Abstract

While steps are often taken to increase women’s representation in politics, it can often prove difficult to change patterns of recruitment and nomination to political positions. This article argues that not only formal regulation, but also informal institutions, like local norms, beliefs and values, history and traditional codes of conduct matter and should be taken into account in plans to achieve balanced gender representation.

The article compares what recruitment policies in rural municipalities in Norway have taught us. Case studies were conducted to establish which factors local political parties consider when nominating candidates, voting behaviour and women’s willingness to stand as representatives. The composition of party lists is influenced by local issues, such as distributional conflicts and desires for community representation. Local codes of conduct impinge moreover on women’s willingness to put themselves forward. These local institutions matter because it is through them that rules and values promoted by national institutions are filtered.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political theory has traditionally tended to treat formal institutions such as election systems, legislatures and the political party system as determinants of who gets elected. They are seen as structures that manipulate practices. Yet in many contexts, success seems to evade regulations meant to increase women’s representation. In this article, formal structures and ‘informal rules of the game’ (Krook & Mackay, 2011) are in focus, that is, how formal and informal rules interact with local representation policies. We identify instances in which similar formal regulations and macro values lead to different behaviour, and ask why Norwegian rural municipalities respond differently to or pursue different representation policies. Our study of the local selection process allows us to see beyond formal arrangements and establish informal determinants of gender recruitment patterns.

The literature on political recruitment of women tends to deal with politics at the national level, to the selection of women to positions in parliament or government (see for instance Bashevkin, 1985; Norris & Lovenduski, 1993; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Trembaly, 2000; Young, 2000). And we find significantly higher proportions of women in the parliaments and governments of the Nordic countries than elsewhere. These are systems where much has been done to facilitate gender equality, generating what Hernes (1987) calls a “women friendly society”. They have arrangements for child-care, certain privileges for women in university and college positions and, in Norway, laws requiring a significant representation of women on the boards of public institutions and private companies. Combining action “from below” –
through social movements and voluntary organisations – with party politics “from above” organised by strong coalitions of women representatives, was key to this success, according to several commentators (Hernes, 1987; Siim, 1988). The Norwegian system of democracy has allowed “feminist-friendly” government legislation to promote measures and initiatives aimed at solving social and economic problems that hinder gender equality. Norway is thus a “most-likely” case for high representation of women.

Similar to the other Nordic countries however, the representation of women on municipal councils in Norway has been lower than in national parliaments; elsewhere in the world the opposite tends to be the case (Raauam, 1995; Stokes, 2005; Vengroff, Nyiri, & Fugiero, 2003). Having said that, the situation is improving. Women’s share of seats in local governments is 38% on average. With a 60/40 mix either way, representation is normally considered “balanced” (see also Kanter, 1977). Aggregated figures do however conceal territorial discrepancies, and some local governments currently have fewer women than they use to have. In Norway, 29% of the municipalities have 50% or more women representation in municipal councils. At the other end of the scale, women’s representation in about 7% of the municipalities is less than 25%. None of the cities have less than 33% women representation: i.e. low women representation is first and foremost a rural problem. There must, in other words, be some local factors explaining these variations. In this article we shall be examining institutional factors in this policy area, not least because they stand for important incentives to and constraints on political behaviour. By learning more about the formal and informal institutions that structure the policy area, we might have a chance to improve success rate of measures promoting balanced gender representation.

We approached the question of variation in representation practices by drawing comparative lessons from case studies. We have been studying the recruitment policies of political parties in two northern municipalities in Norway, one where women are poorly represented, and one where women are well represented. We look at formal regulations and the extent to which various bodies adhere to them in practice. We ask how informal values and interests are framed by local political parties and finally we look at voting behaviour and women’s willingness to stand as representatives.

2. INSTITUTIONS AND GROUP INTERESTS

Defined broadly, an institution is a collection of interrelated rules and routines that constitute a formal or informal structure which displays stability over time and affects the behaviour of individuals (Peters, 1999). Formal institutions like government regulations and values are important as they structure our behaviour, and here we regard rules that are enforced by a third party widely accepted as official (often the state, but also central organisations like the national parties) as formal institutions. Certain elements of the “old institutional perspective” have tended to play up the formal institution aspect (ibid), conceiving laws as the essential element of government. Behaviour is assumed to be determined by the characteristics of positions and the prescribed relations. In this perspective there is a belief in designing and implementing structures that enhance good government, and that institutions determine behaviour and bring about intended outcomes.

Devising new ways of framing action will not, however, necessarily result in changed practices. Formal regulations and values are designed to attain goals, but the behaviour of individuals and groups does not rely solely on formal rationality and ordered positions. There are often other commitments, reasons and values, all of which are liable to affect adaptation to
external regulations. Ways of doing things sometimes become ends in themselves. Authors like Selznick (1984) describe organisations that are embedded in local communities and tied by multiple loyalties via personnel, treaties and loyalties evolved in face-to-face interaction. The belief and value systems, ways of thinking, traditional rules and conventions will here be regarded as informal institutions. Informal institutions are formed by individuals and constrain individual action. They are not consciously designed and may often have legitimacy because of their relative stability over time or their link with a “sense of place” (Lowndes, 1996, p. 182). Broadly they are socially sanctioned rules, usually unwritten, that are communicated, created and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727). They can also be embedded in informal ways of organizing activities and structures and may mediate the effects of formal electoral rules.

