Candidate Gender and the Quantity of Media Coverage in the 2015 General Election

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Abstract

Previous research suggests that lower levels of media attention given to female candidates, relative to male candidates, may contribute to the under-representation of women in national politics. Yet the precise relationship between candidate gender and quantity of media coverage remains unclear, in part because most studies focus on only a few national media outlets. To advance our understanding of this issue, we introduce and analyse a novel dataset measuring the weekly quantity of newspaper coverage given to 72 different candidates across 34 of the most marginal constituencies in the 2015 UK General Election. The data span 31 local and 6 national newspapers. Surprisingly, regression analyses suggest that typical female candidates received more newspaper coverage than typical male candidates, after controlling for alternative predictors of media attention including party, incumbency, and time until election. Our findings have important implications for debates about gender equality in British politics. In particular, lower levels of media coverage given to female candidates does not appear to be a causal pathway to the under-representation of women in British politics.

1 Introduction

Of the information technologies constituting the modern mass media, newspapers are one of the most influential (Kahn, 1994; Gerber et al., 2009). In part this is because press transmit a high volume of information, which is relatively easy to acquire by readers (Druckman, 2005). But even apart from the explicit information transmitted in newspapers, the political power of the press consists especially in how it distributes coverage. By giving more or less attention to certain issues or public figures, the press leads the public to perceive those
issues or actors as more or less important (Cohen, 1970; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

For this reason, a great deal of research has investigated the many factors which influence the quantity of press coverage given to different issues and actors. In particular, a significant current of research has sought to understand the effect of candidate gender on the quantity of media coverage given to individuals running for public office (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Kahn, 1994; Heldman et al., 2005; Ross et al., 2013). While there has been much anecdotal research and commentary on gender bias in media coverage of politicians (Stephenson, 1998; Sreberny & VanZoonen, 2000), there have been relatively few systematic studies focusing on candidate gender and the quantity of coverage in particular. Of the studies which have been done, results remain notably mixed, with some authors claiming that female politicians receive less press attention (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Heldman et al., 2005; Campbell & Childs, 2010; Adcock, 2010; Ross et al., 2013) and others finding that women receive greater coverage (Bystrom et al., 2001; Jalalzai, 2006; Atkeson & Krebs, 2008).

Much of the previous research on this question does not consider the role of local media in political campaigns, which may be an important ‘missing link’ connecting media coverage of campaigns to voting behavior (Hargreaves & Thomas, 2002). Because local and national press differ in the issues they cover and how they cover those issues (Just et al., 1996; Negrine, 2005), the over-reliance on national media in previous research is an important gap in the current state of knowledge on candidate gender and media coverage. The over-reliance on national media is also an important shortcoming because national media in countries such as the UK have much larger circulations than local newspapers and are predominantly centered around London. Including local media is not only a desirable strategy for increasing the number of available observations, but it may increase our confidence in generalizations across the geography and circulation size of various media outlets (Meeks, 2012).

We advance the previous research by introducing and analysing a novel dataset measuring national and local media coverage of candidates in the 2015 UK General Election. The dataset covers 34 constituencies in England, selected from the 50 most marginal races involving at least one female candidate. The decision to focus the study on the most marginal races was primary driven by the fact that such races tend to be the most important sites of party strategy and media contention during General Elections (Johnston et al., 2012).

Surprisingly, after controlling for a wide variety of factors likely to shape the quantity of media coverage given to candidates, we find that female candidates received more press coverage than equivalent male counterparts in both the local and the national press. We believe that findings have important implications for debates on gender in political media. Helping to adjudicate
the mixed conclusions of previous studies, our findings suggest that, however contemporary politics may disadvantage female candidates, under-reporting of female candidates appears unlikely to be the culprit.

This article begins by situating our study in previous research on candidate gender and media coverage in political campaigns. From our discussion of previous research, the second section derives three specific, competing hypotheses. A third section discusses our data and methodology, with details on the statistical approach to our research question. A fourth section presents our results and discusses the findings in detail. A fifth and final section concludes.

