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### Politics is Made for Men: An Exploration into why the House of Commons has not reached Gender Equality

Author name: Isabella Perales

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# Isabella Perales

## Politics is Made for Men: An Exploration into why the House of Commons has not reached Gender Equality

*This paper will discuss gender inequality in the House of Commons and will question whether enough is being done to reduce inequality and understand why this remains a problem, despite the efforts political parties have made to achieve gender equality. The primary aim of this research is to understand the causes of gender inequality in the House of Commons and uses a previous research model to understand what is happening in the UK's Political Landscape in 2018. Research carried out in 1995 by Pippa Norris, and Joni Lovenduski examined why there was gender inequality in the 1990s and used a Supply and Demand hypothesis to understand the problem. In addition to Norris and Lovenduski's research model, further research is included in the form of case study research. This looks at the demand side of the problem, and semi structured interviews with five women and five men examine the supply side of the issue. Both aspects of the research look, in equal measure, at men and women and aim to give a balanced understanding of the situation in the House of Commons and the beliefs of people, possibly considering a career in politics in the future. The research indicates there is more of a supply deficit than a demand deficit. This deficit is caused by the media's coverage of current female MPs, the lack of knowledge and understanding people have about politics at a young age, young women's political role models and society's slow progress in recognising the ambitions of modern women are greater than being only mothers and carers.*

Keywords: Politics; Gender; Equality; UK.

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### INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the continued underrepresentation of women in the House of Commons; a review of the literature explores why gender equality is so important, what progress has been made to achieve gender equality and examines the barriers that prevent people becoming MPs. The research was conducted using the Supply and Demand hypothesis designed by Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski to question what issues remain.

The research aims to establish the extent to which supply and demand factors account for the gender imbalance of MPs in the House of Commons.

The following objectives have been designed to fulfil this:

1. Determine to what extent PPCs meet the same criteria to become an MP.
2. Explore the extent to which UK citizens would consider, and are encouraged to, embark on a political career.
3. Identify the factors that discourage UK Citizens from seeking and developing political careers.

In 1907, women were given the right to stand in borough, county council and mayoral elections; this resulted in Constance Markievicz being the first female elected to Parliament in 1918 (Apostolova & Cracknell 2017). In the same year, women over the age of 30 were given the right to vote in General Elections, and ten years later, in 1928, all women gained voting rights becoming equal to men (Williams 2007). In 1965 Barbara Castle became the first female cabinet minister, and in 1979 Margaret Thatcher became the first female Prime Minister (Apostolova & Cracknell 2017). The turning point for gender equality in the Commons came in 1997; the Labour Party achieved a surge of 101 female MPs and increased female representation in the Commons from 13% to 20% (Pughe 2014). However, progress between 1997 and 2015 was very slow; the percentage of women either decreased or only increased by a few percent at each election, however, in the 2015 General Election women MPs increased by 7.4% bringing the total to 29.4% (Audickas et al. 2017). This progress has come about with the help of All-Women Shortlists (AWS), the Approved List (A-List) and a general change of discourse in society. As a consequence, female MPs currently hold 32% of all seats in the Commons (Apostolova & Cracknell 2017). This research indicates there is a severe supply deficit in the political recruitment of women wanting to become MPs. A demand deficit is still apparent but in much smaller measure than problems with supply. The media, societal expectations of women, a lack of knowledge and understanding about politics and a negative reputation of past female role models all discourage women from becoming MPs and has a negative impact on people's perceptions of current female MPs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Challenging the norms of the Commons

"Feminism is the set of beliefs and ideas that belong to the broad social and political movement to achieve greater equality for women" (Fiss 1994, p. 413). This idea lies at the core of the argument for better representation of women in the Commons. Research suggests having gender equality in the Commons will improve political outcomes and change the way the Commons conducts itself day to day (Norris 2001). Norris' research found "the gender of politicians matters most substantively on gender-related issues" (Norris 2001, p. 8); female politicians have shown greater concern for issues relating to women. Therefore, if the Commons is male-dominated, these concerns will take a long time to improve (Norris 2001). In addition, the outdated "public school/boys club" (Norris, 2001, p. 2) atmosphere in the Commons could be changed by including more women. This links with Critical Mass Theory; a method of measuring representation within a group that has four different stages (Lovenduski 2015; Mercedes 2005; Norris 2001):

- Uniform: all men or all women
- Skewed: imbalance of minority of 0-15%

- Tilted: imbalance of 15-40%
- Balanced: between 40-50%.

This model suggests that as the representation of each gender increases, they have a stronger presence and therefore cause effective change. The theory explains that under a uniform or skewed balance the minority group will not make their voices heard and will bend to the majority group's norms and ideals. Only once a tilted balance is reached can the minority group begin to be heard, however, the change they can make is limited (Lovenduski 2015; Norris 2001). Other benefits of gender equality include the impact women have on parties as individual political actors. Skjeie & Teigen (2005) remark that, based on previous female politicians' performance, women can "challenge and change established political priorities within all the major political parties" (2005, p. 191). This important observation leads to the crux of gender inequality within British politics. Dahlerup (1988) and Lovenduski (1995; 2012; 2015) explain that female MPs introduce other women into politics and break down the male orientated environment with new legislation and institutions, to benefit women (Lovenduski 2015). Also, as the number of female politicians grows, public perceptions of women in politics and positions of power will improve. Therefore, women in senior roles will be more widely accepted and have an impact that reaches further than the Commons alone (Dahlerup 1988; Lovenduski 2005).

