Constituting Women’s Interests through Representative Claims

Karen Celis (University College Ghent, Belgium), Sarah Childs (University of Bristol, UK), Johanna Kantola (University of Helsinki, Finland), and Mona Lena Krook (Washington University in St. Louis, USA)

karen.celis@hogent.be
s.childs@bristol.ac.uk
johanna.kantola@helsinki.fi
mlkrook@wustl.edu


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Abstract

The promotion of ‘women’s interests’ is a central focus and concern of advocates of women’s political representation. Examining the policy priorities and initiatives of female office-holders, existing research seeks to establish whether there are links between women’s presence and policy outcomes favorable to women as a group. Building on recent work critical of this traditional approach, this paper seeks in three key points to rethink the nature and process of political representation. First, it observes, dynamics of representation are not limited to elected bodies; rather, actors in multiple sites articulate policy demands. Second, in the course of their lobbying efforts, these actors make claims about who ‘women’ are and what ‘women’ want. Third, analyzing the multiple sources of claims-making highlights the need to distinguish between ‘women’s issues’ (a broad policy category) and ‘women’s interests’ (the content given to this category by various actors). The implications of this new approach are illustrated via four case studies, pointing to substantial within- and cross-case variations in the issues and interests identified as relevant to women as a group, as well as the actors claiming to act for women. On this basis, the paper concludes that ‘women’ and ‘women’s interests’ are constructed through, and not simply reflected in, political advocacy on their behalf.
The promotion of ‘women’s interests’ is a central focus and concern of advocates of women’s political representation. Suggesting that low numbers of women in elected office is a problem for democratic justice, legitimacy, responsiveness, and effectiveness, supporters propose that a greater proportion of women will enhance the quality and outcomes of policy-making (Phillips 1995; Young 1997). Exploring whether, and under what conditions, representatives ‘act for’ women has therefore been a core interest of research on gender and politics. Empirical work has paid special attention to the question of whether female members of parliament (MPs) identify ‘women’ as a constituency whose issues and interests they seek to promote (Childs 2004; Dodson 2006; Swers 2002). Nonetheless, new work by both mainstream and feminist scholars has challenged this prevailing approach by reframing representation as a creative process of claims-making (Saward 2006; Squires 2008), recognizing multiple sites of policy advocacy (Celis et al 2008; Lovenduski 2005; Weldon 2002), and questioning the utility and accuracy of *a priori* definitions of ‘women’s interests’ (Celis 2006; Mansbridge 1999).

Taken together, these more recent contributions suggest that policies formulated and approved by elected officials constitute only one means by which political actors may advocate on behalf of a group. Claims about groups and group interests are not only made in national parliaments, but also at different levels of government and in a variety of political forums, inter alia, cabinets, women’s policy agencies, political parties, civil society organizations, and even courts. Expanding the range of sites where representation takes place thus affords a more comprehensive view of the policy landscape. At the same time, it also permits a richer analysis of the debates surrounding group interests by potentially uncovering a series of competing policy positions. Turning away from pre-defined policy proposals and outcomes, in turn, helps avoid the charges of essentialism leveled at work that presumes a set of shared interests among all women which can be compared to the behavior of particular representatives (cf. Fuss 1989; Spelman 1989). Attention to claims-making by various actors simply explores how ‘women’s interests’ are articulated in ways that paint a picture of who ‘women’ are and what ‘women’ want.
Viewing representation through this lens has important implications for political analysis. Most directly, it requires abandoning traditional research designs in favor of a more inductive approach, that questions the ways in which groups and their interests are constructed in the course of claims-making by a multiplicity of actors. To build a case for this revised approach, the paper begins in the first section by discussing previous research and synthesizing recent innovations in political theory. Transforming these insights into a strategy for empirical research, the second section outlines an alternative research design and how it can be applied to case studies of claims-making in four countries: Belgium, Finland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. As described in greater detail below, the cases were selected because they share important features in common, at the same time that they reflect a broad array of contextual features that influence the opportunities and constraints for actors to articulate claims on behalf of women as a group. Using these cases as an illustration, the paper’s key contribution is to develop a framework for studying representative claims empirically as a first step in a comprehensive study of how group representation occurs.

The third and fourth sections contain the empirical analysis, exploring first the array of ‘women’s issues’ identified by key political actors in the four countries and then the contestation witnessed with regard to the content of ‘women’s interests’ and alternative normative visions of ‘women’ as a group. Distinguishing between women’s issues (a broad policy category) and women’s interests (the content given to this category by various actors), the data collected generate four main observations: (1) there is rough consensus across actors, sites, and countries as to what constitutes women’s issues; (2) there is a broad selection of women’s issues, although some actors define women’s issues more broadly than others; (3) the nature of women’s interests is subject, in most instances, to extensive contestation and struggle; and (4) the content given to women’s interests by various actors reflect and shape views on who ‘women’ are and should be. On the basis on this analysis, the paper concludes that women’s issues and interests are not fixed or easy to define, but rather, are the subject of vivid and ongoing political debates. Recognizing the constructed nature of group interests, in turn, indicates that representation is best conceptualized as an active and contingent process, rather than as an authentic reflection of the values and needs of society.
Women’s Interests and Representative Claims

Most theoretical and empirical studies of political representation begin with Hanna Pitkin’s seminal work, The Concept of Representation (1967), which identifies four main types: formalistic representation, which refers to the formal bestowing of authority onto a person to act for other; descriptive representation, which reflects the correspondence between the characteristics of the representatives and the represented; symbolic representation, which embodies the more diffuse ‘meaning’ of representation that resides in the attitudes and beliefs of the represented; and substantive representation, which she describes as ‘acting for’ representation. For Pitkin, substantive is the one true type that deserves to be privileged above all others because it captures a relationship between the represented and representative in which the represented are “logically prior.” Accordingly, representatives must be responsive to the represented and not the other way around. This responsiveness can be realized in two ways. The represented may give the representative a mandate clearly stipulating what they should do, transforming the representative into a delegate with no independence. Alternatively, the represented may empower the representative to act on their behalf, empowering the representative to act as an independent trustee (cf. Burke 1968; Rousseau 1978).

