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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

‘It’s the party that counts’? The Rise of Labour and the Image of the Woman Politician at English Elections, *c*.1929–1950

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Abstract

This article uses election addresses to consider how the early women parliamentary candidates sought to make their case to English voters. It then explores the insights that Mass Observation’s election surveys offer into public attitudes to women politicians, and gender and political leadership more broadly, from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. While the pioneer female candidates argued that they should have more representatives at Westminster to better uphold the ‘woman’s point of view’ this approach was gradually undermined from the 1920s onwards with the growth of programmatic politics led by Labour. Mass Observation found that voters claimed to focus more on which party had the best programme rather than the personalities of candidates. However, their findings also indicate that women candidates continued to face many additional prejudices which their male opponents did not.

During the 1950 British General Election campaign Mass Observation (MO), a social-investigation organisation, asked voters: ‘How do you feel about the idea of having women as M.P.s?’. Several of those surveyed, and women in particular, argued that female MPs were needed to offer an informed opinion on matters relating to the home. Typical replies included: (F35C) ‘Some are quite as good as men, some better as regards the household side’; (F40D) ‘I feel it is best because they understand our problems better than men MPs’; (F31C) ‘I think they w[oul]d be particularly good in things which women know most about- food, housing & all that sort of thing. I would say they are good in all spheres’.[1] And yet, while MO encountered little overt hostility to female politicians, only twenty-one of the 127 women who stood at the 1950 election were victorious.

How can we account for the poor showing of female candidates in the decades which followed the introduction of the Parliament (Qualification) of Women Act in 1918? Around this time levels of women’s representation in parliament varied widely across the world. At one extreme, Australia did not elect its first female parliamentary representatives until 1943 despite women achieving the

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right to stand at Senate elections from 1902. On the other hand, in 1906, Finland became the first country to enable women to both vote and stand for parliament. Nineteen women were subsequently elected in the 1907 election, and made up around 10 *per cent* of members. Women also made up a larger share of parliamentary representatives in Germany than in Britain throughout the history of the Weimar Republic. When the first West German Bundestag was dissolved in 1953, 9 *per cent* of its representatives were women. It was not until the 1987 general election that women made up more than 5 *per cent* of British MPs. Given these varying national records, it is essential to explore the specific circumstances that shaped the British public's attitudes to female politicians and debates about the appropriate representation of the 'woman's point of view' in parliament.

Historians have offered a variety of explanations for women's limited representation in the British parliament, including the reluctance of political parties to nominate women for winnable seats, selection committees' hostility to female candidates and public prejudice against voting for women.[2] Nonetheless, while there have been several valuable studies of how candidates used their election literature to make gendered appeals to the public in 1918, there has been a lack of sustained attention to how women politicians' election addresses evolved over subsequent campaigns.[3] Similarly, while historians have reused archived social survey data to consider attitudes to political engagement in mid-twentieth-century Britain, little attention has been paid to the insights that such data can offer into public perceptions of gender and political leadership.

This article provides the first study to combine substantial analysis of how women candidates constructed their appeal to the electorate through their election addresses with discussion of the public reception of their campaigns revealed in MO data available from the late 1930s through to the early 1950s. Scholars have long recognised the value of analysing written addresses to better understand the issues on which elections were fought.[4] Nonetheless, until recently, only a fraction of the available material has been assessed and studies tend to focus on individual elections, brief time periods or candidates' discussions of particular issues. By contrast, the following study makes use of a thorough sample of the surviving election addresses of early women parliamentary candidates.[5]

Our subsequent reanalysis of MO election surveys contributes to a vibrant literature which is making use of these sources to re-examine British political culture.[6] Recent works have used this material to consider what qualities the public prized in politicians in mid-twentieth-century Britain. The 'Good Politician' study explores the responses of volunteer members of the national panel to MO directives between 1945 and 1950. The authors conclude that the public valued MPs who were hard-working, approachable, moderate, able and strong.[7] However, little explicit attention is given to the issues of how the public perceived male and female politicians in different ways or how they thought the 'woman's point of view' could be best represented in parliament. And yet, MO collected a wide range of information about public attitudes to women politicians beginning with its first substantial election survey in 1938, which focused on Edith Summerskill's victory as Labour candidate at the West Fulham by-election.[8]

As the survey responses which open this article indicate, voters (and women in particular) expected that female politicians should be knowledgeable about issues related to the home, welfare and social services and be able to uphold the 'woman's point of view' at Westminster. Indeed, long before women gained the right to stand for parliament in 1918, it was widely assumed that they had specific interests, which needed representation.[9] Suffragists argued that women had a viewpoint distinctive from that of men and their 'special knowledge' of home matters meant they should have the right to hold political office.[10] Such assumptions appear to have shaped public attitudes to women politicians after 1918. Prominent female MPs often received a great deal of correspondence and were expected to work for women in general rather than just their constituents.[11] Moreover, there was a significant gendering of parliamentary speech, which persisted after 1945, and women MPs' participation in parliamentary select committees focused largely on home and welfare issues.[12]

Given that the MO survey suggested widespread goodwill towards the presence of female MPs at Westminster, it may seem surprising that women were so under-represented in parliament. We argue that this phenomenon can be explained, in part, by changing understandings over time of how the

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‘woman’s point of view’ could be best represented at Westminster. This article begins by exploring the changing practices of election address writing by female candidates. Our findings suggest that in the early years after women gained the right to stand for parliament they often based their campaigns around the claim that the ‘woman’s point of view’ needed to be better represented by having more female MPs at Westminster. The first female candidates tended to be far more likely than their male opponents to refer to issues of women’s welfare. However, such distinctions gradually became less common over time as electoral politics became more programmatic, with Labour taking a lead in this respect.[13] By the 1940s, it had become more difficult for individual female candidates to develop a distinct and electorally compelling claim to represent the ‘woman’s point of view’ in parliament should they have wished to do so. After all, many of the people MO surveyed claimed that the most effective way to ensure effective welfare provision and social services was to vote for the party with the best programme. Or, as one respondent to a 1945 MO election survey put it, when mentioning that Summerskill was the only local candidate he knew well: ‘Still, it’s the party that counts, not personalities … it doesn’t matter who the person is so much’.[14] This meant that women candidates, like their male counterparts, tended to present themselves chiefly as good party representatives.[15] Public hostility to women politicians also acted as a push factor which encouraged female candidates to avoid relying on their credentials as representatives of the ‘woman’s point of view’.

MO’s election surveys indicate that women candidates often faced additional obstacles which their male opponents did not encounter, particularly if they sought to combine the role of MP with a professional career or childcare. For example, Summerskill’s decision to pursue a parliamentary career was constantly scrutinised. Critics argued that she did not have the time to combine her profession, work as an MP and be a good mother (there was no such scrutiny of her male opponents). MO’s election surveys indicate that there was widespread support for the idea that a group of female MPs should be present at Westminster to represent the ‘woman’s point of view’. Nonetheless, several respondents argued that women should be a minority in parliament and were not suited to deal with weighty matters relating to finance or foreign policy.

