# Repositório ISCTE-IUL

# The Share of Women in Decision-Making Positions Across Different Levels of Government[i]

**Abstract**

This paper investigates formal and informal patterns of the recruitment process and the features of types of elections to shed light on what affects the share of women across levels of government (European, national, and local). A single country and party – the Portuguese Socialist Party – was analysed to rule out intervening factors, and 19 in-depth interviews were conducted. Our findings highlight the specificities of each type of election, their interactions with the recruitment process, and the relevance of informal factors.

Keywords: political recruitment; women's descriptive representation; informal institutions; levels of government; gender quotas.

## Introduction

Research on women's descriptive representation at different levels of government has been showing mixed results, demonstrating that there is no single pattern across countries. When local and national levels are compared, some authors report higher percentages of women at the former level (e.g., Stokes, 2005; Vengroff, Nyiri, & Fugiero, 2003), whereas others report that the proportion of women represented in elected bodies is lowest at the local level (Eder, Fortin-Rittberger, & Kroeber, 2016; Henig & Henig, 2001). Although it is not yet totally evident, it seems that the latter results correspond to more recent research, suggesting that the current tendency might be for women to perform better at the national than at the local level.

Concerning European elections (vis-à-vis national elections), the results are more homogeneous: women consistently achieve a larger share of the seats in the European Parliament (EP) compared to the average for national lower houses (Fortin-Rittberger & Rittberger, 2014, p. 498; Stockemer, 2008). However, women's representation is not higher in

the EP for all EU member states; in fact, there is considerable variation across countries (Fortin-Rittberger & Rittberger, 2014, p. 500; Stockemer, 2008, p. 466).

Previous scholarship has shown not only that there are differences in women's presence across levels of government, but also that a model that works well in predicting women's representation at the national level does not adequately explain the percentage of female legislators at the European level (Stockemer, 2008). This suggests that the patterns of candidate recruitment by political parties – which retain the monopoly on candidate selection (Hazan & Rahat, 2006) – may vary across levels of government (Eder, Fortin-Rittberger & Kroeber, 2016, p. 371), in particular the informal aspects, i.e., unwritten norms and ways of functioning. Furthermore, the electoral rules depend on context. Therefore, the same electoral institutions might produce different results for descriptive representation depending on the type of election (Fortin-Rittberger & Rittberger, 2014, p. 517). This paper investigates (formal and informal) patterns of the recruitment process and the features of the types of elections in order to shed light on what affects the share of women in decision-making positions across levels of government (European, national, and local).

We look into this question by conducting an in-depth analysis of a single country and party: the Portuguese Socialist Party (PS). Some successful and some failure districts and councils – in terms of women's descriptive representation – were selected, and 19 face-to-face interviews were conducted with key people from the PS. Focusing on only one country and party is indispensable for guaranteeing that the differences observed are solely due to level of government at stake and not to idiosyncrasies of the country (e.g., the electoral system) and/or the party (e.g., ideology).

Portugal emerges as a good study case for three main reasons: (i) the percentage of women in the Portuguese national parliament (38.7%) is only slightly higher than the average of the European Union (EU, 30%), thus – with the necessary cautions in place – it illustrates an

average case for the EU; (ii) all three kinds of elections analysed follow the same electoral system and therefore one of the main factors accounting for differences in women's descriptive representation is controlled for; and (iii) since 2006, Portugal has had a national quota law in place that applies equally across elections (European, national, and local) and hence analysing Portugal enables us to not only focus on the share of women's representation, but also catch a glimpse of the implementation of the same quota law across different levels of government.

The PS was chosen because it is a major party that has often been in government throughout the democratic period. It is an internationally recognised socialist party – it belongs to Socialist International and to the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. Furthermore, although this party was one of the main proponents of the quota law which came into effect in 2006 – the Parity Law – the institutionalisation of the law within the party is rather weak (Verge and Espírito-Santo, 2017, p. 434). In this sense, the PS is a fairly average case, and the gender-equality challenges revealed here are likely to be observed in many other political parties in Europe, excepting those that are either extremely committed to gender equality or exceptionally anti-gender equality.

**Women's nomination across levels of government**

In order to address the paper's goal, we have organised the factors that are theoretically most relevant in accounting for differences in women's nomination across levels of government into two categories: patterns of the recruitment process and features of the types of elections.

