

# Bishops and Bailiwicks: Obstacles to Women's Political Participation in Ireland\*

VICKY RANDALL

*Polytechnic of Central London*

AILBHE SMYTH

*University College Dublin*

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*Abstract:* Women are a small minority of political office-holders in Ireland as elsewhere. The authors first provide details of women's representation in different political arenas, before proceeding to identify the principal determinants of women's willingness to seek office — socialisation, domestic constraints and access to appropriate educational and professional qualifications — and the institutional barriers they encounter. Two features of particular relevance in Ireland are the impact of Roman Catholicism on political culture and the rôle of localism in party politics. So long as these retain their hold there is little prospect of a dramatic increase in women's political representation.

## I INTRODUCTION

Very few women achieve high political office in Ireland. This fact may be familiar but the reasons are less so. Yet the relative absence of women from the public political arena is likely to be of considerable consequence for the representation of their interests as well as constituting an important feature of the (male dominated) Irish political system. In this article we shall point to some of the key determinants of women's political participation, of their willingness to stand for office and of their chances of success. Such an analysis should contribute to a better understanding of how women have been excluded from the public political domain. To date specifically Irish source materials are in limited supply (but see Barnes, 1975; Manning, 1978; Carty, 1980; Laffan, 1981; Tansey, 1984; Smyth, 1985). However, we aim to provide fresh insights into the Irish case from the comparative perspective of a growing international literature.

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Not that we are suggesting that Ireland's record in respect of women's office-holding is distinctive or distinctly poor. In fact the current representation of women in the Dail at 8.4 per cent compares very respectably with most other European countries. In other institutional arenas, including the bureaucracy and the judiciary, women's achievements parallel their European sisters', at least outside the Scandinavian countries. Moreover many of the factors accounting for women's underrepresentation are not peculiar to Ireland but are to be found everywhere, as Gallagher (1984) has already pointed out. There are none the less particular features of Irish political culture and practice that do appear to have a distinct bearing. One is the pervasive influence of the Roman Catholic Church whose moral and cultural hegemony has faced little serious challenge until quite recently. Perhaps as crucial has been the rôle of "localism", together with brokerage, in Irish party politics. A local power base and local government experience give the aspiring politician a tremendous headstart to which women, unless through family connections, are unlikely to have access. We shall argue that the fate of women's political representation in Ireland will be closely linked with the strength of these two traditions.

We must begin however by sketching in the details of the distribution of women within Ireland's political institutions.

## II WOMEN IN PUBLIC OFFICE

In Ireland, as elsewhere, women are a small minority of political office holders. This becomes clear if we look at women's representation in the four principal institutional channels leading to high political office — the "numerical" representative channel (so called because it is based on the principle of one person one vote), interest groups, government administration and the judiciary — as well as in the politically influential communications media.

The numerical channel refers to elected representative bodies and as such includes local and national assemblies, but also the political parties that feed into them and the governments that national assemblies form. It is women's underrepresentation in this channel that readers are most likely to be conscious of and which is best documented. Beginning with the Dail, the present number of 14 women TDs (8.4 per cent) is the highest to date. From 1923 to 1977 there were only ever 24 women in the Dail. The big leap came in 1981 when women's representation rose from 6, or 4 per cent to 11 or 6.6 per cent. It then dipped following the February 1982 election to 8 women (4.8 per cent) before rising to 8.4 per cent in the November 1982 election, where it still stands, as we have seen, following the February 1987 election. Compared with other European countries this present level is quite respectable, falling into what Mossuz-Lavau and Sineau

(1984) have labelled the intermediate category, in contrast for example with the United Kingdom which has resolutely remained below the 5 per cent threshold. In view of speculation this has given rise to, in particular concerning the relative advantage for women of any form of proportional representation, and to which we shall return, it is worth emphasising that it is only very recently that women's representation in the Dail exceeded 5 per cent, nor is it certain it will remain that high.

The percentage of Senators who are women has been consistently higher, currently standing at 10 per cent (6 out of 60). One reason is probably that the Seanad is a much less powerful body than the Dail but, as is suggested later, the procedure for selecting and electing senators may also assist women.

Mention should be made here of women's distribution within the network of parliamentary committees which was revised and strengthened in 1983 (see O'Rourke, 1985). Women served on all ten of the Joint Committees and were particularly well represented on the Women's Rights and Marriage Breakdown Committees. Women indeed chaired the Committees on Women's Rights and Co-operation with Developing Countries respectively. However their complete absence from two of the most powerful Dail committees, those dealing with Public Expenditure and Public Accounts, areas traditionally most resistant to female participation, is at least as significant.

When we come to women's part in government, as in most other European countries it has been minimal. Countess Markievicz served in the Cabinet from 1919-22 but after that no women took part in government until 1979 when Máire Geoghegan-Quinn became Minister for the Gaeltacht. Following the November 1982 election, Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald appointed two women to the Government: Gemma Hussey became Minister for Education and thus one of 16 full Cabinet members while Nuala Fennell became Minister of State for Women's Affairs. However Ms Hussey was subsequently moved across to Social Welfare, which must be seen as a demotion and underlines the tendency for women to be allocated stereotypically feminine or "caring" portfolios. As will be further elaborated, there must also be serious reservations as to the scope of Ms Fennell's powers as Minister of State.

Moving now to local assemblies, it has been noted in a number of European countries that women fare better here than in national assemblies, in keeping with the general observation that women's participation tends to vary inversely with power. Ireland is one of the exceptions. Following the elections of June 1985 they were still only 7.7 per cent of County Councillors and 11.3 per cent of County Borough Councillors. Moreover while the rate of representation is increasing, it is still a very gradual process. Despite claims to the contrary, women do not appear to be on the verge of any dramatic breakthrough in local government. The serious implications of this bottleneck for women's political advancement is one of the central findings of this study.

Before leaving the numerical channel, we must consider women's achievements within political parties. The fact that there are still no reliable statistics available for women's rate of party membership in the main national parties is revealing in itself. Figures are provided on membership of the parties' national executives. As is apparent from Table 1, in 1982 Fine Gael National Executive had by far the largest representation of women at over 21 per cent, although by 1984 they had slipped back and it was the Labour Party, with 17 per cent who were out front. By 1986, women's membership of National Executives of both Fine Gael and Labour parties had declined, increased slightly in the case of Fianna Fail, and significantly in the case of the Worker's Party, while the newly established Progressive Democrats had the highest representation of women at 21.5 per cent. We shall have more to say about women's experience in political parties but parties' crucial rôle in the selection of candidates for local and national elections make it essential that women are well represented amongst party decision makers.

