

Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill: External research commissioned by Senedd Research

22 May 2024

Senedd Research commissioned two external research publications to support scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill:

1. Analysis of UK and international political party selection processes and voluntary measures in place to broaden the diversity of candidates, including good practice examples (*Dr Andrea S Aldrich, Department of Political Science, Yale University*)
2. Modelling potential outcomes of future Senedd elections to take account of whether legislative candidate quotas would lead to a Senedd that is broadly representative of the Welsh population (*Dr William T Daniel, School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham*)

Candidate Selection and the Representation of Women

A Global Parliamentary Perspective

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1 Executive Summary

- Political Parties in parliamentary democracies use a variety of methods to select candidates. There is no single method that advantages or disadvantages women, although more decentralized methods can create more variance in the number of women selected for lists without the use of gender quotas.
- The relationship between candidate selection and women's representation depends on the supply and demand for women candidates within parties. Supply is affected by environmental conditions in politics and demands on women's time while demand is largely the result of party strategy.
- Recruiting women will always be more difficult than recruiting men. Recruitment methods that reduce practical barriers to entry (screening) and provide women with information about their likelihood of success (suggesting and proposing) can help mitigate these differences.
- The current candidate selection procedures used within Welsh political parties create opportunities for women candidates but do not necessarily guarantee them without a desire to promote women on the lists.

2 Comparing Candidate Selection Mechanisms across Parliaments

Candidate selection mechanisms within political parties are important institutions to help understand how electoral lists are constructed and who gets elected to parliaments. Absent national, regional, or local open primary contests, the choice of who gets on the ballot is often made behind the scenes in political parties and is a matter of internal party politics. In recent years, as parties have turned to more democratic methods to select electoral candidates, more and more attention has been paid by researchers to the way parties in parliamentary democracies make these decisions. Thus we can draw on established research to compare how candidate selection affects the representation of particular types of candidates, especially those from underrepresented groups. The consensus in the literature is that the impact of different candidate selection procedures is highly dependent on the recruitment and electoral environment. [Matland and Montgomery \(2003\)](#) offer a framework for understanding selection as a process of narrowing the pool of eligible candidates to aspirants then candidates, and finally Members of Parliament (MPs). They argue that the move from eligible to aspirant requires resources and ambition on the part of individuals while the move from aspirant to candidate depends largely on party decisions and gatekeeping. Party rules and norms impact each of these steps. Other scholars have conceptualized this process in terms of supply and demand, especially in terms of assessing how each step impacts the gender of candidates ([Norris and Lovenduski, 1995](#)). The supply side describes how the electoral and party environment impacts individual decisions to run for office and the way demand side

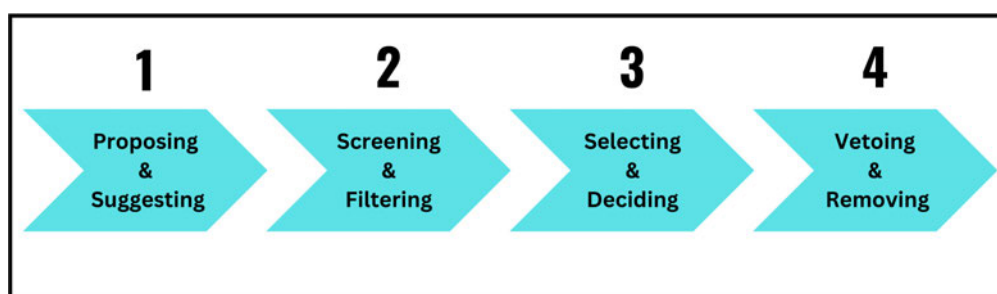


Figure 2.1: Candidate Selection Stages

preferences held by parties and voters can influence candidate selection.

To compare selection across parties, researchers often think about 4 stages for the process: proposing, screening, selecting, and vetoing (Scarrow, Webb and Poguntke, 2017) while also considering the centralization or decentralization of power over these stages. The order of these stages is depicted in Figure 2.1. Proposing candidates (either through recruitment networks or self-nominations) and screening candidates impacts supply while selecting and vetoing is the result of demand. The centralization of power impacts the representativeness of lists by establishing party gatekeepers that can either open or close opportunities to different groups of potential candidates (Aldrich, 2020). The relationship between centralization and decision-making within parties is depicted in Figure 2.2, where the base of the pyramid represents the units of the party where power is dispersed across many individuals or groups and the top of the pyramid represents power held by party elites and/or leaders. These units are referred to as selectorates in discussions of candidate selection. Decentralized parties are generally seen as more democratic and allow individuals and local party organizations to make major party decisions, like selecting candidates, but the link between democracy and representativeness is not always clear (Hazan and Rahat, 2006). Contemporary political parties have democratization and the incorporation of grassroots organizations and individual members into party decision-making to reengage their base and attract new supporters. However, the representative consequences of this trend are still unknown (Borz and Janda, 2020). Individuals and local and grassroots organizations may have goals and strategies for the party that are at odds with national initiatives to increase the representation of certain groups. More exclusive and centralized selection streamlines decision-making which makes it easier to address imbalances, especially in terms of gender (Pruysers et al., 2017). This dynamic also tends to be more important in list systems that use closed lists versus preference votes because list placement is consequential for election (Cross, 2008). Closed lists put more responsibility on parties to promote women (Lühiste, 2015) and the power to decide list placement has proven especially consequential for women (Htun and Jones, 2002).

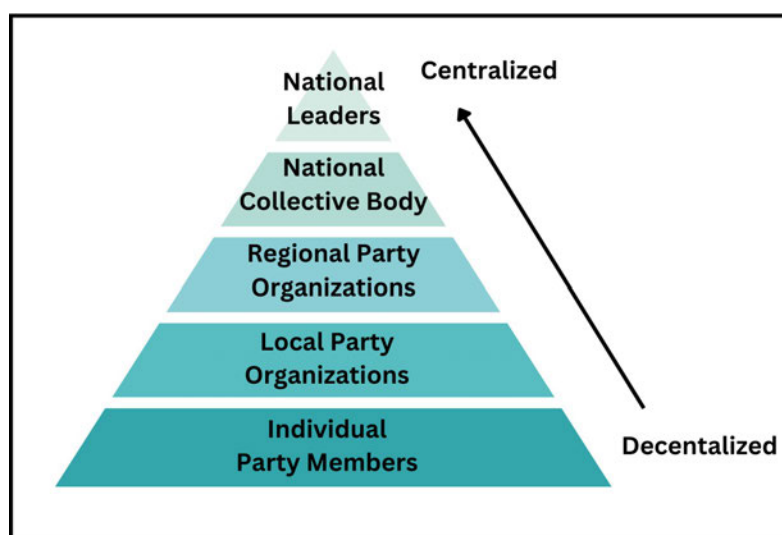


Figure 2.2: Centralization of Decision-Making Power in Political Parties

Thus it is important to compare women's representation across many different combinations of factors. Each step of the selection process will be described in Section 4 with special consideration given to how party centralization (or decentralization) interacts with parties' formal and informal rules at each stage to impact candidate gender on party lists.

3 Global Parliamentary Context

To explore patterns in candidate selection, this report will draw from a cross-national database that collects and records internal party rules from a variety of parties across the globe and elections. The database, *The Political Party Database* devotes an entire module to decision-making processes within parties, including candidate selection processes, and includes 168 Parties across 24 parliamentary democracies (Scarrow, Webb and Poguntke, 2022).¹ A team of political scientists collected and coded the data and it is available for public use. The collection teams are considered country experts and answered a series of questions based on formal political party rules which are codified in party statutes or constitutions. The countries included in the data and the most recent coded election are listed in Table 3.1. These countries might use an open and closed list. The data provides a representative sample of parliamentary systems, both Westminster style (UK, Australia, Canada, etc) and more party-centric proportional representational systems (the Netherlands, Belgium, Israel, etc.) and mixed systems (i.e. Germany). The data refers to party decision-making and selection for national elections. The data allows us to look at trends across different levels and stages

¹The data also includes several presidential democracies or hybrid systems (parliaments with a prime minister and a popularly elected president) but these are not included in the analysis to keep the comparison as relevant to Wales as possible.

of selection as well as compare across ideological party families. These parties range in size from delegations that did not win any parliamentary representation in the collected election year to those with over 300+ members representing as much as a 49% share of the parliament. The parliamentary sample contains 24% left parties, 17% right parties, 17% liberal parties, and 41% “other” parties like communists, far-right populists, and agrarian parties.

To compare how candidate selection procedures are related to the representation of women, I will use variables that signify whether different party selectorates (see Figure 2.2) are incorporated into each of the four stages of the candidate selection process. The categories are not mutually exclusive so many parties may involve more than one part of the party in each step.

Table 3.1: Parliamentary Countries of the PPDB

<u>Country</u>	<u>First Election Year</u>
Australia	2017
Belgium	2017
Botswana	2017
Bulgaria	2017
Canada	2017
Denmark	2017
Estonia	2017
Germany	2017
Greece	2017
Hungary	2017
Israel	2018
Italy	2018
Japan	2017
Latvia	2017
Lithuania	2018
Netherlands	2018
Norway	2017
Poland	2017
Slovakia	2017
South Africa	2017
Spain	2017
Sweden	2018
Switzerland	2017
United Kingdom	2017

Ideological Party Families

The data classifies parties into ideological “families” which is common among researchers. These classifications were determined by party experts I have grouped them into 4 larger groups: Left parties (Social Democrats, Greens), Right parties (Christian Democrats and

Conservatives), and Liberals (Liberals), and Other. All Parties along with their ideological families are available in Table A.1 in the Appendix. For the list of Party Families that are categorized into left, right, liberal, and other, see Table A.2.

4 Gender and the Candidate Selection Processes

In terms of gender, one of the most common approaches is to examine how different steps in the selection process impact both the supply of certain types of candidates and the demand for certain types of candidates (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). After reviewing these two processes as part of the overall candidate selection process, we can derive expectations about how different mechanisms encourage or discourage women's representation on candidate lists.

