

WOMEN

POWER

POLITICS

**WHAT'S CHANGED
IN 100 YEARS?**

#WomenPowerPolitics

FOREWORD

It is astonishing to think that only 100 years ago not a single woman in the UK (alongside many countries worldwide) had the opportunity to vote on who made decisions affecting their lives, let alone being permitted to be directly involved in politics and legislation as a member of Parliament.

A century on, in 2018, it is appropriate to reflect on progress in terms of equal representation and how political power is better shared between men and women. In some respects, the role of women in politics has been normalised in the UK. We have had two UK women Prime Ministers, a woman First Minister for Scotland and for Northern Ireland, and women are playing influential roles as Ministers and Chairs of Parliamentary Committees. They are also important as leaders in political parties and we have seen a significant increase in the number of women MPs and local councillors, particularly over the past 30 years.

The collective action of women, changes to institutional rules and procedures, the influence of women's political and social leadership and the changing culture of politics are all important pieces of the story of how politics has changed and enabled women's participation. Viewed within an international context, the UK has influenced and been influenced by the changing world around us with some countries making more progress than others and, in some cases, more rapidly than in the UK. The UK and international examples included in this report provide useful and often inspiring insights into various methods that can be employed to enable women's participation.

We should also be clear that the vast improvements in the visibility of women in power and politics can mask the ongoing challenges that many women face in the UK. Women continue to be under-represented in the UK parliament, the devolved administrations, local councils and other elected positions across the country. Furthermore, women face 'continuing

barriers' as a result of the challenges that persist of balancing domestic and caring responsibilities and political participation. As this research suggests, other countries face similar challenges and have used multiple strategies to address them. Sharing good practice with politicians, academics and activists worldwide will help to build dialogue around what works and inspire new ways of dealing with shared challenges.

This research commissioned by the British Council sits squarely within our mission and mandate – to share the experience of the UK internationally in the spirit of mutuality and dialogue. In this key year, we are proud of research that constitutes a fitting way of celebrating the centenary of the women's vote. One of the key messages of the research is that achieving change requires sustained effort. This is required on many fronts and by many women and men including elected politicians, political leaders, political parties and representatives of women's and indeed broader based civil society organisations. This is true both nationally and internationally, historically and in the present. There is a clear demand for increased international collaboration on protecting gains and addressing ongoing challenges. This is reflected in the report's recommendations. For the British Council, we are committed to continued co-operation with our partner countries to support women's participation and leadership in political processes and social action across all areas of our work.

**PROFESSOR JO BEALL
DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND SOCIETY
AND MEMBER OF EXECUTIVE BOARD,
BRITISH COUNCIL**



The work
is not
forgotten

WOMEN'S
MARCH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Given that 2018 is the centenary of some women gaining the vote in the UK, the British Council has commissioned this research to map and understand the key developments in women's role in politics in the UK and around the world over the last 100 years, contrasting the UK's progress with international examples.

This report will form a basis for developing international discussion and debate about these vital issues and generating opportunities to do even more to support women's political participation. This is in furtherance of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.5 – 'Women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life' and supports the British Council's role of creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust as the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

The research engaged a range of participants from the UK as a whole, the nations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and internationally through 40 individual interviews; six roundtables with 77 stakeholders and over 60 talking head short films to reflect many different experiences and a range of expertise. There was a desire to understand the direct experiences of participants, and their voices and views were drawn on directly throughout. Participants were mainly women and ranged from those with direct experience as politicians, to those who are experts as academics, international consultants and activists in the field of women's political participation.

In focus groups and interviews, participants were asked to consider the progress of women's political power and participation in terms of: key successes and good practice; the impact on policy change and women's lives; and how international practice or movements have influenced the UK or vice versa. They were also asked what one change needs to happen by 2028 to really progress women's political representation and participation.

In this report, six thematic chapters explore the key enablers and barriers to women's progress as shared by participants, supported by information from further research, a timeline of progress from 1918, key data and examples which offer more in-depth analysis of the issues that arose as important from this dialogue.

1

Participants were clear on the fundamental importance of the role of **women's activism and sisterhood** over the last 100 years in progressing women's access to power and politics, women's influence on the political agenda and the way politics is conducted: *strong women have paved the way, strong women inside the women's movement.*

Participants discussed a number of central themes in their understanding of the importance of women's activism and sisterhood. This included how consciousness-raising has enabled women to take action for their own situation and raise awareness of the reality of women. Women have supported each other to represent and women's activism has been a key route into politics for many women. The increasing number of women in politics has influenced change in the culture of politics, with a focus on cross-party working. Amplifying each other's voices and contributions and working together to remodel political parties and the wider political system is important.

The examples we explore in more detail in this theme of women's activism and sisterhood are: the importance of diversity and sisterhood; how women are supporting women through the political pipeline with a wide range of initiatives; the importance of women's cross-party working in formal political spaces; and how women politicians globally are using networks, learning and shared practice to create international collaboration and support.

2

While participants celebrated many of the momentous legal changes over the last 100 years that have supported women to progress in politics they also reflected on the continued need for changes to **the rules** operating across the political system and how these are implemented by gatekeepers: *I feel pessimistic without rule change; and of course, the hard rules need to be supported with attitudinal change.*

A number of themes emerged from discussion of the barriers and enablers to women's progress within the construction and implementation of the rules. The nature of the electoral systems in use across the UK and the nations has impacted on women's political progress. The second chamber in UK government has been a site for change. Party candidate selection and action within this to address women's representation has been critical and attention was drawn to the financing of political careers. The importance of understanding party structure and regulation as gendered, and securing women's legitimacy and influence in party political structures, was underlined. There is variation in the extent to which countries galvanise reform in support of women's political progress within the accountability mechanisms of key international frameworks and laws – UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and the SDGs.

The examples participants considered as important in exploring these themes included: the power of gathering data; support for temporary special measures or quotas to support progress; the impact of the EU as a regional mechanism for women, and the potential risk to this resulting from the UK exiting the EU; and consideration of how to deliver systemic change to the political system, with learning from both Canada and Wales.

3

Consideration of the culture, norms and practices of the **political workplace** brought focus to the ways in which political institutions can welcome or act as a barrier to women entering politics. The conditions for women within the political workplace in both the national and local legislatures have seen considerable improvement. But participants suggested that achieving a cultural change has taken longer and they shared a sense of urgency, advocating for a range of proactive and bold steps to address deeply rooted power structures and patterns of *how things are done around here*.

Participants raised key themes that had resonance across the political institutions in the UK. Changing attitudes and norms in the political workplace need to be underpinned by practical changes supporting women. Change in the political workplace and its practices requires the building of collective will. Opportunities to design women into political workplaces and systems, as seen in the devolution of political powers to the nations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, should be seized. When the operation of parliaments and legislatures are improved to be *better for everyone* this positive narrative needs to be strong. The nature and reality of sexism and abuse within the political workplace were widely raised and discussed.

The examples raised by participants that we have covered in more depth are: the pioneering cross-party work of the UK Parliament to address sexual harassment in the workplace; the aspirations and barriers experienced by women in the process of building new political settlements; the way in which the House of Commons is working to deliver a whole-system approach to a gender-sensitive parliament through the 'Good Parliament' work; and the nature of the political workplace in local government, and its role as a part of the political pipeline.

4

The growing number and importance of women in **leadership roles** within politics across the UK, and their power and influence was a key discussion for participants: *more women at the top in really important positions matters – it sends a massive signal to society and to women*.

Highlighting the many dramatic changes, with 50 per cent of political parties being led or co-led by women, participants suggested that changes to the way women leaders are treated and perceived have been much slower. And that

the route to the top is much harder for women facing multiple intersectional barriers such as class, race, faith, disability and sexuality.

The following themes emerged most frequently in discussion of the key enablers, barriers and opportunities for further change for women's leadership in politics. Sponsors, and visible role models from the past and present, are seen as critical. There is a key role for the media in addressing or perpetuating ideas and stereotypes of women as politicians and leaders, to normalise women's leadership in politics. The status quo in political life is strong: women have been able variously to exert power and influence both in traditional political roles and by carving out new spaces. There was a desire to see greater acknowledgement and promotion of the different leadership styles that many women, and men, are able to bring to modern politics.

In more depth we have explored: women at the top and the important influence of women holding these top jobs, in particular heads of elected government and political parties; consideration of diversity and the idea of acceptable difference within women's leadership; the importance of male champions of change and consideration of initiatives to support men in this role; women's leadership in times of political instability and peacebuilding and the importance of supporting this.

5

Participants spoke consistently about the visible **results** that have flowed from women's increasing political power and participation over the last century and the extent to which this has shaped the lives of women and girls in the UK, and internationally: *you could hear a much stronger women's voice*.

Internationally, there is a wide range of policy areas which women parliamentarians have brought to the fore yet participants saw a significant level of commonality across jurisdictions in both the enablers and barriers to creating change for women's lives and the significant policy areas that have made a difference. Political stability was identified as important for enabling women to find space and pursue reforms that fall on the dividing lines of party policy. Enacting legislation and policy to improve women's lives is supported when it is understood that everyone will benefit from it. To champion sex equality remains a reputational risk for women politicians, and some policy areas remain resistant to gendered analysis. A mature political process, from legislation through to implementation and post-implementation scrutiny, is needed to effect real change.

The examples of policy areas explored in more depth reflect those that participants cited as important: a critical emphasis on the success of women parliamentarians in tackling violence against women and girls; the importance now of gender budgeting to create systemic change for women; women and their labour; and women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

6

All of the progress for women in politics and the impact this has had on women's lives was seen by participants as inextricably influenced by wider sweeping changes witnessed in the UK and internationally over the last 100 years.

A changing world? reflects discussion by participants on how wider changes have enabled important advances, but also have acted as new barriers.

A number of key themes were discussed by participants. Public attitudes to equality continue to change. The shift in women's economic freedom has been significant despite the continuing unequal nature of economic conditions: *people have to have the resources to enable them to step into that space*. Education affects the political participation of women and girls, leading to a clear call for earlier political and gender education for boys and girls. The cultural sectors have played an important role in engaging women in politics. There are both positive and negative outcomes from the developments in technology.

The specific examples explored are: the impact of the international, social media-based campaign #MeToo; the role and impact of caring and domestic work; how violence against women in politics influences women's participation; women's participation and the vote; and the engagement of girls and younger women in politics through initiatives such as Citizen Girl.

In the **conclusion**, we highlight that participants identified a string of key moments that have created shifts in women's roles and power in politics, various firsts for women in power and politics that are celebrated by participants and those who enabled those shifts as critical actors. We heard that the reality of progress in women's power and political representation is one of slow and piecemeal gains. We heard that progress is not always cumulative: *the idea that it will take so many years to get this, that assumes straightforward progress, assumes a linear path and that is not the case*. While women celebrated moments that *achieved things that can't be undone in the journey to equal representation*, many spoke of feeling the *fragility* of gains and the constant need for vigilance, for *keeping our eye on the ball*. Overwhelmingly it is clear that in the views of those we heard from, single actions do not drive progress.

Views on **what is needed next to achieve a step-change by 2028** were rich and varied. However, there was consensus that action is needed now to extend existing gains to all women within the UK and internationally. In reflecting on the importance of international solidarity, dialogue and global progress in the movement for women's equal power and political representation, we share here the most frequently expressed future ambitions and priorities we heard from participants.

These **recommendations** are the common amalgamation of participants' priorities for change when we asked *What change would you like to see over the next ten years?*

WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SISTERHOOD

1. Enable women politicians, activists, civil society and civil servants to come together to connect, share and learn in a transnational context.
2. Resource women's civil society organisations to support women with the tools to become full political actors and address barriers to their candidacy.
3. Enable a strong, vibrant and diverse women's civil society to have access to power and decision-makers as experts, through mechanisms including a formal women's platform.

THE RULES

4. Harness the levers of international gender equality frameworks and secure a culture of ambition and compliance with global targets on women's equal representation.
5. Operate transparent and comprehensive mechanisms for the collation, analysis and publication of data on women in politics from candidacy through to election.
6. Use legislative routes, party regulation and/or temporary special measures to achieve equal numbers of women candidates and ensure fairness and respect in political parties.

THE POLITICAL WORKPLACE

7. Deliver legislative action and resources to tackle the gendered nature of harassment and abuse targeting women and women politicians.
8. Use the Gender-Sensitive Parliaments framework set out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to audit all legislatures operating at local, regional and national levels.
9. Take action to enable women and men in politics, at local, regional and national levels to be active parents.

LEADERSHIP ROLES

10. Recognise, support and celebrate women as leaders across cultural and media platforms, as role models to girls, normalising women's leadership.
11. Challenge men to exercise leadership on women's equality by listening, stepping back and valuing women, and celebrate those who do.
12. Political and party leadership to consistently make the case for the benefits to all of achieving gender equality.

A CHANGING WORLD?

13. Deliver gender-sensitive political and citizenship education in and outside of schools to challenge gender stereotypes, understand diverse leadership and develop critical thinking.
14. Value and reward caring and normalise shared parenting through legislative, workplace, and wider cultural change.
15. Anticipate opportunities for 'designing-in' changes that hardwire sex equality into the system through the use of gender mainstreaming tools.

We were called militant, and we were quite willing to accept the name. We were determined to press this question of the enfranchisement of women to the point where we were no longer to be ignored by the politicians.

EMMELINE PANKHURST¹

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN THE LOWER OF SINGLE HOUSE IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

COUNTRY	%
Rwanda	61.3%
Bolivia	53.1%
Sweden	43.6%
The F.Y.R. of Macedonia	38.3%
United Kingdom	32.0%
Philippines	29.5%
Afghanistan	27.7%
Algeria	25.8%
Bangladesh	20.3%
United States of America	19.6%
Solomon Islands	4.0%
Oman	1.2%

Women in national parliaments. The figures above represent a selection of countries to illustrate different levels of representation.

INTRODUCTION

It has been 100 years since the first women in the UK could vote (although this was limited to married, property owners) and the first woman was [elected to parliament](#).² Considerable gains have been made since then, with the franchise extended to women over 21 in 1928, in line with their male counterparts and in the ensuing years the number of women active in politics in the UK nationally, regionally and locally has grown.

Significant progress was made from the start of the 21st century with UK devolution of political powers to the nations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, when Wales became the first nation in the world to achieve [50:50 representation](#) in its national legislature in 2003.

And yet in 2018 women remain underrepresented in all levels of UK politics and we lag behind other countries, the UK's position in the [global rankings](#) having fallen over the past 20 years from 25th in the world in 1999, to 41st now. The proportion of [women in local government](#) appears stuck at around 32 per cent across all of the UK nations.

The British Council builds relationships for the UK internationally through making a positive difference around the world through programmes in culture, language, education and society. This includes a range of projects that use UK experience and expertise to support greater opportunities and empowerment for women and girls, making a real difference to their lives and creating lifelong connections and relationships with the UK.

The British Council has commissioned this research on the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in the UK, to map and understand the key developments in women's role in politics in the UK and around the world. This will form a basis for developing international discussion and debate about these vital issues and generating opportunities to develop new partnerships and programmes with UK and global institutions to



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do even more to take forward the rights of women and girls in furtherance of Sustainable Development Goal 5.5 – ‘Women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.’

By drawing on the practical knowledge of participants who have direct experience as politicians, government representatives, academics and activists aiming to change the way politics works, we are able to share unique insights that are relevant across the UK and for stakeholders worldwide that are also seeking to improve the participation of women in politics.



When you have complicated problems you need more ideas, not fewer ideas, women have different backgrounds, approaches and experiences and in the end you get better decisions and a better world.

HON PATRICIA A TORSNEY, INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UN

1 Speech delivered in Hartford, Connecticut on November 13, 1913 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/series/great-speeches-emmeline-pankhurst>

2 1918 saw Constance Markiewicz, Sinn Fein as the first woman elected to Parliament but she didn't take her seat; Nancy Astor was the first woman to enter Westminster as an MP in 1919.



© Michael Bradley/Getty

Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, announcing the birth of her daughter. She is only the second world leader to give birth while in office.

The starting point for this report is that we believe the case for women's equal representation has been made. This is reflected in numerous international laws and commitments, including the Beijing Platform for Action and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. There is increasing [evidence](#) of the gains for women and girls, particularly in gender sensitive laws and policies, when more women are better supported, as individuals and collectively, to participate and lead in the political arena.

The research builds upon the findings and recommendations of the British Council's 2016 report *Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in the UK: Meeting the Challenge of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, specifically the thematic area of participation, power and leadership within the political sphere.

2018 provides a timely moment to take stock of the current picture of women in politics and power, building on the current attention given to women in power and politics and the sense of momentum worldwide. Over the course of 2018 we've seen visible steps forward for the UK: the achievements of Millicent Fawcett, campaigner for women's suffrage, honoured as the first statue of a woman installed in Parliament Square; a cross-party report being published by the UK Parliament on sexual harassment; and the implementation of mandatory gender pay gap reporting.



The contributions of lots and lots and lots of women at different levels and parts of the process who could put their shoulder to the wheel.

BRONAGH HINDS, FOUNDER DEMOCRASHE, NORTHERN IRELAND

Internationally we saw Jacinda Ardern, the New Zealand Prime Minister, publicly announce her pregnancy to the world via [Twitter](#); Costa Rica elected the first black [woman vice-president](#) in Latin America; UK political parties hosted an international summit on [violence against women](#) in politics; and in Dir Kohistan and North and South Waziristan in [Pakistan](#) some women exercised the right to vote they have held since 1956, for the first time. In terms of women's lives, we witnessed international solidarity at the [Women's March](#) and in the #MeToo campaign; and momentous populist movements voting to support women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in the Republic of Ireland and [Argentina](#).

The research highlights a string of key moments that have created shifts in women's roles and power in politics, various firsts for women in power and politics that are celebrated by participants and those who enabled those shifts.

The enablers that made these moments happen, the barriers that remain and the change participants now want to see are set out across six key themes. These themes were identified through analysis of participants' views of the key elements of achieving change for women in power and politics: women's activism and sisterhood, the rules, the political workplace, leadership roles, the results, and a changing world. The conclusions and recommendations set out in this report are drawn from the insights of participants based on their assessment of what will be critical to progressing women's leadership and participation in political life over the next ten years. They are relevant to the multiple actors, in all countries and at all levels of governance required to achieve change.

The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, famously observed: 'no struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men',³ a sentiment that is reflected in [Sustainable Development Goal 5.5](#). We are delighted to play our part in sharing knowledge and best practice between countries in terms of women's representation in government, through this timely report.

METHODOLOGY

This is an independent study largely focusing on formal elected political structures and the barriers and enablers to women's full participation.

The research objectives were to identify the answers to four key questions:

1. What are the key successes and good practice within the UK, as a whole and within each of the UK nations, in progressing women's political power and participation over the last 100 years?
2. How has progress in women's political power and participation impacted on policy change, and women's lives within UK society?
3. How has/can international practice, and/or an international movement to progress women's political power and participation, influence the UK? And vice versa?
4. What is the one change that needs to happen by 2028 to really progress women's political representation and participation, in the UK and/or internationally?

The research process engaged stakeholders through semi-structured conversations, creating an enabling environment for the discussion of social and political change. This reflects the [British Council's approach](#) to women's and girls' empowerment, and will help to shape further dialogue and action to support women's political participation. The participants engaged in this research were mainly women with direct experience as politicians within the UK and internationally, and those who are experts as academics, international consultants and activists in the field of women's political participation. A range of ages, backgrounds and political viewpoints were represented. The stakeholders approached to engage were chosen to reflect the range of different experience and expertise in the UK, and internationally. Self-evidently, those who responded to this invitation and whose views are reflected in this report have a clear interest in improving the participation of women and girls in political life in the UK and internationally.

The research strategy comprised an initial desktop literature review to frame interviews and roundtables, and further research to provide context and support the issues or examples raised by participants; 40 individual interviews; six roundtables with 77 stakeholders covering the UK Parliament and the devolved administrations, as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society, local government and regional combined authorities from across the UK, international experts and over 60 'talking head' short films answering the question: **What is the one change that needs to happen by 2028 to progress women's political representation and participation?** This was supported by a social media campaign using the hashtag #womenpowerpolitics to engage with a wider public audience. We were supported by an advisory panel of UK and international gender experts, and British Council staff.

