


Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland



Candidate selection in Northern Ireland: a cold house for women?

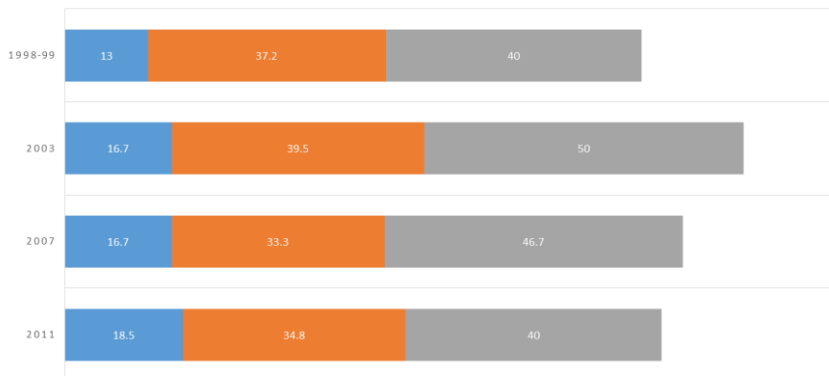
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Women in devolved assemblies (%) (1998-2011)

■ Northern Ireland Assembly ■ Scottish Parliament ■ Assembly of Wales

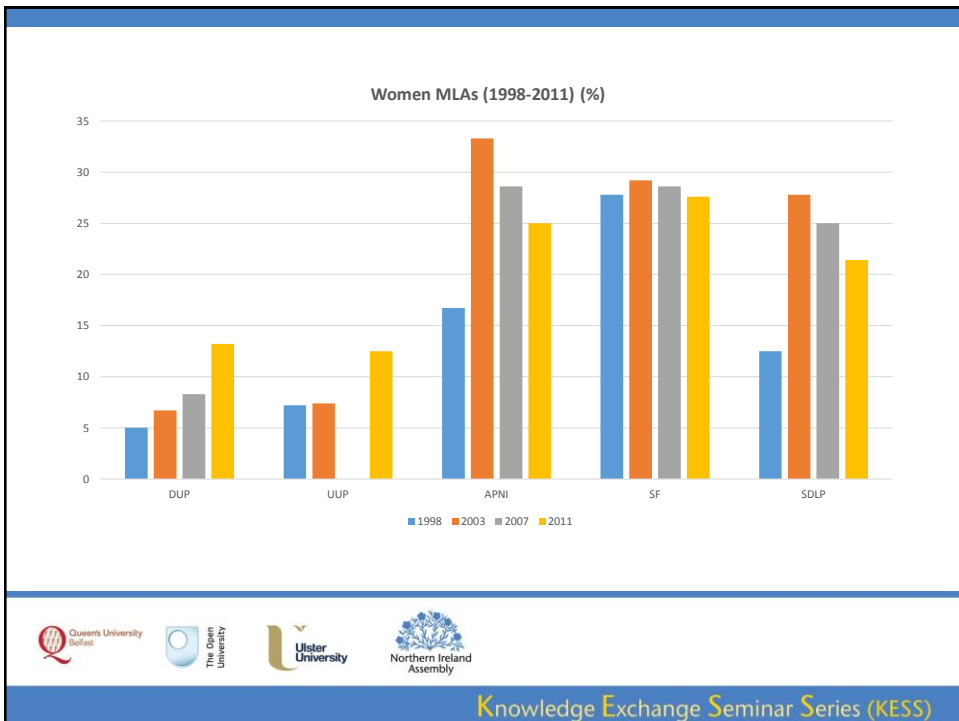
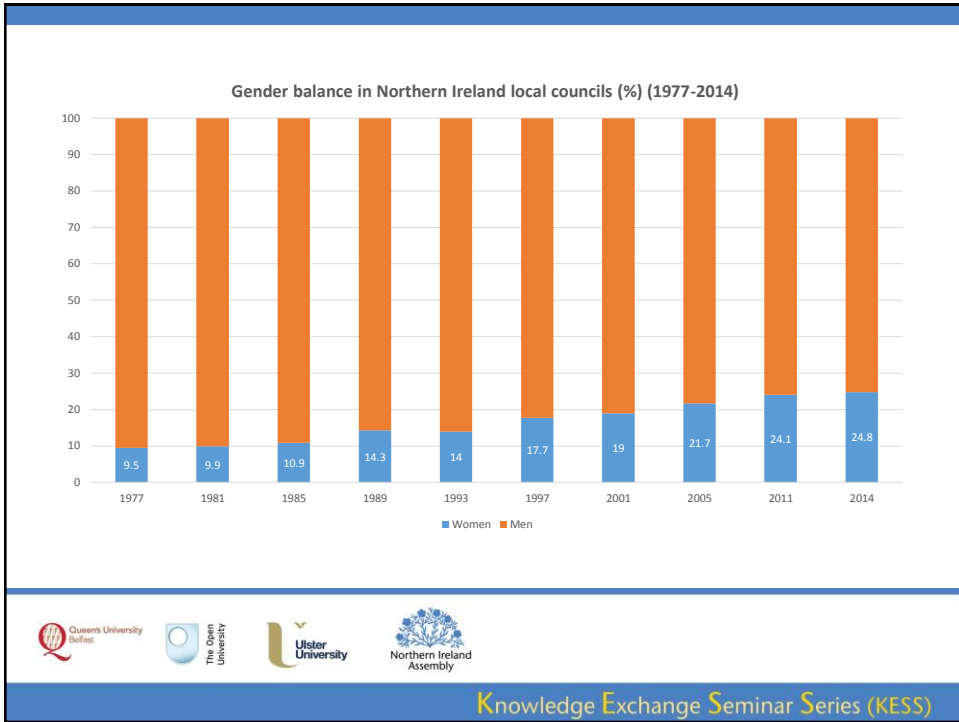


