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# The Impact of Feminist Activism on the UK Government's Policy Proposal on Domestic Violence

- *Actions Speak Louder than Words*

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# Abstract

Social movements have been argued to be important political actors because of their ability to apply pressure and mobilizing governments to take policy action on societal problems. In light of this, it is the aim of this thesis to investigate if a feminist movement in the UK, called the IC Change campaign, can serve as the explanation as to why the UK government put forward a new policy proposal on domestic violence. In turn, this legislative proposal was an important step towards the UK ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence- a groundbreaking legal framework aiming to eradicate gender-based violence that the government was stalling on to implement.

By using theory-testing process tracing as a methodological tool and conducting interviews with actors who were present throughout the process, this case study uses social movement theory as a means of investigating if the IC Change Campaign and their strategic actions had an impact on the UK government's decision to put forward a proposal of a more substantial legislation in the domestic violence area. As a result of my process tracing analysis, one of the main findings in this case study is that the IC Change Campaign managed to leverage the government to put forward the policy proposal by strategically making allies with supportive members of parliament (MP's) from the Scottish National Party (SNP) within the UK parliament. At an overall level, this interaction neatly showcases how civil society mobilization combined with a strategic alliance with political actors inside democratic institutions, can have conducive effects in terms of making the government take action in a certain policy field where action is stalling.

*Key words:* social movements, policy proposal, violence against women and girls, causal mechanisms, elite alliance, theory-testing process tracing

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# 1 Introduction

“The abuse of women and girls is the most pervasive and unaddressed human rights violation we face globally”

(Ms Rashida Manjo, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women)

## 1.1 Violence Against Women: UK & Europe

Domestic violence against women has become an increasing societal problem in the UK. For example, reports conducted by government agencies revealed that domestic violence crimes against women and girls in England and Wales increased with as much as 29% between 2009-2015 (CPS Report 2016/17). Reported incidents of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland show a similar upward trend with a 35.5% increase between 2004-2015 (UK Government Report 2017). In Scotland, a crime survey on partner abuse found that 18% of women had experienced domestic violence since the age of 16 (Scottish Crime & Justice Survey 2014/15). Furthermore, at the overall European level, the prevalence of domestic violence has also been acknowledged. EU-wide surveys across the member states have shown that as much as one in five women have experienced physical and sexual violence from a previous or current partner. In addition to this, one in three women have suffered from intimate partner violence and abuse since the age of 15 (FRA Report 2017).

Bearing these alarming numbers in mind, it's also important to recognize that there has been a substantial political effort at the European level to eradicate gender-based violence of this kind (Stark 2016). This effort is expressed by the drafting of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence that was adopted in 2011 (Stark 2016; Council of Europe 2017). Because the convention was signed and adopted in Istanbul, it is often referred to as the Istanbul Convention and from now on I will also use this name to refer to the convention

The Istanbul Convention is considered to be the most comprehensive legal framework to tackle violence against women that has ever been created at the international level (Stark 2016). Important organizations such as Amnesty International has called it the “gold-standard” of legislation against violence against women and has urged countries around Europe to ratify the convention

(Amnesty International 2014). The praises of the convention are due to its “whole-system approach” that it employs in its strategy. This includes various policy measures such as school education on gender-based violence, increasing the capacity of law enforcement agencies to prosecute offenders, and implementing support programs for domestic abuse survivors. Because of this multifaceted legal framework, it is assumed that the convention, if fully implemented at the state-level, can cement the “societal infrastructure” that is needed in order to combat violence against women (Stark 2016; Council of Europe 2017; Law Absolute 2017). Thus, state-ratification of the convention is a crucial step towards protecting women and girls from violence at the domestic level, especially since international reports have highlighted that insufficient domestic legislation is one of the main contributing factors that enables gender-based violence (FRA Report 2017).

However, the political will and commitment to create the legislation that is necessary to ratify the convention, remains uneven among the governments in Europe. More specifically, the UK is one of the few European countries that has yet to ratify the convention. Other non-ratifying countries of the convention are Hungary, Croatia, Lithuania, Greece and the Czech Republic (Council of Europe 2017) In more detail, the UK government signed the convention in 2012 and publicly expressed its intention to ratify it and thus made a commitment to create the domestic legislation that was necessary in order to implement the convention. However, the government never engaged in creating this legislation and thereby stalled on the implementation of the convention (Leftly 2015) In this context, the lack of government responsiveness to implement this groundbreaking legal framework that would provide legal protection and support for women and girls in the UK is problematic- keeping in mind the increasing rates of domestic violence crimes that previous reports have shown.

In the case of the UK, this lack of action was met with strong criticism. For example, the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights stated that the government was jeopardizing its international reputation of being a protector of women’s rights since the failure to ratify the convention inevitably implied that the government was doing “less at home than abroad on violence against women and girls” (Human Rights Committee Report 2014/15) But more importantly, the lack of government action generated a substantial response and activism from feminist civil society actors who organized a political movement in order to pressure the government to produce legislation that would be necessary to fully implement the convention in the UK. This campaign is called the IC Change Campaign (IC Change Website 2018b). To clarify, the name of this feminist movement is referring to the Istanbul Convention (IC) and the movement’s objective to generate change for women and girls experiencing male violence by making the government ratify the convention in the UK. I will now proceed to introducing the IC Change Campaign in its capacity of being a feminist social movement and its relevance for this case study.

