

**What has been the Impact of Gendered Policies on Women's
Voting Behaviour? An Analysis of the 2015 British General
Election**

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Abstract

Political parties often seek to appeal to women voters through policy pledges. However, little is known as to how and whether these policies influence women's voting behaviour. Using the 2015 British General Election as a case study, the thesis examines the gendered effects of policies and policy promises, and the extent to which they matter for winning women's electoral support. Moreover, it explores how women perceive, experience and negotiate gendered policies in their voting behaviour. Accordingly, this thesis takes an iterative sequential mixed methods approach. In doing so, the thesis examines quantitative data on women's vote choice using the British Election Study, as well as qualitative data exploring women's policy attitudes and voting decisions in their own words.

This thesis makes an empirical contribution to understanding the link between gendered policies and vote choice, addressing a gap in the study of gender and voting behaviour. It finds that gendered policies, and the context of elections more widely, matter for the study of gender and voting behaviour. Specifically, 'class-based' economic policies pertaining to the sexual division of labour matter to women voters, whereas policies seeking to tackle discrimination against women are comparatively less salient. Crucially, the thesis finds that the impact of gendered policies on women's voting behaviour varies across the life-stage. The findings show that, in the context of the 2015 General Election, the Conservative-led government's 'class-based' policies were particularly detrimental for support among working-age women, while 'class-based' policies bolstered Conservative support among women in the oldest life-stage.

Taken together, the findings make an analytical contribution towards existing accounts of women's voting behaviour by confirming that women vote according to pocketbook heuristics. However, these pocketbook heuristics are directly related to the context of the election, such as the policies on offer and the economic context in which the election is held. Moreover, the findings provide empirical evidence to tackle the lack of knowledge surrounding the link between gendered policy promises and voting behaviour. The results suggest that studies of women's voting behaviour should place a greater focus on the context of elections in addition to socioeconomic factors.

Declaration

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Chapter One – Introduction

Introduction

Efforts to appeal to women voters are not new. After first gaining suffrage in 1918, women in Britain were traditionally more supportive than men of the Conservatives (Mattinson, 2014). However, as increasing electoral volatility occurred among women voters from the 1980s, political parties began to take a greater interest in their votes (Hayes and McAllister, 2001; Lovenduski, 1997). In doing so, British mainstream political parties have sought to appeal to women voters through policy pledges. The 1983 General Election saw “competitive bidding” between the newly-formed SDP-Liberal Alliance and the Labour Party in an attempt to capture women’s votes (Lovenduski, 1997:201). After the SDP-Liberal Alliance made explicit efforts to implement women’s representation policies, Labour responded by instituting a range of strategies to advance women’s rights; including the creation of a cabinet minister for women, strengthening the Sex Discrimination Act and a promise to increase the maternity grant (The Labour Party, 1983). The 1992 General Election saw policy initiatives from all of the main parties towards women (Norris, 1996). The Conservatives emphasised their record on equal rights and pledged to increase women’s participation in the labour force via their Opportunity 2000 initiative. Labour proposed to create a Ministry for Women, to select a record number of women candidates for Parliament, and to ensure equal rights at work for women. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats pledged to tackle sexual discrimination through a Bill of Rights and to increase the number of women within the party (ibid.).

Attempts to reach out to women voters have been evident in more recent elections. In 2010, all three mainstream political parties devoted a significant proportion of their manifestos to issues pertaining to family and work-life balance (Campbell and Childs, 2010).

So much so, that 2010 was nicknamed the “Mumsnet” election, in which it was said the result would be “decided at the school gate” (Sylvester, 2009). The run-up to the 2010 General Election saw David Cameron pledge to give one third of Cabinet roles to women (Hinsliff, 2008), and pledges to increase women’s representation at Westminster were echoed in the Labour Party manifesto (The Labour Party, 2010). More recently, the 2015 General Election witnessed Harriet Harman – the erstwhile Deputy Leader of the Labour Party – launch the ‘Woman to Woman’ battle bus as an attempt to engage with women voters across the country. Notably, childcare became a “key battleground of the election” (Peck, 2015), as both Labour and the Conservatives competed to extend the number of free childcare hours to working parents.

So important had winning the ‘women’s vote’ become, that political parties began to identify the female electorate with tailored overtures. Most notable was the concept of the “Worcester Woman”, which entered the political lexicon at the 1997 General Election. The fictional “Worcester Woman” – conceived by party strategists – was the ‘middle England’ woman swing voter believed to be integral to electoral success (Mattinson, 2000:49). “Worcester Woman” was just one of many voter vignettes designed to target different groups of women, including the “school gate mums”, “sandwich mothers” and “*Take a Break* woman” (Harmer and Wring, 2013). The uptake of these targeted appeals illustrates the perceived importance in securing women’s votes and the considerable traction it has gained over time.

These attempts to reach out to women voters have marked a continuing resonance among political parties about the ‘women’s vote’ and the issues that are thought to define it. While attempts at targeting women voters are well-documented, little is known as to how – or whether – policies for and about women influence their voting behaviour. As will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters, existing literature has primarily focused on long-

term structural change, such as modernisation or secularisation, when attempting to explain women's voting behaviour. As a result, these accounts often risk overlooking the importance of context-specific factors, and how party policies may vary from election to election. The central research question of this thesis is, therefore, 'What has been the impact of gendered policies on women's voting behaviour?'. To address this gap, this thesis examines the 2015 General Election using British Election Study data and focus groups. It analyses the policies previously implemented under the 2010-15 Coalition government, the policies on offer in 2015, and how women responded to these in their vote choice.

This thesis makes a set of empirical and theoretical contributions. Empirically, the findings show that certain policies matter: redistributive, economic class-based policies were particularly salient to women at the 2015 General Election. Comparatively, policies based on women's status as a group were less salient. However, women are heterogeneous in their voting behaviour, and this is reflected in the second empirical contribution that this thesis makes. Women's narratives and attitudes showed that they experience the effects of, and thus prioritise, gendered policies in different ways. Crucially, the findings show that gendered policies at the 2015 General Election amplified differences in women's voting behaviour according to life-stage. The findings also provide a set of theoretical contributions. Firstly, they contribute towards existing debates surrounding economic voting: namely, whether there are gender differences in sociotropic and pocketbook voting behaviour. It extends theorisation by examining gender and economic voting in a context of austerity. Secondly, by shedding light on the importance of examining the electoral context, the findings contribute to existing explanations of women's voting behaviour that have tended to focus on structural explanations.

Additionally, the findings from this thesis highlight the importance of mixed methods research. The use of focus groups, for instance, revealed a range of concepts and themes

that would have been otherwise undetectable from the quantitative analysis used in the study. Meanwhile, the use of cross-sectional data (the 2015 British Election Study face-to-face post-election survey) from a nationally representative sample ensured that, unlike the focus groups, aspects of the findings can be generalised to the population as a whole.

This introductory chapter provides an outline to the thesis. I begin by explaining why analysing gender matters for the study of voting behaviour. Following this, I discuss the background of the 2015 General Election in order to contextualise the research question, before presenting the overall methodology used to conduct the research. I then set out the structure and organisation of the thesis and outline the three research questions that will be used to guide the research. Finally, I set out the scope of the research.

Why study gender and voting?

While women in Britain have traditionally been more likely than men to vote Conservative, gender differences in voting behaviour have narrowed since the 1980s (Norris, 1999). The narrowing of the gender gap has meant that over time, gender differences in voting behaviour have diminished to an insignificant level. In other words, overall, men and women in Britain now vote in roughly the same way. This is in contrast to other countries in which a prominent gender gap in vote choice has been observed, such as the United States, West Germany and the Netherlands (Inglehart and Norris, 2000; 2003). Given the fact that there are few differences between men and women's overall voting behaviour in Britain, why, then, is the topic of gender and voting worth exploring further?

Though men and women may vote for the same political parties, they may do so for different reasons. Campbell (2006) explores the idea of a 'motivational gender gap'. She finds that men and women prioritise different issues at elections. While men are slightly more likely to list the economy, taxation and relations with the European Union as the most

important issues facing the country, women are more likely to select education and the National Health Service (NHS) as a prominent issue (Campbell, 2006; 2012). Some have argued that these differences stem from the fact that women view politics differently to men through the prism of their own lives and experiences (Mattinson, 2018). Others argue that differences in issue prioritisation are based on gender differences in socialisation during one's formative years (Welch and Hibbing, 1992). Notwithstanding the source of these differences, motivational gaps suggest that if issues such as the economy, taxation or the NHS become more salient during elections, gender differences in vote choice will become more pronounced.

The study of gender also matters for women's representation. Women in Britain are descriptively underrepresented in legislative fora, comprising just 34% of MPs. Calls to achieve greater gender balance in representation are often founded on the basis that women differ to men in their interests, policy preferences and attitudes (Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 1995). However, assuming such differences without really knowing what women's policy preferences are risks making essentialist claims about women and excludes those who do not sit comfortably within frames of femininity (Allen, Campbell, Espirito-Santo, 2014). In order to ensure that women's interests and preferences are sufficiently represented, it is therefore necessary to explore women's policy preferences further. Unless women's policy preferences are fully understood, women cannot be substantively represented in legislative fora.

As well as motivational differences and women's representation, demographic differences between men and women suggest the topic of gender is worth exploring further. Hewitt and Mattinson (1989) asserted that women's votes are now "the key to winning" and can therefore play a crucial part in electoral outcomes. Had women never been granted the right to vote in 1918, the outcome of an all-male electorate would have led to a Labour

victory in every British general election between 1945 and 1997 (Mattinson, 2014:247). Women's votes are of increased importance simply because there are more of them: as it stands, women constitute 54% of the British electorate (Campbell, 2019). This is due to a combination of demographic factors. Women tend to outnumber men at the younger ages due to men's higher mortality rates (ONS, 2016a). Women also outnumber men at the older ages as a result of their greater longevity (Raleigh, 2019): among those aged over 65, 55% are women (ONS, 2017). This gender disparity becomes more apparent with age, with women comprising 65% of those aged 85 and over¹ (ONS, 2016b). Men also comprise the majority of the prison population, meaning that many of them are illegible to vote. Of roughly 83,000 prisoners in England and Wales, men comprise approximately 95% (Sturge, 2019). Additionally, women's votes are particularly crucial in tight elections. Women are more likely than men to decide their vote closer to election day (Green and Prosser, 2018), and are more inclined towards swing voting (Campbell, 2012; Mattinson, 2018).

Clearly, then, there are a number of reasons as to why the topic of gender merits further study. The fact that women and men may prioritise different issues suggests that electoral outcomes may vary depending on the types of policies on offer during elections. Understanding women's interests and policy preferences has implications on their representation in deliberative fora, specifically whether their policy preferences are being truly represented, and to what extent. Meanwhile, given that women comprise a larger proportion of the electorate, demographic differences between women and men have implications for parties' electoral success.

¹ Author's own calculations.

Background and rationale for focusing on the 2015 General Election

The 2015 General Election witnessed the formation of a new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. Faced with a large budget deficit and “the worst financial crisis for generations” (HM Treasury, 2009:48), it was evident that any incoming government would inherit an economy where difficult decisions would have to be made. Laid out in the June 2010 ‘Emergency Budget’ was the Coalition’s decision to implement a series of unprecedented spending cuts that were to commence immediately. The measures announced in the Budget meant that 77% of the deficit reduction was to come from spending cuts, with the remaining 23% from tax increases (Women’s Budget Group, 2010). The reliance on spending cuts, as opposed to tax increases, led to a disproportionate effect on women’s jobs, used services and incomes (Annesley, 2014). Between 2010 and 2013, House of Commons cumulative data found that women bore the brunt of austerity at least twice as much as men (Busby and James, 2017). This is, in part, because women are heavier users of public services and are more likely than men to rely on transfer payments (Annesley, 2012). Additionally, they make up the majority of those working in the public sector, comprising two-thirds of public sector workers (Annesley, 2012).

The Coalition’s economic policies, and their financial impact on women, led to a widely held belief that the Conservatives would fail to retain their traditional lead with women voters at the upcoming 2015 General Election (Annesley and Gains, 2014; Bryson, 2012; Campbell and Childs, 2015a). Such expectations partly derived from what is known about women voters. Women – including Conservative women – are more likely than men to favour tax and spend policies (Campbell, 2012; Campbell and Childs, 2015a). Thus they are more likely than men to be opposed to spending cuts. Additionally, women are less likely than men to describe certain spending cuts as “fair” – such as those to the police, the NHS, pensions, the armed forces, schools, universities and students (Campbell, 2012). In light of

the Coalition's policies, some scholars also went as far as arguing that a new, 'modern' gender gap, in which women were more likely to support Labour, would emerge (Annesley and Gains, 2014). Several authors expand on this in more detail:

"As the austerity measures begin to take full effect, the gap between 'woman-friendly' rhetoric and reality will become more apparent, and women's rejection of the Conservatives seems likely to increase" – Bryson (2012).

"[The Conservatives] are unlikely to restore the Party's historical dominance with women voters with potentially serious consequences for the likelihood of a Conservative majority" – Annesley and Gains (2014:767).

"Cameron should be minded that Conservative women supporters are simply less in favour of his cuts programme than men Conservatives. If he ignores this difference, it is likely that he will lose Conservative women's votes at the next election" – Campbell and Childs (2015a:634).

Even the Conservative Party recognised the potential struggle to win over women voters at the upcoming election. Paul Goodman, the executive editor of Conservative Home blog, claimed that the Conservative Party was "very, very, very concerned" about women's votes (Topping, 2013). In 2011, a restricted memo from Downing Street was circulated to government departments, acknowledging concerns over the Government's message towards women. The memo, later leaked to The Guardian, began by stating that:

"We know from a range of polls that women are significantly more negative about the Government than men...We are clear that there are a range of policies we have pursued as a Government which are seen as having hit women, or their interests, disproportionately" (quoted in The Guardian, 2011).

The memo then continued to cite specific policies that the Government had implemented that led to a potential loss in women's support, such as the abolition of Child Trust Funds, public sector pay and pensions, changes to Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit and a rising cost of living. In order to win back women's support, the document stated, the Government would consider policies aimed specifically at women. These policies included frontloading Child Benefit to help parents struggling to meet childcare costs, a ban on advertising to children, developing a strategy to ensure women candidates for local government positions, giving Universal Credit to women as a default, and criminalising forced marriage (ibid).

Implicit in these narratives is the expectation that policies will have a direct impact on women's voting behaviour. Namely, that cuts to statutory provision, as well as broader changes in the economy, would prevent women from voting Conservative. At the same time, they reveal beliefs about policies that are thought to *win* women's votes, such as policies relating to child support, violence against women, and women's representation. These beliefs have not yet been tested, and as such, the link between gendered policies and women's voting behaviour remains largely unfounded.

Despite expectations that the Conservatives would struggle to win women's votes in 2015, this was not the case. Evidence from the 2015 British Election Study (BES) (Fieldhouse, Green, Evans, Schmitt, van der Eijk, Mellon and Prosser, 2016) post-election survey showed that the Conservatives still retained their overall lead with women voters: 43% of women voted Conservative compared to 38% of men. Moreover, the 2015 BES post-election survey showed that more women on average voted for the Conservatives than for any other party.² Such a result might lead to the conclusion that policies negatively impacting women's

² 43% of women voted Conservative compared to 33% of women who voted Labour and 8% who voted Liberal Democrat. Author's own analysis.

interests have very little effect on their voting behaviour. Thus, the 2015 General Election opens up a prominent psephological debate as to whether women vote based on self-interest (pocketbook voting), or whether they vote according to national economic conditions (sociotropic voting). Moreover, the result opens up questions regarding which policies matter to women. Finally, the 2015 General Election was held after five years of austerity measures, which raises questions as to how the electoral context impacts voting behaviour. This thesis aims to address these questions.

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, this thesis takes an iterative sequential mixed methods approach. Each chapter discusses the relevant methodology employed in more detail. At this point, however, it is useful to clarify the overall methodological approach of the thesis, as well as to justify the use of an iterative sequential mixed methods approach.

Mixed methods research has been defined as those that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches into the research methodology of a single study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Mixed methods approaches are typically classified as either concurrent or sequential (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). These approaches refer to the order in which the data analysis is conducted within a study. In concurrent approaches, the qualitative and quantitative analysis are conducted and interpreted in a parallel manner. In sequential approaches, the analysis is conducted consecutively, with one phase of the research informing the next. For example, the qualitative phase may inform the next quantitative stage of the study (QUAL→QUANT), or vice versa. Unlike concurrent approaches, in sequential approaches, qualitative and quantitative data analyses are not independent, rather, “one builds on the other” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007:121). In a quantitative to qualitative analysis, subjects who obtained high test scores may be interviewed so that detailed qualitative data can be analysed to explore factors that might be associated with

high test scores (Alivernini, 2012:2281). In a qualitative to quantitative analysis, a set of subjects may be generated from a qualitative analysis, and the subjects may then be compared through a quantitative analysis (ibid.).

The term 'iterative sequential mixed methods', is used to describe "the analysis of data from a sequential study with more than two phases" (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010:24). For example, the stages of the study might take a QUAL (qualitative) → QUANT (quantitative) → QUAL approach. The process is iterative as new components or strands may be added during the project itself (ibid.). The specific approach that this thesis takes is shown below:

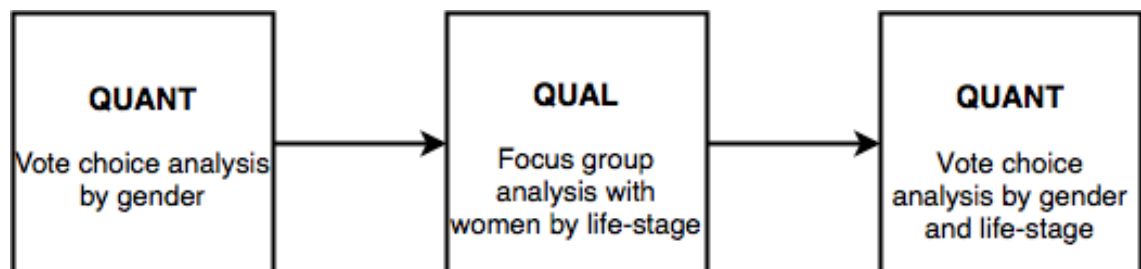


Figure 1.1. An iterative sequential mixed methods approach (adapted from Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010)

As shown in Figure 1.1, the empirical analysis within this thesis follows a QUANT→QUAL→QUANT approach. The first stage begins with a quantitative analysis. Using the British Election Study, it compares men and women's economic and financial attitudes, and how these attitudes interacted to shape vote choice in 2015. The second stage takes a qualitative approach. It takes a more in-depth analysis of women's voting behaviour than the quantitative analysis, by focusing on a sub-section of women voters by life-stage. The use of focus groups allows for any unexpected or ambiguous results from the quantitative analysis to be explored further using interviews. The final quantitative stage of the thesis builds on the qualitative analysis: using the British Election Study, it explores whether the life-stage differences found within the focus group analysis are statistically representative of the wider

population. A more detailed justification for each approach is offered within each chapter of the thesis.

There are many advantages of using mixed methods. Mixed methods can serve as confirmation to verify research findings derived from one source of data, which can be compared with another (Small, 2011). This is otherwise known as triangulation. The triangulation method uses different data and methods to examine the same research problem (Harrison, 2001:83). Triangulation can be employed to compare and contrast quantitative results with qualitative data, or to validate quantitative results with qualitative results (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007:62). For instance, through triangulation, the thesis explores whether women vote according to self-interest by examining their responses to open-ended interview questions (qualitative analysis) as well as set survey questions (quantitative analysis), and whether there are differences in the results produced by these methods.

More specifically, an iterative sequential approach offers certain advantages. Namely, the research methods in an iterative sequential approach can be used to complement each other. Here, complementarity differs to triangulation: where the latter is considered to be confirmatory, complementarity can be used to enhance and elaborate on results. Combining more than one type of method can compensate for the weaknesses of the other (Small, 2011). For example, interviews may be used to interpret quantitative findings where they are ambiguous, or large-scale data may be used to test the results derived from small-N qualitative data (Small, 2011). The assumption here is that every method is limited in the evidence it can produce. Large-scale survey data has the advantage of generating data from a statistically representative sample of a broader population; however, women's attitudes towards specific policies cannot be adequately captured through quantitative means, as the 2015 British Election Study does not list policies that

featured in the 2015 General Election. The use of focus groups compensated for this issue. Using cross-sectional survey data ensures a broader study of women's voting behaviour with generalisable and robust results, while focus groups allow a rich, in-depth analysis of women's policy preferences and voting heuristics in their own words. Focus groups provide an additional dimension to the research that cannot be addressed through quantitative analysis: hearing women's anecdotal experiences – and the language they use to describe them – is integral to examining the mechanisms they use in their voting behaviour, uncovering various themes and concepts that would otherwise remain undetected in the quantitative research. With an iterative approach, the thesis is able to continuously conduct analyses until each research question is answered. In short, different methods thus produce different evidence, which can be pieced together to consider new aspects of an analytical puzzle or problem. In essence, this highlights the importance of mixed methods research.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two highlights existing research on gender and voting behaviour in order to indicate where this thesis sits within the wider voting and policy literature. It reviews longstanding theoretical models of voting behaviour and shows how they overlook gender. Meanwhile, accounts on women's voting behaviour have predominantly focused on long-term structural change in explaining shifts in vote choice, and as a result, have overlooked the impact of policies. This presents a clear gap. The final section of the chapter introduces Htun and Weldon's (2010; 2018) 'gender status' and 'class-based' policy framework, which will be employed throughout the thesis. Htun and Weldon's gender equality policy framework provides a convincing account as to how gendered policies might be conceived. The framework disaggregates between different types of gendered policies, which is relevant to understanding the target population of these policies, as well as policy salience. Additionally, Htun and Weldon's framework considers broader economic policies through a

gendered lens. However, the existing framework does not directly include certain policy agendas that may pertain to women. These include pension policies, which relates to women's equality in the labour market, and the National Health Service (NHS), which relates to women's access to fundamental reproductive and contraceptive services, meeting the criteria of a class-based policy. Additionally, the NHS is also a major employer of women, as women comprise 77% of NHS workers (NHS, 2018). Therefore, I propose to incorporate these additional policies into the 'gender status' and 'class-based' policy framework, in order to gain a broader perspective on gendered policies.

The overall research question of this thesis is 'What has been the impact of gendered policies on women's voting behaviour?'. To help guide the research, there are three additional questions that this thesis seeks to answer. These are:

- 1) Do women vote according to issues that affect them personally (pocketbook voting)?
Are they any less likely to do so than men?
- 2) Which policies – if any – do women think about when they vote? Are some types of policies more salient than others, and if so, which?
- 3) How has the context of austerity impacted gendered voting behaviour?

In order to fully understand the context of the Coalition's policies and the context of the 2015 General Election, Chapter Three examines policies from a retrospective angle. Using a range of policy documents, it outlines the Coalition government's gendered policy agendas between 2010 and 2015. It applies these gendered policy agendas to the 'gender status' and 'class-based' policy framework. Analysing policy briefs, third sector reports and government documents, the chapter considers the impact that gendered policies had on different groups of women, particularly across the life-stage. Finally, the chapter forms expectations around the impact of these policies on women's vote choice, hypothesising how different groups of

women may have responded to these policies in 2015. These expectations are re-visited in Chapter Five.

However, the impact of the Coalition's policies on women may matter little if women do not vote according to policies that personally affect them. Indeed, a body of literature emanating from the United States suggests that women are more 'compassionate' in their vote choice than men (Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler, 1998; Chodorow, 1978; Diamond and Hartsock, 1981; Welch and Hibbing, 1992). This line of argument maintains that women will vote for parties that have implemented policies damaging their interests if they believe these policies to be in the national interest. This opens up a longstanding debate as to whether women vote according to their personal interest (pocketbook voting), or whether they vote in line with what they perceive to be in the national interest (sociotropic voting). Therefore, it is necessary to first unpick these theories surrounding gender and voting behaviour and consider the basic differences between men and women before moving on to any kind of detailed analysis regarding intra-sex differences.

Accordingly, Chapter Four re-visits the pocketbook-sociotropic debate in the context of the 2015 British General Election. Using data from the 2015 British Election Study face-to-face post-election survey, it seeks to answer the first research question, exploring economic voting through a gendered lens. The first section of the chapter examines descriptive differences between men and women's economic attitudes. It begins by examining attitudes towards the national economy and their personal finances, and how these have changed over time. It then moves on to examine the saliency of economic issues in women's policy preferences, comparing them to men's. After outlining basic differences between men and women, the second section of the chapter seeks to explore the link between economic evaluations and vote choice, and whether there are any differences in the way men and women respond. It finds evidence that women were no more likely than men to base their

votes on the national economy, and that men were no more likely than women to base their votes on pocketbook evaluations. In essence, it finds that when it comes to voting, men and women rely on economic evaluations in broadly similar ways.

In the absence of gender differences at the aggregate level, Chapter Four opens up two interesting questions. The first is whether there are differences *between* women. Examining gender at the aggregate level may negate significant differences between groups of women. As the policy analysis in Chapter Three showed, the Coalition's policies impacted women across the life-stage, and as such, it is necessary to explore these intra-sex differences further. The second question concerns which pocketbook and sociotropic policies matter to women.

Using focus groups with women voters across three life-stages, Chapter Five explores women's attitudes towards gendered policies at the time of the 2015 General Election. The chapter seeks to primarily answer the second research question: which policies women think about when they vote. It also touches upon women's broader economic and financial attitudes. Though many of the policies that women discuss are specific to the 2015 General Election, they can, to some extent, be generalised to other elections. For instance, broader discussions around issues of women's representation, childcare and healthcare offer an insight pertaining to wider policy agendas that may be of importance to women voters. Using the 'class-based'-'gender status' policy framework, it considers the types of gendered policies that were salient in their vote choice, and those that were not. It finds that, overall, class-based policies – particularly the NHS – appeared to be of significance to women voters, while status policies seemingly had little salience. However, of the class-based policies they considered, there were stark differences by life-stage. Working-age women articulated concerns regarding living costs and austerity cuts, namely changes to working-age benefits and transfer payments upon which they are more reliant, and scale backs in the NHS.

Meanwhile, access to childcare services appeared to feature as a salient concern for working-age women who undertake unpaid childcare. These class-based policies appeared to hinder their Conservative support. Meanwhile, those in the later life-stages additionally cited the importance of pension-age benefits for the social advantages that these policies brought. As such, the Conservative's class-based policies appeared to bolster support among women in the later life-stages.

By analysing women's narratives, Chapter Five additionally explores the underlying mechanisms that women use when deciding their vote, namely pocketbook heuristics and sociotropic heuristics. Thus, the chapter considers whether women prioritise policies that personally affect them, speaking to the first research question. This corroborates the findings from the quantitative analysis conducted in the previous chapter (Chapter Four). Complementing the findings of Chapter Four, it finds that pocketbook voting occurred across the life-stage: women often referred to themselves and their family when they spoke about their voting decisions.

Overall, Chapter Five shows clear differences across life-stage in how women responded to economic class-based policies. Yet the small number of participants means that these focus group findings are not generalisable to the wider population. These findings open up two further questions. Firstly, are these life-stage differences generalisable to the broader population? Secondly, were these life-stage differences evident in only the 2015 General Election? In light of these questions, it is necessary to explore these economic differences across life-stage further using a quantitative analysis.

Chapter Six, the final empirical chapter of this thesis, seeks to answer the third research question by exploring the context of austerity (and economic policies more widely)

on women's voting behaviour.³ Using the British Election Study face-to-face post-election survey datasets of 2015 and 2017, it compares gender-age gaps in vote choice at the 2015 and the 2017 general elections. These elections were both held during periods of austerity, yet by 2017, all of the mainstream parties were led by different leaders on contrasting policy platforms. This provides the advantage of comparing how women's vote choice changes in accordance with a shift in policies on offer. In contrast to Chapter Three, which considers retrospective policies, the chapter examines *prospective* policies (in other words, policies that were on offer) from Labour and the Conservatives at the 2015 and 2017 elections. Using a manifesto analysis, the chapter focuses on three broad economic policy areas that might be expected to influence gender-age differences in voting behaviour. These areas are pensions, social security and taxation. The chapter uses the manifesto analysis to form expectations about vote choice in 2015 and 2017. It then tests these expectations by first examining economic and financial attitudes between women and men, exploring whether these attitudes vary by life-stage. Then, the chapter explores how and whether these attitudes were associated with vote choice in 2015 and 2017, respectively.

Overall, Chapter Six finds that women were, on average, more pessimistic than men about their own financial situation and the general economy at the 2015 and 2017 General Elections. However, it is younger women who are especially pessimistic: women under 35 were more pessimistic than men their age or older women about their financial/economic situation. It finds that younger women's financial/economic pessimism was associated with their higher relative support for Labour, and their rejection of the Conservatives in both 2015 and 2017. Meanwhile, older women were more similar to men in their vote choice, and their vote choice did not change once their financial/economic concerns were taken into account.

³ This chapter is a version of a published co-authored paper with Dr Rosalind Shorrocks ('All in this together? Austerity and the gender-age gap in the 2015 and 2017 British General Elections', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 21(4): 667-688.). Permission to use the material in this thesis has been granted by the British Journal of Politics and International Relations.

The chapter argues that these life-stage differences were, in part, due to economic policies on offer in 2015 and 2017. It argues that Labour's anti-austerity policies likely appealed to younger women, whereas the Conservative's pension policies likely appealed to older women.

Finally, Chapter Seven offers concluding remarks drawn from the main empirical findings, bringing together the findings from the thesis as a whole. It begins by highlighting how the research approach of this thesis drove, and contributed to, the empirical material presented in this thesis. It then re-visits the research questions and addresses these in turn. In doing so, it outlines how these findings contribute to understanding the role that gendered policies play in women's voting behaviour. Subsequently, the chapter discusses the limitations as well as further research that should be conducted around women's voting behaviour. The chapter concludes by considering the wider implications of the findings presented in this thesis.

Scope of the research

The thesis takes a case study approach of the 2015 British General Election. Case studies can be understood as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1984:23). The 2015 General Election is an interesting case to study for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, it is a clear example in which women, on average, were hit financially harder than men by the Government's economic agenda. This provides an opportunity to explore differences in economic/financial attitudes between men and women, and how they relate to vote choice. Specifically, it provides the opportunity to explore how - or whether - women vote according to policies that personally affect them. Secondly, the 2015 election saw the incumbent governing party (the Conservatives) and the main opposition party (Labour) stand on

different economic policy platforms. This gave women voters a ‘clear choice’ between political parties in 2015. Finally, the years preceding the 2015 election saw a variation in the types of gendered policies that had been implemented, and the impact that these policies had on gender equality. Indeed, gender equality progress under the Conservative-led Coalition between 2010 and 2015 has been described as a “mixed bag” (Sanders, Annesley and Gains, 2019a). Though the Coalition pursued a series of economic policies that were financially harmful to women, at the same time, a range of gender equality policies – that were progressive in nature – were also implemented alongside. The 2015 election therefore provides a fruitful opportunity to unpick women’s attitudes towards the Coalition’s diverging policy agendas, seeking to discover which policies matter, and why.

Given the case study approach taken in this thesis, the empirical findings are, to some degree, limited in their generalisability. The limitations of generalisability in case study approaches are commonly cited in literature elsewhere (Gerring, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Stewart, 2014). The main findings drawn from this thesis pertain specifically to the 2015 British General Election: the focus on party policies at the 2015 General Election – and the Coalition’s policies leading up to it – are specific to the context of the 2015 election in particular. The policies, campaign issues, and economic context in 2015 differed to that of the 2010 election, and indeed elections preceding this period. As such, comparisons cannot be easily drawn from one British general election to another, or from elections outside of Britain. However, that is not to say that the arguments made in this thesis lack empirical or analytical utility beyond the context of the 2015 election. I discuss this further below.

The research presented here contributes to a broader understanding of what role policies play in women’s voting behaviour. Though specific policies will vary from election-to-election, the research investigates broad policy agendas that may have salience with women voters, such as pensions, childcare, violence against women, women’s political

representation and the NHS. Thus women's attitudes towards these broader policy agendas can be considered in the context of other British elections. Women's attitudes towards austerity, and whether these attitudes are associated with vote choice, can also be generalised to other British elections held during periods of recession. This is explored later in the thesis, where an analysis of the 2015 and 2017 British General Elections – two elections that are held in a context of austerity – is conducted in Chapter Six. Additionally, the research may be of broader international significance: women's general attitudes towards austerity can be applied to other electoral contexts beyond Britain. Evidence shows that, across other European countries, the impact of austerity has disproportionately affected women (European Women's Lobby, 2012; Karamessini and Rubery, 2013; Périvier, 2018). Understanding how women respond in their vote choice after being affected by austerity policies suggests that such trends may be mirrored in electoral contexts outside of the UK. These findings may offer a wider insight into explaining the electoral fate of political parties internationally that implement gendered austerity measures. Having established the research strategy of this thesis, there are a number of methodological points that must now be considered. I return to these below.

Comparing men and women provides a useful starting point when examining women voters overall. This is because analysing the voting behaviour of men provides a baseline against which to compare women. Thus, the thesis begins by examining broader differences between men and women (Chapter Four), then builds on this to explore intra-sex differences between women voters by life-stage (Chapters Five and Six). As such, focus groups with women voters form a central component of the empirical research conducted in this thesis. However, focus groups were not conducted with men voters. Focus groups provide in-depth qualitative results, and therefore conducting focus groups solely with women voters allowed for a greater number and wider range of women's voices to be heard, in line with the primary objective of this thesis: understanding women's voting behaviour. Moreover, the use of all-

women focus groups also meant that stronger comparisons could be made across constituency and life-stage, providing a deeper insight into intra-sex differences among women voters.

This, in turn, leads to a second methodological point. It is important to acknowledge that women are not a monolithic entity, nor are they a homogenous block of voters. Rather, women are a heterogeneous group who differ across intersectional lines, such as age, race, ability, sexual orientation and socio-economic class. As such, women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity (Crenshaw, 1989). A middle-class, white, heterosexual woman, for example, might experience gender oppression differently to women who experience other forms of structural disadvantage (ibid.). Equally, policies have a differential impact on certain groups of women. For example, the Women's Budget Group emphasises that Black, Minority Ethnic (BME) women have been hit financially hardest by the impact of austerity (Women's Budget Group, 2017a). BME women have also been disproportionately affected by a loss in specialist services (ibid.). Due to the small number of respondents in the dataset belonging to ethnic minority groups, religious groups, sexual minority groups, as well as those from various socio-economic backgrounds, it is not possible to provide accurate inferences beyond gender and age. Therefore, I explore women voters more broadly according to 'life-stage', which encompasses multiple groups of women impacted by gendered policies.

The study further confines the research to the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. It does so for two reasons: one practical, the other methodological. Though the 2015 election had followed five years of Coalition government between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties and the results of 2015 saw the emergence of "multi-party politics" (Richards and Smith, 2015), the Conservatives still remained the incumbent party and Labour the main opposition. A body of research notes that voters' performance evaluations are

generally strongest with incumbent parties and the largest opposition party, rather than smaller parties (Plescia and Kritzing, 2017; Williams, Stegmaier and Debus, 2017). This is the key tenet underlying economic voting, according to Williams et al. (2017), who summarise that “when voters are dissatisfied with the economy, they shift their support to whichever major party is in opposition” (Williams et al., 2017:293). The authors go on to argue that “not only [is support for] minor parties not influenced by economic evaluations, but that the effects of evaluations for major parties are *statistically greater than* those of minor parties” (ibid.:294, emphasis in original). This may be due to the fact that the largest opposition party has greater access to resources and methods of scrutiny (such as Prime Minister’s Questions), or because smaller parties have not had the chance to hold office. Nonetheless, we might therefore expect effects to be strongest with the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, and so it is partly for this reason that the analysis is focused on the two. Additionally, when using survey data, the relatively small proportion of voters voting for smaller parties in 2015 presents issues relating to sample size. These samples reduce further in size once gender is accounted for. For instance, in the 2015 British Election Study post-election survey, 92 women respondents voted for the UK Independence Party (UKIP), 89 for the Liberal Democrats, 49 for the Scottish National Party (SNP) and even fewer for the Green Party and Plaid Cymru. The small number of cases thus means that statistically robust comparisons cannot be drawn when examining these parties in further depth.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted that, according to democratic voting theory, policies are often expected to influence women’s voting behaviour. In doing so, it highlights the contributions made in this thesis towards understanding this relationship, and outlines the mixed-methods approach it will take in doing so. The chapter demonstrates that, despite the growing focus on the ‘women’s vote’ among political parties, there is relatively little

understanding as to what role policies play in influencing women's voting behaviour. While the Coalition's austerity measures hit women financially harder than men, the traditional gender gap remained in 2015, contrary to expectations at the time (Annesley and Gains, 2014; Bryson, 2012; Campbell and Childs, 2015a). As such, the 2015 General Election provides an interesting opportunity to examine the relationship between gendered policies and women's voting behaviour.

Overall, this thesis finds that gendered policies influenced women's voting behaviour at the 2015 General Election. However, some policies had a stronger influence on women's vote choice than others: 'gender status' policies appeared to carry little weight with women voters, whereas redistributive, economic 'class-based' policies appeared to be comparatively salient. There was strong evidence of pocketbook voting across the life-stage, with the Conservatives' pension policies appearing to be particularly salient to women in their later life-stage, and (anti-)austerity policies appearing to be especially salient with working-age women, particularly those in the younger life stages. This appeared to exacerbate the gender-age gap that emerged in 2015. The findings make an analytical contribution to the understanding of the link between gendered policies and women's vote choice: an area that has hitherto received little scholarly attention. In exploring this link, the findings show that the relationship between gendered policy evaluations and vote choice is not always clear-cut. Rather, the link is often mediated by factors such as knowledge and competence. Empirically, the findings show that the issues and policies that women prioritised were specific to the context of 2015, demonstrating that policies – and the economic context – matters for the study of gender and voting. Moreover, the empirical findings contribute to understanding the diversity of vote choice among women.

Chapter Two – Voting, gender and policy: Bridging the gaps in the literature

Introduction

The remit of this thesis touches upon several broad areas of scholarly enquiry: voting, gender and policy. As such, bridging these literatures together is not an easy task. To provide a backdrop for the terms, theories and concepts that will be used throughout the thesis, several ideas must first be defined, explained and conceptually linked. This chapter reviews the existing literature on voting theories and gendered policy, and lays out the theoretical groundwork for the rest of the thesis. The chapter begins by situating the focus on policies within wider traditional theories of voting behaviour in order to frame the research questions. It then moves on to review theories of gender and voting behaviour. In doing so, I argue that traditional accounts of voting behaviour have overlooked gender, while accounts of women's voting behaviour have overlooked the impact of policy. This thesis intends to fill this gap. The final section then moves on to discuss how gendered policies might be conceptualised, and why it is helpful to think about a policy typology for gendered policies in order to examine their differential impact on voting behaviour. It develops the policy framework that will be employed throughout the thesis. Overall, the chapter aims to bring together the bodies of literature on gender differences in voting behaviour and gendered policy.

Traditional accounts of voting behaviour

Before discussing theories of gender and voting, it is necessary to examine the wider canon of social and psychological theories on voting behaviour in order to contextualise the research questions. Below, I outline three longstanding models of voting behaviour: the Columbia School, the Michigan School and the rational choice model. Throughout the

discussions of each, I explain how these traditional accounts of voting behaviour have predominantly overlooked the effects of gender, and why this matters for the study of voting behaviour.

The Columbia School

Originating from the United States in the 1940s, the Columbia School provides one of the earliest schools of thought on voting behaviour. Prominent studies were led by sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, published in *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948) and *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954). The Columbia School asserted that an individual's voting behaviour can be largely explained by social characteristics. Specifically, attitudes may be shaped by an individual's group membership, such as their religious group, socio-economic status, and their family. These attitudes remain fixed throughout the life course. Each group places a particular 'pressure' on an individual, leading them to vote for one party over another. For instance, Lazarsfeld et al. (1948:56) note, "the Protestant vote allied to the Republicans and the Catholic vote more strongly Democratic" while "individuals on the higher [socio-economic status] levels tended to vote Republican and their poorer neighbors [sic] to vote Democratic". Scholars of the Columbia School argued that these social characteristics – labelled as the "Index of Political Predispositions" (IPP) – were influential in determining the outcome of the 1940 US presidential election.

Scholars of the Columbia School argue that individuals may reside in multiple social groups and, as a result, their voting behaviour may be subject to multiple pressures. These pressures are often complementary, pulling a voter towards one end of the political spectrum. However, their findings indicated individuals may be subject to cross-pressure, which occurs when an individual is a member of social groups with conflicting norms and

values. The result of these conflicting norms may lead an individual to support two different parties at the same time. For instance, an individual may be of Protestant faith and of a lower socio-economic status, causing them to lean Republican on the basis of their religious affiliation and Democratic on the basis of their class position. Consequently, this may delay an individual's final decision on vote choice or may lead to non-voting altogether.

Additionally, scholars of the Columbia School argue that the emphasis of social networks is reinforced through what they term the 'two-step flow' of communication (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). They argue that media exposure is limited in influencing individual vote choice. They assert that, instead, active media consumers within social groups – "opinion leaders" (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948:49) – will first digest information from the mass media, and will then disseminate the information to less active members in their social groups. The authors do not mention gender in their analysis of social networks, and thus assume a level of homogeneity among voters by implying that all voters will respond in to cues the same way.

Although gender is scarcely mentioned in studies emanating from the Columbia School, Lazarsfeld et al.'s (1948) study did find several sex differences in political attitudes and behaviour. Specifically, they find evidence that women are less interested in politics than men. They go on to explain that an individual's lack of interest led to non-voting among all respondents – regardless of their education levels, socio-economic status, religious affiliation or age. The only exception, they find, is sex. They state that "sex is the only personal characteristic which affects non-voting, even if the effect is held constant" (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948:48). They go on to explain that:

"Men are better citizens but women are more reasoned: if they are not interested, they do not vote...If a woman is not interested, she just feels that there is no reason why she should vote. A man, however, is under more social

pressure and will therefore go to the polls even if he is not “interested” in the events of the campaign” (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948:48-49).

There are, however, several issues with the ways that Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) reach this conclusion. Firstly, Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) fail to discuss other possible reasons as to why women may be less likely to vote than men. While some women may be less politically interested than men, which may contribute to non-voting, other factors may also deter women from voting. In systems with low descriptive representation of women, for instance, women may feel politically alienated and may therefore be less likely to participate in politics (Karp and Banducci, 2008; Reingold and Harrell, 2010; Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2006).

Secondly, Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) only control for ‘interest’ in their examination of non-voting between men and women. In doing so, this overlooks other factors that might be driving the gender gap, as well as other factors that might interact with interest levels, such as education or income – variables that are commonly cited as influencing political participation (Anderson and Baramendi, 2008; Van Deth and Elff, 2004; Mayer, 2011).

Finally, Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) directly equate voting with political interest. Though voting may indeed demonstrate a sign of political interest for some voters, the latter does not necessarily indicate the former. Non-voters may be politically interested, but may choose to express this interest in ways other than voting. Moreover, men and women may hold different definitions as to what constitutes political interest. Greenstein (1965), for instance, found that girls scored higher than boys on measures of ‘citizen duty’ and ‘political efficacy’, but they perceive these attributes as ‘moral’ rather than ‘political’.

The Michigan model

Arguably more influential on the study of voting than theories from the Columbia School, studies from the Michigan School set to shape and define the subsequent research

agenda on voting behaviour. While theories from the Columbia School argued that individual vote choice remains fixed throughout the life course, such theories could not explain short-term shifts in individual vote choice. In light of this, Campbell et al. (1960) sought to explain how fluctuations in vote choice could occur without any change in one's social influences. Accordingly, they developed the Michigan model, which highlighted the impact of long-term and short-term variables on vote choice (Campbell et al., 1960).

In *The American Voter* (1960), Campbell et al. suggested that individual voting behaviour is a culmination of *ultimate* causes – such as socio-demographic factors – and *proximate* causes, such as issues and candidates. They conceptualise their model as a 'funnel of causality' (Figure 2.1). In this sense, the variables that affect voting behaviour are interrelated and can be visualised as part of a chain. The basis of individual vote choice begins with long-term factors, such as socio-demographic characteristics or party identification. Campbell et al. (1960) assert that party identification is developed in the formative years of one's life and tends to remain stable throughout the life course. Gradually, more proximate variables may influence the decision-making process, occasionally leading to a change in vote choice. These may include an individual's perception of a candidate or party, party policies on offer, or issues of importance to the individual. Although such factors may lead to a change in vote choice, party identification will remain constant. Campbell et al. (1960) argue that long-term factors influence and shape voters' attitudes towards issues, candidates and parties.

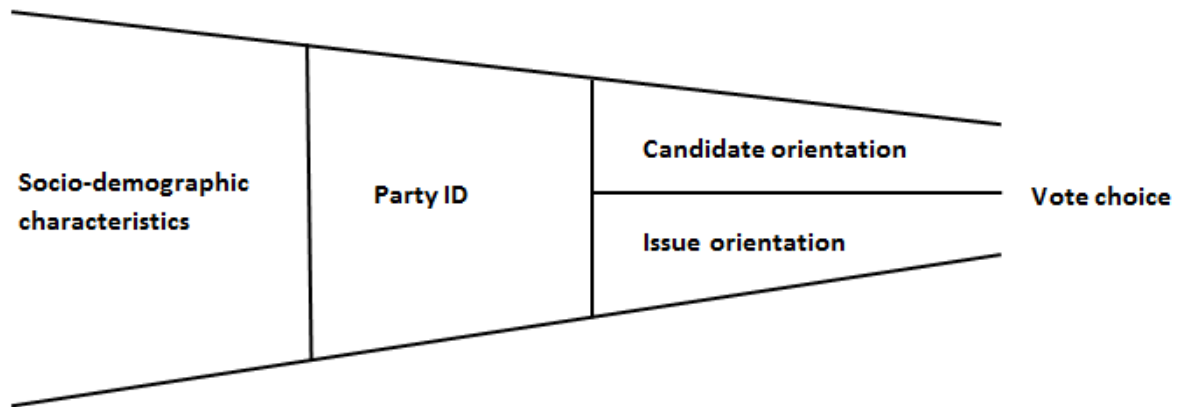


Figure 2.1. Adaptation of Campbell et al.’s (1960) ‘Funnel of causality’

Campbell et al. (1960:121) argue that party identification has the strongest impact on vote formation, finding that short-term factors had little influence. They claim that issues rarely influenced vote choice, because “many people know the existence of few if any of the major issues of policy” (Campbell et al., 1960:170). Parties and candidates must also differ on the policies that they present to the electorate, in order for voters to be presented with a clear choice. Without this, Campbell et al. (1960:179) claimed, the issue can have “no meaningful bearing on partisan choice”. The Michigan model has gone on to influence traditional works on British voting behaviour, such as Butler and Stokes’ *Political Change in Britain* (1974). Following on from the work of Campbell et al. (1960), Butler and Stokes (1974) emphasise the role of long-term factors on voting behaviour, arguing that parental class and socialisation – which in turn shape party identification – are more influential on vote choice than short-term factors.

Crucially, Campbell et al. make little mention of sex. Where sex is mentioned in the authors’ analysis, it is largely discussed in the context of political participation and political efficacy. Campbell et al. (1960:484) find that the turnout rate is around 10% lower for women than men. Examining these differences further, the authors find that the effects of education are steeper for women than men: they find little sex differences in turnout among those who

are highly educated, but significant effects among those with lower education rates, with women in this category being less likely than men to vote. Additionally, the authors find that sex differences in turnout are largest at the older ages, with older women being less likely than older men to vote (Campbell et al., 1960:486). They suggest that this age difference may be because women in this age category were raised in a time before the franchise was extended to women, and that these attitudes have remained among this generation. Further, they find that mothers of young children are less likely to vote than fathers of young children regardless of education level, and thus claim that “the presence of young children requiring constant attention serves as a barrier to the voting act” (Campbell et al., 1960:488). However, this conclusion overlooks the fact that those caring for young children – the majority of whom are women – may be less inclined to vote if, for instance, childcare issues do not feature in mainstream political discussions. As such, this presents a need to establish what the policy offer to women is, and whether women respond to policy offers at elections.

Similar to studies of the Columbia school, the Michigan school (Campbell et al. 1960:485) cite traditional sex roles as an explanation for sex differences in turnout, claiming that according to their female interviewees, it is their husbands who take an interest in political issues. In many ways, this reflects the authors’ tendencies to refer to women in a passive sense – often as ‘wives’ or ‘mothers’ rather than as independent agents. The authors find that while women are just as likely to display a sense of partisan loyalty and citizen duty, women have lower levels of political efficacy than men (Campbell., 1960:489-90). Campbell et al. speculate that this sense of lower efficacy is because women defer to their husbands on political issues – a claim that, as feminist critiques highlight, remains untested in their analysis (Campbell, 2006). Similar to accounts of the Columbia School, the authors do not explore other reasons as to why women are more likely to display lower levels of political efficacy which, *inter alia*, excludes why single women may feel less attachment towards the political system.

Campbell et al.'s analysis of gender differences in vote choice is towards the vague. After controlling for social characteristics, the authors find little evidence of a US gender gap. However, critiques of *The American Voter* point out that this conclusion may mask motivational differences in vote choice (Campbell, 2006). In other words, various demographic groups of women may vote for one candidate or party, but their reasons for doing so may differ to the rest of the general population.

The Michigan model has since been challenged by partisan dealignment theorists. They argue that ties between the electorate and parties have loosened, particularly as a result of class dealignment and a rise of multi-party politics across Western democracies since the 1970s (Nie, Verba and Petrocik, 1979; see also Dalton, 1996). The combination of partisan and class dealignment, they argue, has led to a more volatile electorate, in which more voters are "up for grabs" (Crewe, 1984:211). Scholars such as Nie, Verba and Petrocik (1979) emphasise the role of short-term factors – specifically a rise in issue-based voting – in influencing vote choice among a free-floating electorate. Nie et al. (1979) expand on this, adding that issues such as the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and Watergate affairs played a prominent part in swinging party loyalty during the 1970s. Additionally, they critique partisan identification models on the grounds that political issues, and the political context of the election more widely, matters (Nie et al., 1979). This presents a need to examine the context of elections in more detail. In addition to partisan dealignment theories, prominent critiques of partisan identification models have derived from rational choice theorists. The chapter expands upon these theories in the following section.

The rational choice model

The final traditional explanation of voting behaviour discussed in this chapter is the rational choice model. Many rational choice models of voting behaviour stem from the works of Downs (1957) and Key (1966) (see Fiorina, 1981; Franklin, 1984; Kramer, 1971). Although

these accounts differ in detail, they emphasise the economy and the political context of elections, in which voters will weigh up their financial circumstances and future pledges in accordance with their self-interests.

Much of the rational choice literature can be traced back to the works of Anthony Downs. In *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), Downs proposed a spatial (or 'positional') model of party competition, based on the work of Hotelling (1929). In spatial models, Downs explains, voters will align themselves with parties that are closest to their policy preferences, so as to maximise their utility. Downs outlines the example of government intervention in the economy, which can be viewed on a left-right scale: to the left of the scale is full government control of the economy, and to the right of the scale is no government control. Each voter is located at a specific point on the scale, and will align themselves with the candidate or party that is most closely aligned to their own position. Voters may also weigh up alternative candidates, in order to calculate the best way to maximise their utility. Implicit in Downs' argument is the notion that individuals vote according to future conditions (otherwise known as 'prospective voting'). As Downs (1957:138) states:

"Each citizen estimates the utility income from government action he expects each party would provide him if it were in power in the forthcoming election period, that is, he first estimates the utility income Party A would provide him, then the income Party B would provide, and so on."

