THE PROFILE OF GENDER EQUALITY ISSUE ATTENTION IN WESTERN EUROPE

Claire Annesley (University of Manchester), claire.annesley@manchester.ac.uk

Isabelle Engeli (University of Geneva), isabelle.engeli@eui.eu

Francesca Gains (University of Manchester), francesca.gains@manchester.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality has attracted increasing political attention in Western Europe since the 1980s and a wide set of issues have come onto the agenda, including political representation, violence against women, equal pay, reproductive rights and equality in the family. Nevertheless, gendering policy still presents puzzling patterns in Western Europe that the paper aims to explain. The extent to which policies are gendered varies greatly. To take full account of the heterogeneity of gender equality policies, this paper argues that one should distinguish between class-based policies, status policies and blueprint policies. Indeed, the mechanisms through which gender equality policies gain advocacy and get upon governmental agenda differs according to the type of gender equality policies. Gender equality demands reflect very different issue agendas invoking very different constellations of interests, advocacy, friction and veto points which in turn play out differentially. Drawing on governmental attention datasets from the Comparative Policy Agendas Project, we take a comparative gender equality policy approach to assess the validity of several explanations (women in politics, social democratic politics, economic performance) with a systematic comparative quantitative analysis of the determinants gendering policy domains in Western Europe.
INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, and the mobilization of second wave feminism, gender equality issues have increasingly attracted the attention of governments across Western Europe and a wide range of policies have emerged to promote gender equality in employment, education, and political representation, and to promote reproductive rights and equality in the family (Mazur and Pollack, 2010). The extent to which pressure for policy change to promote gender equality has been successful in gaining the attention of policy makers and then invoking government action is varied however and presents an empirical and analytical puzzle for comparative gender equality policy scholars. This paper argues that one should distinguish between class-based policies, status policies and blueprint policies. Indeed, the mechanisms through which gender equality policies gain advocacy and get upon governmental agenda differs according to the type of gender equality policies. Gender equality demands reflect very different issue agendas invoking very different constellations of interests, advocacy, friction and veto points which in turn play out differentially.

Several literatures address the determinants of gender equality policy change. The comparative politics and comparative welfare states literatures place emphasis on socio-economic change and party ideology as key variables to explain the differential adoption of welfare policies to promote equality in the home and at work (Sainsbury, 1999; Huber and Stephens, 2000; Walby, 2004; Lewis, 2006; Kittilson, 2008; Morgan, 2009; Bonoli, and F. Reber, 2010; Bolzendahl, 2011). However welfare policies form only one subset of a broader definition of gender equality policies (Mazur, 2002; Htun and Weldon, 2010). And the mechanisms through which the changing interests of women gain advocacy and then get on governmental decision and action agendas is often underspecified in this literature. Walby (2004) for example acknowledges that the extent of policy development depends upon effective representation of women’s interests. She argues that this requires the inclusion of women, but does not problematize the nature or extent of women’s representation or the issue of resistance to women’s advocacy (Walby, 2004, 13).

The gender and representation and state feminism literature does focus on the processes through which feminist interests have mobilized for pressure for change, through social movements,
We argue that whilst the comparative welfare state and gender and representation literatures highlight the relevance of socio-economic, and political variables, they would benefit from synthesis with the insights from public policy scholarship on the processes of policy change. The most recent comparative politics of gender analysis builds on the findings of both the comparative politics literature and the gender and representation literature but makes a distinctive contribution from a public policy perspective in stressing that the dynamic and determinants of gender equality policy change will be issue specific and vary across policy domains (Mazur and Pollack, 2010; Htun and Weldon, 2010). However, hitherto the insights from the predominantly qualitative research in this vein have not been subject to systematic and comparative quantitative analysis.

In this paper we advocate and test a comparative gender equality policy approach for understanding the dynamics of gender equality policy change as necessary in recognizing that the profile of gender policy change in Western Europe is differentiated. Gender equality demands reflect very different issue agendas invoking very different constellations of interests, advocacy, friction and veto points which in turn play out differentially (Htun and Weldon, 2010, Baumgartner et al. forthcoming). We argue therefore that the determinants of policy adoption will vary across policy
domains. To do so, we investigate the patterns in gendering policies in Western Europe since the 1980s across a range of gender policy domains. Initially we review the literature from comparative politics, gender and politics and public policy and develop a set of domain sensitive testable hypotheses. Then drawing on governmental attention datasets from the Comparative Policy Agendas Project, which classify governmental issue attention and decision agendas by policy topic, we assess the validity of explanations which address profile of gender equality policy change through a comprehensive, systematic and comparative quantitative analysis of the determinants of gender policy domains in Western Europe.

