



CHAPTER 9

Gender Representation in Wales: New Approaches to Candidate Selection in UK's Devolved Legislatures and Beyond

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Gender is often an overlooked aspect in political and constitutional reform (Brown, Donaghy, Mackay, & Meehan, 2002). The current climate within Western democracies, with high levels of volatility and dissatisfaction with mainstream politics (Mair, 2013; Norris, 2011), has brought about new and often radical parties (Kriesi, 2014; Ramiro, 2016), a revitalisation of smaller parties, as well as a decline of loyalties to centre-ground politics (Jennings, Clarke, Moss, & Stoker, 2017). However, gender is more often than not second order to broader issues driving this new political mobilisation: globalisation, Europeanisation,

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G. Cordero and X. Coller (eds.), *Democratizing Candidate Selection*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76550-1_9



15 austerity, immigration and security. It takes forceful activism within
16 political parties and beyond to raise the profile of gender in debates and
17 bring it on the political reform agenda (Karamessini & Rubery, 2017).

18 Nevertheless, constitutional and political reform (either organic or
19 more revolutionary in nature) represents an opportunity to tackle sys-
20 temic structural factors affecting the electoral opportunity of women,
21 whether this be the electoral system or the internal candidate selection
22 procedures within political parties.

23 The UK is an exemplar of significant democratic flux, where gen-
24 der and constitutional transformations have been closely intertwined
25 in recent times. Although gender did not feature directly on the 1997
26 New Labour's constitutional reform programme, which included devolv-
27 ing political authority to democratically elected political institutions in
28 Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the debates leading up to devo-
29 lution, especially in Scotland and to a lesser extent in Wales, were infused
30 with considerations over the new gender relations within the new politi-
31 cal spaces (Brown, 1998; Brown et al., 2002; Chaney, 2003; McAllister,
32 2000). Moreover, as the winning party in UK general elections in
33 1997 (Labour) pioneered positive action measures in its internal candi-
34 date selection procedures, this opened new opportunities to advance
35 the gender equality agenda in Britain. Labour's adoption of All Women
36 Shortlists (AWS), a form of positive action targeting half of the winnable
37 seats where candidate shortlists were women only, set an important pre-
38 cedent and an example for other parties. The combination of the single-
39 member district majoritarian system used to elect members of the House
40 of Commons, known as First Past the Post (FPTP), and placing women
41 in winnable seats as a result of AWS, meant assured success in terms of
42 gender-balanced electoral outputs for Labour.

43 The devolution process begun in 1997 has led to significant advance-
44 ments in political representation for women in Scotland and Wales—less so
45 in Northern Ireland. When the first elections took place to the new institu-
46 tions in the UK in 1999, the percentage of women elected to the National
47 Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament reached record highs for
48 the UK (40% in Wales and 37.2% in Scotland). This propelled the two sub-
49 national legislatures at the top of the rankings in terms of gender-balanced
50 parliaments and, to an extent, dwarfed the remarkable achievement of the
51 Westminster Parliament's House of Commons, where women representa-
52 tion rose from 9% in 1992 to 18% in 1997—which underlines how far the
53 UK Parliament has to go to improve its gender balance.



54 This progress (at Westminster level and, more importantly at subna-
55 tional level) has been well documented and interpreted by UK gender and
56 electoral scholars, who have largely attributed the success to the progressive
57 influence of the Labour party (Russell, Mackay, & McAllister, 2002), and
58 to Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalist Party, who each adopted posi-
59 tive action measures in their candidate selection for the devolved elections
60 in 1999 in Wales and Scotland (Brown et al., 2002; Mackay & McAllister,
61 2012). Another explanation has been offered in terms of the opportuni-
62 ties offered by ‘new’ political spaces to do things differently (McAllister &
63 Stirbu, 2007), including taking radical steps towards addressing constitu-
64 tional barriers to representation (*i.e.* electoral system) and creating distinct
65 institutional conditions for more gender-balanced representation (rules of
66 procedure, institutional culture, etc.).

67 A more recent constitutional development has been the process of
68 exiting the European Union (EU) following the Brexit vote in June
69 2016. Against a backdrop of growing nationalist sentiments across
70 England (Henderson et al., 2016; Kenny, 2016) and Scotland (Pattie
71 & Johnston, 2017)—yet with very distinct motivations and aspira-
72 tions—and a disconnect between mainstream national political parties
73 (Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats) and their traditional voter
74 base, the raise in support for parties such as UKIP and the Greens, for
75 instance, has been somewhat masked by their electoral insignificance at
76 national level (Ford & Goodwin, 2014), which is a direct effect of the
77 electoral system used in the UK. The debates in the lead up to the EU
78 Referendum are, however, a glaring example of marginalising gender,
79 yet with serious implications (Guerrina & Masselot, 2018; Guerrina &
80 Murphy, 2016; Haastrup, Wright, & Guerrina, 2016).

81 Unlike other Western European democracies, the recent constitu-
82 tional upheaval in Britain has not resulted in the emergence of new politi-
83 cal parties, with the exception of the Women Equality Party, established
84 in 2015 as a result of grassroots activism. It has, however, seen a peak in
85 support for UKIP, a Eurosceptic party founded in 1991, whose two-issue
86 policy platform—UK’s membership to the European Union and immi-
87 gration—has led it to some significant electoral gains in 2013 local elec-
88 tions (23% vote share), in 2014 European Parliament elections, when
89 it surpassed both Labour and the Conservatives (26.6% vote share), in
90 2015 General elections (12.6% vote share), and significant in the context
91 of Wales, in 2016 National Assembly elections, when it won 7 out of 60
92 seats in the Assembly.



93 In this chapter, we focus on the interplay between exogenous and
94 endogenous factors (to political parties) affecting women representation
95 in Wales. First, we review the impact of the new political and electoral
96 system in post-devolution Wales—conceptualised here as ‘new’ politics
97 underpinned by constitutional and political reform—on women rep-
98 resentation. Second, we explore candidate selection procedures within
99 the main three political parties in Wales: Labour, Conservative and
100 Plaid Cymru. We draw on empirical work on UK’s constitutional trans-
101 formation as well as candidate and electoral data on local, subnational
102 and national elections from 1999 until 2017. Wales was chosen as a case
103 study for two reasons: (1) the sheer constitutional fluidity of the Welsh
104 devolution arrangements within the above-mentioned time frame, and
105 (2) the unique mix of being both a ‘leader’ and a ‘laggard’ in terms of
106 advancements in gender representation at other tiers of governance. This
107 provides context for us to investigate the impact of candidate selection
108 strategies at different electoral levels.

109 Our findings highlight the importance of constitutional, political
110 as well as cultural factors to improving women’s electoral opportunity
111 structures. This has come about largely through innovative approaches
112 to candidate selection procedures adopted at national and subnational
113 level, which resulted in significant advances in representation of women
114 in UK’s legislatures. Additionally, we highlight the dissonance between
115 ‘old’ and ‘new’ politics and the lack of contagion whereby success at one
116 level cascades to other elected levels.