2 Literature Review

The relationship between the gender of politicians and the quantity of coverage they receive has been examined in a number of studies (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Kahn, 1994; Heldman et al., 2005; O’Neil et al., 2016). It is considered particularly important since poor media coverage may adversely affect candidates’ recognition (Goldenberg & Traugott, 1984; Kahn, 1992). Unrecognisable candidates are less likely to receive votes (Goldenberg & Traugott, 1984), which is why coverage quantity may adversely affect the outcomes of their political campaigns (Kahn, 1992, 1994; Lovenduski, 1997; Adcock, 2010). This anxiety is not unjustified, particularly considering that nowadays voters build knowledge about the candidates through the media, rather than personal exposure (Blight et al., 2012).

Therefore, attributing the media attention to a politician’s gender, could explain many gender-based inequalities observed in the world of politics today. For instance, in the UK this supposition is frequently put forward as one of the potential reasons for the under-representation of women in the British Parliament (Lovenduski, 1997). Nonetheless, studies to-date haven’t been able to establish a definitive link between gender and media attention, with some scholars indicating that the differences in the coverage for politicians of disparate gender do exist (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Heldman et al., 2005; Campbell & Childs, 2010; Adcock, 2010; Ross et al., 2013), and others challenging these findings (Bystrom et al., 2001; Jalalzai, 2006; Atkeson & Krebs, 2008).

Indeed, there are circumstances which suggest that the media coverage can be less dedicated to female politicians. For example, campaigns in the UK tend to be perceived as strongly leadership-focused (Lovenduski, 1997). Therefore, women are less recognised and written about, as they rarely stand as party leaders. Moreover, females themselves indicate that their access to journalists is restricted (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). They also point out that male politicians and journalists frequently create an environment
which is closed and inaccessible to them (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Ross, 2007).

A host of studies seem to confirm these concerns (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997; Norris, 1997). For instance, quantitative analysis of press coverage by Kahn & Goldenberg (1991) suggests that the political runs which involve women typically draw less media attention whereas those where men are involved has significantly more. Similar research conducted in the UK by Ross et al. (2013) concludes that during the 2010 General Election approx. 71 per cent of the articles released in the national press mentioned only male candidates, while a mere 9 per cent were devoted purely to female politicians. This correlation is disproportionate to the total number of female candidates running in the election. Some studies even suggest that British newspapers may be more attracted by the politician’s wives than the female politicians themselves (Campbell & Childs, 2010; Adcock, 2010).

However, other researches contradict these findings (Hayes & Lawless, 2015), as there are scholars who indicate that the press does not favour politicians of any gender in terms of the quantity of news printed about them (Rausch et al., 1999; Devitt, 2002; Atkeson & Krebs, 2008). Furthermore, there are also studies which show that women can actually receive more coverage than men. For instance, the analysis of press articles during the 2000 US Senate elections reveals that male and female candidates received 75 and 95 per cent of coverage respectively, and that this difference was statistically significant (Bystrom et al., 2001). However, studies indicating that female politicians are more favoured in press coverage are typically more recent. Thus, although their authors do not deny that an opposite trend existed in the past, they emphasize that it might have changed over time. Indeed, the number of female candidates grew in recent years, hence they might have become the media’s primary focus (Jalalzai, 2006).

Although existing research on this subject may be perceived as well documented, its conclusions are unequivocal. Thus, the question as to whether the press favours politicians of a certain gender still remains. One of the areas which stands unexplored is the coverage of politicians in local newspapers. As different types of newspapers vary, not only in circulation sizes but also in types of content, it should be verified whether they cover male and female candidates in the same way.

Local and national press are known to differ, not only in terms of what kind of issues they cover but also how they cover those issues (Negrine, 2005). In particular, local press typically focuses on constituency matters and profiles of candidates, while the national press concentrates on issues that are more substantive (Just et al., 1996). Because female candidates have been shown to receive disproportionately person-centred coverage (Aday & Devitt, 2001;
Fowler & L., 2009), it stands to reason that this gender bias would appear in potential differences between local and national media outlets’ coverage of candidates. Accordingly, research on gender and political media coverage needs to differentiate local and national press, in order to provide a more complete picture of the relationship between media, gender and politics.

This study attempts to fill this gap and analyses the quantity of coverage from selected national and local/regional newspapers for the candidates running in the United Kingdom General Election of 2015.