Crenshaw (1989) developed the idea of intersectionality, which highlights the multiple layers of discrimination people experience. This theory has become widely accepted within feminist theory (Kezar & Lester 2008; Bourne 2016); it highlights that minority groups experience several types of discrimination rather than just one. Examples include racism, class discrimination and discrimination of people with disability (Crenshaw 1989). Within the UK, a significant problem remains within the underrepresentation of minority women; only 4% of MPs in 2017 were females of ethnic minority backgrounds (Audickas & Apostolova 2017). Campaigning to recruit women into politics tends to address women as one collective group, and aims to raise the number, rather than the diversity, of those women elected (Burrell 1994; Evans 2016). However, the number of minority women is increasing (Audickas & Apostolova 2017) and has been helped by selection strategies implemented by Labour's AWS and the Conservatives' A-List (Krook & Nugent 2016). Despite this, Philpot and Walton (2007) believe that white men, the predominant demographic in the Commons, are least likely to support black women hoping to gain a seat.

Research suggests the way women approach politics is different from men (Campbell et al. 2010). Women see a greater importance in prioritising social issues, such as "public spending on education rather than defence, or whether they raise more parliamentary questions about childcare rather than foreign policy" (Norris 2001, p. 2). This is confirmed by Lovenduski (2015), "due to [women's] particular life experiences in the home, workplace and public sphere, women politicians prioritise and express different types of values, attitudes and policy priorities" (Lovenduski 2015, p. 44). Their concern for issues such as health, education and childcare, combined with a "collaborative political style" (Lovenduski 2015, p. 44), provides a new approach which works well when combined with a male approach (Phillips 1995; Perrigo 1996; Lovenduski 2015; Lovenduski 2016). Additionally, female MPs approach their work differently; dedicating more time to constituency matters, compared to male MPs (Norris 2001). Female MPs appeared to have a

better understanding of the demands from their constituency than men; “they pay more attention to constituency service rather than parliamentary debate” (Norris 2001, p. 2). This is an important difference: firstly, looking after a constituency is a central role for an MP and is often overlooked for greater career gains in Westminster (Searing 1985). Secondly, women are more likely to recruit other women than men are, which further promotes gender equality encouraging broader styles of leadership and participation (Dahlerup 1988; Lovenduski 2015).

‘Representation’ has a double meaning in the context of this review. Representative democracy is practised in the UK and is “a system of government in which all eligible citizens vote on representatives to pass laws for them” (Pearcy 2003, p. 1). The second relates to how well-chosen MPs represent the UK’s demographic; being ‘representative’ in this sense, would see an exact 50/50 split of male and female MPs as the UK population is 49.3% male and 50.7% female (Statista 2016). Skjeie & Teigen (2005) make the argument that representative democracy is not functioning correctly if the lower house does not have equal and broad representation (Inglehart et al. 2002). Hernes (1982; 1987 cited by Skjeie & Teigen 2005) also draws on this argument for securing democracy; they highlight three arguments. The justice argument: everyone, including women, has a democratic right to participation (Hernes 1982; 1987), which is an issue in the UK because of the barriers put in place by parties (funding and gender bias) (Norris & Lovenduski 1995). The resource argument: women provide essential contributions (Hernes 1982; 1987; Lovenduski 2015; Norris 2001). Finally, the interest argument: there are conflicting gender-structured political interests (Hernes 1982; 1987). Jonasdottir & Jones (2009) confirm this idea and suggest that the UK has seen women struggle for a formal presence in the political community. All these issues conflict with the necessary parameters of democracy and limit the extent to which everyone can participate in politics (Hernes 1982; 1987; Raevaara 2004).

Connell (2014) argues that sexual politics explains the power balance in politics and wider society; she found that historic excuses of biological or socialised attributes are a barrier to women’s success, rather than the social environment. Sexism and stereotypes of women play a role in how successful women can be (Caul 1999). The societal expectation that women are the primary caregivers or that they should behave in a feminine way has great power and is brought into the work place and everyday life (Connell 2014). As a consequence, this has an impact on peoples’ perceptions of women and the natural biases that individuals have.

#### Gender Equality in Contemporary Politics

More recent political developments in female parliamentary representation include positive discrimination (Williams & Paun 2011). The Labour party introduced AWS, which resulted in the biggest influx of female MPs the UK has ever seen; a 7% increase in the 1997 General Election (Pughe 2014). In addition, the Conservative party introduced an A-List which is less discriminatory but encourages the party selectors to include women and other minority groups (McIlveen 2009). The spike in female representation occurred despite the resistance from some members of the Labour party (Russell 2000), however, once Labour were elected they made it law that positive discrimination of this type was necessary to reach gender equality (Norris 2001).

