



The Implementation of Gender Quotas in Britain¹

Judith Squires
Department of Politics, University of Bristol
judith.squires@bris.ac.uk

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Introduction

Britain is currently ranked 49th the Inter Parliamentary Union table of the percentage of women in national parliaments worldwide, with 18 percent women elected to Westminster in 2001 General Election. The newly devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales have achieved significantly higher levels of female representation, with women comprising 39 percent of the Scottish Parliament and 50 of the National Assembly for Wales.

This is a survey of the discourses and decisions pertaining to, and the implementation and consequences of, electoral gender quotas in Britain, including elections to Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales². During this period party-based gender quotas for candidate selection have been deployed in Britain, 1993-6 and 2002 to date, to increase the number of women in Westminster and, from 1999, in the devolved administrations of the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. They have been used most extensively by the Labour Party and, whilst they remain controversial, they have had a significant impact on the number of female representatives elected to these three bodies.

In line with recent comparative research on gender quotas (Dahlerup 2003), the survey will be structured around four issues: the discourses surrounding quotas; the decision-making process leading up to their adoption; the implementation of the quotas; and the consequences of the quotas.

The discursive controversy surrounding gender quotas in the UK are framed by a liberal citizenship model, which is characterized by a philosophical commitment to individualism and often have majoritarian electoral systems that yield two-party systems, one-party cabinets, and executive dominance (see Siim 2000 and Krook,

Squires and Lovenduski, forthcoming). Gender quotas are discursively constructed as one particular solution to the problem of women's under-representation in parliamentary politics. The debate between advocates and critics of gender quotas has focused on whether quotas help realize equality by securing a more proportionate descriptive representation by gender, or whether they stand in opposition to equality understood as fairness and the pursuit of meritocracy.

The decision-making process regarding the adoption or rejection of gender quotas in the UK has been located within the political parties. A key factor motivating the decision to introduce gender quotas was the sustained lobbying of women within the Labour Party, in alliance with women in civil society organizations (such as the Fawcett Society) and the gender machinery (such as the Equal Opportunities Commission). But, significantly, another key factor was the determination of the Labour Party leadership to gain power after a long period out of office, coupled with statistics that indicated the women's vote would be central to electoral success and the assumption that increasing levels of women's representation would increase the Party's appeal to the female electorate.

The implementation of gender quotas initially took the form of a Labour Party policy to require all-women shortlists in half of all winnable seats in the 1997 general election. Following devolution, quota policies – in the form of twinning and zipping – were also adopted by the Scottish and Welsh Labour Parties. The two nationalist parties, the Scottish Nationalist Party and Plaid Cymru, also implemented zipping. Implementation proved difficult in Westminster elections given the majoritarian electoral system that operates with single member constituencies and a first-past-the-post formula for determining electoral success. The policy of all-women shortlists was devised as a way of implementing party-based gender candidate quotas within a majoritarian electoral system. The key challenge to its implementation has proven to be incumbency (the difficulty of displacing sitting MPs) and resistance from constituency selection committees.

Implementation was complicated, but also dramatically facilitated, by the devolution process, which allowed parties to develop different quota systems appropriate to the mixed electoral system introduced in Scotland and Wales. It allowed Scottish and Welsh parties to implement zipping on regional lists. It also allowed for the creation of a new quota strategy appropriate to the newly established assemblies with no incumbent representatives, 'twinning'. Implementation was further complicated by the legal uncertainty surrounding gender quotas following a ruling in 1996 that all-women shortlists contravened equal opportunity employment legislation. This uncertainty was later removed by the passing of the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill in February 2002, which allowed parties to introduce positive action policies without risk of legal challenge.

The consequences of these various party-based measures will be shown to have varied, but significant. Since 1997 Britain has witnessed a dramatic rise in the overall numbers of women present in national legislatures. This increase is due, in large part, to the policies of a single party – the Labour Party, which has gained a large proportion of the overall vote during this period. However, the other major political parties (Conservatives and Liberal Democrats) have neither followed the Labour Party in introducing gender quotas, nor substantially increased the numbers of women elected within their party. Finally, the survey will suggest that constitutional change, in the form of devolution and the establishment of new

administrations, created new political opportunity structures that facilitated particularly high levels of female representation.

1. Discursive Controversies about Gender Quotas in Britain

Gender quotas remain controversial worldwide, yet the specific controversies surrounding gender quotas vary across countries and regions. The discursive controversy surrounding gender quotas in Britain has focused on the extent to which quotas realize or frustrate the pursuit of equality of opportunity in particular and the ideals of liberal citizenship more generally. Perhaps as a result, countries with liberal citizenship models, such as the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, tend towards the adoption of soft quotas and the occasional use of party quotas rather than legal quotas (see Krook, Lovenduski and Squires forthcoming). The liberal citizenship model operates with distinction conceptualizations of representation, equality and gender. It adopts a principle-agent conception of representation, or a 'politics of ideas' (Phillips 1995), rather than a descriptive conception of representation, or a 'politics of presence'; it endorses equal opportunities rather than equality of outcome; and it assumes an abstract individualism that seeks to render sex non-pertinent in the public sphere, rather than to recognize and affirm gendered identities. Recent research indicates that the British public is skeptical about the idea of equal outcomes and is more comfortable with the idea of equal opportunities. They use the language of 'fairness', 'tolerance' and 'having the same chances in life'. (Howard and Tibballs 2003: 7) There is little support for the idea that women, as a group, are unequal in society today and sex inequality was not seen as a priority issue. The concept of feminism was seen virtually unanimously in negative terms as old-fashioned. However many people (and young women in particular) liked the idea of promoting 'women's rights.' (Howard and Tibballs 2003)