3 Theory and Hypothesis

The distinct characteristics of the local and national press, permit deriving certain suppositions about the quantity of coverage devoted to election candidates of different genders.

First, local and national press tend to give priority to different types of news (Negrine, 2005). While the national newspapers try to address a broader audience, and thus focus on general, high-profile matters, the local press is interested in events taking place within its constituencies (Vinson & Moore, 2007). As a result, certain subjects such as economy or foreign policy could primarily be associated with the national titles, whereas local press will not draw attention to them, unless they are given a local perspective (Negrine, 2005). Conversely, matters related to local schools, nurseries or hospitals will not attract national press’ attention, unless they are a part of a broader topic.

The different nature of issues raised in the news of local and national press is relevant in the context of gendered coverage, as women in general are perceived to be more interested in local politics than men (Hayes & Bean, 1993). Thus they might be expected to pay more attention to local issues as candidates. This theory finds its confirmation in research conducted by Campbell & Lovenduski (2014) which shows that women are more interested in local issues, not only as voters but also as politicians. It, therefore, may be expected that the local media, as they are more locally inclined (Franklin & Richardson, 2002), will be more interested in their candidacy, which in turn may increase their coverage quantity. Moreover, we might expect local media to give more coverage to female candidates because of their tendency toward person-centred coverage, which complements this female gender norm. At the same time, national media may give female candidates less coverage than local media because their tendency to substantive coverage is more consistent with dominant male gender norms.

Secondly, articles in local and national press differ in their focus. Local newspapers, in particular, tend to target a candidate 'per se', showing his/her
profile (Franklin & Richardson, 2002). This may lead to the personalisation of the candidate and bring a focus to those aspects of candidacy which are related to the private, rather than political sphere (Franklin & Richardson, 2002). By contrast, national press predominantly wraps the stories around issues (Just et al., 1996). At the same time, female candidates are known to receive less issue-related press coverage in comparison to males (Devitt, 1999). Instead, press attention is primarily focussed on their personal traits (Devitt, 2002), which may give further grounds to attract more interest of local press in the female candidates.

Thirdly, local and national journalists enjoy different freedoms in their work routines. Those at constituency level may be expected to be more independent in establishing the article content and format. In the national editorial offices, such decisions are made on a higher level, which may significantly complicate the publishing process (Negrine, 2005). This may potentially affect the press coverage of female politicians, who have been reported to complain about having limited access to journalists (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). This may be even further restricted if the article content and format are overseen by editorial officers, whose establishments are primarily male managed (Ross et al., 2013).

All these considerations may suggest the existence of a relationship between the quantity of coverage received by male and female politicians and the type of newspaper. Furthermore, the unequivocal findings of previous research on the influence of candidates’s gender on the quantity of coverage, give grounds to postulate verification of the following hypotheses:

H1: *Women in general will receive more coverage than men*
H2: *Women in general will receive less coverage than men*
H3: *Local press will give women more coverage than national press*

4 Data and Method

To verify the research hypotheses, we decided to conduct a press coverage analysis, looking at the campaign leading up to the 2015 General Elections. To ensure satisfying the quantity of articles and high competitiveness of the political races, 50 of the most marginal constituencies in England were selected. Subsequently, we narrowed down the selection of constituencies to those in which females constitute at least one of the two (or three, in the case of three way marginals) main candidates. This gave us a sample of 34 constituencies and 72 male and female candidates which we identified to monitor. Major local (or, when absent, regional) newspapers were selected for each constituency, using publicly available information. To verify the correctness of our choice, we
contacted local libraries and city councils. Subsequently, we decided to analyse the content of 6 tabloid, mid-market and broadsheet national newspapers. A complete list of selected titles is attached in Appendix.

On-line versions of newspapers were collected for all 39 days of the campaign, starting from dissolution of the Parliament (30 March) and finishing on Election Day (7 May). The data collection was conducted with a website mirroring software (HTTrack), which downloaded the content of the articles on a daily basis. The stories were subsequently searched with NVivo™ for the names of the 72 main candidates standing for election in the selected constituencies. Similarly to the study by Bystrom et al. (2001), the chosen unit of analysis employed for this research was the count of articles referencing the candidate.

