FINDING GENDER ON THE AGENDA:
USING COMPARATIVE AGENDAS DATA TO RESEARCH GENDER EQUALITY
POLICY CHANGE

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ABSTRACT
Policies to address gender equality are non-core and have hitherto received little attention in the public policy literature on agenda setting. At the same time there is a gap in the analysis of agenda setting processes in the gender and politics literature. Recent work has sought to bridge this gap and utilise the comparative agendas datasets (see http://www.comparativeagendas.org/) to identify the pace and profile of gender equality policy change. The research highlights the heterogeneity of gender equality policy issues and develops a typology of gender equality policy issues which differentiates between policies to address class inequality, women’s status or provide overarching gender equality blueprints. This paper discusses the analytical and methodological potential, and challenges, of using comparative agendas data to identify when gender gets on the agenda. It presents findings from an analysis of the determinants of getting government attention for gender equality in 5 European countries, and concludes by considering how these determinants may differ at the legislative stage of gender equality policy reform.

INTRODUCTION
The public policy literature on agenda setting makes clear that although the activities of social movements, partisan commitments and public opinion are important, the achievement of policy change does not straightforwardly flow from these signals (Baumgartner et al 2011). The limitations on government attention, as well as institutional and cognitive friction in executive decision making mean that it is hard for new or emerging demands to break into established government agendas (Baumgartner and Jones, 2005; Cobb and Elder, 1983; Baumgartner et al 2008; Jennings et al, 2011; Annesley et al, 2010). To understand how new policy demands get processed and progress to reaching government decision agendas it is of crucial importance to focus on the determinants and dynamics of getting government attention, and when issues reach government decision agendas. The availability of new data sets illustrating government attention to policy issues across a range of indicators is permitting comprehensive and comparative investigation of the dynamics of
policy change across policy domains hitherto not possible from single sector or single country case studies (Baumgartner et al, 2011).

Despite the inherent difficulty of achieving policy change, new demands for gender equality policies have been widespread since the mobilization of second wave feminism in the 1960s and policies to promote equality between the genders have reached government agendas across Western Europe (Annesley, Engeli, Gains and Resodihardjo 2010; Annesley, Engeli and Gains 2011). But the pace and profile of gender equality policy change presents a puzzling picture. While reproductive rights and gender equality ‘blueprint’ policies reached government decision agendas early in most Western European countries, the promotion of gender equality in the public sphere and in the private sphere emerged during the last decade and other gender equality policies, such as domestic violence, have not yet reached the legislative agenda in some countries. The comparative dynamics of gender policy reform require further investigation.

Scholars researching gender and policy change have highlighted the importance of social, political, and institutional factors including feminist social movements, changing women’s roles, feminist advocacy in political parties, female representation in both the legislature and executives, of the work of femocrats, and women’s policy agencies in making the case for policy reform (Weldon, 2002; Walby, 2004; Annesley, Gains and Rummery, 2007; Stetson and Mazur 2005, 2011; Lovenduski, 2005; Whithey and Childs, 2006; Annesley and Gains, 2010; Banaszak, 2010). These studies have often focused on single countries or single policy issues such as caring policies, abortion rights, or domestic violence. The focus has predominantly been on successful policy outcomes and the causal linkages between say increasing female representation in legislatures and the process of gender equality policy reform is sometimes underspecified or assumed.

Recent work has sought to bridge this gap and utilise the comparative agendas datasets (see http://www.comparativeagendas.org/) to identify the pace and profile of gender equality policy change (Annesley et al, 2011). The research highlights the heterogeneity of gender equality policy issues and develops a typology of gender equality policy issues which differentiates between policies to address class inequality, women’s status or provide overarching gender equality blueprints. This paper draws on this work and discusses the analytical and methodological potential, and challenges, of using comparative agendas data to identify when ‘gender’ gets on the ‘agenda’. It presents findings from an analysis of the
determinants of getting government attention for gender equality in 5 European countries which suggests that the determinants of gender equality issue attention across Western Europe is indeed differentiated. Our analysis confirms the necessity to take account of the domain specific aspects of interests, advocacy and policy processes. In concluding we consider how these determinants may differ at the legislative stage of gender equality policy reform.

