The Role of Political Parties in Empowering Women's Positions in the UK Parliament

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Abstract: Women's political representation has been for decades ahead of women's rights movement. However, women presence in politics is not only limited to women political participation but their position in party politics as well. This paper aims to analyze the role of parties in empowering women at the UK parliament and tries to contribute towards the existing literature through presenting an interdisciplinary view of the issue– notably from a political perspective. Through examining issues such as political participation and legislative behavior, the paper captures the scope of the position of women MPs in British political party life and represents answers to the question whether parties can make a change in favor of changing women's positions at the UK parliament or not. By the scope emerging from different resources, this study shows the British parties have played an important role in empowering women in the United Kingdom parliament mainly through the feminization of some of their partisan aspects and offering new opportunities to women representative at the parliament. Despite this fact, some traditional partisan structures still continue to hinder this process.

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Introduction

The political representation of women has been ahead of women's rights movement for decades. However, women presence in politics is not only limited to their political participation but also their position in party politics or elected institutions. Consequently, there has been widespread support for increasing the number of women representations at the political institutions in order to promote their position on the policy agenda. Many European parties have shifted toward a set of democratic transformation adopting women friendly policies in the political arena over a half century ago. Young (2000, p. 204) defines these transformations as feminizing political parties' representation policies toward more women friendly institutions. She accentuated that feminized parties make more opportunities and facilities for women in order to not face with barriers to participate as well as the position of their female members is not attributed to their gender in the party arena (Ibid). Moreover, it is asserted that women concern, their views and issues are addressed better through these feminizations (Campbell & Childs, 2010, pp. 760-777).

Since 1970s, British parties have experienced a wide transformation as class dealignment[1] and the decline of two-party dominance resulted in the abrasion of partisan affinity and as a result, they tried to perform some changes (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000, p. 45). At the forefront of these changes, empowering women political representation and offering better opportunities to women candidates at the parties have been the main shifts (Baker & Cracknell, 2014, pp. 1-19).

There is no doubt that the UK party politics- as a successful example of modern European politics- have enjoyed a high flexibility in its policies (Bolleyer & Bytzek, 2013, pp. 773-796). But there is still an ongoing discussion over these changes and their prominent impacts on women political position within the parties. It is clear that these changes could improve women position in the British political arena; however, it is still debated that British political parties rarely make a prominent shift for women even if they make themselves more feminized (Young, 2000).

To study better the feminization of the representation policy of the British parties and their impact on women, this paper focuses on the British parties'

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1. *i.e.* the withdrawal of the allegiance of a voter toward a political party

trends toward women in three sub-categories: political parties' candidacy rules, representation in the partisan life and political parties' platform. It will also review a brief history of the political representation of women in United Kingdom and presents the main obstacles of women representation in United Kingdom.

United Kingdom and Women Representation's Obstacles

Among all the European nations, United Kingdom still carries the title of "the mother of all western parliaments" (Russell, 2003) where justly the winner party leads the government and at the same time is submissive to the parliament. Despite this fact, the surveys demonstrate United Kingdom holds a low rank in terms of women representation in the political sphere (Russell, 2002, pp. 104-162). As an example, Table 1 shows that the United Kingdom– from 1950 up to 2005, is ranked fifteen in terms of women's share after Italy and Canada.

Table 1. **The average percentage of women's political representation in 20 democracies 1950-2005**