Unlike the Michigan model, partisanship does not play a role in voting behaviour: rather, individuals merely vote in accordance with the benefits they expect to gain in the future. At the same time, parties – which are distributed across an ideological spectrum – will then converge to the median voter in order to obtain the maximum number of votes.

Alternative explanations to spatial theories of party equilibrium have focused on valence models, pioneered by Stokes. Stokes (1963) argues that voters assess party performance and party competence according to goals with a common consensus – known as ‘valence issues’. Valence issues could include, for example, economic growth, low unemployment, or high-quality public services. Voters evaluate candidates and parties on the basis of their performance and competence, and then vote for the party they believe to be the most competent at delivering these common goals and outcomes. Valence models challenge the argument put forward in spatial theories that voters and parties are distributed within a policy space; rather, they suggest that there is no spatial competition on consensus issues. Valence models of voting have been advocated in Britain. Using the British Election Studies, Clarke et al. (2009; 2011) and Green (2007) find evidence to support increasing levels of valence voting during British elections.

Nearly a decade after Downs published *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), Key developed his theory of ‘retrospective voting’. In *The Responsible Electorate* (1966), Key argues that voters cast their ballot based on their perceptions of the past economic performance of incumbents, rather than future conditions, as Downs suggests. Key (1966:61) elucidates, “Voters may reject what they have known, or they may approve what they have known. They are not likely to be attracted in great numbers by promises that are novel or unknown”. In other words, voters are primarily concerned with outcomes, rather than pledges or promises cast by candidates. Voters thus act as “rational gods of vengeance and reward” (Key, 1966:7), by either rewarding governments based on their past economic performance, or sanctioning incumbents by ejecting them from office in favour of alternative candidates. Therefore, he argues that governments presiding over economic growth will be re-elected. Key terms this the ‘reward-punishment’ model.

Building on the work of Key, Fiorina (1981) examined the theory of economic voting in the US, developing his own model to test voting behaviour. Informed by two sets of panel studies, he finds support in favour of Key's (1966) theory of retrospective voting, suggesting that voters evaluate the past outcomes of government policy, and subsequently hold the government to account in their vote. Here, voters do not require a comprehensive understanding of policies, but rather they are able to use cues in their environment – such as rising unemployment levels, whether wages increase, or whether the country is engaged in war – as a rough proxy to determine whether to reward or punish incumbents. Fiorina (1981:84) describes party identification as a “running tally of retrospective evaluations of party promises and performance”. In this sense, party identification is constantly updated in line with voters' reactions to new information.

Fiorina goes beyond Key's argument to suggest that individuals vote retrospectively on policies that extend outside of the economy. For instance, Democrats in the 1960s blamed the party for its handling of issues including the Vietnam War and Civil Rights, and consequently moved away from the party. Yet Fiorina (1981:200) also stresses that voters can easily shift into prospective evaluations, stating that “future expectations” have a “strong direct impact on the vote”. Thus Fiorina draws on the work of both Key and Downs. He states that, “Like Key we should view the mass public as concerned with the ends of government policy more than with means...But like Downs we should view the voter as looking ahead and choosing between alternative futures” (Fiorina, 1981:198). In essence, Fiorina posits that individuals will base their vote on expectations of their future conditions, which are guided by their evaluations of policies that have been implemented. Fiorina states that “In order to ascertain whether the incumbents have performed poorly or well, citizens need only calculate the changes in their own welfare” (Fiorina, 1981:5). Fiorina gives examples of jobs being lost in a recession, a rise in neighbourhood crime, or an increase in pollution as indicators that can be used to measure individual changes in welfare. This raises

a need to explore both retrospective and prospective policies in voting behaviour, as well as policies outside of the economy.

An important caveat to economic voting, however, is that institutional ambiguity may hide government responsibility for policy-making. Indeed, scholars have suggested that the effects of economic voting are conditioned by political institutions. Powell and Whitten (1993) argue that it is easier for the voter to attribute either blame to governments that are unified (such as single-party, majority governments), than governments where the lines of responsibility are less clear (such as coalition governments). More broadly, they suggest that complex institutional structures, in which there is little clarity of responsibility, compromise the voter's ability to hold the government to account (Powell and Whitten, 1993). Elsewhere, others argue that additional factors diminish government responsibility for economic outcomes, such as fragmented party systems (Anderson, 2000), divided government (where power is divided between the executive and the legislature, such as in presidential systems) (Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci, 2013), strong committee systems (Powell and Whitten, 1993), and decentralised federal structures (Duch and Stevenson, 2005). Another strand of argument suggests that a range of international constraints exist that reduce government responsibility for economic outcomes, such as international trade, globalisation, and economic integration (Duch and Stevenson, 2005; 2008; Hellwig, 2001; Kayser, 2007).

Moreover, scholars have argued that economic evaluations may be influenced by group-based heuristics (Brady and Sniderman, 1985; Helgason and Mérola, 2016; Wilson, 2012). Group-based heuristics suggest that in forming economic judgments, voters will look to the prosperity of individuals within their social group, rather than use the national economy or their own financial situation as an indicator for their financial wellbeing (Wilson, 2012:550-1). Here, 'social group' may relate to demographic groups such as those based on race (Dawson, 1994; Kaufmann, 2003; Sanchez and Masouka, 2010) or social class (Gay,

Hochschild and White, 2016). The underlying arguments of group-based heuristics are captured in the work of Dawson (1994), who introduced the notion of 'linked fate' to explain support for the Democrats among African Americans in the United States. According to Dawson (1994), linked fate emerges from shared lived experiences, such as oppression or discrimination, which leads to individuals developing a sense of identification with others in their social group, as well as a belief that individual prospects are inextricably tied to the group as a whole. Linked fate has been used as an explanation as to why African American voters have remained largely cohesive in their voting behaviour, despite economic polarisation (Dawson, 1994; Sanchez and Vargas, 2016). Overall, these studies illustrate that the relationship between economic evaluations and vote choice is neither simple nor straightforward and may be influenced by factors such institutional conditions or group-based evaluations. At the same time, however, these studies do not attempt to problematise gender. For instance, comparatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to examining whether institutional conditions or group-based evaluations mediate the link between policy and vote choice through a gendered lens.

Pocketbook and sociotropic voting

So far, this chapter has outlined a range of literature highlighting the importance of the economy in voting behaviour. However, a wide body of literature suggests voters use two different heuristics pertaining to the economy. The first is pocketbook voting, which maintains that voters will cast their ballot for the political candidate or party that has, or will, benefit them the most financially (Elinder, Jordahl and Poutvaara, 2015). At the same time, voters who have witnessed a loss in their personal financial situation will punish the government by ejecting them from office. According to Kinder and Kiewiet (1979:948), those "whose economic fortunes have soured [will] vote most heavily against the incumbent party. The party in power stumbles during recessions because there are more voters encountering

economic difficulty in their private lives". Pocketbook motivations assume that individuals will examine their personal finances in a Downsian manner, by evaluating whether they are – or will be – financially better off. As Downs (1957:36) explains, "each citizen casts his vote for the party he believes will provide him with more benefits than any other".

The second heuristic is sociotropic voting, which has typically been contrasted with pocketbook voting. Sociotropic voting holds that voters may blame or reward incumbent governments on the basis of economic performance (Key, 1966; Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979; Fiorina, 1981). The theory of sociotropic voting suggests that if the national economy is performing well, for instance, then prototypic sociotropic voters will be inclined to vote for the incumbent party and keep them in office. On the other hand, if the national economy is performing badly, sociotropic voters may punish the incumbent party by voting them out of office. Sociotropic voters will prioritise the health of the national economy over their own personal finances. For example, voters with higher incomes may choose to support a party advocating higher taxes, if they believe the money raised will be put towards public services.

Studies on economic voting have traditionally argued in favour of the sociotropic hypothesis. In their analysis of the 1974 and 1976 Congressional elections, Kinder and Kiewiet (1979) find that voters' personal experience with unemployment and dissatisfaction with their declining income did not lead them to vote against the incumbent Democrats. Rather, individuals were more likely to base their vote on general business conditions and the relative competence of the two major parties to manage national economic problems (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979:495). Research on economic voting has also extended beyond the US, with an emergence of comparative studies. A prominent comparative analysis of economic voting across Europe by Lewis-Beck (1988) finds no clear evidence of pocketbook voting, but finds clear effects of sociotropic voting. Meanwhile, in a pooled survey analysis of 13 European countries, Anderson (2000) finds evidence of retrospective sociotropic

heuristics, but no evidence of pocketbook voting behaviour. Duch and Stevenson (2008) similarly find strong evidence of retrospective sociotropic voting in their large comparative study of 165 countries. Key studies on economic voting have also been undertaken in Britain. Harrop (1988) argues that the 1983 Conservative victory could be largely attributed to growing public optimism about the national economy, which he suggests illustrates the relationship between the economy and government popularity. Furthermore, Whiteley (1986) finds evidence of a relationship in Britain between national unemployment, inflation and the devaluation of currency, and the level of support for the incumbent party over the opposition party in the polls.

Despite the widespread dismissal of pocketbook voting, a recent comparative strand of literature has emerged to suggest that personal financial circumstances have a significant effect on electoral behaviour (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016; Tilley, Neundorf, Hobolt, 2018; Elinder et al., 2015; Talving, 2017). Specifically, this literature suggests that voters are more responsive to direct government policies that can be easily attributed to government, rather than those that are more difficult to pin on the government. In essence, while traditional accounts of pocketbook voting suggest that voters will use financial indicators – such as a drop in earnings – to cast their ballot, recent literature argues that the measures individuals use to assess their financial situation are closely linked with government policy. Tilley et al. (2018:556) expand on this, noting that “government welfare transfers increasing or decreasing make a substantial difference to party choice, whereas changes to earnings are much less consequential”. In this sense, voters respond to government policies affecting their own welfare and will then adjust their political preferences accordingly (ibid.).

Recent studies, largely based on quasi-experimental methods, have outlined cases where policies have directly influenced vote choice. In Sweden, Elinder et al.’s (2015) study finds that, after the Swedish Social Democrats had proposed reductions in financial support

to parents with young children in the run-up to the 1994 Swedish election, the party performed badly among this group. Yet at the 1998 election, after the Social Democrats promised to place a cap on childcare costs, the party fared well and raised its vote share among parents with young children. Bechtel and Hainmueller's (2011) study shows that recipients of disaster relief provided to those affected by the 2002 Elbe flooding in Germany increased vote share for the incumbent party in the regions affected. Pop-Eleches and Pop-Eleches (2012) find that after the Romanian government program that distributed coupons with a value of 200 Euros to low-income families towards the purchase of a computer, program beneficiaries became more supportive of the incumbent Romanian government. Hobolt and De Vries (2016) find that individuals adversely affected by the economic crisis were more likely to defect from pro-European to Eurosceptic parties at the 2014 European Parliament elections. Elsewhere, in her study of 24 European countries, Talving (2017) finds that government decisions to pursue fiscal austerity have led to lower incumbent support across Europe. However, these studies do not examine gender. Since redistributive policies are gendered, as women comprise the majority of welfare recipients (Erie and Rein, 1988), this omission of gender is of particular importance. Taking these findings forward, these studies suggest the need to explore debates surrounding sociotropic and pocketbook policies through a gendered lens.

Over time, a prolific literature on economic voting has emerged: Lewis-Beck and Stegmeier (2007) estimate that there were at the time already around 400 studies on economic voting alone. Crucially, however, few rational choice studies have examined economic voting through a gendered lens. Traditional accounts of economic voting perceive the 'voter' as a homogeneous, monolithic entity, giving little regard to gendered and demographic variations of economic voting behaviour (see for example Downs, 1957; Fiorina, 1981; Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979, Lewis-Beck, 1988). Expanding on this, Cudd (2001:403) objects to rational choice accounts on the grounds that they are androcentric, as

they assume “that the experiences, biology, and social roles of males or men are the norm and that of females or women a deviation from the norm”. Downs (1957:7), for instance, bases his model of voting on the “*homo politicus*”, which he defines as ““the average man” in the electorate, the “rational citizen” in our model democracy”, while Fiorina (1981:10) refers to the average voter as a “fairly rational fellow”. Much like earlier schools of voting behaviour, where traditional accounts of economic voting do mention women, they refer to them passively and as a sub-category of men. As well as referring to women in a passive sense, some traditional accounts of economic voting go further and portray women as irrational. This is perhaps best depicted in Downs’ discussion of voter utility, in which he states:

“Let us assume a certain man prefers Party A for political reasons, but his wife has a tantrum whenever he fails to vote for Party B. It is perfectly rational *personally* for this man to vote for Party B if preventing his wife’s tantrums is more important to him than having A win instead of B” (Downs, 1957:7; emphasis in original).

Besides the discernible sexism imbued in these accounts, viewing the average voter as male and assuming masculine norms overlooks the possibility of heterogeneity within voting behaviour. If gender differences in economic voting exist, then pooling women and men together might underestimate effects.

Developing a gendered approach

Later studies have since examined economic voting through a gendered lens (Welch and Hibbing, 1992; Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler, 1998; Clarke, Stewart, Ault and Elliott, 2005). Such studies explore the differences in men and women’s evaluations of the economy, and how – or whether – they affect vote choice. The findings typically contend that men are more

likely to vote according to their pocketbooks, whereas women are more likely to vote according to sociotropic heuristics (Welch and Hibbing, 1992; Chaney et al., 1998; Clarke et al., 2005). The arguments within these studies largely stem from an 'ethic of care' literature, suggesting that women have been socialised to display an ethic of care and compassion towards others (Gilligan, 1982), and as such, they are less likely to vote according to self-interest. In contrast, men have been socialised to display an 'ethic of rights', which views them as separate and autonomous (Gilligan, 1982:100). However, such studies are largely US-based, with few analyses focusing on Britain (for exceptions, see Campbell, 2006). Given the vast changes in women's socio-economic status in Britain over time, studies on gender and economic voting are worth re-visiting. Moreover, given the implementation of fiscal retrenchment measures in Britain since 2010, there is a clear case to re-examine gender and economic voting in a context of austerity.

Theories of gender and voting: A focus on socio-economic factors and structural change

So far, this chapter has outlined longstanding theories of voting behaviour and has highlighted their oversight of gender. Having reviewed traditional accounts of voting behaviour and contextualised the research question, the chapter now moves on to discuss theories of gender and voting. In so doing, it suggests that accounts of gender and voting have overlooked the potential impact of policies – and the broader political context – on women's voting behaviour in Britain.

The oversight of gender in traditional accounts of voting behaviour has since been addressed by a range of gender and politics scholars. Studies on women's voting behaviour have typically emphasised the role of long-term structural change and socio-economic factors in explaining gender gaps (Emmenegger and Manow, 2014; Inglehart and Norris, 2000; 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006; Manza and Brooks, 1998). Gender gaps appear when there are differences in vote choice between men and women. Traditionally, women

in Britain – and Western Europe more widely - were more likely than men to vote for parties on the right (a phenomenon known as the ‘traditional gender gap’) (Campbell et al., 1960; Norris, 1999). So pronounced had this gender gap been, that had women never won the right to vote in 1918, the outcome of an all-male electorate would have led to a Labour victory in every British general election between 1945 and 1997 (Mattinson, 2014). Scholars have argued that women’s support for parties on the right could largely be explained by women’s greater pronounced religiosity (Duverger, 1955; Emmenegger and Manow, 2014; Studlar, McAllister and Hayes, 1998), as well as their lower labour force participation than men’s (Manza and Brooks, 1998; Studlar et al., 1998). Women were more likely to support the Conservative Party, given the Party’s association with the Church of England as well as its emphasis on the role of the family, whereas men would largely favour Labour, due to the Party’s ties with trade unions and traditional heavy industries (Norris, 1996).

Since the 1980s, however, the gender gap has gradually narrowed (see Table 2.1). This ‘dealignment’ phase was largely explained by the breakdown of traditional class cleavages (Norris, 1999; Rose and McAllister, 1990), as well as growing modernisation and secularisation (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Following the 1987 General Election, Rose and McAllister (1990:51) concluded that:

“Notwithstanding traditional theories of women favouring the Conservatives and feminist theories indicating that women ought to vote Labour, gender has no influence upon voting in Britain today. The reason is straightforward: on matters that are salient to voting, men and women tend to share similar political values. On most major political issues men and women divide similarly – along lines of party or class, not gender.”

Table 2.1. Vote by gender (%) in Britain, 1945-92 (adapted from Norris, 1993)

Year	Conservative Party		Labour Party		Liberal (Democrat) Party		Gender gap
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
1945	35	43	51	45	11	12	14
1950	41	45	46	43	13	12	7
1951	46	54	51	42	3	4	17
1955	47	55	51	42	2	3	17
1959	45	51	48	43	7	6	11
1964	40	43	47	47	12	10	4
1966	36	41	54	51	9	8	8
1970	43	48	48	42	7	8	11
1974	37	39	42	40	18	21	3
1974	35	37	45	40	16	20	8
1979	45	49	38	38	15	13	3
1983	46	45	30	28	23	26	2
1987	44	44	31	31	24	23	1
1992	46	48	37	34	17	18	6

A positive gender gap indicates that women are more Conservative than men. A negative gender gap indicates that women are more Labour. Gender gap = women (Conservative % - Labour %) - men (Conservative - Labour %). Source: Gallup Polls, 1945-59, BES, 1964-92.

Since then, several studies have suggested that a ‘modern gender gap’ – in which women are to the left of men in their vote choice - has now emerged across advanced Western democracies (Abendschon and Steinmetz, 2014; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Giger, 2009). In *Rising Tide* (2003), Inglehart and Norris examine men and women’s voting behaviour across 11 post-industrial societies from 1981 to 1995. They find that across these years, women were more left-leaning than men in some countries, while in other countries they were more right-wing than men in their vote choice. However, they find consistent evidence that the propensity for women to lean towards centre-right parties weakens over time (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Evidence of a modern gender gap has also been found in more recent elections, where women have been found to lean to the left of men in nearly all countries across Western Europe (Giger, 2009; Abendschon and Steinmetz, 2014). However, such studies have found that gender realignment has not occurred at the same pace, as

gender gaps vary cross-nationally in their size and direction. For instance, Abendschon and Steinmetz (2014) find that in many post-communist countries a traditional gender gap still remains, despite women entering the labour market in high rates.

The modern gender gap has been found to be a product of gender-age differences in vote choice (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Shorrocks, 2016). In their cross-national study of vote choice across Western democracies, Inglehart and Norris (2003) argue that it is especially younger women who are more left wing than their male counterparts or older generations in their political values and orientations. Pre-war generations, meanwhile, still display the 'traditional gender gap', in which older women are to the right of their male counterparts (ibid). Norris (1999) labels this the 'gender-generation gap'. As generational replacement occurs, older cohorts are gradually replaced with younger cohorts, who are more left-wing in their political orientations (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). It is important to note, however, that evidence of a gender-generation gap did not appear in British elections until 2015 (Shorrocks, 2017).

Supporters of the modern gender gap argue that the propensity for women to vote for parties on the left is largely a product of modernisation, where structural factors – such as women's increased participation in the labour force and increased higher educational opportunities – alter women's socio-economic positions and contribute towards their left-wing views (Giger, 2009; Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Women are currently over-represented in lower socio-economic positions than men, experiencing pay disparities, higher levels of poverty, and lower labour market participation rates (D'Arcy, 2017; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Women's Budget Group, 2018a). As higher numbers of women enter the labour market and education, and women thus become more economically independent, it is argued that their experience will enable them to see beyond traditional sex roles and to adopt a particular set of interests that are different to men's (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef

and Lin, 2004; Carroll, 1988; Klein, 1984; Manza and Brooks, 1998). In entering the labour force and higher education, Klein (1984) argues that women's social context and social networks will also change which, in turn, will influence their political values. Paid employment may also expose women to gender inequalities as a result of horizontal and vertical segregation (ibid.). These inequalities may concern issues relating to childcare, sexual harassment or equal pay, which have typically been addressed by parties on the left (Klein, 1984; Manza and Brooks, 1998). Using survey data from 11 US elections since 1952, Manza and Brooks (1998) find that women's changing rates of labour force participation explained the gender gap. Carroll (1988) finds that professional, university-educated and higher-income women diverged most strongly from men in their vote choice and presidential approval ratings. In essence, she suggests that women's greater economic autonomy from men will produce gender gaps.

Relatedly, scholars have argued that the presence of children contributes towards the modern gender gap. In Britain, having children was linked with increased support for the Labour Party among women voters (Campbell, 2006). The propensity for women with children to vote for parties on the left has been reflected across other countries, also shown in studies in the United States (Elder and Greene, 2012; 2008). Given that women undertake a greater proportion of unpaid childcare than men, Howell and Day (2000) find that having children has a greater effect on women's policy preferences than men's. Banducci, Elder, Greene and Stevens (2016) examine parenthood and political preferences in a European context. Though they find that women with children hold more traditional values, they find that women with children consistently desire greater government services, and that this is largely driven by their greater share of unpaid childcare (Banducci et al., 2016:762)

Additionally, declining marriage rates (and rising divorce rates) are also believed contribute to the modern gender gap (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004; Carroll, 1988; Inglehart

and Norris, 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006). Plissner (1983) finds evidence of a “marital gap” in the United States, in which married people are more likely to lean conservative (see also Weisberg, 1987). This trend has been found in studies elsewhere. Examining the gender gap in nine Western European countries, Edlund, Haider and Pande (2005) argue that marriage encourages resource sharing between spouses, and as a result, their political preferences align. Thus, higher levels of unmarried women contribute towards the modern gender gap (Edlund and Pande, 2002). Edlund and Pande (2002) explain that single women, including divorcees, tend to have lower incomes relative to married women, which in turn leads them to become more supportive of parties on the left (see also Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004). As Carroll (1988:244) notes, “[u]nlike economically independent managerial and professional women, many of the unmarried women who are economically independent by virtue of their marital status are clustered near the bottom of the socio-economic structure”. Box-Steffensmeier et al. (2004) argue that growing divorce rates leaves women particularly economically vulnerable. Elsewhere, Inglehart and Norris (2003:91) suggest that women who are married will have different lifestyles to those who are divorced or single, which may influence their perceptions about women’s roles in the family and their attitudes to family policy. They state that the same will also apply for women who have children (ibid.).

Meanwhile, Studlar et al. (1998) find that trade union membership influences vote choice in Britain, Australia, and the United States. They find that trade union membership is associated with voting for left-wing parties (ibid.), which may be due to their ties with organised labour. Since men were traditionally more likely to be unionised than women, this partly explained their greater propensity to vote for the Labour Party (see also Norris, 1996). After controlling for differences in trade union membership, they find that the gender gap reduces in size (Studlar et al., 1998:793). Yet men and women’s union membership rates have changed over time. Heavy industries, which once formed the basis of union activity, have declined since the 1950s (Walby, 2009a). These industries were traditionally dominated

by male workers. The result of industrial change has meant that the majority of union workers are now employed in the public sector – an area in which women form the majority of employees (Walby, 2009a). As women’s labour force patterns have changed and women’s mobilisation in trade unions has grown, scholars have argued that this has increased the propensity for women to vote for parties on the left (Manza and Brooks, 1998; Studlar et al., 1998).

Finally, other scholars have argued that declining religiosity is another factor in explaining the gender gap. Over time, growing secularisation has meant that younger cohorts are now less religious compared to older cohorts (Voas and Crocket, 2005). Emmenegger and Manow (2014) find evidence to support declining religiosity, particularly among women. In this sense, shifts in women’s vote choice cannot only be explained by their greater attachment to parties on the left, but their *de-attachment* from centre-right parties. Examining vote choice across four Western European countries from the 1970s to the 2000s, Emmenegger and Manow (2014) find that once they control for religiosity, the gender gap in political preferences substantially decreases. Accordingly, they argue that religiosity accounted for much of the old gender gap and inhibits the emergence of a new gender gap. Crucially, they highlight the strategic positioning of parties. They explain that parties that traditionally fared well with religious (predominantly female) voters could previously afford to ignore women’s socio-economic interests. However, as a result of growing secularisation, they contend that women have become "socio-economic swing voters" (Emmenegger and Manow, 2014:167), where parties have now had to cater to women’s socio-economic interests in order to secure their vote. Though they do not test this claim, they conclude by stating that further studies on women’s policy preferences and vote choice should explore contextual factors (Emmenegger and Manow, 2014:185). Therefore, this thesis seeks to address the lack of contextual factors cited in previous research.

In short, accounts of women's voting behaviour – and the gender gap more widely – have largely focused on structural trends in explaining differences between men and women's vote choice, overlooking economic theories of voting behaviour. These long-term factors primarily relate to women's participation in the labour force, education levels, socio-economic status, trade union membership, religiosity, marital status, and children (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Inglehart and Norris (2003) explain that these structural shifts may produce, and interact with, cultural attitudes, which may have an independent effect on vote choice. Namely, they suggest that the breakdown of traditional division of labour leads to egalitarian attitudes and post-materialist values, such as freedom, self-expression and gender equality (Inglehart and Norris, 2003:91, see also Conover, 1988; Cook and Wilcox, 1991). This line of argument contends that structural trends occurring over time have led to generational differences in ideological self-placement; as population replacement occurs, women will be more likely to hold left-wing attitudes.

Taking the traditional accounts of voting and accounts of women's voting behaviour together, a gap becomes apparent. The traditional literature on voting behaviour has tended to overlook women or make incorrect assumptions about gender. Yet in focusing on structural trends, accounts of women's voting behaviour have overlooked traditional – mainly economic – theories of voting behaviour through which men tend to be analysed. Overall, the psephological literature lacks a clear understanding of how policy choices might affect women and incentivise either pocketbook or sociotropic voting. This obscures the question of whether women are in fact any different from men in their voting heuristics. Moreover, this presents a blind spot in terms of evaluating how mainstream explanations of voting might differ for women. The research presented within this thesis intends to fill this gap.

While the modern gender gap has been found in the United States and across many Western European countries, evidence of the modern gender gap in Britain has been scarce – despite modernisation and secularisation also occurring in Britain. Indeed, since the 1970s, British elections have shown that there is no longer a statistically significant aggregate level gender gap: in other words, overall, men and women in Britain are considered to vote in roughly the same way (Campbell, 2012; Campbell and Childs, 2008). However, the fact that the modern gender gap varies cross-nationally suggests that scholarly attention should be devoted to the political context in which elections are held. As illustrated above, accounts on gender and voting behaviour have primarily relied on long-term structural factors in explaining intra-sex and inter-sex differences in voting. While structural and socio-economic factors may contribute towards recent trends in women’s voting behaviour, they only offer a partial explanation. In the United States – where a significant gender gap appears – scholars have found that even after controlling for socio-economic and demographic factors such as income, education, occupation, race, and age, a significant gender gap still remains (Cook and Wilcox, 1991; Fite, Genest and Wilcox, 1990; Howell and Day, 2000; Miller, 1988; Stoper, 1989). Given these findings, Howell and Day (2000:860) conclude that “class stratification does not tell the whole story of the gender gap”. More importantly, given that a gender-generation gap emerged for the first time in Britain in 2015 suggests that this phenomenon may be related to the specific context of this election. In short, such accounts overlook the potential impact of policy – as well as the wider economic context – in analysing women’s voting behaviour. Studying the political context may not only explain differences in women’s voting behaviour cross-nationally, but may also explain fluctuations in women’s vote choice between elections in a national context.

Moreover, existing accounts of women's voting behaviour overlook the salience of issues within specific elections. Elections where childcare appears as a salient issue (such as the 2010 British General Election) might therefore yield larger gender gaps if it is an issue that is prioritised more strongly by women relative to men. Specifically, they might yield gaps between those who are of a childbearing age, and those who are not. At the same time, gender gaps (and gender-age gaps) may also appear when political parties differ substantially in their gendered policy agendas. If voters believe that there is a clear choice between political parties at elections, gender gaps may become more pronounced. In essence, the policy context differs across elections. The need to further explore the political context in analyses of gender and vote choice has been outlined in literature elsewhere (Burns, 2007; Campbell, 2006; Emmenegger and Manow, 2014; Shorrocks, 2016).

While some studies have pointed towards the potential impact of policies on women's vote choice, this link is often speculative and untested (see Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Manza and Brooks, 1998). Indeed, existing literature on women's voting behaviour suggest that structural changes – such as increased levels of women entering higher education and growing secularisation - will lead to different political attitudes and policy priorities between men and women (inter-sex differences) as well as among different groups of women (intra-sex differences) (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Klein, 1984; Manza and Brooks, 1998; Studlar et al., 1998). Underlying these arguments is the expectation that women will vote according to policies that personally affect them. According to Inglehart and Norris (2003:92):

“Women are often the prime beneficiaries of government services such as pensions and child care, as well as constituting many of the employees in professional, administrative, and service health work in the health care and educational sectors. Although some Labour, Socialist and Communist parties

retain traditional orientations toward the division of sex roles, these parties usually promote more egalitarian policies toward women”.

Similarly, Manza and Brooks’ (1998) study suggests that women in the United States are more likely to prioritise childcare policies since they undertake a greater relative share of unpaid childcare. Meanwhile, Box-Steffensmeier et al. (2004) contend that women who are more reliant on transfer payments and welfare services will prioritise welfare policy. They argue that “If women are more needy than men, personal self-interest should drive them (relative to men) disproportionately to the Democratic party, the party of the welfare state” (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004:521). In essence, these accounts imply that pocketbook heuristics motivate women’s vote choice. In order to provide a deeper insight into women’s voting behaviour, this link should be explored further.

Conceptualising ‘gendered policies’

So far, this chapter has argued that studies on (women’s) voting behaviour should consider both gender *and* policy. The question then arises as to what type of policies should be included when analysing the impact of gendered policies on women’s voting behaviour. Gendered policies are heterogeneous (Annesley, Gains and Engeli, 2015; Blofield and Haas, 2005; Mazur, 2002) and vary in executive attention between countries (Htun and Weldon, 2010; 2012; 2018) as well as over time (Annesley et al., 2015). The final section of this chapter thus considers how ‘gendered policies’ might be conceptualised, in order to determine how – or whether – they influence women’s vote choice. In doing so, it justifies the choice of policies that will be focused on throughout the thesis.

Scholars within the field of feminist policy have aimed to conceptualise gendered policies into a variety of frameworks (Gelb and Palley, 1982; Mazur, 2002; Htun and Weldon, 2010; 2018). One of the earliest frameworks was Gelb and Palley’s (1982) study, designed to

examine women's rights policies in the United States during the 1970s. In *Women and Public Policies* (1982), Gelb and Palley demarcate women's rights policies as either "role equity" or "role change" issues. They define role equity issues as those that extend the same rights to women that are enjoyed by other groups (namely men and minority groups) (Gelb and Palley, 1982). Role equity issues are regarded as uncontroversial, costing policy makers little in terms of votes. Meanwhile, role change issues are those that challenge women's traditional roles as mothers, wives and homemakers, advocating greater freedom and independence. Unlike those of role equity, role change issues are considered to garner considerable opposition, given that they challenge traditional family structures and values. Thus, role change policies, they contend, are less likely than role equity policies to be implemented. Gelb and Palley (1982) do not consider how women may respond to these policies in their vote choice. However, their study is particularly useful in drawing attention to nuance in considering gendered policy impacts.

Scholars have since branched out to study gendered policies comparatively. In *Theorizing Feminist Policy* (2002), Amy Mazur develops a comparative framework that can be used to examine policies relating to women in any country. Like Gelb and Palley's (1982) study, some of these policies address role equity, while some address role change. Mazur classifies eight major sub-sectors of feminist public policy: 'blueprint policy' (principles that governments use to outline feminist state action, such as the UK Gender Equality Duty 2007), political representation, equal employment, reconciliation, family law, reproductive rights, sexuality and violence, and public service delivery. Each policy area has different policy actors operating within, and will vary across countries (Mazur, 2002). While Mazur's framework provides a useful grounding for case studies on gender and policy, the framework omits the inclusion of welfare policy – a sub-sector that is highly gendered, given women's greater reliance on, and provision of, welfare services (Erie and Rein, 1988). As Orloff (1996:51) states, "the institutions of social provision – the set of social assistance and social insurance

programs, universal citizenship entitlements, and public services to which we refer as “the welfare state” – affect gender relations in a variety of ways”. Notwithstanding, Mazur’s (2002) approach provides a useful starting point upon which to analyse gendered policies, acknowledging their heterogeneous nature.

‘Class-based’ and ‘gender status’ policies

Building on Gelb and Palley’s (1982) and Mazur’s (2002) classifications of gender equality policy, Htun and Weldon (2010, 2018) develop their framework of ‘gender status’ and ‘class-based’ policies in order to explain cross-national variations in governmental uptake of gender equality policies. The first type of gendered policy that Htun and Weldon identify is ‘gender status’ (hereinafter ‘status’) policies. Status policies are based on the injustices and discrimination that women face *as women*. Globally, women face gender-based forms of discrimination and status subordination, such as sexual assault, domestic violence, objectification, disparagement in everyday life, exclusion from public and deliberative institutions, and fewer rights and protections of citizenship (Fraser, 2003). In England and Wales, 20% of women have experienced some form of sexual assault since the age of 16 (ONS, 2018a). Two women are killed each week by a current or former partner in England and Wales and, by March 2019, 1.6 million women had reported experiences of domestic abuse in the past year (ONS, 2019a). Women in Britain also witness status subordination in deliberative fora, in which they are under-represented: as it stands, women comprise 34% of MPs in Parliament and comprise 27% of Ministers in the Cabinet.

According to Htun and Weldon, status policies seek to alleviate these harms inflicted on women, and “attack those practices and values that constitute women as a lesser group vulnerable to violence, marginalisation, exclusion, and other injustices that prevent them from participating as peers in political and social life” (2018:11). In this sense, women face discrimination by virtue of their gender, rather than the fact that they may be a member of

another disadvantaged group (such as low-income, belonging to a sexual minority group, or belonging to an ethnic minority group). However, as women are divided along the lines of ethnicity, race, religion, class and sexuality, they experience status injustices in various ways (Crenshaw, 1989). Status policies may include those regarding women's bodily integrity, such as those that liberalise laws on abortion, contraception and those that deal with women's reproductive capacities (Htun and Weldon, 2018). They may also include policies that tackle violence against women, policies that aid women's representation in decision-making fora (such as gender quotas), legislation on equal treatment in the workplace, and reforms to family law (which shape the capacity for women to own or manage property, to work outside of their home, and grant women the freedom to marry or divorce) (ibid.).

The second type of gendered policy outlined by Htun and Weldon (2018) is 'class-based' policies. Class-based policies are centred on challenging the inequalities that arise from the sexual division of labour, such as pensions or childcare. Broadly speaking, they are based on state-market relations. Yet gendered policies may also go beyond ensuring equality between men and women. As Htun and Weldon (2018) note, class-based policies "intend to promote more equal access to resources among women of different social classes" (Htun and Weldon, 2018), such as access to healthcare. Women with lower incomes are more dependent on the welfare state (Piven, 1985), and so policies stemming from the sexual division of labour will affect various socio-economic groups of women differently. While policies such as abortion legality affect the status of *all* women regardless of their social class, women with lower incomes cannot access and use abortion services unless public funding is provided. Meanwhile, middle-class women will be able to afford market rates for abortion services. Policies pertaining to reproductive labour also affect the lives of women along class lines. Htun and Weldon (2018:11) associate reproductive labour with domestic roles and care giving; they define it, in other words, as "the entire range of work needed to reproduce and maintain human life – childcare; food production; cleaning; care for the sick and elderly;

keeping track of schedules, transportation, household expenses, and the like". Women with higher incomes can afford to 'buy' reproductive labour by employing cleaners and carers for children or the elderly, in ways that lower-income women cannot. As a result, lower-income women who cannot afford market rates may have to rely on family or state-funded care services, or alternatively, carry out reproductive labour themselves. Class-based policies assist with alleviating this barrier and allow for a greater access to employment. As such, public funding for abortion services and policies pertaining to reproductive labour can be viewed a *class* issue: by encouraging equal access to the labour market and facilitating a public expansion of state services they not only encourage greater equity between women and men, but among women regardless of their socio-economic status.

In line with this logic, policy agendas such as family welfare can also be conceptualised as 'class-based' policies and are included in the framework for analysis. Like other class-based policies, family welfare provision from the government relies upon an institutionalised relationship between the state, market, and family (Htun and Weldon, 2018). Family welfare policies incorporate those ranging from family allowances to statutory parental leave. Family allowances are a means of economic independence for women (Mazur, 2002), and recognise the economic value of unpaid care. Paid maternity leave provides women with a source of income while caring for children. Meanwhile, paternity or shared parental leave expands men's role in childcare, encouraging a more equitable division of reproductive labour. This provides women with the opportunity to access paid work or higher education, shifting them out of the unpaid domestic sphere and towards the paid public sphere instead (Htun and Weldon, 2018; Morgan, 2006).

Pensions are also included in the analysis, as policies within this domain may also alleviate economic inequality that arises from the sexual division of labour. Largely due to undertaking a disproportionate share of unpaid childcare, women are more likely to take

extended breaks out of the labour market. Lower wages and extended time out of the labour market mean that women, on average, accrue fewer pension entitlements than men (Price, 2007; Thurley, Keen, McInnes and McGuinness, 2018). Pension policies also impact women to a greater extent than men by virtue of the fact that they outnumber men at older ages: among those aged over 65, 55% are women (ONS, 2017). These gender differences in population widen in later life, with women in Britain comprising 65% of those aged 85 and over (ONS, 2016).

Finally, since abortion services and contraceptives in Britain are publicly funded through the NHS, this policy agenda is examined in its entirety. Beyond the realms of reproductive health, other aspects of the NHS are also gendered, albeit less explicitly. Women are greater users than men of healthcare services – due in part to reproductive health issues and lower socio-economic status (Wang, Hunt, Nazareth, Freemantle and Petersen, 2013). Changes in NHS funding, which may compromise access to health services, therefore affect them implicitly. Additionally, women comprise the majority of NHS workers, accounting for 77% of the NHS workforce (NHS, 2018).

Overall, Htun and Weldon's framework provides a useful way to conceive the different types of gendered policies. The thesis utilises this framework to analyse gendered policy agendas. It does so for three reasons. Firstly, the framework distinguishes between gendered policies affecting all women (status) and policies affecting specific groups of women (class-based). In making this distinction, it allows for an exploration of pocketbook voting, which would imply that certain class-based policies may be more appealing to those who directly benefit from them. This speaks to the first research question of this thesis, which investigates whether women vote on policies that personally affect them. Secondly, by disaggregating gendered policies into different policy types, the framework allows for an exploration into the types of policies that are salient to women voters. This relates to the

second research question that seeks to examine which policies women think about when they vote. Finally, the framework distinguishes between gendered policies that are symbolic and social (status policies), and those with a clear economic and redistributive component (class-based policies). This is relevant for the economic focus of this thesis, thus speaking to the third research question, which investigates how the context of austerity has impacted women’s voting behaviour. In essence, Htun and Weldon’s framework goes beyond policies that are traditionally analogous to gender, which allows us to also consider broader economic policies, such as pensions and austerity, as inherently gendered. The framework is outlined in Table 2.2 below:

Table 2.2. Typology of gendered policies, adapted from Htun and Weldon’s (2018) framework

Does the policy advance women’s rights primarily as a status group or as a gender-class group?	
Status	Class-based
Violence against women and girls	Public funding for childcare
Gender parity/quotas	Maternity/paternity/shared parental leave
Constitutional equality	Family welfare
Legal equality in the workplace	Public funding for abortion and contraceptives (the NHS)
Abortion legality	Pension equality
Reproductive freedom	Transportation

Htun and Weldon (2010, 2018) also identify an additional dimension to their class-status typology. They argue that certain gendered policies may challenge religious doctrines or codified cultural traditions, which they label as “doctrinal policies” (Htun and Weldon,

2018). Such policies may include abortion legality, family law and reproductive freedoms (status policies), as well as public funding for abortion and contraceptives (class-based policies). In some countries, religious groups may oppose gendered policies where they challenge religious doctrines. For instance, in Israel, religious courts obtain exclusive jurisdiction over matters of marriage and divorce (Halperin-Kaddari, 2004). A similar case is evident in many states in the Middle East, where religious courts have administered rules concerning family, marriage and inheritance (Htun and Weldon, 2018). In Saudi Arabia, women are prohibited to work in certain occupations on the grounds of religious law. Until 2018, the prominence of the Catholic Church in Ireland meant that access to abortion was illegal (except in limited circumstances). Gendered policies will thus differ according to the religious doctrines and traditions they challenge, and these will vary by country.

Doctrinal policies thus provide an additional lens through which to analyse gendered policies. However, the distinction between doctrinal and non-doctrinal issues is only salient in countries with prominent religious forces that oppose certain gendered policies and codified cultural traditions. Issues that are considered to be doctrinal in some countries will not be in others. In the United States, for example, the Democrats and the Republican parties have long been divided over doctrinal issues such as abortion legality, reproductive freedoms and funding for abortion and contraceptives. Policies within these areas are highly politicised and feature as salient issues in election campaigns. Such division is due in part to the prominence of conservative social groups, most notably the Christian Right (Wolbrecht, 2000). The 2016 US Presidential election saw Republican candidate, Donald Trump, publicly advocate punishment towards those performing abortions (BBC News, 2016). Meanwhile, Democrat candidate, Hillary Clinton, campaigned to repeal the Hyde Amendment, which bans federal Medicare funding to pay for most abortions (Redden, 2016). Yet a strong religious cleavage has not appeared in Britain, and mainstream political parties have rarely

been divided over doctrinal issues (Emmenegger and Manow, 2014).⁴ Halfmann (2011) explains that religious groups in Britain are less mobilised than the United States around issues such as abortion legality and funding. As such, doctrinal issues are not politicised to the same extent as that of the US. In Britain, doctrinal issues rarely feature as official policies in mainstream party manifestos, and where such issues have been placed on the political agenda, parties have conventionally allowed free votes over those that are considered to be ‘issues of conscience’ (Cowley, 2007). In comparison with countries such as the US, discord between mainstream parties over doctrinal policies has been minimal: the 2019 free vote to legalise abortion in Northern Ireland, for instance, received cross-party support from MPs. For these reasons, doctrinal issues are not examined within this thesis. Rather, gendered policies are analysed through the class-status framework, as these issues are more likely to feature as policies pledged by mainstream parties in British elections.

Htun and Weldon’s disaggregation of gendered policies provides a valuable contribution to the study of gender and policy. Htun and Weldon use the class-status disaggregation to understand policy determinants for each policy type. Specifically, they use the framework to understand when gender equality policies are placed onto government agendas, and by whom. Thus far, however, Htun and Weldon’s framework has not yet been used to analyse vote choice. As such, there is space to consider this framework in the context of voting behaviour to gain a more developed understanding of target populations, policy salience, and the link between policy and vote choice more widely.

Conclusion

Currently, little is known about the impact of gendered policies on women’s voting behaviour. In reviewing the literature, this chapter has shown that traditional studies on

⁴ One notable exception was in the run-up to the 2005 General Election, where abortion nearly became an election issue (Childs, 2008). This was sparked by the disagreement between Conservative leader, Michael Howard and Labour leader, Tony Blair, over the legal time limit for abortions.

voting behaviour have often treated the 'average voter' as a man and have been slow to incorporate a sufficient analysis of gender in their work. Studies on women's voting behaviour have tended to focus on long-term structural explanations, such as modernisation and secularisation, to explain trends in women's vote choice. As such, this overlooks the potential impact of policies on voting behaviour. The gendered impact of policies on men and women (as well as different groups of women) may explain inter-sex and intra-sex differences in voting behaviour. Yet, to date, little scholarly attention has been devoted to exploring this further. This thesis aims to bridge this gap in the literature by analysing policy and vote choice through a gendered lens.

Chapter Three – Assessing the impact of the Coalition’s gendered policies on women

Introduction

Past policies can provide a useful guide for voters at election time. Proponents of retrospective voting behaviour suggest that voters can use past policies to reward or sanction incumbent parties (Key, 1966; Fiorina, 1981; Miller and Shanks, 1996). In this sense, voters evaluate whether they have benefited from policy outcomes under the incumbent government and cast their votes accordingly. If voters believe that they have benefited from government policies, then they will be inclined to re-elect the incumbent party at the upcoming election. At the same time, if voters believe that they have fared badly under the previous government, they will vote the incumbent party out of office. In allowing voters to hold incumbents to account, the retrospective model enhances accountability – one of the key tenets of representative democracy (Key, 1966; Plescia and Kritzing, 2017). Additionally, voters can use their assessments of the governing party’s policy record to guide their expectations about future conditions (Fiorina, 1981). The incumbent’s policy record provides voters with low-cost information that they can use as a proxy to determine how the incumbent party will then perform in office. As such, the premise of retrospective voting is relatively simple: voters are not required to have a detailed knowledge about current campaign issues and policy pledges, or where opposition parties stand on policy issues. Rather, they are concerned with past outcomes from the incumbent party.

If it is that voters do cast their ballot retrospectively, then it is necessary for studies on voting behaviour to consider the impact of past policies. Therefore, in order to examine how women voted in 2015, this chapter identifies and assesses gendered policies that were implemented by the Coalition government between 2010 and 2015. It then forms

expectations as to how these policies might impact women's Conservative support. Here, a focus is placed on the Conservative Party rather than the Liberal Democrats, in line with recent studies of retrospective voting suggesting that voters hold the largest party – or the Prime Minister's party - primarily accountable for government performance (Anderson, 2000; Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Hobolt et al., 2013). Although it could equally be argued that voters punish the minor party within a coalition, this remains a subject of debate, and will not be explored here.

While much of the work around retrospective voting has been confined to economic policies (Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Key, 1966; Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Powell and Whitten, 1993), recent research has argued for a need to extend the scope of analysis to issues beyond the economy (de Vries and Giger, 2014; Singer, 2011; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011). Much of this work suggests that the ideas underpinning retrospective voting behaviour will also apply to other policy agendas. Indeed, given that governments act across a range of policy domains, there is little reason to expect voters to limit government evaluations solely to the economy. In fact, research has shown that voters hold incumbents accountable for issues relating to crime (Ley, 2017), increases in military deaths (Grose and Oppenheimer, 2007), and disaster response (Bechtel and Hainmueller, 2011). This gives reason to suggest that when considering the past performance of governments, non-economic policies may also shape voters' views. However, there is a dearth of literature devoted to these policy agendas beyond the wider economy. As a result, this chapter additionally evaluates not only gendered policies that are economic, but also those that relate to social rights, such as violence against women and women's political representation.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it contributes to the wider thesis by identifying potentially key policy issues of significance to women voters. In considering the outcomes of the Coalition's policies on women, it builds expectations as to how these policies

might have affected Conservative support in 2015. As such, it takes an inductive approach to analysing qualitative data, whereby theories and generalisations are drawn from observing empirical phenomena (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). The advantage of this approach is that it allows for new theories and expectations to be built, which can then be tested against (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). These expectations are formed in the conclusions of this chapter and are then re-visited in Chapter Five. Secondly, the chapter contributes towards a wider literature on gender and public policy. In reviewing government policy documents, legislation and briefings, the chapter examines gendered policies implemented under the Coalition government and their impact on women. By analysing policies through a gendered lens, it adds to a wide body of literature arguing for a need to recognise how policies shape the lives of men and women differently and consequently (re)produce gender inequality (Chappell, Brennan and Rubenstein, 2012; Himmelweit, 2002; Wilson and Sapiro, 1985). As Chappell et al. (2012:228) note, “because of economic and social differences between men and women, policy consequences, intended and unintended, often vary along gender lines. It is only through a gender analysis of policy that these differences become apparent, and solutions devised”.

The chapter finds that, overall, positive gains for women were made through a multitude of gender status policies. Notably, the majority of gender status policies concerned measures to tackle violence against women and girls. While the Coalition offered a range of gender status policies, these were also accompanied by class-based policies that were either limited in effect or worked to undo much of the progress made towards gender equality. Due to the existing demographic composition of women in Britain, it finds that the Coalition’s class-based policies, particularly those concerning fiscal retrenchment, have served to affect women in various ways. The gendered impact of these class-based policies varied across the life-cycle. While the incomes of many older women were protected mainly through the uprating of the Basic State Pension as well as exemptions from reductions in social security,

spending reductions fell disproportionately among women of a working-age. These findings are reflected in the expectations of vote choice.

The chapter is structured according to Htun and Weldon's (2010;2018) framework of 'gender status' and 'class-based' policies. The first section explores policies designed to address women's status, namely those that addressed violence against women policies and political representation. Meanwhile, the second section analyses policies pertaining to class-based reform. Throughout the discussion of each policy agenda, it builds expectations regarding the impact of these policies on groups of women voters. The final section of this chapter brings together these expectations and summarises the main findings from the analysis.

Gender status policies

Since becoming leader of the Conservative Party in 2005, David Cameron sought to feminise the Conservative Party, both by increasing the number of Conservative women MPs and by addressing the substantive representation of women (Bryson, 2012; Childs and Webb, 2012). To address both the descriptive and substantive representation of women, a multitude of status policies were implemented. As set out in Chapter Two, Htun and Weldon (2010:209) define status policies as those which aim to counter disadvantage and harms against women *qua* women. In essence, status policies are those which seek to empower all women as a group. Under the Coalition government, status policies largely focused on combatting violence against women and girls, although extended to some measures to address women's descriptive representation in Parliament. These are discussed in turn below.

Violence against women and girls

In recent decades, the issue of violence against women and girls (VAWG) has moved onto UK government agendas and has become a part of mainstream political debate (Mazur, 2002:157). Throughout the years of 2010 to 2015, the Coalition propelled a range of policies aimed at eradicating VAWG. Indeed, in terms of VAWG, legislative progress was visibly made under the Coalition; stalking became a specific offence under the Protection of the Freedoms Act 2012, and coercive and controlling behaviour was criminalised under the Serious Crime Act 2015. Further, legislation to introduce new powers to tackle anti-social behaviour was enacted under the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014. Following government engagement with campaign groups, the possession of realistic depictions of rape and the disclosing of revenge pornography - of which 90% of those who identified as victims of the latter were women (Phippen and Agate, 2015) - was criminalised under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act in 2015. The same year, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 came into law, under which tougher penalties were introduced for human trafficking, slavery and forced labour.

In the Coalition's 2010 'Call to End Violence against Women and Girls' strategy document, Home Secretary, Theresa May, made the Coalition's commitment to ending VAWG clear. May stated that "The ambition of this government is to end violence against women and girls...no level of violence against women and girls is acceptable in modern Britain or anywhere else in the world" (HM Government, 2010a:3). Accordingly, the Government's 2010 strategy set out four objectives to tackle VAWG:

- Prevent violence from happening by challenging attitudes and behaviours which perpetuate it, and intervene as early as possible in order to prevent it;
- Provide support where violence occurs;
- Work in partnership, to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families; and

- Take action to reduce the risk to women and girls who are victims of these crimes, and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice (HM Government, 2010a:5).