Whilst the basic citizenship practices of the British polity operate within this liberal discursive frame, the political parties each have their own doctrines and ethos within this, generating discursive controversies regarding the pursuit of representative gender equality. Given this, the discursive controversies about gender quotas in Britain can best be understood in the context of the competing conceptions of equality, representation and gender held by the main political parties. Parties that embrace the ideal of minimal equality of opportunity (Swift 2001:91-132), including both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, have eschewed the use of gender quotas, choosing to affirm the ideals of meritocracy and individual opportunities. As Ian Duncan Smith, the then leader of the Conservatives, stated: 'All-women shortlists have not been a success for Labour, because instead of getting people who are high quality, what we've actually got in is people who haven't really performed as politicians for the Labour party.' (*The Guardian* 3rd August 2001). Employing similar a discursive frame, the Liberal Democrats rejected a motion at their 2001 conference for all-women shortlists. Delegates argued that the shortlists proposal was 'illiberal and unworkable', depriving local parties of their ability to choose the most able candidate and making women into 'tokens'. As a women from the Lib Dem Youth and Students group argued: 'The proposers are telling me I cannot fulfill my dream of becoming an MP without this motion. They underestimate me.' (*The Guardian* 27th September 2001).

Parties that adopt a more radical conception of equality of opportunity (Swift 2002), such as the Labour Party, have been more willing to adopt gender quotas. The Labour Party has long been characterized by a commitment to equality, though this commitment has always been accompanied by an intra-party debates as to

whether equality should be understood as equality of opportunity, equality of income or equality of regard (see Drucker 1979, pp.45-67). Nonetheless, arguments for positive action measures regarding women's representation were consonant with certain equality discourses that had a clear lineage within the Party. As the Labour Party states, 'We are an inclusive party. Throughout our 100-year history we have worked to ensure that historically excluded groups are embraced and engaged in the structures of our party...' (Labour Party, 2004). This commitment to equality of presence within the Party was manifest in the General Secretary's statement to the 2002 conference: 'My personal ambition is to see equal representation for women at all levels of public office. I believe the party should adopt measures that ensure the selection of more women candidates and if that means all-women shortlists, then that's what we should do.' (*The Guardian* 2nd February 2002)

Another discursive controversy that has emerged more recently focuses on the tensions between gender and racial equality. Since the reintroduction of all-women shortlists in 2002 there have been increasingly fraught debates within the Labour Party as to whether this policy represents an injustice to ethnic minorities within the party. The national coordinator of Operation Black Vote, which aims to increase ethnic minorities' participation in the political process and their representation, argues that: 'Labour's equality agenda shoves blacks and Asians to the back of the queue. Labour's all-women shortlists will be all-white women shortlists.' (*Muslim News*, 25th April 2003) However, the controversy here focuses not on the conception of equality at play, but on the construction of 'gender' as a category uniquely worthy of positive measures. What is under debate here is not the legitimacy of quota policies, but their confinement to women. As another spokesperson for Operation Black Vote stated: 'I think all-black shortlists are the only way to cut to the chase and address the lack of minority candidates,' (BBC News 21st February 2005).

So gender quotas are discursively constructed as one particular solution to the problem of gender inequality in relation to public participation in parliamentary politics, but one that appears to its critics to rely on a problematic conception of equality of outcome that undermines the pursuit of justice as 'fairness' (Wolff 1998). Moreover, concern about the possible essentialism implied by quota policies, coupled with skepticism that there is a link between descriptive and substantive representation, means that arguments for quotas in Britain have tended to focus on a 'justice' argument, rather than arguments that women's interests remain unfulfilled or that democracy is likely to become atrophied (Phillips 1995: 62-3). The justice argument implies that numerically equal representation of women and men in legislatures is itself an indication of parity, regardless of the beliefs of those present or the policies enacted. Given the ongoing discursive controversies surrounding notions of equality, it is unsurprising the gender quotas remain controversial in Britain.

2. The Decisions to Introduce All-Women Shortlists and Twinning

For those advocating gender quotas within the Westminster majoritarian electoral system, all-women shortlists has been the most popular and effective policy. Those working within the mixed electoral systems of the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies have been able to advocate zipping for the regional lists as well as all-women shorts for the constituency seats. In addition, for the first election to the new Assemblies, advocates of gender quotas were able to lobby for 'twinning'. The decision-making process in relation to the adoption of these policies has been constrained by party

ethos, hostility from the party membership and fears of illegality. The main actors behind the decision to introduce quotas were women within the parties supported by women's lobby organizations, and political elites concerned to ensure electoral success by appealing to the female electorate.

2.1 Westminster

Women have campaigned within the Labour Party to increase women's representation in Westminster from the 1970s on. The first important decision was probably that made at the Labour Women's Conference in 1982 to support the campaign to require the inclusion of women on candidate shortlists. Then, in 1987, the Party conference approved a compulsory shortlisting rule (whereby in districts where a woman was nominated, at least one woman would be included on the shortlist). This decision had the support of the trade unions, but not that of the National Executive Committee (NEC) (Brooks, Eagle and Short 1990). Two years later the 1989 Party conference accepted the principle that quotas for internal party posts were the only way to ensure the equal representation of women throughout the party, retaining the 1987 ruling for the selection of candidates (Eagle and Lovenduski 1998).