Table 1: *Per cent Women on National Executives of Political Parties*

	<i>Fine Gael</i>	<i>Fianna Fail</i>	<i>Labour Party</i>	<i>Workers' Party</i>	<i>Progressive Democrats*</i>
1982	21.4	8.3	7.3	7.6	—
1984	13.0	8.3	17.0	5.8	—
1986	8.8	9.2	13.3	19.0	21.5

\*Interim National Executive.

Sources: Laffan (1983); Tansey (1984); Authors' own data, supplied by the relevant political parties (1986).

Interest organisations provide a second channel of political representation where women's participation rate can be charted. As elsewhere, few women make it to the top of the "peak" economic interest organisations. Women in any case hardly feature within business decision making bodies. Of the 20 leading companies in 1985, not one had a woman chairperson, managing director or chief executive and there was only one woman within the entire membership of their Boards of Directors (*Irish Times*, December 31, 1985). It is thus hardly surprising that none of the principal officers of either the Confederation of Irish Industry or the Federated Union of Employers are women, though their press and information officers are. This pattern is not, however, peculiar to Ireland; in 1982 there were only two women out of 400 members of the General Council of the Confederation of British Industry, while in France women constituted less than 1 per cent of the Conseil National du Patronat Français.

Women's representation within the Irish trade union movement is again broadly comparable with other European countries. For reasons we are not yet able to explain, Ireland is one of only two European countries where women were a lower percentage (28 per cent) of the paid workforce in 1981 than they were of trade union membership (32 per cent) (see Lovenduski, 1986, p. 169). In 1985 women formed 35 per cent of the membership of trade unions affiliated to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions but there were only 4 women members (12.5 per cent) of its Executive Council. This is in line with a number of European countries, for instance Britain where in 1983 women were 13 per cent of the TUC, and distinctly better than levels attained in others such as West Germany and Belgium.

In Ireland agriculture constitutes another major economic interest. The chief peak organisation, the Irish Farmers Association, is widely agreed to exercise considerable influence on policy, indeed Chubb reports that for a time many reckoned it "the country's most effective lobby" (1982, p. 123). Currently all its 16 leading officers are men.

Besides economic or sectional interest groups, it is customary to distinguish promotional groups which advocate some kind of "cause". In Ireland these are comparatively few and less influential than economic interest groups. It is still worth noting that in most cases their chairperson or president is male (an exception is the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children). And of course the influential semi-secret organisation of the Knights of Columbanus is exclusively male.

Interest associations can also be based on particular institutions. Most obviously in Ireland there has been some discussion as to whether the Roman Catholic Church can be described as such an interest group. As we shall argue later, such a definition would seem altogether to understate the Church's political influence, but in so far as it is appropriate, then clearly women have no place within its "hierarchy" of bishops.

Women's representation in interest organisations is one of the factors determining the scale of their presence within "corporate" government bodies, both committees advising individual ministries and the nearly 100 "state-sponsored bodies". In some European countries, notably those of Scandinavia, these corporate agencies have come to play a decisive rôle in policy-making and women have correspondingly pressed for greater representation on them. Chubb has argued on the other hand that despite the growth of corporatist mechanisms from the 1960s, by 1980 by common agreement "Ireland was still recognizably a pluralist and not a corporatist state" (1982, p. 140). At any rate women's presence in these bodies is negligible. Taking first the two main advisory bodies, of the present 23 members of the National Economic and Social Council only two are women while when the Employer-Labour Conference last met in 1978, there were no women amongst the more than 50 employer and

trade union representatives attending and its principal officers are all men.

As Chubb suggests, the "state-sponsored bodies" are a highly heterogeneous category but there is little doubt that some exercise discretion in important policy-making areas and their accountability to government and to the Dail has been an issue of growing concern. Table 2 shows the distribution of women within the boards of selected state-sponsored bodies in 1985. Overall women accounted for just over 12 per cent. More disturbingly there were no women at all on several of the most powerful, for instance AnCO, An Foras Talúntais and the Industrial Development Authority.

Table 2: *Women on the Boards of Selected State-Sponsored Bodies*

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Women</i>
Aer Lingus	16	1
AnCO (The Industrial Training Authority)	14	0
The Arts Council	17	6
Bord na Gaeilge	12	3
An Foras Talúntais (The Agricultural Institute)	15	0
Health Education Bureau	10	3
Higher Education Authority	19	3
Industrial Development Authority	9	0
The Legal Aid Board	13	4
The Medical Council	25	4
National Board for Science and Technology	9	1
National Economic and Social Council	23	2
Nuclear Energy Council	7	0
Radio Telefis Eireann	9	2

*Source:* Council for the Status of Women (1985).

Besides representatives of interest organisations, corporate bodies include civil servants appointed by government. The paucity of women in corporate bodies is also a consequence of their underrepresentation in our third main institutional channel, that of government administration. As Table 3 shows, in 1986 there were no women amongst the 18 top civil servants (secretaries) and only 3 women amongst 82 deputy and assistant secretaries. The removal of the marriage bar in 1973 appears as yet to have had little effect on the upper echelons. If this rate of promotion is depressing for women, it is only a little worse than in Britain where in 1983 there was no woman permanent secretary and women were only 3.7 per cent of deputy secretaries and under-secretaries.

Women's representation in the judiciary is a monotonously similar story. It is

Table 3: *Number and Proportion of Women in Departmental Grades from Higher Executive Officer Equivalent Level and Upwards April 1986*

<i>Equivalent General Service Grade</i>	<i>Numbers in Grades</i>			<i>% Women in Grade</i>
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	
Secretary	18	18	0	0
Deputy Secretary	16	16	0	0
Assistant Secretary	66	63	3	4.54
Principal Officer	479	460	19	3.96
Assistant Principal Officer	1,880	1,698	182	9.68
Higher Executive Officer	637	490	147	23.07
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,096</b>	<b>2,745</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>11.33</b>

*Source:* Information supplied by the Department of the Public Service.

increasingly recognised that in Western democracies the judiciary contributes to the making of policy and this is more obviously so in Ireland where the courts not only apply common and statute law but the provisions of the Constitution. Yet in 1985, as Table 4 shows, there were no women amongst the 6 members of the Supreme Court and only 1 out of 15 in the High Court (nor are there currently any women on the important Law Reform Commission). Within the judiciary as a whole women formed only 6.7 per cent. This is none the less comparable to the British situation where, in 1983, there was no woman judge serving in a court of appeal and only 3 out of 77 High Court judges were women, though in France women have been much more successful in penetrating the upper echelons of the judiciary.

