

Progress or Tokenism?

Female Candidate Selection by Parties in Local Elections under an Informal Quota Regime

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Abstract

Why do political parties support the introduction of legislated gender quota and then fail to implement them? Drawing on a rational choice approach, some claim that deputies only vote for such quotas because of the belief that increased competition from females will increase their incumbency advantage (Self-Interest Theory). Others that legislation is introduced as a response to electorate demands and that variations in the levels of implementation of the quota are the result of a male bias at selectorate level and the effects of incumbency and ideology (Selectorate Bias Theory). This study tests the selection behaviour of political parties in local elections under an informal quota.

Overall the study finds a positive effect of the quota on female selection. There is an increase in absolute and relative presence of women on the slate. In addition, in overall terms, the study does appear to support a self-interest explanation of party behaviour, as post quota there was a small, if very significant, negative effect of marginality. Detailed analysis showed that this negative reaction was shared by most parties, with the exception of Labour, but was only significant for one, SF. Further study on selection as opposed to election data is required if future assessments of quota schemes can truly establish measures of progress over tokenism.

Keywords: gender quota, candidate selection, local elections, Ireland

Paper prepared for the Political Science Association of Ireland Annual Conference, Cork, 16 -18 October 2015.

Introduction

Despite decades of efforts to increase the gender balance in democratic politics, a persistent pattern of significant underrepresentation of women is visible throughout the world's democracies. Based on both a rights-based claim for the equality of gender and an instrumental argument for the value of the feminine perspective in the decision-making process (Bari, 2005; Dahlerup, 2013; Krook, 2009), gender balance in political representation is not only a women's issue, but also a goal for greater representativeness in democratic government. The acceptance of the need to change this situation is evidenced by the United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 and its resulting *Declaration and Platform for Action*. Among a wide range of actions proposed "to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making," it includes a set of actions that are to be expected of political parties. A primary action focuses on the candidate selection process of parties, whereby parties are tasked to: "Consider developing initiatives that allow women to participate fully in all internal policy-making structures and appointive and electoral nominating processes."¹ One of the initiatives that has been developed by political parties since is the introduction of legal or informal gender quota in candidate selection for elections. This paper investigates the impact of one such informal quota regime.

Academic research in potential solutions to the gender imbalance also identifies political parties as potentially playing a central role in redressing this inequality through their control of the candidate selection process (Kittilson, 2006, p. 140). To this end political gender quotas have been widely introduced in representative democracies globally. Indeed over a hundred countries have introduced such schemes, with 54 countries implementing quota through legal means, by reforming the electoral law or in some cases the constitution (Freidenvall & Dahlerup, 2013, p. 6).²

The success of such schemes, when measured in increased numbers of women parliamentarians, has varied greatly (Krook, 2003, p. 3). Indeed the current average

1 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision.htm>, accessed 2 October 2015.

2 <http://www.quotaproject.org> (accessed 2 October 2015) provides a data base of quotas worldwide.

super majority of 77.1% male members of world parliaments³ highlights the questionable efficacy of quota schemes. Given the difficulties of introducing new contenders to party nomination processes, especially in parties with powerful incumbents (Katz, 2001), the question is perhaps more appropriately why any electoral quota are successful at all? Is it really unusual that existing male dominated parties who vote for the introduction of legislated gender quota schemes then proceed not to implement them?

Primarily based on research from electoral outcomes in France, two theories take a prominent place in explaining this disconnect between the support for gender quota and the lack of efficacy in implementing them. Both explanations acknowledge the key role of political parties as the gate-keepers of the 'secret garden of candidate selection' (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988). The first theory posits that male-dominated parliamentary parties, assuming that women have a lower probability of getting elected, vote in favour of gender quota, to encourage opposition from women in elections, assuming that this will increase their own chances of re-election (Fréchette, Maniquet & Morelli, 2008). The second theory argues that the decision to support gender quota is altogether more ideological and/or based on popular support for gender balance. The lack of subsequent compliance here is attributed to (implicit) bias against women among candidate selectors, as well as the dominance of men among incumbents (Murray, Krook & Opello 2012). This is a perspective that is supported and enhanced by others such as Kittilson (2006) and Niven (1998). Where Niven focuses on implicit selectorate bias and Kittilson highlights the role of leadership and top-down influence in conjunction with bottom-up party support.