In keeping with the desire to understand the direct experiences of participants we have used their voices and drawn on their views directly throughout this report. In the spirit of enabling participants to speak freely and openly about both enablers and challenges we have resisted attributing all of these words, and we have reported both praise and criticisms as they were made. Quotes directly from participants are marked in italics throughout the report. Under the usual conventions of independent research commissioned by a public body, these reported views do not necessarily reflect those of the British Council.

We have delved more deeply into some areas and examples that bring together multiple themes, and have highlighted these throughout the text, where participants were keen to share insights on what has worked, and what has not, offering international ideas and comparisons. There are links to further reading throughout, and we have included a wide breadth of sources to provide opportunities for people to learn more. A full list of research sources is available [here](#).⁴

**EVE HOLT, NICOLA WATERWORTH,
DR HELEN MOTT, WOMEN, POWER
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4 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/copy_of_wpp-researchsources-sep18.xlsx

The strength of the collective is key; one woman can never make change on her own. Women have to be the engine for their own liberation.

RT HON HARRIET HARMAN QC, MP, UK PARLIAMENT



WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SISTERHOOD

From the suffragist and suffragette movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; the second-wave feminism of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s; to the recent demonstrations of solidarity among women around social media abuse, women's activism and sisterhood have played a pivotal role in the push for progress of women's political power: *strong women have paved the way, strong women inside the women's movement*. There was a clear view among participants that progress over the last 100 years in the UK, and internationally, has been achieved because women fought for it.

Participants pointed to the many ways in which women have made their voices heard in the political arena, organised and demonstrated sisterly solidarity, in the UK and abroad. Drawing a clear line joining the hunger strikes of the suffragettes and the hunger strikes of women in [Yarl's Wood](#) immigration removal centre today, people spoke passionately about the lengths women have gone to and the sacrifices they have been forced to make.

The main themes that emerged in the discussion of barriers and enablers in this idea of women's activism and sisterhood centred on consciousness raising, supporting each other to represent, changing the culture of politics, amplification, rewiring and women as lawmakers. We share in more detail examples related to diversity and sisterhood, supporting women through the political pipeline, women's cross-party working and creating international solidarity.

CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

Women activists and the women's movement have played an important role in showing that *'the personal is political'*. Women have repeatedly supported each other to take action for their own situation, and to raise public and political consciousness of the reality of life for women. The women's movement has raised issues that were previously not discussed in the political arena. While the suffrage movement focused mainly on the vote, *the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s touched on every area of women's experience – including family, sexuality and work*. And we heard how more recently, the #everydaysexism, #MeToo and #TimesUp movements have not only built public awareness of the sexism and harassment women face but also pushed them up the political agenda: *women are successfully changing social norms and political power; they help set a tone which challenges old public notions of women and protest*.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER TO REPRESENT

Looking after each other's children; putting a safe roof over the heads of women fleeing domestic abuse; mobilising; and cheerleading each other on social media – women have repeatedly relied upon each other to sustain the fight for equality. From the 1918 [bus workers' strike](#) to today's campaigning by groups like [WASPI](#) (Women Against State Pension Inequality) *women have repeatedly been moved to campaign or take action around a single issue often in solidarity with their sisters*. Women's activism has been a key route for many women into political office, which *leads them to start engaging with the formal political process*. The suffrage movement, the women's [peace crusade](#), the labour and trade union movement, the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, all provided pathways into politics for women, offering the much needed networks, visibility and experience needed for selection and office readiness:



© Leon Neal/Getty

Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott on a visit to Yarl's Wood Detention Centre. Women detained at the centre have regularly held hunger strikes in protest at conditions and treatment.

CHANGING THE CULTURE OF POLITICS

Many participants felt that a growing mass of women working inside the system have helped set a new tone that includes greater cross-party working: *here [Westminster Parliament] you are a woman first, our politics may be miles apart but we still support each other.* Some participants pointed to the moment when the leaders of three of the UK's main parties, the Scottish National Party's Nicola Sturgeon, Green Party's Natalie Bennett and Plaid Cymru's Leanne Wood hugged each other after a television debate in 2015. It was suggested that new women coming in were more open to collaborative working, *as the daughters of the women's movement they increase the possibility of working together across party lines on broader issues.*

AMPLIFYING EACH OTHER

Women in politics have at times felt invisible within their own political parties and within political institutions. We heard of the increasing use by women of purposeful techniques to ensure they are heard and contributions are recognised: *as female councillors we have now started to repeat and emphasise what each other says to ensure the women in the room are heard.* This follows the example of female staffers in Obama's team [amplifying each other](#). In Iceland, there has been a longer history of women hand signalling to each other as a code when someone is guilty of mansplaining, i.e. talking over women or wrongly attributing recognition. This strategy is seen as a way of resisting [master suppression](#) techniques.

REWIRING THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

We heard how women had driven changes to the rules of the game in political parties and political institutions. For example, *without demands being made by women activists the parties wouldn't have changed.* The successes in changing the dynamics within the new legislatures in Wales and Scotland were attributed in part to women's tenacity and collective action: *we got there because of women who went before, a strong women's movement, union women, voluntary sector – who worked to bring about the change.*

WOMEN AS LAWMAKERS

Without pressure from women political leaders and the women's sector working in conjunction, it has been argued that laws such as The Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act would never have been passed.⁵ We heard the need to *shout more* about women's work in government to ensure that the impact that women have when in power is visible and recognised. The link between women's community activism, the women's community and voluntary sector, and women in positions of political power, is regarded by many as fundamental to women's role as effective lawmakers, providing women with access to representation of their needs and pathways into politics, the tools to exercise power and the collective will and strength to deliver change. Our participants highlighted the importance of women on the outside of formal political structures, retaining some independence from women in positions of political power, in order to continue to apply external pressure and accountability: *leaders need to be accountable to a social movement.*



Leanne Wood, Nicola Sturgeon and Natalie Bennett leaders of Plaid Cymru, the Scottish Nationalist Party and the Green Party during the 2017 General Election campaign.

5 The Stalled Revolution: *Is Equality for Women an Impossible Dream?* Eva Tutchell and John Edmonds, 2017, pages 271–2.

DIVERSITY AND SISTERHOOD

In celebrating 100 years since some women got the vote I began to think that what will make the difference is fighting for the rights of all women. I take joy in having all women around the table in their diversity.

Dawn Butler MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, UK Parliament

Frustrations were expressed by participants about the *lack of awareness of the movement for suffrage being diverse and multi-racial* and the failure to recognise the contributions of some women: *the UK movement for the last 100 years has had women of different heritages, backgrounds, religions but women's stories are getting lost*. Participants welcome greater consciousness of these stories, supported by many initiatives, such as [Herstory](#) and [@onthisdayshe](#) telling the stories of women who are most commonly underrepresented and written out of history. While some talked passionately about how the women's movement has successfully brought women together, others felt it had failed at times to include the most marginalised, leaving some women behind: *it is clear not all women in politics have progressed the women's cause and not all women have benefited; we need women with a cross-representation of backgrounds*.

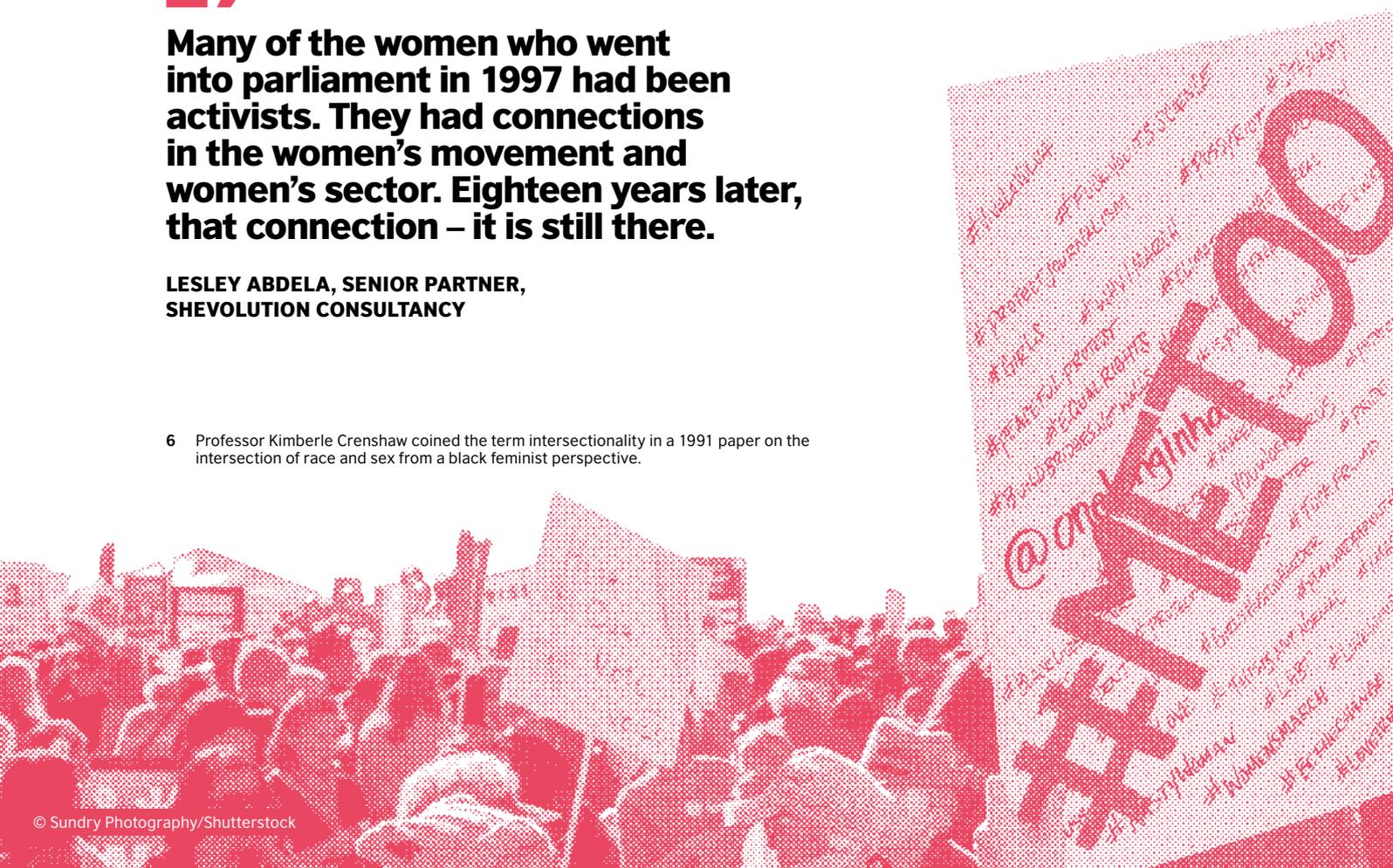
We heard there was an appetite to better recognise and understand [intersectionality](#),⁶ defined as the interconnected nature of social categories such as race, class and sex creating overlapping disadvantage. There was a desire to build bridges across the women's sector to re-forge a shared movement: *we now need a new kind of solidarity to make change happen and to ensure progress is sustained*. Some participants proposed that the creation of a formalised women's lobby in the UK would: bring together politicians, academics, the women's sector and activists; amplify women's voices *in a meaningful way*; support and connect with a plurality of groups; utilise developing technology; and reclaim social media space as tools for collaboration. The UK [Women's National Commission](#) undertook some of this role as the official independent advisory body to government, during its 41-year history, until its closure by government in 2010. At that point some of its work moved to be delivered centrally through the Government Equalities Office (GEO). There is limited gender architecture and no standing platform for [consulting women across the UK](#). By contrast, the Scottish Government funds the [Scottish Women's Convention](#), [Engender](#) provides a platform for women's organisations to engage with the Scottish Government and in 2017 established the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls, while the Welsh Government funds the [Women's Equality Network](#) (WEN) in Wales.



Many of the women who went into parliament in 1997 had been activists. They had connections in the women's movement and women's sector. Eighteen years later, that connection – it is still there.

LESLEY ABDELA, SENIOR PARTNER,
SHEVOLUTION CONSULTANCY

⁶ Professor Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in a 1991 paper on the intersection of race and sex from a black feminist perspective.



SUPPORTING WOMEN THROUGH THE POLITICAL PIPELINE

We're proud of our consistent women's representation in the Green Party. We actively encourage and support other women to stand, [we're] a very feminist party. We will reopen shortlists if [they are] lacking women and BME candidates.

Amelia Womack, Deputy Leader of the Green Party

We heard about the wide variety of initiatives to support women into politics and to help them to overcome the many structural and systemic barriers that prevent women, and some groups of women in particular, in progressing on the pathway to politics. This is often described as a pipeline problem; one that requires the blockages and their potential solutions to be understood and addressed. It includes supporting women on the supply side, i.e. women wanting to take the path, and stay on the path, to politics and also working with gatekeepers on the demand side.

We heard that the system continues to shut out capable women, and it is not simply a question of *building women's confidence*, but equipping women with the knowledge and networks required for them to navigate the system as *political actors across the full range of electoral participation*. There were calls for *making politics something that people want to be involved in, something that feels relevant to them, so we don't lose some incredibly dynamic people* by ensuring that pathways support grassroots activists alongside *career politicians put on the path by the parties*. Participants stressed the need to ask women, repeatedly, to put themselves forward and a number of politicians interviewed said they wouldn't be in office if they hadn't been asked by several people. According to the [50:50 Parliament](#) campaign, most women have been asked at least three times before they have put themselves forward, inspiring their #AskHerToStand campaign.

Prompted in part by this year's centenary celebrations in the UK there is an increasing array of initiatives boosting numbers on the supply side. Alongside the Local Government Association's [Be A Councillor](#) programme, there is the [Parliament Project](#), [50:50 Parliament](#), [Women 50:50](#) in Scotland, [Politics Plus](#) in Northern Ireland (supporting the EU-funded [Next Chapter](#) and mirroring Canada's [Daughters of the Vote](#)), and in Wales [Chwarae Teg](#)'s work providing opportunities for young women to shadow Assembly Members. The main parties have women's network and training initiatives including [Women2Win](#), [Fabian Women](#), [Labour Women's Network](#), [Liberal Democrat Women](#), [Green Party Women](#), [Jo Cox Women in Leadership Programme](#), and their own women's forums at a local level. These sit alongside a range of initiatives and campaigns to boost black and minority ethnic (BME), lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), disabled and working class representation, such as Manchester's [Pipeline Project](#), the [125 campaign](#) for disabled representation and the party specific [LGBT+ Conservatives](#).

The All Party 300 Group (1980–2000): The All Party 300 Group established in 1980 by Lesley Abdela was a pioneer of these initiatives to deliver leadership training and build networks to unblock the pipeline. A former Liberal Parliamentary candidate, Lesley Abdela was responding to the 1979 general election results, where despite the arrival of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, there were only 19 women out of 635 MPs. The group's principal aim was the election of 300 women MPs, i.e. approximately half the House of Commons. Through the 1980s more than 40 local groups flourished, engaging over 5,000 activists. The group dissolved after 20 years as it lacked the financial resources needed to progress. Lesley Abdela went on to take the 300 Group blueprint to many former Soviet Union states of Central Europe and subsequently, through international organisations including the British Council, helped create self-standing women's political organisations in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

The Parliament Project (2016–present): non-partisan organisations like The Parliament Project have revived similar work in the UK in recent years to inspire women to run for political office in the UK. The project runs workshops to demystify the political process for women and increasingly uses technology to connect women with each other through webinars and virtual peer support circles. Along with the 50:50 campaign, they use a range of campaign tools to encourage people to ask women to stand and they support women to express and seek support for their political ambitions through pledging or publicly committing to their goals.

Participants also told us of a range of initiatives globally developed from within political parties, with country-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and with international support. From 2012, the British Council ran a three-year [Women Participating in Public Life](#) project in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco, particularly targeting 18–30 year olds. Opportunities for women's representation did not advance as much as expected after the Arab Spring, but building women's capacity through training facilitators, action research and creating networks had a positive impact for hundreds of women: 'women reported [they] gained new skills to mediate disputes, to speak in public, to present ideas coherently and eloquently, to substantiate arguments... the project has contributed to increase the perceived credibility of certain women involved with the project.'⁷ In America, Canada and [Australia](#) there are party-specific initiatives raising funds for women candidates such as the American Democratic Party [Emily's List](#) and in Canada the [Judy La Marsh](#) fund of the Liberal party and more recent [She Leads Foundation](#) of the Conservatives. Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians stressed the importance of continuing these professional development opportunities once in office: 'it's no good if it suddenly falls away,' said Meenakshi Dhar of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

WOMEN'S CROSS-PARTY WORKING

In South Africa we've seen the power of women coming together in an organised way. In 1954 we saw the launch of the Federation of South African Women which went on to shape the first Women's Charter in South Africa. Women's caucuses now play an important role in South Africa, tracking legislation, providing space for discussion and research and influencing the allocation of budget, for example the ongoing campaign to remove tax on sanitary towels.

Angela Thokozile Didiza, former Minister, South Africa

Over the last 20 years [women's parliamentary bodies](#), often referred to as caucuses, have become an increasing feature of parliaments. Cross-party groupings have been understood as opportunities to 'foster leadership, increase effective participation and debate legislation' that can achieve gender-sensitive policy through collaboration. We heard that the value of caucuses is threefold: their ability to work pragmatically, providing a different style of representation; bolstering the *solidarity and ease* between women for collaborating on legislation; and bringing the expertise of women's organisations, academics and civil society together with politicians.

The [Kenya Women's Parliamentary Association](#) has successfully influenced legislation on marriage and reproductive health and is working with grassroots organisations to [end female genital mutilation](#). As women took 33 per cent of seats in the 2012 Serbian elections, the moment was seized to create an informal [Women's Parliamentary Network](#). A 'troika' system rotates co-ordination among the political parties. In South Africa, the Committee on [Multi-Party Women's Caucus](#) was set up in 2017 to *work on how we systematise* research, scrutiny and the tracking of departmental spend and impact. In Australia we heard that cross-party collaboration resulted from women

seeking to fill gaps in political parties' platforms. There was enthusiasm for models similar to that implemented in [Costa Rica](#) where a committee responsible for women's rights, the caucus and a permanent technical body work in co-ordination.

In the UK Parliament, the House of Commons [Women and Equalities Select Committee](#) came into being in 2015 and was described by participants as key to getting *issues only women raise politically* on the agenda. The more recent [Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion](#) has been convened by the Speaker of the House of Commons to make Parliament more representative. Informal [All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#), such as those on Sex Equality and Women in Parliament, also enhance knowledge and expertise at Westminster. The [Assembly Women in Democracy Caucus](#) has played an important role in addressing underrepresentation of women in public life in Wales. In Northern Ireland we heard of a similar role of the Northern Ireland [Knowledge Exchange Seminar](#) and the work of Politics Plus in forging the way for establishing a [Women's Caucus](#) at Stormont in 2016. Unfortunately the work of this caucus has been limited by the collapse of the Assembly in 2017 and the return of power to the UK government pending an agreement among the Northern Ireland parties.

We heard of real limitations on the effectiveness of these mechanisms globally, including: partisan politics; the extent to which governments are open to scrutiny and co-operation with such bodies; the difficulty of securing allocated parliamentary time; and legislative success remaining dependent on alignment with governmental agendas. For example, participants noted that recommendations from the Women and Equalities Select Committee in 2017 on [increasing the number of women MPs](#) in the UK Parliament were [rejected by the government](#).



Thousands of women joined a protest on the streets of Sao Paulo, Brazil to highlight gender inequality and violence against women.



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CREATING INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

It's about feeding your little grey cells with different ideas, hearing what's going on around the world.

Maria Miller MP, UK Parliament; Chair, House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee

Globally, since women have been elected they have created valued communities of elected representatives, coming together to build capacity and knowledge of legislative practice and solutions. Many of these opportunities bring women politicians together specifically using the global normative and/or legal frameworks as a basis to understanding gender equality as essential to strengthening democratic governance, human rights and sustainable development, i.e. the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; and most recently, the 2015 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). We heard about the work supporting this by international and inter-parliamentary organisations including the [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#) (IPU); the [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association](#) (CPA) [Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians network](#) (CWP); [Commonwealth Women in Local Government network](#); the Iceland-based [Women Political Leaders Global Forum](#); the work of [UN Women](#), [Westminster Foundation for Democracy](#) (WFD), the [National Democratic Institute](#) and [ParlAmericas](#). UK women parliamentarians are active across these networks, sharing and learning; those we heard from told us they would like to engage more.