AGENDA SETTING AND (GENDER) POLICY CHANGE

The public policy literature on agenda setting problematises the interaction between the public’s policy preferences expressed for example via electoral signals or public opinion and policy change (Baumgartner, et al 2011). This literature flags the limited processing capabilities of political actors and argues that the extent to which governmental decision makers can give their attention to policy issues at different ‘decision points’ is key to understanding the comparative dynamics of policy change (Baumgartner et al, 2011, 6; Bevan, John and Jennings, 2011). So the ability of campaigners in and out of the formal political venues to obtain government attention is both critical and yet difficult as government agendas are crowded. This literature highlights the importance of a focus on the determinants and dynamics of different stages of policy adoption and that a key element in disrupting the tendency for stasis in government activity is the ability to gain government attention for an issue. Gaining government attention then is critical for an issue to move from the public agenda to become ‘one of the issues to which government is paying serious attention’ (Baumgartner and Jones, 2005).

Progressing policy demands through to government decision agendas can take different paths but the comparative policy dynamics approach highlights that “[E]ach stage of the policy process is characterized by rules that shape attention with public priorities less important at the later stages of agenda setting such as passing legislation or changing budgetary allocations (Jones, Larsen-Price and Wilkerson, 2009) than at the initial stage of getting government attention. A focus on the determinants of getting government attention it is argued is essential in helping to explain why some issues make it onto government decision agendas and progress to legislation and others do not. And even when issues break through and become flagged as priorities, for example in executive speeches, the ‘transmission’ process to legislative outputs can be disrupted (Bevan, John and Jennings, 2011). Bevan et al
suggest changes in preference signals, endogenous events, loss of legislature support through rebellions, elections or administrative constraints can lead to atrophy in the progression of an issue to legislative output (Bevan et al, 2011, 2) even in parliamentary systems where party discipline augurs strongly for transmission to take place (Bevan et al, 2012; Bara, 2005).

This seemingly narrow focus of agenda setting research examining ‘how Mr Bill becomes Mr Law’ (Kenney, 2003, 183) was criticized for precluding taking a longer term perspective on the advocacy role of feminist social movements or the way in which policy diffusion spread innovation from country to country in relation to gender equality policy change. However whilst the agenda setting literature recognizes the key role played by social movements in issue expansion, and that new issues rise on public agendas due to a variety of stimuli such as international norms and protocols, it problematizes the limited scope of government attention to respond to these signals. Thus even where policy problems have extensive media coverage or provide strong public concern these signals may not lead to government responsiveness if other core issues of government are taking precedence (Jennings et al, 2011). So whilst governments are incentivized to pay attention to new demands (changes in preference signals) for electoral or partisan reward, the ability of governments to process changing public agendas is questioned. The incentives to pay attention to new demands, such as gender equality can be crowded out by the necessity of paying attention to the core issues of government particularly in times of economic constraint.

Even when there might be space for the expansion of issues to which government can pay attention, friction in government arises from cognitive factors with existing policy problems and solutions holding sway (Baumgartner et al 2008). In a study of the role of social movements in the stages of introducing suffrage legislation in US states, the role of social movements was found to be more important in raising the salience of an issue and less important in the later stages of achieving legislative outputs (King, Cornwall and Dahlin, 2005). The high salience of an issue might provoke opposition particularly in controversial or costly measures (Soule and King, 2006; Annesley et al, 2010).

