Diffusion effects of gender quotas: increasing the supply of independent women?

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Abstract

The implementation of legislative gender quotas at the 2016 general election in the Republic of Ireland (hereafter Ireland) resulted in a 97 per cent rise in the number of party women contesting the election. While the gender quota law is not applicable to non-party candidates, the number of women contesting the election as independents also increased, up by 65 per cent. An unintended consequence of the quota law may have been a symbolic and diffusion effect, signalling to all women, party and none, that politics in Ireland is a more welcoming space for women, empowering women to get politically active, and thus increasing the supply of women coming forward as independent candidates. It is this proposition that provides the impetus for this paper, leading to a number of research questions:

- *Can we claim a diffusion effect of gender quotas, leading to an increase in the supply of non-party or independent women candidates?*
- *Is this diffusion effect an example of the symbolic impact of gender quotas, empowering women to become politically active?*
- *Who are these women who contest elections as independent candidates?*
- *Are they different to their female counterparts who contest election as party candidates?*
- *What can we learn about female candidate emergence, and the supply and demand dynamics that shape this, by viewing it through the lens of independents?*
- *What electoral rules and institutions facilitate the emergence of independents, and are these gendered to advantage or disadvantage women?*

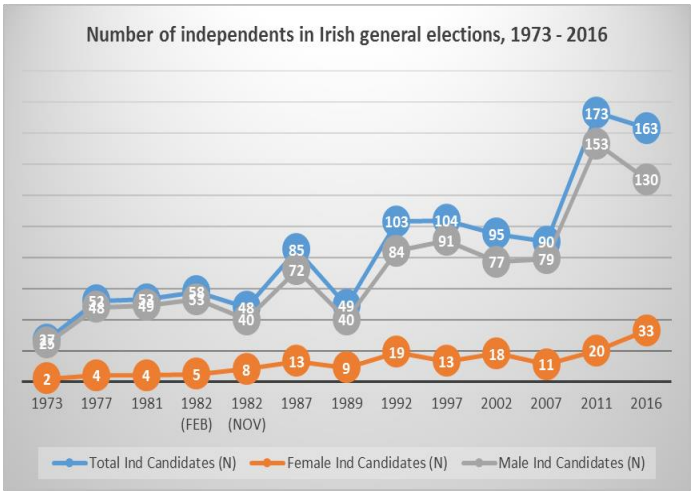
Through this gendered analysis, we can make some tentative assessments of the supply and demand of women candidates beyond the usual party focused explanations, an increasingly important area of focus, given increasing party fragmentation and how this impacts the dynamics of women's access into politics.

Introduction

In 2016, Ireland joined approximately 130 nation-states worldwide in implementing gender quotas for elections. The quota had an immediate impact, resulting in a 90 per cent increase

in women's candidacy and a 40 per cent increase in women's election. Ireland employs a legislative gender quota. The law specifies that political parties must select at least 30 per cent women and at least 30 per cent men as part of their candidate lists[1]. If not, they must forfeit 50 per cent of their state funding which they receive on an annual basis to run their operations. Political parties are therefore incentivised to increase their demand of women candidates. The gender quota law was very effective, increasing women's candidacy across the political parties by 97 per cent. Furthermore, the number of non-party or independent women candidates also rose, increasing by 65 per cent, a rise that occurred at a time when the overall number of independent candidates decreased by 13 per cent and male independent candidacy dropped by 20 per cent (see Figure 1). While increases in female independent candidacy between elections are not uncommon, they usually coincide with increases in the overall number of independent candidates contesting election, though this is not always congruently so (see Nov 1982 and 2002). However, what is interesting about 2016 is the presence of a gender quota law, albeit not applicable to independents, but still one that shaped the context of this general election. Does the presence of this gender rule account for the increase in women independents in 2016? This is a central concern of this paper.

Figure 1: Number of independent candidates, female and male, contesting Irish general elections, 1973 – 2016



While the emergence of parties, variously referred to as populist, anti-establishment and radical right, has been a feature of politics in many established democracies since the turn of the century, Irish party politics, living up to its reputation of not fitting easily into comparative frameworks of party systems, has not experienced such a phenomenon. This is not to say that Ireland is a party de-alignment/detachment/realignment free zone. Rather, a review of the combined support levels for the three parties who have made up the traditional 2.5 party system in Ireland (Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour) over the past twenty years shows a drop in support from 77.6 per cent in the 1997 general election, to a combined support level of 56.4 per cent at the most recent general election in 2016. The main beneficiaries of this party de-alignment has been a resurgent Sinn Féin and non-party or independent candidates. According to Weeks (2018a: xx), in Ireland, independents 'experienced the greatest electoral gains during the recessionary period' that followed the global financial crisis, gaining 10 per

[1] The quota threshold is due to rise to 40 per cent from 2023 onwards. Gender quotas apply at the national level only so are not applicable for local or European Parliament elections.

cent of the first preference vote (FPV) in the 2011 general election and 16 per cent in 2016. As many as 30 per cent of all candidates contesting the 2016 general election were classified as independent. Currently, 23 of the 158 TDs[2] in Dáil Éireann, the lower house of parliament in Ireland, are independent, meaning Ireland has more independent legislators than in the rest of world's lower houses combined (Weeks, 2017a).

It could be argued that this phenomenon of the independent or non-party politician is a most radical expression, in organisational terms at least, of anti-establishment politics (Weeks, 2017b), with politicians side-stepping political parties to appeal directly to voters, amassing a personal following and vote. The mood of the Irish public would seem to accommodate this mode of action. Some 79 per cent of Irish voters in 2011 and 73 per cent in 2016 did not feel close to any particular party, 'a level unmatched in any other Western democracy' (Weeks, 2017a: 158). But as Weeks observes:

> *that this radical alternative should materialise in Ireland might strike some international observers as unusual. After all, Ireland is not exactly renowned as a land of political or ideological radicalism. Historically, it has been a socially conservative country, which partly explains why no pirate party or radical right-wing party emerged during the recessionary years* (2018a: xx).

Rather, attention must be paid to the institutional and cultural factors that facilitate the emergence of independent politicians in Ireland, namely the electoral system Proportional Representation by means of the Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV), and a political culture where personalism and localism are reified. These features of the Irish political system have facilitated the candidacy and election of independents in Ireland since the foundation of the state in 1922, an increasing number of whom are women. In 2016, 20 per cent of all independent candidates were women, while 20 per cent of all women candidates were classified as independent, the highest such recorded proportions. Albeit, just six per cent of all candidates contesting the 2016 general election were women independents (n 33), as noted previously, this represented a 65 per cent increase on the number of women who contested the 2011 general election as independents. While the gender quota law is not applicable to non-party candidates, an unintended consequence may have been a symbolic and diffusion effect, signalling to all women, party and none, that politics in Ireland is a more welcoming space for women, thus increasing the supply of women coming forward as independents and accounting for the 65 per cent rise in their candidacy rates. It is this proposition that provides the impetus for this paper, leading to a number of questions specifically:

- Can we claim a diffusion effect of gender quotas, leading to an increase in the supply of non-party or independent women candidates?
- Is this diffusion effect an example of the symbolic impact of gender quotas, empowering non-party women to become politically active?
- Who are these women who contest elections as independent candidates?
- Are they different to their female counterparts who contest election as party candidates?

[2] TD refers to Teachta Dála, meaning member of the house of Dáil Éireann.

- What can we learn about female candidate emergence, and the supply and demand dynamics that shape this, by viewing it through the lens of independents?
- What electoral rules and institutions facilitate the emergence of independents, and are these gendered to advantage or disadvantage women?

Drawing from two databases, one consisting of demographic, political experience and electoral performance details of all candidates at the 2007, 2011 and 2016 general elections in Ireland, and the second identifying all women who ever contested a general election in Ireland as an independent candidate, this paper presents a descriptive account of independent women in Irish elections. A baseline study, it sketches a picture of independent women candidates, outlining their personal and political backgrounds. Through this analysis, we can make some tentative assessments of the supply and demand of women candidates beyond the usual party focused explanations, an increasingly important area of focus, given party fragmentation, and the rise of minor parties and independents. If major parties do not exert a monopoly on the demand for candidates, we might learn something more of the supply side factors which either support or suppress women in coming forward to stand for election. But cognisant that the end of parties is not nigh, an examination of the research questions outlined, specifically a comparison of independent and party women candidates, could be illuminating in revealing something about what particular characteristics in a women's demographic and/or political biography, are valued by political parties, aiding their selection prospects.

This paper, while more explorative than conclusive in nature, offers some tentative contributions to the literature on gender quotas as well as to the literature on gender and political recruitment, within and without political parties. From here, it proceeds with a brief review of the literature on women, gender and candidate recruitment, specifically highlighting the dynamics of supply and demand, as well as how gendered electoral institutions condition women's access to political candidacy. This is followed by a discussion on gender quotas to assess their impact on women's political representation and mobilization. The paper then contextualizes the Irish case-study, providing a brief overview of the participation of women in Irish politics, outlining why gender quotas were adopted, describing the party system and tracking the increasing presence of independents therein. Before the paper moves onto the empirical section, it locates the study of independents in a comparative context. Following this, the research design and findings are outlined. Finally a discussion and analysis of the results is presented advising that while some indicators point to gender quotas impacting the number of independents to run in 2016, it is only speculative in the absence of more research. However, the paper does shine some light on who are the women who 'go it alone', identifying a historical trend whereby the independent route was oftentimes a 'safety valve' for women, who felt unwelcomed by political parties. The paper concludes by setting out a future research agenda.

The under-representation of women in politics

The question of the need for and lack of, parity of representation in respect of gender has long dominated feminist scholarship and democratic theory (Pitkin, 1967; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999). Arguments for increasing the number of female representatives are made on grounds of justice, legitimacy and efficiency (Childs, 2008: xx;). The women and politics literature has focussed on how to understand, and therefore address,

the factors that lead to women's political under-representation, or, as is increasingly being described, male political over-representation (Murray, 2014). A key analytical distinction is offered between supply and demand explanatory features (Randall, 1982; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995).