Rank	Country	Right to vote, stand	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	Change 1950-2005	Overall 1950-2005
1	Sweden	1919	11.8	13.9	20.2	30.9	38.6	45.3	(+ 35.5)	26.8
2	Finland	1906	12.6	15.2	21.6	29.5	35.8	37.5	(+ 24.9)	25.4
3	Norway	1913, 1907	5.3	8.3	16.2	37.4	36.4	36.4	(+ 31.1)	22.3
4	Denmark	1915	8.5	9.9	16.4	34.1	37.0	37.0	(+ 28.5)	22.0
5	Netherlands	1919, 1917	7.8	9.2	10.3	29.9	36.7	36.7	(+ 28.9)	18.7
6	Germany	1918	8.4	7.7	6.6	27.1	32.2	32.2	(+ 23.8)	15.5
7	Austria	1918	5.1	5.5	6.7	22.1	33.9	33.9	(+ 28.8)	13.8
8	Iceland	1915	2.1	2.2	4.7	26.3	30.2	30.2	(+ 28.1)	13.3
9	New Zealand	1893, 1919	4.5	5.7	4.6	21.1	28.3	28.3	(+ 23.8)	12.6
10	Belgium	1948	3.9	4.2	5.4	11.8	35.3	35.3	(+ 31.4)	11.3
11	Luxemburg	1919	0	0.7	5.3	12.6	17.0	23.3	(+ 23.3)	9.8
12	Israel	1948	9.2	7.8	6.7	7.6	8.9	15.0	(+ 5.8)	9.2
13	Canada	1918, 1920	1.2	1.5	2.5	8.5	16.3	20.9	(+ 19.7)	8.5
14	Italy	1945	6.1	4.1	5.5	9.0	11.6	11.5	(+ 5.4)	8.0
15	United Kingdom	1918	3.3	4.1	4.0	4.2	11.3	18.9	(+ 15.6)	7.6
16	Australia	1902	0.2	0.2	0.3	4.6	12.4	25.0	(+ 24.8)	7.1
17	Ireland	1918	3.1	2.6	3.0	7.1	11.2	13.3	(+ 9.9)	6.8
18	United States	1920, 1919	2.9	3.2	3.6	5.0	10.5	14.5	(+ 11.6)	6.6
19	France	1944	3.5	1.9	2.8	6.7	7.9	12.2	(+ 8.7)	5.8
20	Japan	1945	2.1	1.5	1.5	1.5	2.6	7.1	(+ 5.0)	2.7
	Total		5.1	5.5	7.4	12.8	19.7	25.4	(+ 20.3)	(+ 12.6)

Source: Studlar (2006)

This may have occurred due to different issues inside the political structure of the United Kingdom. Firstly, the political system is decentralized (Mackay, 2004, p. 104). In other terms, the government and the parliament as the institutional bodies of the country have no or low impact over the electoral process of the candidates. Then, the number of British women take part in the electoral competitions in comparison with other Western countries are considerably low which has lead the British parties to face with a lack of supply for their constituencies' nominations (Lovenduski & Norris, 2003, pp. 96-99). Moreover, the British parties impose obstacles on the political representation of the women mainly through their party ideology and their single-member policy (Hill, 2003, pp. 69-71). Also, most parties as Labour Party tend to keep their ex-MPs in the office for a long time and as a result, many women lose the opportunity to nominate for their electoral constituencies (Lovenduski, 1997, pp. 708-719). Studies also suggest that despite many claims to increase the number of women inside British parties, some parties as Conservatives still put women in low partial positions and take advantage of them with a one member- one vote policy where all the members have to vote in favor of the party policies (Studlar, 2006, p. 96). In order to understand this better, we need to have a look at the shifts of British women representation through history.

A Brief History of the British Women Political Representation

Before World War II, the British society was based on a strongly differentiated model of family life where men working full time and women were considered as housewives (Finch, 2008, p.1). Furthermore, Nash and Newth (1974, p.22) indicate that most women during late Victorian era were obedient beings due to their financial support received from their husbands to the extent that McDowall (2002, p. 137) asserts: "The husband and wife are one, and the husband is the one." In other words, women were totally dependent on men. Providentially, there were literary figures who devoted most of their concerns upon women's rights and position in the society as Mary Wollstonecraft (Batchelor, 2010, p.88-91). However, women rights were not supported by the law until 1839 when women gained the custody of children through Custody of Infant Act (Thane, 1981, p.14).

Fortunately, the early twenty century heralded new changes in terms of

women right as the traditional view of women as housewives started to change. The very first change was the right of women to enjoy higher education at the same level as men by gaining the right to apply for Cambridge University (Nash & Newth, 1974, p.153). This shift in education of women ended to the change in their professional life as they could gain better position in the office (Barnet & Hyde, 2001, p. 781). The outbreak of World War I and lack of labor force gave women more opportunities to have better social positions in the society (Nicholson, 2008, pp. 41-59).