Friction in the progression of legislation can arise from institutional issues which also cause ‘stickiness’ for example the resources available to develop and progress new legislation. As Bevan et al suggest “implementation or bureaucratic control problems may bedevil the ability of governments to follow through on their agendas” (Bevan et al, 2011).
At this stage also the actions of veto players in government can prevent issues being progressed as “the willingness of various actors to employ the rules and procedures of the formal political structure to stall or delay policy action on an issue comes into play here” (Baumgartner et al., 2011, 21). And legislators may be more reluctant to pass legislation nearer enactment as “each stage has more stringent rules and becomes more consequential” (King, Cornwall and Dahlin, 2005, 1215);

We return to the discussion of the dynamics of achieving \textit{legislative} outputs on gender equality issues in the conclusion of this paper but for now concentrate on the puzzle of how gender equality issues, which are non-core and represent new post materialist policy demands, have been able to breakthrough established agendas and critically gain attention for gender equality policy change.

\textbf{THE DETERMINANTS OF GENDER EQUALITY ISSUE ATTENTION}

Despite the fact that gender equality issues are non core, since the emergence of second wave feminism across Western Europe policies to promote equality between the genders have managed to overcome the hurdle of getting the attention of government actors, and have moved onto decision agendas and been enacted (See Mazur and Pollack (2009) and Mazur (2009) for summary of comparative projects). Several literatures have addressed the determinants of gender equality policy attention and 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 (Mazur, 2002; Htun and Weldon, 2010) and the mechanisms through which the changing interests of women gain advocacy, obtain political attention and reach 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 processes through which feminist interests have mobilized for pressure for change, through social movements, democratic representation in legislatures and the establishment of women’s policy agencies and executive representation (Lovenduski and Norris, 1995; Tremblay, 1998; Weldon, 2002, Stetson and Mazur 1995; Darlerup, 2006; Childs and Krook, 2008; Celis, 2008; Annesely, Gains and Rummery, 2007; Atchison and Down, 2009). Empirical work in this tradition has been predominantly qualitative with case studies across a full range of gender equality policy areas. Recent examples include research on work and care, abortion and reproductive rights, representation and diversity, sexual harassment and gender mainstreaming in a special edition of Comparative European Studies (Mazur and Pollack, 2010; Engeli, 2009) and the final outputs from the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS) project examining abortion, prostitution, political representation, job training, and ‘hot issues’ of the 1990s (Stetson and Mazur 2010).

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). 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.
However to date very little scholarship on gender equality policy change has focused on the dynamics and determinants of getting government attention and how issues move on the decision agendas and hitherto the insights from the predominantly qualitative research in this vein have not been subject to systematic and comparative quantitative analysis. In short there is a need to examine how gender equality issues become gender equality bills and gender equality laws. The availability of new international data sets classifying governmental agendas by policy topic has opened up the possibilities for comparative analysis of this early crucial stage of issue demands gaining governmental attention (Baumgartner, et al, 2011) and permit a comprehensive and comparative examination of gender equality issue attention across a range of policy domains.

GENDER EQUALITY POLICY DOMAINS

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.

### CLASS-BASED GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES
- Equality at work, equal employment policy, unemployment policy, pensions
- Education, vocational and professional training policy
- Parental leave and childcare
- Family welfare policies

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.

### GENDER STATUS GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES
- Political representation
- Family rights
- Immigration and gender
- Prostitution, trafficking of women and violence against women
- Policies challenging normative assumption of heterosexuality e.g. same sex marriage
- Reproductive rights (e.g. abortion, contraception)

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.

### BLUEPRINT GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES
- Blueprint policy (e.g. anti discrimination or equality policy/law)
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.

EXPLANATIONS FOR THE DETERMINANTS OF GENDER EQUALITY ISSUE ATTENTION

**Women in power:** Women’s descriptive representation refers to the number of women present in political institutions such as parliament and the government. The gender and politics scholarship highlights justice, democratic and pragmatic arguments why increasing the number of women in legislative and executive is desirable (Phillips 1995; Lovenduski 2005). 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 per cent. 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 2008) 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 (Annesley and Gains, 2010; Atchinson and Down, 2009). 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 (Stetson and Mazur 1995). Therefore, we hypothesize that *a higher female representation in government will result in more attention dedicated to all types of gender equality policies. In addition, executive attention will be more sustained in the presence of a women’s policy agency*.  

