

Briefing Paper

Women Represented: The case for statutory quotas in politics

July 2017

Introduction

Despite making up over half of the British population, women remain notably absent from positions of power, particularly in our political institutions. While some progress has been made the pace of change remains unacceptably slow. Our political institutions make decisions about every aspect of our lives and it's reasonable to expect these institutions to reflect the diversity of the communities that they serve.

Evidence from around the world clearly demonstrates that the most effective means of delivering change at pace is the implementation of positive action measures such as statutory quotas. Quotas have successfully driven change in both the private and public sectors.

This paper sets out the case for introducing statutory quotas at all levels of British politics and the measures that can ensure such a move is successful.

1. Where are the women?

- 1.1. Women remain under-represented at all levels of political life in Wales.
- 1.2. Local Government elections in 2017 resulted in just 28% of Councillors being women.¹ This demonstrates little progress since 2012 where 26% of Councillors were women.
- 1.3. At the Assembly level, Wales performs slightly better. Women currently make up just over 40% of AMs. However, among our MPs just 11 out of 40 (28%) are women.
- 1.4. This pattern is seen in other elected posts as well. Across the UK just four out of the sixteen directly elected mayors are women² and seven of the 40 Police and Crime Commissioners are women.

2. The impact of positive action / Delivering change

- 2.1. Evidence shows that the most effective and quickest way of increasing the proportion of women among elected representatives is to implement some form of positive action.
- 2.2. In the UK to date, this is a decision that has been left to political parties. The impact of the Labour Party's All Women Shortlist (AWS) policy is clear. Prior to the 2017 snap General Election women accounted for 21% of

¹ Chwarae Teg *Where are the women in Welsh Local Government? A Diversity Crisis* 2017

² Fawcett Society *The Northern Powerhouse: an analysis of women's representation* 2016

Conservative MPs compared with 43% of Labour MPs.³ A similar picture emerges looking just at Wales, where women make up 52% of Labour AMs compared with 33% of Plaid Cymru AMs, 27% of Conservative AMs and 33% of UKIP AMs.⁴

- 2.3. Internationally the impact of special measures, especially quotas, is clear. A report from the Inter-parliamentary Union concluded that progress on women's representation was not inevitable and required "constant effort, action and will."⁵ The report notes while quotas "do not guarantee a commensurate rise in women's representation" countries that haven't applied them had generally seen fewer changes in the numbers of women elected.⁶
- 2.4. The *Good Parliament* report states that 80% of countries with more than 30% women members of parliament use some kind of quota.⁷
- 2.5. A quota system for local government in Lesotho led to around 53% female representation on councils.⁸ At the national level, where quotas have not been applied, women make up just 23% of representatives.⁹
- 2.6. In 2016, legal gender quotas for candidate selection applied in Ireland which resulted in a 40% increase in the number of female parliamentarians elected.¹⁰ All parties met the 30% threshold for female candidates.¹¹

3. Making quotas a success

- 3.1. There are a number of lessons that can be learnt from international examples of quotas in politics and in relation to women's representation on public and private boards.
- 3.2. Quotas have been most successful when they involve sanctions, effective self-regulation, include targets and deadlines and are accompanied by state endorsed monitoring.¹²
- 3.3. It's important to note that quotas are not a silver bullet and if implemented in isolation the seismic shift required in female representation in British politics will not happen. However, as part of a range of measures that include improving the supply-chain of potential female politicians, addressing structural barriers presented by political institutions and tackling persistent gender stereotypes, sustainable change can be achieved.
- 3.4. Work to develop a diverse pipeline of potential candidates should include initiatives that work directly with women such as training, mentoring and networking, and political parties should ensure that there is effective

³ Chwarae Teg *Response to the Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry – Women in the Commons* 2016

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union *Women in Parliament: 20 years in review* 2015

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Professor Sarah Childs *The Good Parliament* 2016

⁸ Christine O'Byrne *A Woman's Place in Lesotho* 2015

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ LSE Blogs *The 2016 Irish election demonstrated how gender quotas can shift the balance on female representation* Accessed 27/06/2017 <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/03/16/the-2016-irish-election-demonstrated-how-gender-quotas-can-shift-the-balance-on-female-representation/>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² European Women's Lobby *Women on Boards in Europe from a Snail's Pace to a Giant Leap? EWL Report on Progress, Gaps and Good Practice* 2012

- infrastructure in place to ensure that women and other under-represented groups can engage in party structures. Women's networks, conferences and actions to engage younger party members at the local level are important.
- 3.5. Structural barriers should also be identified and addressed. Stereotypical ideas about women in politics must be challenged, selection processes should be reviewed and political institutions should consider issues such as meeting times, remote access and access to parental leave and childcare.
 - 3.6. Alongside this activity, quotas, if applied effectively, can help quicken the pace of change and ensure that women are represented.
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