This theoretical approach has led feminists to devote extensive attention to the question of whether women in political office ‘act for’ women in the broader population. The privileging of constituent interests in this prevailing model has required feminist theorists to identify “women’s interests” – and why they are represented less adequately or well by men – in order to build a case for increasing the numbers of women elected. Early scholars contended that the gendered division of reproductive and productive labor gave women a different socio-economic position in society, which in turn generated a distinct set of political interests (Diamond and Hartsock 1981; Sapiro 1981). Later scholars, wary that such assertions might reduce women’s interests to biology, pointed to differences in the life experiences of women and men that led them to have distinct perspectives on questions of general concern (Jonasdóttir 1988; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Williams 1998; Young 1997).
Inspired by these discussions, feminist empirical work has defined ‘women’s interests’ in three main ways, often using this concept interchangeably with terms like ‘women’s issues,’ ‘women’s needs,’ and ‘women’s concerns’ (Celis 2008, 2009). The first equates women’s interests with concerns that belong to the private sphere according to established views on gender relations (Meyer 2003). These encompass issues linked to women’s bodies, sexuality, and the possibility of giving birth. The second, related to the first, concerns the position of women in the public sphere, especially with regard to the labor market and welfare state policy. These two categories of concerns have been labeled by Maxine Molyneux as “practical” interests “arising from the concrete conditions of women’s positioning within the gender divisions of labor” (1985, 233). A third set of definitions involve what Molyneux describes as “strategic” interests “deriving from the analysis of women’s subordination and from the formulation of an alternative” (1985, 232). This feminist formulation can be seen has having three components: (1) recognition of women as a social category, (2) recognition of a power imbalance between men and women, and (3) commitment to implement a policy that increases the autonomy of female citizens (Wängnerud 2000).

Reflecting these diverse viewpoints, case studies have analyzed a combination of practical and strategic interests. On the whole, however, scholars have tended to privilege feminist definitions. Debra Dodson and Susan Carroll (1995) employ the former approach to distinguish between “women’s rights bills,” those with a feminist undertone, and “laws concerning women’s traditional arenas of interest,” referring to the role of women as care-givers and their priorities in relation to themes such as health and education. In contrast, researchers like Beth Reingold (2000) and Valerie O’Regan (2000) reference some practical issues, but largely focus on feminist concerns. Reingold compares the voting behavior of male and female members of Congress with regard to their support for legislation on topics like abortion, discrimination, domestic violence, and breast cancer. The issues identified by O’Regan include “salary protection,” laws on equal salaries, maternity leave, job opportunities, and childcare, and “social policy,” laws concerning marriage and divorce, child custody, domestic violence, sexual abuse, abortion, and education. In general, research finds that women more than men tend to prioritize and pursue legislation on a variety of women’s issues, whether these bills
address more traditional concerns like healthcare and child welfare or more feminist demands like rape and equal pay (Bratton 2005; Dodson 2006; Swers 1998; Taylor-Robinson and Heath 2003; Wolbrecht 2002).

While decisions such as these constitute a necessary first step for operationalizing empirical research, the problem with this traditional approach to studying substantive representation is that it involves making *a priori* assumptions about the nature of women as a group. This not only potentially essentializes women and their interests, but in many cases, also tends to elide substantive representation of *women* with a more narrow notion of *feminist* substantive representation (Celis 2008, 2009; Childs 2004). As more critical scholars point out, identity categories like ‘women’ are inherently exclusionary in that they may serve to reify one difference while erasing and obscuring others (Carroll 2001; cf. Riley 1988). At the same time, there may be important differences in what are perceived to be women’s needs and status across countries and over time (Celis 2006; Tripp 2001; Weldon 2002). These considerations suggest that coding decisions may be somewhat arbitrary, subject to the opinions and priorities of researchers. At the same time, important variations across contexts may frustrate the possibility of comparative research: while policies on maternity leave and abortion rights may be important to women in some countries, access to water and land rights may be the main concern of women in others (cf. Krook forthcoming). Similarly, while suffrage was a key women’s issue a century ago, it is no longer a central subject of debate in most countries (Celis 2006).

Recent work in political theory, however, offers a means for getting beyond this impasse. A growing number of scholars criticize the delegate-trustee distinction on the grounds that it assumes a relatively static notion of interests as entities that exist ‘out there,’ ready to be brought into the representational process. These accounts stress instead the importance of acts that unfold over time as the representative and the represented respond to one another in an iterative fashion (Mansbridge 2003; Rehfeld 2006; Saward 2006; cf. Urbinati and Warren 2008). Michael Saward (2006), for example, advocates a shift toward understanding representation in terms of “representative claims,” noting that “would-be political representatives… *make claims* about themselves and their constituents and the links between the two” (2006, 302). These “claims to be representative” can be
made by a variety of actors, which may include elected politicians but also “interest group or NGO figures, local figures, rock stars, [and] celebrities” (2006, 306). From this perspective, traditional notions of substantive representation are wrongly “unidirectional,” in that they depict representatives acting for the represented who otherwise remain passive (2006, 300). Further, they ignore the fact that “at the heart of the act of representing is the depicting of a constituency as this or that, as requiring this or that, as having this or that set of interests” (2006, 300-301). Consequently, representation is not a passive procedure of receiving clear signals from below; rather, it is dynamic, performative, and constitutive, taking place within and across multiple actors and sites.

**Toward a New Approach**

Reframing representation in this way has implications for studying the substantive representation of women by problematizing the existence and nature of ‘women’ as a group to be represented. Connecting these debates to insights in feminist theory, Judith Squires (2008) offers insights as to how the concept of ‘representative claims’ might be further developed by exploiting the distinction made by feminists between ‘sex’ (the biological differences between women and men) and ‘gender’ (the social meanings given to these distinctions). The advantage in focusing on ‘gender,’ rather than on ‘women,’ is that it enables a shift in analytical focus away from binary opposites to a continuum of identities. The central question can then be reframed from the extent to which women and men and their interests are represented in policy-making to the ways in which gender and gender relations are constructed in the representative process. This approach, therefore, does not start from the pre-given categories of ‘women’s interests’ (or ‘men’s interests’), but instead, is concerned with the ways that these get constructed by those who claim to represent ‘women’ (and ‘men’). This perspective is thus more interested in the ways that representatives speak about the interests and identities of their constituents, in contrast to the traditional literature studying how representatives speak for their female constituents. In other words, the research question is no longer whether women are adequately represented but “how gender relations are constituted through representative claims making processes” (Squires 2008, 188; emphasis in original). Describing these dynamics
as the “constitutive representation of gender,” in turn, invites scholars to take the constitutive dimension of claims for women and men into account.