1. Disentangling Gender Equality Policies

Across Western Europe policies to promote equality between the genders have overcome the hurdle of getting the attention of government actors, have moved onto decision agendas and been enacted (Kingdon, 1995; Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen and Jones, 2008; Baumgartner, Jones and Wilkerson, 2011, forthcoming; Annesley et al, 2010). The determinants and dynamics of gender policy change is one addressed by the maturing field of comparative gender equality policy analysis which seeks to address ‘the puzzle of how, why and to what end states respond to women’s rights and gender equality’ (Mazur and Pollack, 2010). The distinctive contribution of this literature is in taking a public policy lens to the dynamics of gender policy change and highlighting the domain specific aspects of interests, advocacy and policy processes. This recognition of issue distinctiveness highlights that ‘disaggregating the analysis by gender issue […] involves a distinct set of actors, activates different cleavages and conflicts and has distinct implications for gender relations’ (Htun and Weldon, 2010, 208). So, for example, in countries with a strong Catholic or Christian Democratic tradition, issues such as abortion or reproductive rights might struggle to reach the governmental agenda, but a large number of women in parliament might help overcome this resistance. Or, welfare policies to promote women’s access to employment might be more likely to reach the government agenda in countries with a strong social democratic tradition or in countries where a large number of women have access to the resources associated with government office.
An initial requirement in taking a policy domain approach to the analysis of policy change is consideration of how to identify what counts as gender equality policy and a method of classification of gender equality policy types. This is necessary as there remains some debate in the broader literature on women and policy change regarding what constitutes a women’s issue and what is gender equality policy. For Bara (2010), a women’s issue is one for which women appear to express strong support but which may or may not be specifically gendered, for example, Norris shows women’s stronger concern for health care spending or education (1996). Alternatively, it refers to the study of policies which specifically benefit women, either directly, for example, maternity leave, or indirectly, for example, benefits to lone parents as these tend to be predominantly women. Thus Dionne in her analysis of representation in the British parliaments examines women’s issues as being ‘those for which women are the intended beneficiary, constituency or object’ (2010).

The approach taken in this article is broader than a study of ‘women’s issues’ in that we are interested in policy change which promotes women’s interests and which alters the unequal status and power between men and women. Drawing on Weldon and Htun, we examine gender equality policies which aim to “dismantle hierarchies of power that privilege men and the masculine, a sexual division of labor that devalues women and the feminine, and the institutionalization of normative heterosexuality” (2010, 208). In practice this wider definition encompasses most policies which women either express support for, or benefit from such as parental leave and childcare, equal pay and employment measures, policies on rape and domestic violence, and reproductive rights. Also included are policies directed at men, for example paternity leave policies, or policies which may not directly benefit women but promote gender equality, for example pension equalization and men’s access to widow pension.

For this article we start with the categorization of gender policy domains elaborated by Mazur (2002) which are: blueprint policy, political representation policy, equal employment policy, reconciliation policy, family law policy, and two types of ‘body politics’ which are reproductive rights policy and sexuality and violence policy. To further understand the dynamics of gender policy change we draw on Htun and Weldon’s typology of gender issues which categorize policies into those
which seek to address the subordinate position of women as a group such as reproductive rights (gender status policies) and those which seek to address the unfair gendered division of paid and unpaid work which primarily benefit poorer women such as childcare (class-based policies).

We aim to adopt and adapt this typology to address the puzzle of the differentiated profile of gender equality policy change in Western Europe by developing domain sensitive explanations for the determinants of gender policy change. So when considering the socio-economic or political determinants of gender policy change suggested in the comparative politics, comparative welfare states and women and representation literatures we argue these explanations need to be infused with a domain sensitive understanding of the class or status basis of the policy to address the differential interests and advocacy invoked, and the friction and veto provoked, by different gender equality policy types. For our analysis of Western Europe, we divide gender equality policies into the two main dimensions suggested by Htun and Weldon – class and status – and add a further dimension, which we label ‘overarching’ gender equality policy. In the dimension ‘class’ we include gender equality policies which are costly and redistributive in their effect.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS-BASED GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Equality at work, equal employment policy, unemployment policy, pensions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Education, vocational and professional training policy</td>
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<td>• Parental leave and childcare</td>
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<td>• Family welfare policies</td>
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In the dimension ‘status’ we include the gender equality policies which address the status of women as a group. This includes policies which affect women’s bodily integrity or women’s political or legal rights and might have a doctrinal dimension to them.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>GENDER STATUS GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Political representation</td>
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<td>• Family rights</td>
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In addition, we develop a third type of equality policy: the blueprint policies (Mazur 2002). Blueprint policies are overarching policies which have implications for both class and status policies and state the general principle of gender equality, such as anti-discrimination policy. For example, the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty in the UK in 2007 required all public institutions to promote gender equality issues in their policy deliberations and service provisions.