Accordingly, for each candidate and week of the campaign, a corresponding number of articles which mentioned that candidate was assigned, forming a balanced panel data. We decided to exclude from the dataset any observations greater 20 articles referencing the candidate per week. This criterion rejected from our analysis Graham Evans in fourth week of the Election campaign as well as Ed Balls. Furthermore, we excluded Caroline Lucas from our analysis, as she was the only representative of the Green Party in our dataset.

4.1 Model specification

To verify the influence of the candidate’s gender on the press coverage both in the national and local newspapers, a statistical model was employed. The dependant variable was the count of articles mentioning the Election candidate in a certain week.

Since the primary aim of our model was to investigate whether the quantity of press coverage for male and female candidates differs, the gender of the candidate was used as the main independent variable.

Additionally, we added a range of control variables, which we anticipated to possibly influence the output. In particular, previous reports indicated that media attention may vary throughout the time of the campaign, with press attention picking up closer to Election Day (Deacon et al., 1998). Consequently, to exclude this candidate-invariant effect, time (with weeks as units) was incorporated into the model as one of the control variables.

Furthermore, the quantity of coverage was also expected to be related to the party affiliation. For instance, those parties which received the highest numbers of parliamentary seats during the previous election, may have been more visible than others, thus drawing more interest.

Incumbency was selected as another control variable, as it was recognised as a major advantage for candidates. Indeed, the to-date studies indicate that
incumbents are much more likely to be well-recognised and thus their coverage quantity is expected to be higher than that of the challenger (see Kahn, 1992).

If left unconsidered, autocorrelation in the dependent variable could lead to spurious inferences. Therefore, for each model, we included a lag of the dependent variable as another regressor.

Because the dependent variable was a count variable, it did not follow a normal distribution and thus it could not be modelled with ordinary least squares. For count data, the appropriate model typically uses either a Poisson or negative binomial distribution, depending on the variable dispersion. When the conditional variance is greater than the conditional mean, the dependent variable is over-dispersed and a negative binomial model is the most appropriate.

To test the dispersion of the variables, we produced their histograms, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. The distributions of local and national articles referencing the candidate per week were both over-dispersed. The variable for local weekly references to male candidates had a mean of 1.80 and standard deviation of 2.28. The variable for local weekly references to female candidates had a mean of 2.18 and standard deviation of 2.54. The variable for national weekly references to male candidates had a mean of 0.19 and standard deviation of 0.45. And finally, the variable for local weekly references to male candidates had a mean of 0.42 and standard deviation of 0.66. As a result, in our analysis we utilised negative binomial model which, in comparison to Poisson distribution, included an additional parameter to explicitly model the dispersion.

Accordingly, the regression model we employed could be expressed with the following equation:

\[
\log(COVER) = a + b_1GEN + b_2TIME + b_3PARTY + b_4INC + b_5COVER_{t-1} \\
\]

where:

- \( COVER \) = coverage: a count variable, expressing the number of articles within certain week, which mention particular candidate
- \( GEN \) = candidate’s gender: a binary variable, with 1 indicating female
- \( TIME \) = time: an ordinal variable, with campaign week as a unit
- \( PARTY \) = candidate’s party affiliation: a categorical variable, with 1 indicating Conservative party and 2 indicating Liberal Democratic party

8
\[ INC \] = candidate’s incumbency: a categorical variable, with 1 indicating incumbent and 2 indicating no incumbency within constituency

\[ COVER_{t-1} \] = lagged coverage: a count variable, expressing coverage lagged by 1 week

With this control, each coefficient will represent the average expected increase in the number of mentions associated with a change from the base level of the independent variable to the displayed level (e.g., from male to female).

Figure 1: Histograms of mentions of male and female candidates in local press. Vertical lines correspond to the means.

Figure 2: Mentions of male and female candidates in national press. Vertical lines correspond to the means.
5 Findings and Discussion

Overall, a total of approx. 55,000 articles were downloaded, of which 1142 articles were found to mention candidates selected for this research. As a comparison, Bystrom et al. (2001) in similar study analysed coverage of candidates based on 707 articles.