While these accounts are theoretically innovative, however, they do not address how representative claims and their effects might be studied empirically. The task of this paper is to elaborate and apply such a framework, incorporating (1) a broader range of actors and sites of representation, (2) an inductive approach to ‘women’s issues and women’s interests,’ and (3) more explicit attention to the constitutive aspects of these representations. As previously noted, this approach recognizes that legislatures are one of many arenas where claims-making occurs. However, it is also crucial to recognize that, in the course of making claims, actors within and across sites may reinforce and contradict one another in their constructions of gendered interests (cf. Haas 2005; Holli 2008), leading to competing discourses as to who ‘women’ are and what ‘women’ want. Recognizing and mapping these dynamics thus presents an opportunity to denaturalize the concept of ‘women’s interests’ and destabilize the category of ‘women’ that it presupposes. Performing the analysis with precision, however, requires an additional distinction, often overlooked in the existing literature, between ‘women’s issues’ (a broad policy category) and ‘women’s interests’ (the content and direction given to this category by various actors). As will be illustrated below, actors may converge on the importance of a policy area, but diverge with regard to their view on the course of action that will most benefit women.

Traditional research designs are relatively straightforward, examining the policy priorities and legislative activities of female MPs in relation to a pre-defined set of ‘women’s interests.’ However, if what constitutes ‘women’s interests’ is made an empirical question, a research design must be developed to capture how ‘women’s interests’ are constructed through claims articulated by actors in a wide range of arenas. The first step is to decide which countries and time periods to examine, recognizing that findings may vary depending upon the choices made. The cases selected for the following analysis are Belgium, Finland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, in the year of the previous election, the first year of the last legislative session, the middle year of the last legislative session, and the year of the most recent election. Given variations in electoral cycles, different years are investigated across the four countries, but with the goal of making the insights somewhat comparable. The year of the election and the first
The middle year of the legislature is the one in which political programs are put forward and state and civil society actors communicate extensively about their political priorities. The middle year of the legislature can be one of the most active, affording insights into ‘business as usual.’ Analyzing these moments together can therefore offer a series of related but varied snapshots into the various claims made on behalf of women as a group.

The countries themselves are selected because they share important features in common, at the same time that they reflect a broad array of contextual features that influence opportunities and constraints for actors to articulate claims. On the one hand, the four countries are all wealthy, democratic, and largely secular western nations. As a result, they are likely to witness attention to many of the same issues. On the other hand, the four cases also demonstrate important differences in their political systems, affecting the range of relevant actors and their relations to one another, potentially influencing the nature and types of claims that are made. Their political structures are unitary (Finland) and federal (Belgium, UK, US), as well as parliamentary (Belgium, Finland, UK) and presidential (Finland and US).¹ Their electoral systems are proportional (Belgium, Finland) and majoritarian (UK, US), leading to both multi-party (Belgium, Finland) and two-party systems (UK, US). Similarly, their state-society relations are corporatist (Belgium, Finland) and pluralist (UK, US). Their nature of women’s movement activity also varies, with some preferring to mobilize outside of the state (Belgium, UK, US) and some being more state-oriented (Belgium, Finland).² Finally, the proportion of female legislators varies a great deal: the US has less than 17% women, while the UK has 20%, Belgium 35%, and Finland 42% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2009).

Table 1: Actors, Sites, and Time Frames by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Actors and Sites</th>
<th>Time Frames</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Governments and parliaments (federal and regional), political parties (Flemish- and French-speaking), women’s policy agencies (federal and regional), women’s organizations (autonomous and party-based), and trade unions and employer organizations</td>
<td>2004-2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Government and parliament, political parties, women’s policy agencies, women’s organizations (autonomous and party-based), and trade unions</td>
<td>2003-2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007-2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Finland is often described as a ‘semi-presidential system,’ combining some features of parliamentarism and presidentialism.
² Belgium has strong independent women’s organizations as well as strong women’s sections inside the political parties.
These features of the political systems in these countries suggest some shared but also distinct actors and sites of political representation. Some political actors appear across all countries, including governments, parliaments, political parties, and women’s organizations. However, differences in state structures and policies also mean that others play a role in only some cases, like women’s policy agencies, regional governments, trade unions and employer organizations, and courts (see Table 1).\(^3\) Like the slight variations in time frames, recognizing these similarities and differences is crucial for ensuring valid and comparable insights across the four countries, focused on the salient political actors in each case. With these elements in place, the second step is to collect speeches and other documents to map the claims made by actors in various locations, drawing on materials from websites, manifestos, bills, press releases, and other public declarations, at the four moments in time previously identified. This data is then examined with respect to the claims made by different actors in their efforts to articulate who ‘women’ are and what ‘women’ want. It is crucial at this point to distinguish between the issues mentioned and their content. Representative claims can be recognized as an attempt to constitute ‘women’s interests’ – and by extension, ‘women’ as a group – if an issue is (1) directly constructed as one of importance for women (2) presented as only affecting women, such as motherhood; (3) discussed in terms of gender difference; (4) spoken of in terms of gendered effects; and/or (5) framed in terms of equality between women and men.