A notable distinction between these theoretical explanations is whether the primary gender bias is in the electorate or the selectorate. Do parties manipulate the gender balance among candidates out of fear of losing seats because they expect the electorate to be biased, or in order to avoid an undermining of their male-dominated world as a result of an increased number of female representatives? We argue that by looking at how the selectorate responds to variations in the marginality of seats held in county and city councils in their allocation of non-incumbent female candidates, we can gain insight

³ <http://ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>, accessed 2 October 2015. The most progressive region is that of the Nordic countries in Europe, where the percentage of women in the lower house of parliament is 41% on average. The rest of the world's democracies show remarkably little variation.

into which of these two fears primarily underlies the continuing gender imbalance in candidate selection in local elections. A fear of the electorate's response to female candidates would suggest that a party places female candidates primarily in non-marginal districts – arenas where the party is neither likely to lose a seat, nor likely to win an additional one. A fear of women among councillors on the other hand would suggest placing female candidates in districts where they are less likely to get elected, in the more marginal districts. This paper analyses the effect of an explicit commitment to gender equality on the selection behaviour of Irish political parties in the 2014 local elections, looking in particular at the effect of seat marginality.

The empirical investigations of these theories to date are primarily based on the analysis of electoral reaction to legislated gender quotas – the electorate rather than the selectorate. This paper contributes to the debate by taking a step back and analysing the candidate selection process – ‘the choice before the choice’ (Rahat, 2007, p. 157). In the design of our study we exploit the fact that Ireland has a single-transferrable vote (STV) electoral system. STV is argued to be particularly well suited for assessing party reactions to gender quotas because this system particularly implies that parties will strategically decide on the number of candidates that should run in each electoral area *before* candidate selection takes place. The data show that while the informal quota do appear to have had a positive impact on the percentage of female candidates in the local elections, this impact differs radically by party. Not only do we see the expected differentiation between parties on the left and on the right, we also see significant variation between parties that would be ideologically proximate to each other. The main question is therefore: “To what extent can we attribute this variation between parties in their reaction to the presence of an informal quota regime to variations in seat marginality?”

The paper begins by examining the existing literature, in particular the two theories identified above. We then discuss the Irish quota scheme and the electoral context of the 2014 local election. This is followed by a statistical analysis of the candidate selection across the county and city councils in local elections in Ireland, both before and after the quota agreement, investigating the variation by party and the role of seat marginality on women candidate selection.

Evaluating two observable implications of the theory, we find modest support for the self-interest theory, in particular for the party that showed the greatest increase in female candidate selection since the quota, Sinn Fein.

Explanations of Male Selection Bias

Explanations of the democratic deficit in gender equality tend to focus on either or both, the demand and/or supply side of female candidates. The demand side refers to bias in the electorate or selectorate against female candidates, whereby the supply side refers to reluctance on the part of women to put forward their candidacy. Strikingly, research in North American political science has focused primarily on the supply side, while research in Europe has focused on demand and structural factors such as electoral systems, gender quotas and the nature of the party system (Davidson-Schmich, 2006, pp. 2–3). The persistence of the imbalance certainly suggests ‘that for both the supply and demand for female candidates is artificially repressed’ (Krook, 2010, p. 353). Norris & Lovenduski (1995, pp. 13–15) similarly argue that both, supply and demand, cause difficulties experienced by both women and political parties.

Candidate supply issues have been identified as a complex mix of motivation factors and resources which include ability, finance availability, confidence and ambition (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995, pp. 13–15). A report from the Irish Houses of the Oireachtas on Women’s Participation in Politics summarised the combination of specific challenges faced by women thinking of standing as the “five Cs” of childcare, cash, confidence, culture and candidate selection (Bacik, 2009, p. 11). Jennifer Lawless goes as far as to say that, in the United States, ‘when women run, women win’ (2015, p. 353), thus arguing the case for focusing on the supply side of the process. Discrimination among the electorate is no longer seen as the main explanation. This view is supported by research in the Irish context, where there is little indication of bias among the electorate, either negative or positive, for female politicians (McElroy & Marsh, 2010, p. 11).

