
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to published version (if available):
10.1080/13572334.2012.673067

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The Journal of Legislative Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fjls20

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Available online: 18 May 2012


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2012.673067

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Candidate Selection in British Second Order Elections: A Comparison of Electoral System and Party Strategy Effects

ELIZABETH EVANS* and LISA HARRISON

Whilst most UK political parties have now accepted the need to increase the number of women representatives, the stark reality is that women remain under-represented. The under-representation of women in UK politics is not just evident in the national legislature but is a pattern repeated, to varying degrees, in second order elections at local, devolved and European levels. Recent developments in political recruitment processes allow us to explore the extent to which political parties take advantage of different electoral systems to promote women candidates in second order elections. Providing analysis of (s)election data from across second order elections, this article explores the interaction between systemic and institutional strategies, questioning which combination of electoral system and party strategy is most beneficial for increasing levels of women’s representation.

Keywords: women’s representation; electoral systems; second order elections.

Introduction

Women have traditionally fared better in second order elections than in UK national elections, and we can look to several possible explanations. The first may be that different elections attract different types of candidates, for example, proximity of the legislature to place of residence, frequency of legislature operating hours, frequency of election cycle are just some of the features which may attract (or dissuade) potential candidates. Second, political parties may choose to prioritise the representation of particular groups. Third is the fact that electoral systems differ for legislatures – individually or combined, these factors affect the empirical picture. The preferential representation of women at the second order level is a trend that crosses electoral and party boundaries. The dominant paradigm for understanding this differing performance is that multi-member proportional representation systems are more likely to benefit women candidates (Castles 1981, Studlar and Welch 1991, Norris 2004). It is also well established that the role of political parties as ‘gatekeepers’ in the candidate selection process is critical to understanding the electoral success of women (Gallagher and Marsh 1988, Norris and Lovenduski 1995, Childs 2008). However, it is less clear whether parties have taken advantage of the variety of different multi-member proportional systems operating within the UK’s second order election system to actively encourage the selection of
greater numbers of women candidates. Drawing together data on women’s (s)elections across election types, this article assesses the relative impact of equality strategies and electoral systems on women’s representation, questioning the extent to which women’s electoral success is mediated by the relationship between systemic and institutional factors. In doing so the article considers which are the most effective combinations of systemic and institutional factors that will help increase the number of elected women politicians.

Second order elections are typically perceived as being less important to the electorate, political parties and the media than first order elections (Denver 2007). Accordingly, low voter turnout and greater volatility on the part of the electorate has meant that second order election studies have tended to focus on voter rather than party behaviour (Reif and Schmitt 1980, Marsh 1998, Heath et al. 1999). Perhaps inevitably second order elections have also received relatively less attention from academics interested in exploring women’s electoral success (notable exceptions include Castles 1981, Studlar and Welch 1991, Russell et al. 2002, Rao 2005, Harrison 2010). Constitutional reforms introduced in the late 1990s, including the change to closed list proportional representation (PR) in European elections and the introduction of devolved bodies in Scotland and Wales elected by the additional member system, allowed political parties to vary their strategies for candidate selection in an effort to exploit electoral system opportunities and constraints. At the same time, simple majority elections, sometimes referred to as First Past the Post (FPTP), thrive at the local government level in England and Wales. As such, second order elections are critical sites of analysis for exploring the relationship between electoral systems and party strategies and the subsequent impact on women’s representation.

Previous research has highlighted the beneficial impact that proportional representation can have on women’s representation, citing the pressure on parties to present a more ‘balanced’ slate of candidates, the reduction of incumbency effects and the opportunity for parties to adopt voluntary sex quotas (Rule 1987, Norris 2004). PR is also especially beneficial for women in multi-member constituencies with large district magnitudes (Norris 1985, Welch and Studlar 1990), although district magnitude alone does not necessarily result in increased numbers of women (s)elected (Studlar and Welch 1991). Recent longitudinal research, however, has shown the size of the effect of PR to be consistent rather than increasing over time, thus limiting the impact and creating a plateau effect when other ‘normative pressures’ restrict further progress (Paxton et al. 2009, p. 43); this finding fits with academic perspectives which classify PR as a facilitator rather than a guarantor of better female representation (Childs 2008). By analysing women’s candidacy across second order election types this article compares and contrasts the various electoral systems operating within Britain and argues that without party commitment to increase women’s representation their impact remains limited.