Despite these great changes, women position in the political arena remained the same for years until the suffragette's movements paved the ground by putting the parliament under pressure to pass Representation of the People Act in 1918 (Culpin, 1987, pp. 222-223). Women also found the right to stand for election to Westminster was legalized in this act (Bogdanor, 1988, pp. 53-72). Seventeen women stood candidates at the 1918 General Election (Ibid). The first woman to be elected to the House of Commons was Countess Constance Markievicz– a Sinn Fein MP, who refused to take her seat (Baker & Cracknell, 2013, p. 23). Lady Astor was the first woman to sit in the House on winning a by election[1] in 1919 (Comstock, 1926, pp. 379-384). By 1929, ten women sat in the Parliament. At the outbreak of the Second World War, there were twelve: six Conservative MPs, four Labour MPs, one Liberal MP and one Independent MP (Childs, 2008, p. 93). In much of the post-war period, the percentage of women in the House of Commons averaged around 4 percent (Norris, 1985, pp. 90-101). It was only in 1978 that this rose to 6 per cent (Ibid).

The watershed election of 1997 encountered with an increase both in the numbers of women and percentage of women: to 120 and 18.2 per cent respectively (Childs, 2008, p. 13). The General Election of 2001, however, delivered the first decline in a generation: the number of women MPs decreased by 2 to 118 and the percentage fell to 17.9 percent (Smith, 2001, pp. 989-1006). The upward trend returned in 2005: 128 women were elected, constituting 19.8 percent of the House (Childs, 2008, p. 13). Between 1997 and 2005, the number of women who had better positions in government was multiplied (Ibid: p. 70). In this regard, Toynbee and Walker (2005, p.231) assert

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1. An election in United Kingdom in which a MP is elected for a single constituency during a government's terms of office in order to fill a vacancy at the House of Commons. (Author)

that the feminists who had previously rejected electoral politics joined Labour and looked for parliamentary sex quotas, were effective. Currently, the House of Commons has one hundred and forty women, of which there are only six cabinet ministers (Gay & Cracknell, 2013, pp. 25-26).

Based on above discussion, it is found that British women had benefited from major changes both in terms of their social position and political status. In this regard, some social movements as suffragettes' efforts paved the way for women to find a place in British political life. However, the history approved the nature of British politics is still resistant. To decrease such influence, most British parties in recent years adopted policies to increase the number of women in the parliament. Despite this fact, women can hardly gain critical position in the parties.

1. Feminization of Political Parties' Candidacy Rules

The extent to which feminization has played a role in British political parties attracted scholars to investigate this new phenomenon. Some political scientists believe that the feminization finds an urgent connotation in British politics as it not only helps women to assimilate fully in the political institutions but also it lets women's standpoints and concerns find their way through political debates and policies (Lovenduski, 2005, pp. 32-60). Moreover, feminization gives this opportunity to the parties to make more positive and less-biased responses to political issues (Young, 2000, p.89). The feminization may also include provisions enhancing women's political participation through affirming their position on gender equality, providing some gender-balanced committees and an equalizing candidate list (UNDP, 2012, pp. 6-23).

This started in United Kingdom right after Labour Party adopted a set of opportunities for women in its partisan ideology and organization (Childs, 2008, p. 26). Before 1997, the party enjoyed a traditional paternalistic order in its body holding a big number of men MPs in office (Ibid). However, the economical and instability as well as women committees put the party under pressure in the 1980s to change its policy toward increasing the collective representation of women by enhancing the constitutional reforms in favor of women (Heffernan, 2000, p.71).

As a desire to win the female votes, Labour Party faced with another upcoming feminization in its candidacy policies adopting quotas for women

in its internal organizations in 1989 (Childs, 2008, pp. 26-27). Following this, the party introduced all-women shortlists (AWS) policy to the Chamber as a positive discrimination policy ensuring the selection of a female candidate in half of the party's winnable seats led to a significant shift in the political representation of women within the British parliamentary partisan structure (Moran, 2005, p. 392). As shown in Table 2, women MPs gained only 9.2 percent of seats in the preceding General Election. Following the partial implementation of the policy during candidate selection for the 1997 election, women gained 18.2 percent of the party's seats in the Commons. Despite this, women's representation slightly had decreased in the 2001 General Election to 17.9 percent as the AWS policy was not applied due to its contradiction with 1975 Discrimination Act[1]. Nonetheless, women MPs re-gained their seats within the party during both 2005 and 2010 General Elections. Women now represent 22 percent of the seats at the parliament even though Labours lost their many seats at the 2010 General Election.