This focus on either the demand side – the bias in the electorate – or the supply side – the bias among women against standing – runs the risk of overlooking the importance of the intermediate step, the candidate selection process by the selectorate, which can act as ‘gate-keepers’ in the process. Here research has shown that when party selectors are faced with assessing the best candidate they often use short cuts in evaluation and see the choice as between the ‘safe option’ of the ‘in-group’ male or the risk of the unknown quantity that is a woman or the ‘out-group’ (Niven, 1998a, pp. 61–62). Fox & Lawless (2010, p. 353) similarly identify the gap in political recruitment as a key factor in the American context. The “quota fever” – the near global introduction of affirmative action in candidate selection processes – can be taken as evidence of a recognition of selection as a crucial element in gender bias in women representation (Dahlerup, 2005, p. 18).

Indeed, gender quota have become the most common form of affirmative action to increase female presence in democratic representation, either in the form of reserved seats for women, party quotas, or legislative quota (Krook, 2010, p. 9). The legislative quota is the newest form in which the law requires that political parties ensure a minimum level of gender equality in their nominated slate of candidates, and has been shown to have effective results (Krook, 2010, p. 9; Matland, 2006, p. 283).

This effectiveness, however, has varied significantly across regions and across parties. An electoral law quota of 30% implemented in Argentina has increased female representation to 36.2%, while the same measure has resulted in Venezuela achieving 17.0% and Brazil 9.9% women members of parliament (Krook, 2003, p. 3).⁴ It seems that while political parties and the electorate ostensibly support such measures to the extent that legislation is implemented, in practice either the electorate or the parties themselves withhold their support. Thus there is a paradox between expressed support for the gender quota and lack of positive engagement in the subsequent candidate selection process. A recent subset of the literature on the selectorate bias towards women representation focuses exactly on this paradox, whereby two theories take centre stage.

The first study, entitled 'Incumbents Interests and Gender Quotas' (Fréchette, Maniquet and Morelli 2008), argues that the reason the French National Assembly voted to introduce 'Parity Law' in 2002 was not due to normative support for gender equality, but due to incumbent deputy self-interest. The authors claim that the legislators made a rational choice based on the existence of a male advantage from voter bias. In this explanation, parties and in particular their elected representatives are in favour of a gender quota because it increases incumbents' probability of running against a woman and therefore increases their probability of being re-elected. This is a parsimonious explanation for both the introduction and the non-implementation of the quota (Fréchette, Maniquet, & Morelli, 2008).

Like France, the quota scheme in Ireland is a legislated one with a system of fee sanctions for non-compliance, which passed with the support of deputies from all parties of the Oireachtas, the Irish parliament. There are a number of observable implications of this theory, for example that one would expect a decentralised system of

⁴ <http://www.ipu.org>

party organisation which allows deputies in parliament to vote according to their own preference.⁵ The internal organisation is left for a future in-depth study of specific parties. In this quantitative study, investigating the outcome of the candidate selection process, we focus on the role of seat marginality and incumbency. The self-interest theory has an immediate implication that female candidates are put in districts with male incumbents who are protecting their own chances of re-election.

H1: Parties are more likely to put forward female candidates in electoral districts where male incumbents of the same party are standing for election.

Furthermore we would expect an impact of the marginality of the current seats of the party. If a party in a particular district either barely won a seat, or nearly won an extra seat, it will be more concerned with potential bias in the electorate against women than in a district where their seats are safe seats. Admittedly, this makes a strong assumption of using previous election results as a measure of the current electoral mood, which is only true by rough proxy.⁶

H2: Parties are more likely to put forward female candidates in electoral districts where their current seats have low marginality – they are neither likely to win additional seats, nor at risk of losing their current seats.

A second study by Murray et al (2012) directly challenges this self-interest explanation and argues similarly to Niven (1998) and Kittilson (2006) that male advantage bias is not primarily at the electoral level but within the party selectorate. In particular, that the theory by Fréchette et al ignores the ideological stance and the dynamics of the internal organisation of political parties, whereby they assume that incumbent members of parliament have full control over the candidate selection procedure. However, Murray et al (2012) argue that the party cannot be seen as simply a unitary actor but needs to be considered an organisation with a hierarchy 'which seeks to confront and balance the

5 Admittedly, in this study the link is more indirect, as the quota was voted upon in the national parliament, while the empirical study investigates candidate selection in local elections. The incumbents in the data presented below are therefore not the individuals who voted in favour of the quota, the sanctions of which in any case only apply to national, not local elections.