WOMEN’S ‘SPECIAL POINT OF VIEW’ AND THE RISE OF PROGRAMMATIC POLITICS IN THE 1920S

After 1918, the written election address became the key document in local campaigning. Given that these documents were usually sent via the free post that each candidate was entitled to, they were the one communication which would be likely to reach the home of every registered elector. Addresses provided an opportunity for candidates to outline the principles they would uphold if elected to parliament and a means to convey their ‘character’ to voters. Female politicians used their addresses to highlight their expertise and argue that the ‘woman’s point of view’ needed to be better represented at Westminster. Nonetheless, the relative significance of the election address in relation to the party manifesto gradually declined as the latter became increasingly central to notions of a government’s mandate. As politics grew more programmatic, election addresses became increasingly standardised in format, often drawing on material produced by central office and mimicking the language of party manifestos. This made it less likely for female candidates to make unique claims to represent the ‘woman’s point of view’ and in any case many candidates focused largely on outlining their party programme, downplaying the importance of their gender.[16]

During the 1922, 1923, and 1924 general elections, female candidates were twice as likely to refer to ‘women’s issues’ as their male opponents.[17] Women parliamentary candidates often argued that more representatives of their sex were needed in the House of Commons due to the particular gendered expertise they could offer, particularly in relation to their role as the family’s ‘domestic chancellor of the exchequer’.[18] Standing for Middlesbrough East in 1924, Ellen Wilkinson (Labour) asked voters: ‘[W]on’t you help to send a woman, one of your own sex, who understands your special needs … Parliament looks after the nation’s housekeeping. Ought we not to have more women to help in this work?’[19]

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Over time it became increasingly common for candidates to combine a claim to represent the woman's point of view with reference to their party's position on 'women's issues', with Labour taking a lead in this respect.[20] During her maiden election campaign in 1922, Barbara Ayrton-Gould (Labour, Lambeth North) featured the slogan 'Labour and a Woman This Time!' on the front of her written address. She criticised the Coalition government for breaking its promises 'to provide houses for all' and declared that Labour 'will not be satisfied until every working-class family has a comfortable home'.[21] In some cases, Labour women made direct reference to party programmes in their addresses. In 1924, Margaret Bondfield, MP for Northampton, stated '[i]f re-elected, I shall do my utmost, as in the past session of Parliament, to render effective the policy outlined in the Labour Manifesto'.[22] Numerous Labour candidates used standardised election addresses or stock images and over half of the party's women candidates referred to their leader, Ramsay MacDonald, in 1924, either discussing his achievements in the late Labour Government or his plans for the future.[23]

Conservative women such as Nancy Astor, by contrast, proved more reluctant to focus on outlining party programmes, although this may have, in part, reflected their leaders' reluctance to commit to detailed pledges for reform during the early 1920s.[24] In 1924, Baldwin focused on promoting a 'New Conservatism', providing a counter-offer to the social reforms offered by Labour. Four of the twelve Conservative women standing for election promised to support the party programme in their addresses. Typical of these was Irene Ward (Morpeth) who stated 'I stand as the Conservative Candidate, pledged to support the programme of Mr. Stanley Baldwin, with which I am in entire agreement'.[25]

The 1929 election provided a landmark in the development of programmatic politics, that year both Labour and the Conservatives each distributed over eight million copies of their manifestos.[26] Lloyd George's pledge to 'Conquer Unemployment', which arguably served as the *de facto* Liberal manifesto, provided a challenge to the Labour and Conservative parties, who felt compelled to respond. *Labour Appeal's to the Nation*, which drew heavily on the party programme agreed the previous year, featured prominently in speeches and print propaganda.[27] Baldwin's election address, which doubled as the Conservative manifesto, was longer than the three previous Conservative manifestos put together. Parties across the political spectrum expanded their welfare and social reform programmes in the hope of attracting the female electorate, which had been expanded significantly with the equalisation of the age of enfranchisement at twenty-one.[28] Both of the main parties made special efforts to appeal to the new female voter.[29] The Conservatives produced *Women of Today and Tomorrow*, a one-off magazine, of which 8.5 million copies were printed, but which mainly focused on younger women (the *Daily Mail* had run a campaign against the 'flapper vote' motivated, in part, by fear that women in their twenties would be more likely to vote for Labour).[30] Aside from images of glamorous film stars and the better-looking male Conservative MPs, this publication focused on the home with sections on housewifery, better buying and the cost of living.[31]

Female candidates tended to claim that their life experiences made them particularly well suited to represent 'the woman's point of view' and in 1929 some used their addresses to argue that they should be sent to Westminster on this basis. When discussing Labour's policy for mothers and babies, Aryton-Gould noted that 'As a woman and a mother, I feel most intensely about the welfare of children'. This was then followed by appeals on pensions, international peace and housing which 'again is a problem with which women are specially concerned'.[32] In addition to including a photograph of her husband, son and dog in her election address, there was a written appeal from Aryton-Gould's son, Michael, which read 'Vote for Mummy and help the children'.[33] However, from the early 1920s onwards, several male candidates sought to develop their own credentials as keen social reformers and 'family men', with some picturing themselves with their children in their election addresses. This was a tactic often employed by Conservative and Liberal candidates keen to imply that their Socialist opponents threatened the safety of the home.[34]

The growth of programmatic politics was advantageous for male candidates who could claim that the most effective way to further 'women's interests' was to vote for the party with the best manifesto. In 1929, Herbert Romeril, the Labour candidate for St Pancras South East, observed that in the last parliament the Labour Party had the highest number of women MPs, and stated 'I claim that the

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questions which especially interest our women folk, such as Widows' Pensions, Maternity and Child Welfare, Peace and Disarmament. etc, are adequately dealt with in the Labour Party Programme'.[35] Several male Labour candidates included nearly identical paragraphs in their election addresses, with the subheading 'Labour's Appeal to Women' with copy presumably provided by central office.[36] Such approaches made it increasingly difficult for female Labour candidates to make a distinct appeal to represent 'the woman's point of view'. Both Wilkinson and Aryton-Gould used their election addresses to reiterate Labour's manifesto pledges on unemployment, including public works schemes, providing maintenance allowances for children aged fourteen to fifteen years, and nationalising and reorganising transport, land and mines. When discussing Labour's manifesto more broadly, Aryton-Gould noted 'I endorse every word of it'.[37]

In 1929, there was much talk about the 'women's election', after all this was the first time that women made up a majority of the electorate. The *Aberdeen Press and Journal* wrote that 'many women feel that the woman's point of view is inadequately represented in Westminster, and that at the moment the desire to strengthen it by sending more women … is [as] strong a political cry as many other which holds weight with us'.[38] However, while sixty-nine women stood for election in 1929, only fourteen were returned to Westminster, nine of whom were Labour representatives. Following the resignation of the Labour administration and the creation of a Conservative-dominated National Government in August 1931, the political landscape changed once again. In the election that followed in October, the National Government won a landslide victory and Labour was left with no women MPs.