Following North (1990), we will regard institutions as incentive structures with an impact on individual behaviour. They will arise to cope with problems of bounded rationality and will take the form of sets of rules that reduce uncertainty and provide structures to everyday life. These institutions exist because they help maintain interactional stability and harmony. They are embedded in the value system but are not necessarily efficient structures for interaction in the governing structure, the business or the different organisational bodies in society. These institutions represent a cultural filter providing continuity so that informal solutions to exchange problems in the past carry over into the present (ibid 37). Individuals will seek to achieve their own preferences, but do so in a context that is constrained and shaped by previous institutional choices. While formal rules may be redrawn it tends to occur when it is in the interests of those with sufficient bargaining strength. Informal rules are not so easily changed and may persist simultaneously and adversely affect enactment of the formal rules. This represents a resilience to change. Still, in the intersection between institutions, there is room for manoeuvre. A core process central to social structure, it has been argued, is the choice between socially constructed alternatives (Merton, 1968; Stinchcombe, 1986). As Merton informs us, people are embedded in society as members of groups, social classes, nations, religions etc, each of which represents constraints on and opportunities for them. People are not part of society in a fixed way, as institutional rules shape alternatives in various degrees, and social demands hold ambiguities. These ambiguities pose grounds for individual choices. People are different links between structural pressures and patterns of behaviour as they have different knowledge, motivations, alternatives and sanctions upon them. Discussing this, Barth, (1981) emphasizes the concrete opportunity situation of the actor as the essential and the significant context for his or her act. He is primarily interested in analyzing the process of exchange in the interaction because implications of exchanges constrain behaviour. He sees society as experiences and expectations in the minds of men, with a continuity of agreement between people about the distribution of location of rights in statuses distributed in the population. And, behind these one might expect to find shared cultural patterns of classification and evaluation (ibid 112).

Society is most often not an integrated entity; it consists of a variety of groups and interests. The dynamics of “group politics” is particularly emphasized in the pluralist model, which regards politics as a marketplace (Dahl, 1959). Here we will understand society as generated by actors that pursue their interests wilfully, often without thinking much about it and most often conventionally. They base their judgments on values, and these values refer to the standards of what people want to have and want to be (see Barth, 1981). They also reflect gender roles in society and this again much coincide with socio-economic variables like participation in the labour marked and education.
Societies are, in other words, built up of interconnected communities and groups with their own ways of understanding their institutional environment, and contain people with their own motives and interests. The ways people understand their situation, and their own motives and goals, are linked to the social groups they identify with, and different groups might compete for resources and what counts as appropriate institutional rules. To Collins (1988), society is united and divided, to varying degrees, by emotional solidarity, evolving from feelings of co-membership or antagonism generated by repetitive behaviour. Groups defined by class, gender, and occupations etc. vary in interaction and their control of cultural resources and interactions, and they shape grounds for discourses and “interaction ritual chains” with patterns of sanctions and rewards. It creates robust and stable patterns of alliance and cleavage. And, it is argued, if women are divided by strong crosscutting cleavages, such as ethnicity or religion, social class, or by ideological divisions between left and right, these factors may over-ride shared interests associated with gender (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).

All in all, the informal institutions are drivers for stability (North, 1990), making deliberate efforts to change structures like the representation process difficult. Still, the interplay between informal and formal institutions could be a powerful source of change: Formal rules are consciously designed and clearly specified and communicated and enforced by the state and government organizations; they are likely to affect how actors respond to various informal rules in space and over time. Formal variables like electoral systems, electoral legislation, political party policies have a great impact on women’s representation (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Stokes, 2005). It is, however, often assumed that effective formal institutions require actors to believe in a high probability of sanction.

On the other hand, some societies with formal rules in the form of legislative regulations enjoy relatively unquestioned legitimacy and are likely to be obeyed without the threat of severe sanctions. Informal institutions might strengthen incentives to comply with formal rules (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; March & Olsen, 1989). Informal rules might complement formal rules by filling in the gaps or by providing incentives for individual goals within the formal institutional framework. In instances where balanced representation is sought in official national policies, and where local women candidates are both encouraged and given status in party organisations and in the wider citizenry, it will intensify the efficiency and success of the formal institutions embedded in national gender balanced policies. Hence, in some instances, the interplay between formal and informal institutions can be strong drivers for balanced gender representation.

Sometimes informal incentives alter the effect of formal rules. Informal institutions can seem dysfunctional and a hinder to the wanted balanced representation through the infused practices, motives and sanctions involved. When women local candidates are overlooked, deemed irrelevant, left out the entire decision-making process and generally more or less abandoned on the outskirts of political life, the efficiency of national gender balanced policies will clearly suffer. At the same time, what a feminist perspective sees as dysfunctional mechanisms might have gains for the local community, because the informal rules structuring representation could act as mechanisms for solving social interaction problems and providing informal solutions to exchange problems. Local informal institutions involved in representation policy could also dampen any such conflicts. Political representation and the ways it is implemented are often regarded as a means of overcoming the problem of diverging interests in society, as representation by various special interest groups can uphold legitimacy of the decisions made.
Smaller democracies are more likely to be homogeneous with respect to people’s values, beliefs and goals, it has been said (Dahl & Tufte, 1973). Still, we often find different group interests in smaller municipalities such as those in the rural north of Norway. Even smaller municipalities can have cleavages between districts and groups, and some group interests may very well overrule others. Sometimes these cleavages go in pairs as classes and ethnic and religious groups tend to live together. Representation policies may reduce conflict levels and reinforce power structures, or enhance cooperation locally. Conflicts can, in other words, be toned down through the policies of representation. In the face of institutionalised conflicts, equal gender representation may end up further down the list of priorities of political parties and the wider citizenry.

