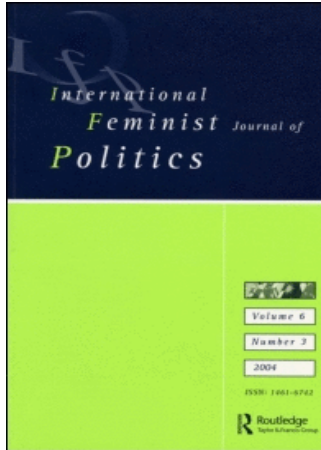


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### Gender Inequality in Politics

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# *Gender Inequality in Politics*

## POLICY FRAMES IN SPAIN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

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### Abstract

This article explores how the issue of 'gender inequality in politics' is framed in Spain and in the European Union (EU), asking to what extent policy discourses on the issue address gender bias in political institutions. Drawing on research carried out within the European project MAGEEQ, it discusses how the problem and solution to gender inequality in politics are framed in the two cases, to what extent policy discourses are gendered, which actors have a voice in the debates, and who are deemed to be the 'problem holders' and target groups of the measures taken in response. The comparison between Spain and the EU, which is based mainly on the analysis of official policy documents, shows that policy frames on gender inequality in politics present a similar pattern in the two cases, and that they address inequality but not always in the most gender-sensitive and consistent ways.

### Keywords

European Union, frame analysis, gender equality policies, 'gender inequality in politics', gender mainstreaming, Spain

### INTRODUCTION

Joni Lovenduski (2005: 48) argues that women's political representation faces its 'most difficult obstacle' in what she describes as 'the deeply embedded culture of masculinity that pervades political institutions'. Lovenduski (2005: 146–7) focuses on the gender bias present in those political institutions that are based on 'unspoken assumptions about a traditional gendered division of labour' and that show hostility when women enter 'male institutional territory'. To what extent do policy discourses on gender inequality target such embedded patriarchal cultures in political institutions? This article attempts

to answer such a question by developing an analysis of policy frames of what will be described as 'gender inequality in politics' in Spain and in the European Union (EU). By opening a window onto a selection of current policy documents in the European context, this article seeks to illuminate the range of interpretations of the issue of gender inequality on the part of policy actors in the two case studies.

Frame analysis enables us to explore how policy discourses frame the issue of gender inequality in politics, and the implicit or explicit representations that political actors offer of the problem of gender inequality and of possible solutions.<sup>1</sup> It seems particularly suited to explore the gender-biased character of political institutions, norms and discourses, because it seeks to make explicit the conceptual prejudices that may unintentionally shape policy discourses. As a result, it can reveal latent inconsistencies and gender bias embedded in the design of public policies.

The definition of the issue under investigation here as 'gender inequality in politics' has been adopted within the context of the MAGEEQ research project,<sup>2</sup> under the rubric of which research for this article has been carried out. The aim is to employ a broad concept that can include a variety of interpretations by different policy actors. The gender-sensitive literature on inequality in politics has focused in particular on the concept of 'political representation', addressing both quantitative representation (meaning the number of women in elected bodies, political parties and decision-making positions), and qualitative representation (referring to the representation of women's interests in policy processes and outcomes) (Pitkin 1967). Although the concept of 'political representation' is dominant in the literature, the idea that women have a common identity as women, and that therefore greater numbers of women representatives will lead to qualitative representation for women, is increasingly contested (Phillips 1995; Young 2000). While Mateo Diaz (2005) argues that women Members of Parliament (MPs) in Sweden show a greater interest in the promotion of social welfare, and Childs (2004) found that 'New Labour' women MPs in the UK claim to represent women's concerns, Tremblay (2000: 341) claims that it is 'feminist consciousness' rather than biological sex that affects the capacity of female politicians to represent women. And Celis (2005) problematizes the notion of women's interests, highlighting the relevance of empirical research that respects the undefined character of women's interests.

Scholars have discussed extensively the existence of structural obstacles to women's political representation, such as institutional constraints, women's lack of resources, restrictions imposed on women by domestic and caring activities, and the codification of politics as a traditionally male domain (Lovenduski and Norris 1995; Lovenduski 2005). Although most of the literature has focused on political representation, some debates have also covered the role of 'velvet triangles' in which institutions co-operate with women's movements, thus strengthening women's political action (Lycklama à Nijeholt *et al.* 1998; Mazur 2002; Woodward 2004). Finally, the incorporation of a

gender perspective into mainstream policy-making, as suggested by the concept of 'gender mainstreaming',<sup>3</sup> has provoked some discussion on the potential to transform policy processes, actors and concepts, challenging existing power hierarchies (Squires 2005; Verloo 2005b; Walby 2005). These are, of course, only a few of the topics debated in the broad literature on gender inequality in politics, mentioned here to set into context the following discussion on policy frames that shows how these issues are articulated in policy practice.

