

Sex & Power

Who Runs Britain?
2015



**COUNTING
WOMEN IN**

EQUALITY = GOOD POLITICS

Sex and Power was researched and written by the Centre for Women & Democracy on behalf of the Counting Women In coalition (CFWD, the Electoral Reform Society, the Fawcett Society, the Hansard Society and Unlock Democracy).

It was generously funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

Both the title and some historic data have been used by kind permission of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

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For more information about the Counting Women In coalition, visit our website at www.countingwomenin.org

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust for making the funds available for the research and writing of this report, as well as for supporting the Counting Women In coalition in its early days; this support has been very much appreciated and without it this report would not have been possible.

We would also like to thank the Equality and Human Rights Commission for permission to use the title *Sex and Power: Who Runs Britain?* as well as material and tables from previous editions published by both them and their predecessor the Equal Opportunities Commission.

The report has been researched and written by the Centre for Women & Democracy, with support from the Counting Women In partners - the Fawcett Society, the Electoral Reform Society, the Hansard Society and Unlock Democracy, all of whom have helped with proof-reading, checking, design, infographics, comment and suggestions.

Foreword

The Counting Women In coalition consists of five organisations – the Centre for Women & Democracy (CFWD), the Electoral Reform Society, the Fawcett Society, the Hansard Society and Unlock Democracy – which came together following the 2010 General Election to raise awareness about the absence of women from the highest levels of politics in the UK.

In that election, concern was expressed because women as political agents seemed to be virtually invisible¹. They were present as wives and commented on for their clothes, shoes and hairstyles, but since the political parties - except the Greens - were led by men, and since there was heavy concentration on the leaders' debates, even high-profile women politicians were squeezed out of the public space. Counting Women In was set up both to raise this issue, and to campaign for more women candidates and MPs.

As part of that work, the Centre for Women & Democracy took over the research and production of the Sex & Power series of reports, which had previously been published by the Equalities & Human Rights Commission. Since then, the report has been published under the Counting Women In banner, and Sex & Power 2015 is the third in the series.

The report aims to report facts, to raise questions, and to suggest some answers. Each of the three editions has concentrated on a different aspect of women and power; for 2015 we have examined the general election and its outcomes in some detail, but information on other decision-making roles can be found in the 2013 and 2014 editions.

After five years, and many developments in women's campaign for power and agency, the Counting Women In coalition is drawing to a close. However, all five of the organisations involved will continue to work to increase women's presence and voice at all levels of our democracy, and CFWD will continue to produce and publish Sex & Power. The 2016 edition will concentrate on the devolved elections to be held in that year as well as on local government.

¹ See 'Wags', 'Wives' and 'Mothers' ... *But what about Women Politicians?* in *Parliamentary Affairs*, (2010) 63 (4): 760-777 and <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/apr/21/women-general-election-2010>



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Executive Summary

Since women were first able to stand for Parliament in 1918 just 450 have been elected. Well over half of those women have only been elected in 1997 or since, and it was not until that year that the percentage of women MPs even reached double figures.

Today, in the wake of the 2015 general election, it stands at 29 percent. Whilst this is a significant increase on the 2010 level of 22 percent, it is not yet the 'third' that some people claimed immediately after the election.

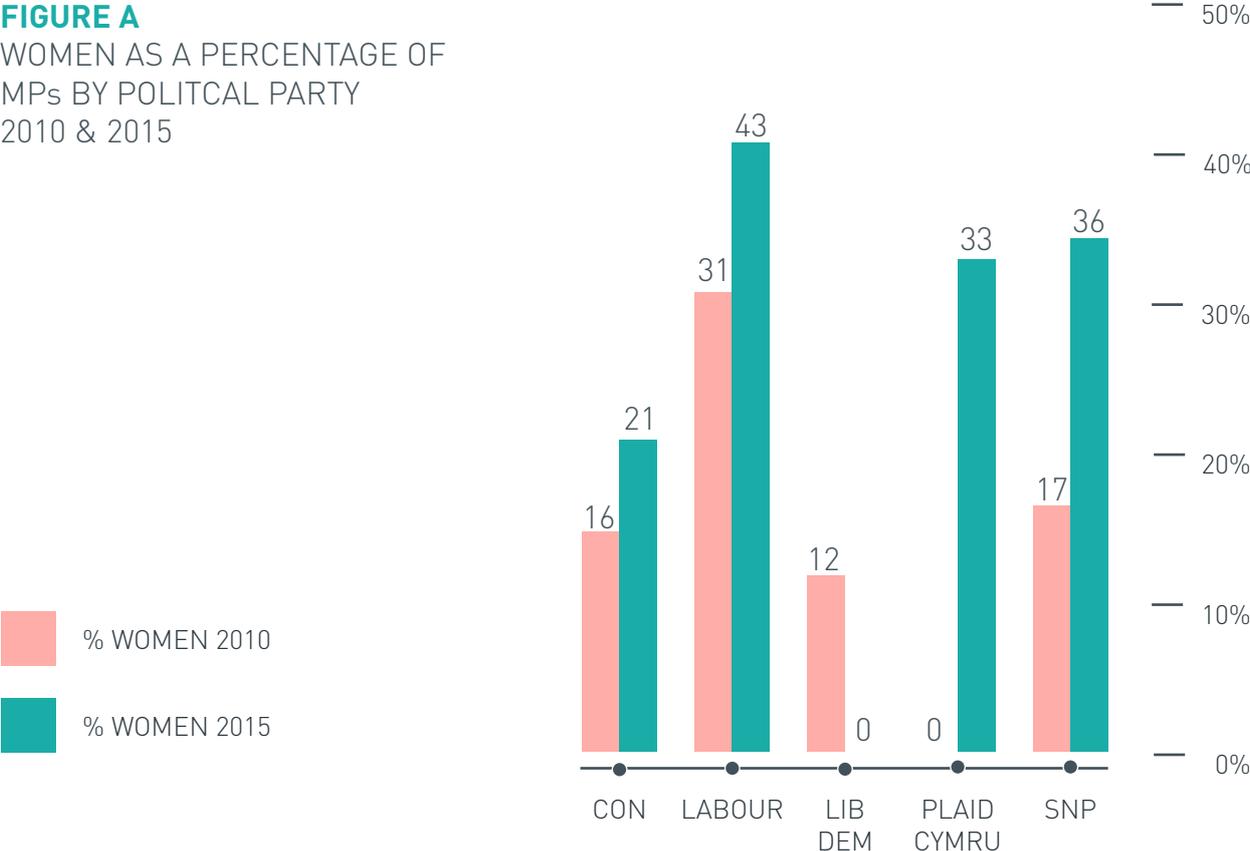
The General Election held on 7 May 2015 resulted in a welcome overall improvement in the representation of women in the House of Commons, with some interesting variations by both political party and nation.

191 women were elected to the House of Commons on 7 May 2015, taking the level of women MPs up to 29.4 percent. In 2010 22.3 percent of MPs elected were women, and this increase is the greatest since the breakthrough year of 1997.

To date there have only ever been 450 women MPs – still well short of a full Parliament's-worth, and still (just) below the number of men elected in 2015 (459).

The presence of women in each political party's group of MPs is variable, but has improved in every case except the Alliance and Democratic Unionist Parties in Northern Ireland, and the Liberal Democrats, all seven of whose female MPs lost their seats in May.

FIGURE A
WOMEN AS A PERCENTAGE OF
MPs BY POLITICAL PARTY
2010 & 2015



The **Conservative Party**, with 68 women MPs, has achieved a record high for the party, with the number of women rising from 49 in 2010 (and the percentage from 16 to 21 percent). 170 (26.3 percent) of Conservative candidates were women.

The **Labour Party** has 99 women MPs; this is below the high of 101 achieved in 1997 but, because the overall number of Labour MPs has fallen, the percentage of Labour women MPs has risen to 42.8 percent. 212 (33.6 percent) of Labour's candidates were women.

The **Liberal Democrats** lost all their women MPs and now have none. The last election after which there were no women Liberals, Social Democrats or Liberal Democrats in Parliament was 1983. 166 (26.3 percent) of Liberal Democrat candidates were women.

The **Green Party** retained their single (female) MP. 212 (37.1 percent) of Green Party candidates were women.

UKIP had one (male) MP elected. 75 (12.1 percent) of UKIP candidates were women.

The **Scottish National Party** (SNP) increased their number of women MPs from just one (out of 6) to 20 (out of 56). 21 (35.6 percent) of SNP candidates were women.

Plaid Cymru has one woman MP, their first ever elected. 11 (27.5 percent) of their candidates were women.

In all, 1,033 women stood at the 2015 general election, amounting to 26 percent of the total 3,971 candidates. This marks an increase from the 21.1 percent level of 2010, and is a record high.

FIGURE B
WOMEN AS A
PERCENTAGE OF
CANDIDATES BY
POLITICAL PARTY
2015



With the exception of UKIP, all of the main parties in Great Britain fielded more women candidates in terms of both numbers and percentages than they did in 2010.

The only political party in the UK to field no women candidates at all was the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland.

The principal opportunities parties have to increase the diversity of either their candidates or their MPs or both arise in two main groups of seats; firstly those in which the sitting MP retires (retirement seats), and, secondly, in marginal (or target) seats.

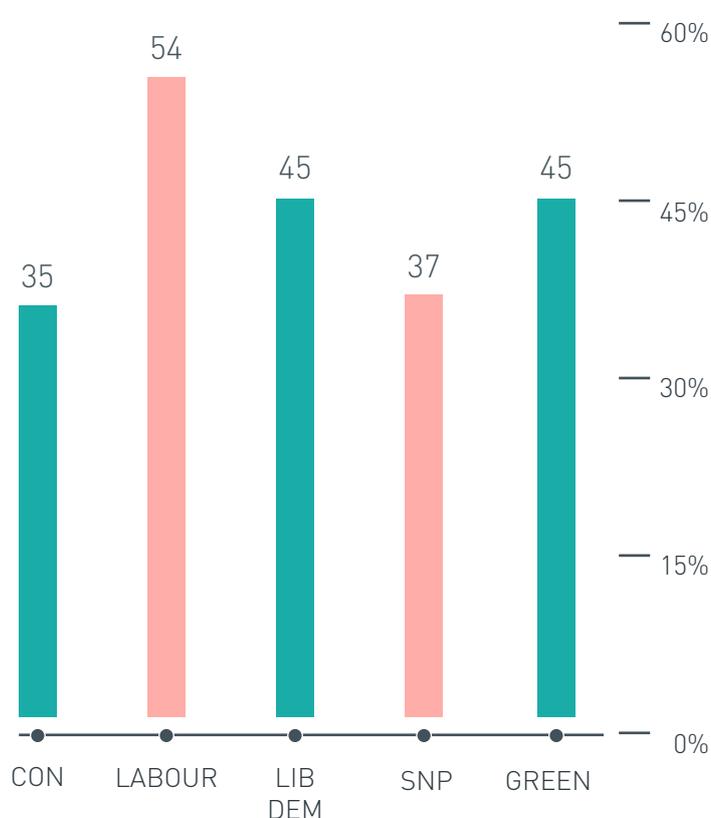
Of the 650 MPs in office immediately prior to any election the vast majority stand for election again, and this was indeed the case in 2015.

Just 90 incumbent MPs² – stood down in 2015 – 13.8 percent of the total 650. 38 Conservative MPs stood down, 40 Labour³, 11 Liberal Democrats, and one from Plaid Cymru.

Male MPs were more likely to retire than women were in 2010. In all, 74 of those retiring were men (14.7 percent of all male MPs) and 16 were women (10.8 percent of female). They were replaced as candidates by 43 men and 47 women.

Political parties vary considerably in the procedures by which they select Parliamentary candidates, the timing of those selections, and the use or otherwise of positive action mechanisms. There were also marked differences in outcomes.

FIGURE C
WOMEN AS A
PERCENTAGE OF
CANDIDATES IN TARGET
SEATS FOR EACH
POLITICAL PARTY
2015



² Includes those elected at by-elections since 2010

³ This includes Eric Joyce in Falkirk, who was elected as a Labour MP but subsequently sat as an Independent.

With one exception, political parties in the UK do not use positive action mechanisms in order to increase the numbers of women candidates for Westminster elections. It is worth noting that positive action is much easier to implement in elections which use some form of proportional representation (PR) as the voting system, and that almost all of the countries who do well in terms of gender also use PR at their elections⁴.

The best-known form of positive action is some kind of candidate quota system; in UK general elections this is difficult to implement because of the single-constituency first-past-the-post (FPTP) system.

With the exception of the 2001 election, the Labour Party has since 1995 had a policy of fielding women candidates in 50 percent of 'winnable' seats, with 'winnable' defined as target seats plus those where the sitting (Labour) MP is retiring.

Figures within other parties (e.g., the Conservatives) have indicated that they would consider the use of positive action if the election results in terms of gender were not 'acceptable', whilst the SNP has already decided to do so.

Internationally, the UK has leaped up the league table from 67th to 37th out of 189 countries.⁵

However, because there are now five years until the next General Election, and because in that period other countries will increase the numbers of women in their legislatures, this position is unlikely to be sustained.

There are seven women members of the new 22-strong Cabinet, bringing the level up to 31.8 percent, and meeting the Prime Minister's earlier stated target of the Cabinet being a third female. An additional eight ministers, of whom three are female, also have the right to attend Cabinet but not vote.

Getting more women into the most senior government roles requires there to be good numbers in the more junior government posts which may ultimately lead to Cabinet office. Here, 20 (24.4 percent) of the 82 office-holders are women⁶.

Neither the Cabinet Office nor the Welsh Office team includes any women. In the Treasury team there are, including Cabinet members, a total of 12 ministers, of whom only one is a woman. The Labour Party's Shadow Cabinet has 15 (53.6 percent) women members out of a total of 27. 40 (39.2 percent) of Labour's full shadow ministerial team are women. The Westminster leader of the SNP has a team of 34 spokespersons, of whom 17 (50 percent) are women. The Liberal Democrats have no women MPs, and therefore, although 54.5 percent of the new Leader's shadow cabinet are women, none of them are in the House of Commons. Following the reorganisation of government after the election, women now occupy 43 (24%) of the 181 seats available in Cabinet Committees and Sub-Committees. However, no woman chairs any of these 14 Committees. The Public Expenditure Committee is the only Committee not to have a female member.

The House of Commons has a number of select committees of which 27 have a policy

⁴ *Women, Quotas and Elections Worldwide*, Centre for Women & Democracy, July 2015.

⁵ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> accessed June 2015

⁶ <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/government-and-opposition1/her-majestys-government/> accessed June 2015. This excludes Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

focus and are responsible for detailed scrutiny of the work and expenditure of the government⁷. (The remaining committees, which we have not included in this analysis, deal with administrative and procedural matters pertaining to the House).

Of these 27 committees, 21 are chaired by men (78 percent) and 6 by women (22 percent), almost all of them secured through election at the start of the Parliament. The committee chairs currently held by women are: Health, Petitions, Public Accounts, Science and Technology, Transport and Women and Equalities.

