

Candidate Gender and Voter Choice

Analysis from a Multimember Preferential Voting System

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Women are greatly underrepresented in elected office. A large literature on the subject has considerably advanced our understanding of this phenomenon, but many questions remain unanswered. Using original aggregate and individual-level data, the authors explore the interplay of candidate gender, partisanship, incumbency, and campaign spending in a multimember preferential voting system. This setting allows unparalleled exploration of the heterogeneous nature of voter decision making. The authors find little evidence for an independent effect of candidate gender on voter choice. Voters do not discriminate against women even in an electoral environment that affords them this opportunity without any cost to their partisan preferences.

Keywords: *women and politics; elections and voting behavior; European politics and society; comparative politics of advanced industrial societies*

With few exceptions, women are greatly underrepresented in elected office across the industrialized world. This descriptive underrepresentation of women has been attributed to a multitude of factors: voter prejudice, biases in recruitment practices, campaign effects, and shortfalls in the supply of women willing to run. Unfortunately, some of this research has produced inconsistent, even contradictory results. Two particularly contested issues relate to how the inclusion of female candidates on the ballot affects voters and how this in turn affects electoral competition. Such basic questions as whether the electorate discriminates against women in general, whether women vote disproportionately for women, and whether voters perceive female and male candidates differently remain unresolved. Most studies of the success rates of women candidates have focused on the, perhaps atypical, world of U.S. congressional elections wherein few women run and those who do are concentrated geographically and clustered in the Democratic Party. This article contributes to the debate on voting behavior and gender by examining the issue in the rather different context of the Republic of Ireland. This is an electoral environment that offers more choice to the electorate in terms of both opportunities to vote for women and the partisan affiliations of female candidates. It thus offers a more nuanced set of observations for the analyst.

The political context of Irish elections certainly offers voters the opportunity to support female candidates. Research has shown that female candidates are more common where district magnitudes are higher (Matland and Brown 1992; Rule 1987) and the multimember nature of Irish constituencies provides electorates with more flexibility in nominating women. In addition, the multiparty system also means that a voter may choose a woman candidate without having to vote for the “other side,” as may occur in two-party systems. If voter choice is between a number of quite similar parties, the gender of the candidate may tip the balance (one way or another). Finally, the Irish electoral system is also a preferential one, permitting voters to choose in many cases between candidates of the same party. Some authorities have suggested

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Authors' Note: The authors would like to thank Richard Matland, Kenneth Benoit, and three anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. This study was made possible by grants under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions of the National Development Plan and the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

that such systems advantage individual women candidates (Rule 1994; Shugart 1994), particularly if there are fewer women than men running. This set of circumstances would thus seem to be conducive to increasing the significance of candidate gender as a factor in electoral choice. Exploration of the Irish case is therefore of interest because it helps to assess a range of conditions in which gender may be electorally important.

This article proceeds as follows. To begin, we examine the existing literature on the topic. Next, we look more closely at the opportunities for a gender-based vote in the 2002 general election. We then outline the data available and the analyses that will be conducted. There are three parts to this analysis. First, we examine the aggregate evidence from the 2002 elections using original detailed variables about the background characteristics and election expenditure of all the candidates running in districts with women. This allows us to examine whether certain candidates are disadvantaged by their gender, in general, in Ireland. Second, we examine patterns of voting behavior from one of the three districts that used electronic voting in 2002. All of the ballots in these constituencies have been made public, and we use these data to examine the apparent importance of candidate gender as a voting cue. Third, we examine survey data from the first ever Irish National Election Study to see if there is any evidence to suggest women tend to prefer female candidates and, if so, what sort of women and what sort of candidates. Finally, we end with a brief discussion of the results and possible directions for future research.

Gender and Voting Behavior

In terms of how gender influences voting behavior, the results in the literature are surprisingly mixed despite a considerable volume of work dedicated to the topic. The literature can be broadly divided into three approaches to the question: aggregate studies, survey analyses, and experimental work.

Studies of aggregate vote totals generally find little evidence to suggest that women candidates are unduly affected by their gender (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Welch and Studlar 1986). Some have even argued that “winning elections has nothing to do with the sex of a candidate” (Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997, 79). Contrary to the expectation that women might be disadvantaged, recent work by Black and Erickson on Canadian elections even found that

“women registered a small but consistent advantage vis á vis their male counterparts” when standard controls were included (2003, 96). This finding is reflected in work on British local elections (Borisyuk, Rallings, and Thrasher 2007). Research on open seats in the United States has found evidence that women may be advantaged in this particular type of competition (Dolan 1998; Smith and Fox 2001). However, further research has suggested that the very nature of races with women may be different from those that are exclusively male (Fiber and Fox 2002). Nonetheless, aggregate studies find for the most part that there is no significant bias against women in the electoral arena despite their continued underrepresentation.