117 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

118 Constitutional reform can prove essential in questioning the gender rela-
119 tions within political systems. It can represent both the platform and the
120 instrument through which the under-representation of women might be
121 addressed at structural level. Structural factors can act as ‘gates’ to rep-
122 resentation prohibiting or facilitating access to political office. In similar
123 fashion, political parties, as principal actors in political recruitment, can
124 act as ‘gatekeepers’; hence, their candidate selection processes are equally
125 significant.

126 The under-representation of women in politics has been widely
127 addressed in the literature. Distinctions have been made between *descrip-*
128 *tive*, *substantive* and *symbolic* representation of women (Krook, 2010;
129 Wängnerud, 2009). With roots in Anne Phillips’ famous *Politics of*



130 *Presence* (1995), and Pitkin's framework of representation (1967), the
131 descriptive versus substantive representation debate has dominated the
132 field for a number of years. Not surprisingly, the point of departure in
133 many descriptive representation studies is to highlight the variations in
134 representation across countries and time and to find possible explanations.
135 Political recruitment has been central to understanding these variations
136 and Norris and Lovenduski's seminal work on electoral opportunity
137 structure (1993, 1995) essential in conceptualising factors affecting
138 political recruitment as a supply- and demand-side model. Their main
139 contention is that supply factors (such as personal political ambition,
140 motivation, as well as availability of resources, such as time and money)
141 may determine whether women come forward as candidates or not,
142 whilst the demand factors (such as political parties, their candidate selection
143 procedures and their selectorate, the electoral system and sociocultural
144 norms dominating in the society) will act as a further filter on how
145 desirable they ultimately are as candidates (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995).

146 On the supply side, the focus of scholarship has been on issues such as
147 political ambition (Alen & Cutts, 2018), aversion towards electoral competition
148 (Kanthak & Woon, 2015), access to resources, etc. Interestingly,
149 supply-side explanations are not entirely divorced from structural and
150 demand-side explanations, women candidates' perception of political
151 institutions being a 'gentleman's club' for instance, generating a sense of
152 exclusion and not belonging (Palmieri, 2011).

153 On the demand side, the concept of electoral opportunity structure
154 has been further developed by Wängnerud (2000), who differentiates
155 between systems and strategy-based models. The systems-based explanatory
156 model places the emphasis on the exogenous (to political parties)
157 factors underpinning the electoral process (*i.e.* the electoral system, the
158 franchise), whereas the strategy-based model focuses on the role of political
159 parties as gatekeepers in the electoral process. The effect of electoral
160 systems on women representation has been widely debated in the
161 literature. Whilst some assert that proportional representation electoral
162 [PR] systems, for instance, increase women's chances in getting elected
163 (McAllister & Studlar, 2002) and mitigate the adverse effect that majoritarian
164 electoral systems have on women and ethnic minorities (Bird, 2003; Ruedin, 2009),
165 other significant contextual and cultural factors come into play (Freidenvall et al., 2006),
166 which explain why for instance the positive correlation between PR and women
167 representation in parliaments seems to be confined more to established Western European
168



169 democracies than those in Eastern Europe, many of whom use PR and
170 have poor records of women in elected office (i.e. Romania, Hungary—
171 see Chiva, 2005; Schmidt, 2009).

172 In fact, cultural and socio-economic explanations to variations in
173 gender representation in politics have dominated the literature, sug-
174 gesting that societies with a more prevalent gender equality culture
175 offer more opportunities for women to move upwards on the gender
176 equality scale (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Quotas have frequently been
177 suggested and used as a quick fix (at structural level) to problems of
178 under-representation in parliaments and have generally received inter-
179 national backing (Norris & Krook, 2011), but the desirability of quotas
180 has been vastly questioned (Krook, 2010) and in the context of British
181 politics fiercely opposed by some political parties. Gender quotas, volun-
182 tary or prescribed, can come in different forms, from candidate quotas to
183 requirements for ordering candidates on lists, to reserved seats (Expert
184 Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform, 2017). On a normative level,
185 Krook and Norris (2014) highlight the need of more holistic approaches
186 that consider the full journey into politics of women, from being eligible
187 to interested individuals to becoming candidates and elected members,
188 thus taking both supply and demand factors into consideration.

189 Strategy-based explanations focus on the role of political parties as
190 ‘gatekeepers’ in the process of recruitment and selection of candidates.
191 The extent to which parties respond to external pressures or to constitu-
192 tional change is dependent on internal party organisation and dynamics
193 (Katz & Mair, 1995). When permissive conditions are created at struc-
194 tural level to advance gender representation (i.e. legal system, electoral sys-
195 tem), political parties can still act as obstructive, depending on the gender
196 composition of their selectorate (i.e. internal candidate selection panels)
197 (Cheng & Tavits, 2011), the level of territorial decentralisation of candi-
198 date selection processes (Hopkin & Bradburry, 2006), as well as on their
199 internal culture of inclusion and openness (Bile, 2001). Whilst democra-
200 tisation of candidate selection has been suggested as improving gender
201 outcome and enhancing inclusivity, scholarship also points to issues of loss
202 of party cohesiveness (Cross, 2008) that may negatively affect centrally
203 imposed positive action measures on gender.

204 Whilst we know that positive action measures embedded in candi-
205 date selection procedures make a difference (Mackay & McAllister,
206 2012), political parties have been reluctant to embrace positive action
207 in the absence of external stimuli (i.e. financial incentives or civil society



208 pressures) (Buckley, 2013). This leaves the inter-party competition and
209 the perception of ‘leaders’ and ‘laggards’ in gender representation cre-
210 ating an important dynamic that can act as an external incentive for par-
211 ties to move from equality rhetoric and discourse to ensuring practical
212 equality guarantees and reforming their candidate selection procedures.
213 Matland and Studlar (1996) frame this as the ‘contagion’ effect and use
214 this to explain some of the advancement in increasing women representa-
215 tion in different contexts. The concept of ‘contagion’ has been further
216 explored in the literature, both in the context of inter-party effect and in
217 terms of voluntary and prescribed positive action effect (Meier, 2004).
218 An important point raised by Davidson-Schmidth (2010) is that the
219 contagion effect of voluntary quotas eventually flattens and more pre-
220 scribed measures are needed to further increasing gender representation
221 in parliaments.

222 Candidate selection is a critical element in unpacking the electoral
223 opportunity of women because it takes place at the intersection of the
224 supply and demand spaces (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995) and because it
225 plays on the dynamic between system and strategy-based explanations
226 of political recruitment (Wängnerud, 2009). Hazan and Rahat (2006,
227 2010) provide an extremely useful framework for evaluating candidate
228 selection from a comparative perspective. The two-dimensional frame-
229 work distinguishes between methods and consequences of candidate
230 selection. On the one side, methods of selection can be explored by fur-
231 ther distinguishing between candidacy rules (inclusive vs. exclusive), the
232 selectorate (which eventually determines who is selected and nominated),
233 the degree of decentralisation and the appointment system. The conse-
234 quences of candidate selection can also be further unpacked along levels
235 of participation, representation, competitiveness and responsiveness.