As a self-declared feminist (Stamp, 2016), the Home Secretary also affirmed her personal commitment to eradicating VAWG. May stated that “Tackling domestic violence and abuse is one of my key priorities” (Home Office, 2013a). In the Government’s 2014 ‘Action Plan’, May highlighted her call for an independent review, led by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), into police response to domestic violence (HM Government, 2014:3). The overall findings of the HMIC report were damning: police responses to domestic violence were found to be inadequate, and many victims of domestic abuse were considered to have been let down (HMIC, 2014:6-7). Following the report, May wrote to chief constables and police force leads, stating that all police forces would now require an action plan by September 2014 (Home Office, 2014). Police forces would thereafter be required to compile data on crimes of domestic abuse against a national standard, for the very first time (Home Office, 2014). Alongside the independent commission into the police force, May called for reviews into domestic homicide (HM Government, 2010a:30). By bringing section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crimes and Victims Act 2004 into force, it would now be a statutory requirement for local authorities across England and Wales to undertake Domestic Homicide Reviews in order to prevent future domestic violence incidents from occurring.

In 2013, the Home Office amended the legal definition of domestic violence and abuse. Prior to amending the definition, the Home Office had used the term ‘domestic violence’ to place an emphasis on the criminal justice aspects of such behaviour (Donovan and Hester, 2015). However, support agencies and victims of gendered abuse argued that using a definition of domestic ‘violence’ was problematic, since this implied that other forms of non-physical violence, such as sexual, financial and emotional, were de-emphasised (Donovan and Hester, 2015). After public consultation, the Home Office adopted the definition of

‘domestic violence and abuse’ in March 2013. In purporting to raise awareness of domestic crime amongst young people, the Home Office also expanded the definition of domestic violence and abuse to apply to those aged 16 or over (Woodhouse and Dempsey, 2016:4).

The new definition of domestic violence and abuse now stated:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional” (Home Office, 2013b).

A series of other policies aimed to tackle domestic violence and abuse. 2014 saw the roll out of two pilot policies across all 43 police forces in England and Wales. Firstly, Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) were enforced, preventing perpetrators from returning to their residence and having contact with the victim for up to 28 days (HM Government, 2014). This was designed to give victims immediate protection after a domestic abuse incident. Second, the Government rolled out the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS or ‘Clare’s Law’), which enables the police to disclose information regarding a partner’s violent past (Home Office, 2013a). Under Clare’s Law, potential victims of domestic abuse have the ‘right to ask’ the police about an ex or current partner’s violent history, while police can disclose information to potential victims under the ‘right to know’ element of the Law. Overall, the DVDS was viewed positively by the police (Woodhouse and Dempsey, 2016:12). Police data revealed that from 8 March 2014 until 31 December 2014, a total of 4,724 applications had been made, with 1,938 disclosures provided (Home Office, 2016:4). 15 police forces stated that a further 691 DVDS applications were received from 1 January 2015 to 31 July 2015, with 297 disclosures made (Home Office, 2016:4).

In addition to issues of domestic violence and abuse, the Coalition implemented a set of policies concerning the eradication of forced genital mutilation (FGM). Legislative initiatives aimed at tackling FGM have been longstanding. FGM was first made illegal in the UK in 1985, and was replaced by the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. The latter extended the criminalisation of FGM offences to include mutilation acts made abroad by UK nationals and increased the maximum penalty of FGM offences from five to 14 years' imprisonment (Ministry of Justice and Home Office, 2015). Under the Coalition, legislation concerning FGM was strengthened further. The Serious Crime Act 2015 introduced new offences, making the failure to protect a girl under the age of 16 from FGM a crime, provided anonymity to victims and created a legal duty for certain professionals to report FGM to the police. At the 2014 Girl Summit, Prime Minister, David Cameron, launched a public consultation for the introduction of Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders (FGMPOs), which would protect a girl against the commission of FGM (Ministry of Justice and Home Office, 2015). The policy appeared to be largely popular among the wider public: 85% of respondents to the consultation were reported to have been in favour of the proposal (ibid.).

Campbell and Childs (2015c:407) argue that while initiatives tackling VAWG may often reflect a commitment to women's bodily integrity, they also complement wider public concerns regarding immigration and 'British' values. This has, to some extent, been reflected in governmental decisions to criminalise forced marriage. Discussions regarding criminalisation first began in 2006, when Lord Lester introduced the Forced Marriages (Civil Protection) Bill into Parliament. Lord Lester's Bill was subsequently modified by the New Labour government and enacted into law in 2008. Under the new legislation, individuals and local authorities would be able to ask the court for Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs), which would provide civil remedies for those faced with forced marriage (Gay, 2015:1). The Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office established the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), which offered support to around 1,500 and 1,700 victims per year –

over 80% of whom were female (Campbell and Childs, 2015c:408). However, although forced marriage became a civil offence, the Forced Marriages Act stopped short of criminalising the procedure altogether. In 2011, Cameron announced the introduction of a consultation concerning the criminalisation of forced marriage, stating that “I want to send a clear and strong message: forced marriage is wrong, is illegal and will not be tolerated” (quoted in Gay, 2015:10). A Home Office document revealed that 54% of respondents were said to be in favour of criminalisation (ibid.:11). Following consultation on the issue, the Coalition criminalised forced marriage in 2014, under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (HM Government, 2014).

Yet complexity resides in the fact that criminalisation is used as a means to deter certain practices of VAWG. Indeed, the policies concerning VAWG between 2010 and 2015 largely reflected a criminal justice approach taken by the Coalition, in which the Home Office stated its determination to “make sure all perpetrators [of VAWG] are brought to justice” (HM Government, 2014:45). Many commentators have voiced concerns regarding criminalisation strategies. Cerise and Dustin (2011:14) argue that while reporting and convicting perpetrators is critical for delivering justice for victims and setting social norms, prosecution-focused strategies to address VAWG can detract from prevention and support. Walby (2009b:8) estimated that the cost of domestic abuse to the criminal justice system was over £1.2 billion in 2008, second to the cost of health care for victims injured by domestic violence incidents but higher than the amount spent on housing and refuge services (£196 million). Some also contest the effectiveness of criminalisation on practices such as forced marriage (Wilson, 2014). A specific criminal offence for forced marriage may deter victims from coming forward and seeking legal redress, due to fear that their family members may be prosecuted (ibid.). Similarly, the criminalisation of FGM has also been argued as ineffective (Dustin, 2016). While the extent to which FGM occurs is unknown, it is estimated that around 170,000 women and girls in the UK have undergone the procedure (House of

Commons, 2014:9). However, to date, there has been just one conviction (Summers and Ratcliffe, 2019).

Proponents of criminalisation, on the other hand, have argued that there is symbolic value in the law which portrays a message that VAWG is socially unacceptable (Anitha and Gill, 2009). Weldon (2002:18) argues that legal reforms have made it more difficult (albeit not impossible) for judges to conclude that such incidents are matters of private concern. A Home Office report on forced marriage stated that respondents felt that criminalisation would challenge community perceptions of forced marriage, and would enable victims to recognise the abuse inflicted upon them (Home Office, 2012). Undoubtedly, the question of criminalisation remains a thorny issue in feminist debates.

While many of the Coalition's policies concerning VAWG could be considered 'beneficial' to women in many respects, there are two important caveats that merit consideration. The first is that there has been some tension in the Coalition's VAWG policy agenda, where policy change has not necessarily been positive or linear for women. Within the Coalition Agreement, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government outlined its proposal to extend anonymity in rape cases to defendants in England and Wales (HM Government, 2010b:24). The proposal, which did not appear in either party's election manifestos, sparked opposition from critics who argued that anonymity would dissuade victims to come forward (Lipscombe, 2012:8). After undertaking an evaluation of the evidence surrounding anonymity for defendants, the Coalition concluded that there was insufficient empirical evidence to proceed with a change in the law (Lipscombe, 2012:1). Despite the fact that the policy proposal was dropped, the proposal nonetheless signified a symbolic reversal in terms of the Coalition's feminisation agenda.

The second caveat pertains to the lack of funding available for VAWG services, where gender equality advocates have questioned the Coalition's level of substantive support for

women amidst funding cuts (Bryson, 2012; Towers and Walby, 2012). On one hand, the Coalition declared its commitment to almost £40 million of centralised government funding (HM Government, 2014). £28 million was to be put towards VAWG specialist services, £10.5 million over three years would be spent on new rape support centres and £900,000 on domestic violence helplines until 2015 (HM Government, 2012:21). Additionally, from 2012, the Coalition pledged £1.2 million for three years to improve the quality of services for young people enduring sexual violence in major urban areas (HM Government, 2012:8). However, the responsibility for funding VAWG services predominantly lies with local authorities (particularly Police and Crime Commissioners) rather than central government, where funds are seldom 'ring-fenced'. While the £40 million of government funding was welcomed by many, it did little to offset the impact of local authority cuts that were implemented by the Coalition.

A report by Towers and Walby (2012:18-19) reveals that domestic and sexual abuse services witnessed a 31% reduction in local authority funding between 2010/11 and 2011/12. This equated to a cut from £7.8 million to £5.4 million (ibid.). Undoubtedly, this reduction in local authority funding had a knock-on effect on the availability and quality of VAWG services – particularly smaller organisations. A VAWG roundtable led by the charity Women's Aid reported that 32 domestic violence services in England have had to close at least one of their services, leaving women with fewer places to turn in times of need (Towers and Walby, 2012:28). Towers and Walby's (2012) report found that in 2011, approximately 9% of women seeking refuge were turned away by Women's Aid due to a lack of space. This figure rose to two-thirds in 2015 (Women's Aid, 2015). Additionally, the report found that services for many Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee women had been hit hard by funding cuts, due to the merging of specialist services into larger, generalised service provision (Towers and Walby, 2012). Imkaan, a charity that runs VAWG services for ethnic minority women, reported the closure of two of six specialist refuges, as well the fact that two other specialist

services faced funding cuts (Towers and Walby, 2012:4). Alongside the critical shortage in women's refuges and shelters, the number of Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) was reduced (Towers and Walby, 2012) despite the Government signalling its intention to continue funding towards these services (Home Office, 2014). IDVAs provide specialist support and advice to victims who are at high risk of domestic abuse. In 2011, of the eight major IDVA services, three faced funding cuts of 50% or more, three of 40% and two of 25% (Towers and Walby, 2012:3). The reduction of funding towards VAWG services has meant that a large amount of pressure has been placed on state services to provide specialist support.

Overall, a number of visible legislative gains were made under the Coalition as an aim to tackle VAWG. Many of these policies reflected a criminal justice approach, which showed that the Coalition appeared to be taking the issue of VAWG seriously. This was matched by rhetorical claims from the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister to tackle gender-based violence. Yet reductions in funding to VAWG services have undermined legislative actions and rhetorical claims to tackle gender-based violence. In terms of women's status, however, the progress made in VAWG legislation under the Coalition would lead us to expect increased support for the Conservatives from women, who are disproportionately likely to suffer from gender-based violence (ONS, 2018a).

Women's political representation

Women's descriptive political representation within the Coalition government was well below parity. Following claims that the Conservative Party was "institutionally sexist" (Lovenduski, 2005:57-58), David Cameron pledged to improve the low levels of women's descriptive representation within the Conservative Party. In the run-up to the 2010 election, Cameron announced that one third of his cabinet positions would be women (Hinsliff, 2008). Yet despite claims to increase the number of women on the front benches, the appointment

of women to the cabinet fell short of Cameron's target. Within the Coalition's first cabinet, the percentage of women ministers was 20% - or five ministers out of 25. By the second cabinet, women's representation had fallen to four ministers, before increasing again to five after the final cabinet reshuffle. By comparison, the representation of Conservative women in Cabinet did not appear to be too poor. The number of women with ministerial positions was much higher than that of any preceding Conservative government, due to increases in parliamentary representation following the 2010 election. The proportion of Conservative women in Cabinet (20%) was also much higher than that within the Parliamentary Conservative Party (16%). On top of this, the Conservatives put forward more women for ministerial positions than their Liberal Democrat Coalition partners, who failed to appoint any women to ministerial positions at all. However, the proportion of women in Cabinet still remained far from equal. Annesley and Gains (2012) show that across government, the descriptive representation of women was similarly poor. Indeed, the number of women Cabinet members and junior members stood at just 13, compared to 31 under the previous Brown government (ibid:721.).

Women also remained underrepresented in Parliament, comprising 22% of MPs between 2010-2015. This figure masked inter-party variation with regard to women's representation. Of the 307 women parliamentarians in total, just 49 were Conservative, which represented 16% of the PCP compared to Labour's 81 women parliamentarians, who comprised 31% of the PLP. The representation of women parliamentarians within the Liberal Democrats was similarly poor, with women comprising 12% of the PLDP. Lovenduski (2005) notes that parties can employ a range of strategies to address the low levels of women's descriptive representation. According to Lovenduski (2005:90), one method that parties may use are "equality guarantees". Equality guarantees suggests top down initiatives within the selection process that ensure an increase in women's representation are essential in order to achieve gender parity, and may include measures such as all-women shortlists, twinning

and zipping (Lovenduski, 2005). Equality guarantees are often considered to be the most effective form of increasing representation, due to the fact that they require an increase in the number of women candidates in order to be considered successful. Despite the fact that women remained descriptively underrepresented relative to men in Parliament as well as within each party, neither governing party introduced any form of statutory quota or equality guarantee between 2010 and 2015.

For many Conservatives, equality guarantees do not sit easily alongside traditional notions of conservatism. Historically, the Conservative Party has opposed gender quotas on the grounds that they undermine the concept of meritocracy and equality of opportunity (Childs, 2008). While recognising women's underrepresentation to be an issue in British politics, 'softer' methods that do not require direct intervention have been found to be a more popular way to address this among both Conservative members and politicians (Webb and Childs, 2012). Accordingly, the Conservatives used alternative methods other than equality guarantees to address women's descriptive representation in politics. Such measures mainly came in the form of "equality promotion" (Lovenduski, 2005:90), which offer financial assistance, training to candidates or internal party targets. Equality promotion was seen in the Conservative's Women2Win campaign, a lobbying and support group designed to encourage more women to stand for political office, as well as the shortlist quota – a measure which required local association executives to shortlist an equal number of men and women candidates. However, Conservative efforts towards equality promotion had arguably weakened by the time the Party reached office. By the time of the 2015 election, the Conservatives had quietly abandoned the 'Priority list' or 'A list', which required Conservative constituency associations in target seats to select a candidate from a list – half of whom must be women (Childs and Webb, 2012). The strategy behind the A-list was to increase the supply of women candidates from which a local association could choose, rather

than to increase the demand of women candidates through measures such as all-women shortlists.

In addition to equality promotion, the Conservatives employed what Lovenduski (2005:90) labels as “equality rhetoric”, in which party leaders will publicly acknowledge the need to address women’s representation. Equality rhetoric may be visible within campaign speeches or written materials, such as manifestos. However, compared to the 2010 election which saw Cameron pledge to allocate one-third of ministerial positions to women, Conservative equality rhetoric had been largely watered down by 2015. Few commitments were made in terms of increasing women’s descriptive representation. One exception was the 2015 Conservative manifesto, which suggested a “want to increase...the number of female MPs” (Conservative Party, 2015:19), however, such a pledge remained far from concrete: there was no detailed indication of how many women the Party had hoped to increase the number of female MPs by, or how this increase would occur.

Women remained descriptively underrepresented under the Coalition. While some ‘softer’ measures were taken by the Conservative Party to try and address women’s representation in both Parliament and the Party, these lacked a concrete commitment to ensuring an increase in the number of women in Parliament. Moreover, some of these measures had been weakened by the time of the 2015 election (the A-List and equality rhetoric). As a result, we would expect the low levels of women’s descriptive representation in Parliament – and the lack of any substantive policies to address it – to have a negative effect on women’s support towards the Conservative Party by the time of the 2015 election.

Class-based policies

In order to understand the Coalition’s gendered policy agendas, one needs not only to consider government policies explicitly affecting women’s status, but also policies

affecting women more widely. As highlighted in Chapter Two, class-based policies are those which aim to counter the discrimination that arise from the sexual division of labour, and seek to encourage a more equitable division of resources between men and women (Htun and Weldon, 2010:209). Throughout the years of the Coalition, the sexual division of labour was reinforced by a policy program of deep fiscal austerity, which hit women disproportionately hard (Rummery, 2016; Women’s Budget Group, 2016).

These inequalities, stemming from the sexual division of labour, were further compounded by detrimental class-based policies pertaining to pension reform, childcare and family welfare policies. A lack of class-based policies is partly explained by the fact that these policies are often ‘costly’ for governments to implement, particularly during periods of economic downturn and in governments that contain a paucity of women in executive roles (as was the case between 2010 and 2015) (Annesley and Gains, 2012; Annesley et al., 2015). Moreover, the likelihood of beneficial class-based reform has also been attributed to the ideology of the governing party, where right-wing governments are found to be less likely to implement beneficial class-based, redistributive policies (Annesley et al., 2015; Blofield and Haas, 2005; Htun and Weldon, 2018). Notwithstanding these policies, there were some relative gains for women *vis-à-vis* the Coalition’s gendered policy agendas; most notably policies relating to increased childcare entitlement, increased spending on pensions and Shared Parental Leave. It is prudent to note, however, that the beneficial outcomes of these policies were, for many women, negated by the impact of fiscal retrenchment.

Austerity

The Conservative Party fought the 2010 election on a platform of austerity and, once in Government, implemented a series of unprecedented austerity cuts that were to commence immediately. In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis – labelled at the time as “the worst financial crisis for generations” (HM Treasury, 2009:48) – the Coalition

acknowledged that difficult spending decisions would have to be taken in order to “reduce the deficit and restore economic growth” (HL Hansard, 25 May 2010).

Shortly after assuming office, the Coalition affirmed its deficit reduction plan within the June 2010 Emergency Budget and the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review. The measures announced by the Government stated that it was to impose a ratio of 77:23 spending cuts to increases in tax revenue (Women’s Budget Group, 2010). Later analyses suggested that the ratio increased from 85:15 (Busby and James, 2017) and subsequently to 90:10 (Campbell and Childs, 2015c:415). According to Robert Chote, Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Emergency Budget posed the “longest, deepest, sustained period of cuts to public services spending at least since World War II” (quoted in Timmins, 2015:328). The decision to impose spending cuts, rather than tax increases, had detrimental consequences for women, where austerity very quickly became a gendered issue. The pernicious impact that these spending decisions would have on women’s employment, benefits and services undermined women’s financial autonomy and was known colloquially as ‘the triple jeopardy’ (The Fawcett Society, 2012). Though it would be misleading to suggest that the Government’s austerity measures were deliberately targeted at women, the cuts inevitably had greater ramifications for women than men.

Moreover, the adoption of fiscal austerity as opposed to Keynesian investment meant that public service cuts were inevitable (Rummery, 2016:311). Since women tend to be more reliant on public services and transfer payments, and also comprise the majority of public service employees, this meant that public service cuts would hit women unequivocally harder than men. 20% of women’s income comes from social security and tax benefits, as compared to 10% of men’s (Rummery, 2016:311). As austerity cuts led to reductions in public sector jobs, women’s unemployment rose to unprecedented levels, reaching 7.7% in the first quarter of 2012 (Elson, 2012:132). At the same time, women’s labour force participation

decreased due to fewer job opportunities alongside a growing pressure to combine work and unpaid care (Elson, 2012:132).

Absent from the Emergency Budget, however, was an equalities impact assessment outlining how men and women respectively would be affected by the Coalition's spending and taxation policies. Under the Equality Act 2010, the government has a statutory requirement to give 'due regard' to the effects of its policies on gender inequalities (Sandhu and Stephenson, 2015). Home Secretary and Equalities Minister, Theresa May, wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, warning him that the proposed cuts within the Emergency Budget could break the law (Dodd, 2010). May stated that "there are real risks that women, ethnic minorities, disabled people and older people will be disproportionately affected. Women, for instance, make up a higher number of public workers, and all four groups use public services more" (quoted in Dodd, 2010). In the absence of the Government's equalities impact assessments, shadow ministers and feminist think tanks have since taken it upon themselves to provide a breakdown of the gendered effects of the cuts (see Annesley, 2012; Fawcett Society, 2012; Women's Budget Group, 2010; 2016).

The then-Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities, Yvette Cooper, obtained statistics from the House of Commons Library which indicated that, as a result of the 2010 Emergency Budget, women would be hit financially twice as hard as men. Using Treasury data, the House of Commons Library found that, between 2010 and 2013, 79% of welfare cuts had been shouldered by women, while 21% had been borne by men (Busby and James, 2017). In other words, approximately three-quarters of the money raised had come from women's pockets. In response to the Coalition's austerity measures, Cooper declared that they were "the worst for women since the creation of the welfare state" (quoted in Stratton, 2010).

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) think tank has also sought to break down the impact of the Government's economic policies on women, particularly on an intersectional basis. Drawing upon research by Howard Reed (Landman Economics), the WBG examined the cumulative impact of the Government's budgets and spending reviews by gender. The WBG found that lone parents and single pensioners, the majority of whom are women, were hit the hardest and saw the largest cut in their disposable income as a result of tax and benefit changes. Estimates showed that lone parents (90% of whom are women) would lose approximately 15.6% of their income, while single female pensioners would see a reduction of 12.5% of their income (Women's Budget Group, 2013). In comparison, single fathers lost 11.7% of their income, while single male pensioners lost 9.5% of their income (Women's Budget Group, 2013). The WBG also found that lone mothers would lose the most in terms of public services, losing four times as much as couples without children (who stood to lose the least, at around 2.6%) (Elson, 2012:132).

Finally, research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), commissioned by the Fawcett Society, examined the impact of tax and benefit reforms on men and women using household-level data (Browne, 2011:1). Analysing all of the Government's tax and benefit changes introduced between 2010-11 and 2014-15, the IFS found that single women lost more as a percentage of their income than single men (Browne, 2011:3-4). This was partly explained by the fact that lone parents (the majority of whom are women) were net losers from the changes to tax and benefits (Browne, 2011). The Coalition's programme of austerity had a deleterious effect on women's services, earnings and employment, especially among women from lower income backgrounds. Though the effects of fiscal retrenchment have been widespread, a closer analysis suggests that the weight of these cuts has fallen disproportionately on women of a working-age. This is seen especially through the reductions in Working Tax Credit, the Social Sector Size Criteria (otherwise known as the 'bedroom tax'), and a cap on benefit rises, from which pensioners were exempt. The impact

of these measures leads us to expect reduced Conservative support among working-age women in 2015, but less so among older women.

Pensions and pension-age benefits

Between 2010 and 2015, the Coalition introduced a number of beneficial policies for older generations. These policies ranged from the implementation of the 'triple lock' pension guarantee and ring-fenced NHS funding, to the protection of 'key benefits' for older people, such as the Winter Fuel Allowance, free TV licences, free bus travel and free eye tests and prescriptions (HM Government, 2010b:26). While benefits to people of working-age were cut, spending on pensioners rose from £84 billion in 2009/10, to £104 billion in 2013/4 (McKay and Rowlingson, 2016:187). Alongside "safeguarding key benefits" for pensioners (HM Government, 2010b:26), the Coalition made several large-scale reforms to pensions between 2010 and 2015. Since the majority of those of a pensionable age are women (ONS, 2017), any changes to pensions would disproportionately affect them to a greater extent than men.

One of the most notable reforms to pensions under the Coalition was the uprating of the Basic State Pension, known as the 'triple lock' guarantee. As one of the first acts of the Coalition, the triple-lock aimed to ensure that pensions would rise every year by the inflation rate, average earnings or 2.5% - whichever was highest. Restoring the earnings link to pensions aimed to ensure that pensioners received meaningful rises in their incomes and sought to protect the Basic State Pension. Under the 'triple lock', the proportion of total benefit spending on state pensions rose from 36.6% in 2010/11 to 41.8% in 2015/16 - its highest level since 1983/84 (Hood and Phillips, 2015:6). Moreover, between April 2010 and April 2016, the value of the state pension increased by 22.2%, compared to growth of earnings of 7.6% and an increase in prices of 12.3% over the same duration (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2016). Since older women are more reliant than

older men on the Basic State Pension (Rummery, 2016), the rise in state pensions, achieved through the ‘triple lock’, was beneficial for their incomes.

The Coalition also made reforms to the State Pension Age (SPA), in an aim to “reduce the advantage currently enjoyed by women over men as a result of lower pension age and higher life expectancy” (DWP, 2010:67). From the 1940s until April 2010, the SPA was set at 60 for women and 65 for men. The Pensions Act 1995 increased the SPA for women from 60 to 65 in a series of stages from April 2010 and 2020, to harmonise the SPA between men and women (Thurley and McInnes, 2016:3). In light of increased life expectancy, the timetable for changes to the SPA was accelerated further under the Coalition: the Pensions Act 2011 sped up the increase of women’s SPA to 65 between April 2016 and November 2018. Additionally, the Act brought forward the increase in women’s SPA to 66 from October 2020 – nearly six years earlier than had been planned under the previous New Labour government. The increase in scheduled rises meant that approximately 500,000 women born between 6 October 1953 and 5 April 1955 would have to wait a year or longer to receive their State Pension than under the previous legislation (HL Hansard, 6 July 2011). Of these, around 300,000 would have to wait 18 months longer, while 33,000 would have to wait two years longer before receiving their State Pension (ibid.).

Following the implementation of the Pensions Act 2011, there were growing concerns for the Government to take action, amid fears that many women – particularly those born in 1954 – would have their retirement plans “shattered” (Jones, 2016). The Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign stated that the changes to pensions were made “unfairly and disproportionately” against many women born in the 1950s (Jones, 2016). Indeed, the accelerated rise in SPA pertains to a cut in state pensions for women (Ginn and MacIntyre, 2013:95). For women who experienced a two-year delay, the loss of income from State Pensions was estimated to amount to £10,000 - or £15,000 for

women in receipt of Pension Credit (HL Hansard, 6 July 2011). Additionally, there were also concerns that many women were not informed about government changes to State Pensions. WASPI stated that some women “were given as little as one year’s notice of up to a six-year increase in their state pension age”, while many women reported receiving no letters at all (Jones, 2016). The lack of appropriate notification, Ginn and MacIntyre (2013:95) argue, gave women little time to adjust their retirement plans and failed to acknowledge the gendered constraints on women’s longer employment. A March 2016 report by the Work and Pensions Select Committee concluded that “more could and should have been done” to communicate the reforms (House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2016:4).

Additionally, in April 2013, the Coalition announced its plans for a single-tier state pension. Pensions Minister, Steve Webb, sought to simplify what was once described as the “most complex pension system in the world” (Pensions Commission, 2004:210). The reform was conducted through the Pensions Act 2014, which combined the complex two-tier pension system into a single-tier flat rate model. Prior to the Coalition government, the previous pensions system consisted of two tiers: the Basic State Pension (BSP) and the Second Tier Pension (S2P). Under the BSP, individuals with a full record of National Insurance contributions would pay towards a flat-rate benefit, and would gain access to the BSP when reaching state pension age (SPA) (Thurley, 2016). The S2P was based on contributions from earnings, which individuals could build up throughout their working life (ibid.). The new single-tier pension came into force in April 2016, which replaced the S2P. The new pensions system would be set above the basic level of means-tested support and would require 35 years of National Insurance contributions (rather than 30 under the previous system) (DWP, 2013:8). For those eligible to qualify, the single-tier pension therefore provided a slightly higher income than that of Pension Credit and was expected to benefit two-thirds of women who reached the State Pension Age by 2020 (Women’s Budget Group, 2018b).

Despite improvements to the structure of the state pension system, the single-tier pension did little to acknowledge the gendered nature of the workforce. The increased eligibility requirement of 35 years of National Insurance contributions (as opposed to 30 years under the old system) disproportionately impacted women, who are more likely than men to take time out of the labour force to undertake unpaid care (Thurley et al., 2018:3). Additionally, women comprise three-quarters of part-time workers (ONS, 2015), who are less likely to be in an occupational pension scheme than men (Price, 2006). Women who have taken time out of the labour force are therefore less likely to accrue the 35 years of National Insurance contributions required for full pension eligibility. As well as a gendered impact, there would also be differences across age. The transitional approach also meant that younger generations would receive a proportionally smaller single-tier amount than under the previous system, since entitlement would be set according to their National Insurance contribution history, and they are more likely than older generations to have fewer qualifying years. In turn, this meant that younger generations would be less likely to accrue contributions to the additional state pension, which could be used to top up the new STP.

Finally, the Coalition pledged ‘pension freedoms’ for pensioners with Defined Contribution (DC) schemes (HM Treasury, 2014:4).⁵ Firstly, in the 2014 Budget, Osborne announced that those aged 55 and over would now be able to withdraw their entire pension savings in one lump sum from April 2015 (HM Treasury, 2014:2), although they would be subject to a marginal rate of tax if they withdraw over 25% of the fund value (McKay and Rowlingson, 2016:188). This was enacted under the Taxation of Pensions Act 2014. Second, the Taxation of Pensions Act 2014 also gave people the choice to opt out of purchasing annuities, which pay a regular income for life (Hills, 2015:3). Prior to the Act, pension tax legislation had strongly encouraged the purchase of an annuity (Thurley, 2015:3). Within the

⁵ Defined Contribution schemes, also known as ‘money purchase’ pension schemes, are those where employees (and employers) contribute towards an individual pension fund.

2010 Coalition Agreement, the Government stated that it would “end the rules requiring compulsory annuitisation at 75” (HM Government, 2010b:26) and thus give pensioners greater freedom as to how they spend their money.

The new pension freedoms could be expected to have a mixed impact on women. For many women with DC schemes, the extended pension freedoms could enable them to use their retirement savings to potentially offset the impact of austerity measures. Moreover, due to greater longevity women have, on average, lower annuities than men (Price, 2006). Ending compulsory annuitisation would therefore be appealing to women who may have previously purchased annuities at low rates (Women’s Budget Group, 2014). While the new pension flexibilities gave many pensioners greater choice over how to spend their savings, there were, however, concerns that some pensioners would exhaust the bulk of their savings prematurely (Pensions Policy Institute, 2014). This is further compounded by the fact that individuals often underestimate their life expectancy and thus fail to save appropriately (ibid.). Since women experience greater longevity, money they have saved for retirement would need to last them over a longer period of time.

Overall, pension policies under the Coalition were beneficial to older generations – predominantly older women, who form the majority of the older population (ONS, 2017). The Coalition’s commitment to protecting spending on the state pension and pension-age benefits helped to protect the incomes of older women and shield them from the harshest impacts of austerity. Moreover, pension flexibilities provided pensioners with access to their pension funds, which may have been particularly attractive to older women, since they tend to be poorer than men in later life (Price, 2006). However, not all pension reforms had a positive impact on women. The equalisation of the SPA, for instance, left many women in their late 50s and early 60s little time to plan for their retirement. Meanwhile, the increase in the number of years before women are entitled to a state pension under the single-tier

pension will compromise the ability of younger generations to gain full pension eligibility. Taken together, we would expect pension policies to lead to increased Conservative support among older women, but reduced Conservative support among some working-age women – particularly those affected by changes in the SPA.

Childcare

Throughout the course of its administration, the Coalition introduced a number of beneficial childcare policy measures for women concerning free entitlement. In 2010, the Coalition expanded the universal entitlement of free part-time early education for three- and four-year olds, from 12.5 hours to 15 hours per week for 38 weeks per year. From September 2013, the entitlement was later extended, when the Coalition rolled-out free early education places to 20% of the most disadvantaged two-year olds (HM Government, 2013:5). This was later increased to 40% the following year (*ibid.*). In many ways, the extension of free entitlement was largely successful as the take-up of free nursery places for three- and four-year-olds was near universal: by 2015, 94% of three-year olds and 99% of four-year-olds used part of their free 15 hours (National Audit Office, 2016:6).

Moreover, the Coalition aimed to tackle the high costs of childcare through an annual package of £750 million in government investment (Thompson and Ben-Galim, 2014:2). Firstly, in the 2013 Budget, the Coalition announced it was to introduce a new tax-free childcare scheme for working families with children under 12, from Autumn 2015 (HM Treasury, 2013:5). Replacing the previous Employer Supported Childcare (otherwise known as the ‘Childcare Voucher’) scheme, the policy was designed to “support working families with 20% of their childcare costs up to £1,200 per child per year” through an online system (*ibid.*). In 2014, the Government later extended the amount of annual childcare costs that would be covered, from £6,000 to £10,000. To qualify for the scheme, all parents would need to be in paid employment. Additionally, parents would also need to have a household income

of under £300,000 per year (or £150,000 for a single parent) (HM Government, 2013:27). The Government estimated that around 2.5 million parents would be eligible for the scheme (HM Government, 2013:4) and suggested it would “incentivise as many women as possible to remain in the labour market” as a result (Dominiczak and Swinford, 2014).

While many acknowledged that the tax-free childcare policy was an improvement of the previous Childcare Voucher scheme and welcomed the help with childcare costs, there were concerns regarding families that fell into a gap between Universal Credit and the tax-free childcare scheme (Rutter, 2015:7). For instance, some families in receipt of tax credits may gain financially if they participate in the new tax-free childcare scheme (ibid.). Meanwhile, other families who are receiving support with their childcare costs through the new tax-free childcare scheme may be financially better off under Universal Credit or tax credits (Rutter, 2015:7).⁶ The policy was also notably regressive: it was estimated that 80% of those eligible for the tax-free scheme would be in the top 40% of income distribution, while only 1% of families in the bottom 40% of income distribution would be eligible (Alakeson et al., 2013:6). The fact that families with a combined income of slightly under £300,000 would still be eligible for the scheme raised questions regarding entitlement (Edwards and Gillies, 2016:256). Thus, these changes reinforced the notion that childcare would be largely available to those who have a higher disposable income.

Though measures on the subsidisation of childcare costs were designed to support families and encourage more women to enter the workforce, progress on the affordability of childcare has, overall, been slow. Between 2010 and 2015, the cost of a part-time nursery place rose by over 30% (Rutter, 2015). Following this increase, out-of-pocket childcare costs

⁶ Increasing demand-side funding (as opposed to supply-side funding) runs the risk of becoming inflationary, since childcare providers may view the additional money that parents are able to spend on childcare as an opportunity to increase service prices. Childcare costs first rose above the rate of inflation in 2005, after the introduction of childcare vouchers (Rutter, 2015:7).

in the UK have now become the most expensive in Europe (OECD, 2020a). The costs of childcare have consequently impacted many families. In fact, research by Huskinson et al. (2014:55) notes that childcare costs are a continuing challenge for families: over a quarter of parents have stated that they find it difficult to pay for childcare and many are discouraged from working by the high cost of services. In particular, childcare costs have been to the detriment of women, since they are more likely to be primary carers and partake in part-time work. The ONS Labour Force Survey revealed that the number of women leaving their jobs in order to care for their children at home had increased by 32,000 from 2010-11 due to the high cost of childcare (Osborne, 2011). Osborne (2011) expands, “A woman with a one-year-old and a seven-year-old who earns £17,513 after tax will have £120 left if she does pay for childcare. If she does not have to meet childcare costs, she will have £1,118”.

Notwithstanding the rising cost of childcare, barriers to women entering the labour force are further reinforced through an under-supply of childcare. Green et al. (2004:19) find that over a third of women (39.1%) expressed that their commitments to care had prevented them from pursuing work or progressing in work. A lack of available childcare was cited as a reinforcing factor, particularly for lone mothers (ibid.). In the UK, the supply of childcare has not been matched with demand. Many parents have reported difficulties in finding childcare: approximately one in three parents stated a shortage of childcare places in their area (Huskinson et al., 2014:115). This has also been reflected in figures from local authorities: fewer than half (45%) of local authorities in England have sufficient childcare places for parents who work full-time, and only 9% of local authorities have enough after-school childcare for nine to 11 year olds (Women’s Budget Group, 2017b:2).

Shortages in childcare places have, in part, been compounded by the closure of Sure Start children’s centres and cutbacks in early education services. Cuts to local authority funding have left local childcare services vulnerable (Stewart and Obolenskaya, 2015:15).

Against the backdrop of austerity, the Coalition removed the ring-fence around funding for Sure Start centres in 2011. Introduced in 1998, Sure Start centres were established to deliver support to children and young families in disadvantaged areas. The National Children's Bureau (2015) reported that real spending on early education, childcare and Sure Start centres fell by over a third (37%), from £1.5 billion in 2010-11 to £0.9 billion in 2014-15 (Women's Budget Group, 2017b:3). The reduction in spending on early education services and cuts to local authority budgets pertained to the closure of over 900 Sure Start centres in England between 2010 and 2015 (Bate and Foster, 2015:21). The closure of Sure Start centres has meant that deprived areas are more likely to bear the brunt of financial retrenchment and leave those with the highest levels of need with fewer resources upon which to rely (Women's Budget Group, 2017b:3).

Clearly, a number of family-friendly measures were introduced by the Coalition concerning childcare. However, some of these measures were limited in their effect. The regressive nature of the tax-free childcare scheme, for instance, has provided limited support to lower-income families, including many women, by excluding eligibility from Universal Credit recipients. Moreover, such measures have been negated by the under-supply and rising cost of childcare, in which there was limited government action. Consequently, these measures have compromised women's access to the labour market, thereby undermining their ability to gain financial autonomy and access resources. Examining childcare policies as a whole, therefore, would suggest reduced Conservative support among working-age women with children in 2015.

Family welfare

Significant reforms were made to family welfare over the length of the Coalition term. In order to "encourage shared parenting from the earliest stages of pregnancy" (HM Government, 2010b:20), the Coalition introduced measures concerning greater flexibility of

working for men and women. One notable policy for women was the right to request flexible working, introduced through the Children and Families Act 2014. Previously, the right to request flexible workers was restricted to carers and those undertaking childcare. However, the Act extended this right to all employees. Additionally, the Coalition introduced Shared Parental Leave. In the UK, women are entitled to 52 weeks of maternity leave with 39 weeks of pay. The implementation of Shared Parental Leave meant that, from April 2015, fathers would be able to share maternity or adoption leave with the mother as they wished, in addition to the two weeks' statutory paternity leave for fathers. The implementation of Shared Parental Leave policies can encourage new fathers to take up a greater share of childcare and to enable mothers to return to the workforce. Shared Parental Leave can facilitate greater gender equity compared to maternity leave, as it incentivises women to (re-)enter the labour market while men take-up childcare instead. As such, the enactment of Shared Parental Leave appeared to be beneficial in terms of increasing women's access to the labour market.

Yet the take-up of paternity leave has been, in practice, relatively low. While Shared Parental Leave was estimated to benefit over 285,000 working couples (BIS, 2013), research among 200 employers and 1000 parents by the organisation My Family Care and the Women's Business Council discovered that four out of 10 employers had not seen any male employees take up their right to parental leave (Osborne, 2016). What is more, fewer than 10% of employers reported more than 1% take-up (ibid.). The UK take-up rate compares to countries such as Sweden and Norway, where approximately 90% of fathers use paternity leave (ibid.). Reasons for the low take-up of paternity leave (such as it being "financially unworkable", a "lack of awareness" and "women refusing to share their paternity leave") (Kemp, 2016) do not appear to be a fault of the policy *per se*, but rather a reluctance on the part of society to embrace cultural change.

The Coalition enacted a significant set of reforms to family allowances. Family allowances, if paid directly to mothers, can be a means of economic independence for stay-at-home mothers (Mazur, 2002:107). The Coalition announced that the childcare element of Universal Credit would increase from April 2016 (HM Government, 2013:4). Accordingly, families would be able to claim 85% of childcare costs, where both parents (or lone parent) meet the minimum tax threshold (HM Government, 2013:4). Previously, families were able to claim 70% of childcare costs through the government. However, the increase in the childcare element was counteracted by the cut in Working Tax Credit, which was reduced from 80% to 70% in April 2011 - estimated to save £385 million a year by 2014-15 (Stewart and Obolenskaya, 2015:17). The cut to Working Tax Credit amounted to a loss of approximately £30 a week for help with childcare, and adversely affected women since they comprise 70% of tax credit recipients (Lansley, 2011).

The cut to Working Tax Credit represented a wider set of reversals under the Coalition concerning child support. 2011 saw the abolition of the Health in Pregnancy Grant (a lump sum payment of £190), the Baby Tax Credit (worth £545 a year), Child Trust Funds and saw restrictions imposed on the Sure Start Maternity Grant (a one-off payment of £500 for low-income families to assist with the cost of baby items), which would be limited to the first child only (Stewart and Obolenskaya, 2015:20-21). It was estimated that cuts to the Sure Start Maternity Grant would affect over 262,000 women (PCS, 2013:7). Meanwhile, changes in the eligibility for Working Tax Credit increased the number of working hours for parents, from 16 to 24 hours per week. Reforms were also made to Child Benefit. While the child element of Child Benefit increased above inflation, this was complemented with a three-year freeze in cash terms (Hills, 2015:13). Moreover, Child Benefit was tapered for higher-rate taxpayers (those who have an income of £50,000 or more) and was withdrawn completely for those who with an income of £60,000 or more (Hood and Phillips, 2015). These changes

to Child Benefit were likely to be felt hardest by mothers, since they comprise 85% Child Benefit recipients (IFF Research, 2017).

Reflecting Conservative support for marriage and the idea of the 'stable family', in 2013, the Coalition introduced the transferable tax allowance (TTA), otherwise known as the 'Married Couple's Allowance'. Under the TTA, married taxpayers would be able to transfer 10% (just over £1,000) of their unused personal allowance to their partner (Hills, 2015:14). While Cameron presented the policy as 'inclusive' since TTA would also include those in civil partnerships, the policy was criticised on the grounds that it encourages a male single earner model which reduces incentives for women to enter the labour market (Campbell and Childs, 2015c:420). Analysis by the Women's Budget Group estimated that only around 14% of women would benefit from the policy (Women's Budget Group, 2014:20-21).

Family welfare under the Coalition saw a number of positive gains made towards gender equality. These primarily concerned legislative action to encourage a more equitable division of labour, notably through Shared Parental Leave and the right to request flexible working. Yet at the same time, progress on gender equality through symbolic legislative action was undermined by reductions in transfer payments pertaining to family allowances and child support. Such measures were complemented by tax incentives in which the main beneficiaries would be men, doing little to counteract clawbacks in welfare entitlements. As a result, these withdrawals in family welfare support lead us to expect reduced Conservative support among working-age women with children in 2015.

The NHS

Spending on the NHS was ring-fenced under the Coalition. Between 2009/10 and 2014/15, spending on health increased in real-terms at an average rate of 1.1% per year (Lee and Stoye, 2018). While this figure represented the lowest average five-year increase since

the 1950s, spending on health was protected compared to other areas in the context of austerity. As greater users of health care, the protection of spending on the NHS appeared to be largely good news for women. However, the increase in spending on health care masked a clear age divide. Growing demands from an ageing population meant that increased spending on health care was primarily focused on older generations, who are greater users of NHS services compared to younger generations (Stoye, 2017). This was largely beneficial to older women in particular, as they comprise the majority of the older population. The situation differed for those of a working-age. Once taking into account the age structure of the population, real age-adjusted per-capita spending on health decreased between 2010/11 and 2014/15 (Stoye, 2017).

In order to sustain the increase in NHS funding, the Coalition implemented a series of efficiency savings. The 2010 Spending Review Settlement outlined plans for the NHS to increase productivity by 4% over four years, equating to £20bn of efficiency savings between 2011 and 2015 (National Audit Office, 2011). Glennerster (2015:305) notes that in addition to cutting the price of treatment that local hospitals would charge commissioners, the majority of efficiency savings came from pay freezes and significant reductions in administrative staff. Between 2011 and 2013, the Coalition imposed a 1% public sector pay freeze applying to NHS staff. The impact of these changes within the NHS has implications for women's earnings and employment. Women's higher representation in the public sector means that they are disproportionately affected by public sector pay freezes. Indeed, women comprise 65% of public sector workers (Annesley, 2012:19). In areas such as the NHS, where women comprise 77% of employees (NHS, 2018), this impact on women's earnings is amplified.

Overall, while increased NHS spending under the Coalition appeared to be good news for all women, there were clear differences by age. Thanks to protected NHS spending

on older generations, older women were arguably the main beneficiaries of health care policy under the Coalition. As a result, this would lead us to expect increased Conservative support among this group. Meanwhile, lower spending per capita on younger generations, comprised with efficiency savings affecting women's earnings, would suggest reduced Conservative support among working-age women.

Transportation

During the course of the Coalition, transport spending fell in real-terms. Between 2010-11 and 2015-16, the Department for Transport faced a cut to its budget of around 6.5% (Crawford and Keynes, 2015:158). This decline represented a reversal in increased transport spending since the early 2000s and mirrored spending cuts to departments seen elsewhere. As well as a real-terms reduction in transport spending, the proportion of public service spending on transport also fell to around 2.8% in 2014-15, slightly below its historical average of between 3-4% (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2015).

While spending on transport declined between 2010 and 2015 overall, a closer analysis shows that spending on different modes of transportation has been largely unequal. Indeed, according to the HM Treasury (2019), spending on railways gradually increased over time and steadily increased under the Coalition. Road-building also featured as a high priority in the Coalition's transport programme. As part of its Infrastructure Bill in 2015, the Government's plans were designed to triple levels of spending into road infrastructure by 2021 and invest in over 100 road schemes (Department for Transport, 2015a).

Despite sustained funding on railways and roads, other areas of transport fared comparatively worse. Local public transport – including buses – represented the lowest expenditure on any form of transport, with £2,519 million being spent in this area in 2014-15 (HM Treasury, 2019). Levels of spending on local public transport marked the biggest

decrease compared to any other form of public transport since 2010 (ibid.). The 2010 Spending Review outlined plans to reduce cut the Bus Service Operators Grant by 20%, which provides subsidies to local bus operators for the cost of fuel duty and subsidises the cost of passenger travel (Raikes, Straw and Linton, 2015). Reductions have also come indirectly at a local level, following central government spending reductions to local authority budgets. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government – from which council funding for bus services derives – witnessed larger funding reductions than any other government department between 2009-10 and 2014-15 (Raikes, Straw and Linton, 2015). By 2014, 70% of local councils had cut bus funding, with a reduction of £19 million across England in 2013 alone (Campaign for Better Transport, 2013).

Reductions in funding have resulted in bus services being altered or withdrawn. The Campaign for Better Transport (2015) estimated that, since 2010, local authorities had reduced or withdrawn over 2,400 bus routes across England and Wales. Rural bus routes, which rely on local government subsidies for their existence, were among those affected by reduced service provision (ibid.). Altered services were complemented with changes to travel prices, which oversaw significant bus fare increases since 2010. Between March 2010 and March 2015, the average annual percentage change in bus fares was 4.5%, higher than the average annual rate of inflation during these years (3.1%) (Department for Transport, 2015b).

Taken together, these changes to transport services between 2010 and 2015 have had a gendered impact. This is because men and women differ in their transportation methods. Across England in 2016, women made one third more journeys by bus than men, while men made one third more journeys by train (Department for Transport, 2018). These gendered mobility patterns appear to persist across all life stages. Women of all ages use buses more frequently than rail services, and 82% of eligible older women hold a

concessionary bus pass, compared to 74% of men (Unison, 2014). Comparatively, men are less likely than women to use public transport, and are instead more likely to drive (Department for Transport, 2018).

Research suggests that these differences in gendered mobility patterns are due, in part, to the gendered division of labour, differential access to resources and differential patterns of care (Sager, 2016). These factors affect women's travel patterns in various ways. On average, women tend to travel shorter distances than men: women are more likely to work in jobs closer to home, undertake household maintenance activities, and carry out unpaid caring activities, which often require them to make several shorter (and more frequent) journeys per day in complex trip chains, involving multiple 'anchor points' (such as the home, workplace, shops and children's schools or nurseries) (Sager, 2016).

Reforms to public transport between 2010 and 2015 have had an impact on the daily lives of women. Reduced access to local transport, such as cuts to local bus routes, especially impacts older women as they are more reliant on public transport (Unison, 2014). Cuts to local transport restrict women's daily mobility and increases isolation, particularly for those living in rural areas. A survey by Unison (2014) found that 12% of women stated that they do not have access to a local bus service after 7pm, while one third stated that their last local bus service was before midnight. As well as reduced services, increases in local transport fares also have a greater impact on women as lower earners.

The Coalition's decision to maintain spending on certain modes of transport rather than others has had a differential impact on the lives of men and women. Local public transport – mostly used by women – faced budget cuts in government subsidies as well as local authority funding. The gendered impact of transport policy would lead us to expect reduced Conservative support among older women and women with children in particular, since they are greater users of transport.

Conclusion and expectations

This chapter has explored the key gendered policy agendas over the course of the Coalition government. Through the use of Htun and Weldon's (2010; 2018) framework, the chapter has identified key policy developments affecting women between 2010 and 2015, according to the 'gender status' and 'class-based' policy dimension. Finally, this chapter has highlighted the expected electoral implications on women's voting behaviour throughout each gendered policy agenda. These expectations are summarised below:

Table 3.1. Gendered policies under the Coalition and expectations on Conservative support in 2015, using Htun and Weldon's (2018) typology

Policy type	Policy agenda	Key policies	Expectation
Gender status	Violence against women and girls	Stalking made a specific offence; criminalisation of coercive behaviour; police forces to collect data on domestic abuse against a national standard; criminalisation of revenge pornography; extended criminalisation of human trafficking; expanded legal definition of domestic violence; Domestic Violence Protection Orders; Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme; extended criminalisation of FGM offences	Increased Conservative support among women
	Women's political representation	Some 'soft' measures to increase women's political representation: equality promotion (Women2win campaign); equality rhetoric (pledges to improve the number of women in the next Parliament)	Reduced Conservative support among women
	Austerity	90:10 spending cuts: tax increases	Reduced Conservative support among

Class-based			women – particularly among those of a working-age
	Pensions and pension-age benefits	Ring-fenced spending on pensions; triple-lock indexation; equalisation of the State Pension Age; single-tier pension; increased pension flexibilities	Increased Conservative support among older women; reduced Conservative support among some working-age women
	Childcare	Expansion of universal childcare for three- and four-year olds (later rolled-out to disadvantaged two-year olds); tax-free childcare scheme; removal of ring-fenced funding for Sure Start centres	Reduced Conservative support among working-age women with children
	Family welfare	Extended right to request flexible working; Shared Parental Leave; increase in the childcare element of Universal Credit; reductions to Working Tax Credit; abolition of the Health in Pregnancy Grant, Baby Tax Credit and Child Trust Funds; reduced eligibility for the Sure Start maternity grant and Working Tax Credit; freeze and tapering of Child Benefit; Transferable Tax Allowance	Reduced Conservative support among working-age women with children
	The NHS	Ring-fenced spending on the NHS; 1% public sector pay cap	Increased Conservative support among older women; reduced support among women of a working-age
	Transportation	Increased spending on roads and rail; reduced spending on local transport	Reduced Conservative support among

			older women and women with children
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As Table 3.1 shows, a number of gender status policies were brought forward that could be expected to have a positive outcome on *all* women. The majority of gender status policies under the Coalition largely concerned the eradication of VAWG. Generally, gender status policies can be considered affordable for political parties to adopt (Gains and Lowndes, 2014; Weldon, 2002:18): changes in legislation cost governments very little, whereas redistributive class-based policies that challenge power relations and hierarchies are more costly given that they require some restructuring of the existing political system. As a result, many of the gender status policies that were implemented did little to radically change power relations and patriarchal norms, reflected in the Coalition’s decision to advance policies to end VAWG while simultaneously dispersing reduced funding for VAWG services. This was also reflected in the Conservative Party’s decision to adopt ‘soft’ measures towards increasing women’s descriptive representation, as opposed to more radical equality guarantees. In contrast, class-based policies under the Coalition were largely detrimental to women, particularly in the context of the Coalition’s economic policy agenda. There were, however, some exceptions, notably around pension reform and some aspects of family welfare and childcare. The latter includes the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and the tax-free childcare scheme, although the analysis shows that these were limited in effect.