The second major approach to studying questions of gender and voting behavior examines the evidence from national election surveys, principally those of the United States (Dolan 2001; Koch 1999; McDermott 1997). A simple gender identity hypothesis suggests that women will support women candidates, even if it means sacrificing party identity. Evidence from a number of studies has suggested that women are more likely to support women candidates than are men (Burrell 1994; Welch and Studlar 1986). Dolan (1998) also found minorities, the less religious, and the elderly are more likely to vote for women than other voters. McDermott (1998) found that women are more likely to support female candidates than are men although, somewhat surprisingly, only in House elections. Sanbonmatsu (2002) argued that the relationship is more nuanced. She suggested that about half of voters have a baseline preference for one gender over another, that women are more likely to have such a preference, and that such a preference is more likely to be for female candidates.

Another question addressed by this survey-based research explores why voters might (or might not) prefer women. Most research concludes that gender stereotyping plays a part in voter decision-making processes. Koch (2002) found voters use stereotypes of women to infer candidate attributes, especially in low-information elections. For instance, voters use gender stereotypes to make inferences about candidates’ political views, assuming woman candidates are more left leaning than their male counterparts. This results in more liberal-leaning voters’ supporting more women candidates (McDermott 1997). Voters seem to perceive women to be more honest or liberal and better at addressing issues of social welfare, and they may choose to vote for them on this basis (Burrell 1994; Golebiowska 2001). However, Sapiro and Conover (1997) agreed that while candidate sex and

gender-related issues can have an impact in electoral contests, these effects differ significantly across elections and depend heavily on the context; gender is an issue in some campaigns and not in others.

The third main methodological approach to the issue of gender and voting uses experimental methods to isolate the impact of gender on voter decision making (Leeper 1991; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b). Here the results are mixed. Many find that there are few differences between male and female contenders. However, there is also evidence to suggest that voters prefer masculine characteristics when choosing candidates for high office such as the presidency (Rosenwasser and Seale 1988; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a), that female candidates may be advantaged by gender stereotypes in elections (Kaid et al. 1984), that such advantages are mediated by partisanship (King and Matland 2003), or that there may indeed be bias against female candidates in different subsections of the population (Fox and Smith 1998).

Research on the impact of gender on voting in Ireland has, so far, been confined exclusively to aggregate vote studies and has not come to any definitive conclusions. Carty (1980, 96) suggested that "the electorate appears reluctant to return women to the Dáil." Marsh (1987) confirmed this negative bias against women candidates when examining elections in the period from 1948 to 1982. Looking at first preference votes in the 2002 election, Gallagher (2003) concurred with this finding and suggested that "male candidates fare better than women, other things being equal, though the effects of gender are far smaller than those of electoral status and those of party" (p. 91). On the other hand, Laver, Galligan, and Carney found that "there is no direct prejudice against women candidates on the part of Irish voters" from their analysis of the 1997 election (1999, 122).

What is clear, if not unexpected, from the studies to date is that the impact of gender is contingent. The role that candidate sex plays in voting behavior is undoubtedly complex; it involves an intricate interaction of voter characteristics, candidate characteristics, partisan concerns, and contextual influences. Voting choices are inevitably a product of those making the choice and characteristics of the choices themselves. A woman may be more likely to vote for another woman, but only under certain circumstances, for instance, if it does not involve crossing party lines or if the woman candidate is of equal quality to her competitors in terms of political experience and/or incumbency. An individual's level of political sophistication or education may condition her ability to use gender

as a voting cue. Gender may be an issue in some electoral competitions and not in others. The heterogeneity of voter decision making means that some voters vote on the basis of issues and others on the basis of candidate traits and characteristics. Hence, the impact of gender, if it exists at all, may be marginal, although this does not necessarily mean it is insignificant.

The Irish Electoral Context

Most studies of elections in advanced industrialized democracies demonstrate that voters vote for the party label rather than the candidates (LeDuc, Niemi, and Norris 1996), but it has been hypothesized (Henig and Henig 2001) that more women will be elected in electoral systems with higher district magnitudes. In elections with closed lists, there is no reason to see a candidate's gender as relevant to the voting process, other than in the process by which parties rank women. Electoral systems with open lists or preference rankings may be different, however, in that they allow the voter to vote for a party and, within the party, to express a preference for particular candidates. This ability to express a preference could be used to advantage or disadvantage female candidates if gender is a consideration. Shugart (1994) has argued that electoral systems that have inbuilt preference elements should in fact benefit women. These systems encourage candidates to stress the personal characteristics that differentiate them from their copartisans. Given that there are fewer female than male candidates as a rule, we should expect female candidates to be advantaged by their gender if they choose to seek personal ties with women in their districts. Rule (1994) argued in a similar vein that preference votes work to benefit women on the assumption that given a choice, voters can move female candidates to the top of the list where they have a much higher probability of being elected. Using a similar logic, but coming to a very different conclusion, Engstrom (1987) noted the possibility of voter bias against women under a preference system in that voters can choose to rank them lower.