*Party Ideology and Partisanship in Politics:* We next examine the literature on party ideology and partisanship as 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, not all feminists promote the same agenda and 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 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, 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, New Labour (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 issue attention relates to economic factors. A chronically under-researched dimension to the gender and politics scholarship is the impact of economic
performance on gender equality advocates’ chances of promoting gender equality policy change (but see Annesley and Gains 2012; 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 LGBT 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 affects the established formula of redistribution in economic decision making and the welfare state and invariably requires more governmental resources. The potential costs of class-based gender equality policies can fall on the state, employers and employees in formal and/or informal work. Governmental costs can arise from transfer payments in the form of social security such as state-funded childcare or for parental leave policies. Policy implementation might lead to compliance and implementation costs of policy reform and oversight for example 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. Employers may face costs from equal pay legislation, from benefit costs such as maternity pay or indirectly from administrative costs. For male employees there are the perceived costs of their displacement by female employees, and the frequently detrimental financial impact of undertaking informal unpaid caring work. For policy demands with fiscally redistributive consequences it is therefore important to consider and understand the economic determinants of gender equality policy agenda setting.

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 labor, which carry potentially large redistributive consequences 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

To investigate the patterns in gendering executing attention across different types of gender equality issues, we draw on the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) datasets on national government agendas. The CAP relies on a common policy issue-classification of government attention across political systems. The CAP datasets, thus, allows for comprehensive and reliable comparative measure of publically stated executive agendas across issues, countries and venues (Breeman et al. 2009; Baumgartner et al. 2009; Baumgartner et al. 2011; Bevan et al. 2011; Jennings et al. 2011; Mortensen et al. 2011).

Finding gender on the agenda

The CAP data sets are based around a common comprehensive topic classification permitting cross national comparison around common topic codings and benefitting from the rigorous and robust coding protocols employed by the country teams. However, there is no single main or sub-code for gender or gender equality policy. Several codes are highly related to gender equality demands for example major topic code 2 covers civil rights issues, with sub code 202 covering gender discrimination; code 508 covers parental leave and child care. However data coded using these codes may also cover non gender related issues. A key initial requirement for scholars using the CAP data to identify gender related issues is to agree on what counts as gender equality policy as this initial analytical frame will inform the required search strategy. It is necessary to be clear about what counts as a gender equality policy 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 that women express stronger concern for health care spending or education (1996). If the research question seeks to examine questions around the relationship between gender, public opinion and policy responsiveness for example a search strategy might identify these codes. Alternatively, researchers could be interested in issues designed to benefit women for example by promoting women’s paid employment or introducing free contraception. Thus Dionne, in her analysis of representation in the British parliament, examines women’s issues as being ‘those for which women are the intended beneficiary, constituency or object’ (2010). Researchers might also be interested in identifying policies which benefit women, regardless of whether they are the intended beneficiaries or not. For example, the National Minimum Wage, introduced in the UK in 1999, was not explicitly about reducing the gender pay gap, yet women were overwhelmingly the beneficiaries of this policy.

For this research we were not focusing on policy issues which women favour, and we were interested in a broader set of issues than those only directed at women (either intended or unintended). We are interested in policy change flowing from feminist demands which promote women’s interests and which alter 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 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. To find ‘gender on the agenda’ it is critical to recognize these different ways of identifying the dependent variable according to the research question. Our search strategy then identified major topic codes where gender equality issues were likely to be located and we used a common search protocol across

1 The codes we searched were 1 macroeconomics: 103; 2 Civil rights: 200, 202, 206, 207, 208; 3 Health: 301, 331, 398; 5 Labour and Employment: 500, 501, 502, 503, 505, 508; 6 Education: 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 606,
countries to identify when gender equality issues had gained government attention searching the CAP data in a systematic way.