ParlAmericas for example supports parliamentary efforts to advance gender-sensitive legislative action, creating *inclusive working spaces that foster peer-driven exchange of best practices, and provide specialised resources and support to strengthen these efforts*. ParlAmericas has launched a video project called [Mapping Gender-Based Political Harassment: Parliamentarians speak out](#). This interactive space

features testimonies of parliamentarians from across the Americas and the Caribbean on political harassment and violence. [iKNOW Politics](#) is a joint project between [International IDEA](#), IPU, [United Nations Development Programme](#) and UN Women. Drawing on the expertise of these four partners, the project seeks to leverage the power of information, collective knowledge, shared experiences and communication technology, acting as a platform to foster 'exchange, dialogue and knowledge creation for all who are engaged in promoting women's political participation'. In 2018 Julia Gillard, former Australian Prime Minister, founded the [Global Institute for Women's Leadership](#) which addresses women's underrepresentation in leadership positions more broadly across all sectors and countries.

Contributors questioned the current lack of formal links between women in the different political institutions of the UK and were keen to see a women's caucus developed to bring them together. In Northern Ireland and Scotland in particular, women spoke of the importance of the [European Women's Lobby](#) in creating space to come together across the EU on issues relating to women. There was concern at the potential loss of UK participation in this network resulting from Brexit and a widespread keenness to strengthen international and cross-regional mechanisms. Some participants also recognised that greater strategic co-ordination, replicating of practice and enhanced evaluation could increase the impact of these international networks and help them to be more inclusive of women from all countries. Participation in such networks is always limited by cost, time, and permission. Additionally, the influence of international networks is not always viewed as neutral and can sometimes be a hindrance to women if it is characterised as outside interference in a nation's democratic processes. There is an enthusiastic recognition of the increasing role technology is playing as an enabler of transnational relationships and collaboration.

We are at an opportune time to really push hard, to open doors, to be radical. Whatever it takes to get more diversity at all levels. We need political parties to push as well as individuals.

WALES ROUNDTABLE

There has been a resurgence in the level of campaigning activity for women's equality. We are seeing a new wave of young women coming into action to take it all forward to the next stages.

LESLEY ABDELA, SENIOR PARTNER, SHEVOLUTION CONSULTANCY

Attitudes do need to change, but in the absence of rule changes it is harder as the power is so entrenched, and held on to, and resistance so strong. I feel pessimistic without rule change; and of course, the hard rules need to be supported with attitudinal change.

PROFESSOR SARAH CHILDS, PROFESSOR OF POLITICS AND GENDER, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

THE RULES

The timeline included in this study demonstrates the progress made through legal changes over the last 100 years to achieve equality in representation in the UK and its nations. We heard celebration from participants of these landmark rule changes and their impact on women's representation. Yet we heard that rule changes are still needed to make the process fair and how, informally, archaic rules can also operate as a barrier to women.

The main themes emerging in this discussion of the barriers and enablers to women's progress within construction and implementation of the rules of the political system were: the electoral system; the role of the second chamber; party selection of candidates; party structure and regulation; accountability within international frameworks and laws; and financing of political careers. The examples participants considered important and we discuss here in more depth are: the power of gathering data; temporary special measures – quotas; regional mechanisms for women: the European Union; and shifting political systems: lessons from Canada and Wales.

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

There was widespread recognition that the first-past-the-post system of elections (as used, for example, in elections to the UK Parliament and to England's local councils) is a particular barrier to women's representation, supported by a range of research evidence.⁸ Proportional representation systems are generally accepted as more effective, as are measures such as quotas and zipping (where parties are mandated to alternate male and female candidates in a proportional representation system): the *first past the post system offers the greatest challenge in taking positive action*. Although polling has shown public support for [reform of the electoral system](#), in the UK, 67.9 per cent voted against this in a [referendum](#) in 2011 although this was a vote on an Alternative Vote system and the turnout was only 42.2 per cent.

Substantial political power has been devolved from the UK Parliament to national legislatures. And at the same time, new [voting systems](#) have been introduced. This has increased women's representation in some cases, but the picture is complicated: Scotland has generally elected more women through first-past-the-post voting, due to the use of gender quotas by parties, than through proportional regional lists.⁹ Northern Ireland has seen only a modest increase despite using more forms of [proportional representation](#).

THE ROLE OF THE SECOND CHAMBER

The UK Parliament has a second or upper chamber, the House of Lords. This chamber is independent from and complements the work of the House of Commons (the lower house of elected representatives). In 1963 when women were first admitted to the [House of Lords](#) this was in the form of hereditary peers. Since reform in 1999 the upper chamber is now largely made up of life peers rather than hereditary peers, and there are more women represented among these appointees. While we heard positive affirmations of the ways of working and role of women within the House of Lords we heard frustration that *the appointments system should have resulted in more change*. Growth of the overall number of peers since 2013 is seen to have resulted in proportionately fewer women because appointments are *dominated by party donors and ex-ministers [who are more] likely to be men*. Reserved seats for bishops within the House of Lords have made gender balance challenging. The [Lords Spiritual \(Women\) Act 2015](#) put in place a temporary special measure stipulating that as vacancies arose among the bishops, they should be filled by women bishops only.

⁸ Mortimer J, Terry C Women in Westminster: Predicting the number of Women MPs, Electoral Reform Society, March 2015.

⁹ 'Women in Scottish Politics', Dr Meryl Kenny, 2018, briefing prepared for Scottish Roundtable.

PARTY SELECTION OF CANDIDATES

Political parties play the dominant role in securing representation of women as parliamentary and local council candidates. Between 1918 and the general election of 1997, only 188 women had ever been [elected as MPs](#). The All-Party 300 Group specifically focused in the early 1980s on using the opportunity of by-elections, such as Virginia Bottomley's in 1984, to challenge concerns within and across the parties that women would be rejected by voters: [these elections demonstrated that] *voters would vote for women, no problem*. We heard these events were important in challenging the status quo around women's selection, and the evidence demonstrates the UK electorate [will vote for a man or a woman](#).

This has placed the focus on the obstacles of party selection and standing in winnable seats. Party regulation and operations are seen as specifically gendered; the rules of the selection process and the many gatekeepers can work either to [unblock the pipeline for women, or maintain the status quo](#). Prior to the 1997 UK General Election the Labour party addressed this through All Women Shortlists (AWS). These specific steps addressed the disadvantage of women: they ensured that half of all winnable seats were open only to women for selection as Labour Party candidates. This made a significant difference in the numbers of women MPs. 120 women were elected to Parliament, of whom 101 were Labour MPs. Those we spoke to heralded 1997 as critical: *if my ward didn't have an all woman shortlist I probably wouldn't have made it*.

Although challenged within the party and at an industrial tribunal, and not used in 2001, AWS paved the way for new legislation to permit action under the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002, now enforceable until 2030 under the [Equality Act 2010](#). In 2018 Labour extended the practice, informally, with the first [All Women \(BME\) shortlist](#) in the by-election at Lewisham. Labour's approach has recently been made [inclusive of transwomen](#), a move that has caused significant debate within the party, as it goes beyond the law. Similar measures have now been adopted by the Scottish Nationalist Party and Liberal Democrats, and the Green Party has a strong commitment to re-opening shortlist processes if lacking women and BME candidates. In August 2018 as the party looked to begin candidate selection process for the next election, Conservative party chairman Brandon Lewis acknowledged that 80 per cent of his party's MPs are men and that the party wants '[radical change](#)' in parliament by setting an ambition that at least half of the candidates on the party's official list must be women.

PARTY STRUCTURE AND REGULATION

Women participants from all parties were clear that effective party selection practice has to be grounded in securing greater influence and legitimacy of women at an early stage within parties. Labour women credited the introduction of rules requiring parity of representation of women within the ranks of party officers in the 1980s for 'creating opportunity for more female members to take on positions of responsibility... This gave women political experience, so women were then ready and able to get on the shortlists. The tendency for women to hang back was also challenged.' (Meg Munn, Minister for Women and Equality 2005–07, MP 2001–15.)

All political parties in the UK have faced greater external regulation since 2000. Yet we heard calls for stronger regulation because existing equalities and employment legislation is *inconsistently applied and unevenly enforced across parties*. Some hoped this could support the *re-gendering of party politics via party regulation, to achieve parity of women's representation*. Specifically, participants wanted to see stronger internal rules providing protection from sexist and misogynistic behaviour of party members, including social media abuse; clearer application by parties of the statutory public duty to promote equality and public financing for parties to be made contingent upon enhanced diversity.

However, some participants felt current efforts are too focused on *normalising* women within existing party and parliamentary structures that are designed around men's needs, and would like to see a more radical approach: [parties] *are not natural homes and not places where women want to go to solve problems, or women are ghettoised*. Existing structures, it is argued, should be replaced: *let's throw the order book out of the window and form in a new and refreshing way*. The [UK Women's Equality Party](#) (WEP) founders said they set up the party because they felt the current model wasn't working for women. WEP aims to have a wide appeal across the entire electorate and to avoid divisive positions: *it was about having a different voice and different people and personality behind it*.

Since 1918, 491 women have been elected as Members of the House of Commons.

The total number of women to have been elected to the House since 1918 has now surpassed the current number of men sitting in the House of Commons (442).

Women Members of Parliament: Background Paper, August 2018, House of Commons Library, Briefing Note

ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND LAWS

We consistently heard that those countries seen to be making the most progress on women’s representation are those that have galvanised their efforts to reform based on the levers within key international frameworks and laws. Two factors – convening women together, and agreeing to act globally on gender equality and the rights of women – are seen as critical, and have impacted to some extent on all countries that commit to global frameworks highlighting *the power of some of the international conventions and that there continue to be follow-up mechanisms.*

The three pivotal frameworks enshrining women’s rights in international law seen by participants as playing a key part in progressing women’s participation in power and politics: the [UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW, 1979) the [UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (1995), and the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs, 2015). For example, *after Beijing [Declaration] it was a different conversation.*

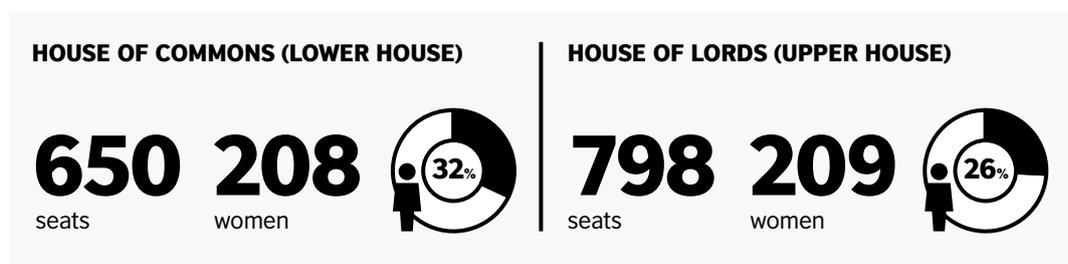
We heard that the countries using these commitments effectively are able to publish plans, allocate resources and have accountability mechanisms, and are additionally supported by working to regional mechanisms of accountability. We heard of strong regional practice in parts of Africa such as through the [African Union](#), as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean. Global frameworks are complemented by important regional mechanisms, such as the triennial Regional

Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean organised by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará) and its [follow-up mechanism](#) housed at the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) at the Organization of American States.

A participant highlighted that, *gender parity and ending violence against women in politics are key parts of the conversation, with regional commitments informing the creation of framework laws on these issues.* A number of international participants recognised the UK as a key international actor in the push for an evidence-based approach to gender equality in development agendas and in supporting countries in these commitments, as demonstrated in the Department for International Development (DfID) [Strategic Vision for Gender Equality: Her Potential, Our Future.](#)

Participants felt these frameworks had been used less effectively in the UK, although Scotland’s [National Performance Framework](#) has been designed to ensure alignment with the SDGs across all policy areas. In the UK and its nations, we heard frequently of a disconnect between its international commitments and action at home such as *we do a lot of talking and research and the rest of it, but making real meaningful change is more difficult.* There are signs of a potential shift to help close this implementation gap with increasing cross-government working on gender including ending violence against women and girls and Penny Mordaunt MP’s appointment as both Secretary of State for International Development and Minister for Women and Equalities.

UK REPRESENTATION BY GENDER



FINANCING OF POLITICS

Women told us about the financial barriers to a career in politics at every stage, including not having the same post-political career prospects as men. Finance is a barrier globally, while varying in type and extent, as demonstrated by the World Bank-commissioned research of [Women in Parliaments](#). Women participants of the Labour movement in the UK spoke of many women benefiting from trade union support while a candidate, and it is understood that WEP have instigated childcare payments for candidates, but at pre-selection stage it was agreed there are limited funds available for women's candidacy. Some women cited the closing of the [Access to Elected Office Fund](#) as severely restricting disabled women as candidates. In May 2018, Inclusion Scotland announced the re-opening of a [Scottish disabled candidate fund](#). Once in office, outside of national parliaments, [remuneration is highly varied and generally low](#). Women in the UK talked about the financial penalties of taking up leadership, *on the back bench* [councillor with no administration or opposition spokesperson position] *I had a full time job.*

Now I'm on the front bench [an administration position at local council] I earn less and have not worked so hard in my life.. And we heard of Byzantine regulations for childcare expenses that discourage women from claiming even limited amounts when electorates are critical of expensive politicians.

Internationally we heard that in some countries, like Pakistan, parliamentarians lack not only a salary that they can live on, but also paid staff or office space, and have to pay for these essentials out of pocket, [excluding all but the most wealthy](#). The impact of this was clear to one participant: *[women] need to run for elections on equal conditions, and presently they do so in very different ones. In general, they have no campaigning infrastructure, no assistants, minimal financial resources. Therefore people do not vote for them, as they cannot get to know them. Even with minimal infrastructure, they still manage to get 1,000, 2,000 votes. Imagine how far they would go under more equal campaign conditions. In Brazil, female candidates who count on the same level of financial resources as of their parties' male candidates, are usually elected with a significant number of votes.*

POWER OF GATHERING DATA

The IPU now lists 193 countries in the annual data table of Women in National Parliaments. Published for nearly 30 years, this continues to be seen as the key measure of women's political representation. This long-standing data gathering exercise demonstrates the power of data in raising awareness and effecting change for women's progress in political representation, as it allows levels of representation to be tracked and we heard from international participants that country representatives want to understand why they are ranked where they are and how they can progress higher up the table.

Internationally we heard the UK is viewed as a leader in the collection and analysis of data. Many participants, both in the UK and internationally, spoke passionately about the example of the UK requiring employers to publish their [gender pay gap](#) in 2018. We heard that the media coverage that followed the first round of published pay data showed that *people got the story*. There were suggestions that similar data-driven interventions to demonstrate the gap in women's political representation across the UK could be well

received. As a result there was overwhelming demand to see improvements in intersectional data gathering on women within the political system, and specifically the enacting of [Section 106 of the Equality Act](#) that requires parties to collect and publish data on candidate diversity, and the extension of this requirement to local elections: *I'm astounded that there is no requirement [enacted] to collect the data in political parties – youth parliaments do it.*

Demands for improvements in data on sex equality echo concerns highlighted in the UK's Shadow CEDAW report in 2018: '[The UK state report] is bereft of data, [reflecting a longstanding deficit in the systematic data collection required to monitor women's equality](#)'. This drive for improved data is replicated internationally; UN Women has undergone a four-year process to [define measures under the SDGs to measure women's local government representation](#). A global community of practice exists to explore and find solutions to the many data challenges around sex equality at [WikiGender](#).

TEMPORARY SPECIAL MEASURES – QUOTAS

From our participants, we heard overwhelming demands for legislated temporary special measures, i.e. legislated quotas, to deliver 50:50 parity in representation across parliaments and local government: *we need quotas, what gets measured gets done*. Those speaking in favour of quotas included those who are *not naturally in favour but feel the argument is compelling*, those speaking from experience of being elected on a quota: *I felt empowered and humiliated to get to this but I wanted to get to the table and it was reserved and women overcoming strong personal opposition: I realised nothing was changing structurally despite swathes of ridiculously over-accomplished intelligent women; change was not happening fast enough*. This call echoes the [Women 50:50](#) campaign, [Sex and Power](#) (2018), the UK Speaker's [Conference on Parliamentary Representation](#) (2010), [The Good Parliament](#) (2016) and the [Women in the House of Commons Inquiry](#) by the Women and Equalities Select Committee (2017).

The evidence is clear: the UK and others are outpaced by those countries using fast-track measures like legal sex quotas; Rwanda and Bolivia (ranked first and second in the IPU data table of women's representation in national parliaments) both have legislated candidate quotas while those countries without, including Scandinavian nations, stall at around [35–40 per cent representation](#). Some form of quota or combination of quota types – reserved seats, legal candidate quotas or voluntary party quotas – are in operation in over [half of the world's countries](#) and 21 of 54 [Commonwealth countries](#).

The support we heard for quotas could be seen to be at odds with mainstream media debates in the UK. And most participants felt that given the lack of political consensus on the issue, legislation in the UK is currently unlikely. Opposition in the UK is viewed as centred on the notions of undermining selection based on merit and the legitimacy of representatives elected through quotas, and is consistent with [public polling](#): *it would be perceived as enormous interference in the democratic process*.

While participants openly acknowledged the problems associated with poorly designed and executed quotas they expressed frustration that the operation of quota systems is not properly understood by many politicians or the public and that *[we] are still having to defend the quality of women coming into politics*. Research analysing nine of the most common myths about MPs elected in the UK on All Women Shortlists looked at comparative levels of experience and activity and found that: *quotas do not pose a threat to 'merit' at any stage of the political process and not only is there no loss of 'quality' associated with the use of gender quotas, but all women shortlists may in fact result in better candidates being selected*.

It was accepted that well-designed measures would need to be specific to UK contexts, and that to introduce legal quotas we would need to *look at other countries and translate*. Nor was it seen as an alternative to longer-term changes to parliaments, parties and politics. The key learnings based on international practice we heard from participants centred on the following themes:

Gain political leadership of public debate: Ireland's post-2008 economic crisis produced a critical focus on the Irish political system, and a discourse on political

reform that provided an opportunity to address women's representation. In 2012 Ireland legislated for 30 per cent women's representation quotas, rising to 40 per cent in 2023. Non-compliant parties [risked losing 50 per cent of their public funding](#). In 1996, New Zealand made a substantive change to the voting system away from first-past-the-post, with the simultaneous use of [party list system quotas](#). While significant changes to electoral systems are rare for a stable democracy, this demonstrates not only success of changing a system fundamentally – there has been a rise in representation of women Maori, Pasifika and Asian MPs – but also that public consent can be delivered for wholesale change if it is seen as improving representation.

Design for parity: we heard that *quota conversations are vibrant in Latin America*, where many governments legislated in the 1990s for 30 per cent representation but (like Bolivia) are now moving to [50 per cent women's representation](#). These moves aim to address an unintended effect of quotas creating a ceiling for women's representation, rather than a floor. Many countries using proportional representation systems are able to design in quotas that 'zipper' female and male candidates (where parties are mandated to alternate male and female candidates in a proportional representation system). Quotas can still be used in first past the post systems like that used in some UK elections, for example by twinning neighbouring constituencies so that party selection panels select one man and one woman, or the use of all women shortlists in half of all winnable seats.

Balance incentives and sanctions, and enforce compliance: quotas require incentives, sanctions and enforcement to be effective. In Timor Leste, parties achieving 30 per cent women on candidate lists gain [extra radio and television time](#). In 2012 [Algeria](#) became the only Arab state to have more than 30 per cent women MPs by rejecting any party lists that failed to fill a minimum number of women calculated against the size of constituencies. In France a 50:50 parity law introduced in 2000 resulted in only a modest increase of women to 38.6 per cent in the national parliament, with some actual decreases at regional and local level. The impact of the law is considered to have been limited because of the lack of effective incentives or sanctions for getting women in winnable seats, some later contradictory electoral reforms, and the strategic formation of new temporary parties deliberately [to avoid the parity law](#).

Put support in place: Support is required from pre-selection through to post-political career, to *bolster legitimacy and skills, and address the under-resourcing of women politicians compared to men*. Critics of quota systems cite the risk of electing women with little political experience, and who might be controlled by family, dynastic, party or community forces. Women in Bangladesh have been disparagingly dismissed as 'quota queens', yet an international participant felt evidence identified they are less well resourced than their male counterparts.¹⁰ In Mexico there is a successful requirement for a percentage of public finance to be spent on [training for women candidates](#). Participants supported training and education for selection panels and party members on gender equality and unconscious bias, to shift ideas about *how parties form norms about what is a good candidate*.

