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Abstract

Whilst analysis of the relationship between the descriptive and substantive representation of women has mainly focused on women politicians as critical actors in many contexts political parties provide *the* linkage between voters' preferences and policy programmes. The manner in which political parties respond to women voters is shaped by both the information they receive about women voters' preferences, from the news media, pollsters and other sources, and by gendered party type. Analysis of parties' attempts to target women voters can help us understand whether parties perceive women as typical or average voters. I conduct two cases studies on the influence of gendered newsframes on party policy and inter-party competition in the United States and Great Britain to formulate a preliminary analytic framework designed to facilitate research to assess how parties' responses to portrayals of women voters vary according to institutional and contextual factors across time and space.

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> *"When we're dealing with a gender-gap issue, there are two ways of looking at it –*
> *superficially through a public relations campaign or substantively through legislation"*
> *Congresswoman Schneider (cited in Abzug 1984: 138)*

Introduction

The core intention of this article is to provide a preliminary analytic framework capable of comparative application, to apply to the question, 'is the electoral linkage between political parties and women voters deep-rooted and central to electoral campaigns, or, on the contrary, superficial, ad hoc and volatile?' Two illustrative case studies are used to set out an innovative research agenda for extensive, in-depth, collaborative work to compare the response of parties- across time and space- to gendered representations of voters.

The majority of the extensive research undertaken by feminist political science on the link between the descriptive and substantive representation of women has focused on the role of women/feminist politicians as critical actors (Celis and Childs 2011; Celis et al. 2008; Childs 2007; Dovi 2002; Dovi 2007; Mansbridge 2003; Phillips 1995; Wängnerud 2000). However, in many

contexts political parties provide *the* linkage between voters' preferences on the one hand and policy programmes on the other; critical actors serve as intermediaries who attempt to convince party elites to incorporate women's interests into their policy programmes. Critical actors make representative claims with regard to women (Celis et al. 2014; Saward 2010) often by employing polling data to produce an account of women voters' preferences. The extent to which these interventions are successful may vary depending on the configuration of a number of factors: such as the mobilisation of feminist (usually) women in the legislature and the upper echelons of the party hierarchy; the ideological position of the party and the strength of women's/feminist organisations in civil society (Kittlison 2006; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Young 2000). Another factor that is likely to have a significant impact on the ability of feminist actors to influence parties is the electoral context.

In an environment where women voters' behaviour is, or is perceived to be, distinct from men's parties may be more responsive to demands to represent women's interests if they anticipate gaining an electoral advantage. For example in the United States and Britain when women's suffrage was first granted political parties feared that women would vote as a block and they responded by developing policy programmes designed to be attractive to women (Burrell 1993: 301; Carroll 2010: 123). The stream of 'women friendly' policies however dried up when it became evident[1] that women differed little from men's (Abzug 1984:30, 109; Mueller 1988: 20; Norris and Lovenduski 1993).

In the early 1980s evidence of partisan dealignment (Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979) demonstrated that many of the previously stable political identities (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), that parties had targeted in order to secure an electoral mandate, had become less politically salient across advanced industrial democracies. The fracturing of these old political identities, and the rise of new politics in the 1960s and the 1970s, provided a window of opportunity for feminists to renew their claims that there was an electoral incentive for parties to take women seriously (Norris 2001: 9-10); and many members of the women's movement switched tactics and began to participate in electoral politics. As a result, we see further evidence that male dominated parties respond to women voters when they fear that they may vote as a block, in their reactions to the emergence of a 'modern gender gap' in the United States.

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[1] Although the evidence that women did not vote as a block in the aftermath of women's suffrage may be faulty due to the lack of opinion polls at the time Mueller, Carol. 1988. "The empowerment of women: polling and the women's voting bloc." Pp. 16-36 in *The Politics of the Gender Gap: The Social Construction of Political Influence*, edited by Carol Mueller. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
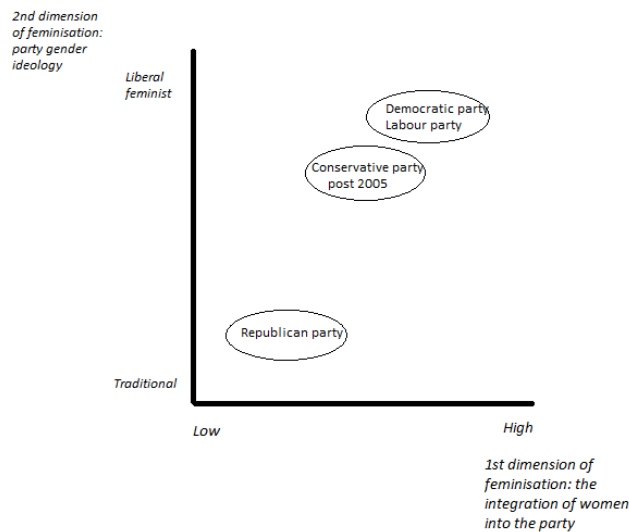
> *"The gender gap is part of an enormous wave of demographic change sweeping the country that threatens to swamp the Republican Party." Edward J. Rollins, President Regan's chief political advisor (Cited in Abzug 1984: 3).*