FROM THE 'FREE HAND' TO *LET US FACE THE FUTURE*: ELECTORAL POLITICS IN THE 30S AND 40S

In many ways, the 1931 election proved an exception to the growing importance of programmatic politics in Britain. The National Government went to the country on the claim that it needed a 'free hand' to deal with Britain's economic crisis. Nonetheless, there was a striking uniformity to the key themes discussed in candidates' election addresses in both 1931 and again in 1935 when the National Government won another decisive victory. Although the Conservative and Liberal parties were more hesitant in adopting programmatic politics than their Labour opponents, over the course of the 1930s and 1940s both gradually came to the conclusion that it was important to centre election campaigns around a detailed series of manifesto pledges.[39] Labour's election triumph in 1945 on the basis of a manifesto outlining radical social reforms arguably marked the point at which programmatic politics triumphed in Britain. *Let Us Face the Future* provided a blueprint which each of the main parties subsequently drew on, although arguably more so in terms of form than substance.[40]

This was all a long way away from the mood of the early 1930s. Astor (Conservative) summed up the sense of crisis which surrounded the 1931 General Election when she called on the voters of Plymouth Sutton to 'drop party politics. Think only of the Nation and support the National government'.[41] Issues surrounding the home, welfare and social reform were pushed down the political agenda, both by national leaders and individual candidates.[42] Nonetheless, despite its failure in 1931 Labour remained committed to an ambitious programme of social reform. During the 1935, election Labour women candidates outlined their biographies in detail, highlighting the work they had done to address social problems in local politics (the party still had no female MPs following the disaster of 1931). Nonetheless, their addresses often heavily paraphrased the language of the Labour manifesto and the longer programme *Socialism and Peace* agreed the previous year.[43] Following the National Government's landslide victory, the *Labour Organiser* had encouraged the standardisation of election literature to make sure that the national party message was delivered effectively in the future.[44]

The addresses of Conservative women in 1935 demonstrated more independence and this was particularly true of affluent figures such as Thelma Cazalet and aristocrats like the Duchess of Atholl (who

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provided a fuller discussion of rearmament than the National Government manifesto offered). Cazalet produced her address in the form of a letter rather than the 'usual formal manifesto' and insisted that as a supporter of the National Government she opposed a 'return to party politics'. She claimed that the Labour programme, if enacted, would lead to 'a first-class financial crisis'. Atholl included a section, 'Need for preserving parliamentary liberties', which noted that she had been unwilling to support some government policies in the last session and insisted she would not provide 'blind support' to her party.[45] She was true to her word, famously losing her seat after forcing a by-election in 1938 when she gave up the Conservative whip in protest at Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy. By-elections provided more leeway for candidates to develop an appeal to the electorate distinct from party programmes and were a key means by which women were elected. Julie Gottlieb demonstrates that prominent Conservative women were able to promote varied forms of female political leadership in the late 1930s through their interventions in foreign policy debates, including a number of high profile by-elections in the months surrounding the Munich Crisis.[46]

The centrality of foreign policy to politics in the late 1930s provided candidates with various opportunities to demonstrate their independence. By contrast, at both the 1945 and 1950 general elections, the main issues discussed in election addresses were housing, social services, and full employment, with candidates often drawing heavily on the language of party manifestos when discussing these issues.[47] During the heyday of the first MO project, many election addresses lacked individuality, which led some political scientists to present them as a moribund form of campaigning.[48] While they remained the main way in which voters engaged with the local campaign, addresses increasingly relied on the contents of manifestos prepared by central office in London or acted as supplements to them, where the candidate could focus in more detail on matters of particular interest to them and their constituents.[49] This was an approach endorsed by the central offices of the three main parties who each produced model addresses as templates for candidates in 1950.[50] Such reasoning made sense as manifestos were often included with the candidate's election address in postal communications. The Conservative party innovated in producing a shorter, 'popular' version of their manifesto which would be easier to distribute in the one free postal communication all candidates were allowed.[51] Manifestos were sold in large numbers at this time. In spite of the problems caused when a government priority printing order supervened, nearly all of the 1.3 million copies of Labour's famous 1945 election manifesto were sent out by the end of the campaign. Two million copies of the pamphlet *Straight Left*, which outlined Labour's key proposals, were also dispatched.[52]

The growing uniformity of local election literature may explain why MO rarely asked voters about their opinions on this form of campaigning. Nonetheless, from the outset of its activities in the late 1930s, MO was deeply interested in the everyday practices and rituals of politics and its election surveys offer highly revealing insights into how women politicians were viewed by the British public. In fact, few politicians appeared more consistently in MO's election work than Summerskill. Her election victory at the 1938 West Fulham by-election was the subject of the first major political activity MO undertook outside of Lancashire, where it had established its 'Worktown' study. MO regularly returned to Fulham over the following twelve years to explore attitudes to Summerskill and her political rivals and conducted political surveys in London during the general elections of 1945 and 1950.

Mass observation on the election trail

In 1938, MO was commissioned by the Labour Party to investigate public attitudes to campaigning during the West Fulham by-election. In particular, it was keen to assess responses to the Labour candidate, Summerskill. As MO conducted its doorstep interviews during the daytime, the vast majority of those surveyed were women. To the surprise of the investigators, who were predominantly male, more respondents claimed to have read Summerskill's address than the recently issued *Your Britain No. 2*, a lavishly produced pamphlet circulated nationally by Labour's central office.[53] Given that the pamphlet focused on foreign affairs and the West Fulham by-election was held a few weeks after the annexation

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of Austria by Nazi Germany, it was expected that this publication would excite widespread interest. Moreover, a draft report drawn up by MO employees claimed the latter was 'a more interesting attractive looking, and unusual piece of election literature than is an Election Address'.[54]

Several of those canvassed on their doorsteps, and women in particular, stated that the election address demonstrated Summerskill's enthusiasm for family life. Approving comments often referred to the family portrait: (Woman, 35) 'Thinks it very nice. Likes photo. Family something to be proud of'; (Woman, 40) 'Not read it. Thinks Summerskill a good sincere educated woman. Likes photo'.[55] Tom Harrisson, who led MO's election operations in Fulham, was presumably referring back to Summerskill's address in his play 'Swelling the Labour Vote'. In one scene, a typical family is presented reading about a forthcoming election. The narrator claims that a 'snappy photo' doubles the chances of election literature being read, especially if it features children.[56]

As MO's report on Summerskill's by-election literature in 1938 makes clear, there was a tension between how the (mainly male) MO staff thought the public should engage with the campaign and the matters which members of the public (and women, in particular) chose to focus on.[57] The report suggested that voters' preference for Summerskill's election literature over *Your Britain* was based largely on superficial impressions. Reading the election address was an expected 'ritual', which did not necessarily indicate substantial engagement with the election. Whereas those who expressed a preference for the Conservative candidate often made constructive comments about the content of *Your Britain*, the same was not true of the Labour address. The often brief comments collected for those who approved of the family portrait in Summerskill's address implied that they had likely not read the address or had just glanced at it but were keen to give the interviewer an indication that they had engaged with the campaign.[58]

In fact, Summerskill's autobiography suggests that she was assiduous in developing careful appeals aimed at female voters. Summerskill largely attributed her good showing in her first election campaign at Putney in 1934 to the attention that she gave to canvassing women.[59] Her by-election address for that contest included a section entitled 'Save The Mothers', which drew attention of 'the national disgrace of increasing maternal mortality'.[60] While MO initially suggested that female voters' enthusiasm for Summerskill's election address was anomalous, it subsequently acknowledged that her decision to emphasise social reform and home issues during the latter stages of the campaign, which appealed more to women voters, was an important factor in explaining her narrow victory. Summerskill's rival, Charles Busby, focused on foreign affairs throughout.[61]