236 Another important consideration, especially given the focus on this
237 chapter, is examining the role of political parties in gender representa-
238 tion, whilst accounting for a multilevel system of democracy. Matland
239 and Studlar (1998) present interesting findings about the Canadian provin-
240 ces, suggesting that the multi-member electoral system as well as the
241 party has a strong effect on determining the electoral fortunes of women.
242 Comparative work on gender representation in subnational legislatures
243 (Vengroff, Nyiri, & Fugiero, 2003) also suggests that the proportionality
244 of the electoral system, alongside the level of economic development
245 of a country, is the strongest factor in determining the gap in representa-
246 tion between national and subnational levels. Overall, women perform



247 only marginally better at subnational level, reflecting perhaps the issue of
248 differentiated voting in second-order elections (Clark & Rohrschneider,
249 2009), although we found no strong evidence in the literature between
250 second-order elections and improved gender outcomes.

251 HYPOTHESIS, DATA AND METHODS

252 This literature is significant in directing our own research. Devolution
253 has altered the political and constitutional context of the UK: there are
254 now four legislatures in the UK, elected via different electoral systems;
255 there is a new level of political representation altogether—subnational—
256 that adds to the multilevel system (local, national and EU). The emer-
257 gence of this new layer of political representation has been underpinned,
258 not by a creation of new parties, but by an equally important discourse
259 around ‘new politics’ that advocated for more inclusiveness, openness
260 and transparency in the political process. We can therefore test whether
261 these new dynamics, largely driven not only by the Labour party at
262 national and devolved level, but also by two of the regional parties in
263 Wales and Scotland, have had any significant reverberations across the
264 new political spaces created.

265 We are specifically interested in exploring how political parties have
266 responded to these structural changes and whether they have made a
267 significant contribution to changing the electoral opportunity structures
268 for women. Therefore, we first look at how the constitutional landscape
269 as well the structural level of electoral opportunity has changed as a
270 result of devolution (i.e. electoral franchise, electoral system). Secondly,
271 we review political parties’ candidate selection strategies across all lev-
272 els (national, regional, local) using Hazan and Rahat’s (2006) framing
273 of selection methods and exploring how inclusive candidacy rules are,
274 who the selectorate is, the level of decentralisation with the party and the
275 specific gender strategies used to select candidates. Thirdly, we compare
276 political parties’ records, first, in putting forward women candidates in
277 elections, as well as in producing women-elected representatives at var-
278 ious levels of government. The focus will be on Wales and the political,
279 constitutional and electoral transformation undergone since the advent
280 of devolution.

281 The starting point of our argument is that devolution in the UK has
282 improved the demand side of electoral opportunity for women by creat-
283 ing a more permissive and competitive context for parties to experiment



284 with positive action. We identify the ‘gates’ as the systemic level of the
285 electoral opportunity structure (electoral franchise, electoral system, legal
286 system) and the ‘gatekeepers’ as the political parties and their equality
287 rhetoric and practice (including candidate selection processes).

288 Therefore, our analysis first maps out the effect of the electoral system
289 post-devolution and, secondly, investigates the equality strategies and
290 electoral performance of three main political parties. We rely on candi-
291 date data and election result data published by the Electoral Commission
292 between 2000 and 2017 and on official political parties’ strategies.

293

RESULTS

294 The political context in the UK has seen some important transforma-
295 tions as a result of devolution. One such change was the emergence
296 of new political spaces as a result of the establishment of the Scottish
297 Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland
298 Assembly in 1999. This in itself created new electoral opportunities for
299 women. In Wales, this new political space, accompanied by a promise of
300 ‘new politics’, benefitted from a certain blank slate, hence offering cer-
301 tain opportunities for gender innovations (McAllister & Stirbu, 2007).
302 The expectation was that the perceived cultural, structural and institu-
303 tional barriers preventing women to accede to political office at UK level
304 (mainly the electoral system, institutional culture, etc.) will not be repli-
305 cated in Wales.

306 *Opening the ‘Gates’ of Electoral Opportunity Structure for Women*

307 Significant for the opportunity structure for women is the electoral sys-
308 tem and who controls the franchise in the electoral process at various
309 levels of representation (see Table 9.1). The UK’s majoritarian politi-
310 cal and FPTP electoral system has been a consistent and resilient fea-
311 ture of the British constitution, despite calls for electoral reform and
312 growing dissatisfaction with the mismatch between the number of
313 votes and the number of seats parties get in the House of Commons
314 (Johnston, 2001). The electoral system tends not only to reward tradi-
315 tional major parties in UK politics—the Conservatives and the Labour
316 Party—but also, in conjunction with the effect of incumbency, to limit
317 the electoral chance of women and ethnic minority candidates (Norris
318 & Lovenduski, 1993).



319 The newly created democratic spaces in Wales, Scotland and Northern
320 Ireland feature more pluralistic electoral systems. In Wales, the electoral
321 system combines the traditional single-member FPTP with an element
322 of PR, which was meant to signal the departure from the majoritarian
323 and confrontational Westminster style of politics to something ‘new’,
324 more inclusive (McAllister, 2000). The National Assembly for Wales was
325 set up as a 60-member unicameral assembly with rather limited legisla-
326 tive powers; 40 Assembly Members (AMs) are elected in single-member
327 constituencies via FPTP and a top-up list of 20 members is elected via
328 multi-member regional lists. This suggested an aspiration to deliver more
329 representative results than FPTP, whilst also retaining the constituency-
330 elected representative link regarded as important. However, the AMS has
331 come under criticism in relation to its ability to deliver a truly represent-
332 ative cohort of AMs- the system still overcompensating major parties,
333 especially Labour (Stirbu & McAllister, 2016).

334 Who controls the electoral franchise at various levels of government
335 is also important as it represents a strong indicator of autonomy and
336 of exogenous structural barriers in changing the electoral opportunity
337 structures for women in a multilevel system. In Wales, the powers to
338 control the electoral system and the electoral franchise for Assembly and
339 local government election were only devolved in 2017 with the Wales
340 Act 2017 commencing in April 2018. Wales already had a good record
341 on gender representation in its national legislature, leading the way
342 amongst all UK legislatures and legislative assembly ever since its estab-
343 lishment. Following the 2016 elections at subnational level, as well the
344 2017 snap UK general elections, the National Assembly still leads on the
345 representation of women.

346 Data from national and devolved elections between 1997 until 2017
347 reveals two facts. First, there is a significant difference in electoral out-
348 comes for women between the UK Parliament and the National
349 Assembly for Wales (see Tables 9.2 and 9.3). The National Assembly for
350 Wales—a key symbol of the ‘new politics’, a new institution, rehearsing
351 a new rhetoric around inclusivity and openness, and elected via a new and
352 different electoral system—has never seen less than 40% women elected,
353 whilst representation of women in the House of Commons, although
354 improving significantly since 1992, still lags behind that in Wales.

