



Terms of Reference: Research on Women's Wings within Political Parties in Malawi

March 2021

BACKGROUND

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is the UK public body dedicated to supporting democracy around the world. WFD partners with UK political parties, parliaments, electoral and financial audit institutions to help over 30 countries make their governments fairer, more effective and accountable.

As part of the Inclusive and Accountable Politics grant from the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), WFD work in partnership with the UK political parties to strengthen political parties around the world and increase women's political leadership.

THE PROJECT

The value of women's networks, both within and outside political parties, is commonly identified by senior political woman as an important aspect of their political journey and success. Whilst there is considerable literature on what makes an effective network, there is little research available on women's networks within political parties.

Political parties are widely recognised as one of the primary arbiters of women's representation in a political system, and many parties organise their women members in networks which are referred to as 'Women's Wings.' Although these vary in size, profile of membership, place in the party governance structure, formal policies and constitution between parties, the establishment of women's wings has a long history.

In many contexts where party leadership is still heavily dominated by men, women's wings are an important network and space within party structures and may present an opportunity for women to work towards better inclusion of women in decision-making structures. They may also provide training to support women's campaigns and political experience (Cels et al., 2014). However, women's wings also face challenges in being able to influence political parties' agendas (Osei-Afful, 2014) and in some cases have been criticised for silo-ing women's issues.

In many cases, women's wings have been considered to be an important conduit through which to support women's political leadership through the network they provide. One study found that women's wings occur in approximately half of 106 parties across 17 nation-states and that parties with women's wings were more likely to have gender quota rules (Childs & Kittilson, 2016).

Another study examined an original dataset of 196 political parties in 79 countries in South America, the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan African and Asia found that women's wings are more likely in states where there is a strong autonomous feminist movement. It also finds significant and positive relationships between women's wings and other aspects of women's representation, including quotas for membership on party NECs and women's membership on NECs and among parliamentary delegations (Cowell-Meyers, 2017). However, **there is limited evidence on how women's wings operate, and in what ways women's wings support women's political leadership.**

In order to address this gap within the literature, this research has two main objectives:



- To explore whether and how women's wings facilitate women's political empowerment and leadership.¹
- To explore whether there are opportunities for WFD Political Party programmes to support effective women's wings?

The research questions we want to explore are:

Motivation and Membership

- What motivates women to be part of a women's wing?
- What are the routes for joining a party's women's wing? (e.g. automatic, gatekeeping procedures etc...)
- Who is involved in the women's wings?
 - Are senior/influential women in the party involved in the Women's Wing? Are elected women in elected public office involved in the Women's Wing
- If a party doesn't have a formal women's wing, do women get support elsewhere within the party?

Structure and Activities

- How formal are the structures and procedures within the women's wing? And does this matter?
- Is there any evidence about the effectiveness of informal v formal women's networks within parties, e.g. informal WhatsApp groups vs formal structures?
- What do members find are the most useful activities within women's wing?
 - How do women's wings support women's leadership?
- Does the women's wing have influence on party policy?
 - Is there a representative on the party National Executive? How important is this?
 - Is there evidence the Women's Wing representative can have influence on the National Executive?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research project will take the format of four country case studies from South Africa, Malawi, Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina, looking at two political parties within each country. The final report will be produced by Westminster Foundation for Democracy Political Party Offices, in partnership with the University of Birmingham, and will include case studies, analysis and conclusions.

This Terms of Reference is specifically for the Malawi case study, and should include a study of the women's wing of two-three major political parties in the country.

The research will utilise a combination of primary and secondary data collection. Primary data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with women and men from within the political parties identified within this study.

This research utilises a purposive sampling approach to explore the role of women's wings in political parties in a number of country contexts. The two parties within each country have been selected based on the existing networks that the WFD Political Party Offices have. The rationale behind identifying and interviewing those

¹ Previous research stated that 'An empowered women's wing is considered to be resourced, institutionalised and positioned to exercise independent power within the party (Childs & Kittilson, 2016).



within *different parties* within the same country context is to explore the impact of different institutional environments on women's wings whilst holding socio-cultural factors constant. The rationale behind examining multiple country contexts is to explore the role of women's wings in parties in contexts where there are different levels of women's representation, different electoral systems and different relationships between political parties.

When exploring the role of women's wings in different political parties, it is important to consider the institutional nature of the parties – is party leadership centralised and cohesive with a clear hierarchy and formal power, or decentralised, fragmented or localised? Is it organised horizontally, with rank-and-file members or local groups able to influence its direction, or vertically, with decisions made at the top and imposed on the membership? This is important, because centralised parties may have greater ability to direct party behaviour (Kenny & Verge, 2013). It might also be worth considering the number of women representatives overall in the party, number of women representatives at national level, size of party, party's financial standing, candidate selection process, election process.

DELIVERABLES

1. Conduct primary research on the women's wings within political parties in Malawi. This will be through semi-structured interviews with 5-7 people from each political party. The interviews will be with a range of elected representatives and party officials.
2. Collate and conduct analysis of the interviews from each party and create final report summarising findings

BUDGET AND TIMEFRAME

10 days work at £200 a day. (Approximately 6 days of interviews; 4 days of preparation, analysis and report writing). Total budget £2,000

- Project starts 15 March 2021
- Draft report 5 April 2021
- Comments and final report
- Final report 15 April 2021

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be assessed on the following requirements:

- Knowledge and networks with political parties in Malawi
- Knowledge and experience of the issues affecting women in politics
- Experience of conducting primary research and qualitative analysis
- Excellent report writing skills

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Interested parties are requested to submit any questions about the assignment and the following documentation via email to adele.poskitt@parliament.uk by **8 March 2021**:

- A summary of relevant experience (a brief CV)
- Proposal, including outline of workplan and details of stakeholders that would be interviewed within each political party; timeline and milestones.

There will be video interviews with shortlisted candidates on 10th and 11th March 2021.



REFERENCES

- Childs, S. & Kittilson, M. C. (2016). "Feminizing Political Parties: Women's Party Member Organizations within European Parliamentary Parties." *Party Politics* 22 (5):598-608.
- Cowell-Meyers, K. (2017). *Waiting in the Wings? The Experience of Women's Wings of Political Parties in Multiple Regions. Paper prepared for presentation at the European Conference on Politics and Gender*, <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/cc069dc5-67c2-4bb6-8384-800d241f0323.pdf>
- Osei-Afful, R. (2014). *Maximising Opportunities: Political Parties, Women's Wings and the Gender Agenda in Africa's Developing Democracies*. <https://africaupclose.wilsoncenter.org/maximising-opportunities-political-parties-womens-wings-and-the-gender-agenda-in-africas-developing-democracies/>