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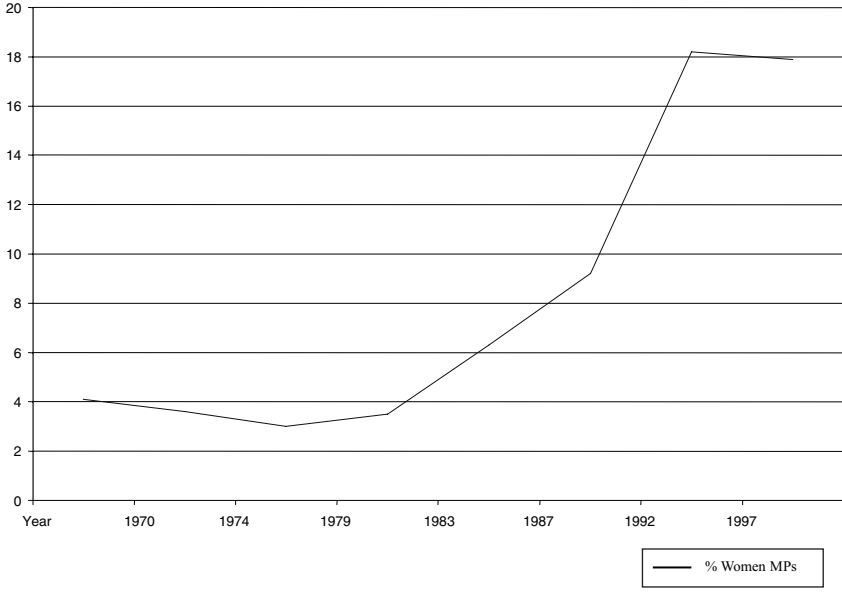
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Britain: Women, Parties, and the House of Commons

British women won the right to vote in two stages, in 1918 and in 1928, and the right to run for office in 1918. By 1974 women's voter turnout rates caught up with those of men (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993). Further, evidence from the 1987 British general elections reveals voters do not appear to be biased against women candidates (Studlar et al., 1988). Yet historically, few women have been elected to the House of Commons. The trends in women's presence in the House of Commons are displayed in figure 5.1. Until 1987 women constituted fewer than 4% of the members of the House of Commons. Although women made great gains in the number of candidates in the late 1980s, it was not until the 1997 election that these candidacies register as a substantial increase in seats in the House.

Neither legal barriers nor a lack of political interest can explain the lack of women's parliamentary presence. So why did women make great gains in Parliament in the 1997 election? Drawing on survey data on gender and voting patterns, I will show that shifts in women's voting behavior did not translate into automatic gains in office. Instead, grassroots forces were bolstered by top-down party efforts, especially in the British Labour Party, after women gained some power within the party and devised strategies that complemented the existing opportunity structure.

Figure 5.1 British Women in the House of Commons, 1970–97

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (1997), updated with data from www.ipu.org.

Political Background

In the British parliamentary system, voters elect, with a plurality of votes, a single representative from their district to the House of Commons; this system is most commonly known as the “first past the post” (FPTP) system. The British party system approximates the “responsible party model” with its centralized and cohesive parties, where members of Parliament (MPs) most often vote along party lines.

As a result of the winner-take-all system, two major parties compete for control of the British government, the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. Although the plurality system works against third parties, the Liberal Democratic Party (or some allied form of this current party) routinely sent MPs to Parliament throughout the period of study in this book.¹ Still, under the FPTP system many voters perceive a vote for a third party candidate as essentially “wasted.” To capture the greatest number of voters, both Labour and the Conservatives attempt to appeal to a broad stratum of the electorate by aggregating a diverse set of groups under the party structure.

Historically, social class structured the British political system. Tradition-

ally, the Conservatives represent the middle class and business, and Labour, the working class and unions. While class has declined from its postwar high in structuring the vote, it still remains a dominant theme in British party politics (Norton, 1994). Yet changes in the composition of the electorate, based on a decline in the industrial sector and a weakening relationship between Labour and trade unions, are linked with the broad process of party “modernization”—a move toward a more centrist, centralized, professional party.