Women within the Labour Party continued to press for further change, drawing on lessons gained from other social democratic parties within the Nordic countries and Western Europe (Russell 2000, Krook 2005). They actively lobbied at the Party Conferences of 1989, 1990 and 1991 for the introduction of all-women shortlists. This proposal was rejected in 1989, but the 1990 Conference agreed to a target of 50 percent women in the party's elected representatives within ten years or three general elections (Squires 1996). However, it did not recommend any specific strategies for reaching this target, and whilst the NEC encouraged constituencies to adopt all-women shortlists, only one marginal constituency used an all-women shortlist in the run up to the 1992 General Election (Eagle and Lovenduski 1998).

The outcome of the 1992 General Election was pivotal to the decision-making process on gender quotas within the Labour Party in two regards. Firstly, the difficulty of pursuing the stated commitment to increasing the number of female candidates in the absence of a formal quotas policy had become manifest, with more women being selected, but most adopted for marginal seats, resulting in only small increases in numbers of women elected. Secondly, the fourth consecutive electoral defeat for the Labour Party generated intense scrutiny of the Party's potential electoral base. Research indicated that a significant gender gap existed, with women more likely to vote Conservative than men (Perrigo 1996). In these circumstances women within the Party were able to argue for the introduction of all-women shortlists in winnable constituencies (Russell 2003). A policy, drawn up by Clare Short (chair of the NEC Women's Committee) was approved by the party leader and put to the next Party Conference in 1993. The proposal to introduce all-women shortlists in 50 per cent of all vacant and winnable seats was passed, with the support of a wide range of groups, including the Labour Women's Network, Labour Women's Action Committee, several of the trade unions and the party leader (Krook 2005).

Once adopted, the policy received a skeptical and hostile reception, both within sections of the party - with some campaigning to get the policy reserved at the next conference (Eagle and Lovenduski 1998), amongst the other parties and

within the press. The criticisms focused on the injustice of giving women special rather than equal treatment (Squires 1996), the difficulty of implementing the policy at the grassroots level (Lovenduski 1997) and the potential illegality of the policy (Russell 2003). However the Party did persevere in implementing the policy and by January 1996 thirty-five women had been selected under its auspices.

But the concerns about the illegality of the policy appeared well-founded when two male Labour Party members – Jepson and Dyas-Elliot - had their challenge upheld by an industrial tribunal, which ruled that the all-women shortlists policy did contravene Section 13 of the Sex Discrimination Act. Although many advocates of the policy encouraged the Party to appeal the decision, the NEC chose not to do so. As a result, the Jepson Ruling led to widespread anxiety about the use of gender quotas and left many hoping that their implementation in the run up to the 1997 Election would have been sufficient to turn the tide and that the Party could once again return to its previous selection procedures.

The noteworthy factors in relation to the decision to introduce all-women shortlists are fourfold. Firstly, the decision to introduce all-women shortlists was taken within the Labour Party and was subject to intense discussion within the Party, but received relatively little attention more widely amongst the other parties or the general public. Secondly, the decision followed a long and sustained period of active campaigning on the part of various women's organizations, mainly within the Party. Thirdly, the decision came at a point in time when the Party perceived there to be strategic electoral gains to be had from acceding to the pressure of those campaigning for all-women shortlists within the Party. Finally, once taken the decision remained unpopular with large sections of the party, and with much of the press. In short, the decision was taken by a reluctant party in the face of hard-fought campaigning by women, and in pursuit of electoral gain. It was swiftly dropped when challenged.

The NEC decision in July 2002 to re-introduce all-women shortlists, was by contrast far less controversial. The constituencies involved in campaigning for the reintroduction of positive measures included a wider range of gender equality organizations, reflecting both the development of gender machinery between 1997 and 2002 and a more public campaign for women's increased participation in public life. Following the 1997 General Election women's lobby groups, notably the Fawcett Society and the Equal Opportunities Commission, launched campaigns focusing on 'women in public life'. Both organisations conducted research that made clear the extent of discrimination within parties in the candidate selection process (Fawcett 2001). They also produced targeted briefings and reports, which showed the positive measures were widely and successfully employed elsewhere (Squires and Wickham-Jones 2001) and lobbied effectively for the reintroduction of quotas.

In light of this continued campaigning, the Labour Government introduced *The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill* in October 2001, which gained Royal Assent on 26th February 2002, after receiving cross-party support in Parliament. The Act allows political parties the freedom to introduce positive measures, such as quotas, when selecting candidates for Parliament, local government and the devolved assemblies, without risk of legal challenge. It amends the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 to provide that Parts II to IV (or 3 to 5 of the Order) will not apply to measures adopted by a party to reduce inequality in the numbers of men and women elected as its candidates. The Act has a 'sunset clause', so that the provisions expire at the end of 2015. This should allow for at least three elections to have taken place in each

body to which the legislation applies. The Bill's remit includes elections for Westminster, the European Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales and local government elections, although it excludes election for the Mayor of London and other directly elected Mayors (Childs 2002b).

The Bill received front bench cross-party support in the Commons, and it passed without a division either at Second or Third Reading in the Commons. In the Lords there was similarly no division and the Bill was debated only at Second Reading. The consensus in support of this Bill may reflect the Bill's permissive rather than prescriptive nature. As Sarah Childs suggests, the issue of positive action for candidate selection, which had previously engendered both inter- and intra-party debate, was side-stepped because the permissive formulation of the Bill required only that MPs be committed to reducing inequality in the numbers of men and women elected (Childs 2002a). However, it may also represent a general cultural shift amongst Parliamentarians towards accepting positive discrimination policies at party level in relation to candidate selection. In arguing for the Bill, many MPs and Peers, from all parties, stated that women should be present in the House of Commons in greater, if not proportionate, numbers. Even the three women MPs who spoke against the Bill at Second Reading in the Commons supported this principle (Childs 2002a: 91).