¹⁰ Panday, PK (2008) Representation without participation: Quotas for women in Bangladesh. *International Political Science Review* 29/4 pages 489–512, 502–503, 507 and 508.

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women MPs were elected during the 2017 General Election – a record high and 32 per cent of all MPs. This is up from 191 in the 2015 election and the highest proportion of any UK election to date.

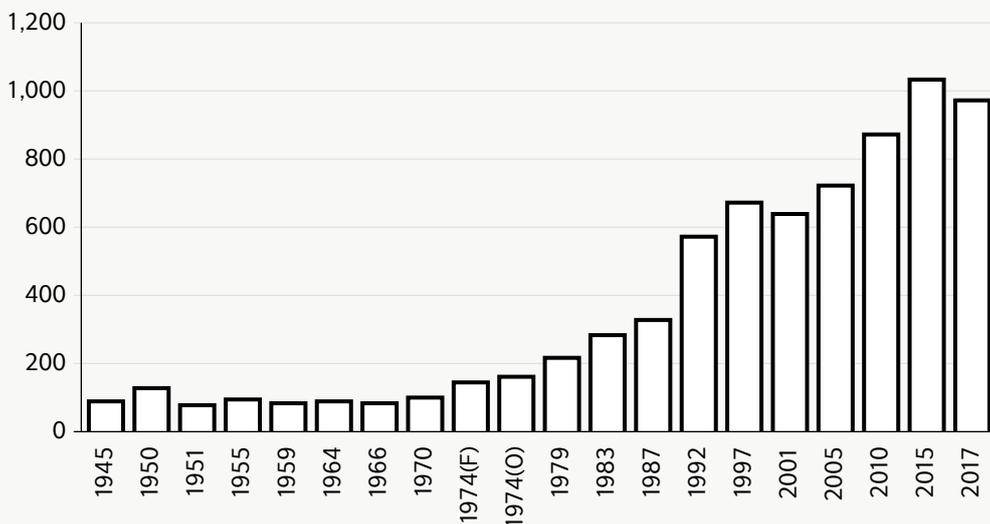
Women in Parliament and Government, House of Commons Library

DEVOLVED LEGISLATURES – WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT



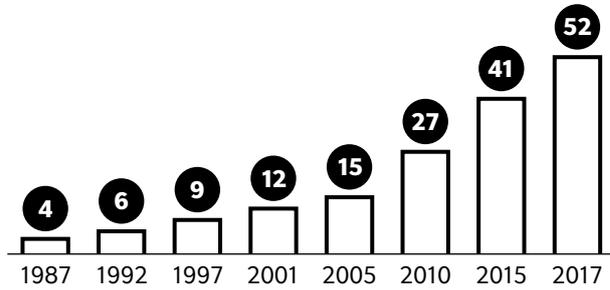
Women in Parliament and Government, House of Commons Library

NUMBER OF WOMEN CANDIDATES AT UK GENERAL ELECTIONS



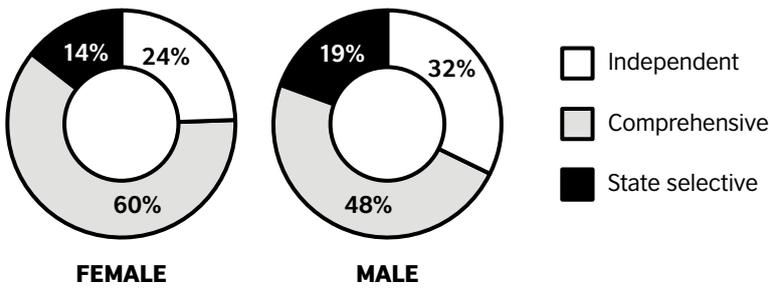
Women in Parliament and Government, House of Commons Library

BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC MPs ELECTED AT GENERAL ELECTION (1987-2017)



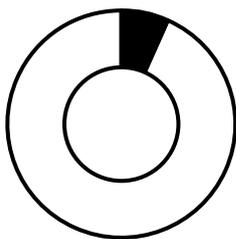
Ethnic Minorities in Politics and Public Life

MPs' SCHOOL BACKGROUNDS BY GENDER



Parliamentary Privilege – The MPs in 2017, Research Brief, The Sutton Trust

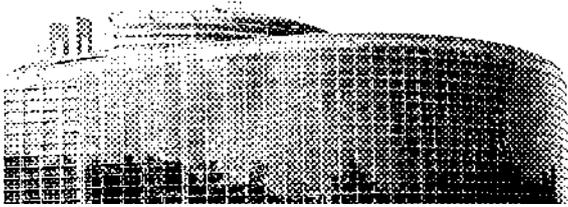
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL OR TRANSGENDER



45 out of 650 MPs openly define themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)

BBC News





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Following the 2014 European Parliament elections, 41 per cent of UK MEPs were women.

Women in Parliament and Government, House of Commons Library

REGIONAL MECHANISMS FOR WOMEN: THE EUROPEAN UNION

In Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in particular we heard of the historic importance of the role of the [European Union](#) in pushing for progress. Equality between women and men is one of the founding principles of the European Union. Legislation, case law and changes to Treaties have given many rights to women in the UK, the EU pursues a [‘twin-track approach to gender equality in development cooperation: gender mainstreaming and gender specific actions in a number of areas’](#) and has a comprehensive EU [Gender Action Plan](#). The ‘no regression’ obligation on member states means that equality rights, once gained, [cannot be rolled back](#). Where the EU member states negotiate as a bloc in the UN, its focus on women’s rights means adding considerable weight globally to the agenda for women’s equal participation.

What Europe has done for Wales. The EU that has been supporting different women’s facilities, as well as supporting women’s rights in terms of maternity leave, means that Europe was important to women. It is a link that Northern Ireland participants are keen to maintain: we need to batten down links we have within the EU, e.g. the Women’s Lobby, we still need a voice at that level, need to hear what is happening.

There is acknowledgement that following [the vote by the UK to leave the European Union](#), equality is not

being prioritised within the process: *the EU referendum felt like a debate between men* and there is a continued lack of women around the table as part of the [core negotiating team](#). Despite research by academics and policy specialists forecasting the detrimental impact for women since 2016, such as the March 2018 independent report of [Women’s Budget Group and Fawcett](#), there remains concern that there is no meaningful discussion at governmental level on the impact on women of Brexit and there is no evidence of an equality impact assessment on any aspect: *if there was no Women’s Budget Group we wouldn’t know how Brexit was impacting on women.*

The loss of a regional mechanism was seen as a risk for women’s rights in the UK: *Brexit is very dangerous, we will be left behind when we look at other jurisdictions in a context of moves to deregulate and slash red tape.* Participants called for the existing equality and human rights protections to be secured with urgency, the risk of protections not being binding in UK law or removed was highlighted by the EHRC in response to the 2018 [government submission to CEDAW](#). Some participants suggested that the UK use this opportunity to take inspiration from those countries that have used a Bill of Rights with constitutional force to secure human rights outside of the control of politicians.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (35.2 PER CENT WOMEN)

COUNTRY	SEATS	WOMEN	%
Finland	13	8	61.5
United Kingdom	72	24	33.3
Austria	17	7	41.2
Malta	5	0	0

Women in regional parliamentary assemblies. The countries above have been selected to show the range of women’s representation in the European Parliament.

SHIFTING A SYSTEM: IN CANADA AND WALES

Participants frequently spoke of the need for system-change to be delivered for women's progress in power and politics to be embedded within democracies. Two examples of political and governance systems working in this way were frequently cited, and are therefore helpful to share. These were Canada, a representative democracy with a federal system of parliamentary democracy and Wales, a devolved administration, within the UK.

In 2018 Canada also recognises the centenary of some women achieving the right to vote, indigenous women having only been free to vote since the 1960s. While currently ranking 19 places below the UK in [international rankings](#) for women's representation, many participants saw the changes in policy and practice as exciting: *gender has become a mainstream part of their agenda*. Common roots in the anglosphere, similarity of electoral system, the translation of lessons from Nordic countries, particularly Sweden, and strong grounding within legal human rights frameworks were all cited as key factors in looking to Canada. [Canada was one of the first countries to ratify CEDAW](#), establishing a Minister for Women in 1971 and the [Status of Women](#) Canada government agency in 1976.

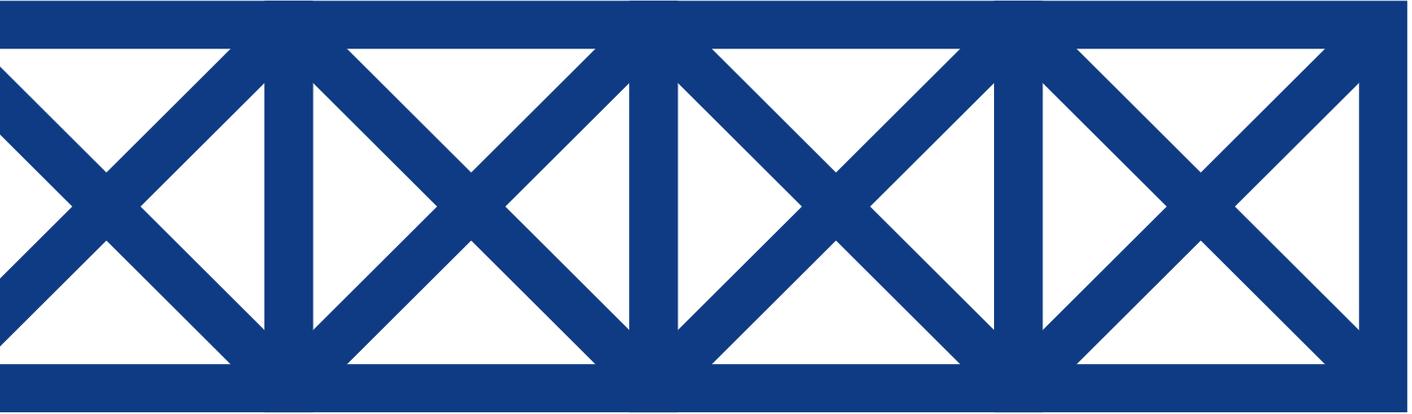
Justin Trudeau's announcement of the first gender-balanced cabinet in Canada because 'it's 2015', has been recognised as a landmark in leadership on [women's parity in power and politics](#). This visible statement is underpinned by a systemic approach to *hard-wire gender in* to political decision-making. Key features are the adoption of feminist international assistance policy [#HerVoiceHerChoice](#) in 2017 and Canada's approach to gender budget analysis. These structural changes are facilitating [a shifting culture and modern leadership styles](#), with civil servants openly discussing 'how meetings are conducted; avoiding "mansplaining" and "manterruption"; tackling unconscious bias – that more subtle and nuanced stuff.' The government has blocked a private member's bill to introduce quotas but there is continued action to create parity of women's representation, visible within reforms to the independent appointment of Senators in 2016 specifically requiring reflection of Canada's diversity, and epitomised by [recent appointments](#); investment in Equal Voice to create innovative actions such as [Daughters of the Vote](#), supporting girls and women into politics, including a focus on indigenous women; and the [Women's Community Fund](#) investing in the *full participation of women in the economic, social and democratic life of Canada*.

In 2003 the Welsh Assembly (Senedd) overtook the Swedish parliament and became the first legislative body in the world with equal numbers of men and

women. In its second set of elections, Labour returned 19 women and 11 men, the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru both returned 50 per cent women and Conservative Assembly members went from zero to two women out of 11 members. The moment made waves worldwide for the [speed and scale of the shift](#). With only four of 40 Welsh MPs in the UK Parliament being women in 1997, there was considered to be a significant democratic deficit and implementing the twinning of constituencies and reserved places for women at the top of lists for the Welsh Assembly were attributed *to women* [politicians and in civil society] *having made demands before the devolution settlement*, for a [unique statutory equality duty in the Act that founded the Assembly](#). In 2003 this was seen by some as vindication that such temporary measures could achieve quick change, 'The pendulum has swung. We now have very confident role models who have encouraged more women to come forward' ([Rhodri Morgan, Welsh first secretary, 2000–09](#).)

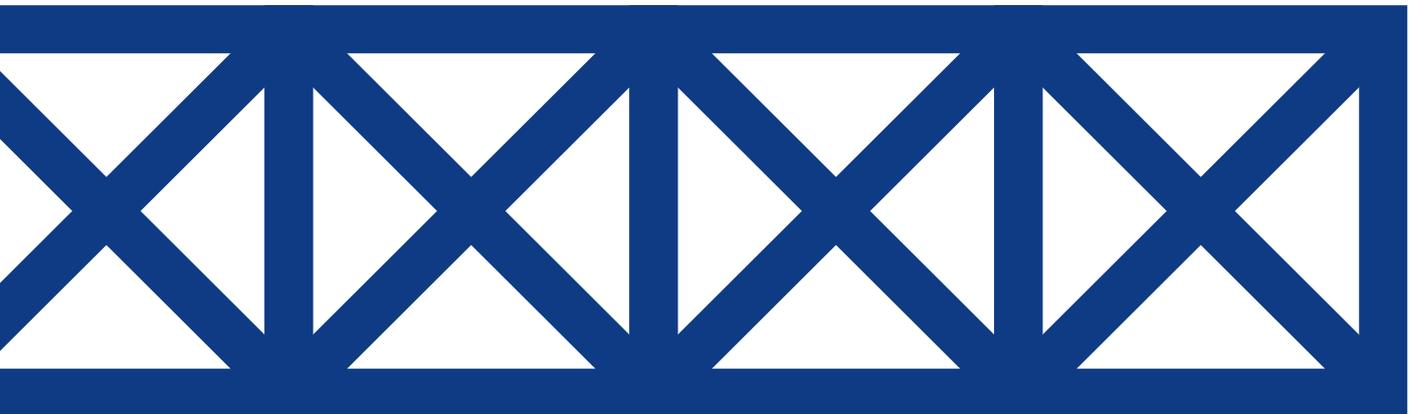
The Assembly has a widespread reputation as a representative institution. Participants cited the plaudits it has received for being a family-friendly, LGBT-friendly and disability-friendly place to work and the strong positioning of women in leadership roles. But in 2016 the Electoral Reform Society Cymru (Wales) identified a high risk of decline in women's representation at the Assembly; women were identified as more likely to be defending battlefield constituencies, with men overwhelmingly occupying [safe seats](#).

Following the 2016 Assembly election Wales remained the most representative of the devolved legislatures but women made up only [41.7 per cent of Members](#). Professor Laura McAllister identified the 'incumbency overhang' as slowing the pace of change; this term was coined to describe the situation where early positive action created a group of women elected in the first two Assembly elections of 1999 or 2003 who stood a greater chance of re-selection and re-election subsequently, but that subsequent 'shying away' from positive measures to promote women by both Labour and Plaid Cymru resulted in [men beginning to replace women in disproportionate numbers](#). Combining this with the retirement of women initially elected in 1999 and 2003, 'creates a new incumbency overhang which works in favour of men, and challenges further drives towards gender equality', much as it does in Westminster. To deliver sustained change we heard calls for *an electoral plan for moving women forward – it is a matter of giving wholehearted priority to these issues*.



Doing more of the business in office hours makes the institution seem more like a serious place of work, and less like a gentleman's drinking club.

JO SWINSON, MP, UK PARLIAMENT¹¹



¹¹ Swinson J, *Equal Power* 2018, page 47.

THE POLITICAL WORKPLACE

Considerable progress has been made in the UK in the conditions for women within the political workplace in both the national and local legislatures. But participants suggested that achieving a cultural change has taken longer, that patriarchal ways remain ingrained in the fabric of political institutions in the UK, and so it has at times felt like *two steps forward and one step back*.

This view is supported by research showing that women in parliament are still often treated as interlopers; like ‘unwanted trespassers’, who do not belong in a place so are treated with hostility. As a result many women focus on ‘[developing authority through continual proof of worthiness](#)’ and placing themselves ‘beyond reproach’.

Participants shared a sense of urgency, advocating for a range of proactive and bold steps to address deeply rooted power structures and patterns of *how things are done around here*. The demand is for a whole-system approach to create gender-sensitive parliaments and political institutions, defined by the IPU as ‘one whose structures, operations, methods and work respond to [the needs and interests of both men and women](#)’.

The key themes that had resonance across the political institutions in the UK were changing attitudes and norms in the workplace; building collective will; seizing opportunities to design women in; changing the narrative; and sexism and abuse. The examples we heard about and have covered in more depth are: addressing sexual harassment in the workplace; new political settlements and aspirations; making a good parliament: the House of Commons cross-party reference group; and local government.

CHANGING ATTITUDES AND NORMS IN THE WORKPLACE

Positive changes within political institutions are linked to the broader shift witnessed over the last 100 years in workplaces adapting to the growing numbers of women in work and the changing role of women in society: *parliaments are a microcosm of wider society, more gender-sensitive parliaments tend to reflect a more gender-balanced society*.

Many practical changes have enabled women’s participation in the political workplace. This

includes the basic provision of women’s toilets. A number of changes to make workplaces more parent-friendly are in place, and are necessary as there is an identified motherhood gap amongst UK parliamentarians, i.e., [mothers are significantly under-represented](#) in the House of Commons. For example, the Scottish Parliament has provided free childcare for Members and their visitors since it opened, the UK Parliament now offers a [nursery](#) covering both day and evening sessions; some local councils offer breastfeeding facilities, have reviewed their hours of legislative business, and treat some [childcare costs](#) as allowable expenses. In 2018 there have been moves to introduce formalised ‘[baby leave](#)’ for members of the UK Parliament. Despite positive moves we heard of the need for greater progress and consistency and some participants felt that political institutions should comply more transparently with the rules and standards deemed normal in workplaces across the public and private sector and that more could be done to learn from other sectors.

BUILDING COLLECTIVE WILL

Participants recognised that accelerated and sustained progress will not happen unless there is strong political will, institutional ownership and collective responsibility for driving the change. This requires a *wholesale adoption* of more progressive workplace practices in all national and local institutions. Participants stressed the need for parties, leaders, elected members, officers, to all play a role – calling out poor behaviour; trialling new ways of working; working cross-party, cross-sector and cross-borders. We were told this must include sharing learning with academics, activists, business, communities: *we can’t tackle this as a standalone issue. We have to ask the question ‘how does this council or country want to be?’ We need to implement whole system, cultural change. This relies on us all committing to live and breathe the changes we want to see, in deeds not words!*



In 2013 some 45 per cent of female MPs did not have children compared to only 28 per cent of male MPs.

SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES TO DESIGN WOMEN IN

We heard about the importance of using windows of opportunity to design more inclusive infrastructure and culture and improve performance on sex equality; that any point of change represents a chance to redesign around women. Members of the UK's national legislatures shared with us how *the process of devolution has offered important opportunities for parliaments to innovate and graft new ideas onto strong Westminster traditions*, the opportunity for change being seized for deliberate design. Similar opportunities in moves to devolve power to the London Assembly and more recently the city regions in the UK were considered to have been seized to differing extents.

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

Changes to workplace culture and practice in political institutions are seen by participants to be *better for everyone*; helping more politicians to work well; supporting greater, more inclusive representation; and improved democracy. Participants felt that change requires the media, and everyone working in the political arena to be advocates for the wider benefits: *for example, more flexibility, parent-friendly hours and options for part-time working would benefit both men and women*. A move for the UK Parliament to work during normal business hours, rather than late into the night as it traditionally has, was seen as beneficial not just to women but also to fathers, people with disabilities and those with caring responsibilities, and to enable more representatives to stay connected with the communities they represent.

SEXISM AND ABUSE

We heard from participants that there is a pressing need to end the *nasties* in politics. Participants acknowledged the presence of everyday sexism across all levels of politics, and a lack of respect for women. Some described how a generally aggressive culture is baked into *its* [UK Parliament] *adversarial design, structures and conventions*. The [2010 Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation](#) referred to similar concerns received: 'The perception of parliamentary culture as aggressive was frequently cited as a barrier to participation in the written evidence we received, on our online forum and in our discussions around the country'. [Fawcett](#) has found that 'almost four in ten women councillors have had sexist remarks directed at them by other councillors' and 'evidence of a macho, combative culture in many council chambers'. This is seen as 'symptomatic of a patriarchal culture' that has long sought to protect the men it serves.