Progress since the 1997 election has slowed significantly; seeing a 3% increase in female representation between 1997 and 2010 (Pughe 2014). However, female representation continues to rise gradually and currently stands at 32% of all MPs in the Commons (Apostolova & Cracknell 2017). This lack of progress may have happened because of where the parties choose to place their female candidates, putting them in unwinnable seats rather than safe seats (Norris 2001), which then makes positive discrimination redundant.

Other tactics the parties introduced included primary meetings and postal primaries (Williams & Paun 2011). The primary meetings were attended by constituency members, where they were given the opportunity to vote for candidates they believed would be best at the job, postal primaries act in a similar way, but are done at home (Williams & Paun 2011). These selection processes were put in place to introduce a new style of candidate selection that made the electorate more involved from an earlier stage, as well as injecting wider representation into the Commons (Williams & Paun 2011). These new processes have been tried and tested by the two main parties and have a positive impact; however, they are costly (Williams & Paun 2011).

The current culture within the Commons, and in British politics in general, is perceived to be predominately masculine, “the white, male body is taken to be the somatic norm within positions of leadership and the imagination of authority” (Puwar 2004, p. 67). Lovenduski identifies the “declamatory, adversarial style of Westminster debate” (2005, p. 54) and highlights that the accepted code of conduct is one of “rhetoric, speechifying, posturing and arcane practice” (Lovenduski 2005, p. 54). Therefore, women are required to decide on their style and approach to politics; they either change their style to fit a more masculine approach and lose the consensus-seeking, and cooperative manner women bring (Bird 2005; Lovenduski 2005). Alternatively, women can maintain a more feminine style but run the risk of being silenced by more aggressive fellow MPs (Lovenduski 2005) or be dominated by the norm, which is not conducive to women (Childs 2004).

#### Politics is for Men

Other factors reinforce the idea that women are less suited to being politicians than men. For example, the media are in an extremely powerful position; as the main source of information for the electorate, their rhetoric surrounding female MPs leads public opinion, creating a distorted reality (O'Neill et al. 2016). News coverage is biased against women MPs and displays them as less capable than their male counterparts (O'Neill et al. 2016; Ross & Carter 2011; Women in Journalism 2012). Further evidence was seen during the Blair era when the new Labour women were branded the ‘Blair Babes’ (O'Neill et al. 2016) and were continually looked at through a ‘male gaze’ (Mulvey 1975). In addition, recent events in the UK highlight the ongoing issue of harassment of women in the workplace (Jones et al. 2009). Men in more senior positions make it harder for women to speak up for themselves, and as previously established, the Commons is very much a male-dominated environment that frames women as the ‘other’ rather than a political norm (Van Zoonen 2006; O'Neill et al. 2016). The consequence of this stigma is women considering a career in politics are more hesitant and if they do enter the field, are more likely to resign prematurely (O'Neill et al. 2016).

The Supply and Demand model, introduced by Randall (1982), “provides an analytical framework [to] understand factors influencing the selection process” (Norris & Lovenduski 1995, p. 14) and is used to analyse recruitment of women in politics. The demand-side of this model predicts “selectors choose candidates depending upon their perceptions of the applicants’ abilities, qualifications and experience” (Norris & Lovenduski 1995, p. 14). However, their perceptions of particular groups have a positive or negative impact on who they select; known as direct discrimination (Norris & Lovenduski 1995). In addition, candidates are subject to imputed discrimination; selectors tend to personally favour a particular category of candidate (Norris & Lovenduski 1995), also known as implicit bias. Therefore, this side of the model suggests that the social bias in Westminster reflects the direct and imputed discrimination of party selectors. The supply-side suggests “the outcome reflects the supply of applicants wishing to pursue a political career” (Norris & Lovenduski 1995, p. 15). Restraints to applicants include limited resources, such as time, money and experience and motivational factors, such as drive, ambition and interest (Norris & Lovenduski 1995). Most citizens are legally eligible to stand in an election; however, they may not due to the risks, constraints and demands that are posed by working in the Commons. The study highlights problems with the supply and demand of candidates in the 1990s and states that if progress remains the same, equality will not be reached until the middle of the 21st century (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). This research suggests there is an equal balance of both supply and demand problems which need improvement before equality is reached.

Before standing as a party candidate, there is a lengthy process that both the party and individual have to go through. Recruitment procedure is at the discretion of each party and rarely has any outside influence (Norris & Lovenduski 1995; Parliament A 2018).

The Conservative party selection process is managed by two parts of their party (see table 1).

Table 1 - Conservative Application Process (Conservatives 2018).			
1) Conservative Central Office: Application Interview Sandhurst      Section      Board Approved List			2) Constituency Association: Application to Constituency Constituency      Selection Committee Constituency      Executive Committee

Candidates are removed at each stage until finally the constituency is left with one individual, who will then stand in the election (Norris & Lovenduski 1995). The Labour party’s candidate selection process differs from the Conservative party’s process. The party is designed as a federal organisation, and therefore the party’s candidates are selected from six branches (Childs 2000) (see table 2).