British Women’s Voting Patterns and Parliamentary Presence

Existing party scholarship leads us to believe that parties react to shifts in voting patterns, as explained in chapter 2. One might logically expect that after parties gain a greater proportion of women’s votes, they will offer more female candidates for office in winnable districts. In this section, I search for links over time between changes in the gender gap in voting and in women’s gains in parliamentary seats. Figure 5.2 displays the trends in the gender gap in both and the trends in the number of Labour women in Parliament from 1970 to 1998. I measure the gender gap as the percentage of women who intend to vote for Labour minus the percentage of men who intend to do the same.² The higher the vote gap line reaches, the better Labour is faring among women voters. The graph shows that in the late 1950s and 1960s, British

Figure 5.2 British Trends in the Gender Vote Gap and Women MPs from Leftist Parties, 1970–98



Source: British National Election Studies. Inter-Parliamentary Union. See Appendices for details.

women slightly favored the Conservatives. Inglehart and Norris (2003) call this the “traditional” gender gap. Although this gap weakened a bit, it persisted through the 1980s and somewhat into the 1990s. In 1970 the gender gap for Labour is at almost a ten point deficit, and in 1998 the deficit is only about five points. This weakening of the traditional gender gap, toward a “dealignment” of women’s votes, is consistent with previous research (see Norris, 1999; Inglehart and Norris, 2003). The top line in the figure shows that Labour women made slight gains in Parliament in the mid-1980s and made a major leap in 1997. There is little evidence that a fading “traditional” gender gap in the 1980s is connected with more women in office in the 1990s. Indeed, gender provides little structure for the British vote in recent years as women’s parliamentary presence has climbed.

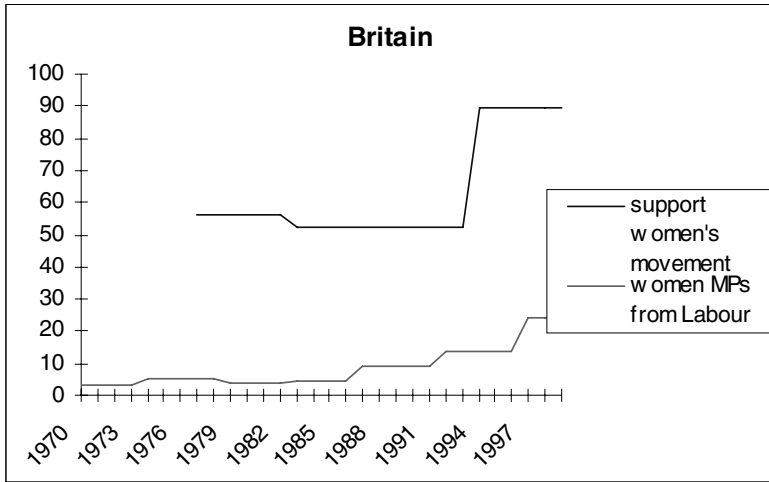
Values and Party Preferences

It may be misleading to treat women as an undifferentiated group. Specifically, it may be a subset of feminists, rather than women in general, who developed a distinct set of values. Conover (1988) finds that American feminists are a distinct group of women with specific values, and that feminism is strongly correlated with party identification. Based on survey data in thirteen established democracies, Hayes et al. (2000) find that women are indeed more likely to hold feminist values. Thus, feminist attitudes may actually account for the apparent gender-based gap in voting behavior. Specific to Britain in 1992, Hayes (1997) finds that although gender had little impact on the vote in Britain in 1992, feminist attitudes do have an impact; those that are pro-feminist are significantly less likely to vote Conservative than for Labour or the Liberals. Women are also significantly more likely than men to adopt a feminist orientation.

So, past research suggests that perhaps attitudinal differences regarding women’s role in society, or in politics more specifically, exerts greater influence than gender on party support. Those who favor women’s equality presumably support women’s parliamentary representation. To be sure, the women’s movement is composed of several different strands, and some sub-groups prefer different courses of action. Yet one common thread is the demand for the democratization of social and political life (Jenson, 1995). Hence, support for the women’s movement may be more directly related to the proportion of women Labour MPs.

The one indicator of feminist values that is considered consistently from the 1970s to 1990s in the Eurobarometer studies is a measure of support for the women’s movement.³ Figure 5.3 displays the trends in the Labour vote among those who support the women’s movement, similar to the analysis of

Figure 5.3 British Trends in the Left Vote among Supporters of the Women's Movement and Women MPs from Labour Party, 1970–97



Source: Eurobarometer studies. Inter-Parliamentary Union. See Appendices for details.

voter support in the previous section. In addition, the trends in Labour women MPs are graphed as well, for comparison. The graph shows that support for the women's movement among Labour supporters did not increase in the 1980s, hovering around 55%, and then jumped considerably in the 1994 survey to 90% approval of the movement. Consistent with this change, the substantial increases in women MPs from the Labour Party began in the 1990s, culminating in 1997—later than in Labour's sister Socialist parties across Western Europe. A late show of support from leftist supporters for the women's movement precedes the jump in women's representation. Certainly these common trends do not constitute causality. Instead, there may be a spurious correlation—a factor that explains both increases in support for the women's movement and for women's parliamentary gains.