Table 4: *Women in the Judiciary 1985*

	<i>Total No.</i>	<i>No. of Women</i>	<i>% Women</i>
Supreme Court	6	0	0
High Court	15	1	6.7
Special Criminal Court	9	0	0
Circuit Court	15	0	0
District Court	44	5	11.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6.7</b>

*Source:* Institute of Public Administration (1986).

To these more direct channels of political recruitment and influence must finally be added the communications media. In Ireland these are arguably of particular importance in forming one of the few arenas within which "liberal" views on issues of social policy have been expressed and developed (this only applies to certain national newspapers and to RTE of course). Several of the pioneers of contemporary feminism in Ireland, for instance Nell McCafferty, Mary Maher and Mary Kenny, were journalists. The impression of a relatively high female and even feminist profile within the national media is all the same quite misleading. In 1985 all the editors of the 4 national dailies, 3 evening newspapers and 4 Sunday newspapers, and of 49 provincial newspapers were men. Though 2 of the 9 members of the RTE Authority were women, only one woman featured among 30 senior managers. Comparable data for other European countries are hard to come by but, in the British newspaper world, by the end of the 1970s, women were just over 2 per cent of news sub-editors and 3.6 per cent of executives.

The chief object of this admittedly rapid survey has been to confirm what is already evident, how few women hold positions of political power, though at the same time it appears that Ireland's record in this respect is comparable to that of the majority of Western European countries. Of much greater interest are the reasons for this underrepresentation and in particular factors peculiar to, or unusually cogent in, the Irish context. Here our comments will centre on the numerical channel, though not to the exclusion of other arenas. This is for two reasons. First is the much greater volume of material, both primary and secondary, that is relevant and available. But second, partly because of this greater openness, it is in the numerical channel of elected local and national assemblies that women in Ireland and elsewhere have been most successful and where their best chances of increased representation for the present lie.

### III THE RECRUITMENT OF WOMEN POLITICIANS: SUPPLY FACTORS

When seeking to explain women's political participation it is helpful to distinguish between factors of supply and demand. To quote Randall

On the supply side are the principal factors determining the availability of women politicians. We are interested not only in the women who do come forward but also in those who don't. On the demand side are the political and institutional factors governing the recruitment and role assignment of political elites in general and female politicians in particular. (1982, p. 84).

At the same time it must be emphasised that supply and demand are not mutually exclusive. Women's reluctance to come forward for instance may anti-



ciate practical difficulties of combining domestic and political rôles or of raising the necessary finance, or it may reflect their perception of the political process as irrelevant to their lives or simply their lack of appropriate credentials.

In Ireland as elsewhere it is important to understand why so few women actively *seek* political office. The supply of potential women candidates is restricted by a complex series of influences ranging from attitudes women have acquired to their own capacities and rôle, through general practical constraints on women's political participation to their handicap in terms of relevant qualifications and prior experience.

A number of authors, especially in the United States, have stressed the rôle of predominantly childhood, socialisation, in shaping women's political aspirations (see for instance Githens and Prestage, 1977; Kelley and Boutilier, 1978). The way in which traditional assumptions about women's nature, rôle in the family and so on, are transmitted through family, school and wider cultural influences are sufficiently well known not to require further elaboration here. In Ireland however these assumptions have been reinforced through the agency of the Roman Catholic Church. While Roman Catholicism has also been important in shaping attitudes towards women in a number of other European countries, what distinguishes Ireland is the fact that the Church has maintained this cultural ascendancy for so long and without any major countervailing secular culture to threaten it. Randall has suggested elsewhere that the reasons for this ascendancy are historical. Roman Catholicism came to be seen as the true religion of the Irish nation oppressed by the Protestant British. Although there were tensions between the more militant forms of Irish nationalism and the Catholic hierarchy, cultural nationalism and Catholicism found a *modus vivendi* which continued after Independence to dominate moral and political life, leaving little scope for competing ideologies (Randall, 1986). The Church has exercised its hold over the Irish people directly through the pulpit — and still in 1981, according to one survey, 86 per cent of Catholics claimed to go to Church at least once a week, a higher rate than in any other European country (cited in Whyte, 1985, p. 7) — but also through its entrenched position within schools and its rôle as a provider of welfare and health services.

It has further been suggested that Irish Catholicism has taken a particularly authoritarian and puritanical form, though opinions differ as to the reason for this. As such its prescriptions for women have been extremely narrow and rigid. The central importance of the family and of women's rôle as child-bearers and home-makers, the indissolubility of marriage, total opposition to all forms of artificial contraception and above all abortion, all these are essential precepts of the Church's teaching. The Irish Constitution adopted in 1937, itself "directly inspired by Roman Catholic theology and teaching, explicitly valorises or sanctifies the roles of wife and mother." (Smyth, 1985, p. 259). According to Article 41,

“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. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.”

While then the impact of Roman Catholicism in shaping attitudes directly, and through social policies, indirectly, is undeniable and probably subject to fewer countervailing influences than in any other European country, it must also be recognised that from the 1970s its moral authority has been waning. A complex of forces such as economic change, urbanisation, tourism, EEC membership and perhaps most of all the development of Irish television, have gradually worked to undermine its hold. Recently commenting on this process, Whyte identified as a major landmark the passage of the 1985 Family Planning Amendment Act, which, against the advice of a number of bishops, legalised the sale of contraceptives to all those aged 18 and above, regardless of their marital status (Whyte, 1985). Evidence of changing attitudes was provided in the 1981 attitude survey already referred to. As Father Liam Ryan, Professor of Sociology at Maynooth, himself summarised the findings:

only a third of those under 25 believe that the Church's answers are adequate on moral problems and problems of family life; some 53 per cent of all Irish people, and 71 per cent of those under 25, approve of divorce; one in four of the adult population does not pray; while half of all Irish people show something less than “a great deal of confidence” in their Church. (cited, in Whyte, 1985, p. 7)

Given what we know of other countries it is of course likely that in Ireland traditional Catholic values are losing their hold over women more slowly than over men. On the other hand it is clear, if obvious, that women have been more positively affected by the Irish women's movement than have men.