Occasional archival notes indicate that some MO employees brought gendered preconceptions about political engagement to their work. One report, which collated initial impressions on the 1945 election survey, sought to explain the apparent lack of public interest in the election in Fulham: 'I would suggest that the lack of male population may have some bearing on it; men usually lead political conversation'.[62] In 1950, another employee, reflecting on a frustrating interview, left a note in the margin: 'unusual for a <u>man</u> to be <u>so</u> ignorant'.[63] Such attitudes may help explain why much of the material which MO collected on attitudes to female politicians was not discussed in its publications. Although the 1950 election survey led to a brief published report, *Voters' Choice*, it made no mention of responses to the survey question on women MPs.[64]

Like the rival social survey organisations whose methods are discussed by Adrian Bingham, MO's employees often assumed that many women were politically passive, and uninterested or uninformed about politics.[65] By the 1950s, it was widely believed that men were the political 'opinion leaders' in families.[66] Surviving archival notes give us few insights into the interview process for MO's election surveys, who undertook the door-step interviews, or why particular streets were chosen. The 1950 election survey appears to have been rushed. Its authors hoped to generate a quick publication which could be used as a basis to attract future commissions.[67] Recorded answers tended to be terse, lacking the rich qualitative detail or reflections on the interviewer-interviewee dynamic to be found in many post-war social surveys.[68] Interviewers also appear to have paid little attention to the different registers with which men and women discussed politics.

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MO struggled to win commissions from the two main political parties and limited funding meant that its election surveys in 1945 and 1950 were confined to London. The latter was restricted to six constituencies which Labour had won in 1945, a decision motivated by hopes that the party would fund future surveys.[69] There are various imbalances in the data which MO collected in relation to public perceptions of politicians. Given that surveys focused on public attitudes to sitting MPs Labour women were better represented than their rivals (only one Conservative woman MP was elected in 1945). Moreover, of the six constituencies which formed part of MO's 1950 election survey, only one was held by a woman, Hendon North, where Ayrton-Gould (Labour) was the sitting MP. However, a pilot survey was also conducted in 1950 in Fulham, which included Summerskill's constituency. Unsurprisingly Ayrton-Gould and Summerskill were discussed significantly more than any other female politicians in the 1950 election survey.[70]

MO's employees' judgements about gender and political engagement should be treated with caution. Indeed, if the notes that MO collected from doorstep interviews conducted during the 1938 West Fulham by-election are read against the grain, we can see that women's greater reticence in giving full and detailed answers may have resulted from distrust of the interviewer rather than indicating a lack of knowledge or interest. Among the replies to interviewers summarised as typical among women were: 'I can't be bothered to stand talking at doors. (Hides face) I'm a Conservative and that's the end of it'; 'My husband's in a government job … it's very awkward not to be able to express our feelings'; 'I'm a public servant … so I've got to keep quiet'.[71] By moving beyond the file reports and published work written by MO employees, and exploring the raw data collected in election surveys, we are provided with a great deal of information about the vernacular forms that people used when discussing politics, most of which were never analysed at the time. These surveys provide us with unique insights into how the public perceived questions of gender and political leadership in mid-twentieth-century Britain.

THE FEMALE CANDIDATE AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE GOOD POLITICIAN

Respondents to MO's 1950 General Election survey offered a variety of opinions on the types of women they deemed suitable to be MPs. A few female respondents argued that housewives were better suited to the role than single women given their life experiences. One woman (F32D) claimed that the country 'should have housewives as M.P.s if anybody at all- should have somebody who knows what really goes on as regards shopping & rationing- they'd find out how far the money goes'.[72] However, a more common response, particularly among older respondents regardless of gender, was that women should only stand for parliament if they had sufficient spare time. Several of those surveyed doubted whether women could successfully balance the roles of MP and mother.[73] Many of the early women MPs had been childless, so the presence of female candidates with young families was still something of a novelty at this time. Constituency selection committees often quizzed women politicians about how they would balance childcare with life at Westminster or asked them about their family plans for the future.[74]

Summerskill was sometimes praised for her work as a doctor and her care for family, indicating that she was well placed to uphold the 'woman's point of view' as an authority on matters of welfare and social reform.[75] However, detractors argued that she did not have the time to combine her profession, work as an MP, and be a good mother. From the first contests she fought, in Putney in 1934 and Bury in 1935, Summerskill appears to have taken particular care with the portraits which appeared in her election literature. She downplayed her professional credentials, presenting herself in informal portraits with her children. It was not until the 1950 election, when she held the rank of parliamentary secretary, that Summerskill chose to pose in formal business attire for her election address portrait.[76] However, Summerskill also took care to present herself as a 'modern' figure. Her Putney election address included a striking 'cinematic' portrait commissioned by the society photographer Dorothy Wilding, well-known for her portraits of the Royal Family. Summerskill was presented as 'an ideal

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representative for mothers' given her medical career and two young children.[77] This strategy appears designed to make her appear more 'ordinary' and relatable (a draft MO report quipped that on the campaign trail in Fulham she appeared 'as much of a socialite as a socialist').[78]

All the same, when MO employees recorded conversations about the likely result of the West Fulham by-election in 1938, much of the discussion focused on Summerskill's gender (she was the first woman to contest the seat). While a girl in a papershop said that the candidates reminded her of the film stars Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor (a quip made by the *Daily Mail*), there was no significant discussion of how gender affected the candidature of the Conservative nominee, Busby.[79] Amongst the negative responses summarised in the draft report were comments such as (Woman, 55) 'We don't want any of these damned women meddling with things they don't understand. Got two kids, stop at home', (Woman, 45) 'Busby, I hope so, it's better than a woman'.[80]

Hostile judgements towards Summerskill were also apparent in the pilot election survey MO carried out in Fulham in 1950. When asked whether they were in favour of women being MPs, several respondents mentioned Summerskill as an example of a female politician they disapproved of. Some of these critics made disapproving reference to a speech Summerskill had made at Oxford in 1949, subsequently reported in the *Daily Express*, where she claimed that it was impossible to tell the difference in taste between butter and margarine. Typical negative replies included (M60D) 'Yes, if they can do it, they're as good as the men. But not married women with kiddies. Summerskill ought to be in her own home by rights'; (F35D) 'I don't think a lot of that Summerskill. They say the country's so short of doctors, she should stick to her own job'; (M35C) 'I dislike them intensely, if they're married that is. They split a home up. Summerskill neglects her own business, she says so herself. And a woman who can't tell the difference between butter and margarine has no business in the Min.[istry] of Food'.[81] Given her ministerial role, Summerskill was expected to be familiar with the struggles which housewives faced coping with rationing and austerity. However, the incident suggested that as a well-to-do professional she was out-of-touch with the struggles that many women faced in running a household during these austerity years.

While few respondents to the 1950 election survey stated that they were opposed to the idea of female MPs, some suggested that women politicians were overly emotional or not able to stand up for local interests. Hostile views were most commonly expressed by male respondents. For example, one man from Hendon (M40D) stated 'personally, I'd rather see a man put up for Labour in this constituency….it needs a very strong personality here'.[82] However, questions of gender rarely featured explicitly when voters discussed the specific qualities of Ayrton-Gould and Ian Orr-Ewing, her Conservative opponent in Hendon North.