The British Women's Movement

Attitudinal forces and women's gains may be driven by the shift in tactics within the movement itself. The British women's movement gained momentum in its "second wave"⁴ in the late 1960s, and the first conference was held in February 1970 (Randall, 1982). Past scholarship characterizes the British movement as radical and autonomous, relative to movements in other Western European nations (Gelb, 1989). In the 1970s, most women's movement

activists preferred to work at the grassroots level, independent of parties and mainstream politics (Randall, 1992; Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). Yet by the 1980s, responding to the attacks on the welfare state by the Thatcher government, an increasing number of movement activists sought alliances with the established parties (Jenson, 1982; Lovenduski and Norris, 1993; Beckwith, 2003). Indeed, a more mainstream movement is likely to garner more widespread public support and is more likely to make some inroads in established political arenas. Thus, changes in attitude may underpin women's gains in Parliament, but certainly other factors are at work as well.

Party-Level Forces for Increasing the Number of Women in Westminster

Women's voting behavior, mass attitudes, and the women's movement alone cannot explain why women's parliamentary representation increased when it did. Further, why were women's gains concentrated among Labour MPs? Certainly it is essential to look at party-level forces. As far back as 1965, the central party organizations of the Labour and Conservative parties advocated for women candidates, but stopped at encouraging rhetoric (as cited in Welch and Studlar, 1986). Charlott (1981) even argues that the central party elite may be ahead of the local party on women's representation, given the fact that women accounted for 13% of those appointed to life peerages in the House of Lords, compared with fewer than 4% in the House of Commons back in the late 1970s and early 1980s. An in-depth focus on the Labour and Conservative parties, and the role of the Liberal Democrats in stimulating party competition, will reveal the motivations for these parties to promote (or not promote) women candidates in winnable seats.

Party Competition

The previous section showed how the women's votes became "unanchored" in the 1980s, and electoral uncertainty may have generated some pressure to gain women's votes. However, it was not until a small third party promised to support more women candidates that Labour took notice. The Liberal Party was the first to run more women in the 1974 campaign, but largely in hopeless races, so women made few gains in Parliament (Hills, 1981). Likewise, in its search for new constituencies, the SDP (the Social Democratic Party) made a direct appeal to Labour's women voters, offering to nominate an unprecedented number of women candidates (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). The SDP joined forces with the Liberal Party to form the Liberal Democrats, and this

alliance campaigned to send more women to Parliament (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). Although the party's initial intentions were not fully carried through, the important point is that the Liberal Democrats had made women's representation a salient political issue in attracting women's votes.

Studlar and Welch (1992) contend that the presence of a third party generated greater electoral uncertainty than in the previous two-party system. Since 1974 the Liberal Democrats had increased their number of female candidates, yet most of them were defeated in hopeless contests (Studlar, 2004). As a consequence of this heated party competition, the Liberal Democrats' rival Labour Party took notice and followed suit by supporting more women candidates as well. While the Liberal Democrats' pressure led to more women candidates, it did not improve women's chances of winning (Studlar and Welch, 1992).

Women in the Party Hierarchy: Gaining Power, Changing Perceptions

Yet even the addition of party competition does not tell the full story. It is essential to add the active role of women in advancing their claims for parliamentary presence. Women have long played a role in British party politics. Yet the women's movement's increasing focus on party politics in the 1980s and 1990s infused the Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democratic parties with new demands for inclusion at all levels in the party hierarchy and for a place in Westminster.

The Labour Party

Although one might expect that Labour's egalitarian ideology would make it a conducive environment for women to gain voice, traditionally this has not been the case. Labour's close ties to trade unions often precluded the representation of other interest groups within the party. British trade unions have not always been terribly supportive of women. In 1979 only one in thirty-two trade union officials was a woman, and women even had little decision-making power in unions where they made up most of the membership—for example, garment makers, health service employees, and teachers (Hills, 1981).

The Labour women's organization was founded in 1906, and it underwent a few name and organizational changes before it became more politically active in the 1970s (Hills, 1981). The women's section of the Labour Party began to play a vital role in pressing for women's opportunities in the early 1980s. The structure of the women's organization parallels the mainstream party organization. Even in the 1970s, Labour's women's organization was large (1400 local-level women's sections according to party pamphlets)—yet

to this point they were powerless. Although the women's sections held meetings at the local and central levels, their meetings were traditionally uneventful social gatherings. Records from the women's section meetings reveal that the organization met infrequently, about half as frequently as the youth committee (Women's Section minutes, Labour Party Archives). In the late 1970s, limited discussions of women's need for greater access to party decision making surfaced. Women's claims were often considered less important than class-based issues (Perrigo, 1995). By the early 1980s the women's section was formulating plans to improve women's representation and began mobilizing around this issue (Women's Section minutes, Labour Party Archives). Yet it would take many years of work to finally get the issue of women's representation on Labour's agenda.

