

Facts & Figures

- Ireland is ranked 104th out of 183 in the IPU rankings
- 22nd place amongst the 27 EU member states
- Only 36 of 155 seats (23,2%) in the Dáil are held by women
- Ireland has had two women Presidents (heads of state) Mary Robinson (1990 – 1997); Mary McAeese (1997 - 2004; 2004 – 2011)
- Of the 214 people who have served in cabinet in Ireland, only 22 (10.3%) have been women
- Ireland falls behind the world average of 26.9% and the EU median of 31.9%
- In 11 of the 39 constituencies there are no women TDs

Key Terms

Historical context

- Women in Ireland have faced legal and social challenges, with significant milestones including the right to vote in 1918
- The introduction of the Contraceptive Legislation in 1980 paved the way for increased reproductive rights for women.
 - The Marriage Act of 1870 was a key legal reform granting women certain property rights within marriage.
 - In 1974, the Employment Equality Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of gender in employment.
 - In the 1970's women began mobilising for change → was supported by Mary Robinson's presidential campaign; many parties for the first time took women's candidacy seriously, however this change was short lived.
 - The 1916 Proclamation of Independence called for equal "citizenship, equal rights and equal opportunities" and Hannah Sheehy Skeffington observed that it was "the first time in history that men, fighting for freedom, voluntarily included women".
 - However, the social conservative, patriarchal, authoritarian and clerical culture of the new state saw women side-lined.
 - and so in 1937 a constitution was introduced:
 - 41.2.1: In particular the State recognises that by her life within the home, women gives to the State a support which the common good cannot be achieved
 - 41.2.2: The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home
 - 2 views on the 1937 constitutions:
 - government should never interfere with what happened in the home
 - it gave recognition to the labour/role of women
- role of Catholicism:** the reassertion of male dominance in public, economic, and social life was a world-view shaped by Catholicism.

Historical context (cont)

- leading to postindependence Ireland being described as a 'confessional state':
- Their shared vision of Ireland as a rural, traditional and Catholic nation (during the nationalist revolution.
- the position of the catholic hierarchy was further enforced through the unchallenged control of its educational system
- This interlacing of two powerful conservative forces left a gendered mark on the early years of the State that persisted throughout the twentieth century. → motherhood was enforced beyond the wishes of women

Gender Quota's in Ireland

- In Ireland, legislative gender quotas require that political parties nominate 30% women candidates for general elections.
- Passed in 2012 to address gender imbalance in Parliament.
 - Quotas apply to parties running at least 30 candidates.
 - Parties face financial penalties for not meeting quotas.
 - Aims to increase representation of women in politics.
- impact:**
- 90 per cent increase women candidates
 - 48 per cent increase in number of women TDs
 - At the 2020 general election, 22.5 per cent women's representation in Dáil Éireann
 - A record high but far away from gender parity

Dáil Éireann

= the lower house of the Irish parliament, where members are elected by proportional representation, and it plays a key role in passing legislation.

- It meets in Leinster House, Dublin.
- There are 160 members known as TDs.
- It is responsible for electing the Taoiseach (Prime Minister).
- Dáil Éireann holds the government accountable through parliamentary questions and debates.

Seanad

= the upper house of the Oireachtas, the Irish parliament, consisting of 60 members appointed through various nomination processes.

- Members of the Seanad are not elected by the general public but are chosen through different panels representing various sectors like culture and education.
- The Taoiseach nominates 11 senators, while graduates of certain universities, agricultural organizations, and the Irish language community elect their own representatives.
- Senators in the Seanad can propose legislation, scrutinize and amend bills passed by the lower house, but do not have the power to veto bills.
- The Seanad plays a role in representing specific interests and expertise, providing a forum for in-depth discussions compared to the lower house.



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