Of the ninety-six replies to MO's questionnaire collected in this constituency, forty-four referred directly to Ayrton-Gould's personality. Among these respondents, ten mentioned that they were unfamiliar with their MP or confined their comments to assessments of her qualities as a speaker. Most of the other respondents judged the sitting MP largely on her ability to represent Labour's values. Often these replies connected judgements on Ayrton-Gould's record to their assessments of whether the government had been able to effectively deliver on its social reform plans in Hendon. Typical replies included (M50C) 'The fact that she is Labour is enough to put me off'; (F40D) 'Mrs. Gould is a good MP and the Labour Party has done a lot for the mothers and children and the working people'.[83] Several respondents discussed their own interactions with Ayrton-Gould, particularly in their attempts to secure better housing for themselves and family members: (F42C) 'She hasn't done me much good. I've been waiting years for proper accommodation … She got me put up at a rest centre, but I'm not better off again now', (M55C) 'I haven't had any contact with her but I reckon she is a real good woman. She had some office where you could go and raise any queries and one chap I knew had great satisfaction from her'.[84]

Both the Conservative and Labour candidates in Hendon North focused on social reforms in their election addresses.[85] Ayrton-Gould presented herself as someone who had 'spent the whole of her adult life fighting … for better conditions for the people, especially women and children, the underpaid and aged'.[86] However, while she was occasionally praised by MO respondents for her work for

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children, there was little specific discussion of how she represented issues commonly identified with the 'woman's point of view'.[87] Ayrton-Gould's campaign is indicative of the difficulties which individual women candidates faced in developing a distinct gendered appeal in 1950. One MO employee noted that they had seen largely the same Labour election literature delivered from Transport House in each of the London constituencies they visited in 1950 – 'Pattern general "FAMILY" type, Old People, babies, lefty brawny work people, hunger crowds'.[88]

Ayrton-Gould's focus on social reform, and her work to ameliorate her constituents' living conditions, closely resembled the approach taken by the five male Labour MPs whose London constituencies featured in MO's 1950 General Election survey.[89] One of the most assiduous of Ayrton-Gould's London Labour colleagues was Harry Wallace, in Walthamstow East, who used his election address to claim he had received 15,000 letters and conducted 2,000 interviews with constituents during the last parliament at his fortnightly surgeries.[90] Eric Fletcher (Islington East) was praised by his supporters as he (M40C) 'understands the working man and the children' and upheld the party's values, with particular attention given to the work he did to respond his to constituents' concerns with housing.[91]

During the Second World War, it was widely assumed that plans for post-war reconstruction had a particular appeal to women.[92] The subsequent focus on social reform and the household budget in post-war politics arguably narrowed perceptions of the appropriate role for female politicians, particularly for Conservative women who had previously demonstrated more independence from the party leadership than their Labour peers.[93] Gary Love suggests that while Dorothy Crisp played a prominent role in developing attacks on government controls during the 1940s as chairman of the British Housewives League she failed to secure a prominent role within the Conservative party due to her reluctance to conform to expectations regarding women politicians.[94] Crisp won less than 6 *per cent* of the vote standing as an Independent at St. George's Westminster at the 1945 election. Her address focused on her expertise on the Empire and the Far East, the need to cut taxes, and cut government 'red tape'.[95] Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska demonstrates that Conservative Central Office devoted great attention to mass-producing literature focused on welfare issues in the late 1940s, aiming to capitalise on popular frustrations with austerity and rationing, particularly among women voters.[96] This approach appears to have shaped understandings of the issues which Conservative women were expected to focus on. Katherine Wilmot was the only female Conservative candidate in the six constituencies which featured in MO's 1950 general election survey. Although there were few comments about Wilmot's personal qualities or particular issues she had raised in her speeches and election literature, some respondents argued that she would be well placed to uphold housewives' interests in parliament.[97]

MO's election surveys suggest that by the 1940s and early 1950s voting decisions were largely shaped by attitudes towards national party programmes. In August 1949, MO asked its national panel of respondents: 'Regardless of his political beliefs, how effectively do you think the M.P. for your constituency represents you in parliament?'. There were very few replies which explicitly referred to women MPs and tellingly the file report which summarised the findings was titled 'The M.P. and his constituency', indicating how male political leadership continued to be seen as normative despite thirty years of women MPs. Respondents praised 'active' MPs who paid attention to matters of housing and social services. However, party allegiance was seen as a key factor on which most respondents judged the effectiveness of their MP. Even on local issues, many felt that they could not be represented effectively by an MP whose party they opposed.[98]

MO's subsequent 1950 election survey found that many were unaware of the names of the candidates, despite the fact that the incumbent MP was standing for election again in each of the six London constituencies surveyed. Around 40 *per cent* of people could not name their local MP when asked. The majority of those surveyed did not give an opinion on their local representative.[99] Respondents often sought to downplay the importance of candidates' personalities, arguing instead that it was essential to vote for the party with the best programme. For example, in East Fulham a man (M45) struggled to recall the name of Vyvan Adams, his favoured candidate, but stated 'I don't think much about the man himself but it's the Conservative people he stands for that's what counts'.[100] In the same constituency,

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another man (M38B) claimed he was not concerned about whether women should be MPs: 'The party not the person or the sex is what matters'.[101] In Islington East, a woman (F55D) stated that one of the candidates, Wilmot, was 'a very nice woman, but she's a Conservative so I have to be against her'.[102]

Nonetheless, while party programmes dominated election campaigns, the evidence MO collected suggested women candidates faced ongoing distrust about their suitability to be MPs, which helps explain why they often tended to focus on their role as party representatives rather than making appeals to represent the 'woman's point of view'. MO's 1950 General Election survey suggested that several respondents, and men in particular, assumed that male politicians were better suited to take on certain tasks, particularly ministerial roles and questions related to finance or foreign affairs. Some argued that the numbers of women MPs should be limited or appeared to assume that they would never make up more than a small minority in the House of Commons for the foreseeable future. Typical of these responses was a man (M53C) who stated that he was in favour of women MPs as they were 'pretty safe, 'cos they're not likely to get a majority over men. Then it would be fatal'.[103]

PROGRAMMES AND PERSONALITIES

This article has sought to demonstrate the importance of two inter-related sources for understanding changing attitudes to gender and political leadership over time. The first of these, election addresses, have long been recognised as a key document in British electioneering, acting as a set of principles which candidates pledge to uphold should they be returned to Westminster. While historians have valuably used election addresses to explore questions of gender and political culture in the immediate aftermath of the two world wars, we suggest that they have a wider value in exploring long-term changes in how politicians made gendered appeals to the public.[104] Second, we demonstrate that the 'vernacular turn', which has largely focused on reusing archived social science data to explore attitudes to class and political engagement, can also be used to better understand the public's attitude to questions of gender and political culture.[105]

Early women parliamentary candidates built on the suffrage campaigners' argument that there was a distinctive woman's point of view that needed to be represented at Westminster by women. These pioneers tended to place a great deal of emphasis on their independence, often referring at length to their own records in election literature. This approach may have been influenced, in part, by the fact that many of these women had experience in the pre-war suffrage movement. However, from the late 1920s onwards, it became increasingly common for women candidates to focus on outlining key points from party manifestos in their election literature as politics became more programmatic, due, in part, to the growing influence of Labour. This made it harder for female candidates to make unique appeals to represent the 'woman's point of view' in electioneering should they have wished to do so. Ayrton-Gould's career is indicative of this changing landscape. While Ayrton-Gould made much of the distinctive qualities she could bring to Westminster as a woman during her first election campaigns in the early 1920s, by the time of her final campaign in 1950, her efforts to present herself as a champion of the welfare state closely resembled the approach taken by male Labour colleagues in neighbouring London constituencies.