355 There are multiple factors that account for the better records in women
356 representation in the National Assembly as opposed to Westminster
357 Parliament. These have been largely discussed in the literature: the effect
358 of the relative blank slate and the opportunity for gender innovations in

**Table 9.1** Electoral systems and franchise in multilevel UK

<i>Level</i>	<i>Electoral system</i>	<i>Who controls the franchise?</i>	<i>Notes</i>
UK (House of Commons) (650 MPs)	First Past the Post	UK Parliament	A national Referendum on Alternative Vote in 2011 was defeated 68 to 32%
Scotland (129 MSPs)	Additional Member System (FPTP+PR)	Scottish Parliament	56 Single-Member constituency 7 × 8 member regions
Wales (60 AMs)	Additional Member System (FPTP+PR)	UK Parliament (1999–2017). National Assembly since 2017	40 Single-Member constituencies
Northern Ireland (90 member since 2017/108 from 1999 to 2017)	Consociational model based on PR-STV	NI Assembly	5 × 4 member regions
Local Government			
England	FPTP	UK Parliament	
Scotland	STV (since 2007)	Scottish Parliament	
Wales	FPTP	National Assembly (since 2017)	
Northern Ireland	STV	Northern Ireland Assembly	
European Parliament	PR	EP+member state (thresholds)	

Table 9.2 Percentage of women elected in UK's legislatures (2016/2017)

<i>National Assembly for Wales</i>	<i>Scottish Parliament</i>	<i>Northern Ireland Assembly</i>	<i>House of Commons</i>
41.7	34.9	27.8	32

359 Wales (Stirbu & McAllister, 2007), the effect of the electoral system, the
 360 space for experimentation and innovation presented by so called 'sec-
 361 ond order' elections, the positive action measures taken by some of the
 362 political parties at subnational level (McAllister & Mackay, 2012), the



Table 9.3 Percentage of women in National Assembly for Wales (1999–2016), UK Parliament and UK Parliament (Welsh Constituencies, 1997–2017)

	1999/1997	2003/2001	2007/2005	2011/2010	2016/2015	2017
Wales National Assembly (AMS)	40	50	46.7	41.7	41.7	43.3
UK Parliament (FPTP)	18.2	17.9	19.8	22	29.4	32
UK Parliament (Wales const.) (FPTP)	12.5	10	22.5	17.5	22.5	27.5

363 more positive institutional culture and discourse instigated by the new
 364 institutions in Wales—as well as in Scotland- (Stirbu, 2011), and, more
 365 generally, the differentiated voting effect between national and subna-
 366 tional levels (Clark & Rohrschneider, 2009). However, in the Welsh case,
 367 explanations regarding the effect of the electoral system on gender rep-
 368 resentation may seem counterintuitive.

369 Based on theoretical assumptions that women’s electoral prospects are
 370 better under proportional representation systems—at least in Western
 371 democracies (Bird, 2003), namely multi-member regional lists, the
 372 expectation from the AMS was that it would redress the adverse effect of
 373 FPTP on minor parties (Stirbu & McAllister, 2016) as well as on women
 374 candidates. The caveat does exist, and empirical evidence from Ireland,
 375 for instance, where small Single Transferable Vote seats have penalised
 376 women candidates and have not necessarily contributed to enhancing
 377 diversity (EPAER, 2017) does suggest that PR is not a panacea for gen-
 378 der representation.

379 In fact, if we are depicting the electoral fortunes of women in the
 380 National Assembly elections under the two electoral systems that make
 381 up the AMS, we see that women candidates for the National Assembly
 382 elections actually fare better on the constituency vote (FPTP) rather than
 383 on the regional lists (PR) (see Fig. 9.1). This is not to diminish the con-
 384 tribution of the PR element of the electoral, but to give a more holistic
 385 perspective which also indicates that endogenous factors (i.e. political
 386 parties internal gender strategies) are as significant as the exogenous
 387 effect of the electoral system.

388 Electoral data trends also indicate that the two elements of the elec-
 389 toral system tend to converge—by strategically positioning women can-
 390 didates on top of the regional lists, their electoral fortunes are improved.

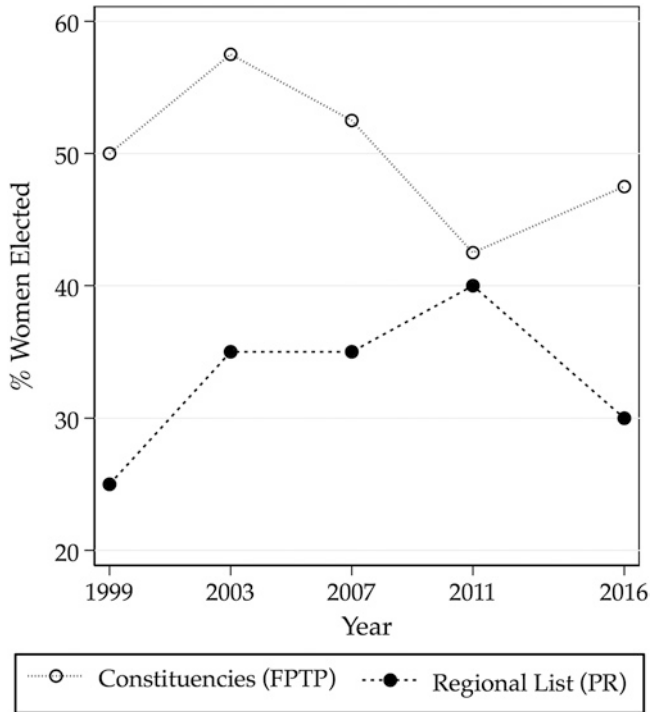


Fig. 9.1 Women electoral fortunes under AMS (Wales)

391 Secondly, despite progress at subnational level, Wales is consistently
 392 and persistently lagging behind the rest of the UK in terms of returning
 393 women MPs in the House of Commons (Table 9.3). This is significant,
 394 given two additional factors: Labour's prominence in Wales, and their
 395 successful application of positive action more widely across the UK.

396 The possible explanation, explored further in the next section, could
 397 be linked with different candidate selection and electoral strategies
 398 employed by the Labour Party for general elections in Wales.

399 Overall, gender and electoral opportunity structures in Wales are
 400 closely linked with the ever-changing constitutional context. Following
 401 recommendations from an Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral
 402 Reform (EPAER) set up in February 2017 by the Presiding Officer
 403 of the National Assembly to look into matters related to the size of
 404 the Assembly, the electoral system and the electoral franchise, the
 405 Assembly passed a motion in February 2018 to start a consultation on



406 the implementation of the EPAER's recommendations, which included
 407 an increase in the size of the Assembly, changing the electoral system,
 408 extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds, and significantly, the
 409 introduction of gender quotas (EPAER, 2017). The Welsh Government
 410 also announced changes to the electoral system for local government,
 411 extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds, following a consul-
 412 tation launched in summer 2017 (Welsh Government Consultation,
 413 2017). The continuing fluid political landscape is likely to present further
 414 opportunities to improve the diversity of representation in the Assembly,
 415 with gender likely to constitute the most important dimension.

