1. What evidence is there about the impact of district magnitude of electoral areas on women’s representation?

There is substantial evidence to suggest district magnitude is a primary factor in promoting gender equality, although other factors like proportionality and gender quotas also play a significant role.

A series of academic studies since the 1980s have shown that more women have been elected to parliaments through proportional systems.[1] As Pippa Norris puts it:

“Within proportional electoral systems, the mean district magnitude has commonly been found to be a particularly important factor, with more women usually elected from systems using large multimember constituencies.”

The Canadian parliament recently provided a useful overview of electoral systems and gender, showing how better representation is linked to PR or mixed systems (9 of the 10 parliaments with best gender parity use mixed or PR systems), [which can be found here](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/bdp-lop/bp/YM32-2-2016-30-eng.pdf).

The correlation of proportional systems to better gender equality is strong and has been consistently illustrated in academic literature.

However, there is strong variation in the representation of women in parliament within each ‘family’ of electoral system (‘families’ are [proportional; mixed; majoritarian](http://electoral-reform.org.uk/voting-systems)), which Pippa Norris links to the following ‘intervening conditions’:

- Average district magnitude (the mean number of candidates per district);

- Levels of proportionality;

- The use of statutory and voluntary gender quotas;

- Party ideologies (with parties on the left found to be generally more sympathetic towards gender equality);

- The type of party organization.[2]

District magnitude therefore has an important effect on gender (due to the incentive it provides for parties to select a ‘balanced ticket’) within wider mixed and proportional systems, but is not in and of itself a guarantor of gender balance. Proportional systems with larger district magnitudes can be seen as facilitators to better gender balance rather than a guarantor in themselves.

1. Is there evidence to suggest there is a minimum district magnitude to (a) achieve proportionality and (b) achieve equal representation of men and women?

Prescribing for achieving proportionality through district magnitude is difficult, as it interacts with the wider electoral and party system. Some political scientists advocate an election with a Gallagher Index of less than 10 as proportional, but this is not a hard and fast rule.

Clearly, the largest number of seats are available in a proportional system, the more proportional that system is – so with a very large district magnitude national list as in Israel, proportionality is more or less guaranteed (although in this particular case, the benefit is counterbalanced by the loss of individual mandate, constituency link and so on).

While there are clearly more proportional systems than others, how proportionality works in a particular context interacts with the wider party system. For example, new actors may have greater impact on some parties than others when they enter the party system depending on parties’ strength so it is difficult to be prescriptive.

In Wales, UKIP’s strong showing in 2016 was always likely to be reflected on the regional list rather than the constituency. As such, UKIP’s entry into the Assembly had the largest impact on parties other than Labour. This is due to Labour’s continued dominance on the constituency seats and the geographic distribution of party support within an AMS system that is semi-proportional. UKIP’s performance may have had a different impact had a different electoral system been in place.

It is difficult to say that there is a ‘minimum’ district magnitude that would achieve equality. The system and district magnitude adopted interacts with other factors such as gender quotas, culture, parties’ organisation and internal selection rules, women’s groups’ influence within parties and ‘selectorates’, party performance and so on. Nevertheless, it is a consistent finding that a greater district magnitude allows more space for women to enter the political arena, and can itself form an incentive to provide means within parties to select women in winnable seats. Where there is an incentive for all parties to stand more than one candidate (that is – where more than one seats is seen as winnable) there is more incentive to aim at gender balance.

1. What evidence is there on the impact of electoral gender quotas? How does this interact with district magnitude?

What is most important about PR systems is they give parties more options of terms of how they achieve gender parity.

A party still needs to put up candidates who are women. But in a single member seat the guarantee is through mechanisms such as All Women Shortlists or Twinning – both rather blunt instruments. Quotas are less blunt in multi-member systems, which provide spaces for parties to promote a balanced ticket.

Ultimately, seats with larger district magnitudes still require some action from parties to ensure a balanced ticket, whether through quotas or through ‘softer’ supply side actions to encourage women on the list. As such, unless there is electoral law encompassing quotas, there is still a need for parties to show political will to ensure better balance through their selections. Different parties will approach this differently in terms of ideological view, party structure (e.g. whether selection can be guided by central constitution or local in outlook), culture and selection criteria. A greater district magnitude allows for more options on how to approach the challenge and may make it easier for different parties to take different approaches towards a better outcome.