The supply and demand model proposed by Norris and Lovenduski (1995) argues that two key factors - resources and motivation – condition the *supply* of candidates into the electoral market place. Resources include candidate background, experience and practicalities such as time and finance, while motivation focuses on an individual's confidence, interest, and ambition in politics. On the *demand* side, an aspirant's desire for political candidacy is conditioned by the preferences and decisions of party selectorates and party leadership. Thus parties are referred to as gate-keepers, determining who gets onto the party ticket. While a gender gap exists in terms of political interest, ambition and confidence between women and men, depressing the supply of women coming forward for political office (Lawless and Fox, 2005 and 2010), studies also show a reluctance by political parties to diversify candidate lists and a preference for the male (candidate) status quo, particularly, and perhaps ironically, in political parties that engage more democratised and decentralised candidate selection processes, as well as those that operate less bureaucratic and more informal candidate selection procedures (Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Gauja and Cross, 2015; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2016).

Compounding all of this is the interaction between demand and supply. The continuing male dominance of politics bolsters the male-gendered environment and image of political institutions. Given that masculinity is the premise on which politics is constructed and the 'norm' against which all political activity is judged (Connolly, 2013; Duerst-Lahti and Kelly, 1995; Harmer et al, 2017: x), women entering politics are contrasted against the 'naturalised' male inhabitants (Puwar, 2004). Their presence is queried and behaviour scrutinised, which, in turn, contributes 'to a notion of women as out of place and unnatural in the political sphere' (Falk, 2010: 37 as cited in Harmer et al, 2016: 3; Puwar, 2004) (paraphrased from Brennan and Buckley, 2017: 19). This can have the effect of depressing women's supply into politics, curtailing role-model effects, inhibiting women's confidence and ambition to pursue a political career (Buckley et al 2015). Confidence, or lack thereof, impacts women's ambition and motivation to enter politics, while differential access to key political resources such as time and money privilege male candidate emergence and stymies women's (Culhane, 2017).

In terms of addressing this supply and demand conundrum, Buckley and Brennan (2018: xx) synopsise that European research has focussed on the system level and the institutional factors shaping women's candidacies (for example electoral systems, political parties and gender quotas) while American researchers tend to focus on individual level research, such as socio-cultural and socialisation impacts on women's attitudes towards running for office.

> *Both approaches find evidence that gendered recruitment practices by major political parties is a key factor in creating more gender balanced parliaments and support the call for affirmative action in candidate selection* (Buckley and Brennan, 2018: xx).

In analysis of women's under-representation, the role of political parties is seen as key (Durose et al, 2013; Sobelewska, 2013; Childs and Campbell, 2015). The over-representation of men in elected office has been linked with the attitudes and preferences of party selectorates who seek to choose a candidate who conforms to a typical picture of a MP (Murray, 2015; 2014; Rasmussen, Vallance; Durose et al, 2013). The gate-keeping effect of party selectors is therefore a key demand side factor in the level of female representation, as it is the perceptions and opinions of party elites who determine what makes a 'good' candidate and who gets selected (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995; Krook, 2010b)[3].

Although supply and demand factors are seen as distinct, they are not discreet in the sense that a political party may encourage prospective women candidates to overcome some of the supply side inhibitors, through mentoring, adoption of affirmative action mechanisms such as gender quotas, and demonstrating a willingness to select women to contest winnable seats (Durose, Richardson et al, 2013; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). Equally a party that is resistant to the adoption of women candidates (or candidates from other under-represented groups) can act to depress the demand for diversity (Webb and Childs, 2012).

Krook (2010a: 712) asserts that adopting a feminist institutionalism lens is necessary to consider how gender permeates systemic institutions, such as the electoral system, and practical institutions, such as party selection procedures, influencing women's candidate recruitment and selection. Through this feminist lens, a number of observances can be made. Firstly, proportional representation (PR) based electoral systems are more conducive to women's selection and election given the greater district magnitude and thus party magnitude when compared to single seat majoritarian or plurality electoral systems such as First-Post-The-Post (FPTP). Secondly, multi-seat districts lower the threshold of votes required to get elected which is said to enhance the election prospects of new candidates who would not have as prominent a profile as incumbents. Thirdly, while the formal rules of candidate selection adopted by political parties do not disadvantage women, many of the informal practices surrounding these procedures do. As previously noted, decentralised and less bureaucratised systems of candidate selection tend to disadvantage women as 'favoured sons' are preferred by local selectors, oftentimes the outcome of processes of homogeneity (Kenny, 2013; Bjarnegård 2013). Finally, as political parties are strategic machines aiming to maximise their vote, the tried and tested incumbent will tend to be selected ahead of a new challenger. Given that a large proportion of incumbents are men, they are more likely to benefit from this informal norm of candidate selection than women.

Much of the research on women, gender and candidate selection has focused on large parties or the major parties in a party system. However not all candidates stand for the main political parties or for parties at all. The increase in candidate competition due to the rise in candidates standing for minor parties and as independents was noted by Norris and Lovenduski (1995: 77) in their study of British parties in the early 1990s. Clark et al (2009) assert that the number of candidates standing for minor, fringe parties and as independents is becoming more important in the electoral landscape. Processes of party fragmentation and realignment suggest that over time, major or main parties are less able to exert a monopoly over the

[3] Though Norris and Lovenduski (1995: 139 – 142), in their examination of British political parties, found limited evidence of discrimination against women applicants among party selectors and assessed that supply side dynamics were more relevant in explaining the under-representation of women in British politics.

supply of candidates for election (Copus et al, 2009; Clark, 2010). Identified in this literature is a rise in both non-hierarchical party organisations and independent candidates. However, this literature has remained relatively quiet on how this rise impacts on both the supply and demand of women candidates.

Gender quotas

The most common form of affirmative action introduced to address the under-representation of women in politics is gender quotas. They are used in approximately 130 nation-states worldwide and can be categorised into three basic typologies: reserve seats, party quotas, and legislative quotas (Krook, 2010b). Reserve seats are a results-based or outcome quota which is stipulated in a country's constitution (sometimes in electoral law) and specifies a certain number or proportion of seats in parliament to be reserved for women. Party or voluntary quotas are the most common form of quota, taking the form of a candidate selection quota adopted voluntarily by political parties. Legislative quotas or gender quota laws have become a more commonplace mechanism to address the under-representation of women in politics, particularly in nation-states who have experienced varied levels of success with party quotas. Adopted through electoral law, it usually takes the form of a candidate selection quota, and requires that political parties select a minimum level of female candidates.

Studies assessing the impact of gender quotas can be stratified to coincide with the three elements of political representation – descriptive, substantive, and symbolic (Franceschet et al, 2012). Assessments of the descriptive impact of gender quotas tends to focus on absolute numbers, measuring the impact of quotas on the numbers of women elected. The extent to which quotas serve to increase women's presence in parliament varies according to quota type, the electoral system, institutional fit between quotas and the electoral system, the use of placement mandates, compliance measures (eg penalties), political culture and elite support. Studies of descriptive impact have branched out to query what types of women benefit from quotas. Franceschet et al (2009: 19) provide a synopsis of these findings:

> *quotas primarily lead to the recruitment of women with ties to powerful men (Bird 2003; Chowdhury 2002; Pupavac 2005; Rai, Bari, Mahtab, and Mohanty 2006), high levels of education (Sater 2007; Srivastava 2000), and close loyalties to their political parties (Cowley and Childs 2003; Tripp 2006). However, others find that quotas promote women from marginalized groups (Mehta 2002), those with low levels of education (Schwartz 2004), those with lower status occupations (Bird 2003; Catalano and Baldez 2008), and those who are relatively young (Britton 2005; Burness 2000; Marx, Borner, and Caminotti 2007; Murray 2008). Evidence also suggests that women who accede to office via quotas tend to have less political experience – and in some cases, different kinds of political experience – when compared with men and non-quota women (Kolinsky 1991; Murray 2008; Franceschet and Piscopo 2009).*

Studies assessing the impact of gender quotas on the substantive representation of women in politics identifies two primary effects – the 'mandate' and 'label' effect (Franceschet et al, 2012). Female representatives exhibiting 'mandate' effects are those women elected in quota era elections who enthusiastically embrace, or feel obligated, to represent women, and

initiate policy discussion on those issues gendered to affect more women than men. Conversely, female representatives exhibiting 'label' effects are those women elected in quota era elections, who disassociate themselves from 'women's issues' in an attempt to be taken 'seriously' (Childs, 2004 cited in Franceschet et al, 2009: 20 – 21).

Finally, studies assessing the symbolic effects of gender quotas is a relatively under-researched area, but those that do exist tend to consider the impact of quotas on public attitudes towards women in politics, their effect on women's political empowerment, as well as assessing the diffusion or contagion effects of quotas into non-political arenas (Franceschet et al, 2009 and 2012; Meier, 2013). However, the results are conflicting with some studies finding no symbolic effects (Zetterberg, 2009) but others, as Franceschet et al (2009: 21 – 21) synopsise, demonstrate the potential of quotas to:

> *renegotiate the gendered nature of the public sphere (Sgier 2004), reduce negative bias towards female politicians by male constituents (Beaman et al, 2008), encourage greater engagement with politicians among female constituents (Kudva, 2003) and mobilise women to consider a career in politics (Geissel and Hust, 2005).*

Much of this research has consisted of attitudinal studies, and that which relates to political office identifies aspirational and ambition tendencies only. But what if we could assess the impact of gender quotas on mobilising *actual* numbers of women to contest election, as in those women outside of the party fold? Given the prominence of independents in Irish electoral politics, the Irish case-study provides an opportunity to do just this. By studying the numbers of, and reasons why, non-party women contested the 2016 general election in Ireland, we can assess if the quota law had a symbolic effect, inspiring these women to contest this election.

Legislative gender quotas in Ireland

The 2016 general election was the first where legislative gender quotas for candidate selection applied in Ireland. Introduced as part of the Fine Gael-Labour government's political reform agenda, the *Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012* incentivises political parties to select at least 30 per cent female candidates and at least 30 per cent male candidates. Non-compliant parties surrender half of the state funding they receive on an annual basis to run their operations, with the potential loss for larger parties running into millions of euros. The gender quota threshold rises to 40 per cent from 2023 onwards[4]. The legislative gender quotas applies only to general elections.