The executive agendas investigated here are the annual statements of policy priorities and commitments in executive speeches in Denmark, The Netherlands, The United Kingdom, Switzerland and Spain. Our time period goes from 1961 to 2007 for the first four countries, and from 1982 to 2007 in the case of Spain. More precisely, the agendas are: the Queen’s Speech for the UK (Jennings et al. 2011) 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 union debates and investiture speeches in Spain (Chaqués and Palau 2011). The comparative strategy applied here is not either a most-similar nor a most-different systems strategy stricto sensu. It is rather an availability-based selection of countries which aims at maximizing variation on the dependent variable as well as on the three main explanatory factors across time and countries: women’s representation, party politics, and economic performances.

The speeches are addressed by the titular Head of the State in the Netherlands and in the United Kingdom and by the prime minister in Denmark and Spain- and state the forthcoming executive priorities and concerns for the forthcoming parliamentary session. The messages of the Swiss government are delivered through the year by the minister in charge and present the upcoming legislative intent of the government. Despite some cross-national differences in the institutional format, these executive statements all reflect how and to which issues executive dedicate attention for the coming year. In this sense, the CAP executive datasets constitute a reliable comparative measure of the policy issues that government choose to politically emphasize and give priorities to (Bara 2005; Baumgartner et al. 2009; 607, 698; 12 Law, Crime and Family Issues: 1208, 1210, 1211; 13 Social Welfare: 1302, 1303; 19 International Affairs and Foreign Aid 1925; 20 Government Operations: 2000

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. 2011).
Bevan et al. 2011; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2005; Jennings et al. 2011; Mortensen et al. 2011). As discussed by Breeman et al. 2009 and Jennings et al. 2011, speeches vary regarding ceremonial and symbolic statements across countries as well as regarding the overall size - the UK executive statements being more concise than the Dutch ones for instance. As the analysis presented in this article focuses only on the substantive mentions of gender equality regarding class-based issues, status-related issues and blueprint issues, this type of cross-national variation does not severely harm the comparability over countries and time. When issues promoting gender equality are mentioned in the speeches, it means that governments have decided to pay serious attention to them at that particular time and include them in their set of priorities that they want to publicize (Kingdon 1995; Green-Pedersen 2008). Taking into account the considerable amount of competing issues to which the government has to dedicate some of its limited capacity of attention, appearances of gender equality issues in executive speeches constitute as such hard cases of gendering executive attention.

As argued above, gender equality is multi-dimensional and promotes different goals. To assess whether patterns of attention toward gender equality vary across policy domains, we distinguish between three types of gender equality issues: class-based issues, status-related issues and the so-called “blueprint” issues (Mazur 2002).

(1) Class-based issues 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 issues: the first 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 issues 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 issues addresses the subordinate status of women in the society and the social gender roles. In this article, the dependent variable measuring such status-related issues covers executive attention toward reproductive rights, violence against women and same-sex couple rights (“reproduction and violence”).
Finally, our fourth dependent variable covers the speech 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 overtime and gender equality does not constitute a core issue in any of the agendas that are included in this study: gender equality mentions regarding labor and pension issues N=61; childcare and leave N=18; reproduction and violence N= 20; Blueprint N=25. Mentions of gender equality are relatively rare and when any type of gender equality issues is eventually mentioned, it is mostly mentioned once per speech only. We have therefore decided to build up a pooled binary time-series cross-section (BTSCS; Beck and Katz 1995) 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.

OPERATIONALIZING THE DETERMINANTS OF GENDERING POLITICAL ATTENTION

Four explanations were developed in the previous section regarding the impact of women's political representation, women’s policy agencies, party politics and factors related to economic performance. The remaining part of this section presents the operationalization of the independent and control variables as well as the 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

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.
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 (Inter-Parliamentary Union database, 2009). For their representation in 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.4

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 promoting the goals of women's movements and gender equality may provide crucial assistance. Our hypothesis is 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. The effect of the existence of a women’s policy agency is captured through a binary variable stating whether a executive body or women’s minister portfolio formally existed 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 Spain and federal office for gender equality in Switzerland.5

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 (source: Armingeon et al. 2007).