Table 2. Women MPs elected at the general elections by party (1918 – 2010)

	Con	Lab	LD	Other	Total	%MPs
1918	0	0	0	1	1	0.1%
1922	1	0	1	0	2	0.3%
1923	3	3	2	0	8	1.3%
1924	3	1	0	0	4	0.7%
1929	3	9	1	1	14	2.3%
1931	13	0	1	1	15	2.4%
1935	6	1	1	1	9	1.5%
1945	1	21	1	1	24	3.8%
1950	6	14	0	1	21	3.4%
1951	6	11	0	0	17	2.7%
1955	10	14	0	0	24	3.8%
1959	12	13	0	0	25	4.0%
1964	11	18	0	0	29	4.6%
1966	7	19	0	0	26	4.1%
1970	15	10	0	1	26	4.1%
1974 (F)	9	13	0	1	23	3.6%
1974 (O)	7	18	0	2	27	4.3%
1979	8	11	0	0	19	3.0%
1983	13	10	0	0	23	3.5%
1987	17	21	2	1	41	6.3%
1992	20	37	2	1	60	9.2%
1997	13	101	3	3	120	18.2%
2001	14	95	5	4	118	17.9%
2005	17	98	10	3	128	19.8%
2010	49	81	7	6	143	22.0%

Source: House of Commons Library Research Paper 10/38 General Election 2010

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1. It is an act of United Kingdom Parliament which protects British civilians from discriminations based on marital status or gender. (Author)

According to the afore-mentioned, it is clear that the adoption of AWS policy has reaffirmed the party's policy initiatives and intra-party rules toward a more "women-friendly" one and hitherto, it could leave an effective influence on women representation inside the Chamber.

In addition to the increase in the number of candidate and elected women due to AWS policy, the role of Labour Party leadership should not be ignored. Although Labour Party was increasingly centralized and disciplined during Neil Kinnock's party leadership (Shaw, 1994, pp. 401-418), the election of Tony Blair as the new party leader introduced reforms strengthening the power of the party leadership (Seyd, 2002, pp. 95-116). Several Labour Party members attributed the feminization of the party's policies in part to Blair's vote-seeking aims (O'Brien, 2012, pp. 178-204). They argued that his political perspectives as party leader and prime minister broke the traditional policy-making machinery of the Labour Party (Ibid).

On the other hand, the feminization of party candidacy rules had not happened on the same level for other British parties. For example, Conservatives are often described as "opposed to equality guarantees on the basis that such measures offend principles of meritocracy" (Childs et al., 2005, p. 31). As shown in Table 2, women's representation in Conservative party remained relatively constant between 1992 and 2005. Krook (2009, 161) notifies that some intermittent efforts were done to address the continued gender inequalities within the party but nothing really changed inside the party until the big loss of 2005 General Election. The loss of votes in the election motivated the Conservatives to advance women's presence among the party's parliamentary candidate (Lloren, 2015, pp. 144-167).

Some political scholars had attributed these changes to the efforts of Conservative female activists and party leaders within the organization (Childs et al., 2009, p. 213). For instance, David Cameron– the then newly elected Conservative party leader– used his leadership call to select more women candidates through "selecting candidates and refusing to pick from a centrally agreed priority list in safe and winnable seats" (Ibid: pp. 204-213). Despite this fact, his reforms were met with criticisms (O'Brien, 2012, pp. 178-204). In June 2006, David Cameron responded to these criticisms by emphasizing on "getting more Conservative women into the parliament"

(David Cameron: Getting More Women into Parliament Remains Top of My Agenda, 2006). As a result, Cameron's plans for increasing the number of female candidates left party unaffected as the high opposition rose inside the party (Scott & Williams, 2011, pp. 513-529). Despite this fact, Conservative women candidates won 49 of 306 seats in the House of Commons in the 2010 General Election (Compare Tables 1 & 2).