The gender quota law is an attempt to redress the historical gender imbalance in Irish politics. Prior to the 2016 general election just 95 women had ever been elected to Dáil Éireann in comparison to 1148 men[5]. At the time of the law's adoption in July 2012, just 25 TDs (15.1 per cent) were women, placing Ireland in 89th ranked position on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's league table for women's political representation in national parliaments, situating

[4] To be in receipt of state funding, parties must be registered and achieve at least two per cent of the first preference vote at the preceding general election.

[5] Information sourced from Michael Gallagher *Irish Elections 1948–77: Results and Analysis* (London: Routledge and PSAI Press, 2009) and email communication with Prof Michael Gallagher of Trinity College Dublin.

Ireland behind the then world average of 20.3 per cent. To understand women's political under-representation in Ireland, one needs to understand Irish political culture:

> *Political culture replicates, and often intensifies, the dominant social value system in which politics operates. In Ireland, personal identity was shaped by the twin forces of nationalism and Catholicism, social politics was determined by these same forces, and societal values too expressed the preferences and priorities of these two hegemonies. Neither was particularly empowering of, or for, women* (Buckley and Galligan 2018: xx).

The early decades of the state saw the passage of gendered laws including the banning of contraception and the restriction of women's employment opportunities, circumscribing women to the domestic domain and the *ideal* role of 'child bearer, carer and nurturer' (Buckley and McGing, 2011: 224). Faced with 'strong cultural, societal and legal barriers'(ibid, 224), it is not surprising then that only a handful of women entered public life during the 1922 to 1977 period with many achieving office through what is termed the 'widow's and daughter's inheritance'(Galligan et al, 2000). However, what is surprising is the continuing persistence of the male super-majority in Irish politics during the past 40 years, despite significant socio-cultural change and socio-economic advancements for women during this time. Women's electoral candidacy and election remained low in the period between 1977 and 2011 (see Table 1). Research has identified male incumbency, masculinised party cultures, decentralised candidate selection processes and the gate-keeping functions of political parties as key barriers to women's political candidacy in Ireland (Buckley, 2013) restricting women's access to the ballot paper, and severely limiting opportunities for women's election.

Table 1: Women candidates and TDs at elections, 1977–2016

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

Source: Galligan and Buckley (2018: 221)

From the mid-2000s there was a growing recognition within political parties of the severe under-representation of women in Irish politics but most stopped short of advocating gender

quotas for electoral politics (with the exception of the Labour Party). However a constellation of pressures combined to facilitate the introduction of candidate selection legislation in 2012:

> *The demands for institutional change and democratic innovation bestowed by the political reform discourse [following the economic crash] in 2008 were key motivations for the introduction of legislative candidate sex quotas. While resistance to the notion of electoral gender quotas still exist[ed] within political parties, the language of political reform … smoothed the way for their introduction, and has contributed to gaining support for the measure from elites who may not have supported the initiative otherwise. The mobilisation of groups campaigning for increased women's political representation … also brought a salience to the issue rarely seen before. It is the combination of these factors that have been critical to the adoption of candidate sex quotas in the Republic of Ireland* (Buckley, 2013: 355).

In response to calls for political reform, two parliamentary committees examined the role of women in Irish politics and recommended the introduction of legislation to tie the public funding of parties to the number of women candidates they nominate for election. The findings of these committees were pivotal to the legislation that followed which was enacted in July 2012 with the support of all political parties (Buckley, 2013: 353). This paved the way for the implementation of legislative gender quotas at the 2016 general election. Despite some controversies as the gender quota was rolled out at party selection conventions and an ongoing constitutional court challenge, the gender quota was deemed a success resulting in a 90 per cent increase in women's candidacy and a 40 per cent increase in women's election. As previously noted, this included a 65 per cent increase in the number of independent women candidates. The number of women independents elected increase from two in 2011 to five in 2016.

The Irish party system and prominence of independents

Ireland is distinguishable for its non-adherence to standard classifications of party system models. Political cleavages based on social conflicts between church/state, centre/periphery, worker/owner, and rural/urban (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) did not materialise in Ireland due to the lack of an industrial revolution, and the homogenous nature of society at the time of the state's foundation. Rather, the Irish party system finds its origins in the Irish Civil War, a conflict between those in favour and against the Anglo-Irish Treaty[6]. The first decade of the new state was marked by a period of polarized pluralism (Sartori, 1976), characterised by 'extreme polarization and [a] highly centrifugal competition between the two major protagonists' (Mair, 1979: 447), anti- treaty and pro-treaty Sinn Féin, which later fashioned themselves into Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. While this polarization moderated in the decades that followed, party competition and voter allegiances formed during the nascent years of the state's existence, a period also marked by universal suffrage in 1922, were to remain in place long after the Civil War ended, corroborating Lipset and Rokkan's findings or hypothesis of a freezing effect of social conflicts on party systems long after the origins of those disputes.

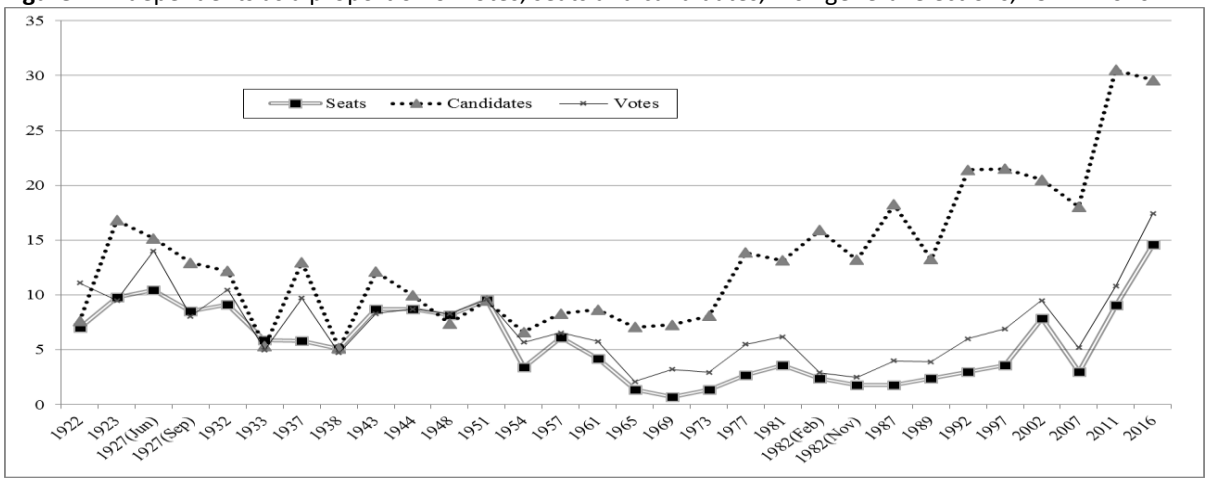
[6] The Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed between representatives of the British government and Irish negotiators in December 1921. The Anglo-Irish Treaty created a split in the Sinn Féin party between those in favour and against the agreement. Those against objected to the creation of two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland – a 26 county Irish Free State and a six county Northern Ireland.

With the Labour party not taking a position on the national question, they occupied, as described by Mair (1979: 447), 'a center placement of a second party', offering an alternative to the nationalist bloc of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The 2.5 party system had taken hold.

The effective number of political parties (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979) in the Irish party system has fluctuated between 2.5 and 4.93 at parliamentary level and between 2.5 and 6.57 at electoral level, with the 2016 general election being the most fragmented ever recorded in Ireland (Gallagher, 2016: 126). The 2.5 party system largely prevailed until the late 1970s. In the 1977 general election, the combined FPV of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour was 92.7 per cent. However, a fragmentation of political power has taken hold since the 1980s. This decade saw the emergence of new political parties, most prominently the Progressive Democrats and the Green Pary. In 1989, Fianna Fáil abandoned its anti-coalition stance, paving the way for new coalition combinations (Little and Farrell, 2018). The Northern Ireland peace process of the mid 1990s saw the strong re-emergence of Sinn Féin on the electoral landscape for Dáil elections. However, it was the economic recession of 2008 to 2013 that caused the greatest systemic shock to the party system (Weeks, 2018b: 123). In what was dubbed the 'earthquake election' of 2011 (Gallagher and Marsh, 2011), Fianna Fáil was severely punished for its mishandling of the economic situation, and saw its FPV collapse to just 17 per cent, its lowest ever, a reality check to a party whose FPV averaged 42.6 per cent across the previous 28 general elections. The 2011 general election in Ireland was the third most volatile in post-war Europe while the 2016 general election registered as the eighth most volatile (Farrell and Suiter, 2016: 279). The main beneficiaries of this volatility have been 'forces outside the party system … with increasing numbers of independents elected' (Weeks, 2018b: 123).

Independents have been a constant feature of Irish politics since the foundation of the state in 1922 (Weeks, 2017a). As demonstrated in Figure 2, the electoral fortunes of independents have varied. From a position of relative prominence in the post-independence era, as a party system in flux presented opportunities for independent candidates to emerge, to the so-called 'nadir' election of 1969 when just one independent was elected, and back to a position of strength in recent years, reflecting the fragmenting of the party system and the advent of anti-establishment politics (Weeks, 2016: 587-8; Weeks, 2017a).

Figure 2: Independents as a proportion of votes, seats and candidates, Irish general elections, 1922 - 2016



Source: Reproduced from Weeks, L. (2017a) *Independents in Irish Party Democracy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 68.