Gender and politics scholars are largely in agreement that the role of political parties in the selection process is critical to increasing the number of women
elected (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Candidate selection remains a contested and divisive issue within political parties (Ranney 1965, Gallagher and Marsh 1988), challenging power dynamics between national and local parties. Whilst the vast majority of interest has focused on selection procedures for Westminster elections, research has noted that under PR list systems the central party can have more influence over selection outcomes (Gallagher and Marsh 1988). This central intervention has in the past proved important for ensuring greater diversity amongst candidates, particularly with regard to selections for Westminster seats. This article explores the ways in which parties have responded to the different and changing context within which candidates are selected for second order elections and assesses the extent to which the central parties have sought to use second order elections to ‘boost’ the number of elected women politicians.

There are three main strategies available to political parties to enhance the number of women representatives: equality rhetoric, equality promotion and equality guarantees (Lovenduski 2005). Equality rhetoric is the public acknowledgment of the need to do something about increasing the numbers of women who come forward, and can be identified in campaign literature and speeches. Equality promotion offers a more tangible approach to the under-representation of women by providing training or financial help for women in order to redress the balance, and it can also include the setting of internal party quotas. Lastly, equality guarantees recognise that direct intervention in the selection mechanism is vital to ensure the selection and election of more women representatives. Interventions include all-women shortlists (AWS) twinning and zipping (Norris 2004, Childs 2008). This article adopts this three-tiered equality framework to consider the extent to which parties take advantage of the different multi-member electoral systems to select women candidates effectively.

Research into second order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980, Carrubba and Timpone 2005, Schmitt 2005) tends to focus on two aspects – (i) variations in turnout as compared to first order elections and (ii) patterns of vote switching in which voters deviate from existing party allegiance as demonstrated in first order elections. In contrast, less emphasis is given to the political implications of electoral systems, in which political parties can experiment in candidate selection in order to translate equality rhetoric into equality promotion at the very least, or equality guarantee at the most. This article draws on evidence from recent Scottish, Welsh, European and local elections to explore women’s electoral success. Despite some ‘debate’ as to whether the devolved elections are second order elections at all (Ingram 2003, Johns 2008), Scottish and Welsh elections are included in this analysis as they fit the model of lower voter turnout and greater electoral volatility (Denver 2007). Previous research has observed that for the electorate some second order elections are less second order than others, for instance local elections vis-à-vis European elections (Heath et al. 1999); paralleling this we contend that the combination of, and interaction between, systemic factors and equality strategies result in a hierarchical typography of women’s success rate in second order elections.
Analysing the Data – Women’s (S)election in Second Order Elections

Our core argument is that (i) political party rhetoric on women’s representation is not always matched with positive action when we consider the selection and election of women. Furthermore, political parties are not consistent in their selection of women as (ii) electoral systems act as a facilitator (or equally a hurdle) which can influence the type of candidate parties prefer to select. We present the data in the following way: (a) Which second order elections lead to the highest levels of female representatives? Can we identify a ‘hierarchy of equality’ and, if so, how is this explained? (b) What is the relationship between selection and election? Is there some veracity in the claim that women are more reluctant to seek election? Are women effectively paper candidates where a presence on the ballot paper is unlikely to result in presence in the legislative chamber? (c) What have political parties done to facilitate the election of women? Are individual parties consistent in supporting women candidates? And (d) to what extent is the effect of party strategies mediated by electoral systems? We draw on data from European Parliament elections, Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections, and local elections in England, Scotland and Wales.

(S)election Trends

Although second order elections have a number of shared characteristics, it is less clear whether the favourable selection and election of women can be added to the list (‘favourable’ is defined as relative to women’s electoral performance at Westminster). Accordingly, this section of the article sets out the comparative data for women’s selection and election across the different types of second order elections.3

As the data in Figure 1 illustrate, on average women are numerically better represented in all second elections compared to Westminster. Furthermore, on an aggregate level this appears to be related to election type rather than geographic trends. For example, women are better represented as a result of elections to the relatively young devolved bodies (Welsh Assembly and Scottish

![Figure 1: Percentage of Women Elected 2009/2010 by Election Type](image-url)
Parliament) than in local elections (where aggregate trends are reasonably close across three nations).

Any claims that geography is a determining factor (that is, women prefer to stay close to the home when entering politics) is further undermined by the results of recent elections to the European Parliament. On this basis an early conclusion would be that electoral systems are the key – women enjoy better representation in second order elections where there is some form of proportionality – be it the closed party lists employed for European Parliament elections or the multi-member proportionality adopted in Scotland and Wales. This, of course, is rather simplistic. First, it renders party strategy irrelevant – and indeed these aggregate data mask some very interesting trends. Second, we need to take into account that not all local elections are the same; for instance there is a variance in district magnitude, as some wards in England are multi-seat. Moreover, for the 2007 Scottish local elections the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system was adopted, where previous elections had been held using single-member plurality. What, if any, difference has this made? Next, we explore in more detail the selection and election patterns of political parties in these second order elections.