> *"The greatest political upheaval of the century [the gender gap]" Patrick Cadell polling analyst for the Democrats (Cited in Abzug 1984: 4).*

Thus, where there are gender gaps in political attitudes and behaviour there may be an opportunity for feminist actors to exploit these gender gaps to secure policy gains. It is well documented that feminist activists have used portrayals of women voters as leverage to pursue feminist goals (Norris 2001). In the United States the high profile modern gender gap, evident since 1980, where more women than men support Democratic candidates, has been utilized by feminists to support their case for pursuing a feminist conception of women's interests. In the United Kingdom the Labour party's adoption of all women shortlists (1993) in the selection of parliamentary candidates has been, at least partially, accredited to a sustained campaign undertaken by women in the party to draw the leadership's attention to the historic advantage the Conservative party had among women voters (Eagle and Lovenduski 1998; Russell 2005). If the supposition, that high profile gender gaps in political attitudes and behaviour provide fertile ground for feminist policy initiatives, is correct then where gender gaps become salient features of media coverage of electoral contests we would expect to see the parties competing to capture gendered votes.[2] The extent to which the parties are themselves feminised is likely to influence whether any reaction to media portrayals of women voters is either fully integrated into a party's offer or superficially appended to it. Additionally exogenous shocks to the party system may open up windows of opportunity where feminist actors are able to direct the party's attention to the perceived interests of women voters (Childs 2015: 9).

Figure One: Gendered Party Types, US and UK two largest parties

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[2] In the main when women's organisations in Western democracies advocate for the inclusion of women's interests in party policy they do so from a liberal feminist position. It is possible to imagine a position where an anti-feminist women's movement would make claims about how the parties should best represent the interests of women using gender gaps to support their case, but we do not see these to any great extent in media coverage of national elections. In this paper I therefore focus on feminist conceptions of the representation of women but the framework could equally be applied to anti-feminist campaigns to represent women who support traditional gender roles.

2nd dimension of feminisation: party gender ideology

Liberal feminist

Democratic party Labour party

Conservative party post 2005

Republican party

Traditional

Low — High

1st dimension of feminisation: the integration of women into the party

The feminisation of political parties can take place on two levels; deep-rooted and superficial. Deep-rooted feminisation occurs when women's organisations, interests and perspectives are embedded within party structures and routinely incorporated into policy platforms and campaigns. Superficial feminisation occurs when women's interests are accommodated in an ad hoc and piecemeal fashion in response to a perceived electoral case on an election by election basis. Figure one represents a schematic approach to classifying gendered party types along two dimensions: gender ideology (ideas) and the integration of women within the party (numbers) (à la Lovenduski 2005). A party with a liberal feminist ideology will include the substantive representation of women among its core beliefs and values. As such a party with a liberal feminist ideology should be highly responsive to feminist portrayals of women voters. It is not necessarily inevitable that a party with a feminist ideology will also include large numbers of feminist (usually) women integrated within the party[3] but the two dimensions are highly correlated because feminist activists working within the party over a long time period are likely to influence its core beliefs and values. Thus, a feminised party is most likely both feminist in its ideology and within its party structures. I hypothesise that feminist claims regarding women voters will provoke a more deep rooted response from a feminised party than one with a traditional gender ideology and few feminists (usually) women mobilised within the party hierarchy.

Case Studies

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[3] There are two components to the first dimension of feminisation; women can be integrated within parliamentary elites and as party members through party women's organisations Childs, Sarah. 2008. *Women and British Party Politics: Descriptive, Substantive and Symbolic Representation*. London: Routledge.

In order to highlight the need for an analytic framework to assess the relationship between feminist activism, media newsframes and party behaviour I employ two case studies (the United States and Great Britain). The criteria for case selection is that in both countries the issue of gender became a salient feature of the election campaign coverage (from 1980 in the US and 1997 in the UK). Focusing on these high profile cases maximizes the likelihood that parties will be aware of, and therefore possibly responsive to, gendered newsframes either at a surface or deep level. Future research should attempt to explain party response by capturing variation in media coverage and feminist activity to establish what factors determine party response across time and space (as set out in the preliminary analytic framework - table one).