Given the emphasis on discursive aspect of representation in this research design, qualitative content analysis is most appropriate method to use when investigating representative claims. Content analysis can be performed using quantitative and qualitative techniques, with the goal of analyzing the language utilized in texts of various

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\(^3\) This project shares an interest with the state feminist literature (especially the various publications stemming from the RNGS project) with regard to the role of parliaments, women’s policy agencies, and women’s movements in promoting women’s issues and interests. However, it differs from this literature in recognizing a broader range of actors and leaving the questions of issues and interests open to empirical investigation.
kinds. Quantitative versions tend to focus on large sets of documents, relying on computer programs to discover definitions, frequencies, and even relations between terms in various kinds of texts. Qualitative approaches, in contrast, aim to analyze texts in a systematic but also holistic way, focusing on expressions and meanings as well as potential relations between texts (Krippendorff 2004; Neuendorf 2002). Influenced by discourse analysis, some also seek to uncover the power relations at work behind the text in order to better place its meaning in context (Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton 2001). Given affinities between these goals and the purposes of this study, therefore, this type of content analysis is more likely than other methods to reveal how various actors construct women’s issues and interests, and in turn, constitute ‘women’ as a category.

**Identifying Women’s Issues**

A close and critical reading of the texts utilized in the four case studies uncovers a range of intriguing insights when questions about women’s issues and interests are left open to empirical investigation. To discern which *issues* tend to be associated with women in these four countries, the research examines, first, whether there is a broad consensus among actors within and across countries in terms of what these issues are, and second, whether there are systematic variations across actors and sites, within and across countries, in terms of the breadth of issues identified. Although there are important variations, the content analysis indicates that some issues appear to be common across all four countries, addressed by all actors or a majority of actors, many of which have been the focus of prior studies of women’s substantive representation. Yet, there are further issues in each country that have received the attention of a minority or even a single actor. Viewed as a whole, therefore, the investigation reveals that ‘women’s issues’ cannot be easily or adequately reduced to a small range of policy areas. At the same time, there are notable differences among actors in the sheer numbers of issues they identify. Most notably, women’s organizations tend to demonstrate the greatest breadth, followed by parties and legislators, and then much further behind, by courts, trade unions, and employer associations. Nonetheless, it is crucial to stress that these findings are restricted
to the countries and time periods analyzed; based on the restricted scope of this study, it is not possible to draw wider conclusions about global trends.\(^4\)

*Degrees of Consensus*

The existing literature, as discussed above, defines ‘women’s issues’ to include reproductive rights (especially abortion), equal pay, violence against women, education, women’s health, maternity leave, childcare, and legal issues surrounding marriage and divorce. When the documents for each case are examined, it emerges that representative claims made on behalf of women do indeed revolve around many of these same issues (see Table 2). However, a number of interesting patterns surface when these claims are compared across countries. The first is that there is no one single issue that is shared by all actors in all four countries. Nonetheless, certain common themes are apparent, with issues related to equal pay, work-life balance, violence against women, and access to political representation being mentioned by all actors in two or three countries. Looking at the types of issues addressed by all or a majority of actors produces a more extensive list. Equal pay and violence against women are identified as women’s issues across all four countries, while political representation, retirement security, caregiving, equality policy, and the rights of marginalized women are given priority in three. These trends support some of the coding decisions made in earlier studies, but crucially, also raise questions about the appropriateness of other categories.

**Table 2: Issues and Actors by Country**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue addressed by all actors</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender pay gap</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Access to the labor market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Work-family combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Participation in decision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Violence against women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Trafficking in women and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prostitution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gender pay gap/equal pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Women's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Violence against women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pensions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gender pay gap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Political representation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^4\) The research itself, however, generated a great deal of data. More detailed country-specific trends will soon be available at [http://krook.wustl.edu](http://krook.wustl.edu).
| Issues addressed by a majority of actors | 1. Violence against women | 1. Gender segregation in the labour market | 1. Childcare |
|                                         | 2. Migrant women/women refugees | 2. Family policy | 2. Education/ skills |
|                                         |                        | 5. Childcare | 5. Maternity provision |
|                                         |                        | 7. Women in media | 7. Carers |
|                                         |                        | 8. Sexuality | 8. Immigration/ trafficking |
|                                         | 8. Social security |                        | 8. Divorce/ marriage |
|                                         | 9. Mobility |                        | 1. Support for small business |
| Issues addressed by a single actor | 1. Housewives | 1. Older women | 1. Marriage tax allowance |
|                                         | 4. Sustainable development |                        | 4. Abortion |
|                                         | 5. War and conflict |                        | 5. Childbirth |
|                                         | 6. Housing |                        | 6. Dinner ladies |
|                                         |                        |                        | 7. Environment |
|                                         |                        |                        | 8. Ethnicity |
|                                         |                        |                        | 9. Older women |
|                                         |                        |                        | 10. Criminal justice |
|                                         |                        |                        | 11. Fatherhood |
|                                         | 5. Sexual harassment |                        | 6. Women and policing |
|                                         | 7. Homeschooling |                        | 8. Political appointments |
|                                         | 8. Political appointments |                        | 9. Intersectional civil rights |
|                                         | 9. Intersectional civil rights |                        | 10. Feminism |
|                                         | 10. Feminism |                        | 11. Taxation |
|                                         | 11. Taxation |                        | 12. Environment |

Turning to some of the issues identified by a minority or single actor, an even more differentiated picture emerges. Only at this point do issues like abortion, divorce, and maternity leave appear with greater consistency across countries. However, a number of issues not traditionally associated with women are also mentioned, such as taxation,
crime, sports, the environment, men’s roles, and the status of older women. Further, several issues appear in single countries only, like housing, war, matrons, dinner ladies, restroom gender parity, and access to firearms. These findings suggest that adopting a more inductive approach focused on representative claims may yield a much broader array of ‘women’s issues’ than traditional research designs. At the same time, it also calls into doubt the robustness and replicability of studies that pre-define what women’s issues are, without in fact investigating whether actors in that case have themselves articulated such issues in this fashion.

The benefits of a more systematic approach to issue-identification, however, are even more evident when trends in individual countries are examined. In Belgium, there is a consensus among all actors that women’s issues include those pertaining to the labour market (namely access to the labour market and the wage gap), work-life balance (with the main focus being to improve the situation for women in general and encourage their participation on the labour market), and increased participation in decision-making (both in political bodies and neo-corporatist arrangements). In Finland, the issues around which there appears to be shared agreement relate to violence against women (in its many manifestations), trafficking in women and prostitution, women’s employment (both equal pay and overcoming the gender pay gap), work-life balance (with an effort to reconcile work and family obligations in particular), and maternity/paternity/parental leave (to enable both women and men to participate in childcare). Actors in the UK share some of these concerns, like violence against women, equal pay, and political representation, but also identify a further issue – pensions – not raised in Belgium and Finland. Finally, in the US, only one issue, reproductive rights, has received attention from actors in all major political arenas. This category of issues, however, is not restricted to abortion, but also includes access to contraception, pre-natal care, and sex education.