Second-wave feminism emerged relatively late in Ireland, at the end of the 1960s (on this see Levine, 1982; Laffan, 1981; and Brennan, 1979). The small pioneering group that became known as the Irish Women's Liberation Movement included a number of journalists who brought feminist arguments to a wider readership and, amongst other issues, campaigned for freely available contraceptives. This group gave rise to a “second generation” of younger, more militant feminists, based around Irish Women United, which was formed in 1975. From 1977 however the ideological and organisational unity of the movement once more declined as divisions surfaced similar to those in other European feminist movements, as well as on the issue of Irish republicanism. The movement began to diversify; a number of single-issue groups were formed and the Equal Employment Agency and Council for the Status of Women were

established on an official basis. In 1982 the campaign established to oppose the Constitutional amendment on abortion provided a new focus for concerted action, though within limits, since not all feminists were prepared to oppose the amendment and those who did disagreed on tactics.

There is no question but that the women's movement has made its mark on political culture and practice. There are, for example, now 45 women's organisations affiliated to the Council for the Status of Women as compared with 10 when it was first set up as an *ad hoc* committee in 1968. There are three women's publishing houses, numerous women's studies groups and courses, and a series of flourishing women's groups around the country. Politicians are now much more conscious of women's interests and a potential women's vote. The Employment Equality Agency, set up following the Employment Equality Act of 1977, official recognition of the Council for the Status of Women in 1979, the appointment of a Minister of State for Women's Affairs in 1982 (though it should be noted her full title was Minister of State for Women's Affairs and Family Law Reform, her responsibilities were split between two government departments and her budget, never munificent, by 1986 was less than £200,000) and the creation of an Oireachtas Committee on Women's Rights in 1983 may all have reflected the government's pragmatic response to an effective lobby rather than a more profound change of heart. But these moves none the less constituted a kind of public legitimisation of women's attempts to venture beyond their traditional social and political rôles.

The complex interaction of these different influences has been apparent in women's attitudes. These can be illustrated with some caution by the findings of a series of surveys conducted by the Information Directorate of the European Communities on Men and Women in Europe, in 1975, 1978 and 1983. Although in 1983 the Report concluded "In Ireland, the traditional model of women in the home is dominant", with 39 per cent of respondents (as against a European average of 28 per cent) believing women's place was in the home, 72 per cent of Irish women agreed with claims for sexual equality in general and 64 per cent (an increase from 47 per cent in 1978) were broadly supportive of the women's movement.

A much quoted finding was that 32 per cent of women in 1975, and 45 per cent in 1978, said they would have more confidence in a man than in a woman deputy, a higher percentage than in any other EEC country. As Laffan points out, the percentage of Irish men having greater confidence in a male deputy also rose during this period and the overall increase may have been partly due to a backlash following the prominence given the women's movement in 1975 as United Nations' Women's Year (Laffan, 1981, p. 16). At any rate by 1983 only 20 per cent of women (38 per cent of men) in Ireland fell into this category.

The 1983 survey also sought to measure political interest and participation.

Perhaps its most pertinent finding, though not of course confined to Ireland, was that women's expressed interest in politics was less than men's. Women also appeared less likely than men to belong to political groups (3 per cent of women as compared with 5 per cent of men), or indeed to belong to any organisations such as clubs or associations, unless they were of a religious nature.

A preliminary conclusion to this part of our discussion would be that Irish women have until the very recent past been subject to a particularly intense, if complex, process of socialisation, through the agency of family, school and the Church, into an acceptance of an extremely traditional division of labour between the sexes and its implications for women's political rôle. There is evidence however that over the last 15 years women have increasingly been questioning these assumptions of their childhood socialisation, under the impact of challenging experience in their adult life associated with the declining influence of the Church and the emergence of a women's movement. Women's attitudes, we would argue, can no longer be offered as the main explanation for the small numbers of Irish women to be found in political office. On the other hand, a much more disturbing finding is that men's attitudes do not appear to have been liberalised in tandem. (See Fine-Davis 1983.) If anything the last decade has seen a hardening of male opposition to sexual equality.

Women's attitudes and their living situations cannot be entirely separated. Attitudes are not only reinforced, or undermined, by experience, they will have affected earlier choices embodied in the present situation. Even so, many accounts of women's political underrepresentation prefer to emphasise the practical restrictions imposed on women's political participation by their domestic and especially their mothering rôles (see in particular, Lee, 1976).

The Irish Republic has for some time had the highest birth rate in Europe. Amongst contributory factors have been the continuing importance of agriculture and of rural values, as well as the moral injunctions of the Catholic Church and the consequent virtual impossibility of procuring contraceptives (until recently), let alone an abortion. Given traditional assumptions about women's responsibility for childcare and the home, this must have severely limited the practical possibility for married women to take an active part in politics. While this continues to be a major constraint, it is significant that, partly due to the greater availability of contraceptives, following the 1973 McGee ruling and the 1979 Family Planning Act, the last three years have seen a sharp decrease in the birth rate. By 1983, the crude birth rate of 19 births per 1,000 of the population was the "lowest since comprehensive birth registration commenced in 1864". (Clancy, 1984, p. 33).

We should here point out, without being able to provide a very satisfactory explanation, that, contrary to the pattern observed in a number of other European countries and in the United States, where women deputies are unlikely to have young children, at least 4 of the present 14 women TDs are in

this position. It is possible that in Ireland having young children can be a political asset for a woman, providing proof that she measures up as a woman as well as a politician, though it is also probable that these women can afford private child care.

Several studies in the United States found an association, statistically speaking, between women's participation in the paid workforce and increased political activity and interest (see Welch, 1977; Andersen, 1975). The assumption here was that this work experience widened women's horizons and gave them greater confidence. On the other hand it seems that, combined with women's continuing domestic responsibilities, paid employment could impose a "dual burden" making political activity still more difficult. More recently Christy found that in Western European countries workforce participation had a variable effect on political activism, depending on such additional factors as education. The association between employment and politicisation was strongest amongst younger women (Christy, 1983).

With this caveat, it may still be of relevance to Irish women's political representation that their participation in the paid labour force increased from 25 per cent of women aged 15 and above in 1951 to 29 per cent in 1981. Following a pattern observable in many other European countries, for instance Britain, this increase has been greatest amongst married women and women now are concentrated in part-time employment and in the service sector. Women's participation rate in 1981 was higher in Ireland than in Italy or the Netherlands, though on a par with women in Greece. At the same time the rate of women's unemployment has been growing since the mid-1970s; in 1981 it stood at 6.3 per cent as compared with 10 per cent for men. The survey of European Men and Women also found that whereas in 1975, 63 per cent of Irish women respondents said they would prefer to be in paid employment, by 1983 only 57 per cent felt this way, indicating some degree of disenchantment with their dual burden if also a realistic assessment of their employment opportunities.

