

# The Substantive Representation of Women—Does Issue-Salience Matter? Party Politicization and UK Westminster Elections 1945–2010

Paul Chaney

## Research Highlights and Abstract

This article

- Responds to recent calls for a more holistic approach to studying the substantive representation of women (SRW). Specifically, it explores the nexus between the SRW and issue-salience. A theoretically-informed review of the literature and analysis of party manifestos in UK elections 1945–2010 both confirm that this matters to contemporary understanding of the SRW.
- Extends existing understanding of the substantive representation of women by reviewing relevant theory and providing new, empirical research findings.
- Heeds earlier calls for the combination of content and critical discourse analysis in policy studies. Thus this mixed methodology responds to earlier calls for social research to ‘humanize’ quantitative data by focusing on language and meaning related to specific phenomena, notably from political actors’ perspectives.
- Includes a future research agenda emerging from the present study. It is one that will extend contemporary understanding of the substantive representation of women and generate debate and further research.

*The following discussion responds to recent calls for a more holistic approach to studying the substantive representation of women (SRW). It uses mixed methods to explore the nexus between the SRW and issue salience in the manifesto discourse of UK state-wide elections 1945–2010. The data show that issue salience does matter to the SRW because it is part of on-going patterns and processes of party politicization linked to electoral cycles. The present findings also affirm that whilst there has been a trend of increasing issue salience over the post-war period, the SRW has also been subject to periods of set-back and reversal. Thus its status amongst competing policy priorities remains ‘fragile’; in turn, this raises issues of institutional sexism in the formative, agenda-setting phase of parties’ public policy-making.*

**Keywords:** issue-salience; substantive representation; women; elections

## Introduction

This study responds to recent calls for a more holistic approach to understanding the substantive representation of women (SRW) (Cf. Celis et al. 2008; Mackay 2008; Childs 2008). The latter term describes the situation whereby women’s needs

and concerns are reflected in public policy-making and law. As Hanna Pitkin (1967, 209) states, it can be conceived of as 'acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them'. The focus of the following discussion is the nexus between issue-salience, party politicization and electoral politics in the manifesto texts from UK Westminster elections 1945–2010. It is argued that this is an appropriate locus of enquiry because electoral discourse is part of the agenda-setting process whereby prospective parties of government set out their policy programmes. These are key indicators of political intent and reveal the degree to which parties' agendas advance the SRW. 'Issue-salience' is the measure used to make such an assessment. It is a cross-disciplinary concept that refers to the importance of an issue for a given party in a particular election as indicated by the nature and number of policy proposals. It posits that the more an issue is emphasised by a party, the greater the likelihood it will attract voters who share similar concerns (Cf. Helbling and Tresch 2011). Allied to this 'party politicization' is a term that refers to the process by which issues, principles and values develop to become electorally salient, subject to inter-party competition and changing prioritization on the political agenda over time (Chaney 2012a).

Existing studies of women's representation and electoral politics have tended to examine a range of political activities concerned with the core issues of 'who represents, what is represented, and how it is represented?' (Galligan 2007, 557). They include analysis of: candidate selection processes (Niven 1998), quotas for women candidates (Caul 2001), the impact of proportional electoral systems (Galligan 2008), the gendered nature of policy pledges (Bara 2005), and the relationship between gender and turnout (Paolino 1995). The traditional focus of earlier SRW studies has been the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation (in other words, whether having women present as elected representatives translates into SRW—see for example, Reingold 1992; Dovi 2002; Chaney 2012b). More recently scholars have called for more sophisticated analysis that extends beyond exploring the role of descriptive representatives in legislative settings (cf. Weldon 2002; Celis and Childs 2008; Mackay 2008). For example, Mackay (2008, 131) asserts that 'a broadened version of representation is needed which takes into account multiple sites of representative activities and policy-making'. In a similar vein, Celis et al. (2008, 107) state 'rethinking how representation "works" in [a] broader sense is crucial'. Importantly, the latter scholars allude to 'anticipatory representation' as a facet of the SRW whereby, 'the representative and the represented respond to one another in an iterative fashion' (Celis et al. 2008, 101). It is an avenue of enquiry also highlighted by Childs et al. (2010, 199) who state that 'in studying the SRW ... scholars should both look at changes in the representative claims and pledges that are made by individual political actors, such as political parties'.

The following discussion offers an original response to these entreaties by focusing on electoral discourse and the role of issue-salience in the SRW. It is structured as follows. First, the existing literature and theory on SRW is reviewed in order to outline contemporary understanding of the relationship between issue-salience and the SRW. This is followed by a summary of the research methodology before the research findings are presented in relation to: the changing electoral salience of

**Table 1: Factors and Associated Questions Underpinning the Role of Issue Salience in the SRW**

Factor	Associated questions
Public policy agenda-setting	Is the SRW on/reflected in—parties' policy agenda? How is it addressed?
Party responsiveness to public opinion and exogenous interests concerned to advance the rights and representation of women	How and to what extent have parties programmes been shaped by feminist activism?
Women's role and influence in collective intra-party negotiations and power relations	Do traditional, sex-discriminatory party practices endure?
Mandate theory	Have parties secured electoral endorsement for the far-reaching reform necessary to move away from traditional male-dominated socio-political practices?
Accountability theory	Have parties delivered on their earlier SRW policy pledges?
Symbolic politics and cultural change	Are parties promoting cultural change by advancing policy programmes that make a symbolic statement that sex-discrimination and women's marginalisation is unacceptable?
Future compatibility between party programmes and legal rights requirements under gender equality legislation	Have party programmes been subject to gender equality impact assessments?
Party support and vote maximisation	Is a given party standing on a policy agenda (more) likely to secure the support of female voters—when compared to other parties and past practices?