In total, there are 303 places available on these committees of which 202 (66 percent) are held by men and 101 (33 percent) by women. This is, of course, a bit above the proportion of women in the House overall.

There are no women at all on the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and the Statutory Instruments Committee, and only one woman on the high profile and influential Treasury Committee. There are two women on the Defence, Energy and Climate Change, Foreign Affairs, Northern Ireland, Petitions, Public Administration and Transport Committees.

Conversely the Women and Equalities (10 women; 1 man), the Health (9 women; 2 men) and Education Committees (8 women; 3 men) are disproportionately female.

On only five committees – Business, Innovation and Skills, Communities and Local Government, International Development, Science and Technology, and Work and Pensions – is there a near gender balance although this favours male MPs 6 to 5 in each case.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ONE: KNOW THE FACTS

In order to enable everyone concerned to develop a much better understanding of who is standing for elected office at all levels, and to assess where the barriers are, an equalities monitoring form should be introduced by the relevant election authority. It would be completed and submitted to returning officers by all candidates together with nomination forms at all levels of election, and the results collated (either by the Cabinet Office or the Electoral Commission) and published annually.

This requirement should be implemented for the local and regional elections in 2016, and at all elections thereafter.

TWO: COMMIT TO CHANGE

Political parties should take immediate action to increase the number of women candidates at all levels of election with a view to fielding as many women candidates from as wide a variety of backgrounds and communities as possible in winnable seats in 2020.

Before beginning selection processes for the 2020 general election, each party should review their selection procedures and publish an action plan outlining how they will address the bottlenecks in progress, maximize the number of women in winnable seats in 2020 and retain women MPs. These should draw on evidence of what works to recruit, elect and retain women candidates as well as the data provided by this report, and include

⁷ The data is taken from the committee membership pages on Parliament's website, as accessed on 9 October 2015. At the time of writing, one policy focused committee, Regulatory Reform, has yet to be chosen and is therefore not included in this analysis.

active consideration of positive action measures in selection processes.

In the light of the boundary review and the proposed reduction in the number of MPs from 650 to 600, each party must commit to ensuring that, so far as is practicable, their processes for allocating or selecting in new seats do not reinforce male dominance in the Commons.

Local parties at grassroots level should be actively encouraged to talent-spot, and political parties should develop schemes to encourage and reward them for doing so. This should apply to candidates for local and devolved bodies as well as for European and parliamentary elections.

Given that, despite some progress, it still seems unlikely that 50:50 representation will be achieved in the near future, the recommendation in the Speaker's Conference report that prescriptive quotas and equality guarantees should be seriously considered should be revisited immediately.

THREE: A BETTER WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Parliament should revisit the 2010 Speakers' Conference Report and implement its recommendations. Most immediately this should include: diversity awareness training, and advice and support to be made available to those involved in candidate selections. All parties and the House should implement statutory maternity and parental leave for MPs and peers.

Parliament should also revisit the issue of working hours to identify and effect further improvements. In particular, they should take into account the needs of members with caring responsibilities as well as those of members with constituencies outside London.

All political parties should establish, publish and implement internal complaints procedures for dealing with sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying. These should reflect the fact that political parties are both employers and spaces where unpaid members, activists, staff and public representatives interact with both one another and the general public.

FOUR: PROMOTE WOMEN

Party leaders should commit to selecting a cabinet or shadow cabinet/spokespeople that are gender equal by no later than 2020. Where a party runs elections for the Shadow Cabinet, there must be positive action to ensure women make up at least half of those elected.

Government and shadow ministerial posts should be 50:50 too – if the party has insufficient women MPs and peers to achieve this they should commit to getting as close as possible to 50:50.

FIVE: AN EQUAL VOICE

We call upon the media to ensure that their coverage of political issues includes women and their views, treats all contributors with the dignity and respect to which they are entitled, and accords with the Code of Conduct published by the National Union of Journalists. Editors and broadcasters should also take responsibility for commissioning contributions from both women and men as commentators and experts. Broadcasters and event

organizers and audiences should challenge parties which always put up male speakers.

All organisations – public, private and third sector – should take steps to ensure that, at meetings and events, both women and men appear on platforms as speakers. We encourage individual citizens to object to men-only platforms, panels and programmes.

This year's edition of Sex and Power has concentrated on the general election; in 2016 it will look in detail at local government and devolved elections.

The figures in *Sex and Power 2015* represent a snapshot of the outcomes of the 2015 general election in terms of gender, together with snapshots of national and international information as background and comparisons.

Any snapshot is by definition out-of-date almost immediately, and thus there are likely to be some figures which, if checked again at the time of publication (October 2015) will be found to have changed. We are confident, however, that in no case is the change very great.

Unless otherwise stated, the terms 'Britain' or 'Great Britain' mean England, Scotland and Wales. The term 'UK' includes Northern Ireland. In some cases figures relate only to one of the UK nations and, again, this is made clear in either the text or a footnote.

In many cases we undertook our own research in order to arrive at the relevant figures. Where this happened we have indicated the sources we have used. Appendix 1 contains the figures used as the basis for the first four charts in the text, which relate to the 2015 general election.

The graphs and charts dealing with political parties exclude those in Northern Ireland because even those with parliamentary representation fielded candidates in a maximum of 18 seats. However, they are referred to in the body of the text, and they have their own sections in Chapter Two (Political Parties).

All information regarding the percentages of women in parliaments internationally, including rankings, is taken from the International Parliamentary Union's data, which covers the period from 1997, and which can be accessed at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm>

Percentages have been given to one decimal place in the body of the text, and rounded for use in graphs. Where percentages do not add up to exactly 100% this may be due to statistical rounding.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the picture presented in this report is fair and accurate, and that sources have been identified and acknowledged. The authors would be grateful if any errors or omissions could be brought to their notice as soon as possible.

Introduction

Since women were first able to stand for Parliament in 1918 just 451 have been elected. Well over half of those women have only been elected in 1997 or since, and it was not until that year that the percentage of women MPs even reached double figures.

Today, in the wake of the 2015 general election, it stands at 29 percent. Whilst this is a significant increase on the 2010 level of 22 percent, it is not yet the 'third' that some people claimed immediately after the election.

Certainly there have been great strides. In 1979 when Margaret Thatcher came to power she was one of just 19 women MPs – eight Conservatives and eleven Labour. Today there are 191 – 68 Conservatives, 99 Labour, 20 Scottish Nationalists, one Plaid Cymru, one Green, one SDLP and one Independent. The scale of this achievement, the effort put into achieving it and the changes in culture it has begun, should not be under-estimated.

But it is not yet enough.

Most people, in principle, accept that it is desirable that the nation's highest legislative authority should be diverse and reflect the nation as a whole. But still, progress is painfully slow.

In our first edition of *Sex & Power* in 2013, we said that at the rate of progress then current, a newborn child would be drawing her pension before she had any chance of being equally represented in the UK Parliament. Matters have certainly improved, but not enough to make 50:50 representation a realistic prospect in the near future without a step change in efforts to achieve an equal Parliament.

Different approaches by the political parties, combined with the vagaries of the first-past-the-post electoral system, mean that until recently solid progress has been hard to achieve. One of the more hopeful features of this year's election is that more women MPs than ever before hold seats that can reasonably be regarded as 'safe' by their parties. This is not only good in itself, but also means that those women are more likely to be able to go on to have ministerial careers, thus addressing some of the issues around the 'pipeline' for cabinets and shadow cabinets.

There are also other encouraging signs. The Conservative Party increased its number of women MPs from 48 to 68, and did so by using a combination of pressure and central direction, but without the use of contentious positive action mechanisms. In the space of ten years the number of Conservative women MPs has risen from 17 to its present level, and, although positive action remains in our view by far the most effective mechanism for rapid change⁸, the Party's experience is significant, and its progress should be recognised.

Parliament consists of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. This report looks in detail only at the election outcomes in 2015 for the former, but it is worth noting that, with 24.6 percent women, the House of Lords now lags a little behind the elected chamber. All but one of the 26 bishops are men⁹, and of the 88 hereditary peers just one is

⁸ See *Women, Quotas and Elections Worldwide*, Centre for Women & Democracy, July 2015.

⁹ *The Bishop of Gloucester is first woman to occupy one of the ecclesiastical seats.*

a woman. Nearly all of the 192 women peers, therefore, hold life peerages.

There are a number of reasons why our society would benefit from more women in our politics; diverse groups make better decisions⁹, women's skills, experience and expertise is being wasted, and women's interests are imperfectly represented in decisions about issues which affect them both directly and indirectly¹¹. A more diverse political body would both reflect the electorate and help to change the political culture. Finally, women are over 50 percent of the population and should therefore constitute at least 50 percent of the people by which the country is governed at all levels.

The effort to correct the imbalance, however, constantly seems to fall foul of the perception that our democratic system is a meritocracy, when in fact it is anything but. If it were, it would not be so difficult for women to get selected as candidates in winnable seats, nor would they find ministerial advancement so slow.

The key element in creating change lies in ensuring that the established political parties field sufficient numbers of women candidates in seats they believe they have a reasonable chance of winning. All but one of the 650 MPs elected were run as candidates by established national political parties. Although women do stand as independents or for the very small parties, they do not do so in large numbers. The Conservative, Labour, Green and Scottish National parties all had women candidate levels of 30 percent or more, whilst women constituted over 25 percent of candidates for the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru. Only UKIP fell below this. On the other hand, only 20 percent of independent or small party candidates were women. The way in which parties find, train and select candidates will therefore remain a matter of concern to everyone who is interested in changing the face of politics.

One of the reasons parties sometimes give as to why there are not more women politicians is that not enough women come forward. Even if this is true at local government level, at national level this argument has less traction. For the first time ever over a thousand (1,033) women stood for election in 2015, most of them for the main political parties. To achieve gender parity on the current constituency boundaries in the House of Commons just 325 women would have to be elected at any one election. It can hardly be impossible to find that number of women to fill those seats, yet on all sides (and in most countries) political parties approach the problem as though it was insoluble without massive upheaval.

It is true that there are a number of problems around the practicalities of political life; despite recent improvements, Parliament's working hours and practices, and the demands on MPs who have caring responsibilities or who represent constituencies outside London do not make being an MP easy for either women or men. In addition, political parties need to resolve questions about internal cultures and disciplinary and complaints procedures. Recent events in the Liberal Democrat party in particular have highlighted the challenges, but the issue exists at all levels in all parties. However, none of these problems are insurmountable provided that Parliament and the parties get serious about dealing with them.

There are other issues at play too. Despite everything that has been written and said in

¹⁰ See, for example, Lord Davies of Abersoch, *Women on Boards*, 2011, p 7

¹¹ See Professor Sarah Childs, Professor Joni Lovenduski and Dr Rosie Campbell, *Women at the Top 2005: Changing Numbers, Changing Politics*, Hansard Society, 2005

recent years¹², some elements of the media still think it is appropriate to ask women politicians about their fertility, their weight and their dress size¹³. Women still find themselves the recipients of misogynist abuse as well as political, particularly, if, as in the case of Stella Creasy (which eventually resulted in a prosecution), they identify themselves as feminist. In *Sex & Power 2013* we showed that very few women either edited national newspapers or held jobs as Political Editors¹⁴. This has improved a little in recent years, but the reporting and commentating on British politics still remains overwhelmingly male. Moreover, since the men running the media are likely to have been educated at the same schools and universities as those in Parliament¹⁵, there is the clear potential for cultures to be perpetuated and reinforced even as they are criticised.

Campaigns to increase the number of women in politics (or at the top of professions or in boardrooms) are sometimes criticised on the grounds that they only seem to be concerned with a small minority of privileged women. We wholeheartedly agree that there is much more to gender equality than just who occupies well-paid and influential jobs. These are spheres in which great power is exercised, not only financially but also in terms of culture, access to education and training and the maintenance of civil rights and the law. The people who occupy them make decisions that affect the daily lives of both women and men across the country, and it is therefore legitimate to ask who they are.

There are also practical reasons for demanding change. There is good evidence that increasing women in positions of political power has an impact on government policy and legislation in ways that affect a much wider group of women¹⁶. Women at the top are also believed to have a positive influence in improving the number of other senior women through role modelling, support and networking, and balanced groups make better decisions than those which simply consist of one element of the population. If this last point is true of business – as research suggests it is¹⁷ – how much more the case must it be for the running of countries?

If we truly want a democracy which is more representative of people of all backgrounds and communities we need to do something about gender balance. Women are a majority of the population, but a minority of those who make decisions. It is high time women had equal access to political power.

¹² E.g. *Women in Journalism 'Seen but not heard: how women make front page news'* 15 October 2012,

¹³ E.g. *the Daily Mail* in an interview on 19 July 2015

¹⁴ *The appointment of Katharine Viner as the Guardian's Editor-in-Chief brings the number of women editors up to two (out of 20); the appointment of Laura Kuenssberg as the BBC's first Political Editor makes her the only woman currently holding that role in a national broadcaster.*

¹⁵ <http://www.suttontrust.com/news/news/over-half-the-countrys-top-journalists-went-to-private-schools/2006>

¹⁶ E.g. Irene Tinker, "Quotas for women in elected legislatures: Do they really empower women?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 27 (2004) pp531-546

¹⁷ E.g., "The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity", *Catalyst*, 2007, and "Women on Boards", Lord Davies of Abersoch, 2011.

OVERVIEW

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The General Election held resulted in a welcome overall improvement in the representation of women in the House of Commons, with some interesting variations by both political party and nation.

191 women were elected to the House of Commons on 7 May 2015, taking the level of women MPs up to 29.4 percent. In 2010 22.3 percent of MPs elected were women, and this increase is the greatest since the breakthrough year of 1997.

It is now nearly a hundred years since women were first admitted to the House of Commons, and for the first eight decades progress in terms of women elected was painfully slow. Indeed, until the 1980s it was virtually stagnant, and even after 1997 it has remained sluggish, with the presence of women MPs rising by just 11 percentage points across the four General Elections since.

To date there have only ever been 450 women MPs – still well short of a full Parliament’s-worth, and still (just) below the number of men elected in 2015 (459).

The presence of women in each political party’s group of MPs is variable, but has improved in every case except the Alliance and Democratic Unionist Parties in Northern Ireland, and the Liberal Democrats, all seven of whose female MPs lost their seats in May.