Gradually, more militant women began to demand greater access (Gelb, 1989). From 1979 to 1983, feminist organizations based outside Labour were well connected to women on the inside (Perrigo, 1995). In the 1980s feminists within the party, organized in the Labour Women's Action Committee (LWAC), joined forces with the more radical leftist party factions, who sought to take over the entire party apparatus. Yet this more militant women's organization still did not achieve the goal of substantially raising women's representation within the party or in Parliament. Several former high-ranking Labour Party officials stated that party leaders largely ignored the LWAC's claims because of its ties to the party's radical left faction. A former party general secretary revealed that at this time, women's claims were viewed as part of the "loony left," which was the faction that chained Labour to unpopular radical policy positions and thereby contributed to Labour's electoral losses. Moderate party factions were trying to rid Labour of the "loony left." During this period, women's gains within the party largely stagnated. One former Labour Party official commented that in the mid-1980s, there were not even enough women at the top levels to even qualify this as an era of tokenism.

Yet women within the party persisted, as they had for so many years, working to gain a foothold and to further the party's goal of recapturing government. Labour's first (and largely symbolic) response to women's demands was to appoint a women's officer and a shadow minister for women's affairs (Gelb, 1989). Yet the women who held this post—Jo Richardson and her successors, Joyce Gould, Clare Short, Vicky Phillips, Deborah Lincoln, Meg Russell, and Rachel McLean—used this newly gained power within the party to fight tenaciously to bring women's equality within the party to the forefront. Using the women's officer position as a springboard to higher office, Richardson, Gould, Short, and Phillips went on to assume new roles in the making of party policy.

With access to the party leadership, these women gradually gained more concessions. Responding to pressure from the activists, in 1982 the party made women's representation an official concern by drafting the National

Women's Charter, which called for more women to be promoted at all levels of the party. Still, party rhetoric was not enough to bring substantive changes. In an interview, a former national women's officer said that each year the women's conference would vote for some form of quotas, and each year the resolution would not make it through the national executive committee (NEC). Clearly, women needed some leaders on the NEC who were sympathetic to their demands.

By the late 1980s, women's presence on Labour's national executive committee rose to 30%. Although Labour had guaranteed women five of the twenty-nine seats (17%) on the NEC since 1918 (see Studlar, 2004), a larger presence in a new era created a new context for women in the party elite. With a new power base, women inside the NEC were instrumental in pushing for new rules to promote more women to positions within the party (Short, 1996). In 1989 Labour passed a resolution that, in summary, mandated that women make up from one-third to one-half of selected party bodies at the local, regional, and national levels. At first the local parties resisted, but with continued pressure, the intraparty quota policy was implemented. The effect of these new internal rules was two-fold. First, these quotas solidified women's presence within the higher echelons of the party, and second, they also ensured that women within the party had the power to press for increased representation at the parliamentary level.

With even more women well placed in the party hierarchy, the issue of parliamentary representation took the spotlight. The women who had attained those high positions among party officers and on the NEC, such as Clare Short, Tessa Jowell, and Barbara Follett, worked closely with the top party leaders and directly lobbied for more women candidates in winnable seats.

In interviews, a few former national women's officers emphasized Clare Short's role. Short had persuaded the party leadership to add research on women voters to their surveys and focus groups. The initial pollster refused to analyze women's opinions separately, and Short turned to her connections in academia to conduct a gender-specific analysis. In one report, two British political scientists, Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris, reported that Labour could have won the last election if women's votes had swung in their direction. Lovenduski later collaborated on a manuscript for the Labour Party, illustrating how the party could achieve gains in women's representation.

Focus group researchers presented Labour's leaders with new evidence that women often viewed Labour as male dominated and union controlled (interview with former aide to women's officer; Russell, 2003). Many women who agreed with Labour's policy positions failed to vote Labour because of their male-dominated images of the party. Women who perceived Labour as a group of confrontational men were more likely to vote for the Conservatives. Thus, it became quite clear to Labour officials that they must communicate

more effectively with women in order to change their image among female voters (Short, 1996). Focus group research, to a certain extent, had created a new target issue group—women who had historically viewed Labour as male dominated, but would vote for New Labour if it became more female friendly. This potential swing-voter, dubbed the “Worcester Woman,” was described as a working mother, in her 30s, and living in middle England, who had traditionally voted Conservative (Coote, 2001). Labour leaders became convinced they could attract her vote and swing the election in their favor.

To change their image among women voters in the 1997 campaign, Labour launched a party campaign called “Winning Words” (interviews with former women’s officers). As part of the campaign, Labour trained its candidates to speak about issues in a manner that specifically appealed to women. Labour politicians were rehearsed on how to shift from more abstract language to discussing policies in more concrete terms, and in a form of language that women preferred. For example, rather than talking about a nebulous economic policy, Labor candidates discussed pocketbook finances and job opportunities. In addition, the campaign highlighted women politicians. Key sources within the party said that the strategy was to feature these women in policy discussions in the media. Thus, Labour needed more female candidates and MPs to successfully transform its image.