This article analyses the discourse of official documents produced by the main political institutions and for parliamentary debates at the Spanish and European levels, as well as examining, to a lesser extent, texts produced by civil society and the media. It addresses the different representations, both explicit and implicit, that political actors provide of the problems (diagnoses) of gender inequality in politics and of possible solutions (prognoses). It also reflects on how gender inequality in politics is conceived in policy discourses, which actors have a voice in these discourses, who is deemed to be the so-called 'problem-holder' (the group impacted upon by the problem of gender inequality in politics) and thus the target of the actions taken, and who instead represents the norm against which target groups are measured.

My interest in comparing Spain and the EU is due to the increasingly important role of the EU in relation to the issue of gender inequality in politics, a policy area in which 'soft law' measures have been approved that, although not binding given that the EU has no remit or 'competence' in this field, may have practical effects on member states. Spanish similarities with the EU are to be expected, due to the relatively high level of impact of EU gender equality policy on Spain, together with differences that are typical of the specific socio-political context of the case studies (Lombardo 2003, 2004). The similarities and differences detected in the policy frames can provide elements for future research on processes of reciprocal influence between the EU and the member states (known as 'Europeification', see Andersen and Eliassen 1993) and the impact of the EU on national gender equality policies (known as 'Europeanization', see Hoskyns 1996).

I argue in what follows that the issue of gender inequality in politics is similarly framed in Spain and the EU, with small differences that depend on a more procedural approach in the EU and a greater political polarization in Spain. The issue is predominantly framed as one of women's quantitative representation in political institutions, to be solved through a variety of measures. Inconsistencies in the framing of the policy can be found in the tendency of the texts to focus more on solutions and less on a comprehensive diagnosis of the problem. Frames tend to address inequality but not always in the most gender-sensitive ways, as shown, for instance, in the tendency to attribute the problem of gender inequality in politics to women only and not to call upon men to change.

After introducing, in the first part, the issue of gender inequality in politics in the Spanish and EU contexts, this article presents in the second part the

frame analysis methodology that was employed in the research. It moves on in part three to discuss the diagnostic and prognostic frames of gender inequality in politics identified in the two case studies. In the final part, the article reflects on the findings regarding the comparative frame analysis of gender inequality in politics in Spain and the EU.

#### CONTEXTUALIZING GENDER INEQUALITY IN POLITICS: SPAIN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION<sup>4</sup>

The issue of gender inequality in politics was introduced into political debate in Spain and the EU over a decade ago (see Meier *et al.* 2005). In Spain, it became an issue at the end of the 1980s, with debates mainly focusing on quotas.<sup>5</sup> Factors such as women's policy advocacy, the internal decisions of parties and the role of (male) party elites in the Socialist and Leftist parties are crucial in explaining the emergence of provisions for gender parity in electoral lists (Threlfall 2007). In 1988 the Socialist Party (PSOE) discussed and approved a 25 per cent minimum quota of women in party positions and electoral lists. In reaction to this measure, the Leftist Party (IU) established a quota of 35 per cent that contributed to an increase in the number of women elected, although this increase was still far from the target set (Bustelo *et al.* 2004; Bustelo and Lombardo 2007). In 1997, the pressure of Socialist women within the PSOE led to the approval of a 40 per cent share for women in party positions and electoral lists. The Popular Party (PP), in government in 1996, explicitly rejected quotas. None the less, the third and fourth National Plan for Equal Opportunities and a number of regional equality plans began to introduce sections on women and political power, due to a possible 'mutual contagion effect' between parties (Meier 2004).

Both the municipal and regional elections in 1999, and the 2000 general elections, saw a quotas debate within all parties, with Socialist and Leftists supporting quotas and Conservatives insisting on their rejection while slightly increasing the number of women candidates. In 2000, the Socialists presented a bill for reforming the national electoral system and, together with the Leftists, submitted a bill on egalitarian access to electoral positions, an initiative that was also taken up by a mixed group of parliamentarians. All proposals were blocked by the Conservative majority in government at the time. The Government also referred to the Constitutional Court, on the basis of 'unconstitutionality',<sup>6</sup> bills introducing quotas on electoral lists that were approved in June 2002 in the regions of Balears and Castilla-La Mancha, both governed by a Socialist majority. The initiative of the Conservative Cabinet against the two regional governments led in October 2002 to the suspension by the Spanish Constitutional Court of both quota laws (Bustelo *et al.* 2004).<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing (October 2006), the Constitutional Court has not yet established a date for analysing the cases of Balears and Castilla-La Mancha.