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 former, some economic consequences can fall on governments, employers and employees, the latter 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 (source: Armingeon et al. 2007). 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.6

We added eventually a number of control variable in the models. To control for vote-seeking strategy that would incite political parties to dedicate attention to gender equality to gain female votes, we included a dichotomous variable controlling for parliamentary elections year (source: Armingeon et al. 2007). Second, international norms may impact on the promotion of gender equality at the national level. To control for such effect, we include a dichotomous variable measuring whether the country has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Eliminations of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) at the time of the governmental speech was delivered. Lastly, to control for time dependence

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6 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. There is not any longitudinal comparative data regarding women’s participation in the workforce or public opinion on gender equality for the 1960s and the 1970s.
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).7

We first compared a series of alternative models for our binary time-series cross sectional datasets - which 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 point out 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 and added country-dummies to control for country-effect.8 We double-checked the robustness of the pooled model results against the impact of cross-sectional outliers and estimated jackknifed standard errors (Efron and Tibshirani 1994; Kittel and Winner 2005).

RESULTS

Our first explanation draws on the contested argument that increasing women’s representation in politics positively impacts on political attention regarding gender equality issues, gendering policy debates and promoting women-friendly policy outcomes. As table 1 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 add to class-based policies regarding gender equality to their agenda. Policy measures regarding women’s

7 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.

8 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.
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 a women’s executive unit is not sufficient to guarantee a greater executive attention toward gender equality. The impact of a women’s policy agency strongly depends on its willingness and resources capacity to act in favour of women (Stetson and Mazur 2010).

Our second explanation relies on party politics. We formulate the hypothesis that the impact of party politics on the promotion of gender equality will vary across policy domains. Gender equality policies to promote women’s economic independence and a fairer distribution of the sexual division of labor are 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 parliament proves to be a decisive factor 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 affect the likelihood of getting issues regarding reproduction, same-sex marriage and domestic violence upon the agenda. Although the coefficient indicates a negative relationship, which is in line with 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 revels 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 required the amendment of a series of laws that contained discrimination on the base of gender, prior to ratification of the convention.

CONCLUSION – PROMISES INTO POLICY?

Our article confirms that gender equality issues are not a homogeneous set of issues and they do not respond to the same issue determinants in gaining government attention. By distinguishing between class-based policies, status policies and blueprint policies we are able to demonstrate that the mechanisms through which gender equality policy issues gain advocacy and get upon governmental agendas differs according to the type of gender equality policies.

Class-based gender equality issues which address the economic independence of women and gendered division of paid and unpaid work carry important financial consequences for the state, the employers and employees. Our analysis shows that their costly character makes them more likely to get political attention when the economy is performing well. In addition, strong support of Social Democrats proves to be decisive for gendering government agenda regarding measures to improve women’s economic independence. Similarly, 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 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 of these policies protects them from any change in national economic performance. Party politics do not seem to exert an 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 status issues and overarching blueprint policies seems not to rely on a mass of females MPs but rather on the presence of (a few) women in the concerned ministries empowered to advocate policy reform.

These research findings suggest that the profile of gender equality issue attention across Western Europe is indeed differentiated. Our analysis confirms the necessity to take account of the domain specific aspects of interests, advocacy and policy processes. As such these research findings make a series of contributions to the policy agendas and gender and politics literatures. By gendering the policy agendas scholarship, we offer a clear example of policy variability in when executive attention is achieved which reflects very different constellations of interests, advocacy, friction and veto points, which in turn play out differently. For the gender and politics literature we considerably improve the understanding of the early stages in the process of gender equality policy making by explaining factors which influence the agenda setting stage across different policy domains.