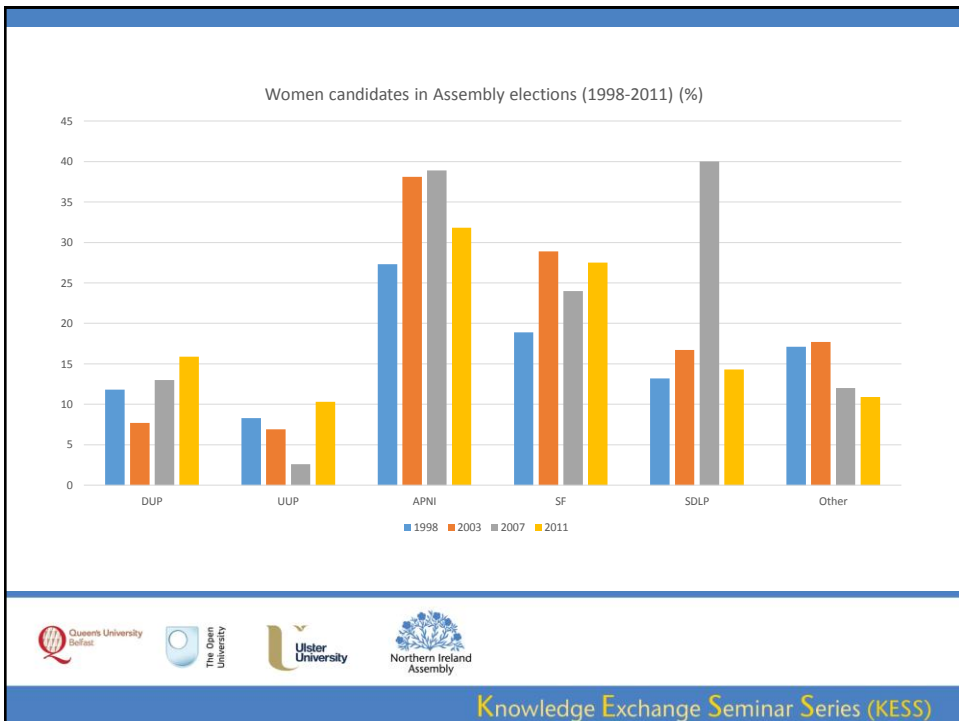
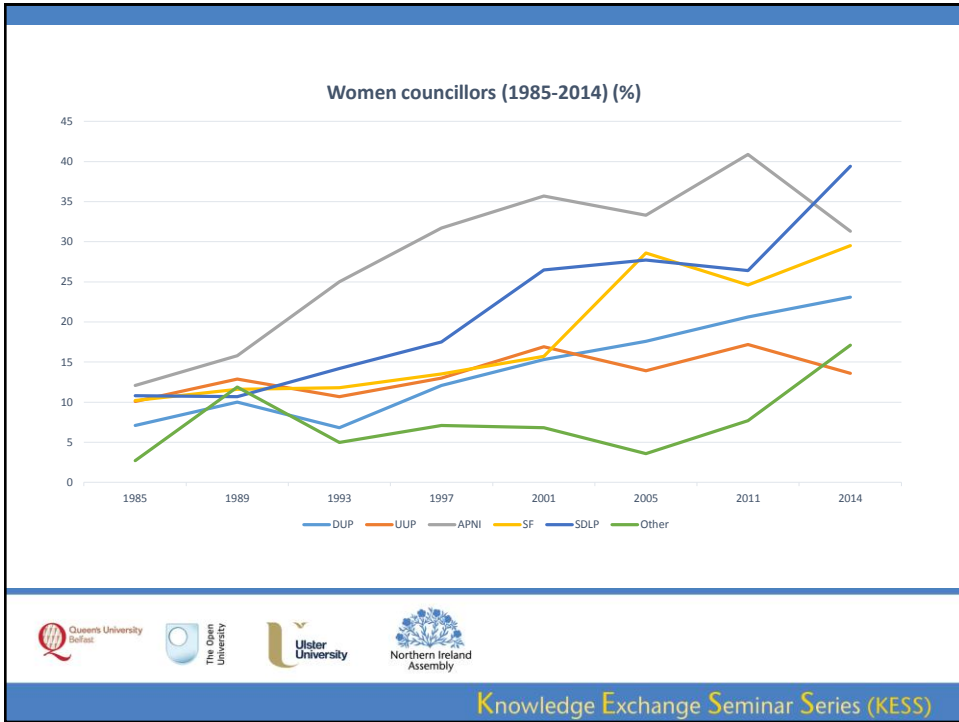
Year	Northern Ireland Assembly (%)	Scottish Parliament (%)	Assembly of Wales (%)
1998-99	13	37.2	40
2003	16.7	39.5	50
2007	16.7	33.3	46.7
2011	18.5	34.8	40