## 1.2 The IC Change Campaign

The IC Change campaign is a grass root and volunteer-based organization with the main objective to make the government follow through with its commitment to produce sufficient legislation on violence against women in order to ratify the Istanbul Convention (Ibid). The IC Change Campaign consists of a number of feminist volunteer organizations all working for the improvement of women's rights policies across the UK. These include (among others): Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Aid, End Violence Against Women Coalition and the Southhall Black Sisters (Ibid). As a feminist movement working for change, the campaign engaged in several activities in order to pressure to government in to creating legislation on domestic violence in order to be compliant with the Istanbul Convention. In this context, the IC Change Campaign distinguished itself by collaborating and working closely with members of parliament (MP's) from the Scottish National Party (SNP). A party that is known for its political work on violence against women and that also has the same political agenda in terms of making sure that the UK government would produce domestic legislation on domestic violence in order to ratify the Istanbul Convention (Sellby 2017: Women's Aid 2017). Together with the political representatives from the SNP, the IC Change organized several activist events that were directed towards the MP's of the UK parliament in order to mobilize cross-party political support that in turn would pressure the government in to taking legislative action on domestic violence (IC Change Website 2018a). These events included organizing lobby events inside the parliament to raise awareness of domestic violence among parliamentarians. The campaign was also one of the main actors behind the so-called IC Act (IC again referring to the Istanbul Convention in this context) which is a piece of legislation that legally requires the UK government to set out a clear time-table for creating legislation in order to ratify the Istanbul Convention (UK Parliament 2018). Because of this bill, the government is also required to report to parliament on an annual basis what measures it is taking to ratify the convention (UK Government Policy Briefing Paper).

After these events took place, the UK government put forward a substantial policy proposal to increase the regulation on domestic violence in November 2017. In turn, the government argued that this "landmark Domestic Abuse Bill" would be an important step towards full ratification of the Istanbul Convention and that this Bill would ensure that the government's promise of ratification would be enforced (Home Office Progress Report 2017). Against this background, it is the aim of this thesis to investigate further if the feminist activism carried out by the IC Change Campaign, was the reason why the government subsequently proposed legislation on domestic violence to parliament.

In order to establish whether or not there was an actual relationship between the activism of IC Change and the policy proposal on domestic violence, I will use theory-testing process tracing and social movement theory as a means of investigating if there is a possible link between the IC Change and the policy

proposal on domestic violence put forward by the government. I will further elaborate on these choices in my theory and method section.

### 1.3 Purpose & Research Question

In light of my previous discussion, I derive following research question for this thesis:

- Did the IC Change campaign manage to get the UK government to put forward the Domestic Abuse Bill in order to ratify the Istanbul Convention in the UK?

As an implication of this research question, my thesis has an explanatory entry point which allows me to investigate if the IC Change, as an actor in civil society working for the improvement of women's rights, did in fact manage to have an impact on the government's proposed Domestic Abuse Bill. It is my argument that this research question enables me to look at the process behind the proposed legislation on domestic abuse and thereby further investigate if the IC Change was an important factor to take into account and whether or not this feminist social movement was able to generate a new policy proposal in a context where the government was not taking sufficient action.

Like I further will elaborate on in my theoretical and method section, I will adopt a hypothesis from social movement theory that stipulates that, on the basis of certain conditions and circumstances inherent to the IC Change and the favorable political landscape it operated in, these conditions would have increased the likelihood that the IC Change would have been successful in its attempt to pressure the government into proposing legislation on domestic violence. Thus, my hypothesis, based on social movement theory, assumes that there was in fact a relationship between the feminist activism of the IC Change and the policy proposal. In turn, it is the main purpose of this thesis to find empirical within-case evidence that either confirms or rejects this hypothesis about an existing relationship between these two variables.

In the next section I will present previous research on social movements and more specifically, I will present previous research that emphasizes the important role of domestic feminist movements in terms of generating progressive government policy on violence against women.

## 1.4 The Political Power of Social Movements

This thesis is written in a context where existing scholarship within political science have recognized the ability of social movements to impact policy by pressuring and thereby mobilizing governments to take action (Burstein & Linton 2002; Soule & Olzak 2004; Giugni 2009; Weldon 2012). Arguably, the impacts of social movements on government policies within various fields such as the environment, social policy, human rights and women's rights, have gained increased scholarly attention over the years (Keck & Sikkink 1996; Amenta et. al 2005; Andrews 2001).

The underlying assumption of the political role of social movements in this context, is that they function as important catalysts for policy action when governments are not taking sufficient action within a specific policy area. In light of this, social movements are able to shape governments' agendas and "create the political will to address particular issues" (Weldon & Htun 2013, p.239). However, the scholarly understanding of *how* social movements are able to make government's take action on these policy issues more specifically in this way, have been argued to be insufficient (Bidé 2015; Amenta 2010). Rather, scholarly reviews summarizing existing research on social movements, find that political scientists have focused primarily on understanding why and how social movements emerge in different policy fields, whereas the causal mechanisms through which they are able to mobilize governments into taking action, remains relatively understudied (Amenta et al. 2005; Bidé 2015) As a consequence, this thesis is structured with this "gap" in mind in the sense that investigating the ways in which the IC Change tried to pressure the government in to taking action and whether or not these attempts were successful, will hopefully contribute to the overall scholarly understanding of how social movements can strategically work in order to leverage governments in to taking action in important policy fields.

More specifically, I have written this thesis in a context where previous research regarding government action on violence against women and girls has found that feminist movements, as a category of social movements operating in civil society, are an important part of the explanation of what makes governments take action and create policy to combat this problem (Weldon & Htun 2012;2013). Interestingly, the activities of feminist movements, as a form of social mobilization, have been found to have a stronger impact on government policy in comparison to other explanatory variables such as the number of elected female legislators and the presence of left-wing parties in the legislative assembly (Ibid.). In light of this research, the main conclusion from these empirical findings is that women's movements are a more effective means of policy influence compared to other variables and hence, these movements also have an important representative role for women in politics (Weldon & Htun 2013; Weldon 2012).

In addition, Weldon and Htun has found in their quantitative research that domestic feminist movement are an important explanatory variable to take into consideration when governments are to ratify international treaties on violence against women. In this context, Weldon & Htun argue that in countries where



strong feminist movements are present at the domestic level, ratification and effective implementation of international treaties tend to be carried out to a sufficient extent by the government (Ibid.) In light of this, domestic feminist movements can be considered to be an important societal actor that makes sure that government stays committed to their promises of implementing international rules and take progressive policy action to combat gender-based violence.

