

Achieving sex equality in executive appointments

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Forthcoming in *Party Politics* – Final Accepted Version, December 2015

In a political context the 'glass ceiling' is shorthand for the barriers faced by women politicians that result in them being less likely to reach executive roles at the same rate as their male colleagues. This article outlines a case where there was sex equality in executive appointments; a cohort study of British Labour party MPs elected at the 1997 parliamentary election. Examining executive appointments at the cabinet and sub-cabinet level, descriptive analysis shows no statistically significant differences in the proportion of men and women reaching executive positions, or the prestige and gender-type of these positions. Regression modelling confirms this, and sex is not found to be a significant driver of these patterns. Three factors are identified that combined to achieve this – critical actors, favourable context, and a left-wing party in government. The article concludes with a call for further comparative research using the cohort study method.

The idea of a 'glass ceiling' has gained currency in recent decades as shorthand for the invisible obstacles faced by women on the basis of their sex when attempting to break into the upper echelons of occupational life that leave them less likely to make it into executive and other leadership positions than male colleagues (Reynolds 1999; Ragins et al. 1998; McDowell et al. 1999; Cotter et al. 2001; Arulampalam et al. 2007; Murray 2010). Political science has paid increasing attention to the number of women holding executive appointments worldwide, with feminist activists and scholars alike arguing the case for more women to make it into such posts in addition to studying the conditions under which

this occurs . Methodologically, many accounts in this field are based on data collected at a specific point in time, providing a 'snapshot' of how many men and women hold cabinet or government positions, rather than looking at how the careers of comparable groups of male and female politicians develop over time. Thus, while much is known about the numbers of men and women in executive positions at a given time, little is known about the gendered dynamics of career progression for comparable individuals and how this might present a different picture to the 'snapshot' method.

This article contributes to this literature by adopting a unique cohort study methodology to examine the career trajectories of a group of legislators who all entered the national legislature of the United Kingdom, the House of Commons, at the time of the 1997 general election. This election saw the numbers of women in the national legislature of the UK double overnight in advance of a long period of single-party government, offering an unprecedented opportunity to assess the longitudinal progress of those women elected at this time. Based on this methodological approach, the article makes an empirical contribution to the literature by demonstrating a case where men and women achieve equality in executive appointments.

Three research questions are addressed – do women reach executive office at the same rate, of the same gender type, and the same prestige, as their male colleagues? The analysis proceeds in two parts. First, descriptive statistics demonstrate that men and women from the cohort make it into cabinet and sub-cabinet positions in roughly equal numbers and that the gendered nature and overall prestige of the offices they hold are also broadly the same. Second, a series of penalized binomial logistic regression models support the descriptive

analysis and show that sex is not a significant driver of patterns of executive promotion. The situation is one of broad sex equality in appointments. I argue that three factors combine to result in this outcome: the presence of critical actors in gatekeeper roles, a context of pressure for more women in executive positions, and the presence of a party of the left in government that was ideologically amenable to arguments supporting sex equality. Combined, these factors resulted in the shaping of norms around executive appointments that somewhat normalized the presence of women in the executive arena (Annesley et al. 2014). I conclude by highlighting the limitations of the study and call for further comparative research that utilizes the method employed here.

Glass ceilings in a comparative context

According to the U.S. Federal Glass Ceiling Commission the term 'glass ceiling' was first popularized in a journalistic account as the 'invisible barriers that women confront as they approach the top of the corporate hierarchy' (1995, p.3). Since then, the term has been widely used in studies of women's progress in the corporate, judicial, academic, and political worlds in addition to being utilized in studies of racial inequality (Cotter et al. 2001). In political terms, the underlying logic of the term stipulates that as women move closer to political power held in executive positions, they encounter barriers to entry that are not a result of any 'job-relevant characteristics' that they may or may not hold but rather based solely on their sex. Additionally, the negative impact of these barriers will be 'greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower' (Cotter et al. 2001, pp.657-661). This has developed some expectation that higher the office that women achieve in political life, the harder they will find it to reach an even higher one – a so-called 'vertical segregation' (Yule 2000).ⁱ

Much existing work in this field considers the position of women in cabinet positions across countries, broadly asking three wide-ranging questions . First, how many women are appointed?; second, to what positions?; and third, what are the causes of variation in both numbers and types of appointments?ⁱⁱ

In terms of the number of women in cabinet positions worldwide, the data is mixed, but in recent years the overall trend has been one of growth compared to previously low numbers (Bauer and Tremblay 2011a; Krook and O'Brien 2012, p.841). A number of European countries have had parity or even a majority of women in cabinets. These include Finland, Spain, France, and Norway. Conversely, at the time of writing Italy, Greece, and Portugal have been noted as performing especially badly at getting women into cabinet-level roles.ⁱⁱⁱ Women are increasingly seen in prime ministerial or presidential roles, for example Angela Merkel became Chancellor of Germany in 2005, Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir prime minister of Iceland in 2009, and Julia Gillard prime minister of Australia in 2010. So although the picture is not universally positive, there appears to be a general trend towards more women making it to the top of political life (Bauer and Tremblay 2011b).^{iv}