Table 2 - Labour Application Process (Labour A 2018; Labour B 2018)
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<p>Selected from one of the following branches:          Union Branches, Ward Branches, Young Socialists Branches, Workplace Branches, Coop Branches, The Women's Section          Constituency Executive Committee          Electoral College          National Executive Committee</p>
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Williams & Paun (2011) discuss the limitations of assessment procedures proposed candidates have to undertake. The cost to candidates is extremely expensive, so those with less money or of a lower social background are less likely to pursue a career in Westminster politics.

To summarise, this chapter examines why the Commons needs gender equality, the steps political parties have taken to promote gender equality and what has, historically, stood in the way of women becoming politicians. This review has highlighted several issues within British politics but most notably, Norris and Lovenduski's research on the supply and demand of candidates has raised questions concerning barriers for women going into politics. The conceptual framework has been built around gender inequality within the Commons and the research that Norris and Lovenduski have already conducted (see figure 1). Therefore, the research will examine the following: whether the parties' demand for women is still an issue, using the 2015 election as a starting point. Following this, the possibility of a supply deficit will be examined by talking to members of the electorate.

## METHODOLOGY

### Aim

The aim of this research is to establish the extent to which supply and demand factors account for the gender imbalance of MPs in the House of Commons.

### Objectives

This research seeks to understand why there is still a gender imbalance in today's political climate, to fulfil this, it is necessary to address the following:

1. Determine to what extent PPCs meet the same criteria in order to become an MP.
2. Explore the extent to which UK citizens would consider, and are encouraged to, embark on a political career.
3. Identify the factors that discourage UK Citizens from seeking and developing political careers.

### Research Design

The research uses a mixed method approach, in the form of qualitative data collection; the specific methods are case study research and in-depth, semi structured interviews (Saunders et al. 2009; Walliam 2011). Qualitative research is an effective way to gather data, about and from individuals, that adds the detail or



depth of information that quantitative data struggles to achieve (Atieno 2009). This combination of methods was chosen to provide a broad range of data which complement each other and answer different questions (Holliday 2002). The case study research has been designed to question whether there is still a demand issue, by examining MPs elected in the 2015 election and the indepth interviews seek to understand if there is a supply issue, by interviewing UK citizens that are allowed to stand as MPs.

#### Case Study Research

Case study research was selected as the best method to gather information about multiple constituencies and compare them using the same framework (Yin 2003). The case studies were sampled from all 127 constituencies with a new MP in the 2015 General Election. Following this, the sampled constituencies were examined against pre-determined criteria which are taken into consideration when PPCs are being selected. These criteria include age, gender, marital status, number of children, education, past work experience, previous relationship with their party, and with their constituency. These criteria were established based on a review of the literature (Gerring 2007).

#### Sample

This study focused on the 2015 General Election for two reasons: firstly, this was the last regular election in the UK; the 2017 General Election was a snap election, which changed the selection process. Therefore, choosing the 2015 General Election gave an up-to-date view, without the bias of a snap election. Secondly, this election saw the biggest increase in female MPs since the 1997 General Election (Pughe 2014; Apostolova & Cracknell 2017). The population of this research includes every new, successful candidate in the 2015 General Election. Following this, the 127 constituencies were split into five groups, Labour marginal seats, Labour safe seats, Conservative marginal seats, Conservative safe seats and seats established in 2010. The constituencies were split this way because the literature suggests female candidates are put in safe or marginal seats to suit their party. Following this, one male and one female were selected from each category and examined against the framework. The sampling process will be a form of probability sampling known as stratified sampling; this method has been chosen to get an equal representation of each stratum. Ten candidates were chosen to equally represent the five categories and both genders. Within the case study, the researcher has used a combination of qualitative data collection and content analysis to reach a cross-case conclusion (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki 2012).

#### Advantages

Case study research has many strengths, but most notably, it allows the researcher to explore multiple cases that can be examined using the same criteria; this is an effective way to compare and contrast the data using the same framework (Yin 2003), just as this study calls for. Secondly, case study research provides the ability to be flexible and follow where the research leads (Curtis et al. 2014), another significant aspect of this study's research design.

#### Limitations

Case study research also has its limitations; the information found can be limited by the researcher, as they are the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam 2009). The perspective of the researcher can mean that some subjects may not be

given the importance required. In addition, case study research can lack the rigour of other forms of research (Yin 1984). However, this research has been guided by the literature and aims to cover as many areas as is possible. Finally, Yin (1984) recognises that case study research can be limited by having a small number of subjects to examine. However, this research has used a fair and representative sample that includes both genders of the five groups highlighted. Therefore, the researcher feels that 10 case studies are an adequate representation.

#### Analysis

Each case was separately examined and a short report made for each, following this, the individual reports were collated to form one cross-case report by drawing cross-case conclusions (Yin 2003). Therefore, finding an answer to the question initially posed; whether there is an issue with the demand of female applicants in the UK political system.

#### In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to determine whether there is a supply issue, semi-structured interviews were devised to question how compelled UK citizens are to enter a career in the political field. Initially, the research design had been to solely examine the case studies and compare the candidates sampled; however, the parties did not provide all the required information upon several requests. As a consequence, this research has been designed to explore people's political ambitions and obtain the answer to whether there is a supply issue.

