

Institution: University of Bristol
Unit of Assessment: 21 – Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Improving women's parliamentary representation in the UK
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research by Professor Sarah Childs has had wide-ranging influence in relation to improving women's parliamentary representation in the UK. This impact has taken the following forms. First, through her role as Specialist Adviser to the Speaker's Conference (2008-10), Childs helped set the agenda around the multiple issues and political practices (including legislative ones) that determine women's political representation. Second, she followed up on the Conference by presenting proposals on MPs' pay, assisting in the development of the Counting Women In campaign, and drawing attention to the implications of parenting for parliamentary representation. Third, Childs' research has been significant in promoting the adoption of strong equality promotion measures in the Conservative Party. This includes helping to secure acceptance in principle in 2009 by the then Leader of the Opposition David Cameron of All Women Shortlists. Her interventions have also accentuated the issue of women's representation in the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, resulting in support for some of the measures Childs has advocated at the highest levels of those organizations. Thus, due in part to her research and argumentation, it is now more accepted amongst party elites and grassroots members alike, in all three principal UK political parties, that women's representation continues to be inadequate and requires urgent redress. More broadly, Childs has made political, public and civil society actors, as well as the wider public, more cognizant of the democratic deficit incurred when women, and women's interests and perspectives, are absent, under-represented or marginalized in parliamentary politics.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The body of research relating to the impact claimed in this case study was conducted by Childs at the University of Bristol as a Lecturer (2003-05), Senior Lecturer (2005-08) and Professor of Politics and Gender (2009-).</p> <p>Childs' research has identified and examined four salient dimensions of women's political representation: descriptive (the sheer numbers of women in political bodies); symbolic (how representatives are perceived, what values and images they are held to signify); substantive (actions and policies on women's behalf); and constitutive (how representation claims create and maintain gendered identities). She therefore provides a specific analytical angle into the gendered nature of political institutions/parties, and gendered political change. Two core ideas within the public engagement and impact activities flow from this research: that women's multi-dimensional under-representation in electoral politics constitutes a significant democratic deficit, and that sex quotas are vital to improving the number of women MPs returned to the UK Parliament [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9].</p> <p>Childs' research while at Bristol since 2003 has established the following:</p> <p><i>The ongoing significance of party 'demand' for women candidates and the overall levels of women's under-representation at Westminster.</i> Childs' analysis of the 2005 and 2010 general elections shows that, whilst women are less likely to seek selection than men, parties act as critical gate-keepers, deciding who is selected and then elected to Parliament, and that 'equality promotion' measures such as training, and 'equality rhetoric' such as party leader calls for women to stand, have only limited effect [1] [2] [4] [5]. 'Equality guarantees', such as Labour's All Women Shortlists, are the only measures for the UK Parliament that have delivered substantial increases. Much of this research draws on the British Representation Studies (BRS), a series of surveys of MPs and candidates undertaken at General Elections [2] [9] alongside qualitative analysis of party procedures and practices [1] [4] [5] [8] (with Lovenduski and Campbell, Birkbeck). Childs leads on the analysis of qualitative data - party strategies, rules and implementation, and leads on liaison with the parties.</p> <p><i>That resistance to legislative quotas remains amongst the UK political elite, party members and the wider electorate</i> [3] [4] [5] [8]. Work on the Conservative Party was ESRC funded, with Childs as the Principal Investigator (PI) on full time buyout for the full three year project.</p> <p><i>That party regulation is an alternative means - hitherto largely unacknowledged by</i></p>

comparative party, and gender and politics scholars - to enhance women's representation. Building on findings in previous research [4], Childs was invited as a gender and politics expert to participate in a European Research Council funded workshop in 2012, resulting in Childs (2013) published in *Representation*.

That there is convincing empirical evidence – qualitative and quantitative – of a link between women's descriptive and substantive representation in the UK. Women MPs are more likely to 'act for' women than male MPs by raising women's concerns in Parliament through parliamentary questions, debates, Early Day Motions and select committees, and informally influencing party and governmental policy [1] [2] [4] [5] [8] (see also Childs, Withey in *Parliamentary Affairs and Political Studies*, 2006, 2004 respectively; Childs led on these, with Withey as research assistant).