We argue that this differentiation between three different types of policy is fundamental to fully account for the heterogeneity of gender equality policies. These distinctions alter the determinants and dynamics of gender policy change in a national or regional setting as the type of policy determines which actors are involved, how effectively they can press for change and the degree of friction they face. In the following section we outline the theoretical foundations for three competing explanations of gendering executive attention and develop a series of testable hypotheses related to the impact of (1) women in power, (2) party politics, and (3) economic performance.

1. EXPLAINING THE DETERMINANTS AND DYNAMICS OF GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES

Women in power

Women’s descriptive representation refers to the number of women present in political institutions such as parliament and the government. Gender and politics scholarship highlights three reasons for why increasing the number of women in legislative and executive is desirable (Phillips 1995;
Justice arguments propose that it is unjust for women not to be represented on equal terms to men; democratic arguments claim that the inclusion of women will improve the overall quality of democratic practice; and pragmatic arguments emphasize that political parties can boost their success by fielding more female candidates. The substantive rationale for increasing women’s representation in parliament is the contested notion that female parliamentarians will not only represent, but also act for women and, by so doing, make a difference to women’s lives (Lovenduski, 2005). Indeed a growing body of gender and politics scholarship investigates the link between the presence of women in parliament (descriptive representation) and women friendly or gender equality policy outcomes (substantive representation).

The substantive representation of women literature has tended to move away from ‘critical mass’ arguments (Dahlerup 2006) which claim that policy change for women will be forthcoming when women comprise a certain percentage of parliamentary seats – usually around 30%. It points out: that female bodies might not equate with feminist minds (Childs 2004); that institutional barriers might militate against feminist claims (Annesley and Gains 2010); but that women acting alone as ‘critical actors’ (Childs and Krook 2006) might be able to make significant progress towards gender equality (Childs and Withey 2006). It also points out that men can be important allies to feminist politicians seeking change (Annesley 2010). Empirical research on the substantive representation of women has, nevertheless, successfully shown that the presence of women in a variety of legislative settings is likely to make a difference to policy outcomes on a range of issues from domestic violence policy to women’s health to work-life balance issues. While it cannot be guaranteed that all women parliamentarians will act for women, increasing their numbers overall improves the likelihood that some women legislators will act for women (Stokes, 2005, 20). Accordingly, we hypothesize that an increasing women representation in parliament will incentivize government to dedicate more attention to all types of gender equality policies.

Studying women in parliament has been the dominant approach for scholars hoping to identify the capacity of women to shape policy. However, the limitations of this approach are increasingly being identified. Celis et al (2008, 104) highlight the need for the focus to shift away
from women in parliament to include other sites and political actors, increasingly referred to as ‘critical actors’ who might be ‘male and female legislators, ministers, party members, bureaucrats and members of civil society groups’. Annesley and Gains (2010) make the case that to accurately assess the agenda setting capacity of women in politics it is necessary to be clear about which institutional settings wield political resources and power in a given political system. In parliamentary democracies, political resources for agenda setting are increasingly controlled by the government so executive actors rather than legislators determine the policy agenda. However, feminist ministers experience resistance to gender equality agenda setting and frequently do not have adequate access to executive resources to shape the agenda (Annesley and Gains 2010). Ministerial resources for gender equality agenda setting are strengthened when a minister’s work is supported by a dedicated and effective bureaucratic unit such as a women’s policy agency (McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995). Therefore, we hypothesize that a higher women representation in government will result into more attention dedicated to all types of gender equality policies. In addition, executive attention will be more sustained in presence of a women’s policy agency.

**Party Ideology and Partisanship in Politics**

Women in politics might be inclined to work together on some gender equality issues, but not on others. Gender equality issues related to ‘status’, such as violence against women or reproductive rights will be more likely to garner cross-party support from women across the political spectrum than class based rights. However, some issues concerning women’s status, such as abortion or reproductive rights, will prove to be controversial and harder to get on the agenda in countries with a strong Christian or Christian-Democratic political tradition.

However, not all women are feminists and not all feminists promote the same agenda. Not all women will be inclined to act for women in the same way. It is on class based gender equality policies that women’s positions tend to diverge the most. Christian Democratic politics emphasize gender difference, promoting a traditional gender division of labor of a male breadwinner and a traditional caring roles for women. Neo-liberal conservatism might encourage women into the labor market, but will not intervene to improve their financial independence or realign gender roles in the
private household. In contrast, Social Democracy conceptualizes gender equality as part of an overarching political program to reduce class-based inequality and promote equal citizenship (Buchanan and Annesley 2007, Htun and Weldon 2010, McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995). Thus gender equality policy to promote women’s economic independence and a fairer distribution of the sexual division of labor is more likely to be advocated by social democratic politics.