SRW in Westminster elections, the party politicization of SRW, and parties' framing of SRW policy proposals. The discussion concludes with a summary of the findings and an agenda for future study.

## The Substantive Representation of Women: Does Issue-Salience Matter?

A review of the existing literature on the SRW suggests that issue salience is a key, if often overlooked, concept in contemporary understanding of the SRW. This assertion is based on a range of factors (Table 1). Each of these is now considered in

turn before the discussion turns to the empirical findings from the Westminster election data.

As noted, one of the principal reasons why manifesto discourse is significant to the SRW is because it reveals the extent to which parties' policy programmes are cognizant of, and potentially responsive to, women's needs and concerns. In other words, party manifestos play a formative role in political issue definition and prioritization. Both are far from being gender-neutral (Baumgartner and Jones 1991, 1993) for they reflect power relations between the sexes (Lukes 2005). As Jenner (2012, 294) explains:

... identifying who and what has influence over the problems policymakers attend to is central to the question of how power is exercised in politics ... in the study of policymaking, research on agenda-setting explores relationships with a single focus of interest: the salience of an issue.

A further reason why issue salience in manifesto discourse matters to the SRW is because it is an indicator of party responsiveness to public opinion and exogenous interests concerned to advance the rights and representation of women. This is underpinned by earlier work that has explored how the public's policy preferences and priorities shape parties' political decisions and policy choices by setting limits of what is broadly acceptable (e.g., Cobb and Elder 1972; Page and Shapiro 1983; Erikson et al. 2002). When applied to the SRW this view provides insight into whether a party's policy agenda is ahead of, or lags behind, general public feelings on gender relations and the status of women. In this regard manifestos can also be seen to constitute part of the prevailing political opportunity structures (cf. McAdam et al. 1996) for advancing the SRW because they reflect the past influence of, and future opportunities for, feminist activism.

Although outside the scope of the present empirical enquiry, a further series of intra-party processes also underline the relevance of manifestos to understanding of the SRW. One of these is explained by endogenous saliency theory (cf. Dellis 2009). This conceptualisation details how party programmes reflect the outcome of collective intra-party negotiations and power relations between different groups and interests—as well as prevailing leadership practices. In this regard they provide a valuable index of women's role and influence within a given party.

Manifestos are also political texts fundamentally concerned with setting out parties' general position on a multiplicity of contemporary policy issues in advance of an election (Stimson 1995). This has conceptual underpinnings in the form of mandate and accountability theories (cf. Royed 1996; Fearon 2003). The former describes manifestos' future potential to advance the SRW; whilst the latter is concerned with holding parties to account for past actions. In this way mandate theory is allied to traditional, instrumental analysis of policy delivery and asserts that when in power parties should implement the programme that they promised when running for office (and were therefore mandated to introduce). Thus, according to this view, it is important that SRW policies are pre-figured in the electoral discourse. In reality this does not always happen. Parties may renege on—or, for a range of reasons, be unable to deliver—earlier commitments. In such circumstances accountability theory asserts that party programmes remain of key importance to SRW. This is

because elections are, in effect, 'opinion polls' on the policy record and performance of the party (or parties) that formed the previous administration (Ferejohn 2003). As Przeworski et al. (1999, 40) explain: 'even if citizens are unable to control governments by obliging them to follow mandates, citizens may be able to do so if they can induce the incumbents to anticipate that they will have to render accounts for their past actions ... [thus] the incumbent chooses policies necessary to get re-elected'.

Both mandate and accountability theories map directly onto the associated literature on gender, party support and vote maximisation. Here an expansive body of work on electoral competition highlights contemporary attempts to adapt party programmes to maximize support from targeted groups—including women, in heterogeneous electorates (Franklin et al. 2004). A central strand of this is concerned with the analysis of party election manifestos and understanding gender differences in political activity (cf. Bischoff 2005; Kitschelt and Rehm 2005). As Richardson and Freeman (2003, 402) note, 'a host of variables long considered as important correlates of voting decisions—region, union membership, and age—are less significant than gender'. Thus the 'gender gap' in voting (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986) suggests that the saliency that a party affords to the SRW shapes gendered patterns of turnout (Mueller 1988); ergo probabilistically women voters will support parties giving greatest saliency to the SRW. This is evident in UK elections (See Electoral Commission 2004; Geddes and Tonge 2006)—as is the systematic targeting of women by political parties as a source of electoral support (Hayes and McAllister 2001).

Aside from traditional, instrumental analysis of policy outcomes (Sanderson 2002) reference to the SRW in manifesto discourse is also an important example of symbolic politics and the promotion of cultural change (Brysk 1995). As Sarcinelli (2008, 389) explains, 'substantive policy can be communicated, implemented, or averted by symbolic politics ... [this] means the strategic use of signs to meet society's requirements of political orientation'. Thus, existing work on the promotion of equalities concludes that some policy measures (e.g. anti-discrimination law) may have wider significance in changing cultural attitudes and practices (cf. Hepple et al. 2000). Applied to the SRW, this perspective suggests that, in addition to policy outcomes, key importance attaches to the extent and manner in which parties address the SRW in their election programme for it reflects their values and normative vision of contemporary/ future gender relations.