Candidate Supply

The literature on women and political ambition identifies several reasons that women are less likely than men to consider themselves as potential candidates, thus limiting their supply as candidates. First, women are far less likely to perceive themselves as fit for office than men, even though most women candidates are as qualified, if not more qualified than men (Aldrich and Daniel, 2025, 2019; Fulton, 2012). Survey research has highlighted the way traditional gender roles (Conover and Gray, 1983), and women's socialization into politics, shape women's attitudes toward political careers (Fox and Lawless, 2014). Women usually do not see politics as a feasible and/or acceptable career for themselves. Women also tend to view themselves as less qualified for office, even when they are objectively as qualified, if not more qualified, than other candidates (Fox and Lawless, 2011).

Another reason that women are less willing to step forward is due to the conflictual nature of electoral politics (Schneider et al., 2016). Experimental evidence has shown that if running for representative leadership requires women to volunteer as candidates, they are especially unlikely to step forth if campaigns are seen as untruthful (Kanthak and Woon, 2015). Violence against candidates, while common for both genders, also disproportionately affects women. A study of Swedish politicians found that women mayors experience the greatest levels of violence of all politicians and if the women are visible in the media, the level of violence is even greater (Håkansson, 2021). This is a particularly important finding given that Sweden is often seen as a leader in women's political presentation. This violence creates conditions that are unwelcoming to women and discourages them from running.

A third major reason women are less likely to put themselves forth as candidates stems from the different challenges women face in terms of demands on their time. Care responsibilities are often a deciding factor in whether a woman is willing and able to participate in politics.

One study of European democracies found that men have, on average, 5.5 more hours of free time each week after care and work responsibilities (Sevilla-Sanz, Gimenez-Nadal and Fernández, 2010). This means it is easier for them to participate in political activities outside of the home. Because of these responsibilities, women's political involvement tends to decrease during the child-rearing years when family responsibilities are high (Quaranta and Dotti Sani, 2018). This means not only are they running for office at lower rates than men, but they are also not participating in activities that provide them with the qualifications for office and notoriety among party networks. We even have research that this high care burden creates a "double bind." Women who become politicians are overall less likely to be married and/or have fewer children than men or no children at all (Campbell and Childs, 2017). However, women who are married with children are often seen as the most desirable women candidates. Thus, there is a double bind where women must have families to be successful in politics but it is the existence of these families that makes it harder to serve in these positions (Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth, 2018).

The reasons described above help us explain why women are less likely to make the jump from eligible to aspirant candidate. Thus it is less likely that women will come forward on their own to propose themselves as candidates or consider running for office on the suggestion of a few individuals. The investment required, or the barriers that need to be overcome, to pursue candidacy are greater for women than men. They may need reassurance or encouragement from a larger party body to pursue candidacy. This not only provides reassurance that their candidacy is viable but also information about their likelihood to win the office they choose to pursue (Aldrich and Somer-Topcu, 2024).

Candidate Demand

The literature on the demand for women candidates among parties provides mixed views in terms of what kinds of parties, which party selectorates, and what environments will encourage the selection of women. In terms of timing, demand for women fluctuates with party strategies. It is largely dependent on the role of women within political parties (Childs and Kittilson, 2016), the salience of gender in elections (Campbell, 2016), and the distribution of power among selectors (Aldrich, 2020). When party members and elites think about the recruitment and selection of candidates, they often tend to prefer people like themselves. Thus if parties are male-dominated, then demand for candidates will largely reflect a preference for men (Niven, 1998). If more women are incorporated into party membership, women's organizations, and party leadership, the preferences for women may be more common at each of these levels (Baskaran and Hessami, 2018). Also, if women are present and active in the party, it can help dispel stereotypes held by members about the ability of women to serve the party (Bagues and Campa, 2021; De Paola, Scoppa and Lombardo, 2010).

While we have little evidence of outright gender bias among voters, there is evidence that voters hold gendered stereotypes about which personality traits can be attributed to men and women. Survey research has found that men are perceived as being more decisive, experienced, and intelligent, traits that pair well with leadership. Women are more likely to be considered more compassionate, honest, and consensus-building than men, traits that are less common for leadership (Dolan, 2014). However, stereotypes are most prevalent in low-information environments and are generally only used to assess candidate quality when very little is known about potential candidates. Thus if women are incorporated into all aspects of party life, we would expect there to be greater demand for women than in parties where they are absent.

The salience of women in the electorate is also a driver of candidate demand. Increasing the number of women on electoral lists has been a strategy employed by parties to attract women voters when women are seen as crucial to electoral outcomes (Campbell, 2016). Not only can women candidates expand the appeal of the party, but it can also increase political engagement among women. Research has shown that women are more likely to vote, contribute to campaigns, and discuss politics when there are women candidates (Fridkin and Kenney, 2014; Reingold and Harrell, 2010). However, electoral strategies that promote women can also be a way for parties to deal with loss and poor performance. Crossnational research from advanced democracies shows that women's first appearance in party leadership is often associated with poor performance. Women signify a significant shift from the party norm and represent significant change (O'Brien, 2015). Women are also often strategically placed on electoral lists or in electoral districts where it is hard to win seats. This can be both a way to convey a new party strategy while also insulating male candidates from further electoral loss. This phenomenon is often referred to as the glass cliff, where women are given opportunities when there is a high chance of failure but not when there is a high chance of success (Ryan, Haslam and Kulich, 2010).

Finally, the distribution of power among party selectorates matters. Parties are gatekeepers for potential candidates but the locus of power among different units of the party determines which strategy is realized. Following Aldrich (2020), the best way to think about gatekeepers in terms of selection is to consider party members and local organizations as decentralized gatekeepers and national collective bodies (often party congresses) and national leaders as centralized gatekeepers. The goals of these two groups may be cohesive or they may conflict and this plays a huge role in how women fare in candidate selection. Simply put, if the electorate that has the power to choose favors choosing women, then it will lead to more women on candidate lists. If they do not, it will not. Thus party strategy matters only so far as the ability of the selectorate to realize their demand. Decentralized selectorates can

provide more opportunities for women when selectors are closer to their local constituencies, know more about each potential candidate, and can identify and encourage women to run. On the other hand, decentralized actors can also eschew national priorities to promote women and continue to exclude them (Kenny and Verge, 2013). Alternatively, centralized selection can allow elites to push through their own priorities. If this means women are a priority then they are able to present women-friendly lists without the input of individual members or local organizations. If they do not prioritize women or do not see women candidates as a strategic move, then they are able to keep them off the lists. This is especially true in closed list systems where voters cannot exercise a preference vote to reorder the list (Lühiste, 2015).

A note on Gender Quotas and Selection

In terms of the supply and demand for women candidates, gender quotas within parties are one way to condition the effects of the factors described above. In terms of demand, they can set a floor for the representation of women and allow parties to guarantee that whatever strategy is employed in a given election, and whichever unit of the party is involved in candidate selection decision-making, there is a least minimum attention given to potential women candidates. This also effect supply by signaling to women that they have a place on the list and encouraging more of them to seek out political careers. In essence, quotas alter both the types of aspirants that seek candidacy and the construction of party lists in a way that benefits women (Aldrich and Daniel, 2025).

Expectations Across Different Selectorates for Each Stage of Selection

The consensus in the literature, as described above, is very much one of context conditioning the effect of the centralization of decision-making at each stage in the candidate selection process. If the locus of power in each stage considers women a priority, then we will see women on lists. If they do not, we will not, unless there are quota mandates in place to ensure representation. Thus, it is not easy to make generalized predictions about what types of selection mechanisms are best for the selection of women. Instead, it is better to explore the data and describe empirical patterns.

5 Empirical Patterns in Women's Representation on Party Lists

Using the PPDB data, patterns in gender on party lists can be examined across levels of selection and centralization. In this data, the average percent of women a party list is 35% with a standard deviation of about 14%, but the range extends from 0% percent (Japan's Democratic Party and the Reformed Political Party in the Netherlands) to 74% (The Greens

in Australia).¹ If we separate the data by those parties that are subject to national quotas and voluntary party quotas, then we can compare the effect of these quotas on lists. The summary statistics of these measures are reported in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Average % of Women on Party Lists

	No Quota	National Quota	Voluntary Quota
Mean	26.24	44.85	38.22
SD	13.39	6.8	14.33
Min	0	32	11.5
Max	56	56	74

Table 5.2: Average % of Women on Party Lists by Party Family

(a) Left Parties				(b) Right Parties			
	No Quota	National Quota	Voluntary Quota		No Quota	National Quota	Voluntary Quota
Mean	24.42	45.02	41.4	Mean	23.79	43.4	32.52
SD	16.21	7.85	14.97	SD	10.75	7.40	12.92
Min	0	32	17	Min	7.53	32	15
Max	42	52	74	Max	49	50	46

(c) Liberal Parties			
	No Quota	National Quota	Voluntary Quota
Mean	32.75	44.12	30.15
SD	10.76	6.655	1.20
Min	17	32	29.3
Max	51	50	31

On average, parties subject to national quota rules have nearly 19% more women on their lists than those that are not and the difference is statistically significant. The difference between voluntary party quotas and no quotas is about 12% and this is also statistically significant.² We can also separate this data by the party family of the parties and notice differences across party types. Summary statistics are reported in Table 5.2. There is about a 6% difference across left parties, about a 17% difference across right parties, and about a 12% percent. All of these differences are statistically significant with more women on lists subject to national quotas than lists that are not.³ The results are similar for voluntary quotas in left and right parties.

¹Note that two Israeli religious parties are removed from the parliamentary data as their party constitutions strictly forbid women candidates.

²Statistical significance was determined using difference of means testing. Results can be provided on request.

³Right and Liberal at a 95% confidence level and Left at 90%.