Following this reasoning we would expect the implementation of balanced gender representation to be most successful when formal regulations are to the point and supported by sanctions, and where the value system structuring the opportunity situation in the informal institutions sustains them. Conversely, if formal support remains at the declarative level without the support of sanctions, and where values in informal institutions do not sustain these aims, we are not likely to find development towards balanced representation. Also, when informal rules operate in situations with group conflicts, where they cope with problems of bounded rationality, power structures and cleavages in values, they are not likely to promote the value of balanced gender representation. In the next section we shall look at the formal regulations and rules in Norway and their “strictness” in structuring balanced gender representation.

3. FORMAL RULES STRUCTURING LOCAL ELECTIONS

The Nordic countries share very similar parliamentary systems with several tiers of government, proportional representation and multiple parties. These political structures have been found to provide good opportunities for women’s representation (Darcy, Welch, & Clark, 1994; Norris, 1997). They display a broader and more egalitarian composition of representatives than many majority systems (Narud, 2003; Narud & Valen, 2007), although no representative system mirrors its constituency in full (Norris 1997). Proportional representation (PR) is generally regarded as favouring women’s representation and ethnic minorities (Norris, 2004): The use of party lists in the Nordics introduces the principle of group representation, which can be formalised though, for instance, quotas in the lists if the parties decide so.

The political parties have to comply with government regulations on gender representation on the executive board and The Local government Act (1992) § 36, section 2 prescribes that each gender shall be represented – if possible - by at least 40%. This regulation is overseen by the County Governor and acts as a strong incentive for local parties to put women on lists of candidates. We do not, however, find government regulations in the form of quotas to achieve balanced gender representation on the municipal board. As many commentators have noted, the quota system enforces change and does has an impact on women’s representation (see for instance Lovenduski & Norris, 2003; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Stokes, 2005). This, followed up with firm sanctions, would have been the strongest formal regulation.

Local elections are rather special in two respects. First, the top positions are very important. Local parties pre-cumulate these candidates by a system of weighting votes in favour of candidates at the top of the list to improve their chances getting elected. This makes the top positions on the lists very important. Another thing in local elections is that voters can
indicate candidate preferences by adding extra “credits” to particular candidates, including candidates on other party lists. In elections since 1957 such preferential voting has affected the recruitment of women councillors negatively (Hellevik & Bjørklund, 1991; Raaum, 1995, p. 257). In 2007 voters’ opportunity to delete candidates from lists was withdrawn. It was supposed to improve women’s electoral chances if parties nominated them as candidates.

Parties have ideologies on how men and women should act and think and how resources should be used (Connell, 1987; Lovenduski, 2005, p. 26), also at the local level. National party policies do impact the gender distribution on local party lists, as they define the selection principles that are applied both nationally and locally. According to Hernes (1987), Norway displays a type of state or government sponsored feminism where feminist demands – raised by powerful social movements – have been adopted by most national parties. The national Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party have had highly profiled gender policies over the years, alternating between men and women on the lists of candidates – in accordance with the party programs. They also have the highest proportion of female representatives on municipal councils (on average 42% and 50% respectively, Statistics Norway). Other parties are pursuing this rule of “for every male a female” for their lists of candidates for local elections, though party programme declarations have been more diffuse in this respect until recently. However, the Progress Party, whose support throughout municipal Norway has been growing, has rejected the idea and is negative to any policy or law that makes it easier for women to obtain political office or any other coveted positions. As one of the major parties, it has the lowest proportion of women candidates in Norwegian municipalities (28%). The Conservative Party, whose ideology is actually more liberal than that of most conservative parties in Europe, is also somewhat reluctant to adopt this particular practice.

What we find here is that the formal rules structuring balanced representation at the local level have become fairly strong during the past 20 years. There is a statutory requirement to ensure balanced representation on the executive boards; party candidates can’t be deleted from party lists anymore; and the largest political party (Labour), and several others, have a selection quota system.

Before we compare informal institutions affecting the representation policy in the two case study municipalities, we need to review the status of this level of government and its allotted tasks, and how candidates are selected.

4. NORWEGIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND GENDER BALANCE

There are 430 municipalities in Norway. They are responsible for primary and lower secondary schools, nurseries/kindergartens, care of the elderly and disabled, and social services (social assistance, child welfare, etc.). They deliver most of the public services and social welfare, and are regarded as crucial to the functioning of the welfare state (Kjellberg, 1988; Nagel, 1991). They are also in charge of local planning (land use), environmental issues, local roads, waste disposal, water supplies and sewage. Despite significant demographic differences, the municipalities have the same rights and responsibilities, and apart from the mandatory tasks, they are authorized to undertake any activity that is not prohibited by law or falls within the exclusive jurisdiction of other public authorities (Page & Goldsmith, 1987). Decentralised institutions, like municipalities or regional councils, are expected to be more open to women as these are close to their essential responsibilities (Johnson, Kabuchu, & Kayonga, 2003; Neyland & Tucker, 1996), and because they deal with
welfare issues that are important to women (Phillips, 1995). But as we said above, women’s representation varies in the local communities.

As Rokkan (1970) demonstrated, up to the 1960s women’s representation varied between central and peripheral regions as well as between urban and rural municipalities within the same region. He found that the peripheral municipalities of the outer regions lagged furthest behind (the fishery communities in the North and West). Rauum (1995) found great improvements 25 years later. The political mobilization of women in the intervening years brought the percentage of female municipal councillors closer to the national average, and narrowing the gap between regions since the 1960s. Women’s representation in municipal councils has increased steadily since then too, and peaked at the 2007 elections with an average 38 per cent for the country. The South-West is still lagging behind, while the North, which traditionally has had low women representation, is today more or less on a par with the country average.

