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Understanding Institutional Change – A Gender Perspective E-Newsletter, Issue 5, July 2015

Welcome to our Summer newsletter. This issue gives you an idea of some of our activities over the last six months. Carmen Sepulveda joined the project team to research on institutional change in Bachelet's Chile in January and Faith Armitage has just returned from maternity leave this summer. In addition to all our usual conference and workshop presentations (described later on) Georgina Waylen also visited FREIA at the University of Aalborg to talk about our ongoing project research in a lecture to students and staff seminar. The newsletter begins with a short piece from Leah Culhane, the project PhD student on the implementation of the new gender quotas in Ireland based on the fieldwork she has been conducting over the last 9 months. We wish you a pleasant summer break.

Best wishes, The UIC Project Team

Gender quotas in the Republic of Ireland: the story of a new institution

Report by Leah Culhane

With the Irish general election fast approaching, political parties are currently in the midst of selecting their candidates across the country. For the first time in the history of the Irish state however, the sex of candidates is a pressing concern for party strategists as each struggles to meet the new legislative gender quota. The new institutional rules, which were introduced in 2012 as part of a wider programme of political reform, require the four largest political parties to put forward no less than 30 percent male or female candidates for the next general election. Failure to meet the quota, which is set to rise to 40 per cent in the election thereafter, will result in parties losing half of their state funding, which in 2013 stood at a combined figure of €5.5 million.



Although establishing a sex-specific outcome, the new rule does not dictate the means by which this change is to be achieved. Over the past two years, my research has been concerned with examining how this legislation has impacted gendered political parties in the Republic of Ireland and how they have adapted, reorganized and reformed existing intra-party practices. As a mechanism for reform, quotas can be viewed as a form of 'layering' insofar as they work on the fringes of existing institutions

in an attempt to alter them. Acknowledging that new rules are not applied to a blank slate, the central question has therefore been how these new regulations regarding candidate selection has interacted with and reformed pre-existing and well-established institutions. Each is faced with different opportunities and difficulties, specifically surrounding incumbency and the political trajectory of the party. Although the severity of the sanction has led each party to show a strong level of commitment to meeting the new measures, the extent to which the parties have needed to change internal practices and rules to fulfil their otherwise rhetorical commitment has differed.

Formally, the parties have responded to the quota in a myriad of ways from running all female training 'boot camps' and networking events to establishing internal commissions on women's participation to hiring equality consultants. Applying internal party quotas to the 2014 local elections has also enabled each of the parties to recruit and elect more women at the local level and therefore increase their pool of female aspirants for the general elections. These softer measures have largely targeted 'supply factors' insofar as they serve to identify and facilitate female aspirants and have been seen as relatively uncontroversial by local party members.

Changes to selection practices and rules, on the other hand, have been met with greater resistance. Pre-existing processes in Ireland were both decentralized and democratized with candidates largely being chosen at local conventions by the rank and file party members. Local party members have narrated the new rules as undemocratic and as an increase in central level power. Despite claims of centralization, having women selected at conventions, as opposed to appointed by the central level, has been a priority for both feminist actors and party strategists. This is to ensure that women have the support of the local organization that is needed to fuel an election campaign and to maintain a sense of local participation in selection.

In the face of local resistance, ensuring local selection may be a tricky endeavour and the appointment of female candidates by the central level has already been used by some parties in order to add women to the ticket. How the balance between the central and the local level will play out in practice and how the gender quota will ultimately be integrated into selection and recruitment remains to be seen. With the election scheduled for Spring 2016 however, getting women on the ticket, in any way possible, still remains a pressing priority for all of the parties.