That the concept of 'critical actors' should replace that of 'critical mass', the once dominant gender and politics analytic framework. Childs and Krook's critique [3] [4] [8] has transformed subsequent research in this area (Krook was an ESRC post-doctoral fellow at Bristol in 2004-05). The relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation is best conceived as complex and mediated (Celis, Childs, Kantola, Krook 2008 in *Representation*; Celis and Childs 2008 in *Political Studies*). An associated European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions of Workshop co-directed with Celis (Brussels) resulted in two peer-reviewed Special Issues (*Representation and Parliamentary Affairs*, both 2008).

That scholars of gender and politics need to take seriously the views of Conservative representatives. This research derived from the preceding work on critical mass [3] [4] [8] and the ESRC funded research on the UK Conservative Party [5] [8]. It included exploration of how the 'represented' are constituted during the processes of representation. Again, it led to further research and outputs: Celis and Childs 2011 in *Political Studies*, a second co-directorship of an ECPR workshop in 2012, and an edited ECPR book (Celis and Childs forthcoming 2014).

The importance of empirical research to understandings of gendered institutions. Innovative cross-disciplinary research revealed, through in-depth interviews and observation and drawing on conceptual frameworks of ceremony and ritual applied to political science questions, how Labour women MPs experienced their gendered representative lives in Parliament, and how their parliamentary friendships with other women MPs constituted an important and hitherto unacknowledged political and personal resource [6] [7].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Outputs:

- [1] Childs, S. (2004) *New Labour's Women MPs*, London, Routledge. 144 citations. Can be supplied upon request.
- [2] Childs, S., Lovenduski, J., and Campbell, R. (2005) *Women at the Top*, London, Hansard Society, <http://hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/publications/archive/2007/10/01/Women-at-the-Top-2005.aspx>. Childs: lead author. 23 citations.
- [3] Childs, S. and Krook, M.L. (2006) 'Should Feminists Give up on Critical Mass? A Contingent Yes', *Politics and Gender*, 2 (4): 522-30. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X06251146>. Peer reviewed. American Political Science Association journal. Thomson Reuter's 6th ranking political science journal at time of publication. 113 citations.
- [4] Childs, S. (2008) *Women and British Party Politics*, London, Routledge. 58 citations. Can be supplied upon request.
- [5] Childs, S. and Webb, P. (2012) *Sex, Gender and the Conservative Party*, Basingstoke, Palgrave. 19 citations. Listed in REF2.
- [6] Childs, S. (2013) 'Negotiating Gendered Institutions: Women's Parliamentary Friendships', *Politics and Gender* 9 (2): 127-51. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X13000019>. Peer reviewed. American Political Science Association journal. Thomson Reuter's 6th ranking political science journal at time of publication.

Grants:

- [7] Childs, S. (CI), with Rai, S. (PI) (Warwick), Lovenduski, J. (CI) (Birkbeck) and Waylen, G. (CI) (Sheffield) (2007-11) 'Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament', Programme Award, Leverhulme Trust, £800k.
- [8] Childs, S. (PI), with Webb, P. (CI) (Sussex) (2007-10) 'Gender and the Conservative Party', ESRC, £476k. Awarded 'outstanding' by all reviewers of the 'End of Award' report.
- [9] Childs, S., with Lovenduski, J. and Campbell, R. (Birkbeck) (all CIs) (2005) 'The 2005 British Representation Study', Nuffield Foundation, £7.5k.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Since 2008 Childs' research has improved women's parliamentary representation in the UK by influencing thinking, agendas, legislation and political practices in the following ways:

Agenda setting, legislation and changing political practices: Childs' lead co-authored Hansard Report of 2005 [2] was featured on Radio 4's flagship 'Today' programme, commented on in Parliament's *House* magazine and launched in Parliament – the Rt Hon Theresa May (then Shadow Secretary of State for Transport and former Party Chairman) spoke to the Report's conclusions [d]. This publication contributed to the decision to establish a Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation in November 2008 and to Childs' appointment as its Special Adviser [e]. In that role she directly impacted evidence gathering, public dissemination and Conference consultation processes: she provided briefings and data, responses to written evidence, and prepared questions for witnesses; participated in evidence gathering sessions in Parliament and throughout the UK; and appeared on BBC Radio 4 'You and Yours' [a] [b] [f]. The Conference worked through 2009 into early 2010. During this time, Childs also participated in a private meeting with MPs and the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) to discuss MPs' pay and expenses, and possible impacts on the supply of women candidates [a]. The Speaker's Conference published its final Report in January 2010. It included analysis, data, conceptual frameworks and recommendations which drew on Childs' research [1] [2] [3] [4]. The Report included the following recommendations influenced by Childs: paragraph 143 relating to parties' equality policies; the extension to the Sex Discrimination (EC) Act sunset clause; discussion of sex quotas [11] [4], including 'serious consideration' of prescriptive quotas; reviewing House sitting hours, party selection procedures and outcome monitoring; and regular Parliamentary debate on women's representation. Parties now monitor selection more and provide some data, and the sunset clause was extended in the 2010 Equality Act. The concept of 'critical mass' - which retains considerable purchase amongst political actors, the media and public - was not directly used in the Report due to Childs' intervention [3]. The Labour Party's 2010 General Election manifesto said that it would 'take forward' the Conference's proposals [g] and continues to use sex quotas.

Following up the Conference on pay, participation and parenting: Since the Conference, Childs has extended the agenda-setting impact of her research on three issues related to its work, namely pay, increased women's political participation, and parenting. On pay, the 2010 IPSA consultation document raised the issue of the relationship between salary and diversity of candidates. Childs was amongst a group of academics who participated in IPSA meetings in 2012 to discuss MPs' pay [a]. In these sessions Childs made contributions based on her previous research on the issues of, inter alia, job-sharing by MPs and childcare costs due to the nature of MPs' work and hence the need for a higher salary, which IPSA has recommended [1] [6]. On participation and representation, the Conference, and Childs' role therein, contributed to the creation in 2010 of the civil society campaign group Counting Women In (www.countingwomenin.org) which combines the Electoral Reform Society, Hansard Society, Fawcett Society, Centre for Women and Democracy and Unlock Democracy. Childs and Ruth Fox (Director and Head of Research of the Hansard Society) wrote the group's founding charter and helped to set up its organisational structure [e]. Childs continues to be an active member. Childs appeared as an expert witness before the Commons Procedure Committee in 2011 in relation to sitting hours due to her research on that issue [1] [4] [6] and submitted written evidence. This issue remains live on the agenda of parliamentary reformers. On parenting, Childs and Campbell (Birkbeck) submitted to IPSA research they conducted in 2012-13 on the need for family-friendly hours in the House to lower this barrier to participation. The research was facilitated by the Speaker and Anne Foster, Parliament's Head of Diversity and Inclusion.

Promoting adoption of strong equality promotion measures in the Conservative Party: Awareness in the Conservative Party of women's under-representation has been heightened by Childs' research [c] [d]. Leading Conservative women, including Baroness Jenkin [c] and Theresa May [d], drew on Childs' research [1] [2] in their creation of a new group within the party – Women2Win www.women2win.com - in 2005 which advocates a gender balance of candidates that reflects the composition of British society overall. Childs spoke at Women2Win's launch and at its fifth anniversary conference in 2010. There has been particular interest in the Conservative Party in Childs' identification of specific party-level strategies to enhance women's representation, and to address the party's lack of 'demand' for women candidates [2] [c] [d]. Childs was also invited to meet with individuals from David Cameron's team in advance of his election as leader in

