9 Women in politics

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The centenary commemorations of the women's suffrage campaign and associated Acts, notably the Representation of the People Act, 1918, and the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act, 1918, shine a spotlight on women's political representation over the past 100 years. Suffragists thought that their victory heralded the end of inequality in political life for women. Yet, women's political under-representation persisted, and by the mid-1990s gender equality in public office became a test of democratic legitimacy and accountability for feminists and advocates of political reform. This framing of the democratic deficit was reinforced by the United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women in 1995, at which women's empowerment was a central theme. Thereafter, the Irish government was one of over a hundred governments held accountable to the UN for its commitment to realising gender equality in power and decision-making.

Thus, at the close of the twentieth century, the paucity of women in politics gradually became a litmus test for the health of democracy. The structural exclusion of one half of the citizenry from an equal share of power created a strong normative claim for redress, based on justice and equality as the fundamental principles of democracy. Important though this normative argument is for a focus on women, Irish parties have paid variable attention to the representativeness of parliament, and the presence of women in the Oireachtas remains low by European standards. Perhaps this lack of urgency reflects public indifference to the representative nature of the Dáil, as the 2011 and 2016 Irish National Election Surveys (INES) would seem to indicate. When asked what characteristics were important in a TD (such as being of the same social class, having the same level of education, being of the same age), being of the same gender as the respondent was the least important, though it was still somewhat more relevant for women than for men (Farrell *et al.*, 2018).

This raises the question, then, as to why we should be concerned about gender as a representative characteristic in political life. Yet, perhaps this snapshot in time provided by the INES survey does not reflect public indifference to the gender of elected representatives. Instead, it may be that the public thinks this issue is now addressed and that it is time to incorporate other diversity characteristics into the electoral sphere. This is quite a typical view among voters in Britain (Cowley 2013), and could have echoes among the Irish public. Or, it may also be that the public – male and female – think that their interests are adequately represented, and so the sex of politicians is not an issue. Whatever the explanation, there is evidence to show that the public was attentive to the gender of politicians in previous times. In 2007, on the eve of the economic crash that was to send shock waves through the Irish economy and society, 60 per cent of those surveyed in a similar INES poll indicated that 'things would improve if there were more women in politics'. While just about half of men agreed, 71 per cent of women did so, indicating a pent-up demand among the female public

for better descriptive representation. Moreover, in 2011, even though respondents attached little importance to the idea of having a TD of the same gender as themselves, 62 per cent believed that there should be more women TDs, with 29 per cent wanting no change and only 3 per cent saying they wanted fewer female TDs (Farrell *et al*., 2017). That pressure for greater female presence in politics was articulated further in the 2014 Constitutional Convention report on women in public life, where an overwhelming majority (97 per cent) of the 100 citizens and political participants wanted to see government take more action to encourage women's public and political engagement.[1]

The public view, an important aspect in understanding the politics of presence and its underlying drivers, can differ also on policy. In a study of voters and politicians' attitudes on policy issues in a European Parliament election, female voters in Ireland were found to be more progressive than males on the four policy issues interrogated – same sex marriage, abortion, women and paid work, and the welfare state (McEvoy 2016: 766). This finding points to women and men collectively holding different views on policy issues, and by exten-sion, it can be argued that these policy differences should be represented in parliament. The same research shows that women MEPs hold more liberal views on abortion, as well as on women and paid work, than their male counterparts. Interestingly, it also finds that as more women enter the European Parliament, men become more liberal in their policy posi-tions, and both women and men then more fully represent women's interests and positions (McEvoy, 2016: 772–6).

The discussion above highlights the complex dynamics of gender politics in practice, making it relevant for our understanding of how group-based interests are expressed in rep-resentative politics. Gender – male, female and non-binary – infuses all representative char-acteristics. In studying women/gender politics in Ireland, we draw attention to one aspect of representative politics, and in so doing, highlight the working of Irish democratic processes and practices from a viewpoint that adds nuance to the rich knowledge base provided by other perspectives. We begin this chapter by taking a detailed look at the pattern of women's representation in social and political decision-making. This is followed by an exploration of the causes and the consequences of women's absence from public life. We chart the gradual inclusion of women's interests – some old, others new – in the political agenda, before con-cluding with a general assessment of current patterns and future challenges.

Women in society

The dearth of women in positions of political power in Ireland is only part of the wider pat-tern of women's absence from, or under-representation in, decision-making centres gener-ally. Socio-cultural research confirms a positive link between women's access to legislatures, female employment levels and societal attitudes towards gender equality (Alexander and Welzel, 2007; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Inglehart *et al.,* 2002). These are factors in the persistent under-representation of women in Irish politics also.

The early years of the state saw the passage of discriminatory constitutional provisions and laws that restricted women's access to employment, accentuated their role in the private sphere, banned birth control and facilitated the second class status of women (Beaumont, 1997). These included Article 41.2.1 of the current (1937) constitution: 'In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.' Even in 1937, this provision was hotly con-tested by a coalition of feminists and trade union activists (Luddy, 2005). By the 1970s, how-ever, women's subservient role and status was challenged (Galligan, 1998; Connolly 2002).

Restrictions on women's employment were lifted and legislation outlawing unequal pay was introduced. In subsequent decades, the proportion of women in the labour force increased. In 2015 the female employment rate stood at 63 per cent with the corresponding figure for men at 75 per cent (Eurostat, 2016). Thus, one of the background reasons for women's under-representation – their low labour force participation – was less relevant.

Caring responsibilities have regularly been identified as depressing women's political and civic participation. The same goes for women's employment patterns. In 2016, employment rates of women and men aged 20–44 were much the same when they had no children (approximately 86 per cent). However, the figure falls to 60 per cent for women when their youngest child is aged three years or under. The comparable figure for men is 82 per cent, representing a gender gap of 22 percentage points (IBEC, 2016: 8). Given the high costs of childcare in Ireland, estimated to be €16,500 per annum in a two-child household (Barry, 2014: 11), it is little surprise that some parents opt out of the labour force. This care work largely falls on women to perform, indicating the persistence of traditional gender roles in Ireland. Many women balance family life and work by engaging in part-time employment. In 2013, women constituted 73 per cent of those working 19 hours per week or fewer, often in low paid jobs (CSO, 2014). The varied level of women's engagement with the workforce, as compared with men's high and continuous employment patterns, goes some way to explaining the persistence of a gender pay gap, measuring 14 per cent in 2014 (Eurostat, 2016). However, policy measures to ease the cost of childcare since 2010 have resulted in a significant growth in publicly-funded childcare places, amounting to over 100,000 places for three- and four-year-olds in 2017 (Ní Aodha, 2017).