The analysis of the 1992 electoral loss, coupled with women’s negative images of Labour in focus groups, finally persuaded Labour leaders to listen to women in the party hierarchy (Russell, 2003). After Clare Short and her colleagues framed women’s votes as a key ingredient to winning the next election, the party’s leadership took steps to close the gender gap in the next election. These women in high-ranking party bodies effectively moved the issue of women’s representation from the “loony left” to the party’s rising package of “modernization” issues. In the early 1990s, the Labour Party was in the midst of recasting itself as “New Labour”—a pragmatic, centrist, and progressive party. This key group of women presented its demands to a succession of Labour leaders, including Tony Blair, as congruent with the party’s overall goals to gain wide appeal and win control of the government (Perrigo, 1995). Turning its back on promoting women candidates, a prominent women’s officer reasoned, was couched as retreating to Labour’s earlier, more old-fashioned and unsuccessful days. Meg Russell (2003) sums this idea up by saying that women pushing for greater presence shifted their “frame” from one centered on justice to one of electoral necessity.

In addition to women within the party, external women’s groups both lobbied for and provided practical assistance in increasing women’s parliamentary representation. The Labour Women’s Network (LWN) was founded in 1987 by four women who had attempted to become candidates in the 1987 election but had encountered too many obstacles. According to the Network’s

leader, Val Price, the LWN uses the media to keep women's representation on the political agenda. Newspapers seek stories on women's roles in the party, and the LWN provides them with information and research. In addition, the LWN sponsored training sessions for potential candidates for office. The training seminars were so successful that Labour itself eventually took them over. Adding another dimension to support for Labour women candidates, Emily's List UK, modeled after its counterpart in the United States, was founded in 1993 by Barbara Follett to offer training and grants to women candidates to meet the costs incurred in running for office, such as travel, supplies, and childcare expenses (www.emilyslist.org.uk).

Women's sustained efforts to ascend to the top of the mainstream party hierarchy and gain a voice among the party leadership proved effective. Although Labour began with only about 20% women on the NEC in the 1970s, this percentage jumped to nearly 30% in the late 1980s and rose to 48% by the mid-1990s. In sum, these gains can be attributed, in part, to the decision of parts of the larger women's movement to align with Labour in the 1980s, the subsequent pressure generated by the more politicized women's organization, and the women's organization's eventual alliance with the party "modernizers."

Conservatives

Since women's enfranchisement, the Conservatives have mobilized women's electoral support by incorporating women at the grassroots level (Lovenduski et al., 1994). Women at the local level run meetings, campaign door-to-door, and serve on local committees. Conservative women are well represented in many positions in the lower rungs of party hierarchy, such as constituency chairs and councilors. Yet among the higher ranks, women have been severely underrepresented. As far back as 1965, the Conservative leadership paid lip service to women's underrepresentation. The Selwyn Lloyd Report recommended that each short list contain one woman, but the constituency organizations largely ignored the central leadership on this issue (Rush, 1969, as cited in Welch and Studlar, 1986; Hills, 1981).

Although more women are active among the Conservatives' local ranks than in those of the Labour Party, Conservative women are not as well represented at higher levels in the party and within Parliament. At the annual party conference, some spaces were set aside for women. The Conservatives have not released records on the number of women among the party's leadership in the 1970s, but according to scholars, women made up 20% of the Conservatives' NEC from the 1970s to the 1990s (Hills, 1981; Lovenduski and Norris, 1993).

Despite their fairly low and stagnant levels of representation in the national party hierarchy, women historically made few demands for greater

representation within the Conservative Party (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). The Conservatives' women's organization, the Conservative Women's National Committee (CWNC), avoided the LWAC model of mobilization for greater representation. The lack of internal divisions and feminist mobilization within the CNWC, and within the party more generally, not only stem from the party's more rightist ideology, but also the party's more authoritarian culture (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993). Comparisons of women's organization pamphlets from the 1980s from both the CWNC and LWAC reveal two contrasting styles of organization and goals. The CWNC stuck close to its original goals to recruit women party members and discuss mainstream party business. The CWNC sponsors an annual women's conference, and pamphlets from that event from the 1970s and 1980s emphasize how women across the country contribute to the party. In short, early party records indicate Conservative women were more likely to take the "good soldier" role within the party, rather than challenging the status quo.