FIGURE 1
WOMEN AS A
PERCENTAGE OF
MPs
1945-2015

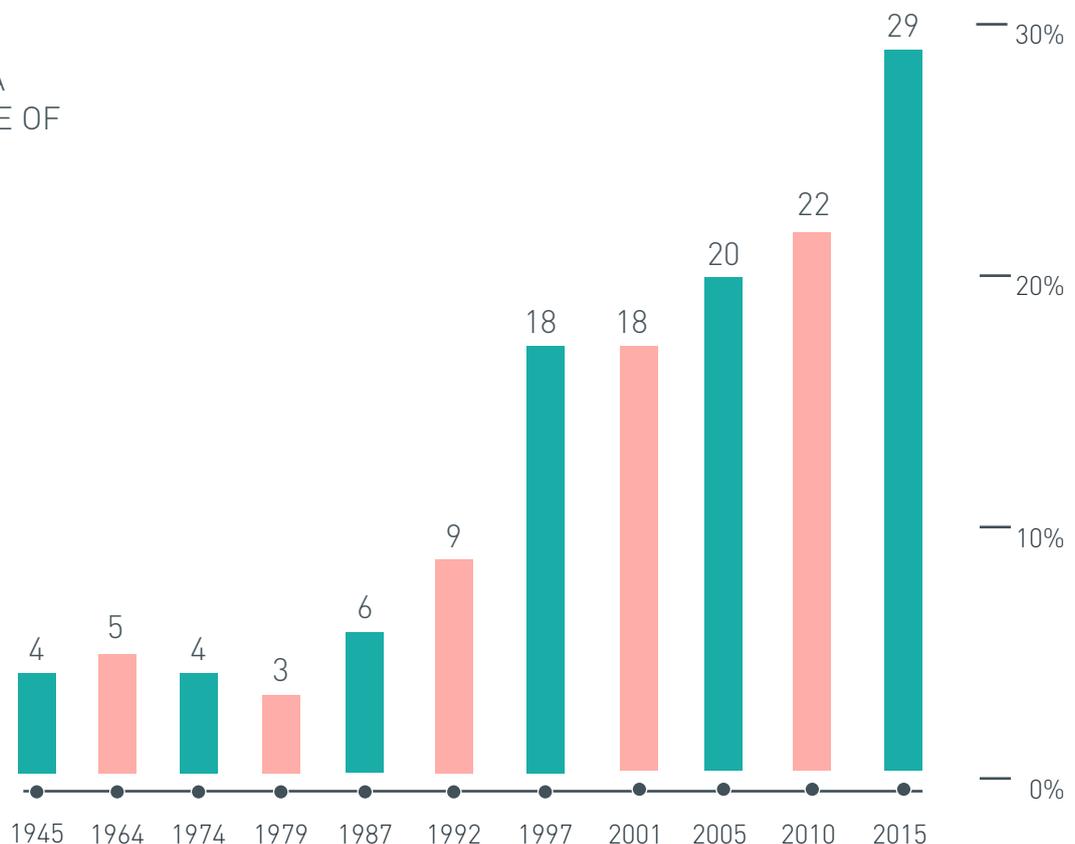
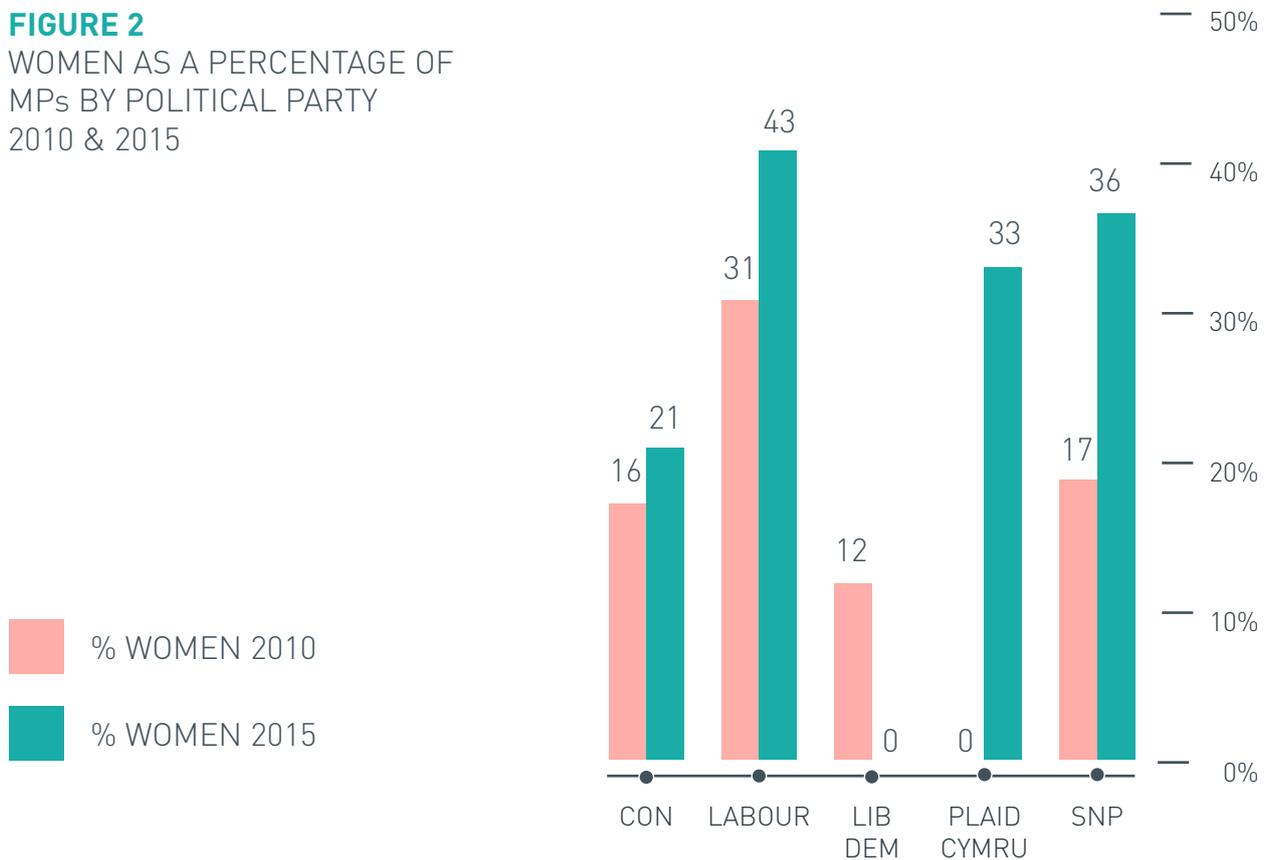


FIGURE 2
 WOMEN AS A PERCENTAGE OF
 MPs BY POLITICAL PARTY
 2010 & 2015



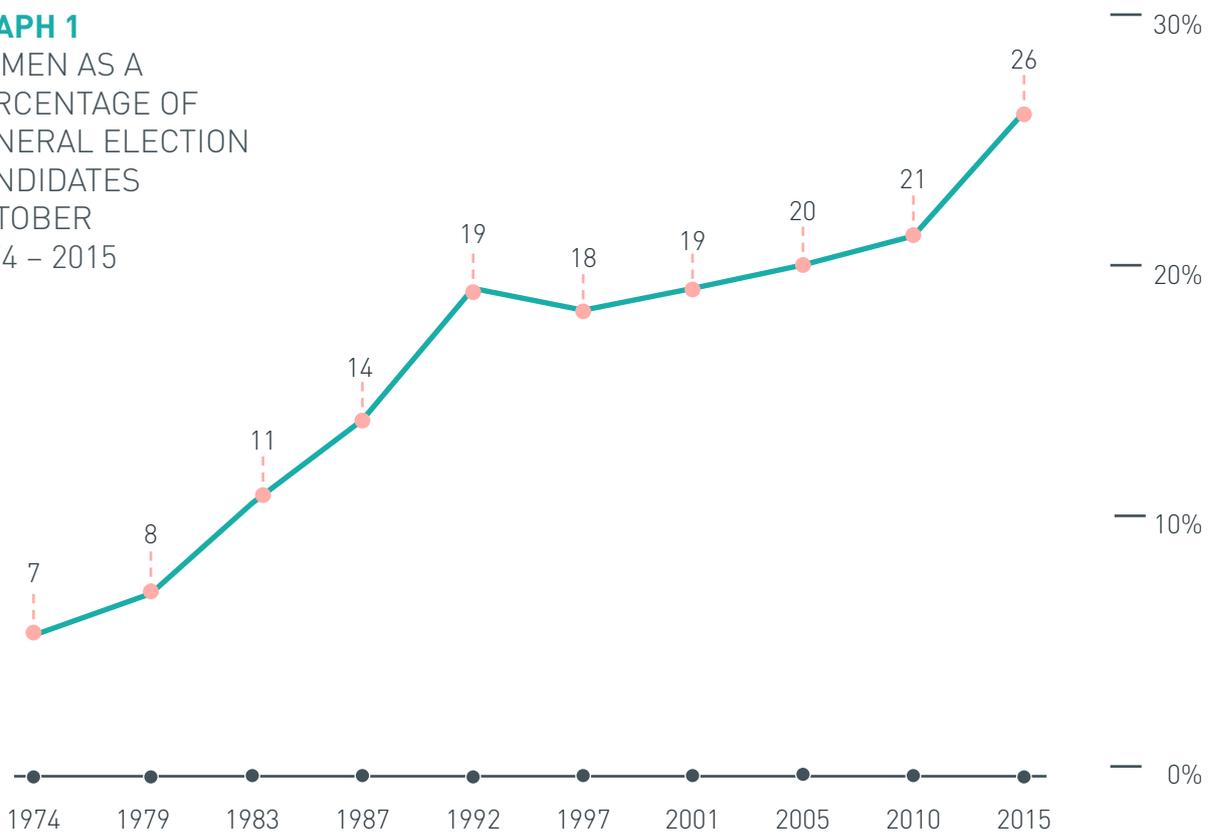
The achievements (or otherwise) of each party are shown in the chapter on political parties further on in this report, but some points are worth noting here.

The Conservative Party, with 68 women MPs, has achieved a record high for the party, with the number of women rising from 49 in 2010 (and the percentage from 16 to 21 percent). There are 99 Labour women MPs; this is below the high of 101 achieved in 1997 but, because the overall number of Labour MPs has fallen, the percentage of Labour women MPs has risen to 42.7 percent.

It was widely predicted before the election that the Liberal Democrats would find themselves with no women MPs, and this has indeed turned out to be the case. The last election after which there were no women Liberals, Social Democrats or Liberal Democrats in Parliament was 1983.

Other success stories of the election in terms of women's representation were the Scottish National Party (SNP), which, with an increase from just one woman (out of 6) to 20 (out of 56) has achieved major change, and Plaid Cymru, which had its first ever woman MP elected.

GRAPH 1
 WOMEN AS A
 PERCENTAGE OF
 GENERAL ELECTION
 CANDIDATES
 OCTOBER
 1974 – 2015



02 Candidates

Women can only be elected if they are present in significant numbers in seats their parties believe they have a reasonable chance of winning.

Levels of women candidates overall have been rising steadily – if undramatically – since the early 1970s, as Graph 1 shows.

In the last 40 years the number of women standing for election has risen more quickly than the number of candidates overall. In 1974, for instance, 2,305 people stood for election, of whom 161 were women.

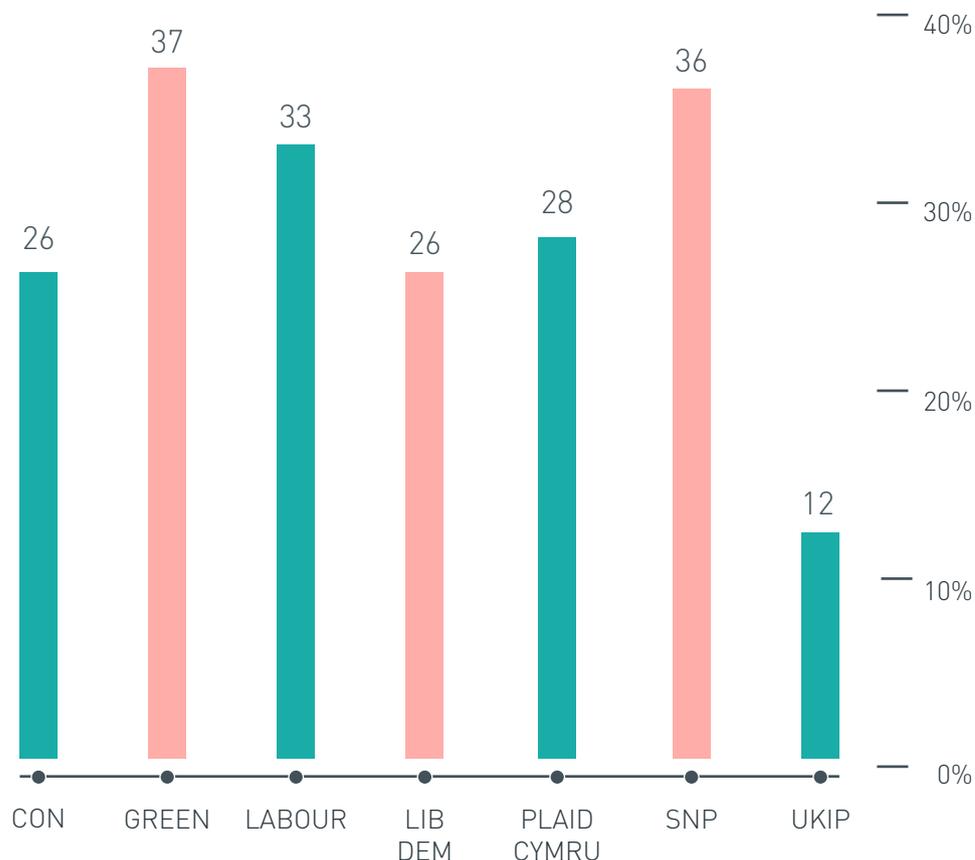
1,033 women stood as candidates at the 2015 general election, amounting to 26 percent of the total 3,971 candidates. This marks an increase from the 21.1 percent level of 2010, and is a record high.

The political parties stood varying levels of candidates.

With the exception of UKIP, all of the parties listed in Figure 3 fielded more women candidates in terms of both numbers and percentages than they did in 2010.

The only political party in the UK to field no women candidates at all was the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland. The party with the highest percentage of women candidates was the Northern Irish Alliance Party, (38.9 percent).

FIGURE 3
WOMEN AS A
PERCENTAGE OF
CANDIDATES BY
POLITICAL PARTY
2015



Graph 2 compares the rates at which the main parties have improved (or otherwise) their percentages of women candidates across the four general elections held this century.

Many of the main parties' candidates are sitting MPs, and, obviously, if these individuals choose to stand again the parties find it difficult to make changes in those constituencies¹⁸. This is one reason why progress tends to be slow, particularly in years with high rates of sitting MPs offering themselves for re-election. There are currently no term or age restrictions, nor are there any plans to introduce any. Thus an MP in a safe seat can remain there for many years¹⁹.