Since the 1970s, women have made significant inroads in the professions. This is especially evident in the areas of law and justice. In March 2017, the Minister for Justice, Attorney General, Chief State Solicitor, Garda (police) Commissioner, Director of Public Prosecutions, Chief Justice and chairperson of the Policing Authority were all women. In 2015, female solicitors (4,623) outnumbered male solicitors (4,609), reputed to be 'the first time a female majority has existed in any legal profession anywhere in the world' (Kelly, 2015). The proportion of female gardaí increased to 26 per cent in 2016, up from 19 per cent in 2006, while the number of female sergeants, inspectors, superintendents and chief superintendents doubled in the same time period (*Dáil Debates* 345:16, 28 September 2016). Over a third of all judges were women in 2017, up from 23 per cent in 2009 (see Table 9.1). However, the judicial arena is not immune from sexism. A 2016 Bar of Ireland survey found that just 16 per cent of all senior counsel were women, while two-thirds of women barristers recounted experiencing discrimination during their careers (Keena, 2016).

Table 9.1 Women in the judiciary, 2009–17

Court	2009		2017	
	Total number of judges	Women N (%)	Total number of judges	Women N (%)
Supreme Court	8	2 (25.0)	9	4 (44.4)
Court of Appeal	n/a	n/a	9	2 (22.2)
High Court	38	5 (13.2)	40	13 (32.5)
Circuit Court	38	12 (31.6)	38	15 (39.5)
District Court	62	15 (24.2)	63	21 (33.3)
Total	**146**	**34 (23.3)**	**159**	**55 (34.6)**

Source: www.courts.ie (last accessed 30 June 2017).

The public service is a key employer of women in Ireland, offering job security and flexibility. However, within the highest rank of the civil service, a gender imbalance persists, despite improvements over the years. In 2007, four women occupied the top position of secretary general (25 per cent), while a further twelve (13 per cent) held the position of deputy secretary general or assistant secretary (CSO, 2007: 22). Since the economic crisis, the civil service workforce has reduced in size, but women retained and increased their presence in senior positions: in January 2017, 29 per cent of secretary general positions, and 28 per cent of deputy secretary general or assistant secretary positions, were held by women (see Table 9.2). Furthermore, over a third of posts at principal officer level were held by women, indicating a strong supply of women well positioned to contest future promotional opportunities. Yet, there is no room for complacency. As Table 9.2 demonstrates, there is a 'largely pyramidal [structure] with relatively few women compared to men rising to senior positions' (National Women's Strategy, 2013: 10, 51). In January 2017 the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced measures to address the under-representation of women at the senior levels of the civil service, including a 50–50 gender target for appointments at senior levels.

Statistics on state board membership in 2013 indicated that 36 per cent of positions were held by women; close to, but still short of, the target of 40 per cent originally set by government as far back as 1993. To accelerate gender balance on state boards, in 2014, the government introduced new measures, which included the development of a talent bank of women willing to serve as board members, as well as a renewed commitment to the 40 per cent target, accompanied by an aim to achieve this by the end of 2016.[2] However, in January 2017 a survey revealed that just over half (54 per cent) of boards had yet to reach the 40 per cent target (Doyle, 2017).

Women's representation on company boards also remains low. In 2016, just 13 per cent of board members of Ireland's largest publicly listed companies were women, below the EU average of 21 per cent (European Commission, 2016). To address the under-representation of women on company boards, the EU set targets to ensure that at least 40 per cent of board members of publicly listed companies are women by 2020. In Ireland, a potential pool of suitably qualified women is available to fill these positions, as evidenced in the

Table 9.2 Civil service grades by biological sex, 2013–17

Grade	Women		Men	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*
Secretary general (2017)	5	29.4	12	70.6
Deputy and second secretary (2015)	5	23.8	16	76.2
Assistant secretary (2015)	60	28.0	155	72.0
Principal officer (2015)	452	36.2	798	63.8
Assistant principal (2015)	1,518	44.2	1,915	55.8
Administrative officer (2013)	123	56.2	96	43.8
Higher executive officer (2013)	1,686	53.2	1,484	46.8
Executive officer (2013)	3,338	66.6	1,674	33.4
Staff officer (2013)	1,239	78.6	338	21.4
Clerical officer (2013)	8,383	77.3	2,457	22.7

Sources: 2017 figure authors' own; 2015 figures calculated from information available from *Dáil Debates* 885: 2, 2 July 2015; 2013 figures from Central Statistics Office (http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wamii/womenandmeninireland2013/socialcohesionlifestyleslist/socialcohesionlifestyles/#d.en.65499), accessed 27 February 2017.

proportion of female graduates. Women accounted for 52 per cent of all graduates in 2014 (Higher Education Authority, 2016a). Yet, just 14 per cent of Irish companies are headed by a female chief executive, and while 34 per cent of junior level management positions are held by women, their representation falls off at each subsequent senior grade (Taylor, 2016). In addition to childcare, organisational culture, in the form of gender biases, acts as a barrier to women's career advancement. This is very evident in the field of academia, where high profile cases have exposed gender discrimination in the area of promotion.[3] While gender balance exists at lecturer level, just 19 per cent of professors are women. To address the lack of women in senior levels of academia, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) supports the introduction of mandatory gender quotas for promotion in higher education institutions (Higher Education Authority, 2016b).

Women in political institutions

In the late nineteenth century, Irish women campaigning for the vote saw it as the key to increasing women's influence in national life. The Irish suffrage movement, strongly influenced by the women's franchise campaign in Britain, sought to bring a feminist voice to Irish politics. However, the strengthening independence movement led to this aim being joined, and arguably overshadowed, by the demand for national sovereignty promoted by prominent Sinn Féin women (Cullen, 1997: 272). The supremacy of the nationalist discourse over that of feminism is important in understanding the low representation of women subsequent to independence. While winning the vote in 1918[4] was presented as a victory for feminists in Britain, the extension of the franchise to women in Ireland was interpreted as a step on the way to self-government. From this point on, women's place in political life was linked to their association with the 'national question', and among the few women who made it to political office in the post-1918 decades, many had close family and personal connections with the revolutionary era (Galligan 2017: 159–63). In the following sections, we trace the participation of women in Irish political life to the present, focusing on their representation in national and local politics, and their involvement in political parties.

National level

When people are asked to reflect on the role of women in Irish politics, the names of Constance Markievicz, Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese readily come to mind. Their accomplishments serve as milestones in the history of women's political representation in Ireland. Constance Markievicz was the first woman parliamentarian in Ireland, and her appointment as Minister for Labour in 1919, though largely a symbolic appointment, placed her among the first women worldwide to achieve such political office. Mary Robinson's election as the country's first female president in 1990 made Ireland only the second country in Europe (after Iceland) to have a woman head of state elected by popular vote. In 1997, Mary McAleese became the first woman in the world to follow another woman into the office of elected head of state (see Appendix 3 for biographical details of leading political figures). These achievements placed women firmly on the political map in Ireland and brought international recognition to the country for the advancement of women in politics. However, these highlights are more symbolic than substantial. The role of president is primarily ceremonial (see Chapter 7), and Markievicz's appointment as Minister for Labour in 1919 was emblematic of the contemporary fusion of the nationalist and suffrage causes. It would be 60 years before another woman served in cabinet.