The United States

The US gender gap literature is extensive, evolving and highly sophisticated. In this case study I use the gender gap literature to identify gendered newsframes employed during election campaigns. I trace the circumstances in which a newsframe gains purchase and identify causal factors that should be isolated in a systematic comparative analysis across space and time. The high profile 'modern' gender gap in the US has generated a massive body of research that has influenced analysis of gender and voting behaviour across the globe. The gender gap is not a chasm (Seltzer, Newman and Leighton 1997) but it has been relatively stable since 1980; remaining between four and eleven percentage points (figure two).

Figure Two:

US Gender Gap in Presidential Elections 1980-2012
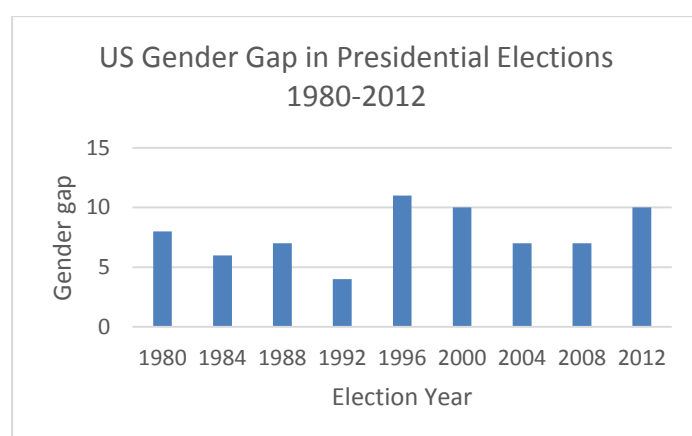
Source: Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP)[4]

In the United States, little public attention was given to potential differences between men and women voters- after the bout of consternation at the time of women's suffrage-until the *Gender*

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[4] http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/voters/documents/GGPresVote.pdf

Gap was revealed in the aftermath of the 1980 presidential election, where eight percent fewer women than men voted for Ronald Regan (Frankovic 1982; Sigel 1999).[5] In fact there was a small gender gap in 1976, with more women supporting Carter, but this fact did not receive media attention and was dismissed by Carter's own pollster as unimportant (Mueller 1988: 17). It took feminist intervention for the 'modern' or left-leaning gender gap in the US to gain public attention. The first use of the term *Gender Gap* is attributed to Eleanor Smeal, then president of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1981 (Bonk 1988: 89; Sigel 1999: 5). Roberta Sigel (1999) argued that by naming the phenomena- *Gender Gap-* and providing a coherent narrative about women voters the women's movement was able to draw politicians' attention to the issue of the representation of women (Sigel 1999: 5).

The naming of the *Gender Gap* kept the issue of women's interests and concerns on the political agenda and encouraged the parties to consider women candidates; for example, it influenced the selection of Geraldine Fararro as the Democrat candidate for Vice-president in 1984 (Norris and Carroll 1997: 9). Carol Mueller argues that NOW effectively utilised the gender gap to convince the Democrats that including a women as the Vice Presidential candidate would be electorally advantageous (Frankovic 1988; Mueller 1988). However, both CBS and the New York Times produced polls that showed that including a woman on the ticket would have no effect on the result but neither polls were published as they did not fit with the prevailing newsframe (Mueller 1988: 29). NOW's campaign to maintain a feminist newsframe was successful in the short term because of the resources they deployed and because their frame fulfilled the news media's demand for exciting news stories, with a coherent narrative, as a result the *Gender Gap* frame influenced the Democrat's decision to choose a woman to run for vice president. Thus, feminist representations of women's interests can be demonstrated to have had a significant impact on the party's decision-making (directly improving the descriptive representation of women in the form of a woman vice presidential candidate) but in this case success was not driven by the use of reliable evidence regarding the demands of women voters. Instead the narrative that women would be more inclined to vote for a party with a women running as vice president was not supported by the opinion poll data, but evidence that ran counter to the newsframe was excluded from media portrayals of women voters. This example illustrates why a comprehensive account of how parties represent the interests of women voters requires the inclusion of an analysis of how information about women

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[5] However, there were some notable academic exceptions. For example see: Tingsten, Herbert. 1937. *Political Behavior*. Totowa, NJ: Bedminster. & Duverger, Maurice. 1955. "The Political Role of Women." Paris: UNESCO. *The Political Role of Women*

voters is conveyed to the parties rather than simply linking survey data to party policy without considering the intervening variables of feminist activism and media content.