What remains clear from Table 3.1, however, is the expectation that women’s voting behaviour will differ by life-stage. Firstly, due to the Coalition’s policies on pension reform and austerity policies, it is expected that age is one such dynamic. This division is largely prominent between those of a working-age and those of a pensionable age. Many working-age women were exposed to austerity measures which saw the removal of welfare provisions available to those of a working-age, as well as public sector pay caps within the

NHS. Meanwhile, some class-based policies did provide some gains, particularly for older women. These included increased spending on the NHS, increased pension flexibilities, and the introduction of the 'triple lock'. Table 3.1 shows that another dynamic is women with children, many of whom are of a working-age. This is shown within the Coalition's family welfare and childcare policies (such as the tapering of Child Benefit, the removal of ring-fenced funding around Sure Start centres and reductions in the childcare element in Working Tax Credit) as well as reduced generosity in family welfare policies (such as the abolition of the Health in Pregnancy Grant and Child Trust Funds). As such, having children would also be expected to contribute towards intersectional differences in voting behaviour.

Underlying the findings within this chapter is the wider implication that policies that are neutral by design often have unintended gendered effects. For instance, transportation – a policy area that is not typically analogous to gender – witnessed unequal public spending on different modes, which has compromised the services that women are more reliant upon. Similarly, pension policies have assumed a traditional male worker model as a reference point and overlooked gender differences in care. This was perhaps best illustrated in the Pensions Act 2014, which proposed reforms that would consequently restrict the ability of workers who had taken extended breaks out of employment – the majority of whom are women – to accrue National Insurance credits. These examples show that policies are not only gendered, but are *gendering*: by entrenching traditional divisions of labour and gendered patterns of care, they reinforce existing power structures and relations between men and women. 'Gender neutral' policies that fail to fully recognise gender inequalities can serve to reinforce them as an unintended consequence.

Overall, the findings presented in Table 3.1 suggest that a range of policies impacted women's pocketbooks differently across life-stage. According to traditional theories of economic voting and classic reward-punishment models (Downs, 1957; Fiorina, 1981; Key,

1966), this would suggest prominent life-stage differences emerged in women's voting behaviour in 2015. However, these expectations do not sit easily alongside gendered accounts of economic voting behaviour that stem from the 'ethics of care' literature, which suggest that pocketbook issues have little effect on women's voting behaviour (Chaney et al., 1998; Welch and Hibbing, 1992). As such, it is necessary to first address these debates to determine whether pocketbook policies matter to women, before considering the expectations presented in Table 3.1. The next chapter thus re-visits debates of gender and economic voting in the context of the 2015 General Election.

Chapter Four – Gender and economic voting

Introduction

Existing evidence has consistently demonstrated that women were hit disproportionately harder than men by the 2010-15 Coalition's gendered economic policies (Busby and James, 2017; MacLeavy, 2011; Keen and Cracknell, 2017). However, the impact of these policies on women's vote choice may have little effect on party support if women do not vote on policies that personally affect them. Thus, this opens up a debate on pocketbook (or 'egotropic' voting) – "voting for the political candidate or party that benefits the voter the most financially" (Elinder et al., 2015:117), and sociotropic voting, in which individuals base their votes on the vitality of the national economy as a whole (Fiorina, 1981; Key, 1966; Kinder and Kiewiet, 1981). This chapter addresses one of the three research questions in this thesis: do women vote according to issues that affect them personally? In exploring this question, the chapter also asks: are women any less likely than men to vote according to their pocketbooks?

This chapter examines inter-sex differences in economic voting (that is, the differences between men and women voters overall). Specifically, it seeks to explore the hypotheses that women are more likely than men to vote sociotropically and that men are less likely than women to vote according to their pocketbooks. The chapter begins by outlining the case as to why gender and economic voting is worth re-visiting in the context of 2015. Subsequently, it reviews the extant literature on gendered economic voting, which leads to the formulation of my theoretical expectations. It then explores key differences in economic evaluations between men and women, before testing how these potential differences are associated with vote choice at the 2015 General Election. Finally, the chapter discusses these findings in the context of the wider literature and the overall thesis.

The chapter finds strong evidence that positive sociotropic and pocketbook evaluations are associated with a greater likelihood of voting for the incumbent. However, there were no statistically significant gender differences in economic voting. Men were just as likely as women to reward/punish the incumbent on the basis of the national economy. Meanwhile, women were just as likely as men to reward/punish the incumbent on the basis of their household financial situation. Taken together, the chapter suggests that there is more similarity between men and women, rather than differences that are commonly assumed within literature on gender and economic voting.

Why re-visit gender and economic voting?

Changes in women's economic and social status over time

Studies examining gender differences in economic voting have been predominantly confined to the United States, where there is a significant gender gap in voting relative to the UK. Many of these studies are dated from the 1980s and 1990s yet continue to be widely cited in modern gender and voting literature (see Deckman and McTague, 2015; Huddy and Cassese, 2013; Lizotte, 2017). However, over the last 40 years, women's economic and social positioning relative to men has substantially shifted. This suggests that the structure and nature of women's status in Britain has changed since initial studies from the 1980s were published.

Such changes have occurred on an economic and social political basis. Many changes have been slow and incremental, occurring more as a long-term process rather than through abrupt systemic shocks. Most notably, the proportion of women in the labour market has gradually increased over time. In 1980, just over half of women between 16-64 were in the labour market, where women's employment rate stood at 57% (ONS, 2019b). From 2019, women's employment rates stood at 72% (ibid.). For the most part, this reflects an increase

in women's full-time employment, while the proportion of women working part-time has remained relatively stagnant (Roantree and Vira, 2018). Additionally, since the 1980s, the gender pay gap has gradually narrowed. According to OECD (2020b) data, in 1980, the gender pay gap for both full-time employees stood at 36.7%. By 2018, the gender pay gap had narrowed to 16.4% (OECD, 2020b).

Increases in women's labour force participation have partly stemmed from a rise in women's educational attainment (Roantree and Vira, 2018). In 1980, the share of women with first degrees stood at 37%, which increased to 57% in 2011 (Bolton, 2012). While men were traditionally more likely than women to participate in higher education, the gender gap in educational attainment has reversed over time. Since the 1990s, women have comprised the majority of those receiving first degrees (ibid.).

Alongside changes in women's employment and educational attainment, widespread social changes have occurred since the 1980s. Marriage rates between opposite-sex couples have slowly declined over time, and the gender gap in marriage rates has narrowed.⁷ In 1980, there were 48 women marrying per 1000 unmarried women and 60 men marrying per 1000 adult men (ONS, 2019c). However, in 2016, the marriage rate fell to 20 for women and 22 for men (ibid.). These changes have been coupled with a slow shift in attitudes towards gender roles. Research from the British Social Attitudes survey indicates support for traditional gender roles has decreased over time, where 49% of respondents in 1984 agreed that "a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and the family", compared with 13% of respondents in 2012 (Scott and Clery, 2013). Meanwhile, 64% of respondents in 1989 stated they believed that "a mother should stay at home when there is a child under school age", compared with 33% in 2012 (Scott and Clery, 2013).

⁷ Marriage rates are calculated by the number of marriages per head of the unmarried population. Here, 'unmarried' includes those who are single, divorced or widowed.

Taken together, trends in women's employment, educational attainment, marital status and caring patterns over time suggests that the economic and social lives of women have vastly changed over the last 40 years. While gender inequality still remains, these shifts are nonetheless indicative of a gradual, albeit glacial, shift among women out of the private sphere and instead towards the paid labour market. Clearly, given the scale of these changes since studies on gender and economic voting were first published, there is a need to re-examine existing arguments surrounding gender and economic voting in a contemporary context, and interrogate whether the same arguments and conclusions from initial studies still apply.

The context of the 2015 British General Election

As well as changes that have occurred in women's economic and social status over time, I argue that gender differences in economic voting should be examined in the recent UK electoral context for two reasons. Firstly, the run-up to the 2015 British General Election saw the national economy as a focal point of discussion, following five years of fiscal recession (Gamble, 2015). YouGov research suggests that the national economy was also a salient issue in voters' minds. Indeed, the economy was rated by 55% of voters as the most important issue facing the country, above health and immigration (Jordan, 2015). Any differences in economic voting between men and women may therefore be amplified when the national economy features as an important issue among political parties and voters. Moreover, within discussions of the economy was a narrative of austerity. The 2015 election took place after five years of fiscal retrenchment policies, which had gendered effects. Given the disproportionate impact of these austerity policies on women, this would suggest gender differences will emerge in evaluations of the national economy and one's household financial situation. Combined, these reasons indicate a clear need to re-visit studies of gender and economic voting in the context of the 2015 British General Election.

Existing literature and theoretical expectations

As outlined in Chapter Two, the literature on gender and economic voting highlights that women and men employ different economic heuristics in their voting behaviour. This section examines this literature on gender and economic voting in greater depth, in order to frame the theoretical expectations that will guide the analysis within this chapter. Additionally, it draws on this literature to inform the variables that will be used in the vote choice analysis.

Gender differences in economic voting are often used to explain women's propensity to vote Democrat in the US (Andersen, 1999; Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004; Manza and Brooks, 1998). Embedded within this body of literature are expectations that women are more likely to base their votes on the national economy (known as 'sociotropic' voting), whereas men are more likely to vote according to their own personal financial situation (known as 'pocketbook' or 'egotropic' voting) (Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler, 1998; Clarke, Stewart, Ault and Elliott, 2005; Miller, 1988; Welch and Hibbing, 1992). In their analysis of US presidential approval ratings, Clarke et al. (2005:31) find that a national economic evaluation model performs best for women, but a personal model works best for men. Similarly, in their study of US presidential elections, Chaney et al. (1992:12) find that "men are more likely to "vote [with] their pocketbooks" while women are more likely to base their vote choice on how they perceive the economy in general to be performing". Existing literature highlights two competing explanations for these gender differences.

The first explanation, predicated on normative assumptions within psychoanalytic theory, suggests that women are naturally more 'compassionate' and less individually-oriented than men, and are therefore less inclined to vote according to their pocketbooks (Welch and Hibbing, 1992; Chaney et al., 1998). The 'compassion' thesis has formed "One of the most persistent and popular distinctive gender explanations" for women's voting

behaviour (Wolbrecht and Corder, 2020:49). Much of this literature builds on the work of Carol Gilligan (1982), who finds that women and men are socialised to display differences in their moral judgments. Women, Gilligan contends, have been socialised to display an “ethic of care” and responsibility towards others (1982:73), in which they tend to “see themselves in a relationship of connection” (1982:171). Conversely, Gilligan (1982:40) argues that men have been socialised to display an ethic of “justice”, in which they are more inclined to view themselves as autonomous. Expanding on this, Gilligan explains that “The logic of justice (as in the case of distributive justice), places emphasis on rights and formal equality; the ethic of care focuses on responsibility and respect” (Gilligan, 1982:164-5). Thus the differences in the ways women and men are socialised leads to distinct traits and values between both genders.

In a similar vein, Chodorow (1978:198) also contends that women tend to view themselves relationally, whereas men are more inclined to view themselves as separate and disconnected from the world (Diamond and Hartsock, 1981:718). Chodorow (1978) explains that these differences stem from the sexual division of labour in heterosexual nuclear families. As women continue to undertake the bulk of childcare and are present within the family home to a greater extent than men, this leads to differences in attitudes between boys and girls. Girls are more likely to identify with the same-sex parent, leading them to prioritise interpersonal relationships, while boys are more likely to identify with the absent parent (their father), leading them to become more “individuated” and less oriented towards others (Chodorow, 1978). The psychological impact of care on attitudes and values has also been highlighted in the works of several scholars (Elder and Greene, 2008; Ruddick, 1989; Scott et al., 2001), in which it is argued that the impact of mothering leads women to become more altruistic. Authors have argued that women’s greater sense of altruism leads them to ‘trade off’ policies such as increased taxation in order to spend more on public services that will benefit society as a whole (Chaney et al., 1998). In this sense, women may be willing to

forego the impact of austerity on their personal financial situation if they perceive austerity cuts are a necessary measure to boost the national economy.

Using survey data for US presidential and House elections in 1980 and 1984, Welch and Hibbing (1992) examine gender differences in economic evaluations, finding that women are much less likely than men to engage in pocketbook voting, and are slightly more likely to vote sociotropically. They suggest that this may be due to gender differences that arise from the locus of responsibility. In other words, Welch and Hibbing (1992) suggest that men and women attribute blame in different ways. Women, they contend, are “more likely to blame themselves rather than others when things go wrong” (Welch and Hibbing, 1992:202). Additionally, Welch and Hibbing (1992) suggest that their findings could be a result of gender differences in values, where women are more likely to emphasise values such as “cooperation, nurturance, sacrifice, harmony, and moralism”, whereas men “prize rationalism, competition and objectivity” (Sapiro, 1983:30-31, quoted in Welch and Hibbing, 1992:202). Importantly, however, Welch and Hibbing (1992) do not test these assumptions, and thus they remain purely speculative. Similarly, Shapiro and Mahajan (1986) find that different values between men and women lead to gender differences in policy preferences. Examining the US between 1960 and 1980, they find that women are slightly more supportive of what they call ‘compassion’ issues (such as unemployment policies, income redistribution, and other economic policies designed to help poorer social groups), and that, in terms of defence issues, they are much more opposed than men to the use of force (Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986:51).

These virtues ascribed to women, such as compassion, altruism and connectedness, lead authors to argue that women would be more inclined to vote sociotropically, rather than according to their pocketbooks. Chaney et al. (1998) suggest that women vote based on how they see the economy affecting others and punish incumbents on this basis, rather

than on the basis of classically self-interested rational behaviour that concerns their own personal financial situation. At the same time, values ascribed to men, such as rationalism, competition and objectivity, suggest that men are more likely than women to engage in pocketbook voting. As Welch and Hibbing (1992:202) explain,

“While these distinctions are exaggerated, to the extent that women remain less inculcated with values of competition and aggression, we might expect them to be less likely to select a candidate for personal economic reasons, since these values underlie economic criteria”.

Meanwhile, the assumption in the psychoanalytic literature that women are more likely to prioritise relationships would suggest a greater tendency to vote sociotropically as “a woman voter is more likely to see her family’s struggles as part of a larger picture” (Ackelsberg, 1984, quoted in Welch and Hibbing, 1992:203). In essence, women would be more inclined to think relationally to the national economy, and would thus be more likely to vote sociotropically. Taken together, proponents of the ‘compassion’ thesis suggest that these gender differences are not related to socio-economic factors, such as income, age or marital status, but fixed traits and values that stem from socialisation. In other words, women will be more inclined than men to vote sociotropically, irrespective of their socio-economic status. The compassion thesis holds that these gender differences remain fixed over time and space, which suggests that the same gender differences will also be evident in a British context.

However, the link between altruism and sociotropic voting, Lockerbie (2006) argues, is flawed. While sociotropic voting may partly stem from altruistic motivations, it may also proceed from self-interest (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1981). Put simply, voters may base their votes on the wellbeing of other individuals, or alternatively, they may use the national economic situation as a cue for their own financial wellbeing. Thus, this suggests that voters may use ‘rational’, rather than altruistic, motivations.

Therefore, the second explanation for gender differences in economic voting, deriving from rational choice theory, suggests that women are more likely to vote sociotropically since they have a greater stake in the national economy. Several authors argue that women's greater support for income redistribution and other economic policies designed to help poorer social groups may not be due to their greater 'compassion', but because they are more likely to be concentrated in poorer social groups as a result of their lower on average incomes and earning power (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004; Erie and Rein, 1988). In her analysis of US presidential elections between 1980 and 2012, Hansen (2016:5) argues that, "male/female differences in attitudes and behaviour are not based on innate or biological differences between the sexes, but reflect their very different situations with respect to the market economy, responsibility for child-rearing and the welfare state". In the UK, women continue to be overrepresented in lower-paid forms of work, comprising 60% of low earners (D'Arcy, 2017:5).⁸

Additionally, Andersen (1999) argues that, due to undertaking a disproportionate share of unpaid care, women are more likely than men to benefit from redistributive policies and increased public spending on areas such as health and education. Women in the UK continue to undertake the bulk of unpaid care (58%) (ONS, 2011), and comprise the majority (90%) of single parents (Women's Budget Group, 2013). Accordingly, as a result of their greater relative poverty and disproportionate share of unpaid caring activities, women are more reliant on welfare: one-fifth of women's income comes from transfer payments compared to one-tenth of men's (Annesley, 2012). Rational choice arguments contend that as women's economic situations improve, they will have lower preferences for social spending and redistribution.

⁸ Based on a 'core' low pay definition, capturing employees earning under two-thirds of the national median across all workers.

Notably, while the 'compassion' thesis suggests that gender differences in economic voting will remain stable and fixed, the rational choice perspective suggests that gender differences will vary depending on women's socio-economic positioning relative to men. According to rational choice arguments, as women gradually enter the labour force and their material resources improve over time, gender differences in economic voting will narrow. However, gender differences in economic voting may also widen in specific contexts, such as 2015, which saw women disproportionately impacted by austerity. As such, arguments within the rational choice literature suggest the importance of controlling for socio-economic factors, such as class, education, trade union membership and having children, since they may interact with gender and economic attitudes.

It is important to note that rational choice and compassion explanations do not appear to sit easily alongside each other. Rational choice perspectives lead us to believe that women may be more inclined to support sociotropic policies, such as those designed to raise the national minimum wage and increased funding on public services, since they may indirectly benefit from them. As rational choice perspectives suggest that there is an element of self-interest in sociotropic voting behaviour, this shifts explanations away from 'altruism' and 'compassion' towards the 'self'. This emphasis on self-interest appears to resemble theories of pocketbook voting, and therefore poses difficulties in differentiating between sociotropic voting and pocketbook voting effects. Despite this tension, it is possible to distinguish between pocketbook and sociotropic interests: while under the former self-interest occurs at a direct, personal level, under the latter, self-interest may occur indirectly through a societal level.

Regardless of whether the 'compassion' or 'rational choice' theories are correct, the arguments embedded within the extant gendered economic voting literature lead to the following hypotheses:

H0a: Women are no more likely than men to vote according to general economic conditions (sociotropic voting).

H0b: Men are no more likely than women to vote according to their personal financial situation (pocketbook voting).

H1: Women are more likely than men to vote according to general economic conditions (sociotropic voting).

H2: Men are more likely than women to vote according to their personal financial situation (pocketbook voting).

Gender and economic attitudes

Before analysing gender differences in economic attitudes and vote choice, it is necessary to explore whether there are any differences in how men and women generally perceive economic issues. If there are differences in the ways women and men think about the economy, for instance, then this would suggest there might be differences in their economic voting behaviour. The following section of this chapter examines descriptive economic attitudes between men and women overall.

The first area of economic differences between men and women concerns attitudes towards taxation and redistribution. Within the British context, a wide body of literature suggests that women – including women Conservative party members (Campbell and Childs, 2015a; Childs and Webb, 2012) - are more likely than men to prefer higher taxation and higher levels of public spending (Campbell, 2006; 2012). These attitudinal differences, therefore, suggest that women are more likely than men to oppose austerity measures. Women's aversion to public spending cuts can be traced back to the 1950s. Maguire (1998) notes that the Conservatives were particularly successful with women voters after the end of World War II, in part due to their anti-rationing stance. The anti-rationing stance held by

the Conservatives, which strongly differed to their fiscal platform in 2015, appealed to women – especially housewives, who had traditionally been in charge of managing family budgets (Maguire, 1998).

Using the 2015 face-to-face British Election Study (Fieldhouse et al., 2016), gender differences in tax/spend attitudes can be seen in 2015. 0 indicates that the “government should cut taxes a lot and spend much less on health and social services” and 10 indicates that the “government should raise taxes a lot and spend much more on health and services”. The mean self-placement on the scale was 6.3 for women and 6.1 for men, indicating that women are slightly more likely than men to prefer higher taxation and higher spending on public services.⁹ This is consistent with gender differences found in studies elsewhere (Campbell and Childs, 2015a), and resonates with earlier arguments that men are more inclined to favour tax cuts, while women are more likely to consider wider issues such as spending on social services (Alvarez and McCaffery, 2003; Chaney et al., 1998). Given women’s greater relative preference for higher taxation and higher public spending, we might expect women to be more likely than men to have voted against the incumbent government in 2015, due to the Coalition’s implementation of public spending cuts between 2010 and 2015.

The second gender difference concerns issue salience, namely how men and women weigh different issues at election time. For instance, women and men might agree on the condition of the national economy, but the importance they attach to this might affect their vote choice (Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999). Studies of the gender gap have found women are more likely than men to prioritise healthcare, while men are more likely to prioritise the economy (Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986; Wängnerud, 2000). These differences have not only been found in a British context (Campbell, 2006; 2012), but in countries such as Sweden

⁹ Mean gender differences were significant at the 0.01 level, using a t-test.

(Wängnerud, 2000) and the United States (Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986). Table 4.1 shows respondents' top five 'most important issues facing the country' at the time of the 2015 General Election.¹⁰ While both men and women listed immigration as their most important issue facing the country, the largest gender gaps were on the issues of the NHS and the economy. Roughly 7% more women than men selected the NHS as the most important issue facing the country, while roughly 6% more men than women selected the economy. Interestingly, men's greater propensity to list the general economy as the most important issue suggests that they may be *more* likely than women to vote according to sociotropic heuristics. There are insignificant gender differences on the economic issues of 'spending on services' and 'taxation', due in part to the small number of respondents selecting this as their 'most important issue'.¹¹

Table 4.1. Most important issue facing the country in 2015 by gender

Issue	Men	Women
Unemployment	11%	12%
NHS	6.5%	14.2%
Immigration	37%	34.8%
Economy (general)	16.3%	10.2%
Politics (negative)	2.9%	1.2%
Housing	3.3%	4.6%
Poverty, living standards	2.1%	2.9%
Spending on services	6.1%	5.4%
Social inequalities	1.2%	0.9%
Environment	1.5%	0.8%
Education	0.7%	2.1%
Welfare fraud	1.1%	2.7%
Europe	2.3%	0.8%
Terrorism	3.4%	3.4%
Crime	0.8%	0.7%
Scottish constitution	0.3%	0.1%

¹⁰ Due to the relatively small number of cases in each category, it was not possible to break the data down further into sub-categories, such as age group or class. Women aged 35-64 were more likely than their male counterparts or other age groups of women to list the NHS as their most important issue, however there were only 109 women in this category.

¹¹ Only 17 respondents listed 'taxation' as their most important issue.

Ageing population	0.2%	0.2%
Consumer debt	1%	0.9%
National security	0.7%	0.4%
Taxation	0.7%	0.8%
Pensions	0.5%	0.5%
Iraq War	0.5%	0.3%
Total	100% N = 1,020	100% N = 1,112

Statistically significant gender gaps highlighted in bold. Source: British Election Study 2015. N = 2,132. Gender differences significant at the 0.01 level using a Chi Square test.

Previous research has broken these issues down further into generational sub-categories. Using the 2001 British Election Study, Campbell (2004) found that men aged between 35 and 44 were the group most likely to prioritise taxation when asked their most important issue. Meanwhile, women of a childbearing age were more likely to prioritise education at elections, while older women were more likely than their younger counterparts to prioritise healthcare (ibid.). This indicates elements of pocketbook politics: as higher earners on average, men make larger net contributions in taxation and are thus more likely to benefit financially from tax cuts. At the same time, women are more likely to undertake unpaid childcare than men (Busby and James, 2017), and may therefore be more likely to consider education in regard to their children. Finally, older generations are, on average, more reliant on the NHS, as healthcare requirements increase with age (ONS, 2018b). In particular it is older *women* who are more reliant on the NHS. This is because older generations (those over 75) are disproportionately female, due to women's greater longevity (Price, 2006).

The final economic difference between women and men concerns feelings towards the national economy and personal finances. Research suggests that women are consistently more pessimistic than men in their attitudes towards the national economy (Chaney et al., 1998; Clarke, Stewart, Ault and Elliott, 2005), as well as their household financial situation

(Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004), and this is supported in 2015. Figure 4.1 shows the mean self-placement score (on a scale of 0 to 5) of economic evaluations, for both men and women in 2015. There are four indicators. Two indicators concern pocketbook evaluations, where respondents were asked how their household financial situation had changed over the last 12 months (pocketbook retrospective) and how their household financial situation would change over the next 12 months (pocketbook prospective). Two indicators relate to sociotropic evaluations, where respondents were asked how they believed the general economic situation had changed over the last 12 months (sociotropic retrospective) and how the general economic situation would change over the next 12 months (sociotropic prospective). 0 indicates 'A lot worse', while 5 indicates 'A lot better'. Figure 4.1 shows that, in each of the four indicators, women were slightly more towards the lower end of the scale than men. This suggests that women were more pessimistic than men with regard to their economic evaluations.

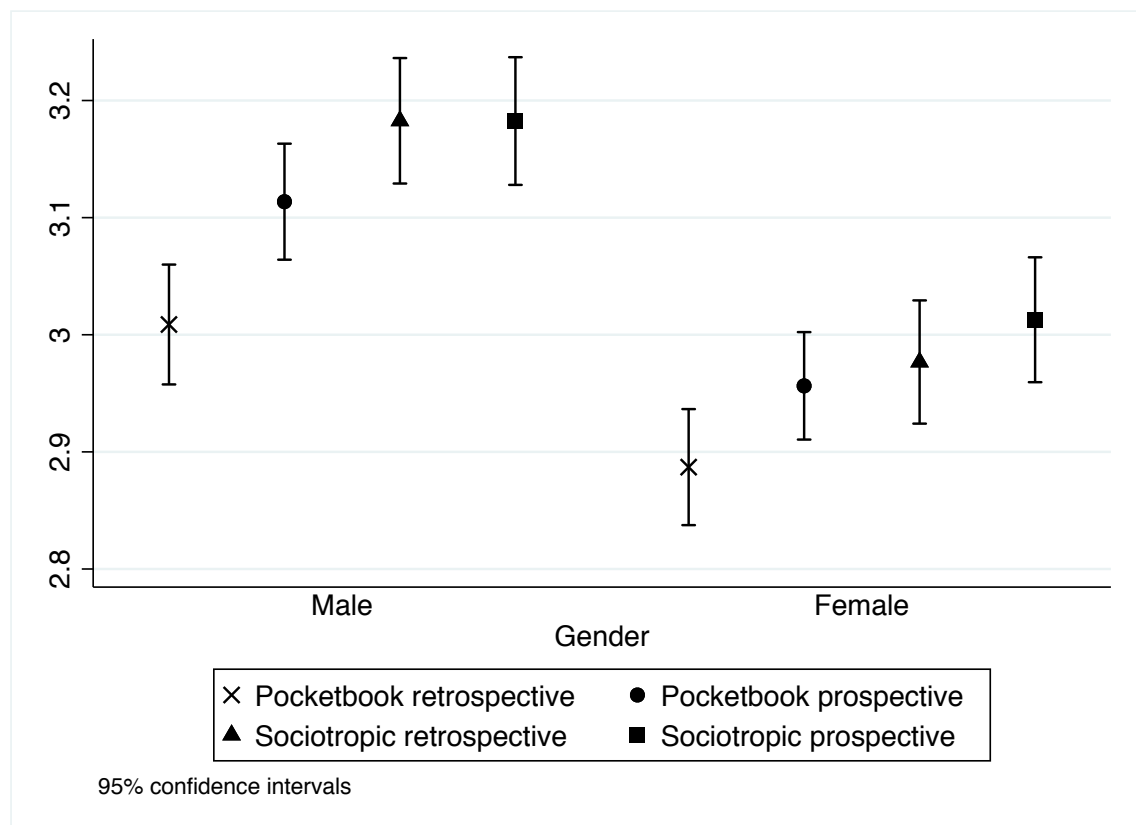


Figure 4.1. Mean self-placement on economic evaluations in 2015 by gender. Source: BES, 2015. N = 2,834. Analysis is weighted according to recommended weights.

How do these economic evaluations in 2015 compare to those during previous elections? Using data from the British Election Studies 1997-2015, Figure 4.2 shows that women are consistently more likely to think that the national economy had worsened over the previous year. This supports findings that women are consistently more pessimistic than men in their evaluations of the national economy (Chaney et al., 1998), as well as evaluations of their own household finances (Campbell, 2006). While all respondents become more pessimistic around the 2008 global financial crisis, it is women who are consistently more pessimistic than men before, during, and after the recession. Interestingly, the difference between men and women's economic evaluations appears to narrow over time, before widening after 2010. This may reflect 'sociotropic' issues that affected women, such as the rise in women's unemployment in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

Turning to pocketbook evaluations, Figure 4.3 shows that until 2005, there is relatively little difference between women and men's attitudes towards their household finances. Women are slightly more pessimistic than men, and these gender differences appear to widen during and after the 2008 financial crisis. Again, given women's greater relative pessimism, we would expect them to be less likely than men to vote for the incumbent government – the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties – in the case of 2015.

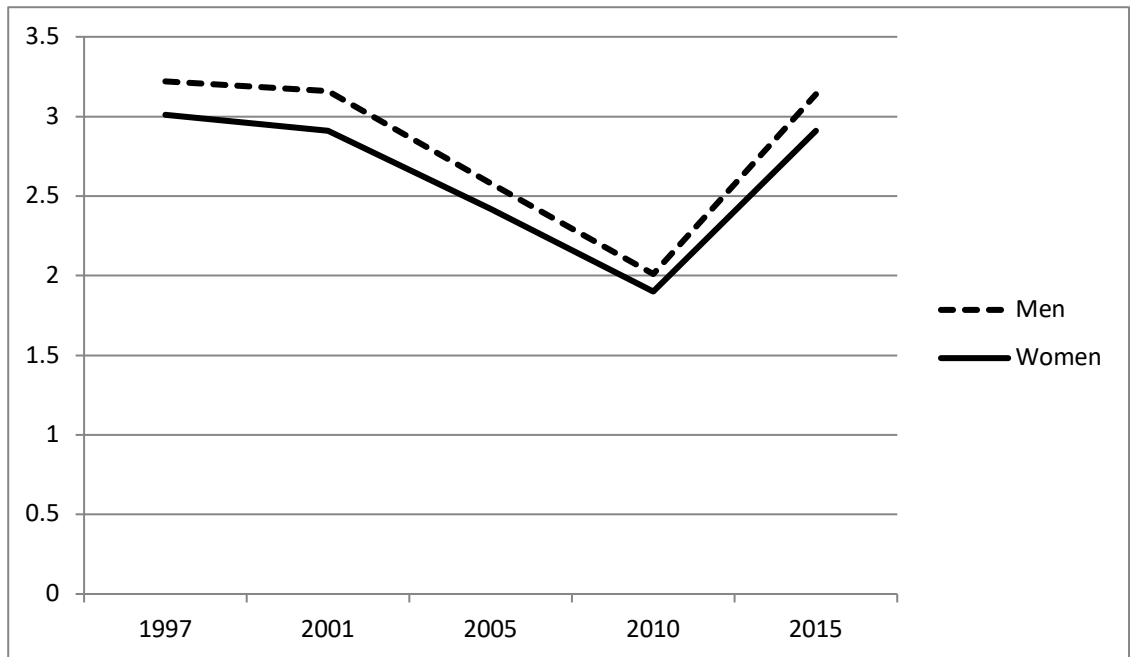


Figure 4.2. General economic evaluations (retrospective) over the last five general elections by gender. Source: British Election Study face-to-face surveys 1997; 2001; 2005; 2010 and 2015. Selected weights applied at each election.

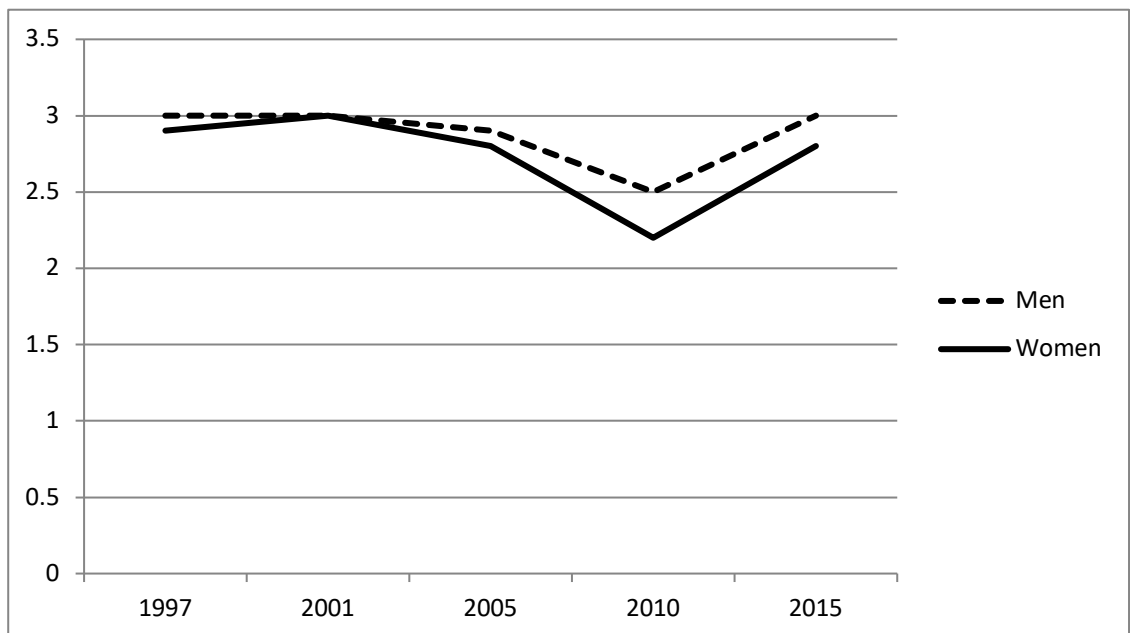


Figure 4.3. Household financial evaluations (retrospective) over the last five general elections by gender. Source: British Election Study face-to-face surveys 1997; 2001; 2005; 2010 and 2015. Selected weights applied at each election.

In summary, then, there are differences in the ways women and men perceive and prioritise economic issues. These differences in economic attitudes give us further reason to

suggest that there might be differences between women and men in regard to pocketbook and sociotropic voting. The next section of this chapter focuses on exploring economic issues and vote choice in greater depth.

Data and methods

In order to examine gender differences in economic voting, I draw on cross-sectional data from the British Election Study's (BES) 2015 face-to-face post-election survey (N = 2,987). The BES, described as the 'gold standard' in survey research (Campbell, 2012), has the advantage of being conducted immediately after the 2015 General Election – the election of focus for this thesis. Additionally, the BES is a nationally representative sample. For the main analysis, I conduct four logistic regression models that include sociotropic voting evaluations (retrospective and prospective) and pocketbook evaluations (retrospective and prospective) and predict the probability of voting for the incumbent for both men and women. The aim here is to examine gender differences in economic evaluations, and to explore how – or whether – they are related to vote choice. The variables are tested using interaction terms, in order to further interrogate whether there is a relationship between gender and economic voting. The use of interaction terms, rather than estimating separate-sample regressions for men and women, allows for testing of the claim that women and men rely differentially on pocketbook and sociotropic heuristics, and whether this is significant. If the interaction effect between gender and economic attitudes is significant and reduces or diminishes after controlling for socio-economic factors, then this would suggest that socio-economic factors are driving gendered differences in economic voting behaviour, thus supporting rational choice theories. If a gender gap remains, this would support the 'compassion' thesis within the ethics of care literature.

The dependent variable (vote choice in 2015) has been coded into a dummy variable, where 0 indicates a vote for non-incumbent parties and 1 indicates a vote for the incumbent

parties (Conservative and Liberal Democrats). The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are considered to be the 'incumbent' due to both parties holding office in the 2010-2015 Coalition government, with a shared formal arrangement. There are, arguably, limitations in grouping the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties together as the incumbent. Both parties sit at different points on the ideological scale, and as the previous chapter (Chapter Three) has shown, many economic policies introduced under the Coalition government came predominantly from the Conservative Party. As such, the results do not depict whether voters are rewarding/punishing the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats to different extents. Therefore, to ensure consistency, the results were then run with the Conservatives as the incumbent party, and the Liberal Democrats excluded. After running the models to predict just Conservative vote choice, the overall findings did not change: gender and its interaction with economic evaluations had an insignificant effect on vote choice across all four indicators. The results can be found in Tables A5-A8 in Appendix A.¹²

There are two key independent variables based on sociotropic evaluations. The first is how respondents believe the general economic situation has fared over the last 12 months (retrospective), and the second is how they believe general economic situation will fare over the next 12 months (prospective). Meanwhile, there are two independent variables for pocketbook evaluations. The first is how respondents believe their household financial situation has fared over the last 12 months (retrospective), and the second is how they believe their household financial situation will fare over the next 12 months (prospective). Here, 'household' is used as a proxy for one's 'personal' financial situation, as there are no items in the BES relating to evaluations of individual finances. These items have been used in analyses of gendered economic voting elsewhere (see Welch and Hibbing, 1992; Kam,

¹² Ideally, a multinomial logistic regression model would show the effects of economic evaluations on Conservative and Liberal Democrat support separately. However, due to the small sample size of respondents stating that they had voted Liberal Democrat in 2015 (158 respondents in total), robust comparisons could not be drawn.

2009). All four variables are based on a continuous five-point scale, where 1 indicates “A lot worse”, 2 indicates “A little worse”, 3 indicates “Stay(ed) the same”, 4 indicates “A little better” and 5 indicates “A lot better”.

There are nine independent variables included in the analysis, drawn from the gender and economic voting literature: gender, age, education, trade union membership, marital status, socio-economic classification, religion, children and left-right economic values. Gender is a dichotomous variable for being either non-female (reference) or female. The age variable is continuous. Education is comprised of six categories: ‘none’ (reference), ‘GCSE or equivalent’, ‘A Level or equivalent’, ‘Post A Level vocational’, ‘degree’, and ‘other’. Marital status contains six categories: ‘married’ (reference), ‘living with partner’, ‘single’, ‘widowed’, ‘separated’ and ‘divorced’. Occupational class is coded according to the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC), which is based on Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC2010). Occupational class is comprised of nine categories: ‘employers in large organisations and higher managerial occupations (reference), ‘higher professional occupations’, ‘lower professional and managerial and higher supervisory occupations’, ‘intermediate occupations’, ‘employers in small organisations and own account workers’, ‘lower supervisory and technical occupations’, ‘semi-routine occupations’, ‘routine occupations’, and ‘never worked’. Religion is comprised of three categories: Anglican (reference), ‘non-religious’ and ‘other denominations’. Finally, having children is coded into four categories: ‘no children’ (reference), ‘just preschool children’, ‘just school children’ and both ‘preschool and school children’. Preschool and school children were split into separate categories, as they influence factors such as access to employment in different ways. The full coding for all variables can be found in Appendix A.

Additionally, the analysis controls for left-right economic values for men and women since these values may influence how voters perceive the national economy as well as their

financial situation. There are four individual economic left-right statements: 'ordinary people get their fair share of the nation's wealth'; 'there is one law for the rich and one for the poor'; 'there is no need for strong trade unions to protect employees' working conditions and wages', and 'it is the government's responsibility to provide a job for everyone who wants one'. These items are found to be a reliable predictor of left-right values, with high levels of consistency (Evans, Heath and Lalljee, 1999). All variables are coded on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates "strongly agree" and 5 indicates "strongly disagree". All four items were collapsed into one single 'left-right' item, using a 1-5 mean scale. The full wording for all questions can be found in Appendix A. All analysis is weighted using the recommended weights in the BES.

Economic evaluations and vote choice analysis

Having examined key economic differences between men and women, I now explore sociotropic and pocketbook voting in turn. Model 1 includes gender and its interaction with one of the four economic indicators. Model 2 shows the interaction effects of gender and one of the four economic indicators on incumbent support once the controls are added. The full logistic regression models can be found in Table A1 and A2 of Appendix A. For ease of interpretation, I plot the predictive margins (with 95% confidence intervals) below each table for incumbent vote by gender. If there are no overlaps in the margin of error between women and men, this indicates that there is a statistically significant gender difference in economic voting, on average.

The first section of this analysis tests H1: that women are more likely than men to vote according to general economic conditions. Given arguments within the sociotropic literature, we would expect to find a positive correlation between those who thought the national economy had, or would, improve and incumbent vote. If H1 holds, we would expect

to find a significant difference between genders in the average change in probability of voting for the incumbent from an increase in the sociotropic indicators.

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show the effects of sociotropic evaluations on incumbent support, and whether there are gender differences. Table 4.2 examines retrospective sociotropic evaluations, where respondents were asked how the general economic situation had changed over the last 12 months. Meanwhile, Table 4.3 examines prospective sociotropic evaluations, where respondents were asked how the general economic situation would change over the next 12 months.

Table 4.2. Logistic regression models for vote choice in 2015 by gender and retrospective general economic situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.408 (0.362)	0.368 (0.411)
General economy retrospective	0.830*** (0.0810)	0.607*** (0.0911)
Female*General economy retrospective	-0.00262 (0.109)	0.0113 (0.123)
Constant	-2.891*** (0.279)	-6.001*** (0.592)
Observations	2,028	1,865
R-squared	0.0994	0.2373

Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Source: BES 2015.

Table 4.3. Logistic regression models for vote choice in 2015 by gender and prospective general economic situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.528 (0.365)	0.387 (0.410)
General economy prospective	0.827*** (0.0811)	0.572*** (0.0893)
Female*General economy prospective	-0.0521 (0.109)	-0.00828 (0.122)
Constant	-2.862*** (0.279)	-5.783*** (0.585)
Observations	1,963	1,808
R-squared	0.0945	0.2296

Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Source: BES 2015.

The positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) coefficient in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 shows that respondents who believed that the general economy had got, or would get, better were more likely to vote for the incumbent in 2015. This is in line with existing theories of sociotropic voting behaviour, suggesting that voters use evaluations of the national economy to guide their vote (Fiorina, 1981; Key, 1966; Kinder and Kiewiet, 1981). Adding the controls slightly reduces the magnitude of sociotropic effects in both Tables, although the effects still remain significant ($p < 0.01$). However, the interaction between gender and sociotropic evaluations is insignificant in model 1 in both Table 4.2 ($p < 0.981$) and Table 4.3 ($p < 0.633$). This suggests that there were no statistically significant differences in the ways that men and women use prospective and retrospective sociotropic evaluations to inform their vote choice. As such, we cannot reject the null hypothesis (H0a) that women are no more likely than men to vote according to national economic conditions.



Figure 4.4. Predicted vote choice in 2015 by gender and retrospective general economic situation with 95% confidence intervals. Source: BES 2015.

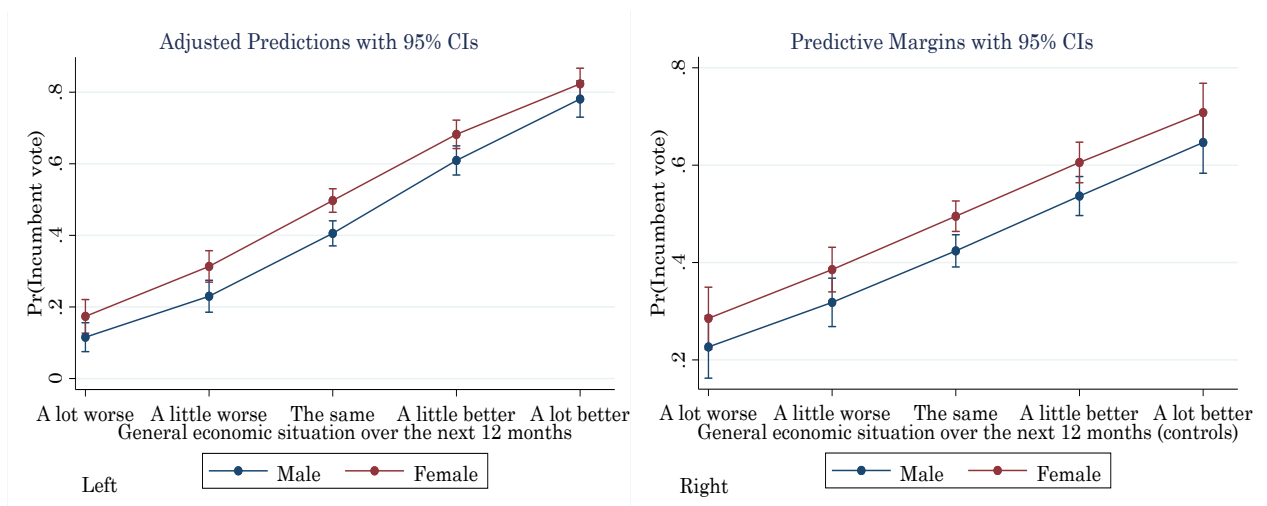


Figure 4.5. Predicted vote choice in 2015, by gender and prospective general economic situation with 95% confidence intervals. Source: BES 2015.

Figures 4.4 and Figure 4.5 (left) show the adjusted predictions from model 1 (without controls), and Figures 4.4 and 4.5 (right) illustrate the marginal effects from model 2 (with controls). The steep positive slopes in Figure 4.4 show that, overall, respondents who believed the national economic situation had got better were more likely to vote for the incumbent. Similarly, the steep slopes in Figure 4.5 show that those who thought that the national economic situation would improve were also more likely to vote for the incumbent. This is reflected in the highly significant positive coefficients in Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show that the slope of voting for the incumbent against sociotropic evaluations is similar for men and women. This is reflected in the very small values for the interaction between gender and evaluations of the general economy in Tables 4.2 and 4.3. The difference between men and women in incumbent support is fairly constant along the scale of sociotropic evaluations, and as such there is an insignificant interaction between gender and sociotropic evaluations, as shown in Tables 4.2 and 4.3. Women are slightly more likely than men to vote for the incumbent, however the overlapping confidence intervals illustrate that this difference is not statistically significant. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 (left) show there are some very small gender differences at certain individual data points, which suggests that there is a slightly greater propensity for incumbent support among women who believed that the general economic situation had or would stay the same. The predictive margins in Figures 4.4 and 4.5 (right) show that adding the controls slightly reduces these gender differences, suggesting that such differences are being driven by socio-economic factors. Individual data points should, however, be treated with caution, as the models include economic evaluations as a *continuous* rather than categorical variable.

Overall, the regression analysis and the marginal effects show that men and women both equally appeared to reward the incumbent in 2015 if they believed the general economic situation had got, or would get, better. At the same time, they were just as likely to punish the incumbent if they believed that the general economic situation had got, or would get, worse.

The second section of this analysis explores H2: that men are more likely than women to vote according to their own personal financial situation. Table 4.4 shows retrospective pocketbook evaluations, where respondents were asked how their household financial situation had changed over the last 12 months. Meanwhile, Table 4.5 shows prospective pocketbook evaluations, where respondents were asked how they believed their

household financial situation would change over the next 12 months. In line with pocketbook assumptions of voting, we would expect to find a significant difference between genders in the average change in probability of voting for the incumbent from an increase in the pocketbook indicators. Specifically, we would expect a stronger positive correlation among men than women. The full regression models can be found in Tables A3 and A4 of Appendix A.

Table 4.4. Logistic regression models for vote choice in 2015 by gender and retrospective household financial situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.268 (0.336)	0.583 (0.406)
Household financial situation retrospective	0.489*** (0.0796)	0.465*** (0.0952)
Female*Household financial situation retrospective	0.00608 (0.108)	-0.0868 (0.128)
Constant	-1.681*** (0.253)	-5.801*** (0.595)
Observations	2,083	1,902
R-squared	0.0330	0.2099

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Source: BES 2015.

Table 4.5. Logistic regression models for vote choice in 2015 by gender and prospective household financial situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	-0.0107 (0.359)	-0.0933 (0.435)
Household financial Situation prospective	0.453*** (0.0798)	0.353*** (0.0963)
Female*Household financial situation prospective	0.0957 (0.114)	0.137 (0.136)
Constant	-1.573*** (0.258)	-5.475*** (0.599)
Observations	2,017	1,854
R-squared	0.0314	0.2056

Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Source: BES 2015.

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 show that pocketbook evaluations are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), where respondents who thought that their household financial situation had got or would get better were more likely to vote for the incumbent. The effects of pocketbook evaluations on vote choice reduce in magnitude although they remain statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) once the controls are added in model 2. In model 1, the coefficient for the interaction between gender and pocketbook evaluations on vote choice is insignificant in both Table 4.4 ($p < 0.955$) and Table 4.5 ($p < 0.401$). This is similar to sociotropic evaluations, where the interaction with gender was also insignificant. The regression analysis suggests that men were no more likely than women to vote according to their personal financial situation and as such H_0b – the null hypothesis – cannot be rejected.

Notably, in model 1, gender and pocketbook evaluations explain only a very small proportion of the variance in incumbent support, as seen in the small size of the model fit

($R^2 = 0.03$ in both Table 4.3 and 4.4). This suggests that the effects of pocketbook evaluations and gender alone have relatively little explanatory power, supporting arguments within economic voting literature (Anderson, 2000; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Lewis-Beck and Stegmeier, 2007). Once the controls are included in the model, the model fit increases substantially ($R^2 = 0.2$ in both Table 4.3 and 4.4), indicating that the control variables explain a much larger proportion of the effects on vote choice compared to gender and pocketbook evaluations alone.

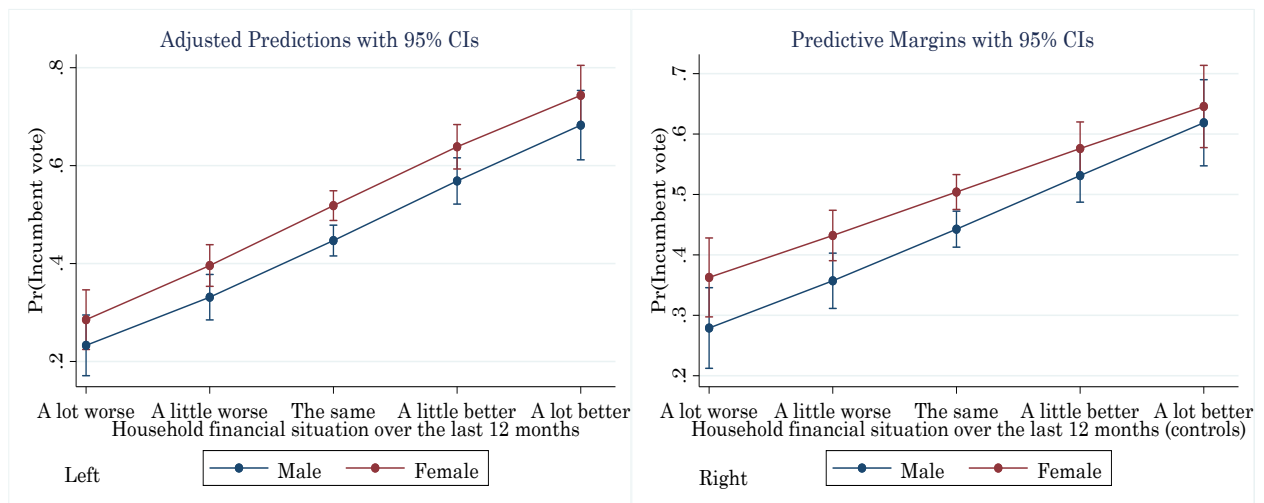


Figure 4.6. Predicted vote choice in 2015, by gender and retrospective household financial situation with 95% confidence intervals. Source: BES 2015.