A number of institutional and cultural variables facilitate the presence of independents in Irish politics, namely the use of a PR-STV electoral system, which encourages candidate-centric voting behaviour, and a political culture which features strong levels of personalism and localism. In his research on independents in Ireland, Weeks identifies four primary ways in which PR-STV aids the emergence and election of independents. Firstly, the use of multi-member districts lowers the threshold of votes required for election. This is believed to benefit independents (Weeks, 2018b: xx). Secondly, it has been suggested by Weeks (2017, 2018a, 2018b) and Bowler and Farrell (2017) that the open candidate lists of PR-STV, which requires voters to indicate their preference through a rank-ordering of candidates, may advantage independents, as they may be viewed as 'transfer-friendly' by party voters who may switch 'to independents as a protest, but they have not yet crossed the Rubicon by transferring their partisan allegiance to new parties' (Weeks, 2018b: 123). Thirdly, as noted previously, the preferential and ordinal nature of the electoral system encourages candidate centric voting behaviour, which in turn, incentivises politicians to cultivate personal votes (Farrell and McAllister, 2006: 11 cited in Weeks, 2018a: xx). This is said to bolster the electoral prospects of independent candidates. Fourthly, Weeks (2018a: xx) highlights that PR-STV favours 'independent-minded behaviour' as this was:

> *one of the aims of its originators in the nineteenth century, Thomas Hare and John Stuart Mill, … 'a scheme devised partly with the aim of weakening the power of parties and increasing the independence of MPs both in and out of parliament' (Hart, 1992: 97). Both viewed STV as a means of securing the election of independents (Hart, 1992: 267).*

Localism and personalism, whereby voters choose between candidates on the basis of what a candidate can deliver for the local area/community, and what personal attributes a candidate possesses, is facilitated by the candidate-centric nature of PR-STV. PR-STV's multi-member districts fosters intra-party rivalry, meaning both party and non-party candidates engage in high levels of constituency work, clientelism and brokerage type politics, hoping that these activities will be awarded by votes from the electorate.

> *This is important for independents because most of them lack a national profile, and are almost entirely dependent on their local persona to deliver a vote* (Weeks, 2018b: xx).

The institutional features of PR-STV and political cultural variables combine to moderate the impact of the party label on voting behaviour, thereby enhancing the prominence of 'the candidate' in voter decision-making and aiding the electoral prospects of independents (Weeks, 2018b; Weeks, 2017).

When elected, independents in Ireland have been described as the 'kingmakers' in government formation talks where their numbers have been sought to prop up minority governments (for example the Fianna Fáil/PD government of 1997 to 2002) or indeed, as it currently the case, where they have entered into coalition government (with Fine Gael).

Weeks (2016: 588) assesses that in recent times independents 'have tended to be of an anti-establishment nature, with a primarily constituency-driven agenda'. As Irish voters become more volatile, yet instrumental, selecting a constituency oriented candidate, who also represents a break from 'the establishment', makes voting for an independent an attractive option. *Choosing a candidate to look after the needs of the constituency* is consistently the most popular reason given by survey respondents when asked to explain how they voted in general elections (see Irish National Election Studies (INES) and RTÉ exit polls). Coupled with this, political parties are the least trusted of all political institutions in Ireland with only 20 per cent of Irish people declaring trust in them in 2017 (Eurobarometer, 2017). In light of this:

> *Rather than go down the long and winding path of forming a new party, it is far easier for those who seek to challenge the party establishment*[7] *to run as an independent. This suggests that rather than being an entity entirely separate to the party system, independents are a by-product of it* (Weeks, 2018a: xx)[8].

However, it would be disingenuous to not acknowledge that independents engage in group formation. Referred to as *alliances,* they may form to contest an election, with members signing up to a shared policy platform, for example, preventing the closure of rural post offices or, form in parliament to avail of parliamentary rights and resources such as speaking time. In 2016 the Independent Alliance entered into a coalition government with Fine Gael. The Independent Alliance was formed in 2015 to contest the 2016 general election. Its members sign up to a charter of shared principles advocating change in a broad range of areas including political reform, banking, business and social policy (to view please see: http://www.independentalliance.ie/principles-priorities/). Since the 2016 general election, a so-called Rural Alliance of TDs has formed in parliament. These rural based independent TDs, share a common platform advocating on issues affecting rural Ireland.

The variety of alliances demonstrate that independents in Ireland are a rather 'heterogeneous' group (Weeks, 2016: 588). Weeks (2017) typologizes the profiles of independents contesting general elections between 1922 and 2016 into six distinct categories namely 1) community or constituency independents (those who aim to advance the interests of their constituency), 2) ideological independents (left-leaning independents, republicans, single national issues) 3) apostate independents (for example those independents who sought a party nomination but were not selected or those who previously contested the election for a political party but left the party over policy/personal difficulties; also referred to as party rebels); 4) corporatist independents (those who campaign on economic interests such as business and farming); 5) quasi-parties (groups of independents who come together to form alliances or parties) and 6) vestigial independents (more prominent in the early years of the state's existence and largely consisting of independent unionist[9] politicians).

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[7] As an aside, party membership numbers have decreased from 129,200 (approximately 5 per cent of the electorate) in 1985 to 69,460 (approximately 2 per cent of the electorate) in 2014 (Weeks, 2018a: 125).

[8] For further discussion and assessment of this, see Bowler and Farrell (2017) 'The Lack of Party System Change in Ireland in 2011' in Michael Marsh, David M. Farrell, and Gail McElroy (eds) *A Conservative Revolution? Electoral Change in Twenty-First Century Ireland* pp.83-101, Oxford University Press: Oxford.

[9] A unionist is someone who wishes to maintain the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

The work of Weeks tells us much about independents in Ireland. However, it remains silent on the role of women independents and does not engage in a gender analysis. This paper hopes to address this gap.

Independents in a comparative context

Many may query why study independents, and do their relevance have a wider applicability beyond Ireland?

The visibility of independents in electoral politics has been increasingly notable in recent years, with prominent electoral successes in gubernatorial and senate elections in the USA, mayoral contests in the UK, and parliamentary elections in Australia and Ireland (Weeks, 2016: 580). The rise of Macron in France, initially as a non-party candidate prior to the foundation of La République En Marche, also points to the growing prominence of the independent route to political candidacy and office. An independent refers to 'someone who is neither a member of, nor affiliated with, a political party', and who runs for office 'on their own' and do not 'take a party whip' (Weeks, 2016: 582). Weeks calculated that in 2013, there were '32 elected independents in the national parliaments of the 36 leading industrial democracies' (2016: 582). Many others have been elected to sub-national parliaments, local councils and territorial assemblies[10].

According to Weeks (2016: 583) explanations for the success (and failure) of independents point to four key factors – size, political culture, electoral rules and the party system.

The *size* of populations, territories and parliaments are determinants in independent candidate emergence, and their presence and persistence within parliamentary systems (Weeks, 2016: 583). Small-scale societies tend to be more homogenous in nature with higher levels of personal interaction (Weeks, 2016: 283 -4). As Weeks (2016: 582-4) observes, in small scale territories such as the North-west Territories in Canada and Pacific Island states, where societies are 'likely to be more homogenous, with fewer social divisions' and where 'levels of personal interaction are higher', the necessity of political parties is reduced as they are not required to mobilise voters or represent distinct social cleavages. In the absence of political parties, independents flourish. The size of parliament also matters. Weeks (2016:584) assesses that all assemblies with a presence of independents, dominant or otherwise, are small. 'In general, the smaller the assembly, the fewer the pay-offs arising from the formation of a party' (Weeks, 2016: 584).

While small sized assemblies may be a factor in the success of independents, it does not explain the existence of independents in parliamentary systems where parties are dominant or where the parliament size is relatively large. Thus, we must turn attention to the other factors determining independent candidate success. A common denominator in many nation-states that have experienced independents' electoral success (Australia, England, Ireland, Russia and the Pacific Island states) is the existence of a *political culture* which exhibits high levels of personalism and localism (Weeks, 2016: 285). Personalism and localism encourage candidate-centred voting, resulting in a situation where the 'party label is less of an asset'

[10] Some examples provided by Weeks (2016: 584) include the non-partisan state legislature of Nebraska, the Tasmanian Legislative Council, territorial assemblies in the Falkland Islands, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, and the assemblies of the Nunavut and Northwest Territories in Canada.

(Weeks, 2016: 585). Whether or not a candidate has a party affiliation, electors tend to rely on their personal knowledge of, or interaction with, a candidate to determine their voting intention. In addition, electors will assess candidates on the likelihood of how well those candidates will 'look after' the locality if elected. Voter decision-making processes of this nature augment the candidate over the party, aiding independents' electoral success.

Electoral rules are also an important consideration in independent candidate emergence and election. Rules relating to nomination and ballot access (are independent candidates allowed to contest election?), ballot design (is ordinal voting permitted?) and campaign and finance requirements are all important determinants in whether an independent candidate can contest an election (Weeks, 2016: 585-6). Most significantly, however, is the proportionality of the electoral system employed with the general assessment being that 'the more proportional the electoral system, and the more it is oriented towards candidates over parties, the better independents are likely to fare' (Weeks, 2016: 585; see also Weeks 2014).

Finally, the *party system and party organisational* structures are factors to consider when assessing opportunities for independent candidate emergence. Weeks (2016: 586) argues that party systems deeply rooted in the social cleavages of church/state, centre/periphery or owner/worker have traditionally been quite structured, resulting in polarized party competition and a closed-off electoral market for independents, making it difficult for non-party candidates to 'gain an electoral stronghold'. But what happens when these 'traditional' social conflicts dissipate or harden, or when a new cleavage of establishment/anti-establishment politics emerges? Lessons may be learned from those party systems 'not built on deep social cleavages', as we are advised that such party systems are 'more fluid and open to the emergence of challengers' (Weeks, 2016: 586). When the status quo ruptures, and party fragmentation occurs, as witnessed in many party democracies worldwide, greater fluidity enters the electoral market, initiating opportunities for new parties and/or non-party challengers to emerge (ref). Moreover, newer parties or weakened established ones, may place less premium on party hierarchies, favouring instead more decentralised structures to engage and empower the party grassroots (ref). However, what may be a noble endeavour to democratise parties, could have converse effects, incentivising defection. Bolleyer and Weeks (2009) cited in Weeks (2016: 586) observe that 'the weaker the parties and the consequently weaker premium placed on party affiliation, the greater the incentive to choose an independent status rather than form or join a party'. Extending this argument to party organisation, Weeks (2016: 586) advises that the more decentralised the party structures, and the weaker the party organisation, 'the more likely we are to see politicians veer between party and independent status'.

To-date, the literature on non-party candidates and representatives has concentrated on identifying the key factors - size, political culture, electoral rules and the party system – that determine the success (or failure) of independents. However, this literature has largely ignored the gendered nature of these dynamics and their impact on the supply and demand of women candidates. Indeed, at a more basic level, there has been little or no attempt to analyse independent candidature and/or electoral success through a gendered lens. This paper contributes to addressing this anomaly.

