

## Analysis of Welsh Assembly Selections January 2007

### Current Situation

Party	Number of Men	Number of Women	Percentage
Labour	10	19	66%
Plaid Cymru	6	6	50%
Conservatives	9	2	18%
Liberal Democrats	3	3	50%
Others	1	1	50%
Total	29	31	52%

Following the 2003 Welsh Assembly Election, there were exactly even numbers of men and women in the Assembly. Then Trish Law was elected in a 2006 by-election and the Welsh Assembly made history as the first legislative body to have a majority of female members. Two thirds of Labour's Assembly team are women, while Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats have even numbers of men and women. In fact, the Conservatives are the only party group with fewer women than men.

### The Voting System

The Welsh Assembly is elected using a mixed voting system, one that combines constituency contests under First-Past-the-Post (as for Westminster elections) with a regional top-up to increase the proportionality of the final result. Five regions each return four Assembly Members (AMs) from party lists, taking into account how many constituency seats each party has already won. Because the top-up is not as large as the number of constituency seats, the overall allocation of seats does not reflect the share of votes won by each party exactly. The distortions of First-Past-the-Post are partly offset but not fully.

Women account for 57% of constituency AMs and 40% of regional AMs. A large part of the difference is explained by Labour's policy of twinning constituency seats: pairing up seats to ensure that a woman and a man were selected in each set of equally-winnable seats. For Plaid Cymru and the Conservatives, women did better in the list seats than the constituencies. Plaid Cymru uses a form of positive action to ensure that a woman candidate has the top position on its party lists.

Party	Constituency		List	
	Men AMs	Women AMs	Men AMs	Women AMs
Labour	10	19	0	0
Plaid Cymru	4	1	2	5
Conservatives	1	0	8	2
Liberal Democrats	1	2	2	1
Others	1	1	0	0
Total	17	23	12	8

There have been two significant changes to the electoral arrangements since the last election. The first is that candidates will no longer be able to both contest a

constituency seat and appear on their party's regional list. This favours the Labour party and place other parties, which win fewer constituency seats, at a disadvantage. The candidates with the highest profile will have to choose whether to risk a constituency bid or remain on the party list, where a high position may assure success. Secondly, boundary changes will significantly affect three seats in the forthcoming election. The incumbents, who will now be more vulnerable than under old boundaries, are two Plaid Cymru men and one Labour woman.

### Party Selections for 2007

Political parties have not yet announced all candidates for the election on 3 May 2007. Two Assembly Members have announced their intention to stand down at the next election, one Labour woman and a Conservative man. Both parties have selected candidates of the same gender to contest the seats.

Each party has so far selected the following numbers of men and women to contest seats they do not currently hold:

Party	Number of Women	Number of Men	Percentage of Female challengers
Plaid Cymru	6	22	27%
Conservatives	9	23	28%
Liberal Democrats	7	18	28%
Labour	2	4	33%

As important as the number of women selected is, the determining factors for the Assembly's gender balance is where they are selected and how likely the party is to win the seat. Below, the fortunes for women in each party are examined.

### Labour

All Labour's seats are constituency seats, and a majority are occupied by women. Several of Labour's most vulnerable Assembly Members are women. Excluding seats subject to boundary changes, three of Labour's four most marginal seats have female AMs. A uniform swing of just over 1% to the second-placed party in each of these seats would result in their loss. Only in one constituency is the next best-placed contender a woman, Helen Mary Jones who will attempt to take back Llanelli which she lost to Catherine Thomas in 2003. She must overturn a majority of just 21 votes.

Swing away from Labour	Labour losses (cumulative)	Other parties gain
1.5%	3 women, 1 man	1 woman, 3 men
3.0%	4 women, 1 man	1 woman, 4 men
4.5%	4 women, 1 man	1 woman, 4 men
6.0%	6 women, 3 men	3 women, 6 men

Given that women account for two thirds of Labour's AMs, we should not be surprised that they also make up two thirds of Labour's most vulnerable incumbents. The Labour-held seat of Conwy will be replaced by the new constituency of Aberconwy and is likely to be less favourable to Labour. Denise Idris-Jones who currently represents Conwy is also, therefore, very exposed. If we add her to the

above tally, then, any swing up to 6 per cent (which would be a much worse than expected result for Labour) would mean a net loss of around 3 or 4 women in the Assembly.