The reality is that women have been grossly under-represented in Irish politics. Of the approximately 1,300 people elected to Dáil Éireann between 1918 and 2016, just 114 (9 per cent) were women. Between the 1992 and 2011 general elections, the number of women TDs increased by a mere five, to 25 (see Table 9.3). With only 15 per cent of women TDs, Ireland was in 107th position in a global league table for women's parliamentary representation at the end of 2011, a significant drop from its 1996 position (39th).[5] The drop of nearly 70 places is primarily due to the surge in countries adopting affirmative measures, such as gender quotas, following the United Nations (UN) Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995.

The stagnation in growth in Irish women's political representation, up to and including the 2011 general election, drew attention from international observers. In the comments on Ireland's progress under the UN's Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), concern was expressed about the 'significant under-representation of women in elected political structures, particularly in the Oireachtas' (United Nations, 2005: 8). It encouraged the State 'to take sustained measures to increase the representation of women in elected bodies' (United Nations, 2005: 8). In Ireland though, despite much rhetoric about the need for more women in politics, politicians and political parties largely shied away from advocating equality measures, such as gender quotas, preferring instead the softer strategy of gender targets (Galligan and Wilford, 1999; Buckley, 2013).

The economic downturn of 2008 was a catalyst for change. In the febrile political atmosphere that followed the banking and financial crisis, there were ubiquitous demands for political reform.[6] Oireachtas committees[7] were established to review the political system. To address the under-representation of women in politics, proposals to introduce gender-balancing mechanisms in candidate selection processes were made, recommending that state funding of political parties be tied to the proportion of women candidates.[8] These recommendations were to be pivotal in the legislation that followed (Buckley, 2013). In May 2011, the Fine Gael–Labour coalition government announced its intention to link the public funding of political parties to the proportion of women candidates selected at general elections. The

Table 9.3 Women candidates and TDs at elections, 1977–2016

Election	Candidates			Deputies		
	Total	*Women*	*%*	*Total*	*Women*	*%*
1977	376	25	6.6	148	6	4.1
1981	404	41	10.1	166	11	6.6
1982 (Feb)	366	35	9.6	166	8	4.8
1982 (Nov)	365	31	8.5	166	14	8.4
1987	466	65	13.9	166	14	8.4
1989	371	52	14.0	166	13	7.8
1992	482	89	18.5	166	20	12.0
1997	484	96	19.8	166	20	12.0
2002	463	84	18.1	166	22	13.2
2007	470	82	17.4	166	22	13.2
2011	566	86	15.2	166	25	15.1
2016	551	163	29.6	158	35	22.2

Sources: Authors' calculations. Note: the actual number of women contesting the 1987 general election is distorted due to the fact that one independent candidate, Barbara Hyland, ran in thirteen constituencies. For 2007 figures, Gallagher (2008: 80).

Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act, 2012, incentivises political parties to select women candidates by specifying that payments to political parties 'shall be reduced by 50 per cent, unless at least 30 per cent of the candidates whose candidatures were authenticated by the qualified party at the preceding general election were women and at least 30 per cent were men'. The 30 per cent gender threshold came into effect at the 2016 general election and is due to rise to 40 per cent from 2023 onwards.

Candidate selection quotas are primarily used in European and South American states and can be adopted through legislation or voluntarily by a political party. Aside from Ireland, eight other EU member states use legislative candidate gender quotas for elections to their lower houses of parliament: Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. Like Ireland, Croatia, France and Portugal use financial provisions to incentivise parties to comply with gender quota laws. In Belgium, Greece, Poland, Slovenia and Spain political parties that do not select the requisite proportion of women candidates face rejections of their list as invalid. Voluntary gender quotas are more frequently used in Scandinavian countries, where they have been in use since the late 1970s. A third form of gender quota – the reserved seat quota – is primarily used in African and Asian contexts. This quota specifies that a certain number or proportion of seats in parliament are reserved for women. They are usually adopted via a country's constitution. Following the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, which specified the inclusion of women in peace negotiations, it is not uncommon to see reserved seats adopted in post-conflict societies, such as Afghanistan. To ensure the effectiveness of gender quotas, a growing number of political parties and nation-states worldwide have introduced extra features to their quota regimes, including placement mandates that specify where on the ballot paper women candidates are to be listed, and recommendations that women candidates are selected in winnable seats.

The introduction of gender quotas in Ireland proved a success in 2016 (Buckley *et al.*, 2016). The number of women candidates increased by 90 per cent compared with 2011, and the number of women elected by 40 per cent. Following the election, women's political representation in Dáil Éireann was 22 per cent, demonstrating the capacity of gender quotas to engender fast-track change in women's descriptive political representation (Buckley *et al.*, 2016: 201). However, there is no room for complacency. When we place Ireland in a comparative context, it is clear that a male super-majority still exists in Irish politics. Comparing the proportion of women in Dáil Éireann with that of the lower houses of parliament in other EU member states in 2017, the Dáil emerges as one of the least gender-balanced legislatures (see Table 9.4).

Male domination of Irish politics is also clear to see when reviewing government office-holding. Of the 199 people appointed cabinet ministers between 1919 and June 2017, 91 per cent were men. Only 18 women had ever served in cabinet up to that time. With the exception of the largely symbolic appointment of Constance Markievicz as Minister for Labour in 1919, no woman held a cabinet post until December 1979, when Máire Geoghegan-Quinn (Fianna Fáil) became Minister for the Gaeltacht. Although the proportion of woman attaining ministerial office has grown (see Table 9.5), government in Ireland continues to be a male-dominated space. Despite Enda Kenny's pledge in December 2014 to have gender parity in ministerial appointments following the 2016 general election,[9] some 75 per cent of his ministerial appointees (cabinet and ministers of state) were men.

