

Shopping List of Measures for Parties

What are the options for Parties to increase the number of female candidates?

All-Women Shortlists (AWS) limits the candidate who can stand for selection by a party in a particular constituency to being only women

Twinning is where two constituencies select candidates jointly, with the requirement that one candidate is a man and one candidate a woman.

Zippering is used in closed party lists, such as in the Euro elections or the 'top-up' regional lists in the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. Selections guarantee that men and women candidates alternate on the list. The lists can be adapted to increase positive action: for example it is possible to guarantee that a woman will be top of the list, with candidates alternating afterwards according to the vote gained from party members.

Where have they been used and to what effect?

All Women Shortlists

In 1997 contributed to influx of women MPs. In 2005, little difference due to Labour losses but of Labour's 40 new MPs, 26 were women, 23 of whom had been selected through AWS.

David Cameron has announced his support for AWS if softer measures do not work, and Nick Clegg said he was not 'theologically opposed' to the policy as a short-term measure but thought it unsustainable in the long run.

Twinning was adopted by Labour for the FPTP constituency element of the AMS system in Scottish and Welsh elections, from 1999-2007, but was dropped for 2011. The Labour party accounts for the greater part of gender parity in both institutions as a result, which reached a peak of 50% in 2003 in the Welsh Assembly and 39.5% in 2003 in the Scottish Parliament.

Zippering is used by the Liberal Democrats in European elections, alternating the party list between a man and woman.

A stronger version of zippering has been used by Plaid Cymru and Labour in the regional list element of Welsh Assembly election, and by Labour in Scottish Parliament Elections, which required that the candidate at the top of the list be a woman. This was changed by Plaid Cymru to a zippering policy of alternating between a man and a woman for 2011.

In the 2011 Welsh assembly Elections the Conservatives pursued a weaker variant where the top vacant (i.e. excluding incumbents) list seat was to be given to a woman or BME candidate.

Softer Measures

Balanced Selection Lists requires that a balanced slate of candidates is shortlisted for selection by their party. However, the choice of candidate is not required to follow gender parity. It was used by Labour and the Liberal Democrats in the 2001 UK General Election.

Training and Support is now often available; organisations such as Women Making a Difference in Wales, Conservatives' Women2Win, Labour Women's Network and the Liberal Democrats Campaign for Gender Balance, give additional support and training to female candidates.