But it is not enough for women to possess the freedom and motivation to participate in politics. Here we come to the intermediate zone, between supply and demand, where the nature of political institutions themselves, the types of individuals they require to fill political rôles, are projected back like a filter affecting the potential supply of eligible women. As in other European countries, women in Ireland are at a severe disadvantage, in satisfying the entry requirements, in terms of educational and occupational criteria, to what has traditionally been an exclusively male-defined and male-dominated public arena.

At this point we can draw on Gallagher's useful profile of the membership of the 24th Dail, elected in November 1982 (Gallagher, 1984). The educational qualifications of TDs have been steadily rising, especially in Fine Gael, and appear particularly important for women. In the 24th Dail, 38 per cent of TDs had a university education and for women the figure is 50 per cent. Yet women

in Ireland are still less likely than men to go on to full-time higher education; in 1982-83 women constituted 44.6 per cent of total student numbers, though this represented a significant narrowing of the gap since 1971-72.

Clearly related to education but still more crucial, as Gallagher notes, "women are not prominent in most of the occupational groups from which deputies emerge" (Gallagher, 1984, p. 254). It is generally recognised that certain professions and occupations are particularly compatible with a parliamentary career. The best known of these is law. Lawyers are most numerous in the US Congress but also prominent in most European legislatures. Following the November 1982 election, 16 TDs (9.6 per cent) were lawyers but none of these were women. As we have seen, Irish women have yet to make much impression on the higher ranks of the judiciary, though some comfort may be derived from women's increase as a percentage of all law students from 27 in 1971-72 to 41 in 1981-82 (Smyth, 1984).

Two further professions commonly associated with a parliamentary career are journalism and teaching. The proportion of TDs with a background in one of these professions has been growing, and most markedly amongst those from Dublin constituencies. In the 24th Dail 1 woman TD, Nuala Fennell, was formerly a journalist. More strikingly, 5 women TDs had teaching qualifications and one had been a lecturer. Teaching seems currently to be the most accessible of the occupations conducive to a political career as far as women are concerned.

The fact remains that the single largest occupational category in the Dail, accounting for 27.1 per cent of all TDs, is "commercial", covering business people, mainly small businessmen such as shopkeepers, publicans and auctioneers. The high incidence of small businessmen is striking and, as Gallagher says, "seems peculiar to Ireland" (1984, p. 248). It is because of the advantage this rôle gives them in cultivating a local network of contacts, so essential in Irish constituency politics and especially in rural areas. We shall be considering this aspect of Irish politics more fully in the following section but here simply register that it places women at an obvious further disadvantage.

One last significant occupational category in the Dail are farmers. In 1985 only 5.8 per cent of farm-owners in Ireland were women and it comes as little surprise to learn that no women TDs fall into this category.

To summarise, this discussion has identified both stimuli and deterrents to the supply of potential women politicians in Ireland. Traditional attitudes to women have strongly discouraged them from participation in politics, though these are now under challenge. Women's domestic responsibilities have also been a major practical constraint, though this could be less the case in the future, while the effects of women's paid employment are more ambiguous. Finally, women are less likely than men to possess the "credentials" facilitating a political career: access to university education is rapidly equalising but women remain starkly underrepresented in most of the occupational categories, exclud-

ing teaching, from which politicians are recruited.

Even so supply factors alone cannot explain why there are so few women holding political office. Not only is the definition of supply to some extent dictated, as we have seen, by the nature of demand, but we need to understand the ways in which Irish political institutions may themselves constitute barriers to women's political advancement. This need not imply, though neither of course does it rule out, actual conscious discrimination against women aspirants. What we shall be focusing on are rules and conventions of the Irish political process that tend to put women at a disadvantage. We shall be concentrating here on the "numerical" channel, and first and foremost on obstacles to women's membership of the Dail.

#### IV THE DEMAND SIDE: IRISH POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

To begin with, how are individuals selected as candidates for Dail elections? Obviously the main formal agencies are political parties and we shall later have more to say specifically concerning parties' treatment of women as members and potential candidates. In selecting candidates, though, parties will be looking for particular qualities. Some time ago (1970), Farrell identified four principal routes to the Dail. First was participation in the Independence struggle. So long as this was a relevant consideration it worked to women's disadvantage, but the last hero of 1916 lost his Dail seat in 1977.

A second route was through sport, exemplified of course in the career of Jack Lynch. Gallagher points out that sporting prowess is in itself no guarantee of selection. What it does make more likely is selection to stand for the local council, itself a stepping stone to the Dail. Membership of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), especially as an officer of the County Board, also valuably extends political contacts. Of the 166 TDs elected in November 1982, around 50 were past or present members of the GAA (Gallagher, 1984). This is again an avenue of political advancement from which women are excluded.

The third route, family connections, has on the other hand been of great relevance to women. The practice, when a deputy died, of selecting a relative to stand in his seat was always a feature of Irish politics but intensified from the 1930s. By the 1965 and 1969 General Elections, around 30 per cent of Dail members were closely related to previous or incumbent TDs. Since then the proportion has declined a little, to 24.7 per cent in the 24th Dail which "is still exceptionally high for a modern legislature" (Gallagher, 1984, p. 259). Studies of women politicians in other countries have regularly noted the rôle of "male equivalence", women attaining political office through their relationship to male politicians. In the US Congress, for example, from 1917 to 1976, 73 per

cent of women Senators and 50 per cent of women Representatives were the widows of Congressmen. Not that this necessarily implied anything about the calibre of these women. They still had to fight to be selected and many became formidable politicians in their own right (Kincaid, 1978). In Ireland family connections have been the single most important access route for women. Of the 26 women elected to the Dail from 1922 to the eve of the 1981 General Election, 13 were widows of TDs or nationalist leaders and only 5 could be said to have made it on their own. Not until the November 1982 election was that pattern broken, though then dramatically. Only 5 of the 14 women TDs then elected could fairly be said to have "inherited" their seats (though at 35 per cent of all women TDs this was still over the percentage in the Dail as a whole).

A major reason for this salience of family connections may be that they provide aspiring politicians with ready-made capital in the form of a network of local ties that can be mobilised (Marsh, 1981). We have also suggested earlier that a background in sport helps build local connections. The numerousness of small businessmen in the Dail can be similarly explained.

But it is in considering the fourth of these traditional routes to the Dail, through local government, that the full import of localism in Irish politics emerges. Localism in politics can be defined as a preoccupation with local or parochial issues and relationships. It is held to be a product of the particular combination of clientelism and the electoral system. The clientelist, or quasi-clientelist, tradition in Irish politics stems from Ireland's history and the continuing influence of rural interests and orientations.