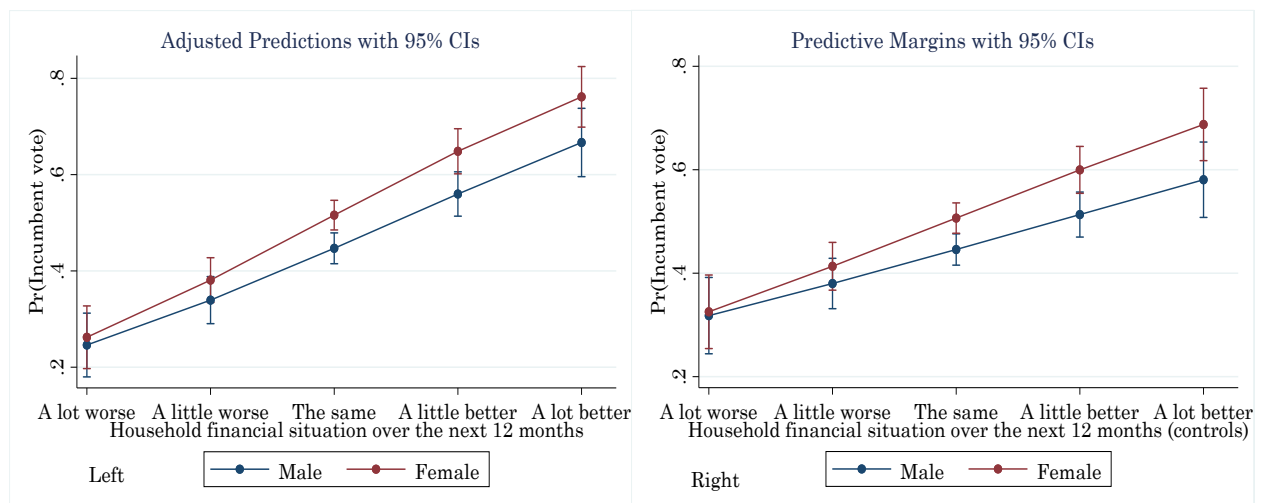


Figure 4.7. Predicted vote choice in 2015, by gender and prospective household financial situation with 95% confidence intervals. Source: BES 2015.

Figures 4.6 and Figure 4.7 (left) show the adjusted predictions from model 1 (without controls), and Figures 4.6 and 4.7 (right) illustrate the marginal effects from model 2 (with controls). The steep positive slopes show that those who believed that their household financial situation had, or would, improve, were more likely to vote for the incumbent, as shown by the highly significant positive coefficients in Tables 4.4 and 4.5.

The parallel slopes in Figures 4.6 and 4.7 illustrate that the likelihood of voting for the incumbent based on one's household financial situation is similar for men and women. This is reflected in the small values for the interaction between gender and pocketbook evaluations in Tables 4.4 and 4.5. This suggests that men and women both equally appeared to reward the incumbent in 2015 if they believed their household financial situation would get, or had got, better. At the same time, men and women were just as likely to punish the incumbent if they believed that their household financial situation had got, or would get, worse. Although women are generally more likely to vote for the incumbent, this gender difference is not statistically significant, as shown by the overlapping confidence intervals. Similar to the sociotropic models, there are some very small gender differences at certain individual data points, where women who thought that their household financial situation had or would stay the same were slightly more supportive of the incumbent. Adding the controls reduces the magnitude of pocketbook effects, as shown by the gradual slope. However, the gender differences still remain small and statistically insignificant. Below, I discuss these findings further, as well as their wider theoretical implications.

Discussion

The overall analysis suggests that there are small but significant gender differences in economic attitudes. Women hold slightly more redistributive attitudes, favouring higher taxation and public spending. The second strand of difference concerns issue salience: men were more likely than women to list the general economy as an important issue in 2015,

while women were slightly more likely to list the NHS. Finally, women were, on average, more pessimistic than men regarding the condition of the national economy and their own financial situation. Yet crucially, while there are differences in the ways women and men weigh and perceive economic issues, they rely on economic voting heuristics in similar ways.

Taken together, both the sociotropic and pocketbook voting analysis suggest more similarity than difference between men and women. For both genders, there is evidence that women and men vote sociotropically – and do so to the same degree. Positive sociotropic evaluations appeared to be associated with voting for the incumbent, while negative evaluations were associated with voting for the opposition. As women and men appeared to rely on sociotropic heuristics to similar extents, this indicated that H1 – that women are more likely than men to vote according to general economic conditions – is not supported. Similarly, there appeared to be no significant gender differences in pocketbook voting. Men and women who believed their household financial situation would improve over the next 12 months were just as likely to vote for the incumbent. Meanwhile, women who believed that their household financial situation had got or would get worse were no different in their vote choice compared to men; both genders were just as likely to sanction the incumbent during times of personal financial struggle, indicating that H2 cannot be supported. In all models, women were slightly more likely to vote for the incumbent, however this gender difference was not significant.

There was evidence of both sociotropic and pocketbook voting throughout the analysis, as both sociotropic and pocketbook evaluations were correlated with incumbent support. Interestingly, pocketbook and sociotropic effects were still significant after socio-economic controls *and* left-right values were included in the models, suggesting that pocketbook and sociotropic evaluations had an independent effect on vote choice over and

above these factors. As such, this highlights the importance of the economic and policy context in shaping voting behaviour.

Additionally, there was evidence of both retrospective and prospective voting, suggesting that both women and men consider past *and* future economic conditions. Respondents who believed that their household finances and the national economy had worsened over the last 12 months were more likely to support opposition parties, and those who thought their financial situation and the national economy had improved were more likely to vote for the incumbent. This supports the reward-punishment model (Campbell et al., 1960; Key, 1966; Kramer, 1971; Fiorina, 1981; Lewis-Beck, 1988), suggesting that in tough economic times, voters will punish incumbents by not voting for them, and in good economic conditions, individuals will 'reward' the incumbent, by voting to keep them in office. At the same time, those who thought their household finances and the national economy would get worse over the next 12 months were more likely to vote for opposition parties, and those believing their household finances and the national economy would improve were more likely to vote for the incumbent. This supports theories on prospective voting, in which individuals use their perception on future conditions to guide their voting behaviour (Downs, 1957). As Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson (2000) note, individuals can be seen as forward-looking 'bankers', who use economic forecasts to shape their vote choice.

Re-visiting earlier arguments within the 'ethics of care' literature, there is no evidence to support the claim that women and men's different traits and values lead to differences in economic voting. In the British case, at least, essentialist notions and gender stereotypes that women are less likely than men to vote according to their pocketbooks as a result of women's greater compassion are not supported. Such accounts of gender and economic voting are inherently problematic, not only because they reinforce normative gender stereotypes about women and men, but also because they do not examine how

gender and economic evaluations interact (see for example, Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler, 1998; Welch and Hibbing, 1992). Many studies upholding claims of normative gender differences continue to be widely cited in recent literature on the gender gap literature (see Deckman and McTague, 2015; Huddy and Cassese, 2013; Lizotte, 2017). While the results suggest there is little evidence to support the compassion thesis, further research is needed, however, to explore rational choice arguments in greater depth. Specifically, research should examine gender differences in economic voting across time and explore how this relates to men and women's economic wellbeing. If gender differences in economic voting narrow over time as women's socio-economic status has improved relative to men's, this would lend credence to arguments within rational choice theory.

It is important to note that economic attitudes and vote choice are partially endogenous (Evans and Andersen, 2006), where economic evaluations may be influenced by party support. In other words, incumbent (Conservative and Liberal Democrat) supporters may be more likely to believe that the national economy and their personal financial situation had or would improve. The use of the BES cross-sectional data meant that it was not possible to account for this endogeneity. While the analysis presented here does not fully account for endogeneity, it has sought to account for partisanship bias by controlling for left-right values. Using panel data (in which the same voters are interviewed over time) would help to disentangle this endogeneity between economic attitudes and vote choice by measuring how respondents' preferences change over time. Unfortunately, such data do not exist, as there is no available panel data before the 2008 financial crisis.

Conclusion

This chapter has found strong evidence that positive economic evaluations are associated with voting in favour of the incumbent, as well as some evidence that women are more likely to vote for the incumbent. However, linking the findings back to the key research

question of this chapter, the analysis suggests that women did engage in pocketbook voting in 2015, and were no less likely to do so than men. Moreover, while there was clear evidence of sociotropic voting among voters, this did not differ between women and men. These results imply more similarity than differences between women and men, in terms of how they attribute credit and blame to incumbent and opposition parties.

The findings presented within this chapter suggest that further analysis is needed. Firstly, women's greater relative pessimism suggests that there were policies that they believed to affect their pocketbooks (and the wider economy) in 2015. As such, it is necessary to analyse the underlying factors beneath the data. Specifically, a more in-depth examination is required in order to explore which specific policies were salient in 2015. Secondly, in the absence of gender differences at the aggregate level, the findings raise an interesting question as to whether there are differences *between* women. The analysis within Chapter Three suggests that the Coalition's gendered policies affected women differently across the life-stage. Using focus groups, the following chapter seeks to explore which types of policies influenced women's vote choice in 2015. It explores differences between women, by examining their attitudes across life-stage.

Chapter Five – In their own words: A focus group analysis of gendered policies and voting behaviour

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how women view, experience and negotiate gendered policies in their voting behaviour. In particular, I seek to examine if women apply some of the patterns of thinking that have been suggested by the quantitative literature (Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler, 1998; Dawson, 1994; Welch and Hibbing, 1992). The chapter goes into greater depth by examining intra-sex differences with women voters across life-stage. Here the use of qualitative research also allows me to analyse women's attitudes towards specific gendered policies that are not covered in the British Election Study's 2015 post-election dataset – particularly 'gender status' policies, since there are no items relating to these policy areas in the survey. Through in-depth interviews, the chapter seeks to explore which pocketbook and sociotropic issues were salient to women in 2015. Throughout the chapter, I underscore the need for methodological pluralism in research: crucially, the chapter finds that women's explanations for their policy priorities and thus vote choice revealed key themes and divides that would have otherwise remained undetected in my quantitative analyses.

The research question that this chapter seeks to explore is: Which policies – if any – do women think about when they vote? The findings within this chapter suggest that redistributive, class-based policies were particularly salient to women voters in 2015. Interestingly, women appeared to value policies that are less analogous to gender compared to those that are typically associated with gender. However, there were clear life-stage differences among women. Working-age women shared concerns relating to living costs and austerity, which featured prominently in discussions on vote choice. Meanwhile, older

women appeared to value pension-age benefits for the independence, wellbeing and social advantages that these policies brought. Relatedly, transportation featured as a salient issue for many older women, particularly those on lower incomes. Corroborating the research findings from Chapter Four, the findings suggest that women often *do* vote egocentrically and according to their pocketbooks, and this behaviour appears to transcend across age and policy agenda. Even in areas where women are found to display sociotropic heuristics, such as younger women's adversity to austerity, these are complemented by pocketbook motivations.

Alongside exploring the main research questions, this chapter goes into further depth by exploring whether women employ linked fate in their voting behaviour. Chapter Four used a measure of 'household' evaluations as a proxy for pocketbook voting. While the findings of Chapter Four suggest that household evaluations correlate with vote choice, this leaves a question open as to whether the 'household' pertains to the family or one's own personal situation. As outlined in Chapter Two, Dawson's (1994) theory of linked fate suggests that individuals from structurally disadvantaged groups harbour an awareness that their personal circumstances are tied to their group as a whole. In this chapter, I extend the logic of linked fate to women, exploring whether associate their own situation with that of their families'. Here, the use of focus groups allows for an exploration into how and whether women consider the family in their voting behaviour.

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the focus group methodology as well as a rationale for the selection of this method. The second section of this chapter presents the findings from six focus groups with women voters, drawing out themes and key concepts from the interview data. It seeks to explore the gendered policies that influence women's votes using their own words. Firstly, the data on class-based policies are analysed. Secondly, the data on status policies are explored. I conclude the chapter with some final

reflections on the focus group discussion material and examine whether these findings confirm the expectations outlined in Chapter Three.

Focus groups as a tool for research

Focus groups are described as a “series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger and Casey, 2009:2). First employed as a market research technique in the 1920s, the use of focus groups has, in recent years, gained considerable traction in political marketing research, particularly due to their extensive use by the 1997 New Labour election campaign (Burnham et al., 2008:128). Philip Gould, a key Labour Party strategist of the 1997 election campaign, emphasised the importance of focus group research. Had Labour paid greater attention to focus group findings in the 1980s, Gould argued, the party would have realised how unelectable they had become (Savigny, 2007:129). Aside from their use in political marketing, focus groups are also widely used as a method in the field of political science. Indeed, focus group methods are often utilised in qualitative studies, covering a range of topics such as perceptions of AIDS (Geis et al., 1986), obstacles for women returning to work (Holmgren and Ivanoff, 2004), and understanding how media messages are processed (Kitzinger, 1994).

Before continuing, it is helpful to further clarify my decision to use focus groups in addition to quantitative methods. On a practical note, the use of focus groups provided a deeper insight into women’s perceptions of specific policies that were not covered in the British Election Study’s (BES) 2015 face-to-face post-election survey. The use of qualitative methods allowed me to pick apart specific policies in the 2015 General Election campaign and ask women’s views on these measures. On a deeper level, while the 2015 BES post-election survey provides a useful overview of what respondents perceived to be the most important issue (MII) facing Britain at the time, the use of focus groups allowed me to analyse

the meanings underlying their assessments and compare patterns of thinking around these issues. This played an extremely valuable part in the research: I found that when providing their opinions on policies, the explanations that women gave often revealed striking themes in voting behaviour. For instance, while the majority of participants highlighted the NHS as one of the most important policy areas, their rationales differed between age groups. These themes would have otherwise remained undetected in the survey research.

Advantages and limitations

Having established the merits of using focus groups in conjunction with quantitative research, here I assess the benefits and drawbacks of using focus groups in relation to standard interviews. One of the most unique aspects of the focus group method is its explicit use of group interaction as research data (Morgan, 2012). Group interaction allows for participants to 'bounce' ideas off each other, enabling subjects to develop new insights that would otherwise be left untouched in a standard interview. This is an effect otherwise known as "synergism" (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Further, group interaction allows participants to challenge each other, stimulating debate and in-depth discussion. There were often times when the participants in my focus groups openly challenged and disagreed with each other. Kitzinger (1994:113) argues that disagreements within her focus group discussions often led to participants clarifying why they thought as they did, sometimes drawing on personal experiences which had altered their opinions. As Kitzinger (1994:113) explains, "Had the data been collected by interviews the researcher might have been faced with 'armchair' theorising about the causes of such difference". Through disagreements, participants may also re-evaluate their own beliefs of their particular experiences. From this, I was able to explore the factors which led to individuals changing their minds on certain issues.

The method of focus groups allows for a more egalitarian and less exploitative dynamic between the researcher and subject, making them attractive as a research methodology to feminist researchers (Montell, 1999). The settings for my focus groups were neutral and largely relaxed in nature. Constructing an open and informal environment was integral to meaningful discussion in order for participants to elicit personal information and feel comfortable in stating their opinions (Acocella, 2012:1127). The fact that I am a woman arguably enhanced this open and relaxed environment, and might have led to participants being more forthcoming. It is argued that “Having a woman interview other women is sometimes said to enhance the quality of the conversation” (Childs, 2004:213). In her interviews with Labour women MPs, Childs felt that this increased the numbers of women MPs who were willing to participate in discussions (ibid.).

While traditional interviews are one-sided “interrogations”, focus groups can be considered as more of a “true dialogue” (Montell, 1999:52). Using focus groups, researchers are able to allow conversations to flow naturally rather than intervene and assert a rigorous frame of questions. This enables the researcher to take a back seat in discussions and develop a sense of “structured eavesdropping” (Powney, 1988). Accordingly, a semi-structured interview format and open-ended questions were used as a basis for discussion. This generated a “guided conversation” (Childs, 2004:212) in which I was able to hear participants speak at length about pertinent issues that influenced their voting behaviour, prompting participants when necessary.

Finally, Johnson (1996:525) argues that focus groups can “foster a collective identity among the participants because they can transcend individualism and connect up individual narratives”. One way in which this collective identity manifested was through conversational completion. For example, when discussing the NHS:

Emma¹³: ...And when I've had to go into hospital, I've had to wait hours and hours to be seen...

Laura: ...Just by the midwife

Emma: Yeah, who's completely exhausted...

Group consensus furthered this sense of 'collective identity'. This would have been otherwise unattainable in a standard one-to-one interview. Consensus ranged from issues surrounding VAWG to pension flexibility. I was able to gauge consensus not only through analysing what was said, but through personal observation: examining body language and changing intonation helped me to assess women's opinions and how they conceive gendered policies.

At the same time, there are also intrinsic limitations of focus groups. On occasion, participants would digress onto other topics of conversation, steering the dialogue away from the subject in question, which was problematic due to limited time. Similarly, another issue for focus group moderators is how to deal with dominant voices overriding other participants in the group and 'hijacking' the group discussion (Smithson, 2000:107).

In these instances, I considered it necessary to intervene and ask the participants questions listed within my interview guide. Group exercises also helped to overcome the digression of conversation. Group exercises and tasks, commonly employed in focus group research, encourage participants to focus on each other rather than the group facilitator and require participants to explain their different perspectives (Kitzinger, 1995). When necessary, card games were used as prompts. This consisted of loosely 'ranking' gendered policy pledges taken from parties' 2015 General Election manifestos into order of personal preference. If participants did not care for the gendered policy, they were given the option

¹³ Participant names have been replaced with selected names taken from a list of the most popular girls' names in England and Wales (between 1904 and 2015) published by the Office for National Statistics. Names have been selected roughly according to birth cohort.

to not rank the policy at all. The aim of the card game was not to focus on where the participants had ranked the cards *per se*, but to stimulate discussion surrounding relevant gendered policies and place an onus on participants to explain their reasoning (Kitzinger, 1994:107). Experimental methods, such as word associations, were also employed. Word associations serve as “quick and convenient tools” in exploring concepts (Roininen, Arvola and Lahteenmaki, 2006:20-21). Participants were asked to describe a photo of the Coalition leaders (David Cameron and Nick Clegg) and a photo of the erstwhile Labour leader, Ed Miliband, in one word. This also served to refresh participants’ memories of the 2015 General Election and, at the very least, ‘warmed’ the group up for subsequent discussion.

Acquiescence with the main group consensus can also be problematic in focus groups (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech and Zoran, 2009). A sense of conformism may occur because it is easier to accept what is being discussed than challenging the consensus with an opinion that may not be popular. This may also derive from the pressure of societal conventions, which may steer participants to express more socially desirable answers or present themselves in the best way possible (Acocella, 2012:1134). While there was often consensus from younger women around increased spending on welfare, for example, one reason for this may have been because participants felt pressured to conform to such views. Acquiescence and conformity can reduce the creativity and spontaneity of information provided, which limits the ability of the focus group to generate information by involving all participants in the group (Acocella, 2012:1134).

Krueger and Casey (2009) argue that acquiescence can be designed out by selecting participants with similar power levels. Expanding on this, Acocella (2012:1127) states that, “if participants feel more equal, they will get to know each other more quickly, and this will help them express their thoughts spontaneously”. Using homogeneous and pre-existing

groups meant that the power dynamics within my focus groups were largely equal. I return to homogeneity further in the following section.

Overall, then, the use of focus groups presents several advantages as well as limitations. Group interaction allows for the development of ideas in an equal and open setting. Participants are able to build on these ideas and experiences of other group members and foster a group narrative. On the other hand, group dynamics can exclude certain members and hinder productive debate. This may also lead to a sense of conformity. Many of these limitations can be overcome with careful design and planning. Below, I sum up the advantages and disadvantages of the focus group method in relation to qualitative interviews.

Table 5.1. The benefits and limitations of focus groups

Benefits	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants can ‘bounce’ ideas off each other (otherwise known as ‘synergism’) • Less hierarchical than standard interviews • Foster a sense of ‘collective identity’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group conversation can digress from the original topic • Discussion can be ‘hijacked’ by dominant voices • Participants may acquiesce or conform to popular opinions within the group

Group composition and organisation

The number of participants required to partake in focus group discussions is contested. Typically, scholars suggest around six to eight people (Burnham et al., 2008:129), although some have used as many as fifteen participants (Goss and Leinbach, 1996) while others have used as few as four (Kitzinger, 1995). The size of my focus groups varied from nine to 11 women. This allowed for conversation to consistently flow while giving each

participant an opportunity to speak in turn. Additionally, the size of the group covered the possibility that some participants might naturally be more reserved and take a 'back seat' in group discussions, which appeared to be the case in several of my focus groups. In total, 61 women were interviewed (Table 5.2). The length of each discussion lasted approximately one hour.

In order to recruit participants, I attended social activity groups. These ranged from parent and baby groups to Tai Chi groups for over 65-year-olds. The use of pre-existing groups is a common means within participant recruitment (see Kitzinger, 1994). In terms of practicality, pre-existing groups are an easier method of recruiting participants for a myriad of reasons. For instance, I would often conduct focus groups at the end of group meetings, which meant that transport for my research subjects was less likely to be an issue (particularly for older participants and women with children). In addition, Hennink (2007:118) argues that pre-existing groups are already part of an established network of individuals which share communication links. Indeed, one such advantage of using pre-existing groups is that the participants have a group dynamic, so they may be more comfortable in challenging each other's views (Hennink, 2007; Kitzinger, 1994). On top of this, some participants provided information about each other's experiences in my group discussions. This had the effect of stimulating memory:

Mary: [VAWG policies] aren't something that really affected me. But Susan's had problems with her neighbour, haven't you?

A total of six focus groups were conducted. Groups were carried out in two constituencies in order to assist the controlling of partisanship and assure a range of views were being represented overall. These consisted of a Conservative safe seat (Altrincham and Sale West) and a Labour safe seat (Manchester Central). I focused on Conservative and Labour seats as these were the two largest parties in 2015. Three focus groups were

conducted in each constituency, comprised of women under 35, women aged 35 to 64, and women aged over 65. Groups were organised according to age in order to reflect the different life-stages that women enter which, in turn, may shape their life experiences and the issues they think about. Here, the selection of age 35 as the cut-off for the youngest age group is in line with other demographic studies that label 18-34-year-olds as 'young adults' (Payne, 2016; Vespa, 2017). Women aged 65 and over are designated as the oldest age group, as this was the State Pension Age applying to women at the time of the focus group analysis. Within the analysis, women in the youngest life-stage (under 35s) and women in the mid-life stage (35 to 64) are referred to as 'working-age women'.

Choosing groups on the basis of age and geography meant that the participants in each group were largely homogeneous, both ideologically and demographically speaking. Montell (1999:62) argues that homogeneity can facilitate discussion and reduce pressure on participants to "represent" and speak for their category. This helped to minimise counter-productive debate stemming from the polarisation of political views. Creating groups with widely different perspectives can cause inhibitions and unpleasant situations for the participants and a degree of conflict that might hinder the discussion from developing (Acocella, 2012:1127). Further, homogeneous focus groups help to capitalise on participants' shared experiences (Kitzinger, 1995:300), which had the effect of enhancing participants' abilities to 'feed off each other' as they responded to each other's comments.

There are, however, limitations to excessively homogeneous focus groups. Since participants largely derived from the same ethnic background (where the majority of whom were white British), this raised concerns regarding the intersectionality of my research. Murray (2015:4) argues that "wealthy, straight white women might experience gender oppression in a different way to women for whom gender oppression intersects with other forms of discrimination or disadvantage" (see also Crenshaw, 1989). For example, while

research on austerity under the Coalition government reveals that women were more likely to shoulder austerity cuts than men (Busby and James, 2017; Keen and Cracknell, 2017), it was women of colour who were more likely to bear the brunt of fiscal retrenchment than white women (Sandhu, Stephenson and Harrison, 2013). The predominance of white British women’s perceptions, therefore, meant that some experiences, particularly those on the impacts of certain policies, went unheard. One way I sought to ameliorate this was through conducting an intersectional focus group of women voters from various ethnic minority backgrounds. By conducting an intersectional focus group, I was able to gain insights from women of different ethnic minority backgrounds who might view or experience policies in different ways to white women. Additionally, I sought to capture class dynamics and hear from women of different income backgrounds by examining a wealthier constituency – Altrincham and Sale West – and contrasted this with a constituency in Manchester (Manchester Central) – an area considered the fifth most deprived of 326 local authorities in England (Bullen, 2015).

Table 5.2. Number of interviewees

	Altrincham and Sale West (Conservative)	Manchester Central (Labour)
Younger life-stage (Under 35s)	9	11
Mid-life stage (35-64)	11	10
Older life-stage (65+)	10	10

The intersectional group formed the mid-life group in the Conservative seat (Altrincham and Sale West). Ideally, undertaking additional focus groups with women of different ethnic minority backgrounds would allow for a comprehensive examination of gender and race by

life-stage. However, the project lacked the resources to administer additional focus groups. As such, the analysis is confined to examining just gender and life-stage. I return to this issue in 'limitations and future research' within Chapter Seven.

Ethical issues

It was of high importance to ensure that ethics were maintained throughout the duration of the fieldwork. Participants were given an information sheet (see Appendix B) before the start of each focus group, and consent — both verbal and written — was obtained before proceeding with the group discussion.

For all six focus groups, discussions were recorded via Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim, in order to minimise potentially important omissions. Recordings were deleted immediately after the transcription process in order to protect the anonymity of participants. Confidentiality was guaranteed to participants from the outset. To further maintain the anonymity of group participants, participant names were changed throughout the thesis. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the discussion at any given point and make amendments to the discussion, although none of the participants did so.

There appears to be a general consensus among researchers that participants should be remunerated, however there is contention on what form this compensation should take. Montell (1999:57) asserts that financial remuneration is necessary when conducting interviews with existing groups, since the researcher is usurping time that people have set aside for their own needs. Yet Gibson (2007:481) argues that, depending on the participants, financial compensation is not always the most appropriate incentive, and instead suggests that researchers should remunerate travel expenses. Since many of my participants did not have travel expenses, I chose to remunerate my participants in the form of a £10 gift voucher at the end of each discussion.

Finally, Krueger and Casey (2009) posit that it is important to contact the group convenor beforehand, in order to legitimise the researcher's presence at the group activity. Accordingly, I fostered links with those such as social workers, reverends and members of student unions, who were able to provide details of the groups they facilitated. This proved especially useful in one instance, where a social worker was able to point me in the direction of another group — a technique known as 'snowball sampling'.

Class-based policies

Turning now to the analysis of the focus group discussions, this section examines the discussion material using Htun and Weldon's (2010; 2018) framework of 'class-based' and 'gender status' policies. I begin by exploring class-based policies – in other words, policies that aim to counter inequalities which arise from the sexual division of labour. These include social security and pensions, as well as services upon which women are more likely to rely, such as healthcare and childcare.

The NHS

Women's prioritisation of the NHS as a policy area was evident in all of the focus groups conducted and emerged as a prominent theme within group discussions. When asked to rank gendered policy cards in order of salience when voting in 2015, the majority of women placed the NHS as their most important issue when casting their vote. The importance that women repeatedly attached to the NHS transcended both age categories and constituencies. The saliency of the NHS among women corroborated the findings of Chapter Four, which showed that the NHS was the 'most important issue' among women in 2015. However, the focus group discussions revealed that there were clear differences in women's reasons for prioritising the NHS. I found that there were two broad ideological differences, which varied according to life-stage. Firstly, younger women placed a greater

emphasis on society, whereas older women tended to be much more individually (i.e. pocketbook) oriented in their explanations for prioritising the NHS. Secondly, though there was a consensus that the NHS is facing significant demands, working-age women (i.e. younger and mid-life women) were more likely to blame this on austerity and privatisation, whereas older women were more likely to blame this on immigration. I explain these two key differences in greater detail below.

Society v the individual

When explaining why the NHS was an important issue when voting, younger women – particularly from the Labour constituency – tended to cite egalitarian reasons relating to society, such as those of equality and fairness:

Sarah: [The NHS] affects everybody and you could need it at any time. I think it doesn't send a particularly nice message if we're cutting it up and making it more difficult for people to access.

Rachel: It's so universal...I think it's probably one of the most important things in our lives because we all get sick, we all get ill, and without being depressing, we all die. It's so fundamental to look after your health in your life...and also, I think [the NHS] is one of the best things about our country.

Georgia: Everybody's going to use it at some point in their lifetime or know somebody that needs it.

Some younger women also attached a fundamental importance to the NHS due to the fact that people are able to access healthcare for free:

Victoria: I just think it's an amazing thing that Britain has. I think it's amazing that you can just go into a hospital and you don't have to pay...I just think it's great and really unique, we should look after it.

In contrast, older women were more likely to prioritise the NHS when voting for reasons that primarily focused on their own wellbeing:

Jean: I can't get to Manchester Royal in 45 minutes on one bus. I have to get a tram and a bus and I can't do it – it's an hour....They're closing the nearest hospitals and sending you miles away.

Valerie: More needs to be done about the NHS; I've had to pay for private medication.

As healthcare requirements are greater among the older population (ONS, 2018b), it is perhaps unsurprising that older women typically expressed a stronger personal attachment to the NHS. The concept that voters prioritise policy areas that primarily affect themselves lends itself to the idea of pocketbook voting evaluations. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, assumptions underpinning pocketbook voting theory hold that voters are driven by self-interest, where citizens cast their ballot in response to the party that will enact (or have previously enacted) policies that personally benefit them (Downs, 1957).

Several older women stated that, as a result of health and social care reforms, they would personally be financially worse off. Valerie, as quoted above, suggested that she has had to pay for private healthcare due to gaps in NHS provision. Additionally, one older participant, Jean, stated that the closure of her local hospital meant that she would therefore have to travel further in order to access health services. Though this ramification was not necessarily financial, the concept that she would *personally* be affected by hospital closures is nevertheless a fundamental aspect of pocketbook evaluations.

Meanwhile, some older women responded positively to policies in which they would be made personally better off. Many of the older women in the focus group discussions shared a general consensus in favour of same-day appointments for over 75 year-olds – again indicating elements of pocketbook voting theory. In the run-up to the 2015 General Election, the Conservative Party promised they would offer access to GP services seven days a week by 2020 – ensuring that everyone over 75 would receive a same-day appointment (The Conservative Party, 2015:37). Thus older women prioritised certain healthcare policies that brought a direct benefit to them.

Austerity v immigration

Despite all groups sharing concerns over the sustainability of the NHS, the root cause of these concerns differed. Firstly, older Conservative voters were more likely to attribute their concerns over the NHS to immigration:

Patricia: There's too many people now...It's like having a can of sardines with six fish in it but we're now trying to put 106 fish in it...The NHS has been overcrowded and there's no beating around the bush...there's too many people trying to use the system, people who have only just come here and never paid into it.

This view among older Conservative voters resonates with Conservative Party policy in 2015, where the party announced a series of policies linking concerns over the NHS to immigration. The 2015 Conservative Manifesto stated that the party “will recover up to £500 million from migrants who use the NHS by the middle of the next Parliament” (The Conservative Party, 2015:31). This was proposed through a new Controlling Migration Fund, designed to relieve the pressure on services and fund immigration enforcement (The Conservative Party, 2015:31).

While older women commonly cited immigration, younger women and mid-life mothers were more likely than older women to relate their concerns to austerity measures and privatisation. Interestingly, these concerns – especially among mid-life mothers – were often linked to the family:

Ella: I put protecting the NHS as my top because my mum and sister both work for the NHS and I hear first-hand about all of the cuts and how bad it is...it's awful.

Nicola: That's why the NHS is so important to me, because if it all gets privatised they're going to have to pay for healthcare and things, I just think it's all going downhill really fast and I don't want my kids to, you know, have to deal with that in the future. It changes your perspective when you have kids, definitely.

Sandra: There's so much strain on the NHS...but seeing austerity cuts has made my GP service function outside of its community really...so it was one of the reasons the NHS was a priority in my vote. But also having children, having a son now, definitely...

Karen: My husband was working as a doctor in a Blackpool hospital, and now in his [third year] of GP training he spent a lot of time to go to his job...he says "sometimes I don't have five minutes to stop, because there is a shortage of doctors in the hospital" ...there was a decision last year to cut their salary as well.

However, there was one exception, where one older Labour voter expressed concerns over cuts to the NHS. Note that her concern is also linked with a reference to the family:

Lesley: I don't trust the health service in the Tories' hands. They keep saying "it's safe in our hands" – it isn't safe in their hands.

AS: Why do you think that?

Lesley: Well for a start I've got a daughter in the health service, I know what a strain they're under because of the cutbacks, they're being cut back all the time, they've got less and less resources and they're just privatising it by the back door.

These references to the family raise wider questions pertaining to Dawson's (1994) concept of 'linked fate'. I explore how these findings relate to this concept further in the following section.

Linked fate and mentions of the 'family'

Evidence of traditional linked fate thinking did not appear to be prevalent in discussions on the NHS, although that is not to say that women did not think about their family when voting. Indeed, for mid-life women especially, their children, siblings, parents and partners were used to inform their own perceptions of issues regarding the NHS. As quoted above, Karen stated that she prioritised policies on the NHS when voting due to the fact that her husband has to contend with NHS cuts. Elsewhere, Nicola, stated that she did not want her children to deal with negative consequences of privatisation in the future. Interestingly, she explained that having children changed her 'perspective' on policies. When asked whether this affected her voting behaviour, she replied, "I probably did vote quite selfishly before, and just thought about what life was like for me. But yeah, it does change your perspective". Here, this implies a shift in voting evaluations; in this case, the idea that women potentially shift from thinking about themselves towards thinking of their family after having children.

Pensions and pension-age benefits

Pocketbook voting and life-stage effects

Included in the Conservative's generous pension policies in 2015 were commitments to maintain all pension-age benefits, such as concessionary travel and the Winter Fuel Allowance. The Conservative's pension-age policies differed to Labour's, who had pledged to reduce eligibility for certain pension-age benefits, such as the Winter Fuel Allowance. Pension-age benefits were clearly valued by older participants, particularly those who had voted Conservative in 2015:

Sheila: Thank our lucky stars we've got a free bus pass. We're just thankful...I use it every day and it gets me from A to B...I see people I know on the [route] into town and we sit, we chat, and then we go off and go about our day. And then we do the same thing the day after.

Polly: [The bus pass] gives you health benefits, it gives you social benefits, you know, because if you can get out it's good for your health and your mental wellbeing as well.

Cynthia: For me [the bus pass is] about a sense of freedom that I wouldn't be able to have otherwise.

Monica: Bus passes, Winter Fuel, they're important when you're on a low income. My pension's only £73 because I only worked part-time when my children were growing up. And my husband gets paid the main pension and the occupational one. However, £73 wouldn't go anywhere would it?

One older woman, Marie, raised the free TV licences for over 75-year-olds as a policy that she valued. In particular, she valued the ability to watch TV as a way to combat loneliness, which the free TV license was able to provide:

Marie: I like having the telly on... sometimes I don't have it on to watch it, it's the sound of it on in the background, it makes me feel like someone else is there.

These findings resemble heuristics of pocketbook voting among older women, where, in this case, they appeared to support the Conservative Party in 2015 due to the protection of these pension-age benefits. For these women, pension-age benefits provided much more than their intended outcomes. In this sense, the benefits from these policies were beyond material, and instead provided valuable advantages pertaining to independence and wellbeing. For example, Shelia and Marie's comments suggest that pension-age benefits can ameliorate the effects of social isolation and loneliness. In England, nearly half (49%) of people aged over 75 live alone, and over 17% of older people have less than weekly contact with family, friends or neighbours (Davidson and Rossall, 2015:2). For Polly, in addition to social advantages, pension-age benefits brought health advantages. Class-based dynamics are also apparent. As Monica suggests, pension-age benefits may bring more of a material value to women from lower income backgrounds. These benefits may be particularly important to insulate older women from the effects of austerity, especially when other avenues of support, such as access to community services, have been reduced.

While pocketbook heuristics were clearly prominent in discussions of pension-age benefits, there was one exception, which became evident in discussions of universalism. As aforementioned, the Conservatives and Labour parties diverged on the universal aspect of pension-age benefits in 2015, with Labour pledging to means-test specific benefits, whereas the Conservatives pledged to keep all pension-age benefits as universal. Universalism was an

aspect of pension-age benefits that appeared to be valued by many older women, but not all. Elizabeth, an older woman who had voted Labour in 2015, discussed how she felt towards pension-age benefits. This sparked an exchange between some of the focus group participants in the Labour seat:

Elizabeth: I value them but, I feel now that to have all of it free, you know, well it isn't free - nothing's free. Is too much money being spent on that that should be spent on something else? I mean could we sort of lessen it a bit and save the country money?

Harriet: I suppose it depends on how much you use things like your bus pass

Ruth: Yes, I use it a lot

Evelyn: You probably don't use it much?

Elizabeth: Well I don't, no

Ruth: You see I use it a lot, Elizabeth, and if it wasn't free I wouldn't be going

Elizabeth: Well so that's what I'm saying...if you're well enough, could there be a different one for people who need it rather than people who are healthier?

Marian: But that would mean testing it, either means-testing or health-testing, and that all costs. So it's a question of how much do you spend to save money? Because all of the testing, like means-testing and everything else, all of those people in offices, it's giving them work to

do. But how much does it cost the country to perhaps save some money on it?

Both Elizabeth and Marian's comments are illustrative of sociotropic heuristics, but this manifested in different ways. At the fore of their comments are themes around value for the national economy. For Elizabeth, restricting pension-age benefits demonstrated a priority to forgo policies that would bring a personal benefit to her in favour of the national economy. For Marian, implementing means-tested benefits would be more costly for the national economy than maintaining universal benefits, due to the administrative costs that means-testing would bring.

While older women generally appeared to hold pension-age benefits in a high regard, they seemed less familiar with the minutiae of 'technical' pension policies, such as the 'triple lock' indexation, or reforms to the Basic State Pension that had occurred under the Coalition government, including the introduction of a single-tier pension. Though the 'triple lock' had been offered by both the Conservatives and Labour in 2015, few voters – in all discussion groups – could explain what the policy was. Thus there was a clear divide between simple, 'attractive' pension policies – such as universal pension-age benefits, and complex, 'technical' pension policies that were more difficult for voters to understand. Notwithstanding, older women did appear to place an importance on pension policies overall when explaining their voting behaviour. Of the pension policies that older women cited, a majority of these had been pledged by the Conservatives at the 2015 election.

By comparison, younger women claimed that pensions or pension-age benefits did not factor into their voting strategy. The most common reasons were that they felt pensions either did not affect them at their age, or that they felt they lacked understanding on pension policies altogether:

Maisie: I think it's scary but I just don't want to have to worry about [pensions] yet. Because I'm not having to deal with it yet.

Ruby: I know a lot of people around our age or a bit older who just all think "well we're not going to get a pension until way later than people now anyway", so we put it off in that sense.

Florence: No, I don't know anything about pensions...I'm in a pension scheme – what does it mean?

The fact that some younger women claimed they did not consider pension policies when voting simply because they were not affected by them serves as further evidence of pocketbook voting. These findings build on those from Chapter Four, to demonstrate that some pocketbook policies are more salient among groups of women than others. Furthermore, that younger women did not think about pension policies when voting while older people were more likely to prioritise them implies that personal interests are dependent on the current stage of one's life. This suggests that policy saliency changes over time in line with age-related interests.

Pension flexibilities: ideological differences

There were mixed views among older women regarding policies on pension flexibilities, which had been introduced by the Coalition government in 2014. These flexibilities allowed those over the age of 55 to withdraw their defined contribution pension savings as one lump sum. While the Conservative Party pledged full support for the policy at the 2015 election, Labour's approach was somewhat apprehensive. Though Labour had supported the policy in 2015, the party indicated that greater pension freedoms would be complemented with "proper guidance" to avoid mis-selling (The Labour Party, 2015:65). To some extent, Labour and Conservative differences in support for the policy were also evident

among voters. Two older Labour voters expressed concerns over the financial risks of withdrawing their pension funds:

Judith: I'd be worried if I took a big lump sum like that that something would go wrong, I'd lose it, and then what do you live on if you've lost your money?

Pauline: I'd just want my pension as it is, and then I know what I've got that way.

Meanwhile, Conservative voters seemed receptive to the idea of greater pension freedoms:

Nancy: We did think about taking the money out [from pension savings]. I thought it was a good idea because when you need the money you can have it there...Especially when my pension isn't much anyway and I have to pay for private medication.

The apprehension among Judith and Pauline is reflective of wider concerns that people would exhaust their pension savings prematurely (Pensions Policy Institute, 2014), leaving them with no financial support upon which to rely in later life. For others, such as Nancy, the idea of accessing pension funds immediately may prove helpful in order to cover other expenses. In particular, having access to pension funds may be especially appealing to the poorest of pensioners, who may need the funds as a source of additional income – especially in a context of austerity.

Austerity

There were clear life-stage differences in how women responded to austerity policies. In the discussions with working-age women, austerity stood out clearly as an issue that was prominent in 2015. In their discussions of austerity, some cited a rising cost of living.

Research by Unison (2017) highlighted that between 2010 and 2016, the cost of all goods and services increased by 17.7%. This included a 28% rise in the cost of electricity and an 8.5% rise in the cost of food (ibid.). The exceptions among working-age women who did not tend to consider living costs were those who either lived at home or those in higher-paid professions. Notwithstanding, some women in higher-paid professions said that they still considered austerity and the cost of living. For example, Ali a younger woman in the Conservative seat, stated that a rise in inflation affected her disposable income, which meant cutting back on non-essentials. Responding to which issue she prioritised at the 2015 election, she said:

Ali: I think low pay as well because it concerns me, like the rate of inflation, and even my own salary, that I am definitely worse off than I was a couple of years ago. And I know that because each month I have less disposable income. It's meant cutting back on the non-essentials, the luxuries I suppose, things like holidays and that sort of thing. So there's that side of low pay, which doesn't mean to say I'm low-paid, but what I mean is how wage rates are moving in line with inflation.

For other working-age women, particularly those in the Labour seat, austerity manifested further into their everyday lives. Some women spoke about changes in the pricing of supermarket items, while others noted a rising cost of utility bills. For some, dealing with the rise in living costs meant changing their shopping habits or working more hours. This was evident for women with and without dependents:

Yvonne: Even now, food in supermarkets has got too dear, like meat and fish and things. I've become more aware of it. I used to do my weekly shop in Tesco but I changed to Aldi... I can't afford a big weekly shop [in Tesco] anymore, not for the four of us.

Keira: I've worked extra hours or days even to make ends meet. Sometimes you kind of just think 'I hope my car doesn't break down this month' or that you'll have to fork out for unexpected things like that.

Shannon: For me it's how to cope with the cost of bills when they keep going up, especially electricity I've noticed...Normally I can budget carefully on top of food and rent each month, but I wouldn't say it's easy...all it takes is one [utility bill] that's much higher than usual and you feel it financially, sometimes for a while after, actually.

For many working-age women, the impact of austerity policies appeared to influence their vote choice. Broadly speaking, working-age women (those in the youngest and mid-life groups) generally viewed Coalition/Conservative austerity policies negatively, whereas older women were less likely to view these policies in a negative light. Interestingly, these age differences related to both pocketbook and sociotropic heuristics. Below, I expand on these differences further:

Working-age women: averse to austerity

Working-age women (i.e. those in the youngest and mid-life age groups) in both constituencies tended to be much more averse than their older counterparts to austerity policies. Several participants in the working-age groups mentioned specific benefit cuts and reforms that had occurred under the Coalition and Conservative governments. One younger woman, Chloe, stated that the Conservative's two-child policy on Child Tax Credits (labelled by critics as the 'rape clause') was confirmation that she would not vote Conservative, whereas one mid-life woman in the intersectional group, Leanne, stated that the Coalition's Social Sector Size Criteria (otherwise known as the 'bedroom tax') prevented her from voting Conservative. On the topic of disability cuts, one younger woman stated:

Joanna: I also couldn't bring myself to vote for the Conservatives because of everything that they'd been doing in terms of things like disability cuts. That still is horrendous to see.

As well as tax and benefit reforms, other women mentioned cuts to public services:

Maya: Cuts to welfare, and cuts to emergency services are huge. And I mean I actually think that a lot of things that have happened recently have made us think how much we need our emergency services.

Keira: It's been so long since the credit crunch – it's been 10 years – and we're still doing austerity measures. And nobody's had any pay-off, nobody's benefited, but we're still doing it.

When asked about the issues that were central to her vote choice, Yvonne explained:

Yvonne: Education – so the cuts in funding for schools – that's a huge one. Because I have two kids at school. And [the Conservative MP I voted against] was one of the main people that voted for cuts to the school.

One Labour voter in the mid-life intersectional group went further, stating that she had previously worked at a council-funded children's centre for children of multicultural and diverse backgrounds. She explained that council cuts under the Coalition government had meant that the children's centre was closed down, which resulted in her losing her job. She added:

Tracy: [Cameron] changed a lot of things to people for the worse, I think. He started cutting things like the NHS, teachers, and education.

These findings within the younger and mid-life groups provide evidence of both pocketbook and sociotropic heuristics. Indeed, one reason that these working-age women were more averse to cuts in public spending was because they had been personally affected by these measures, with Tracy giving the example of losing her job and Yvonne stating that there had been cuts to her children's school. The strong emphasis that women placed on previously implemented policies that impacted them personally confirms the finding in Chapter Four, which finds retrospective pocketbook voting effects among women. Yet working-age women's negativity to austerity policies was not only based on their belief that they were personally affected, but also that austerity negatively impacted all of society. For instance, while Joanna had not personally been affected by disability cuts, Chloe had not personally claimed for Child Tax Credits, and Leanne had not been directly impacted by the Social Sector Size Criteria, these women still shared fundamental beliefs that social security should be available to all of society – similar to their beliefs on healthcare. In these instances, cuts to welfare under the Coalition government had prevented them from voting Conservative. This also confirms the findings within Chapter Four, which finds retrospective sociotropic voting effects among women.

Older women: austerity as a necessity

By comparison, many older women – particularly those in the Conservative seat – were less critical of the Coalition's austerity measures. When asked, some older women said that they had not been personally affected by austerity measures but spoke about austerity in more general terms. This demonstrated that austerity was materialised in different ways. One older woman, Martine, mentioned, "I think the worst thing that I've noticed is the mess in all the streets. We used to have street cleaners didn't we?". This differed from the detailed, personal accounts that some working-age women provided. The fact that older women in the discussion groups claimed they were not personally affected by austerity measures is

perhaps one explanation as to why they appeared less critical of austerity policies, and suggests evidence of pocketbook heuristics.

As well as being comparatively shielded from austerity, another reason older women appeared to be less critical of the Coalition's austerity measures was because they viewed them as a necessary response to Labour's handling of the economy. In fact, within discussions on social spending, Labour's economic competence was met with scepticism among older women. One older Conservative voter explained that she did not view Labour's policies to be properly costed, citing Jeremy Corbyn's pledge at the 2017 General Election to abolish university tuition fees as an example:

Joan: Corbyn and his education policies – stopping all the fees, I thought, “don't be silly, where's this money coming from?”

Peggy: Well you've got to think “it all sounds wonderful” and then analyse it down, and as [Joan] says, you can't pay for it.

Carole: Well [the Labour Party] cleaned the coppers out last time, didn't they?

Enid: I remember when Labour went out of power and don't get me wrong, I had voted for them all my life until the last two elections, but they left a note saying “there's no money left”. How childish is that?

In many ways, these comments from women in the oldest life-stage are indicative of sociotropic voting behaviour. In these discussions, older women mention the national economic situation, which they appeared to view negatively under the former Labour government – a finding that has been found among older generations generally (Lee, 2017). Here, their perceptions of the national economy are associated with whether they consider the governing party to be economically competent. These views of economic competence,

in turn, condition their perceptions of policies. In this case, the fact that older women largely viewed Labour as economically incompetent meant that they were more sceptical of Labour's policies on greater public spending.

Political generation theories have sought to explain these attitudinal differences between younger and older women. Such accounts suggest that political attitudes are shaped by the political or historical context during the formative years of an individual's life (Grasso et al., 2017:3). In this sense, government spending levels and redistribution during one's early adult years can be expected to influence political attitudes toward the economy. According to theories of political generation, since cohorts born before the Second World War were socialised during a period of economic downturn, this would imply that they are less supportive of government spending. Conversely, women born after the post-war period were socialised at a time of increased government spending and cross-party commitment to state expansion, suggesting they are particularly supportive of redistribution and greater welfare provision. As generational replacement occurs, each cohort is expected to be more egalitarian and left-wing in their values than the last (Inglehart and Norris, 2003).

Overall, the finding that younger women were more averse to the Coalition and Conservative's austerity cuts than their older counterparts lends credence to the expectations in Chapter Three, in which younger women were more likely than older women to hold pessimistic views about the economy and their own financial situation. In line with the expectations in the Chapter Three, younger women's adversity to austerity is associated with reduced support for the Conservative Party. These age differences lie, in part, with pocketbook explanations: due to cuts in working-age benefits, younger women were, on average, hit comparatively harder by austerity than older women. Since older generations were comparatively protected from austerity under the Coalition, they were less likely to view these measures negatively. Yet crucially, the findings here also show that younger and

mid-life women were anti-austerity not only because they were personally affected by the effects of fiscal retrenchment, but due to their beliefs that welfare and public services should be made available to the whole of society. Thus these beliefs were not solely pocketbook-based, but also based on a holistic view of society extending beyond their personal financial situation.

Although older women were generally less likely than working-age women to cite austerity as an issue that they thought about in 2015, there were some exceptions. Indeed, some older women raised concerns over cuts to transport services that had affected them. I expand on this in the following section.

Transportation

There was some evidence of a class-based divide in the way that women viewed and experienced transportation policies. When discussing austerity, transport featured as a salient issue for some women in the oldest life-stage. Many older women in the lower-income constituency cited their frustration with cuts to local transport, compared to older women in the higher-income constituency, who cited transport much less. For these women in the lower-income constituency, reduced access to services was an important issue. In particular, these women cited reductions to local bus services that limited their access to vital services and daily activities. Discussing reduced transport services in the lower-income constituency, Lynn, who had voted Labour in 2015, explained that this had hindered her access to the local hospital:

Lynn: I can't get to Manchester Royal Infirmary on one bus. I have to get a tram and a bus and I can't do it – it's an hour...There might be other ways to get there, but I can't afford to take a taxi every time I need to go to hospital.

At the same time, Dawn, who had voted for UKIP in 2015, also cited reductions to local transport services that she used. Due to cuts to local bus routes, she was critical about the Conservative's policy to retain the free bus pass for over 75s:

Dawn: It's all very well having a free bus pass, but it doesn't mean much when you can't use it.

As well as reducing mobility, cuts to local bus services may also lead to social exclusion. One older woman in the lower-income group explained that she had used the same bus service "three to four times a week", however, could no longer use the service since it had been withdrawn. In line with pension-age benefits discussed earlier in this chapter, she pointed towards a social benefit that the bus itself provided: "I got to see friends on the way in [to the city centre]...you know, everybody knew everyone...you don't get that now". Building on this, Rita, who had voted Conservative in 2015, explained that she had been affected by cuts to the same bus route:

Rita: I don't drive...buses are the easiest way I can get into the city centre. The service I use has been axed...it's limited my access in and out of the city. The council hasn't done anything about it.

