Abstract

This paper considers women’s political presence in the Northern Ireland (NI) Assembly and the Dáil (Irish parliament). The paper discusses the significance of having more women in elected office in the two assemblies. It examines a range of practical initiatives supported by parties and non-party organizations to encourage women into running as candidates while also pointing out the limited commitment of most parties to these measures. The paper then discusses the barriers to a political career as identified by women legislators in the Republic of Ireland. Building on the emerging “gendered institutions” literature in political science, the paper explores the culture of Stormont and Leinster House to determine the ‘woman-friendliness’ of each institution, bringing to the fore the role of the Women’s Coalition in shaping the gendered culture of the NI Assembly. In conclusion, the paper situates the quite traditional political and party cultures determining women’s access to political office of both jurisdictions in the wider drive towards political gender parity currently emerging in Europe.