Extent of Breadth

The analysis thus far points to some common, but also some puzzling, patterns in terms of the types of issues associated with women in the four countries. The data itself suggests two possible reasons for these trends. First, as illustrated in Table 3, actors vary
enormously in terms of the numbers of issues they articulate. Despite some differences in the numbers across cases, a general observation can be made that women’s organizations, whether autonomous or party-based, tend to politicize a much broader range of issues than other actors. They are followed, in descending order, by women’s policy agencies, political parties, parliaments, presidents, courts, trade unions, and employer associations. Women’s organizations in civil society generally adopt an approach to defining women’s issues that seeks not only to encompass many different facets of women’s lives, but also to recognize diversity among women. For these reasons, they draw attention to a wide range of social, economic, and political concerns that may have a differential impact on women as opposed to men – including violence, media coverage, wage gaps, maternity provisions, and political office – and highlight the ways in which these may be experienced in distinct ways by women depending on their age, ethnicity, ability, domicile, or sexual orientation. In comparison, the positions espoused by women’s organizations in political parties are slightly truncated – except for in the case of Finland – due in large part to the need to conform to the scope and direction of existing party ideologies. Nonetheless, in some instances, women’s sections have brought new issues to the table, including such items as pensions (Belgium), entrepreneurship (Finland), and student loans (UK).

Table 3: Numbers of Issues by Actors and Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Belgium 5</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women’s policy agencies</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party-based women’s organizations</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Numbers for federal and regional parliaments and women’s policy agencies are collapsed
Along similar lines, women’s policy agencies (state structures responsible for promoting public policies on women) often adopt a broad approach when defining issues of concern to women. In Finland, where several agencies play a role, the range of issues has been extended to include the labor market and gender violence, but also trafficking, pornography, the media, and even military conscription. In contrast to these groups, parties and MPs tend to include a slightly smaller range of issues on their electoral platforms and in the legislation they introduce. Again, selection and emphasis appears to be related to the nature of party ideologies. In Belgium, there are significant differences across parties in terms of their levels of activity on women’s issues, with Christian Democrats discussing many more than any other party, and their commitment to different solutions, with Flemish Christian Democrats, for example, proposing a series of measures to promote motherhood and French Socialists demanding free contraceptives for girls. In the UK, similar patterns are evident: parties on the center and the left address a wider range of issues, but also vary in important ways with regard to their priorities: on the same issue of maternity leave, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats seek an increase in maternity pay, while the Conservatives seek to make maternity provisions more flexible, including later payments to grandparents rather than public centers for childcare. In the US, differences are even starker: whereas the Democrats highlight, among other things, the need for further equality legislation like the Equal Rights Amendment and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Republicans are firmly against such reforms.

A second potential reason for the patterns witnessed across countries is that some of the issues uncovered in this study are brought to the agenda by a single actor. In the
three European cases, many of these issues are raised only by political parties: the status of housewives in Belgium, taxation in Finland, and ‘dinner ladies’ (women who work in schools providing lunch services) in the UK. The US, however, provides perhaps the best illustration of this point, with a number of seemingly esoteric issues being introduced by a range of individual actors. Progressive women’s groups, for example, highlight political – especially judicial – appointments as an issue relevant to women, noting that these are vital for ensuring the protection of women’s fundamental freedoms and civil rights. More conservative women’s groups, in contrast, emphasize the right to homeschool children as a means for women to oppose curriculum changes mandated by the central government. In terms of the parties, the Democrats emphasize issues that echo many of the demands of progressive women’s organizations. However, the Republican Party includes two issues on its platform that appear nowhere else: a constitutional amendment to secure the formal rights of crime victims, including battered women, and the option of firearms training in federal programs serving senior citizens and women. Along similar lines, the Senate has witnessed two bills to protect pregnant women from lead exposure, while the House of Representatives has seen a bill introduced to ensure restroom gender parity, which would require at least a ratio of two to one in the number of women’s to men’s toilets in all new federal buildings, recognizing that women’s demands for such facilities exceed men’s.

**Constructing Women’s Interests**

Mapping the range of policy areas that actors view as women’s issues makes it possible, in turn, to explore in greater depth how women’s interests are framed by actors, and by extension, how women are constructed as a group in the course of these debates. The need to remain agnostic about the content of ‘women’s interests’ is vividly illustrated by the case study materials, which reveal that while actors within and across sites can often agree on the importance of certain issues, they can also disagree vehemently with regard to the policy content most beneficial to women. Their views on substance appear, in turn, to be informed by differing normative views of women as a group. In the analysis below, these points are elaborated, first, by focusing on a single issue in each country that has been subject to extensive discussion regarding women’s interests, and second, by
noting how differences in the content given to these interests by various actors reflect and shape views on who women are and should be. The issues selected for closer scrutiny are those that have been particularly salient in each country in recent years: migrant women in Belgium, work-family reconciliation in Finland, political representation in the UK, and abortion in the US. Debates on these issues have engaged a wide array of actors, as well as reflected a range of views of women as a group. The study reveals that, far from being uncontroversial, questions about what is in women’s interests is highly contested, largely because what is at stake are conflicting worldviews regarding the proper roles of women.

Contesting Women’s Interests

As previously noted, most scholars analyzing women’s substantive representation have privileged feminist definitions of women’s interests. This tendency is problematic in that it not only presumes that all women share the same interests, overlooking important differences among them, but also truncates the potentially vast array of issues affecting women’s lives. Seeking to avoid these traps, the analysis here focuses on four issues that emerged organically from the research as having been the focus of extensive discussion among a variety of actors and reflecting widely divergent views of what women need and want. In Belgium, one issue that has caught the public eye in recent years is the status of allochtonous women and girls. Engaging nearly all policy actors, these debates have revolved around several broad concerns, including efforts to improve the situation of these women in specific policy domains, and the role that allochtonous women’s organizations should play in their own emancipation. However, one of the most sustained controversies relates to headscarves and burqas, which have exposed tensions between concerns to promote gender equality and respect cultural differences.