The Irish electoral system, the single transferable vote (STV) in multimember constituencies, gives an unusual degree of freedom to the voter to choose between candidates, both within and across political parties. The system is designed to minimize vote wastage, and for the purposes of this research, the key characteristic of interest is that votes are explicitly cast for individual candidates. The ballot paper that

voters receive lists all of the candidates (with an accompanying photo) in alphabetical order, with the candidate's party affiliation provided next to his or her name. To cast a valid vote, the voter must indicate his first choice by placing a "1" next to a candidate's name. The voter may go on to indicate second, third, and later preferences using the numbers "2," "3," and so on up to the number of candidates on the ballot, but he is not obliged to cast more than a first preference for the vote to be deemed valid. Seats are allocated to candidates using a Droop quota. Any candidate who reaches the quota on the first count is deemed elected. If seats remain unfilled once the first preferences have been counted, then there is a further count, either by redistributing the second preference votes of the candidate with the lowest number of votes or by redistributing the surplus votes of any candidate over the quota. In practice, lower preferences are critical to the destination of seats as relatively few candidates are elected on the first count.¹ Supporters of the STV system point with approval to the fact that the system allows voters to rank candidates on the basis of whatever candidate attributes are most important to them. A voter may be influenced by party but also by, for instance, a candidate's gender. Furthermore, these are not necessarily exclusive: voters may vote on gender, for instance, but within parties, ranking the candidates of a preferred party according to gender. Whether STV alone accounts for the importance of candidates in Irish elections has been widely discussed (see Sinnott 2005). What is agreed is that STV certainly makes candidate-cued voting compatible with party voting to a degree that is virtually unique. Opinion surveys and exit polls have asked people how important the factors of party and candidate are in their decision, and the most important factor is typically said to be the candidate (Sinnott 1995). On the other hand, the way in which ballots are filled in suggests party is a not insignificant cue (Laver 2004; Marsh 2007). Even so, party loyalties are relatively weak. Less than 10 percent say they feel "very close" to a party and less than one-quarter admit feeling close to a party at all (Marsh 2006). These conditions provide a significant incentive for politicians to develop and seek support on a personal basis (Carey and Shugart 1995). This they do. However, the search for support tends to be conducted more on the basis of what candidates can do or have done for constituents than by championing particular issues (Gallagher and Komito 2005).

The Republic of Ireland has a poor record in terms of the descriptive representation of women. At present,

Table 1
Number of Women Candidates, by Party, in 2002

Party	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total Candidates
Fianna Fáil	12.26 (13)	87.74 (93)	22.99 (106)
Fine Gael	16.47 (14)	83.53 (71)	18.44 (85)
Labour	25.53 (12)	74.47 (34)	9.98 (47)
Progressive Democrats	30.00 (6)	70.00 (14)	4.34 (20)
Green Party	25.81 (9)	74.19 (22)	6.72 (31)
Sinn Féin	18.92 (7)	81.08 (30)	8.03 (37)
Other parties	12.20 (5)	87.80 (36)	9.78 (41)
Independents	20.00 (19)	80.00 (76)	20.61 (95)
	100.00 (85)	100.00 (376)	100.00 (461)

Note: Figures in parenthesis represent absolute numbers.

only 13 percent of members are women, although this figure does represent a slight improvement on the situation in the 1980s where women's proportion of total representatives failed to get out of single figures. In the 2002 elections, the focus of this article, there were a total of 461 candidates running for elected office in Ireland; of these, 85 (18 percent) were women.² The number of women candidates varied slightly across the six political parties, as Table 1 demonstrates, but all parties fielded at least 12 percent women candidates. The Progressive Democrats (PDs) had the highest number of women candidates as a percentage of their total candidate pool, although in absolute terms, this converts to only 6 candidates from their total of 20. Both of the main parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, had below average levels of female candidates. The two big parties, between them, ran all male slates in fully half of the constituencies. Fianna Fáil ran women candidates in only thirteen of the forty-two districts in which they competed. Fine Gael ran female candidates in fourteen districts. Of the forty-two electoral districts in 2002, nine did not have a single female party candidate on the ballot. In only one constituency were there more women candidates than men (Dublin South, 7 versus 4).³

Data

Several sources of data are available to study the impact of gender on voting in the 2002 election. Most important is the existence for the first time of an academic election survey (Irish National Election Survey; INES).⁴ This contains more than 2,500 interviews with a random sample of the electorate, conducted in all forty-two constituencies in the weeks after the election.