[The] assiduous cultivation and preservation of local connections is made necessary by the Irish electorate's desire for representatives who will perform a brokerage role between themselves and a state machinery which, partly for historical reasons, is often seen as remote and hostile and is viewed with suspicion (Gallagher, 1980, p. 491).

But as Carty (1983) has elaborated, localism is reinforced by the single transferable vote (STV) system or proportional representation. This electoral system has allowed simultaneously for the establishment of a stable national party system with relatively strong party identification and parochial politics at the constituency level in which local networks and interests are of paramount importance. Since in each constituency the electorate return 3 or more TDs and individual voters are not obliged to restrict their support to candidates from one party, constituency parties are encouraged to look for candidates with an edge over other contestants in terms of their existing record of service to constituents. Probably more germane, the system encourages individual politicians to build personal followings or "bailiwicks" in a part of the constituency, to maximise their chance of being selected as a party candidate, that is the electoral system fosters intra-party competition which again reinforces localism. Localism may



be more intense in rural than in urban areas though the difference should not be exaggerated. It might also be expected to decline with processes associated with modernisation and urbanisation but in fact the effect of the present economic recession may actually be to strengthen localism (See Komito, 1984).

One consequence of localism is the very high premium placed on local residence in the process of candidate selection. Of the 166 deputies elected to the Dail in November 1982, less than 10 did not live in their constituency and over 86 per cent were born there. Though the residential requirement was virtually essential in rural constituencies, it was also very relevant in Dublin. However only 10 of the 14 women TDs at that time (less than 75 per cent) were born in their constituencies, a reflection on the fact that several had been "imposed" as candidates by the party leadership.

It is in the context of localism that experience in local government becomes so valuable. Chubb cites one verdict that Ireland has "one of the most centrally controlled of local government systems" and suggests that neither the public nor politicians are especially concerned about local government as such (1982, p. 288). What does matter to aspiring politicians is that membership of a local authority enables them to acquire a record of local service and to cultivate a local network. Komito also suggests politicians may find it easier to put pressure on local government workers on behalf of individual constituents, than on civil servants, especially those employed in "state-sponsored" bodies (1984, p. 184). Of the November 1982 Dail deputies, Gallagher (1984) found that 66.3 per cent had previously served on a local authority.

A local government background is a major asset for a potential candidate. There is, of course, nothing in the law to prevent the same individual serving simultaneously as councillor and TD. Mossuz-Lavau and Sineau (1984) have suggested that in France this widespread practice of a "cumul des mandats" provides a further obstacle for women, since they have to break into a political world where the local and national rôles of entrenched male politicians are mutually reinforcing.

Local government experience is less essential for deputies from Dublin; according to Gallagher (1984) only 26 of its 48 TDs elected in November 1982 had previously been county councillors. Indeed local government experience seems to feature to inverse proportion to alternative educational and professional qualifications. Nearly 60 per cent of TDs with no county council experience but only 30 per cent of those first elected to county councils had university degrees, while 26 of the 69 professionals in the Dail had never been county councillors. This is of little present comfort to women however, since we have seen they are less likely than men to qualify for selection as parliamentary candidates on the strength of their professional experience.

If women are less able than men to bypass the local government route, what has been their record in securing nomination as candidates and election to local

authorities? In fact, as Table 5 shows, during the 1970s women's representation on County Councils and County Borough Councils was little better than in the Dail, aggregating at 5.2 per cent in 1974 and 6.8 per cent in 1979. By 1979 they were only 5.6 per cent of County Councillors and 13 per cent of County Borough Councillors, though this did reflect a steady increase on the previous decade. Much was hoped for the local elections of June 1985, when more women candidates stood than ever before. The results were disappointing. Women are now 7.7 per cent of County Councillors (compared with 5.8 per cent in 1979) and 11.3 per cent of County Borough Councillors (actually down from 1979). As already noted this experience of Irish women contrasts with a general tendency in European countries for women's rates of representation to be substantially higher in local than in national elected assemblies.

Table 5: *Local Government Elections (Absolute Numbers of Women Elected and % of Seats)*

	1967	1974	1979	1985
County Councils	20 (2.9)	27 (3.9)	41 (5.8)	58 (7.7)
Borough Councils	6 (5.5)	15 (13.8)	14 (13.0)	13 (11.3)
Total	26 (3.2)	42 (5.2)	55 (6.8)	71 (8.1)

Sources: Barnes (1975); Tansey (1984); Authors' own data drawn from Department of the Environment Local Government Returns 1985.

While presently we can do no more than speculate on the reasons for this apparent anomaly, certain features of local government in Ireland may be of relevance. It has been argued that councillors are even more preoccupied than TDs with "brokerage" functions, the need to present themselves as the indispensable intermediaries between individual constituents and council bureaucrats. Local government officers, and notably the powerful Council Managers, are willing to co-operate, some would even say collude, in this process because, within the constraints of an already highly centralised local administrative system, it leaves them free to determine broader policy (see Collins, 1985a and 1985b). That is, the same political culture that we have already identified as militating against women's selection as candidates for national elections, informs, in if anything a more intense way, the arena of local government. In local as in national assemblies, particular occupations are overrepresented. A survey in August 1982 by the County and City Managers Association (cited by Collins, 1985b, p. 40) indicated that 28 per cent of local councillors were farmers, 10 per cent shopkeepers and publicans and 10 per cent salesmen and auctioneers. Such occupations, we have suggested, afford the best opportunities to cultivate an informal network of contacts and clients but will include few

women. Similarly women are largely excluded from the kinds of meeting-places — pubs, sporting, business and other clubs, markets, auctions — where these networks are cemented. The possession of such local influence is likely to be of overwhelming importance in the selection of local candidates. In national elections, party leaders do sometimes intervene in the selection process, as we shall see, but at the local level there is generally no such compensating pressure. That the salience of brokerage politics provides at least part of the explanation for women's relative underachievement in local government seems confirmed by the finding that in 1979 around 20 per cent of women councillors were concentrated in the Dublin area where it is rather less significant.