Lastly, the SRW is part of the process of securing gender equality. As Kardam (2004, 88) notes, this contested concept can be defined as 'basic principles for ... the prohibition of discrimination against women and the active promotion of equality between the sexes. [Whereby] the latter explicitly recognizes unequal power relations between women and men'. Inter alia, this requires equal resource allocation, rights and participation in representational structures and processes, including the conduct of public business and policy-making. Thus, parties' treatment of the SRW is an indicator of the future compatibility between party programmes and legal requirements under gender equality legislation. Examples of the latter include: the sex equality duties in the Equality Act (2010, S.66), and the 'Equal Treatment of

Men and Women in Matters of Employment and Occupation' Directive of the European Parliament and Council (Directive 2006/54).

Overall, the foregoing factors underline the centrality of electoral discourse to understanding the SRW. Accordingly, attention now turns on the methodology used in the current study, followed by a discussion of the research findings.

## Methodology

This article makes a methodological contribution to the field by heeding earlier calls (e.g. Jütersonke and Stucki 2007) for policy analysis to combine aspects of traditional quantitative analysis (Walgrave and Nuytemans 2009) with qualitative discourse analysis (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996). It must be acknowledged that as the principal data source manifestos have limitations. For example, they do not encompass the entirety of views in a given political party; 'hardliners', factional interests, 'traditionalists' and the like, may have different policy prescriptions to the official party line. Moreover, party policy proposals are also expressed in speeches, debates and other documents. Yet, as the extensive body of electoral studies attests, they constitute the principal political texts that reflect a party's priorities and issue positions thereby allowing systematic analysis over time. In the present case electronic versions of the three main UK parties' manifestos covering the period 1945–2010 were analysed using appropriate software<sup>1</sup> (in the case of earlier manifestos this necessitated transcription of the original hardcopy documents).

Accordingly, the present mixed-method approach consisted of a five-stage process, as follows:

- (1) A series of key words were used to identify manifesto text potentially concerned with women's representation ('woman', 'women', 'female(s)', 'gender', 'sex' and 'girl(s)'). This approach followed established content analysis procedures involving the recording of the number of incidences of key words, ideas or meanings in a text, thereby informing an understanding of the salience of a policy issue (Topf 1994; Neuendorf 2002). A database of manifesto extracts including all references to these terms was then compiled.
- (2) All database text extracts were subsequently divided into 'quasi-sentences' (defined as 'an argument which is the verbal expression of one political idea or issue,' Volkens 2001, 96). Dividing sentences in this manner controlled for long statements that contained multiple policy proposals.
- (3) In turn, each quasi-sentence was subsequently classified using an inductive coding schema (Joffe and Yardley 2003) consisting of key SRW policy frames. The latter were derived from the UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—selected as an internationally-recognised 'agenda for women's empowerment' (UN 1995, 7) in order to ensure all aspects of the SRW were covered. In definitional terms, as the research methods literature attests, policy frames are 'a necessary property of a text ... broadly conceived to include discourses, patterned behaviour, and systems of meaning, policy topics, policy logics, and deep cultural narratives' (Creed et al. 2002, 37). In the present case they included: social security/ taxation matters, the labour market, rights and protections, health etc.<sup>2</sup>

- (4) In order to increase reliability the coding process was independently repeated by a research assistant. Divergent views on the coding emerged in <1.7 per cent of cases (this was resolved by discussion between coders). The use of frame analysis (Rein and Schön 1994) in this way facilitated exploration of how, as key political texts, manifestos enable parties to construct (or 'frame') policy proposals advancing the SRW.
- (5) Whilst the level of textual analysis provided by the foregoing stages in the methodology is illuminating and reveals the relative attention afforded to different issues and topics, it is not exhaustive. Therefore, following established methodological practice (Chaney 2012a), a further data coding-phase was introduced whereby quasi-sentences in each respective frame were deductively-coded for reoccurring themes and meanings. This two-phase process is termed 'trope-bundle' analysis (Maurin 2002, 127).<sup>3</sup> As Fischer and Forester (1993, 117) observe, 'tropes' here can be defined as 'figures of speech and argument that give persuasive power to larger narratives [including policy frames] of which they are part' (examples of the tropes used in the present analysis include: 'choice', 'reform', 'autonomy', and 'opportunities'). The result is a 'nested' or sequential, two-stage qualitative technique that divides the political discourse into broad themes and topics (frames) and then unpacks each revealing their constituent components (tropes).

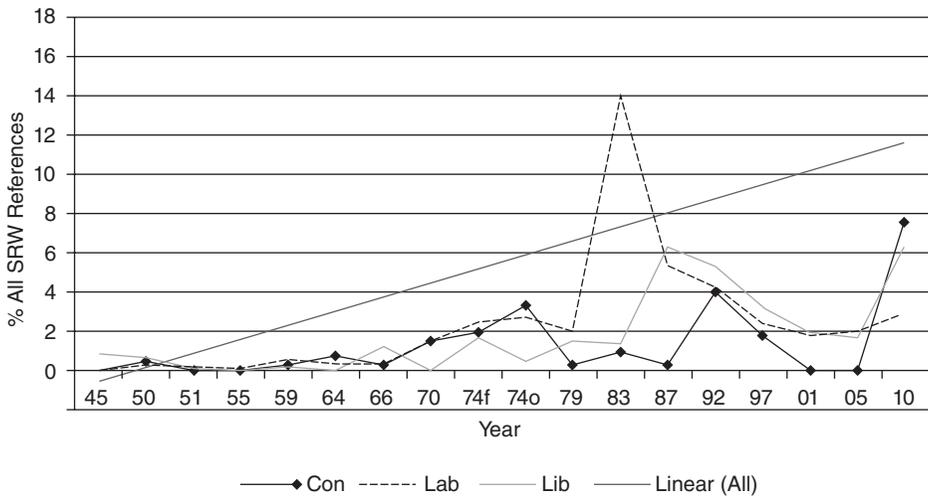
The foregoing mixed methodology can be seen as a response to earlier calls (e.g. Blumer 1969) for social research to 'humanize' quantitative data by focusing on language and meaning related to specific phenomena, notably from political actors' perspectives. Attention now turns to the research findings.