The questionnaire contained a number of items tapping assessments of candidates. These include the use of a simulated ballot that voters were asked to complete as they did on Election Day as well as thermometer ratings of all the party candidates. This provides a much more nuanced set of measures of candidate appeal than is common in survey data. The second set of data is that on the candidates themselves, including their party, gender, political experience, and campaign spending, as well as their election performance. Combining these two sets of data allows us to take into account characteristics of the candidates themselves—including gender—when looking at how voters evaluated them. Of course, the number of respondents voting in each constituency is low—on average only approximately fifty—and even aggregating constituencies still means the numbers with a particular gender choice, such as within a favored party, remains relatively small. A third set of data has no such problems. In the 2002 election, voters in three of the forty-two constituencies cast their votes electronically as opposed to filling out a ballot sheet by hand, the traditional method. This was intended as a trial run for the introduction of electronic voting nationwide, although the latter project was subsequently shelved indefinitely. The full data from these three races have been published (in anonymous format) and provide a data set with which to examine the actual rankings of voters in a real setting. Laver (2004) has used this data to explore the importance of party. We use this remarkable data set of full rankings by more than 135,000 voters to examine systematically the structure of preferences for female candidates. At least one woman ran in all of the three constituencies in question, but the most interesting case—and the case explored here—is the Dublin West constituency, which had a total of nine candidates of whom four were women.

Candidate Success

We begin our analysis with a general examination of the performance of female candidates in the 2002 election in the Republic of Ireland. There are two dependent variables in this analysis; the first, vote, examines the number of first preference votes a candidate obtained relative to his or her fellow competitors. Specifically, the dependent variable (V_{dev}) measures candidate i 's deviation from the mean candidate first preference vote in his or her constituency, where V_{cmean} gives the mean vote for candidates in a constituency and V_{ci} gives candidate i 's vote total.

$$V_{dev} = (V_{ci} - V_{cmean}) / V_{cmean}$$

This approach is intended to capture how well a candidate did, in terms of his or her total number of first preferences, relative to other candidates in the election, controlling for the different number of votes cast in each constituency.

The second dependent variable, rank, takes advantage of the full range of preferences cast by voters and compares a candidate's average ballot position with the mean average ballot position in his or her constituency. The use of this second dependent variable allows us to take advantage of the full range of preferences expressed; in particular, we can explore how well women do in terms of lower preferences. For instance, it may be the case that women, while they get fewer first preferences, may still rank higher than men in terms of overall preferences. The calculation of average ballot rank is taken from the simulated ballots that respondents completed in the INES. This represents the first time such analysis can be done for a complete set of constituencies as such information is simply not calculable from aggregate data.

To calculate average ballot rank for a candidate, we need to impute the missing preferences on ballots. As discussed above, STV in Ireland does not require voters to rank all candidates, which makes comparing average ballot position a little problematic. If we think of it in the extreme, if only one person from an electorate of 50,000 ranked a candidate first, his or her average ballot rank would be 1, while a candidate ranked first by 25,000 people and second by the remaining 25,000 would rank lower, at 1.5. There are a number of alternatives for giving a rank to non-ranked candidates for each respondent. We could give all unranked candidates the rank of the next available preference, we could give them all the lowest available preference, or we could give them the average of the available preferences. Following Laver (2004), we have opted for the last of these. Explicitly missing preferences (MP in the equation below) are filled in as follows:

$$MP = (\text{Candidate}_{total} + 1 + \text{Preference}_{max}) / 2,$$

where Candidate_{total} is the total number of candidates in a district and Preference_{max} is the maximum number of preferences used by a respondent. For example, if there are twelve candidates and only four votes cast by the elector, the remaining eight candidates get a score of 8.5.⁵ The dependent variable rank (R_{dev}) was then simply derived as the deviation of the

candidate's average rank (R_{ci}) from the average ballot rank of all candidates (R_{cmean}) in his or her constituency (deviations are used again because the number of candidates running in each constituency varies).

$$R_{dev} = (R_{ci} - R_{cmean}) / R_{cmean}$$

The key independent variable in the model is the gender of the candidate (a dichotomous variable; 0 if *male*, 1 if *female*). Several other characteristics of the candidates are captured through the variables: spending, incumbent, and minister. The incumbent variable measures whether the candidate was a sitting member of the Dáil (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). Similarly, minister captures whether the candidate was a sitting minister (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), and finally, spending is the standardized euro expenditure of the candidate over the course of the campaign period. Finally, dummies are also created for the party affiliation of the candidate. Also included in the full model are the interactions of all of these variables with the key variable of interest, Gender. More details on these variables can be found in the appendix at <http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 2. Eight separate models are estimated, four for each of the two dependent variables (vote and rank). In the first two models in the table, only the gender of the candidate is included. It is not significant for either of the dependent variables. In the full models in columns (3) and (4), spending, incumbent, and minister are included, along with the party dummies and interaction terms. Again, in none of these models is gender found to be significant. Both the incumbent and spending variables, not surprisingly, achieve significance; candidates are most benefited by having served already and by the size of their war chest. Interesting to note, ministerial status does not seem in itself to bring particular advantages for either male or female candidates. These four models were rerun on the subset of nonincumbent candidates (models 5-8) to check if the impact of gender is moderated by incumbency. Again, gender fails to reach significance in any of the models.