Although such statistics might seem *prima facie* positive, many women are appointed to positions which reinforce traditional gender roles, or to roles which hold lower levels of prestige than those more commonly held by men (Krook and O'Brien 2012, pp.841-2). For example, rather than holding portfolios that relate to the financial management of government or to military defense, women are more likely to find themselves dealing with issues such as health, education, and other issues which are sometimes referred to as 'soft'

or 'feminine' areas (Karam and Lovenduski 2005, p.197). However, the extent to which this is necessarily a negative thing is contested, with the argument that women perhaps choose to pursue such areas ahead of others holding some merit, as well as the fact that many of these areas 'tend to have the largest budgets and the greatest impact on people's daily lives' and should not be dismissed out of hand (Murray 2010, p.456). There is also the problem of assessment – how should the femininity or prestige of the policy area of a ministry be judged? Mona Lena Krook and Diana Z. O'Brien utilize a historical approach, taking into account the ways in which policy areas have developed as either the domain of either men or women, or both (2012, p.844). It should be noted, however, that the gender type of policy areas can develop and change over time. For example, education portfolios, once seen as 'soft', are now perceived quite differently, with ministers in this area holding significant spending power in addition to a portfolio considered to be of great importance by the electorate.^v Turning to prestige, they build on the consequentialist approach adopted by Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor Robinson (2005, 2009), which uses notions of visibility and policy control to rank different ministries in addition to the upward mobility that these policy areas provide in terms of future promotional prospects.

Finally, existing research has considered the circumstances under which women tend to increase their presence in cabinet positions. Krook and O'Brien offer three broad factors that will affect the number of women in executive positions –institutional factors, the broader state of gender equality within a country, and finally wider political recruitment issues including the number of women already present in a political elite (2012, pp.846-848), and these factors are reflected in the broader literature (Siaroff 2000; Bauer and Tremblay 2011a). Institutional effects include the electoral system, the system of

government, the partisan alignment of the governing party(ies), and the proximity of party competition (Krook and O'Brien 2012, pp.846-847), in addition to electoral system and the process of cabinet selection. Rebecca Howard Davis distinguishes between generalist models of cabinet recruitment, whereby cabinet members are mostly selected from an eligibility pool comprising of a parliament, and specialist models where ministers are selected for their specialist knowledge and are commonly selected from extra-parliamentary locations (1997), and the literature largely argues that a generalist model, if combined with an increasing number of women in parliament, should yield a greater number of women in executive positions (Siaroff 2000; Bauer and Tremblay 2011a). Bauer and Tremblay writing that 'one may deduce that a situation combining voting systems yielding generous proportions of female legislators with a generalist model for selecting cabinet ministers should have a positive impact on the proportion of women cabinet ministers' (2011a, p.183). However, in many ways the dynamics of cabinet appointments remain a black box of sorts. As Claire Annesley and her colleagues note, 'there is much that we do not know about the...'hidden life' of institutions within the executive branch' (2014, p.2).

In terms of broader attitudes to gender equality within a given country, measures include women's labour force participation, women's historical role in political leadership and the extent to which this is institutionalised, and how developed the country is overall – modernisation often leads to shifting attitudes towards traditional gender roles . The political recruitment traditions of a country, as well as the number of women already present in its political elite, will impact the number of women in cabinet . Whether a woman has ever held a senior institutional role within the national legislature, whether a woman is currently the prime minister or president, what the percentage of women parliamentarians

is, and whether or not there exists a ministry specifically devoted to women's affairs, or other state women's policy agencies, will all have an effect (Lovenduski 2008, pp.174-175; Krook and O'Brien 2012, pp.847-848). The role of extra-institutional women's movements is also noted in the literature (Bauer and Tremblay 2011a).

The British case

Britain is an old parliamentary democracy with a bicameral legislature, the upper House of Parliament being the (mostly) appointed House of Lords, and the lower one, the fully elected House of Commons. The Commons is elected on a single-member constituency basis using a simple majoritarian electoral system commonly dubbed 'first past the post'. Those candidates who successfully contest elections are subsequently referred to as Members of Parliament (MPs). The electoral system arguably throws up barriers to the success of women at the candidate selection stage, offering limited turnover due to an abundance of safe seats that are almost always secured by one party, as well as removing the opportunity to instil the tenets of gender equality through equal presence on a PR list system ballot (Norris 1997, pp.309-310). The leader of the party with a majority of legislative seats forms a government following an election and draws their cabinet, for the most part, from the House of Commons.^{vi} The cabinet is the most senior level of the UK government and contains a mostly consistent number of around 25 ministers, though this fluctuates between administrations and on those occasions when the prime minister, the head of government, chooses to 'reshuffle' their cabinet. Utilizing the classification of Davis, the UK has a generalist model of cabinet selection (1997) and this power of patronage is one of the prime ministers' single greatest sources of executive authority, 'the locus of prime ministerial primacy' within the cabinet (Hennessy 2001, p.68). However, there are active constraints on

the prime minister's use of this power, most notably the requirement to maintain party unity under their leadership, and it cannot be used unfettered.