In the example of Welsh Labour in the National Assembly, women’s representation was increased due to the use of internal quotas (through blunt All Women Shortlists). Gender parity was a significant achievement, given that Labour AMs have always overwhelmingly been elected from the single member seats on the constituency seats.

The fact that the National Assembly was a new institution allowed for an ‘opportunity structure’[3] that helped the party make seats available to AWS, with fewer male incumbents already entrenched (although this did not happen without controversy). Given Labour’s dominance in the constituency seats in Wales, the constituency seats were largely the winnable seats for Labour to use to promote women in the National Assembly.

Plaid Cymru have focused on ‘zipping’ by placing women and men alternately on the list, with varying success. This has been diluted since 2007 without a guarantee that a woman would be top of the list. However, as there are some perverse outcomes in the way a list system operates (generally, with greater success in the constituencies meaning fewer seats won on the list) the provision of what are ‘winnable’ or ‘safe seats’ to place women in is less clear than in multi member wards. In practice, the Conservatives have had a soft policy of non-incumbent list seats being available for women or minority groups. This indicates that ‘contagion’ – that is party competition to ensure that one’s party cannot be said to be ‘anti-women’ – has had some effect in providing an incentive to progress.

The example of Welsh Labour shows that quotas have been very important to better gender parity in the National Assembly for Wales. However the role of formal quotas have been less important in some countries, and they should not be viewed in isolation from the wider system and internal party politics – in Sweden for example, the role of organised groups within parties pushing for clear rules for selection, placing women in positions of power and better places on party lists, without recourse to formal quotas (although the threat of their use promoted the promotion of women and led to a ‘soft’ target of 40% women).

Quotas have been key to gender balance in the National Assembly for Wales, but how they operate should be seen in the wider context.

The recent Irish example in providing enforcement mechanisms to gender quotas through party funding has also been effective, and indicates how in practice quotas interact with wider context.[4] While party funding is not devolved (nor is it likely to be), the panel may wish to explore whether there are disincentives and incentives that are possible through electoral administration powers devolved in Wales Act 2017.

International evidence overwhelmingly show that quotas have worked, although how they operate differs greatly internationally, and historically. Placing women in winnable seats, placement mandates, and enforcement, as well as interaction with wider political culture and party system all have a bearing on how effective they have been. The following provide a good overview of the literature:

* <http://schwindt.rice.edu/pdf/publications/schwindtbayer2009_LSQ.pdf>
* <http://www.cfwd.org.uk/uploads/QuotasElectoralSystems2015.pdf>
* <https://www.equalvoice.ca/pdf/CS_Dahlerup_25-11-2003.pdf>

In summary, there is more space for either state-led or party action with an electoral system that provides a larger district magnitude.

[1] See for example, Pippa Norris, Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2004; Arend Lijphart, “Constitutional Choices for New Democracies,” Journal of Democracy, Vol. 15, 2004; and Mona Lena Krook, “The Political Representation of Women and Minorities,” in Comparing Democracies 4: Elections and Voting in a Changing World, ed. Lawrence Leduc, Richard G. Nieme and Pippa Norris, Sage, London, 2014; Pippa Norris, ‘Women in European legislative elites’, West European Politics 8(4): 90–101. 1985; R Matland, ‘Women’s representation in national legislatures: developed and developing countries’, Legislative Studies Quarterly 23(1): 109–125, 1998; Reynolds, ) ‘Women in the legislatures and executives of the world: knocking at the highest glass ceiling’, World Politics 51(4): 547–572. , 1999; Kenworthy and Malami, ‘Gender inequality in political representation: a worldwide comparative analysis’, Social Forces 78(1): 235–269, 1999; Siaroff, ‘The Women’s Representation Bill: making it happen’, The Constitution Unit Report, University College, London. 2000; Moser, ‘The effects of electoral systems on women’s representation in post-communist states’, Electoral Studies 20(3): 353–369, 2001

[2] Pippa Norris, “The Impact of Electoral Reform on Women’s Representation”, Acta Politica 41, 2006, available at <https://sites.google.com/site/pippanorris3/publications/articles/article-pdf>

[3] See L McAllister, F Mackay, P Chaney, Women and Constitutional Change in Wales, UWP 2003.

[4] TheJournal.ie, March 2016 available at: <http://www.thejournal.ie/women-in-32nd-dail-election-2016-2630150-Mar2016/>