A pilot interview was conducted with participant 1. This interview was successful; however, the objectives were not addressed well enough, some questions were not relevant to the overall aim and were removed. A second pilot study took place and after this interview the order of the questions was amended as the researcher felt the order did not allow the discussion to flow, following this, the interviews remained the same. The interviews were recorded on an audio device to be referred back to at a later date (Brennan 2013), and transcriptions were made.

#### Sample

The sampling of the semi-structured interviews in this study is based on a purposeful convenience sample, which is a type of non-probability sampling (Bryman 2015). The participants of this study have been selected due to constraints of time, location and the availability of respondents, however, they are of varied backgrounds and offer a wide view of the UK electorate.

The criteria for participants of this research is men and women, aged 18 and over, who are registered UK voters. Both genders were questioned in order to understand if men and women have similar ambitions and to understand what motivated or demotivates the participants. The age of the participant is set at 18 and over for two reasons; firstly, ethics guidelines dictate that interviewing people under the age of 18 is unethical (Brinkmann 2014). Secondly, the voting age is 18, and the study aims to talk to people who have had some form of political engagement, like voting. All participants were given a participant information sheet for them to understand the aim of the research.

#### Advantages

Semi-structured interviews have many advantages. Firstly, face-to-face interviews allow the interviewer and interviewee to build a rapport which leads to more open and free responses (Daymon and Holloway 2002). In addition, face-to-face interviews do not have a time delay which leads to honest and instant answers from the participants (Opdenakker 2006). Interviews of this nature are the best kind to enable the interviewer to read social cues such as intonation, voice and body language, which are all important in analysing what the participant is saying (Opdenakker 2006). The structure of these interviews allows for a free-flowing discussion that can be instigated by the researcher and the participants alike, which can enhance the findings (Saunders 2009). Finally, recording interviews, with participant permission, gives the researcher the opportunity to go back and listen to the responses and pick up on new information (Opdenakker 2006).

#### Limitations

Although semi-structured interviews have many advantages, there are some limitations that the researcher needs to consider. The interviewer must consider whether their body language and tone are leading participants into specific responses (Opdenakker 2006) therefore, whether other researchers would glean the same information should be considered (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008). In addition, the researcher can become complacent with note-taking, as they rely entirely on the recording, however, these recordings can fail in various ways (Heritage 1984). Therefore, the researcher will use both note-taking and audio recording to collect the data (Opdenakker 2006). Finally, as with most qualitative research, the researcher's own bias is a possible concern (Saunders et al. 2009).

#### Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) system of thematic analysis the interviews were analysed through the following process: understanding the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally writing up the findings. The process of understanding what participants had said and grouping their responses culminated in four main themes with multiple sub-themes.

#### Validity and Reliability

Thorough reliability and validity are essential aspects of producing successful research. Validity is defined as "the extent to which data collection methods accurately measure what they intend to measure" (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 603). Further to this, reliability is "the extent to which data collation techniques will yield consistent findings" (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 600). Both of these aspects have been taken into consideration by making sure sampling for both research methods are as fair, equal and representative of the whole population, as possible. Using interviews as a research technique can often be considered as unreliable (Saunders et al. 2009), this is because they can be spontaneous and subjective to both the interviewee and the researcher, however, a participants' information sheet has been produced to try to combat this.

#### Ethical Considerations

This research has ethical considerations that have been considered before starting the data collection process. Firstly, participants in the interviews need to feel comfortable sharing their views and ideas with the researcher (Saunders et al.

2009). This issue has been combated as the participants were made aware their views and opinions will remain anonymous (Saunders et al. 2009). The study is unlikely to generate views which are extreme or radical; however, the participants will stay anonymous, with the goal that this will allow the participants to be more open and honest. A question about sexual harassment stories in the media is included; however, the participants will be warned of this beforehand, and if they feel uncomfortable discussing this topic, the question will be omitted from their interview. The case study research does not interact with people directly; however, the case studies are looking directly at individuals' profiles; including their age, work experience, and past relationship with their party to name a few. This can cause ethical concerns in the form of identifying individuals and revealing specific information about them (Tripathy 2013). All the data gathered is publicly accessible, however, to resolve this concern the individuals within the case studies will remain anonymous and be referred to as candidate 1, candidate 2, etc.

### Summary

This chapter has outlined the aims and objectives and discussed the possible advantages and limitations of the chosen research methods. Further to this, the validity, reliability and ethical concerns for this research have been outlined and considered and are believed to be adequate for the standards required.

## FINDINGS

### Research Objective 1

Determine to what extent PPCs meet the same criteria in order to become an MP.

#### Similarities

The findings from the case study research demonstrate little difference between male and female candidates.

All candidates were aged between 28 and 58; the men between 33-52 and the women 28-58. Therefore, women appear to be hired across a wider age range than men.

The sample was split equally between both genders, however, by analysing the whole population, the following was seen (table 3).