Table 3. Women conservative candidates selected and MPs elected from A-List

Election	Conservative A-List	MPs Elected from A-List
2010	153	49

Source: House of Commons Library Research Paper 10/38 General Election 2010

A look in to the number of Conservative women candidates selected and MPs elected from A-List in 2010 General Election reveals that the role of party leaders and their commitment toward women representation in partisan agenda are critical issues (Childs, 2008, pp. 27-38).

In short, most of British parties in last decade started to change their candidacy rules toward more women-friendly rules mainly because of gaining more votes from British women voters. In this regard, the role of party leaders as Tony Blair and David Cameron should not be ignored. During party leadership of both of them, Labour and Conservative parties experienced major feminization shifts. Also, some attribute these shifts to women activists' efforts working within the parties. Despite these, the studies show that women still are underrepresented in the parties mainly due to the position they held after being elected.

2. Feminization of Political Representation in Partisan Life

Beside party candidacy rules, another factor playing an important role in representation of women inside parliamentary agenda is the political representation of women inside parties. It is argued that the percentage of women representation in the legislature is directly related to the proportion of female ministers (Nason-Clark, 1987, pp. 330-340). Moreover, increasing the number of women MPs can also have a more immediate impact on changing the composition of the electorate for these positions (O'Brien, 2012, pp. 178-204). In order to understand this better, one should see how

131

the position of women minsters as high-party ranking change through British political parties.

The first woman MP appointed as minister was Margaret Bondfield (a Labour MP) in January 1924 after Stanley Baldwin's resignation during Ramsay MacDonald's government (DuBois, 1998). After her, only 35 women were appointed to the cabinet positions (Table 4).

Table 4. Women Cabinet Ministers (1929-2014)

| 1929-31	Margaret Bondfield	2001-7	Patricia Hewitt
1945-47	Ellen Wilkinson	2001-07	Hilary Armstrong
1953-54	Florence Horsburg	2001-07 & 2009-10	Tessa Jowell
1964-70 & 1974-76	Barbara Castle	2003-07	Baroness Amos
1968-69	Judith Hart	2004-08	Ruth Kelly
1970-74 & 1979-90	Margaret Thatcher	2006-09	Hazel Blears
1974-79	Shirley Williams	2006-9	Jacqui Smith
1982-83	Baroness Young	2007-08	Baroness Ashton
1992-97	Virginia Bottomley	2008-10	Yvette Cooper
1992-97	Gillian Shepard	2008-10	Baroness Royal
1997-98	Ann Taylor	2010-12	Carolina Spelman
1997-98 & 2007-10	Harriet Harman	2010-12	Cheryl Gillan
1997-2001	Mo Mowlam	2010-12	Baroness Warsi
1997-2003	Clare Short	2010-	Theresa May
1997-2007	Margaret Beckett	2011-	Justine Greening
1998-2001	Baroness Jay	2012-2014	Maria Miller
2001-3	Helen Liddell	2012-	Theresa Villiers
2001-2	Estelle Morris		

Source: David Butler and Gareth Butler, British Political Facts (2005)

As the following table shown, the number of women ministers has been increasingly duplicated both in 1997 and 2010 General Elections. However, the number of women in 2005 General Election is something about one ministerial position. It seems that the adaption of parliamentary "women-friendly" policies inside parties had helped to enhance the number of women appointing on the high-ranking party positions (Childs, 2008, pp. 21-52).