6 An alternative approach would be to look at marginality in hypothetical elections based on opinion poll data, but such data is not available at the scale of the local election areas. It should be noted in this context that we are primarily comparing 2014 with 2009 local elections – both taking place after the onset of the financial crisis in Ireland and thus after the main shift against Fianna Fail in the Irish electorate.

demands of competing factions' within the party (Murray, Krook, & Opello, 2012). So French parliamentarians are argued to have voted for Parity Law, not out of self-interest, but because, to the parties on the left, the law satisfied their ideological and electoral commitment to equality, while the parties on the right publically supported a popular bill, satisfying an electoral populace strategy. Meanwhile, parties on the right in particular would hold on to the non-compliance option to, however costly, minimise negative effects of the quota perceived by the right. The reason the parties then fail to implement the quota, is argued to be due to a bias against women by party selectors, combined with parties' reluctance to replace male incumbents and, in some cases, parties' shallow ideological commitment to gender equality generally, a pragmatic explanation.

Should this theory apply in the Irish context, the results should show a strong male dominance in candidates selected, but with significant differentiation between parties of different political ideology. Parties on the left should show greater support for female candidates than parties on the right. Similar to the first explanation, however, incumbency should dominate gender – that gender imbalances among current representatives will persist among candidate selection for next elections. Indeed, much has been written about the adverse effect of incumbency on female selection (Gallagher, Laver, & Mair, 2011; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Kittilson, 2006; Lovenduski, & Norris, 1993; McGing, 2013; McGing & White, 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, 2005).

H3: Parties on the left are more likely to put forward female candidates than parties on the right.

Since the bias against women candidates – either consciously or unconsciously – is here expected to be in the selectorate, as opposed to the selectorate assuming such bias in the electorate – and the selectorate is protecting its male-dominated in-group, we would expect parties not to put forward female candidates in safe seats, but rather in districts where they are less likely to get elected. The effect of seat marginality in previous elections can thus be assumed to be exactly opposite to that in the self-interest theory.

H4: Parties are more likely to put forward female candidates in electoral districts where their current seats have high marginality, to reduce the chance of the female candidates getting elected.

The Irish Case

It was a legislative quota that was chosen by the Irish parliament to address gender inequality in Dáil Éireann. At 16.3% women representatives, Ireland has one of the lowest female participation levels in any parliament in the European Union (EU) and is ranked jointly at 89th with North and South Korea in the IPU rankings.⁷ The quota legislates that political parties must nominate a minimum of 30% (rising to 40% seven years after the end of the next parliament) of gender equality in candidates selected for election to the national parliament.⁸ The first elections under this new regime are expected to take place in 2016.⁹ The quota explicitly only references general elections for the Oireachtas, the national parliament.

The experience from the introduction of a similar scheme in France was referenced in the design of the legislation which includes a significant penalty of 50% deduction of party political funding for noncompliance (Bacik, 2009, p. 32) . This sanction recognises that while the introduction of a quota received cross party support, international experience has shown that the aspirations of parties for such quotas is often not matched by implementation.

⁷ <http://ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, accessed 2 October 2015.

⁸ Fiona Buckley, "How Ireland legislated for candidate sex quotas to increase women's representation", <http://www.democraticaudit.com/?p=1848>, accessed 2 October 2015.

⁹ Fionnan Sheehan, "Fine Gael plans date for next general election", <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/fine-gael-plans-date-for-next-general-election-29051657.html>, accessed 2 October 2015.

Party		2004	2009	2014
Overall		18	17	22
Fianna Fail	Incumbent	14	13	14
	Non-incumbent	16	22	21
Fine Gael	Incumbent	18	19	15
	Non-incumbent	20	16	32
Labour	Incumbent	19	20	25
	Non-incumbent	20	23	32
Sinn Fein	Incumbent	17	17	21
	Non-incumbent	20	25	35

Table 1: Percentage of female candidates, by party, across three local elections in Ireland.