December 2005. Women's representation became a key dimension of Cameron's leadership campaign and subsequent party modernization which included a series of selection reforms prior to the 2010 General Election. In his evidence to the Speaker's Conference [f] in 2009 Cameron stated that the party would introduce some All Women Shortlists in advance of the election, a measure which Childs had championed in her research [1] [2] [4] and within the Conference, in Women2Win and when meeting Cameron's team. Childs had private conversations with Theresa May during her tenure as Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions 2009-10 [d]. Childs has provided May with research-based data and arguments [4] [5] which have supported May's advocacy efforts among her senior colleagues. Aiming at the next General Election, Baroness Jenkin met with No. 10 in 2011 armed with a briefing by Childs on selection reforms based on research published the following year [5] [6]. Following the establishment of a new Conservative parliamentary grouping in December 2011 – the Conservative Women's Organisation www.conservativewomen.org.uk – Childs briefed Conservative MPs on arguments, data and reform derived from her research in progress [5] [6] [c].

Promoting sex-balanced leadership in the Labour Party: Childs' book on New Labour women MPs [1] in particular has contributed to her decade-long academic association with leading Labour women MPs, not least the Rt Hon Harriet Harman (whose posts since 2008 have included Leader of the House of Commons and Secretary of State for Equalities and Minister for Women) and Dame Anne Begg (Vice-Chairman of the Speaker's Conference) [a]. In 2010 Childs participated in a private meeting of the Fabian Society to discuss gender and the Labour leadership contest. In 2011, at Harman's invitation, Childs was a lead author of the Political Studies Association's Women and Politics Specialist Group briefing to Harman on sex-balancing Labour's leadership. The briefing identified mechanisms such as the Leader and Deputy Leader having to be of different sexes that would deliver that outcome: the measures are still being considered.

Promoting action by the Liberal Democrats on women's under-representation: Early in 2013 Childs presented written and oral evidence to the party's investigation into women's representation at Westminster. Based on her research [1] [4] [5], Childs argued for sex quotas and job-shares. The party has been exploring the issue of MP job-shares as of February 2013 [i] and and it became public in October 2013 that the Party leader and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg is considering the adoption of All Women Shortlists for the 2020 General Election [j].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Corroborating contacts:

- [a] Vice-Chairman of the 2008-2010 Speaker's Conference; Chair of Work and Pensions Select Committee 2010-; MP for Aberdeen S. 1997-. Corroborates impact on Speaker's Conference.
- [b] Speaker of the House of Commons 2009-. MP for Buckingham, 1997-. Corroborates impact on Speaker's Conference and parliamentary agenda more broadly.
- [c] Member of the House of Lords, 2011-; Co-Chair of Women2Win. Corroborates impact on Women2Win and Conservative Party.
- [d] Home Secretary, 2010-; Co-Chair of Women2Win; MP for Maidenhead 1997-. Corroborates impact in Women2Win and Conservative Party.
- [e] Director and Head of Research, Hansard Society. Corroborates impact on CountingWomenIn.

Documentation:

- [f] *Speaker's Conference* Report, House of Commons 2010, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>. Corroborates impact on Speaker's Conference.
- [g] The *Labour Party Manifesto 2010* 9:3, <http://tinyurl.com/lman2010>. Corroborates impact on the Labour Party.
- [h] Oral evidence, House of Commons Procedure Committee, 29 June 2011 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmproced/c1370-i/c137001.htm>. Corroborates impact on House of Commons procedures.
- [i] Patrick Wintour, 'Lib Dems Draw Up Job-share Plans to Boost Number of Women MPs', *The Guardian*, 18 February 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/feb/18/lib-dems-job-share-mps>. Corroborates impact on Liberal Democrat Party.
- [j] Jane Merrick, 'Nick Clegg Looks at All-women Shortlists in 2020 Election', *The Independent*, 27 October 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/nick-clegg-looks-at-allwomen-shortlists-in-2020-election-8906449.html>. Corroborates impact on Liberal Democrat Party.