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District magnitudes and the election of women to the Irish

Dáil

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Abstract

Previous research has suggested that electoral opportunities for women within proportional representation election systems may be directly related to district magnitudes. The fewer the seats apportioned to constituencies, it is argued, the less opportunities women will have to be nominated and elected. This article assesses whether the election of women to the Irish Dáil varies across that country's three, four, and five-seat constituencies. Data for three elections held in 1981 and 1982 reveal that the underrepresentation of women has been much greater in the three-seat constituencies while differences between the four and five-seaters have been only minimal. The severity of underrepresentation in the three-seat districts can be attributed to both nomination practices and voter reactions. Women were nominated by the major parties to contest three-seat constituencies much less often than the other constituencies, and when nominated, the voters' reactions to women candidates were

more adverse in the three than in the four and five-seat contexts.



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