416 *Political Parties in Wales: The Gatekeepers*

417 Most political parties operating in Wales have engaged with the gender
 418 equality rhetoric, but not all have pursued active promotion of gender
 419 balance and not all use the same electoral strategies at different electoral
 420 levels. We are interested here in variations in parties' electoral strategies
 421 and in the consequences of this in relation to gender at different levels
 422 and focus our attention on: Labour, the Conservatives, Plaid Cymru, and
 423 to a more limited extent UKIP.

424 By far, the Labour party the best record in electing women in the
 425 National Assembly since 1999 as depicted in Table 9.4. Plaid Cymru
 426 has experienced a downward trend since 2003, when half of its cohort
 427 of AMs were women, whilst the Conservative party has only seen more
 428 significant progress since 2011. UKIP has only broken through in the
 429 Assembly following the 2016 elections, with a record of 7 elected mem-
 430 bers—all elected on regional lists—2 being women. Following the resig-
 431 nation of one of UKIP's male AMs, and the automatic nomination of
 432 the next candidate on the list to take the vacant seat, a woman, UKIP's
 433 record improved to 43% in 2017.

Table 9.4 Percentage of women of total party cohort elected in National Assembly elections 1999–2016

	1999	2003	2007	2011	2016
Labour	57	63	62	50	52
Conservatives	0	18	8	29	27
Plaid Cymru	35	50	47	36	33
UKIP	–	–	–	–	29



434 At national level, the Labour party is rightly been perceived as a pio-
435 neer in driving gender equality and in moving from rhetoric to practical
436 gender interventions in their candidate selection procedures. The party
437 introduced AWS for the 1997 UK general elections, despite being found
438 in breach on the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act in 1996 (Norris, 2001).
439 The astounding results of the 1997 general election saw 101 Labour
440 women MPs elected out of the total 120 women MPs elected to the
441 House of Commons that year (HoC, 2016). After the election of New
442 Labour in 1997, the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act was reformed in 2002,
443 allowing parties to use AWS in order to improve the chances of women,
444 thus paving the way for political parties to implement more robust posi-
445 tive action measures in their candidate selection.

446 The candidate selection process within the Labour Party nation-
447 ally has traditionally mixed central control and local autonomy and has
448 undergone some important changes since 1997, both national and at
449 subnational level. The focus has been on widening participation in the
450 candidate selection process. Candidacy rules require individuals to
451 have been party members for at least one year before being approved
452 as candidates. Whilst not entirely exclusive, this rule may prevent new
453 party members from standing for elections. One of the most important
454 changes in candidate selection has been a redefinition of the ‘selectorate’
455 within the Party. Traditionally, candidates have been chosen by local con-
456 stituencies and approved by a central body, this changing with the intro-
457 duction of ‘one member one vote policy’, which gives more substantial
458 power to party members. Following the 2010 general elections defeat,
459 say in candidate selection has been further expanded to registered party
460 supporters, in a move which bolstered the grassroots movement in the
461 party (Institute for Government, 2011).

462 Whilst widening participation in candidate selection has been a fea-
463 ture of internal party transformations, this has been accompanied by
464 the introduction and imposition of a formal candidate selection process,
465 which includes formal application, assessment, long-listing and short-
466 listing of candidates. The process, although normally carried out by
467 local branches is overseen by a representative of the National Executive
468 Committee of the Labour Party. Central party control and imposition
469 also includes requirement for the local candidate selection panels to be
470 gender-balanced (Institute for Government, 2011).

471 The degree of decentralisation and the party’s general adaptation
472 to devolution has been discussed by the scholarship (Bradbury, 2009;



473 Hopkin & Bradbury, 2006). At subnational level, the Welsh branch
474 insisted on rebranding as the Welsh Labour despite little divergence in
475 terms of party organisation at subnational initially. However, with the
476 party's strategic leadership devolved to the Welsh Executive Committee
477 and a general policy distancing between Welsh Labour and the national
478 party, famously encapsulated in the promise of 'clear red water' between
479 Cardiff and London by a former Welsh Labour First Minister, the degree
480 of regional autonomy, especially on elections to the National Assembly
481 and the local government, has increased, whilst there is still significant
482 control from the national party in terms of candidate selection and elec-
483 tion strategy for Westminster elections (Bradbury, 2009).

484 In terms of specific gender strategies, Labour's use of AWS in UK
485 general elections¹ made it a leader in pushing for equal representation
486 of women in the UK. Despite the scholarship showing no evidence of an
487 AWS penalty (Cutts & Widdop, 2013), other parties have been reluctant
488 to adopt this form of gender quota and even within the party ranks there
489 are many dissenting voices resisting the central party imposition of AWS.

490 Wales is a good example to highlight the tensions created by the top-
491 down approach to AWS. For General elections in Welsh constituencies
492 the use of AWS has been rather limited and marred with controversy.
493 Between 1997 and 2015, only eight constituencies put forward AWS.
494 Strong opposition of local branches in Blaenau Gwent in 2005, and
495 again in 2015 in Cynog Valley and Swansea (BBC Wales, 2014) suggests
496 that the equality rhetoric and practice are still far apart in Wales, despite
497 Labour's pioneering role in adopting positive action. AWS for the elec-
498 tions to the National Assembly were approved after heated debates and
499 only with a wafer-thin majority (3%) in 1999. The strategy used by Welsh
500 Labour in 1999 Assembly elections targeted the 40 seats elected FPTP,
501 'twinning' neighbouring constituencies, with one putting forward a man
502 whilst the other one putting forward a woman. This explains the excel-
503 lent results of women under FPTP as previously shown in Fig. 9.1.

504 Alongside with embedding positive action in their candidate selection
505 process, the Labour party and its Welsh branch also increased the num-
506 ber of women candidates at every election, at every level (local, subna-
507 tional, national and European level). In the last round of elections for
508 the European Parliament in 2014, for the House of Commons in 2017,
509 and for the National Assembly for Wales in 2016 women candidates
510 accounted for nearly or more than 40% of their Labour total candidates
511 at all levels (see Fig. 9.2).



512 The success of women Labour candidates is strongly linked with
 513 seat targeting, seat marginality as Fig. 9.3 reveals. Although no Labour
 514 women MEPs were elected from Wales in 2014, there is no indication
 515 that women candidates have a worse rate of success than male candidates.

516 Figure 9.3 explores whether women candidates are placed in more
 517 or less competitive constituencies at NAW elections compared to their
 518 male counterparts. If placed in less competitive constituencies we would
 519 expect the constituency margin (measured here as the difference in vote
 520 shares between a given candidate and the winning candidate) to be
 521 greater for women than for men. In this regard, there is no clear pattern
 522 for two of the parties of interest, the Conservatives and Plaid Cymru.
 523 However, the data for Welsh Labour shows a remarkably clear trend:
 524 women candidates are consistently placed in more competitive seats than
 525 their male counterparts.

