Gender equality benchmarks for political parties
Candidate recruitment, selection, and nomination

Women are underrepresented in legislatures worldwide, a political gender gap that is not explained by either a shortage of qualified women or, in general, voters’ unwillingness to elect them. A wide variety of circumstances can make political careers more risky and difficult for women than for men, including lack of family support for their participation in public life, limited access to campaign finance networks, poor coverage by the media, and male party elites’ biases. This means political parties concerned with gender equality must make special efforts to reach and promote women in their recruitment and nomination processes.

Party elites who influence candidate recruitment and selection must demonstrate support for women. Official procedures for party nomination or party list formation may be less important than the attitudes and actions of party elites. Reaching out to women leaders in civil society, publicly endorsing or facilitating contacts for female nominees, and highlighting the importance of recruiting women are all ways that party elites can create a more welcoming environment and build support for women who consider running for office. Depending on the electoral system and party recruitment procedures, recruiting women to key positions on district or riding executives may also increase the number of women nominated.

Addressing financial barriers is key to putting male and female political aspirants on a more equal footing. Money is a factor not only during the election period, but also in the nomination and selection process. Financial barriers may prevent women from even considering political careers. They may be disadvantaged if they cannot afford nomination or party membership fees; transportation, childcare, and networking costs; or the ongoing costs of maintaining a profile at the constituency level prior to elections. In candidate-centred systems, women will be less likely to seek nomination and viewed less favourably by power brokers if their access to campaign finance is limited. Upper class and elite women may face fewer financial barriers than others. Measures to address financial gender gaps should therefore consider in particular the needs of lower income, minority, and other underrepresented women.

There are many ways for parties to address gendered financial barriers. For example, they may create internal funds earmarked for women’s campaigns, set caps on nomination and campaign spending, subsidize or cover women’s costs for such items as transportation or childcare, waive nomination or membership fees. Facilitating fundraising contacts or participating in women’s fundraising networks may be especially helpful.

The Women2Win initiative in the United Kingdom encourages women to run and helps them build political skills and contacts through training, mentoring, and networking. The initiative also seeks to make the party more welcoming for women by engaging the support of men and working to convince local riding associations of the benefits of selecting women candidates. Women2Win also gathers information about women’s experiences in order to better address their challenges. After the 2015 general election, the group surveyed women candidates who did not win to ask them what their experience had been like, how it could be improved, and whether they were “prepared to go on with the journey.”

Political parties can work together or with other sectors such as business and civil society groups to help address barriers to women in politics. In Jordan, the Women Helping Women Network is a coalition supported by the US National Democratic Institute. Its purpose is to support women by “recruiting viable candidates, helping them run effective campaigns, together training the next generation of political activists, and mobilizing voters.” The Network’s fundraising unit supports women candidates by identifying and contacting potential donors, and managing and distributing funds.
Sharing information about the political process and connecting with women outside the party, including young women and those from underrepresented groups, can enlarge the pool of female candidates over the medium term, eventually leading to the election of more women and better links with female voters. To this end, there should be meaningful opportunities for women to become active in their parties at all levels, and to gain access to non-traditional and leadership roles.

1 Information accessed on line at www.women2win.com (February 10, 2016)
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| Party leaders demonstrate commitment to recruiting and supporting female candidates | - Number/type of actions by party leaders demonstrating commitment to recruiting and supporting female candidates (e.g. public statements, outreach to women who are potential candidates)
  - Leaders’ views on importance of electoral gender balance/parity
  - Party members’ views of leaders’ commitment to recruiting and supporting female candidates |
| Party rules and practices for recruitment and nomination are fair and transparent, and include measures to identify and recruit a diversity of women | - Number/type of activities undertaken to reach out to women as potential party nominees or candidates (e.g. networking outside the party in civil society, business, and other sectors; holding recruitment events and capacity building)
  - Evidence of measures such as aspirant gender quotas governing the proportion of women on candidate short-lists
  - Number and identity of women recruited as candidates (by categories such as age, profession, ethnicity, income)
  - Number and identity of women who turn down invitations to be candidates (by categories such as age, profession, ethnicity, income)
  - Reasons given by women who turn down candidate recruitment
  - Evidence of recruitment reaching underrepresented women |
| Voluntary and/or legislated gender quotas or targets are included in party statutes and reflected in recruitment and nomination processes | - Evidence of party gender targets/quotas for candidates, linked to accountability and monitoring
  - Evidence that party nomination and party list processes are oriented to complying with legislated gender quotas or other legislated gender measures
  - Number/proportion/position of women on local executives, recruitment committees, and similar bodies
  - Number/proportion of female nominees for seats or party list spots |
| Male and female prospective candidates seek nomination on equitable financial footing | - Number/type of measures to address financial barriers to women’s nomination (e.g. waiving fees, capping nomination spending, donor networking, earmarking party funds for women recruits)
  - Party funds allocated to support for women nominees
  - Financial barriers to nomination identified by party aspirants |
| Female potential aspirants to political office have the skills, resources, and support they need to confidently seek or accept nomination and contest elections | - Evidence of party-based initiative to recruit and support women aspirants
  - Number of women who have participated in political capacity building workshops or mentoring
  - Number of women reporting gains in political and campaign skills from workshops, mentoring, or related activities
  - Number of women attending capacity building sessions who run as candidates and number elected
  - Number of activities aimed at disseminating political information and encouraging involvement by women in party
  - Views of nominees and candidates on logistical, financial, and other support received, or barriers faced, within the party |

* Indicators that refer to people must be disaggregated by sex and, where possible, other relevant categories such as party role/seniority, age, regional origin, language, ethnicity, etc.