Step 1: Proposing and Suggesting Potential Candidates

Proposing and suggesting candidates takes many forms among parties and this process is usually governed by both formal and informal rules. The most open processes allow individual members to nominate themselves or others as *potential* candidates. In this sample about half of the parties allow this. It is most common in left parties and least common in liberal parties and the majority of these parties (64%) also allow local party organizations to propose candidates, but it is less common to grant this power to individuals and national party bodies at the same time. This is a crucial stage in the recruitment process, especially for women.

Given the research on candidate selection, political ambition, and gender, we know that the unit of the party that is tasked with proposing and suggesting candidates can impact how many women decide to come forward. If individuals are expected to nominate themselves, it may discourage women from coming forward whereas being suggested by other members of the party might encourage women to become potential candidates. However, we also know that networks within parties are largely influential and if women are not incorporated into these networks, self-nomination can be a way to overcome their “outsider” status. However, if individual members are reaching out to women and asking them to consider candidacy, this can provide women valuable information about their likelihood of gaining a position on a list. Figure 5.1 presents a summary of the data for three groups: parties without quotas, parties with national quotas, and parties with voluntary quotas only. In this data, about half of the parties involve individuals in the proposal and suggestion stage. Of those parties, about 20% have national quotas and 80% do not.

Interpreting the Box Plot

Figure 5.1 presents a box plot that represents the summary of the measure of the percentage of a list candidates who are women across our observations for quota parties and non-quota parties. The box plot is useful because it allows us to view and compare many important summary statistics of the data. The endpoints represent the minimum and the maximum percentage of women across each group of suggestors (individuals, local party organizations, regional party organizations, national leadership bodies (congress), and national executive leadership). Any single dots on the plot are outliers in the data. The shaded box shows us the interquartile range (IQR), or the range of the data for which 50% of the observations fall. The bar within the range represents the median. This type of graph allows us to assess both differences in central tendencies across groups (median comparison) but also differences in the skew of the data (toward more or less women). The three plots show these summary figures for parties with no quotas, those subject to national quotas, and those that use voluntary party quotas only.

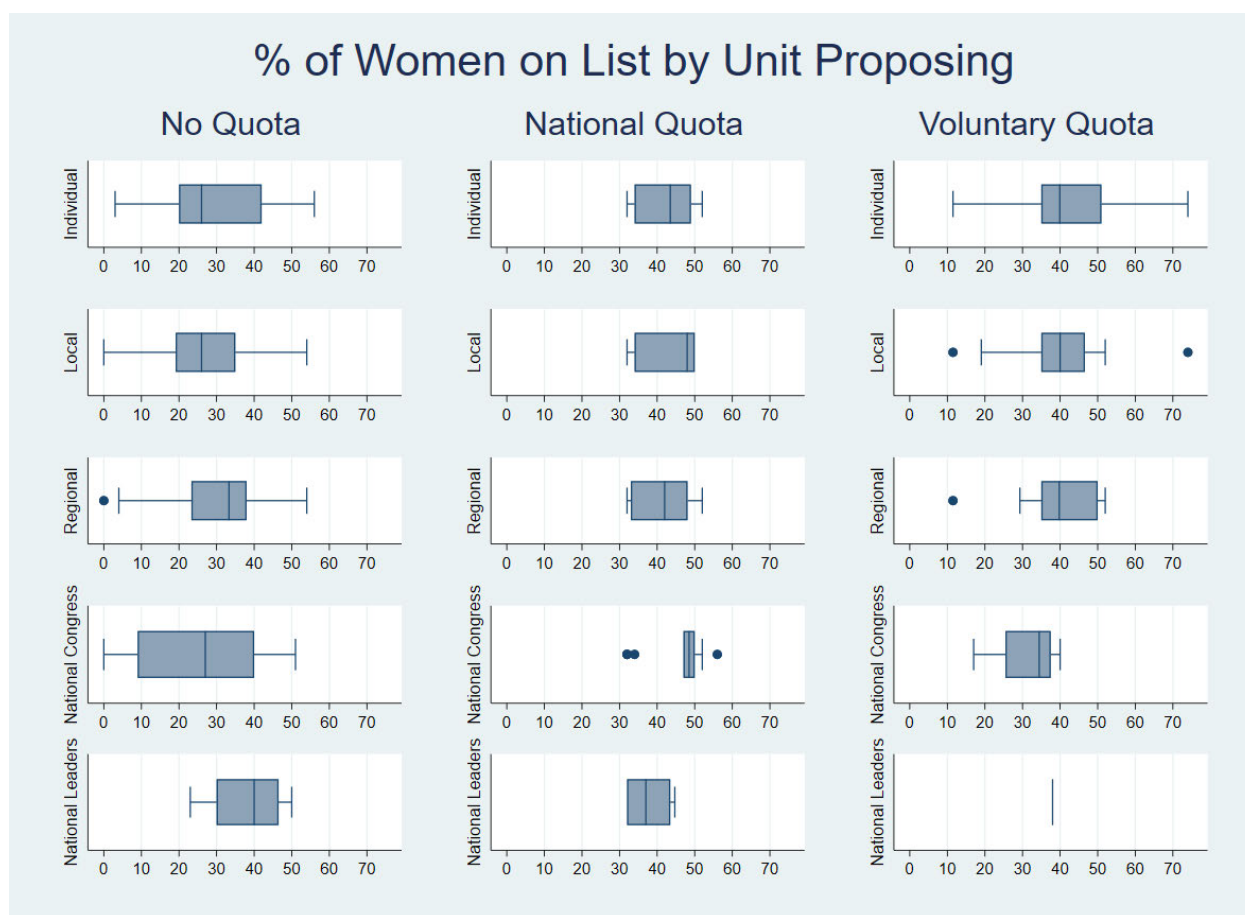


Figure 5.1: Unit Proposing or Suggesting Potential Candidates

Figure 5.1 allows us to compare both proposing units and quota types in a useful way. If we first look at differences across party units, there are no consistent patterns in non-quota parties. The median is consistent between 25% and 35% across most units, except including national leaders in suggesting and proposing where there are slightly more women. In parties with national quotas, the median is consistently nearly 40% and with no observations below 30%. In parties with voluntary quotas, the median resembles that of national quota parties. This data is likely due to the overlapping nature of proposing within parties, where several units can contribute to this part of the process. Comparing quota categories, we can see that non-quota parties tend to skew left while quota parties skew right. There is also a much larger range of values in the non-quota parties. **this figure illustrates that regardless of the selectorate of suggesting and proposing candidates within parties, quotas increase the number of women on the lists overall, providing consistency across party units and reducing the range of possible outcomes. They appear to do this no matter which party unit is involved the proposal stage.** For example, the percentage of women candidates that appear on lists if individual members are involved in proposing and

suggesting is about 8% higher in national quota parties and 13% higher in voluntary quota parties compared to parties without quotas. These differences are statistically significant.

If we compare Welsh political parties to this, their practices seem to be very similar to those depicted here. Both individual members may put themselves forth to join potential candidate registries or local parties can encourage individuals to seek out a candidacy. Once an eligible candidate becomes an aspirant, they are subject to screening by the national party election committees to receive approval to enter the selection process. Occasionally party priorities will adjust the target recruitment pool across elections, which has tended to benefit women and other underrepresented candidate pools in the past. Most parties also expressed difficulty in recruiting potential female candidates, especially in constituencies where they were unlikely to win. The consensus was that it was too much of a burden (for a variety of reasons related to time scarcity and the possibility of harassment) for women to step forward.

Screening and Filtering Potential Candidates

Screening and filtering candidates can be both an administrative process, for example, making sure potential candidates meet certain objective criteria, and also a political process, screening candidates using more subjective criteria. In terms of objective criteria, most parties have laws about who can be a candidate. The most common one is to require a certain length of membership in the party. A plurality in this data requires at least 12 months but the range is between 0 and 60 months. The majority of parties also require a loyalty pledge but only a few require something like a trade union membership or a religious affiliation. About 12% require potential candidates to get signatures from party members and another 10% require potential candidates pay a deposit. We would not expect these to have much of a gendered effect unless membership length requirements are particularly long, the number of signatures required is particularly as high, or the deposit is substantial. These would all make it more difficult for women candidates.

This is also the stage at which most candidates would declare basic information about themselves and their eligibility for candidacy (for example their geographic location, legal name, address, etc) and attest to the truthfulness of these states. This is also the stage at which candidates would declare their gender. **While the proposed reforms in Wales will allow the declaration of gender to go uncontested, it makes no mention of the accommodation of non-binary gender declarations. This is also true of party statutes and existing quota laws. Gender quota laws and party rules about**

gender on lists (voluntary quotas) usually refer to *women* as the target group.⁴ They usually do not define what *women* means. This may create ambiguity in interpretation. It seems reasonable to expect any person identifying as a woman could hold a “women” spot on an electoral list but (as of writing) I have been unable to locate any research addressing whether gender identity has ever been contested concerning these laws. It also leaves questions about the representation of non-binary persons in these positions unanswered. Scholarship on how non-binary identities are incorporated into affirmative action programs based on gender remains mostly legal and addresses how national constitution law is or is not evolving to incorporate non-binary identities (Suteu, 2020).

Other, more subjective requirements will have a much more gendered impact on potential candidates. Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2019) focus their research on four criteria: background, qualifications, experience, and electability. They find that criteria related to background and experience favor men and make it less likely that women will be selected as candidates. These criteria are often determined by men and take a very gendered approach to defining appropriate experience (Kenny and Verge, 2013). If these requirements are set formally by the party, it may not matter which unit is screening and filtering candidates. However, if each unit has its own criteria, this could have both positive and negative consequences for women, in line with much of the literature reviewed above. In terms of which selectorate is included in this screening, our data suggest this is most often done by a national party body with nearly 50% of all parties and only 14% allowing individual members to be involved in this task.

This data for screening and filtering candidates displayed in Figure 5.2 shows many of the same patterns as that of the suggestion and proposal stage. If there are no quotas, there appears to be a higher proportion of women when more centralization units of the party are involved in screening. However, there appears to be the opposite when quotas (both national and voluntary) are in place. Quota parties also have less variance. **This figure illustrates again that regardless of the level of screening candidates within parties, quotas increase the number of women on the lists overall, providing consistency across party units and reducing the range of possible outcomes.** There are also no real differences across screening units.