When women are appointed to cabinet government in Ireland, a gendered pattern is evident in the ministerial portfolios assigned to women with female cabinet ministers more likely to receive portfolios relating to social affairs (48 per cent of cases) than economic

Table 9.4 Women's parliamentary representation in EU28, 2017

Country	% female representation
Sweden	43.6
Finland	42.0
Spain	39.1
Belgium	38.0
Netherlands	38.0
Denmark	37.4
Germany	37.0
Slovenia	36.7
Portugal	34.8
Italy	31.0
Austria	30.6
United Kingdom	30.0
Luxembourg	28.3
Poland	28.0
Estonia	26.7
France	25.8
Republic of Ireland	*22.2*
Lithuania	21.3
Romania	20.7
Czech Republic	20.0
Slovakia	20.0
Croatia	19.9
Bulgaria	19.2
Greece	18.3
Cyprus	17.9
Latvia	16.0
Malta	12.5
Hungary	10.1

Table 9.5 Ministerial office-holding by gender, *1977–2017*

Government	Year	Men (N)	Women (N)	Women (%)
Fianna Fáil	1977	21	1	4.5
Fianna Fáil	1979	29	1	3.3
Fine Gael–Labour	1981	26	2	7.1
Fianna Fáil	1982	24	1	4.0
Fine Gael–Labour	1982	28	3	9.7
Fianna Fáil	1987	28	2	6.7
Fianna Fáil–PDs	1989	27	3	10.0
Fianna Fáil–PDs	1992	28	3	10.0
Fianna Fáil–Labour	1993	25	5	16.7
Fine Gael–Labour–Democratic Left	1994	24	6	20.0
Fianna Fáil–PDs	1997	26	5	16.1
Fianna Fáil–PDs	2002	28	4	12.5
Fianna Fáil–Greens–PDs	2007	29	6	17.1
Fianna Fáil–Greens–Independents	2008	30	5	14.3
Fine Gael–Labour	2011	24	6	20.0
Fine Gael–Independents	2016	24	8	25.0
Fine Gael–Independents	2017	27	7	20.6
All		**448**	**68**	**13.2**

Note: Ministerial office-holding includes cabinet ministers and ministers of state.

Source: Authors' own calculations.

ones (24 per cent). Male ministers have been less likely to hold social affairs portfolios (17 per cent) while, in contrast, they dominate economic and foreign policy briefs (52 per cent). According to Connolly (2013: 376), the continuing tendency to engage in gender clustering of ministerial portfolios in Ireland is high by international standards. Given that ministerial appointments are made within the context of party interests and dynamics, Connolly (2013) argues that the type of portfolio assigned to women is a function of their position within their parties, as well as the gendered ethos of those parties, party leaders and government, rather than a conscious act of discrimination.

Box 9.1 Firsts for women in politics

1918	Women over 30 entitled to vote for the first time in parliamentary elections; first woman elected (Constance Markievicz, Sinn Féin)
1919	First woman government minister (Constance Markievicz), though the position was largely symbolic as Ireland was not self-governing
1923	Votes for all women
1937	First woman party leader (Margaret Buckley, Sinn Féin)
1969	First woman on a parliamentary committee (Evelyn Owens, Labour)
1977	First woman junior minister (Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, Fianna Fáil)
1979	First woman government minister (Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, Fianna Fáil)
1982	First woman Cathaoirleach (speaker) of the Seanad (Tras Honan, Fianna Fáil)
1982	First woman chairperson of a parliamentary committee (Nora Owen, Fine Gael)
1990	First woman president (Mary Robinson)
1993	First woman leader of a party with Dáil representation (Mary Harney, PDs)
1997	First woman Tánaiste (Mary Harney, PDs)
2011	First woman Attorney General (Máire Whelan)

Local government

The pattern of women's representation in local government has been similar to that at national level. Women's local council representation has been consistently low, reaching a modest 21 per cent in 2014. This wide gap in gender representation on local councils is relevant as local government service is one of the main routes to national politics. Following the 2016 general election, close to 90 per cent of women elected were local councillors at some stage in their political careers. The corresponding figure for male TDs was 85 per cent, indicating the significance of local government service to both women's and men's electoral prospects. However, as seen in Table 9.6, men dominate local councils, meaning that few women have an opportunity to acquire the political experience and networks essential for candidate selection and election at the national level (Buckley *et al.*, 2014; 2015). The legislative gender quota does not apply at local elections. However, there are signs of a quota diffusion effect (Buckley and Hofman, 2015). At the 2014 local elections, female candidacies increased as political parties set informal gender targets as they prepared for the implementation of gender quotas at the 2016 general election. Gender targets ranged from 25 per cent (Fine Gael) to 33 per cent (Fianna Fáil). Smaller, newer and leftist parties tended to meet their targets more easily than the long-established and centre-right parties of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, emphasising the role of political parties in encouraging or encumbering women's candidacy.

Table 9.6 Women councillors elected at local elections, 1974–2014

Election year	Women's seat-holding (%)
1974	6
1979	6
1985	8
1991	12
1999	15
2004	19
2009	17
2014	21

Source: Buckley and Hofman (2015: 89); Manning (1987: 158–60).

Political parties

By 2010, Irish political parties had come to recognise that interventions were required to secure women's place on candidate lists. However, few were willing to commit to a definite gender quota, preferring instead the more fluid concept of 'gender targets'. The reluctance to adopt gender quotas often stemmed from 'rank and file' opposition, often at odds with the party leadership on the best way forward to facilitate women's candidacy. Evidence of divergent views on gender quotas was apparent. In 2010, the Fine Gael leadership proposed the introduction of gender quotas in its political reform statement 'New Politics'. However, the proposal was widely resisted within the party with objectors claiming 'that the introduction of gender quotas would contravene the principles of equal opportunity, fairness and democracy' (Buckley, 2013: 347). Consequently, Fine Gael rolled back on a commitment to gender quotas in its 2011 general election manifesto. Similarly, in Fianna Fáil, a motion to support electoral gender quotas, supported by the party's elected representatives, 'was defeated at the party's Árd Fheis in March 2012 with delegates preferring the notion of "merit" as grounds for selection' (Buckley, 2013: 351). Even within Labour, a party that has supported the use of interventionist measures since the 1980s, and which negotiated the inclusion of legislative gender quotas in the 2011 Fine Gael–Labour Programme for Government, some resistance was evident; Joanna Tuffy, one of the party's TDs, was among the most vocal opponents of gender quotas.

All parties formally supported the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012, but the grassroots resistance outlined here was to re-emerge in the course of selection conventions for the 2016 general election (discussed later). However, of 155 selection conventions held across the four main political parties, just 12 directives from party headquarters specifying the gender of the candidates to be selected were issued. In effect, party managers and electoral strategists were able to ensure that the convention process would deliver an outcome in line with party gender plans. Thus, the inaugural roll-out of legislative gender quotas in Ireland was a relatively smooth process (Buckley *et al.,* 2016).

Besides the electoral arena, there has been a growing consciousness among political parties of the need to bring more women into internal decision-making fora too. Research indicates that party service at national executive level enhances women's electoral ambitions, mainly through socialising prospective candidates into the norms and rules of political decision-making, providing future candidates with a profile within the party and enabling party leaders to evaluate the electoral potential of senior female party members (Kittilson, 2006).

The level of women's participation in party politics has remained broadly static in terms of membership since the 1990s, with women comprising between 25 and 40 per cent of party members, a common pattern across the world (Buckley and McGing 2011; Gauja and van Haute, 2015: 194).