*Patterns of the recruitment process*
In this section, we present factors of political recruitment – which are likely to vary across levels of government – that possibly have an effect on the inclusiveness of the candidate lists and/or on their gender balance.

The first factor to be considered concerning political recruitment is the composition of the selectorate – that is, the body that selects the candidates – and its level of inclusiveness. The selectorate is extremely exclusive if it is composed of only one person (a single leader), but it may be more inclusive when it is composed of many people – up to the entire electorate (Hazan & Rahat, 2006, p. 110). Some parties use multistage procedures and therefore have different selectorates at different stages. Usually, the early-stage selectorate (responsible for approving the initial nominations) is more inclusive, whereas the selectorate at a later stage (which intervenes right before candidate lists are made official) is more exclusive. Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger (2015) investigated the formal rules of gatekeeping (i.e., what is written in national legislation and party statutes) of 124 parties that participated in the 2009 EP elections and demonstrated that the inclusiveness of the selectorate in the early stages of the selection process was one of the central determinants of gender-balanced lists.

However, recent research has been showing that party regulations may tell us very little about the actual recruitment process on the ground (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2015, p. 749), since recruitment often takes place within existing informal male-dominated party networks (Preece, Stoddard, & Fisher, 2016, p. 564). In fact, tracking the same elections (2009 EP) but including informal aspects of the recruitment process, namely the perception of candidates, Luhiste (2015) observed that whether candidates were officially nominated by a small group of party executive members or by a more inclusive selection body had no statistically significant effect on women candidates' chances of being placed in winnable positions. The discrepancy between the results of these two studies illustrates the importance of considering both the formal and the informal aspects of political recruitment.

Another characteristic of the selectorate that is likely to play a role in the gender balance of the final lists is the *gender composition of the selectorate* itself. Lovenduski and Norris (1993) concluded that 'there is no party in which efforts to nominate more women have

occurred without an intervention by women making claims' (p. 14). Caul (2001) has also demonstrated that having a greater number of women at the table when party decisions are made makes it more likely that the party will adopt formal mechanisms to advance women's gains (p. 1225). Similarly, scholarship on Canadian elections has shown that having a woman as the main gatekeeper significantly increases the probability that the party candidate from that constituency will also be a woman (Cheng & Tavits, 2011), while in the Uruguayan case, party factions composed of mainly male leadership and selectorates result in leading positions that are generally held by male candidates (Johnson, 2016, p. 402).

Related to the gender composition of the selectorate is the existence of party *women's sections*, which might be determinant bodies for ensuring a higher presence of women in political power (Lovenduski & Norris, 1993, p. 14). They have dissimilar strengths, and their influence depends on both the position they hold within the party hierarchy and the strategies they are able to develop (Kenny & Verge, 2013; Kittilson, 2006).

The jurisdictional level at which nominations are decided is considered to be another important dimension of research on representation (Fortin-Rittberger & Rittberger, 2015). Party selection is decentralised at the territorial level, where local party selectorates nominate party candidates (Hazan & Rahat, 2006). By comparison, it is centralised when the party leader makes the main decisions. Scholarship on the effect of the *centralisation of the recruitment process* on the nomination of women has not reached homogenous findings. Whereas some studies argue that centralisation could be of added value (Hinojosa, 2012; Kittilson, 2006; Luhiste, 2015; Matland & Studlar 1998), others state that it depends on whether or not party leaders are sympathetic to increasing women's representation (Kenny & Verge, 2013; Murray, 2010) or mention that having a centralised process sometimes does not help (Kenny, 2013).

A final aspect of the recruitment process that is likely to play a role is whether that process is formal or informal, or its *degree of institutionalisation*. Highly institutionalised parties rely on rules to achieve their goals. Therefore, they should be more likely to resort to

quotas to increase women's representation (Caul, 2001). Moreover, more bureaucratised candidate selection processes lead to a somewhat more successful quota implementation (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2016), whereas political recruitment processes marked by informal practices of local patronage and clientelism position women as outsiders in the process and hamper access to political power (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2016, p. 387). Although male party leaders do not have a monopoly on informality – for instance, 'in Mexico, female party members developed informal networks and informal practices of their own, collaborating across parties and with state regulators to end their exclusion from the choicest candidacies' (Piscopo, 2016, p. 488) – in general, the more formalised nomination processes are, the easier it becomes for outsiders to be successful (Lovenduski & Norris, 1993).