While MO election surveys suggest that the public based their voting decisions largely on attitudes to party programmes, the normative concept of male political leadership arguably became gradually more entrenched after 1918. Male candidates took care to present themselves as diligent workers for their constituents' welfare and keen supporters of their party's programme for social reform. In doing so, they challenged the idea that only female politicians could represent the 'woman's point of view' in parliament. As existing studies have shown, the mid-twentieth century was a time when supposedly masculine values of self-control, diligence and restraint were widely valued in political life both in Britain and elsewhere in western Europe.[106] Respondents to the 'M.P. and his constituency' directive favoured 'industrious' MPs who brought qualities from their professional careers into serving their

constituents' needs, with farmers being praised for their neighbourliness and ex-army officers for their dutiful approach to constituents' interests.[107]

Even though MO data suggest that while there was popular enthusiasm for MPs from professional backgrounds, this largely benefitted men. Indeed, Summerskill faced widespread criticism for her attempts to combine her medical and political careers, while also taking care of young children. And yet, the difficulties which female candidates faced in arguing that women's representation at Westminster should be significantly expanded were a product of the particular political circumstances which Britain faced during the early decades of mass democracy. By the 1940s and 1950s, programmatic politics had triumphed with the advent of the modern welfare state. National advertising campaigns co-ordinated by Transport House and Conservative Central Office had now become central to election campaigns.[108] However, from the 1960s onwards, earlier paternalistic codes of political leadership came under challenge in Britain as well as other parts of western Europe.[109] In the UK, growing frustrations with the records of the two main parties in government, who were widely viewed as over-promising to the electorate, led to breakthroughs by challenger parties such as the Liberals and Scottish National Party (SNP). These challengers focused more on community politics and the personalities of individual candidates than national programmes for government. Winnie Ewing became a well-known torchbearer for Scottish nationalism after her surprise by-election victory in 1967 brought the SNP to national prominence. At the same time, issues where candidates often took a different line from their party manifesto, such as abortion and equal pay, as well as European integration and immigration, rose in prominence.[110] In the era of 'Second Wave Feminism', the 'woman's point of view' in British politics could be stated afresh.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Topic Collection (TC) 76-5-C, 3314, 3358, 76-5-E, 3650, Mass Observation Online (MOO), Adam Matthew Digital and University of Sussex. For similar observations, see, for example, 76-5-A, 3059, 3113, 3121; 76-5-B, 3163, 3197, 3213, 3287; 76-5-C, 3311, 3313, 3334, 3369, 3393, 3422, 3424, 3435; 76-5-D, 3470, 3479, 3512, 3526; 76-5-E, 3704, 3757. In Mass Observation coding, F and M denote the gender of respondents, A-D denotes MO employees' assessments of respondents' social class, with A being the most prosperous.

[2] For a classic survey of the subject, see Elizabeth Vallance, *Women in the House: A Study of Women Members of Parliament* (London: Athlone Press, 1979), particularly pp. 5–22.

[3] For gendered analyses of candidates' election addresses in 1918, see, for example, the following chapters in David Thackeray and Richard Toye (eds), *Electoral Pledges in Britain Since 1918: The Politics of Promises* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): Luke Blaxill, 'Election Promises and Anti-Promises After the Great War', pp. 17–46 at pp. 36–44; Lisa Berry-Waite, 'The 'Woman's Point of View': Women Parliamentary Candidates, 1918–1919', pp. 47–69; Matthew Johnson, '"A Fighting Man To Fight For You": The Armed Forces, Ex-servicemen, and British Electoral Politics in the Aftermath of Two World Wars', pp. 71–93.

[4] From their inception in 1947, the Nuffield series of general election studies included a sample of issues covered in election addresses.

[5] We comprehensively sample the surviving general election addresses produced by women candidates between 1918 and 1931 using collections held at the National Liberal Club archive (NLC), Conservative Party Archive, the Labour Party Archive, the Women's Library and personal papers. Additional samples of women candidates' addresses between 1935 and 1950 were made using personal papers, the NLC archive and Mass Observation Online.

[6] Jonathan Moss, Nick Clarke, Will Jennings and Gerry Stoker, 'Golden Age, Apathy or Stealth? Democratic Engagement in Britain, 1945–50', *Contemporary British History* 30 (2016), pp. 441–62; David Cowan 'The "Progress of a Slogan": Youth, Culture, and the Shaping of Everyday Political Languages in Late 1940s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*

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29 (2018), pp. 435–58; David Thackeray, 'Mass Observation, Apathy and Electoral Politics in England, 1937–1950', *Historical Journal* 65 (2022), pp. 750–73; Rebecca Goldsmith, 'Mass-Observation and Vernacular Politics at the 1945 General Election', *Twentieth Century British History*, Advance Access, https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwad047.

[7] Nick Clarke, Will Jennings, Jonathan Moss and Gerry Stoker, *The Good Politician: Folk Theories, Political Interaction, and the Rise of Anti-Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 185–93; Claire Langhamer uses Mass Observation material to conclude that the public expected politicians to represent the 'ordinary' values of decency, common sense and authenticity and considers how candidates sought to represent these qualities in their election literature. See her '"Who the Hell Are Ordinary People?" Ordinariness as a Category of Historical Analysis', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 28 (2018), pp. 175–95, see esp. pp. 179–84.

[8] For the evolution of MO's election and by-election surveys between 1938 and 1950, see Thackeray, 'Mass Observation, Apathy and Electoral Politics'.

[9] Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[10] Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 16–27, 428, 462–70; Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Lyndsey Jenkins, 'Introduction', in Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Lyndsey Jenkins (eds), *The Politics of Women's Suffrage: Local, National and International Dimensions* (London: University of London Press, 2021), pp. 1–22, here p. 6.

[11] Krista Cowman, *Women in British Politics, c.1689–1979* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 124.

[12] Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House: The Women MPs, 1919–1945', *Historical Journal* 29 (1986), pp. 623–54; Mari Takayanagi, '"They Have Made Their Mark Entirely Out of Proportion to Their Numbers": Women and Parliamentary Committees, c.1918–1945', in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 181–202; Luke Blaxill and Kaspar Beelen, 'A Feminized Language of Democracy? The Representation of Women at Westminster Since 1945', *Twentieth Century British History* 27 (2016), pp. 412–49, here p. 432.

[13] For the development of programmatic politics in inter-war Britain, see David Thackeray and Richard Toye, *Age of Promises: Electoral Pledges in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 53–73, 86–7.

[14] TC, 76-2-I, 1077.

[15] Cowman, *Women in British Politics*, p. 126.

[16] For the evolution of references to women in party manifestos between 1918 and 1929, see Thackeray and Toye, *Age of Promises*, pp. 80–81; Jorgen Rasmussen, 'Women in Labour: The Flapper Vote and Party System Transformation in Britain', *Electoral Studies* 3 (1984), pp. 47–63, see esp. pp. 51–3.

[17] 'Women's issues' are defined here as equal citizenship and parliamentary rights, equal pay, equality in matters of marriage law, custody of children and property, and women police.