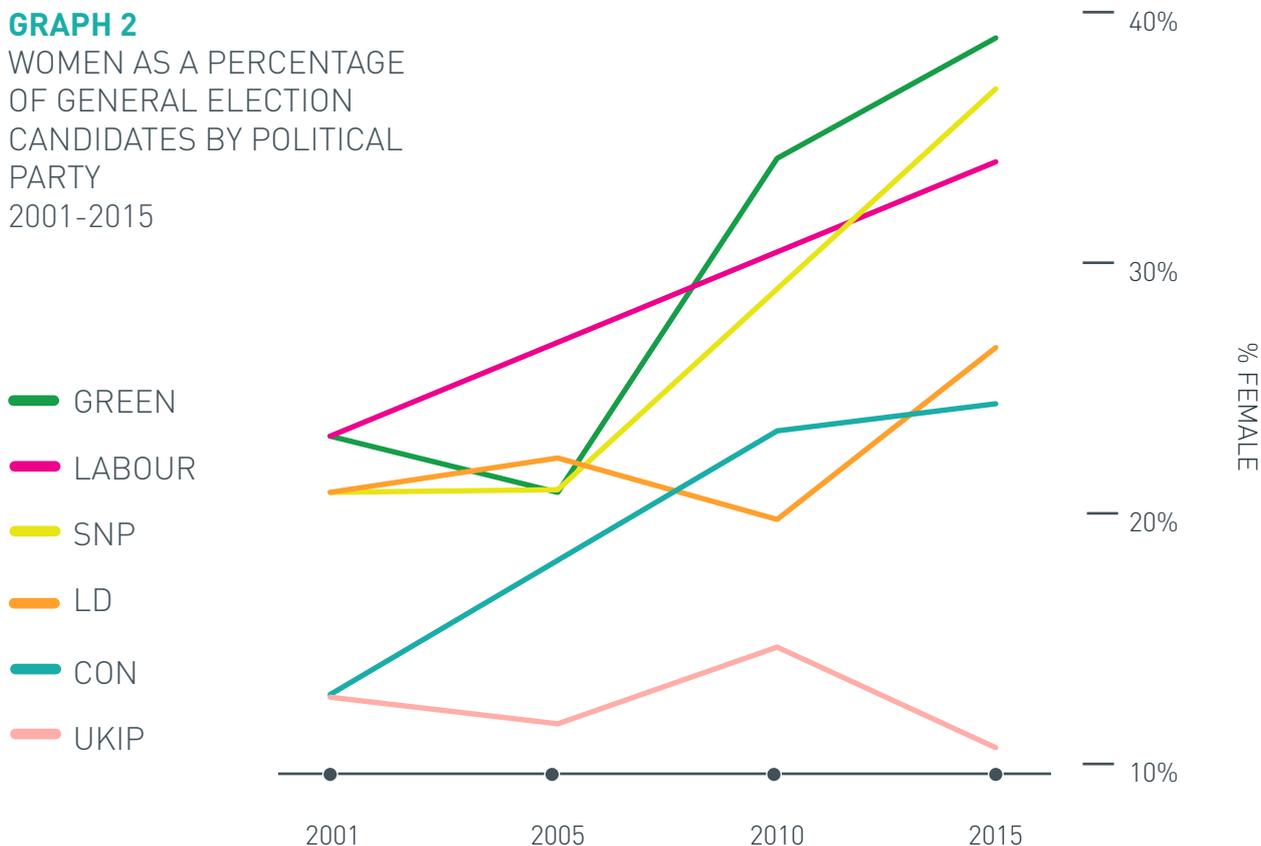
The principal opportunities parties have to increase the diversity of either their candidates or their MPs or both arise in two main groups of seats; firstly those in which the sitting MP retires (retirement seats), and, secondly, in marginal (or target) seats.

¹⁸ In theory, local (or national) parties can deselect sitting MPs. In practice, this is relatively rare, and in 2015 applied to only two MPs, both Conservative: Anne McIntosh in York Outer, and Tim Yeo in South Suffolk.

¹⁹ The current Father of the House (i.e., the MP with the longest unbroken service), is Sir Gerald Kaufmann, who was first elected in 1970. There is no equivalent title for women, but Harriet Harman has the longest unbroken period of service, having been in Parliament continuously since 1982.

GRAPH 2

WOMEN AS A PERCENTAGE OF GENERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES BY POLITICAL PARTY 2001-2015



03 Incumbency & Retirement

Of the 650 MPs in office immediately prior to any election the vast majority stand for election again, and this was indeed the case in 2015.

Just 90 incumbent MPs²⁰ – stood down in 2015 – 13.8 percent of the total 650.

38 Conservative MPs stood down, 40 Labour²¹, 11 Liberal Democrats, and one from Plaid Cymru.

Prior to the election there was much discussion of the idea that women MPs were more likely to stand down than men²². However, this suggestion is not borne out by the facts²³.

Male MPs were more likely to retire than women were in 2010. In all, 74 of those retiring were men (14.7 percent of all male MPs) and 16 were women (10.8 percent of female). They were replaced as candidates by 43 men and 47 women.

In 1997 the majority of women elected were in seats with low majorities. As a consequence,

²⁰ Includes those elected at by-elections since 2010

²¹ This includes Eric Joyce in Falkirk, who was elected as a Labour MP but subsequently sat as an Independent.

²² See, for instance, Melissa Kite in the Guardian, 28 November, 2013; Radhika Sanghani in the Telegraph 22 January 2014.

²³ See the sections on individual parties in Chapter 2.

they were much more likely to lose seats than men elected at the same time. This pattern was particularly marked in Labour, who had been prevented by the Leeds Industrial Tribunal judgement in 1996 from using all-women shortlists (AWS) in retirement seats²⁴. As a consequence, women were more likely to lose their seats in succeeding elections. Labour's failure to use positive action in 2001 resulted in only four new women being elected²⁵. However, since then at least 50 percent of retirement seat Labour candidates have been women, reducing the likelihood of there being a high turnover of Labour women MPs in future.

The Conservative party was also much more successful in 2015 in increasing the number of women candidates in retirement seats, and as a result has seen a significant increase in women MPs with good majorities.

One of the by-products of this increase in women MPs in 'safe' seats is that they are more likely to be able to go on to have sustained ministerial or shadow ministerial careers, and, in the longer term, will create a wider pool of women parliamentarians from whom ministers can be drawn.

04 Marginal & Target Seats

The other way in which political parties can increase the number of women candidates who have a reasonable chance of being elected is to concentrate them in marginal or target seats.

The traditional way to interpret marginality is to assess it on the basis of the incremental percentage swings needed for a party to take or lose the seat. On this basis, in those seats where Labour required up to a 10 percent swing to win, 53 percent of its candidates were women; however only 29 percent of Conservative candidates and 33 percent of Liberal Democrat candidates were women in such seats. In contrast, in the least winnable seats, where a 30 to 40 percent swing was required to win, the Conservatives had the highest proportion of female candidates at 36 percent compared to 26 percent of Liberal Democrats and 19 percent of Labour candidates. On this basis then, Labour did a better job of placing women in potentially winnable seats than did the other parties²⁶.

However, political parties themselves do not target seats in such a mathematical way. They use different criteria to identify their targets, and as a consequence swing required alone is not a safe guide as to whether or not a seat is also a target, particularly since some parties have defensive targets (those seats it is working not to lose, and where there is therefore either an incumbent MP or, if the sitting MP is not standing, a replacement candidate) as well as offensive ones (those it is hoping to win). In addition, not all parties publish their list of targets, targets may include seats for political reasons, and these may change during the course of the campaign.

²⁴ In 1997 Labour selected candidates in the marginal seats before moving on to the seats where sitting MPs were retiring. The Leeds ruling came just as selections in the retirement seats were about to start.

²⁵ 30 new male Labour MPs were elected at the same election.

²⁶ House of Commons Library: General Election 2015, CBP7186, 28 July 2015, p60.

For the purpose of this report, therefore, we have used the definitions used by the different parties, since these are the ones which drive candidate selection decisions²⁷.

The Conservative Party had a 40:40 strategy – i.e., there were 40 seats they had as targets to defend and 40 to win; because in this section we are considering new candidates only we have not included the defensive ones (which had incumbent candidates unless the MP retired, in which case the seat has already been counted in the section on Incumbency and Retirements).

The Labour Party published a list of 106 target seats well in advance of the election.

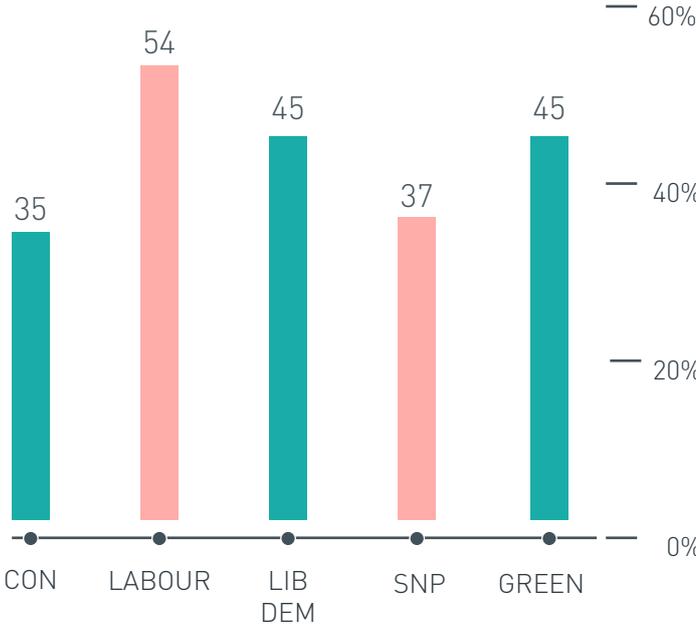
The Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, did not publish a list of targets, and we have therefore looked at 27 seats in which the party came either second or a close third in 2010, and in which they would need a swing of less than 3 percent to win.

In the case of the SNP we have set the bar higher; the Party did not start to select candidates until after the referendum result (September 2014) and by then the polls were already showing that they would pick up a significant number of seats from the other parties in general, and Labour in particular. By the end of 2014, when candidate selections were in full swing, polls were predicting that the SNP would pick up at least 30 seats. For the purposes of this study, therefore, we have defined as SNP targets 23 seats in which they were second in 2010 (and in which they would require a swing of 20 percent or less to win, plus seven in which they were third (with Labour in second), and in which the swing from the first to the second party needed for the seat to change hands was less than ten percent.

The Green Party identified a list of 11 seats²⁸ it was targeting.

The chart below shows, by party, and on the basis outlined above, the percentage of women candidates in target seats.

FIGURE 4
WOMEN AS A PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES IN TARGET SEATS FOR EACH POLITICAL PARTY 2015



²⁷ See Appendix 2 for a list of the seats used for this analysis.

²⁸ <http://pledge.greenparty.org.uk/>

05 Selection Procedures

Almost every MP elected represents a political party²⁹. At each election the distribution of seats between them changes, but there has not been the oft-predicted dramatic increase in the number of smaller parties getting elected, nor has there been a flight towards independent candidates.

Political parties vary considerably in the procedures by which they select Parliamentary candidates, the timing of those selections, and the use or otherwise of positive action mechanisms. There were also marked differences in outcomes.

With one exception, political parties in the UK do not use positive action mechanisms in order to increase the numbers of women candidates for Westminster elections. It is worth noting that positive action is much easier to implement in elections which use some form of proportional representation (PR) as the voting system, and that many of the countries who do well in terms of gender also use PR at their elections³⁰.

The best-known form of positive action is some kind of candidate quota system, but in UK general elections this is difficult to implement because of the single-constituency first-past-the-post (FPTP) system.

With the exception of the 2001 election, the Labour Party has since 1995 had a policy of fielding women candidates in 50 percent of 'winnable' seats, with 'winnable' defined as target seats plus those where the sitting (Labour) MP is retiring.

Other parties have indicated that they would consider the use of positive action if the election results in terms of gender were not 'acceptable'.

In 2010 the Conservative Party used the 'A-List' system, which prioritised a list of preferred candidates. This list was diverse both in terms of gender and race, but was also controversial, and was scrapped almost immediately after the election. For 2015 there was only one candidates list, but it was more diverse than in earlier years. 'Soft pressure' combined with shortlists in those target seats being drawn up by the Conservative Party HQ rather than locally produced a significant number of women candidates in winnable seats, and there is some evidence that this happened both in 'open caucus' or primary selections and where only members made the choice. Thus, although the Conservative Party still lags well behind Labour in terms of women candidates and MPs, it has begun to develop a model which may, in time, deliver women parliamentarians in the required numbers.

The SNP does not use positive action mechanisms, but had high levels of women candidates. The party took the unusual step of opening candidacy up to Yes campaign activists from the independence referendum who were not members of the Party. It will require some separate work to identify how – or if – this affected the numbers of women selected.

²⁹ The exceptions to this are the one Independent MP from Northern Ireland and, technically, the Speaker of the House.

³⁰ *Women, Quotas and Electoral Systems Worldwide*, Centre for Women & Democracy, 2015

The Green Party, which also consistently fields relatively large numbers of women, does not use formal positive action measures either, but does re-open nominations if there are no female candidates in the first round of the selection process.

These issues, together with the outcomes of the various selection processes, are considered in more detail in the chapter on the political parties.

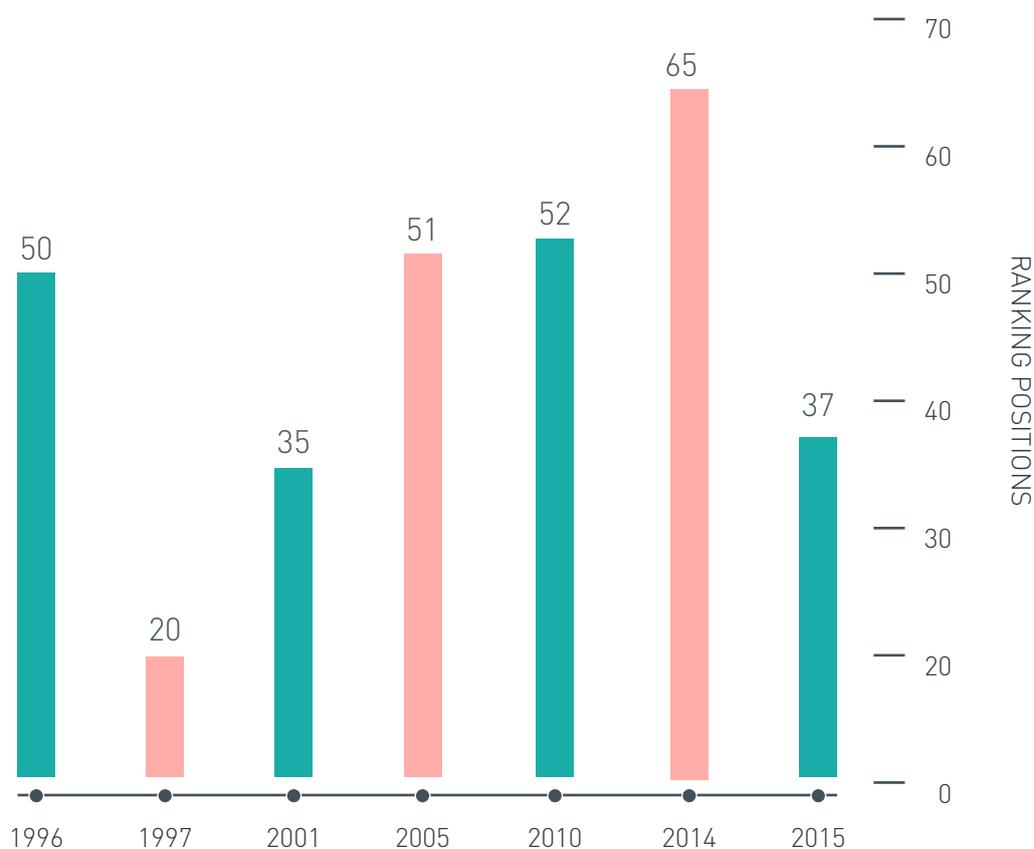
06 International Comparisons

Internationally, the UK has leaped up the league table from 67th to 37th out of 189 countries³¹.