Research Design

The previous sections identify a number of distinct concepts, models and theories, namely the supply and demand model of candidate recruitment and selection, gender quotas and their symbolic impacts, the rise of independents as party fragmentation occurs, and feminist institutionalism. Bringing these broad literatures together into one inter-connected framework to theorize about gender, women and candidate recruitment outside of political parties, is the ambition (and challenge) of this paper.

The review of the literature identifies a number of research lacunas and opportunities:

- Given the prominence of independents in Irish electoral politics, and the availability of data demonstrating how many independents contest election, Ireland provides an ideal case-study to assess the symbolic impact of gender quotas on mobilizing *actual* numbers of women to contest election, specifically those women who run independent of political parties, where demand for female candidates is shaped by the stipulations of the gender quota law.
- As party fragmentation takes hold in Ireland, there has been an increase in the number of independents contesting and winning election, thereby reducing the monopoly of major parties on candidate recruitment. However, there has been no assessment on how this impacts upon the supply and demand dynamics that shapes women's access into politics.
- Who are the women who contest elections as independents?
- The availability of women independents and women party candidates in one country case-study presents an opportunity to control for motivational factors, such as confidence and interest in running for office, thereby allowing analytical space to assess what other supply side factors facilitate women's candidacy.
- A comparison of the demographic and biographical backgrounds of female independent and party candidates could reveal differences which may point to those characteristics that are particularly valued by political parties when selecting women candidates.
- A number of institutional and political cultural features shape the emergence of independents but this literature has largely ignored the gendered nature of these dynamics and how these may encumber or enhance female independents.

To investigate these, a number of research questions are identified:

1. Can we claim a diffusion effect of gender quotas, leading to an increase in the supply of non-party or independent women candidates?
2. Is this diffusion effect an example of the symbolic impact of gender quotas, empowering women to become politically active?
3. Who are these women who contest elections as independent candidates?
4. Are they different to their female counterparts who contest election as party candidates?
5. What can we learn about female candidate emergence, and the supply and demand dynamics that shape this, by viewing it through the lens of independents?
6. What electoral rules and institutions facilitate the emergence of independents, and are these gendered to advantage or disadvantage women?

To address questions **one** and **two**, women's independent candidacy from 1973 to 2016 will be reviewed to assess if the increase observed between 2011 and 2016 is attributable to the advent of legislative gender quotas. If not, what other trends are observed, and what do these tell us about women's independent candidacy throughout the period examined.

To address question **three**, two databases are compiled. The first consists of demographic, political experience and electoral performance details of all election candidates at the 2007, 2011 and 2016 general elections in Ireland. The second identifies all women who ever contested a general election in Ireland as an independent candidate. These databases facilitate the development of a gendered descriptive account of non-party candidates in Ireland, sketching a picture of their personal and political backgrounds, as well as typology of women independents. To answer question **four**, the first database referenced above will be analyzed to identify any differences in the backgrounds between female independent and party candidates.

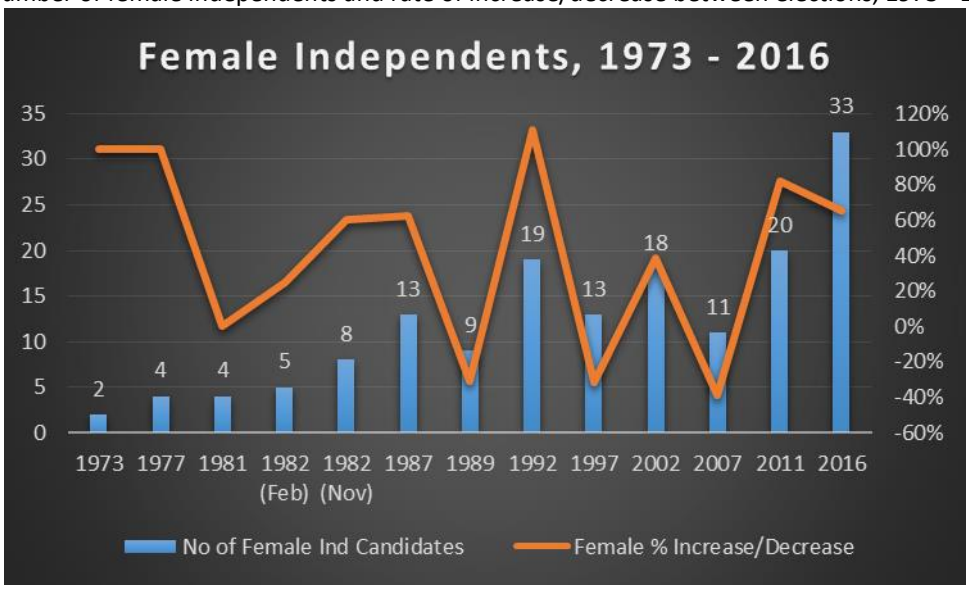
Answering question **five** will take the form of an analytical discussion of the empirical findings while question **six** will be addressed by reviewing the existing literature through a gendered lens.

Data and Findings

Can we claim a diffusion effect of gender quotas, leading to an increase in the supply of non-party or independent women candidates (Q1) and is this diffusion effect an example of the symbolic impact of gender quotas, empowering women to become politically active (Q2)?

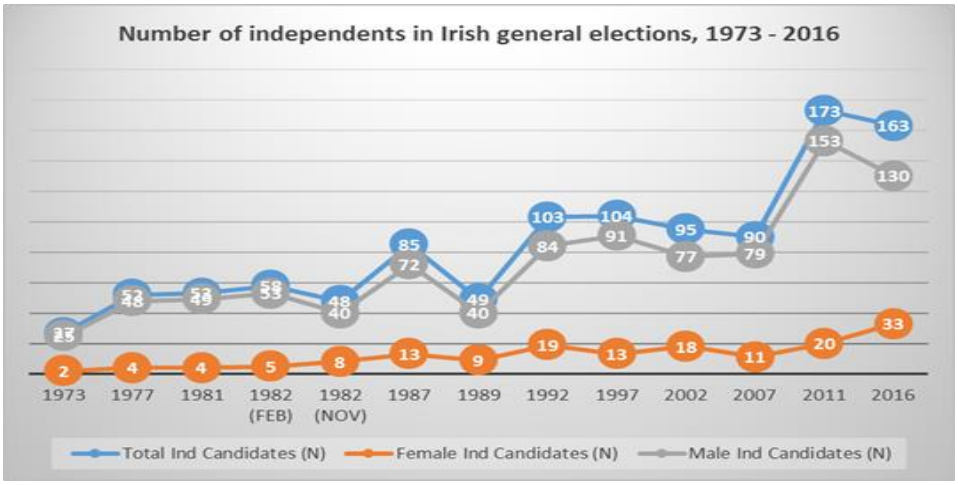
Figure 3 shows the number of women independents contesting general elections in Ireland between 1973 and 2016 demonstrating that the number of women independents has increased from two in 1973 to 33 in 2016. The 2016 general election marked an all-time high for the number of women contesting a general election as an independent candidate. Figure 3 also shows the percentage rate of increase/decrease in female independent candidacy between these elections. While there was a 65 per cent jump in the numbers of women contesting the general election as an independent between 2011 and 2016, this does not represent the highest percentage increase between elections, albeit, many of these percentage rate increases/decreases are based on very low 'n' sizes.

Figure 3: Number of female independents and rate of increase/decrease between elections, 1973 - 2016



When Figure 3 is viewed in tandem with Figure 1 (on page 2 but reproduced here) and Table 2, we observe that increases and decreases in the number of women independents usually coincides with increases and decreases in the overall number of independents contesting the election as well as the overall number of women contesting election. There are four exceptions. In November 1982, 2002 and 2016, the number of women independents increased at a time when the overall number of independents was decreasing. In the case of November 1982 and 2002, this increase occurred at a time when the overall number of women candidates had also decreased. Conversely, in 1997, the number of women independents decreased at a time when the overall number of independents was increasing as was the overall number of women candidates.

Figure 1



In the case of November 1982 and 2002, the dynamic of increasing women independents at a time of decreasing numbers of women candidates overall may seem counter-intuitive. However, it may point to something in the political environment or electoral context that is contributing to this outcome. If the overall number of women is decreasing, this means political parties are selecting lower numbers of women at these elections. Perhaps there was a sense amongst those women who contested these elections as independents that political parties were not a welcoming space for them and/or the issues they championed. Examining the profiles of those women who contested the November 1982 and 2002 general elections, these women championed a variety of issues including republicanism, disability rights, pro-life, children's rights and anti-immigration stances. The social conservative undertones of the issues highlighted by some women independents, particularly in 2002, may be a reaction against an increasingly liberalising party system. However, the number of women independents involved in these elections is so low, particularly in November 1982, it renders the task of identifying key trends impossible.

In 2016, as already outlined, the increase in the number of women independents coincided with an increase in the overall number of women contesting the election. Borrowing from economic parlance, it may point to a phenomenon of 'rising tides lifting all boats', whereby the discourse surrounding gender quotas and the politicisation of women's political under-representation in Irish politics, acted as a mobilising agent, inspiring women outside of political parties to also run for the election. This argument may find some credence when considering the 1997 general election. In that election, the number of women independents

decreased at a time when the overall number of independents, as well as the overall number of women candidates, increased. However, the difference between 2016 and 1997 was that in 1997, there was an absence of any discourse or political concern about the under-representation of women in politics in 1997. This changed in later years as the political elite reacted to a public desire to see more women in politics. As Galligan and Buckley (2018: 216-17) note:

> *In 2007, on the eve of the economic crash that was to send shock waves through the Irish economy and society, 60 per cent of those surveyed in a[n]…INES poll indicated that 'things would improve if there were more women in politics'. While just about half of men agreed, 71 per cent of women did so, indicating a pent-up demand among the female public for better descriptive representation. Moreover, in 2011, even though respondents attached little importance to the idea of having a TD of the same gender as themselves, 62 per cent believed that there should be more women TDs, with 29 per cent wanting no change and only 3 per cent saying they wanted fewer female TDs (Farrell et al., 2017). That pressure for greater female presence in politics was articulated further in the 2014 Constitutional Convention report on women in public life, where an overwhelming majority (97 per cent) of the 100 citizens and political participants wanted to see government take more action to encourage women's public and political engagement*.