In rural Norway municipal council have about 15–20 seats, for which several parties (most often around 5-6) compete. Not all national parties are represented locally, especially not in the smaller municipalities. Sometimes we also find non-partisan councillors elected on what are known as “community lists”, to advance the cause of a specific community in the municipality. The composition of most executive boards, elected from the municipal councils, is proportional.

The different parties appoint selection committees – comprising only a handful of party members – which nominate candidates to stand at national and local elections. Selection is done behind closed doors (Narud, 2008). In this process the parties consider the candidates’ political skills, experience, gender, geographic affiliations, age, work and the like. Considerations are coloured by party ideology and the institutional and legal framework (ibid). The Centre (agrarian) Party gives priority to employment in agriculture while Christian parties will look for religious affiliations. Social democratic parties will find union experience important (Valen, 1988). The district you come from is also important, and so is experience in politics (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988). The challenge for the handful of party members is to find candidates which fill as many of the criteria as possible.

5. TWO RURAL MUNICIPALITIES

The two case municipalities are situated in different parts of the county and are similar in many respects to their adjacent municipalities, including the level of gender (im)balance. We conducted 11 interviews (8 with politicians and 3 with council officers of both sexes) in these municipalities; we attended meetings, studied documents and read up on previous research.

Both case municipalities are rural and coastal and both display a skewed demography with a larger than average share of elderly people. It is a very common feature of Norwegian rural municipalities; people, especially the younger ones, move south and they move to cities. Jobs in agriculture and fisheries have been declining for almost half a century, and the manufacturing sector is increasingly under pressure (Bjørnå & Aarsæther, 2009). Rural municipalities tend not to have jobs for highly specialised workers, distances are vast and, unlike Sweden, for instance, communities are strung along the main roads. So “our case municipalities” share several features and, indeed, challenges. The public institutions not only deliver most of the services, but most of the jobs as well, i.e. the livelihoods of people living outside the urban areas. We also find fishery and agriculture and small-scale industries.
Beside revenue from taxes and transfers from central government to the municipal institution, money passes from the state to individuals in the form of retirement and disability pensions, which forms a large part of total income in the peripheries (Teigen, 1999).

The first of our case municipalities, which we are calling ‘A’, has 2,200 inhabitants. Council representation is currently skewed, with women in only 24% of the seats in the municipal assembly. The number of women representatives is actually down on the previous period. In the 1980s women held 14% of the seats, rising to 25% in the ’90s. The population of this municipality is divided between 54% men and 46% women in the age group 20–89, a highly disproportional demographic mix in other words. This in itself makes a well-balanced council unlikely, but it cannot fully explain women’s poor showing.

Municipality B has 1,500 inhabitants. The council is balanced, with 53% of the seats held by women, up on the previous period. In the 1980s it was 27%, rising to 29% in the ’90s. The population has about as many men as women in the 20–89 age group.

Women in both municipalities are more likely to have a higher education than men, thought the rates are far below national average.

**Table 1. Education and employment amongst men and women (2008)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education and Employment</th>
<th>Municipal A</th>
<th>Municipal B</th>
<th>Regional average</th>
<th>Country average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher education (16+)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Men</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed persons (15-74)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Men</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Norwegian statistics

Jobs in both municipalities are divided equally between men and women, but also here the figures are below the regional and country averages. As for personal income, men earn – on average – about € 9,000 more per year than women in these municipalities (Norwegian statistics 2007). Still, even considering the smaller number of women in the essential age groups in municipality A, the socioeconomic factors would seem to tell in favour of female participation in local politics in both selected municipalities.

6. BELIEF AND VALUE SYSTEMS IN MUNICIPALITY “A”

Municipality A has a mixed population that includes ethnic minorities such as the Sami and descendants of 18th and 19th century Finnish immigrants (Kvens). The municipality has always had unbalanced representation.

“It is the men’s arena; it has always been like that” (former female representative).

The municipality hit the headlines in the 1990s when ethnic conflicts arose in the wake of a parliamentary vote to include it in the official Sami language zone (Høgmo & Pedersen 2004). Tensions are lower today, but not entirely gone.

“There is some tension. You cannot put a party list up without considering the different districts. People are certainly not going to vote for you, they vote for their
village representative.” “I think there are way too many representatives from that particular district, they have too much influence, I would like to see that change.” (several representatives, female and male)

What one might call traditional local conflicts are in other words important. They are historical in a sense, and also informed by the geographical distribution of municipal funds. Like most municipalities in rural areas of Norway, municipality A does not have a single municipal centre, but several; the population is spread on either side of the main roads and between 3–4 small communities. They all “fight” to get what they perceive as their fair share of the municipal “budget cake”:

“The municipality should help people in this particular district financially with the new sewer arrangement.” “We have to support these new firms in this particular district to compensate for job losses when the fish farm moved out.” (opinions expressed at a municipal meeting)

Local politics, in other words, is very much a zero-sum game as the different communities compete for scarce resources. People here want the best for their own community.

Many Sami people adhere to a strictly orthodox form of Lutheran Christianity (Laestadianists). Its followers are concentrated in certain local communities. It is pietistic, with strong rules for social conduct and morality.

“The Christian Democratic Party have their primary focus on traditional matters.” (representative)

As a belief and value system it does not favour women in political positions.