However, because there are now five years until the next general election, and because in that period other countries will increase the numbers of women in their legislatures, this position will not be sustained. Figure 5 shows how the UK's position internationally has fluctuated over the decades.

The high point of 20th reached in 1997 has not been repeated partly because the UK's progress since then has been slow, but also because that of other countries has been

FIGURE 5
UK WORLD
RANKING FOR
WOMEN IN
PARLIAMENT
1996-2015



³¹ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> accessed June 2015

much faster. In almost all cases this has been due to the use of some form of positive action measure to increase either the number of candidates, or the number of women seeking to be candidates, or both. A significant number of countries also use proportional representation (PR) electoral systems.

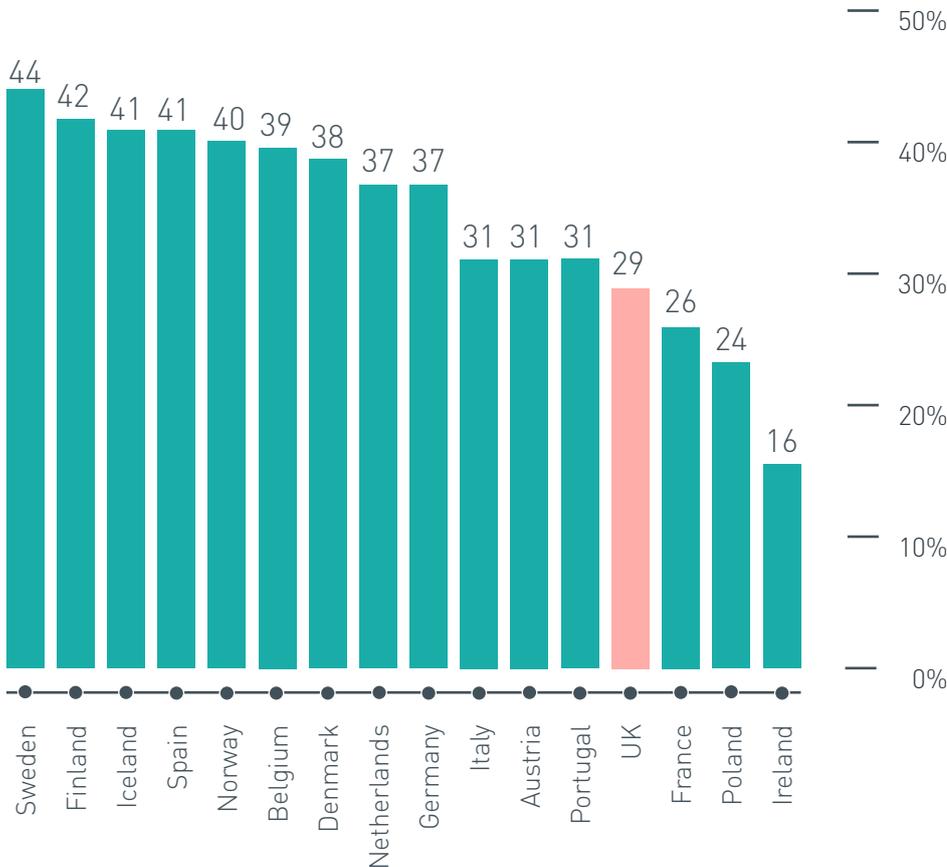
On 1 June 2015 there were 44 countries worldwide where the representation of women stood at 30 percent or more. Of these, 37 use some form of quota system, 28 use PR, and a further five use systems which mix elements of PR and first-past-the-post³².

Even within the UK, some political parties treat different elections differently; both the Green Party and the SNP use forms of positive action for selections for the European election, which uses PR, but not for the Westminster Parliament, which does not.

However, the fact that some countries (and political parties) have achieved progress under FPTP systems means that, whilst PR certainly makes things easier, it is not necessarily a pre-requisite.

Rwanda (63.8 percent), Bolivia (53.1 percent) and Cuba (48.9 percent) have the highest number of women MPs globally, but they are not necessarily the countries most comparable to the UK in their political systems and culture. Figure 6 shows how the House of Commons stands in relation to the lower houses of Western European legislatures.

FIGURE 6
WOMEN AS A PERCENTAGE OF EUROPEAN NATIONAL LOWER HOUSES OR SINGLE CHAMBER LEGISLATURES



³² *Women, Quotas and Electoral Systems Worldwide*, Centre for Women & Democracy, 2015

Chapter

THE POLITICAL PARTIES

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This section looks at the performance of the different political parties in terms both of women candidates and of women elected. It also looks at each party's starting point and history in this context and at what, if any, mechanisms are used to try to increase women's representation.

For each of the main parties, the definitions of marginal seats are those outlined in the section above on Marginal and Target Seats.

An additional complication is that parties organise themselves differently. Some are UK-wide bodies with separate 'branches' in the UK's constituent nations. Others are completely separate bodies in the different nations, whilst others still stand in only one nation. For the purposes of this report, therefore, and because a general election is a UK-wide event, we have aggregated the candidates and election outcomes for each party across the four nations.

01 The Conservative Party

The Conservative Party fielded candidates in a total of 647 seats³³ throughout the United Kingdom. Of these 170 (26.2 percent) were women, and 68 were elected.

As can be seen from Figure 7, the percentage of women candidates for the Conservatives has been steadily rising over the last 30 years, but the significant increases in both the numbers³⁴ and the percentages of women elected have come only in 2010 and 2015. Prior to 2010 the Conservative Party did not use any form of positive action, but for that election an 'A List' system was used which ensured that women candidates stood in seats the Party considered winnable. This list contained over a hundred 'preferred' candidates, and was 50 percent female.

Following the 2010 election, the A list, which was viewed as having had variable levels of success, was abandoned. Despite the Party Leader's public support for all-women shortlists³⁵ these were not introduced, and neither was any other form of positive action. However, pressure from within the Party, both from the leadership, from individuals and from organisations such as Women2Win³⁶ and the Conservative Women's Organisation³⁷, combined to produce a good number of women candidates in winnable seats. This pressure was accompanied by a centralised shortlisting system and extensive training provision³⁸.

Prior to the 2015 election, prominent figures in the Party again used AWS as a threat to be implemented if progress was insufficient³⁹.

³³The Conservative Party did not field a candidate in the Speaker's seat.²⁹ *Women, Quotas and Electoral Systems Worldwide*, Centre for Women & Democracy, 2015

³⁴See Appendix 1 for tables containing relevant numbers for charts and graphs.

³⁵<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/7265221/David-Cameron-I-will-impose-all-women-shortlists.html> February 2010

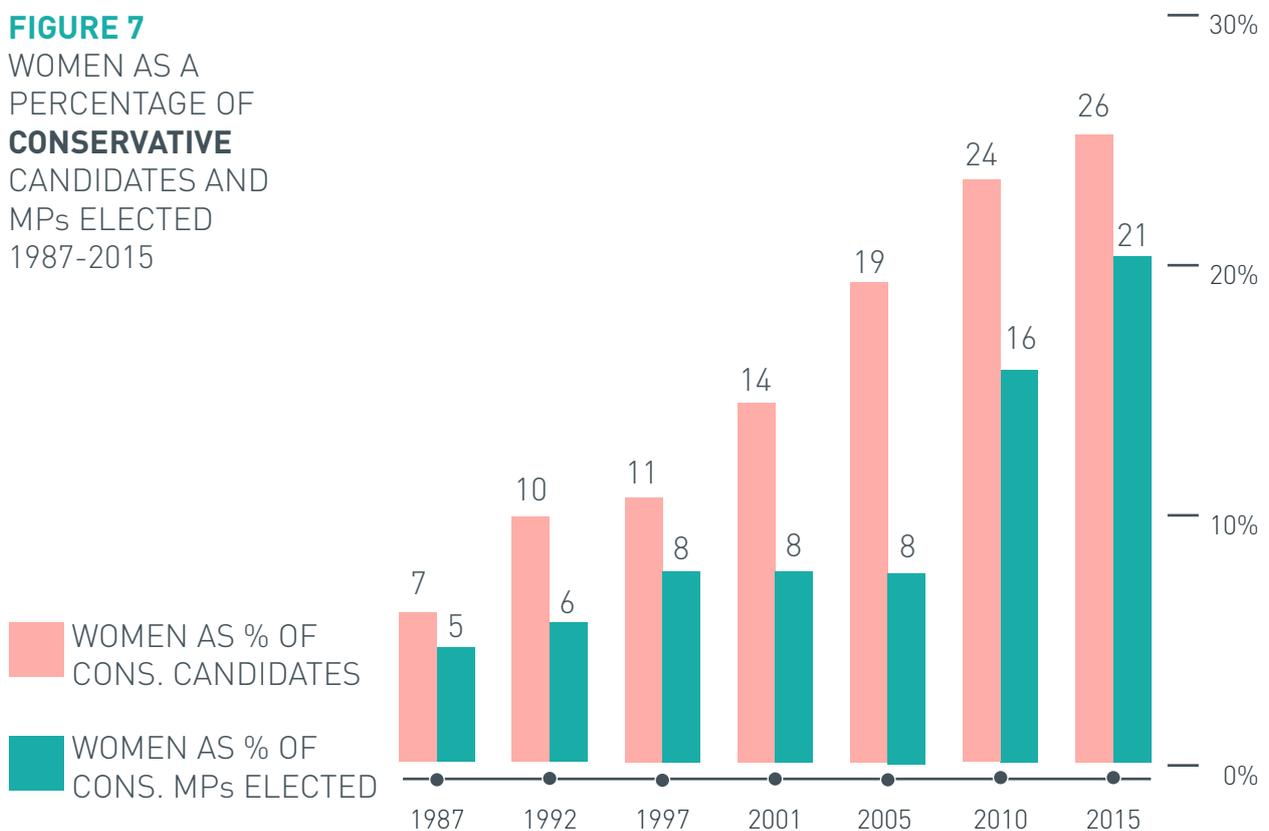
³⁶<http://www.women2win.com/>

³⁷<http://www.conservativewomen.org.uk/default.asp>

³⁸http://www.conservativewomen.org.uk/article.asp?art_id=196 accessed 15 June 2015

³⁹E.g. Nicky Morgan, the Equalities Minister and Secretary of State for Education, June 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/jun/26/conservatives-all-women-shortlists-nicky-morgan>

FIGURE 7
 WOMEN AS A
 PERCENTAGE OF
CONSERVATIVE
 CANDIDATES AND
 MPs ELECTED
 1987-2015



As with any of the major parties, a significant number of Conservative candidates - 272 (42.0 percent) - were incumbent MPs. 44 of these were women.

A total of 38 Conservative MPs⁴⁰ stood down at the election; four women and 34 men. They were replaced as candidates by 14 women and 24 men.

Men were more likely to be fielded in the safest retirement seats. 25 of the 38 had majorities of 10,000 or above. In eight of these the new candidates were female, and in 17 they were male.

The proportion of female candidates replacing retiring Conservative MPs has continued to rise. 36.8 percent of the candidates replacing retiring Conservative MPs were women. This is a significant increase on 2010, when only 25 percent of women in Conservative retirement seats were women.

Conservative men were more likely to be elected than Conservative women. Including the Speaker, who is technically non-Party but was originally elected as a Conservative, 51.1 percent of Conservative candidates overall were elected.

40.5 percent of Conservative women candidates were elected, and 55.0 percent of men. Three incumbent female Conservative MPs were defeated, all by women candidates. 27 Conservative women were elected for the first time; 17 in seats where the previous MP had retired, and 10 in target seats (as defined earlier in this report), and two in seats in which they defeated Liberal Democrats.

⁴⁰ Includes Douglas Carswell and Mark Reckless, who had defected to UKIP. Although they both stood as candidates at the election, therefore, they had to be replaced by new Conservative candidates.

02 The Labour Party

The Labour Party fielded candidates in 631 seats of whom 212 (33.6 percent) were women. Labour does not stand candidates in any of the 18 Northern Ireland seats, and also follows the convention of not running against the Speaker.

99 Labour women MPs were elected in 2015; fewer than the 1997 record of 101, but 18 more than in 2010.

As can be seen from Figure 6, levels of Labour women candidates and MPs have been rising steadily over the last 30 years. However, it is the only party for which the percentage of women MPs elected now exceeds the percentage of women candidates, and this reflects the proactive measures the Party has taken over that period.

Between 1987 and 1997 local parties were encouraged to select women and in 1992 were required to include them on shortlists. For the 1997 election highly contentious all-women shortlists (AWS) were used, and whilst this produced very little increase in the overall number or percentage of women candidates, the concentration of those women in winnable seats produced a 10 percent rise in the percentage of Labour women MPs.

The use of AWS had been declared illegal in 1996, after Labour had selected candidates in the majority of marginal seats, but before it had moved on to selections in retirement seats. As a result, not only were a high number of the women elected in 1997 in seats that could easily be lost in subsequent elections, but the number of women standing in retirement seats fell below the original 50 percent target.

Labour did not use any positive action measures to select candidates for the 2001 elections. As a result, the level both of women candidates and women elected fell slightly; in numerical terms, 30 Labour men entered Parliament for the first time at that election, and four women.