Before examining trends in female selection and election it is necessary to pay attention to party strategies which may be labelled as positive discrimination, or facilitators of parity representation. As Table 1 illustrates, Labour aside, parties have rarely used equality strategies for the selection of candidates for second order elections. The Liberal Democrats’ use of zipping in 1999 is largely thought to have ensured gender balance amongst their MEPs, yet they have since relied on incumbency to retain this parity, despite internal pressure from gender equality advocates (Harrison 2010). Despite David Cameron’s equality rhetoric, the Conservative Party has not adopted any equality guarantees for second order election selection processes.

Labour stands out in relation to the variety of equality promotion and guarantors adopted to increase women’s descriptive representation. For example, Labour’s adoption of twinning for the Scottish Parliament elections was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Conservatives</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Lib. Dems.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Zipping (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Targeted quotas (2003)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Twinning (1999), AWS (2003)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>AWS (2003)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
subsequently enhanced by the introduction of AWS in 2003 for the selection of a number of constituency seats in devolved elections. In addition to strategies outlined in Table 1, the Labour government established a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women’s taskforce specifically designed to encourage more diverse women to consider standing for local government. In 2003, Labour instructed local selectors ahead of the local elections in England that they had to ensure that a third of the candidates selected were women (John et al. 2007). Thus we can already identify a pattern of difference emerging between the types of strategies adopted and the type of second order election. When there is a political ‘will’ to increase the number of women representatives, a political party appears to explore the alternative ‘ways’ to facilitate this.

Looking in more detail at the selection data by election type and by party in Table 2 we can see that women accounted for over a third of all candidates in elections to the European Parliament and the Scottish Parliament election in 2009 and 2007 respectively. Elsewhere, there is a remarkable convergence for all other elections, including to Westminster. For the Conservative Party we can see that women have consistently taken between a fifth and close to a third of candidacies – most favourably selected for European elections and least so in elections for the Welsh Assembly. If we contrast these selection figures to data on those successfully elected, we can see that the conversion of Conservative women candidates into representatives has been least effective in Westminster and the Welsh Assembly.

The selection of women candidates by the Labour Party provides a much broader pattern. In second order elections to the European Parliament and local government the percentage of women candidates was higher than those elected. The exceptions are the most recent elections to the devolved bodies where women candidates were more efficiently placed – women constituted 44.5 per cent of Scottish candidates and 54 per cent of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), and 53.1 per cent of Welsh candidates and 62 per cent of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election type</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Lab</th>
<th>LD</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sel.</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>Sel.</td>
<td>Elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local (Eng)*</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local (Scot)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local (Welsh)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total percentage includes others. Refers to data from the 2008 local authority elections. For Scottish and Welsh elections this is a percentage of all candidates (constituency and party lists combined).
Assembly Members (AMs). This is accounted for by the fact that Labour continues to place women in winnable constituency seats for the devolved bodies.

Table 2 demonstrates that Liberal Democrat women represent between a fifth and two-fifths of all election candidates – and are much more prevalent in second order elections compared to Westminster (not always the case for Labour or the Conservatives). Again, in most second order elections there was a higher percentage of women candidates than women representatives. The notable exceptions are the Welsh Assembly and the European elections – Liberal Democrat women consisted of 32.9 per cent of Welsh candidates and 50 per cent of AMs, and 29 per cent of European candidates and 55 per cent of MEPs. The data show that whilst Labour has a good track record in the devolved bodies, the Conservatives have performed pitifully in the most recent Welsh Assembly election. In contrast, the Liberal Democrats have been effective in promoting women in Wales but performed poorly in the 2009 election to the Scottish Parliament. Next we go on to examine these elections in more detail, focusing upon the type of competition that different electoral systems generate and the selection practices of the three main parties.