### *Features of the types of elections*

In this section, we present factors that are known to characterise elections at different levels of government. Whereas some factors are specific to one type of election only (say, local elections), others are shared by two types of elections (for instance, local and European elections).

A distinguishing feature between the types of elections is *the level of visibility* of their candidate lists, which is much higher in European elections than in local or even national elections. In the overwhelming majority of EU countries, the electoral system for legislative elections establishes the existence of many districts, and hence produces many candidate lists in proportional representation systems or many single-member constituencies in majoritarian systems – not to mention in local elections, where the number of lists is enormous. In sharp contrast, for European elections in most countries, one single constituency covers the entire state. If a party builds a paritarian list for a national or local election, it is only one among many lists and hence it will probably have no impact in the media. However, if a party builds a 50/50

list for a European election, it is more likely to be a news item – that is, it has much more visibility.

As a consequence, parties often include women on the candidate lists at the European level in order to satisfy the women inside the party and prevent future pressures from rising without having to go through disruptive inner-party struggles (Stockemer, 2008), while also pleasing the general public and potential voters. Furthermore, the fact that European elections are international contributes to enhancing the desire of projecting a progressive image of the party abroad. Still concerning the European level, there might be some '*contagion effect*' (Matland & Studler, 1996) that also entices parties to nominate more women (Stockemer, 2008). This is quite likely due to the high level of activism of women's movements in the EU.

In many countries, both local and European elections are considered to be second-order elections, since many voters base their vote on factors that have more to do with the national political arena than with the elections at hand. The European Parliament, despite its growing importance, still has few direct decision-making powers; consequently, both parties and populaces in most countries do not perceive a seat in the European Parliament to be as prestigious as a seat in the national parliament (Stockemer, 2008). Hence, *the level of competitiveness* associated with becoming an MP might be higher than with becoming an MEP (Kantola, 2010)[ii]. Concerning local elections, the level of competitiveness is likely to be even lower, first because of the greater number of candidates that parties have to nominate at this level and second because this level holds the least jurisdictional authority, is subordinate to the other levels of government (Eder et al., 2016, p. 369), and lacks prestige (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian & Trounstine, 2015). It is expectable that such a political ladder has consequences for the level of candidates' inclusiveness, i.e., presumably the share of minorities decreases as we move towards higher and executive positions (Crowder-Meyer et al., 2015; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993).

Other factors are equally likely to intervene in this equation. A significant number of scholars argue that women offer an advantage in local elections, since local issues (education, health care, social services, etc.) tend to fit into the *stereotypical female strengths* (for an overview of this literature, see Bauer, 2020). In the same vein, stereotypical female traits (compassionate, warm, service-provision-focused, etc.) fit particularly well with elected positions that are of closer proximity with constituents (Crowder-Meyer et al., 2015, p. 322). Since both gatekeepers and potential candidates may anticipate voters' use of gender stereotypes, this might have consequences for both the demand and supply sides.

On the *supply-side* only, both the local and the European levels might be more appealing for women than the national level, albeit for different reasons. The local level is conjectured to attract women due of its geographic proximity to home and because 'electoral contests are usually less intense, and not as time- and resource-demanding as those at higher levels' (Eder et al., 2016, p. 369). However, some local-level features are equally likely to keep women away, namely the fact that local positions often entail a notable workload but an insignificant compensation in return, whereas higher levels of government are always remunerated (Eder et al., 2016, p. 371). Switching to the European level, this is characterised by a less confrontational style of politics than the one common in national parliaments, which is likely to be appreciated by potential female candidates (Freedman, 2002).

**The Portuguese context**

A so-called Parity Law (Organic Law nº 3/2006, 21 August) was approved in August 2006 and revised in 2019. Between 2009 and 2017, all lists presented for local, legislative, and European elections must guarantee a minimum representation of 33% for each sex, and neither sex was to occupy more than two consecutive positions on lists. Parties that did not respect this minimum were fined. Since 2019, candidate lists must instead guarantee a minimum

representation of 40% for each sex, while the ban on having two consecutive seats occupied by people of the same sex is maintained. Non-compliant party lists are now withdrawn.