The elected council in A

A’s council has 17 seats of which 13 are held by men and 4 by women (2007–2009). All the women in this municipal assembly are from the Labour Party, which received 60% of the vote at the election. The Christian Democratic Party is second largest (14%) and the newcomer, the Progress Party, third (12%). Other parties got just one mandate each in the council. The District list lost all their mandates.

Table 2. Elected council in A (2007–2010), and changes from previous election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List</th>
<th>% support</th>
<th>% change from last election</th>
<th>Council mandates</th>
<th>Change in council mandates</th>
<th>Female mandates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>+23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Left Party</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party (agrarian)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Democratic Party</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Party</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District lists/other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are fewer women on this council than in the previous period. A District List and
Socialist Left Party lost most of their support in this election; many of the former female council members belonged to these parties. The Conservative Party, a major national party, is not represented in this municipality, and hasn’t been in recent years.

**The candidates put forward and the voting**

As to representation policy and the election lists, while there are women candidates on all party lists, none of the parties in this municipality had women as their top candidates. Indeed, the Christian Democratic Party and Progress Party both put 2–3 men in lead position. The Labour Party, Socialist Left Party and Centre party have a fairly even distribution of men and women on their lists and all seek an even share of representatives from the different communities.

Table 3. Candidates on party lists in municipality A. Number of women among 10 top candidates, distribution of top positions, communities and experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Women listed</th>
<th>Distribution of gender</th>
<th>Distribution of communities</th>
<th>Experience*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A man at the top - then even distribution.</td>
<td>Even distribution between three communities</td>
<td>Mix of experience / newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Democratic Party</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Two men at the top - then even distribution.</td>
<td>Even distribution between three communities but most candidates from one of them</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Party</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Three men at the top</td>
<td>Even distribution between all communities at the top of the list but most candidates from one of them</td>
<td>All are newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Left Party</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A man at the top - then even distribution.</td>
<td>Even distribution between two communities</td>
<td>All are newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A man at the top - then even distribution.</td>
<td>Even distribution between three communities</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Most experienced candidates are at the top of the lists.

Some of the parties do have a stronger following in some of the communities and think a bit differently about gender representation:

* Gender is a very important factor and we consider it, but we also take account of districts and experience. (Labour councillor)*

* We think Christian values are important and it is hard for us to get women to stand. (Christian Democratic Party councillor)*

* We want to fight the prevailing politics and the dominance of certain communities, gender is of less importance. (Progress Party councillor)*

The lists are one thing, and voting another. Voters frequently change the lists, and here lists would have given a female representation of 35%, actual voting gave 24%.

The Labour Party strengthened its position as by far the largest party, winning 10 seats. Those who voted Labour gave extra support to the candidates from one of the communities,
relegating candidates from a second village to the sidelines (a man and a woman). The Christian Democratic Party got 3 councillors in the new council after voters had rallied round and indicated extra support for a male candidate from the village that was “pushed off” the Labour Party list. The Progress Party won seats for the first time, both for male candidates. Two other parties won seats for the (male) candidates on top of their lists.

**Experience and willingness to stand as candidates**

The only women in the municipal assembly belong to the Labour Party. There are very few experienced candidates seeking re-election (5) and only one of the female representatives did so.

> “Women quit because they don’t feel included, the men get together in groups and deal with things that don’t appeal to us. It’s a men’s game and there are too few of us to get our opinions across and the two of us have felt pretty much alone….Another problem is that there are few women living here, there are not many to choose from” (representative)

Conditions are now improving. Since the election female Labour politicians have formed an interest group where they discuss things of common concern and find a new sense of their importance in politics.

> “Now we have formed a network. No one used to bother about women’s concerns and new women did not feel comfortable with the situation.” (women representative)

**Adherence to formal rules**

The local government adheres to statutory requirements on gender balance, and the executive board is correctly balanced with of 2 women and 3 men. It was easy enough since the Labour Party, which has the majority, has four women on the municipal board to choose from. The mayor is male, and the deputy mayor female. Of the three largest parties, only Labour put forward a gender balanced list. The national Christian Democratic Party and Progress Party leave it to the local branches do decide the male/female ratio, and they both nominated male candidates at the top of their lists.

**Representation in municipal A**

The party lists and voting confirm the pattern we find interviews. This municipality has a history of religious and ethnic conflicts that influences how they perceive potential candidates and what they stand for. Local parties try to reduce cleavages by seeking to balance community representation on the lists. Voters do not trust representatives from neighbouring communities to pursue their interests. They give “extra credit votes” to their own candidates, and political parties are stronger in some communities than others. The pattern of voter support changed when the District list and the Socialist Left Party, both of which had several female candidates, lost all their seats. The Progress Party, with few women candidates, is represented for the first time.

This has always been a male province. This does not mean that women are not welcomed or
that parties do not want to nominate women, because gender balance is increasingly what the voters and government are demanding. But women are not invited to take part in the political debates within the parties, and have felt uncomfortable anyway. Women and gender seem to pick the shortest straws when nominations clash with district interests. Formal rules are obeyed, but the informal institutions in this municipality seem reluctant to promote gender balance in political representation. The philosophy of the municipal council may be changing, not least because women here have taken steps to do something about their sense of isolation, and work together for the common good. There have been improvements at least within the Labour Party insofar as women enjoy being part of the local politics scene and want to continue as politicians.