After the introduction of the Bill in July 2012, all four major parties announced their intention to voluntarily introduce a quota for the 2014 Local Elections, even though the legislation has no effect at this local level and therefore no penalty. Table 1 provides an insight in the results for candidate selection. Fine Gael (FG), perhaps most realistically, set its quota target at 25%, while Labour and Sinn Féin (SF) stuck to the 30% required by the national scheme. Fianna Fáil (FF) was even more enthusiastic and aimed for a 33% goal. In the end, only SF achieved the quota with 31.1% female candidates nominated, with Labour coming very close with over 28% and FG achieving a credible 22.6% equality. FF however, had a most disappointing performance nominating only 17.4% women candidates. Given that in all these political parties, the central executive retains the power to approve and to appoint additional candidates, why did the two largest parties in the state enthusiastically support and then fail to achieve the quota?

Ireland forms a particularly interesting case to study the effect of a quota on candidate selection due to the nature of its electoral system. The STV electoral system involves voters voting for individual candidates, as opposed to party lists, while being able to indicate how their vote should transfer in case their preferred candidate has more than sufficient votes to win a seat. These transfers can take place both within and across parties, which creates a significant deviation from list-based proportional systems. The

main implication of interest to this study is that the electoral system strongly discourages parties to field too many candidates in a particular district. While in a list-based proportional system a party can “pad” their list with additional women candidates at no extra cost, under STV such parties would run the considerable risk of splitting the vote and reducing the number of overall seats obtained (Reidy, 2011, p. 49). Farrell & Katz (2014, p. 15) refer to the scholarly debate on this issue which also primarily focused on the Irish case. Here Cohan and McKinley suggest a formula where parties should only nominate as many candidates as the maximum they might win (1975, pp. 369–370), while others disagree, arguing that under-nomination can be even more damaging to vote management and that other considerations, such as local preferences and geography all play a role in each party’s final decision (Gallagher, 1980, p. 493; Katz, 1981, p. 122; Lijphart & Irwin, 1979, p. 368). All however accept that the number of candidates in STV is a key strategic selection decision forced on parties by the electoral system. This implies that the party will first carefully consider the number of candidates to put forward, and only as a second step, consider who the individual candidates standing should be. Parties will therefore also carefully consider the gender of the candidates they put forward.

The puzzle of this paper – the discrepancy between support for the quota and reluctant implementation – is evident across many countries. International research shows that while there is general support for greater gender equality, there is also a frequent failure of some European political parties to achieve their stated selection goals (Buckley, Galligan, & McGing, 2013; Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; Freidenvall & Dahlerup, 2013; Gallagher et al., 2011). The Irish case study is therefore one where – due to the electoral system – the observable implications of the different theories put forward should be particularly clearly visible, while the theories can be expected to operate in a similar fashion across most contemporary democracies.

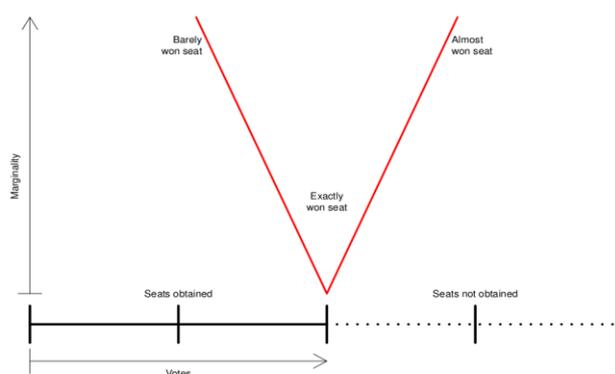
The choice of studying local elections, after expressed voluntary participation in an informal quota scheme, is of interest for a number of reasons. Aside from local elections being a political phenomenon just as important to study as any other aspect of politics, in the Irish case, the local elections are dominated by the same parties that dominate the national scene, and are often used as a spring board and a testing ground by parties for future national representatives (Galligan, 2010, p. 270; Weeks & Quinlivan, 2009, p. 150). A second advantage is the sheer number of observations – there are significantly more electoral districts and more candidates in the local than in the national elections. The total number of candidates selected for the 2011 general election in Ireland was 566

(Reidy, 2011, p. 62) while the total number of nominations for the 2014 local election came to 2,037.