Rita's comment is interesting in part, because she cites issue with the council for failing to address the impact of the cuts. In many ways, this illustrates the different ways that voters attribute blame for political outcomes, specifically those relating to austerity. Multi-level governance may obscure how voters are able to assign credit or blame to parties, as the presence of multiple actors weakens the clarity of responsibility, allowing for blame avoidance and credit slippage (Anderson, 2000; 2006). Although reductions in local transport spending after 2010 derived from central government, councils in England and Wales hold the primary responsibility for the delivery of local transport services in their area. As local

authorities have faced smaller budgets, councils have reduced their provision of some local transport services. As Rita's comments suggest, voters affected by austerity may not attribute blame to central government, but rather local authorities, who appear at the frontline of cuts to public services.

Transport also featured as a salient issue for some women with children in the lower-income constituency. Penny, who voted Labour in 2015, cited concerns regarding transportation, highlighting difficulties in getting to work:

Penny: Since I've had [my child], I've been working part-time...there are definitely less buses running which has made it harder to get to and from work in the evenings.

Taken together, women's experiences of transport cuts reveal class-based differences in a number of ways. Penny's statement is reflective of the issues that many women who are reliant on public transport face: reduced local transport services pose difficulties in undertaking daily activities, such as getting to work. Lower-income women may face practical barriers in using alternative methods of local transport. Lynn's comment above suggests that lower-income women are less likely to afford private modes of transportation, such as taxis. The impact of these policies serves to exacerbate class-based divisions between women, by providing unequal access to resources, such as healthcare, education and the labour market.

Childcare and family welfare

Childcare was considered to be a "key battleground" of the 2015 General Election (Peck, 2015), where Labour's pledge to increase subsidised childcare to 25 hours per week for working parents was trumped last minute by a 30-hour pledge from the Conservative Party. The 30 subsidised childcare hours that had been promised by the Conservative Party

was met with scepticism from mid-life mothers in both constituencies. This scepticism lay in part with the eligibility for the hours where, in order to qualify, each parent would have to work at least 16 hours per week at a National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage level. Additionally, some mothers raised concerns that the policy was not properly costed:

Suzanne: I always take everything that the Conservatives say with a pinch of salt. So, the 30 free [childcare] hours, I think, well, how? Like no, it's not as simple as that.

Sally: The 30 free hours seems like a good idea but even then I think they've still put things in place where there are still loopholes...you still have to be earning over a certain amount in order for it to benefit you in any way.

Tina: ...under the 30 free hours [the nurseries] only get a very small amount don't they and obviously they've got to make a profit and that's why they start charging for meals and all the other things...so it's not really free hours, is it? Because you've always got the extras.

On top of this, two mothers mentioned additional costs associated with raising a child, which the proposed childcare hours would not cover:

Annette: Sometimes some people are working but not working enough. And they can't afford to put them into a nursery. And even if they are working, and if they get the benefit of those hours, they need those salaries in their hand to pay their bills or pay for activities of the children.

Kerry: My husband and I were looking to put our son into nursery for three or four full days a week. If you took away the 15 free hours on top of that, it would still cost several hundred per month - that doesn't

include food, and you still have to provide nappies. I could just stay at home and be a full-time mum and, sure, that's difficult for me, but it's the only option.

Working-age women's adversity to austerity was also evident in discussions on childcare. Between 2009/10 and 2012/13, spending on early years education and Sure Start services fell by 25% (Hills, 2015), from £2,508 to £1,867 per child (Rummary, 2016:317). The impact of funding reductions was estimated to have led to the closure of over 900 Sure Start centres in England between 2010 and June 2015 (Bate and Foster, 2015:11). The closure of children's centres was an issue that was raised by several mid-life women in the discussion groups, such as the mother who had lost her local childcare facilities as well as her job at a children's centre due to council cuts. Two mid-life mothers expanded on the issue of cuts to childcare facilities:

Claire: My local Sure Start centre was closed...I relied on it to get the baby weighed, meet the health visitor, the nine month check-up, the two-year check-up, breastfeeding clinics...Even though [my area] has got a lot of people on higher incomes, we still need centres to take the kids to. I have to travel a lot further now.

Hayley: There was a Sure Start centre here, but they closed it now. Finding alternative centres has been difficult. With the expense of it all, it's whether it's working for a lot of people, especially if you've got multiple children. It's such a challenge.

Austerity cuts to children's services may place an added financial burden on those who undertake unpaid childcare. As well as cuts to childcare services, women's adversity to

austerity also extended to cuts in family allowances, such as cuts to Working Tax Credit in 2011. As one mid-life mother in the Labour seat stated:

Libby: I probably won't be able to afford to go back to work full-time, which sounds ironic because you should have more money if you're working full-time. But actually, the fourth and fifth day at nursery I've run out of discounts, I've run out of tax credits or vouchers. So actually, I have to pay a lot more tax for those days of work and pension contributions and student loan repayments, so actually I probably can't afford to go back to work more than three days a week. It's frustrating.

For many mid-life mothers in the discussion groups, Conservative childcare pledges appeared to matter little at the 2015 election. Rather, mothers were more likely to cite the cost and paucity of childcare, as well as cuts towards childcare services and payments that had been implemented under the Coalition government, and this appeared to have a deleterious effect on their Conservative support by 2015. In essence, this was indicative of retrospective voting behaviour, where women used past policies to guide their future voting behaviour.

Pocketbook voting and the life-stage

While Chapter Four suggested evidence of pocketbook voting among women, some policies were more salient among groups of women than others. Mid-life mothers were the group most likely to claim that childcare policies featured in their voting behaviour, indicative of pocketbook voting theory and life-stage effects. As the majority of primary carers, mothers are greater users of childcare payments and services (Busby and James, 2017), and are therefore most likely to be personally affected by childcare reform.

Interestingly, three women in the mid-life group claimed that they did not think about childcare and family welfare policies until they had children:

Erin: I don't really remember anything about childcare [in the 2015 General Election campaign], that wasn't on my radar really, because I hadn't had [my child] yet, I wasn't thinking of children really at that time.

Georgina: At the 2015 election...I hadn't thought about having kids as we weren't really at that point, so I think you have to think about what's going on with you personally...now I've had a baby, it's definitely something I thought about this time, and what the future's going to be like for them...It changes your perspective when you have kids, definitely.

Kimberley: I used to be a real 'blue' shall I say...I think since having kids, and like Georgina said, when you go on maternity leave it's not all about 'how much am I earning and how much tax do I have to pay?' and things like that, it's totally different, isn't it. And it does change.

These pocketbook observations from mid-life women on childcare are similar to those of younger women regarding pensions: because they had not yet reached a particular stage in their life (such as having children or retiring), they did not consider policies in these domains. Once they had reached a stage of having children, they were more likely to look out for childcare policies at elections. In essence, this suggests that life-stage events can influence policy preferences.

Women's preferences for greater spending on childcare services relative to men's has been documented in studies elsewhere (Andersen, 1999; Campbell, 2006). However, the focus group findings indicate that women factored childcare policies into their voting strategy not because they were necessarily more "compassionate" (Gilligan, 1982), but

because they are, on average, greater users of childcare services. Moreover, this ‘compassion’ was not necessarily shared by all women in the discussion groups. Indeed, Erin, Georgina and Kimberley’s comments suggest that they considered childcare policies in their voting strategy only *after* they had children. While childcare appeared to feature as a salient issue among women who undertake childcare, it featured comparatively less among discussions with those in the youngest and oldest age groups, suggesting that women prioritise issues that personally affect them at the time of voting.

As outlined in the quotations above, there was a tendency among mid-life mothers to take their children into consideration when voting. Though this does not resemble linked fate theory in its conventional sense, it builds on the assumption that women use the status of a group – in this case, their own family – as a proxy for their own wellbeing. Erin, Georgina and Kimberley’s comments on their own family suggests that pocketbook motivations are still evident; however, they extend to their own family, rather than focusing primarily on themselves.

Status Policies

The next section now turns its attention to what Htun and Weldon (2010; 2018) term ‘gender status’ policies – in other words, policies that advance the status of all women as a group. Here, I focus on two policy agendas: VAWG policies, and policies concerning women’s descriptive representation in Parliament.

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG):

In the run-up to the 2015 General Election, both Labour and the Conservatives made pledges to tackle VAWG in their manifestos: the Conservative Party stated, *inter alia*, that they would aim to “tackle violence against women and girls, end FGM and combat early forced marriage” (The Conservative Party, 2015:79), while tackling VAWG featured as a

specific pledge in the Labour Party's Manifesto for Women (The Labour Party, 2015:3). Despite the multitude of VAWG policies introduced by the 2010-15 Coalition government and the many VAWG policies on offer from both parties at the 2015 General Election, these seemed to have little resonance with the focus group participants. Indeed, across all of the focus groups, VAWG was generally not a policy agenda that women thought about when they voted. That is not to say that most women did not find tackling VAWG important, but that VAWG policies simply did not factor into their voting strategy. When explaining the order of their gendered policy cards, some younger women stated:

Katie: What I didn't put on my list, which again not because I don't think it's important but because I don't think about it when I vote, would be tackling violence against women and girls...[it's] important but I don't think about [it] when I vote.

Sophie: I guess tackling violence against women would always be something I care about, but I think other factors are more important.

Stephanie: I've put tackling violence against women...at the bottom just because [it's] not at the forefront of my mind when I'm voting, but [it is a] kind of important issue.

Women in the mid-life groups largely echoed these views, although were less familiar than younger women with VAWG policies on the whole. In the Labour constituency group with mid-life mothers, most women stated that they were not familiar with any VAWG policies introduced by the Coalition government or VAWG pledges from the mainstream parties. One woman did, however, mention the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law):

Kelly: I'm trying to think about the articles that I've read...wasn't there one where a mum was campaigning because her daughter was killed by her boyfriend and it turned out that he had previous convictions of violence?

While another participant in the same discussion group stated:

Clare: The only thing I know is when you do your booking and appointment when you're pregnant and they warn you about domestic violence.

There were, however, some exceptions. One younger woman in the Labour constituency stated that VAWG policies were her priority. Though not a policy on VAWG *per se*, she notes the 2015 Conservative government's two-child policy on Child Tax Credit:

Chloe: I'm always looking for policies that are on violence against women, so that's what my priority is. I remember recently [the Conservatives] had that rape clause¹⁴, that was one of the things that was a big deal breaker. I was like, "yep, if I'd ever had any doubts, I know who I'm voting for".

Similarly, one woman from the mid-life group discussed the importance of VAWG policies, but on an international scale. When asked what she perceived to be her most important issues at the ballot box, she replied:

Helen: Domestic violence I think is a key thing, especially for women all around the world really.

Additionally, one older woman from the Conservative constituency raised the issue of stalking, which was made a specific criminal offence by the Coalition government in 2012.

¹⁴The Conservative government's reform to Child Tax Credit (CTC), known as the 'rape clause', limits CTCs to two children unless a woman can prove her third child was a result of rape. The reform was announced in the 2015 Budget, but came into effect in April 2017.

June: I was getting stalked by one of the neighbours...I reported it to the police and it was just after the stalking law had come out

Marion: I didn't know there was a law about stalking?

June: They made it illegal a few years ago...now he doesn't go near me, he turns away if he sees me in the street. Sometimes he doesn't, but it stopped him. I'm glad it was made illegal. I think it was the Tories that did that, wasn't it?

A lack of knowledge surrounding VAWG policies

It is perhaps unsurprising that, within the focus group discussions, VAWG was not described as a salient issue for most women. In their interviews with Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC), Gains and Lowndes (2014:545) explain that VAWG policies are less "attractive" to potential voters. Expanding on this, one PCC explained that, "Domestic violence is not a vote winner. People don't understand it, they don't want to engage with it, and it's not visible" (ibid.). Indeed, a lack of knowledge surrounding specific VAWG policies was evident in many of the focus groups. As illustrated in the Labour constituency group with mid-life mothers, many women were simply not aware of the VAWG policies that had been implemented by the previous government, or were unfamiliar with recent VAWG policy pledges from the mainstream parties. Similarly, older focus group participant, Marion, stated she was not aware of a stalking law. Meanwhile, there was confusion among some participants over what could be classed as an VAWG policy, reflected in Chloe's comment on reform to Child Tax Credit.

VAWG as a 'valence' issue

VAWG policies in Britain may not feature highly on the political agenda because they are rarely politicised. This opens up a distinction between 'valence' and 'position' issues

(Stokes, 1963). Position issues are those where there is little consensus about the goals and means of the policy, such as abortion, or sex work. As outlined in Chapter Two, valence issues are those where there is consensus surrounding the goals, but not the means of the issue. Accordingly, Outshoorn and Rubin (2014) argue that VAWG can be considered a valence issue. At the 2015 election, there was a large degree of consensus between the main parties on tackling VAWG, with all three mainstream parties outlining a clear commitment within their manifestos to ending VAWG. This contrasts with position issues, which may encourage parties to hold polarised positions since there is disagreement on the goals of the issue. One clear example is the US Democrats and Republicans on abortion, with the former openly supporting the issue, and the latter largely opposing it. Highly politicised ‘position’ issues may be more likely to influence vote choice where there is clear party competition.

VAWG as a ‘pocketbook’ policy and linked fate

While pocketbook voting theory has typically been associated with economic benefits, its underlying assumption nevertheless holds that voters are self-interested, and base their votes on policies that personally affect them (Elinder et al., 2015). Arguably the benefits of pocketbook policies, therefore, need not always be financial. At times, participants expressed elements of self-interest and spoke of policies that personally affected them. As quoted above, June, discussed the fact that legislative amendments to laws on stalking had benefited her personally. This seemingly led her to view the Conservative Party in a more positive light. Though the benefit of this policy was social rather than economic, June perceived herself to be personally ‘better off’ than before, which demonstrates the central tenets of pocketbook voting evaluations.

In contrast to June’s rhetoric of VAWG policies bringing a personal benefit, Helen, for instance, discussed the importance of tackling VAWG more widely. In this sense, Helen’s comment is emblematic of ‘linked fate’ thinking, in which she considers the status of women

as a group to inform her policy preferences. Her rhetoric of addressing VAWG on a global basis was a stark contrast to the fundamental beliefs of pocketbook voting theory. Helen's idea that gendered policies should benefit other women across the globe, rather than her personally, suggests that voters do not always act in self-interest.

Women's descriptive representation in Parliament

In 2015, all mainstream parties included commitments to increase the number of women MPs in Parliament. Similarly to VAWG policies, policies designed to aid the representation of women in Parliament did not appear to influence participants' vote choice. Many women agreed that there should be more women in Parliament although, like VAWG policies, it did not feature as a priority:

Molly: More women in Parliament... I do think it's really important, I do think there should be more, but I think there are other issues that were more important to me.

Sian: I'd expect a party to have more women in Parliament as a general policy... But it's more of a deal killer at a party level, rather than an election. If I didn't see it in a manifesto, I wouldn't be like, "oh I can't vote for them".

In their explanations, some women – in both constituencies – implied that the descriptive representation of women in Parliament will not necessarily lead to the substantive representation of women as a group. In other words, women MPs will not necessarily 'act for', or represent the interests of, women:

Lauren: Even though more women in Parliament is great for representation, they often don't vote how you want them to vote as a

woman, in terms of women's rights and all of that. Like Theresa May, for example, her voting history is absolutely shit.

Zoe: ...I don't really consider more women in Parliament, and I say this because I think that's silly to say "I'm going to vote for someone because they're a woman", because a man may have policies that better support what I would vote for... I don't think you should vote for someone on the basis of their gender, because that's almost like discriminating.

Even when one participant believed in a link between descriptive and substantive representation, she still did not view policies on women's representation as a priority:

Phoebe: So [policies enhancing women's political representation] wasn't a priority, although I really do feel more women need to be in Parliament to perhaps push a lot of [other gendered policies] up the agenda.

These findings resemble those within the wider literature on representation, where some studies have found relatively little evidence of a link between candidate gender and vote choice at the aggregate level (Campbell and Heath, 2017; McElroy and Marsh, 2009). If it is that women voters are generally no more likely to vote for women candidates on the basis of their gender, then it would be fair to assume that they are no more likely to base their votes on policies designed to enhance the representation of women. For the most part, this appears to be the case: equality guarantees to enhance women's representation in Parliament did not appear to factor into women's voting decisions. Many women were, however, still supportive of these equality guarantees – an attitude found in studies elsewhere (Campbell, 2012:706).

Re-visiting earlier expectations

After analysing the Coalition’s gendered policies between 2010 and 2015, Chapter Three set out a series of expectations, outlining the predicted impact of these policies on voting behaviour in 2015. The use of focus groups allowed for a discussion of specific gendered policies under the Coalition, and a discussion of women’s political attitudes towards them. Below, I re-visit these expectations and compare them with the focus group findings.

Table 5.3. Expectations of gendered policies on Conservative support in 2015, with focus group findings

Policy type	Policy agenda	Expectation	Focus group finding
Gender status	Violence against women and girls	Increased Conservative support among women	No effect
	Women’s political representation	Reduced Conservative support among women	No effect
Class-based	Austerity	Reduced Conservative support among women – particularly among those of a working-age	Reduced Conservative support among working-age women; no effect on older women
	Pensions and pension-age benefits	Increased Conservative support among older women; reduced Conservative support among some working-age women	Increased Conservative support among older women; no effect on working-age women
	Childcare	Reduced Conservative support among working-age women with children	Reduced Conservative support among working-age women with children
	Family welfare	Reduced Conservative support among working-age women with children	Reduced Conservative support among working-age women with children
	The NHS	Increased Conservative support among older women; reduced support	Increased Conservative support among older women;

		among women of a working-age	reduced support among women of a working-age
	Transportation	Reduced Conservative support among older women and women with children	Reduced Conservative support among older women from lower-income backgrounds and women with children

The focus group findings confirm some of the expectations that were outlined in the previous chapter. Of the expectations that were met, these pertained to class-based policies. Firstly, expectations around childcare and family welfare were upheld. Both childcare policies and family welfare policies appeared to have a negative influence on Conservative support among working-age women with children. While the Conservatives proposed some childcare policies that women acknowledged (such as the 30 free hours of childcare), women with children remained critical of the Coalition’s policies around childcare and family welfare, due to provisions in these areas being restricted or withdrawn.

Meanwhile, some expectations were partly met. The impact of austerity policies appeared to reduce Conservative support among working-age women but, contrary to expectations in Chapter Three, had little to no effect on Conservative support among women in the oldest life-stage. That is not to say that women in the oldest life-stage were not affected by austerity, but rather, older women were much less likely to harbour concerns regarding their financial or economic situation compared to those of a working-age. Working-age women appeared to share a greater awareness of austerity policies and raise concerns regarding their personal financial situation. Furthermore, while the Coalition’s pension policies appeared to increase Conservative support among older women, pension policies appeared to have little effect on those of a working-age – including those in the mid-life stage. However, had interviewees comprised working-age women born between December 1953 and November 1954 (in other words, women affected by the Coalition’s

changes to the rise in the state pension), the discussions may have produced different results. Both findings reveal interesting dynamics whereby women considered policies that affected them according to their life-stage.

Additionally, expectations around transportation were partly met. These findings reveal an added class dimension. Transportation policies appeared to be a salient issue for older women from lower-income backgrounds, as opposed to all older women voters. Reductions in the availability of local transport services appeared to reduce Conservative support among some older women in the lower-income constituency. These findings lend credence to Htun and Weldon's (2018) argument that gendered policies contain class-based dimensions, which affect women differently across class lines. Partly due to their financial status, older women from lower-income backgrounds were largely dependent on local transport, and it was at the oldest life-stage that these differences became apparent.

However, the focus group findings demonstrate that some expectations did not hold at all. These expectations related to gender status policies. While violence against women policies under the Coalition were expected to have a positive influence on women's Conservative support and women's political representation policies were expected to have a deleterious effect, neither policy agenda appeared to have any effect on women's Conservative support, or their voting behaviour more widely. This was because women stated that they did not consider these policies in their vote choice.

Concluding remarks

Women voters cannot be considered a monolithic entity and, as such, the salience they place on policies in their voting strategy is varied. In particular, this chapter finds that there are key differences in policy salience according to life-stage. This is summarised below:

Table 5.4. Salient policy agendas among women, by life-stage

	Younger life-stage	Mid life-stage	Older life-stage
Class-based policies			
The NHS	✓	✓	✓
Pensions and pension-age benefits	X	X	✓
Austerity	✓	✓	X
Childcare	X	✓	X
Family welfare	X	✓	X
Transport	X	Mixed: some austerity measures cited by women in the lower-income group	Mixed: some austerity measures cited by women in the lower-income group
Status policies			
VAWG	X	X	X
Women's representation in Parliament	X	X	X

This chapter demonstrates three main findings that became evident from the focus group discussions. The first is that class-based policies appeared to influence women's voting behaviour, while status policies seemingly had less of an impact on vote choice (see Table 5.4). Women in the youngest, middle, and oldest age groups across constituencies cited a range of class-based policies that were salient in their voting behaviour, despite the fact that these class-based policies varied. Meanwhile, the majority of women in the focus group discussions stated that they did not consider VAWG policies, or policies to enhance better gender representation, at all when they voted. That is not to say that these women did not consider status policies important, but that they did not factor such policies into their voting strategy.

Secondly, contrary to the work of several scholars (Chaney et al., 1998; Welch and Hibbing, 1992) the chapter demonstrates that women do employ pocketbook voting

heuristics in their voting behaviour. This confirms the findings also outlined in Chapter Four. Of the class-based policies that women *did* prioritise, these were policies that appeared to benefit them personally and directly, and were largely dependent on their stage of life. For instance, pension policies – particularly pension-age benefits – appeared to matter to older women when voting, and were commonly cited in the focus group discussions. For older women, Conservative policies, such as maintaining concessionary travel, free TV licences, a universal Winter Fuel Allowance and, in some cases, greater pension flexibilities, proved popular. The value that older women attributed to pension-age benefits was much more than financial: the benefits were a way of maintaining their independence, social life and wellbeing. Moreover, they helped to combat loneliness and social exclusion. Meanwhile, younger women were less likely to refer to pension policies, other than the fact that they had not yet thought about pensions. Similarly, childcare policies, such as more affordable and available childcare facilities, were most salient to those of a childrearing age, and were raised less frequently by those in the youngest or oldest age group. Relatedly, austerity policies, such as reductions in working-age benefits and childcare and maternity services, were most likely to be raised by those of a working-age (i.e. those in the mid-life and younger age groups). Austerity policies since 2010 – arguably felt hardest by those of a childbearing and working-age – emerged as a key voting issue within these groups, where these retrospective policies appeared to have a deleterious effect on their future Conservative support. As such, these pocketbook policies were directly related to the context of 2015.

Since women were predominantly personally-oriented in their voting strategy, this meant that they were less likely to consider the status of other women to inform their policy preferences. Aside from one participant who viewed VAWG policies as an issue affecting all women, evidence of linked fate within its conventional sense was generally scarce. Rather than using the status of other women as a guide for their voting behaviour, as linked fate implies, the chapter finds that women – particularly mid-life mothers – used the fate of their

families as a proxy for their own wellbeing. This was particularly evident within discussions of childcare, where several mothers claimed that they factored their family into their voting strategy after they had children. These mentions of the family validate the use of the household question in Chapter Four, in which respondents were asked whether they felt their *household* financial situation had got, or will get, worse.

Although women displayed strong elements of pocketbook voting heuristics, that is not to say that sociotropic heuristics did not occasionally feature in their voting strategies. Some women in the oldest age group implied that they believed the national economy had worsened under the Labour government, which led to their Conservative support. Meanwhile, other women were not always pocketbook-oriented in their explanation: women in the youngest age groups commonly cited egalitarian reasons for greater spending on welfare and social services. In essence, this suggests that pocketbook voting and sociotropic voting are not mutually exclusive concepts, and should instead be considered as complementary.

The third and final finding of this chapter highlights substantial life-stage differences between groups of women voters – a key expectation in Chapter Three. One of the main life-stage differences was the issues that women associated with gendered policies. Older women in both constituencies often linked gendered policies back to immigration in their explanations, even when these policy areas did not always directly pertain to immigration. Meanwhile, younger women were more likely to associate certain gendered policies with austerity, and often cited reasons of equality and fairness. These associations appeared to have implications on party support: those who felt strongly about egalitarian values often viewed Labour as the best party to govern – a finding reflected in research elsewhere. Celis and Erzeel (2015:48) argue that policies concerning egalitarianism are typically (though not always) associated with parties on the left, while policies on immigration tend to play to the

advantage of parties on the right. Though 'protecting the NHS' is in itself a valence issue, the associations women attached to it were nonetheless ideological. As shown in Table 5.4, when it came to the policies that women prioritised when voting, they consistently appeared to cite policies concerning the NHS. However, their reasons for this varied according to life-stage.

Overall, women materialised economic class-based policies – particularly austerity – in different ways. This differed between life-stage. While the focus groups were able to provide an in-depth discussion of policy saliency, the small number of participants limits the generalisability of these findings. As such, the findings presented within this chapter open up a number of further questions. Firstly, are these life-stage differences towards austerity generalisable to the wider population? Secondly, were these life-stage differences evident only in the 2015 General Election? The next chapter seeks to answer these questions, by undertaking a quantitative analysis of gender-age differences in 2015 and 2017.

Chapter Six - All in this together? Austerity and the gender-age gap in the 2015 and 2017 British general elections¹⁵

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the context of austerity and vote choice, and builds on the findings of Chapters Four and Five. Thus far, the findings presented within this thesis suggest that women vote according to policies that personally affect them. Moreover, the findings suggest that gendered policies affected women differently across the life-stage. This would suggest that gender-age differences emerged at the 2015 General Election. While Chapter Five found that life-stage differences among women voters were prominent at the 2015 election, this chapter tests the generalisability of these findings. In other words, it now tests empirically the idea that women vote differently on policies according to life-stage. In testing the generalisability of these findings, the chapter extends the analysis to both the 2017 and 2015 general elections, in order to explore whether these life-stage differences in 2015 were also evident in other austerity elections in Britain. As the previous chapter showed, the context of austerity – and economic class-based policies more generally – appeared to be salient for women at the 2015 General Election. Accordingly, the chapter takes forward this finding and places a specific focus on economic policies within the analysis.

The research question of interest is: How has the context of austerity impacted on gendered voting behaviour? This chapter seeks to answer this question by examining Labour and Conservative economic policy proposals in 2015 and 2017, in conjunction with data from the BES's face-to-face post-election surveys for the same elections. Both elections were

¹⁵ This chapter is a version of a published co-authored paper with Dr Rosalind Shorrocks ('All in this together? Austerity and the gender-age gap in the 2015 and 2017 British General Elections', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 21(4): 667-688.). Permission to use the material in this thesis has been granted by the British Journal of Politics and International Relations.

fought against a backdrop of austerity, but with different party leaders and centred on different issues. Here, the examination of economic policy assesses the likely gendered impact of the policies being offered by the parties, while the BES analysis tests whether gender differences in economic concerns were associated with gender differences in vote choice. This chapter argues that (anti-)austerity policies were particularly influential for Labour support among younger women, while older women were comparatively protected from austerity through pension policies and thus were more inclined to vote Conservative.

The focus on the consequences of economic policy for gender vote gaps presents a significant contribution to the literature on gender gaps and electoral behaviour. While a wide body of research highlights the importance of economic policy on voting behaviour (Downs, 1957; Fiorina, 1981; Key, 1966), little attention has been devoted to the impact of policy on *gender differences* in vote choice. Studies of gender vote gaps rarely, if ever, examine the role of party policy in creating gender gaps. This chapter argues that examining the electoral context and choices available to the electorate can shed light on the presence or absence of gender differences in voting behaviour. This chapter examines the connection between party policy and gendered voting behaviour here in the British case, but studies beyond Britain and comparatively should explore party policy positions further as a source of gender differences in vote choice.

Moreover, the chapter draws attention to the electoral consequences of austerity. In the European context, the impact of austerity has been gendered (Karamessini and Rubery, 2013). Reductions in women's entitlements have been widespread; for instance, in Ireland and Denmark, Child Benefit has been reduced, and in Romania and Macedonia, maternity leave benefits have been cut (European Women's Lobby, 2012:9-10). Yet little is known about the impact of such policies on women's party support. The importance of

austerity policies for voting behaviour has implications for party support at future elections and raises the possibility of a backlash against such policies.

The chapter begins below by summarising the extant literature on gendered voting behaviour discussed in Chapter Two, with a focus on the context of austerity. Subsequently, it conducts a manifesto analysis for Labour and the Conservatives in 2015 and 2017, generating expectations for gendered vote choice patterns. These expectations are then tested using the BES. Finally, the chapter discusses the main findings alongside the wider implications of the research.

Gender, austerity and vote choice

Existing literature on gender vote gaps in Western democracies largely emphasises socio-economic factors. Scholars such as Inglehart and Norris (2000; 2003) argue that, as a result of socio-economic change, younger women lean towards left-wing parties, whereas older women are more likely to support parties on the right. Older women's greater religiosity is thought to be partly responsible for this trend (Emmenegger and Manow 2014; Shorrocks 2018). Younger women's shift to the left has been linked to developments such as declining marriage, increasing labour force participation, and rising education rates. Evidence of ideological similarity between spouses (Jennings and Stoker, 2005) means declining marriage rates imply gender divergence. Single women also have lower household incomes than married women, making them more supportive of parties on the left (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, and Lin 2004; Edlund and Pande, 2002). Moreover, it is argued that paid employment exposes women to gender inequalities related to childcare or unequal pay, which shape their political preferences (Manza and Brooks 1998). Increased educational opportunities are also believed to contribute towards younger women's left-wing views, as this leads women to become more economically independent (Giger, 2009; Inglehart and Norris, 2000; 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006).

However, socio-economic factors, although a compelling explanation for change in the gender vote gap over time, cannot account for fluctuations in gender vote gaps across elections. Factors such as increased labour force participation and education rates also tend to have little explanatory power for gender vote gaps in comparative research (Giger 2009; Shorrocks 2018). Furthermore, in analysis conducted prior to 2015, there was little evidence that younger women were indeed more left-wing than younger men in the British context (Campbell 2006; Shorrocks 2016). For these reasons, the chapter argues that we should go beyond socio-economic explanations of gender vote gaps and examine the electoral and policy context within which men and women make their electoral choices. The chapter now turns to the case of austerity in Britain, a policy with gendered implications.

A wide body of research has consistently demonstrated the gendered burden of austerity in Britain (Browne, 2011; MacLeavy, 2011; Keen and Cracknell, 2017). Taking every specific change to direct taxes and benefits since 2010, analysis from the House of Commons Library found that between 2010 and 2013, 79% of budget cuts were borne by women, compared with 21% by men (Busby and James, 2017). This impact of austerity on women has varied by life-stage. Women in the younger stages of the life-cycle, who are more likely to be working than older women and to undertake childcare, appeared to bear the brunt of public spending reductions. The Women's Budget Group (2016) estimated that lone parent families – 90% of which are headed by women – witnessed the greatest reduction in disposable income due to tax and benefit changes, including the freezing of Child Benefit (of which women comprise 98% of recipients) (Campbell, 2010), reductions in the childcare element of Working Tax Credit from 80% to 70%, and the tapering of Child Benefit paid to individuals with a family earning over £50,000 per year.

Meanwhile, benefits for pensioners were largely protected and, in some cases, increased (McKay and Rowlingson, 2016). The 'triple lock' on pensions, meaning the basic

state pension would increase by average earnings, inflation, or 2.5%, whichever is highest, was implemented in 2011 and saw the value of the state pension increase significantly. Between 2010 and 2016, the value of the state pension increased by 22.2%, compared with growth in earnings of 7.6% and growth in prices of 12.3% over the same period (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2016). Often poorer than their male counterparts in later life, women pensioners are more likely than men to rely on the basic state pension as a source of income (Price, 2006; Rummery, 2016).

The impact of policies enacted in the 2010-2017 period thus had a gendered effect, but in a way that varies across the life-cycle. This was the broad context within which voters made their choices in 2015 and 2017. The chapter now turns to an analysis of the party manifestos at both elections to understand the specific choices put before voters in these elections. If voters were not faced with relevant and distinct choices between the parties, we would not necessarily expect the gendered impact of austerity to translate into gender differences in vote choice.

Manifesto analysis

This section analyses the economic policy pledges made by the Conservatives and Labour to the electorate in the 2015 and 2017 elections. Manifestos are an effective way to map parties' shifting ideological positions and policy agendas (Allen and Bara, 2017), and have been used as a method of analysis in gender scholarship elsewhere (Campbell and Childs, 2010; 2015b). Here, the focus on policy pledges (prospective policies) complements the analysis of retrospective policies in Chapter Three. Analysing prospective policies allows for an assessment of the choice that voters are presented with at elections. Retrospective policies may be limited in influencing vote choice if voters are not presented with a clear choice between parties. Moreover, evidence from Chapters Four and Five suggests that, in addition to retrospective policies, women also consider prospective policies in their vote

choice. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the policies that were on offer in 2015 and 2017, and how these shaped women’s vote choice. This chapter analyses both the Conservative and Labour party manifestos, as these were the two main parties at the 2015 and 2017 general elections. In doing so, it places a focus on social security, taxation, and pensions, three areas where gender is particularly relevant. I summarise these policies below, and use them to guide the expectations for gender differences in vote choice.

The 2015 General Election

Despite a nascent recovery in the economy since 2010, the budget deficit remained at the forefront of political debate at the 2015 election. Both Labour and the Conservatives offered fiscal policy agendas designed to address the deficit, shown in Table 6.1 below. The Conservatives predominantly relied on spending cuts, while Labour sought to achieve balance in current spending, and borrowing to finance investment (Gamble, 2015).

Table 6.1. Key economic policies within party manifestos at the 2015 General Election

Policy areas	Conservatives	Labour	Expectations
Social security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower the benefit cap from £26,000 to £23,000 - Freeze working-age benefits for two years - End housing benefit for 18-21 year olds on JSA - Roll out Universal Credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freeze Child Benefit rises for two years - Protect spending on tax credits - Abolish the ‘bedroom tax’ - Review Universal Credit 	Higher Labour support among working-age women
Taxation and earnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase 40p tax threshold to £50,000 - Raise personal tax allowance to £12,500 - Reduce tax relief on pension contributions for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Return to the 50p tax rate for higher earners - Reintroduce a lower 10p starting rate of tax 	Higher Conservative support among working-age men

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> people earning over £50,000 - Raise the minimum wage - Recognise marriage in the tax system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce pension tax relief for higher earners - 'Mansion tax' on property worth over £2m - Raise the minimum wage - Abolish the recognition of marriage in the tax system 	
Pensions and pension-age benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retain the 'triple lock' - Maintain all pension-age benefits - Extend pension freedoms - Cap social care costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retain the 'triple lock' - Maintain some pension-age benefits - Extend pension freedoms 	Higher Conservative support among older voters – particularly women

As part of its 'long-term economic plan', the Conservatives promised to reduce government spending and run a small budget surplus by 2018/19. Crucially, the party pledged to reduce social security spending by £12 billion by 2017/18, with approximately £1.3 billion of these savings delivered through reductions to working-age benefits. Labour also proposed some spending cuts to social security, but to a lesser extent. Notably, Labour made a series of anti-austerity pledges designed to dismantle measures implemented under the Coalition government. This included the abolition of the Social Sector Size Criteria ('the bedroom tax'), and a promise to review Universal Credit – a single monthly payment combining six means-tested benefits and tax credits – both policies which had been deleterious to working-age women who are more likely to rely on such benefits. Universal Credit, a 'flagship' Coalition policy (Sainsbury, 2014), garnered criticism among gender equality advocates because the payment would be made to one person in a household, putting women at greater risk of financial abuse (Women's Budget Group, 2018c). Taken together, we would expect Labour's anti-austerity policies to be particularly attractive to

employed women and women who undertake childcare – in other words, women at earlier life-stages – since it is this group who are most reliant on transfer payments (Women’s Budget Group, 2010).

As shown in Table 6.1, the ‘mansion tax’ was one of several commitments to tax increases from the Labour Party. Conversely, the Conservatives focused on tax cuts through increasing the personal tax allowance and the Income Tax threshold. Tax cuts are more likely to benefit men, since they comprise the majority of higher earners. Rises in the personal tax allowance do not benefit those already below it, 66% of whom are women (Women’s Budget Group, 2017c). By contrast, of those expected to benefit from the increase in the Income Tax threshold, 73% would be men (Women’s Budget Group, 2017c). Thus, we would expect Conservative support to be bolstered among working-age men who are more likely to gain financially from lower taxation.

As already highlighted in Chapter Three, a large proportion of Conservative spending commitments would benefit older generations in 2015, such as pledges to maintain all pension-age benefits (upon which older women are more reliant), including the Winter Fuel Allowance, free bus passes, free TV licences, and a cap on the cost of social care. Additionally, the party remained committed to retaining the ‘triple lock’ on pensions (a policy also supported by Labour). The Conservatives also pledged to continue Coalition policy of relaxing pension regulations, including scrapping the requirement to purchase an annuity – a policy that would be particularly attractive to older women pensioners since they previously had to buy annuities at higher rates than men (Curry and O’Connell, 2004).

The 2017 General Election

By 2017, Britain’s political landscape had shifted considerably, with the issue of Brexit dominating the political agenda. The Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership

shifted further left on a range of economic issues – a development which interestingly somewhat reversed the parties’ positions in relation to older voters. The Conservatives offered fewer policies to secure their core base of older voters than in 2015, while Labour offered a range of economic commitments – including those to older voters – that the IFS deemed would raise public spending to its highest level since the mid-1980s (Inman, 2017).

Table 6.2. Key economic policies within party manifestos at the 2017 General Election

Policy areas	Conservatives	Labour	Expectations
Social security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue the roll-out of Universal Credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Abolish the ‘bedroom tax’ - Abolish the two-Child policy on Child Tax Credits - End six-week delays in Universal Credit payments - Reinstate housing benefit for 18-21 year olds 	Higher Labour support among working-age women
Taxation and earnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raise higher rate tax threshold to £50,000 - Raise personal tax allowance to £12,500 - Increase the National Living Wage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce a £45,000 rate on income tax for those earning over £80,000 p/a - 50% tax on those earning over £123,000 p/a - Raise the minimum wage 	Higher Conservative support among working-age men
Pensions and pension-age benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce a ‘double lock’ from 2020 - Means test Winter Fuel Allowance - Raise cost of care threshold to £100,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retain ‘triple lock’ - Maintain universality of pension-age benefits - Increase pension credit for women affected by the change in State Pension Age 	Reduced Conservative support among older voters – particularly women

The apparent reversal between the Conservatives and Labour in their commitments to older voters was reflected in several policy proposals. The Conservatives proposed to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, while Labour pledged to maintain their universality. Labour pledged to retain the ‘triple lock’, while the Conservatives proposed to replace it with a ‘double lock’ from 2020. Most notable was the Conservative proposal on social care funding, which emerged as a key issue in the 2017 campaign. Dubbed by its critics as the ‘dementia tax’, the policy proposed that elderly people would be required to pay the full amount for social care (both domiciliary and residential) until their assets and savings were reduced to £100,000. Criticism of the policy led to a U-turn by Theresa May, who later announced that a Conservative government would introduce a cap on care costs (Bale and Webb, 2017; Hughes, 2017). The impact of this policy (despite the U-turn), alongside proposed reductions in pension-age benefits, leads to expectations of a reduced Conservative lead among older voters – particularly older women as those most reliant on state support. Importantly, though, the context of Brexit in 2017 realigned the electorate along generational lines. The Conservative’s promise of a hard Brexit at the 2017 election was especially attractive to older voters, who were more likely to have voted Leave, while Labour’s softer stance on Brexit appeared to carry weight with voters of younger generations (Heath and Goodwin, 2017). In this context, despite the Conservative Party’s *economic* policies appearing less attractive to older voters in 2017 compared to 2015, we nevertheless expect higher support amongst older voters for the Conservative Party in 2017 in line with other studies.

In 2017, the Conservative manifesto contained relatively little on social security, indicating a continuation of current austerity policies in this realm. This contrasts with Labour’s proposals for a series of reforms to Conservative family welfare policies – indicative of its shift to an “anti-austerity platform” under Jeremy Corbyn (Heath and Goodwin, 2017:346). This included abolishing the two-child policy on Child Tax Credit (labelled by critics

as the ‘rape clause’, which limits payments to two children unless a woman can prove her third child is a result of rape), and ending six-week delays in Universal Credit payments (which the Conservatives stated they would continue to roll-out). These measures lead us to expect higher support among women – particularly younger women who had been hit hardest by austerity measures – for Labour.

Turning to the issues of taxes, the Conservatives pledged they would continue to raise the higher rate tax threshold to £50,000 and the personal allowance to £12,500. While Labour proposed no changes to basic and higher income tax rates, it did propose more progressive tax policies than in 2015 with a 45% rate on income tax for those earning over £80,000 a year, and a 50% tax on those earning over £123,000 a year. Similarly to 2015, we would expect Conservative tax policies to be particularly attractive to working-age men in particular, since they comprise the majority of higher earners.

To summarise the manifesto analysis, then, Labour and the Conservatives broadly offered differing economic policies to voters in 2015 and 2017. At both elections, Labour’s positions would be more beneficial for working-age women than the Conservative’s. Working-age men, especially without dependents, would gain more from the Conservative’s policies than from Labour’s. In 2015, Conservative policy would have particularly benefited women at older life-stages compared to Labour’s, especially those drawing a state pension. By 2017, there was less difference in how Conservative and Labour policy would impact older voters, with Labour’s policies becoming more generous to those in more advanced life-stages than in 2015. This manifesto analysis, and what is known about the gendered impact of austerity, leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Younger women will be more pessimistic about their economic and financial situation than men or older women.

H2A: Younger women will be more supportive of Labour and less supportive of the Conservatives relative to younger men.

H2B: This gender difference will be associated with gender differences in economic and financial pessimism.

H3A: Older women will be more supportive of the Conservatives and less supportive of Labour relative to younger women.

H3B: This age difference for women will be associated with age differences in economic and financial pessimism.

Vote choice analysis

This section uses cross-sectional data from the British Election Studies (BES) in 2015 and 2017 (Fieldhouse et al., 2016; 2018) to test the hypotheses. The BES provides ideal data because they provide face-to-face surveys of nationally representative probability samples in the immediate aftermath of each election, asking identical questions. The strategy in this section is firstly to examine whether men and women of different life-stages differ in their evaluations of their own economic situation as well as the national economy, and then to examine whether such attitudes are associated with gender differences in vote choice.

The key dependent variable is retrospective vote choice: Conservative, Labour, and Other. Here, a focus is placed on Labour and Conservative support as the two dominant parties, and because there are too few respondents voting for other parties in the survey to sensibly examine them by gender and life-stage. Economic and financial pessimism is measured using individual perceptions of living costs, the household financial situation, the national economic situation, and the NHS. I refer to these collectively as 'economic/financial pessimism.' Each variable has three categories, indicating whether the individual thought the situation had got/will get worse, stayed/will stay the same, or had got/will get better. The

period of reference is the last election (2010 or 2015) for the questions on the NHS and living costs, and 12 months for questions on the household financial or national economic situation. Retrospective questions are asked for all indicators; prospective ones just for the household financial and national economic situation. Full question wordings for these variables can be found in Appendix C. The original questions contain five categories, and respondents could differentiate between 'a little worse' and 'a lot worse', and 'a little better' and 'a lot better.' A very small number of respondents thought that things had got either a little or a lot better, especially in 2017; therefore these categories were collapsed.

I examine the relationship between economic/financial pessimism and vote choice via a series of multinomial logistic regression models for each election. The 2015 and 2017 elections took place in very different contexts. The 2016 EU Referendum vote was a seismic moment in British politics, and voters' positions on the issue were crucial to understanding the 2017 election (Heath and Goodwin, 2017; Mellon, Evans, Fieldhouse, Green and Prosser, 2018) – but not the one in 2015. Moreover, almost all political parties were led by a different leader in 2017 compared to 2015 and had experienced a corresponding change in policy direction, especially Labour under Jeremy Corbyn. Thus, the analysis is run separately for both elections. The first multinomial model includes just gender and its interaction with life-stage. Gender is a dichotomous variable for being a woman. Life-stage is operationalised through respondent's age, which is coded into three categories: less than 35; 35-64; and 65+. The selection of age 35 as the cut-off for the youngest age group is consistent with other demographic studies that label 18-34 as 'young adults' (Payne, 2016; Vespa, 2017). Those aged 65 and over are classified as the oldest life-stage, as this is the State Pension Age applying to both men and women in the sample.

The second model controls for other explanations of gender differences in vote choice, especially those that have been associated with different gender vote gaps at

different ages. Education has six categories: none; GCSE or equivalent; A-Level or equivalent; post A-level vocational; degree; and other. Employment is a dichotomous variable for being in employment or not. Religiosity has five categories: no religion; Protestant; Catholic; Other Christian; Other non-Christian. Marital status has six categories: married; living with a partner; separated; divorced; widowed; single (never married). Social class (self-reported) has three categories: middle class; working class; and other. Trade union membership is a dichotomous variable for being a trade union member. This is thus controlling for other explanations for why younger women might be more supportive of Labour apart from the hypothesised mechanisms relating to the electoral context and party policy.

This model also includes controls for factors known to be relevant for British elections. I control for hypothetical EU referendum vote in 2015, and retrospective referendum vote in 2017. These variables have three categories: wouldn't vote or don't know (2015)/didn't vote (2017) (reference), Leave, and Remain. Although EU opinion was not as salient in 2015 as in 2017, I control for this in both years to keep the models consistent. I also control for left-right and liberal-authoritarian positions, to account for the possibility that younger women are more left-wing because of the values they hold rather than because of their economic situation under austerity. Left-right position and liberal-authoritarian position are each constructed out of responses to four items on a five-point strongly disagree to strongly agree scale. Full wordings for these items are in Appendix C. This strategy presents a tough test for H2B and H3B, as it is expecting to find an effect of economic/financial pessimism over and above that of control variables that are themselves likely related to being pessimistic (such as marital status, social class). Moreover, respondents could hold left-right values *because* of their economic/financial pessimism.

The third model adds measures for economic/financial pessimism. The discussion of the literature and the context of austerity in Britain suggests that there will be gender

differences in vote choice *within* particular life-stages (H2A/H2B). However, I also expect women of different life-stages to differ from each other (H3A/H3B). The strategy is thus to examine how gender vote gaps within age groups, and age differences within genders, alter once these economic/financial pessimism variables have been added. If they substantially reduce in size or become statistically insignificant compared to model 2, this provides evidence that such pessimism is relevant for gender gaps by life-stage in vote choice in Britain. This is a strategy often employed in studies of gender vote gaps (see Campbell, 2006; Giger, 2009). All models are run on the sub-sample of respondents who answered all relevant questions: N=1,650 in 2015 and 1,258 in 2017. Summary statistics for all variables can be found in Table B1 of Appendix C. All analysis is weighted according to the recommended weights in the BES.

Gender and economic/financial pessimism

Chapter Four examined household financial attitudes and evaluations of the general economy by gender. Here, I extend the analysis to include living costs and the NHS alongside these two economic items in order to reflect a broader picture of austerity – the key focus of this chapter. Additionally, I extend the analysis to examine responses to these items in the context of both the 2015 and 2017 elections. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 show men and women’s opinions towards living costs, their financial situation, the economic situation, and the NHS in 2015 and 2017. In 2015, around 50% of respondents thought that the NHS and living costs had got worse since the last election. Respondents were more positive about their household finances and the general economic situation, with about 30% of respondents thinking these had got worse in the past 12 months and were going to get worse in the next 12 months. By 2017, around 60-70% of respondents thought that living costs and the NHS had got worse since the last election, and a similar percentage thought that the general economic situation had got worse and was going to get worse. Very few respondents in 2017 thought that any

of the areas asked about had improved or would improve. Respondents thus became markedly more pessimistic in the two years between 2015 and 2017, and the shift in opinion likely reflects concerns about the UK economy post-Brexit, in addition to continued austerity.

In both elections and for all indicators, women were more pessimistic than men. The gender differences in terms of thinking the situation had got or would get worse are mostly between 5-10 percentage points. Men were also more likely to respond that things had improved or would improve in the future.

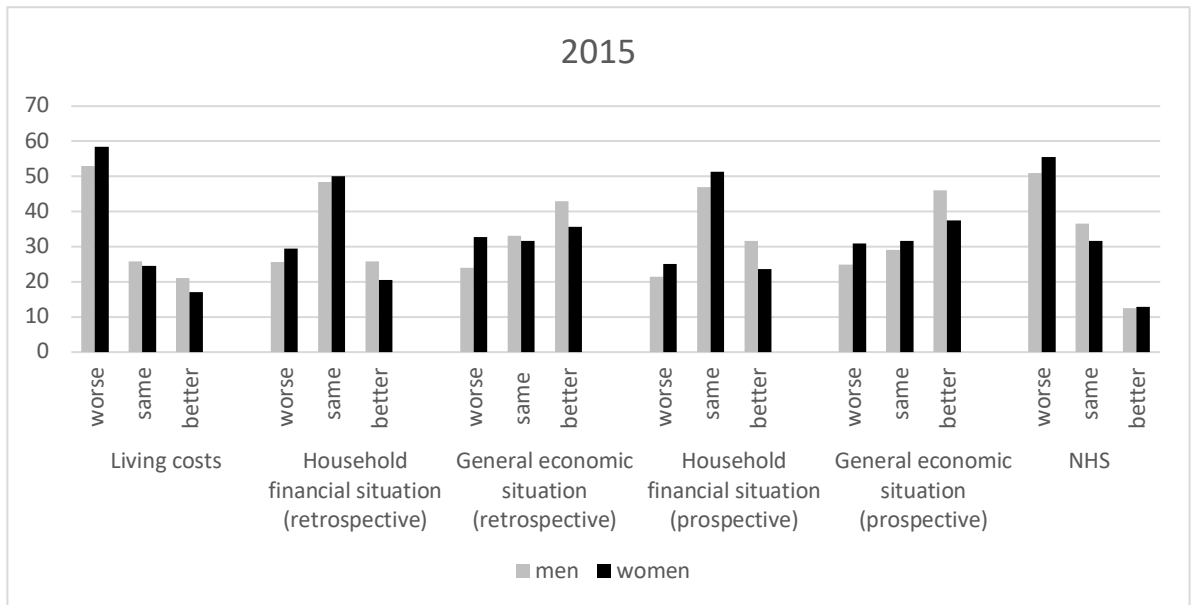


Figure 6.1. Economic/financial pessimism for men and women in 2015. Source: BES 2015.