☒ DIVERSITY OF WOMEN COUNCILLORS

AGE

Councillors aged between 65 and 74

35%

DISABILITY

Councillors who said they had a disability or long-term health condition

19% female

22% male

ETHNICITY

Councillors who identified as BAME

5.5% female

3.8% male

Does Local Government Work for Women?
The Fawcett Society



ADDRESSING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

In November 2017, after a spate of allegations concerning sexual misconduct and a culture of bullying in Westminster, UK Prime Minister Theresa May ordered a review into how such behaviour could be better prevented and sanctioned. A subsequent [report](#) by the cross-party working group of parliamentarians revealed that one in five people working in the UK Parliament had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment over the previous year, with women reporting twice as much sexual harassment as men. A separate survey conducted by the [Young Women's Trust](#) found that 51 per cent of female MPs and 17 per cent of male MPs in Westminster were personally aware of sexual harassment happening in parliament.

Other governments and political parties, across the UK and internationally, have also been coming to terms with the scale of the problem. A [survey by the IPU](#) has found that 65 per cent of women parliamentarians across the world had been repeatedly subjected to humiliating sexual remarks and 21 per cent had been subjected to some form of sexual violence. In March 2018, UN officials, diplomats, and experts from civil society took up the subject of [how to combat sexual harassment at the UN](#), in recognition that no political institution is immune and that leadership is needed from the top.

Following the Working Group recommendations the [UK Parliament Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy Steering Group](#) implemented a programme of reform considering: the adoption of a new strong standalone sexual harassment policy; an independent

procedure for report, support and complaints including specialist sexual violence advice; a new behaviour code for everyone in Parliament and the strengthening of measures to promote confidentiality and prevent victimisation. The programme and a new [Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy](#) were voted through in July 2018. Participants we heard from welcomed the approach and recommendations of the Working Group, including the active and visible leadership of women, the broad membership of the group, its commitment to the development of specialist policy and to a zero tolerance culture. Participants were keen to see wholesale changes to address sexual harassment across all political institutions and in public life more broadly, including by local councils.

This work is seen to represent a groundbreaking acknowledgement that the culture of parliaments can be covertly hostile specifically to women through sexual harassment, and is a model of how this can be addressed to dismantle one of the most powerful barriers to women's participation in politics. The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom MP, Leader of the House of Commons, who chaired the [cross-party report](#), said 'the new independent procedure will demonstrate that we want to be the best parliament in the world when it comes to treating everyone who works here with dignity and respect. This is a major step in bringing about the culture change that Parliament needs.' We heard that UK parliamentarians have already shared learning with Canada, led by the Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee.

NEW POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS AND ASPIRATIONS

When some women gained the vote in 1918, it was part of a broader change to the political settlement as the [Representation of the People Act](#) also enfranchised five million working class men. This pattern of making gains for women within broader shifts to the political makeup of a nation was identified by participants as a repeated theme. For example, formerly colonised nations extended the franchise to women within constitutional reform that came with independence, such as Pakistan. There, women were granted suffrage in 1947, votes in national elections were reaffirmed in the 1956 interim constitution, and [quotas are still in use today](#). But others did not take this opportunity to design-in women's equality, for example, with Samoan independence in 1962 only matais (or male chiefs) were granted voting rights and universal suffrage was not introduced until 1991 but we heard that they have subsequently developed a [quota model](#) that may be helpful to other countries in the region.

We heard that the creation of new political institutions in the UK has presented a huge opportunity for change because there is *no status quo to overcome*; without a built-in male majority, it was easier to push for inclusion from the beginning. Contributors cited the establishment of national legislatures for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales as critical moments in the UK where women politicians and pressure from civil

society organisations gained access to the negotiations and kick-started women's equal political participation. In Scotland we heard similarly that women mobilised to change the debate around ambitions for independence during the independence referendum of 2014: *the independence referendum was critiqued quite heavily early on but then we saw the rise of grassroots activists, saw women shift from small p politics to big p politics.*

Yet we also heard the disappointment of women in England that during [devolution](#) of powers to city-region level in recent years they did not see any discernible action to design in equality for women from the start. The negotiations, candidate selection, and subsequent election of men in all six 'Metro Mayor' roles attracted considerable criticism for the [lack of diversity at the table](#) and for being the result of decisions made by men behind closed doors. Women and men subsequently mobilised to demand greater women's voice and attention to diversity within decision-making at a city region level, witnessed in the rise of [#DivaManc](#), [West Midlands Women's Voice](#) and [Northern Power Women](#), specifically creating coalitions of women politicians, activists and business women and their supporters to ensure the chance to design for diversity *is not missed*.

**MAKING A GOOD PARLIAMENT:
HOUSE OF COMMONS CROSS-PARTY REFERENCE GROUP**

We may like to think of ourselves as the mother of all parliaments but... there is so much that we at Westminster could and should learn from other legislatures internationally and indeed from the devolved parliaments and assemblies that have emerged from within the UK itself ... There is much about our House of Commons that I am very proud of, there is also a substantial inheritance that we would not choose to create if we were to start from scratch...

The Rt Hon. John Bercow MP,
Speaker of the House of Commons

The Rt Hon. John Bercow MP has convened the [Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion](#) taking forward the recommendations of the independent [Good Parliament report](#), authored by Professor Sarah Childs, to make the UK Parliament truly representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective in all its functions. This work is seizing two windows of opportunity – the centenary of the Representation of the People Act and the

[Restoration and Renewal programme](#) for the Palace of Westminster – to drive parliamentary reform and to design for greater diversity.

Participants welcomed reform, with one describing Westminster as *very much behind the curve rather than ahead of it with outdated ways of working that normalise masculine norms and sexism that is very difficult to shift* and another saying *[there are] lots of reasons why Parliament still doesn't work well for women*. The Good Parliament is a model of international good practice building on the work of the IPU on Gender Sensitive Parliaments. Forty-two recommendations act as a blueprint for a more inclusive workplace: a concord on unacceptable and unprofessional behaviour in the House and improved sanctions against those who break the rules; a 'house statement' on maternity, paternity, parental, adoption and caring leave; an updated dress code; trialling new and more inclusive layouts and social spaces and changes to timetabling, sittings and voting to increase predictability, flexibility, and normal business hours; and initiating a gender sensitive parliament audit in autumn 2018.

NUMBER OF WOMEN COUNCIL LEADERS

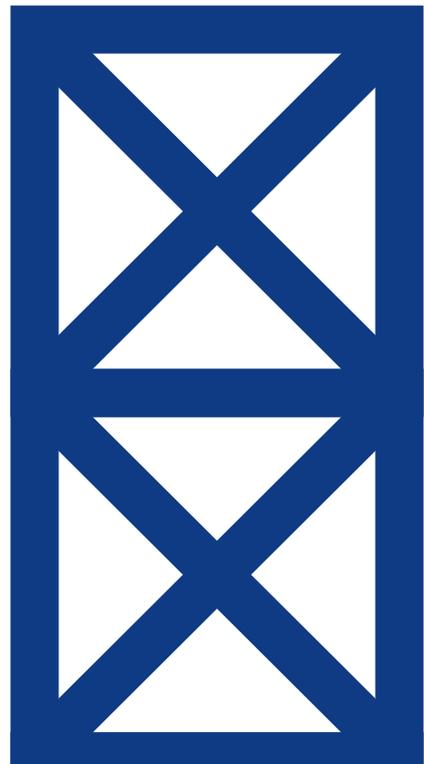


Fewer than 1 in 5 council leaders are women.

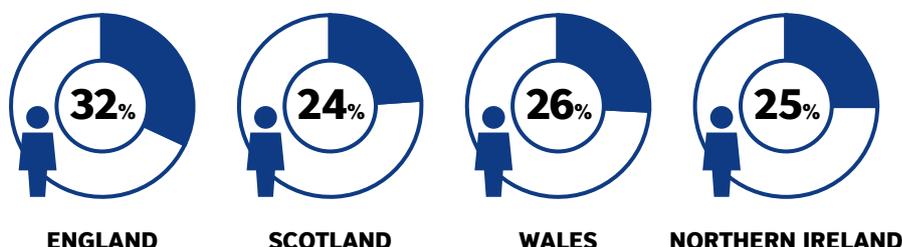


6 in 7 of the council cabinet jobs that lead to the top go to men.

*Does Local Government Work for Women?
The Fawcett Society*



NUMBER OF WOMEN COUNCILLORS



Women in Parliament and Government
LGA, National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013
Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), Local Government Elections 2012
Electoral Reform Society, Spotlight on Wales: Women and local government
NISRA, Women in Northern Ireland 2015

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

There is now a shared cross-party ambition to equalise numbers but there's a lack of agreement on how. There has been improvement in some councils and some parties but progress has stalled with the overall proportion of women councillors stuck at around the 30 per cent mark.

Sarah Pickup, Deputy Chief Executive,
Local Government Association

Progress for women in the 418 principal councils making up local government in the UK reflects the international trend, with women's representation more limited than at national parliament level, giving an overall deficit of 3,028 [women councillors](#). Globally we heard high numbers of women operate at the *foundational level of political functions* in formal or informal roles as leaders working to *make a difference for their community*. In doing so women develop many of the skills needed for public office.

We heard local government *should be a natural choice* for women in politics and a good stepping stone to national representation. The importance of building capacity with women at a local level in politics was highlighted in work in Iraq, Yemen, Palestine and Syria by the [Westminster Foundation for Democracy](#) and others. There are many examples of women in local government making a difference to the lives of their local communities; on panchayats (local councils) in India the number of drinking water projects in areas with women-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with men-led councils and in [Norway](#), a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found.

Yet, participants highlighted a continued recruitment and retention issue. Women's representation is flatlining [as few women progress through the local government pipeline](#) and those who do only stay a short time. The Commonwealth Women in Local Government network highlighted this as *a big challenge for political parties wanting to be representative, leaving an untapped pool of women politicians that parties are failing to reach out to*. One participant highlighted the additional inter-community barriers to some BME women in the UK engaging in local politics in those communities with strong influence of the 'biradari

system' from Pakistan, described as a kinship based system used to preserve culture and deference to community elders who are most likely men through allegiance to the 'clan'. This system amongst some Asian communities can be used to push [Muslim women](#) candidates out of politics.

The Fawcett Society and Local Government Information Unit convened a [Local Government Commission for England](#) in 2017. The Commission looked to explain the gap in women's representation due to the lack of operational and cultural changes and wide variance of practice limiting how local government works for women. While some councils in the UK choose to give maternity pay, hold meetings at more family friendly times and take tough action against abusive and sexist behaviour, the majority do not. The Commission concluded that 'an outdated culture ... holds local government back – and which now must modernise to be fit for purpose in the 21st century.' Alongside [IPPR](#) research comparing Germany and the UK, the Commission called for wholesale moves to provide maternity, paternity and parental leave entitlements; address carers' allowance and childcare expenses; review meeting times; clarify and enforce codes of conduct to stamp out discriminatory and abusive behaviour and utilise technology to support inclusion. [Stockport](#) is one of a number of councils to have passed a motion in support of the Commission's recommendations and committing to actions.

Despite a strong case for urgent reform to engage more women locally in decision-making, we also heard that local government is *subject to other winds of change, which makes conversations very challenging*, such as the impacts of national funding cuts. Nor is change solely within the gift of individual councils as some legislative change is required, for example legalising remote attendance at council meetings. There was agreement that ending the wide variation of local practice would have significant benefits. In Scotland we heard there is a live [Local Governance Review](#) and it was suggested that *the IPU gender sensitive parliament checklist could be adapted to local government; the weight of an international framework is helpful*.

Having women in the most important room in 10 Downing Street has made an enormous difference. Overwhelmingly the inspiration for women in my party anyway, is seeing women doing the job... 'She can do it. She's there, I can do it.' Margaret Thatcher made politics relevant to me, not men in grey suits.

**MARIA MILLER MP, UK PARLIAMENT;
CHAIR, HOUSE OF COMMONS WOMEN AND EQUALITIES SELECT COMMITTEE**

LEADERSHIP

The UK has over the last 100 years had two women Prime Ministers, and a growing number of women in political leadership roles. At the time of writing, women are leading, or co-leading, half of the political parties represented in the UK Parliament and/or devolved administrations, and women hold the positions of First Minister in Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as UK Prime Minister. While this presents a dramatic change, participants suggested that changes to the way women leaders are treated and perceived have been much slower. The route to the top is much harder for women facing multiple intersectional barriers such as class, race, faith, disability and sexuality.

The themes that emerged in discussion of the key enablers, barriers and opportunities for learning on leadership to progress women's participation in politics were: role models and sponsors; normalising leadership; the media; the status quo; and different leadership styles. There was a desire to explore in more depth examples around: women at the top; diversity and acceptable difference; male champions of change; and leadership in political instability and peace building.

ROLE MODELS AND SPONSORS

Participants told us role models matter: *you can't be what you can't see*. We were told that having a woman in Number 10, as Prime Minister of the UK, makes an enormous difference to the ambitions of all girls and women and many Conservative women in particular cite Margaret Thatcher as an *overwhelming inspiration for coming into politics*. According to women politicians, *having more women at the top in really important positions matters – it sends a massive signal to society and to women*.

The women politicians we spoke to saw encouraging other women to lead as *part of our job* and spoke of their own important experiences of being mentored by other women.

We heard passionate calls for women to hold themselves more accountable for *sending the ladder down*. There was the suggestion that the practice of 'sponsoring', more commonly used in the US, where a sponsor undertakes a proactive role: connecting to people of influence, actively championing, promoting and even fundraising for a candidate could be adopted more widely by women in the UK.

Yet we also heard that women who have been leaders need to be remembered more visibly to be able to offer them as role models: *Barbara Castle was a major player – but she was northern, outspoken and has disappeared* [from popular history]. Similar criticism was raised this year by some that [Mo Mowlam's](#) contribution to the Good Friday peace agreement in Northern Ireland was not fully recognised in the 20th anniversary celebrations. Important actions in addressing this invisibility are evident. The UK Parliament is committed to showing more images of women MPs and the diverse membership of MPs by [commissioning new artwork](#) and abolishing the 'ten years dead' rule, whereby only Members who have been dead for at least a decade are represented in the artworks. And 2018 has seen the result of successful campaigns for a statue of suffrage campaigner [Millicent Fawcett](#) to join the 11 male statues outside the UK Parliament and of suffragette [Emmeline Pankhurst](#) in Manchester. Fundraising continues for a statue of [Annie Kenney](#), working class suffragette, in Oldham.



Currently a woman holds the post of president or prime minister in 16 countries. This is nine per cent of the 193 countries who are currently members of the United Nations.

Women in Parliament and Government, House of Commons Library





You see ‘success’ when you see the normalisation of women in positions of power. We may not have seen [that normalisation] anywhere yet, but we seem to be working towards it in some countries, perhaps in the UK. Having had a woman prime minister for over a decade, you could potentially argue that there is a cultural acceptance of women in positions of power.

DR SONIA PALMEIRI, CONSULTANT IN GENDER AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, AUTHOR OF IPU GENDER SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS REPORT

NORMALISING LEADERSHIP

Despite a growing number of women in the top positions most participants felt that there is still a long way to go to normalise women’s political leadership in the UK and globally: *you get one woman at the top and people think ‘job’s done’ but we’ve still a long way to go to level the playing field.* They pointed to the UK never having had a woman Chancellor of the Exchequer (Minister of Finance), the lack of wider representation of ethnicity and class in the top jobs, an enduring demand for a certain leadership style from women and the continuing trend for women to hold so-called ‘soft’ issue portfolios. Annually the IPU and UN map women’s global role as governmental ministers, and have consistently tracked a tendency for women to hold ‘soft’ issue portfolios focused on [Family/Children/Youth/Elderly/Disabled](#).

There were mixed views on the progress made across women’s leadership more broadly and how that supports the normalisation of women’s political leadership. It was suggested that people were more likely to view it as normal to have a female MP, for example, if there were women in other prominent positions locally: *very fortunate in our area that our Chief Constable is a woman, one of four out of 44 in the country, the head of the local hospital is a woman; I have tried to gather key women together.* Some suggested that changes in politics reflect a *shift in business with more females in board positions, as non-executive directors and looking for roles as trustees than ever before* and suggested that the sectors had lots to learn from each other in addressing bias and normalising women’s leadership. Women also shared continuing concerns about the risks of tokenism – whether real or perceived – in taking up positions on committees and public platforms.

THE MEDIA

The public expects political representatives to be far more visible in public life than they did 100 years ago. Their competence is likely to be judged by what people see and hear in the mainstream media and in social media, encouraging personality politics.¹² There is repeated evidence of the continued gender bias in how women political leaders are portrayed in the media, the more limited media coverage received and the impact this has on public perception of their ability to lead and to [hold the government or others to account](#). Some [elements of the media](#) continue to consider it appropriate to ask women politicians about their fertility, their sexual attractiveness and their dress size rather than the serious issues they are discussing. While the historical dominance of male journalists and political editors has shifted a little in recent years the reporting and commentating on British politics remains overwhelmingly male. The [Good Parliament](#) report recommends steps to ensure a representative parliamentary press gallery.

THE STATUS QUO

Even when women make it to the top table that isn’t a guarantee of real power and agency, we heard that *the ability of men behind the scenes to get their own way on these things is never ending.* Most political leaders rely on the exercising of soft power, i.e. the ability to attract, persuade and co-opt, to get things done, making it all the more important that women leaders build a network and visibility. Stories were shared of the various unwritten conventions and the political manoeuvring of the ‘boys’ network’ that continues to shut women leaders out, consciously or not. Harriet Harman MP has described for example, the importance of where a minister is seated at the Cabinet table, and how the act of upholding or breaking with that convention is used to maintain the status quo.¹³ And we heard that *normalisation of women’s presence doesn’t just come from having women in positions of power, it comes from men working with them and accepting their authority.*

Yet we also heard discussion of the ways women have *carved out* powerful roles within politics, often holding governments and public bodies to account in important ways from both within the party of government and opposition. Referring specifically to UK government, participants shared the examples of: Margaret Hodge MP who as chair of the Public Accounts Committee garnered great political and media attention for her role; the work of Maria Miller MP in striving for equality through the Women and Equalities Select Committee; and Dr Sarah Wollaston MP bringing her professional expertise to the chair of the Health and Social Care Committee.

¹² Phillips J, *Everywoman: One Woman’s Truth about Speaking the Truth*, 2017, p73.

¹³ Harman H, *A Woman’s Work*, 2017, p281.



And in my experience, women often bring a different approach to politics than do men. For women, politics can be as much about listening and learning from others as it is about broadcasting your own views and opinions. And that is all to the good. Because when there isn't just one way of doing things or one perspective on an issue, our understanding is enriched and we can achieve better outcomes.

RT HON. THERESA MAY MP, UK PRIME MINISTER

DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP STYLES

Many participants spoke of the different ways of working and leading that many women bring to politics. For example, some identified that women politicians can play a critical role in strengthening the representative relationship with an ability to mobilise people from the *bottom up, top down and middle out*, holding a more representative and accountable relationship as an elected representative within a critical network. There was a suggestion that a shift of emphasis from a top down, hierarchical leadership style towards a less directive and more collegiate style, creating space for dialogue, is happening and is reflective of an increase in women in politics bringing with them a different approach. This was viewed as a positive change in tone and reflective of a shift across other sectors in how power is exercised. Some participants were keen to see more opportunities for women leaders in politics to work with women in other sectors, including business, to share learning in recognition that *women are all facing the same challenges*. In the same vein, research on [The 21st Century Councillor](#) describes political leaders who are facilitators, connectors, and orchestrators.

WOMEN AT THE TOP

Margaret Thatcher was an outlier when she became the UK's first woman Prime Minister in 1979, as one of only 19 women MPs joining a very small list of women leaders globally, but today women are increasingly evident in the 'top job(s)'. Theresa May, UK Prime Minister, currently holds a place in a growing line of [women leaders internationally](#): from 1960, a total of 32 women became presidents and 41 became prime ministers around the world and 70 countries have had some form of female political leadership (elected, appointed, interim or other). This list includes Indira Gandhi as the first and, only woman Prime Minister of India in 1966; Benazir Bhutto, elected in 1988 as Prime Minister in Pakistan; and Sheikh Hasina and rival Khaleda Zia who together served 23 years leading Bangladesh from 1992. Both Ireland and Iceland recorded 20 years or more of women's leadership over the last half century.