Welsh political parties reported processes where national executive committees screen all potential candidates and create national registry lists. these lists appear to consider mostly objective characteristics of candidates like the length of party

⁴There may be a few that use the broader term of “gender” when addressing subjects like parity on lists.

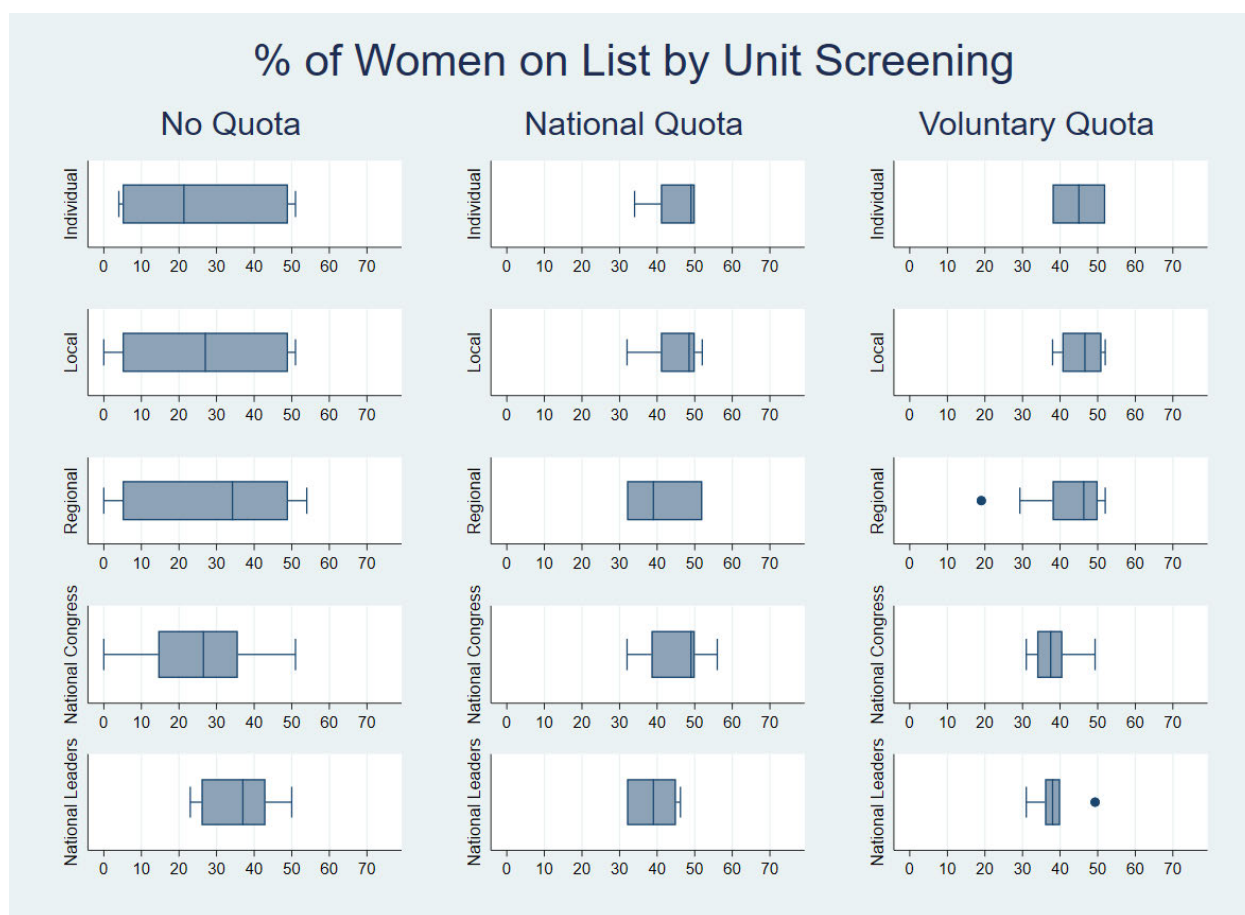


Figure 5.2: Unit Screening or Filtering Potential Candidates

service (minimum of 12 months in most parties) and passing a background check. If the candidate is approved, they are then available for selection. If they do not receive approval they cannot become candidates. Most parties inform all party members when this application and screening process will begin for the next election and create an approval list that the selection state selectorates can draw from.⁵

Selecting and Deciding Candidates

Selecting and deciding candidates will be the most consequential step for potential candidates. It is here that the party has the most gatekeeping power and narrows the list of eligible candidates (after screening) to the list of actual candidates. Much of the literature described above examines this step of the process. This is the step where the locus of power and the goals of the selectorate (whichever unit this is) have the largest impact on women's success. In this data, there is a lot of variance across parties. Most parties involve more than one

⁵All information on Welsh political parties was obtained through interviews with party officials conducted on March 25, 2024 via zoom by the author.

Table 5.3: Candidate Selection Units within Parties

Unit	% of Parties in Data
Individual Members	39
local Organizations	24
Regional Orgnaizations	37
National Collective	46
National leader(s)	43

party body. Table 5.3 reports the percentage of the parties in this data that include each of these units in the process. It is most common for national leadership and/or individual memberships to be involved in making the final selection decision.

Figure 5.3 highlights much more variance in the relationship between selectorates and the percentage of women on lists. Especially in parties that do not use quotas, the level of selection appears to matter a great deal for women. Practically, individual membership selection usually occurs with a constituency-level membership vote and the more centralized the selectorate, those allowed to weigh in on the decision become more and more elite (i.e. moving from local votes to regional votes or voting within the national congress or selection by the party leader or executive leadership). Some parties decide both the candidates and the order of the list based on membership votes while others may leave selecting candidates up to a membership vote but reserve the right to order lists for party executives (Aldrich, 2018).

The median percentage when individuals are involved in selection is about 29% but can range from 5% to 55%, however, 50% of the observations are between 20% and 40% women. In contrast, when national leaders are involved in selection, the median proportion of women is closer to 40% and the data extends further right (between 20% and 50%). This suggests that in the parliamentary democracies included in this data, executives may be more prone to selecting women than individual and local parties. The same is true when compared to regional party units and party congresses.

If we look at parties with quotas, the quotas appear to function as a “correction” to individual, local, and regional preferences for women’s representation. Except for a few outliers, they appear to provide a floor for women’s selection. while the number of women on lists that involve national leaders in selection is still around 40% in national quota parties (and even lower in voluntary quota parties), the proportion of women selected when individual and local organizations are involved is higher and more concentrated around the median than in parties without quotas.

The overall takeaway from this figure is that the relationship between the level

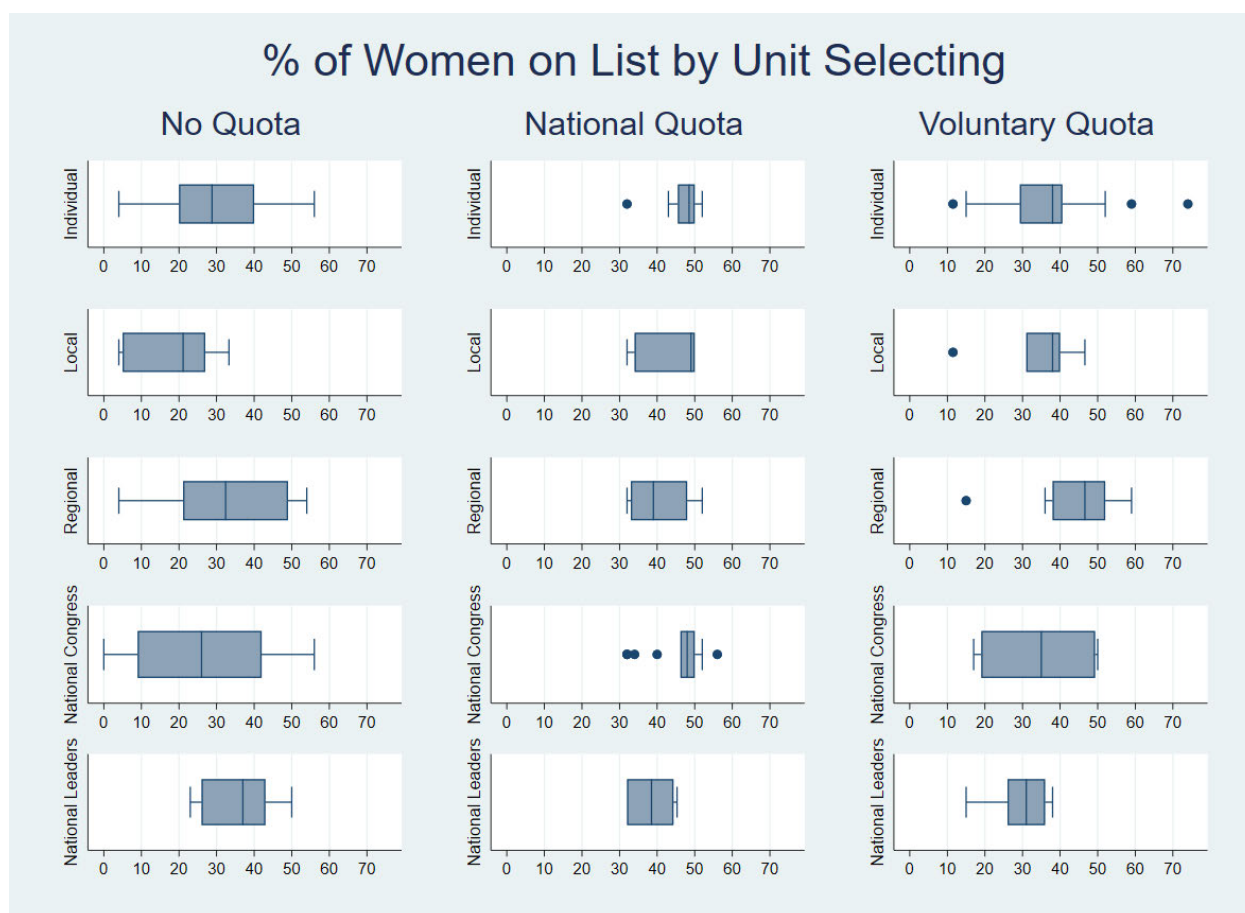


Figure 5.3: Unit Selecting or Deciding Potential Candidates

of the party involved in selection and women on party lists is highly conditional on gender-promoting rules like quotas. Quotas have the largest impact at more decentralized levels of selection, which corroborates the findings of Aldrich (2020) and suggests quotas are most influential in more decentralized and democratized parties. In terms of the most common form of selection, the plurality of parties involves national leaders or individual members.