526 At local level, the percentage of women candidates put forward by
 527 Labour, as well as of women-elected councillors (see Table 9.5), is
 528 improving at a much slower pace than at other levels and slower than in

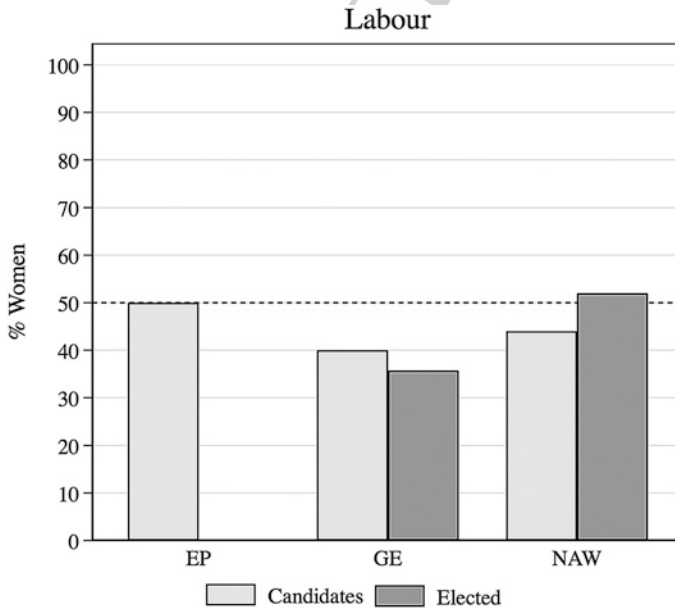


Fig. 9.2 Labour women candidates vs elected representatives—last elections

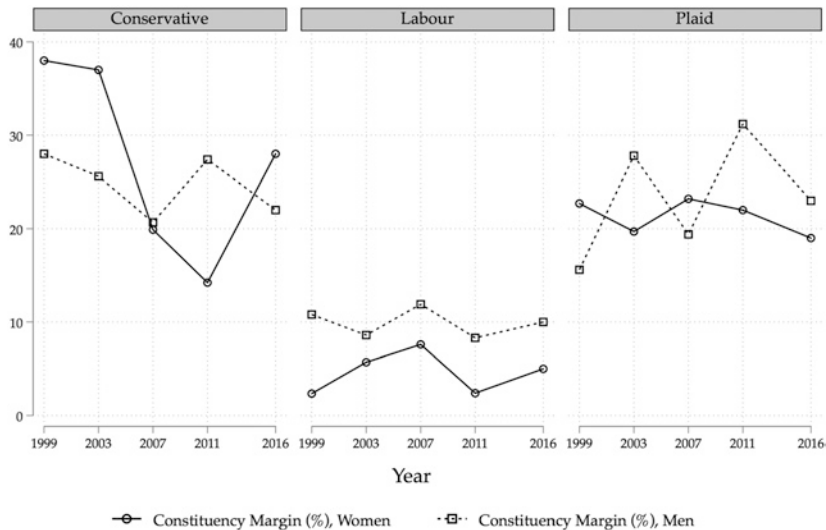


Fig. 9.3 Constituency margins for women and men in National Assembly Elections 1999–2016

529 other parts of the UK (Fawcett Society, 2017). This reveals yet another
 530 area of disconnect between the ‘new’ politics of devolution, with Labour’s
 531 pioneering role in gender equality, and the old majoritarian structures and
 532 dynamics at local level (Stirbu, Larnar, & McAllister, 2017).

533 The lack of cascading effect of the progress made at Assembly level to
 534 the local level has been linked with various cultural, structural and political
 535 barriers hindering women’s entry to local government (Equality &
 536 Human Right Commission, 2017; Fawcett Society, 2017), but also with
 537 cultural elements underpinning the organisation of local politics in Wales
 538 (Stirbu et al., 2017).

539 The Conservative party has generally been averse to any form of positive
 540 action in their candidate selection process. Until 2000, the party
 541 engaged little with the equality rhetoric, fielded smaller numbers of
 542 women candidates in all elections and returned significantly smaller numbers
 543 of women MPs in comparison to Labour. In 2005 General election only 9% of the
 544 elected Conservative MPs elected in the House of Commons were women. In
 545 Wales, the Conservatives have only started breaking ground since 2010 General
 546 elections, when 8 Conservatives MPs



Table 9.5 Percentage of labour women candidates and women-elected councillors (2008–2017)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Women candidates</i>	<i>Women-elected councillors</i>
2008	27	24
2012	30 (+3)	30 (+6)
2017	35.5 (+5)	32 (+2)

547 were elected from Wales but none of them were women. The situation at
 548 National Assembly level features a similar pattern or under-representation:
 549 no Conservative women were elected in 1999, and two were elected in
 550 2003, and just one in 2007. Only since 2011 do we see some improve-
 551 ment both in terms of candidates and women AMs. In 2016 the
 552 Conservatives fielded 25% women candidates in the 2016 assembly elec-
 553 tion, resulting in 27% of their elected members (EPAER, 2017).

554 The candidate selection process in the Conservative party has tradi-
 555 tionally been dominated by informality, the importance of strong per-
 556 sonal and political networks, and a relative autonomy of local branches.
 557 The process has seen somewhat important transformations over the
 558 years and is at present much more formalised and centrally driven. In the
 559 past, the parliamentary selection board used to base its selection crite-
 560 ria on strict rules derived from army officers training, raising criticism of
 561 institutionalised sexism within the candidate selection process (Institute
 562 for Government, 2011). Since 2001, all candidates on the centrally
 563 approved list, as well as other nomination from local branches have to
 564 go through the Parliamentary Assessment Board. Candidacy rules are
 565 more flexible than for the Labour party, as a candidate that reaches the
 566 assessment board stage needs to have been a party member for only three
 567 months (Conservative Party, 2018).

568 There has also been some experimentation with the nature of the
 569 selectorate and the process of approving candidates, namely changes
 570 to the selection committees since 2005 have seen more central control
 571 imposed in the process, but also some experimentation with open (and
 572 postal) primaries between 2006 and 2010 for general elections (Institute
 573 for Government, 2011).

574 The issue of gender and candidate selection was addressed at the Party
 575 conference in 2000, when questions were raised as to why in the 19 win-
 576 nable seats at the time not a single woman was selected (BBC News,



577 2000). Whilst the party leadership had expressed its opposition to positive
 578 action measures, other strategies were put in place. The introduction
 579 of the ‘A List’, a list of preferred women and black and ethnic minority
 580 candidates, was meant to increase the supply of these underrepresented
 581 groups. To support this, a more informal network, the ‘Women2Win’
 582 campaign, was launched by two leading Conservative women and focused
 583 on mentoring, support and on lobbying to place women in winnable
 584 seats as a means of addressing the poor gender record in the party
 585 (Women2Win, 2018). The strategy has also been accompanied by an
 586 increase in number of women candidates (see Fig. 9.4). In 2017 General
 587 elections the conservatives fielded 184 women candidates, making up 29%
 588 of their candidate cohort. Whilst this is important progress for the party,
 589 it was still lagging behind Labor (41%), the Green Party (35%) and the
 590 Scottish National Party (34%) in 2017 elections (HoC 2017). In Wales,
 591 although the number of women candidates nearly doubled from 2001
 592 (18%) to 2010 (35%), and the number of Conservative MPs elected from
 593 Wales in the House of Commons has reached a record high in 2015–
 594 2011 Conservative Welsh MPs—there remains no single woman MP
 595 elected from the party.