Yet most of the world's countries have never had a woman leader and, unlike Margaret Thatcher, women leaders rarely stay in the top positions for a long time. In 2017 only [18.3 per cent of government ministers globally were women](#). We heard that at the *summit of the Americas recently there were no women presidents or prime ministers and that really stood out*. [Evidence](#) also suggests that there is 'no systematic relationship whereby a country had a woman national leader as the result of a certain representation of women in parliament, or that a top woman leader automatically led to an increase in the number of women MPs... there was no automatic 'trickle up' or 'trickle down' between the national leader and parliament'. Getting a woman to the top does not necessarily lead to improvements in women's representation more broadly or vice versa. One reason given for this was that historically women in leadership positions have had to work in isolation in male dominated environments and not been able to deliver this.



A key change we need to see is more women at the top, in really important positions, whether US President or [UN] Secretary-General. It matters and sends a massive signal to society as a whole and to women as individuals. We need more women in real positions, prominent, visible positions of power.

**LU ECCLESTONE, SENIOR GOVERNANCE ADVISER
DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**



Julia Gillard was vilified; no male prime minister would have been treated in the same way. She was a fantastic prime minister. As a result other women don't want to do that anymore, I've spoken to a large number of women who now won't put themselves forward for politics.

MARIA OSMAN, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY EXPERT, AUSTRALIA

It was suggested that women are often forced to adopt more macho behaviours to be successful. Margaret Thatcher was described during her time as Prime Minister as 'the only man in her cabinet'.¹⁴

Some women have used humour to help combat the macho culture; Harriet Harman MP employed Ayesha Hazarika (a stand-up comedian) as her political adviser and Chief of Staff who helped her make good use of humour in Prime Minister's Question Time when acting as Leader of the Opposition.¹⁵ Margaret Thatcher was considered to have used her handbag as a weapon for dramatic effect, 'what she did was perform leadership like no man could ever have done: with her hair and handbag, sitting on a tank, that was macho politics big time.'¹⁶

DIVERSITY AND ACCEPTABLE DIFFERENCE

**It's not just about the female thing:
I have another thing that is called colour.**

Baroness Verma, former UK Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for International Development

There is growing number of women and growing levels of diversity amongst political leaders in the UK. Participants frequently cited the visibility of Diane Abbott MP, elected in 1987 as the first black woman in the UK Parliament and now the UK's longest standing black woman MP and Shadow Home Secretary; and Ruth Davidson MSP, leader of the Scottish Conservatives and an openly lesbian woman. Yet LGBT+ women, [disabled women](#) and [BME women](#) remain underrepresented in political leadership roles.

We heard from many participants about the need for greater diversity, as one said: *30 per cent of MPs are women but how do we deal with intersectionality? It is a question of diversity, we need to improve representation of different people in the UK.* Research has demonstrated that while aspiring candidates from under-represented groups are increasingly selected, these candidates are seen to be 'acceptably different' and have to conform to key aspects of the archetypal candidate. This results in the pathways to politics and leadership continuing to be narrow and exclusionary, i.e. open to those who are not too different.

We heard that the barrier for a black middle class woman is higher than for a white middle class woman, and it is higher again for black working class women: class plays into it. *People of minority backgrounds who are middle class are rising up the ranks. It can feel like*

tokenism [being] visible without substance.

And there were also concerns that those who do make it into political leadership roles face a more hostile environment than other colleagues.

An area where a number of participants suggested further consideration is around women's political leadership and faith. This was significant in discussions in Northern Ireland where religion and politics are tightly woven together. As the first Sikh woman elected to the House of Commons in 2017, [Preet Gill MP](#) spoke of the importance of encouraging and supporting more women of different faiths to step into politics and of the many calls of congratulations she received from the Sikh community upon her election.

Experts in this field talked about the complexities and challenges faced by women when elected to represent people on the basis of a descriptive characteristic, such as their ethnicity or religion, which can make it hard for them to act as independent leaders and to challenge practices within that community: *It's the thing about authenticity, seeing you as someone who represents the community in the way that the community wants to be understood.* One politician shared that *I was expected to fulfil the image of a 'good Muslim woman' to fit in to a caricature of a Muslim woman. Instead of treating me as an individual with my own skills and experiences, it was easier for people to treat me as a tick box.* We also heard concern at the lack of secular space for women in the UK that is not anti-religion and concern of the risk that an *uncritical acceptance of all things religious will have a detrimental effect on political progress in the UK.*



Currently there are six women in the Cabinet (including the Prime Minister) which is 26 per cent of 23 posts (not including those who 'also attend Cabinet').

Women in Parliament and Government, House of Commons Library

¹⁴ *The Whole Woman*, Germaine Greer, 1999, p384.

¹⁵ *A Woman's Work*, Harriet Harman, 2018, page 280.

¹⁶ Campbell B, *Iron Ladies: why do women vote Tory?*, 1987

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan joins the #March4Women in London on 4 March 2018.



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MALE CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

| At City Hall, I have pledged to be a proud feminist.

Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London

There was consensus that change depends on strong political will and that we need both men and women to progress sex equality and to take others with them. We were repeatedly told about the importance of *bringing men along too*. The key thread was a need to change the narrative to promote the message that sex equality benefits everybody: *that it is good for everybody, good for society, good for the economy and that, equality is something we should all work for*. One participant recommended enlisting male champions of change as an implementation strategy across the UK.

There were differing views on whether more political leaders (male or female) should be encouraged to publicly describe themselves as feminists. Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, who actively celebrates his gender balanced and diverse mayoral cabinet, joined [Jacinda Ardern and Justin Trudeau](#) in 2018, in publicly describing himself as a feminist. Over the course of the year he committed to redouble action towards sex equality in London with a programme of activity to include the [Our Time: Supporting Future Leaders](#) initiative, described as the *largest-scale mentoring programme of its kind to be adopted in the public sector* to address the gender imbalance in leadership roles, and bridge the gender pay gap. Participants suggested that the Mayor has demonstrated a clear political will and commitment and an ability to *get the right people around the table*. Internationally, French President Emmanuel Macron appointed a [gender-balanced cabinet](#) after his election in 2017 and in June 2018 women took the majority of roles in the [new Spanish Government](#) of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

Participants pointed to the UN Women [#HeForShe](#) campaign and the [Global Forum men's leadership initiative](#) as successful campaigns to engage men as champions of change. The #HeForShe solidarity movement engages with male political leaders as catalysts for change across both public and private spheres, providing targeted support to male leaders

and seeking to mobilise all people as advocates for equality. The Global Forum men's leadership campaign has seen over 70 male heads of state and governments give their personal reason for having more women as leaders. These statements are continuously exhibited in fora such as the headquarters of the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the African Union, the World Economic Forum, and many parliaments around the world. Several participants spoke of encouraging their male colleagues to decline panels which weren't representative of both gender and diversity and sign up to [#nomoreallmalepanels](#).

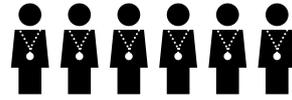
Men were repeatedly acknowledged by participants for having helped progress women's representation and leadership via a tap on the shoulder encouraging a woman to put herself forward. Women described encouragement they received from party members, fellow trade union members, and activists. One MP said her predecessor had called her up to say he would give up his seat so she could stand. And a Member of the Legislative Assembly (Northern Ireland) (MLA) told how an MLA *took me under his wing, he was a great mentor for me, he recognised my abilities and he pushed me*.

Participants acknowledged the important role male partners, fathers and uncles can play. This proved to be an effective narrative for the Conservative [Women2Win Daughters](#) campaign which included a video of male politicians talking about their aspirations for their daughters. A couple of participants talked of how some women gain political leadership roles because of their husband or father and the challenges of familial and dynastic control over politicians and candidates, giving the example of women in the Pacific Islands who often *came in [to office] because of the popularity of their husband. Their husband died and the women filled their position, people feel sympathy. Many of these women, as soon as their term finishes they finish, they are just there because they are forced to be and they don't know how to do it well. And I've heard in other countries that sometimes it's because her father used to be a politician*.



Of the 16 directly elected mayors currently in England and Wales, only four are women.

Page 11, Appendix 1, House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 05000, 12 June 2017



All six of the elected metro mayors in England are men.

Page 12, Appendix 2, House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 05000, 12 June 2017

LEADERSHIP IN POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND PEACEBUILDING

It was the combination of the moment in time and being able to do it in Northern Ireland because we had 20 to 25 years of grassroots working through conflict, coming together and that involved lots and lots and lots of women at different levels and parts of the process who could put their shoulder to the wheel to make sure it worked.

Bronagh Hinds, Founder DemocraShe, Northern Ireland

Growing up in Libya I knew there was much I could not speak about outside of the home. I had to leave my politics at home. I am now constantly looking to help create spaces and platforms for women to talk about the things they care about without fear.

Amna Abdullatif, campaigner and activist for women's rights

Many of the major shifts in women's political agency and power over the last 100 years have come about in the opportunities offered in the peacebuilding that followed conflict. It was well understood by participants that women's roles in politics and society can expand in times of conflict or political instability, empowering women through economic independence and widening horizons. Women mobilised internationally in unprecedented numbers during the First World War; [two million women entered employment in the UK alone](#). During the Second World War vast numbers of women entered industries in support of the war. We heard that in conflict women have been prompted to find their political voice: *in Argentina and Chile ordinary women were moved to challenge their own safety to find out what had happened to their sons and daughters*. In Northern Ireland participants talked about the *mobilised women, women in communities as the backbone, finding common ground, and strength in how they perceived themselves*.

Instability has been seen to give rise to women mobilising and the OECD has found that in countries where women's participation and access to the public sphere is more restricted there is a [higher level of political instability](#). These moments of mobilisation are understood to have a *huge impact on the visibility of women, [they show] that we're equal*. But there is no guarantee that this contribution will be either recognised with formal rights or continued

opportunities, and in many post-conflict situations women's roles contract, creating tension as women refuse to *get back in their box*. In the UK, alongside the role of the First World War a change of Prime Minister, the pre-war context of the suffrage campaigns (that were put on hold during the war), and a compromise solution were instrumental in gaining some women the vote in 1918, but notably the vote was not extended to the vast majority of women who had joined the war workforce, questioning the part played in giving the vote in recognition of [women's contribution to the war effort](#).

The Arab Spring of 2010–12 was defining for women's political participation in the Middle East and North Africa region as a whole. During the uprisings we saw women speaking out, saw how they mobilised at grassroots and online as public spaces were not safe. [Women's mobilisation](#) was a central narrative. As the wave of protests faded the impact for women is viewed largely as a move backwards and in the only extant democratic Arab government, we heard that in *Tunisia women had a louder voice before the Arab Spring*. But we also heard that women creating spaces in the region epitomises *the quiet conversations and movement building* by women with their international supporters that matter now in those places where political instability or transition could create the opening for change.



Taiwan's 14th-term President Tsai Ing-wen.

(CONTINUED)

Baroness May Blood, who was a peace activist during Northern Ireland's darkest days, always talks about women holding the fabric of society together while everything else fell apart. That seems to be the case globally, especially in the most conflict-affected states in the Middle East. Women are doing some of the hardest work of politics every day.

What's dispiriting is what happens when they raise their hands for formal political office – to compete for the authority and resources to do the work they were already doing. There seems to be a backlash, from both women and men, when women stand up for political leadership. This dynamic isn't limited to any geographic region; it is something on which all of our societies need to work.

Shannon O'Connell, Senior Policy Advisor, Gender and Politics, Westminster Foundation for Democracy

A formal role for women in negotiating and implementing peace is recognised as imperative for post-conflict stability: wherever there is conflict, women must be part of the solution. There are successes. After a slow start, international organisations ensured women in post-genocide Rwanda had a formal place in peacebuilding. In Northern Ireland a strong grounding in civil society and women's organisations is viewed as having enabled the formation of the Women's Coalition to secure inclusion in the Good Friday peace talks. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security requires women's full participation and protection of women's rights, specifically in the

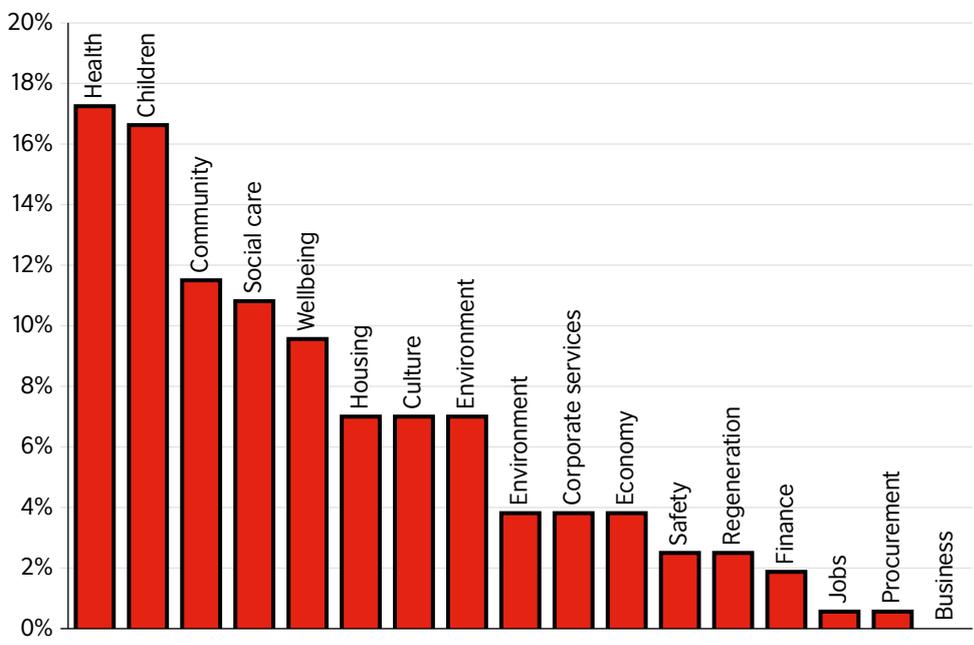
form of an action plan. Colombia has mainstreamed this requirement from the constitutional framework through to public policy and public consultation on the agreement to end the internal conflict. While there are still gaps, this is seen as having ensured 'broad participation and representation of women's voices in such spaces'.

Yet there remain widespread concerns that women are still too often not at the peace table, or hold a token presence only, and there is a lack of accountability against international UN commitments. This makes gains unstable: I'm just back from Bosnia and it's very difficult there for women; they really are fragile and the problem is not the capacity of women. There are some common factors at play in women's marginalisation. The dominant role of political parties replicates the existing patriarchal logic, the marginalisation of women in structures for community building and financial support and women's engagement is seen as being undermined by unstable security situations. For example, in Iraq a quota system supports a drive to get more women in place but this is being undermined by increasing sectarian violence and religious opposition to women's participation.

We heard that this limits progress on pressing issues. For example in Northern Ireland we heard in particular of a lack of progress on childcare: we're still waiting on a childcare strategy, there are grandparents who campaigned for it as parents. And in common with many post-conflict countries, significant concerns exist about the levels of domestic and other violence and the need for resources to tackle this in the face of systemic patriarchal, misogyny in a highly militarised and violent society.

WOMEN COUNCILLOR PORTFOLIOS

Frequency of words in the portfolios of female council cabinet members across England's combined authorities



You need to intimately understand what the problem is to be an advocate for it. The most empathetic man won't have awareness of being a girl at primary school – so you need to be listening and respecting the unique experience that women and girls bring to the debate and men need to understand and appreciate that.

SARAH CHAMPION MP, UK PARLIAMENT



THE RESULTS: CHANGE FOR WOMEN'S LIVES

Politicians spoke consistently about the changing nature and tone of political debate as, with increasing numbers of women within parliamentary structures you could hear a much stronger women's voice. This is echoed by parliamentarians across the world; for example, women Deputies in [Rwanda](#) say that women's issues are raised more easily and more frequently since achieving the highest representation of women in the world. Growing numbers of women, working together, have successfully changed the political agenda and the law to [improve the lives of women and girls](#).

We heard a firm belief that increasing women's representation in legislatures, and thus, government, translates into substantive representation by bringing into the political forum *those issues that make a difference to women's lives*. We cite here examples that were consistently raised as areas where women's representation is seen as having improved the position of women. We heard that this stems from the lived experience of women politicians as women, their closeness to community and grassroots politics and women's organisations and a difference *in how legislation is driven by women, how it's developed and implemented*.

Women parliamentarians have brought to the fore internationally a very wide range of policy areas from women's economic autonomy, childcare and equalities legislation to Sweden's work on [gendered snow ploughing](#). There are differences across countries and regions in the pressing issues for women, for example land rights, HIV/AIDS and poverty alleviation are critical in the [global south](#). Respondents saw a significant level of commonality across jurisdictions in both the enablers and barriers to creating change for women's lives and the significant themes explored were: political stability; alignment with government policy; changing the tone of the debate; the 'right issues'; and the maturity of the policymaking process. The [evidence](#) for direct impact of women politicians on policy outputs is growing and participants identified the key examples to consider in more depth as: gender budgeting; women and their labour; women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; and tackling violence against women and girls.

POLITICAL STABILITY

The collaboration spoken of requires a degree of political stability, enabling women politicians the space to pursue and develop cross-party influence. For example, [Ukraine's Equal Opportunities](#) caucus was years in the making due to 'deeply rooted divisions between political parties', eventually overcoming this to draft legislation on domestic violence, child trafficking and social protection for single mothers and fathers.

ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY

[Rwanda](#) ranks number one on the world classification of women in parliament. Yet research demonstrates that [influence on policy of women parliamentarians can be limited](#) in a political environment that remains heavily authoritarian. We heard limitations to cross-party working for the needs of women in the UK can also fall on the *dividing line of austerity and benefits reform*. There was a strong political fault line on the creation of a new household [benefit cap](#) and 'two child limit' limiting welfare payments to a family, the only exception being for any additional children born of rape, or from a coercive relationship. This was viewed as controversial, and has been criticised by the [Equalities and Human Rights Commission](#), because of the potential to increase child poverty and for the barriers for women to report rape in order to claim welfare, in a context in which only around 17 per cent of those experiencing [rape](#) report it to the state authorities.



The statue commemorating the life of Millicent Fawcett is unveiled opposite Parliament in April 2018. It was the first statue of a woman to be erected in Parliament Square.

CHANGING THE TONE OF THE DEBATE

We heard success in influencing can be seen when it is *no longer emotional or visceral, a much more honest conversation* about the benefits of sex equality. [Sweden's](#) gender mainstreaming has been attributed to the reformulation from 'women's issues' to agendas that improve the lives of all. Globally, we have seen that the dialogue and campaigning on violence against women and girls increasingly includes the economic impact (loss) to society as a whole as a pragmatic shift in the policy narrative to highlight the [return on investment of state expenditure](#).

THE 'RIGHT ISSUES'

Some women spoke of agendas *women [in Westminster] are not allowed to comment on* or where a gendered analysis is dismissed as irrelevant. Hard economics is seen by some as remaining closed to women, and globally we heard that definitions of GDP remain too narrow to influence change in women's lives, for example *to understand the value of women's reproductive work*. The extent to which parliamentarians are able to *ensure legislation considers women as a whole* was also questioned.

Some participants also highlighted the difficulty that women, of all faiths, ethnicity and backgrounds can face if they visibly champion sex equality. While some participants were able to point to sex equality champions, both past and present, in the UK and internationally, the same few names were generally repeated and some participants voiced concern about a lack of visible leadership. This was in part put down to a real and perceived risk of women leaders being pigeon-holed if they took up a feminist agenda: *on being elected I was warned by fellow councillors, both men and women, that there was a risk I'd be put 'in that box'*.

MATURITY OF THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS

The ability to impact on women's lives was viewed as dependent on how well the policymaking process worked as a whole. In particular, we heard of the importance of *attending to the evidence base we all know exists*. Evidence was viewed as critical to success: *you see in Scotland a governmental unit stacked with qualified statisticians and social science knowledge that can interpret with the gendered lens; a very unique and important set of skills*. It was argued that this was epitomised in the annual [Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report](#). It was also noted by participants that tracking the policy impact of women's representation in the UK is in its infancy, although this is work that sits at the centre of international development and aid policy, by the UK's Department for International Development and other countries.