7. BELIEF AND VALUE SYSTEMS IN MUNICIPALITY “B”

Municipality B is a long-standing fishery and agriculture municipality. It is very small: only 1,500 people live in five small communities. Over the past few decades, however, the livelihood structure has changed, with fewer living from fishery. The main jobs are today in services, agriculture, fish-farming with a scattering of industry jobs. There are no ethnic conflicts and no orthodox church groups. The conflicts here have been the same as in most municipalities, with rivalries over local government spending and development within the municipality. This has however changed.

The north and the south of the municipality used to quarrel incessantly, but do so much less today (former COE).

We did something before the previous election because we had such a bad economy to deal with. We invited almost all the nominated candidates to join in a workshop where we agreed to make serious cuts. These were pledges we promised to respect were we to be elected, and [it is thanks to] this consensus that the quarrelling is largely a thing of the past. (Mayor)

I am part of the opposition, but I stood by what we decided in the workshop, something had to be done. Of course, it might cost me my seat at the next election! (women representative in opposition)

Women have tended to be strong in this area. They used to manage the household when men were away fishing for long periods. They took care of the small farm and the children, ran the village organizations and acted when the need arose.

They have always been strong, they had to be because they had so much responsibility. There is a story about the quay in this beautiful part of the municipality – it is called the “women’s quay” because women took the initiative to build it. They collected money and did all the paperwork and ordered the men to set it up. (Several representatives)

You know, my father was in politics for a little while, but it was my mother who was the real politician. (Representative)

There is this story about the wife of a priest who lived in the last century. She was one of our most important politicians and sat for a very long period. (representative)

Political life is a different here. A strong Labour Party controls the council in coalition with the Socialist Left Party. The Centre Party (agrarian) is fairly strong in opposition: agriculture
means a lot here, especially in two of the communities. The opposition also consists of a
group of Liberals (who broke with the Labour Party some years ago), the Conservative Party
and Progress Party. The Christian Democratic Party is not represented today. This is a
municipality with a classic “left–right” ideological cleavage.

The elected council in B

There are more women on this council than on the previous one. The women belong to the
Labour Party (38% support), Socialist Left Party, Centre Party and Conservative Party. The
Centre Party is split into fractions replicating a municipal South–North cleavage, but also
between two younger women candidates and two older men. It is further complicated by
family relations.

Table 4. Elected council in B (2007–2011), and changes from previous council

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List</th>
<th>% support</th>
<th>% change from previous period</th>
<th>Council mandates</th>
<th>Change in council mandates</th>
<th>Female mandates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Left Party</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party-agrarian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Party</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Party</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District lists/other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Christian Democratic Party used to have a seat, but lost it. The Labour Party won one
more seat and the District list lost their only representative.

The candidates and the voting

The election lists in this municipality have women candidates from all the parties, but only the
Socialist Left Party has a woman as a top candidate. The Progress Party and Centre Party have
a clear majority of men on their lists, but the lists are balanced in the top positions. The rest of
the parties have a fairly even distribution of men and women on their lists. The Labour Party,
Socialist Left Party and the Progress Party are fielding candidates from all over the
municipality, whilst the Centre Party and the Liberals have stronger support in a few districts.

Table 5. Candidates on party lists in municipal B: number of women among 10 first
candidates, distribution of top positions and communities, experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Women listed</th>
<th>Top positions</th>
<th>Distribution of communities</th>
<th>Experience*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A man at the top - then even distribution</td>
<td>Even distribution between north and south</td>
<td>Mix of experience / newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Left Party</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>A woman at the top- then relatively even distribution (most women)</td>
<td>Even distribution between north and south</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We also find disparity between the election results and the fielded candidates, and mostly in women’s favour. Lists would have given a female representation of 35%, actual voting and other circumstances gave 53% women in the municipal assembly. The recent election did not change the balance of parties, but did improve the gender balance.

*Most experienced candidates are at the top of the lists.*

People used to delete many of the women candidates, they voted mainly for their own village candidates. (Long experienced women representative)

We have usually had many women politicians, though not all the time. Not in the previous period, but in 1987 we got the county gender equality prize for good balance in the municipal council. (Mayor)

In the recent election those who voted for Labour gave extra support to a woman candidate, dislodging a male candidate. Those who voted for the Conservative Party and Centre Party also moved a woman up the list in front of a male candidate.

Outstanding personalities, the skill to communicate and experience mattered a lot in this election. (Administrative officer in the election process)

One male candidate moved out of the municipality, paving the way for an even more “favourable” difference in the gender balance. There would probably have been one less woman representative had he not moved.

**Experience and willingness to stand as candidates**

Of the 9 women on this council, three are newcomers. They are outspoken and like local government work. The women on the executive board feel included in discussions, that they have a say and make a difference, and are respected as councillors. All but one (who disapproves of the strategic games her party plays and has started to wonder if local politics really makes any difference) are likely to stand for their parties in coming elections.

There have not been any women networks in this council, with the exception of a special
gathering held 8 March 2009. They have not felt the need to network, they say; they feel that they know and respect each other well enough, even if they do not always agree.

The party lists and voting are in line with what our interviewees told us, that this municipality has a tradition of strong women. Voters have not always trusted the neighbouring village representative to stand up for their interests, and deleted the candidates, but at this election most of the parties had candidates from everywhere and there was less “community voting”. The council is more harmonious. Women are welcome because they are good politicians, they are respected and invited to take part in internal party political debates and feel quite comfortable with politics. Most parties nominate them on every other spot, but not as top candidates.