The House of Commons has seen a slow and steady rise in the number of women MPs over the past 34 years. As shown in Figure One, the one uncharacteristic leap in the number of women elected was at the 1997 general election which saw the number of women double overnight on May 1st 1997 from 60 to 120, or from 9.2% to 18.2%. This was in large part due to the All-Women Shortlists (AWS) imposed by Labour at the candidate selection stage in half of its marginal target constituency seats prior to the 1997 election (Norris 1997, p.306). The party lies to the left of centre of the ideological spectrum and had been out of governmental office for 18 years prior to its 1997 victory. Pursued in the face of significant dissent, the quota had the desired effect, with 64 Labour party women being elected to parliament for the very first time. This provided new Prime Minister Tony Blair and his successor in 2007, Gordon Brown, with a larger pool of eligible women than any previous prime minister from which to pick their cabinets throughout the next thirteen years of Labour government. Figure One also highlights the extent to which the overall number of women MPs was essentially equivalent to the number of Labour Party women MPs until the 2010 general election, underlining the validity of studying the internal dynamics of executive appointments within the Labour government between 1997 and 2010.

FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE

The institutional structures in place at Westminster (generally) offer stable single party governments thanks primarily to the majoritarian electoral system, something considered

conducive to the promotion of women to cabinet roles by reducing the trade-offs which characterise the formation of coalition governments (Krook and O'Brien 2012, p.846).^{vii}

Societally, in terms of gender equality in a broader sense, the UK is a relatively equal country, highly economically and socially developed overall and scoring 0.863 in the 2011 United Nations Human Development Index (HDI).^{viii} That said, this score places the UK below France, Germany, and Spain amongst others, even if it compares well globally. The employment rate for women aged 16-65 is 66.5% (compared to 76.6% for men) although this is partly a result of women's greater presence in higher education than men.^{ix} Women are now more likely to be educated at degree level than men in the UK, with this gap widening in the university intake of 2012.^x In global terms, women in the UK hold a strong economic and social position and as such, the impact of levels of gender equality in the country overall, as identified by Krook and O'Brien, are unlikely to have a notable impact on the presence of women in cabinet positions in contemporary Britain (2012).

Existing work also assesses the impact of whether countries have a tradition of including women in political executives (Krook and O'Brien 2012). The UK had its first woman cabinet minister in 1929 with the appointment of Margaret Bondfield as Minister of Labour, but between then and 1997, only nine other women made it into the cabinet, this despite the fact that a woman, Margaret Thatcher, served as prime minister from 1979 for 11 years. Since 1997, there have been over 25 further women cabinet ministers, as well as a full-time Minister for Women, although there has been controversy with some officeholders combining this with other, perhaps more time-consuming, roles at other ministries (Annesley and Gains 2010, pp.918-919). It is clear that the UK is not in possession of a

tradition of sex parity in politics, but has rather had middling success at including women in an intermittent fashion.

Data and method

Existing research in this field generally adopts one of two methods. The first is to compare the numbers of men and women in a cabinet, the insinuation being that anything short of sex parity is evidence of sex inequality – a glass ceiling. A second method is to, in addition to the first method, compare the proportion of men and women in executive positions with their respective proportion in the legislature from which the executive is drawn. This method is only applicable in situations where there is a clear selection pool in existence (see, for example, Bauer and Tremblay 2011a, p.173). The issue with this approach is that it does not always compare like with like. That is, it does not account for intervening factors, namely the amount of time an individual has spent in a legislature as well as the ways in which political contexts may change over time. For example, counting the respective numbers of men and women in a cabinet alongside their numbers in the legislature following an election which saw an increased number of women elected is a flawed method of assessing sex equality – it takes time for individuals to gain promotions to junior government posts, let alone reach the cabinet. To address this, rather than looking top-down at the number of women and men in executive appointments at a single point in time, the article instead adopts a longitudinal cohort study method to track the progress of women and men elected to the British House of Commons at the same time.

The original individual-level data, collected by the author from official parliamentary data sources, details the political career trajectories of the 178 Labour Party MPs elected for the

first time in 1997 – only those MPs who had never sat in the Commons prior to this election. The 1997 cohort provides two main benefits which are unparalleled in the British case. Firstly, it offers a uniquely large group of newly-elected women MPs who can be compared directly to their male colleagues elected simultaneously. Secondly, the longevity of the Labour government first brought to power in 1997 provides a significant time period which can be analysed. The party went on to win the 2001 and 2005 general elections, giving them an uninterrupted tenure of 13 years in government.^{xi} Looking at data which covers the entire life of a party in government for a bounded time period allows for the identification of how high men and women MPs rose within the executive hierarchy over the 13 years that their party was in government. There currently exists no comparable UK cohort in terms of either the timespan of government or the number of women elected together for the first time and as such this cohort in particular provides a unique opportunity to interrogate any 'glass ceiling' in British political life.