[18] The phrase comes from Henry Houston and Lionel Valdar, *Modern Electioneering Practice* (London: C. Knight & Co., 1922), p. 13, which argued that women voters were chiefly concerned with matters relating to the home.

[19] Wilkinson 1924 General Election address, PUB229/4, Conservative Party Archive (CPA), Bodleian Library, Oxford.

[20] Lisa Berry-Waite, 'The "Woman's Point of View": Women Parliamentary Candidates and Electoral Culture, 1918–1931' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2022), p. 137.

[21] Aryton-Gould 1922 General Election address, PUB 229/2, CPA; See also Wilkinson 1923 General Election address, PUB 229/3.

[22] Bondfield 1924 General Election address, PUB229/4, CPA.

[23] For standardisation of election literature among women candidates see, for example, Picton-Tubervill 1922 General Election address, PUB 229/2, CPA; Bondfield 1922 General Election address and Pallister 1923 General Election address, both DM668, National Liberal Club papers (NLC), University of Bristol Library Special Collections.

[24] Thackeray and Toye, *Age of Promises*, pp. 60–61; For Astor's efforts to highlight her independence from the Conservative party leadership in her early election addresses, see Lisa Berry-Waite, '"I Stuck to Plymouth, Plymouth Stuck to Me': Nancy Astor, Electioneering and Female Parliamentary Candidacy", *Open Library of Humanities* 6 (2020), pp. 1–41, see esp. pp. 9–12, 16, 20–21.

[25] Ward 1924 General Election address, DM668, NLC.

[26] Thackeray and Toye, *Age of Promises*, p. 65.

[27] Laura Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 125.

[28] For the debate about extending the vote to women aged twenty-one and over, see Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), pp. 30–36; Adrian Bingham, '"Stop the Flapper Vote Folly": Lord Rothermere, the *Daily Mail*, and the Equalization of the Franchise, 1927–28', *Twentieth Century British History* 13 (2002), pp. 17–37.

[29] For a discussion of Labour party literature focused on women in 1929, see June Hannam, 'Woman and Labour Politics', in Matthew Worley (ed.), *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900–39* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 171–91 at p. 177. For surveys of the evolution of party literature aimed at women in the 1920s and 1930s, see Cowman, *Women in British Politics*, pp. 133–38 and David Thackeray, 'From Prudent Housewife to Empire Shopper: Party Appeals to the Female Voter, 1918–1928', in Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (eds), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 37–53.

[30] A. R. Linforth to J. Ball, 20 March 1929, CCO170/5/47, CPA; Bingham, 'Stop the Flapper Vote Folly', p. 19.
[31] *Women of Today and Tomorrow* (London: National Union of Conservative Associations, 1928).
[32] For the wider importance of housing issues in women's political activism in the 1920s, see Krista Cowman, '"From the Housewife's Point of View": Female Citizenship and the Gendered Domestic Interior in Post-First World War Britain, 1918–1928', *English Historical Review* 130 (2015), pp. 352–83.
[33] Ayrton-Gould 1929 General Election address, PUB 229/5, CPA.
[34] David Thackeray, 'At the Heart of the Party? The Women's Conservative Organisation in the Age of Partial Suffrage, 1914–28', in Clarisse Berthezene and Julie V. Gottlieb (eds), *Rethinking Right-Wing Women* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 46–65, see esp. pp. 57–59.
[35] Romeril 1929 General Election address, DM668, NLC.
[36] Berry-Waite, 'The "Woman's Point of View"', p. 240.
[37] Ayrton-Gould 1929 General Election address, PUB 229/5, CPA.
[38] 'Will Women Vote for Women or will they Choose Male Candidates?', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 13 May 1929, p. 2.
[39] Thackeray and Toye, *Age of Promises*, pp. 61–63, 66, 68.
[40] Thackeray and Toye, *Age of Promises*, pp. 88–95, 97, 105, the Liberal and Conservative manifestos in 1945 were also strongly programmatic.
[41] Astor 1931 General Election address, MS 1416 1/1/1760, Papers of Nancy Astor, University of Reading Special Collections.
[42] Andrew Thorpe, *The British General Election of 1931* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 220.
[43] See for example, Mercer (Birkenhead East), Bulley (Chester), Bentwich (Harrow), Corbet (East Lewisham), 1935 General Election addresses, DM668, NLC. Adamson (Dartford) included a copy of the Labour manifesto with her address.
[44] 'The Morning After: An Editorial Review of the General Election', *The Labour Organiser*, November 1931, pp. 204–205.
[45] Cazalet (Islington East), Atholl (Kinross and West Perthshire), 1935 General Election addresses, DM668, NLC.
[46] Julie V. Gottlieb, 'Modes and Models of Conservative Women's Leadership in the 1930s', in Idem and Clarisse Berthezène (eds), *Rethinking Right-Wing Women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 89–103.
[47] R. B. McCallum and Alison Readman, *The British General Election of 1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 91, 96; H. G. Nicholas, *The British General Election of 1950* (London: Macmillan, 1951), p. 219.
[48] D.E. Butler and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London: Macmillan, 1960), p. 133.
[49] For a wider discussion of the evolving relationship between election addresses and manifestos, see Thackeray and Toye, *Age of Promises*, pp. 75–8, 95–6, 107–12. For examples, of women candidates focusing on outlining party programmes in their addresses, see, for example, Colman, (Tynemouth), Rees (Barry), Lee (Cannock), all Labour, and Tweedsmuir (Conservative, South Aberdeen). Davidson (Hemel Hempstead) included a copy of the Conservative manifesto with her address, 1950 General Election addresses, DM668, NLC.
[50] Thackeray and Toye, *Age of Promises*, p. 110.
[51] For its inclusion in the free postal communication, see Interview with Mr. Tarrant, Conservative Agent, East Fulham, 17.3.50, TC, 76-4-F, 2664.
[52] 'General Election, July, 1945: report on campaign publicity services', 23 July 1945, 1945 election file, Labour Party Archive, People's History Museum, Manchester.
[53] TC, 46-2-C, 1329, April 1. Election Address Canvass.
[54] TC, 46-2-C, 1330.
[55] TC, 46-2-C, 1330-1, see also 1333 for detailed responses.
[56] TC, 46-2-A, 812.
[57] For an excellent discussion of the tensions between MO employees' understandings of 'rational' responses to surveys and the public's varied forms of reply, which focuses on the 1945 election survey, see Goldsmith, 'Mass-Observation and Vernacular Politics'.
[58] TC, 46-2-C, 1330.
[59] Edith Summerskill, *A Woman's World* (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 49.
[60] Summerskill 1934 By-election address, Summerskill 1/19, British Library for Political and Economic Science (BLPES), London.
[61] Julie V. Gottlieb, '*Guilty Women, Foreign Policy and Appeasement in Inter-War Britain*' (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 214–16; Report on West Fulham by-election, March 1938, File Report A7.
[62] 'East Fulham questionnaire. Impression of qq.18.6.45-21.6.45 (26 June 1945), TC, 76-2-I, 1046.
[63] TC, 76-5-C, 3366.
[64] For a more detailed discussion of the 1950 election survey and its reception, see Thackeray, 'Mass Observation, Apathy and Electoral Politics'. The survey is available via TC, 76-7-B, 4714-15. The objectives of the survey are outlined in 'A political survey', January 1950, TC, 76-7-B, 4699.
[65] Adrian Bingham, 'Conservatism, Gender and the Politics of Everyday Life, 1950s–1980s', in Clarisse Berthezene and Julie V. Gottlieb (eds), *Rethinking Right-Wing Women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 156–74 at pp. 156, 162. For MO employees' claims that women tended to be politically passive, see, for example, 'East Fulham questionnaire. Impression of qq.18.6.45-21.6.45 (26 June 1945), TC, 76-2-I, 1046; TC, 76-5-C, 3366.