Progress towards class-based gender equality can be seen empirically in western democracies where social democratic parties have governed (Walby, 2009; Morgan, 2009). Obvious examples include Sweden, Norway, Finland since the 1970s, where social democratic politics has led to welfare states featuring high levels of quality paid work for women, a good provision of public childcare, and parental leave schemes where care is shared between both parents. In the UK, the social democratic New Labour party (1997-2010) improved the financial circumstances of, and support provided to, working women (Annesley, Gains and Rummery 2007). In short, class-based gender equality policies focusing on improving women’s financial independence and a better work-care balance are associated with left-wing parties. As a result, we hypothesize that less executive attention will be dedicated to gender equality policies related to the promotion of women’s status in society when Christian Democrats are strong in the party system. On the contrary, class-based gender equality policies and blueprint policies will be more likely to emerge on government agendas when Social Democrats are strong.

Economic Determinants

A final explanation for the emergence of different kinds of gender equality policy relates to economic factors. A chronically under-researched dimension to gender and politics scholarship is the impact of economic performance on gender equality advocates’ chances of promoting gender equality policy change (Annesley and Gains 2009; Annesley, Engeli, Gains and Resodihardjo, 2010). The predominant focus of much feminist policy analysis has been on policies to achieve more equal gender representation in legislative arenas (i.e. quotas), or on bringing attention to feminist policy issues otherwise ignored by the ‘mainstream’, and which we categorize here as ones associated with women’s status (e.g. abortion, prostitution, rape and domestic violence). These studies show the ways
in which feminist policy agency is constrained by institutional factors, policy legacies, party politics or religious doctrines. There is no clear evidence that economic performance affects the propensity of governments to adopt such issues onto their policy agendas. Instead, introducing such issues could be regarded as a ‘cost free’ way of making progress on gender equality. As Wilson (2007) points out in her analysis of the development of GLBT rights in the UK under New Labour, promoting the rights of lesbian women was a cost neutral advancement in gender equality policy.

In contrast, introducing new class based gender equality policies affect the established formula of redistribution in economic decision making and the welfare state and invariably require more governmental resources. For policy areas with fiscally redistributive consequences it is therefore important to consider and understand the economic determinants of gender equality policy agenda setting. The potential costs of class-based gender equality policies can fall on governments, employers and men in formal and/or informal work. For governments, costs arise from higher fiscal transfers in the form of social security payments, for example for state-funded childcare or for parental leave policies. Also costly for government are the compliance and implementation costs of policy reform and oversight for example through the start up and running costs of regulation agencies, the costs of supporting legislative challenge, the costs of directly administering and advising employers on compliance. For employers, particularly small employers, negative costs might arise directly from wage costs for example from equal pay legislation, from benefit costs such as maternity pay or indirectly from administrative costs of introducing and managing the policy change. For male employees, the cost is perceived to arise from their displacement by female employees, and the often detrimental financial impact of undertaking informal unpaid caring work.

It is our argument that in the case of class based gender equality policies to promote sex equality in the division of paid and unpaid labour, which carry potentially large redistributive consequences - between the state and the market, within the state as employer and within the private realm between men and women - advocates for gender equality policy change will face economic constraints on their agenda setting activity. As Kingdon suggests, officials note changing public moods when it comes to the economy. They act on this information to promote or downgrade possible
policy agendas (Kingdon 1995). McBeth et al (2007, 88) describe how policy advocates seek to bolster their arguments ‘in the certainty of scientifically deduced numbers and facts’ when making the case for policy change and demonstrate narrative tactics identifiable in how they construct ‘who wins and who loses’. Advocates in this issue area, we argue, will find it easier to get gender equality policies on government agendas when economic circumstances are favorable. Drawing from this debate, we hypothesize that class-based gender equality will reach the government agenda when the economy is performing well while the level of attention toward gender equality policy related to women’s status and blueprint will remain unaffected by economic performance.

DATA AND METHODS

The paper aims at investigating how patterns in executive attention to gender equality diverge across types of gender equality policies.. To do so, we investigate patterns in gendering executing attention in five countries: Denmark, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Spain from 1961 to 2007 for the four first countries and from 1982 to 2007 for Spain. This set of five countries allows for capturing diversity in terms of social security systems, party systems and commitments to international gender agendas.