## **On the Agenda? The Electoral Salience of SRW in Westminster Elections**

Analysis of post-war elections shows that the SRW has been subject to a general trend of increasing issue-salience in party manifestos. It also reveals that the SRW is far from being mainstreamed into party programmes (in other words, embedded across policy areas). Moreover, its status amongst policy priorities appears 'fragile' for it has been subject to periods of declining salience over recent decades (Figure 1). This points to a continuing failure by the parties to give routine and systematic attention to the SRW and lends credence to the idea that the parties' policy-making practices have been subject to institutional sexism (Cf. Reitman 1975; Anthony 1980).<sup>4</sup>

Specifically, the longitudinal data reveal that the post-war decades can be divided into four periods (Table 2). (i) During the years 1945–1966 party practices reflected long-established and entrenched discriminatory social attitudes and norms (Sinfield 2004); consequently the SRW was largely ignored. (ii) 1970–1987 was a period of significant social change; crucially, it coincided with the growing impact of heightened second-wave feminist activism (Cf. Whelehan 1995), this in part this explains the significant growth in salience of the SRW in party programmes of the period. (iii) 1992–2001, the decline in the salience of the SRW during this time needs to be seen in the context of a decade in which there was a distinct broadening of parties' policy agenda with greater attention paid to generic promotion of equalities—as

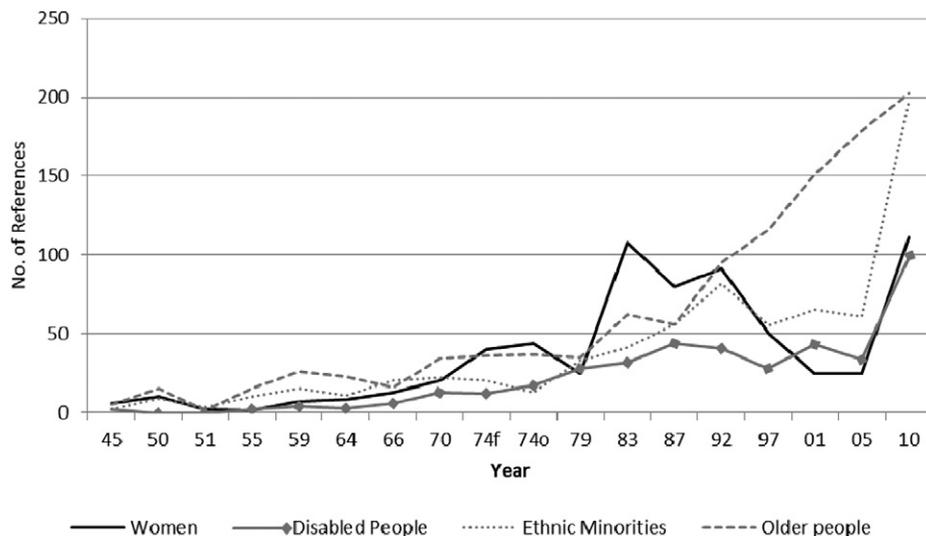
**Figure 1: The Issue- Salience of the SRW in Party Manifestos for Westminster Elections 1945–2010 (Percentage of All- Party Total, by Election)<sup>16</sup>**



**Table 2: Periodization Summary of the SRW in Party Programmes for UK General Elections 1945–2010**

Period	Status of the SRW in party programmes
1945–1966	The SRW given little attention in election programmes (< 8 per cent of the post-war total was made in the six elections up to, and including 1966).
1970–1987	Greatest attention is afforded to the SRW (47.6 per cent of the post-war total was made during this period).
1992–2001	The issue-salience of the SRW declines significantly (–69 percentage points when 1987 and 2001 are compared).
2005–2010	There is a rise in SRW salience (20.4 per cent of the post-war total of SRW references is made in these two elections).

**Figure 2: Manifesto References the Substantive Representation of Women Compared to Other Equalities Groupings (Westminster General Elections 1945–2010)**



well as increased attention on other groups such as LGBT people (Chaney, 2012c) (Figure 2). Finally, (iv) 2005–2010, this period encompasses present electoral cycle and is a time characterised by attempts by all parties, but most noticeably the Conservatives, to appeal to hitherto marginalised groups (Kerr et al. 2011). Despite this, existing studies have raised a series of concerns about disappointing progress in women’s representation during and after the 2010 election (inter alia, owing to limited gains in level of women’s descriptive representation in the UK parliament—and shortcomings in the delivery of policy pledges on SRW—see for, e.g. Ashe et al. 2010). For these reasons the recent rise in SRW issue salience needs to be treated with caution, for (as previous election cycles illustrate) such gains are often followed by significant reversals. In turn this underlines that the SRW is not subject to mechanistic causality (whereby heightened electoral salience automatically maps onto sustained progress). Rather, it points to the complex and contingent nature of the SRW. Moreover, a notable pattern that emerges from the present longitudinal data is that marked increases in salience are driven by the parties of the Left and they tend to coincide with the transitional period when Left-party government is replaced by the Right’s return to office. This is significant for it suggests that peaks in the manifesto salience of the SRW are part of heightened discursive politicking seen at such times when opposition is voiced to the traditionalist norms espoused by the Right. The data also show that such heightened attention to SRW is not sustained over time. Indeed, it is subject to marked decline when Left parties assume office. This does not automatically mean a lessening of party conviction on such matters but instead it may be a function of the way that competing policy priorities and pressures of holding government office arrest progress in the prioritization of the SRW in party programmes.