This legislative reform means that Labour has been able to revert to the kind of strategy it adopted before the 1997 general election. It signals a return to a policy of positive action about which many of its senior figures, including Tony Blair, were once lukewarm.

2.2 The Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales

The decision to adopt gender quota policies in Britain is further complicated, and dramatically shaped, by the devolution process that was underway during this period. The establishment of the new assemblies in Scotland and Wales created new parliamentary arenas, new electoral systems, and new political opportunities for women.

The campaign for a Scottish Assembly began in the 1980s, with the first Scottish Constitutional Convention (SCC) meeting in 1989. The demand for the equal representation of women in any future government for Scotland was made right from the outset, and the Scottish Women's Co-ordination Group was established in 1992 to lobby political parties in the SCC to consider electoral systems that would ensure the equal representation of women (Brown 2001). Following the successful referendum on devolution, held in September 1997, a mixed electoral system was proposed (with 73 members being elected from single-member constituencies and 56 from party lists).

The Scottish Labour Party had committed in 1990 to adopting positive action measures in any future Scottish elections (Brown 2001). Following the Jepson ruling it sought to develop measures other than all-women shortlists. 'Twinning', the new proposed measure, entailed pairing two constituencies according to geography and winnability, then selecting one male and one female candidate for each. The proposal was intended to avoid legal challenge of all-women shortlist on the basis that men would not be excluded from selection procedures. The Scottish Labour Party agreed to adopt this policy for the 1999 election on a one-off basis, arguing that incumbency in subsequent elections would make the policy unsustainable.

Other political parties in Scotland embraced the principle of equal representation, but rejected explicit quota proposals. Whilst the Scottish National Party women's organization proposed a policy of 'zipping' for the party lists, this proposal was defeated at the party conference in 1998 on the grounds that it ran counter to the party's commitment to 'merit'. Similarly, the membership of the Scottish Liberal Democrats proved hostile to measures considered 'illiberal' (Russell, Mackay and McAllister 2002), with delegates to the 1998 party conference rejecting the proposal for 'zipping' on party lists, but approving a balanced shortlist provision in its place.

The debates about women's representation in the context of devolution for Wales took place slightly later than, and drew upon, those in Scotland. Following the successful referendum on devolution in Wales in September 1997, a mixed electoral system was also proposed (with 40 members being elected from single-member constituencies and 20 from party lists) (Channey 2003). In Wales, as in Scotland, most of the political parties considered adopting positive measures to ensure the equal representation of women, with the Welsh Labour Party and Plaid Cymru ultimately deciding to do so.

A proposal that the Welsh Labour Party adopt the twinning policy developed by the Scottish Labour Party initially met with strong hostility from the Welsh leadership, but was passed by a narrow margin at the Welsh Party conference in 1998 (Russell, Mackay and McAllister 2002). Plaid Cymru rejected twinning, but endorsed 'zipping' on regional lists, with women placed first (Bradbury et al 2000). The Welsh Liberal Democrats and Conservative Party again emphasized merit, with the Liberal Democrats endorsing balanced shortlists and the Conservatives declining to adopt any positive measures.

It is striking that there was a high degree of similarity in the decision-making stage across the three assemblies. In all three the Conservatives refused positive measures, and the Liberal Democrats adopted only balanced shortlists. The Labour Party in Westminster, Scotland and Wales adopted the strongest party quotas in the form of either all-women shortlists or its nearest post-Jepson equivalent, twinning. In all cases the proposals for positive measures came from women within the party, often with support from the party leadership, meeting various degrees of opposition from other members within the party.

3. Implementing Quotas: All-Women Shortlists, Twinning and Zipping

Political parties in the United Kingdom have employed three kinds of strategy to increase the level of female representation: rhetorical (a commitment to some form of change), affirmative action (practices to help selection such as training) and positive measures (such as the use of all-women shortlists, zipping and twinning).

3.1 Westminster

To date the Conservatives have relied upon rhetorical strategies; the Liberal Democrats have employed rhetorical strategies, some affirmative action and a limited use of positive measures (short-listing quotas). Labour has employed all three strategies: for more than a decade it has advocated measures to increase the representation of women.

The affirmative action strategies employed by the Labour Party have included the provision of training sessions and mentoring schemes for women. The positive measures employed by Labour have included internal party quotas and candidate quotas for Westminster selections 1993-96. Only Labour has used candidate quotas in elections to Westminster. Other parties (notably the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru) have adopted quotas at an earlier stage in the selection process, most commonly short-listing.

Between 1993 and 1996, Labour implemented its all-women shortlists policy, though the policy remained controversial and generated some opposition at a grassroots level. Whilst the dramatic rise in the number of women in Westminster was widely celebrated amongst those who had long campaigned for women's greater representation in the national legislature, it marked the beginning rather than the end of a longer process of cultural and institutional change in relation to women's representation in Britain. The period since 1997 has seen many significant developments, many - but not all - of which are positive.

Following the abandonment of the women-only-shortlists policy in 1996 Labour returned to the kind of measure it had used between 1987 and 1992. For the 1997-2001 round of Westminster parliamentary selections, the party insisted on equal numbers of men and women on parliamentary shortlists (and at least two of each). Although the Liberal Democrats again used shortlisting quotas, women replaced none of their retiring MPs. Twenty-five Conservative MPs stood down, including one woman. Rejecting measures of positive discrimination the party adopted twenty-five men.