Data and methodology

The primary source of data concerns the lists of candidates, their incumbency status, and the votes obtained, made available through the Election Reports, which we obtained from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.¹⁰ For the 2014 local election the data was assembled from the Notices for Election / Candidate Listings sourced directly from county and city council websites. The gender of the candidates was derived from the first name, supplemented with various online searches in cases where the gender was not obvious. The primary data was compared to various online sources to check the reliability of the data.¹¹

Figure



1: Measure of marginality

Given hypotheses H2 and H4, a key independent variable is the marginality of the seat in the previous election. We develop our measure of marginality as follows, illustrated in Figure 1. Our measure is a variation on that proposed by different authors (Grofman &

10 We thank John in the Franchise Section of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government for his assistance and generosity in providing us with the relevant data.

11 Including <http://www.electionsireland.org/>, <http://irishselections.org/>, <https://irishelectionliterature.wordpress.com/>, <http://adriankavanaghelections.org/> and <http://adriankavanagh.com/> (all accessed between April 2013 and October 2015).

Selb, 2009; Selb & Lutz, 2015). We take the total votes cast in the district, V , and calculate the Droop quota required to obtain a seat:

$$Q = \frac{V}{m + 1} + 1,$$

whereby m represents the district magnitude. We subsequently evaluate the number of seats obtained by the party in the district, s , and the number of votes cast for a specific party in the district, v , to obtain the marginality of the seat for the party in the particular district as follows:

$$M = \left| s - \frac{v}{Q} \right|.$$

This measure will therefore be zero if the party wins exactly the number of votes required for the seats obtained and will be higher as it either barely managed to win the last seat, or almost won an additional seat.

In our analysis we make use of a number of control variables that can be expected to relate to the likelihood of a party putting forward female candidates in a district, but in the current and in subsequent elections. Because these variables affect candidate selection and voting behaviour over time, they can also indirectly be expected to impact on key independent variables such as incumbency and marginality. The first control variable is that of district magnitude, which has been shown to affect female candidate selection (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2011, p. 24; Krook, 2010, p. 164; McGing, 2013, p. 330). We proxy the socio-economic character of the county or city by looking at tax returns on properties – overall Local Property Tax returns divided by the number of properties. For liberal values we make use of the recent Marriage referendum, taking support for the Yes side of the referendum as a rough proxy for long-term progressive cultural attitudes in the region. Similarly, we take support for female candidates in the previous election as a proxy for pro-women attitude in the district.

Assuming, as discussed above, that parties make their candidate selection decisions in two steps – first deciding on the number of candidates and subsequently deciding on who those candidates should be – our primary regression model is one where we estimate, given the decision to field a candidate in a particular district, the probability that this candidate is female. We make use of straightforward logistic regression models. Because incumbency is assumed to strongly dominate any further candidate selection (Gallagher, Laver, & Mair, 2011, p. 344; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988, pp. 248–249; Kittilson,

2006, p. 122; Lovenduski, & Norris, 1993, pp. 315–316; Schwindt-Bayer, 2005, p. 240) decisions, we model this for non-incumbents only. In 2014, although incumbents were five times more likely to be male, they constituted only 38% of the total number of candidates on the slate.

Changing boundaries of local electoral areas

A complication in the data collection is the fact that the boundaries of LEAs have changed over time. For the regression analysis it is crucial to include lagged variables – data on the previous election that will have affected candidate selection behaviour in the current election. However, this lagged data is not available for LEAs where the boundaries have changed since the previous election. To avoid a very significant loss of data – approximately a third of the LEAs would have changed between 2009 and 2014 – we map the current LEA onto the previous LEA using boundary definition files for Geographical Information Systems software. These boundary files have been provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Ireland.¹² Using these boundary definitions, we identify the proportion of each current LEA that falls into each LEA of the previous election, and calculate a weighted mean of lagged variables based on the proportion overlap in geographical area.¹³ For example, 62 per cent of the 2014 Graiguecullen-Portarlington LEA covers the old Luggacurren 2009 LEA, while 38 per cent falls in the old 2009 Emo LEA. For FF in 2009 in Emo, the marginality index is 0.19 and in Luggacurren it is 0.63, so to calculate the lagged value of the marginality for FF in the 2014 Graiguecullen-Portarlington LEA, it is $0.62 \cdot 0.63 + 0.38 \cdot 0.19 = 0.46$ (see Figure 2).