_They do not need any help at all, they are perfectly capable of getting their opinion across and have always been._ (Mayor)

**Adherence to formal rules**

Formal rules are obeyed, and the values structuring informal institutions in this municipality are not antagonistic to gender balance in political representation. The players adhere to formal rules when positions are allocated and members nominated for the executive board, which consists of three women and two men (including the mayor). Every party, _even those not obliged_ to do so by party headquarters, nominate a mix of male and female candidates at the top of their lists.

**Representation in municipal B**

The party lists and voting confirms what our interviewees told us about the history of strong women in this municipality, and their current fairly high status as political actors. The distributive conflicts in this municipality mirrored split loyalties and party strongholds, but are much less intense today. Most of the local parties, at least the larger ones, try to balance community representation at the very top of their lists.

This has not always been a male province, and women are welcomed as candidates. Formal rules are obeyed. Most parties do, however, field men as top candidates with the Progress Party as the only predominantly “male party”, and the Socialist Left Party the only predominantly “female party”.
8. LOCAL COMMUNITY AND REPRESENTATION

The socioeconomic data discussed above reflect the tendency of unbalanced municipalities to have more men than women citizens. This makes a difference, and is a challenge for many of the northern rural municipalities. On the other hand, women are more educated than men and fill as many jobs as men. This should indicate a relatively good starting point for balanced representation in the case municipalities.

Formal institutions structuring local representation policies are fairly strongly in encouraging balanced gender representation. The executive board has to be balanced and voters are no longer allowed to delete party candidates. There is, however, no legislation securing female representation in the form of a quota of seats on the municipal council. The political parties make a big difference here, and have their own gender equality rules. Labour and Socialist Left Party use gender quotas for their candidate lists, as dictated by party headquarters. These regulations are adhered in both municipalities and formal rules are respected. Neighbouring municipalities do likewise, so formal rules like these evidently matter. Designing and implementing structures to enhance good government does in fact work. In other words, formal regulations largely determine behaviour in local Norway.

In the balanced municipality, the Conservative Party and Progress Party put men and women in alternate places on the list even though this is no formal demand. This was not done in the municipality without gender balance, where the Christian Democratic Party and Progress Party fielded several men at the top of their lists. In other words, informal values, conventions and traditions matter.

Certain parts of the municipality with unbalanced gender representation swear to an orthodox, pietistic brand of Lutheranism with ultra-traditional gender roles, and a history of local conflicts. Female representatives were reluctant in the past to continue because they felt “left on the fringes” of political deliberations. This is an unfavourable starting point for balanced gender representation. Something is, however, changing here too. The women themselves have banded together to demand to be included in discussions, and feel better “standing together”. This, we are told, is encouraging other women as well to engage in local politics. The increasing public demand for balanced representation is a structural demand requiring change, and women here are taking matters into their own hands. The formal rules, public demands and debates have muddied the waters in terms of values and norms, creating space for manoeuvring and change, even in a situation in which local codes of conduct are resilient to change.

The balanced municipality has no orthodox church but does have a history of powerful women. The women here are used to taking care of the household, their self-esteem is coloured by it. There is a classic “left–right” ideological cleavage, but the distributive
conflicts between south and north have abated. The governing parties have representatives from both parts of the municipality, and efforts are made before the election to accommodate opposing views and interests. The climate for women in politics is good, as women representatives respect each other and feel included in the rest of the council. It has not been necessary to form a special “women’s interest group”. Experienced women representatives intend to carry on in politics although some find it hard to combine with raising a family. One of them objects to the strategic games that characterise her party.

There is mobilisation within parties to get their community representative elected. All local parties in unbalanced municipality A seek an even representation from all the districts. This is especially important since the municipality has gone through a period of severe inter-communal strife and political gridlock. This does not work in favour of women representation, because votes seem to prefer a local community representative more than some sort of gender parity. In A, voters bring localisation conflicts to the fore and community interests matter when they vote. They change the order of candidates on the lists to secure representation on the council from their community. Territorial cleavages and interests seem to matter more than a gender balanced council. It seems reasonable to assume that voters – over the years – have adjusted to this “interest group” game, they learn from experience and each other and adapt their electoral behaviour to the outcomes of previous elections. They are therefore likely to rally support within the village behind a local representative. It is rational and functional for people living in the communities, but it might not be very functional for the local government as a whole, and appears to be dysfunctional for gender balanced representation. This way of coping with the problem of bounded rationality reduces uncertainty and provides a structure to everyday life, as no one wants to end up as losers in a distributive game. But, if conflicts are manifested and continually reinforced in institutions like the municipal council, they will be hard to overcome. The “common good” and shared interests associated with gender will be swamped by implacable cross-cutting cleavages. Here the informal rules and ways of doing things give incentives to behave in ways that contradict the spirit of balanced representation.

Most of the top candidates on the party lists are also male, moreover. As most the parties only get one of their candidates elected, the result will be clearly detrimental to a broader representation of women. Table 4 shows the institutional factors that seem to influence women representation in these municipalities.
### Table 6. Factors influencing women representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal institutions</th>
<th>Unbalanced municipality</th>
<th>Balanced municipality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Local beliefs, values, traditions and conventions</td>
<td>Interest conflicts between villages</td>
<td>Interest conflicts between villages has much been overcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pietistic religion with traditional gender views has some appeal</td>
<td>Women has always held a salient role in the household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Not favourable for gender balanced representation</td>
<td>o Favourable for gender balanced representation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| - Values in local party representation politics | Parties seeks even distribution of seats between villages | Most parties seeks even distribution of seats between villages |
|                                                | All parties place men at the very top of the list | Most parties place men at the very top of the list |
|                                                | Labour party have even distribution of male and female candidates in election list | Local parties have even distribution of male and female candidates in the election lists |
|                                                | Experience is important but women have not taken re-election because they have felt alone and shoot out | Experience is important and women feel that they are taken seriously and likes local politics |
|                                                |   o Not favourable for gender balanced representation |   o Fairly favourable for gender balanced representation |