In sum, these scholarly findings call for further exploring the nexus between feminist movements and their ability to make the government take progressive policy action on violence against women. Against this background, these previous scholarly findings motivate why it would be of interest to study the impacts of the IC Change Campaign in a more in-depth way; it is a domestic feminist movement with the main objective to make the government produce progressive policy in order to effectively implement an international treaty on violence against women.

## 2 Theory

In this section I present the theoretical work I rely on in my case study of the IC Change Campaign. In this context, two theoretical concepts are highlighted: political opportunity structures and elite alliances. Like I will explain further, it is on the basis of these concepts that I adopt my hypothesis that the IC Change was in fact successful in terms of making the government put forward the policy proposal and that there is an actual relationship between these variables. Like I have already mentioned, I will proceed to collect empirical evidence that will either confirm or reject this hypothesis in the later part of this thesis.

### 2.1 Political Opportunity Structures

As scholars have argued, there is no single theoretical model that alone can account for the various ways in which social movements can mobilize government policy action (Andrews 2001).

However, in order to find a suitable theoretical framework that can be used in order to gain a better understanding of how the IC Change campaign achieved policy change, I have looked at the theoretical framework of Kalm and Uhlin (2015) for guidance. In their analytical model, they put forward different factors and conditions that determine the political context and landscape that a movement operates in (2015, p.68).

In the specific case of the IC Change Campaign, I specifically look at one variable proposed in their model: whether the movement is trying to achieve change within an *open* or *closed* political opportunity structure. A central aspect of an open opportunity structure in this regard, is the presence of “elite allies”. A significant type of elite allies for social movements, are politicians within the institution that the social movement is addressing in their actions (2015, p.64) The presence of elite allies in this context, produces an opportunistic setting for the social movement to operate in since they “are open to civil society participation, but also have potential aligned interests” (2015, p.66). In contrast, movements operating in a closed opportunity structure do so in the absence of elite allies that are open to civil society actors and do not have aligned interest with the policy objective of the movement.

In the specific case of the IC Change, the MP’s from the Scottish National Party, known for their political work on violence against women within the UK parliament, and who worked closely with the IC Change throughout the process, can be identified as having this function of elite allies open to civil society

participation and having aligned interests with the IC Change of generating policy action by the government. In turn, I argue that this could serve as an evidence of the IC Change operating within in an open political opportunity structure that was favorable for the movement in their attempt to mobilize government action and hence there's a need for a theoretical framework that will take these factors into account when I further investigate the possible relationship between the IC Change and the government's policy proposal.

Against this background, I have chosen to extend my theoretical section by looking in to social movement theory that further elaborates on how movements can interact with members of the political elite as a means of getting access to the political process and through this process mobilize the government to propose public policy. Furthermore, it is also my argument that by choosing this theory on the basis of Kalm And Uhlin's analytical model, I will also adopt a theoretical model that is more sensitive to the contextual factors that are inherent to this case study of the IC Change.

In the next section I will present the political access theory as the main theoretical model in this thesis. It is also on the basis of this theoretical work that I derive a plausible causal mechanism as a means of investigating if the IC Change managed to generate a new government proposal on domestic abuse.

## 2.2 Political Access Theory

A few scholars have advanced theories regarding the causal mechanisms through which social movements can achieve policy change. Two of those social movement scholars are Kenneth T. Andrews and Marco Giugni. I have chosen to build my theoretical framework on the basis their work since they share common ground in their study of social movements; they both emphasize the importance of a social movement accessing the political process as a means of achieving change in policy.

In his theoretical work, Andrews asserts that in order for a movement to be successful in its objective of generating change, adopting disruptive tactics from an outsider position (i.e. disruptive public protests and demonstrations taking place outside political institutions), as a way of forcing a response from policy makers, is not the most effective means of achieving changes in public policy (Andrews 2001). Instead, Andrews argue that social movements have the ability to generate policy action by accessing the political process and gaining an "insider position" from which it can influence policy (Andrews 2001; Bidé 2015).

As an extension of and complement to Andrews argument, I have also looked at the theoretical work of social movement scholar Marco Giugni. In his theoretical model regarding social movement impact on public policy, Giugni elaborates a more concrete theory on how social movements can gain access to the political process and how this in turn is a precondition for movement-generated change in policy to occur (2009;2004). In this regard, Giugni argues that a social

movement can gain access to the political process by establishing an alliance with representatives from the political elite. Furthermore, the establishment of this kind of “elite alliance” between the movement and politicians, serves as the link through which the movement can access and influence the political process. (Giugni 2004, p.5). This kind of alliance with influential political actors operating within formal political institutions, serves as an important tool for social movements to achieve change. The reason being that this alliance allows the movement to generate change through their political allies that are willing to work for the advancement of the movement’s policy objective from inside political institutions (Ibid.) Giugni further argues that movement mobilization combined with political allies in this way, can generate a “joint-effect” that is conducive to policy impact (2009, p.468).

Similarly to the theorization of Kalm and Uhlin, Giugni also argues that there are incentives for politicians to join forces with the movement if they have a common interest in the policy issue and if this collaboration would advance their political agenda (2004, p.5) In this regard, Giugni regards elite political alliances of this kind “*as crucial resources and opportunities that facilitate the impacts of social movements on public policy* (2004, p.5).

In more detail, Giugni theorizes in this joint-effect model of his, that concrete government action on policy issues can be described as being achieved through a two-stage process: first by establishing political alliances and then by letting these actors influence policy within political institutions in order to advance the movements cause (2009, p.436). As such, Giugni asserts that “*the policy impact of a social movement is conditioned by the presence of powerful allies within the institutional arenas*” (2009, p.468).