The Gender Gap newsframe, although still in use, was accompanied by the *Year of the Woman* in 1992; focusing on the record numbers of women running for and elected to Congress (Dolan 1998). Sue Carroll contends that although women's organisations, such as NOW, initially benefited from the surge in attention to women voters in the *Year of the Woman,* over the longer term interest may have waned as a result of media fatigue and interest in women candidates declined in 1994 and 1996 (Carroll 1999). Attempts to estimate the influence of the women's movement on the parties' attitudes toward women voters should include a measure of the fluctuation in campaign intensity (in this case as a result of diminishing resources available to NOW (Bonk 1988; Mueller 1988)) to assess whether, as feminist activism drops off, other actors' framing of women's interests become dominant.

The *Year of the Woman* was followed by the *Year of the Angry White Male* in coverage of the 1994 House elections. The shift to a focus on men resulted from an opinion poll showing that men had transferred their support to the Republicans, as a result women were largely absent from media portrayals of voters and candidates during the 1994 election (Carroll 1999: 8). The shift of emphasis from women to men was criticised on the grounds that it simply reflected the media's appetite for a new angle rather than a response to credible evidence of a shift in the behaviour of men.

> "*Scholars with access to the National Election Studies have searched hard for evidence about the angry white male in the 1994 elections, but they have come up empty-handed*" (Norris and Carroll 1997: 11).

Yet more evidence that media portrayals of voters should be included in models of parties' attempts to represent women voters.

The 1996 presidential election saw the arrival of the *Soccer Mom*. The term was cited by E. J. Dionne in *The Washington Post* on July 21, 1996 when he quoted a senior media adviser to Bob Dole, Alex Castellanos, who said that Clinton was following the advice of his pollster, Dick Morris, and targeting a voter whom Castellanos called the "soccer mom" (Norris and Carroll 1997); "the overburdened, middle income working mother who ferries her kids from soccer practice to scouts to school" (Dionne Jr 1996). Clinton responded to the *Soccer Mom* frame by speaking on issues that his team

believed would appeal to this specific group of target voters, such as school uniforms and curfews for teenagers (Carroll 1999: 10). Dole's response was more explicit than Clinton's and he referred to *Soccer Moms* directly on several occasions and argued that his proposed tax cut would allow more women to stay at home with their children rather than seek paid employment (Carroll 1999: 10). To some extent neither candidates' responses to the *Soccer Mom* frame were liberally feminist as they focused almost exclusively on children rather than the core demands of the organised women's movement – such as the liberalisation of access to abortion, access to healthcare or childcare or other feminist concerns such as sexual harassment (ibid). The *Soccer Mom* frame resulted in an emphasis on policies that impact on children and women were used as a proxy for family concerns. In fact in her analysis of the same election Sue Carroll concluded that the widespread use of the gendered *Soccer Mom* newsframe may have been detrimental to the ability of women's organisations to translate the media and party interest in women voters into tangible gains for women (Carroll 1999). This example again shows that models of party behaviour should include competing representative claims made about women voters and should incorporate the dominant narrative evident in any given election cycle.

However, a small number of the Clinton ads did cover feminist concerns (Jamieson, Falk and Sherr 1999) and Clinton referred to women in his speeches and made use of them as examples more often than Dole did. Clinton's even suggested God might be a women (Jamieson, Falk and Sherr 1999: 14). This analysis demonstrates that despite Carroll's critique that Clinton's attempts to target women voters were overly narrow they were considerably more liberally feminist than Dole's overtures. This is in keeping with a feminist analysis of Democrat and Republican gendered party types which demonstrates that even in the context of a high profile gender gap gendered party type plays a crucial role in the extent to which campaign messages and policy platforms are designed to meet the interests of feminist women.

The potential for dissonance between gendered newsframes and the empirical evidence is manifest in the post-election analysis of the 1996 presidential election.

> *"Ultimately,… the soccer mom did not play a particularly important role in Clinton's victory. Like the "angry white male" before her, on further analysis, systematic evidence establishing the importance of the soccer mom proved elusive (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1997 cited in Norris and Carroll 1997: 12)."*

It would seem that although the *Soccer Mom* newsframe did direct some attention to women voters, it shifted the media and parties' attention from the feminist framing of the gender gap and the need to address a wide range of 'women's issues' to a much narrower conception of women's interests which elided women with the family. Hence it is important that any analysis of the influence of gendered newsframes on parties' attempts to represent feminist women voters include an assessment of the extent to which the newsframe is liberally feminist.