From the aggregate analysis presented here, it would seem that there is nothing particularly advantageous or disadvantageous about being a woman per se. The results in Table 2 clearly indicate that the gender of the candidate is not significant in any version of the model. Women do get fewer first preference votes, but even in the most parsimonious models, this is not significant. When controlling for all of the standard variables, we find there is no

evidence from the aggregate analysis that female candidates are discriminated against in terms of their gender, although it is interesting to note that female candidates from the PDs appear to be positively advantaged in terms of both first preference votes and average ballot rank. In all of the full models, the interaction term that captures this subset of candidates (PD \times Gender) is statistically significant. However, given there were only six such candidates in the full data set (not to mention the fact that the party was officially disbanded in November 2008), we should not read too much into these results.

Analysis from Electronic Ballot Data

Whether or not women candidates perform equally as well as men, it remains possible that they are assessed differently and that some voters may prefer to vote for women (or men). The available electronic ballot records allow us to explore the extent to which voters use gender as a cue in voting. Where they do, we should expect them to give a higher number of their top preferences to women rather than men (or vice versa). Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of the electronic votes in the constituency of Dublin West, where a total of nine candidates ran. The four female contestants in this urban constituency come from four different parties, Fianna Fáil, Labour, the PDs, and Sinn Féin. These parties run the full range of the ideological spectrum (with Sinn Féin and the PDs as bookends); they also include government and opposition parties.⁶ Using the full set of ballots, we can explore if there are any voters who cast a "pure" gender ballot or who disproportionately favor men or women in their top preferences. That is, are there voters who rank all female (or male) candidates sequentially with no "breaks" in the running order? As we can see from Table 3, only a tiny proportion of voters vote a straight male or female ticket, suggesting that gender is the predominant cue for, at most, a tiny number of the electorate. In total, only 0.3 percent of those casting at least four preferences ranked the four women candidates 1, 2, 3, and 4. The number is slightly lower than we would expect if voting were a totally random process (0.7 percent). The random probability of picking four women in a row in a race with nine candidates is actually very low, but the number who vote a straight gender ticket in the actual data is even lower. The number of voters choosing two women in their first two preferences where they expressed at least two preferences is

Table 2
Performance of Candidates

	All Candidates				Nonincumbents			
	Column							
	(1) Vote	(2) Rank	(3) Vote	(4) Rank	(5) Vote	(6) Rank	(7) Vote	(8) Rank
Gender	-0.130 (0.090)	-1.797 (2.349)	-0.094 (0.076)	-1.222 (2.278)	-0.000 (0.083)	1.256 (2.320)	-0.120 (0.074)	-2.603 (2.254)
Spending			0.369 (0.030)**	8.050 (0.917)**			0.441 (0.000)**	10.675 (1.062)**
Incumbent			0.402 (0.059)**	9.145 (1.762)**				
Minister			0.150 (0.131)	-3.910 (3.916)				
Gender × Incumbent			-0.114 (0.148)	-3.593 (4.425)				
Gender × Spending			-0.062 (0.061)	0.593 (1.843)			-0.092 (0.068)	-0.472 (2.072)
Gender × Minister			0.020 (0.297)	-0.066 (8.857)				
Fianna Fáil			0.553 (0.072)**	15.836 (2.170)**			0.600 (0.082)**	15.914 (2.499)**
Fine Gael			0.249 (0.066)**	7.217 (1.987)**			0.216 (0.074)**	6.655 (2.271)**
Labour			0.214 (0.085)*	9.466 (2.548)**			0.043 (0.094)	6.323 (2.858)*
Progressive Democrats			-0.134 (0.128)	-3.226 (3.843)			-0.247 (0.123)*	-7.750 (3.760)*
Green			0.256 (0.096)**	9.647 (2.870)**			0.286 (0.091)**	9.778 (2.780)**
Sinn Féin			0.339 (0.086)**	-1.795 (2.584)			0.292 (0.081)**	-3.243 (2.465)
Fianna Fáil × Gender			-0.034 (0.419)	-0.659 (1.298)			-0.047 (0.047)	-0.137 (1.443)
Fine Gael × Gender			0.034 (0.041)	0.658 (1.249)			0.051 (0.045)	2.493 (1.391)
Labour × Gender			0.234 (0.154)	6.496 (4.612)			0.354 (0.169)*	6.879 (5.165)
Progressive Democrats × Gender			0.647 (0.224)**	-14.252 (6.702)*			0.644 (0.238)**	15.188 (7.234)*
Green × Gender			0.060 (0.184)	-0.894 (5.495)			-0.056 (0.171)	0.357 (5.217)
Sinn Féin × Gender			-0.235 (0.190)	-3.052 (5.681)			-0.176 (0.175)	-0.864 (5.324)
Constant	0.026 (0.038)	0.239 (1.008)	-0.344 (0.048)**	-8.918 (1.448)**	-0.301 (0.038)**	-7.626 (1.055)**	-0.299 (0.048)**	-8.076 (1.488)**
Observations	461	461	460	460	324	324	323	323
R-squared	.00	.00	.71	.62	.00	.00	.64	.56