Therefore, the politicisation of women's political under-representation in Irish politics through the enactment of the gender quota law, and the consequential debates and discourses that surrounded the issue, may have inspired a cohort of women to run, who had never previously considered a career in politics. And in an era of anti-establishment politics and low trust levels in political parties, they may have acted in a rational manner, opting to 'take their chances' via the independent route rather than join a political party. When comparing those women who ran as independents in 2016 versus those who ran in 2007/2011, we observe that fewer women were categorised as 'quasi-party' in 2016 (24.2 per cent) than in 2007/2011 (32.3 per cent). It may indicate a preference on behalf of these women to distance themselves from any connection with a party 'label', quasi or not. Significantly more independent women ran on a community issue in 2016 (48.5 per cent) than in 2007/2011 (12.9 per cent) suggesting it was community activists who were most likely to be mobilised to run in 2016. This would make sense given that community activists, by their very nature, are connected into their communities, are aware of issues affecting the local area, and are already politicised and politically engaged due to their interactions with public representative and the public administration infrastructure. They are a cohort primed for electioneering.

However, in the absence of interviews with those women who contested the 2016 general election as independent candidates, much of this discussion is conjecture. To claim that the rise in the number of women independents between 2011 and 2016 is attributable to a symbolic effect and thus a diffusion effect of the gender quota law is spurious on the basis of a descriptive review of the numbers alone. A more in-depth qualitative study, involving interviews with those women who contested the 2016 general election as an independent candidate is required to determine whether the gender quota law empowered them to become politically active and contest this election.

Table 2: Women candidates, overall number of candidates and independent candidates

Year	*Total Candidates N*	*Female Candidates N (%)*	*Independent Candidates N*	*Female Independents N (%)*	*Female inds as a % of total candidates*
1973	332	16 (4.2%)	27	2 (7.4%)	.6
1977	374	25 (6.7%)	52	4 (7.7%)	1.1
1981	402	41 (10.2%)	53	4 (7.5%)	1
1982 (Feb)	365	35 (9.6%)	58	5 (8.6%)	1.4
1982 (Nov)	364	31 (8.5%)	48	8 (16.7%)	2.2
1987	467	65 (13.9%)	85	13 (15.3%)	2.8
1989	371	52 (14%)	49	9 (18.4%)	2.4
1992	481	89 (18.5%)	103	19 (18.4%)	4
1997	484	96 (19.8%)	104	13 (12.5%)	2.7
2002	463	84 (18.1%)	95	18 (18.9%)	3.9
2007	471	82 (17.4%)	90	11 (12.2%)	2.3
2011	567	86 (15.2%)	173	20 (11.5%)	3.5
2016	551	163 (29.6%)	163	33 (20.2%)	6

More generally, Table 2 clearly demonstrates the 5.4 times increase in the number of independents contesting elections between 1973 and 2016. Over the same time period, the number of party candidates increased by just 26 per cent, increasing from 307 candidates in 1973 to 388 candidates in 2016. The rate of increase of women independents (16.5 times) is much higher than that for male independents (5.2 times), but this is to be expected given the low levels of women independent candidates in 1973. The increase in candidate competition due to the rise in the number of independent candidates has seen the number of candidates per seat has increase from 2.3 candidates in 1973 to 3.5 candidates in the 2016 election.

When disaggregating women candidates in accordance to their party/grouping (see Tables 3 and 4), we observe that the number of women contesting elections under the 'independent' label is often higher than the number of women selected by each of the political parties.

Table 3: Women candidates and TDs in 2016 general election disaggregating according to party/grouping

Party/Grouping	**Women candidates N (%)**	**Women TDs N (%)**
Fianna Fáil	22 (13.5)	6 (17.1)
Fine Gael	27 (16.6)	11 (31.4)
Labour	13 (8.0)	2 (5.7)
Sinn Féin	18 (11.0)	6 (17.1)
Greens	14 (8.6)	1 (2.9)
AAA-PBP	13 (8.0)	2 (5.7)
Renua	8 (5.0)	0
Social Democrats	6 (3.6)	2 (5.7)
Others	9 (5.5)	0

Independents	33 (20.3)	5 (14.3)
Total	***163***	***35***

Table 4: Women candidates in the 2002, 2007, 2011 and 2016 general election

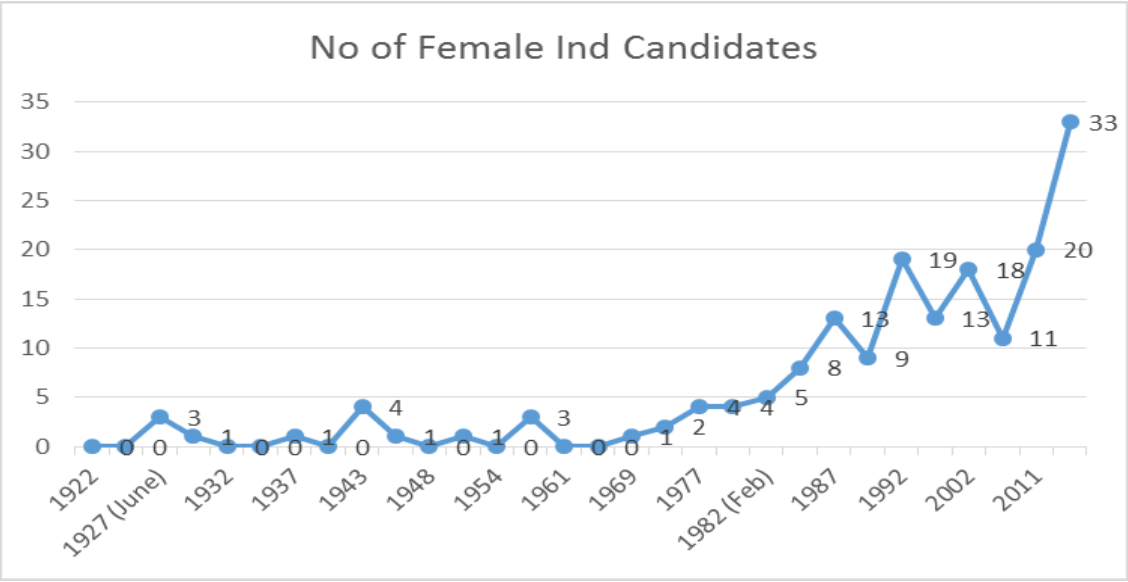
	2002	**2007**	**2011**	**2016**
Party/Grouping	*women candidates N*	*women candidates N*	*women candidates N*	*women candidates N*
Fianna Fáil	13	14	11	22
Fine Gael	14	15	16	27
Labour	12	11	18	13
Sinn Féin	7	10	8	18
Green Party	9	11	8	14
Other parties	11	10	5	36
Independents	18	11	20	33

Under PR-STV, political parties must finely balance their candidate numbers to prevent 'splitting their vote'. This has served to restrict their overall candidacy numbers, and given the preference for the 'tried and tested' (usually) male incumbent in party candidate selection processes, the selection of women candidates has been limited. The independent route presents candidates an avenue into political candidacy, and possibly political office, free from the confines of party vetoes, restrictions and controls, but this maybe even more important for women, as they seek to combat and overcome the restrictions posed on their candidacies by masculinised culture and gendered biases within political parties.

Who are these women who contest elections as independent candidates? (Q3)

Figure 4 shows the number of women contesting election as independent candidates in Ireland between 1922 and 2016. The last election to not have at least one female independent candidate was 1965. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of women choosing the independent route to contest elections.

Figure 4: Number of female independent candidates, 1922 – 2016



A review of the profiles of independent women offers an insight into the cultural barriers faced by women at certain stages throughout the state's existence. Of the 38 women independents who contested general elections between 1922 and November 1982, 50 per cent did so to raise feminist consciousness about particular issues (feminist activists accounted for 81 per cent of women independents between 1922 and 1977). For example, in the elections of 1937 and 1943, all women independents ran on a platform highlighting the need to protect women's economic, social and political status in the context of the 'new' constitution, Bunreacht na hÉireann, a document reflecting the social conservatism, clerical influences and nationalistic tendencies of 1930s Ireland. As noted previously, none of these cultural features were particularly empowering of women. The fact that women took to the independent route to campaign on feminist issues, points to the deep-seated social conservatism that permeated Irish society and political parties right up to the mid-1990s in Ireland. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, one of four independent women who contested the 1943 general election spoke of 'the party machine' as 'male and still allergic to women'. As Margaret Ward (2017) elaborates:

> *During the campaign against the 1937 Constitution feminists set up the Women's Social and Progressive League to scrutinise and challenge legislation emanating from the Dáil. In 1943, as a forerunner of a possible women's political party, four women stood for election. Hanna* [Sheehy-Skeffington] *was a candidate in South Dublin. Her election address included demands for equal work, equal opportunities for women, the removal of the marriage ban on teachers, doctors and other skilled women, the restoration of jury rights, the abolition of the means test, proper pensions, school meals and free books for school children, family allowances, a clean milk supply, an effective anti-TB campaign, and civilised treatment for the unemployed. It was, as she said, a "bold enough challenge to masculine monopoly".*

The independent route can be therefore be assessed as providing 'a safety valve' for women's candidacy and a platform for feminist activism[11].

Since the late 1980s, women independents have become a much more diverse group of candidates. Table 5 categorises women independents in accordance to the Weeks' Taxonomy of Independent Candidacies which was outlined earlier. It finds that when women contest elections as independent candidates, they tend to do so more on *ideological* grounds (36.8 per cent). The second most popular classification of women independents is that of *community* independents (30.5 per cent), contesting elections to raise awareness of an issue of particular concern to a local community, for example preventing the closure of a local hospital. Some 23.6 per cent of women candidates contested elections as members of a *quasi-party*, a group that may call itself 'a party' but may not be an actual registered party. The group is likely to be small in number with very lose organisational structures, meaning the *party's* candidates are usually a group of loyal standard-bearers. Finally, 9.2 per cent of women candidates can be classified as *apostate* candidates, candidates who contested the

[11] Aside from the *Women's Social and Progressive League,* other examples of feminist activism and women's mobilisation in the period between 1922 and November 1982 include the Irish Women's Citizens' Association (1927); the Irish Housewives' Association (1957) and the Women's Political Association (1977, 1982).

previous election on behalf of a political party but subsequently left that party over some disagreement or policy difference. Between 1922 and 2016, one-in-five women independents contested election on a gendered issue, with the issues ranging from women's political and social rights to women's liberation, and from matters of concern to Irish Housewives and Army wives to abortion.