The *Soccer Mom* reappeared, although to a lesser extent, in the 2000 presidential election campaign and she was followed by the *Security Mom* in 2004 (Carroll 2006; Carroll 2008: 77). The *Security Mom* had much in common with the *Soccer Mom:* she was perceived to be white, married with young children, but in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks she was extremely anxious to protect her family (Carroll 2006: 93). And, much like the *Soccer Mom,* "empirical data collected from voters offer little support for the characterization of security moms as portrayed in media accounts" (Carroll 2008: 76). Kerry and Bush both addressed the *Security Mom* by stressing that they would be tough on terrorism, but Kerry also focused on healthcare and the gender pay gap in an attempt to gain support among poorer women who were over-represented in the undecided category. Both candidates made symbolic attempts to appeal to women voters by making public appearances with prominent women and in addition Kerry made some targeted issue based appeals. Sue Carroll concludes that the *Security Mom* frame benefited the Bush campaign because it allowed him to appear to address women's concerns without making any tangible policy commitments (Carroll 2008: 87). Again the *Security Mom* frame deflected attention away from other sub-groups of women, from the women's movement and from a feminist reading of the gender gap (Carroll 2006). Although the use of the frames meant that women voters received some attention during the campaign it would seem that neither the *Soccer Mom* nor the *Security Mom* were likely to encourage the parties to attempt to represent liberally feminist women.

In the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections women voters received more media attention than ever before (Carroll 2010; Carroll 2014). In 2008 Hillary Clinton's candidacy in the Democratic primaries and the high levels of support she received among women ensured that women voters were a central part of the media's coverage of the election (Carroll 2010). Again the candidates made symbolic appeals to women voters by being seen with high profile women and the Republicans sought to push back against the Democrats' advantage among women by selecting a woman, Sarah Palin, to run as Vice President (Carroll 2014). The selection of a woman to run as VP was McCain's most serious attempt to target women voters in 2008. Obama made more issue-based attempts to attract women voters, stressing economic initiatives to help working women (Carroll 2014: 120). In

2008 there was not a dominant gender newsframe and instead women voters were portrayed in a variety of different ways and they were central to the election coverage. In 2012 the most prominent gender newsframe was generated by the Obama campaign itself, they developed a narrative of the *Republican War on Women*. The narrative had purchase because of the extreme and shocking statements made by a number of Republicans during the primaries and the campaign: including Republican Senator Rick Santorum saying that contraception is "not okay" and Republican Congressman Todd Akin stating that women's bodies prevent them from getting pregnant as a result of rape (Carroll 2014: 121-122). In addition Obama repeatedly stressed his support for equal pay for men and women whilst Romney publicly dodged the question. Romney's campaign made little reference to women's issues and in contrast Obama frequently raised issues of women's health and pay equality. It is clear that gendered newsframes often originate from within political campaigns/organisations (both feminist and non-feminist) and critically the extent to which they are liberally feminist in content is likely to both reflect and shape the parties' attempts to represent women voters.

It would seem that thirty two years after NOW publicised the *Gender Gap* the story of how women voters are portrayed by the media and represented by the parties in the US is one of considerable variation and change over time. The extent to which parties respond to women voters in an ad hoc or more systematic and holistic manner does seem to be influenced by the way women voters are portrayed in the campaign and which actors are most successful in shaping that narrative.

Great Britain

Historically women in Britain voted for the Conservative party in greater numbers than men (Norris and Lovenduski 1993: 38). In the UK feminist activists within the Labour party in the 1980s and early 1990s were successful in linking this gender gap in voting behaviour to the under-representation of women in Parliament and this narrative played a critical role in the party's decision to adopt a gender quota, in the form of all women short-lists (AWS), in the selection of parliamentary candidates in the run up to the 1997 General Election. The use of women voters to argue for the better representation of women in politics was set out in two pamphlets published by prominent Labour women (Brooks, Eagle and Short 1990; Eagle and Lovenduski 1998; Hewitt and Mattinson 1987). The attempt to secure the better representation of women voters was largely an internal party campaign and not driven by media generated gendered newsframes. However, the party's attempts to target women voters did lead the media to identify newsframes to pitch the story.