| - Citizen vote pattern | Citizens seems to vote for own village candidate | Citizens evaluate the character of the candidate |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal regulations</th>
<th>Are adhered</th>
<th>Are adhered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Quotation in party lists (Labour and Socialist Left Party)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Quotation in Municipal Executive Board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a party of some size it will be easier to balance different group interests in their group in the governing apparatus, like different districts, gender and experience; and these parties will thereby be able to take roles as integrating forces in the localities.

### 9. CONCLUSIONS

In general then, the conditions for a balanced representation of women in local government in Norway are quite favourable, and perhaps strengthened by the fact that this level of government deals with matters of importance to everyday lives which some regard as
typically female – like welfare and care of children and the elderly. There is also a quota system pertaining to the composition of the executive board that favours women’s representation, and measures have been taken to prevent the type of preferential voting that was assumed to affect women’s chances of representation. Besides, the largest party is in favour of balanced representation. The national quota rules on the selection of members to the council’s executive board, the changes in the preferential voting system and awareness in most political parties and society of the importance general gender equality, have generated fairly favourable and conditions for women’s representation. Without all this gender representation locally would likely be much less favourable. And the share of women representatives in Norwegian municipalities has increased over the years. Formal institutions do in other words matter greatly in Norway; the rules, regulations and values of political parties have an effect on local representations policies. The values they express are increasingly regarded as legitimate.

This study has shown that the Labour Party, which holds a strong position in Norway and in the North, emphasizes equal gender representation and welcomes women as party candidates. The Socialist Left Party does so as well but it is a small political party. The parties on the right are somewhat more reluctant at the national level, but many of the local parties practise a system of “alternating men and women” anyhow which seems to have much to do with the informal values of the municipality. Here we find that the informal values and codes of conduct in the balanced municipality are strengthening the incentives to comply with formal rules.

The less gender aware Progress Party is however winning wider electoral support and this might slow the trend of equal gender representation. In addition, we found that local parties tend to favour men as top candidates, in both the balanced and unbalanced municipalities, leading to a situation with many male representatives on councils composed of a multitude of smaller parties. For a party of some size it will be easier to balance different group interests and incorporate those of women, less so for the smaller parties. There is a trend towards equal gender representation in Nordic local governments, but as local Norwegian councils are composed of a multitude of parties it is necessary to place women as pre-cumulated top candidates if this positive trend is to continue.

These case studies indicates that local parties are trying to address local group interests; they are especially careful to consider the interests of all the communities within their territory when setting up local party lists. This, however, can be dysfunctional for balanced gender representation if voting behaviour is largely dictated by self-interest and “community favouritism”, and if local conventions makes it hard for women to find acceptance and a place in local parties. They must enjoy council work to be willing to continue in politics. Findings further indicate that orthodox religious values worsen gender balance in local politics. This is
also reflected in the broader picture of recruitment patterns in adjacent municipalities. The losers here are the women and maybe some of the smaller communities. Orthodox religious values and distributive conflicts seem to matter both in the formation of party lists and what people vote for. It also seems to create a political climate which dissuades female candidates from continuing as politicians.

Representation policies in local governments are, in other words, not only affected by rules and values “from above”, it must also be understood in a “bottom up” perspective, as the aggregated consequences of the rational behaviour of voters who tend to put community interests before gender equality. And sometimes local issues and group interests can overshadow the issue of balanced gender representation; as long as your community benefits it matters less if the representative is a man or a woman. Thus, it seems appropriate to conclude that local circumstances and informal institutions matter through modifying the effects of the rules set and the values promoted by formal institutions. Things are however gradually changing as gender balance seems to be within reach at the next Norwegian local election. Here, the local representatives themselves might be the key, as it is important to harness the experience of women in the nomination process and create an inclusive, productive environment for both men and women.

References


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1 National representation: Sweden 47% women in parliament, Iceland 43% and Finland 42%. Norway has 39% women in parliament, whilst Denmark has 37%.

Representation on average in municipalities: Sweden: 42% women representation (2006-2010), local political parties nominated 41% women. Constituents gave women extra support in elections. Denmark: 27% women representation (2005-2009), local political parties’ nominated 30% women. Denmark has recently gone through major amalgamations within the frames of the Structural reform, and this implied that several experienced candidates had to compete for a fewer number of seats. The 2009 local election brought in 32% women representatives. Finland: 37% women representation (2008-2012), local parties nominated 40% women. Norway: 38% women representation in municipalities (2007-2011), local political parties nominated 42% women.

2 Here individuals and interest groups struggle to advance their own interests by electing representatives who will serve as their advocates. In Dahl's vision every citizen seeks political information, analyzes it, and makes enlightened judgments about what political choices that will maximize his or her self-interest. In a pluralist view this leads to a system where preferences and politics are chiselled out by means of bargaining among different groups (Dahl 1959).

3 Municipalities span from less than 500 persons to hundreds of thousands in large cities like the capital Oslo. Even municipalities located in the periphery in Northern Norway, with just a couple of thousand inhabitants scattered over large areas, provide high standard services within e.g. child care, primary education, health, services to elderly people, and technical infrastructure.