Table 3 – Population of Candidates

Type	Female	Male
<b>Conservative Marginal Seat</b>	13	27
<b>Conservative Safe Seat</b>	10	15
<b>Labour Marginal Seat</b>	12	9
<b>Labour Safe Seat</b>	17	9

The data demonstrates the Conservatives had a deficit of women; however, Labour had an overwhelming majority of females in safe seats. As the literature suggests, Labour is more equally balanced, and these results indicate they are making efforts to place women in safe seats, giving them their best chance to be elected. Labour is more accepting of positive discrimination than the Conservatives (Williams & Paun 2011), and these efforts are indicated by the data. Also, Norris (2001) comments on this issue and suggests this problem exists.

The marital status of candidates remained consistent, 9 of the 10 candidates were married; therefore, the marital status of individual genders appears not to be an issue.

Each sampled candidate, bar one female, has at least 1 child; collectively the men have 10 children, and the women have 6 with one candidate expecting. This demonstrates candidates are selected despite having children.

3 of the MPs have not made their early education public, however, the 7 who did, attended the following types of schools (see table 4).

Table 4 - Type of School

Type of School	Conservative Men	Conservative Women	Labour Men	Labour Women
<b>Private</b>	2	1		
<b>Grammar</b>			1	2
<b>Comprehensive</b>				2

These findings demonstrate a divide by party rather than gender. The Conservatives favour privately educated candidates whereas Labour appears open to candidates from other educational backgrounds.

All the sampled candidates embarked on undergraduate degrees, raising questions about the levels of education parties expect MPs to have, however, this is the case for both genders. In addition, 7 of the 10 candidates continued their education and studied postgraduate courses or similar (see table 5).

Table 5 – Education

<b>Education</b>	<b>Conservative Men</b>	<b>Conservative Women</b>	<b>Labour Men</b>	<b>Labour Women</b>
<b>Undergraduate</b>	1			2
<b>Postgraduate in Law</b>	2	1	1	
<b>Postgraduate in other subject</b>		1	1	1

The results demonstrate an even balance of both genders’ educational background, however, both parties favour candidates with a law background. Finally, candidates had a range of work experience; however, the job roles were as follows (see table 6).

Table 6 - Work Experience

<b>Work Experience</b>	<b>Conservative Men</b>	<b>Conservative Women</b>	<b>Labour Men</b>	<b>Labour Women</b>
<b>Law related</b>	2	1	1	
<b>Business</b>	1	1		2
<b>Social or Media</b>			1	1
<b>Charity</b>	1	2	2	2

These results demonstrate that parties prefer males who have law experience and females who have business experience. Whether this is a supply issue of those specific industries is unknown; however, the parties do not discriminate with relation to gender and past work experience.

Two of the eight categories raised concerns. The data generated from examining the candidates’ previous relationship with the party is as follows (see table 7).

Table 7 - Relationship with the Party

Relationship with the party	Conservative Men	Conservative Women	Labour Men	Labour Women
Previous political role		1	1	3
Local campaigning/ public supporter		1	1	1
No previous relationship	3			

This suggests women required previous experience with the party before becoming MPs. 3 male candidates were elected without any connections to the party which is also discussed by Norris (2001), the “boys club” (Norris, 2001, p. 2) in the Commons is strengthened by this type of recruitment.

Finally, each candidates’ previous relationship with their constituency was examined (see table 8).

Table 8 - Relationship with the Constituency

Relationship with the constituency	Conservative Men	Conservative Women	Labour Men	Labour Women
Grew up in the local area		1	1	2
Lived in the area before selection	1			1
No previous relationship	2	1	1	

Women require a prior link with the constituency to be the party’s candidate, 3 male candidates were elected to constituencies despite being unknown. The parties may believe the electorate require a previous connection with female candidates to be

selected, or, the women have chosen to apply for constituencies closer to their homes to consider their families, which would make it a supply issue. The ideas put forward by Hernes (1982; 1987 cited by Skjeie & Teigen 2005) suggest that there is a considerable deficit within candidate recruitment; however, this research demonstrates that some of Hernes' arguments have become outdated and that in 2018 there is much more justice when parties select their candidates.

The impact

The UK political system has come some way in comparison to when Norris and Lovenduski (1995) conducted their research on supply and demand. These results establish that parties are much less discriminatory about age, gender, levels of education and experience than they used to be. However, the results also suggest there is still a disparity in the following areas; candidates' relationships with the party and their constituency and candidates' level of education. This being said, the results suggest there is not a severe demand issue within British politics and that the problem may lie in other areas.

Research Objective 2

Explore the extent to which UK citizens would consider, and are encouraged to, embark on a political career.

Table 9 - Gender of Participants

	<b>P 1</b>	<b>P 2</b>	<b>P 3</b>	<b>P 4</b>	<b>P 5</b>	<b>P 6</b>	<b>P 7</b>	<b>P 8</b>	<b>P 9</b>	<b>P 10</b>
<b>G e n d e r</b>	F e m a l e	F e m a l e	F e m a l e	M a l e	M a l e	M a l e	M a l e	F e m a l e	M a l e	F e m a l e

In comparing responses of the participant's desire to embark on a political career a supply issue of females became apparent. There was less interest in political careers from women and even less desire to become MPs (see table 10).