Figure Three: The British gender gap 1945- 2010 (Adapted from Norris 1999)
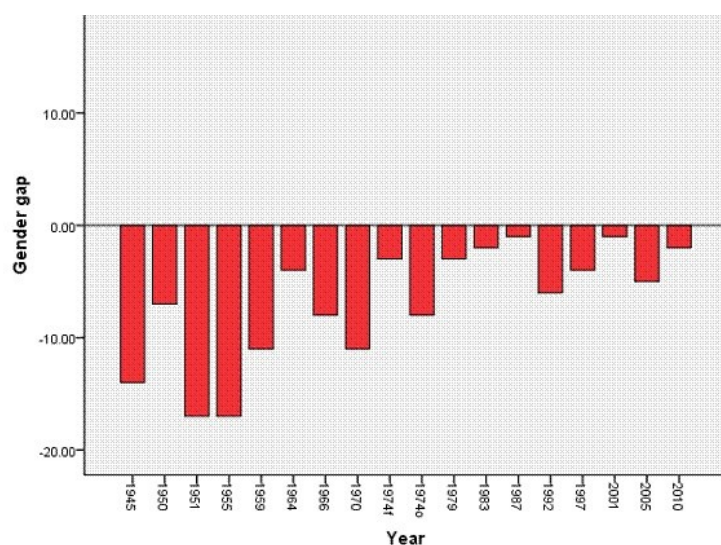
Feminist advocacy groups were particularly active in the 1997 election campaign; producing reports and polls and generally attempting to push the issue of women voters onto the media agenda and gaining considerable coverage (Lovenduski 1997). The press coverage did not include one single dominant gendered newsframe and both feminist and anti-feminist portrayals of women voters were in evidence (Lovenduski 1997: 714). However, in 1997 *Worcester Woman* was identified by Conservative pollsters and adopted by the media as a newsframe to describe working-class women in marginal constituencies with children who might have previously voted Conservative but who had switched to Labour. To some extent *Worcester Woman* was borne out of the Labour feminists' campaign for the party to take women seriously by drawing attention to the traditional gender gap but it also narrowed the focus to women with children. In addition women MPs were subject to a gendered newsframe after the election in the form of *Blair's Babes,* which was prevalent in coverage of the increase in the number of Labour women MPs from 37 to 101. Again there was not a dominant gendered newsframe during the 2001 election campaign, although *Worcester Woman* returned, and women journalists took up feminist criticisms of the absence of women politicians from key campaigning roles (Lovenduski 2001). There was evidence that the parties were seeking to target women's votes, most prominent was the Labour party which produced a manifesto for women but the Conservatives also produced some policies targeted at liberally feminist women (Lovenduski 2001: 748).

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[6] The gender gap is calculated as the difference between the Con-Lab lead for women and men. Gallup polls 1945-59; BES 1964-2010. 2015 data was not available at the time of writing.

In the run up to the 2005 General Election the parties and the media were unusually interested in women voters. The media attempted to define women voters by applying gendered newsframes, *Worcester Woman* returned again, accompanied by *Let-down Woman* and *Do-it-all woman*. *Let-down Woman* reflected a belief that women were especially unhappy about Britain's involvement in the Iraq war and that they were disaffected with Tony Blair, supported by a poll commissioned by the liberally feminist advocacy group the Fawcett Society. However, women's supposed disillusionment with Blair was probably an artefact of poor research methods; reports of polling evidence that women were unhappy with Blair frequently did not offer a comparison with men and implied a gender difference that was not in evidence. The *Let-down Woman* frame created the impression that women were moving away from Labour when in fact there is no evidence to support this interpretation. The focus on women's alleged hostility to Blair also suggested that women respond to party leaders in a more personalised and emotional way than men- headlines asked questions such as whether 'women had fallen out of love with Blair' and discussed attempts to 'woo' women voters- again a stereotype without empirical support. All three parties used the media to engage in direct appeals to women voters. Labour and the Liberal Democrats produced manifestos for women and Labour women filled a bus with women MPs and visited marginal constituencies to speak to women voters, although the bus received little media attention (Campbell and Lovenduski 2005: 847; Childs 2005). The Conservative Party's third consecutive defeat in 2005 led them to elect a new party leader, David Cameron. Cameron sought to detoxify the party's brand by portraying the party as being in touch with modern Britain: a key part of the strategy was party feminisation (Childs and Webb 2012). Cameron chose to make his first speech as party leader at the Equal Opportunities Commission and he focused on women's issues from a liberally feminist conception of women's interests. As a result from 2005 onwards the difference between the main parties on feminist ideology diminished considerably.

 In the British news media 2010 was going to be the '*Mumsnet Election*'. The term was coined by Rachel Sylvester in the Times (17/11/09) and by May 5th, 43 further articles in British national newspapers used the term. Sylvester claimed that the election "would be decided at the school gate' and she depicted the party leaders as lining up to participate in live web-chats with women voters through the Mumsnet site. The focus on mothers was confirmed by Douglas Alexander, the Labour party's 2010 election coordinator, when he said that 'Labour needs to win back middle-income female voters with children in marginal seats" (*Guardian*, 19.2.10). The 'Mumsnet election' was a significant feature of the election newsframe that set up a narrative that women voters, and policies that affect women more than men, would be at the centre of the campaign. The three main parties

did set out policies specifically targeted at women and mothers in particular, work/life balance issues were addressed in all three election manifestos with promises to make maternity and paternity leave more flexible. All three parties were also committed, rhetorically at least, to improving the representation of women in Parliament. All three main parties offered a liberally feminist set of policy propositions and although the Labour party provided the most comprehensive offer for liberally feminist women the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives actively competed to secure their votes.