Thus, when considering the characteristics of the social movement theory elaborated on by Andrews and Giugni, access to the political process is a precondition for achieving movement-generated change in public policy. In turn, Giugni is more specific in this regard by arguing that movement impacts on policy are conditioned on the presence of elite political alliances within the “institutional arena” that the movement is aiming to address (Ibid.). Thus, the underlying assumption of this theorization is that social movements aren’t able to generate policy change on their own. On the contrary, their ability to have an impact on public policy is preconditioned on the presence of elite political allies.

In reference to the assumption I made that IC Change operated within an open political opportunity structure, the political access theory corresponds well to these background conditions. In light of this, I aim to investigate if the arguments made in the political access theory can be used in order to investigate if there’s a relationship between IC Change and the government’s policy proposal.

### 2.2.1 Hypothesis: The Elite Alliance- Mechanism

It is my intention in this thesis to use the social movement theory I have presented as the basis for my hypothesis that there was in fact a relationship between the activism of IC Change and the government's policy proposal on domestic abuse. The theoretical assumptions about the opportunistic setting that an open political opportunity structure and elite alliances provide for a social movement and how these are background conditions that increases the likelihood for a social movement to influence government policy, will serve as the basis for this hypothesis.

More specifically, I will use the political access theory as a basis for conceptualizing a plausible causal mechanism that I aim to test the explanatory power of in the specific case of the IC Change. From this point forward, I will call this mechanism the "elite-alliance mechanism". In accordance with my definition of a causal mechanism, this translation means that political access theory will be used in order to construct a hypothetical "[...] chain of intervening cause-effect relationships that connects x to y (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p.64). This mechanism will be translated and operationalized in the method section and further subjected to an empirical test in the later part of this thesis.

### 3 Research Design

It is my argument that the structure of my research questions implies a qualitative within-case analysis approach. The main reasons behind this is that the scope of this thesis is explanatory in its nature, but I also attribute this choice to the complexity and mutual dynamics inherent to the case itself.

Bearing in mind that my research objective is to investigate if the IC Change campaign, in its capacity of being a social movement, was able to affect the government's policy on domestic violence, a case-study is a suitable choice for answering this question. The reason for this is that an intensive research design allows for in-depth exploration of causal processes through which the independent variable affects the dependent variable. In addition, a qualitative case-study can give insights from the relevant actors involved in the process at a micro-level (2007, p.272). In turn, this in-depth feature of the case study provides the researcher with the tools to discover causal mechanisms on the basis of single observations (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p.273). Also, bearing in mind the mutual interaction between a social movement and politicians that my theoretical framework says have to occur in order for policy change to be achieved (i.e. establishing an elite alliance), this is where a case-study would allow me to look at interpersonal dynamics between these actors at the micro-level (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p.272).

Like Teorell and Svensson argue, an explanatory research objective aims to provide evidence of causation between two variables (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p.27) This assertion has guided me in my methodological choices for this thesis. In this context, it has been argued from a methodological point of view, that process-tracing (PT) is one of the strongest methods within political science that best allow for investigation of the intervening causal mechanisms i.e. the "causal chain" connecting two variables (Beach & Pedersen 2013; Teorell & Svensson 2007, p.247; Esaiasson et al. p. 129). In fact, other empirical studies that have looked further into the political impacts of a specific social movement, have also used process tracing as their main methodological tool (Bidé 2015).

As a consequence of using a PT-method I have to identify the central variables in the process (Beach and Pedersen 2011; 2013). Thus, in my attempt to investigate the presence of a causal relationship, I view the IC Change campaign as the independent variable in its attempt to mobilize the government to take action in order to secure ratification of the Istanbul convention. Second, I regard the legislative proposal by the UK government (i.e. the proposal of a new Domestic Abuse Bill) with the objective to ratify the convention, as the dependent variable and thus as the final outcome of the process I aim to trace.

As a summary of this discussion and as yet another argument for my methodological structure, I highlight the arguments made by Beach and Pedersen in this regard: "*Studying causal mechanisms in qualitative in-depth case studies*

*using PT, enables the researcher to make strong within-case inferences about how outcomes come about, updating the level of confidence we have in the validity of theorized causal mechanisms” (Beach & Pedersen 2011, p.11)*

### 3.1 Method: Theory-Testing Process Tracing

To be more specific, this thesis adopts a theory-testing process tracing (PT) methodology. In terms of methodological literature, I mainly rely on the work of political scientists Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen (2013;2011) in this regard. Theory-testing PT is a deductive method that allows the researcher to test for whether or not there is an actual relationship between X and Y by using existing theorization on causal mechanisms that allegedly connects the two variables. Thus, the purpose of a theory-testing PT case study is to investigate if this theorized causal mechanism is present in the given case that is to be analyzed and if it can serve as the explanation as to how X generated Y (Beach & Pedersen 2013, p.63). In this context, the researcher conceptualizes a hypothetical causal mechanism from previous literature and gathers case-specific empirical evidence that aims to reject or confirm this hypothesis about the mechanism- hence updating the scholarly confidence or the theorized causal mechanism (Ibid.)

To be more specific, a theory-testing PT-methodology is carried out in three main steps. The first task is for the researcher to conceptualize a causal mechanism between X and Y by using existing theorization. In this case, I use the theorized “elite-alliance mechanism” by Giugni as a means of investigating if it can serve as a plausible causal mechanism through which the IC Change campaign might have been able to pressure the UK government to propose a domestic violence policy in order to ratify the Istanbul Convention.

Second, this theoretical causal mechanism will be operationalized and translated in to case specific predictions. Put differently, this means that the causal mechanisms put forward by social movement theory, have to be operationalized and translated in to case specific predictions of “observable manifestations” that allow the researcher to test for whether or not the theorized causal mechanism is actually present in the given case (Beach & Pederson 2013, p.57) Or, like Teorell and Svensson similarly asks: *if the theory is correct, what would we expect from the events, the process?* (2007, p.247,249). This means that the theory that is to be applied in a theory-testing PT have to be able to provide the researcher with concrete observable manifestations in terms of how this theorized mechanism would express itself empirically (Beach & Pedersen 2011). Put differently, if the “elite-alliance mechanism” is a valid theoretical prediction of how a social movement can achieve policy change, what evidence should we look for empirically?