In recent years, all parties have become more aware of the institutional obstacles to women's political ambitions and have undertaken various publicly funded projects to address these issues. The heightened consciousness of the gender makeup of parties has benefited women in the senior ranks. Fianna Fáil's powerful Committee of 20, elected at its annual conference, returns equal numbers of women and men through elections based on separate male and female slates for 10 seats each. Labour has a 30 per cent gender quota for membership of its executive board and central council positions, while of the six executive board members elected by party members, three must be women. At least 30 per cent of Sinn Féin's *ard chomhairle* must be women (through co-option, if necessary). Of the 12 *ard chomhairle* members chosen by the party membership, equal numbers of women and men must be elected. Fine Gael's national executive also shows some signs of gender balancing, with parliamentary and regional representatives including at least one woman in each case. Gradually, the numbers of women holding positions on the national executives of political parties have come to reflect their party membership rates; as of March 2017, 50 per cent of members of the national executive of the Green Party were female, with the figures for other parties being 43 per cent for Sinn Féin, 37 per cent for Labour, 33 per cent for Fine Gael and 28 per cent for Fianna Fáil (data supplied by the respective parties).

Awareness of the need to support women seeking political office has also grown. All political parties engage in capacity-building programmes, encouraging women's candidacy through training and mentoring programmes, as well as working with Women for Election, a non-partisan organisation offering support programmes to women seeking political office. However, party expenditure on the promotion of women remains low. In 2015, just three per cent of all expenditure went on women's participation in politics.[10]

Women's hold on constituency officer positions shows little change from the traditional pattern, according to which, women have held supportive rather than leadership positions. In 2017, women held just 15 per cent of constituency chair positions within Fine Gael, yet occupied half (51 per cent) of constituency secretary posts. In Labour, one fifth (21 per cent) of constituency chair positions are held by women while women account for 35 per cent of constituency secretaries. In Sinn Féin, only 17 per cent of constituency chair positions are held by women whereas women predominate among constituency secretary positions (72 per cent). While a breakdown of constituency office-holding in Fianna Fáil is unavailable, of the total of 935 positions within Fianna Fáil's constituency and cumann organisations, 213 (23 per cent) are held by women.

The under-representation of women in constituency leadership positions may be indicative of traditional expectations regarding women's political involvement at the grassroots level. These attitudes contribute to a local reluctance to encourage the ambitions of aspiring women candidates, stymieing women's access to local council politics. *The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017–2020*, published in April 2017 (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017), acknowledged the need for action to 'be taken to increase the participation of women in local government' (57). However, it did not commit to concrete initiatives, such as gender quotas, to redress the continuing under-representation of women in local politics, preferring instead a loose commitment to 'investigate potential supports to promote the participation of women' (59) in future local elections.

Box 9.2 Leading women politicians

Irish politics has been largely male-dominated since the foundation of the state. Only since the late 1970s have women politicians gained access to any of the levers of power. Some of the prominent women in Irish politics include:

Mary Robinson (born 1944) was the first woman elected President in 1990, with the backing of Labour, the Workers' Party and the Green Party. She had previously served as Senator between 1969 and 1989, elected via the University of Dublin constituency. During her time in the Seanad, as well as during her career as a barrister, she was an advocate for law reform on a number of gender equality issues, including equal pay and access to contraception. Between 1997 and 2002, she served as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Mary McAleese (born 1951) was elected President in 1997, standing as the Fianna Fáil candidate with the support also of the Progressive Democrats. She was returned unopposed for a second term in 2004.

Máire Geoghegan-Quinn (born 1950) was appointed to cabinet in 1979. She was the first woman to hold such office since the largely symbolic appointment of Constance Markievicz to cabinet in 1919. She was TD for Galway West from 1975 until her retirement from electoral politics in 1997. During her time in politics, she held various ministries including Gaeltacht, Transport and Communications and Justice. After national politics, she went on to have a prominent career in Europe, serving on the European Court of Auditors between 2000 and 2010 and as EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science between 2010 and 2014.

Mary Harney (born 1953) was the first women appointed Tánaiste in 1997. Originally a member of Fianna Fáil, she left the party in 1985 and became a founding member of the Progressive Democrats. She served as its party leader between 1993 and 2006. Following the disbandment of the party in 2009 she became an independent TD and, in the process, became only the second independent TD to hold a cabinet position in the history of the state. She served as TD for the constituencies of Dublin Mid-West and Dublin South-West over a 30-year period from 1981 to 2011. She held a number of cabinet ministries, including Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Health and Children.

Mary O'Rourke (born 1937) was a Fianna Fáil TD for the constituencies of Longford–Westmeath and Westmeath between 1982 and 2002, and again from 2007 to 2011. During her time in national politics, she served in a number of cabinet ministries including Education, Health, and Public Enterprise. She was the first woman to serve as deputy party leader of Fianna Fáil.

Mary Coughlan (born 1965) was a Fianna Fáil TD for Donegal South-West between 1987 and 2011. She is one of just four women to serve as Tánaiste, and the second woman to be appointed to this position, serving in the role between 2008 and 2011. Of the 17 women who have served in cabinet in Ireland, she has held the highest number of cabinet ministries, including Social and Family Affairs; Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Enterprise, Trade and Employment; and Education and Skills.

Joan Burton (born 1949) was first elected as a Labour TD for Dublin West in 1992, and though she lost her seat in 1997, she regained it in 2002 and held it at each of the

next three elections. In 2014 she became the first woman to be elected leader of the Labour Party and the third woman to be appointed Tánaiste. She served as Minister for Social Protection from 2011 to 2016.

Frances Fitzgerald (born 1950) was re-elected as a Fine Gael TD for Dublin Mid-West in 2016, having first taken a seat there in 2011. She previously served as TD for the constituency of Dublin South-East between 1992 and 2002. In May 2016, she was appointed Tánaiste. During her political career to date, she has served as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Minister for Justice and Equality, and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Katherine Zappone (born 1953) was elected an independent TD for Dublin South-West in 2016. In May 2016, she was appointed Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, becoming the first openly gay woman to serve in cabinet in Ireland. She also became only the second independent woman TD to hold a cabinet ministry and the sixth person to hold a ministry as a first-time TD in the history of the state.

Causes of the under-representation of women

So far, we have examined the extent of the under-representation of women in politics and other centres of decision-making. We now look at possible reasons for this under-representation. In doing so, we will discuss some of the factors that have acted as barriers to women's participation in public life, beginning with socio-cultural attitudes. We follow this with a review of party selection practices to assess the extent of gender inequality in party institutional structures. We then outline the barriers that women face in creating a local presence, which is an essential first step to a career in politics.