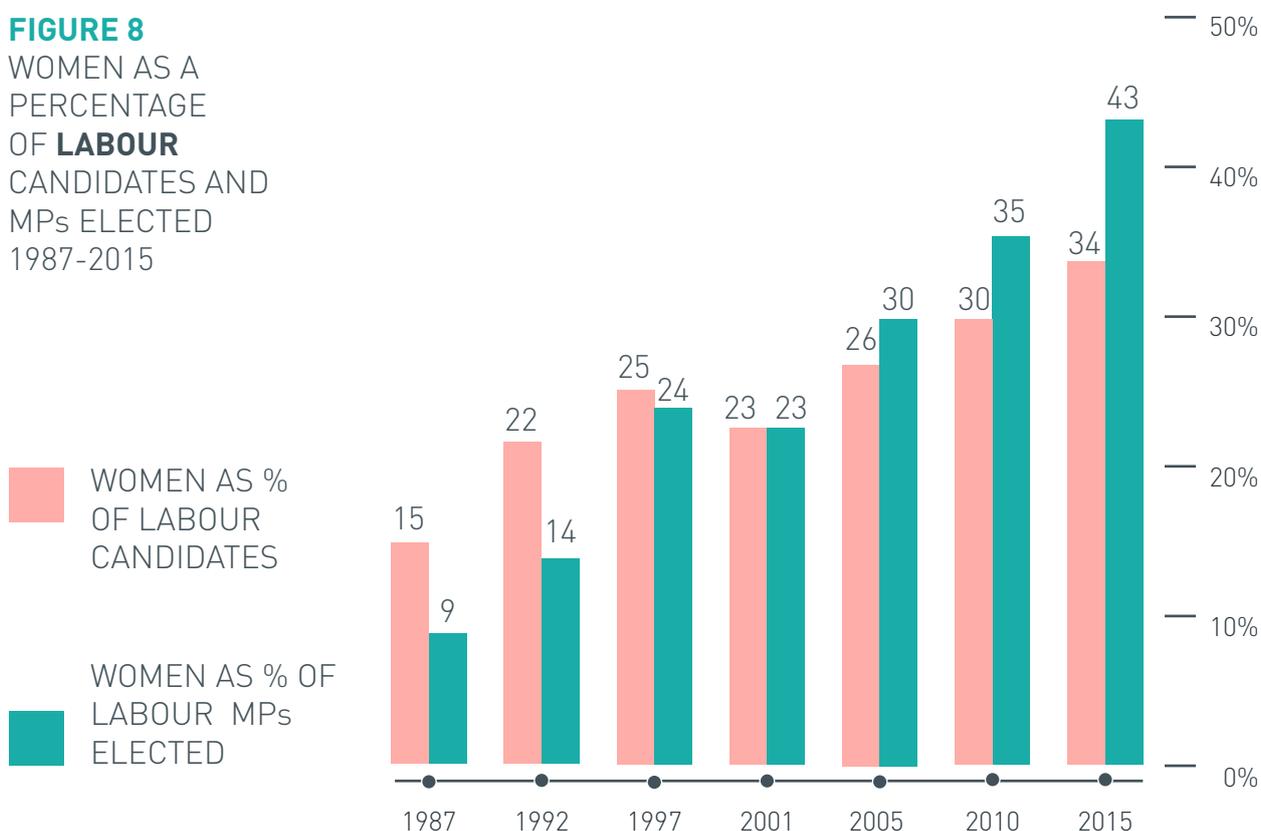
The Sex Discrimination (Candidates) Act of 2002 made it legally possible for political parties to use positive action to increase the number of women candidates. Because Labour's policy was (and remains) to use AWS to select women candidates in 50 percent of all winnable (i.e., target and retirement) seats, the level of women elected began to rise at a greater rate than the level of women candidates, and, indeed overtook it. Thus, even when, as in 2015, Labour as a whole loses a significant number of seats, the percentage of women in the Parliamentary Labour Party has continued to rise.

As with other parties, lay women's organisations such as Labour Women's Network⁴¹ and the Fabian Women's Network⁴² provide training and mentoring schemes for women members and apply pressure to ensure that the Party continues to promote women candidates.

⁴¹ <http://www.lwn.org.uk/>

⁴² <http://fabianwomen.org.uk/>

FIGURE 8
WOMEN AS A
PERCENTAGE
OF **LABOUR**
CANDIDATES AND
MPs ELECTED
1987-2015



218 (34.5 percent) of Labour candidates were incumbent Labour MPs who stood again; 77 women and 141 men.

Labour replaced retiring MPs with a higher proportion of women in 2015. A total of 40⁴³ Labour MPs stood down at the election; 10 women and 30 men. They were replaced as candidates by 25 women and 15 men. 20 of the women were elected, and 10 of the men. Labour also increased the number of women in the safest seats. 13 of the 40 seats where the Labour MP stood down had majorities of over 10,000. 11 of these were held by men and two by women. Of the new candidates five were women and eight were men.

Labour had 106 target seats, and fielded women candidates in 57 (53.8 percent) of them.

34 Labour women were elected for the first time in 2015; 20 in seats where the previous MP had retired, and 14 in target seats (as defined earlier in this report).

36.8 percent of Labour candidates overall were elected; 46.7 percent of women candidates, and 31.4 percent of men.

Although it is tempting to deduce from this that women candidates are more likely to win in Labour seats, the temptation should be resisted. Women were more likely to be candidates in seats where the MP was retiring, more incumbent women MPs had seats which were 'safe' even in a bad year, and significantly more men than women lost their seats in Labour's collapse in Scotland.

12 incumbent female Labour MPs were defeated, of whom three were defeated by women from the SNP. The remainder were defeated by men (seven SNP and two Conservatives).

⁴³ This includes the former Labour member Eric Joyce, in Falkirk.

03 The Liberal Democrats

2015 was not a good election for Liberal Democrat women; all those who stood lost, including all the incumbent women MPs. Thus the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Group in the House of Commons now has no women members.

The Liberal Democrats fielded a total of 630 candidates in England, Scotland and Wales, of whom 166 (26.3 percent) were women. The Party does not run candidates in Northern Ireland. Following convention, it also did not contest the Speaker's seat, and there was no Liberal Democrat candidate in Gower.

The Liberal Democrats do not use any form of positive action for their Westminster parliamentary selections, and have, throughout their history, had low levels of women MPs. In 1987, prior to the merger of the Liberal Party and the Social Democrats, the two parties had five women MPs between them; in 1992 the new Party had just 2 women (out of a total of 20 MPs). The record high of 16 percent in 2005 represents 10 women (out of 62 MPs).

Following the fall in 2010 to 7 women, the Liberal Democrats took steps to encourage the selection of more women candidates, but did not revoke the 2001 conference decision not to use positive action in the form of AWS. A Leadership Academy was established to try to increase and support the numbers of women coming forwards, and there was indeed the biggest increase in the percentage of women candidates since 1992. However, none of the seven Liberal Democrat women MPs elected in 2010 had a majority of more than 7,000, and in an election in which even relatively large Liberal Democrat majorities were vulnerable – Vince Cable, for instance, lost a majority of over 12,000 in Twickenham – they were not able to survive. As a result, for the first time since 1983 there are no Liberal or Liberal Democrat women in the House of Commons.

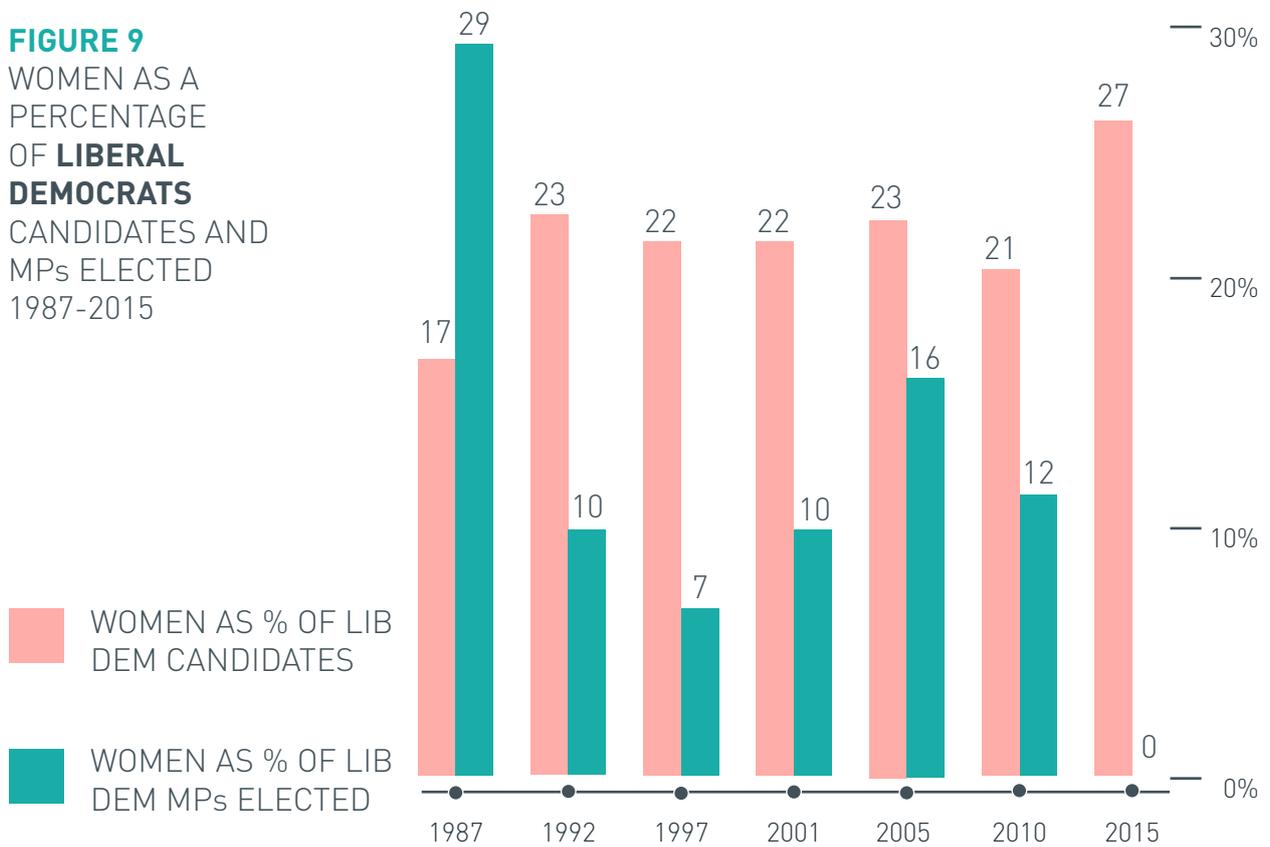
Although the Party is often viewed as being anti-positive action per se, this is not entirely the case. Zipping systems⁴⁴ are used for European and devolved elections, where the electoral systems make taking such action easier and a little less contentious.

However, even prior to the 2010 election the Liberal Democrats had indicated, in evidence to the Speaker's Conference, that they could reconsider their opposition to positive action, but although the debate continued during the course of the Parliament no conclusion was reached. The recently elected new Liberal Democrat leader has already indicated that he favours AWS and zipping mechanisms⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ Zipping can be used in elections such as those for the European and devolved assemblies in which parties field lists of candidates and rank men and women alternately.

⁴⁵ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/lib-dem-leadership-farron-and-lamb-in-diversity-hustings-46613.html>

FIGURE 9
 WOMEN AS A
 PERCENTAGE
 OF **LIBERAL
 DEMOCRATS**
 CANDIDATES AND
 MPs ELECTED
 1987-2015



The Liberal Democrats did replace retiring MPs with higher numbers of female candidates. 11 of the 56 Liberal Democrat MPs chose to stand down at the 2015 election – 9 men and 2 women. They were replaced as candidates by 5 men and 6 women. In the one seat with a majority of over 10,000 the replacement candidate was male, but men and women were pretty evenly distributed through the list. None of the 11 replacement candidates were elected.

In the 27 ‘target’ seats in which the Liberal Democrats needed a three percent swing or less to win, the party fielded 11 women and 16 men. None were elected.

04 The Green Party

The Green Party historically does well in terms of women candidates at all levels, and 2015 was no exception. However, their inability under the present electoral system to win seats commensurate with their vote means that, even when they do well in terms of numbers of votes, they struggle to do well in terms of MPs.

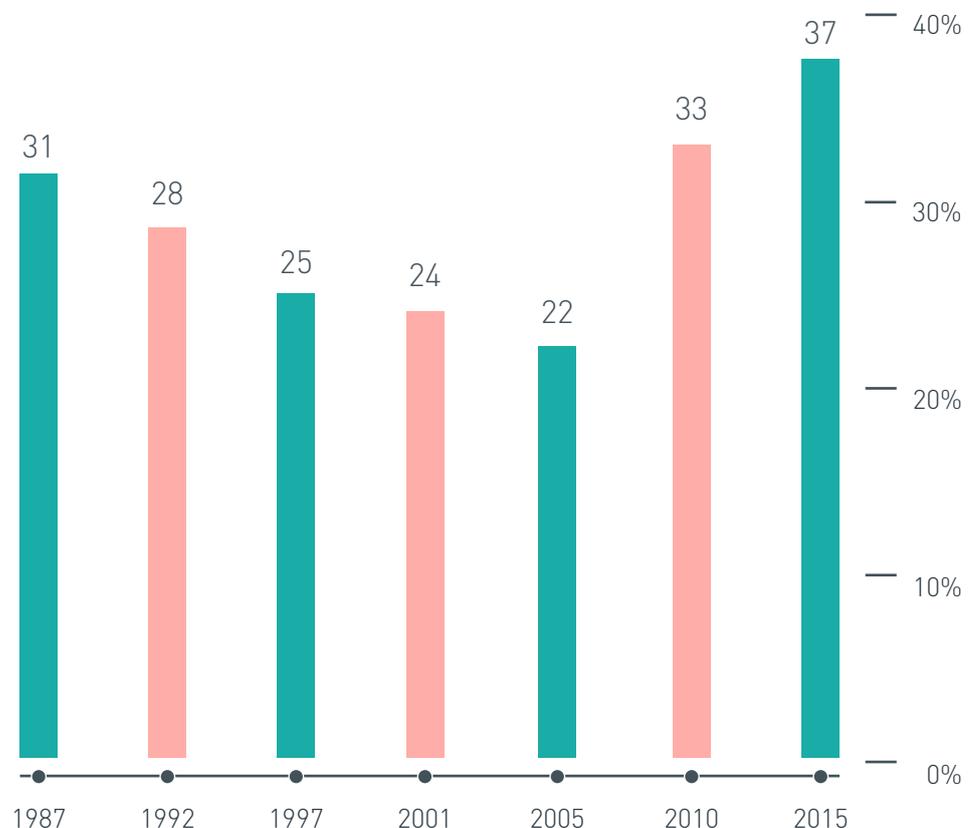
Although the Green Party does not use formal positive action mechanisms for Westminster elections it is not in principle opposed to them, and uses zipping for devolved and European Parliamentary elections. However, the first-past-the-post system means that zipping effectively produces all-women shortlists in 50 percent of seats, and it has not therefore been implemented for UK-wide general elections.

However, recognising that without some kind of action the level of women candidates is likely to fall, the Party did require nominations for selections to be re-opened before shortlisting if no women applied. It is not currently known how many seats this applied to or whether or not it resulted in the selection of more women candidates.

The party had 11 target seats; five of these had women candidates. Only one of the 11 candidates, Caroline Lucas, was elected. This was a repeat of their result in 2010 when she became the party's first ever MP.

Just one Green MP was elected, and that one (Caroline Lucas) is female. This is a repeat of their result in 2010. Prior to that there were no Green MPs.

FIGURE 10
WOMEN AS A
% OF **GREEN**
CANDIDATES
1987-2015



UKIP ran a total of 619 candidates, of whom 75 (12.1 percent) were women. This is a fall from the 2010 level of 15 percent (83 women out of 557 candidates.)

UKIP does not use any positive action measures in its selection processes.

UKIP went into the election with two MPs, both of whom had defected from the Conservative Party. Both were male, and both stood again, but only one (Douglas Carswell) was re-elected.

06 Scottish National Party

The Scottish National Party provided one of the success stories of the 2015 election in more ways than one, increasing its number of women Westminster MPs from one to 20, and the percentage from 16.7 to 35.7 percent.

The Party fielded a total of 59 candidates in Scotland only, of whom 21 (35.6 percent) were women.