While women in the party traditionally made few demands, external groups did lobby the Conservative Party. The most prominent, the 300 Group, was formed outside party institutions and initially was unaffiliated with either political party. Aptly titled, its goal was to increase the number of women in Parliament to 300. Founded in 1980, the 300 Group offers women training in campaign skills and policy education, and provides a forum for networking and developing mentor relationships (www.300group.org.uk). As more Conservative women entered the ranks of the group, key sources in British women's organizations revealed that it is now essentially a Conservative-dominated organization. To add to pressures from the 300 Group, over the course of the 1980s, a tide of discontent began to sweep across segments of Conservative women activists as younger generations of professional women joined the party. Some ten years after similar events in the Labour Party, segments of Conservative women activists began to press for greater representation on party bodies, and in the party's parliamentary delegation.

The Conservative Party's Women's National Committee (CWNC) pushed for several years in the late 1980s and 1990s to get the party to more actively recruit women candidates, to no avail. Because the Conservatives historically enjoyed a large bonus in women's votes, the party organization paid little attention to the paltry number of women they sent to Parliament. Yet with the Conservatives' defeat in 1997, party leaders took greater notice of women within the party. According to an interview with a key women's officer in the Conservative Party, after 1997 the Conservatives were eager to win back women's votes, and party leaders began to discuss strategies.

Increasingly focused on the gradual loss in their loyal base of women voters, the Conservatives began to hold special meetings to address regaining women voters by running more women candidates in the next election. The

party adopted new recruitment structures designed to seek out potentially strong female candidates. Rather than waiting for women to step forward to run, the party organization has gone so far as to “talent spot” in certain constituencies for potential women candidates, urging them to run in the next election, and providing assistance and training. The Tories (the Conservatives) have also decided to emulate the “Winning Words” campaign of Labour and change the way that they talk about issues in order to appeal to women voters. However, focus group research (done by an independent political organization) suggests that the Tories’ attempt to package their issues in a more “woman-friendly” way will be unsuccessful with women voters if the policies continue to be pitched only by men (interviews with Conservative women’s officer and a leader of The Fawcett Society).

Party Rule Changes: Gender Quotas

Certainly attaining gender quotas is more difficult in a single-member district system like Britain, where quotas mean reserving a seat for a woman, rather than the list-balancing that characterized proportional representation systems. Yet Labour women persuaded the Labour Party to adopt a form of gender quotas for candidates, and the Conservatives have steered clear of any formal rule changes.

Labour

The road to changing party selection rules to promote women candidates in the Labour Party was long, and Labour women made many incremental steps. Beginning in the 1970s, each year the women’s conference voted for quotas, and the measure passed to the NEC for a vote. Year after year the quota resolution failed. Since 1970, after each election the party general secretary sent a letter to all constituencies regretting the low numbers of women candidates and suggesting that more women be nominated (Brooks et al., 1990). However, these letters brought little change, and no rules for increasing women’s representation were considered by the central party organization at this time. Those arguing for quotas were an isolated minority in the 1970s and in the early 1980s.

The first step toward quotas in the British Labour Party began within the party organization as part of an effort to increase the number of women in party offices and among party decision-making bodies, and these internal quotas were discussed in the last section. In 1989, the party conference passed Composite 54, which accepted, in principle, the idea of quotas within the party structure (Brooks et al., 1990). The 1990 party conference passed a resolution

requiring that women make up 50% of the party officers at the branch level, three-sevenths of the party officers at the constituency level, and one-third of general selection committees. At first the local parties resisted these new rules, claiming that they could not find enough women to fill the spots. However, eventually the local party organizations found women and implemented the policy.

Gradually, the party flirted with watered-down versions of quotas for candidate lists. First, in 1988 the party ruled that each list of potential candidates, or short list, should contain one woman. The token woman policy had little effect on actual nominations. Then, in 1990 the party ruled that each short list should contain 50% women (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993). Yet the presence of women on a short list did not ensure that a woman would be nominated.

Support for a form of quotas for women candidates continued to build throughout the 1980s. A change in party leadership changed the climate within Labour. Interviews with former party officials highlighted the leadership of new party leader John Smith in legitimizing the idea of rule changes as part of a process of opening up Labour to traditionally underrepresented interests. Although Neil Kinnock ushered in the process of reform within Labour, Kinnock did not support any form of positive discrimination. In contrast, Smith strongly supported a temporary measure to directly get more women into office. Because most people characterized Smith as an old-fashioned lawyer who generally put limits on Kinnock's reforms, his support for a form of quotas surprised many within the Labour party, and contributed toward a new perception of quotas.

Yet the support of the larger body of party leadership was still necessary. Key Labour officials, including a national women's officer and former party secretary, revealed that Labour's NEC finally changed its attitude toward quotas in an attempt to change the party image among women voters. As part of a larger process in which Labour sought to construct a new image to appeal to a wider group of voters after the 1992 defeat, senior Labour figures began to prize women's votes. As a means to winning control of the government in the next election, putting forth more women candidates became part of Labour's strategy to attract those women's votes. Because the central party organization has only some control over the selection of candidates, they needed a mechanism to encourage local constituencies to run women candidates. The rules mandating 50% women on the short list had little effect on getting women nominated. Clearly more rigorous rules were necessary.

