



# **Increasing Party Political Participation**

Policy Consultation Paper

March 2021

## **Introduction**

Our democracy is a social contract in which we give certain rights to representatives who then act on our behalf. However, one question remains prevalent: how representative are those who represent us? In recent decades political commentators and academics have been particularly concerned with the low levels of political participation from women, young people, BAME, and those from lower socio-economic classes.

In 2021 we celebrate the centenary of Northern Ireland and look towards the future of our country. Ensuring that our political systems have continued support is vital to moving Northern Ireland successfully into the next centenary.

This is the third in a series of consultation papers examining electoral and political participation in Northern Ireland.

## **The consultation process**

To ensure that this paper accurately addresses party political participation, a two-stage process will be undertaken:

1. Policy consultation: this paper will be published for public consultation and welcomes responses and comments from all.
2. A policy document: after feedback from this paper has been received and adapted, a final policy paper will be created outlining the Democratic Unionist Party's position on enhancing party political participation.

As this is a consultation paper, nothing within this constitutes present party policy.

## **Female party political participation in Northern Ireland: a case study**

The Northern Ireland Assembly has the lowest level of female participation across the United Kingdom with a percentage of 33%<sup>1</sup>. However, it should be noted that the bar is extremely low across the majority of the United Kingdom with the national Parliament having reached its highest level of female

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<sup>1</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/international-womens-day-charting-womens-progress/>

representation in 2019 with a percentage of only 34%, the highest percentage since numbers only truly beginning to rise in 1997<sup>23</sup>. This figure rises slightly with female representatives making up 36% of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly leads the way with 41%<sup>4</sup>.

Whilst this statistic may appear strikingly low for the Northern Ireland Assembly, it should be noted that this is the highest level of female political participation within Northern Ireland. Statistics from a 2020 Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service briefing paper highlight the gender disparity across all levels of government in Northern Ireland, with men dominating women in our political arenas by 74% to 26% at local council level, 67% to 33% in the Assembly and 78% to 22% at Westminster<sup>5</sup>. What is clear is that there is still much to be done to improve gender balance across the United Kingdom and in Northern Ireland in particular.

In Northern Ireland, female representation varies drastically across political parties and across ethno-national divides.

*Table 1: Political Party breakdown by gender<sup>6</sup>*

	Assembly		Westminster	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
DUP	22	6	7	1
SF	15	11	5	2
UUP	9	1	0	0
SDLP	7	5	1	1
Alliance	4	3	0	0
Green Party	0	2	0	0
TUV	1	0	0	0

*Source: NI Assembly, 2020*

What is interesting to note from the statistics above is the gender divide between unionist designated political parties and nationalist designated political parties. Nationalist parties have a greater gender

<sup>2</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/general-election-2019-how-many-women-were-elected/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/international-womens-day-charting-womens-progress/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/holyrood-ready-to-catch-up-on-gender-balance-jcqpjckg>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2017-2022/2020/assembly\\_exec\\_review/0120.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2017-2022/2020/assembly_exec_review/0120.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/mlas/search.aspx>

balance than their unionist counterparts. Why is this the case? In this situation, cultural norms within political parties may have the answers we need. Unionist political parties tend to be traditional, conservative and religious in nature, a combination which does not necessarily lend itself well to increase female political representation. Yet within these parties' women also have a role to play. Of the twelve members who make up the Northern Ireland Executive, six are currently female<sup>7</sup>. The First Minister is female and so is the deputy First Minister. However, this does not mean that we should become complacent to the fact that women are still vastly under represented within the Northern Ireland Assembly as a whole.

### **International participation**

How do our statistics compare to those of our closest nations and our international peers? 2019 statistics from UN Women highlight the discrepancies which still exist in parliaments across the world. Since 1995 the percentage of women holding seats in parliaments across the world has risen from 11.3% to 24.3%, but much more still must be done<sup>8</sup>. Research conducted in 2019 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union of 193 national parliaments puts the United Kingdom at 39<sup>th</sup>, with women making up 32% of the House of Commons and 26.4% of the House of Lords<sup>10</sup>.

Our closest neighbour, the Republic of Ireland, is 86<sup>th</sup> on this list and has been making moves to address this. The Republic of Ireland has used gender quotas in Dail elections since 2016. This is the result of the 2012 Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act, which incentivises political parties to run women as at least 30% of their candidates, or they lose half of their state funding<sup>11</sup>. This initiative saw female candidates increase from 15.2% in the 2011 election, to 29.6% in 2016<sup>12</sup>.