The same treatment was meted out to the Andalusian electoral parity law<sup>8</sup> and the Basque equality law<sup>9</sup> (specifically the section on parity), which were taken to the Constitutional Court by the Popular Party in September 2005 and June 2005, respectively. The Basque 'Law for Equality of Women and Men' affects both electoral laws (by establishing the obligation that electoral lists for the Basque Parliament should have a quota of at least 50 per cent women), and government law (making it mandatory that the Cabinet be composed of at least 40 per cent of representatives from each sex). As a result, the Basque Parliament formed after the regional elections of 17 April 2005 was for the first time composed of thirty-eight female and thirty-seven male representatives.

In March 2004, the Socialist Party won the general elections and created the first parity government in Spain by appointing an equal number of female and male Ministers (eight of each sex) and a female Vice-President of Government.<sup>10</sup> The new national Parliament formed after the 2004 elections increased its number of women MPs to 36 per cent in the Congress and 25.1 per cent in the Senate.<sup>11</sup> The Socialist electoral programme included a proposal to reform the 'Organic Law of the General Electoral System' by adding to the existing Article 44 an obligation to achieve parity in candidate lists for elections. This was accomplished in the 'Equality Law between Women and Men', passed 22 March 2007, which obliges political parties in their electoral lists to respect a proportion of no more than 60 per cent and no less than 40 per cent of each sex.<sup>12</sup> However, the battle on quotas is still open as in June 2007 the Popular Party took the Equality Law to the Constitutional Court with the accusation that it limits political parties' freedom to form their candidate lists, and it goes against freedom of ideology and political pluralism.

In the European Union, the issue of 'gender inequality in politics' received attention from the 1990s onwards (Meier and Paantjens 2004). Notwithstanding the lack of an official EU remit in this area, advocates of greater political equality for women appealed to democratic arguments and to the need to comply with the EU objective, established in the Treaty of Rome, of achieving gender equality. Since the third medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities (1991–5), the EU has devoted funds to researching the causes of women's under-representation in politics.<sup>13</sup> This included exploring the role of electoral systems (Leyenaar 1997), gathering comparative data on women in politics (e.g. the Expert Network on 'Women in Decision-Making' and the 'European Database on Women in Decision-Making'), and preparing guidelines on how to create a gender balance in political decision making. In addition, the Commission promoted conferences demanding power sharing between the sexes, such as those held in Athens in 1992, Rome in 1996 and Paris in 1999.

The European Parliament's Committee of Women's Rights has played a leading role in the development of the EU debate on gender inequality in politics, preparing reports and resolutions from as early as 1988, when it presented its first report on the position of women in political decision making. 'Soft' policy measures adopted have included the 1995 Council

Resolution on the balanced participation of men and women, promoted by the Committee on Women's Rights of the European Parliament (EP); the 1996 Council Recommendation inviting both the Member States and the EU institutions to develop an integrated approach for advancing women's political representation; and the EP Resolution of March 2000, followed by another in 2001, proposing quotas as a transitional measure to bring more women into politics. Measures to encourage a more balanced participation of women and men in political institutions also included the 2000 Commission decision on reaching a gender balance within its committees and expert groups, and a report by the EP Committee on Women's Rights on how to ensure a gender balance among candidates in the 2004 European elections.

## FRAME ANALYSIS

Frame analysis is the approach employed in this article to study the issue of gender inequality in politics in Spain and the EU. It is based on the assumption of multiple interpretations in policy making, whether implicit or explicit, and seeks to address such multiplicity by focusing on the different representations that socio-political actors offer of the problem of gender inequality and of the solutions for it. This methodology seems particularly suited to exploring the gender-biased character of political discourses and institutions because it aims to reveal the unintentional conceptual schemas, or 'frames' (Goffman 1974), that shape both understandings of reality and policy discourses, by steering our attention towards dominant aspects of the representation of social reality.

The type of frame analysis employed in this article builds upon theoretical notions developed in social movement theory (Snow *et al.* 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; McAdam *et al.* 1996), public policy (Giddens 1984; Bacchi 1999) and gender theory (Connell 1987; Walby 1990; Verloo and Roggeband 1996), and further elaborated within the MAGEEQ project (Verloo 2005b, 2007). In the latter, a policy frame is defined as an 'organising principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included' (Verloo 2005b: 20). Within the framework of this definition, a policy problem can be represented through various dimensions: a *diagnosis* (analysis of the problem) and a *prognosis* (analysis of the solution); an interpretation of who are the *problem-holders* and *problem-solvers*; an identification of the *causes* of the problem and the *means* to solve it; and a claim about the extent to which *gender* and its intersections with race, class, sexual orientation, ability, ethnic origin, age, religion, ideology, etc., is recognized as part of the problem and of the solution. A further characteristic of the frame analysis developed by MAGEEQ is a focus on which actors have a *voice* in representing problems and solutions, which favours a critical assessment of the ways in which certain actors are excluded from policy making (see Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998).