Socio-cultural attitudes

To understand women's under-representation in politics in Ireland, one needs to understand Irish political culture (see Chapter 2 for a general overview of this). The turbulent decades at the beginning of the twentieth century afforded women the opportunity to integrate a feminist consciousness within nationalism. But as noted in the earlier pages of this chapter, the policies and laws of the new state unravelled women's status as equal citizens, and bestowed on men a patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1996) that reinforced their dominant position in the gender order in Irish society (Buckley *et al.,* 2013).

The influence of Roman Catholic teachings conveyed a traditional view of women's social role and prioritised home and family-based duties (Randall and Smyth, 1987). The role of wife and mother was valorised, essentially marginalising women from the public sphere. These socially conservative views shaped attitudes towards women in politics, as is evident in some male politicians' comments on women politicians. Laffan (2014: 166) notes that when republican women campaigned against William T. Cosgrave's re-election as president of the executive council in 1923, he is reported to have said they 'should have rosaries in their hands or be at home with knitting needles'. Similarly, Ferriter (2008: 189) recounts the views of Fianna Fáil TD Timothy O'Connor who, when asked for his thoughts on women's participation in politics in a Women's Political Association survey in 1977, advised 'in my own county the women are doing a great job of work in keeping their homes going and bringing up their families. This I think is just what Almighty God intended them to do'.

Faced with such socio-cultural attitudes, it is not surprising that so few women put themselves forward for election in the period between 1922 and 1977. During this time, just 24 women were elected to Dáil Éireann, 80 per cent of whom were related to a former male TD. Women were heavily reliant on male networks to enter politics, an access route that Galligan *et al.* (2000) describe as the 'widow's and daughter's inheritance'. From 1977 to 1992, there was a perceptible increase in the number of women contesting and winning Dáil elections with the proportion of women candidates and TDs increasing threefold, though from a low base (see Table 9.3). However, as noted previously, progress stagnated after this period of growth. Perplexingly, this stagnation coincided with an era of greater equality for women and the growing feminisation of the workforce, factors usually associated with increased women's participation in politics (Buckley *et al.*, 2015).

For mothers with political ambitions, the practicality of pursuing this time-consuming career in tandem with child-rearing is an issue of greater significance than it is for their male colleagues. Data from a comprehensive survey of women legislators pointed to family responsibilities as the most significant source of difficulty in pursuing a political career – demands that are exacerbated when a politician is from a constituency outside Dublin (Galligan *et al.*, 2000). It indicates the continuing influence of traditional cultural attitudes in Ireland, even among women who have managed to get elected to the highest legislative office, confirming that culture is an important ingredient in shaping women's political opportunities.

However, culture is just one of the causes of the under-representation of women in Irish politics, and indeed, cannot solely explain why gains in women's political representation between 1977 and 1992 were not continued in the following years (Buckley *et al.*, 2015). Thus, we must widen our analytical gaze to examine institutional factors, such as party candidate selection procedures, and how they interact with informal institutional dynamics, such as localism, to stymie women's access into politics.

Candidate selection

Explanations for women's political under-representation have focused on internal party selection processes as the single most important obstacle to women's political participation (Elgood *et al.*, 2002). As the gate-keepers to political office, political parties exercise considerable influence on the extent of women's candidacy. In comparison to single-member district election systems, studies suggest that PR-STV has the potential to increase female candidature due to the availability of more opportunities in constituencies with higher seat magnitudes (Buckley *et al.*, 2014: 473; McGing, 2013; Matland and Taylor, 1997; Kaminsky and White, 2007; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). However, constituency size is relatively small, ranging from three to five seats (see Chapter 4), encouraging political parties to favour established and incumbent candidates, usually male, rather than risk fragmenting the party vote excessively by running additional candidates. While women's membership of the four main political parties averaged 34 per cent in 2011, their average rate of female candidacy was just 19 per cent in that year's general election. Of course, not all party women (or men) will put themselves forward for selection at conventions, but the gap between women's membership and candidacy rates indicates that women are overlooked in favour of their male party colleagues.

Viewing candidate selection through a feminist analytical lens uncovers the gendered underpinnings of the informal practices that guide this institutional process. Emphasis is placed on localness and incumbency, characteristics that tend to favour 'local sons' (Kenny, 2013). Developing a local base and network requires time and money. As highlighted in

earlier sections of this chapter, women continue to be the primary care providers in Irish families and many opt out of paid employment to undertake these responsibilities. Thus, in comparison to men, women have unequal access to the key political resources of time and money to develop local bases, which places them at a disadvantage in selection contests. Likewise, incumbency disadvantages women. Incumbency confers instant name recognition and track record on the bearers, garnering them levels of support that challengers find difficult to muster (Benoit and Marsh, 2008). Given that the majority of incumbents are men, female candidates operate at a disadvantage in both selection and election contests.

To address this gender inequality in candidate selection processes, political parties were legally bound to implement the quota law passed in 2012. The selection of women candidates in this context led to claims that women were unmerited candidates, selected solely on the basis of their biological sex rather than ability and political experience. However, as Buckley *et al.* (2016: 192) show, some 51 per cent of women candidates were political office-holders at the time of the general election in comparison to 60 per cent of male candidates, demonstrating that the women who ran were already politically experienced. The issuing of gender directives by party headquarters at the 2016 general election led to tensions with the party grassroots, but this is nothing new in Irish politics. At election after election, constituency level parties strive to protect their selection autonomy against what they perceive as centralised democracy within political parties (Reidy, 2016).

Local base and networks

In an Irish context, one of the most important determinants of political success is the strength of a candidate's local base (Kavanagh, 2007: 186). One of the most effective methods of establishing this is through local government service. In 2017, 86 per cent of TDs in the 32nd Dáil were councillors at some stage of their political careers (Gallagher, 2016: 153). However, as we have seen, there are relatively few women in local government. One way of overcoming this disadvantage is through the development of local networks based on occupation. Professions such as teaching, medicine, law and business are generally seen as conferring status within a local community. They involve extensive interaction with the local electorate, and can be used as a foundation for personal bailiwick-building. In addition, these occupations bring economic independence and relative flexibility of time, two additional advantages for a person ambitious to hold political office. It is no accident then that teaching is the most prevalent occupation among the women TDs in the 32nd Dáil. Just under 30 per cent of women TDs are teachers, an occupation that provides aspirants with significant local networking opportunities, and the time in which to consolidate these networks (Buckley *et al.,* 2016: 200). However, women TDs' working lives are diverse, including other occupations with the potential to generate a high profile, such as trade union organisers, lawyers, and business women. These forms of employment combine three important factors facilitating political career-building: income security and financial independence, opportunities for local contact, and time in which to pursue support-building activities.