According to research by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Sweden and Denmark are highlighted for having higher levels of gender equality within their societies<sup>13</sup>. This is interesting as no

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/topics/your-executive>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

<sup>9</sup> <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world010219.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif010219.htm>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/143/35>

<sup>12</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2016/03/16/the-2016-irish-election-demonstrated-how-gender-quotas-can-shift-the-balance-on-female-representation/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019>

parties in Denmark use quotas and only some political parties in Sweden do<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, quotas alone are not necessarily the answer to increasing female representation. Instead, measures such as education, mentoring programmes, networking and changes to societal culture are viewed as more beneficial<sup>15</sup>. For further information see section **Addressing party political participation**.

### **Barriers to political participation**

Across the board we may see that the issues which effect one under-represented group in society may in fact affect them all. This raises the issue of 'multiple barriers' affecting an individual's likelihood to enter politics, such as gender, race, social class and age<sup>16</sup>. It is therefore vital that any attempt to address political participation examines all of these barriers and creates a cohesive approach that can work and be applied across demographics. Political and wider societal culture can be a detrimental barrier to the inclusion of women, young people, those with disabilities, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and members of BAME communities.

### The candidate selection process and electoral eligibility

Why are certain demographics underrepresented in politics? Is it that women are not as successful with the electorate than their male counterparts? Research has shown that this is not accurate and that the electorate are just as likely to vote for a female candidate as a male candidate. The real issue therefore, is that women are not being selected by associations<sup>17</sup>. This is not only relevant to women, but also to young people, those with disabilities, and those from ethnic minority communities. As outlined within an Institute for Government project, work must be done to innovate our candidate selection processes to ensure accurate and fair representation<sup>18</sup>.

In order to increase representation of those who have traditionally been left out of the political process, we must look at our candidate selection processes and in particular the following points:

- Who is asked to consider running?

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/2873/file/Quotas%20Sweden.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/2873/file/Quotas%20Sweden.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Celis, K., Erzeel, S., & Mügge, L. (2015). Intersectional Puzzles: Understanding Inclusion and Equality in Political Recruitment. *Politics & Gender*, 11(4), 765-770

<sup>17</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1478-9302.2009.00185.x>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/our-work/parliament/innovations-candidate-selection>

- Who asks them?
- How this is managed?
- Do we actively encourage enough women, young people and other less traditional candidates to run?
- Do we offer enough support/training/advice to those individuals who wish to run, or who are thinking about running in the future?
- How do we find and nurture talent within the Party?

Research conducted by academics Allen and Cutts in 2018 on political ambition within Great Britain noted the following findings:

- *Men are more likely to be politically ambitious than women.*
- *Individuals with higher levels of education are more politically ambitious than those with lower levels of education.*
- *There is a north–south geographical divide in political ambition.*
- *Personality traits like being more confident and having greater comfort with the unknown are more common among the politically ambitious than among others.*
- *There is a filial-driven divide in ambition, whereby individuals whose parents were involved in politics while a person was growing up are more likely to be politically ambitious.*
- *There is a class divide in political ambition, with individuals in higher social grades more likely to be ambitious than those in lower grades.*
- *With the caveat that we have a limited sample size, there is evidence that certain ethnic minority groups have lower levels of political ambition than white respondents.*
- *Individuals displaying low levels of trust in politicians and democracy as a whole are less likely to have considered putting themselves forward as a candidate for political office.<sup>19</sup>*

It may not be the case that women, or other politically marginalised groups, are less likely to want to run for political office, but that they are in fact less likely to be approached and asked to run for political office. The fault therefore lies with political parties themselves and with the recruitment mechanisms they have in place. Men are more likely to be asked to run by political parties.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1467-923X.12457>

A Fawcett Society report notes that for women and other marginalised groups obstacles exist at every stage of the political process – and parties and gatekeepers play a huge role. For women and other marginalised groups, ‘money, time, personal credibility, flexibility and party support and networks’ are harder to find and resistance to women in politics, both at an institutional and individual level, unfortunately continues<sup>20</sup>.