In the MAGEEQ research, all dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis contained in the selected policy documents were analysed through a list of 'sensitizing questions'<sup>14</sup> and translated into frames. Policy documents on 'gender inequality in politics' selected for the analysis, in the period from 1995 to 2004, include, for Spain, equality plans, laws, electoral and party programmes, press articles and, to a lesser extent, texts of the feminist movement and gender experts. For the EU, documents include Council resolutions and recommendations, decisions, communications and reports of the Commission and the EU Presidency, resolutions and reports of the European Parliament (EP), speeches, press declarations and research or information reports written and published by the European institutions.<sup>15</sup>

By applying frame analysis to the issue of gender inequality in politics, it is possible to identify the different diagnostic and prognostic frames that operate implicitly or explicitly in the official policy texts of Spain and the EU. The analysis informs us not only of the presence of what could be called 'major' and 'minor' frames,<sup>16</sup> but also of the nuances of policy frames and the extent to which these are internally consistent. This enables us further to understand how policies aimed at solving the problem of gender inequality in politics are formulated, and to assess the success or otherwise of the challenge posed by policies on gender inequality in politics to the gender bias embedded in political institutions.<sup>17</sup>

#### POLICY FRAMES ON GENDER INEQUALITY IN POLITICS IN SPAIN AND THE EU<sup>18</sup>

The problem of gender inequality in politics in the selected Spanish and EU policy texts is predominantly framed as one of women's quantitative under-representation in political institutions. The documents emphasize the prognosis of or solution to the problem, with debate tending to focus on ways to increase women's numbers rather than on thorough diagnosis of the nature of the problem of gender inequality in politics. Within this similar quantitative frame, policy discourses in the two cases highlight different aspects of the issue. The EU documents appear particularly concerned with achieving or failing to achieve the targets set for numbers of women in elected and decision-making bodies. The Spanish documents centre on quotas for women in politics, the problem being presented as either a positive or negative assessment of quotas as a way of achieving women's increased representation. The discourse here is polarized between the Socialist Party, which is in favour of quotas, and the Popular Party, which opposes them. Such a polarization is absent at the EU level due to the positive evaluation of quotas that emerges in official documents. In Spain, while the Socialists propose quotas as a means to increase women's numbers, the Popular Party rejects them with a discourse based on individual

responsibility and the denial of structural obstacles to women's equal political representation.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of its limited articulation, the diagnosis of the problem of women's quantitative under-representation in both cases makes some reference to the causes of the problem and to why it is considered a problem in the first place. The texts emphasize at points the lack of institutional responses, with electoral and political systems highlighted among the causes of under-representation. At other points, the texts connect the problem to other structural inequalities and to sources of discrimination mainly located in the labour market. Here the EU presents us with a utilitarian discourse on the waste of human resources that results from having too few women in decision-making positions, underpinned by the idea that women's skills are needed in the labour market. Less often, in either the EU or Spain, is the under-representation of women situated in the larger context of the traditional gendered division of labour. The two main arguments employed in both cases to justify why women's under-representation should be considered a problem centre on democracy and equality. Women's under-representation is presented as a sign of inequality, bad democracy and, in the case of the EU, the illegitimacy of political institutions.

Less widespread than the frame on quantitative representation is that on qualitative representation. Here, the EU and Spanish texts converge on the idea that women's voices are silenced in politics and, as a result, women's issues are left off of the agenda. The recurrent theme is that women's qualities are excluded from politics, though the nature of such qualities is rarely discussed. In both cases, utility discourses are mobilized to justify the potential benefits of women's qualitative representation. The argument here is that unequal representation is undesirable not only for the under-represented but also for society, politics and the labour market. While the EU develops a more 'business-style' discourse on women's under-representation as a waste of women's human resources and skills for the labour market, Spanish texts consider women's representation as beneficial for the progress of society and politics.

In addition to the 'major', or dominant, diagnostic frame of quantitative representation, 'minor', or alternative, less widespread frames can be identified both in the EU and Spain.<sup>20</sup> These 'minor' frames articulate broader questions concerning the problem of gender inequality, focusing on, for example, the existence of male domination and patriarchal structures hindering women's political representation. The diagnosis of the problem, however, is not very developed in either of the two cases. Spanish texts often refer to patriarchy, but in a general and vague manner, while the few references to it in EU texts specifically address gender bias, legal obstacles and attitudes that affect the recruitment, selection and election process of political candidates. The reverse side of women's under-representation is reflected in the frame representing the male domination of political life and decision making as a problem. Though the frame is extremely weak in both cases, it is slightly

more present in Spain. There, the problems represented include men dominating in power positions and subordinating women, a gender-biased politics and the persistence of masculine structures.