All Portuguese elections, irrespective of the level of government (except for the presidential, which is not considered in this paper), follow a proportional electoral system and use closed-list ballots. Plus, all political electoral seats are allocated through the application of the D'Hondt method. Although there are small differences in terms of the proportionality (see Table A1 in the Appendix), the differences are minor.

However, there are important idiosyncrasies in each kind of election that cannot be disregarded. Legislative elections comprise 22 plurinominal electoral districts, with an average district magnitude of 11, but with great magnitude variances between them (currently ranging between two and 47). These elections serve to allocate the 230 seats that compose the Portuguese unicameral national parliament (NP). European elections occur in a sole national electoral district. The number of Portuguese seats in the European parliament has been slightly decreasing over the last three decades, ranging from 24/25 between 1987 and 2004, 22 in 2009, and 21 in both 2014 and 2019. Therefore, the average magnitude of districts has always been considerably larger in European elections than the average in legislative ones. By comparison, the magnitude of electoral districts is much smaller in local elections (Freire & Santana Pereira, 2017), and the dimension of the election is much greater, since there are 308 competitions taking place at the same time at the council level.

Local elections involve electing three different political organs: two at the council level – the City Council (*Câmara Municipal*, CM) and the Council Assembly (*Assembleia Municipal*, AM) – and one at the parish (*freguesia*) level – the Parish Assembly (*Assembleia de Freguesia*, AF). Of the three organs, only the CM has executive power; the remaining two are legislative organs[iii].

Looking at Figure 1, it is clear that European elections have always enabled a higher percentage of women to be elected than the other two levels, whereas there have been few or no differences between local and legislative elections since 2005[iv]. Even though the Parity Law was only implemented for the first time in 2009 (and its effect is visible in all three levels of government), its spirit was already felt in 2005 due to the political debate about it that was already taking place. Before 2005, the feminisation among local politicians was slightly lower. The effect of the revision of the law is quite visible in the two elections that took place in 2019.

Figure 1. Percentage of women elected since 1999 across all levels of government

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

*Source*: Santos, Teixeira & Espírito-Santo (2018, p. 5) (translated by the authors); data for 2019: legislative: http://www.cne.pt/sites/default/files/dl/2019ar_mapa_oficial_resultados.pdf; European: https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/122606792

The Socialist Party (Figure 2) generally reproduces the patterns observed for all parties put together in the previous figure. The parliamentary group in the EP is clearly more feminised than those elected at the other two levels. In fact, at the European level, the PS has always overcome the Parity Law, particularly in the 2014 election, when it managed to have 50% women among its MEPs. Concerning national elections, although the PS candidate lists always fulfil the Parity Law, the percentage of women MPs is well below 30%, except for the 2015 and the 2019 elections when it reached 31.4% and 39.4%, respectively. As for local elections, since the implementation of the Parity Law in 2009 until 2017, it portrayed slightly higher feminisation percentages than the national elections, but it remains to be seen if the 2021 local elections – the first after the revision of the law – will keep the same pattern. Furthermore, whereas all PS lists at the national level comply with the Parity Law, there are a few cases of non-compliance in every local-level election.

Figure 2. Percentage of women from the PS elected since 1999 across all levels of government

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

*Source*: Completed by the authors using data from Santos et al. (2018); data for 2019: see Figure 1.


**Research design**

In order to grasp patterns of the recruitment process and the features of the types of elections, 19 face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted between March and July of 2017 with key people within the Socialist Party, many of whom are/were gatekeepers (see Table A4 in the Appendix with details about the interviewees).

For the purpose of this study, i.e., to reveal what affects the share of women in decision-making positions across levels of government, it is essential that all important confounding variables – factors that potentially account for the differences in women's representation – are held constant. This is why a single country and party were chosen. Furthermore, it is crucial that the Parity Law works exactly the same way across all levels of government, thus enabling us to exclude issues related to the design of the law (Schwindt-Bayer, 2011), and that the levels of disproportionality of the electoral system (see Table A1) are very similar across levels of government. This way, we can guarantee that the recruitment processes and the features of the types of elections are the only variations taking place between levels of government and that no country or party characteristic intervenes.