As surmised by Murray (2015):

*‘Party candidate selection practices vary considerably by culture, internal democracy, ideology, and nationality. Practice may also vary within the party, even when codified guidelines on candidate selection exist.’<sup>21</sup>*

Unlike their male counterparts, research by Kenny has found that female candidates in Scotland are less likely to be selected for safe seats to ensure that they win election<sup>22</sup>. One may wonder why this is the case, when actively making the decision to run female candidates in safe seats would appear in theory to be a sure way of increasing female participation. Unfortunately, institutional bias within political parties may be the barrier which is preventing this from happening.

Initiatives to improve the candidate selection process may include:

- Running female candidates in safer seats.
- Allowing individuals interested in running for elected office to shadow current incumbents.
- Workshops on tackling sexism within politics to be delivered to all Associations.
- Asking Branches and Associations to suggest female members for positions.

### Branch structures

Branch and association meetings can be off putting to many due to their formal and structured nature. For anyone who is not familiar with this style of meeting, it can prevent engagement. As observed by

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.parliamentproject.co.uk/research>

<sup>21</sup> Murray, R. (2015). What Makes a Good Politician? Reassessing the Criteria Used for Political Recruitment. *Politics & Gender*, 11(4), 770-776

<sup>22</sup> Kenny M. (2011) Gender and Institutions of Political Recruitment: Candidate Selection in Post-Devolution Scotland. In: Krook M.L., Mackay F. (eds) *Gender, Politics and Institutions*. Gender and Politics Series. Palgrave Macmillan, London

the Equality and Human Rights Commission, ‘less progressive attitudes by local party branches or associations’ can be observed, meaning that it can be difficult for new members who do not fit traditional stereotypes of the type of individual who should be a member of a political party<sup>23</sup>. Branch meetings can also be physically inaccessible, particularly for those with visible or hidden disabilities<sup>24</sup>. This unfortunately means that many people who wish to attend meetings cannot for reasons beyond their control.

Initiatives to improve participation in branches may include:

- Asking branches and associations to recommend potential future candidates.
- Changing the format of branch and association meetings, such as the use of online meetings or holding themed meetings based on member suggestions.
- Welcome packs for new members.

#### Double jobbing: balancing work with caring responsibilities

A 2018 report by the University of Bath notes that caring and household responsibilities remain barriers to female participation. In the United Kingdom Parliament, female MPs are less likely to have children than their male counterparts and the average age of children for a female MP is 16 years old, compared to 12 years old for a male MP. What these findings highlight is that raising a child defers a woman’s political career more so than a man’s<sup>25</sup>. The report also notes that:

- *Selection that is too restricted in its scope and reach;*
- *Evidence of direct and indirect discrimination against women;*
- *Lack of openness and transparency in selection and recruitment procedures at national and local level, and*
- *Women having a greater propensity to be selected to stand for marginal seats. Additional factors which have a detrimental impact on widening representation include: the difficulty of achieving an acceptable work-life balance, due to the demands of long and irregular working practices; the absence of statutory entitlement among MPs and local councillors to employment rights, e.g.*

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-65-pathways-to-politics.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://inclusionscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Access-to-Local-Branch-Meetings-for-Political-Parties-and-Groups.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/barriers-to-women-entering-parliament-and-local-government/attachments/barriers-to-women.pdf>



*maternity and parental leave/flexible working practices; living in the public eye; and the Parliamentary calendar.*

At Council level, meetings can often be scheduled during the day. As being a Councillor is a part-time job, this can be a barrier to participation for individuals in full-time employment, further or higher education, or those who have childcare or caring responsibilities. Local government is often viewed as the first step on the political ladder and the DUP want to ensure that the correct structures and support mechanisms are in place to encourage individuals who wish to enter local government.

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 changed the way in which many meetings, jobs and events were conducted. With face-to-face meetings banned through regulations, many organisations turned to online video conferencing platforms to ensure that meetings could still take place. This has proved that it is possible to conduct Council or even branch and association meetings without all members having to be physically present. For individuals with caring responsibilities, the continuation of this in the future could help to alleviate concerns regarding being able to attend meetings. East Belfast DUP Association is an example of good practice that could be further rolled out across Northern Ireland. During the past year, virtual coffee clubs have been held for members to allow them to socialise, access information regarding the ongoing pandemic, and to allow them the opportunity to engage with politicians on a range of issues.

