

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Biliau Diwygio | Reform Bill Committee

Bil Senedd Cymru (Rhestrau Ymgeiswyr Etholiadol) | Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill

Ymateb gan Laura Sudulich, Prifysgol Essex a Jeffrey Karp, Prifysgol Brunel |  
Evidence from Laura Sudulich, University of Essex and Jeffrey Karp, Brunel University

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**What are your views on the general principles of the Bill and the need for legislation to deliver the Welsh Government's stated policy objective (to make the Senedd a more effective legislature by ensuring it is broadly representative of the gender make-up of the population)?**

We support the adoption of gender quotas for the Senedd to produce a gender balanced parliament. Our research shows that public support for gender quotas in Wales and the rest of the UK is reasonably high when compared to other established democracies (Karp and Sudulich 2024). Our findings challenge the assumption that gender quotas are controversial. Such a change should be welcomed and could help to provide greater legitimacy by promoting fairness and equity in political representation. Our findings are supported by empirical evidence from surveys that we conducted over the past year in the UK, Italy, and the Netherlands.

Over the past year we conducted representative surveys of voting eligible citizens in the UK, Italy, and the Netherlands. In the UK, a total of 2,163 respondents agreed to participate, of which 91 respondents resided in Wales. Overall, 42% support gender quotas compared to 32% who opposed them. Support in Wales is higher than the rest of the UK, but the differences are not statistically significant. In comparison, support for gender quotas in the Netherlands is substantially lower. A survey of 1,204 respondents conducted in November and December 2023 following the Dutch election indicated that only 26% support gender quotas while 43% oppose them.

We also asked respondents in each of the countries about their support for other reforms that could help more women get elected. For example, proposals such as free advertising or government or party funding of campaigns for female candidates would help to reduce the financial burden for female candidates and allow them to compete more effectively for political office. We found that gender quotas were the most popular method for helping more women get elected. In comparison other

reforms that would help provide women with more financial support proved to be far more controversial.

In Italy, which already has gender quotas, support is 47% compared to 26% who oppose quotas. Italy has a mixed member electoral system similar to Wales. Members of the lower house are elected in both single member constituencies and on a party list. Italy requires that parties alternate by gender on the list (zipped). In addition, it requires parties to have at least 40% of women (or men) as candidates in the single member districts. Some parties also have voluntary quotas that exceed the mandatory quotas. For example, the Democratic party in Italy requires that half of its candidates are women. Overall, there are no major differences between the parties in terms of their gender balance. The higher support for gender quotas in Italy may be due to the fact that the quotas have been in place for over ten years.

#### Datasets

Karp, Jeffrey A. and Laura Sudulich. 2023. "Explaining Public Support and Opposition to Voting Reforms in the Netherlands". Fieldwork completed 24 November-11 December.

Karp, Jeffrey A. and Laura Sudulich. 2023. "Explaining Public Support and Opposition to Voting Reforms in the United Kingdom". Fieldwork completed 21-28 July.

Karp, Jeffrey A. and Laura Sudulich. 2023. "Explaining Public Support and Opposition to Voting Reforms in Italy". Fieldwork completed 15-24 February.

#### References

Karp, Jeffrey A. and Laura Sudulich. 2024. "Unequal Representation, Partisan Advantage and Public Support for Proposals that Get More Women Elected" Paper presented at the 2nd Annual Elections, Public Opinion, and Voting Behavior Conference, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida. February 29- March 2, 2024.

**What are your views on the system of enforcement and potential sanctions for non-compliance proposed in the Bill?**

**Are there any potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions? If so, what are they, and are they adequately taken into account in the Bill and the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum and Regulatory Impact Assessment?**

Although the bill does not need any formal form of public approval to be implemented, greater support for the Bill's provisions will strengthen political

legitimacy. Our data from the UK - in line with comparable data from Italy - indicate that citizens are more likely to approve of reforms to close the gender representation gap when the principle of fairness is highlighted. In a survey experiment we divided respondents into three groups: one was informed that the status quo is one of unfair gender representation, another group received information about the partisan implications of introducing reforms to elect more women, and one control group received no information. Those who were told that women only account for a third of MP in Westminster were substantially more likely to support reforms (including quotas). Communicating why the Bill is important and how it helps to address a history of unfair gender representation is key to public support.

**Are any unintended consequences likely to arise from the Bill?**

**What are your views on the Welsh Government's assessment of the financial and other impacts of the Bill?**

**What are your views on the balance between the information contained on the face of the Bill and what is left to subordinate legislation? Are the powers for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation appropriate?**

**Do you have any views on matters relating to the legislative competence of the Senedd including compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights?**

**Do you have any views on matters related to the quality of the legislation, or to the constitutional or other implications of the Bill?**

**Are there any other issues that you would like to raise about the Bill and the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum or any related matters?**

**Anything else?**