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[66] R. S. Milne and H. C. Mackenzie, *Marginal Seat 1955: A Study of Voting Behaviour in the Constituency of Bristol North-East at the General Election of 1955* (London: Hansard Society, 1958), pp. 147, 167–87.
[67] 'Notes on 1950 election survey', January 1950, TC, 76-7-B, 4697.
[68] For changing survey methodologies in the 1950s and early 1960s, see Mike Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain Since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 94–99.
[69] 'Notes on 1950 election survey', January 1950, TC, 76-7-B/4697.
[70] Although Summerskill was MP for West Fulham, her record was discussed by several respondents in the East Fulham constituency, one of the six constituencies which formed part of the 1950 General Election survey.
[71] TC, 46-2-1176-7. Similarly, several respondents to the 1950 election survey refused to give their names and addresses suggesting distrust of the motives of Mass Observation's employees.
[72] TC, 76-5-F, 3854, see also 3764.
[73] TC, 76-5-B, 3185; 76-5-C, 3427, 3430, 3431, 3440, 76-5-D, 3569.
[74] Rachel Reeves, *Women of Westminster: The MPs Who Changed Politics* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), p. 79.
[75] See, for example, discussion of Summerskill in the 1945 East Fulham survey, TC, 76-2-I, 1085. For scepticism about her abilities as a politician, in spite of her professional achievements, see 76-5-A, 3094.
[76] *The Putney Elector*, in Putney election material, 1934, Summerskill 1/19, BLPES. See also staged photos with her children which featured in press coverage and were subsequently used in her 1938 by-election address, newspaper cutting from *Daily Sketch*, 9 September 1937, as well as Summerskill's 1945 and 1950 general election addresses, Summerskill 1/40.
[77] See Summerskill's election address and a newspaper cutting from *The Star*, 26 November 1934, which discusses the popular appeal of her election address portrait, Putney election material 1934, Summerskill 1/19.
[78] On the importance given to the value of 'ordinariness' in mid-twentieth-century Britain, see Langhamer, 'Who the Hell are Ordinary People?'. TC, 46-2-C, 1256.
[79] TC, 46-2-C, 1251.
[80] TC, 46-2-C, 1251; *Daily Mail*, 30 March 1938, p. 13.
[81] TC, 76-4-F, 2613-14, 2619; for similar comments, see, for example, 2612, 2621; 76-5-A, 3053, 3106, 3122, 3134-35, 3147; 76-5-B, 3207, 3210; For a discussion of the Oxford speech, see Summerskill, *A Woman's World*, p. 92.
[82] TC, 76-5-C, 3352, see also 76-5-B, 3179; 76-5-C, 3328, 3329, 3372, 3377; 76-5-D, 3465.
[83] TC, 76-5-C, 3303, 3358, see also 3310, 3335, 3348, 3387, 3433.
[84] TC, 76-5-C, 3305, 3422, see also 3312, 3316, 3320.
[85] TC, 76-4-D, 2426-7, 2434-5.
[86] TC, 76-4-D, 2427.
[87] TC, 76-5-C, 3427.
[88] TC, 76-4-I, 2838.
[89] For their election addresses, see TC, 76-4-E, Fletcher (East Islington), 2602-4; 76-4-C, Daines (East Ham North), 2342; 76-4-G, Rogers (Kensington North), 2798, 2802-3. For these MPs' attention to constituency work, particularly on housing matters, see (Daines) 76-4-C, 2407, Survey 23, interview with the Conservative agent, 22.3.50. For the questions asked, see 2403, (Rogers) 76-5-E, 3595, see also 3596, 3599, 3609.
[90] TC, 76-4-I, 2923. In his interview with an MO employee, Wallace's agent claimed this work was key in winning over marginal voters in what had traditionally been a Tory seat, see 76-4-I, 2831.
[91] TC, 76-5-D, 3466, 3472, 3483, 3502, 3514, 3558.
[92] Alison Oram, '"Bombs Don't Discriminate!" Women's Political Activism in the Second World War', in Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds), *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 53–69, here p. 55.
[93] 1945–50 was dubbed 'the era of the housewife' in Pamela Brookes, *Women at Westminster: An Account of Women in the British Parliament 1918–1966* (London: Peter Davies, 1967), p. 149.
[94] Gary Love, 'A "Mixture of Britannia and Boaedicea": Dorothy Crisp's Conservatism and the Limits of Right-Wing Women's Political Activism, 1927–48', *Twentieth Century British History* 30 (2019), pp. 174–204, here pp. 175–6, 187.
[95] Crisp 1945 General Election address, Teresa Billington-Greig Papers, The Women's Library (TWL), London, 7TBG/1/2a.
[96] Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Rationing, Austerity and the Conservative Party Recovery After 1945', *Historical Journal* 37 (1994), pp. 173–97, here pp. 182, 186–9.
[97] TC, 76-5-D, 3512, 3526.
[98] Mass Observation, 'The M.P. and His Constituency' (November 1949), File Report 3180, pp. 6–7, 9–13, MOO.
[99] Mass Observation, *Voters' Choice: A Mass-Observation Report on the General Election of 1950* (London: Art & Technics, 1950), pp. 3, 7.
[100] TC, 76-5-B, 3148; for similar comments, see, for example, 3181, 76-5-E, 3635, 3693.
[101] TC, 76-5-B, 3261.
[102] TC, 76-5-D, 3574.
[103] TC, 76-5-B, 3191. See also TC, 76-5-A, 3032, 3095, 3098, 3102, 3117; 76-5-B, 3244; 76-5-C, 3329, 3355, 3422, 3424; 76-5-D, 3468, 3564, 3565; 76-5-F, 3768.
[104] See, for example, David Jarvis, 'The Conservative Party and the Politics of Gender, 1900–1939', in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880–1990* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press,

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1996), pp. 172–93; Matthew Johnson, '"Send a Soldier to Parliament": Ex-servicemen, Masculinity, and the Legacies of the Great War in Liberal Electoral and Parliamentary Politics', *Journal of British Studies* 62 (2023), pp. 739–66.

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[106] Martin Francis, 'Tears, Tantrums and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three British Prime Ministers, 1951–1963', *Journal of British Studies* 41 (2002), pp. 354–87 at p. 358; Clarke et al., *The Good Politician*, pp. 185–95; Harm Kaal, 'Popular Politicians: The Interaction Between Politics and Popular Culture in the Netherlands, 1950s–1980s', *Cultural and Social History* 15 (2018), pp. 595–616 at pp. 595–6; Martin Conway, 'Democracy in Postwar Western Europe: The Triumph of a Political Model', *European History Quarterly* 32 (2002), pp. 59–84, here pp. 59–60.

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[108] Thackeray and Toye, *Age of Promises*, pp. 88–98, 103–08, 114–17; Laura Beers, 'Labour's Britain, Fight For It Now!', *Historical Journal* 52 (2009), pp. 667–95.

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