Initiatives to improve participation of those with caring responsibilities may include:

- The option for individuals who cannot attend, branch, association or council meetings in person to dial into a live stream via Zoom or other online video conferencing platforms.
- Family themed meetings/events/fun days where parents can bring children.
- Onsite childcare during Council meetings.
- A review of Council meetings held during the day and an assessment of attendance rates of these meetings.
- Onsite childcare for larger Party meetings, such as candidate selection meetings and manifesto launches.
- The introduction of maternity and paternity leave for Councillors and MLAs.
- Parent friendly sitting hours in the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- A time limit of Council meetings.

## Disability and participation

For individuals with both visible and hidden disabilities, there are additional barriers to political participation. These can be defined under three overarching themes:

- Lack of accessibility: this includes access to buildings and meetings, the availability of bathroom facilities, traveling to meetings and events, ability to canvassing, election literature being provided in the correct format and the extra resources which are needed for candidates with disabilities to fill in forms and paperwork
- Lack of resources: this includes financial constraints for reasonable adjustments to be made in order to increase accessibility for disabled candidates
- Ableism: many candidates with disabilities find debates and public speaking to be exhausting, many admit that they felt pressure from their political parties to fit into existing political norms, there is a physical and emotional toll of elections and of disabled candidates trying to prove that they can do it, and treatment experienced by candidate from both their own parties and the oppositions<sup>26</sup>

All of this creates unnecessary stress on candidates and can turn many excellent potential candidates away from running in elections. Whilst political parties are required under the UK Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to allow individuals with disabilities to participate in party politics, this unfortunately is not always the case. This Act 'also permits parties to take positive action to encourage and facilitate the participation of disabled people in politics and their election to public office.'<sup>27</sup>

Initiatives to improve access of for those with disabilities may include:

- Ensuring that all meeting venues are accessible to all.
- Ensuring that all meeting venues have accessible parking.
- Ensuring that all venues have an accessible bathroom.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0192512120947458>

<sup>27</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0192512120947458>

- Funding available to branches to ensure that disabled candidates are given the correct resources necessary to run for political offices, such as forms being printed in the correct format.
- Extra support for disabled candidates when canvassing, such as a dedicated volunteer driver for transport and a larger canvassing team to help cover the area.

### Youth participation: disinterested or discouraged?

When discussing low levels of youth participation, one theme emerges time and time again: that young people have a distinct lack of confidence in their knowledge of politics<sup>282930</sup>. It is a patronising generalisation to say that young people do not understand politics, as well as being wrong. It is more accurate to say that the political process is seen by many young people as confusing and difficult to engage with<sup>31</sup>. Young people and civic engagement is vitally important as there is a strong connection between citizenship and political involvement<sup>3233</sup>. What is clear from the research is that young people need to feel that they are a part of something and that their voice is being heard. More must be done to ensure that political parties are proactive in involving young people in all aspects of politics.

A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that when questioned, many young people view politics as boring and they have a clear perception that politics lack relevance to the lives of young people. On one hand, young people lack trust in politicians, while on the other hand there is a lack of interest from politicians in young people that needs to be addressed.

There is an opportunity here for the community sector to help address this issue. Community based pop-up constituency surgeries, Q and A sessions with local politicians and more hands on engagement

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267561931\\_Young\\_People\\_Political\\_Participation\\_and\\_Trust\\_in\\_Britain](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267561931_Young_People_Political_Participation_and_Trust_in_Britain)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13676261.2019.1636951>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/re-engaging-young-people--f82.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13676261.2013.830704>

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267561931\\_Young\\_People\\_Political\\_Participation\\_and\\_Trust\\_in\\_Britain](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267561931_Young_People_Political_Participation_and_Trust_in_Britain)

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[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andrew\\_Mycock/publication/270785607\\_The\\_Party\\_Politics\\_of\\_Youth\\_Citizenship\\_and\\_Democratic\\_Engagement/links/54d9e34f0cf2970e4e7d07bf.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andrew_Mycock/publication/270785607_The_Party_Politics_of_Youth_Citizenship_and_Democratic_Engagement/links/54d9e34f0cf2970e4e7d07bf.pdf)

between politicians and community organisations may have a positive affect in introducing individuals to politics who may have felt that this was not an option for them.

More opportunities need to be made available for young people under the age of 18 to engage with politics<sup>34</sup>. As part of the consultation process, we welcome examples of good practice in encouraging young people to be more involved politically.