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Significant at $p < .05$. ** Significant at $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

similarly lower than we would expect randomly (13.5 percent versus 16 percent). Perhaps even better evidence of a lack of bias against women is the fact that only 19.4 percent of voters did not give a single preference to women when they cast at least two preference

votes. The percentage of such votes we would expect if voting were random is actually much higher, at 28 percent. Similarly, where at least three preferences were cast, the proportion of voters who failed to give women a high preference is much lower than we

Table 3
Proportion of High Preference Votes for Women
Candidates in Dublin West

Number of Votes for Women	At Least Two Preferences Cast (%)	At Least Three Preferences Cast (%)	At Least Four Preferences Cast (%)
None	.194 (.277)	.043 (.119)	.008 (.039)
One	.670 (.555)	.518 (.476)	.093 (.317)
Two	.135 (.166)	.419 (.357)	.747 (.476)
Three		.019 (.047)	.147 (.158)
Four			.003 (.007)
<i>n</i>	28,217	25,002	14,130

Note: Random probabilities, in parentheses, were generated using a hypergeometric distribution.

would expect randomly (4 percent versus 12 percent). In terms of actual votes, only 113 voters ($0.008 \times 14,130$) in this constituency failed to give a woman any high preference where they ranked at least four candidates; in contrast, random voting would generate 551 ($0.039 \times 14,130$) such votes. As is clear from Table 3, the number of voters voting straight male or straight female tickets is lower in all instances than we would expect if voting were random. This suggests that gender is rarely the only cue or even a dominant one for the overwhelming number of voters. However, before we can conclude that gender is irrelevant to the Irish voter, we need to explore a wider diversity of contexts and allow for a greater diversity of voters, which we do in the next section.

Survey Analysis

The INES data matched with the candidate data permit us to consider voter characteristics, candidate characteristics, and the interactions between the two, thus allowing for the identification of considerable heterogeneity in voter decision making and the possibility that the impact of gender is conditional on other variables such as partisanship.

We make use of three dependent variables in the analysis that follows. The first, *preference*, captures whether the respondent expressed any preference for a female candidate and, if so, which preference; the second, *therm*, measures the thermometer rating score given to candidate *i* by the respondent *j*; and the third, *preference 1-3*, captures whether the respondent gave a high preference (1, 2, or 3) to the candidate in question. The independent variables in the analysis include the demographic and attitudinal characteristics of voters that might be expected, in

the light of previous research, to identify those more likely to support women candidates: woman respondent, age, class, ideology, knowledge, abortion, own party candidate, strength of party ID, party attachment, and party-centered voter. Woman respondent is measured as a standard dichotomous variable: 0 if *male* and 1 if *female*. This variable is intended to capture the propensity of women to vote for women, although as noted earlier, the literature is inconclusive on this relationship. Age is measured in years. The expectation in the literature is that younger people will be more likely to vote for women, although Dolan (1998) found the opposite relationship. Class is a dichotomous variable that distinguishes manual from nonmanual workers. Again, the literature leads us to expect that the more educated (those employed in nonmanual trades) will be more inclined to vote for women. Ideology is measured using an eleven-point, left-right, self-placement scale, with 0 representing the *far left* and 10 the *far right*. The expectation is that more left-wing respondents will favor women. Political knowledge is intended to capture political engagement and uses the political knowledge scale from the INES. This comprises five factual closed-ended questions with four options provided with each (for full details about each question, see Marsh et al. 2008); the variable ranges from 0 to 5, although the median number of correct responses was four. Own party candidate is a simple dichotomous variable that captures whether the candidate under consideration is from a party with which the respondent self-identifies, that is, reports himself or herself as feeling close to. We also include a variable that measures the strength of the respondent's party identification. We reason that where this is strong, the voter will be driven to vote the party line regardless of the gender of the candidate. This variable is measured as a dichotomy where 1 is *feeling close to a particular party* and 0 is *not feeling close to a particular party*. Finally, party-centered voter captures how important candidate-centered voting is for the respondent. This measure is a three-point scale composite of two variables in the INES and ranges from -1 (*candidate centered*) to 1 (*party centered*). There was no specific attitudinal question on gender issues included in the 2002 INES, such as the respondent's opinion of feminism or the suitability of women for leadership roles. The nearest proxy for a gender-salient issue was the respondent's attitude toward abortion. This variable, measured on an eleven-point scale, captures a respondent's attitude toward abortion liberalization, with 0 representing a *total ban* and 10 representing *freedom of availability*.⁷ We expect that those who favor liberalization will