During the 2015 British General Election women voters became a salient feature of the election coverage when the Labour Party launched its pink battle bus intended to reach out to women voters. The bus generated a great deal of publicity, not because the party was targeting women voters per se but due to its colour; generating many column inches that at least touched on the issue of women voters. The Labour party were accused of patronising women and of succumbing to the 'pinkification' of womanhood; although-as previously noted- the Labour party had employed campaign buses (of other hues) seeking out women voters in previous elections which had been largely ignored by the media. Admirable as the attempt to draw attention to women's issues may have been, the bus's deployment was largely publicly justified on the basis of dubious statistics. The Labour party claimed that there were *9.1 million missing women* voters in the 2010 British election whereas in fact there was not a statistically significant gender gap (Campbell and Childs Forthcoming). The 'missing' women voters became a recurrent news story and thus a good deal of the media coverage and public debate about women voters that took place was based on the erroneous belief that women had been less likely to vote in 2010 than men. This is another example of a representative claim made about women voters that became part of the news agenda but was not supported by sound evidence. As a result in order to understand the parties' attempts to target women voters during the 2015 election we need to understand how they responded to this portrayal of women as disproportionately non-voters as well as including observational data about 'real' gender differences in analytic models. Future research should assess whether the other parties responded to the frame and offered feminist policies in order to attempt to compete for women's votes as a result.

Although there wasn't a single coherent gendered newsframe in play during the 2015 election a Nexis search of UK national newspapers shows that considerable newspaper copy was devoted to the subject. In fact during the final three months prior to the election in 2015 there were 142 references to women voters in national newspapers compared with 45 references in the same

period in 2010. There was not an easily digestible simple newsframe such as the 'Mumsnet Election' or 'Worcester Women' to provide a journalistic hook for articles discussing women voters but women voters and women's issues were raised frequently. It is possible that the issue of women voters was more fully integrated into the coverage of the 2015 campaign as a whole. Analysis of the parties' manifestos shows that all of the parties offered liberally feminist policy positions on issues ranging from childcare to domestic violence and even UKIP, the least feminist party, put forward a set of policies designed to attract liberally feminist women voters (Campbell and Childs Forthcoming). The 2015 British General Election was highly gendered in other regards, the prominence of the small parties in the leaders' debates in the election coverage (three of the seven party leaders were women), meant that women politicians were more visible in the campaign than in previous years. Further research should assess whether an electoral context where women voters and women politicians, framed from a liberally feminist perspective, are highly visible results in interparty competition for women's votes.

To sum up there is no longer a statistically significant aggregate level gender gap in voting behaviour in the UK. Women voters are a recurrent feature of election coverage and there appears to have been an upsurge in the attention the media pays to them. Crucially all of the main political parties have adopted liberally feminist policy platforms, particularly since the election of David Cameron as Conservative party leader, the main parties are explicitly competing for the votes of liberally feminist women. In this context it is perhaps not surprising that a 'modern gender gap' (Inglehart and Norris 2000) has not emerged in Britain. There is less variation in gendered party types in the UK than in the US, which may help explain the variation in the gender gap across the two countries. Returning to our central research question there has been a significant movement in the attempts of the main parties in the UK to incorporate liberally feminist policies into their election commitments. The application of the analytic framework, set out below, would help us to unpick whether this change has been driven by observable shifts in women's preferences, feminist activism, gendered newsframes or all three.

The Analytic Framework

In this section I use the insights gained from the US and UK case studies to elucidate a preliminary analytic framework to guide future comparative research. In order to provide a convincing answer to the research question: 'is the electoral linkage between political parties and women voters deep-rooted and central to electoral campaigns, or, on the contrary, superficial, ad hoc and volatile?'

researchers must operationalise a series of concepts.[7] These concepts include gendered party types (measured using the two dimensions of party feminisation), feminist and anti-feminist campaigning from inside and outside of the parties and gendered newsframes. The extent to which election campaigns address liberally feminist concerns can be assessed through the use of content and discourse analysis of party campaign materials, manifestos and speeches. In order to generate comparable data country researchers should develop a common coding frame and create a cumulative party liberal feminist campaign scale generating a score for each major party seeking election. The first dimension of feminism could be operationalised by collating information about women/feminists representation throughout the hierarchy of the political parties. The second dimension of feminism could be operationalised by conducting a survey of gender and politics scholars to place the parties on a liberal feminist scale over the previous legislative period.