If women face difficulties breaking into this brokerage culture, then there is also perhaps less inducement for them to get involved in local government than in some other European countries. In Britain and in Scandinavia, for example, women councillors have been able to develop expertise and serve on committees specialising in policy issues that could be seen as an extension of their concerns as mothers and home-makers — education, housing, health and welfare. In Ireland, as suggested above, not only do local councils have relatively little say in broad policy questions but that say is largely, by tacit consent, the prerogative of paid officers. As recently as last year, from her survey of councillors' rôle perceptions in one county, Carey found that only a small minority believed they should be shaping policy, as opposed to representing the interests of individual constituents or their district in the detailed implementation of already formulated policies (Carey, 1986). Those who did have policy-making aspirations were moreover frustrated by the restrictions they encountered. Education and health services do not, for the most part, fall within the ambit of local government in Ireland but even in the field of housing, at least outside Dublin, councillors will not be expected to make policy.

Whatever the reasons, for the moment local government appears to be a major stumbling block for aspiring women politicians. They need local government experience, the more so while they have less access than men to relevant professional qualifications, and indeed 9 of the 14 women TDs, that is 64 per cent or approximately the average for the Dail as a whole, have such a local government background. But the rate of women's representation in local government lags behind many other European countries and is only increasing very slowly.

Given these difficulties, an alternative route that women appear to be making increasing use of is through the Seanad. The Seanad may play a minor policy-making rôle but it includes many future TDs. Its composition rules are complex. Of the 60 Senators, 6 are elected by graduates of the National Universities and 43 are elected by a college, made up of Oireachteas members together with County and County Borough Councillors from 5 panels of candidates nominated by bodies representing sectional interests and by Oireachteas members. In practice this part of the selection process is dominated by the

political parties. The remaining 11 members are nominated by the Taoiseach.

Mossuz-Lavau and Sineau (1984) found that in Europe as a whole indirectly elected second chambers tended to work against women, particularly given their frequent overrepresentation of rural constituencies. On the other hand, when senators were directly appointed, this could help women, depending of course on the attitude of the nominating authority. The proportion of women in the Seanad has been consistently higher than in the Dail. From 8.3 per cent in 1928 it dropped to 5 per cent in 1938 but by 1977 was up at 10 per cent and in 1981 as high as 15 per cent (9 women Senators) though it subsequently reverted to 10 per cent. This is partly because the Seanad is much less powerful than the Dail, although this does not apply in local government for reasons we have suggested. However women also benefit from its composition rules. Significantly enough only 3 of the present 6 women Senators were elected through the panel system (a Seanad panel campaign is notoriously arduous); 2 were elected by the universities and 1 appointed by the Taoiseach. Consistent with this finding, in recent years, family connections have been far less important for women Senators than for women TDs. Of the 9 women who served in the Seanad following the 1973 and 1977 General Elections, only 1 had a family tie with a former member of either house (Carty, 1980).

Membership of the Seanad is one alternative route to the Dail for women. Of the 14 women TDs elected in November 1982, 5 were previously Senators. These include Mary Harney, Monica Barnes and Gemma Hussey all of whom could be seen as typifying a new kind of woman TD, not dependent on family connections and with a record of feminist commitment prior to election and all of whom represent constituencies in the Dublin area.

Another potential route, at least since direct elections were introduced in 1979, is through election to the European Parliament. So far however its potential has hardly been realised. There were 4 women candidates, 2 of them elected, in 1979 and 6 women candidates of whom again 2 were elected in 1984. Lovenduski (1986) points out that in 1984 Ireland was the only EEC state not to return a higher proportion of women in their delegation than women constitute in their national parliament. Of women TDs at that time Eileen Desmond was an MEP and Eileen Lemass is currently an MEP. Both are widows of former TDs and both were TDs before becoming MEPs.

Would-be candidates can improve their chances of selection in all the ways we have described but it is still ultimately parties that decide. Candidates can, of course, stand as independents. Carty, however, having considered the 1977 General Election when several women candidates ran as independents but none were elected to the Dail, concludes that women "can hope to be successful only if they join a party and work from within existing organisations." (1980, p. 100). Party support also helps defray, though to judge from conversations with women politicians it does not eliminate, the financial burden of mounting an election

campaign and, equally important, without such support it is extremely difficult to get media coverage.

In Europe as a whole women have done better both in relation to their position in the party and candidate selection in parties of the Left. Neither Fianna Fail nor Fine Gael could remotely be described as Left-wing while the Labour Party has been of marginal electoral significance. Labour's record in promoting women has not in any case been outstanding, though improving over the last decade. Manning (1978) pointed out that, at least up until 1977, the distribution of women TDs between the three main parties broadly corresponded to those parties' strength in the Dail. From 1977 until 1982, Fine Gael had the most impressive record for selecting women candidates and getting them elected. In the 24th Dail, 9 of the 14 women TDs were Fine Gael members (4 were Fianna Fail and 1 Labour). The balance has altered interestingly with the entry of the Progressive Democrats into national politics. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael now have 5 women TDs each, while the Progressive Democrats have 4, and Labour and the Workers' Party none. But here we should look at the selection process itself, usefully discussed by Gallagher (1980). As compared with elsewhere, the selection process in Ireland shows a considerable local bias. In each constituency the selection conference is dominated by the local party organisation and its criteria prevail, above all the requirement that prospective candidates should have established a local power base. The national executive none the less does have the power to ratify or veto candidates thus selected and most relevantly to our discussion, to impose additional candidates (possibly because they are not single-member constituencies).

This power of nomination is of the utmost importance for women. Against the background of Irish feminist campaigning and generally heightened awareness of women as a constituency, politicians on the eve of the 1977 General Election were said to have "discovered" the potential of the women's vote. The party leaderships began to appeal more deliberately for women's support. They offered greater encouragement to women to come forward as candidates both locally and nationally. From 6.7 per cent of all candidates in 1977, women increased to 10 per cent in 1981 though at the November 1982 elections they had declined to 8.5 per cent. The party leaderships also imposed women candidates. In 1977, Fianna Fail's national executive imposed no less than 16 candidates, 6 of whom were women. Two Fine Gael women TDs, both "self-propelled" rather than using family connections and with a background of involvement in the women's movement, were imposed as candidates by Garret FitzGerald: Nuala Fennell before the 1981 General Election in Dublin South and Monica Barnes before the November 1982 election in Dun Laoghaire.

In other European countries this form of sponsorship has often proved a crucial means of increasing women's representation. So far, however, neither of the two main Irish parties has gone further in attempts to modify the selection

processes of local party organisations. The Labour party prior to the 1985 local elections recommended a quota of 1 woman in 4 for all local election candidate panels, though in the event the proportion secured was closer to 17 per cent.

