

3. An entitlement to **maternity/adoptive leave should be introduced for all elected TDs, Senators and Councillors.**

Women for Election wishes you the very best in your important deliberations. We would welcome the opportunity to come and speak with you during your discussions and to answer any queries you might have about our submission.

Ciairín de Buis,

CEO

Background and context

While quotas work, training and political networks for women are also vital to supporting more women to run for election. That’s why we provide training and networking opportunities for women who have or are interested in political careers.

We’ve worked with or trained more than half of the women who were elected to their local council last year, and we’ve worked with or trained 31 of the 36 TDs elected in 2020.

General Election 2020

36 Female TDs elected (of 160)

+1 relative to GE2106 (35 of 158)

This election for the first time saw at least one woman running in every constituency. And while it is progress that there was at least one woman running in every constituency, it shows how far we are from a balanced political system. The number of female TDs elected in our recent election has risen marginally (by 1) to 36, since our general election in February.

The *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012* introduced gender quotas into the Irish electoral system. The gender quota system applies for both men and women. Our quota system allows for a party’s state funding to be cut by half unless at least 30% of their general election candidates are of each gender. This requirement is set to increase to 40% in 2023. It’s important to remember that quotas simply get candidates onto the ticket – the electorate chose who represents them.

Quotas work. The introduction of quota requirements saw significant change in the number of women in politics. The numbers and proportion of women running in the next election (2016) almost doubled.

	Candidates	Women candidates	%
GE2020	530	162	31%
GE2016	551	162	29%
GE2011	556	86	15%

Source: Oireachtas Library and Research Service

But while there was an increase, albeit not large enough, most of the parties did not run a balanced ticket.

Fine Gael just made it over the quota with 30.5% of their candidates' women, Fianna Fáil weren't much better with 31% women, and the Labour Party and Sinn Féin selected 32% and 33% respectively. Only the Social Democrats ran majority women candidates (55% or 11 of their 20 candidates).

At this rate, most parties will struggle when the quota requirement increases to 40% in 2023.

If we look at the breakdown of women **elected, by party**, we can see huge variations across the party groupings.

Women in the Dáil (by party/group)			
	TDs	Women TDs	%
Social Democrats	6	4	67%
Sinn Féin	37	13	35%
Independents & Others	20	5	25%
Sol-PBP	5	1	20%
Fine Gael	35	6	17%
Green Party	12	2	17%
Fianna Fáil	38	5	13%
Aontú	1	0	0%
Labour	6	0	0%
Total	160	36	23%

There are also significant geographical variations, with **12 constituencies** electing **0 women**, and 20 constituencies where just 1 woman was elected.

Even with the quotas in place women (who are more than half the population) still only make up 22.5% of the Dáil. But there is no quota in place for our local or Seanad elections.

One of the real challenges and barriers to women in politics is the challenge of balancing home/family life with the demands of political life. Elected politicians have no entitlement to maternity leave. If we are to attract, and retain, more women into political life they should – at the very least – be able to access maternity leave.

Local Elections 2019

29% candidates were women

226 (24%) women were elected

Given that many of the parties appeared to struggle to meet the 30% quota requirement for the general election, it is no surprise that they fielded even fewer women in the local elections last year.

Neither of the two larger parties at the time of the local elections met the 30% threshold. Only 22% of Fianna Fáil's candidates were women, of the Fine Gael candidates 29% were women.

In contrast some of the smaller parties - Solidarity/People Before Profit (57%), Independents4Change (57%) and the Social Democrats (55%) – had a majority of women candidates.

There were also significant geographical variations, with more women tending to run in urban areas. After the elections there were 23 electoral areas with no women representatives, the majority of which are in rural areas. Only 24% (226 people) of those elected to local councils were women, which compares to the EU average of 32% for local/municipal councils.

Overall, only 29% of candidates were women – 24% or 226 of those elected were women.

Seanad Election 2020

19 (32%) Senators in the outgoing Seanad

The outgoing Seanad has 19 (32%) women. At the time of writing, there are 45 women (or 30% of candidates) running for election in the current Seanad elections.

Most of the parties are running a more balanced ticket in the Seanad election. The Labour party, seem keen to redress the imbalance in their Dáil representation (they currently have no women TDs), have nominated 3 women and 1 man. The Green Party have put forward the names of 3 women who lost out on Dáil seats recently. Fianna Fail have run a balanced ticket in the Seanad election with 9 nominees, 5 women and 4 men. As have Sinn Féin, with 3 women and 4 men on the ticket. In stark contrast, of the 13 Fine Gael nominated candidates, only 3 are women – **Fine Gael nominated as many candidates whose name is John as they did women.**

Recommendations

Local government matters to local communities. We rely on our local authorities to provide services such as libraries, planning, housing, roads, and the arts. Local authorities are a key element of our democratic system, and local councillors play a key role in our democracy.

Added to which, local election experience is often a predictor of who will be elected to our Dáil. Many of our TDs were previously elected to their local council, particularly so for women TDs.

Similarly, the Seanad plays a critical role in our democratic structures and process. Through initiating and scrutinising legislation, facilitating debate on issues of national and international importance, the Seanad plays an important role in providing a check and balance on Dáil Éireann, and within our political system.

Women for Election are proposing 3 key recommendations:

4. Legislate for a **quota system to be extended to local and Seanad elections.**

Parties should be required to ensure at least **40% of their election candidates are of each gender.**

5. Additional targets to improve **diversity within our political system should also be introduced.**

And to help ensure that once elected women can stay within elected politics

6. An entitlement to **maternity/adoptive leave should be introduced for all elected TDs, Senators and Councillors.**

Conclusion

We need a better balance in our political system, we need the full participation of women in all aspects of our political system. Quotas, at a local and Seanad level, would play a significant role in seeing more women elected. We would ask the Citizens' Assembly to include these recommendations in their report to government.

Contact

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