Subsequent to the passage of the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act in 2002 the Labour Party reaffirmed its commitment to all-women shortlists in at least half of all seats in which incumbents were retiring. Constituencies were asked to volunteer for an all-women shortlist, though the NEC has been given authority to impose all-women shortlists on constituencies where necessary in order to reach the party target of electing a minimum of 35 percent women (Childs 2004). Although the Act sparked off debates within the other parties concerning positive measures, neither the Liberal Democrats nor the Conservatives seem likely to adopt candidate quotas in the near future. The Conservatives have, however, acknowledged their difficulties in selecting women for Parliament and their selection procedures have been revised (Guardian, 22 January 2003), though they have eschewed the top-down approach of the Labour Party and are offering their local associations a choice in the mechanisms used for the selection of their candidates. The Liberal Democrats are reviewing the processes by which parliamentary candidates are selected, though the implementation of quotas in relation to candidate selection is made difficult both by the party structure, which is Federal, and by the party ethos, which favours equal opportunities and individual merit. Their Gender Balance Task Force is pursuing rhetorical and affirmative action strategies to increase the number of women selected by the party (Fawcett Society 2004b).

3.2 The Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales

The introduction of systems involving proportional representation for elections to the newly devolved Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales obliged participating parties to adopt a list system. Given comparative research, which indicates that PR systems facilitate higher levels of women's representation than either mixed or majoritarian systems, it might have been expected that the

deployment of lists would boost the representation of women as it has done in many European countries. However in the elections to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales to date the impact of PR has proved to be disappointing. In both Scotland and Wales higher percentages of female candidates were returned for the constituencies than for the regional lists. The explanation for this lies in the fact that some of the parties winning seats for the regions did not place women sufficiently advantageously on their lists. Had Labour not had a strategy of twinning in place for the majoritarian aspect of the electoral system far fewer women would have been elected to the two bodies. The Labour Party adopted the policy of twinning for the 1999 elections on a one-off basis. Given that these were the first elections to be held to these bodies, Labour was able to implement the policy in a context where there were no sitting MSPs or AMs. Twinning becomes harder where only a fraction of a party's representatives are standing down and was therefore not used in the 2003 elections.

Although it did not employ twinning for the 2003 election, Welsh Labour did run all-women shortlists in six constituency seats. Plaid Cymru applied zipping to the regional lists. Whilst the Welsh Liberal Democrats took no official positive action, the party was proactive in encouraging women candidates. The Welsh Conservatives operated no formal mechanism but women tended to be placed towards the middle of regional lists.

4. The Consequences of All-Women Shortlists, Zipping and Twinning

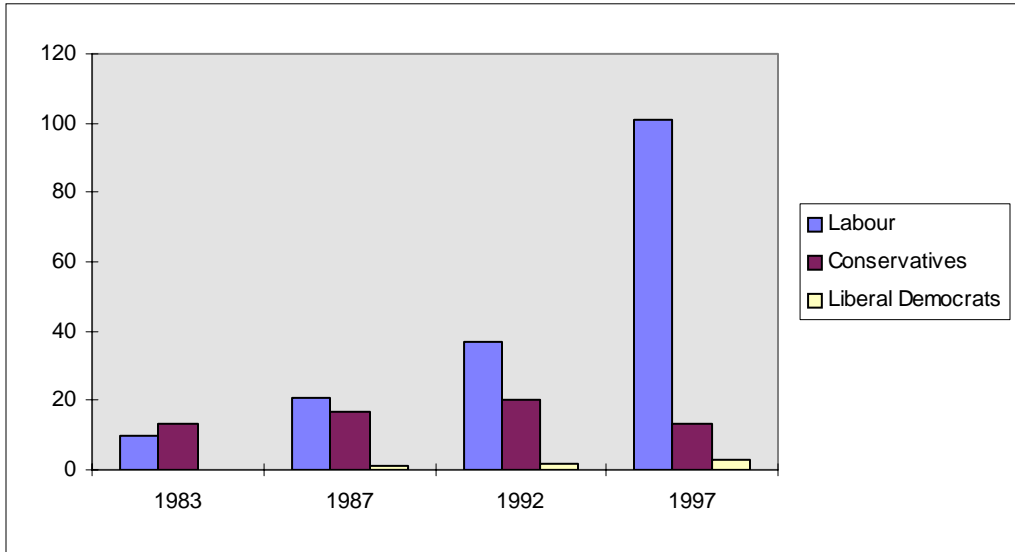
The implementation of all-women shortlists had a positive impact on the number of women in Westminster, resulting in a significant increase in the proportion of women in the House in 1997. Following the abandonment of this policy, the proportion of women fell slightly in 2001. The implementation of twinning and, to a lesser extent zipping, had a dramatic affect on the first elections to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales, resulting in much higher levels of female representation than have ever been achieved in Westminster. These high levels rose again in the subsequent 2003 elections, in which zipping, but not twinning, was implemented. This reveals that although very similar discursive controversies framed quotas in Scotland and Wales as in Westminster, and whilst very similar decision-making processes took place with the parties across these polities, the consequences of the policies were significantly difference, with the new Assembly gaining more substantially highly levels of female representation than Westminster. This suggests that the level of incumbency is pivotal in determining the impact of quota policies.

4.1 Westminster

In May 1997 the number of women elected to the House of Commons increased dramatically: the proportion of women in Westminster rose from 9.2 per cent to 18.2 per cent.

A brief glance at the numbers of women elected to each of the main political parties in the general elections of 1983-1997 reveals that this increase was due to the rise in the number of female Labour MPs. The proportion of female Labour MPs, as a percentage of the total number of Labour MPs, rose steadily between 1983 and 1992 and then dramatically between 1992 and 1997. This relative increase in female Labour MPs was a direct result of its adoption of all-women shortlist 1993-1996. This, coupled with the landslide Labour victory in 1997, explains the significant rise in women in Westminster following the 1997 general election.