Table 10 - Participants Political Ambitions

Male			Female		
Participant	Political Career	MP	Participant	Political Career	MP
4	Yes	Yes	1	Yes	No
5	Yes	No	2	Yes	Maybe
6	Yes	Maybe	3	No	No
7	Yes	Yes	8	Yes	No
9	Yes	Yes	10	Maybe	No

The female candidates expressed a lack of belief in the political system and had concerns about how the media behave towards current politicians. Other concerns included valuing privacy, lying to be successful, the Commons needing change, more equality and a lack of interest. The only male candidate to state that they were not interested in becoming an MP also blamed the judgement of the media.

To compare, most men expressed interest in becoming MPs, they had previous political work experience, and one even stated that they would like to be an “independent Prime Minister” (P4). The men were questioned about what motivates them to pursue a political career, and they often stated they wanted to have an impact on society (P4, 6, 7 & 9). The women made the same observations (P1, 2, 3 & 8) however, as the next objective will discuss, there were other factors that the women felt outweighed the opportunity to make an impact.

The analysis of whether women and men have been equally encouraged to pursue political careers demonstrates a similar pattern to whether they wish to become MPs. The results show that men have had more encouragement than women, from a wider range of sources (see table 11).

Table 11 Participants Encouragement

Male		Female	
Participant	Encouragement	Participant	Encouragement
4	Yes	1	Yes
5	No	2	No
6	Yes	3	No
7	Yes	8	Yes
9	Yes	10	No

An analysis of these results demonstrates that family influences and work experience are the two leading factors in people feeling encouraged to pursue a political career. Three of the males (P4, 7 & 9) all gained motivation from political work experience, whereas only one female (P1) felt the same. In addition, participants’ families had an effect on levels on encouragement, participants 8 and 9 felt encouragement from their families, whereas participants 2, 3 and 10 felt there had been a lack of encouragement from their parents, which was due to their parents’ lack of engagement in politics.

The Impact

This demonstrates there is a supply issue; the women provided a variety of views; however, they all came to the same conclusion that they were not interested in careers as MPs. In comparison, the men were most interested in embarking on the path to become an MP. Most notably, the women considered roles within politics, but at lower levels than an MP. In addition, the men experienced more encouragement to seek a political career and follow their ambitions of becoming an MP.

Research Objective 3

Identify the factors that discourage UK Citizens from seeking and developing political careers.

When examining what discourages UK citizens seeking political careers and becoming MPs, these main themes surfaced:

- The Media
- Education and Knowledge
- Politics and Society
- Female Political Role Models.

The Media

The tone of stories published by the press concerned the female participants. They believe that the media tell “untruthful or exaggerated stories” (P1), and “are too

critical" (P3). Participants expressed the belief that the media "attack female politicians more than male politicians" (P8) and acknowledged there are not "many positive stories in the press about female MPs" (P1). The second concern, shared by men and women, was the media's invasiveness into politicians' personal lives. Participant 3 mentioned the examination of "childcare behaviour" and participants 3 and 4 criticised stories that discuss what female politicians wear. Further to this, participants were concerned about their family and friends dealing with the media (P1, 3 & 9) and participant 9 stated he would reconsider his career in politics if it began to affect his wife. The media appears to be an issue that affects most participants; but much less of a concern for the men, participant 7 gave a positive outlook suggesting "if the media is talking about you, you must be doing something which is good". As O'Neill et al. (2016) highlights, this is a prominent issue and the response, from the female participants especially, indicates the media are responsible for women's reluctance to become MPs. Male politicians do not have as hard a time in the media (O'Neill et al. 2016), and therefore, women are less likely to embark on political careers; thus, indicating that the problem is related to the supply of female applicants.

#### Politics and Society

Another reoccurring topic was that "nothing changes in the House of Commons" (P9). Participants highlighted its history of "male dominance" (P5) and lack of drive for progress (P9), and believe the same issues which apply now with May, existed when Thatcher was in power (P3 & 8). Also, participant 8 believes "women's opinions are still perceived to be less important than a man's". Norris (2001) discusses this issue; the atmosphere in the Commons has an impact on women's perceptions of Westminster politics, and the female participants were uncomfortable with being immersed in such an intimidating environment.

Participants spoke about how women have to conduct themselves to be successful; one believes "masculine traits run our social society" (P6). Moreover, participants expressed concerns about "stick[ing] to the party line" (P1). Although most politicians have this concern, participants noted "the House can appear incredibly intimidating" (P7) and "if you're not an opinionated, woman could feel very vulnerable" (P8). Women have a more "collaborative political style" (Lovenduski 2015, p. 44) than men; however, if the Commons is too intimidating, women are going to be less successful reaching their goals.

Participants believe society expects women to be mothers and carers; participants agreed that women have a lot of external responsibilities, mainly children and childcare (P3 & 10). One participant expressed that her "ambitions don't aim that high" (P10) and another commented that "there are so many women who are okay with their role, they don't try and challenge it themselves" (P8). The Commons needs radical change before women feel comfortable there, society places too much emphasis on women as caregivers and these concerns indicate there is a problem with the supply of female candidates.