Political socialisation is vital when looking to address low levels of youth participation in politics. Schools have a key role to play in political socialisation, yet it could be argued that more can be done by the education system<sup>35</sup>. Political socialisation can be taught through school citizenship programmes and used to educate young people of the very real role that politics plays within their daily lives and the importance of taking an active interest in politics<sup>36</sup>. There is also a core role for parents to play in teaching young people about politics as many young people learn their political opinions from their family<sup>37</sup>.

According to academic James Sloam, there are five key factors which must be addressed when discussing how to improve youth participation in politics:

1. *Alienation*
2. *Empowerment*
3. *Mobilisation*
4. *Appreciation of young people's politics*
5. *Knowledge*<sup>38</sup>

All five of these themes must be addressed in partnership in order to encourage and continually promote the active involvement of young people in politics.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/1859353096.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1746197917734542>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/political-disengagement-and-what-can-be-done-about-it.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf\\_file/Social-exclusion-and-political-engagement.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/Social-exclusion-and-political-engagement.pdf)

<sup>38</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/James\\_Sloam/publication/249293723\\_Rebooting\\_Democracy\\_Youth\\_Participation\\_in\\_Politics\\_in\\_the\\_UK1/links/5f51009ba6fdcc9879c54a8d/Rebooting-Democracy-Youth-Participation-in-Politics-in-the-UK1.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/James_Sloam/publication/249293723_Rebooting_Democracy_Youth_Participation_in_Politics_in_the_UK1/links/5f51009ba6fdcc9879c54a8d/Rebooting-Democracy-Youth-Participation-in-Politics-in-the-UK1.pdf)

Here is a very particular problem which needs to be addressed. Political parties need young people in order to survive. They need future members, future candidates and future funders. Yet young people across the United Kingdom view political parties as not being interested in their issues and concerns<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, neither the political party, nor the young people, believe that the other accurately represents them and reflects their interests. This is somewhat of a vicious circle and can be detrimental to political institutions in the long term if nothing is done to try and reverse this.

Initiatives to improve youth participation may include:

- Increasing the amount of citizenship/political education children and young people are taught in schools.
- Party information stands at school/college/university open days.
- Youth outreach programmes which do not only target University students.
- Including young people further within the policy development process.
- The introduction of an annual DUP youth conference.

Social deprivation needs to be addressed<sup>40</sup>. Political representatives should reflect the population and as such should be from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. This variety within a political system should be encouraged as it allows a variety of viewpoints and expertise to help set and influence the political agenda, further increasing representation.

### **Defining political engagement**

There are also issues regarding the definition of what type of activity truly counts as political engagement. Traditionally we have viewed political engagement in terms of being a paid-up member of a political party, attending political meetings, voting at elections and running for political office. However, there is a growing rise in what is known as political activism. This refers to activities such as protesting and joining social movements. Some groups who are currently under represented in so

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<sup>39</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andrew\\_Mycock/publication/270785607\\_The\\_Party\\_Politics\\_of\\_Youth\\_Citizenship\\_and\\_Democratic\\_Engagement/links/54d9e34f0cf2970e4e7d07bf.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andrew_Mycock/publication/270785607_The_Party_Politics_of_Youth_Citizenship_and_Democratic_Engagement/links/54d9e34f0cf2970e4e7d07bf.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf\\_file/Social-exclusion-and-political-engagement.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/Social-exclusion-and-political-engagement.pdf)

called 'mainstream' political engagement, are actually heavily engaged within social movements. These types of activities tend to appeal to young people in particular<sup>4142</sup>.

Research by the Electoral Commission highlighted the following aspects of participation:

- *Voting: women and men are equally as likely to vote in local, regional and national elections.*
- *Campaign politics: women are less likely participate in activities such as party membership, party donations and contacting politicians.*
- *Civic-oriented: women are less likely to belong to voluntary associations. hobby, consumer or professional groups, and sports of social clubs.*
- *Cause-oriented: women are more likely than men to sign petitions and boycott or buy products for ethical reasons.*
- *Overall: women were found to be significantly less politically active than men.*<sup>43</sup>

Voting registration is an important aspect of political participation, but it is not the remit of this paper<sup>4445</sup>. For more on this, please see our policy paper **Improving electoral participation and voter turnout**.

### Addressing party political participation

For too long we have observed a situation wherein female political candidates have to be viewed as exceptional in order to receive the same chances and opportunities as an average male political candidate. This outdated and misogynistic attitude is entirely wrong and should be confined to the history books where it belongs.