An implementation gap was consistently raised [in] just about any country you open a legislative book and you find policy for education on girls, VAWG, equal opportunities – and on paper they are beautiful, but then you look at the reality. The gap is implementation, funding, resourcing, tracking, evaluating. For example in [Namibia](#), the successful implementation of reforms by women parliamentarians has been viewed as problematic. Legislation on female genital mutilation (FGM) in [Kurdish-controlled Iraq](#) was applauded, but the absence of follow up action has been questioned. In Scotland, we heard concern that *we have probably [the] best legal framework on violence against women and girls in the world but we have a rape conviction rate that fell ten per cent last year*. More encouragingly, we heard Scotland does have in place good practice in [post-legislative scrutiny mechanisms](#); these mechanisms have been identified as important to ensure that equality commitments in statute are implemented by governments.

The main differences women see in those countries making the greatest progress are a *fundamental acceptance of women's inequality* and the need to address this within policy. We heard of the importance of a genuine acceptance that *it's not controversial*. Women pointed to the self-proclaimed, [first feminist government in the world](#) in Sweden particularly and their gender mainstreaming as evidence of this shift across the whole of a government. Scottish women told us they felt *lucky to have had that [acceptance of women's inequality] from successive administrations, they've got that and so it has never really been challenged centrally*.

GENDER BUDGETING

Participants we spoke to reflected on the many important, often life-changing political and policy gains made for women's lives on specific and 'single' issues. And there was wide agreement that progress now is driven by those administrations adopting a systematic approach (at, arguably, the foundations of government policy) by the use of gender budgeting. [Gender budgeting](#) is the process of analysing a budget for its effect on gender equality, creating 'budgets which recognise the different situation and needs of women and men and aim to promote equality'. A wide range of [tools and practice](#) have been developed to support this process.

The [UK government](#) piloted gender budgeting tools in 2004 but has not adopted a mainstreamed approach. The [Welsh Assembly](#) has tested gender budgeting. The [Scottish government](#) has commenced a gender budget pilot specifically focused on creating good practice examples within the equality impact assessment process and raising the gender competence amongst staff;

The aim is to raise gender competence across the organisation, starting with a pilot in the Economy portfolio. This should lead to improved understanding of the impact of budget changes and policies on gender.

Lesley Irving, The Equality Unit, The Scottish Government

In [Northern Ireland](#) in May 2018 the first empirical research to be conducted on gender responsive budgeting was announced, conducted by academics and with civil society stakeholders. Live tweeting the event, the [Scottish Women's Budget Group](#) noted: 'If @WomensBudgetGrp as a civil society organisation can do quality, detailed, in-depth cumulative analysis of the impacts of budgetary decisions, why can't the UK Treasury? #inclusivebudget'

A [survey](#) in 2016 showed that almost half of OECD countries have introduced, plan to introduce, or are actively considering the introduction of, gender budgeting. Canada committed to gender budget analysis at Beijing in 1995, and with strong civil society pressure for gender budgeting from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' annual alternative budget the 2018 federal budget introduced 'gender based analysis plus'. This approach considers how policies, spending and taxation measures differ for women and men, in a [budget](#) described as 'anchoring long-term national prosperity to women's economic equality'. Tackling the legacy of inequality embedded in public policy and the allocation of resources is a core part of gender mainstreaming. We heard hopes that gender budgeting could drive a broader societal shift that *starts valuing the work women do, childcare as much as plumbing, showing the importance of it.*

WOMEN AND THEIR LABOUR

It [Grunwick] was a turning point in anti-racist labour and pro-feminist politics, contributed to dignity and equality for all women and workers, offering role models of political women who look like me.

Yasmin Rehman, feminist and human rights activist

Legislative changes to employment rights have been key to securing women's economic autonomy and changing ideas of [women's contribution to wider society](#), including challenging male-dominated labour movements. Participants highlighted the importance of women's industrial action in the UK since the 19th century [Matchgirls Strike](#) through to the [Dagenham machinist strike](#) (credited as pivotal in introducing the Equal Pay Act) and how the [Grunwick strike](#) by women of South Asian origin put migrant workers' rights on the map.

In Wales we heard of the Miners' Strike as a political education that was *an inspiration to women MPs and Assembly Members. Our children and grandchildren are*

more politically active. Forty-eight years after the Equal Pay Act, women roundly credited the new statutory requirement in the UK to report the Gender Pay Gap with *starting extraordinary conversations about how we got here and what is needed, this is a lifelong impediment on women's lives that we need to address.*

The day 90 per cent of [Icelandic women went on strike](#) in 1975 is iconic, an action to 'demonstrate the indispensable work of women for Iceland's economy and society'. The action is credited with propelling subsequent equality legislation. Initially repeated every decade to symbolise the continued struggle, the frequency of the strike has increased since 2010 in response to the 'tiny progress made in 30 years'. In Bangladesh, [UN Women and CARE International](#) have been working with women garment workers to address economic empowerment through workers' rights and develop leadership skills amid international calls for global brands to prioritise freedom of association for workers in the face of [state persecution of labour activists](#).

In September 2017 thousands of women in Buenos Aires, Argentina marched to campaign against violence against women and for equal rights.



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WOMEN'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Women told us: *it's really powerful – what has changed in terms of reproductive rights*. Legislation and investment in reproductive health has been achieved following women's increased representation all over the world: for example, in [Rwanda and South Africa](#). In [Zambia](#) in 2017, the Speaker called for women parliamentarians to exercise their influence on these issues. Most recently in May 2018 Ireland voted overwhelmingly to [Repeal the Eighth](#). This vote was achieved through popular mobilisation and powerful male advocates, notably in the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, it was rooted in decades of campaigning by grassroots women's rights activists, working alongside a minority of politicians backing reform.

Globally, ideological campaigns have driven regressive action on women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and are challenged by the

continued [co-ordination of politicians and women's organisations](#). Participants pointed us to a number of examples. [NGOs](#) internationally come together to offer support to those opposing a 'Stop Abortion' bill tabled in Poland in March 2018. In many [Latin American](#) countries, the 'lack of access to reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education, and contraception prevent women from fully enjoying their rights as citizens'. In addition, the US Presidency has been accused of '[consistently targeting women's health since day one](#)' at home and abroad. At the time of writing, in the most recent attempt by parliamentarians to address the inconsistency in women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights across the UK, a [debate in Westminster](#) included two women MPs sharing personal experiences of terminations, *a tone unthinkable, even three weeks ago* [prior to the Irish referendum result].



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TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)

There was consensus among those we talked to that violence against women and girls is without doubt *the* issue that women parliamentarians have put at the top of their agenda and arguably where their impact has been most obviously and widely felt. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is widely understood to be the most extreme manifestation of female inequality, and to be both a cause and consequence of that inequality, inter alia, reducing their ability to participate in public and political life ([CEDAW general recommendation 19](#)).

Participants told us that until women raised it in the UK Parliament, VAWG was not considered a public policy issue, and the police would still refuse to intervene in a 'domestic'. Women parliamentarians began working closely with women's liberation activists and refuges, beginning in the 1970s, to raise awareness, strengthen legislation and enforce policy implementation. This work over nearly four decades has most recently resulted in the criminalisation of [coercive control](#) as a recognised form of domestic violence in the UK. The UK government and the three devolved administrations each have a strategy in place for tackling VAWG, and when Home Secretary (the role of UK Minister for internal affairs, between 2010 and 2016) Theresa May MP prioritised creating cross-government strategic working. Both Wales and Scotland have led the way internationally in [legislative practice](#). In Scotland we heard: *within the first week there was a members' debate about domestic abuse. It summed up the shift in 1999 – it felt like women's activists were part of the legislature* [Scottish Parliament].

Many women politicians spoke of their desire to act personally on this issue.

I'm fully conscious that when I became Justice Minister it was my overarching priority to address domestic violence, it is probably one of the most prevalent crimes in Northern Ireland and is related to me being a woman.

Claire Sugden, Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Similarly we heard that since England and Wales introduced elected Police and Crime Commissioners in 2012 some women elected have been seen to prioritise VAWG, such as Sue Mountstevens in Avon

and Somerset and Vera Baird DBE QC in Northumbria. Research has found that 'Female PCCs are more likely to prioritise violence against women in their annual Police and Crime Plan'.¹⁷

We heard of many local women councillors and politicians that have worked alongside the women's sector at grassroots level to protect services in the face of mounting austerity cuts and develop innovative practice to influence national policy. The WEP candidate Tabitha Morton worked with women's organisations in Merseyside *to ensure VAWG made the agenda* and was included in the subsequent [priorities of the Liverpool City Region](#) Mayoral election in 2017. The decision taken in Nottinghamshire to treat [misogyny as a hate crime](#) is understood to have shifted the attitudes of victims, perpetrators and the public and has subsequently fed into a House of Commons [Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry](#).

Much global progress has been instigated by [women parliamentarians](#). The 2006 gender-based violence law in [Rwanda](#) is a notable achievement of women Deputies. Alliances between activists outside Parliament and women within were crucial in passing the 1998 [Domestic Violence Bill in South Africa](#). Tackling female genital mutilation (FGM) as a form of VAWG has united women and men politicians in many countries including [England, Wales, Scotland](#) and [Kenya](#). The Iraqi Kurdish Parliament has passed [the first FGM legislation of its kind in the Middle East](#) and there are attempts in [eastern Africa](#) to implement a regional legal framework to strengthen national approaches. The Coalition of Women MPs from Arab countries to combat violence against women, supported by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, has pioneered a draft [Arab Convention against Violence against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence](#).

Some participants acknowledged examples of improvements in working relationships between policymakers and experts in VAWG over recent years, but talked about the continuing high-profile cases of sexual assault and abuse that prompts consideration of the bigger cultural shift that is needed to end violence against women and girls. In considering this in June 2018, the [Women and Equalities Select Committee](#) took evidence on the role of the media and wider culture on the sexual harassment of women and girls in public spaces as part of its inquiry.

Over the last 100 years one of the most significant engines of change has been women's improved access to education leading to increasing economic independence and influence in society as a whole.

SUE INGLISH, WESTMINSTER FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY

**WE ARE
BETTER
THAN THIS**



A CHANGING WORLD?

Our participants spoke of sweeping changes witnessed over the last 100 years in the UK and internationally on big themes like voting, the economy, care, education, justice and violence, culture, technology and attitudes to gender equality and the impact these have had and continue to have on women, power and politics.

For participants, women's progress in politics remains inextricably linked to forces in the wider changing world, acting as both enablers and barriers, having both a positive and negative impact, and some wider changes are seen as not happening quickly enough. The key themes discussed were: public attitudes to equality; economic freedom; the role of education; the cultural sector; and technology. The specific examples most frequently explored around **A changing world?** are discussed here as: #MeToo; caring and domestic work; violence against women in politics; women's participation and the vote; and Citizen Girl and youth engagement.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO EQUALITY

There was agreement that there have been positive changes in attitudes over the last 100 years led by the rise of feminism and a growing consensus that gender equality is desirable. Many highlighted the inclusion within the SDGs, as adopted by world leaders in 2015, of a standalone goal (Goal 5) on equality for women and girls, and the mainstreaming of gender and inclusion through the other 16 goals, as a key milestone demonstrating a *sign that attitudes have changed internationally* for women and girls. Yet for UK participants these normative goals, and domestic law, are seen to still be *ahead of the country*, in terms of views and attitudes. Participants said *sexism is still going strong and we still have men who don't see it and don't get it*.

Fawcett's [State of the Nation 2016](#) survey suggested there was a pro-equality majority in the UK with 'over two thirds of people supporting equality of opportunity for women with men' and believing that 'equality for women and men would be good for the economy and for them personally', although it was noted that, 'only seven per cent actually describe themselves as feminist.' Some of our participants described a *backlash to feminism* and suggested feminism faces an *existential crisis* and needs to be *reinvented*. Everyone agreed that the responsibility for cultural change is a collective one and emphasised the *importance of bringing up our sons to respect women and treat them equally* and ensuring that *men take up the cause*.

ECONOMIC FREEDOM

A number of participants reflected on the issue that without safe shelter, food and security it is very difficult to participate in public life or take public office: *people have to have the resources to enable them to step into that space*. A huge shift in women's formal economic participation and improvements in women's day-to-day lives, means *women have over the years taken up more roles as conditions enabled them*. More women now have the economic independence and security needed to step into politics. Examples given included *when my mother-in-law got married as a teacher she had to ask the head teacher for permission to continue working and when I became a civil servant I was one of the first who didn't have to leave when I got married following the abolition of the marriage bar in 1973*.

But participants highlighted that current economic conditions still favour men and only enable entry into politics to some women, reflected in lower numbers of women, in particular from disadvantaged social classes, amongst party membership and party officers. Many participants shared the view that *we need to collectively consider who is missing, who is excluded and consider who is turning up to these meetings and who has time?* While more women than men are living in poverty and women continue to carry '[the triple burden](#)' (understood as three roles in society of reproductive work, productive work and community managing work) it was seen as inevitable that political power and participation will remain inequitable: *when you look at the economy and the gendered nature of poverty, what capacity do women have to step into roles of power?* Women also impressed on us how precarious and fragile the shift feels in practice particularly in periods of economic downturn or political instability: *in a period of austerity where women have received the brunt, it is difficult to see progress*.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

One key message was that *we are starting too late* in the UK in developing girls' political literacy and awareness of gender stereotyping. Participants called for more to be done within formal education to challenge gender stereotypes, linking this to women's progress in political participation: *it is important to highlight that the increase in women's political representation is directly related to the promotion of gender equality in the both public and the private sphere.*

There were strong calls to *teach gender equality in early years* and a recommendation to *make gender equality part of teacher training general qualification*. This included discussion of the role of sexual assault and harassment within schools working to support and set gender stereotypes into the future, and the need to challenge this. [The Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry](#) on this issue concluded that girls' daily experience in schools is of being sexually harassed, assaulted and subject to image-based abuse, and of boys finding that they have impunity in doing so, as it is treated by the teachers as normal male behaviour.

There was agreement that *we are a long way from seeing women's equality affirmed or mainstreamed across the curriculum*. Businesses could be asked to do more to support teaching on sex equality as *improving diversity facts speak for themselves, smaller gender gaps create opportunities and more money*. [Fawcett](#) recommendations include 'greater ... guidance around tackling gender bias when providing careers and apprenticeship advice'.

There have been long-standing calls for a [Curriculum for Life](#) from the UK's Youth Parliament. Participants highlighted examples of political education projects that incorporate sex equality *in patches* across the country and an increasingly organised [coalition of organisations](#) championing political education. However, in line with the recent report by the [House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement](#) participants didn't think current citizenship education in the UK goes far enough.

Participants had mixed views on current levels of civic and political engagement among young people but there was a consensus that there were benefits to engaging and empowering young people with specific calls to help get more *younger women engaged in activism*. There was great respect for the grassroots community work that goes on in this area and some positive comments about the government-funded [National Citizen Service](#) programme.

There is potential for greater shared learning from projects to improve gender mainstreaming in schools. For example: *Womankind had an education programme that had been built overseas and brought over to the UK – building respect and citizenship, and addressing bullying and discrimination on gender in schools*. There was appetite for communication, to exchange knowledge and inject ideas from other countries: *it is really worthwhile pulling together leaders within the UK and some good external leaders.*

THE CULTURAL SECTOR

Culture and the arts have played a huge role in the [UK centenary celebrations](#) this year. Women (and some men) have been brought together across the country in banner making, performance, song, writing of books and zines, and public speaking, just as the suffragettes used other publications 100 years ago. The occasion has been marked with public art including commissioning of new statues, colourful processions, and a burst of arts events in cities and communities across the UK. We were told that the cultural sector plays an important role in promoting women's participation, representation and power, and is too often overlooked. In their book, *The Stalled Revolution* Eva Tutchell and John Edmonds described how during the two women's movements of the 19th and 20th century 'theatre, dance, music, painting and sculpture flourished. This was not a coincidence. During periods of intellectual revolution and political upheaval we tend to find what energises us... The Actresses Franchise League, founded in 1908, coached women unused to public speaking to project themselves and they helped to choreograph and stage some of the political spectacles of the campaign.'¹⁸ In this vein 2018 has seen the founding of the [Centenary Action Group](#), a coalition of over 100 activists, politicians and women's rights organisations, to support the centenary celebrations to deliver a lasting legacy for a step change in women's rights in the UK and women's political engagement.

We heard also how the *artistic and cultural response to the referendum* [on Scottish independence] *was important in challenging the male, pale, stale view of politics...and changed the tone of the conversation*. And of the power of culture and the arts in engaging women (though not women exclusively) in political issues and campaigning, connecting across cultural and language barriers, and in creating the energy and momentum needed for change.

TECHNOLOGY

Rapid progress in technology has dramatically changed the way many people stay informed about politics, participate, and interact with their political representatives. Television and mainstream media have played an important role over the last 100 years in the way politics is done, and continue to do so. Yet arguably, the biggest shift that has been witnessed is with social media creating new spaces for increased connectivity and sharing, and unfortunately abuse of women in politics.

Many positive and negative examples were given of the impact this has in terms of women's political participation and power. The flexibility

that new technologies offer, including the phone, video conferencing, laptops, were discussed by participants as changes that enable more women to work while on the move, to work more flexibly at a time and place that suits them, to reach new audiences, and to build powerful networks and campaigns as seen in the #MeToo campaign. But, as widely reported, these new spaces remain, like traditional media sources, on the whole largely dominated by male voices and the contributions and experiences of women are still too often [under recorded and underrepresented](#). Examples were given of the recorded disparity of [retweeting of women on Twitter](#) and the gender page gap on [Wikipedia](#).

#METOO

Great enthusiasm was expressed by participants for the role of #MeToo; the international, social media movement challenging sexual harassment and assault: *[#MeToo] is huge, it has in a way energised feminism and it feels like there is change in the air*. The movement was seen to be a new and powerful example of how technology can be used to harness women's voice and experience and galvanise women to act in the societal and political spheres: *the #MeToo campaign and the awful things we have been hearing about sexual harassment etc. means that women are saying we have had enough, things must improve*. The potential we heard for creating international solidarity between women and girls was palpable and particularly the ability to resonate with younger women: *international solidarity, as a millennial it mobilises you*.

Participants identified tangible results of the movement as an *important starting point to see men being held to account* and in opening up debates:

the public #MeToo movement is important, in Argentina the movement against femicide became a conversation about violence and representation more broadly. There were views that the movement has enabled links to be demonstrated between equality agendas: *it builds the case – linking important agendas [such as] representation and gender violence*. In the UK the #MeToo movement was cited as *revitalising outrage*. And we witnessed the direct mobilisation within the movement by political activists in the UK with the encouragement of party members to anonymously share stories of sexual harassment and seek support using #LibDemsToo and #LabourToo. While we heard hope that *we are at the tipping point and an opportune time to really push hard, to open doors, to be radical* there was widespread recognition that concerted action is needed quickly to make this platform deliver change: *the problem is that if we don't move fast and see change it will just dissipate*.



CARING AND DOMESTIC WORK

There was much rich and vibrant discussion around the lack of progress in the UK on caring, paid or unpaid, childcare or eldercare, and domestic work. While *the invention of the washing machine* and other domestic appliances was heralded as *key in freeing women from domestic chores*, the fact women continue to do the bulk share of all caring and domestic work was seen to have a very direct impact on women's political participation, representation and power. Participants pointed to evidence of politicians in the UK looking towards the Nordic countries, in particular Sweden and Iceland, where higher rates of women's political representation and participation correlate with more equal parenting roles and a smaller [gender gap](#). For example, the [Welsh Assembly Women in Democracy Caucus](#) visited the Icelandic Parliament in 2014 to learn from the world's oldest parliament. While no one suggested that any one country has *got it completely right*, participants felt these examples highlight the importance of *creating the conditions for a fairer society*, including the fact that having enough women in employment and consequently in decision-making positions is only made possible by quality childcare and shared parenting (shared parental leave was first introduced in [Sweden](#) in 1974 and shared parenting has become the norm).

Our participants said there is a need in the UK to be more proactive in challenging current norms around working hours and parenting to change dynamics in the home and workplace, for example normalising flexible and part-time working for everyone: *roles in third sector and politics must be flexible, part time, not just policies on paper but properly implemented*. Recommendations in the recent [Fathers and the workplace](#) report from the Women and Equalities Select Committee support this, and recognised the need to address a macho culture that stops fathers from taking up paternity rights and flexible or part-time working opportunities. The [government's response](#), while rejecting many of its recommendations, acknowledged that the government *can and indeed does have a direct influence on what happens in the workplace*. Those we spoke to highlighted the need for politicians to be at the forefront of pursuing new norms in parenting and care *our – politicians and political institutions should be leading the way not lagging behind* – and the need to look more broadly, beyond parenting, to consider caring responsibilities in the round as part of a review of how care is valued.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

We really need to work harder to make space for different voices. I think we have seen a disturbing trend where, for their safety and security, people – even parliamentarians – are afraid to speak out; it's chilling for women.