The most pervasive framing of solutions to the problem in Spanish and EU policy discourses is related to the need to solve the problem of women's quantitative under-representation in politics through measures such as quotas for women in politics, changes in electoral rules and, in the case of the EU, monitoring progress on women in politics. Debates on the need to change electoral rules centre on the advantages of a proportional system and the relevance of an equal composition of candidate lists. Both the EU-level and Spanish texts promote the responsibility of parties to increase women's numbers. However, the EU privileges soft measures to pressure parties to revise their selection procedures to increase women's numbers, while Spanish texts mix voluntary and awareness raising actions with more binding regulation like quotas and obligatory 'zipper' systems for electoral lists (the latter being the alternating of female and male candidates on a list). The disagreement between the two main political parties in Spain is evident in the polarizing of approaches in favour of (Socialist Party) and against (Popular Party) legally binding regulation on quotas for female candidates.

The role of state and EU institutions in encouraging and supporting women in politics by training and qualifying them is among the most frequently suggested solutions. Although it arguably reveals signs of a patronizing attitude towards women, this frame also has more progressive features, in that the training and information programmes for women candidates contain elements fostering women's autonomy. Initiatives that increase women's empowerment and independence, and raise awareness towards new models of leadership can be found in Spain particularly in the Basque Country. Conversely, no solution is offered to the problem of male domination. The assertion of the need to change male political elites is a very 'minor', or marginal, frame that appears in Spain only in one case of self-criticism on the part of a male Socialist leader concerning the existence of machismo within his own party.

'Minor' frames of the solutions in both cases are concerned with changes in the traditional sexual division of labour, including measures to favour the reconciliation of labour and family, the creation of 'velvet triangles of empowerment' between state feminists and the women's movement, and gender mainstreaming. The latter is associated, in Spain, with the incorporation of a gender perspective in politics and a revision of the gendered effects of policies. In the EU, it is associated with the collection and publication of data, the elaboration of indicators for follow-up and the gathering of gender-specific statistics. The emphasis in the two cases is on non-binding legal measures. These 'minor' frames in general reveal the adoption of a broader approach to the problem of gender inequality in politics, one that seeks to challenge existing gender structures in all areas of social life and to build bridges between the formal and the informal levels of women's political action.

Spanish and EU discourses on gender inequality in politics are similar not only in their framing of the problem and the solution, but also in their gendering of the issue, in terms of the attribution of roles and 'voice' to actors in the policy documents. The issue of gender inequality in politics is gendered in both cases in the sense that the analysed documents explicitly address women and, more implicitly, men. However, it seems as if the concept of quantitative representation mainly focuses on the lack of women at the moment of diagnosis and on the need to increase women's presence as the solution. Diagnosis and prognosis, then, centre on women. Further, women are treated as a homogeneous social category, not intersected by class, race, sexual preference or any other structural inequality.

In both the EU and Spain, women are represented as the 'problem-holders', those who are impacted upon by the issue of gender inequality in politics, while men are treated as the standard of 'normality' that women should attain in order to be equal. It is thus not men's over-representation that is depicted as a problem for which solutions are needed, but rather female under-representation. In general, texts make no reference to who caused this problem. Either nobody appears responsible, or the fault is laid at the door of abstract entities such as traditions or society. An exception in the Spanish documents can be found in the reference of the regional governments of the Basque Country and Castilla-La Mancha to men as subjects who cause the problem of women's under-representation. But when it comes to attributing roles in solutions, in both cases women are the target group of the actions, while men are never called upon to act and never targeted by the proposed measures.

Voices privileged in the texts tend to be those of policy-makers, in particular female party members, which is to be expected in a selection of official policy documents. However, two points are worth making here: first, not only are the voices of feminists or gender experts extremely scarce in official documents, but also the merest reference to them is rarely to be found; and, second, gender experts and feminist activists most frequently express frames that pay a greater attention to the structural causes of gender inequality. Their voices are more present in the frames concerning the proposal to reform electoral systems that hinder women's political representation, the existence of a traditional gender division of labour and the need to change it, and the relevance of creating 'velvet triangles' between femocrats and feminists. With respect to the frame on male domination, however, while feminist actors are more likely to voice a diagnosis focused on male domination of politics, they do not provide a solution to this problem.