As a dependent variable I focus on the roles MPs were appointed to within government, specifically looking at which of the offices they reached was the highest^{xii}. Highest office is coded as either the highest office reached hierarchically in government, or, if multiple posts were reached at the same hierarchical stage, which was more prestigious, between the 1997 and 2010 general elections or when the MP left parliament for electoral or other reasons, whichever came first. here is a naturalized hierarchy of governmental positions, beginning with cabinet roles at the top, minister of state positions beneath these, under-secretary of state roles underneath these, and then, finally, private parliamentary secretary (PPS) positions at the bottom, the latter unpaid (Allen 2013). Although the final category of PPS is technically approved by the Prime Minister, they are likely to have had little to do

with their appointment, this instead being decided by the minister whom the PPS will directly support.^{xiii} As such, these offices are not directly comparable to the others listed above and will not be included in the analysis. I use Krook and O'Brien's framework for assessing the presence and status of women in governmental roles, by looking at 'numbers, gender, and prestige' (2012, p.842). The *number of women* is a self-explanatory way of measuring the progress of women. The *gendered nature* of the positions they are appointed to, as well as their *prestige* will be coded for using the guidelines laid out by Krook and O'Brien, with only minor alterations being necessary (2012, p.846).^{xiv}

Descriptive analysis of the effect of sex on executive appointments

Numbers

There is a clear hierarchy of governmental positions in the UK, and therefore the numeric distribution of women across this parliamentary hierarchy matters. The rationale for comparing cabinet roles with wider governmental positions is based on the 'glass ceiling' expectation of fewer women in the higher positions. This is assumed in the existing literature – where power is, women are not (Davis 1997).

TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE^{xv}

As shown in Table One, there are no statistically significant differences between the highest office achievements of men and women. At the lower end of the hierarchy, 3% more women than men left the backbenches altogether. At the higher end, 7% more women had reached either the cabinet or Minister of State levels than men. Thus, a slightly higher proportion of women reached cabinet and Minister of State roles than men, whilst a lower

proportion of women than men saw their careers peak at the PPS or Under-secretary of State level.

Even when looking at the percentage of posts at each hierarchical level held by MPs of each sex (as opposed to looking at the proportion of men versus the proportion of women reaching each level), of the 10 cabinet positions taken by those MPs first elected in 1997, women took 50%. Of the 32 Minister of State roles occupied as a highest office by that same group of MPs, women took 41%, this despite their raw numeric disadvantage relative to men.

Gender Type

Existing research notes that although women may be present in relatively high numbers in cabinet positions, they are often placed in roles which augment existing norms and stereotypes of gendered socialisation (Lawless 2012). The dominant coding schema across previous comparative work classifies ministries by their gender type, delineating between those which are masculine, feminine, or neutral (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005, p.838; Krook and O'Brien 2012, p.846). As noted above, I have adapted this for use in the British case. The findings for cabinet positions only are shown below in table three.

TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

As seen in table two, the gender type of those cabinet roles achieved by men and women are identical. The three women appointed to masculine-type positions were Ruth Kelly as Secretary of State for Transport, Jacqui Smith as Home Secretary, and Yvette Cooper as

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Based on this measure, as with the previous measure of numeric presence, women and men are equal in terms of cabinet appointments by gender-type of portfolio. Increasing the number of cases by additionally including sub-cabinet positions tells a similar story, shown in Table Three.

TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE

Table three, showing the highest office appointments of those MPs who reached at least the level of Under-secretary of state, finds no sexed division of role type and no statistically significant differences across portfolio assignment. 65.4% of women hold positions coded as either neutral or feminine in comparison to 53.9% of men), and almost 50% of men hold masculine-type portfolios compared to 36.4% of women.

Prestige

The third measure of women's executive presence is the relative prestige of the offices they are appointed to. Existing research has laid out the criteria and benefits of higher prestige offices to women ministers, which include greater visibility and increased policy control in addition to greater springboard capability into other offices (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005, 2009).

TABLE FOUR ABOUT HERE

Despite the small n , pattern of cabinet-level sex equality is also clear in table four, with exact tests finding no statistically significant differences in the prestige of portfolio areas

held by male and female cabinet ministers, a finding different to those seen elsewhere in the literature (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005, pp.838-9). The sole woman appointed to a high prestige role from the 1997 intake was Jacqui Smith, who became Home Secretary.^{xvi} This reflects the findings of other studies and highlights that women do gain appointment to such high prestige posts (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005). This pattern is interrogated further in the multivariate analysis below.

TABLE FIVE ABOUT HERE

Expanding the sample to sub-cabinet positions, shown in table five, sees the majority of both sexes holding medium prestige posts, and no statistically significant differences between men and women. 23.1% of men reach high prestige posts compared to 7.7% of women, but over half of both held medium prestige offices as their highest government office reflecting the scarcity of high prestige offices.

Modelling the effect of sex on executive appointments

Building on the descriptive statistics above, multivariate analysis allows for the establishment of the relative effect size of sex alongside other predictors of frontbench and executive appointments drawn from the existing literature (Berlinski et al. 2011). The multivariate analysis proceeds in two parts – first, a binomial logistic regression model fitted by Firth's Penalized Maximum Likelihood Method establishes that sex does not appear to affect progression to the frontbench relative to other variables such as political experience or level of education. Second, two further binomial models, also fitted using Firth's method, suggest that this is also true of the gender type of such appointments as well as their

prestige. The Firth Penalized Maximum Likelihood Method is used in this case to avoid the small sample bias that can be found when using traditional maximum likelihood estimates in logistic regression models, in particular when the number of 'events' in the dependent variable is small relative to the number of non-events (Firth 1993; Heinze and Schemper 2002). These models are estimated using the 'logistf' package in R (Heinze 2015).