Third and finally, the researcher conducts an empirical test with the main objective to test whether the theorized causal mechanism that connects X to Y is present in the given case or not (Beach & Pedersen 2011, p.10). Practically, the

empirical test is conducted by the researcher gathering empirical evidence of the observable manifestations of the theorized mechanism. On the basis of these evidence, the researcher will draw conclusions about whether or not the theorized causal mechanism was present in the case (Ibid.). Like Beach and Pedersen frame it: [...] *Empirical material is then gathered to see whether the predicted observable manifestations were present or not. If strong evidence is found for these observable manifestations, we can infer that the hypothesized causal mechanism is present in the case [...]* (Ibid.).

In the following sections below, I will present how I translate the elite-alliance mechanism in to case specific observable manifestations along with the material and sources I rely on for gathering empirical evidence.

### 3.1.1 Operationalization

In this section I operationalize and translate the elite-alliance mechanism in to case specific observable manifestations according to the methodological prescriptions of Beach and Pedersen. The elite-alliance mechanism will serve as the hypothetical theorized causal mechanism I aim to trace the presence of in this case-study. Thus, according to theory, this is a plausible mechanism through which my hypothesis stipulates that the IC Change (X) would have achieved the outcome- i.e. the UK government's proposal on legislative measures on domestic violence (Y).

As the second step in this theory-testing PT-method, I now have to translate this elite-alliance mechanism into case specific predictions of how it would, according to theory, manifest in my specific case. Hence, I have chosen to translate the mechanism in to observable implications accordingly:

- IC Change (X)→Elite Alliances→Accessing Political Process→Policy Change by UK Government (Y)

Thus, if the elite-alliance mechanism is a valid theoretical prediction of how the IC Change might have been able generate government action, these are the case-specific empirical evidence I would anticipate. Methodologically, this is also how I use the theory of Giugni to construct a hypothetical “causal link” connecting the independent and dependent variable that are present in a causal mechanism (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p.64; Beach & Pedersen 2011, p.7). Like Beach and Pedersen argue, these links are the actions and activities that the actors in the theorized mechanism engage in that “transmits causal forces from X to Y”. (2013, s.9)

According to Giugni's theory, a case specific prediction would be that the IC Change allied with representatives from the political elite as a means to achieve their goal. In addition, I would also expect that the politicians (i.e, MP's from



SNP) joining forces with the IC Change did so because they had aligned interest and because it served their political agenda.

Second, the alliance between the movement and representatives from the political elite, would allow the IC Change to get access to the political process by letting these politicians work for the advancement of the movement's goal within this process. As a result of this inside advocacy, policy action by the government can be expected to occur.

Taken together, my intention is that this operationalization of the elite-alliance mechanism will reflect Giugni's suggestion of the two-stage process through which a social movement can achieve influence public policy. In this regard, Giugni's theoretical mechanism suggests that movement mobilization in combination with political alliances, creates a joint-effect conducive to produce policy influence. By using a theory-testing PT-method in this case, I aim to test for whether I can find case-specific evidence of this joint-effect of movement mobilization combined with political alliances in my study of the IC Change. Hence, I also investigate the ways in which the mechanism can manifest empirically in a single observation of a social movement.

In addition, this translation of the theorized mechanism into case-specific observable manifestations, will serve as important operational indicators that I rely on when I investigate if the theorized elite-alliance mechanism was present in the case and thus can serve as the causal link connecting X to Y. As an implication, I hope that the way I have translated the elite-alliance mechanism in to observable manifestations will have a positive effect on the overall validity of this case study (Esaiasson et al. 2007, p.63).

Proceeding from this stage, I will present the empirical material I rely on in order to see whether these predicted observable manifestations of the elite-alliance mechanism was present in the case.

### 3.1.2 Sources and Material

In order to trace the presence of the hypothesized and theorized elite-alliance mechanism, I collected empirical evidence by analyzing different kinds of material and sources. I have partly based my process tracing analysis on written material such as press releases, news articles covering the activities of the IC Change campaign, official policy briefing reports from the government and transcripts from parliamentary debates. I have used these secondary sources as a means of getting an overall view of the process that led the UK government to take legislative measures on violence against women in order to be compliant with the Istanbul convention. As a result of analyzing these secondary sources, I have gained a better overall view of the actors and the events that were central to the process. As a complement to these sources, I have also conducted in-depth interviews with actors who were present in the process and thus were able to give me more information about these events.

### 3.1.3 Interviews

Proceeding from this stage, I managed to get in contact with three actors who were present throughout the process and I conducted Skype interviews with them in order to get their perception on the process and the potential motives for their actions (Teorell & Svensson 2007, p.248, 250). The individuals that I interviewed were Rachel Nye, (co-director of the IC Change campaign), Ellie Munro (Women's rights activist) and Eilidh Whiteford (MP for the SNP).

However, I originally planned to conduct five interviews in total with actors who were present. Three of these were actors who were a part of the campaign and the SNP but the other two actors were not part of the campaign. One was an academic and the other a MP from the Labor party. The reason for planning interviews with these two actors was that they would have been able to provide information about the process from a more objective point of view (since they were not members of the campaign). Unfortunately, due to last minute cancellations, only three of these interviews were actually carried out and these were actors who were all a part of the IC Change Campaign. This implies that the data I have collected from these interviews aren't able to give me the same view of the process in the way that five interviews with actors with different positions in the process would have provided. To this extent, I acknowledge that the empirical material I use in this study is somewhat limited. However, the statements made by these three actors in the interviews, produced valuable primary material in terms of giving me clues about whether the elite-alliance mechanism was present in this case or not. Methodologically, I used semi-structured interviews whereby I formulated and categorized the interview questions on the basis of different themes that I derived from my theory. I prepared these theoretical themes in advance and used them as guide throughout these individual interviews (Denscombe 2016, p.236).