By way of contrast, some 45 per cent of male independents contest elections as *community* independents, 23 per cent on *ideological* grounds, 11 per cent can be categorised as *apostate*, while 8 per cent are members of *quasi-parties*. Seven per cent are categorised as *vestigial* while a further seven per cent are *corporatist* in nature. While close to 33 per cent of women independents are categorised as quasi-parties and apostates, just 19 per cent of male independents fall within these two categories. It points to the importance of an organisational structure in women's candidate emergence, whether that takes the form of being a member of a losely arranged 'quasi-party' or previously being a member of a political party.

Table 5 Taxonomy of Women Independents contesting Irish general elections, 1922 - 2016

	N	***%***	***Totals***	%
Apostate Independents	16	9.2	16	9.2
Community Independents	53	30.5	53	30.5
Corporatist - *Independent Business*	0	0	0	0
Corporatist - *Independent Farmer*	0	0		
Ideological - *Independent Republican*	6	3.5	64	
Ideological - *Left-wing*	12	6.9		
Ideological - *Single (National) Issue*	28	16		36.8
Ideological – *Gendered issues affecting women*	18	10.3		
Quasi-parties	25	14.4	41	23.6
Quasi-party – *Gendered issues affecting women*	16	9.2		
Vestigial - *Independent Unionist*	0	0	0	0
Vestigial - *Independents*	0	0		
Totals	***174***		***174***	

Looking more specifically at the profiles (political biography and demographics) of those women who contested the 2007, 2011 and 2016 general elections as independent candidates, these women were more likely to contest in 5 seat constituencies (42 per cent) than in 4 seat constituencies (34 per cent) or 3 seat constituencies (24 per cent). Of those elected, 50 per cent were elected from 5 seat constituencies, 37.5 per cent from 4 seat constituencies and 12.5 per cent from 3 seat constituencies. Just 28 per cent contested election in the Dublin constituencies. Female independent candidates secured an average FPV of 1837 with those elected securing an average FPV of 5604. Of those women independents elected, 75 per cent had been an incumbent TD at the time of their election, yet, only 9 per cent of all independent women candidates were incumbents. In terms of campaign expenditure, €8,913 was the average campaign expenditure/money raised by each candidate, but when viewing the campaign spending/money raised by the 8 women independents elected over the 2007/2011/2016 period, their total was €16,082.83, nearly twice the average spend/money raised. Unlike party candidates, who can be allocated campaign funding by their political party, there is no such funding available to independents so €16,082.83 is the average total

campaign expenditure per winning independent candidate and also the average total raised by each winning independent woman.

In terms of political background and experience, of those women independents who contested the 2007, 2011 and 2016 general elections, 29.7 per cent were former party members and 28.1 per cent were within a micro-party or alliance of independents at the time of the general election. Some 37.5 per cent of female independent candidates who contested the 2007, 2011 and 2016 general elections were or had previously held an elected political office. Of those independent women elected, all had experience of elected office.

In terms of personal backgrounds, 12.5 per cent of female independent candidates had/have family in politics of which three (4.7 per cent) followed a family tradition into political office. Of those elected, two (25 per cent) had/have family in politics but just one (12.5 per cent) followed a family tradition into politics. The average age of women independents is 48.5 years old (38 known cases) with the average age of elected female independent candidate being older at 55.5. In terms of educational attainment, 94.5 per cent of women independents were third level educated (36 known cases). Of those elected, 87.5 per cent had a third level (university) qualification. 84. 2 per cent of female independent candidates were married and 83.7 per cent have children. Of the 8 elected, 3 (37.5 per cent) have children; 5 (62.5 per cent) do not. When women ran as independent candidates in 2007, 2011 and 2016, 31.25 per cent ran on a community issue; 28.2 per cent were categorised as quasi party candidates; 28.2 per cent ran on an ideological issue stance and 12.5 per cent were apostate candidates.

Are women independents different to their female counterparts who contest election as party candidates? (Q4)

When comparing the profiles of women who contested the 2007, 2011 and 2016 general elections as party candidates against those of independent women, we observe some differences (see Appendix). While just over 9 per cent of women contesting these elections as independents were incumbents, 21 per cent of party women were. However, 75 per cent of those women independents elected were incumbents in comparison to just 46 per cent of winning party women. Female party candidates achieved an average FPV of 4027 in comparison to 1837 for independent women. Those that win election as party candidates achieve an average FPV that is over 1700 votes more than that secured by winning female independents (7309 versus 5604). In terms of campaign finance, on average, party women spend €11,487.40 of their own resources on their campaigns in comparison to €8,913 by independent women. However, when only those who win election are examined, there is little or no difference in the funding raised by the two groups of candidates (winning women independents: €16,082.83; winning party women: €16,069.32). As party candidates can also avail of funding from their parties, when this is factored in, €18,557.85 is the average total campaign expenditure per winning female party candidate. When comparing data on previous political office experience, 60.7 per cent of women party candidates had experience of elected office in comparison to just 37.5 per cent of the female independent candidates. When comparing familial links in politics, 21.7 per cent of female party candidates had/have family in politics with 15.4 per cent following a family tradition into political office. The comparable data for women is 12.5 per cent and 4.7 per cent. Female party candidates and TDs tend to be younger than their independent counterparts. Of the 193 known cases, the average age of

party candidate is 44.9 while the average age of elected party candidate is 48.7. The comparable ages for independent women are 48.5 and 55.5 respectively. In terms of career backgrounds of independent women candidates, close to half work in professions in health, education, children and caring professions, 15 per cent are classified as highly skilled professionals (eg engineers, IT professionals), 10 per cent work in law and 3 per cent are from business and upper level management professions. The remaining 22 per cent come from a variety of backgrounds including community activism, carers, and working within the home.

What can we learn about female candidate emergence, and the supply and demand dynamics that shape this, by viewing it through the lens of independents? (Q5)

The descriptive data presented in the previous two sections allows us to make some tentative assessments of the supply and demand dynamics shaping women's access to political candidacy. As discussed previously, a third of women independents are categorised as quasi-parties and apostates. As noted, just 19 per cent of male independents fall into these two categories. It points to the continuing significance of *organisational structures* in women's candidate emergence, whether that takes the form of being a member of a loosely arranged alliance or previously being a member of a political party. These organisational units may act as mobilizing agents, facilitating women's access into politics and serving as a capacity building and networking function.

Running for political office is not cheap. Being able to raise *money* to fund an election campaign is a requirement of all political candidates, an even more crucial characteristic for independent candidates who do not have a political party to turn to for funding. The average election spend or money raised by women independents in 2007/2011/2016 was €8,913, the amount doubling for winning independent women. As other studies attest, money is a key supply-side resource determining women's capacity to put themselves forward for political candidacy. It is no different for independent women.

The ability to raise funding is strongly associated with *career*. Having a secure job is necessary if one must seek a bank loan to fund a campaign. It is no surprise then to observe that some women independents are in highly skilled and well-paid employment. However, this is not the case for all. But careers can present more resources than simply funding capacities. Certain careers, such as teaching, nursing, doctor and publican, have the potential to network a person into a local community, thereby increasing profile and name recognition. Of those known cases, over 40 per cent of women independents work in the health and education sectors, jobs, if locally based, which can present opportunities to interact with large volumes of people, a valuable asset if considering a career in politics.

When the data on women independents for 2007, 2011 and 2016 is viewed collectively, we observe that just over 30 per cent of these women contest election on community issues. Being a champion of a local issue taps into one of the key political culture variables in Irish politics – *localism*. Being the 'strong voice' and 'local face' of an issue of concern to constituents can bring with it resources such as name recognition, familiarity, but also a sense that the independent is 'one of us' against the might of 'them', ie the government and the 'established' politician. Therefore, in the Irish context at least, localism and community

activism are key supply dynamics, which have the potential to overcome and compensate for short-comings in other resources such as funding.

Assuming that all women who contested the 2007, 2011 and 2016 elections are motivated to run and have an interest in politics (key supply dynamics), the comparison of independent women candidates and those *selected* by a political party allows us to assess the primacy of other supply dynamics as well as isolate those candidate characteristics most valued by political parties. The comparison uncovers little significant difference in terms of demographic and political background, with age the only characteristic pointing in that direction – women independents tend to be older than party women. However, the comparison is revelatory in terms of the resources valued by political parties when selecting candidate, and it would seem from this analysis that *incumbency*, *previous elected office experience* and *familial links* continue to be criteria in a party candidate's background that party selectors value as key attributes. While incumbency and previous elected office experience are indicators of candidate quality, familial links point to the enduring presence of internal party fiefdoms, or legacies of these, which continue to have a stranglehold on power within the constituency level party, playing a crucial role in determining who gets selected. In light of this, the continuing justification and use of gender quotas is warranted to ensure that all women, not just those with familial links, have an equal opportunity to get selected.

As previously noted, qualitative interviews with women independents need to be conducted to assess why they choose the independent route over that of political parties. If the legislative gender quota had a symbolic effect, indicating that Irish politics is a more welcoming space for women, thereby increasing the supply of women coming forward to contest elections, why would women overlook political parties in favour of the independent route? After all, it is a tougher journey 'going it on your own'. As our comparison of party and independent women shows, party women tend to be better off and better resourced in terms of campaign financing. The average FPV is also higher for party women than it is for independent women, an outcome of the mobilising efforts of political parties in 'getting the party vote out'. Perhaps, as suggested earlier, the decision to run as an independent is a rational calculation, tapping into the anti-establishment sentiment which has been a feature of Irish politics since the recession of 2008 - 2013. Only qualitative interviews will allow us to assess if this is the case.