Women's progress within the party's internal hierarchy is relevant here, not only for its symbolic significance but because studies in a number of countries suggest that experience of party office is a further qualification likely to impress the party selectorate. As we have seen, while women's share of places in the party national executives has increased by 1984 it was still less than 20 per cent. Also relevant here are the party women's sections. In the general literature about women in politics opinions have been divided on whether party sections spur women's promotion through the party or act as a kind of distraction and *cul-de-sac*. Conversations with women politicians in Ireland indicate that they have found them extremely valuable. These women's sections however are not equally well established. Women in the Labour Party formed an *ad hoc* advisory council as early as 1971 though it was not officially recognised until 1979 and only in 1980 was it allocated two reserve seats on the party's Administrative Council. Fine Gael's women's section was formed around three years ago and officially established two years later. Fianna Fail now has a National Women's Committee, set up in 1981, and restructured in 1984. It is made up of women TDs and national executive members with additional women co-opted from party branches, its chairwoman is appointed by the party leader and its functions are primarily advisory and for research. The women's sections have helped focus attention on the question of women's representation as well as bringing so-called women's issues on to their parties' political agendas. The sections have also brought individual women considerable support. Labour's Women's Council encouraged women to stand in local elections and helped with their campaigns. Fine Gael women likewise appreciated the day-long seminars run by the Women's Section before the 1985 local elections.

We have concentrated so far on the process by which candidates are selected but we should finally consider more closely the impact of the electoral system and of elections themselves. In the general literature on women's political participation some writers ascribe almost paramount importance to the electoral system (see in particular Vallance, 1979). They regularly suggest that, other things being equal, systems of proportional representation encourage the selection of women candidates while single-member plurality systems do not. It might therefore be supposed that the comparatively high rate of women's membership in the present Dail is a consequence of Ireland's electoral system. However Ireland does not use the party-list system form of proportional representation (PR) that has been credited with women's successes in Scandinavia and the Netherlands. If PR systems do help women it is because parties must offer a number of candidates for each constituency. This may prompt them to seek a "balanced" ticket to appeal to as wide a cross-section of the constituency

as possible, and specifically with the spread of feminist values to include women candidates. In a fixed party-list system it is moreover easier to ensure that imposed candidates are actually elected.

In Ireland admittedly the fact that constituencies return 3–5 members has enabled the party leaders exceptionally to add candidates to locally determined lists and from the late 1970s this has been of benefit to women. But as we have seen the STV system by reinforcing the localism of Irish politics may in other respects positively hinder women's representation. Mossuz-Lavau and Sineau (1984) argued that PR could be of particular value for women when it broke down a politician's established local stronghold or prevented it from forming. In Ireland on the contrary the electoral system not only strengthens localism in constituency party politics but, by fostering intra-party conflict, encourages politicians to establish their own bailiwicks within constituencies. A "balanced" ticket becomes one in which the different districts within a constituency are catered for and attempts to appeal to other kinds of interest, for instance women, are secondary at best.

A further question is whether the electoral system gives the electorate a greater opportunity than other systems to register its preference between individual candidates on grounds other than party, and if so whether this has resulted in lower votes for women candidates. If we simply take the ratio of men and women candidates respectively elected to the Dail, there has certainly been a much higher proportion of men elected, nearly 2:1 in 1977 and again in February 1982 though in November 1982 there was virtually no difference, at 45.6:45.2. It is not possible to estimate how far this is because women are less likely to be selected for "safe" seats, given the difficulties of identifying safe seats in the Irish context. Marsh (1981) has provided some additional evidence from the 1977 General Election as to whether gender itself makes a difference to the vote. Applying multivariate analysis to the election results, to isolate the independent effects of different relevant variables, he found that overall sex made virtually no difference, with a correlation of only 0.05. Controlling for incumbency, the correlation was a little stronger at .15, suggesting that for women trying to break into the parliamentary arena, gender was an electoral liability though hardly a serious one.

Summing up this discussion of the "demand" within Irish political institutions for women politicians, we have seen first that women need to be selected as candidates by a political party if they are to stand a real chance of election. Party selection processes tend to be dominated by constituency organisations, looking for candidates who have been able to build a local power base, whether through family connections, sporting activities, small business occupations or local government experience. In rural areas where such localism is most pronounced, women's only real way in has been through family ties. They have been hamstrung in seeking local government office by the very lack of a local power base

built on brokerage which such office might itself enable them to secure. In urban areas localism and brokerage count less, corresponding credentials are less essential, and educational and professional qualifications count for more. Party leaders also have shown greater willingness in recent years to impose women candidates, and here the electoral system, with multi-member districts, has proved advantageous. Women with suitable credentials have been able to take advantage of these opportunities and have also used the Seanad as an alternative route to the Dail.

But the scope of these new opportunities should not be exaggerated. We have not so far mentioned two further political developments that may have helped women but are unlikely to be repeated in the near future. One is the succession of three General Elections in 1981-82, meaning a rapid turnover of seats and therefore perhaps greater opportunities for women to break in. Secondly the number of Dail seats was actually increased by 12 per cent in 1981, so that more women candidates could be selected without threatening the position of existing male candidates or TDs. The results of the General Election this year tend to confirm our view that the virtual doubling of women's parliamentary representation between 1981 and 1982 was due to a particular combination of favourable circumstances rather than marking the beginning of a continuing and definite upward trend.

## V CONCLUSION

All in all our conclusions cannot be very encouraging. On the one hand the potential supply of women politicians is only slowly increasing. Although attitudes are changing, the results of the divorce referendum in June 1986 indicate the tenacity of traditional Catholic values. Women are less constrained than they were by domestic responsibilities and their achievement in terms of educational and professional qualifications is steadily improving. At the same time the "localism" in party politics which we have identified as a major stumbling block for women far from waning may be growing stronger in the climate of economic recession. Localism can be counteracted by national party sponsorship and this has been instrumental in launching several of today's best known women politicians on their careers. But sponsorship of women candidates from the late 1970s was a response to the vitality of the women's movement and the spread of feminist values. Again the divorce referendum confirms earlier impressions that the impact of the movement may have peaked.

One can finally suggest, at the risk of oversimplification, two types of women politicians in Ireland. On the one hand are the "traditional" women who have come into politics through their family connections, have inherited local clienteles, represent rural areas and have some background in local government.



On the other are perhaps younger, more educated and professionally qualified women, who are "self-propelled", have been more publicly identified with feminist values, have been sponsored by party leaders, often serving first of all in the Seanad, and now represent an urban, particularly a Dublin parliamentary seat. These we could call the "new" political women and we must suppose that they are harbingers of the future. But so long as the influence of bishop and bailiwick remains in Irish political life, that future must still be a long way off.

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