## POLICY FRAMES AND GENDER BIAS<sup>21</sup>

The above analysis of the framing of the problem of gender inequality in politics and its solutions in the two case studies enables us to draw out a

number of implications, not only concerning similarities in and differences between Spanish and EU frames, but also regarding the extent to which policy discourses address gender bias in political institutions. The Spanish and EU texts present similarities in the framing and gendering of the issue, in role attribution and with regards to the voices speaking in the texts. Except for a few slight differences of approach, such as a more 'business-style' and procedural discourse in the EU contrasted to a more politically polarized debate in Spain, frames tend to converge. The fact that frames have travelled across the EU and Spanish contexts with no major changes reflects a process of reciprocal influence among the main actors elaborating policy discourses on gender inequality in politics at the national and EU levels: women policy-makers and party members.

The frame analysis of the two case studies reveals among the main inconsistencies an imbalance in all the policy texts whereby most attention is focused on prognosis. Rather than providing a comprehensive diagnosis of the problem of gender inequality in politics, official documents eagerly offer solutions to it. Consequently, these solutions are likely to be partial and to fail to address the problem at stake in all its implications. An example of this imbalance can be seen in the fact that the debate on quotas, which should only be found in that part of the text offering solutions to the problem, infiltrates also the diagnosis of the problem in the selected documents. The poor diagnosis of the problem is also reflected in the framing of women's qualitative representation. Documents tend to presume that the low number of women is responsible for the fact that women's interests are not represented and that policy outcomes are not women-friendly. The underlying assumption is that quantitative representation will by default lead to the qualitative representation of women. This, however, is a contested view in current scholarly debate, due to the risks involved in treating women as subjects sharing a common identity as 'women', which in effect reduces a multiplicity of different subject positions to a shared 'essence' derived from a privileged, hegemonic identity.

The most dominant frame in both cases is the quantitative one: there is a low number of women (the problem) that must be increased through a variety of measures (the solution). On the one hand, the emphasis on increasing the number of women in representative institutions directly challenges male entrenchment in positions of power. On the other hand, however, a focus on numbers not supported by an equally strong discourse promoting a more holistic approach could backfire by de-politicizing the issue, by suggesting that it is a problem simply of achieving target figures and not of transforming gender power relations (Meier *et al.* 2005).<sup>22</sup> In this sense, the EU's focus on target figures avoids more difficult and controversial issues such as the challenging of male hegemony over positions of power in the political sphere. Moreover, the prevalence of the quantitative frame in both cases could narrow the definition of the problem, thus leaving hidden other types

of discourses concerning the structural nature of the problem of 'gender inequality in politics' or the role of women's political networks.

The goal of policies addressing women's political representation tends to shift from gender equality to other goals such as an efficient labour market or a functioning social and political context. While more gender-sensitive arguments in both cases are centred on equality and democracy, utilitarian arguments to legitimize women's political representation also characterize the discourse of the EU on the waste of women's human resources for the labour market, and that of Spain on the socio-political benefits of women's increased representation. No matter what their concern is, these utilitarian frames show a lack of gender sensitivity in their failure to acknowledge women's political under-representation as a problem *per se*.

Although it is dominant in both the EU and Spanish texts, the discourse on increasing the number of women through quotas is articulated differently in the two cases. The discourse is extremely polarized in Spain, with the Socialist and Leftist Parties in favour and the Popular Party against. Debates on quotas have monopolized the Spanish public debate on gender inequality in politics, with the result that discourses adopting a more structural approach to the problem have remained invisible. In the EU, there seems to be a widely accepted discourse on the need to seek solutions to the problem of women's under-representation, which, together with the awareness of the lack of EU legal powers to enforce binding legislation on the member states in this field, prevents the emergence of anti-quotas discourses in official documents.

Similar in the two cases is the gendering of the issue and the attribution of roles, with an emphasis on the representation of women as the main 'problem-holders' and the target group of the actions, and men as the implicit norm group, not required to change and not addressed by the measures proposed. The perception that men are not required to change is also supported by the absence of equivalent frames for male politicians to those encouraging their female counterparts to become more qualified and self-confident. No emphasis is placed on the training of male politicians to overcome their resistance towards treating women as their equals and to become more competent on gender equality issues. A framing of the issue that leaves men untouched is one that does not take into account gender as a socially constructed and interrelational category, in which changes in the conditions of one group greatly depend on and affect the conditions of the other. Moreover, the absence of analysis of how gender intersects with other inequalities shows that, while there may be concern about the under-representation of women in general, the under-representation of groups of women, particularly those that are migrant or working class, is not perceived as a problem. The above-mentioned type of gendering and role attribution seems a particularly good indicator of the implicit biases that affect even policy discourses aimed at tackling the problem of gender inequality in politics.

Voices speaking in the texts are those of policy-makers, mostly women. This could support the argument for increasing the number of women in politics,

otherwise the issue of gender inequality in politics might never be raised (Verloo 2007). The rare presence of and reference to the voices of gender experts and feminists in official texts means that the contribution they could offer to the framing of the problem and solution of gender inequality in politics is *de facto* limited. This seems problematic as the analysis in this article has revealed that the frames that adopt a broader and more structural approach to the problem come precisely from these actors.