Parties in Wales use a variety of procedures to ultimately select candidates. While some parties have formal rules in their constitution that apply each electoral cycle, others have maintained the flexibility to change the procedure to meet party needs across elections. Across parties, there is the norm to involve decentralized units in some way, usually with a constituency membership vote to choose candidates after a list of approved candidates has been made available. Candidates are allowed to advocate for themselves at this point but there are limits to how much one can spend in pursuit of the selection that are set by parties themselves. Incumbents wishing to remain in office are usually automatically on the shortlists

for this stage of selection. Gender-promoting provisions like all women shortlists and rules about placement for women essentially function like voluntary quotas even if they are not titled as such.

Vetoing Candidates

Allowing a veto for any unit of the party means that they can remove a candidate from a list. Very few parties in our data have assigned a formal power of veto in their statutes or constitutions. If they do, this power tends to be vested in a national organ of the party (collective or leadership). Patterns in the data show women's representation in these parties reflects the patterns that are explored above and do not need to be explored here. The box plot for this step can be found in Figure A.1 in the Appendix. More vetos exist when quotas are in use, presumably to allow party executives and other units to refuse lists that do not meet the current standard.

Parties in Wales reported vesting veto power in the national executive but suggested that it is rarely used. When it is used, it is usually in a situation where there is a legal conflict, moral conflict, or conflict among candidates. However, all parties made it clear that it is very rare. They appear to exercise more power over the placement of candidates across lists or restrict short lists before selection to a single gender vs removing candidates after selection has been made.

6 Conclusion

Political Parties in parliamentary democracies use a variety of methods to select candidates and each one has been explored here using the Political Party Database (Scarrow, Webb and Poguntke, 2017). This data has contextualized the literature on candidate selection and gender. It shows that there is no single method that advantages or disadvantages women, although more decentralized methods can create more variance in the number of women selected for lists without the use of gender quotas. The fate of women on electoral lists is determined by a combination of supply and demand for women candidates within parties. On the supply side, recruiting women will always be more difficult than recruiting men and this holds in Wales as it does around the globe. Recruitment methods that reduce practical barriers to entry (screening) and provide women with information about their likelihood of success (suggesting and proposing) can help mitigate these differences. Mechanisms to ensure women's presence and placement (like quotas) work by creating a floor in the proportion of women on lists. The largest gap in this proportion between quota and non-quota parties is seen across parties that use individual membership selection. In comparison to the global context, the current candidate selection procedures used within Welsh political parties create opportunities for women candidates but do not necessarily guarantee them without a desire

to promote women on the lists. However, there is strong evidence that these parties are well equipped and experienced in promoting women if they choose to.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Parliamentary Parties in the PPDB

Country	Party Name	Party Family
Australia	Labor Party	Left
Australia	Liberal Party	Right
Australia	National Party	Other
Australia	The Greens	Left
Belgium	Christian-Democrat and Flemish	Right
Belgium	Democrat Humanist Centre	Right
Belgium	Democratic, Federalist, Independent	Other
Belgium	Ecolo	Left
Belgium	Flemish Interest	Other
Belgium	Green	Left
Belgium	New Flemish Alliance	Other
Belgium	Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats	Liberal
Belgium	People's Party	Other
Belgium	Reform Movement	Liberal
Belgium	Socialist Party	Left
Belgium	Socialist Party Alternative	Left
Belgium	Workers' Party of Belgium	Other
Botswana	Botswana Congress Party (BCP)	Left
Botswana	Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)	Other
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Left
Bulgaria	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	Other
Bulgaria	Movement for Rights and Freedoms	Other
Bulgaria	United Patriots	Other
Bulgaria	Volya	Other
Canada	Conservative Party	Right
Canada	Green Party	Left
Canada	Liberal Party	Liberal
Canada	New Democratic Party	Left
Denmark	Conservatives	Right
Denmark	Danish People's Party	Other
Denmark	Liberal Alliance	Liberal
Denmark	Liberals	Liberal

Denmark	Red-Green Alliance	Other
Denmark	Social Democrats	Left
Denmark	Social Liberal Party	Liberal
Denmark	Socialist People's Party	Other
Denmark	The Alternative	Left
Estonia	Centre Party	Liberal
Estonia	Conservative People's Party	Right
Estonia	Free Party	Right
Estonia	Pro Patria and Res Publica Union	Right
Estonia	Reform Party	Liberal
Estonia	Social Democratic Party	Left
Germany	Alliance '90/The Greens	Left
Germany	Alternative for Germany	Other
Germany	Christian Democratic Union	Right
Germany	Christian Social Union	Right
Germany	Free Democratic Party	Liberal
Germany	Social Democratic Party	Left
Germany	The Left	Other
Greece	Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza)	Other
Greece	Communist Party of Greece (KKE)	Other
Greece	Independent Greeks (ANEL)	Other
Greece	New Democracy (ND)	Right
Greece	Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)	Left
Greece	The River	Liberal
Hungary	Democratic Coalition	Left
Hungary	Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Alliance	Other
Hungary	Jobbik	Other
Hungary	Politics Can Be Different	Left
Hungary	Socialist Party	Left
Israel	All of Us	Liberal
Israel	Balad	Other
Israel	Hadash	Other
Israel	Labor Party	Left
Israel	Likud	Right
Israel	Meretz	Left
Israel	The Jewish Home	Other
Israel	The Movement	Liberal

Israel	There is a Future	Liberal
Israel	Yisrael Beiteinu	Other
Italy	Brothers of Italy	Other
Italy	Democratic Party	Left
Italy	Five Stars Movement	Other
Italy	Italian Force	Liberal
Italy	Northern League	Other
Japan	Communist Party	Other
Japan	Democratic Party	Left
Japan	Komeito	Other
Japan	Liberal Democratic Party	Right
Japan	Nippon Ishin	Right
Japan	Social Democratic Party	Left
Japan	The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan	Liberal
Japan	The Party of Hope	Other
Latvia	Alliance of Regions	Other
Latvia	Farmers' Union of Latvia	Other
Latvia	Green Party of Latvia	Left
Latvia	KPV LV	Other
Latvia	National Alliance	Other
Latvia	New Conservative Party	Right
Latvia	Social Democratic Party "Harmony"	Left
Latvia	Unity	Liberal
Latvia	Vidzeme Party	Other
Lithuania	Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance	Other
Lithuania	Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats	Right
Lithuania	Labour Party	Other
Lithuania	Liberal Movement	Liberal
Lithuania	Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union	Other
Lithuania	Order and Justice	Other
Lithuania	Social Democratic Labour Party of Lithuania	Left
Lithuania	Social Democratic Party of Lithuania	Left
Netherlands	50PLUS	Other
Netherlands	Christian Democratic Appeal	Right
Netherlands	Christian Union	Other
Netherlands	DENK	Other

Netherlands	Democrats 66	Liberal
Netherlands	Forum for Democracy	Other
Netherlands	Green Left	Left
Netherlands	Labour Party	Left
Netherlands	Party for Freedom	Other
Netherlands	Party for the Animals	Other
Netherlands	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	Liberal
Netherlands	Reformed Political Party	Other
Netherlands	Socialist Party	Other
Norway	Centre Party	Other
Norway	Christian Democratic Party	Right
Norway	Conservative Party	Right
Norway	Labour Party	Left
Norway	Liberal Party	Liberal
Norway	Progress Party	Other
Norway	Red	Other
Norway	Socialist Left Party	Other
Norway	The Greens	Left
Poland	Law and Justice	Right
Poland	Modern (Nowoczesna)	Liberal
Slovakia	Bridge	Other
Slovakia	Christian Democratic Movement	Right
Slovakia	Direction – Social Democracy	Left
Slovakia	Freedom and Solidarity	Liberal
Slovakia	Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia	Other
Slovakia	Ordinary People and Independents	Right
Slovakia	Party of the Hungarian Community	Other
Slovakia	Progressive Slovakia	Liberal
Slovakia	Slovak National Party	Right
Slovakia	Together -Civic Democracy	Liberal
Slovakia	We Are Family	Other
South Africa	African National Congress	Left
South Africa	Democratic Alliance	Liberal
South Africa	Economic Freedom Fighters	Other
Spain	Basque Nationalist Party	Other
Spain	Citizens	Liberal
Spain	PDECAT -European Democratic Party of Catalonia	Other

Spain	People's Party	Right
Spain	Republican Left of Catalonia	Other
Spain	Socialist Party	Left
Spain	United Left	Other
Spain	We can	Other
Sweden	Centre Party	Other
Sweden	Christian Democrats	Right
Sweden	Green Party	Left
Sweden	Left Party	Other
Sweden	Liberal Party	Liberal
Sweden	Moderate Party	Right
Sweden	Social Democrats	Left
Sweden	Sweden Democrats	Other
Switzerland	Christian Democratic People's Party	Right
Switzerland	Swiss People's Party/Democratic Union of the Centre	Other
Switzerland	Swiss Socialist Party	Left
Switzerland	The Liberals	Liberal
United Kingdom	Conservative Party	Right
United Kingdom	Green Party	Left
United Kingdom	Labour Party	Left
United Kingdom	Liberal Democrats	Liberal
United Kingdom	Plaid Cymru	Other
United Kingdom	Scottish National Party	Other
United Kingdom	UK Independence Party	Other