¹² Boundary changes were implemented in 1998, 2008 and 2014, with no changes between the 1999 and 2004 elections. We thank Dermot Corcoran of the CSO for his help in providing the shape files.

¹³ A future version of this paper will use population-weighted proportions, using fine-grained data on the distribution of the population across the area of the LEA, instead of proportions based on geographical area only.

Graiguecullen-Portarlington LEA

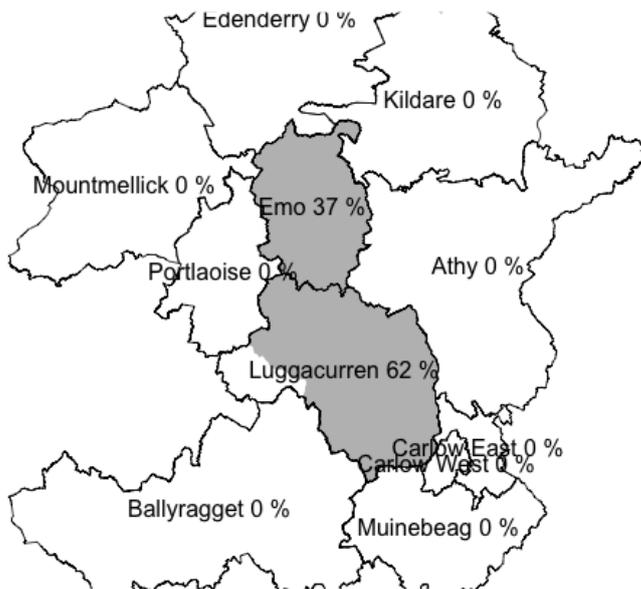


Figure 2 LEA borders in 2014 (grey) vs 2009 (lines) for Graiguecullen-Portarlington. Percentages represent weights for calculation of lagged value for Graiguecullen-Portarlington.

The same logic is applied to including the results of the Marriage Referendum. For the referendum results, data is available at the level of the national constituencies. We calculate for each LEA the proportion overlap with the respective constituencies and use this to calculate a weighted average of support for marriage equality within the LEA.

Analysis and results

Table 1, above, gives a comparison of individual political party selection of both incumbent and non-incumbent females over the past three elections. The results show that both parties on the ideological left (Labour and SF) increased their non-incumbent female selection over the past three elections, with a significant increase in 2014 – an expected result, explained by the endogenous effect of ideology and the exogenous effect of the quota. This lends therefore tentative support for H3. However, the selection behaviour of the parties of the centre-right is not consistent. While the almost doubling of non-incumbent females by FG is in line with the party's introduction of the legislation, FF actually selected 2% less non-incumbent women in 2014, which shows the significant discrepancy between the party's policy rhetoric and its implementation.

These findings suggest that we need to look deeper into the causes of gender bias in candidate selection. To test the stated hypotheses, a series of logistic regressions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Logistic regressions explaining gender of non-incumbent candidates.

	2004	2009			2014		
	All	All	All	Fianna	Fine	Labour	Sinn
	parties	parties	parties	Fail	Gael		Fein
Log marginality (t-1)	-0.04 (0.03)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.16 (0.24)	-0.08 (0.20)	0.19 (0.20)	-0.27** (0.11)
Nr of male incumbents	-0.02 (0.14)	0.09 (0.14)	0.14 (0.09)	0.24 (0.23)	0.12 (0.19)	0.10 (0.36)	0.84** (0.40)
District magnitude	0.03 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.13 (0.15)	0.08 (0.12)	0.27 (0.19)	-0.25* (0.15)
Log (LPT returns / properties) (t-1)	0.95*** (0.26)	0.51** (0.25)	0.96*** (0.21)	1.70*** (0.56)	0.88* (0.48)	0.77 (0.82)	0.99 (0.62)
Female vote (t-1, in thousands)	0.16 (0.18)	0.10 (0.15)	0.12 (0.10)	0.06 (0.27)	0.20 (0.18)	0.14 (0.38)	-0.36 (0.48)
Fine Gael	0.40 (0.29)	-0.43 (0.27)	0.51** (0.23)				
Labour	0.18 (0.38)	0.16 (0.32)	0.61** (0.29)				
Sinn Fein	0.14 (0.41)	0.38 (0.33)	0.81*** (0.26)				
Other party / independent	0.35 (0.32)	-0.51* (0.27)	-0.11 (0.21)				
Percentage Yes in Marriage Referendum			-0.02** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.03)
Constant	-0.74 (0.52)	-0.47 (0.53)	1.20 (0.92)	2.30 (2.50)	-0.87 (2.10)	1.10 (3.10)	4.60* (2.70)
Observations	916	939	1,247	218	207	84	139
AIC	865	878	1,377	223	267	114	180
Note:	$p < 0.1$; $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$						