Table 4
Factors Affecting Votes and Thermometer Ratings for Female Candidates

	Column					
	(1) Preference	(2) Preference	(3) Therm	(4) Therm	(5) Preference 1-3	(6) Preference 1-3
Woman Respondent	-0.165 (1.34)	0.168 (0.22)	1.129 (0.79)	0.836 (0.09)	0.164 (1.90)	-0.072 (0.14)
Own party candidate	-1.022** (5.51)	-1.543** (4.87)	24.955** (7.93)	28.835** (6.97)	5.814** (12.87)	6.043** (12.52)
Woman × Own Party Candidate	0.366 (1.26)	0.177 (0.38)	-3.630 (0.84)	0.201 (0.03)	-1.858** (3.30)	-1.138 (1.80)
Number of preferences	0.487** (18.06)	0.461** (14.84)				
Strength of party ID		0.666 (2.33)*		-8.273 (2.90)**		-0.797 (4.21)**
Class		-0.078 (0.38)		1.025 (0.46)		-0.046 (0.34)
Knowledge		0.120 (1.49)		-0.458 (0.41)		-0.075 (1.31)
Age		0.003 (0.44)		0.008 (0.10)		-0.002 (0.50)
Abortion		0.010 (0.30)		0.309 (0.87)		0.032 (1.55)
Ideology		0.002 (0.05)		0.421 (0.87)		-0.025 (0.91)
Party-centered voter		0.221 (1.90)		1.414 (1.00)		0.123 (1.44)
Woman × Strength of Party ID		0.315 (0.84)		-1.774 (0.44)		-0.401 (1.34)
Woman × Class		0.131 (0.48)		4.364 (1.32)		0.332 (1.63)
Woman × Knowledge		-0.117 (1.16)		-3.039 (2.12)*		-0.026 (0.36)
Woman × Age		-0.000 (0.02)		0.156 (1.53)		0.004 (0.73)
Woman × Abortion		-0.017 (0.40)		0.168 (0.33)		-0.009 (0.31)
Woman × Ideology		0.007 (0.15)		-0.092 (0.15)		-0.024 (0.67)
Woman × Party-Centered Voter		-0.029 (0.19)		-3.922 (1.94)		-0.265 (2.10)*
Mean rating of male candidates			0.497 (9.13)**	0.509 (8.37)**		
Constant	0.945 (6.92)**	0.375 (0.60)	18.402 (5.92)**	17.431 (2.38)*	-2.987 (47.48)**	-2.295 (6.26)**
Observations	1,317	1,057	1,826	1,465	10,705	8,472
R-squared	.48	.49	.14	.18		

Note: Robust *t* statistics are in parentheses.

* Significant at $p < .05$. ** Significant at $p < .01$

favor women candidates. Finally, for the preference model, we control for the number of preferences cast, as some respondents express only one preference and others complete the full ballot. For the therm models, we also control for a respondent's mean rating of other candidates as respondents may treat these

scales differently and we are interested in the relative ratings of candidates by the respondent in question.

Table 4 presents the results of this analysis for six models, using both a parsimonious and a full model for each of the three dependent variables. It is important to stress that the analysis was confined to female

candidates. However, the results are equivalent to a model in which both male and female candidates were included. This choice, to use only women candidates, makes absolutely no difference to the conclusions that can be drawn. By including male as well as female candidates, however, we would have to include third-order interaction terms, which only serve to obfuscate the central findings, not to mention making an already large table of output considerably larger.⁸

Column (1) in Table 4 reports the results of the parsimonious linear regression model with preference as the dependent variable and woman respondent and party candidate as independent variables (with a control variable also included for number of preferences cast and an interaction term between the two variables of interest). As is clearly evident from the results in column (1), the only variable that is significant is whether the candidate under consideration (own party candidate) is from a party with which the respondent identifies. In model 3, where the thermometer rating of the candidate is the dependent variable, party candidate is yet again the only variable to reach significance. Similar results are found with the binary logit results in column (5), where preference 1 through 3 is the dependent variable. These three models taken together find no evidence in favor of the hypothesis that women respondents are more likely to vote for female candidates than men are or to rate them more highly on thermometer scales.