Table A.2: Party Family Classification

Ideological Category (Broad)	Party Family (Narrow)
Left	Social Democrats
	Greens
Liberal	Liberals
Right	Conservatives
	Christian Democrats
Other	Agrarian/Farmer's Party
	Regionalist
	Far right (extreme right)
	Right-wing (populists)
	Communists or Left Socialists
	Ethnic
	Other
	Confessional, other than Christian Democratic

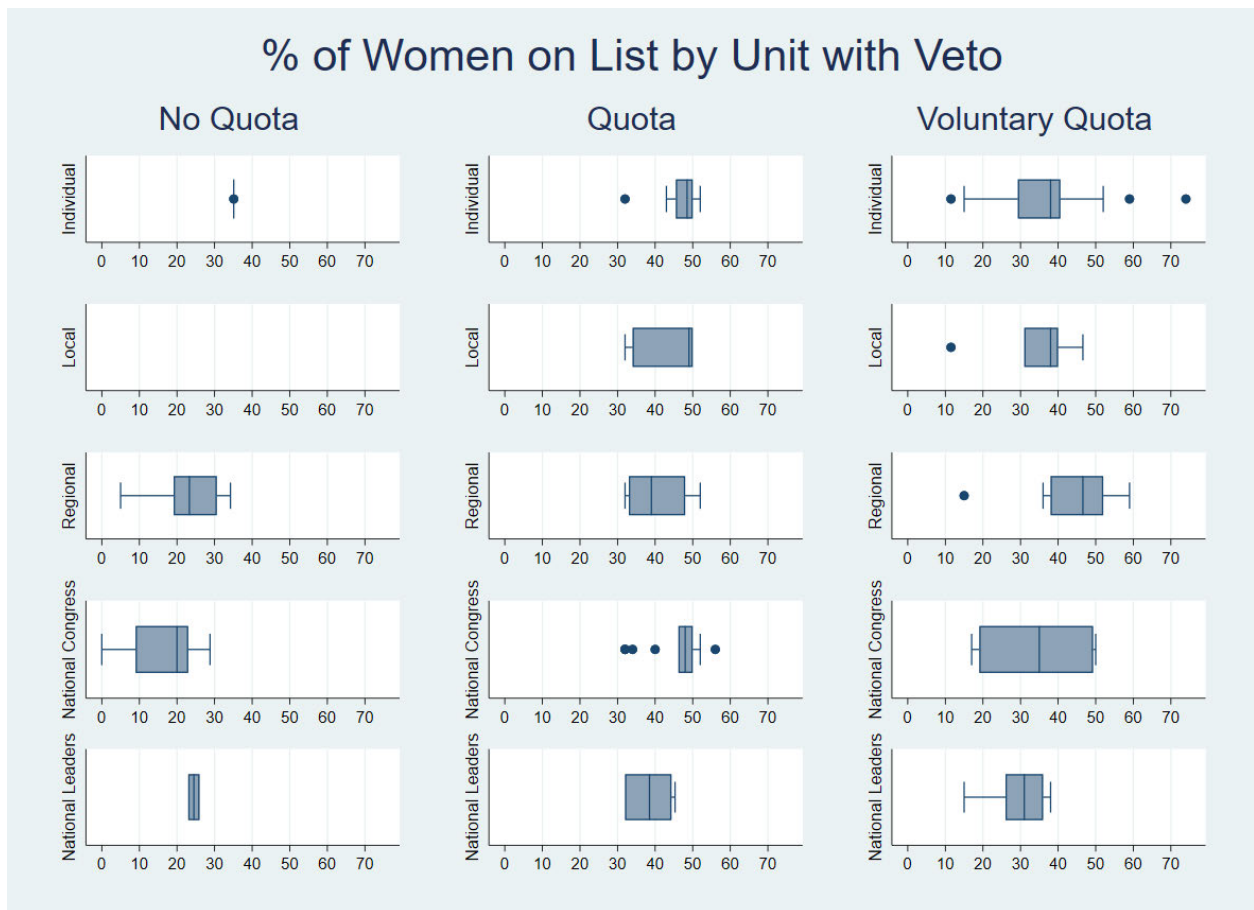


Figure A.1: Unit Vetoing Candidates

Modelling of Proposed Gender Quotas

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Executive Summary

- Gender quotas are used around the world and are successful at increasing or ensuring women's representation in both public and private institutions.
- Quota success depends upon factors from proportional electoral systems, ballot types, placement rules, and enforcement mechanisms.
- The proposed Welsh Senedd quota is a strong quota; considering data on existing quotas, it can be expected to promote and retain gender-equal representation as the legislature is expanded.

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Global Context

Gender quotas are used in many settings around the world. Although they exist in the private sector, particularly in areas like corporate boards, they are more frequent in governmental and especially legislative settings. Politically, quotas can be used to promote various underrepresented identities (e.g., linguistic, ethnic, ability), but the most typical quotas relate to gender inclusion. As of 2024, gender quotas are used in nearly 80 national parliaments (both upper and lower houses), as well as in sub-national and local governments in a similar range of countries ([International IDEA 2024](#)).

Gender quotas can either be *legislative*, meaning that they are a matter of national law and apply across the political system, or they may be chosen as *party quotas* for only specific political movements within a system (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012; Krook 2010). A related mechanism is *reserve seats*, which ringfence a proportion of seats

for legislators of a certain background; these are comparatively less common for gender and are used most typically in societies where ethnic or social backgrounds need to be guaranteed a minimum representation (Tan 2015).

Quota Strength

Gender quota effectiveness is oftentimes referred as quota 'strength.' Political scientists have shown that different kinds of quotas are more effective at promoting women's representation, especially in conjunction with institutional choices made around electoral system design (Paxton and Hughes 2015). The main decision points here relate to electoral proportionality, electoral lists and ballot design, the use of placement mandates and minimum thresholds, and the enforcement of quota policies (i.e., sanctions or incentives to follow what is legislated). Political parties themselves also have a role to ensure that candidates are recruited from a suitably diverse pool and nominated to winnable positions (Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014, 2015), which is discussed in the adjacent brief in more detail.

Electoral Systems: PR v. FPTP

In terms of electoral system design, the political science literature is clear: proportional representation (PR) favours women's representation to a greater extent than majoritarian or 'first past the post' (FPTP) contests (Dahlerup 2006; Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo 2012). Even without a quota, the nomination of multiple candidates in a simultaneous contest (i.e., a single party list) shifts the focus of voters away from personal traits of candidates – such as their gender – and more towards the political parties that have nominated them. In terms of quota implementation, PR elections make these much easier to operationalise. Instead of having to choose only one candidate per constituency, as in FPTP, multiple candidates can run concurrently for the same constituency (which itself can be local, regional, or national). This means that personal backgrounds are not only less essentialised, but the nature of multiple candidates means that greater diversity can exist at a collective level (Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2014).

Operationally speaking, the more candidates are elected per constituency, the more proportional the electoral system is. Here, the list length is a key defining variable, with longer lists meaning more proportional elections. This, in turn, can also have a gendered effect, as longer lists mean that more types of people can be elected to represent a given constituency. If quotas have been used to guarantee or promote gender equality on these lists, then they are also more likely to produce a more gender-equal distribution of elected legislators.

Electoral Threshold

One key ingredient in any quota is the minimum threshold of women required to appear on the list. Of course, a requirement of parity (such as is used in France), is a particularly high threshold and requires equal numbers of men and women. Other legislatures use a slightly lower minimum, e.g., 40% of candidates must be women. Initially, many quotas were set at 30%, given that a longstanding discussion in the gender and political representation literature – referred to as 'critical mass' (Grey 2006; Lovenduski 2001) – implied that at least a third of legislators needed to be women, for any sustainable

progress on women's issues to be considered by the legislature. However, other legislatures require a smaller threshold than this. It is also not uncommon to see countries increase their thresholds over time (Hughes et al. 2017).

List Types

Of course, the mechanics of the election matter, as well. When voters can only vote for a party list (which is typically called a 'closed list'), they typically accept the rank ordering that has been provided by the political party, in terms of which specific candidates are elected to office. This implies that parties are the key deciders about which specific politicians are placed in winnable spots on the list; voters must simply accept this choice, if they select the party. On the other hand, 'open lists' allow for voters to either spread votes across multiple parties (i.e., for different individuals from different parties). More common, however, are flexible or 'semi-open' lists, where voters must restrict their votes to a specific party but can either preference individual candidates within the party list – or even reorder the list entirely.

In terms of gender equality, the academic literature is somewhat mixed, but tends to expect that closed lists produce more gender-equal outcomes (Allik 2015; Corrêa and Chaves 2020; Kunovich 2012; Luhiste 2015). Assuming that electoral lists have been set up to produce equal outcomes, the nature of closed lists removes the ability of voters to discriminate against individual candidates. Given that many names are visibly gendered, an open list might produce an outcome where women candidates are specifically 'de-selected' by voters.

Placement mandates

Political parties, given that they are typically tasked with the drafting of candidate lists, can have an outsized role in deciding which candidates are most likely to win from among their full complement listed candidates. This is particularly important when gender quotas are in use, as even quotas with a relatively high threshold do not always contain the requirement that women included in election lists are placed in 'winnable' positions. You might, for example, imagine a party that must list 50% of their 10 candidates as women, but places these candidates in the last five places. As a result, many quota systems also contain *placement mandates*, which require women to be placed in positions that are no less winnable than their men colleagues. One clear way of doing this is the *zipper list*, where women and men are alternated throughout the list. Other countries use more bespoke arrangements. For example, you might require the second and third candidates to be women – if the list leader were a man – or that there be at least two women out of every five candidates on a list, and so on.

Beyond gender, parties that are used to working with list arrangements oftentimes consider balancing other kinds of background in assembling a party list. For example, left-wing parties from across Europe have historically insured that candidates with trade unionist backgrounds appear evenly among a party's list (Rahat and Hazan 2001). In several European countries, youth movement leaders and other activists might appear in 'unelectable' though visible positions (Hooghe, Stolle, and Stouthuysen 2004; Reiser 2014). In Poland and Belgium, there are even examples of parties who list recognisable

names in highly unelected positions – such as the last place – as a means of boosting party brand and name recognition (Marcinkiewicz 2014).