INSERT TABLE SIX ABOUT HERE

In addition to a binary sex variable, all three models shown in Table Six include the same additional independent variables that together represent those characteristics that might be expected to affect various dimensions of frontbench promotions. Measuring the 'quality' of politicians could be done in myriad ways, and is in many ways problematic, but existing work has utilized measures of candidate quality which include legislative experience, wider political experience, and also occupational experience (Murray 2010). In addition to this could be added educational qualifications and age at time of first election, these all factors which might be measures of quality or preparedness for office in some way, but also as a route into understanding the differences, if any, between men and women MPs in this cohort. Evidently, there will be no sex differences in legislative experience at the national level – all of these men and women were elected for the first time at the same election. Based on this, I include the following three covariates. First is a variable that denotes whether the MP holds pre-parliamentary political experience at the national level. Second, there is a dummy variable indicating whether the MP is educated to degree level. Third, I include a measure of the age at which the MP was first elected. This is grouped by decade. The models are necessarily parsimonious, but allow for the impact of sex to be estimated.

Across all three models shown in Table Six, it is clear that sex is not driving patterns of promotion into frontbench positions or affecting the types of portfolios to which legislators are assigned. This supports the descriptive findings outlined above. In Models 1 and 3, age has a significant effect on the outcome variable, indicating that being elected young improves not only the odds of gaining promotion to frontbench office overall, but also to frontbench office of masculine portfolio type. Model 2 is less clear, with no variables having a statistically significant effect on the outcome in question. This might be reflective of the 'black box' nature of factors driving high prestige ministerial appointments, and additionally could be a product of the small number of high prestige positions available to access. In other words, it is hard to know precisely what differentiates those MPs who do reach those kinds of portfolios from those who do not.

Discussion – explaining a case of sex equality in executive appointments

Descriptively, there were no significant differences between the proportions of men and women first elected to the British House of Commons at the 1997 general election making it into executive positions, no significant differences between the gender type of the portfolios they held, and no significant differences between the prestige of those portfolios. Additionally, logistic regression models support the descriptive findings, suggesting that sex was not a driver of any promotional patterns seen across the period covered by this study. How to explain this? I argue that the New Labour era saw a combination of factors come together to provide the recipe for sex equality in executive appointments. I claim that there are three main explanatory variables: the presence of critical actors in gatekeeper roles, a

wider context of pressure for increased numbers of women leaders, and a left-wing party in government that was supportive of principles of sex equality.

Critical actors in gatekeeper roles

There is ample evidence that the leadership of the Labour party wanted women in prominent positions within both the party and government. Primarily, the adoption of All-Women Shortlists (AWS) prior to the 1997 election resulted in the election of an unprecedented number of women MPs. In the face of legal challenges, Blair dropped the policy in 1996 but re-introduced it for the 2005 general election following its full legalisation under the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act, passed in 2001 (Squires 1996; Campbell and Lovenduski 2005). In his pursuit of the AWS policy despite opposition, Blair arguably fulfilled the role of 'critical actor', a term which refers to 'those who act individually or collectively to bring about women-friendly policy change' (Childs and Krook 2009, pp.126-127). While the UK continues to use a majoritarian electoral system with single-member constituencies, any moves to bolster women's presence through the use of quotas will remain politically costly for those who pursue them, regardless of outside support.^{xvii} However, Blair's persistence paid off, with the images of him surrounded by new women MPs becoming iconic. A pro-active political elite, in the role of gatekeeper, is also necessary to maintain momentum in terms not only of getting women elected, but also getting women promoted, and into governmental roles focused on various policy areas.

Context of pressure for more women leaders

The pressure to challenge these norms, and consistently act to further women in the party came from advocates inside and beyond Labour. Maria Eagle and Joni Lovenduski note that

'by the of the 1980s, a number of feminist voices in different parts of the Labour party were campaigning for power for women' (1998, p.5). Clare Short describes this movement within the party as 'a quiet revolution' (1996, p.17). Short notes how earlier Labour leaders, especially Neil Kinnock, instigated the feminization of the party, and points out that this was completely in line with an international movement amongst similar socialist parties (1996, p.18). The late 1980s saw an increased sense 'that the party had to make itself more women-friendly' (Short 1996, p.19). Meg Russell, in a similar vein, notes that the presence of women in the parliamentary party following the 1997 general election kept the issue of women's representation within the party on the agenda . Overall, this movement within the party, almost a decade old by 1997, created a context of pressure for women to be appointed to top positions within the party. Combined with increased numbers of women rising to the top of politics in other European countries, it was simply no longer acceptable for the party leadership to not include large numbers of women.

Left-wing party of government

The Labour party held an additional commitment to women and equality in a broader sense. As reflected in the comparative literature, parties of the left are generally better at getting women into national legislatures than parties of the right, both by using sex quotas of some kind and promoting women once they are in the eligibility pool (Caul 2001; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005, p.840).^{xviii} The party's commitment to sex equality was evident in both the adoption of AWS in order to increase the number of women MPs, and thus the potential supply pool for cabinet positions, and in the broader promotion of women's equality through the establishment of the Minister for Women position as well as

in a wider gender mainstreaming agenda (Squires and Wickham-Jones 2004; Cowley 2007, pp.28-29).