The results from the fuller models (columns [2], [4], and [6] of Table 4) also fail to find any evidence in favor of the hypothesis that women favor female candidates; nowhere does woman respondent reach significance. Nor do we find any evidence that any particular subgroup of women respondents is more inclined to vote for women candidates, as almost all of the interaction terms are insignificant. The only exception to this is that women with less knowledge are more likely to assess women candidates more favorably on the thermometer scales, but the effect is small: only 3 points on the thermometer scale (whose range is 0-100) between most and least informed. Moreover, that evaluation does not appear to translate into actual electoral support (preferences cast)—a result that perhaps underlines the difference between thermometer scores and voting behavior.⁹

Discussion

All things considered, it would appear that gender does not play a big role in candidate success or voter

decision making in Ireland. While none of the tests can be said to prove conclusively that gender is completely irrelevant in Irish elections, the article does test a rich variety of ways in which one could assent to female candidacy, and we remain confident that if we have to look this hard to find any evidence of gender bias or effect in the Irish case, it cannot play a very significant role in voting behavior. Women candidates do not do significantly worse than male candidates in the aggregate, even when one controls for just gender. Women do not seem to be discriminated against in terms of ballot order and rank in the analysis of the electronic data. And finally, the analysis of the individual-level data demonstrates that women do not seem to get votes disproportionately from female voters. All in all, it would seem gender in Ireland is not politicized. The puzzle remains, however, that there is a general underrepresentation of women in elected office, not just in Ireland, but across electoral democracies.

There may be a whole host of reasons why women are represented in such poor figures in the Dáil, but the actions of the electorate would not appear to be responsible. Evidence from a survey of candidates carried out by the authors in 2007 backs up this finding. When candidates were asked to consider why there were so few women in the Dáil, only 17 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “Most voters preferred male candidates,” with no statistical difference in the responses of male and female candidates. On the other hand, 80 percent of respondents (83 percent of male and 72 percent of female candidates) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Not enough women came forward.” This echoes the findings of Fox and Lawless (2004) on the United States that women express significantly lower levels of political ambition to hold elected office. While only 29 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Women are not given fair opportunities by parties,” the gender difference in this response was rather startling; only 22 percent of men agreed with the statement while more than 60 percent of women candidates did so. While far from an ideal insight into the reasons for the continued underrepresentation of women in the Dáil, these figures do hint at supply-side issues. It may be the case that increasing women’s political representation will depend on whether political parties have a strategic incentive to promote women. Studies of candidates themselves suggest that women are far less likely to seek public office than men, they are less likely to think they are qualified to run, and they are less likely to be recruited (Lawless and Fox 2005). A gap in political ambition

may account for the underrepresentation of women in Ireland. While we have established that there is no penalty for promoting women, there also appear to be few advantages. Women's representation is simply not a politicized issue. Female candidates neither win nor lose votes for their parties; as a result, political parties have no real incentive to promote them and may encourage them less for a host of reasons.

Notes

1. A full discussion of the electoral system is beyond the scope of this article, but an excellent overview is provided in Gallagher (2005).

2. In the five general elections of the 1980s, women averaged 11 percent of candidates; in 1992, women constituted 17 percent of candidates; and in 1997, women constituted 20 percent.

3. It is worth noting that there is no evidence to suggest that Irish women disproportionately favor one party over the other. Results from exit polls indicate that only the small Sinn Féin party had a significant gender difference among its voters in 2002, being less favored by women than by men.

4. The Irish National Election Study was directed by Michael Marsh and Richard Sinnott. Fieldwork was carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin.

5. Alternative solutions to the missing preferences problem include giving all nonranked candidates a score of either 5 or 12. Admittedly, the chosen methodology is not without problems. The fundamental assumption we have to make is that candidates who are not ranked are viewed equally by the voter—that they are equally indifferent between them.

6. Unfortunately, only in the case of the largest party, Fianna Fáil, was there also a male candidate from the same party running.

7. As abortion is illegal in all but exceptional circumstances in the Republic of Ireland, this proxy is not unproblematic. Nonetheless, we hypothesize that those who favor liberalizing abortion are broadly more aware (and supportive of) female candidates.

8. We also see this as taking the spirit of the advice offered by Chris Achen (2002) for more parsimonious and reliable statistical analysis. However, these full tables are available on request from the authors.

9. We also tested the models in Table 4 for nonincumbent female candidates. In general, less will be known about these candidates, and so cues such as gender might become more significant. We might expect the voter to use a candidate's characteristics as a cheap means of acquiring information to a greater degree for such candidates. Again, the results for this set of contenders indicate that partisanship appears to be the driving force behind whether a respondent expresses a preference for a female candidate.

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