In general, there is a broad consensus among actors in various locations that, in the conflict between Islam and gender equality, priority should be given to the democratic value of equality. In the words of the Flemish women’s policy agency, and echoed by the Socialist Party’s women’s organization: “the struggle for equality in Belgium has been

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6 In Belgium, the word ‘allochtonous’ is used to refer to people ‘of foreign origin,’ ignoring differences between migrants of the first, second, or even third generations.
long and hard; we should not accept discrimination against women in the name of culture.” Unsurprisingly, the Flemish party of the extreme right went further to state that “foreigners wishing to settle in Belgium need to respect the fundamental values of our society such as equality between men and women,” with a “return policy” implemented for those who do not respect that basic value. These concerns led several actors to make declarations against wearing headscarves and burqas in public, ostensibly in defense of allochtonous women and girls. During debates in the Flemish parliament, a ban was justified on the grounds that “the burqa is unworthy of a human being and denies women physical freedom,” a point that was further emphasized by the Christian Democratic women’s organization, asserting that the burqa is a “physical handicap that hinders women’s role in society.” A note of dissent, however, was registered by the umbrella organization of French-speaking women’s groups, which recognized that “the meaning of the burqa is plural, not per definition a sign of submission.” They urged that the debate focus instead on promoting “liberty” and “self-determination and equal rights in the family” for allochtonous women and girls.

In Finland, in contrast, heated debates have revolved around a different topic, the importance of reconciling work and family as a means to promote gender equality. While there is broad consensus among parties regarding the need to promote better work-life balance, those on different ends of the political spectrum offer distinct solutions and justifications when claiming to represent women. Left-wing parties argue that women’s interests are served when the state provides affordable, high-quality municipal childcare places for all children under the age of seven, thereby enabling women’s labour market participation. In their electoral manifesto, the Social Democratic Party suggested that doing this most effectively required developing a variety of new forms of public care, including afterschool programs. Along similar lines, in a parliamentary debate the Left Alliance stated that “[f]amilies need to be supported by developing municipal childcare and education systems so that every father and mother who is capable to and wants to could safely enter the labour market.”

Parties on the right, in contrast, claim to represent women by giving them the opportunity to “choose to stay at home” and care for their children themselves (Kantola 2006, 55). The conservative Coalition Party manifesto, for example, stated that the home
care allowance – an existing provision which enables (mainly) mothers to stay at home and look after their young children – should be increased, because “this improves families’ chances to choose the most appropriate form of care for their children.” In a parliamentary debate, a (male) MP from the Centre Party took this point one step further by questioning “why the state wants to guarantee every child a childcare place outside the home” rather than “giving families the choice for organizing their own lives?” In his view, “all forms of care should be made equal.” Later policy discussions moved closer in this direction, as the overall debate shifted towards increasing the levels of maternity and paternity leave pay and the home care allowance rather than the quality of municipal childcare.

In UK, questions regarding work-life balance have been less salient than concerns to increase the numbers of women in elected political office. This issue has received attention from actors in all policy locations, although their levels of commitment and the solutions they propose vary considerably. In parliamentary debates in 2005, several MPs made comments critical of the composition of the House of Commons. One male Labour MP observed that the House did not “truly reflect the people whom we represent…when I was elected in 1983 there were 59 male MPs called John, 30 male MPs called David, and only 23 women MPs,” while another suggested that reforms to the House of Lords could “provide the gender and ethnic balance that still eludes the Commons.” A Conservative male MP, however, was clear that he was not in favour of “family friendly” sitting hours that might facilitate women’s participation. An exchange that took place between the Women’s Minister (Labour) and the Shadow Women’s Minister (Conservative) also highlighted key differences: while the Shadow Minister acknowledged that women in her party “must all keep working to ensure that we have more and more women,” the Minister responded with “regret” that only her party “took advantage of legislation permitting the use of equality guarantees” to ensure greater access.

Similar differences across parties were evident in the party manifestos: Labour stressed the need for all women shortlists (AWS); the Liberal Democrats highlighted their principled commitment to “improving” the numbers of women, advocating reform of the electoral system as a means by which to deliver a greater proportion of women and ethnic minority MPs; and the Conservatives were silent, remaining averse to any measures that
might interfere with the principle of “merit” in candidate selection. These approaches find parallels as well in the discussions of the parties’ women’s organizations, although there are some points of variation with the party line. Whereas Labour women tended to view AWS as the most appropriate means for combating women’s under-representation, Liberal Democrat women stressed several “reasons for the lack of women candidates” which were “staring us in the face.” For one prospective female candidate, these included younger women’s responsibility for childcare, as well as party responses to men and women having children: “fatherhood sells” a male candidate whereas motherhood was a “millstone around a female candidate’s neck.” For another woman, they involved the need to show party “members and activists that I was serious about winning and putting my all into the campaign.” Conservative women, in contrast, were encouraged to take part in public life by the women’s organization, but were also considered by the same to lack confidence and, because of their “biology” were more involved with their families than men. The opposite interpretation was given by one women’s group in civil society, which emphasized that the problem was not shortcomings with women, but rather the discrimination that parties expressed toward women in candidate selection procedures.

In the US, finally, one of the most polarizing political issues of recent decades has been abortion. These debates have generally been framed as an opposition between “pro-choice” and “pro-life” positions. The former view was well-articulated by a progressive women’s organization, arguing that a “woman’s well-being requires self-determination, equality, and the respect and support of her society.” The latter view could be seen in the mission statement of a conservative women’s organization, which declared “support [for] the sanctity of human life as a gift from our Creator.” Sustained controversies over this issue, however, have led to discursive innovations by actors on both sides of this debate. The Democrats’ party platform in 2008, for example, stated that they “oppose the current Administration’s consistent attempts to undermine a woman’s ability to make her own life choices and obtain reproductive health care….We will never put ideology above women’s health.” The Republicans, in contrast, framed abortion not as a health issue, but as a moral issue of another sort in their 2008 platform: “We all have a moral obligation to assist, not to penalize, women struggling with the challenges of an unplanned
pregnancy….Women deserve better than abortion. Every effort should be made to work with women considering abortion to enable and empower them to choose life.”