The extent to which gendered newsframe/s are evident in election coverage could be captured with a simple frequency score for the number of references to women voters subdivided by the key words employed in the gendered newsframe/s in coverage of the campaign. For the purposes of this analysis gendered newsframes refer to media portrayals of women voters that have a single coherent narrative and a frequently employed phraseology, such as *Gender Gap*, *Soccer Mom* or *Security Mom* (Jamieson and Waldman 2004). The gendered newsframe may be coded as liberal feminist or anti-liberal feminist and may originate within feminist organisations (inside and/or outside the parties) or from outside of the women's movement. Undertaking this data collection exercise would require the creation of a network of country researchers and the deployment of substantial research resources, but the potential for significant advances in our understanding of how/when the substantive representation of women occurs and, potentially, the sources of the gender gap itself are sizeable. Collating detailed and systematic comparative data, as set out in table one, would enable a comparative analysis of how political parties respond to liberally feminist representations of women voters over time and place that would incorporate variations in election context and political activism.

Table 1: Proposed analytic framework

Dependent Variable/s	Party Liberal Feminist Campaign Scale
	Comprising of analysis of:
	• Party manifestos;

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[7] In this paper I elucidate a framework for analysing the link between liberally feminist claims about the representation of women and political parties but it could equally be applied to studies exploring radical feminist or conservative feminist campaigns to attempt to represent women.

	• Leaders' speeches; • Election policy commitments; • Campaign materials. (Gender gap in party of vote)
Independent Variables	• Party feminisation dimension 1: Proportion of women representing the party in the: Legislature; Executive; Mass membership. Relative power of party women's organisations • Party feminisation dimension 2: Elite survey rating parties' position on a liberal feminist scale over the previous legislative period. • Feminist campaign activity outside of the parties • Gendered voter newsframes: Frequency of articles referring to women voters; Frequency of use of gendered newsframes; Feminist/Traditional gender ideology driving the newsframe (Y/N); Newsframe created by feminist activists (Y/N). Newsframe created by anti- feminist activists (Y/N). Newsframe created by party (Y/N). Additional information: Newsframe supported by sound empirical evidence (Y/N). • Actual size of gender gap at last election

Conclusion

A historical reading of how parties have been persuaded to address women's issues reveals that a case that women's votes depend on it, is very commonly made. Critical actors are important but they are most successful when they are able to claim that they can bring women voters with them. The study of gender and voting behaviour and gender and party politics form two distinct strands of

gendered political research but they should be more fully integrated. This is a real challenge because it requires extensive collaborative research across time and space but such an approach would provide more complete accounts of how the representation of women occurs.

It is time to bring politics back into models of the gender gap. The US case study demonstrated that the 1980 US presidential election was a critical election in gendered terms as it was the first where a modern gender gap was apparent. 1980 also possibly represents a critical moment in terms of the polarisation of the two main parties on gender ideology (Freeman 1987; Gillion, Ladd and Meredith 2014; Rymph 2005). The successful Republican presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, was the most traditional in his view of gender roles among his Republican rivals; stating that a wife in the workforce "threatens the very structure of family life itself" (Abzug 1984: 81-87) and arguably this was the moment where the two parties' gender ideology clearly diverged or arguable reversed (Freeman 1987). Early studies of the gender gap incorporated the behaviour of the parties into their analysis of the gender gap; for example Sue Carroll described Ronald Reagan as a "catalyst for the gender gap" (Carroll 2010: 125) but most recent studies focus on sociological explanations for differences in men and women's voting behaviour. Most current analysis of the gender gap in voting behaviour treats the party positions as relatively stable, but if 1980 was a critical moment then there is reason to measure the parties' gender ideology and mobilisation of women within the party hierarchy over time to assess the impact this has on women's support for the parties themselves. In these circumstances we would expect the Democrats to be more responsive to feminist portrayals of women's policy interests and to prove more attractive to liberally feminist women voters than the Republicans, arguably a significant source of the US gender gap. In the UK, however, the main parties are much closer together in terms of gender ideology, particularly since 2005 (Campbell and Childs 2015). In this context we may not expect to see a gender gap in voting behaviour as the main parties are competing to capture 'feminist'[8] women's votes. Thus understanding gender and voting behaviour in global perspective requires an account of both the sociological factors shifting gendered attitudes and the reactions of political actors.

Throughout the case studies it was clear that political parties create and react to gendered newsframes and that the extent to which they respond by incorporating feminist demands depends on gendered party type and the feminist (or not) nature of the newsframe itself. It is important, therefore, that any academic analysis of the relationship between gender gaps and the descriptive and substantive representation of women, as facilitated through political parties, includes

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[8] In this article I refer to 'feminist' women as women who are not necessarily self-conscious feminists but whose policy preferences are liberally feminist.

measurements of both actual gender differences in political attitudes and behaviour and media portrayals of these differences.

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