This article generally paints a positive, if qualified, story. Clearly, questions remain regarding the sexed distribution of executive portfolios in government. The relative desire of women legislators to substantively represent other women may affect the portfolios they both desire and attain, something dependent in part on the enthusiasm of political parties to incorporate these desires into their political programmes, in addition to whether governments are comprised of parties of the left, or are coalitions (Curtin 2008). Sarah Childs, reporting evidence from women MPs elected in 1997, highlights the perception of a tension between substantively representing the interests of women and getting promotions to top governmental positions - a lone MP alerted Childs to 'a perceived tension between a feminized transformation of politics and a successful parliamentary career for individual women MPs' (2004, p.131). Assessing the extent to which this is true is beyond the scope of this article, but it is possible to speculate that a government not amenable to 'women's' concerns might exacerbate such a tension, making it hard for women looking to further women's interests to make it into executive positions.

In sum, this section offers some explanation of the empirical patterns of sex equality in executive appointments which focuses on three elements that aided the patterns discussed above. The Labour government elected in 1997 had demonstrated a clear and broad commitment to the principles of sex equality, most notably through the adoption of a party sex quota in the form of all-women shortlists. This policy led to an increased number of women in the House of Commons, with their overall number doubling overnight at the time

of the 1997 general election. Concurrent with this was a desire to increase the numbers of women at the top of the Labour government. Utilising the theory of critical actors, it has been argued that Blair and Brown, as well as other ministers of both sexes in their governments, were critical actors, taking action which resulted in women-friendly outcomes. Overall, these factors combined to contribute to the case of equality highlighted for the first time in this article.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the executive office attainments of the 64 women who entered the House of Commons as Labour MPs following the general election in May 1997. Utilizing original data which tracks the careers of men and women from the same political generation, it has been shown descriptively that women proportionally achieve high office in equal numbers to men. Additionally, there is no statistically significant difference between men and women in terms of either the gender-type of any portfolio they hold or the prestige of their office. Logistic regression models also indicate that sex was not a driver of any patterns of executive promotion across the period studied. Although it is hard to say with any precision whether this constituted a sea-change in gender attitudes amongst British parliamentarians or was simply a one-off, it is clear that the men and women of the 1997 general election cohort achieved executive office unaffected by explicit sex discrimination, a finding that challenges the 'glass ceiling' discourse.

This empirical contribution arises from a methodological approach not previously used in this literature; a cohort study approach. This looks simultaneously at the political career trajectories of men and women elected at the same time, under identical political

circumstances. Given the findings of the article, which run contrary to much existing scholarship in the field, the findings suggest that scholars should in future look at the proportional appointment of men and women who were elected at the same time to executive positions. This provides more accurate estimation of the presence of discrimination than 'top-down' accounts that compare the numbers of each sex in an executive at a single point in time, or that compare the overall numbers of men and women in executive positions to their number in the legislature from which they are drawn.

The article has highlighted factors which resulted in sex equality across executive appointments in this case, and has also raised questions about those factors which could result in the opposite, using the UK as a case study example. These findings apply directly to the sole cohort analyzed here – the situation will likely differ under a right-leaning government, for example, or over time, as women parliamentarians embed themselves further into the norms and culture of legislative life. In this case, the mix of critical actors and a political environment conducive to the appointment of more women to executive roles was pivotal given the inherently informal nature of the rules that govern executive promotion (Annesley et al. 2014).

The article has also thought beyond the British case, utilizing comparative concepts as outlined by Krook and O'Brien amongst others (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005; 2012), opening the door for further country-specific case studies to develop in a similar fashion. Such case studies allow for detailed examinations of how country- or region-specific political contexts, often at specific moments, can interact with broader factors, conceptualised comparatively, such as electoral systems and institutional structures. In

particular, studies such as this one should nurture discussion of how women in cabinet can substantively represent women at the top of political life, as well as consider how these frameworks would apply to ethnic minority legislators in addition to other minority groups (Childs and Krook 2009). In terms of future comparative work, a similar study which includes more European cases should test for any contagion effects, something which has been found in studies of Latin American cabinets (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005, p.841). Additionally, this work adds to a growing selection of scholarship which utilizes the study of political careers to understand the similarities and differences in the ways in which men and women politicians enter and progress in a given political system (Lawless and Fox 2005; Lawless 2012), and cumulatively, will hopefully provoke mainstream studies to consider the effect of sex on cabinet appointments in a more detailed way.

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Figure One - Women MPs Total and from Labour Party 1945-2015