Nonetheless, the most dramatic actions and statements with regard to abortion among the actors examined were initiated by members of the House and Senate. In 2007-2008 alone, no less than 48 pieces of legislation were introduced that touched on the subject of abortion. A number of these bills sought to facilitate access by prohibiting deceptive advertising of abortion services, reducing the need for abortion via education and improved family planning services, and affirming “a woman’s freedom to choose,” noting that prior court “decisions have protected the health and lives of women.” The vast majority of bills, however, aimed to restrict or overturn access by establishing “the right to life,” prohibiting the transport of minors across state lines to circumvent parental consent laws, forbidding family planning grants to be awarded to an entity that performed abortions, and requiring that women seeking abortions “be shown the visual image of the fetus” and be “fully informed of regarding the pain experienced by their unborn child.” They also included the two bills that most explicitly referenced women’s interests, despite being sponsored and co-sponsored entirely by men. One aspired to outlaw “‘sex-selective’ abortion,” which it viewed as “barbaric” and as “an act of sex-based or gender-based violence” because the “targeted victims” were “overwhelmingly female.” The other sought to provide for research on and service for individuals with “post-abortion depression and psychosis,” because “[a]bortion can have severe and long-term effects on the mental and emotional well-being of women [including] eating disorders, depression, and suicide attempts.” During this session of Congress, the Supreme Court also upheld by a 5-4 decision a ban on late-term abortions, because in their view, there was no evidence that an exception was needed to protect the health of the pregnant woman.

Constituting Women as a Group

The quotations taken from these four sets of debates provide insight into a range of different kinds of representative claims that have been put forward on behalf of women as a group. In each instance, actors have presented their views as an assessment of what is in the best interests of women. Closer examination of these claims, however, reveals that
these policy positions are far from neutral and objective evaluations of what women want and need. Rather, the heart of the debate revolves around competing normative visions of women as a group. The cases analyzed here point to two broad oppositions: (1) women as victims versus women as agents, and (2) women as mothers versus women as workers. In all four countries, individuals and groups frame their arguments and policy proposals on these issues with reference to one or more of these portrayals. Importantly, these are not necessarily invoked in the same way in all cases, nor are representations of women as a group necessarily restricted to these four views. Further, issue debates are not inevitably – or universally – couched according to these particular oppositions: one side may privilege women as agents, for example, while the other emphasizes women as mothers. While specific images may differ, however, the purpose – and eventual outcome – of these claims is the same: to shape perceptions of who and what women are and should be.

In Belgium, allochtonous women and girls are framed as a specific and generally homogeneous group. Almost no internal differentiations are made, for example between religious and non-religious women, or between ‘well-integrated’ and more ‘ghettoized’ women. This results in a fixing and freezing of their identity, which is then employed to characterize them as victims of their own culture and/or as victims of Belgian society. A similar dynamic operates as well with regard to Muslim men, who are by extension portrayed as a homogeneous group of oppressors. In the headscarf and burqa debates discussed above, the majority of actors depict women from these communities as oppressed and in need of help from the state in order to be emancipated. They become passive subjects caught in a double discrimination as women and as “foreigners,” who must be saved from their own culture by better integrating them into Belgian society with its more liberal values. This approach contrasts sharply with the portrayal of women as agents put forward by French-speaking women’s groups. In their view, these women are to some degree already empowered to make their own decisions, and perhaps with some support from the Belgian state, might be further able to emancipate themselves.

In Finland, the debate over reconciling work and family involves quite a different set of themes. Actors on the left end of the political spectrum present the average or ideal woman as a working mother. In their view, women’s place is in the labor market, both
factually and normatively: it is where women are and should be. However, while the
working mother has historically been constructed as a strong survivor who successfully
combined these roles with the help of the state through gender equality policy (Kantola
2006, 61), recent debates have focused more on young women as a precarious group in
need of protection, due to the increase in insecure fixed-contract jobs. Young women are
therefore constructed as no longer benefiting from a welfare policy intended for working
mothers who have “normal,” permanent jobs. Instead, they are victims needing protection
from the state in order to successfully combine work and family. By way of contrast,
right-wing actors constitute women as mothers whose desire is to fulfill their traditional
gender roles in nuclear families. The needs of the family are valorized and placed above
individual choices, requiring the reactivation of traditional gender roles which treat.
heterosexual partnership between women and men as the norm.

In the UK, concerns about women as workers and mothers are also invoked in
deliberations over how to promote women’s political representation. Yet, the problem is
not so much about work-life balance as about the perceived fundamental incompatibility
– for women only, apparently – between work, parenthood, and a political career. In all
of these discussions, as in Belgium, women are talked about as a relatively homogenous
group in relation to men. There appears to be broad consensus among political actors
with regard to the difficulties in balancing the responsibilities associated with work and
family. For some, such as the head of the Conservative Party’s women’s organization,
this reflects women’s biology; for others, like women’s groups in civil society this
reflects an unequal division of labour in the public and private spheres. These dual
responsibilities are rendered especially problematic for those seeking to participate in the
political sphere. Consequently, women are constructed by the parties and female actors
themselves as being in some sense deficient from the typical politician, reinforcing a
distinction between the male-politician-norm and the female-politician-pretender (Childs
2008). To overcome these perceived deficiencies, prospective female candidates seem to
believe that women – but not men – need to “hide” rather than showcase their families
and give up paid employment to prove their commitment to politics.