On the other hand, it cannot always say that women in high-ranking positions enhancing the position of women inside partisan life. As an example, 1979 General Election faced with lowest number of women in the parliament even though Margaret Thatcher was elected as the first women prime minister of United Kingdom (Fig. 1).
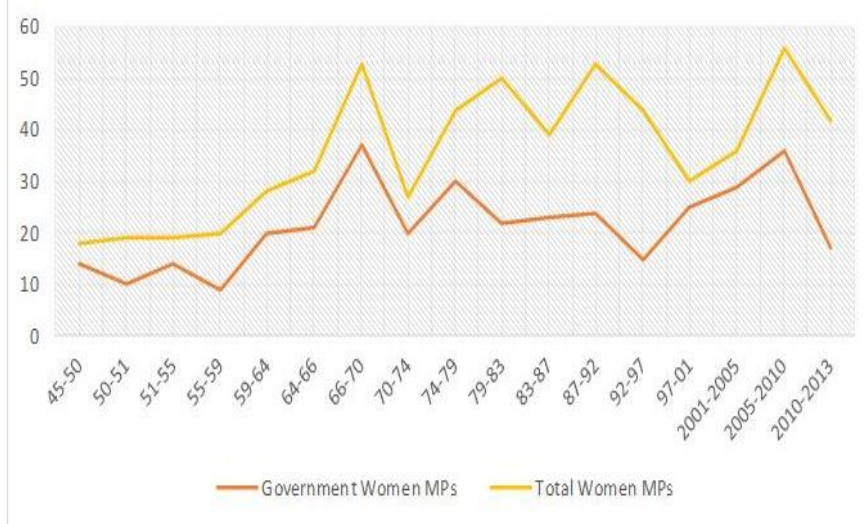
Fig. 1. Percentage of women MPs appointed as ministers
Source: Center for the Advancement of Women (2013)
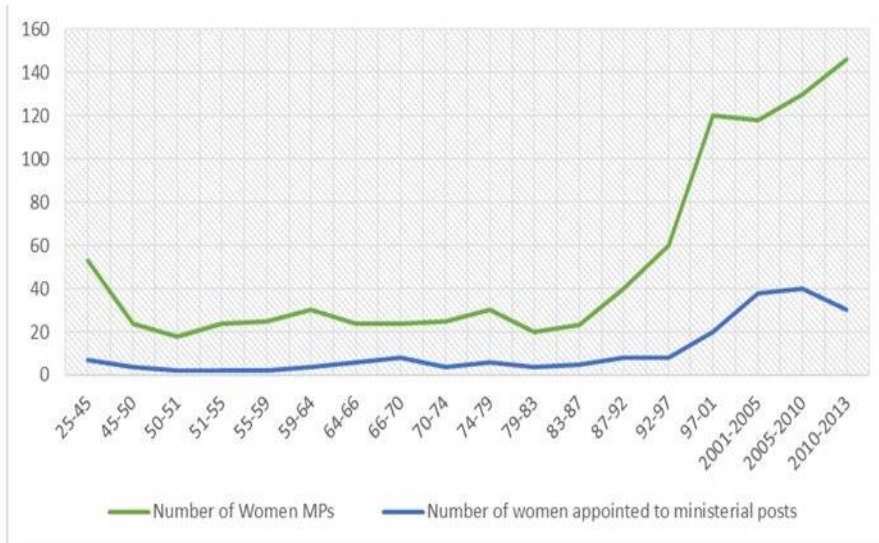
Fig. 2. Women Ministerial appointments 1945-2013
Source: Center for the Advancement of Women (2013)

Furthermore, the number of women elected as MPs in comparing with the number of women ministers is quite low which emphasizes that the nature of British partisan life is still resistant toward feminization (Fig. 2). Considering party platform, the highest percentage of women MPs held the highest percentage of women MPs appointed as ministers came during the Labour government of 1966-1970 (38%), closely followed by the 2005-2010 Labour government (37%). The 1966-1970 Labour government and the 1992-1997 Conservative government had the highest percentage of their female MPs appointed as minsters (53%).

3. Feminization of political parties' platform policy making

In the last two sections, it is discussed two major feminization shifts, showing how British parties went through as the feminization of parties' candidacy rules and the feminization of political representation within parties. In the first, a set of British parties' efforts were presented in which candidacy rules became more women friendly. It is also asserted that party leaders did great job in this regard. Concerning the feminization of political representation in partisan life, the position of women MPs in parties were investigated and it is found that the number of elected British women MPs in comparison with the number of women ministers is quite low. In other words, British parties in this aim are still resistant and rarely offer high ranking partisan position to women. In this part, we look at the feminization of parties' platform policy making.