Labour has selected two women in seats it does not currently hold: Lesley Griffiths will fight the seat of Wrexham again (the 2.8% swing needed is possible) and Keren Bender will challenge Trish Law for the Blaenau Gwent seat. The party's goal will be to hold its current seats and widespread gains are not expected.

## Plaid Cymru

Five of Plaid Cymru's women AMs were elected on the regional lists, with just one woman out of their five constituency AMs. In the constituency seats the party does not currently hold, six women are among the 22 candidates so far selected.

Plaid Cymru's number one target seat is Llanelli and it will be contested by list AM Helen Mary Jones. She was narrowly defeated in this seat in 2003, but this time she will not have the safety net of a list seat if she is not successful at winning the constituency seat back.

Llanelli is one of four seats which Plaid Cymru lost in the 2003 election. One other has a female candidate, though Jill Evans needs a much larger swing of 17% to win Rhondda. The new seat of Aberconwy is made up mostly of the old seat of Conwy, with boundary changes it will be more favourable to Plaid Cymru in 2007. If the party won it, Gareth Jones would displace Labour's Denise Idris Jones. The fourth seat is Islwyn, which also needs a major swing to win and is contested by a male candidate, Allan Pritchard.

In constituency seats which Plaid Cymru stands a chance of winning for the first time, there are not many women candidates. There are eight seats which the party would win if it secured a swing of 10%: two have women candidates.

Plaid Cymru's women do better on the regional lists. The party has a policy which means every list is topped by a woman, the female candidate with the most votes in the list selection process. This is good news for gender balance, because wherever the party wins list seats women are guaranteed to be among them. Half of all Plaid's list candidates are women.

## Conservatives

The party has selected nine women out of 32 candidates so far, a rate of 28%. However, the key will be where they have been selected and whether the party has put forward women candidates in any of its most promising seats.

The Conservatives may pick up some more seats: in 2005 they went from zero to three Welsh seats in the Westminster election. They will be keen to turn Westminster gains into Assembly gains in Clywd West and Preseli Pembrokeshire: the party has selected men in both these seats. The third seat they won in the General Election was Monmouth, which they already hold in the Welsh Assembly. David Davies currently sits in both chambers and vacates his Assembly seat at the

forthcoming election. He leaves a healthy majority and a good chance of election for the Conservative candidate: the party has selected a male candidate, Nick Ramsay to replace him.

Men have been selected in the five seats which need the smallest swings for the Conservatives to win. A swing of up to 4.5% towards the Conservatives would mean a net loss in the number of women in the Assembly. Only where the swing is larger than this will the Conservatives start to see any women elected in constituency seats.

Swing towards Conservatives	Other party losses	Conservative gains
1.5%	1 man, 1 woman	2 men
3.0%	1 man, 2 woman	3 men
4.5%	2 men, 2 women	4 men
6.0%	4 men, 4 women	6 men, 2 women

In 2003, most of the Conservatives Party's seats were won in the regional list part of the election. Two out of their ten current regional list AMs were women. If they make gains in constituency seats, they are likely to be offset by a reduction in the number of list seats. Even still, the ordering of the lists will be significant in terms of women's representation. Four out of the 18 people on regional lists are women. Even though these seats have been more significant for the party in the past, a lower proportion of women have been selected than in the constituency seats. Every list is topped by a man and only one woman is in the number two slot, Laura Jones in South Wales East. If the party wins the same share of votes and seats as in the last election, the two women currently elected on Conservative lists will be secure, but no more women will be elected.

## Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats have three constituency AMs and three list AMs. Of the three incumbents in the constituencies, the two female incumbents have slightly larger majorities than the male incumbent. The party has selected 7 women so far to contest constituency seats out of a total of 25 candidates.

Lib Dems gains are often the result of large swings which are hard to predict, so identifying winnable seats for the party is a difficult and unreliable process. However, when the party's fortunes in the last election are examined, a pattern emerges which suggests female Lib Dem candidates have a higher hill to climb than male Lib Dem candidates. The average swing needed by a woman standing for the Lib Dems is 23% while the average swing needed by male candidates is 16%. Of those seats in which the Lib Dems need to achieve a swing of 15% or less, only one woman has so far been selected out of ten candidates. This suggests that if the Lib Dems make gains in constituency seats, it will be male not female candidates who are elected.

The Liberal Democrats have one seat in each of three regions and the incumbents (two men and one woman) head up three of the lists. The other two lists are headed by male candidates. If the party wins more regional seats than it currently has, women are next in line on two regional lists and men on three.