As noted, the rise and fall in the salience of the SRW over time is also apparent when it is compared to the issue salience of comparator groups (disabled people, ethnic minorities and older people). When reference to the SRW is expressed as a mean percentage of the combined total for the comparator groups there is an upward trend, peaking in the 1980s—followed by a subsequent decline. This suggests that the reduced salience of the SRW witnessed over the past two decades may in part stem from greater competition from policy proposals centred on other equalities constituencies. Specifically, the data show that: in the 1950s, the SRW accounted for 16.5 per cent of references; in the 1960s it was 21 per cent; 1970s, 30 per cent; 1980s, 39.2 per cent; 1990s, 25.3 per cent; and 2000s, 13.5 (Figure 2). The shifting levels SRW issue salience over electoral cycles identified here points to the need for future work on the sources of dynamics over time. It is clear that such fluctuations are complex and contingent in nature and grounded in a potentially wide panoply of factors including: the role and commitment of party leaderships in relation to gender equality and SRW; the agenda-setting power of women in parties; political communication and parties' targeting of particular groups in the electorate; and levels of activism and the changing influence of new social movements.

The implications of the shifts in issue-salience identified here are profound and underline that election discourse does matter to contemporary understanding of patterns and processes of the SRW. This is because issue salience determines the progress made in the SRW across different policy areas. Thus, for example, in economic policy failure to address the under-representation of women in corporate governance or particular sectors of the economy can in part be traced to the formative phase of public policy-making and failings on the part of parties to outline appropriate policy proposals in their election programmes. In similar fashion, growing gender inequality and patterns and processes of sex discrimination in, for example, diverse aspects of welfare delivery can also be traced to inadequate agenda-setting action by parties. In turn, the impact of low salience episodes is considerable (with the manifold outcomes including structural, organisational, fiscal, cultural and personal consequences).

## **Party Politicization of the Substantive Representation of Women**

When the issue salience of the SRW in party manifestos is compared a Left-Right cleavage in is apparent. Left-of-centre parties make more than three-quarters of manifesto references to the SRW; Labour account for 43.5 per cent and the Liberal Democrats 33.3 per cent. This dominance by the Left<sup>5</sup> underpins its widely perceived 'issue-ownership' of the SRW (Short 1996). As Petrocik (1996, 825) notes, this term refers to parties and candidates using discursive politics to present themselves as more competent than their rivals in addressing given social issues. Thus, the present findings support earlier work on the ways that Left parties present themselves as more proactive than the Right on women's rights and representation (Byrne 1996; Meguid and Bélanger 2008). In contrast, reflecting the Right's general rejection of affirmative action measures and comparatively poor record on the advancement of women (Wolbrecht 2000), the present data show that the Con-

servative Party advanced fewer than one-in-four manifesto references to the SRW over the six and a half decades studied (23.3 per cent). Thus, the Tories have a post-war mean of 8.7 references to SRW per election, compared to 16.0 for Labour and 12.3 for the Liberals/Liberal Democrats. Notably, the significant all-party increase in SRW salience evident in the 2010 election (with a quadrupling of all-party references compared to 2005) is, to a large extent, explained by the increase in the Conservative Party's SRW pledges. As such it is a function of its recent attempt to present itself as more socially progressive than in the past (Cf. Kerr et al. 2011).

In exploring the party politicization of the SRW it is also instructive to explore whether parties are acting wholly independently of each other or whether they are competing on the SRW. In this regard the present data confirm a process of on-going inter-party competition. This has two dimensions. First, qualitative analysis shows it to have involved the dismissal of rival parties' programmes and approaches. For example: 'we shall replace the Conservative Government's inadequate and unjust long-term pensions scheme ... and give full equality of treatment to women' (Labour Party 1970, 14); and 'women have had a rough deal over pensions from the present government, which has abandoned the last Conservative government's Second Pension Scheme' (Conservative Party 1974, 12). Second, quantitative analysis of the two main parties' references to the SRW across policy frames shows a significant positive correlation ( $\bar{x}$  coefficient 0.890)<sup>6</sup> revealing inter-party competition linked to electoral cycles.

### Parties' Framing of SRW Policy Proposals

As Figure 1 reveals, the three policy frames most used in party proposals to advance the SRW<sup>7</sup> were: 'social security/ taxation' (21.9 per cent; e.g. 'we will ... work to establish equal treatment in tax and social security', Labour Party 1983, 43); followed by gender equality in labour market (14.8 per cent; e.g. 'we will promote equality in the workplace. We will establish equal opportunities procedures and pursue the principle of equal pay for work of equal value', Liberal Democrats 1997, 28); and rights/ legal protection (10.1) (e.g. 'the women of our country are still denied many essential rights. Labour's Ministry for Women will make sure that, in framing their policies, all government departments listen and respond to women's needs and concerns', Labour Party 1987, 41).

The foregoing lead frames were followed by general references to anti-discrimination/ sex equality (9.8 per cent); women's control of all aspects of their health (8.8 per cent; e.g. 'we will promote equal treatment of the sexes within the Health Service', Liberal Democrats 1997, 18); and equal representation (7 per cent; e.g. 'proportional representation for elections and modernising Parliamentary procedures will help to end the discrimination against women on elected bodies and in government', Liberal Democrats 1992, 18).