Embedded gender biases in politics are addressed in particular by 'minor' frames that investigate the structural causes of gender inequality in politics, acknowledge the persistence of male domination, discuss the creation of networks between femocrats and feminists, and seek to offer solutions to women's discrimination in the labour market, the sexual division of labour or women-unfriendly electoral systems. However, the challenge they pose to gender bias in political institutions is reduced by their infrequent appearance in the texts.

Although they target gender inequality, the most structural frames can also be inconsistent in their correspondence between diagnosis and prognosis, as in the case of the frame on male domination in politics, or not particularly transformative of existing gender power relations, as in the case of gender mainstreaming (Lombardo and Meier 2006). In the first case, while male domination and patriarchy are seen as problems, no appeal is made to men to change. Thus, the diagnosis of the problem of male domination and patriarchy is left with no solution. In the case of the frame on gender mainstreaming, the concept seems to be employed in a rhetorical way in Spanish texts, without any concrete reference to its implementation and its effects on the political context. Mainstreaming is treated as a procedural concept in the EU, concerned more with gathering data on women's progress than with challenging power hierarchies, gender roles and the political agenda. Thus, in neither of the two cases is gender mainstreaming treated as the beginning of a radical transformation of the policy process and of actors, concepts and gendered structures of power, as the literature recommends (Squires 2005; Verloo 2005a; Walby 2005).

Although they are relatively homogeneous, Spanish and European frames present slightly different approaches that attention to the specific EU and national jurisdictions and powers can help to clarify. The lack of an EU-specific remit on the issue of gender inequality in politics can help us understand the EU focus on benchmarking, elaborating guidelines for member states and monitoring progress on women in politics, with the limited enforcement that is imposed by 'soft law' measures. In Spain, the national mandate on the issue has led to the articulation of policy discourses that mix awareness-raising actions with legally binding measures. Further, the government capacity to introduce legally binding measures is essential to understanding the controversial party debate in favour of or against quotas in Spain, a confrontation that is superfluous in the EU arena, where the lack of remit or 'competence' excludes the possibility of enforcing legislation on quotas in the member states.

## CONCLUSIONS

Policy frames on what has been described in this article as 'gender inequality in politics' in Spain and the European Union address inequality but not always in the most gender-sensitive and consistent ways. The attribution of the problem of gender inequality in politics to women only, and the lack of a call for change on the part of men, reveal the limited capacity of policy discourses on gender equality to challenge patriarchal political cultures embedded in existing institutional frameworks. The dominant quantitative framing of the issue targets inequality at one level, that of representation, but shows limitations in its capacity to address broader structural causes of the problem. The imbalance in the texts in terms of the tendency to focus on the solution could be part of the reason for this limited approach, as an overly brief diagnosis may end up focusing on the most visible symptoms of inequality that are reflected in the small numbers of women in political institutions, and influence solutions accordingly.

The pervasiveness of the 'major' quantitative frame obscures the role of more 'minor' frames that tackle some of the structural causes of the problem, such as the traditional gendered division of labour or the existence of patriarchal relations in all domains, and propose political practices based on women's empowerment. However, the potential of 'minor' frames to target gender bias in political cultures and institutions is limited by their low occurrence and their mismatched solutions to the problem of male domination in politics. The infrequent appearance of these frames could be attributed both to the limited inclusion of the voices of feminist activists and gender experts in official policy texts, and to the absence of analyses of intersectionality in the policy discourses. The inclusion of these voices and analyses in the texts could help place more emphasis in the political debate on the role of power mechanisms in the reproduction of gender and other inequalities.

Finally, in the light of the analysis in this article, further theoretical and empirical research appears to be needed to explore what other 'minor' frames are present and how they are articulated in the discourse of both governmental and non-governmental actors. Such studies might generate a complementary set of questions to those asked by the current research on political representation, thus broadening the range of insights on how to address gender bias in the sphere of politics.