Subsequently, two balanced panel datasets were produced for the local and national newspapers and the descriptive statistics of the variables accounted for in the model were established, as presented in Tables 2 and 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COVER (local)</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVER (national)</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary descriptive statistics for count variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INC</td>
<td>0 (challenger)</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (incumbent)</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 (none)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>all</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTY</td>
<td>0 (Labour)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (Cons.)</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 (Lib. Dem.)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>all</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>0 (male)</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (female)</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>all</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Summary descriptive statistics for categorical variables.

Two separate models were run on the two datasets. Table 4 presents the regression results, with coefficients representing the expected change in log count of mentions associated with a one-unit increase in a count independent variable, or a change from the base category to the displayed category of a categorical variable.

From the Table 4 it may be observed that the coefficients associated with change of the gender variable from male to female is positive for both local and national press, which permits to infer that female candidates received more press coverage than their male counterparts, confirming hypothesis \( H1 \) (and rejecting hypothesis \( H2 \)). This finding aligns with study conducted by
Bystrom et al. (2001), who in her analysis of press coverage during the senate elections in the US indicated that female candidates were more likely to receive media attention. In contrast, our findings contradict with some of the earlier studies (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local Press</th>
<th>National Press</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>0.41†</td>
<td>−2.76***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
<td>(0.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN (female)</td>
<td>0.27†</td>
<td>0.59*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>−0.09*</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTY (Cons.)</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>−0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
<td>(0.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTY (Lib. Dem.)</td>
<td>−0.25</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
<td>(0.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INC (incumbent)</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>0.56*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INC (none)</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.56*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
<td>(0.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVER_{t-1} (local)</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVER_{t-1} (national)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>1296.52</td>
<td>455.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>1331.21</td>
<td>489.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>−639.26</td>
<td>−218.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>384.87</td>
<td>257.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. obs.</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**†p < 0.1, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001**

While coefficients and p-values are a useful first step for hypothesis testing, log counts are not readily interpretable. Simulations can provide a better sense of the estimated effect sizes and a better accounting of the uncertainty. Accordingly, we conducted 1000 simulations of each model, to predict the effect of candidate gender. All simulations and associated estimates were conducted
with the R package *Zelig*. Figures 3 and 4 present the outcomes of the model simulations.

![Predicted Effect of Gender on Local Press Mentions](image)

**Figure 3:** Outcomes of simulation of the statistical model, with a view to predict effect of gender on quantity of local press coverage.

From Figure 3 it can be observed that in local press, the expected number of articles mentioning the candidate for a typical male is 1.36, with standard deviation (SD) of 0.2, whereas for an otherwise equivalent female it is 1.8 (SD=0.3), a difference of 0.44 (SD=0.24).

In the same time, from Figure 4 on page 13 it can be observed that in national press, the expected number of articles mentioning the candidate for a typical male is 0.11 (SD=0.03), whereas for an otherwise equivalent female it is 0.2 (SD=0.06), a difference of 0.09 (SD=0.05).

While the coefficient for gender is larger in the model of national press than in the model of local press, coefficients in terms of log counts cannot be directly compared due to differently distributed dependent variables. In particular, the variance in local coverage (SD = 2.43) is much greater than in national coverage (SD=0.58). If we divide the estimated effects by the standard deviations of the respective dependent variables, the standardized (z-score) effect of candidate gender is slightly larger on the local press. Specifically, a hypothetical change from male to female gender of an otherwise equivalent candidate will be associated with an increase of local press mentions equal to 0.18 standard deviations, whereas the expected increase in national press mentions would be equivalent to 0.15 standard deviations, which confirms hypothesis $H3$. This finding aligns with the reports by (O’Neill & Savigny, 2014), who documented that female candidates running in 2010 General Elections themselves could
indicate similar differences in coverage they received in the local and national press.

Our findings put the debates of the under-representation of women in British politics in a different perspective, due to their implication that coverage quantity cannot be treated as a preventive factor for the women to enter Westminster. Furthermore, they underline the importance of the local media as one of the 'missing links' between the media, candidate’s gender and voters. Indeed, it should be also emphasized that, because national press is very unlikely to cover local candidates, the effect of gender in local media may potentially be substantively more significant.