It is also worth noting that an electoral list does not always constitute the exact sequence of elected candidates that take up their seats. It is perfectly plausible, and indeed common in the European Parliament, for parties to list a sequence of candidates at the top of a list that have no intention of taking up their seat. In such cases, parties will simply move down the list until all seats awarded to the party have been filled.

Enforcement

Not all legislative or party quotas are followed by political parties in the way that they are designed. Enforcement mechanisms are oftentimes required to incentivise parties to follow the rules. Even here, though, sometimes parties may choose to breach quota requirements and pay a fine or forego public finance, prioritising other aspects over gender equality in their candidate selection. A stronger version of enforcement would allow for a government body to reject any draft electoral list that did not satisfy the quota. Lists might be returned to parties to edit or be disallowed entirely (Hughes et al. 2017; Schwindt-Bayer 2009). The party finance system, auditing responsibility, and presence of key actors who can block non-compliant lists from registration are all key to enforcement, and thus the enacting of quotas.

Welsh Context

Having provided a global context, I use this section to comment on the proposed quota that appears in the proposed amendments to the Government of Wales Act 2006 (Electoral Candidates List) Bill. My aim here is to contextualise how the Welsh proposal can be compared with other existing quotas. *In my view, the Government proposal represents a strong quota.*

Electoral System

The nature of the broader electoral reform to a fully PR list system facilitates the addition of a gender quota. Especially important here is the expectation that the new electoral system be conducted via regional, closed lists, which as mentioned above put parties firmly in control of candidate selection – while also depersonalising vote choice. *This should ensure that, assuming parties compose lists that follow the new quota law, candidates will not be disadvantaged by voters during the election.*

Quota Strength

The quota strength of 50% also places the Welsh quota at the stronger end of the spectrum. As shown below, stronger quotas are more likely to return more equal representation. They also de-emphasise the moniker of 'quota women,' which is sometimes used in systems to suggest that some women are less deserving of their space. While I have written extensively on the positive attributes that quotas can facilitate (Aldrich and Daniel 2020, 2024), in terms of background qualifications and expertise, *having equal numbers of men and women candidates makes all candidates*

appear part of a shared process – rather than a mixture of more and less ‘deserving’ politicians.

In this respect, it is also worthwhile that the Senedd is being expanded *as* quotas come into place. One major barrier to women’s entry into elected office is the outsized benefits of incumbent politicians seeking re-election. In other words, if it is already harder to unseat an incumbent – and incumbents are disproportionately men – then this creates an additional obstacle for facilitating women’s representation, even under quotas. *The combination of new seats with a new quota law should further facilitate access for women.*

Placement Mandate

In terms of the placement mandate, *the proposed vertical and horizontal criteria should be judged as functionally as zipper quotas, although the horizontal criteria make the Welsh proposal even stronger.* In upcoming research on quota implementation in the European Parliament elections (Aldrich and Daniel 2025), my colleague and I find that quotas oftentimes produce more women candidates in electable positions but may come at the expense of women appearing in list-leading roles. By requiring women to appear as list leader on equal numbers of constituency lists, the Senedd can avoid a scenario where women candidates routinely come in ‘second’ to men, even if they are ultimately both elected.

One word of caution, based upon the existing section 8 of the bill (Calculation of seat allocation), is worth noting. As discussed in the above (not specifically gender-related) examples, there is extensive precedent for parties to skirt their list ordering under closed list PR elections (Millard 2014). This can be done by listing candidates in winnable positions on a list that are unlikely to take up their seat (Daniel 2015). *One might imagine a similar scenario to arise in implementing the placement mandate, whereby a party might list an insincere candidate who is elected but declines to take up their role.*

Such an occurrence, if institutionalised, would imply that parties could still circumvent placement and threshold rules by nominating women that – by declining their seat – would effectively pass their position on to the following man. Although not commonplace in Europe, there is some precedent for this in Brazil, where parties have been known to list candidates that were even unaware that their party had selected them – all in the name of fulfilling a quota (Gatto and Wylie 2022).

Enforcement

Finally, *the proposed role of the national nominations compliance officer and the constituency returning officers, which would allow them reject or amend proposed candidate lists, is among the strongest possible sanction for quota enforcement.* Although, as I discuss below, this is unlikely to feature heavily in daily operation – the tasking of these officials with ensuring that quota requirements are met can be seen as sending an important signal to the political parties about the seriousness of the quota requirements.

Modelling Outcomes

As part of our upcoming monograph (Aldrich and Daniel 2025), my colleague and I collected background data on the political careers and demographics of all Members of the European Parliament (MEP) since the start of direct elections, 1979-2022. For the purposes of this report, we used these data to build a predictive model that can provide some illustrations on how the Welsh Senedd composition might be expected to change, were the quota bill to be enacted.

Building the Model

We begin by pairing information on MEP backgrounds with quota information about legislative and party quotas from across Europe. Separately, we also collected additional data on all candidates to have sought election for the European Parliament since 1999, to compare the candidates available with the politicians who were elected.

One advantage of our approach to data collection is that European Parliament elections have taken place on a direct basis since 1979 but do so using country-specific electoral systems that typically mirror those in place for national parliaments. Candidate selection, too, is done by the national political parties. In other words, by studying the 28 different countries that have elected MEPs since 1979, we can learn valuable comparable information about 28 different European electoral systems.

In terms of gender quotas, there is an extremely diverse set of different rules and policies that feed into the common body of elected legislators. European elections exist on a common timeframe - held every five years – and share the expectation that some degree of proportional representation be used. Beyond that, each country uses a slightly different system. This means that we see examples of both legislative and party gender quotas in place, alongside multiple permutations of open and closed lists, shorter and longer ballots, the presence, and absence of placement mandates, etc. Our predictive model can therefore draw several empirical conclusions about which types of electoral systems are the most influential in promoting women's representation.

A summary of the national legislative quotas that feature in our dataset, and their year of adoption, is as follows:

Country	Year
Belgium	1994*
Italy	1999, 2019*
France	1999*
Slovenia	2004
Portugal	2006
Spain	2007
Croatia	2008*
Poland	2011
Ireland	2012
Greece	2012
Luxembourg	2016

*Belgium introduced equality legislation in 1994 but adapts this to more stringent measures in 2002 and 2009, eventually establishing parity on party lists. France passed constitutional equality provisions in 1999 and a parity law in 2000. Italy introduced a quota in 1999 but later rescinded it, re-establishing the quota in 2019. Croatia passed legislation in 2008 but allowed for gradual implementation.

We also consider party quotas, which sometimes exist in systems without national legislative quotas, but are nonetheless prominent (e.g., Sweden and Germany). Voluntary party quotas are found in our dataset for 17 of the 28 current and former EU member states. They are present at various points from 1979-2019 for at least 40 different national political parties:

Country	Party	EP Year*
Austria	Die Grunen - Die Grune Alternative	1994
Austria	Osterreichische Volkspartei	1999
Austria	Sozialdemokratische Partei Osterreichs	1994
Croatia	Socijaldmokratska Partija Hrvatske	2009
Cyprus	Dimokratikos Synagermos	2004
France	Parti communiste francais	1979
France	Parti socialiste	1979
France	Les Verts-Europe-Ecologie	1989
Germany	Bundnis 90/die Grunen	1989
Germany	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	1989
Germany	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	1999
Germany	Die Linke	2009
Germany	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	1999
Germany	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern	1979
Greece	Panellinio Socialistiko Kinima	1999
Greece	Nea Dimokratia	1994
Hungary	Magyar Szocialista Party	2014
Italy	Partito democratico	2009
Lithuania	Lietuvos socialdemokratu partija	2004
Luxembourg	Déi Gréng - Les Verts	2009
Luxembourg	Parti populaire chrétien social luxembourgeois	2009
Luxembourg	Parti ouvrier socialiste luxembourgeois	2009
Malta	Partit Laburista	2009
Netherlands	Partij van de Arbeid	1989
Romania	Partidul Democrat-Liberal	2009
Romania	Partidul Social Democrat	2004
Romania	Partidul Social Democrat + Partidul Conservator	2004
Slovakia	Ľudová strana – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko	2009
Spain	Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol	1999
Spain	Izquierda Unida	1989
Spain	Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya	1989
Spain	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya	2014
Spain	Bloque Nacionalista Galego	2014
Sweden	Arbetarepartiet- Socialdemokraterna	1994

Sweden	Miljöpartiet de Gröna	2009
Sweden	Moderata Samlingspartiet	2009
Sweden	Vänsterpartiet	1994
UK	Labour Party	1999
UK	Liberal Democrat Party	1999 & 2019

*EP Year relates to the first year of the European Parliament session in which the party quota first appeared. In some cases, parties may have already had quotas, but did not appear in our data because they were not yet in the EP. NB: the session start year is given for each party, even if the party only joined part-way through the term.

Modelling Effects

We use multivariate regression techniques to estimate the independent effect of various quota design choices and their impact on women's presence in the European Parliament. The first set of models compares the effectiveness of quotas across national delegations to the EP (i.e., all members from all parties within a country); the second set of models compares the effectiveness of quotas on political parties (i.e., regardless of country).

The dependent (outcome) variable in our model is the share of women MEPs (whether in a country or a party delegation). The main independent (predictor) variable is the presence of a quota, which we then manipulate across various kinds of quota options. Quotas are applied to our data at the party level, meaning that in countries with a legislative quota, all parties are assessed as having a quota. In countries without legislative quotas, only those political parties with their own party quotas are assessed as having quotas. We use a series of two-way fixed-effects models, which control for both the EP session (time-level) and the national (country-level) differences.