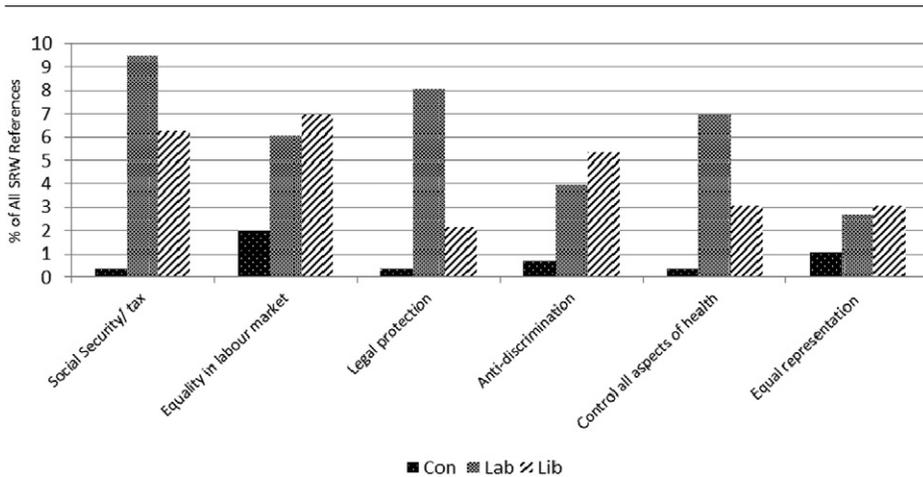
In terms of explaining these framing patterns, the predominance of social security/ taxation matters in the post-war election discourse can be seen as a function of enduring patterns and processes of sex discrimination and institutional sexism associated with the institutions of the welfare state (Woodward 2007). Allied to

this, the attention placed on women's rights in the labour market reflects growing concern with enduring issues such as horizontal and vertical gender segregation in employment practices—as well as the persistence of the gender pay gap (Blau and Kahn 2003). In turn, the attention afforded to 'rights/ legal protection' is a reflection of the wider recognition of the inadequacies of earlier anti-discrimination law and the need for more comprehensive and proactive gender equality legislation (Van der Vleutena 2005). It is also notable that equal (descriptive) representation of women gains greatest attention in the period after 1979; in part, this reflects the impact of European Directives on gender equality and is an indicator of women's growing dissatisfaction with enduring marginalisation and exclusion in politics and beyond (Duerst-Lahti 2002).

In terms of inter-party framing dynamics, statistically-significant differences in policy framing are evident (Figure 3). This again confirms the existence of a Left-Right cleavage. The parties of the Left lead in use of each of the principal frames: social security/ tax (Labour,  $P \leq 0.001$ );<sup>8</sup> gender equality in the labour market (Liberal Democrats,  $P \leq 0.001$ );<sup>9</sup> legal rights and protection (Labour,  $P \leq 0.001$ );<sup>10</sup> general references to gender equality and anti-discrimination (Liberal Democrats,  $P \leq 0.001$ );<sup>11</sup> women controlling all aspects of their health (Labour,  $P \leq 0.001$ ); and equal representation (Liberal Democrats).<sup>12</sup>

Further insight into the framing processes in the electoral discourse is provided by issue profile analysis (Longacre 2009). This is an analytical technique that examines the number of policy frames that a party uses in each election. It is an indicator of whether the SRW is mainstreamed across all frames and policy areas or is centred on a limited number of issues. Thus it can be used to gauge whether party practices are consistent with legal directives on gender mainstreaming (Liebert 2002) that require organisations to consider gender equality in all areas and at all stages of their policy-making and service delivery (McGauran 2009). Accordingly, the all-

**Figure 3: Policy Framing in Westminster Elections 1945–2010 (Percentage of All Post-war SRW References, by Party)<sup>17</sup>**



party mean number of frames used in each election shows that references to the SRW in the 1940s, 50s and 60s mainly centred on the 'social security/ taxation' and 'gender equality in the labour market' frames. Subsequently there is a significant broadening of the mean number of frames used through to the 1990s. This is followed by a slight decline in the 2000s (1950s, 2.4; 1960s, 5; 1970s, 6.5; 1980s, 13; 1990s, 13; and 2000s, 9.7). While this provides some evidence of progress, it remains the case that party references to the SRW remain concentrated in a limited number of frames,<sup>13</sup> indicating parties' general failure to fully mainstream the SRW in their programmes.

As Magnusson (2000, 78) observes, 'political documents ... contain interesting systematic variations in justification strategies and discursive commitments at different political-rhetorical levels. This is particularly apparent when political texts move from general gender equality to arguing about specific issues'. Thus further insight into the electoral discourse on the SRW can be gained by qualitative analysis of the tropes associated with each of the principal frames in the manifesto coverage of the SRW (Table 3). Again this shows a Left-Right cleavage and an emphasis on social-justice oriented language traditionally associated with the discourse of the Left (Levitas 1998; Fairclough 2000; Schram and Soss 2001).

The Left's shifting discursive emphasis away from (re-)distributive notions of equality (Tawney 1931) towards equality of opportunity (Lister 1998) is also apparent in the discourse with Labour leading in the use of the tropes: 'discrimination' and 'protection'; whilst the Liberals/ Liberal Democrats make most references to 'equality', 'fairness', and 'opportunities' (Table 4). Notable is the Conservatives' sharp increase in the use of these tropes in the 2010 election.<sup>14</sup> This is a marked discontinuity with the party's general historical approach (e.g. it marks a sevenfold increase over the party mean for the preceding post-1945 elections) and is in sharp distinction to the 2005 election when no SRW references were made. As such it can be viewed as part of what Kerr et al. (2011, 195) describe as the party's recent rhetorical 'emphasis on 'work-life balance, identity politics and a new emphasis on tackling issues such as ... social justice'.