Hon. Patricia A Torsney, IPU Permanent Observer to the UN

The experiences from the [suffragettes](#) through to women fighting for representation all over the world today show that psychological and physical violence are commonly used against women who attempt to participate in democratic processes.¹⁹ In February 2018 the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and UK political parties hosted the first [International Stop Violence Against Women in Politics](#) summit. Delegates explored solutions including action such as [Bolivia's Law against Harassment and Political Violence against Women](#), which was a response to 4,000 complaints of harassment from women participating in politics over the eight-year period preceding 2012. In 2016 an international movement, [#NotTheCost](#), was formed to specifically address violence against women in politics. Other international and UK-based campaigns include cross-party [Reclaim the Internet](#) founded by Yvette Cooper MP and [Fix the Glitch](#). A key message from these campaigns is for the level of verbal, social media and physical violence not to be accepted as the new norm.

When surveyed by the IPU nearly 45 per cent of all [women parliamentarians](#) internationally had received threats of death, rape, beatings or abduction during their term and 65 per cent had repeatedly been exposed to humiliating sexist remarks. Women are three times more likely than men to receive [negatively gendered comments](#), i.e. related to their appearance,

marital status, or competence due to gender. Representatives who openly describe themselves as feminists face regular vitriol; Jess Phillips MP has spoken of receiving over [600 threats of rape over the course of one night](#). Harassment and abuse has a disproportionate impact on BME, Muslim and Jewish candidates where misogynistic abuse is combined with [racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism](#); over half of abusive tweets to MPs in the run up to the 2017 general election were directed at one black woman MP, [Diane Abbott](#), shadow Home Secretary. Online sexism, abuse and threats dissuade women from engaging in representative politics at all levels as they *delegitimise, dehumanise, distract, instil fear and dissuade women and intertwined with both threats and acts of physical violence*, are designed to silence and control women. While political violence is not solely directed at women, it is [gendered](#).

The murder of the UK MP Jo Cox, in her home town in Yorkshire, in 2016 sent shockwaves globally. Such extreme [violence against women in politics](#) is normally associated with countries with higher rates of violent crime and criminal impunity, lower women's representation and high social and economic inequality or where a state is transitioning or suffering political unrest. In Egypt, following the Arab Spring, the breakdown of security from 2010 has seen [increasing use of systematic sexual violence against women](#) acting in the political space. And in March 2018, while completing this study, we have also witnessed the murder of Rio de Janeiro councillor and activist Marielle Franco in Brazil. [Some governments are seen to be actively complicit in perpetrating violence](#); Serbia under President Milošević witnessed the denigration and open governmental attacks on women's NGOs working for peace and women's human rights.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND 'THE VOTE'

What I say when I'm ... speaking to women who say they might not vote, is that everybody should vote. It is their chance to have their say in who is running their country. There are women who gave up their lives to have the right to vote in this country and people who yearn, across the world, to have this freedom and so we should use it.

Rt Hon. Theresa May MP, UK Prime Minister

100 years after some women won the vote, 85 per cent of women are reported to be [registered to vote in the UK](#), (compared to 83 per cent of men) and [women are as likely to turn out to vote as men](#). The [gender gap in vote choice](#), i.e. the difference in support for political parties between men and women, is not seen to be consistent and varies by election. Political parties have made concerted appeals since the 1980s to 'the women's vote'. Most recently in 2015 there was the Labour party's [pink campaign bus](#) and the attempted feminisation of the Conservative party under David Cameron. Participants felt strongly there is likely no single or easy way to gain women's support at the ballot box, but as 50 per cent of voters there is a good reason to try.

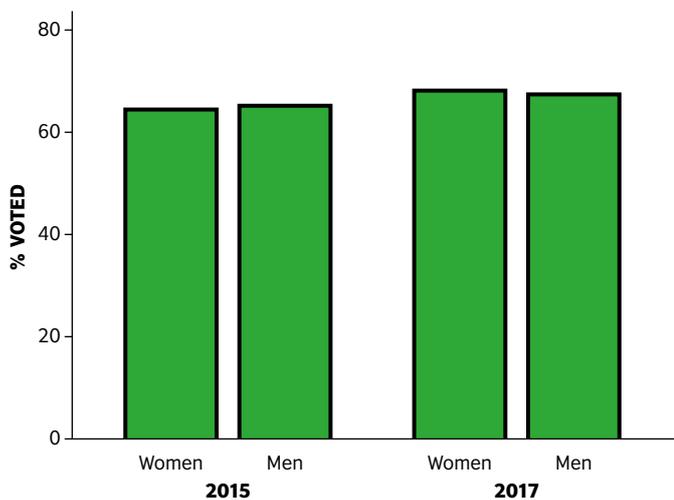
All over the world more women are consciously exercising their autonomy in voting. We heard from UK politicians of *quite often meeting women who say 'my husband says I should vote for [names another politician] but I think I am going to vote for you'*. Yet participants also told us of meeting women who continue to defer to their husbands or family when it comes to who they vote for, or see it as a joint decision. Both in the UK and internationally there remain many *cultural, tribal and religious barriers* [constraining women's political action and involvement](#) and we heard of the power of 'clan-based' systems of deference

influencing and constraining women particularly, with examples cited in the Pacific Islands and some Asian communities in the UK: *this further demonstrates the cultural, religious and community barriers that BME and women from faith communities face in addition to the wider societal barriers.*

Participants understood there to be added barriers for some groups of women in the UK, particularly women who are homeless, Gypsy or Traveller women, those who are refugees or asylum seekers, and women living in a refuge or experiencing domestic abuse. We heard from one participant of women disenfranchised due to insecurities around their citizenship related to immigration policy: *if [women] born and raised here over decades can then be deported what does it mean to be a citizen? How do you engage in the debate if you're not a citizen?* It was also noted that it remains unclear if following the withdrawal from the EU whether the [three million EU citizens](#), including women, in the UK will continue to be able to vote at a local level.

Activist organisations impressed on us the view that there are no quick fixes to engaging women who are disenfranchised. Important work was cited, for example, by [Women for Refugee Women, Rosa](#) and [UK Feminista](#): *it's a very slow process ... literally just meeting places for women, a sense of community, empowering women to do things and change things.* Those we heard from stressed that *democratic participation is more than being represented by a political representative* and there is a need for women's broader civic and democratic participation to be supported. There was some support for the possibility that if the UK realises more localised models of government, the participation of women could be boosted, especially if they feel decision-making is closer to them and there is greater acceptance of their role as active citizens.

TURNOUT AT UK GENERAL ELECTION IN 2015 AND 2017 BY GENDER





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CITIZEN GIRL AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

In celebration of both 100 years of some women having the vote and [Scotland's Year of Young People](#), Girlguiding Scotland have teamed up with Women 50:50 to launch [Citizen Girl](#), to empower the next generation of female leaders in politics and beyond. Alongside the UK-wide Girlguiding programme 'Action for Change', Citizen Girl is one of a rising number of civil society based projects working within both formal and informal education settings to improve political literacy, advocacy and political engagement with young women and young people. These include [Bite the Ballot](#), [The Politics Project](#), [Rosa](#), [Reclaim](#), [Uprising](#), [Young Women Lead](#), [UK Feminista](#) and [RiseVoiceVote](#). The UK Parliament runs an outreach programme and specifically [Women in Parliament](#) workshops. There is a thriving [UK Youth Parliament](#) and [Youth Council](#) movement, and increasingly UK mayors have appointed young people to act in an advisory role, such as [Youth Mayors in Bristol](#) and the [Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority](#). Many of these youth initiatives are understood to have a strong commitment to gender balance, for instance the Bristol Youth Mayor scheme deliberately appoints one male and one female representative. Our participants were excited about the opportunities for young women to engage in politics but also mindful that this engagement needs to be broad-based within a plurality of spaces: *we need to make sure the youth parliament is not the only route for young people to get engaged.*

In considering young women's levels of political engagement participants raised the role of new and different styles of political campaigning as important in gaining traction with younger people including women, such as the rise in social media campaigning and use of visual arts. Examples cited in the UK included the rise of the [Momentum](#) movement, the youth-led [#weareeurope](#) campaign, [Conservative Party moves to reinvigorate the youth wing](#) and internationally, participants referenced the role of the Bernie Sanders campaign in the US in reaching out to younger voters. The UK [general election in 2017](#) saw the highest youth voter turnout in 25 years, with 57 per cent of 18 and 19 year olds voting while for women aged 18 to 24 years old, participation rose from 44 per cent in 2015 to 53 per cent. While this remains significantly less than older voters (84 per cent of those over 70 voted in 2017), it followed significant public debate about the impact of the EU Referendum vote in 2016 on young people's futures. There is a popular campaign for votes at 16 across all UK elections. In [Scotland](#), 16 and 17 year olds were granted the vote for the Independence Referendum in 2014 and now vote in Scottish Parliament and local elections, registering a 75 per cent turnout rate.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reflects the views we heard, mainly of women but also some men, of politicians, academics, gender equality experts and campaigners in 2018. Their voices are reflected throughout in affirming the many gains for women in the UK and internationally, remembering those who took action both individually and collectively, and talking about where change is still needed to progress women's participation in power and politics.

We heard that the reality of progress in women's power and political representation is one of slow and piecemeal gains: *politically [we're] looking at incremental change, not one eureka moment.* And where grasping the moment entails *putting the gender wedge in there when the opportunity arises.* These opportunities or moments are not random but result from tipping points created by a range of factors. We heard significant discussion and celebration of the role that many critical actors have played in delivering progress, through women's individual agency and leadership and *putting their head above the parapet.* At the same time, there was concern that this focus on singling out one leader, if used uncritically, can reduce or omit the role of those unseen pushing for change.

And we heard that progress is not always cumulative: *the idea that it will take 'so many years' to get this, that assumes straightforward progress, assumes a linear path and that is not the case.* While women celebrated moments that *achieved things that can't be undone in the journey to equal representation,* many spoke of feeling the *fragility* of gains and the constant need for vigilance, for *keeping our eye on the ball.* Overwhelmingly it is clear that in the views of those we heard from, single actions do not drive progress. Throughout we heard of the importance of the interaction of our six key themes to achieving change: women's activism and sisterhood; the rules; the political workplace, leadership roles; the results and the impact of the wider, changing world.

At the very heart of debate we heard an ambition to change the fundamental nature of the roles women and men play in our society: *sharing the care, sharing the work* as the foundational building block for achieving parity of power, *women push to secure legislation but if we don't create the infrastructure, the childcare, the way we deliver social care more broadly and don't value that, then we are not going to get the imperative for implementing the change.*

Some participants felt the UK is reaching the *tipping point* with a growing number of competent and visible women leading within the political sphere: *we now have around the table lots of articulate women and we are starting to hear their voices, in politics and in social media, it's very welcome.* Participants were keen to reflect on the possibility of now being a moment when further change might be achieved: *it feels like there is change in the air.*

The nature of these moments means that to see them as pivotal, whether positive or negative in impact, is only possible in retrospect. This did not prevent vigorous debate by participants about the nature and potential impact of two current potential opportunities for women's political progress. The first relevant to women globally, *is the #MeToo movement a new international tipping point?* and the second more directly relevant to women in the UK, *what does Brexit mean for women's rights and progress in the UK?* Both remain open questions on women's progress in power and politics.

Participants clearly cited evidence of women's gains in the political sphere making a meaningful difference for the lives of women and girls in the UK and internationally, from women's labour rights, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, through gender budgeting and particularly in global action to tackle violence against women and girls. Getting women elected is not enough on its own to enable focus on the needs of women and girls within political processes – more needs to be done. And we heard great enthusiasm for the international mechanisms and other ways in which the exchange of ideas and the creation of mutual support take root globally. There were many examples cited of practice from other countries and jurisdictions that participants felt could usefully be translated for use in the UK, and across the nations. It is also hoped that examples from the UK and discussion of the UK context can be helpful to progress elsewhere.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Views on what is needed next to achieve a step-change by 2028 were rich and varied. However, there was consensus that action is needed now to extend existing gains to all women within the UK and internationally. Echoing the energy of our *suffragette sisters* there was a strong call for action.

In reflecting on the importance of international solidarity, dialogue and global progress in the movement for women's equal power and political representation, we share here the most frequently expressed future ambitions and priorities we heard from participants. These recommendations are the common amalgamation of these priorities for change when we asked **what change would you like to see over the next ten years?**

They are expressed broadly and we believe they are applicable in all jurisdictions, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the starting point. They constitute a 'shopping bag of reforms'²⁰ for governments, civil society and women and men of all ages, working at the grassroots level in all countries and internationally to create systemic change in the political sphere to be more inclusive of women.

There was a common wish expressed among participants to find ways to collaborate further, to come together, both in person and making use of technology. The recommendations are intended to reflect the view we heard that all countries need to strike a balance between forging their own path and translating practice from the plurality of ideas and actions of elsewhere.



WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SISTERHOOD

1. Continue to create, and enable women to take part in, regional and international spaces for women politicians, activists, civil society and civil servants to come together to connect, share and learn in a transnational context.
2. Resource women's civil society organisations to reach and equip women with the tools to become full political actors through awareness raising, providing information and training, and addressing direct financial barriers to their candidacy, such as childcare and the additional costs of disability.
3. Enable a strong and vibrant women's civil society to come together, representing the full diversity of women's lives and experiences and have access to power and decision-makers as experts, through mechanisms including a formal women's platform.

THE RULES

4. Harness the levers of international gender equality frameworks – CEDAW, Beijing and the SDGs – through binding legal commitments that secure a culture of ambition and compliance with global targets on women's equal representation in power and politics.
5. Operate transparent and comprehensive mechanisms for the collation, analysis and publication of data on women in politics from candidacy through to election and into senior roles, at local and national levels, including data on the intersection of sex with class, race, disability, age and religion.
6. Use party regulation and temporary special measures, including legislated quotas and other legislative routes, to achieve equal numbers of women candidates in winnable seats, and ensure women are accepted as equals and treated with fairness and respect in political parties.

THE POLITICAL WORKPLACE

7. Deliver legislative action and resources to tackle the gendered nature of harassment and abuse targeting women and women politicians, within broader moves to enforce the proper regulation of social media activity and behaviours.
8. Utilise the Gender-Sensitive Parliaments framework set out by the IPU to audit all legislatures operating at local, regional and national levels.
9. Take action to enable women and men in politics, at local, regional and national levels to be an active parent.

LEADERSHIP ROLES

10. Recognise, support and celebrate women as leaders across cultural and media platforms, as role models to girls, normalising women's leadership.
11. Challenge men to exercise leadership on women's equality by listening, stepping-back and valuing women; celebrate those men who achieve this and call out the behaviour of those who undermine women's leadership.
12. Political and party leadership to consistently make the case for the benefits to all of achieving gender equality by demonstrating clear action to create change and highlighting the impact and gains.

A CHANGING WORLD?

13. Deliver a gender-sensitive political and citizenship education in and outside of schools from a young age that enables young people to challenge gender stereotypes, understand diverse approaches to leadership and develop critical ways of thinking.
14. Value and reward caring and normalise shared parenting through legislative, workplace, and wider cultural change.
15. Anticipate opportunities for 'designing-in' changes that hardwire sex equality into the system through the use of gender mainstreaming tools such as gender budgeting and gender impact assessments that include the meaningful evaluation of impact.



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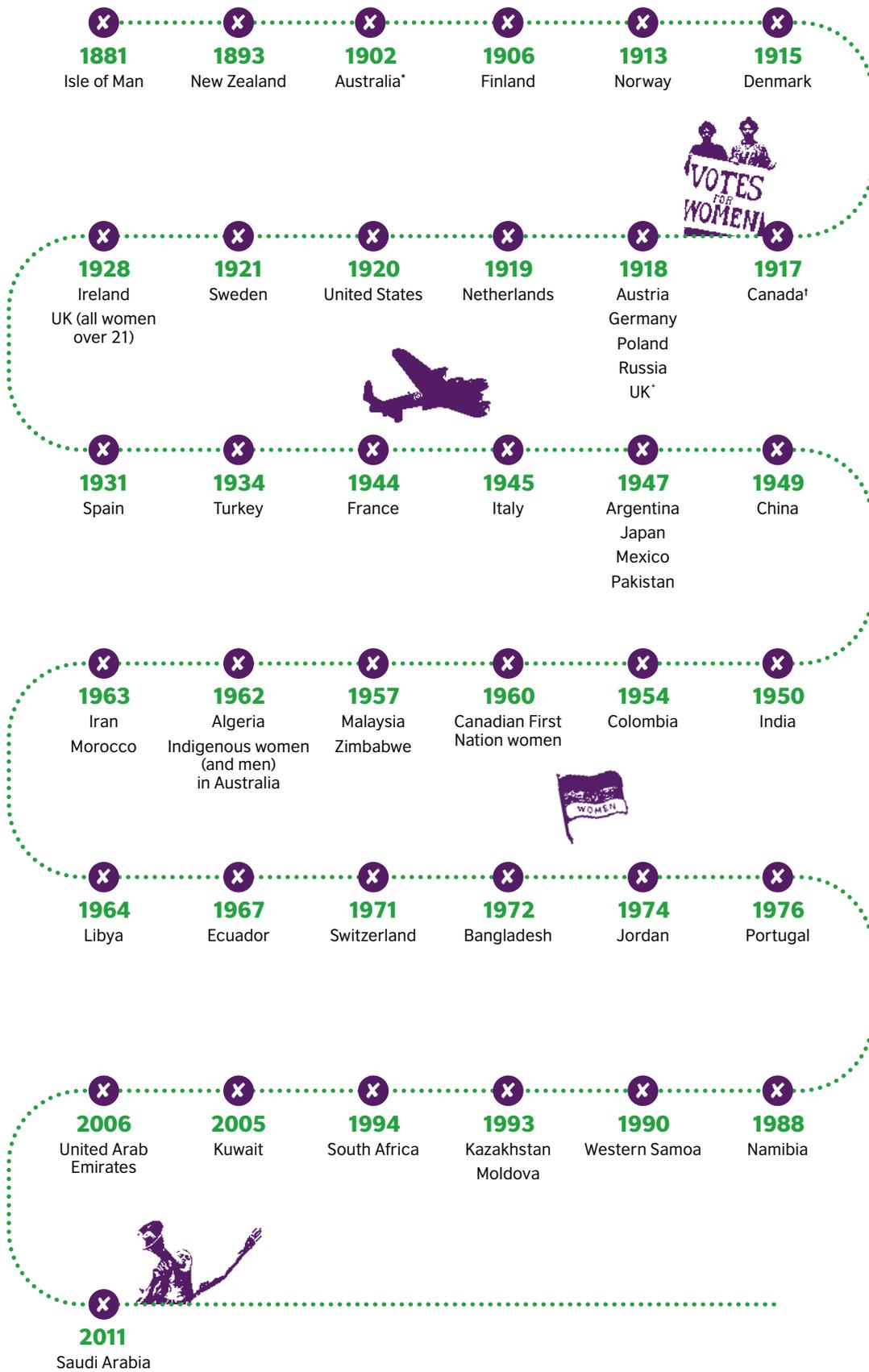
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DATA SECTION AND DATA TABLES

Knowledge of women's local government representation (encompassing state/county, regional and local arrangements) is globally more challenging than at national parliamentary level; [the global proportion is unknown](#) and in the UK data is gathered only by civil society, in 2017 by Fawcett Society's Local Government Commission. Seeking solutions for this data is a pressing issue for [UN Women's global reporting on SDG 5](#).

In the UK, patterns of representation at local level are [traditionally] lower than at national; England is currently on a par with Westminster, with [national assemblies] at around 25 per cent [BME/disability figures]. Despite a change to Single Transferable Vote in 2007, a system generally considered better placed for offering inclusion, women's representation in Scottish local government remained static 2012–2017, [for Dr Meryl Kenny] 'demonstrating that voting systems are only one facilitator of change'.²¹

WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE – THE INTERNATIONAL STORY



* excluding indigenous Australians
 † Women of property aged over 30 only
 ‡ excluding First Nation women