Systemic Factors

As outlined previously, comparative research exploring factors affecting women’s descriptive representation has repeatedly noted the influence of electoral systems. Whilst historically the UK has relied upon simple majority for electing political representatives, constitutional reforms introduced since the late 1990s have resulted in a range of systems in terms of both electoral method (for example, selection of candidate or party list) and seat distribution process. In Table 3 we outline the systems that are currently in place and define these in terms of competition type. Specifically, we distinguish between individualised contests – here there is a ‘winner takes all’ effect – one seat in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Electoral System</th>
<th>Competition Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European elections</td>
<td>Closed regional list</td>
<td>Multi-seat intra-party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/Welsh local elections</td>
<td>Single member plurality but some multi-member wards</td>
<td>Individualised multi-seat/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish local elections</td>
<td>Single transferable vote</td>
<td>Individualised multi-seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish/Welsh elections</td>
<td>Single member plurality with additional members chosen from regional lists</td>
<td>Individualised plus multi-seat intra-party</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Individualised competitions ask voters to distinguish between candidates. The most common example occurs when candidates are competing for a single seat. In elections where the electoral unit contains more than one seat we employ the term ‘individualised multi-seat’. ‘Multi-seat intra-party’ refers to elections where voters select a party rather than a named individual. Candidate success will depend not only on the vote share compared to other parties but also their position on the party list.
each electoral constituency which may encourage parties to play safe with the type of candidate they select. This is contrasted to elections in constituencies with district magnitude of two seats or more, in which parties may seek to elect slates of candidates which resemble different constituent groups (based, for example, on age, sex, ethnicity or factional interest).

Of our second order election systems three types might be considered to be conducive to increase women’s descriptive representation because they require parties to put forward candidate ‘slates’. One of these is the European Parliament PR system, the second is the STV multi-seat system recently employed for Scottish local elections, and the third is the regional list element of elections in the devolved bodies. Yet we return to our previous health warning that PR should be considered a facilitator rather than a guarantor of better female representation. In single-member constituencies the selectorate must choose between individual candidates, and to date this has overwhelmingly favoured men (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Anecdotal evidence repeatedly criticises local party selection processes as being sexist, though the extent to which this has a significant and quantifiable effect is impossible to evidence. PR list electoral systems are perceived to be advantageous for women candidates because parties might be more willing to gender balance their lists in response to both internal and external pressures. Additionally, local elections in multi-seat wards could be argued to offer some of the opportunities of PR in that a party can put forward a ‘group’ of candidates – both men and women.

It has been noted in comparative research that elections which operate via list systems tend to lead to more women being elected as parties see this pool of candidates seeking multiple seats as less ‘risky’ compared to placing more ‘unusual’ candidates in single-member constituencies (Bergh 2009, p. 57). Yet this greater degree of freedom afforded to political parties in Britain appears to have had only a minimal effect in terms of women’s representation. Whilst women make up a greater percentage of those returned in European elections (31.8 per cent in 2009), it is far short of parity. In contrast, early forays with STV have not been beneficial for women in Scottish local elections – the percentage of women candidates declined in 2007 (by 5.2 per cent to 22.5 per cent), whilst the number of female councillors remained reasonably stable (21.6 per cent compared to 21.8 per cent in 2003). Accordingly, who and how the parties select increases in importance.

Political parties have a number of considerations to take into account when selecting candidates (Gallagher and Marsh 1988, Norris and Lovenduski 1995). The first is the pool of individuals seeking selection, and here we can distinguish between two categories: (i) those genuinely seeking electoral office and (ii) paper candidates – those willing to add their name to the ballot paper safe in the knowledge that they will not be elected. In closed party lists candidates languishing at the end of a list are effectively paper candidates, just as opposition candidates standing in safe seats under single-member plurality contests are also often considered paper candidates. A further consideration is a notion of loyalty.
well-established parties in particular will usually have incumbents seeking re-election. There are exceptions – newly created institutions such as the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, though such scenarios rarely occur – but otherwise the opportunities to promote the hitherto under-represented will depend on the retirement of representatives and/or electoral gains made from opponents. When there is no legal fixed term of office for elected representatives parties may find it difficult to persuade those with a track record to stand aside.

We can see, therefore, that the potential for systemic effects in the form of electoral systems is a factor worthy of consideration. Accordingly, the behaviour of candidate selectorates working within their party framework becomes increasingly important to properly understand the ‘rules of the game’ under which selections take place for second order elections. It is for this reason that the more detailed analysis of second order election types are considered by the categories listed in Table 3.

Individualised Elections – Local Elections in England and Wales

Due to the sheer breadth of local elections in terms of frequency, council size and contestation rates, our claims in this section are derived from secondary analysis. In doing so we draw on two sources – research using census data (that is, scrutinised data on candidates and councillors) and contrast with exploratory data gathered by survey – the latter attempting to explain why certain social groups are under-represented in council chambers. What both methodological approaches demonstrate is that women’s representation in local government is complex. For example, semi-structured interviews conducted in two metropolitan district councils in the North of England illustrate that variations appear – over time, between parties, across regions and in the type of local government itself (Yule 2000). Furthermore, Yule offers some historical reasoning for inter-party differences, stating that the women’s movement had a positive impact on Labour groups whilst, in Conservative groups, family background was important for both men and women. Yet, as with so many studies of this type, the emphasis is placed upon women when in office, rather than the candidate–representative relationship which is of concern to us.