For the local and national levels, it was necessary to decide to which districts and councils the interviewees should be related, since it was impossible to include all 22 districts and 308 councils in our sample. Some successful and some failure districts and councils in terms of women's descriptive representation were selected. At the local level, selecting the failure case was straightforward: the only council where the PS did not comply with the Parity Law in the 2013 local election, Castro Daire[v]. In this council, the PS presented a non-complying list both at the council level and in six of the 16 parishes that compose that council[vi]. As a

comparable successful case, we selected the council of Mangualde, which belongs to the same district as Castro Daire (the district of Viseu) but which has a tradition of electing considerably more women (see Table A2 in the Appendix for a comparison of both councils).

For the national level, two successful districts and two failure districts were selected based on the percentage of women elected in the last few years (see Table A3 in the Appendix): Setúbal and Viseu (successes), and Portalegre and Vila Real (failures).

**Women's descriptive representation within the Portuguese Socialist Party**

The analysis of the interviews confirmed many of our expectations based on previous scholarship, but also introduced some new facts.

*Inclusiveness, centralisation, and formality of the recruitment process*

In the Portuguese Socialist Party, the selectorate is extremely exclusive for the three levels of government in the early stage (initial nominations). This is particularly the case for European elections, where the list is completely composed by the party leader (as expressed in interviews I1, I2, and I3); it is also to a great extent true for the local level, where the candidate for mayor – if he/she is a candidate with a good chance of winning the election (I13 and I18) – builds or strongly interferes in all of the lists for the different political organs (CM, AM, and AF) that belong to his/her council (I3, I5, I14, I15, and I17). If the candidate for mayor does not have a good chance of winning, then the president of the district-level branch might also intervene, as may the secretary for the organisation of the party (a sitting member of the National Secretariat, who the leader delegates to deal with this process – I3, I4, I10, and I15) in the case of a conflict.

The candidate selection for National Parliament is more complex, and the selectorate is composed of considerably more people. It is a decision shared by the party leader – who can, according to party statutes, nominate 30% of the winnable positions in each district, including the head of the list – and several actors at the district level, in particular the president of the

district-level branch (I6). In practice, the presidents of the district-level branches, the party leader, or the secretary for the organisation of the party (when the leader chooses to delegate) are the most relevant interveners in this process (Verge & Espírito-Santo, 2016, p. 431), leading the selectorate to be also classified as 'exclusive' at this level.

Since the most exclusive selectorate (European) is the one that achieves the best results concerning gender balance, we confirm previous results (Luhiste, 2015), which suggest that the inclusiveness of the selectorate is not an asset. Furthermore, at least two examples at the local level emerged from the interviews, which portray equally exclusive selectorates as having opposing results concerning women's descriptive representation. On the one hand, there is the aforementioned council of Castro Daire, where the candidate for mayor had great chances of winning the elections and hence composed all candidate lists (I13). He deliberately decided not to include many women on his lists, compromising compliance with the quota law (I13, I15, and I18). On the other hand, there is the example of the president of the parish of Vila Real in 2016, who was given total freedom to compose his own list of candidates for the AF. Since he is sensitive to gender equality issues, he decided – and managed – to build a paritarian list (I6). The only differing variable between these two examples is the will to include women.

Therefore, according to our findings, when the gatekeepers are sympathetic to increasing women's representation, having an extremely exclusive selectorate makes the process of building a gender-balanced list smoother. However, when the gatekeeper is not concerned about the issue, it has a radically different effect. In the latter case, if the selectorate were more inclusive, the result would not have been so dramatic.

In the later stages of candidate selection at all levels of government, the selectorate is much more inclusive, since all lists have to be ratified at the central level by the National Political Commission, and in some cases they must also be ratified at the district level. However, the lists do not suffer many changes at those stages (Verge & Espírito-Santo, 2016, p. 432).