As part of Labour's "modernization" campaign, gender quotas shifted from a "loony left" policy to the mainstream agenda. Women on the NEC packaged gender quotas in a new way—as part of an image shift. Three members of the NEC Women's Committee were integral in achieving the quota policy—Rachel Brooks, Angela Eagle, and Clare Short. After Clare Short was named chair of

the Labour Women National Executive Committee, a subgroup of the NEC that is elected by the Labour Women's Action Committee, she directly and effectively lobbied the National Executive to pass a form of gender quotas for parliamentary candidates. Together, Clare Short, with Labour MPs Brooks and Eagle, published a manuscript calling for quotas (Brooks et al., 1990). The manuscript not only lays out the legal and theoretical reasons that Labour should adopt quotas, but it also makes the pragmatic claim that Labour must find a mechanism to get more women into Parliament, or risk losing the next election without women's votes. This argument was integral to getting Labour leaders to listen to the women's committee demands. In several interviews with party insiders, it was emphasized that Clare Short, who would go on to be a Labour Minister, was the most publicly visible of the strong advocates, and her power within the party was a great strength to the eventual passage of a quota-type policy. In order to pass a quota policy, the NEC Women's Committee joined forces with the NEC Organization Committee—a move toward an alliance with the powerful forces within the party.

While the single-member district plurality electoral system did not preclude the introduction of a quota policy as generally assumed, the electoral rules necessitated a modification in the standard quota policy and made quotas more difficult for the party to implement. With single-member districts, the quota policy could not follow the typical gender balance on a party list, more common to quotas in Labour's sister Socialist parties across Western Europe. The plan that was devised, titled the "all-women shortlist" (AWS) policy, mandated that in one-half of the upcoming "inheritor seats" (vacancies resulting from retirement) and one-half of "strong challenger" seats (those deemed most winnable), the list of potential nominees must be composed of only women, ensuring that the nominee would be a woman (Studlar and McAllister, 1998; Norris, 2001; Russell, 2003). The goal was to get women nominated in forty constituencies, which were to be selected on an ad hoc basis.

With the backing of the NEC, the quota bill was finally passed on to the party conference for a vote. At the 1993–94 Conference, Labour leaders attached the AWS policy to the one-member one-vote (OMOV) policy, which was designed to take power away from trade unions and the hard left by removing the block vote. Knowing that OMOV would likely succeed at the conference, former national women's officers and their staff revealed in interviews that the two bills were strategically linked together. If a member voted against AWS, then he or she also had to vote against the popular OMOV resolution. In effect, the top Labour leaders gave the AWS policy a boost by slipping it by conference members as part of the OMOV bill, indicating that the Labour leadership supported the passage of gender quotas. Some party insiders even speculate that many members voting at the conference did not even know that they were also voting for AWS when they cast their ballot in support

of OMOV. As a consequence, AWS passed and was popular in the following months.

The women-only short list became a difficult policy to implement, and AWS supporters increasingly found themselves targets of ridicule. Because only one candidate could be nominated in a given constituency, any form of quotas meant taking power away from men. Where the AWS policy was used, no men could apply for a seat in that constituency. Many men in those constituencies had worked for decades within the party, waiting for their chance to be nominated. With Labour's fortunes on the rise, many activists saw the upcoming election as their best opportunity to be elected. Labour's national women's officer traveled to several regions trying to "sell" the idea of AWS. Regional party officers were invited to a "consensus meeting" at which central party officials attempted to persuade the local party to agree to nominate only women to the party's short list of potential nominees (Russell, 2003). Because of the previous intraparty quotas, three of the local attendees at any meeting were guaranteed to be women. However, former party officials who had been commissioned to enforce the policy noted in interviews that Labour's national women's officer did not always gain the support of those women in attendance. In the end, some constituencies voluntarily adopted the AWS policy. Yet some resisted, and because there were not an adequate number of volunteers, the central party resolved to impose the new selection procedure. Thus began the bad publicity related to AWS.

The AWS policy was challenged by two male party members who claimed that the policy discriminated against them. They took their case to the Leeds Industrial Tribunal, which ruled that Labour acted unlawfully and contravened the Sex Discrimination Act (Lovenduski and Eagle, 1998). The tribunal struck down the AWS policy and ordered Labour to extend equal opportunities to men. Labour officials, including Tony Blair, decided against appealing the ruling, and the all-women short lists ended in January 1996. According to interviews with former members of Clare Short's staff, Blair was highly reluctant to push another quota policy, lest it be viewed as discriminatory. Yet thirty-four of the forty women had already been nominated under this policy, and their nominations stood. Given the proximity of the upcoming election, Labour could not afford to be uncertain about its candidates (Russell, 2003). After the defeat of AWS in the employment tribunal, gender quotas lost popularity among party members and leaders.