## Conclusion

In responding to earlier calls for more holistic approaches to the SRW this study has explored the hitherto under-examined relationship between the substantive representation of women and issue-salience in party manifestos. A review of the existing literature and the present empirical data indicate that electoral discourse does matter in understanding the patterns and processes associated with the substantive representation of women. It is an assertion based on the following factors: 1. manifesto discourse is an indicator of the extent to which the SRW is (or is not) on the parties' political agendas; 2. It reveals SRW's level of prioritization amongst competing policy issues (as measured by comparing past and present levels of SRW-salience and, by comparison to the substantive representation of other groups); 3. The way that the SRW is framed in manifesto discourse provides insight into what aspects of women's representation parties emphasize and what they downplay or ignore. In turn, it reveals parties' understanding of the SRW; areas where parties are unable—or unwilling—to promote the SRW; and, it may

**Table 3: The Electoral Discourse of the SRW: Principal Frames and Associated Tropes**

Frame	Principal Tropes	Example
Social security/tax	Discrimination	'The present tax system discriminates against wives who, of necessity, have to stay at home, and it should be re-examined' (Liberal Party 1966, 7).
	Equality	'Full equality for women ... women will receive earnings-related sickness and unemployment benefit' (Labour Party 1970, 4).
Labour market	Protection	We 'will give a right to at least 14 weeks' maternity leave and protection against dismissal on grounds of pregnancy' (Conservative Party 1992, 18).
	Equality	'The Liberal Party demands for women equality of opportunity and status; it stands for equal pay for equal work' (Liberal Party 1945, 3).
Legal rights and protection	Fairness	'We will make Britain fair for women. We'll make parental leave interchangeable between mothers and fathers. We'll crack down on sex discrimination at work with name-blind job application forms' (Liberal Democrats 2010, 5).
	Equality	'Implicit in all our objectives in the field of social policy is a commitment to ensure full and equal rights for women in every sphere ... there will be no let-up in our campaign for equality between the sexes' (Liberal Party 1974b, 14).
	Reform	'Women are treated by the law, in some respects, as having inferior rights to men, we will amend the law to remove this discrimination' (Conservative Party 1970, 8).
	Discrimination	'We will introduce major new legislation to end discrimination against women at work, and to set up an Equal Opportunities Commission to investigate other aspects of discrimination against women, and to recommend further action' (Conservative Party 1974, 20).
	Efficacy	'We will strengthen the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts to make them more effective. We will shift the burden of proof from the complainant to the alleged discriminator' (Labour Party 1983, 34).

General references to gender equality and anti-discrimination	Opportunities	'We believe that all people are entitled to be treated as equals: that women should have the same opportunities and rewards as men ... all should have equal opportunity for advancement in and service to the community' (Labour Party 1970, 8).
	Positive action	'Expand Positive Action Programmes to eliminate discrimination, change employment practices and introduce special training schemes to equip women to enter non-traditional areas of work' (Labour Party 1983, 37).
Women controlling all aspects of their health	Choice/autonomy	We will 'ensure that every woman who wishes to, or needs to, have her baby in hospital shall be able to do so' (Labour Party 1964, 7).
	Prevention	'The primary health care team working with family doctors must be built up and their preventive work expanded. There should be more screening, including well-women clinics, with efficient follow-up for known risk groups' (Liberal-SDP Alliance 1987, 34).
Equal representation	Democracy	'We believe that positive steps are needed to help women and ethnic minorities get a fair deal, and to attain more democracy in the workplace (Labour Party 1987, 8).
	Participation/inclusion	'Labour will appoint a Cabinet Minister for Women. She will ensure that women's voices are heard at the highest level. She will monitor the work of all other departments and co-ordinate action for equal opportunities across government' (Labour Party 1992, 18).
Fairness	Fairness	'This is not only unfair, because too many talented women are being denied the opportunity to contribute, but it also reduces the diversity of opinion in boardrooms' (Conservative Party 2010, 4).

**Table 4: Left Parties' Predominance in the Use of Equality-oriented Tropes**

Trope	Lead Party	Significance-level
'discrimination'	Labour	$P \leq 0.05^{18}$
'protection'	Labour	$P \leq 0.01^{19}$
'equality'	Liberals/ Liberal Democrats	$P \leq 0.01^{20}$
'fairness'	Liberals/ Liberal Democrats	$P \leq 0.01^{21}$
'opportunities'	Liberals/ Liberal Democrats	$P \leq 0.05^{22}$

potentially reflect the impact of lobbying by external interests such as women's groups; 4. It also shows whether the SRW is subject to party politicization (inter alia, is there a cross-party correlation in the salience of the SRW linked to electoral cycles? does the manifesto text contain explicit examples of parties attacking their rivals' approach/record on the SRW? and is there a Left-Right cleavage in the salience, framing and tropes associated with the SRW?). This is significant because inter-party competition around the SRW in elections underlines the presence of political opportunity structures for exogenous interests (such as feminist activists and gender equality campaigners) to advance policy claims on parties at the time of elections. It also suggests that elections are a potential representational mechanisms for 'levelling-up' the SRW in public policy-making as parties seek to match the proposals of their rivals as they attempt to maximise electoral support; Lastly, 5. Attention to electoral discourse locates the SRW in the formal representational process. Thus, in this regard mandate theory underlines that electoral discourse provides an indicator of the future policy approach to the SRW by the party (or parties) that will hold government office. Whilst accountability theory underlines how manifesto discourse can be a means to hold future governments to account for their SRW record.