To this end we are assisted by three recent surveys of local election candidates (Rallings et al. 2007, 2008, 2009). What emerges here is that attitudes towards women’s under-representation did differ between the sexes – men were more likely to attribute differences to lower levels of interest in politics among women, whilst women were more likely to identify a lack of confidence and the negative image of councillors as contributors to their under-representation. However, there was little to suggest a differential in attitudes towards what parties do. This latter point is reinforced by the 2009 survey in which under-representation is attributed to a lack of women prepared to stand, rather than a lack of effort on behalf of political parties – respondents placed emphasis on the
practical demands on women’s time (that is, family over political career) rather than a lack of interest or confidence.

Turning to the census data on candidates and councillors, Borisyuk et al. (2007) demonstrate a tidal effect in local election candidates in England. In 1964 approximately 16 per cent of local election candidates were women, and this underwent a slow but steady rise, until a four-yearly dip started in 1989 coinciding with county council elections. Borisyuk et al. (2007) note, as we do in the broader context, the need to take into account an incumbency effect. In fact it is difficult to locate clear and robust trends across all local authority types – whilst ‘women candidates in the metropolitan boroughs are more likely to be found fighting difficult-to-win seats and challenging incumbents’ (Borisyuk et al. 2007, p. 188) this is not the case elsewhere. In contrast, there does appear to be a clustering/contagion effect ‘when one party selects a woman its rivals often follow suit’.

In Table 4 we take a snapshot of female representation in local authorities by comparing those held in Wales in 2008 with the 2009 local elections in England, which incorporated county and unitary authorities. The variations between women candidates between parties illustrated in Table 4 is notable – the Green Party had the highest share of women candidates, and women were more likely to be candidates for the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives in Wales, whilst Labour Party women candidates are more prevalent in England. Furthermore, there is a reasonably close correlation between the percentage of women candidates and women councillors in all but one case – the Green Party. The 2009 elections for English authorities were held on the same day as the European elections (see below), and in the latter case women represented a higher percentage of women candidates compared to local elections for most parties listed (the exception being a marginal difference for the Liberal Democrats) – suggesting evidence of an electoral system effect. Indeed, the proportion of women candidates appears to be in decline in English local elections (31 per cent of candidates were women in 2008 and 28 per cent in 2009). Referring again

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wales Candidates</th>
<th>Wales Councillors</th>
<th>England Candidates</th>
<th>England Councillors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaid Cymru</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All candidates</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: University of Plymouth Elections Centre. We are grateful to Mary Shears at the University of Plymouth’s Election Centre for supplying recent data on candidates and councillors.
to candidate survey data (where there is a potential for a margin of error) many local candidates put this down to a supply-side issue, stating personal resistance rather than a political party reluctance, and male survey respondents were just as likely to be ‘paper candidates’ as their female counterparts (Rallings et al. 2009).

This combination of census and survey data, when considered in the light of an individualised electoral system, shows interesting patterns. Despite a steady growth in women candidates in the late twentieth century, there appears to be little recent evidence that women are forging further ahead in local authority representation. There is some evidence of an authority type effect and of clustering – in a head-to-head contest women may prefer to challenge other women. What is notable is the lack of party political strategy – if this did exist we would expect to see this recognised by the candidates themselves. Yet beyond the attention given to under-representation via initiatives such as taskforces as detailed above, none of the major parties adopt any form of consistent equality guarantee for the selection of candidates for local elections. What evidence does emerge is highly localised equality promotion targeting specific groups, for example the Conservative group on Ealing Council held various open evenings to encourage non-politically aligned women to consider standing for the council (John et al. 2007). In individualised contests such as these, parties are unable to manipulate the electoral system to promote under-represented groups, but rather would need to be far more explicit in adopting equality guarantees – a contentious policy. Given that local government is still commonly viewed as a stepping stone to Westminster this could be interpreted as a worrying obstacle.