Measuring attention towards gender equality: classed-based policies, status policies and blueprint policies

We draw on datasets on governmental agendas created within the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP)\(^1\) which uses a common policy topic classification of government activities across political systems. The CAP data, thus, allows for comprehensive and reliable comparison across issues, countries and venues (Baumgartner, Jones and Wilkerson forthcoming). In this analysis, we use the government’s statements of policy priorities and commitments taken from: the Queen’s “Speeches from the Throne” for the United Kingdom (Jennings et al. 2010) and the Netherlands (Breeman et al. 2009), the so-called “messages” from the Swiss government (Varone et al. forthcoming), the Prime Minister's annual addresses to the Parliament in Denmark (Green-Pedersen 2007), and the State of the

\(^1\) See [http://www.comparativeagendas.org](http://www.comparativeagendas.org).
union debates and investiture speeches in Spain (Chaqués and Palau 2011). The Danish, Dutch, Spanish and UK speeches are delivered by the titular Head of the State or the prime minister in Denmark and Spain and state the forthcoming executive legislative intent for the forthcoming parliamentary session. The messages of the Swiss government are delivered during the year and present the upcoming legislative intent of the government. Even though they present some cross-national differences in institutional format, statements in the speeches and messages constitute a clear and reliable measure of government’s agenda priorities (Baumgartner et al. 2008, Jennings et al. forthcoming). When policies promoting gender equality are mentioned, it means that these policies have reached the political agenda for action and are one of the issues to which Governments are paying serious attention at that particular time (Kingdon 1995).

To assess whether patterns of attention toward gender equality varying across policy domains, we drawn on Htun and Weldon (2011) to distinguish between three types of gender equality policies: class-based policies, status policies and blueprint policies. As argued in section 2, these three sets of policies address different kind of issues related to gender equality and promote different goals. (1) Class-based policies are mainly redistributive and aim at promoting women’s economic independence and a better gender balance between work and care activities. In our analysis, we operationalize two dependent variables addressing class-based policies: one covers all the mentions in the speeches that address the promotion of women’s economic independence such as measures regarding women’s access to the workforce, education, vocational training and workforce development as well the eradication of gender discrimination at work and in pension schemes, unemployment benefits and taxation (“labor and pension”). The second dependent variable addressing class-based policies covers the improvement of gender balance between work and care activities through the development of childcare program and maternity / paternity / parental leave (“childcare and leave”). (2) The second type of gender equality policies addresses the subordinate status of women in the society. In this paper,

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2 The five datasets were built up following the same master codebook of the Comparative Agendas Project, Each sentence or quasi-sentence was coded according to the coding scheme, with the exception of Switzerland for which the topic of the messages was used the coding unit. Using these codebooks, agendas were cross-coded by two independent coders and satisfied a high level of intercoder reliability (Jennings et al. forthcoming).
the dependent variable measuring such status policies covers executive attention toward reproductive rights, violence against women and same-sex couple rights (“reproduction and violence”). (3) Finally, our fourth dependent variable covers speeches mentions regarding the third type of equality policy: blueprint policies that address the promotion of gender equality in general (“blueprint”).

The overall promotion of gender equality is relatively limited in the five countries that are studied in the paper (gender equality mentions regarding labor and pension issues: N=61; childcare and leave: N=18; reproduction and violence: N= 20; Blueprint: N=25). Accordingly, we have constructed a pooled binary time-series cross-section (BTSCS) dataset including the five countries over 47 years for Denmark, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom and 26 years for Spain, that is 213 country-year observations. The four dependent variables are coded 1 in a given year if the promotion of gender equality in their respective domain is mentioned at least once in the speeches, and 0 otherwise.

Determinants of gendering executive attention

Three explanations have been developed in the previous section regarding the impact of women's representation in legislatures and in executive office as well as through women’s policy agencies; party politics and economy-related factors. The remaining part of this section presents the operationalization of the independent and control variables and model specification.

Women in power – The first explanation relies on the contested argument that increasing women’s representation in politics positively impacts on political attention regarding gender issues, gendering policy debates and promoting women-friendly policy outcomes. To measure women’s representation in parliament, we use the percentage of parliamentary seats occupied by female MPs in the lower or single House at the time when the speech was delivered (see Table 1). For their representation in

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3 The Danish Prime Minister speech for the year 1971 has been excluded from the analysis. Parliamentary elections took place a couple of weeks before this speech, which was pronounced by the former Prime Minister heading the care-taker government until the new government coalition was formed. As the 1971 elections led to a drastic change in the party composition of the government, we cannot assume that the speech reflect the policy priorities and intents of either the new government or the old one. Accordingly, we have excluded this observation.
government, female ministerial participation was computed as the percentage of female ministers (with or without portfolio) within a cabinet at the time of the speech. In the UK, some members are part of the cabinet without being paid. These members are taken into account. On the contrary, we do not take into account British members who attend cabinet only when issues regarding their portfolio are concerned.