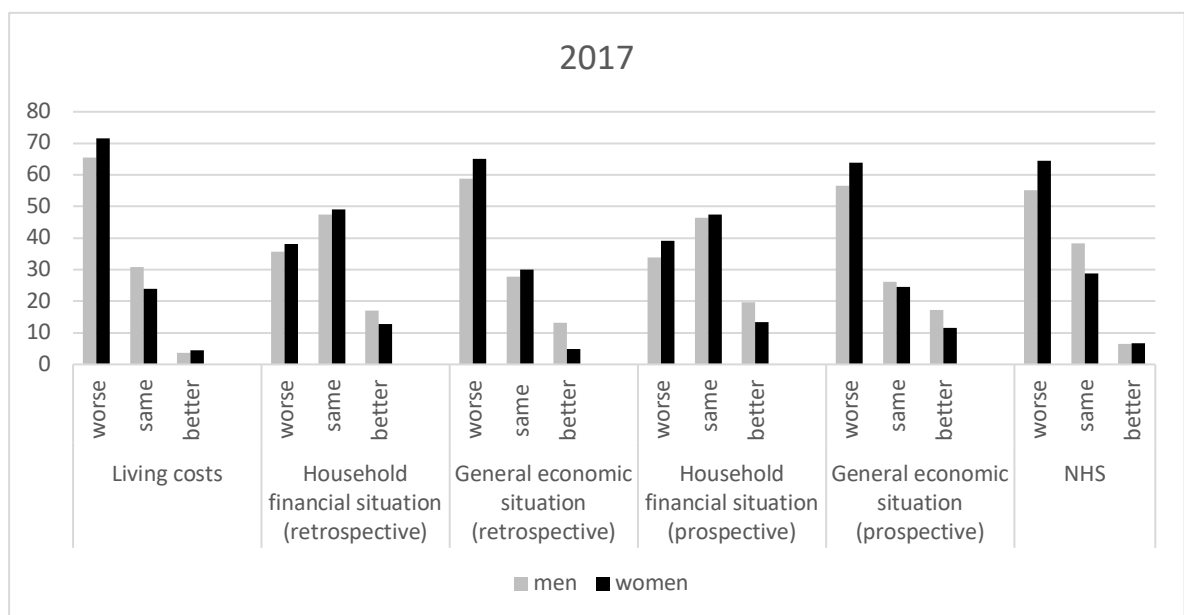


Figure 6.2. Economic/financial pessimism for men and women in 2017. Source: BES 2017

The discussion of the Coalition/Conservative government’s policies in the period 2010-2017, as well as the policy analysis within Chapter Three, suggests that their impact should differ by gender and life-stage. Table 6.3 shows the percentage of men and women agreeing with the statements by life-stage in 2015. In line with H1, the table shows that women under 35 were consistently more likely than men of the same age group to think that the situation had got or would get worse, usually by about 10-15 percentage points.

Additionally, in almost all cases they are the most pessimistic of all six gender-by-age groups, with the exception of the issue of the NHS. Women aged 35-64 also tend to be more pessimistic than men of their age group, although this is less consistent. Older women (65+), however, are no more pessimistic than older men, and the oldest age group are generally the least pessimistic. Because younger women were particularly pessimistic, the difference between age groups tends to be larger for women than men.

By 2017 (Table 6.4), economic/financial pessimism has risen amongst all groups. It is striking how few respondents in 2017 were optimistic about any of the issues. While younger age groups still tend to be the most pessimistic, this becomes less stark with a majority of all six gender-by-age groups agreeing that living costs, the general economic situation, and the NHS had got worse since the last election. H1 is again supported. Women under the age of 35 are still the most pessimistic group and are more pessimistic than men of the same age. This difference tends to be between 5-15 percentage points, but women under 35 are 22 percentage points more likely than younger men to say that they think the economic situation will get worse over the next 12 months.

Table 6.3. Economic/financial pessimism by gender and age in 2015

		Living costs			Household financial situation (retrospective)			General economic situation (retrospective)		
		worse	same	better	worse	same	better	worse	same	better
<35	F	72	21	6	35	43	23	39	30	31
	M	62	21	18	23	45	32	25	33	42
35-64	F	59	21	20	33	44	23	32	31	37
	M	55	26	20	30	45	24	24	35	41
65+	F	42	34	24	17	70	13	27	35	38
	M	39	33	28	19	60	21	22	29	48
		Household financial situation (prospective)			General economic situation (prospective)			NHS		
		worse	same	better	worse	same	better	Worse	same	better
<35	F	30	38	32	36	30	34	54	33	13
	M	19	34	47	27	29	44	53	34	13
35-64	F	25	50	25	30	33	36	60	31	10
	M	25	46	29	25	30	44	52	37	12
65+	F	20	69	12	26	31	43	49	32	19
	M	17	66	17	21	26	52	47	39	14

Note: Numbers are percentages. Source: BES 2015

Table 6.4. Economic/financial pessimism by gender and age in 2017

		Living costs			Household financial situation (retrospective)			General economic situation (retrospective)		
		worse	same	Better	worse	same	better	worse	same	better
<35	F	74	23	2	40	40	20	65	31	4
	M	68	29	4	28	50	23	59	23	18
35-64	F	73	20	6	41	46	13	69	27	5
	M	67	30	4	42	41	17	61	28	11
65+	F	65	32	3	30	65	5	58	36	6
	M	61	35	4	31	59	10	56	32	12
		Household financial situation (prospective)			General economic situation (prospective)			NHS		
		worse	same	Better	worse	same	better	worse	same	better
<35	F	37	41	22	70	21	9	70	24	6
	M	24	44	32	47	30	23	56	36	8
35-64	F	40	47	13	64	26	10	66	27	7
	M	37	43	19	60	26	14	55	40	4
65+	F	39	55	6	56	25	19	56	37	9
	M	37	55	8	60	22	18	54	39	6

Note: Numbers are percentages. Source: BES 2017

Gender and vote choice

Tables 6.5 and 6.6 show the results of the multinomial logit models, which predict vote choice, for the key variables of gender and age group. The full results are in Tables B2 and B3 in Appendix C. Model 1 includes just gender and its interaction with age group; model 2 adds the control variables; and model 3 adds the economic/financial pessimism indicators. The coefficients of interest are those for the main effect of gender (the gender difference for those under 35), the main effect of age (the effect of age for men), and the interaction terms, which show if the age effects are different for men and women. To aid interpretation of the interaction terms, Figure 6.3 shows the results in terms of the predicted gender difference in vote choice within each age group in 2015 and 2017, and Figures 6.4 and 6.5 show the results in terms of the predicted age differences in vote choice for men and women, for the Conservatives and Labour respectively. This allows me to examine whether economic/financial pessimism is associated with gender differences in vote choice within age groups, and age differences in vote choice separately for both men and women.

Model 1 shows that there are gender differences in vote choice by life-stage in both election years. Men under 35 years were less likely to vote Labour, and more likely to vote Conservative, than women under 35 in both elections. This is indicated by the statistically significant and positive main effect in the first column of Tables 6.5 and 6.6, as well as the first bar for each plot in Figure 6.3. In 2015, men under 35 were approximately 10 percentage points more likely to vote for the Conservatives than women of the same age, while women of this age group were 14 points more likely to vote Labour. In 2017, men under 35 were 14 points more supportive of the Conservatives than women of the same age, while women were about 15 points more supportive of Labour than men in this age group. This is in line with H2A. This pattern remains with the controls included in model 2, but with smaller

gender gaps, indicating that some of the gender-by-age differences in vote choice results from the socio-economic factors emphasised by the gender vote gap literature.

Table 6.5. Multinomial logit models for 2015 vote choice

	Labour vs Conservatives			Other vs Conservatives		
	Model 1	Model 2 (controls)	Model 3 (economic/ financial pessimism)	Model 1	Model 2 (controls)	Model 3 (economic/ financial pessimism)
Female	0.633* (0.250)	0.695* (0.285)	0.472 (0.306)	0.147 (0.290)	0.201 (0.311)	0.012 (0.324)
Age						
35-64	-0.313 (0.207)	0.165 (0.261)	0.249 (0.279)	-0.003 (0.225)	0.231 (0.269)	0.273 (0.280)
65+	-0.818** (0.247)	-0.494 (0.355)	-0.180 (0.381)	-0.116 (0.250)	0.041 (0.344)	0.150 (0.362)
Female*35-64	-0.788** (0.298)	-0.919** (0.341)	-0.853* (0.363)	-0.443 (0.336)	-0.501 (0.361)	-0.410 (0.374)
Female*65+	-0.737* (0.346)	-0.805* (0.402)	-0.743 (0.429)	-0.769* (0.374)	-0.723 (0.407)	-0.588 (0.421)

N = 1650. * p<0.05; ** p<0.01. Coefficients are log odds; standard errors in parentheses. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of Labour/Other than the Conservatives

Table 6.6. Multinomial logit models for 2017 vote choice

	Labour vs Conservatives			Other vs Conservatives		
	Model 1	Model 2 (controls)	Model 3 (economic/ financial pessimism)	Model 1	Model 2 (controls)	Model 3 (economic/ financial pessimism)
Female	0.804* (0.336)	0.825* (0.369)	0.470 (0.393)	0.501 (0.461)	0.444 (0.478)	0.246 (0.492)
Age						
35-64	-0.272 (0.247)	-0.167 (0.299)	-0.154 (0.328)	0.147 (0.336)	0.559 (0.376)	0.533 (0.396)
65+	-1.321** (0.273)	-1.002** (0.380)	-1.021* (0.419)	-0.832* (0.375)	-0.375 (0.474)	-0.320 (0.498)
Female*35-64	-0.833* (0.384)	-0.676 (0.425)	-0.459 (0.453)	-0.546 (0.517)	-0.441 (0.537)	-0.341 (0.552)
Female*65+	-0.764 (0.427)	-0.582 (0.472)	-0.192 (0.506)	-0.695 (0.591)	-0.495 (0.614)	-0.352 (0.630)

N = 1258. * p<0.05; ** p<0.01. Coefficients are log odds; standard errors in parentheses. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of Labour/Other than the Conservatives

Economic/financial pessimism is included in model 3, and these indicators largely have a statistically significant effect on vote choice (more so in 2015 than in 2017), with more pessimistic voters more likely to vote Labour than the Conservatives. Once economic/financial pessimism is included, the gender differences in 2015 for the youngest group shrinks to around 4 percentage points for Conservative support, and to around 7 percentage points for Labour support, consistent with H2B. In 2017 the size of the gap for the youngest age group in both Conservative and Labour support shrinks to about 7 percentage points, also in line with H2B. In both cases, the main effect of gender in Tables 6.5 and 6.6 becomes statistically insignificant, suggesting that once economic/financial pessimism is accounted for, gender is no longer relevant for vote choice amongst the under-35s. The results indicate that in both elections, younger women's greater financial and economic pessimism relative to their male counterparts was related to their greater likelihood of voting Labour.

In 2015, the older age groups show no gender difference in Labour support, but women aged over 65 were about 10 percentage points more supportive of the Conservatives than men their age. However, while the controls somewhat reduce the gender difference in Conservative support at older age groups, economic/financial pessimism makes little difference. In 2017, there is no gender difference at older ages. This is interesting in the context of the reversal between Labour and the Conservatives in terms of their policies towards older voters.

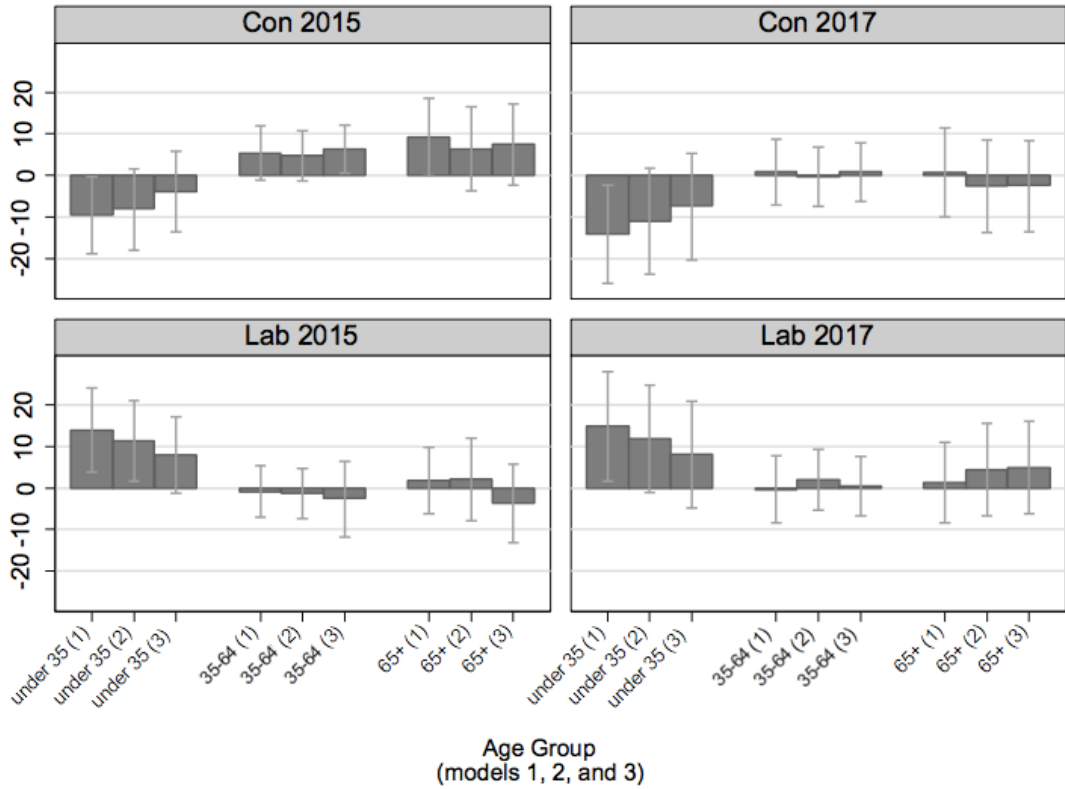


Figure 6.3. Predicted gender differences in Conservative and Labour vote by age group in 2015 and 2017 with 95% confidence intervals.
 Note: Gender differences are calculated as % of women supporting the party minus % of men supporting the party. Positive numbers thus indicate women are more supportive.

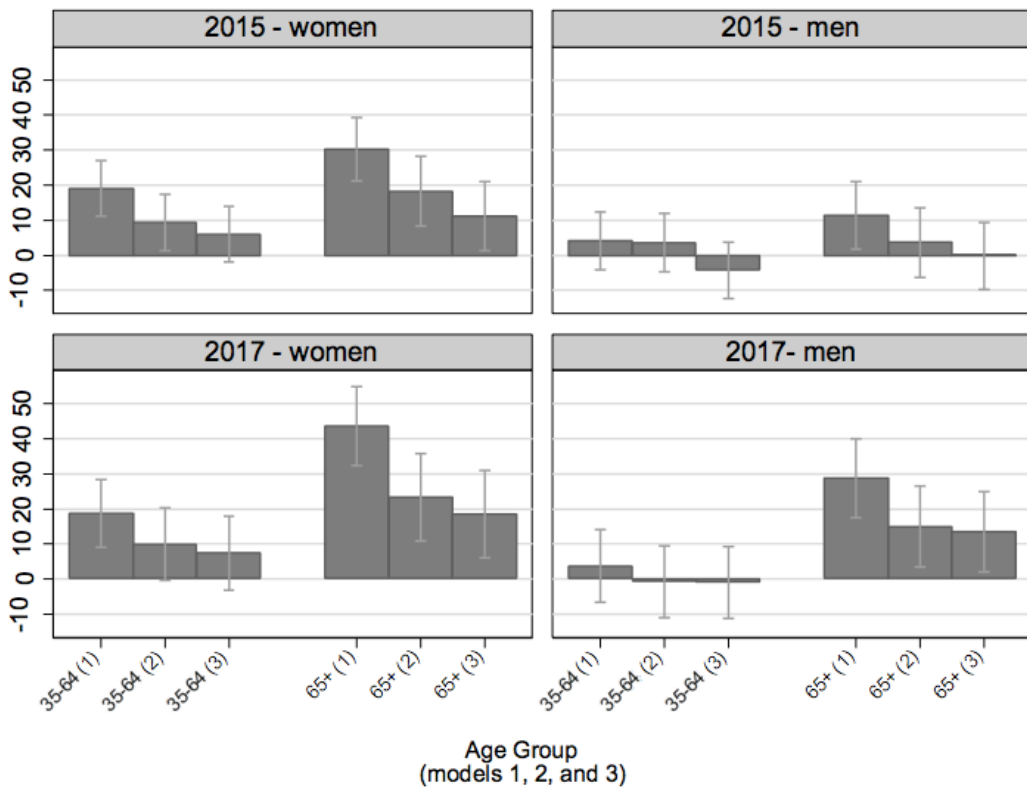


Figure 6.4. Predicted age differences in Conservative support by gender in 2015 and 2017 with 95% confidence intervals.

Note: Age differences are calculated as % of the relevant age group supporting the party minus % of under-35s supporting the party. Positive numbers thus indicate older groups are more supportive.

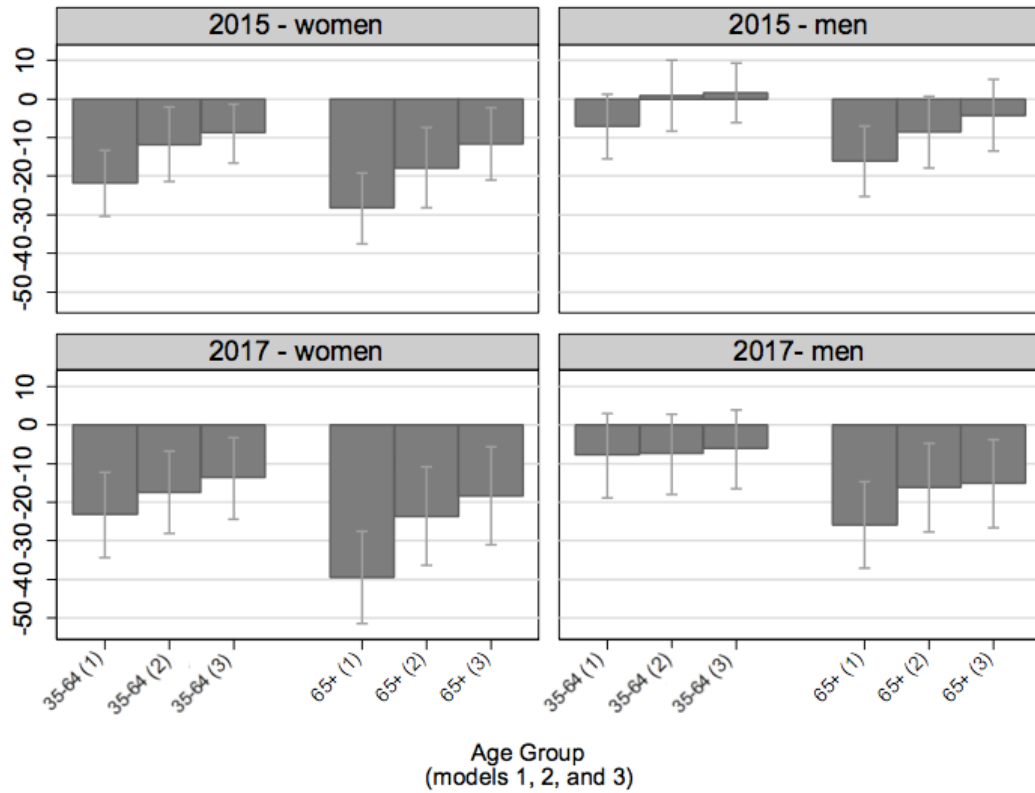


Figure 6.5. Predicted age differences in Labour support by gender in 2015 and 2017 with 95% confidence intervals.

Note: Age differences are calculated as % of the relevant age group supporting the party minus % of under-35s supporting the party. Positive numbers thus indicate older groups are more supportive.

Figures 6.4 and 6.5 show gender differences within age groups for men and women separately, for Conservative and Labour respectively. Positive numbers indicate that the age group has more support for the party than the under-35s. There are clear differences in both Labour and Conservative support by life-stage for women in 2015, consistent with H3A. Those aged 35-64 are about 20 percentage points more supportive of the Conservatives, and less supportive of Labour, than the under-35s. For the over 65s, this figure is 30 percentage points. These age differences reduce in size once the controls are added, which fits with

theories contending that younger women should be more left-wing than older women because of their greater labour force participation, higher education rates, and greater likelihood of being single (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004; Edlund and Pande, 2002; Inglehart and Norris, 2000; 2003; Manza and Brooks, 1998). However, the age differences amongst women shrink even further to less than 10 percentage points in all cases once economic/financial pessimism is included. The interaction between gender and being aged 65+ also becomes statistically insignificant in this model. This suggests that differences in economic/financial pessimism between younger and older women in 2015 play a role in shaping their vote differences, as expected by H3B. By contrast, the age differences in vote choice for men in 2015 are very small and largely disappear once the controls are added.

As previously documented, the age differences in vote choice in 2017 were extremely large (Curtice, 2017), although the results show that they are larger for women. Model 1, with just gender and its interactions, shows that women aged over 65 were 44 percentage points more supportive of the Conservatives than women under 35, compared to 29 percentage points for men. Similarly, women under 35 were 40 percentage points more supportive of Labour than women over 65, compared to 26 percentage points for men. Adding the controls in model 2 reduces the size of these differences somewhat, but adding economic/financial pessimism in model 3 makes very little difference to the magnitude of these age differences and the interaction between gender and age group remains statistically significant in Table 6.6. The lack of importance of economic/financial pessimism for age differences in vote choice in 2017, compared to 2015, likely results from higher pessimism in all age groups about their financial and economic situation by 2017. Furthermore, other factors are associated with the age gap in the 2017 election, such as the collapse of UKIP, for whom particularly older men have been more likely to vote (Ford and Goodwin, 2014; Green and Prosser, 2018).

Discussion

The above analysis of the 2015 and 2017 general elections illustrates the relevance of economic policy for gender differences in vote choice. The findings presented within this chapter show that women were more pessimistic than men about their financial and economic situation, consistent with Chapter Three's argument that women were hurt more by austerity than men. This pessimism is associated with vote choice, and with the interaction between gender and life-stage.

Younger women in particular were more pessimistic on average than men in their economic and financial outlooks, as expected by H1. Younger women's greater economic and financial pessimism can be linked to a number of factors. Firstly, younger women are more reliant on transfer payments than younger men: on average, benefits and tax credits comprise one-fifth of women's income, and under one-tenth of men's (Annesley, 2014). Women's greater reliance on benefits and tax credits meant that cuts to housing benefits, the weekly benefit cap, and cuts to Universal Credit – benefit reductions from which pensioners were exempt – not only hit younger ages, but disproportionately affected younger women. Approximately 60% of those hit by cuts to housing benefit were single women, for example, compared to 3% of single men (Rubery and Rafferty, 2013). Secondly, younger women are more likely to undertake childcare than younger men (ONS, 2011). Reductions in Child Tax Credits (used to subsidise the cost of childcare), Child Benefit freezes, and reductions in Sure Start funding are most likely to affect lower-income women, as they are more reliant on these payments and services (Rubery and Rafferty, 2013). Meanwhile, women from black and minority ethnic groups are among those hardest hit, as they comprise 40% of those living in low-income households (Colney, 2012). Given the sample size of the survey, it was not possible to break the data down into further demographic sub-categories; instead, I use the broader category of 'life-stage' to capture many different groups who were

disproportionately affected by austerity. Future research should, therefore, explore these sub-categories further in order to examine intra-sex differences more comprehensively.

Conversely, older women were less likely than younger women to think that their financial and economic situation had worsened, and were more similar to men in their economic assessments. Pension flexibilities, the 'triple lock', and pension-age benefits all likely contributed towards older women feeling less pessimistic about their finances. The increase in the Basic State Pension, due to the 'triple lock', benefited older women in particular, who are more reliant on the state pension as a source of income (Rummery, 2016). This is consistent with the findings within Chapter Five, which suggests that older women were less pessimistic about their financial situation and the general economy than younger women in 2015. The analysis presented here extends this finding and suggests that these life-stage differences in economic assessments between women were largely evident in 2017. However, by 2017, these life-stage differences in economic pessimism were less stark.

In line with H2A, the findings show that younger women were both more likely to vote Labour and less likely to vote Conservative than younger men in both elections. Economic and financial pessimism were positively associated with voting for Labour, and including these variables rendered the gender vote gap at younger ages small and statistically insignificant in both elections, in line with H2B. This suggests that Labour's anti-austerity policies proved appealing to younger women in both 2015 and 2017. Such proposals (such as a review of Universal Credit in 2015, and the abolition of the two-child policy on Child Tax Credits in 2017) would largely benefit women of working-age or caregivers, who are more reliant on these benefits and services (Stephenson, 2011). Meanwhile, Conservative taxation policies, such as proposals to increase the Income Tax threshold, likely proved more attractive to men than women since they comprise the majority of higher earners.

Finally, H3A expected older women to be more supportive of the Conservatives and less supportive of Labour relative to younger women, and H3B expected that this difference would be related to younger women's economic/financial pessimism. The chapter finds that this is the case in 2015, where anti-austerity policies pledged by Labour, combined with generous pension policies pledged by the Conservatives, likely contributed towards the strong age differences among women at this election. This stems from women's explanations in Chapter Five, where younger women were markedly opposed to austerity. Moreover, older women generally tended to view the Conservative's pension policies favourably. The pattern seen in 2015 resembles the 'gender-generation gap' seen in other countries, where younger women vote for left-wing parties, and older women vote for right-wing parties, in greater numbers than their male peers. However, this pattern has not been seen in prior British elections (Campbell, 2006; Shorrocks, 2016) and does not disappear once socio-economic factors thought to be important for the 'gender-generation gap' are controlled for. This suggests that it is not wholly due to a long-term process of socio-economic change as Inglehart and Norris (2000; 2003) suggest, but at least partially a product of the specific recent economic and policy context in Britain.

Although older women were more supportive of the Conservatives and less supportive of Labour than younger women in 2017, this age gap does not change once economic/financial pessimism is included in the model, and as such, H3B does not hold in 2017. In 2017, Conservative support among older women *and* men increased relative to younger voters, reflecting the role of Brexit in exacerbating age differences at this election. This was especially notable for men, for whom there were few age differences in 2015. This can partly be explained by older men – previously more likely than older women to vote UKIP – defecting to the Conservatives (Green and Prosser, 2018). Older women were also still drawn to the Conservatives despite the party offering fewer pension-age benefits in 2017. The prominence of Brexit as the context for the 2017 election meant that older women, and

older voters more generally, displayed strong Conservative support despite their pension and social care policies. This difference between 2015 and 2017 underscores the need to examine the context of each election, specifically how external factors may mediate the impact of policies on vote choice.

By 2017, both genders across all life-stages became more pessimistic in their economic and financial assessments, suggesting concerns about the UK economy in the context of Brexit and continued austerity. As all voters became more pessimistic in their economic attitudes, gender differences in their voting behaviour narrowed, serving to further demonstrate the contingent influence of economic context, policy, and attitudes on gender differences in voting.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between austerity, economic policies, and gender differences in vote choice. Labour's offer of anti-austerity policies in the 2015 and 2017 elections appear to have gained them the support of younger women. Meanwhile, older generations were less likely to report economic/financial pessimism, probably in part due to the generous pension policies and increased spending on pension-age benefits implemented under the Coalition/Conservative governments, which helped to protect those in their later life-stages from the harshest effects of austerity.

There is a caveat to these conclusions. Economic and financial perceptions might be partially endogenous to party support (Evans and Andersen, 2006); supporters of the incumbent party may hold more favourable views on the economic and financial situation, whereas voters supporting other parties may hold negative assessments. This may exaggerate the relationship found here between economic pessimism and vote choice.

Future research could perhaps use the internet panel elements of the BES to explore these relationships further.

Socio-economic theories that have sought to explain gender-age differences in vote choice by focusing on long-term change (Inglehart and Norris, 2000; 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006; Manza and Brooks, 1998) thus only offer a partial explanation for such patterns. Labour's success among younger women and the Conservative's high support among older women was not a consistent feature of British elections prior to 2015 (Campbell, 2006, Shorrocks, 2016), suggesting that the extent to which we see gender gaps at different life-stages in any given election depends partly on the economic and electoral context. Future research should therefore not only consider long-term, socio-economic factors when analysing the gender gap, but should also devote attention to the specific context in which elections are fought, and how policy positions may explain change in party support between elections.

The following chapter takes forward these findings, as well as the wider findings from preceding chapters, to offer concluding remarks from the thesis. In doing so, it summarises the relationship between gender and economic voting, the types of gendered policies that were salient in 2015, and the impact of austerity policies on women's voting behaviour. It revisits the three research questions set out at the beginning of the thesis and summarises the academic and political implications of these findings.

Chapter Seven – Conclusions

Introduction

The basic premise of democratic voting theory assumes that voters will reward or punish incumbent governments at elections (Downs, 1957; Key, 1966). This informed expectations that women – having been hit financially harder by the Conservative-led Coalition’s spending cuts – would therefore penalise the Conservative Party at the 2015 election (Annesley and Gains, 2014; Bryson, 2012; Campbell and Childs, 2015a). However, relatively little is known about how – or whether – women responded to these policies, and policy pledges, in 2015.

While the expectations in the run-up to the 2015 General Election assume that women vote in line with their pocketbooks (*ibid.*), the idea that women employ pocketbook heuristics has been contested in earlier academic studies (Chaney et al., 1998; Clarke et al., 2005; Welch and Hibbing, 1992). The latter strand of thought is often based on arguments pertaining to ethics of care, contending that women are more relational, altruistic, and less individually-oriented than men. The former, meanwhile, is based on the argument that women will vote on policies that personally affect them. At first glance, these theories of women’s voting behaviour do not appear to sit easily alongside each other, and greater analysis is needed to unpick these theories in order to gain a deeper understanding of women’s voting behaviour.

The 2015 British General Election provides a timely opportunity to explore these debates on women’s voting behaviour. Moreover, it provides an interesting opportunity to examine which gendered policies mattered to women. The election took place following five years of austerity measures that had a deleterious effect on women’s jobs, benefits and services. At the same time, the Coalition introduced a range of symbolic policies aiding

women's bodily status. Whether these gendered policies vary in salience to women voters, however, remains relatively unknown.

This thesis has taken an iterative sequential mixed methods approach to examine the impact of gendered policies on women's voting behaviour in the context of the 2015 British General Election. In applying Htun and Weldon's (2010; 2018) typology of 'gender status' and 'class-based' policies, it has aimed to provide a window into which types of policies influenced women's vote choice in 2015 and those which did not. More specifically, through analysing women's economic and financial concerns, it has sought to assess the impact of austerity on women's voting behaviour. In examining the impact of these policies on women's vote choice through life-stage, it considers how certain groups of women may experience the effects of gendered policies and how this manifests into life-stage differences in vote choice.

By examining both policy and voting behaviour, this thesis has shown that the policy context of elections matters. Gendered policies that are on offer at elections (prospective policies), as well as policies that have been previously implemented (retrospective policies), factor into women's voting decisions. Moreover, the economic climate under which elections are held also influences women's voting behaviour. The 2015 election was held after five years of Conservative austerity measures, which affected women's views of the economy and their own financial situation. Women that were affected by the harshest measures of austerity held economic and financial concerns, and these concerns were associated with their vote choice. This emphasis on context contributes to existing theories of women's voting behaviour, which, to date, have strongly centred on long-term structural changes relating to modernisation (Inglehart and Norris, 2000; 2003). While socio-economic factors such as marital status, children, religion and social class partly influence inter-sex and intra-sex differences in vote choice, these factors do not solely account for the differences that

emerge at elections, nor can they explain fluctuations in women's voting behaviour between elections. By highlighting the importance of policy, this thesis has demonstrated that studies of women's voting behaviour should not only consider socio-economic factors in their explanations, but should also examine contextual factors specific to each election.

This concluding chapter begins by discussing the overall findings of the thesis. It revisits the three research questions that were set out at the start of Chapter One, addressing each question in turn and highlighting the key findings. These pertain to pocketbook voting, the salience of gendered policies and the impact of austerity on women's voting behaviour. Following this, it moves on to consider the theoretical contribution that this thesis makes, before moving on to consider the limitations and areas for further research. Finally, the chapter concludes by indicating the wider implications of the research.

Re-visiting the research questions

In seeking to assess the impact of gendered policies on women's voting behaviour, this study set out three research questions in Chapter One that are addressed in turn below. In order to examine implemented policies leading up to the 2015 election (retrospective voting), Chapter Three began by analysing the Coalition's gendered policy agendas between 2010 and 2015. It examined the gendered impact of these policies, and how they affected women across the life-cycle. The findings within Chapter Three showed that a range of class-based policies, such as the Transferable Tax Allowance, the single-tier pension and the tax-free childcare scheme were limited in their advancement of gender equality. While there were some relative gains for women under the Coalition – particularly gender status policies relating to violence against women – the findings showed that many of these gains were offset by the impact of austerity. In essence, the impact of austerity significantly reduced the effectiveness of many gender equality policies. For instance, the closure of Sure Start centres offset positive advancements in childcare policy, and the closure of domestic and sexual

abuse refuges across England and Wales negated many positive gains in attempts to tackle violence against women.

Given the negative impact of the Conservative-led Coalition's economic policies on women, one might have expected women to vote against the incumbent government (the Conservatives) in greater numbers at the 2015 General Election. This idea is broadly aligned with the theory of pocketbook voting, which suggests that voters cast their ballot according to policies that personally affect them (Downs, 1957; Elinder et al., 2015; Hobolt and de Vries, 2016; Tilley et al., 2018). However, others have argued that women are less likely than men to engage in pocketbook voting (Chaney et al., 1998; Welch and Hibbing, 1992). Rather, this literature suggests that due to gender differences in socialisation, women have a greater propensity than men to vote according to national concerns (sociotropic voting) (ibid.). The question of whether women engage in pocketbook or sociotropic voting opens up a longstanding debate within studies on gender and economic voting behaviour, which leads to the first research question below:

RQ1: Do women vote according to issues that affect them personally (pocketbook voting)? Are they any less likely to do so than men?

Contrasting with a range of literature on gender and economic voting (Chaney et al., 1998; Clarke et al., 2005; Welch and Hibbing, 1992), the findings presented in this thesis support the argument that women do engage in pocketbook voting, and are found to vote on issues that personally affect them. Chapter Four investigated the pocketbook-sociotropic debate in the context of the 2015 General Election. Using the 2015 British Election Study's face-to-face post-election survey, the chapter found that women's perceptions of their personal financial situation and voting for the incumbent were positively correlated. Moreover, the findings show that women are just as likely to vote according to their

pocketbooks as men: there were no statistically significant differences between women and men's pocketbook evaluations on vote choice.

The propensity for women to engage in pocketbook voting was further demonstrated in the focus group discussions, analysed in Chapter Five. Indeed, issue prioritisation varied according to where women were in the life-stage, which served to reinforce notions of pocketbook voting. In light of recent closures, access to affordable childcare services was raised as a salient issue by those with children, and pension-age benefits – such as free bus passes, the Winter Fuel Allowance, and free TV licenses – were raised by women among the older life-stage. Working-age women cited reforms to social security policies affecting those in employment, such as the Social Sector Size Criteria and cuts to Working Tax Credit. These issues and policies that women raised pertained specifically to 2015, which suggests that pocketbook heuristics are directly related to the context of the election.

Moreover, the findings in Chapters Four and Five showed that as well as pocketbook voting, women also appeared to vote sociotropically. Contrary to a range of gender and economic voting literature suggesting that women are more likely than men to use sociotropic heuristics (Chaney et al., 1998; Welch and Hibbing, 1992), this thesis finds that men are just as likely as women to vote in line with the national economy. While women's perceptions of the general economic situation were correlated with voting for the incumbent, crucially, there were no statistically significant differences between women and men's sociotropic evaluations on vote choice. These sociotropic heuristics were also reflected in the focus group discussions. Many women cited the broader economy in discussions of salient issues, and these attitudes differed by life-stage. Some women in the oldest life-stage viewed austerity as a necessity due to Labour's handling of the national economy. In contrast, women in the youngest life-stage claimed that cuts to statutory

services and welfare provision had reduced their Conservative support, not only due to the personal effects of austerity measures they faced, but also due to the wider impact of austerity measures on the rest of society.

The findings in this thesis challenge and extend existing theories on gender and economic voting that are often predicated on gender differences that stem from socialisation (Gilligan, 1982), as well as the psychological impact of caring (Elder and Greene, 2008; Ruddick, 1989; Scott et al., 2001). Moreover, the theories hold that as a result of these gender differences, women are more compassionate and less individually-oriented than men, and are thus less likely to vote according to their own self-interest (Welch and Hibbing, 1992; Chaney et al., 1998). This leads several scholars to argue that women are less likely than men to vote according to pocketbook heuristics, and are more likely than men to vote sociotropically (Chaney et al., 1998; Welch and Hibbing, 1992). Chapter Four tested these arguments in the context of the 2015 British General Election and finds that there are no statistically significant gender differences in economic voting. Here, Baldez' (2001) work is particularly helpful in understanding these findings, where she suggests that it makes more sense to think about 'gender overlaps' rather than gender gaps, as differences in voting behaviour between women and men at the aggregate level should not be overstated.

What is more, as Chapter Five shows, women often used language pertaining to self-interest when discussing policies that factored into their vote choice. Where women did not vote in line with gendered policies that would benefit them directly, these motivations did not appear to be related to altruism or compassion (see Figure 7.1). While much of the existing literature on gender and economic voting emanates from the United States in the 1980s and 1990s (Chaney, et al., 1998; Welch and Hibbing, 1992), these studies are still widely cited in contemporary literature (see Deckman and McTague, 2015; Huddy and Cassese, 2013; Lizotte, 2017). Such claims have been noted as problematic because they

“unacceptably essentialize[s] gender differences” (Andersen, 1999:17) and reinforce outdated gender stereotypes, such as viewing women as irrational and solely as caregivers.

However, the relationship between gendered policy evaluations and vote choice is not necessarily linear or clear cut. Indeed, there were some exceptions where gendered policies not always appear to easily translate into vote choice. Chapter Five finds that the relationship between gendered policy evaluations and vote choice voting was often mitigated by, and mediated through, levels of knowledge, scepticism, values and competence. Together, these factors can be visualised below:

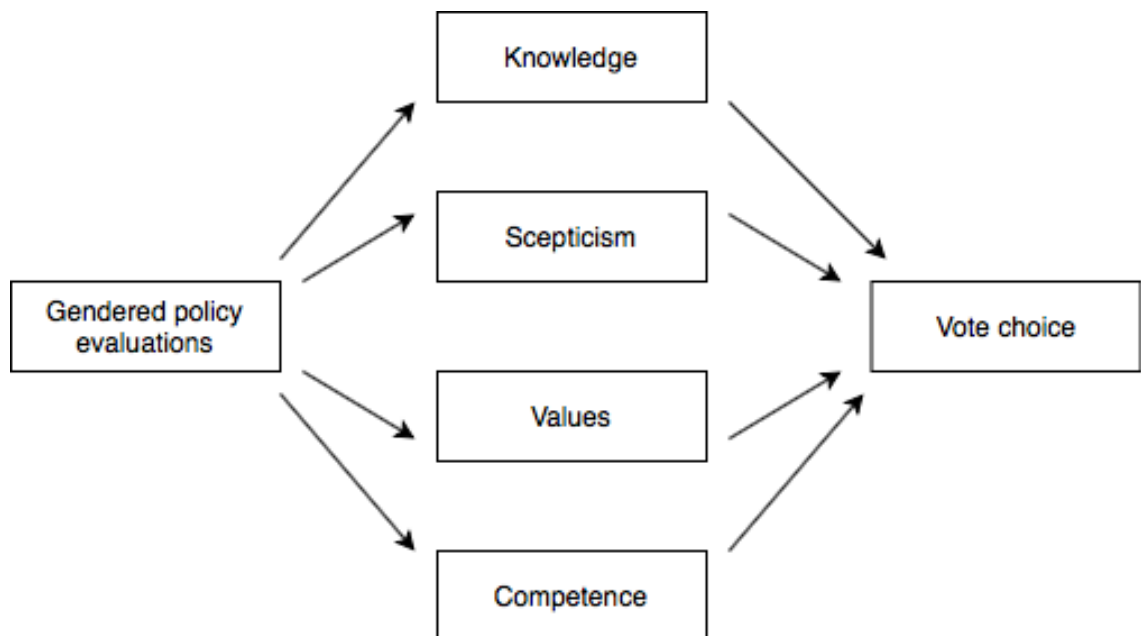


Figure 7.1. The mediated relationship between gendered policy evaluations and vote choice

The focus group discussions showed that voters lacked knowledge around some policy areas. This was evidenced in discussions around violence against women, aspects of pension reform, and transportation. Despite a range of violence against women policies that were implemented between 2010 and 2015, and violence against women policies from all mainstream parties in 2015, women appeared to be unfamiliar with the majority of policies within this realm. Additionally, women across all groups were unfamiliar with technical

changes to the state pension, such as the introduction of the single-tier pension and the 'triple lock' indexation. This differed to more simple and 'attractive' pension reforms, such as universal pension-age benefits and support. Finally, for some voters, there was a lack of knowledge surrounding multi-level governance. This hampered voters' ability to attribute responsibility for certain policies, such as reductions in funding for local transportation. This lends credence to existing research, which has shown that complicated structures of governance can obscure voters' clarity of responsibility (Anderson, 2000; Duch and Stevenson, 2005; 2008; Hellwig, 2001; Hobolt et al., 2013). As institutional structures become more fragmented, the lines of responsibility blur and it becomes increasingly difficult for voters to allocate responsibility to governments for economic performance (Powell and Whitten, 1993). While the reasons for gaps in knowledge differed across policy areas, these examples serve to illustrate that there is nonetheless a clear disjuncture between government policy action and voter response, where limitations in knowledge can prevent or obscure issue-based voting.

The impact of gendered policies on vote choice was also mitigated by scepticism. In this sense, voters may support a policy in theory, but exhibit doubt as to whether the policy is credible in practice. This related to specific policies, such as the Conservative's pledge at the 2015 General Election of 30 subsidised childcare hours per week for three- and four-year olds. While many women agreed with the principle of subsidising childcare and increasing statutory support, some women viewed the policy as too simplistic, while others believed that the proposal contained loopholes. More broadly, policies designed to increase women's descriptive representation in politics were also met with scepticism. Despite a general agreement regarding the need to increase the number of women in political fora, few women believed that more women in politics would bring about greater substantive representation for women in practice. In sum, then, women objected to gendered policies on practical or ideational grounds, and this appeared to limit their impact on vote choice.

The third mitigating factor is voters' values. Within discussions surrounding the NHS, younger women appeared to prioritise values such as egalitarianism and universalism. This contrasted from older women, who prioritised authoritarian values associated with immigration. Women from each life-stage placed an importance on the NHS for reasons that corresponded to these values. In essence, values and priorities served to shape the ways that women considered the NHS, and which party was best placed to deliver on it. For women in the youngest life-stage who valued egalitarianism, there was a general consensus that viewed Labour as the best party to deliver on the NHS. This differed to women in the older life-stage where, as a result of their preferences for increased immigration, they viewed the Conservatives as the strongest party to deliver on the NHS. Gender-age differences in values are reflected in research elsewhere. According to Norris and Inglehart (2019), across Western countries, younger women are more likely to hold liberal and egalitarian values, whereas older women are more likely to hold authoritarian views. Building on these findings, the focus group results show that these values interact with policy preferences, where voters may prioritise gendered policy agendas and thus parties that align with their values.

Finally, competence shaped and mitigated the impact of gendered policies on vote choice. Similarly to scepticism, voters may support a party's policy in principle, but may object to the policy if they do not view the party as competent. Questions of competence emerged on issues pertaining to the national economy. In both constituencies, women in the oldest life-stage did not consider Labour to be competent at handling the economy. As such, they were much less supportive than women in the younger age groups of Labour's proposals to increase public spending on services – even if they supported such policies in principle. Competence ratings, as a result, may shape the effect of the national economy on perceptions of the incumbent's performance (Bélanger and Gélinau, 2010). These competence ratings may be driven by exogenous shocks, such as economic or political crises (Green and Jennings, 2017). As Green and Jennings (2017:42) argue, "A serious mishandling

of policy, a mismanagement of a crisis or disaster, or occurrence of a damaging scandal can leave voters to adjust their opinions about a party or candidate overall". For older women voters, the impact of the Labour government's handling of the 2007 financial crisis appeared to have a lasting effect on their voting behaviour. Interestingly, these attitudes towards Labour were not evident among groups of working-age women, which suggests that other factors are also at play.

Of course, these mitigating factors should not be viewed in isolation: to a large degree, they are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Voters' perceived competence of parties, for instance, may influence whether they are sceptical of policies being proposed by that party. Additionally, voters' values may shape their perceptions of party competence (Evans and Andersen, 2006). For instance, older women's attitudes towards Labour's economic competence may be shaped by their economic values and preferences for lower public spending. While this thesis does not attempt to disentangle the endogeneity between these effects, these findings shed light not only on the impact of gendered policies, but how their effects are moderated in women's voting behaviour.

RQ2: Which gendered policies – if any – do women tend to think about when they vote? Are some types of gendered policies more salient than others, and if so, which?

Gendered policies vary across issues (Gelb and Palley, 1982; Mazur, 2002; Blofield and Haas, 2005; Htun and Weldon, 2010; 2018), and can be broadly disaggregated into those that facilitate progressive economic change and those that facilitate social change. According to Htun and Weldon (2010; 2018), gendered policies can be classified into two broad types according to their intention: class-based policies and gender status policies. As outlined in Chapter Two, class-based policies aim to alleviate the harms inflicted on women through the sexual division of labour or caring inequalities. Meanwhile, gender status policies seek to challenge practices and values that uphold women as a subordinate group, vulnerable to

violence, marginalisation and exclusion, as well as other barriers that prevent them from participating in political and social life (Htun and Weldon, 2018:11). The findings in this thesis show that class-based policies and gender status policies differ in their electoral appeal to women.

Chapter Five provided a focus group analysis on the 2015 election with women voters and found that, when discussing the policies that influenced their vote choice, women continuously cited class-based policies. For older women, these tended to focus around pensions and transportation. Notably, older women clearly valued the Conservative's pension-age benefits. For these women, pension-age benefits were simply more than 'just' a bus pass or a TV license: the importance they attached to these policies was for social, as well as material, reasons. For many older women, bus passes enhanced their social interactions and provided a sense of independence. For others, free TV licences were a way to combat loneliness. For these women, retaining these benefits was an important way of maintaining their physical and social wellbeing. These benefits likely helped to shield older women from the harshest effects of austerity. Meanwhile, austerity emerged as a clear issue among working-age women. Women with childcare commitments cited concerns over access to local and affordable childcare services, as well as family welfare. Women in the youngest life-stage cited issues relating to employment, living costs and working-age benefits. Interestingly, women materialised austerity in different ways. Across both constituencies, older women spoke of austerity in more general, abstract terms, whereas working-age – especially younger women – provided detailed, personal accounts relating to their economic and financial concerns.

The focus group findings suggested that these economic and financial attitudes influenced vote choice in 2015. Across both constituencies, many working-age women were vocal about their adversity to specific austerity measures undertaken by the Coalition and

the following Conservative minority governments. Some working-age women stated that they had been personally affected by cuts to services and benefits upon which they are dependent. These included closures to Sure Start centres, Working Tax Credit and funding reductions to schools. Others raised concerns regarding rising childcare costs, as well as living costs more broadly. Some of these working-age women explained that policies such as the Social Sector Size Criteria and cuts to statutory provision for those with disabilities had reduced their Conservative support. At the same time, some women in the oldest life-stage were less averse to austerity, perceiving fiscal retrenchment to be a necessary measure in response to the profligacy of the previous Labour governments. This distrust of Labour's handling of the economy meant that many women in the oldest life-stage were sceptical about Labour's spending plans, viewing them as not properly costed. The findings suggested that the impact of austerity likely decreased Conservative support among working-age women in 2015, but had little effect on Conservative support among women in the oldest life-stage.

Across all life-stages, however, the NHS appeared to be the most salient gendered policy agenda that women claimed to think about in 2015. This was also reflected in Chapter Four. The salience of the NHS was evident across all three life-stages and both constituencies. However, the reasons for the importance that women attached to the NHS differed across life-stage. Women in the youngest life-stage tended to prioritise the NHS for egalitarian reasons. Some women in the youngest life-stage claimed that they believed that everybody should be entitled to healthcare, while others stressed the importance of free and affordable healthcare. In contrast, many women in the older life-stage appeared to prioritise the NHS due to their greater reliance on healthcare services. Interestingly, many older women viewed the NHS as an exclusive and rivalrous good, often attributing NHS shortages to immigration – indicative of what Andersen and Bjorklund (1990) label as “welfare chauvinism”. These

findings highlight the importance of ideology and values in voting behaviour, and how they condition views on policies (Campbell et al., 1960).

While it is pertinent to consider which gendered policies matter to women during elections, it is equally important to consider those that do not. Gender status policies generally appeared to carry little weight with women voters in the focus groups. The relatively low salience of status policies was evident across all three life-stages and in both constituencies. In discussing why gender status policies did not factor into their vote choice, women provided two broad explanations. The first was that there appeared to be a lack of knowledge surrounding certain gender status policies. Some women claimed that they were unfamiliar with policies aimed at tackling violence against women and girls. Although there were some exceptions around policies relating to domestic abuse (Clare's Law), few voters were familiar with policies relating to sexual abuse and emotional abuse. The second explanation that women provided related specifically to women's political representation. While many women believed women's representation in politics to be important an important issue, they did not believe that the presence of women in Parliament would lead to an advancement of progressive policies women's interests. In essence, there was a general disbelief that the descriptive representation of women would lead to the substantive representation of women.

One possible explanation for the low profile of gender status policies is that, unlike class-based policies, gender status policies are rarely politicised in Britain. Put simply, while mainstream parties might disagree on the *means* of status policies, few would disagree on the ends. In other words, mainstream parties might disagree on how to solve issues such as violence against women or how to increase women's representation in politics, but few would disagree that they are issues that should not be addressed at all. In contrast, there may be greater political divergence over class-based policies. Parties might not only disagree

over how to implement state-funded childcare or a national health service, for instance, but they might also disagree over whether these should exist at all.

As well as this, recent elections have seen the main political parties converge towards a 'centre ground' on gender status issues. Under David Cameron's leadership, the Conservative Party began to undertake a process of feminisation in order to shed its image as the 'nasty party' (Childs and Webb, 2012). In seeking to broaden its appeal, the Party adopted a range of socially liberal policies designed to reach out to a broader base of voters, many of whom were women. While the Conservatives had traditionally lagged behind Labour in terms of women's representation, Cameron pledged to give one third of ministerial positions to women (Hinsliff, 2008). At the same time, while the Conservatives had once traditionally opposed the issue of same-sex marriage, Cameron pledged to enshrine same-sex marriage into law (Cameron, 2011). And, under the stewardship of then-Home Secretary, Theresa May, the Conservatives introduced a range of policies aimed at tackling violence against women (Campbell and Childs, 2015c; Sanders et al., 2019b). These examples demonstrate that in playing the politics of 'catch up', the Conservatives have clearly made some headway in terms of gender status policies. As a result, policy agendas where there is less divergence between parties – and thus less intra-party competition – may fail to gain coverage during election campaigns.

RQ3: How has the context of austerity impacted gendered voting behaviour?

The gendered impact of austerity on women in Britain has been widely documented (Annesley 2012; MacLeavy, 2011; Keen and Cracknell, 2017). The Women's Budget Group has predicted that, since 2010, women have been hit financially twice as hard as men by the Government's tax and benefit changes (Women's Budget Group, 2016). As outlined in Chapters Two and Six, accounts of women's voting behaviour have tended to focus on socio-economic explanations relating to long-term structural change, rather than the economic

and policy context at each election. As such, little is known about how the context of austerity impacted gendered voting behaviour, and whether women did indeed sanction the Conservatives on the basis of its austerity measures.