New Project Publications

Georgina Waylen (2015). 'Engendering the 'Crisis of Democracy': Institutions, Representation and Participation'. *Government and Opposition*, 50, pp 495-520
[doi:10.1017/gov.2015.7](https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2015.7)

4th European Conference on Politics and Gender

Uppsala, 11th-13th June 2015



The Fourth European Conference on Gender and Politics in Uppsala provided a great opportunity for the UIC project team to showcase our research and receive some great feedback on our work. We organised a well-attended Panel on Gendering Processes in Institutional Change. The presentations by Leah Culhane and Pedro dos Santos on the introduction of gender quotas in Ireland and Brazil showed the complexity of the institutional processes leading to women's improved representation. Carmen Sepulveda, Georgina Waylen and Silke Staab discussed the institutional challenges faced by the Bachelet government, in particular from the presence of strong and influential informal institutions in the policy-making process. The discussant project associate Fiona Mackay provided great feedback to the panellists on the necessity to define more precisely the gender dimension of change in order to clarify our own theory of change. She highlighted the limited changes coming out of the case studies presented and the importance in some cases such as Brazil of path-dependent analysis. The questions to the panel also addressed the necessity to clarify if an analysis of gender processes of change is mostly focused on gendered institutions or outcomes. Georgina Waylen also participated in a Roundtable on Researching Institutions, together with leading feminist institutionalist scholars Louise Chappell, Elin Bjarnegard, Meryl Kenny, Sarah Childs and Peter Allen, which explored some key unresolved questions about how we actually go about researching institutions.

Conference report by Carmen Sepulveda

I attended the first European Conference on Gender and Politics Conference in Belfast a couple of years ago as a PhD student, and I remember the excitement of realising for the first time how many people worked in the same field I was interested in. This time, for the fourth ECPG in Uppsala the great surprise was to see how established this area of research is in Europe and how many well-known scholars from around the world attended. As a young scholar, having the opportunity of listening to more experienced colleagues debate on the state of the art in the area of gender and politics, the challenges ahead, and new main lines of research was particularly motivating.



I was also particularly curious about a new ECPG initiative involving mentoring from experienced scholars to early-career scholars which involved a "speed-mentoring" session. Trying to speak to more experienced colleagues during the conference and in-between sessions can be intimidating and difficult, especially since many people have tight agendas, with back to back meetings in between sessions. So the speed-mentoring provided a unique space to answer all those questions you have in the very first years of your career: Is it better to publish articles or a monograph? Which publishers are more open to the work of young scholars? How to make sure one is recognised as a politics scholar and not just a gender scholar? How to conciliate family responsibilities with the intensity of work? Etc... Mentors were extremely generous with their time and personal experiences. I believe this was one of the best initiatives for those starting a career in this field. I hope this will remain a constant in future conferences as well as in-between conferences.

Selected Conference and Workshop Presentations

- Georgina Waylen gave a paper entitled '*Theorising Informal Institutions and Gender Equity*' at the Gender Relations and Increasing Inequalities conference at UEA between 6-8 July 2015

- Francesca Gains and Vivien Lowndes co-authored a paper entitled '*How gendered processes of institutional formation shape policy outcomes*' presented by Francesca at the IPCC Conference which took place in Milan between the 1-4 July 2015
- Laura McLeod gave a paper entitled '*Haunting Brick Walls: Gender ghosts and Bosnian peace process*' at the Narratives of Peace and Conflicts Conference which took place at Liverpool Hope University between 1-3 July 2015
- Georgina Waylen gave a paper entitled '*Gender, Institutions and the Quality of Democracy: Engendering the 'Crisis of Democracy''*' at the Quality of Government and the Performance of Democracies Conference at the University of Gothenburg between 20-22 May 2015
- Georgina Waylen gave a paper entitled '*What does the Study of Institutions Add to Gender and IPE/the IPE of Gender?*', at the New Directions in International Political Economy conference which took place at the University of Warwick between 13-15 May 2015
- Georgina Waylen gave a paper entitled '*Michelle Bachelet's Presidencies: gender, politics and institutional change in Chile*' at a seminar at the University of Leeds on 22 April 2015
- Laura McLeod gave a paper entitled '*Haunting Brick Walls: Shifting Gender Knowledge and the Dayton Peace Negotiations for Bosnia and Herzegovina*' at the ISA Annual Convention in New Orleans, between 18-21 February 2015

Informal Institutions Workshop 10th and 11th September 2015 The Midland Hotel, Manchester

Our next project workshop will be on Informal Institutions and will be taking place on the 10th-11th September 2015. A detailed programme and abstracts will be circulated shortly.

Please contact Lisa Jenkins on lisa.jenkins@manchester.ac.uk for further details.



And here is our cutest 'project output', Julian, helping Faith cast her vote in the General Election.

Engaging in the democratic process nice and early!