Mixed Electoral Systems - Devolved Elections

As identified earlier, new legislatures offer a unique opportunity for political parties to campaign with a ‘clean slate’ – there are no incumbents to consider. Table 5 demonstrates that the three elections held to elect the Scottish Parliament have generated reasonable levels of female representation, but maintaining this standard has been problematic. At the 2007 Scottish elections the proportion of women at Holyrood declined by 5 per cent compared to 2003. Labour, with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>MSPs (%)</th>
<th>Change since 1999 (%)</th>
<th>AMs (%)</th>
<th>Change since 1999 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>5 (29)</td>
<td>+2 (+13%)</td>
<td>1 (8)</td>
<td>+1 (+8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>23 (50)</td>
<td>−5 (no change)</td>
<td>16 (62)</td>
<td>+1 (+3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>2 (12)</td>
<td>0 (−0,5%)</td>
<td>3 (50)</td>
<td>0 (no change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNP/PC</td>
<td>12 (25)</td>
<td>−3 (−17%)</td>
<td>7 (46)</td>
<td>+1 (−4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (33)</td>
<td>+1 (+33%)</td>
<td>1 (100)</td>
<td>+1 (+100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43 (33)</td>
<td>−5 (−1%)</td>
<td>28 (45)</td>
<td>+4 (+5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The total number of seats in the Scottish Parliament declined in 2007, hence ‘no change’ for the Liberal Democrats affects the percentage share.
the highest proportion of women MSPs, lost seats which disproportionately affected the overall number. The SNP substantially increased its overall number of MSPs but did not have a sufficient number of well placed women candidates to make up for the decline of the Labour women. Furthermore, the poor performance of the smaller parties, which despite having low numbers of MSPs had a good percentage of women candidates, also contributed to this decline.

Although the Labour Party dropped its use of equality guarantees in the selection of women candidates for the 2007 election, the continuing impact of the policy is still in evidence, with many of the current women MSPs having been first selected under the twinning system, and protected by incumbency. None of the other three main parties adopted any equality guarantees, instead relying upon equality rhetoric and promotion. For example, the Conservative campaign group Women2Win held a successful event at the Scottish party conference ahead of the Scottish elections – with David Cameron urging more women to get involved with the party. The Scottish Women Liberal Democrats held a women-only training event with the national Campaign for Gender Balance in early 2007. The SNP also held women-only training sessions for their candidates (Kenny 2007). This indicates that parties may be able to make equality guarantees more palatable to the sceptical by emphasising the potential long-term benefits of fixed-term strategies. Large scale retirements and/or electoral swings aside, the Labour Party has far outstripped the performance of its main competitors in the Scottish Parliament by taking advantage of equality guarantees.

Turning to the Welsh Assembly, Table 5 indicates that although the number and percentage of women has increased since 1999, this masks a drop from 2003 when the Welsh Assembly had been a sex-balanced institution. The decline can partly be explained by the loss of four Labour seats, including three held by women. In fact, Labour’s seats are overwhelmingly constituency seats (24 out of 26) – so the early adoption of twinning was vital in contributing towards the existing female presence in the Welsh Assembly. Plaid Cymru – which returns most of its women AMs on the regional ballot – reserved the top place on each list for a woman; it won a total of eight regional seats, five women and three men were returned (one woman from five regions, plus three men

| Table 6: Scottish Women Candidates and Councillors 2003 and 2007 (%) |
|-------------------|------|-----|------|-----|
| Cons             | 32   | 23  | 25   | 24  |
| Lab              | 26   | 19  | 19   | 18  |
| LD               | 37   | 33  | 31   | 31  |
| SNP              | 25   | 25  | 22   | 21  |

from the five regions where the party won more than one seat). Thus two Plaid
Cymru women won constituency seats (compared to five men). Here we see
two parties adopting equality guarantees – for different types of seats – but *effec-
tively* so, due to the type of seats in which they have attained most success.

The Conservative Party made electoral advances in Wales in 2007 (increasing
its vote share by 2.4 per cent in the constituencies and by 2.3 per cent on the
regional lists). Winning more constituency seats effectively means that a party
gains less from the regional ‘top ups’. Conservative men topped all the regional
lists, whilst female candidates tended to be either in unwinnable constituency
seats or in third place (or non-existent) on regional lists – hence the poor level
of presence in the National Assembly. The party’s single woman AM represents
a constituency seat, in contrast to the previous Assembly, when their two female
AMs were both elected from regional lists. The message here is that the represen-
tation of women was not a priority in an election in which the Conservative Party
expected to make gains, and just two years after David Cameron had highlighted
the under-representation of women in his leadership acceptance speech. There
was no overall change to the number of seats held by the Liberal Democrats,
 nor to the number and percentage of seats held by women, and no new strategies
were adopted. Again, we can emphasise the importance of ‘new’ legislatures in
facilitating women’s representation. The two ballot system adopted for the Welsh
Assembly has enabled some parties to promote women candidates effectively
and, furthermore, in a way which recognises their electoral strengths (either on
the constituency or the regional list ballot).