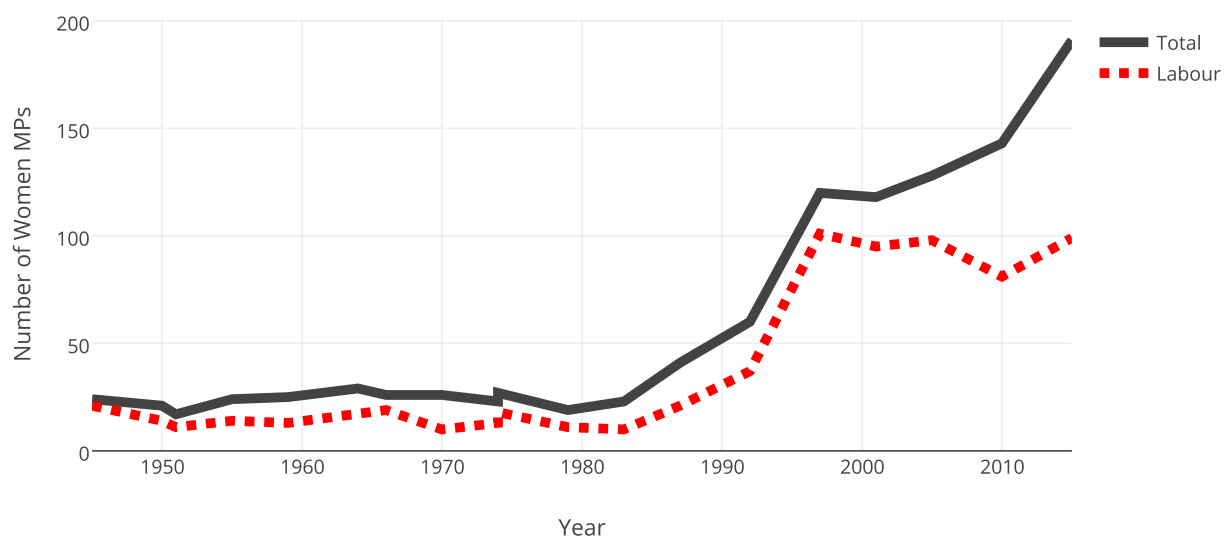


Figure One – Total Women MPs and Women MPs from Labour Party 1945-2015

	Backbencher (n=82)	PPS (n=31)	Under-secretary of state (n=23)	Minister of state (n=32)	Cabinet (n=10)	Total
Men (%) (n=114)	47.4	18.4	13.2	16.7	4.4	100
Women (%) (n=64)	43.8	15.6	12.5	20.3	7.8	100
Total	45.5	17.4	13.5	18.0	5.6	100

Table One – Highest office achievement by sex, $n=178$; χ^2 test found no significant differences, $p=0.831$ (all of the tables in the article report percentages for ease of reader comprehension, although for the statistical analysis raw numbers were used to facilitate accurate significance tests).

	Masculine (n=6)	Feminine (n=2)	Neutral (n=2)	Total
Men (%) (n=5)	60	20	20	100
Women (%) (n=5)	60	20	20	100
Total	100	100	100	100

Table Two – Gender-type of highest cabinet role by sex, $n=10$; Fisher’s exact test found no significant differences, $p=1.000$

	Masculine (n=27)	Feminine (n=11)	Neutral (n=27)	Total
Men (%) (n=39)	46.2	10.3	43.6	100
Women (%) (n=26)	34.6	26.9	38.5	100
Total	41.5	41.5	16.9	100

Table Three – Gender-type of highest government role by sex, $n=65$; Fisher’s exact test found no significant differences, $p=0.208$

	Low Prestige (n=3)	Medium Prestige (n=3)	High Prestige (n=4)	Total
Men (%) (n=5)	40.0	0	60.0	100
Women (%) (n=5)	20.0	60.0	20.0	100
Total	100	100	100	100

Table Four – Highest cabinet role prestige by sex, $n=10$; Fisher’s exact test found no significant differences, $p=0.286$

	Low Prestige (n=14)	Medium Prestige (n=40)	High Prestige (n=11)	Total
Men (%) (n=39)	17.9	59.0	23.1	100
Women (%) (n=26)	26.9	65.4	7.7	100
Total	100	100	100	100

Table Five – Highest government role prestige by sex, $n=65$; χ^2 test found no significant differences, $p=0.238$

	<i>Model 1 – Promoted to frontbench position</i>	<i>Model 2 – Promoted to high prestige portfolio</i>	<i>Model 3 – Promoted to masculine portfolio</i>
<i>Variables</i>	<i>β(S.E.)</i>	<i>β(S.E.)</i>	<i>β(S.E.)</i>
Constant	2.567*** (.800)	0.348 (1.247)	1.150 (0.974)
Sex (Woman)	-.014 (.345)	-.822 (.713)	-.249 (.464)
Instrumental occupational experience	.372 (.348)	.191 (.611)	.191 (.447)
Degree educated	.614 (.394)	-.762 (.627)	.172 (.539)
Election Age (by decade)	-1.018*** (.240)	-.804 (.406)	-1.086*** (.307)
Log Likelihood	3.324	1.963	2.784
N	178	178	178

Table Six – Binary logistic regression models fitted with Firth's Penalized Maximum Likelihood Method using the 'logistf' package in R (Heinze 2013): Impact of MP characteristics on promotion to frontbench office, high prestige portfolios, and masculine portfolios. Note - *** denotes statistical significance at the .001 level.

ⁱ Although I will not explore this here, there is a well-rehearsed normative argument as to why it matters how many women are appointed to cabinet positions, an argument drawn from notions of democratic health, the representation of women's interests in policy-making processes, and from justice. See, for example, Phillips, Anne. 1995. *The Politics of Presence: Political Representation of Gender Race and Ethnicity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Phillips, Anne. 1998. "Democracy and Representation: Or, Why Should it Matter Who our Representatives Are?" In *Feminism and Politics*, ed. Anne Phillips. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 26.; Phillips, Anne. 2012. *Representation and Inclusion*. *Politics and Gender* 8 (4): pp.512-518.