1998-2011: 69 women elected to Northern Ireland Assembly



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Political gender inequality: the five C's

Confidence: *women are less likely to go forward for selection*

Cash: *women have less access to financial resources than men*

Culture: *political culture tends to be dominated by men*

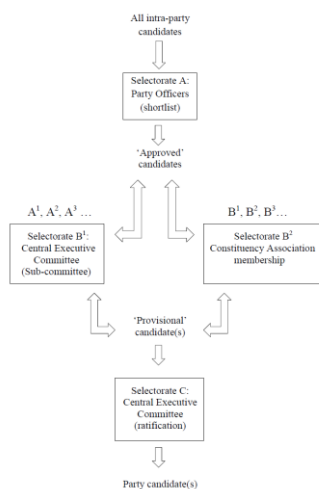
Childcare: *women are more likely to have this primary responsibility*

Candidate selection: *how political parties select candidates discriminates against or disadvantages women*

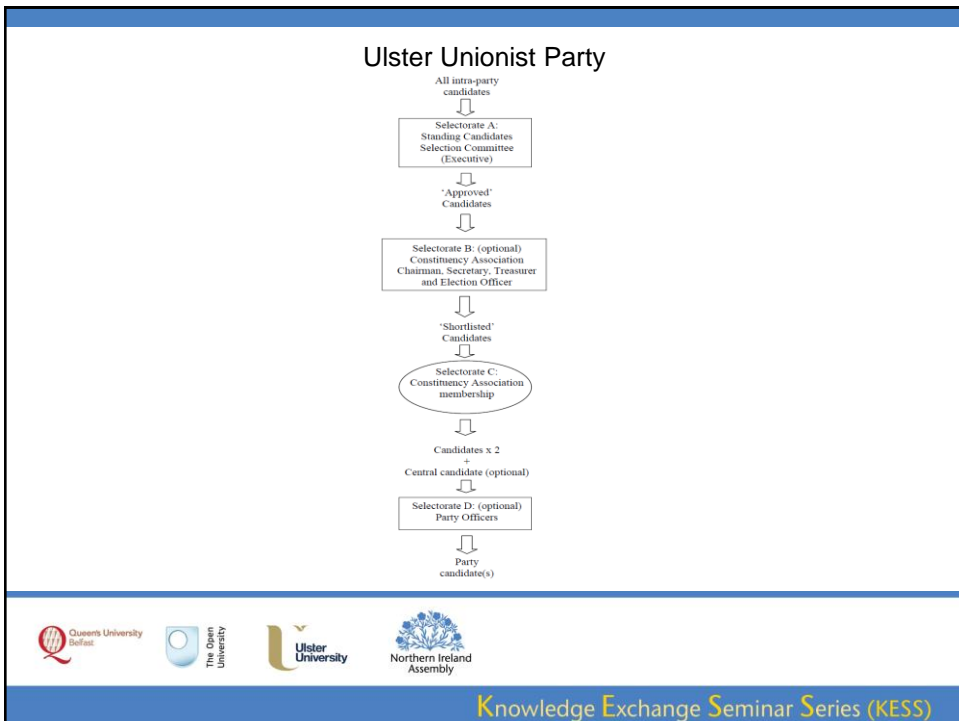
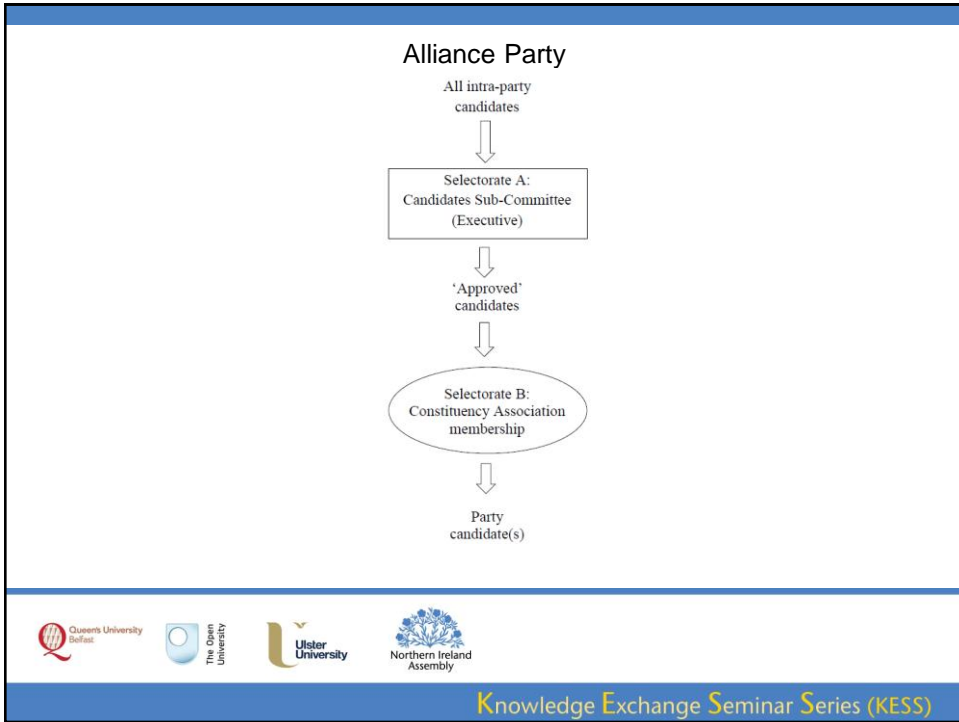