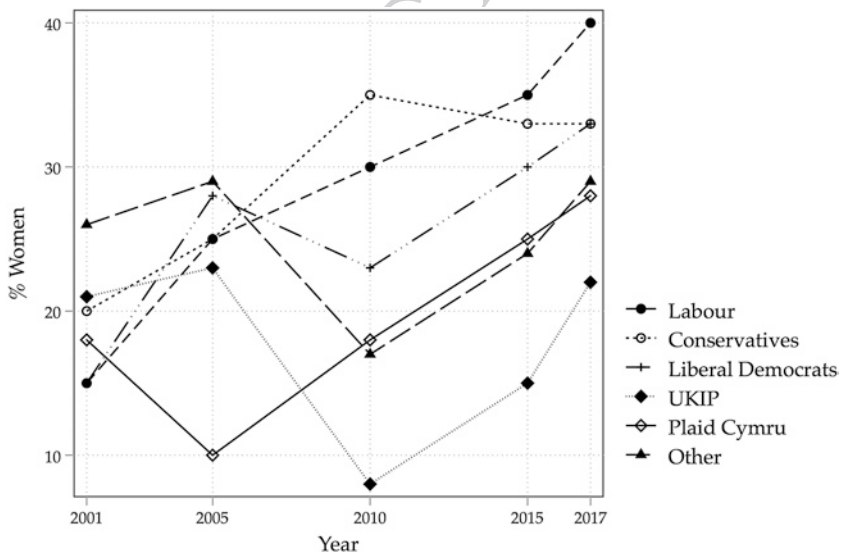


Fig. 9.4 Women candidates by party, general elections 2001–2017



596 Conservative women in Wales fair slightly better at other levels of
597 government. The Welsh Conservatives have adapted well to devolution
598 and have been reaping the rewards of a more pluralistic electoral system.
599 In 1999, out of the 9 seats won, 8 were won on the regional list vote,
600 whilst in 2003, out of the 11 seats, 10 were regional seats. Yet the num-
601 ber of women remained pitiful. As the party's confidence grew within
602 the devolved context it also started targeting and winning seats in the
603 Constituency vote, the latest election, in 2016, awarding the Welsh
604 Conservatives with 11 seats (6 won on the constituency vote and 5 on
605 the regional list votes). Three out of the 11 Conservative AMs are cur-
606 rently women.

607 The level of decentralisation with the party remains relatively low and
608 central imposition of candidates for general election has remained largely
609 unopposed, exception being the upset caused to the Bridgend branch by
610 the central imposition of Conservative candidate Karen Robson, in the
611 2017.

612 Whilst the Welsh Conservative party remains a 'laggard' in returning
613 gender-balanced cohorts to the Assembly, our analysis s some progress
614 has been made since 2007, when the percentage of Conservative women
615 elected rose to double digits and passed the 20% mark.

616 Plaid Cymru has also been instrumental in the successful descriptive
617 representation of women, but has shown very slow progress at UK and
618 local level elections. Until 2015, Plaid had not elected a single women
619 MP in the House of Commons and its poor record in fielding women
620 candidates for the general elections has been eclipsed only by UKIP
621 in recent times. Central to Plaid's candidate selection strategy for the
622 Assembly elections has been targeting the PR element of the electoral
623 system in Wales, using 'zipping' of candidates, and placing women in the
624 first and usually third position on the regional lists for the year 1999.
625 In 2003, it placed third women within the first two spaces of each regional
626 list (EPAER, 2017). Between 1999 and 2007, we see a concentration of
627 Plaid's women candidates on the lists (above 50%), whilst the percentage
628 of women candidates on the constituency list is significantly lower, hov-
629 ering around 20% (Fig. 9.5).

630 In terms of ensuring gender-balanced teams in the Assembly, the
631 strategy paid off—in 1999, Plaid Cymru's list vote produced a 50–50
632 distribution of regional seats (PR) between their regional male and
633 female Assembly Members. In 2003 and in 2007, 71% and 63% of their
634 regional AMs were women. However, as the party started picking up

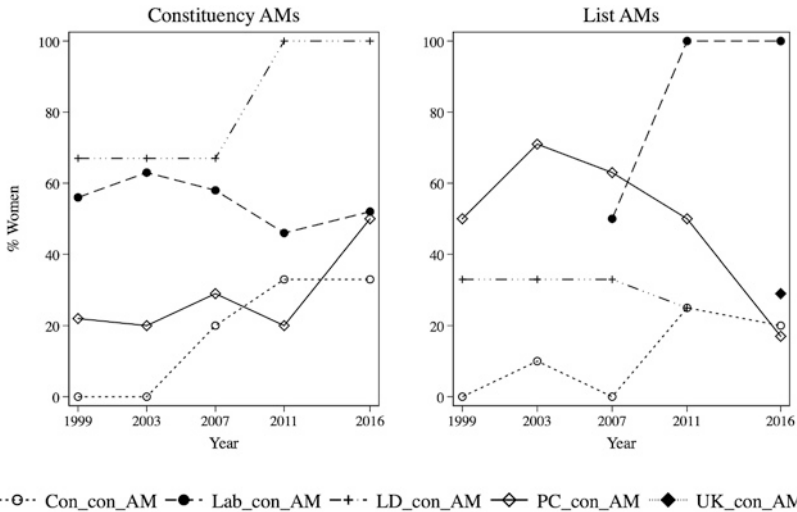


Fig. 9.5 Constituency and list candidates, National Assembly for Wales elections (1999–2016)

635 constituency seats from 2007, the seats secured through the regional
 636 lists has declined. Moreover, with a significant slump in 2011, and the
 637 increased competition of UKIP in 2016, Plaid has moved away from the
 638 positive action measures instituted in 1999 (targeting the regional seats
 639 had become rather ineffective anyway). This saw less women placed on
 640 top of the regional lists (as represented in Fig. 9.6) and more on second
 641 and third position. The party's revised strategy for 2016 Assembly
 642 elections allowed male candidates to places top of the regional list only
 643 if the second place was taken by a woman candidates, whilst the reverse
 644 would not apply—if a woman was placed top of the regional list, another
 645 woman could potentially be selected in second place (EPAER, 2017).

646 Plaid has struggled to make significant progress in electing women in
 647 local elections too—in the last decade, the percentage of women candi-
 648 dates fielded has increased by merely 3.2%, from 26% in 2008 to 29.20%
 649 in 2017, whilst, remarkably, the percentage of elected women councillors
 650 has decreased from 27% in 2008 to 26% in 2017 (Stirbu et al., 2017).