Parties' policy platforms serve as the main pivot for the legislative agenda (Ralling, 1987, pp.1-14; Rose, 1980, pp. 22-37). In this regard, Mansergh and Thomson (2007, pp.311-329) indicate parties use their platforms to make specific pledges on the policy themes on which they emphasize most. The policies outlined in manifestos are also correlated with party behavior once in the office (Walgrave et al., 2006, pp. 1021-1038). Considering parties are committed to implement their manifestos, the extent to which women are addressed in their platforms provides a reasonable perspective of their commitments to women's policy representation (Campbell & Childs, 2010, p. 764). In recent years, there has been a wide shift in partisan platforms toward a more "women friendly" arena in United Kingdom (Caul, 2001, p.1220).

Labour Party- as one of the main British parties which went through such changes- established a two-step rolling program of policy formation under the policy of "Partnership in Power" in 1997 where policy commissions considered membership submissions and input from external organizations and individuals and sent them to the National Policy Forum (NPF) for investigators in a meeting comprised of 183 representatives of whom 40 percent are women in the first step (Childs, 2008, pp.31-33). At the second stage, the inputs are considered by the Joint Policy Committee chaired by the party leader and some other members including women MPs before moving on to the National Executive Committee (NEC) and finally, they are announced as party manifestos at the Annual Conference (Ibid). Mainstream critics of "Partnership in Power" assert that it has reduced intraparty democracy (Seyd, 1999, pp. 383-406) and empowered frontbench parliamentary elites (Webb, 2000, p. 128) even though the defenders state that it has created new sites of dialogue between leaders and women members (Russell, 2005, p. 152). However, there is no provision for representatives of women as women in Labour Party's platform policymaking nor there is a designated women's policy commission (Veitch, 2005, pp. 600-602). Despite this fact, Russell (2005, p.138) states 40 per cent of the NPF are women leading to the suggestions and recommendations for the party's gender quotas and Labour Party's women forums can directly submit amendments to NFP.

On the other hand, the policy making of Conservative party's platform has also changed to concentrate on the Review Groups where party leadership would choose the recommendations for policies as the party platform for the next General Election (Childs, 2008, p.38). Considerably, there is no corporate representation for women on the Review Groups but the responsibility for gendering the reviews is left for Shadow Minister for Women and the Women's Policy Group (WPG) (Lloren, 2015, pp. 144-167). Nonetheless, the Policy Review Groups is not made to respond to the Shadow Minister, WPG or the Vice-Chairman for Women (VC) and the Policy Review Groups can decide whether disregard their submission or not (Childs et al., 2009, pp. 204-213). Hitherto, the Shadow Minister for Women and the WPG enjoy little impact on the Conservative party's platform policy making (Ibid). In 2007, as an example, the WPG stepped forward to

135

feminize Conservative policy making where the submissions for party platform being directly reported to the party leader and party chairman; however, it could rarely change the agenda toward more women friendly as the party top rankings opposed the submissions (Fielding, 2011, pp.168-171). Despite this, the role of party leader should not be forgotten as party leaders can hold responsible the Policy Review Group to women concerns and submissions (Evans, 2008, pp.291-310). David Cameron's role in the feminization of Conservative party's policy making is considerable (Childs et al., 2009, p.210). He opened equality doors to women Conservative representatives when other potential leaders might not have (Ibid). His efforts ended to the establishment of *women2win* as a new group in which women from across the party could join together in order to push for party change (Scott & Williams, 2011, pp. 513-529).

The British parties also make effort to shift their partisan platform toward a more popular arena. Labor party and Conservative party as two dominant parties of United Kingdom have tried to make this process happen through establishing policies where designated women's commissions find the opportunity to present their recommendation and suggestions for the party platform. Nevertheless, the process of policy making is still dominantly masculine as it is the party top rankings have always the right to veto the submission. Despite this, the party leaders can still hold responsible their party platform toward women concerns and viewpoints as David Cameron's role in the establishment of *women2win*.

Conclusion

The political representation of women has been a head of women's rights movement for decades. However, women presence in politics is not only limited to their political participation but also their position in party politics or elected institutions. Since 1970s, British parties have experienced a wide transformation as class dealignment from parties as well as the decline of two-party dominance resulted in the abrasion of partisan affinity as a result, they tried to perform some changes. Empowering women political representation and offering better opportunities to women candidates at the parties were only some of the issues at the forefront of these changes.