In order to make these interviews serve as empirical evidence that would confirm or reject my hypothesis about the elite alliance mechanism, I have specifically asked questions to these actors about the importance of collaborating and being allies with MP's from the SNP, in what ways they believed that working with these MP's was conducive to their policy objective, and to what extent they believed that being allies and working with these politicians allowed them to get access to the political process and thereby mobilize the government to take actions. In sum, these were also the three main themes that structure my interviews.

## 4 Empirical Analysis & Results

In this section I present the empirical findings I have gathered through my interviews and my analysis of the written material I have mentioned above. On the basis of these findings, I also further elaborate a discussion regarding the extent to which these empirical findings can confirm my theoretical predictions about the presence of the elite-alliance mechanism in this specific case.

As a result of my process tracing, two MP's from the SNP appeared as central allies to the IC Change: Gavin Newlands and Eilidh Whiteford. Because of these findings, I will first present the ways I found that Gavin Newlands was an important ally to the IC Change campaign and the ways in which he worked to advance the movements cause inside the UK parliament in the attempt to make the government propose legislation on domestic violence. Second, I will present the similar ways I found that Eilidh Whiteford was helpful to advance the movement's cause.

Like Beach and Pedersen argue, the analysis of empirical evidence in a theory-testing PT-method has to proceed stepwise "testing whether evidence indicates that each part of the mechanism was present or not" (2011, p.11). Because of this, after presenting Newland's and Whiteford's political contributions separately, I will summarize each section by discussing to what extent their collaboration with the IC Change campaign, corresponds to the theoretical predictions of the elite-alliance mechanism and thus if my empirical findings confirm my hypothesis.

### 4.1.1 Leveraging the Government to Take Action

One MP that joined the IC Change campaign at an early stage was Gavin Newlands from the SNP (Paisley UK 2016). As a politician, Gavin has worked significantly towards ending male violence against women mainly through his work as an ambassador for the White Ribbon's campaign- a volunteer organization specifically addressing male violence against women (Newlands 2016). Since the beginning of his election, ratification of the Istanbul convention has been an important political objective (Ibid). Together with IC Change, Gavin Newlands therefore actively worked inside the parliament to raise cross-party support in the House of Commons in order to make the government take the legislative action on domestic violence that was necessary in order to ratify Istanbul Convention. This included organizing cross-party events such as roundtable discussions (i.e. a formal meeting taking place in parliament where MP's and civil society actors are invited to discuss the policy issue) and

submitting early day motions to the parliament (EDM's). To clarify, an EDM is a motion submitted by an MP for debate in the House of Commons. The more specific purpose of submitting of an EDM is to "draw attention to a topic or to express an opinion on any issue" (UK Parliament EDM's 2018). In addition to this, it was mentioned in my interviews that Gavin Newlands actively asked questions in parliament to pressure government ministers about their work to combat violence against women (E. Munro, personal communication, 24 April 2018).

The support of the SNP and evidence of Gavin Newland's contribution in this regard, was further confirmed in my interviews with Ellie Munro and Rachel Nye—both women's rights activists and participants of the IC Change campaign:

"Gavin Newlands was one of the first MP's to take us seriously. We had meetings with other politicians as well but he's really a fantastic man committed to violence against women. He told us to come in to parliament and let's have a roundtable discussion and invite those who have to be invited. [...] He was an important ally and parliamentary link for us".

Rachel Nye, co-director of IC Change (Interview 24 April 2018)

In my interview with Ellie Munro, one of the activists working for the IC Change Campaign, she also emphasized the importance of Gavin submitting EDM's in parliament to mobilize support for increased legislation on domestic violence. In this context, she also emphasized the strength of the SNP as a political party and as an important ally to the IC Change:

"Gavin helped us by submitting EDM's and publish them through parliament. [...] An EDM is a very specific tool to get into the minds of MP's and not really directed towards the general public. Primarily, it's about getting the issue on the agenda and in the minds of MP's to try to build parliamentary support. Gavin has been a fantastic ally all the way through. [...] I get the impression that he is the reason why a lot of the political work happened for us".

"And I think particularly, it really to me emphasized the strength of the SNP-block as quite an unusual group of MP's [...] they are very professional and very united. If one person is interested in one issue they will all be interested and get on board".

Ellie Munro, activist IC Change (Interview 19 April 2018)

Besides asking question in parliamentary sessions and submitting EDM's in favor of IC Change, Gavin Newlands also used his position as an MP to organize a parliamentary lobby event together with the campaign organizers. This event had cross-party support in the sense that MP's from the Labor party and the Liberals co-hosted and joined this lobby event (R.Nye, personal communication, 24 April, 2018). The main purpose of this event was to raise awareness among MP's in the House of Lords regarding about the need for legislative measures on

domestic violence in order to comply with the Istanbul convention. This was expressed in my interviews accordingly:

“The lobby event at Westminster was powerful. We decided to make it a briefing event where MP’s could come in and receive a briefing pack with information about the Istanbul convention in order for them to get to grips with the issue as much as possible. And we also invited domestic abuse survivors to attend the event and these women gave their view to MP’s on how the current system is failing them and why there’s a need for increased legislation on gender-based violence”

Rachel Nye, co-director IC Change

In reference to the case specific observable manifestations of the elite-alliance mechanism, it is my argument that these findings correspond to the first two links of the elite-access mechanism. First, an elite alliance was formed between the IC Change and Gavin Newlands. Arguably, the basis for forming this alliance was that the IC Change regarded him as “an important parliamentary link” that could advance their policy objective inside parliament. However, I have not found empirical evidence that would speak for Gavin Newlands motivation for joining forces with IC Change. However, since an important objective for him as an MP was to work against domestic violence, I consider this to at least be evidence of “aligned interests”.