6 Conclusion

In our study, we quantitatively analysed the press coverage of 72 male and female candidates, who stood for the 2015 General Election in 34 marginal constituencies across England. The articles obtained for the purpose of this research were collated with a website mirroring software, from the on-line edition of 31 local and 6 national newspapers. The high count of newspapers was preferable, as it raised the number of observations, consequently increasing our confidence in generalisations.

The results of our analysis suggest that female candidates during the campaign leading to the 2015 General Election, received more coverage than their male counterparts, regardless of the newspaper range. What is more, our
study provides clear evidence for the hypothesis that it is more likely for a local newspaper to cover female candidates to a greater extent than the national counterparts.

Thus, the finding of this research might indicate that women, rather than being a group neglected by the press can, in fact, receive more media attention than men. Consequently, our study indicates that the quantity of coverage, at least in that particular year, should not be perceived as a disadvantage of a female’s Parliamentary campaign. What is more, we can also speculate that in terms of the number of articles devoted to female candidates, the press has become more favourable towards them.

It should, however, be noted that our study focuses on one single campaign and covers a short period of time. The issue of gender bias in media coverage quantity should thus be revisited in future to confirm whether our findings hold over time.

Furthermore, the unit of analysis selected for our study was the count of articles mentioning a particular candidate within a certain campaign week. To add another level of scrutiny to the analysis, other choices could be considered. For instance, units such as count of words devoted to the candidates could provide a different perspective to our approach.

Although our research provides a unique insight into the role of national, as well as local, media in supplying a coverage of male and female candidates to the British Parliament, its focus remains mainly quantitative. For completeness, it is thus proposed to complement it with a qualitative approach, which will provide an even broader level of analysis and permit the verification of whether the substance of male and female candidates coverage differs. In particular, a closer look should be taken into issues such as: focus on private/professional life, amount of direct/indirect quotations, etc.

Since our study does not analyse the coverage qualitatively, our results should not be interpreted as a complete denial of the existence of gender bias in the campaign coverage, but rather as a form of stimulus to further research on this issue. Nonetheless, they complement the existing body of research, indicating that the coverage of local newspapers, which was neglected for years, should now be readdressed.

A better understanding of the impact of the local press is particularly important, as many voters rely on the press as a mean of ‘contact’ with the candidates, and thus is a medium which may significantly influence their political choice (Blight et al., 2012). Furthermore, political parties seem to be placing increasing emphasis on local campaigns (Denver, 2003). Indeed, we believe that the local media may constitute the ‘missing link’, tying media coverage with voting behaviours (Hargreaves & Thomas, 2002).
References


Appendix - list of newspapers

National newspapers
1. The Guardian
2. The Independent
3. The Times
4. Daily Express
5. The Sun
6. Mirror

Local newspapers
1. Ham and High - Hampstead and Killburn
2. West Briton - Camborne and Redruth
3. Bolton News - Bolton West
4. Thurrock Gazette - Thurrock
5. Solihull News - Solihull
6. Oxford Mail - Oxford West and Abingdon
7. Chad - Ashfield
8. Daily Echo - Southampton Itchen
9. Nottingham Post - Sherwood and Broxtowe
10. Dorset Echo - Mid Dorset and North Poole
11. Stockton Evening Gazette - Stockton South
12. Lancaster Guardian - Lancaster and Fleetwood
13. Western Morning News - Truro and Falmouth
14. Torquay Herald Express - Newton Abbot
15. Wirral Globe - Wirral South
16. Derbyshire Times - Chesterfield
17. Derby Telegraph - Derby North
18. Hull Daily Mail - Hull North
19. Grimsby Telegraph - Great Grimsby
20. Wells Journal - Wells
21. Westmorland Gazette - Carlisle
22. Lancashire Evening Post - Morecambe and Lunesdale
23. Shropshire Star - Telford
24. Chester Chronicle - Weaver Vale
25. Yorkshire Post - Harrogate and Knaresborough and Morley and Outwood
26. Lincoln - Lincolnshire Echo
27. The Argus - Brighton Pavilion and Brighton Kemptown
28. Birmingham Mail - Birmingham Edgbaston
29. Brent and Killburn Times - Brent Central
30. Watford Observer - Watford
31. Halifax Courier - Halifax