**Insert table 1 about here**

*Women's policy agencies*— As the literature points out, feminist ministers and legislators experience resistance in their effort to gender agenda setting and frequently do not have adequate access to political resources to shape the agenda. Women's policy agencies and a specific women’s minister portfolio dedicated to promote the goals of women's movements and gender equality may provide crucial assistance. Our hypotheses are that the existence of a women's policy agency and or a women’s minister portfolio will successfully increase the likelihood of gendering executive agendas ($H_{2a}$) and strengthen the impact of women in political offices in gendering executive agendas ($H_{2b}$). The effect of the existence of a woman policy agency is captured through a binary variable stating whether a executive body or women’s minister portfolio has formally been established to promote gender equality and women's status at the time of the governmental address (1) or not (0). These bodies take the form of a secretary of state on emancipation in the Netherlands, junior minister for equality in the UK, minister for gender equality in Denmark and federal office for gender equality in Switzerland.

*Party Politics*— The literature points out that gender equality policy promoting women’s economic independence and a better distribution of caring roles between the sexes is more likely to be advocated by social democratic political parties. On the contrary, the presence of a strong Christian Democratic party and other religious parties in the party system may delay the promotion of gender equality regarding bodily integrity, reproduction and same sex couples rights. To measure the parliamentary strength of the Social Democrats and religious parties, we use the percentage of Social Democratic and Christian Democratic seats in the lower or single House at the time when the speech
was delivered. Another possibility would have been to measure cabinet shares held by the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats. Two main reasons have motivated our choice. First the Swiss executive is formed by a permanent coalition composed with seven members from the four main political parties (Social Democrats, Liberals, Christian Democrats and the Swiss People's Party). As a result, relying on cabinet shares in the analysis would have resulted into artificial stability over time. Second, as Bonoli and Reber argue (2010), opposition can play an important role in multi-party systems in vetoing policy proposal from a weakened government and push for placing issues upon agenda.

**Economic Performance**— Class-based policies regarding gender equality such as the promotion of women economic independence and the development of childcare and parental leave are generally more costly to implement than status-oriented policies (blueprint, reproduction, and violence against women policies). While, for the formers, some economic consequences can fall on governments, employers and employees, the latters do not imply any major direct economic repercussion. Therefore, advocates of gender equality policy may face a different level of macroeconomic constraints on their agenda setting activity. To estimate the effect of macroeconomic conditions, we include two indicators: the annual percentage change in growth of real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the annual percentage change of unemployment rate. As policy intent appearing on governmental agendas tend to reflect argumentation within the executive taking place during the preceding months, the two economic indicators are lagged by one year in order to better reflect the speed with which economic performance are generally taken into account in setting governmental priorities for the following years. In additional models, we have also included different economic indicators such as gross public debt, annual public deficit and long-term interest rate, which have revealed to be non-significant.

Finally, we add a series of control variable in the models. First, the gender and politics literature argues that social democratic attention paid to gender equality may be driven by electoral considerations. To control for vote-seeking strategy, we include a dichotomous variable measuring parliamentary elections year. Second, the national pattern in promoting gender equality may be
influence by international norms. To control for such effect, we include a dichotomous variable measuring whether the country has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) at the time of the governmental speech is delivered. Finally, to control for time dependence effect, i.e. when the occurrence of an event may increase the likelihood of subsequent events, we include cubic polynomial of time in the models (Carter and Signorino 2010). 

**RESULTS**

To select the appropriate regression model for our binary time-series cross sectional dataset, we first compared a series of alternative models - that are binomial logit model, panel random effect logit model and panel fixed effect logit models - and checked for the importance of the panel-level variance and unit heterogeneity (likelihood-ratio test of rho, Hausman test). For both series of test, the null hypothesis could not have been rejected. In other terms, the tests did not indicate that a panel logit model (with random effect or fixed effect) would provide a more consistent estimation than a binomial logit model. Accordingly, we have selected a pooled binomial logit model with robust standard errors. 

Our first explanation draws on the contested argument that increasing women’s representation in politics positively impacts on political attention regarding gender issues, gendering policy debates and promoting women-friendly policy outcomes. At table 2 reveals, women’s access to elected offices exerts a systematically positive impact on promoting gender equality in different policy domains. Nevertheless, women’s influence seems to impact through different channels according to the type of policy issues. A higher representation of women in parliament seems to encourage governments to

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4 Carter and Signorino (2010) demonstrate that the use of a cubic polynomial of time presents performs as well as the natural cubic splines developed by Betz et al. 1998. To reduce multicollinearity, the cubic term was left out of the model. As our aim is to control for time, we do not have any expectation regarding the significance and direction of these coefficients. In order to save space, we do not report them in table 2.