Table 1: Women MPs of the three main parties 1983-97



Source: *'Women in Politics'*, briefing produced by Rachel McCollin, National Women's Officer, The Labour Party, September 2000.

In June 2001, the proportion of women in parliament remained stuck at under twenty per cent, declining slightly in response to a small fall in the number of female MPs. With the dropping of the all-women shortlists policy, the progress of 1997 (and the slow advancement of earlier elections in 1987 and 1992) came to a halt. In total, 118 women were elected to Westminster at the 2001 general election, a ratio of 17.9 per cent. June 2001 marked the first general election since 1979 at which the number of women MPs fell. Although this fall was small, it indicated that significant barriers to the selection and election of women remained.

Table 2: The number of women MPs from the three main parties elected at the last five general elections

	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001
Labour	209	229	271	418	412
women	10	21	37	101	95
% of total	4.8%	9.2%	13.7%	24.2%	23.1%
Conservative	397	376	336	165	166
women	13	17	20	13	14
% of total	3.3%	4.5%	6.0%	7.8%	8.4%
Lib. Dem.	23*	22**	20	46	52
women	0	1	2	3	5
% of total	0%	4.5%	10%	6.5%	9.6%
Other	21	23	24	30	29
women	0	2	3	3	4
% of total	0%	8.7%	12.5%	10%	13.8%
All MPs	650	650	651	659	659
women	23	41	60	120	118
% of total	3.5%	6.3%	9.2%	18.2%	17.9%

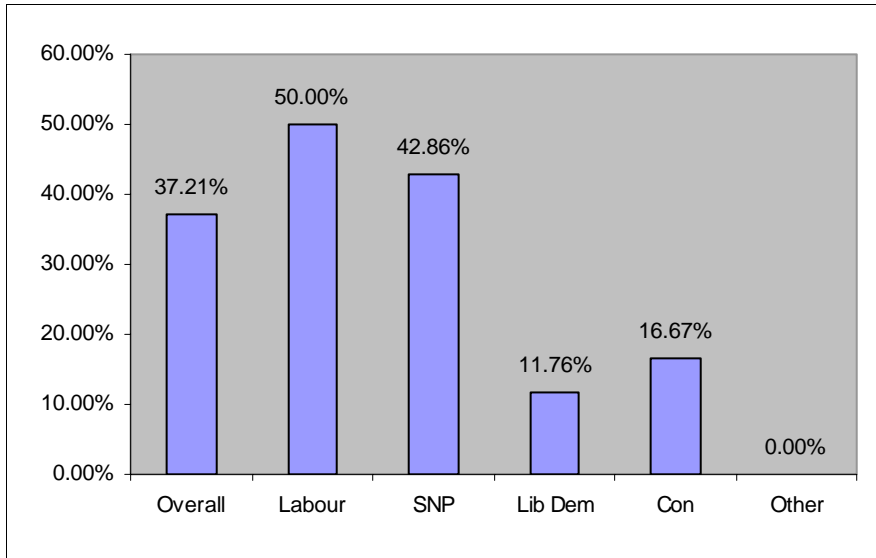
The positive action measure that the Labour Party reverted to following the dropping of all-women shortlists (equal numbers of men and women on parliamentary shortlists) resulted in very few female MPs being selected. Only 10.3 per cent of women were selected for vacancies in Labour held seats in 2001. This level was below that of 1997 (when the all women short-lists policy was in place): it also falls below the level achieved in 1992 and 1987. The low proportion of women selected to fight Labour held seats in 2001 indicated that the notion that all women shortlists would reform decisively the party's culture in one parliament had been hopelessly optimistic. It became clear that long-term policies of positive discrimination needed to be in place if the level of female representation was to be increased on a sustained basis. The abandonment of the policy of all-women-shortlists clearly had a detrimental affect on the upward trend in the percentage of female MPs elected for the Labour Party. Rhetorical strategies and positive discrimination strategies in the form of short-listing quotas adopted by all parties in the run up to 2001 did not have the dramatic impact of all-women shortlists.

Indications regarding the likely proportion of women in the 2005 General Election, based on candidates selected to date, suggest that the Conservatives are unlikely to increase their proportion of female MPs (Fawcett Society 2004a). The Liberal Democrats have also selected relatively few women for target seats (Fawcett Society 2004b) and, as three of the six sitting women Liberal Democrat MPs are in very vulnerable seats (Fawcett Society 2004b), the party is unlikely to improve its proportion of female MPs in the coming election, and could see it fall dramatically. The Labour Party is implementing all-women shortlists in at least 50 per cent of the seats in every region where the sitting Labour MP is retiring. The success of this policy will depend on the willingness of the constituencies to co-operate, and on the extent to which the NEC acts to implement the policy if the constituencies prove reluctant. Overall, research suggests that the 2005 General Election will see, at best, a continuation of the current levels of women MPs, with a decline if there is a big swing away from Labour.

4.2 The Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales

The first election to the Scottish parliament in May 1999, using a mixed electoral system, led to a proportion of 37.2 per cent women Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). Of these, 30 were elected for constituencies (41.1 per cent) and 18 for the regional lists (32.1 per cent). Women comprised 28 out of 56 members of the Labour group (50 per cent), fifteen out of 35 members of the Scottish National group (42.9 per cent), three out of 18 Conservatives (16.7 per cent) and two out of 17 Liberal Democrats (11.8 per cent).