In other words, the following effect sizes show differences in the levels of women present (at the national or the party level), following the implementation of different varieties of quotas. All of the following estimates have already taken into consideration the generalised impact of other national and time differences (i.e., our use of two-way fixed-effects models), so the effects represent the specific amount of difference attributable to each quota option. The full output of our regression models is available upon request. Due to the models used, we derive predictive margins, which we share here.

Quota Threshold

At the country level, we first explore the impact of quota thresholds on the percent change of women MEPs. We explore different potential thresholds for quotas and use them to infer how women's presence changes at the country level, at different levels of quota strength.

No Quota	0.00
10%	1.67
20%	3.35
30%	5.03
40%	6.71
50%	8.39

The above table demonstrates the predicted change in women's presence at the national delegation level (i.e., all MEPs elected from a given country), when a quota is present at the 10%, 20%, etc., threshold. All else equal – meaning other country and time-specific differences are controlled for, separate of these effects – we observe between 1.67 and 8.39% more women in national delegations, as quotas strengthened. *This implies that stronger thresholds produce national delegations with more women present in them, across all parties within those countries.*

No Quota	0.00
10%	2.00
20%	4.01
30%	6.01
40%	8.01
50%	10.01

The second table is derived from a model that considers the effect of quotas on the share of women at the political party level, rather than at the overall country level. Here, we observe a larger effect. In other words, when a 50% quota is in place within a given party, a political party is likely to see more than 10% more women elected to that party, relative to when it did not have a quota, once, national and time differences are accounted for. *That the effect size is greater for party-level quotas implies that women's presence is more strongly affected at the party level than at the national level.* This is a consistent finding that will be observed in further dimensions.

Time Since Quota

We can also examine the timing of quota impacts, given that political parties and national party systems will likely need to adapt over time to the reality of new quota laws. We first model this as the independent effect of each subsequent EP election, while holding country-level differences constant. Remember that EP elections take place every five years, so the predictive margins below represent the average predicted change in women's presence within a national delegation, across all its parties, compared with the first election where a quota is present (t=0).

t	0.00
t+1	-0.02
t+2	-0.04
t+3	-0.06
t+4	-0.08
t+5	-0.11

If anything, the models indicate that quota effects do not change much after the first election, at least when women's presence at the national level is considered. After five electoral cycles, countries with legislative quotas experience a very slight drop of about 0.11% in women's presence. *In other words, the positive effect of quotas discussed in the previous section is 'locked in' for national delegations relatively quickly and does not change much thereafter.*

t	0.00
t+1	0.64
t+2	1.28
t+3	1.92
t+4	2.56
t+5	3.20

When we model this at the party level, we find a slightly different pattern. Here, when political parties experience a quota (whether at the legislative or party level), the effect of the quota on women's presence in each political party only continues to grow. In other words, if we saw an effect size of around 10% for parties with 50% quotas in the last section, the above result shows that an additional 3.2% might be expected in the future. Substantively speaking, quotas lock in their effect at the national level, but continue to have a positive impact on women's representation at the party level. *This is consistent with other findings from our data, which show that parties that require the largest increases to reach gender equality among their representatives, also experience the largest effects from quotas. In turn, these effects continue to amplify over time.*

Quota Enforcement

We can also examine the effect of quota enforcement on women's elected presence. We use data from the QAROT database (Hughes et al. 2017) to distinguish between systems with strong enforcement provision and systems with weak or no enforcement provisions. In line with the above discussion, strong enforcement comes from governments that have the power to reject or amend party lists that do not comply with quota rules, whereas weak enforcement includes things like fines or other one-off sanctions.

At the national level, we observe a predictive margin of 2.11% for women's presence among the national delegation. *In other words, countries that have strong enforcement mechanisms have more women MEPs than those with weak or no enforcement.* At the party level, the effect is even stronger, with countries that have strong enforcement mechanisms having 9.94% more women among their party's elected legislators. In both

cases, these margins are derived whilst controlling for differences in time and country. It is worth noting that these effect sizes are smaller than the enforcement effects witnessed in the literature for countries in other geographic regions. Like Wales, our data is comprised of only consolidated democracies that have a long history of respect for the rule of law and good governance structures. *We might therefore infer that, whilst enforcement mechanisms are a useful 'stick' to incentivise parties to follow quota legislation, parties in democratic systems are already more likely to abide by government legislation than in other, more developing or transitional contexts.*

Finally, we can model the effectiveness of different types of electoral system on women's representation. When quotas are in use, we find that country delegation that use open or semi-open lists, which allow for voter preferences to be expressed, have about 8.29% more women in their national delegations. At the party level, this effect is weakened to 4.55%. These finds run contrary to the general literature, which expects closed list ballots to be more conducive to women's election than open/semi-open ballots that allow for voter preferences. *This is likely due to the relatively small number of countries that use open or semi-open lists in European elections and should therefore be taken with caution.* In other words, we would be reticent to pass judgment on closed list electoral systems as detrimental to women's election, based upon our limited sample.

Summary of Modelling

To summarise, using actual data on the variegated presence of quotas in the EP, we can generate a set of predictive margins that highlight the features of quotas that tend to be the most important for improving women's presence among European democracies and political parties. *We find that higher thresholds lead to more women being elected. At the level of the political party, these effects continue to grow over time, as parties adapt to quota rules in subsequent elections and more women attain incumbency status.*

Conversely, we show a lesser effect for enforcement, even when it's at its strongest. Ballot type does not have a very strong effect, either. For both variables, we imagine that this is more the product of the countries that we are considering. Quotas are used in a wide range of countries – many of which are in non-Western, non-democratic, and/or less-developed economies. For Wales, the most suitable point of comparison is its consolidated, democratic neighbours. *Given our data's focus on these same countries, it is worth hypothesising that things like enforcement mechanisms and ballot types matter a lot less here than they might in more diverse contexts.*

What is clear, however, is that quotas have a large and immediate effect. But how large could that effect be in Wales? We examine that now.

Forecasted Effects for Wales

Using the predictive margins from the previous section, it is possible to forecast a likely effect for the proposed gender quota on women's descriptive representation in the Welsh Senedd. The below forecasted effects are derived from 40 years of European

Parliament election data used in (Aldrich and Daniel 2025), drawing upon differences in the electoral systems of 28 European countries, alongside the electoral patterns of more than 400 European political parties and 4000 elected politicians.

Because the patterns that we explore in the previous section are derived from such an extensive and comprehensive sample, and because the Welsh system contains many structural, cultural, and systemic similarities to the countries in our dataset, it is worth contemplating what the effectiveness of different quota forms might be for the Senedd. On the other hand, it is worth treating these forecasted effects with caution, as they are essentially averages from across different combinations. Nonetheless, the effect sizes from above do reveal interesting information about the relative impact of different institutional choices.

Following the most recent election in 2021, 43% of Members were women. The relative present of women among party delegations varied from 57% for Labour members to 38% for Plaid Cymru, and 19% for the Conservatives. Liberal Democrats won a single seat, held by a woman (Davies et al. 2021). Given the above predictions, we might reasonably expect the addition of quotas at the specified threshold of 50% women candidates to yield between an 8 and 10% increase in women's presence in the Senedd, following the next election. In other words, this would bring the overall composition of the Senedd to around 50% women overall.

You will note from the above predictive margins that we expect stronger effects at the party level than at the overall institutional level. Similarly to Wales, most of the national delegations in our dataset have a mixture of parties – each with differing levels of women's representation. Common to our research findings, though, is that women tend to be most present among leftist and centre-left parties. From the 2021 Welsh results, this seems to be in line with broader trends.

The result of these party-differentiated representational levels, however, is that quotas tend to have the largest effect on women's representation when they are adopted by parties that previously had lower levels of women's representation. In other words, the 8-10% effect size can be viewed as an average across all parties, with a larger effect expected for those parties at a lower starting point. As shown in the over-time modelling from the previous section, one would expect for within-party effects to grow over time, relative to the overall legislature (which we model above as the national delegations present within the European Parliament).

To summarise these points, I would expect for an overall effect of an 8-10% increase in women's representation across the Welsh Senedd after the implementation of quotas, with larger gains among those parties that currently experience lower levels of women's representation. At the party level, the largest increase would be expected at the first election following the quota, with an additional increased effect over time, thereafter.

Among other factors that are relevant from the proposed Welsh quota are enforcement mechanisms and the ballot structure. As I discuss in the previous sections, the proposed enforcement mechanism is quite strong, as compared with other countries. This will be

to the quota's benefit, should it be enacted into law. *Key here is that the electoral authority retains the right to refuse or amend registrations that do not comport with the quota regulation.* However, based upon our substantive data from across Europe, the presence or absence of strong enforcement laws does not have an overly large effect on women's election – from a substantive point of view. This is likely due to our country cases' existing levels of democracy and therefore willingness to comply with the rule of law – rather than run elections based upon the perceived threat of government sanctions.

In a similar vein, it would be reasonable to expect that the proposed closed list design with privilege political parties to place women in electable positions that cannot be amended by voters to their detriment. *Whilst we do not find evidence that open lists disadvantage women's election across our European data, we would not expect the proposed closed list arrangement to disadvantage women, either – especially given the strong placement mandate.*

Conclusions

Quota usage around the world has been consistently shown to be effective at increasing women's representation. The proposed gender quota for the Welsh Senedd represents a strong quota that is likely to have a sizeable effect on the nomination and election of women legislators. This is particularly due to its high threshold (minimum 50% women nominations), its placement mandates (the vertical and horizontal criteria) and its enforcement mechanisms (the ability of the electoral authority to refuse or amend registrations that do not comport with the quota).

Drawing upon patterns observed from extensive research on 28 European countries and 400 political parties, across more than 40 years of quota implementation, I am of the view that the proposed Welsh quota is likely to have a positive effect on women's presence in the Senedd, and that this effect will not only be strongest in parties where women's presence is currently lowest but will grow over time.

As the Senedd considers its broader reforms, including its enlargement, the academic literature is clear that an effective quota can produce a result that is more descriptively representative of the Welsh population than would be the case were only individual parties to commit to similar practices.

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