A similar conclusion can be reached for the level of centralisation of the recruitment process. In Portugal, it is radically different across levels of government: it is very centralised for European elections, partly centralised for national elections (district and central level), and very decentralised for local elections (council and district level). This suggests that having a centralised process helps in regard to the representation of women, at least when – as mentioned by Kenny and Verge (2013) and Murray (2010) – the party leaders are sympathetic to increasing women's representation. Furthermore, there are two other factors, which will be further developed below, that boost the strength of having a centralised political recruitment process, namely the visibility of the elections and the weight of public opinion. All together, these factors contribute to explaining the success reached by this party on women's description representation at the European level.

Concerning the formality of the recruitment process, the conducted interviews were useful for confirming that in the Socialist Party (Freire & Pequito Teixeira, 2011) the process is very informal, particularly in the early stages. In fact, significant differences were reported depending on not only which parish/district we considered, but also the current context (more harmonious vs. more quarrelsome) and the specific protagonists involved (I11). However, since the level of formality of the recruitment process seems to be the same at all levels of government, this cannot be a valid explanation for variations across levels of government.

***Gender composition of the selectorate***

Since the selectorate at the early stage is composed of people with key positions within the party (say, the party leader, the presidents of the district-level branches, or the candidate for mayor), its members are almost always men (I15). Women only enter the process at a later stage, given that they are represented in the organs that then ratify the lists (the political commissions at the district and national levels).

Although scholarship on policy preferences finds a tendency for female MPs to be more feminist than male MPs (e.g., Campbell, Childs & Lovenduski, 2010; Childs & Webb, 2012; Diaz, 2002; Kittilson, 2008, among others), from the particular cases analysed through our interviews, we do not observe that building paritarian lists is a predominant feature of female politicians. Instead, as mentioned before, having the will to include women, irrespective of the selectorate's sex, is determinant (I1, I3, and I7). It is nevertheless very likely that this will is more common among women than men.

### *Role of the women's section*

According to the PS statutes, the women's section has been in charge of supervising quota implementation since 1998; however, the current research generally corroborates previous findings that state that it has no influence in candidate selection at the national level (legislative elections) (Verge & Espírito-Santo, 2016, p. 432). In fact, most interviewees from the local and legislative levels reported that it plays no role at all in the candidate selection process (I6, I7, I8, I9, I11, and I14), and some leaders of the district-level women's section are not even aware that supervising quota implementation is one of the section's functions (I13 and I18). Plus, there are no mechanisms to enable this supervision, since the leader of the district-level women's section only has access to the lists in the later stages of the process, when the lists are ready for ratification by the national or district-level organs (I15 and I18).

Finally, there is a considerable feeling of helplessness, at least at the local level, given that the only actions previous or current leaders of the district-level women's sections could conceive of doing, when faced with cases of non-compliance, was to call the attention of the party to the situation or to talk to the candidate for mayor and try to raise his/her awareness of the problem (I14). However, they 'cannot force him to do anything' (I13 and I18). The role of supervising the composition of the lists is not recognised and is clearly not being implemented (I6 and I15).

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Still, there seems to be considerable variation across the examples reported in the interviews, that is, actors from different districts tell other stories. In Setúbal, for instance – which we consider a success case and which is described as a special district (I5) because of its established tradition of women occupying leadership positions (I7) – the leader of the district-level women's section pressed for the candidate list of the district for the 2015 legislative election to be paritarian and almost achieved it. Therefore, the section played an important role here. So, if it is supported by other structures and/or exists within an enabling environment, the women's section gains strength and might play a role, at least at the legislative level. Also, concerning the European level, both MEPs interviewed believe that the national women's section was important for the outcome, that is, a paritarian list (I1 and I2). Nevertheless, the actions of the women's section are characterised by high levels of informality.

The main finding here is that there are no mechanisms at any level of government for assuring that women's sections accomplish their function of supervising the quota implementation. Therefore, in some cases they might manage to accomplish it (at the European and in some districts at the legislative level), whereas in most of them they do not.

### *Intraparty competitiveness and supply-side explanations*

The argument that becoming an MEP is less competitive and hence more accessible for women (Kantola, 2010) seems more complex in the Portuguese case. In fact, according to a Portuguese MEP, next to having a cabinet position, being an MEP is the most appealing political position one can dream of (I1). Not only is the salary of an MEP much higher than that of an MP in Portugal, but also the working conditions (i.e., the means available to develop quality work) are much better in the EP (I1 and I2). So, the prestige associated with being an MEP is not an explanation for why the European candidate list has more women vis-à-vis lists at the national level.