In this paper, the feminization of these parties with the aim of empowering women within the United Kingdom parliament in three sub-categories as political parties' candidacy rules, the feminization of representation in the partisan life and the feminization of political parties' platform were discussed.

First of all, it is said that the feminization of political party candidacy rules started in United Kingdom right after Labour Party adopted a set of opportunities for women in its partisan ideology and organization. As a desire to win the female votes, Labour Party faced with another upcoming feminization in its candidacy policies adopting quotas for women in its internal organizations in 1989. Following this, the party introduced all-women shortlists (AWS) policy to the Chamber as a positive discrimination policy ensuring the selection of a female candidate in half of the party's winnable seats led to a significant shift in the political representation of women within the British parliamentary partisan structure. In addition to this, the role of Labour Party leadership should not be ignored. Although Labour Party was increasingly centralized and disciplined during Neil Kinnock's party leadership (Shaw, 1994, pp. 401-418), the election of Tony Blair as the new party leader introduced reforms strengthening the power of the party leadership (Seyd, 2002, pp. 95-116). On the other hand, the feminization of party candidacy rules had not happened on the same level for other British parties. For example, Conservatives led some intermittent efforts to address the continued gender inequalities within the party but nothing really changed inside the party until the big loss of 2005 General Election (Butler & Kavanagh, 2005, pp. 243-250). The loss of votes in the election motivated the Conservatives to advance women's presence among the party's parliamentary candidate. Despite this fact, the reforms were met with criticisms and consequently, they could not make a huge change.

Secondly, another factor alongside party candidacy rules which was discussed is the political representation of women inside parties. The paper argues that the percentage of women representation in the legislature is directly related to the proportion of female ministers. It seems that the adaption of parliamentary "women-friendly" policies inside British parties had helped to enhance the number of women appointing on the high-ranking party positions. On the other hand, it cannot always be said that women in

high-ranking positions enhancing the position of women inside partisan life as what happened during the government of Thatcher. Furthermore, the number of women elected as MPs in comparing with the number of women ministers is quite low which emphasizes that the nature of British partisan life is still resistant toward feminization.

Thirdly, the paper had a look into the British parties' platforms and approved that there has been a wide shift in the British partisan platforms toward a more "women friendly" policy. As an example, under the policy of "Partnership in Power", Labour Party established a two-step rolling program of policy formation in 1997 where policy commissions considered membership submissions and input from external organizations and individuals and sent them to the National Policy Forum (NPF) for investigators in a meeting comprised of 183 representatives of whom 40 per cent are women in the first step. At the second stage, the inputs are considered by the 'Joint Policy Committee' chaired by the party leader and some other members including women MPs before moving on to the National Executive Committee (NEC) and finally, they are announced as party manifestos at the Annual Conference. Mainstream critics of "Partnership in Power" assert that it has reduced intraparty democracy and empowered frontbench parliamentary elites even though the defenders state that it has created new sites of dialogue between leaders and women members. On the other hand, the policy making of Conservative Party's platform is to concentrate on the 'Review Groups' where party leadership would choose the recommendations for policies as the party platform for the next General Election. Considerably, there is no corporate representation for women on the Review Groups but the responsibility for gendering the reviews is left for Shadow Minister for Women and the Women's Policy Group (WPG). Nonetheless, the Policy Review Groups is not made to respond to the Shadow Minister, WPG or the Vice-Chairman for Women (VC) and the Policy Review Groups can decide whether disregard their submission or not. Hitherto, the Shadow Minister for Women and the WPG enjoy little impact on the Conservative party's platform policy making.

According to the evidence presented, the British Parties have played an important role in empowering women in the United Kingdom parliament through the feminization of some of their partisan aspects; however, some

traditional partisan structures still continue to hinder this process. Despite this, the role of 'British Party Leaders' in the empowerment of women inside parliamentary agenda is very considerable as they can make big changes even if the partisan structure is quite masculine. Indeed, British Parties' paying particular attention to women and offering new opportunities to women representative at the parliament in recent years are the two critical factors which have not only given special position to women inside the United Kingdom parliament but also have improved their political participations.

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