The normative representations of women in these three cases are interwoven, to a
certain degree, in debates over abortion in the US. The nature and direction of these
portrayals, however, have evolved over the years. Earlier discussions frame abortion as a question of whether women should be trusted to make their own decisions, or if the state should intervene to protect the life of the fetus. Core tensions revolved around whether women could be trusted to “do the right thing,” with one group focused on women as agents who could best decide for themselves and the other emphasizing women’s biological – and religious – obligations to bring new life into the world as mothers. New discourses introduced in recent years shift around some of these traditional positions. Supporters continue to frame abortion as a question of choice, but also stress the need to give women better access and information to avoid unwanted pregnancies in order to give them the means to protect their health. Opponents still emphasize the right to life, but have also introduced new language to their campaign to restrict abortion. Most strikingly, they have moved away from a primary focus on the fetus to consider the position of the expectant mother, who they argue must be able to make “informed choices.” They also suggest that women are victims of abortion, being the majority of aborted fetuses and suffering emotional damage after having abortions. The best way to overcome this victimhood, in their view, is by empowering women to make the choice not to abort.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

The question of whether women elected to political office advocate on behalf of ‘women’s interests’ has been the subject of an extensive literature, which to date, has tended to employ a research design focused on the priorities and actions of female MPs with regard to a set of women’s issues and interests defined previously by the researcher. This prevailing approach to analyzing the dynamics of political representation, however, has come under challenge in recent years by theoretical and empirical work opening up what is meant by representation and where and to what end it might occur. Shifting the focus to the representative claims-making requires adopting a more inductive approach to the question of women’s issues and interests, which can in turn be analyzed as to their content and meaning. To demonstrate how these insights might be implemented in case study research, the paper outlines a framework that calls on scholars to consider a broader
range of actors and sites of representation, remain agnostic about the nature of women’s issues and interests, and explore the implications of competing representations.

Examining texts produced by the key political actors in four countries – Belgium, Finland, the UK, and the US – at specified and comparable moments in time, the analysis yields a range of intriguing findings. The first is that, when representative claims are investigated, ‘women’s issues’ cannot be easily or adequately reduced to a small range of policy areas. Although some issues are raised across all four countries, they vary in the extent to which they are the focus of all or only a few actors. At the same time, a number of other issues have been the subject of mobilization in only some countries by some actors. A second insight gained from the study relates to the scope accorded to women’s issues by different types of actors. Across all countries, women’s organizations – whether based in parties or civil society – tend to embrace the widest definitions, followed by parties, legislators, courts, trade unions, and employer associations. In general, women’s groups are often quick to acknowledge diversity among women, as well as to recognize a wide variety of policy areas which may have an impact on women’s lives. Other actors, in contrast, tend to narrow the scope of issues they see and prioritize.

A third major finding is that while actors within and across sites can often agree on the importance of certain issues, they can also disagree vehemently with one another with regard to the policy content most beneficial to women. This conclusion emerges from close study of one issue that has been subject to extensive debate in each country in recent years, including allochtonous women in Belgium, work-family reconciliation in Finland, political representation in the UK, and abortion in the US. The fourth key insight becomes clear upon closer inspection of the claims made in these debates with regard to ‘women’s interests.’ Rather than reflecting objective assessments, controversies over how best to understand these issues, and thus develop the most effective policy options, are rooted firmly in competing normative views of women as a group. While not claiming to be exhaustive, the materials analyzed here indicate that ‘women’ may be presented alternatively – and sometimes concurrently – as victims, agents, mothers, and workers.

The implications of this re-orientation of political representation as an active and contingent process, rather than as an authentic reflection of the values and needs of society, is that it provides a more systematic, case-driven approach to defining and
exploring women’s issues and interests and the sources and potential impact of claims-making processes. The analysis carried out here, however, is limited in two important ways. As signaled at multiple points in this paper, the content-specific insights garnered from this comparison are limited to the particular cases being investigated. They are not intended as the final word on what women’s issues and interests are in a universal sense. Indeed, the approach developed here would anticipate potentially substantial differences across space and time, depending on actors and their priorities in each case. The second major limitation is that the paper focuses exclusively on representative claims. As such, it does not examine the whole policy-making process to determine whether and how issues are taken up by other actors, in turn offering few insights as to which versions of ‘women’s interests’ – and normative visions of ‘women’ – tend to prevail in policy-making. Nonetheless, the analysis here points to the need to engage in careful process-tracing in order to generate conclusions grounded in the details of each case.
References


# Appendix: Source Documents for Representative Claims

## Belgium

**Governments:** *Federal State of the Union speech, 2008; regional State of the Union speeches, 2004, 2006*  
**Parliaments:** *Federal State of the Union debate, 2008; federal budget debate, 2008; regional State of the Union debate 2006; regional budget debates 2004, 2006*  
**Political Parties:** *Regional electoral programme, 2004; press releases, 2006-2007; federal electoral programme, 2007*  
**Trade Unions:** *Press releases, 2004, 2006-2008*  
**Employers’ organizations:** *Federal and regional press releases 2004, 2006-2008*

## Finland

**Government:** *Governmental Programs, 2003, 2007*  
**Parliament:** *Parliamentary Debates on Governmental Programs, 2003, 2007*  
**Political Parties:** *Political Party Manifestos, 2003*  
**Political Parties Women’s Sections:** *Women’s Sections Manifestos, 2003*  
**Women’s Policy Agencies:** *Annual reports, research interviews, 2003, 2007*  
**Women’s Organizations:** *Newsletters and websites, 2003, 2007*  
**Trade Unions:** *Programs, action plans*  

## United Kingdom

**Government and Parliament:** *Queen’s Speech Debate, 2005, 2007; Budget Debate, 2006, 2007*
Political Parties: *General Election Manifestos, 2005*

Political Parties Women’s Sections: *Women’s Manifestos and other publications, Conservative Women’s Conference, and private communication*

Women’s Policy Agencies: *Women’s National Commission Website and publications*

Women’s Organizations: *Fawcett Society Magazines; Women’s Aid ‘Safe’ Magazine; Southhall Black Sisters websites; private communication*

### United States

President: *State of the Union speeches, 2004-2008*


Supreme Court: *Court decisions, 2004-2008**

Political Parties: *Electoral platforms of the two major parties, 2004*, 2008

Women’s Organizations: *Websites of autonomous women’s organizations, current*

*Denotes materials and years not yet examined.

**Some initial analysis completed.