#### Knowledge and Education

When questioned about their knowledge of how to apply to be an MP, 8 of the 10 participants did not know the procedure; only participants 7 and 9, both males, knew the process. The level of education surrounding politics, the age people first

engaged and their knowledge of politics often came up during the interviews; most participants were not engaged in politics before they started voting (P1, 2, 3, 6 & 10) or only became aware once they reached A-Level (P 7 & 8). Participants acknowledged that their lack of interest at a young age resulted in them developing other career prospects (P2, 3, 6 & 10). Factors that had a significant impact appear to be schooling or parents' lack of encouragement (P 2, 3, 5, 6 & 10). Unlike other issues raised during the interviews, this concern appeared to be shared more equally by both men and women.

### Female Political Role Models

The participants indicated female political role models were extremely limited and did not show female MPs in a favourable light. Participants were critical of Thatcher, suggesting she gave female MPs a poor reputation (P1 & 4). In contrast, some believed the press over-criticised Thatcher, which deterred women from pursuing political careers (P7, 8 & 9). Diane Abbott was often criticised (P5, 6 & 7); however, Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) describes the battle Abbott faces. Abbott's reputation impacts the likelihood of young black women, and other ethnic minorities, seeking a career as politicians as a result of how Abbott was treated by the media. Finally, it was often suggested that there are not enough high profile female politicians (P1, 2, 3, 4 & 8), that women in politics are not celebrated enough (P8) and that "if there are no female MPs there isn't much to aspire to" (P3). Skjeie and Teigen (2005) suggest that the more women there are in politics, the more likely women will be to follow in their footsteps.

### The Impact

To conclude, the interviews indicate four different problems cause the supply deficit. The participants believe the media's approach to female MPs is too critical and invasive and they would not want to put themselves or family and friends through such an ordeal. Secondly, politics and society have not progressed to accept the new ambitions women have; women are still expected to be the primary caregivers and society is moving too slowly to keep up with changing attitudes. A lack of knowledge about politics and the limited amount of information given in younger life steers women away from becoming MPs and leads them into other jobs within the political field or to other sectors. Finally, female political role models, both past and present, have had an impact on peoples' perceptions of an MPs' role, participants were concerned about the characters they would need to portray but also, the way that other people would see them.

Therefore, the interviews identify several problems with the supply of female candidates entering the Commons and raises questions about how this supply deficit can be solved.

### Summary

In summary, this research demonstrates a far more significant supply deficit, in comparison to a slight demand deficit. The parties efforts to include women and other minority groups has made an impact, especially in the Labour party, and candidates of both genders have similar backgrounds and educations. However, the demand of candidates could be improved by being more inclusive to women who do not have as much connection with the party and by placing them in safe seats, so they have a better chance of getting elected. In comparison, the supply of candidates

is extremely unbalanced; men appear to receive more encouragement and less societal barriers than women.

Expectations of women in society are still stuck in the past, and role models for women are not discussed often enough or in a positive enough light. Most importantly, compared to Norris and Lovenduski's research, people are more concerned about the media and the way female politicians are discussed. They are invasive, overcritical and distract from important political issues by trivialising female MPs and their work by discussing topics that are not important or relevant to their work. The work of Norris and Lovenduski was an essential step in understanding the problems with political recruitment in the UK; however, their model now suggests there is a supply deficit, rather than an equal balance of the two issues.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research aimed to establish the extent to which supply and demand factors account for the gender imbalance of MPs in the House of Commons. The research has found that supply factors have a much greater impact on the gender imbalance in the Commons than demand factors. The research found that when comparing current male and female MPs, factors such as age, gender, education and work experience are equally balanced and the parties appear to have a particular type of candidate in mind, rather than a specific gender. However, the case study research did highlight some difference, mainly in the previous relationships the candidates have with their party and with their constituency. Women are required to have a prior relationship with the party and constituency to be selected, and this indicates that parties still have a lack of trust in female politicians. The research would suggest one of two things: that the parties hold the belief that female candidates will be less successful in areas where people do not know them. Alternatively, women may be standing in seats they are already familiar with; this is a likely possibility because women throughout the study demonstrated a concern for their family and friends, which suggests they would not want to uproot their family and relocate to another part of the country for political gains.

This confirms the House of Commons currently has a supply deficit of female candidates that wish to pursue a career as an MP. Many contributing factors have led to women shying away from a job that is so public, critical and demanding. Factors that contribute to this problem include the lack of education about politics young women receive, which results in them generating different career prospects. In addition, the lack of female political role models has created the image of a male-dominated, intimidating and overwhelming environment that seems unreachable. Further to this, the natural and societal burdens that women are under to reproduce and care for their offspring limits women's ability to participate and still be accepted by the society around them. However, the factor that is most impactful on the deficit of female candidates in Westminster politics is the aggressive, invasive and untruthful way that the media commentate on female politicians. This appeared to be of great concern to the participants and if this barrier was removed could have a significant impact on the supply of some embarking and succeeding on the journey to becoming an MP in the House of Commons.

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