However, the interviewees mentioned another factor: there are many more people with the appropriate profiles (and who perceive themselves as having the appropriate profiles) for becoming MPs than for becoming MEPs (I1 and I2). For an MEP, professional, technical, and even academic competences, as well as the requisite languages skills, are assets (I1 and I2). As a consequence, the pool of potential candidates for the EP tends to be paritarian, that is, there are approximately the same number of women and men within the Socialist Party who meet the criteria necessary for entering the EP (I1). In sharp contrast, for national elections and even more so for local elections, the pool of potential candidates is much more masculinised, since there are many more male than female party members.

So, whereas the supply side is not an issue for the European or national elections at all, many interviewees mentioned it as a problem at the local level in some interior rural councils (e.g., I3, I13, I14, and I19). For instance, Castro Daire is perceived as an interior, closed, and conservative council (I11, I13, I15, I17, and I19). Being a female politician in such an environment is certainly neither common nor easy, and even the practical aspects might be a barrier: 'a woman in Castro Daire, or in one of its parishes, arriving at home at midnight or at 1 a.m. [because she attended a political meeting] must be a scandal' (I13).

*Visibility and contagion effect*

Following previous research (Stockemer, 2008), the European elections offer an easy and efficient way for a party (and for a party leader) to present itself as progressive and concerned about gender equality. It is easy because it is much simpler to compose a list with 30 candidates (including effective and alternative candidates) than to control around 40 thousand candidates for local elections (I3) or to build 22 paritarian lists for national elections. It is efficient due to the visibility that that lists get in the media and hence among the general public. In contrast, local politics receive much less media attention (I7) and are therefore much less known by the public. For instance, almost none of our interviewees – even many of those related to the district

of Viseu (e.g., I4, I9, I10, and I12) – were aware of the cases of non-compliance with the quota law in the council of Castro Daire. A case of non-compliance at the European level or even at the national level within the party that was one of the main proponents of the Parity Law would have received much greater media coverage.

The European list also has the particularity of projecting the image of the party not only among the general public nationally but also abroad. The fact that equality issues are common topics within the European political agenda (I1) combined with the PS being part of a major political family/European group that shares concerns about gender equality are seen as fundamental questions. In the words of an MEP, 'our European list could obviously not be disarticulated from the group list (…). It was a question of "peer-pressure" when we were looking, for example, to Spain, France, paritarian groups and so on; a fundamental leap was made' (I2). Portugal very much follows the predictions of previous scholarship, suggesting that some contagion effects (Matland & Studler, 1996; Stockemer, 2008) took place here.

Besides wanting to portray a modern image of the party, building more gender-balanced lists might be a strategy for earning some electoral advantage, mainly among female voters. That was an argument used not only for European elections (I2 and I3), but also for elections at the national level in the district of Setúbal during the 2015 election (I7). Because of the tradition of the district concerning gender-balance, an MP from this district is convinced that the strategy was successful (I7).


**Conclusions**

The main objective of the present paper was to highlight the main factors that account for the differences observed in terms of women's descriptive representation across levels of government. Following the same pattern observed in other countries – though not in all – in Portugal, and in the PS in particular, there is a considerably higher presence of women in the

EP, but the numbers are less impressive when we look at the national and local levels. We conducted several in-depth interviews with key political actors from the Socialist Party (men and women, many of them part of the selectorate) in the three levels of government. Furthermore, for the national and local levels, in order to avoid getting a biased view, we interviewed actors that are related to both successful and failure districts and councils. The analysis of the potentially relevant factors was performed looking at two groups of factors: the first considers aspects more directly related to the recruitment process, whereas the second focuses on aspects that concern the different types of elections, and both of these are likely to vary across level of government, even within the same party. Our findings offer some valid contributions to the literature by showing the importance of the features of the types of elections and the way they interact with the characteristics of political recruitment to explain the share of women in decision-making positions.

The context of European elections offers the best conditions for the production of a gender-balanced list for two main reasons: (i) the visibility that the list has at both the national and the international level, magnified by the fact that gender equality issues are a common concern within the EU and even more so within some specific political European groups and (ii) the fact that it involves only one candidate list (with quite a high magnitude) makes it very easy for the gatekeepers to achieve a successful result in terms of women's representation and facilitates its monitoring by the media and by the general public. Further research is necessary to confirm that these factors can be generalised to other countries, but we contend that, when combined with each other, they are the main reasons why European lists are systematically more gender-balanced than national or local ones.