The party fixed effects in the model report the same finding as in Table 1, with all parties being significantly more likely to select women non-incumbents than FF. Our main interest is with testing the above stated theories, however. The results cautiously suggests a positive relationship between female selection and male incumbents. We find a significant effect of the number of male incumbents for the party that most strongly increased the number of female candidates, SF, but we do not find this pattern across the board. This provides partial support for H1, which suggests further study is needed to derive the scope conditions of this theory.

H2 and H4 are contrasting hypotheses, where one theory suggests a positive relation between marginality and support for women and the other a negative relation. We find a negative relationship overall, but this appears to be driven, again, by the results for SF. Here the higher the marginality of a party's seat in an LEA, the less likely the party is to select female non-incumbents. This result is therefore very much in line with the result for the presence of male incumbents and we find modest support for the self-interest theory, at least in the behaviour of SF.

Conclusion

Overall the study finds a positive effect of the quota on female selection. There is an increase in absolute and relative presence of women on the slate. This increase is consistent in rural and urban areas. In addition, in overall terms, the quota does appear to support a self-interest explanation of party behaviour, as post quota there was a small, if very significant, negative effect of marginality. Implying the more marginal the seat the slightly less likely a woman would be selected. Detailed analysis showed that this negative reaction was shared by most parties, with the exception of Labour, but was only significant for one, SF. While the results seem to point to the self-interest theory as the best explanation for the paradox of gender quota – support for the quota, but lack of engagement – results are mixed and further evidence would be required.

What the study does highlight however is that previously accepted explanations for progress in female representation along ideological lines may only be true to a point. That is to say that while a party is ideologically supportive of the equality ideal, selectorate bias and other factors may challenge this stance. For example, ideology should not depend on a quota for gender equality progress within a party. In this instance, both Labour and SF have never achieved a selection of beyond 30% gender equality.

Second we argue that election results are an inappropriate database for examining political party selection behaviour with any form of quota. This study shows that only by stepping back and assessing party's selections can we see what is really happening in terms of progress or tokenism. The two core arguments referred to in this study come from an examination of French electoral results post Parity Law in France. Both sets of scholars try to retrospectively explain party selection behaviour from the perspective of the final outcome. While election results are in reality 'what counts', we argue that this is not the most appropriate place to begin the assessment of 'why it happened that way'. For example in terms of the electoral outcomes in this election, the results support earlier studies of voter choice behaviour (McElroy & Marsh, 2010, p. 10), with 44.6% of female and 47.1% of male candidates successfully elected. However if we measure quota effect at this level FF actually increased their number of women councillors from 31 in 2009 to 39 in 2014, even though the party selected the lowest percentage of women nominees (17.4%) and eight fewer women than they had selected in the 2009 election. On the other hand SF, who secured the second largest number of women councillors by party (46), displayed the most significant self-interest tendencies within that increased selection. Selection can have more impact than the voters on outcomes (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988, p. 2), in particular in cases of 'safe seats, particularly in majoritarian systems where it can determine the election (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995, p. 2) and in cases where there is no electoral choice between candidates of the same party. The variants in party selection processes can be affected by many internal considerations, intra-party conflict (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988, pp. 2-3) or levels of party organisation (Lovenduski, & Norris, 1993, p. 13). Indeed, Hazan and Rahat have identified four major dimensions that delineate candidate selection methods, candidacy, the selectorate, decentralization and voting versus appointment systems (2010, p. 15). Further study on party selection methods on these dimensions is required if future assessments of quota schemes can truly establish measures of progress over tokenism.

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