ⁱⁱ I acknowledge here that there are other approaches to the study of women in cabinet. For example, Berlinski et al. model the differing influence of various factors, including sex, on the likelihood of being promoted to a cabinet position (see Berlinski, et al., 2012) . Additionally, rather than focusing on highest office attainment, it would also be of interest to look at patterns of career trajectory by sex, looking at variables such as number of offices occupied overall in addition to the relative prestige of first office appointments. These are, however, different research questions to the one being examined in this paper; suffice to say, there are multiple methodological approaches to the issue of women in executive roles.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://guide2womenleaders.com/situation_in_2014.htm (last accessed 22-06-2015).

^{iv} It is worth noting here that there is a tacit assumption when considering these figures that women want to be in cabinet, an assumption that equally is made of both sexes in much of the political ambition literature (see Schlesinger, Joseph. A. 1966. *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States*, Illinois, Rand McNally). In this paper, I too will make this assumption as it almost without doubt that, to quote Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor Robinson, 'some ambitious politicians of both genders want to be cabinet ministers because ministers influence policy and control extensive resources' (2005, p.830). Additionally, empirical evidence from Sarah Childs and Philip Cowley (see Childs, Sarah 2004. *New Labour's Women MPs: Women Representing Women*, London, Routledge) suggests that there was no significant difference in the political ambitions of new MPs of either sex elected in 1997, with just over 60% of both men and women stating their ambition to be a minister in a decade's time.

^v For example, at the United States Presidential elections of 2008 and 2012, almost 70% of voters listed education as a 'very important' priority for them when casting their vote, <http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/24/for-voters-its-still-the-economy/> (last accessed 20-12-2014).

^{vi} It is, however, common to see cabinet ministers being drawn from the Lords, though it is rare for them to hold the most prestigious roles. The government has numerous representatives in the Lords, but these are mostly sub-cabinet level posts.

^{vii} Since the May 2010 general election, however, the UK has had a coalition government formed by the right-leaning Conservative party and the center-left Liberal Democrat party. The implications of this for the topic in hand will be discussed in the concluding remarks of the article.

^{viii} This figure is used in other comparable studies such as Krook and O'Brien (2012) and Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2005). Data obtained from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2011/> (last accessed 20-12-2014).

^{ix} Taken from the UK Office for National Statistics Labour Market Statistics, February 2013, http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_297429.pdf (last accessed 20-12-2014).

^x Data taken from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-21698522> (last accessed 20-12-2014).

^{xi} Evidently, there have been longer-serving governments in Britain in the post-war period, most notably the Conservative government which was in power from 1979 to 1997, but the low numbers of women elected for the party in that time preclude any in-depth statistical analysis.

^{xii} I collected individual-level, cross-sectional data on 178 Labour party MPs first elected to the UK House of Commons at the May 1997 General Election, comprising 114 men and 64 women. The Labour party, led by Tony Blair, who became Prime Minister following the election, won a landslide victory and held a House of Commons majority of 179 seats. Data was sourced from the Dod's Parliamentary Companion volumes in addition to the House of Commons website, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/commons/> (last accessed 20-12-2014).

^{xiii} A PPS can be characterised as the eyes and ears of a minister on the floor of the House of Commons, bringing them news from the backbenches as well as relaying the general mood of the parliamentary party. Cabinet ministers all have their own PPS, but those ministers on the lower levels of minister of state and under-secretary of state often share.

^{xiv} The main alterations and addition to Krook and O'Brien's coding schema are as follows. Government whips, whose role is to enforce roll call voting in the House of Commons, were coded as gender type neutral and given medium prestige. Positions in the Department for International Development were coded as gender type masculine, but were given only medium prestige despite being related in some way to foreign affairs. This is because the position deals with issues similar to those of a welfare role which happen to be on an international scale, thus involving little in the way of diplomacy and other areas associated with foreign affairs portfolios.

^{xv} A Fisher's exact test was used in some cases where the data violates the assumptions of a chi-squared test. As Fisher's test is conservative in nature, p values have been reported throughout the article for readers' benefit and own interpretation. Although it could be said that the article presents a full population analysis, by looking to make a more substantial point about whether sex matters (or not) in executive appointments, running robust descriptives or analytical models that examine particular effects requires a way of gauging influence on the outcome. As such, it is necessary to generate betas, related standard errors, and then the subsequent P-values and significance associated with these. Consequently, all of the above are reported throughout.

^{xvi} It is also of note that Smith was selected from an all-woman shortlist at the candidate selection stage. Differences in the political careers of quota and non-quota women in this cohort were found to be non-existent by Allen et al (2014).

^{xvii} Recent polling in the UK regarding quotas, albeit quotas for boardroom positions, puts support for quotas at 30% compared to 45% who oppose them. Data taken from <http://yougov.co.uk/news/2011/03/12/gender-quotas-britain/> (last accessed 20-12-2014).

^{xviii} It should be noted, however, that many parties from the right of the political spectrum have placed increasing emphasis on getting more women elected. See Celis and Childs (eds, 2014) for discussion of this.