651 UKIP has been a relatively new, yet cataclysmic and frugal feature
 652 in Welsh politics. Its electoral achievements in the Assembly 2016 gen-
 653 eral elections, has been followed by a significant drop in support at local

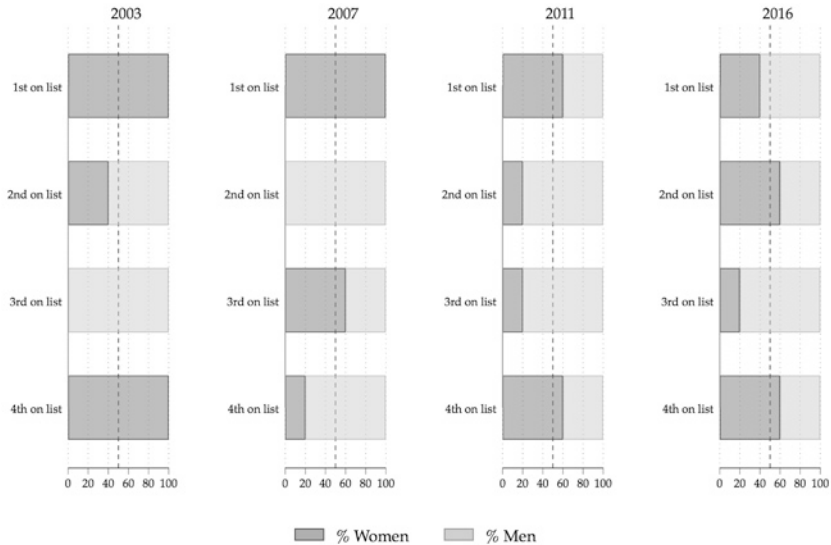


Fig. 9.6 The positioning of women candidates on lists—Plaid Cymru National Assembly elections (2003–2016)

654 level, UKIP winning no councils or seats in 2017 Local Elections. This
 655 drop in support has later been confirmed in the 2017 general elections,
 656 where the party lost 11.6% of its vote share in Wales, currently at 2%.
 657 Despite UKIP's Assembly AMs team being 29% women in 2016, it is
 658 difficult to talk about a gender strategy within a party that has not yet
 659 embraced the gender rhetoric.

660

CONCLUSIONS

661 Our discussion has explored how the electoral opportunities for women
 662 can be transformed by significant constitutional change such as devolu-
 663 tion in Wales. Wales was used as a case study as it is an exemplar of recent
 664 continuous constitutional fluidity and also because it presents us with a
 665 paradoxical contrast in the electoral fortunes of women at various levels
 666 of representation there. The new political space created by the National
 667 Assembly for Wales presented an opportunity for change: a new electoral
 668 system and a degree of experimentation with internal candidate selection
 669 especially by two of the main political parties in Wales (Labour and Plaid).



670 This was backed with a strong rhetoric around gender representation in
671 politics. However, the achievements at subnational level of Wales' three
672 main political parties have not cascaded through to the national and local
673 levels, failing to live up to rather lofty expectations.

674 Central to our analysis have been theoretical assumptions in relation
675 to structural and political factors that improve the electoral opportu-
676 nity structures for women: the electoral system, the political context,
677 as well as the role of the political parties in strategising gender equality.
678 Our analysis has focused exclusively on the demand side of the political
679 recruitment model (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995) investigating the extent
680 to which devolution created an improved electoral context for women
681 and whether this context has been sufficiently exploited by political par-
682 ties to experiment with more inclusive candidate selection procedure and
683 embed positive action in their electoral strategies.

684 The main findings of our analysis are fourfold. First, constitutional
685 reform has altered the political and electoral context in the UK creating a
686 new level of democratically elected politics, which in turn opened up new
687 opportunities for women to seek political office (in itself a positive effect).
688 It also created a more pluralistic political space, the new democratically
689 elected institutions promoting rhetoric of inclusiveness and instituting
690 practices meant to eliminate institutional barriers for women to accede to
691 political office—another positive change. Other system changes introduced
692 (in Scotland and Wales) were new more proportional electoral systems.

693 Secondly, the dynamic created by the pioneering role of the Labour
694 party and other parties has had positive effects on women representation,
695 instigating other parties to either adopt positive action measures (Plaid)
696 or review their candidate selection processes (Conservatives). Labour
697 used AWS at all levels, whilst in Wales, Plaid Cymru focused its positive
698 action on the PR element in the electoral system, zipping candidates with
699 women on top of the regional lists.

700 Thirdly, despite the new opportunities created by devolution, and the
701 progress made at subnational level, there has been no real contagion with
702 progress made at other elected levels much slower. Of the three parties
703 investigated, two (Conservatives and Plaid) show particularly poor records
704 in terms of fielding women candidates in general and local elections.
705 Whilst all three main parties developed electoral strategies to improve the
706 gender representation of their elected representatives, these strategies were
707 not uniformly applied across all levels of government nor geographically.



708 Fourthly, despite clear progress made, questions remain about the
709 sustainability of this gender progress. In Wales, this was especially pro-
710 nounced as it has been disproportionately linked to just one party's
711 electoral fortunes—when Labour does well in elections, women do well.
712 Experimentation with candidate selection procedures has not been as
713 revolutionary and as contagious as expected, yet it has been necessary for
714 advancing the gender agenda.

715 Whilst parties have been described as the principal gatekeepers in gen-
716 der representation, our findings highlight the importance of both endog-
717 enous and exogenous factors in improving the electoral outcomes of
718 women. Strategy-based explanations help explain the significant progress
719 by the Labour party nationally and at National Assembly level. However,
720 closer analysis and breaking down of Labour's electoral data in Wales (for
721 general elections) as well as at local level reveals further deeply cultural
722 and institutional barriers for women. The exogenous factors explored,
723 mainly structural—electoral system and franchise, show that the elec-
724 toral opportunity of women can be widened through structural and elec-
725 toral reform, however, that alone does not necessarily solve the issue of
726 under-representation.

727 Addressing cultural factors and diversifying pathways into politics for
728 women through innovative approaches to candidate selection procedures
729 is equally important. We argue that, although the incipient 'new' poli-
730 tics brought about by constitutional change has changed significantly
731 the electoral opportunity structures for women at subnational level, there
732 has been little cascade effect at other levels of government, where pro-
733 gress has been slow or stagnating. This dissonance between the old and
734 'new' politics suggests that it takes action aimed at both the gatekeepers
735 and the gates, parties and systems, to support this. Initial evidence from
736 Wales suggests that permissive or enabling opportunities for political parties
737 to promote more female candidates will only achieve so much and is
738 likely to be temporary or unstable. Without prescriptive or system based
739 interventions (especially quotas), it is hard to make gender balance both
740 a reality and permanent or lasting.

741

NOTE

742 1. In 2001, the AWS was not used, but the Labour party still returned a sig-
743 nificant number (95) of women MPs in the House of Commons.



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