Candidate selections did not begin until after the independence referendum in September 2014, by which time it was already anticipated that the SNP would make significant gains

FIGURE 11⁴⁶
WOMEN AS
A % OF **SNP**
CANDIDATES
1987-2015



⁴⁶Figure 11 does not include a comparison for MPs elected since 2015 is the first election at which SNP representation reached double figures in terms of numbers.

at the general election. Although positive action was not used, the Party decided to allow experienced Yes campaigners from the referendum who were either not Party members, or had only just joined, to stand as candidates. To date, no detailed study has been published on the effect this may or may not have had on the selection of women candidates.

The SNP had strong hopes of winning significant numbers of seats even before the polls started suggesting the possible scale of their success. Parties often find that the more likely it is to win a seat the more likely it is that there will be strong competition at the selection and the more likely also that the candidate is male. This does not appear to have happened in this case.

All but one of the SNP's women candidates won, resulting in an SNP Westminster Party which is 35.7 percent female.

In March 2015 the SNP Conference voted in favour of empowering the National Executive Committee to implement AWS in individual constituencies and balanced lists in devolved elections⁴⁷.

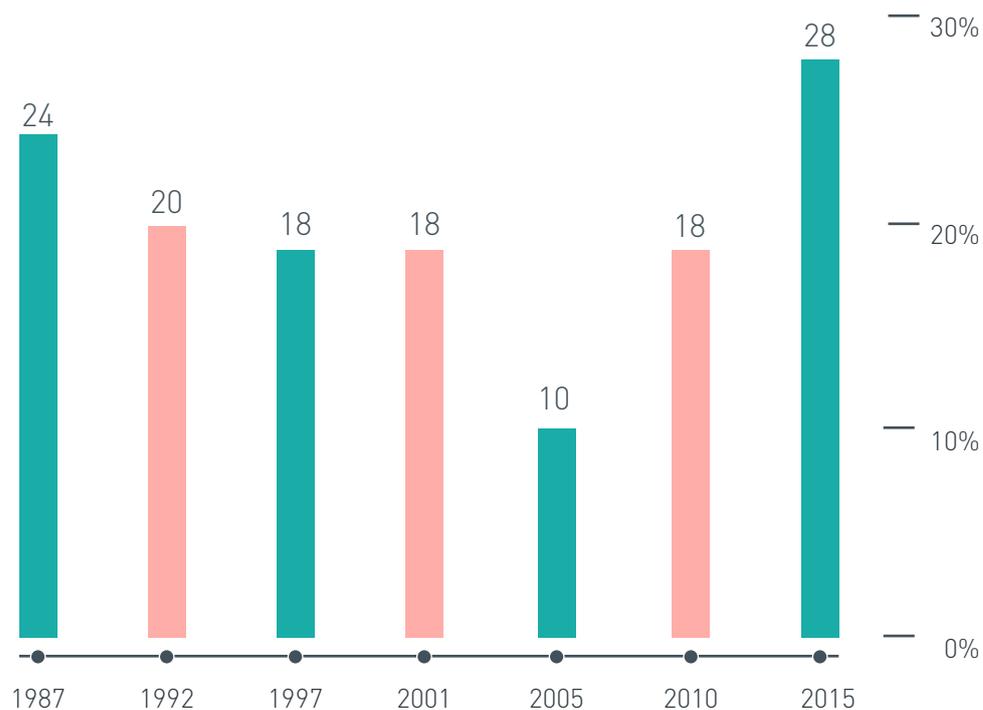
07 Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru fielded 40 candidates in Wales only, of whom 11 (27.5 percent) were women.

The Party did not use any positive action mechanisms in Westminster candidate selections, although it does use zipping at devolved Assembly and European level.

Three Plaid Cymru MPs were elected, of whom one (Liz Saville Roberts) was a woman selected to fight a retirement seat. She is the first female Plaid Cymru MP.

FIGURE 12
WOMEN AS A
% OF **PLAID**
CYMRU
CANDIDATES
1987-2015



⁴⁷<http://www.snp.org/media-centre/news/2015/mar/snp-lead-example-gender-equality>

08 Alliance Party

The Alliance Party stood candidates in the 18 Northern Ireland seats only; 7 (38.9 percent) of their candidates were women, including their one incumbent candidate.

The Alliance won no seats at the election, and their single female incumbent (Naomi Long) was defeated by a male candidate from the Democratic Unionist Party.

The Alliance Party is the sister party of the UK Liberal Democrats, and for this reason the Liberal Democrats do not field candidates there.

09 Democratic Unionist Party

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) stood candidates in 16 of the 18 seats in Northern Ireland. None of their candidates were women.

The DUP won eight seats.

10 Sinn Fein

Sinn Fein fielded 18 candidates in Northern Ireland, of whom six (33.3 percent) were women, including one in the five seats they held prior to the election.

Four Sinn Fein MPs were elected; the one female incumbent lost her seat to a male candidate from the Ulster Unionist Party.

11 Social Democratic & Labour

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) fielded candidates in all 18 Northern Irish seats; 5 (27.8 percent) of them were women, including one (Margaret Ritchie) of the Party's three incumbent MPs seeking re-election.

All three were re-elected.

The SDLP is the British Labour Party's sister party in Northern Ireland, and for this reason the Labour Party does not field candidates there.

12 Ulster Unionist Party

The Ulster Unionist Party ran 18 candidates in the province, of whom three were women.

The Party won two seats, both with male candidates, one of whom took a seat from a female incumbent (the Alliance's Naomi Long).

13 Independent Candidates

Across the UK a total of 297 people stood as Independent candidates. For the purposes of this report, an Independent is defined as someone who does not stand on any Party ticket, although s/he may be part of a local group of independents.

60 (20.2 percent) Independent candidates were women, including the one Independent MP (Lady Sylvia Hermon in Northern Ireland) standing for re-election. She was successful, and remains the only Independent MP in Parliament.

14 Others

There is a plethora of smaller parties, ranging from the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition, who fielded 80 candidates (21.5 percent women) to very small groupings fielding only one or two candidates across the board.

In all, there were 386 candidates for these parties, of whom 78 (20.2 percent) were women. The male candidates included the only MP from this group (George Galloway, Respect), and he was defeated by a Labour woman (Naz Shah).

As a consequence, no MPs from parties in this category were elected.

CABINET, GOVERNMENT & SCRUTINY

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01 The Cabinet & Ministers

There are seven women members of the new 22-strong Cabinet, bringing the level up to 31.8 percent, and meeting the Prime Minister's earlier stated target of the Cabinet being a third female. An additional eight ministers, of whom three are female, also have the right to attend Cabinet but not vote.

Prior to 1997 there had never been more than two women in any Cabinet, and then only on three occasions, twice when Harold Wilson was Prime Minister, and once under John Major. The current level represents a return to the previous high point of seven (31.8 percent) seen in 2001 under Tony Blair.

Getting more women into the most senior government roles requires there to be good numbers in the more junior government posts which may ultimately lead to Cabinet office. Here, 20 (24.4 percent) of the 82 office-holders are women⁴⁸.

Neither the Cabinet Office nor the Welsh Office team includes any women. In the Treasury team there are, including Cabinet members, a total of 12 ministers, of whom only one is a woman.

Both the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have a woman minister in their teams, but in both cases the woman concerned is a member of the House of Lords rather than the Commons. Of the total 20 women ministers in junior posts a quarter are peers rather than MPs⁴⁹.

In all, there are 27 women members of the Government⁵⁰ - seven in the Cabinet and 20 in ministerial roles. This represents 26 percent of the total number, and whilst this clearly outruns the percentage of women in the Conservative Parliamentary Party (21 percent), and is a great improvement on the pre-election position, it remains the case that there is still some way to go before women are equally represented at the top of government.

02 Opposition Parties

Opposition parties form shadow administrations, although these do not always match the government in terms of numbers and roles.

Following the general election, the official opposition was led for several months on an

⁴⁸ <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/government-and-opposition1/her-majestys-government/> accessed June 2015. This excludes Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

⁴⁹ Women constitute 21.2 percent of Conservative peers; of the 48 women eight hold government posts at these levels.

⁵⁰ Excluding HM Household

interim basis by Harriet Harman⁵¹ MP until the election of the new leader Jeremy Corbyn in September 2015. His Shadow Cabinet has 15 (53.6 percent) women members out of a total of 28 and he has committed to ensuring a gender balance in his Cabinet should he become Prime Minister⁵² at the next general election.

In terms of the full shadow ministerial team, 40 (39.2 percent) of the 102 post-holders are women⁵³.

The Scottish National Party is led by a woman (Nicola Sturgeon) but since she is not an MP they are led by Angus Robertson at Westminster. He leads a team of 34 spokespersons, of whom 17 (50 percent) are women. All are members of the House of Commons.

The Liberal Democrats have no women MPs, and therefore, although 54.5 percent of the new Leader's shadow cabinet are women, none of them are in the House of Commons. Eight are members of the House of Lords, two are former MPs, one is an elected mayor, and one is the Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats and a member of the Welsh Assembly.

03 International Comparisons

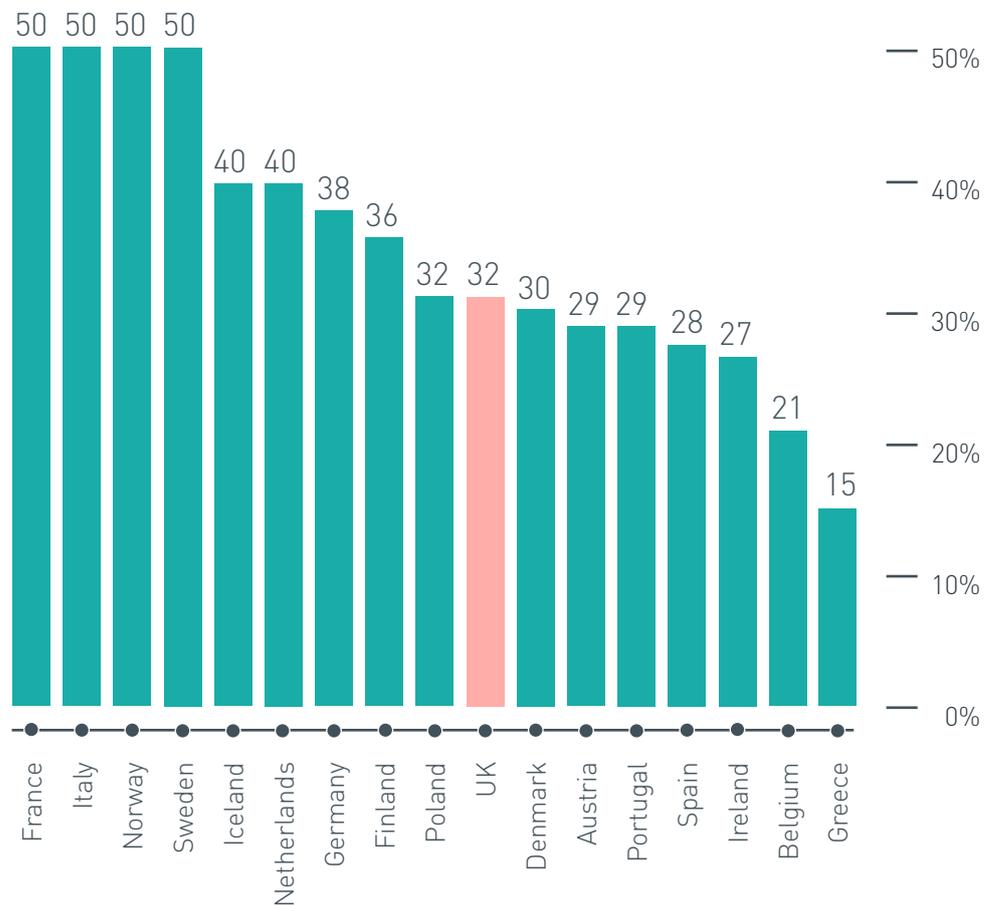
Internationally, the UK's position in terms of women in cabinets has improved somewhat, moving from next to bottom to lower mid-table ranking.

⁵¹ Only three women in total have ever held the post of Official Leader of the Opposition: Margaret Thatcher (1975-1979), Margaret Beckett (in 1994, following the death of John Smith) and Harriet Harman (in 2010, following the resignation of Gordon Brown, and, again in 2015, following that of Ed Miliband). As at the time of writing (August 2015) only Margaret Thatcher has served in this role for more than a few months.

⁵²<http://www.lwn.org.uk/leadforwomen>, and <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/2015/07/labour-leadership-candidates/>

⁵³<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/government-and-opposition1/opposition-holding/> accessed 2 October 2015

FIGURE 13⁵⁴
WOMEN AS A PERCENTAGE OF EUROPEAN CABINETS



04 Cabinet Committees

Following the reorganisation of government after the election, women now occupy 43 (24%) of the 181 seats available in Cabinet Committees and Sub-Committees. However, no woman chairs any of these 14 Committees; Theresa May as Home Secretary might have been expected to chair the Home Affairs Committee but this post has been given to Cabinet Office minister Oliver Letwin MP⁵⁵.

The Public Expenditure Committee is the only Committee not to have a female member; although its Efficiency Sub-Committee has two female ministers (20%).

Ten new Implementation Taskforces have also been established to ‘monitor and drive delivery on the Government’s most important cross-cutting priorities’⁵⁶.

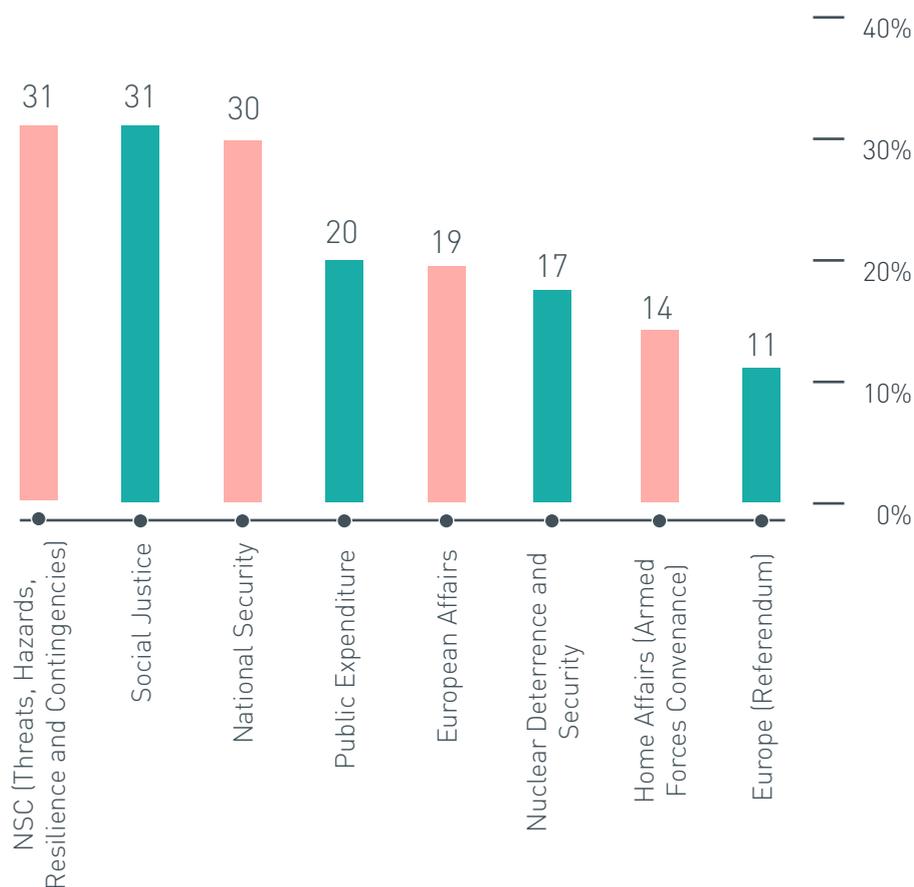
Of a total of 82 seats available, 17 (20.7 percent) are occupied by women. Two of these Taskforces are chaired by women: Theresa May chairs the Syrian Returners group, while Priti Patel chairs that on Childcare. This Taskforce has the highest level of female

⁵⁴Data for Figure 13 were drawn from the websites of individual governments in July 2015.