The quota policy achieved results—the number of female Labour MPs increased from 38 to 101 in the 1997 election as a result of the compulsory all-women short lists. In seats where AWS did not apply, men remained the favored candidates. Thus, we can assume that without AWS, women would not have fared nearly as well in the last election (Lovenduski and Eagle, 1998). Not only did AWS work to get more women elected, but also its controversial

nature did not cause a backlash among British voters. Studlar and McAllister's (1998) analysis of 1997 voting data reveals that women selected through AWS averaged a higher percentage of votes than other Labour challengers—even other women on short lists.

The Liberal Democratic Party

Before the small British Social Democratic Party joined forces with the Liberals to form the Liberal Democrats, the Social Democrats demonstrated their support for women's parliamentary presence by stepping forward as the first party to mandate women on candidate short lists (Studlar and Welch, 1992). Once allied, the two parties employed this policy for the 1983 and 1987 elections. The impetus for this policy appears to be electoral competition. As a small party in need of publicity, such a policy served as a way to grab attention. Yet without key women protagonists pushing for stronger measures, no formal quotas were adopted. Importantly, as an entrepreneurial third party, the Liberal Democrats acted as policy entrepreneurs by introducing a mild (and largely ineffective) rule change onto the political stage. This rule change served as a precedent for subsequent moves to employ mechanisms within parties to directly raise the proportion of women candidates.

The Conservative Party

The Conservatives have not adopted quotas, and Britain did not witness a contagion of quotas across the party system. The Tories have not even adopted targets for women candidates. Instead, they rely on "talent spotting" and training programs for potential women candidates, and they encourage selection committees to consider women candidates through promotional videos.

The Conservative Party lacks many of the forces for quotas found in the Labour Party. First, Conservative ideology has long worked against quotas. The *laissez-faire* ideology that applies to government intervention logically works against any formal party policies mandating local party organizations to select candidates of a certain gender. Further, positive discrimination of any form is eschewed in favor of selection based upon merit. In addition, there has been less electoral pressure to adopt quotas. The Conservatives have not suffered from a consistent deficit in women's votes. Until the post-1992 campaign by Labour to revamp its image among women voters, the Conservatives had not even perceived a challenge over women's votes. In addition, the Conservative women's organization has not pressured for quotas because they do not view quotas as an appropriate mechanism to increase their numbers in the delegation to Parliament. When interviewed, a top-ranking woman within the Conservative Party organization stated she and many of her colleagues reasoned

that a quota policy would diminish women's status in the party, and that Tory women prided themselves on rising through the party ranks on the basis of their qualifications alone. This party official lamented that quotas seemed to be out of reach, reasoning that she did not see any effective mechanism to increase women's representation in the near future. Rather, women would have to continue building their qualifications and wait for their opportunity in the future.

Conservative insiders point out that a rule change implemented by the central party organization may be the only way to encourage reluctant local party organizations to promote more women, but such central leadership is unlikely in the form of public rules. One former women's officer revealed that the party is between a rock and a hard place in finding formal mechanisms to increase women's participation; quotas for internal party offices are out of the question given the party's overriding *laissez-faire* ideology, while the party's wait-and-see approach yields few women among the leadership.

Relative to the gains made by women in the Labour Party, the underrepresentation of Conservative women in the House of Commons results from less vociferous pressure on the party leadership from both internal and external women's groups, and the Conservative ideology that precludes any intervention into the process of promoting women through the party ranks.

Conclusions

The British case illustrates the importance of electoral pressure *plus* women's strategic activism in the party leadership. Party competition from the Liberal Democrats set women's presence on the agenda. The Conservatives sense electoral pressure but have taken few direct measures to incorporate women, because Conservative women have been less vociferous on this issue and because special measures are largely antithetical to their ideology. The successes of women in the Labour Party demonstrate how women pressured the party leadership for greater representation within the party, and how women use their influence inside the party to improve the opportunities for women in the party's parliamentary delegation. Specifically, internal quotas for party offices were key to getting more women into powerful positions, and those women pitched women's parliamentary presence as essential to Labour's electoral success. The importance of women's mobilization and rule changes within Labour supports Joyce Gelb's (2002) analysis. Yet Gelb also cautions that numerical representation does not automatically translate into political power. She asserts that British women MPs need to rebel a bit more, pushing feminist claims. Presence may not equal power, but with the addition of an alignment with the dominant party faction and strategically pitched claims, British women were able to shake up the party culture and reconfigure the rules.