Table 3: % Women elected to the Scottish Parliament in 1999



Following the 1st May 2003 election the number of female MSPs increased slightly to 51 (39 per cent), of which 30 were elected for constituencies and 21 for the regional lists. Women comprised 28 out of 50 of the Labour group (56 per cent), nine out of 27 members of the Scottish National group (33 per cent), four out of 18 Conservatives (22 per cent) and two out of 17 Liberal Democrats (12 per cent). There were also increased numbers of female MSPs for the Scottish Green Party and Scottish Socialist Party. As in 1999, women made more gains in the constituency seats than in the List seats. Only the Labour Party and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) used positive measures to increase the proportion of female candidates.

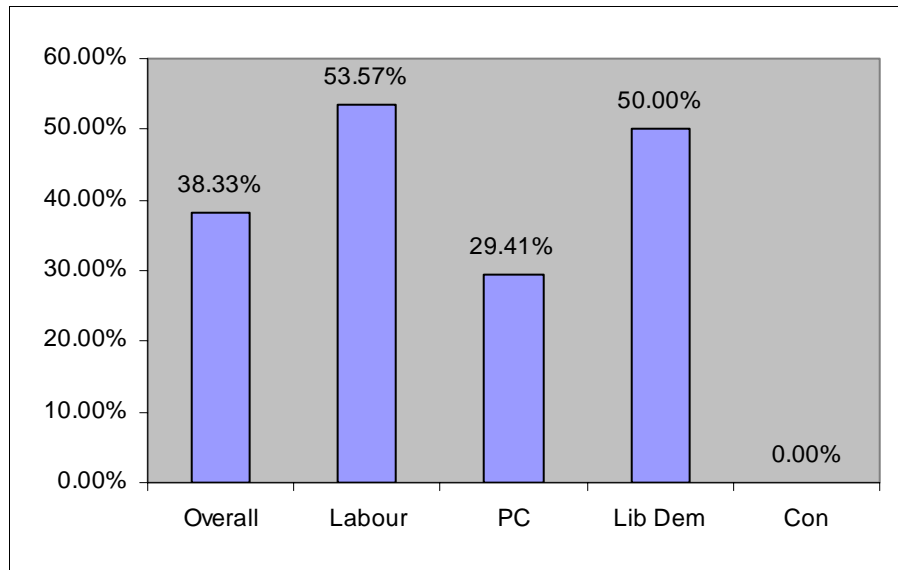
Table 4: Scottish Parliament election results by gender and party, 2003

Party	Constituency women	Constituency men	Regional women	Regional men	% Women
Labour	26	20	2	2	56
SNP	2	6	7	12	33
Conservative	0	2	4	12	22
Liberal Democrat	1	11	1	4	12
Other	1	1	7	6	53
Total	30	40	21	36	39

Source: Modified version of a table produced by Centre for the Advancement of Women: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/cawp/UKhtmls/AM.htm>

The first elections to the National Assembly for Wales in May 1999 returned 24 out of 60 Assembly Members (AMs). As with the Scottish Parliament candidates were elected to constituencies and by regional lists. Women comprised 47.5 per cent of those elected to constituency seats and 25.0 per cent of those elected by the regional list. Women comprised 16 out of 28 members of the Labour group (57.1 per cent), six out of 17 members of Plaid Cymru (35.3 per cent), none of the nine Conservatives (0.0 per cent) and three out of 6 Liberal Democrats (50 per cent).

Table 5: % Women elected to the National Assembly for Wales in 1999



Following the 1st May 2003 election the number of female AMs increased to 30 out of 60, 50 per cent. Women comprised 19 out of 30 members of the Labour group (63 per cent). The Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru both returned 50 per cent women. The Conservatives, who struggled to select women in winnable seats, also returned two female AMs of their 11 assembly members (18 per cent). That the Fawcett Society could celebrate the fact that 'Wales is now world leader on equal representation' (*The Guardian* 3rd May, 2003) is particularly surprising given that until 1997, Wales had only ever had four women MPs.

Table 6: National Assembly for Wales election results by gender and party, 2003

Party	Constituency women AMs	Constituency men AMs	Regional women AMs	Regional men AMs	% Women
Labour	19	11	0	0	63
Plaid Cymru	1	4	5	2	50
Liberal Democrat	2	1	1	2	50

Conservative	0	1	2	8	18
Other	0	1	0	0	0
Total	22	18	8	12	50

Source: Centre for the Advancement of Women:

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/cawp/UKhtmls/AM.htm>

In other words, although the Scottish and Welsh Labour Parties did not implement twinning this these second elections, and although many of the other parties rejected positive measures, the proportion of women in both assemblies rose in 2003 relative to 1999: from 37 per cent to 39 per cent in Scotland, and from 40 percent to 50 percent in Wales. This increase was a product of high levels of female incumbency plus increases in the regional lists seats.

4.3 Other Consequences

The increasing proportion of women in the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales stood in marked contrast to its fall in Westminster in 2001 following the abandonment of the all-women shortlists policy. What appeared to make the difference was the adoption, by the Scottish and Welsh Labour Parties in particular of positive measures. In other words the elections to the devolved assemblies showed again that positive measures do work.