Second, this alliance meant that the IC Change could be granted access to the political process by having Gavin Newlands as an MP that could work inside parliament to advance their policy objective. In this regard, I interpret Gavin Newlands’s actions such as submitting EDM’s, organizing roundtable discussions, and organizing parliamentary lobby events as a manifestation of how he granted the IC Change access to the political process. According to the activists themselves, these actions were important for raising awareness in parliament and putting legislation on domestic violence on the government’s political agenda.

However, I refrain from drawing any specific conclusion about whether these events organized by Gavin Newlands, was a contributing factor to the legislative measure the government eventually started to make. On the basis of my interviews and the written material I have looked at, I do not find that I have enough information to do so. In this context, it would have been a great contribution if I had managed to also conduct interviews with officials or other actors who worked more closely with the government throughout this process to get a fuller picture of the results of these events.

I will now proceed to present the empirical evidence that speaks for the contribution of Eilidh Whiteford as another MP that joined forces with IC Change.

#### 4.1.2 Institutional Change: The IC Act

My analysis also reveals that a crucial event through which the IC Change campaign could impact the UK government, was through the drafting and passing of the so-called IC Act. Throughout this process, MP Eilidh Whiteford was a central actor who strategically collaborated with the IC Change.

As I have previously mentioned, the IC Act is a piece of legislation that binds the UK government to report to the parliament on the legislative progress on violence against women it is making in order to ratify the Istanbul Convention. In addition, after the passage of the IC Act, the UK government put forward its policy proposal on domestic violence. These measures have been proposed to the UK parliament by the government in an annual policy briefing report. In this report, the government specifically attributes these proposed policy measures as a direct result of the IC Act (UK Policy Briefing Report). Like I have mentioned, these measures include the proposition of a new Domestic Violence and Abuse Act aiming to increase the prosecutions of domestic violence offenders (Law Absolute 2017).

During her time as an MP at Westminster, Eilidh Whiteford was determined to put forward legislation that would mobilize action on governmental policy on violence against women (E.Whiteford, personal communication, April 20, 2018) Subsequently, she received the opportunity to do so by being able submit a Private Member's Bill, i.e. a bill that can be proposed to parliament by MP's who are not ministers or part of the executive branch (Ibid). The Private Member's Bill managed to get cross-party support and passed all the way through the parliamentary stages and thus received legal status on the 27:th of April 2017 (Law Absolute 2017) After this, the bill is commonly known as "IC Act" since it specifically addresses the UK government's promise of creating legislation on domestic violence to ratify the Istanbul Convention.

Throughout this process, my analysis of the interview material finds that collaboration between Eilidh Whiteford and the IC Change campaign, was a crucial factor to generate this kind of institutional change. In my Interview with Eilidh Whiteford she described the process accordingly:

“ I wanted to bring forward legislation to pressure the government on the Istanbul Convention. So, I got in touch with people who were already campaigning in civil society on this issue. I then met with the co-directors of the IC Change and it was very clear from the beginning that these were people I wanted to work with”.

“I believe my background in the NGO-sector was relevant in that I had very clear sense of the role that civil-society actors can play in terms of pressuring the government and creating political space for cross-party action that was extremely important in this case. It was clear for me right from the outset that if I was to get through this narrow mesh and get the bill to pass, we would have to ensure that there was enough pressure coming from civil society that the government would feel the pressure to do this. So, that was why I was particularly keen to work with civil society actors and the IC Change women had already done a lot of the important groundwork”.

Eilidh Whiteford, MP SNP (Interview 20 April 2018)

From the IC Change perspective, the importance of collaborating with Eilidh on getting the IC Act through parliament, was also confirmed in my interview with one of the main campaign activists:

“I think she saw the IC Change campaign as an opportunity to gain more support for her bill and we were already campaigning on this issue. So, I think we complemented each other’s work very well in this regard”.

Rachel Nye, co-director IC Change

Another interesting statement made during this interview was that the alliance with Eilidh resulted in that the IC Change Campaign was included in the drafting process of the Private Members Bill taking place inside parliament:

“[...] We had meetings in parliament together with Eilidh to discuss how we could create a bill that would be likely to get through because, you have to get government support if you want any chance for this to go through. So, this was a group drafting process between us, Eilidh and academic experts were there as well”.

Rachel Nye, co-director IC Change

Furthermore, after analyzing the results of these interviews, it became clear that Eilidh and the IC Change campaign had two distinct roles in terms of ensuring support for the bill. As a politician, Eilidh actively used her political network and worked inside the parliament to ensure cross-party support. To complement Eilidh’s inside work, the IC Change campaign used their large organizational network to pressure and MP’s and thereby mobilize support for the bill:

“I obviously did a lot of the political work around the Private Member’s Bill. I talked to my colleagues in the Labor party and found allies in the Tory party. When my bill went forward I made sure that I had sponsorship and cross-party support. I went around the whole house, I went around to all the parties represented, not just all the big parties. [...] I worked very closely with my colleagues on the Labor benches but there were also people from the Tory side who were very helpful and active on this issue”

Eilidh Whiteford, MP SNP

“ I believe working with our partners and other women’s rights activist groups was really crucial. One thing we did really well was to bring together a network of organizations working with these issues such as Women’s Aid Federations across the UK. Bringing all these organizations together was key because it opened up all of their supporters to our messages and our actions.

In this way, we were able to become the large movement we had to be in order to get the 100 MP's that had to be attending the voting session to get the Private Member's Bill through parliament. Without civil society pressure, I don't think it would have gone into the consciousness of those MP's who showed up for the voting session"

Ellie Munro, activist IC Change

To clarify these comments made during the interviews, IC Change and their partner organizations actively engaged in mobilizing their supporters to put pressure on their MP's to attend the voting sessions of the Private Member's Bill. They did this by urging their supporters to use Twitter to tweet and write their MP's and ask these MP's to attend the voting sessions (E. Munro, personal communication, April 20, 2018). Hence, in accordance with my interview with Ellie Munro, this is where the large organizational network of the IC Change played a crucial role in terms of pressuring MP's to attend the voting sessions to get the bill to pass through the parliamentary stages (Ibid.). In light of this, the strategic use of the IC Change's media channels was an important part of leveraging MP's to attend the sessions since Twitter was used as a tool through which the supporters of the campaign could use to put pressure on their MP's.