Consequences of the under-representation of women

The term 'representation', when used in the context of women's presence in parliamentary assemblies is taken to have two different, yet related, meanings. One is the representation of interests, or substantive representation: do women represent women's concerns, are they expected to do so by the voting public, and do they feel they have a specific responsibility to

speak for women's interests? The second addresses the representativeness of the legislature, descriptive representation – is a parliament truly democratic if it excludes women or only minimally incorporates them among its members? In this section, we focus on these questions to assess their application in an Irish context before going on to examine the extent to which women's interests have been institutionalised and mainstreamed into the policy agenda in Ireland.

Substantive representation – representing women's interests

Studies of women parliamentarians appear to indicate that women legislators seek in some way to speak and act for women in the community, and they also show that there is some expectation among women voters that women politicians will share their concerns (Celis, 2014: 59–61). Indeed, many of the discriminatory policies enacted against women in Ireland, from 1922 onwards, are often seen as the product of a male-dominated political order. It is clear that during the 1970s, when women's parliamentary representation was almost negligible, government and parliament were, at best, only partially responsive to the growing voice of gender reform. The articulation and representation of women's rights fell to the emerging feminist movement, a reform-minded judiciary (see Chapter 3), and the European Commission (see Chapter 14). These agencies were more important catalysts in the initiation of change in the status of women than either politicians or parliament, suggesting that the political system was forced to respond to external pressures rather than initiating change. While European directives on employment and judicial decisions on individual rights acted as an important spur to specific legislative changes, the re-emergence of the women's movement in the early 1970s prompted a public discussion of discrimination against women in law and public policy.

It can be argued that women's lobby groups have had a more immediate influence on specific aspects of public policy than the efforts of women TDs. In 1972, the Commission on the Status of Women recommended that action be taken to remove discrimination against women in the areas of the home, employment, social welfare, taxation, family law, jury service, public life and education. Over four decades later, the issues have evolved, with consideration given to issues such as advancing socio-economic equality for women and girls, women in leadership, embedding gender equality in decision-making, and enhancing women's and girls' mental and physical health and active citizenship (Department of Justice and Equality, 2016).

One issue that has remained contentious is that of abortion. Since the constitution was amended in 1983 in a way that was intended to prohibit any legalisation of abortion, the issue has been the subject of repeated court cases, the findings of which have called for political responses (Bacik, 2013). One sad case above all mobilised public support for change. Savita Halappanavar presented to a hospital in Galway in October 2012 suffering from a miscarriage and died from complications shortly thereafter. The crux of the issue was that medical doctors treating her refused to perform an abortion due to uncertainty around the legal protection for those performing terminations. Media attention to the tragic story mobilised widespread support for the deceased woman, and the government responded by introducing legislation to clarify the protection available to doctors. However, it was not a sufficient response to satisfy a new generation of citizens. Halappanavar's death re-mobilised a coalition of civil society groups that had lain dormant for two decades along with a new generation of citizens in a coalition to repeal the eighth amendment to the constitution. This amendment, passed in 1983 after a bitter campaign, provided for the equal right to life of mother and unborn child, and it was interpreted by the Supreme Court in the 1992 X case in a manner not foreseen by proponents of the amendment (see Box 3.2, p. 00).

The emergence of a repeal coalition also spurred pro-life groups to mount a vigorous defence of the constitutional status quo. In 2015, a private members bill tabled by independent socialist TD Clare Daly, sought to provide for abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality. The bill was defeated, with Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour voting against it, guided by the advice of the Attorney General that the bill was unconstitutional, and Sinn Féin abstaining. Yet, the issue remained a live one. It was raised during the 2016 election campaign, with a pledge to repeal the eighth amendment in the Labour, Sinn Féin and Green Party manifestos. The Fine Gael manifesto committed to referring the issue to a citizens' assembly, with a view to determining the extent of a consensus for constitutional change (Fine Gael, 2016: 71–2). At the same time, some independent candidates spoke against reform of the constitution. Nonetheless, it remained a party commitment, and became part of the negotiations on government formation (O'Malley, 2016: 270). In the following months, the United Nations Human Rights Council recommended a repeal of the restrictive abortion provision (Fitzgerald, 2016) and some members of the government openly favoured a repeal of the eighth amendment. Following a defeat of a private members' bill on 27 October 2016, seeking to repeal this amendment, proposed by Ruth Coppinger of the Anti-Austerity Alliance (subsequently renamed Solidarity), the citizens' assembly at its inaugural meeting on 26–27 November 2016 agreed to dedicate four of its meetings to the topic. In April 2017, the citizens' assembly recommended a liberalisation of the state's abortion laws.

Of importance too, is the internationalisation of the domestic gender equality agenda, influenced by government commitments to progress on United Nations and European Union equality policies. The importance of international obligations is that they require the Irish government to respond in a proactive manner to progressively effect gender equality. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women repeatedly exhorted Ireland to adopt 'temporary special measures' to increase women's legislative representation. This external pressure, aligned with national debates and lobbying, resulted in the adoption of gender quotas in Irish political life. In September 2016, Ireland accepted, in full or part, 84 per cent of the 262 policy recommendations from the UN evaluation of the government's sixth and seventh combined periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Of the 41 recommendations not accepted, almost one half (19) dealt with issues of reproductive rights and abortion.[11] These external fora also provide women's civil society representatives and equality institutions independent of government (such as the Irish Human Rights Commission) with a platform to present alternative analyses of women's situation to that of the state. These shadow reports are considered carefully by the relevant international body, and their contents are used to frame critical questions to Irish government representatives.

Descriptive representation – women in parliament

For long, then, the representation of women's interests has largely been conducted by voices outside the legislative system, through lobbying, pressure, and international frameworks, forcing a generally reluctant government to respond. Nonetheless, there have been feminist voices within the Dáil seeking to address women-specific issues in health, family matters, gender-based violence, employment opportunities and, less frequently, women in decision-making. As more women enter national politics, and as the number of women and men from centre-left parties increases, gender equality issues have come more distinctly to the fore, of which the issue of repeal of the eighth amendment is but one example. Other issues to come onto the floor of the 32nd Dáil, following the 2016 election, included gender reassignment,

pension equality, gender balance in decision-making and equality proofing of budgets, all demonstrating the diversity of issues being raised by representatives. Thus, there is a range of evidence emerging to indicate that having more women in parliament can have an effect on the style and substance of political debate. In January 2017, a women's caucus was established in Leinster House, led by Green Party TD, Catherine Martin. This initiative followed hot on the heels of a similar move in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and reflects a growing trend in specialised parliamentary bodies dealing with gender equality matters (Sawer and Grace, 2016).

However, as more women enter parliaments across the world, there is no consistent evidence of a continual move towards more gender equality policy outputs. Indeed, Dahlerup (2014: 155) notes in relation to Scandinavia that there was a greater commitment to feminism and feminist values among women representatives in the 1980s than in the 2000s, even though there are more women in parliament now. She argues that progress in terms of women's numerical representation cannot be automatically linked with a more woman-friendly parliament and with parliamentary outcomes sensitive to the redress of gender inequalities. This also underlines the complex relationship between gender, ideology and 'competing' identity interests that, as the case of Northern Ireland illustrates, fragments women's political claims (Galligan, 2013).