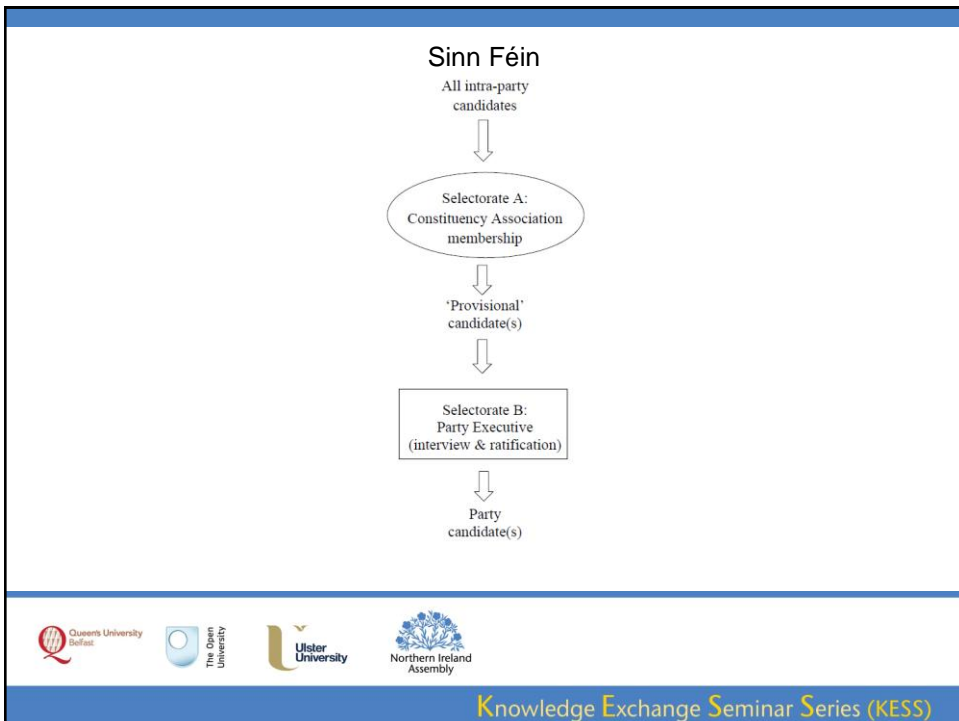
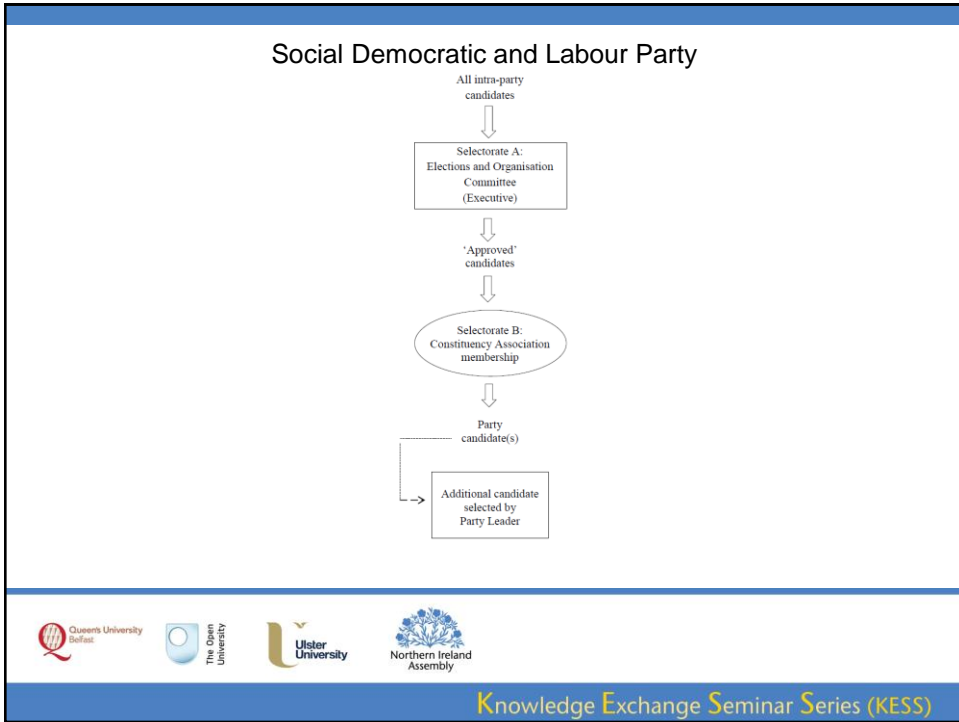
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Democratic Unionist Party