5 To check whether the limited number of positive outcomes for three out our four dependent variables (childcare and leaves, blueprint policies, reproduction and violence against women) may bias the estimation, we ran the procedures suggested by King and Zeng (2001) for rare events. All in all, the corrected results are similar.
add to classed-based policies regarding gender equality to their agenda. Policy measures regarding women’s access to the labor market, the removal of gender discrimination in wage and pension as well as the development of childcare and parental leave are significantly more likely to appear upon governmental agenda when there is a strong backup from female MPs. On the contrary, female MPs seem to be less influential to promote non-classed based policies regarding gender equality. A higher representation of women in government seem to be more decisive for getting blueprint policies as well as policies addressing reproduction and violence against women upon the agenda. Finally, the presence of a women’s policy agency does not seem to impact much on attracting executive attention to gender equality. The effect proves to be non-significant for the four policy domains, with the relative exception of the model regarding labor and pension issues for which the effect of women’s policy agency nearly reaches significance (p=0.055). The existence of women’s executive unit is not sufficient to guarantee a greater executive attention toward gender equality. The impact of women’s policy agency strongly depends on its willingness and resources capacity to act in favour of women (Stetson and Mazur 2011).

Insert table 2 about here

Our second explanation relies on party politics. We formulate the hypothesis that the impact of party politics on the promotion of gender equality shall vary across policy domains. Gender equality policy to promote women’s economic independence and a fairer distribution of the sexual division of labor should more likely to be advocated by social democratic politics while gender equality policies related to doctrinal traditions such as abortion, same-sex marriage and reproductive rights should be less likely to reach the agenda when Christian Democrats are strong in the party system. Our preliminary results show a contrasted impact of party politics on gendering executive agenda. A strong presence of Social Democrats in the parliament proves to a strong support for getting attention regarding women’s paid work activities and gender discrimination in pension schemes. Issues regarding employment and welfare benefits constitute core issues of the Social Democratic agendas. Their high profile of these issues in the partisan mainstream agenda may increase their likelihood of being gendered in the parliament. On the contrary, it does not seem to
matter much for pushing issues regarding childcare and parental leave. The issues are mainly framed as purely “gender issues” and may not benefit from the overall high attention of Social Democrats regarding the welfare state. Finally, the presence of strong Christian Democrats in the party system does not seem to refrain the likelihood of getting issues regarding reproduction, same-sex marriage and domestic violence upon the agenda. If the coefficient indicates a negative relationship, which would go in the sense of our expectation, it is largely statistically insignificant. To control for the impact of upcoming elections which may incite government to mention gender equality on their agenda to attract women’s vote, we have included a dummy variable capturing parliamentary elections year which reveals to be largely insignificant.

Our last explanation relates to economic performance. Policies regarding the improvement of women’s status and overarching blueprint policies that state the broad principle of gender equality can be regarded as cost neutral advancement in gender equality policy. On the contrary, the development of childcare program and parental leave, the promotion of women’s access to the labor market and the removal of discrimination in pension scheme have important redistributive consequences and may require important budget resources. Accordingly, we expect that economic performance will exert a strong impact on the likelihood of getting executive attention toward class-based policies while such an effect should not occur for blueprint policies and status-related policies. Our preliminary results confirm our expectations. It is easier to get gender equality policies carrying significant economic consequences onto the policy agenda when the economy is performing well. While decreasing unemployment does not exert any significant impact, a rise in GDP growth appears to enable attention to the improvement of women’s access in the labor market as well as the development of childcare support and parental leaves. This finding suggests support for the expectation that feminist advocates and executive actors are more likely to succeed in pressing for potentially costly and redistributive measures and less likely to face resistance and cognitive friction when the economic climate is perceived to be good. That the relationship is not so found in relation to decreasing unemployment may reflect that some measures to tackle sex inequality in the labor market flow from executive
concern to increase labor market participation when unemployment is high rather than flowing from feminist advocacy.