**Individualised Elections with Multiple Seats – Scottish Local Elections**

Recent reforms have led to a truly varied experience for Scottish voters. Whilst
MPs are still selected via simple plurality, and MSPs are selected via the two-vote
Additional Member System (AMS), since 2007 the 32 Scottish councils have
been elected via the Single Transferable Vote using three or four seat wards
(1222 seats in total). Clark and Bennie (2008, p. 244) argue that STV ‘has
eased the pressure on party organisations to recruit candidates ... The need for
elaborate efforts to recruit ‘paper’ candidates by parties, while not dying out com-
pletely, is ... less prevalent’.

An advantage of STV, from an elector’s perspective, is that it not only facili-
tates preference between parties but also preference between party candidates.
Therefore, a voter wishing to elect only women can use their preferences accord-
ingly, as long as there are a number of women candidates equal to or greater than
the district magnitude. Whilst the percentage of women candidates declined in
2007 (22.5 per cent compared to 27.7 per cent in 2003), the number of female
councillors remained reasonably stable (21.6 per cent compared to 21.8 per
cent). Baston (2007) demonstrates that those parties with better female candidacy
rates also had better women councillor rates.
What this tends to show is the relative cross-party similarity – women’s status as candidates and councillors is close for all political parties. Interestingly, women candidates appear to be almost as likely to be elected as their male counterparts, regardless of political party affiliation. Of chief interest is that all parties failed to take advantage of the electoral system to adopt equality strategies to promote women’s electoral success. Women candidates were less successful under the old single seat plurality system, but more likely to stand as candidates in the first place. This is an interesting observation which deserves further analysis in future elections of this nature.

Multi-Seat Intra-Party Elections – European Parliament Elections

Three European elections have now taken place under the regional closed party list system, providing a 10 year span by which we can explore the behaviour of political parties in relation to ‘supporting’ women’s descriptive representation. In the 1999 and 2004 elections virtually all parties failed to take advantage of their own retiring MEPs to promote women. This said, it is clear from Table 7 that both the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats (prior to 2009) had taken the most ‘positive action’, whilst Conservative equality rhetoric had failed to materialise into notable female candidate selection, and the electoral success of UKIP served as a hindrance to female representation in general. Party-wise, the ‘winners’ in 2009 were UKIP and the BNP, and while the Labour Party lost support neither the Conservatives nor the Liberal Democrats could make gains from this.

Looking at the selection data it appears then that the Conservative Party has consciously made positive advances, which Childs et al. (2009) put down to a 2005 watershed in approaches to selection following, though not wholly down to, the election of David Cameron as party leader. The use of closed party lists in the European elections may enable a certain amount of ‘gender balancing’

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKIP</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaid Cymru</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNP</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNP</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The number of candidates fielded by the nationalist parties is very low. Plaid Cymru fielded four for each election whilst the SNP fielded 8, 7 and 6.
(by zipping men and women, for example) to take place without controversy or comment.

To what extent can we see a clustering/contagion effect, similar to that noted as occurring in certain local elections? Table 8 illustrates whether clustering occurs in particular regions. We focus on the six parties which presented full slates in every region and who won seats, and include the two regional parties in Scotland and Wales. We can see there is a relatively small variation in the aggregate patterns of where women stood in 2009. In fact, women were more likely to stand for election in the North East, the region with the least seats available. Are there any notable trends when considering party political behaviour?

Women did appear on every Conservative list, but in notably low numbers in the North West and West Midlands whilst faring a little better in London. The only woman to top a list was in Wales. To some extent this reflects patterns of regional variation in the Westminster-targeted A-lists, with female selection being low in Yorkshire and the East Midlands (McIlveen 2009). However, the party adopted a policy for the European elections of placing women directly after a male incumbent on the regional lists. All Labour Party regional party lists demonstrated a fairer male/female balance than was the case for the Conservatives, and in numerous regions it appears that zipping was taking place. For the Liberal Democrats the priority was maintaining a male/female balance which, on aggregate, it achieved. Given our classification of electoral systems we should expect, if all parties were committed to equal representation, female MEPs to be most prevalent in the largest regions – the South East, London and the North West. Women do make up 40 per cent (four) of MEPs in the South East – of these two are Liberal Democrats, one a Green MEP and one a UKIP MEP. In London, all three main parties (and, in addition, the Green Party) have a female MEP – women equate to 50 per cent of MEPs in this

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No. Seats</th>
<th>No. Women Candidates (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7 (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15 (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11 (30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: We include only parties which won seats (i.e. Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Greens, UKIP, BNP and SNP and Plaid Cymru in Scotland and Wales, respectively).
region. In the North West, women are more poorly represented (only 25 per cent of MEPs) – one woman for the Conservatives and one for the Labour Party.