## Notes

- 1 On frame analysis, see, for example, Snow *et al.* (1986); Snow and Benford (1988); McAdam *et al.* (1996); Bacchi (2005); Verloo (2005a; 2007).
- 2 The MAGEEQ Project on 'Policy Frames and Implementation Problems: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming' (see MAGEEQ, [www.mageeq.net](http://www.mageeq.net), accessed 5 December 2007)

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- 3 Gender mainstreaming is commonly defined as 'the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making' (Council of Europe 1998: 15).
- 4 This section is based on the MAGEEQ research reports by Bustelo *et al.* (2004) and Meier and Paantjens (2004).
- 5 Designed as temporary measures to achieve a gender balance in political institutions, 'quotas consist of establishing a compositional threshold that can be either defined positively (i.e., the minimum required of minority members) or negatively (i.e., the actual majority cannot be more than a maximum)' (Mateo Diaz 2005: 19).
- 6 According to the Popular Party, the Spanish Constitution grants an exclusive remit or competence to the central state to guarantee equality among citizens in the exercise of rights, public liberties, electoral law and access to public mandates.
- 7 In spite of the fact that the parity law was not in force for the regional elections of 25 May 2003, the Parliament of Castilla-La Mancha that was formed after the elections includes twenty-four female and twenty-three male representatives. This was due to the introduction of parity in candidate lists presented by the Socialist Party.
- 8 Ley 5/2005, de 18 de abril, por la que se modifica la Ley 1/1986, de 2 de enero, Electoral de Andalucía [Law 5/2005, 18 April, that modifies Andalusia Electoral Law 1/1986 of 2 January].
- 9 Ley 4/2005 para la igualdad de mujeres y hombres del País Vasco [Law 4/2005 for the Equality of Women and Men in the Basque Country].
- 10 Parity, however, disappears below the ministerial level, as there are only 15 per cent of women secretaries of state and 23 per cent of women as general directors (Alfageme and Moran 2006).
- 11 Until the end of the 1990s, Spain had one of the lowest numbers of women in representative institutions out of all the EU Member States (from 1977 until the end of the 1980s, women MPs were about 6 per cent in the national parliament). During the 1990s, their number rose to 15 per cent, to reach 28 per cent in 2000 and 36 per cent in 2004, thus reducing the gap between Spain and those EU members with a higher percentage of women in political positions. However, the number of women remains considerably lower in the Senate.
- 12 Ley Orgánica 3/2007, de 22 de marzo, para la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres [Organic Law 3/2007, 22 March, for the effective equality of women and men]. See *Boletín Oficial del Estado 2007* for the full text.

- 13 The percentage of women in Parliament was 16.5 per cent in the first European election in 1979, and it has progressively risen to reach 30 per cent at the 1999 and 2004 elections. See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/election/newep/en/tcwm.htm>, [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/women\\_men\\_stats/out/measure\\_out413\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/out/measure_out413_en.htm) and <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2004/ep-election/sites/en/results1306/women/index.html> (accessed 21 September 2007).
- 14 The 'sensitizing questions' are the methodological tool elaborated by the MAGEEQ project for the analysis of policy texts in order to detect the different aspects of a policy frame. All policy documents were analysed on the basis of the 'sensitizing questions' and the result of the analysis is summarized in a so-called 'super-text', that is a detailed summary of each of the selected texts based on the structure of the 'sensitizing questions'. For the entire set of questions see Verloo and Lombardo (2007).
- 15 For a list (in Spanish) of analysed documents see MAGEEQ España ([www.proyecto\\_mageeq.org](http://www.proyecto_mageeq.org), accessed 5 December 2007).
- 16 The criteria employed in the MAGEEQ project to distinguish the 'major' or most important frames from the 'minor' and more fragmented frames are, first, rate of occurrence (i.e. frequency, calculated on the basis of the researcher's assessment of the appearance of certain concepts across the 'supertexts'), and, second, comprehensiveness (i.e. the extent to which a frame incorporates many aspects of a problem, its complexity, which does not necessarily imply its consistency).
- 17 Although frame analysis can be helpful in mapping policy discourses on 'gender inequality in politics', it is not equally useful for understanding why the existing frames have emerged in the form in which they appear to the researcher. For this aim, other explanatory approaches are required, such as those investigating the institutional and political context in which certain discourses emerged, the actors that elaborated them and those actors that have been excluded, and the conditions under which some discourses became more dominant than others. In particular, the literature on political opportunities structures, on state feminism and changes in the gender machinery, and on the relationship between women's movement and state feminism can provide helpful explanatory insights (see Outshoorn and Kantola 2007). This, however, goes beyond the scope of this article.
- 18 This section is based on the following MAGEEQ research reports: Bustelo *et al.* (2004); Meier and Paantjens (2004); Lombardo *et al.* (2005).
- 19 The Popular Party objects to quotas for three main reasons, apart from their supposed unconstitutionality: quotas are considered humiliating for women since qualified women do not need quotas to succeed in politics; competition for power will promote the most capable individuals; and under-representation cannot be solved by 'imposing' legally binding measures on parties.
- 20 See note 16 for an explanation of the distinction between 'major' and 'minor' frames.
- 21 This section is based on Lombardo *et al.* (2005).
- 22 Meier *et al.* (2005: 38) have referred to this problem as the 'benchmarking fallacy of women in political decision-making'.

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