Finally, a last effect deserves some attention. To control for the influence of international norms on national patterns in promoting gender equality, we have included a dichotomous variable measuring whether the country has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Our results reveal a somewhat puzzling pattern: CEDAW ratification seems to exert a positive effect on the promotion of measures related to reproduction, domestic violence and same-sex couples' rights but a negative effect on measures addressing employment and pension issues as well as blueprint policies. One explanation could be that the ratification of the CEDAW had required the amendment of a series of laws that contained discrimination on the base of gender, prior to ratification of convention.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper investigates the extent to which pressure for policy change to promote gender equality has different profiles according to the type of policy domain. Drawing on Htun and Weldon (2010), our paper shows that gender equality policies should not be considered as a homogeneous set of policies which would respond to the same policy determinants. To take full account of the heterogeneity of gender equality policies, this paper argues that one should distinguish between class-based policies, status policies and blueprint policies. Indeed, the mechanisms through which gender equality policies gain advocacy and get upon governmental decision and action agenda differs according to the type of gender equality policies. Gender equality demands reflect very different issue agendas invoking very different constellations of interests, advocacy, friction and veto points which in turn play out differentially.

Classed-based gender equality policies address the economic independence of women and gendered division of paid and unpaid work. They carry important financial consequences for the State, the employers and employees. Our analysis has shown indeed that their costly character make them more likely to appear upon executive agenda when the economy is performing well. If gender equality
has appeared more frequently on policy agendas over time, such issues remain largely at the periphery of political attention. In time of crisis, the executive agenda tends to retract on core issues (Jennings et al. forthcoming), among which the economic independence of women is does not figure. In addition, class-based gender equality policies tend to fit well along the class-based political cleavage that remains important over time. Indeed, a strong support of Social Democrats proves to be decisive for gendering government agenda regarding measures to improve women’s economic independence. In a similar vein, as Social Democratic parties have favored women’s access to the parliament, the strengthened presence of female MPs seem to strongly incentivize government to dedicate more attention to class-based gender equality issues.

Executive attention towards policies addressing the status of women in the society and proclaiming the general principle of gender equality seems to follow a rather different pattern. As expected economic conditions do not play any role. The neutral cost character of these policies make them insensible to any change in national economic performance. Party politics do not seem to exert any impact either. Blueprint policies stating the general principle of gender equality do not get more attention from the left than from the right. The same goes for issues regarding reproduction, same-sex marriage and domestic violence. None of these issues are part of the class political cleavage and do not tend to be sensitive to any variation in the power configuration of the political forces. Finally, regarding the impact of women’s presence in politics, the path to executive attention for status policies seems to diverge from the class-based policies path as well. Women’s representation in Parliament seems to matter less than an increasing representation of women in government. Here, the promotion of gender equality seems not to rely on the mass of females MPs but rather on the presence of (a few) women in the concerned ministries who can advocate policy reforms.

These early findings suggest that the profile of gender equality policy change across Western Europe is differentiated and confirms the necessity to take account of domain specific aspects of interests, advocacy and policy processes. Whilst confirming the spatial aspects of gender equality policy change however it leaves the puzzle of the effect of temporality and to what extent there are domain sensitive patterns of the pace of policy change. Further work is required to investigate how
gender equality issues of different types gain government attention and move onto decision agendas and the timing of policy change both within and across policy types.
REFERENCES


Jennings, W. et al (forthcoming) ‘Effects of the Core Functions of Government on the Diversity of Executive Agendas’, *Comparative Political Studies*


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STD. DEV.</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of seats held by women in the lower or single House</td>
<td>16.06</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009)</td>
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<td>Percentage cabinet positions held by women.</td>
<td>12.66</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>CH: <a href="http://www.admin.ch">www.admin.ch</a></td>
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<td>&quot;Regeringer&quot; at <a href="http://www.ft.dk">www.ft.dk</a></td>
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<td>NL: <a href="http://www.rijksoverheid.nl">www.rijksoverheid.nl</a></td>
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<td>UK: Dod's Parliamentary Companion; Butler and Butler, 2000; Cabinet Office Press Releases.</td>
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<td>Presence of women's policy agency (1 for presence, 0 for absence)</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>CH: Engeli(forthcoming)</td>
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<td>NL: Lauwers (2007); Outshoorn (1995)</td>
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<td>UK: Durose and Gains, (2007); Annesley and Gains (2010).</td>
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<td>7.33</td>
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<td>2.19</td>
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<td>.49</td>
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<td>CEDAW, (1 for years following ratification, 0 otherwise)</td>
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<td>.49</td>
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<td><strong>GENDER STATUS POLICIES</strong></td>
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<td>Childcare &amp; Leave</td>
<td>Blueprint</td>
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<td>.104 (.035)**</td>
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<td>.141 (.707)</td>
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<td>Social Democrats</td>
<td>.116 (.029)**</td>
<td>-.060 (.043)</td>
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<td>Christian Democrats</td>
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<td>L_GDP</td>
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<td>L_Unemployment</td>
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<td>1.084 (1.237)</td>
<td>-2.490 (.131)**</td>
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<td>.384 (.583)</td>
<td>.199 (.479)</td>
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<td>-9.033 (3.214)**</td>
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