⁵⁵Theresa May did not chair the Home Affairs Committee in the last government either as this post was given to the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg MP.

⁵⁶Cabinet Office, *Cabinet Committees and implementation taskforces - membership and terms of reference*, p.13. [See: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/business-papers/commons/deposited-papers/#toggle-468>]

FIGURE 14
WOMEN AS A
PERCENTAGE OF
CABINET
COMMITTEES
AND SUB-
COMMITTEES



representation at 42.9 percent; no other Taskforce has more than 29 percent female membership.

Of the ten Taskforces, five have less than 20 percent female occupancy: the lowest being Housing at just 10 percent, and Troubled Families at 12.5 percent. Women are, however, better represented on the Exports (25 percent), Earn or Learn (25 percent) and Digital Infrastructure and Inclusion (28.57 percent) Taskforces.

Looking at this level of government decision-making combined, there are 263 seats available in 24 Cabinet Committees, Sub-Committees and Taskforces. Sixty of these places are occupied by 14 female ministers, representing 22.8 percent of the total available. Theresa May MP and Nicky Morgan MP alone account for 13 and 9 of the places respectively.

It is not possible to draw a direct comparison with government at this level in the last Parliament as the sub-Cabinet structure was very different. However, in its first year in office in 2010-11 the coalition government had 347 places on Cabinet Committees and Sub-Committees of which just 49 (14.1 percent) were occupied by women. By this measure, the current make up of government has improved markedly by ten percentage points and by just over eight percentage points if the new Taskforces are included). So too at the start of the coalition there were four Cabinet Committee and two Sub-Committees with no female representation at all. This time there is just one.

05 Select Committee Chairs

The House of Commons has a number of select committees of which 27 have a policy focus and are responsible for detailed scrutiny of the work and expenditure of the government⁵⁷. (The remaining committees, which we have not included in this analysis, deal with administrative and procedural matters pertaining to the House).

Of these 27 committees, 21 are chaired by men (78percent) and 6 by women (22percent), almost all of them secured through election at the start of the Parliament. The committee chairs currently held by women are: Health, Petitions, Public Accounts, Science and Technology, Transport and Women and Equalities.

In total, there are 303 places available on these committees of which 202 (66percent) are held by men and 101 (33percent) by women. This is, of course, a bit above the proportion of women in the House overall.

There are no women at all on the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and the Statutory Instruments Committee, and only one woman on the high profile and influential Treasury Committee. There are two women on the Defence, Energy and Climate Change, Foreign Affairs, Northern Ireland, Petitions, Public Administration and Transport Committees.

Conversely the Women and Equalities (10 women; 1 man), the Health (9 women; 2 men) and Education Committees (8 women; 3 men) are disproportionately female.

On only five committees – Business, Innovation and Skills, Communities and Local Government, International Development, Science and Technology, and Work and Pensions – is there a near gender balance although this favours male MPs 6 to 5 in each case.

⁵⁷ The data is taken from the committee membership pages on Parliament's website, as accessed on 9 October 2015. At the time of writing, one policy focused committee, Regulatory Reform, has yet to be chosen and is therefore not included in this analysis.

ONE: KNOW THE FACTS

In order to enable everyone concerned to develop a much better understanding of who is standing for elected office at all levels, and to assess where the barriers are, an equalities monitoring form should be introduced by the relevant election authority. It would be completed and submitted to returning officers by all candidates together with nomination forms at all levels of election, and the results collated (either by the Cabinet Office or the Electoral Commission) and published annually. This requirement should be implemented for the local and regional elections in 2016, and at all elections thereafter.

TWO: COMMIT TO CHANGE

Political parties should take immediate action to increase the number of women candidates at all levels of election with a view to fielding as many women candidates from as wide a variety of backgrounds and communities as possible in winnable seats in 2020.

Before beginning selection processes for the 2020 general election, each party should review their selection procedures and publish an action plan outlining how they will address the bottlenecks in progress, maximize the number of women in winnable seats in 2020 and retain women MPs. These should draw on evidence of what works to recruit, elect and retain women candidates as well as the data provided by this report, and include active consideration of positive action measures in selection processes.

In the light of the boundary review and the proposed reduction in the number of MPs from 650 to 600, each party must commit to ensuring that, so far as is practicable, their processes for allocating or selecting in new seats do not reinforce male dominance in the Commons.

Local parties at grassroots level should be actively encouraged to talent-spot, and political parties should develop schemes to encourage and reward them for doing so. This should apply to candidates for local and devolved bodies as well as for European and parliamentary elections.

Given that, despite some progress, it still seems unlikely that 50:50 representation will be achieved in the near future, the recommendation in the Speaker's Conference report that prescriptive quotas and equality guarantees should be seriously considered should be revisited immediately.

THREE: A BETTER WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Parliament should revisit the 2010 Speakers' Conference Report and implement its recommendations. Most immediately this should include: diversity awareness training, and advice and support to be made available to those involved in candidate selections. All parties and the House should implement statutory maternity and parental leave for MPs and peers.

Parliament should also revisit the issue of working hours to identify and effect further

improvements. In particular, they should take into account the needs of members with caring responsibilities as well as those of members with constituencies outside London. All political parties should establish, publish and implement internal complaints procedures for dealing with sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying. These should reflect the fact that political parties are both employers and spaces where unpaid members, activists, staff and public representatives interact with both one another and the general public.

FOUR: PROMOTE WOMEN

Party leaders should commit to selecting a cabinet or shadow cabinet/spokespeople that are gender equal by no later than 2020. Where a party runs elections for the Shadow Cabinet, there must be positive action to ensure women make up at least half of those elected.

Government and shadow ministerial posts should be 50:50 too – if the party has insufficient women MPs and peers to achieve this they should commit to getting as close as possible to 50:50.

FIVE: AN EQUAL VOICE

We call upon the media to ensure that their coverage of political issues includes women and their views, treats all contributors with the dignity and respect to which they are entitled, and accords with the Code of Conduct published by the National Union of Journalists. Editors and broadcasters should also take responsibility for commissioning contributions from both women and men as commentators and experts. Broadcasters and event organizers and audiences should challenge parties which always put up male speakers.

All organisations – public, private and third sector – should take steps to ensure that, at meetings and events, both women and men appear on platforms as speakers. We encourage individual citizens to object to men-only platforms, panels and programmes.

Appendix 01: Tables & Figures

Table 1: Women MPs 1974-2015

Year	Total MPs	No. of Women MPs	% Women MPs
1945	640	24	4%
1964	618	29	5%
1974 (Oct)	635	27	4%
1979	635	19	3%
1987	650	41	6%
1992	651	60	9%
1997	659	120	18%
2001	659	118	18%
2005	646	128	20%
2010	650	143	22%
2015	650	191	29%

Table 2: Women as a percentage of MPs by political party 2010 & 2015

Party	2010 # women	2010 % women	2015 no. of women	2015 % women
Conservative	49/307	16%	68/331	20.5%
Labour	81/258	31.4%	99/232	42.7%
Liberal Democrats	7/57	12.3	0/8	0%
Plaid Cymru	0/3	0%	1/3	33.3%
SNP	1/6	16.7%	20/56	35.7%

This figure does not include:

-1 Green, 1 SDLP, 1 Alliance, 1 Sinn Fein and 1 Independent woman elected in 2010 (total 5 women);

-1 Green, 1 SDLP and 1 Independent woman elected in 2015 (total 3 women)

Table 3: Women as a percentage of candidates by political party 2015

Party	No. of candidates	No. Women candidates	% Women candidates
Conservative	647	170	26.2%
Green	210	571	36.7%
Labour	212	631	33.2%
Lib Dem	166	630	26.3%
Plaid Cymru	11	40	27.5%
SNP	21	59	35.6%
UKIP	77	619	12.4%

Table 4: Women as a percentage of candidates in target seats (as defined by each political party in 2015)

Party	No. of target seats	No. Women candidates	% Women candidates
Conservative	40	14	35%
Labour	106	57	53.8%
Lib Dem	27	11	40.7%
SNP	30	11	36.7%
Green	11	5	45.4%

Appendix 02: Target seats by party as defined in the report

For the purposes of this report we have, wherever possible, used the definition of 'target seat' used by the relevant party. In cases where lists were not published we have used the definition outlined in Chapter 1 (4).

CONSERVATIVE TARGET SEATS (40):

Aberdeenshire West & Kincardine, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Birmingham Northfield, Bolton West, Brecon & Radnorshire, Bristol East, Carshalton & Wallington, Cheadle, Cheltenham, Chippenham, Chorley, Corby, Cornwall North, Delyn, Derby North, Derbyshire North East, Devon North, Dudley North, Eastbourne, Eastleigh, Hampstead & Kilburn, Harrow West, Mid Dorset & Poole North, Morley & Outwood, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Nottingham South, Portsmouth South, Solihull, Somerton & Frome, Southampton Itchen, St Austell & Newquay, St Ives, Sutton & Cheam, Taunton Deane, Telford, Torbay, Vale of Clwyd.

LABOUR TARGET SEATS (106):

Aberconwy, Amber Valley, Arfon, Argyll & Bute, Basildon South & Thurrock East, Battersea, Bedford, Bermondsey & Old Southwark, Birmingham Yardley, Blackpool North & Cleveleys, Bradford East, Brent Central, Brentford & Isleworth, Brigg & Goole, Brighton Kemptown, Brighton Pavillion, Bristol North West, Bristol West, Broxtowe, Burnley, Burton, Bury North, Calder Valley, Cambridge, Cannock Chase, Cardiff Central, Cardiff North, Carlisle, Carmarthen East & Dinefwr, Carmarthen West & Pembrokeshire South, Chatham & Aylesford, City of Chester, Cleethorpes, Colne Valley, Crawley, Crewe & Nantwich, Croydon Central, Dewsbury, Dover, Dudley South, Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale & Tweeddale, Dunbartonshire East, Dundee East, Ealing Central & Acton, Edinburgh West, Elmet & Rothwell, Enfield North, Erewash, Finchley & Golders Green, Gloucester, Great Yarmouth, Halesowen & Rowley Regis, Harlow, Harrow East, Hastings & Rye, Hendon, High Peak, Hornsey & Wood Green, Hove, Ilford North, Ipswich, Keighley, Kingswood, Lancaster & Fleetwood, Leeds North West, Lincoln, Loughborough, Manchester Withington, Milton Keynes South, Morecambe & Lunesdale, Northampton North, Norwich North, Norwich South, Nuneaton, Pendle, Peterborough, Plymouth Sutton & Devonport, Preseli Pembrokeshire, Pudsey, Reading West, Redcar, Redditch, Ribble South, Rossendale & Darwen, Rugby, Sherwood, Somerset North East, Stafford, Stevenage, Stockton South, Stourbridge, Stroud, Swindon North, Swindon South, Tamworth, Thurrock, Vale of Glamorgan, Warrington South, Warwick & Leamington, Warwickshire North, Watford, Waveney, Weaver Vale, Wirral West, Wolverhampton South West, Worcester.

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT TARGET SEATS (27):

Ashfield, Camborne & Redruth, Chesterfield, Derby North, Devon West & Torridge, Ealing Central & Acton, Edinburgh North & Leith, Edinburgh South, Hampstead & Kilburn, Harrogate & Knaresborough, Hereford & South, Herefordshire, Hull North, Montgomeryshire, Newport East, Newton Abbott, Northampton North, Oldham East & Saddleworth, Oxford West & Abingdon,

Rochdale, Sheffield Central, St Albans, Swansea West, Truro & Falmouth, Warrington South, Watford, Weston-Super-Mare, Winchester.

SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY TARGET SEATS (30):

Aberdeen North; Airdrie & Shotts; Ayrshire North & Arran; Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey; Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross; Dumfriesshire; Dundee East; Clydesdale & Tweeddale; Cumbernauld, Kilsyth & Kirkintilloch East; Dunbartonshire East; Dunbartonshire West; Dundee West; Edinburgh East; Edinburgh West; Falkirk; Glasgow Central; Glasgow East; Glasgow South; Glenrothes; Gordon; Inverclyde; Lanark & Hamilton East; Linlithgow & East Falkirk; Kilmarnock & Loudoun; Livingston; Midlothian; Ochil & South Perthshire; Paisley & Renfrewshire North; Paisley & Renfrewshire South; East Kilbride, Strathaven & Lesmahagow.

GREEN PARTY TARGET SEATS (11):

Brighton Pavillion, Bristol West, Cambridge, Holborn & St Pancras, Liverpool Riverside, Norwich South, Oxford East, Reading East, St Ives, Sheffield Central, Solihull.



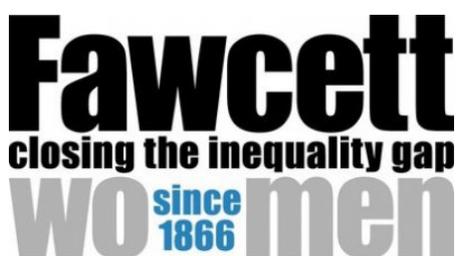
The Centre for Women & Democracy campaigns to increase and promote women at all levels of public decision-making in the UK. Based in the north of England, we work with partners and supporters across the country to achieve equal representation and power for women in politics, democracy and public life.

www.cfwd.org.uk



The Electoral Reform Society is campaigning for a better democracy. We put voters first. We offer an independent voice, and work across Britain to shape the democratic debate at all levels. Our vision is a representative democracy fit for the 21st century.

www.electoral-reform.org.uk



The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading charity promoting gender equality and women's rights at work, at home and in public life. We work to create a society in which the choices you can make and the control you have over your life are no longer determined by your gender.

www.fawcettsociety.org.uk



HANSARD
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The Hansard Society is the UK's leading independent, non-partisan, political research and education charity. We aim to strengthen parliamentary democracy and encourage greater public involvement in politics.

www.hansardsociety.org.uk



Unlock Democracy is the UK's leading campaign for democracy, rights and freedoms. We campaign for a vibrant inclusive democracy that puts power in the hands of people.

www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk



**COUNTING
WOMEN IN**
EQUALITY = GOOD POLITICS