The empirical findings presented in the foregoing discussion show changing SRW salience over electoral cycles. They also reveal patterns and processes of party politicization that underline the formative role that electoral discourse plays in public policy agenda-setting. In post-war UK state-wide elections the SRW has been subject to a general trend of increasing salience. However, analysis also shows that it is far from being mainstreamed into party programmes. Accordingly, its status amongst policy priorities is judged to be 'fragile'—for it has been subject to reversal with extended periods of declining prioritization.<sup>15</sup> In turn, this affirms continuing failure by the main parties to give systematic attention to women's substantive representation and raises the spectre of on-going institutional sexism in parties' policy-making practices. It also raises questions about future government compliance with gender equality legislation. Moreover, the Westminster data give insight into the inter-party dynamics of electoral discourse and show a Left-Right cleavage in salience and policy framing. This extends current understanding, for whilst

existing studies have highlighted Left-of-centre parties' greater concern with the SRW in terms of descriptive representation (women present as elected members), the current findings show that it also applies to the formative policy-making stage of electoral politics.

All of the foregoing confirms that electoral discourse is integral to contemporary understanding of the SRW. The Westminster findings also suggest an emerging agenda for future research into the 'electoral dimension' to the SRW. It includes: qualitative investigation of the internal party dynamics (including the role of leadership) in determining the nature and status of the SRW in manifesto texts; examination of the way that feminist activism and pressure from exogenous interests shapes manifesto discourse; and study of political behaviour and the views of the electorate on the role of manifestos' SRW coverage in shaping voting patterns. Moreover, in exploring the complexity associated with the SRW future comparative analysis will need to factor in the contingent effects of socio-political contexts, government practices and electoral systems. Accordingly, on-going study needs to build on the present work and extend analysis of the SRW in electoral processes as part of the formative stage of public policy-making.

### About the Author

**Paul Chaney**, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3WT, UK, email: [chaneyp@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:chaneyp@cardiff.ac.uk)

### Notes

The author would like to acknowledge the constructive comments of three anonymous referees when revising an earlier draft of this article.

1. NVIVO 9.
2. The full list of the frames used is as follows: social security/ taxation; the labour market; legal rights and protections; general references to gender equality and anti-discrimination; women controlling all aspects of their health; equal representation; equal pay; the elimination of violence against women; civil and political rights; equal treatment of women and men in education; participation in policy and decision-making; intersectionality; and miscellaneous.
3. So named for it identifies 'bundles' of tropes or themes within each policy frame.
4. 'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their [sex]', which 'can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour, which amount to discrimination'—see Home Office (1999).
5. In this analysis the Liberal Party/ Liberal Democrats are classified as a party of the Left in this analysis—whilst their shift position on the party political spectrum is acknowledged (see for, e.g. Knutsen 1998).
6. Correlation values for individual elections: (1970) 0.8461; (1974 Feb) 0.9607; (1974 Oct) 0.9868; (1983) 0.6702; (1992) 0.9075; and (2010) 0.9693. Values calculated according to the formula:

$$\text{Correl}(X, Y) = \frac{\sum(x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum(x - \bar{x})^2 \sum(y - \bar{y})^2}}$$

The Sigma symbol indicates summation and  $x$  and  $y$  stand for the two data ranges (based on the issue-salience of the SRW in a given election for the Conservative and Labour Parties). The correlation coefficient measures how strong a linear relationship exists between variables  $x$  and  $y$ . It is always a number between  $-1.0$  and  $+1.0$ . If the correlation coefficient is close to  $+1.0$ , there is a strong positive

linear relationship between  $x$  and  $y$ . Coefficients for elections experiencing a decline in overall SRW salience compared to the previous ballot exhibit no, or weak correlation coefficients.

7. The six main frames are discussed in the text. The remaining frames and their incidence as a percentage of the total are: equal pay (6.1); the elimination of violence against women (4.6); civil and political rights (3.9); equal treatment of women and men in education (3.9); participation in policy and decision-making (1.9); intersectionality (0.9); and miscellaneous (6.8).
8. Chi Squared = 44.6, d.f. = 2,  $P = 0.00457822$ .
9. Chi Squared = 15.929, d.f. = 2,  $P = 0.00034759$ .
10. Chi Squared = 51.492, d.f. = 2,  $P = 0.0009897$ .
11. Chi Squared = 19, d.f. = 2,  $P = 0.0007485$ .
12. Not statistically significant.
13. For example, the three leading frames account for over a half of the total SRW references in the last three elections: 2001, 52 per cent; 2005, 68 per cent; 2010, 53.2 per cent.
14. For example, the number of incidences of: 'discrimination' (8); 'protection' (6); 'equality' (43); 'fairness' (8).
15. As indicated by decreased salience in manifesto texts.
16.  $N = 665$ .
17. Six leading frames measured by number of references.
18. Chi Squared = 7.86, d.f. = 2,  $P = 0.01964367$ .
19. Chi Squared = 9.875, d.f. = 2,  $P = 0.00717251$ .
20. Chi Squared = 10.425, d.f. = 2,  $P = 0.00544804$ .
21. Chi Squared = 11.655, d.f. = 2,  $P = 0.00294543$ .
22. Chi Squared = 7.968, d.f. = 2,  $P = 0.01861105$ .

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