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Candidate selection: overview

- Candidate selection in Northern Ireland is highly decentralised
- Long-standing organisational tradition that grassroots party members are privileged actors in the process
- Candidate selection is a key incentive for members to engage in party activity, not least campaigning and fundraising:

'I think the dynamic of selecting a candidate is the lifeblood of a local political party.... It is a great driving force within local organisations' [interview with SDLP MLA, March 2013]

'By picking who they [local members] feel are the right people, they are much more likely then – knowing that they have had that influence – to throw themselves into the campaign and really get behind the people they have chosen. And we have then, as the leadership, the right to go back and say: 'You picked these people, now go get them elected. This is your responsibility. You chose them, go sell them'. Which you can't do if you impose a candidate because the members will say, 'Well it's not down to us, you picked them' [interview with Alliance MLA, June 2013]



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Candidate selection: overview

- Decentralised candidate selection processes more likely to produce unrepresentative tickets
- However, there is a clear trend of *centralisation* occurring in respect of candidate selection in Northern Ireland – with central party leaderships acquiring more (formal) authority in recent years
- From a gender equality perspective this is an encouraging development – appears to be partly motivated by concerns over representation:

'The party at times has allowed itself to suffer from its democratic nature. ... We can't allow ourselves to be in a situation where because our decision-making on candidate selection is invested so heavily in the membership that there isn't a strategic outlook being influenced and informed from the party centrally. So there is a balance to be struck, so that you can have strong democratic choice, authentically selected local candidates, but you also have a more strategic candidate offer being made across the North as a whole' [Interview with SDLP MLA, April 2013]



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A supply issue?

'I don't know that many political parties who are having their door knocked down by women wanting to put their head above the parapet and stand for selection. There is a degree of competition in every selection process but there isn't the flood that people imagine [and] so the notion that parties are rejecting vast numbers of women and trying to keep them out of politics is actually really flawed' [interview, Alliance MLA, June 2009]

'It's not the selection process . . . What you need to look at is what deters women from standing for election' [interview, Sinn Fein MLA, April 2009]

'There are plenty of women there. Wanting to run is a whole different ball game' [interview, DUP councillor, July 2009]

- The other four C's: *confidence, culture, childcare and cash*
- See recommendations in AERC 'Women in Politics' report (2015)



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Thanks!

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Northern Ireland Assembly Election Study 2016

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/NIAES2016>



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Northern Ireland
Assembly



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