Another factor emerges as relevant in some situations but not in others, namely the exclusiveness of the selectorate. We believe that Kenny and Verge's conclusion that a centralised recruitment is an advantage when party leaders are sympathetic to increasing women's representation (2013) can be extended to the exclusiveness of the selectorate. Since

the recruitment process in the Socialist Party (as well as in other Portuguese parties) is very informal and the selectorate is extremely exclusive – at least when the initial nominations are made – the few persons that compose the early-stage selectorate are determinant. Therefore, the idea that there are critical actors (Childs & Krook, 2009), or even more accurately, critical actions (Sawer, 2012), fits this case very well. Moreover, the two factors identified above (namely the visibility and simplicity of the list) are also likely to intervene here. To summarise, an exclusive selectorate and/or a centralised recruitment process is an asset when the selectorate is sympathetic to increasing women's representation, and even more so if the candidate lists at stake are easy to build (i.e., there are not too many) and have high visibility levels.

Supply-side explanations, though not crucial, might also play a role, since there seems to be no gender gap in the pool of potential candidates for the EP, whereas there are many more male than female potential candidates for both the NP and local elections. The gender-balanced candidate pool for the EP is not explained by the general assumption that becoming an MEP is not very competitive (Kantola, 2010), which does not apply to the Portuguese context, but rather by the technical and academic competences generally required of MEPs – characteristics that are recognised to be equally distributed between male and female party members.

In Portugal, there is still some resistance to the quota law, mainly at the local level (Santos & Amâncio, 2016). Even within the Socialist Party, it is sometimes seen as a necessary evil (Verge & Espírito-Santo, 2016), as some of our interviewees confirmed. However, the only (few) cases of non-compliance with the law at the local level occur because there are no institutionalised mechanisms at the party level to supervise compliance with the law. The women's sections are rather weak and, at least so far, the gatekeepers have not seen them as partners in the candidate selection process. This outcome places a new item on the list of the already-identified factors that affect quota effectiveness, namely quota size, placement mandates, and enforcement mechanisms (Schwindt-Bayer, 2011), which is the existence of formalised supervision mechanisms at the party level. We believe that accounting for the latter

in the law would contribute to a more effective quota design and hence guarantee a higher representation of women.

Political parties, like all other political institutions, are not gender neutral (Kenny, 2013); instead, they tend to be male-centred institutions (Lovenduski, 2005). In order to understand the continuity of women's underrepresentation, focusing on informal practices within political parties emerges as essential (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2015; Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2016; Cheng & Tavits, 2011). This paper clearly illustrates that whenever the recruitment process enjoys a high degree of informality – as is clearly the case in the PS across levels of governments – women's representation becomes dependent on rather random factors, such as party leaders' sympathy towards gender equality or the existence of a supportive environment (e.g., a district with a feminist tradition). Hence, we corroborate previous research that argues that formalised processes are more convenient for the inclusion of women (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993; Henig and Henig, 2001).

Future research would benefit from a deeper understanding of the differences in women's descriptive representation, quota implementation, and political recruitment across levels of government, both within and across countries.

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[i] We would like to thank the anonymous referee of *Representation* for offering very valuable suggestions.

[ii] This point was also made later by Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger (2014).

[iii] There is yet another organ (an executive one) at the parish level (*Junta de Freguesia*), but citizens do not vote for it. The president and the rest of its members are indirectly elected through elections inside the AF, which occur after the local elections take place.

[iv] To be more precise, there are differences within local elections, depending on the specific organ being considered. Typically, the executive organ at the council level (CM) has the lowest percentages of women's presence, whereas the two legislative organs, the AM and AF, have much higher ones (see Figure A1 in the Appendix).

[v] The interviews were conducted before the 2017 local elections took place; therefore, the landmark local elections were the ones that took place in 2013.

[vi] Here is the link to the Electoral National Commission, which makes non-compliances with the law public: http://www.cne.pt/content/violacao-da-lei-da-paridade