What electoral rules and institutions facilitate the emergence of independents, and are these gendered to advantage or disadvantage women? (Q6)

While the independent route may provide, as it did in the past, a 'safety valve' for those women who feel unwelcome by political parties or who feel political parties do not represent their views and policy interests, whether the independent route is a sustainable one for women is questionable given the fact that many of the institutional and cultural features that facilitate the emergence of independents have traditionally been gendered to disadvantage women. On the plus side of debate, studies of gender, PR-STV and elections have found that when women are on the ballot paper, the mechanics of the Irish electoral system are relatively female-friendly and conducive to their election (McGing, 2013). Also, as noted previously, the use of multi-member districts lowers the threshold of votes required for election. This is believed to benefit independents (Weeks, 2018b: xx), an argument also

rehearsed in gendered assessments of PR-STV which contend that the multi-member nature of PR-STV and the lower threshold of votes required for election, is an institutional feature favourable to women's election (McGing, 2013; White 2006). However, as noted previously, the preferential and ordinal nature of the electoral system encourages candidate centric voting behaviour, which in turn, incentivises politicians to cultivate personal votes. This is said to bolster the electoral prospects of independent candidates but Thames and Williams (2010) finds candidate centric electoral systems disadvantageous to women's political representation. Time is a valuable resource for anyone wishing to carve out a career in politics, especially in Ireland where personalism is so ingrained in the political culture but 'gendered differences in care commitments impact upon the availability of time and financial resources, meaning men are more likely than women to possess such capital to develop a political career' (Brennan and Buckley, 2017: xx). In 2017, the Central Statistics Office 'Women and Men in Ireland 2016' report[12] highlighted that 98 per cent of those who were looking after home/family in Ireland were women; men worked longer hours than women in paid employment averaging 39.7 hours a week compared to 31.7 hours for women; and men had a higher rate of employment than women (69.9 per cent versus 59.5 per cent). Given the continuing bias towards traditional gender roles in Ireland, more women than men are time poor, as well as financially less well off, meaning the pursuit of a political career may not be a possibility for many women, or, at the very least, women face choices that men oftentimes do not – do I hold off on starting a family after I establish my political career; do I delay entering politics until my children are reared; do I not have children so that I can pursue a political career? These are issues that face all political women, party and none, but whereas party women can rely somewhat on a party organisation and networks for supports (for example canvassing teams, ready-made leaflets; party posters), independent women cannot, which compounds their 'time' deficits.

While some research highlight the female-friendliness of PR-STV, Schwindt-Bayer et al (2010: 707) concluded that there was no advantage at all of being a woman under STV elections in Ireland finding 'no individual, party or district characteristics benefit[ting] female candidates more than male candidates with the same characteristics'. They advise that the negative bias against female candidates is compounded by the fact that 'female candidates are particularly challenged when they run in incumbent-dominant districts' (707). This is a particularly detrimental finding for women independents, given that our assessment of independent women in 2007, 2011 and 2016 general elections revealed that just 9 per cent of women independents are incumbents.

Conclusion

This paper is an initial attempt to bring together four broad literatures, that of gender quotas, supply and demand, independents and feminist institutionalism into one inter-connected framework to theorize about gender, women and candidate recruitment outside of political parties. A central concern of the paper is to query whether the presence of a legislative gender quota at the 2016 general election in Ireland, had a symbolic and diffusion effect, explaining the increase in women independents contesting that election. While some indicators point to

[12] See http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/pressstatementwomenandmeninireland2016/ (accessed 6 May 2018).

this being the case, it is only speculative in the absence of qualitative interviews with the women independents of the 2016 general election. This will be the next stage of this research.

However, the paper does shine some light on who are these women who 'go it alone' and contest elections. They tend to run in elections on ideological platforms and community issues, with one-in-five of all female independents contesting election highlighting issues gendered to affect more women than men. Indeed, between 1922 and 1977, some 81 per cent of women independents used the independent route to pursue their feminist activism, a finding leading to the conclusion that the independent route has, historically, been a safety valve for women, who feel unwelcomed by political parties.

In terms of essential supply dynamics shaping the candidacy of women independents, the paper found the continuing significance of *organisational structures* in women's candidate emergence; identified the ability to raise *money* as an even more crucial characteristic for independent candidates who do not have a political party to turn to for funding; identified *career*, particularly locally based professions, such as teacher, school principal, librarian, doctor, nurse, publican as an important resource networking independents into communities, thereby aiding local profiles; and *localism and community activism* are key supply dynamics, which have the potential to overcome and compensate for short-comings in other resources such as funding.

A comparison of independent women candidates and those *selected* by political parties facilitated an examination of those characteristics most valued by political parties. It would seem from this analysis that *incumbency*, *previous elected office experience* and *familial links* continue to be criteria in a party candidate's background that party selectors value as key attributes.

Finally, the paper engaged in a gendered analysis of the institutional and cultural variables that facilitate independents to emerge. While noting that those features of PR-STV that enhance independent candidacy and election, also benefit women's candidacy, ie the multi-member nature of PR-STV and the lower threshold of votes required for election, the paper cautions about the sustainability of the independent route for women, as features such as personalism and incumbency are gendered in favour of male candidacy.

Future research and data analysis is required, specifically, interviews with women independents will be necessary to address questions of symbolism, empowerment and rationalism:

- Was the adoption of the gender quota law in Ireland both a pragmatic solution to the under-representation of women in Irish politics and a symbolic gesture, marking a departure from the male-gendered script that has permeated Irish politics since the state's foundation, thereby inspiring women to run?
- Why do independent women avoid joining a political party? Is this a rational calculation at a time of low trust levels in political parties?

Future research will also compare female and male independents to asses if there are any gendered differences resulting in gender disadvantages/advantages for women. Finally, a better framing of the paper will be developed, including an analytical framework and hypotheses.

While embryonic in its development, this examination of gender, women and candidate recruitment outside of political parties has potential to make an analytical contribution in three ways:

- Research on women independents takes party out of the equation, thus facilitating an extended examination of the supply and demand model, exploring the dynamics of women's access into politics beyond the 'gate-keeping' explanations which have dominated gender, party and representation research thus far.
- Research on women independents presents an opportunity to develop research on the 'supply' dynamics affecting women's candidate emergence and access into politics. It allows us to ask and identify which resources are key to that emergence
- Research on women independents contributes to the literature on political recruitment and party realignment by providing gendered data on the rise of independent candidates and by providing an initial test of party, agency and institutional oriented explanations for this phenomena.

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Appendix

2007, 2011, 2016	***Independent Women***	***Party women***
Number of candidates in 2016	64	267
Number elected	8	74
District magnitude	More likely to contest in 5 seat constituencies (42%) than in 4 seat constituencies (34%) and 3 seat constituencies (24%)	More likely to contest in 4 seat constituencies (39.2%) than in 5 seat constituencies (31.5%) or 3 seat constituencies (29.3%)
Geographical spread of candidates	28% contested election in Dublin constituencies; 72% outside the capital city	33.3% contested in Dublin constituencies; 66.7% outside the capital city
Elected women and district magnitude	Of those elected, 50% elected from 5 seat constituencies; 37.5% from 4 seat constituencies and 12.5% from 3 seat constituencies	Of those elected, 43.2% elected in 4 seat constituencies, 31.1% elected in 5 seat constituencies and 25.7% elected in 3 seat constituencies
Incumbent - candidate	9.4% are incumbents	21% are incumbents
Incumbent - elected	75% of independent women elected were incumbents	46% of party women elected were incumbents
1st preference vote (FPV)	Female independent candidates secured an average FPV of 1,837. Those elected secured an average FPV of 5,604	Female party candidates secured an average FPV of 4,027. Those elected secured an average FPV of 7,309.
Campaign expenditure	€8,913 is the average candidate/campaign expenditure. Of the 8 elected, the average amount of money raised by each candidate is €16,082.83. Thus, €16,082.83 is the average total campaign expenditure per winning independent candidate.	€11,487.40 is the average candidate expenditure Of the 74 elected, the average amount of money raised by each candidate is €16,069.32 After party expenditure is factored in, €18,557.85 is the average total campaign expenditure per winning party candidate
Previous party affiliation/membership of alliance – independents only	29.7% of female independent candidates were former party members 28.1% were within a micro-party or alliance of independents when contesting the election	- - - -
Political office experience	37.5% female independent candidates who contested the general election had experience of elected office Of those independent women who were elected, all (100%) had experience of elected office.	60.7% women party candidates who contested the general election had experience of elected office Of those party women elected, 93.2% had previous elected office experience.
Family in politics	12.5% female independent candidates had/have family in politics 4.7% followed a family tradition into political office.	21.7% of female party candidates had/have family in politics 15.4% followed a family tradition into political office.

	Of those elected, two (25%) had/have family in politics but just one (12.5%) followed a family tradition into politics.	Of those elected, 22 (29.7%) had/have family in politics. Sixteen (21.6%) followed a family tradition into politics.
Age	Average age of 38 known cases is 48.5 years old Average age of elected female independent candidate is 55.5	Of 193 known cases, the average age of party candidate is 44.9. Average age of elected party candidate is 48.7
Education	Of the 36 known cases, 34 (94.45%) are 3rd level educated Of those elected, 87.5% have a 3rd level (university) qualification	Of 218 known cases, 201 (92.2%) are 3rd level educated; n14 or 6.4% are 2nd level educated; and n3 or 1.4% is 1st level educated. Of those elected, 66 (89.2%) have a 3rd level qualification; 6 (8.1%) have a 2nd level qualification; 2 (2.7%) have a primary or 1st level education
Marital status	38 known cases; 32 (84.2%) married; 6 (15.8%) unmarried	Of 192 known cases, 136 (70.8%) married; 40 (20.8%) are single; 6 (2.7%) are widowed; 2 (2.1%) are separated; 3 (1.6%) had a partner; 3 (1.6%) were divorced
Children	43 known cases: 36 (83.7%) have children; 7 (16.3%) do not have children. Of the 8 elected, 3 (37.5%) have children; 5 (62.5%) do not.	205 known cases: 154 (75%) have children; 51 (25 %) do not have children. Of the 74 elected, 82.4% have children; 16.2% do not. One case is unknown.

✓ When women ran as independent candidates in 2007, 2011 and 2016, 31.25% ran on a community issue; 28.2% could be categorised as quasi party candidates; 28.2% ran on an ideological issue stance and 12.5% were categorised as an apostate candidate.