Conclusions and Further Questions

This initial inquiry enabled us to ‘test out’ some expectations and genuine queries regarding political party behaviour in relation to women’s descriptive representation. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt to analyse across second order elections in the UK. Indeed, whilst the concept of ‘second order elections’ may be a useful framework on which to hang explanations of voting behaviour, we wish to understand whether it has the same relevance to understanding party political behaviour in relation to a specific cross-party objective, the promotion of women into winnable electoral positions. The research has allowed us to identify a number of key findings vis-à-vis women’s representation relating to differences between political parties and between election types.

The type of second order election has, to a certain extent, mediated the success of women’s descriptive representation. This is not due to the electoral system per se but to the ways in which certain systems, specifically the additional member system and PR list systems, help facilitate the use of equality guarantees (which are far more controversial in Westminster elections). Overall, women perform best in European elections where parties can most easily operationalise equality strategies to ensure women are placed in winnable positions on the list. Indeed, the second order nature of the election and the regional list system has allowed parties that traditionally oppose equality guarantees on ideological grounds, such as the Liberal Democrats, the ‘freedom’ to experiment with candidate selection procedures. Whilst first order (parliamentary) elections continue to be fought in simple plurality contests, political parties face considerable barriers – incumbency can severely limit the number of winnable seats available to new faces, and the ‘winner takes all’ mentality discourages risk taking. As such, the promotion of under-represented groups may be difficult to sell to local selectors unless equality guarantees are used (and evidence illustrates that these are contentious – as demonstrated in the constituency of Blaenau Gwent in the 2005 General Election).6

By focusing on systemic and contextual factors we find that local elections are worthy of further investigation. Our study to date has relied on existing aggregate data, but there appear to be few systemic or contextual effects. Indeed, the clustering effect of women candidates as noted by Borisyuk et al. (2007) is not something we have identified in other second order elections. In terms of the relative number of women candidates, recent local and European elections demonstrate similar party trends. As these operate under different electoral systems this may indicate something interesting is occurring contextually in which certain political parties are systematically ensuring that women are selected as candidates at least. More research is warranted here on supply and demand.
We cannot escape the fact that party matters. Again the strategies adopted by political parties are in part mediated by the electoral system. This interaction has been particularly successful in the devolved parliaments, where Labour has taken advantage of AMS. However, the absence of strategy as outlined in Table 1 suggests that parties must be proactive in understanding the opportunities presented by different electoral systems if their equality rhetoric is to translate into women winning seats. The debates which have circulated around the larger parties in recent years have recognised that the under-representation of women (in addition to other groups) is problematic, though the reasons and ‘solutions’ are still debated. The use of equality guarantees appears to have enjoyed a relatively short-lived heyday in the very early years of the twenty-first century, and ongoing debates within the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats demonstrate how controversial these remain. Furthermore, the recent success of parties such as UKIP and the BNP demonstrate that women’s descriptive representation is still firmly off the radar for some political parties.

By focusing on women’s representation and second order elections this article has allowed us to explore overlooked aspects of political behaviour. As expected, women have performed relatively well in regional list elections for those parties that have taken advantage of the opportunity they offer, but STV in Scotland has yet to deliver more women councillors. Whilst the devolved assemblies have created new, and reasonably successful, avenues for women to enter political institutions, we can see that parties must play to their strengths in terms of the two different voting systems if they are to gain female representatives. Whilst this exploratory article has sought to ask a different type of question about second order elections, it is clear that further work is needed to analyse how the status of the election has the potential to mediate the political recruitment process.

Note on Authors

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*Corresponding author

Notes

1. Zipping refers to the practice of alternating male and female candidates on party lists – if a party wins two or more seats on a regional list at least one will be female. Twinning involves the pairing of winnable single-member constituencies and guaranteeing that one contest is fought by a woman – a less reliable method than zipping dependent on consistent levels of support across seats to be most effective. The policy was more controversial in Wales than in Scotland (Russell et al. 2002).
2. The initial analysis included by-elections. However, this was excluded from the final analysis because as unique one-off occasions it was difficult to draw comparisons at the aggregate level.

4. The 2008 survey demonstrates that paper candidates were no less likely to be male than female (i.e. women represented a third of paper candidates) (Rallings et al. 2008).


6. The previously safe Labour seat of Blaenau Gwent was lost at the 2005 General Election following the resignation of local party member Peter Law who, having been informed that the seat would select the candidate using a women only shortlist, stood as an independent candidate and won.

References