However, it nonetheless worth noting that although intensive lobbying by women's groups led to high numbers of women being elected in the new Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales, not a single one of these was an ethnic minority representative. In Westminster there are only two black female MPs. Moreover, the recent debates about the need to increase the level of female representation with Westminster paid little attention to the issue of ethnic minority representation. During parliamentary debates about the introduction of the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Bill the issue of the representation of ethnic minorities was regarded as of a different nature to the question of women's representation (Childs, 2002). It was suggested that devising mechanisms to ensure the (s)election of ethnic minority MPs is more problematic than it is for women (for example, defining who is 'black') and that there are large swathes of the UK where the minority ethnic populations are too low to warrant representation. Amongst widespread media debate that all-women shortlists are not delivering for ethnic minority women (*The Guardian*, February 25th 2005), Labour Party went against its all-women shortlist in March 2005 policy in imposing an all-black shortlist (two male and two female) on the constituency of Brent South, where a black MP is stepping down (*The Guardian* 21st March 2005). Critics of Labour's all-women shortlist policy have also include representatives of gay rights organizations, who note that not a single openly lesbian candidate has been selected in a winnable seat under the system (Summerskill, 2005).

Finally, in terms of surveying the consequences of quota policies, it is worth commenting briefly on the perceived 'success' of those women elected under quota policies. Here it is striking that whereas campaigns to transform Westminster to make it more women-friendly have largely come to nothing to date, the Scottish

Parliament and National Assembly for Wales manifest clearer signs that female parliamentarians are having a discernible effect.

Research into whether women representatives are more likely to act for women than male representatives, based on the 101 Labour women MPs elected to Westminster in 1997, has been ambivalent on the connection between descriptive and substantive representation. One study found that these female MPs had been more loyal to the Blair government than their male counterparts, with the voting records of the new intake Labour women MPs demonstrating that they voted disproportionately with the government (Cowley 1999). This finding was taken to imply that women had not 'made a difference'. Another study found that the female MPs themselves consider that they have substantively represented women since their election. The women MPs felt that their presence in Parliament had enabled the articulation of a feminized agenda in parliamentary debates, in select committees and in the Parliamentary Labour Party's women's group (Childs 2001, 2004). However, it is probably fair to say that this perception was not widely shared amongst the press or public, who remain skeptical about the impact of 'Blair's Babes'.

By contrast the achievements of the women in the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies have been perceived to be more impressive, leading researchers to suggest that the process of devolution has resulted not only in the re-negotiation of powers between centre and sub-state nation, but also 'in the redistribution of political power between the sexes.' (Mackay, Myers and Brown 2003: 84) The differential impact of women in the devolved assembly vis-à-vis that of women in Westminster may be explained by 'critical mass', but it also symptomatic of the active role women played in Scotland and Wales in shaping constitutional change. As Mackay, Myers and Brown make clear, 'a coalition of women's organizations, grassroots activists, female trade unionists, party women, key insiders and gender experts' lobbied for a role in shaping a 'women-friendly' Scottish Parliament that would 'counteract the traditional masculinist biases of political institutions.' (Mackay, Myers and Brown 2003: 85) This suggests that the high proportion of female representatives in the devolved assemblies may be part of a wider cultural shift to a new, more inclusive, politics.

Conclusion

Whilst party-based gender quotas have proven to be successful in terms of increasing the levels of female representation in Westminster, and securing high proportions of women in the new devolved administrations, they have remained controversial. Many parties remain unwilling to adopt all-women shortlists or zipping.

Prior to 1997 the single most significant factor affecting the level of female representation in British politics was the adoption by the Labour Party of all-women shortlists. Developments subsequent to the 1997 General Election suggest that important factors in the struggle to increase the representation of women in Britain include: the new political opportunity structures created by devolution and the lessons these generate; the role of female parliamentarians in articulating changed normative ideals in the three assemblies; women's lobby groups providing data and arguments to support these parliamentarians; and finally legislative change in the form of the Act allowing political parties to adopt positive measures.

The dramatic rise in the number of women in Westminster in 1997 was largely a product of four factors: the continual lobbying by women within the Labour Party for the introduction of positive measures; the decision taken by the Labour Party in 1993 to introduce all-women shortlists; the successful implementation of this policy between 1993-6; and the landslide victory of Labour in the 1997 General Election. This signals the central importance of political parties in any explanation of the changing number of women in Westminster.

The high numbers of women elected to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales was again a product of four factors: the effective lobbying of women, particularly in Scotland, to ensure that the electoral system adopted was favourable to strategies for equal representation; the continued lobbying within the parties to introduce positive measures; the decision taken by the Scottish and Welsh Labour Parties in 1998 to adopt a twinning policy for the first elections to the new assemblies coupled with the decision taken by the two nationalist parties to implement zipping on regional lists; the high proportion of the vote going to parties adopting positive measures.

As a result of the adoption and effective implementation of these party quotas the number of women elected to the three assemblies under consideration has definitely increased. However, it is clear that the changes remain located within particular parties, with little evidence that the other parties intend to adopt quotas in the near future. Moreover, the Labour Party remains committed to all-women shortlists as a temporary measure only.

The policy of all-women shortlists has proven to be an effective measure for increasing women's representation within a single-member constituency majoritarian political system and could be adopted by parties in other countries working within similar political systems. The policy of twinning, devised and implemented for the first time in the Scottish and Welsh elections of 1999, proved to be an extremely effective measure for securing high levels of female representation in new parliamentary assemblies. This policy has a narrower applicability, but highlights the effectiveness of devising and implementing quota policies for elections establishing new parliaments.

Endnotes

¹ Many thanks to Mona Lena Krook, Sarah Childs and Mark Wickham-Jones for their help in providing data and ideas that have been incorporated into this report.

² Britain comprises England, Scotland and Wales. The United Kingdom comprises Britain and Northern Ireland. Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998 will not be considered in this survey. No parties adopted candidate gender quotas in this election. The proportion of women elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998 was 13 percent. The Assembly is currently suspended.

*Liberals and SDP combined

** SDP Liberal Alliance

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