The analysis of the Coalition's gendered policy agendas presented in Chapter Three suggested that the impact of economic policies on women between 2010 and 2015 differed by life-stage. Meanwhile, the findings from Chapter Five suggested that austerity emerged as a salient issue for working-age women, particularly those from the youngest life-stage. This suggested that the context of austerity would lead to gender-age differences in vote choice in 2015.

Chapter Six sought to explore the context of austerity on gendered voting behaviour. However, it also explored whether women's attitudes in the focus groups reflect the broader population, and whether these attitudes were evident in both the 2015 and 2017 election. Examining the 2017 election in addition to 2015 enabled a comparison between two elections held against a backdrop of austerity, but under different electoral contexts. By 2017, both Labour and the Conservatives witnessed a change in leadership, and much of the electoral narrative had shifted to the issue of Brexit following Britain's decision to leave the European Union. In line with existing studies on gender and vote choice (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004; Campbell, 2006; Chaney et al., 1998), Chapter Six shows that women were, on average, more pessimistic than men about their own financial situation and the national economy in 2015. In line with the findings of Chapter Five, women's economic/financial pessimism differed by life-stage. Chapter Six found that women in the youngest life-stage (those under the age of 35), were the most pessimistic gender-age group. Women in the youngest life-stage were around 10 percentage points more pessimistic than their male counterparts about their living costs, household financial situation, the national economy, and the NHS. Meanwhile, older women were less pessimistic than those in the youngest life-

stage and were more similar to older men in their economic/financial assessments. These findings were in line with expectations that working-age women had been disproportionately affected by the context of austerity.

Chapter Six then explored whether these life-stage differences in economic/financial pessimism were associated with gender-age gaps in vote choice. In both 2015 and 2017, younger women were more supportive than their male counterparts of Labour and were less supportive of the Conservatives. This gender gap still remained even after controlling for socio-economic factors (such as marital status, religion, social class, having children, and left-right values). This suggests that while socio-economic factors contribute to gender-age gaps as some scholars suggest (Emmenegger and Manow, 2014; Giger, 2009; Inglehart and Norris, 2000; 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006; Manza and Brooks, 1998), they only partly account for gender-age differences. When including the economic/financial controls into the model, the gender-age gap among those in the youngest life-stage became insignificant. The chapter found that younger women's greater economic/financial pessimism was associated with their higher relative support for Labour, and reduced support for the Conservatives in both 2015 and 2017. At the same time, economic/financial pessimism had little effect on Conservative support for older women. Indeed, older women were still more supportive of the Conservatives in 2015 than older men, even after controlling for economic/financial pessimism. Moreover, when including the economic/financial controls, life-stage differences between women diminished in 2015. These findings corroborate those in Chapter Five, suggesting that economic attitudes – which varied by life-stage – influenced women's voting behaviour in 2015.

Prior to 2015, there was little evidence of a gender-age gap in British elections (Shorrocks, 2016). This thesis has argued that the context of austerity likely exacerbated the gender-age gap that emerged in 2015. Many of these economic policies were introduced

during the previous Conservative-led Coalition government in 2010-15. Indeed, the Coalition's austerity policies, outlined in Chapter Three, were particularly detrimental to women of a working-age. These included reductions in the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, cuts to the 'baby element' of Child Tax Credits and the tapering of Child Benefit. Older generations fared comparatively better (McKay and Rowlingson, 2016). The Coalition protected benefits and pensions typically enjoyed by those in older life-stages, and notably, introduced the 'triple lock' indexation on pensions, leading to a significant rise in the value of the Basic State Pension (House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2016). Such measures helped older women to be protected from the harshest impact of austerity. Evidence from the manifesto analysis in Chapter Six showed that by the time of the 2015 election, the Conservatives pledged to continue to protect many of the benefits for older voters that they had introduced in the previous Coalition government, such as the 'triple lock', maintaining free bus passes for pensioners and the Winter Fuel Allowance.

At the same time, Labour offered a range of anti-austerity policies in both elections that might directly appeal to those reconciling work and care; these included pledges to abolish the Social Sector Size Criteria (2015), review Universal Credit (2015), abolish the two-child policy on Child Tax Credits (the 'rape clause') (2017), and end delays in Universal Credit payments (2017). These pledges likely appealed to younger women for various reasons. Women are the prime beneficiaries of tax credits and benefits (Annesley, 2014). Cuts to Universal Credit, housing benefits, the weekly benefit cap – from which those of a pensionable age were exempt – thus not only impacted younger ages, but younger women. Moreover, younger women are more likely to undertake childcare than younger men (ONS, 2011), meaning that they are disproportionately affected by reductions in social support for children and childcare.

These findings present implications for the study of gender gaps in voting behaviour. The research findings suggest that the context of austerity influenced gender gaps in both 2015 and 2017. This finding suggests that studies should examine the specific context at each election, such as the economy and the policies on offer. Additionally, the research findings showed significant differences between groups of women voters across life-stage. This finding adds to a widening body of literature that underscore the need to go beyond examining gender at the aggregate level, and instead explore differences by both gender and age (Campbell, 2006; Shorrocks, 2016; 2018). Many existing studies that examine gender gaps at the aggregate level find differences that are small in magnitude (Allen et al., 2014), and as a result, likely underestimate gender-age differences.

Limitations and future research

The limitations within the analysis of this thesis point towards several avenues for future research. As outlined in Chapter One, the quantitative research presented in this thesis does not examine policy and vote choice beyond gender and age to include other demographic sub-categories, such as social class, occupational status, ethnicity and disability. This is due to the relatively small sample sizes after accounting for gender and age, which meant that robust comparisons could not be drawn. Future research should therefore comprehensively explore policy attitudes and voting behaviour across other intersections. This is particularly important in terms of what we know about women, given the wealth of research which shows that gender (in)equality varies across intersectional lines (Crenshaw, 1989; Htun and Weldon, 2010; 2018; Women's Budget Group, 2017a). In this sense, women often experience cumulative disadvantage by virtue of their gender, ethnicity and social class, and these overlap with each other.

In their study of the impact of austerity on BME women in Coventry, Sandhu and Stephenson (2015) note that women are often affected by multiple cuts at once. They

highlight the example of BME women who are mothers. BME mothers, they argue, are disproportionately likely to face cuts to tax credits and freezes to Child Benefit and the four-bedroom restriction on housing allowance. BME women – particularly those from Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Black African backgrounds – are more likely to live in larger households with dependent children: 51% of Black African, 65% of Pakistani and 64% of Bangladeshi children live in large families¹⁶, compared to 30% of those in White British families (Women’s Budget Group, 2017a). As a result of living in larger families, BME women will be particularly affected by the benefit cap – in fact, the Government’s equality impact assessment found that in 2011, four in ten households affected by the benefit cap would include someone of BME background (Sandhu and Stephenson, 2015). Cumulative analysis of tax and benefit changes since 2010 shows that Black and Asian women stand to lose, respectively, approximately £4,000 and £4,200 a year by 2020, equating to around 15% and 17% of their income (Women’s Budget Group, 2017a).

In addition to ethnicity, Htun and Weldon (2018) highlight how class differences can exacerbate inequality among women. Low-income women will experience the effects of gendered policies differently to higher-income women and this was, to some extent, reflected in the focus group findings. Older women from low-income backgrounds emphasised their reliance on public transport and raised concerns over local transport cuts. While the in-depth approach of focus groups was useful to gain a detailed understanding of how women from different income backgrounds experience the effects of policies (and subsequently how this affects their vote choice), the relatively small number of women interviewed meant that the findings cannot be generalised to the wider population. Future research should explore these intersectional differences further.

¹⁶ ‘Large families’ is calculated by the Women’s Budget Group as three or more children.

One possible way to explore intersectional differences further would be to use large-scale online surveys with larger sample sizes. However, although this might allow for a more comprehensive exploration of some demographic groups, the number of cases from certain demographic groups may still be relatively small – even with a larger sample size. Research elsewhere has highlighted that the underrepresentation of voters from different demographic groups remains an issue. In their analysis of sexual minority voting in Britain, Bailey et al. (2019) note the small number of sexual minority respondents in surveys. While their study aims to redress this imbalance, their sample of over 250,000 respondents still contains too few trans respondents to undertake a robust analysis of voters in this category. Additionally, respondents from different ethnic minority groups are frequently underrepresented in survey research. The Ethnic Minority British Election Study provides a nationally representative sample of the five main established ethnic minority groups, however, it excludes other minority groups, such as respondents of Chinese or other minority ethnic origin, due in part to small sample sizes (Martin, 2016). Finally, members of religious groups are also underrepresented. For example, Barclay et al. (2019) highlight the small number of Jewish respondents in nationally representative surveys in Britain, which prevents meaningful inferences about the population from the sample. While large-scale online surveys are one method to explore intersectional differences further, these examples highlight that minority groups may still be underrepresented, likely due to the fact that these groups comprise very small minorities in the population.

Another possible way to explore intersectional differences further would be to conduct additional focus groups with a sufficient number of participants from various demographic backgrounds. The resources available to this project allowed for six focus groups to be conducted, and as such the small number of cases meant that differences beyond gender and life-stage could not be examined comprehensively. However, with a

larger number of focus groups, intersectional differences in voting behaviour could be explored at a deeper level by hearing a wider range of women's attitudes and experiences.

This leads to the second limitation of this thesis. Ideally, focus groups with men voters would also be conducted to enable a comparison between men and women's responses. Again, however, the project lacked the resources to administer such a study. Since the focus group findings cannot be compared with men, a gender gap in this context cannot be explored. The focus group findings presented here reveal life-stage differences in policy preferences between women that open up a number of new questions and areas for future research. Namely, do these life-stage differences between women equally apply to men? For instance, do older men voters attach similar social values to pension-age benefits? Are working-age men who undertake the majority of childcare just as likely to consider access to affordable childcare as a salient issue? In terms of intra-sex differences, are men in the younger life-stages more averse to austerity measures than men in the older life-stages? To answer these questions, future research should also compare focus groups with women and men voters across various life-stages. Some existing research has compared focus groups with women and men voters (Campbell, 2006), but thus far has not explored gender differences by life-stage. Comparing these gender differences across life-stage would allow one to explore whether women and men in similar life-stages prioritise different policies.

The approach used in this thesis of analysing solely women voters was useful for an in-depth analysis of examining intra-sex differences between women. However, future research should devote further scholarly attention to analysing life-stages differences among men voters in greater depth. Men also have distinct interests within gendered policy agendas, such as healthcare and childcare (Murray, 2014). However, structural differences in society mean that they experience these policies differently to women. As Himmelweit (2002:51) explains, "most policies are likely to have gendered behavioural gendered

impacts...men and women are systematically differently placed in the economy, so that they face different constraints, assume different socially determined responsibilities, and consequently are likely to behave differently to policy". Understanding how men experience and view gendered policies may help to eschew essentialist views around what men want (Murray, 2014), which may consequently serve to deconstruct dominant discourses surrounding masculinity.

Wider implications of the research

The research findings presented in this thesis also have a range of political implications. The first, and most significant implication, is that political parties must broaden their definition of 'women's issues' to include wider issues pertaining to the economy. Traditionally, financial affairs have been perceived as a 'masculine' policy issue stem from the structural and historical division of labour (Catalano, 2009). Yet economic issues are gendered. Policies designed without gender in mind have gendered effects due to the different compositions of men and women in society (Sapiro, 2002; Chappell et al., 2012). Funding reductions to welfare provision will have gendered effects because women are more dependent on such support (Sapiro, 2002). Job losses in the public sector will have gendered effects because women comprise a majority of the public sector workforce (Annesley, 2012). These economic issues – which may appear as 'gender neutral' – have a differential impact on men and women.

Economic class-based policies designed to ameliorate structural inequalities arising from the gendered division of labour are of importance to women voters. It is clear that women think about their household financial situation and the national economy when they vote. Women – particularly those in the younger life-stage – share concerns regarding their own household finances, living costs, the NHS, and the status of the national economy. For many women who undertake care, access to affordable childcare services continues to be a

pressing concern. For many older women, maintaining a stable pension and supplementary benefits is of importance, as well as having access to transportation services. As was the case in 2015, these concerns impacted their vote choice. If political parties want to win support among all groups of women voters, they must address their economic and financial concerns in their diversity and consider the impact of economic issues through a gendered lens. Reconsidering their definition of what constitutes a 'women's issue' will be key to engaging with women voters.

Parties should also be mindful that women are not a monolithic group, and as such, their interests are heterogeneous. Despite discussions of the 'women's vote' featuring prominently in election campaigns, the average voter is a woman (Campbell, 2019). Yet parties have often overlooked this fact. Historically, pledges for and about women voters have strongly focused around childcare and family policy (Greenlee, 2014). More recently, evidence has shown that narratives around women 'as mothers' featured in the 2010 General Election (Campbell and Childs, 2010) and, to a certain extent, the 2015 General Election, in which all of the mainstream parties 'battled' over the number of free childcare hours. While childcare featured as an important issue to women voters who undertake unpaid childcare, women who did not undertake childcare claimed that it was an issue to which they paid little attention at election time. As a result, this strategy risks framing women solely as mothers and excludes a wide range of women from the campaign discourse. When parties develop proposals designed to appeal to women's pocketbook interests, therefore, they must be fully cognisant of which pocketbook issues will appeal to women in their diversity. As well as childcare and other typically 'gendered' issues, these may include issues that are not considered to be explicitly gendered but that have an impact on women nonetheless, such as housing provision, mortgage affordability and the rate of VAT. In taking this diversity into account, parties should eschew targeting women voters as a single bloc, but rather seek to appeal to their heterogeneous interests that vary between life-stage.

Moreover, parties should ensure that their policies are properly costed. As Figure 7.1 highlights, scepticism can mediate voting behaviour. For example, pledges regarding funding for free childcare hours was met with scepticism by women voters, due to concerns that the policy was not fully planned or funded. Such scepticism was driven, in part, by the existing cost of childcare that the free hours would not cover. This suggests that there is a need for greater transparency among parties regarding the costs and eligibility of proposals, as well as a need to address underlying economic issues that relate to the policy on offer.

Finally, parties should seek to address existing gaps in policy knowledge. As Figure 7.1 outlines, policy knowledge can filter vote choice. The lack of knowledge among voters surrounding gendered policy areas such as violence against women suggests that greater coverage should be denoted to these issues in order to place them on the campaign agenda. Between 2010 and 2015, the Coalition implemented a range of reforms relating to violence against women, yet such policies rarely featured within the 2015 campaign discourse and were not at the fore of the electoral agenda. Research indicates that there is merit in highlighting the impact of government policy action. Enhancing voters' understanding of public policies can have profound impact on democratic participation. Wilson (1980:364-72) shows how the costs and benefits of a policy can encourage citizens to become politically active. Policies may create material incentives among beneficiaries to collectively mobilise in order to protect or increase benefits (Mettler and Soss, 2004). Skocpol (1992:59) cites the example of Civil War pensions in the United States, "After initial legislative liberalisations, veterans became self-consciously organised and mobilised to demand ever improved benefits". In addition to collective mobilisation, increasing voters' knowledge of policies has advantages elsewhere. Mettler (2011) argues that increasing the visibility of policies to reveal government action may enhance political accountability and restore trust among voters. Such a strategy may be particularly important when levels of public distrust and apathy are high.

Conclusion

This thesis began by asking how and whether gendered policies affected women's voting behaviour in 2015. Following five years of gendered austerity measures under the Conservative-led Coalition, a series of predictions emerged, suggesting that the Conservatives would struggle to retain their traditional lead with women in 2015 (Annesley and Gains, 2014; Bryson, 2012; Campbell and Childs, 2015a). These predictions raised a number of questions regarding the women's vote and the issues that are thought to define it. Firstly, do women vote according to policies that personally affect them? Which policies do women tend to think about when they vote? And finally, given the widely documented impact of austerity on women, did this influence women's vote choice in 2015?

Gendered policies play a role in women's voting behaviour, and this was evident in the 2015 election. Firstly, women did appear to vote according to policies that personally affected them, and were just as likely as men to do so. Women voters highlighted the salience of redistributive class-based policies in their vote choice, many of which related to them personally. The value that women placed on class-based policies often corresponded to their life-stage. These life-stage differences were reflected in vote choice in 2015. The Conservative's fiscal agenda of austerity – and the party's class-based policies more widely – have had a negative impact on its support among younger women, but less so among older women voters. Rather, class-based Conservative policies in 2015 appeared to *strengthen* Conservative support among older women – who were also less pessimistic about their household finances and the national economy compared to younger women. These findings show that the link between gender and vote choice is nuanced, and parties should be aware of this if they want to secure women's votes. The findings presented in this thesis consistently point towards the importance of economic and financial concerns in women's voting behaviour. If political parties want to broaden their electoral appeal among women,

they must start by recognising the gendered impacts of policies, and sufficiently address these economic and financial concerns.

Appendix A – Chapter Four

Question wordings and response categories

General economic situation (retrospective)

How do you think the general economic situation in this country has changed over the last 12 months? 1 Got a lot worse; 2 Got a little worse; 3 Stayed the same; 4 Got a little better; 5 Got a lot better

General economic situation (prospective)

How do you think the general economic situation in this country will develop over the next 12 months? 1 Get a lot worse; 2 Get a little worse; 3 Stay the same; 4 Get a little better; 5 Get a lot better

Household financial situation (retrospective)

Now a few questions about economic conditions. How does the financial situation of your household compare with what it was 12 months ago? 1 Got a lot worse; 2 Got a little worse; 3 Stayed the same; 4 Got a little better; 5 Got a lot better

Household financial situation (prospective)

How do you think the financial situation of your household will change over the next 12 months? 1 Get a lot worse; 2 Get a little worse; 3 Stay the same; 4 Get a little better; 5 Get a lot better

Control variables

National Economic Statistics Socio-economic (NS-SEC) classification

1 employers in large organisations and higher managerial occupations; 2 higher professional occupations; 3 lower professional and managerial and higher supervisory occupations; 4 intermediate occupations; 5 employers in small organisations and own account workers; 6 lower supervisory and technical occupations; 7 semi-routine occupations; 8 routine occupations; 9 never worked

Highest educational level achieved

0 none; 1 GCSE or equivalent; 2 A-level or equivalent; 3 post A-level vocational; 4 degree; 5 other

Trade union membership

0 not a member; 1 member

Marital status

1 married; 2 living with partner; 3 single; 4 widowed; 5 separated; 6 divorced

Religion

0 Anglican; 1 non-religious; 2 other denominations

Children

0 no children; 1 just preschool; 2 just school; 3 both preschool and school

Left-right attitudes

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please choose an answer from this card. 1 Strongly disagree; 2 Disagree; 3 Neither agree nor disagree; 4 Agree; 5 Strongly agree. Each item was collapsed into one category and a mean was constructed on a scale of 1-5.

It is the government's responsibility to provide a job for everyone who wants one (reverse coded)

Ordinary working people get their fair share of the nation's wealth

There is no need for strong trade unions to protect employees' working conditions and wages

There is one law for the rich and one for the poor (reverse coded)

Logistic regression models

Table A1. Logistic regression models for incumbent support in 2015 by gender and retrospective general economic situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.408 (0.362)	0.368 (0.411)
General economy retrospective	0.830*** (0.0810)	0.607*** (0.0911)
Female*General economy retrospective	-0.00262 (0.109)	0.0113 (0.123)
Age		0.0192*** (0.00426)
Education (ref: none)		
GCSE or equivalent		0.381** (0.185)
A-level or equivalent		0.159 (0.181)
Post A-level vocational		0.718** (0.330)
Degree		0.318* (0.191)
Other		0.503* (0.271)
Class (ref: large employers/higher managerial)		
Higher professional		0.447 (0.312)
Lower professional/managerial		0.142 (0.271)
Intermediate		0.297 (0.297)
Small employers/self-employed		0.485

		(0.310)
Lower supervisory/technical		0.164
		(0.319)
Semi-routine		0.216
		(0.303)
Routine		-0.296
		(0.323)
Never worked		-0.419
		(0.398)
Trade union member		-0.455***
		(0.156)
Religion (ref: Anglican)		
Non-religious		-0.696***
		(0.148)
Other denomination		-0.589***
		(0.147)
Marital status (ref: married)		
Living with partner		-0.297
		(0.198)
Single		-0.263
		(0.181)
Widowed		-0.515**
		(0.251)
Separated		-0.231
		(0.472)
Divorced		-0.176
		(0.228)
Children (ref: none)		
Just preschool		0.0205
		(0.161)
Just school		0.160
		(0.250)
Preschool and school		-0.412
		(0.274)
Left-right mean scale		1.202***
		(0.0936)
Constant	-2.891***	-6.001***
	(0.279)	(0.592)
Observations	2,028	1,865
R-squared	0.0994	0.2373

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties.

Table A2. Logistic regression models for incumbent support in 2015 by gender and prospective general economic situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.528 (0.365)	0.387 (0.410)
General economy prospective	0.827*** (0.0811)	0.572*** (0.0893)
Female*General economy prospective	-0.0521 (0.109)	-0.00828 (0.122)
Age		0.0180*** (0.00433)
Education (ref: none)		
GCSE or equivalent		0.475** (0.187)
A-level or equivalent		0.133 (0.182)
Post A-level vocational		0.689** (0.338)
Degree		0.362* (0.192)
Other		0.485* (0.273)
Class (ref: large employers/higher managerial)		
Higher professional		0.464 (0.314)
Lower professional/managerial		0.113 (0.275)
Intermediate		0.239 (0.300)
Small employers/self-employed		0.385 (0.314)
Lower supervisory/technical		0.0124 (0.321)
Semi-routine		0.0946 (0.306)
Routine		-0.371 (0.327)
Never worked		-0.258 (0.399)
Trade union		-0.472*** (0.157)
Religion (ref: Anglican)		
Non-religious		-0.673*** (0.149)
Other denomination		-0.597*** (0.147)
Marital status (ref: married)		
Living with partner		-0.234 (0.200)
Single		-0.233 (0.184)

Widowed		-0.503** (0.254)
Separated		0.0935 (0.482)
Divorced		-0.211 (0.232)
Children (ref: none)		
Just preschool		0.0892 (0.161)
Just school		0.170 (0.257)
Preschool and school		-0.363 (0.276)
Left-right mean scale		1.196*** (0.0938)
Constant	-2.862*** (0.279)	-5.783*** (0.585)
Observations	1,963	1,808
R-squared	0.0945	0.2296

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties.

Table A3. Logistic regression models for incumbent support in 2015 by gender and retrospective household financial situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.268 (0.336)	0.583 (0.406)
Household financial situation retrospective	0.489*** (0.0796)	0.465*** (0.0952)
Female*Household financial situation retrospective	0.00608 (0.108)	-0.0868 (0.128)
Age		0.0210*** (0.00420)
Education (ref: none)		
GCSE or equivalent		0.556*** (0.179)
A-level or equivalent		0.252 (0.175)
Post A-level vocational		0.676** (0.325)
Degree		0.399** (0.184)
Other		0.533** (0.260)
Class (ref: large employers/higher managerial)		
Higher professional		0.497* (0.302)

Lower professional/managerial		0.119 (0.261)
Intermediate		0.298 (0.285)
Small employers/self-employed		0.382 (0.299)
Lower supervisory/technical		-0.000138 (0.307)
Semi-routine		0.0596 (0.291)
Routine		-0.404 (0.312)
Never worked		-0.349 (0.380)
Trade union member		-0.503*** (0.151)
Religion (ref: Anglican)		
Non-religious		-0.793*** (0.144)
Other denomination		-0.646*** (0.142)
Marital status (ref: married)		
Living with partner		-0.276 (0.191)
Single		-0.263 (0.177)
Widowed		-0.594** (0.241)
Separated		-0.0502 (0.456)
Divorced		-0.189 (0.223)
Children (ref: none)		
Just preschool		0.159 (0.157)
Just school		0.191 (0.244)
Preschool and school		-0.163 (0.263)
Left-right mean		1.308*** (0.0900)
Constant	-1.681*** (0.253)	-5.801*** (0.595)
Observations	2,083	1,902
R-squared	0.0330	0.2099

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties.

Table A4. Logistic regression models for incumbent support in 2015 by gender and prospective household financial situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	-0.0107 (0.359)	-0.0933 (0.435)
Household financial Situation prospective	0.453*** (0.0798)	0.353*** (0.0963)
Female*Household financial situation prospective	0.0957 (0.114)	0.137 (0.136)
Age		0.0217*** (0.00425)
Education (ref: none)		
GCSE or equivalent		0.598*** (0.180)
A-level or equivalent		0.240 (0.176)
Post A-level vocational		0.711** (0.325)
Degree		0.459** (0.187)
Other		0.630** (0.261)
Class (ref: large employers/higher managerial)		
Higher professional		0.468 (0.306)
Lower professional/managerial		0.0835 (0.264)
Intermediate		0.288 (0.288)
Small employers/self-employed		0.360 (0.302)
Lower supervisory/technical		-0.0389 (0.309)
Semi-routine		0.115 (0.294)
Routine		-0.375 (0.317)
Never worked		-0.391 (0.386)
Trade union member		-0.409*** (0.153)
Religion (ref: Anglican)		
Non-religious		-0.785*** (0.145)
Other denomination		-0.626*** (0.144)
Marital status (ref: married)		
Living with partner		-0.299 (0.194)
Single		-0.243 (0.178)

Widowed		-0.592** (0.243)
Separated		0.0673 (0.477)
Divorced		-0.227 (0.224)
Children (ref: none)		
Just preschool		0.159 (0.159)
Just school		0.152 (0.244)
Preschool and school		-0.237 (0.270)
Left-right mean scale		1.289*** (0.0912)
Constant	-1.573*** (0.258)	-5.475*** (0.599)
Observations	2,017	1,854
R-squared	0.0314	0.2056

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the incumbent than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties.

Table A5. Logistic regression models for Conservative support in 2015 by gender and retrospective general economic situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.523 (0.387)	0.471 (0.441)
General economy retrospective	0.870*** (0.0860)	0.639*** (0.0970)
Female*General economy retrospective	-0.0358 (0.115)	-0.0265 (0.131)
Age		0.0178*** (0.00451)
Education (ref: none)		
GCSE or equivalent		0.296 (0.194)
A-level or equivalent		0.0888 (0.192)
Post A-level equivalent		0.691** (0.349)
Degree		0.131 (0.203)
Other		0.402 (0.284)
Class (ref: large employers/higher managerial)		
Higher professional		0.305 (0.327)
Lower professional/managerial		0.0459

		(0.285)
Intermediate		0.226
		(0.312)
Small employers/self-employed		0.437
		(0.326)
Lower supervisory/technical		-0.0601
		(0.339)
Semi-routine		0.169
		(0.317)
Routine		-0.285
		(0.337)
Never worked		-0.595
		(0.428)
Trade union member		-0.451***
		(0.168)
Religion (ref: Anglican)		
Non-religious		-0.875***
		(0.156)
Other denomination		-0.670***
		(0.152)
Marital status (ref: married)		
Living with partner		-0.206
		(0.208)
Single		-0.289
		(0.194)
Widowed		-0.497*
		(0.263)
Separated		-0.158
		(0.503)
Divorced		-0.141
		(0.245)
Children (ref: none)		
Just preschool		-0.0632
		(0.173)
Just school		0.215
		(0.265)
Preschool and school		-0.216
		(0.280)
Left-right mean scale		1.292***
		(0.0991)
Constant	-3.197***	-6.192***
	(0.299)	(0.628)
Observations	1,875	1,723
R-squared	0.1035	0.2545

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the Conservatives than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the Conservatives than other parties.

Table A6. Logistic regression models for Conservative support in 2015 by gender and prospective general economic situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.270 (0.400)	0.0374 (0.454)
General economy prospective	0.865*** (0.0865)	0.610*** (0.0959)
Female*General economy prospective	0.0211 (0.118)	0.0823 (0.133)
Age		0.0168*** (0.00463)
Education (ref: none)		
GCSE or equivalent		0.383* (0.197)
A-level or equivalent		0.00535 (0.194)
Post A-level vocational		0.692* (0.362)
Degree		0.118 (0.206)
Other		0.356 (0.289)
Class (ref: large employers/ managerial)		
Higher professional		0.286 (0.332)
Lower professional/managerial		-0.0325 (0.293)
Intermediate		0.126 (0.319)
Small employers/self-employed		0.256 (0.334)
Lower supervisory/technical		-0.255 (0.344)
Semi-routine		0.0272 (0.324)
Routine		-0.419 (0.345)
Never worked		-0.669 (0.444)
Trade union member		-0.471*** (0.170)
Religion (ref: Anglican)		
Non-religious		-0.888*** (0.158)
Other denomination		-0.688*** (0.154)
Marital status (ref: married)		
Living with partner		-0.127 (0.212)
Single		-0.263 (0.199)

Widowed		-0.492*
		(0.270)
Separated		0.216
		(0.524)
Divorced		-0.136
		(0.251)
Children (ref: none)		
Just preschool		0.0194
		(0.175)
Just school		0.234
		(0.277)
Preschool and school		-0.142
		(0.285)
Left-right mean scale		1.284***
		(0.100)
Constant	-3.156***	-5.899***
	(0.301)	(0.623)
Observations	1,815	1,671
R-squared	0.1085	0.2585

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the Conservative than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the Conservatives than other parties.

Table A7. Logistic regression models for Conservative support in 2015 by gender and retrospective household financial situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.402	0.889**
	(0.350)	(0.433)
Household financial situation retrospective	0.495***	0.506***
	(0.0836)	(0.103)
Female*Household financial situation retrospective	-0.0436	-0.202
	(0.112)	(0.136)
Age		0.0201***
		(0.00446)
Education (ref: none)		
GCSE or equivalent		0.464**
		(0.188)
A-level or equivalent		0.185
		(0.185)
Post A-level vocational		0.652*
		(0.343)
Degree		0.234
		(0.196)
Other		0.422
		(0.272)
Class (ref: large employers/higher managerial)		
Higher professional		0.349
		(0.317)

Lower professional/managerial		0.0256 (0.274)
Intermediate		0.229 (0.299)
Small employers/self-employed		0.333 (0.314)
Lower supervisory/technical		-0.219 (0.325)
Semi-routine		0.0203 (0.304)
Routine		-0.400 (0.324)
Never worked		-0.690* (0.416)
Trade union member		-0.499*** (0.162)
Religion (ref: Anglican)		
Non-religious		-0.986*** (0.152)
Other denomination		-0.707*** (0.148)
Marital status (ref: married)		
Living with partner		-0.220 (0.202)
Single		-0.319* (0.189)
Widowed		-0.586** (0.252)
Separated		-0.0115 (0.491)
Divorced		-0.192 (0.241)
Children (ref: none)		
Just preschool		0.0807 (0.169)
Just school		0.247 (0.260)
Preschool and school		-0.0122 (0.272)
Left-right mean scale		1.400*** (0.0956)
Constant	-1.856*** (0.266)	-6.034*** (0.632)
Observations	1,925	1,756
R-squared	0.0302	0.2277

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the Conservatives than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties.

Table A8. Logistic regression models for Conservative support in 2015 by gender and prospective household financial situation

	Model 1	Model 2 (Controls)
Female	0.0526 (0.379)	-0.0214 (0.469)
Household financial situation prospective	0.487*** (0.0840)	0.400*** (0.103)
Female*Household financial situation prospective	0.0738 (0.119)	0.0997 (0.146)
Age		0.0212*** (0.00452)
Education (ref: none)		
GCSE or equivalent		0.520*** (0.190)
A-level or equivalent		0.172 (0.187)
Post A-level vocational		0.712** (0.344)
Degree		0.304 (0.199)
Other		0.546** (0.273)
Class (ref: large employers/higher managerial)		
Higher professional		0.286 (0.321)
Lower professional/managerial		-0.0593 (0.277)
Intermediate		0.180 (0.302)
Small employers/self-employed		0.265 (0.317)
Lower supervisory/technical		-0.319 (0.327)
Semi-routine		0.0548 (0.307)
Routine		-0.403 (0.330)
Never worked		-0.701* (0.421)
Trade union member		-0.400** (0.165)
Religion (ref: Anglican)		
Non-religious		-0.977*** (0.153)
Other denomination		-0.684*** (0.150)
Marital status (ref: married)		
Living with partner		-0.224 (0.206)
Single		-0.286 (0.190)

Widowed		-0.573**
		(0.254)
Separated		0.0961
		(0.515)
Divorced		-0.201
		(0.241)
Children (ref: none)		
Just preschool		0.0887
		(0.171)
Just school		0.230
		(0.260)
Preschool and school		-0.0857
		(0.279)
Left-right mean scale		1.375***
		(0.0969)
Constant	-1.844***	-5.716***
	(0.274)	(0.636)
Observations	1,866	1,713
R-squared	0.0338	0.2264

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of the Conservatives than other parties. Negative coefficients indicate that respondents are less supportive of the incumbent than other parties.

Appendix B – Chapter Five

Participant information sheet

Information Sheet for Focus Group Participants

- My name is Anna Sanders. I am a PhD student at the University of Manchester, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. I am conducting these focus groups for my doctoral research, which aims to find out more about women's voting behaviour.
- You have been asked to take part in this focus group because I would like to hear about the issues that matter to you at election time.
- The focus group will last for approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw any time without detriment.
- I will be the only person analysing the data. No personal data will be stored.
- I will record and then transcribe our discussion. After I have finished transcribing, I will delete any recordings I have.
- Your anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Your names will **not** be used anywhere in my research.
- As a 'thank you' for your participation, you will receive a £10 gift voucher.

Contact details:

Anna Sanders anna.sanders@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Francesca Gains (Supervisor) Francesca.gains@manchester.ac.uk

Maria Sobolewska (Co-supervisor)
maria.sobolewska@manchester.ac.uk

Consent form

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

	Activities	Initials
1	I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.	
2	I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to myself. I understand that it will not be possible to remove my data from the project once it has been anonymised and forms part of the data set. I agree to take part on this basis	
3	I agree to the interviews being audio / video recorded .	
4	I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books, reports or journals	
5	I agree to take part in this study	

Data Protection

The personal information we collect and use to conduct this research will be processed in accordance with data protection law as explained in the Participant Information Sheet and the [Privacy Notice for Research Participants](#).

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of the person taking consent

Signature

Date

Appendix C – Chapter Six

Question Wordings and Response Categories

Control Variables (model 2)

Highest education level achieved (all years):

0 none; 1 GCSE or equivalent; 2 A-level or equivalent; 3 post A-level vocational; 4 degree; 5 Other

Full-time homemaker

0 not a full-time homemaker; 1 full-time homemaker

Marital status

1 married; 2 living with a partner; 3 separated; 4 divorced; 5 widowed; 6 single (never married)

Social class

1 middle class; 2 working class; 3 other

Religiosity

1 no religion; 2 Protestant; 3 Catholic; 4 Other Christian; 5 Other non-Christian

Trade union membership

0 member; 1 not a member

EU Referendum vote

2015: If there was a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, how do you think you would vote? Would you vote to leave the EU or to stay in? 1 Leave the EU; 2 Stay in the EU; 3 I would not vote; -1 Don't know.

Recoded: 0 Would not vote/don't know; 1 Leave the EU; 2 Stay in the EU

2017: Thinking back to the EU referendum held on June 23rd 2016, if you voted did you vote to remain in the EU or to leave the EU or did you not vote? 3 I did not vote; 1 Leave the EU; 2 Remain in the EU; -1 Don't know.

Recoded: 0 Did not vote/don't know; 1 Leave the EU; 2 Remain in the EU

Left-right values

A 1-5 scale was created out of the following items:

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please choose an

answer from this card. 1 Strongly disagree; 2 Disagree; 3 Neither agree nor disagree; 4 Agree; 5 Strongly agree.

Ordinary working people get their fair share of the nation's wealth (reverse coded)

There is one law for the rich and one for the poor

There is no need for strong trade unions to protect employees' working conditions and wages (reverse coded)

It is the government's responsibility to provide a job for everyone who wants one

Liberal-Authoritarian values

A 1-5 scale was created out of the following items:

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please choose an answer from this card. 1 Strongly disagree; 2 Disagree; 3 Neither agree nor disagree; 4 Agree; 5 Strongly agree

Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values (reverse coded)

People should be allowed to organize public meetings to protest against the government

Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards (reverse coded)

People in Britain should be more tolerant of those who lead unconventional lives

Economic/financial pessimism (model 3)

NHS is worse

Choosing an answer from this card, would you say that since the last general election in 2010/2017 the National Health Service has got better, worse, or has it stayed the same? 1 Got a lot worse; 2 Got a little worse; 3 Stayed the same; 4 Got a little better; 5 Got a lot better

Recoded: 4, 5: (1) better; 3: (2) same; 1, 2: (3) got worse

Living costs

And do you think the cost of living has got better, worse, or stayed the same since the last general election in 2010/2015? 1 Got a lot worse; 2 Got a little worse; 3 Stayed the same; 4 Got a little better; 5 Got a lot better

Recoded: 4, 5: (1) better; 3: (2) same; 1, 2: (3) got worse

Household financial situation

Now a few questions about economic conditions. How does the financial situation of your household now compare with what it was 12 months ago? 1 Got a lot worse; 2 Got a little

worse; 3 Stayed the same; 4 Got a little better; 5 Got a lot better

Recoded: 4, 5: (1) better; 3: (2) same; 1, 2: (3) got worse

How do you think the financial situation of your household will change over the next 12 months? 1 Get a lot worse; 2 Get a little worse; 3 Stay the same; 4 Get a little better; 5 Get a lot better

Recoded: 4, 5: (1) better; 3: (2) same; 1, 2: (3) will get worse

General economic situation

How do you think the general economic situation in this country will develop over the next 12 months? 1 Get a lot worse; 2 Get a little worse; 3 Stay the same; 4 Get a little better; 5 Get a lot better

Recoded: 4, 5: (1) better; 3: (2) same; 1, 2: (3) will get worse

How do you think the general economic situation in this country has changed over the last 12 months? 1 Got a lot worse; 2 Got a little worse; 3 Stayed the same; 4 Got a lot better; 5 Got a lot better

Recoded: 4, 5: (1) better; 3: (2) same; 1, 2: (3) will get worse

Table B1. Summary Statistics for all Variables

Variable	2015	2017
Vote Choice	Con: 40%; Lab: 32%; Other: 27%	Con: 40%; Lab: 44%; Other: 16%
Controls		
Female	Men: 49%. Female: 51%	Men: 49%. Female: 51%
Age Group	Under 35: 15%; 35-64: 54%; 65+: 32%	Under 35: 17%; 35-64: 51%; 65+: 32%
Employment	Not in employment: 44%; employed: 56%	Not in employment: 46%; employed: 54%
Education	None: 22%; Other: 7%; GCSE or equivalent: 22%; A-level or equivalent: 17%; post-A-level: 8%; Degree: 24%	None: 17%; Other: 5%; GCSE or equivalent: 24%; A-level or equivalent: 16%; post-A-level: 8%; Degree: 31%
Marital status	Married: 52%; Living with a partner: 10%; Single: 17%; Widowed: 9%; Separated: 2%; Divorced: 8%	Married: 54%; Living with a partner: 9%; Single: 18%; Widowed: 9%; Separated: 2%; Divorced: 8%
Religion	No religion: 38%; Church of England/Scotland: 29%; Catholic: 9%; Other Christian: 18%; Other non-Christian: 6%	No religion: 47%; Church of England/Scotland: 22%; Catholic: 7%; Other Christian: 18%; Other non-Christian: 6%
Social Class	Middle class: 21%; Working class: 43%; Non/Other: 36%	Middle class: 25%; Working class: 35%; Non/Other: 40%
Trade Union Membership	Not a member: 81%; Member: 19%	Not a member: 84%; Member: 16%
EU Referendum vote	Wouldn't vote/don't know: 15%; Leave: 34%; Remain: 51%	Didn't vote/don't know: 6%; Leave: 44%; Remain: 50%

Liberal- Authoritarian Values	Mean: 3.13; Standard deviation: 0.61; Min: 1; Max: 5	Mean: 3.47; Standard deviation: 0.70; Min: 1; Max: 5
Economic/financial pessimism		
Living costs since last election	Got worse: 51%; Same: 26%; Better: 23%	Got worse: 72%; Same: 24%; Better: 4%
Financial situation in the past 12 months	Got worse: 25%; Same: 51%; Better: 24%	Got worse: 36%; Same: 48%; Better: 16%
Economic situation in the past 12 months	Will get worse: 28%; Same: 30%; Better: 42%	Will get worse: 65%; Same: 27%; Better: 9%
Financial situation in the next 12 months	Got worse: 22%; Same: 53%; Better: 25%	Got worse: 39%; Same: 45%; Better: 16%
Economic situation in the next 12 months	Will get worse: 27%; Same: 29%; Better: 44%	Will get worse: 64%; Same: 23%; Better: 14%
NHS since the last election	Got worse: 53%; Same: 34%; Better: 13%	Got worse: 63%; Same: 31%; Better: 6%

Note. Unweighted percentages. Statistics from restricted sample: N = 1,650 (2015) and N = 1258 (2017)

Multinomial logit models

Table B2. Multinomial logit models for 2015 vote choice

	Labour vs Conservatives			Other vs Conservatives		
	Model 1	Model 2 (controls)	Model 3 (economic/ financial pessimism)	Model 1	Model 2 (controls)	Model 3 (economic/ financial pessimism)
Female	0.633* (0.250)	0.695* (0.285)	0.472 (0.306)	0.147 (0.290)	0.201 (0.311)	0.012 (0.324)
Age						
35-64	-0.313 (0.207)	0.165 (0.261)	0.249 (0.279)	-0.003 (0.225)	0.231 (0.269)	0.273 (0.280)
65+	-0.818** (0.247)	-0.494 (0.355)	-0.180 (0.381)	-0.116 (0.250)	0.041 (0.344)	0.150 (0.362)
Female*35 -64	-0.788** (0.298)	-0.919** (0.341)	-0.853* (0.363)	-0.443 (0.336)	-0.501 (0.361)	-0.410 (0.374)
Female*65 +	-0.737* (0.346)	-0.805* (0.402)	-0.743 (0.429)	-0.769* (0.374)	-0.723 (0.407)	-0.588 (0.421)
Employment		-0.623** (0.199)	-0.625** (0.212)		-0.378 (0.195)	-0.392 (0.203)
Education (ref: none)						
GCSE or equivalent		-0.751* (0.344)	-0.536 (0.363)		-0.124 (0.308)	0.076 (0.318)
A-Level or equivalent		-0.441* (0.219)	-0.263 (0.232)		0.028 (0.212)	0.200 (0.220)
		-0.286	-0.143		0.118	0.289

Post A-Level vocational Degree	(0.233)	(0.248)	(0.228)	(0.237)
Other	-0.478 (0.302)	-0.308 (0.316)	-0.271 (0.310)	-0.158 (0.318)
Marital status (ref: married)	-0.205 (0.236)	-0.003 (0.252)	-0.089 (0.241)	0.099 (0.249)
Living with a partner	0.324 (0.235)	0.321 (0.246)	0.078 (0.239)	0.026 (0.244)
Separated	0.373 (0.212)	0.479* (0.227)	0.262 (0.218)	0.303 (0.227)
Divorced	0.554 (0.313)	0.532 (0.333)	0.169 (0.317)	0.159 (0.325)
Widowed	0.004 (0.638)	0.105 (0.696)	0.422 (0.561)	0.400 (0.584)
Single (never married)	0.252 (0.304)	0.158 (0.321)	0.344 (0.286)	0.264 (0.295)
Religion (ref: none)				
Protestant	-0.731** (0.188)	-0.646** (0.199)	-0.680** (0.176)	-0.613** (0.182)
Catholic	0.192 (0.253)	0.352 (0.272)	-0.148 (0.258)	-0.036 (0.268)
Other Christian	-0.187 (0.201)	-0.095 (0.214)	-0.319 (0.199)	-0.269 (0.206)
Other non-Christian	0.945** (0.276)	1.154** (0.299)	-0.444 (0.346)	-0.297 (0.355)
Class (ref: middle class)				
Working class	0.912** (0.196)	0.879** (0.208)	0.741** (0.198)	0.728** (0.204)
Other	0.115 (0.192)	0.119 (0.205)	0.249 (0.191)	0.268 (0.198)
Trade Union member	0.615** (0.184)	0.547** (0.196)	0.206 (0.190)	0.142 (0.196)
EU vote (ref: don't know/didn't vote)				
Leave	-0.484* (0.213)	-0.605** (0.226)	0.484* (0.214)	0.403 (0.220)
Remain	0.226 (0.196)	0.281 (0.208)	0.282 (0.212)	0.305 (0.218)
Liberal-Authoritarian scale	0.524** (0.132)	0.628** (0.136)	0.613** (0.126)	0.613** (0.130)
Left-Right scale	1.547** (0.117)	1.134** (0.126)	1.135** (0.112)	0.887** (0.119)
Living costs (ref: got worse)				
Stayed the same		-0.514** (0.185)		0.024 (0.175)
Got better		-0.963** (0.213)		-0.551** (0.197)
Household financial situation (retrospective) (ref: got worse)				
Stayed the same		-0.054 (0.200)		-0.209 (0.196)
Got better		0.195 (0.240)		0.008 (0.228)
Economic situation (retrospective) (ref: got worse)				
		-0.272		-0.233

Stayed the same			(0.213)			(0.215)
Got better			-0.964**			-0.411
			(0.226)			(0.220)
Economic situation (prospective) (ref: will get worse)						
Stayed the same			0.056			-0.271
			(0.216)			(0.216)
Got better			-0.528*			-0.610**
			(0.226)			(0.219)
Household financial situation (prospective) (ref: will get worse)						
Stayed the same			-0.414*			-0.212
			(0.208)			(0.208)
Got better			-0.453			-0.249
			(0.243)			(0.237)
NHS (ref: got worse)						
Stayed the same			-0.441**			-0.267
			(0.165)			(0.158)
Got better			-0.938**			-0.544*
			(0.245)			(0.218)
Intercept	0.125	-7.373**	-4.542**	-0.269	-6.454**	-4.507**
	(0.174)	(0.710)	(0.796)	(0.193)	(0.699)	(0.769)

N = 1650. * p<0.05; ** p<0.01. Coefficients are log odds; standard errors in parentheses. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of Labour/Other than the Conservatives

Table B3. Multinomial logit models for 2017 vote choice

	Labour vs Conservatives			Other vs Conservatives		
	Model 1	Model 2 (controls)	Model 3 (economic/ financial pessimism)	Model 1	Model 2 (controls)	Model 3 (economic/ financial pessimism)
Female	0.804*	0.818*	0.594	0.501	0.431	0.308
	(0.336)	(0.404)	(0.423)	(0.461)	(0.498)	(0.511)
Age						
35-64	-0.272	-0.207	-0.172	0.147	0.533	0.482
	(0.247)	(0.332)	(0.351)	(0.336)	(0.397)	(0.411)
65+	-1.321**	-1.100**	-1.097*	-0.832*	-0.440	-0.405
	(0.273)	(0.421)	(0.449)	(0.375)	(0.500)	(0.520)
Female*35	-0.833*	-0.737	-0.612	-0.546	-0.500	-0.409
-64	(0.384)	(0.466)	(0.487)	(0.517)	(0.560)	(0.574)
Female*65	-0.764	-0.554	-0.297	-0.695	-0.480	-0.397
+	(0.427)	(0.514)	(0.540)	(0.591)	(0.636)	(0.651)
Employment		-0.298	-0.351		-0.285	-0.273
		(0.231)	(0.240)		(0.264)	(0.269)
Education (ref: none)						
GCSE or equivalent		0.093	0.163		-1.177	-1.023
		(0.482)	(0.512)		(0.803)	(0.818)
A-Level or equivalent		-0.246	-0.290		-0.592	-0.565
		(0.264)	(0.275)		(0.316)	(0.323)
Post A- Level		-0.187	-0.280		-0.093	-0.055
		(0.315)	(0.328)		(0.352)	(0.363)
vocational Degree		-0.955*	-1.132**		-0.953*	-1.040*
		(0.394)	(0.404)		(0.469)	(0.478)
Other		0.192	0.048		0.092	0.044
		(0.311)	(0.325)		(0.355)	(0.365)

Marital status (ref: married)				
Living with a partner	0.181 (0.320)	0.184 (0.335)	0.322 (0.363)	0.361 (0.374)
Separated	0.349 (0.272)	0.457 (0.286)	0.618* (0.305)	0.643* (0.316)
Divorced	0.352 (0.364)	0.549 (0.381)	-0.033 (0.479)	0.028 (0.486)
Widowed	0.761 (0.681)	0.710 (0.684)	0.766 (0.783)	0.568 (0.799)
Single (never married)	0.400 (0.364)	0.386 (0.378)	-0.161 (0.478)	-0.190 (0.483)
Religion (ref: none)				
Protestant	-0.874** (0.240)	-0.859** (0.247)	-0.419 (0.260)	-0.423 (0.266)
Catholic	-0.234 (0.348)	-0.142 (0.361)	-0.839 (0.485)	-0.814 (0.490)
Other Christian	-0.025 (0.229)	0.067 (0.243)	-0.182 (0.275)	-0.103 (0.283)
Other non-Christian	1.704** (0.395)	1.985** (0.419)	0.226 (0.541)	0.344 (0.556)
Class (ref: middle class)				
Working class	1.266** (0.248)	1.361** (0.260)	0.477 (0.293)	0.517 (0.300)
Other	0.349 (0.229)	0.453 (0.240)	0.426 (0.252)	0.499 (0.259)
Trade Union member	0.808** (0.260)	0.791** (0.266)	0.141 (0.311)	0.098 (0.316)
EU vote (ref: don't know/didn't vote)				
Leave	-0.995** (0.358)	-0.867* (0.385)	-0.273 (0.472)	-0.175 (0.491)
Remain	0.073 (0.354)	0.103 (0.382)	0.506 (0.468)	0.492 (0.486)
Liberal-Authoritarian scale	0.650** (0.155)	0.662** (0.161)	0.566** (0.177)	0.636** (0.181)
Left-Right scale	1.621** (0.147)	1.406** (0.155)	1.256** (0.166)	1.187** (0.176)
Living costs (ref: got worse)				
Stayed the same		-0.344 (0.228)		-0.233 (0.261)
Got better		-0.367 (0.494)		0.107 (0.494)
Household financial situation (retrospective) (ref: got worse)				
Stayed the same		-0.103 (0.215)		-0.486* (0.243)
Got better		0.164 (0.296)		-0.336 (0.335)
Economic situation (retrospective) (ref: got worse)				
Stayed the same		0.081 (0.233)		-0.286 (0.274)
Got better		0.207 (0.353)		-0.151 (0.431)
Economic situation (prospective) (ref: will get worse)				
		-0.410		-0.170

Stayed the same			(0.235)			(0.272)
Got better			-1.089**			-0.531
			(0.309)			(0.354)
Household financial situation (prospective) (ref: will get worse)						
Stayed the same			-0.341			0.211
			(0.215)			(0.247)
Got better			0.102			0.146
			(0.296)			(0.342)
NHS (ref: got worse)						
Stayed the same			-0.971**			-0.222
			(0.208)			(0.233)
Got better			0.036			0.520
			(0.384)			(0.408)
Intercept	0.423*	-7.507**	-6.124**	-0.809**	-7.191**	-6.766**
	(0.209)	(0.908)	(0.986)	(0.292)	(1.060)	(1.144)

N = 1258. * p<0.05; ** p<0.01. Coefficients are log odds; standard errors in parentheses. Positive coefficients indicate that respondents are more supportive of Labour/Other than the Conservatives.

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