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<sup>41</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267561931\\_Young\\_People\\_Political\\_Participation\\_and\\_Trust\\_in\\_Britain](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267561931_Young_People_Political_Participation_and_Trust_in_Britain)

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[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/James\\_Sloam/publication/249293723\\_Rebooting\\_Democracy\\_Youth\\_Participation\\_in\\_Politics\\_in\\_the\\_UK1/links/5f51009ba6fdcc9879c54a8d/Rebooting-Democracy-Youth-Participation-in-Politics-in-the-UK1.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/James_Sloam/publication/249293723_Rebooting_Democracy_Youth_Participation_in_Politics_in_the_UK1/links/5f51009ba6fdcc9879c54a8d/Rebooting-Democracy-Youth-Participation-in-Politics-in-the-UK1.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf\\_file/Social-exclusion-and-political-engagement.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/Social-exclusion-and-political-engagement.pdf)

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/669130/democratic\\_engagement\\_strategy\\_2017.PDF](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/669130/democratic_engagement_strategy_2017.PDF)

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.lse.ac.uk/PBS/assets/documents/Increasing-Youth-Voter-Turnout.pdf>

In many countries, gender quotas have been used as a method to rapidly increase female political participation and are accepted legal practices<sup>46</sup>. Whilst this method can quickly increase representation within a political system, it does not address the core cultural issues which have traditionally been barriers to female participation. Increasing the number of women involved in politics may in turn address the underlying cultural issues, but a targeted approach is best.

The DUP do not support the use of quotas.

Aside from the use of gender quotas, other measures can be taken to address barriers to female participation in politics. A University of Bath publication highlighted the following two options:

- *Training and mentoring programmes which focus on helping women attain the knowledge, skills and confidence to stand for election. Political parties are critical in providing women with the necessary networks and support to put themselves forward as candidates and successfully elected women have cited the impact of these schemes. However, studies have consistently identified resistance to changes at a local level, with local networks often remaining closed to women;*
- *Schemes run by external organisations which encourage women to consider running for elections. The Local Government Association's (LGA) 'Be a Councillor' scheme is an example. However, this programme is not designed specifically to encourage women and the evidence points to the need for this scheme to provide more events aimed at women in order to make it more effective.<sup>47</sup>*

A 2013 Northern Ireland Assembly research paper highlights the importance of electoral systems and candidate selection processes in encouraging greater representation<sup>48</sup>. This research is still relevant today. Certain electoral systems, such as proportional representation, may make it easier for more individuals from politically underrepresented groups to be elected<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/WomenAndElections.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/barriers-to-women-entering-parliament-and-local-government/attachments/barriers-to-women.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2011-2016/office-of-the-first-minister-and-deputy-first-minister/research-papers/research-papers-2013/women-in-the-northern-ireland-assembly/>

<sup>49</sup>

[https://scholar.smu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.co.uk/&httpsredir=1&article=1000&context=hum\\_sci\\_sociology\\_research](https://scholar.smu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.co.uk/&httpsredir=1&article=1000&context=hum_sci_sociology_research)

Three possible electoral systems to consider instead of first past the post include:

- *The Two-Round System (2RS) extends voter choice, while ensuring the continuation of a direct link between each MP and a specific constituency, and allowing for the direct election of a majority government;*
- *The Single Transferable Vote (STV) ensures broad proportionality, maximises voter choice, minimises the power of parties, and establishes the direct accountability of MPs to voters, albeit in a multi-member district;*
- *The Additional Member System (AMS) can provide for almost any level of proportionality desired, while maintaining the existence of single-member districts and the central role of political parties.<sup>50</sup>*

However, it must be noted that changing electoral systems is a long and challenging process that would involve consultations, legal advice, legislation and a referendum. It would not be a quick fix to our current problems and may in fact raise new ones over time. Even if our electoral system does not change, the very processes of our political systems themselves must be enhanced to make them more accessible to individuals from traditionally marginalised groups.

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<sup>50</sup> <https://consoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/David-Klemperer-The-Electoral-System-and-British-Politics.pdf>



## Questions

1. Are there any underrepresented groups which have not been discussed within this paper?
2. Do political parties offer enough opportunities for young people to engage with the political process?
3. What are your views on gender quotas?
4. What role can outside organisations play in encouraging party political participation?
5. Are branches and associations welcoming environments for new members?

Please send responses and comments to Ashleigh Perry at [ashleighperry@dup.org.uk](mailto:ashleighperry@dup.org.uk) by 23/04/2021