The institutionalisation of women's interests

Gradually, as issues of women's rights and status in society came onto the political agenda in Ireland, political structures evolved and institutionalised the expression of these demands. Since 1993, there has been a cabinet minister for equality, with this brief constituting part of a larger portfolio, usually Justice. Recent commitments to gender mainstreaming have brought about renewed efforts to combat domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. In January 2017, the Minister for Justice and Equality announced plans to introduce legislation to define sexual consent (Bardon, 2017), gender proofing of national budgets and the gender proofing of fiscal plans. The Gender Recognition Act and Marriage Act (legalising same-sex marriage) were passed in 2015, and there is a promise in the 2017–2020 National Women's Strategy to provide the institutional arrangements within government to support the delivery of gender-sensitive policymaking (Department of Justice and Equality, 2016: 8).

However, structures for supporting gender mainstreaming in policy did not emerge from the austerity years unscathed. Public sector bodies were targeted for savings in an effort to place the public finances on a viable footing after the fiscal crisis. Over 2009–10, the budget of the Equality Authority was cut by 43 per cent, and that of the Human Rights Commission by one quarter. The Equality Authority was merged with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHRC) in 2013, with a consequent reduction in expertise and personnel. Also closed in 2009 were the Women's Health Council and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (merged with the Health Service Executive). The closure of the gender equality unit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform predated the crisis. Its activities were 'mainstreamed' into the general working of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in 2006. The National Employment Action Plan (NEAP), too, had a gender mainstreaming requirement, as a result of European policy on equal opportunities for women and men in employment. However, this initiative also came to an end in 2006. Public funding for the peak women's civil society organisation, the National Women's Council of Ireland was repeatedly cut. Since 1997, a restructuring of parliamentary committees led to the stand-alone women's affairs committee being subsumed into the committee

on justice and equality and, within that, the creation of a sub-committee on women's rights in 1998. In 2016, the Committee on Justice and Equality had no sub-committee on women's rights. Thus, the separate standing of women's rights has never been restored, and in recent times, has disappeared, making it more challenging for gender issues to be explored in a parliamentary context, such as happens in Finland (Hoppania and Holli, 2015). Though there has been some restoration of funding for equality agencies and women's organisations, the depth of the row-back on equality institutions during the economic crisis reflects the contingent hold of the field in Irish governance.

Conclusion

The relationship between women and politics in Ireland has become more complex over time. Women considering a career in public life continue to do so in a cultural environment that expects them also to fulfil traditional home-based duties. In partial response to these pressures, women are postponing having their first child until later in life and the fertility rate, at 1.96 in 2014, was below replacement level.[12] While Ireland still ranked low on the European scale in terms of women's representation in political life, the candidate quota began to take effect at the 2016 election. Thus, unlike earlier assessments that were pessimistic about an increased presence of women in elected office, the affirmative action measure is expected to continue improving women's political presence.

Significant progress has been made in policy terms also. A range of issues raised by women since the 1970s, particularly those relating to women's rights within the family and in employment, have largely been addressed. A number of institutional reforms have taken place that have impacted on gender equality issues. Alongside the courts, the internationalisation of Ireland's gender equality agenda has led to important shifts in policy focus, bringing renewed opportunities for coalition-building between external equality organisations and internal civil society activists, to effect change. Furthermore, women continue to forge ahead in all aspects of Irish economic and social life. A new generation of women are taking their place in Irish decision-making fora. Considerable numbers of highly educated, experienced, talented women are not prepared to settle for a second-place role in Irish society. The effect of these patterns combined is to influence politics and political parties to be more responsive to, and inclusive of, women and women's issues. The challenge for the future is to maintain, and improve on, gender equality in all its aspects, while taking account of the intersectional complexities of gender-related issues. On this point, parties and politics have a long road to travel.

Notes

1 www.constitution.ie/AttachmentDownload.ashx?mid=268d9308-c9b7-e211-a5a0-005056a32ee4 (accessed 18 March 2017).
2 www.genderequality.ie/en/GE/Pages/State_Boards (accessed 20 January 2017).
3 In 2014, the Equality Tribunal found that the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) had discriminated against Dr Micheline Sheehy Skeffington because of her gender, overlooking her for promotion.
4 The Representation of the People Act, 1918 granted the vote to women aged 30 and over who met certain property qualifications, while all men aged 21 and over were entitled to vote. Women and men in Ireland gained equal suffrage rights under Article 14 of the Constitution of the Irish Free State, 1922. This came into effect at the 1923 general election.

5　Figures adapted from the Inter-Parliamentary Union – www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm (accessed 27 February 2017).

6　An alliance of groups called for the introduction of gender quotas, including the 5050 Group, the National Women's Council of Ireland and the women's section of the Labour Party.

7　A sub-committee of the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights, namely 'Women's Participation in Politics' was convened in April 2009. In September 2009, the Joint Committee on the Constitution conducted a review of the electoral system to assess its performance against a range of criteria, including the representation of women.

8　Gender quotas for TDs, whereby a certain proportion of seats in Dáil Éireann would be reserved for men and a certain proportion of seats would be reserved for women, were not considered as this would contravene the constitution.

9　www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/enda-kenny-pledges-to-appoint-women-to-half-of-cabinet-posts-1.2043269 (accessed 24 March 2017).

10　Under the Electoral Act, 1997 political parties must detail their expenditure under a number of headings including 'the promotion of participation by women'.

11　www.upr.ie/ (accessed 25 January 2017).

12　ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Total_fertility_rate,_1960%E2%80% 932014_(live_births_per_woman)_YB16.png (accessed 25 January 2017).

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Central Statistics Office website links to the various editions of *Women and Men in Ireland* reports.

www.qub.ac.uk/cawp
Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics in Queen's University Belfast, which provides data on women in politics in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain, including women candidates at elections. The site also makes available a range of documents on women and politics and has links to other women and politics sites.

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/index_en.htm
Maintained by the European Commission's Directorate General on Justice and Consumers. It collates data on women and men in decision-making across the European Union.

http://www.quotaproject.org/
The quota project is a joint project of the International IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Stockholm University, collating data on gender quotas worldwide.

http://www.genderequality.ie/en/GE/Pages/WomenPublicSector
Provides data on women in Ireland and maintained by the Gender Equality Division of the Department of Justice and Equality.

http://www.unwomen.org/en
UN Women is an entity of the United Nations, responsible for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

http://www.womenforelection.ie/
Hosted by Women for Election, a non-partis2an organisation that encourages women to run for politics and provides capacity training to achieve this aim.

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