In turn, the bill itself was an important institutional tool that made the UK government take action on domestic violence and put forward a proposal of the Domestic Abuse Bill. The importance of the IC Act in terms of making the government take action, was mentioned several times during my interviews:

"The bill was very much a way of leveraging the government into taking action they had already said it would take. What it has done is create a platform for MP's to hold the government to account. With the bill now having legal status it's possible for MP's to claim parliamentary time to embarrass the government on it. It has been more effective over the last couple of years than any other carrot we have waved in front of the government"

Eilidh Whiteford, MP (SNP)

"With the Private Member's Bill, we pushed the government forward to make them take action on some of the things they've been dragging their feet on. The government has produced an annual progress report and put forward policy changes in the domestic violence area. I don't think we would have seen that kind of action without it"

Elli Munro, activist IC Change

To connect these events to the case specific manifestations I would expect to be present in accordance to my hypothesis of the elite alliance-mechanism, it is my argument that these events correspond to the causal sequences of this mechanism. First, the IC Change established an elite alliance with Eilidh Whiteford in the context of the Private Member's Bill that aimed to pressure the



government to take action on domestic violence. In turn, there were also incentives for Eilidh to join forces with IC Change since she stated that it was necessary to include pressure from civil society and that she specifically wanted to work with IC Change in order to pressure the government. Second, the alliance with Eilidh implied that the IC Change could get inside access to the political process by being able to participate in the drafting process of the Private Member's Bill that eventually became the IC Act. Thus, the Private Member's bill is also an example of how Eilidh as an MP worked inside the political process to advance the objectives of IC Change. Further on, the organizational network of the IC Change that allowed them to mobilize pressure on MP's to attend the voting sessions, combined with Eilidh Whiteford making sure that there was cross-party support in parliament for the bill, can be interpreted as having had a "joint-effect" that in the end was able to get the government take action on domestic violence as a result of the IC Act.

Third and finally, the UK government started to take action on the Istanbul Convention by proposing the Domestic Abuse Bill as a direct result of the IC Act. More specifically, it is stated in the government's official policy report that these actions on the domestic violence area, was a response to their obligation under the IC Act (UK Policy Briefing Report).

To summarize my analysis, the alliances with Gavin Newlands and Eilidh Whiteford were conducive for the IC Change in the sense that it gave them access to the political process inside parliament. According to the activists, this resulted in a raised awareness among MP's about the need for legislative measures and that moved up the issues on the government's agenda. However, I do not make the conclusion that these events had an impact on the government's actions since I lack empirical evidence to connect these events with the final outcome.

In the case of the Private Member's Bill, the collaboration between IC Change and Eilidh resulted in a legal act that requires the government to take more concrete measures on domestic abuse. And as result of this legal act, the government has put forward measures to improve the UK legislation to protect women and girls from violence. Hence, I interpret these events as a case specific evidence of how the elite-alliance mechanism might express itself in a single observation of a social movement and thus as a causal link through which the IC Change managed to mobilize the government to take action. To this extent, I conclude that the findings in my data analysis confirm my hypothesis about the impacts of IC Change had on the policy action taken by the government.

To conclude my analysis, and to further give an example of how the IC Change believed that using the political process and making alliances with politicians was an important mean to pressure the government, I highlight this statement made during one of my interviews:

"I believe in this case and in this context, that specifically targeting parliamentarians and using the democratic process was the best approach to pressure the government definitely [...] We couldn't have done it without Gavin Newlands and Eilidh Whiteford".

Ellie Munro, activist IC Change

## 4.2 Conclusion

In this case study, I have attempted to investigate if the IC Change campaign managed to pressure the UK government in to presenting a policy proposal on domestic violence.

By using a theory-testing PT-method, I conceptualized a plausible causal mechanism, that I named the elite-alliance mechanism from political access theory. By conceptualizing, operationalizing and tracing the presence of this mechanism, it was my intention to test whether the assumptions of political access theory regarding the importance of joining forces with elite allies within political institutions, can be considered as a valid theoretical prediction of how a single social movement can mobilize a passive government to take policy action.

On the basis of my empirical findings, I believe they speak in favor of the political access theory as means of understanding how elite-alliances that connects the movement to the political process, can be a conducive factor for a movement's policy influence. One main evidence of this is the great importance the activists attributed to working with MP's and how this alliance benefited their goal in terms of their policy objective receiving inside advocacy. In this context, the MP's were considered to be "important parliamentary links". To this extent, I conclude that these empirical evidences confirm my hypothesis about the relationship between the IC Change and the government's policy proposal.

Furthermore, one of the main findings of this study is that the IC Change managed to get the UK government to put forward legislative proposals on the domestic violence area mainly as a result of the IC Act. In turn, according to the activists and MP Eilidh Whiteford, the large organizational network of the campaign and the strategic use of Twitter were two important factors that made the IC Act pass through all of the parliamentary stages and receive legal status. Through this large network, they were able to mobilize all of their supporters to put pressure on MP's to attend the voting sessions of the bill. This large network that was channeled through social media, in combination with having an elite ally inside parliament securing cross-party support, can be interpreted as having had joint-effect that ensured that the Private Member's Bill passed through. In turn, this also shows that MP's also have something to gain from working with civil society actors that have a large organizational network that can be used to apply pressure around a certain policy issue that they want to advance inside parliament.

As an implication of the results of this study, future research can be directed towards further analyzing how social movements and politicians can use their combined strengths to apply pressure and affect government policy.

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