In taking forward this work it will be important to examine the transmission of gender equality issue ‘promises’ into gender equality issue ‘policies’ and to examine the comparative determinants at legislative stages of achieving gender equality outputs for this heterogeneous set of demands. What are the likely determinants which will assist in ensuring the transmission of words into action? What are the electoral and partisan incentives for overcoming friction across the policy domains? Who are the advocates and veto players in decision making venues and what can overcome cognitive and institutional friction? We can anticipate and hypothesize that economic factors will continue to be important at the legislative stage with poor economic growth driving out commitment to costly policies dealing with class based policy issues. We can anticipate that as the ‘consequentiality’ of passing legislation approaches, that the role of women in the legislature might become more fragmented due to the controversial nature of some bodily integrity issues. Finally we can hypothesise that the role of women in executives and the existence of a women’s policy agency will become more apparent for all gender equality issues. Firstly in providing advocacy for change and overcoming cognitive friction around traditional agendas. Secondly because the resources which ministerial office and policy agencies can provide will help in overcoming institutional frictions, oiling the wheels behind the scenes in the legislative
stages. Finding gender on the [legislative] agenda will add to the understanding of the transmission of gender equality issues to substantive policy outcomes and contribute to knowledge of the comparative dynamics of gender equality policy change.
REFERENCES


Annesley, C. and Gains, F. (2010). Gender Power and Change in the Core Executive. Political Studies, 58:5, 909-29


### Figure 1: Typology of Gender Equality Issues

**Class-Based Gender Equality Issues**
- Equality at work, equal employment policy, unemployment policy, pensions
- Education, vocational and professional training policy
- Parental leave and childcare
- Family welfare policies

**Status-Related Gender Equality Issues**
- Political representation
- Family rights
- Immigration and gender
- Prostitution, trafficking of women and violence against women
- Policies challenging normative assumption of heterosexuality e.g. same sex marriage
- Reproductive rights (e.g. abortion, contraception)

**Blueprint Gender Equality Issues**
- Blueprint policy (e.g. anti discrimination or equality policy/law)
Table 1: Estimated coefficients, binomial logit (jackknifed standard errors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>CLASS-BASED ISSUES</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th><strong>BLUEPRINT ISSUES</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Labor &amp; Pension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Childcare &amp; Leave</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blueprint</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reproduction &amp; Violence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in parliament</td>
<td>.104 (.035)**</td>
<td>.091 (.044)*</td>
<td>-.009 (.038)</td>
<td>-.067 (.061)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in government</td>
<td>.063 (.036)</td>
<td>.017 (.040)</td>
<td>.102 (0.045)*</td>
<td>.125 (.058)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women’s policy agency</td>
<td>1.071 (.557)</td>
<td>-.426 (.773)</td>
<td>.141 (.707)</td>
<td>1.574 (.1.721)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democrats</td>
<td>.116 (.029)**</td>
<td>-.060 (.043)</td>
<td>.021 (.035)</td>
<td>-.059 (.049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Democrats</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.016 (.029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L_GDP</td>
<td>.269 (.110)*</td>
<td>1.025 (.252)**</td>
<td>-.098 (.221)</td>
<td>.185 (244)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L_Unemployment</td>
<td>.127 (.208)</td>
<td>.346 (.426)</td>
<td>-.377 (.301)</td>
<td>-.030 (.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>-.1.237 (.606)*</td>
<td>1.084 (1.237)</td>
<td>-.2.490 (.131)**</td>
<td>1.546 (.61)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections year</td>
<td>-.494 (.416)</td>
<td>.384 (.583)</td>
<td>.199 (.479)</td>
<td>-.236 (.613)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-9.545 (1.619)**</td>
<td>-9.033 (3.214)**</td>
<td>-5.102 (2.261)*</td>
<td>-2.315 (1.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logpseudo likelihood</td>
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<td>-37.024</td>
<td>-62.412</td>
<td>-53.188</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>0.397</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.193</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
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